

TIA Thatcham Industrial Area

Historic Character

Most of this zone, lying to the east of the residential area of Thatcham, was green-field prior to industrial development, and had a landscape like that of the adjacent *KVFE*. It is bisected by the railway and canal with differing types of development either side of the canal. North of the canal is a series of industrial estates which are home to a wide mix of different businesses, from small local firms to huge distribution centres operated by major national companies. There are historic roots to this industrial development of this zone. Colthrop Mill paper mill, itself on the site of a medieval watermill, had been established on the canal by the 1880s. It grew to cover the area between the canal and railway by the 1930s and further development in the 1960s led to the establishment of new mills and an industrial estate on the fields between the railway and the A4. The mill closed in the 1990s; parts of it were demolished and redeveloped, but some of its buildings remain in use.

South of the canal, the zone is less-industrialised and retains some rural characteristics. A small settlement exists at Colthrop Bridge (perhaps grown out of a historic farm) and the remainder of the zone is occupied by current and disused sewage works with some scrubby former marshland present.

Historic Environment

There is little archaeological evidence prior to the Roman period in this zone despite activity for all periods being documented in adjacent zones, and this part of the Kennet Valley being an important focus of Mesolithic activity. The only secure prehistoric evidence from the zone is a Mesolithic find, and it is possible that further Mesolithic activity could be present. It is also likely that the general spread of prehistoric activity seen along the lower slopes of the Kennet Valley would have continued into the zone. The presumed line of Ermin Street runs diagonally across the zone and, if this course is correct, it would have crossed the Kennet around Colthrop Mill. A burial suggested to be Roman was found at Colthrop Mill and cropmark enclosures of probable later prehistoric/Romano-British fields were observed by Piper's Lane. Medieval evidence is limited to the watermill site at Colthrop Mill and some finds. It is possible that deposits relating to the water mill and early paper mill remain, as although the buildings were demolished, parts of the site have not been redeveloped yet. More recent archaeology is concentrated around the railway and canal and is dominated by canal features and Second World War Defence of Britain structures.

Historic Environment Potential

Most of the industrial buildings in this zone were constructed prior to the onset of developer-funded archaeology so it is unclear the extent to which any archaeological deposits may have been removed during development. It is likely however, that significant truncation of archaeological deposits occurred during recent re-development of part of the Colthrop Mill site. The archaeological potential of any open areas, such as those south of the canal, is likely to be high. It is possible that any deposits adjacent to the river, including ones relating to the mill, could be well-preserved.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- Development pressure.
- Conservation/recording of extant remains of Colthrop Mill.

Historic Environment Character Zone

Research Priorities

- What is the nature and extent of Mesolithic activity in the zone?
- Can the line of the Roman road be established? Does a Romano-British settlement exist in the zone?
- What are the origins of the mills along the river and how did they function within the medieval and post medieval economy?
- Does evidence survive for the development of Colthrop Mill?
- Can the evidence of WWII features along the canal side help us understand the military planning in 1939-40?