



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Avon Vales

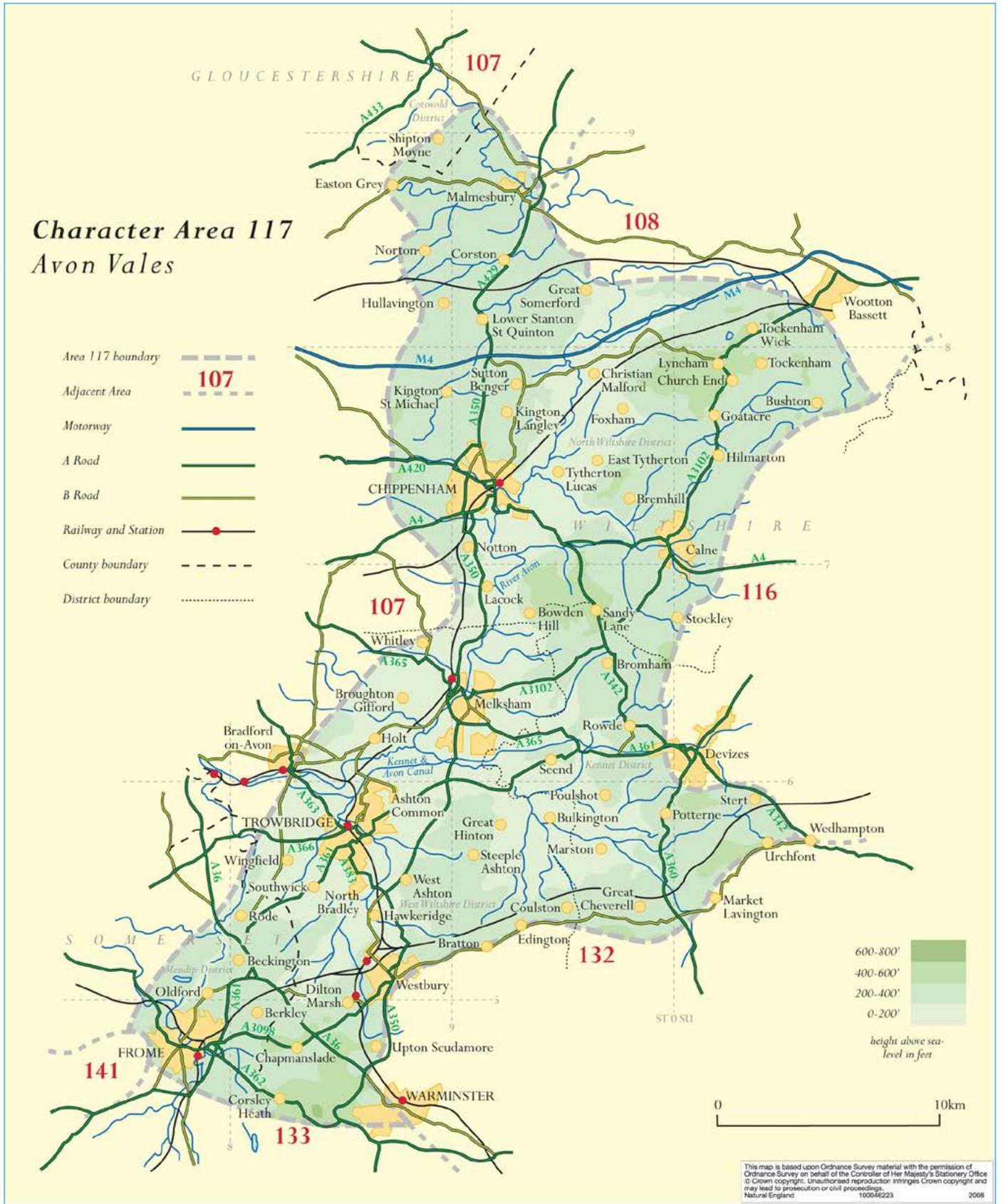
NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 117



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>).

