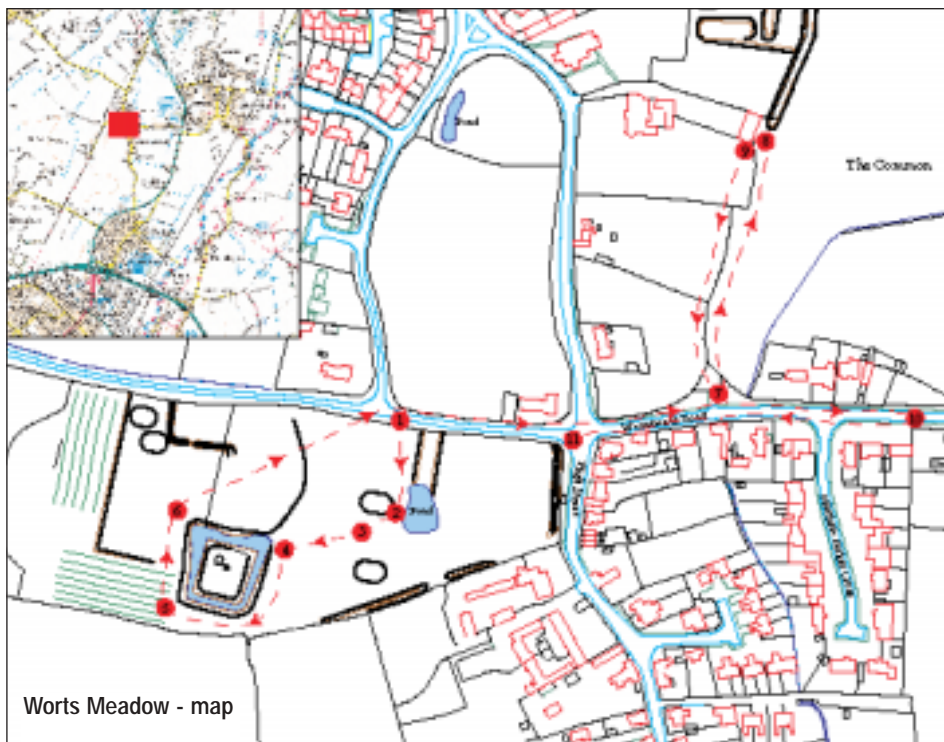


# HISTORIC LANDBEACH

**This brief tour of historic Landbeach includes two manors, a tithe barn and earlier settlements in the fields surrounding the village.**

Landbeach has been studied in depth by local historian Jack Ravensdale and is perhaps one of the best documented villages in Britain. You can read more in *The Domesday Inheritance* by Ravensdale, J.R (1986), Souvenir Press.



## Worts Meadow – The Manor of Brays

The Manor of Brays To the south are the remains of a Shrunken Medieval Village (SMV) and moat – the remains of the Manor of Brays. The humps and bumps in the grass are the buried remains of old trackways, the foundations of buildings and croft boundaries and the remains of medieval cultivation (ridge and furrow).

The manor was given to two of King William's carpenters after the Norman Conquest and held by the de Bray family from 1135. In 1349 half the villagers died from the plague and there are records of many houses lying empty and ruinous throughout the 14th and 15th Centuries. The Kirby family bought the estate in the 16th Century and Richard Kirby, a notorious local character, deliberately drove the villagers off the manor in order to profit from the wool trade by grazing sheep on the vacant land. In 1549 he let 14 tenements decay, rousing great fury and becoming the most hated man in the history of Landbeach.

Mathew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord of the other manor in Landbeach (Chamberlains), intervened and the estate was split between Richard Kirbys daughters after

his death but the manor and surviving crofts remained empty. The land passed to William Worts in 1691 and finally to Cambridgeshire County Council in 1915, to become part of the County Farms Estate.

*Proceed to the south towards the pond.*

**The Pond** The pond has been widened since it was first dug. Fish ponds were a common feature in medieval villages and a valuable source of food throughout the year.

*Proceed to the west, towards two house platforms (raised rectangular mounds)*

**Medieval house platforms** The house, which would have been built of timber and wattle and daub, would have included a vegetable garden. The platform would have been surrounded by a ditch on all sides and raised up in the centre with the soil from the ditches to help keep it dry. A fence or hedge around the croft would have prevented livestock from eating the contents of the garden!

*Now go to the west towards the water filled moat of the Manor of Brays, stopping on its northeastern edge*

## Moat – The Manor of Brays

The rectangular moat is the site of the manor house the foundations are beneath the tangle of trees and scrub. Very little is known about the manor house as no excavations have ever been undertaken on the site. Birds do use the exterior canopy to nest and the water filled moat is an important wildlife habitat, particularly for Great Crested Newts.

