



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

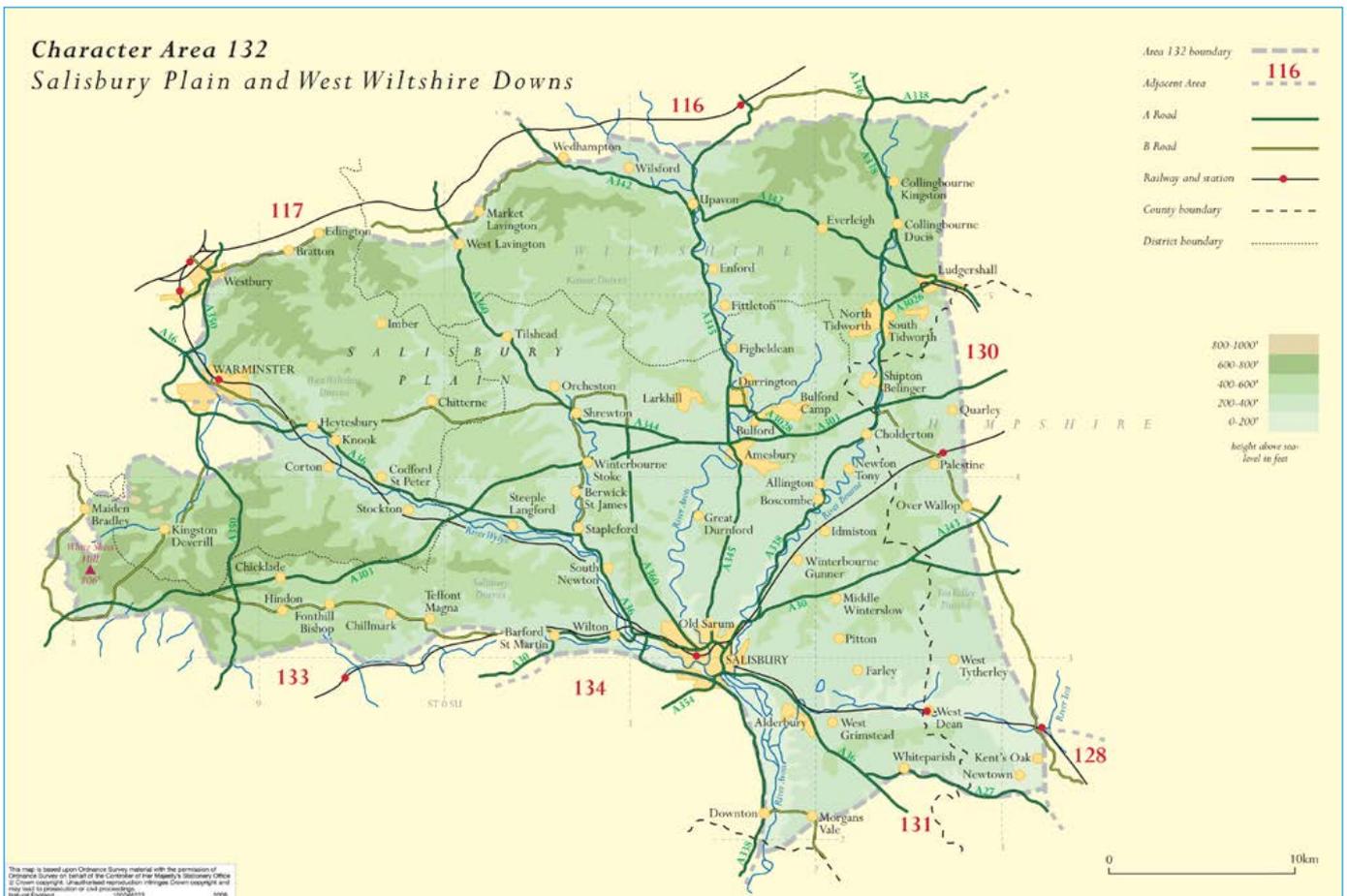
Salisbury Plain and West Wiltshire Downs

