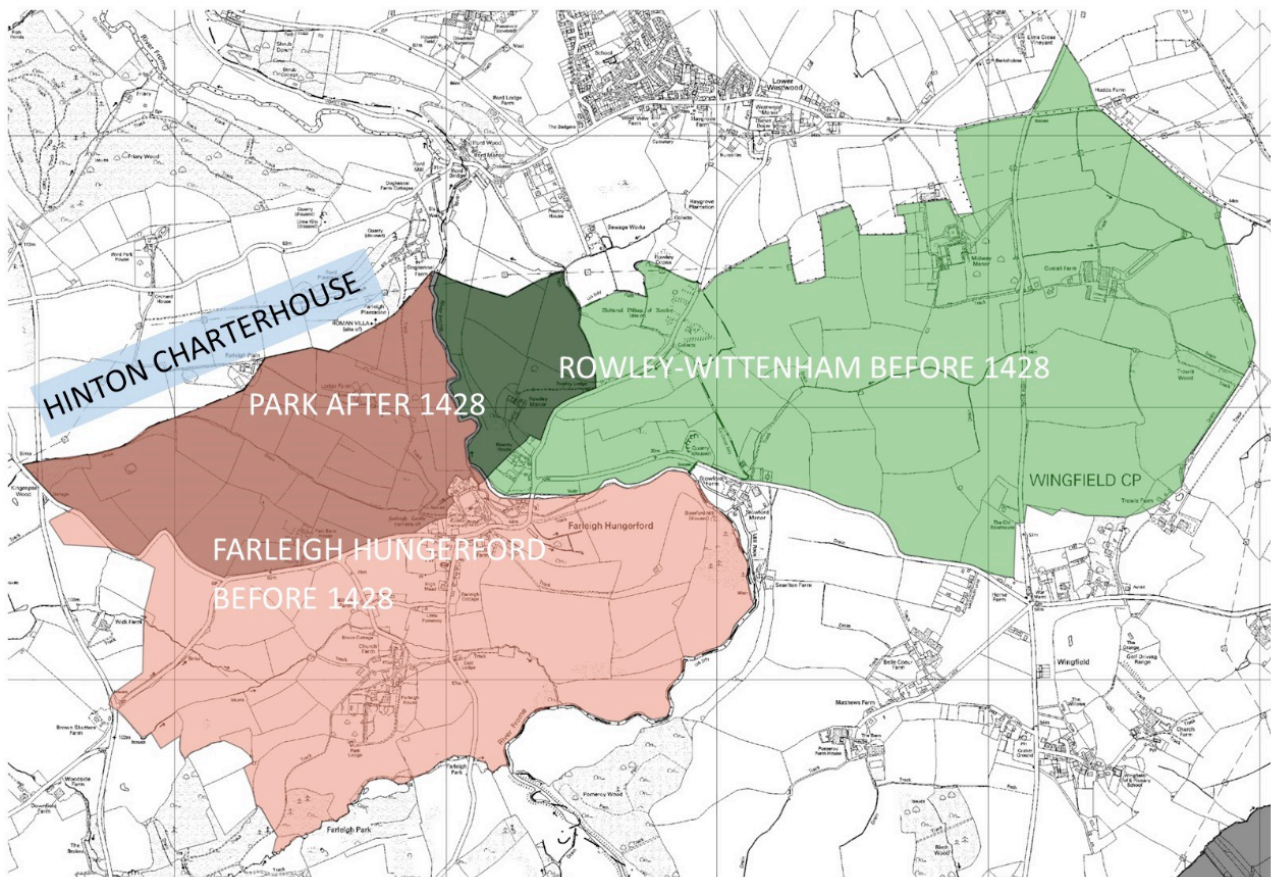


Rowley-Wittenham Medieval Deer Park

(as part of Farleigh Hungerford Park)

