

Chapter 9 **Villages on the Bottomlands: the Overtons and Fyfield**

Former settlement remains in Kennet valley:

West (East) Overton: post-med. pasture on bluff above flood plain with deserted medieval settlement remains (X-ref Chap 12 re Scheduling of this site on basis of my plan used here - the threat was development following sale in 1995 of the land in two lots: G. Swanton has sale details. Has it actually been done?: ask Amanda)

THE VILLAGES

Introduction

The study area contains three extant villages, now called

West Overton

Lockeridge

Fyfield

They were previously called respectively (East?) Overton, *Ovretone (DB)* and, earlier still, *Uferan tune* (AD 939, BCS 734); *Locherige (DB)* or *Lokeruga* (1142); and *Fifhide (DB)*.

All three lie in the valley of the R.Kennet, their buildings now just above and back from the flood plain. Overton and Lockeridge, like East Kennet to the west and Clatford to the east, are on the south bank; but Fyfield, like West Kennet to the west, is on the northern side. This distinction is conceivably significant.

Of at least three other medieval villages formerly existed in the study area:

Lockeridge Dene in Zone W *below*

Shaw in Zone Y *below*

the Anglo-Saxon West Overton *below* Chap. 8, p.00)

West Overton

The village is superficially a street village oriented W-E along the S side of the flood plain of the River Kennet. The village's main road apparently has no specific name but is here called the `Street` purely for identification purposes. It leads up to the church on a slight, but locally prominent, eminence at its E end. About half-way along the street, a geometrically awkward cross-roads gives off what were in the 1960s minor lanes to N (Frog Lane) and S, though that to the S

is now the priority road at the junction because of the traffic to a recent housing estate towards its southern end (occupying the site of the former South Farm). Behind such mundane detail lies a village which in the morphology of its plan quite as much as in its visible archaeology of earthworks and buildings is historically quite complicated and probably the most interesting of the three villages in view.

The awkwardness of the cross-roads, for example, immediately raises the suspicion that the W part of the present village street may be a 'late' re-alignment, perhaps to lead to the model farm at its W end. A glance at the current OS map as well as on the ground indeed suggests that the, or an, 'old' road may have led straight on westwards from the cross-roads along what has since become merely the back-lane behind the houses on the front street. The west end of that street is closed by West Overton Farm. Almost the whole of the C19 century model farmyard has been destroyed since our project began but the farmhouse apparently of c1800 still stands rather grandly looking out northwards over the River towards the Bell Inn. So much for a superficial appraisal, though it turns out to be not too far from the history realised by a more considered examination.

To begin at the extreme W end of the village with West Overton Farm house: with its slate roof, Flemish brickwork, two storeys and double pile plan, it is one of the several Georgian 'country seat-type' houses scattered occasionally in our study area, indicative of a certain prosperity and a stating of social status during the Napoleonic period. The means, indeed social need, to do such was presumably being provided by the emergent 'winners' in the increasingly formalised rural hierarchy resulting from Enclosure. The point is reinforced in a sense by the fact that this farmhouse, listed Grade II and dated 'Late C18-early C19', is not shown on the Enclosure Award map (1816). It first appears on the 1841 map of 1841.

Equally evocative in its position and architecture was the visually somewhat different corrugated-iron Wesleyan Methodist Chapel (Pl. 3.00). This lay nearby, - and what offence that may well have caused, - immediately S of the Farm and, significantly, right on the dog-leg of the road forced to turn S by the farmyard before going out into the 'old arable' of the long-enclosed fields all with 'Ground' names - Hall's, Home, May's, Long and Drove Ground (1794 Survey Map). Presumably the Chapel marked the very end of the village around 1840 where the back lane and main street joined. It was removed in the early 1960s and replaced by a bungalow.

Farmhouse and Chapel have 'fixed' the W end of the village for a century and a half (and there is no evidence that it was ever stretched any further). The roads to and past them have been in existence longer, and indeed belong to a 'street pattern' in existence in 1802 and, presumably, earlier (map of West Overton Manor). The western, straight part of the village street existed then and so is not

a C19 addition as surmised above; but it was merely the W-E part of a plan which also included a N-S road of which the northern half has since totally disappeared. That N half curved SW from the ford (Pl. 3.00) to form a T-junction with the W-E street and then ran straight on southwards between `closes` (?1794 Map) along a line now represented by a path only (CHECK). This N-S road indeed formed the E end of the village, with one `old` house out along it on the way to Bitham Barrow Field (fig. 00).

