



The  
WISSETT  
DOMESDAY  
1086-1986

In 1066 Duke William of Normandy conquered England. Most of the English nobility lost their lands, which were granted to William's followers. Domesday book was compiled 20 years later. It was compiled in order to define land ownership for taxation and legal purposes. The Saxon Chronicle for 1085 records..

"At Gloucester at midwinter - the King had deep speech with his counsellors - and sent men all over England to each shire - to find out - what or how each landholder held - in land and livestock, and what it was worth - The returns were brought to him."

The information was abridged and written out

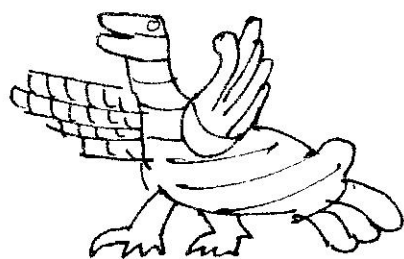
In fair copy by one hand, known now as Domesday Book Volume One or DB. Essex Suffolk and Norfolk were left unabridged and are in another volume called Little Domesday Book or LDB.

The whole undertaking was complete by Michaelmas 1086, although the fair copying of DB may have taken a little longer.



The survey remained unmatched in Europe for many centuries. It was possible because of the sophisticated English administration that William found here.

Many holdings were described by the Norman word "manerium" or manor. These varied greatly in size from tiny farms to huge estates in several parishes.



Some versions of the regional returns survive. One of them, from Ely Abbey, is called Inquisitio Eliensis. It records the brief given to the commissioners.

They were to ask:

"The name of the place. Who held it before 1066 and now?

How many hides (120 acres)? How many ploughs, both in the Lordship and the men's?

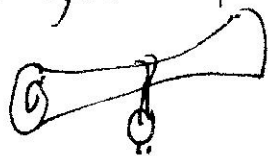
How many villagers, cottagers and slaves, how many free men and Freeman?

How much woodland, meadow and pasture? How many mills and fishponds?

How much has been added and taken away? What the total value was and is?

How much each free man or Freeman had or has? All threefold, before 1066, When King William gave it, and now, and if more can be had than at present."

The procedure was also set down. The Commissioners took evidence on oath from the Sheriff, the barons and their Frenchmen, The whole Hundred, the priests, the reeves and six villagers from each village.



In the time of King Edward, Wissett was held by Ralph Stabra (or Constable). His Suffolk headquarters were in Wissett. It is described as a lordship of 480 acres (4 carucates). There were 14 freemen, and another at Covehithe. All of Ralph's fee went to Count Alan of Brittany by 1086.

In the Survey the lands are grouped as follows:

Land held as a manor.

Land held by 14 free men

Land held by the church

Land held by villeins attached to the church.

Land held at Stone (Street)

These were all, with the exception of the last, in the one assessment of £20. They could perhaps be loosely termed the extent of the Manor of Wissett in 1086, held by Count Alan.

