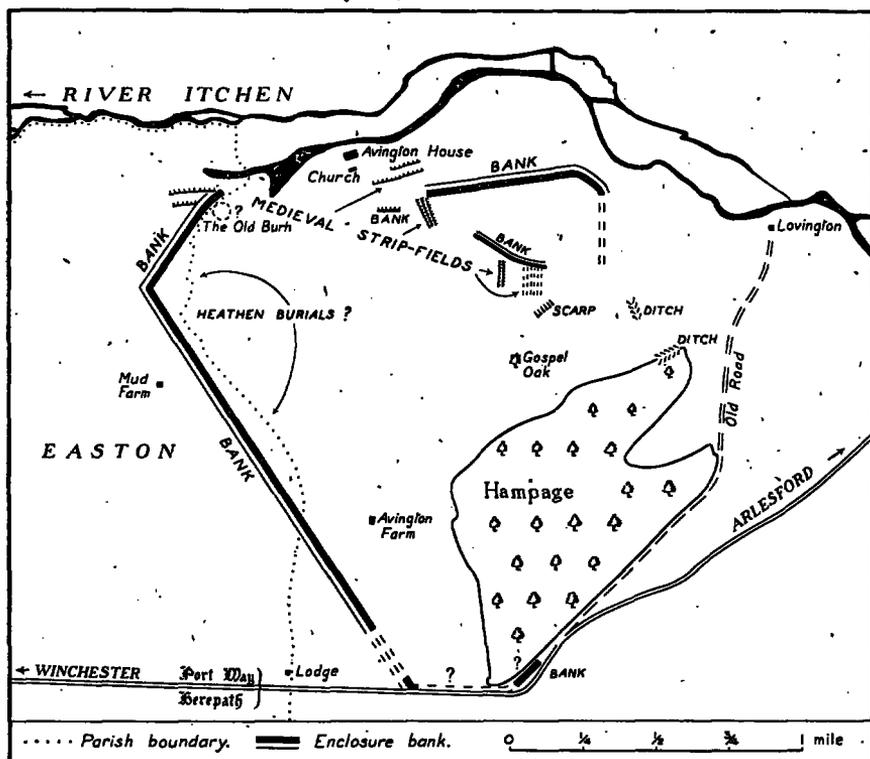


## SOME NOTES ON AVINGTON.<sup>1</sup>

By O. G. S. CRAWFORD, C.B.E., F.B.A.

THE great bank and ditch which we have just seen has been a puzzle to archaeologists for many years. Most of its course is marked on the 6-inch Ordnance maps, and part of it was marked on the original edition of the 1-inch map of 1810. It was, however, observed long before the 19th century, for Thomas Leman<sup>2</sup> records that "Wharton says there is a bank and ditch running north and south at right angles over the Roman road to Farnham Castle . . . bearing on the north to the hamlet of Chilland and the River Itchen, about 5 miles from the East Gate of Winchester." The Wharton mentioned is presumably Henry Wharton,



1. Read at a meeting of the Club at Avington, September 1948.

2. Manuscript notebook in the library of the Wiltshire Archaeological Society at Devizes, fol. 147.

who lived from 1664 to 1695. Dr. Williams-Freeman does not mention the bank in his book. It was rediscovered by Christopher Hawkes, now Professor of Archaeology at Oxford, when he was at school at Winchester. I lent him my 6-inch maps, and he marked on them that part which was not shown, namely, the portion running west and east with yew trees growing in it which you can see from here. On going over the ground again earlier this month with the same maps I found nothing to alter in Professor Hawkes's markings, and only a few things (the lynchets) to add. I visited the site for the first time with Mr. A. H. A. Hogg, who studied it in the field in 1934. The bank is not even mentioned in the *Victoria County History*,<sup>3</sup> whose historical sections lose so much by ignoring field-archaeology.

