



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

# Blackmoor Vale and Vale of Wardour

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 133



# 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>).

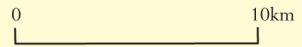
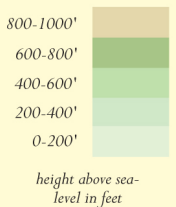
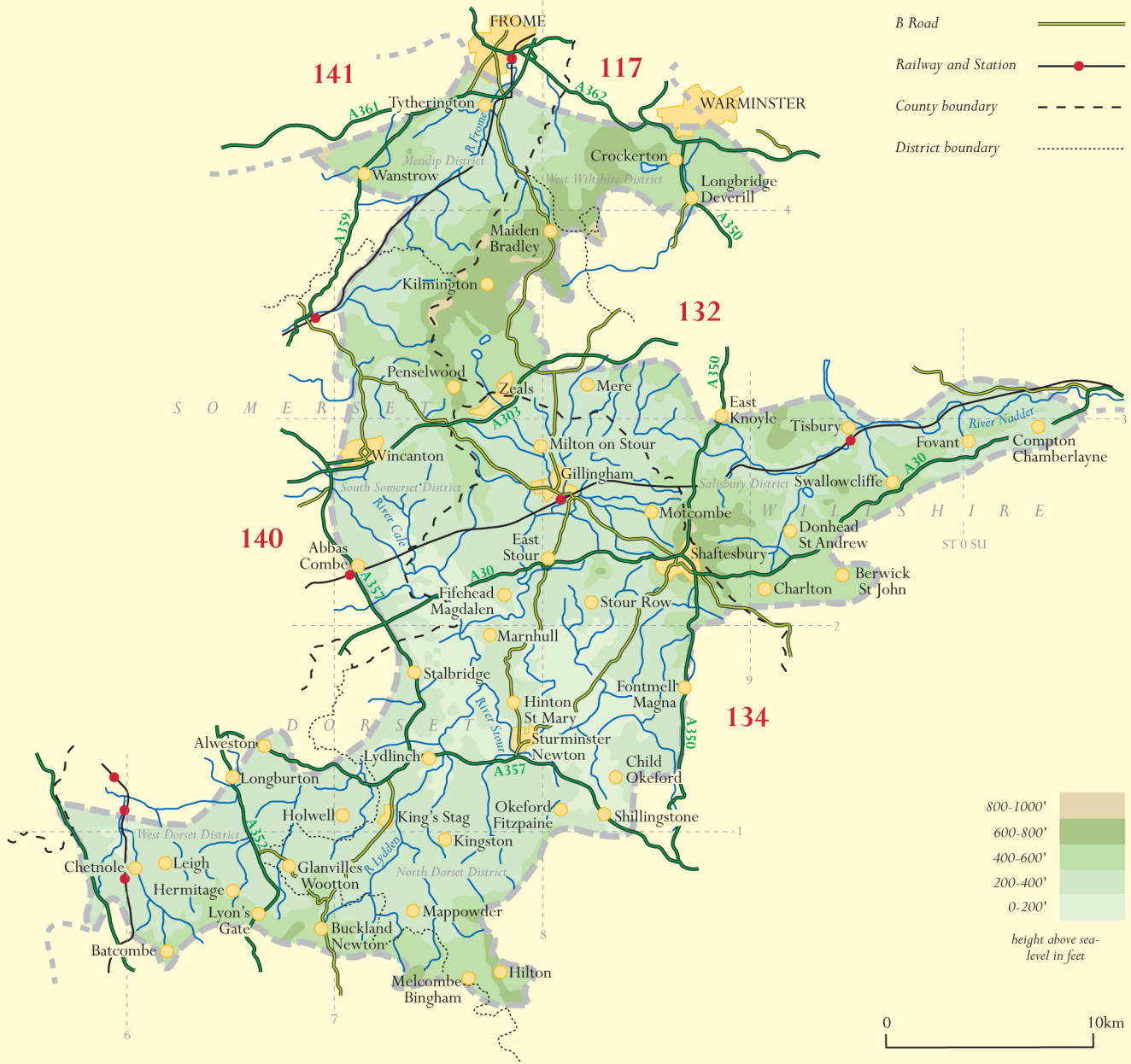
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**Front cover:** In contrast to the small and medium-scale farms found across most of this area, Stalls Farm, the home farm at Longleat, is an example of the investment that estates could make in farm buildings in the 19th century. The group of model buildings here is dominated by the large, covered-yard building mainly providing housing for cattle but also incorporating piggeries, cart sheds and stabling with an eight-bay barn forming part of the attached range. Threshing and a large saw mill were powered by a stationery steam engine. Photo © Historic England 27693/049

