



Directorate of Community Services
Director **Sarah Mitchell**

Historic Environment Action Plan Thorley/Wellow Plain

**Isle of Wight County Archaeology
and Historic Environment Service**

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01983 823810
archaeology@iow.gov.uk

HEAP for Thorley/Wellow Plain

INTRODUCTION

The *Thorley/Wellow Plain* has been defined on the basis of its geology, topography and historic settlement patterns but also on the basis of its distinctive present-day character as an open and exposed landscape with few field boundaries or hedgerows.

This exposed character, particularly in the central part of the HEAP Area, justifies the use of the term *Plain* in naming this Area, but the term is not entirely accurate as even the central part of this Area is on a gentle slope and is dissected by streams which provide some variation in relief.

This document identifies the essential features of the *Thorley/Wellow Plain* as a rural farmed landscape with historic linear settlements at Thorley and Wellow. Buried archaeological features and archaeological finds recovered from the plough soil are identified as being of special significance within this Area. The document also identifies the most significant features of the historic landscape and considers the most important forces for change. Management issues are discussed and actions particularly relevant to this Area are identified from those listed in the Isle of Wight HEAP Aims, Objectives and Actions.

ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT

Location, Geology and Topography

- This HEAP Area is bounded by the River Yar in the west, Thorley Brook in the north, the Calbourne-Brighstone Road (Lynch Lane) in the east and the *West Wight Chalk Downland* in the south.
- In the central part of this Area, to the south of Thorley and Wellow, there are deposits of Bembridge Limestone surrounded by Osborne and Headon Beds and Bracklesham Group deposits.
 - Narrow deposits of London Clay and Reading Beds lie between the Bracklesham Group Beds and the *West Wight Chalk Downland*.
 - Bembridge Marls lie to the north of the Bembridge Limestone.
- The Bembridge Limestone deposit within this Area is the only extensive outcrop of the deposit on the Island away from the coast.
 - However, until the early 20th century the limestone in this Area appears not to have been quarried, possibly because it is not of a quality suitable for building stone.
 - Soils derived from the Bembridge Limestone in this Area are easily worked, well-drained loams.
- The *Thorley/Wellow Plain* has an altitude of 105m OD at the foot of the chalk ridge, falling to 80m OD near Freshwater-Calbourne Road and then sloping down gently to 5m OD at Thorley Manor.
 - The relief in the eastern part of Area between Dodpits Lane and Lynch Lane is more varied.
- Barnfield Stream flows north-west into Yar Estuary.
- Thorley Brook derives from streams rising near the B3401 and flowing north to Wellow. The brook itself flows west past Thorley and leaves this HEAP Area to the north of Thorley Manor.
- In the eastern part of this HEAP Area a stream rises below Chessell Down and flows north-east past Little Chessell and Chessell Copse to enter the Caulbourne Stream at Newbridge.

Defining Attributes and Principal HEAP Types

- Main settlements are Thorley and Wellow, strung out along the B3401.
 - There are also several historic manor houses and a few other farmhouses and dwellings of more recent origin.
- Entirely rural Area with nearly all land in agricultural use.
- A generally open and exposed landscape with large *prairie fields* and few hedgerows.

- 64% (by area) of the *field patterns* within the *Thorley Wellow Plain* are made up of large fields (over 12 hectares).
- The *Thorley/Wellow Area* has a higher percentage of large fields than any other HEAP Area except the *Atherfield Coastal Plain*. (Large fields make up approximately 21% of field patterns within the Island as a whole).
- Most land is in arable use but there is dairy farming on improved grassland to the north of East Afton Farm and Tapnell Farm.
 - There are also small valley-floor pasture fields between the settlement of Thorley and Thorley Brook.
- Between River Yar and Wilmingham Road there is *ancient woodland* at Backet's Copse and Thorley Copse, a *replanted ancient woodland* at Mill Copse and a small amount of *secondary woodland* and *plantation woodland*.
 - Between Wilmingham Road and Broad Lane there are larger blocks of plantation woodland with pockets of replanted ancient woodland centred around Wilmingham Plantation and Tapnell Furse.
 - Between Broad Lane and Dodpits Lane there is virtually no woodland apart from the tiny areas of Hummet Copse and Stony Copse beside minor streams.
 - Between Dodpits Lane and Lynch Lane there is valley floor woodland at Chessell Copse and a number of small copses associated with the *designed landscape* of Westover.
- At the northern edge of this Area the B3401 runs from Thorley Manor to the east of Wellow.
 - Wellow Top Road runs from Wellow village to Dodpits Lane.
 - At the southern edge of this Area the B3399 runs from Afton in the west to Chessell in the east.
 - Wilmingham Road and Dodpits Lane cross this Area from north to south
 - Broad Lane runs diagonally across the Area from Thorley to Shalcombe and the B3401 also runs diagonally across the Area from Chessell to Sweetwater Copse (south of Calbourne Mill).
- Rights of way are significantly less dense within this Area than in some other HEAP Areas, (particularly downland edge areas)
 - From River Yar to Wilmingham Road rights of way run from west to east.
 - From Broad Lane to Dodpits Lane three rights of way run from north to south (including the Hamstead Trail) and play a part in defining the 'grain' of the landscape.

