

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 tasks and 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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West Berkshire
Countryside Society

‘HISTORIC HAMPSTEAD’

**A walk around the southern part of Hampstead
Norreys Parish. Starting and finishing at St Mary’s
Church**

About 2½ miles or 4 km.

**Ordnance Survey Explorer Map
158 – ‘Newbury and Hungerford’ will be useful**

There is a modest hill on this walk and surfaces can be uneven and muddy

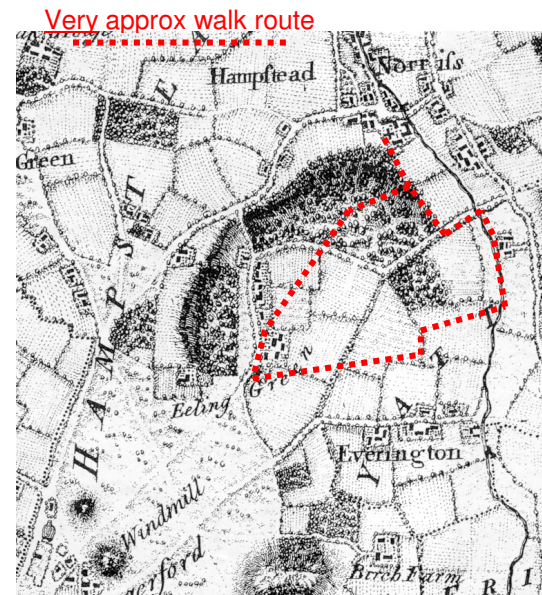
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Hampstead Norreys. The name means 'farm place' and there has been a settlement of some kind here for at least a thousand years and probably for as much as four and a half thousand years since there are Bronze Age burial mounds close to the north and south of the village. The manor is listed in Domesday Book (1086) as having belonged to King Edward (the last Saxon king) and as having been allocated to Theodoric the Goldsmith after the Norman Conquest. The name changed to *Hampstead Sifrewast* in the 12th century and to *Hampstead Norreys* when it was bought by the Norreys family of Bray in 1450.

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.

Deer Parks. Medieval deer parks were both the ultimate status symbol and a strictly practical method of producing meat. They were mainly a product of the 12th & 13th centuries. The Statute of Merton in 1235 allowed lords of manors to enclose parts of the manorial waste to create deer parks providing they left 'sufficient' for the peasants. If the site was in or near a royal Forest a licence called a Grant of Free Warren was needed before a park could be created. They were usually stocked with fallow deer but could hold wild pigs, and red or roe deer.



The area in 1761

much older. Note the large lynchet which has been created by plough loosened soil building against the up-hill side and by soil moving away from the downhill side.

17. The River Pang. This is a chalk *bourne* meaning that it is spring fed and naturally dries up when the water table falls below the spring levels. After a wet winter the head of the West Pang is East Ilsley pond and the North Pang rises on Churn Plain. They join at Compton. The perennial head is at the Blue Pools between Stanford Dingley and Bradfield. The river is reasonably rich in plant and animal life. Look for: greater and lesser pond sedge, soft rush, common reed, reed sweet grass and reed canary grass, water forget-me-not, water mint and water crowfoot. The river is rich in invertebrates. Over 80 species have been recorded. Fish are well represented with brown and rainbow trout, grayling, chub, minnow, bullhead, stickleback and others.

18. The Swimming Pool. In the early 1930's the then Prince of Wales, who became Edward VIII but who abdicated before the coronation, appealed for landowners to provide more sporting and leisure facilities for the population. Mr TC Dewe of Everington Farm responded by building the pool and by providing a camping site and three tennis courts. Using the pool cost 6d (2.5p) for a private changing cubicle and 3d if the communal changing room was used. The pool was 6 feet (1.8m) deep at one end and 3 feet (0.9m) deep at the other. As a reward the local authority increased his rates and so he closed the site in 1938. It continued to be used unofficially for many years.

