***The Forced Loan and Men Fit to Serve as Soldiers (Berkeley Castle Muniments: Select Book 28).* BGAS Gloucestershire Record Series 36, 2021. xx plus 207 pp, one b/w ill. Hardback £30.00. [ISBN 978-1-913735-04-3]**

The record of the Forced Loan of 1523 and of men fit to serve as soldiers is held at Berkeley Castle under the reference Select Book 28. Arranged by hundred and then by place, it gives a record of payments made under the forced loan by lay people in Gloucestershire, men and women whose wealth had been assessed at £5 or more but less than £20, and the names of men fit for military service, distinguished by whether or not they had armour or “harness”. It follows, and largely complements, the Military Survey of the county carried out in 1522, the original of which is also held at Berkeley Castle under the reference Select Book 27, published in 1993 as volume 6 of the Gloucestershire Record Series, *The Military Survey of Gloucestershire, 1522*, edited by R W Hoyle.

This volume provides a valuable addition to the history of the ordinary people of Gloucestershire in the first half of the sixteenth century: it gives a fascinating insight into their lives and occupations, and their readiness for war, should they be needed to fight.

The introduction is clear and well laid out, explaining the context and contents of the volume and giving a thorough account of its similarities and differences compared to the 1522 survey, enabling the reader to gain a concise and robust understanding of the information presented in the document. The peculiarities of the document, particularly the omission of several hundreds, are clearly stated.

The original document is mostly written in Latin, with occasional instances of English and Law French: this edition provides a useful translation into English. The editorial method is rigorous and consistent and is explained clearly and in detail; expansions of abbreviations and a list of translations of recurring Latin phrases is given, and all omissions of minor features such as paragraph signs and rough calculations have been explained. The difficulty of expanding ambiguous abbreviations is exemplified by the recurring ‘Eđus’, which could be ‘Edwardus’ or ‘Edmundus’: the edition has circumvented this by looking at internal evidence, which reveals that the full name ‘Edwardus’ appears many times, while ‘Edmundus’ is used only twice, and taking the decision that this implies that the abbreviation is more likely to stand for ‘Edmundus’. This decision is explained clearly, and its result, that several individuals appear as ‘Edwardus’ in the 1522 survey and ‘Edmundus’ here, is acknowledged; indeed, some are indicated in footnotes and in the comparison with the 1522 survey that appears in the first appendix.

A photograph of an example entry, for Westbury-on-Trym, shows the layout of the original document, with a heading for the place name, and the list of inhabitants and the amount paid given in columns, a list of amendments and lists of men fit for military service, with and without armour. This layout is replicated in the edition, rendering the information clearly. The introductory statement, listing the names of the commissioners and collectors of the loan and the hundreds for which they were responsible, is similarly laid out in columns, replicating the original clearly.

Folio numbers for the original are given throughout the text, making it easy to refer back to the original if necessary, and footnotes explain apparent inconsistencies, crossings-out, omissions and other peculiarities; this, together with the explanation of the editorial method in the introduction, gives the reader a sense of the rigour with which this edition has been compiled, and confidence that this is as close a replication of the original as is possible to produce.

Following the edition of the document appears a thorough comparison of this document with the 1522 survey, first setting out the differences by hundred and place, and then, in tabular form, giving a detailed comparison of numbers of differences in the three groups included in the forced loan, again arranged by hundred and place: those paying the loan, harness-keepers and men fit for military service. This detailed analysis would enable any student of the two documents to draw detailed conclusions without having to carry out the comparison themselves, and has the potential to be a significant time-saver.

The index of personal names and place names is comprehensive and the editorial method used in its compilation is again explained clearly, while the brief index of subjects enables the reader to find easily items of interest such as occupations and types of armour specified.

The presentation and interpretation of the information given in the document, and of the various inconsistencies it contains, opens it up to study in a way that has not been possible before, and in company with its predecessor volumes in the Gloucestershire Record Series, provides another window into the lives of those who have gone before.

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