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 132



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 Salisbury Plain and West Wiltshire Downs, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

Front cover: A regular multi-yard plan farmstead on a manor farm. This farmstead appears to have developed this plan form by the 17th century – both of the aisled barns are of that date. In the paddock adjacent to the farm are earthworks relating to a shrunken settlement. Photo © Bob Edwards

Summary

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

Salisbury Plain and West Wiltshire Downs are bounded by the chalk downland of the Hampshire Downs and the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs on the northern and eastern sides and by the Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase in the south-west. The Character Area is almost entirely within Wiltshire, with a small part of the eastern edge in Hampshire. The dominant and unifying features of the landscape are rolling chalklands, steep escarpments and sheltered chalk valleys. Just under 30% of the area is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs). It is a very rural area with just under 4 % classified as urban. Woodland cover is 8% and over 70% is agricultural land. Farmsteads Mapping has been undertaken across the Character Area.

The key sub-areas are: Salisbury Plain
 The east and south of the 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 resulting from the growth of large capital-based farms from the 15th and 16th centuries but mainly associated with 18th- or 19th-century enclosure of downland.
- The predominant pattern is one of nucleated settlement along river valleys.
- There is a low density of very large-scale isolated farmsteads in the landscape.
- Enclosure of open fields and downland was largely undertaken in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- Large-scale courtyard farmsteads are typical of downland landscapes, with large barns, stabling, granaries, cart sheds and cattle yards.
- Outfarms of 19th-century date can be 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.
- Of the recorded farmsteads (in Wiltshire), 70% retain some historic farmstead character and 51% retain more than 50% of their historic form.
- Of recorded farmsteads, 20% retain a pre-1700 farmhouse and 4.4% of recorded farmsteads have a pre-1700 working farm building but few farmsteads have both a pre-1700 house and farm building.
- There are some large-scale courtyard groups with ranges of buildings representative of arable-based agriculture, including some notable estate farmsteads.
- There are some examples of dispersed plan farmsteads which are rare, particularly in a chalk downland context.
- Thatched farm buildings are now rare.

Present and future issues

- There are below-average rates of conversion of listed buildings to non-agricultural (primarily domestic) uses (20–30%, the national average being 34%).
- This area now has some of the largest corn-producing farms in England.

Historic development

- There is extensive settlement from the Neolithic period, resulting in loss of woodland cover and development of arable-based agriculture combined with grazing on species-rich grasslands. Salisbury Plain contains a remarkable survival of prehistoric monuments, most famously Stonehenge but numerous other features including barrows, a cursus and henges. Away from the Plain – where many of these monuments survive as earthworks because of the use of the Plain by the military, and the subsequent absence of ploughing – agriculture has reduced many monuments to crop and soil marks which provide evidence for extensive field systems and farmstead sites of Iron Age or Roman and earlier date.
- Salisbury, dominated by its cathedral spire, is the main urban area. Salisbury is a medieval new town sited close to its earlier hilltop location at Old Sarum. Amesbury and Wilton developed from important royal Saxon centres whilst a planned urban settlement was attached to an earlier Saxon manor at Downton. Warminster, on the western edge of the area, developed as a medieval new town in the 13th century.
- This area, together with other chalk landscapes of southern England saw the early development of the capitalist farmer; farmers who, from the late 15th and 16th centuries, 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 enlargement of farms from the later 18th century, estates having a more profound impact on the character of this area than neighbouring downland in southern England.
- Demand for liquid milk, combined with a fall in grain prices in the 1880–1940 period, saw many farmsteads converting to serve stock rearing or dairying, whilst others increased their corn production.
- There are several important country houses with their associated parks and estates, for example, Wilton House and the well-timbered

historic parks like Boyton and Wilbury, which lie in similar valley-side settings. The Wilton estate took an especially active part in agricultural improvement and the building of large-scale farmsteads in the early to mid-19th century.

