

Hereward 'the Wake' and the Barony of Bourne: a Reassessment of a Fenland Legend^[1]

Hereward, generally known as 'the Wake', is second only to Robin Hood in the pantheon of English heroes. From at least the early twelfth century his deeds were celebrated in Anglo-Norman aristocratic circles, and he was no doubt the subject of many a popular tale and song from an early period.^[2] But throughout the Middle Ages Hereward's fame was local, being confined to the East Midlands and East Anglia.^[3] It was only in the nineteenth century that the rebel became a truly national icon with the publication of Charles Kingsley novel *Hereward the Wake*.^[4] The transformation was particularly Victorian: Hereward is portrayed as a prototype John Bull, a champion of the English nation. The assessment of historians has generally been more sober. Racial overtones have persisted in many accounts, but it has been tacitly accepted that Hereward expressed the fears and frustrations of a landed community under threat. Paradoxically, however, in the light of the nature of that community, the high social standing that the tradition has accorded him has been denied.^[5]

The earliest recorded notice of Hereward is the almost contemporary annal for 1071 in the D version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A Northern recension probably produced at York,^[6] its account of the events in the fenland are terse. It records the plunder of Peterborough in 1070 'by the men that Bishop Æthelric [late of Durham] had excommunicated because they had taken there all that he had', and the rebellion of Earls Edwin and Morcar in the following year. Edwin was killed and Morcar retreated into the fen with various Englishmen. In reply King William dispatched a fleet and land force and besieged the Isle of Ely where the rebels had resorted. They were all forced to surrender 'except Hereward alone and those who could escape with him, and he led them out valiantly'.^[7] This is the only notice of Hereward, and it would appear that his escape was already such a well-known story as to require no further explanation. The E version, in an interpolation composed at Peterborough c.1121,^[8] casts no light on the episode but introduces Hereward into the story at an earlier point. It recounts that a Danish army went to Ely and all the fenland people went to them in the expectation that they would conquer England. Meanwhile, with the appointment of the Norman Torald as abbot of Peterborough by King William, Hereward and his band in an apparently related incident plundered the monastery and took all the treasure to Ely from where the Danes, bought off by the king, took it to Denmark. The siege of Ely is then recounted in the same terms as those of the D version. Hereward is simply identified as one of the abbey's men.^[9]

Later literary sources are more forthcoming. Gaimar, in his *L'Estoire des Engles* written c.1140, calls him 'a noble man... one of the best of the country'.^[10] Other sources expand on this theme. In the mid twelfth-century work known as the *De Gestis Herewardi Saxonis* Hereward is said to have been the son of Leofric, kinsmen of Earl Ralph Staller (that is, staller), and Ediva great-great-granddaughter of Earl Oslac of Northumberland, and to have married Turfrida, a Flemish woman of noble birth. His patrimony was the manor of Bourne in Lincolnshire, and it was the loss of the estate to an unnamed Norman which prompted Hereward to lead a rebellion against the hated foreigners and take a primary role in the siege of Ely. The story ends with Hereward coming to terms with King William after his flight from the Isle and the restoration of his patrimony.^[11] The late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century *Historia Croylandensis* records much the same information, with the substitution of Earl Ralph of Hereford for Ralph the staller and with the added detail that Hereward was the nephew of Abbot Brand of Peterborough. However, it continues the story by asserting that Hereward's daughter subsequently married Hugh de Evermue, bringing with her her inheritance of the manor of Bourne, and that their daughter married Richard de Rullos.^[12] Finally, a fifteenth-century genealogy of the Wake family and account of the descent of their barony of Bourne

again makes him lord of the estate and notices its descent through the marriage of Hereward's daughter to Hugh de Evermue, but asserts that the rebel was the son of Earl Leofric of Mercia and Lady Godiva.^[13]

