

Historic Environment Character Zone

WVML Winterbourne Valley – Middle and Lower

Historic Character

This is an arable zone containing the historic settlements of Peasemore, Leckhampstead, Winterbourne and Chieveley. Historically, most of the zone was covered by open field with some areas of downland, commons and ancient woodland. The downland and most open field were enclosed into regular and irregularly-shaped fields by the 18th century, probably through a mix of agreement between farmers and piecemeal enclosure. Beedon and Rowbury Commons, and the remaining areas of open field were enclosed by Act of Parliament in the early 19th century. Small commons at Leckhampstead, Hillgreen and North Heath remained unenclosed. The zone was not heavily wooded, but woodlands were ancient and located at parish boundaries; most were on the edge of Winterbourne parish. The historic settlement pattern was mixed and the villages of Chieveley and Peasemore were the largest settlements. Each had a nearby subsidiary hamlet, Down End and Mell Green respectively. A similar combination existed in Leckhampstead parish, but Leckhampstead itself was only a hamlet, smaller than both Leckhampstead Thicket and Leckhampstead Street. Other dwellings were in common-edge settlements, such as Hillgreen and North Heath, and a small number of farms scattered across the zone. Common-edge settlements are generally absent from downland areas; their origins are unclear but they existed by the 18th century and grew from squatter occupation. Winterbourne House was the only park in the zone.

There has been major change since the mid-20th century: most historic fields have been altered as a result of the shift to mechanised farming. Much field alteration was by boundary removal and, in some places, stubs of these boundaries remain. Areas of relatively unaltered fields exist between North Heath and Peasemore. A large area of probable ancient woodland at the southern edge of Peasemore was cleared for fields by the late 19th century. There has been little further clearance and only one small block of ancient woodland has been replanted. This contrasts with surrounding zones, where clearance of ancient woodland for fields or plantation is common. Substantial growth in housing has occurred at Chieveley, largely due to its proximity to the M4/A34 junction. The housing is typified by small estates, mostly on the edge of Chieveley itself and at Downend. This has joined together the separate settlement nuclei and has effectively turned them into a single village. Development at Peasemore and Leckhampstead has been less extensive but has had a similar effect, uniting previously separate settlement nuclei.

Historic Environment

HER records are fairly evenly distributed across the zone and consist mostly of cropmarks, findspots, buildings and features known from documentary references. The zone was covered by both the National Mapping Programme and the Berkshire Downs Survey. Other archaeological work has been limited. Most has been carried out in advance of development, particularly the Southern Feeder gas pipeline and improvement works at the M4/A34 junction, but a significant landscape archaeology project is being undertaken at Peasemore by the Berkshire Archaeology Research Group. There is only one scheduled monument in the zone, a Bronze Age bowl barrow east of Rowbury Farm.

Evidence of early prehistoric activity is very limited. No Palaeolithic finds have been recorded from the zone and the only Mesolithic material is two microliths found north of the M4 at Bussock Wood. Neolithic material is more common; a polished stone axe was found at Peasemore and late Neolithic flintwork at Hill Green and four locations near Peasemore during fieldwalking by the Berkshire Downs Survey. Bronze Age activity is better documented with early Bronze Age

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flintwork collected from field walking and further early and late Bronze Age finds at Peasemore and Leckhampstead. Bronze Age activity is dominated by round barrows, some confirmed earthworks and others only identified from cropmarks or conjectural evidence. The barrows are all located on the valley slopes and include the scheduled bowl barrow at Rowbury Farm. Iron Age activity is largely documented by finds as no features of this date have yet been excavated. Early Iron Age pottery was found during pipeline construction at Chieveley and several coins have been found at Winterbourne, North Heath and Chieveley, all by metal detectorists.