# Character Area 133

## Blackmoor Vale and the Vale of Wardour

- Area 133 boundary 134
- Adjacent Area
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway and Station
- County boundary
- District boundary



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This map shows the Blackmoor Vale and Vale of Wardour, 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.

This area lies between Frome and Warminster in the north, the Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase in the south and the West Wiltshire Downs to the east. Less than 2% of the Character Area is urban and approximately 9% is woodland. Around 36% of the Character Area falls within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and just over 2% of the Character Area lies within an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA). It includes the Greensand Hills of the Somerset Fringes and the Vale of Wardour, North Dorset Limestone Ridges, Blackmoor Vale, scarp foothills which flank the southern edge and the Rolling Clay Vale of Wardour between Shaftesbury and Compton Chamberlayne. Farmsteads Mapping has been undertaken within the Wiltshire part of the Character Area.

## Historic character

- Small, nucleated settlements are intermixed with dispersed farmsteads and hamlets.
- Increasing specialisation from the late 16th and 17th centuries resulted in a contraction of arable in favour of dairying; the area specialising in butter production, cattle grazing and sheep. The Blackmoor Vale became one of the prime cattle-fattening areas of the South West, with London being the main market. The cattle were driven to market along well-established droves.
- Loose courtyard plans and regular multi-yards predominate.
- There is some survival of dispersed cluster plans.
- Small barns, cattle housing, cart sheds and stables can be found. Some small dairy farms were provided with cattle housing and no barn.
- Stone is widely used for walling across the area. Roofing is of clay tiles, including plain tiles, pantiles and patent Roman tiles from Somerset.

## Significance

- There is a low survival of pre-1700 working farm buildings in this area; 14% of recorded farmsteads have a pre-1700 farmhouse and 2% have a pre-1700 working building.
- Of recorded farmsteads (in Wiltshire), 77% retain some historic farmstead character and 65% retain more than 50% of their historic form; these are high proportions for a lowland area.

## Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a medium proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (31.5%, the national average being 32%).
- The project also noted an above-average percentage (10.8%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working buildings showing obvious signs of structural disrepair.

## Historic development

- This area contains some of the most intricate and complex settlement landscapes in the country. High densities of small nucleated villages and dispersed farmsteads mainly developed from a process of secondary settlement associated with the clearance of woodland and waste beyond the open fields of the villages. This process of assarting was underway before the 11th century. There are some larger areas of assarting that produced the characteristically small, irregular fields as seen surrounding the medieval farmsteads that were created within the former Royal Forests of Semley, Gillingham and Blackmoor.
- There are numerous small areas of common, some of which were the foci for settlement. Other, long, narrow commons served as driftways between blocks of assarted fields.
- Some very large estates developed in the area from the 16th century, with large houses and associated parks being created (such as Stourhead, Longleat and Wardour) which were actively involved in agricultural improvement and the rebuilding of farmsteads in the late 18th and 19th centuries
- The dominant pattern of small, irregular enclosure is accompanied by areas of piecemeal enclosure – generally by agreement – of open fields and common meadow, much of this complete by the 17th century, together with small pockets of regular, late 18th- or 19th-century enclosure, sometimes associated with newly built farmsteads.
- Although historically this was a well-wooded area, woodland is not extensive – it is mainly found on the scarp slopes of the north-eastern part of the area and within the Longleat estate.

