Women and Landed Society in Conquest England

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1: Introduction

The Domesday Book offers a truly unique insight into the Norman Conquest's impact on women. Its records of female landholding and lordship in 1066 and 1086 allow a re-evaluation of how the Conquest altered women's position in society. Buckstaff was the first to argue women's position deteriorated after the Conquest. She claimed Anglo-Saxon women were 'equal partners in marriage' and 'independent citizens' as widows, but William the Conqueror's reign set in motion gradual changes that had reduced women's agency and independence by the twelfth century.[1] Doris and Frank Stenton developed the idea of an Anglo-Saxon 'Golden Age' for women, whom they considered 'more nearly the equal companions of their husbands and brothers than any other period before the modern'; instead of a gradual change, however, they argue the Norman Conquest ended this 'rough and ready partnership'.[2] Though Frank Stenton was struck by Anglo-Saxon women who enjoyed considerable influence, such as seventh-century Hild of Whitby, who ruled a monastery for both men and women, eighth-century Cynethryth of Mercia, who had coins struck in her name, and Ælfgifu of Northampton, Cnut's first wife, who ruled over Norway with severity,[3] his principal observation was the frequency with which place-names recorded in Domesday contained women's names in various forms; several even combined women's names with the Anglo-Saxon word 'burh' (fortress).[4]

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[1] E. Buckstaff, 'Married Women's Property in Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Law and the Origin of Common-Law Dower', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 4 (1893), pp.50-56.
[2] D. Stenton, *The English Woman in History* (London, 1956), p.26.
[3] F. Stenton, 'The Historical Bearing of Place-Name Studies: The Place of Women in Anglo-Saxon Society', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4/25 (1943), p.1.
[4] Ibid., pp.5-8.

Stenton also touches upon Anglo-Saxon women's apparent license to inherit and bequeath lands, briefly referring to the freedoms associated with bookland, and drawing attention to a lady in Herefordshire who disinherited her son, Edwin, in favour of her kinswoman, Leoflæd.[5] Anglo-Saxon women were responsible for 25%-30% of all surviving wills; several, including Wynflæd's, are remarkably comprehensive.[6] Hough has explored women's position within Anglo-Saxon law-codes, using surviving legislation from several Anglo-Saxon kings, including Alfred the Great, Æthelred II and Cnut. She concludes women were not only protected by the law, with sexual assaults heavily penalised, but were oath-worthy and accountable under the law. [7] Evidence from lawsuits, such as a certain Wynflæd's victorious suit against Leofwine at a shire court in Berkshire, suggest Anglo-Saxon women could prove their title to land by making an oath.[8]

This 'Golden Age' view of Anglo-Saxon women and the reduction of their status following the Norman Conquest was widely accepted until Stafford's work 40 years later. Stafford cogently criticises 'Golden Ages' as a historical trope, pointing to historians' tendency to oversimplify complex historical phenomena in an attempt to relate the past to present day concerns: Buckstaff, for instance, may have been affected by the contemporary feminist drive for women's legal and property rights.[9] The late eighteenth and early nineteenth-

[5] Stenton, 'The Place of Women in Anglo-Saxon Society', pp.2-3. P. Wormald, *Papers Preparatory to The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. Volume II: From God's Law to Common Law*, ed. S. Baxter and J. Hudson (London, 2014), pp.212-228. P. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968), p.410.
[6] *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, ed. and tr. D. Whitelock (Cambridge, 1930), pp.11-15.
[7] C. Hough, 'Women and law in the Anglo-Saxon period', ed. B. O'Brien, http://www.earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk/reference/essays/women-and-law/ (9 Feb. 2019)
[8] Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, p.410.
[9] P. Stafford, 'Women and the Norman Conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 6 (1994), pp.224-225.

century tendency to use women's status as 'a litmus test of civilisation' rendered Norman culpability for a regression in women's rights appealing to English historians.[10] Stafford argues there has been an overstatement of both the liberties Anglo-Saxon women enjoyed before the Conquest and the change it yielded. She points to the extremely modest proportion of land pre-Conquest women held in Domesday and their sparse appearance on royal charters' witness lists,[11] and stresses the need to account for variation among women in the interpretation of the relatively sparse surviving Anglo-Saxon evidence: there is no guarantee that the control Edwin's mother exercised over her property was in any way typical.[12] Moreover, she makes the case for continuity, pointing to practices concerning women which spanned the Conquest period, such as their treatment as pawns in politics; she argues the differences between the morning gift and *maritagium* have been overstated and that dowries were neither a Norman import nor necessarily equivalent to lower status.[13] Finally, Stafford draws attention to the careers of influential Anglo-Norman women, including Empress Matilda and Mabel of Bellême, and observes that women's consent was regularly recorded on twelfth-century land grants.[14]

Although Stafford makes some provocative points and worthwhile criticisms of the subject's previous historiography, she severely underestimates the Conquest's impact on women and several of her own arguments invite criticism. Firstly, Stafford's case for present day concerns affecting historians' agenda may seem worthwhile, but it does not render their

[10] Ibid., p.228.
[11] Ibid., p.226.
[12] Ibid., pp.241-242.
[13] Ibid., pp.237-239.
[14] Ibid., pp.226-227.

arguments completely devoid of any truth and, surely, the same criticism can be applied to Stafford herself. Writing in the context of a historiographical shift towards a maximum view of the late Anglo-Saxon state, evident in the works of Campbell and Wormald, it seems likely that Stafford was also affected by this drive to stress continuity in the Conquest period.[15] Secondly, Stafford neglects certain evidence in her treatment of women, most notably wills. Wormald supplies a corrective: he makes a convincing case that women appeared so frequently in Anglo-Saxon wills because they were primarily concerned with bookland, acquisitions which could be dispensed of with greater flexibility than inherited land, and which constituted a means of providing for women. There was no post-Conquest equivalent. Stafford criticises Anglo-Saxonists' tendency to cast select women as entirely representative, and then makes a similar point herself. Some Anglo-Norman women may have exercised influence in spite of their patriarchal context, but that does not disprove that, on the whole, women's opportunity for influence, be it through landholding or lordship, diminished in the wake of the Conquest. Even if women's pre-Conquest position has indeed been over-glorified, it still stood to be further reduced; Anglo-Saxon women may have held very little land in 1066, but they held markedly less 20 years later.

It seems, then, that the primary challenge facing this subject is the difficulty of assessing change that broadly affected all women, rather than making assumptions or estimates based on a select few examples. Recently, as part of the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England (PASE) Project, directed by Stephen Baxter, Simon Keynes and Jinty Nelson, the

[15] J. Campbell, 'The Significance of the Anglo-Norman State in the Administrative History of Western Europe', in J. Campbell (ed.), *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), pp.171–190. Wormald, P., *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. Volume I: Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999).

Domesday evidence has been digitized, allowing the Conquest's impact on women's landholding to be evaluated with unprecedented ease and accuracy.[16] Treated with caution, these records can be taken as representative of women's experience across an exceptionally broad spectrum of society. As landholding is intrinsically linked with status and the potential for influence, the sharp decrease in the number of female landowners and the wealth they held between 1066-1086 can be interpreted as evidence of a deterioration in women's position after the Conquest. PASE Domesday's data also hints at the causes of this reduction and offers an insight into the corresponding diminution in female lordship.

This reassessment of the Conquest's impact on women will be drawn primarily from Domesday, though also supported by chronicles, law-codes, wills, writs, land charters and other governmental documents. Although PASE Domesday permits an analysis of all female landowners, more evidence has surviving about wealthier women, allowing them to be contextualised with greater depth. Landowners have been separated into 10 'class bands', based on Corbett's 'Classes A-E',[17] for analytical purposes. Chapter 2 will use Domesday's evidence to assess the decrease in women's landholding, its nature and its extent; Chapter 3 will propose an explanation for this decrease; Chapter 4 will evaluate the Conquest's impact on female lordship; and Chapter 5 will reflect upon the Conquest's long-term repercussions for women. The shocking decrease in female landownership and lordship between 1066-1086 suggests the Conquest reduced women's capacity for influence within society

[16] PASE Domesday http://domesday.pase.ac.uk/ (29 Feb. 2019) is the website, the offline database for which I have been granted access. Not all the database's entries have been thoroughly checked yet, but I have checked the accuracy all those referenced below.
[17] W. Corbett, 'The Development of the Duchy of Normandy and the Norman Conquest of England', *Cambridge Medieval History* (8 vols, Cambridge, 1926), v, p.510.

considerably. This deterioration to their position was to prove lasting. The intensification of royal lordship under the new Anglo-Norman monarchy led, among other phenomena, to the systemisation of the marriage market, causing long-term grievances that were eventually articulated in Magna Carta.

2: The Scale of Women's Landholding in 1066 and 1086

Domesday reveals an unmistakable drop in the amount of land women held: not only were there significantly fewer landholders in 1086, but those landholders cumulatively held much less land. Stafford engages with Domesday's evidence for women in more depth than any previous historian. She raises several issues with taking it at face value: royal administration forced a 'brutal clarification' where lands potentially controlled by women in practice were recorded under husbands and sons.[18] 'Domestic arrangements internal to the estate' were considered largely irrelevant to the survey, so land ear-marked for women, like dower, was attributed to their husbands instead. This lead to an underrepresentation of women's holdings in Domesday.[19] In her attempt to criticise the 'Golden Age' thesis, Stafford calculates that women held only 5% of England's landed wealth in 1066, and that 8 women held 80-85% of this.[20]

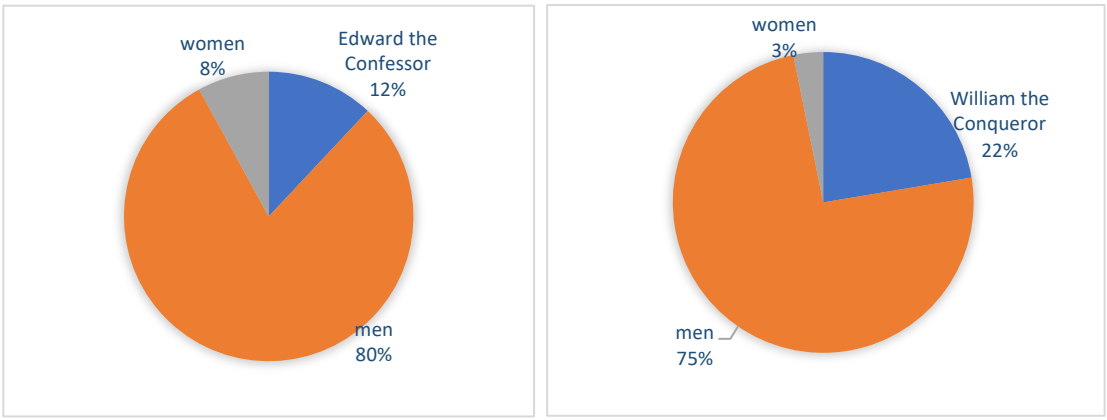
Though elements of Stafford's analysis are compelling, she understates Domesday's value for assessing change and her calculations can be much refined. Domesday may indeed reveal only a fraction of women's landholding, focusing on widows and disregarding internal

[18] P. Stafford, 'Women in Domesday', in A. Bate and M. Barber (eds), *Medieval Women in Southern England* (1989), pp.81-82.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Stafford, 'Women and the Norman Conquest', p.226.

domestic arrangements, but this underrepresentation was consistent across 1066-1086. Therefore, although exact figures should be treated with caution, Domesday remains valuable for assessing change. An analysis of Domesday's evidence with greater depth and accuracy made possible by PASE Domesday, shows women held 8%, not 5%, of England's total landed wealth in 1066. This pre-Conquest portion may have been small, but that did not preclude a very noticeable reduction after the Conquest.

There was an unmistakable drop in the proportion of England's landed wealth that women held between 1066-1086: it decreased from 8% to 3%.

Figure 1: The distribution of landed wealth by gender in 1066 and 1086



Women collectively possessed £5502 of landed wealth between them in 1066, but only £2423 in 1086, a 56% decrease. Perhaps more shocking was the decrease in their number. The 319 female landowners England boasted in 1066 had dwindled to 62 by 1086, an 81% decrease.

