

William de Wrotham and the Forestership of Somerset

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The following charter (Plate V) is in the collection of Dr. E. G. Millar, F.S.A., whom I must thank for the photograph, and for permission to print the text. I must also thank Mr. Lionel Landon of the P.R.O. for the great help he has given me in preparing the notes on the charter.

RICARDUS dei gratia Rex Anglorum, Dux Normannorum, Aquitanorum, Comes Andegavorum, Archiepiscopis, Episcopis, Abbatibus, Comitibus, <2> Baronibus, Justiciariis, Vicecomitibus, Senescallis, Prepositis, et omnibus baillivis et fidelibus suis Salutem. Sciatis <3> nos concessisse dedisse et hac presenti carta confirmasse Willelmo de Wrotham pro homagio et servitio suo <4> omnes terras et tenementa que Robertus de Osbervill tenuit in Exeton',¹ et in Hauekerigg',² et in Widepol',³ et in Weleford'⁴ <5> et in Neweton',⁶ et in Hamme,⁶ et in Kathangr',⁷ et in Erneshill,⁸ et in Werne,⁹ et in Fifhide,¹⁰ cum omnibus pertinentibus <6> suis tenenda ipsi Willelmo et heredibus suis, de nobis, et heredibus nostris per servitium feodi unius militis pro omni servitio; <7> Quare volumus et firmiter precipimus quod prefatus Willelmus et heredes sui post ipsum habeant et teneant omnia predicta te <8> nementa de nobis et de heredibus nostris pro predictum servitium feodi unius militis pro omni servitio: bene et in pace, libere <9> et quiete, integre et plenarie, honorifice et hereditarie, in bosco et plano, pratis, pascuis, et pasturis, in viis, semitis, <10> aquis, stagnis, molendinis, vivariis, piscariis, moris et mariscis, gardinis et virgultis, in omnibus rebus et in omnibus <11> locis cum omnibus pertinentiis, et omnibus libertatibus et liberis consuetudinibus ad predicta tenementa

¹ Exton.

² Hawkridge.

³ Withypool.

⁴ Wellisford.

⁵ Newton in the Hundred of North Petherton, known also as Newton Forester.

⁶ Ham, or Low Ham.

⁷ Cathanger.

⁸ Earnshill.

⁹ Wearne.

¹⁰ Fivehead.

pertinentibus. Hiis testibus <12> Warino filio Geroldi, Roberto de Gan[ey], Alano Basset, Gaufrido de Ver, Wiscardo Leidet, Petro de Stokes, Johanne de <13> Jerpunvill, Hugone de Nevill, Thoma de Heiden, Alano de Hertiland, Johanne de Brancestr'. Datum per ma <14> num Eustacii Episcopi Elyensis Cancellarii nostri apud Leon ¹¹ Vicesimaquinta die Augusti, Anno Regni nostri Nono.

Seal missing : silk cords remain.

The King's Serjeants in the Domesday Survey of Somerset are headed by Robert de Odburville. He held lands in Wearne, Withypool, Wellesford, Axbridge, and also the mansion of Melcome from the King. One virgate, which follows the entry about Wearne, is recorded to have been held in the time of King Edward by Dodo freely in parage, and is probably a part of the later vill of Hawkridge. The half-hide in Withypool had been held in parage by three foresters—Dodo, Almar and Godric. Robert de Odburville may probably be identified with the Robert who was a tenant of Ham, in the estate of Abbey of Glastonbury, and possibly is the Robert who held three virgates of Roger de Corcelle in Newton in the Hundred of North Petherton. It may be safely assumed that the Dodo who held land in Hawkridge and in Withypool is one and the same man. It is also probable that Robert de Odburville holding land from the King in serjeanty, had succeeded the three Saxons as Forester.

The other estates enumerated in the charter must have come into the possession of the Odburville, or Osberville, family at a later date. In the Domesday survey Exton was held by the Bishop of Coutances, whose estates passed to his nephew Robert de Mowbray, Earl of Northumberland in 1093, and were forfeited to the crown at his rebellion two years later. The estate at Newton must have been increased. It was farmed at 40s. in 1194 for the half-year, and at 4 *li.* 8s. in the next three years.¹² This estate was later known as Newton-Forester, the administrative centre of the office. In Domesday five tenants-in-chief held lands in Newton : Eustace, Count of Boulogne, Anschetill Parcarius, Roger Arundell, John the

¹¹ Lyons-la-forêt.

¹² *Pipe Roll*, N.S. 5, p. 19 : N.S. 6, p. 38 : N.S. 7, p. 198 : N.S. 8, p. 139.

Usher and Roger de Corcelle. Some of these holdings must have been joined together by the Osbervilles. From this we must except the holdings in Newton which belonged to the Estable family and to the Dacus family. William de Wrotham acquired both these estates, the former in 1199,¹³ and the latter in 1204.¹⁴ Cathanger in Domesday was held by the Abbey of Muchelney, who it has been suggested exchanged it for the manor of Fivehead.¹⁵ It will be noticed that the holding in Axbridge and the mansion at Melcome are not referred to in the charter.

