

# Valley Park Woodlands



Test Valley Borough Council  
Licence No. LA079715

1	prehistoric/Roman sites
2	Bronze Age barrow
3	Bronze Age barrow
4	Deverel Rimbury barrow
5	Iron Age enclosure
6	linear earthwork

0 500 metres

# VALLEY PARK FROM PREHISTORY TO THE PRESENT DAY

## INTRODUCTION

Situated within the parish of North Baddesley just beyond the western outskirts of Chandler's Ford, Valley Park Woodlands comprises five separate woods. Until quite recently these were set within an agricultural landscape that was characterised by a patchwork of small fields used for pasture, and to a lesser extent for arable. Since the 1990's extensive residential development, in line with the requirements of the South Hampshire Structure Plan, has absorbed most of the former farmland, leaving the woods relatively isolated in what is now a predominantly suburban setting.

Taken together the five woods cover some 42.5 hectares and fall into the category of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland. The woods are owned by Test Valley Borough Council and managed by Leisure Services for conservation and education, along with informal access to local residents for various recreational purposes. The chief habitats are created by oak, ash, neglected hazel coppice, alder carr and

small areas of heathland. Beech, yew and birch are less common, being restricted to areas where suitable soil conditions and opportunities for colonisation have favoured their survival.

For reasons of habitat diversity and rarity, the ancient woods have a high conservation value and are greatly prized by local residents. These qualities are emphasised in the Borough Council's current Management Plan, which underlines the ecological fragility and amenity potential of the woods. The plan makes a number of recommendations for reversing the deterioration in the historic character of the woodlands, caused largely by a decline in traditional management practices.

Alongside their conservation value, the woods are important as an archaeological and historical resource. Several sites of archaeological interest have been recorded or excavated in recent years, and these have produced information about the settlement and shaping of the landscape before the present woods existed. Other findings relate directly to the origins, development and management of the woods down to the present day.

Z o n e s	Climate	Woodland Succession	Period	Period Dates
Sub-Atlantic	deterioration	decline of lime increase of ash, birch, hornbeam and beech	Modern	↑
500 BC			Post-Medieval	AD 1485
			Medieval	AD 1066
			Saxon	AD 410
			Roman	AD 43
			Late Iron Age	50 BC
Sub-Boreal	decreasing warmth	increase of ash and birch decrease of elm	Early Iron Age	600 BC
3000 BC	climatic optimum	mixed oak forest with an increase of alder	Late Bronze Age	1000 BC
Atlantic			Middle Bronze Age	1400 BC
5000 BC			Early Bronze Age	2000 BC
Boreal	increasing warmth	mixed oak forest with hazel and pine	Neolithic	4000 BC
7500 BC		birch, pine, juniper	later Mesolithic	6000 BC
Pre-Boreal			earlier Mesolithic	
8000 BC				8000 BC
Late Glacial	Sub-Arctic	Tundra	Palaeolithic	↓

***Time chart for the post-Glacial. The chart depicts the climate and vegetation trends corresponding to the main archaeological and historic periods***

## THE PREHISTORIC AND ROMAN PERIODS IN VALLEY PARK

In common with other parts of southern England during the late Glacial period, Sub-Arctic conditions prevailed throughout most of Hampshire. From around 8000 BC, following the retreat of the ice sheets, shrubs and trees such as juniper, birch and pine, were becoming established. Further climatic amelioration through the Boreal and Atlantic zones encouraged the growth and spread of mixed deciduous forest to form a complex mosaic over most of the British Isles. Across most of southern England these 'wildwoods' were dominated by oak and lime, with pockets of ash and alder along the coastal fringe. The 'wildwoods' supported a wide variety of animal species such as beaver, pine marten, elk, roe and red deer, wild ox and pig, along with a variety of water fowl.



***A Mesolithic hunter using microliths to prepare composite spearheads***

## The Mesolithic 8000-4000 BC

It is from the early post-Glacial period, known as the Mesolithic or middle Stone Age, that the first signs of human activity appear in Valley Park. The remains consist of small numbers of worked flints (microliths) found during recent work in the former farmland alongside Zionshill Copse. Microliths are small flakes detached by carefully controlled knapping from a shaped nodule, or core. They were used to form composite tools such as projectile points, fishing spears, knives or graters by fitting the individual pieces into a wood, bone or antler mount. These tools formed the basic kit used by the small and mobile Mesolithic groups as they exploited plants and animals in a seasonal cycle of hunting and gathering.

The site near Zionshill Copse may have been a temporary camp, used to advantage by a small party occupying the slightly higher and drier ground during a hunting foray. Such hunting bands would exploit various territories determined by the availability of game and the proximity of other Mesolithic groups. To follow the larger animals, such as deer or wild ox, it might have been necessary for the hunters to range over annual territories extending to tens of square kilometres.

It was once believed that Mesolithic hunter gatherers had a minimal effect on their environment. However, the most recent research has suggested that by the later Mesolithic these small groups were manipulating their environment in a variety of ways, ultimately leading to a thinning of the primary forest and a change in its species composition.

In the pollen records from several sites, peaks in the representation of hazel or alder pollen are closely associated with finds of microliths and the presence of charcoal, both indicating that changes in the abundance of the two species were being brought about by human intervention. At other sites the more open conditions created by woodland clearance are reflected in an increase in the pollen of plantain, sorrel and grasses, while in some areas clearance appears to have initiated the formation of heathland.

