West Berkshire Countryside Society

West Berkshire Countryside Society was formed in January 2012 by merging four long-established environmental groups. These were *The Friends of the Pang, Kennet & Lambourn Valleys*, *The Bucklebury Heathland Conservation Group, The Pang Valley Conservation Volunteers* and *The Pang Valley Barn Owl Group*.

Our remit is to continue their work of promoting and improving the landscape of West Berkshire by practical conservation work and by introducing people to the countryside, its work, history and wildlife, through the medium of talks and conducted walks – of which this is one.

Members of **West Berkshire Countryside Society** currently pay a £15 annual subscription for individual and family membership to provide a financial resource. Those members who wish to, make up volunteer working parties to undertake practical conservation tasks.

Non-members are very welcome to join our conducted walks for which we make no charge. Non-members are also welcome at our talks for which we make a small charge.

If you would like more information about our activities or would like to join us and help with our work, please visit our website:

www.westberkscountryside.org.uk References

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AROUND & ABOUT HAMPSTEAD NORREYS

A Walk around Hampstead Norreys Parish. Starting and finishing at Hampstead Norreys Village Hall

About 6 miles or 10 km.

Ordnance Survey Explorer Map 158 – 'Newbury & Hungerford' will be useful

There are two modest hills and one steep hill on this walk

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Why Hampstead Norreys is here.

Even our earliest ancestors required a reliable source of water and after the adoption of farming in about 4.000BC a fertile non-acid soil was needed to grow the cereals on which life depended. Looking down from Folly Hill we can see how the site of Hampstead Norreys fulfilled these requirements. The stream and a high water table into which shallow wells could be dug provided the water and the fertile alluvium in the valley bottom provided lush grazing. The slightly less fertile, but free draining, valley soils had a sufficiently high pH to allow cereals to be grown. The village was established many centuries before it was first recorded in Domesday Book in 1086. It is surrounded by Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman sites and the conjunction of an early church and a manor farm indicates that the village was probably the headquarters of a large Saxon Estate. The high land to the southwest of the village around Eling was mostly open scrubland until the end of the 18th century. The land is composed of free draining gravel and loam soils with a pH of about 6 and it may have been the lack of a water supply that inhibited settlement. Further south the soils are infertile sands and clavs and were used for brick making.

Early Saxon Estates.

Current historical research indicates that, after the re-conquest of southern England from the invading Danes by King Alfred the Great and his family in the late 9th and early 10th centuries AD, the country was divided up into very large estates controlled by the king's immediate family and senior colleagues. These estates were soon sub-divided and tenanted by lesser lords. These smaller estates were constructed so that they had a mixture of land types. Typically the headquarters would be in a valley surrounded by the arable and dairying land but the estate would spread up the valley sides until it met the land of the estate based in the next valley. This remoter land would be used for pasture and for supplying woodland products. King Alfred encouraged the spread of Christianity and literacy and local lords began to build churches on their estates. They naturally built them conveniently close to their own dwelling. The priest was funded by the Tithe – a tenth of the increase of the land – from his parish and the parish would coincide with his patron's estate. Thus parish boundaries often show us Saxon estates. They are usually marked by earthen banks and ditches which have often been shown to be very much older and perhaps the boundaries of Roman or Iron Age land holdings.

Manor Farm.

This is almost certainly on the site of the original Saxon estate headquarters. The Manor House dates from at least the 17th century together with its carefully planned layout of barns and stables. As with the typical estate above, its arable land lies to the north of the village in the valley bottom. The Betts family have farmed here since 1909 and their 9 year old son later married the daughter of the previous farmer who had farmed here from 1817 to 1902. Almost two centuries of care by two families. In the 1920's the farm was famous for pioneering large scale chicken farming. The modern farm consists of 350 acres of arable land and a 100 head beef herd which rears the bull calves born on Eling Farm. The farm entered the Countryside Steward Scheme and has transferred to the new Entry Level Scheme. This explains the wide field margins and the area behind the White Hart which is sown with wheat, kale and quinoa to provide wild bird food in winter.



St. Mary's church

Possible Saxon 'Long & Short work'



World War 2 pillbox



Air corridor beacon



Waymarks fush to ground for aircraft safety



World War 2 air raid shelter



The Lousley memorial



Deep sunk lane and parish boundary

- **12. Air raid shelter.** This provided a retreat for people training and working in the huts nearby.
- **13. Ancient woodland**. The rich ground flora indicate many centuries without ground disturbance. The 1.2m diameter ash coppice stools are about 400 years old.
- **14. Old unimproved grassland**. This field contains WW2 shelters and it, and the field to the south, have been farmed since the end of the war by organic farmers who used it for grazing. It has a rich flora and large ant hills.
- **15. Old field.** This part of the wood is a hazel coppice planted on an old field. Note the dense mat of dog's mercury and lack of plants such as bluebells. There are several large badger setts. The badgers harvest their bedding from the field and their 'drag lines' are often visible.
- **16.** Lousley memorial. This commemorates Job Lousle (*sic*). He was a member of the Lousley family, who were notable local archaeologists and botanists.
- 17. View south along the valley. The late Ice Age river must have been much larger to have cut such a large valley. Such valleys are called *misfit valleys*
- 18. Ancient Parish Boundary. Parish boundaries were established in this area in the 9th century. There have been alterations since but this deeply sunken track seems to be very ancient. It leads to a major Roman site and may be even older than that. The area is called *St Abb's*. She was a Saxon abbess also called *St Ebbe*. The name demonstrates a link with Oxford. This is strengthened by the dedication of Frilsham Church to St Frideswide the patron saint of Oxford Cathedral.
- 19. River Pang. Note the clean gravel bed and (when there is water) the water crowsfoot. These are typical of chalk streams. An alternative route can be taken from here. It shortens the walk and avoids a hill.

