

East and West Hanney Neighbourhood Plans

Evidence – Walter Giffards Mill?

12 February 2016

1 Neighbourhood Plan issue

Should the possible site of an ancient mill be protected? Should the existing bridge be protected and recorded on the Oxfordshire Historic Records.

2 Evidence

Looking at the Parish boundary map there is an odd boundary shape near the Letcombe brook near the boundary of East Hanney, West Hanney and Grove. The West Hanney boundary encloses an area of uncultivated shrubs where there is a small stone bridge across the brook. Why does the boundary enclose this area and what was there that made this boundary shape important?

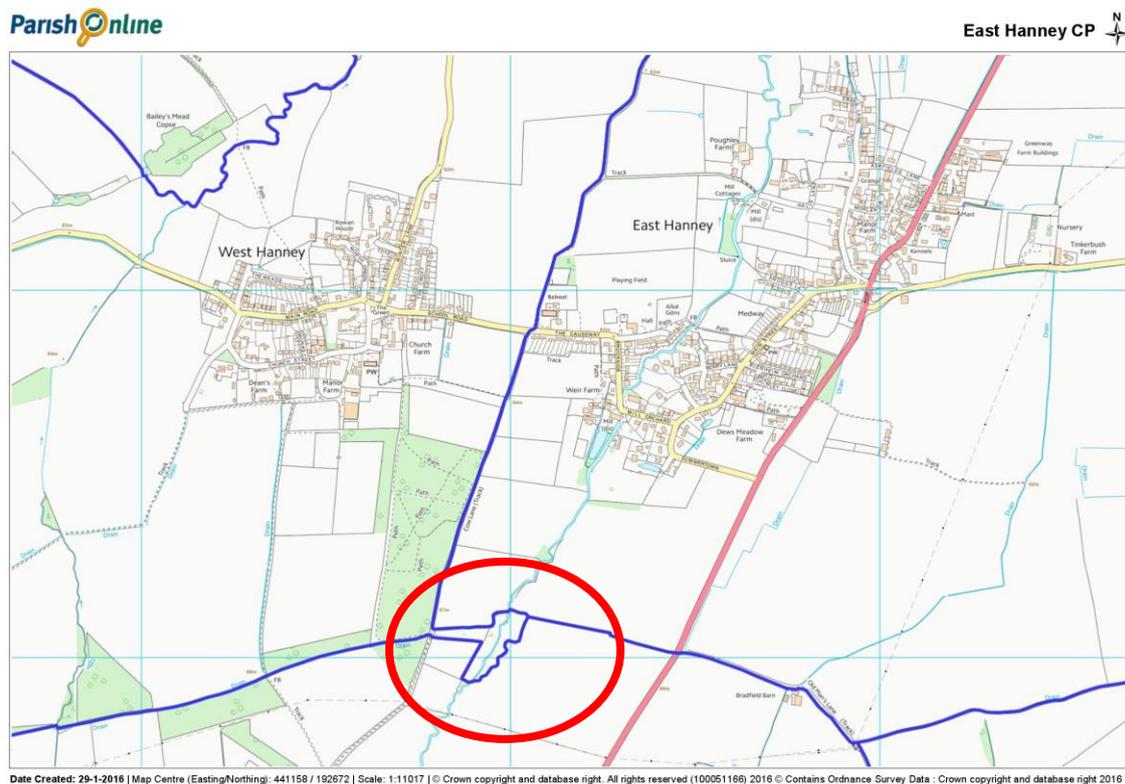
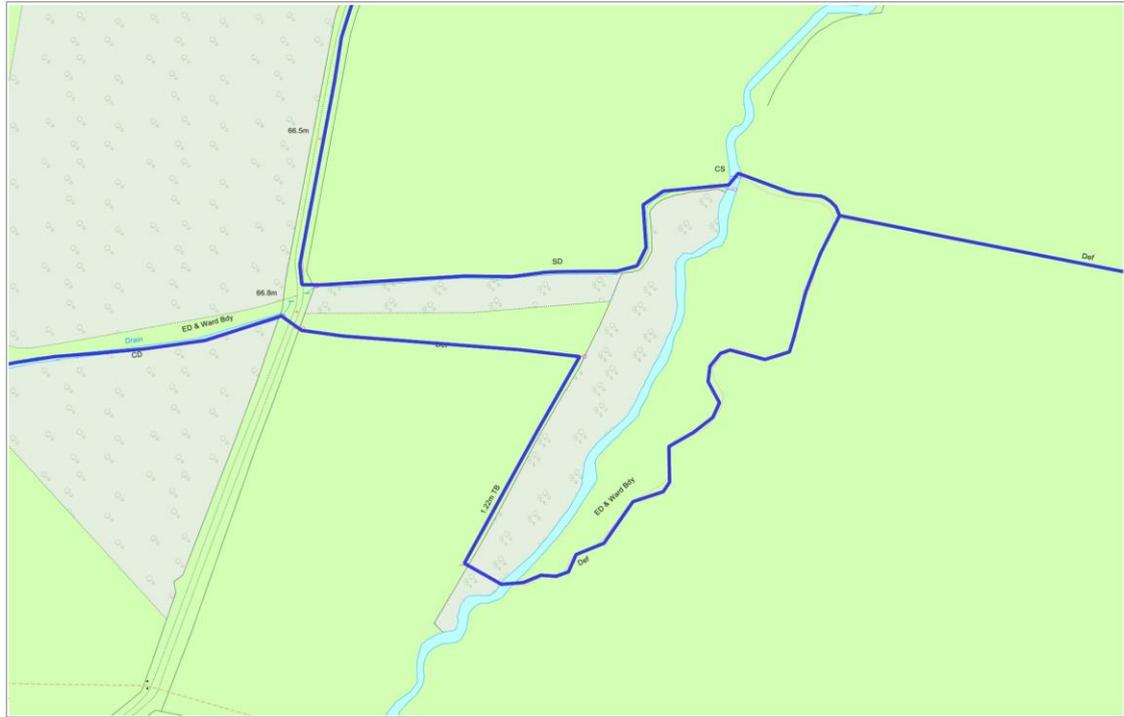


