

**GROVE SOLAR FARM, BENTLEY, SUFFOLK**  
**D3505/W/25/3370515**

**PROOF OF EVIDENCE**  
**of**  
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**HISTORIC LANDSCAPE ISSUES**

On behalf of

**Bentley Parish Council and Stop Grove Farm Solar**

December 2025

**Introduction: Qualifications and Experience**

My name is Edward Martin and I am a retired archaeologist and landscape historian. I have a BA in Archaeology from Cardiff University. I am also a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and a Member of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.

I was an archaeological officer for Suffolk County Council for about 40 years, specialising in prehistory and landscape history. I wrote the project designs for, and supervised, two English Heritage-funded landscape projects: the Historic Landscape Characterisation of Suffolk Project 1999–2000 (now available online: <https://heritage.suffolk.gov.uk/hlc>) and the Historic Field Systems of East Anglia Project, 2000–2005. I was the principal author of the report on the latter project: *Wheare most Inclosures be. East Anglian Fields: History Morphology and Management*, East Anglian Archaeology 124, 2008 (<http://eaareports.org.uk/publication/report124>). I was subsequently closely involved with Suffolk County Council's Suffolk Landscape Character Assessment (<https://suffolklandscape.org.uk>) and the regional East of England Landscape Typology (<http://landscape-east.org.uk/east-england-landscape-typology>). I was also on the partnership board of the HLF-funded Managing a Masterpiece – Stour Valley Landscape Partnership Project 2010–13. Additionally, I helped to devise a series of heritage walks under the theme of 'Treasured Suffolk' (<https://www.discoversuffolk.org.uk/?s=treasured>). I am the author of 'Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex: Medieval Rural Settlement in 'Greater East Anglia' in N. Christie and P. Stamper (eds) *Medieval Rural Settlement. Britain and Ireland, AD 800–1600* (Windgather Press 2012), and a second edition is due to be published in 2026. I am also a vice-president and a past chairman of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History, a past chairman of the Suffolk Gardens Trust, and a committee member of the Suffolk Historic Buildings Group.

Although I have a detailed knowledge of Suffolk's historic landscapes, I have not had occasion to consider in detail the Bentley landscape before. Aspects of historic features of Bentley were drawn to my attention by Leigh Alston, a long-term friend and fellow researcher, and I felt it sufficiently interesting to warrant my writing a short assessment of the significance of some of those features and to try to put them into a Suffolk-wide context, given that an important decision is about to be taken about around 120 acres of this landscape in the very near future.

## The Historic Landscape of Bentley

Bentley lies on the eastern edge of the broad boulder-clay plateau that runs diagonally through the centre of Suffolk, the clay changing to gravels capped by wind-blown loess deposits, giving deep, loamy soils. Bentley however has much in common with Suffolk's clayland in having a landscape character that can be broadly defined as 'ancient'. 'Ancient' because the fields and roadways are of medieval or earlier origin, they were not created by parliamentary enclosure in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.

Bentley has the fortunate benefit of a large collection of medieval documents relating to land transactions and administration that still survives in the ownership of the Tollemache family at Helmingham Hall, including a survey of the manors of Bentley in January 1613/14 (reference: T/Hel/24/4). There is also a large collection of documents relating to Dodnash Priory (see no. 4, below) that is now held by Suffolk Archives (reference no. HD1538/202/1) and published, together with others from the Helmingham archive in C. Harper-Bill (ed.), *Dodnash Priory Charters*, Suffolk Records Society, Charter Series XVI, 1998. More charters are in Suffolk Archives HD1047/1.

