



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

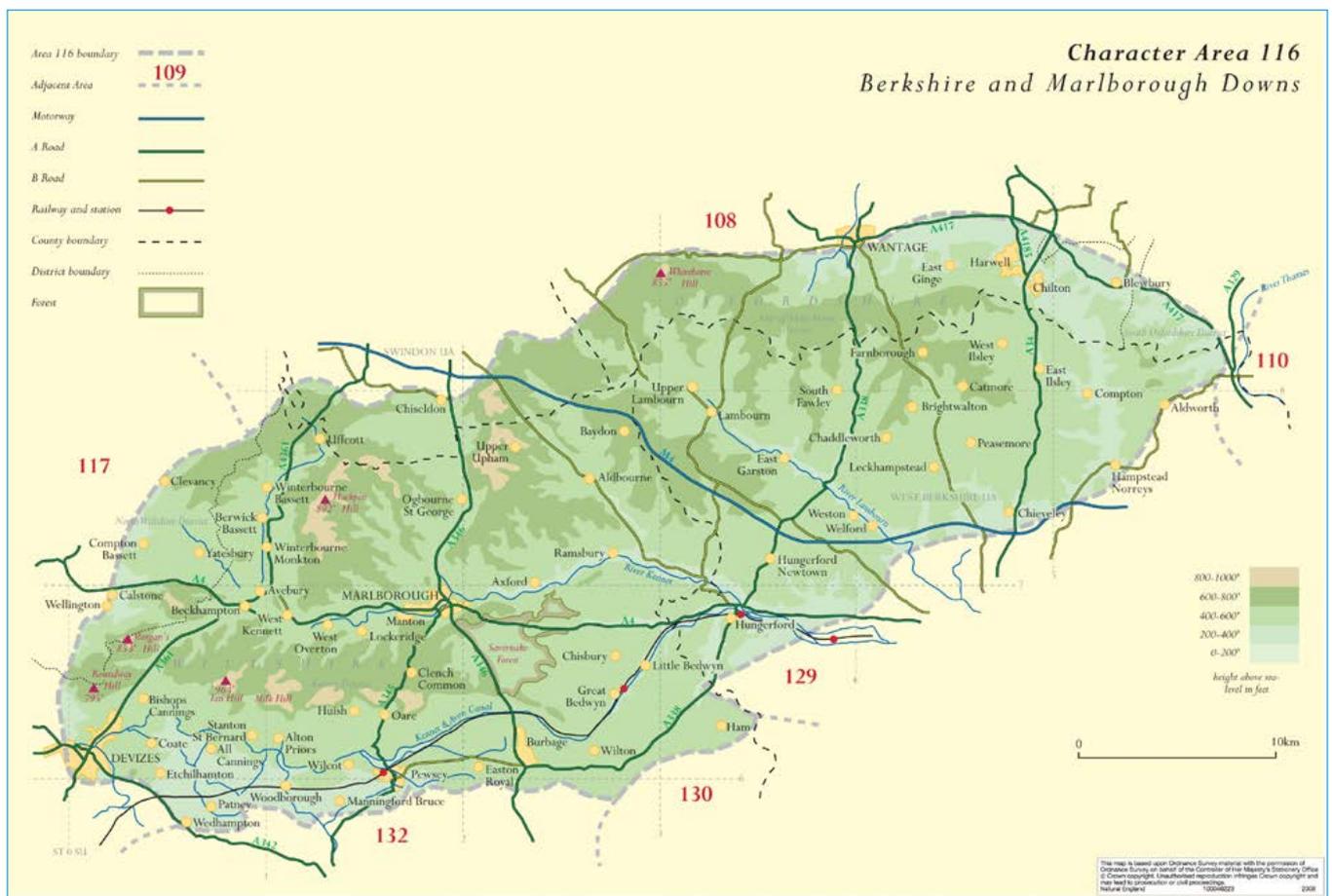
# Berkshire and Marlborough Downs

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 116



# Introduction

The Farmstead and Landscape Statements will help you to identify the historic character of traditional farmsteads and their buildings in all parts of England, and how they relate to their surrounding landscapes. They are now available for all of England’s National Character Areas (NCAs), and should be read in conjunction with the NCA profiles which have been produced by Natural England using a wide range of environmental information (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>). Each Farmstead and Landscape Statement is supported by Historic England’s advice on farm buildings (<https://historicengland.org.uk/farmbuildings>), which provides links to the *National Farmsteads Character Statement*, national guidance on **Farm Building Types** and a fully-sourced summary in the *Historic Farmsteads: Preliminary Character Statements*. It also forms part of additional research on historic landscapes, including the mapping of farmsteads in some parts of England (see <https://historicengland.org.uk/characterisation>).