## Farmstead and building types

- There is a medium survival of pre-1700 farmstead buildings in this area.

### Farmstead types

- Loose courtyard groups with detached buildings around a yard (ranging from one to three sides) and courtyard groups with an L-plan range and one or more detached buildings were the predominant plan group in the area.
- Multi-yard farmsteads which reflect the management of stock were also important to the area, mainly regular multi-yard plans but also including occasional dispersed multi-yards.
- The larger, regular courtyard plan types are uncommon. There was a small number of regular U-plans.
- Dispersed cluster plans, typically associated with small farmstead groups, were once common but are now rare.
- There are some examples of other farmstead types associated with common-edge settlement in southern England. Linear plan

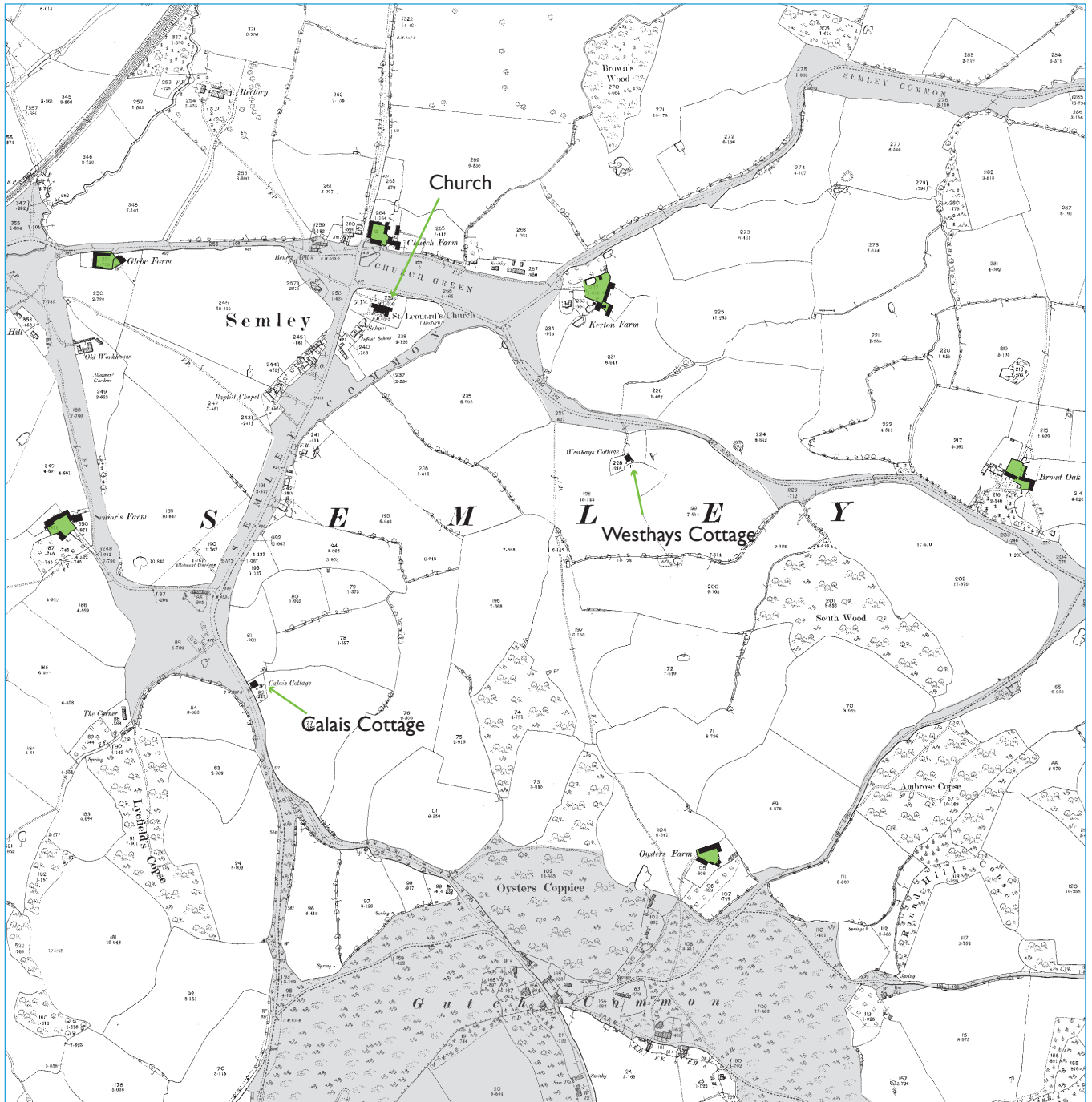
types were found in small numbers across the area but are now rare.