The suggested chronology of the *Historia Croylandensis* may be suspect - Richard de Rullos is made to be a contemporary of Hereward while married to his granddaughter - but there is nothing intrinsically unlikely in these accounts. Hereward's high social standing is consistent with the role he is reported to have assumed in the rebellion, and native families, especially in the North, were often successful in maintaining title to their lands in the years immediately after the Conquest, whilst the marriage of English heiresses to Norman aristocrats is well-attested. Ivo Taillebois held the honour of Bolingbroke by right of his wife the Countess Lucy who was the daughter of Thorald the sheriff or Earl Ælfgar of Mercia; the history of the fee in the twelfth century turned upon her rights in the land rather than those of Ivo or her two further husbands.^[14] The tenure of the Lincolnshire lands of Colsuain, Alfred of Lincoln, Colegrim, Robert Malet, and Durand Malet were all likewise underpinned by English title.^[15] Nevertheless, Hereward's rights in Bourne and their transfer through his family have been rejected. Domesday Book shows that the manor was held by Earl Morcar in 1066.^[16] Hereward apparently only held part of Laughton and its soke in his own right; otherwise his most substantial holdings were parcels of land held of the abbeys of Crowland and Peterborough in Rippingale and Witham on the Hill, Barholm and Stowe respectively.^[17]

Domesday Book, then, apparently substantiates the account of the E version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Far from the aristocrat of the literary sources, Hereward would seem to have been a mere tenant of religious houses. Round argued that the elevation of his status and his association with Bourne was a later invention prompted by the subsequent tenure of all of Hereward's lands by the lords of Bourne.^[18] The Rippingale manor was already held by Oger the Breton, who succeeded Earl Morcar in Bourne, in 1086. Witham on the Hill and its sokelands, by contrast, were held of the abbey by a certain Ansford at that time and so continued until granted to the lords of Bourne in return for knight service in the twelfth century.^[19] It was, then, natural to associate Hereward with Bourne and it was but a small step to make him a member of the Wake family who then held it.

This conclusion has gone largely unchallenged, but it is not beyond criticism. The *De Gestis Herewardi* was apparently written in the mid twelfth century by Richard of Ely and is probably a polished and extended version of an earlier draft which is entered in the *Liber Eliensis*.^[20] In common with its genre, the *De Gestis* is not without its stereotypes. Much of the account of Hereward's early life is phantastical, rigourously conforming to what was expected of a hero.^[21] Nevertheless, in the later sections a real personality repeatedly emerges from its pages: Hereward is far too hot-headed and at times downright vicious to be the perfect hero. Much of the detail is of course unparalleled and is therefore unverifiable. The historical section, however, is evidently independent of the E Chronicle, for, among other discrepancies, it places the sack of Peterborough after the siege of Ely. But this is no ground for rejecting the authenticity of the account of the rebellion. The Peterborough account is as much a local tradition as that of Ely - both houses might be expected to begin their stories with the events that most touched their respective interests - and to neither of them can absolute authority be ascribed. However, the author of the *De Gestis* was both chronologically and spatially close enough to the events that he describes to know the basic facts of Hereward's life and to get them right for its equally knowledgeable audience.

The author of the *Historia Croylandensis* may have been no less well placed, albeit vicariously. The History purports to be written by Ingulf, abbot of Crowland, c1080-1109, but is in fact an elaborate conceit compiled at Crowland in the later Middle Ages.^[22] Since its exposure as a forgery in the nineteenth century, the 'Pseudo-Ingulf' has been almost universally execrated as a source. Yet it can be shown that the compiler drew upon authentic tenth- and

eleventh-century material. The account of the Domesday Survey, for example, is apparently fanciful in its assertion that it was drawn from hundred rolls as well as Great Domesday and in its deviations from that text. Its misunderstandings and eleventh-century name forms, however, reveal that it was copied from a Domesday satellite which pre-dated the Exchequer text. Likewise, the forged charters, probably compiled in the early twelfth century, incorporate pre-Conquest boundary clauses.^[23] The author clearly drew upon some version of the Ely Hereward and neatly summarized the story. Since Hereward held of the abbey, the *Historia* may well have preserved an equally authentic tradition of his background.