This map shows the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

**Front cover:** An example of a large, arable farmstead at Chaddleworth that moved out of the village into the enclosed downland in the 18th century. The regular multi-yard group, set within large, regular fields defined by low, thorn hedges, consists of a large, ten-bay, aisled barn to one yard and a seven-bay barn to the second yard with single-storey ranges for cattle. Also forming part of the complex, are a fine, classically-proportioned early 19th-century house and 19th-century cottages for farm workers, another typical feature of large downland farmsteads. Photo © Historic England 27707/003 and /008

# Summary

See the National Farmsteads Character Statement for a short introduction to the headings below, including maps and tables.

The Berkshire and Marlborough Downs is an extensive area extending from the edge of Salisbury Plain and the West Wiltshire Downs in Wiltshire across a band of chalk to the edge of the Chilterns in Oxfordshire. In addition to the open, rolling chalk upland, the area also includes downland with woodland, more intimate river valleys and farmed vale landscapes. The area is almost entirely (97%) within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is a rural agricultural landscape with 97% of the Character Area classified as open country and just 3% urban. There is relatively low woodland cover (6.5%). Farmsteads Mapping has been undertaken across the Wiltshire part of the Character Area.

## Historic character

- This area shares many characteristics with other downland landscapes of southern England. Very large arable based holdings, by national standards, were provided with large and visually prominent courtyard farmsteads for crop processing and storage, which make the farmsteads of this area particularly prominent in the landscape. Some smaller-scale farmsteads survive within villages.
- The predominant pattern is of nucleated settlement across the Character Area, but with a distinction between the Vale of Pewsey, which has a significantly higher density of settlement, and the remainder of the area.
- Extensive medieval forests, such as the Royal Forest of Savernake, locally influenced settlement pattern and land use.
- There are large-scale courtyard farmsteads typical of downland landscapes and regular multi-yard groups with large barns, stabling, granaries, cart sheds and cattle yards. Dispersed farmsteads can be found in the Vale of Pewsey and in the area of Savernake, where small, linear farmsteads were also found.
- Timber-framing, typically clad in weatherboard, was the traditional construction form across much of the area until the later 17th century. It continued in use for most farm buildings until the 19th century. Greenstone, sarsen, chalk and brick and flint were also used, the latter mainly from the late 18th and 19th centuries. Chalk cob was also widely used for cottages and boundary walls.

## Significance

- Most farmsteads, if they remained in farming use, underwent considerable expansion in the period after 1950.
- Farmsteads Mapping shows that in the Wiltshire part of the Character Area, 62% of recorded farmsteads retain some historic farm buildings with 35% retaining more than 50% of their historic form.
- Of recorded farmsteads in the Wiltshire part of the Character Area, 17.5% have a pre-1700 farmhouse and 2.5% have a pre-1700 working

building; mostly concentrated in the Vale of Pewsey.

- Dispersed plan and linear type farmsteads, typical of common-edge farms in southern England, are a rare and unusual feature of chalkland areas.
- Aisled barns are an iconic feature of the chalklands of central England.
- There are some extremely rare surviving examples of single-storey, timber-framed animal housing of 18th-century or earlier date.
- Thatched farm buildings are now rare.

## Present and future issues

- The Photo Image Survey (2006) recorded below-average rates of conversion of listed buildings to non-agricultural (primarily domestic) uses (13.8%, the national average being 34%).

## Historic development

- Crop and soil marks, and occasionally small areas of earthworks, provide evidence for extensive field systems and farmstead sites of Iron Age, Roman and earlier date.
- By the medieval period the open downs were famous for their huge flocks of sheep that provided wool and, through their manure and the process of folding the flock on the arable land, supported valuable corn production on the lower slopes of the valleys.
- The presence of large areas of Royal Forest including Savernake had an influence on the settlement pattern and development of farmsteads.
- This area, together with other chalk landscapes of southern England saw the early development from the late 15th and 16th centuries of capitalist farmers who, from, began to enlarge their holding by taking on the demesne estates of large institutions and engrossing the holdings of smaller farmers, creating some of the largest farms in the country. There was a considerable further enlargement of farms from the later 18th century and after 1950, resulting in some exceptionally large farmsteads in a national context and now a larger farm size than other chalk downland landscapes.
- Race horse gallops, training stables and stud farms began to develop from the 19th century.

