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## HOW MAPPING THE LOWY OF TONBRIDGE CAN FURTHER OUR UNDERSTANDING OF ITS ORIGIN, NATURE AND EXTENT

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A lowy was an area around a castle or sometimes a religious house, held for the purposes of maintaining and supplying the establishment. The word is no longer in general use but is thought to have come from an old Gallic word giving rise to late Latin 'leuga' and Old English 'leowe' from which we have 'league', a measure of distance.<sup>1</sup> This varied from place to place but was in the order of three to four miles, from castle to boundary in all directions. The word was used more widely in the middle ages but Tonbridge is unique in that the word was used to describe an administrative unit around the town as late as the nineteenth century.

'The origin, nature and extent of the lowy of Tonbridge' is how W.V. Dumbreck began his article in this journal in 1958.<sup>2</sup> He dismissed the old story, that soon after the battle of Hastings, Richard Fitzgilbert measured the land he was awarded at Tonbridge with a rope so that it would match that of his old family seat in Brionne, Normandy.

Dumbreck went on to say that the rope story may have had its origin in the circular shape of the parishes grouped around Tonbridge. His main contribution however, was to publish the jury's findings in the 1279 perambulation of the lowy of Tonbridge from which he deduced that the lowy had no clear boundary but was a scattering of holdings, some belonging to the castle and some to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Rochester and others. The perambulations could do no more than define an outer limit of very fragmented castle lands.

This article draws on more recent research into Domesday Tonbridge and the routes of the thirteenth-century perambulations to argue that when the Normans came to Tonbridge, the intention was to measure out a clearly defined area around the castle and as far as Richard and his successors were concerned, the resulting block of land rightfully belonged to them. The apparent circular shape of the group of parishes, it will be argued, arose from their subsequent formation within the very clearly defined boundary of the lowy. Richard Fitzgilbert may well have been unfamiliar with the complexity of land ownership in the Weald and the fact that most of the land around Tonbridge had belonged to the archbishop of Canterbury. His goal of consolidating the lowy was to prove unachievable in the long run because of the relentless efforts by successive archbishops to recover their lands and by kings to limit the power of the nobles. The nineteenth-century lowy was a shrunken version of that envisaged by the first inhabitants of Tonbridge Castle.

In any discussion of the origins of the lowy it is important to set the scene as it was in 1066. It is more likely than not that however small, there was a settlement at Tonbridge before the Norman Conquest.<sup>3</sup> It was on the north side of the river Medway, on an old prehistoric route across the river which had become the most direct route between London and Normandy via Pevensy. Tonbridge overlooked five channels of the river, each of which had a bridge of sorts, but the settlement was elevated enough to avoid the floods which frequently made the crossings impassable. In the autumn of 1066 when Harold and his army crossed here (or close by), it was the time of year when the crossing was at its most congested with drovers and their stock moving to and from the wood pastures of the High Weald. Towards the end of October the news will have travelled back along the road that Harold and many of his men who were local landowners had been defeated and killed in battle. During the next two months until William arrived in London and was crowned on Christmas Day, the local people of Tonbridge and district will have heard of the destruction wrought in the countryside as the Normans meandered around the capital, coming as close as Yalding.<sup>4</sup>

William the Conqueror would also have been apprehensive, not knowing how successful he would be at consolidating his gains and staying on the throne. With threats on all sides, his primary concern was securing the kingdom and he began with Kent. During the following year he sailed to and from Normandy, probably going through Tonbridge. It is likely that as early as spring 1067, he installed Richard Fitzgilbert at Tonbridge. At the same time he gave his half-brother Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, the earldom of Kent and entrusted him with guardianship of the kingdom during his absence. Odo was granted a number of lands in the county including Hadlow, Tudeley and others in the Tonbridge area which he in turn offered to Richard to include in his lowy. Richard and Odo were close colleagues and together made a strong power base in Kent.

Richard and Odo were to discover, if they were not already aware, that many of the lands they had gained belonged to the archbishop of Canterbury. In the confused and uncertain period following the Conquest when security was paramount, Archbishop Stigand became a diminished figure. He was kept closely guarded by William so that he would not be a focus of rebellion and was 'asked' to accompany him on his return to Normandy.<sup>5</sup> It is possible that during Stigand's absence in 1067, Richard built his castle in Tonbridge and claimed his land for the lowy. It was not Richard's only castle. He went on to build another at Clare in Suffolk from which the family would ultimately take its name, but until 1086 at least, Richard was Richard of Tonbridge.<sup>6</sup>

In 1070 there was a new archbishop, Lanfranc, and in 1072 Richard appeared with him at a trial on Penenden Heath in connection with appropriated lands. Lanfranc had begun the process of claiming back his lost lands and Richard, who had taken a large swathe in west Kent, was an obvious target.<sup>7</sup> The trial is certain evidence that Richard and Odo had indeed forcibly taken ecclesiastical land in Kent. The circumstantial evidence that land was taken in this way is also strong: William needed to defend key sites in Kent as early as possible; the archbishop was effectively 'gagged'; and Richard would not have had an intimate knowledge of the structure of land ownership around Tonbridge. Land appropriation was not new. Lanfranc was also claiming lands wrongfully taken by Earl Godwin before

the Conquest.<sup>8</sup> Acknowledging that Richard forcibly commandeered land for his lowy (probably with the blessing of William and helped no doubt by his ally, Odo) how did he set about defining it?

### *Domesday Tonbridge*

The possibility of the lowy defining a circular area around the castle can first be explored by researching the Domesday Book. Tonbridge is not among the list of manors, for which a number of reasons have been suggested.<sup>9</sup> The survey however, provides considerable information about the lowy.<sup>10</sup> As Dumbreck said, Tonbridge district was made up of a scattering of holdings that were Saxon dens and owned by several different manors to the north of the Weald. Tonbridge is recorded in each of the manors affected by this Norman intrusion. Under twenty-seven different manors, Richard of Tonbridge is recorded as holding land of the manor, in most cases 'in sua leuga,' (in his own lowy) and in two cases holding the entire manor. Well watered and with a crossing over the river, the Tonbridge area had become a seasonal focus for northern manors as a grazing area for their pigs, sheep and cattle. Many of the grazing pastures had been or were in the process of becoming farms and small hamlets with fisheries and mills. Tonbridge by this time was taking on a more settled appearance, with fields replacing woods in some parts. Despite this change from den to farm, the lands were still appendages to their respective parent manors in north Kent. Dumbreck listed the manors which had a parcel of land in Tonbridge and it would be useful to list them again (see **Table 1**).

