

SHRINKAGE OF SETTLEMENT IN STEVENTON, BERKSHIRE (NOW OXON), 1380–1560

By C.R.J. CURRIE

Introduction

For a century or more historians have debated the extent, chronology, and regional variation of late-medieval population decline, while for several decades archaeologists have investigated deserted and severely shrunken medieval villages in the ‘central province’ of England (Roberts and Wrathmell 2000), and other settlement types in and outside it. Nevertheless, large nucleated villages in the central province that shrank in the later middle ages but expanded again later, especially when on much the same footprint, may not be identified as shrunken from map and fieldwork evidence alone, and archaeological investigation can be difficult; Taylor showed the risks of speculative reconstruction of plan development on incomplete evidence (Taylor 1985). Given exceptional documentation, historians have been able to make speculative reconstructions of pre-1400 village plans. At the extreme north of the central province, Campey restored and analysed 16 village plans in Durham, showing that the presence of early freeholds underlay the more complex layouts (Campey 1989). Merton College’s rich muniments enabled reconstructed plans of Cuxham, Oxon (Harvey 1965; Harvey 1985) and of Kibworth Harcourt, Leics; the latter study reconstructed the topography speculatively from 1086 and more precisely from 1484, taking account of shrinkage (Howell 1983). In recent years systematic large-scale fieldwork has been undertaken in the Midlands to establish among other things the relationship between settlement type and degree of shrinkage, and the parts of settlements that were lost (Lewis *et al.* 1997; 2001; Lewis 2005–9; Page and Jones 2006). Documentary work on large surviving villages, of the kind undertaken in this paper, underlies many Victoria County History (VCH) parish histories written since the 1960s, but is very seldom explicit there and has generally been ignored by later writers (Christie and Stamper 2012). The present investigation, based on documentary evidence of extensive abandonment of individual plots in the later middle ages, results paradoxically from detailed study of a village known for its exceptionally *large* number of surviving medieval vernacular buildings, including, also exceptionally, several peasant houses dating from between the 1290s and 1360s. Steventon has been in Oxfordshire since 1974 but was in Berkshire during the period studied.

The study arose out of work undertaken in 2010–12 by N.W. Alcock, C.K.C. Currie and others to establish tenurial histories of medieval houses in Steventon village for a collaborative project on the medieval peasant house in the Midlands (Alcock and Currie 2011; 2013a; 2013b;

Alcock and Miles 2013). It proved necessary to trace the history not only of plots on which medieval houses still stand but those where later houses had been built or which were still vacant in the 19th century. The main sources, manor court records and surveys, are listed in the bibliography and discussed in recent publications (Currie 2013; Alcock and Currie 2013a; 2013b). Other documents, including parish registers, probate and equity-suit records were used, especially to fill the 17th-century lacunae in the court records.

Like Seacourt a few miles to the north (Biddle 1962), Steventon had previously been supposed to result wholly from 12th- or 13th-century regular linear replanning with a back street (Currie 1976). This is Bond’s ‘simplest form’, which may have affected some other villages in the area (e.g. Long Wittenham), besides those with irregular cores and planned extensions (Bond 1985; Currie 1992, 86–7). In fact, Steventon’s regular plan appears superimposed on extensive earlier elements, which themselves survived for two or three centuries until they were almost completely eliminated by late-medieval shrinkage. Those elements are discussed below in the Conclusion.

Steventon

Location, geology, soils

Steventon (SU 47 92) lies south of Abingdon in the Vale of White Horse. Though geographically in the eastern Vale, Steventon’s soils are more like those of the western zone than the more fertile east (see Cottis 1985; Jarvis 1973; Glasscock 1975). Steventon parish is mostly on heavy clay soils, with only a small area of fertile Upper Greensand in the south. Like its soils, its peasant tenures, with relatively little freehold, were more like those of townships in the western vale studied by Yates (2007) than most eastern-vale townships (for those, see Currie 1992; Cottis 1985). As elsewhere in the vale, the village’s land lay in open fields, finally inclosed as late as 1885 (VCH4, 365)¹. The manor farm, however, seems to have been mostly consolidated by 1216 and had been inclosed by 1757 (Currie 1976, 29, 31, map 8).

Manorial history

Steventon was unusual among Vale parishes in that it had only one manor, conterminous with the parish. Held by Earl Harold Godwinson in January 1066, it passed to the Crown. Henry I (d. 1135) gave it in 1121 to the Norman priory of Pré, a cell of Bec, which established a non-conventual cell at Steventon with a prior and (in peacetime) another resident monk. During the French

wars from 1294 onwards it was repeatedly taken into Crown hands. In transactions from 1378 to 1399 it passed through four successive lords to Westminster Abbey. The abbey and its successors held the manor until the nineteenth century, except briefly after the Dissolution and during the Interregnum (VCH4, 367; Currie 1976, 21–8).

Tithings; peasant tenures

The lords of the manor held view of frankpledge, and for that jurisdiction Steventon was divided between two tithings, called Eastsyde and Westsyde in 1382² but thereafter always Eastend and Westend. At the view, separate presentments were made for the tithings until the early 16th century.

In the later Middle Ages Steventon had a few freeholds (discussed below), but the great majority of peasant holdings were held by customary tenure, and in our period by copy of court roll. Because the Crown had held the manor at Domesday, the customary tenants were sokemen of ancient demesne³, a status that supposedly limited increases in their services. Admissions were normally to the tenant *et heredibus et assignatis suis*, and from 1399 the copyholds were always heritable. Entry fines for standard holdings seem to have been themselves fairly standard from the 1280s until a drastic change in the land market beginning in the 1430s (Currie 2013; and below), normally £4 for a yardland (virgate) and £2 for a half-yardland, low rates for the eastern vale but high for the western (Currie 2013; Yates 2007). Most labour services were commuted some time between 1307 and 1382, and rents for standard tenements were standardized at 13s 4d a virgate (Currie 2013; Currie 1976). The numbers of tenants in the 13th and 14th centuries are discussed below.

Economy

The economy was mainly agricultural. Two open fields, North and South, mentioned from 1324, stretched north of the village to the parish boundary (Currie 1976, 28–30, maps 5 and 8; TM)⁴. A third area of open field, ‘the Heath’, on the hill south of the village (about SU473 915) – its only patch of fertile greensand – seems to have been rotated with South field. The manor farm southwest of the village seems to have been consolidated by 1216 and lay outside the common fields (Currie 1976). Medieval farming systems probably followed the local pattern of mixed but predominantly arable farming with relatively high yields of barley (Currie 2013). There was little permanent pasture; common pasture, especially of cows, was stinted probably long before 1382 (the court rolls contain no stinting ordinances before the first mention in 1439 of cowleases, which were part of standard tenements and only mentioned specifically from when those were beginning to break up⁵; at nearby Harwell, with more pasture than Steventon, it was stinted by the mid-13th century⁶. Winter sheep pasture was further regulated in 1434⁷. After 1350, however, a cloth-finishing industry developed, apparently on a large scale by the 1390s, and it seems to have flourished until the early 1430s, declining sharply thereafter. Its decline may have been accelerated by pollution of watercourses by tanners, noted from 1433 until 1522 (Currie 2013).

Evidence for population and tenement numbers in the 13th, 14th, and early 15th centuries

In 1086, 38 *villani* and 28 bordars were listed on Steventon manor. This already large number of tenants had increased by the late 13th century. Altogether 77 customary tenants were named in a lawsuit of 1281, besides 11 tenants at will, holding on the same terms as the others. In 1294 there were said to be 63 customary tenants holding 77 yardlands, and in 1324 allegedly 33 yardlanders, 22 half-yardlanders and 9 cottagers, perhaps an underestimate (discussed in Currie 2013). Comparison of tax assessments with those of neighbouring vills (Fig. 1, based on subsidy assessments) suggests that Steventon’s population may have held up well in the late 14th century; in the earliest surviving poll-tax assessment, that of 1381, there were 171 taxpayers, in apparently 80 households. Given the likelihood of evasion, this must be regarded as a minimum estimate, so that the number of households was little, if at all, lower than the number of manorial tenants a century earlier. Despite any effects of the plagues of 1349, 1361, and later, of 36 tenements changing hands between 1382 and 1399 only four were composite, and of those the largest consisted of two messuages (houses) and half-yardlands, though a larger composite holding was recorded in 1404 and another in 1426. Conversely, after 1400 one or two house-and-yardland holdings were split into moieties (Currie 1976, 86–9, 99–105)⁸.

Chevage payments provide further evidence of Steventon’s vitality until the 1420s. Chevage here, as on a few other manors (Fox 1996, 528), was charged *not* on out-migrating serfs but on incomers. Not mentioned in records of customs of 1281 and *c.* 1307 (WAM 7301)⁹, it may even have been introduced during the growth of the cloth-finishing trade, to police lodgers. The court leet levied a ‘capon’ (in cash) a year on each newcomer (*caponarius*) who wished to remain in the vill without being sworn into one of the two tithings. Most were probably servants, as certainly in 1446¹⁰, either in husbandry (Fox 1996, 560) or industry. The tax is recorded in most years where court rolls survive from the 1380s until 1422, then about every two years until 1432, after which it lapsed until briefly revived in 1446 and 1447. Figure 2 shows the average number of caponaries per decade: after declining in the 1390s it peaked in the 1410s. If in-migration is a rough proxy for population pressure, that may then have been but little lower than a century before. The steep fall from the late 1420s suggests a decline in economy and population, reflected in the leet’s declining interest in enforcing the levy.