## Landscape and settlement

Devizes, Hungerford, Marlborough, and Pewsey are the principal settlements in the area; all are historic market towns. Marlborough is a planned medieval new town with a wide market place lined by regular burgage plots and it developed into a centre for cloth production.

### Chalk downs and river valleys

- The present pattern of settlement, with linear villages in the valleys alongside the principal routeways through the downs, was established by the 11th century. Evidence for deserted and shrunken settlement is also abundant. Close to the settlements, fields tend to be small, representing meadowland or, occasionally, former arable strips.
- The low density of isolated farmsteads in the landscape relates to large fields on the valley sides and higher ground which have mostly developed through a piecemeal process of enclosure and enlargement from the 15th and 16th centuries. Successive enlargement and

reorganisation has resulted in very large fields, some developing after 1950 into so-called 'prairie fields'.

- There are few hedgerows or trees on the higher ground, other than shelter belts to farmsteads and clumps of trees. There is more woodland on the valley sides. Savernake Forest, a former Royal Forest lying on an isolated area of clay overlying the chalk, forms the largest block of woodland in the Character Area. Savernake includes ancient woodland, planted beech avenues and commercial conifer plantations.
- Older hedgerows typically relate to the sinuous droves, tracks and roads running from the valleys up to higher ground, which often form the framework for manorial and parish land division, some of which developed from estates of the Roman period or even earlier.

- This open landscape retains crop marks and archaeological remains representing several millennia. These include barrows, lynchets, field systems, hill forts and linear boundaries.

### Vale of Pewsey

- In contrast to the chalk downs and river valleys, the Vale of Pewsey has significantly higher densities of nucleated settlement.
- Villages are scattered across the wide, vale landscape and are typically of linear form although they are not constrained by river valleys as is the case in the chalk downs.
- At the east end of the vale is the area of Savernake Forest where there is also a higher density of settlement including higher levels of dispersed-plan and linear-plan farmsteads of a type found elsewhere in wood pasture landscapes of lowland England.