TABLE 1. DOMESDAY MANORS WITH LAND IN THE LOWY OF TONBRIDGE

Tenant in Chief	Manors
Archbishop	Otford, Northfleet, Wrotham, East Farleigh, Darenth, East Peckham*
Archbishop's Knights	Eynsford, Farningham
Archbishop's Monks	Meopham
Bishop of Rochester	Southfleet, Stone*, Halling, Frindsbury
Odo, Bishop of Bayeux	Swanscombe, Ridley*, Ash*, Seal, Leybourne, Cooling, Milton, Luddesdown, Offham, Eccles, Hoo*, Wrotham Heath
Richard of Tonbridge	Hadlow, Tudeley (held of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux)

\* Domesday entry says 'Richard holds....' but omits to say 'in his lowy'. This may be a mistaken omission and may or may not mean that the land was in the lowy.

**Fig. 1** shows the locations of these manors which are spread over a wide area between Dartford and Sevenoaks in the west and Rochester and Maidstone in the east. They are up to 20 miles from their dens or lands in Tonbridge. The locations of the Tonbridge lands have been well researched by Witney and are indicated on the map.<sup>11</sup> They are all south of the Greensand ridge, entirely within the Weald and show a clear north to south alignment with their parent manors.<sup>12</sup> The pre-conquest tenurial system shown on the map had become woven into the landscape over centuries. It shows that the Norman castle and lowy intruded into a complex



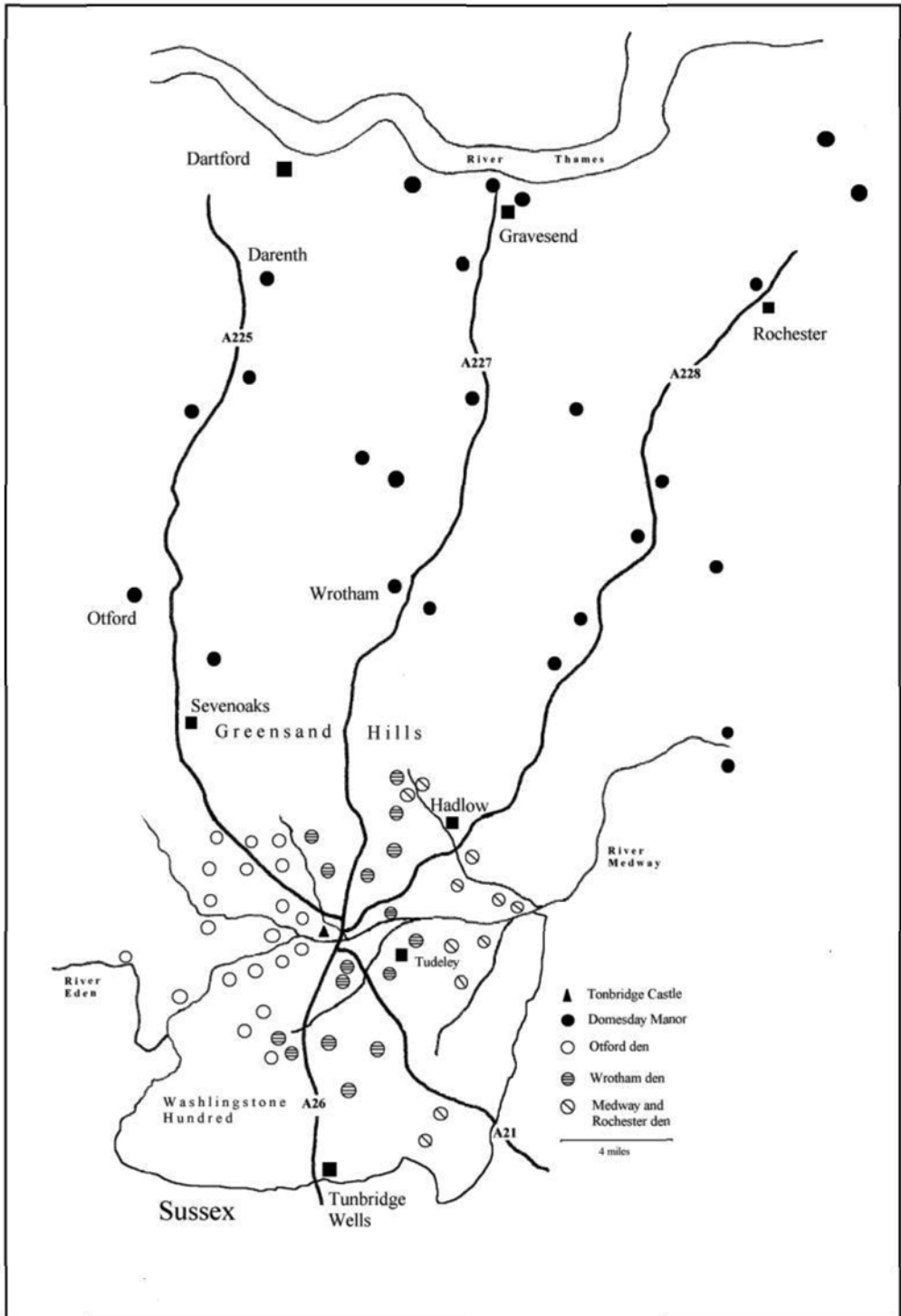


Fig. 1 Domesday manors with land, including dens, in the lowy of Tonbridge.

administrative structure which was not just forest wilderness. Tonbridge Castle itself was built on a parcel of land belonging to Darenth Manor.<sup>13</sup> Across the High Street and around the church the land probably belonged to a different manor, perhaps Hadlow or Wrotham.<sup>14</sup>

Unknown to Richard, he had not only taken land already accounted for, but he had cut a swathe through the Saxon hundred system. Witney expressed this perfectly; the lowy of Tonbridge was ‘a special jurisdiction uncomfortably inserted, like a cuckoo’s egg, among the Wealden hundreds’.<sup>15</sup> The lowy was placed in the centre of Washlingstone Hundred, splitting it into two parts; one west of Tunbridge Wells and the other east, in Pembury, Capel and Tudeley.

