

THE ENCLOSURE OF STRATTON'S COMMON FIELDS

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ENCLOSURE of COMMON FIELDS in the EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES.

CHAPTER V. TWO DORSET MANORS, STRATTON AND GRIMSTONE

Full Thesis : http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/565/1/Slater_Enclosure_common_fields_1905.pdf

Dorchester is bounded on the south by Fordington Field. The parish of Fordington, up to the year 1875, was uninclosed; it lay almost entirely open, and was divided into about 80 copyholds, intermixed and intercommonable, the manor belonging to the Duchy of Cornwall. But in 1875 the Duchy authorities bought out the copyholders, and the old system disappeared.

About three or four miles from Dorchester, along the road to Maiden Newton and Yeovil, are the two adjoining villages of Stratton and Grimstone, forming together the Prebend of Stratton, belonging till recently to the See of Sarum, which have only been enclosed since 1900. The enclosure was effected without any Parliamentary sanction; it was brought about, I am told by the present lord of the two manors, by the refusal of the copyholders, who held by a tenure of lives, to "re-life." In consequence all the copyholds, except a few cottages, have fallen into the hands of the lord of the manor; all Grimstone has been let to a single farmer, and Stratton divided into three or four farms.

Besides the very late survival of the common field system in these two manors, there are two other features which make them specially notable. In the first place they are, agriculturally, thoroughly characteristic of the Wessex type of open field village, the type that prevailed over Berkshire, Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset. In the second place the manorial system of village government survived with equal vigour; the proceedings of the manorial courts and the customs of tillage and pasturage forming manifestly only two aspects of one and the same organisation. It is fortunate that the court rolls for the last two hundred years have been preserved, and that they are in the safe custody of the present lord of the manor.

On the south west the lands of Stratton and Grimstone are bounded by a stream, the river Frome, flowing towards Dorchester, from which Stratton Mill has the right of taking a defined amount of water. Between the stream and the villages are the commonable meadows; on the north east of the villages the arable fields, tapering somewhat, stretch up the hill slope to Stratton and Grimstone downs. The whole arrangement is shown very clearly in the tithe commutation map, dated 1839. The two manor farms were separate and enclosed, and lay side by side along the boundary between the two manors, in each, comprising about one third of the cultivated land. The remaining arable land in each manor formed, so far as fences were concerned, one open field, divided into three oblong strips, known respectively in Stratton as the East, Middle and West Field, in Grimstone as Brewers Ash Field, Rick Field, and Langford Field. The rotation of crops was 1. wheat, 2. barley, 3. fallow. The lower part of the fallow field was sown with clover, and was known as the "hatching ground" - a term we find elsewhere in the forms "hitch-land" and "hook-land" - the upper part was a bare fallow. More recently an improved method of cultivation was adopted. The barley crop every third year was maintained, but after it was carried, Italian rye grass was sown in the upper part of the barley field (instead of a bare fallow). This was fed off with sheep in the spring, and then put into turnips; the following year barley was sown again. The lower part however continued to be sown with clover in the fallow year, this was fed off with sheep, and wheat followed.

The arable fields consisted of "lands" or "lawns," each supposed to be 40 "yards" (i.e. poles) long, and one, two, or four "yards" broad - hence supposed to be quarter acres, half acres, or acres. Half acres were the more common; but whatever the area in theory it was somewhat less in actual fact.

The West Field in Stratton was somewhat smaller than the other two, in consequence of the extreme portion - that next the down and farthest from the village - being enclosed. These enclosures in shape and arrangement exactly resemble the lands in the open field; they are about one acre each. They are called "The Doles." Further there are a series of small square enclosures taken out of the down, called "The New Closes." All the Doles and the New Closes were in grass.

A remarkable fact is that all the "lands" were scrupulously separated from one another by mere orbalks of turf, which however were known not by these names. Among the people they were, and are, known as "walls," but in the court rolls one finds the term "lanchetts" which one connects with "lynches;" and "land-shares," which seems to explain the term "launchers" which I have found in Devonshire. In the level parts of the fields the "walls" were mere strips of turf about a foot wide; but in the sloping parts they formed steep banks, sometimes several feet high, and the successive "lands" formed terraces one above the other.

All the cultivators, except the tenants of the two manor farms, were copyholders, holding for a tenancy of three lives, the widow of the holder having the right to continue the holding during the period of her widowhood. By a somewhat extraordinary custom the lessee of the manor had at any time (even though his lease had but a day to run) the right to grant a copyholder two lives, i.e. to accept a fine, and substitute two new names for those of dead or dying persons on the "copy."

