THE EVIDENCE FOR ANGLO-SAXON ENGINEERING IN THE ROMSEY CHARTER

Romsey Local History Society LTVAS
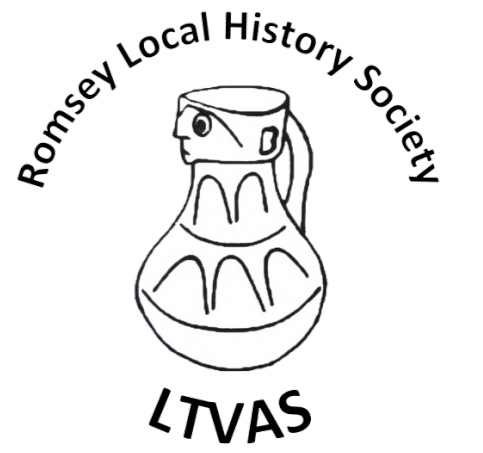
THE CAUSEWAY

The Romsey charter of c970 records a grant of land to the Abbey by King Edgar. Its boundary clause starts: Erest up and lang street ðare ðat ðurstan seit - First up along the street to where the Test (does something). The street is the Causeway which crosses the floodplain to Greatbridge.
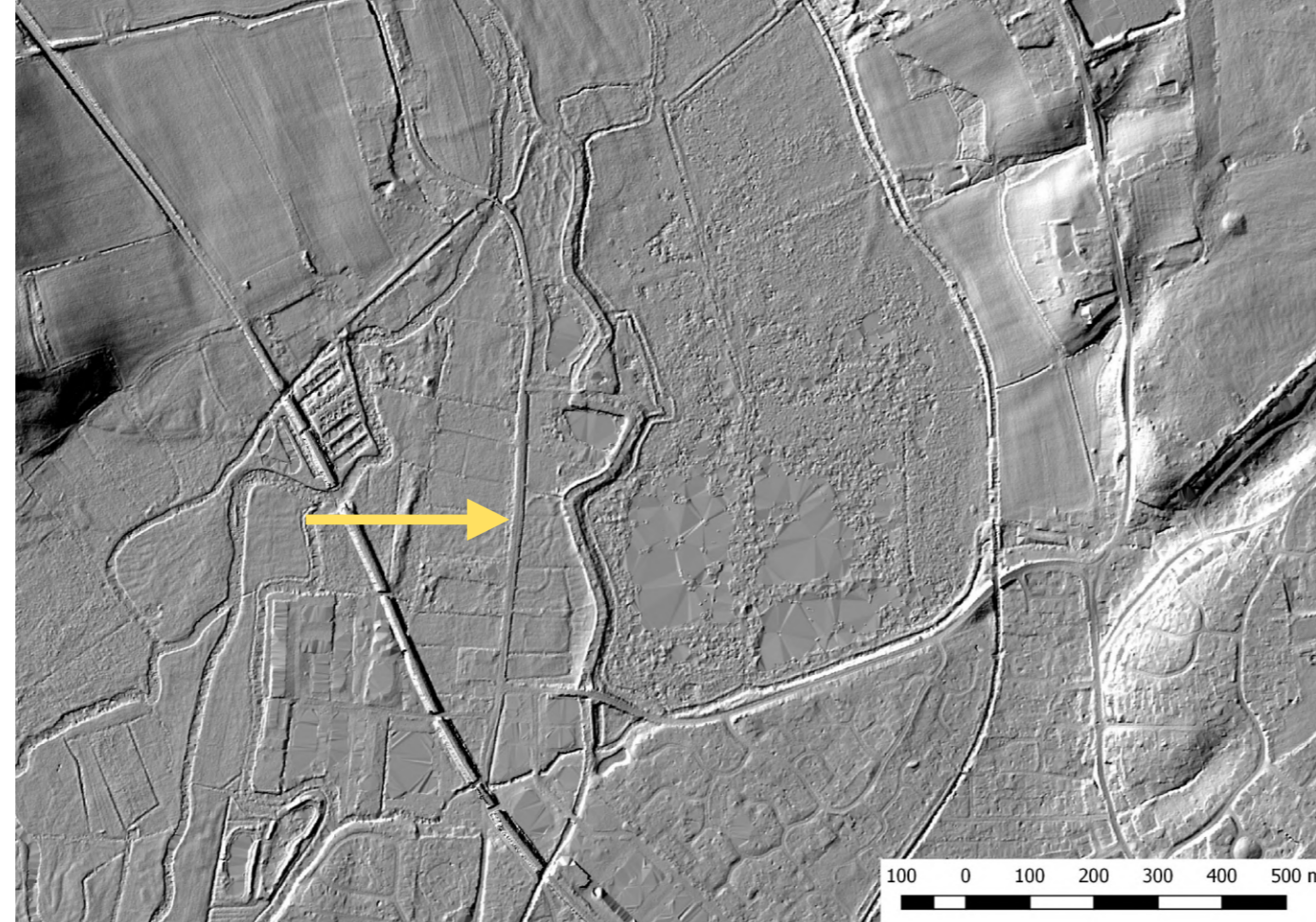
The Causeway lies west of the Fishlake. The LiDAR shows it raised above the floodplain. A field at its southern end was referred to as Street Mead in 1507.
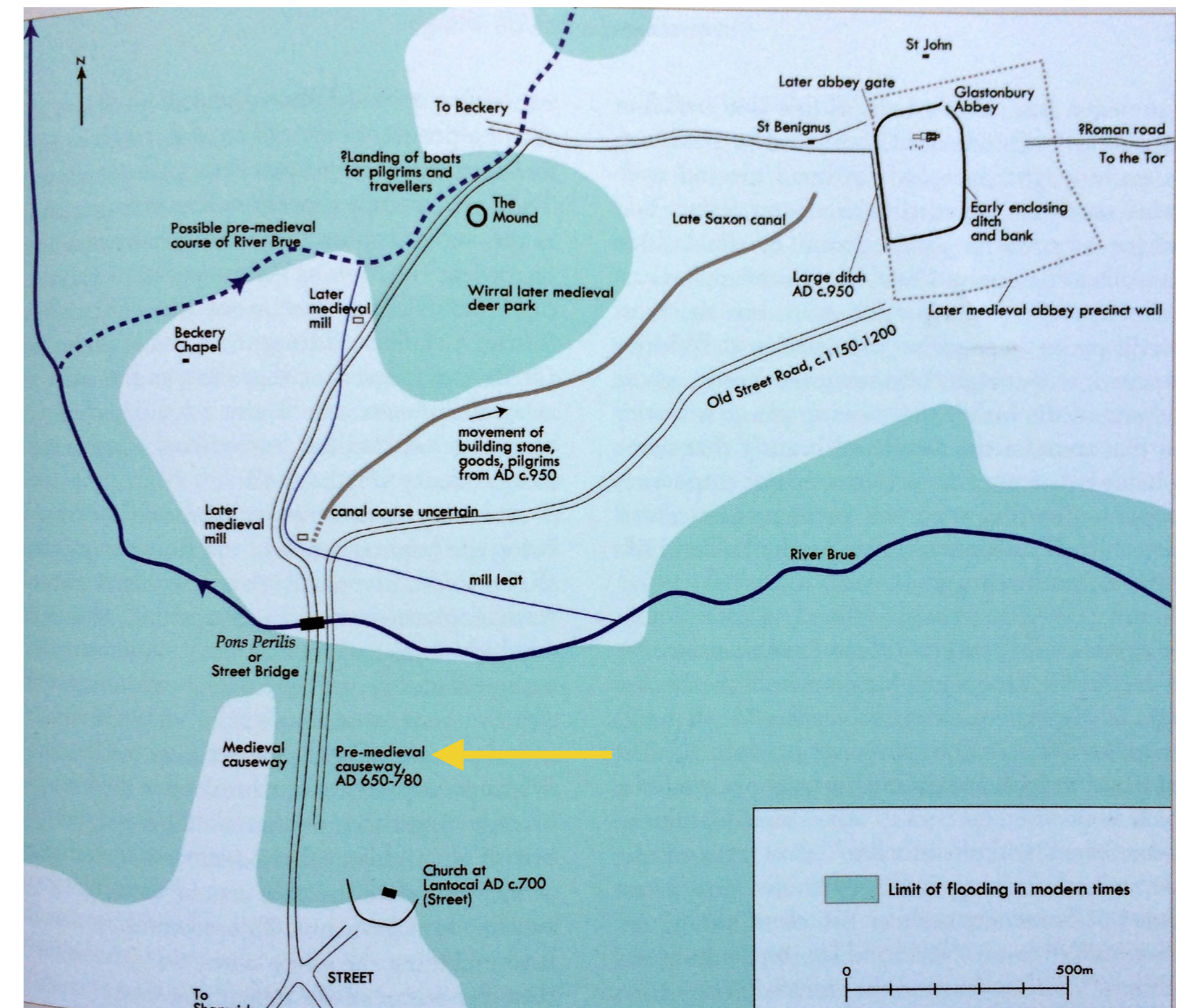