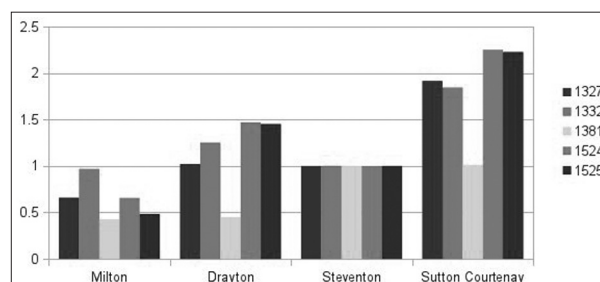


Figure 1 Tax payers in neighbouring vills relative to Steventon.

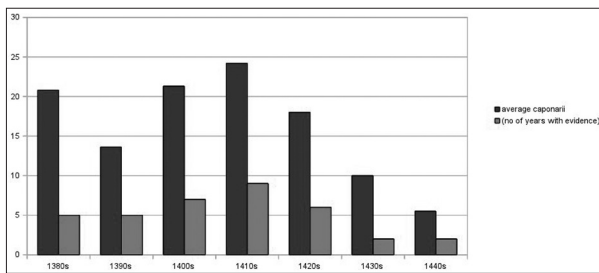


Figure 2 Payers of chevage for right to reside at Steventon. (Gaps 1380s, 90s rolls (i.e. absence of evidence); record stops 1433–45, 1447+ (perhaps evidence of absence).)

Certainly Steventon's relative decline between 1381 and the mid 1520s, when 32 (1524) or 31 (1525) were assessed to the subsidy, compared with 47 taxpayers in 1327, was sharper than its neighbours' (Fig. 1).

Freehold messuages

Though large freeholds had existed in the thirteenth century, the two largest had been sold, or escheated, to the prior before 1281, and were in the late 13th century let to tenants at will. In 1324, two freeholders with undertenants, and three smaller freeholders, were listed¹¹. Freehold rents of 48s recorded in 1400 may have included those paid by undertenants of Farthing in East Hendred, which had passed with Steventon to Westminster Abbey (Currie 2013). Freehold is harder to trace in the court rolls than copyhold, since its transfer was only recorded at the death and inheritance of a tenant, when a relief was payable. Neither freehold conveyances *inter vivos*, nor beneficial inheritance of freehold previously conveyed to feoffees, were normally recorded. Because of the ready alienability of freehold, freehold house-plots could become detached, as also in the western vale (Yates 2007) from their fieldland, small pieces of which often descended with copyhold houses. Two substantial freehold farms survived through the 15th and 16th centuries, but in the mid 16th century surveys only two or three houses were freehold, though 16 tenants had some freehold land¹² (Currie 1976: 30, 66–8, 226). Some house-plots shifted between freehold and copyhold tenure. In the later 16th century the manorial steward interrupted some attempts to pass off copyhold as freehold¹³ but because of the peculiarities of the Steventon land market, and post-Interregnum confusion, some freehold house-plots that descended with adjoining copyholds came to be regarded as copyhold (STE-A, STE-E; TM 7¹⁴). Sites of freeholds are discussed below.

General evidence for copyhold settlement shrinkage in the manorial records

References to tofts in the court rolls

A toft is the house-plot on which a house was built, typically associated with the enclosed arable 'croft' behind it. In late-medieval documentation, however, 'toft' was often used to mean a house-plot from

which the house (and probably any other building) had disappeared, and in many areas seems to be the normal term for such a plot in contrast to 'messuage', the normal term for a standing house, so that settlement shrinkage can sometimes be traced through references to tofts. All occurrences of this term in Steventon court rolls before 1664 are listed in context in Table 1. They are remarkably rare, being found in only 8 out of over 2000 property transfers, even if that numbered 4 in the table is not a misreading. Except for no 8, which is very late and isolated (as well as half-hearted), they are all concentrated between 1389 and 1432. A particular toft is never mentioned a second time: there is no sequence of transfers of an individual 'toft', with or without a holding or other farmland. The earliest examples (1 and 2) are of property that has fallen into the lord's hands, because the heir was not immediately identified. As soon as regranted, the toft was redescribed as a messuage. In theory, the lord could have rebuilt the house of toft no. 1 while it was in hand, but we know that a house on toft no. 2 was not rebuilt before becoming a 'messuage' again, because account rolls survive. Moreover this grant occurs in a period when the lord was contracting with tenants for them to build or rebuild houses on particular plots (Currie 2013); in the absence of such a contract, it is unlikely that the tenant had rebuilt it before being granted it. Later-mentioned tofts either become described as messuages again (3, 4, 8) or disappear completely, the farmland being transferred with no mention of the house (6 and 7). (The case of Plecys, no 5, is complex, but 3 houses, and indeed the 3 yardlands, are never mentioned together again). This evidence indicates that *the standard term in Steventon documents for an empty house-plot, if mentioned at all, after the 1430s was 'messuage'*: the terminology does not distinguish reliably between occupied and unoccupied houses. Even so, the table does establish that at least six copyhold houses had vanished by 1436, and a seventh by 1519.

House swapping; land market changes

Yates has shown that in West Berkshire, the standard peasant holdings – a house and yardland, or house and half-yardland – persisted until the 17th century (2007, 176): larger copyhold farms, temporary or permanent, might be built up of multiple holdings, but the core units were not permitted to be subdivided; rents were assessed on these holdings, not calculated per acre. The same restriction on subdivision is also found further east, as at Bishop's Harwell (Currie 2013). Harvey showed that Westminster Abbey usually imposed it on its manors, wherever located, until the Dissolution (1977, 300). Similarly at Kibworth Harcourt in Leicestershire, despite important early-15th-century tenurial changes, the separation of houses from holdings was delayed until the late 15th century (Howell 1983, 50–3, 60). In the late 14th and early 15th century the restriction on subdivision was clearly enforced at Steventon; apart from cottage tenements, transfers of property by death or sale consisted of house-and-yardland and house-and-half-yardland units. Holdings, as seen above, had largely standardized rents and entry fines. Already by the 1380s, however, tenants by copy could exchange in court, for a standard fine, arable strips of notionally equal sizes

Table 1 *Steventon: references to tofts in context*

Date	Month	Toft no.	Adm	From	To	Property	Fine	Ref WAM
1389	12 Mar	1	C2391	Death Agnes Han/ukyn	Lord - In hand	1 toft and ½ v	Heriot 15d	7261, rot 13
1398	18 June	1 [not clear where other ½ v comes from]	C2426	Lord	Thos Hankyn or Haukyn, and his [suis]	1 messuage 1 v called Han/ukyn, for ancient services	£4 0s 0d	7261, rot 24
1412	17 May	2	C2347	Late Maud w of Wm Reed	Lord - In hand	1 toftes & ½ v		7262, rot 47
1412	3 Nov	2 [No evidence of rebuilding in account roll 1411-12 (WAM 7459)]	C2350	[late Maud Reed]	John Reed, son & heir of Maud	1 messuage ½ v	40s	7262, rot 48d
1415	5 Feb	3	C2117	Surrender of Rob Pynnok	John Smart	1 toft and ½ v called Wylmotes	40s	7263, rot 5
1420	24 Apr	3	C2167	Surrender of John Smart	Wm Wellys	1 messuage ½ v once called Wylmotes	40s	7263, rot 16d
1421	9 Jan	Cf 4	C2174	Death John Bartolot	Ric Longe son & heir	1 mess 1 v called Longes	£4 0s 0d; Heriot horse 8s	7263, rot 21 (loose), m 2
1421	9 Jan	4	C2175	Death John Bartolot	Ric Longe son & heir	1 tenement [or toft] and ½ v once Wm Longes	40s; heriot 15d	7263, rot 21 (loose), m 2
1437	2 May	Cf 4 [nb intermediate leases etc before]	C2002	Surrender of Ric Long	Ric Doo	2 messuage 1½ v	Respited till Ric Long's death	7264, rot 27
1426	16 Apr	5	C1885	Surrender of Rob Plecy of Kintebury	John Dyke & Alice his wife	2 messuage 1 toft and 3 v called Plecyes	£12 0s 0d	7264, rot 5d
		Cf 5		Later	Plecyes	Split, but toft not mentioned again		
1432	23 June	6	C1937	Surrender of Rob Andrew, teste Ric Doo, bailiff of liberty	Thos Ffelmonger	1 toft and 1 v called Wyllestevenys	Respited till Rob's death	7264, rot 17d
1438	26 May	Cf 6	C2018	[Death Rob Andrewe]	Thos Felmonger	Fine for 1 v land bought earlier by copy, payable on Rob's death	£4 0s 0d	7264, rot 29d
1432	23 June	7	C1938	Surrender of Rob [or Ric] Andrew	Ric Atwyke	1 toft 1 v called Davyls	Respited till Rob's death	7264, rot 17d
1438	26 May	Cf 7	C2007	[Death Rob Andrew]	John Bole	1 v. To pay formerly respited fine	£4 0s 0d	7264, rot 29
1519	10 May	8	C851	Surrender of Alice Ffeld	Thos Pledel	1 messuage alias 1 toft	ng	7412, rot 11d
1528	3 Nov	Cf 8	C935	Death Thos Pledell	Wm Pledell son & heir	1 messuage and 4 a as by ct_ Hen 8	5s	7412, rot 21

(acres and half-acres), without affecting the net rent of either holding.