The copyholds, when not "cotes" or simply cottages with common rights, were either "half livings," "livings," or in one or two cases, other fractions of a living. A half living consisted of four or five nominal acres in each of the common fields, and common rights upon the meadow, common fields and common down, in Stratton for one horse, two cows, and 40 sheep. A whole living consisted of a share about twice as large in the field and meadow, and a common right for two horses, four cows and 80 sheep. But each copyhold, whether a whole or half living, included one Dole and one New Close. There were three whole livings and twelve half livings in Stratton, and 5 "cotes" i.e. cottages with one or two strips of land in the arable fields attached to them. In Grimstone there were four whole livings, six half livings, one three quarters living, and one whole and a quarter living. In either manor therefore, if we reckon the half livings as equal to one whole, there were nine whole livings in all; those of Stratton being normally held by fifteen copyholders, those of Grimstone by twelve; though the number might happen in practice to be less. Thus at the time of the tithe commutation (1838) there was in each manor one copyholder who had two half livings. In all formal documents a "living" is termed a "place," and a half living a "half place." The common rights attached to a living in Grimstone differed slightly from those in Stratton; they are further explained below.

Once a year, at about Christmas, the tenants of each manor met, the Steward presiding; the elected officials submitted their accounts, and resigned their offices, and their successors were re-elected. The most important of these were two "viewers of the fields and tellers of the cattle," commonly known simply as the "viewers." These was also a "hayward," and two "chimney peepers," (described in the Court-rolls as Inspectors of Chimnies.) The Inspectors of Chimneys do not appear in the rolls of the eighteenth century; instead are the more important officials the "Constabul" (sic) and "Tythingman," who ceased to be appointed after the establishment of the county police and the commutation of the tithes.

The duty of the "chimney peepers" was, as their name implies, to see that chimneys were kept properly swept so as not to endanger a neighbour's thatched roof. The hayward was in charge of the pound; he was entitled to charge 4d a head for all stray beasts impounded if they belonged to the manor, and 8d a head for outsiders.

The "viewers" had more varied duties. In the first place they had to appoint one villager as "Lacy's Bridge man." "Lacy's bridge" is a structure of loose stones at a place where the stream which for the most part bounds Stratton meadow, crosses it; and the duty of the bridge man is to keep it in sufficient repair to enable sheep to cross. The viewers used to appoint the cottagers in turn, going down one side of the road to the end of the village, and up the other side.

Next the viewers provided the manor bull. They bought the bull, they charged a fee for his services, and made all necessary regulations. The breed favoured

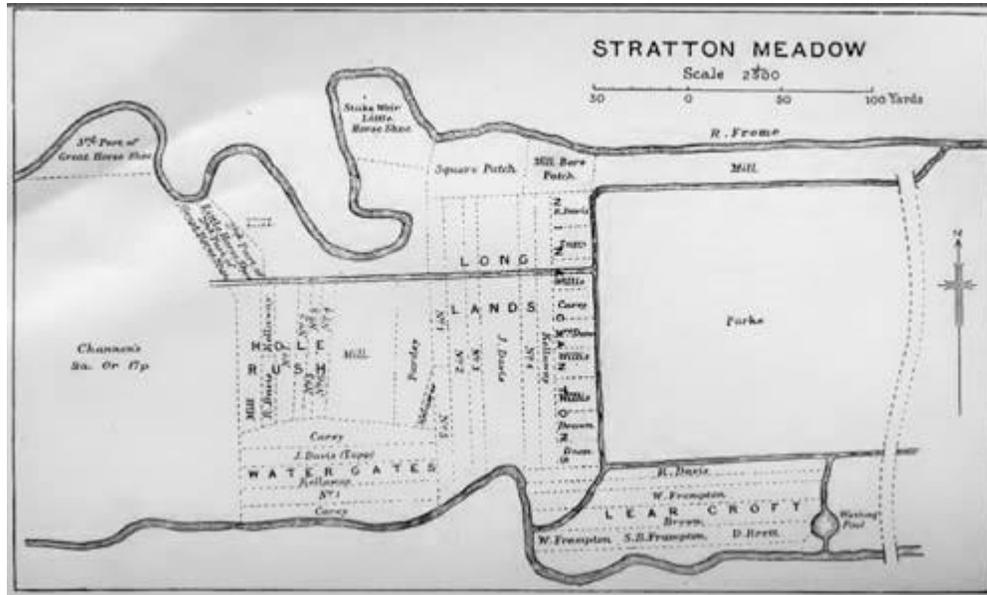
varied from year to year, and the viewers were never known to please everybody with their choice.