The Robert de Osberville, mentioned in this charter, was very likely the son of Hugh de Osberville, who appears in an assize of mort d'ancestor in 1201.¹⁶ He was involved in the treason of John Lackland and in 1193 his estates were forfeited. They are accounted for in the Pipe Roll of 1194 for the half-year, and for the whole of the next three years. In 1197 William de Wrotham was granted 23 *li.* from the Osberville fee 'ad se sustentandum in servitio regis'.¹⁷ The next year this charter was granted to him. William was the son of Godwin de Wrotham¹⁸, a member of the household of the Archbishop of Canterbury. He became one of the royal justices and in 1197 was appointed Warden of the Stannaries of Devon and Cornwall.

The estates enumerated in this charter have a distinct connection with the Forestership, a connection dating in some of the holdings from the pre-Conquest period. In 1199 the counties of Dorset and Somerset gave 100 *li.* to the King to have William de Wrotham as their forester.¹⁹ The *Victoria County History* (II, p. 548) states that William de Wrotham held the office of forester for the service of one knight's fee; this does not distinguish between serjeanty and knight's service. The *Red Book of the Exchequer* (I, p. 235), which is cited, does not encourage this confusion as it merely says, 'Willelmus de Wrotham tenet terram que fuit Roberti de Oburville pro feodo i militis de dono Regis Ricardi'. A distinction must be made

¹³ *Rot. Chart.*, p. 29.

¹⁴ *Pipe Roll*, N.S. 18, p. 183.

¹⁵ *Som. Rec. Soc.*, xiv, 52.

¹⁶ *Som. Rec. Soc.*, xi, 10, nos. 29, 30, 31.

¹⁷ *Pipe Roll*, N.S. 8, p. 139.

¹⁸ *Curia Regis Rolls*, vi, 75.

¹⁹ *Rot. de Obl.*, p. 10.

between the office and the lands. Entries in the State Papers show the family of Wrotham holding the Forestership-in-fee by hereditary right.

1207. *Rot. Litt. Pat.* (p. 68). 'Rex omnibus de Somerset' sciatis nos redditis Willelmo de Wrotham (son of the original grantee) archid' Tanton forestariam totius Somer' et Exon' in Devon sicut jus suum pertinens ad laicum feodum quod tenet de nos.

1218. *Pat. Rolls* (p. 138). John Marshall fines to have the custody and marriage of Richard son and heir of Richard de Wrotham, who is the heir also of William de Wrotham of the lay fees and tenements which were of William to whom belonged the custody of the forest of Somerset 'de feodo'.

A statement in the Testa de Nevill (p. 160), concerning Ham 'quod pertinebat ad manerium de Somerton quod modo pertinet ad Niweton ad forestiam quam Willelmus de Wrotham modo tenet per servicium foreste', implies that some property was held by serjeanty, but more likely only emphasizes the connection between the estate and the office of forester. In 1204 William de Wrotham obtained the estate of the family of Dacus and held it 'per servicium custodiendi parcum illum et bailliam illam pro omni servitio'.²⁰ An entry in the *Inquisitions Post Mortem of 1274* (II, no. 81) states that William de Plessetis (representing the co-heirs of William de Wrotham) held in Somerset the manors of Newton, Hawkridge and Exton, etc., and the keepership of the park of Newton, held of the King in chief by serjeanty by the service of $\frac{1}{4}$ knight's fee. This conjunction of serjeanty and knight's service can be explained by the arrentation of serjeanties carried out by Robert Passelewe about 1250.

As far as is known Wrotham held the Forestership; he obtained the estate of the Estable family, and the serjeanty of the Dacus family at Newton, and he held the lands referred to in this charter. Although the lands are closely connected with the office, the charter does not indicate this. There is no reference to the forest, and 'forestarii' are not included among those to whom the charter is addressed. William de Wrotham had to fine to obtain the office. Gerard—implying perhaps correctly that William de Wrotham held lands in Exton by

²⁰ *Pipe Roll*, N.S. 18, p. 183.

serjeanty—was nevertheless careful to distinguish the tenures. In his note on Exton he writes, 'This with other lands heretofore William de Wrotham held by sergeanty to be the King's Forester of Exmore, and to keep his park at Newton, and so gracious was this William with King Richard the First that hee gave unto him the Barony of Ambreville in these parts.'²¹ This charter makes it clear that the bulk of the lands was held by knight's service.

History of the Forest of Exmoor, by E. T. MacDermot (Barnicott and Pearce, 1911), has some useful information. It is inaccurate on the subject of William de Wrotham, but the copy in the Library of the Somerset Archæological Society has been extensively corrected by the author.

²¹ *Som. Rec. Soc.*, xv, 2.