

## THE MANOR OF STAPLETON IN MARTOCK, AND THE ST CLAIRS

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The hamlet of Stapleton lies in south-east Somerset, about one mile north of Martock or  $6\frac{1}{2}$  miles north west of Yeovil. Its early history is obscure. No reference to it has been found in pre-Conquest charters, and it does not appear by name in Domesday Book; in 1086 it was presumably part of the great royal manor of Martock where Domesday shows there to have been land for 40 ploughs,<sup>1</sup> indicating an extent of approximately 4,800 acres. Domesday also mentions that  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hides had been 'taken away' (*ablata*) from the manor and were held by Ælfric the Little (Alvric *parvus*) of Hampshire. Ælfric the Little (Alvric *petit*) appears in Hampshire Domesday as one of the king's thanes, holding land in the 'Forest' and, more specifically, in the New Forest.<sup>2</sup> In view of the Hampshire connexions of the St Clair family who held the manor of Stapleton for at least two hundred years up to the later fourteenth century, it is tempting to conjecture that it was Ælfric's detached holding in Martock that eventually became the capital manor of Stapleton.

The origin of the place-name also remains obscure. Professor Round, with uncharacteristic disregard of the elements of place-name scholarship, confused Steepleton, Dorset,<sup>3</sup> with the place which is firmly identified in numerous medieval records as Stapleton in Martock, Somerset. The term *stapol* or *stapel* was Old English for 'post' or 'pole'. It could also mean 'threshold', 'market' or 'court'. Writing of the term generally, Grundy remarked that it commonly occurred as a landmark in Saxon charters, and he suggested that 'the poles were probably boundary marks of strips of ploughland in the common fields, used, may be, where holders did not wish to waste ground by leaving a grass balk'.<sup>4</sup> Such an inference postulates rows of poles which would have made the work of the common ploughs virtually impossible. Balks were almost certainly used only to mark the boundaries of the groups of strip holdings known as 'shots' or 'furlongs' (Latin *culturae*) which were formed by the system of ploughing. The second element of the place-name was from Old English *tun* which was originally an 'enclosure', but developed into 'homestead', 'settlement', 'village', 'town'. The place-name Stapleton occurs in a number of counties, and Ekwall gives the general derivation as 'tun by a post'.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Stapleton, Somerset, one might tentatively suggest that the name derived from a post set up to mark the boundary of the land detached from Martock.

The earliest known record of Stapleton in Martock dates from the time when it had come into the possession of the St Clair family. This family came from St Clair-sur-Elle, Manche, Normandy. They were distinct from the Scottish Sinclairs who are said to have come from St Clair l'Evêque, Normandy.<sup>6</sup> At the time of the Domesday inquest, Bretel de St Clair held extensive lands in Somerset, Dorset and

Devon, and his kinsman Hubert held lands on a smaller scale in Somerset and Dorset. The first to appear as holder of Stapleton was Sir Robert de St Clair (*de Sancto Claro*) in the twelfth century.<sup>7</sup> By 1195 the manor had passed to his son William.<sup>8</sup> Evidently William died without issue for he was succeeded by his brother Geoffrey who, in 1212, held Stapleton of the king by the serjeanty of holding a towel before the queen at Easter, Pentecost and Christmas, and also on the occasion of the coronation of the king.<sup>9</sup> This not very onerous service reminds us that those were times long before the introduction of table forks, and that eating with knife and fingers made finger-bowls and napkins indispensable for meals in polite society. The occasions for rendering this service coincide with the ceremonial wearing of the crown by the king at Winchester at Easter, at Westminster at Pentecost and at Gloucester at Christmas.<sup>10</sup> Thus, unless he was able to delegate, and it seems likely that he would have deemed it politic to be present on these state occasions, the lord of Stapleton had to make what, in those days, must have been arduous journeys in order to render the menial service due for his lands.

Geoffrey de St Clair was succeeded by his son Robert II in 1223. The inheritance included 2 virgates in Somerton and unspecified land at Staunden in Hampshire.<sup>11</sup> There is evidence of association by a Robert de St Clair with both Hampshire and Martock in 1201 and 1203,<sup>12</sup> but the dates suggest that he was of Geoffrey's generation, possibly a brother, for the Robert who succeeded to Stapleton appears to have lived until 1267.

