

FWP30a : The Ridgeway

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A brief study of the early documentary and cartographic evidence

The parish maps of West Overton, Avebury, Fyfield and Winterbourne Monkton, parishes whose borders are partially defined by The Ridgeway in this area, have proved to be a rich source in the study of The Ridgeway as a path and boundary. Although the earliest maps are somewhat unreliable in terms of scale, as the science of cartography improved during the 19th and 20th centuries the later maps studied for this Report become a much more reliable source. It should be borne in mind, however, that maps were and still are drawn to serve a purpose and are, therefore, a representation of the what the cartographer wishes to convey. Nevertheless, whatever drawbacks they may have, it is the features represented on them, and especially those which appear on several maps over many years, which are of importance for the present purposes.

Whatever the features that are included on these maps, be they boundary stones, burial mounds or fences, they were, and if still extant are, markers of great importance in the landscape. The mapmakers noted such things because of their prominent or distinguishing traits in a relatively high Downland area. Thus the many boundary stones placed along The Ridgeway (at some presently unknown date), not only demarcated the dividing line of ownership, but also stood out as visual points of reference in a landscape littered in places with sarsen stones. The same can be said of the barrows, fence lines and trees which have, amongst others, at one time or another acted as markers for the Ridgeway traveller. They were recorded by the mapmakers, one may safely assume, because they were known widely in the communities as distinctive landmarks and were also clearly evident as such to those unfamiliar with the Downs. The more notable landscape features thus played the role in the past of the prominent urban features we use today, such as the roundabout or set of lights we tell strangers asking for directions to go to before they turn.

Indeed, those features on The Ridgeway which are still in evidence continue to perform this original function, although less so today as they gradually become less apparent in the overgrowth or under the plough and modern maps choose to ignore them. Nevertheless, some evidence of these features still remains along much of the length of this particular stretch of The Ridgeway. Such evidence, and especially those features which have survived the passage of time, could be said to act not only as visual markers in the present landscape, but, precisely because they have survived, also markers to past ones. Their loss would therefore represent a loss not only to those wishing to study the long history of The Ridgeway, but a loss to the present integrity of the landscape.

The maps presented in Figs. XX, XXX & XXXX are composite ones, produced by amalgamating information obtained from various sources (see Appendix 1).

Map I illustrates the approximate position of the features in The Ridgeway Assessment Zone (TRAZ) visible in the tenth century. This information emanates from a re-interpretation of the Saxon Land Boundary Charters for the area (see Appendix 1a).

Map II indicates the position of those features which were evident in TRAZ around 1820. This information has been compiled by combining all the pre-1820 maps obtained (Appendix 1b). Clearly, the position of every feature cannot be as precise as one expects from modern maps due to the problem of reconciling different scales and cartographic techniques. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that this information has been plotted as accurately as possible and is reproduced here to illustrate the nature and quantity of the features which delineated the parish and tithing boundaries and which in turn delineate boundary of The Ridgeway.

Map III shows the features in TRAZ around 1900. This is taken from the maps detailed in Appendix 1c. The positions of the features are accurately plotted.

Map IV shows the present position of the features illustrated in the previous three maps which remain visible in 1995.

The Ridgeway as a Saxon boundary.

Fortunately the area of study is covered by three, possibly six, charters of the ninth and tenth centuries. These charters are grants of land from the king to a person who would then assume certain rights of lordship. The ones of interest here detail the administrative boundaries considered to pertain to the settlements of East Overton and West Overton, with one possibly for Winterbourne Monkton. These pre-Conquest charters provide a clear indication of how the landscape was exploited and from the nomenclature used in these charters, it is possible to gain an indication of the social and economic conditions of the period. Although the landscape has evolved over the millennium since these boundaries were first secured in a written form, the boundaries themselves are still reflected more or less exactly in the late 20th century parish and tithing limits of West Overton, Fyfield and Winterbourne Monkton. Whether they reflect pre-Saxon land divisions is, however, unclear (see Bonney 1972, Goodier 1984).

