

## The Foresters of Cannock in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries.

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In the preface to his *The Royal Forests of Medieval England* C.R. Young observed that English forests and their custodians have been curiously neglected.<sup>2</sup> This paper is a brief study of the early keepers of Cannock Forest (Staffs).

It is generally accepted that forests in the sense of areas subject to special legislation were introduced into England after the Norman Conquest, although there were hunting grounds in England prior to the Conquest and Cannock may well have been one of them.<sup>3</sup> Cannock Forest seems to have been in existence by the 1080s, when the Staffordshire folios of Domesday Book make passing reference to a forester and to woodland in royal hands. William Rufus and Henry I both visited Cannock, where there was a hunting lodge, and presumably hunted whilst they were there.<sup>4</sup> At its greatest extent Cannock Forest covered around one hundred square miles, encompassing the uplands now known as the Cannock Hills and the area surrounding the cathedral centre of Lichfield. During the period under consideration rivers formed the boundary on three sides, the Trent to the north, the Penk to the west and the Tame to the east respectively. To the south, where a natural barrier is lacking, the boundary of the Forest was not permanently fixed; it apparently retreated northwards during the reign of Stephen but was restored or even extended southwards under Henry II.<sup>5</sup> The soils within the area of the forest are mostly poor and Domesday Book indicates that the locality was thinly settled and extensively wooded in 1086.<sup>6</sup> However, in the twelfth century the expansion of arable cultivation was clearly considerable, as the grant of fifteen hundred acres of assarts in the forest to the Bishop of Coventry in 1155 shows.<sup>7</sup> Even so much woodland remained from which deer and timber could be taken in the thirteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

The first reference to the post of Forester of Cannock is in the Pipe Roll for 1130. The incumbent, Walter Croc, was heavily fined for several different misdemeanours. The Pipe Roll also shows that Walter's predecessor was Richard the Hunter.<sup>9</sup> In 1270 a later Forester claimed that the manor of Chesterton (Warks) had been granted to Richard the Hunter to be held in serjeanty by virtue of his office as forester in the time of King Edward the Confessor.<sup>10</sup> Whilst Domesday Book shows that Richard the Hunter, alias Richard the Forester, was a serjeant and held Chesterton there is no definite evidence that he was custodian of Cannock before 1066.<sup>11</sup> Richard was probably the anonymous Staffordshire forester mentioned in Domesday Book.<sup>12</sup> Walter Croc married Richard's daughter Margery. Walter was presumably related to the Croc the Huntsman mentioned in late eleventh century sources and to other twelfth century foresters with the same surname, but it is not known how.<sup>13</sup> Walter and Margery produced two sons, William who had succeeded his father before *ca* 1150 and Robert.<sup>14</sup> William married Rachilda and died before 1164 leaving a son also called William and a daughter called Margery. The forest was then in the hands of the sheriff for some years, presumably because the younger William was a minor.<sup>15</sup> The younger William was hanged for his part in the murder of Gilbert Butler, another Staffordshire forester, in 1175<sup>16</sup> and the office passed to Robert de Brok who married his

sister Margery.<sup>17</sup> Robert died in 1196 without a male heir the office of Forester passed to Hugh de Loges who married Robert's daughter Margery.<sup>18</sup>

Of the foresters who followed Robert the Hunter only Robert de Brok was more than a simple keeper. He had been a member of King Henry II's household and, with his kinsman Rannulf, had been deeply implicated in the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket in 1170.<sup>19</sup> His appointment as keeper of Cannock was probably part of Henry's policy of centralising forest administration, and he was subsequently appointed to conduct Forest Eyres during the reign of Richard I.<sup>20</sup> Virtually nothing is recorded about the Foresters' official activities during the twelfth century, but their principal duty was undoubtedly enforcement of Forest Law, summarised in the Assize of the Forest of 1184.<sup>21</sup> Of the operation of this at Cannock there is little mention other than references to illegally withheld fines and impounded stock in 1130, and regular mention of pannage in the later twelfth century.<sup>22</sup> We do know that records were kept by Robert de Brok, which were sufficiently important for his successor Hugh de Loges to pay a fine to recover them from Robert's kinsman.<sup>23</sup> Thirteenth-century evidence shows that the Foresters presided over a swanimote court, presenting pleas of vert and of venison, and Robert's records may have related to this.<sup>24</sup> In 1130 Walter Croc owed a *cesse* (*censa*) of ten marks, or around £6,<sup>25</sup> for his office and lands and this figure remained fixed for the rest of the period covered here.

