

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.westberks countryside.org.uk

References

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West Berkshire
Countryside Society

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 clays and were used for brick making.

Early Saxon Estates.

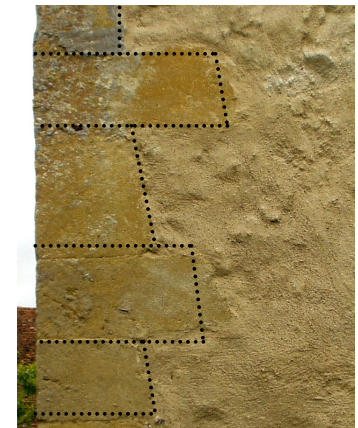
Current historical research indicates that, after the re-conquest of southern England from the invading Danes by King Alfred the Great and his family in the late 9th and early 10th centuries AD, the country was divided up into very large estates controlled by the king's immediate family and senior colleagues. 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 flush to ground for aircraft safety



World War 2 air raid shelter



The Lousley memorial

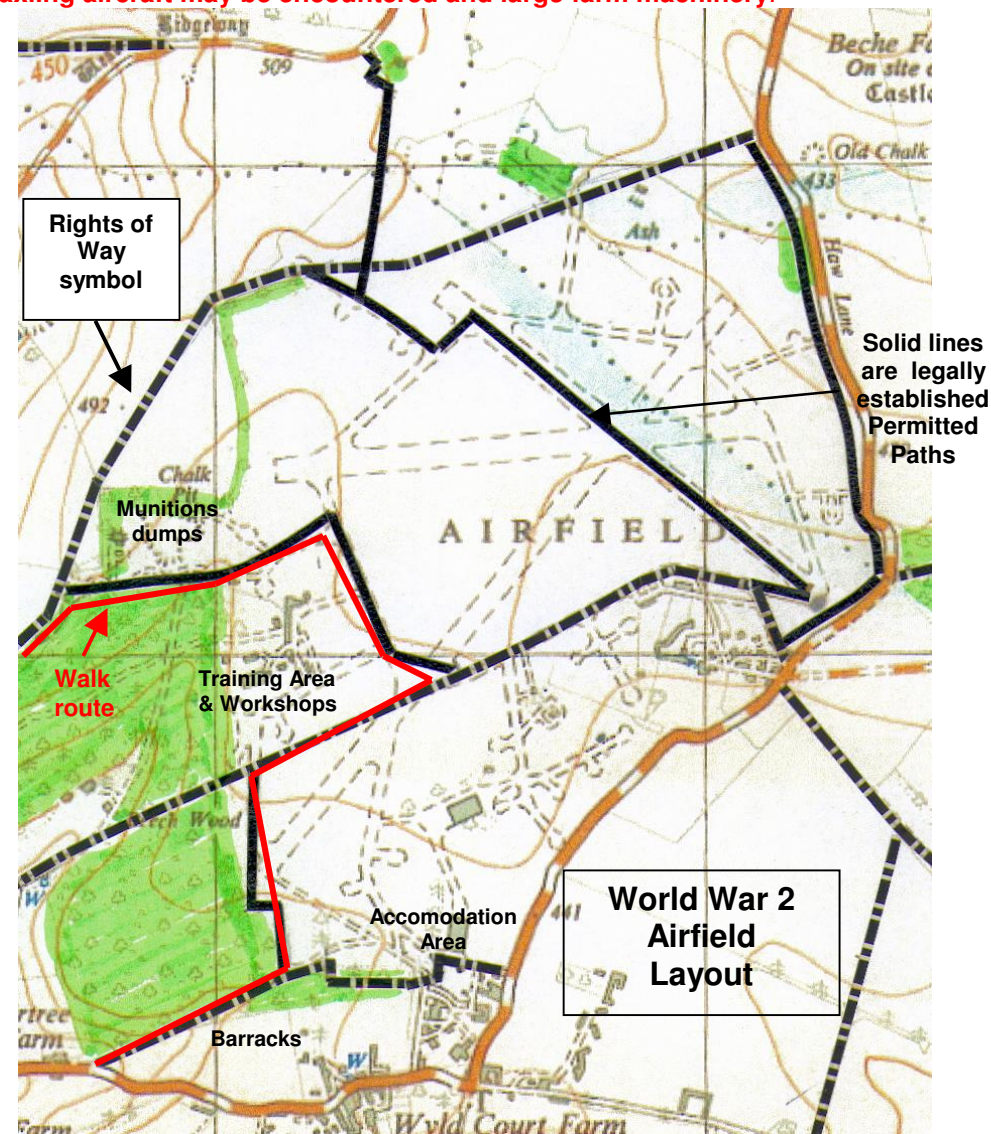


Deep sunk lane and parish boundary

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.*

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.**



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.

