

THE ANCIENT POPULATION OF THE FOREST OF DARTMOOR.

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THERE is abundant evidence of early residence on Dartmoor. Hut circles, either in groups or scattered in small numbers, are numerous. They existed in greater numbers formerly, for many have been destroyed. At present the number of these ruins probably approaches two thousand, for more than half this total are shown on the ordnance maps. Of these several hundred have been explored, with the result that whilst many of them have served as habitations, a considerable number have evidently been used for some other purpose, probably as cattle or sheep pens or store-houses. It does not follow that all the huts were concurrently occupied, for it is quite possible that summer visitors made use of varying settlements, for although the foundations of the huts were durable, the superstructure, consisting of an easily-made roof of rush or heather thatch or skins, could be quickly added.

That the early inhabitants were pastoral is indicated by the "pounds," which either include the dwellings or lie adjacent thereto. Very few of the hut circles which yielded signs of being human habitations indicated prolonged occupancy.

Some of them were clearly summer houses, and others again were of such considerable diameter and in such exposed positions that it would be difficult to keep such an expanse of roof weather-tight in the winter.

The group at Watern Oke is a good example of a considerable settlement existing in a most exposed position. The writer has been there in foul weather in the summer, and came to the conclusion that if a similar climate existed in the Bronze Age as we have to-day, these huts would be quite untenable in the winter.

Reviewing all the circumstances, the opinion is formed that Dartmoor in early times carried a larger population in the summer than it did in the winter, and that this variation was caused by a pastoral people annually seeking its open uplands for grazing purposes.

There are considerable areas of very boggy ground on Dartmoor which could never have been suitable for grazing, and on these, from the nature of the ground, no hut circles exist. Between and adjacent to these boggy tracts there is good rough summer pasturage known as "lairs," and it is about these, and the commons and valleys which run up to the upland from the low country, that hut circles abound.

There were doubtless many also on the ancient tenement lands, but these have mostly disappeared under the stress of cultivation and enclosure.

Not a single explored hut circle has rendered any evidence that the early folk were tanners or smelted the ore. If streaming had been general at this period some indication, it is reasonable to suppose, would have been discovered. It is possible that such evidence still exists undiscovered in unexplored hut circles, or may be buried under the "spoils" of more modern times.

Practically the whole of the Dartmoor valleys have been explored for tin, and the greatest age of these workings in the shape of actual evidence is the blowing-house in Deep Swincombe, which yielded pot-sherds of early medieval type, probably as early as the tenth century.

The Romans were uncommonly keen on mines and minerals, and although they had a station at Exeter, within a score of miles of Dartmoor, there is absolutely no evidence that they were directly interested in its tin.

We see abundant traces of their occupation in remote corners of Wales, where they were attracted by lead, and to some extent by gold, but on Dartmoor nothing, and even in Cornwall there is little more than most uncertain traces.

We return to the conviction that the hut-circle people were pastoral, and that there was a larger population in the summer than in the winter. The winter population must have been strictly limited, for a pastoral people could only then maintain such beasts as their stores of forage would permit, and this, from the nature of the herbage and climate, must have been small.

With all the advantages of improved cultivation, roots, and artificial food, the winter stock is far from large to-day.

The modern limit of the agricultural population is well illus-

trated by the returns made as a result of the first census in March, 1801, when with a vastly increased general population and improved means of communication, the resident population of the forest portion was only a little over 200 persons. This is exclusive of the population in and around the township of Lydford, which numbered an additional 222 persons.

Working backwards from 1801, we find that in 1702 the recorded tenants of the forest of Dartmoor numbered thirty-eight. Of these, four were widows or spinsters. Assuming that each male tenant had a wife and small family and a few servants, we find that the agricultural population in 1701 must have been approximately similar to that of 1801.

In 1344 there were forty-four tenants, so that probably the permanent population at this period was again somewhat similar. That this agricultural population was increased in the summer is extremely likely, for then streaming for tin was active, and much turf was cut. In 1222 Henry III commanded the bailiffs of Lydford to permit the tanners of Devon "to take and have fuel in our moor of Dartmoor," and in 1296-7 there is a record of payment of 11s. 3d. by twenty-seven carbonarii.

In the reign of James I as many as 100,000 horse-loads of turf were annually carried away from Dartmoor Forest. As a horse-load was, say, about 300 lb., this would represent over 13,000 tons, a large quantity, representing a considerable influx of summer labour.