These documents, with others in the national collection, reveal that Bentley has a complex manorial history, but, for simplicity, in the medieval period there were four main components:

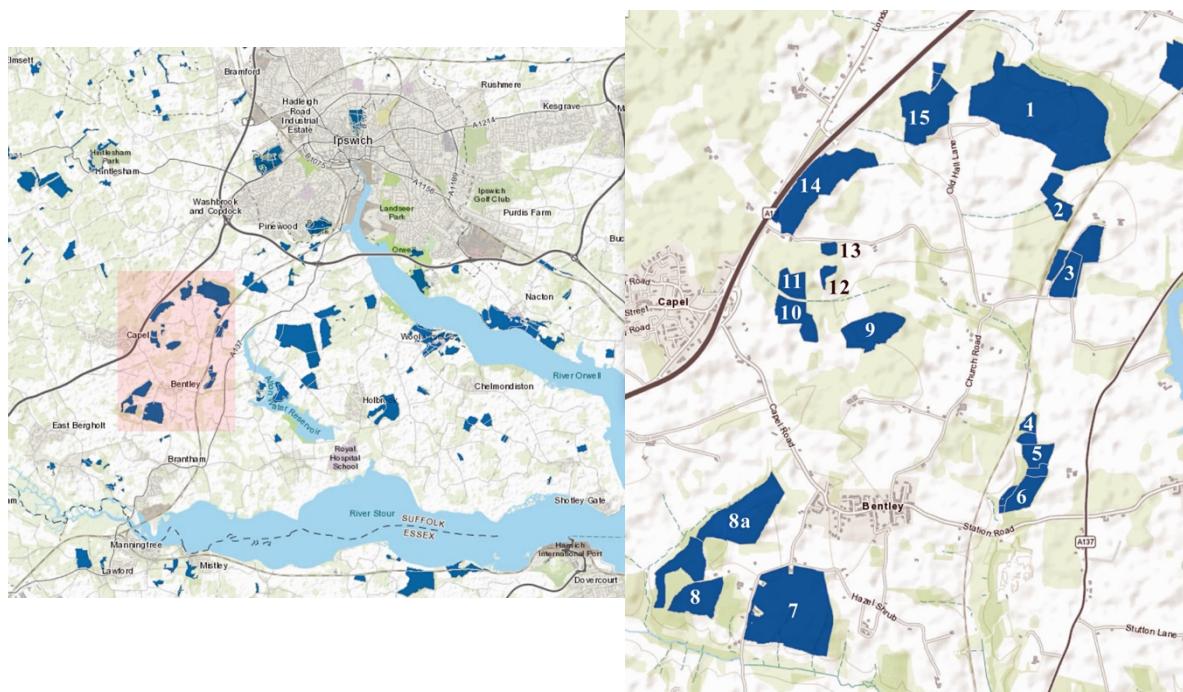
1. **The manor of Bentley Hall.** This was in the possession of the Tollemache family by 1210–12, when Hugh Talemasche was stated to hold it from the king 'by the service of being in the king's service, as a knight in England, for 40 days [per annum]'. It continued with that family until it was sold in 1668 to John Cudworth, Citizen and Girdler of London (Alderman of London and Master of the Girdlers Company in 1668). The existing Bentley Hall was built by the Tollemache family and bears the date 1582 and Tollemache initials. The original Bentley Hall was probably what is now Bentley Old Hall, in the northern part of the parish.
2. **The manor of Church House.** This represents the property that belonged to the Priory of Holy Trinity in Ipswich. No church is recorded at Bentley in Domesday Book, 1086, but one is recorded at Dodnash (see below). A charter dated between 1158 and 1162 records the gift of the church of St Mary of *Benetlia* to Holy Trinity by Hervey de Dodenes, together with further gifts of land in Bentley by him. It is therefore very likely that the Domesday church 'at Dodnash' was actually at what is now called Bentley. The Priory of Holy Trinity was suppressed in 1537, and in 1544 the rectory of Bentley and its associated lands were acquired by Sir Lionel Tollemache. It was sold in 1662 by Sir Lionel Tollemache, 3<sup>rd</sup> Bt., to Sir Philip Meadows, who in turn sold it in 1679 to Tollemache Duke, a great-grandson of Sir Lionel Tollemache, 1<sup>st</sup> Bt. Tollemache Duke and his son, another Tollemache Duke, are commemorated by well-carved floorstones in Bentley church.
3. **The manor of Fastolfs.** This first appears as an estate held, in 1240, by Sir William de Holbroke as a tenant of the Priory of Leighs (Leez) in Essex. The Holbrokes had estates in many parts of Suffolk, and at the death of Sir John Holbroke in 1375, these were divided between his two daughters, Margery and Elizabeth. Margery, the eldest, received the Bentley land in her share. She married Sir John Fastolf – a cousin of the more famous Sir John Fastolf (a military commander under King Henry V in his French wars) who was the inspiration for Shakespeare's character 'Falstaff', although actually very different in character to the real man. The name Falstaff Manor commemorates this family, although using the Shakespearian spelling. The family, who lived mainly in Nacton or Ipswich, fell into debt in the early 1500s and George Fastolf parted with it to his father-in-law Sir Richard Broke. Sir Richard's son