## Farmstead and building types

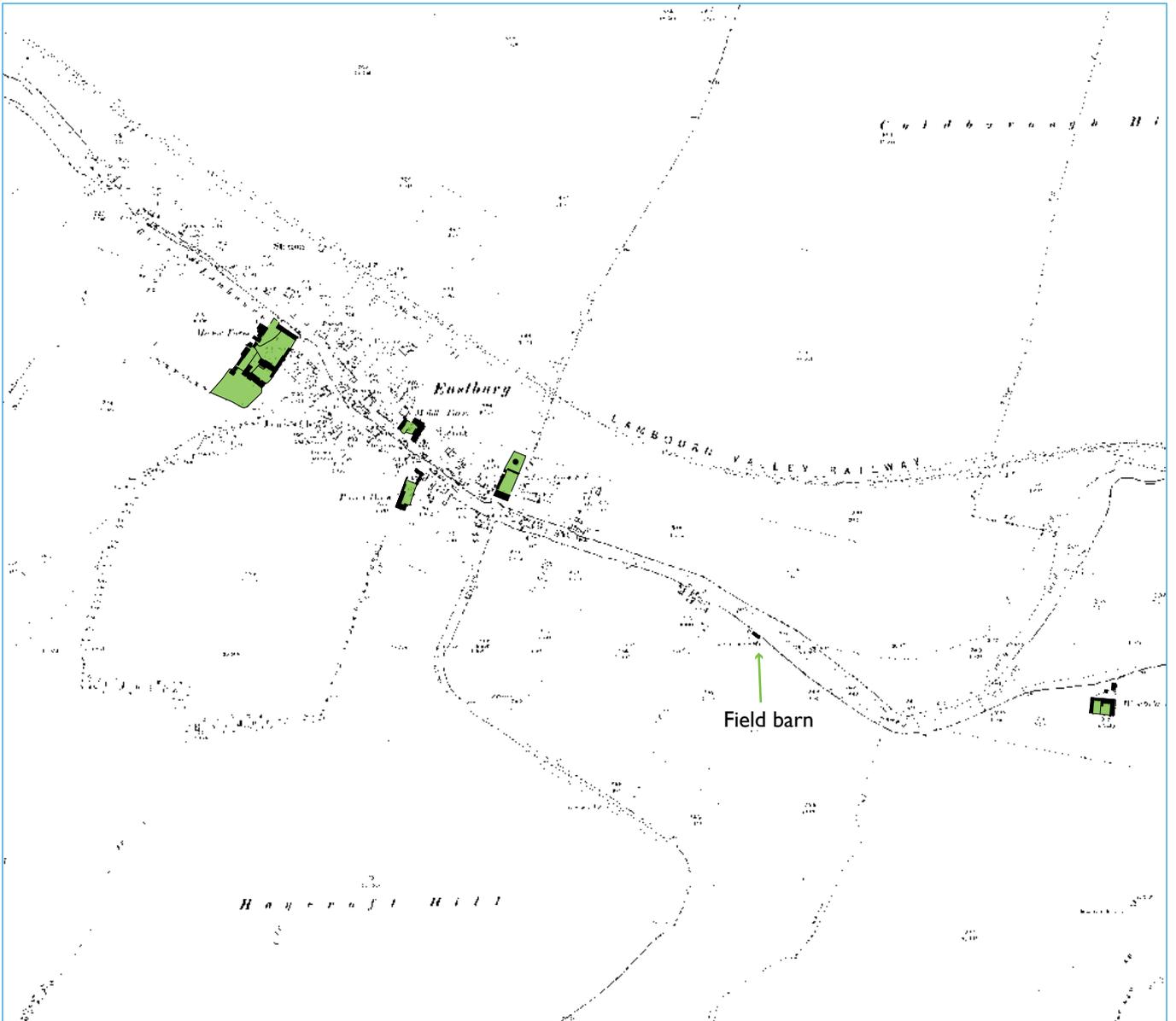
There is a medium density of pre-1750 farm buildings across this area generally whilst buildings of 17th-century or earlier date are concentrated in the Vale of Pewsey.

### Farmstead types

- Farmsteads are very large scale by national standards.
- Large-scale courtyard plans are highly characteristic, as with much of the downland of southern England. They typically have two or three detached, working farm buildings standing around one or more yard areas, with an L-plan element and detached buildings.
- Multi-yard plans were the most common plan type in the area. Regular multi-yard plans represented around a quarter of plans recorded from Ordnance Survey maps of c.1900. These plans have a number of separate yards, reflecting the management of stock combined with arable farming, and have often evolved to reflect the increased importance of cattle in the 19th century. Some multi-yard plans have a more irregular, dispersed character, often due to the presence of a detached yard, separate from a relatively regular group.
- Regular U-plan farmsteads were built in both sub-areas in the late 18th and, mostly, early 19th centuries.
- There are few large, full regular courtyard plan farmsteads; most are concentrated in the Vale of Pewsey and in the Savernake area.
- Small dispersed cluster plans were concentrated in the Vale of Pewsey in the late 19th century but are now rare survivals.
- Linear and L-plan (house attached) farmsteads were found, particularly in the area of Savernake Forest, the Vale of Pewsey and along the Kennet valley. Surviving examples are rare.