Figure 1 - Parish boundaries



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Figure 2 - Map of location of possible mill



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Figure 3 Aerial view of possible mill location

Local historian Paul Sayers thinks that this area could be a possible site of an ancient mill.

Here are Pauls comments.

The area in question adjoins the footpath which skirts the Letcombe brook between Bradfield Grove Farm and Dandridges Mill. It is an overgrown piece of land which I have heard referred to by longtime residents of the villagers as the Wilderness and which is said to have been popular site for summertime picnics in years gone by.

At its narrow, upstream end there is an old derelict bridge across the brook, the downstream end is rather wider and the overall position and shape suggest that, at one time, it may have been a millpond with a dam across the brook which has subsequently become silted up. My theory is that this may have been the site of the mill referred to in The Domesday Book has having been seized by Walter Gifford, the Lord of West Hanney, from the manor of Charlton.

The Domesday book of 1086, the inventory of land holdings commissioned by William the Conqueror shortly before he died, records enormous amounts of information about most of the counties of England. For example, the Berkshire section tells us that there were three manors or estates in East Hanney, the largest of which was held by Abingdon Abbey, and two in West Hanney, both held by Walter Giffard. There were 61 heads of household in East Hanney and 40 in West Hanney, including Thorold the priest.

Historians usually assume that an average Domesday household was around 5 people giving a population estimate of 300 for East Hanney and 200 for West Hanney.

There were three Walter Giffards, father, son and grandson who held land in West Hanney. The first Walter Giffard I (1015-1084) was one of duke Williams henchmen, he was Lord of Longueville in France and is said to have furnished the invasion fleet with 30 vessels and 100 men. Some sources allege that he was implicated in the mutilation of King Harold's body after the disastrous defeat. Like others of the Norman hierarchy, he was amply rewarded in the post conquest division of spoils and, in addition to substantial estates in Buckinghamshire, he was given lands in nine other counties, including Berkshire.

Walter Giffard II (1066-1102), created Earl of Buckingham in 1097, was in charge of the family estates at the time of the Domesday survey. From local evidence he, and probably his father before him, appear to have been in the habit of throwing their weight around as typical Robber barons. Domesday Book tells us that at Lyford he had suborned the loyalty of the tenants of Abingdon Abbey while at West Hanney he wrongfully held a mill belonging to the neighbouring manor of Charlton. Evidence of this usurpation has been given by the Hundred court, the local assembly of village representatives. Perhaps significantly, there is no mention of similar thuggish behaviour on his core holdings in Buckinghamshire where, no doubt, he held a tighter grip and his tenants would be less likely to complain.