Limited observations made during the building development in Valley Park suggest that parts of the lower-lying areas were probably marshy and subject to periodic flooding during the Mesolithic. A palaeo-channel (ancient river bed), the presence of alluvial deposits (water-lain silts) and the discovery of bog-oak (fragments of oak preserved in waterlogged silts or peat) during the excavation of the balancing pond near Zionshill Copse are all indicative of increasingly wet conditions. These are local reflections of much broader trends in southern England that included rising sea level and coastal inundation, and further inland the extension of river floodplains. While the main agent for these changes was climatic, peat formation and alluvial sedimentation at the local level were almost certainly promoted by the later Mesolithic forest clearance.

### **The Neolithic 4000-2000 BC**

Other flint implements recovered by recent fieldwork suggest that small scale activity around Zionshill Copse continued into the succeeding Neolithic (new Stone Age) and Bronze Age periods.

The character of this activity is unclear, but the unusual discovery of a single sherd of late Neolithic pottery might indicate that some form of more permanent settlement existed in the vicinity of Zionshill Copse.



***A Neolithic flint axe hafted in a wooden shaft. Experiments have shown that axes of this type are very effective for felling quite large trees***

The Neolithic has been seen as a period characterised by an agricultural revolution which followed the introduction of cereal crops and animal domestication. It was also a period when more extensive woodland clearance for cultivation and pasture was undertaken. This rather generalised picture of a Neolithic economy universally dependant on agriculture has been challenged in recent years.

A number of studies of Neolithic society have stressed the variability of subsistence practices at the local level, especially in marginal environments where hunting and gathering continued to play an important role. With its heavy, wet soils, much of the lower land in Valley Park may have been unsuited to cereal cultivation and almost certainly remained wooded.

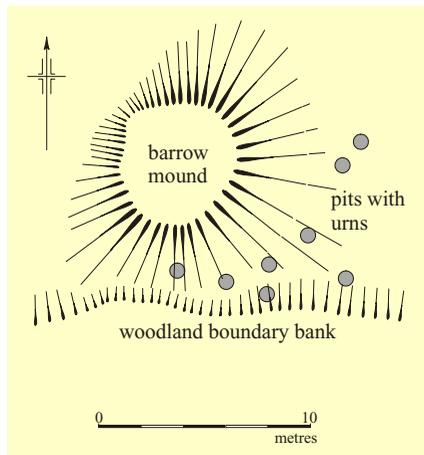
The wet woodlands with their rich diversity of plant and animal species would have been a valuable resource for local communities, who would have visited the area on a seasonal basis to hunt and collect wild plants.

### **The early Bronze Age 2000-1400 BC**

The character of the early Bronze Age occupation of Valley Park is equally elusive, depending as it does on a few surface finds of worked flint and two round barrows (burial mounds), one in Sky's Wood and the other in Clothiers Copse. These were identified during a recent survey, and while both are of a form that was introduced during the early Bronze Age, neither has been excavated and consequently their date remains uncertain.

### **The middle Bronze Age 1400-1000 BC**

By the middle Bronze Age the archaeological evidence from Valley Park is much stronger. The excavation of a previously unrecorded round barrow in Zionshill Copse, alongside Sky's Road, revealed a small cremation cemetery of middle Bronze Age date. The type of pottery recovered from the site belongs to a tradition known as the Deverel Rimbury Culture; its name derived from two Dorset barrow cemeteries excavated during the nineteenth century.



***Plan of the Deverel Rimbury barrow showing the distribution of the pits containing funerary urns***

The barrow consisted of a small circular mound measuring some 12 metres across and 0.6 metres high. There was no sign of the usual surrounding ditch, dug to provide material for the mound, and it appeared that the mound had been created by scraping up topsoil from the adjoining area.

Preserved pollen grains recovered from the ancient soil buried below the mound showed that the barrow had been constructed in a relatively open setting, possibly a woodland glade. The tree species included oak, hazel, birch, alder and pine, with herbaceous vegetation consisting of grasses, plantain and ferns.



Eight pottery urns were found, all in small pits placed around the south-eastern perimeter of the mound. Only three of these still contained cremated bone, representing the remains of four individuals. Three of these were adults, all over 30 years old, and one was an infant of about 4 to 5 years old. Given the fragmentary condition of the cremated bone the gender of the individuals is not certain, but one possible female and one probable male were identified.

***Deverel Rimbury urns. The vessel at the front is known as a bucket urn, while the urn at the rear is known as a Barrel urn***



***Reconstruction of a funeral procession at the middle Bronze Age barrow. The central figure at the front carries a Deverel Rimbury urn containing the cremated remains***

Unfortunately we have no knowledge of the settlement where these individuals lived. What we do know from the detailed studies of other sites in southern England is that the Deverel Rimbury cemeteries were rarely more than a few hundred metres from the settlement. These were often small rectangular enclosures formed by an earthen bank and external ditch. The earthworks typically surrounded a few round houses, with their walls made from wattle and daub surmounted by a conical thatched roof supported on timber posts. At some sites there is also evidence for interior fences marking off various parts of the enclosure, the post settings for structures thought to be granaries, and frequently large numbers of grain storage pits.

Deverel Rimbury settlements have the appearance of small farmsteads, and for the most part they were probably home to no more than one or two extended families. The animal bones and carbonised plant remains recovered from excavated sites show that these small communities practiced a mixed farming economy based on cereal cultivation, mostly barley, and a range of domestic animal species including cattle, sheep and pigs.

