PV Pang Valley

Topography, Geology and Soils

This is the middle and lower Pang Valley from above Hampstead Norreys to the Thames at Pangbourne. The area includes the Pang's eastern watershed up to the dry valleys within *Pang-Thames Plateaux* HECA. Most of the area is chalk; south of Eling on the upper valley sides it is capped by Reading Beds. At the southern end of the eastern watershed the chalk is overlain by extensive Reading Beds with a capping of London Clays around Frilsham. Extensive gravel deposits exist on the valley floor with a small area of plateau gravel at Frilsham. A mix of soil types exist across the area. North of Yattendon and Eling, flinty silty brown calcareous earths exist on the valley floor with flinty clay palaeo-argyllic brown earths on the valley sides. South of this point loamy argyllic brown earths are found on the floor and lower slopes of the valley, with clay stagnogley soils on the upper slopes.

Historic Landscape

The medieval landscape of the area was characterised by nucleated settlements, mostly sited on the valley floor, surrounded by open fields on the valley slopes and with common meadow grazing by the riverside. Most of the open fields had been enclosed into fields by the 18th century. The majority of these fields were irregularly-shaped which suggests that much of the land was probably enclosed on a piecemeal basis. Areas of regularly-shaped early enclosures existed between Yattendon and Beche Farm, between Bucklebury and Stanford Dingley and around Bradfield. The regularity of these fields suggests that they were created in a more planned fashion and may result from agreement between local land-holders and farmers to rationalise holdings in the common fields and grazing or woods and turn them into fields. The valley floor meadows had also been largely enclosed by this date; most were simply enclosed into pasture fields. Areas around Frilsham, between Bucklebury and Stanford Dingley and between Bradfield and Tidmarsh, were turned into water-meadows over the course of the 18th century. Parliamentary enclosures were only found around Hampstead Norreys and a small area at Frilsham. A small area of open field was still in use in the middle of the 19th century between Bucklebury and Stanford Dingley. This was enclosed into private fields by the late 19th century.

The area was not well-wooded but some large blocks of woods existed on the upper valley slopes, mostly around Hampstead Norreys, Yattendon and Ashampstead. Most woods were ancient woodlands and existed either as large blocks or groups of woods on or near the top of the valley slopes. Areas of other old woods were present but were generally much smaller and less frequent than ancient woods, most existing along boundaries and historic trackways.

Parks were not frequent features of this area and most were near the edge of the area. Minor parklands existed at Bucklebury House, Bradfield Hall, Marlston House, Frilsham Park and Yattendon Park.

The historic settlement pattern of the area was nucleated and composed mainly of villages and hamlets located on the valley floor, such as Pangbourne, Bucklebury, Frilsham and Hampstead Norreys. Yattendon was an exception to this pattern and lay at the junction of several routes through the area on the crest of the eastern watershed.

Farms were found in the area but were not particularly common features within the landscape. They were located either on the valley floor between villages or on the upper slopes of the valley; most were named after nearby places or topographic features.

Modern Landscape

There have been major changes to the agricultural landscape. Most historic fields have been rationalised into fields better suited to modern agriculture and much of this has been through removal of historic field boundaries. During the early 20th century management of water-meadows for early spring grazing ceased, and all former water meadows have now been converted to arable. Although most enclosed meadows were also reorganised, blocks of them survive between Everington and Hampstead Norreys and around Stanford Dingley. The construction of the M4 further contributed to the reorganisation of the landscape by disrupting and truncating fieldscapes. The changes to fieldscapes have created a much more regular landscape than previously existed.

Substantial changes have occurred in the tree-cover of the area. Although no woodland has been cleared for other land-uses, large areas of ancient woodland have been cleared of native tree cover and replanted with other species. These remain as wooded areas but plantations have a totally different tree-cover and lack the biodiversity of ancient woodlands. Clearance is also likely to have damaged or removed historic features such as woodbanks. Large tree plantations have been created at several locations: the largest are between Frilsham and Yattendon, and between Stanford Dingley and Bradfield. The plantations have made these areas much more wooded than they would have been historically and have created a very visually enclosed landscape in place of one that was much more open.

Much of the parkland in the area has been enclosed and converted to arable fields and many parks now have only small stubs of grounds immediately around the house, such as Frilsham Park and Bucklebury House. Parks have also been subject to change of use, with housing developed on sections of Yattendon Park and a school established at Marlston House.

Pangbourne has experienced large-scale housing growth and is now several times the size of its historic extent. Growth at other settlements has been less marked and is typified by small-scale growth around the historic nuclei. Most growth has been at Yattendon and Hampstead Norreys but this has not greatly expanded the built-up area of either settlement. Some new settlement nuclei have been created at previously unsettled locations, most of these being single large houses.

Changes in fieldscapes and wooded cover have caused substantial modification of the historic character of the area.