

SMERRILL

Medieval settlement immediately south east of Smerrill Grange

List Entry Summary

This monument is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as amended as it appears to the Secretary of State to be of national importance. This entry is a copy, the original is held by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Name: Medieval settlement immediately south east of Smerrill Grange.

List entry Number: 1019044.

List entry Description

Summary of Monument

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Reasons for Designation

Medieval rural settlements in England were marked by great regional diversity in form, size and type, and the protection of their archaeological remains needs to take these differences into account. To do this, England has been divided into three broad Provinces on the basis of each area's distinctive mixture of nucleated and dispersed settlements. These can be further divided into sub-Provinces and local regions, possessing characteristics which have gradually evolved during the past 1500 years or more. This monument lies in the Cheshire Plain sub-Province of the Northern and Western Province, a gently rolling plain of red marl covered by ice-carried clays, sands and gravels. It is diversified by occasional sandstone escarpments, notably the Central Cheshire Ridge east of the Dee valley. It has lower densities of nucleated settlements than surrounding areas, and high concentrations of dispersed farmsteads and small hamlets. In the Wirral and the lower Dee and Weaver valleys, the settlement mix is different, with low and medium densities of dispersed farmsteads intermixed with more frequent villages. Domesday Book records a thin scatter of settlement in the Wirral, the Dee lowlands and the central and southern plain in 1086, with much woodland. The Cheshire Plain local region is marked by an enormous range of settlement forms, such as market towns, villages and scattered farmsteads. There are numerous small hamlets bearing the name 'green', associated with areas of common grazing land, as well as moated sites. All these types of settlement are known to have medieval roots, though it is not yet clear which represent the oldest forms.

Medieval villages were organised agricultural communities, sited at the centre of a parish or township, that shared resources such as arable land, meadow and woodland. Village plans varied enormously, but when they survive as earthworks their most distinguishing features include roads and minor tracks, platforms on which stood houses and other buildings such as barns, enclosed crofts and small enclosed paddocks. They frequently include the parish church within their boundaries, and as part of the manorial system most villages include one or more manorial centres which may also survive as visible remains as well as below ground deposits. In the central province of England, villages were the most distinctive aspect of medieval life, and their archaeological remains are one of the most important sources of understanding about rural life in the five or more centuries following the Norman Conquest. The earthwork, buried and standing remains of the abandoned areas of Smerrill medieval settlement are particularly well preserved and retain important archaeological and ecological deposits. The earthworks indicate the layout of the early village and how it fitted into the wider medieval landscape. As a whole the remains of Smerrill medieval settlement will add greatly to our knowledge and understanding of the development and subsequent shrinkage of medieval settlement in the area.

History

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details.

Details

The monument includes the earthwork and buried remains of the abandoned areas of Smerrill medieval settlement. The monument is situated on a narrow terrace to the south of Rowlow Brook which runs north west to south east through a steep, V-shaped valley. The monument survives as a series of well preserved earthworks which follow the upper edge of the valley scarp. The settlement is laid out on a linear arrangement along a central track which runs south east to north west. At its eastern end the track turns to the south and follows the field boundary until it meets with the existing road linking the villages of Elton and Middleton. Tradition suggests that the northern end of the track originally continued beyond the area of protection, along the edge of the valley scarp and round to the north east where it eventually met with the access road to Lowfields Farm. The track is no longer visible beyond the area of protection. Earthworks either side of the central track define a series of rectangular crofts or enclosures laid out at right angles to the track. The crofts are defined by linear, grass covered banks which represent the buried remains of walls. The banks survive up to a height of approximately 1m and short sections of walling are visible in a few exposed places. Most of the crofts contain at least one raised, rectangular platform which is defined by grass covered banks. These represent the sites of medieval buildings which, in most cases, lie adjacent, and parallel, to the track. The buildings vary in size but in many cases doorways and internal partition walls can be identified from the earthworks. The two largest and most clearly defined building platforms lie at the eastern end of the settlement. The easternmost building platform is positioned at right angles to the central track and shows evidence of at least two internal walls. The largest of the platforms suggests the building was L-shaped in plan with one section fronting onto the track and the other laid out at right angles to it. These remains

survive to a height of up to 1.5m. The name of the adjacent farm, Smerrill Grange, suggests there may have been a monastic farm or grange here. There is, however, little historical information to support this. The history of the medieval settlement also appears unrecorded. All modern field boundaries are excluded from the scheduling although the ground beneath them is included.