It should be borne in mind that in addition to the tenants of the ancient tenements there were in former times persons described as censarii.

There are records of these in the fourteenth century paying rent as dwellers within the moor, not being tenants of the manor. They were few in number at this period, probably not more than half a dozen. In 1545-6 they had increased, for under the head of issues of the manor the bailiff answers for 4s. 6d. from the census of fifty-four men and women dwelling within the forest of Dartmoor and paying one penny per man for having the liberty of the lordship.

It is incidentally interesting that what are commonly described as *venvil*¹ rights should be enjoyed by persons dwelling in the forest, but not occupying ancient tenements, on the payment of a small annual sum.

¹ *Venvil*, a corruption of *fines villarum*, or township fines.

In attempting to carry back the inquiry as to the possible population of Dartmoor earlier than the indications based on the number of recorded tenants in 1702 and 1344, recourse must be had to the statistics for Devon compiled in the monumental valuation list known as "Domesday Book." This record has many details, for the commissioners appointed by the Conqueror, whilst they omitted what they considered was immaterial, inserted everything that they thought was necessary, so as to arrive at a close valuation.

The whole of the county of Devon was, prior to 1204, dedicated to the sport of royalty. It cost the men of Devon 5000 marks to obtain from King John a charter of disafforestation. It was not, however, put in force until the boundaries were settled by perambulation in 1242, Dartmoor and Exmoor being left as forest.

The clearings, or *essarted* portions, in 1086 were cultivated subject to forest law, and these being the only areas capable of taxation, they are fully described for such a purpose, whilst Dartmoor was ignored.

We cannot, therefore, obtain direct evidence of the adult population of Dartmoor from "Domesday," but we can approximately ascertain the number of men employed in the county on agricultural pursuits, and from this result an indication may be obtained whether the population of Dartmoor in 1086 can be reasonably considered to be greater or less than it was in 1801-1702 and in 1344.

The scope of the inquiry made by the Domesday Commissioners may be exemplified by the record of the manor of Axminster.

The King has a manor called *Alseminstra*, which King Edward held T.R.E. How many hides are there is not known, because it never paid geld,¹ but the land can be tilled by 40 ploughs.

Thereof the King has 2 ploughs in demesne and the villeins 18. There the King has 30 villeins, 20 bordars, 4 serfs, 2 beasts, 50 sheep, 2 mills paying 10s., 100 acres of coppice, 30 of meadow, and 100 of pasture. It pays 26 pounds a year weighed and assayed.

Here we have an adult population of fifty-four persons living in and cultivating the manor of Axminster and attending the two mills specified.

The villeins were freemen² occupying land and rendering

¹ Danegeld, a war tax first levied by Ethelred II.

² There is positive evidence that the villein of 1086 was a freeman. To the manor of South Perrot, Somerset, every freeman in the manor of Crewkerne rendered one bloom of iron; but at Crewkerne there were only villeins, bordars, coliberts, and slaves.—Ballard's "Domesday Inquest," p. 151.

service on their lord's demesne farm—the bordars, occupiers of small holdings and working as general labourers and tradesmen, and the serfs working in bondage.

In addition to the above the following workers are enumerated in other manors of Devon: Salt-workers, a smith, a few iron-workers, bee-keepers, fishermen, boors, and a larger number of cottagers and swineherds. A solitary priest is mentioned and one bondwoman—the former in the manor of Instow, held by Walter de Clavil, and the latter a slave on the land of William the Usher, in North Tawton parish. Priests did not apparently cultivate land in 1086. This exception did, and he was enumerated.

For purposes of comparison the figures arrived at by Ellis are given, in addition to those extracted by the author.

TABLE A.—BURNARD.

Priest	1
Villeins	8508
Bordars	4667
Salt-workers	44
Smith	1
Iron-workers	4
Bee-keepers	5
Fishermen	2
Cottagers	66
Swineherds	375
Boors	4
Serfs	5177
Bondwoman	1
	<u>18,855</u>

TABLE B.—ELLIS.

Villeins	8070
Bordars and cottars	4936
Miscellaneous	390
Serfs	3295
	<u>16,691</u>

In Table A the salt-workers, smith, iron-workers, bee-keepers, fishermen, and the priest account for 57, swineherds and boors 379, or a total of 436, as against a total of "miscellaneous" 390 in Table B.