Front cover: A regular courtyard group which probably developed in a piecemeal way with buildings to house cattle and horses being added to the gables of the earlier, timber-framed threshing barn and returning to define the sides of the yard. The farmhouse stands detached from the working area and is served by its own entrance, typical of higher-status farms in this area. The farmstead lies at the junction between fields of piecemeal enclosure and fields that are generally regular in form, suggesting an area of reorganised, earlier enclosure or enclosure of common land. Photo © Historic England 27694/011



This map shows the Avon Vales, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

Summary

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

The Avon Vales are bounded by the Cotswolds to the west and by the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs, Salisbury Plain and West Wiltshire Downs to the east. To the north is the Upper Thames Clay Vales and the Blackmoor Vale and Vale of Wardour to the south. This is a low lying, varied landscape, reflected in the settlement patterns and building styles. Approximately 9% of the Character Area is urban, nearly 81% is cultivated and 5% is woodland. Over 3% of the area lies within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Farmsteads Mapping has been undertaken across the Wiltshire part of the Character Area.

Historic character

- This is an area of mixed settlement patterns with nucleated villages intermixed with hamlets and dispersed farmsteads, often associated with areas of common. Medium to small-scale farmsteads predominate.
- The area is mixed farming with an emphasis on stock fattening and dairying, undertaken within a complex pattern of enclosure with former open fields largely enclosed by agreement by the 17th century, and piecemeal enclosure of common.
- Regular multi-yards predominant with loose courtyard plans. The regular plan types are strongly associated with estate landscapes that are important in parts of the area. There is some survival of dispersed plans.
- Stone is widely used for walling across the area, with stone slates for roofing, particularly in the west. There is some limited timber-framing; most framing was replaced by the 17th century. Straw thatch was widely used and remains an important characteristic.

Significance

- Of the recorded farmsteads (in Wiltshire), 70% retain some historic farmstead character, with 51% retaining more than 50% of their historic form.
- Of the recorded farmsteads (in Wiltshire), 20% retain a pre-1700 farmhouse and 4.4% have a pre-1700 working building.
- This area contains some rare surviving examples of 18th-century and earlier cattle housing in a national context.
- Some dairies and cheese houses retain features relating to their historic use, which are extremely rare in a national context.
- Surviving pigsties of 17th-century or later date are a significant feature of farmsteads in this area.



A large, regular multi-yard plan farmstead adjacent to the ruins of Bradenstoke Priory adjacent to the north side of the military airfield at Lyneham. The farmstead consists of a number of regularly laid out yards, each served by detached buildings including two barns, cow houses and shelter sheds. Photo © Historic England 26920/024

Present and future issues

- In this area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded medium rates of conversion of listed buildings to non-agricultural (primarily domestic) uses (29.8%, the national average being 34%).
- Dereliction of unlisted farm buildings is a visible issue.

Historic development

- Towns of the area (the early Christian centre of Malmesbury, Calne, Chippenham, Melksham and Trowbridge), located along or accessible from the major communication route of the River Avon, all developed as important centres of the wool trade and broadcloth production from the late 14th century, increasing in importance from the 16th century.
- The wealth from this industry financed the rebuilding of churches from 15th century, merchants' houses and minor domestic architecture and mills. The industry declined from the early 19th century largely due to competition from northern England where new technologies for production were employed.
- There is mixed agriculture: many areas are associated with development of the dairying industry from the 17th century, particularly cheese production.
- In comparison with the chalklands to the east, this area generally had weaker manorial control, resulting in the selling of manorial land and the creation of small family farms from the 16th century.
- Development of parkland, including from monastic estates such as Lacock and especially marked in the clay vales to the east, marked by the development of landscape parks like Spye or Bowood and the development of gentry houses.

Landscape and settlement

- The predominant pattern is of nucleated settlement intermixed with dispersed settlement, especially in areas of early woodland clearance, including some moated sites. The extent of woodland in the Saxon period is marked by 'leah' and 'wood' names, for instance around Bowood with additional isolated farmsteads associated with enclosure of areas of open fields, common and marsh in the post-medieval period.
- Small areas of common can form a focus for small, often secondary settlements creating small greens. In some cases, several foci coalesce to create polyfocal villages.
- Areas of extensive open fields around settlements have been subject to piecemeal enclosure from the 14th century. In some cases, the pattern of the former strips is fossilised within the field boundaries.
- Small and irregular fields to areas of ancient enclosure were created through medieval woodland clearance (assarting) with more varied medium-scale fields associated with later piecemeal enclosures. The areas of regular enclosure are generally small, with characteristic straight field boundaries of 18th- or 19th-century date, usually creating small to medium-scale fields.
- The fields in dairying areas in particular, often became smaller in the post-medieval period.
- Ancient woodland is concentrated on valley sides (for example, around Lyneham), on former common land, adjacent to streams and river banks and in areas of historic parkland (for example, Bowood). Hedgerow trees are common in pastoral areas.

