

# A CHARTER FOR ABBASCOMBE

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## SUMMARY

Evidence gathered by the South East Somerset Archaeological and Historical Society is presented to support the suggestion that a 10th-century royal charter naming Henstridge may actually apply to Abbascombe.

## ABBASCOMBE AND SHAFTESBURY ABBEY

In the Domesday Book there are two entries for an unnamed valley in Somerset. Various spellings for the Old English word *coombe* are used for valley. In one entry, under the heading, 'The Land of St Edward', it records that 'St Edward's Church holds Cumbe'.<sup>1</sup> This tells us that the five hides of land for which tax was paid belonged to Shaftesbury Abbey which had been allowed to retain much of its land after 1066. According to Asser, King Alfred in about 880 had founded the abbey for his daughter Ethelgifu to be the first abbess.<sup>2</sup> Originally the abbey church was dedicated to the Virgin but in 1001 the (alleged) remains of King Edward the Martyr, who was murdered at Corfe Castle, were ceremonially interred in the Abbey, having been moved from their earlier resting place at Wareham to Shaftesbury in 979.<sup>3</sup> This was part of a royal dynastic cult which eventually achieved Edward's beatification and brought great financial benefits to the Abbey when its church became known as St Edward's.<sup>4</sup> Hence the Domesday Book attribution. In the Lay Subsidy Returns of 1327, this Abbey land is shown as *Coombe Abbatissa* and in 1791 Collinson called it *Abbots Combe*, otherwise *Abbascombe*.<sup>5</sup> Variants of both these names appeared on maps thereafter between Horsington and Henstridge to locate the village that grew around the church which was built there. The Abbey held the advowson until the dissolution of the monastery in 1539.<sup>6</sup> There cannot be any doubt about the truth of Gerard's comment that 'anciently it belonged to the Abbess of Shaston (sic), and soe gott that addition to its name'.<sup>7</sup> However, there are still uncertainties about the provenance of this property.

## EADRED'S CHARTER

From the cartulary of Shaftesbury Abbey,<sup>8</sup> only one charter is known which records land in Somerset and this details a gift made in 956 by King Eadred of five hides of land in Henstridge, a manor bordering Coombe to the south. In the charter the boundary of the land granted is given in detail (see appendix) and Grundy made efforts to fit it to Henstridge but, even with the

device of following the boundary marks anticlockwise, which is historically very unusual, he was doubtful that he had succeeded.<sup>9</sup> Both Forsberg and Kelly suggested that perhaps the 'Henstridge' charter really referred to Abbascombe, and Forsberg even suggested that the boundary might start in the south-east of the parish. However none of these three authorities was able to identify any points on the Charter's boundary in either Henstridge or Abbascombe with any confidence.<sup>10</sup>

An examination of the Tithe Apportionment award<sup>11</sup> for Abbas and Templecombe (which is now the name for 'Combe') shows that there are field names that are clearly recognisable as places on the boundary in the Charter. Although the Charter is in Anglo-Saxon, translation hardly changes the form of these words. For example 'hors pol' becomes horse pool and 'duccenhulle' becomes duck hill. Both the latter forms appear as field names in the Tithe Apportionment award and a member of our Society observed that there were two fields still named Duck Knolls on his farm in Abbascombe.<sup>12</sup> These are the fields referred to below in relation to the old Saxon charter.