Tonbridge was a collection of dens belonging to multiple owners rather than a single estate which led Dumbreck and Ward to say that the lowy was not a compact block of land and had no clear boundary.<sup>16</sup> The dens were in varying states of settlement and land use and were of various sizes. Some would have had well defined boundaries and some not. The map shows their approximate locations but it cannot show in detail how much land individual dens covered. The purpose of the map is to show the general shape of the area covered by the cluster of dens in the lowy. Tonbridge Castle was at the centre and they were evenly spread in a roughly circular shape around it. From the map it could be argued that Dumbreck was correct in saying that the lowy was fragmentary with no clear boundary. The omission of a clear boundary in the records however, does not mean it wasn’t there. The only comment about it at this early stage is the telling of the rope story.

### *The Thirteenth-Century Perambulations*

Fortunately, there is a way of discovering more about the ‘boundary’: by referring to the routes recorded by the jurors on their thirteenth century perambulations of the lowy. Before delving into the detail of the routes, some background information helps explain the reasons for the perambulations. By the late thirteenth century, the Clare family had had two hundred years of direct father to son succession and through strategic marriages and careful diplomacy had become immensely powerful and wealthy, owning land in much of England, Wales and Ireland. When Gilbert, the ‘Red Earl,’ 9th Earl of Clare, 6th Earl of Hertford, 7th Earl of Gloucester and Lord of Glamorgan, inherited Tonbridge in 1262, it is probable that the magnificent stone gatehouse to the castle had just been or was just about to be built.<sup>17</sup> Over the next few years he would build Caerphilly Castle in Wales and entertain the new King Edward 1 and Queen Eleanor at Tonbridge. Over the years, slowly but surely, Tonbridge and the lowy had become a special liberty with devolved powers from the Crown. Special courts were held by itinerant justices and there was a constable, a coroner, a gallows and a prison.<sup>18</sup> At the court, the jury of twenty four local lords and knights, embarked on their perambulations of the lowy after swearing oaths in front of three presiding judges. The first perambulation in 1258 was commissioned by Henry III in response to a dispute between Archbishop Boniface and Gilbert’s father, Richard (merely the latest argument in two centuries of wrangling over the lowy).<sup>19</sup> It failed to bring about a durable resolution as the jurors walked a larger circuit than was warranted and the ensuing complaints triggered a second perambulation in 1279.

Surprisingly little has been written on the perambulation routes considering their geographical detail and antiquity. This neglect might have had something to do with the doubt placed on their worth by Hasted. Although the translation was included in the first edition of four volumes, in the second twelve-volume edition he remarked that, ‘the places as well as the names of persons mentioned in these perambulations being obsolete and now totally unknown, the insertion of them in this place can give so little information to the reader’.<sup>20</sup> Despite this disparagement, Hasted printed a map of the lowy of Tonbridge which is remarkably detailed (Fig. 2). His publication was a little too early for the first professionally surveyed maps and he seemed to copy older maps but had them edited and checked by (probably) amateur surveyors. His maps therefore, appear similar to older maps but they are not identical and have additional material.<sup>21</sup>

The original perambulations merit further investigation than they have received

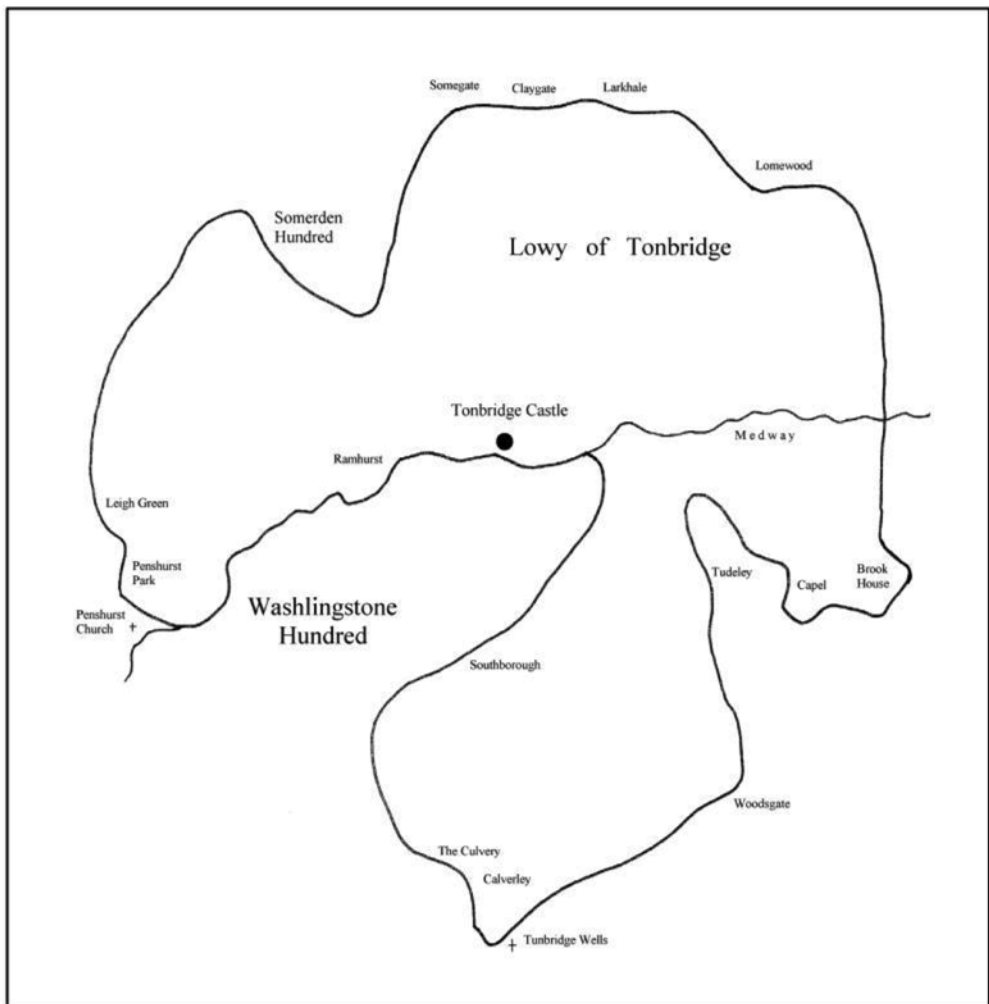


Fig. 2 Hasted's map of the lowy of Tonbridge.

