



Island Heritage Service

## **Historic Environment Action Plan South Wight Downland**

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

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## HEAP for South Wight Downland.

### INTRODUCTION

This HEAP Area has been defined on the basis of geology, topography and land uses which differentiate it from other HEAP areas. It comprises a block of Chalk and Upper Greensand at the southern end of the Isle of Wight, separated from the sea only by the Undercliff. Obviously there are many similarities between this HEAP Area, the *West Wight Chalk Downland* and the *East Wight Chalk Ridge*. However, each of the three Areas occupies a particular geographical location and has a particular character although a variety of different historic landscape types occur within each Area.

This HEAP identifies the essential characteristics of the South Wight Downland as its surviving areas of open and unimproved grassland with a range of archaeological monuments, its fine views, and its open and exposed farmland with relatively few hedgerows.

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**

- Area of high ground, indented on northern side where it abuts *South Wight Downland Edge* and straight on south side where it abuts *The Undercliff*.
- Three distinct blocks of high ground:
  - Gore Down, Niton Down, St Catherine's Hill, St Catherine's Down and Head Down to west of Niton.
  - Week Down, Rew Down, Stenbury Down and Appuldurcombe Down between Niton and Ventnor.
  - Wroxall Down, St Boniface Down, Bonchurch Down, Luccombe Down, Shanklin Down and St Martin's Down to north and east of Ventnor.
- Three blocks of high ground are separated by two main combes, one containing 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> settlement at Niton and one containing the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ventnor suburb of Lowtherville.
  - The incisions of the combes result in the ridges of high ground running roughly north-south rather than the east-west trend of the *West Wight Chalk Downland* and the *East Wight Chalk Ridge*.
- Geology is Middle Chalk, Lower Chalk and Upper Greensand with superficial deposits of Angular Flint Gravel in some areas.
- Topography varies between the narrow spine of St Catherine's Down, the wider ridge of Luccombe Down and the broad plateau of Week Down.
- Top of St Boniface Down is highest point on Island at 240m. St Catherine's Hill rises to 236m, Appuldurcombe Down to 226m.
- The Upper Greensand cliff running around the north and west edge of this Area is a significant landscape feature, giving rise to steep slopes that are particularly dramatic at Cliff Copse, Gatcliff and Tolt Rocks.
- Spring line is below the northern edge of the high downland, from where streams flow northward.
- Soils are calcareous on Middle and Lower Chalk but acid on Upper Greensand and on gravel deposits.

## Defining Attributes and Principal HEAP Types

- Nearly 50% of the fields within this HEAP Area are of *medium* or *large* size (3% more than for the Island as a whole).
- Much of the land to the west of Niton is cultivated farmland with *medium* and *large* fields on the slopes of Niton Down, *small-medium fields* on the slopes of Head Down and *small fields* immediately to west of Niton.
- Most of St Catherine's Hill is enclosed and improved grassland with only a small area of unimproved chalk grassland. Much of St Catherine's Down is unimproved acid grassland but there is a substantial area of scrub. Head Down has some unimproved acid grassland and a small patch of heathland.
  - Stone walls on St Catherine's Hill are a distinctive feature and are unusual on the Isle of Wight, occurring elsewhere only in the Undercliff.
- Land between Niton and Ventnor is mostly cultivated farmland with an exposed and open feel. Field sizes are mainly *medium* or *large*
- Unimproved chalk grassland on southern side of Rew Down and south-east edge of Week Down.
- Land to the north and east of Ventnor comprises a horseshoe-shaped ridge of open land overlooking cultivated fields of *medium* and *small-medium* size on the lower ground around Wroxall Manor Farm. Open land includes areas of unimproved chalk grassland, acid grassland and heathland.
- To the west of Niton there is no woodland in this HEAP Area, only scrub on St Catherine's Down. Between Niton and Ventnor there is *ancient woodland* at Rew Copse and Appuldurcombe Copse. Wroxall Copse, Luccombe Copse, Cliff Copse and Greatwood Copse, situated to the north and east of Ventnor, are *ancient woodland*.
- 20<sup>th</sup> Century secondary holm oak woodland on downs above Ventnor. Other *secondary woodland* on Bonchurch Down, Luccombe Down and Shanklin Down.
- Some historic *dispersed settlement* on downland slopes and in combes. Part of Niton Village (not the *historic settlement core*) and a suburb of Ventnor lie within this HEAP Area.
- Farm buildings are constructed of local greensand. Some older buildings are of greensand within the part of Niton lying in this HEAP Area but there are also modern bungalow estates. In Ventnor some buildings are of brick or flint.
- Appuldurcombe Landscape Park lies mainly within the adjacent South Wight Downland Edge HEAP Area. Historically, the park included Appuldurcombe Down, with a now-ruinous deer park wall encircling the base of the high downland.
- The almost vertical profile of Gatcliff at the northern end of Appuldurcombe Down may have been partly formed by quarrying in medieval times.
  - There are other small greensand quarries and chalk pits elsewhere.
- A road runs above the Undercliff, linking Whitwell with Ventnor and the A3055 skirts the eastern side of the Area linking Ventnor to Shanklin.
  - Otherwise, the roads run mainly northward through the combes on the north side of this Area, linking it with the rest of the Island.
  - Roads lead down into the Undercliff via Barrack Shute (Niton) and St Lawrence Shute, as well as from the roads above Ventnor.
- Rights of Way lead up to and across the high downland, including portions of the long distance 'Worsley Trail' and 'Stenbury Trail'.
  - The Cripple Path and St Rhadegund's Path are two Rights of Way linking this Area with the Undercliff.