Robert sold it to Sir Lionel Tollemache in 1549. In 1662 it was sold by Sir Lionel Tollemache to Sir Philip Meadows and again resold in 1679 to Tollemache Duke.

**4. The manor of Dodnash.** A priory of Augustinian canons was founded at Dodnash in 1188 by Wimer the chaplain. He belonged to a family that sometimes used the surname of ‘de Dodenesse’, indicating their ownership of an estate at Dodnash. Dodnash occurs in Domesday Book, 1086, as *Todenes*, and apparently then it had a church with 30 acres of free land. The Dodnash family’s own manor was acquired by the knightly Charles family of Kettleburgh, Suffolk, in the late thirteenth century. In the 1330s the manor was acquired by the priory. In 1525 Dodnash Priory was suppressed and its estate was granted to Cardinal College at Oxford (newly founded by Cardinal Thomas Wolsey), and transferred to Wolsey’s College in Ipswich in 1528. But with Wolsey’s fall this college failed and the estates were assigned to Sir Lionel Tollemache in 1531. In 1662 it was sold by Sir Lionel Tollemache to Sir Philip Meadows, and resold in 1679 to Tollemache Duke. The site of the priory lies on the southern edge of the parish, bordering East Bergholt.

An important point of this manorial history is that by the mid sixteenth century most of Bentley was in the possession of the Tollemache family. Although they subsequently sold most of their agricultural estate here in the 1660s, they retained their extensive woodland in the parish, which had the effect of limiting change by subsequent owners to the layout of the Bentley landscape.

This also means that Bentley is remarkably well-endowed with ancient woodland, with no fewer than fifteen woods in the Natural England national inventory of ancient woodland (<https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/Defra::ancient-woodland-revised-england-completed-counties-1/explore?location=52.010718%2C1.125095%2C12.15>):



1. **Old Hall Wood** – classified as ancient replanted woodland.

Recorded as *Oldhall Woode* in 1614.

2. **Newcome Wood** – classified as ancient replanted woodland.

Actually two woods: recorded as *Newepondowne Grove* and *Nicolls Grove* in 1614; *Nupondowne grove* and *Nicholls Grove* in 1630; *Lady Grove* 1826.

3. **Hall Heath** (including Mungon’s Grove) – classified as ancient and semi-natural woodland.

Recorded as *Bentley Heath Wood* in 1826; *Munsland Grove* 1614; *Munsland grove* 1630.

4. **Alder Carr** – classified as alder carr.

5. **Buxton Wood** – classified as ancient replanted woodland.

Recorded as *Bugesdune* mid 13<sup>th</sup> century; *Buckesdune* mid-late 13<sup>th</sup> century; *Buckysdoune* 1343, *Buggisdoune* 1362; *Buxon Wood* in 1614; *Buxon Wode* in 1630

6. **Buxton Wood South** – classified as ancient replanted woodland.

Part of the above.

7. **Dodnash Wood** – classified as ancient and semi-natural woodland.