so far. The original manuscripts of the 1258 perambulation are lost but the route is recorded in a copy of a translation of uncertain date. An original manuscript of the 1279 perambulation, however, can be found in Canterbury Cathedral Archives.<sup>22</sup> A translation from the medieval Latin is provided by John Harris (1719) but the manuscript was transcribed and translated again and compared with Harris's version to check for any omissions and misspellings, etc.<sup>23</sup> Details of both routes follow.

## 1258

*The said Jurors do upon their oaths begin the lowy of Tonbridge at Horsegate in the parish of Hadlow which is within the lowie of Tonbridge. and so to the house of Browning which is without, and so straight over the field to the house of John de la Brooke which is without and so by the Kings Way to the house of James Lomewood which is without and so by lomewood (so that lomewood be within) to the house of Benedict of Woodhall which is without, and so to the house of Hugh Perlaben which is without and then to the house of Peter Fromund which is within so that all the lands which Roger of Permunter holdeth of the Earl be within, and so to the house of Gilwyn of Cooper which is within, and so to the gate of Adam Chekar so that Goldesland, Hargesland Cuppersland and Durentisland be without, so that all the land of Hugh de Wald (as the Kings highway leadeth from the house of Adam Chekar to the house of Pupin be without) and so to the house of Peter de la Mare so that the one half thereof be within and the other half without, so that all the hall thereof be within and so to the house of Robert de Cure which is without, and so to the messuage of John a Curton which is without and so to Knockwerepool which is without, and so directly unto the ashtree which is over against the house of Benedict Darnell so that the ash be within and the house without, and so to Wynelesbroke so that it is altogether within, and so by the midst of the new pond of Gilbert Badsell and so to Buttsbridge so that it be within, and so by the midst of Lustingland and so by the marlepitts on the east side of the house of Walter of Shipretheld which is within, and so to the house of Elias at Mill which is within and so by the midst of the meadow of the said Elias at Mill which is within to Stokesbridge which is without. Cross over the Kings Highway that leadeth from Winchelsea to London, to Marbury so that Marbury be without and so by the midst of the messuage of William Wrong so that all the lands of Elias wrong be without, and so directly to the ashtree which is on the north part of the mill of William Bressing so it be within, to the said mill so it be within, and so by the midst of the pond of Sunninglith unto hotingbery which is within and unto wogebohe which is within, and so to the house of Jeffrey of Culverden and so to the house of Elias of Holdene so that Culverdenne by the midst of Cherisland be within, and so directly by the midst of Borsholders hill and so to the messuage of William Shrufrin which is without unto Wolstanes land so that two parts of Wolstones land be within and the third part thereof without, and so to Horsegate and Highden within and then directly by the midst of the field of Dodshere unto the hill called Smythesborne Swynesland and after by the midst of harnes (hawes) land and by the midst of the land called pevenesse unto the church of Penshurst without with all the land of the church. from thence to a land called Redleafe directly to the house of Godfrey Welegate which is within and so to heryngsheath and to Dorkinhole so that the messuage by without and so to the house of Ralph of Wathyrst so that all the tenement which holdeth of the Earl be within, and so to the four wants of Rotherdenne which is without and to the Kings Way called Castevene, and so to Rymshed so that the messuage of Nicholas Malmains and all that tenement which he holdeth of the Earl be within, and so to the messuage of Peter*

*which is without, and so to Markstoke so that all the land of Richard of Vabedone of Shipborne be within, and so to Goodingcrouch without and the lands of Puttenden within and so to the mill called Oxenhoth Mill without so that Sleweth mede be within and so to Horsegate where the perambulation began.*

1279

*Beginning the lowy at Somegate which is in the parish of Tonbridge, and so along so the hedges and pale include the northern forest to Claygate ... and so from Claygate to Larkhale, so the pale and hedges of the forest include the said forest, therefore this part of the said forest and Larkhale be within the lowy ... and so from Larkhale to the domus of Henri Neweman so the said domus be without ... and so from the said domus through the middle of Lomwode to the messuage which was Ricardi Parleben's so that messuage and all the land of Ricardi is without ... and so from the said messuage to the domus which was Peter Fromunds which is within ... and so from the domus of Peter Fromund to the land of Regi le Parment which is held from the earl and is within ... and so to the messuage of Elwyn the Couper which is within ... and so cross over to the domus of Ade Cob(l)bel which is within ... and so from the said domus to the Kings Highway which includes the land of Hugo de Waldis and by the same way to the messuage of Pepin?(obscured) which is without and all his land ... and so directly over the field(s) to the hall of Peter de la Mare ... and so by the window to the first door of the messuage so the east part of the hall and first door are without ... and so to the domus of Thomas de la Hothe so that domus and land is within and so to the mill of John de C--- [obscured] so the messuage, the mill and all the tenements of the Prior and tenants of the Archbishop of Canterbury be without ... and so to Cnokewerespole which is without and from Cnokewerespole to Wynelingbroke so that which is of the fee of the earl is within and those tenements of others in the same way are always without and Wynelingbroke is within ... and so from Wynelingbroke to land which is called Ketecroft which is of the fee of the Archbishop of Canterbury so the fee of the earl is within and so to Leth--- [obscured] which is without so the fee of the earl is within and the fee of the Archbishop of Canterbury without ... and so directly to the domus of Walter le Throme which is without ... and so from the said domus by the highway to Matters Cross and from Matters Cross to Dodingebery which is without ... and so to the domus of Hereward Cimentar which is without these limits the tenements of the hundred of Wechselstone and of Brenchesle are without and so from the domus of Heriward west as far as the pale of the forest so the land which is called Kymeneland is within ... and so by the pale to the land of Reginald de la londe so the land which is of the fee of the earl is within ... and so to the domus of Finecot Bolle which is within so the tenements of the earl are within ... and so by the pale to Bromelegeregg which is all within so Flesherf(s)e which is of the fee of the Archbishop of Canterbury is always without and Sunningelegg and hocubery which was of the service of the king be without ... and so from Bromelegeregg to the oak which is called Wogebohe ... and so to the domus of Willelmi de Colverdene which is within ... and so directly to Leuichisland so the fee of the earl is within and the fee of the Archbishop without ... and so through the middle of the wood of Hertesell so all the tenants of the hundred of Wechselstone within those limits are without ... and so directly to the messuage of Willelmi Shrofin which is without and so to Wolstonesland so two parts of this land are within and the third part without ... and so to Horgate which is without ... and so to Hegedonne which is within ... and so directly through the middle of the field of B[D]odesere to a sort of hill which is called Smethedonne of which one half is within and the other half without ... and so to a certain water called Pevenese so the fee of the earl is always within and*