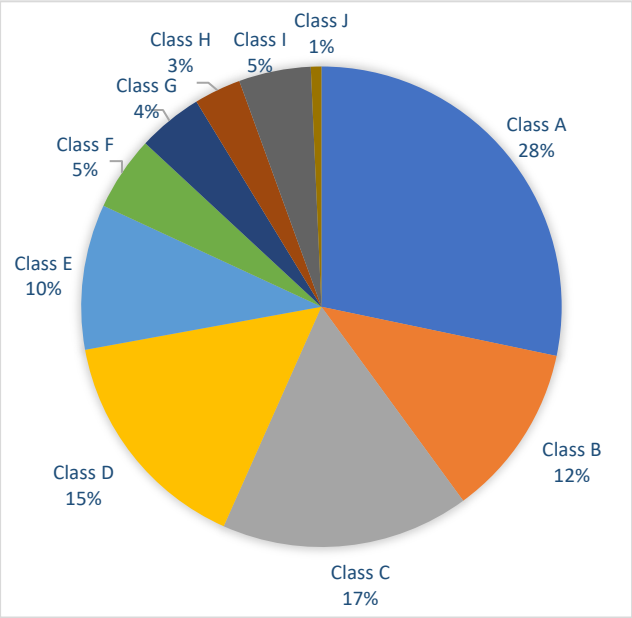
Table 1: The distribution of landed wealth between pre-Conquest female landowners

Class	1066		1086		% Decrease	
	No. Landholders	Net income (£)	No. Landholders	Net Income (£)	No. Landholders	Net Income (£)
A: £750+	1	1556	0	0	100	100
B: £400-750	1	642	1	670	0	-4
C: £200-400	3	920	2	591	33	36
D: £100-200	6	851	4	518	33	39
E: £40≤x<100	9	536	6	354	33	34
F: £20≤x<40	9	275	6	171	33	38
G: £10≤x<20	17	241	5	62	71	74
H: £5≤x<10	26	174	4	24	85	86
I: £1≤x<5	131	267	11	27	92	90
J: x>£1	116	39	23	8	80	79
Total	319	5502	62	2423	81	56

This decrease affected small landowners the most. Landowners in Classes G-J collectively saw an 82% decrease in their landed wealth, with Class I losing a shocking 90% of its net income. They also suffered the most dramatic reduction among their ranks: Classes G-J saw an 82% reduction, while Class I, which contained the most women in 1066, experienced a 92% decrease. As Stafford asserts, the distribution of landed wealth between pre-Conquest women was, perhaps unsurprisingly, quite top-heavy.[21] A select few women at the top of the social hierarchy held most of women's total landed wealth, while the majority had much smaller holdings. In 1066, Classes A-C's 5 members possessed 57% of women's total landed wealth; the 247 members of Classes I and J had only 6%.

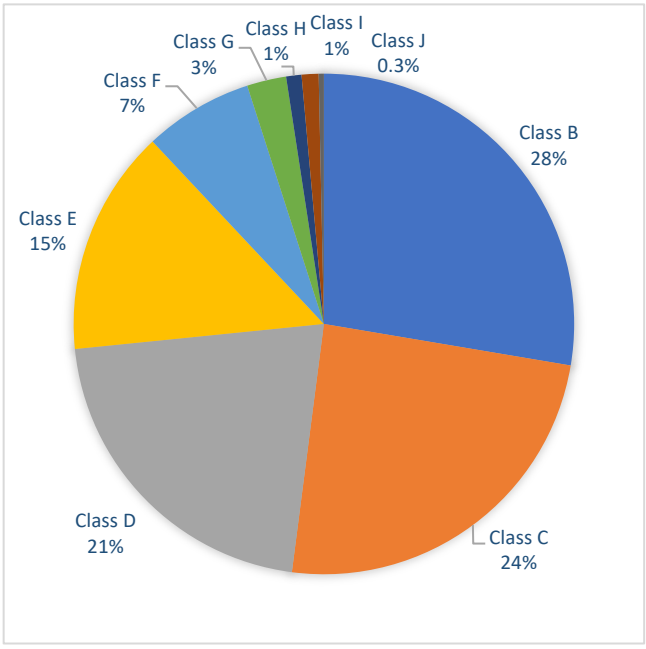
[21] Stafford, 'Women and the Norman Conquest', p.226.

Figure 2: The distribution of landed wealth among women in 1066



By 1086, less substantial landowners held an even smaller proportion of women's landed wealth. Classes G-J went from holding 13% in 1066 to only 5% in 1086, and Classes I-J held a mere 1.4%

Figure 3: The distribution of landed wealth among women in 1086



Larger female landholders were also affected, however. Classes C-F saw a 30-40% reduction, in both the number of landowners and the wealth they held. Classes A-B suffered a 50%

decrease in number and a 70% decrease in wealth. Still, caution should be exercised here. A crucial difference between 1066 and 1086, quite aside from the Conquest, was that Edith had been queen in 1066, but both she and her Anglo-Norman successor, Matilda, were dead by 1086. In 1066, Queen Edith enjoyed extensive holdings across England worth £1556. Although most of her lands had escheated to the crown by 1086, Stafford suggests that Edith's willingness to support William's new regime meant she kept many of her lands until her passing on 19 December 1075. Respecting his predecessor's widow was important for William's image as Edward's legitimate successor, so it suited him to protect Edith's position.[22]

There is good reason to believe Matilda of Flanders also held substantial lands in England before her death on 2 November 1083. Her founding of the Abbey of Sainte-Trinité at Caen and probably the church of Notre Dame de Pré at Emendreville in Rouen, and her many gifts to various religious institutions, suggest she was wealthy.[23] Her name can be found on 39 pre-Conquest and 61 post-Conquest land charters, and Domesday records or alludes to her having lands in many counties including Buckinghamshire, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Hampshire.[24] It seems probable, therefore, that Matilda living until 1086 would have rendered the decrease to Classes A and B less pronounced. Even so, there were still fewer wealthy female landowners, particularly secular ones, by 1086. In 1066, 11

[22] P. Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford, 1997), p.275.
[23] E. van Houts, 'Matilda of Flanders', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, Sept. 2004), http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-18335?rskey=IMpslC&result=1 (24 Jan. 2019).
[24] *Domesday Book: Index of Persons*, ed. J. Dodgson and J. Palmer (Chichester, 1992), p.139.

women held lands worth over £100, 8 of them secular, compared to 8 in 1086, only 2 of them secular.

Table 2: Women with holdings over £100 in 1066

Name	Landed Wealth (£)
Queen Edith	1556
Countess Gytha	642
Eadgifu the fair	351
Ælfgifu, abbess of Wilton	299
Leofgifu, abbess of Shaftesbury	270
Gode, Edward the Confessor's sister	190
Ælfgifu, abbess of Barking	167
Wulfwynn of Creslow	147
Godgifu, wife of Earl Leofric	117
Wulfgifu Beteslau	116
Æthelgyth 'of Wimbish'	115

Table 3: Female tenants-in-chief with holdings over £100 in 1086

Name	Landed Wealth (£)
Countess Judith	670
Eulalia, abbess of Shaftesbury	353
Unnamed abbess of Wilton	238
Ælfgifu, abbess of Barking	164
Christine, abbess of Romsey	135
Unnamed wife of Hugh fitzGrip	112
Unnamed abbess of Caen La Trinité	106
Alice, abbess of Winchester	100

There is abundant evidence that several secular women enjoyed great wealth before the Conquest. Orderic Vitalis describes how Countess Gytha offered William 'Harold's weight in gold for his body' after Hastings,[25] and later fled abroad with 'ingentem gazam'.[26] Eadgifu the fair had goldsmiths, Grimbold and Wulfwine,[27] and Godgifu built the monastery at Coventry with her husband Earl Leofric 'de suo patrimonio'.[28] The founding of the church of

[25] Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. and tr. M. Chibnall (6 vols, Oxford, 1969), ii, pp.178-179 (hereafter, 'OV').
[26] Ibid., ii, pp.224-225.
[27] P. Rex, *The Last English King: the Life of Harold II* (Stroud, 2008).
[28] *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, trans. J. Bray and P. McGurk, ed. R. Darlington and P. McGurk (3 vols, Oxford, 1995), ii, pp.582-583.

Holy Trinity, Evesham, and endowment of Stow St Mary, Lincolnshire, among other generous religious grants and gifts, were also joint endeavours.[29] Examples of such immense wealth are not as plentiful amongst post-Conquest women. Secular women still made gifts to religious foundations. Countess Judith founded Elstow Abbey, Bedfordshire, and churches at Kempston and Hitchin, and Adeline d'Ivry 'conferred perpetually 1 hide at the place called Fencott' to Abingdon abbey.[30] Yet Fleming's observation that the endowments of England's wealthiest lords shrunk dramatically, with the total demesne of England's 9 wealthiest post-Conquest families roughly equivalent to 80% of the Godwinesons' 1065 estates, seems to have applied to wealthy female lords too.[31]

Van Houts asserts that 'a considerable number' of women retained control over their lands during the Conquest.[32] In fact, very few pre-Conquest female landowners still held any land in 1086. Of the 319 female landowners recorded in 1066, only 13 were listed as tenants-in-chief in 1086, and collectively they lost £124 of land during the Conquest.

[29] A. Williams, 'Godgifu (d.1067?)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, Sept. 2004), http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-10873?rskey=XXmI9i&result=1 (26 Jan. 2019).
[30] *Historia Ecclesie Abbendonensis*, ed. and tr. J. Hudson (2 vols, Oxford, 2002), ii, pp.106-107.
[31] R. Fleming, *Kings and Lords in Conquest England* (Cambridge, 1991), p.219.
[32] E. van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900-1200* (London, 1999), p.138.

Table 4: Women recorded as landowners in 1066 and tenants-in-chief in 1086

Name	Landed Wealth in 1066 (£)	Land Held as a Tenant-in-Chief in 1086 (£)
Ælfgifu, abbess of Barking	167	164
Godgifu, wife of Earl Leofric	117	47
Ælfgifu, wife of Earl Ælfgar	66	17
Eadgifu 'of Chaddesley'	12	12
Eadgyth 'of Bickmarsh'	5	6
Goda 'of Stitchcombe'	2.5	2.5
Eadgyth the nun	1.8	0.3
Beorhtgifu 'of Corby Glen'	1	1
Leofgifu 'of Nettleton'	1	0.3
Ealdgifu 'of Hendred'	1	0.3
Ælfgifu 'of St James'	0.2	0.2
Ælfhild 'of Knowstone'	0.1	0.1
Eadgyth 'of Gainfield'	0.05	0.1
Total	374	250

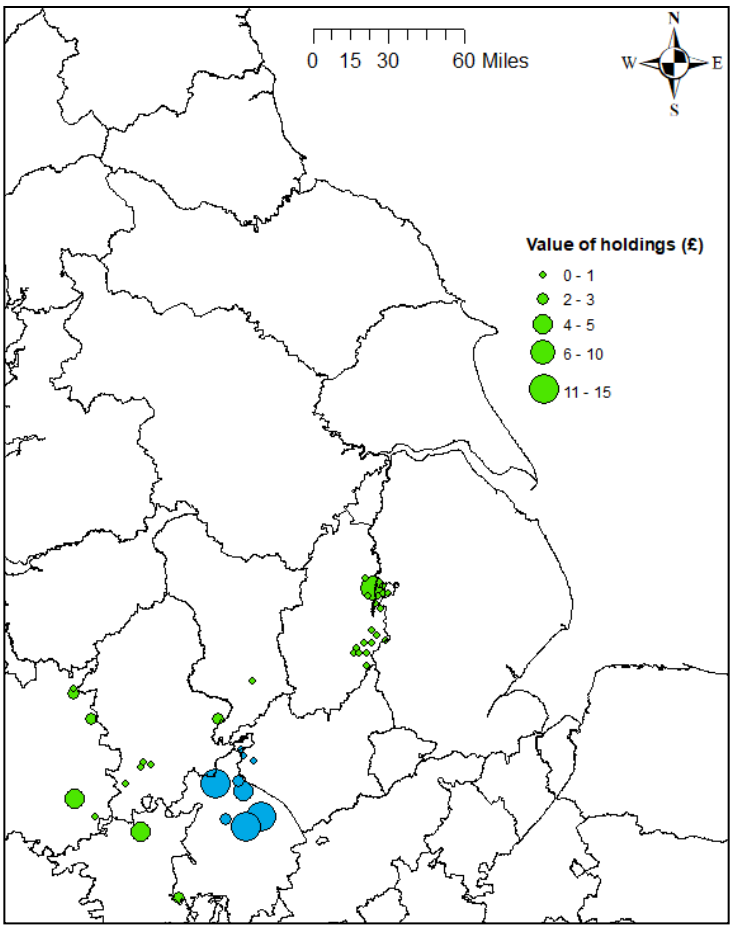
A further 3 women who held land in 1066 were recorded as subtenants in 1086: Eadgifu, wife of Wulfweard, Æthelgifu 'of Clopton' and Ælfgifu 'of Coleridge'.[33] Therefore, 303 women, a staggering 95%, were replaced as landowners for all their holdings 1066-1086. Most who retained any holdings were minor landowners. Nine of the 13 female tenants-in-chief Domesday records as retaining lands held lands worth £5 or less in 1066: Ælfgifu 'of St James' had just one holding in Wonford, Devon.[34]