- The use of Salisbury Plain for the training of the military has had a major impact on

Landscape and settlement

A major theme in this area is the continuity of use and division of the landscape with features ranging from the Bronze Age, Roman and early Saxon periods all being used as boundaries for medieval estates and parishes, suggesting that many of the land units seen today reflect much earlier territorial divisions. There is also a strong pattern of long, narrow land units representing parishes and tithings stretching from the valley to the higher downland, giving each community access to the range of resources: water, meadow, arable on the lower slopes and downland grazing. These land units are often defined by tracks and droves giving a strong grain to the landscape.

Salisbury Plain

- Salisbury Plain is an area with some of the lowest densities of settlement in lowland England, primarily due to the use of the area as a military training ground with a small number of nucleated villages such as Tilshead within the Plain. Chitterne and Shrewton lie in the upper parts of river valleys that drain southwards.
- This area is a large-scale, open landscape with some areas that have been returned to downland although large areas are still under arable cultivation.

East and South of the area

- Rural settlement is mostly nucleated, with linear villages strung along the river valleys and with a long history, probably dating to the Romano-British period or earlier. Within these valley-based settlements there is evidence for both medieval planning in

the landscape; at least one village was abandoned during the Second World War and arable farming ceased over a large part of the Plain. Military barracks developed from the late 19th century around and within the Plain including those at Bulford, Larkhill, Tidworth and Warminster.

the form of regular property plots and the desertion and shrinkage of settlements in the 14th and 15th centuries. The present pattern of discrete villages separated by farmland is often the result of loss of some villages or shrinkage of existing villages from the 14th and 15th centuries.

- There is very little dispersed settlement. Many farmsteads expanded within or on the edge of villages, and others result from the late enclosure of downland and the movement of farms out of the villages to the newly enclosed fields.
- Some piecemeal enclosure of the open fields was underway by the 15th century. However, most of the open fields survived until the 18th and 19th centuries when they were subject to Parliamentary enclosure. Due to the framework of sinuous parish boundaries, droves and tracks stretching from valley to downland, the resultant enclosures do not have the strong regularity usually associated with Parliamentary enclosure although the internal boundaries are invariably straight.
- On the higher downs, regular enclosure is more obvious although here the topography often dictated the course of field boundaries, softening the regularity of the new fields. Occasionally areas of earlier enclosure are seen on the downland. Intensification of arable production has often resulted in the removal of hedges, or surviving hedges are in poor condition.
- On the downland there is very little woodland except for shelter belts planted around 18th

or 19th-century outfarms and farmsteads and some small plantations of beech or conifers. There is more woodland on valley sides, steeper slopes in combes and on the scarp slope.

- Water meadows, developed from the 17th century, are an important feature of many river valleys particularly along the Avon valley south of Salisbury.

Farmstead and building types

- In common with other chalk downland areas in the south, the buildings of the farmsteads in this area 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. There is a medium survival of pre-1750 buildings in this area, with an apparent concentration of 17th-century farmhouses and working buildings in the Wylde valley.

Farmstead Types

- As with much of the downland of southern England, medium to large-scale, loose courtyard plans with two to four detached working farm buildings standing around a yard area or incorporating an L-plan element, are the dominant plan form.
- A large proportion of large farmsteads have 'multi-yard plans' where there are a number of separate yards reflecting the management of stock. These plans have often evolved, reflecting the increased importance of cattle in the 19th century. These plans are mostly regular multi-yards but, unusually for a chalk downland area, they also include dispersed multi-yard farmsteads although these have

often been subject to significant levels of change since c.1900.

- Larger, regular courtyard plan farmsteads including full courtyards, E- and F-plans are an important feature of the area, reflecting the activities of estates. Over 50 farmsteads, for example, were built on the Wilton estate west of Salisbury between around 1840 and 1870.
- Linear plan types typical of the smallest common-edge farmsteads in southern England are rare in this area; the few recorded examples were concentrated in the valleys of the Wylde and its tributary, the Till.

