

STANSTEAD 900 to 1300

GROWTH FROM VILLAGE TO TOWN AND LATER CHANGES

BY
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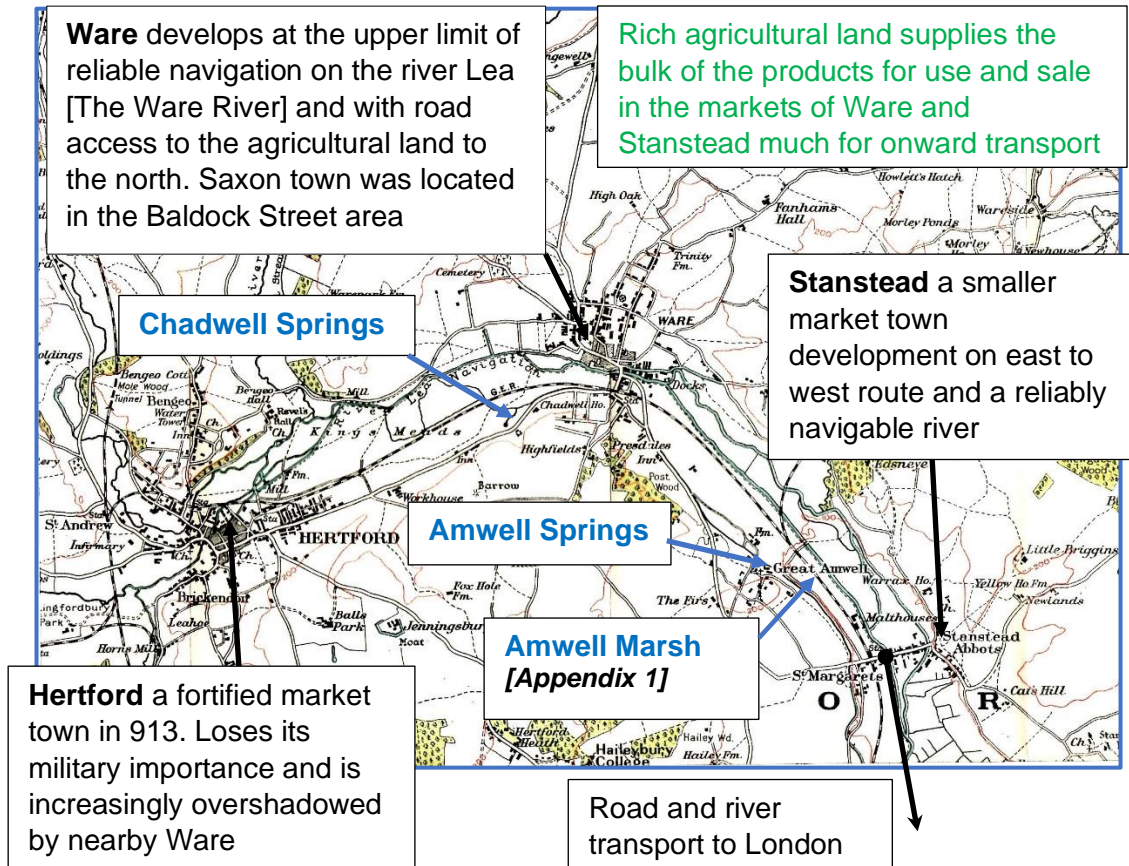
In the first decade of the 900s Stanstead was in a frontier area between the West Saxons and the Danes. King Alfred had ensured that an incursion of the Danes into the Lea Valley in 894 had been forced to leave the area the following year. In a more general way, he made great efforts to create a blueprint for ensuring a future unified nation of the English. This intelligent and studious King set out to achieve this by improving the legal system and the structure of the military, emphasising the importance of learning and worked towards improving the affluence of his people. He had constructed fortified towns in firmly held Saxon territory protected by local militias. These fortified towns provided a safe place for markets to be held and food to be stored against the time that the Danes might choose to return. These scattered militia defended towns were backed up by a newly formed mobile standing army and a coastal navy. These arrangements were effective in making it more difficult for the Danes to retake these Saxon held towns and the areas surrounding them. King Alfred's long-term military aim was to reclaim the lands that had been occupied by the Danes and eventually create a unified nation of the English.

After Alfred's death in 899 these tasks fell to his son King Edward the Elder who created a fortified frontier town at Hertford in 912-913. This effectively defended the northern approach to London as well as providing a springboard for retaking Danish occupied East Anglia. As the years passed the Middle Lea Valley between Hertford and Stanstead became more peaceful and the importance of Hertford as a defended and fortified place began to fade, diminishing the town's importance locally. King Edward died on the 17th July 924 and was succeeded by his son King Aethelstan. It was Aethelstan who created official mints at important places, one of them being the Burgh of Hertford. This perhaps made up to some extent for Hertford's loss of its military importance and coins continued to be minted there until the mid-1090s. Aethelstan is regarded as the first King of the English, which he began to style himself in 927, until his death in 939. It is likely that the people who lived in this area of the country began to feel safe enough to more fully develop non fortified centres of commerce sometime after the mid-920s and most definitely by the mid-930s. This would mean that markets are likely to have begun to increase their volume of trade during this time at Ware and Stanstead. Both places being able to benefit from the reliable navigation on the river Lea south from Ware towards London thus increasing their trade.

Very little is known about the local area between the 920s and the Norman invasion in 1066. However, the data recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 does include the value of the local settlements as they were before 1066. The taxable figures given are Hertford £7 10s 0d, Ware £50 and Stanstead £20 payable under the pre-Norman system. It is clear from other sources that in 1066 the town of Hertford was the dominant local settlement, despite the numbers suggesting otherwise. Ware had more obviously benefited from its advantageous geographical location where the main road to the north crossed the river Lea. Stanstead had also grown significantly in importance, particularly notable as its population pre conquest is thought to have been considerably less than Ware or Hertford. One of the reasons for this was the probable use of Stanstead as a river port by the important estates at Sawbridgeworth to the east. Sawbridgeworth was located on the river Stort which was not to become navigable until the 1760s. What is clear is that in the century before the Norman invasion both Ware and Stanstead had grown to be market places on the river Lea drawing trade and some importance away from Hertford as a trading place. This change was also encouraged by the fact that Ware was the effective head of reliable navigation on the Lea. This disadvantaged Hertford and continued to do so until the major navigation improvements between Hertford and Ware in the 1740s.