19. St Abbs Orchard An orchard is shown on this site in 1773. The trees have been identified as *Pott's Seedling*, *Blenheim Orange*, *Bramley's Seedling* and *Lord Derby*. These were all developed in the mid 19th century

20. St Abbs St Abb was a 7th century Saxon Abbess at a nunnery in Kent. She also gave her name to the area called St Ebb's in Oxford. Frilsham church is dedicated to St Frideswide another Saxon female saint associated with Oxford. Oxford was first fortified by King Alfred the Great who owned the Pang Valley and there is clearly a link between the Pang Valley and Oxford.

21. Parish Boundary. Parish boundaries are often the boundaries of early Saxon estates and were usually fixed by the 9th century AD. Excavation elsewhere has shown boundary banks to be Iron Age. This lane has been here for at least 1000 years and probably much longer

1. Manor Farm. The central part of the house is 16th century and the wings are 19th century but it is certainly built on the site of a sequence of older houses stretching back to the 9th century.

2. St Mary's church. Probably built in the early 12th century although some of the fabric may be earlier Saxon work. Both the north and south doors are typically Norman. The nave was re-roofed in 1635 and the church was restored in 1879-80. The pairing of the parish church and the Manor House is typical of late Saxon estate centres. **The cast iron tomb** of the Lousely family behind the church was made at the Bucklebury foundry from scrap iron collected by friends and admirers of the family.

Ancient Woodland Indicator Species. Ancient Secondary Woods are defined by English Nature as having been wooded since at least 1600. Such woods typically have a rich ground flora and English Nature publish a list of plants associated with them. These include bluebell, wood anemone, wood spurge, sweet woodruff, orchids and many others. They are plants which, once destroyed, do not readily return.

3. Park Wood. This is Ancient Secondary Woodland. It may have been a medieval deer park. It is managed by clear felling blocks of trees and then replanting them with oak, beech, larch, Scot's pine and western hemlock. The many banks and ditches in the wood indicate a rich history and are the subject of on-going study.

4. Old road. This is the road from the village up to the commons on the top of the hill. Note the rich flora on the banks showing that they were built in woodland.

5. Westbrook Copse. This wood is planted on old fields. This is shown by the mat of dog's mercury under the trees and

the paucity of other flora. Compare its poor flora with the rich flora on the north (right hand) side of the track.

