

Historic Environment Character Zone

CFW Crookham Fields and Woods

Historic Character

This zone comprising the eastern end of the Enborne – Kennet watershed is predominantly agricultural, characterised by a mix of sinuous ancient woodlands and pre-18th century and more recent fields, with some small parklands around Crookham. Settlement is sparse and centred on Crookham. The origins of Crookham are unclear; it consists of several small nuclei and was mentioned in Domesday, but further information is scarce. The combination of woods, irregularly-shaped fields and the undulating landform give a very sinuous, intimate character to this zone. Although there has been considerable modification to some elements of the landscape, mostly rationalisation and reorganisation of historic fields, the grain of the landscape is largely intact and much of the zone retains a historic feel.

Significant changes have occurred in some parts of the zone. At its western end, Bowdown House was constructed in the early 20th century on fields between Cakeball Copse and Great Wood. In an adjacent open area, bombs were stored during the Second World War, but these former fields have now become totally wooded-over. This has created an almost continuous tract of woodland where a mixed coverage of fields and ancient woods had existed previously. A second bomb stores at Limberlost occupies former fields and has retained a more open character. Crookham has also been the focus for some new housing. This growth is beginning to merge the previously separate nuclei of the settlement, altering its historic character to resemble a nucleated village. Commercial quarrying of the plateau gravel deposits has occurred at George's Farm. This quarry is now closed and re-landscaped, with a plantation of trees established on the restored land.

Historic Environment

Although archaeological evidence is sparse in this zone, activity for nearly all periods has been documented. This evidence comes mostly from findspots, extant buildings and documentary sources. Little recorded archaeological work has been carried out, with excavations limited to an area at George's Farm carried out prior to gravel extraction, where deposits from later prehistoric and Romano-British settlements were recovered. Aside from George's Farm there is a scatter of prehistoric material from the slopes of the watershed, and a significant amount of flints of Mesolithic and Bronze Age date was recovered from fieldwalking north of Riddings Farm. Evidence for Romano-British activity is limited to single findspots near Bowdown House and Little Park Farm. Early medieval activity is almost entirely absent. Cropmarks in fields north of Crookham Common may represent a continuation of some of the linear earthworks running perpendicularly across the watershed in *NMC* HECZ, and suggested to be post-Roman land divisions. The settlement at Crookham probably dates back to this period and was definitely in existence by Domesday, although the origin and nature of this settlement is unclear. There is also very little evidence for late medieval activity, apart from the settlement at Crookham, and the only recorded finds are a small number of medieval artefacts. There is documentary evidence for a deer park which is thought to have been centred on Little Park Farm, although the extent of this park and the survival of related structures are unknown.

Standing buildings, including listed examples, are an important component of the HER for this zone. These include the extensive country house Crookham House as well as others at Bowdown and Stone House. Also on the Crookham House estate was an icehouse and a Second World War prisoner of war camp, although the condition of these buildings is unknown. Other military structures are the Bowdown and Limberlost Bomb Stores, two storage facilities

Historic Environment Character Zone

associated with, but physically separate from, the Greenham Common airbase. The agricultural and domestic buildings in and around Crookham date from the late 15th to the mid 18th Century and these are the only buildings to have been recognised and offered some degree of protection through designation as listed buildings.

Historic Environment Potential

Although this zone presently has a limited archaeological record, it is likely that deposits of buried archaeology are present within this zone and the paucity of known archaeology is probably due to a lack of archaeological work, as the excavations at George's Farm have demonstrated. It is probable that the kind of later prehistoric and Romano-British deposits found at George's Farm could be present across the remainder of the zone. Buried archaeology relating to the early medieval development at Crookham may be located within the settlement. Any such deposits may help shed light on the origin and nature of the pre-Domesday settlement. Later medieval and post-medieval evidence, both in terms of below-ground deposits and standing buildings, is also likely to be encountered at Crookham. New development and alteration to existing structures in Crookham should be monitored in the event that significant buried and structural remains are encountered. Structures and deposits relating to the deer park may be found in the vicinity of Little Park Farm. Military remains from both the Second World War and the Cold War remain within the zone, but are largely unstudied.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- There is continued development pressure in the zone, much of it unsympathetic in scale and design. This could lead to further erosion of the historic character.
- Development infilling between historic nuclei threatens the historic character of the settlements.
- Historic building stock is poorly understood and little protection is currently afforded to this resource.
- Ancient woodland has not been well managed in recent years and this poses a threat to its survival.
- Poorly understood archaeological resource.

Research Priorities

- Do the results of the archaeological investigations at George's Farm represent a model for prehistoric and Roman activity in this zone?
- Does evidence for the early settlement and exploitation of the zone survive?
- Does evidence for early medieval settlement survive in Crookham?
- Does evidence survive for the scale and character of the medieval settlement?
- What was the extent of the deer park at Little Park farm and do any features related to this survive?
- What are the date, function and significance of the historic buildings in the zone?