In 1239, Robert confirmed a grant which his grandfather Robert de St Clair had made, with the assent of his wife Aaleis and his son William, of free transit by the monks of Muchelney Abbey and all who wished to go to that church, with their wagons and carts, across his pasture north of Stapleton where he had two acres in demesne, and similar free transit along his meadow beyond Haiwardsmede (location unknown) and as far as the demesne of the Abbey.<sup>13</sup> This grant indicates that the demesne lands of the Abbey extended some five miles southwards to the border of the manor of Stapleton. In return for this access the monks granted to Robert and his heirs, land in their moor of 'La Hamme' (modern Muchelney Ham), for which the St Clairs paid an annual rent of a pound of wax.<sup>14</sup> The term 'moor' usually meant marshland and was used mainly as pasture, as it is in many places today. Some reduction in the obligations of the tenure seems to have occurred by 1243 when a jury said only that the service to be rendered by Robert de St Clair for his 10 librates of land at Stapleton was to hold a towel before the Queen at Pentecost.<sup>15</sup> Robert II appears to have participated in what became a tradition of service to the Crown by various branches of the St Clair family for he is mentioned as a verderer in the Forest Pleas at Ilchester in 1257,<sup>16</sup> and in 1262 he was one of the two escheators for the county of Somerset.<sup>17</sup>

An indication of the decline of serjeanty and its merging into military service may be inferred from an undated inquisition (probably c. 1267) at Martock when it was presented that Robert de St Clair held the manor of Stapleton in serjeanty by the service of holding a towel before the Queen on Whit Sunday, and if there were no Queen, by finding one serjeant for the king's army.<sup>18</sup> Poole remarked that 'serjeanty was already by the beginning of the thirteenth century somewhat antiquarian and out of date'; Henry III had set up a number of commissions to review this form of tenure.<sup>19</sup> The inquisition also stated that the parson of Martock and the Abbot of Mont St Michel (*de Monte Sancti Michaelis*) held one virgate of land (viz. arable) and 3 acres of meadow belonging to the same tenement, a gift of the old (*veteris*) Robert de St Clair, to maintain a chantry at the chapel in the courtyard at Stapleton. The virgate was worth 10s., unsown, as it then was; and the meadow 3s. The Prior of Montacute also held 3 acres of meadow by the gift of the

old Robert, though the terms were not known to the jurors. A William Selavine held 3 ferlings of land on the manor by the service of going with his lord, at his lord's cost, in the king's army. The 'ferling' was normally a quarter of a virgate and could therefore be anything between 5 and 10 acres.

Although the exact relationship between the St Clairs of Domesday Book and those who held the manor of Stapleton has not been established, both lines of the family are brought together in the muniments of Montacute Priory. A charter by the Count of Mortain, founder of the Priory, was witnessed by Bretel de St Clair (whose name is preserved in modern Ashbrittle). Bretel also gave to the Priory a hide of land at Bishopstone, near Montacute. Robert de St Clair witnessed a Montacute Priory charter in 1262, and another, undated but probably in or around 1262. Also in 1262, Robert confirmed a gift to the Priory of 3 acres of meadow at 'Runge' which extended as far as the water of 'Gevele' (River Ivel *als.* Yeo *als.* Yevel), and gave another 3 acres of his meadow in the same place.<sup>20</sup>

In 1267 the king received homage of Robert de Sayncler, son and heir of Robert de Sayncler, deceased, for all his lands.<sup>21</sup> This third Robert was active in the king's service, and it is probably because he was so fully engaged that in 1270 he was granted exemption from serving on assizes, juries and recognitions, or being made sheriff against his will.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, he served on the jury in a dispute between the Archbishop of Canterbury and Richard de Waleys in 1277.<sup>23</sup> In 1279 Robert was one of the justices appointed to deliver the gaol at Ivelcestre (Ilchester).<sup>24</sup> He was also commissioned to deliver the gaol at Sherborne, Dorset, in 1288 and 1289, and the gaol at Somerton in 1289 and 1291, and again at Sherborne in 1290 and 1291.<sup>25</sup> When he witnessed a gift by the prior of Montacute to the bishop of Bath and Wells of 2 acres at Yeovilton in 1291, he was described as Sir Robert de St Clair.<sup>26</sup>