It is therefore very surprising to find that from 1439 Westminster Abbey, contrary to its own and to local custom, abandoned the restriction on subdivision at Steventon, creating a market for small parcels of land (Currie 2013). Somewhat earlier, tenants had been allowed to exchange messuages (houses), so that A's house would be held thereafter with B's yardland, and

vice versa (Table 2). The first such exchange was in 1406, when Thomas Goryng exchanged his house (probably in the East end)¹⁵ with John Smyth Atte Yate for a house on the site of nos 79–81 the Causeway (SU 4673 9171; TM 17 and 18; STE-I) it was explicitly stated that that house would be held with Goring's yardland in future¹⁶. After a twenty-year lull, an exchange of a house for a croft was allowed in 1428. From 1429 to 1441 altogether six house-for-house and 11 house-for fieldland exchanges

Table 2 *Steventon: exchanges of houses, 1428-41*

Year	Date	Ref.	Nature of exchange	Vendor	Premises	Former tenant	Fine	WAM
1428	26 Apr	C1904	House swap to Wm Grete	Ric Wyke	1 mess once belonging to ½ v called Colynbakeres [but cf above] between mess of John Hattere to E and mess of Wm Grete to W, [ie Grete doubles up]		10d	7264, rot 11
1428	26 Apr	C1905	House swap to Ric Wyke	Wm Grete	for croft in Eastcroft		10d	7264, rot 11
1429	18 Nov	C1906	[house swap] Ric Wyche and Catherine his w	Thos Ffelmonger	1 mess, 1 a, 2 x ½ a in exchange for [see below] [all part of one transaction]			7264, rot 12
1429	18 Nov	C1907	[house swap] Thos Ffelmonger	S Ric Wyche and Cath his w	1 mess and 2 a once called Robert Sutton's [all part of one transaction]	Rob Sutton	6s 8d	7264, rot 12
1429	18 Nov	C1908	[house swap] Thos Ffelmonger	QC John Lyford, wever of Abingdon, and Isabel his w dau & h of Rob Sutton	Ack knowing sd mess and 2 a once called Sutton, and qc to Ffelmonger . F gives Lyford 40s for qc [all part of one transaction]	Rob Sutton		7264, rot 12
1431	15 Nov	C1930	House swap to John Bryghtelton	Walter Elyot clerk/	1 mess and 1 ½ a parcel of Gaylehornys		3s 4d	7264, rot 16d
1431	15 Nov	C1931	House swap to Walter Elyot clerk	John Bryghtelton	for 1 other mess and 1 ½ a called Ffelmongers		As above	7264, rot 16d
1432	23 June	C1935	House swap to Thos Grete	Wm Baker	1 Mess called Bakers		nr	7264, rot 17d
1432	23 June	C1936	House swap to Wm Baker	Thos Grete	1 a		nr	7264, rot 17d
1438	26 May	C2010	House swap to John Pynnocke	John Brightelton	1 mess 1 croft [for below]		12d	7264, rot 29d
1438	26 May	C2011	House swap to John Brightelton	John Pinnock	1 a at Alftesgore [for above]		as above	7264, rot 29d
1438	26 May	C2012	House swap to Ric Smyth	Ric Doo	1 mess late called Bertlotes next ten of Hen Coke [for below]	Bertelotes	12d	7264, rot 29d
1438	26 May	C2013	House swap to Ric Doo	Ric Smyth	1 a in Gronefurlong [Grove or Grene] [for above]		As above	7264, rot 29d
1438	26 May	C2014	House swap to Wm Wodebyrne	Wm Justice	1 mess late Steph Chapman's [for below]	Steph Chapman	nr	7264, rot 29d
1438	26 May	C2015	House swap to Wm Justice	Wm Wodebyrne	1 a [for above]		nr	7264, rot 29d
1438	8 Dec	C2024	[Cancelled house swap]	[Ric Webbe/John Shepard]	1 mess called Shepartemes & ½ a for 1 a and 1 a 'veat quia fals'			7264, rot 30, m 1
1438	8 Dec	C2025	House swap to Rob Clere	Thos Townesende	1 mess called Halmonnees for below		12d	7264, rot 30, m 1
1438	8 Dec	C2026	House swap to Thos Townsende	Rob Clere	1 a for above		As above	7264, rot 30, m 1
1438	8 Dec	C2028	House swap to London	Wm Doo and Agnes his w	1 mess called Hankyns [? Haukyns?]		nr	7264, rot 30, m 1
1438	8 Dec	C2029	House swap to Wm doo & Agnes his w	London [prob John]	1 a		nr	7264, rot 30, m 2
1438	8 Dec	C2031	House swap to John Brayne	Nich Chapman	1 mess called Edwardes		nr	7264, rot 30, m 2

1438	8 Dec	C2032	House swap to Nich Chapman	John Brayne	L and for above	nr	7264, rot 30, m 2
1438	8 Dec	C2033	House swap to John Brayne	Wm Justice	Mess once John at Yates for below	nr	7264, rot 30, m 2
1438	8 Dec	C2034	House swap to Wm Justice	John Brayne	1 a for above	nr	7264, rot 30, m 2
1438	8 Dec	C2035	House Swap to ? John Brayne	John Shepard	1 mess called Sheparden mess and ½ a for below	12d	7264, rot 30, m 2
1438	8 Dec	C2036	House swap to John Shepard	? John Brayne	1 a for above	As above	7264, rot 30, m 2
1439	4 May	C2049	House swap to John London	John Hegan	Mess called L... for below	6d	7264, rot 32
1439	4 May	C2050	House swap to John Hegan	John London	½ a for above	As above	7264, rot 32
1439	4 May	C2051	House swap to Ric Doo	Wm Prince	1 mess and appurts called Prynce mees for below	6d	7264, rot 32
1439	4 May	C2052	House swap to Wm Prince	Ric Doo	½ a for above	As above	7264, rot 32
1440	30 May	C2056	House swap to John Brayn	Hen Cook & Alice his w	1 mess, 9 a [details]	9s	7264, rot 33
1440	30 May	C2057	House swap to Hen Cook & Alice his w	John Brayn	2 mess and 9 a called Popes and Weresdales	As above	7264, rot 33
1440	30 May	C2060	House swap to Ralph Bydell	Ric Doo	1 mess called John Jones for below	20d	7264, rot 33d
1440	30 May	C2061	House swap to Ric Doo	Ralph Bydell	Another mess called Bartelottes [beware! There are two!] for above	As above	7264, rot 33d
1441	29 May	C2073	House swap to Ric Justice sen	Wm Justice	1 mess for below	12d	7264, rot 35
1441	29 May	C2074	House swap to Wm Justice	Ric Justice sen	1 a for above	As above	7264, rot 35
1441	29 May	C2087	House swap to Wm Justice	Ric Justice sen	1 mess next ten of Wm Justice to S and per via into le myddy/croftys to N [for below]	12d	7264, rot 35d
1441	29 May	C2088	House swap to Ric Justice sen	Wm Justice	1 a for above	As above	7264, rot 35d

were made. A house seems normally to have been made equivalent to an acre of fieldland, and the entry fine for a house-for-house or house-for-acre exchange, at 12d, was the same as that normally charged on an exchange of an acre for another¹⁷. Most of the house-plots exchanged for fieldland were probably already derelict. Such house-for-land exchanges may explain the desuetude of the term 'toft' after 1432.

Churchets

From 1460 to 1560 property transfers refer to 'churchets', or, from 1516 sometimes 'churchyates', also found in mid-16th century rentals. The term occurs in relation to up to 15 properties, some of them including two churchets or a half-churchet. Though clearly indicating here a piece of real estate, the term might be related to church-scot or 'cherset'. In Steventon in 1281 cherset was confirmed as a payment of 3 hens and 1 cock at Martinmas from, and only from, each of the customary half-yardlanders¹⁸. Manorial accounts show that in 1399–1400 31 tenants paid, and in 1400–1 32 paid 'a certain rent called churchett' of the required number of poultry¹⁹. Presumably new half-yardlands, formed by splitting old yardlands into two²⁰ should not have been chargeable. But the churchets listed in property transfers are fewer than half the total number of chargeable half-yardlands – so why were they singled out, and why was the term not applied before 1460? The early churchets seem associated with half-yardlands, but sometimes seem to have been units or plots separate from the messuage concerned²¹. Others were mentioned with half-yardlands but no messuages²². Occasionally it was made explicit that some were messuages²³, but mostly that was either assumed or not made clear. Two late freehold churchets, of which one is said to be a cottage and another a 'bordewe' (cottage tenement) seem anomalous²⁴. Possibly the churchets were house-plots of half-yardland tenements that had been detached from their land. Thus a messuage inherited by John Scolys with its half-yardland in 1480²⁵ was described as a churchet when he sold it with only 6 a land in 1489²⁶, although this house and half-yardland holding had originated by division of a house and yardland in 1399²⁷. If this explanation is correct, those churchets that appear to be associated with a messuage and half-yardland in the early 1460s may have been *second* house-plots of the property and thus perhaps already derelict.

Grouped and numbered copyhold messuages in the court rolls

Fourteen instances have been found in the court rolls between 1463 and 1562 where messuages (or occasionally churchets) are referred to as a group, by number (e.g. 'three messuages'), without their individual components being identified, though sometimes located. The components can sometimes be identified in earlier property transfers. Being grouped in this way was clearly the kiss of death for a house. Eight of the copyhold groups, containing 21 messuages, ended by being described as closes or 'land', sometimes after shrinking from a group to 'one' messuage as an intermediate stage. In one case just one messuage survived of the group²⁸; in one other, this may have happened, or both the houses

have disappeared²⁹. A final group looks suspicious at first mention³⁰ (WAM 7412, rot 39).

Two other groups became part of the absentee-owned Dormer estate, sold in lots in 1571; the groups cannot be identified with the substantial houses sold with the lots, but may correspond to two possibly derelict ones, or have emerged as closes. But it is likely that by the time messuages were referred to in anonymous groups in this way, they were already derelict, perhaps particularly when no predecessors of the group can be identified. Altogether, 31 copyhold houses (two originally freehold) formed part of the listed groups, with at most 5 houses emerging in the later 16th century.