### LAND HELD BY THE TEMPLARS IN COMBE

The Tithe Apportionment award lists a number of 'tithe free' areas on the Tithe map of 1839 and since this is important in interpreting the charter bounds below, now is the time to explain it by returning to the other entry for the unnamed coombe in the Domesday Book. In this entry it is stated that 'The Bishop of Bayeux holds COMBE, and Samson the chaplain from him'. It seems unlikely that the writers of the Domesday Book listed the same land as belonging to different owners so either there were two nameless valleys or the valley was divided. Odo the bishop was the half brother to William the Conqueror, who gave him many tracts of land after the Conquest. This particular tract later appears in the 1185 Inquest which records a gift of land to the Knights Templar '*apud cumbam*' – in the neighbourhood of Coombe. The donor was a brother Templar called Serlo, the son of Odo.<sup>13</sup> The Order of the Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Jesus Christ and the Temple of Solomon (Templars) had been formed in Jerusalem in 1119 to protect pilgrims to the Holy Land and with many adherents and gifts, such as the land at Combe, it became a considerable and wealthy religious order aligned with the Pope almost from the beginning. In a papal bull of 1139, Innocent II gave the Order many privileges.<sup>14</sup> The one which concerns us here forbade the collection of tithes by the Church from the Templars. This applied to the products of the land held by the Templars in 'Combe' which came to be called Combe Temple in the Lay Subsidy Returns of 1327 ('*Coumbe Abbatissa et Temple*') and later Templecombe by Gerard in 1633.<sup>15</sup> In 1312 the Templars were suppressed and their property in Templecombe granted to a similar Order of Knights, the Hospitallers of Saint John, who, in their turn, suffered dissolution by Henry VIII in 1540 and their lands dispersed to others.<sup>16</sup> Through all this, the tithe-free element of the land in Templecombe appears to have been carried forward for the benefit of later owners, although they were not Templars. This is reflected in the Tithe Apportionment award produced in 1839 by the Tithe Commissioners who listed, by name, fields in the parish which were tithe free by virtue of Templar ownership in the past. This extraordinary fact, together with the mystery of why only part of the land in Templecombe is shown as having belonged to the Templars, is a subject for further study but, in the meantime, it suffices that the tithe-free Templar fields can be marked on the extract from the Tithe map shown here (Fig. 1). This gives the extent of the parish formed by joining together Abbascombe and Templecombe which are shown separately on earlier maps<sup>17</sup> and shows the fields and buildings, streams and roads. Even the smallest field on the Tithe map has a number. The Tithe Apportionment award, also prepared by the Tithe Commissioners, lists the contemporary names of the fields against these numbers. Some have been identified from this document and marked in the appropriate fields on the maps shown below as Figs 2, 3, and 4.

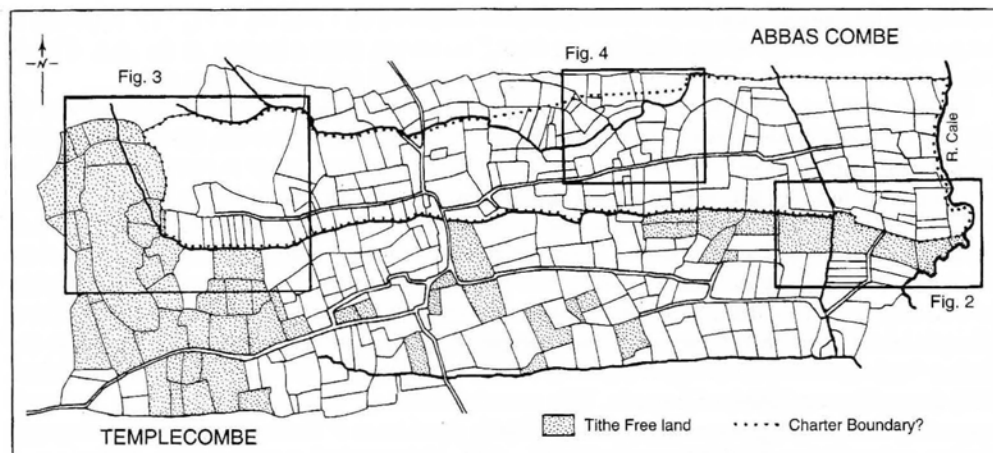


Fig. 1 Templecombe and Abbascombe, showing suggested charter boundary, extent of tithe-free land, and location of Figs 2-4; drawn by Nick Griffiths

### THE BOUNDARIES OF EADRED'S CHARTER

The translation of the charter at Appendix A states that the boundary starts 'At the head of the horse pool'. Kelly and others believe that the pool is in the River Cale.<sup>18</sup> It seems likely that it would be near to the fields named horsepool and horsepool hill, marked on Figure 2. On the Cale the chosen place to water horses in this parish would be a ford crossing over an otherwise steep-sided little river. It appears likely to be located where the Ordnance Survey maps still show the Abbey Ford (now a bridge as inserted in Figure 2). This is also the only place where the Tithe map shows a bridle path crossing the river. In Anglo Saxon times the village to the north was (and still

