**Medieval Okeover**

Mayfield Heritage were treated to a most interesting and informative look at the history of our neighbours the Okeover family on Wednesday 14th June. It was presented by Peter Watson admirably assisted by his daughter Zarina. We were also pleased to welcome Sir Andrew Walker Okeover who had given Peter assistance with his research.

The Okeovers have descended in direct line from a man named Orm all the way to Sir Andrew’s grandmother, from then the family became the Walker Okeovers we know today. The interesting thing about Orm is that he held his estate directly from Burton Abbey before the Norman Conquest and may well have been of Danish ancestry. Despite all the upheavals, most especially in the north Orm managed to maintain his position and may even have improved it.

Over the years the Okeovers gradually became part of the Norman elite. As well as land in Upper Mayfield they held Okeover, Ilam, Atlow, and Snelston from the Montgomerys, Callow, Sheen, Woodhouses, Swinscoe, Bradbourne, Wirksworth and Ashbourne as well as Stretton near Burton-on-Trent. During his research Peter made use of the Okeover Cartulary, the Burton Abbey Cartulary, and the British Library, a charter of Ralph Okeover and some Okeover and Burton originals. It was Sir Roger de Okeover, son of John Okeover and Margaret Fitzherbert, who was responsible for the cartulary which catalogues the many court battles over his wardship. Margaret was fighting for wardship against Sir William Montgomery and also the Chandos family. Margaret sues her father Henry Fitzherbert for her dowry in order to pursue her claim.

During his career he was made a King’s Batchelor and given land near Buxton by Queen Isabella. The following day the coup took place that deposed Isabella and Mortimer in which Roger was closely implicated. Edward III visited the area shortly after. Roger died at the Siege of Stirling in 1337.

The Okeovers held lands at Caldon and Ilam including Throwley and Castern from Burton Abbey who owned them through the will of Wofric Spot, Earl of Mercia. The Church held a number of interesting tithes in Caldon, Colton, and Grindon that formed a larger ecclesiastical estate.

In Domesday Okeover is under an Abbot, and held by Essulf which suggests a hereditary holding. Later Abbot Nigel gave Orm the lands for 20 oras each year and become our man, to be buried at Burton and son to follow son. Was Orm related to Essulf? Oras were a Scandinavian currency in use before the conquest.

This is probably confirmation of a charter already in existence. It was an honour to be buried at Burton also the charter was witnessed among others by William Fitzherbert and William Fitz Nigel which suggests he was of some importance in the locality. Later he turns up on the Pipe Rolls having unjustly apprehended the King’s men which suggests he had power as well.

At least part of Mayfield which has a classical Anglo Saxon boundary was given to the Abbey of Tutbury by Henry de Ferrers who held much of the land around Burton-on-Trent, probably to control a rebellious area. This along with Houghton, Butterton, Colton and Wetton appear to be the remnants of another religious domain.

Ellastone, Wyaston and Little Ireton were also in the hands of Orm at Domesday. Interestingly a son of Ralph Prior granted Hugh Okeover land near Hanging Bridge in exchange for some adjacent to Snelston. The area being mostly open fields at the time. Hugh was Sheriff of Staffordshire and Shropshire, owed significant debts to the Exchequer and acquired a lot of land including Snelston.

Hugh’s successor Robert, due to some very strange dealing with Letitia a widow of Ashbourne, the Abbot of Stratton and a chap called Hamilton acquired Atlow in 1286. Apparently Royal moneylenders thrived at this time due to the fall of the Jews.