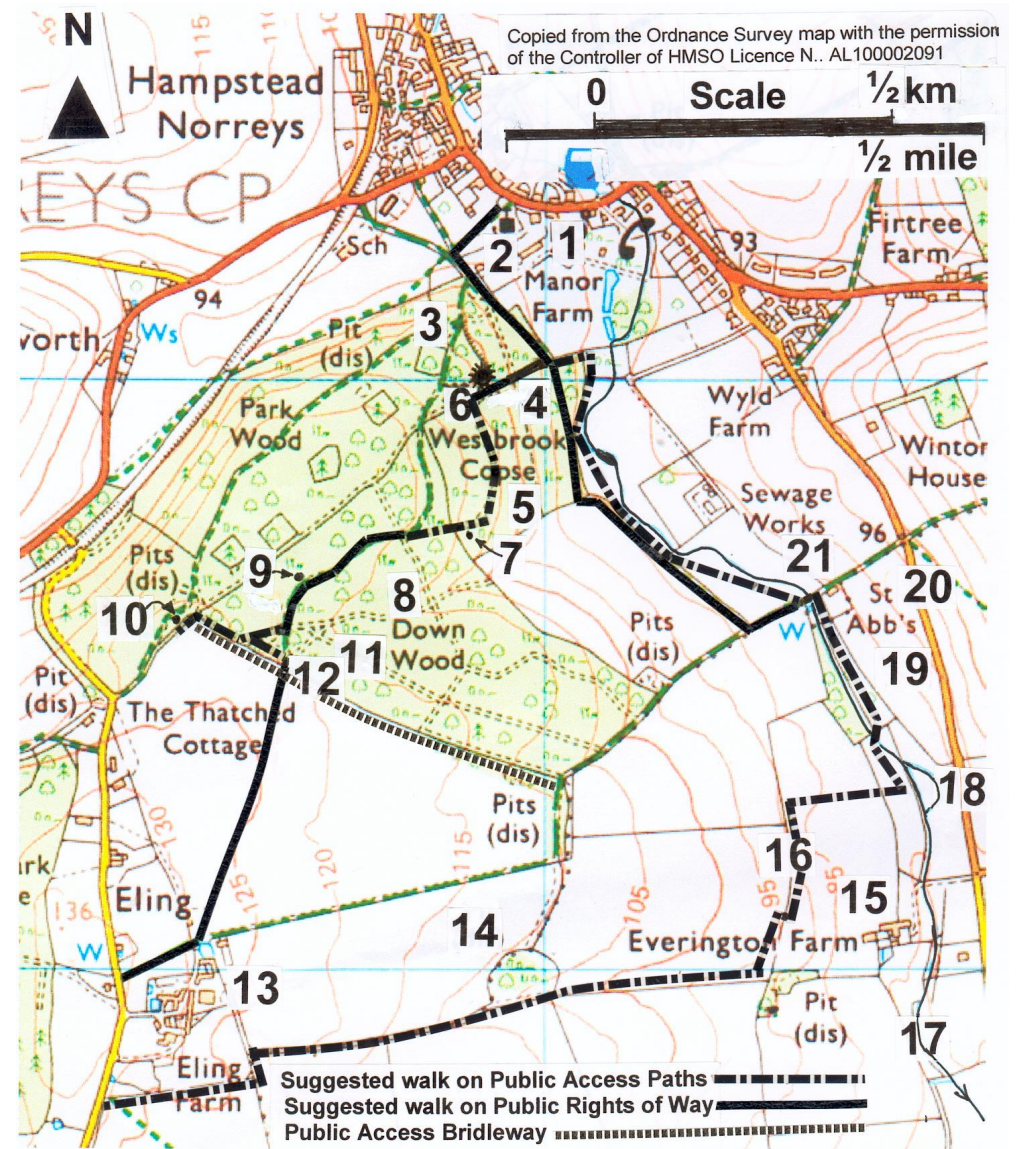
6. The 'motte'. Mottes are Norman defensive works, usually built soon after the Conquest in 1066. They sat within another defence called a *bailey*. The small size of this mound and the lack of a bailey means that it is actually a large Bronze Age barrow (burial mound). Its pristine preservation is due to it being in an ancient wood and thus being spared from ploughing.

This is a Scheduled Ancient Monument which it is an offence to damage or disturb.

Guidance turn sharp left at the path junction about 130m uphill beyond the motte

7. Sawpit. This is about 20 yards east of the bank which crosses the path. The shallow hollow is the remains of a pit about 6ft (2m) deep, 10ft (3m) long and 4ft (1.2m) wide. A log was layed lengthwise along it and two men with a long saw cut it into pieces – one standing on top of the log and the other in the pit. Trees were sawn up in the woods to reduce weight. Itinerant sawyers would spend the winter producing planks etc in the brick lined and covered pits in wheelwright and builder's yards, and the summer cutting fence posts, beams etc in temporary pits in the woods. Sometimes a particularly large tree would have a pit dug underneath it where it lay after felling.

8. Down Wood. *Down* in this case means *hill*. This is a hazel coppice with oak standards. The



girth of the oak trees indicates at least two periods of planting, the oldest are about 8'8" in girth giving an age of about 250 years. The bluebells and other plants also show that this is an ancient wood.

9. Potash Pit. These shallow pits may have been used to burn the waste twigs etc resulting from

coppicing and forestry work to make potash. The ash was soaked in water and the water was drawn off as lye for use as a washing liquid and to make soap. The residue was added to sand as a flux to lower the melting temperature when making glass. Different trees produced different colours; beech gave pink, elm – blue.

