

NFS Newbury Fringe South

Historic Character

This is a mixed zone bisected by the A339, Newbury to Basingstoke road. East of the A339 there is a mix of industrial areas, small-scale modern housing developments and an independent school. These all occupy land that was part of Sandleford Park, which extended both sides of the present A339. The main house, Sandleford Priory, and its grounds were east of the road, with parkland, walled garden and home farm lying to the west. St. Gabriel's School now occupies the grounds and buildings of Sandleford Priory. Sandleford Priory was an Augustinian priory and traces of the area's monastic past can be observed within its buildings and in the grounds to its rear. The land west of the A339 remains rural in character and combines blocks of ancient woodland, some uncommon types of pre-18th century fields, and the degraded remains of the western part of Sandleford Park. This is a zone with a high probability of change, either through development or by further degradation of woods and boundary features via unofficial recreational uses.

Historic Environment

Few HER records exist in this zone and most are around Sandleford Priory. An extensive archaeological evaluation was carried out on the western part of Sandleford Park in 1997, but limited other work has taken place. The evaluation covered three areas: Area 1 was in the south near the A339; Area 2 was north of Gorse Covert; and Area 3 was between High Wood and Dirty Ground Copse. The general paucity of HER records may be due to a combination of soils and geology, which are unfavourable to the creation of cropmarks, and the fact that the zone was historically covered by parkland.

Prehistoric material is scarce and only a single find, an Iron Age gold coin from near Gorse Covert, is recorded from this zone. Romano-British activity however is better documented. Evaluation in the western part of the park found a series of ditches and postholes immediately north of Gorse Covert. These were interpreted as the remains of fields and paddocks and were thought to be peripheral elements of a settlement complex. The settlement itself was not located by the evaluation, but it might lie within the area of high flat ground to the west, between Gorse Covert and the A343 Andover Road. Romano-British finds have also been recovered from the area around Gorse Covert.

Later records are dominated by Sandleford Priory and Park. An Augustinian priory was established in the early 13th century. A chapel dedicated to St John the Baptist existed on the site in the 12th century and references of this date have led to the suggestion that this was an earlier religious community, perhaps of nuns. No physical remains of this structure are known and its precise site is unclear. The only known surviving features of the priory are the cemetery, a 15th century chapel, and fishponds to the rear of the priory. Following the dissolution, the priory eventually became a private house and the cemetery continued in use into the 17th century. The present house is a good example of late 18th century Gothick architecture. Lancelot Capability Brown was involved with the design of the parkland around the house and this is now a Registered Park. Little of the western part of the park was included in the designated area. The park was laid out at around the same time that the house was constructed and utilised the priory fishponds within the landscaping, enlarging them to form romantic water features. Area 3 of the evaluation found ditches by the stream between High Wood and Dirty Ground Copse that were interpreted as drainage channels and may be related to landscaping within the park in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Historic Environment Character Zone

There are five listed buildings in this zone; four are within the Registered Sandlesford Park and include the house itself and its home farm, dairy and stables. A further listed building, Sandlesford Place lies adjacent to the Enborne on the west of the A339, and although previously named Sandlesford Lodge is much larger than a typical gate lodge.

One of the Peace Camps set up in the 1980s to protest against the housing of Cruise Missiles at Greenham Common, Turquoise Camp, was established in woods at the northeast tip of the zone. This site was the subject of recent archaeological work which has demonstrated the survival of elements of the camp including structural remains.

Historic Environment Potential

The extent of below-ground archaeology across the whole zone is hard to assess. Most of the archaeological work that has been carried out has located significant features despite limited indication of their existence prior to excavation. It is possible that further features exist across the zone, but the exact location and nature of such features is unclear. Evaluation in Area 1 found only a single feature despite the excavation of 44 trenches and it is possible that this is a true reflection of the paucity of activity in this area. Deposits of medieval and later date are likely in the area of Sandlesford Priory. Limited archaeological work has been carried out around the priory so the precise nature and quality of deposits is unclear. The zone has an important but small historic building stock. This seems to be well-studied and large numbers of further significant buildings or structural elements are unlikely to be discovered.

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.
- Management of woodlands, conservation of surviving ancient woodlands and replacement of plantations with more mixed tree coverage.
- Poorly understood archaeological resource.
- Management of Sandlesford House and park as a school.
- Management and conservation of the registered park.

Research Priorities

- Do unrecorded archaeological sites/features survive within the wooded areas?
- What evidence survives of early prehistoric exploitation of this landscape?
- Does a significant Romano-British settlement site exist in the area as indicated by the evaluation results?
- Did a smaller religious community exist on the site prior to the foundation of the Augustinian Priory? What was the nature of the monastic house at Sandlesford priory? What archaeological evidence survives on the site?
- Can Sandlesford Park help explain the development of architectural styles and landscape garden design in the late 18th to early 19th centuries?
- Does evidence for the Cold War peace camp survive? Can this resource be used to understand the protest movement?