This map shows the area around Glastonbury Abbey. The village of Street was named after the Anglo-Saxon causeway which crossed the floodplain of the Brue.

MOVING THE TEST

Charter boundary clauses give a point to point description of features, proceeding in a clockwise direction. On a boundary shared by neighbouring estates, the surveys travel in opposition directions. There appears to have been a significant change in the topography of the floodplain along the Nursling/Romsey boundary in the century between the two charters. The north boundary of Nursling in 877 runs east from the Test along the boundary stream across the width of the floodplain. In Romsey's charter of c970, the stream has been replaced, from east to west, by the 'heaf' (water), a dead lake (stagnant water) and an island. The westernmost point is the Old Test. The Test has apparently been moved to a new main channel on the east side of the floodplain. The relevant sections of the boundary clauses are shown below.
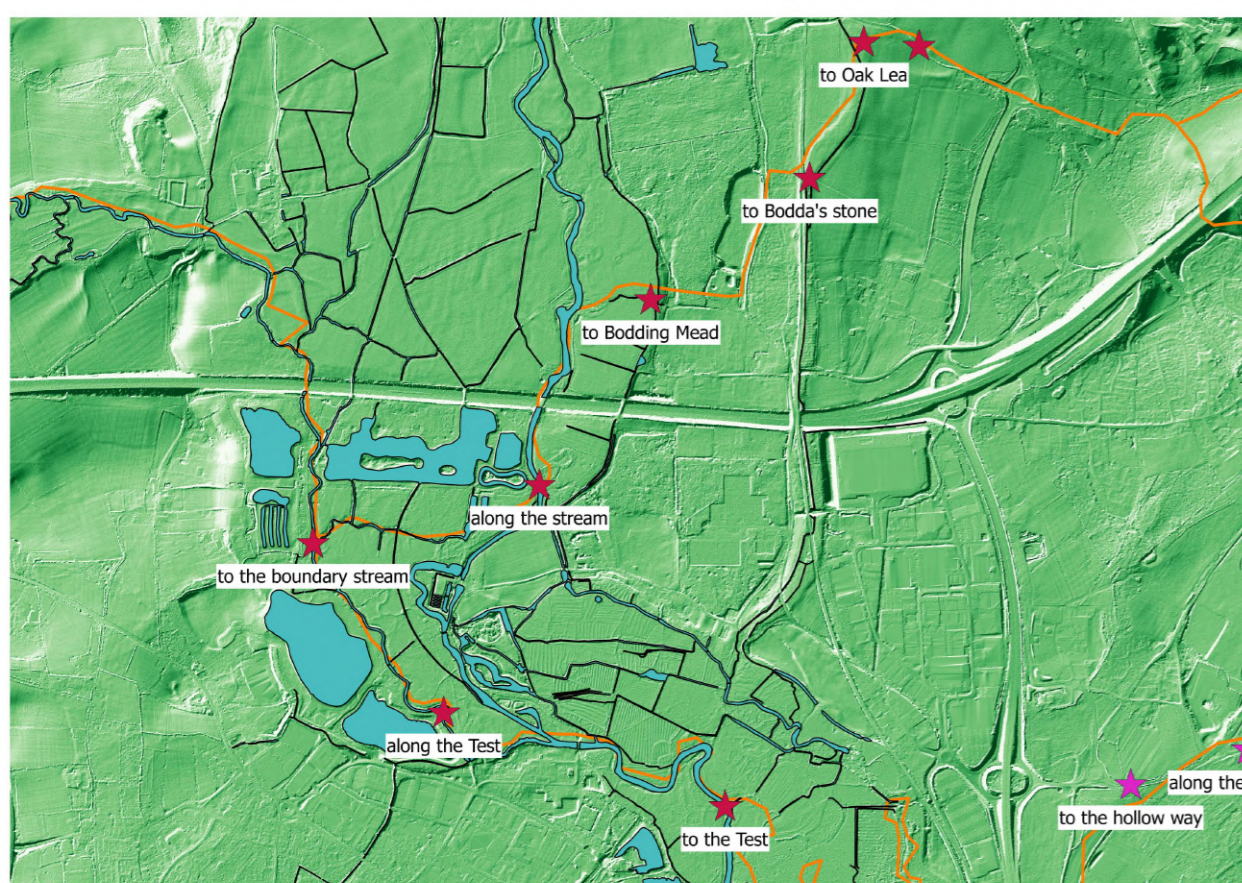
Nursling:
∂onon andlang testan
on mercfrot
∂onon anlang fliotes
on boddingmed
∂onon on boddanstan