Detailed examination of areas of lost houses, while locating those in some of the categories already listed, shows that even more have disappeared. Where were they?

The village plan and the Causeway (Fig. 3)

The recent work has drastically revised earlier understandings of Steventon's medieval topography. The two tithings, East End and West End, with a boundary apparently at High Street (Highway Lane) may, as discussed below, indicate an origin as two settlements, and it will be argued later that Steventon includes elements of an irregular green village (cf. Bond 1985) as well as a medieval planned village. The church (SU 4645 9150; TM 212) stands at the west end and the manor house, later Manor Farm, site of the former alien priory, immediately south of it. East of the church was an area of rectorial glebe (Currie 1976, map 8; Currie 2013) and a tithe barn, which survived into the 18th century. The raised and paved causeway that is the village's most striking feature runs from the church and manor house northeastwards, in three straight alignments along the south side of the green, at its east end veering further northwards to cut across the green (in this paper the Causeway will be treated as aligned west to east; court rolls usually treated it as aligned south to north). On its south side is a long row of rectangular north–south tofts (TM2 TM137), evidently the fruit of deliberate planning; on them stand all but one of the surviving medieval, and most of the early modern, farmhouses, with their crofts behind. This row, and therefore the Causeway (and Milton Lane, its eastern section), existed as a street by 1299, the date of the earliest known surviving house aligned with it, Tudor House, no 67 (SU4676 9174; TM 21; Alcock and Miles 2013, 224, 233); in Milton Lane the Home Farm (SU 4732 9204) contains a wing probably of similar date (Currie 1992, 197–9): the raised path itself, however, was not mentioned until 1404 (Currie 1976, 11): Lanes and streets ran southwards from the Causeway between the houses, from Mill Street in the west to High Street (called Highway Lane in the 17th century)³¹ in the east. The crofts were separated by a further row of closes, by the 19th century mostly aligned east–west, from the Mill Brook. Beyond the Mill Brook and its adjacent closes ran a series of back streets: Cat (later Castle) Street in the west, mentioned in 1420 (Currie 1976, 11), Pugsden Lane in the east, and an intermediate street (not named in the Middle Ages, and partly diverted in 1839 for the railway) from Stocks Lane to Highway Lane. The large closes south of those streets in 1842 were already present in the late Middle

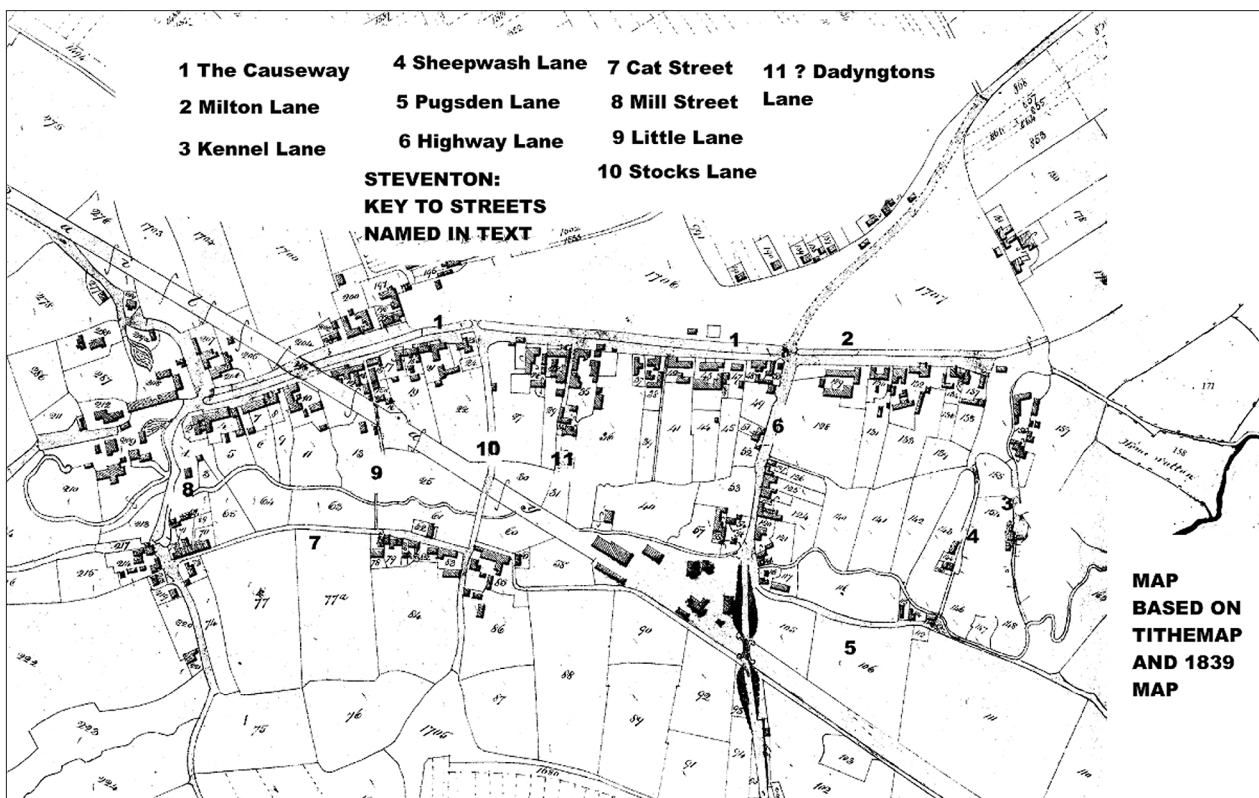


Figure 3 Key to streets named in text. Map based on TM and ORO P238/M/1 (see Bibliography).

Ages or soon after. South of Cat Street, closes TM 77, 77a were called Tun Furlong, indicating that they had been medieval arable, and Pugsden (TM 102–7, 111) was being inclosed in the late 16th century³². The scattered post-medieval houses along Cat Street and Pugsden Lane were mainly cottages or smallholdings (and it was formerly assumed that all the medieval cottages also lay there: Currie 1976, 11). House plots north of the green and of the Causeway date from post-medieval expansion into open arable, although the site of Causeway Farm (SU 4664 9168; TM 200) which existed by 1571³³ may be medieval. The adjoining houses (TM 197–199) were built before 1600³⁴. Stocks Lane Farm (SU 4695 9157; TM 86) was built in the 17th century, probably on a new site (Currie 2013).

It is now clear that the farmhouses of many of the medieval customary yardland and half-yardland holdings lay away from the Causeway, as did most of the ‘burdewes’ or cottage holdings (Currie 2013). These areas are discussed, in relation to shrinkage, in detail below.

Topographical analysis of lost and merged house-plots (Fig. 4)

Location of freehold houses

The sites of 14th-century freehold houses seem to have been mainly in three blocks along the Causeway. The first, of four houses towards the west end of the Causeway, included apparently the eastern part of TM 7³⁵ and more certainly TM 8–9 (the Old Vicarage, SU 4661 9154) and TM 10 (SU4663 9155; two freehold

house-plots combined into one in the 15th century and rebuilt as one house in the earlier 16th: STE-G). A little further east, the surviving TM 15 was freehold (SU 467 917; STE-C). A third block, of three houses, lay in the area of TM 35–37. TM 35 (SU 4692 9182) merged one copyhold and one freehold plot (STE-A); TM 36 and 37 (SU 4699 9186) included, on the Causeway frontage, two freehold plots that had been combined in single ownership apparently by 1428, and a copyhold plot to which they were added before 1467, themselves later becoming copyhold (STE-E). It seems more probable that the three freehold houses had been in a row, flanked by the two copyholds, than that freehold and copyhold plots alternated. Of other freeholds, excluding post-medieval building on freehold fieldland, and enfranchisement of copyhold (hardly noted before the 19th century), there was apparently a freehold cottage at the East End created in 1416 and later absorbed into TM 156 (STE-N); a freehold held by the Cocks family in the 15th century³⁶ and in the 16th is unlocated³⁷, while in Cat Street the post-medieval Old Bakery (SU 4686 9152; TM 62) may have been freehold (Alcock 2011); these last two, even if not the same plot, may not have had houses on their plots in the 16th century. Thus freehold houses were mostly on the Causeway, and half of the freehold houses inferred c. 1400 are later represented by abandoned or merged farmsteads.

