

THE HISTORY OF BEENHAM

Neolithic, Bronze Age and Roman finds have been made in the parish mainly on the flat land to the south. Beenham is first mentioned in 956AD as *Benna's Hamme* – meaning 'Benna's enclosure', but is not mentioned in Domesday Book (1086). There may have been two manors. The main one based on Grange House on the flat land to the south and a tiny one based on Beenham House. The church and manor were granted to Reading Abbey on its foundation by Henry I in 1121. The isolated church is the third church on the site. No trace of settlement around it has been found. The earliest settlements grew up on the ridge at Beenham Stocks and at the west end near the 'Six Bells'.

During the Civil War 1642-46 the area was 'no man's land' and many skirmishes took place. A barmaid in an alehouse near the more recent 'Six Bells' was murdered by soldiers.

The original common fields were enclosed piecemeal at various dates with a final Parliamentary Enclosure in 1814. During World War 2 the Great Western Railway's management was dispersed to the area around Aldermaston and the General Manager's office was in Beenham Grange. Beenham Grange is now a scientific establishment and the eastern side of path 17 is now devoted to re-cycling and scrap yards.

See the parish website for more information

NATURAL HISTORY

The geology very much determines the natural history. A few damp areas survive from the ancient marshes that once existed along the Kennet and these are home to willows and wetland plants. The acid soils further up the slopes are a patchwork of woods and coppices. Some of these, particularly in the deep, narrow valleys, are ancient and home to plants like bluebells, wood anemones, old twisted coppice stools and hazel bushes. Deer, particularly muntjak, are regularly seen and there is a wide range of bird species – including red kites. You may hear wolves howling! These, however, are safely enclosed at the Wolf Conservation Trust!



Polypody. A sign of ancient woodland and unusual in West Berkshire. For more detail on the history of Beenham see 'Beenham. A History' Published by The Beenham History Group in 1999.

A leaflet 'BEENHAM, Footpaths, Bridleways and Byways' showing all the Rights of Way, a Permitted Path and an Access Path can be downloaded from the Parish Website.

www.beenhamonline.org



West Berkshire
Countryside Society
and
Beenham Parish Council

A BEENHAM STROLL



White Cottage

***This walk is about 3¼ miles (5.3km) long.
There are two stiles and two more that can be by-passed through gates.
There are two hills and some paths can be uneven and muddy.***

Dick Greenaway & Nick Hopton 2013

4. The Bourne is the Parish Boundary (have your passports ready). Its name means 'the stream that often dries up'. It is a valuable wetland habitat but can be difficult to cross in very wet weather.



3. Butlers Farm. 16th century in origin.

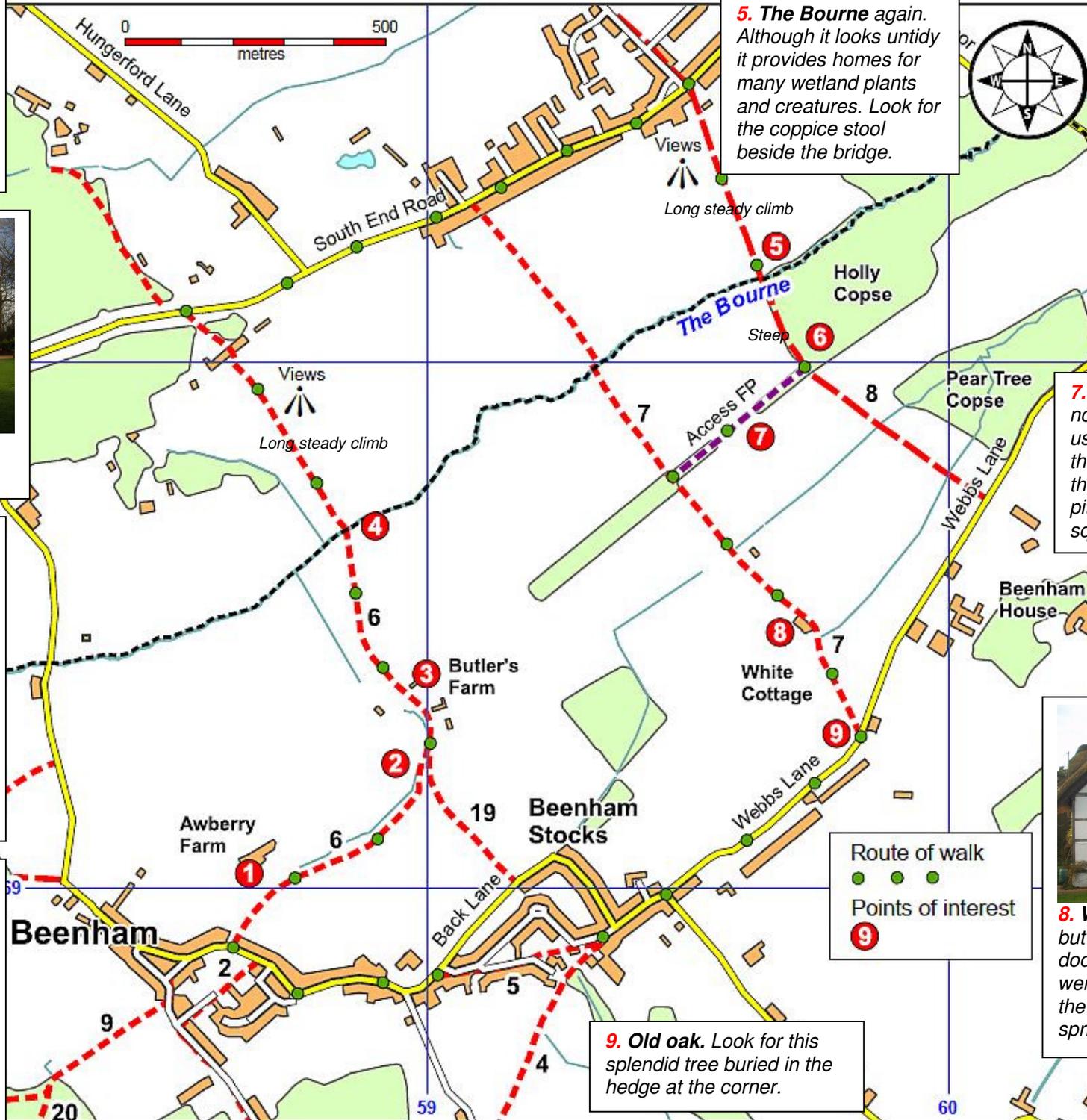


Photo: Danny Kidby-Hunter

2. Beenham wolves at the Wolf Conservation Trust



1. Awberry Farm – early 18th century



5. The Bourne again. Although it looks untidy it provides homes for many wetland plants and creatures. Look for the coppice stool beside the bridge.

6. Holly Copse is a hazel coppice with oak standard trees. The hazel provided sticks to make woven fence hurdles and the oak provided timber and bark for tanning. It seems to have been planted on arable fields about 250 years ago.

7. Access Path. This is not a Right of Way. Its use was agreed between the Parish Council and the landowner. The round pits are root holes but the square one is a sawpit.

Route of walk
 ● ● ●
 Points of interest
 9

9. Old oak. Look for this splendid tree buried in the hedge at the corner.



8. White Cottage. 16th century, but the converted barn next-door may be even older. They were built to take advantage of the water supply from the spring.