Romsey:
to bodestan
suthe andlang lauen
in ðe dich bi ðugen
ðanne andlang dich
in non ðe widige
in an ðe heat (heaf)
andlang heae (heaf)
in ðan dede lake
to huntesige
in and ðan alde tersten
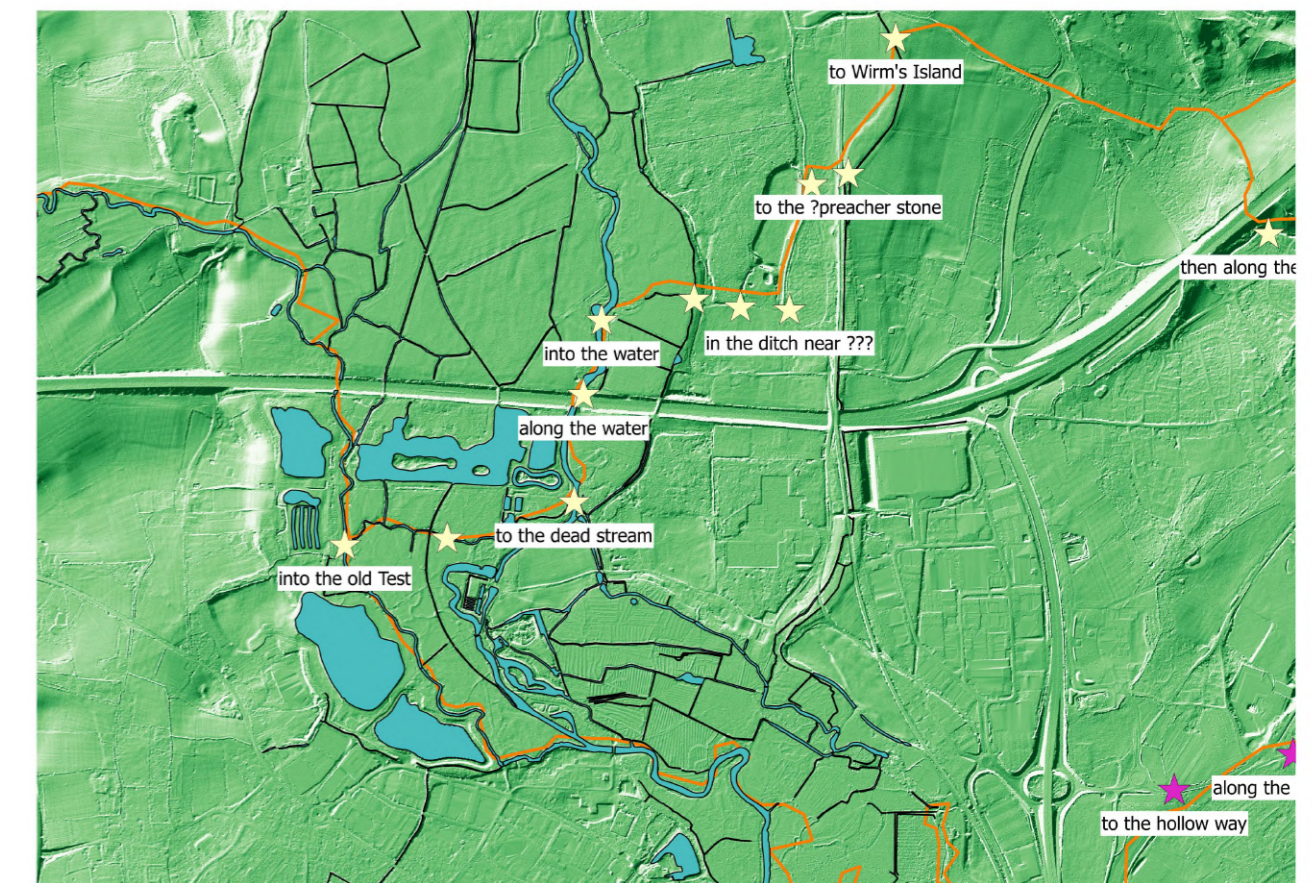
THE FISHLAKE