Other barrows once stood on Cranbury Common, just over two kilometres away to the north-east. Their excavation during the nineteenth century produced Deverel Rimbury pottery, indicating that other farmsteads were established in the area. The combined impact of these farming communities on the landscape of Valley Park was probably quite dramatic. Although some vestiges of the 'wildwoods' may have survived on the wetter and less easily cultivated soils, extensive areas of the more productive land would almost certainly have been cleared for arable and pasture.

In several parts of southern England this period is associated with the first appearance of permanent fields laid out on a large scale. While there is no evidence for prehistoric fields surviving in Valley Park, the middle Bronze Age does mark the beginning of more stable settlement in the lower Test Valley, and by implication this would have involved the formal organisation of agricultural land.

### **The late Bronze Age and early Iron Age 1000-400 BC**

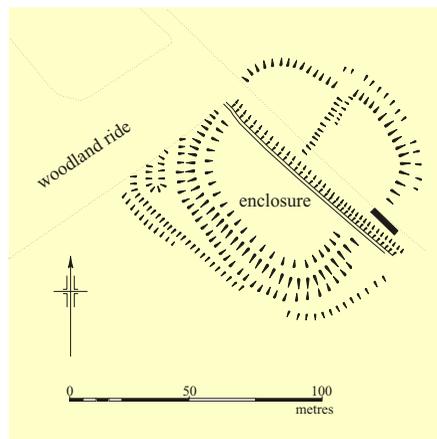
Finds of late Bronze Age or early Iron Age pottery from an excavation a short distance to the south of Zionhill Copse suggest some form of continued occupation, but we have no detailed information on its extent or character. However, the same area has produced large quantities of burnt or fire-cracked flint. This material occurs on many prehistoric sites of different periods, though in southern England it is particularly abundant on sites of late Bronze Age date. Burnt flint is found both on settlements, where it sometimes occurs in the filling of pits, and near rivers or marshy areas, where large quantities may be formed into mounds.

In Hampshire, many mounds of burnt flint have been recorded in the New Forest, where they typically concentrate alongside streams. Features of this kind are thought to mark the location of 'saunas', where steam was generated by quenching hot flints with water. Bizarre as this may seem, the practice has been recorded by anthropologists, most notably amongst native Americans who used 'sweat lodges' for ritual purification as a preparation for war, or during 'rites of passage' ceremonies. These could include entry into clan societies, or coming of age rituals.

One other site in Valley Park might have an origin in the late Bronze Age, although in the absence of excavated evidence this is largely conjectural. It consists of a substantial linear bank and ditch passing through the centre of Knight Wood. In form and scale the earthwork bears some resemblance to those on the chalk downs, referred to collectively as the Wessex Linear Ditches System. These are known to have their origin in the late Bronze Age and appear to define extensive territories. If the earthwork in Knight Wood is of this same period, it is likely to be the sole surviving fragment of a once more widespread network, most of which has long since been destroyed.

### **The middle to late Iron Age 400-AD 43**

By the middle Iron Age the settlement and environment of Valley Park emerges in much sharper detail. Once again it is Zionshill Copse that provides the source of our information. Just to the north of the middle Bronze Age barrow and alongside a woodland ride, the well preserved earthworks of a large enclosure mark the position of a middle Iron Age settlement. The clearly defined earthworks consist of a low spread bank with an external ditch, together enclosing an area of about 0.4 hectares.



***Plan of the Zionshill Copse enclosure. The black rectangle is the ditch excavation***

A trial excavation across the silted up ditch was carried out in 1998 and produced a small assemblage of pottery. The finds demonstrated that the enclosure had been occupied between 310 BC and AD 43, a period spanning the middle and late Iron Age.



***Excavated section of the Zionshill Copse enclosure ditch. The vertical scale rod measures 2 metres.***



***Types of middle and late Iron Age pottery found at the Zionshill Copse enclosure***

Although the Roman invasion of Britain took place in AD 43, initially it may have had little impact on the day to day life of isolated rural settlements. At the Zionshill Copse enclosure there was no sign of Roman influence, and the latest pottery ends with the native tradition.

Aside from the valuable dating evidence recovered during the excavation, the ditch silts also yielded important environmental data. Owing to the anaerobic (oxygen starved) conditions prevailing in the wet ditch, plant remains were well preserved. Fragments from a range of species were identified including birch, hazel, bracken, broom and grass, as well as seeds from buttercup, small nettle and elder berry. In addition, several clusters of small twigs rested on the base of ditch, and amongst these was found a sharpened wooden stake made from oak heartwood.



***The wooden stake lying in the base of the enclosure ditch. The scale is 30 centimetres***

Pollen contained in samples taken from the enclosure ditch was as well preserved as the other organic remains, and revealed a complex environmental picture. Although trees and shrubs were well represented, it is quite obvious that the canopy of any woodland must have been fairly open, and that the site itself was set in weedy grassland with areas of bare, broken soils. Heather and bilberry were present and they may have been growing in open, acid woodland close to the site. The presence of bluebell lends supporting evidence for this type of woodland nearby, since this plant thrives under an open tree canopy, in glades and woodland margins. Bracken, polypody fern and other ferns may also have been growing in or close to the edge of a wood.

The locality was certainly herb-rich, and the abundance of plantains and grass pollen, as well as that of docks, thistle and knapweed suggests that if stock were being grazed locally, then the numbers of animals were low.



**Reconstruction of the Zionshill Copse enclosure. The picture shows the enclosure as it may have appeared between 310 BC and AD 43 looking from the south-west**

Open, broken and 'waste' soils were indicated by species such as mugwort, dandelion-like plants and nettle, although they could easily have been growing as weeds in cultivated land.