Building Types

- Large barns, typically of five or more bays, reflect the importance of arable farming. This area lies at the western end of the main distribution of aisled barns in southern England although there are not high numbers of fully aisled barns. Barns with an aisle to one side are more common but most 18th- and 19th-century barns are unaisled. Roofs are typically half-hipped or gabled. The re-use of timbers from earlier buildings was commonplace making the dating of some barns particularly difficult.

- 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 other central downland areas (Hampshire Downs and Berkshire and Marlborough Downs).
- Large stables for working horses and, on larger farms, a separate stable for the riding horses are typical.
- Granaries were provided on most farmsteads. These may be free-standing buildings,

typically timber-framed and raised on staddle stones with some being two storey, or being incorporated into another building such as a loft in a barn or above a cart shed.

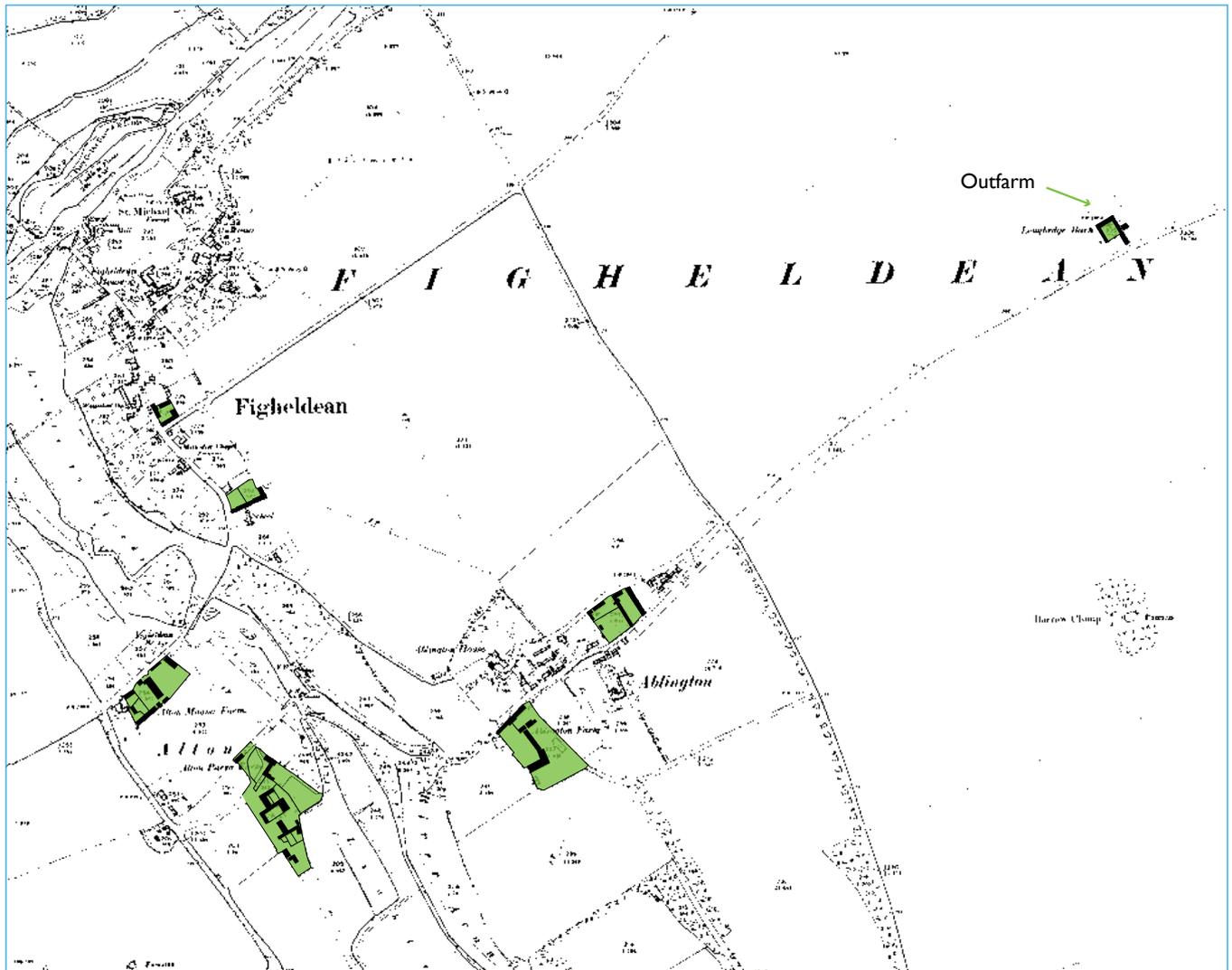
- Cart sheds were a feature of the majority of farmsteads which would have required several wagons and other implements associated with arable cultivation.
- Buildings for cattle typically date from the 19th century and include open-fronted shelter sheds and cow houses arranged around yards and often connected to earlier barns.
- There are, probably of unique importance and shared with Berkshire and Marlborough Downs to the east, some very rare surviving examples of 18th-century or earlier date, of single-storey buildings for cattle.
- Few buildings constructed specifically for sheep have been recorded in southern England generally. In some downland areas,

