

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: King's College London
Unit of Assessment: 30: History
Title of case study: The Making of Domesday Book and its Implications for Understanding the Impact of the Norman Conquest of England
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Domesday Book (DB) is one of England's most important historical documents and, as its very name suggests, it possesses an iconic status with the potential to excite popular imagination. This case study describes how new research and dissemination have combined to realise that potential, transforming Domesday studies and making its interest and significance accessible to wide audiences. The research explores how DB was made, and why this is vital for interpreting the precious evidence it contains. The impact has been achieved by exploiting a wide range of media – television, radio, national press, the internet and public presentations – to enhance awareness, share the excitement, and deepen understanding of Domesday studies; and to create new opportunities for millions of people to engage meaningfully with it.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>This has three main strands:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Domesday survey (of 1086) and the making of Domesday Book. Since Galbraith published a pioneering essay on this subject in 1943, it has been axiomatic that we know to understand how DB was made in order to interpret the matter it contains, and a substantial body of scholarship has since refined our understanding of the process which brought DB into being; but the resulting literature is voluminous, technical and controversial, rendering it largely inaccessible to a non-specialist audience. For these reasons, Baxter published a concise interpretation for non-specialist readers (section 3 no. 4). 2. Re-interpreting Domesday Book. Using a computer-assisted analysis of Latin formulae, Baxter has shown that Domesday Book was decisively shaped by the processes that brought it into being (nos. 4 and 5). Formulaic patterns demonstrate that DB is an abbreviated copy of documents produced by the commissioners of 7 different 'circuits', each consisting of several shires; that these were themselves the product of documents generated at and below the level of the shire; and that a small number of landholders were also able to influence how their property rights were represented in the final product (in other words, a few lords managed to cook the Domesday books). DB cannot, therefore, be read as objective statement of fact, but must be read as a contested artefact full of distortions. The implications of this are far-reaching, affecting every area of Domesday studies (e.g. land tenure, lordship and justice, nos. 3, 6). 3. Identifying Domesday landholders. Because DB rarely uses surnames or bynames, it is often difficult to differentiate people with common names. However, once all the relevant information in DB and other sources is made readily accessible and seen on maps, it becomes possible to distinguish people from the mass of names far more efficiently than ever before. This is the vision underpinning two major research projects. The first of these resulted in the creation of PASE Domesday, a database of DB landholders linked to mapping facilities and a comprehensive analysis of non-Domesday evidence, all specifically designed to identify pre-Conquest landholders (no. 1). The second, which remains ongoing, aims to use these resources to reconstruct English landed society in 1066 in its entirety, publishing profiles and maps describing the career, landholdings and lordship of every pre-Conquest landholder names in DB (no. 2).
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England</i> (PASE), integrating <i>PASE Domesday</i>, published online at http://www.pase.ac.uk/ in August 2010. This research project was funded by the AHRB from 2000 to 2004 (£517,839) and from 2005 to 2008 by the AHRC (£317,246). Baxter was a co-applicant (with PI Professor Janet Nelson) for the second award; and was co-director of the project (with Professors Nelson, Harold Short (King's) and Simon Keynes (Cambridge)) between 2005 and 2010. Baxter designed and directed the implementation of <i>PASE Domesday</i>, a resource which broke new ground in humanities computing by replicating the functionality of a

GIS database in a freely-available online resource.

2. *Profile of a Doomed Elite: The Structure of English Landed Society in 1066* (PDE). This project was funded by the Leverhulme Trust from September 2010 to August 2012 (award £254,742). Baxter was the sole applicant and PI, and led a research team comprising Dr Chris Lewis and Dr Duncan Probert, plus humanities computing specialists. The project aimed to use PASE and PASE Domesday to identify as many pre-Conquest landholders as possible during the funded period, and succeeded in producing profiles of 1,112 people (roughly 40% of the total). These profiles, and others written subsequently, will be published on the PASE website after 31 July 2013; during the REF period, the PDE team gave numerous seminars and lectures to public audiences (details below).
3. Stephen Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2007), winner of the Royal Historical Society Whitfield Prize in 2007.
4. Stephen Baxter, 'The Making of Domesday Book and the Languages of Lordship in Conquered England', in *Conceptualizing Multilingualism in Medieval England c.800-c.1250*, ed. Elizabeth M. Tyler (Brepols, 2012), pp. 271-308.
5. Stephen Baxter, 'The Representation of Lordship and Land Tenure in Domesday Book', in *Domesday Book*, ed. E. Hallam and D. Bates (Stroud, 2001), pp. 73–102, 203–208.
6. Stephen Baxter, 'Lordship and Justice in the Early English Kingdom: the Judicial Functions of Soke and Commendation Revisited', in *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. Stephen Baxter, Catherine Karkov, Janet Nelson and David Pelteret (Farnham, 2009), pp. 383-419.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Until recently, Domesday scholarship was confined to small circle of scholars, but that situation has now been transformed. By harnessing a wide range of media including television, radio, mass-circulation press, the internet and public lectures, it has proved possible to share the importance and interest of DB with millions of people in Britain and worldwide, and to create new opportunities for them to engage meaningfully with the matter it contains. A wide public audience now has been given access to a richer, more sophisticated understanding of DB – how and why it was made, what it contains, and why it is so important for understanding the effects of the Norman Conquest. That audience has also been empowered, by *PASE Domesday*, to establish who held land in particular villages and towns in England at the time of the Norman Conquest, to determine whether or not these landholders possessed property and lordships elsewhere in the kingdom, and to explore the imprint these people left on the wider historical record. All this has enriched the lives of millions of people for whom the historical interest of particular places is of profound importance to the way they construct personal and collective identities.