Van Houts lists several women who retained land, including Godgifu and Ælfgifu, the widows of Earls Leofric and Ælfgar respectively. However, these women were in fact dead by 1086. Godgifu, or 'Lady Godiva', made famous by Wendover's account of her naked ride through Coventry in defiance of her husband's heavy toll, was Earl Ælfgar's mother and the

[33] GDB 145b (Buckinghamshire 5:8). GDB 243b (Warwickshire 28:13). GDB 112a,b (Devon 23:25).
[34] GDB 118c (Devon 52:50).

grandmother of Earls Edwin and Morcar.[35] In 1066, she had estates worth £117, largely in Nottinghamshire. By 1086, Remigius, bishop of Lincoln, was in possession of most of her Nottinghamshire lands, earl Roger her Shropshire lands and William fitzAnsculf her Staffordshire lands. Still, Godgifu is recorded as having retained almost all her Leicestershire and Warwickshire estates, worth £47 in 1086, roughly 40% of her landed wealth (the areas coloured blue in figure 4 below). At first sight, this appears very peculiar. Godgifu was reportedly dead by 1086; in the thirteenth-century, her death was commemorated on 10 September and was thought to have occurred in 1067.[36]

Figure 4: Godgifu's 1066 holdings



[35] Williams, 'Godgifu'. Roger of Wendover, *Flowers of History: Comprising the History of England from the Descent of the Saxons to A.D. 1235,* trans. J. Giles (2 vols, London, 1849), i, p.314.
[36] Williams, 'Godgifu'.

Godgifu's daughter-in-law, Ælfgifu, the mother of Earls Edwin and Morcar, was in a similar predicament. Although, King William, Odo, bishop of Bayeux, and Baldwin, abbot of Bury St Edmunds, are recorded as having succeeded to parts of her estates by 1086, Domesday records her Leicestershire holdings, worth £17 in 1086, in her name despite her passing. Baxter explains that these holdings, as well as those recorded in Queen Matilda's name, are examples of escheated honours that retained 'sufficient integrity to be recorded as distinct fiefs in Domesday'.[37] Their lands, having become royal demesne upon their deaths if not before, were still 'ring-fenced' off to be farmed by the king in 1086.

Therefore, in reality, there were even fewer surviving female tenants-in-chief in 1086, a mere 11, holding £187 between them. Given only 14 female landholders retained any land and there were 62 in total in 1086, it follows only 48 new female landholders emerged 1066-1086.

Table 5: Land lost, retained and gained by women during the Conquest

Female Landholding	**No. Landowners**	**Total Landed Wealth (£)**
Held in 1066	319	5502
Retained 1066-1086 (excluding Godgifu and Ælfgifu, including tenants-in-chief and subtenants)	14	190
Held in 1086	62	2423
Dispossessed 1066-1086	305	5312
Created 1066-1086	48	2233

Clearly, then, the Conquest resulted in a tremendous loss for women of all 'class bands', both in their number and the wealth they held. Remarkably, however, this loss was felt overwhelmingly by secular women. Nunneries suffered much less of a reduction in number and holdings, and some even prospered.

[37] S. Baxter, *Making Domesday* (forthcoming), p.101.

Table 6: The value of lands held by secular and religious women (£)

Class	1066					1086				
	Secular	Religious	Total	% Secular	% Religious	Secular	Religious	Total	% Secular	% Religious
A: x≤£750	1562	0	1562	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
B: £400≤x<750	644	0	644	100	0	670	0	670	100	0
C: £200≤x<400	351	568	920	38	62	0	591	591	0	100
D: £100≤x<200	703	167	870	81	19	112	405	518	22	78
E: £40≤x<100	313	227	540	58	42	274	198	472	58	42
F: £20≤x<40	236	39	275	86	14	92	21	113	82	18
G: £10≤x<20	236	18	254	93	7	52	10	62	84	16
H: £5≤x<10	167	9	176	95	5	18	6	24	75	25
I: £1≤x<5	257	8	265	97	3	27	0	27	100	0
J: x<£1	38	1	39	98	2	8	1	8	94	6
Total	4507	1038	5545	81	19	1252	1231	2483	50	50

While before the Conquest, secular landowners held a clear majority of women's total wealth, both overall and in every 'class band' except C, by 1086 secular and religious women held roughly even amounts. Secular landowners' landed wealth decreased by 72%, while religious holdings actually increased by 19% overall. A similar trend is evident regarding the number of secular and religious female landholders either side of the Conquest.

Table 7: The number of secular and religious female landholders

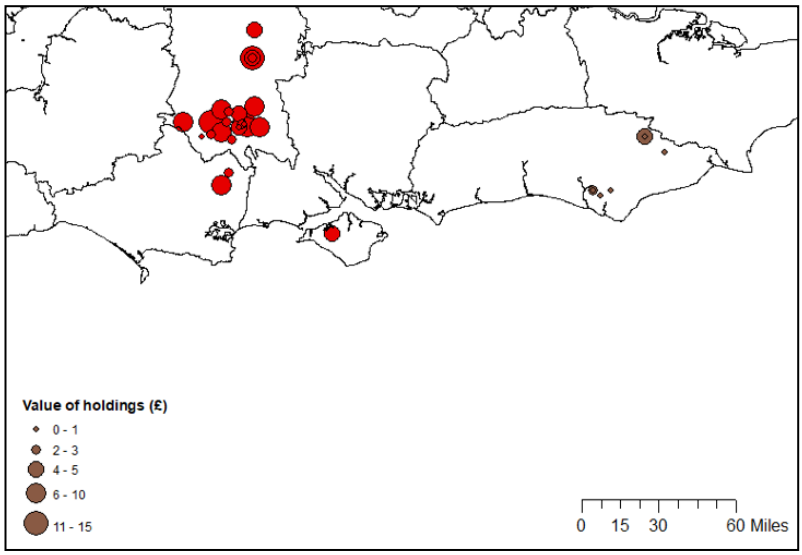
Class	1066					1086				
	Secular	Religious	Total	% Secular	% Religious	Secular	Religious	Total	% Secular	% Religious
A: x≤£750	1	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
B: £400≤x<750	1	0	1	100	0	1	0	1	100	0
C: £200≤x<400	1	2	3	33	67	0	2	2	0	100
D: £100≤x<200	5	1	6	83	17	1	3	4	25	75
E: £40≤x<100	6	3	9	67	33	5	3	8	63	38
F: £20≤x<40	8	1	9	89	11	3	1	4	75	25
G: £10≤x<20	17	1	18	94	6	4	1	5	80	20
H: £5≤x<10	25	1	26	96	4	3	1	4	75	25
I: £1≤x<5	128	3	131	98	2	11	0	11	100	0
J: x<£1	117	2	119	98	2	22	2	24	92	8
Total	309	14	323	96	4	50	13	63	79	21

Although 96% of female landowners had been secular in 1066, this had decreased to 79% by 1086. While there was only one fewer religious institution, the number of secular female landholders dropped by 84%.

Individual religious institutions generally witnessed a remarkable degree of continuity in their holdings. In 1066, Ælfgifu, abbess of Barking, held lands primarily in Essex worth £171. The same abbess held virtually the same lands in 1086, with just the addition of 'Tollesbury' in Thurstable, Essex, which had been held by Oda 'of Tollesbury' before the Conquest.[38] The abbey of Wilton, where Queen Edith was raised, underwent slightly more change. In 1066, its abbess, Ælfgifu, held lands worth £299 in Sussex and Wiltshire. By 1086, not only had Ælfgifu been replaced, but Robert, count of Eu, held most of Wilton's Sussex estates (the brown areas in figure 5 show lands held by Ælfgifu in 1066 and Robert in 1086). Nevertheless, the abbey retained its Wiltshire lands, about 68% of its original holdings (red in figure 5), worth £222 in 1086. Three new estates in Wiltshire were added,[39] raising Wilton's post-Conquest value to £238. Overall, there was still a great deal of continuity: 93% of Wilton's 1086 holdings had been the abbey's in 1066.

[38] LDB 18b (Essex 9:14).
[39] GDB 67d (Wiltshire 13:2-3). GDB 68a (Wiltshire 13:13).

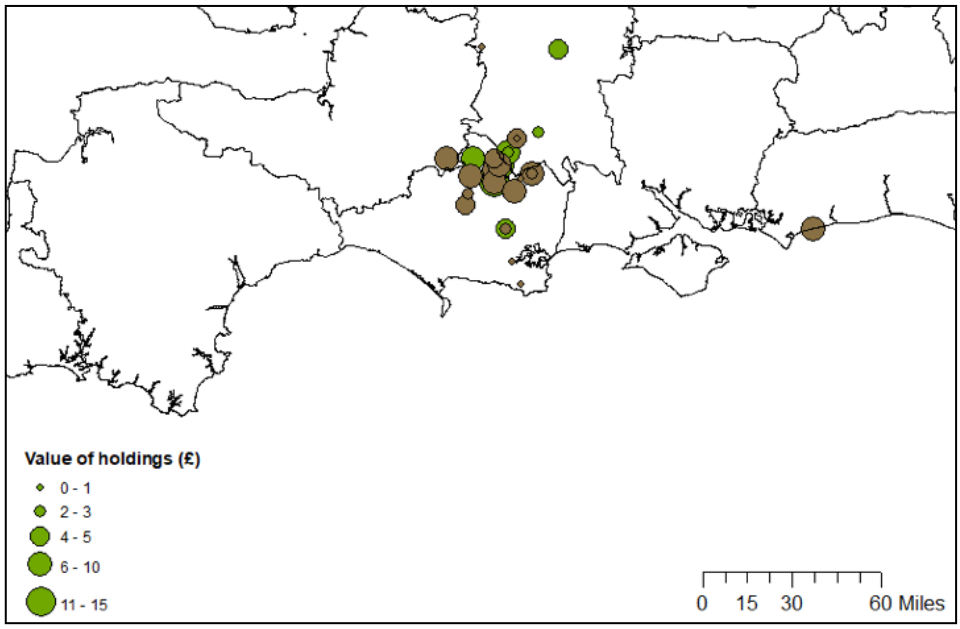
Figure 5: Wilton's 1066 estates



Shaftesbury abbey, which had strong connections to the West Saxon dynasty, held lands worth £270 in Wiltshire and Dorset in 1066. During the Conquest, abbess Leofgifu was replaced: a Norman, Eulalia, was abbess from 1074 onwards. The fief 'Wareham' became royal demesne and Eulalia now held 'Shaftesbury' as a subtenant from King William.[40] The abbey also grew, however, with the restoration of 'Cheselbourne' and 'Stour', supposedly after Harold Godwinson's unlawful seizure of them, and the addition of 'Beechingstoke', held by Heading, son of Eadnoth, in 1066.[41] Figure 6's green areas represent these additions. Still, 91% of the abbey's post-Conquest estates, worth £353, had been Leofgifu's in 1066 (brown in figure 6).

[40] GDB 78d (Dorest 19:10). GDB 75a (Dorset B4).
[41] *Charters of Shaftesbury Abbey*, ed. S. Kelly (Oxford, 1996), p.xxiii. GDB 78d (Dorset 19:3). GDB 78d (Dorset 19:14). F. Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs* (Manchester, 1956), p.544. GDB 67c (Wiltshire 12:1).

Figure 6: Shaftesbury's 1086 estates



That the location of these religious institutions' lands remained broadly unaltered is unsurprising. Potentially more telling is that, whilst most pre-Conquest secular landowners were subject to mass dispossession, these religious institutions retained the overwhelming majority of their holdings and even grew in places. The emergence of new Norman abbesses, such as Eulalia of Shaftesbury, and records of Norman donations made to these religious houses, suggest the Normans preserved them for their own use after the Conquest.[42]

Although women's religious institutions were preserved, Domesday records a massive decrease in the number and value of secular women's landholding and in women's landholding overall between 1066-1086. Women's share of England's landed wealth may have been small in 1066, but it had decreased significantly by 1086. The next section will explain why.

[42] K. Cooke, 'Donors and Daughters: Shaftesbury Abbey's Benefactors, Endowments and Nuns c.1086-1130', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 12 (1989), pp.29-45.