The Wake genealogy is probably an independent record of the same tradition. Its invocation of Earl Leofric and Lady Godiva is possibly a mere guess at the identity of otherwise unqualified names in its source or alternatively a deliberate attempt to create a more noble lineage for Edmund Holland, earl of Kent, for whom the work was compiled. Other deviations cannot be so interpreted. Hereward is credited with a second wife, the widow of Earl Dolfin according to the *De Gestis*,^[24] and is said to have been killed after an argument by his son-in-law Hugh de Evermue. Both assertions are reflected in Gaimar's *L'Estoire*. He records that the wife was called Alfruda and that Hereward was killed by a band of Normans.^[25] If the genealogy is not a mere compilation from various sources, it would appear to bear testimony to a tradition of the descent of Bourne from Hereward's daughter earlier than the fifteenth century.

Unfortunately, the account that these sources give of Hereward's antecedents is not amenable to verification. A Leofric, supposedly his father, appears in Domesday Book as a predecessor of Oger the Breton in 'Awsthorpe' (Rutland),^[26] but there is no way of associating him with Hereward. Likewise, no connection can be made between Hereward and Ralph the staller, earl of East Anglia, Ralph of Hereford, earl of the East Midlands and a benefactor of Peterborough, or Abbot Brand.^[27] However, the high status that the works attribute to him is reflected in Domesday Book. The terms by which Hereward held the manor of Rippingale from the abbot of Crowland are not obviously consistent with his status as a mere man of the abbey.^[28] Religious houses regularly granted land in return for heavy annual services in food rents and the performance of the common burdens of army, bridge, and borough service. The median thegns who held such estates were largely dependent on their ecclesiastical lords.^[29] Hereward, by contrast, simply paid an annual render which he negotiated with the abbot, and the fact suggests a different type of relationship and a different type of man. Monasteries, open to aggression from local families, often leased out estates on beneficial terms to powerful laymen to counter unfriendly forces.^[30] Crowland lacked an influential patron, and it may have found it expedient to recruit Hereward, if not on the most beneficial of terms, to protect its interests in south Lincolnshire where many of its estates were situated.

As difficult as it is to determine social rank in Domesday, there are hints that Hereward's essential qualification for this role was his status as a king's thegn. Before the Conquest, society in Lincolnshire was characterized by a high degree of freedom. Land was held by sokemen and thegns who had free disposal of their estates and performed the public service assessed upon them in person within the wapentake. Soke, however, a term which encompassed a whole variety of judicial dues, food rents, and labour services, was usually reserved to an overlord who answered for his liberties directly to the king within the shire. It was such king's thegns rather than the freeholders on the ground who were designated as predecessors and conferred title on tenants-in-chief in 1086.^[31] Hereward would appear to have been in a relationship of this type to Oger the Breton. He is not recorded as the holder of sake and soke in the list which is appended to the account of the county boroughs in the Lincolnshire folios: the schedule is far from complete and therefore does not provide an exhaustive list of predecessors. But the text probably indicates that Oger held Laughton and its soke through him, for the land is described in a multiple manor entry, a form which often, if not always, records the name of the

overlord.^[32] More clearly, Oger's tenure of Crowland's manor of Rippingale was derived from Hereward. Crowland's plea that the land belonged to the abbey was on the ground that Hereward had relinquished his tenure before the Conquest rather than that Oger had no intrinsic claim to it. Had Hereward not been a king's thegn the tenant-in-chief would not have had a presumptive right beyond that of mere appropriation.