The real value of the office lay in the lands that came with it. In 1086 Richard the Hunter held eleven properties in Warwickshire valued in excess of £14 and eleven in Staffordshire valued at rather less than £3. After his death ten of the Staffordshire holdings and three in Warwickshire passed into other hands with a loss of revenue exceeding £6.<sup>26</sup> One of the Staffordshire holdings, Huntington, passed to a subordinate official of Cannock Forest who paid a rent to the foresters for it.<sup>27</sup> The loss of royal demesne land at Kenilworth (Warks) leased by Richard the Hunter in 1086 may have been compensated with a grant of land in Great Wyrley (Staffs) which was certainly held by his grandson William.<sup>28</sup> Two more properties in Cannock Forest, Fradley and Hopwas, were acquired by the foresters after 1086. Both were very small.<sup>29</sup> The Foresters' demesne manors were at Chesterton and Rodbaston (Staffs). Both were adjacent to major Roman roads, the Fosse Way and Watling Street respectively. At Rodbaston a manor house was recorded in 1195, the moated site of which is still visible.<sup>30</sup> Substantial and deliberate development of this estate is suggested by the Domesday Book entry, which records that it was entirely demesne and had grown in value from 2s. to 15s.<sup>31</sup> The Foresters also had a messuage in Warwick in 1086 that they continued to hold until 1200 when it was sold and became the site of a gaol.<sup>32</sup>

In theory land held in serjeanty was indivisible and inalienable;<sup>33</sup> however, all of the foresters from Walter Croc onwards alienated and divided their estates freely. Hugh de Loges had a prolonged dispute with a Gilbert Croc regarding Grandborough and part of Walsgrave-on-Sowe (Warks) that the latter held for a rent of 10s. and his service as a serjeant.<sup>34</sup> Other tenancies had been created by Walter Croc's grant of part of Hillmorton (Warwicks) to William of Morton as 1/5th of a knight's fee; and William Croc the elder's grant of Ettington to Frederick of Bishopton for the service of keeping his dog.<sup>35</sup> Much less substantial were Robert de Brok's grants of half virgates at Walsgrave to his servants Everard and Robert de Codsall for a rent of two arrows and 2s. respectively.<sup>36</sup> Various religious houses benefited from the foresters' piety; the elder William Croc was particularly

generous. In *ca* 1153 he granted his lands at Wyrley to Radmore Abbey, a Cistercian house that grew out of a hermitage established in the Forest. However, the monks relocated to Stoneleigh in Warwickshire after 1155 because of 'molestation' by the foresters. This seems to have taken the form of disruption of devotions rather than despoliation, and William himself seems to have regarded the house fondly enough to wish to be buried there.<sup>37</sup> He also granted the church of Chesterton to Kenilworth Priory, confirmed a gift to the Templars of four virgates in the same vill, and gave half a virgate there to the Hospitallers.<sup>38</sup> William's grant of Wyrley to Radmore lapsed and Robert de Brok gave all the land held of him there by Hamo of Wyrley to Lilleshall Abbey (Salop) some years later.<sup>39</sup> Robert also made a very modest grant to Stoneleigh of half a virgate and a messuage at Radway (Warks), perhaps in compensation.<sup>40</sup>

