



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

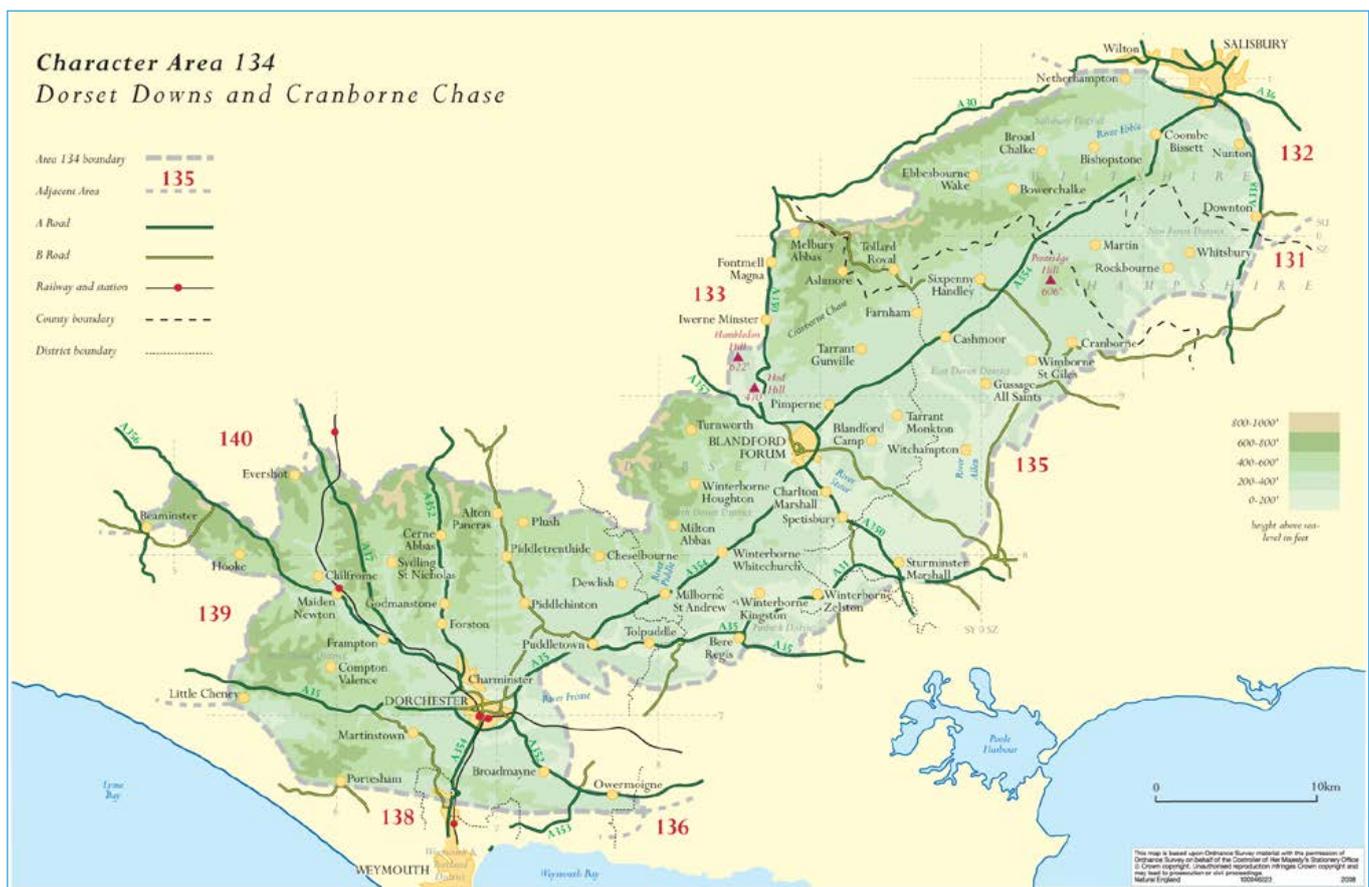
Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 134