Principal Historical Processes

- An abundance of archaeological *cropmarks* within this Area suggests tree clearance, occupation and agriculture from Late *Neolithic* /*Early Bronze Age* (O'Rourke 2006).
 - This contrasts with the relative lack of evidence for prehistoric settlement in the adjacent *Northern Lowlands* HEAP Area, where tree clearance continued into the medieval period.
- Concentrations of Roman and early Anglo-Saxon material indicate probable occupation sites although no major settlements have been identified.
 - The quantity and richness of pagan Anglo-Saxon finds from within this Area is comparable to that of finds from the nationally important Chessell Cemetery (within the *West Wight Downland Area*).
- In the 11th century, just before the Norman Conquest, Thorley formed part of a large estate held by Earl Tostig and centred on Kings Manor, Freshwater.
- Only a small part of the medieval Calbourne Estate (which belonged to the bishopric of Winchester from the 10th century until the late 13th century) lay within this HEAP Area.
- Domesday Book records manors within this Area at Afton, Wilmingham, Thorley, Wellow and Shalcombe.
 - Afton and Wilmingham lay within the medieval parish of Freshwater.
 - Thorley Manor lay within Thorley Parish after this parish had been taken out of either Freshwater Parish or Shalfleet Parish by the 12th century.

- Wellow Manor lay within Shalfleet Parish.
- Chessell (not recorded in Domesday Book) was part of the Manor of Shalfleet until the early 14th century when it became an independent manor.
- Shalcombe Manor was one of the disparate parcels of land attached to the Chapel of St Nicholas at Carisbrooke Castle; all of these land parcels being within the notional Parish of St Nicholas. The manor became a grange of Quarr Abbey at an unknown date (Hockey 1970, 84), probably after 1284 (Page ed. 1912, 274).
- This HEAP Area includes nearly all of the medieval Thorley Parish and parts of the medieval parishes of Freshwater, Shalfleet, Calbourne and St Nicholas.
- The OS 1793 map shows *interrupted-row settlements* at Thorley Street and Wellow, each settlement comprising a number of farmsteads. Margham (1990) has suggested settlement shift from Thorley Manor to Thorley Street by mid 16th century.
 - A footpath (Y5) north of the present B3401 was the original route between Thorley Manor and Thorley Street.
 - The original parish church next to Thorley Manor was demolished (except for the porch) and replaced by a new church at Thorley Street in 1871.
- Wellow Manor, within the medieval Shalfleet Parish, was in the same ownership as Thorley Manor from 1337 to 1478 (Page ed. 1912, 274).
 - Wellow Farm (probably on the site of the original manor house) is situated close to Thorley Brook beside Wellow Top Road.
 - Wellow Top Road lies south of the B3401 and runs parallel to it. The OS 1793 map shows small plots of grazing land with boundaries running between the two roads and widely spaced farmsteads spread out along the road that is now the B3401.
 - This regular layout of small grazing plots with straight boundaries running at right angles between the two roads raises the possibility that Wellow originated as a *planned village* and then suffered from late *medieval depopulation*.
 - However, a more likely explanation is that the two roads originally enclosed a rectangular green, around which the settlement developed.
 - The name 'Wellowgreen' appears on the OS 1st Edition 6" map of 1866 at the western end of the settlement.
 - Several farmsteads and cottages are also shown on the OS 1793 map beside the B3401 to the west of the village. Buildings in this position today include Marshfield and Mattingley Farm on either side of a 19th century Baptist chapel.
- These case studies of Thorley and Wellow raise the wider question of *medieval depopulation* and settlement desertion on the Isle of Wight.
 - Beresford (1954) and Beresford and Hurst (1971) identified 32 Isle of Wight settlements thought to have been depopulated in medieval times. However, the medieval taxation records studied by Beresford and Hurst refer to administrative areas rather than individual settlements, although they certainly suggest population decline in the 14th century.
 - A manorial hamlet may possibly have been associated with Afton Manor, although by 1793 the only buildings fairly close to the manor house were Afton Mill and Afton Farm.
- Today the only buildings on medieval sites away from the settlements of Thorley and Wellow appear to be the manor houses of Afton, Chessell and Shalcombe. However, the place-name 'Churchills' is mentioned in a document of 1295 (Kökritz 1940, 209) and a farm is shown here on the OS 1793 map.
- The lack of small settlement clusters dotted about within the present agricultural landscape contrasts with the *polyfocal settlement pattern of Freshwater Isle*.
- Settlements at Thorley and Wellow developed close to the Thorley Brook at the interface between the free-draining soils on Bembridge Limestone to the south and the narrow strip of damp pasture beside Thorley Brook.
 - The OS 1793 map shows this strip of land divided into small pasture fields or meadows from Ningwood Manor Farm in the east (just outside this Area) to Thorley Manor in the west.
 - In medieval times this land may have served as *common meadow*.