Subordinate foresters at Cannock are alluded to in the Pipe Roll of 1130 and in a royal charter of 1155, and five of them are named in *Testa de Neville* of 1198.<sup>41</sup> These officials had custody of hays, or subdivisions of the Forest, for which they paid dues totalling four and a half marks.<sup>42</sup> Reginald de Puys had custody of Rugeley Hay, where he held 25 acres of land for a rent of 3s. His nephew Richard de Puys held a quarter of a carrucate worth 4s. and paid half a mark to the Forester annually perhaps sharing responsibility for the hay.<sup>43</sup> Roger of Bentley held Bentley Hay and paid one mark annually.<sup>44</sup> Henry de Brok held Teddesley Hay and had a carrucate of land at Huntington, worth 10s. for which he paid two marks. Henry was the husband of Constance, the daughter of Geoffrey Brown. Geoffrey, also known simply as Brown, held a hide of land from William Croc at Chesterton which he gave to the Knights Templar.<sup>45</sup> Jordan of Cannock, who held a quarter of a carrucate of land worth 2s. in Cannock in 1198, seems to have had custody of Cheslyn Hay. It is possible that his predecessors can be traced back to the 1090s. Purported charters of William Rufus confirmed Cheslyn to one Leofwine and subsequently to his son Trumwine. A Robert Trumwyn had charge of Cheslyn Hay in 1236, although the relationship of the Trumwyns to Jordan of Cannock is unclear.<sup>46</sup> The remaining hays of Alrewas, Gailey, Ogley and Hopwas were all in the hands of Hugh de Loges in 1198, and may always have been held by the foresters themselves. Thirteenth-century records show that the Forester and his subordinates enjoyed similar privileges in the forest; mainly hunting, underwood and pannage rights which were probably of long standing.<sup>47</sup>

The subsequent history of the forest is one of slow decay. The extent of the forest was much reduced after 1230 when the manors of Rugeley and Cannock were granted to the Bishop of Coventry and thereafter treated as exempted from Forest Law. Over the next few years more of the forest was illegally annexed to these manors and the Hay of Rugeley passed out of royal control. In 1246 Hugh de Loges' son was deprived of his post of Forester but was allowed to retain most of his lands. Later foresters were for the most part minor local landowners.<sup>48</sup> For all practical purposes the forest ceased to exist by the end of the sixteenth century when the remaining woodland had been cleared to supply charcoal for the emerging Black Country iron industry. The present, and very different, Cannock Forest was established by the Forestry Commission in the 1920s.

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## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> C. R. Young, *The Royal Forests of Medieval England* (Leicester, 1979), pp. vii-ix. I am grateful to Dr Kath Thompson for comments on an early draft and to Mr Nick Griffiths for providing the map for this article (see Fig.1).

<sup>3</sup> C. Petit-Dutaillis, 'Les origines franco-normandes de la 'foret' anglaise', in *Melanges d'histoire offerts a M. Charles Bemont* (Paris, 1913), pp. 58-76; D. Hooke, 'Pre-Conquest woodland: its distribution and usage', *Agricultural History Review*, 37 (1989), pp. 113-129.

<sup>4</sup> *Domesday Book: Staffordshire* (1976), fo. 249c; S. Erdeswick, *A Survey of Staffordshire* (London, 1844), p. 199; C. Johnson and H. A. Cronne (eds.), *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum* (Oxford, 1956), II, pp. 56, 116, 278; H. M. Colvin (ed.), *History of the Kings Works*, HMSO, 6 vols (London, 1963-1982), II, pp. 848, 907.

<sup>5</sup> There was also a small private forest adjoining Cannock to the south, the Earl of Warwick's chase at Sutton (Warks): D. Crouch, *The Image of Aristocracy in Britain 1000-1300* (London, 1992), p. 306.

<sup>6</sup> *V. C. H Staffs*, II (1967), p. 339; H. C. Darby and L. B. Terrett (eds.), *The Domesday Geography of Midland England* (Cambridge, 1954), p. 197.

<sup>7</sup> *Staffordshire Historical Collections*, 1924, Salt Soc. (1926), 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Calendar of Close Rolls 1234-1237*, HMSO (London, 1908), pp. 84, 502.

