

Historical Study of the Harlington Springs Project Area



**Carried out by the Greensand
Trust on behalf of Harlington
Parish Council**

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Historical Study of the Harlington Springs Project Area

The area covered by the Harlington Springs Project contains a number of features of historic interest. Two sites that are present on the Historic Environment Record (HER) of Bedfordshire County Council are of particular interest:

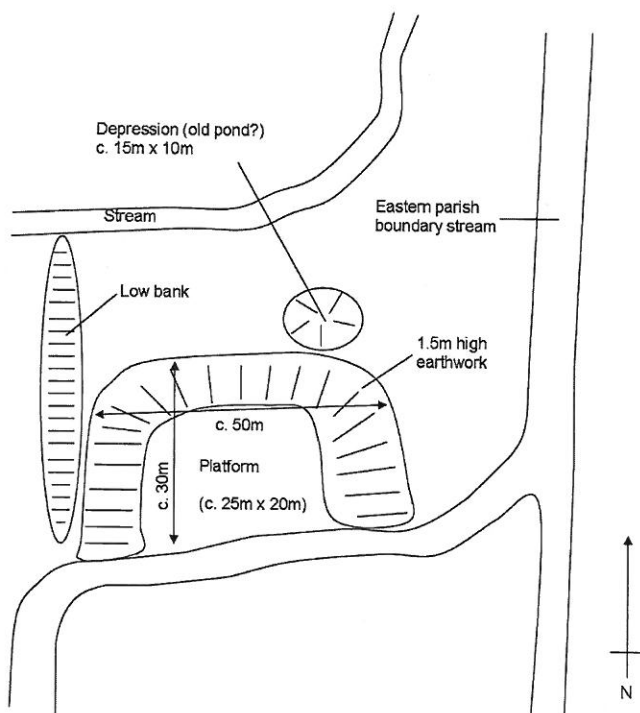
HER 9708 (TL 051 303) - Earthworks adjacent to a stream in an area known as 'Mill Pikes' in the 19th century. The HER card provides the following information about the site:

'The site is situated directly beside the stream which marks the eastern boundary of the parish. It is bounded on three sides by streams which now support hedges. The east-west stream turns sharply north and sharply east again just at the western edge of the earthworks. To the west where the field is now open there is a low bank that runs north-south across the field.'

The earthworks themselves comprise a large platform roughly semicircular about 50m east-west along the edge of the stream and about 30m north-south. The platform rises about 1.5m above the surrounding land. The slope down from the top of the platform is about 1:6. The platform top is level and measures about 25m east-west by about 20m north-south. Just north of the platform is a shallow depression about 15m east-west by about 10m north-south. The bottom of this depression, although planted with grass, is unusually soggy and clayey as if originally the bed of a pond of some kind.

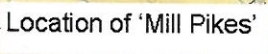
I suggest that this was the mill of the place name "Mill Pikes", "Pikes" perhaps comes from the fact that the land in this place comes to a point between the streams which meet.'

Earthworks at Mill Pikes (from sketch made in 1979)



FROM

Broad Cuts



The earthworks are currently under arable cultivation, though the raised platform is still evident and the north and east banks of the semi-circular earthwork can still be seen as a shallow incline in the field. There is no evidence of the western bank of the semi-circular earthwork, the western boundary bank or the northern depression.



View of Mill Pikes earthworks from the east

The area of the field that contains the site would be a high priority for arable reversion to permanent grassland, for example under the Environmental Stewardship Scheme, to help preserve what remains of the earthworks.

HER 4440 (TL 054 307) - Streatley parish survey suggests this area is part of a deserted medieval settlement called Aldbury. The following extract from the Streatley Parish Survey written by Stephen Coleman of Bedfordshire County Council describes what is known about the settlement:

'This was to the west of Sharpenhoe in the vicinity of a small diamond-shaped area of common land known in the 17th and 18th centuries as Aldberry or Aldbury Green which adjoined Aldberry or Aldbury Close. Tracks entered this green from the north, west and east in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and there was probably one to the south in earlier times. This suggests the green had been a focus at some time, as the crossroads to the east were. Medieval documents relating to Sharpenhoe also mention Aldbury: in 1232 Matilda de Audebir is mentioned, and in 1297, Aylwyne de Aldebur. In 1345 a grant referred to:

"The messuage formerly of Hugh de Aldebury between the messuage of Robert Ailwyne and the water running by the grange of the monks of Woburn".