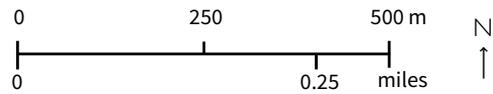
## Building types

- There is little difference in the character of farm buildings between the two sub-areas of this Character Area.
- In common with other chalk downland areas in the south, the buildings of the farmsteads of the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs demonstrate the importance of arable farming but rarely do they reflect how important sheep were to the farming economy of the downland. This was an area of large and generally prosperous farms where there was capital available for new buildings that were added to the farmstead.
- Free-standing staddle barns, which are late 18th- or early 19th-century threshing barns raised on staddle stones, are a characteristic feature of this area and the downland to the south (Hampshire Downs, and Salisbury Plain and West Wiltshire Downs).
- Large stables for working horses and, on larger farms, a separate stable for the riding horses are typical. Most stables are of 18th- or 19th-century date. Earlier stable buildings are rare.
- Granaries were provided on most farmsteads from the 18th century. These may be free-standing buildings, typically timber-framed and raised on staddle stones, or be incorporated into another building such as a loft in a barn or above a cart shed.
- Cart sheds were a feature of the majority of farmsteads which would have required several wagons and other implements associated with arable cultivation.
- Buildings for cattle typically date from the 19th century and include open-fronted shelter sheds and cow houses arranged around yards and often connected to earlier barns.
- There are – probably of unique importance in a national context and shared with Salisbury Plain and the West Wiltshire Downs to the south – some very rare surviving examples of single-storey buildings for cattle of 18th-century or earlier date.
- Sheep were rarely provided with buildings in the farmstead as the yards and shelter sheds could be used for shearing or lambing. Pens and shelters for rams, indicated by their low eaves heights, were occasionally provided and are now extremely rare.
- Large isolated downland farms often included a number of ancillary buildings and structures such as a smithy, a carpenter's workshop or a well house. Surviving examples are now very rare.
- Outfarms and field barns associated with enclosure of higher downland were once common but many have now been demolished or are derelict.



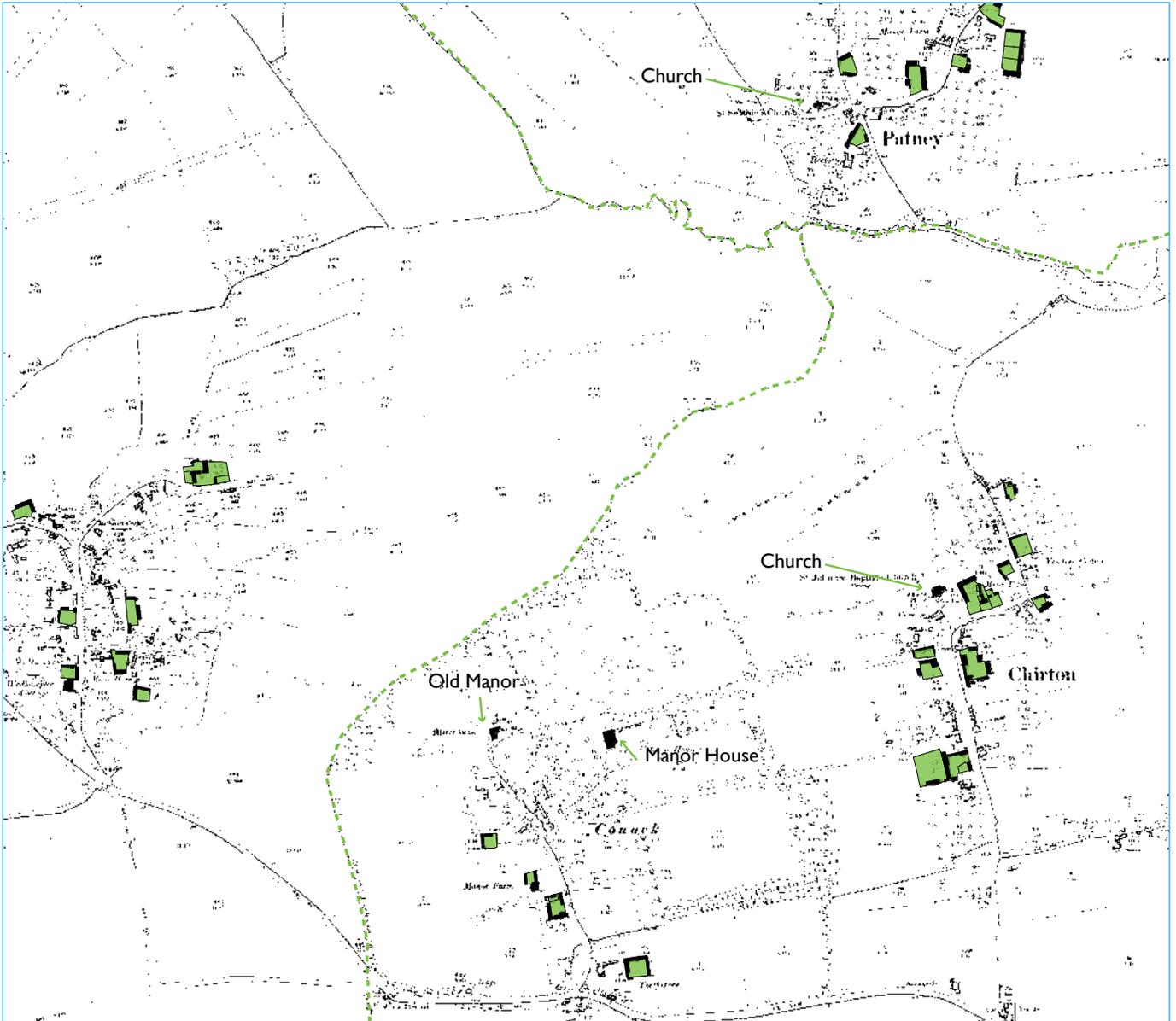
Maps are based on 2nd edition 25" Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England.  
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 Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



