

HIDES, CARUCATES AND YARDLANDS IN LEICESTERSHIRE: THE CASE OF SADDINGTON

by

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In Gartee Wapentake. The King holds Setintone. There is one hide less one carucate. In demesne there is i plough, and there are xi sochmen and xvii villeins with v bordars who have viii ploughs . . .¹

This is the entry in Domesday Book. How many carucates were there in Saddington? The Leicestershire Hide is wrapped in much controversy.²

Three Hypotheses

Leicestershire is a duodecimal county—the Domesday and the Survey of Leicestershire (c.1130) entries seem to round off into twelves or fractions of twelve. The first two candidates for the number of carucates in a hide are, therefore, twelve and eighteen. It should be remembered that a carucate (or ploughland) in Leicestershire was a fiscal unit for the taxation of land, and contained four “virgates” (or yardlands). A virgate was, in this part of the country, a bundle of strips in the open fields, a unit of tenure and of assessment, which varied much in size within each village (or at least, I think, within Saddington, and, for example, the neighbouring village of Fleckney). Two sizes keep on recurring: fifteen and thirty acres or areas approximating to these. Land in the open fields was bought and sold (usually, not always) by the virgate and by quarters of the virgate, a balanced unit in three fields. A bovate was half a virgate, one eighth of a carucate, the land of one ox, when a plough was drawn by eight oxen.

The best evidence for twelve or eighteen carucates to the Hide comes from *Brandinestor*, which is described in Domesday as follows: “There are two parts of one hide, that is, twelve carucates of land. Six ploughs were there”.³ The entry for Kilby is similar, and Aylestone seems also to be twelve.⁴

Unfortunately, there is some ambiguity here, though it is an ambiguity which a local historian of that manor should be able to clear up. It might mean that the hide was of twelve carucates, or that two-thirds of a hide of eighteen carucates made twelve carucates. It does confirm the supposition that the hide was of either twelve, or eighteen, carucates in some places in Leicestershire. Other evidence points the same way: in Burbage it was assuredly eighteen.⁵

The third hypothesis comes from the entry for Melton Mowbray. Here were “vii hides and one carucate of land and one bovate. In each hide there

are *xiiii and a half* carucates of land".⁶ There were four *plus* six and a half ploughs, it was "now" worth eight pounds; Saddington, for comparison, was "now" worth nine pounds. The entry is in many ways a puzzling one, and may contain a grave error, but it appears explicit on the point of $14\frac{1}{2}$. I have no suggestion to account for this curious figure.⁷

Thus we may have three hypotheses. A hide is either twelve, or eighteen, or fourteen-and-a-half carucates. Quite probably, we may further conjecture, it was of a different value in different places.

The Relationship of carucates to ploughs

"Now two facts," Sir Frank Stenton states, "stand out prominently upon a consideration of the Leicestershire plough-lands as a whole. The first is that with rare exceptions they (the number of ploughs mentioned in Domesday) are less in number than the carucates imposed upon the same manor. The second is that the ploughs recorded in the entry will generally bear some very simple ratio to the fiscal units (*viz.* the carucates) comprised in the same."⁸

Here follows a table, from which I have extracted some manors near to Saddington.

Ratio 1 : 2			Ratio 2 : 3			Ratio 1 : 1		
Vill	Ploughs	Car.	Vill	Ploughs	Car.	Vill	Ploughs	Car.
Knaptoft	6	12	Wigston			Peatling	4	4
Knighton	6	12	Magna	16	24(?)			
Shearsby	$\frac{1}{2}$	1	Burton					
Shangton	1	2	Overy	8	12			
			Peatling	2	3			

(The two Peatlings are adjacent)

Which hypothesis suits Saddington?

Size. Saddington contains about 1,700 modern acres. If there were eighteen carucates to a hide, then this means that there were seventeen carucates in Saddington. The carucate is usually approximately assigned a limit of 120 acres, but if there were 100 acres in the average Saddington carucate (four yardlands averaging 25 acres) then the Domesday carucate would precisely fit in—but it is an uncomfortably tight fit. Moreover, it would imply 68 (17×4) virgates, whereas, I should say, sixty virgates was a sort of maximum. 68 is not quite impossible, but it is unlikely. In general, therefore, a hide of eighteen carucates is uncomfortably high for Saddington.

On the other hand, a hide of twelve carucates is somewhat low, although again not quite impossible: so far as acreage is concerned indeed, it quite likely approximates to the correct figure (at 120 acres to the carucate). But 11 carucates would give only 44 virgates, and this seems uncomfortably low.