A variety of soils seem to have been present in the pollen catchment. Some must have been dry and acidic to support heathers, broom, bilberry and bracken. Wetter and richer soils were also available, since alder, hazel and birch do better in damper conditions, and the occurrence of sedges also suggest wetter soils in the locality. In spite of the poor local soils, the presence of elder and nettle indicate nitrogen and phosphate enrichment.

Both of these plants may have been growing along with guelder rose in the wetter soils of the alder woods that were very close to the site.

Like the settlements of the middle to late Bronze Age, those of the middle Iron Age were occupied by small scale, self-sufficient farming communities. Unfortunately no animal bone was recovered from the Zionshill enclosure ditch, no doubt owing to its poor survival in the slightly acidic soil conditions. Nevertheless, the range of domestic species is well known from other sites of the period and would have included cattle, horse, sheep, pig and dog.

Arable farming would have been highly developed by the middle Iron Age, with large tracts of land taken into cultivation. Indeed, the pollen sequence from the enclosure ditch produced ample evidence for cereals being grown nearby and processed on the site. Within the enclosure itself there would have been storage facilities for harvested crops, animal pens, working areas and shelters alongside the domestic round houses.



***Grinding corn with a rotary quern. A stone quern fragment was found in the enclosure ditch***

By the Iron Age, woodland clearance in Valley Park is likely to have progressed to such an extent that none of the primary woodland remained. Although the damper low lying land to the north of the enclosure supported mixed alder, birch and hazel wood this is likely to have been secondary woodland that was closely managed, possibly by coppicing. Much of the drier land was probably utilised for arable cultivation and pasture to the extent that the landscape had taken on a much more structured and managed appearance.

Just to the south of Zionshill Copse, recent excavations produced an assemblage of pottery characteristic of the native pre-Roman Iron Age tradition. The pottery indicates a phase of

occupation in part contemporary with the settlement at the Zionshill Copse enclosure, perhaps indicating a shift in location, or some form of activity taking place away from the main settlement. How the Zionshill Copse enclosure fitted into the broader pattern of settlement in the lower Test Valley is far from clear. Enclosures of the period are not well represented in the surrounding area and the few that are known include sites that are inadequately dated, or of uncertain character.

Chilworth Ring, some three kilometres to the south of the site, is described as an Iron Age univallate hillfort (having a single ditch and bank), but excavations in 1928 and more recently have failed to confirm its date. Another earthwork nearby on Castle Hill is also thought to be of Iron Age date, but again there is no conclusive supporting evidence. Toot Hill, to the south-west of North Baddesley, may have been occupied during the Iron Age, although the only finds from this site are bronze spearheads which might indicate a Bronze Age origin for the earthworks. The only other enclosure in the vicinity of Zionshill Copse was located to the north-east and is entirely undated. The site was first recorded from the air, but is now lost under housing.

Iron Age finds have been recovered from three sites within a few kilometres of Zionshill Copse. Sherds of pottery spanning the late Iron Age to the late Romano-British period were found near Otterbourne, although there appears to be some uncertainty surrounding their provenance; a single sherd of Iron Age pottery and burnt flint was found during fieldwalking close to the Roman Road north-east of Chilworth; and an Iron Age gold stater (coin issued by a native tribal ruler) was found in allotment gardens just over three kilometres to the east of Zionshill Copse.

## **The Roman period**

### **AD 43-AD 410**

The only trace of Roman occupation in Valley Park was discovered during excavations to the south of Zionshill Copse. This consisted of three shallow pits and a short stretch of ditch. Several of these features produced sherds of early Roman pottery, while a collection of fired clay loom weights was found in one of the pits. The relatively large quantity of pottery and the presence of loom weights clearly indicates that the site was a domestic settlement, possibly engaged in pottery production. Most of the pottery was made in the pre-Roman native tradition, with only a small amount of Roman fine ware. This was dated to the first century AD and may have been imported from the Continent.

The evidence for early Roman occupation near to the Zionshill Copse enclosure may testify to a degree of settlement continuity in Valley Park, but if this was the case it was relatively short-lived. Despite the proximity of the Roman road from Winchester (known in the Roman period as Venta Belgarum) passing through Chilworth to the south, there is no sign that improved access to markets had any lasting influence on indigenous settlements in the local area. It is possible that early Roman settlement in Valley Park failed to flourish because of the poor soils, which were incapable of nurturing the economic growth that took place over this period elsewhere in Hampshire.

## **THE LATER SETTLEMENT HISTORY**

### **The Saxon period**

#### **AD 410-AD 1066**

There is little information for Valley Park during the Saxon period. The area lay within the conjectured boundaries of the Jutish kingdom which retained a semi-independent status into the seventh century AD, afterwards becoming a part of the Saxon kingdom of Wessex.

Place-name evidence seems to indicate that the early settlers were moving into a wooded landscape. The place name ending 'ley' refers to a settlement in an area cleared of woodland, while the ending 'field' implies a settlement in an open area adjacent to woodland. Both of these endings are found in the modern names of settlements such as Baddesley, Eastleigh, Hursley, Ampfield and Braishfield, all of which are within a few kilometres of Valley Park.

One feature discovered during a recent survey that might possibly belong to the Saxon period is the bank and ditch recorded in Knight Wood. Although this is undated and could even be Bronze Age, there are similar earthworks elsewhere in Hampshire which are thought to be Saxon. The best known examples that have tentatively been assigned to the Saxon period are in the Meon Valley, though they are on a somewhat larger scale than the Knight Wood earthwork.