Despite the ambitious claims by some property owners that a building on their site is "mentioned in Domesday" this is virtually impossible to show since locations are not given in the document. Five mills are recorded in East Hanney and two in West Hanney. All that we can be certain of is that they were water driven and located on water courses since windmills, together with rabbits and fallow deer, were only introduced later by the Norman invaders. We can be reasonably certain that one of the East Hanney mills was in the vicinity of the present day Marcham mill as an Abingdon Abbey Charter of 956 puts wulfmaer's mill somewhere in this area, a location which would have allowed it to serve the Abbey's estates both at Marcham and East Hanney. Venn Mill is also in a likely position for an early mill, just below the confluence of the Letcombe and Childrey brooks. The location of the other mills are more problematic but one at our site is a distinct possibility. Although the area is part of Grove Parish, Grove is not mentioned in Domesday and probably included under the entry for Charlton.

Walter Giffard III, the grandson, (died 1164) was more interested in his estates back home in France and it was he who gave much of his West Hanney holdings to the priory of Newton Longville, which rebuilt West Hanney church in around 1160, some of the fabric of which still remains in the north west corner of the present church. The lands were seized by Henry V in 1415 when he suppressed the alien (i.e. foreign, particularly French) priories and were subsequently given to New College Oxford

in 1442 by Henry VI. A map of the New College Estate in West Hanney dated 1779, clearly shows our possible mill pond as belonging to the college, although no building is shown.

So we have a mill usurped by Walter Gifford from the people of Charlton, a possible mill site in about the right location to have belonged to Charlton and an outlying part of West Hanney dating back to 1779 and probably earlier. Is our site Walter Giffard's mill pond stolen from the people of Charlton in the 11th Century?

3 Old Bridge

The old bridge is further south than the area enclosed by the West Hanney Parish Boundary. It is unused with no obvious recent use. The centre span has a large hole in the roof and is likely to fall down soon.

The arch is almost gothic shaped, it may be historically important.

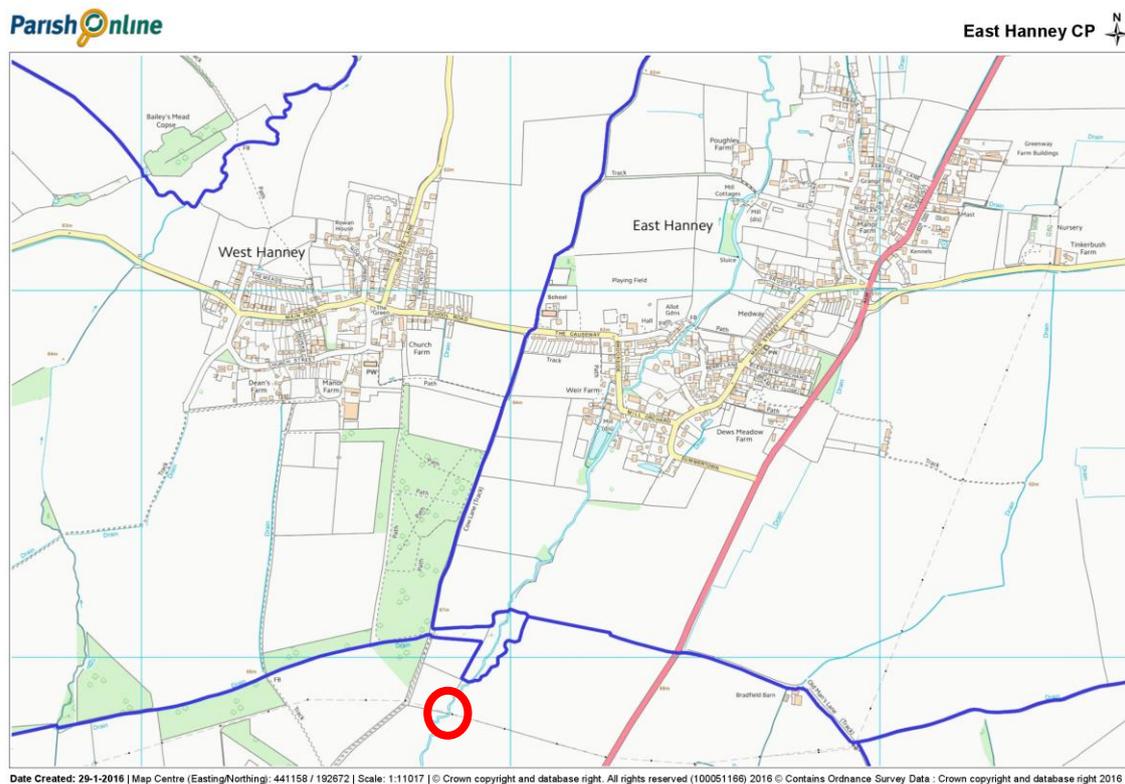


Figure 4 - Location of old bridge



Figure 5 - Old bridge



Figure 6 - Old bridge looking south