Farmstead and building types

There is a medium survival of pre-1750 farmstead buildings in this area.

Farmstead types

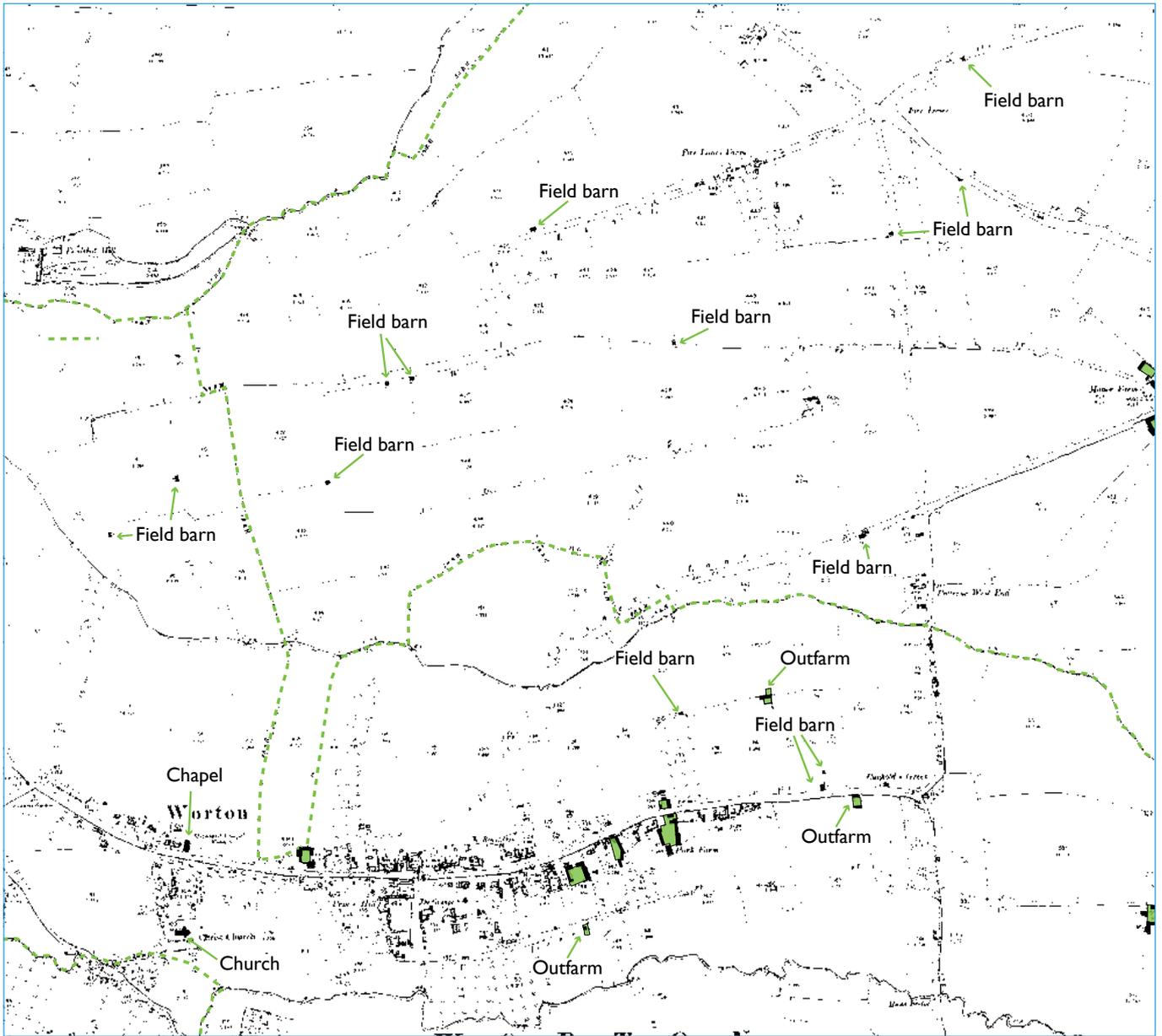
- Loose courtyard plans, typically with buildings to one or two sides of the yard but also some courtyards incorporating an L-plan element and other detached buildings, are mostly concentrated in the southern half of the Character Area.
- Multi-yard farmsteads predominate: most (just under one third of farmsteads recorded in the Character Area) being regular-multi-yards but with some dispersed multi-yard plans. These farmsteads reflect the need to manage stock combined with arable farming and are concentrated in the northern part of the Character Area.
- Dispersed cluster plans were a feature of the area but most have experienced high levels of change.
- Apart from regular L-plan farmsteads, the larger, regular courtyard plans are generally uncommon in the area: the largest types being found in the area east and south-east of Chippenham, where several large estates are found.
- Linear plan types were found in small numbers across the area but are now rare.