The form of the charters is straightforward. The prominent and significant features in the landscape are noted and one simply has travel from one point to the other, always in a clockwise direction. The following discussion is of those features recorded in the charters within The Ridgeway Assessment Zone.

The East Overton Charter (B 734. K 378. S 449.) was granted in AD 939 by King Aethelstan to Wulfswyth, a nun. In the West Overton Charter (B 1285. K 571. S 784.) the land at Kennet granted to Ælfflæd, a lady, by King Eadgar in AD 972 is detailed. Winterbourne Monkton is covered by one, possibly three charters; one to prince Wulfere possibly in AD 869 (B 886. S 341.), one by King Aethelstan to Ælfflæd in AD 928 (B 664. S 399.) and one undated charter (B 1192. S 1589.). The AD 869 charter is almost certainly for Winterbourne Monkton (Darlington, 96), the others (B 664 and B 1192) are less certain and are recognised as such (the information from them is therefore bracketed).

Starting from the northern edge of the study area where the parish of Winterbourne Monkton meets that of Winterbourne Bassett, Ogbourne St. Andrew and Fyfield (SU125729), a boundary stone is visible today. This point is referred to as the '*redeslo*' or red slough in B 886 possibly indicating a red, muddy area. The clay subsoil is red in this area and clearly the Wroughton brickkilns were positioned here from at least 1773 (A&D Map, pl. 14) to the end of the 19th century (OS Maps XXX & 28/3) to take full advantage of this resource. The clay pits remain as visible earthworks. (B 664 notes a ?????).

The Winterbourne Monkton charter then follows the '*rihte Weye*' or straight way, which is most likely to be the present Ridgeway until it reaches '*egelferdeston*' or Egelferd's Stone. Here one has reached SU126714 where the boundaries of the parishes of West Overton, Winterbourne Monkton, Fyfield and Avebury meet. The East Overton charter refers to its most northerly point as '*tha Dic with suthan Aethelferthes Stane*'; the dyke to the south of Aethelferthe's stone. The similarity between these two points; Egelferd's and Aethelferthe's stone, is clear and both charters are most likely to be referring to the same stone. At present at this point a large number of sarsens, some of considerable size, lie on the eastern edge of The Ridgeway and although most, I believe, are field or track clearance debris, the remains of Aethelferthe's stone may still be present.

An additional parcel of land is described at the end of the East Overton charter and refers to the four Dairy farms and the downland. To date the precise deliniation of this area has proved elusive to various students of the text (Long 54-5, Grundy, Brentnall). A recent reassessment carried out as part of the FYFOD Project offers a fresh suggestion which, although it is certainly not the definitive answer, appears at present to be a likely candidate. Careful consideration should be given to these findings, but again the compilers of this Report stress their version is a possibility and not a certainty. The line of stones

(B 664 notes XXXX)

(B 664 notes XXXX)

13. *up betweox tha Twegen Beorgas* - up between the two barrows.

From the Salt House, in a north-easterly line and following the present hedge, the boundary crosses the A4, then the Roman road and carries on between barrows A and B of the SMR map (no. 30; two of the grouping referred to as 'six ring ditches'). The cause of the unusual bend in the hedge at SU129685, 300m W of North Farm, is probably due to this early land division. A footpath also follows this line.

14. *Of tham ...on thaes Furlanges West Heafde* - to the West Headlands of the ploughland.

This could be where the hedge line curves slightly as it divides the 'Headlands' Iron Age site in two, around about SU129687, on the western edges of the south-facing ploughland of East Overton. This is significant for at least two reasons. Firstly the boundary makers were obviously well-aware that their decision would cut a LIA? settlement exactly in half. This may point to the land being divided between two sons, with them, and their kin, settling elsewhere (West Overton and East Overton?). The nature of the division does, I believe, show a forced division and resettlement and may therefore date from the arrival of the Romans in the valley. As Bonney argues (185), in an area of considerable pre-Roman Iron Age settlements, the Roman road does not seem to demarcate land divisions. It may, especially if following an earlier route, have further stimulated colonization and development, but in such relatively densely settled areas it appears not to have acted as a boundary. This would, Bonney believes, indicate that the area had clear divisions already in existence in some form or another and that the road, although 'an intrusive feature, ...[would] appear to have been absorbed' (*ibid.*).