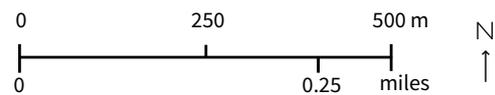
## Eastbury

Map of Eastbury, see the photos that accompany it on page 10.



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 Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.

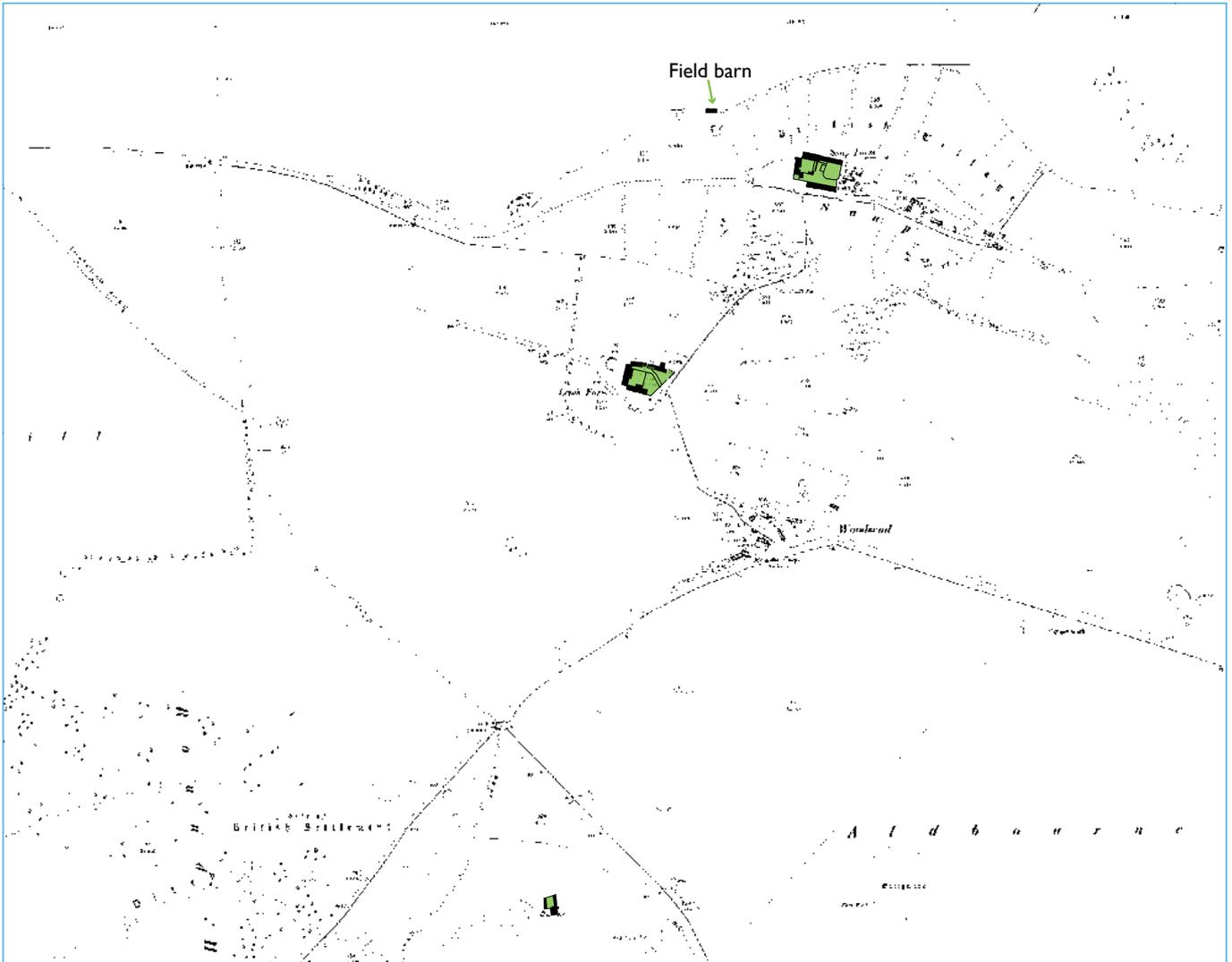


## Vale of Pewsey

The Vale of Pewsey is a very fertile area which supported a much higher density of small, nucleated settlements and farmsteads than is typical across most of the chalk downs in this Character Area. Chirton and its neighbours lie on the greensand close to the foot of the scarp of the Salisbury Plain, the parish of Chirton stretching onto the chalk to the south. Conock, to the centre of the map, is a shrunken settlement, the Old Manor dating from the 17th century and The Manor from c.1700, representing two survivals of that settlement. Whilst there was some early, informal enclosure, many of the open fields were subject to formal enclosure in the 18th and 19th centuries, producing relatively regular field patterns with only a few closes adjacent to the settlements retaining any hint of the former strip fields. As with the valley-based farmsteads, few moved away from the village core after enclosure. Medium-sized farmsteads, mostly with courtyard plans and many having L- and U-plan elements, remained in the villages but few working buildings date from before the 18th century.

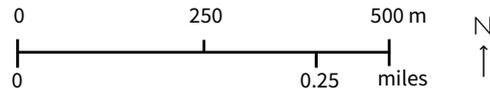


A view across the undulating Vale of Pewsey from the rising ground along the southern edge of the vale with one of the numerous, small villages in the foreground. Photo © Bob Edwards



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 Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



## Aldbourn

Whilst most farmsteads were located within the valley-based settlements in the chalk downs, some isolated farmsteads are found in the higher parts of the downs. In the case of Snap Farm and Leigh Farm, they are remnants of shrunken medieval settlement; the earthworks of the former property plots surviving around Snap Farm. To the south-west are the earthworks of an earlier, probably Iron Age or Roman-British settlement showing the long history of settlement change in this landscape. Away from the immediate area of the deserted village, the field boundaries are straight, typical of 18th- or 19th-century enclosure of downland but here may represent reorganisation of earlier field systems. The former Royal Aldbourn Chase and rabbit warrens