Moated sites were a development of the 13th Century onwards. Unlike the great castles of the nobility, these small moats were not purely defensive, although they may have kept robbers at bay and livestock safe, but more of a "fashion statement", - any self respecting lord had to have a moat to declare his status!

*Walk south through the kissing gate and head west to the western side of the moat.*

**Ridge and Furrow** To the north and west of the moat is an area of ridge and furrow, the remains of medieval ploughing which has been preserved in this small area of pasture since the Middle Ages. Although there are some regional variations, each plough ridge, or "selion", was formed by the use of a heavy mould-board plough. The furrows assisted drainage in a relatively low-lying area like Landbeach..

*Walk north to the kissing gate to the north of the moat, stop there.*

**House Platforms and Hollow Way** To the north lie two more house platforms (crofts), while to the east of these are the remains of a medieval trackway that may have led from Waterbeach Road, through the village to the manor house.

Beyond the western boundary of the site is Bourne Wood, a tribute to Cecil John Bourne (1920-1990) a distinguished architect associated with Landbeach parish church and the Council for the Protection of Rural England.

*Go east through the kissing gate and walk northeast back to the main entrance. Walk east along Cock fen Lane to the crossroads and continue east along Flood Lane to the:*

**Manor of Chamberlains and Tithe Barn** looking north from the kissing gate there is another pasture field covered in earthworks with ditches and a wooden barn in the distance. This is the site of the main manor of Landbeach, the manor of Chamberlains. Originally these 'ditches' were lodes or canals

used for ferrying goods from Landbeach to the fens and beyond. The Landbeach canal was originally known as the Beach Lode and ran into the centre of the village and the track leading to the Tithe barn follows the line of the lode, which then continues as a shallow ditch past the barn.

*Go through the gate and walk along the narrow path to the Tithe Barn*

**The Manor of Chamberlains - Please note there is no public access to these remains, which are privately owned.**

The medieval manor stood to the north of the Tithe barn, behind the church. A Saxon lord, Blacun, originally owned the land; however, it was stolen from him at the Norman Conquest, when the manor was created. It passed to the Peveril family in the 12th Century, but was acquired by William de Chamberlain in the 13th Century after he apparently murdered the other claimant.

Sir Thomas Chamberlain granted the manor to the newly founded Corpus Christi College in 1359. By the 15th Century, the site was used solely for grazing which has contributed to the survival of the earthworks. As a result of the link to Corpus Christi College, the Lord of the Manor of Chamberlains was also the master or rector of the college and The Rectory, which is the oldest building in the village and has the college coat of arms set in the roof of its 14th Century cellar.

**Landbeach Tithe Barn** A 16th Century timber-framed building, clad in weatherboards with a hipped longstraw thatched roof. The barn has five bays, with a large central bay with double doors giving access to a threshing floor. Tithes were taxes paid to the Church equivalent to 1/10th of the income of all the residents in the parish, these were paid in grain or livestock, rather than money and were stored in the Tithe Barn.

*Return back down the path to the kissing gate, walk east along Flood Lane to the edge of the fields on the eastern side of Landbeach, between the village and the A10. You are now on the edge of the fields, looking south east across a large arable field, with the A10 and Milton in the distance.*

**Limes Farm Prehistoric & Roman archaeology** Despite being a flat field with arable crops they are full of cropmarks (variations in the crop produced by buried ditches, pits, wall foundations etc), showing a landscape from over 2000 years ago. The site was identified from aerial photography and presumed to be Roman due to the very regular layout of fields and tracks. In 1999 an excavation was carried out which revealed a much earlier Middle Iron Age (300-50 BC) settlement, which continued through to the early Roman period.

*This is almost the end of the walk, head back west towards the village green and car park.*

Worts Meadow is owned by Cambridgeshire County Council's County Farms Estate and managed for the benefit of archaeology, wildlife and nature conservation, as well as being part of a working farm. Please treat the site with respect, keep dogs on a lead and follow the Countryside Code. Worts Meadow is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and it is an offence to metal-detect on the site.

**Parking:** There is a car park at the recreation ground off the Village Green, behind the village Hall.



For further information about sites of archaeological interest in Cambridgeshire please contact the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record on (01223) 717312, [CAO@Cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:CAO@Cambridgeshire.gov.uk)



Worts Meadow



Aerial view of earthworks at Chamberlains Manor