*the tenants of Wechelstone without ... and from Pevenese to the garden of Penecestr and so directly to Redelef so the land of the parson of Penecestr bealways without ... and from Redelef to Durkynghale so that Redelef is within and to Welleheche and so to Durkynghale which is the fee of the earl and so Durkynghale which is not of the fee of the earl is always without ... and so from Durkynghale by the highway to a marsh/pool of a certain Radulph de Durkynghale so the pool is without ... and from the pool through the middle of lands called Rissettes so that Eastriisset is within and from the said Risset to Coppingsland ... directly there it is without so that of the fee of the earl is within ... and from Coppingsland to Bissoppesbeoche and so directly next to the land of the Prior of Tonbridge which is within ... and so to the highway of Eadinghurst ... and so to the mead of Newsoles which is within ... and so to the paved way so that the fee of the earl is within and the fee of the archbishop without ... and so from the paved way to Markstokke and so to Romdshedde so the fee of the earl is within and the other tenements are without ... and from Romdshedde to Erlemeyesland which is within and from Erlemeyesland to the messuage of Radulphi le Fughe which is without so the fee of the earl is within and Holindenne without ... and from the messuage of Radulph le Fughe by the other way to Hothcroft which is without ... and so directly to the new messuages [plural?] which are Rici de la Helles which is within ... and so directly to Marlerui which is next to the Grange? which is John de Wattons so that Holindenne is always without ... and so through the middle of Marlerui to the land of Bendevile which is without and so directly to the pale of the forest so that the tenements of the earl are always within and Holindenne is without ... and so by the pale of the forest which continues to Somegate.*

#### *Finding the Lowy Boundary*

Having transcribed and translated the 1279 perambulation, the long process began of constructing the route walked by the jurors. There are sixty places mentioned, some on and some off the route. Thirteen of the names are still in existence today or at least can be recognised and they are:

Claygate	Redelef (Redleaf)
Cnocwerespole (Oak Weir Pool)	Coppings land
Dodingebery (Downingbury)	land of the Prior of Tonbridge (Priory Farm)
Sunningleghe (Sunninglye Farm)	Romdshedde (Romshed)
Hocubery (Hawkenbury)	Holindenne (Hollanden)
Colverdene (Culverden)	Newsoles (Nizels)
Penecestr (Penshurst)	

A further five places were identified by Dumbreck from other written sources:

Larkhale	Fromunds
Newmans	the land of Hugo de Waldis (Weald) <sup>24</sup>
Lomwode (Lomewood)	

Another six were identified by Witney, who researched in great detail the manorial



structure in Kent, matching manors with their Wealden dens (drawing substantially from Hasted's work):

the message of Pepin (Pepin straw)	the message of William Shrofin (Scriventon)
John de Curtone's mill (Little Mill or Stilstead)	Hegedonne (High Dens, Bidborough)
Leuichisland (Frychisland near Broomhill)	the field of Dodsere (near Swaylands) <sup>25</sup>

Somegate, at the start of the perambulation near Shipbourne has not been identified, but Hasted marked it on his map of the lowy (Fig. 2).<sup>26</sup>

Twenty-five names out of sixty could therefore be located with reasonable confidence. They were linked on a map and as Dumbreck noted, parish boundaries were generally followed on the perambulation. Using the pre-1870 parish boundary network, the decision was made to walk the bounds in the hope of locating the missing thirty-five places. It was hoped that some lost names might be preserved as house or road names, or might be indicated by landscape features. Beginning at Shipbourne the circuit was followed in the same clockwise direction as the jurors walked and in the process sixteen further names were identified. Public footpaths obligingly followed much of the speculated route and it has now been made into a long distance thirty-three mile circular walk around Tonbridge through lovely and very varied countryside.<sup>27</sup>

Interesting discoveries were made from the start. The perambulation begins along the forest pale of the 'northern forest.' Just beyond Claygate, a footpath follows the top of a linear bank which is the Hadlow and West Peckham boundary (Fig. 3). It is marked by a boundary stone and must be the course of the old forest pale of the great North Frith, hunting forest of the Clares.

In Hadlow, a number of personal names are recorded of owners or occupiers on the route which are now lost. About a third of all personal names on the circuit around Tonbridge occur on a three or four mile section in Hadlow, giving the impression that this was the most densely populated part of the lowy. In fact a close study of the old Hadlow Parish boundary with East Peckham shows that it is heavily convoluted. The boundary zigzags through now empty fields indicating that when the parish boundaries were created before the thirteenth century the land was divided into many more tenements. Every change of direction probably touched on someone's property and their boundary.

*Wynelingbroke* is recorded as being just south of the Medway. The name suggests a winding stream and there are many of them on the flat lands between the Medway and Five Oak Green. In Five Oak Green there are a number of 'brook' names over a large area south of the village and as the footpath passes by Brook Farm, innumerable footbridges are crossed. This brook, now called the Alder Stream could have been the 'winding brook'. Hasted placed 'Brook House' on the boundary of the lowy (Fig. 2).