On 16 March 1303, the Sheriff of Somerset and Dorset was given mandate to 'purvey' 1000 quarters of wheat, 1000 of oats, and 1000 of beans, and to have them delivered to Berwick-on-Tweed as soon as possible. These victuals were to be paid for by Robert de St Clair and John de Meleburn out of the aid for the marriage of the king's eldest daughter, for which they were collectors in these two counties.<sup>27</sup> Robert was commissioned to collect and levy the thirtieth and twentieth in Somerset in 1306.<sup>28</sup>

When Robert died in 1308, 'two parts' of his lands in Stapleton, 'Andredesie' and 'Saltmor' were taken into custody by the king's yeoman during the minority of his heir, another Robert.<sup>29</sup> The heir is described in the text as '*nepos*'. Latin *nepos* could be used for both 'nephew' and 'grandson', and also in the general sense 'descendant'. The editor of the *Calendar of Patent Rolls* translated here as 'nephew',<sup>30</sup> while Collinson opted for 'grandson'.<sup>31</sup> The *Inquisition Post Mortem* of 1308 says less equivocally 'Robert son of Robert son of Robert de St Clair, aged 14 . . . is next heir'.<sup>32</sup> In 1317 Robert (IV), who is now described (in the translation of the Close Rolls) as 'kinsman' and heir of Robert de St Clair, proved his age and did homage 'for the lands of the said Robert his grandfather', and the escheator was ordered to release the lands to him.<sup>33</sup> Presumably it was the rather odd phrasing of these documents which mislead Collinson into implying that Robert II, who appears to have been adult in 1223, survived until 1308 and was directly succeeded by his grandson,<sup>34</sup> thus omitting from his account the best documented of all the Stapleton St Clairs. Sir Robert III left a widow, Rose, who appears to have held a third of the estate in dower for her lifetime.

Defective and incomplete though the surviving copy of the 1308 inquisition is, it provides a detailed description (not included in the printed *Calendar*) of the manor of Stapleton and its tenants.<sup>35</sup> The capital messuage with its garden was

valued 6s. 8d. *per annum*. There was a dove cote and a mill. In the demesne there were 210 acres of arable, 45½ acres of meadow, 16 acres of enclosed pasture called 'Coulege', and 9½ acres of pasture in a 'new close'. There were also 7 virgates (*virgulta*), though why they should have been separately specified is not clear (but see below). There was one free tenant, named John le Gyw. who held 3 ferlings of land for 4s. *per annum* for all services. There were 17 villeins who each held half a virgate and 6 villeins who each held a ferdel. 'Ferling' and 'ferdel' were alternative terms for a measure which was normally a quarter of a virgate. Unlike the hide which, although traditionally of 120 acres, was already by the time of the Domesday inquisition a fiscal unit for taxation, virtually unrelated to land area, the virgate, originally the fourth part of a hide, continued to be used as a superficial land measure in manorial apportionments. Traditionally the virgate was 30 acres, but it varied considerably, could be as little as 20 acres, but on some manors was set at 40 acres, as for instance at Taunton.<sup>36</sup> The term was normally applied only to arable. If we take the virgate at 30 acres, the 7 virgates (above) equal exactly the 210 acres of the demesne arable at Stapleton. If we assume that these 7 virgates were a repetition of the extent of the demesne arable, then in 1308 the total acreages would have been:

Arable – demesne	210	
tenants	<u>322</u>	532 acres
Meadow		45½ acres
Pasture		<u>25½</u> acres
Total		603 acres

This compares with 693 acres for the tithing of Stapleton in 1823/40. Bearing in mind that in 1308 the acre was not yet firmly standardised, and the extent in the inquisition is likely to have been an estimate, and allowing for assarts and 'creeping' of boundaries over the five centuries, the two figures are remarkably close.

There were 13 cottars (*cotar*). None is shown as holding any land. Two held a messuage and curtilage; ten just a messuage; and one, a widow, a cottage (the distinction is interesting and might argue against translating 'cottar' as 'cottager', and the fact that none held land argues against the practice of translating as 'smallholder'). They paid a money rent twice a year and performed certain work services, though considerably lighter than those required of the villeins. Their services were mainly at haymaking and harvest, the seasons when agricultural labour normally needed reinforcement in the days before mechanisation. Each was required to supply the lord with several chickens at Christmas. That the dwellings of the villeins are not mentioned may mean that the buildings of the villeins 'went with the land', while the cottars had nothing but the patch of ground, in two cases 'curtilage', on which their dwellings stood and where they could keep their poultry and perhaps a pig.

