

**Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB
Historic Landscape Characterisation Project**

SECTION 6: OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF THE AONB



ENGLISH HERITAGE

CONTENTS

6.1 Summary.....	395
6.2 Broad Landscape Classification.....	395
6.3 The iconic map of the CCWWD AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation.....	397
6.4 Fieldsapes in the AONB.....	498
6.5 Open Land in the AONB.....	400
6.6 Woodland in the AONB.....	401
6.7 Settlement in the AONB.....	403
6.8 Parks and Gardens in the AONB.....	404
6.9 Landscape History.....	405

6.1 Summary

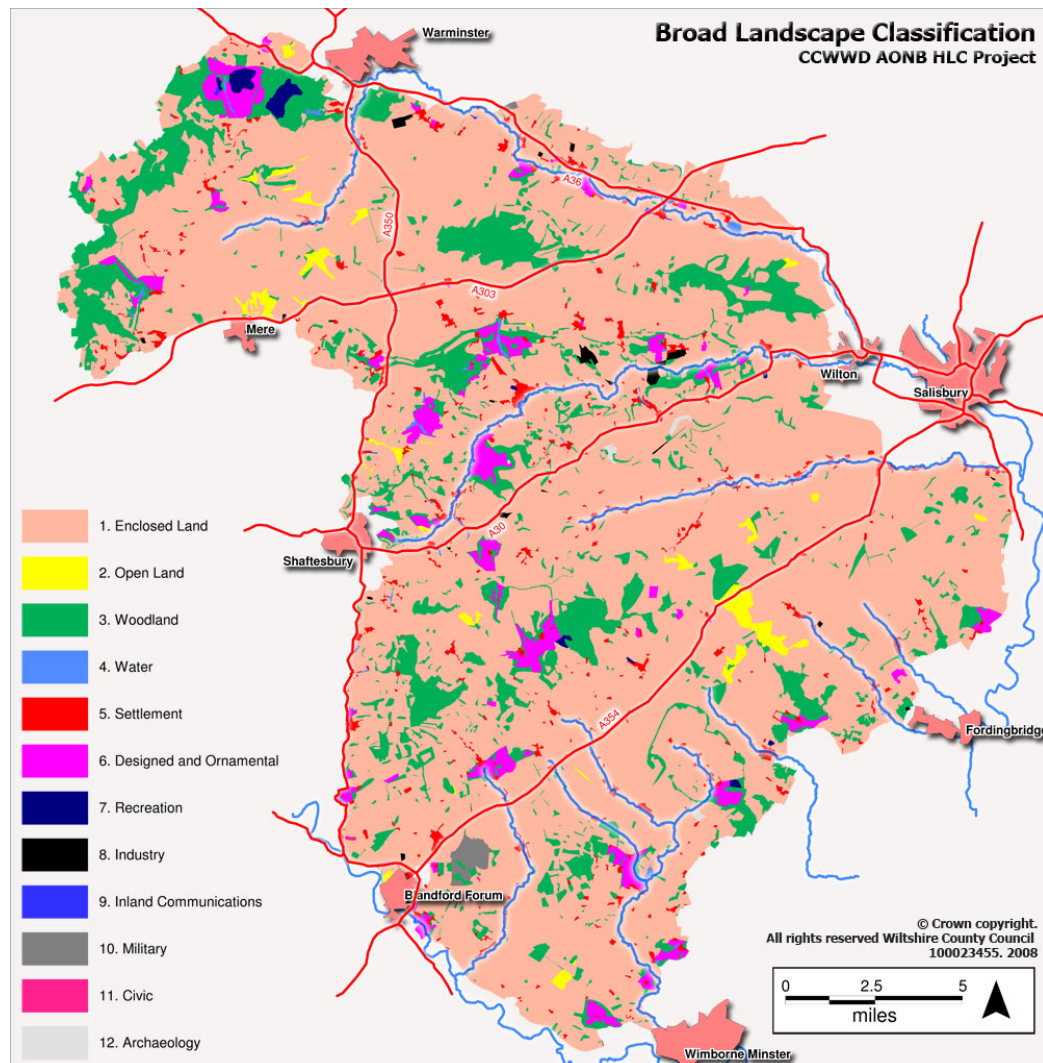
This section contains a general description of the Historic Landscape Character of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB. This description is a synthesis of the information contained in the individual Historic Landscape Type descriptions and focuses on the key components of the historic aspects of the landscape of the AONB.