- It was alleged by Worsley (1781, 264) that ‘the greater part of Thorley was once a rabbit warren, as appears by a grant of the Countess Isabella’. This statement refers to a period in the later 13th century but it seems questionable whether the rabbit warren was as extensive as Worsley suggested.
 - The location of the warren is unknown. It could have been on Thorley Common but Tapnell Furze is a more likely site (see below).
- Medieval *open-fields* are recorded within the manors of Thorley and Wellow.
 - In Thorley Manor the *open-field* may have been to the south of Thorley Street and to the south and west of Thorley Manor House.
 - A manorial survey of Thorley in 1648 refers to ‘Westfield’, ‘Homefield’ and ‘East Field’ but by 1608 these open fields appear to have been enclosed (Margham 1990).
 - The OS 1793 map shows that the land to the south and west of Thorley Manor House was enclosed into relatively large fields whereas the land to the south of Thorley Street was enclosed into small strips.
 - A survey of 1608 refers to ‘West Field’ and ‘East Field’ within Wellow Manor. At this date about half the land of Wellow Manor was still held as unenclosed strips although the *demesne* land was enclosed.
 - Part of Wellow Manor’s *open-field* was still unenclosed in 1793 when the OS map shows a large ‘L’ shaped block of land surrounded by small fields.
 - The names ‘West Field Arable’ and ‘Part of West Common Field’, shown within this block of land on the Shalfleet Tithe Map of 1840 indicate that Wellow’s open fields had been in this area.
 - The present-day ‘Hamstead Trail’ is shown on the OS 1793 map as a road running along the east side of Wellow’s unenclosed *open-field* land and Wellow Common
- Historic maps suggest the former presence of *open-field* elsewhere within this HEAP Area at Wilmingham and to the south of Afton Manor (Margham 1992, 110).
- A survey of Thorley Manor in 1648 listed only 156 acres of arable land out of a total holding of 1580 acres.
 - This is quite surprising as at least half of the manor lies on Bembridge Limestone, much of which is now used for arable agriculture, although the land around Tapnell Farm is still used for grazing.
- 657 acres of unenclosed land was recorded within Thorley Manor in the 1648 survey and much of this was within this HEAP Area although it also included common downland in the *West Wight Chalk Downland Area*.
 - The unenclosed land would have included the rough land of Tapnell Furze to the northwest of Tapnell Farm.
 - The remainder of the unenclosed land must have been on Thorley Common which lay on the eastern side of the parish and abutted Wellow Common.
- There was common for 616 sheep within Thorley Manor in 1608. Within Wellow Manor at the same date there was common for 300 sheep belonging to the *demesne* land and 420 sheep belonging to manorial tenants.
 - Wellow Manor, like Thorley Manor, had common downland grazing in the *West Wight Chalk Downland Area*, in addition to that available on Wellow Common
 - It could be inferred that sheep farming was significant in the early post-medieval period but the tenants of Kings Manor in Freshwater Parish had a greater number of sheep, despite the fact that a considerable portion of King Manor was arable *open-field*.
- Thorley Common and Wellow Common lay together to the south of the open fields of Thorley and Wellow, mainly on the relatively good quality land of the Bembridge Limestone.
 - The western edge of Thorley Common was in line with the present-day footpath Y9.
 - The area of Thorley Common and Wellow Common ran from the junction of Broad Lane and footpath Y9 in the west to the Hamstead Trail (bridleway S19) in the east.
 - Thorley/Wellow Common had been enclosed by 1793. The OS map of this date shows Broad Lane cutting across small plots with straight boundaries but before enclosure Broad Lane would have been an unfenced track across the open common.

