

**BRI            Brimpton Area**

**Historic Character**

This zone is made up of the easternmost part of the Enborne – Kennet watershed where the ridge diminishes and the two valley systems join. Historically, the zone was focussed around the hamlet of Brimpton and had a mix of land-uses found on the watershed and in the Kennet valley itself. Brimpton was sited on the crest of the ridge and, like the Kennet valley settlements, seems to have been supported by an open field system in the medieval period. Most of it had been enclosed into irregularly-shaped fields by the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the remainder was enclosed by act of Parliament in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The pattern of sinuous woods in gullies, characteristic of the watershed, continued into this zone. The zone's settlements, Brimpton and Hyde End, were smaller and less-nucleated than those of the Kennet valley and were more similar to those on the watershed, such as Crookham. Brimpton was comprised of a series of nuclei around the junction of roads running east-west along the ridge and north-south between the Kennet and Hampshire. The combination of fields, woods, and small roads and tracks gave a distinct, sinuous grain to the landscape which focussed on the route along the ridge.

Agricultural changes and settlement growth over the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century have led to significant modification of the landscape. Most fields have been rationalised into larger and more regularly-shaped holdings more suited to mechanised agriculture. This has been most noticeable between Brimpton and Hyde End where large numbers of field boundaries have been removed. A large area of relatively unaltered early fields does remain around East Field Copse and Burnell's Farm. Brimpton has attracted considerable growth from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, including both the expansion and infilling within its historic nuclei. The growth around Brimpton has had the effect of linking up its previously distinct nuclei. These changes have not yet caused significant alteration to the nature of land cover and, with the exception of the area between Brimpton and Hyde End, the overall grain of the landscape is largely intact and retains a historic and rural feel. This balance could easily tip if new development and land-use changes do not take account of the historic character and grain of this zone.

**Historic Environment**

There is a high density of HER records and much of this zone has been relatively well-researched. The Lower Kennet Valley Survey carried out fieldwalking at several sites and an aerial survey of the Brimpton area has also been carried out. There has however been little recorded excavation, and no building survey.

Prehistoric activity has been recorded across most of the zone, apart from the southern edge, and is mainly documented by findspots and cropmarked features thought to be prehistoric. Much of the prehistoric material is not closely dateable; however, the Bronze Age is the best documented with the excavation of an urned burial and the presence of cropmarked ring-ditches at Hyde End Farm. Many of the cropmarked enclosures around Brimpton are thought to be features from later prehistoric and Romano-British settlement and agriculture, but this cannot be confirmed without excavation. Activity of a definite Roman date is very scarce, but there seems to have been a settlement at or near Brimpton, as Roman building material has been found in and around the hamlet. Early medieval documentary evidence is confined to the mention of a settlement at Brimpton in a charter of 944. No deposits relating to this settlement have been encountered and its location, nature and extent remain unclear, but it is assumed to be at or in the vicinity of the present hamlet. There is however, considerable evidence for late medieval settlement. This includes a complex of earthworks at Manor Ash Moats, identified as the site of

## *Historic Environment Character Zone*

Crookham Manor, and the moat and chapel at Manor Farm, Brimpton. The earthworks at Manor Ash Moats and the Chapel at Manor Farm are designated as scheduled monuments. Brimpton was mentioned in Domesday, but as with the early medieval settlement no deposits or structural remains have been encountered and the extent and development of the hamlet remains unclear. Although no archaeological features of post-medieval date have yet been recorded, many of the zone's standing buildings are of this date. Several listed buildings are present at Brimpton, Manor Farm and Hyde End. The majority of these are 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century cottages and 19<sup>th</sup> century houses. Despite the presence of several historic farm sites, only one farm building has been recognised by listing. The centre of Brimpton is designated a Conservation Area.

### **Historic Environment Potential**

The zone is not developed on a large scale and the presence of buried archaeology has been demonstrated by cropmarks and the few excavations that have occurred. The archaeological potential of the zone as a whole is high and prehistoric and Roman material is most likely to be encountered within the rural parts of the zone.

If deposits relating to earlier settlements are encountered at Brimpton they will be significant in understanding the nature of Roman activity in the zone, and could help to shed light on the origin and nature of this hamlet itself. The importance of elements of some buildings has been recognised through listing, however the historic building stock as a whole is poorly understood and this is particularly true of farm buildings. This should be addressed.

### **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.
- Condition of the medieval chapel at Manor Farm continues to be a concern.
- Conservation Area appraisal and management plan for Brimpton is overdue.
- 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.

#### Research Priorities

- Does evidence for the early settlement and exploitation of the zone survive?
- Does a structure of Roman date survive in the centre of Brimpton?
- Where was the early medieval settlement and how substantial was it?
- Does evidence survive for the scale and character of the medieval settlement?
- What was the nature of the activity at the moated sites at Manor Ash Moat and Manor Farm? Why are they separated from the main settlement foci?
- What are the date, function and significance of the historic buildings in the zone?