3: The Cause of the Decrease in Women's Landholding 1066-1086

Women's landholdings decreased during the Norman Conquest in part simply because Anglo-Saxon women, like their male counterparts, were replaced with a new Norman aristocracy. Women, whether 'exposed to the insults of low-born soldiers', as Orderic Vitalis describes, or fleeing from burning buildings, as the Bayeux Tapestry depicts, clearly suffered during the process of Conquest.[43] Many fled to nunneries for 'fear of the French'.[44] Others sought refuge abroad: Gytha fled to Flatholm and then St. Omer with 'many distinguished men's wives'.[45] Whether they died, fled or simply had their lands seized, many Anglo-Saxon women were dispossessed during the Conquest.

William acquired much of the land that Anglo-Saxon women lost. The royal demesne increased substantially from £8277 in 1066 to £16982 in 1086, from 12% to 22% of England's landed wealth. William held 78%, or £1337, of Queen Edith's lands in 1086 (dark purple in figure 8). Similarly, he acquired 69% of Countess Gytha, Harold Godwinson's mother's, lands: her Hampshire, Wiltshire and Somerset lands, worth £466 in 1086, were all made royal demesne (blue in figure 7).

[43] OV, ii, pp.268-269: 'despicabilium ludibrio armigerorum patebant'. L. Musset, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, trans. R. Rex, (Woodbridge, 2005), p.216.
[44] *The Letters of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury.* ed. and tr. H. Clover and M. Gibson (Oxford, 1979), pp.166-167: 'timore Francigenarum'.
[45] 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (1042-1154)', in D. Douglas (ed.), *English Historical Documents* (12 vols, London, 1953), ii, p.148.

Figure 8: Edith's 1066 holdings

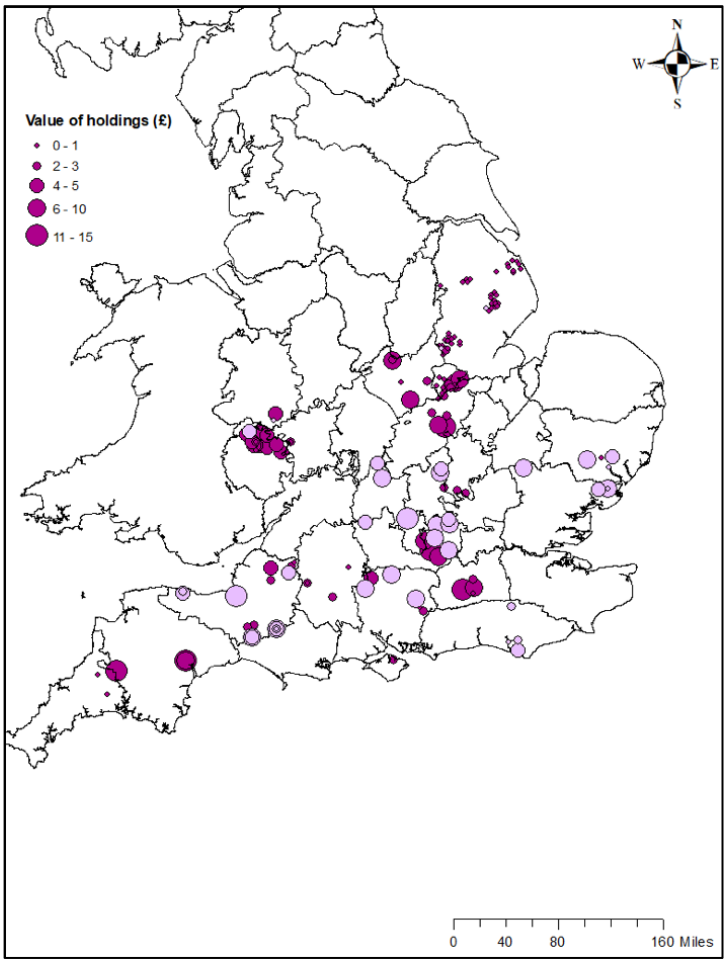
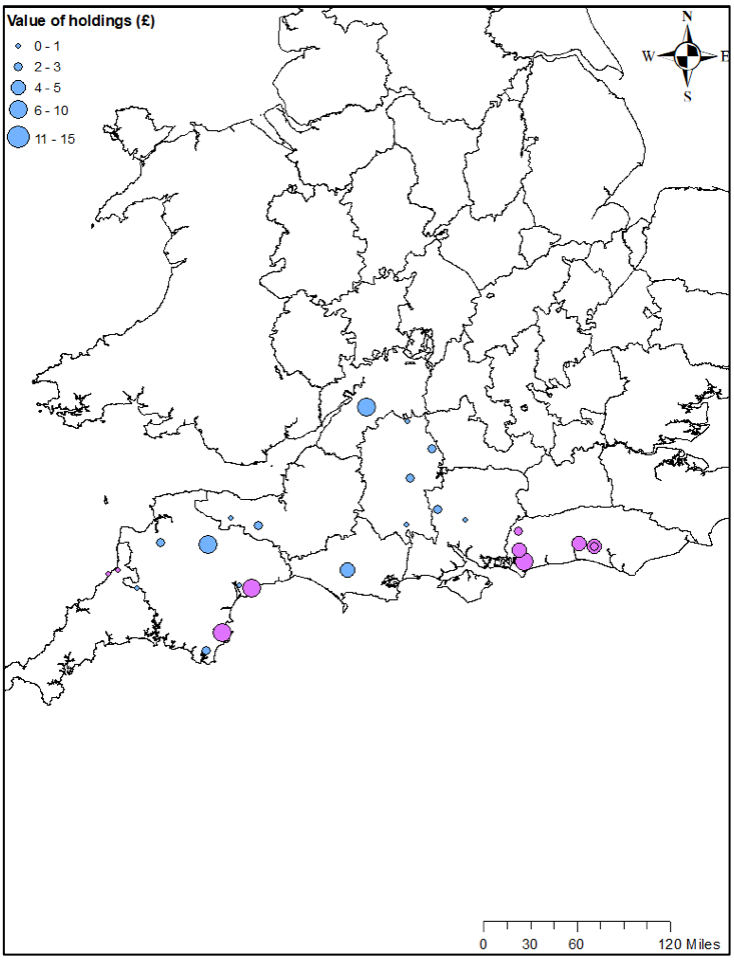


Figure 7: Gytha's 1066 holdings



Before the Conquest, Gytha's daughter, Eadgifu, had 2 holdings in Somerset worth £49. William held both of these in 1086.[46] Upon his conquest of England, William claimed the right to forfeit and redistribute the lands of those who had committed an act of rebellion by supporting his opponent, Harold Godwinson, over himself, the rightful king.[47] This aided William's expansion of the royal demesne and his distribution of land previously held by Anglo-Saxons to his Norman followers. Stafford argues, perhaps somewhat optimistically given the immense scale of Edith's pre-Conquest holdings, that Edith retained control over

[46] GDB 86d,87a (Somerset 1:20).
[47] Baxter, *Making Domesday*, p.132.

many of her lands after the Conquest,[48] in which case they would have escheated to the crown upon her death. On the other hand, Harold's sister and mother were almost definitely considered contumacious vassals, especially given Gytha's possible role in Exeter's rebellion, and their possessions forfeited accordingly.

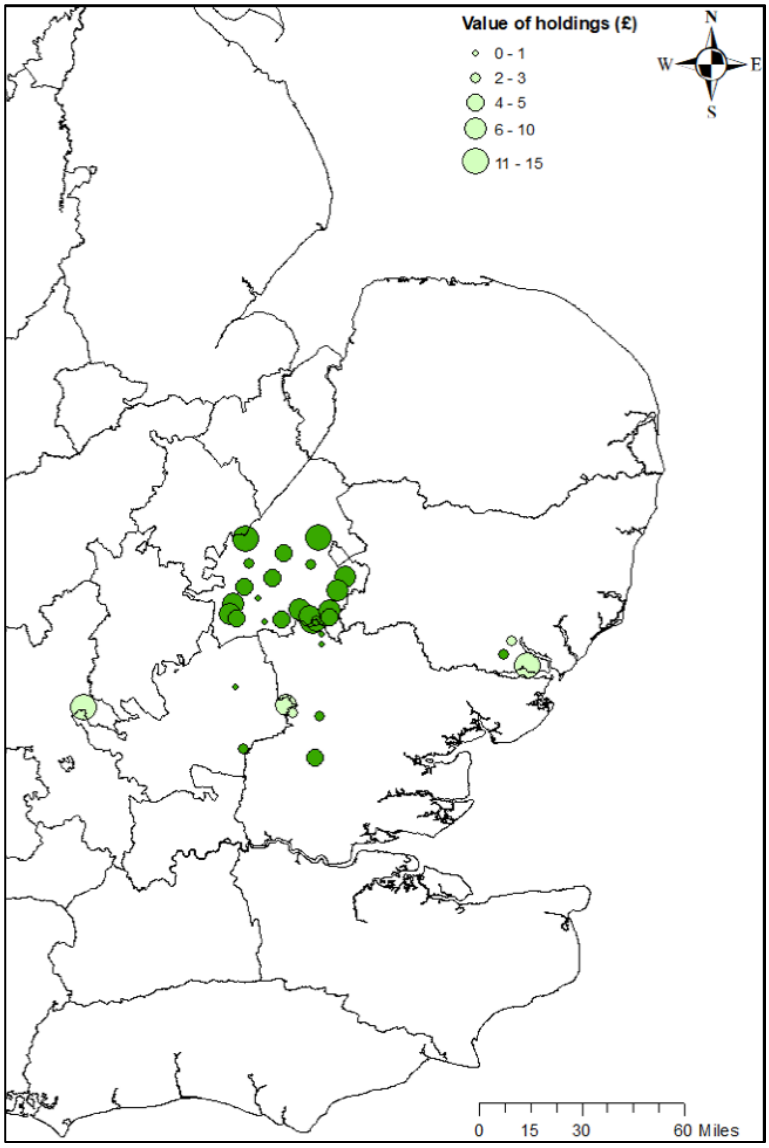
William's Norman tenants-in-chief also had their estates swollen with the land of Anglo-Saxon women. Orderic Vitalis observes that William's 'earls and magnates…received great revenues and fiefs in England', continuing regretfully that 'foreigners grew wealthy with the spoils of England'.[49] Although William acquired most of Edith's holdings, a further 28 tenants-in-chief held portions of it, varying in size, concentration and location, in 1086. Robert, count of Mortain, Robert, count of Eu and William de Warenne all lands she had owned in Sussex, while Osmund, bishop of Salisbury, succeeded to the entirety of her Dorset estates, worth £83. Likewise, the lands of Countess Gode, Edward the Confessor's sister, worth £190 in 1066, were split between William, Robert, count of Eu, and 10 other tenants-in-chief.

In some cases, one new Norman lord acquired the majority or entirety of a woman's estates. William Peverel inherited all the lands of Countess Gytha, wife of earl Ralph, located in Northamptonshire and worth £72 in 1066. Eadgifu the fair, or Edith 'Swanneck', married to Harold Godwinson *more danico* c.1044 and described by the Waltham chronicle as identifying his body after Hastings, had lands worth £351 in 1066.[50] By 1086, Count Alan

[48] Stafford, *Emma and Edith*, p.275.
[49] OV, ii, pp.266-267.
[50] Rex, *Last English King*, p.119. E. Mason, *The House of Godwine: The History of a Dynasty* (London, 2004), pp.177-178.

Rufus had all her Cambridgeshire holdings, the dark green lands in figure 9 below, which were worth £238 and had constituted 67% of her estates.