- The boundary between Wellow's *open-field* and Wellow Common is defined in the modern landscape by footpath S34.
- The present-day 'Hamstead Trail' defines the eastern edge of Wellow Common.
- The southern boundary of Wellow Common ran along the B3399.
- Regular fields with a north-south axis between the chalk ridge and the B3399 were probably enclosed from downland-edge common in the 17th or 18th century.
- Tapnell Farm is first mentioned as Tapwell Farm in 1715 and appears to be a post-medieval holding associated with the reclamation of rough ground, possibly including the lower slope of Tapnell Down but also land in the area of the present Tapnell Furze forestry plantation.
 - Tapnell Furze appears to have been a mosaic of wet and dry rough grazing land and scrub until reclamation took place and may have been the site of Thorley's medieval rabbit warren (see above).
 - Dog Kennel Cottage, on the west side of Broad Lane, is of 18th century date and may have been built as a squatter's cottage on the edge of Tapnell Furze.
 - By 1793 Tapnell Furze had been enclosed into fairly large irregular fields (mainly used for grazing) but much of it is shown as rough ground on the 1866 6 inch OS map.
- East Afton Farm (within Freshwater Parish) is not shown on the OS 1793 map although a small unnamed building is shown nearby. The farm is first named and shown in its present position on the Freshwater Tithe Map of 1839.
 - This new farmstead may have been responsible for the enclosure of land to the north of the farmstead, including a large close named 'North Park' on the tithe map.
 - North Park, including the tiny area of surviving ancient woodland at North Park Copse, may have been the site of the medieval rabbit warren at Afton Manor mentioned in 1343 (Margham 1992, 112-113).
- The origins of the field patterns at the eastern end of this Area between Dodpits Lane and Lynch Lane are uncertain.
 - The field patterns shown on the OS 1793 map seem to suggest an original enclosure pattern of large closes with a predominantly north-south axis which were subdivided at a later date.
 - A tentative 16th or early 17th century date for these large closes may be suggested by analogy with other Isle of Wight examples (e.g, on the Swainston estate to the east of Newtown and on the lands of St Helens Priory).
- By 1862 the land between Broad Lane and Dodpits Lane was divided into semi-regular fields of small-medium size (3-6 hectares), retaining some field boundaries relating to earlier enclosure patterns and influenced by the natural drainage pattern.
- About 66% of Thorley Parish was arable land by 1844, compared with about 10% in 1648 (Margham 1990, 124).
- A landscape park was created at Westover from the late 18th century.
 - The inner park falls within the *Northern Lowlands Area*. However, the wider *designed landscape* to the south of the park lies mainly within this HEAP Area and partly within the area designated on the English Heritage Register (see Conservation Designations).
 - Westover Farm, Westover Park Farm and Wheelbarrow Cottage (an ornamental estate lodge) all lie to the south-west of the park within the designed landscape.
 - Westover Farm is shown but not named on the OS 1793 map. It may possibly equate with 'Woodcotts or Westover Hawley', named in a lease of 1429 (BL Add.Ch.56584).
 - The OS 1793 map shows only a barn in the position of Westover Park Farm and this farmstead was clearly subsidiary to Westover Farm even in the 19th century, although a small cottage and more elaborate farm buildings are shown on 19th century OS maps from 1862.
- Between 1793 and 1862 a number of small copses and *rews* had been created within the Westover *designed landscape* and existing copses had been modified.
 - This woodland cover was probably planted for the purposes of hunting or the preservation of game.