## Principal Historical Processes

- At the end of the Ice Age Britain's climate warmed and most of the landscape, including chalk downland, became covered in woodland.
- The earliest farmers on the Isle of Wight cultivated small areas of cleared woodland, chalk downs and greensand from 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC.

- Much of the chalk and greensand remained wooded until the Bronze Age from c. 2300 BC when extensive clearance took place, allowing grazing and cultivation.
  - Surprisingly, there are records of only two possible prehistoric field systems in this Area on Luccombe Down and Middle Barn Farm, Wroxall.
  - However, *lynchets* of unknown date have also been recorded from Appuldurcombe Down.
- On the Isle of Wight surviving Bronze Age burial mounds occur mainly on the downs and exist within this Area at St Catherine's Hill, St Catherine's Down, Head Down, Week Down, Rew Down, Luccombe Down and Shanklin Down.
- Only evidence for Iron Age activity is a possible Iron Age burial from Lowtherville, a coin from Dean Farm and a Late Iron Age/Early Roman brooch from Span Farm.
- Evidence for Roman activity consists only of a few finds including a small coin hoard from Upper Ventnor.
- Wroxall was an important Anglo-Saxon estate centred on the *South Wight Downland* and recorded in an 11<sup>th</sup> century charter (Margham 2007).
- Anglo-Saxon *mother parishes* on the Island seem to have stretched right across the Island from the Solent shore to the English Channel.
  - All included a section of chalk downland, either within the *West Wight Downland*, *East Wight Chalk Ridge* or the *South Wight Downland*.
  - Newchurch Parish retained its original territory until the later 19<sup>th</sup> century.
  - The other Island parishes were divided into smaller parochial units from late Anglo-Saxon times onwards but nearly all included some open downland.
- Parts of the medieval parishes of Chale, Niton, Whitwell, Godshill, St Lawrence, Newchurch, Bonchurch and Shanklin lay within this HEAP Area.
  - The configuration of the medieval boundaries of Niton and Whitwell parishes suggest that they were taken out of Godshill Parish (Margham 2000, 122)
  - Whitwell did not achieve full parochial status in the Middle Ages and was dependent on Gatcombe Parish for part of the medieval period (Hockey 1982, 6-7) but after the construction of the church in the 12<sup>th</sup> century the territory for which it was responsible was presumably marked by a boundary.
  - To the east of Nettlecombe a segment of Whitwell Parish protruded into Godshill Parish. The indented boundary between the two parishes at this point suggest that it was laid out after *open-field* agriculture had been established in this location – the 'dog-legs' in the boundary representing the ends of *furlongs* within open fields.
- St Rhadegund's Path linked the Undercliff portion of Whitwell Parish with Whitwell Church (which bears the unusual dedication to St Rhadegund) but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it passed through land in Godshill Parish.
  - However, it is likely that in medieval times St Rhadegund's Path may have formed the Whitwell/Godshill Parish boundary,
  - At an earlier date, probably in Anglo-Saxon times, St Rhadegund's Path seems to have formed part of an ancient boundary running across the Island from the Solent shore to the Undercliff.
  - This boundary appears to have run through the middle of the later medieval parishes of Arreton and Godshill, thus challenging the hypothesis that together they formed one of the Island's Anglo-Saxon mother parishes.
- The modern name of St Rhadegund's path links it with St Rhadegund's Church at Whitwell but this is apparently due to a corruption of its medieval name of 'Radegang' which meant a path fit for riding (Kökeritz 1940, 284).
- The manors of Week and Wroxall, recorded in Domesday Book, held land within this Area. Their manor houses may have occupied the sites of the present Week Farm and Wroxall Manor Farm.
  - Other manors recorded in Domesday Book held portions of downland within this Area during the medieval and post-medieval periods, these manors being Chale, Gotten, Niton, Bonchurch, Luccombe and Shanklin.