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 Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

Front cover: A full regular courtyard built as part of Lord Portman's drive to enclose and improve the downland and to provide much needed work for labourers in the later 19th century. In the foreground is a stack yard, which served a large threshing barn. The straw from the yard was then taken to the animal housing and the cattle yard, and then returned as manure to the fields. Around the yard are cart sheds, stables, shelter sheds for cattle with haylofts over and a single-storey shelter shed and stores to the fourth side. On the left is a second cattle yard with a shelter shed built against the two-storey range. Photo © Bob Edwards

Summary

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

This is a rolling chalk landscape that forms part of the extensive belt of chalk which stretches across southern England. The Wardour and Blackmoor Vales lie to the north-west, below the steep scarp slopes of the chalk, and the Dorset Heaths lie to the south-east, at the foot of the rolling dip slope. The chalk landscape extends to the north-east into the West Wiltshire Downs and Salisbury Plain Character Area. The downland supports unimproved calcareous grassland, arable downland and woodland while the valleys are linear villages, streams and flood meadows. Of the Character Area, 98% is open country, 87% of which is agricultural land, whilst 9% of the Character Area is woodland and 2% is urban. About 80% of the area falls within the Dorset and the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). Farmsteads Mapping has been undertaken within the Wiltshire and Cranborne Chase AONB parts of the Character Area.

Historic character

- The predominant pattern is of nucleated settlement along river valleys.
- There is low density of very large-scale, isolated farmsteads in the landscape, resulting from enclosure of open fields and downland from the 17th century.
- Large-scale courtyard farmsteads are typical of downland landscapes, with large barns, stabling, granaries, cart sheds and cattle yards. Unlike the chalk downland areas to the north and east, aisled barns are rare.
- There are shelter sheds for cattle, either free-standing or built against barns and cow houses.
- Outfarms of 19th-century date usually consist of a barn and shelter shed or just a shelter shed and a yard for cattle.
- Timber-framing is uncommon across most of this area, in contrast to many of the other downland landscapes of southern England. Greensand, sometimes combined with brick, brick alone or brick with flint are the predominant walling materials. Plain clay tile roofs or Welsh slate is used for roofing. Straw thatch is rarely seen on farm buildings.
- On the large, isolated farmsteads that often remain in agricultural use, large sheds dominate the farmsteads.

Significance

- Of recorded farmsteads (in Wiltshire), 70% retain some historic farmsteads character with 52% retaining more than 50% of their historic form.
- There is a low survival of pre-1700 buildings in this area; 12% of recorded farmsteads (in Wiltshire) have a pre-1700 farmhouse and 2.7% have a pre-1700 working building.

- Early surviving buildings are typically barns of 17th or early 18th-century date.
- Few working farmsteads remain within villages, their buildings either converted, usually to residential use, or demolished leaving only the farmhouse.
- There are several barns that were associated with religious houses or high-status owners.

Some of these have particularly interesting roof carpentry including hammer beam roof trusses, sometimes re-used from former monastic buildings.

- The 'sling brace' truss is a type that is mostly found in Dorset and principally found in this Character Area.

Present and future issues

- The Photo Image Project (2006) recorded medium rates of conversion of listed buildings to non-agricultural (primarily domestic) uses (over 30%, the national average being 34%).
- This area now has some of the largest corn-producing farms in England.