If the Domesday evidence supports the assertion that Hereward was of high status, it cannot prove that he held the manor of Bourne. However, it does suggest that there is a question mark over Morcar's tenure of the estate. The Domesday survey is famously imprecise in its record of pre-Conquest lords and tenants. In the initial stages of the inquiry it was intended that details of tenure on 'the day on which King Edward was alive and dead' were to be recorded, but in practice a precise datum of title was largely abandoned in the course of the survey. Thus, some of the individuals referred to held a long time before 1066, others after the death of Edward the Confessor.^[33] Throughout the accounts of the North and the East Midlands, for example, Earl Siward is recorded as an immediate predecessor, although in fact he died in 1055 and his lands had passed to various individuals before 1066 and their grant by William I, whilst in East Anglia post-Conquest Normans are frequently named as predecessors. More importantly, the status and rights of these holders are often vague. Those of Earl Morcar are particularly ambiguous. He is recorded as holding a large number of estates in Lincolnshire, but he did not have full rights to all of them. Thus, the manor of Castle Bytham, to the west of Bourne, is ascribed to him, but a will of 1066x1069 reveals that it was bookland of a king's thegn called Ulf son of Tope.^[34] Likewise, Earl Morcar seems to have held the lands of Merlosuen at some point.^[35] He evidently only held these lands in some kind of temporary capacity, either as the earl or the earl's representative - he may have held Lincolnshire as part of his earldom of Northumbria or alternatively it may have been constituted as a separate earldom which was held by his brother Earl Edwin.^[36] His right in Bourne seems to have been equally equivocal. Drew de Beurere, presumably on the basis of his tenure of 'Earl Morcar's' manor of Bytham, claimed Bourne. The jurors of Aveland Wapentake denied his right but nevertheless remitted all claims to Morcar's lands to the king.^[37]

The tenure of Bourne by Hereward is thus not precluded by the Domesday account of the estate. The survey substantiates the assertion of the *De Gestis* that he was outlawed at some point in his life,^[38] and it is possible that Morcar merely held the estate as a forfeiture after his flight. The subsequent history of the manor and the estates associated with it is complex. In 1086 Bourne was held by Oger son of Ungomar the Breton and was probably the *caput* of his small fee. The honour encompassed the soke of Bourne, along with various other sokelands that had been legally or otherwise appropriated from neighbouring lords, and the manors of Rippingale and Laughton in the wapentake of Aveland in Lincolnshire and the manors of Kilby in Leicestershire, Thrapston in Northamptonshire, and 'Awsthorpe' in Rutland.^[39] Oger's lands are known to have passed to his son Ralph c. 1105 but otherwise there is no certain evidence of the estate until it came into the hands of Baldwin fitz Gilbert of Clare in the 1120s or 1130s.^[40] He, however, may have held by right of his wife Aelina, the daughter of Richard de Rullos whose brother William had held his lands before him in succession to Hugh de Evermue. It was from this inheritance that lands of Godfrey de Cambrai in the Deepings, Barholme and its soke, Creeton and its soke, and Wilsford in Lincolnshire, Sproxton in Leicestershire, and Thistleton in Rutland, and the fee of Baldwin the Fleming in the soke of Doddington Pigot in Lincolnshire came into the twelfth-century honour of Bourne.^[41]

This, the known descent of the manor, does not substantiate the *Historia Croylandensis*' account of the fee. Nor does it contradict its essential details. More positively Hereward's rights almost certainly continued to inform the actions of the lords of Bourne after the eleventh century. It is not completely inconceivable that the acquisition of the manor and soke of Witham on the Hill from Peterborough was coincidental. Godfrey de Cambrai held land in

Barholme and Stowe in succession to one of the abbey's men who can probably be identified as Godfrey's predecessor Azor or Leofwin,^[42] as Godfrey's successor, the lords of Bourne may have been granted the adjacent estate of Witham to hold similarly of the abbot or have simply appropriated it.^[43] But this is unlikely. Part of the land was already claimed in 1086 through Hereward and in the early twelfth century Peterborough thought it expedient to acquire charters of confirmation, albeit by forgery.^[44] In neither case is the claimant named, but given the eventual settlement of the dispute, there can be no doubt that it was the lord of Bourne. The right that Baldwin fitz Gilbert perceived and made good in the early twelfth century clearly devolved upon Hereward.

Ultimately that right must have been founded in Hereward's status as a king's thegn and as Oger the Breton's predecessor. However, it is improbable that a purely legalistic concept of that kind would have carried much weight in the twelfth century. Lawsuits did proceed from the Domesday process,^[45] but by and large the *de facto* tenures of 1086 seem to have been sanctioned by entry in the Great Survey, or became so, for little action was taken to restore estates to their rightful holders thereafter.^[46] Hereditary right was a more potent force and would provide a more plausible explanation for Baldwin's claim. The *Historia Croylandensis* may not tell the full story: Oger the Breton, and his son from him, clearly had an interest in the estate and the sources would therefore demand that a daughter of Hereward married one or the other of them before Hugh de Evermue. But the *Historia* and the genealogy do provide a not unreasonable solution to the otherwise perplexing puzzle of the origins of the barony of Bourne.