In Table A the villeins are 438 in excess of Table B. Reckoning cottagers and boors under the heading of bordars, Table B is in excess of Table A by 199 persons, but the greatest discrepancy of all is under the heading of serfs, for the author accounts for 5177, whilst Ellis only enumerates 3295, a difference of 1882.

The total difference amounts to 2164.

Ellis enumerates 77 tenants in capite and 402 mesne tenants, and also 274 burgesses. The two former classes we will for the moment pass over, and the latter we will

altogether disregard, as not coming under the list of those who worked on the land. The difference in the two tables is so great that it passes beyond mere clerical errors incidental to extraction and addition. Table A is based on the list of holders of land prepared by the Rev. O. J. Reichel, who adopted the text of the Exeter book for the county of Devon in the Victoria History. This version was not departed from except in cases where pages of the Exeter book were missing, or where there are important variants of phraseology or nomenclature.

The resulting list of particulars of men and beasts and land under cultivation, compiled by Mr. Reichel, is so clear that extraction of details, if laborious, should not be capable of serious error.

As all the additions involved in extraction for Table A have been checked, the author must leave his version where it is, in the hope that some enthusiast in the future will correct or confirm his figures.

In attempting to arrive at the total population living on the land of Devon in 1086, we of course enter on a purely speculative phase, for up to this point only the adult population has been enumerated.

We may take it for granted that the bulk of these possessed wives and families, but to what extent is mere guess-work. Leaving out the solitary priest, bondwoman, and the serfs, we have 13,676 possible heads of families. We cannot tell whether families were large or small in 1086, but adopting, say, five as a reasonable number, we arrive at a total of 68,380 souls.

If this be accepted as reasonably approximate, how can we deal with the serfs?

Some doubtless were married, for some held land, and as mere chattels they were valuable and deserving of some encouragement. As some worked indoors as well as out, it is quite possible that those who were employed as indoor servants were unmarried. With some diffidence we may multiply the number of serfs by two, and the families in a state of slavery reach the respectable total of 10,354, or a total of 78,734 men, women, and children living on the land.¹

¹ Slaves were much more numerous in the western counties than elsewhere. According to Ballard, no slaves were recorded in York, Lincoln, Rutland, or Huntingdon, and they were only half of one per cent of the population of Nottingham and one per cent of that of Derbyshire. Their density in the western counties appears to show that the English conquest of the west was milder than in the east, and that many of the conquered Britons were spared to work for their conquerors.—“Domesday Inquest,” p. 154.

In addition to this total the lords and their families who resided in the manor-houses may be added, but the writer has refrained, for it is by no means clear to him that every manor had its manor-house, or that absentee landlords were unknown in 1086.

As the tenants in capite and mesne tenants number—according to Ellis—479, the author leaves any further speculative addition to the reader.

In his opinion the approximate estimate of the agricultural population arrived at as above is sufficient for the purpose. It compares with a *total* Devon population of 340,308 in 1801 and 664,697 in 1901.

Bearing in mind that the population of Dartmoor has ever been of a pastoral character, the author included in his extraction from the Exeter "Domesday Book" the number of domestic animals mentioned in every manor, or lands attached to such, in the county of Devon.

Referring again to the manor of Axminster, particulars of which have been previously given, we noted that the king possessed two ploughs and the villeins sixteen. The domestic animals are given as four beasts and 120 sheep. It is obvious that four beasts could not possibly be made to work eighteen ploughs, so that we must conclude that the number of oxen necessary were implied. A comparison of parallel passages in the "Exchequer Domesday," the "Cambridgeshire Inquest," and the "Ely Inquest" shows instances where the compiler of one record states "there is land for half or a quarter of a team." Again, "there is land for four or two oxen," as though it were a matter of indifference whether the area was expressed in terms of teams or oxen, and showing that in Cambridgeshire the plough team was composed of eight oxen. This equation is implied in other counties, and it is only reasonable to suppose that the commissioners considered that a team was composed of the same number of oxen in all parts of the country, otherwise those who used "Domesday Book" would have required a table showing the number of oxen in a team in the different counties.¹

On the other hand, the illustrated manuscripts of pre-Conquest times frequently show plough teams of two and four oxen each, but never a team of eight.

The number of oxen in a team must have been governed by the nature of the soil. Heavy land would naturally

¹ See "Domesday Inquest," p. 34.

require a larger number of draught animals than some of the lighter soils.