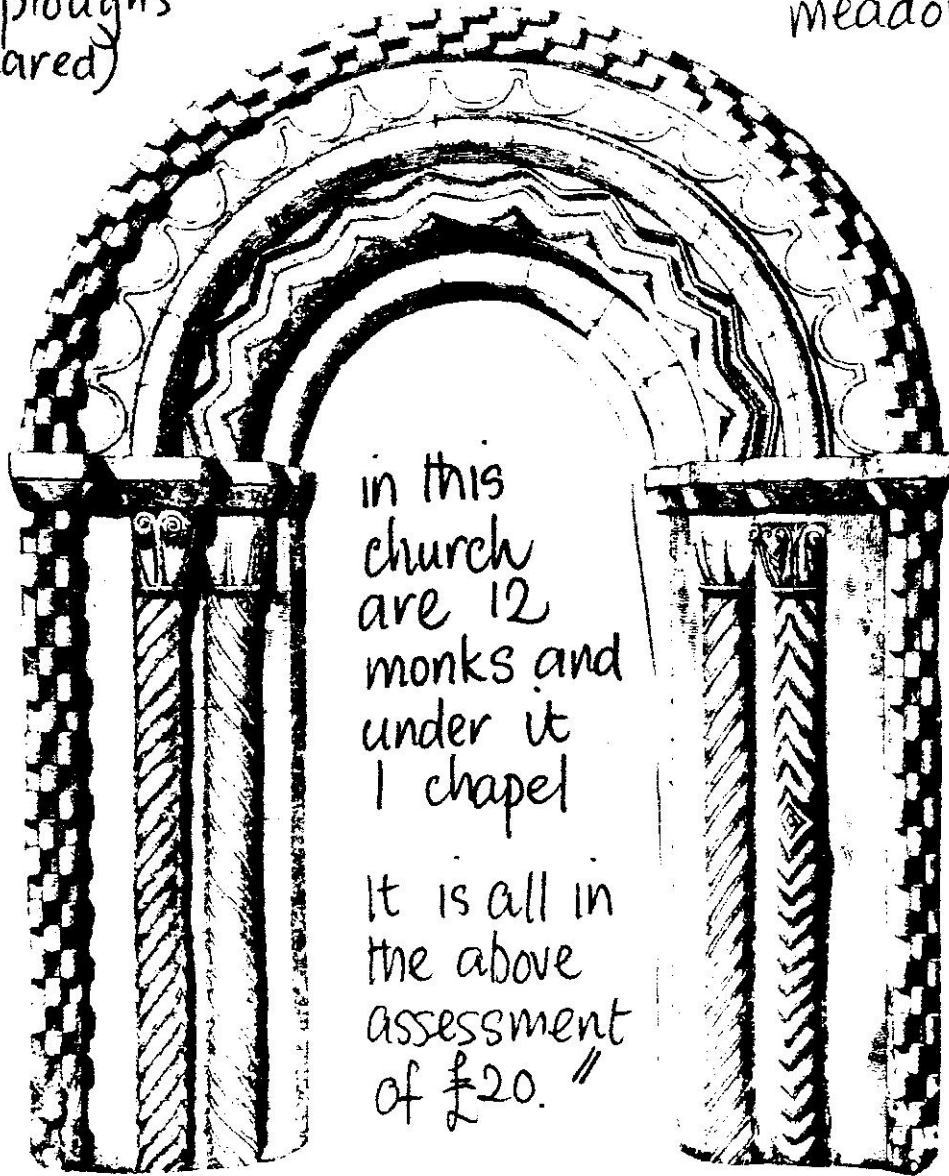
A possible interpretation of this is that the Demesne or central manorial holding is the present village of Wissett and surrounding farmlands. The 14 freemen held land in the region of Spexhall. The Church lands were in Rumburgh. Stone might have been the area now called Stone Street.



# Domesday Extract - Lands of Count Alan.

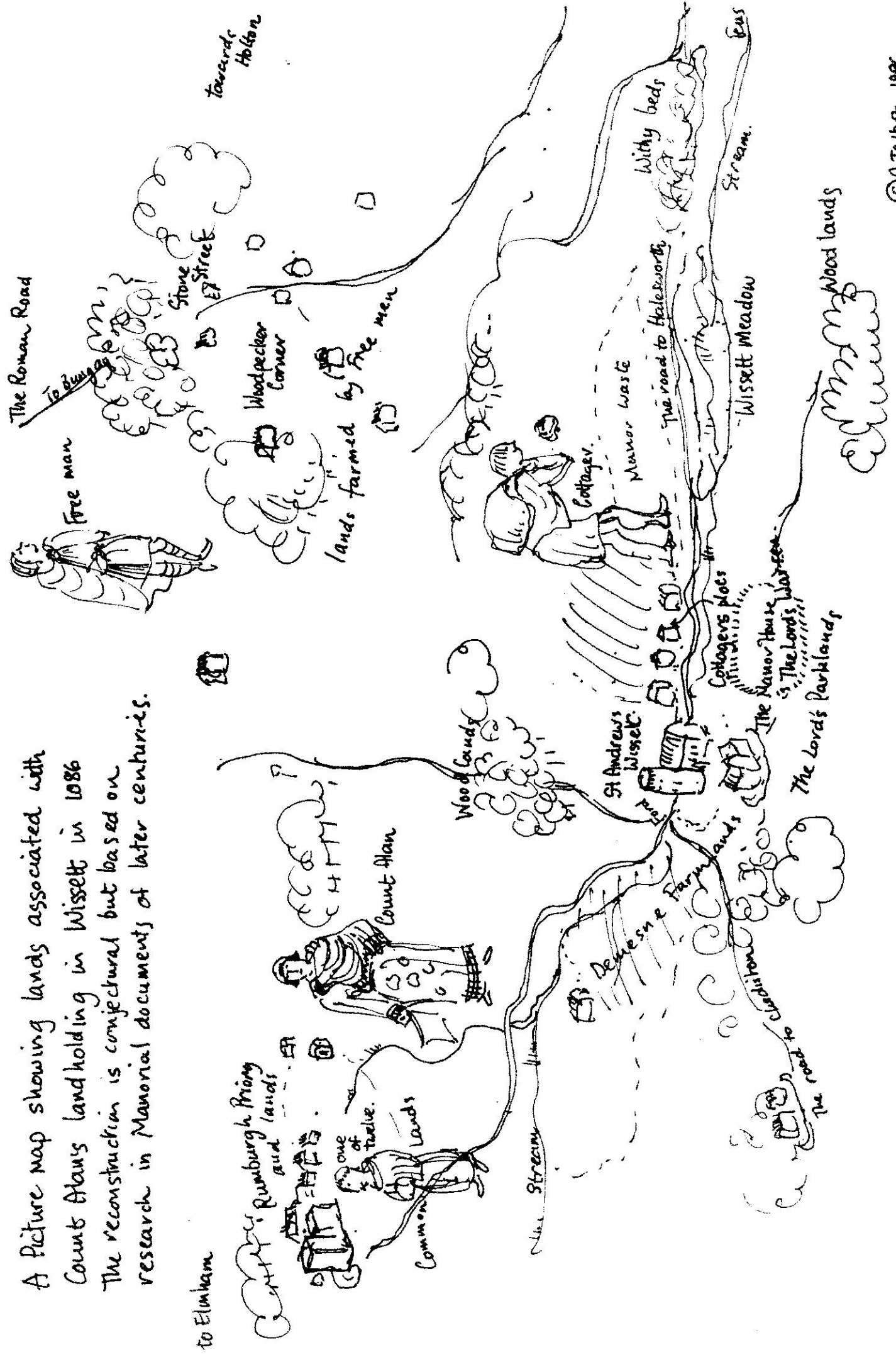
"In the same Wissett, 1 church 2 carucates  
of free land always 12 villagers (villeins) 16 small holders (cottagers)