On the other hand, it could be argued that the road, especially in the Kennet valley, was the central point off which the land was allotted. The northern tip of East Overton, at *Aethelfethres Stane*, as mentioned below, is 6.2km from *Aethelferthes Setle* at the southern tip (if note 6 is correct). St. Michaels church, built on the site of a Roman villa, is at an **exact** equidistant point (3.1 km from the two ends). This would indicate a precise division of land, based on the Roman mile?, centred on the villa and may explain why the boundaries follow straight lines.

That this seems more than a coincidence can be illustrated by measuring the northern and southern ends of the tithings of West Overton. Again the central point is the church site (with Saxon origins and possibly Roman or earlier??) of the West Overton charter (now part of East Kennet village). Here the northern point, Colta's barrow, is 3km from the *Chiricstede* along the Ridgeway. The southernmost point of West Overton, where the boundary leaves the Wansdyke,

somewhere around the 'heathen burial place' (see WOv. note 17), is also exactly 3km from the *Chiricstede*.

In Fyfield, another villa lies under, or possibly just north of, the church. Here the northern point at SU135729 is 4.6km from Fyfield church and the southern point, near Yew Tree Cottage, is also 4.6km from St. Nicholas. In Lockeridge, one may wish to look for a villa, if one believes all this about measuring maps, at an equidistant point between the two furthest ends of the tithing. Strangely enough, this point is **exactly** where the Roman road crosses the field at c. SU145685, but it would seem that Lockeridge is probably not of Roman origin (see 24.2. below).

Secondly, it is clear that the edges of the cultivated land in Saxon times were important as boundary markers (see 9., WOv. ??). Whether this is evidence of the importance of the division and distribution of agricultural land between settlements and farmsteads is unclear. It does, however, clearly indicate that arable farming was fairly widespread on the valley sides during the early 10th century, and probably had been for some time if headlands and prominent hedges have become landscape features.

15. *Thonne on Scropes Pyt* - then to Scrope's Pit (shrub pit?)

This pit is probably around SU128689 where the hedge takes a right-angled turn west. The pit could, however, be at the Iron Age 'Headlands' site where depressions may have been evident (and overgrown with bushes) in the tenth century. If this is the case, then the headlands of the ploughed fields of 14 would be a little further south.

16. *Thonne on thone ...pan Crundel midde werdne* - then on to the middle of the quarry

The probable location of this quarry would appear to be at SU124694, where the tithing boundary (see also Enclosure map) makes a loop around some feature, although nothing is evident today nor anything noted on the SMR map. CHECK. It is worth noting that only half this quarry is in East Overton, the other being in West Overton, which would indicate that the quarry was shared equally by the two villages. This quarry could well be similar in function and nature to the one across the valley in the north-facing fields (see 8 above & WOv. 11).

17. *Thonne on Coltan Beorh* - to Colta's Barrow

This barrow, now ploughed out, is shown on the Enclosure and SMR maps as being at SU120693 (SMR no. 68 'Bowl Barrow - site of') at the point where the hedge line meets the Ridgeway.

18. *Oth thaene Herpoth an Hacan Penne* - along the army path on Hack Pen (the gated penning?)