***Woodland resources in the Medieval Period. Coppicing and hurdle making***

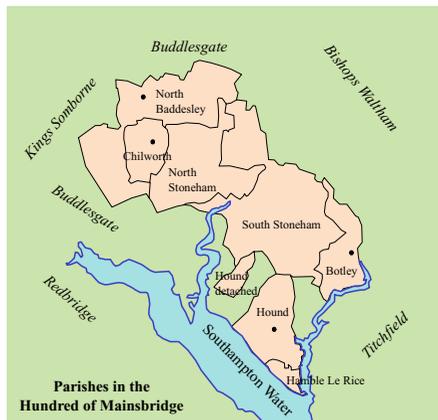
**The Medieval period  
AD1066-AD 1485**

The first documentary reference to the land around Valley Park occurs in the Domesday Book. This refers to the ancient settlement of North Baddesley, which at that time was known as Bedeslei. This name is almost certainly a derivative of the Old English name Bæddeslēah meaning Bæddi's Wood and referring to a settlement in a stretch of ancient woodland. In the eleventh century the parish of North Baddesley was situated in the Hundred of Mainsbridge. This was a Royal Hundred and remained in the hands of the crown until the fifteenth century.

During the fourteenth century the village of North Baddesley was known as Baldisle, and between the twelfth and

sixteenth centuries it was dominated by a preceptory (provincial estate or manor) of the Knights of St. John (later known as the Knights Hospitallers) which was granted to the order by Henry Blois, Bishop of Winchester (AD 1129 - 1171). It is known that the preceptory was established by AD 1167, and that originally it was a branch of the preceptory of the Knights Hospitallers at Godfield. By AD 1355, however, the Hampshire headquarters of the order had been transferred to Baddesley. The preceptory stood on the site now occupied by the manor house, just opposite the Medieval church of All Saints.

The old church was re-dedicated to St. John the Baptist, the patron saint of the Knights Hospitallers, following their transfer from Godsfield.



### ***The Hundred of Mainsbridge***

In 1338 Prior Phillip de Thame made a return to the Grand Master of the Hospitallers in England. This includes particulars for Baddesley, where there was a messuage (dwelling house with outbuildings and land) together with a garden and pigeon cote; 360 acres of land; 18 acres of pasture; 40 acres of meadow; pasturage for 24 oxen; pannage for pigs; pasturage for 30 cows; and pasturage for 400 sheep. Baddesley also had a 100 acre common wood of large timber, which was

reserved for repairs to the houses of the preceptory and places of the Templars.

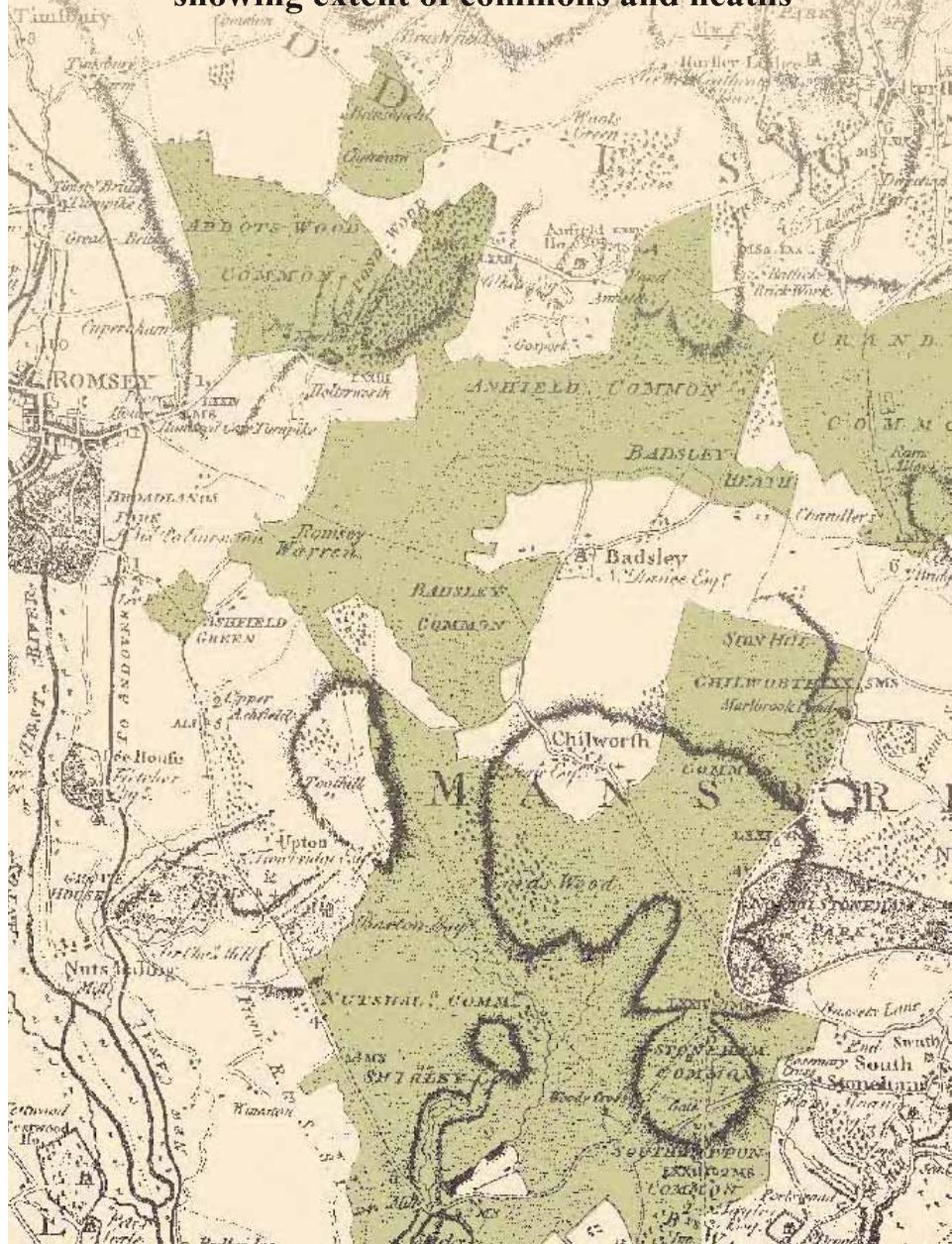
### **The post-Medieval to modern period After AD 1485**