The extent of the impact

The research has been disseminated using the following media:

1. Television. A one-hour documentary called *Domesday*, written and presented by Stephen Baxter. This was first broadcast on BBC 2 at 8pm on 10 August 2010 to an audience of 2.22 million viewers, and has since been broadcast on several occasions (on BBC1, BBC 2, BBC 4, BBC IPlayer, and the 9 times on the Yesterday Channel) and is available on DVD, taking the total audience to 4.21 million people in the UK and internationally.
2. Radio. The launch of *PASE Domesday* was timed to coincide with the first transmission of BBC *Domesday*, and on the morning of 10 August 2010 Baxter gave a series of radio interviews about their interest and importance. These included a 5-minute interview with James Naughtie on *The Today Programme*; this is Britain's most popular radio programme, regularly attracting audiences in excess of 6 million weekly. He also gave 5-minute interviews to BBC Radio Cambridgeshire, Black Country, Berkshire and Gloucestershire; and subsequently gave two further radio interviews which drew significantly on Domesday evidence in the discussion: BBC Radio 4, *Things We Forgot to Remember*, 'King Harold II', presented by Michael Portillo, 29 October, 2010; and BBC Radio 4, *In Our Time*, 'The Battle of Stamford Bridge', presented by Melvyn Bragg, Thursday 2 June 2011.
3. National press articles. These included (i) *The BBC History Magazine* (circulation 69,000 in 2010). Stephen Baxter contributed a question-and-answer interview which was published as the cover-page story, 'William the Conqueror's Domesday Book: A Brutal Exercise in Power Politics' in Volume 11 no. 8 (August, 2010), cover page and pp. 22–27; (ii) *The Guardian*, 9 August 2010. Maev Kennedy, 'Domesday Book reveals the rise of a Norman Abramovich after 1066';

- (iii) *The Daily Mail*, 11 August 2011. David Derbyshire, 'William the Conqueror on the web: Discover your town's history with digital Domesday Book'; (iv) BBC Magazine *Who do you think you are?* Issue 39, October 2010, p. 13, 'Domesday database online'; (iv) The BBC News website, 10 August. 'Domesday Book details made available in map form', online at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-10922836>; (vi) *My Science*, The Portal for Science and Innovation, 9 August 2010. 'New Domesday Database Launched Online'.
4. The internet. *PASE Domesday* was published online on 10 August 2010. Owing to the publicity this resource secured in television, radio and in the press, there was a dramatic increase in the number of people who used the PASE website on that date. For example, between 9 and 10 August 2010, there was a 10-fold increase in the number of pages consulted on the PASE website (from 7,053 to 73,631 pages) and a 23-fold increase in the number of hits (from 22,611 to 526,745 hits).
5. Public appearances and lectures. Baxter and other member of the PDE research team have between them given 24 talks, seminars and lectures to public audiences (at historical associations, schools, cathedrals, conferences, and other universities) totalling approximately 1,350 people in total.

The nature of the impact

It is demonstrable that many people found this material rewarding, and that many of them were moved to pursue the subject further. The principal evidence for this is as follows:

1. Strong audience feedback research for *Domesday*. The viewing figures for 'Domesday' were maintained throughout the programme, proving that the audience remained interested and engaged for its duration. A sample of 125 viewers were invited to evaluate their enjoyment of the programme on a scale of one to ten, and the mean average 'satisfaction rating' for the programme measured in this way was 8.5 or 85%. The same viewers were invited to contribute qualitative feedback, and this too was positive: for example, 'An authoritative and knowledgeable presentation by an acknowledged and passionate expert, this is the sort of programme that the BBC does best and well worth my licence fee.' 'An excellent and comprehensive insight into something many of us know only a little about but which is an extremely significant part of our history.' 'A really interesting programme on a subject we are all aware of but understand very little about. That position has been partially resolved. I now wish to know more.' 'Excellent, even on the second viewing. Most interesting and informative.' Some viewers published comments online in blogs, e.g. 'Last couple of years best history programme: Domesday Book, Dr Stephen Baxter. New theses, clearly told by a man who wants to communicate and not forge a career. Utterly brilliant.'
2. The fact that the programme was repeated 6 times on BBC channels and 9 times on the Yesterday Channel demonstrates strong on-going interest and demand.
3. Positive press coverage and reviews of *Domesday*. The programme was singled out as recommended viewing by several independent television guides and was positively reviewed in the national press. Previews included: (i) *The Guardian Guide*, Saturday 7 August – Friday 13 August 2010, p. 67, pick of the day; (ii) *The Radio Times*, 7–13 August 2010, pp. 76, 78 'pick of the day'; (iii) *Total TV Guide*, 7–13 August 2010, one-page article in 'This week's TV highlights' (p. 12) and 'pick of the day' (p. 56); (iv) *The Observer*, Sunday 8 August 2010, The New Review, p. 47 'pick of the day'. Reviews included *The Guardian*, 11 August 2010: 'It's rare for TV to open such a radically different perspective on a national treasure and rarer still to make it come alive, so Baxter is clearly a TV star in the making.'
4. Exeter Cathedral Library's decision to have Exon Domesday (a manuscript written during the survey of 1086) unbound for preservation, and to facilitate research. Baxter used a sequence in *Domesday* to show how crucial this manuscript for understanding how DB was made. As a direct result of this, and the interest it generated, members of the cathedral community (not professional historians) decided to have the manuscript unbound in 2010. Baxter has since given a lecture ('Exon Domesday: A National Treasure') attended by the Dean and about 80 members of the Friends of Exeter Cathedral; and he is actively involved with the cathedral and a group of scholars to attract funding for a major research project relating to the manuscript.
5. Increased public attendance at Old Sarum, an English Heritage site which featured prominently on *Domesday*. Naomi Matthews, Site Manager of Old Sarum Castle: 'Following its airing on the 10th August we saw a spike in visitor numbers of roughly 100 extra people a day throughout the week. Many of these people were locals who had seen the footage, especially the aerial shots