The *Herpoth* is the Ridgeway and thus the *Herepath* shown on the OS maps coming from the east entrance of Avebury up over the Downs (aka Green Street) is wrongly named. This army path, called the *Ealden Herepathe* (NB. already an **Old** Army-path) in the Alton Priors charter of 825AD, marks the boundary of several tithings and/or parishes. Brentnall notes (124) that 'herepaths led to the meeting-places of the various hundreds, for it was there that the levies gathered when the army was mobilised. [The Herepoth/ Ridgeway] was the nearest way from Overton to the point on the Marlborough-Broad Hinton road called Man's Head (SU140739) [which, G. M. Young suggests,] was probably the meeting-place of the Hundred of Selkley in Saxon times.'

That the *Herpoth* is on *Hacan Penne* is of interest as today Hackpen Hill is 5km. further north along the Ridgeway in Winterbourne Bassett. This clearly indicates a shift in name, probably due to successive mapmakers moving the name and the general usage of 'Hackpen' to denote the whole hill, therefore pushing it further and further north.

The name itself, Grundy believes, denotes a cattlepen in the area and this is reflected in the name 'Cow Down' on the Enclosure award map. The *Penne* is mirrored in the modern name for the area of land north of the hedge to Colta's Barrow; 'Parson's Penning' and in the two smaller enclosed areas on the Enclosure map called 'Higher Penning' and 'Lower Penning' (the former on 'Farm Down', the latter on 'The Cow Down'). It would seem certain, therefore, that in the early 900s this land, whether relating to a northern parcel of land in the tithing of East Overton or a southern one in the tithing of West Overton, maybe both, was an enclosed area, most probably for cattle grazing or at least for some sort of livestock (you don't need a 'penning' for crops!), possibly for sheep. It probably also served as an area where the animals could counted, marked, sold or made ready for moving, as well as being allowed to graze.

19. *Thonne andlang Herpathes on tha Dic with suthan Aethelferthes Stane* - along the Herepath to the Ditch south of Aethelferthes Stone.

The Herepath, or Ridgeway, crosses a ditch 2.2 km further up this track at SU127714, just after a point where the Ridgeway turns true north. This ditch is marked on the Pathfinder map as 'Earthwork'. When visited (24/3/95), a ditch and bank were clearly evident running in an East-West direction.

19.1 Aethelferthes Stone could, I believe, be the *polissoir* 20m to the north of this ditch (see Misc. Excavations, esp. ODII, p??). Although 'found' in 19?? by ?? (see WAM ???), such an unusual? stone would have been known to a community with much closer ties to, and more frequent contacts with the land than today. Could be standing stone photographed 4/6/95 see Plate XXX.

19.2. O. G. S. Crawford, quoted in Brentnall (124), identifies *Aethelferthes Stane* with a large sarsen 'near the junction of the parishes of Overton, Avebury and Winterbourne Monkton' (WAM xlii, 57) which Brentnall presumes is 'the one that lies on the east edge of the Ridgeway beside the fence of an enclosed field' (*ibid.*). CHECK

19.3. As 19.1. could be considered slightly too far east and 19.2. slightly too far north to be stones north of the ditch, it could be that the stone is/was situated just on the other side of the ditch on the Herepath. CHECK

It is also interesting to note, as Brentnall does (128), that *Aethelferthes Stane* is four miles (6.2 km.) from *Aethelferthes Setl* (see 6 above).

20. *Thonne suth andlang Hric Weges on thone Dunnan Stan* - South along the Ridgeway to the Downland Stone.

From the ditch the boundary headed south (probably SSE) along a recognisable track to a stone. There are several points to make here:

20.1. The ridgeway track of 939 is therefore not the Ridgeway of 1995 and it would appear that one has again encountered 'name slippage'. Could it be that the modern word 'Ridgeway' has obtained its name from a 'ridge way' which was once situated to its east? It is clear from the Tithe award Map for East Overton, that in ??? what they called the '*Ridgeway*' was this Saxon one and not the '*Ridgeway*' of today (which should, therefore, be called the '*Herepath*').

20.2. This ridgeway no doubt followed the ridge of Overton Down and, if coming from 19.1. or 19.2., then this track is now to the east of the gallops.

