

DORNEY IN 1798

Those who keep a close eye on the Dorney History Group website may have spotted that it now contains an item called the Posse Comitatus dating from February 1798. This strange title hides some remarkable content. It is a list of all the men living in the parish of Dorney aged between 15 and 60, who could be called on to fight in the event of an invasion by France.

It's hard to imagine, perhaps, but the country was gripped by a very real fear of such invasion. Just as we did before the two world wars, the authorities made preparations. This included working out how many men could be available to join the armed forces and how many draught horses, wagons and carts could be supplied. The information was collected at parish level and then collated by hundred and finally by county. Buckinghamshire is the only county for which complete returns have survived. It is our luck that this gives us a snapshot of Dorney over 40 years before the first detailed census records.

So, what does this tell us? In total, there were 53 eligible men aged between 15 and 60. This did not include clergymen or gentlemen. This number is consistent with the first census taken three years later, which counted 190 inhabitants of the parish, comprising 41 families in 37 dwellings. We know that a lot of children were being born in Dorney at the end of the 19th century.

The detailed breakdown confirms the image of Dorney as a farming village. Five farmers were listed, but a further four were included in the list of those owning horses, waggons and carts. Of these, one was a woman, one was Sir Charles Palmer, and one was listed as a labourer. There were 31 labourers, most of whom probably worked on the land. Two carpenters, a chairmaker, a tailor and nine servants completed the occupations. Most of the servants would have been working outdoors. Two of them, living at one of the farms, refused to give their surnames – William the milkman and George the carter. Four men had no occupation given. It was noted if anyone had some infirmity which might prevent them from fighting, and out of the 53 potential recruits, four had some disability – two were lame, one infirm and one had a crooked knee.

Let's drill down and have a look at some of the individuals comprising Dorney society. The largest farmer living in the parish was Richard Sedding, aged 57. He had more horses and vehicles than any other farmer – 21 horses, 3 waggons and 4 carts which would have regularly travelled the lanes we know so well. Thomas Sedding seems to have been Richard's younger brother, and unlike Richard he was married. His was the farm where the milkman and carter were recorded. When he died, he was recorded as "a reputable farmer". His widow Elizabeth left £200 to maintain her grave and to make annual payments to poor widows in Dorney when she died in 1815. The third Sedding farmer in 1798 was widow Sedding. This was Mrs Parker Sedding, who later took on Bayliss Farm in Stoke Poges and established a charity for the poor of Dorney. The Sedding family was long established in Dorney and no doubt they employed many of the labourers. Between them, they owned 35 of the 56 working horses in the village. Another farmer, William Neighbour from Taplow, had married Richard's sister Elizabeth Sedding. Now aged 44, he had settled in the parish of Dorney (actually in Dorney Wood) where they had a son.

Another well-known Dorney farming family was the Perrymans. In 1798, the list of farmers included David Perryman aged 46 and his eldest son Charles who was 22. David was married to Mary the daughter of Richard Brothers, and so was connected to the Sedding family, as the mother of Richard and Thomas Sedding had been another Mary Brothers. A map produced in 1812 marks the name Perryman as the tenant on several fields – the

northern part of Thames Field adjacent to Barge Path, part of North Field and two smaller fields at Dent's Corner.

At the other end of the scale was Avery Kimberley. In his mid-30s, he kept 4 horses and had one wagon and one cart. He doesn't seem to have been a permanent resident of Dorney; he was living in Bray when his son was born in 1788, and in New Windsor when he died in 1814. Thomas Weston was another small farmer who appears to have been transient – a daughter born in Dorney, then another in Burnham. He was recorded as a labourer, so perhaps he just rented a small amount of land where he made use of his cart and two horses.

The chairmaker was Jeremiah Dell, whom we have met before in this column as an old man. In 1798 he was in the prime of life, 37 years old, married to Sarah and with a young family. The Dells were another long established Dorney family. Jeremiah's grandfather John Webb, another Dorney chairmaker, had died only four years earlier. The farmer Richard Sedding called Jeremiah Dell his friend.

The men classified as labourers accounted for well over half of the total and included several families. Robert Cox was there with his 19-year-old son, also called Robert. Robert and his wife Elizabeth had married in Burnham and their eldest child had been born in Farnham Royal, but they had then settled in Dorney where six more children had been born and one died. John Cox, aged 45, and his wife Sarah already had eight children and there was another one on the way. Their eldest son William, aged 17, was also listed; he was one of those recorded as lame.

Robert Tarrant had married Sarah Mead in Dorney in 1789, but they had only just started their family in 1798, with a son under 2 and another on the way. It looks as though Robert's father had lived in Dorney for a time before moving to Eton where Robert was born 30 years before. His younger brother Thomas Tarrant was also listed as a labourer.

John Martin was Dorney born and bred, and he and his wife Elizabeth had 4 children. John's father, who had died 5 years earlier, had also been a labourer.

Thomas Newell's wife Susanna had just given birth to their first child, a baby daughter. They had been living in Eton when they married the previous year and had moved to Burnham by the time Susanna died a few years later. James and Sarah Ellwood started their family in Burnham and had only moved to Dorney a year or so earlier.

Many of the men had not been born in Dorney, and there was clearly a lot of mobility around local villages – Burnham, Taplow, Bray, Eton, Windsor. Some came from further afield – Cholsey, Rickmansworth.

So, these were some of the people who lived in Dorney 220 years ago. Some families were resident here for several generations; others made the village their home for only a brief time. All would have known the old buildings we still know today – Dorney Court, the parish church, many of the houses and cottages in the village or lining the common. They walked or rode along the same roads as we do, were familiar with our stretch of the Thames, and saw the distant view of Windsor Castle rising above mist over the common. They are gone but – thanks to the survival of an old administrative list – they are not forgotten. And the names of Richard Sedding and David Perryman are recorded in Dorney church for posterity, as churchwardens, on a board painted with the words of the Lord's Prayer.

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