- Page (1912, 218) states that Westover House was built in the 18th century as a hunting-box by Leonard Troughear Holmes.
- Isle of Wight hunts chased hares until 1845, when foxes were first introduced in quantity. At least three packs of harriers for hare-hunting existed by 1820 (Phillips 2008).
- A second landscape park within this HEAP Area was developed around Afton Manor in the 19th century.
- Prospect Cottage had been built by 1862 on a plot of land lying on the former Wellow Common.
- Prospect Quarry lies to the north of Prospect Cottage beside Broad Lane, also on land that was formerly within Wellow Common.
 - The quarry appears to have been exploited only from the early 20th century
 - The quarried material is classified as 'weak limestone' and at present the quarry is only worked intermittently for use as infill (e.g. in gabion baskets).
 - Prospect Quarry is the only Bembridge Limestone Quarry still being worked on the Isle of Wight.
- Forestry Commission plantations were established at Tapnell Furze, mainly from 1940 to 1960.
- The landscape character of the *Thorley/Wellow Plain* Area changed very considerably in the later 20th century as a result of hedgerow removal, creating much larger fields than in most other parts of the Island.
- Ponds to the north of Churchills Farm appear to have been created in the late 20th century.
- The settlement character of Thorley and Wellow was modified in the later 20th century by infilling between plots, many of the new buildings being bungalows.
- An application for a wind farm within this Area was submitted in 2006 but did not receive planning approval.

Archaeology and Built Environment (for details see HER)

- Aerial photographs have revealed at least ten ring-ditches of probable Bronze Age date close to Wellow Farm and a number to the south of Thorley Street. Many more are currently listed in the HER as of 'unknown date'.
 - One ring-ditch partially excavated in 1984 was thought to be a ploughed Bronze Age round barrow. Romano-British material was found in the adjacent plough soil.
- Aerial photographs also provide evidence of many sub-rectangular enclosures (to the east of Dog Kennel Cottage and close to Hummet Copse) and of many linear features.
- Field-walking in the 1980s revealed a wide distribution of prehistoric flintwork and Romano-British ceramics (Margham 1990, 116).
- More recently an archaeological watching brief prior to the insertion of a pipeline in connection with Seaclean Wight revealed four main sites (O'Rourke 2006, 4.26):
 - Site to east of Wilmingham Lane produced Iron Age pottery and features including some 12 postholes, pits and a gully.
 - To the south of Thorley a hearth and two pits were located and tentatively associated with a nearby ploughed ring barrow. Another pit produced pottery sherds of Romano-British and medieval date. A section of trackway and field boundary may have been associated with medieval agricultural activity.
 - Immediately to the west of Broad Lane and south of Thorley village a scatter of medieval pottery was located. This was thought to have been spread as a result of manuring practices. Several flint artefacts of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age date were also recovered.
 - At Wellow village medieval and post-medieval features were uncovered, including field boundaries, drainage ditches and gullies, a hearth, a trackway and deep deposits of medieval plough soils. These deep plough soils sealed a large amount of prehistoric flint and datable earlier medieval activity on the site and also a possible prehistoric pit or cremation cut associated with a ring ditch.

- Recent finds from the plough soil have included a Roman coin hoard, evidence for Roman occupation, rich concentrations of 6th century Anglo-Saxon metalwork and other finds. These have been recorded under the Portable Antiquities Scheme and some can be viewed on the Scheme's website www.finds.org.uk
 - The finds have been made in four main locations within this HEAP Area.
 - One of these locations has produced a copper-alloy Early Christian skilnet thought to be a baptismal vessel dating from the 7th or 8th century A.D. (Basford 2007, 204).
- Only surviving remnant of Thorley's medieval parish church is its porch, situated close to Thorley Manor, with replacement 19th century church some distance to east at Thorley Street.
- The manor houses at Shalfleet and Shalcombe date from the 17th century and those at Thorley and Afton from the early 18th century.
 - Chessell Manor House and Wellow Farm are also of 18th century date.
- Farmhouses, farm buildings and cottages are built of Bembridge Limestone or of brick.
 - Distinctive 19th century buildings at Wellow include the Literary Institute and the Baptist Chapel.

Relationships with other HEAP Areas

- All the manors of this HEAP Area held portions of the *West Wight Downland* chalk ridge as common grazing land. Drove tracks linked the *Thorley/ Wellow Plain* and the chalk ridge. These are preserved in the modern landscape as rights of way F31, F27/28, S19 (the Hamstead Trail) and the southern part of S21.