Then the viewers appointed the common shepherd, in whose charge were the sheep of the whole manor almost all through the year. And in general they had to enforce all the decisions of the court with regard to the times when sheep or cows should be allowed in the meadow, when the sheep should come into the "hatching ground," how and where horses should be tethered, and particularly to see that each tenant sowed his clover properly. And when the hay in the meadow was ripe, they marked out to each tenant the plots which fell to his share that year. It was usual to re-elect one of the viewers, so that though there was an annual election, each viewer held office for two years, being for the first year the junior viewer, for the second the senior.

There is much that is interesting in the management of the sheep flock. From April 6th to September 18th the sheep fed by day on the down, and were folded by night on the fallow field. The fold began at the top of the field, and gradually worked downwards, covering about half an acre every night, and so manuring the whole. There being no other water supply on the downs, all the tenants had to take turns to carry up water to fill the water-troughs, and the viewers saw that they did so. On September 18th the sheep came into the "hatching ground," on which, as we have seen, clover had been sown; and it is noticeable that this crop, sown individually by each copyholder on his own lands, was fed off by the common flock under the supervision of the common shepherd. In winter the sheep belonging to each tenant had to be-folded separately; and the Doles and Key Closes were used for wintering the sheep. Some made it a practice to sell off their flock when feed became scanty, and to buy again the next spring; but traditional custom was to keep the sheep till they were four or five years old, at which age they became fat, perhaps by superior cunning; meanwhile, of course, they had been yielding wool and manure. In later years, though every half living was entitled to forty sheep, by a common agreement the number was limited to twenty five in spring, and later in the year to thirty five, when the lambs reached the age at which they were counted as sheep in the calculation of common rights.

Perhaps the most curious feature in the local system of agriculture was the management of the common meadow. Sheep were allowed in it from March 1st to April 6th (it would only bear 10 or 11), then they had to come out and join the common flock, and the grass was let grow to hay. At hay time the viewers went out and by the help of some almost imperceptible ridges in the soil, and certain pegs driven into the river banks, they marked out to each tenant the plots to which he was entitled. There were 47 of these little plots; 27 of them were definite parts of particular copyholds, but nineteen were "changeable allotments,"* each of which belonged one year to one holding, the next year to another, according to certain rules; while the remaining allotment, a little three cornered plot in the middle called "Hundred Acres," amounting to perhaps five perches in area, was divided among the holders of the adjacent "Long Lands." On July 6th, the hay having been carried, the cows came in and grazed in the meadow till Nov.23rd, and then the meadow was watered.

I have before me the map of the meadow, now somewhat tattered, being drawn upon a half sheet of thin foolscap, and a little notebook recording particulars of the different plots in the meadow, and in the case of the changeable allotments, who were entitled to them each year from 1882 to about 1905, which the viewers used in partitioning the meadow. The map I reproduce. *[Click on map for larger image]*



The notebook reads:-

Stratton Common Meadow

Year	Croft	Changable Allotment next the Yard but one to Sparks (Parks in map)
1882		Ozzard
83		Brett
84		Ozzard
85		Green

Water Gates Changeable Allotment No. 1

1883	M. Dean (Newberry)
84	R. Davis
85	Dean
86	Davis

84	Brown
85	Kellaway
986	Brown

Hole Rush No. 6 near the Parish

1883	Brown
84	Kellaway
85	Brown
86	Kellaway

Long Lands No. 2

1883	Mr. Dean (Dunn)
84	Brett
85	Brett
86	Dean

Long Lands No. 3

1883	Ozzard
84	Mrs. Dunn
85	Mr. Dean
86	Mrs. Dunn

Long Lands No. 1

1883	Mr. Tilley
84	Ozzard
85	Tilley
86	Ozzard

Long Lands No. 5

1883	Ozzard
84	Tilley
85	Ozzard
86	Tilley

Long Lands No. 4

1883	Mrs. Dunn
84	Mr. Dean (Newberry)
85	Mrs. Dunn
86	Dean

The first part of the Three Patches in the Great Horse Shoe is the "Mill Bars Patch" containing about 36 Perches.

The second part is the narrow strip next to Mr. Channen's - 17 Perches.