It can be suggested, then, that greater reliance can be placed on the account of Hereward's background in the literary sources than modern historiography has hitherto allowed. Domesday Book supports the Peterborough tradition that Hereward was a tenant of the abbey, but it would seem that he was more protector than creature of the foundation. As much is preserved in the abbey's sources, for Hugh Candidus, using much the same material as the author of the *E Chronicle*, reported in the late twelfth century that Hereward justified his sacking of the monastery in precisely those terms.^[47] Such a role clearly must have been underpinned by a substantial patrimony and a powerful kin. The *De Gestis Herewardi*, the *Historia*, and the rest provide a plausible account of that background which is consistent, or at least not inconsistent, with the known facts of Hereward's landed interests and their subsequent fate.

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NOTES

^[1] I would like to thank Dr Katharine Keats-Rohan, Professor Edmund King, and Dr Ann Williams for their comments on this article. All errors of commission or omission remain my own responsibility.

^[2] A. Bell, ed., *L'Estoire des Engles by Geffrei Gaimar* (Oxford, 1960), lines 5461-5730. A popular tradition is attested in the *Historia Croylandensis* of the fourteenth or fifteenth century (H. T. Riley, ed., *Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland* (London, 1854), p.135).

^[3] Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c.500 to c.1307* (London, 1974), pp.210, 275.

^[4] Charles Kingsley, *Hereward the Wake* (London, 1866).

- [5] E. A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest*, 2nd edn, 6 vols (Oxford, 1876), IV, pp.481-85, 826-33; J. H. Round, *Feudal England* (London, 1895), pp.159-64; C. R. Hart, *The Danelaw* (London, 1992), pp.625-27. Two recent studies, however, have uncritically accepted the tradition (T. Bevis, *Hereward* (March, 1982); J. Hayward, 'Hereward the Outlaw', *Journal of Medieval History*, 14 (1988), pp.293-304).
- [6] Dorothy Whitelock, David C. Douglas, Susie I. Tucker, eds, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London, 1961), pp.xiv-xvi.
- [7] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p.154.
- [8] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, pp.xiv-xvii; Cecily Clark, ed., *The Peterborough Chronicle 1070-1154* (2nd ed., Oxford, 1970), pp.xx-xxi.
- [9] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, pp.151-55.
- [10] *L'Estoire des Engles*, lines 5462-64.
- [11] S. H. Miller and W. D. Sweeting, eds, 'De Gestis Herewardi Saxonis', *Fenland Notes and Queries*, 3 (1895), pp.9, 32-35, 67-72.
- [12] *Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland*, pp.135-36, 141-45.
- [13] F. Michel, *Chroniques Anglo-Normandes* (Rouen, 1836-40), pp.ii, xiiff.
- [14] I. J. Sanders, *English Baronies* (Oxford, 1960), pp.17-18.
- [15] C. W. Foster and Thomas Longley, eds, *The Lincolnshire Domesday and Lindsey Survey*, Lincoln Record Society, 19 (Horncastle, 1924), chapters 26, 27, 44, 58, 67.
- [16] *Lincolnshire Domesday*, 42/1.
- [17] *Lincolnshire Domesday*, 8/34, 35, 37; 42/13.
- [18] Round, *Feudal England*, p.161.
- [19] H. W. C. Davis, J. Johnson, and H. A. Cronne, eds, *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, 4 vols (Oxford, 1913-1969), II, nos 1038, 1039; Edmund King, 'The Peterborough 'Descriptio Militum' (Henry I)', *English Historical Review*, 84 (1969), p.100; Edmund King, 'The origins of the Wake family: the early history of the barony of Bourne in Lincolnshire', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 5 (1975), pp.167-70.
- [20] E. O. Blake, ed., *Liber Eliensis*, Camden Society 3rd ser., 92 (1962), pp.xxxvi, 173 n2.
- [21] Hayward, 'Hereward', pp.299-303.
- [22] W. G. Searle, *Ingulf and the Historia Croylandensis* (Cambridge, 1894).
- [23] D. R. Roffe, 'The Historia Croylandensis: a plea for reassessment', *English Historical Review*, 110 (1995), 93-108.
- [24] *De Gestis Herewardi*, p.65.
- [25] *L'Estoire des Engles*, lines 5593ff.
- [26] Frank Thorn, ed., *Domesday Book: Rutland*, (Chichester, 1980), R14.
- [27] Ann Williams, 'The king's nephew: the family and career of Ralph, earl of Hereford', in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. Allen Brown*, edited by Christopher Harper-Bill, Christopher Holdsworth, Janet L. Nelson (Woodbridge, 1989), pp.327-43; *Lincolnshire Domesday*, pp.xl-xliv. Descent from Oslac may be mere fantasy suggested by a reference in Ely sources to Haward, a kinsman of the earl (*Liber Eliensis*, p.95). I am grateful to Dr K. S. B. Keats-Rohan for this reference.
- [28] *Lincolnshire Domesday*, 72/48.
- [29] Paul Vinogradoff, *English Society in the Eleventh Century* (Oxford, 1908), pp.229-32; Richard P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1988), pp.151-54.
- [30] Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation*, pp.154-55. For example, Beorhtric son of Ælgar, one of the greatest thegns in the West Midlands, held Bushley (Worcs) from the bishop of Worcester on similar terms to those by which Hereward held Rippingale (Frank and Caroline Thorn, eds, *Domesday Book: Worcestershire*, (Chichester, 1982), 2,30.E4).
- [31] D. R. Roffe, 'An introduction to the Lincolnshire Domesday', in *The Lincolnshire Domesday*, edited by A. Williams, G. H. Martin (London, 1992), pp.12-15.
- [32] *Lincolnshire Domesday*, p.13; 42/9; Roffe, 'Lincolnshire Domesday', pp.12-15.
- [33] David R. Roffe, 'The Descriptio Terrarum of Peterborough Abbey', *Historical Research*, 65 (1992), 2.
- [34] *Lincolnshire Domesday*, pp.xlii-iii, 30/29; Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge, 1930), pp.94-96.
- [35] *Lincolnshire Domesday*, 35/13; 72/5.