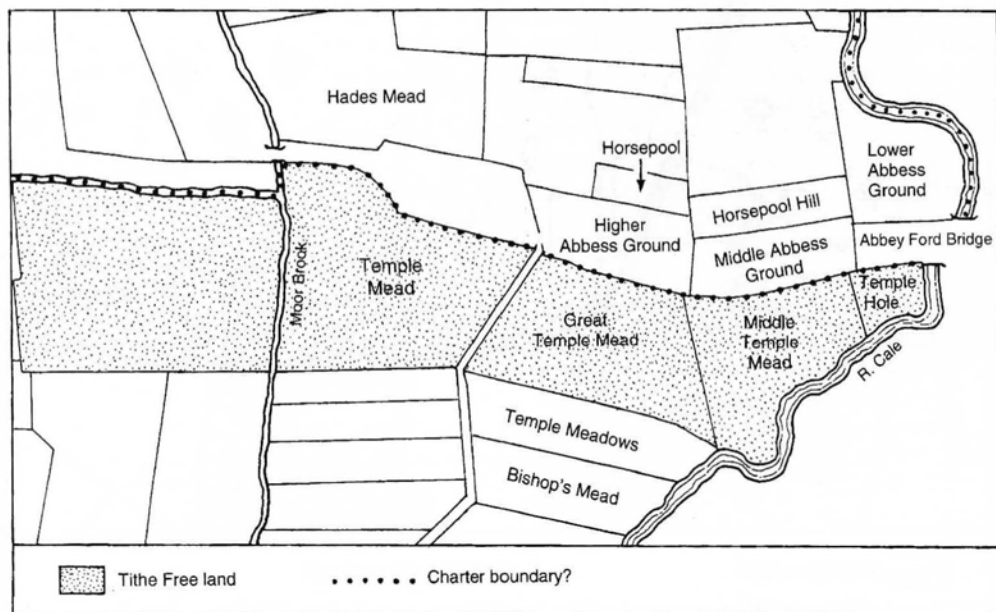


Fig. 2 The charter boundary to the east; drawn by Nick Griffiths

is) called Horsington – the place where the horse keepers live – and the village to the South is Henstridge – the ridge where stallions are kept,<sup>19</sup> so horses were a feature of the area. This is where the horse pool is most likely and where it is suggested that the boundary starts.

From here the charter leads it ‘Along the dyke to Luda’s Enclosure’. In this part of the parish, drainage ditches bound nearly every field. Many of these ditches have the remains of sluices, which were used to flood the meadows in the spring, and many appear to have taken over the drainage functions of streams. The resultant ‘dykes’ are straight in contrast to the meandering natural streams such as the Cale. From the horse pool, the boundary could follow almost any local field margin and would be on a ‘dyke’ of greater or lesser degree but there is here a clear choice of direction along one dyke which is bounded on the south side by tithe-free fields, shown stippled on Figure 2 which also shows that these fields are named Temple Mead, Great Temple Mead, Middle Temple Mead and Temple Hole. Clearly this indicates that this was not Abbey land in contrast to the other side of the dyke where there is a line of fields named Higher, Middle and Lower Abness Grounds. This must indicate the dividing line between the lands owned by the two religious orders. It was probably confirmed at the time of enclosing common land or rationalizing the fields previously farmed by the strip culture system of which there is evidence in the narrow fields shown on Figure 2 south of the field named Temple Mead and the field named Hades Mead to the north. (This name is derived from the ‘Heads’ of fields where

