

# Domesday and the lost village of Sidenore

Domesday Book was compiled by order of King William the Conqueror and dates from 1085. In his facsimile edition of the Sussex portion of the book, [W D Parish](#) describes it as ‘the Register from which judgement was to be given upon the value, tenure, and services of all the land in England, excepting Northumberland, Cumberland, Durham, the greater part of Westmoreland and part of Lancashire’. It is in two volumes and written in Latin. The first volume, which begins with Kent and contains the Survey of Sussex, is folio size and is written throughout by the same hand in a small but clear character in double columns, on 382 double pages of vellum.

Following William’s (Duke of Normandy) victory over Harold at Senlac Hill, Battle in 1066, he was quick to reward his knights and loyal followers with gifts of land here in Sussex. The county was at that time divided into six rapes (boroughs), each having a castle within its boundaries, and had been so divided since the time of Alfred. In 1067, William gave his half-brother, Robert (Count of Mortain) the the rape of Pevensey (which included most of the surrounding areas of Selmeston).



## Selmeston in the Domesday Book

In the Domesday Book there are two entries for Selmeston, one referring to Sielmestone and the other to Selmestone, along with an entry for Sidenore. There are also two entries for Sherrington (Sirintone/Serintone) and three for Tilton (Telentone/Telitone).

### The literal translation of the first Selmeston entry is:

*In Sielmestone Elfer held half a hide of King Edward. It never paid geld. There Reinbert has one plough with one villein. There are 3 acres of meadow and wood for 1 hog. It is, and was, worth 10 shillings.*

**King Edward** was Edward The Confessor (1042-1066)

**Elfer** was Alfred.

A **hide** was enough land to maintain a household and was approximately 120 acres.

**Geld** means Gold.

A **plough** was equivalent to eight acres of arable land.

A **villein** was a tenant during the feudal period, whose rent included working on the lord's demesne for one or more days a week and on special occasions such as times of ploughing and harvesting.

An **acre** was as much land that could be ploughed in a day with a team of oxen.

**The second entry is rather more significant.** It mentions the now lost village of Sidenore, places Selmeston in the Hundred of Wandelmestrei and states that: *William holds Selmestone and Sidenore of the Earl. Alfer held them in alodium. Then and now they vouched for 4 hides and a half. There is land for 7 ploughs. In demesne are 3 ploughs, and 4 villeins and 3 bordars with 4 ploughs. There is a church, and a priest, and 5 serfs.*

A **hundred** usually consisted of 80 hides (9,600 acres), but could also mean a unit of 100 fighting men.

**alodium** is real estate that is the absolute property of the owner and not subject to rent.

**demesne** refers to the land retained by a lord of the manor for his own use (the 'home farm') rather than land let out to a villein, or tenant farmer. A villein might farm about 40 acres; a border (or boarder) was his son, and was the next rung down the ladder, who could farm a smallholding of about 10 acres.

A **serf** was a labourer who performed work for the Lord of the Manor.

**The William** was William de Cahaignes, who came over with William The Conqueror and to whom John Maynard Keynes traced his ancestry.

### **Where was Sidenore located?**

There has been considerable speculation as to the location of Sidenore (also spelt Sydenore – Sydenoura – Sidenora). It certainly existed before the Norman invasion, and is shown on maps a half a mile north west of Selmeston. It has also been claimed that Sidenore was a place name derived from a manor adjacent to the manor of Mays, and later became a settlement just to the north of Selmeston, perhaps in the area of May's Farm. Sydenore is shown in the Lewes Chartulary of 1150-1170 (a manuscript to track charters and deeds with regard to ownership and tenancy of land). In 1166, William Maffet gave his son Richard one hide of land in Sydenore. It is also mentioned in the Feudal Aid Return of 1302-1303, where tax is shown to be paid on 2 Knight Fees ( an estate large enough to maintain a knight). However, the village has disappeared without trace, one theory being that it was abandoned during the period of the Black Death (1345-1353 in Europe).

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