

Land at Terriers Farm, High Wycombe

Historical Land Use Briefing Note

Introduction

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared by BSA Heritage Limited and reviews the likely land use history for a site lying north of Terriers, on the northern edge of High Wycombe; the 'site'. In particular, it addresses claims that the eastern part of the site area has a long history in 'three field' or 'open field' rotational cultivation and is therefore historically significant.
- 1.2 The site covers an area of 23 hectares which lies approximately a mile north east of High Wycombe's centre and is centred at NGR SU 8805 9515. The site's fields are all now pasture with some trees and scrub in places and as shown on Plan 1.
- 1.3 The likely pre-19th century use of the land has been assessed using historical sources available at the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies in Aylesbury and Historic England Archive in Swindon. These sources have included historical maps and secondary sources. Mr Jones, who farmed the land from 1948 into this century has also been consulted. The open or common field system of the medieval period is also summarised.

Early Site Use

- 2.1 The pre-mid nineteenth century layout and use of the site cannot be confirmed given an absence of detailed maps or other dedicated primary or secondary sources. Archaeological evidence suggests that earlier communities were settled in and exploiting the Chilterns with a Roman settlement and two medieval farms within a kilometre of the site area and north of the site (Rae 2007).
- 2.2 Indeed, geophysical survey and subsequent targeted trial trenching within the site has located archaeological features and two were dated to the Iron Age. However, it is also known that the Chilterns were well wooded with large areas of wood remaining into modern times. King's Wood remains south east of the site and was more extensive and a royal forest in the medieval period. The Iron Age activity may have lain within a parcel of cleared land. It is also possible that woodland recolonised areas cleared in the late prehistoric and Roman periods in the early medieval period.
- 2.3 In well wooded areas, place names ending in 'end' or with 'green' in their title are taken as an indication of the piecemeal clearance of woodland or 'assarting' to provide farmland (Rackham 1986). Widmer End and Tyler's Green are two nearby settlements which indicate this practice in the area.

- 2.4 It is known that the site lay at the junction of at least two parishes and this peripheral position may have led to it remaining as uncleared woodland, waste or pasture land. Perhaps more telling is the absence of a documentary reference to settlement at 'Terriers' until 1714 (WDC 1995).
- 2.5 There is certainly no evidence now of ridge and furrow earthworks surviving within the fields, although these might have been ploughed out. However, there was no indication of ridge and furrow picked up by the geophysical survey completed across the site a decade ago.

Map Evidence

- 3.1 Jeffreys' county map of circa 1760 and Bryant's map of the 1820s are the earliest available which cover the site, but show little detail. The site is clearly open land and has a similar shape as now. 'Tarriers' or Terriers is marked to the south, but the maps do not mark field boundaries.
- 3.2 The earliest detailed map is the High Wycombe Tithe map of 1848. This confirms a very similar field layout to that which survives today (Plan 1). The field in the east was not sub-divided at this time, was called 'Long Close' and was arable. To the west, there were further arable fields and also 'meadow' under grass.
- 3.3 The Tithe map field boundaries are generally straight, but occasional indentations and the curved boundaries of the large triangular field probably reflect the topography and existing parish boundary in the north. There is no clear fossilisation of ridge and furrow ploughing in the shape of field boundaries except, perhaps, with the west to east longest internal boundary.
- 3.4 To the south, the unenclosed nature of Terriers' landscape is clear, with later maps suggesting the unenclosed area to the south east was woodland.
- 3.5 Little change is apparent on later Ordnance Survey maps through to 1946. Unusually, boundaries were added rather than removed where change is shown. The 1946 six inch to the mile map confirms the absence of change in the east of the site.