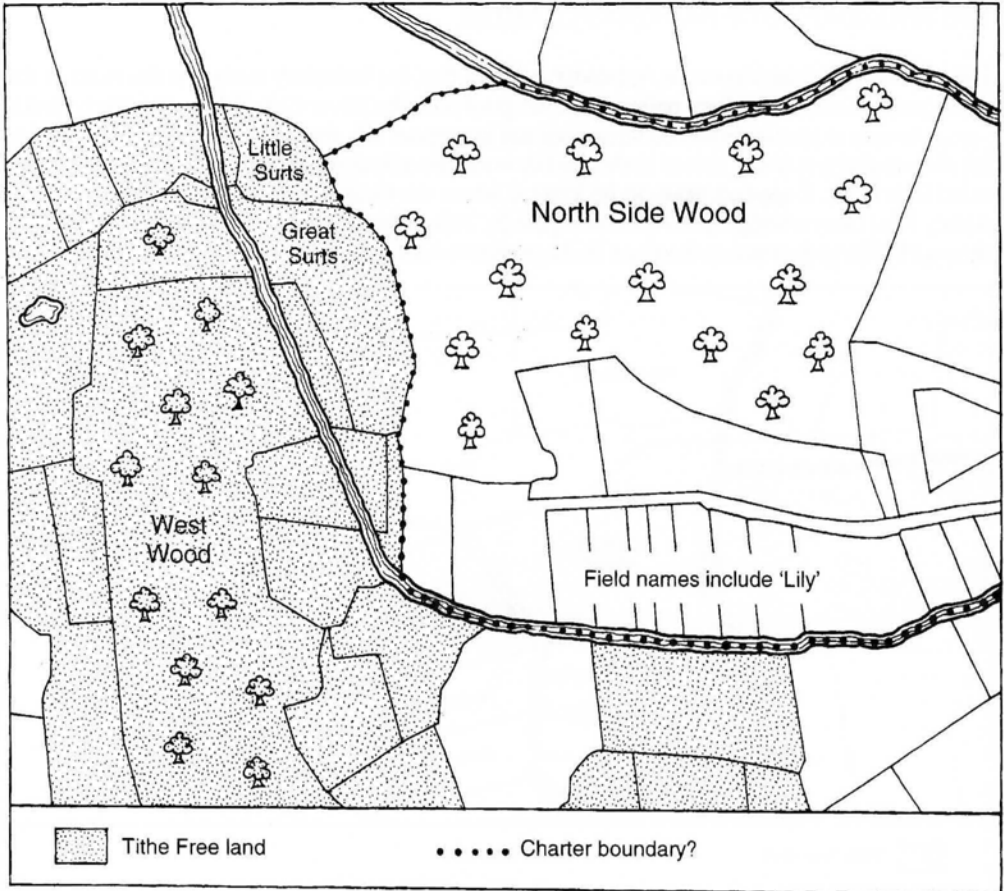


Fig. 3 The charter boundary to the west; drawn by Nick Griffiths

the plough turned at the ends of the strips.) A record of such a concord is kept at Winchester College,<sup>20</sup> although there are no known other written records of enclosures in this parish. Clearly the agreed line would not have strayed far from the original boundary of the Abbey land. Therefore this must be the line of the first section of the charter's instructions.

There is no known trace of 'Luda's enclosure', but it might have been at the point where the dyke meets a stream since the next instruction from the charter is to proceed 'From Luda's enclosure along the stream to the old enclosure' (or house). There is a choice between two streams at this place where Luda may have lived. One is named Bow Brook or Moor Brook on different maps and runs from the north to the south in a suggestively straight line, collecting the drainage from the surrounding fields, to cross the border of the next parish before debouching into the Cale. The other stream joins the Moor Brook at this place, having run down the Combe from the woods in the west end of the parish. Tithe-free Templar fields intermittently march along the south of this stream as far as these woods and there are none north of the stream so it must make a border between the Templar and Abbey land. A stream is a more stable and identifiable boundary than other charter boundary indicators such as hedges and enclosures, so it seems a reasonable decision by the land surveyor to have used it as the boundary along most of the southern length of the manor. At the western end of this stream/border, before it is turned north by the stream and the presence of tithe-free fields, there is a row of twelve tiny strip fields whose southern ends abut the stream while their northern ends stop at the lane which runs parallel. All these little fields are named in part 'Lily' as in 'Poor Lily' or 'Button's Lily' indicating that they are 'leahs' or parts of a wood where the top cover is light enough to allow a crop, in this case of flax, for linen or linseed. Several 'Yarn Bartons', where this crop was dried and processed, are on the parish maps to support this agricultural past but nowhere does this 'linleah' field name cross this insignificant stream, which suggests that it is a boundary of ancient separate agricultural management and ownership.<sup>21</sup>