This section also contains key maps created from the Historic Landscape Characterisation dataset which look at main themes such as broad landscape use, fieldscapes, or settlements.

6.2 Broad Landscape Classification

At the most general level the project has recorded the broad land use in today's landscape. Figure 27 shows the areas of landscape which are enclosed, unenclosed, wooded, parkland, water or used for modern purposes such as recreation.

Figure 27: Broad Landscape Classification



The broadest information recorded from the Historic Landscape Characterisation strongly reflects the deeply rural nature of the AONB, 80% of the area has been characterised as enclosed land - the vast majority of this being farmland.

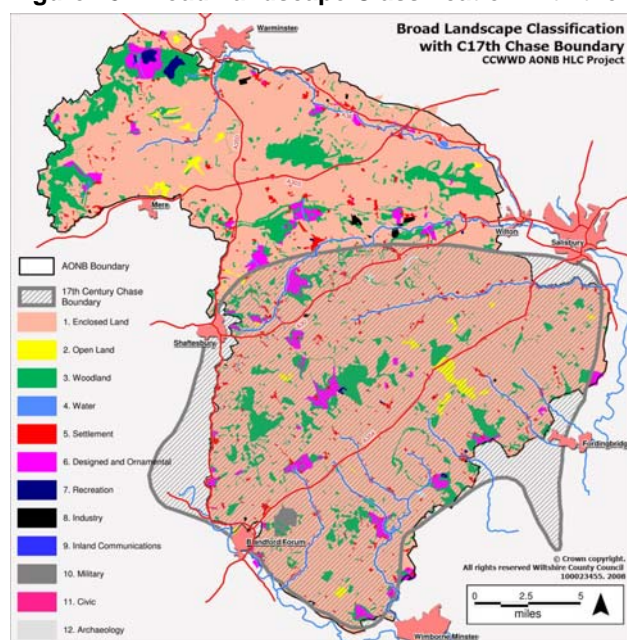
Another key feature is woodland. In the north of the AONB it is still present as contiguous blocks, while it is much more dispersed through the Vale of Wardour to the north east of Shaftesbury and in the area to the north of Blandford. The belt of oval woodland which demarks the ride of the designed "Capability Brown style" landscape of Wimborne St Giles can clearly be seen to the south of the A354.

There are small yet significant areas of unenclosed land remaining in the AONB, including the open chalk grassland of Martin Down and the open chalk escarpments to the region to the north of Mere. There is also a small amount of surviving common land at Semley to the north of Shaftesbury.

The parkland and designed landscapes of the AONB provide a small but significant feature of the landscape, 2,960 hectares of land retains its parkland character. These landscapes are generally concentrated to the west of the AONB and through the Nadder Valley.

The AONB is sparsely populated - much of the settlement is spread along the river valleys especially of the Ebbel and Wylve. More nucleated and scattered settlement can be seen in the area between the A303 and A30. There is also a distinctive pattern of settlement following the edge of the wooded greensand hills in the far North West corner of the AONB.

Figure 28: Broad Landscape Classification with the 17th century Chase Boundary.



Due to the fact that much of the AONB forms marginal borderland, it should be no surprise that the region is associated with a proliferation of medieval hunting areas. A major historical feature of the AONB, therefore, is the delimited hunting preserve of the Cranborne Chase. Figure 29, adjacent, shows the approximate outer bounds of this Chase as defined in the Quo Warranto of Edward I dating to around 1280.

The chase was a medieval royal hunting area very similar to the royal hunting forests which surround the AONB. These

include Holt Forest to the east of Wimborne, Grovely Forest in Wiltshire, the Forests of Gillingham and Selwood and the Forest of the White Hart in Blackmore Vale. The chase forms a rough quadrangle with Shaftesbury, Salisbury, Ringwood and Wimborne at the four corners – an approximately circuit of 80 miles. The area of the Chase was subject to special laws, and what these laws upheld was the primacy of the beasts that were hunted. The main difference between forests and chases were

in the way the special laws which governed them were administered. Chase law in essence was not as stringent as forest law.

