

Rolling Valley Farmlands

Key Characteristics

- Gentle valley sides with some complex and steep slopes
- Deep well drained loamy soils
- Organic pattern of fields smaller than on the plateaux
- Distinct areas of regular field patterns
- A scattering of landscape parks
- Small ancient woodlands on the valley fringes
- Sunken lanes
- Towns and villages with distinctive mediaeval cores and late mediaeval churches
- Industrial activity and manufacture, continuing in the Gipping valley
- Large, often moated, houses

Location

This landscape character type occurs in two main areas:

- The Stour valley from Cattawade and Manningtree upstream to Haverhill and Kedington, including the tributary valleys of the Newmill Creek (to Little Wenham), the Brett (to Hitcham and Thorpe Morieux) and the Brad (to Lavenham), the Box (to Edwardstone), the Chad Brook (to Brockley) and the Glem (to Wickhambrook)
- The valley of the lower Gipping from Sproughton upstream to the southern edge of Needham Market, and those of its western tributaries: the Belstead Brook (including the Spring and Flowton Brook, to Elmsett) and The Channel (to Great Bricett)

Geology, soils and landform

These landscapes occur on the sides of the valleys that cut through the thick layer of chalky till deposited by the retreating icesheet of the Anglian Glaciation. Chalk underlies the whole area, but there are only a few places where it outcrops on the valley sides, as at Great Blakenham or Ballingdon, near Sudbury, where there are disused 19th-century chalk pits and lime kilns.

The valleys themselves are filled with gravel, sand and silt deposits left by torrential glacial meltwaters.

Clay laid down in meltwater lakes at the beginning of the Hoxnian interglacial at Little Cornard, south of Sudbury, were exploited in the 19th and 20th centuries for making white bricks by the Tricker family and then the Cornard Brick and Tile Company. Basal deposits of 'Lower London Tertiaries' were also used for making red bricks. Similar deposits were used for the Allen family's 19th-century Ballingdon Grove Works for making both red and white bricks. London Clay deposits are used for the Bulmer Brickworks.

A large former embayment on east side of Stour to the south of Sudbury contains part of a former river channel, now largely peat-filled and known as Cornard Mere. The greater part of Stour Mere in the upper Stour valley lies in the Suffolk parish of Wixoe and was being used for osier beds in the 19th century, but is now largely infilled and overgrown, but a smaller part survives as a wet area across the county boundary in Essex, where it gave name to the parish of Sturmer (recorded as *Sturmere* in the Anglo-Saxon poem about the Battle of Maldon written around AD 1000). Semer Mere in the Brett valley also gave name to its parish (Old English *sæ* = lake/sea + *mere* = lake/mere) and it still survives as a circular open body of water near the medieval church. Baylham Fish Pond in the Gipping valley is recorded as *Liver Mere* in 1783 and former ponds at Sycamore House in Bramford were probably the remains of another mere, the place being known in the 13th century as *Siglemere* marsh. The Polstead Ponds in a tributary of the Box valley similarly gave rise to their parish name (Polstead = 'place at the pool') and must also represent an ancient mere.

Topography is generally sloping valley sides, usually relatively gentle, but sometimes with surprisingly complex and steep slopes, as at Shelley in the Brett valley. The soils are mainly well-drained deep loams of the Ludford series, overlying glaciofluvial drift. In places there are patches of the heavier Melford loams, while on the upper slopes and in the upper valleys there are deep clay soils of the Hanslope series. All have a good arable potential.

Landholding and enclosure pattern

This landscape has small and medium sized fields on the valley sides. These have an organic form were made by the piecemeal enclosure of common arable and pasture lands. There was also parliamentary enclosure that included some common arable at Haverhill (1853 and 1857), Kedington (1853) and at Cornard (1813). This has created areas of more regimented and systematic field patterns. As with the other valley side landscapes the field size tends to increase on the upper sides and plateau edges of these valleys.

The overall impression in the landscape is of sinuous and organic boundaries around the anciently enclosed fields. There are only limited areas of common arable fields enclosed systematically

The soils on these valley sides are deep, easily worked and loamy, so there has been little opportunity or incentive for the creation of parkland, Tendring Park at Stoke by Nayland is one of the more significant exceptions. Originally a medieval deer park called Stoke Park, it takes its present name from its medieval owners who came from Tendring in Essex. Their heirs were the Howards, dukes of Norfolk, who had one of their principal seats here in the 15th and early 16th centuries. Their mansion was rebuilt before 1723 by Sir John Williams, a London merchant who was 'the greatest exporter of cloth in England'. Williams also added a fashionable garden canal to the park which still exists, together with a beautiful Fishing Lodge or Temple at one end, which was added later in the 18th century. The Williams mansion was replaced in 1784 by a new one on a new site, designed by Sir John Soane for Sir Joshua Rowley. The park was redesigned by Humphry Repton (Red Book 1791) for Sir William Rowley. The Hall was demolished in 1955, but the park and the estate still survive.