Building types

- Barns are stone-built; they are typically of five bays with a central threshing floor and porches (sometimes full-height with first-floor granaries). There are many substantial surviving examples of the pre-1750 period. A few aisled barns are found in the eastern fringes of the area.
- There are many combination barns, typically with cow house, stabling and a first-floor granary, some of early 18th-century or earlier date.
- Some staddle stone granaries can be found, mostly timber-framed or brick.
- There is some very rare surviving evidence for 18th-century and possibly earlier ox houses and cow sheds (for example, at Wingfield). Shelter sheds to cattle yards are a common feature, some dating from the 18th century but mostly they are 19th-century in date.
- Brewhouses and dairy houses – often integrated into rear wings of farmhouses, sometimes with cheese lofts on the upper floor – can date from the late 17th century or earlier, but most commonly from the 19th century.
- Pigsties, often with associated poultry lofts and some dating from the 17th century, were found on most dairy farms in the area. Surviving examples are often threatened by neglect or demolition.
- In the western part of the area, long stone wagon sheds with open ends survive on the boundaries of some farmsteads.
- Small outfarms, typically with one or two buildings around a yard, were found across the area. Field barns were also a feature of the area with a high concentration in the area south-west of Potterne. Field barns and outfarms have been subject to high rates of change and loss.

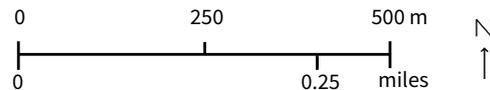


The importance of cattle over arable is reflected in many farmsteads in the area in the single-storey ranges of buildings and regular multi-yard plans. Here, the largest yard has detached sheds to four sides of the yard, with an open-fronted shelter shed of at least 17 bays to one side. There is a barn in this group with a smaller yard area to the rear of the farmhouse, the barn being of just three bays. This isolated farmstead has medieval origins; the earliest element of the house dates from the 15th century. Photo © Bob Edwards



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. © Crown Copyright [and database rights] 2020. OS 100024900

