



Island Heritage Service

Historic Environment Action Plan South Wight Downland Edge

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

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HEAP for South Wight Downland Edge.

INTRODUCTION

This HEAP Area has been defined on the basis of geology, topography and land uses which differentiate it from other HEAP areas. The essential characteristics of the *South Wight Downland Edge* are identified as its close relationship with the *South Wight Downland*, a generally sloping topography, a fairly small scale and intimate landscape character, many Rights of Way, historic settlements and designed landscapes. The historic landscape within at least part of this HEAP Area appears to be more coherent than in most other Areas, probably because the uneven land surface and relatively poor soil within the zone of Gault Clay and landslips favoured the continued existence of small farm holdings, historic boundaries and small fields.

The HEAP sets out the most significant features of this HEAP Area, assesses its overall survival, lists the most important forces for change and identifies key management issues. 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

- Situated to north of the *South Wight Downland*, which it surrounds on all sides except the south.
- Geology comprises bands of Gault, Carstone and Sandrock beds with a small area of Ferruginous Sands.
- Areas of landslip occur at the interface with the *South Wight Downland* HEAP Area.
- Varied topography, with fairly steep slopes dissected by short valleys surrounding much of the high downland, particularly in the west.
- Heavy Gault clay surrounds the high downland with lighter soils to the north.
- Most watercourses flow north but there is drainage to the west from the slopes of St Catherine's Down. The River Medina rises to the south-east of Chale Green and flows to the north-west for about 1km within this HEAP Area. The Eastern Yar River rises to the west of Niton and flows in a northerly direction within this HEAP Area.
- Area includes only a tiny section of coast at the mouth of Shanklin Chine.

Defining Attributes and Principal HEAP Types

- Landscape character is generally fairly small-scale and intimate with hedged pasture fields, particularly in the zone of Gault Clay and landslips.
- Over 60%(by area) of the *field patterns* within the *South Wight Downland Edge* are *small* or *small-medium*, compared with 53% within the Isle of Wight as a whole and 50% in the South Wight Downland HEAP Area. Two thirds of the *small* and *small-medium* fields in this HEAP Area are irregular in pattern.
- Historic settlements, some with significant later 20th century expansion, often at the interface with other HEAP Areas. Main settlements are Niton, Whitwell, Chale, Chale Green, part of Godshell, Wroxall and the historic settlement core of Shanklin.
- Widely scattered pockets of woodland with a greater concentration of small woods and copses only to the north of Appuldurcombe Park.
 - Only six or seven of the woods within this HEAP Area have been classified as *ancient woodland*.
- Appuldurcombe House (mainly early 18th century) and much of the former landscape park of late 18th century date surrounding the house falls within this HEAP Area although the former deer park lies partly within the South Wight Downland HEAP Area.

- Land to the north of the park boundary lay within the Appuldurcombe estate and still retains designed elements such as the former carriage drive backed by the beech plantation of Freemantle Copse.
- ‘The Hermitage’, below St Catherine’s Down, is a small country house of early 19th century origin with modest wooded grounds dominated by beech trees.
- Wydcombe has an unusual Victorian house with earlier origins and 19th century parkland now in agricultural use but with parkland characteristics.
- Shanklin Chine is a natural feature that has been a tourist attraction since the early 19th century but without losing its botanical and geological interest.
- Roads define the northern edge of this HEAP Area.
 - Other roads run north-south through valleys linking this HEAP Area with the South Wight Downland to the south and with the generally flatter land to the north.
- Numerous Rights of Way lead up steep slopes to St Catherine’s Down from the west, north and east.
 - Appuldurcombe Down is approached by rights of way from the north, including short sections of the ‘Worsley Trail’ and ‘Stenbury Trail’.
 - The downs to the north and east of Ventnor are approached by rights of way mainly from the west and north.
 - The long distance ‘Coastal Path’ runs through this HEAP Area from Shanklin Chine to Bonchurch Landslip.
 - The Yar River Trail passes through this Area from the source of the Yar at Niton to Southford.