The Manor of Stanstead before 1066 was held by the Saxon Lord Alwine of Gotton [Aelfwine of Godtone]. He also held the Hertfordshire manors of Hunsdon and Oxhey, along with a virgate of land in Sawbridgeworth and nine acres in Ayot, the last two being let to sub tenants. Stanstead was the most important of Alwine's holdings and it is generally believed that he was resident at Stanstead. He is also thought to be responsible for building the earliest still existing parts of St. James church dated by Daniel Secker to about 1050. The church located next to the main house of the manor, [location of the modern Stanstead Bury], suggests that Alwine lived at a substantial home close to his church. A church close to the Manor House but some distance from the main settlement in the parish being fairly common in East Hertfordshire. This evidence suggests that perhaps before the Norman invasion Stanstead was held for some time by a resident owner(s) which would have encouraged investment in the manor thus aiding the growth of the small market town down in the valley some distance away from the church.

MARKET TOWN DEVELOPMENTS 930 TO 1066



The springs at Chadwell and Great Amwell delivered millions of gallons of water a day from the chalk aquifer. This flow emerging from underground was particularly reliable throughout the year and ensured that the river below the town of Ware was a dependable all-year-round navigation. This led to the Lea between Ware and London being generally referred to by those relying upon it as the "WARE RIVER". The chalk also supplied copious water through the ground directly into the water table. This gave rise to a high water table in the flood plain generally and more so in the marshy areas just down valley from the springs at Chadwell and Amwell. In addition, the chalk aquifer also contributed to the risk of regular flooding which affected much of the valley floor, with deeper flooding as regular ten yearly events. Due to this much of the flood plain was dedicated to summer only pasture. The main settlements were restricted to locations where regular flooding was less of a problem. At Hertford and Ware raised gravel beds close to the river created suitable riverside locations. At Stanstead the main settlement was located above the flood plain to avoid floods with just essential commercial settlement near the ford, later a bridge.

DOMESDAY SETTLEMENT DATA

Place	Pre 1066	Post 1066	1086 Value	Households	Population
Hertford	£7 10s 0d	£15	£20 + 3 mills at £10	146 Burgesses	880
Ware	£50	£45	£50	125	750
Stanstead	£20	£10	£17	30 [7 Burgesses]	180

NB 1 *The population figures have been calculated using a commonly used formula. R Kiln and C Partridge in their book "Hertford & Ware from Birth to Middle Age" calculated what they thought a more realistic population for Hertford as 2000 people. The actual population of the town of Hertford made it the largest market town in the county. [\[Appendix 2\]](#)*

- The valuations for Hertford are not a true value but are a reflection of the changes in the levy for the right to trade as a Borough that paid additional money in other ways.*
- The drop in the value of Stanstead directly after the conquest is in line with a general 50% drop in manors heavily dependent on ploughlands.*
- The 10% drop in value at Ware after the conquest suggests that it was less reliant on ploughlands due to income from trading activity from a more important market place and other trade occupations.*

HERTFORD

The high number of Burgesses recorded in Hertford may be related in part at least to its early formation as a fortified town when the privileged tenure required some militia service. However, that may be Hertford was certainly by the time of Domesday a significant market town, probably the largest in the County. Shortly after the conquest a castle was built at Hertford and it became a Royal Borough. This undoubtedly enhanced its status and provided local traders with additional income serving the castle's needs. The town remained hampered by the fact that only the smaller boats on the river could travel upstream of Ware to Hertford and all year-round navigation was unreliable.

WARE

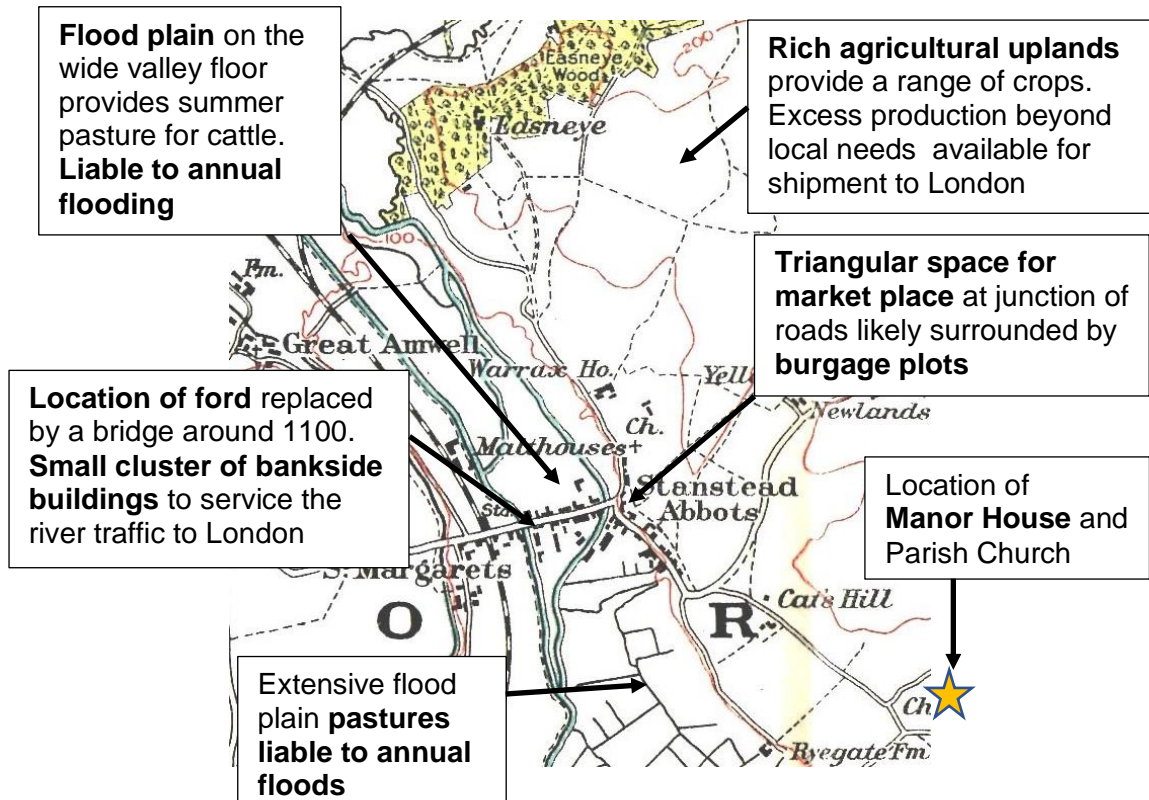
At the time of the Domesday the main settlement at Ware, located in the Baldock Street area, was more like a village with prosperous estates to the north on the rich agriculturally uplands. The area of prosperous estates to the north and north east would have had a scatter of small settlements, some of which like Wareside and Babbs Green still exist whilst the ancient site of Thundridge became deserted when the population migrated to its present site on the old north road. The main settlement at Ware was well placed being at the head of reliable navigation on the river Lea and on the main road from London to the north. Although not specifically mentioned as having a market in Domesday it had inevitably supported a manorial market without the privileged tenure of Burgesses to organise and regulate the running of it for a very long time. Given the high taxable value of Ware by 1066 it is very likely the settlement had been a sizeable market place by value for at least a century. It was in 1086 the third most important manor in Hertfordshire by the number of households [After Sawbridgeworth & Hertford]. Its growth after the Norman conquest was to accelerate after 1190 when the Lady of the manor Petronilla de Grandesmesnil began to develop a new High Street. The growth in the economic strength of the town of Ware after 1086 was to have a significant impact on the fortunes of both Hertford and Stanstead.