20.3. If, on the other hand, one is coming from 19.3., then one may be following the track between another *Ditch/Earthwork* (this one going in a southeasterly direction from the Green Street), and the western side of the gallops. This path is closely reflected today by the track and footpath which descend the hill towards the pond at SU132705, and could therefore be the *Hric Weges*. Although human activity on Overton Down over the years has meant tracks are constantly being redefined, the *Hric Weges* would have come this way.

20.4. *Aethelferthes Stane* is not in East Overton, but in Lockeridge. (NB. The ditch is south of the stone and then the boundary turns south, so it cannot incorporate the *Stane*).

20.5. In an area of hundreds of large sarsens, the *Dunnan Stan* must have stood out. This stone may well be referring to a standing stone, I believe, as the *Twegen Dunne Stanas* in WOv. note 5 and the *Dunnan Stan* of WOv. note 9 appear to apply to erect stones. No such stone is, however, visible today, but due east Long Tom still marks the eastern edge of Fyfield parish. CHECK. *Dunnan* may possibly refer to the darkness (brown, tan, black etc.) of the stone, as Brentnall argues. As he says (125), 'brown stones are by no means rare'.

By considering the next feature, the stone ought to be/ have been in an area centred on SU135702, which is not far from a possible stone-circle or round barrow (SMR no. 50). Whether this feature is natural or manmade, it is certainly an fairly unusual association of stones and is therefore a possible candidate for the *Dunnan Stan* (unfortunately there are several stones, not just one, but here again the plural ending of *Stan* may have been lost in the transcription).

20.6. Of great interest here is that the boundary (*Hric Weges*) passes close to ODXI. Does it, like at Headlands, dissect it, thus giving us the fence under the lynchet? And is this a further indication of settlement division and resettlement? Or does the boundary skirt ODXI, either west or east? CHECK

21. *Thonne west and south ofer thaet Yrdland on Pyttel Dene* - then West and South over the Plough (Ard) land to Pickledean.

As Grundy (243-4) and Brentnall (125) point out, one should read **east** for west. The boundary now, therefore, zigzags south and east over the ploughed area north of Pickledean Barn. These apparently erratic changes in direction are probably because the boundary is respecting the baulks at the edges of the fields. Indeed, headlands of fields were visible on the ground in the shape of banks or lynchets until recently (e.g. SMR no. 86 'strip lynchets, field systems - ploughed out'). The East Overton boundary may well respect the lynchets of ODXII before continuing down to reach Pickledean.

The modern boundary between the parishes of West Overton and Fyfield, further to the east of the Saxon East Overton one, takes similar right-angled turns. One could assume that the eastern boundary of the Saxon charter of Fyfield, if it existed, would contain a similar description to its neighbour at this point.

That this area of ploughland north of Pickledean Barn was under cultivation in the early 10th century raises the following questions:

i) was the land more fertile than today, or at least made so?

ii) at some point, early 14th?C, did the pressures on the land, decisions from Winchester and/or the weather mean it became unviable as arable and so became land for grazing sheep?

iii) what were the pressures on tenants and farmers to bring land into cultivation, *i.e.* why were the land lower down the valley slope, the meadowland and the ploughland on the north facing slopes opposite (see 8, 9 & 10 above) not sufficient?

iv) does the area of land under plough give us a hint to the population of the tithing?

v) could land across Pickledean valley to the west (the area to the west and south of Down Barn, on the same latitude as the *Pyttel Dene Yrdland*) also have been under cultivation at this time? CHECK

vi) how long had this land been under cultivation? how long is the gap between the ardmarks of ODXI and the ridge-and-furrow on *Pyttel Dene Yrdland*? how much of the ridge-and-furrow in this area can be considered contemporaneous?

vii) has the cultivation of this higher ground been brought about by the introduction of Roman rule and the Roman villa at EOv.??

viii) is cultivation restarted c. 400 AD (ODXII) after the abandonment of the villa and Roman road (food more scarce?)? (Bonney 1972, 181).