At the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536, Baddesley, which was still held by the Knights of St. John, fell to the crown. It was immediately afterwards granted to Sir Thomas Seymour, Henry VIII's brother-in-law, who nine years later was tried and beheaded for high treason. After a brief restoration to the Knights Hospitallers during the reign of Queen Mary, the manor passed through various families down to 1908. At that date the Victoria County History of Hampshire records that the estate was owned by Mr. Tankerville Chamberlayne of Cranbury Park, who was lord of the manor.

An evocative postscript to the residence of the Knights Hospitallers at Baddesley appears in John Marsh's 'Memoranda of the Parishes of Hursley and North Baddesley' published in 1808. Marsh writes that the ancient building of the Hospitallers was still remembered by many locals as 'the old monastery' and although most of the Medieval structure had been destroyed by fire, the kitchen remained and was still being used as a kitchen to the manor house. Marsh also notes that some of the arms and accoutrements of the knights, including swords and saddles, were still to be seen in the manor farmhouse.

# William Faden's Map of 1791

showing extent of commons and heaths



The outline character of the landscape around Valley Park is first revealed by Ralph Treswell's map of Hursley produced in 1588. Commons and heaths were a dominant feature of the landscape at that time, as they had been throughout the preceding centuries. The commons were tracts of land over which certain local inhabitants held common-rights for grazing, and sometimes for woodcutting.

Wooded commons were especially important to rural communities since they provided wood-pasture for cattle and sheep and pannage for pigs, as well as coppiced underwood for building, fencing and fuel. Underwood was traditionally distinguished from timber both in practice and in law, by which it was precisely defined. It consisted of the poles from coppicing and pollarding, as well as small suckers and the branches from felled trees.

Common rights were strictly regulated, and more often than not the lord of the manor retained ownership of the valuable timber. By the thirteenth century, wood-pasture appears to have been in general decline, either through the conversion of woods for other uses, as a consequence of over-grazing, or through simple neglect. Some wood-pasture was converted to agricultural use, while in other places the pastures were appropriated by the lord of the manor to become parks or coppices.

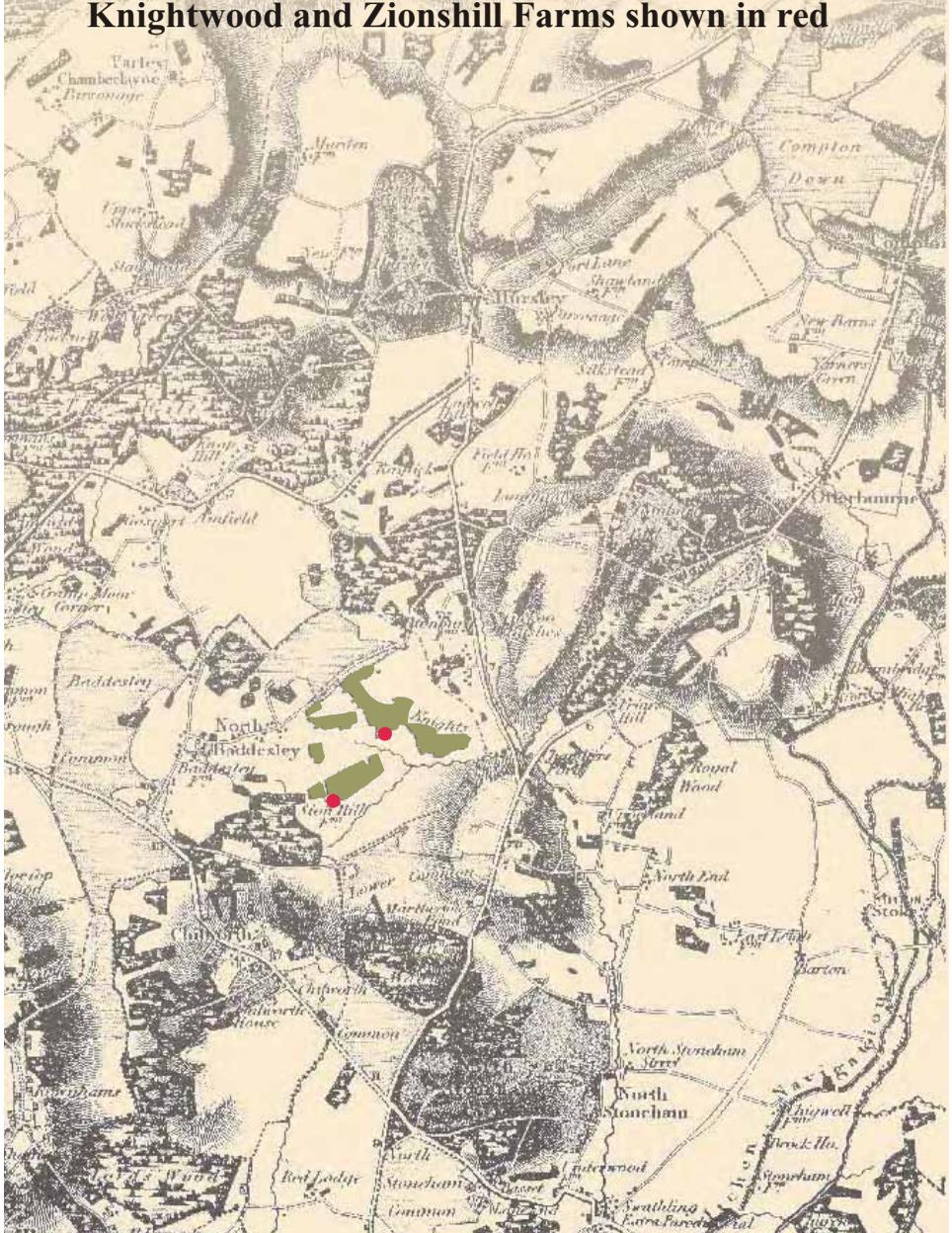
By the end of the eighteenth century the land around Valley Park was still dominated by heaths and common land. William Faden's map of 1791 shows that the commons extended around the villages of Chilworth and Badsley (now Baddesley) and included a part of Zionshill, then called Sion Hill. The shape of the commons depicted on Faden's map is fairly typical, with the concave, irregular outlines hinting at a piecemeal encroachment of private land.