STANSTEAD

The Stanstead of 1086 would be regarded in size as a village, but because of its market and the seven Burgesses with their privileged tenure it was regarded as a small town. It benefited both from its position close to rich agricultural land to the north and east as well as the river transport southwards down the river Lea to London. Unlike Ware it was not on the main road to the north nor did it have extensive dry flat land close to the river bank. What limited flat land that existed nearest to the river was just above the level of regular flooding and squeezed between the flood plain and the foot of the valley side. Stanstead did benefit from being situated on the admittedly less important east to west road which provided a route for produce from the rich estates of Sawbridgeworth to the east, to access river transport at Stanstead.

[Sawbridgeworth was the largest Manor measured by the number of households in Hertfordshire in 1086 and one of the top two places by value.] [\[For Burgesses see footnote 3\]](#)

STANSTEAD AS A SMALL MARKET TOWN



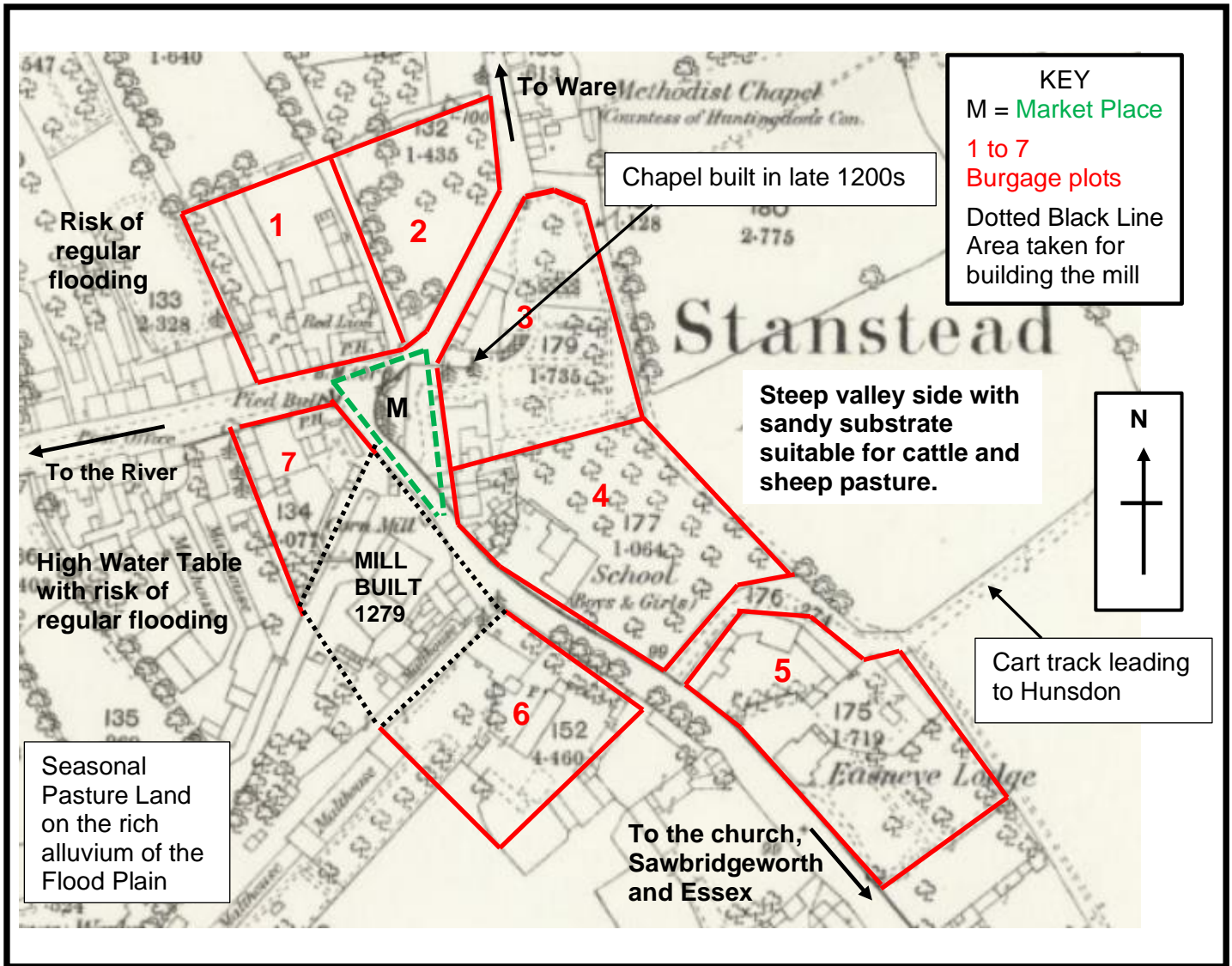
In the Domesday Book Stanstead is one of four identified trading towns in Hertfordshire located on the river Lea; - *Hertford, Ware, Stanstead and Cheshunt*, with the other two in the County being *St Albans and Ashwell*. This emphasises the importance in 1086 of the part the river Lea played in supplying goods to London. Stanstead not only had good agricultural lands within its boundaries but also a much wider hinterland to the north and east from which agricultural produce could be derived. In addition, the valley floor used for summer pasture added to the amount of meat that could be produced. Cattle also provided ample hides for a local tanning industry. Undoubtedly sheep were also kept on some of the steep pasture lands along the valley sides providing wool as an additional raw material for trade and local workshop style manufactories. This suggests a wide range of produce for a market and for forward transit to London. The Lord of the Manor also owned a watermill and the flour produced that was additional to local needs would have been sold in London, an important additional income.