Time-Depth

- Evidence from air photographs of buried prehistoric features.
- Significant archaeological finds relating particularly to Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods.
- Manors of Afton, Wilmingham, Thorley, Wellow and Shalcombe are recorded in Domesday Book and manorial dwellings of that period may have occupied same sites as existing manor houses.
- Thorley and Wellow are linear settlements which probably originated in medieval times and which retain this form to some extent although there has been much modern infilling.
- Manor houses, farmsteads, and cottages date from 17th to 19th centuries.
- Present roads within this Area are all shown on OS 1793 map but most are probably of medieval or earlier date.
 - The roads through Wellow and Thorley, for instance, are obviously as old as these settlements although the change of route between Thorley Street and Thorley Manor has been noted above.
- The modern landscape shows evidence for various historic field patterns and other types of land use:
 - Regular fields with straight boundaries between Afton and Shalcombe preserve evidence of 17th and 18th century downland-edge enclosure to the north of the *West Wight Downland* Chalk Ridge.
 - Field boundaries and rights of way with an east-west orientation between Wilmingham Road and the River Yar follow the drainage pattern and are shown on the OS 1793 map, although at that date there were many more boundaries.
 - The forestry plantation at Wilmingham is partly on the site of *ancient woodland* and that at Tapnell occupies the former rough grazing (and possible medieval rabbit warren) of Tapnell Furze.
 - The only surviving boundary connected with the possible medieval rabbit warren at Afton is the tree lined stream which formed the Freshwater/Thorley Parish Boundary, beside which lies North Park Copse.

- Surviving boundaries, watercourses and rights of way between Broad Lane and Dodpits Lane have a predominantly south-north orientation and can be equated with similar features on the OS 1793 map. However, there were far more boundaries on the 1793 map and field boundaries underwent substantial reorganisation in the 19th century before many were stripped out in the later 20th century.
- Between Dodpits Lane and Lynch Lane surviving field boundaries, rights of way and boundaries of plots now occupied by copses can be equated with similar boundaries on the OS 1793 map although many appear to have been straightened in the 19th century.
- Between Chessell and Sweetwater Copse, to the north of the B3401, internal field boundaries were stripped out in the later 20th century.
- The medieval Thorley/Shalfleet parish boundary (now the boundary between the civil parishes of Yarmouth and Shalfleet) is marked on the modern OS 1:25,000 map.
 - A short length of this boundary survives in the form of hedgerows marking the western edge of some small fields to the south of Marshfield.
 - Most of the boundary has been ploughed out and is no longer visible on the ground. The line of the parish boundary provides evidence relating to the medieval open fields of Thorley Manor and of Wellow Manor (which lay within Shalfleet Parish).
 - The parish boundary displays kinks in its alignment and these probably correspond to the edges of interlocking individual strips in the open fields, suggesting that the open fields of Thorley and Wellow had been laid out before the parish boundary was established.
 - The interlocking nature of the *open-field* strips within the parishes of Thorley and Shalfleet suggests that they were part of a single field system.
 - This may indicate that Thorley was taken out of Shalfleet Parish rather than Freshwater Parish (see 'Principal Historical Processes').
- Footpath S18 runs due south from Mattingley Farm along the eastern edge of Wellow's 'West Field'.
 - The northern part of this footpath preserves the classic sinuous profile associated with medieval open fields.
 - Unfortunately the southern part of this footpath has been ploughed over.
- The boundary of the medieval Shalcombe Grange (which equated with a parcel of the medieval parish of St Nicholas) is preserved between Shalcombe Down and Broad Lane as a thick blackthorn hedge, along the edge of which runs the Hamstead Trail.
 - The northern boundary of Shalcombe Grange/ St Nicholas Parish survives as remnant field boundaries running from Broad Lane to Dodpits Lane
- Throughout this HEAP Area surviving boundaries are mainly rights of way, watercourses or balks of unploughed land on the line of former hedgerows.
 - There are fenced boundaries in some parts of the Area.
 - Few hedgerows or wooded boundaries survive except those beside watercourses e.g. on the medieval Freshwater/Thorley parish boundary running from Newport Road to Wiltingham Road, and alongside the stream running from Little Chessell into the Caulbourne Stream.
- The only *ancient woodlands* of any size are Backetts Copse and Thorley Copse.
 - Copses planted or modified in the 19th century relate to the *Designed landscape* at Westover
 - There are some pockets of 19th century secondary woodland and 20th century forestry plantations at Wiltingham and Tapnell.
- Afton Park, which surrounds Afton Manor House, is now in agricultural use and most of the parkland trees were lost to Dutch Elm Disease in the 1970s or in the Great Storm of 1987.
 - However, the interior of the park retains some trees and there is a wooded shelter belt around the park boundary.
 - The park also retains a walled garden and two ornamental lakes.
- Prospect Quarry dates from the early 20th century.