Historic development

- The chalk downs have been settled since the Neolithic period and the landscape is rich in prehistoric monuments including henges as at Knowlton, bank barrows and the causewayed enclosure on Hambledon Hill. Other monuments of the period survive as crop and soil marks, including the Dorset Cursus on Cranborne Chase. The Bronze Age period is represented by numerous barrows including several highly significant barrow cemeteries. The Dorset Ridgeway has a particular concentration of prehistoric monuments. The Dorset Downs also contains some of the most famous Iron Age hill forts in England, including Maiden Castle, Hambledon Hill and Hod Hill, where a Roman fort was constructed within the ramparts of the fort shortly after the Roman invasion of AD 43. There is extensive evidence of Iron Age and Romano-British field systems and settlements, including several villa sites, across the chalk indicating the extent of woodland clearance and the intensity of agricultural activity on the downs by that time.
- Two major linear earthworks cross the area: Bokerley Dyke, which crosses Martin Down, and Combs Ditch, which runs along a ridge to the south of the Stour. These earthworks are believed to represent defences against the invading Saxons.
- Dorchester, the county town, is on the site of a Roman town whilst Blandford, the other town within the area, is a medieval new town founded in the 13th century. The north-eastern part of the area fell within the influence of Salisbury, the most important cloth-making centre in Wiltshire in the medieval period and remaining a significant industry up to the 18th century; its cloth-making industry spread into the surrounding valleys including the Ebble valley.
- In common with other adjacent chalk downland areas, sheep and corn have been the dominant agricultural elements since the medieval period at least.
- In this area, however, the farmsteads remained relatively small in contrast to those in the chalk downs to the east of the Avon. The enlargement and reorganisation of holdings did not result in the rebuilding of farmsteads until the mid to late 19th century, due to the late movement of farmsteads out of villages and the involvement of estates in their construction. Earlier buildings are rare, except in the extreme north-east of the area. In common with other chalk landscapes of the south, this area was dominated by estates dependent upon wage labour. The low wages that were paid to labourers and the general lack of investment in buildings,

both farmsteads and housing for workers, meant that by the 19th century much of the building stock was deficient. This background of very low pay and poor housing conditions was the stimulus for the Tolpuddle Martyrs to form an illegal trade union to press for higher wages. During the later 19th century, many traditional cob cottages and old farm buildings were swept away to be replaced by brick buildings.

- Demand for liquid milk, combined with a fall in grain prices in the period 1880–1940, saw many farmsteads converted to serve stock rearing or dairying, whilst others increased their corn production, replacing the sheep fold with artificial fertilizers, allowing the conversion of most of the remaining downland to arable.

Landscape and settlement

- Settlement is predominantly nucleated, with the oldest farmsteads concentrated in the valley-based villages and hamlets, established between the 8th to 11th centuries. Within these villages there is often regularity in the layout of property plots, suggesting medieval planning of the settlements, either replanning of existing areas of the village or representing extensions to earlier cores. Gaps between villages often contain earthwork evidence for lost villages or shrinkage of existing settlements.
- There is a relatively low density of isolated farmsteads in the area. Most isolated farmsteads located on higher ground are the result of farms moving out of the villages to newly created fields at the time of enclosure in the 17th to early 19th centuries, although occasionally some isolated farmsteads can trace their origins back to the medieval period. The enclosure is mostly medium to large-scale and piecemeal, although boundaries tend to be straight within a framework of earlier features such as droveways, with some pockets of regular enclosure.
- On the dip slope, there are generally few trees but woodland becomes increasingly important to the north of the Stour valley where there are remnants of the ancient hunting ground of Cranborne Chase (a Royal Forest from the 11th century). The medieval religious houses in and around the Chase formed the basis of the later parks such as those at Tarrant Crawford, Cranborne and Iwerne. Woodland is also found on the valley sides.
- There are occasional blocks of woodland on the downland, including clumps of beeches to knolls. The few hedgerow trees and shelter belts of beech, ash and sycamore are found mainly near the scattered farmsteads and there are small blocks of woodland, mainly plantations dominated by beech, oak and ash.

Farmstead and building types

- There is a low survival of pre-1750 farmstead buildings except in the north-east of the area; along the Ebbles valley there is a greater survival of 17th-century and earlier buildings, possibly reflecting the wealth derived from the Salisbury cloth-making industry.

Farmstead types

- Courtyard plans predominate, with regular courtyard plans dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries being dominant on the higher downs and in areas dominated by estates such as the Kingston Lacy estate near Wimborne. Several model farmsteads were built on the Portland estate near Blandford Forum.

