

“...his lady...”
in
Domesday Book.

The Domesday Book entry for what later became known as ‘Eardisland’ is longer than most in Herefordshire. The parts of it which are relevant to this Paper are:

“ in Lene Hundred
Eardisland. Earl Morcar held it.....
...Before 1066 the reeve of this manor had the custom
that when his lady came to the manor he presented to her 18 ora of
pence so that she might be happy.
The steward and other officers had 10s from him.”¹

A note referring to this at the back of the same edition of Domesday Book states:

“HIS LADY. That is Morcar’s wife. There is a similar entry in DB Shropshire 4,1,20 referring to the wife of Earl Edwin, Morcar’s brother.”

But in the twenty one years since the publication of the Phillimore edition of Domesday Book scholarship has moved on. At the very end of the entry for Morcar in the 2004 Edition of the Dictionary of National Biography is the wording: “There is no record of Morcar marrying or fathering children.”

And so “his lady” can not have been Morcar’s wife.

Also important to the thrust of this Paper is that the Phillimore ‘Note’ relates the word “his” before “lady” back to Morcar, who in the DB text itself is mentioned right at the start of the entry, some ten lines – as set out there – before the wording translated as “lady”. I do not doubt the correctness of the translation from the Latin, but surely the “his” relates to “...the reeve of this manor” and not to “Morcar”, those several lines earlier. To me this signifies that “TRE”² –and before Morcar held it- the manor was held by “his lady” and that she was certainly not resident here – nor did she (impliedly) visit particularly often. The text tells us that the manor had a ‘reeve’, a ‘steward’ and ‘other officers’. The steward and the other officers also benefited on such occasions, but it is not recorded that the reeve did also. A ‘reeve’ was a royal officer, but one whose functions as a local official were probably varied.³

¹ Domesday Book. Phillimore & Co. Ltd’s Edition. Vol.17. Chichester.1983.

² Tempore regis Edwardi. (1042-1066).

³ Phillimore: Notes 1,3 and “Technical Terms”.

Who then are the candidates to be this “lady” – possibly of royal background and possibly, but not without doubt, a relative of Morcar, and if so, perhaps of a previous generation? The fact that twenty years after 1066 there was such a clear local memory of the situation as it had been TRE may be an indication that Morcar had not then held the manor for very long. Indeed as I read the Phillimore translation in modern English, I get the impression that happy days are being recounted, referring to not very long before the Conquest.

If I am correct that she (‘his lady’) held the manor before Morcar, how long before 1066 was this? Or to put the question the other way round, when did Morcar first come to hold the manor? There is no specific record of when this was, although his age in 1066 may give some indication.

Morcar and his brother⁴ were still in their teens in 1066⁵ and Morcar was the younger brother. Thus even if Eadwine was a full nineteen years old in 1066, Morcar was at most eighteen, and if so, he was born circa 1048, roughly six years into the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042-1066).

Morcar was not elected earl of the Northumbrians until October 1065 and held considerable estates throughout the midland and northern counties, probably inherited, his father having died in “1062?”⁶ If Eardisland/Lene was one of these midland estates which he, probably, inherited, then the “lady” may well have been his mother. Whether or not she actually held the manor in her own right or was visiting on behalf of her husband is not really of importance, nor is it provable one way or the other.

If all this conjecture of mine is correct then this Paper can be finalised by suggesting that the holder in the mid-eleventh century (before Morcar) of the lands which later became known as Eardisland, was either his father, Aelfgar, or his mother, Aelfgifu. Both were individuals of considerable importance.

Aelfgar was the son of Earl Leofric of Mercia and the Lady (Countess) Godiva. He was Earl of East Anglia 1051-1052 and 1053-1057, then earl of Mercia 1057-1062.⁷

Aelfgifu was possibly the daughter of the Northumbrian thegn Morcar (killed in 1015) who had married into the family of Aelfgifu of Northampton, King Knut’s first wife.⁸

It is tempting to try to take the story back before Morcar’s parents – but whilst there is a lot of general information published about the individuals who may have been involved in this vicinity, I have found nothing that is specific to ‘Eardisland’. In the context of a serious ‘history’ of Eardisland, of which this is intended to form a part, such speculation would be inappropriate.

⁴ Eadwine, earl of Mercia (d.1071). [From Oxford DNB of 2004].

⁵ ‘Battle Conference’, page 162.

⁶ Oxford DNB, 2004.

⁷ Phillimore DB. Notes 10,58.

⁸ Oxford DNB. 2004.