This boundary road intersected the `back-lane` running W from the present cross-roads in the village centre which was probably not a cross-roads and certainly not the centre of **the** village of West Overton as we now see it. That did not exist. Today's West Overton, still then called East Overton, lay east of an unoccupied area on the west side of the cross roads now at the centre of the village. It was aligned along two W-E roads, each end closed by N-S roads running respectively from a bridge and a ford southwards to the fields. Its plan was of a little rectangle of properties 150 m. W-E by 75 m. N-S. This rectilinear shape lying as an independent entity with clear ground all around suggests an origin in an act of village planning, perhaps involving the laying-out of a new settlement on arable land.

That it was all there by c.1800 indicates that such planning, or even the planting of a whole village was nothing to do with model farms and improved housing for farm labourers during the age of agricultural `revolution.` Yet there are no `old` *sensu* pre-1700 houses in it. The only house likely to be of that date or earlier in the W part of the present village is on the N side of the planned unit being proposed and is probably best seen as sited in relation to the former road curving round from the ford as shown on the manorial map of 1802 (fig. 00). Nevertheless, if the rectilinear plan really does hint at a deliberate planting or a planned village, then such an origin is most likely to be medieval. The site clearly lies within what was an Anglo-Saxon estate in the 10th century and it could have originated in late Saxon times, perhaps to pull a dispersed community together, perhaps to move the community (from what is now East Kennet??) nearer to the one church in the immediate area i.e. St Michaels in the late Saxon East Overton (see *below* p. 00).

It could, however, have as easily been founded somewhat later, perhaps at the same time as, - and in response to? - the `new village` of East Overton (if indeed that itself is not late Saxon). Another occasion might have been in the mid-C12 when the Templars moved into the neighbouring Lockeridge and possibly themselves created a newly ordered settlement (*below* p. 00). West Overton first appears as *Westovertone* in 1275 (PNW 305), implying a need to distinguish a West one from the East one by at least the later C13. Or the Abbess of Wilton, who owned the estate, might have simply re-arranged her affairs for purely local or personal reasons at any time between her (pre-Norman but undated) acquisition and the Dissolution.

Interpretation has now distinguished two villages of Overton, both West Overtons and neither of them the present West Overton. Indeed, both have in a sense disappeared, the Anglo-Saxon one literally, the later one absorbed into a larger village now confusingly called West Overton but actually East Overton. East Overton was part of a manor belonging to the Priory of St. Swithin's, Winchester. Its village lay in the eastern end of the present village. The main local farm was probably the former South Farm, itself was on a site of some antiquity respected by the tithing and Anglo-Saxon charter estate boundary. But it too has now disappeared: a splendid range of timber buildings enclosing a farmyard opposite the farm house was already seriously delapidated in 1960 (Pl. **) and the farm itself has since been destroyed (Check this with GS - I couldn't see it!)

To it went the southern continuation of Frog Lane from the ford, passing from the Anglo-Saxon cross-roads in the centre of the present village; a way which was part of the long N-S route already discussed under Down Barn (*above*). Frog Lane is in fact an integral part of West Overton's village plan. It is on the line of the boundary as defined in the C10 century by two Charters, respectively of West and **East** Overton (*below* Chap. 9).

To the E, the village street rises as it approaches the Church. Clearly we are entering the 'old' part of the village, in as far as this is indicated by standing houses. On the N side of the road is a group of C19 buildings with older origins; then there is the Vicarage or Rectory, now West Overton House (Pl. 00). It looks the part for an upwardly mobile cleric of the late C18: of sarsen and faced with rendered brickwork, its three bays and two storeys plus attics rival West Farmhouse. Then, in contrast, is a range of low, thatched cottages, acutely perched on a sharp corner as the road dives down to the N. In fact, it is a hollow-way still in use, it being as much as 3 m. deep below ground level as it then curves around to the NE. The cottages are C17/18, of sarsen with brick dressings, windows now replacing their end doors.