Rob Arkell, Bradford on Avon Museum Research Group

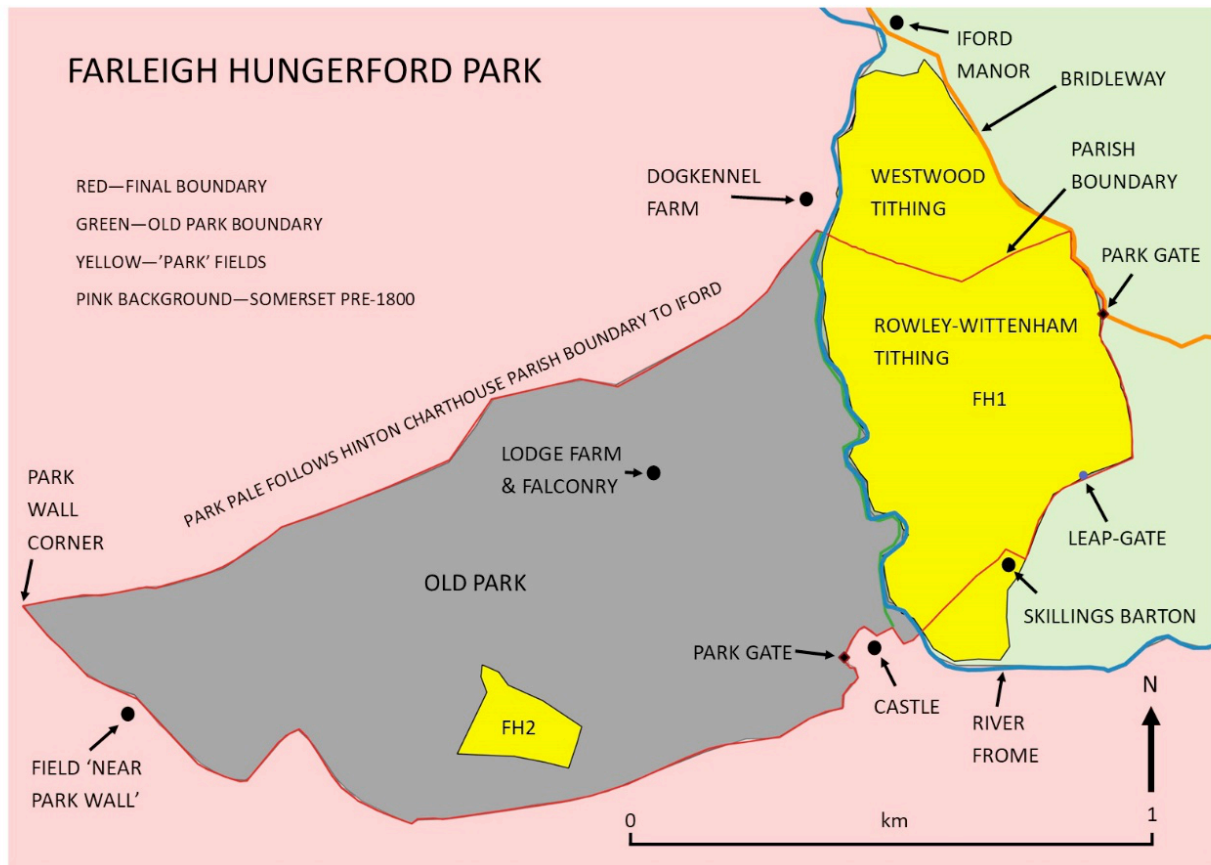
Rowley-Wittenham's park is an addition, made at some time after 1428, to Farleigh Hungerford Castle's deer park. Farleigh Hungerford's Somerset park (Old Park) was in existence before the Hungerford family acquired Farleigh Montfort manor in the 14th century. Its origins may be earlier still, as Farleigh Hungerford parish has an area of 442 hectares which is sufficient for a typical five-hide Anglo-Saxon manor, but it was only taxed at half a hide in the Domesday Book. This low tax value suggests that it may have been used for hunting and that this use may then have continued under subsequent owners.



The park across the Wiltshire-Somerset boundary

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The park was surveyed in 1540 when the manor was confiscated by Henry VIII. The survey gave the perimeter as 2¾ miles (approx. 3.7 statute miles) and recorded that the park was replenished annually with 26 antlered deer and 44 rascal (young) deer. This value for the perimeter combined with other documentary references allows the boundary to be drawn with some certainty although there are no obvious boundary banks or ditches to mark the boundary on the ground.



Farleigh Hungerford Park

The perimeter can be followed in a clockwise direction by starting at the Castle, which had a gateway into the park, and following the road to Hinton Charterhouse thus keeping Park Barn and Park Home Ground (FH2) adjoining it in the park. A field which was part of West Week Farm on the opposite side of the road was described as 'neere unto the Park Wall' in 1634. The south-eastern boundary of Hinton Charterhouse parish is described in a survey of 1606 as running from the Park Wall Corner of the park of Edward Hungerford for 1000 paces (2000 steps) along the park pale to Iford Bridge. Whilst the Hinton Charterhouse parish boundary continued along the River Frome, the park boundary in 1606 must have diverged to follow the Westwood parish boundary to the packhorse route. It is not thought that the park extended as far as Iford Manor since the bill of sale for Wiltshire Park Farm (FH1) in 1743 gives an area of 80 acres, which matches the area south of the parish boundary.

Victorian maps show the area north of the parish boundary as part of Wiltshire Park Farm as by that time Wiltshire Park Farm had absorbed part of the Iford estate. The boundary then followed the bridleway to the park gate shown. Its position is indicated by a lease of 1673 which records half an acre of land in Westwood Field adjoining Rowley Park yate (gate). This portion of the boundary is confirmed by Leland in his tour of c1542 when he describes keeping the park on his left as he travelled along the bridleway towards Freshford, having started in Trowbridge. The boundary then follows a hedge to the Farleigh Hungerford to Westwood road and then follows the road back to Skillings Barton which is described as being 'underneath the park pale' in 1583. It then dog-legs to go round Skillings Barton before returning to the castle.

Lodge Farm, the Falconry and Dogkennel farm, shown on O.S. maps, are reminders that hunting regularly occurred in the park. Dog Kennel Farm lies outside the park in Hinton Charterhouse parish.

Evidence for cattle in the park comes from the Hungerford Accounts for 1440-42 which record an allowance for hay brought to support beasts (cattle) in the park. Raids on the park by a gang of poachers in 1621 and 1622 are recorded in a complaint made to King James in 1623. The park is described in the document as having a 'strong wall of stone, ten feet or more in height'. The poachers, led by a butcher from Monkton Farleigh, took 17 mature deer and sundry 'rascal' deer as well as 412 coneys (rabbits). Deer were still being poached in 1686, the year that the Hungerford estates were sold. A group of men from Rode 'took a doe out of the dogg kennel in ffarleigh park'. The reference to an area as 'the dogg kennel' indicates that the park may have been divided into compartments.



Approximate site of the deer leap

Deer leaps or leap-gates allowed deer to jump into a park but prevented them from jumping out. A deer leap is recorded in a document of 1786 which refers to land under Wiltshire Park Wall being held 'under the ancient claim of a Deerleap'. This deer leap adjoined Rowley Green on the eastern boundary of the Wiltshire park and there is an ideal two metre drop from the road into the park in this area.