<sup>9</sup> J. Hunter (ed.), *Pipe Roll 31 Henry I*, Records Office (London, 1833), pp. 106-7.

<sup>10</sup> *SHC*, IV (1883), pp. 179-180.

<sup>11</sup> *Domesday Book: Warwickshire* (1976), fo. 244c. Richard has been identified with the thegn called *Chenvin* who held land at Codsall (Staffs) before 1066 but this seems rather dubious. There is no evidence that Richard or his heirs held land here subsequently: *SHC*, IV, 179.

<sup>12</sup> *DB Staffs* (1976) fo. 238a. The distribution of his lands in Staffordshire suggests Richard was also responsible for Kinver Forest.

<sup>13</sup> Young, *Royal Forests*, pp. 48-9.

<sup>14</sup> R. Hilton (ed.), *Ledger Book of Stoneleigh*, Dugdale Soc., 24 (1960), 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Pipe Roll 14 Henry II*, p. 118.

<sup>16</sup> Three knights and a serjeant were hanged for the murder. One of the knights was Alan of Coven, a hamlet on the western side of Cannock Forest. The Book of Fees indicates that William was the serjeant concerned: *Chronicle of the Reigns of Henry II and Richard I*, Rolls Series, 2 vols (London, 1867), I, p. 93; *PR 21 Henry II*, pp. 66, 69; *Book of Fees*, HMSO, 3 vols (1920-31), p. 1277.

<sup>17</sup> *PR 21 Henry II*, p. 67; *Book of Fees*, pp. 1275-1277.

<sup>18</sup> *PR 6 Richard I*, p. 41; *PR 7 Richard I*, p. 255. For the descent of the office see Fig. 2.

<sup>19</sup> F. Barlow, *Thomas Becket* (1986), p. 301.

<sup>20</sup> *The Historical Works of Master Ralph de Diceto*, Rolls Series, 2 vols (London, 1876), I, pp. 342-5. Young, *Royal Forests*, pp. 18-32. *PR 1 Richard I*, passim.

<sup>21</sup> D.C. Douglas and G.W. Greenaway (eds.), *English Historical Documents 1042-1189* (London, 1953), pp. 417-420.

<sup>22</sup> *PR 31 Henry I*, p. 107; *PR 1 John*, p. 163.

<sup>23</sup> *PR 2 John*, p. 254

<sup>24</sup> *SHC*, V(1) (1884), p. 167.

<sup>25</sup> *PR 31 Henry I*, p. 106.

<sup>26</sup> *DB Warks*, fo. 244c. *DB Staffs*, fo. 247a..

<sup>27</sup> See n. 43 below.

<sup>28</sup> In 1121 Henry I appointed Geoffrey de Clinton sheriff of Warwickshire and gave him Kenilworth, where he built a castle and priory. Wyrley had belonged to the bishop of Chester as a berewick of the cathedral manor of Lichfield in 1086. For a period before 1121 the see – now styled Coventry – was in royal hands, but was later granted to Roger de Clinton, Geoffrey's nephew. Roger seems to have accepted the abstraction of Wyrley without demure. D. Crouch, 'Geoffrey de Clinton and Roger, Earl of Warwick, new men and magnates in the reign of Henry I', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 55 (1982), passim; *DB Warks*, fo. 244c.

<sup>29</sup> *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, I, HMSO (London, 1916), p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> *PR 7 Richard I*, p. 256.

<sup>31</sup> *DB Staffs*, fo. 250c.

<sup>32</sup> *DB Warks*, fo. 238a; *PR 2 John*, pp. 176, 250.

<sup>33</sup> Poole, *Obligations of Society*, pp. 58, 76.

<sup>34</sup> *Memoranda Roll 10 John*, PRS, N.S. 31 (1957), p. 87; *Curia Regis Rolls*, HMSO, I (London, 1922), pp. 30, 125, II (1925), p. 278, VII (1935), p. 340; *Warwickshire Feet of Fines*, I, Dugdale Society, 11 (1932), p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> *Book of Fees*, p. 1276.