Moderate-sized parks also exist at Denston and Boxted in the Glem valley, Chadacre in the Chad valley, Gifford's Hall, Polstead and Chelsworth in the Brett valley, and formerly at Bramford and Sproughton in the Gipping valley.

There has been little in the way of common pasture in this landscape because of the quality of the soils and now only small "village" greens such as at Long Melford tend to remain. Where common pasture existed at all it was found in valley floor locations such as at Little Blakenham. Historically any other reference to commons in this landscape usually refers to former common arable land, such as *Kedington Common*, *Southfield Common* and *Welchmere Common* as well as Baylham Common (there is also former *Claydon Common*, on the east side of Gipping that may be a further example of this). This usage is another indication of the cultural boundary of the Gipping divide and helps to provide some context for the use of the term tye to the south of the river.

Settlement

Overall the growth and development of villages and small towns in this landscape has been driven by the quality of the land and the agricultural prosperity that it brought. The area is also blessed with the steepest and fastest flowing rivers in the county an important and reliable source of power.

There is abundant evidence of early settlement in these river valleys. At Stratford St Mary on the Stour there is an important complex of cropmarks of Neolithic monuments: a linear cursus monument, numerous rings and a probable long barrow, suggesting that this was an important ritual centre. There are cropmarks of another cursus at Bures and numerous rings indicative of flattened Bronze Age burial mounds along the Stour valley and in the Brett and Gipping valleys. There were Roman villas at Capel St Mary in the upper valley of the Newmill Creek and at Wixoe in the upper Stour valley, as well as an enclosure at Hadleigh in the Brett valley. At the aptly named Blood Hill at Bramford in the Gipping valley two Bronze Age burials were

found in 2006 beside three Roman graves, one of which contained a murdered woman and her two children dating from the time of civil unrest and Saxon raids in the late Roman period (c.AD 350-80). In 2000 Anglo-Saxon burials of the 7th century were found in inserted in and around a Bronze Age burial mound at Hadleigh.

Clare was one of the early centres of Suffolk's medieval wool trade and that trade was responsible for the growth of many towns and villages in the Stour valley and its tributaries, as at Cavendish, Bures, Nayland, Stoke-by-Nayland, Stratford St Mary, East Bergholt, Boxford, Edwardstone, Hadleigh, Kersey, Lavenham and Bildeston. Their medieval and Tudor prosperity shows in their exceptionally rich heritage of fine timber-framed houses and magnificent churches – the latter often termed 'wool churches' in recognition of the industry that paid for them. That industry was in decline by the 17th century, slowing growth and changes to the housing stock.

The earthwork enclosure called Clare Camp, may be Late Saxon or possibly even Iron Age in origin. In the Middle Ages it was certainly used as a manorial enclosure with barns, other buildings and yards, but since the 16th century it has been used as a common pasture for the poor of Clare and forms a part of Lower Common.

Callis Street and the Market Place, together, form an elongated rectangle that stretches almost from Clare Camp to the foot of Clare Castle, with the parish church near the centre. This layout is a planned layout dating from the late 11th century: the market forming a link between the two main administrative centres (the castle for the huge feudal estate and Clare Camp for the Manor farm in Clare), with the church as a central feature. The northern part, called Callis Street, narrows at the site of the ford (bridged by the 14th century) before joining the main market place. The present High Street was earlier the High Rowe of the market. This original large open area was encroached upon by houses and shops in the later Middle Ages.

Hadleigh, in the Brett valley, was a royal residence (*villa regia*) in AD 890 when the Viking king, Guthrum, was buried there. It was later given by Ealdorman Brihtnoth of Essex (who was killed fighting the Vikings at Maldon in 991) to Canterbury Cathedral and the cathedral priory continued to be the lords of Hadleigh through the Middle Ages. The large rectangular market place was laid out to the east of Toppesfield Hall, stretching between the existing linear Market Place and Duke Street, but this has been much infilled. High Street, running parallel to the river, formed the main part of the town, but George Street and Angel Street, running off it at right angles, seem to have been part of an ambitious planned layout that was not fully built-up until modern times.

Lavenham, in the upper Brett valley, was granted a market in 1257. The new market place was laid out on a hilltop 400m to the north-east of the one bearing the original hall-and-church complex. This duality is reflected in its magnificent 15th-century church, which bears the insignia both of the manorial

lords (the earls of Oxford) and the wealthiest of the town's merchants (the Spring family). Lavenham was Suffolk's leading wool town in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, and the 15th wealthiest town in England. This wealth shows not only in buildings like the early-16th-century Corpus Christi Guildhall that flanks one side of the market place, but also in its ambitious and still surviving under-street brick drains.

The centres of all these towns and villages have retained their much of their mediaeval structure, and the majority of expansion and change has occurred on the periphery. The exception to this is Hadleigh where there has been, more change in later periods as the town continued to be more economically active than places such as Lavenham or Bildeston.