pens and shelters for rams were occasionally provided and are now extremely rare. Buildings in the farmstead such as barns and cattle shelter sheds could be used for shearing or lambing but occasionally shelter sheds are found with an eaves height too low to admit cattle and so were presumably meant for sheep. Wheeled shepherds' huts were used during lambing on the downs.

- 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. Many outfarms were accompanied by one or more cottages for farm labourers. Some of these sites developed into separate farmsteads.



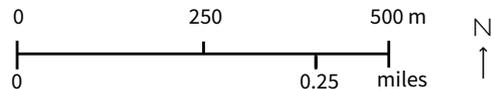
Manor Farm is a large, village-based farmstead in Barford St Martin located opposite the parish church. The full regular courtyard group was largely rebuilt in the 19th century, leaving little evidence for earlier buildings. Manor Farm is one of three large farmsteads that still retain farmstead character in the village, although most of the historic cottages in the village were once farmhouses which became detached from agricultural use as a result of the engrossment of holdings and enclosure – a common theme in the downland of Wiltshire and the south-east of England. Photo © Historic England 27838/014



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

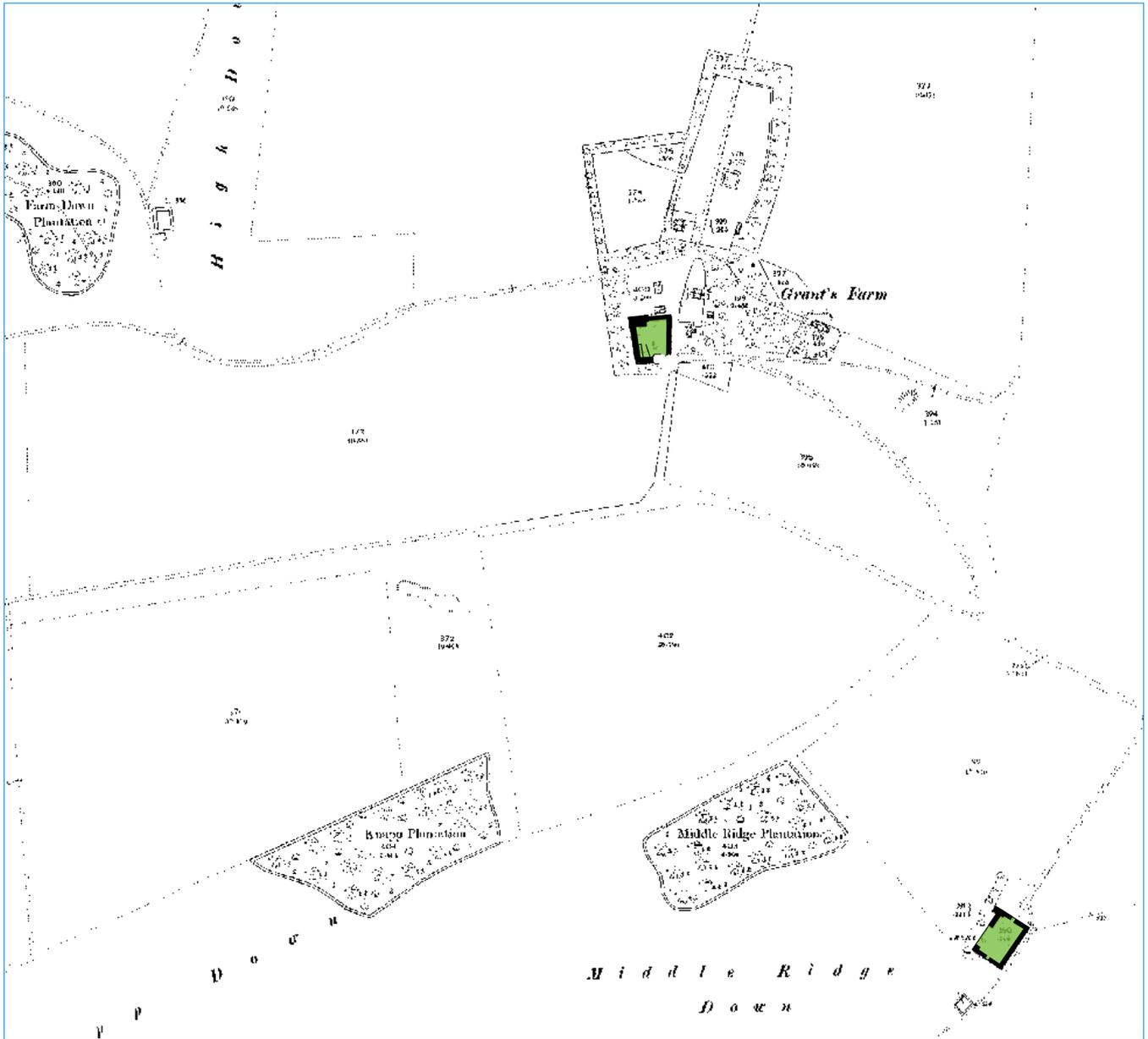


Figheledean

Settlement within the eastern and southern parts of the Character Area usually consists of linear villages set along the chalk stream valleys, where the majority of early farmsteads were located. Some of these villages show evidence of being planned with regular property plots set at right angles to the street, and many of these were amalgamated as large farms developed from the 15th century. Typically, there were small closes and paddocks close to the village, offering pasture for cattle with arable on the valley sides and open downland for sheep pasture on higher