



1066: The beginning of a new era

Background information

The Death of Edward the Confessor to the Dissolution of the Monasteries

In 1066, at the time of the death of England's penultimate Anglo-Saxon King, Edward the Confessor, most of Fairlop Plain was covered in dense woodland. It belonged to Henholt (Hainault) Forest which was owned by Barking Abbey, part of a huge landholding which spread as far as the River Thames in the South. All local people had Common rights in Hainault Forest which allowed them, for example, to collect fruit and nuts from the forest trees, gather brushwood for cooking fires and to graze pigs, cows and horses. However, these Common rights were about to be challenged with the death of Edward's successor, King Harold 1, at the hands of Norman-French invaders from across the English Channel.

The Norman Conquest brought huge changes in the way England was governed and administered. The conquering King William 1 claimed ownership of all the land he now ruled. He introduced a Feudal and hierarchical system of government whereby people of high status who swore allegiance to him (both Anglo-Saxons and Frenchmen) were rewarded with landholdings for their own use, and which they could lease to others in return for work or money. Some, like the Abbey at Barking, retained their previous landholdings in return for agreeing to maintain a rigid new system of law and order.

William 1 ordered a huge, countrywide survey which was compiled as the Domesday Book. It included details of who owned land at the Norman Conquest and just after, the land's size and what grew there. From this book we know that the Abbess of Barking had enough woodland (mostly Hainault Forest) in which to graze 1,000 pigs; a valuable source of meat, fat and bristle which could be sold for profit.



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Imagine pigs roaming Fairlop Plain! They helped maintain the landscape by grazing the Forest undergrowth, eating low bushes, roots and acorns. Horses and cows were also grazed under Commoner's rights.

Under the new regime, new Forest Courts strictly controlled when and how local people were now allowed to use the Forest and nearby farmland. Hunting was a popular past-time for Royalty. The needs of deer now took precedence over the needs of the local people. Laws prevented people collecting brushwood in the breeding season or harming the deer if they damaged crops. Disobedience resulted in fines which boosted the king's income.

However, the land and trees in and near Fairlop Plain still needed to be managed to create the best hunting ground for the king. People were employed to ensure that deer had enough food and shelter, and to maintain fences and sites such as Chapel lodge, for the use of Forest Keepers and visiting huntsmen. Common rights of collecting brushwood and grazing were still permitted at certain times of the year and trees were felled to improve growing conditions. Felling also provided a valuable source of building material which could be sold for profit by the Abbey. Both the Crown and Abbey benefitted materially from this arrangement as the Abbey paid the King for permission to fell!