## Building Types


- Farmsteads reflect the mixed farming of the area with small threshing and combination barns, cattle housing, cart sheds and stables seen on most farms.
- On areas of heavier clay soils dairying was predominant and small farms with cattle and fodder housing but no recognisable barn are typical.
- There are rare examples of staddle barns which are mostly associated with the chalk downland of Wiltshire, Hampshire and Berkshire.
- Dairy houses, often integrated into rear wings or upper floors of farmhouses, from late 17th and most commonly 19th century.
- A number of farmsteads include relatively large mills for grinding corn, this association being notable in a national context.
- Small outfarms and field barns were once numerous but have been subject to high levels of change and loss.

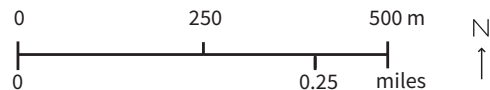


This small dairy farm in Semley has a single range of buildings facing into a yard with the farmhouse with its gable end to the yard. The building range mainly consists of single-storey cow houses with a one-and-a-half-storey element at the end, possible a stable. As with many small dairy farms in this area, no barn was required, indicating the limited extent of arable land. Photo © Historic England 27691/036



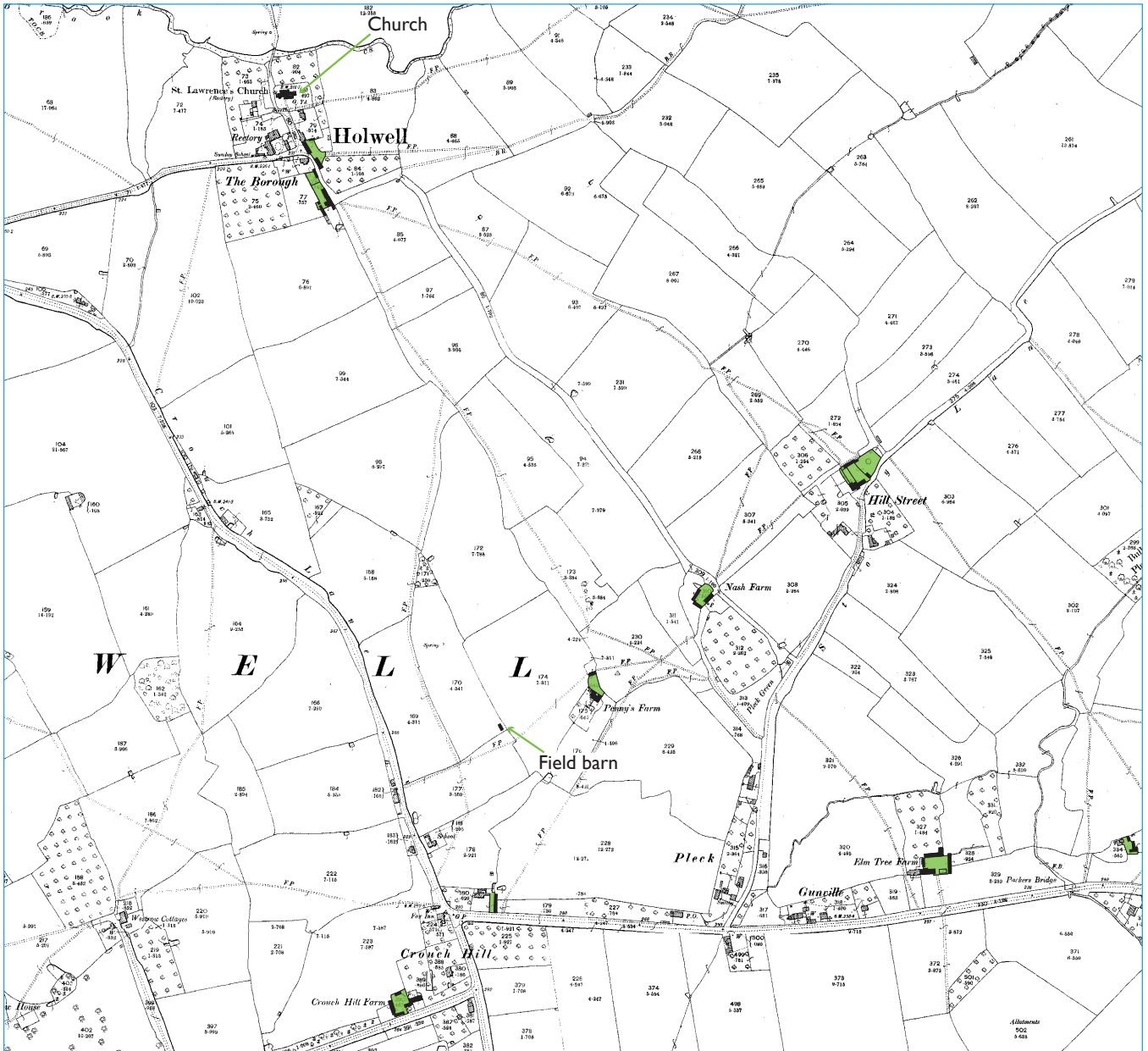
Maps are based on 2nd edition 25" Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England. © Crown Copyright [and database rights] 2020. OS 100024900