If we ignore the lord's household, and assume that such tradesmen as the miller, blacksmith etc. were included among the villeins and cottars, then in 1308 the 603 acres supported 37 families, a population of approximately 150 people.

Little is heard of Robert IV during his lifetime. We know only that his mother was Rose (*Roesia*) and his wife was Sibyl. He died in 1336 at the early age of 42, leaving as his heir a son, yet another Robert. As the heir was aged only 16, the manor was again taken into ward.<sup>37</sup>

Although the Inquisition *Post Mortem* of 1336 still states that the manor was held by serjeanty, it was now by the service of finding an armed horseman for the king in war. The capital messuage, garden and dovecote were valued 10s.; and the

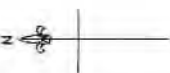


mill now described as a windmill, at 6s. 8d. The demesne arable remained at 120 acres. Meadow had decreased by  $5\frac{1}{2}$  acres to 40 acres and the pasture also by  $5\frac{1}{2}$  acres to 20 acres. Allowance should be made for possible variations in estimating area, for we can be sure that land was not accurately surveyed. There were still 17 villeins holding half a virgate and 6 with one ferling. The number of cottars had increased from 13 to 16; thus the slight increase in population appears to have been confined to the landless.<sup>38</sup>

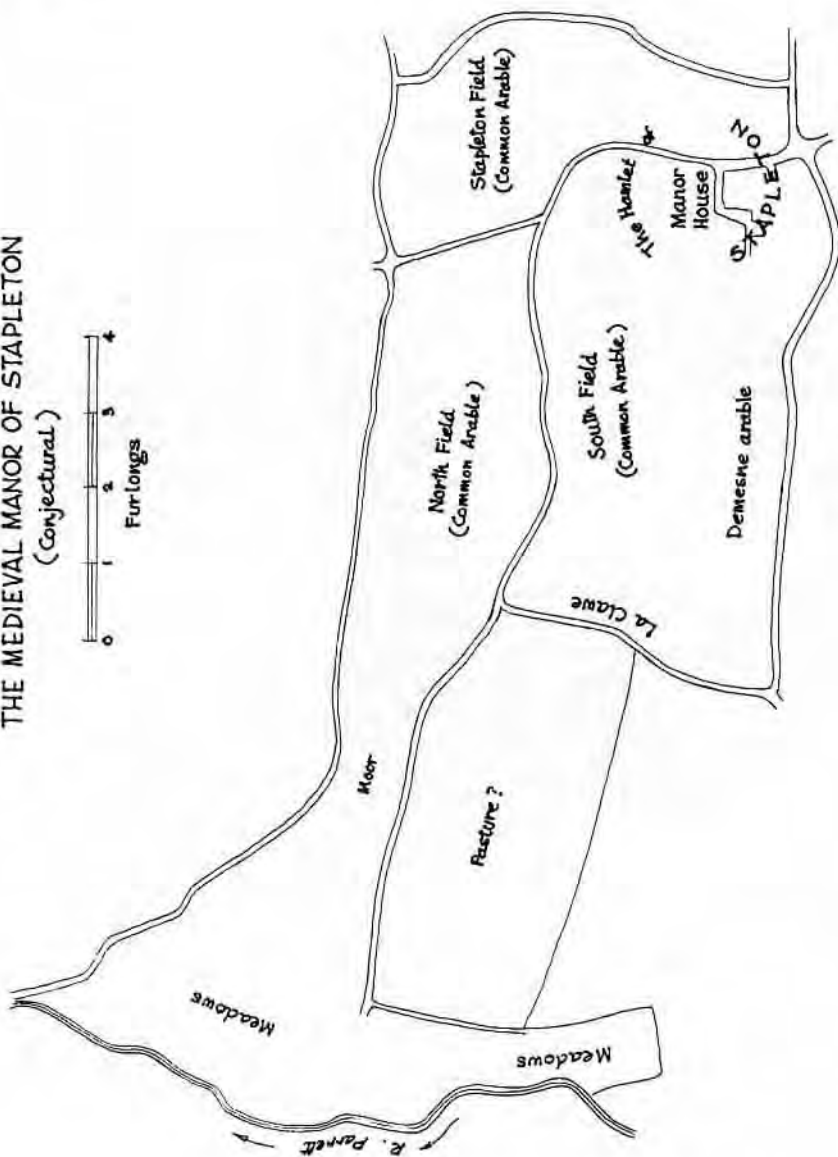
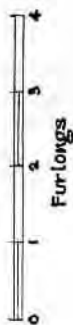
Robert III had held lands at 'Andredeseye' and 'Saltmor by Bergam'. In the *Cartulary of Muchelney Abbey*<sup>39</sup> there is a reference to 'Andredeshie in the fields of Curi Revel', but modern Andersey is a hamlet on the River Parrett roughly 8 miles north east of Taunton, while Curry Rivel is 9 miles east of Taunton and some 8 miles south of Andersey. Salt Moor lies a little under 3 miles upstream from Andersey, or  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles north west of Stapleton. When his son Robert IV died in 1336 these holdings were not mentioned, but in addition to Stapleton he held a tenement and lands at 'Budeclegh' and 'certain lands and tenements at Somerton'.<sup>40</sup> In the south-western outskirts of Somerton there is still a locality called 'St Cleers'. 'Budeclegh' in this instance has been firmly identified as Butleigh, some five miles south of Glastonbury. This tenure presents a snare for historians, for the Domesday Bretel de St Clair held lands in the manors of Holbrook and Farrington, both of which lay in the hundred of Budleigh, Devon; and from an unknown date in the Middle Ages until the seventeenth century, a branch of the St Clair family is well-documented as holding land in Budleigh, Devon.<sup>41</sup> The St Clair coat of arms (azure, a sun in splendour or) may still be seen, carved on bench-ends dated 1535, in the parish church of East Budleigh. In the sixteenth century Butleigh, Somerset, was sometimes spelt 'Budleigh',<sup>42</sup> while in 1219, Budleigh, Devon, was rendered as 'Butelegh'.<sup>43</sup> The Somerton lands had been brought as dowry by Robert's mother Rose, and they were charged to provide her with food, clothes and 'such other necessities fitting for her station' for her life.<sup>44</sup>