Probably included in the ‘woodland for 30 pigs’ recorded at *Todenes* in 1086; recorded as *boschum de Dodenes* before 1196; *Dodnash Wood* in 1783.

8. **Great Martins Hill Wood** – classified as ancient replanted woodland.

Martin de Rivery, Abbot (c.1205–1212) of Aumale (Abbaye Saint-Martin d’Auchy) in Normandy granted to Dodnash Priory all the woodland he held in *Huleneia* (see 8a, below); recorded as *Martins Hills* in 1783; *Martins Hill* 1826; *Martins Hills* 1838.

8a. **Great Martins Hill Wood** – classified as ancient replanted woodland.

Recorded as *Hulney* or *Hylneia* before 1196; *Hulenheia* late 12<sup>th</sup> century; *Hulenhey* 1236/7; *Hulgrove* 1614; *Hulney Wode* 1630; *Hulley Wood* 1783; *Holly Wood* 1838. Middle English *heie* had a developed meaning of a ‘wood’.

9. **Engry Wood** – classified as ancient and semi-natural woodland.

Recorded as *Ingerethewode* in 1427; *Ingre Wood* 1544; *Ingrey Wood* 1614; *Ingrey Wode* 1630. This wood belonged to Holy Trinity Priory, as did Pedlars Grove (see no. 10). A wood called *Lemanshei* in 1223 and *Lemaneshay* in the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century also belonged to Holy Trinity Priory and this could be an earlier name for Engry Wood or Pedlars Grove.

10. **Pedlars Grove** – classified as ancient and semi-natural woodland.

Recorded as *Pettelande Grove* in 1544; *Petland Grove* 1614. This wood also belonged to Holy Trinity Priory.

11. **Tare Grove** – classified as ancient and semi-natural woodland.

12. **Fingery Grove** – classified as ancient and semi-natural woodland.

13. **Ponders Grove** – classified as ancient and semi-natural woodland.

14. **Bentley Long Wood** – classified as ancient and semi-natural woodland.

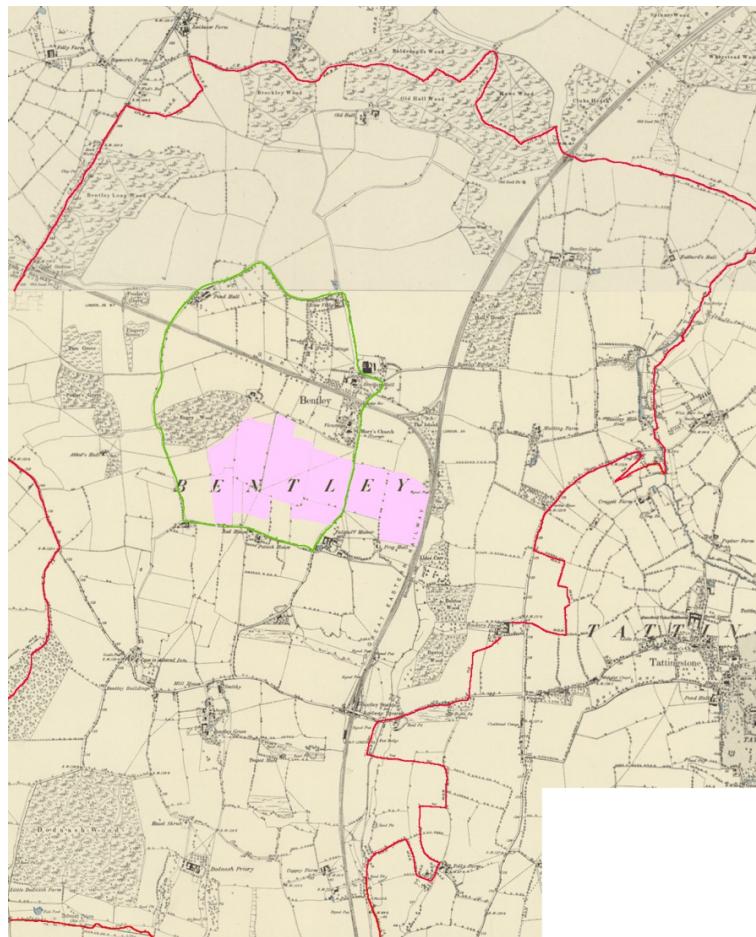
Recorded as *Bentleyhall Wood* in 1614; *Bentley Great Wood* in 1826.

