

The Story of the 1986 Domesday Project

In 1986, 900 years after William the Conqueror's original Domesday Book, the BBC published the **Domesday Project**. The project was probably the most ambitious attempt ever to capture the essence of life in the United Kingdom. Over a million people contributed to this digital snapshot of the country.

People were asked to record what they thought would be of interest in another 1000 years.

The whole of the UK was divided into 23,000 4x3km areas called Domesday Squares or "D-Blocks". Church Minshull was d-block 364000-360000.

Schools and community groups surveyed over 108,000 square km of the UK and submitted more than 147,819 pages of text articles and 23,225 amateur photos, cataloguing what it was like to live, work and play in their community.

Website address: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/domesday/dblock/GB-364000-360000>

The project was about documenting everyday life - the ordinary, rather than the extraordinary and residents of Church Minshull in 1986, responded with their written accounts...

The categories below contain the Church Minshull snapshot of life in 1986...

The Village

Church Minshull is a village situated at a bend in the R. Weaver. It was called Maneshale (Old English = nook or corner) in the first Domesday book. The village is the centre of the area in which agriculture, mainly dairy farming, is the principle industry.

There are 286 people on the electoral role, the main centres of population being the village and the mobile home site at Lea Green. So far, there are not too many commuters living here, but there has been a noticeable increase in the turn-over of property in the last five years. We are concerned that we should not become a dormitory village, but that we should retain our rural character. The centre of the village is a conservation area so there can be only limited changes to the buildings.

Landscape

The village is situated at the site of an old ford across the Weaver river. The present bridge was built in 1701 to allow easy transport of bricks for the rebuilding of the church. The



appearance of the village is somewhat withdrawn, as most of the houses have high hedges to the road, their gardens running behind to the river. There are 12 listed buildings in the area. They have all been restored in the last ten years. The principle feature of the village is the

nucleus of 16th century timber framed buildings. They are reputed to have been built around 1588 with timber released from Delamere Forest by Queen Elizabeth I, for the rebuilding of Nantwich after the great fire. These three cottages; Old House, the Mill House and Church Farm (which has a magpie porch), are all in good condition.

Architecture

They are now painted black and white. Wades Green Farm, however, has been restored to natural timber and brick infill. There are other manor houses of this period in the area. The next wave of building, in the early 18th century used local field made bricks. These bricks are not very resistant to weathering and several of the buildings have been rendered (the Vicarage, the Badger Inn, Bridge Cottage and Woodside Cottage). Some (Bridge House and Village Farm) have been built round the frame work of an earlier cottage. The church (1702) is not a beautiful building, but the inside, it is friendly and welcoming, with an attractive colour scheme of blue, white and gold, recently repainted by YTS workers. The school and many of the farmhouses are Victorian, the former now redundant and the latter too large for times without servants. There is an interesting house by Thomas Telford near the canal (The Wharf). The unusual towers on the school and Bridge House were the work of Henry Brooke, last of the local landowners. The large water mill generated electricity until 1954. It is now two dwellings, but the machinery is still in place. The architecture of Weaver View and The



Homesteads is typical British Town Council, with few ameliorating features. However, the two new buildings opposite the Badger have generally been welcomed as enhancing the centre of the village. Currently a debate is taking place about whether two bungalows should be built at the back of the field opposite the Church.

The main architectural blots are the Village Hall, the telephone exchange and the silage tower at Village Farm, shortly to be demolished.

Ecology

Although this d-block lies in a district of intensively farmed grassland with high fertiliser usage, it is also ecologically fairly rich. The major feature is the River Weaver. Also of importance are the canal and various woods, copses and hedgerows. The Weaver

has recently been upgraded to a class 2 quality river, with reduction in the ammonia pollution from the sewage works upstream. This means that it is capable of supporting coarse fish. Below the weir gudgeon, stone loach, dace, chubb and roach are found. The physical barrier of the weir has delayed colonisation higher up the river. The banks support a varied flora and fauna. In one riverside meadow a survey during May, indicated 76 species of grasses and meadow flowers, including rarities such as a few clumps of cowslips and primroses. Kingfishers and, recently, cormorants have been seen catching fish. Many other birds have been seen in the area including gold crest, pied woodpecker, tawny, little and barn owls, nuthatch, tree creeper, grey wagtail and kestrel. In one woodland is an active rookery. Herons frequently fly over the area. During the winter swans are seen and fed on the river. In the woodland are about 10 active badger setts, some of which are of considerable age. Several footpaths criss-cross the d-block, but most of these are not much used by the public. The canal towpath offers a good foot-path and frequently water voles and other wild life can be seen. After an absence due to myxomatosis, rabbits are making a re-appearance. Hares are plentiful, as many as five being seen at one time. Annual rainfall is 700mm.