Households within the parish would have been in scattered hamlets across the upland agricultural lands with a couple of small hamlets on the valley side road with a notably important settlement where the road across the valley [*The High Street today*] met the road running along the base of the valley side. [today's Roydon Road & Cappell Lane]. The larger settlement would have contained a noticeably smaller proportion of the total parish population than we are used to today. A small collection of buildings at the river crossing [*a ford until about 1100*] would have served the small river port but the road across the valley floor would have been more sparsely populated. This was because the valley of the Lea particularly below Ware had a higher water table than today and was subject to regular floods with much of the flood plain under a foot of water or so. However, every decade a much deeper flood, about four feet deep would be a predictably unwelcome event. There was in fact little dry flat land available in those days for the future expansion of Stanstead as was available at Ware and Hertford.

Saxon market places were characterised by being triangular in shape with a road entering at each corner and sited usually at a junction of main roads. It is thought that some of these market places were probably village greens or widened roads which were put to market use by the Lord of the Manor. The burgage plots are often thought of as being long thin plots of land as was common in many planned market places of the 11th to 13th century, like that created at Ware in the 1190s onwards. At Stanstead it is likely as that the burgage plots were laid out around the market making use of what space was available. These burgage plots formed part of the privileged tenure holdings of the seven burgesses noted at Stanstead in 1086. In addition to these plots the Burgesses would have had additional lands, out in the surrounding fields in several locations, allocated to them. The Burgesses were expected by the Lord of the Manor to take on considerable responsibilities within the manor in return for their various privileges.

[For Market Places and Burgage Plots Appendix 4]

IDENTIFYING BURGAGE PLOTS IN STANSTEAD



The above map is an attempt to recreate the possible burgage plots at Stanstead as they might have been arranged around or close to a market place. This has been based on boundaries some of which still exist today, known long term integrity of the boundaries and the later land use and associated land leased along with them. The outer boundary of the triangular market place remained intact until the Victorian road changes of the mid 1860s. The triangular nature of the open space that existed for so long is much less obvious today. Other buildings in the settlement would have been located just beyond plot 5 and for a little way to the north of the road junction along the road to Ware. The above is merely one possible interpretation of the evidence scanty as it is. The identification of a triangular open space at this location so characteristic as it is of an Anglo-Saxon market place does along with the existence of Burgesses suggest Stanstead did have a market place before and after the conquest despite a lack of documentary evidence providing more positive proof. [\[For Stanstead Market & Fair see Appendix 5\].](#)

Plots 1, 2 and 3 plus the mill area were to remain in the ownership of the Lord of the Manor until the 1830s. All three plots seem in later times to have adapted to use their prime position in the settlement and the plot of land to support a sizeable Inn. It appears that all three had associated land out in the fields not that far away. If these were the sites of privilege tenure in early times then they continued to be used to promote the businesses of the later owners albeit in different occupations, as they would have done for the original Burgess tenants. Plot 1 today contains the Red Lion Inn dating from 1538 and its 1836 sales document states "An eligibly situated and old established freehold Inn with the most complete premises, including Brewhouse, ample stabling and large farmyard together with compact farm attached thereto." The farmyard was to the rear of the premises and fields beyond were part of the farm. Plot 2 was to be occupied by the Swan Inn with the plot containing stables, brewing capabilities and a pasture. The lease was associated with the rental of fields and an orchard at the time of its sale in the 1830s.

Plot 3 became the Griffin Inn with a large and impressive building with the plot containing stabling and sizeable yard and with fields associated with the lease. All three plots were fundamentally functioning as they would have if owned by a Burgess all those years ago. The history of plot 4 remains largely lost until the Victorian period. When the field was chosen as the site for the village school. Plot 5 seems to have been a roadside farm for a long time with the fields farmed lying above it up the slope of the valley side. Plot 6 and 7 are problematic as the Abbott of Waltham who owned the Manor in 1278/9 took land to build a water Mill, the footprint of the building intruding into the market place. An open millstream channel was also constructed cutting across one corner of the triangular open space. We might be inclined to think that the market had already closed or that the remaining space was adequate for the diminished amount of trading that still took place. What is clear is that these sizeable roadside plots existed under individual leases in later centuries. The nature of the businesses may have changed with the times but fundamentally the uses of the plot of land and outlying fields were still an integral part of the business. Interestingly plot 3 after 1836 was occupied by the miller and had a shop, next to his house, where corn and flour were sold. This being the very type of business the seven Burgesses were very much involved with centuries previously.

In the wider context what we can deduce is that after the Normans arrived Hertford was still the dominant settlement in the area with control over Ware, the tolls on bridges and the movement of goods along the roads. Although Ware was regarded as a place of importance it had yet to develop its main settlement beyond a village sized settlement with a market place, but had considerable growth potential yet to be exploited. Unlike Stanstead Ware had more informal organisational arrangements for its market as no Burgesses had been created at this time. Stanstead was a relatively small place that was punching above its weight economically but had geographical disadvantages that would be restrictions to its future growth. The future prospects of these three settlements known later as the three river ports of the Upper Ware River was going to depend not just on the advantages of their location but also on the wealth and influence of their most important personalities.

