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Chapter 8

Old Arable, West Overton: the Ridgeway to Headlands

Superficially, this large stretch of featureless arable looks like one of the least interesting areas of the two parishes. Hedgeless and open, it lies on a gentle south-facing slope dropping towards the Kennet: one could easily guess it to be the mini-prairie product of modern grant-led arable farming. In fact, the area is one of the most interesting, its open character being because it has never been enclosed. It largely consists of the 1000 year-old permanent arable of the Anglo-Saxon 'tithing' of West Overton, stretched west-east between the Ridgeway and the 10th century boundary with East Overton.

(a prose text to be drafted from these notes and 2 key AP)

688. Settlement and field system, probably EIA &/or RB, showing beautifully on Crawford AP in 1924 and 1952 AP, and still surviving as earthworks when this project began. Downland broken up and earthworks overploughed from c1960 onwards

160: Roman road, *Aquae Sulis ad Cunetio*. Now taken out of cultivation after some 30 years of being overploughed, it is still visible as a low spread *agger*. In 1960 it was a sharply upstanding earthwork but cultivation annually went a little further up its sides until, despite its Scheduled status, ploughing went over the top. Its actual route E from Ridgeway needs discussing: is it under A4 in front of N Farm, and does it go along hollow-way S of Fyfield church or to the N of the village (AP evid. rejected by CS?)

657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663: the seven barrows of 'Seven Barrow Hill', in a rough line S-N except for the northermost, 663, which is offset to the E; all immediately E of The Sanctuary (159) (in West Kennet ph.). S of 159 is 610, marked as 'Site of' on OS but actually surviving as a visible swelling in the arable; it might well be considered the southermost of the 'Seven Barrow' group, slightly offset to the W like 663 is to the E at the N end. N of 159 is a pair of barrows, 611 and 612. The former was completely destroyed before the area became the site of the Ridgeway Cafe, now removed in the interests of amenity, conservation and aesthetics by its new owner The National Trust.

B.1; VCH E.229; SMR 203/674/675; AM 822, now SM 21763. 'Headlands': settlement complex, so-named (by us) after reference to this area in ASC /// (*below* Chap. 9). Known entirely from AP, backed up by some field-walking. Consists of :

203. A slightly oval ditched enclosure c 150 m NW-SE x 120 m SW-NE, approx. 1.5 ha. (3.7 acres) in area, well within the 'Little Woodbury' range and virtually

identical to OD X/XI (*below* p. 00). Entrance and `antennae`, however, uncharacteristically to NW (cf. Bowen and Fowler 1966, fig. 1). Full extent visible on RCHM 1995 AP and many pits and other dark features showing on CUCAP CE 053 etc. The enclosure itself is divided almost equally NNW-SSE by the tithing boundary, earlier the estate boundary between West and East Overton. Indeed, it can be argued that this boundary, here on a low bank bearing hawthorn and other scrub-like species, and originally documented in the C10, swerves NW as it climbs from the Roman road to the south in order to dissect, perhaps even bisect, the EIA settlement enclosure. How old the boundary? Presumably the enclosure was visible as an earthwork when it was crossed? Or was some concept of tenure and property still alive when the boundary sought out its line across an already flattened ancient marker. Another interesting aspect, especially given the mirror-like quality of Headlands compared to ODXI, is that here again is an example of an EIA site being abandoned but living on in some different mode which still nevertheless influenced the land arrangements round about - for over 2000 years, it might be noted, for the AS boundary across it still survives and indeed stands out as a remarkable line of bushes growing in an ocean of arable to either side. The only reason for its being there and surviving is history and tenure.

674. Three sides of rect. ditched enclosure AP

675. Rect. ditched enclosure, probably around RB villa which shows reasonably clearly on CUCAP. A ditch clearly runs between 203 and 675.

000. W of that ditch, arranged in a staggered lined to the NW are three rectangular features defined by pit-like blotches: are these timber halls? If so, Neo. or DA?? CUCAP CE053

303. A cross on SMR map, probably the findspot of RB material recorded in VCH (1957), 121. This appears to be a settlement area stretching perhaps between 675 and the Roman road cf. Bowen and Fowler 1962, 101, B1

665 (here refined as 665a) and 665b (a new number pro tem but this may be 734 on latest ed. of SMR map) is for two barrows, both showing as cropmarks and known only from AP. The original 665 (now 665a) lies on the E side of the As boundary at a points where it starts to go round three sides of a rectangle before picking up again the general line of its course NNW. An obvious inference is that the boundary did indeed deviate to go round the E side of something, perhaps an enclosure; but so far there is no evidence of such a feature. The ASC refers, however, to two barrows hereabouts and clearly passes between them; so it is satisfactory that RCHM air photography picked up another barrow (665b?SMR 734) c 110 m WNW and just to the W of the boundary

666, 667, 668, 670: round barrows which, together with 734 and 665, make up an irregular linear cemetery of six W and N of North Farm. 667 is remarkably

right under the NW corner of the Farm`s domestic surrounds and 668 is an almost identical situation at the NE corner of the Farm *enceinte*. Even though the present buidings and layout do not appear to pre-date the later C18, again one wonders about possible long-lasting influences of land-markers, especially here where again there could well be an argument that North Farm is the tenurial inheritor of the role played by the Headlands complex, only 500 m to the NW, from the EIA onwards. The other point here is simply about the barrows themselves: theirs is a somewhat unusual position, strung out along the 500 ft. contour low on the local slope and only just above the bottomlands of the R. Kennet.

669. A round barrow, probably to be regarded as part of the same group as last but out of line and further down the slope, S of the Roman road and right on the N edge of the present A4