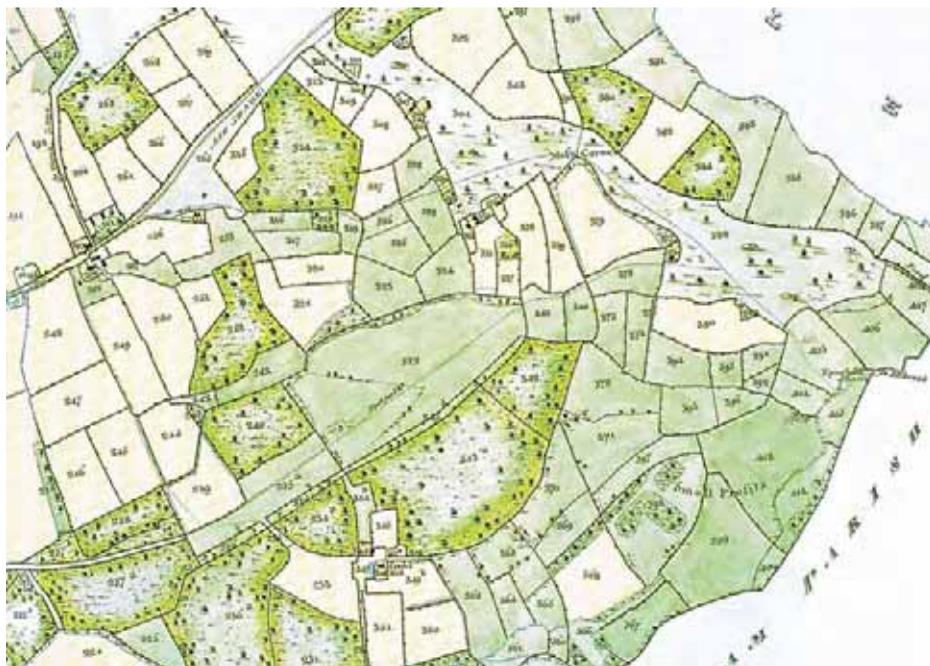
Even though Faden's map shows the woods at Zionshill, it shows no sign of Zionshill Farm. Knight Wood and Knightwood Farm are also absent, with neither appearing on a map until the early nineteenth century. Both farms are believed to be associated with the Knights Hospitallers, though there is no direct evidence that either was of Medieval origin. Sion Hill Farm (later Zionshill Farm) first appears on Greenwood's map of 1826. The same map seems to show buildings on the site of Knightwood Farm, although they are not identified by name.

R. C. Gates' survey of the lands of Thomas Chamberlayne, produced in the same year as Greenwood's 1826 map, provides the first detailed view of the five woods now making up Valley Park Woodlands. The survey shows both of the farms and records that Knightwood Farm was then tenanted by James Rider, and Zionshill Farm by Thomas Tarver.

# Greenwood's Map of 1826

Knightswood and Zionshill Farms shown in red





***Extract from the survey of the lands  
of Thomas Chamberlayne 1826***

Knightwood Cottages are also depicted on the 1826 survey map of Thomas Chamberlayne's lands, when they were tenanted by George Self. Before the recent demolition of the cottages, comprehensive recording found elements of an original timber framed structure surviving in the east wall. On the basis of certain architectural details this was dated to the seventeenth century, with subsequent additions of brickwork made during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The interval between Faden's map and the two maps of 1826 corresponds to the period when the commons of England were coming under increasing pressure from the enclosure movement. This culminated in Parliamentary enclosure, which at North Baddesley has a relatively late date of 1867.



***The east end of Knightwood Cottages  
showing the 17<sup>th</sup> Century timber frame  
construction***

Both Knightwood Farm and Zionshill Farm were in existence by 1826, and while we have no sure knowledge of their origins it seems quite likely that they began life as private encroachments on common lands. This was known as assarting, a term usually applied to the uptake of woodland, though it can equally mean the conversion of heaths and commons for agricultural use.