The bank is first visible half a mile east of the south lodge of Avington Park, where a fragment can be seen immediately north of the Winchester road. Thence it runs in a dead straight line for a little over a mile and a half to the top of a ridge north of Mud Farm where it turns nearly at right angles and runs straight for nearly half a mile, ending (at present) on the hill south of the west end of the lake. There it is lost, but it seems to bend round and may have passed through the village and joined the west-and-east portion a little east of where we now stand (which, for the benefit of those who read this account later, I would say is near a clump of trees  $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile S.E. of Avington Church). After it leaves the park the bank curves round to the south and its line is taken up by a belt of trees where there is a pronounced escarpment but no other sign of it. There is a ditch about 5 feet deep in a belt of trees further south just within the 300 foot contour line (41 S.E.), oriented N.W.—S.E., and another ditch, which also has a bank (on the north side), oriented S.W.—N.E.; at the N.E. corner of Hampage Wood. It is not certain that either of these formed part of the bank in question; but I have little doubt that the bank did originally run over this ground and eventually joined up again with the portion on the Winchester road.

Before suggesting an explanation of its purpose I would call your attention to the two lynchets in this field. At our last meeting we saw some very fine examples of lynchets, and I explained how they were formed by purely natural agencies as a result of ploughing. Like causes produce like effects. Medieval cultivation produced lynchets just as much as did prehistoric cultivation, and the only way in which it is possible to distinguish those of the one period from those of the other is by their plan. The prehistoric people took as their unit of cultivation a small roughly square area, and the field-pattern that results is a chequer-board;

3. *Hampshire*, Vol. III, 1908, 306-8 (Avington).

the Saxons, on the other hand, divided each field into narrow acre-strips, separated by turf balks. The soil, when washed down, could not cross the balks, and piled up there, forming in each field a series of terraces, which we call strip-lynchets. The ones we now see are such strip-lynchets, and there are several others on the eastward-facing slopes of this hill, just out of sight. There are others in the immediate neighbourhood, the biggest and best being those in the wood south of the west lodge, immediately above the road. Some of these lynchets come into contact with the bank; what then is their relative age? Here at any rate the strip-lynchets on the eastward-facing slope definitely end at the bank on the north; this may mean that the makers of the bank followed an already existing field-boundary, for it is hard to believe that the bank can be older than the fields. The problem is difficult and too complicated to discuss at length in the short time available, and I must ask you to be content with my own tentative explanation, without the arguments by which I would support it. The fields should have been in existence in the year 961 when Avington, to which they certainly belong, was granted by the king to the monastery of St. Swithun's, Winchester. But the bank is not likely to be earlier than the 12th century at the earliest. It resembles, in dimensions, those great banks which enclose Hursley Park and Ampfield Wood, both possessions of the bishop of Winchester, which were in existence in the middle of the 12th century. That is proved by documentary evidence, for in medieval times it was the custom to enclose parks and woods with just such banks as these. Before doing so a royal licence had to be obtained, and it is the records of the granting of such licences that enable us to date them. There is unfortunately no record of any licence granted to enclose a park at Avington; but there is a record of a licence granted in 1306 to the Prior of St. Swithun's to impark his wood at Avington called Hanepynge<sup>4</sup>. The construction of such a bank as ours was a necessary part of such imparking. Hampage Wood still exists, and although it now occupies a much smaller area, I suspect that our bank is the one which imparked it. It is not impossible that the bank was made before the licence was obtained, possibly long before; *post facto* legislation is not a modern invention.

I would therefore suggest that the bank was made by the prior of St. Swithun's in 1306 or before, that he included within it certain of the fields of Avington, and that these fields continued to be cultivated and in the course of time encroached upon the bank and so gradually obliterated it in the immediate neighbourhood of the village. Possibly the obliteration may not have begun until

<sup>4</sup> List of Inq. ad quod damnum, Pt. I, 1904, 85; Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1301-7, p. 448; V.C.H., III, 307 (Hemepynge).

after the Reformation, but this is merely a guess. That there was a break in the cultivation just here is suggested by the fact that the lynchets in the wood south of the lodge and outside the bank—whose cultivation *ex hypothesi* was unbroken and continuous—are very much bigger than those we now see in this field.