- During the medieval period most of the high downland ridges and slopes within this Area would have been used as common grazing by the tenants of the various manors.
  - However *open-field* arable agriculture was practised on the slightly lower and less steeply-sloping ground within the Area.
- Two extensive medieval open fields lay in Niton Parish, one to the west and one to the east of the village and there appear to have been other blocks of *open-field* within the parish between Bury Lane and Niton Down and on the edge of Head Down.
- The large open field to the east of Niton lay adjacent to one of Whitwell's medieval open fields and the whole area may have been laid out as *open-field* in the period before the Norman Conquest when Niton and Whitwell both formed part of Godshill Parish.
  - However, in the Middle Ages the two fields would have been separated by the long straight parish boundary running from Ashknowle Lane to the Undercliff.
  - This block of open-field land in Niton and Whitwell was bounded by Ashknowle Lane to the north-west and by the Undercliff to the south.
  - The open-field land in Whitwell Parish had been mostly enclosed by 1793 although some small strips are still shown on the Whitwell Tithe Map of 1838.
  - The adjacent field in Niton Parish was still shown mainly as unenclosed strips on the Niton Tithe Map of c. 1840 and was finally enclosed in 1856 by an Act of Parliament which also covered the fields on Head Down (Adams 1960, 221).
  - The Niton open fields were one of only two areas of open-field on the Island to be enclosed by parliamentary act, the other area being that of Easton Common Field in the *Freshwater Isle Area*.
- Another area of medieval open-field appears to have been located to the east and south-east of Nettlecombe (see above).
  - The lower-lying land around Wroxall Manor Farm may also have been used for open-field arable cultivation. .
- There is evidence in the form of *lynchets* for medieval cultivation of the steep downland slopes, for instance on St Catherine's Hill and St Martin's Down but this cultivation may have been temporary and occasioned by land hunger.
- A document of 1270 refers to 'breaking stone at Gateclive', indicating that Greensand was being quarried at Gatcliff in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Masters 2005 Vol. 2, 1.7)
- Between 1559 and 1576 various landowners were involved in a dispute about rights of common grazing on St Catherine's Hill and St Catherine's Down (Hockey 1982, 212-218)
- Defensive beacons were sited on the chalk downs and other high points during medieval times to warn of French attacks and continued to be used into the 17<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Beacon sites listed in a document of 1324 include Chale Down, Niton, Appuldurcombe and Shanklin (probably on the downs) and St Martin's Down.
- St Catherine's Lighthouse and Oratory (chapel) was erected on the summit of St Catherine's Hill in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century for the assistance of ships in the English Channel.
  - A map of 1566 shows the lighthouse and the chapel attached to it surrounded by an enclosure (Currie 2001, Vol 3, Fig 4).
  - The Chale Down beacon was probably sited close to the lighthouse.
- Work on another lighthouse was started at St Catherine's Hill in 1795 just to the south of the medieval site but this later structure was never completed.
- The post-medieval deer park of Appuldurcombe included high downland within this HEAP Area although Appuldurcombe House itself is within the *South Wight Downland Edge Area*.
  - In the 1770's Sir Richard Worsley extended his park to take in additional downland and re-landscaped it with advice from 'Capability Brown' (Masters 2005).
  - The present stone park wall was erected at this time.
  - In 1774 Sir Richard erected the obelisk on Appuldurcombe Down in memory of his ancestor Sir Robert Worsley. At about the same time he also erected Cook's Castle, a *folly* nearly 2 km to the east of Appuldurcombe Park below St Martin's Down.