After this, the line of the stream changes direction to come from the north-west and the edge of the tithe-free land swings to the north in the woods as depicted on Figure 3. At this point, the charter indicates 'old enclosure', and if the boundary follows along the edge of the tithe-free land it will reach the southern end of two fields called Great and Little Surts (Serts or Sarts in other documents). This name is a corruption of 'assart', meaning a clearing in woods where the trees and undergrowth have been grubbed out to allow an agricultural enclosure and, possibly, a dwelling place. It is a very old word derived from Old French with a Latin origin and suggests that this is indeed an old enclosure. It would fit the alternative translation of 'farm'.<sup>22</sup>

The boundary is now in woodland, which was probably more extensive in the past than that shown on the Tithe map. Some still remains. At this stage, the various boundary marks from the charter would be appropriate to woodland and also closer together than the easily visible length of a straight stream. A line diverting from the stream at the end of the 'Lilys' to run northwards along the eastern side of the tithe-free Templar land would follow a 'hedge' surrounding the 'Serts' fields past the farm or cultivated clearing in the woods. A 'stoc' or 'stake way could well run eastwards to keep deer in or out of the wood as needed. A suitable target for the 'hay enclosure' could be any of the fields lying along the north side of the woods as they are all edged by a stream which could be used for spring flooding. One is even suggestively named 'Haprick' (?hayrick) on the Tithe map.

To reach the 'dyke' or stream that follows the general line of the present northern boundary, the way would probably have been 'through a grove' at this time and place and continuing 'straight' along the stream it will reach the present road through the village. The stream crosses the 'highway' and if followed 'straight' in its continuing easterly direction in line with the present northern boundary looking for 'Lorta's spring' or a spring in a 'lorte' or boggy place,

the proposed line reaches a tiny patch of ground marked on the Tithe map as 230 (Withy beds) where a spring used to rise and run into the stream or 'old dyke' which we have been following. This is visible on Figure 4 although the spring has now been channeled to the stream through a pipe and the land reclaimed for agriculture.<sup>23</sup>