The reason why the Chase is so important to the history of landscape of the AONB is that it was not disenfranchised until 1829. The effect of the Chase Laws and the primacy given to deer continued much later here than in other areas in the country. In 1816 William West calculated that the land subject to damage by deer comprised 7000 acres of woodland, 10000 acres of sheep walks and commons, and 15000 acres of arable (Hawkins 1980)

The Chase, therefore, has had a major effect on the historic landscape of the southern half of the AONB. Many of the features seen in the landscape today relate to the former importance of the Chase. These include the ancient woodlands, proliferation of downland, number of lodges and large estates, and the late enclosure of open chalk downland.

6.3 The iconic map of the CCWWD AONB Historic Landscape Characterisation

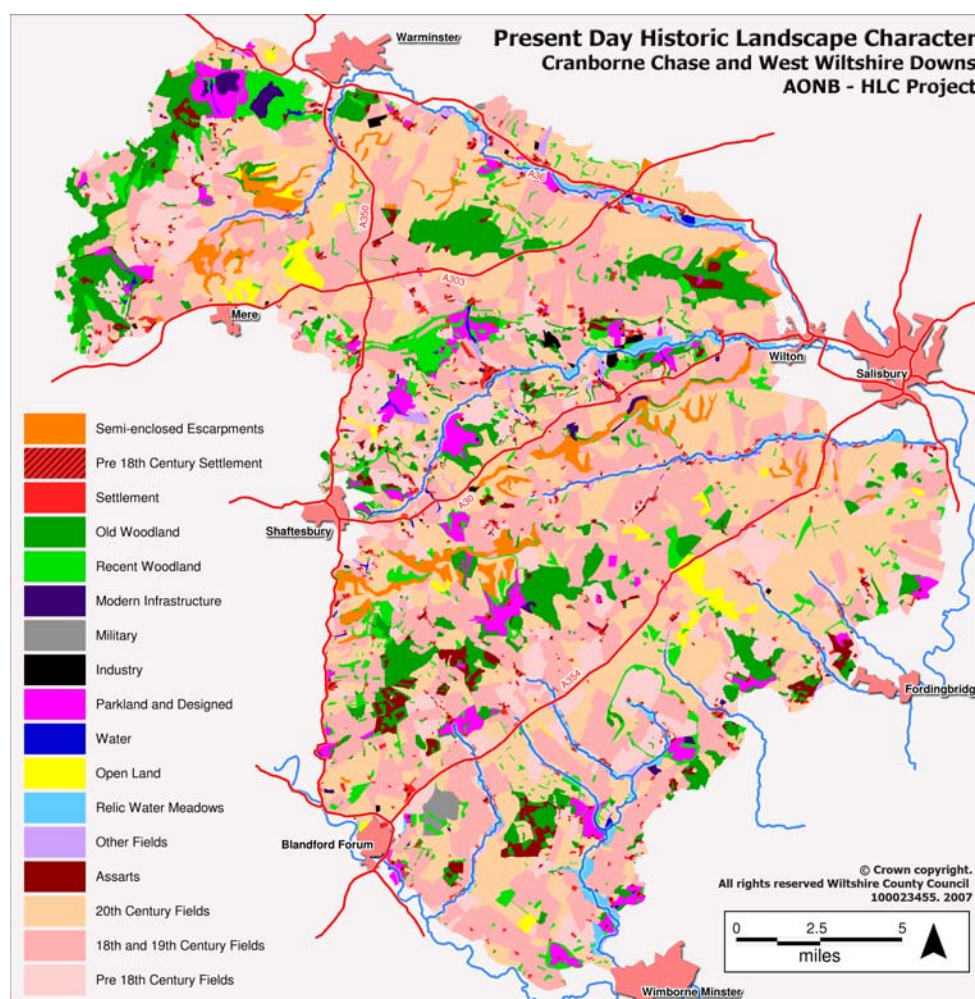


Figure 29: Iconic Map showing Present Day Historic Landscape Character

Figure 29 shows an overview of the historic character of the AONB. One key pattern which can be seen is the dominance of pre 1800 fields, assarts, old woodland and

common land in the area just north of Shaftesbury. This clearly demonstrates that this area contains a landscape whose character shows considerable antiquity.