<sup>36</sup> *Book of Fees*, p. 1277.

<sup>37</sup> *Ledger Book*, p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> *Book of Fees*, pp. 1275-6.

<sup>39</sup> *Calendar of Charter Rolls*, II, HMSO (London, 1906), p. 59.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, III, HMSO (1908), p. 486.

<sup>41</sup> *Pipe Roll 31 Hen I*, pp. 106-7; R.W. Eyton, *Court, Household and Itinerary of King Henry II* (Dorchester, 1878), p. 6; *Book of Fees*, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> *Book of Fees*, p. 594.

<sup>43</sup> *Book of Fees*, p. 7; *SHC*, IV, p. 36.

<sup>44</sup> *Book of Fees*, pp. 7, 1277.

<sup>45</sup> *Book of Fees*, p. 7. William Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire Illustrated* (London, 1730), p. 478; B. Lees, *Records of the Templars in England*, British Academy Records of Social and Economic History, 9 (1935), p. 29.

<sup>46</sup> Erdeswick, *Staffordshire*, p. 199; *Book of Fees*, pp. 7, 594.

<sup>47</sup> *Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, I, p. 74; *Rotuli Hundredorum*, II, Records Commission (1818), p. 115.

<sup>48</sup> Young, *Royal Forests*, pp. 60-73; *V.C.H. Staffs*, II, p. 343; P.R. Coss, *Lordship, Knighthood and Locality: A Study in English Society c. 1180 – c. 1280* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 291-4.

Figure 1: - The Forest of Cannock c.1200.