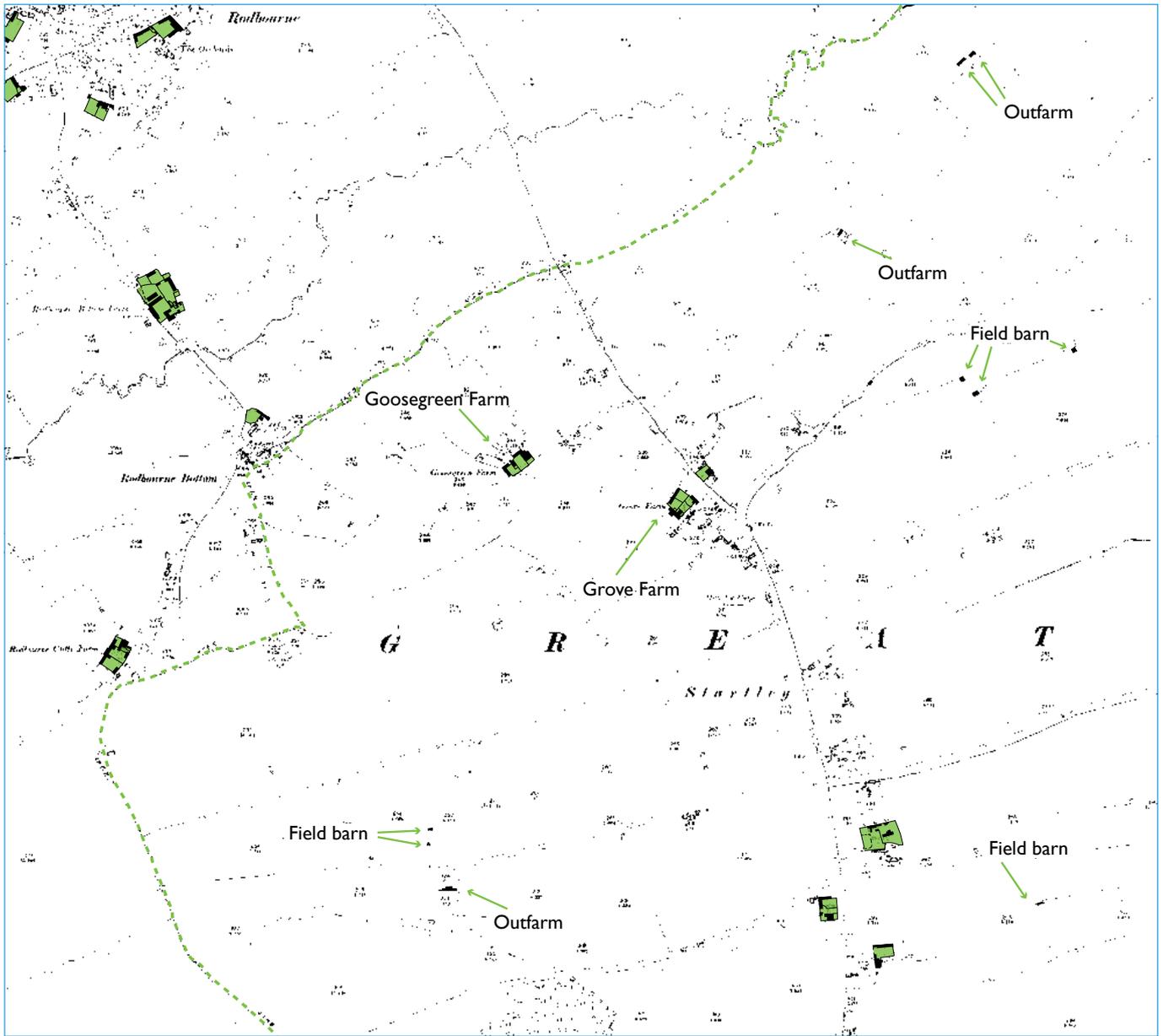
 Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



Worton

Worton is a linear plan village that formerly lay within Potterne parish, together with another secondary settlement, Marston. The pattern of fields created through enclosure by agreement of former strip fields to either side of the village is clear through the slightly curving boundaries of the fields. Within the village, a number of small to medium-sized farmsteads survive with loose courtyard or L-plan groups, two with pre-1700 farmhouses and a number of small field barns standing within the enclosed strips. To the north of the stream that bounds the strip fields are larger fields, some of which also have slightly curving boundaries, but overall the pattern appears to be the result of piecemeal enclosure possibly of former marsh. Small field barns were also located within a number of these fields. The barn, set gable-end to the main street through Steeple Ashton (below) shows how farm buildings can play an important part of the street scene in many of the small villages within the area.

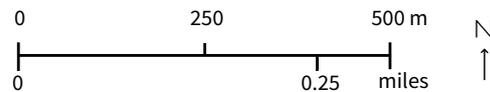




Maps are based on 2nd edition 25° Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England. © Crown Copyright [and database rights] 2020. OS 100024900



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



Great Somerford

This extract, located in the western part of Great Somerford parish, shows the complexity of the enclosure patterns that are characteristic of this area and influence of areas of former common. To the east of the north-south road through Startley, the slightly curving boundaries suggest that these fields are the result of enclosure by agreement of the former open fields of the village to the east. On the west side of the road, Goose Green Farm is associated with a small area of irregularly shaped fields typical of piecemeal enclosure. West of Grove Farm is a strip of larger fields with both straight and irregular boundaries whilst to the south is a strip of smaller 'ladder' fields with regular boundaries either side of a trackway, with medium-sized irregular fields to the south. Startley is a settlement of at least medieval date which was located on the edge of an area of common called Startley Marsh, the varied fields to the west representing enclosure of this area of common, probably from the early 17th century. In addition to the identified farmsteads, other small houses that possibly utilised the common were built, some encroaching onto the common. Most of the farmsteads were rebuilt in the 19th century but Grove Farm can be dated to the 17th century by documentary sources.