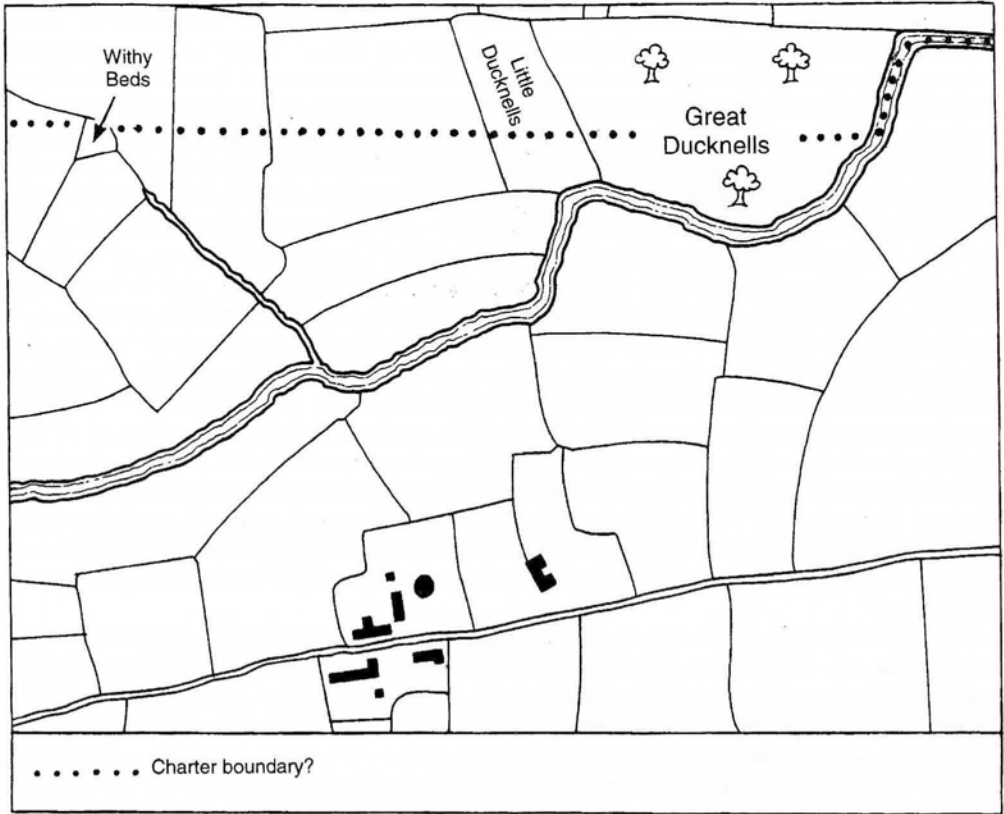


Fig. 4 The charter boundary, central area; drawn by Nick Griffiths

This is, moreover, the right place to leave the 'old dyke' as it swings away south and to go directly in the previous line towards the 'duccenhulle' or 'duck hills' now shown as the fields named 'Ducknells' on Figure 4. If the line from here goes along the modern boundary (which is still a dyke) it reaches the Moor or Bow Brook which is a tributary of the Cale (and Kelly suggests that the writer of the charter also called it 'Cale').<sup>24</sup> If one again follows the same dyke, as instructed, it runs into the River Cale which can be followed south to the 'head of the horse pool'.

## CONCLUSIONS

It has been possible to match the boundary of the 9th-century charter for Henstridge with the boundary of Abbascombe before it was joined with Templecombe, particularly using the 1839 map of the Tithe Apportionment Commissioners and the field names at that time, many of which are still in use. This fits with known Templar land, and the positions of the horse pool and the duck hills fit in exactly. The boundary proposed follows a clockwise direction as did 97% of Anglo

Saxon Charters as distinct from the hesitant line traced by Grundy in Henstridge.<sup>25</sup> Many of the field names of Abbas and Templecombe quoted can be found in indentures and estate maps predating the Tithe map<sup>26</sup> and although it is amazing that names in the charter could have survived in use by mostly illiterate farm workers for a thousand years there are plenty of similar examples.

## HENSTRIDGE


However, there remains the fact that the charter firmly places the grant of land in Henstridge and this must be addressed. In addition to providing safekeeping for charters such as this one, abbey cartularies replaced old deteriorating documents. In these copies, mistakes were made and sometimes alterations were introduced deliberately. For example, well known names might be added to the list of witnesses who had subscribed the charter to enhance its apparent validity. Sometimes the names used would be inappropriate, either not being alive, or not having the correct rank at the date of the charter. Some were blatant forgeries to obtain lands. Grundy and Kelly<sup>27</sup> both assess this as a copy of a genuine charter and since another copy of the document is recorded from Glastonbury Cartulary, also naming Henstridge, a scribe's error will not serve. Other authorities have failed to find evidence of past Abbey ownership of any part of Henstridge and the Tithe Apportionment award for Henstridge has no names matching those found in the charter as are still to be found in Abbascombe. The only hint that suggests Abbey ownership in Henstridge rests in two fields which are named Porter's Ground. There is a record of Abbascombe having been, at times, called Combe *Porter*, using the style of the official who managed the Abbey properties.<sup>28</sup> In the absence of other evidence, this weighs very little compared with the claims for Abbascombe.