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




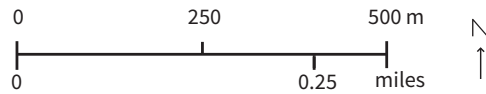
## Semley

Semley lies on Kimmeridge Clay, so this area has always been poorly drained pasture with woodland on higher ground and dairying predominated. The small to medium-sized, irregular fields across the area indicate piecemeal enclosure from woodland and common that was probably largely complete by the 14th century. Within the blocks of enclosures are scattered farmsteads and cottages that probably represent former farmstead sites, for example, Westhays Cottage was a former farmstead and Calais Cottage may also stand on the site of a medieval farmstead, standing within an area defined by a curvilinear boundary to the east and north, possibly reflecting the original extent of the farm. Most of the farmsteads were rebuilt in the 19th century, as small farms were amalgamated. The survival of areas of common land is an important characteristic of this area; the network of lanes, typically having wide verges often opening out into small remnants of common, lead to the main areas of common pasture to the west and south on Gutch Common.



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.



## Holwell

Settlement in Holwell, to the south-west of the area, predominantly consists of numerous, small nucleated villages intermixed with dispersed farmsteads and cottages. Holwell is a small settlement where two farmsteads were located with the church, the rectory and some cottages. Around the hamlet, the fields to the south-east have the slightly curving boundaries reflecting the piecemeal enclosure of former open field strips. The fields to the south of Holwell, which were subject to some reorganisation creating larger fields, are probably also the result of piecemeal enclosure. Away from the village, there are several dispersed farmsteads including the farm at Hill Street, a place name often indicative of secondary settlement. To the south there are some regular fields of 18th- or 19th-century enclosure, probably of common: the farms and cottages at Crouch Hill, Plecks and Gunville representing former common-edge settlement.