Merged copyhold house-plots on the Causeway and Milton Lane

Many of the late-medieval and post-medieval farmsteads along the Causeway each cover the sites of several

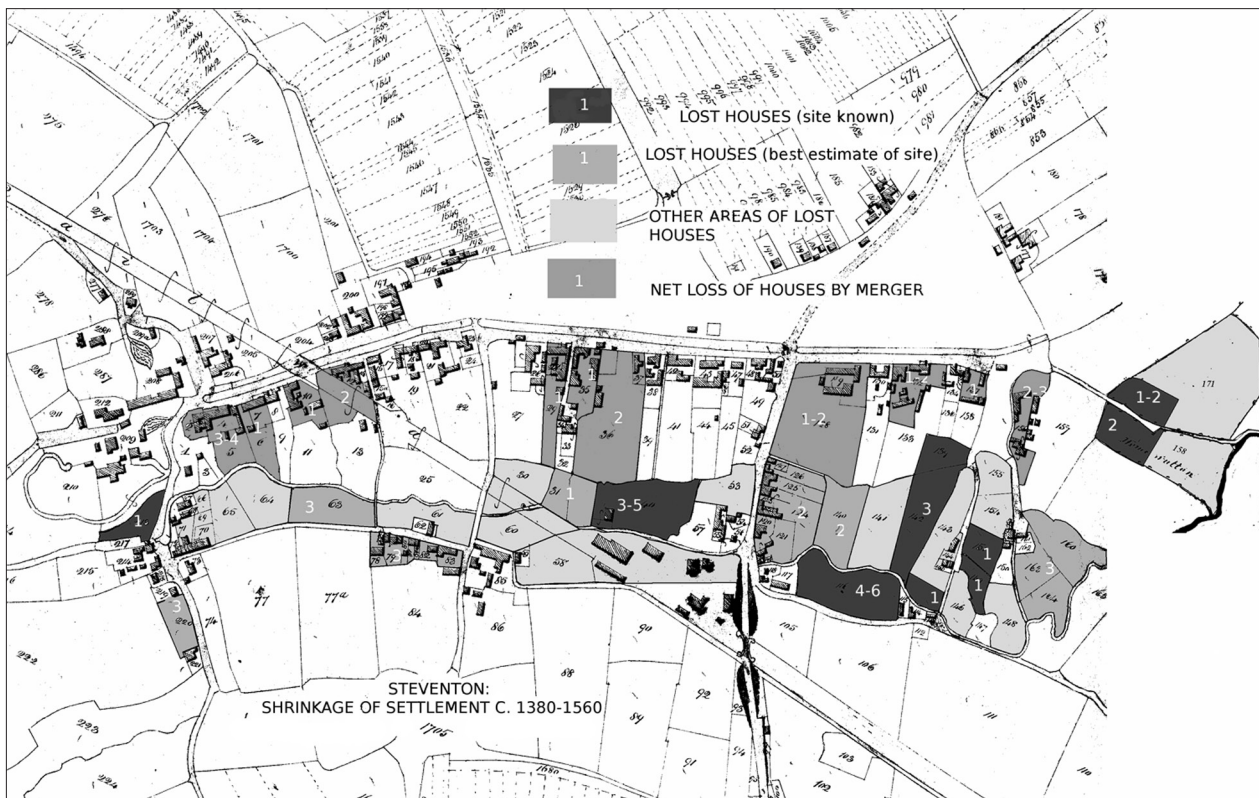


Figure 4 Steventon: shrinkage of settlement 1380–1560.

earlier messuages, as at Kibworth Harcourt (Howell 1983, 117–29). At the west end of the Causeway, the complex now called the Priory (SU 466 915; TM2–5) was put together by Richard Doo, who between 1435 and 1456 acquired a row of at least four houses there, and probably a fifth; one of them had been the subject of an exchange in 1428. He rebuilt them as a single large mansion in 1443–4 and 1461–3, retaining only the west wing of the westernmost house, his first purchase on the site (STE-F). Immediately east, TM 7 lies on the site of two houses united in one family in the earlier 17th century but divided again from before 1664 to 1843. Further east, TM 12 and 14 incorporate Villers, apparently a double plot reduced to one by 1423, and Webbes; the whole was one farmstead from the 1540s, its eastern end abutting Little Lane, now no. 87 the Causeway, being a house built perhaps soon after 1517 (SU 4668 9165; STE-H). TM 28, no 57 the Causeway (SU 4689 9182), is a late 16th-century house: later held with three yardlands as part of Holding 93 in the court books (Alcock 2011), it belonged in the 17th century to the Ayshcombe family, who acquired it in the 1590s as two messuages, Huggins and Scoles³⁸. They had been in the same ownership since 1511³⁹. Scoles (earlier Colys, Dolys, and before that Stylard) can be traced from 1408 and Huggins (Hegyns) from 1439⁴⁰.

On Milton Lane, TM 128 and 129, Fir Tree House, 10 Milton Lane (SU 4723 9200), was built by John Hopkins in and after 1570 on a site that Hopkins had put together following his purchase in 1560 (Alcock and Currie 2011) of two house-plots, Plecys and Frenshes, from the absentee gentleman owner Francis Wellesbourne of

East Hanney (VCH4, 286, 292) and a third message from William Stone, which lay apparently on the corner with Highway Lane and was still let to an undertenant, not necessarily resident. Frenshes had been created in 1399 by splitting in half the earlier house-and-yardland tenement of Frenshes. The Plecy family had been landholders in both East and West ends (e.g. John Plecy in 1390)⁴¹. Plecys was the name of several properties all possibly derived from the two messuages, one toft, and three yardlands transferred by Robert Plecy to John and Alice Dyke (or Duke) in 1426. Alice Duke transferred a message and yardland to Nicholas Carpenter in 1448⁴², and he sold a message and 2 acres in le Graslonde called Plecys, next to John Harryes's tenement, to John Harryes in 1452⁴³. Thereafter the message and 2 acres can be traced down to its purchase by Hopkins⁴⁴. It was described in 1471 as 1 message and 2 acres parcel of Plesyes lying in le Close⁴⁵, and in 1483 as 1 message and 2 acres land adjoining⁴⁶, so that the house may have been really situated in one of the Grasslands closes east of the village (TM 169, 171⁴⁷; discussed below). Nevertheless '*adjacen*' may mean '*belonging to*' in this instance, and the house thus may actually have stood on the Milton Lane site, whose great width suggests three former messuages rather than two. In either case Plecys was clearly derelict by 1471.

Further east on Milton Lane, Home Farm House, or Waynemans (SU 4732 9204; TM 132), was part of an estate of at least 4 messuages variously inherited and acquired by the Wayneman family from 1463, described in 1537 as 1 message and 4 closes, and in 1546 as 2 messuages and 4 closes, although six former messuages

were listed in 1548. Two of the former messuages lay in Home Sutton, and one perhaps in Grasslands, both further east (discussed below) but two, perhaps more, were on the main site; a wing of *c.* 1300 survives at the west end (STE-L; Currie 1992, 197–9). At the east end of Milton Lane the row of houses known as Green Farm were before 1949 two properties that can be traced separately from the 15th century. The eastern, Green Farm I (SU 474 921; TM 137), stands on a plot, Straunges, apparently resulting from the merger of two houses by Thomas Straunge in 1407–13; by 1434 there was only one house (STE-M).

Thus by *c.* 1560, along the Causeway and Milton Lane, identifiable mergers had swallowed, net, 10 to 13 copyhold, and 4 freehold, house-plots of *c.* 1380. The width of some other post-medieval plots may result from a few other mergers, possibly even before 1380, but they have not been documented.

This accommodation of shrinking demand for houses by grouping some of the messuages along the main street is paralleled, among other places, at Kibworth Harcourt, where it was mostly concentrated in the centre of that street; a subsidiary area of medieval assarting was hardly affected (Howell 1983, 117–18). At Steventon, though, much heavier losses can be traced in two other areas of the village that in the 19th century were very sparsely, or not at all, occupied, and which had not been understood to have been part of the medieval settlement.

The East End

The first such area is the old East End. The planned row in Milton Lane is less than a third the length of the rest of the Causeway; yet in November 1399 the East End had 12 brewers to the West End's 24, and the ratio stayed usually between 0.5 and 0.6 until the 1450s. That suggests that the East End had a disproportionate number of houses somewhere *away* from the causeway line. Moreover a sharp drop in the number of brewers in the 1460s and 1470s, to only 1 in the East, and the fact that from 1482 there was only one ale-taster for both tithings, who had formerly served the West End only, imply substantial depopulation in the East End, reducing the demand for brewers' services.

East of the planned row in Milton Lane, the causeway, as noted above, veers north-eastwards across the Green, ending at a ditch that marks the Green's eastern boundary, and separating off a small southern area. (Although the line of the Causeway continues beyond the ditch as a field boundary, there is no sign of raised structure or paving along it). Into that southern green ran several funnelling lanes and paths. The northernmost is a footpath to Milton, which in 1514 was said to have been a packhorse way time out of mind⁴⁸. It is paved with cobbles and pitchings of various types as far as the parish boundary; 19th-century and later maps (TM; Ordnance Survey 1960⁴⁹) suggest that the western 200 m formed a wide lane, the rest a narrow footpath. The distinction is now obscured by tree growth on the south side. On its south side, extending past and beyond the junction of lane and path, and abutting eastwards a north-south stretch of the brook, lay the close named Home Sutton in 1839⁵⁰ and 1842 (TM 158). It seems to have been divided earlier into smaller closes: thus 'a close at the west end of Homesetton' in 1601, part

of the estate of Wayneman's (Home Farm House) in Milton Lane (Alcock and Currie 2013, STE-L⁵¹), was presumably part of the four or more closes that formed part of the estate in 1537, 1546, and 1548⁵² but was alternatively described, undoubtedly archaically, as a messuage called 'A Homeset' in 1548⁵³, and is identifiable as the *two* messuages called Home Setlyns lying in the East End in 1463⁵⁴. Since they lay at the west end of Home Sutton, that may include the sites of others further east. North of the lane, opposite Home Sutton, are the closes called Grasslands from the 15th to the 19th century (TM 171 etc⁵⁵; *cf.* Currie 1976, map 5). As already seen, Plecy's was said to have had a messuage that may have been in the Grasslands, and in 1548 the Home Farm estate included a messuage in Grasslands with no former owner mentioned⁵⁶. The adjoining lands in the list, one of two selions in Grasslands, were formerly John Saundres, so he may have been the house-plot holder. Whereas Saundres' selions can be traced back to 1453⁵⁷, the messuage is not mentioned earlier. Thus there was a small group of houses on either side of the lane to Milton, some way east of the Green, and all lost by the mid 16th century.