POST DOMESDAY

Stanstead was to face a change of ownership following the Norman conquest of 1066. The manor of Stanstead being then granted to the Norman, Ralph Tallebois [Tallboys]. He was in time to take 1 hide of land from Stanstead and attach it to his neighbouring manor of Hunsdon. It is likely that Ralph did not reside at Stanstead and was not as focused on developing Stanstead as he might have been if residing there. By the time of Domesday in 1086 it had already passed to Ranulf brother of Ilgar. His Baronetcy included 33 properties only some of them clustered together in Essex not that far from Stanstead. Given Ranulf's other holdings further away it is likely that he like Ralph resided elsewhere. However, the fact that Stanstead had only reached a value of £17 in 1086 rather than its pre 1066 value of £20 is in line with the shortfall in other agricultural smaller settlements. This suggests that Ralph and then Ranulph after him had ensured the best recovery of trade possible in Stanstead by 1086. Just prior to 1100 a bridge was built across the Lea improving road travel through Stanstead, an event which would have improved the prospects of the inhabitants.

After Ranulf died in 1100 Stanstead came into the possession of Richard de Wancy who unfortunately was to later find himself borrowing money from a hard-nosed moneylender, with his son Michael inheriting an ever-growing debt. It is therefore likely that there was little money spare during that time to spend on the manor of Stanstead. The prosperity of a place often relied heavily on the willingness and ability of an owner to invest in a settlement to support its long-term growth. A tenant Lord not surprisingly tended to make less investment in a manor than an owner residing within their own manor. A near century then which probably saw little substantial growth in the prosperity of Stanstead. Due to the de Wancy family having a connection with the royal family, it was King Henry II who stepped forward to pay off the debt but not the interest. As part of the arrangements made with the King the manor of Stanstead was to pass fully into the hands of the Augustine Cannons of Waltham, which it eventually did by the early years of the C13th. Meanwhile Ware had been growing economically and causing concern for the town of Hertford.

Some years before 1190 Petronilla de Grandmesnil the sole heir to her family estates came to live in Ware. She was the first Lady or Lord to do so since the Norman invasion. She had a strong and determined nature and soon set about improving the town of Ware. She created a new main street for the town which ran eastwards from the church and then crossed the Lea by a new bridge and joined up on the other side of the river with the road to the north.

This meant that all the long-distance traffic would be funnelled along the new High Street, which was laid out in the shape of two triangular market places. The produce market nearest the church and the livestock market closest to the new bridge. This was very much the type of town being created at the time with narrow burgage plots, the homes of newly created Burgesses, running off from each side of the market places. The town of Hertford was outraged by this assault on their towns trade and as early as 1191 the men of Hertford were fined for breaking down the bridge at Ware. Petronilla seems to have not to have been perturbed by this, rebuilding the bridge and carrying on with her plans. What the Burgesses of Hertford thought when King John granted Ware a charter for a weekly Tuesday market in 1199 one can only imagine. Had the Burgesses of Hertford thought Petronilla was a tough person to deal with then they were in for a bit of shock when on her death in 1217 she was replaced by her daughter and her husband Saer de Quincy the Earl of Winchester. He was a very important person in England and had been in 1215 one of the leaders who had forced King John to sign the magna carta. Not a man to put up with any sort of interference from a Bailiff of the Royal Castle at Hertford. In 1217 Hertford chained the ford and bridge at Ware and demanded tolls for anyone to pass, Saer de Quincy did not bother with the niceties of using the law but took down the chains and threw them in the river and made it clear to the Bailiff, that he would follow it if he persisted. Although trouble from Hertford continued for a very long time, Saer de Quincy and his descendants continued to build up the trade and prosperity of Ware at the expense of Hertford. Ware began to hold a large annual September three-day fair [Charter dated 1254] which despite complaints from Hertford continued to be held. Fairs were really important events and drew in people from a surprising distance and much enhanced the economic wellbeing in the towns in which they were held. The holding of a September fair was to take place in Ware until 1936.

Meanwhile Stanstead was settling in with the new permanent owners the Cannons of Waltham. Stanstead at least does not seem to have been seen as a threat by Hertford. Stanstead's agricultural catchment area was too far away to be of interest to Hertford and in any case the river crossing point between Thele [St Margarets] and Stanstead was one of the few convenient places to cross the river when travelling from Hertfordshire to Essex. If Hertford's problems with Ware were not enough in 1216 at the start of Henry III reign Louis the Dauphin of France laid siege to Hertford Castle and occupied the town. Which of course caused disruption and longer-term damage to the town, pushing more trade towards Ware. Even the traders of London began to abandon Hertford building their warehouses further downstream and using their own boats to transport goods to London and not Hertford based small boats. This loss of trade was a blow to Hertford and in part at least was due to the fact that only the smaller boats could navigate upriver from Ware. Making the Hertford boats less economic to use for journeys all the way to London than the larger boats available at Ware and Stanstead. In connection with this change, the merchants of London built a warehouse at St. Margarets close to the bridge leading to Stanstead. *[first mentioned in 1247]*. It is thought that this was built where the riverside gardens are now located.

