

Historic Environment Character Zone

CVF Combe Village and Fields

Historic Character

This is a mixed zone of arable, pasture, downland and woodland, containing the small historic settlements of Combe and Buttermere Corner. Historically, most of the zone was covered by irregularly-shaped early enclosure fields. Both Combe and Buttermere Corner were small hamlets lying in sheltered positions at the head of the coombe. Combe comprised two distinct nuclei, one consisting of just the church and a manor, and a main nucleus lying 300m to the east around a road junction. Two areas of downland existed south and east of Combe, and a large ancient wood, Park Wood, occupied the majority of the south-western corner of the zone.

Agricultural mechanisation from the mid 20th century led to a dramatic alteration of this landscape. Existing fields were amalgamated into larger holdings, through boundary removal or reorganisation, and this has led to the removal of historic features such as hedgerows. Agricultural intensification also led to the enclosure of about a third of the downland south of Combe. There has been a small growth in tree-cover with the creation of a few small plantations. These are mostly linear and do not mesh well with the established grain of the landscape.

Historic Environment

HER records are scattered across the zone and are dominated by cropmarks. The zone was covered by the National Mapping Programme and limited other work has been carried out.

Despite significant evidence of prehistoric activity on the downs scarp to the north, no definite finds of this period have been recorded from this zone. Complexes of cropmarked field systems were mapped at several locations by the National Mapping Programme. These are thought to be of a later prehistoric or Romano-British date and are the only evidence of activity of this period in this zone. The lack of later prehistoric material is odd given the extent of activity indicated by the field systems.

Roman material is also scarce, but an inhumation of this date was found in Combe. The burial is probably part of a larger cemetery but the extent of this is unknown. The existence of a cemetery implies a nearby Romano-British settlement and it is possible that this may exist in this area.

There is evidence of settlement at Combe in the early medieval period, it was first mentioned in a charter of 1065 and recorded as having a church in Domesday. It is thought that the present, 12th and 13th century church lies on the site of the early medieval church and that early settlement would have been in its immediate vicinity. Little else is known of the nature of this settlement as deposits of this date have not yet been encountered. The late medieval settlement at Combe is also poorly understood. It has been suggested that the main hamlet nucleus represents a shift from the original nucleus at the church late in the period, and earthworks thought to be the remains of medieval settlement exist south west of the church. A settlement existed at Buttermere Corner by the late medieval period but little is known of its origin. There is only one medieval structure in the hamlet, a 14th century farmhouse, Wright's Farm. Some indication of settlement shrinkage is also present at Buttermere Corner and earthworks of medieval settlement exist in the field east of Wright's Farm.

Post-medieval records consist solely of standing buildings. There are 13 listed buildings and all, apart from Wright's Farm, are at Combe church and manor. The church and several tombs make-up the majority of the listed structures and the 17th century manor and associated contemporary garden features are also listed. No buildings within the main Combe nucleus are listed or recorded on the HER, and little is known of its historic building stock.

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Historic Environment Potential

Deposits of Bronze Age to Romano-British date are likely across the zone but preservation may be varied as deep ploughing is likely to have caused significant truncation of many features. The extent of the survival of the cropmarked features is unclear as few have been excavated, and deposits may range from relatively intact to very ephemeral and illegible. Any such deposits will be significant as little is known about the precise nature of later prehistoric and Romano-British activity in this zone. Deposits of occupation from the medieval period onwards are likely in Combe and Buttermere Corner and could be crucial to understanding their origin and development. The historic building stock, particularly in the main part of Combe, is likely to contain further significant buildings.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- There is an ongoing need to understand in more detail the nature and extent of the archaeological resource.
- Ancient woodland has not been well managed in recent years and this poses a threat to its survival.
- 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

- Is the high potential for later prehistoric and Romano-British deposits across the zone real or perceived?
- What is the nature and extent of the Roman cemetery? Does a related settlement exist in the vicinity?
- What are the date and functions of historic buildings in the zone?
- What are the origins and nature of farms and small settlements in the zone?
- Can the nature, date and reasons for the apparent settlement shift be explained?