

Frontespiece. Fyfield Down on June 13th, 1934

This familiar oblique air photograph by Major Allen looks across Fyfield Down from the south east. It has been repeatedly published to illustrate well-preserved and typical 'Celtic' fields. In fact, it shows three major phases of pre-medieval land allotment on three discrete orientations, developed and used periodically during the two and a half thousand years up to about the middle of the first millennium AD. Various field types were incorporated. The arrangements, and individual fields, are not, in fact, well-preserved in places because they were differentially modified by medieval cultivation. The ridge-and-furrow in the centre of the photograph is one such example, almost certainly representing the work in the mid-13th century of a man called Richard of Raddun.

The photograph shows much else besides. Top left is a Bronze Age ditch bounding the prehistoric arable, though the visible, markedly regular fields to its south east are of early Roman date. Across the centre, on land cultivated during the 2nd and earlier part of the first millennia BC, are fields, defined by lynchets up to 4 metres high, which have finally accumulated against small, dry-stone walls also in the early Roman period. Overlying these early fields, and crossing their boundaries in places, is ridge-and-furrow arranged in butting furlongs, with a contemporary farm ('Raddun') cut by the photograph's edge (bottom left). Between the fields is a Romano-British track system with a contemporary settlement at the T-junction right centre. Passing along the track and through the settlement is a small, sharp bank and ditch continuing to the right: it is the 19th century boundary of Overton Cowdown, as Fyfield Down was then called. It is smoothed over by what looks like an air-landing strip but which was in fact a race-horse training gallop.

The prominent wood on the left is Wroughton Copse, a name derived from 'Raddun'. The triangular enclosure in front of it is part of the medieval farm, with later medieval additions suggesting it may also be the site of a documented sheep-cote of 1490 and probably the site of a named barn, 'Rodden', in 1570. Further away on the left is a small but prominent beech plantation, also within an enclosure, and contemporary with the 18th century building alongside. The only house on the Down, Delling was the (game-)keeper's cottage. From bottom right to left centre runs the heavily rutted Old Bath road, 'Green Street', formerly the main road from London via Marlborough and Avebury. It was formally closed to through traffic in 1815 when the toll road along the Kennet valley was available.

Centre right is a low bank and ditch which is still the boundary of the straight north-east side of Fyfield parish. On it is 'Long Tom', a cut sarsen pillar which, as perhaps has been the case since at least Anglo-Saxon times when the area was called 'Red Down', marks where Fyfield ends.