The survey carried out for Thomas Chamberlayne records Knight Wood as part of the commons in 1826, whereas Tredgoulds Copse, Sky's Wood, Zionshill Copse and Clothiers Copse were all in private ownership by that time. Indeed Clothiers Copse was described as 'The New Inclosure', implying that it had only recently passed into the hands of the Chamberlayne family. This may have been part of a more concerted uptake of the commons during the first decades of the nineteenth century, until by an Order of 1857 a further 725 acres were enclosed. By 1868, the survey for the first edition Ordnance Survey map (published 1872) shows the woodlands of Valley Park bearing their present names and appearing much as they did prior to the onset of recent development.

Physical evidence for traditional management and woodmanship can be found throughout Valley Park Woodlands. In each of the five woods the original wood boundary is marked by a ditch and bank.

These are without exception small in size and regular in layout, both of which are characteristic of post-Medieval woodland boundaries. There are a number of examples of internal wood-banks, some marking the original boundaries of separate woods that have grown together, and others defining the sub-division of the wood between different owners.

In Clothiers Copse and Knight Wood the arrangement of banks preserves the historic shape of the two separate woods of 1826, which are now joined by secondary woodland, while some of the internal divisions define the individual coppices.

Neglected hazel coppice is abundant in Valley Park Woodlands, a reflection of the former importance of underwood in a number of rural industries. In Tredgoulds Copse other evidence for the historic exploitation of the woodland can be found. A naturally low-lying area in the southern part of the wood seems to have been artificially lowered in order to create suitably damp conditions for coppiced alder. This was a valuable source of good quality charcoal, which was used extensively for the manufacture of gunpowder. Alder timber had a variety of uses in other rural industries and, because of its durability under water, was often used for submerged piles or supports.

Larger timber had been important for building from the earliest times, but increasingly during the post-Medieval period the fate of woodland became inextricably linked to the industrial economic cycle. Oak woodlands in particular were susceptible to these fluctuations, and cycles of 'boom and bust' in industries such as shipbuilding and tanning had a major impact on their character.

In the twentieth century, demands for timber increased sharply during the two World Wars, and the stumps of felled mature oaks in some of the woods of Valley Park are likely to be the mute testament to this renewed demand.

## **DECLINE, REVIVAL AND CONSERVATION**

*“Almost every wood of which the coppice stools remain is worth preserving. Normally re-coppicing is the best conservation policy, for it brings to life the traditional working of the wood and all its plants and animals”*

### **Oliver Rackham 1986**

At the national level, huge tracts of woodland were lost during the post-Medieval period, not least as a result of the agricultural ‘improvements’ of the later eighteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century the traditional woodland management practices dating back to before Domesday were already in steep decline. However, the first part of the twentieth century saw the most radical changes in the use of woods, and perhaps most significant of these was the reduction of coppicing which had helped to shape their ancient character. The period following the Second World War has also seen a significant reduction in the extent of historic woodland, as large swathes have been lost to afforestation, agriculture and development.

With the demise of traditional woodmanship, Valley Park Woods like innumerable others have fallen into neglect as their primary economic importance has lessened. In more recent times the woods offered some economic return through the growth in sporting interest. The evidence for this can be seen in the game release pens and the areas cleared for game crops and shooting rides.

Since their purchase by Test Valley Borough Council, the conservation and amenity potential of Valley Park Woods has been the subject of detailed ecological assessment. The five woods are on the English Nature Register of

Ancient Woodland in Hampshire, and the principal objective of the current Management Plan is to preserve and enhance their ancient character. This will be achieved by reviving the economic sustainability of the woods, while at the same time maintaining a balance between conservation interests and the public enjoyment of the area. The popular annual wood fair held in Zionshill Copse is part of this undertaking, and its success is a measure of the growing public interest in the woods and their future.

In addition to their habitat diversity and value for wildlife, Valley Park Woods are an important archaeological and historic resource. It is clear from the various surveys and excavations that the area retains significant evidence for past settlement and land-use. This is not entirely unexpected, for it is now widely recognised that in intensively farmed, or developed land, many of the more vulnerable archaeological sites have survived only where they are protected by ancient woods.

Though much altered in recent years, Valley Park still preserves evidence of its ancient past. Archaeological discoveries and the analysis of Palaeo-environmental material have enabled us to sketch out the story of its early settlement, and to gain some insight into the changes in landscape and ecology brought about by human intervention. The shape and structure of the woods as they exist today also tell us much about the ways in which they were managed and exploited through later centuries.

The landscape evidence for this survives in the form of boundary banks and other features that are the physical reminder of the long vanished relationship between rural communities and the woods, heaths and commons, which played such a prominent role in their lives.

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Reconstruction illustrations showing the Zionshill Copse enclosure, the middle Bronze Age barrow, the use of a rotary quern and Medieval hurdle making are by Jane Brayne (© Copyright Jane Brayne 2001). Other illustrations and the text are by Roy Entwistle (Berkshire Archaeological Services).

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## FURTHER INFORMATION

Reports on the Valley Park archaeological investigations can be found in the Hampshire Sites and Monuments Record, Winchester.  
Web Page:  
[www.hants.gov.uk/environment/database.html](http://www.hants.gov.uk/environment/database.html)

The Hampshire Record Office, Winchester, holds an extensive collection of historic maps and documents.  
Web Page:  
[www.hants.gov.uk/record-office/](http://www.hants.gov.uk/record-office/)

Information on North Baddesley, including a brief history, can be found on the Internet.  
Web Page:  
[www.baddesley.net.org.uk/ie/](http://www.baddesley.net.org.uk/ie/)

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