were enclosed after damage from troops in the civil war. Archaeological excavation has shown that isolated farmsteads were also present in the downs in the 12th to 14th centuries. Surviving isolated farmsteads rarely retain any built evidence. The large farmstead in the photograph, located in the downs between the Kennet and Lambourn valleys, retains elements of 17th-century date, indicating that the downland in which this farm is set was subject to piecemeal enclosure by at least that date although boundary loss and reorganisation means that few of the present field boundaries reveal the relatively early date of enclosure. Photo © Bob Edwards





Eastbury is a classic, chalk-stream valley village, the road along the valley forming the main street through the linear plan village, with roads descending into the valley from the downs to either side. The village houses, many of which will have originated as farmsteads but are long removed from agricultural use, stand in relatively regular plots, suggestive of planning in the layout of the settlement. Typically, the larger farms are found on the edges of villages in the downland but at Eastbury one former farmstead survives in the heart of the village. The massive roof of its 17th-century, aisled barn lying parallel to the street makes a major contribution to local character – aisled barns being a major feature of the chalk downs of central southern England. This barn is accompanied by a second barn, a stable range, a cart shed and a 17th-century dovecote which is indicative of the high status of the site. Photos © Historic England 27706/044 and 045



A typical, large-scale loose courtyard farmstead, with all the working buildings required for an arable working farm, within the context of shrunken medieval settlement and a large green close to the medieval church at Aldworth. The farmstead includes a 16th-century house and two 16th- to 18th-century, timber-framed, aisled threshing barns defining two sides of the yard, with a large, staddle granary to the third side. Stabling was provided in the range attached to the farmhouse backing onto the road on the fourth side of the yard. The area has a relatively high proportion of woodland and 16th-century or earlier farmsteads set within fields enclosed from woodland and in settlements where large farmsteads developed around greens and commons, within land enclosed from medieval fields at an early date. Photo © Historic England 27707/027



