

FWP11a

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It would be appreciated if any users of this FWP would respect the intention of IWB and PJF to publish it properly with a map and correct translation. – pjf 02.10.00.

Saxon Charter S547; West Kennet

In AD 949 four hides of land at 'ofertune' were granted by King Eadred to his thegn or minister Frytheric (S547). It is described as being '*in loco ubi jamdudum ruricole illius regionis nomen inposuerunt ÆT OFÆRTUNE*'. This translated means; '*in the place which has for a long time been known by the local inhabitants as Upper Town*'. This description reflects the East Overton charter which describes UFERAN TUN as '*in illo loco ubi ruricoli antiquo usu nomen indiderunt UFERAN TUN*' (S449). P.N. Wilts. (305) concluded that this grant referred to West Overton, as did de Gray Birch (B875, 1885, vol ??, 26). Darlington, in VCH Wilts. (vol ii, 85, n.46), incorrectly, as I shall argue, places this parcel of land in East Overton, albeit in the modern parish of West Overton. In fact, this parcel of land can be identified as the four *mansae* covered by the Domesday *Chenete* and describes land around West Kennet Farm.

The bounds delineated in this charter have been translated into modern English, I believe, for the first time. As my knowledge and experience of Early English is limited, this translation certainly requires the critical eye of a professional to look over it (copy to send to Della Hooke). I hope the main intinary will remain valid.

'This is the land belonging to Ofertune. First to the water (?) and then along the Wusan as far as the fountain/well in Crooked Wood. Through the wood to the street, then along the street, over the brook then on to the ditch. Along the ditch as far as the headland of the ditch, then back to the water.'

The precise meaning of *Wusan* is unclear. Grundy believed it to refer to the river Ouse and thus allocated this charter to Overton in North Yorkshire (Grundy, 1919, 247). This seems unlikely (Darlington, 85) as the charter is from the *Codex Wintoniensis*. Furthermore, *Wusan* is not necessarily the Ouse as it seems to have been used to refer to many rivers (Place Names in the Landscape, Gelling 1993, 11). *ea* is translated as stream following Gelling (*ibid.* 59). So both *wusan* and *ea* are referring to a stream; in this case the Kennet.

The bounds are delineating an area which is centred around West Kennet Farm. Travelling in a clockwise direction, as with all Saxon charters, the boundary starts from the Kennet to the west of the *Straetford* of the West Overton charter (S784), that is upstream from the present bridge where the Ridgeway crosses the Kennet. The bounds thus follow the river, as part of the modern East Kennet parish boundary does, as far as the *fountain/well in Crooked Wood*. This could be Swallowhead Springs, which lay within a band of trees on the early OS maps, traces of which are visible along the bank today. The 'Crooked' nature of the wood may refer to the gnarled trees or the 90° bend in the river whose banks the wood may have followed. The Saxon *thweores*, which I have here taken to be 'crooked', may also have connotations of perverse or wicked. If the Springs dried up in the 10th century as they do now, then maybe they were considered cruel. It is possible that the modern word 'Swallow' derives from this Old English word.

The bounds then traverse the wood to the street. Clearly, the line followed was one from the Spring northward to the Roman road to a point some 250m. east of Silbury Hill, following the original line of the Kennet before it was diverted and canalised in the 18th century. The northern part of Frytheric's land then travelled along the Roman road, over a brook, which may be the Winterbourne/Kennet coming down from Avebury or, more probably, the one just to the east of West Kennet Farm, north of the A4. The boundary then meets a *dic* or ditch, which is followed as far as the end of the ditch, before returning to the 'water'.

The ditch the Roman Road encountered was on the boundary between the modern parishes of Avebury and West Overton, that is to say on Overton Hill at the western side of the

Ridgeway fence line, indicating a substantial boundary mark was once visible here. In the West Overton Inclosure Award maps, 'Ditch Hedge Field' is mentioned just north of the road between the village and East Kennet, and there is ample evidence to show that a ditch with a hedge on the bank formed by the ditch spoil was common practice throughout the medieval period to demarcate boundaries (the boundary line followed the ridge of the bank/hedge).

The boundary then leads down the hill, (there's no mention of the *Herpoth* in S547) past the Sanctuary, to the hedge on the northern bank of the Kennet. This final stretch is reflected in the modern parish boundary between Avebury and West Overton parishes. S547's use of the term '*Straet*' for the Roman road is of note: it reflects the term used in the West Overton charter (S784) describing where the *Herpoth* (The Ridgeway) crosses the Kennet, even though the two roads run at 90° to each other.

This area measured four *mansae* (approximately 120 acres (48.5 ha.) CHECK). Frytheric had no downland, but he obtained high quality meadow land around the flood plain of the Kennet.

This area may have been the land described in Domesday as *CHENETE* (VCH ii, 156, n.403) which was held by St. Mary of Winchester of the daughter of Hugh Lasne which Honewin held in the time of King Edward. It was an estate paying geld for 2 hides all but 1 virgate in 1086. In 1242-3 it was held by the Abbess and reckoned at 1½ hide (*ibid.* n.57).