Stanstead faced an interesting problem with the growth of Ware. It is clear that the two impressive market places at Ware were going to dominate trade in the area and almost inevitably cause the terminal decline of the market at Stanstead. On the other hand, as Ware grew in importance Stanstead could benefit from the growing trade passing along the river. The trade with London at the time showed every sign of continuing to grow into the distant future, which it did. Stanstead being only a short distance from Ware was also able to benefit from becoming an economic satellite of its larger and more important neighbour, piggy backing on its success. It is not clear exactly when the market at Stanstead ceased to function but one suspects that it gently faded away, as these things tend to do, along with the privileged tenure of the Burgesses disappearing with it. It would be a reasonable assumption that this occurred sometime in the early or middle years of the C13th. The Cannons of Waltham owned many properties and for them such ownership supplied funds for their Abbey Church and their good works in the Hundred of Waltham. Given the changing economic situation in the upper Ware River the Abbott was keen to increase his income at Stanstead. One of the problems at Stanstead was that the watermill on the river Lea was not really powerful enough to produce more flour for a growing London Market. However, the Abbott managed to have his permissions enhanced which allowed him to build a long millstream. [Well over a mile in length.] This provided a watermill at least twice as powerful as any he could have contrived along the natural course of the river. Interestingly the millstream was dug across a corner of the market triangle and the mill building itself partially intruded into the market space. In addition, a considerable area of land on one of the long sides of the market triangle was used for the mill and associated yard and buildings. This suggests that by 1278/9 when the mill was built the market in Stanstead and the Burgesses were a thing of the past. Staying with the Abbott to round off the century we find he gave permission for a chapel to be built on a small plot of land at the end of the 1200s. This location today is now occupied by the Old Clock House, a building which is thought to date from the reign of Elizabeth I.

[For Chapel and Clock House Appendix 6]

FORWARD TO MORE RECENT TIMES

As time passed Stanstead settled down to gently grow as a malting village with other products like flour, meat and tanned hides being produced. Stanstead benefited from improvements to the navigation on the river carried out to benefit the Ware River traffic. This over time reduced travelling time and lowered the cost of transporting produce to London. Stanstead was also helped by investment in its malting industry from the Maltsters of Ware. In addition, malt made in Stanstead could be classed as Ware Malt which attracted a premium price on the London markets. Much of the traffic on the river was carried by Ware based barges with only one or two barge owners usually mentioned as being from Stanstead. Ware itself became increasingly important and was to rise to be the most important malt market in England. In the Victorian period families like the Trumans, Hanburys and Buxtons were to create large vertical businesses with financial interests in one form or another from the agricultural fields of Hertfordshire to the public houses of London. As for Hertford it declined in importance so much that a later writer describing the town in the C14th as having; *“been of greater state than now..... and has been most robbed of her glory by Ware’s advancement”*. Hertford suffered another blow when towards the end of Queen Elizabeth’s reign, the royal family lost interest in Hertford Castle and the town no longer benefited financially from royal visits nor the holding of parliament in Hertford when plagues drove them out of London.

Hertford’s fortunes began to revive when the Hertford to Ware navigation was greatly improved in the 1740s. The railway arrived to serve Stanstead, Ware and Hertford in 1843 and was to boost commercial activity in all three places. By the end of the Victorian period Ware’s place as an important malting town had waned and Hertford’s fortunes were on the rise. All three places have seen a very large increase in commuting to London and populations have increased quite dramatically. Hertford has now got more Households than Ware and as in 1086 is once again considered the more important town. Meanwhile Stanstead remains a pleasant village and has amazingly retained one of its maltings which even Ware has not managed to do.

Stuart Moye January 2023

Appendix

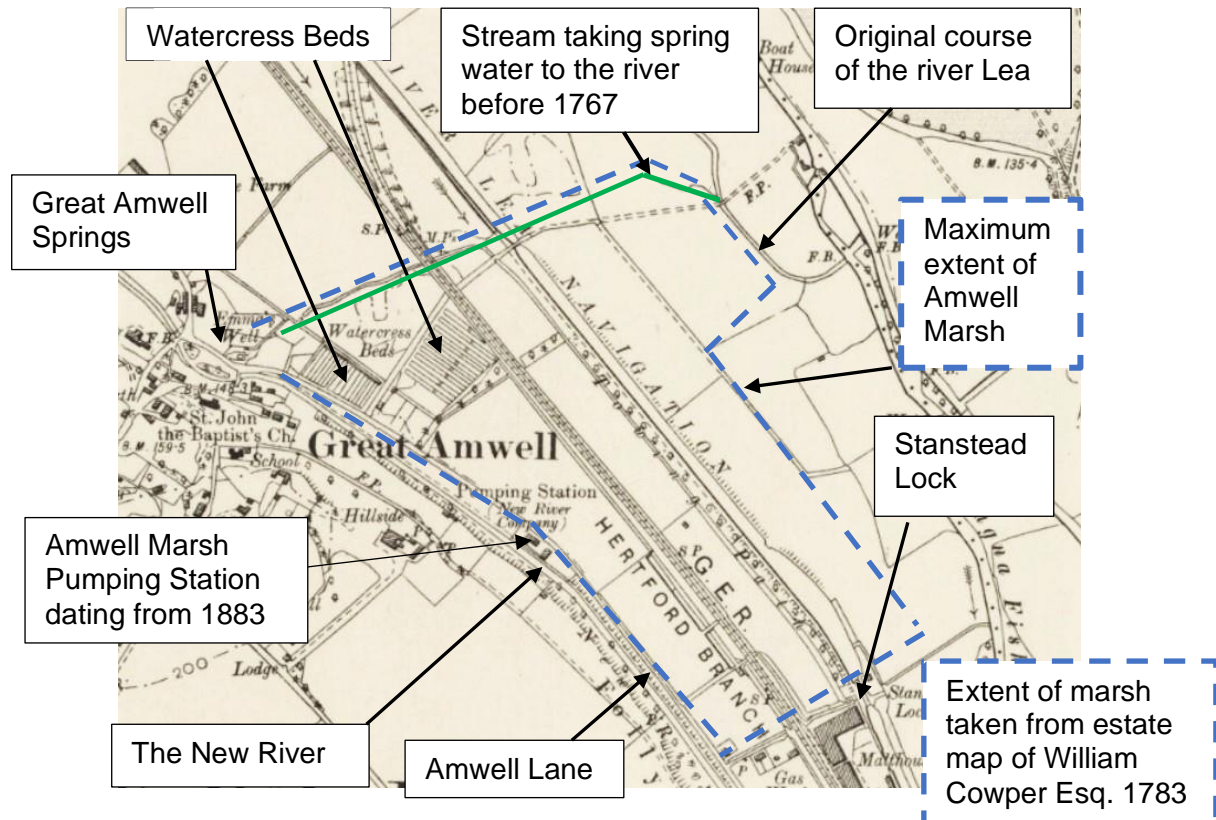
1 Amwell Marsh

In the distant past and up to the early 1800s a considerable area of the Lea Valley flood plain between Stanstead and Great Amwell church was a marsh. Two springs at Amwell which did not feed into the New River, after it came into use in 1613, still supplied considerable extra water into both the water table and via a stream into the River Lea. This provided sufficient water to maintain Amwell Marsh all year round with considerable surface water present in the winters. The extent of the marsh before 1613 covered a greater area as water from all four major springs at Amwell were issuing their water into the water table and the River Lea. The marsh was used for seasonal pasture for cattle and horses. A scheme to drain Amwell Marsh took place in the 1850s along with a wider scheme to improve the navigation. This included the removal of Amwell Marsh Lock and the building of Stanstead Lock a short distance downstream.