15. **Brockley Wood** – classified as ancient and semi-natural woodland.

Recorded as *Brockhall* in 1584; *Brockhall Wood* 1614.

This is an outstanding collection of ancient woods with documented histories that reach back to at least the twelfth century, and most probably much earlier. Their survival into the modern landscape makes Bentley stand out from its neighbours as an important area of historic landscape.

The solar farm application area is central both geographically and historically to Bentley. On the map below, based on the Ordnance Survey map of 1884, the parish boundary is outlined in red and I have highlighted a central circuit of lanes in green which seem to enclose an historic core that contains the parish church and lands historically associated with it. I have also approximately indicated in pink the area of planning application D3505/W/25/3370515. It can therefore be seen that the planning application affects a large part of that central core area.



The historical depth of the potentially affected area can be illustrated with reference to the below aerial photograph taken by the RAF in 1945 (see below for the numbered features):

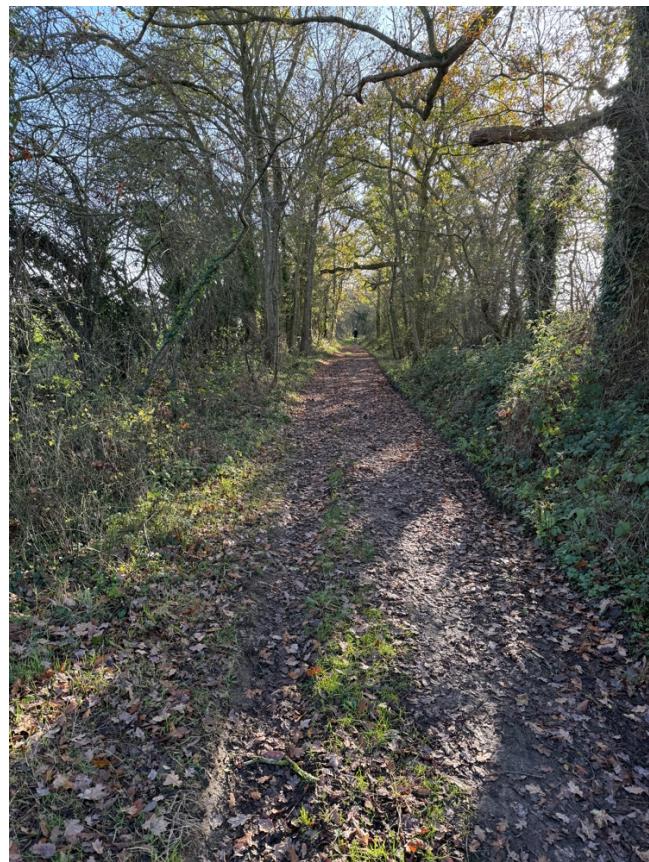


The numbered historical features are:

1. **Engry Wood.** See above p. 4. This ancient woodland is still surrounded by its medieval wood bank.



2. **Pond Hall Lane.** This visually impressive green lane is now a bridleway, but was recorded as *Kantisestrete* in 1276; *Kentisestrete* in 1298; and *Kentens Waye* in 1614.



**3. Potash Lane.** This lane is recorded as *le Hundredisweye* in 1299; and *the Hundred Waye* in 1614. A number of Hundred Lanes are recorded in Suffolk, but normally they refer to a roadway on the boundary one of the old administrative areas called hundreds, but here in Bentley this lane occurs is the centre of a hundred (Samford Hundred), but leads toward the former meeting place of the Samford Hundred court at *Copthorn* in Capel St Mary (now the eastern side of the village with the White Horse Inn).



