

Robert Fitzhamon, Tewkesbury Abbey and the Roath Connection

In C1100, Robert Fitz-Hamon (Robert son of Hamon), a kinsman of William the Conqueror established the Norman Lordship of Glamorgan. Within the curtilage of the old Roman Legionary Fortress in Cardiff, he had built a **Motte** and **Bailey**, heavily fortified and for the purpose of controlling the local native tribes. This structure dominates the Castle Arena to this day.

*The **Motte** is a man-made mound circa 40 feet in height, surrounded by a ditch, with drawbridge access. The **Bailey** is the stone-built **Shell Keep** on top of the mound, probably constructed with stone from the old Roman fort. The original structure would have been much larger than is seen today and it was here that the Lord of the Manor, his retinue and family would have lived, with numerous soldiers in adjacent accommodation. This was the true Cardiff Castle. The large building on the west side is not and never has been fortified and serves no military purpose. It was built as a residence for later Lords of the Manor and developed over the years into the ornate and palatial building we see today.*

Such large numbers required food supplies and other essentials, for this purpose an agricultural enterprise was established several miles east of the castle, on the site of the former **Rath**, which would have been situated in pre-Norman times, on the approximate site, that **Roath Court** occupies today.

***Rath** is an Irish-Celtic word, that refers to a settlement consisting of a group of primitive wattle and daub dwellings, surrounded by a high earth bank. The construction would have a stout wooden palisade around the top and be surrounded by an outer ditch. There would only be one, heavily guarded entrance.*

The demesne would have been run on well organised, feudal lines. There would have been a manor house, from which the area was administered and the work of the agricultural year planned and implemented - when to sow, reap, harvest etc. Minor disputes and infringements could also be settled at the manor, as reflected in the name **Roath Court**.

At a later stage, the manor of Roath was subdivided and parts were granted or gifted to several religious houses. Towards the end of the 12th. Century, a portion of the land surrounding Roath Court had been granted to Tewkesbury Abbey, a wealthy Benedictine order, the Abbey Church of which having been established by Robert Fitzhamon. The area was then designated "Roath Tewkesbury". Another section, gifted to Keynsham Abbey, became "Roath Keynsham".

At the time of the dissolution of the Monasteries, the lands which had been gifted to these religious houses reverted to the Crown. In due course they were redistributed, either by gift or purchase and were eventually acquired by families such as the Butes, Tredegars and Mackintoshes, who went on to develop these lands as present day Roath.

It is most appropriate for Roath Local History Society to visit Tewkesbury Abbey and make time to reflect on the intimate connection between Tewkesbury and Roath through one man, Robert Fitzhamon. On your visit, why not visit him - his tomb is tucked away, on the left of the high altar.