The walk between Old Pembury and the junction of the A228 with the old Hastings Road (once called Woodsgate) follows the parish boundary of Tonbridge and Pembury. Here, the jurors walked alongside the forest pale at the edge of the 'South Frith'. As at the North Frith, the course of the pale can be seen as a linear



Fig. 3 Boundary bank of the North Frith. (Photo by the author.)

bank running alongside the footpath. This part of the South Frith is called ‘Forest Wood’ (the wood of Tonbridge Forest).

*Bromelegeregg* in Tunbridge Wells means a ‘heathy’ ridge. There is an echo of this word in High Brooms. A sixteenth-century map of Tunbridge Wells shows that at the junction of Crescent Road, Church Road and Mount Pleasant there was a hamlet called Bromelerge.<sup>28</sup> The A264 Pembury Road follows a ridge which ends naturally at this junction and it is speculated that *Bromelegeregg* is this ridge.

The *oak of Wogebohe* was translated by Harris as Bowbeech although in the manuscript it does not look much like that. Between *Bromelegeregg* and Culverden, it would have been a distinctive tree at a place where the perambulation changed direction. Such a place could be the junction of parish and county boundaries at the church of King Charles the Martyr. The boundary meeting point is now marked by a paving slab just beyond the south wall of the church (**Fig. 4**). There was once a stream here, now buried, but there must have been a distinctive feature such as a tree that marked the place where boundaries met and changed direction.

*Hertesell* is described as a wood to the south of Bidborough. Birchetts Wood is a strong contender for this as it is in just the right place and the appearance of the names in medieval Latin is not so different.

*Wolstonesland* is to be found where there is now a Stone Wood. This wood is exactly on the parish boundary between Tonbridge and Speldhurst and could come from the hundred name ‘Washlingstone’ or the older version, ‘Wechelstone’ of which Speldhurst was a part.



Fig. 4 Parish boundary stone between Speldhurst and Tonbridge. (Photo by the author.)

*Horgate* is indicated on the perambulation as being ‘without’ the lowy. Bowen’s Farm is just outside the Tonbridge boundary and the position on a road (Poundsbridge Lane) could have been the site of a gate.

Continuing along Poundsbridge Lane from Bowen’s Farm there is a steep ascent up the hill towards Swaylands and at the top there is an old forge. This area was an important source of iron ore in Tudor times and probably earlier.<sup>29</sup> The timber clad slopes provided charcoal for a furnace which was at the site of Barden Mill less than half a mile away from the old forge. It is possible that iron working was already known of in the area in the thirteenth century and a smithy was here as early, giving the hill its name of *Smethedonne*.

*Newsoles* seems to be an old form of Nizels, near Hildenborough, and there is evidence of this change of name in the fourteenth century.<sup>30</sup> Nizels is now a golf and leisure club and covers a large area where there are a number of variations on the name such as Nizels Heath and Nizels Farm. Nizels Mead on the perambulation route is not one of them, but at a boundary stone where the parishes of Tonbridge, Leigh and Sevenoaks meet, the land is flat and criss-crossed with many streams. This will be the site.

*Durkyng hale* and *Welleheche* are associated and are listed after Penshurst and Redleaf. *Durkyng hale* is recorded several times on the perambulation because some land was within and some without. The elusive location of this place has prompted much discussion.<sup>31</sup> Dumbreck placed it near to Ramshurst in Leigh, perhaps because it is of the same knight’s fee. Witney however, preferred a location aligned with other places on the route and that meant somewhere near Chiddingstone Causeway. Gordon Ward placed it similarly on a line between Redleaf and Coppings.

The name Durkynghale had many variant spellings (now Durnall) and is associated with early title deeds in Chiddingstone and particularly around the Eden Valley. In the thirteenth century Stephen of Peshurst (who was one of the presiding judges for the perambulation) granted William Durkynghale ‘common of pasture for cattle he kept all winter’ in the area of Cinderhill in Leigh. He also granted him ‘a way one rood in breadth’ leading from William’s land to the common pasture.<sup>32</sup> At Cinderhill there was, until recently, common land called Blackhoath Common or Lyghe Green which was on a tributary of the Eden about a mile upstream. If William was overwintering his cattle there, he would be seeking higher ground away from the damp Eden Valley and the droveway probably followed this small tributary stream uphill. There is another Durkynghale association with the Eden Valley further downstream towards Peshurst at Doubletons; named after Dubel de Durkynghale.<sup>33</sup> Welleheche or Wellegate was probably at the spot where the Leigh Parish boundary turns on Station Hill. In title deeds this part of the Eden Valley was called Wellefield.<sup>34</sup> The evidence suggests that Durkynghale was by the Eden Valley in the vicinity of Chiddingstone Causeway and Moorden Farm.

The twenty names still to be identified on the ground are:

Ketecroft, Leth ... (obscured), Walter le Throme, Matters Cross, Hereward le Cimentar, Kymeneland, Reginald de la Londe, Finecot Bolle and Flesherfe in the Pembury and Capel areas;

Pevenese near Peshurst;

Rissettes, Bissopesbeeche, Eadinghurst and Markstokke in Leigh and Weald areas;

and a group of names in Hollanden (Erlemeyesland, Ralph le Fughe, Hothcroft, Rici de la Helles, Marlerui and Bendevile).