Principal Historical Processes

- Not much evidence for prehistoric activity within the *South Wight Downland Edge Area*, possibly because many fields have been under pasture within the last century and thus unavailable for fieldwalking (but see below for Bronze Age huts sites at Gore Down).
- This general area, including the *South Wight Downland*, has been described as a ‘landscape of continuity’ (Margham forthcoming), implying that there was early Anglo-Saxon settlement continuing without interruption from late Romano-British times
 - However, there is very limited archaeological evidence of Romano-British activity and no recorded archaeological evidence of early Anglo-Saxon activity within the *South Wight Downland Edge Area*.
- The important Late Anglo-Saxon estate of Wroxall included some land in this Area (around Appuldurcombe and in the Wroxall Valley) although most of the estate fell within the *South Wight Downland* and *Undercliff* Areas.
 - The Wroxall Estate is recorded in a charter dated between 1043 and 1044, the bounds of which have been reconstructed by Margham (2007).
- Domesday Book records manors within this Area at Chale, Niton, Luccombe and Shanklin.
 - Wroxall Manor, the centre of the Late Anglo-Saxon estate, was also recorded in Domesday Book. It lay just within the *South Wight Downland* Area.
 - Godshill is not mentioned by name in Domesday Book but was probably included in the unnamed manors held by the Abbey of Lyre.
- Appuldurcombe is not recorded in Domesday Book but may have formed part of the Manor of Wroxall or Week. Appuldurcombe was given to the Abbey of Montebourg in 1100 and a priory was established there.
- This HEAP Area contains parts of the medieval parishes of Chale, Niton, Whitwell, Godhill, Newchurch, Brading and Shanklin.
- *Nucleated settlements* grew up around the medieval parish churches at Chale, Niton, Whitwell, Godshill, and Shanklin with minor settlements at Nettlecombe and Sandford.
- In addition to *nucleated settlements* this HEAP Area contains *dispersed* combe-head manor houses and farmsteads.
 - Earthworks at Nettlecombe and Stenbury suggest later medieval retrenchment from these combe-head settlements on the Gault clay.

- In 1793 settlement at Godshill was in the form of an *irregular row* with the church at the centre.
 - Niton was in the form of a *nucleated* cluster around the crossroads to the east of the church.
 - Whitwell was a linear settlement reflecting its topographical situation in a valley with higher ground on either side.
- Chale was a settlement with three elements; a small *irregular row* settlement between the church and the manor house, then the long *interrupted row* settlement of Chale Street and finally Chale Green at the northern end.
 - Chale Green (named as Strood Green on the 1793 OS map) was one of the relatively few 'green' villages on the Isle of Wight.
- The Late Anglo-Saxon and Domesday manor of Wroxall was probably centred on Wroxall Manor Farm, which lies in a combe within the South Wight Downland HEAP Area, but by 1793 settlement had spread down the valley into this HEAP Area and Wroxall is shown as a large hamlet on the OS 1793 map.
- There is cartographic evidence within this HEAP Area for only for a limited amount of medieval *open-field* at Whitwell, occupying a constricted space on the valley side.
 - Field pattern morphology suggests that *open-field* existed elsewhere within this HEAP Area but it appears to have been absent on the downland edge slopes and landslip areas.
- The small irregular hedged pasture fields around the steep slopes of St Catherine's Down probably derive from medieval and post-medieval enclosure of rough open grazing land but this land may not always have been under pasture. For example, many of the small pasture fields around Wydcombe were used for arable crops at the time of the tithe survey c.1840.
- Appuldurcombe was acquired by the Worsley family at the time of the Dissolution and became the one of the largest post-medieval estates on the Isle of Wight, much of it lying beyond this HEAP Area.
- The Tudor house at Appuldurcombe was replaced by an English Baroque mansion built for Sir Robert Worsley from 1701.
- Formal garden and parkland was laid out at Appuldurcombe by Sir Robert Worsley, possibly replacing an earlier deer park on the same site or nearby at Godshill Park (Masters 2005).
- Appuldurcombe Park was re-landscaped by Sir Richard Worsley from 1772 with some of the work based on a plan drawn up by Capability Brown. The Freemantle Gate was erected at the northern edge of the park.
- In the early 19th century the Yarborough family created an inner park at Appuldurcombe and built additional lodges but the Appuldurcombe estate was sold off in the 1850s and the outer park became farmland.
- The Hermitage was a small country house set within grounds beneath the eastern slope of St Catherine's Down (Wright 1992).
 - It was built in about 1810 by Michael Hoy, a Russian merchant trading out of the Port of London who also built the Hoy Monument on top of St Catherine's Down (see *South Wight Downland* HEAP document).
 - The original building was a cottage orné but the house was rebuilt in 1895 (IWGT Records).
- Parkland was created at Wydcombe in the mid 19th century by William Henry Dawes, nephew of the infamous Sophie Dawes (a poor girl from St Helens on the Isle of Wight who became the mistress of the Duc de Bourbon).
 - The main house at Wydcombe was rebuilt or remodelled at this time (Basford and Smout 2000).
- Another small park was created in the late 19th century at Strathwell.
 - The present house at Strathwell was built in the mid 19th century by the Rev Oliver Robert, Rector of Whitwell, possibly incorporating elements of an earlier building on the site. However, the surrounding park first appears on the OS 25" map of 1898