Across the top of the hollow-way and again up-slope is 'The Old Manor House', visibly one of the oldest houses in the village. Of C16 date with many later additions and alterations it is basically of sarsen build with a timber-framed and tile-hung upper floor and, south centre, a canopied porch (?C18, though Pevsner, 1963, 505, dates the door C16). The impression of oldness is maintained by the two remaining secular buildings at this E end of the village. To the N, tucked into the slope downhill of the Church, is Church Hill cottage, C17 or earlier with colourwashed brick and thatch, remains of a probable cruck and a sarsen rear wall. Immediately E of the Church are nos. 74/75 Church Hill, two cottages but actually a former cottage, probably C17 at latest, to which the Verger's Cottage was added in 1746 (datestone). Both are thatched and seemingly crowd into the churchyard, adding their contribution to the antique effect at this E end of the village. On the other side, their E, they seem to be roadside cottages, for the road they front was there in 1815.

The Church of St. Michael and All Angels dominates the village and, because of its impressive tower, is a prominent landmark both along the Kennet valley (pl. 00) and looking S from Overton Down. Undoubtedly its site is ancient, though not the present building (Pevsner 1963, 504-5; Anon, *Church of St Michael*, undated). The tower is indeed of 1883, an addition to an almost complete rebuild of 1877-8 to the design of C.E.Ponting. This was occasioned by the dire state of the then standing church, apparently a C14 chancel with a C15 nave. Though the Victorian nave followed the plan of that church, most of the building shown before rebuilding on fig. 00 was removed. Parts, however, remain: the chancel arch, for example, was moved to its present position in the side aisle next the organ chamber. During the work, fragments of an earlier church still were found, and two early consecration crosses that were unearthed were built into the external E chancel wall where they can still be seen (Pl. **). The present somewhat dramatic church is, therefore, the third known church on the site, taking stone construction certainly back to the C13 and possibly earlier (Norman?).

It is legitimate to surmise that, with East Overton a manor of Winchester from before Domesday (*below* p. 00), an Anglo-Saxon church, in stone or otherwise, is highly likely at least by the C10. It is a guess, but plausibly so, that all this occurred at East Overton because the locally prominent spot was first chosen for Christian worship in earlier times, perhaps in the C7 (*below* p. 00). Something similar may have happened at Avebury. There, unlike Overton, the shape and some of the fabric of the Anglo-Saxon church survives.

This next long description and analysis can be considerably reduced once the writer/reader has the earthwork plan (in NMR) in front of her/him:

South west from the church is a grass field-full of earthworks (fig. 3.00; Pl. 3.00). They represent a totally deserted part of East Overton and with the Church form the most important part of the historical village. The earthworks contain hollow-ways of former roads or tracks, the sites of former buildings, the banks around closes or gardens. Some deeper, larger hollows and other superficial features almost certainly represent disturbance after desertion, probably quarrying and robber pits for the sarsen stones of former walls and foundations.

A possibly more significant pattern appears to be present: a distinction between the earthworks to E and W respectively of the N-S hollow-way which runs into the field to continue southwards the hollow-way already noted as climbing up from the river into the village. East of it is another hollow-way coming in from the existing road from the E. In the area between those two hollow-ways and the Church, the earthworks are slight and mainly of a cluster of ten or so apparent building sites, bounded on the E by a low bank. To the S, across the E-W hollow-

way, is a `blank` area. The inference is that the E-W hollow-way formed the southern boundary of this part of the settlement.

In contrast, W of the main N-S hollow-way, the earthworks are more upstanding, more rectilinear and apparently enclose somewhat larger spaces. Their almost planned appearance is emphasised by the presence on their S side of 25 m. of non-symmetrical hollow-way, almost certainly a relic from an earlier phase. The earthworks themselves, including perhaps six sites of potential buildings, relate to another E-W hollow-way, debouching into the area of the now-destroyed barns of South Farm. They also relate to, 60 m. N, a parallel bank. That bank and its parallel hollow-way form the axes of the western part of this earthwork complex. Neither continues E into the area S of the Church; but both are parallel to the eastern end of the present village street now leading up to the Church (see above p. 00).

This complex of settlement earthworks certainly comprises an extremely good set of well-preserved earthworks of what would be called, if they existed in isolation, a `deserted medieval village`. They present a particularly good Wiltshire example of an apparently `complete DMV` existing, not out in isolation on the downs or alone along a river valley, but actually in a village. Whether they represent a whole medieval village which then shuffled sideways and northwards to its present alignment along the street; or whether they represent just part of a village which became partly deserted, that is, which shrank as distinct from moving sideways, is uncertain. The earthworks may also be the remains of a late addition to an existing village, an expansion perhaps in the C12-13 when population growth burst out of its essentially Anglo-Saxon village shape and size. So far, no documentary evidence has come to light bearing on this desertion, whether it be the result of shuffle, shrinkage or expansion.