### *Mapping the Boundary*

With forty of the sixty place names identified on the 1279 perambulation, and given that parish boundaries were generally followed, it was possible to construct a map of the route (**Fig. 5**). The 1279 perambulation route is drawn in solid ink around the perimeter except where dashed lines indicate a projected route. The 1258 route is the same except where it is marked by a dotted line. The three parts of Tonbridge which made up the nineteenth-century lowy is indicated with a combination of a solid line and dots. Although the accuracy of the translation of the 1258 perambulation is questionable without the original, it was encouraging to find that the two routes match each other for about half the circuit, especially on the west side. The 1258 perambulation followed a larger circuit than the later one, by taking in Shipbourne Parish, a fragment of Hoo Hundred, a fragment of Littlefield Hundred and Pembury Parish. Hasted’s late eighteenth-century map is also shown for comparison but may look different from his original as it was redrawn on the same scale as the per-ambulation map (**Fig. 2**). Like Hasted’s map, hundreds are indicated rather than parishes for greater clarity and because they were the principal administrative unit at the founding of the lowy. The lowy of Tonbridge was sometimes named on maps as a hundred.<sup>35</sup>

The nineteenth-century lowy of Tonbridge was made up of three detached parts. The southern part (Southborough and the South Frith) was detached from the

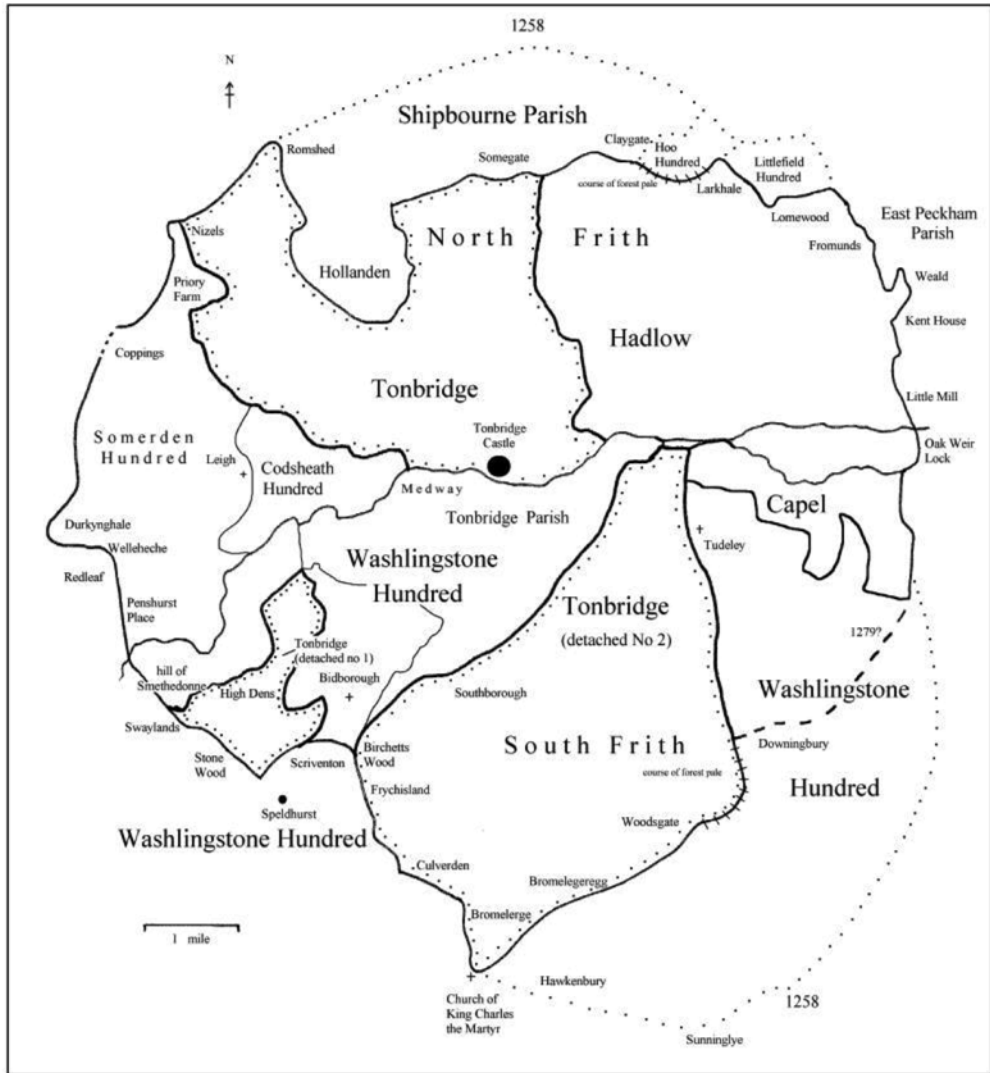


Fig. 5 The Perambulation routes of 1258 and 1279.

northern part by the intervening Washlingstone Hundred which covered a large area south of the Medway including Tudeley and Pembury. As long as Hadlow and Capel were joined to the lowy, the two principal parts of Tonbridge were connected through them.

Leigh Parish with its components of Somerden and Codsheath Hundreds was considered by Hasted to be part of the lowy and is also included in both perambulations. Hasted's lowy map and the perambulations map are agreed on the main components of the lowy except that Hasted failed to include the small detached part of Tonbridge by Bidborough Parish, called Barden. In his maps small detached portions such as this were often excluded, so this omission is not significant. This



detached part of Tonbridge is of interest because it has remained fully part of Tonbridge, lowy and parish. Witney suggested that before the conquest it was part of Eynsford Manor and was an early archbishop's knights' fee.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps in the aftermath of the conquest, Archbishop Stigand was stripped of his knights' fees and disarmed. Richard Fitzgilbert could have been granted it and in later peaceful times, the archbishop was paid with four knights for the lowy which might have included this fee.

Dumbreck argued that because the lowy boundary was so vague, the jurors followed the much better known parish boundaries to try and separate land belonging to the earl in the lowy and land belonging to the archbishop. The twenty years of confusion and complaint following the first perambulation Dumbreck argued, resulted from the jury following the wrong parish boundaries and wandering into the territory of others. The 1279 perambulation with its reduced circuit was an attempt to resolve these disputes once and for all. One glance at the maps, even without the myriad parcels of land belonging to a host of different owners, is enough to confirm the complex and fragmentary appearance of the lowy. It is not hard to imagine the jury arguing over the route and occasionally wandering off course. Perhaps it was the first time for many years or even since its creation that anyone had been asked to define the lowy boundary.

There is, however, another striking feature about the map that meets the eye and that is, the generally very circular nature of the lowy boundary, especially if a line is drawn around Shipbourne Parish and continuing round the 1279 perambulation. Within this circuit, Tonbridge Castle is at the exact centre. If the distance from Tonbridge Castle to this boundary is measured the following interesting statistics emerge (see Table below).