- Shanklin Chine was first laid out in the early 19th century to exploit the beauty of a natural feature in the earliest phase of the Island's tourist industry.
 - In 1817 William Colenutt built the thatched Fisherman's cottage on the beach, then excavated a path through the chine and opened it to the public.
- Wroxall expanded in the later 19th century, possibly in connection with the coming of the railway and construction of the railway tunnel running beneath Wroxall Down to Ventnor.
 - The church of St John the Evangelist at Wroxall was built in 1876-7.
- In the later 19th century a long strip of rough ground known as Luccombe Common existed on top of Knock Cliff, to the north of Luccombe Chine although it is shown as enclosed pasture on a Luccombe estate map of 1728.
 - Luccombe 'Village' was established at some time between 1909 and 1938 on land adjoining Luccombe Common and has been described as 'a peculiar settlement of modest Arts and Craft type houses' (Currie 2002, 41).
- Appuldurcombe House was unoccupied from the early 20th century and damaged in the Second World War. In 1952 the house was taken into Guardianship by the Ministry of Works and is now under the Guardianship of English Heritage.
- Agricultural change in the 20th century was probably more limited than in other HEAP Areas due to hilly terrain, heavy clay soils and unstable land in parts of this Area.
- Late 20th century residential expansion and infilling at Chale Green, Niton, Whitwell and Wroxall.
- Development of historic part of Godshill (partly within this HEAP Area) as tourist destination in late 20th century.

Archaeology and Built Environment (details in HER)

- Despite a general lack of prehistoric material in this Area two Bronze Age hut sites (the only ones known from the Isle of Wight) were recorded on the west side of Gore Down during construction of the new Blackgang Road in 1931.
- Roman coin hoards recorded from Wroxall and Cliff Copse (near Shanklin).
- Roman pottery recorded from Wroxall and Whitwell.
- Medieval parish churches at Chale, Niton, Whitwell, Godshill and Shanklin (the last much altered).
- Medieval moated site at Stenbury. Settlement earthworks of probable medieval date at Stenbury and Nettlecombe
- Ridge and furrow of probable medieval date known from Stenbury.
- Chale Manor House (sometimes referred to as Chale Abbey although it was always a secular building) dates partly from the 14th century and an adjacent barn dates from the 16th century.
- Partially roofed remains of 18th century Appuldurcombe House.
 - Freemantle Gate - late 18th century monumental gateway to Appuldurcombe Park.
 - Remains of 18th century deer park wall at Appuldurcombe.
- Stenbury Manor House and Niton Manor House are 17th century stone buildings
- 19th century country houses of The Hermitage, Wydcombe and Strathwell with associated parkland.
- Vernacular stone farmsteads and cottages of 17th to 19th century date.
- Metal water hydrants in Whitwell village (provided by William Spindler of Old Park, St Lawrence as public water supply).
- Two former railway lines pass through this Area.
 - The line from Shanklin to Ventnor (a continuation of the Ryde to Shanklin line) was opened in the 1860s. Within this Area it runs from Upper Hyde to Wroxall where there was formerly a station. The line was closed in the 1960s but the route survives as a permitted path.

- The line from Merstone to Ventnor West via Godshill, Whitwell and St Lawrence was completed as far as St Lawrence in 1897, then extended to Ventnor in 1900. It was the first of the Island railway lines to close, in 1952. Within this Area the line ran from Southford to Dean Farm, passing through Whitwell where there was a station. Most of the route survives as a linear earthwork but in places this has been removed. A partially demolished section of embankment can be seen near Sunnyside Farm.

Relationships with Other HEAP Areas

- This HEAP Area surrounds the South Wight Downland and is part of the same block of high ground in the south-east of the Island.
 - Access to the *South Wight Downland* is by Rights of Way running through this HEAP Area.
- Most of the historic settlement within this HEAP Area is at the interface with the *South Wight Downland*, the *South Wight Sandstone and Gravel* or the *Newchurch Environs and Sandown Bay Area*.
 - In fact, historic settlement throughout the Island generally tends to be at the interface between different geological and topographical zones.
 - This enabled farmers to exploit the different resources of these zones such as land suitable for arable agriculture, land suitable for grazing, valley-floor land and woodland.