The assignment of dower to Robert's widow Sibyl brings the manor of Stapleton into sharper focus,<sup>45</sup> and gives the impression that its manor house was larger and more complex than might have been expected for a fourteenth-century estate of only some 600 acres. A widow's dower was normally a third part of the estate for her life, and this custom appears to have been scrupulously observed at Stapleton in 1336. Having sworn that she would not marry without the king's licence, Sibyl was allotted two chambers by the chapel on the north side of the hall, with a solar adjoining the chapel; a newly constructed room (*domus*) opposite her two chambers on the west, with a little chamber by the room (*domus*) on the east. She was to have a bakehouse, with a 'middlehous' and 'dayhous'; an ox-house by the highway; and a little chamber over the gate to the south. She was also to have a plot of ground for a pig-sty, a third part of a sheep-fold on the east, and a plot for a barton on the east side of the grange. On the south side of the ox-house, in a plot called 'Vorecourt' (perhaps the scribe was unfamiliar with the voiced fricatives of Wessex), easements for cattle and manure 'as becomes her estate'. She was also allotted a curtillage on the north side of the chapel; a third part of the garden on the north side, with a third part of the profit from the larger fish-pond in the garden; a third of the profit from the dovecote; and a third of the profit from the windmill, though she had to contribute a third part of the costs.

Sibyl was also assigned a virgate (*virgulta*, erroneously translated as 'thicket' in the printed version<sup>46</sup>) which extended from 'la Clawe' to 'the ditch over against the moor'. She was to have a meadow and, to the south, two pastures enclosed by ditches, with free access for her cattle on the moor called 'Bythonelake'. Various pieces of arable land were assigned to her, identified by the names of the *culturae* or



THE MEDIEVAL MANOR OF STAPLETON  
(Conjectural)



TH87

furlongs (see above) in which they lay. These arable lands were 8 acres in Morlond, 3 acres 1 rood in Netherclawe, 5 acres in Middelforlang, 6 acres in Overforlang, 1 acre in N. . . ., 5 acres in Uppedoune atte Sandforlang, 7 acres in Stretforlang, 4 acres 1 rood in Bysydehywshedich, 5 acres in Woghlong, 2½ acres in Byhywshedich, 2½ acres in Langelond by the Bercar' (sheepfold), 6 acres in . . . garston; and of meadow 3 acres in Cherlemede, 4 acres 1 rood by Monekedole, 3 acres in Gousacre, 3½ acres in Rugheheye. There was also an assignment of pasture.

