

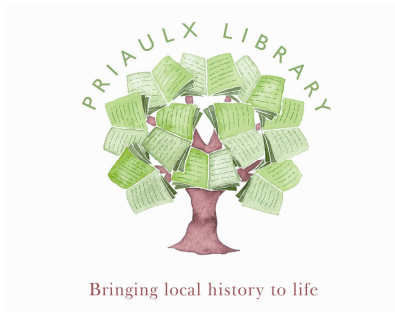
Priaulx Library
Livres de Perchage

What are Livres de Perchage?

A complex system of land-holding required meticulous record-keeping to ensure that the Seigneur or the monarch was not deprived of his rightful dues. A detailed account of the land held by each tenant and sub-tenant was therefore recorded in a **Livre de Perchage** for each fief. The Livre de Perchage was compiled by a “douzaine” of twelve tenants, who were appointed by the Seigneur and sworn in by the Royal Court. Livres de Perchage for the Fief le Roi, belonging to the Crown, would be compiled by the Parish douzaine for the particular parish in which the tenancy lay. The land area of an individual tenancy would be listed in vergées (two and a half Guernsey vergées equalling one English acre) and perches (an area of forty-nine square yards). The nature of the property, for example, be it a dwelling, a garden, outbuildings or meadows, would be specified. It was intended that Livres de Perchage be revised every twenty years, although in practice this was not always done.

The Priaulx Library has a collection of Livres de Perchage, which, whilst not comprehensive, numbers approximately one hundred and sixty items. Others can be consulted in the Island Archives and at the Greffe.





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History of Fiefs and Livres de Perchage

The original division of Guernsey into two fiefs occurred about 1020, when Duke Richard II of Normandy (996-1026) granted the southern and south eastern part of the Island to Néel, Vicomte of the Cotentin, and the western part to Anchetel, the Vicomte of the Bessin. Néel's fief included the parishes of St Sampson, St Peter Port, St Martin and St Andrew, Forest, and Torteval. Anchetel's encompassed Vingtaine d'Epine and the parishes of Câtel, St Saviour, and St Pierre du Bois. The Vicomte du Cotentin rebelled against William the Conqueror and lost his right to his fief; it was eventually restored to him, but William altered the distribution of sub-fiefs within the Fief du Cotentin. This is well illustrated in the case of sub-fiefs granted in the parish of St Andrew. The ecclesiastical fiefs granted to the Bishop of Coutances, the Abbey of Tours (Fief Ste Hélène), the Abbey of Evreux (La Rue Frairie), and the Abbess de la Trinité, Caen, probably date from this period of ducal control and Néel, once he had regained the fief, was obliged to confirm these grants.

Instability during the civil war between Empress Matilda and King Stephen, (1135-1152), affected the Guernsey fiefs. From 1144 the Channel Islands were under the control of Geoffrey of Anjou. Roger, Vicomte of the Cotentin, was killed in Normandy in 1138, whilst supporting King Stephen; Ranulf III, (Fief du Bessin/Le Conte and Earl of Chester) had also supported Stephen. All fiefs both in Guernsey and Normandy were thus forfeit.*

Henry II transferred the Fief du Bessin/Le Conte to Hugh Wake, and it remained in the Wake family until 1239 when his grandson, (also Hugh) went on crusade and sold his fief to Baldwin de Ver. In 1262, his grandson Baldwin de Ver sold the Fief Le Comte to William de Cheney and it was sold again in 1509 to the Fouaschin family. In 1630, Fief Le Comte was purchased by Peter Priaulx and held by the Priaulx family until 1722, when it was sold to Eleazar Le Marchant.

*During this period the Fief St Michel was created by enfeoffing land in the Braye du Valle and waste land in other parishes. The whole amounted to approximately one quarter of the land area of Guernsey. Fief St Michel remained under clerical control until 1414, when Henry V seized the property of all foreign priories and the fief passed to the crown.

If you require further information, please contact Sue Laker, Deputy Chief Librarian