6.4 Fieldscapes in the AONB

The AONB is an extremely rural landscape, dominated by agriculture. The HLC has characterised enclosed land as covering 79% of today's landscape in the AONB. Fields therefore are a dominant feature of the landscape. The patterns that their boundaries and outlines create in the landscape form a major landscape component dominating most views of the AONB. The way individual fields and blocks of fields appear today has been created and shaped through successive stages of historic land use and agricultural activity.

This view west from Whitesheet Hill clearly demonstrates the visual effect of this differing land use history. On the right of the view is an area of regular pre 1800 enclosure leading towards the boundary of the former Kilmington common lands in the distance. This contrasts markedly with the more irregular 19th century planned enclosure on the right.



These individual examples of differing land use history build up to create the overall pattern of fields in the AONB. Figure 30 shows the fields which exist in today's landscape displayed by major Historic Landscape Type.

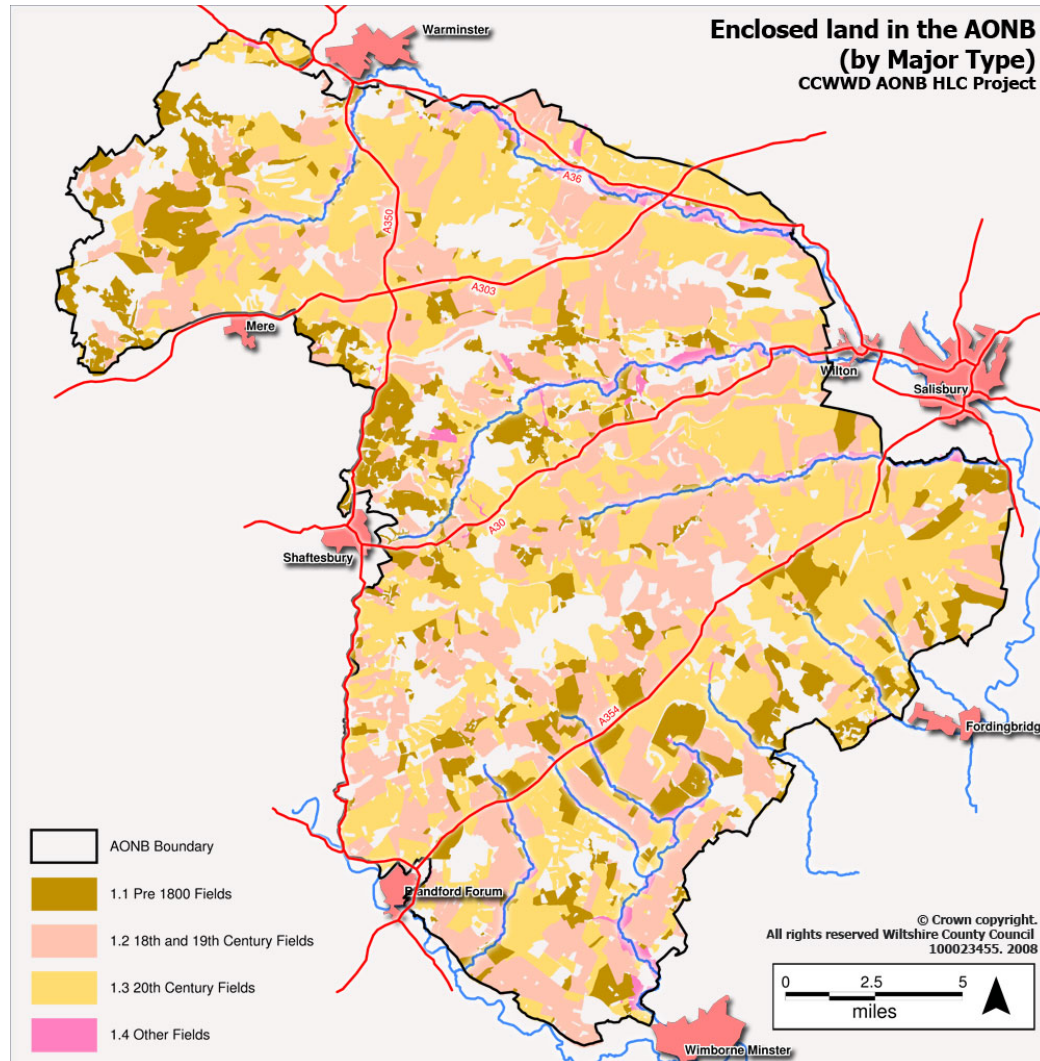
This illustrates that there are notable concentrations of pre 1800 fields along the greensand terraces and hills between Mere and Warminster, in the Vale of Wardour and to the south of the A354. These fields, and other features in this area, are of considerable antiquity. One notable example of pre 1800 fields is the evidence for the incorporation of formerly open strips through a piecemeal process of enclosure to form newly enclosed fields. The remaining traces of this process have a restricted distribution. In the southern half of the AONB they occur in dense clusters: - in the area around Martin; the area around Camp Down to the North of Blandford; west of Cranborne; and finally around Gussage St Michael and Gussage All Saints.

