

Historical Landscape report – Fields south of Brackenley Lane, Embsay.
Proposal for inclusion in North Yorkshire County Council and Yorkshire Dales National Park
Historical Environment Record.



Figure 1. 1851 Ordnance Survey map

In the 1847 Tithe Apportionment this field was known as Little Meadow and was the field attached to the building listed on the 1851 Ordnance Survey map as Sawley House. This house is often known as Sawley Grange and thus frequently assumed to be linked to Sawley Abbey although this link is yet to be proved. The house appears to be 18th century (kneelers on roof corners), as does the wall between the house and field. All other walls and field boundaries to Little Meadow appear relatively modern.



Figure 2. Lidar images of proposed EMB3 housing Development showing circular feature, linear and curved bank.

LIDAR for Little Meadow shows 3 features as banks. In the top left there is a circular feature which can be seen on the ground as a raised bank enclosing a relatively flat area. There is an iron drain grille set in the flat area, which implies it can be wet and requires draining. It is possible that this defines a pond. This could have been fed as required from the stream/drainage ditch that runs down the west side of Stone Butts field on the opposite side of Brackenley Lane or it could be a dew pond.



Figure 3. Embankments at possible pond location within Little Meadow, EMB3

Little Meadow is too small to justify a pond but there is evidence that it and nearby fields were created from a much larger field. In Little Meadow, originating at a point close to the junction of the drive-way to the 18th century Sawley House, a bank can be seen curving south and west. A wider LIDAR view (with Little Meadow in the top right) shows this feature to be the continuation of a field boundary line stretching west as a ditch-and-bank until it is lost under the railway. A large enclosure such as this would justify the construction or creation of a pond if it was used for livestock.



Figure 4. LIDAR view showing line of ditch-bank enclosure originating in Little Meadow.



Figure 5. Annotated LIDAR view showing line of ditch-bank enclosure originating in Little Meadow.

There is evidence further to the west, along the curved field boundary shown on the LIDAR, of the original quality of ditch-and-bank enclosure that was created. The preservation of this length of field boundary is exceptional. It is unusual that such a feature cuts across earlier ridge-and-furrow remains.



Figure 5. Revetted ditch-bank feature at position 'A' in Figure 1 (General view) SE 00016 53263



Figure 6. Revetted ditch-bank feature at position 'A' in Figure 1 (Detail). SD 99981 53243

The third feature visible in the LIDAR, the broad shallow bank to the left of the Little Meadow shows some alignment with the ridge and furrow in the field below. It is highly possible that this could be part of the pre-enclosure field system.

Analysis

The style of enclosure shown in the wide LIDAR view, with a curved boundary, is unusual, especially in a ridge-and-furrow landscape. As it cuts across some ridge-and-furrow it clearly post-dates the normally accepted cut-off date of 1350 for wide ridge-and-furrow. Enclosures within the curved boundary are in line with the ploughing, but the implication is that these will be later, secondary enclosures. One of these secondary enclosures is named 'Hunger Hills' in the 1847 Tithe apportionment map, and the rent from this field was used to supplement poor relief in the parish. An alternative explanation may result from events after the Scots invasions in 1318 and 1319. It seems likely that, with the reduced population, farms moved away from growing oats, wheat and beans, and started to rear livestock, probably sheep. It is possible that this large enclosure was part of the sheep management program in the village. A pond would be necessary if this curved feature was the enclosure for a livestock field.

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