Historically The springs at Amwell and those at Chadwell provided a large volume [millions of gallons daily] of water pouring from the chalk bedrock out onto the surface, much of which ended up in the river Lea. This meant that even in early times the river Lea benefited from this regular all year-round supply of additional water, independent of the frequency of rainfall. This was an important contributing factor which allowed Ware and Stanstead to benefit from reliable navigation on the natural course of the Lea down to London. Hertford being upstream of these major springs did not benefit from this additional water. Ware and Stanstead may have greatly benefitted economically from the reliable navigation but the extra water made both places more vulnerable to flooding.

The early 1880s was a time when Amwell Marsh had fairly recently benefited from a drainage scheme. We have a contemporary account of Amwell Marsh from those times written by Mary Mylne [1814-1903]. She was the granddaughter of the architect William Chadwell Mylne who spent many of her summers in the 1820s and 1830s in Great Amwell. She wrote “*The marsh was open to villagers in certain months of the year for horses and cows who would come up to for milking, when boys of the different farms would call them by different tunes. The common rights to graze animals in the marsh were known locally as the leaze. In the month of February, it was always under water. On the far side of Amwell Marsh was the Amwell Magna Fishery which was founded in 1831.*”

In the 1950s Jean Mylne added more recent observations to her Great Aunts earlier writing. “*Between the Lower Road [Amwell Lane] and the river Lea were the marshlands, now under cultivation, having been drained a hundred years ago*” She also related that in her Great Aunt’s day the Amwell Magna Fishery was known as the Fishery House, then a quaint and picturesque wooden building. At one time the keeper was called Mr Fish and he married a Miss Salmon from the Pint Pot [the George IV Inn]



Before the construction of the Lea Navigation in the 1760s surface water from the springs in Amwell flowed along a stream across the flood plain to the river. Its approximate position is indicated by the green line on the map. The navigation cut through this channel and water from the springs was directed into the new channel. The chalk aquifer water supply to the springs and the water table remained at historic levels until the 1820s when extraction of water by pumping water up from deep underground started to reduce the water supply to the springs and the water table. By the end of the 1800s this depletion of the underground water supply caused Amwell Spring and even Chadwell spring to occasionally dry up.

In the 1850s Amwell Marsh was the subject of a drainage scheme which was to reduce the level of the water table sufficiently to allow it to be put to more productive agricultural use. It will be noted on the map that the excess water from Amwell springs was put to good use with the development of water cress beds close to the springs. Amwell Marsh Pumping Station opened in 1883 and was one of many such pumping stations. As more and more water was being pumped from underground the supply of water at the springs reduced further and the water cress beds were turned into a smallholding in the mid C20th.

The marsh is remembered today in the name of Amwell Marsh Pumping station. When bird watchers make their way from Amwell Lane to the bird sanctuary they walk along Amwell Marsh Lane and pass over the railway by using Marsh Lane level crossing. Neither have a sign to give their origins away and one suspect few people realise as they walk down the far side of Amwell Marsh bridge and out into the bird sanctuary that they have just traversed an ancient marsh.

2 Population figures from the Domesday Book

It is very difficult to use the Domesday book to calculate a figure for the population of a place as many people were not counted including those living in castles, monks, and nuns. Calculations have been done to estimate the population of England with the Domesday Book as a starting point. Various methods have returned values between 1.25 and 2 million people. However, the generally accepted estimation of the population in Roman Times is approximately 4 million. Opinion is divided on how such a discrepancy can be explained. Others point to the large volcanic eruptions that took place in 536 and 541 causing crop failures for several years and subsequent starvation and deaths. In addition, the second event coincided with the Plague of Justinian [The first recorded outbreak of the Bubonic Plague], which swept across the known world between 541 and 549. Estimates of the death in some areas are in the range of 50 to 60% of the population. This is perhaps a partial explanation for such a drastic drop in the population of England between 410 and 1086. Things being made worse by a cold period of time up until the 750s with many poor years giving rise to poor harvests starvation and many early deaths.

The calculation used for estimating the population in 1086 involved multiplying the no. of Households by 5 then adding 20%. This gives Ware with 125 households a population of about 750 persons, Hertford with 146 Burgesses 880 people and Stanstead with 30 Households gives about 180 people. This is a widely used calculation which is thought to give a general guide to populations for places in the Domesday Book.

Robert Kiln and Clive Partridge suggested a more realistic population for Hertford from the Domesday information could be calculated by multiplying the number of Burgesses 146 by 7 and then doubling to give an estimated population of about 2000 people in total instead of the 880 as shown in the table on page three above. Hertford in Domesday shows the number of Burgesses rather than the number of households as in other places thus requiring a different approach to assessing the true population.