Distance from Tonbridge Castle to ...	Distance in miles (to nearest half mile)
the outer edge of Shipbourne Parish	4.5
the outer edge of Hadlow Parish	4.5
Oak Weir Lock	4.5
the outer edge of Capel Parish	4.5
the South Frith forest pale	4.5
Culverden	4.5
Swaylands	4.5
Penshurst Place	4.5
the outer edge of Leigh Parish	4.5
Nizels	4.5
Romshed	4.5

The outer edge of this 'lowy' (a combination of the two perambulations excluding Pembury parish) is so strikingly circular and the distances from the castle to the outer edge so uniform, that it is entirely plausible that this was the original lowy. There is other evidence to suggest that this was the case. The map of lowy lands recorded in the Domesday Book and researched by Witney and others shows that at the outset in the eleventh century, they were evenly scattered throughout this



area around the castle. The boundary itself is not recorded but suffice it to say that the lands taken by Richard Fitzgilbert were spread over an area at least within the 1279 perambulation and included lands in Shipbourne Parish and certainly in Hoo Hundred.

A large part of the lowy was created from the commons of Wrotham Manor. The precise area is unknown but the outer edge of Shipbourne Parish is very definitely curved inwards towards Tonbridge which appears to be more than coincidental. An item in the Hundred Rolls of 1274/5 makes the complaint that the Earl of Gloucester and Roger Horn, his Bailiff, had taken the township of Shipbourne into the liberty of Tonbridge. There were clearly disputes over Shipbourne on more than one occasion which might have resulted from the Clares believing they were entitled to it.<sup>37</sup>

The fragment of Hoo Hundred within the lowy recorded by Domesday Book is certain evidence of a 'lowy plan' by Richard Fitzgilbert. Hoo Manor records 'half a sulung (about 100 acres) and woodland, 20 pigs' in Richard's lowy.<sup>38</sup> This area of land is unlikely to have incorporated the whole of the Hoo fragment but just enough to complete the lowy circuit. The Hundred Rolls confirm that the earl of Gloucester was only interested in the 'Clearhedges' section, nearest to Tonbridge. 'The Earl of Gloucester and Roger de Horn have made an encroachment on the Lord King of Hoo Hundred, occupying in the lowy of Tonbridge, three messuages, one corn mill, one fulling mill and 100 acres of land and wood'.<sup>39</sup> Again it seems that the earl of Gloucester was attempting to recover lands he thought were rightfully his. This theme is repeated with Washlingstone and Littlefield Hundreds, with Hollanden and areas of Leigh. The jury on the 1279 perambulation differentiated between the part of the lowy which was also part of Washlingstone Hundred and the part of Washlingstone Hundred beyond the boundary. Their findings for the lands around Bidborough repeat the refrain several times, 'within, but is also a hundredsland'.<sup>40</sup>

If Richard had planned a measured circular lowy, it was not entirely flawless and had a few ragged edges. They can be explained. The convoluted nature of the Hadlow and East Peckham Parish boundary has already been referred to. Small fragments of East Peckham lay in Hadlow and vice versa. In 1066, there was probably already a patchwork of fields with well-defined boundaries in this area whereas on the west side of Tonbridge, the country was occupied but less intensively. The 1258 excursion round Pembury Parish was not the lowy boundary. The lowy lands of Domesday Book might have touched on but did not extend across this parish.<sup>41</sup> The odd extension at Tunbridge Wells to the Sussex Border went beyond the pale of the South Frith which itself would have produced a nicely rounded off end. Perhaps the intention was to have a toe on the border and to include the small settlement which developed at the southern gate of the South Frith. There is an indentation at Speldhurst, a village on a hilltop which was outside the lowy. Speldhurst was a place of local significance as a meeting place of Washlingstone Hundred. It had existed for at least three hundred years before the conquest and had belonged to the bishop of Rochester.<sup>42</sup> There are records of land being returned to him soon after the creation of the lowy.<sup>43</sup> The extended Leigh Parish boundary at Durkynghale has been discussed at length. Suffice it to say that it was disputed land on the Chiddingstone and Penshurst boundaries and it is suggested that the final configuration was a compromise to include linked Durkynghale territory.

### Conclusion

When Richard Fitzgilbert arrived at Tonbridge, his intention was to establish a territory around the castle, which was common practice in Normandy. He was unlikely to have been familiar with the intricate and complex manorial structure that already existed around Tonbridge in what seemed to be an area of relatively sparse population. If he had known, he might not have cared very much. The evidence suggests that he marked out his territory, not necessarily with a rope but nevertheless measured, in terms of distance from the castle. His boundary was strong and well defined in the troubled aftermath of the Conquest but over succeeding years the family had to shrink back from this ideal where they conflicted with the inherent strength of the Saxon administrative system. Not only that, but they had to combat the zealous recovery by the archbishop of Canterbury of lost lands, many of which lay within the lowy. When Odo, Bishop of Bayeux fell rapidly from favour in the later 1070s and was forced to give up his lands which he had appropriated from the Crown and the archbishop in alliance with Richard, this must have impacted heavily on the lowy. Support from the Crown would have diminished as the initial urgency to secure strategic sites such as Tonbridge became redundant. In fact as every medieval monarch experienced, the granting of land and castles to vassals ultimately became in many cases, a more dangerous threat to their security.

Nevertheless, the Clares fought back to become extremely powerful and wealthy. Their lowy became a special liberty with its own jurisdiction, replacing that of the Sheriff and officials of Kent. It is perhaps for this reason that there are a number of 'Kent Houses' on the lowy boundary. This special jurisdiction administered from Tonbridge Castle, ensured the continuing survival of the lowy as a unit of local government into the nineteenth century. By then it had come to look far from circular as the lowy had progressively broken up into parishes with Tonbridge Parish having the largest slice. Shipbourne, Hadlow, Capel, Tonbridge, Bidborough, and Leigh Parishes probably took on their rounded shapes from the outer boundary of the lowy. In other words the lowy boundary preceded the parishes and had sufficient definition that the parishes adopted this boundary as an outer template. There is much more to be said on this subject but the fact that the discussion can be started at all owes much to the geographical detail that can be lifted from Domesday Book and the recorded routes of the thirteenth-century perambulations.

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