6 ploughs Woodland 130 pigs Meadow 3 acres  
5 villagers are attached to this church 52 acres  
4½ ploughs (1 shared) meadow 1 acre



It seems that the "church" was Rumburgh Priory founded between 1064 and 1070 by Ethelmar, Bishop of Elmham, and Thurstan Abbot of St. Benet. The "chapel" was St. Andrew's Wissett. The engraving shows the North doorway in Norman times.

A Picture map showing lands associated with Count Alan's landholding in Wissett in 1086. The reconstruction is conjectural but based on research in Manorial documents of later centuries.



# The Domesday Survey 1086 Wissett.

## Lands of Count Alan.

### Blything Hundred.

"Ralph the Constable (Stabra L.D.B.) held Wisseta (Wissett) in the time of King Edward (before 1066) as 1 manor, for 4 carucates of land (480 acres). The count now holds it in Lordship.

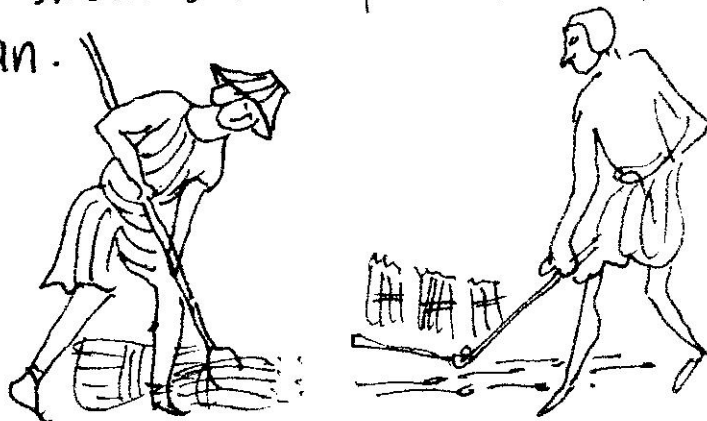
Always 10 villagers (villeins) 10 small-holders (bordars) - Then 2 slaves (servi)

Always 2 ploughs in Lordship  
5 men's ploughs

Wood land 300 pigs Meadow 4 acres  
4 cobs. 20 cattle 60 pigs . 63 sheep  
51 goats.

Value then £8. later £15 now £20. "

This description covers the Demesne lands of Alan and the holdings of his Villeins and the garden plots of his labourers (cottagers). Villeins were in effect small scale farmers who owed duty to Alan.



# The Domesday Survey 1086 Wissett

## Lands of Count Alan - Continuation.

// In the same (Wissett) 14 free men under patronage. 4 carucates of land. (480 acres)

15 Small holders (bordars)

Always 8 ploughs

Meadow 2 acres

Wood land 300 pigs then. Now 60. "

(This implies land clearance and possible increase of value)

// This description tallies closely with free holdings in Spahall.

In the same Wissett 1 Church 2 carucates of free land. Always 12 villagers 16 small holders 6 ploughs. Woodland 13 pigs meadow three acres.

5 villagers are attached to this church.

52 acres 4½ ploughs Meadow 1 acre

In this church are 12 monks and under it a chapel.

It is all in the assessment of £20. "

This is land in Rumburgh.

Monk hurrying  
to Wissett to take  
morning service.

