

At the Historians meeting of 29 August, Allan Howard presented the Staffordshire Domesday Book which had been kindly given by Gill Sykes to the Historians' archive. This was an impressive collection of three sets on information in a large red box: the Domesday Book entries relating to Staffordshire in Latin, the information translated into English and general essays by various scholars on topics relating to the whole Domesday Book, including geography, archaeology, agriculture and parish churches. There were also two maps, of England and Staffordshire at the time of William the Conqueror. These sets had been published in the year 2000 as part of a Millennium Project, for the various English counties.

William the Conqueror was born in 1028 and spent most of his life fighting, first in Normandy, then to claim England from Harold Godwinson in 1066 and to maintain his power over the country. William died shortly after the survey for the Domesday Book was completed, in 1087, 21 years after the Battle of Hastings. His reason for undertaking the survey was to record the landholdings and resources of the country, primarily for taxation purposes, and it was carried out by royal officials who travelled the length and breadth of England to obtain the information.

There is a very small entry relating to Kings Bromley, one of 13,418 places mentioned in the Domesday Book, showing that it was worth £5 (compared to Alrewas £10), had land for ploughs, 2 slaves or serfs, 11 villeins or villagers and 8 bordars who had a slightly higher status. Rich people, women and children are not mentioned.

The area of Staffordshire was considered rather backward and poor, but Allan pointed out that Kings Bromley, with the word King in the title, was obviously of some importance: Leofric, Earl of Mercia, (whose wife was Lady Godiva) died in Kings Bromley in 1057, Harold II owned Kings Bromley in 1066 and William I then took the village for himself (the only place in Staffordshire claimed by William). Nearby Cannock Chase and Needwood Forest were hunting grounds for royals and nobles and the possibility of a hunting lodge in Kings Bromley has been put forward; however, Allan considers that the importance of the village is more likely linked to its vicinity to Ryknild and Watling Streets and the possibility that the River Trent was navigable to Kings Bromley. There were no mills or eel fisheries mentioned for Kings Bromley and the main use of the land was agricultural, with arable growing of wheat etc and pastoral raising of cows, sheep and pigs.

There is a wealth of information contained in the Staffordshire Domesday Book and the Historians will learn a great deal from the essays on various aspects of life in the 11th century.