- The field patterns as they exist today show evidence for the extensive removal of boundaries in the later 20th century, in line with the agricultural trends of the time.
 - Nevertheless it has been demonstrated that woodland, roads, tracks and remaining boundaries give the agricultural landscape considerable time-depth.

Contribution of Historic Landscape to Present Landscape Character

- The present open and exposed landscape character with very large fields owes much to the removal of field boundaries in the later 20th century. However, it has been shown that roads and rights of way, settlement patterns, buildings and surviving boundaries are, in many cases, historic. The limited amount of woodland has varied historic origins and contributes to present landscape character in parts of this Area.

Values, Perceptions and Associations

- Perceived by many people to have lost much of its landscape character as a result of late 20th century boundary removal.
 - However, the open, exposed landscape can be appreciated in its own right and may offer benefits to some animals.
 - Although it has less biodiversity than other HEAP Areas a rich arable flora has survived, indicative of long periods of arable cultivation.
- The essentially rural nature of this area is valued by residents and was cited as a reason why a proposed wind farm would be intrusive.
- Thorley and Wellow both retain a strong historic character and a considerable number of historic buildings although there are also many modern buildings.
- The 17th century manor houses at Shalcombe and Chessell and the 18th century manor houses at Thorley and Afton contribute to the character of this Area.

Research and Documentation

- Historic Environment Record is basic resource for archaeology, built environment and historic landscape character (includes HLC layer).
- 'Thorley – A Parish Survey' (Margham 1990) describes archaeology and landscape history of Thorley Parish.
- 'Freshwater – Man and the Landscape' (Margham 1992) describes archaeology and landscape history of Freshwater Parish, part of which is in this HEAP Area.
- 'Figures in a Landscape' (Hammer ed. 2007) recalls local farming, buildings and way of life from 19th century to present day.
- 'West Wight Landscape Assessment' (LUC 2005)
- 'An Appraisal of Archaeological Investigations for West Wight Project' (O'Rourke 2006).

Amenity and Education

- This Area is one of the few parts of the Island where tourism is not significant.
 - The only attractions open to the public are Chessell Pottery and Afton Park Garden Centre (to the south of the historic park).
- There are fewer rights of way than in other parts of the Island but sufficient to give access to the Area.
 - In particular, the 'Hamstead Trail' passes right through the Area.
- Wight Nature Fund manages Mill Copse for nature conservation and public amenity.

Features of Particular Significance within this HEAP Area

- The *Thorley/Wellow Plain* is a key area for understanding early settlement, burial and land use patterns on the Isle of Wight, as it is one of the relatively few parts of the Island where the buried archaeology is visible as crop marks and soil marks on air photographs.
 - Concentrations of probable ploughed Bronze Age round barrows away from the chalk downland are found only in this Area and raise important research issues about the original distribution of these monuments.

- This Area has produced some evidence for Iron Age occupation and may well contain more evidence for this period, which is less well understood on the Isle of Wight than on the mainland.
- Recent finds evidence for Pagan and Early Christian occupation of this Area is of great significance and requires detailed academic study within a national context.
- Later medieval settlement, road and lane patterns have survived well.
- The *Thorley/Wellow Plain* is the best area of farmland on the Isle of Wight for illustrating later 20th century fieldscapes and the impact of modern agricultural processes.
- A key feature of this Area, compared with other HEAP Areas on the Island, is the fact that it does **not** contain any iconic landscape features or visually distinctive historic monuments and is little visited by tourists.

VULNERABILITY

Rarity and Typicality

- The high concentration of archaeological crop-marks and soil-marks in this Area is unusual on the Isle of Wight.
- The concentration of early Anglo-Saxon material found within this Area is greater than that recorded in most other HEAP Areas on the Isle of Wight. *Interrupted row settlements* such as Thorley and Wellow occur elsewhere in downland edge situations (e.g. Gatcombe, Chale Street) and in the *Arreton Valley* (e.g. Arreton Street) but do not occur in the northern part of the Island except in this Area.
- The landscape character of the *Thorley/Wellow Plain* is not typical of the Isle of Wight as a whole although there are other areas that have large fields.

Coherence

- The Thorley/Wellow Plain has coherence as a modern agricultural landscape but historic components relating to earlier patterns of agricultural land use are fragmentary.
- Thorley and Wellow have retained their historic settlement form to a considerable extent although recent infilling has eroded their character as interrupted row settlements.
- There is some internal variation in the landscape of this Area, as described in the sections above.