- Michael Hoy lived at 'The Hermitage' in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and erected the Hoy Monument on nearby St Catherine's Down in 1814 to commemorate the visit of Tsar Alexander I of Russia (Wright 1992).
  - A second tablet was added in 1857 to commemorate those who fell in the Crimean War.
- The enclosure of manorial common grazing land on the downs was a gradual process from post-medieval times, continuing into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Initially, the purpose of downland enclosure was to provide improved private grazing but by the 20<sup>th</sup> century arable agriculture was taking place in some of the land enclosed from downland.
  - By 1793 some of the downland to the west of Niton, on St Catherine's Hill, had been divided into a few large enclosures. (This land was probably still permanent grazing but was no longer treated as manorial common.)
  - The summit of Week Down was still unenclosed grassland in 1793, coming under cultivation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Appuldurcombe Down, Rew Down, St Boniface Down and Luccombe Down also remained as unenclosed grassland in 1793 as did Shanklin Down, although this down was divided into a few large enclosures.
  - Newbarn Farm, to the west of Stenbury Down, is shown on the OS 1793 map, although not named. Farms of this name on the Isle of Wight seem to be associated with downland enclosure.
- The long spine of St Catherine's Down and much of Head Down is depicted as unenclosed grassland on the OS 1793 map.
  - However, the earlier 1774 Worsley Estate Map showed the eastern side of St Catherine's Down and the northern side of Head Down divided into small regular plots with straight boundaries and this division is also shown on the Whitwell Tithe Map of 1843 (Basford and Smout 2000, 11-13).
  - These plots probably represented portions of the former common downland divided up among the manorial tenants.
  - Currie (2001, 30-31) suggests these boundaries were purely notional and that this area of downland remained unenclosed until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century but two small banks which survive on St Catherine's Down may indicate that physical boundaries existed
- During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century earlier field patterns were reorganised or fields amalgamated, and some former areas of unenclosed chalk grassland were ploughed and taken into cultivation.
- A railway tunnel 1312 yards long was dug beneath Wroxall Down in the 1860's, allowing the railway line from Ryde to Shanklin to be extended to Ventnor.
  - This was the largest engineering scheme undertaken by the Isle of Wight Central Railway, necessitated by the opposition of a local landowner to an alternative route.
  - A station was built in Upper Ventnor within a chalk combe.
  - The railway line closed in the 1960s and the site of the railway station became an industrial estate.
- Much of Rew Down became a golf course in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, now Ventnor Golf Club.
- Holm Oak started to invade the downs above Ventnor in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, having been planted in Ventnor and Bonchurch gardens.
- Ventnor Radar Station was constructed on the summit of Wroxall Down just before the Second World War and the site continued to be used for civil and military air control after the war.
  - Ventnor was an important radar station in the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, being part of the south coast chain of stations acting as early warning sites for enemy attack by air. It was bombed in August 1940 but was operating again by November of that year.
- Radio transmission masts were also erected on Stenbury Down and Rew Down in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- St Catherine's Hill was acquired by the National Trust in 1967 and St Catherine's Down between 1970 and 1978 (Currie 2001, 34).

- Downland to the north and east of Ventnor remained largely unenclosed and uncultivated into the 20<sup>th</sup> century
  - Much of this area, known as ‘Ventnor Downs’ and including Wroxall Down, Littleton Down, St Boniface Down, Bonchurch Down and Luccombe Down, was acquired by the National Trust between 1922 and 1996, ensuring its conservation to the present day.

### **Archaeology and Built Environment (details in HER)**

- A good many earthworks have been recorded in this Area, partially as a result of three detailed historic landscape surveys (Currie 2001, Currie 2002, Masters 2005).
  - However, most of these earthworks except the Bronze Age burial mounds have not been positively identified or dated.
- Bronze Age burial mounds (*round barrows*) survive on all three blocks of high ground but many have been subject to past ploughing or excavation, notably the group on Week Down.
  - However, the Luccombe Down barrow cemetery has remained unploughed.
- The whole area of downland to the north of St Boniface Down is now known as Luccombe Down but historically the portion to the west of the Newchurch/Bonchurch parish boundary formed part of Wroxall Down.
  - A surviving bank on the western edge of this down may be a medieval boundary separating the common downland grazing from the open-field.
- The boundary between the medieval parishes of Newchurch and Bonchurch survives as an earthwork along the crest of Luccombe Down, running the entire length of the down (Currie 2002 Vol 1, 105).
  - The two parishes of Newchurch and Bonchurch are thought to have been *mother parishes* that originated in Anglo-Saxon times.
  - These *mother parishes* may have corresponded with large secular estates that were broken up in the later Anglo-Saxon period.
- The eastern boundary of the late Anglo-Saxon estate of Wroxall followed the same line as the Newchurch/Bonchurch and Newchurch/Shanklin parish boundaries along the top of Luccombe Down and Shanklin Down.
  - The western boundary of the Wroxall Estate is preserved in the line of existing field boundaries along the eastern edge of Week Down and the western edge of Stenbury Down (Margham 2007, Fig 7).
- The indented medieval parish boundary between Whitwell and Godshill to the east of Nettlecombe survives as part of the modern civil parish boundary of Niton & Whitwell, marked out by hedged field boundaries.
  - As indicated under ‘Principal Historical Processes’, these field boundaries provide evidence for medieval open fields, laid out before Whitwell was taken out of Godshill Parish.
  - The fields may have been worked from the small nearby settlement of Nettlecombe in the *South Wight Downland Edge Area*.
- Another portion of the Whitwell/Godshill medieval parish boundary survives as a hedgerow between Berryl Farm and Dean Farm.
- St Rhadegund’s Path runs from Dean Farm to the Undercliff.
  - This route may have been on the line of an Anglo-Saxon land division (see ‘Principal Historical Processes’ and may also have formed the Whitwell/Godshill Parish Boundary in medieval times although the OS 6" map of 1866 shows the parish boundary slightly to the west of the path .
  - St Rhadegund’s Path is a public Right of Way (V50). It consists of a hedged track for much of its length, continuing as an unmarked field track to the edge of the Undercliff.
- The present route of the ‘Cripple Path’ across the fields from Niton Village to the Undercliff is defined as Rights of Ways NT 25 and NT 27 on the Isle of Wight Council’s Definitive Map (2000).
  - However, this route is not shown on the OS 1793 map or the tithe map of c.1840 when the area between Niton village and the Undercliff formed one large open field.