Figure 9: Eadgifu's 1066 holdings



He went one step further in his usurpation of Eadgifu's position. In August 1093, he abducted her daughter, Gunhilda, who had taken the veil, from Wilton, planning to marry her. He died soon after and his brother, having succeeded to his estates, married Gunhilda instead, much to Anselm's disgust.[51] Searle, appalled at Southern's underestimation of the

[51] Rex, *Last English King*, p.123. R. Southern, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer: A Study of Monastic life and Thought 1059-c.1130* (Cambridge, 1966), pp.185-188.

importance of marriage in his portrayal of the episode as a romance, argues convincingly that marrying Gunhilda allowed the man presiding over her mother's estates to strengthen their position by forging a connection with 'the old Danish war-lineage'.[52] New Norman lords also acquired smaller female landowners' holdings. In 1066, Eadgifu 'of Runwell' had 2 holdings in Essex, worth £6; Count Eustace held both in 1086.[53] 'Shelton' in Stodden, Bedfordshire had been held by Wulfgifu 'of Shelton' in 1066. In 1086, William, the bishop of Coutances's steward, held it from him as a subtenant.[54]

While it is abundantly clear that much land was transferred from Anglo-Saxon women to new Norman lords, dispossessing 81% of female pre-Conquest landowners in the process, how these transfers took place is less transparent. Many historians, including Freeman, F. Stenton, Round and Darlington, have cast antecessorial grants as the primary method of land transfer. Supposedly, upon an Anglo-Saxon lord's disinheritance, their Norman replacement would hold the same estate with all its pre-Conquest rights and obligations.[55] It seems probable that the lands of both Gytha, wife of earl Ralph, and Eadgifu the fair were transferred by antecessorial grants. Single Normans succeeded to the entirety or majority of their pre-Conquest estates and Count Alan's desire to marry Gunhilda supports an image of him directly replacing her mother. Sawyer goes one step further in his case for tenurial continuity, arguing many post-Conquest lordships and estates, seemingly created by merging the holdings of many minor pre-Conquest landowners, did not actually emerge

[52] E. Searle, 'Women and the Legitimisation of Succession at the Norman Conquest', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 3 (1980), pp.167-169.
[53] LDB 27b,28a (Essex 20:17). LDB 31a,b Essex (20:54).
[54] GDB 209d,210a (Bedfordshire 3:5).
[55] F. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England,* 3rd edn (Oxford, 1971), p.626.

during the Conquest; they were simply pre-Conquest lordships that had been transferred from large *antecessores*, concealed in Domesday, to new Norman lords.[56]

However, several of the wealthy Anglo-Saxon women explored here had their estates divided between multiple new Norman lords. While Queen Edith's Dorset lands seem to have been bestowed upon Osmund as a territorial grant, her remaining lands were distributed between Norman tenants-in-chief relatively randomly, or at least not along the lines of pre-Conquest tenure. No clear, single Norman successor emerges for Countesses Gytha, Gode nor Harold's sister, Eadgifu, either. This supports Fleming's assertion that antecessorial grants' frequency and significance have been overstated.[57] Baxter explains that the complex nature of pre-Conquest lordship meant antecessorial grants were not straightforward but often messy.[58] Moreover, although the lands of many smaller female landowners were indeed conglomerated into larger lordships, Fleming demonstrates that Sawyer chose misrepresentative examples and that this process did not tend to happen along the lines of pre-Conquest tenure.[59] Fleming regards extra-legal land-grabbing as the main way land was transferred, instead, reasoning that only personal conquests could explain the Conquest's speed.[60] Baxter disagrees, however: that under 10% of land was contested in 1086 suggests transfers were orderly and controlled.[61] Overall, the variation between even the few land transfers explored here supports the idea that land was

[56] P. Sawyer, '1066-1086: A Tenurial Revolution?', in P. Sawyer (ed.), *Domesday Book: A Reassessment* (London, 1985), pp.71-85.
[57] Fleming, *Kings and Lords,* p.112.
[58] Baxter, *Making Domesday*, p.125.
[59] R. Fleming, 'Domesday Book and the Tenurial Revolution', *Anglo-Norman Studies,* 9 (Woodbridge, 1987), p.87.
[60] Fleming, *Kings and Lords*, pp.210-211.
[61] Baxter, *Making Domesday*, p.123.

transferred from Anglo-Saxon women to new Norman lords by various means, including also territorial grants and the granting of honours, the frequency of which changed over time and with location, but which definitely altered previous tenurial patterns.[62]

This replacement of female pre-Conquest landowners with new Norman ones, and women's role as conduits of land, their life cycles marked by property changes at marriage and widowhood (the only period they technically had control over any property),[63] explains why so few women who had held land in 1066 still did so 20 years later. However, it does not explain women's substantially smaller share of England's wealth, nor the small number of new female landowners. Ultimately, it was not the dispossession of female landowners that caused the overall reduction in women's landholding, but rather that so few of their replacements were women. There were some new female landowners in 1086. Land appears to have passed to several Anglo-Saxon widows from their deceased husbands, uninterrupted by the Conquest. 2 fiefs held by Edward 'son of Swein' in 1066 were held by Eadgifu, wife of Edward 'son of Swein' in 1086.[64] Similarly, the manor of Latchingdon was held by Finn, a free man, in 1066 and by Wulfgifu, wife of Finn, in 1086.[65]

The Conquest also saw the creation of several Norman female landowners. Adeline d'Ivry acquired 3 holdings in Oxfordshire worth £13, presumably upon Roger d'Ivry's death in 1079, previously held by Godric 'of Islip', Alwine 'of Islip' and Alwig 'of Oddington'.[66]

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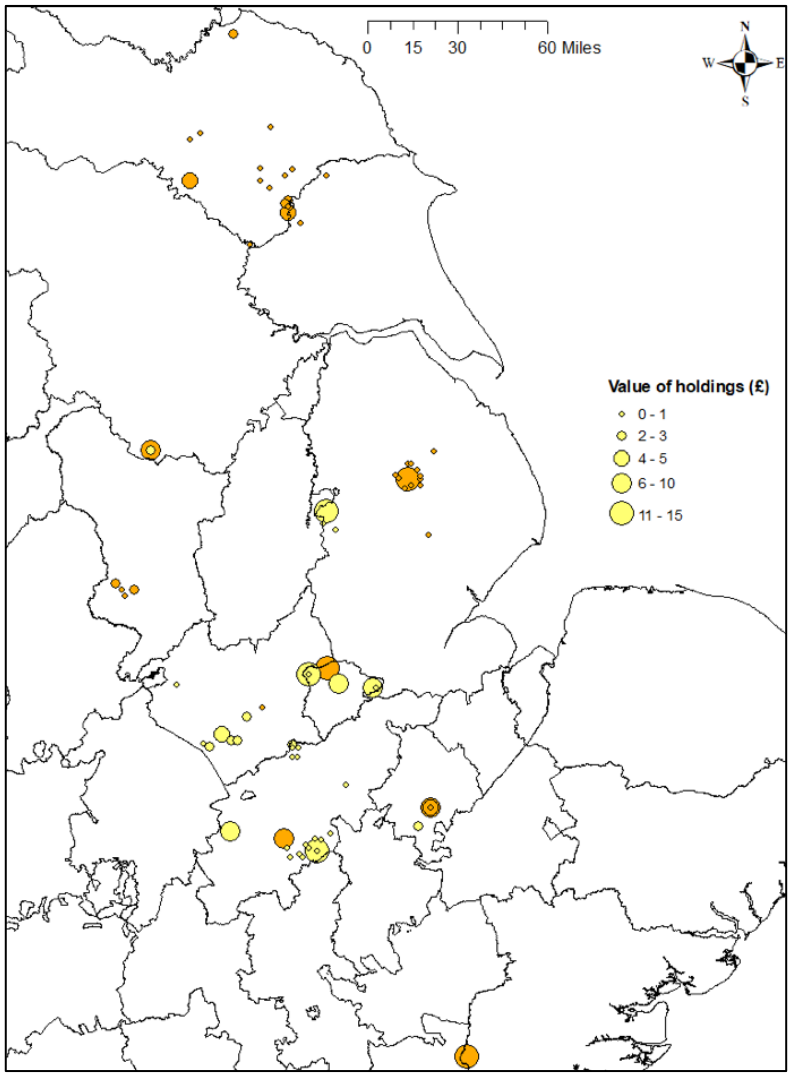
[62] Ibid., pp.133-137. Fleming, *Kings and Lords*, p.181.
[63] Stafford, 'Women in Domesday', pp.83-84.
[64] GDB 130d (Middlesex 25:1). LDB 98a,b (Essex 85:1).
[65] LDB 98a,b (Essex 84:2).
[66] GDB 160c (Oxfordshire 55:1-2).

Adelaide, Countess of Aumale, William's sister or half-sister depending on her mother's identity, held lands primarily in Suffolk worth £54. These had been held by various free men in 1066, meaning, like Adeline, she presided over a conglomeration of previously smaller and separate estates. Adelaide is a remarkable example of female landownership because her third husband, Odo of Champagne, was very much alive, but she held substantial lands in her own name regardless.[67] Adelaide's daughter, Countess Judith, was the largest female landholder in 1086, with estates worth £670 in the east and midlands. Having been married to Earl Waltheof in 1070 by William to 'to strengthen the bonds of friendship between them',[68] she later exposed his role in the 1075 rebellion.[69] After he was beheaded on 31 May 1076, Judith inherited 70% of his estates, worth £211 in 1086 (the yellow areas in figure 10), maybe because they formed parts of her dower, or perhaps as a reward from William for her denunciation of Waltheof.

[67] K. Thompson, 'Being the Ducal Sister: the Role of Adelaide of Aumale', in D. Crouch and K. Thompson (eds), *Normandy and its Neighbours, 900-1250: Essays for David Bates* (Turnhout, 2011), p.76.
[68] OV, ii, pp.262-263: 'ut firma inter eos amicicia perduraret'.
[69] Ibid., pp.320-321.

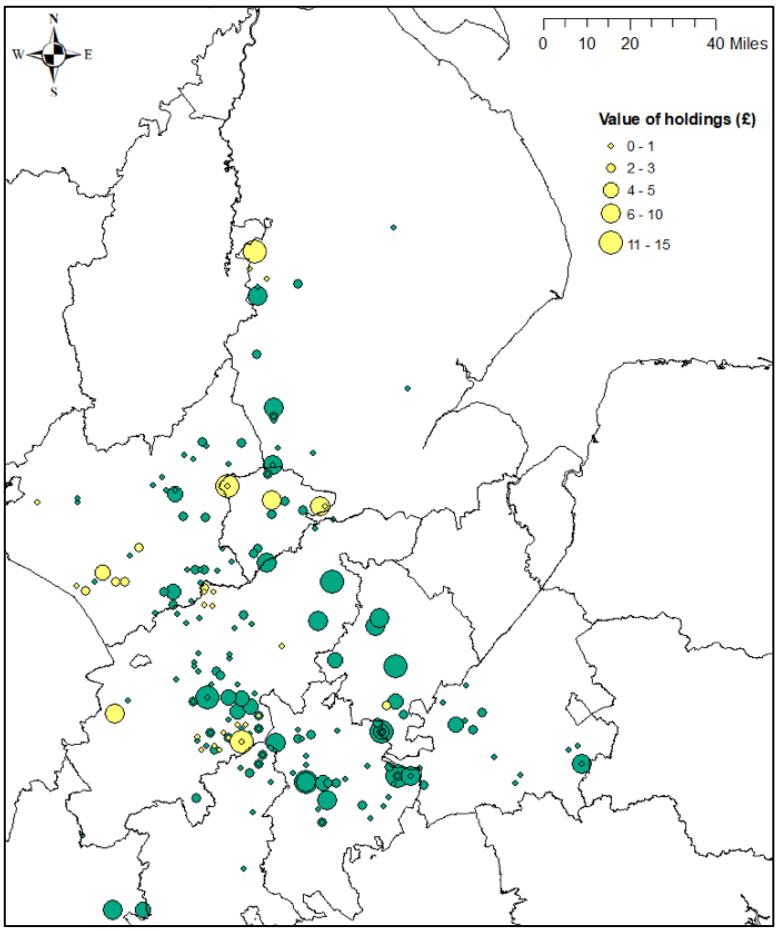
Figure 10: Waltheof's 1066 holdings



Only 31% of Judith's own lands came from Waltheof, though (yellow in figure 11 below). Her 1086 estates included lands from 89 other pre-Conquest landowners of varying significance (green), many of whom may have been Waltheof's men; his land and lordship may have been transferred together to Judith. Unfortunately, as Sawyer argues, the patchy nature of pre-Conquest records for lordship makes it difficult to determine whether this was the case.[70]

[70] Sawyer, 'A Tenurial Revolution?', pp.71-85.

Figure 11: Judith's 1086 holdings



However, although there were several new female post-Conquest landowners, there were nowhere near enough to replace those completely dispossessed between 1066-1086, in neither number, nor landed wealth. Table 5 shows that while 305 Anglo-Saxon women, holding £5312 of land, were completely dispossessed, only 48 new female landholders, holding £2233 of land, were created. It was the Conquest's failure to produce many new female landholders that was ultimately responsible for the overall decrease in secular women's landholding. Stafford offers an explanation for this. William may have given his close relatives, Adelaide and Judith, land, but generally land was bestowed principally as a reward for past military service and an incentive for future military aid. Given only men usually performed military roles, William had little reason to directly distribute land to women. Instead of direct grants of land, women tended to acquire land through family or

marriage at specific points in their life cycles. This took time and Stafford argues that 1086 was too soon after the Conquest for many women to have acquired land through family provision.[71]

The Conquest dispossessed 96% of England's female landowners, yet the net decrease in female landownership was not a result of this mass dispossession but rather how few new female landowners emerged after 1066. William's reluctance to grant women land directly and women's tendency to acquire land through the family instead were ultimately responsible for the decrease in women's landholding by 1086.

