
FEATURE ARTICLE

PEN MEADOW – EARTHWORK SURVEY JUNE 2006 BY SUE BURNAY

Pen Meadow in East Ilsley lies between the High Street and Fidlers Lane and is bounded on the west side by the A34. Up until 1934, the Ilsley Sheep Fairs were partly held in this meadow, particularly at the eastern end adjacent to the High Street, with large numbers of sheep (and some cattle) being penned for sale. In later years it was used for grazing, but in recent years is generally unused and has become overgrown with nettles, particularly at the eastern end.

During June 2006, I took advantage of the mowing of Pen Meadow for the Sheep Fair (now a village fete) and was able to carry out an earthwork survey of the whole site (with kind permission of the Lockinge Estate). Some of the earthworks in this meadow are very obvious, but others are subtler and can only be seen when the grass and other vegetation is very short. The survey was carried out just using surveying tapes and poles, not a theodolite, so no height information is available but the position of the tops and bottoms of banks can still be clearly indicated.

The standard convention of using hachures to show banks has been used, the broad end being at the top of a slope and the narrow end at the bottom. Where the bank blends into the natural slope, the hachure is shown as broken. The spacing of the hachures gives some indication of the relative steepness of the banks, more closely spaced indicating a steeper bank. Figure 1 shows the overall survey of the meadow, the green circles and ellipses indicating where single trees or clumps of trees lie in the meadow. The natural slope is down from west to east and from south to north.

A total of 12 earthwork features were found in the meadow (numbers correspond to those on the survey in Figure 1) -

- 1) Marked bank blending into natural slope
- 2) Marked bank blending into slope, partly cut into by modern boundary with telephone exchange area
- 3) Marked bank blending into natural slope, similar to bank 1 at eastern end but much broader at western end.
- 4) Narrow bank close to southern fence boundary and track
- 5) Shallow bank aligned with modern boundary
- 6) Shallow bank, blending into bank 2

- 7) Shallow pit, possibly modern
- 8) Marked bank at southern end, blending into natural slope at northern end
- 9) Very shallow bank, barely discernible at northern end
- 10) Large bank aligned with modern boundary, curving round to gate way on Fidlers Lane
- 11) Very shallow bank
- 12) Very shallow depression, aligned with bank 9

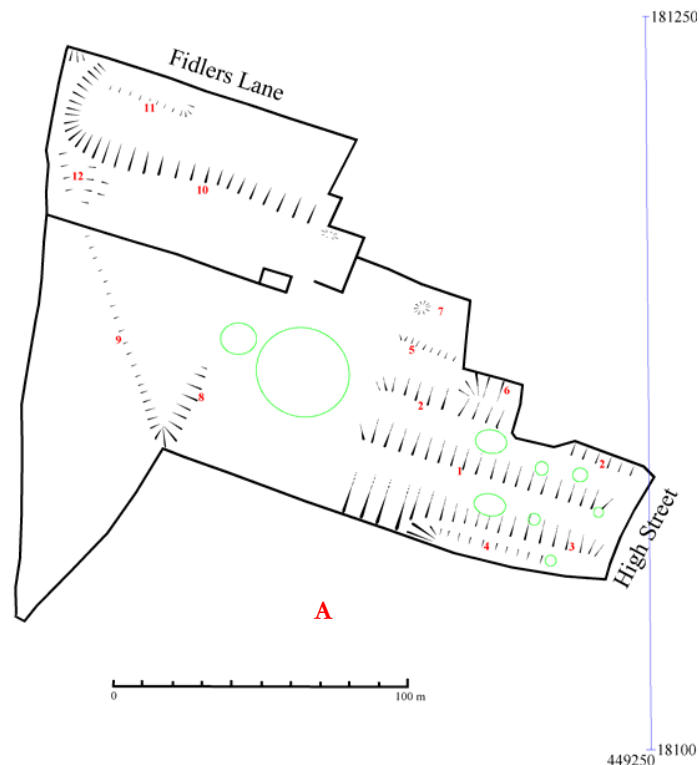


Figure 1 – Overall survey results – the original survey was made at a scale of 1:1000
 [Earthworks shown as hachures – with broad end at top of slope and narrow end at bottom of slope]

The earthworks have been compared with early maps of the village to determine whether any of them correspond to earlier field or property boundaries.

- Banks 1, 2, 3 & 5 appear to be the remnants of an old strip lynchet system in the part of Pen Meadow nearest the High Street. The way they peter out before reaching the large clump of trees suggests that the headland to these strips lay across the meadow (N-S) at this point. This area was used for sheep pens for the Sheep Fairs during the 19th & 20th C (see Figure 3). This is also the area extensively covered with nettles.
- The ridge between banks 3 & 4 is aligned with the field boundary between plots 108, 109 and the cottage and outbuildings at plots 110 and 111 on the 1840 tithe map (see Figure 4). The cottage and outbuildings would have been partly in the southeast corner of the meadow next to the High Street and were demolished by 1877 (first 25 inch OS map). [this

might warrant further investigation using geophys, but most of the cottage area would probably now lie under the track adjacent to the meadow]

- Bank 10 aligns with the southern boundary of plot 94b on the tithe map (see Figure 4) – this field boundary persisted through to very recent times.
- The slight bank at 9 and 12 corresponds to the field boundary between plots 490 and 132 on the tithe map and the footpath, which ran along the boundary (see Figure 3). This boundary and footpath still existed in 1912.
- Bank 8 marks the access track to Narborough Farm from the Stanmore Road (see Figure 5). The farm buildings lay between the existing shed and bank 10. These buildings were erected after 1840 and demolished before 1975. [this would warrant further investigation using geophysics, since most of this area is still grass]
- Bank 11 is very slight, but could possibly be the heavily eroded remains of another lynchet.



Figure 2 -You can get an impression of the size of the earthworks from the photo which was taken from point A in Figure 1, looking towards the High Street.

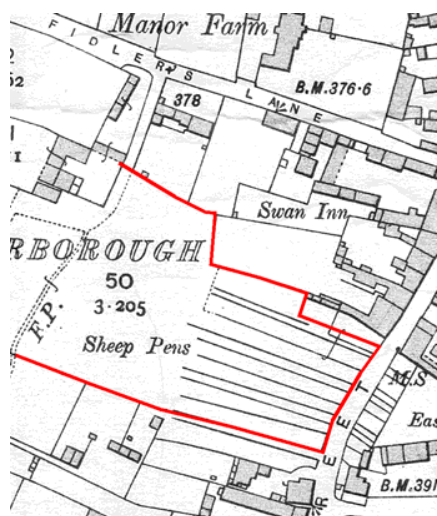


Figure 3 – part of 1912 OS map showing eastern end of Pen Meadow, adjacent to High Street, with area used for sheep pens (red line shows part of the boundary of the meadow)



Figure 4 – part of the 1840 tithe map showing Pen Meadow area



Figure 5 – part of 1912 OS map showing location of Narborough Farm on Pen Meadow