

Historic Environment Character Zone

NB1 Newbury I Battlefield

Historic Character

This is a rural zone bounded by the A34, the edge of Newbury and the Kennet valley floor and is the only part of the site of the First Battle of Newbury (1643) that remains undeveloped. The rest of the battlefield lies under housing at Newbury and Wash Common. Most but not all of this HECZ is designated as a Registered Battlefield; small parts of the Registered area also exist within the adjacent zones *KVFW*, *WWHM* and *NSA*.

Historically, the landscape was like that of the rest of the *VSW* HECA and comprised small irregularly-shaped fields and blocks of ancient woodland. Settlement was composed of small farms scattered across the zone with a small agglomeration of buildings at Skinner's Green. Two minor parklands existed at Cope Hall, Skinner's Green and at Enborne Lodge. The zone was served by a dense network of lanes and tracks. The combination of these routes and the shape of the fields and woods in the zone gave a very sinuous and irregular grain to the landscape.

Recent agricultural changes and the construction of the A34 Newbury By-pass on the edge of the zone have caused considerable change to the landscape. Most historic fields have been reorganised to create fields better suited to mechanised agriculture and this has created fields that are both larger and more regularly-shaped. The construction of the A34 led to further field reorganisation and also truncated the largest ancient wood in this zone, Redding's Copse. Settlement has remained relatively stable in the zone. Cope Hall, however, was abandoned and had been demolished by the late 1970s. The modifications to the landscape have created a much more regular fieldscape but have not yet substantially altered the grain of the landscape. This balance could easily tip and significant change could occur if land-use changes and new development do not take account of the historic character of this zone.

Historic Environment

HER records are quite common and the zone has been studied during the Lower Kennet Valley Survey and the National Mapping Programme, but little other archaeological work has been carried out. There has been no modern systematic research into the battlefield and the understanding of it is based largely on antiquarian work. The post-medieval is the best documented period in this zone and evidence of earlier periods is fairly scarce.

Prehistoric and Roman artefacts were recovered from several locations during fieldwalking conducted by the Lower Kennet Valley Survey, but no definite features of this date have been located. Cropmarks of boundaries, enclosures and pits have been mapped north of Skinner's Green and it is through that they relate to later prehistoric/Romano-British settlement and agriculture. It is likely that activity of this date is present in this zone as concentrations of later prehistoric/Romano-British activity are found in adjacent parts of the Kennet valley and Enborne – Kennet watershed.

Medieval material is very scarce and only a scatter of potsherds and some coins are recorded from the zone. The battlefield is the dominant post-medieval feature in this zone: its precise extent is not known, but it is thought to have extended into the adjacent part of the Kennet valley floor. Current understanding of the battle is based on historic accounts and subsequent antiquarian interpretations, and the physical form of the battlefield, the location of the densest fighting or where the dead were buried are all poorly understood. Apart from the general zone of the battle its physical remains are limited to concentrations of battle debris found across the

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zone and a still extant farmstead, Wheatland's Farm, which is reported to have been used as a hospital during fighting. Wheatland's Farmhouse is the only listed building in the zone. It is unclear whether it is the same building as was used as a hospital as the building is dated broadly to the middle of the 17th century. Recent work at other Civil War battlefields has shown that antiquarian interpretations can give a very partial understanding of the morphology of the battle. It is likely that further buried remains of the battlefield are present.

The only other non-battlefield feature of this date recorded within the zone is a wooded-over brickworks site on the edge of Oaken Copse. With the exception of Cope Hall, the few other farms and buildings mapped on the first edition Ordnance map remain in use but little is known of the nature and condition of these structures.

Historic Environment Potential

The zone has a high potential to contain below-ground deposits relating to later prehistoric and Romano-British activity. Archaeological remains of the first battle of Newbury are also possible in this zone and any such deposits will be crucial to understanding the actual nature of the battle. The nature and quality of any deposits present is hard to estimate on present evidence. The historic building stock of the zone is not extensive, but is not well understood and it is possible that it contains significant buildings or structural elements.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- Management of registered battlefield site.
- Intensive modern agriculture threatens the resource on buried archaeological sites.
- Conservation Area appraisal and management plan required.
- Development pressure especially related to the expansion of Newbury up to the Bypass.
- Management of woodlands, conservation of surviving ancient woodlands and replacement of plantations with more mixed tree coverage.
- Potential gravel/minerals extraction in zone.

Research Priorities

- What was the nature of land use in the prehistoric and Romano-British periods? Does the paucity of evidence represent a true picture of the level of activity here?
- What are the origins of the farmsteads in the zone?
- What evidence survives on the site of the 1st Battle of Newbury? Can the archaeological and landscape value of the battlefield be quantified?
- Do the historic buildings in the zone contain any information about post-medieval and modern changes to land use and agricultural systems?