

## **WP51**

lwb 03/10/96

### ***Windows 1 - The High Downland***

#### ***Overview***

On the Ridgeway, to the west of the window, is an important junction; that of the tithings of East Overton and Lockeridge. This point in Saxon times was described as *tha dic with suthan Aethelferthes stane*, the ditch south of Aethelferth's Stone (1). This dic is the Bronze Age ditch (SMR694/ AM466) excavated at OD1-3, which the Ridgeway crosses at SU 126714. Aethelferth's stone, although not possible to identify today, was probably where the parishes of West Overton, Avebury and Winterbourne Monkton meet (SU 126715). There is a notable similarity between the *egelferdeston* of the Winterbourne Monkton charter of 869 AD (S341) and Aethelferthes stane, indicating the stone had been given its name at least 70 years earlier.

From the point south of the ditch (2) ran the *hric weges*, or ridgeway, which is today mirrored in the public footpath (16). Where the boundary veers off the Ridgeway south of the ditch, stood a boundary stone (14), shown in 1819 with a circle around it and line travelling due east to another circled stone. Clearly, these two acted as bench marks for the cartographers. It is also probable that the *mappeldrelen*, the mapletrees, of the Saxon charter were in this area.

To the north, in the tenth century, ran a row of stones, *thonne north up anlang stan ræwe*, which delineated the boundary of the downland area and four dairy farms, to south of the ditch ran the *Herpoth*. This row of sarsens may refer to the section of land from the parish boundary junction at SU 126715 along the Ridgeway to the junction of Fyfield and West Overton parishes. If a stone row was 'probably nothing more than [a row] of stones, placed at wide intervals, such as today exist on the downs of Wiltshire, as the boundaries of adjoining farms' (Long, 55), then, if the interpretation of the boundary clauses is correct, boundary stones would have been placed along the *Herpoth*, or to its west. Stones which clearly serve just such a purpose are clearly evident on the early 19th century maps; four boundary stones can be seen on the 1811 map (3), though eight years later 17 were marked in in the same area. Even today many stones lie along this western boundary, though it is unclear whether these are from field-clearance or are markers. A stone row would have also indicated the limits of the path itself.

A further prominent stone marked the junction between the parishes of West Overton and Fyfield (3) at a point where the boundary leaves the Ridgeway at more or less 90° (SU 125724). This was described in the Saxon charter as *thonne on tha byrgelsas*, 'then to the burial places'. A possible group of three barrows are marked on the 1819 map, just north of the northernmost corner of West Overton parish, which could be the burial places (15). However, the cartographic evidence is not conclusive; for example the seven barrows on Overton Hill are clearly marked and labelled as such, whereas these three northern ones are not.

Further north still, at the very top of the parish of Fyfield stood Temple Hedge (9) in 1811 and a boundary stone (11). In the 19th and early 20th century clay was removed from this area. Today these pits have become filled with water and are a haven for wildlife. Along the eastern edge of this parish ran a track which passed Glory Ann and its two pits, referred to as clay pits in 1925 when only the barns remained (4). By 1811 Drymock's map calls the farm Lorient Cottage, but by 1819 his map has returned this outlying farm to Glory Ann again. Clearly the misunderstanding had come over the confusion in pronunciation; Glory Ann sounds very much like Lorient, if the latter is said with the correct French accent, thus dropping the final letter 't'.

In the late 18th century the area between the Ridgeway and the boundary with Fyfield was called Lockeridge Farm Sheep Down in the top half, and Lockeridge Tenants Down in lower half, though by 1819 it was simply referred to as 'Lockeridge Down' (12). Part of this upper half of Lockeridge Down right up to the Temple Hedge was ploughed in the mid 19th century (CHECK), and still is today (18). Just inside the north-east corner of this

downland area stood the Wroughton Brick Kiln from at least the late 18th century to 1819, though nothing remained of it by the early 20th century (13). Some 500m to the south of the brick kiln, chalk was extracted during the C18 and C19, though it had stopped prior to the 1920s (17).

To the east of Lockeridge Down, in the parish of Fyfield, was an area called Overton Sheep Down in 1819, though it had been Dillon Sheep Down in the late 18th century (7). At the most northerly point of Overton Sheep Down stood a prominent stone, noted on both 1811 & 1819 maps as a 'bound stone' (6). This stone was evidently the marker in the late 18th century as well. The boundary between Lockeridge Down and Overton Down mirrors exactly the parish boundary between West Overton and Fyfield (5). In the Late Saxon period this was a weges, or way, from the burial places (15) to the arable north of Pittledene. To the east, and completely surrounding Overton Sheep Down, was an area called 'Fyfield Tenants Down' in the late 18th century, but 'The Sheep Down' in 1811 (7). Further east still, in the parish of Preshute, stood Totterdown at least from the late 18th century (A&D) until the 1960s (10) when it had become Old Totterdown, as opposed to New Totterdown which today stands c.1km to the west.

### ***Discussion***

This high downland area has, throughout the historic period up until the present day, been used predominantly for grazing. During Saxon times it was referred to as dun landes, just as in the 19th century it was called Overton Sheep Down or Lockeridge Down. This area does not appear to have experienced any cultivation apart from the area north of the ditch and west of Totterdown. This northern area is Clay-with-Flints over Chalk and is thus much more productive than the rest of the thin topsoils over Chalk which surround it. It would appear that this relatively harsh agricultural environment can only sustain one settlement per kilometre square at any one time. Thus Glory Ann an Totterdown farms were replaced by New Totterdown, the former only existing concurrently, it would seem, because of the extraction of chalk and clay, and the odd small-scale industry such as the brick kiln.