The third part is the lower patch adjoining Mr. Channen's - 1 Rood 10 Perches; Total 2 Rood 13 Perches

Year	Rush Hole No. 3 or All Rush
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1883	R. Davis
84	Beau (Newberry's)
85	Davis
86	Dean

Hole Rush near the Parish No. 5

1883	M. Dean (Newberry)
84	R. Davis
85	Dean
86	Davis

Hole Rush No. 4

1883	Mr. Kellaway
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84	Brown
85	Kellaway
986	Brown

Hole Rush No. 6 near the Parish

1883	Brown
84	Kellaway
85	Brown
86	Kellaway

Long Lands No. 2

1883	Mr. Dean (Dunn)
84	Brett
85	Brett
86	Dean

Long Lands No. 3

1883	Ozzard
84	Mrs. Dunn
85	Mr. Dean
86	Mrs. Dunn

Long Lands No. 1

1883	Mr. Tilley
84	Ozzard
85	Tilley
86	Ozzard

Long Lands No. 5

1883	Ozzard
84	Tilley
85	Ozzard
86	Tilley

Long Lands No. 4

1883	Mrs. Dunn
84	Mr. Dean (Newberry)
85	Mrs. Dunn
86	Dean

Changeable Allotments in the Great Horse Shoe.

The Three Patches are one part.

Three Patches.

1883	Ozzard
84	Mr. Dean (Dunn)
85	Mr. Tilley
86	Mill
87	Tilley
88	Mill
89	Ozzard
90	Brett

The Square Patch is joining the patch by the Mill Bars, it may be called the fourth part of the "Great Horse Shoe," it contains about 2 roods and 4 perches.

1883	Mr. Tilley
84	Mill
85	Ozzard
86	Brett
87	Ossard
88	Green

89	Tilley
90	Mill

The Stake Weir is one part of the Little Horse Shoe about one rood and nine perches changeable.

1882	Ozzard
83	Dean (Newberry's)
84	Tilley
85	Mill

The "Little Horse Shoe" changeable. The narrow strip and the strip round the corner next to Stake Weir patch is one part.

1883	Mill
84	Ozzard
85	Dean
86	Tilley

A narrow strip	r	p
		16
Patch round the corner	1	22

The small strip of land called "Hundred Acres" is a part of the Long Lands and is divided amongst the half acres.

The nine cantons under the Parks Hedge are about 10 Perches each.

About the agricultural merits of the whole system of managing common fields, down and meadow there is naturally a difference of opinion. An old labourer says that before the old customs began to decay "they made the most of everything," that the crops are not so good now, and you can't get the butter or the cheese which used to be produced. The butter nowadays goes rancid immediately, and the cheese has no taste. On the other hand the enterprising young farmer who now holds the manor farm of Stratton, who has himself been a viewer, says, "They always had two crops," i.e. the corn crops had to struggle with couch grass, which partly because of insufficient ploughing, and partly because it had a secure foothold in the "walls," was never properly got rid of.

That the life of the old system was gradually dying out before it was ended by the extinction of the copyholds appears from two circumstances: the old habit of mutual help in ploughing, one tenant lending his horse to another, had died out; and the viewers had difficulty in getting their expenses refunded. The wonder is that its vitality was so persistent.

The history of the manors can be pretty fully traced by means of the Court rolls from 1649, when a Parliamentary Survey was held, to the present day. In 1649

Stratton had one copyhold tenant holding a place and a half, four holding one place each, and ten holding half a place each, making 10½ "places" or "livings" altogether.

There were besides 12 copyholders who each hold a "customary cottage with thappurtenances." During the next two hundred years (from 1649 to 1838) the number of "livings" diminished from 10½ to 9; the actual number of holders of livings or half livings diminished only from 15 to 14, but the twelve "customary cottages with thappurtenances, * which included one or two acres of arable land and corresponding common rights, diminished to 5 "cotes." The other cottagers, however, retained the right of cutting as much furze on certain "sleights" on the down, at any one time, as they could carry home on their head and shoulders; and the total number of cottagers was just less by two in 1838 than in 1649.

The Court rolls contain besides declarations of rights of the manor to water from the stream, and to the allegiance of certain residents outside, and a record of the changes in the tenantry, the names of the officers elected, and the regulations agreed upon for the management of the land. Thus there is usually some regulation as to the length of the rope by which a horse may be tethered in the common fields; mares are continually being prohibited from being kept in common or common field; pigs must not be allowed to stray, cow dung must not be removed from the meadow, nor certain thorny bushes in the meadow be cut, nor may ducks or geese be fed in it. The penalty for each of these offences is a fine of 5/- or 10/-. The neglect to carry water up to the down for the sheep is another punishable offence. In 1748 it was found that the sheep pond needed to be mended, the viewers accordingly had to see to its repair, and penalties were agreed upon for refusing to pay the proper share of the cost.