Time-Depth

- Roads and Rights of Way form a historic framework to the landscape, connecting the settlements of the *South Wight Downland Edge* with the open grazing of the high downland.
- The boundaries of the 11th century Wroxall Estate reconstructed by Margam (2007) correlate with some modern Rights of Way and boundaries within this Area.
 - From Gatcliff the boundary is followed by Rights of Way GL 49, 35 and 36.
 - In Newchurch Parish the reconstructed bounds follow various sunken ways and field boundaries.
- There are medieval settlement earthworks at Stenbury and Nettlecombe.
- Historic settlements preserve morphology and street plans which may date back to medieval times, although sometimes masked by infilling or surrounded by later development.
- Sites of farmsteads may date back to medieval times or earlier although buildings are of later date.
- Earliest buildings are medieval churches.
 - Secular buildings date from the 17th to 19th century apart from the 14th century Chale Manor House and nearby 16th century barn.
- Field patterns provide evidence for medieval and post-medieval enclosure of rough open grazing land and limited evidence for post-medieval enclosure of *open-field*, with some of these field patterns being modified by amalgamation or re-organisation in the 19th and 20th centuries.
- The use of the landscape around Appuldurcombe for hunting may go back to Tudor times and surviving boundaries in the Godshill Park area may be linked to the creation of a deer park or hare park in the 17th century (Masters 2005).
 - The 18th century landscape park at Appuldurcombe Park has been in agricultural use since the later 19th century but preserves some parkland features.
- 19th century parkland at Wydcombe and Strathwell is also in agricultural use but retains parkland elements.
- There are surviving 19th grounds at The Hermitage associated with the 19th century house.
- Shanklin Chine retains an essentially Victorian layout.
- 19th century development at Wroxall, probably associated with the development of the railway.
- Disused railways lines from the 1860s and 1890s.
- Early 20th century residential development at Luccombe Village.

Contribution of Historic Landscape to Present Landscape Character

- The present landscape of the *South Wight Downland Edge* exists as a direct result of historic processes including the creation of routes onto the high downland, the development of nucleated and dispersed settlements, the construction of vernacular buildings within these settlements, the enclosure of land for cultivation and the creation of designed landscapes.

Values, Perceptions and Associations

- In landscape terms this HEAP Area is perceived by most people as part of the block of downland in South Wight even though it does not contain any open downland. This perception is reinforced by the fact that much of the Area falls within the AONB.
- The numerous Rights of Way are in general probably less used by tourists and the public than those of the *South Wight Downland* or the *West Wight Downland* but are valued by walkers. The landscape around Appuldurcombe is becoming increasingly popular with walkers.
- The historic village centres are valued by local people and by tourists although only Godshill is a major tourist attraction.

Research and Documentation

- Historic Environment Record is basic resource for archaeology, built environment and historic landscape character (includes HLC layer).
- Designed landscapes within this HEAP Area are covered in Basford (1989).
- An 'Archaeological and Historical Survey of the Ventnor Downs and Luccombe Farm National Trust estates (Currie 2002) includes land in this Area.
- A conservation plan for Appuldurcombe Park has been prepared for English Heritage (Masters 2005).
- 'The Landscape and History of Wydcombe, Isle of Wight' covers the estate from the medieval period to the 19th century (Basford and Smout 2000).

Amenity and Education

- Numerous rights of way provide good access to area and could be used on educational field trips.
- Good survival level of historic landscape lends itself to educational field trips to observe time-depth in the landscape.
- Attractive countryside.
- Shanklin Chine is a popular tourist amenity that is also of historic landscape and ecological interest.
- Appuldurcombe House is an important historic building. It is in the Guardianship of English Heritage but is run under a local management agreement.
 - The house is open to the public and a Falconry Centre has been developed to provide another tourist attraction on site.
- Godshill has become a major tourist attraction with a variety of gift shops and a large car park.

Features of Particular Significance within this HEAP Area

- Evidence in the present landscape for boundaries of 11th Wroxall Estate and for later boundaries e.g. those relating to Appuldurcombe Estate.
- Historic pattern of roads and Rights of Way.
- Historic pattern of small villages and farmsteads dating from medieval times.
- Existing layout and street pattern of villages may be of medieval origin.
- Generally small-scale and intimate landscape with small hedged pasture fields in many parts of the Area
 - Field patterns may not have been subject to as much reorganisation and amalgamation in the 19th and 20th centuries as in other Areas

- Appuldurcombe House is an important early 18th century English Baroque building (Grade I *Listed Building*).
- Appuldurcombe Park is a significant example of a late 18th century landscape park on the *English Heritage Register*.
- Shanklin Chine is a significant example of a natural landscape feature utilised as a tourist feature from an early date.

