

SUPPORTING HENRY VIII'S WARS

It's the year 1522. Henry VIII has been on the throne for 13 years. He hasn't yet started dismantling the Church and the internal conflicts of the Wars of the Roses are a thing of the past. Richard Hill is the Lord of the Manor but has not yet fallen out with the locals or the Abbess of Burnham. The people of Dorney are getting on with their lives as usual, the daily routine of growing the crops and tending the livestock.



Dorney is not however so isolated as to be unaware that the king is pursuing warfare elsewhere. Earlier in his reign, Henry invaded France and fought off a Scottish attack on the north of England. Since then, he had sent a small army to Ireland and was now embarking on a second war with France. And the king expected his subjects to support him in these endeavours, both financially and by providing manpower. There was no permanent army, other than a small royal protection force, so each campaign required men to be recruited to fight and money to pay for armour, weapons and other costs. It's been estimated that as many as 30,000 English fighters took part in some battles, a not insignificant number. These men came from their work in the fields and returned

there, God willing, when the fighting was over. Gradually, the system for raising troops was changing from the medieval practice of noblemen bringing their estate tenants and servants to serve as soldiers, to a requirement for each town and village to provide a quota of armed men.

Dorney residents are therefore not altogether surprised when there is a survey of military capability in each parish. The assessors carefully list the name of each person who owns land, buildings or goods, showing the value of these. They also note who holds what weapons, but it is widely – and rightly – suspected that the main purpose of the survey is not to assess fighting strength but rather to provide a solid database for taxation. Cardinal Wolsey, who is organising the survey on the king's behalf, is keen to increase the tax yield in the face of mounting costs. And indeed, a couple of years later taxes are levied. Twenty-six men and women in Dorney are assessed for tax in 1524, most of them paying tax on the value of goods at 4d or 6d in the £1, raising the grand total of 34s 10d for the king's coffers.

Ten years later, faced with further campaigns against the Scots and the Irish, an attempt is made to identify able men who could be mobilised to fight. In Dorney, eleven names are put forward. Two men, one a foot soldier and the other a horseman, are provided with what was called "almain rivets", a light half-suit of armour. Another horseman has no armour. All three of these, plus another foot soldier, are archers who would have carried longbows, while the remaining seven men are armed with bills, a dual-purpose weapon with a point at the end and a blade at the side, capable of thrusting like a pike and hacking like a battle axe. The body armour, and possibly the weapons too, has to be maintained by the parish, needing a lot of work to clean and then oil the metal to prevent rust as well as repairing or replacing the fabric, leather and nails which hold the plates together. All fit men are expected to practice using their weapons, especially archery, so that they are ready when called upon.



So, who were the people living in Dorney then? Three of the wealthiest residents on the 1524 tax list were Alice Goldwyn, John Carter and William Wollward. Although some of these families

owned small parcels of land, their goods were worth more, and mostly they rented their homes and land. Dorney still had common fields, such as South Field, where villagers farmed individual strips, as well as common grazing, but some farms were named, for example West Town Farm.

Alice Goldwyn was a widow, and her sons William, John and Robert Goldwyn were also taxed. John was a farmer and the survey recorded he had four good bows to fight with. When Alice died in 1539, she left a red ox each to William and Robert, plus a black cow to William. Each of her three married daughters received a cow, grandchildren were left a ewe and a lamb each, and every godchild got a bushel of barley. Son John inherited what was left of her estate, which was worth in total £21 15s 6d – the equivalent of over £9,000 today. Among the prized possessions of an earlier John Goldwyn when he died in 1513 were nine silver spoons and a wooden drinking vessel chased with silver. He rented small areas of land in different fields of Dorney, including Rush Acre and Upcottes. So, we have the picture of a comfortably off farming family, able to afford a few luxuries and to leave something of worth to the next generations.

John Carter was one of several Carters in Dorney; there was a younger John as well as Richard, Thomas, William, Nicholas, Joan and Alice. William had four good bows and Nicholas nine bills. It was perhaps the younger John Carter whose name was put forward to fight armed with a bill in 1534.

William Wollward was a farmer and was permitted to graze as many sheep as he wanted on the common fields, unlike everyone else who was restricted. He was also furnished with nine bills but was identified as an archer in the list of potential soldiers. When he died in 1548, only one of his five daughters was married; his son Thomas was still a child, and his wife was expecting another baby. His estate was valued at £87 16s, worth over £24,000 today. Each of his unmarried daughters was to have ten sheep and five quarters of barley. In addition, the eldest, Katherine, was left a black cow with a white face, and a gown and a kirtle for her wedding outfit. Thomas was to receive £6 13s 4d at the age of 20 while the unborn baby would have half that amount. As a successful sheep farmer, William was able to make good provision for his family.

Thomas Dolwyn was taxed on the farm he had inherited from his parents. His mother Alice had died in 1521 and her will mentioned oxen, which were used for field work, a cow, a colt, a sow with litter, wheat, barley and malt. We can imagine the farm produced grain for sale, while the cow and the pig would have provided the household with milk, cheese and meat. Malt was essential for beer brewed on the farm, as water was not safe to drink. Alice had successfully raised a large family, leaving three married daughters, two unmarried and two sons; at least three of her children were living in Dorney.

Three men in the King family, Robert, William and Edward, all paid tax. William and Edward each had six bows and Robert and Edward had their names put forward to serve as archers in 1534. Robert was married to Alice Goldwyn's daughter Alice.

The parish registers show that these families intermarried and the manor court rolls record when farms changed hands and who broke the rules by enclosing a bit of the common or grazing animals where they shouldn't. They witnessed each other's wills, which give us the detail of the things that were important to them. They were God-fearing people and those who could afford to often left money for the church of St James. As well as the vicar, there was a priest attached to a chantry chapel in the church, established by an earlier Lord of the Manor. Rich and poor gathered together at Mass in St James and perhaps they prayed for a speedy and successful conclusion to Henry VIII's wars.

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