and decided there was more to see than they thought at Old Sarum. Others were those who lived further afield and had been interested by the historical part Sarum had to play in the Domesday book.'

6. Increased use of *PASE* and *PASE Domesday*. There were spikes in the numbers to the *PASE* website on each occasion that the *Domesday* documentary was shown and repeated. There were approximately 19,000 unique visitors to the *PASE* website between October 2010 and July 2013, with on average of between 1,500 and 2,500 unique visitors per month. Approximately 8,500 people visited the site in August 2010 alone, when media publicity for *PASE Domesday* was at its height. Since the number of established scholars who use the site cannot be greater than 1,000 worldwide, the great majority of these users can safely be assumed to be students and members of the public. Users of *PASE Domesday* were able to search for villages and towns of interest to them; to establish the names of people who held property in those places in 1066 and 1086; and to generate interactive tabular lists and distribution maps of the property these people held elsewhere in England. Members of the public with little or no experience in the field could thus see and explore meaningful patterns in the DB evidence, achieving in a few seconds research of a kind that only experienced scholars with several days to spare could have undertaken prior to the publication of *PASE Domesday*.
7. Demand for public lectures given by Baxter and his research team in historical societies, universities and schools throughout the UK and internationally (24 given, as above).
8. A teacher at Comberton Village College, Cambridgeshire, wrote to say that she had been 'inspired' by Baxter's work on DB, which had 'greatly contributed to a series of lessons' she prepared for year 7, and to propose teaching collaboration in the future (invitation received and accepted before 31 July 2013, teaching collaboration to take place in 2013-14).
9. Private expressions of interest, and requests for help. I have received and responded to more than 100 hand-written letters and emails from people outside academia in the UK and internationally (including Norway, Belgium, New Zealand and Canada). Many of these expressed their enjoyment of *Domesday* ('this is probably the best documentary I have ever seen' (Arnt Hvinden, Norway); others raise specific questions about points made in the programme; and some seek guidance on ways to research aspects of local history using *PASE Domesday* (e.g. I have corresponded with and spent a morning with a retired Yorkshireman, assisting him with a local research project).

How the research underpinned the impact

Stephen Baxter's knowledge of DB made it possible for him to reach large audiences in an informed and engaging way. He was initially contacted by the BBC to provide research ideas for a series on the Normans, but his enthusiasm for the subject made it possible for him to sell the interest, excitement and importance of *Domesday* to the channel controller of BBC 2, and the commissioning editor of BBC, who decided to commission a one-off documentary dedicated to DB. Baxter's research enabled him to write the first draft of the script for *Domesday* and to retain authorial control of the script throughout the production process. It also enabled him to recommend visually arresting and illuminating places of interest to film, and to write authoritative introduction to the programme in high-circulation media. *PASE Domesday* was designed from the inception to be accessible and meaningful to wide audiences as well as students and scholars. Its existence was a further selling-point for *Domesday* since it showed how new resources were transforming scholarship, and was featured in two sequences in the programme.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Producer and Director BBC: viewing figures for BBC *Domesday* (factual statement)
2. Dossier of qualitative audience feedback for *Domesday*
3. Dossier of press cutting of previews and reviews of *Domesday*
4. Letter from Exeter Cathedral Library regarding Exon *Domesday* project (factual statement)
5. Letter from English Heritage regarding increased interest in Old Sarum, Wiltshire (factual statement)
6. Usage data for *PASE Domesday*
7. List of talks, seminars and lectures given by Baxter and other members of the PDE team
8. Dossier of emails and letters from viewers of *Domesday* and users of *PASE Domesday*
9. Email from a school teacher requesting teaching collaboration (factual statement)
10. Letter from local history researcher (factual statement)