

Launch of Domesday Online

The **Domesday Book** is the oldest public record in the UK National Archives and is the latest document to be digitised and made searchable on the World Wide Web. Domesday Online was launched on 3rd August 2006 and within twenty four hours had received thousands of hits.



Historical context

In 1066 William Duke of Normandy defeated the Anglo Saxon King, Harold II, at the Battle of Hastings and became King of England. In 1085 England was again threatened with invasion, this time from Denmark. William had to pay for the mercenary army he hired to defend his kingdom. To do this he needed to know what financial and military resources were available to him.

At Christmas 1085 he commissioned a survey to discover the resources and taxable values of all the boroughs and manors in England. He wanted to discover who owned what, how much it was worth and how much was owed to him as King in tax, rents, and military service. But Domesday is much more than just a tax record. It also records which manors belonged to which estates and gives the identities of the King's tenants-in-chief who owed him military service in the form of knights to fight in his army. The King was essentially interested in tracing, recording and recovering his royal rights and revenues which he wished to maximise. It was also in the interests of his chief barons to co-operate in the survey since it set on permanent record the gains they had made since 1066.

Why is it called 'Domesday'?

The nickname 'Domesday' may refer to the Biblical Day of Judgement, or 'doomsday' when Christ will return to judge the living and the dead. Just as there will be no appeal on that day against his decisions, so Domesday Book has the final word – there is no appeal beyond it as evidence of legal title to land. For many centuries Domesday was regarded as the authoritative register regarding rightful possession and was used mainly for that purpose. It was called Domesday by 1180. Before that it was known as the Winchester Roll or King's Roll, and sometimes as the Book of the Treasury.



By logging on to the following: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/domesday visitors can learn about the history of the document and can search the index entries for people and place names, as well as towns, cities and villages.

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