**4. Church Road.** This tree-lined 'quiet lane' affords wide views across to Engry Wood.



5. Field named **Dowlands** in 1838. Recorded as *Duueslond* in the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century, as *Great* and *Little Dowlands* in 1614 and *Dowlandes* in 1630.
6. Field named **Ingrey Field** in 1838. Recorded as *Ingriefield* in 1614 and *Ingrey feilde* in 1630
7. Field named **Silletts** in 1838. Recorded as *Sellettes* in 1614.
8. Field named **Great Elmes Acre** in 1838. Recorded as *Great Emes Aker* in 1614.
9. Field named **Wadmellwent** in 1838. Recorded as part of *Churchhouse fielde* in 1614.
10. Field named **Little Burrow Field** in 1838. Recorded as part of *Burreldefielde* in 1614.
11. Field named **Church Field** in 1838. Recorded as *Churchehouse fielde* in 1614.
12. Field named **Great Burrow Field** in 1838. Recorded as part of *Burreldefielde* in 1614.
13. **Bentley church**. Listed Grade II\*. See above page 2.
14. **Bentley Hall**. Listed Grade II\*. See above page 2.
15. Lane recorded as *waye to Ingreywode* in 1614.
16. Field recorded as **Butts Field** in 1838. Recorded as *Greate* and *Little Butfielde* in 1614.
17. Field recorded as **Farm Field** in 1838. Recorded as *Farm field* in 1614
18. Field recorded as **Thornhill** in 1838. Recorded as *Thornyehill* in 1614.
19. Field recorded as **Wades Hill** in 1838. Recorded as *Wadehill* in 1614.
20. **Falstaff Manor**. See above, page 2.
21. Field named **Little Meechboys** in 1838. See below.
22. Field named **Great Meechboys** in 1838. Recorded as *Mucheleyboyefeld* in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and as *Muche boysefield* in 1614. It takes its name from the family of William Mucheleboy, who was living in Bentley in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The field names are an indication of the age of this agricultural landscape and although many of the field boundaries seen in the 1945 aerial photograph have since been removed, there is still a continuity represented by the outer circuit of lanes. The 1945 photograph seems to indicate that the internal field boundaries were relatively low and un-treed, suggesting that views from the lanes across to Engry Wood have a long history.

### The modern landscape

The nineteenth century saw the construction of the Great Eastern Railway which cut across the east side of the parish, from north to south, which is still the main line from Ipswich to London. There was also a branch line to Hadleigh which cut westward across the parish from a point close to Bentley Church and Bentley Hall; this closed in 1932 and its line is now a footpath. The twentieth century saw the construction of the A12 arterial road which clips the western edge of the parish. Bentley effectively became a cut-off area between the railway and the A12. As a result, it is an unexpectedly quiet and relatively unchanged landscape full of historic interest. In visiting the area, I noticed that it was being used for informal exercise by various people and, if not adversely changed, it offers great potential as a 'green lung' for the larger communities that flank it. So far there are no widely advertised walk routes in this area, but Bentley certainly qualifies as a piece of 'Treasured Suffolk'. Bentley Parish Council has already published six excellent walks in the parish (<https://bentleysuffolkparishcouncil.gov.uk/assets/Uploads/6-Country-Walks-May-2023.pdf>) but they deserve to be more widely advertised, perhaps on Suffolk County Council's walk's website (<https://www.discoversuffolk.org.uk>) with information on all the fascinating historical features that are briefly mentioned above.

My views expressed here stem from a long career studying Suffolk's historic landscapes. My conclusion is that the landscape at Bentley contains numerous features of special historic interest, which are in many ways remarkable survivals into the twenty-first century. I am in no doubt that both the inherent interest of this landscape and its appreciation by others would be greatly diminished by the introduction of a large solar development in its midst. I leave the planning policy implications of my conclusions to other witnesses.