Woburn Abbey's grange was on the site of what is now known as Grange Farm close to the parish boundary and by the road to Harlington. The watercourse mentioned was therefore the stream forming the north western parish boundary. This passed just to the west of Aldbury Green in whose vicinity individuals were evidently living in the 13th and 14th centuries. There were at least two houses there in 1345 but the full extent of the occupation here is not known; no remains survive on the ground today. It is also not known whether the cottage present at the southern end of Wateroff Meadow in the early 19th century, but demolished sometime between 1844 and 1856, was on an ancient site that could have been part of the Aldbury settlement. If any sizeable settlement existed at Aldbury it had probably gone by the late 16th century; post-medieval land transactions in this area make no reference to it, they merely refer to agricultural land.

The origin of the name Aldbury is of some interest. It is sometimes interpreted as

meaning "old earthworks", based on the definition of "bury" as a fortified enclosure. A good example of this is on the hilltop at Billington where Aldbury Close coincides with the site of an Iron Age hillfort. As previously mentioned "bury" can also indicate the site of a manor house; could Aldbury therefore sometimes mean "old manor house site"? In Sharpenhoe it is possible that the Bury Farm/moat complex could have been a 12th century replacement for an earlier manorial site to the west that was the focus for a small settlement which became known as Aldbury after the abandonment of the manor house. The old manor house building could have survived and may subsequently have been divided and occupied by tenants. Later, new dwellings may have been built there for tenants. It could also be that the alleged destruction of a manor house reported in the Inquiry of 1518 as having occurred in 1501 at Sharpenhoe relates to buildings occupied by tenants on a former manorial site at Aldbury rather than to the then manor house site at the moat.

The site of Grange Farm belonged to Woburn Abbey for much of the medieval period. They built a grange (monastic farmstead) there to serve an estate which included some land in Sharpenhoe (a few closes of pasture and meadow adjoining the farmstead and common field land) besides lands in Harlington and Pulloxhill parishes; the grange was often referred to as Pulloxhill or Harlington Grange. The Woburn Abbey property also then included Grange Mill, later Harlington Mill, which was a water mill just to the south west of the grange on the stream forming the parish boundary. A mill pond was created by widening the stream on the south west side of the mill. In later times most of the mill building itself lay in Harlington parish but some associated outbuildings lay on the Sharpenhoe side of the stream. Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries (including Woburn Abbey) in the later 1530's this property was divided up by the Crown and sold off; this resulted in the separation of the mill from the grange'.

The site of Aldbury Green is located on higher ground to the east of the stream at the junction of arable fields and contains a group of ash trees on a slightly raised area either side of a farm track. Part of the northeast boundary hedge shown on the pre-enclosure map of 1828 is still present, and running down the slope to the west is a bank and shallow ditch with scattered trees that is also shown as a boundary on the 1828 map.



Site of Aldbury Green from the east



Detail of bank to west of the site of Aldbury Green

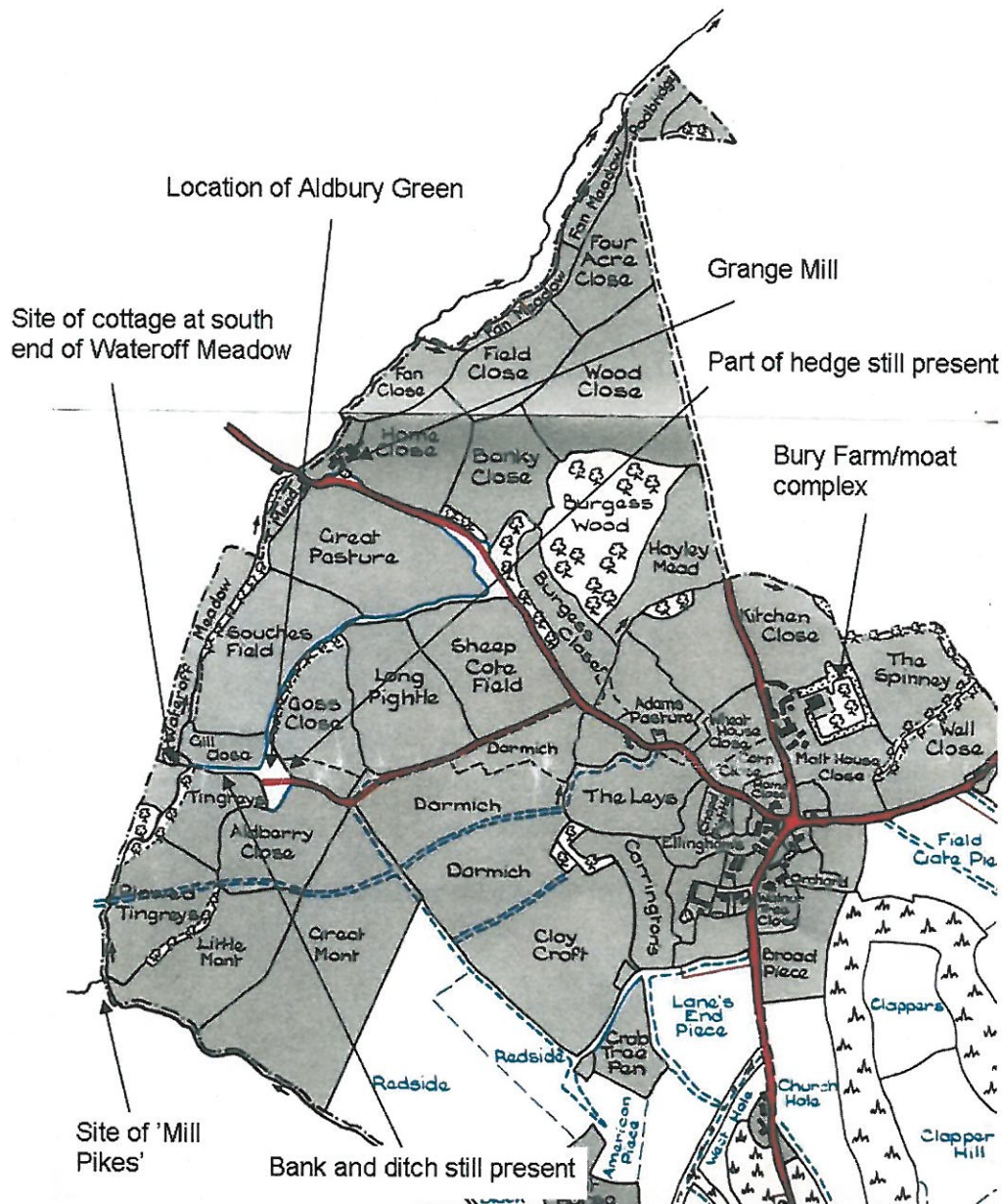
Wateroff Meadow shown on the 1828 map is still present with all its boundaries intact including the western wet ditch which marks the parish boundary between Harlington and Sharpenhoe. There is no evidence of the cottage that was shown at the south of this field. The field currently consists of rough grassland though its name would suggest that it was currently much wetter, and an area of rush is still present at its northern end.