- Farmsteads in villages and along the river valleys were typically built as loose courtyard groups with detached buildings, often later developing into courtyards with an L-plan

Building Types

- Large, timber-framed barns, typically of five or more bays and some with aisles, are confined to the north-east of the area. Elsewhere in the area, aisled barns are extremely rare and associated with high-status properties.
- Traditional threshing barns continued to be built into the late 19th century but combination ranges including a mixing house and animal housing are found on some farmsteads.
- Free-standing staddle barns, which are late 18th/early 19th-century threshing barns raised on staddle stones, are also confined to the north-east. These are characteristic feature of the downland to the north and east (Hampshire Downs, and Salisbury Plain and West Wiltshire Downs) with occasional examples found in adjacent landscapes.
- Stables, granaries and cart sheds are also common features. Free-standing granaries are typically built on brick arches rather than

element and other detached buildings to one or two sides of the yard.

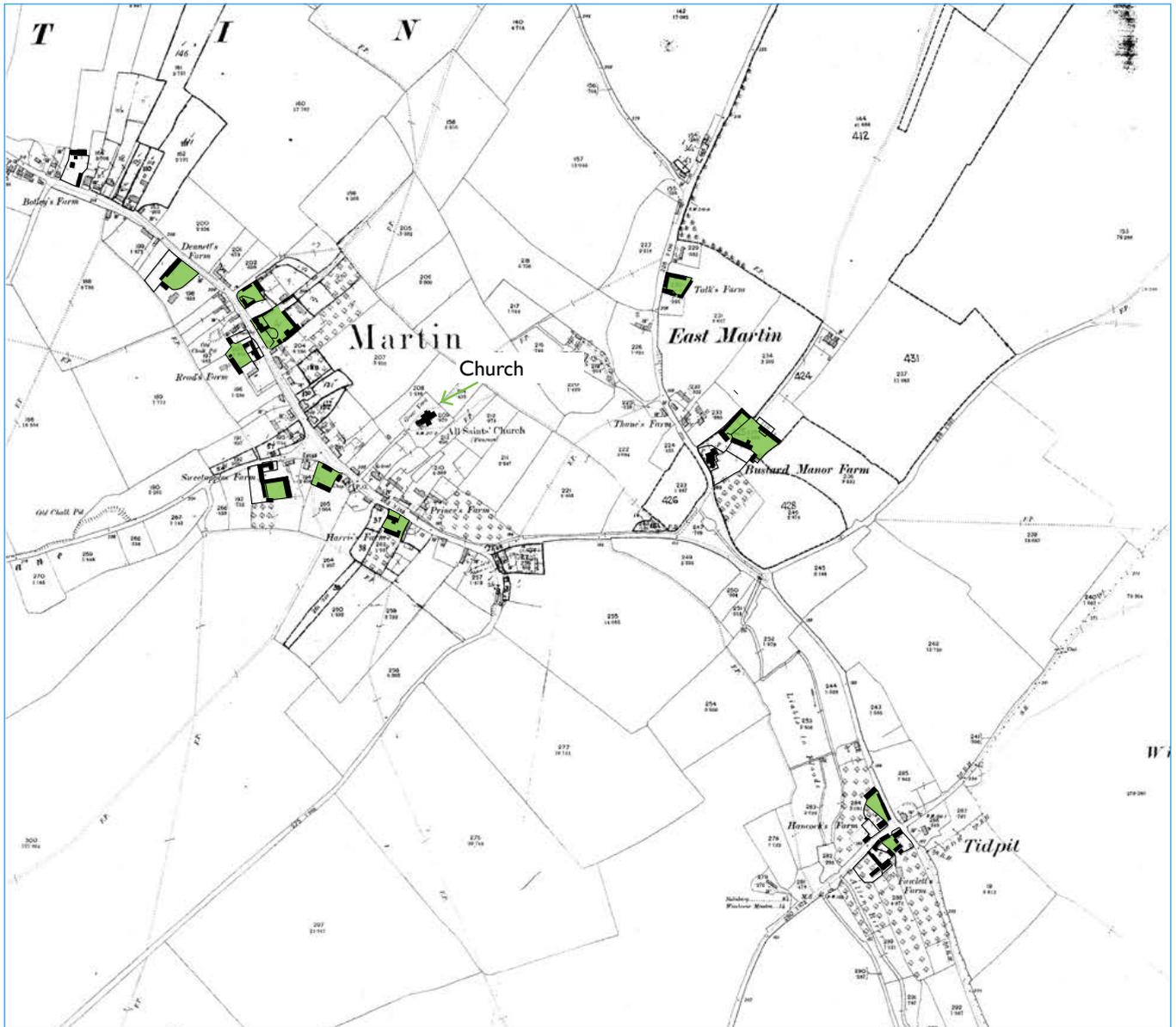
- Dispersed and linear type plans were uncommon and are now very rare.
- staddle stones except in the north-east of the area where timber-framing is characteristic.
- Buildings for cattle typically date from the 19th century and include open-fronted shelter sheds and cow houses, some two storied, arranged around yards and often connected to earlier barns.
 - Sheep were rarely provided with buildings in the farmstead. Yards and shelter sheds could be used for shearing or lambing but some open-fronted sheds have a very low eaves height and could have been specifically built for sheep. Pens and shelters for rams 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.