The assignment of roughly a third also extended to the customary tenantry: six villeins each holding half a virgate and (?two) with a ferling, and five cottagers (*cotagir'*). It is interesting to note that the cottager was now replacing the cottar.

Sibyl was also assigned buildings and lands in Butleigh and Somerton.

Unfortunately, few of the medieval Stapleton field-names can be located. The earliest map giving fields with their boundaries and names is dated 1823. It was sufficiently detailed and accurate to be used for the Tithe Apportionment in 1840.<sup>47</sup> From this map it can be deduced that the tithing of Stapleton was approximately conterminous with the old manor (see remarks on acreages above). The lands extended westwards from the hamlet to the River Parrett which formed its boundary, a distance of roughly 1¾ miles. The eastern boundary was less than two furlongs from the high street of the hamlet. The distance between the northern and southern boundaries varied between ¾ and ½ a mile. Although very few fields bear names identifiable with those of the fourteenth century, they nevertheless go some way towards enabling a general reconstruction of the manor to be attempted (Fig. 1). South of the manor, close to and probably adjoining the hamlet to the east, were the demesne lands, indicated by fields called 'Lord's Field', or some variant, in 1823. From the nineteenth-century fieldnames it might be inferred that the medieval demesne lands were not intermixed with the tenants' strips. This is a very tentative inference: alternatively the demesne arable may have been consolidated at some time after the fourteenth century. Sibyl's holdings could well average out at one third of each *cultura* or 'shot' in which they lay (the 'ideal' shot was 12 acres, but in practice the acreage is bound to have varied considerably).

Two fields north of the hamlet were called 'Stapleton Field' in 1823. These are likely to have been remnants of a former common field. Another common field is indicated by six enclosures all called 'North Field' west of the two 'Stapleton Fields'. At the western limits of the tithing was a number of meadows all bearing the name 'Stapleton Mead'. These would have been the original common meadow. It was usual for the meadows to be as close as possible to water, when it was available, and they were often flooded, as water meadows, to ensure lush grass for haymaking. The Stapleton meadows were bounded on the west by the River Parrett. Amongst these meadows was one called 'Tithe Mead', part of which was divided into five narrow strips each of less than one acre. These were survivals of the system of dividing meadows into 'doles' for allocation to individual tenants. The remaining 6½ acres of Tithe Mead were held by the rector (presumably of Martock), though he also held one of the doles. Another cleric, possibly the curate, held another of the doles. Between the meadows on the west and the arable on the east lay a number of enclosures bearing names with the element 'leaze', indicating that in 1823 they were, or had been, pastures. It is likely that much of this pasture would have been arable in the Middle Ages. The only field-name that survived from 1336 was 'Claw' (La Clawe above) as in Claw Hill, Claw Gads and Claw Corner which lay in a group in the south of the tithing, midway between the hamlet and the river. (Old English *clawu* was a 'river fork', here apparently applied to a forked lane or track).

The field-name 'Bysydehywshedich', mentioned in the assignment of 1306, is

sufficiently interesting to merit a short paragraph. The elements are 'bysyde' – 'beside', Old-English 'hiwisc' and 'dich' – 'ditch, dike'. The term 'hiwisc' could be used in three senses: 'household', 'family property', or 'hide' (of land). In this instance we are left to wonder whether 'hiwisc-dic' or 'hywyschedich' was the ditch that formed the boundary of a hide; the boundary of family lands, possibly the lord's demesne; or, bearing in mind that Latin *familia* was a term for a religious community (Old English 'hiwan'), perhaps the boundary of the demesne lands of Mulchelney Abbey to which Geoffrey de St Clair had granted access for the monks across his land, and which Robert had confirmed in 1239 (above). The third derivation is the most attractive and, it is thought, the most likely. The field-names in 'moor' (marsh) lay in the north of the manor where the Abbey lands would have bounded, and the ditch could well have served the dual purpose of boundary and drainage.