A regular multi-yard farmstead at Easton with a barn and attached sheds, including shelter sheds and stables forming the yard in front of the house and a second yard with an L-plan range of cattle housing to the side. This farmstead, part of a hamlet which includes a second, regular multi-yard farm, is set within piecemeal enclosure fields and illustrates the importance of yards for cattle on farmsteads in this area. Photo © Historic England Archive 27695/044



A dispersed multi-yard group wrapped around the edge of the medieval church yard at Poulshot. This farm and church are slightly detached from a hamlet group consisting of one other farm and some cottages. Photo © Historic England Archive 27695/066



This dispersed farmstead group with a 17th-century farmhouse stands around the edge of the churchyard. Within the adjacent field are the earthworks of a medieval moat at Poulshot. Typically, the buildings are predominantly single-storey cow houses and shelter sheds; the stable with a hay loft over is the largest scale of the working buildings. Photo © Bob Edwards



A mid-19th-century, small, loose courtyard group with buildings to two sides of the yard: a three-bay barn and a stable beyond. Built by Lord Crewe, this small farmstead is an example of estate architecture extending down to relatively small farmsteads in the area near the park. Photo © Bob Edwards



A regular L-plan yard on a small to medium-scale farmstead. Both ranges are single storey and there is no barn. Photo © Bob Edwards



An early 19th-century threshing barn built in ironstone with stone-slate hipped roof on a larger farmstead. Internally, the walls of the barn are lined in brick. The farmhouse, attached to the left, is of c.1840. This barn was a multifunctional building; the smaller doors are original features. Photo © Bob Edwards



This four-bay barn has been subject to numerous changes, reflecting the variations in the balance between arable and stock on farms in this area. The threshing bay has been blocked, probably as part of its conversion to a cow house. There are also blocked doors: probably relating to its use for cattle or stabling, possibly as part of a combination barn. Photo © Bob Edwards



In the west of the area, farm buildings share many characteristics with the neighbouring Cotswolds, although here barns tend to be smaller. This early 19th-century, four-bay barn has lean-tos either side of the porch, the larger one possibly for calves. Photo © Bob Edwards



Large stables are not common in this area due to the limited extent of arable; only the larger farms having substantial stables. This example is of two storeys with the hay loft accessed from the road, which is higher than the yard, and a cart shed accessed from the far gable end. Photo © Bob Edwards



This area retains some early examples of cow houses dating from the 17th or 18th century that are rare in a national context. Photo © Bob Edwards



Open-fronted shelter sheds are the most common building type on farmsteads in this area. They are typically stone built with timber posts to the open front but here, in the west of the area, they have stone piers. Photo © Bob Edwards



A late 19th-century, covered yard building with a typical vented ridge and numerous window openings. Photo © Bob Edwards



Fittings relating to dairies and cheese lofts such as hoists for lifting the cheese and shelves or racks for their storage are now extremely rare and significant. These survive in the dairy shown overleaf. Photos © Alyson Curtis



The ruins of a small, 19th-century field barn, with a hay loft over housing for cattle. Some field barns in this area may also have provided shelter for milking. Photo © Bob Edwards



This two-storey building, attached to the rear of the farmhouse, provided a dairy to the ground floor with a cheese loft above. Occasionally, dairies are detached buildings but are rarely found far from the house. Photo © Alyson Curtis

Materials and detail

- Stone buildings utilise a wide range of materials including Corallian limestone (often termed 'Rag') and the more finely-worked Bath and Cotswold limestones.
- 17th century and earlier timber frame is now concentrated in towns and rarely seen in farm buildings, although evidence of earlier timber-framed buildings is sometimes found in the re-use of timbers.
- Brick was increasingly used from the 18th century, and often used in conjunction with stone facades.
- Stone slates are the dominant roofing material in the north-west of the area adjacent to the Cotswolds with some limited use elsewhere in the area.
- Straw thatch was common but has been replaced on some farm buildings with slate or tile including pantiles and patent Roman tiles brought in from Somerset.



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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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