Wateroff Meadow

The site of Aldbury Green would also be a priority for arable reversion to permanent grassland under the Environmental Stewardship Scheme to help preserve any remaining below ground archaeological features. Managing Wateroff Meadow by a traditional grazing regime and ideally raising water levels would help to enhance the ecological interest of the field, and restore something of its historical character.

Pre-enclosure map transcript for Sharpenhoe (c.1828) showing the location of Aldbury and adjacent areas including meadows and Grange Mill



STREATLEY with SHARPENHOE . **The Pre-Enclosure Landscape, c.1828, and** **Enclosure Proposals, 1858.**

Compiled from: Jefferys Map of Bedfordshire (1755); CRO. SM 136, Echols Map (1824); AT and MAT 42/1, Tithe Award and Map (1844); MA and A37, Enclosure Map and Award 1856/1858.

PRE-ENCLOSURE FEATURES

- Historic Parish Boundary
- Close
- 1x Buildings
- o Ponds
- Woodland
- Scrubland: Fungus and Broom
- Roads and Tracks (fenced and unfenced)
- Direction of Stream Flow

PRE-ENCLOSURE FEATURES ABANDONED OR ALTERED BY ENCLOSURE

- Fencing Boundaries and other divisions within the Common Fields
- Roads, Tracks and Paths (fenced and unfenced) dropped up

ENCLOSURE PROPOSALS

- Allotment Boundaries
- Designated as Bridleway
- Designated as Footway
- Confirmed as Road
- Note: The section of the present Luton-Basingstoke road passing through the map was constructed as a turnpike road in 1829-32, just prior to enclosure.

A further two HER sites are present on the edge of the Project Area:

HER 3267 (TL 046 308) - This may also be the remains of a medieval settlement, in 1979 earthworks were noted but by 1999 they only survived as a series of rectilinear cropmarks. A sketch plan of the area in the HER file shows cropmarks that are consistent with settlement activity.

HER 3565 (TL 054 313) - This is another possible medieval settlement area, also rectilinear, surviving as earthworks until 1979 when some of the area was ploughed. The unploughed area is reported to include house platforms and holloways. Iron finds and tile were also found during the ploughing episode.

Two features are also listed on the Pastscape website <http://pastscape.english-heritage.org.uk> derived from the National Monuments Record database which is the public archive of English Heritage:

Monument No. 359627 (TL 043 293) - Saxon pottery found at Dyers Hall Farm

Monument No. 359563 (TL 059 295) - Linear cropmarks of uncertain date probably representing ridge and furrow

Historical Sites in the Harlington Springs Project Area

Includes sites listed on the Beds CC HER and the Pastscape website

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