- The Niton/Whitwell medieval parish boundary survives as a long straight hedgerow running between Ashknowle Lane and the Undercliff.
- The parish boundary between Chale and Niton is marked by a stone wall shown on the OS 1793 map from Gore Cliff to the 18<sup>th</sup> century lighthouse on St Catherine's Hill, then runs just below the crest of the down in the form of a discontinuous low bank.
  - A drystone field wall (also marked on the 1793 map) branches to the north-west away from the parish boundary wall at its northern point.
  - This drystone wall may contain reused stone from St Catherine's Oratory and is shown on the 1566 map
- The stone-built St Catherine's Lighthouse survives at the summit of St Catherine's Hill.
  - The attached chapel was demolished in post-medieval times but an enclosure surrounding the site of the lighthouse and chapel, shown on a map of 1566, survives as a low platform.
  - A Bronze Age *round barrow* within the enclosure, excavated in 1925, was found to contain a medieval lime kin associated with the building of the lighthouse and chapel (Dunning 1927, Dunning 1951).
- The roofless remains of the 18<sup>th</sup> century lighthouse also survive on St Catherine's Hill.
- There are medieval *strip lynchets* (cultivation terraces) on St Catherine's Hill and St Martin's Down.
- Hollow ways and trackways surviving as earthworks have been recorded at Week Farm, Luccombe Down, Luccombe Farm, Wroxall Down, Appuldurcombe Park, Appuldurcombe Down and Gat Cliff.
  - These features are difficult to date but some are likely to be of medieval origin.
- Remains of stone quarries and chalk pits throughout this Area. Many of these are shown on the OS 1793 map but some could be much earlier.
- Remains of 18<sup>th</sup> century stone deer park wall on Appuldurcombe Down.
- Late 18<sup>th</sup> century Worsley Monument on Appuldurcombe Down and foundations of Cook's Castle (late 18<sup>th</sup> century folly) on St Martin's Down.
- Early 19<sup>th</sup> century Hoy Monument on St Catherine's Down.
- The 19<sup>th</sup> century railway tunnel under Wroxall Down is intact and both portals can still be seen.
- Remains of Second World War radar station on St Boniface Down.
- Historic buildings within this Area are mainly associated with farmsteads but 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century cottages in the southern part of Niton also lie within the Area.
  - Earliest domestic buildings are 17<sup>th</sup> century farmhouses at Rew Farm and Dean Farm, and Berryl Cottages near Whitwell.
  - There are 18<sup>th</sup> century farmhouses at Week Farm, New Barn Farm, Span Farm and Wroxall Manor Farm.
  - Other historic farm buildings such as barns and stables are of 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century date.

### Relationships between HEAP Areas

- This HEAP Area is surrounded on its north side by the *South Wight Downland Edge* HEAP Area where historic settlements grew up, utilising the high downs for open grazing.
- *The Undercliff* is physically separated from the *South Wight Downland* by the inner cliff but the parishes of Chale, Niton, Whitwell, Godshill, St Lawrence, Newchurch and Bonchurch all included land in both Areas and various roads and tracks connected them.
- The *South Wight Downland* HEAP Area shows many similarities with the *West Wight Chalk Downland* and the *East Wight Chalk Ridge*.