In contrast late 18th and 19th century fields are widely distributed throughout the AONB with slightly higher concentration occurring in the area around the Ebble Valley and on the West Wiltshire Downs. They mark a time of great upheaval and change in the landscape, when common rights were extinguished and large swathes of formerly open chalk downland enclosed. The evidence for this upheaval takes a range of forms and has been created by a range of processes and includes replanned fields, fields created by agreement, and parliamentary enclosure.

The impact of 20th century changes on the landscape can largely be linked to the large scale changes in agricultural practice and the intensification of farming. In the present day 20th century fields account for 34% of the AONB, they are widely distributed but are largely absent from the far north-western edge. These fields have

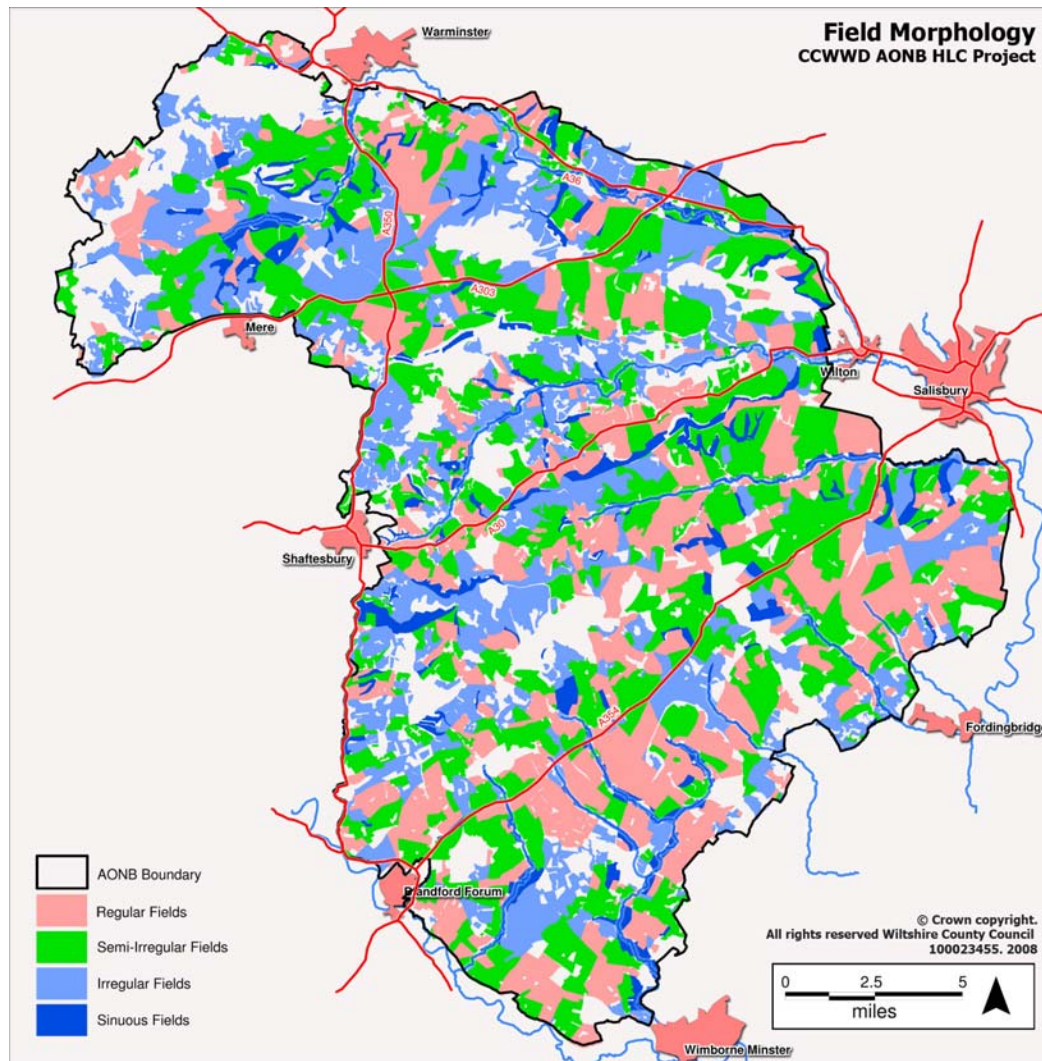
been created through the creation of new fields, through modifying existing field layouts, and finally through amalgamation, where existing field boundaries are removed to create new larger fields. In general terms there has been a trend over the last 100 years for an increase in the number of fields present in the AONB.