Condition and Fragility

- The archaeology of this Area is affected by deep ploughing which can damage both buried features and artefacts in the ploughsoil.
 - The presence of artefacts in the plough soil indicates the destruction of the features with which these artefacts were originally associated.
 - Artefacts in the plough soil will eventually be destroyed unless found and recorded.
- The historic character of Thorley and Wellow as *interrupted row settlements* is vulnerable to dilution by continued insertion of new dwellings.

CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Forces for Change

- Future housing development within this Area is likely to be limited as the forthcoming Island Plan is likely to plan for development mainly within the Medina Valley and Ryde areas.
- Possible drive for bio-fuel crops such as elephant grass could change the nature of the landscape quite considerably.
- There may be future applications for wind farm developments.
- Agri-environment schemes could encourage alternative land use or management regimes, which might benefit the archaeology of the Area
- Woodland Grant schemes could encourage new woodland planting within the area. Any new schemes should take historic landscape character into account.

- Projects and action plans supported by Heritage Lottery Fund or other funders could enhance the conservation and enjoyment of the landscape.
 - West Wight Landscape Partnership Landscape Strategy (awaiting Stage 2 funding as at February 2008) includes an action plan which sets out specific actions covering landscape conservation and enhancement, improved access for all, understanding the landscape and cultural heritage and celebrating the landscape of the West Wight.
 - The various actions identified in the West Wight Landscape Partnership Strategy should help to support the conservation, management and interpretation of the historic landscape.

Management Issues

- Need, wherever possible, to prevent further damage to buried archaeological sites and archaeological material by deep ploughing.
- Need for academic assessment of recent early Anglo-Saxon material from this Area and for field evaluation of sites.
- Need for character appraisals within settlements of Thorley and Wellow.
- Need for maintenance and restoration of hedges, where appropriate.
- Need to enhance local awareness, understanding and enjoyment of historic landscape character by appropriate interpretation projects.

Conservation Designations

- Part of this Area to the west of Wilmingham Road and to the south of the B3399 lies within the *AONB*.
- There are no *Scheduled Monuments* within this Area.
- There are no *Conservation Areas* within this HEAP Area.
- There are 26 *Listed Buildings* in this Area.
 - Afton Manor, Thorley Manor, Shalcombe Manor and the remains of St Swithin's medieval church at Thorley are Grade II*.
 - All other Listed Buildings (most of which are farmhouses and cottages) are Grade II
- Westover Park is on the English Heritage *Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest* and a small part of the designated site falls within this Area.
- There are *SINCs* within this Area at Mill Copse, Backet's Spinney, Backet's Plantation, Backet's Copse, Wilmingham Plantation, Tapnell Furze, Hummet Copse, Chessell Copse and Westover Copse.
 - The *SINCs* of Calbourne Meadow and Thorley Copse are partly within this Area.

FUTURE MANAGEMENT

The *Isle of Wight HEAP Aims, Objectives and Actions* are generic and applicable to the whole Island. However, some actions are particularly relevant to HEAP Types and management issues identified for this Area and these are listed below.

- A14.** Completion of Rural Settlement HEAP.
- A16.** Completion of character appraisals for all existing and potential Conservation Areas.
- A19.** Investigate funding and potential for 'ground-truthing' of selected AP sites.
- A22.** Completion of HEAP for Parkland/Designed Landscapes.
- A23.** Completion of HEAP for roads, lanes, tracks and rail lines.
- A24.** Complete field survey of historic rights of way.
- A30.** Investigate potential for projects to identify archaeological features within cultivated and non-cultivated land.
- A32.** Facilitate supply of HEAP and HLC Information to land managers, farm advisers, farmers and funding bodies.
- A34.** Advocate protection of buried archaeological features within cultivated land (by management agreements).

- A35.** Promote conservation of historic farm buildings, and ensure that fabric and character are retained or enhanced if reused.
- A51.** Support the conservation of historic parks, gardens, cemeteries and public open spaces, including appropriate restoration schemes.
- A54.** Encourage awareness of HEAP amongst community groups.
- A55.** Encourage inclusion of HEAP information in community based strategies/ initiatives (e.g. community archaeology projects, parish plans, village design statements, interpretation projects and trails).
- L1.** Evaluation of PAS and HER data within each HEAP Area to enhance period-based understanding of Island's archaeology.
- L4.** Study of rural settlement pattern, including settlement morphology, significance of dispersed settlement and evidence of medieval desertion.