- **20. Ancient orchard**. This is shown on a map of 1773 and some of the apple species have been identified as *Pot's seedling, Lord Derby, Blenheim orange and Bramley's seedling.* **21. Swimming pool**. Built in the
- 1930's at the urging of the Prince of Wales to provide out-door recreation for the urban working class. It included tennis courts and a camp site. To reward the farmer's efforts the Council raised his rates! Soils. Note the difference between the riverside molehills and the field's surface. The rich flora in the next field shows how an organic farmer manages grassland. Look for: clover, sorrel, chicory, dandelion, meadow buttercup. Chicory has deep roots which bring nutrients to the surface it also has a worming action on grazing cattle.
- 22. Ancient lynchet. This boundary is shown on a map of 1773 but is certainly much older. Note the difference in levels between the two fields. This is caused by centuries of ploughing moving the soil downhill.

 23. Eling Farm. The name means the
- 23. Eling Farm. The name means the people of Eli and is at least a thousand years old. In 1761 most of the land to the south of the farm was uncultivated scrub land. The large roadside oaks probably date from the enclosure in 1778. In contrast to the opposite valley crest this area is gravely loam with a pH of about 6. Perhaps the lack of surface water prevented more early settlement. Note the ponds which provided water for stock before piped water.
- 24. Down Wood & Park Wood. Both these ancient woods contain even more ancient features. The mound is a Bronze Age burial mound (2500BC), the faint terraces may be Roman field boundaries and some of the banks are the boundary of an early 15th century deer park.

Haw Farm Airfield. The airfield was a satellite for the main airfield at Harwell. Building started in 1938 and it was commissioned in 1940. It was used mainly for the training of Wellington bomber crews and as a base for ferrying bombers to the Middle East. Later in the war it was used for the training of the soldiers who piloted troop carrying gliders. After the war it was used by the Fleet Air Arm. It was then decommissioned and returned to agriculture, but many war time relics remain. For example, the narrow strip of trees mark a runway and there are air raid shelters and pillboxes scattered around the landscape. It should be remembered that this is an active airfield and a working farm. Landing and

taxiing aircraft may be encountered and large farm machinery. Liborwan On site of Castle Rights of Way symbol Solid lines are legally established Permitted **Paths** Munitions dumps Training Area Walk & Workshops route World War 2 Accomodation Airfield Lavout Barracks*

- 1. The Village Hall and Dean Meadow. These were given to the parish by Mr Thompson of Wyld Court in 1989. 'Dean' comes from Early English denu meaning a hollow. Note the low ridge running close to and parallel with the hedge. This is the headland on which the ploughs were turned and cleaned before the next furrow. The scrapings built the ridge.
- 2. St Mary's church. Parts of the church are said to date from the Saxon Period. The 'Long & Short Work' on the corners at the east end may be Saxon. It has a fine timber roof, a single medieval wall painting and part of a medieval stone grave cover showing a charging knight. Outside there is the base of a preaching cross and the cast iron Lousley family tomb.
- 3. The River Pang. This important chalk stream has two sources (East Ilsley pond and Churn Plain) and is fed by springs in the chalk rock. It is a bourne which means that its upper reaches regularly dry as the water table in the chalk falls below the spring levels. The well was given to the village in 1903 by Mr Harry Weber of Hawkridge House, Frilsham. The garden was made and is maintained by local volunteers.
- **4. Old road**. This track is part of the ancient route up the valley and over the saddle in the chalk ridge above Compton.
- **5. Species rich hedge.** The restoration of this hedge was one of the first tasks undertaken by the Pang Valley Conservation Volunteers.
- **6. Tumulus (site).** This was a Bronze Age (c.2,600BC) burial mound similar to the well preserved example in Park Wood. It has been ploughed flat by centuries of farming. Three other barrows to the south have shared the same fate.

- 7. View from Folly Hill. The view extends from the chalk ridge around Walbury hillfort to the south and to the Berkshire Ridgeway to the north. To the west lies Perborough Castle, an Iron Age (c100BC) hill fort. At some point the southern rampart caught fire and collapsed into the ditch. Accident or attack?
- 8. World War 2 remains. Note the way that the concrete road and the bomb storage banks are being absorbed by nature after being abandoned for only 60 years. The small pill box is one of a number scattered around the airfield to provide defence against ground attack.
- **Brick works**. The chalk ridge tops of the whole area are overlain by sands and clays. These provided materials for many small scale brick and tile works. In the late 19th century there was a brick and tile works here. In the mid 20th century it became a Council Waste Disposal Site.
- **9. Air corridor beacon**. This is a Doppler VHF omni-range radio beacon. It marks the centreline of the airliner corridor from Heathrow to the west and accounts for the steady stream of airliners over this part of West Berkshire.
- **10. Airstrip and waymarks**. The way-marks are flush to the ground to avoid damage to aircraft landing on the grass strip to the east.
- 11. Beetle bank. This strip of rough grass harbours insect predators which prey on insect pests in the surrounding crops. It also provides hunting grounds for owls. In season, note the large number of grains held by the wheat and barley stalks. Medieval could be as low as four times the seed sown.