A large, loose courtyard plan farmstead. At the end of the 19th century, this farmstead had working buildings to four sides of the yard with the farmhouse detached from the yard, facing out across the landscape. The large, aisled barn with two threshing bays, dating from the 18th century is the dominant building in views to the farmstead and appears to have been positioned to be highly visible to passers-by. Photo © Bob Edwards



A courtyard group with an L-plan element that has developed over time, probably from a loose courtyard plan. The timber-framed barn forming part of the right-hand range has been extended with a brick and flint building against its gable. The L-plan range consists of a 19th-century brick and flint stable with a later brick range at right angles replacing an earlier, long range to this side of the yard, which provided cattle housing. The farmhouse dates from the 17th century and may be a remnant of a hamlet located in the higher downs, away from the principal settlement in the river valley. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large, late 19th-century, brick-built regular multi-yard farmstead in the Vale of Pewsey consisting of two shallow U-plan ranges, the main ranges lying parallel to each other with the open sides facing south-east and serving a series of yards. The ranges are almost wholly devoted to cattle housing and pigs – there is no large, conventional threshing barn on this farmstead, suggesting that the farmstead was built with dairying as the principal activity. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large, aisled barn on a manor farm. This barn is of nine bays with aisles to both sides and the ends and has two cart entrances. The barn was built in the 17th century but the carpenters used many older timbers including some cruck blades, possibly from an earlier barn on the site. Photo © Bob Edwards



This unaisled, 17th-century barn of a village-based farmstead is an important feature of the street scene, the farmhouse being set back behind the barn. The barn is of six bays with a hipped thatched roof. Photo © Bob Edwards



A smaller, four-bay barn with the threshing bay located in the end bay, an unusual arrangement in southern England. The porch is a later addition. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A two-storey, timber-frame and brick staddle granary with tiled, half-hipped roof. This building is of late 17th- or early 18th-century date. Photo © Bob Edwards



A rare example of a 19th-century malt house, located on a village farmstead in Aldbourne that retains its characteristic cowled vent to the drying chamber. With the loss of this feature, it would be difficult to identify the function of this building without an internal inspection. Photo © Bob Edwards



A rare and significant late 16th- or early 17th-century, timber-framed cow house in the Vale of Pewsey with a single original entrance to the centre, with two doors to the full-length hay loft which has hay drops to mangers below. Photo © Wiltshire Buildings Record



A single-storey, stone-built stable with a half-hipped roof which has been extended over a later brick addition. Photo © Bob Edwards



A rare surviving outfarm group, now converted to equestrian use, located within the open downland in the west of the Character Area. Photo © Bob Edwards



A typical L-plan outfarm range, providing cattle housing and a threshing barn. Photo © Bob Edwards



Sarsen stone is a hard sandstone which was used for plinths and boundary walls and, more rarely, for complete walling. Here the stone has brick quoins and dressing to the openings. Photo © Jeremy Lake

## Materials and detail

- Timber-framing, often covered in weatherboard, was the traditional construction form across much of the area until the later 17th century. It continued in use for most farm buildings until the 19th century.
- Brick combined with flint is also characteristic, its use dating mainly from the late 18th and 19th centuries.
- Sarsen stone, a hard, grey sandstone, was used for the foundation of some houses and in the Avebury area was used as a roughly coursed rubble. Sarsen stones can also be seen used in the foundations of farm buildings and boundary walls particularly in the area between Amesbury and Chiseldon. Greensand was available in some areas such as the Vale of Pewsey and may be used squared combined with flint to create chequerboard or banded patterns.
- Chalk was rarely used externally but was often used as the inner skin to brick walling.
- Chalk cob was also widely used for cottages and boundary walls.
- Straw thatch was the usual roofing material for houses and farm buildings.
- Welsh slate was widely used from the later 19th century.
- Plain clay tiles were also used, particularly in the central and eastern part of the area. Patent Roman tiles are more common in the west of the area.



# Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by  
Jeremy Lake with Bob Edwards.

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For more detailed guidance on farmsteads in  
Wiltshire see the **Wiltshire Farmsteads Guidance**  
on the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre's  
website at <http://www.wshc.eu/visiting-the-centre/24-our-services/archaeology/253-wiltshire-farmsteads.html>

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