The Romsey charter ends by returning to the starting point: in and ðan alde tersten ond ðe hit comeð in ðare streit ðare ðurstan seyt - into the old Test until it comes to the street where the Test (does something). What does seit/seyt mean?

The scribe made some errors in transcribing the charter bounds: the correct words are scit/scyt. This is a dictionary entry for the word corner:
sceat Strong Masculine Noun
i. a corner an angle (v. -scite) applied
Old English feówerscýte Modern English a corner quadrangular square
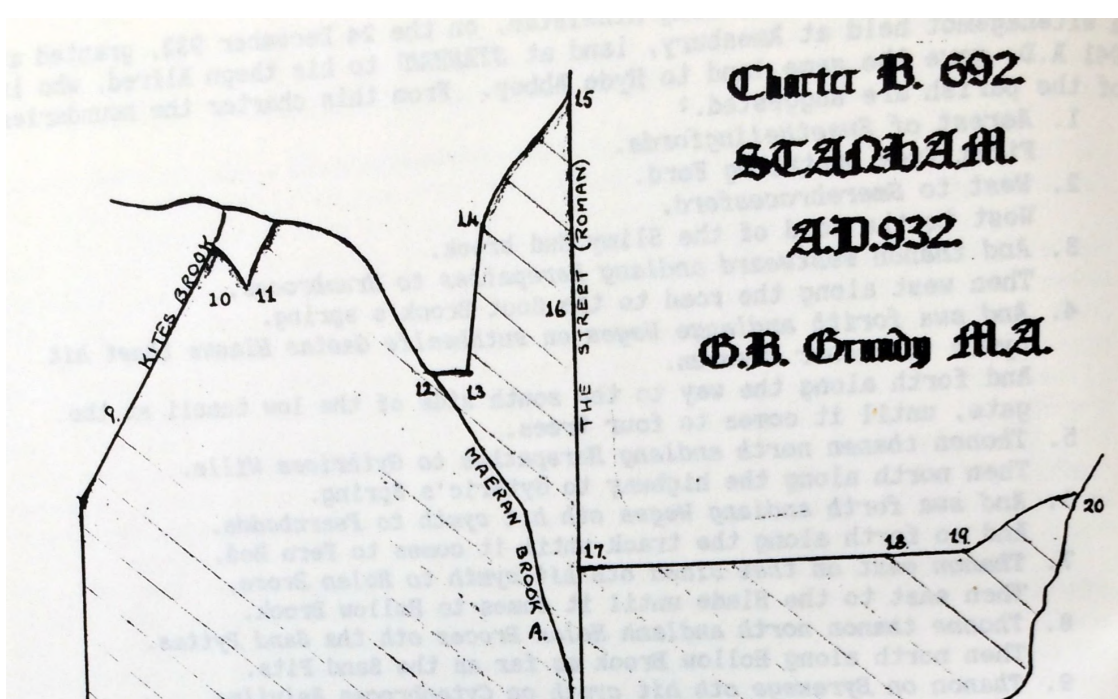
The word scit/scyt appears three times in the North Stoneham charter:
oth thaet slaede tha scit to maeranbroce
Thone north swase haga scyt
Thon swa Icenan scyt

The sketch of the boundary shows these points:
11 the slade (valley) corners
13 the hedge corners
20 the Itchen corners

The Old Test meets the Test at the street where the Test corners. This is a good description of the point where the Fishlake leaves the Test. Was the Fishlake an Anglo-Saxon construction?