Two large farmsteads within a village located within a valley in the Dorset Downs. The farmstead in the foreground, on the edge of the village, was largely rebuilt in the 19th century in brick and brick and flint. Beyond, adjacent to the church, is a farmstead associated with a now lost manor house and includes a 17th-century dovecote and a large, greensand and thatch, 18th-century threshing barn. Photo © Bob Edwards



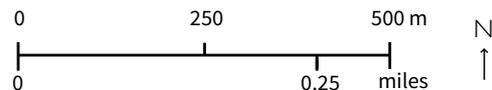
Many isolated farmsteads represent movement out of the valley-based villages into areas of downland that were enclosed in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Occasionally, enclosure by agreement of former open fields between the 15th and 17th centuries resulted in the construction of farmsteads within the new enclosures. 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



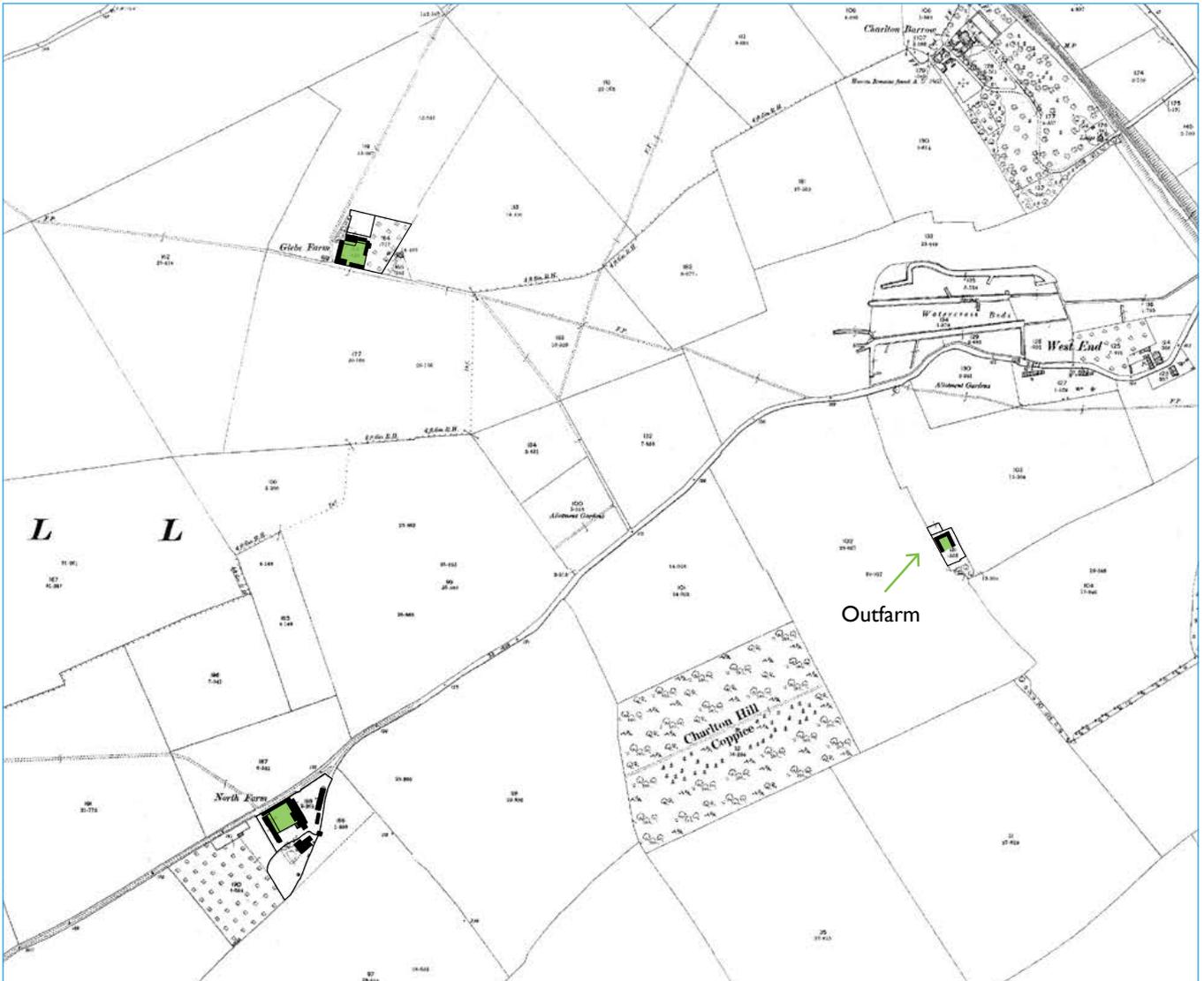
Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



Martin

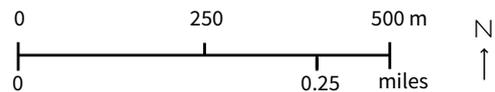
Settlement across this Character Area usually consists of linear villages set along the chalk stream valleys, where the majority of early farmsteads were located. These villages often show evidence of being planned, with regular property plots set at right angles to the street. Typically, there were small closes and paddocks which offered pasture for cattle close to the village, with arable on the valley sides and open downland for sheep pasture on the higher ground. Access to these resources meant that parishes and manors often formed long, narrow land units stretching from the valley floor to the downland, the latter being accessed by drove ways. Often, there is evidence for the shrinkage or desertion of settlements and in some valleys it would appear that by the 14th century, there was almost continual development along the valley. Earthwork remains at East Martin suggest that this settlement has been subject to some shrinkage. The farmsteads that survived into the 19th