### Time-Depth

- Chalk grassland, acid grassland and heathland were created within this HEAP Area in the Early Bronze Age as a result of human clearance of woodland.
  - Surviving areas of unimproved grassland and heathland on the high ground provide a link with the Island's prehistoric past.

- Surviving areas of unenclosed old grassland and heathland also preserve the medieval and post-medieval character of the high downland as manorial common grazing land.
- Archaeological earthworks and monuments date from the Bronze Age to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Bronze Age burial mounds (*round barrows*) are well represented in this Area.
- *Ancient woodland* at Rew Copse, Appuldurcombe Wood, Wroxall Copse, Luccombe Copse, Cliff Copse and Greatwood Copse is likely to have been wooded since the Middle Ages and possibly from much earlier.
- St Rhadegund's Path was used in medieval times to connect the Undercliff part of Whitwell Parish with Whitwell Church but may have originated as a territorial division of Anglo-Saxon date.
- Many of the Rights of Way shown on the Isle of Wight Council's Definitive Map (2000) are shown on the OS 1793 map. The majority of the routes marked on the 1793 map are likely to be of medieval date or earlier.
- Portions of parish boundaries survive in the landscape as earthworks or hedgerows. The Chale/Niton boundary is marked by a stone wall.
- *Lynchets* provide evidence of medieval cultivation on steep downland slopes.
- Some hedgerows in the modern landscape define the external boundaries of medieval open fields or represent the enclosure of *furlongs* within former open fields.
- Field patterns within the area of high downland generally originate from downland enclosure of 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century date and can be recognised by their regular layout, straight boundaries and species-poor hedgerows.
  - However, these field patterns have often been modified by reorganisation or amalgamation of field patterns in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- St Catherine's Lighthouse is of 14<sup>th</sup> century date.
- Other historic buildings in this Area are mainly of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century date.
- Appuldurcombe Park Wall, the Worsley Monument on Appuldurcombe Down and the foundations of Cook's Castle date from the 1770s.
- The Hoy Monument on St Catherine's Down dates from 1814.
- The holm oak woodland on St Boniface Down dates from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Ventnor Radar Station dates from 1939.

### **Contribution of Historic Landscape to Present Landscape Character**

- The present landscape of the *South Wight Downland* exists as a direct result of historic processes including the prehistoric clearance of woodland on the chalk, prehistoric and Roman grazing, the use of downland as manorial common grazing in medieval and post-medieval times, and arable cultivation dating back to prehistoric times but becoming more widespread in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- The major historic components of the present landscape within this Area are listed below.
  - Surviving blocks of unenclosed chalk grassland, acid grassland and heathland.
  - *Ancient woodland* on the downland slopes.
  - Field patterns and boundaries dating back to the medieval period, although the majority are of more recent origin.
  - Features associated with the late 18<sup>th</sup> century landscape park of Appuldurcombe.
  - Parish boundaries.
  - Historic lanes, bridleways and footpaths. (The names of historic bridleways and footpaths contribute to present landscape character e.g. Bury Lane, Crocker Lane and St Rhadegund's Path.)
  - Archaeological monuments of various ages, of which Bronze Age burial mounds are the most visible features.
  - Eye-catchers on the high downland such as the 14<sup>th</sup> century St Catherine's Lighthouse, the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Worsley Monument on Appuldurcombe Down and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Hoy Monument on St Catherine's Down, not to mention 20<sup>th</sup> century radio masts.

- Holm oak woodland of early 20<sup>th</sup> century origin on St Boniface Down which gives the southern face of the downland above Ventnor a very unusual and distinctive character.
- The radar station on Ventnor Downs is the most obvious feature of 20<sup>th</sup> century origin within this Area. This large complex is quite dominant in the landscape and is a strong reminder of the Island's recent past.

### Values, Perceptions and Associations

- The downs are the part of the Isle of Wight landscape most valued by many people.
- The Isle of Wight chalk downs are perceived to be a valuable tourist asset.
- Old chalk grassland, acid grassland and heathland surviving in this Area is of ecological value.
- Unploughed land on the chalk is valued for its surviving archaeological earthworks, the most notable of which are Bronze Age burial mounds.
- The *South Wight Downland* is particularly valued for its fine views of the English Channel and of other parts of the Island to the north. The coastal path gives excellent views of the Undercliff and of Ventnor.
- The *South Wight Downland* is generally a quiet rural area although it is closer to significant settlements than is most of the West Wight Chalk Downland.
  - A road giving access to Ventnor Radio Station and car parking close to the former radar station means that this area is somewhat less tranquil than Luccombe Down to the north-east.
- The 14<sup>th</sup> century stone-built lighthouse on St Catherine's Hill is an iconic, structure, an eyecatcher and a popular tourist attraction.
  - The 14<sup>th</sup> century lighthouse is known locally as 'the pepper pot' whilst the nearby 18<sup>th</sup> century lighthouse is known as 'the salt pot'.
- St Boniface Well, on the south slope of St Boniface Down, was a holy well or spring reported by 19<sup>th</sup> century antiquarians as being much venerated by local seamen.
  - On St Boniface Day, the locals of both sexes would garland themselves in flowers and dance at the well site.
  - It is no longer possible to locate the exact site of the well which lies within an area of scrub and holm oak wood (Currie 2002 Vol 1, 64).