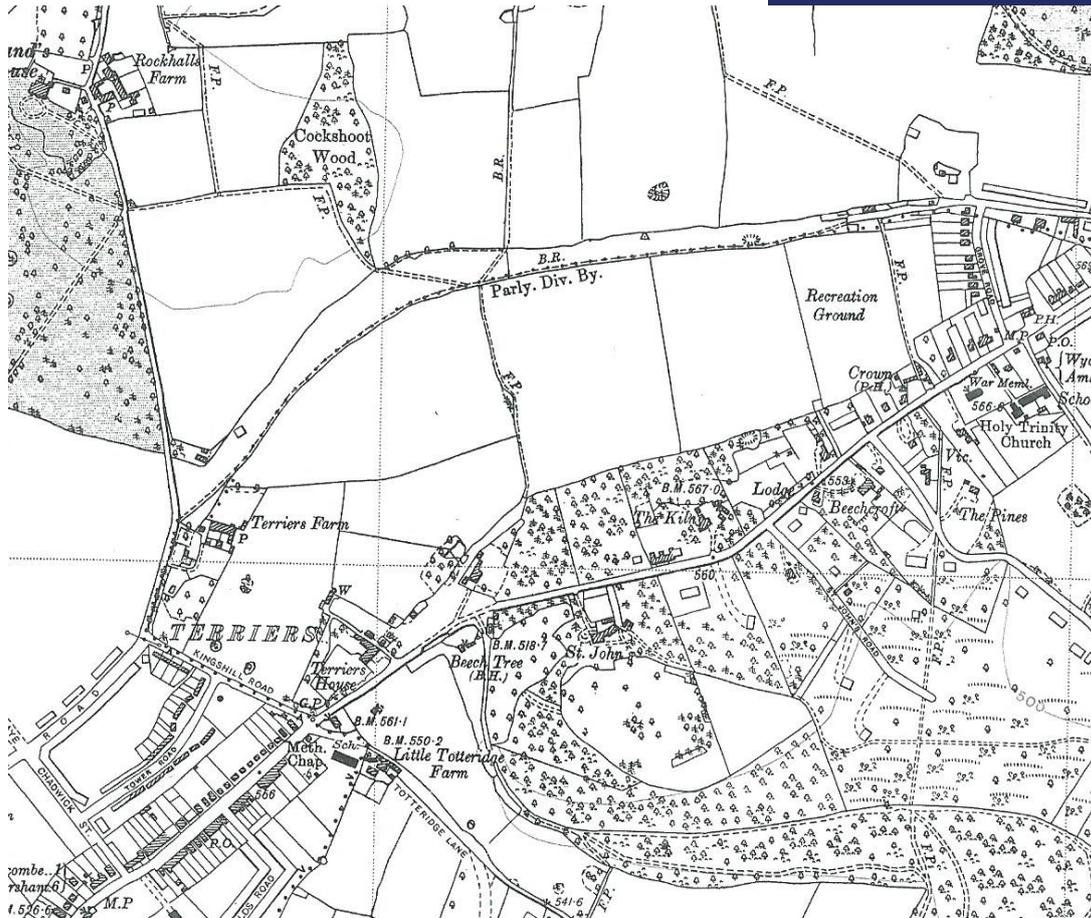


Plate 1: 1946 Ordnance Survey map excerpt

Post-war Land Use

- 4.1 The site's former owner and farmer, Dennis Jones, was contacted in August 2015 to discuss past land use after he purchased the land in 1948. Mr Jones remembered that the government office had dictated that he plant a crop across the eastern field in the first season he owned the land. Food shortages were still a concern and government officials had the power to order particular land use in that year.
- 4.2 Mr Jones does not think the requirement continued beyond the first year, although kale may have been grown at one time. He subsequently reared pigs in the 1950s when swill could be secured from London. A dairy herd followed, to be replaced by 'horseculture' as the agricultural economy changed.
- 4.2 Mr Jones divided up the eastern field into three equal sections of circa six acres each for convenience and this explains the absence of hedgerows on the earlier maps. These three fields were subsequently used for either a hay or silage crop when not grazed by cattle.

The Three Field System

- 5.1 It has been suggested that the easternmost field of the site has heritage value as it has been the site of a three field agricultural system. In archaeological terms, the 'three field system' is one which was common across much of the 'champion' land of England from at least the medieval period, although it is thought the system may have had pre-Conquest origins (Hoskins 1988).
- 5.2 Nucleated villages were surrounded by three (although sometimes two or more than three) large open or common fields. These were farmed in a large number of unbounded strips with each villager owning or leasing a number within and possibly dispersed across the wider field. Crop rotation was practiced with each field or 'furlongs' of strips under a different use each season. Crops would be varied and areas or whole fields might also be left fallow to regain nutrients or as pasture for grazing (Taylor 1975). Stock might at times be grazed on a harvested field and would add nutrients through their manure.
- 5.3 Given the ubiquity of the system across England, considerable variation occurred. Many aspects of the system remain conjecture. Although most three field systems were lost with enclosure of the common fields as animal husbandry became more common and, perhaps, society more individualistic, a small number of open fields survive including those at Braunton in Devon and Laxton in Nottinghamshire.
- 5.4 The open field system can still be recognised today in an enclosed landscape by the survival of distinctive ridge and furrow earthworks. Wide banks and shallow furrows create a corduroy effect. The ridges and furrows may have an elongated inverted 's' shape which is thought to reflect an ox team turning as it reached the end (headland) of each strip. Although ridges have often been ploughed out in the twentieth century, they can sometimes be seen as cropmarks on aerial photographs or the curve may be fossilised within field boundaries. Geophysical survey will often locate such a system through the vestigial differences in soil magnetism or electrical resistance.
- 5.5 Post-war aerial photographs confirm that a large amount of ridge and furrow survived seventy years ago across England. Animal husbandry had ensured that whole field systems remained well preserved. Much extant ridge and furrow and related earthworks has been lost since due to more widespread arable cultivation and deeper ploughing. A dedicated assessment of earthwork survival was completed by English Heritage in the 1990s and the best surviving open field landscapes were identified as 'heritage assets' (Catchpole & Priest 2012).
- 5.6 Even when the communal open field system ceased, individual farmers continued to rotate crops in order to 'rest' fields. This might often involve a three field rotation, but does not leave any archaeological trace per se and cannot therefore be a 'heritage asset'.

Conclusions

- 6.1 This briefing note considers the known land use history of an area of land at Terriers Farm, High Wycombe. Historical sources and past site visits and investigation has informed an assessment of the heritage significance of the fields.
- 6.2 There is no firm evidence of an open field system within the site. The site's peripheral location, nearby place names and lack of references to Terriers until the 18th century suggest late clearance for agriculture.
- 6.3 More importantly, there are no vestiges of ridge and furrow or other early physical elements which might be preserved. The internal hedgerows of the eastern field are certainly of post-war date, although earlier hedgerows on the edges and within the site are of local heritage significance.
- 6.4 There is no evidence for a specialised land use regime during recent decades. Indeed, in line with changing economics, the farming of the site has changed at least three times since the war. Even if a rotational system had been in place for many decades, there would be no heritage value in retaining a system of land use of itself.

References

Catchpole T. & Priest R. 2012 *Turning the Plough Update Assessment* Gloucester (for English Heritage)

Hoskins W. G. 1988 *The Making of the English Landscape* London

Rackham O. 1986 *The History of the Countryside* Frome

Rae E. 2007 Archaeological Investigation of land at Terriers Farm, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire Northampton (unpublished Northamptonshire Archaeology report ref. 07/144)

Taylor C. 1975 *Fields in the English Landscape* London

Wycombe District Council (WDC) 1995 *Conservation Area Character Survey – Terriers High Wycombe*

Plan 1

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