

PVL Pang Valley - Lower

Historic Character

This is a rural zone containing the historic settlements of Bucklebury, Stanford Dingley, Bradfield and Tidmarsh. Historically, the zone was a mix of open fields on the valley slopes and common meadow grazing on the valley floor. The majority of open field was enclosed by the 18th century and most fields were irregularly-shaped suggesting that they were created on a piecemeal basis. Regularly-shaped fields existed at Bucklebury, Stanford Dingley and Bradfield and were probably created by agreement between local farmers. The meadows were also enclosed by this date, most into pasture fields, but some areas were turned into water-meadows. Woodland was generally on the southern upper valley slope and most woods were ancient woodlands and formed large wooded blocks. Minor parklands existed at Bucklebury House, Bradfield Hall, and Marlston House.

There has been major change since the mid-20th century and most historic fields have been altered into fields better suited to modern agriculture; much of this has been through removal of field boundaries. Management of water-meadows for early spring grazing ceased, and all have now been converted to arable fields. Many enclosed meadows were also reorganised, but blocks survive around Stanford Dingley. The construction of the M4 further contributed to change by disrupting and truncating fieldscapes. Changes to fieldscapes have created a much more regular landscape than previously existed. Some woodland plantations have been created, but these are not very extensive and have not had a large impact on landscape character. Much of the parkland in the zone has been enclosed and converted to arable fields, and a school now occupies Marlston House. Only minor settlement growth has occurred across the zone and most has occurred at existing settlement nuclei. Some new housing, mostly single large houses, has been created at previously unsettled locations.

Historic Environment

HER records are unevenly distributed across the zone; most are on the valley floor around historic settlements, with few elsewhere. Records are dominated by standing buildings and features known from documentary sources. The zone has been partially covered by three survey projects: the Berkshire Downs Survey, the Middle Thames Valley Survey and the National Mapping Programme. Other limited archaeological work, mainly the monitoring of construction projects, has been carried out.

Evidence of prehistoric activity is scarce. Palaeolithic flintwork has been found at Bradfield Hall and Maidenhatch; Mesolithic and Neolithic flintwork was recovered from Rotten Row, and the only other Neolithic find was from Frogmore Meadow. Later prehistoric activity is also poorly documented and consists of a cropmark ring ditch of possible Bronze Age date and Iron Age field-system ditches excavated at Maidenhatch prior to construction of the M4. It is unclear if the lack of prehistoric material in this zone reflects a lack of activity during these periods or if it is biased by the lack of research opportunities.

Romano-British activity is better documented. A villa and kiln were excavated at Maidenhatch prior to construction of the M4 and a hoard of 600 forged 4th century coins was found at the site. Scatters of building debris in ploughsoil south-west of Bucklebury have been interpreted as a possible villa, and geophysical survey has confirmed the presence of walling in the area. Evidence of Roman building material has also been found in Stanford Dingley and south and east of Bradfield. Several Romano-British finds, including horse furniture, have been recovered from across the zone.

Historic Environment Character Zone

Considerable evidence of early medieval activity in the zone comes from documentary sources. Bucklebury was recorded in Domesday and has been interpreted as a potential urban settlement as it was both a royal manor and the centre of a hundred. Stanford Dingley was also recorded in Domesday. Bradfield was mentioned in the late 7th century and early 9th century and was recorded as a settlement at Domesday. Apart from early medieval structural elements in the churches at Bucklebury and Stanford Dingley, little is known of the nature or extent of each settlement. A reference exists to a grant of land at or near Bradfield to a monastery in 699 but nothing else is known of this foundation as no later references have been found.

It is not clear if there was settlement at Tidmarsh in the early medieval period as the earliest reference to it was in 1196; its church is largely 12th century and was restored in the 19th century. A medieval settlement existed at Marlston, but was deserted by the early post-medieval period. A 12th century chapel lies north of Marlston House and the village site is thought to lie between the two. Bucklebury church is of 11th and 12th century date, and Bucklebury Farm has a 16th century timber-framed manor house and barn. A complex of fishponds, thought to be medieval, exist south of the farm. A moat exists at Stanford Dingley Manor Farm; the village contains three 15th-16th century timber-framed buildings and its church is largely 12th century. Bradfield church was heavily rebuilt in the 1840s but retains 14th and 16th century elements and a 15th-16th century cottage exists next to the church. Bradfield Place, the medieval manor house, became part of Bradfield School when it was established in the 1850s and a small portion of the manor house exists in the school building. A mill existed at Bradfield in the 14th century, but it is not clear if this was at the present mill site. A previously unknown medieval settlement was excavated 500m north-east of Bradfield village. It was occupied during the 12th and 13th centuries and may have been a satellite hamlet.

Post-medieval features are dominated by mills and buildings. Watermills existed at Marlston, Bucklebury, Stanford Dingley, Bradfield and Tidmarsh. Bucklebury mill was developed into an iron foundry by the mid-18th century and continued to operate until 1986. A brick and tile works existed in Kiln Copse south-east of Bradfield, but was demolished by 1913 and it is unclear if elements of the works or its clay-pits survive. There are 89 listed buildings in the zone, most being in historic settlement nuclei, and the majority are 16th to 18th century farm buildings and domestic structures. Most 19th century listed structures are school or country house structures and are at Marlston House, Maidenhatch and Bradfield College. The five churches and several of their tombs are also listed. The historic core of Bucklebury and large parts of Stanford Dingley and Bradfield have been designated as Conservation Areas.

Three Second World War pillboxes and two gun-emplacements from the GHQ stop-line exist north-east of Tidmarsh between the Pang and Sulham Brook. These structures were an important component of this defensive system but are falling into disrepair.

Historic Environment Potential

The archaeological potential of most of the zone is unclear. It is possible that prehistoric and Romano-British deposits exist but it is not possible to be more specific about the location, nature and quality of any below-ground archaeology. Deposits of early occupation may survive at historic settlement nuclei and could be crucial to understanding the development of settlement in this zone. The historic building stock is fairly well-studied but it is possible that further significant buildings or structural elements may be identified.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- There is continued development pressure in the area. This could result in a loss of character.
- Historic building stock is poorly understood and little protection is currently afforded to this resource.
- A Conservation Area appraisal and management plan is required for Ashampstead.
- Management of woodlands, conservation of surviving ancient woodlands and replacement of plantations with more mixed tree coverage.
- Management of surviving WWII stop line features.

Research Priorities

- Does the paucity of evidence for the prehistoric period represent a genuine picture of the level of activity in the zone in this period?
- How extensive is the Romano-British pottery industry at Maidenhatch? Do further kilns survive in the area? How do the kilns relate to the villa?
- What is the nature of the Romano-British activity at Bucklebury?
- Does evidence survive on the nature and origins of the medieval settlement?
- Is Bucklebury an early medieval settlement and does archaeological evidence for this period survive? Is the location of Bucklebury on the corner of a large Oval enclosure significant?
- Does evidence survive for the medieval settlement at Marlston?
- What are the origins of the brick works in the zone? How significant were they and where were their main markets?
- What are the date, function and significance of the historic buildings in the area?
- Can archaeological study of the WWII stop line features advance our understanding of military strategy?