century in these villages were often medium to large in scale and could include one or more large threshing barns and shelter sheds for cattle. In this north-eastern part of the Character Area, most evidence for the working buildings of the small farms of medieval origin has been lost, leaving only the often timber-framed, former farmhouses.





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



Spetisbury and Charlton Marshall

Spetisbury and Charlton Marshall lie on the south bank of the River Stour. They are typical river valley parishes in the chalk downs; the villages lie on a terrace above the flood plain of the river and the parishes are long, narrow units of land stretching from the river up to the downland. Linking the settlements to the distant downs is a series of drove ways that run parallel to each other. North Farm lies alongside one such trackway. In Charlton Marshall, these droves also served as boundaries between the three manors in the parish. On the valley side above the village were the open fields which were enclosed by agreement in the 18th century, producing medium and large fields, often with straight boundaries. The dog-leg turns in the line of the parish boundary trace the junction between the strip fields of the two parishes. After enclosure of the open fields, several farms, including North Farm, moved out to the newly enclosed land. Glebe Farm was developed in the 19th century when the glebe lands of Charlton Marshall were sold. Beyond the open fields to the south-west was the open downland which was also enclosed by agreement around 1800. The farmsteads in this landscape were of courtyard form, usually with brick and flint buildings and often with linked ranges to at least two sides. These large farms have largely remained in agricultural use and the historic farm buildings have often been significantly altered or replaced by large modern sheds. Today there are few historic farmsteads' sites surviving in either village.