On the east side of the south Green, and just south of the path to Milton, stands the Old Farm House, 5 Kennel Lane (SU 4747 9209), the only medieval survivor away from the Causeway. Its modern house-plot includes those of two others, Princes and Longes, which in 1477 adjoined it, and probably also a small cottage, regarded as freehold, newly built on a plot hived off the main farm in 1416 and reabsorbed in it by 1524 (above, freeholds). The 16th-century holding included the site of another 15th-century East End house, Harrises, that has not been located (STE-N). Princes and Longes were among the grouped and numbered houses discussed earlier.

Further south, at the end of Kennel lane, a small cluster of houses (SU 4755 9192) apparently displays continuity of settlement: at least one dates from the 17th century and two or more cottages can be traced from the 17th century in the court records: south of them, however, former paths or lanes from the brook marked the boundaries of converging closes, perhaps former messuages and tofts. Three grouped messuages in the East End, otherwise unlocated, later reduced to one or none, may have stood in this area⁵⁸.

Between Kennel Lane and Sheepwash Lane to its east is a row of closes that definitely included house-plots; perhaps all were. Towards the southern end, TM 149, fronting Sheepwash Lane, and TM 147 between TM 149 and the brook, belonged in 1842 to the Causeway Trustees. Their endowments, all copyhold, consisted in 1837 of a close (probably TM 149), a coppice (probably TM 147), common meadow, two cow commons, and a yardland of open arable, all at the pre-15th-century standard house-and-yardland rent of 13s 4d (Charity Commissioners 1838) replaced in 1883 by an inclosure allotment; they also acquired land (TM 78), later cottages, in Cat Street⁵⁹ in 1675. Two sisters had allegedly given the farm to maintain the Causeway (Godfrey 1995; Charity Commissioners 1838; VCH 4, 369). The trust, which presumably existed by 1467, when the causeway fieldland was named in a casual abuttal reference⁶⁰, was reorganized by the manor court in 1564⁶¹; the land was let out, but there is no evidence of a farmhouse in

the 16th century, or of any earlier alienation of one (an alienation that would have reduced the rent). Thus the two closes presumably represent the toft and croft of the medieval yardland farm. North of it TM 151 was the messuage in the East End between the close belonging to the causey land to the south and the close of Thomas Moulder junior to the north, sold in 1563 with other property by William Stone to John Hopkyns, and in 1566, described as a close with the same abutments, by Hopkyns to Thomas Baker⁶². Further north on the same strip of land, the similarly sized closes TM 154 and 155 were probably, but not provably, former messuages.

On the west side of Sheephouse Lane TM 143–5 was a messuage, orchard and close in 1636, but seem to have been one close in 1707, though later again built on before 1842⁶³. The close included next to the brook the former site of the East Mill, which in 1477⁶⁴ abutted Wyresdales (TM 139 and 142) west of it. The latter close, enfranchised in 1917 as part of Green Farm I (WAM CC 292099), had descended with that house and was known as West Dills or West Dales in 1723 (Alcock 2011, Hld 68, adms 392–3). Wrigsdalls in 1638 (WAM 7420, rot 2d), Wrigsdalles alias Wirsdalles in 1604 (WAM 7524, fols 19–26), and a pasture called Wiresdales containing 3 acres in 1567 (WAM 7418, rot 10). The acreage is notional and reflects the rent equivalent to that of 3 houses. (A house was built at the west end of the close between 1587 and 1604 and passed separately from it until 1801, when it was derelict: WAM 7524, fols 19–26; Alcock 2011, Hld 68). From 1518 to 1528, however, the close appears as three messuages (WAM 7412, rott 11, 16, 17d, 22), Wersdalles or Wiresdalles, Edwardes and Yates. Since they formed a notionally 3-a close it is likely that they adjoined each other. They had descended to the Hopkins family from Henry Winchester (WAM 7411, rott 17, 21d), who bought Edwards and Yates in 1481 (WAM 7410, rot 23d) and Wiresdales in 1483 (WAM 7410, rot 25d). Before that they had descended separately from Henry Cook, who held them in the 1450s (WAM 7409, rott 29d, 31, 33; WAM 7410, rot 11, 19d, 22d). Before Cook, the houses had apparently belonged to John Brayne, who collected in the 1430s messuages called Popes (WAM 7264, rot 4), Yates (WAM 7264, rott 27, 28), and Edwardes (WAM 7264, rot 30 m 2), though it was Popes and Wiresdales that he sold to Cook in 1440 (WAM 7264, rot 33). Wiresdales was described as a bordewe in 1457 (WAM 7409, rot 31), which may identify it as the messuage and bordell that Elena Catelotes brought in marriage to William Wyresdale in 1416 (WAM 7263, rot 10d). Yates and Edwards, however, had both been yardland farmhouses (WAM 7264, rott 2, 27), and a former owner of Yates and Edwards sold 1 ½ yardlands of arable called Mychell and Wyresdale in 1444 (WAM 7409, rot 5d), so there may even have been four or more yardland and half-yardland farmhouses in or near the large later close.

In Pugsden Lane, beyond the brook, most of the frontage was in 1842 taken up by a single close, TM 116. This, or part of it, can be identified as the Brockheys Close containing 3 ½ messuages, sold by Thomas Moulder to William Pinnock in 1572⁶⁵. The close in 1604 abutted the messuage which William Peerson then settled in trust for the poor⁶⁶, (WAM 7524, fols 19–26), shown by abutments to be at the west end of the lane

at TM 117–18 (part of Hld 57: Alcock 2011). The 3 ½ messuages had been accumulated in the 1460s by John Austyn (d 1506) and included half of a messuage called Bathes and of a burdewe called Hoses, a messuage formerly William Justice's, and a messuage between those of Richard Bedell and William Atwell⁶⁷. The latter may have been the Lyford's messuage called Canes which had attracted a tanner and a corvesor and thus probably abutted the brook⁶⁸; Atwells had also been Canes or Caves, and had been held by William Justice⁶⁹, whose other messuage bought by Austyn may have been that called Greneman's. Both, and the Lyfords' Caves, had been half-yardland farmhouses, not burdewes or cottages⁷⁰. Richard Bedell's abutting messuage cannot be traced after the 1460s. All told, the evidence suggests that Brookheys Close must have absorbed the sites of more than the 3 ½ messuages, perhaps 5 or 6 altogether, though one of the additional lost messuages may have been TM 115, which seems not to have had a house in 1670 (Alcock 2011, Hld 91).

At its west end Pugsden Lane ran into Highway Lane (High Street), whose east side seems also to have been in the East End. Here, however, particularly at the southern end (SU 472 917–918), any late-medieval shrinkage of occupation has been obscured by vigorous mid 17th-century and later development, most of it on what were previously empty closes and including subdivision (TM 120, 123, 125, 127; Alcock 2011, Hld 27, 36, 73)⁷¹. Conversely no messuage has yet been linked to a late-medieval predecessor. Moreover, two messuages and two churchetts one called Segerres and 1 called Orpyddys and 4 parcels of land between the Brook and the high road next the close called Segerres, sold in 1464⁷² were probably in this area, as the area north of Pugsden Lane can be ruled out. By 1549 they were two 'lez churchettes' lying in the east end next the land of [the long-dead] John Scolys (WAM 7414, rot 4d) and they were still recorded in the 1560s (WAM 8034), though later lost. Segerres had, allegedly still in 1454, more plausibly in 1439, been a half-yardland farmhouse (WAM 7409, rot 25; WAM 7264, rot 32). Orpyddys may, however, have been misidentified in 1464 and been in different ownership, but was equally derelict (WAM 7409, rot 32; WAM 7410, rot 10). Two other churchetts called Segarres, or Seagarres and 'Eames called yattes', traceable from 1516 to 1554, are unlocated but were probably in the East End and apparently part of a close, called Herseys by 1548 (WAM 7412, rott. 8d, 14d, 24, 35, 41; WAM 7416, rot 1; WAM 7417, sewn, fols. 7v–8; WAM 7359, John Stevens, close called ...Herseys.) This was distinct from the Herceys close in Mill Street, discussed below. Stevens's main house was 12, Milton Lane (STE-K).

Twychens

Another area of lost farmhouse settlement has now been identified, mainly in the West End. Behind the regular crofts of the houses on the Causeway, running eastwards from Little Lane (running south between 85 and 87 the Causeway) to Highway Lane, what in the 19th century was still an almost continuous, undulating hedge line marked the former position of a lane, recorded in the 15th century as the Twychen or Twychens (the word means a narrow lane between two houses or closes). The path

extended east of Highway Lane, and a small length of lane there survives; beyond, it probably reached as far as Sheepwash Lane, as the hedge line, although apparently straightened before 1839, extends thither, cutting across Wiresdales close (see above). (The whole township was ordered to repair another twychens at the end of the Grasslands in the East End, in 1489: WAM 7411, rot 8). It may explain why three houses could be accommodated in the close: one, necessarily with a smaller toft and croft, north of the path, and two to the south. In the West End, on the south side of the Twychens, in what were later pasture closes, were the frontages of more medieval houses between the lane and the brook. Those in Cook's Close (TM 40), which is named after Henry Cook, a tanner (d. apparently 1468, followed by his daughter Joan)⁷³ included at least three former farmhouses that Cook sold in 1456, two of yardland and one of half-yardland farms; one of the yardland house sites seems to have been the main house of Vowcylles or Foushulls, a two-and-half yardland combined holding recorded in 1404; one or more of Foushulls' two other houses may have adjoined it; and other houses are recorded in this area, though they cannot be precisely counted or located (Cook retained some property along the Twychens until his death)⁷⁴. The three identified houses in Cook's Close had probably been abandoned by 1489 at latest, when they were grouped as three messuages 'between the brook and the twychens', later garbled to 'in the hoke and the twychens'⁷⁵. The only intermission of the Twychens hedge in 1839 was at the south-west corner of TM36, which projects across it as far as the brook. The projection can be explained as the site of a lost half-messuage or half-churchet belonging, with copyhold and former freehold messuages in the rest of TM 36, to John Buckingham (d. 1467)⁷⁶ (cf. STE-E); his father had sold the matching half-messuage, which lay on Dadingtons Lane, to John Doo in 1446⁷⁷, and that was presumably TM 31. The original full messuage, which had a half-yardland farm before the split, thus occupied the rough square of TM 31 and the TM 36 projection. The repeated problems of encroachment, draining and fencing along the Twychens⁷⁸ probably underlie the disappearance of the lane and the abandonment by 1560 of all the houses there.

