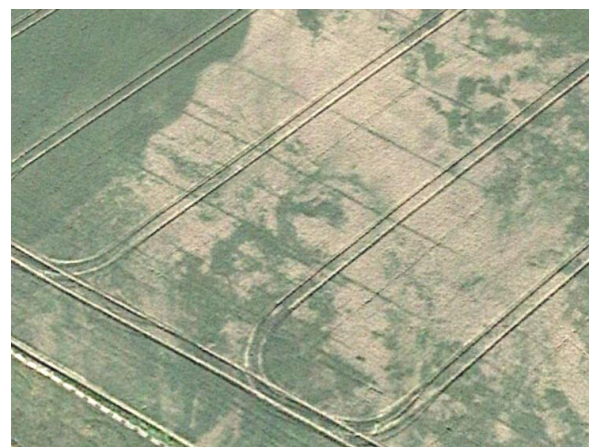
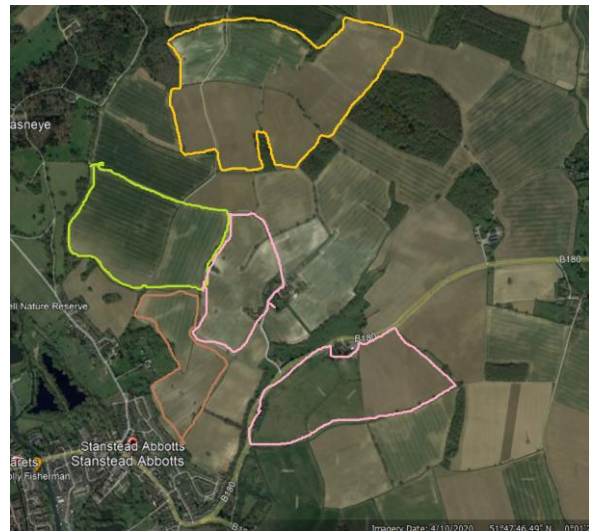


## The Three Large Commons

The first article on commons looked at the overall location of the main commons and the importance of Dung Common in helping to suggest a likely location of an early settlement. This article considers the three larger commons and their possible function in the later Early Medieval period.

### How Field Common:

How Field Common (pink outline) extended from Cat Hill north-westwards for about 1km. On the tithe map it was shown in two sections on either side of Hunsdon Road. This split could be difficult to account for, however the intervening fields are largely named by their size (6 Acre Field and so on) and so may the artifacts that reflect the enclosure of the larger common. The south-western boundary seems to be adjacent to Dung Common and it may be that this common that also reflects agricultural patterns that are linked to the earliest post-Roman settlement. In the first article we looked at the 'infield/outfield' system whereby cereals are grown closer to settlement with pasture for animals beyond that, How Field Common may be just such a common used as pasture when Dung Common as used for agrarian crops.



'How' in Old English refers to a hill or mound, so in this instance could refer to either Cat Hill or a now lost burial mound. There is in fact a ring ditch within this common (see image) which may be such a 'How' however it is impossible to know if this was being referred to<sup>1</sup>.

### Garrett's Field Common

This common (green outline) continues to run west from the edge of How Field Common to the edge of Easneye wood and south to the ridge above Holly Cross Road, approximately 43 hectares. Similar to How Common it has crop marks listed as a Historical Environment Record, these are adjacent to Easneye Wood are of unknown date. During WW2 a searchlight was located on the western edge of this common.

<sup>1</sup> See Historical Environment Report HHER 7626: "Cropmarks of a circular enclosure approx. 20m in diameter, probably representing the ploughed-down remains of a round barrow"

## Wheeler's Ley Common

Wheeler's Ley Common lies to the north of both How and Garret's Field commons and runs to the northern parish boundary. In addition to more crop marks of enclosures within the common, just to the east lies a moated enclosure thought to be Medieval in date<sup>2</sup>. This common has various names on the tithe map including Great Wheeler's Ley, Lower Wheeler's Ley and Wheeler's Common Ley. Ley (or *Leah*) in Old English is a word that changed its meaning over a long period, starting out as 'wood' then eventually coming to mean 'pasture' in the later period. This may mean that Wheeler's Ley dates from the later Early Medieval.

There are records of a landowner called John Wheeler who handed over some land during the reign of Henry VIII. This may be the family that benefited from the enclosure of the common, however until further records become available it must remain a speculative identification.