ground. Access to these resources meant that often parishes and manors formed long, narrow land units stretching from the valley floor to downland, the latter being accessed by drove ways. Enclosure of the arable had often begun by the 15th century and resulted in the development of large farmsteads and the loss of small peasant holdings. Enclosure of the downland commenced in the 17th century but predominantly being enclosed in the 18th and 19th centuries. Despite the distance to fields at the far end of the parish, farmsteads often remained within the villages, the farmsteads utilising outfarms in the fields. These outfarms housed cattle to supply manure to the surrounding farmland and a barn for processing harvested corn, meaning only the grain had to be transported back to the farmstead.



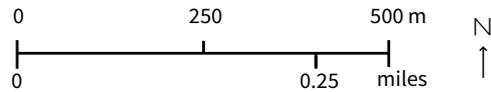
A medium-scale, loose courtyard group in Figheledean with buildings facing on to three sides of the yard. The farmhouse is set away from the yard with a separate driveway to the formal front of the house. Photo © Historic England 27689/017



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



Middle Ridge Down

Enclosure of the chalk downland in this Character Area was largely undertaken in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Many farmsteads remained in the villages after enclosure, but some new farms were built in isolated locations within the downs. Here the regular courtyard farmstead at Grant's Farm is surrounded by shelter belts of trees and the group includes several cottages for labourers, typically accessed by a short drive off the road crossing the downs. To the south-east is an outfarm with a large yard with building to all sides, including a cottage for a stockman. The enclosures created on this area of former downland are large and, apart from where topography dictated, the boundaries were usually straight.