A large, regular multi-yard plan farmstead with a series of regularly arranged yards served by barns, stables and cattle sheds. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large, brick-built courtyard farm with an L-range and a building to the third side of the yard. This farmstead was built in a dry valley, probably in association with the enclosure of the open fields, although the farmhouse remained in the village. Photo © Bob Edwards



A regular L-plan farmstead, built as part of the Earl of Pembroke's programme of farmstead construction which saw over 50 farmsteads newly built or reconstructed in the mid-19th century. Photo © Bob Edwards



A regular U-plan range built on the Kingston Lacy estate in the early 20th century. This dairy unit was built on a greenfield site and is one of several new farmsteads built at around that date, a period when nationally few farm buildings or farmsteads were constructed. Photo © Bob Edwards



This rare, 16th-century, stone-built, five-bay barn in the Dorset Downs incorporates a 15th-century, hammer-beam roof that is believed to have been removed from Milton Abbey after its dissolution. Photo © Bob Edwards



A barn with a 'sling brace truss': a 19th-century truss type that is rarely seen outside of Dorset. The diagonal timber is a later addition. Photo © Bob Edwards



Staddle barns were a form of threshing barn built over a short period around 1800 and are concentrated within the downland of West Hampshire, West Berkshire and East Wiltshire. This is a rare building type within this Character Area and stands on a larger farm benefiting from the fertile lands along the Avon Valley. Photo © Bob Edwards



Free-standing granaries are rare in Dorset: this example being raised on brick arches rather than the staddle stones more commonly seen to the north and east. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large, brick and flint stable range reflecting the number of horses required to work the large arable farms in the downs. The hayloft over indicates that this is an 18th or early 19th-century example, later examples usually being single-storey to provide better ventilation for the horses. Photo © Bob Edwards



A late 19th or early 20th-century cow house built on the Kingston Lacy estate. Photo © Bob Edwards



A brick and flint threshing barn forming part of an outfarm within a higher area of enclosed downland, some distance from its village farmstead located in the valley. Photo © Bob Edwards



A shelter shed, once with an attached yard, sited away from the farmstead but close to the fields where the manure from the cattle was required. Photo © Bob Edwards



In contrast to Dorset, the Wiltshire part of the Character Area contains large, timber-framed, aisled threshing barns as found in the chalk downs areas to the east, in Hampshire and Berkshire. Photo © Bob Edwards



Aisled barns are extremely rare in Dorset. This example, now of nine-and-a-half bays but formerly longer, was built on a high-status Court Farm adjacent to the parish church in the late 16th century. Photo © Bob Edwards

Materials and detail

- The oldest barns are stone built, whilst there are few fully aisled barns in the area; the majority of them are located in the north-east of the area or on high-status farmsteads.
- There is some timber frame, again predominantly in the north-east of the Character Area.
- Greensand and, in the south of the area, limestone was used for most of the older farm buildings. From the 18th century, brick or brick and flint was used for nearly all farm buildings.
- Chalk cob was occasionally used for smaller buildings and boundary walls.
- With significant arable production, straw thatch was the traditional material for roofing the farm buildings of the area for centuries. Tile, and more recently, corrugated steel has replaced thatch on many farm buildings. From the mid-19th century, slate became more common although tile continued to be used on new buildings.
- The roofs of older farm buildings are half-hipped or gabled, hipped roofs being largely confined to the north-east of the area until the mid to late 19th century, when hipped slate roofs became common.
- The sling brace is a form of roof truss that is largely concentrated in Dorset.



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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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