Population

Total	325
Locally employed	52
Employed in a local town	70
Employed further afield	4
Unemployed	11
Pensioners	79
Non-working wives	30
Pre-school children	11
Primary school children	13
Secondary school children	24
Children in Further Education	10
Home owners	98
Local Authority Tenants	19
Private Tenants	16
Families in tied cottages	10
Families resident:	
for more than 20 years	20
10-19 years	22
1-9 years	82
less than 1 year	11

Lifestyles

A sample of fifty families reveals that many traditional patterns prevail. Men tend to see to the garden, the car and household repairs while cooking, cleaning and child care remain largely the woman's job. 50% of the people questioned grow some of their food. Many do a substantial amount of home baking, knitting and dressmaking. 75% often do their own decorating and routine maintenance jobs. Regular paid domestic help is confined to 8% of families. Families tend to eat together and the main meal is between 5 and 6 in the evening. Roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and roast potatoes constitute the favourite meal. Baked beans and egg and chips, are the most common standby.

50% of families own at least one dog and 75% at least one cat. Two of each is not uncommon.

There is no mains gas supply in the village. Roughly half the houses have central heating, mainly oil fired. Open fires are commonly used, either alone, or in conjunction with central heating, or electric fires. The number and variety of modern appliances marks a departure from tradition. All the questioned families have a TV and most a telephone, washing machine and fridge. 75% own a freezer, sewing machine and power tools. 10% have microwave ovens, video recorders and computers. TV provides the main evening entertainment, but most families take a daily paper and manage to fit in hobbies including, darts, snooker, embroidery, piano, cards, pigeons, tennis, walking and sailing. Family ties remain strong and relatives visit frequently.

Recreation

Most of the village events focus on the village hall and Parish Church now that the school has closed. The village fete is held on the field in the centre of the village. The money raised is divided between the Church and Village Hall. Antique fairs, car boot and jumble sales, bonfire parties, dances and whist



drives, are held occasionally. Church Minshull Guides and Worleston Scouts attend an annual Parade Service at the Church. The W.I. (annual Subscription £5) meets monthly in the village hall. The programme includes outings, speakers, a produce and handicraft show and a

Christmas party with entertainment by members. Home Farm Park is a Mobile Home Site. The residents have formed a Tenants' Association to look after their interests. Business meetings are held throughout the year Members also have a Christmas party. There is surprisingly little contact between the two communities.

The Church has a tower housing six bells. The bellringers belong to the Crewe branch of the Chester Diocesan Guild of Bellringers. They meet on Wednesday evenings for practice and on Sundays for services and other occasions when needed. There are several keen supporters of the hunt and Cheshire Hounds and Cheshire Beagles meet here several times between November and March. The Weaver is fished by several angling clubs. The South Cheshire branch of the Pony Club meet regularly at Manor Farm, Lea Green for competition work, including a tetrathlon event. A small group have formed an Archery Club. Several members of the community shoot (either clay pigeons or live game)

Customs

Customs and traditions have evolved from the Church. In January, the farmers of the parish attend the annual Blessing of the Plough Service. In August, St.Bartholemew's Day is celebrated by a gift evening, when every household in the parish is asked to make a contribution toward the upkeep of the Church. In October, the Harvest Festival is held to give thanks for the year's harvest. In addition to the Sunday services, Evensong is said the preceding Friday. Gifts of produce are distributed to the sick and elderly.

At Christmas time a traditional carol service of nine lessons and carols is held and every house in the parish is visited by carol singers. At this time the Vicar and wardens dispense charity money to the poor of the parish.

Language and Dialects

This southern area of Cheshire has a basically North West Midland dialect, in which certain letters are exchanged in the spelling of words, and various sounds are similarly exchanged. Words are often shortened for example by the dropping of the letter H at the start of the word, for example:

bonk = bank

mon = man

ommer = hammer

ond = hand

teel = tail

dee = day

feever = favour.

Place names are also simplified and shortened for example:

Aulem = Audlem

Ooton = Oulton

Budorth = Budworth

Wembury = Wybunbury

Wetna = Wettenhall.

Chomson = Cholomondeston.

Our village is called Minsha.

Other words are:

thrutch = push

nowt = nothing

neet = night

Sentences can be severely abbreviated.

“..a winna tell thi ” = “I will not tell you”

“..anna thee done up?” = “..are you not exhausted?”