It seems more likely that the compiler of the charter looked to the nearest named manor or village, Henstridge, to locate the valley which was to be granted and which, by the time of Domesday was still unnamed. This part of the little valley, together with the adjoining portion to the south, may both have been part of Henstridge before they were put into different administrations by royal grants – to the Abbey in 956 and to Odo after the Conquest. Henstridge was royal land, from time to time, before the Conquest, and it seems not unlikely that different kings granted slices off the northern parts of Henstridge at different times. It is therefore proposed that Eadred was the earliest of these Kings and that the charter of his grant in 956 refers to the land later called Abbascombe.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## LEAD AUTHOR

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## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> C. and F. Thorn (eds) *Domesday Book, 8, Somerset*, (Chichester), 1980. Section 14.1 Land of St Edward's: 'St Edward's Church holds (Abbas) Combe. Before 1066 it paid tax for 5 hides. Land for 5 ploughs, of which 2 1/2 are in lordship; 2 ploughs there. Section 4.1 Land of the bishop of Bayeux: The Bishop of Bayeux holds (Temple) Combe, and Samson the chaplain from him. Earl Leofwin held it before 1066; it paid tax for 8 hides. Land for 8 ploughs.
- <sup>2</sup> S. Keynes and M. Lapidge (eds), *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred*, (Harmondsworth), 1983, 105.
- <sup>3</sup> S. Keynes, 'King Alfred the Great and Shaftesbury Abbey', in L. Keen (ed.), *Studies in the Early History of Shaftesbury Abbey*, (Dorset County Council), 1999, 40–1.
- <sup>4</sup> L. Keen *ibid.*, 7, quoting C.E. Fell, *Edward, King and Martyr*; (Leeds) 1971.
- <sup>5</sup> J. Collinson, *The History and Antiquities of Somerset*, vol II, (Bath), 1791, 359; SRO L/K3/B.
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, 359.
- <sup>7</sup> Gerard, Thomas of Trent, *The Particular Description of the County of Somerset*, 1633, ed E.H. Bates, Castle Cary, 1900, 163.
- <sup>8</sup> The British Library, Harleian MS 61. There was also a copy held in the Glastonbury Abbey Cartulary. Trinity College Cambridge holds a Calendar of this lost cartulary.
- <sup>9</sup> G.B. Grundy, *The Saxon Charters and Field Names of Somerset*, (Taunton), 1935, 109.
- <sup>10</sup> S.E. Kelly, *Anglo Saxon Charters V; Charters of Shaftesbury Abbey*, (Oxford), 1996, 73–6, quoting R. Forsberg, *A Contribution to a Dictionary of Old English Place-names*, (Uppsala), 1950.
- <sup>11</sup> Somerset Record Office, Tithe Apportionment Awards, 1839.
- <sup>12</sup> Pers. comm. W. Garrett.
- <sup>13</sup> B.A. Lees (ed.) *Records of the Templars in England in the Twelfth Century. The Inquest of 1185*, (Oxford), 1935, 58–63.
- <sup>14</sup> Innocent II: *Omne Datum Optimum*.
- <sup>15</sup> Gerard, *op. cit.* note 7, 162.
- <sup>16</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, Temp Henry VIII, (Record Commissioners, 1810) vol I, 210.
- <sup>17</sup> Saxton's Map of Somerset, 1575, Abbascombe and Templecombe marked separately and equally; J. Blaeu, *Atlas Nova 1648, Somersetshire*, Abbascombe and Templecombe both marked separately and equally; T. Kitchin, *A New Map of Somersetshire*, 1764, Abbots Combe (sic) shown with a rectory. Templecombe omitted; Ordnance Survey, one inch to the mile, 1811, modified at a later date to include new toll roads and the railways that had been routed through Templecombe (which is shown), does not include Abbascombe; Ordnance Survey, 1:10,000, 1983, showing E/W Southern Railway but not N/S Somerset and Dorset Railway (closed by this time) shows Templecombe and, in much smaller print, Abbascombe.
- <sup>18</sup> Kelly, *op. cit.* note 10, 76.
- <sup>19</sup> E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names*, 4th edn. (Oxford), 235, ('Henstridge'); in this entry, he refers to the mention of Horspol in the boundary of BCS 923; *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. W. de G. Birch, (London), 1885–93.
- <sup>20</sup> *Winchester College Muniments. Vol. 6.* Document 12843 (1396/1397) Calendar of charters and muniments of Templecombe – Renewed by William Hulle brother of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem – in the 20th year of King Richard II; translation from *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries* 21 (1935): para. 82, 7, concord between the brothers of the Temple of Cumbe and Thomas the Porter of divers pastures in open time; para. 82, 8, concord between the brothers of the Temple of Cumbe and Julianna Abbess of Shaftesbury of common and pasture in Cumbe.
- <sup>21</sup> Ekwall, *op. cit.* note 19, 298.
- <sup>22</sup> *Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary*, Edinburgh, 1972, 'Assart'.
- <sup>23</sup> Pers. comm., J.L. Bennett.
- <sup>24</sup> Kelly, *op. cit.* note 10, 76.
- <sup>25</sup> Grundy, *op. cit.* note 9, 109.
- <sup>26</sup> The following notes include field names quoted in this paper which were in use in indentures, terriers, and estate maps predating the Tithe Apportionment award: all are held in Somerset Record Office, whose catalogue numbers are stated. SRO, D/P/Temp./C 3/2/1 is the rent book of the Parish of Abbas and