Patches of cropmarks of later prehistoric/Romano-British field systems exist around Winterbourne and across the northern part of the area east of Peasemore and around North Heath. Although these might suggest significant Romano-British activity, material of this period is not widespread across the zone. Roman finds consist only of metalwork from Chieveley and Leckhampstead, and pottery from Leckhampstead Thicket, Peasemore and Hill Green. Finds at Leckhampstead Thicket were from fieldwalking on a rectangular cropmark south of the hamlet, this has been interpreted as a Romano-British feature but its function is unknown. The skull of a single Roman burial was uncovered beneath a modern house nearby. An early Romano-British farmstead with some evidence of burials was also partially excavated at Chieveley prior to road construction.

There is evidence for early medieval settlement at Chieveley, Winterbourne and Leckhampstead as all were referred to in 10th century documents, and at Peasemore, which was mentioned in Domesday. Leckhampstead is recorded as having a church in 1050 and the site of this was at Chapel Farm. Little is known of the nature or extent of each settlement during this period as no deposits of this date have yet been found. Several finds of this period have been recovered by metal detectorists near Winterbourne and Bussock Court.

Most late medieval evidence comes from buildings. Peasemore had a medieval church which dated back to the late 11th century, but the present church is 18th century. Some late medieval buildings exist in the village including Manor Farm, a 15th century house, a 15th century cottage and four possible cruck-framed cottages. The church at Chieveley was heavily reconstructed in the 1870s, but retains a 13th century tower. Earlier church foundations were exposed during drainage work at the east of the present building. Settlement at Winterbourne seems to have shifted as the medieval church and manor house are isolated, lying about 500m west of the present hamlet. Winterbourne church is largely 13th century, but contains 18th - 19th century elements. A similar migration also occurred at Leckhampstead where the medieval church was at Chapel Farm 1km east of the present hamlet, but the date of this migration is unclear. Some settlement did exist in Leckhampstead itself during this period and at least one 16th century timber-framed building exists there now. Leckhampstead was documented as probably having a deer park in 1228 but its location is unknown. Earthworks at Bussock Court have been interpreted as a manorial site mentioned in the 16th century. The site is referred to as Winterbourne Mayne by the National Monuments Record and may be one of Winterbourne's three Domesday manors.

Post-medieval records are mainly of buildings and farmsteads. There are about 60 listed buildings in the zone and most are in the historic settlement nuclei. The majority are cottages and houses and most are 17th to 18th century, although 15th and 16th century examples also exist. A significant number of 17-18th century farm buildings are listed as well as all of the churches. Leckhampstead church was constructed on a new site within the hamlet in 1858 to replace the medieval church at Chapel Farm which was demolished at the same time. Another

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record is of a boundary stone; the Hangman's Stone dates back to at least the early 19th century and stands at the junction of Leckhampstead, Welford, and Boxford parishes.

The centre of Chieveley and the hamlet at Hillgreen have been designated as Conservation Areas. Peasemore is currently subject to a Conservation Area appraisal to determine whether it too should be similarly designated.

Historic Environment Potential

Deposits of Bronze Age to Romano-British date are likely to exist across the northern part of the zone. Evidence is less clear in the area south of the zone, but similar deposits may be encountered. The preservation of deposits could be varied as ploughing since the medieval period might have truncated 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.
- Settlements are traditionally small and scattered. Development pressure may lead to settlement expansion that erodes this character.
- Conservation Area appraisals and management plans for Chieveley and Hillgreen are overdue.
- 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 does not appear to be an accurate reflection of the significance of the building stock in these hamlets.
- Ancient woodland has not been well managed in recent years and this poses a threat to its survival.
- There is a need to ensure that any new tree planting avoids the visually and archaeologically erosive impacts of recent plantations. Where possible opportunities to soften the impact of recent plantations should be encouraged.

Research Priorities

- What is the nature of the early prehistoric flint scatters recorded in the zone and what type of activity do they represent?
- Does enough evidence survive in the zone to allow us to reconstruct the Bronze Age landscape?
- Does the existing evidence suggesting a high presence of Romano-British material reflect the true level of activity of this period?
- Do the early references to the existing settlements represent an early date for settlement foundation?
- What information do the shrunken/deserted settlements contain for understanding how medieval population utilised the landscape?
- Do the historic buildings in the zone contain any information about post-medieval and modern changes to land use and agricultural systems?