4: Women and Lordship

A complete, well-informed comparison of women's participation in lordship either side of the Norman Conquest would undoubtedly reveal much about the impact of the Conquest and women's reduction in landholding on their ability to wield social influence. Unfortunately, there are several obstacles to making such a comparison. Firstly, pre-Conquest lordship was complicated. Maitland identified 3 types. Baxter has since refined their forms:[72] commendation, the most widespread, was a personal bond where men offered their loyalty and service in exchange for protection, dependent land tenure was a tenurial bond where tenants held *lonland* from a lord in exchange for rent and or service,

[71] Stafford, 'Women in Domesday', p.90.
[72] F. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond: Three Essays in the Early History of England* (Cambridge, 1921). S. Baxter, 'Lordship and Justice in late Anglo-Saxon England: the Judicial Functions of Soke and Commendation Revisited', in S. Baxter et al. (eds), *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald* (Farnham, 2009), pp.383–419.

and soke was a jurisdictional bond whose form varied considerably. [73] These could exist in various combinations.[74] Perhaps unsurprisingly, given their time pressure and drive for conciseness, the Domesday commissioners struggled to record the intricacies of such information fully and consistently. Often the names of pre-Conquest lords are omitted and only commissioners in circuits 3 and 7 specified whether men had the power of alienation over their land, allowing us to distinguish between commendation and dependent land tenure.[75] Elsewhere, apart from occasional hints, it appears virtually impossible to identify the presence and or nature of a bond. The nature of lordship in England also changed with the Conquest. Pre-Conquest lordship was both more flexible, with a variety of different bonds in play, and less dependent on tenurial transactions. While before the Conquest, commendation was the most widespread form of lordship, after the Conquest most relationships involved tenurial transactions and lordship could be categorised easily: either it involved a subtenancy or not. Therefore, pre-Conquest lordship was not only complex and poorly recorded in Domesday, but it differed quite substantially from its post-Conquest equivalent. Any evaluation or comparison between pre- and post-Conquest lordship requires great caution.

It is possible, however, to draw some conclusions about women and lordship before the Conquest. Of Domesday's 319 female pre-Conquest landowners, only 19 (6%) are distinguished as lords.

[73] S. Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2007), pp.204-210.
[74] Ibid., p.212.
[75] Ibid., p.213.

Table 8: Domesday's female pre-Conquest lords

Name	Total income (£)	Value of Lordships (£)
Queen Edith	1562	299
Countess Gytha	644	10
Eadgifu the fair	351	176
Ælfgifu, abbess of Wilton	299	13
Leofgifu, abbess of Shaftesbury	270	16
Countess Gode	190	14
Ælfgifu, abbess of Barking	167	2
Wulfwynn 'of Creslow'	147	2
Wulfgifu Beteslau	135	6
Æthelgyth 'of Wimbish'	115	5
unnamed abbess of Romsey	99	25
Gytha, wife of Earl Ralph	72	0.1
Godgyth, man of Esgar the Staller	19	2
Eadgyth 'of Norton'	19	0.3
Wulfgifu 'of Thorndon'	13	3
Ælfgifu 'of Churchstanton'	12	1
Althryth 'of Watton'	4	4
Tova, free woman	1	0.1
Ealdgifu, 'lord of Amersham'	0	1
Total	4117	578

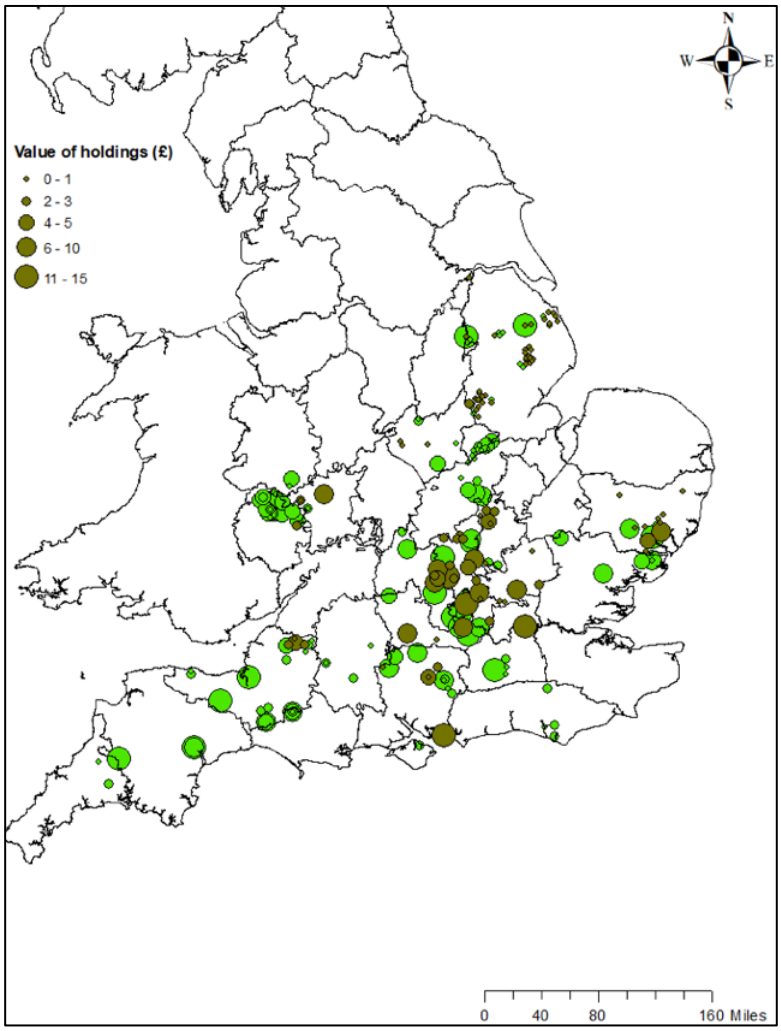
However, the presence of women from a surprisingly wide variety of 'class bands', both secular and religious, suggests if we take Domesday's evidence as a snapshot rather than a complete record, there was scope for many different types of women to exercise lordship in pre-Conquest England. Queen Edith, Gytha and Eadgifu the fair can illuminate women's capacity for lordship further. Edith and Eadgifu are substantial lords in Domesday. It is difficult to know how representative they were, both due to their connections to Edward the Confessor and Harold Godwinson respectively, and because Eadgifu's lands happen to have fallen into circuit 3's coverage, which recorded lordship in more detail. Regardless, their seemingly substantial lordship suggests that at least some pre-Conquest women had the potential to exercise real influence within society.

In 1066, Edith had 105 men and £299 worth of lands commanded to her; her lordship was widespread, both in quantity and geographically. Much of her influence came by virtue of

her position as queen. Running the king's household and her own meant she enlisted and presided over very many men and women, including some who were substantial landowners in their own right.[76] The witness list of the 1062 Waltham charter, confirming Earl Harold's foundation of Waltham abbey, is a rare instance where Edith's servants are listed as 'testibus' alongside Edward's: 'Herdingus', the queen's butler, appears after the king's butler, 'Wigodus', and 'Godwinus', the queen's steward, after the king's, 'Yfingus'.[77] Other servants included Wulfweard the White, worth £223 in 1066, his son-in-law, Æthelsiege, a steward, and chaplains Ælfgar, tenant of Peterborough Abbey, and Walter, bishop of Hereford, worth £234.[78] Her men had various responsibilities, some very specific. Wudumann, against whom she appealed to a local hundred court for withholding her rent, cared for her horses,[79] whilst Colwine dealt with her Exeter revenues and royal lands in Cornwall.[80]

[76] A. Williams, 'Edith (d.1075)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, Sept. 2004), https://ezproxy-prod.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:4563/10.1093/ref:odnb/8483 (21 Jan. 2019).
[77] B. Thorpe, *Diplomatarium Anglicum Ævi Saxonici: A Collection of English Charters, from the Reign of King Æthelberht of Kent to that of William the Conqueror* (London, 1865), p.397. Stafford, *Emma and Edith,* p.109.
[78] Williams, 'Edith'.
[79] Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, p.286.
[80] Stafford, *Emma and Edith,* p.109.

Figure 12: Edith's lands (green) and lordship (brown) in 1066



Meanwhile, Eadgifu the fair commended 116 men with £176 worth of lands. Rex suggests Harold married Eadgifu, from East Anglia, upon his appointment to the earldom there, not only to enhance his local 'standing', but because she held lands and had men in an area where his own influence was lacking.[81]

[81] Rex, *Last English King*, pp.119-122.

Figure 14: Eadgifu's lands (orange) and Harold's (yellow) in 1066

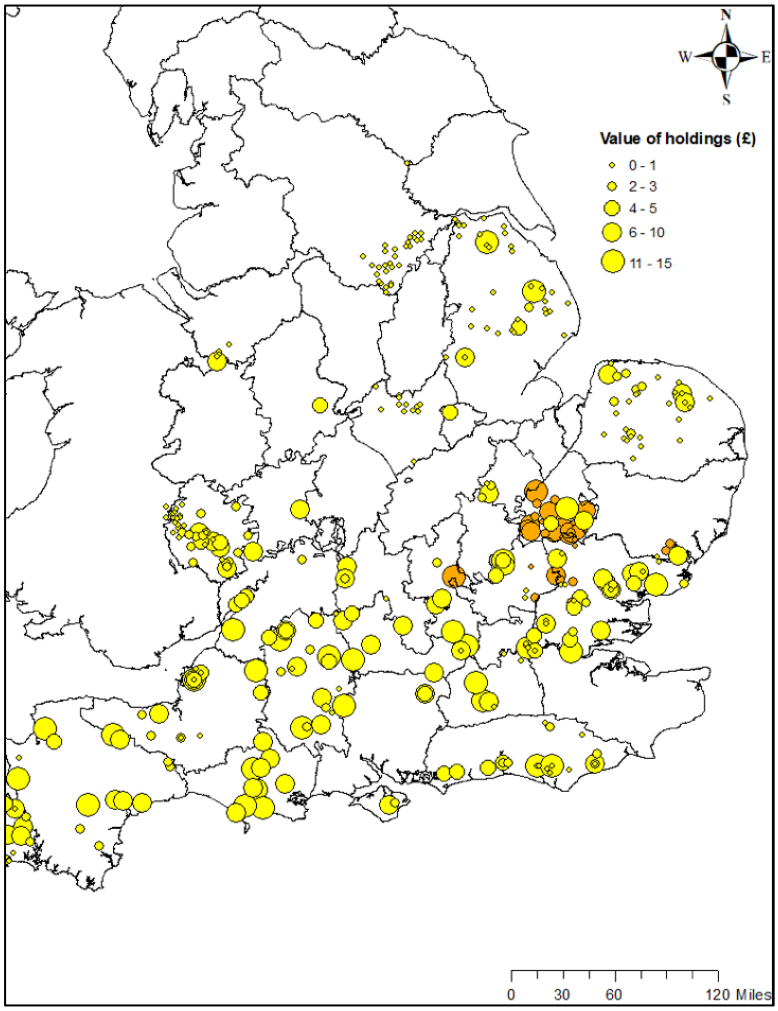
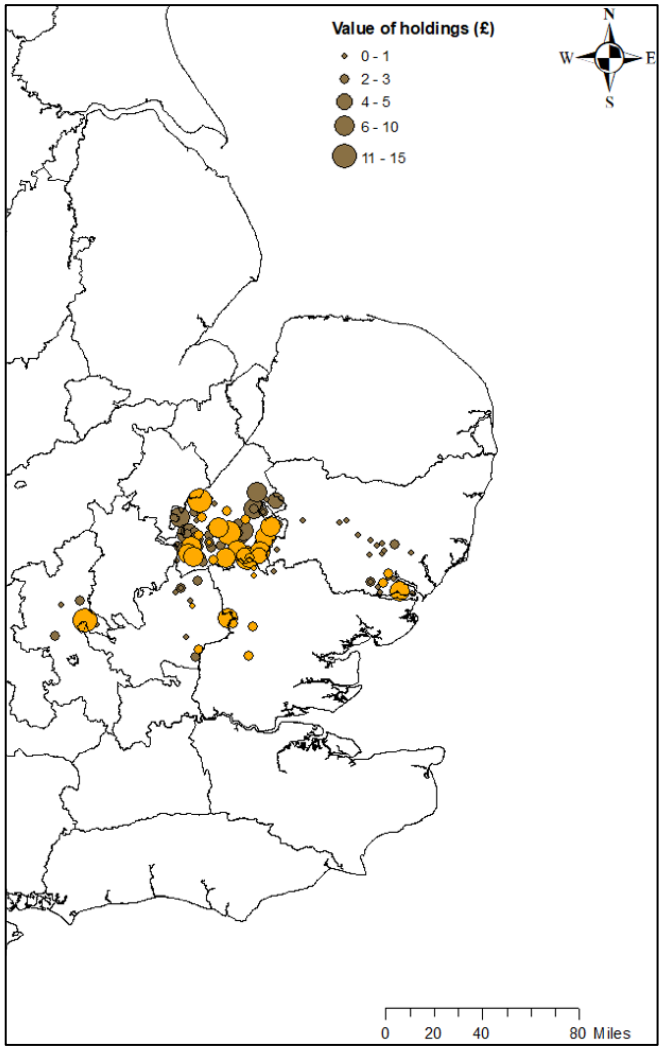


Figure 13: Eadgifu's lands (orange) and lordship (brown) in 1066



Although Harold's influence does not appear to have been completely lacking where Eadgifu held sway, she did clearly have a significant amount of concentrated wealth and influence, which could only have benefitted him.