A loose courtyard group with buildings to three sides of the yard, located in Winterbourne Gunner. The barn was originally of five bays and is accompanied by a stable backing onto the road and a staddle barn on the third side of the yard. Photo © Bob Edwards
Photo © Bob Edwards



This farmstead has a regular U-plan which has developed from a loose courtyard plan; the timber-framed barn on the left side of the yard was originally detached. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large, regular E-plan farmstead built by the Wilton estate in the mid-19th century as part of a major rebuilding of farmsteads in this area. Photo © English Heritage/Michael Williams



Linear plans are rare in this area, but within some villages, former farmhouses with attached agricultural buildings can be found. Photo © Bob Edwards



Aisled barns, whether fully aisled (or as here, with an aisle to one side only) are principally found in the east of the Character Area. Photo © Bob Edwards



The large, arable farms were provided with one or more large barns. On this manor farm in Chitterne, this nine-bay barn was accompanied by a five-bay barn, both of early 19th-century date. The double doors in this building give access to a covered entrance to the yard rather than being a threshing bay. Photo © Bob Edwards



This five-bay barn, on the same manor farm as the nine-bay range also shown, is typical of the early 19th century, with its shallow-pitched, slate roof. Photo © Bob Edwards



Eighteenth-century or earlier brick barns are rare in this area. This five-bay barn dates from the mid-18th century. Photo © Bob Edwards



A mid-19th century barn on a medium scale Wilton estate farmstead. Even at this late date conventional threshing barns were being built as part of a courtyard group with an L-range and a detached building to the third side of the yard. Photo © Bob Edwards



By the late 19th century estates were building multi-functional ranges. The use of brick alone in farm buildings is relatively uncommon in this area. Photo © Bob Edwards



Staddle barns (timber-framed threshing barns raised on staddle stones) are a building type concentrated in the chalk downs of Wiltshire, Hampshire and West Berkshire. This adaptation of the barn was developed in the late 18th century and had a relatively short period of construction. Photo © Bob Edwards



This small stable with a hay loft over is a relatively rare survival of a small, village-based farmstead in Wylde. Photo © Bob Edwards



The low eaves height of this shelter shed suggests that it could have been intended for the use of sheep in winter or at lambing time. Photo © Bob Edwards



An outfarm on the higher downland overlooking the village of Figheldean in the valley beyond. Photo © Historic England 27689/042



Free-standing, timber-framed granaries on staddle stones. Larger granaries can be two storeys. The smaller granary was possibly used to store seed corn. Taken as part of the Images of England project © Mr Brian Harvey ARPS



An outfarm group consisting of a threshing barn with attached cattle housing. Outfarms are typically associated with higher downland areas but this example lies on the flood plain between villages. Photo © Bob Edwards



Cob boundary walls often bound farmsteads in villages. The cob can be rendered or protected by a chalk slurry. Traditionally having thatched cappings, the thatch has often been replaced by tile. Photo © Bob Edwards

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 of the larger farm buildings until the 19th century.
- Brick combined with flint is also characteristic – its use dating mainly from the 18th and 19th centuries for farm buildings but from the 17th century on manor houses and larger farm houses. Brick used on its own is relatively uncommon.
- A particular characteristic is the use of Chilmark stone in the south of the area which was often used in a chequered pattern with knapped flint. The Wylde Valley has distinctive buildings in a chequered pattern of knapped flint and clunch. Greensand is also a commonly seen building material, usually laid in irregular blocks.
- Cob was typically used for smaller houses, some farm buildings and boundary walls, the latter being a distinctive feature of chalk land villages in central southern England.
- Straw thatch was the predominant roofing material for cottages and farm buildings.
- Welsh slate was widely used in the estate rebuildings of the 19th century and is now the dominant roofing material.
- The use of plain clay tile is limited; it is most often seen in the south-east of the area.



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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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