### Research and Documentation

- Historic Environment Record is basic resource for archaeology, built environment and historic landscape character (includes HLC layer).
- Unpublished excavation of Bronze Age burial mounds on Week Down in 1970s. Excavation archive in HER.
- Unpublished report on Isle of Wight Downlands prepared for Isle of Wight County Council (Cahill 1984).
- Archaeological and Historic Environment Surveys of St Catherines Hill and Down, and of the 'Ventnor Downs' National Trust estates (Currie 2001, Currie 2002).
- Detailed analysis of Appuldurcombe Park in report for English Heritage (Masters 2005).

### Amenity and Education

- Rights of Way give good access onto the *South Wight Downland* and over the high downs. Good access and excellent views make this area ideal for recreational walking and for educational purposes.
- The National Trust holdings within this Area are all *Access Land* as defined by the *CROW* Act of 2001. Part of Appuldurcombe Down and a small piece of woodland on Week down are also defined as *Access Land*.
- Nansen Hill, to the north of Bonchurch, is managed by the Isle of Wight Countryside Section.

- Uncultivated high downland has great time-depth and a range of archaeological monuments, making it highly suitable for educational fieldwork. It also overlooks cultivated land enclosed from open downland and open fields, thus enabling a range of historical processes to be observed and discussed on the ground.

### **Features of Particular Significance within this HEAP Area**

- Surviving areas of old grassland and heathland which have a long history as an unenclosed grazing resource.
- Archaeological earthworks and monuments dating from the Bronze Age to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, notably Bronze Age burial mounds and the 14<sup>th</sup> century St Catherine's Lighthouse .
- Field patterns showing evidence of enclosure from open-field and downland.
- Historic lanes, bridleways and footpaths.
- Historic parish boundaries, including stone boundary wall on St Catherine's Hill.
- Historic hedgerows and other boundaries.
- Ancient woodland
- Appuldurcombe Park Wall, the Worsley Monument on Appuldurcombe Down and the foundations of Cook's Castle, dating from the 1770s.
- The holm oak woodland on St Boniface Down of early 20<sup>th</sup> century origin.
- Ventnor Radar Station.
- Views over other HEAP Areas.

## **VULNERABILITY**

### **Rarity and Typicality**

- A large percentage of England's unimproved chalk grassland was lost in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Isle of Wight now contains 10% of the total surviving extent of this habitat in south-east England, some being in this HEAP Area.
- The *South Wight Downland* has archaeological earthworks typical of unploughed downland.
  - Notable among these earthworks are Bronze Age burial mounds (*round barrows*) but the overall numbers and condition of these burial mounds has declined in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of downland ploughing.
- The 14<sup>th</sup> century lighthouse on St Catherine's Hill is the second oldest such structure in England (the oldest being the Roman lighthouse at Dover).

### **Coherence**

- Within this HEAP Area there is a basic divide between west and east, with more land being under cultivation in the west of the area whereas most of the eastern downs, including Wroxall Down, Littleton Down, St Boniface Down, Bonchurch Down and Luccombe Down, are unimproved and unenclosed grasslands and heathlands.
- The western part of the Area, although much more heavily cultivated, retains a basic internal coherence, with surviving historic dispersed settlements, roads, tracks and field boundaries still enabling the landscape history of this area to be read.

### **Condition and Fragility**

- Survival of old grassland is dependent on grazing and has been affected in some areas by cessation of grazing and subsequent growth of scrub.
- Ploughing over archaeological earthworks or ploughing too close to these sites has damaged earthworks and some have been destroyed.
- Archaeological earthworks on the downs have been affected by erosion and possibly by rabbit damage.