Between Cat Street and Pugsden Lane

Across the brook, also presumably in the West End, an unnamed lane ran between Cat Street and Pugsden lane. There seem to have been houses in this area also, though perhaps not many. A copyhold settlement of 1366 transferred a messuage and a croft 'against the hill', and all of a close⁷⁹ (it might, however, have been on Pugsden lane⁸⁰). Henry Cook may have had a house there too, since in 1471 Richard Doo had a stone bridge in decay towards the tenement late Henry Cook's; the decayed bridge obstructed the water, and the implication is that Cook's house was beyond the brook⁸¹.

Cat Street

Cat (now Castle) Street had already been recognised as an area of medieval settlement (Currie 1976). By 1839⁸² houses there were restricted to three areas: (i) on the south side of the road at its east end; (ii) one house at the south-west corner with Mill Street; (iii) the isolated Old

Bakery (SU 4686 9152; TM 62) on the north side; (iii), three plots on the north side at the corner of Mill Street, of which two seem to be described as in Mill Street in property transfers. The first area seems to be entirely, or almost entirely, the result of 17th-century development on previously empty closes, though abutments sometimes seem conflicting, perhaps precisely because new houses were springing up, e.g. TM 82⁸³; TM 81⁸⁴; TM 81a⁸⁵; TM 80⁸⁶; TM 78⁸⁷; and the east and west halves of TM 79⁸⁸. In the mid and late 17th century houses on the north side of the street cannot be identified in the court rolls. The street may not have been fully built up in the Middle Ages: a tenement of William Cook next to which a ditch of Richard Colles extended towards the Down in 1426 must have been on the south side⁸⁹; it was a close by 1458, and thereafter can be traced as an unbuilt-on close through many transfers to 1582. By 1584 a new house (*domum*) had been built on the holding, possibly there⁹⁰. John Colles may have had an adjoining house, which in 1451 abutted another messuage transferred from Richard Bacon to Thomas Townesend: neither is recorded later⁹¹. These three houses had lost any field land by the time they are recorded, so that it is not clear if they had been farmhouses or cottages. William Grete's tenement in 1420 was on the north side, near the west end, since he bought a plot then to provide a way to his house on the Causeway (SU 4652 9147; later part of Priory Cottages)⁹² (STE-F). A row of three 'burdewes' stood on the street in the earlier 15th century⁹³; west of them was in 1451 a fourth held by John Yate⁹⁴. Only one of the four can be traced to the late 16th century; the house on it was rebuilt shortly before 1459 and again shortly before 1530, and it was inherited by Henry Stone in 1591⁹⁵. Some other burdewes may have stood on Cat Street but that cannot be proved. Of those unlocated, two lacked houses by 1546⁹⁶ and a third, Pepercorns, traceable from 1377⁹⁷ was still called a messuage in 1573⁹⁸, (WAM 7418, rot 19) but was a close by 1599⁹⁹.

Mill area

There is some evidence of settlement loss on and around Mill Street. A plot between the manor and the mill (SU 4655 9133; TM 218), let to William Fuller (later also called William Heved, Hefd, or Heed) on a 100-year lease in 1402 on condition of building a new house there, was mapped in 1757 as an empty close called Rose Fuller's¹⁰⁰. Rose had been William's wife, and the house, which is not recorded in presentments of their deaths in 1442¹⁰¹ cannot be traced after them, and was probably derelict by the mid 15th century. A bungalow was built there after the Second World War, deterring excavation. Four messuages that Thomas Hercey inherited in 1513 passed in 1545 to his son, also Thomas, as a close, Herceys Close (WAM 7412, rott 5d, 38d, 39; WAM 8034, fol 55/59¹⁰²): a survey of the early 1560s describes them, in successive but contemporary revisions, as three messuages near the mill, one messuage, and 'now in one close inclosed'. The most plausible site is TM 220.

Conclusions

This topographical analysis of shrinkage gives a minimum of 55 and a maximum (excluding possible duplicates discussed in two areas) of 64 lost houses. To

those must be added 5 or 6 definitely lost grouped-and-numbered houses that are still unlocated, and 7 tofts, making a total loss of 67 to 77 houses. This range errs on the side of caution, since it omits other unlocated churchets and burdews, and some early 15th-century farmhouses whose later descent has not been traced. Yet the lost houses make such a high proportion of the households listed in 1381 (82 to 95 per cent) that it seems inevitable that the Poll Tax underenumerated, reducing the losses of houses to a more plausible 66 to 75 per cent.

When lost freeholds are excluded, the loss of copyhold tenements compared with the 1281 listing is also very large, 72 to 88 per cent. That may indicate that, despite the apparently contrary evidence of the 1294 and 1324 extents, more new tenements were created (especially by subdivision of yardlands to make half-yardlands) between 1281 and the Black Death; as seen above, such divisions were still occasionally made in the early 15th century. But whatever allowances are made, certainly a large majority of Steventon's houses were lost, without direct replacements, between 1380 and 1560. That raises the question whether the extent of shrinkage in other large surviving villages, such as Kibworth Harcourt (Howell 1983), was greater than historians have inferred.

Implications for the village layout

Most of the wholly lost houses, as opposed to those merged to form larger farmsteads, lay in the back streets, particularly in the East End and along the Twychens. The explanation is not hard to seek: those houses, especially at the Twychens, had less easy access to the open fields and distant pastures; in the Twychens and Pugsden Lane, and the south end of Sheepwash and Kennel Lanes, they backed onto the brook, which was being polluted by tanners; but above all the tofts and crofts were irregular, and most must have been much smaller than those on the Causeway and Milton Lane. Even the former Causeway Trust farm (TM 147–9) had less space and room for manoeuvre than the houses whose access it subsidized, while the houses crammed into Brookheys or Cook's Closes (TM 116 and 40) would have had far less. That might have been unimportant for cottagers, but for peasants with expanding acreage in the fields would have precluded substantial farm buildings and impressive houses; and it has been shown that farms with standard holdings had earlier been based in those cramped areas (there is little evidence of systematic concentration of holdings of a particular size or tenure in particular areas, as had been deduced for instance at Cuxham by Harvey, at Kibworth Harcourt by Howell, and by the author earlier for Steventon itself). Thus the Causeway was the preferred location for rebuilding.

But why were the abandoned house-plots so much smaller and less regular than those on the Causeway? Clearly their layout cannot have been planned at the same time. The Twychens presumably served as a back lane, but unlike planned back lanes it was not laid out in straight lengths but in undulating curves. Thus either the East End and the Twychens were *later* than the Causeway, resulting from extensive but haphazard medieval assarting, or they were relics of a village layout *older* than the Causeway, to which the latter was added.

The first hypothesis, of assarting, might be plausible if all the houses in the abandoned areas were cottages

or smallholdings, but in fact many were the houses of standard agricultural holdings. It is also rendered implausible by their location with respect to the brook: if the Twychen and Kennel and Sheepwash Lanes had been unoccupied when the Causeway was laid out, the land would have been (as it later became after settlement shrinkage) mostly valuable meadow, at first probably held in common, so that any expansion for houses would have taken place at the expense of cheaper arable strips – as indeed happened north of the Green in the 17th and 18th centuries. We can infer, also, that Sheepwash Lane probably existed by 1086, since Steventon already had three mills and the East Mill later lay on that lane, although the block between it and Kennel Lane might have resulted from assarting a stock-watering green. (The Middle Mill can be shown by abutments to have been somewhere behind no 99 The Causeway; its site was empty by 1399¹⁰³ (STE-G)).

Thus the second hypothesis, that the abandoned areas survived from an older layout, deserves examination. Several topographical features support it. In the East End, the funnel-like lanes debouching on the green, with houses beside them, are typical of greenside settlements (*cf.* Bond 1985). The undulating line of the Twychens also forms a plausible former green-edge lane. The easternmost alignment of the raised causeway, as noted, crosses the Green, but does not join the path to Milton and indeed goes nowhere. In contrast to the rest of the causeway, which is typically around 2 m above the level of the adjoining roadways and green, and paved with small rectangular 'pitchings', the east alignment is only some 0.5–0.6 m above the level of the green and is paved with large, less regular sarsen flags. The difference in height and surface are probably attributable to lack of use: the rest of the causeway has probably been heightened over the centuries by repeated resurfacing, rather than built at one go as an earth bank, as suggested by Fuller (2005, 8), while the eastern end represents the original level or something close to it. It makes sense as the end of a replanning scheme that was never completed.

Hypothetically, the two tithings may represent two early settlement nuclei, one with the manor house, church and two mills at the west end of the green, west of the present Little Lane, and another at the east end, with one mill; the two were joined by scattered settlement along the south edge of the green, backing onto the brook. They would be an earlier 'marginal-green' settlement than the examples given by Bond (1985). (With the present village of Milton, the two settlements would have formed three almost equally spaced nuclei along the brook).

The Causeway would thus have been a planned extension driven right across the green, with the former green-edge lane forming a back lane, the Twychens, thenceforth with access to the remaining, truncated, green along the straight north–south lanes that punctuate the Causeway. South of the brook, Cat Street, and the intermediate lane east of it, may have been relics of either stage of development.