VULNERABILITY

Rarity and Typicality

- Most of the HEAP types and components found in this Area are typical of southern England but are combined in a manner that gives the Area a high level of local distinctiveness.
- Shanklin Chine is an unusual example of a natural feature that has also been a tourist attraction since the early 19th century.

Coherence

- The historic landscape within at least part of this HEAP Area appears to be more coherent than in most other Areas, probably because the uneven land surface and relatively poor soil within the zone of Gault Clay and landslips favoured the continued existence of small farm holdings, historic boundaries and small fields.

Condition and Fragility

- Field patterns have been subjected to some amalgamation and re-organisation but have retained much of their overall character.
- No detailed information is available on the state of field boundaries.
- The former parkland of Appuldurcombe has been subjected to intensive agricultural use in the later 20th century and does not retain its historic trees but the basic framework of the park remains.
- The historic character of Godshill Village has been affected to some extent by tourist developments and heavy traffic through the village.

CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Forces for Change

- Climate change
- Changes in agricultural practices
- Decline in agricultural activities and use of land for other purposes such as horse keeping.
- Possible pressures for tourist developments that would detract from historic landscape character.
- Some incentives for restoration and conservation of historic landscape types such as parkland and traditional farmland are available through the Heritage Lottery Fund or *Environmental Stewardship*
- Land may come under the management of the National Trust or other conservation bodies.

Management Issues

- A conservation and management plan has been prepared for Appuldurcombe Park, funded by English Heritage and Defra (Masters 2005) but its full implementation is subject to financial and other considerations.
- There is potential to consider the creation of Conservation Areas within the historic villages of Niton and Whitwell.

Conservation Designations

- Much of this HEAP Area is within the AONB.
- Two *Scheduled Monuments*, one being the medieval moated site at Stenbury Manor, the other including both Appuldurcombe House and the associated Freemantle Gate.
- Parts of the Godshill and Shanklin *Conservation Areas* fall within this HEAP Area.
- 85 *Listed Buildings* within this Area, reflecting historic rural settlement patterns. Appuldurcombe House is Grade I, Chale Manor and Chale Manor Barn are Grade II*. All other listed buildings are Grade II.
- Appuldurcombe Park, lying mainly within this HEAP Area, is included in the *English Heritage Register* of Historic Parks and Gardens.
- The Hermitage, Wydcombe Park and Shanklin Chine are listed as Historic *Parks of Local Interest* in the Isle of Wight Council Unitary Development Plan.
- There are no SSSIs within this HEAP Area.
- There are 12 *SINCs* within the HEAP Area, including the Wycombe Estate, Appuldurcombe Park, Godshill Park, Upper Dolcoppice, Gotten Copse, Appuldurcombe Beeches, Sainham Copse, Bottom Copse, Hungerberry Copse, Luccombe Common and Godshill Church.

FUTURE MANAGEMENT

The Isle of Wight HEAP Objectives and Actions are set out in a separate document. These objectives and actions are generic and many of them are relevant to all HEAP Areas. Those that are most relevant to this HEAP Area are cited below.

- A12** Complete Field Patterns HEAP.
- A13** Identify field patterns of significance.
- A14.** Complete Rural Settlement HEAP.
- A16.** Complete character appraisals for all existing and potential Conservation Areas.
- A17.** Investigate and record condition of all archaeological earthworks within the Open Land and other HEAP Types.
- A22.** Complete HEAP for Parkland/Designed Landscapes.
- A23.** Complete HEAP for Roads, Lanes, Tracks and Rail Lines.
- A24.** Complete field survey of historic Rights of Way.
- A28.** Complete Boundaries HEAP.
- A35.** Promote conservation of historic farm buildings and ensure that character is maintained if converted.
- A41.** Ensure that woodland and forestry planting and management conserves historic landscape character and does not damage archaeological features.
- A45.** Advocate the maintenance of historic character of rural roads.
- A51.** Support the conservation of historic parks, gardens, cemeteries and public open spaces, including appropriate restoration schemes which follow an agreed Conservation and Management Plan.