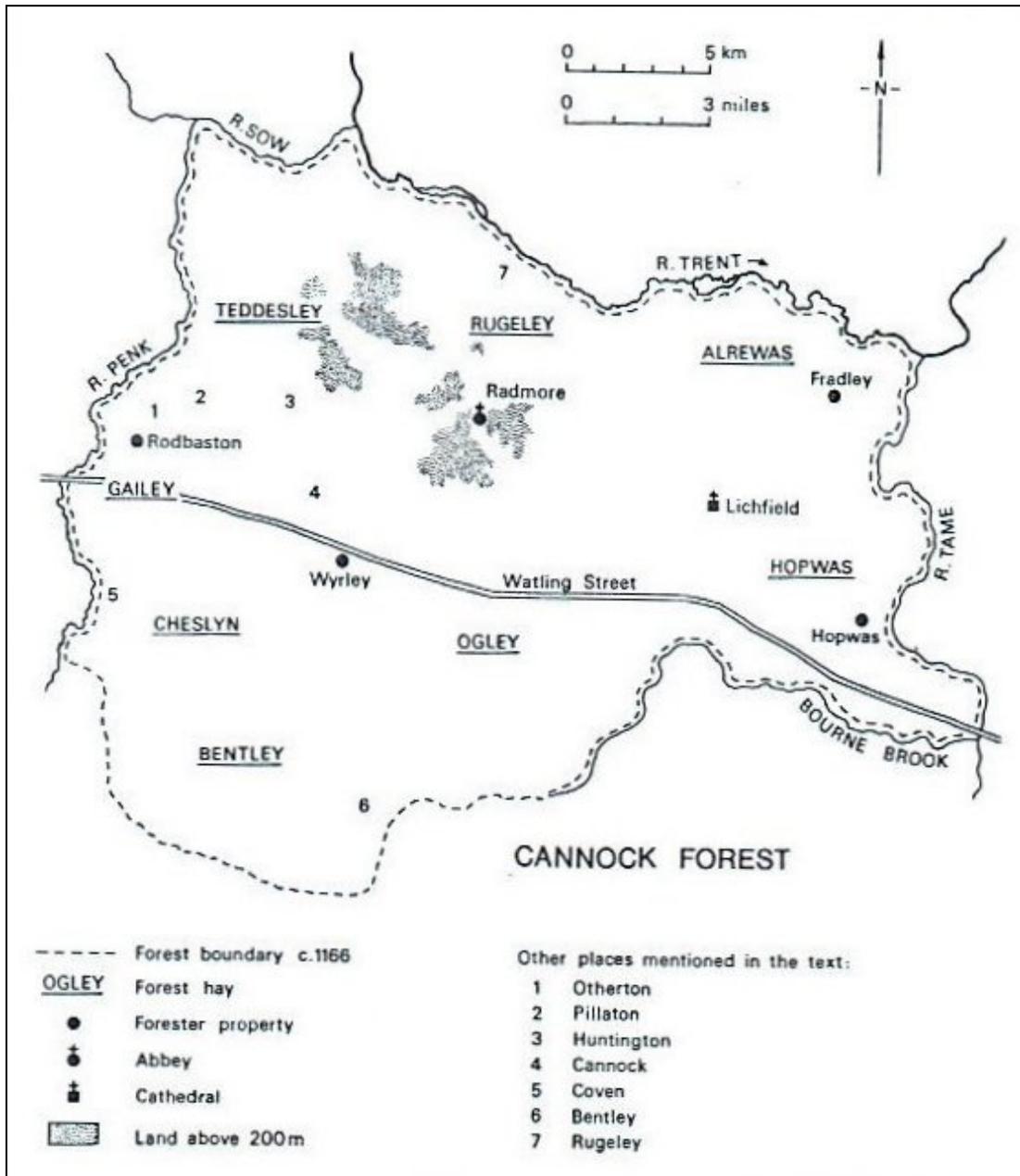
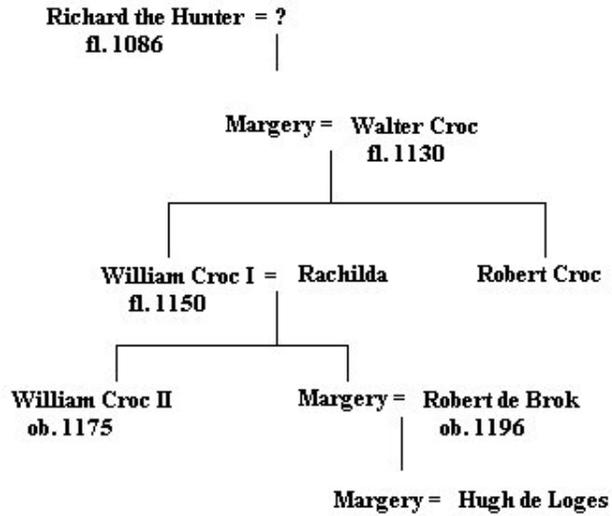


Figure 2: - The descent of the office of Forester of Cannock 1086-1198.



Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Monastic Movements Anchorites and Hermits. From the end of the eleventh and throughout the twelfth centuries, groups of religious began to react against the extravagant growth and development of monastic orders like that at Cluny. The desire for a return to primitive Christian experience was now reflected in monastic practices. New religious orders seeking quiet, solitude, poverty and simplicity began to appear, likely in reaction against the highly liturgized and richly endowed Benedictine monasteries. Source for information on Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Mon By the eleventh century royal authority probably went wider and deeper in England than in any other European country. This process gave power into the hands of those who could read and write, and in this way class divisions were increased. The power of landlords, who had been given land by the king, was increased because their names were written down. The Scots were Celtic settlers who had started to move into the western Highlands from Ireland in the fourth century. In 843 the Pictish and Scottish kingdoms were united under a Scottish king, who could also probably claim the Pictish throne through his mother, in this way obeying both Scottish and Pictish rules of kingship. The third group were the Britons, who inhabited the Lowlands, and had been part of the Romano-British world. Recent papers in Eleventh and Twelfth Century Europe. Papers. People. They recorded the beginnings of these monasteries in series of the deeds, and not in one single act, but all these deeds were in the second half of the twelfth century reshaped in one single document. As such, they are important sources for the establishment of the bonds between the central power and the periphery.