

LVDR Lambourn Valley and Downs – Racing

Historic Character

This zone comprises the head of the Lambourn valley and surrounding downs and contains the historic settlement of Upper Lambourn, in a landscape that is strongly associated with the horse racing industry. Historically, most of the zone was covered by downland with areas of open field existing around the village. The open field and down north of the village was enclosed into large regularly-shaped fields by the 18th century. Small irregularly-shaped fields, probably crofts, also existed immediately around the village by this date. The remaining land was enclosed into large regularly-shaped fields by Act of Parliament in the early 19th century. The six farms in the zone seem to have been established at the same time, and several were developed on the site of existing field barns. The large size and regularity of fields and the lack of woodland gave a very open character to the zone. It also had a very sinuous grain due to the convergence of several dry valleys at Upper Lambourn and the existence of numerous routes radiating from the valley floor to surrounding watersheds.

Agricultural mechanisation from the mid-20th century led to changes as many existing fields were amalgamated into larger holdings. The growth of Lambourn as a nationally important centre of the racehorse industry has resulted in large areas of land being devoted to horse breeding and training. Extensive areas of former fields and downs are now areas of gallops. Several studs have been established, and large areas of paddocks exist at Upper Lambourn and Sheepdrove. Many studs are within Upper Lambourn itself, although studs were also established at the historic farms on the downs above Lambourn. Several tree plantations were created in the late 20th century, most are small rectangular shelter features, but some are more irregular in shape. These intrude into the character of the zone which was previously very open and almost totally unwooded. Although some historic features such as hedgerows have been removed, changes have had a less dramatic effect than in other parts of the district as many historic fields were already fairly large and regular. The overall character is largely retained as the open and sinuous framework of the landscape remains.

Historic Environment

HER records are densely distributed across the zone and are dominated by cropmarks and findspots. The zone was covered by the Berkshire Downs Survey and the National Mapping Programme and both added significant numbers of records to the HER. There are five scheduled monuments: Farncombe Down barrow; Fognam Clump field-system; two prehistoric boundary earthworks (one runs from Bailey Hill to Near Down and the other is on Baydon Hole Farm); and Maddle Farm Roman villa.

Prehistoric records are widespread, but early material is fairly scarce. No Palaeolithic material has been recovered from this zone and Mesolithic finds are also scarce, consisting of finds of blades from fieldwalking at Wellbottom Down and Post Down. Evidence of Neolithic activity is also scarce, but is more common than in adjacent parts of the valley. Neolithic flintwork, including axe fragments, have been found at Park Farm, Wellbottom Down and Kingsdown all-weather gallop. Other evidence of activity for this period has been found during excavations including a pit at the Kingsdown Gallop and burials at Halfmoon Covert. Bronze Age material is quite widespread and consists largely of barrows, including the scheduled barrow at Farncombe Down, and other probable barrows. One barrow is visible at Farncombe Down but two barrows existed there until the mid-20th century when the other was bulldozed. This has since been excavated and a burnt area underlying the barrow has been interpreted as traces of Neolithic or early Bronze Age settlement. Cropmarks of ring-ditches exist at Park Farm, Wether Down,

Historic Environment Character Zone

Foxbury Farm, Lambourn and northeast of the Seven Barrows cemetery. The ring ditches north of Lambourn have been interpreted as a probable barrow cemetery. They lie on the sides of the same dry valley that has the Lambourn Seven Barrows cemetery at its head. Late Bronze Age artefact scatters were found at Park Farm Down and seem to be a combination of settlement and funerary activity.

Definite Iron Age material is scarce and consists of an artefact scatter southeast of Maddle Farm that has been interpreted as settlement evidence, and traces of plough strips found during excavation of nearby later lynchets. The scheduled long-distance linear boundary features at Baydon Hole Farm and Near Down are also thought to be of Iron Age date. Extensive cropmarks of field-systems that exist across the zone have generally been ascribed a later prehistoric/Romano-British date. Elements of the field-systems survived until recently as earthworks, but have been levelled by the increased intensity of ploughing.

Significant Romano-British activity, in addition to the field-systems, is documented in this zone. Evidence of settlement is widespread and includes the 2nd to 3rd century villa at Maddle Farm. Fieldwalking by the Maddle Farm Project found dense scatters of Romano-British artefacts that were interpreted as settlements west of Upper Lambourn and north east of the villa site. Excavation on Row Down found post holes and a hearth dated to this period, and these were interpreted as a dwelling. Several burials have been found around Upper Lambourn, three graves were found at Lynchets and an isolated burial was found on Kingsdown Gallop. Finds of this date, mostly coins, have been recovered from across the zone.

Early medieval records are uncommon and consist of a pit excavated at Upper Lambourn and a barrow at Row Down. The pit has been tentatively interpreted as evidence of settlement at Upper Lambourn during this period and lies outside the historic core of the village. There are also very few late medieval records. The origins of Upper Lambourn are unclear, but it is likely that the village developed in the medieval period. The earliest recorded buildings in the village are five 16th century timber framed buildings. Earthworks on Warren Down have been interpreted as relating to late medieval warrening.

Post-medieval records consist solely of listed buildings. There are 24 listed buildings and all, apart from Park Farm, are in Upper Lambourn village. The majority of the listed structures are either 16th to 17th century cottages or 18th century farm buildings. The pub and the former Methodist chapel are also listed. Park Farm is the only one of the 19th century farms that is listed. These farms are important features and reflect the move away from traditional common agriculture to enclosure. Large parts of Upper Lambourn are designated as a Conservation Area, which is split into two parts.

Historic Environment Potential

Deposits of Bronze Age to Romano-British date are likely across the zone, but preservation may be varied. Deep ploughing is likely to have caused significant truncation of many features. The extent of survival of the cropmark features is unclear as few have been excavated, and deposits may range from relatively intact to very ephemeral and illegible. Deposits of occupation from the medieval period onwards are likely in Upper Lambourn and could be crucial to understanding its development. The 19th century farms are important features, but little is known about the nature of their historic building stock. It is possible that further significant buildings or structural elements may exist at Upper Lambourn and the 19th century farms.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- The open aspect of this zone is part of its historic character; will this be maintained with changing agricultural practices?
- Intensive modern agriculture threatens the resource on buried archaeological sites.
- There are a small number of earthwork archaeological monuments that require careful management to ensure their preservation.
- The horse racing industry is under pressure to move stables away from traditional sites within settlements to new 'greenfield' sites closer to the gallops. The development of new facilities of this type could threaten the historic character of the zone.
- The move towards 'all weather gallops' threatens the survival of the traditional grass gallops.
- 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.
- A Conservation Area appraisal and management plan for Upper Lambourn is overdue.

Research Priorities

- What was the nature of land use in the earlier Prehistoric period?
- Is there any relationship with prehistoric land-use patterns in this zone with the adjacent Ridgeway corridor?
- Do the locations of the Bronze Age burial mounds tell us anything about the use of the landscape in this period?
- Where are the Romano-British settlements and how do they relate to the Villa at Maddle Farm and the extensive field systems?
- Does Upper Lambourn have early medieval origins? Do deposits from this period survive in the village?
- Do the historic buildings in the zone contain any information about post-medieval and modern changes to land use and agricultural systems?