Figure 30: Enclosed Land in the AONB by Major Type



The Historic Landscape Characterisation Project dataset is also able to analyse the morphologies of individual landscape components. Figure 31 maps the morphology of fields across the AONB. The four morphological categories identified: regular, irregular, semi-irregular and sinuous fields are widely spread in the landscape, but key patterns do emerge. Sinuous fields, for example, tend to follow the line of chalk coombes and escarpments. Regular fields appear in large blocks through the southern half of the AONB, coinciding with areas of formerly open chalk downland which was subject to late 19th and 20th century enclosure. Irregular fields are much more common in the northern half of the AONB especially through the Vale of Wardour due to the greater antiquity of the fields in this area.

Figure 31: Map of Field Morphology



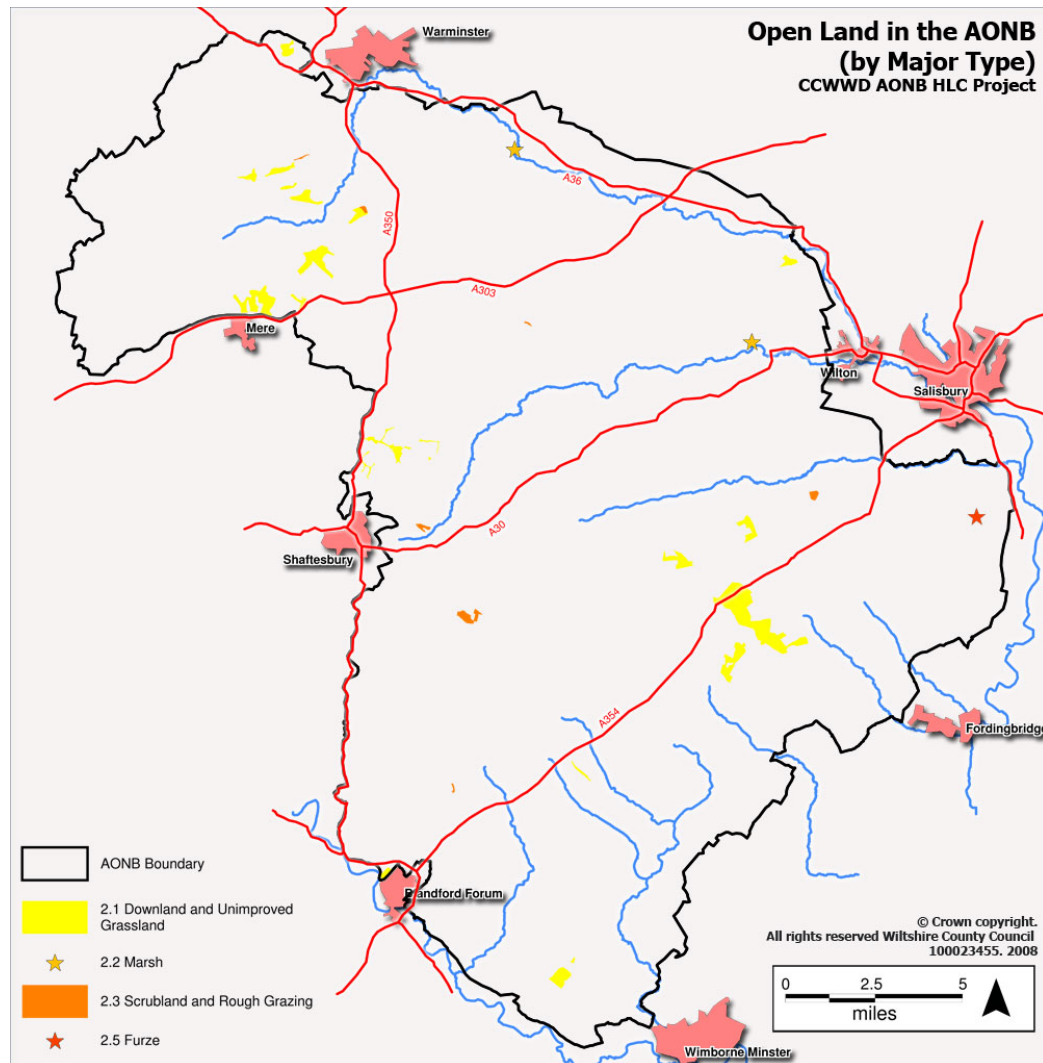
6.5 Open Land in the AONB

Today the open downland of the AONB is limited to small areas on the edge of escarpments, in steeped sided coombes or to nature reserves such as at Martin Down in Hampshire. However historic ordnance maps show that as recently as 50 years ago the AONB was dominated by open downland. Figure 32 illustrates the distribution of open land through today's landscape in the AONB by major type. Open Land in the AONB has a very restricted distribution. There are distinct concentrations of surviving open land firstly in the area surrounding Martin Down, to the north of Mere and to the north of Shaftesbury around Semley Common. The area around Semley Common forms the only surviving common land in the AONB; common land is an unusual feature in the 21st landscapes of England.

The surviving open chalk downland represents traces of what would have once been large tracts of downland. In the 18th and 19th century this land formed a major part of the sheep/corn husbandry system of farming. Much of this land was transformed into fields in the 19th and 20th century, leaving only small areas.

The other types of open land represent the survival of land which would have been on the edge of settlements and fields in the past and often was poor quality agricultural land such as marsh or heath. This land did, however, represent an important resource in the past, and much of the scrubland and rough grazing, for example, was subject to common rights. The escalating process of enclosure culminating in the intensification of farming in the 20th century meant that this land was increasingly encroached upon to the extent that only fragments were left in the landscape.