Nothing remains of the medieval manor house, and even its location can be only conjectured. It has been suggested that a house described as 'late Lavours called Court House' which in 1821 stood at the north-west corner of Stapleton Street and West Street, marks the site.<sup>48</sup> As Stapleton was not the centre of the hundred and there is no evidence that its lords ever had hundredal jurisdiction, the only court would have been the court baron which normally would have been held in or near the manor hall. The map of 1823 shows a house which, in the accompanying schedule, is called 'Lavers', roughly half-way up the main street and on the corner of a street leading westwards. The land behind it was an orchard also called 'Lavers', and adjoining this orchard to the west was a pasture named 'Courts'. Separated only by a field called 'Resting Place' and another called 'Cow Leaze' (perhaps a garble of Coulege above?) are the fields which appear to have been originally the demesne lands. The evidence, such as it is, supports the suggestion that 'Court House', otherwise 'Lavours' or 'Lavers', marks the site of the medieval manor hall.

From the inquisitions and the assignment of dower quoted above it is possible to attempt a general visualisation of the medieval building. In this part of Somerset it is likely to have been of stone. We know that it had its own chapel, adjoining the hall, and that this chapel was entered from the courtyard. From the number of rooms assigned to the widow Sibyl de St Clair as dower in 1336, we can infer that in addition to the hall, chapel and service rooms, there were about 18 rooms in all. The references to 'a little chamber over the gate' and to the chapel entered from the courtyard, suggest that the building was quadrangular and enclosed on all four sides, with the hall and chapel on the east side of the quadrangle which was entered from the south – a pattern similar to that of many Oxford colleges. There was a scatter of domestic offices, including, possibly, a detached kitchen south of the hall, with access to the hall between service rooms (buttery and pantry). To the north were the garden, probably mainly devoted to fruit and herbs, a little vineyard and a fishpond.

As Robert V was aged only 16 when his father died in 1336, the lands were held in ward until he came of age in 1340.<sup>49</sup> His life remains obscure. He died in 1359, leaving a widow Elizabeth and a son and heir Richard who, according to the Inquisition *Post Mortem*, was 'aged 23 years and more'.<sup>50</sup> If the inquisitions of 1336 and 1359 are correct Robert V can have been aged only 16 or 17 when his son Richard was born.

The inquisition of 1359 shows that Robert V never held more than 'two parts' of the manor of Stapleton, for he was survived by his mother Sibyl who retained her dower of one third. The two-thirds inherited by Robert V were now assessed as half a knight's fee, held of the king in chief. Thus the conversion from serjeanty to



knight service appears to have been completed, though at this late stage of the feudal system a financial contract may well have been substituted for military service.<sup>51</sup> The only assets singled out for specific mention were two willow beds (*salseta*), the withies of which were to be cut every third year; 'Churcheshutte' (church scot?) of 21 cocks and 43 hens; and a custom at the 'gule of August' of 11½ geese. The gule of August was the feast of St Peter ad Vincula (St Peter in Chains),<sup>52</sup> otherwise Lammas Tide, or 1st August. One may wonder how the half goose was rendered, or whether it indicates that the due had been commuted to a cash payment. The messuage and land at Butleigh (Botecleghe) was held jointly by Robert and Elizabeth and was to revert to their younger son John de Seyncler for life (setting another trap, for it was a John de St Clair who is said to have acquired the estate at Budleigh, Devon, in the Middle Ages).

In 1362 William de Boneville succeeded to a messuage and garden; 27 acres of (arable) land; 6 acres of meadow; 8 acres of pasture; and 20s. rent in Stapleton which Elizabeth Seyntcler had held in dower by assignment of her husband Robert Seyntcler, with reversion to William on Elizabeth's death.<sup>53</sup> According to Collinson, Robert V had held only a moiety of the manor of Stapleton, and (in 1368) the other moiety was held by Ralph Seyncler.<sup>54</sup> This conflicts with the records, and the present study has found no Ralph Seyncler (or de St Clair) in Somerset at this time. In any case, Sibyl continued to enjoy her dower of one third.

In 1373 the escheator for Somerset was ordered to deliver to William de Boneville a third part of the manor of Stapleton which had come into the king's hand by the death of Sibyl, widow of Robert Seyntclere, who had held that part in dower.<sup>55</sup> Sibyl had outlived not only her son Robert, but she had also survived her grandson Richard and his wife Margaret who had died without issue. Like the two parts of the main inheritance, this third part of the estate was now held by knight service. The Stapleton line of the St Clairs had come to an end, and the manor passed to the Bonville family. William de Bonville was presumably related to the St Clairs by marriage, but the marriage has not been traced.

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Where entries in printed sources are numbered, the number given is that of the entry, not the page unless prefixed p.

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