Previous to 1765 the dates for e.g. turning cows into the meadow or sheep into the "hatching ground" varied from year to year; but the settlement then arrived at was maintained for a succession of years. The jury,

"Present that the Common Meadow be broke with horses on November 22nd, (at this time the court met in October) that it be laid up on January 5th and continue unfed till February 5th, than be broke or fed with sheep."

"That the Hatching Ground be laid up on January 5th, and not be fed again till September 19th."

"That the Cow Leaze must not be fed with sheep in time of sheep shearing, nor with horses or mares at winnowing time."

The year 1789 was a comparatively important date in the agricultural history of Stratton during the eighteenth century. At the court held on October 9th it was agreed that "the tenants shall meet in the West Field on the 14th inst. between 9 and 10 in the morning, to bound out the several lands, and afterwards each shall leave a Lanchett of a furrow between his and the adjoining land under penalty of a fine of 20s. And no tenant shall turn his plough on his neighbour's land after the 21st of November." It would appear that the scrupulous observance of the "walls" dividing one man's land from another, which was such an exceptional feature of Stratton and Grimstone Common Fields, dates from this meeting.

Fordington parish, until the extinction of the copyholds, had many features which compare curiously with those of Stratton and Grimstone. It is very much larger; for whereas Stratton and Grimstone together have an area of only about 1300 acres, the area of Fordington is 2749 acres, of which, up to 1876, nearly 1800 acres was common field and common meadow, and 618 acres commons adjoining the common field. Fordington is also peculiarly divided into three portions; the arable field and common pastures lying immediately south of Dorchester, the meadows forming a detached area by the side of the river Frome, and the village itself a third detached area.

The copyholds in Fordington were known some as "whole-places, " "half-places, " as in Stratton, and Grimstone, but others as "farthing holds." One cannot help asking what were the original meanings of these terms, and how they are related to the "virgates" of Domesday, and to the "yardlands" of the Midlands, and the broad and narrow oxgangs of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire.

Concerning these terms it appears to be established that a "yardland" or "virgate" was originally one quarter of a "carucate" or ploughland, i.e. the amount of arable land (about 120 acres in average soil) which a plough team of 8 oxen could plough in a year, together with its due share of meadow and common pasture.

A broad oxgang was about 24 acres of arable land, and therefore apparently the northern representative of a yardland or virgate; and a narrow oxgang was about 12 acres of arable, or half a broad oxgang.

In Stratton, as we have seen, every "whole place" or "whole living" had common rights for two horses, four cows, and 80 sheep; every half place common rights for one horse, two cows and 40 sheep. The areas of land attached to the three whole places were respectively 18 A, 3 R, 35 P, 10 A, 2 R, 3 P, 22 A, 0 R, 11 P; - averaging just 20 acres; the half places varied from 9 A, 0 R, 19 P to 13 A, 2 R, 25 P, the smaller half places having an advantage in quality of soil, and the average being almost exactly 11 acres.

In Grimstone the common rights as well as the area of land belonging to particular whole or half places varied somewhat. The half places consisted respectively of

	Area			Common Rights		
	A.	R.	P.	Horses	Cows	Sheep
A	11	0	28	1	3	56
B	12	0	7	1	3	48
C	16	3	7	1	3	60
D	12	3	11	1	3	44
E (two half pieces)	19	2	27	2	5	96
	(average 12 acres)					
the Whole Places						
A	21	1	25	2	5	104
B	21	1	28	2	5	96
C	21	0	19	2	4	96
D	20	3	32	2	5	96

The "whole and a quarter place" had 26 A, 0 R, 13 P of land and rights for 3 horses 5 cows and 120 sheep, and the "throe quarter place" 16 A, 1 R, 2 P, with rights for 1 horse 5 cows and 80 sheep. If these be added together and divided by two we arrive at two whole places of 21 A, 0 R, 27 P, with common rights for 2 horses, 5 cows and 100 sheep. This may be taken as the typical whole place, and the half place is just a little more than the mathematical half of a whole place. The fact that the common rights attached to a given unit were more extensive in Grimstone than in Stratton is the natural consequence of the fact that Grimstone had 244 acres of down and 35 acres of cow common, Stratton only 190 acres of down and 26 acres of cow-common.

