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**A Minchinhampton Custumal, c.1180**

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a NE direction as part of a tile drainage scheme. Observations of these showed a black topsoil lying directly on grey clay except on the upper slope where a brown subsoil on gravel overlies the clay to 24 ins.

This latter area is covered by an occupation spread of black stony earth at about 14 ins, A, B, C representing areas in which vertically-sided dark-filled sections 24-38 ins deep suggest wall trenches of buildings. This seems most certain at B where the drainage trench apparently cut across the corner of two walls at right angles.

Other features include V-shaped sections, some possibly representing ditches, others the cuts for old stone and tile drainage systems. These latter are not plotted on the plan. Four sections on old field boundaries are shown as late ditches and the remaining cuts are marked X generally with a depth in inches. Seven sections were noted in the field to outline two ditches running down the slope towards a common outlet in the boundary stream.

All the X sections contained oolite and sandstone fragments, Roman brick, hypocaust tile and animal bones. The occupation area produced a few body sherds of RB coarse pottery. No medieval material appeared and it would seem that tradition is a memory of an earlier occupation probably connected with the Roman villa proved by Capt Gracie to exist under the church.<sup>1</sup>

Further evidence of this occupation was supplied by the drainage contractor who recently laid a water pipe on the N side of the churchyard. In OS 151 he encountered solid masonry over a length of nearly 100 ft at D.<sup>2</sup> During other work in OS 153 he noted a hard stone layer at E.

E. G. PRICE

#### MINCHINHAMPTON CUSTUMAL, c. 1170

Minchinhampton has long been recognized as one of the best-documented Gloucestershire manors for the medieval period. Numbers of court rolls, reeve's accounts, and rentals survive, in addition to the detailed survey and custumal of c. 1300 published by Revd C. E. Watson in Volume 54 of the *Transactions*. An earlier, not so well-known, survey exists in the cartulary of Caen abbey, Normandy, now in Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, as MS. Latin 5650. (A microfilm has been acquired by the Glos. County Records Office.) The survey dates from Henry II's reign, probably c. 1170, and describes all the abbey's manors, among them the Gloucestershire group of Minchinhampton (then including Rodborough), Avening, Aston (in Avening), and Pinbury (in Duntisbourne Rous).

The manorial demesne lands are unfortunately not described in the survey but the tenants' labour-services that are specified suggest that they were still mainly given over to arable farming, and it is significant that, of the large number of tenants who already at this early period had had most of their works commuted, many were still required to work in the busy harvest month of August. Ten ploughmen (i.e. for five teams) were also retained on Minchinhampton manor. Nevertheless sheep-farming, which was to dominate the economy of the manor by the beginning of the 14th century when Caen abbey ran a flock of over 1,000 sheep on Hampton and Aston Downs, was already important enough for two of the tenants to hold their land by service as shepherds, and the services of other tenants included help with the lambing.

The services owed by the Avening tenants included carrying-service, presumably usually to the nearest market at Cirencester, although sometimes they might be required to go to Bristol or Gloucester, or to drive livestock to Felsted and Horsted, two Caen abbey manors in south-eastern England. Some of the produce of the manors was evidently sent over to the abbey in Normandy, for Minchinhampton tenants were required to carry cheese and bacon to Southampton, whereas by the beginning of the 14th century the profits were taken over in the form of cash and a group of chief tenants were liable to assist the abbey's steward convey it. This group of chief tenants also appears in the early survey but the estate of only one of them, Adam Spilman's, the later Spilman's Court manor in Rodborough, can be identified.

1. *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, LXXXII (1963), 148-67.

2. *Ibid.*, 149.

One of the most interesting features of the survey is the occurrence of four Minchinhampton tenants surnamed 'fuller', probably the earliest evidence of the cloth industry in a region of which it was to be the shaping force. A number of mills are mentioned, among which can be identified Stoneford Mill at Chalford and the mill by the ancient river-crossing at Dudbridge, but there is no evidence that any were yet fulling-mills; none of the fullers occupies a mill and presumably they were still carrying on their trade by the primitive walking process, although conceivably using the ponds or sluices of the corn-mills. A few other trade surnames occur, including that of a merchant, and a smith and a carpenter held from Avening manor by their service. Other tenants, surnamed from their place of abode, provide evidence that the slopes of the Frome valley were already fairly well populated, with settlements established at Chalford, Cowcombe, Hyde, Besbury, Burleigh, and Brimscombe. Among the tenants' forenames, the Saxon ones, such as Edric, Gudmund, and Ailward, still predominate over the Norman Roberts and Williams.

One of the most characteristic features of the region, the extensive beechwoods, figure in the survey in the tenants' complaint that whereas they once drove herds of some 3,000 swine to mast in Gatcombe, Cowcombe, Hazel wood, Windsorage, and the other woods of the manors, the felling of timber for sale and for charcoal-burning had reduced by about half the numbers that could be pastured. The tenants also mentioned the woods on the high ground in the west part of Minchinhampton and in Rodborough, which in later centuries came to be distinguished as 'custom woods' where the inhabitants could take timber, and which were gradually cleared to produce the open commons that survive today. One large assart had already been made in the woodland on the boundary of Minchinhampton and Rodborough and was called in the survey *magna roda* (which Professor R. E. Latham suggests is a Latinization of O.E. *rod*, a clearing), and the word apparently supplied the origin of the local place-name, the Road, and possibly also the first element of Rodborough.

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#### BRONZE CLOSING RING FROM ST NICHOLAS CHURCH, GLOUCESTER

After many years of dwindling congregations, St Nicholas church in Westgate Street was finally closed for worship in 1967. On 7 May 1971, it was declared redundant under the Pastoral Measure 1968, and at the time of writing its future still remains in doubt.

The church, which still retains Norman features, was well-known as having a 'sanctuary knocker' on its south door (see PLATE). This object is not a knocker in the accepted sense of the word since it lacks a beating plate, but is more properly an elaborate form of closing ring, and is an outstanding example of English medieval metalwork. It is in superb condition having been protected from the weather by the church porch which was first built in 1347, not long after the date of the closing ring itself.<sup>1</sup> In October 1969 the ring was lent to Gloucester City Museum by the vicar and churchwardens, and two years later it was bought outright by the Museum for £5,000. The National Art-Collections Fund made a generous gift of £2,000 towards the purchase and the Department of Education and Science, through the Victoria and Albert Museum, contributed a further £1,500.

The closing ring consists of a hexagonal escutcheon measuring approximately 239 mm by 261 mm. The plate varies between 5 and 6 mm in thickness, and has been pierced to take ten square-taper headed iron spikes with which it was fixed to the church door.

The principal motif, cast in high relief, is that of a grotesque with a human head, flowing locks, long pointed ears, short stumpy wings and hairy forelegs each ending in a paw with four digits with sharp claws. The ring passes round the attenuated neck of the grotesque.

The secondary motif, back to back with the grotesque, is a human face with open mouth and protruding tongue. This figure is wearing a close-fitting 'balaclava'-like head-dress which covers

1. *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, xxiii, 113, 117, 124.