

Historic Environment Character Zone

WWHM

West Woodhay – Hamstead Marshall

Historic Character

This is a predominantly rural zone characterised by a mix of ancient woodlands, pre-18th century and recent fields, and small parklands. The zone is dissected by small valleys carrying tributary streams of the Kennet, and has an undulating and sinuous landform. Excluded from this HECZ but surrounded by it on three sides is Hamstead Park (*HPK*).

The medieval landscape of this zone seems to have been characterised by small fields interspersed with commons and woods. The remaining common heathlands were enclosed by Act of Parliament in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Settlement was widespread across the zone and characterised by hamlets, common-edge settlements and farmsteads, served by a dense network of roads and tracks. The largest settlements were Hamstead Marshall, West Woodhay, and Enborne. Several small parklands existed in the zone, and were typified by large farms, manor houses and minor gentry's homes set within a few acres of landscaped grounds. The interplay of topography, roads, fields and woods gave a very sinuous and intimate grain to the landscape.

Agricultural change led to reorganisation of many historic fields in the zone to create holdings better suited to modern, mechanised farming. This has had a slightly less-widespread effect than in other parts of the district, and areas of largely unaltered historic fields exist south of West Woodhay and east of Hamstead Marshall. Tree-cover has remained fairly stable in extent, but its character has changed slightly and there has been some loss of mature woodland and increases in tree plantations. Historic woods were cleared to create fields, and blocks of ancient woodland south of Hamstead Marshall have been cleared of mature tree cover and replanted with other species. Replanting may have removed historic features and decreased the biodiversity of these woods. Small plantations have been created at several locations; most are rectilinear and next to historic woodlands, and fit into the grain of the landscape relatively well. Settlement growth has been limited and is mostly characterised by new housing constructed around the historic settlement nuclei of Hamstead Marshall and West Woodhay.

Historic Environment

HER records are fairly well distributed across most of this zone with slightly larger concentrations found around Hamstead Marshall and West Woodhay. This reflects the fact that standing buildings and farmsteads are a major component of the HER here. The zone has been studied as part of large surveys and saw archaeological monitoring and excavation prior to construction projects, but little other work has been carried out across most of the area.

Evidence of prehistoric activity, including Palaeolithic material, has been recorded, but it is not densely spread and no period is particularly well-represented. Mesolithic material has been recovered and consists of two findspots and an artefact scatter south-east of Hamstead Park. Further material of this date may be present as the zone lies adjacent to an important concentration of Mesolithic occupation and activity evidence around Wawcott and Kintbury. Neolithic material is quite scarce and consists of a findspot and artefact scatter near the head of the Enborne and a findspot east of Hamstead Marshall. Bronze Age evidence is also scarce but includes a partially excavated ring ditch and cremation from the Southern Feeder Gas Pipeline near Hamstead Marshall, and a possible ring ditch recorded by the National Mapping Programme near West Woodhay. No definite Iron Age material has been found in this zone but the National Mapping Programme recorded traces of fields systems between West Woodhay and Inkpen and between Enborne and Hamstead Marshall, which may be later prehistoric/

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Romano-British in date. Part of a Romano-British kiln site was excavated before gravel extraction near Hamstead Park. The only other material of this date comes from finds of pottery from Crockham Heath and Blandy's Farm. The Crockham Heath finds may be indicative of a kiln site, but the site has not been excavated.

Early medieval material has not yet been recovered from this zone. Enborne was mentioned in Domesday, but the origin and nature of this settlement is unclear. Hamstead Marshall was also mentioned in Domesday but it is unclear whether this settlement was on the site of the present hamlet. Late medieval material is not common and the only excavated features of this date are ditches found during construction of the Newbury Bypass, and a possible motte or hunting lodge at West Woodhay investigated in the 1930s. St Michael's Church, Enborne is 12th century in date and the only clearly identified medieval listed building in the zone, although some timber framed houses may date back to the early 16th century. Settlement at West Woodhay is documented from the 13th century, but little is known of the nature of the settlement itself. Good documentary evidence exists for a settlement called *Holt*. The site of this is thought to be Holt Manor Farm, but no physical evidence of the settlement has been found. There are also many examples of ridge and furrow noted in this zone by the National Mapping Programme.

Records of post-medieval date are dominated by standing buildings. There are over 30 listed buildings in the zone. The majority of listed structures are cottages, farmhouses and other farm buildings and date to between the 16th and 18th century. The churches at Enborne and West Woodhay are also listed, the latter being a Victorian replacement for 2 earlier churches. West Woodhay House is associated with Inigo Jones; the country house and many of its associated buildings and structures are listed, and sit within a relatively well-preserved minor park.

A small extension of the Registered Park of Hamstead Marshall is present in this zone, as is a short isolated stretch of the deer park pale; this is a Scheduled Monument but it lies outside the Registered Park. It is also probable that some action associated with the First Battle of Newbury occurred in the zone; part of the Registered Battlefield comes into the northeast corner, though most lies within the adjacent HECZ *NB1*. The Parliamentary forces may have left evidence of the temporary camps established prior to the conflict, for example to the east of Hamstead Park. There are no Conservation Areas in this zone.

The northern boundaries of this zone either side of *HPK* are formed by the Kennet and Avon Canal with associated locks and bridges. The eastern boundary largely follows the line of the Newbury Bypass, which can be considered a significant modern monument in itself.

Historic Environment Potential

Prehistoric and Roman material is likely to be present across much of the zone but the nature and quality of any deposits is hard to estimate on present evidence. Deposits relating to the early development of settlement are likely to survive within the historic settlement nuclei and may be well-preserved, as recent development has not been intensive. Any such deposits will be significant in understanding the origin and nature of settlement in this zone, particularly the relationship of the present village of Hamstead Marshall to medieval settlement in Hamstead Park. The importance of elements of some buildings has been recognised through listing, but further significant buildings or structural elements may be discovered.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- This is one of the best preserved historic landscapes in the district; there is a need to ensure this is understood and communicated.
- Intensive modern agriculture threatens the resource on buried archaeological sites.
- More detail is needed on the historic building stock to ensure appropriate policies are put in place to conserve this resource.
- Development pressure.
- Management of woodlands, conservation of surviving ancient woodlands and replacement of plantations with more mixed tree coverage.
- Management of registered battlefield site.

Research Priorities

- What was the nature of land use in the prehistoric and Romano-British periods? Does the paucity of evidence represent a true picture of the level of activity here?
- What are the origins of the settlements in the zone? Does evidence for early medieval settlement activity survive?
- Where was the historic, early medieval core of Enborne?
- What are the origins of the villages of Hamstead Marshall and West Woodhay? How did the development of major houses and estates impact on these settlements?
- Can the deserted settlement at Holt be located?
- Can further evidence of pottery production, especially in the medieval period, be found in the zone?
- 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?
- What evidence survives on the site of the 1st Battle of Newbury or where baggage trains may have camped? Can the archaeological and landscape value of the battlefield be quantified?