It is tempting, therefore, on grounds of size to make an intermediate hypothesis for Saddington, and to try out the Melton Mowbray figure of fourteen-and-a-half.

Carucates and ploughs. If the reader will glance back at the list of "simple" ratios between ploughs and carucates, he will see that 2 : 3 is common for nearby parishes of Saddington. There were either 17, $13\frac{1}{2}$ or 11 carucates in Saddington, according to the value of the hide. There were nine ploughs.

$$\text{Now, } 9 \text{ plus } \frac{9}{2} = 13\frac{1}{2}$$

The $14\frac{1}{2}$ carucate hide is, in fact, the only one that comes out exactly to a simple ratio, *viz.* 2 : 3.

How many virgates were there in Saddington Fields?

It seems possible, even likely, that the number of virgates remained constant, at least for assessment purposes, from the Conquest until 1770, when the fields were enclosed.

On the basis of the manorial extents of 1310 and 1316,⁹ it would seem that the free tenants held $31\frac{1}{2}$ virgates, and that a free tenement of from one to four virgates was in the lord's hands. The villeins held $14\frac{1}{2}$ virgates, and the demesne¹⁰ was 6 virgates, making a total of 53 or 54. Perhaps a virgate of glebe should be added. There may have been another small manor, not included, but this would require much argument to elucidate. The provisional figure is therefore 54 virgates, though it might be more.

Again, in the unpublished Constables' Accounts¹¹ for 1758, there is a levy at the rate of six shillings a "yardland", which omits the Glebe and the Rector's tithes, and amounts to £15 19s. 10d., that is to say 52 to 53 yardlands for fiscal purposes, plus one yardland of glebe: the figure is confirmed by four other entries.¹² The actual, unenclosed, yardlands seem to have been $48\frac{14}{16}$ in 1770 (the figure given to the House of Commons¹³ on enclosure), including glebe, but excluding ancient enclosures of at least seventy acres¹⁴ and probably more: it is reasonable to suppose that the enclosed areas were reckoned in yardlands for assessment purposes. Both lines of argument are consistent with an assessment of 54 yardlands.

The point of this argument is that 54 yardlands (virgates) is $13\frac{1}{2}$ carucates, which is one hide less one carucate if there are $14\frac{1}{2}$ carucates in the hide.

Since these three arguments (size, simple ratio, yardlands) point in the same direction—though none of them is absolutely conclusive—I hold it to be *very nearly* proved that the Saddington hide, like the Melton Mowbray hide, was fourteen-and-a-half carucates.

The other manors surveyed in Hides

The contribution to Domesday studies that has been made above, if the facts and the logic hold, can be summarised:

(i) There is no single answer for the whole county, to the question "What is a hide?". $14\frac{1}{2}$ is as reasonable an answer as 18 and 12, and we may expect some hides to be of each size. The search for the hide is brought down to the province of the local historian, the search in each instance of the hide in that particular place.

(ii) Confirmation of the "simple ratio" must be obtained from intimate knowledge of the actual place, in terms of virgates. I believe that this is a new line of enquiry. From inspection it seems there may be some manors where there is a discernable relation between Domesday carucates and virgates, and others where there is none.

With the other manors reckoned in hides in Domesday (Shepshed, Dishley, Knighton, Knaptoft, Aylestone, Wigston Magna, Foston, Arnesby, Saltby, Kilby, "Brandinestor", Burbage) in general the value of twelve or the value of eighteen gives an equally "simple ratio" of ploughlands to ploughs. With twelve it is generally 1 : 1, with eighteen 2 : 3, and both are usual. Shepshed¹⁵ I cannot make work on any formula. In the case of Dishley,¹⁶ 12 fits the "simple ratio" better, but 18 fits the Leicestershire Survey better. In the case of Saltby, a twelve-carucate hide seems called for in the Survey.¹⁷

In the case of Wigston, however, some progress can be made. Professor Hoskins gives the number of yardlands as $92\frac{2}{3}$ in the sixteenth century, but as 96 in 1764.¹⁸ There are one-and-one-third hides there in Domesday, and sixteen ploughs. While twelve or eighteen fit the "simple ratio" equally well, the yardlands at a later date show that there were just over 23 carucates, which fits an eighteen-carucate hide sufficiently neatly. Moreover, Domesday gives the Wigston demesne as one third of one hide, that is to say, one quarter of the whole assessment, and Dr. Hoskins shows that this was 23 virgates, an exact quarter of 23 carucates—confirming that the Wigston Magna hide was eighteen carucates.