Although ploughing oxen are seldom mentioned in the Exeter book, there are a few exceptions, and a close examination shows that some plough teams in the county were composed of eight oxen, for at Cridia (Creedy, West Budleigh Hundred) there is one plough in demesne, whilst the villeins have one plough and seven oxen towards another plough.

A lesser number is indicated by the following manors:—

At Cheneoltona (Kellaton in Shirwell Hundred) one plough in demesne is mentioned, the villeins having six ploughing oxen. No mention is made of the villeins possessing a plough.

At Lochetona (Lupton in Haytor Hundred) the same numbers occur.

At Cicecota (Chidacot in Lifton Hundred) there was one plough in demesne, and the land was cultivated with two oxen. This again occurs at Loventorna (Loventor in Haytor Hundred).

Although eight is the usual accepted number assigned to a team, there were apparently variations in this figure, as indicated above. The greater number of oxen per plough may appear to be excessive to the modern mind, but it should be remembered that the Domesday ox was a very inferior animal to the beast of to-day.

According to Professor Thorold Rogers, the fourteenth-century ox weighed about 400 lb.,¹ as against a modern bullock of about 700 lb. The Domesday ox was probably not as heavy as the fourteenth-century animal, for three centuries of progress must have resulted in the improvement of the breeds of stock.

The total number of oxen existing in Devon in 1086 is not included in the enumeration given in the Exeter book. This can only be approximately arrived at by counting the ploughs or teams.

Ellis arrived at a total for Devon of 5542 teams. A careful count by the author makes it 5697, another discrepancy, but not so serious as in the case of the enumeration of human beings.

If eight, the commonly accepted number of oxen in a team, be adopted, the total reaches 45,576, but the probable number fell short of this.

¹ "Six Centuries of Work and Wages," p. 77.

We have somewhat firmer ground under our feet in counting the heads of beasts, sheep, swine, and goats. These in nearly every case are given, but whether the stock so enumerated in the various manors covers in every case the animals owned by the villeins, bordars, and cottagers is not quite clear to the author.

Taking the figures as given in the Exeter book, the domestic animals total as follows:—

Beasts (animalia)	7350
Horses	482
Sheep	43,782
Swine	3528
Goats	6928
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	62,070
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The beasts include twenty-three cows in milk and thirty-nine oxen.

The horses consist of 157 rounceys or pack-horses, 170 forest mares, and 155 unbroken mares.

The forest mares are a reminder that practically half of the county in 1086 was open forest, and the small number of pack-horses indicates that carriage of produce from one district to another was of a very limited character.

The sheep are numerous, as one might expect, for in addition to mutton and milk, the bulk of the clothes of the people must have been derived from the fleeces.

In the absence of milch cows, the goats, as well as the sheep, must have been largely used for milking and cheese-making.

The temptation to make the number of domestic animals and production of cereals to fit the estimated population is great, but the author found the difficulties were too great.

The amount of arable land may be obtained, but how much lay each year in fallow, and the probable yield per acre, are initial and apparently—to him—insoluble difficulties.

Bearing in mind the large quantities of stock which was salted down in the late autumn, there must yet have remained a great number of oxen, cows, ewes, sows, and horses to live through the winter on summer-saved forage. Whether the cultivated areas and hay meadows were sufficient for a great number the author has been unable to determine.

Although this inquiry regarding the probable number of human beings and animals in the county of Devon in 1086 is defective, we do obtain some indication, and when we bear in mind that of the whole county half was still open forest, or nearly three-quarters of a million of acres, we can readily imagine that the remnant of this forest land which we call Dartmoor, with an area of about 100,000 acres (the forest proper is 50,861 acres), carried but a small winter population, and that the summer contingent of graziers, tanners, and turf-cutters might be counted by hundreds, and not by thousands.

It has been asserted by students of population that during the peaceful Romano-British period the people of England might well have been equal to that of the eleventh century.

Prior to that we have no information or material on which to speculate, but an assumption that the people of Devon during the early Iron Age were not nearly so numerous, and were fewer still when some of the hut circles on Dartmoor were occupied by the Bronze Age folk, is reasonable, and that in the numerous ruins of these early dwellings on the moor we have evidence not of occupation by many thousands, but of much smaller numbers, who came to this open grazing ground in the summer, and retired to the low country in the autumn, leaving behind a very limited number as winter residents.

We have only to refer back to the census of March, 1801, to find that even at that near period the settled dwellers in the forest of Dartmoor, outside the township of Lydford, only numbered some two hundred souls.