Unfortunately, Domesday's records of Gytha's lordship are lacking because her lands were concentrated in the south-west (see figure 7), in circuits 1 and 2 where lordships were recorded infrequently. She was the second wealthiest female landowner in 1066 and matriarch of England's most influential family, but Domesday records her only having 2

men, Leofsige 'of Marden' and a free man 'of Chaddleworth'.[82] Gytha's extensive ties to Exeter suggest she had influence there, perhaps even participating in the 1068 rebellion. She was a patron of St Olave's church in Exeter; indeed, a charter survives recording her grant of 'land at Sherford, Devon' to it.[83] Nearby was a residence called *Irlesbyri*, which probably constituted a hall belonging to the Godewine family that Gytha may have continued to occupy.[84] The extent of Gytha's role in the rebellion is difficult to assess. John of Worcester also references the impact of an 'unbearable tax'.[85] Yet it seems likely that, even if she did not actively rally the rebels herself, her presence encouraged dissidence.[86] It is hard to believe she did not exercise substantial lordship in the region.

Certain pre-Conquest women appear to have been capable of fulfilling the tasks expected of a lord. Above all, lords were expected to offer protection, often judicial in nature. A lord would seek and expect to receive compensation for his man's death or injury from the perpetrator: the *manbot* for death. Lords could also pay their men's wergild 'as a judicial ransom'.[87] Men expected help protecting their property; lords could act as a sort of guarantor for their tenurial rights, or influence the proceedings of lawsuits against them by filling the court with their men to act as witnesses and or oath-helpers.[88] Lords sometimes helped men expand their properties, either by helping them despoil a religious house's

[82] GDB 24a (Sussex 11:33). GDB 59d (10,1 Berkshire).
[83] Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters,* p.360.
[84] A. Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge, 1995), p.20.
[85] *John of Worcester,* pp.4-5: 'importabile tributum'.
[86] Williams, *English and the Norman Conquest*, p.20.
[87] Baxter, 'Lordship and Justice', pp.400-401.
[88] R. Fleming, *Domesday Book and the Law: Society and Legal Custom in Early Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1998), p.535. Baxter, 'Lordship and Justice', p.401.

property or by granting them land from their own holdings.[89] Lords in a tenurial relationship would need enough land to supply *lonland* to men, or enough wealth to purchase land from indebted men who might then hold it back from them as a dependent.[90] Moreover, it was expected these duties would be performed well. Lordship was competitive; several different lords might attract commendation in a shire and men of the same hundred could be commended to different lords. Those with either national or substantial local importance tended to attract the most men,[91] presumably because they were best-placed to perform a lord's responsibilities well.

The popularity of Edith and Eadgifu's lordship suggests their wealth and connections rendered them capable of wielding enough influence to offer judicial protection. Presumably this was self-perpetuating, for men and influence must have attracted further men and influence. Though these women probably successfully attracted lordship primarily because of their national connections, Eadgifu's lands were quite concentrated, and there may have been women with concentrated holdings who commanded a great deal of localised lordship, but whose sphere of influence lay in a patchily-recorded circuit. In pre-Conquest England, then, lordship constituted both a means and reflection of social power for women. While, it seems unsurprising that Domesday records women as having commanded less lordship than men, given their smaller share of England's landed wealth, its records for lordship are incomplete and at least some women were able to attract many men and command real influence in society.

[89] Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, p.208.
[90] Ibid., pp.208-209.
[91] Ibid., p.212.

Stenton argues the Norman Conquest marked a 'definite break away from Old English tradition' for lordship.[92] Commendation, dependent land tenure and soke were fused together into a system based primarily on homage and dependent tenures.[93] Although Domesday rarely records the nature of post-Conquest bonds, for which homage, military service and sometimes monetary payments were central, it records their existence systematically. While, there remains insufficient pre-Conquest evidence to conduct a close comparison of women's lordship, surviving evidence suggests this change limited the influence women could exercise. After the Conquest it was still possible to engage with men without a tenurial bond, but the general movement away from 'mere commendation' and towards subtenancies was particularly restrictive for women because they tended to hold less land. Landowners now had to choose between wielding economic power by keeping land in demesne, or fostering social power by engaging with subtenants. The wealthiest women tended to hold most of their land in demesne; as table 9 shows, on average they held 88% in demesne, while their male counterparts only held 61% (table 10).

[92] F. Stenton, *The First Century of English Feudalism, 1066-1166,* 2nd edn (Oxford, 1961), p.123.
[93] G. Garnett, 'Conquered England, 1066-1215', in N. Saul (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of Medieval England* (Oxford, 1997), pp.69-70.

Table 9: The proportion of land held by the wealthiest female post-Conquest landowners in demesne

Name	Land held in Demesne (£)	Land held as Subtenancies (£)	Percentage of Land in Demesne (%)
Countess Judith	467	203	70
Eulalia, abbess of Shaftesbury	318	35	90
unnamed abbess of Wilton	216	22	91
Ælfgifu, abbess of Barking	162	2	99
Christine, abbess of Romsey	109	27	80
unnamed wife of Hugh fitzGrip	45	68	40
unnamed abbess of Caen La Trinité	106	0	100
Alice, abbess of Winchester	96	4	96
Rohais, wife of Richard fitzGilbert	54	4	93
Unnamed abbess of Amesbury	53	3	95
Christina	55	0	100
Adelaide, countess of Aumale	54	0	100

Table 10: The proportion of land held by the wealthiest male post-Conquest landowners in demesne

Name	Land held in Demesne (£)	Land held as Subtenancies (£)	Percentage of Land in Demesne (%)
King William	14644	3143	82
Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury	1204	1093	52
Earl Roger	956	1107	46
Odo, bishop of Bayeux	832	2408	26
Robert, count of Mortain	839	1164	42
Simeon, abbot of Ely	845	90	90
Walkelin, bishop of Winchester	831	890	48
Count Eustace	655	293	69
Count Alan	663	432	61
William de Warenne	577	602	49
Scotland, abbot of St Augustine's Canterbury	556	48	92
Thurstan, abbot of Glastonbury	562	259	68

The above is just a sample of post-Conquest landholding: there remained much scope for variation regarding the proportion of land tenants-in-chief kept in demense. Still, while no clear pattern is easily discernible for men, women displayed a marked tendency to hold their land in demesne, with the exception of Hugh fitzGrip's wife, Hawise de Bacqueville, probably recently widowed by the sheriff of Dorset. There are several possible reasons for this. Women may have held less of their land in demesne because they had less of it, and were unwilling to compromise their economic power for social influence. Being female may have made their lordship less attractive, perhaps due to its increasing connection with

military service, perhaps because women could no longer exercise lordship independently of their husbands.[94] Still, caution must be exercised here: it is unclear how far subtenants chose their lord. Tenurial bonds were certainly less predisposed to flexibility and choice than pre-Conquest commendation. Likewise, different women probably exercised different amounts of control over their fiefs' structure. Countess Judith may have exercised some control, at least over the honours not inherited from Waltheof, but it seems less likely that Hawise did. Therefore, that these women happen to have held a disproportionately high amount of their land in demesne is not necessarily a comment on their sex.

Nunneries may have held so much of their land in demesne because being generally less burdened with knight service than other tenants-in-chief meant they had less need of the military service subtenants were bound to give. The *Cartae Baronum* of 1166, a record of the 'servitium debitum' tenants-in-chief were expected to provide the king, many of which had been maintained since the Conquest,[95] reveals that while Robert, 'son of the king', owed as many as 100 knights, and Peterborough and Abingdon abbeys owed 60 and 30 respectively, Shaftesbury Abbey owed only 5 and Ramsey only 4.[96]

Whatever the reason female lords after the Conquest held so much of their land in demesne, having so few subtenants undoubtedly severely limited their capacity to exercise social influence. Although the degree to which the pre-Conquest evidence of female

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[94] *Tractatus de legibus et consuetudinibus regni Anglie qui Glanvilla vocatur*, ed. and tr. G. Hall (London, 1965), p.106.
[95] J. Holt, 'The Introduction of Knight-Service in England', in J. Holt (ed.), *Colonial England, 1066-1215* (London, 1997), p.96.
[96] 'The *Cartae Baronum* of 1166', in D. Douglas (ed.), *English Historical Documents* (12 vols, London, 1953), ii, pp.905-907.

lordship is representative remains an issue, Anglo-Saxon women clearly had the capacity to exercise a substantial amount of lordship and enjoy the resulting social power. Their post-Conquest counterparts certainly acted as lords, but the Conquest appears to have limited their capacity to do so and it seems likely they enjoyed less social influence as a result.

5: The Conquest's Long-Term Impact

Stafford argues that, due to women's tendency to suffer more during the initial period of land redistribution in the Conquest's immediate aftermath, 1086 is too soon for a reflection on the Conquest's impact on women.[97] However, regardless of whether women's share in England's total landed wealth eventually increased over time, the changes the Conquest wrought to inheritance patterns and its intensification of royal lordship meant it had lasting consequences for women beyond the initial reduction to their landholding. Before the Conquest, women were able to inherit family land and came into possession of their dower and morning gifts as widows. The Conquest restricted these avenues of female landownership.

The Conquest resulted in changes to inheritance patterns which made women less likely to inherit land. Wormald makes a persuasive case for thinking bookland had been a mechanism for providing Anglo-Saxon women with land before the Conquest. Of the 39 pre-Conquest wills Whitelock edited, 18 were issued by women or jointly by husband and wife. Women were both testators of wills,[98] and were named as beneficiaries of them, as were

[97] Stafford, 'Women in Domesday', p.90.
[98] *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, pp.34-37: see Æthelflæd's will.

for example Ælfhelm's wife and daughter.[99] Using Bede's *Historia Abbatum* and Domesday evidence to argue partible inheritance between sons was the norm in Anglo-Saxon England,[100] and reflecting upon women's prevalence in surviving Anglo-Saxon wills, Wormald makes the case that wills were primarily concerned with bookland, acquired property *par excellence,* rather than sons' inheritance. While sons inherited patrimonial land, bookland could be disposed of more freely and was often used to provide for female relatives.[101] There was no post-Conquest equivalent to bookland; this avenue for women to acquire land ended with the Conquest.

Holt argues the Norman elite had disposed of their acquisitions with similar flexibility before the Conquest. While patrimonial lands had succeeded to one or more sons, acquisitions provided an opportunity for daughters to inherit.[102] Following the creation of cross-Channel Anglo-Norman territories, however, often a family's English lands, technically acquisitions, were more valuable and thus more coveted than the patrimonial lands in Normandy. Consequently, they were less likely to be set aside for women, inhibiting the creation of a new class of wealthy female Norman landowners in England in earnest. Holt argues principally that inheritance customs were unstable in the Conquest's aftermath: managing cross-Channel territories under different lords, the king and the duke of Normandy, presented problems, as did the king's ability to interfere with inheritance.[103] Undoubtedly this uncertainty rendered women's position within inheritance procedures less clear too.

[99] Ibid., pp.30-35.
[100] Wormald, *Making of English Law. Volume II*, pp.227-228.
[101] Ibid., p.225-226.
[102] J. Holt, 'Politics and Property in Medieval England', *Past and Present*, 57 (1972), pp.10-13.
[103] Holt, 'Politics and Property', p.19, p.44.

