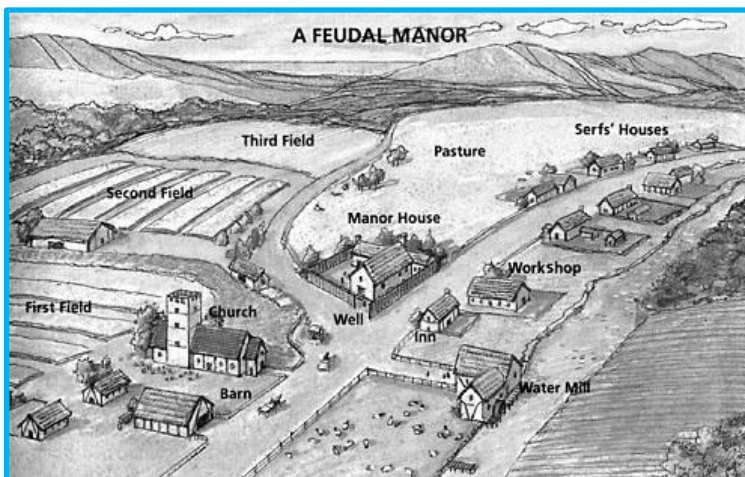




Medieval Manors around Weston

The manor system was a way that medieval Lords organized their land to produce food and money. The manor had four main areas: the manor house and accompanying village, farmland, meadowland, and wasteland.

The Lord of the manor lived in the manor house and the Villeins (his tenants) and Serfs (who were virtual slaves) lived in mud brick cottages that were somewhere on his land.



An illustration of a medieval manor © Weston Museum

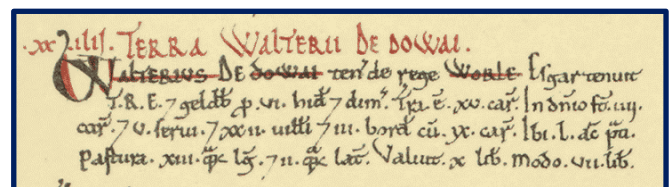
The Villeins were given the Lord's protection and allowed to farm strips of land. In return they had to work two or three days a week on his land and give him some of what they produced themselves. This might be fruit, cereal, wool, meat, fish or anything they harvested.

The manor used a special system to farm the fields. This system was called three-field rotation. Each Villein was given three acres of land.

In the autumn one third was planted to wheat, barley, or rye, and in the spring another third of the land was planted to oats, barley, and vegetables to be harvested in late summer. One strip was always left crop-free so that when the fields were rotated the soil could be rested. The best land was kept by the Lord, while the Villeins took to the rest of the farmland regardless of its quality.

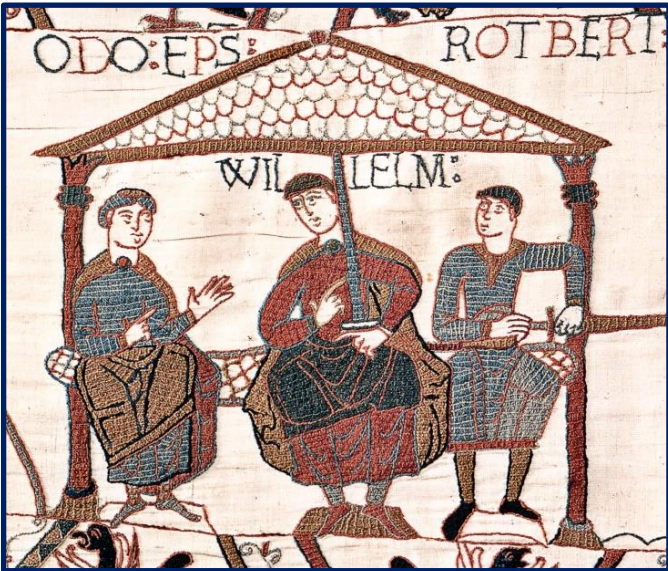
This system provided for the population quite well, sometimes there was even a surplus. If the tenants produced more than they needed to eat or give to the Lord they could sell their crops at market which encouraged towns and villages to grow in the area.

It is very likely that there had been settlements on the banks of the Severn for many centuries but it is only with settlement by the Saxons that we have any records. Most of the place names that exist today we owe to the Saxons. For example 'ton' was the Saxon word for settlement or homestead. So 'West ton' literally meant the "settlement to the west" - but to the west of what?



Worle's entry in *The Domesday Book*

When the Normans conquered England William I ordered a list of all the wealth of England in The Domesday Book (1086). The most valuable manor listed locally is Worle; which would make sense as Weston would have been to the west of Worle.



William I (The Conqueror) as shown in the Bayeux Tapestry

The Domesday Book tells us that in the time of the Saxon King Edward the Confessor, the manors of Worle and Milton were owned by Edgar and Elwacre. There were 22 Villeins and five Serfs. Three Bordars, who ranked below Villeins, held the gardens around their cottages and received wages for work on or in the manor. In Saxon times Worle had been worth £10, now it was worth only £3. It was the only village in the area to possess a horse for riding. William granted these lands to Walter de Douai.

To put together the Domesday return from this area a jury of 'twelve good men' from the Winterstoke hundred had to examine the answers to twelve questions put to Walter de Douai and say if his answers were true or not.

In his answers Weston is not mentioned. Is this because the settlement was not valuable enough? Or was Walter pulling a fast one to avoid having to pay the King the full tax on the value of his possessions?

There are other manors also listed in Domesday which we can still recognise today 'Aisecombe' (of which Weston is thought to have been a part) now Ashcombe. Opopille now Uphill, Middleton now Milton, Chiewstoke now Kewstoke and Worspring now Woodspring.

At some point Weston became important enough to be separated from Ashcombe although it is not until the eve of The Black Death that a monk recording rents due to The Bishop of Wells first talks of 'Weston super Mare' (Weston above the sea) probably to distinguish the settlement from all the other Westons in Somerset.

'Weston super Mare' is not the creation of upwardly mobile Victorians as many people think. But a medieval description of a settlement which grew up around St John's Church (in what is now Lower Church Road) on the hill above the sea. Actually Weston super Mare was just the name that stuck. Other medieval names for the settlement included 'Weston-prope-Worle', 'Weston-juxta-Worle' and 'Weston-upon-More'.



Weston-super-Mare
Town Council