Hall and church complexes that did not expand into large settlements abound in these landscapes, often architecturally significant and frequently visually stunning. At Wissington, on the Stour, the small 11th-century church containing a well-preserved 13th-century cycle of wall-paintings forms a very atmospheric group with the late-18th-century hall designed by Sir John Soane. At Polstead, on the Box, the 12th-century church contains a brick chancel arch and arcades that are possibly the earliest surviving example of English brickwork, whilst its 73ft-high stone spire is said to be the oldest in Suffolk. At Little Wenham, on the uppers waters of the Newmill Creek, a castellated late-13th-century hall has an equal national importance as probably the earliest English building to be constructed mainly of brick.

The high arable capability of these landscapes is reflected in a preponderance of former manorial halls, many of which show their status by being moated. At Brockley, on the Chad Brook, a timber-framed manor house of c.1319 lies in the centre of a large moated site beside the parish church. Smallbridge Hall, the Tudor brick mansion of the Waldegrave family at Bures on the Stour was visited by Queen Elizabeth in 1561 and 1579. In 1561 she also visited Shelley Hall in the Brett valley, the brick mansion of her cousins, the Tilney family, standing beside its contemporary moated garden.

Not moated, but with an imposing brick gatehouse giving access to an enclosed courtyard, Gifford's Hall in Stoke-by-Nayland was described by Pevsner as 'one of the loveliest houses of its date in England'. This imposing 15th-century timber and brick complex was built by the Mannock family, who had previously acquired wealth as local clothiers and merchants.

Numerous watermills lined these valleys, which have the steepest incline or "head" if any Suffolk river valleys, including the iconic Flatford Mill in East Bergholt that was painted by John Constable. Principally flour mills, but also fulling mills connected with the cloth trade, most have either been demolished or converted to other uses, including Flatford Mill which is now a Field Studies Centre.

The workshops of the medieval cloth trade have left few obvious traces as most were accommodated within domestic settings. More intensive industrial use is only recorded to the south of Sudbury in the Stour valley and in the

Gipping valley. The former comprised the former Ballingdon Grove Works, where a grouping of 19th-century chalk pits, lime kilns, a maltings and a brickworks were linked by the Ballingdon Cut to the Stour, which had been made navigable under an Act of 1705. A number of Stour lighters (timber barges) were scuttled in the Cut during World War I and twelve still remain submerged in the water of the canal. In the lower Stour valley, the late-19th-century xylonite works at Brantham necessitated the building of Brantham New Village as an extension to the Cattawade hamlet. This was accompanied by sports fields and areas of allotments for the factory workers.

In the Gipping valley there were several chalk pits in Great and Little Blakenham, Baylham and Barking. In 1912 George Mason opened a cement works beside the railway at Great Blakenham, drawing on the local resources of chalk and clay. This survived bombing in World War II and was taken over by the Blue Circle Cement Company in 1946. It ceased production in 1996 and the buildings and landmark chimney were demolished following closure in 1999. Nearby, the Zenith engineering works were established by 1926, which is now the Claydon Industrial Park.

Trees and woodland cover

Ancient woodland is mainly confined to the upper slopes of the valleys and is mostly in relatively small parcels. Three significant large woods partly in this landscape are the adjacent Lineage Wood and Spelthorn Wood in Long Melford (both recorded by name from the 14th century), and Middle Wood in Offton.

At Polstead, the decaying remains of its famous Gospel Oak lie between the church and the Hall. Reputed to have been be the oldest living in Suffolk, it collapsed in 1953. Polstead was also reputed for its cherries (Polstead Blacks) by the early 19thC, few cherry orchards now remain, though they are still commemorated in local place-names: Cherrytree Farm, Cherry Billy's Lane and Cherry Meadow.

Visual experience

This is a rich and varied landscape with it's concentration of prosperous mediaeval towns and villages, contrasting with the smaller and less glamorous settlements of the surrounding plateaux. The steeper valleys and sunken lanes contrast clearly to most of the other valley networks in the county.

This landscape type embraces some of the most famous views and sites of Suffolk, East Anglia and England. The Stour valley is internationally renowned as 'Constable Country', being the inspiration for many of the landscape paintings of John Constable. The landscape has also inspired other artists, such as Thomas Gainsborough, Sir Alfred Munnings, Sir Cedric Morris and John Nash. This artistic legacy led to its designation as an Area of Outstanding National Beauty in 1970. The Constable-related complex at Flatford Mill features on many tourist itineraries, as do the timber-framed

buildings of Lavenham, the monumental 'wool churches' and picturesque villages such as Cavendish, Kersey and Nayland.

Condition

Much of this landscape retains its historic patterns, of both the agricultural and built environment. However, the Gipping valley has been a focus of economic activity so has been subject to transport and industrial developments. Conversely the Stour and its tributaries have been subject to some gentrification, with significant changes in land use, such as the increase in horse pastures and the loss of much commercial orchard production.