- [36] Morcar had the earl's penny of Torksey, but Edwin held the comital manor of Kirton in Lindsey in succession to Earl Tosti (*Lincolnshire Domesday*, p.13/3; 1/38; John Morris, ed., *Domesday Book: Nottinghamshire* (Chichester, 1977), 1,65).
- [37] *Lincolnshire Domesday*, 72/40, 50.
- [38] *Lincolnshire Domesday*, 72/4, 48. It is possible that the flight to which Domesday refers was Hereward's escape from the Isle of Ely as recorded in the D Chronicle (Round, *Feudal England*, p.162). However, that interpretation is unlikely to be correct since the rebels had presumably been outlawed, and therefore forfeited the lands to which Crowland and Peterborough were making claim, long before their defeat.
- [39] *Lincolnshire Domesday*, 42/1-19; Philip Morgan, ed., *Domesday Book: Leicestershire* (Chichester, 1979), 38,1; Frank and Caroline Thorn, eds, *Domesday Book: Northamptonshire* (Chichester, 1979), 52,1; *Domesday Book: Rutland*, R14.
- [40] King, 'Wake family', pp.167-70.
- [41] King, 'Wake family', pp.167-70.
- [42] *Lincolnshire Domesday*, 8/36, 38.
- [43] King, 'Wake family', pp.167-68.
- [44] *Regesta II*, nos 1038, 1039.
- [45] David Bates, 'Two Ramsey writs and the Domesday survey', *Historical Research*, 63 (1990), pp.337-39.
- [46] Patrick Wormald, 'Domesday lawsuits: a provisional list and preliminary comment', in *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the 1990 Harlaxton Conference*, edited by Carola Hicks (Stamford, 1992), pp.61-76.
- [47] W. T. Mellows, ed., *The Peterborough Chronicle of Hugh Candidus* (Peterborough, 1966), p.41.