

CHINNOR HILL (PART 1), EAST OF KEENS (DONKEY) LANE – C 1948



This is one of two aerial photos taken about 1948 and shows the area to the east of Donkey Lane, across to Wainhill and almost to the old Leather Bottle pub on the Upper Icknield Way (Ridgeway). It does completely “flatten” the hill and you have to use imagination to realise that the top half of the photo is a scarp slope rising several hundred feet from the relatively flat fields below. The open area with the diagonal hedgeline at the top of the photo is, in fact, on the plateau area at the top of the hill and well into Bucks.

The Plain is the partially scrub-covered area immediately below this. Over the years the amount of scrub on the Plain has varied and, in recent years, only vegetation clearance by BBONT volunteers has kept it as open as it is.

Discernible on the Plain is a clear track across the top of the hill and, as a whitish mark on the grassland adjacent, are the sites of iron age (or earlier) “bowl” barrows. These 2 iron-age burial sites are in close proximity to each other and are Scheduled Ancient Monuments (Ref: 1016067). Today they are covered in scrub and look more like little copses than earth mounds but they can still easily be found. They have been excavated in the past and have been “robbed out” (to use an archaeological colloquialism) over the centuries. There is a 3rd barrow located in the woods to the north of Hilltop Lane that is on private land and is much less easily accessible.

The entire Chiltern ridge is scattered with barrows, hill forts and other ancient monuments of which Chinnor's examples are but a few. Many are within easy access of the Ridgeway path.

The line of the Upper Icknield Way is clear across the centre of the photo as is the sunken way ("Blood Valley") descending diagonally across the steepest part of the hillside from the top right corner to the centre, then crossing the Icknield Way towards Wainhill. Within the area sandwiched between the two tracks at the base of the hill are the remains of old chalk pits.

Bledlow Cross can be seen quite clearly in the left centre of the photo and, although it still exists, it is no longer in an open area and is now fully obscured by trees. Its origins lie in the mists of time but it is one of four Scheduled Ancient Monuments on this part of the hill. It is, in fact, just in Bucks by about 100m as the County boundary runs down the sunken way towards Bledlow village.

Slightly less discernible is a second sunken way descending from the Plain at the top left and running just beneath the Bledlow Cross.

The buildings at Stepping Hill (Stepping Hill and Greenways) are visible on the Icknield Way where it joins Donkey Lane, together with other buildings about 100 – 200m further east. These latter have now gone but the land between them and Stepping Hill became the site of the Stepping Hill Field residential caravan site that post-dated this photo.

Although today, a path runs from Donkey Lane past Stepping Hill and veers west along the hegeline, the photo shows a gap in the trees running directly up the hill. This was the old footpath to the top of the hill (this area was known locally as the Horseshoe) and was (is!!) extremely steep. It was a scary toboggan run in the winter!

Closer to the village, buildings can be seen on both sides of Donkey Lane north and south of the railway and beside the wooded area. All have now disappeared although the wooded area south of the railway is the old orchard that is currently being renovated and researched by the Donkey Lane Community Orchard group.

The line of the Breach can be seen running south of, and parallel to, the railway across to Wainhill and, vaguely discernible at the junction of the Breach and Donkey Lane is a line heading diagonally across the large field toward the junction of the Icknield Way and the sunken way. This is across private land and is not a public footpath but the land may have retained the "memory" of the line of an old track shown on the pre-enclosure map of 1854.

The hamlet of Wainhill remains largely unchanged other than for some infill of buildings (mostly quite large) along the length of the lane up to the Icknield Way.

Maurice Pullen - Nov 2021