It would seem therefore that a determination of the yardlands in these manors would, probably in most cases, give an added probability to our guess at the size of the Leicestershire hide in each particular place.¹⁹

NOTES

1. DB, *f.* 230 *b*, *col.* 1.
2. For the principal references to this controversy, see F. M. Stenton "Domesday Survey", in *Victoria County History, Leicestershire*, Vol. 1 (1907), 280-282. The Leicestershire hide has puzzled Maitland, Round, Stevenson and Stenton. It corresponds in a rough way to the carucate of the southern counties, while the carucate in Leicestershire is the hide of the southern counties. The puzzle is how many carucates the hide contains in Leicestershire.
3. DB, *Brandinestor*, *f.* 237 a.2. This entry has sometimes been identified with Bromkinsthorp, now a part of Leicester, and sometimes with Bruntingthorpe.
4. DB, *Cilebi*, *f.* 236 a. *Ailestone*, *f.* 231 b. "one hide and the sixth part of a hide".
5. DB, *Burbece*, *f.* 231 a.2.
6. DB, *Medeltone*, *f.* 235 b.
7. Melton can, on the face of it, hardly have contained much more than one of these agricultural hides, and c.1130 seems to have had 15 carucates—see *The Leicestershire Survey*, 20, 51, 64, edited by C. F. Slade (Department of English Local History, University College of Leicester, Occasional Paper No. 7 (1956), henceforward cited as *Survey*). Mr. Slade protests against the "enormous", the "fabulous" assessment, that puts out all his figures, and indeed the whole carucage of Leicestershire. I am unhappy that an entry upon which I rely so much should contain a *prima facie* error.
8. F. M. Stenton, *op. cit.*, 285.
9. G. F. Farnham, *Leicestershire Medieval Village Notes*, (1930), IV, 7-8.

10. *Victoria County History, Leicestershire*, vol. V, (1964), 284. This site as reference a manuscript copy made by Burton, the seventeenth-century antiquarian, in the Bodleian. In 1310 (Farnham, *loc. cit.*) the demesne was described as 120 acres. I could adduce more argument to show that the 1310/1316 survey shows much the same picture as Domesday Book.
11. Saddington Town Book, the earlier of two manuscript volumes so entitled. These records have recently been deposited in the County Record Office, Leicester.
12. The other entries are complicated by the Tithes and Glebe, but seem to give nearly the same result, when these are allowed for.
13. *Journals of the House of Commons (1770)*, vol. XXXII, 716.
14. See the map compiled by the author from the description given in the Enclosure Award of 1770, and deposited with a copy of the Award in Leicester University Library.
15. DB, *Scepeshefd*, f. 230, b, col. 2. Saddington, Shepshed and Dishley are part of the same entry.
16. DB, *Dislea*, f. 230, b, col. 2. This is a difficult entry. See *Survey*, 45.
17. *Survey*, 54. The Domesday assessment is 2 hides 3 c (DB, *Saltebi*, f. 234, b, col. 2). "TRE" 28, "now" 26 ploughs. The Leicestershire Survey gives it as 28 carucates. But it is a difficult entry.
18. W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant (1957)*, 22. This is the only case where I have been able to obtain either reliable knowledge of the number of yardlands in a village assessed in hides, or an established work of scholarship to rely upon. I regard Wigston Magna as rather convincing support of the yardland method of obtaining a value for the hide. It works both for the vill as a whole, and for the demesne as it does in Saddington. The discrepancy between $92\frac{2}{3}$ and 96 can be accounted for.
19. The implications of a constant number of yardlands from Domesday to Enclosure also stretch into the question of assarting, the breaking of waste land for cultivation. We know of particular yardlands at some early date of fifteen acres, and yardlands at a later date which are of thirty or so acres, but no conclusion can be drawn from this unless we can prove that it is the same yardland; for they varied in size in the same parish. If Professor Hoskins is right, and the cultivated area subject to open-field rules expanded in Wigston, and if I am right in thinking that the cultivated open-field area also expanded in Saddington—and the number of yardlands remained constant in both places, then we must conclude that the individual yardland expanded in size. There are rather many other complications (*e.g.* a change from two fields to three fields). It is interesting to find yardlands used as units of assessment, as well as of tenure, in the eighteenth century, and this prompts reflection upon a large controversy. The parson's yardland also merits more study. The title story, the size of the hide, adds a new complication to an old controversy. But I can find no suggestion of a $14\frac{1}{2}$ -carucate hide elsewhere in Leicestershire than Saddington (and Melton). The yardland theory, however, depends to some extent on the hide theory, and both cannot be proved simultaneously from the same data. This is why it is necessary for me to bring in other arguments that increase the probability.

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