Women after the Conquest were still entitled to their dower lands and marriage portion, but Henry I's coronation edict, his 1130 pipe roll and Magna Carta all show signs of women paying to come into possession of these lands, possibly because the king's new position as the source of all land tenure meant their land had technically escheated upon their husband's death, but more likely because they needed the king to protect them from family members or heirs who might attempt to acquire it.[104]

Anglo-Norman and Angevin kings encouraged and facilitated what amounted to a marriage market which may have proved highly profitable to them, but which ultimately restricted women's capacity for agency. Marriages to wealthy widows and heiresses were highly desirable because their husbands would gain control over their all of their lands (whether marriage portions, dower or inheritance) once the marriage had taken place.[105] The existence of pre-Conquest laws, such as those of Æthelbert, king of Kent, outlining punishments for abducting and marrying widows by force, suggests marriage to certain women could be highly coveted for similar reasons long before the conquest.[106] It is also probable that pre-Conquest kings exploited elite marriages to their advantage. Legislation forbidding marriage to widows and maidens against their will implies this was an issue. Æthelred decreed that, after remaining unmarried for 12 months, a widow could then

[104] 'Henry I's Coronation Charter' http://www.earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk/laws/texts/hn-cor/view/#edition/translation (9 Feb. 2019). *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Thirty-first year of the reign of King Henry I Michaelmas 1130*, ed. and tr. J. Green (Loughborough, 2012), p.76, 74, 53. J. Holt, *Magna Carta*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1992), pp.452-453.
[105] Baxter, *Making Domesday*, p.80.
[106] 'The Laws of Ethelbert, king of Kent', in D. Douglas (ed.), *English Historical Documents,* 2nd edn (12 vols, London, 1979), i, p.393.

'choose what she herself will'.[107] Cnut's laws, admittedly drawn largely from Æthelred's, also assert that widows should choose whom they married.[108] Stafford draws attention to this code's location in the section where Cnut dealt with royal and lordly abuses of power, suggesting that kings too manipulated marriages.[109] Moreover, there are clear examples of kings using marriages for their advantage as patronage before the Conquest. Cnut himself promoted and rewarded Earl Godwine by marrying him to his own sister-in-law, Gytha, in 1019. Gytha, daughter of Thurgils Sprakaleg and sister of Jarl Ulf, had impressive Danish heritage and the marriage was considered a 'fitting reward' for Godewine. [110] Unfortunately, the fact that we lack detailed fiscal records means that we cannot know how far English kings facilitated dynastic marriages and alliances before the Conquest, and indeed whether they made much income by doing so.

However, it seems probable that the Conquest resulted in an intensification of the king's involvement in the marriages of wealthy women. Heiresses and the widows of tenants-in-chief were considered to be 'in the king's gift' and, unless they were willing to pay the king for the right to remain unmarried, the king would take proffers for their hand from potential suitors. Payments for these marriages constituted one of the 'feudal incidents' from which the king derived a great deal of revenue.[111] The marriages gave kings political leverage too

[107] 'King Ethelred's code of 1008', in D. Douglas (ed.), *English Historical Documents,* 2nd edn (12 vols, London, 1979), i, p.445.
[108] *Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, ed. and tr. A. Robertson (Cambridge, 1925), pp.211-213.
[109] Stafford, 'Women and the Norman Conquest', p.231.
[110] *The Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster*, ed. and tr. F. Barlow, 2nd edn (London 1962), pp.5-6: 'decenti beneficio'.
[111] H. Mayr-Harting, 'Twelfth-century English Mothers', in C. Leyser and L. Smith (eds), *Motherhood, Religion and Society in Medieval Europe, 400-1400* (Farnham, 2011), p.104.

because the scale of the payments charged and speed with which they were expected to be collected could be adjusted depending on whether the suitor was in the king's favour.[112] Henry I's coronation edict clearly implies that William Rufus had abused his rights of royal lordship.[113] For example, it promises that Henry would not to compel widows to re-marry 'except in accordance with her wish', suggesting Rufus had done so.[114] Magna Carta's promise that 'no widow shall be compelled to marry' carries similar implications for John I's reign.[115] Chapter 6's declaration that heirs should 'be given in marriage without disparagement' implies women had been forced into marriages that constituted a diminution to their social position;[116] this situation occurred when kings, notably Henry I, used lucrative marriages to promote their 'new men'.[117]

There is abundant evidence that men paid the king for marriages to widows and heiresses in post-Conquest England. Henry I's Michaelmas 1130 pipe roll records many men paying for marriages under various conditions. In Devon, Hugh Daniscus was charged 6 silver marks for permission to marry Emma 'cum terra sua'.[118] In Norfolk, William of Houghton was charged 10 gold marks to marry Geoffrey de Fervaques' widow and obtain her land, along with custody over her son.[119] The same man paid £200 for his son, Payn, to marry Edward of Salisbury's wife 'cum terra sua' in Northamptonshire; Payn too was to contribute 200 silver

[112] Baxter, *Making Domesday*, p.81.
[113] Garnett, 'Conquered England', p.77.
[114] 'Henry I's Coronation Charter'.
[115] Holt, *Magna Carta*, pp.452-453.
[116] D. Carpenter, *Magna Carta* (London, 2015), p.104.
[117] Holt, *Magna Carta*, pp.452-453. R. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970), pp.222-223.
[118] *Pipe Roll 31 Henry I*, p.122.
[119] Ibid., p.74.

marks and 2 gold marks towards the marriage.[120] These payments were mandatory; circumvention incurred fines. Robert d'Avranches, sheriff of Exeter, was charged 170 silver marks that the king might pardon his 'maliuolentiam' towards Havise, Gelduin II of Dol's daughter. [121] Given Robert later married and had a daughter with Havise, this payment may relate to unlicensed pre-marital sex. The *Rotuli de Dominabus et Pueris et Puellis*, a record of widows, wards and their estates in 1185, states that Geoffrey Brito married Margaret Engaine 'sine licencia Regis' and determined that Brito needed to produce a warrant for the marriage. The following year's pipe roll records his 20 mark fine for marrying Margaret 'sine licentia regis' when she was 'de donatione ejus', suggesting he failed to do so.[122] Women's payments for control over their marriages were also lucrative. Henry I's 1130 pipe roll records how Countess Lucy of Chester, whose Lincolnshire estates rendered her so desirable that she had already married 3 times by 1130, owed £100 and 500 silver marks 'so that she need not marry within 5 years'.[123] She was clearly keen to avoid a fourth marriage following her third husband, Ranulf le Meschin's, death in 1129. In Suffolk, Wiverona, wife of Euerwacer of Ipswich, paid £4 and 1 silver mark 'so that she might only take a husband whom she wished', and William, son of Richard son of Hermer was charged £11 13s. 4d. so that his mother 'might marry a husband of her own choosing'.[124]

Perhaps the most striking element of the post-Conquest marriage market, and the aspect that most clearly distinguishes it from pre-Conquest arrangements, was the truly systematic

[120] Ibid., p.64.
[121] Ibid., p.122.
[122] *Widows, Heirs and Heiresses in the Late Twelfth Century: The Rotuli de Dominabus et Pueris et Puellis*, ed. and tr. J. Walmsley (Tempe Arizona 2006), pp.36-37.
[123] *Pipe Roll 31 Henry I,* p.87.
[124] Ibid., p.76, p.73.

approach taken by Anglo-Norman and Angevin kings to ensure maximum profits were made. Secular women were relatively consistently positioned near the end of Domesday's contents lists, regardless of their estates' size, so that the king could more quickly identify them when needed. Stafford observes how Countess Judith had substantial estates in Leicestershire but appeared 40th of 44 tenants-in-chief.[125] Similarly, Hugh fitzGrip's widow, with lands worth £112 in Dorset, was listed 53rd of 58 tenants-in-chief. In Oxfordshire, Judith, Christina and Adeline d'Ivry appeared 53rd, 54th and 55th respectively of 59. Abbesses were not subject to this grouping: the abbesses of Shaftesbury, Wilton and Romsey were listed 12th, 13th and 15th of 68 in Wiltshire. Godgifu and Ælfgifu, whose lands had become royal demesne by 1086, were unaffected too, appearing 11th and 12th of 44 tenants-in-chief in Leicestershire. It seems likely, therefore, that these secular women, most often widows, as the king's financial assets, were grouped together such to ease his manipulation of royal rights.

The *Rotuli,* a financial assessment of the 99 widows, 60 male heirs and dozen heiresses from whose marriage or custody the king might benefit, went yet further in aiding the king's manipulation of the marriage market.[126] Matilda Malherde was recorded as being 40 years-old with children and lands worth £4 15s 4d per annum, the value of which could be increased by £1 were 100 sheep added.[127] Here, as with many Domesday entries, the estates' potential value was assessed too. There is evidence the *Rotuli* had a 1177

[125] Stafford, 'Women in Domesday', pp.78-79.
[126] *Rotuli*, pp.xii-xiii. See S. Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm* (Manchester, 2003), pp.165-193 for a reading of the *Rotuli* as evidence of women's significance rather than their exploitation.
[127] *Rotuli*, p.51.

antecedent.[128] The 1176 Assize of Northampton prompted an enquiry of all women 'in the king's gift',[129] and several *Rotuli* entries reference the state of affairs 8 years before: Rose de Bussy 'took 10 marks from her wood in this period 8 years'.[130] Not only did post-Conquest kings systematically manipulate the marriage market, but this systematic manipulation seems to have been consistently applied.

The frequency within which widows re-married mattered because widowhood was the period of their life cycle which generally offered the greatest opportunity for agency and landowning.[131] Arguably the stakes for widows remaining unmarried were even higher after the Conquest because the shift to primogeniture meant sometimes vast landholdings were funnelled through just one descendant (at least until Stephen's reign);[132] therefore, although women had fewer avenues to inheriting land, those who did were more likely to be extremely wealthy.[133] The cruel irony, of course, was this rendered them even more attractive as marital prospects, ultimately tending to reduce the duration of their widowhood and restrict their opportunity to exercise agency. The Conquest had a lasting impact on the lives of women in England. Shifts in inheritance practices rendered them much less likely to inherit land, while an intensification of royal lordship meant widows had to pay even to come into possession of their marriage portions and dowers. Perhaps most

[128] Mayr-Harting, 'Twelfth-century English Mothers', p.105.
[129] 'The Assize of Northampton (1176)' in D. Douglas (ed.), *English Historical Documents* (12 vols, London, 1953), ii, p.413.
[130] *Rotuli*, pp.66-67.
[131] Stafford, 'Women in Domesday', pp.83-84.
[132] J. Holt, 'Feudal Society and the Family IV: The Heiress and the Alien', in J. Holt (ed.), *Colonial England, 1066-1215* (London 1997), p.252.
[133] Stafford, 'Women and the Norman Conquest', p.236.

crucially, women had their widowhood cut short by additional and unwanted marriages, organised remarkably systematically, or paid a hefty price to remain unmarried.

Conclusion

Assessing the degree to which Anglo-Saxon women enjoyed a 'Golden Age' presents difficulties, both in terms of the sparse evidence available and the methodical problems associated with defining a 'Golden Age'. Substantial gaps in pre-Conquest evidence often inhibits a full post-Conquest comparison. Stafford's effort to draw attention to these issues, criticise previous historiography and complicate our interpretation of Domesday's evidence is valuable and pertinent.[134] What is clear, however, is that, regardless of quite how much agency they enjoyed before the Conquest, women position's deteriorated as a result of it. Stafford underestimates the impact that changes wrought by the Conquest had on women. Domesday reveals a dramatic decrease in secular female landowners and the landed wealth they held. In addition, changes to inheritance practices narrowed the opportunities for women to inherit land; their capacity to exercise social influence through lordship was reduced; and they were increasingly subject to an intense marriage market which limited the length of their widowhood. While before the Conquest bookland had been used to set aside land for women, after the Conquest women had to pay even to come into possession of their dower, and serial re-marriage restricted their ability to enjoy it.

This decrease in women's position benefited primarily the king and his lordship. Much land previously held by women became royal demesne; pre-Conquest lordship's more

[134] Ibid., pp.240-243.

streamlined post-Conquest equivalent tended to exclude women but allowed the king to govern with greater efficiency; and the marriage market proved extremely lucrative for him. Although women held land and exercised lordship on both sides of the Conquest, and select examples of female agency can be found either side, ultimately the Conquest reduced women's landholding and restricted their opportunity to exercise influence within society.

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