

UPVAP

Upper Pang Valley – All Periods

Historic Character

This is a zone dominated by arable cultivation containing the historic settlements of East Ilsley, Compton and Aldworth. The zone also contains small wooded areas and some paddocks and gallops. Historically, most land north of the Pang was covered by downland grazing, whilst to the south it was characterised by open fields belonging to the settlements. A large area of open field south and east of Compton had been enclosed into fields by the 18th century. The remaining open fields and downland were enclosed by Act of Parliament in the early 19th century. Most settlement was in the villages, on the valley floor of Compton and East Ilsley, but Aldworth was slightly different being situated on the Pang–Thames watershed in the extreme east of the zone.

Mechanisation of agriculture in the later 20th century led to a near total re-organisation of fieldscapes in the zone, and few historic enclosures remain unaltered. These changes have not had as drastic an effect on character as in other parts of the district, since the majority of the historic fieldscapes were already regularly-shaped. The growth of the racing industry and the development of extensive gallops, studs and associated paddocks have introduced a new element to the landscape. Some plantations have been created which are at odds with the unwooded nature of the landscape. They are uncommon and are mostly on a small-scale, so have not yet impacted on the overall character of the zone. There has been negligible settlement growth at East Ilsley. Settlement growth is concentrated around Compton and typified by small housing estates. The development united the neighbouring, but previously separate, hamlets of West Compton and Compton into a single settlement, known as Compton.

Historic Environment

HER records are densely distributed across the zone and include several scheduled ancient monuments. Records are heavily dominated by cropmarks, but significant earthworks and many standing buildings have also been recorded. The zone was covered by both the Berkshire Downs Survey and the National Mapping Programme and other archaeological work including survey and small-scale excavation has also been carried out.

Early prehistoric material is scarce and consists of two finds of Neolithic axeheads, including a polished axe from southwest of Woodrow's Farm. There is increased evidence of activity within the landscape from the Bronze Age onwards. Barrows and cropmark ring-ditches have been recorded over much of the zone and groups of them exist on Nutfield Down, Shrill Down, Compton Down, and east of Compton. The two barrows on East Ilsley Down are a scheduled ancient monument and were excavated in the 19th century. Artefact scatters indicative of Bronze Age occupation have been found on Nutfield Down, but no settlements of this period have been excavated.

Field systems of probable later prehistoric/Romano-British date exist over much of the zone and indicate intensive exploitation and settlement during these periods. The field systems are mostly evidenced by cropmarks, but earthwork elements are also recorded. There has been no systematic excavation of these features so their period of construction and use is unknown. Perborough Castle hillfort lies near the southern edge of the zone and survived as a substantial earthwork with possible traces of walls in the interior into the 20th century. The hillfort is a scheduled ancient monument, but extensive ploughing over the last century has largely levelled the south-western section of the rampart and ditches. Perborough Castle has not been excavated, but much early Iron Age pottery has been recovered from ploughsoil and it is thought

Historic Environment Character Zone

the main phase of use was in this period. The hillfort overlies parts of the Cow Down field-system indicating that the field system was constructed in the early Iron Age at the latest. An Iron Age/Romano-British settlement has been partially excavated at Roden Down.

Romano-British activity has been found at several locations. Excavation at the Roden Down settlement found that the site was also used for cremation and burial later in the Roman period. Evidence of pottery manufacture was located southwest of Woodrow's Farm where two kilns were excavated. Romano-British finds have been recovered from across the zone and an artefact scatter on Cow Down is thought to derive from a midden, indicating the existence of a settlement. The Lowbury Hill temple site lies on the northern edge of the zone, in Oxfordshire, but activity related to the temple is likely to have extended into this area.

The only definite early medieval features are burials inserted into pre-existing monuments. Secondary burials are found at the East Ilsley Down Bronze Age barrows and the Romano-British temple at Lowbury Hill. Other evidence of this period is from documentary sources. The battle of Ashdown between the West Saxons and Danes in 871 is thought to have been fought in this area, but its exact location is unknown. Aldworth and Compton were mentioned in Domesday and a settlement may have also existed at East Ilsley. Ilsley was recorded in Domesday but it is not known if this refers to East or West Ilsley. The nature of any of the settlements during this period is unclear as no physical remains of this date have yet been recovered. East Ilsley was referred to from 1232. West Compton seems to have been the lesser of the two Comptons as the medieval church is in the eastern hamlet and as it was also known as Compton Parva (minor). Late medieval structures survive at each village. East Ilsley has two 15th century timber-framed buildings and its Church is largely 12th-14th century. Aldworth church is also substantially 12th and 14th century, and 15th and 16th century timber-framed buildings also exist in the village. Compton church is largely 15th century, although heavily Victorianised, and 16th century timber-framed buildings exist in both of Compton's historic nuclei.

There are over 50 listed buildings in the zone and the majority are 16th - 18th century domestic structures and farm buildings. All three churches and some burial monuments are also listed. The listed structures also include 19th century houses and stables, a milestone and a telephone box. A large part of East Ilsley and Aldworth and the historic core of Compton are designated as Conservation Areas.

Historic Environment Potential

The archaeological potential of most of the zone is high. Significant deposits of Bronze Age to Romano-British date are likely to exist across much of the zone. The preservation of deposits and features may be varied, as ploughing since the medieval period may have caused truncation of archaeological layers. Deposits relating to early occupation may survive within historic settlement nuclei and any such deposits could be crucial to understanding the development of settlement in this zone. The historic building stock is fairly well-studied but it is possible that further significant buildings or structural elements may be identified.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- The open aspect of this zone is part of its historic character; will this be maintained with changing agricultural practices?
- Intensive modern agriculture threatens the resource on buried archaeological sites.

Historic Environment Character Zone

- There are a small number of earthwork archaeological monuments that require careful management to ensure their preservation.
- A large quantity of archaeological material from a broad date range indicates a high potential for future discoveries.
- Development pressure may lead to settlement expansion that erodes their character.
- Conservation Area Appraisals and management plans are required for the three designated areas.
- More detail is needed on the historic building stock to ensure appropriate policies are put in place to conserve this resource. Of particular relevance is the small number of listed buildings which do not appear to be an accurate reflection of the significance of the building stock in these hamlets.
- The move towards 'all weather gallops' threatens the survival of the traditional grass gallops.
- There is a need to ensure that any new tree planting avoids the visually and archaeologically erosive impacts of recent plantations.

Research Priorities

- What was the nature of land use in the earlier Prehistoric period?
- Do the locations of the Bronze Age burial mounds tell us anything about the use of the landscape in this period?
- What is the nature of the Iron Age occupation at Perborough Castle
- Can the broad date range of archaeological material present be used to create detailed picture of land-use and settlement continuity?
- What can be learnt about the date, origins and use of the extensive field systems?
- What is the nature of the Romano-British cemetery at Roden Down and does it relate to any adjacent settlement activity?
- Do Romano-British rural settlements exist within the field systems?
- Does the existing settlement pattern reflect the establishment of settlement in the early medieval period? Does evidence for settlement continuity exist within these villages?
- Do the historic buildings in the zone contain any information about post-medieval and modern changes to land use and agricultural systems?