

Lists of knight's fees in Kent : 1166 : Certificates submitted by the king's tenants in chief : Introduction

Early in 1166, orders went out to the king's tenants in chief -- to every one of them, so far as it was known who they were. They were each to produce a list of the tenants who held from them by knight's service, reporting each tenant's name, and the number of fees for which he was answerable. They were to distinguish clearly between fees of "old feoffment" and fees of "new feoffment" -- that is, between fees which had already existed on the day when the first king Henric was alive and dead (1 Dec 1135), and fees which had been created since that time. Also, if the sum of the service which their tenants owed to them was less than the service which they themselves owed to the king, they should say explicitly how many fees they were personally liable for -- that is, the number of fees "upon the domain".

Not everyone received and complied with these orders (the exchequer rolls refer occasionally to tenants of the king's "who did not send in certificates", *qui cartas non miserunt*), but apparently most people did -- from barons possessing hundreds of knight's fees down to men owning just a single fee which formed their entire estate. The resulting documents came to be called collectively "The baron's certificates concerning knights", *Carte baronum de militibus*. They were kept in a chest bought specially for this purpose. (The chest was paid for by the sheriff of Wiltshire, who reclaimed the cost of it in his account for 1165/66.)

There is, it seems, only one of these documents surviving in the original -- the reply from the bishop of Chichester (E 198/1/3, reproduced by Hall 1896, frontispiece). The rest survive -- those that *do* survive -- through having been copied into two of the Exchequer's registers: the "Little Black Book" (E 164/12) and the "Red Book" (E 164/2). In this case, however, two copies are no better than one. From the stretches of text which I have compared, it seems clear, beyond any reasonable doubt, that this portion of the "Red Book" was copied from the "Little Black Book": the "Red Book" has all the same mistakes, plus some further mistakes of its own. So the "Red Book" can be ignored: looking at a copy is a waste of time when one can look at the exemplar.

These certificates form the main contents of the "Little Black Book": they prove straight away that it cannot be earlier than circa 1170. (If the contents of the preceding leaves were written by the same scribe, they will prove that it cannot be earlier than circa 1190; if the contents of the following leaves were written by the same scribe, they will prove that it cannot be earlier than circa 1200.) On the other hand, if we can be sure that part of the "Red Book" was copied from it, the "Little Black Book" cannot be later than circa 1220. Beyond that I cannot go. I see it suggested that the "Little Black Book" was first put together in about 1206 (ODNB, "Alexander of Swerford"); I have no objection to that dating, but do not know how it was arrived at.

The entire contents of the "Little Black Book" were printed by Thomas Hearne in 1728, not from the original, but from a copy supplied by one of his network of friends. My translation is based on Hearne's text; but I have felt free to make many small changes. Mostly I adopt the readings from this manuscript which were quoted by Hall in the footnotes to his edition of the "Red Book" (1896); but here again I have allowed myself some latitude. Even with these improvements, the text is marred by numerous mistakes which apparently must be present in the original. As far as I can judge from this distance, the "Little Black Book" was not a very careful piece of work.

The file which I am making available here comprises the whole of the section relating to Kent plus extracts from some of the other certificates which refer to fees in Kent. By the time that these copies were made, though some of the documents still existed as originals (in which case they usually take the form of a letter addressed to the king), others had apparently been replaced with summaries, presumably written by Exchequer scribes.

It would be much easier to make sense of the entries in these lists if the king had demanded to be told exactly where each fee was located; unfortunately he did not think of asking that. Sometimes the tenant's name is a good enough clue -- it is not hard to guess that "Eustachius de Marewrth", 2 knights" refers to Mereworth -- but things are not always so easy. It takes some detective work to find out, for example, that "Willelm Malet, 5 knights" refers to Tonge. (It belonged to him, for the time being, because he had custody of the heirs of Radulf Picot.) The degree of difficulty varies from barony to barony. With some I think I can identify most of the entries; with others I can barely get started.

For the numbers of fees, we are not solely dependent on the "Little Black Book", because it is clear that the certificates produced in 1166 were used, two years later, for calculating the contribution due from each baron to "the aid for getting the king's daughter married", at the rate of 1 mark (160 pence) for each knight's fee. These are the entries which appear in the Kent section of the exchequer roll for 1167/68 (GREx 1168:212-13):

Aid of knights for getting the king's daughter married.

Hugo de Dovra (owes) 2240 pence for (14) knights of old feff' and 160 pence (for 1 knight) of new feff'.

Walter de Maiene (owes) 4640 pence for (29) knights of old feff' and 240 pence (for 1.5 knights) of new feff'.

Willelm de Averenich' (owes) 3440 pence (for 21.5 knights) of old feff' and 400 pence (for 2.5 knights) of new feff'.

Willelm son of Helto (owes) 560 pence (for 3.5 knights) of old feff' and 32 pence (for 0.2 knight) of new feff'.

Walchelin Maminot (owes) 4320 pence for (27) knights of old feff' and 160 pence (for 1 knight) of new feff'.

Daniel de Crevequer (owes) 2240 pence for his (14) knights.

Willelm de Ros (owes) 1120 pence for his (7) knights.

This is excellent evidence -- the original survives, the arithmetic can all be checked -- and the totals are sure to be right. If the "Little Black Book" says something different, the "Little Black Book" is wrong.

References

H. Hall (ed.), *The Red Book of the Exchequer* (Rolls Series 99, 1896).

T. Hearne (ed.), *Liber niger scaccarii* (Oxford, 1728).

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