## Where the Commons Meet

The area where all three commons met is perhaps the most interesting with regard to the possible function of these larger commons. The tithe map lists a number of interesting field names here and these include:

**The Stocking Herne:** A herne was a fenced area, with the obvious reference being that animals were kept here before or after being placed on the commons.

**High Trees and Birds Nest fields:** Both these fields lie just to the east of the Stocking Herne field and may indicate more extensive woodland around the fenced area.

**Thrift Wood:** Identified as the Alwine's Frith of an early charter by Ron Dale. Sadly the accepted toponymy (place name studies) would indicate that this is not a pagan shrine, but rather an area of scrubland next to a wooded area<sup>3</sup>.

**Horne Pasture and Horne Six Acres:** As these lie immediately to the south of the Stocking Herne field it must be assumed that Horne in this instance is Herne transformed.

So what we have is a fenced area, central to and surrounded by the three large commons, with a stocking function and bounded by woodland. The online Hull Hydra copy of Domesday lists the following for Stanstead Abbots:

*Also 7 burgesses who pay 23 shillings to the Lord, with other customary dues of the meadow and woodland.*

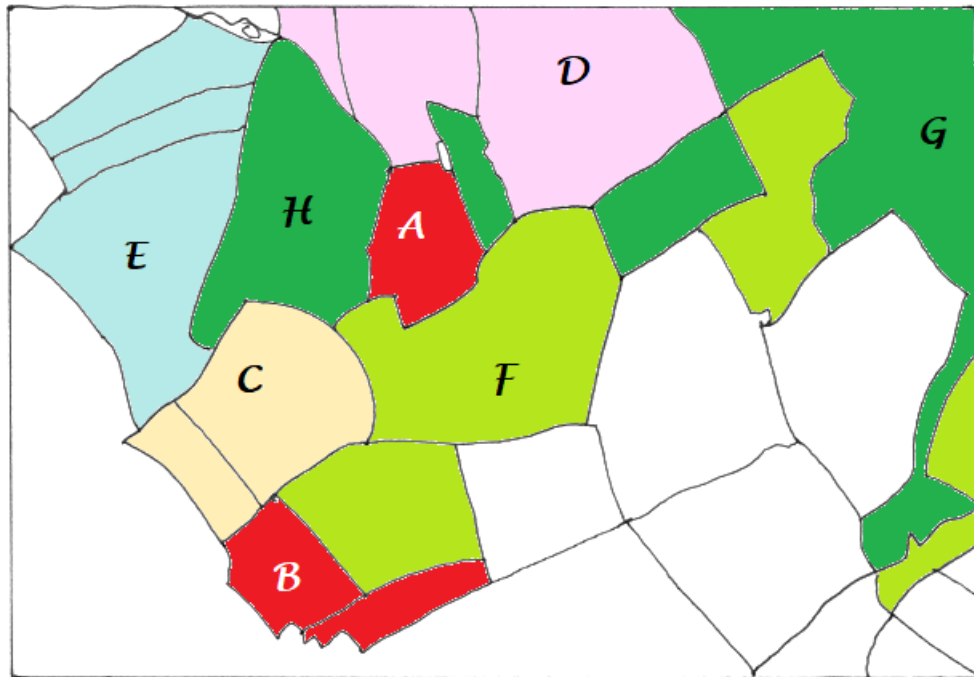
This would seem to indicate that the burgesses (who were the only merchants in the whole of the Braughing Hundred) were utilising meadow and woodland. If their activity centred on the supply of animals for the London market (Stanstead Abbots is the most southerly point on the River Lea for the Hundred), then it would make sense that the central commons area was crucial to their activity and this may well be the area of meadow and woodland the 23 shillings were being paid for.

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<sup>2</sup> See HHER014

<sup>3</sup> See the work of Margaret Gelling of the toponymy of field names.

## The Central Area in 1840



- A. The Stocking Herne
- B. Horne Pastures
- C. Fields listed as part of How Field Common (these extend in a broken fashion all the way to Cat Hill)
- D. Fields listed as part of Great Wheeler's Ley Common, extending to the northern boundary of the parish
- E. Fields listed as Garrett's Field Common, extending south to Hollycross Road
- F. Field names that indicate an area that may have been woodland (High Trees, Birds Nest etc)
- G. Woodland still extant in 1840
- H. The Thrift Wood

Other fields have names which seem to be later (name given by size) or have obscure roots (Hexions)