I almost hesitate to complicate an already involved story yet further, but for the sake of completeness I must add that there is a fragment of yet another bank exactly like the first running for more than a quarter of a mile across the park at a distance of about a quarter of a mile to the south of the first bank. I will not attempt to explain it, but would merely add that it does not necessarily invalidate the hypothesis I have already put forward; it may only mean that, as an explanation of the facts, it is an incomplete hypothesis.

It should be explained that there was no distinction in early times between the lands of the bishop of Winchester and those of the monastery of St. Swithun's.<sup>5</sup> A story quoted (without authority given) by the *V. C. H.* relates that the king granted the bishop as much wood as he could carry away from Hampage Wood in four days and nights, for the purpose of building Winchester Cathedral. The bishop collected woodmen from over the countryside and cleared the wood in the time specified with the exception of one tree under which St. Augustine was said to have preached. This oak still stands as a mere shell, and is called Gospel Oak. The story is an etiological one, accounting for the name. There are Gospel oaks all over England, and they were bound-marks and no more. They were so called because, in beating the bounds, a gospel was read at such points to impress them upon the memory of the perambulators.

Before concluding a word or two must be said about Avington in Saxon times. We possess the bounds of Avington, attached to the original grant of 961.<sup>6</sup> The western boundary of the modern parish does not follow the line of the bank—a fact which must surely indicate that the bank is of later date. The bounds begin at the Old Burh (tha ealdan byrig) which must be a prehistoric camp, of which no traces survive, that formerly stood on the hill south of the west end of the lake. They then go along the Itchen, and after other points mentioned come to Small Down and the Herpath, which must be the Winchester road. Thence they go on to the Heathen Burials and thence back to the Old Burh. The term "Heathen Burials" occurs frequently in these Saxon boundaries all over England; its meaning has never been proved by excavation; but as barrows are usually called by their proper name "beorh" (plural beorgas), it is supposed, I think correctly,

5. *V.C.H.*, Hants, II, 108; III, 307.

6. *W. de Gray Birch, Cartularium Saxonicum*, Vol. III, 1893, No. 1068, A.D. 961.

that Heathen Burials were Saxon cemeteries of the pagan period. Somewhere, therefore, between the Winchester road and the lake there may be a pagan Saxon cemetery yet awaiting discovery. I should expect it to be not far from the village, perhaps on or a little south of Beech Hill.

We also possess the bounds of the next village on the west, Easton.<sup>7</sup> They begin at Edmund's Weir on the Itchen and proceeding eastwards and then southwards come to the Old Burh already mentioned in the bounds of Avington. Thence they go up along the ditch to the Heathen Burials, thence along the mark (boundary) to the Port Street, and thence along Small Down. The Port Street is the Winchester road, the Herpath of the Avington bounds. This road from its straightness is often called a Roman road, and the use here of the word "street" does support this idea. Whether Roman or not, the road is proved by the hollow tracks which can be seen beside it to have been in constant use for a very long period. These would long ago have obliterated any Roman causeway that may have existed. The "port" was of course Winchester, for the word "port" in Saxon simply meant "town."

It will be noted that the Saxon bounds of Easton do mention a ditch at exactly the point where the modern parish boundary follows our bank (and ditch) for a distance of a little less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile. This might justifiably be used as an argument to prove that our bank was in existence in 961. If that were so, then this great enclosure is unique. No such earthwork enclosing an area is otherwise known in Saxon times. I think it more probable that the ditch of the bounds was an earlier predecessor whose line was followed later. There are ditches mentioned in nearly every set of Saxon bounds that has survived, so that such an explanation is by no means improbable.

What I have said is, I fear, unsatisfactory and inconclusive, and may be erroneous. It is no more than a statement of the problem, not a final solution of it. Further evidence from documents, old maps and excavation are required before the mystery of the bank can be solved.

7. Birch, *Cart. Sax.* III, No. 1076, A.D. 961.