A more complex model potentially take the village story back to its beginnings as a village (in the absence of any pre-Anglo-Saxon evidence from the site cf. Fyfield *below* p. 00). We suggest that the hollow-way coming off the flood-plain round the NW side of the `ancient` church site continued southwards as the N-S hollow-way dividing the earthwork remains as distinguished above (fig. 3.00). Presumably it then climbed southwards to the local resources of arable land, pasture and woodland beyond. Its E branch S of the Church led SE to Lockeridge. These N-S and W-E tracks, we suggest, bounded at least the S part of an early settlement, perhaps a nucleated village, centred on the Church. Potentially this little knoll and its slight slopes above the flood plain is the site of the Anglo-Saxon settlement, and probably of the earliest occupation of this locality whatever the date.

The rest of the earthworks, W of that N-S hollow-way, can be interpreted in conjunction with the eastern part of the present village street as forming a characteristic rectilinear planned village added to an existing nucleated one (as well-demonstrated in south Somerset over 20 years ago, Ellison 1973; Lewis`

1994, 188-89, recent discussion of medieval planned settlements in Wiltshire does not assemble similar evidence). Such a development might generally be best envisaged as of C12-13, though no specific evidence for such an event has so far emerged in this case. The earliest reference to West Overton is 1275, which may be due to the chance of documentary survival but is at least telling us that by the mid-C13 it was necessary to distinguish it from the other or *East* Overton. Planned or otherwise, the point seems to be that the village expanded in a reasonably logical way to the W of its nucleus as far as - but no further than, - South Farm and the western boundary of the manor of Overton Prioris (1167). The boundary - and perhaps with it the village and also the Farm? - was still basically where it had been in the C10 i.e. along Frog Lane leading from the ford to the cross-roads in the middle of present-day Overton and then bending westwards around South Farm.

A possible planned village could therefore have existed some 200 m. square, that is 200 m from the `old` N-S hollow-way on the E to the probably equally `old` N-S lane along the E side of (or through?) South Farm to the W; and about 200 m. from the back of the properties along the N side of the northern street to a similar position at the back of the properties on the S side of the southern street (the present road along the south side of the earthworks). This rectangular plan is divided exactly in half, at 100 m. from both property boundaries as envisaged *above*, by the W-E bank running through the centre of the earthworks.

At some later date, the southern half, and eventually the southern strip of the northern half, of this rectangular village was deserted or possibly even cleared. Six buildings appear to be depicted in these fields on the late C18 manorial map; their positions re-inforce the `early` pattern of the N-S hollow-way and the settlement core to its E. Only one building is shown in the area of the `planned` earthworks and that had disappeared some 25 years later. Then, only one building, perhaps a shed or barn set up in the hollow-way, is shown in the two fields on the Enclosure Award Map (1815). Only some hachures mark its site on C19 OS maps. The houses on the N side of the approach to the Church have then enjoyed an effectively clear view southwards across a green and pleasant field for at least 200 years.

Whether we are looking at the earthworks of abandonment, slow desertion, `village shuffle` or manorial clearance, a fairly safe inference is that the change from habitation to grass took place long before 1800. A guess would place it in the C14-15. If the equally unprovable (at the moment) guess be right that a village was laid out either in the C10 or the mid-C12, then 'new' East Overton lasted between about 500 and 350 years.

They may be irrelevant to consideration of a valley-bottom village because of their marginal location and special status, but two local downland settlements, Raddun (*below* p. 00) and Shaw (*below* p. 00) were deserted around 1300 and 1400 respectively. More generally, following Hare (1994, 167-8) and trends of

demographic and economic decline balanced by local stability (Lewis 1994, 177-83), recent discussion points, albeit for different reasons, to the same period; but the best evidence, short of excavation, is most likely to come from an as yet unnoted documentary source. On such a long-established ecclesiastical estate as East Overton, where other records indicate a sensitivity to annual returns and rents, did not anyone notice that the medieval village, or at least a large part of it, was not there any more?

ed to here 4/4/96

a. **Fyfield**: on flood plain, with Roman road, now modern pasture after 1970s mechanised clearance

(to be inserted)

The Villages and the Houses and their dating: perhaps a general point in chap 1, with decision to be made whether to include anything in more detail in chaps 9 and 10 as appropriate (if used at all?)