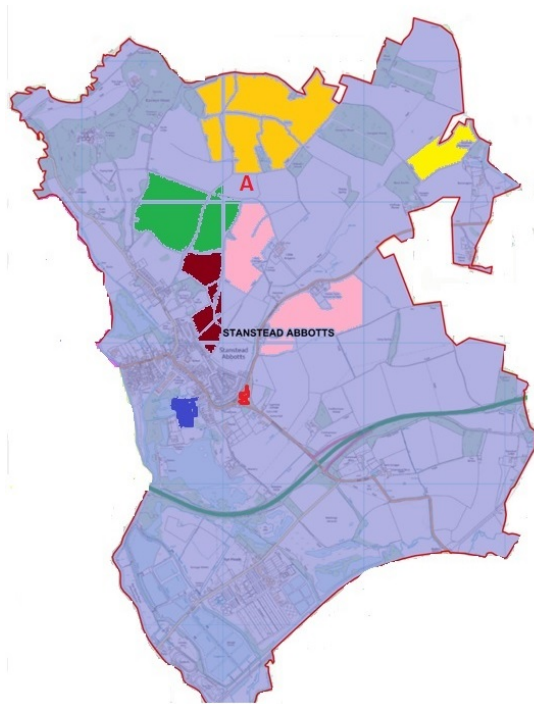


The Commons Part 1: Dung Common

Stanstead Abbots had at least 6 commons that can be identified on the 1840 Tithe map. This short series of articles on the commons contends that topographical and field name evidence offers indication of settlement and agricultural practice from at least the mid-late Early Medieval Period (464-1066ce).



The commons shown on the tithe map were:

- How Field Common shown in pink (1840 in 2 parts)
- Garrett's Field Common shown in green
- Dung Field Common shown in brown
- Wheeler's Ley Common in mustard
- Fillett's Field Common in yellow
- And the Common Marsh in blue
- The red area is the small common at between Cat Hill and Kitten Lane which at some point had the village animal pound.¹

Research indicates that with the departure of Rome there was a general fall cereal production evidenced in a decline in pollen of cereal crops and an increase in woodland pollen; however the local soil may not have been suitable for long-term cereal production anyway². At this point there was

a shift from arable to the pastoral farming of cattle, pigs, sheep and so on, kept on communal commons. An Infield/Outfield system of agriculture operated in many areas whereby those crops that were grown were cultivated close to the settlement where they could be looked after, with the pastured commons beyond³.

This shared use of pasture continued until a growing population and markets once again instigated a shift back to cereal production. In some suitable areas this may have begun as early as the 8th-9th centuries and continued through to the medieval period with more commons coming under the plough and the advent of an early open field system. Commons would frequently be enriched and brought in and out of arable production as necessary.

As Dung Common would seem to have been an area that was manured (enriched) it should be expected, under an Infield/Outfield system, to have been closest to the main settlement than the

¹ See HHER: MHT 30327

² See the Heritage Impact Assessment for Briggens Estate. The identified Roman farmstead is thought to have lasted less than 100 years. This point is underlined by the recording of only a single mill at Stanstead Abbots in Domesday.

³ Hamerow 2012 & Blair 2018

other commons. This in fact supports the generally understood idea that Early Medieval Settlements in river valleys were positioned on the well drained terraces over the rivers. (The OE *Dunge* usually meant animal manuring as human excrement was known as *cac*.)

The extent of Dung Common would therefore indicate a settlement spread along the ridge overlooking the river from at least the Hertfordshire Way on Cappell Lane Church southwards. Archaeological finds in Chapelfields⁴ further support this location, and indeed ceramics identified from a test pit may take the settlement as far as Roydon Road.



It is not possible to know how far Dung Common extended eastwards towards Hunsdon Road as these fields have been renamed; however if the ceramic finds on Roydon Road are indicative of settlement then it is likely that the fields behind Trotters Gap known on the Tithe Map as 'Five Acres, Trotters Gap and Sand Pits' was also part of this common and maybe Bourn Field just to the north. Bourn Field takes its name from the Old English '*burna*': a stream from the small spring fed brook running along the Hunsdon Road.

⁴ See HHER MHT30958



The view across Dung Common today. This area immediately in front was shown as plot 216, 217 and 218 on the Tithe map and was divided into extremely 3 small plots of 2 roods (about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an acre). It is not possible to say whether these reflected an early partition, though it is unlikely. The small pond seen to next to plot 218 is still present and has been recently cleared.