3 Burgesses

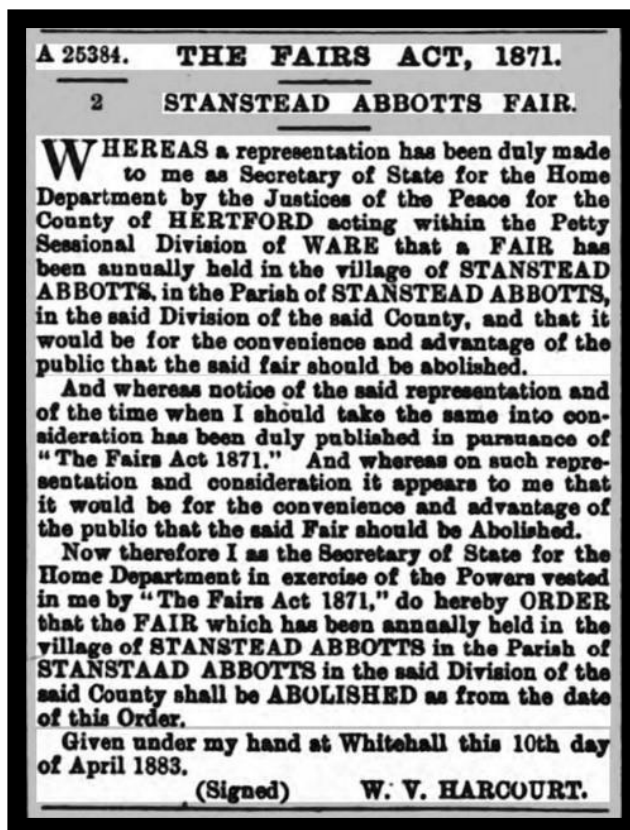
Burgesses had to be to be a Freeman and were tenants of the Lord. They paid rent in cash rather than providing services for the Lord. They were entitled to practice a trade and usually had a burgage plot fronting on to the market place. This location gave them a permanent spot in the market and were not reliant on a temporary market stall. The Burgesses were a key part of an organised town and market and had responsibilities for which they were rewarded with privileged tenure and other benefits. One of their main functions was to organise and regulate trade. They would also have other privileged tenure in the fields giving them a range of types of land. The Domesday Book relates that the Burgesses at Stanstead collectively paid *"23 shillings per year with customary dues of the meadows and woodland"*.

4 Market Places and Burgage plots

It is often thought that Burgage plots were long thin plots of land which had a small frontage onto the market place. This is true for the planned market towns which were either built from scratch as new towns or as at Ware an extension to the existing town to escape the confines of the original site. In older sites or where space was limited burgage plots were fitted in where space allowed perhaps around an existing green or a widening of a road that was developed into a market place by the Lord. It is envisaged that Stanstead was of this kind with the triangular market placed at the meeting of roads at the end of the causewayed cross-valley road. The nearest place to the river crossing and wharfage on the river that was above the level of the regular floods. In some places the land held under privileged tenure were just out in the fields. This was usually in places where crops like hay formed the primary agricultural output and a market place was not really required. This was clearly not the not the case at Stanstead.

5 Markets and Fairs

Ware has been mentioned as having both a chartered market and permission for an annual fair. There is no record of Stanstead ever being granted either of these things. However, there are many places where we only know of an early market because a request was submitted later for a long-standing market. The need for paperwork to underpin a Lord of the Manors ownership and grant of permissions like a market became important when Edward I carried out his Quo Warrento investigations in the late 1200s. This focused minds on the fact that they may have to prove their ownerships and privileges in the future. In the case of Stanstead, it seems the need for a market charter may have arisen after the market had in fact closed. No evidence has so far been found for the granting of an annual fair at Stanstead. The 1883 document below does however reveal that Stanstead did hold an annual fair up until the 1880s.



Unfortunately, when this fair in Stanstead began and why it was granted is yet to be discovered. It would be nice to think of course that it dated from the time when Stanstead had a market. It is possible that this fair was held in later years on the Town Mead. [Located on the land occupied by the High Street car park and the residential houses between it and the High Street].

Of additional interest is that in 1281 a grant for a Thursday market was made, to be held in Thele [St Margarets] just across the river from Stanstead. At the same time permission for an annual fair was given to take place on the vigil, the feast and the morrow of St John the Baptist and for the six days following. Little else is currently known about the success, failure or longevity of this market or fair. Was it perhaps an attempt to create a local market once the one at Stanstead had closed, we may never know.

6 Chapel and the Clock House

A chapel is mentioned as being built in Stanstead in the late C13th This chapel required permission from the Abbot of Waltham and is documented in the Harlean [Harl] Archive. MS. 4809 (Catulary of Waltham), folio 151b. The entry explains that "**John** son of John son of Robertus Clericus granted licence from the Abbott to build a chapel in honour of the Virgin Mary in Stanstead".

A former vicar of Stanstead called Robert is recorded in the records of Waltham Abbey as being in post in the 1220's and had owned land in the parish at that time. One wonders if this was John's grandfather and a special connection with Stanstead prompted the building of the chapel.

This chapel was built on a small rectangle of land carefully chosen so that the chapel aligned east to west. This plot of land is currently occupied by the Clock House which itself occupied the minimal rectangle of land for much of its long existence. The Clock House is thought to date from the mid to late C16th [Elizabethan] and became the Grammar School in 1636. {Architectural experts have suggested that the construction of the Clock House indicates a build date in the reign of Elizabeth I [1558 – 1603] Possibly erected to the orders of the first Sir Edward Baeshe who became Lord of the manor in 1577 until his death in 1587 or his son Ralph 1587 to 1598. Sir Edward's grandson the 2nd Sir Edward Baeshe opened a Free Grammar school in this building in 1636. {Date of signing school deed}. He died on 12th May 1653 { This date sometimes given as the opening of Grammar School due to the Baeshe Charity being formalised in perpetuity within his will thus leaving behind a legacy that persists to this day } Interestingly Sir Edward permitted the school to be used as a chapel on Sundays. Quite an important consideration for the young and the frail as the parish church was over a mile away.



The picture shows a 2014 view of the Clock House in Stanstead Abbots. It sits on what was once a very restricted site aligned east to west. East being at the far end of the building in this view. The odd angle which the building makes with the road footpath and wall was created when part of the triangular open space was fenced off to be part of residential gardens in the 1860s. The small plot of land surrounding the building was enlarged in the C20th.

RELATED ARTICLES

The following articles on this website by the same author may be of further interest.

- 1, Changes to Stanstead Abbots old village centre 1820 to 1870
2. Back in time at the top of the High Street

S Moye January 2023