

KVSW

Kennet Valley South-West

Historic Character

This is a rural zone comprising recent and historic fields and small areas of ancient and other old woodlands. The lower stretches of the Dun and Shalbourne valleys run through the zone creating a gently undulating topography. The Kennet and Avon canal and railway run along the floor of the Dun valley and have created a very visible transport corridor. Historically, settlement was sparse, with only a handful of farms in the zone, and most land was under open field farming. Most of the open fields had been enclosed into irregular and regularly-shaped fields by the 18th century. A large area south of Hungerford, however, was enclosed by Act of Parliament in the 1820s. Swathes of meadowland existed in the Dun and Shalbourne valleys and those by the Dun had been converted into watermeadows by the 18th century. A few small woods were scattered across the zone and only one large area of ancient woodland existed on the Dun-Kennet watershed at Cake Wood. The interplay of the fields, routes and topography created a very sinuous, open landscape.

This remains a rural zone, but considerable change has occurred since the latter half of the 20th century. Agricultural changes have led to reorganisation of many historic fields in the zone to create holdings better suited to modern, mechanised farming. Areas of relatively unaltered historic fields exist south of Standen Manor and Farm. The watermeadows on the Dun became disused and are now either pasture fields or woodland plantations. The earthworks of the watermeadow channel systems survive in the pasture fields, but mechanised tree planting is likely to have damaged such features in the other zones. There has been some settlement growth in the zone and at least one of the historic farm sites, Little Templeton, has been demolished and abandoned.

Historic Environment

HER records are unevenly distributed across the zone and are dominated by cropmarks, features known from documentary evidence and buildings. Many HER records are in the Dun valley, with a less dense group south of Hungerford between Standen Manor and Templeton. The zone was covered by the National Mapping Programme, but little other archaeological work has been carried out.

Prehistoric activity has been documented at several locations in the zone. Early activity is attested by a scatter of Palaeolithic flintwork found near Standen Manor, but very little Mesolithic material has been recovered from the zone. Two large groups of cropmarked ring ditches, one east of Standen Manor and the other north-east of Anville's Farm, have been interpreted as later Neolithic/early Bronze Age barrow cemeteries. Three cropmarked ring ditches have been mapped on the side of the Dun-Kennet watershed and a single example was mapped immediately south of Hungerford. These are also thought to contemporary funerary monuments in this zone.

No later prehistoric material has been found in this zone and little evidence of Romano-British activity has been located. Later prehistoric and Romano-British field systems have been mapped in neighbouring zones but it is unclear whether they continue into this zone, although some cropmark enclosures and lynchets may date from this period. A probable Roman road, running from Bath to join Ermin Street near Speen, has been recorded at two locations on the Dun-Kennet watershed. One stretch is in Cake Wood and is described as surviving as an earthwork. The only other Roman material from the zone is a coin found in a field north of the A4 near Cake Wood.

Historic Environment Character Zone

An early medieval settlement is known to have existed in the zone. 'Standone' was recorded in Domesday and was thought to be Standen Manor, but it may be referring to North Standen Farm or both. The origin, extent and precise location of the early medieval settlement is unclear and no deposits of this date have been found. North Standen Farm has been identified as a deserted late medieval village and Standen Manor was also a late medieval settlement. Late medieval chapels were located at both Standen Manor and North Standen Farm, but have now been demolished. It is possible that below-ground deposits relating to medieval settlement and the chapels survive at these locations.

Several post-medieval features are recorded in this zone; most are in the Dun valley and consist of buildings and transport features. Canal bridges and locks, milestones and toll-roads are an important component of the post-medieval records. Although there is only a short stretch of the canal, four pillboxes and a tank trap from the Kennet and Avon stop line exist in this zone. None of the structures are listed but they were an important component of the system and are now falling into disrepair. There are seven listed buildings in the zone and four of these are milestones, with two each on the London to Bath and Salisbury to Oxford roads. The other listed buildings are Hopgrass Farm and Standen Farm, two 17th/18th century farm houses, and an early 18th century mansion, Standen Manor. Historic buildings exist at other locations in the zone, including North Standen Farm and Sanham Green, but they have not been studied and their history and significance is unclear. A small strip of Registered Park also crosses this zone, being the driveway from the A4 Bath Road to Littlecote House in Wiltshire.

Historic Environment Potential

There are several areas with clear potential for below-ground deposits of prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval date. The potential of the zone as a whole is hard to assess on present evidence. Later prehistoric and Romano-British field systems may continue into this zone. Most of the zone has been subject to ploughing since the medieval period and it is possible that this has caused truncation of deposits in places. Below-ground archaeological deposits of early settlement are likely to survive at North Standen Farm and Standen Manor and any such material is crucial in understanding the development of settlement in this zone. There has been limited study of the historic building stock and it is possible that further significant structures could be identified.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- Intensive modern agriculture threatens the resource on buried archaeological sites.
- 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.
- More detail is needed on the historic building stock to ensure appropriate policies are put in place to conserve this resource.

Research Priorities

- Does the relative paucity of evidence for prehistoric and Roman activity in the zone represent a true picture of the resource?

Historic Environment Character Zone

- Do the locations of the Bronze Age burial mounds tell us anything about the use of the landscape in this period?
- Does evidence for the Roman Road survive in the Dun Valley?
- Does archaeological evidence for the medieval settlements at Standen Manor and North Standen Farm survive? Is it possible to determine the character of these settlements and the reasons for their decline?
- What are the origins of the farmsteads in the zone?
- Do the historic buildings in the zone contain any information about post-medieval and modern changes to land use and agricultural systems?
- Can the surviving WWII defensive features in the Kennet/Dun valleys help us understand the military and political history of that period?