Templecombe, opened by the then Rector Thos. Fox in 1786. In it he has made a copy of a terrier presented on July 16th 1606 to the Bishop of Bath and Wells by Geo. Roche (Rector 1588–1613). It includes a field called *Horsepool Hill*. The rent book also contains the terrier for 1786 which lists fields called *Horsepit Hill* and *Ducknolles*. SRO, T/PH/VCH 86 is a list of documents extracted by Dr R. Dunning in Sept. 1993 from the English MS collection of Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York. These record, inter alia, sales and rentals of the following fields in Abbas and Templecombe: 1612, *Great Sart* in Templecombe; 1629, *Middle Temple*; 1632, *Little Sart* and *Great Sart*; 1708/9, Three closes called *Lillyes*, and three called *Sarts*; 1647, *Lower Temple Meade* and *Horse Pool*; 1668, *Sart* and *Lower Sart*, lying and being in Templecombe (this document also refers to these fields' existence under these names in 1545). SRO, DD/BTI/77 A map of the estate in Templecombe of the feoffees of Bruton Hospital in 1780, showing: *Button's Lilley*, *Little Lilley*, and *Horseford Hill* (whose shape is recognisable as Horsepool Hill on the Tithe map). SRO, DD/YB 110 A map of the estate of John Garrett in Templecombe in 1820 includes *Temple Hole Meadow*.

<sup>27</sup> Grundy, *op. cit.* note 9, Kelly, *op. cit.* note 10.

<sup>28</sup> Collinson, *op. cit.* note 5, Abbots Combe, para.1: 'It is also sometimes called Combe Porter'; Kelly, *op. cit.* note 10, 7.

## APPENDIX

This translation of the boundary instructions from Eadred's charter of 956 granting land in Henstridge follows Grundy and Kelly, who agree in all but minor points; alternative translations are shown in brackets.

- 1 *arest of horsepoles heauede anlang dich on ludenham*  
First from the head of horse pool along the dyke to Luda's enclosure (or house),
- 2 *of ludenham alang streames on eldenham*  
From Luda's place along a stream to the old enclosure (or Ealda's meadow),
- 3 *thannen forth to there ealden hege*  
Then on to the old hedge,
- 4 *thannen forder be hegen one stoc way*  
Then on by the hedge to the stake way (or farm),
- 5 *of stoc wei anlang hecgham to filed hamme*  
Along the hedged enclosure to the hay meadow,
- 6 *of filed hamme ut thurt there groue on irichte to there eald dich*  
Out through the grove straight to the old dyke (ditch),
- 7 *of there eald idich on irichte to herepath*  
From the old ditch directly to the highway,
- 8 *of herepathe anlang richtes to lortenpille on tha elden dich*  
Straight along to Lorta's (or the boggy) spring to the old dyke
- 9 *of there dic on ducenhulle*  
Along the ditch to duck hills,
- 10 *of ducenhulle on Cawel*  
From duck hills to the Cale,
- 11 *andlang dich on Wricawel*  
Along the dyke to the River Cale,
- 12 *thannen anlang streames on hors poles heaued*  
Then along the stream to the head of the horse pool.