When then was the Causeway laid out? Such excavation as has taken place (*c.* 1957) has been wholly inconclusive and indeed forgotten (Fuller 2005). As already seen, the Causeway existed by 1299; the largest known increase in the number of holdings took place between 1086 and 1281, even if, as suggested

above, some yardlands may have been split into halves between 1281 and 1349. Thus the most likely date for the new layout would be between 1086 and 1281. Since the lawsuit of 1280–1 was brought by peasants claiming rights of ancient demesne, and asserting that the services they owed were customary and fixed by the time of Richard I (1189–99), but that an abbot of Bec, apparently Osbern, abbot 1179–87 (WAM 7301; no other abbot could correspond to the scribal errors in the text) had later (!) imposed more, the number of tenements had probably not much increased between 1180 and 1280. Moreover, as already seen, the manorial demesne had apparently been consolidated before 1216. Given these considerations, the probable period for a new layout would have been soon after Pré acquired the manor in 1121 (Currie 1976, 21). Planned extensions of this type, without total replanning, and of early 12th-century date, though less ambitious than the Causeway, have been identified for example in Whittlewood (Page and Jones 2006, 193), at the sort of period when green-edge settlements were developing in East Anglia (Martin 2012, 235–7). The inferred earlier Steventon green-edge settlement(s) may stimulate further work to query green-settlement chronology elsewhere.

Endnotes

1. And Berks RO, Q/RDC/81.
2. WAM 7261, rot 1.
3. WAM 7301.
4. And Oxon RO, P238/M/1.
5. WAM 7264, rot 34d.
6. Magdalen College, Oxford, Harwell deed 64A.
7. WAM 7264, rot 21.
8. And WAM 7262, rott 19, 39; 7264, rot 5.
9. WAM 7301.
10. WAM 7409, rott 9 and 10.
11. TNA E 106/8/5, no 20d.
12. WAM 7358; 7359; 8034.
13. WAM 7417, sewn, fols 7, 9; 7418, rot 14.
14. Lay Deeds no 5; Alcock 2011, Hld 84.
15. Cf. TNA E 179/73/53.
16. WAM 7262, rot 27d.
17. WAM 7264, rott 11–17d, 29d–30, 32–end.
18. WAM 7301.
19. WAM 7448; 7449.
20. e.g. WAM 7262, rot 39.
21. WAM 7409, rot 37; 7410: rott 2, 4d.
22. WAM 7410, rott. 3, 4.
23. e.g. WAM 7410, rott 5, 10.
24. WAM 7358; 7359; 7414, rot 3; 7418, rot 2; 8034.
25. WAM 7410, rot 23.
26. WAM 7411, rot 7.
27. WAM 7262, rot 1d.
28. WAM 7418, rot 1.
29. WAM 7412, rot 28d.
30. WAM 7412, rot 39.
31. WAM 7420, rot 3.
32. WAM 7418, rott 16, 28–29d; 7419, rot 10d; 7424, fols 19–26.
33. WAM 7418, rot 13d; 7524, loose sheets, list of fines.
34. WAM 7419: rott 2d, 13d–14.
35. Lay Deeds no 5; Alcock 2011, Hld 84.
36. WAM 7411, rot 6.
37. WAM 7412, rot 11d, 16, 18d; 8034, fol 57/61.
38. WAM 7419, rott 5, 8.
39. WAM 7412, rott 3, 4, 20d–22, 24d, 27d; 7418, rott 2d, 15, 19d.
40. WAM 7262, rott 33, 45d, 46d; 7263, rot 9; 7264, rott 15, 24, 32, 35d; 7409, rot 30d; 7410, rott 7, 22, 23; 7411, rott 2d, 3d, 9, 13d, 27d.
41. WAM 7261, rot 15, m 1.
42. WAM 7409, rot 13d.
43. WAM 7409, rot 22d.
44. WAM 7410, rott 13, 25d; 7411, rot 7, 19d; 7523; 8034, fol 60v/64v; 7418, rot 15.
45. WAM 7410, rot 13.
46. WAM 7410, rot 25d.
47. And ORO P238/M/1, nos 168–70.
48. WAM 7412, rot 7.
49. And ORO P238/M/1.
50. ORO P238/M/1 no 157.
51. And WAM 7419, rot 16d.
52. WAM 7412, rott 33d, 39; 7358.
53. WAM 7359.
54. WAM 7410, rot 3.
55. And ORO P238/M/1, nos 168–70.
56. WAM 7359.
57. WAM 741, rot 19; 7409: rot 24d.
58. WAM 7410, rot 14d; 7411, rot 17; 7414, rot 2 and loose outer membrane; 7415.
59. WAM 7423.
60. WAM 7410, rot 9.
61. WAM 7418, rot 7d.
62. WAM 7418, rots 5d, 9.
63. WAM 7420, rott 1, 2; 7347; 7360; Alcock 2011, Hld 4.
64. WAM 7410, rot 19d.
65. WAM 7418, rot 17.
66. WAM 7524, fols 19–26.
67. WAM 7418, rot 2; 7523; 7412, rott 28, 29d; 7411, rott 27d, 29; 7410, rott 4, 10.
68. WAM 7264, rott 5, 6, 7.
69. WAM 7409, rott 1d, 37; rott 23, 26.
70. WAM 7264, rott 5, 26.
71. And WAM 7420, rot 2; 7421, rott 4, 6, 6d; 7422.
72. WAM 7410, rot 4d.
73. WAM 7409, rot 19d; 7410, rott. 10–11, 22d.
74. WAM 7262, rot 19; 7264, rott 9, 12, 28d, 29d, 33d, 35d; 7409, rott 4, 19d, 30d; 7410, rott 11, 15d.
75. WAM 7411, rot 7d; 7412, rott 6, 19d, 25; 7418, rot 1; 7523.
76. WAM 7410, rot 9.
77. WAM 7409, rott 9, 10d.
78. e.g. WAM 7409, rot 17, 24; 7410, rott 10, 2; 7411, rot 28.
79. WAM 7262*.
80. Cf WAM 7409, rot 37.
81. WAM 7410, rot 13.
82. ORO P238/M/1.
83. WAM 7420, rot 3; 7421, rot 2d; Alcock 2011, Hld 41.
84. WAM 7421, rott 2d, 4d, 5; 7422; cf WAM 7420, rot 3; Alcock 2011, Hld 61.
85. WAM 7423, 23 Sept 1671; Alcock 2011, Hld 56.
86. WAM 7421, rot 4d; 7422; cf. WAM 7420, rot 3; Alcock 2011, Hld 74.
87. WAM 7423, 13 Sept 1675; Alcock 2011, Hld 05.
88. East: Alcock 2011, Hld 69; WAM 7423, 25 Sept 1677; West: Alcock 2011, Hld 38, Hld 69.
89. WAM 7264, rot 7.
90. WAM 7409, rot 34; 7418, rott 28–30; intermediate transfers omitted.
91. WAM 7409, rot 19d.
92. WAM 7263, rot 16d.
93. WAM 7263, rot 10, 11d, 15, 16; 7264, rott 3, 19d, 23; 7409, rott 1d, 24d.
94. WAM 7409, rot 19d.
95. WAM 7409, rot 35; 7412, rot 24; 4519, rot 5; many intermediate transfers.
96. WAM 7412, rot 40d.
97. WAM 7262, rot 34, attachment.
98. WAM 7418, rot 19.
99. WAM 7419, rot 15d.
100. WAM 7262, rot 11d; WAM Map 12.471⁵.
101. WAM 7409, rott 1, 24d.
102. WAM 7412, rott 5d, 38d, 39; WAM 8034, fol 55/59.
103. WAM 7262, rot 32.

Primary sources

Note: Types of primary source searched for background but not directly relevant to the descents used in this paper are listed in Currie 1976: 369–71 and Alcock and Miles 2013.

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Q/RDC/81A and B Steventon Enclosure Award and Map
- Bishop's Manor Farm, Harwell, Lay deeds [seen 1970]
no. 5 Conveyance of Steventon property,
Richard Kirfoot to Thomas Webb and
Saloman Aldworth, 30 April 1624
- The National Archives, Kew (TNA)
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E 106/2/6 1294
E 106/8/5, no 20d 1324
Subsidy assessments including Steventon
E 179/73/6 1327
E 179/73/7 1332
E 179/73/53 1381, poll tax
E 179/73/134 1524
E 179/73/128 1525
- Steventon court rolls*
LR 11/57/82 10 Apr 1540
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P238/M/1 Map of Steventon, 10/Jun/1839
- Westminster Abbey Muniments, London SW1 (WAM)
Account Rolls of Steventon manor from 1399
WAM 7447–WAM 7461, WAM 7463–WAM 7522A
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WAM 7261 1382–99
WAM 7262 1399–1413, and tenant's copy, 1377
WAM 7263 1413–22
WAM 7264 1422–41
WAM 7409 1442–60
WAM 7410 1461–83
WAM 7411 1484–1508
WAM 7412 1509–46
WAM 7414 1547–53
WAM 7416 1553–58
WAM 7418 1559–87
WAM 7419 1588–1601
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WAM 7423 1671–78
WAM 7424 1681–87
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WAM 7262* Tenant's copy, 1366
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WAM 7415 1548–51
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WAM 7358 1548
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WAM 7354 1590
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WAM 7360 1686
WAM 56665 1696
- Demesne map*
WAM 12.471⁵ 1757
- Other*
WAM 7301 15th-century copy of record of pleas in the Court of King's Bench, Easter 9 Edward I and later, concerning Steventon manorial tenants

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