“..oo in tin..” = “..she is not at home..”

Religion

The religious life of this area is centred on two buildings. The largest is a typical English country church, where members of the Church of England worship in decreasing numbers, 10-20 at a normal Sunday service, although many more attend festival services. The present vicar, the Rev.P.Gains was inducted into the twin parishes of Church Minshull and Leighton cum Minshull Vernon, in 1959, and will retire in 1986. Cross Lanes Chapel was built in 1809 by the Congregational Church, which became the United Reform Church in recent years. The regular minister is the Rev. Paul Frampton. Only eight members belong to the chapel but numbers increase with visitors from other areas. A very small part of the population is of Catholic, or other faith.

Law and Order

The village is served by one policeman who lives in Worleston. Recently a Home Watch Scheme, one of the first in Cheshire, has been started. This scheme comprises several local people who can be contacted quickly should any suspicious behaviour be suspected. They then inform the local police at Crewe. There have been no break-ins in the village since the scheme's inception.

Agriculture

In our designated area there are 10 farms, farming 2,000 acres. 90% is grassland and 10% arable.

Cattle: There are 1640 Friesian cattle, including calves up to 3 months 200 cows and heifers 1290, cattle reared for beef 150. Two of the herds are pedigree, the rest commercial. The cattle are fed on silage. Silage cutting (2 or 3 cuts per year) is contracted out on all but two farms and is kept in clamps rather than silage towers. Concentrates are all bought in from local mills except by those farmers who produce corn, who feed their own barley to their young stock. Dairy cows receive an average of 1.7Kg concentrates to every 4.5lt milk produced. The annual yield per cow is approx. 6,000lt. All farmers use modern milking parlours. All milk is collected by the Milk Marketing Board.

With effect from 1985, the Common Market introduced a restriction on milk production and each farmer was given a quota which entailed a reduction in output. So now more beef cattle are being reared at the expense of the dairy cows. Depending on requirements, artificial insemination is used by the farmers, half dairy and half beef bulls being used. Animals are sold at Crewe and Beeston Markets.

Pigs: 10 sows for breeding purposes.

Sheep: In winter some farmers receive sheep from upland areas, to make use of surplus grass when the ground would be damaged by cattle.

Poultry: Between two farms there are 200 free range and 6000 battery hens. The free range eggs are sold from the farm and to a health food shop. The battery eggs go to the Egg Marketing Board.

Horses and Ponies: There are 21 animals. All are used for recreation.

Rabbits: 30 commercial.

Land: Arable, 10% of land. Half wheat and half barley. Yields average 3 tonnes/acre.

Farm workers: The 10 farms are worked by 31 people, not including farmers' wives. 16 are fathers and sons, the rest are employed. The union rate is higher in Cheshire than in other areas.

Farm equipment: Used on the 10 farms:

Tractors x 32 from 120bhp to 45bhp – Fertiliser and manure spreaders x 1/farm – Combine harvester, roller, chain harrow, mower, plough, disc, corn drill and sprayer x 1/farm with arable land. Precision chopper, silage trailer, buck rake, rowler-in x 1/farm making own silage. Landrovers x 4, Trailer for taking cattle to market x 1/farm.

Trade

The village shop and P.O. has a paper round, groceries, fresh fruit, vegetables and stationery. There is an antique shop with tea rooms. The Badger, newly renovated (traditional beer, log fires, but no longer any dart or dominoes) now has a restaurant. The Smithy has agricultural engineering, vehicle repairs and hardware sales. There is a petrol station, with small parts sales, second hand cars and refreshments and also a salt packing depot. Two mobile butchers, an ice cream van, a fish and chips van and a mobile library, visit the village. Milk is delivered from Church Farm, the milk coming from a dairy in Winsford. Some farms sell produce from their gate. One has bed and breakfast accommodation for 6. There is also a concern selling bagged hay for pets, an outside catering business and one selling wooden garden furniture.

Transport

Church Minshull is at the junction of B5074 Nantwich/Winsford road and a minor road to Crewe that crosses the river by the only bridge between Nantwich and Winsford. This means heavy commercial traffic, which is detrimental to roads, buildings and life style. Farm machinery and herded stock regularly use the roads. An hourly bus service (Crosville K31) runs between Northwich, Winsford and Crewe, but there is no public service to Nantwich. Contract coaches take primary school children to Worleston and secondary school children to Malbank, Nantwich. The road is an emergency route, so it gets priority treatment in bad weather. Nearly all households have one car, many have more. There are a few motor cycles and bicycles. The canal is used by holiday makers and a few small boats and canoes use the river.