But when we compare these with the whole places, half places and farthingholds of Fordington we find rather a puzzling discrepancy. In the latter parish the fourteen whole places each had, in 1841, the date of the tithe commutation, rights for 4 horses, 3 cows and 120 sheep: - except one, which had no common rights at all, but, apparently by compensation, had 66 acres of arable land, 11 more than any of the others. The smallest of the others had 42 A, 3 H, the largest 55 A, 0 R, 22 P - the average being about 48 acres: - in other words in Fordington a whole place had more than twice as much arable land as in Stratton or Grimstone, and carried a common right for four horses instead of for two.

Each of the 21 half places in Fordington had common rights for 3 horses 2 cows and 66 sheep - which more closely approximates to three-quarters than to a half of the rights of a whole place. The area of land attached to a half place is however on the average somewhat less than half that attached to a whole place; the largest having 25 A, 1 R, 6 P, the smallest 15 A, 1 R, 36 P; the average being just under 21 acres. It happens curiously that the largest "farthingholds" had more land than the smallest half-places; as their areas range from 11 A, 1 R, 7 F to 17 A, 3 R, 35 F. There were nineteen of them, and their average area was 14½ acres. Each had a common right for 2 horses 2 cows and 4C sheep.

The following tentative hypothesis may be suggested as an explanation, it is based on the presumption that the names represent a more ancient set of circumstances than the actual facts recorded in the tithe apportionment.

I think it on the whole more probable that these units of holdings are based upon ploughing by horses than upon ploughing by oxen. In other words I think that the system of co-aration persisted unimpaired in these particular villages after horses had superseded oxen for ploughing purposes, which might have happened at a very early date. This seems plainly indicated by the fact that during the 190 years from 1649 to 1839 the majority of the copyholders in Stratton and Grimstone had only one horse apiece, therefore they must have combined to work even a two horse plough; and, as I have said above, the practice of helping one another with horses for ploughing only died out in very recent years.

I think further that a "whole place" or "whole living" meant the land cultivated by one plough, but that in Stratton and Grimstone the plough was a light and shallow one drawn by two horses only; and in Fordington a heavier plough drawn by four horses. The soil in Stratton and Grimstone is very thin and stony and would not bear deep ploughing, that of Fordington is much deeper and heavier. Further Stratton and Grimstone fields lie on the steep slopes descending from the downs, Fordington field is gently undulating. Therefore a four horse plough in Fordington would plough more than twice as much land as a two horse plough in the other villages. A whole place then in Fordington naturally would have common rights for four horses, in Stratton and Grimstone for two horses only.

A half place in Stratton and Grimstone was, therefore, the holding allotted to the tenant who had one horse, and it carried a common right for one horse. Though a half place in Fordington carried in 1841 a common right for three horses, I am inclined to believe that it originally was the holding of a tenant who had two horses, i.e. half a plough team, and originally had a common right for two horses only; and, similarly, though a farthinghold in 1841 had a common right for two horses, I am inclined to think it originally was the share of the man who had one horse only, and only carried a common right for one horse. That is to say I think the names here a better guide than the nineteenth century common rights. If one were to adopt the opposite view on this point, one would infer that a "half place" was a misnomer for a "three quarter place," and was the allotment of the man who had three horses, and that a "farthinghold" should properly be called a half place. But on this assumption it would be hard to explain the fact that the arable land attached to a half place is on the average a little less than half that attached to a whole place; and that attached to a farthinghold only a little more than one quarter.

It seems quite probable that when in the course of the gradual improvement of horses and ploughs in Fordington, the stage was reached at which three horses were sufficient for a plough, the holders of half places already possessing two horses each, endeavoured to emancipate themselves from the necessity of joint-ploughing, by obtaining an additional horse; and that when they had generally succeeded in this, they obtained the right of pasturing three horses each on the commons and common field; and when a two horse plough had come into general use, the holders of farthingholds would naturally take similar steps, and so acquire common rights for two horses each.

There is one other noteworthy fact with regard to Fordington revealed by the tithe apportionment. Certain lands scattered over the fields of a total area of 4 A, 2 R, 20 P were the property of the parish constable for the time being; the churchwardens similarly held 1 R, 7 P, the parish hayward 1 A, 3 H, 18 P and the parish reeve 3 A, 0 R, 17 P. Those ancient village offices were therefore in Fordington not entirely unremunerated.