22. *Thonne up Lamba Paeth* - up to Lambs' Path

From the Pickledean Barn area the boundary goes up (not down, as one might imagine) to a sheep path, or, if poorly transcribed, possibly to the *Lámes* path or loam/clay path. Either one seems appropriate.

22.1. Pickledean forms a natural valley through which animals could be driven from the higher downland area where sheep grazing has been evident from at least the 12th century. The Lambs' Path could therefore be the trackway, possibly of Romano-British origin (noted again 24/3/95), which comes down the eastern edge of Pickledean, slightly up the slope from the plain of the valley bottom. This track is visible 10m to the north of the Down Barn Enclosure, marked as a RB Enclosure on the SMR map (no. 31 - see also pp.??), where it stretches up and down the valley for at least 100m in either direction. This track may have been constructed just higher than the highest line reached by the river or possibly to avoid a marshy area. On the other hand, further south, it may go along the eastern edge of the Dean so as to avoid the large sarsens in the valley

bottom CHECK - today a dry valley, water scarce, calyey soil soaks it up well, but can get marshy with heavy rains. But why *lamba* and not *Sceáp*?

22.2. The other possibility is that of a *Lámes* Path, or loamy/muddy path. Although the valley is dry, the path from it to the *Hlinc uferweardne* (see 23) may have been across fields and therefore be muddy.

23. *Suth on thone Hlinc ufewardne* - south to the upper side of the lynch.

23.1. The boundary now seems to follow the eastern side of Pickledean to the southern limits of the ploughland on this south-facing down.

23.2. If it does go up, eastwards across the fields (22.2), then the Saxon boundary would now go directly south (following the straight section of the West Overton/Fyfield parish boundary).

24. *On Hole Weg* to the Hollow Way

Appendix 1

Appendix 1a

The following Saxon Land Boundary Charters have been studied:

BCS West Overton
BCS East Overton
BCS Alton priors
BCS Winterbourne Monkton

The translations used are those undertaken by Dr. Grundy, published in *Archaeological Journal* XXXX, 1919. and by Brentnall WAM XXX???. The translation used to suggest a land boundary of the four Dairy Farms and the Downland from BCSXXX is Brentnall's with corrections by Ian Blackwell.

Appendix 1b

The maps used for the pre-1820 cartographic study are as follows:

Andrews' & Dury's Map of Wiltshire, 1773. (Reproduced by the Wiltshire Archaeological Society, Devizes, 1952). Plates 11 & 14. Referred to as '**A&D**' in the text.

The Manors of East Overton, Lockeridge in Overton, Fyfield and Clatford in Preshute. Late 18th century. WRO/Open-access. Referred to as '**Early Manor Map**' in the text.

West Overton in the County of Wilts, 1783. WRO/2203. Two versions of this map exist, one, the rougher draft, clearly preceding the other. These are referred to as '**1783 Map**' or '**1783/draft**'.

A Plan of the Manor of West Overton in the County of Wilts, 1802. WRO/EA61. Referred to as '**1802 Manor Map**'.

A Plan of an Estate belonging to The Rev.^d F. C. Fowle with the Lands adjoining comprehending the Manor of Fifield and East Overton in the County of Wilts. By A Dymock, 1811. WRO/628/49/4. Referred to as '**Dymock's 1811 Map**'.

A Map of East Overton. West Overton. Lockridge and Fifield, made in the Inclosure. 1815 and 1816. WRO/EA117. Referred to as '**Inclosure Map**'.

A Plan of East Overton, West Overton, Shaw, Lockeridge and Fifield in the County of Wilts. By Abraham Dymock, 1819. WRO/778/2. Referred to as '**Dymock's 1819 Map**'.

Appendix 1c

Maps used for Fig. XXXX. The Ridgeway in 1900.

Appendix 1d

Maps used for Fig. XXXX. The Ridgeway in 1995.