The aerial photograph of Semley parish shows the large wooded boundaries and small blocks of woodland that are characteristic of farmland created through the gradual clearance of woodland in the medieval period. Photo © Historic England 27703/014



A smaller, loose courtyard on a dairy farm having three single-storey, detached buildings providing housing for cattle and storage for fodder. All the farm buildings date from the 19th century. The low, earlier element of the farmhouse to the side originates from the 16th century and was much enlarged in the 17th century. Photo © Bob Edwards



This regular courtyard plan farmstead was built in the mid-19th century on the Longleat Estate and represents one of the larger farmsteads in the Character Area. The large barn has a projecting horse engine house attached on the side of the stack yard and has single-storey ranges for cattle facing into the main yard area beyond the barn. Photo © Bob Edwards



This massive barn built on the Shaftesbury Abbey estate at Tisbury stands as a reminder of the immense wealth of this monastic institution in the medieval period. Photo © Bob Edwards



A five-bay threshing barn with half-hipped roof, probably formerly tiled or thatched. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large, loose courtyard group with working buildings to four sides of the yard on a mixed farm that clearly had considerable arable, as it has two threshing barns, one a staddle barn, with ranges of cattle housing to two-and-a-half sides of the yard with the stable (behind the staddle barn) set at right angles to the main yard area. The farmhouse, standing off to one side of the yard, looks out across the landscape. The cart shed to the left faces onto the track leading into the farmstead. Photo © Bob Edwards



A typical small dairy farm consisting of two linked ranges of cattle housing forming an L-plan. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large, combination barn range that consists of a threshing barn of four or five bays with animal housing to the left part. Photo © Bob Edwards



A staddle barn built on one of the larger farms in the area which also had a conventional threshing barn. This barn is an outlier from the main concentration of this type of barn in the chalk downland of Wiltshire, west Hampshire and Berkshire. Photo © Bob Edwards



This building probably served as a combination building. There is a hayloft or pitching hole in the gable end. The single door in the yard side is larger than usual for a cow house but smaller than a barn. It is possible that this building had limited use as a threshing barn as there is a smaller door opposite on the rear elevation which would have provided the necessary through draught for winnowing. Photo © Bob Edwards



The dominance of dairying in this area means that relatively few farms had a need for a granary, with small amounts of grain being stored in the barn. This late 19th-century staddle granary is a relatively rare survival in this area. Photo © Bob Edwards



The north-east of the area extends into the upper part of the Ebble valley where larger farms had access to the adjacent downland and had larger areas of arable. As a result, these farmsteads included larger granaries such as this 19th-century example, built above a cart shed. Photo © Bob Edwards



This small, two-storey, formerly detached building may have served as a granary although it lacks the usual feature of being raised on staddles or arches to provide ventilation beneath the floor, or it may be a dairy and cheese loft. If so, it would be a rare example of this type of building that was more often housed within a range to the rear of the farmhouse; most dairies and cheese lofts have been incorporated into the domestic part of the farmhouse. Photo © Bob Edwards



On many farmsteads in this Character Area, cow houses are the main buildings. This cow house also has small yards to the front of the cow house which is attached to the gable end of a single-storey farmhouse. Photo © Bob Edwards



The lean-to on this farmhouse was added to the original front elevation of the house, concealing its mullioned windows and a fine moulded stone doorway. This is the north elevation of the house and so provided the coolest area for the construction of a dairy. Originally built as a one-storey addition, the lean-to was raised to two storeys to provide a cheese loft above, accessed by a trap door in the ceiling of the dairy below. Photo © Bob Edwards



Watermills are not usually part of a farmstead but in the Blackmoor Vale and Vale of Wardour there are a number of farmsteads with a mill. Photo © Bob Edwards

## Materials and detail

- Timber-framing is seen in a few farm buildings, but stone was most widely used, especially the local greensand and limestones from Chicks Grove and Chilmark. In the south-west of the area, Ham stone was used on some higher status buildings.
- The availability of stone meant that brick was not widely used until the later 19th century. For many farm buildings of the 19th-

century, brick was used for window and door surrounds.

- Plain clay tiles, pantiles and patent Roman tiles were widely used.
- Straw thatch is now rare.



# Historic England

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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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