## **CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

### **Forces for Change**

- Climate change may not have significant adverse effects on the areas of old chalk grassland, acid grassland and heathland surviving within the *South Wight Downland*.
  - Hotter, drier summers are better for chalk grassland as an ecological habitat and some species have responded positively. In this respect, it is important that both south and north facing downland slopes are retained as chalk grassland to provide different habitats.
  - More information on the possible impacts of climate change on the protected landscapes of the South East can be found in a recent report funded by SEEDA (ADAS 2006).
  - The likely impacts of climate change on the historic environment in general are discussed in a report by English Heritage (2007).
- The changing global market in which agriculture operates may work for or against the conservation of archaeological sites (i.e. the potential to take buried sites out of cultivation).
- The management regimes of bodies such as the National Trust and Wight Conservation will have an impact on the historic environment as well as on the natural environment and amenity of areas managed by these bodies.
  - An example of this is the management of holm oak woodland on St Boniface Down which the National Trust are no longer seeking to eradicate but merely to contain by the use of feral goats.
  - The National Trust now takes the view that the holm oak woodland is a habitat and a historic landscape feature in its own right, albeit of recent origin.
- Recreational use of this Area may increase in the future. This may possibly have negative impacts on the historic environment (e.g. at St Catherine's Lighthouse) and will require monitoring.

### **Management Issues**

- Need for field survey of known areas of former open-field to record surviving earthworks or fossilised boundaries.
- Need for field survey to identify and record surviving archaeological earthworks on chalk grassland not covered by National Trust surveys.
- Need to review management of rough grassland jointly with the Isle of Wight Biodiversity Action Partnership to ensure that appropriate levels of grazing are maintained and scrub is kept under control.
- There may be potential for reversion to rough grassland in some of the more marginal fields.

### **Conservation Designations**

- All of this HEAP Area is within the *AONB*.
- Nine *Scheduled Monuments* (most containing more than one archaeological item), all Bronze Age burial mounds except for St Catherine's Hill medieval lighthouse.
- There are no *Conservation Areas* within this HEAP Area as it is high downland.
- There are 13 *Listed Buildings*, far fewer than in other HEAP Areas because most of this area is high downland.
  - All *Listed Buildings* are Grade II apart from the medieval St Catherine's Lighthouse which is Grade I.
  - Grade II properties include the Hoy Monument, Worsley Monument, and the unfinished 18<sup>th</sup> century lighthouses on St Catherine's Hill.
- Appuldurcombe Park, included in the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, lies partly within this HEAP Area.
- Part of this Area falls within the Isle of Wight Downs SAC.

- SSSI's within this HEAP Area are 'St Lawrence Bank', 'Rew Down', 'Ventnor Downs' and 'Greatwood and Cliff Copses'.
- There are 13 S/INCs within the HEAP Area, including St Catherine's Down, St Catherine's Hill, Gore Down, Head Down, Appuldurcombe Down, Rew Copse and Wroxall Copse.
- There is a Local Nature Reserve at Rew Down.

## **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.
- A17.** Investigate and record condition of all archaeological earthworks within the Open Land and other HEAP Types.
- A18.** Complete Open Land Type HEAP, building on earthwork condition survey and setting out best management practices.
- A19.** Investigate funding and potential for 'ground-truthing' of selected AP sites.
- A21.** Complete HEAP for Trees and Woodland.
- 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.
- A26.** Complete HEAP for Mineral Extraction.
- A27.** Complete HEAP for Military HLC Type.
- A28.** Complete Boundaries HEAP.
- A29.** Complete Climate Change HEAP.
- A30.** Investigate potential for projects to identify archaeological features within cultivated and non-cultivated land.
- A31.** Encourage detailed field survey of selected earthworks and features.
- A32.** Facilitate supply of HEAP and HLC information to land managers, farm advisers, farmers and funding bodies.
- A33.** Facilitate use of HLC information to assess importance of hedgerows affected by hedgerow removal notices.
- A34.** Advocate protection of buried archaeological features within cultivated land.
- A35.** Promote conservation of historic farm buildings and ensure that character is maintained if converted.
- A36.** Support maintenance of downland and heathland by appropriate grazing regimes.
- A37.** Support proposals for reversion of cultivated land, improved grassland or plantation woodland that will result in restoration of historic downland or heathland.
- A38.** Support proposals which minimise damage to archaeological earthworks from agriculture, recreational activity, forestry or rabbits, and improve settings of earthworks where necessary.
- A39.** Promote the retention of significant field patterns.
- A41.** Ensure that woodland and forestry planting and management conserves historic landscape character and does not damage archaeological features.
- A42.** Support the re-introduction of traditional management of woodland where appropriate.
- A57.** Facilitate pedestrian access to all HEAP Areas and HEAP Types.
- L8.** Encourage field survey of historic quarries and pits.