10. Lime kiln or Potash kiln, Many things can be burned in holes in the ground. This is probably a 'Farmer's Lime Kiln' where small amounts of chalk dug from the nearby quarry pits were burned to make lime for mortar or lime wash. However, it may be another potash kiln. Potash was made in larger quantities for use as agricultural fertiliser. There is a Potash Farm near Bradfield. In the Kennet Valley peat was burned, but wood and bracken would have been burned here.

Guidance. *This pit is about 200 yards to the right along the wide track. It lies just beyond the bank and is marked by a large holly tree.*

11. Permissive Paths. The Gerald Palmer Trust has a very generous policy of allowing public access to many of its wood and farm tracks. Look for the green map boards and waymarks. The bridleway crossing here was created as part of Eling Farm's Higher Level Stewardship Plan and is open to walkers as well as riders.

12. Pheasant Release Pens These pens are used to accustom young pheasants to life in the wild before they are released in the late summer. Pheasant shooting is the reason for the survival of so many small areas of woodland and coppice. Without a function as pheasant cover the woods would have been cleared and converted to agriculture long ago

Roman settlement. A Roman farm existed in the fields over to the east of this path. It was the ancestor of the Saxon farm and demonstrates the long term continuity of farming in the Pang Valley. It was fully excavated in the 19th century and the finds dispersed and lost. ***The site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument which it is an offence to damage or disturb in any way.***

13. Eling Farm. This is an ancient site. The name is in an early form of Anglo Saxon meaning *the place of Eli's people*. The ancient estate belonged to the Saxon royal family and was a sub estate of the large estate based on Hampstead Norreys.

Domesday Book (1086) records that it was held by Roger de Ivry and it only had four ploughs indicating about 120 acres of arable. It had wood for 30 pigs which is quite a lot of woodland. In 1761 it was in *Eeling Green* on the edge of *Ealing* (Hampstead Norreys) *Common*. The Common was enclosed in 1778. The farm buildings were built in the mid 19th century, although a much earlier house is known to have existed.

Today it is the centre of an organic farm rented from the Eling Estate by the Goodenough family who have been farming here since the 1920's.

14. Chalk pit. The soils overlying the chalk bedrock are often too acid to grow cereals. The medieval farmer's remedy was to dig through to the chalk and to spread large quantities on the fields. It was allowed to weather and then ploughed in. This was regularly repeated resulting in many chalk pits in fields and woods. To day lime made by burning limestone is used which is half the weight of raw chalk.

15. Everington Barn. This is without doubt an 18th century wheat barn but it is not shown on the maps of 1773 and 1845. Barns of this type were constructed of pre-fabricated timber frames and could be dismantled and rebuilt fairly easily. This barn was moved here from Everington.

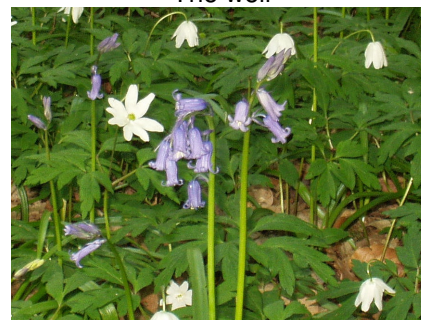
16. Hedge Line. This hedge is shown in 1773 and is probably very



St Mary's Church



The well



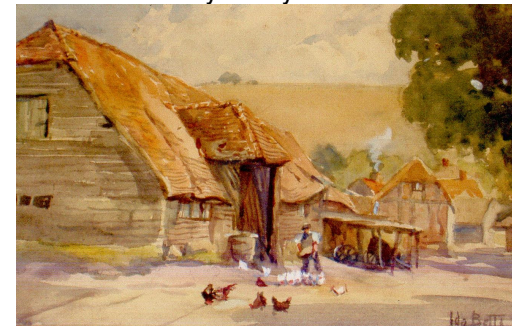
Bluebells and wood anemones



Hampstead Norreys 'motte'



The Lousley family cast iron tomb



Manor Farm barns early 20th century



Manor Farm and church 1969
With acknowledgements to Mr & Mrs Betts



Everington Swimming Pool
With acknowledgements to Mrs Smart