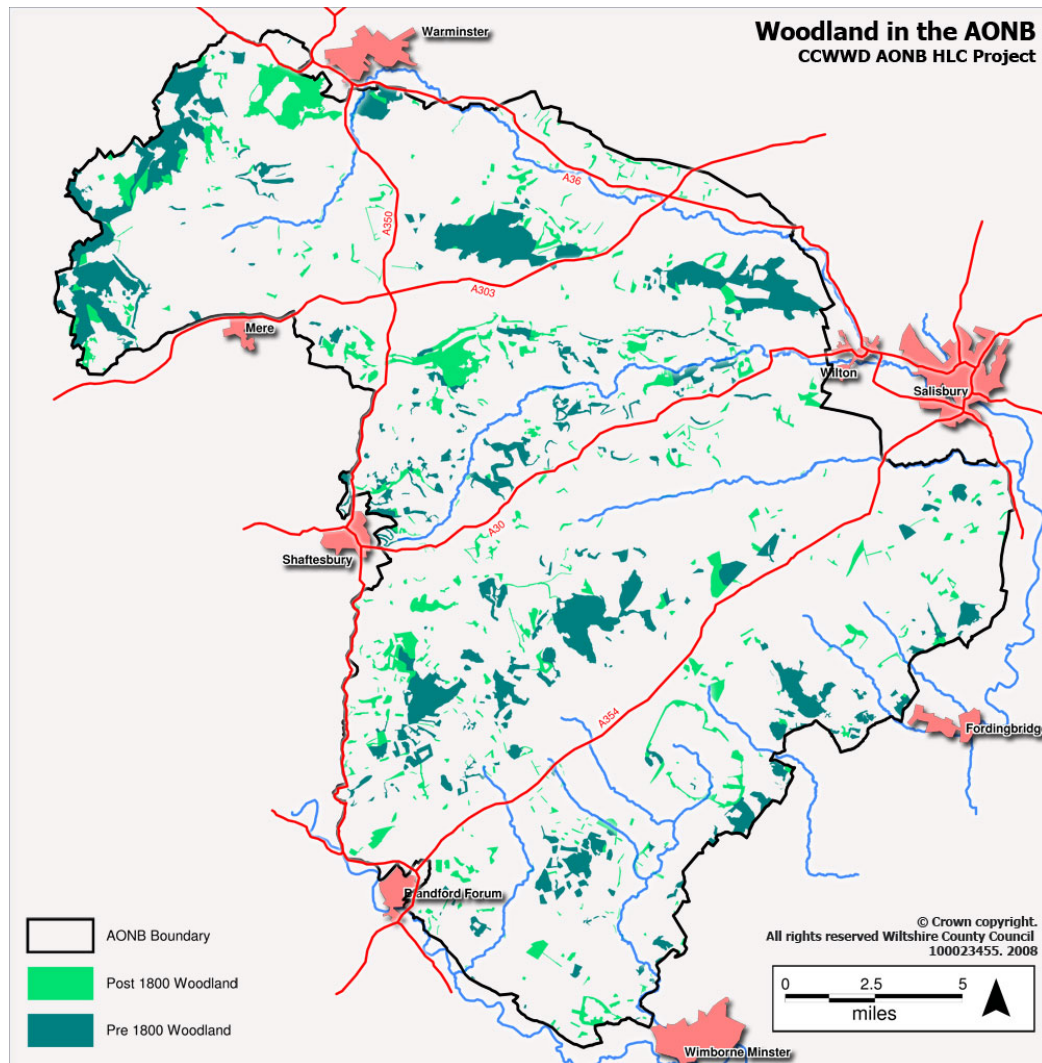
Figure 32: Open Land in the AONB by Major Historic Landscape Type



6.6 Woodland in the AONB

Woodland is a major component of the landscape of the AONB, with a diverse and complex land use history. Figure 33 illustrates the distribution of woodland through today's landscape in the AONB by broad type.

Figure 33: Woodland in the AONB



Pre 1800 woodland is found in large blocks across the northern greensand hills, the tops of the West Wiltshire Downs, the woods of the Cranborne Chase downland, the area between Warminster and Mere, and the Martin to Whitsbury Downland Hills. The woodland is much more dispersed through the Vale of Wardour. There is very little ancient woodland in the chalk river valleys and through large parts of the southern downland belt. The woodlands of the wooded downland of Cranborne Chase are the remnants of the woods of the medieval hunting chase, and many of the woods have names which reflect this history. Both the woodland here, and through the Downland Hills between Martin and Whitesburg, is dominated by old coppices. Although many areas of old woodland have been cleared or replanted since the medieval period, the general trend over the last 200 years has been towards a more dispersed woodland landscape punctuated by ancient blocks of woodland.

Post 1800 Woodland is more widely distributed across the AONB. It includes new geometric blocks of woodland used as game cover and striking ornamental additions linked to the creation of great landscape parks. In general it is found in small

scattered blocks and is absent from areas of the chalk downland in the south of the AONB and along the river valley of the Ebble. There are larger and denser concentrations along the greensand terrace in the North of the AONB especially near Longleat and around Fonthill in the Vale of Wardour. These are the result of new planting schemes undertaken by two of the major landowners in the AONB. There is also a linear distribution of medium blocks of woodland along the edge of the chalk escarpment between Shaftesbury and Blandford Forum.

6.7 Settlement in the AONB

Settlements are widely distributed across the AONB in scattered groupings. There are four major voids in the distribution of settlement, on the West Wiltshire Downs, in the area between the Ebble Valley and the A30, south of the Ebble Valley, and to the North of Mere. Clear linear distributions can be seen in some areas especially along the river valleys and along the greensand terrace between Warminster and Mere. The Vale of Wardour is associated with larger nucleated settlement while through the wooded chase downland settlement is more scattered.

Figure 34: Settlement in the AONB

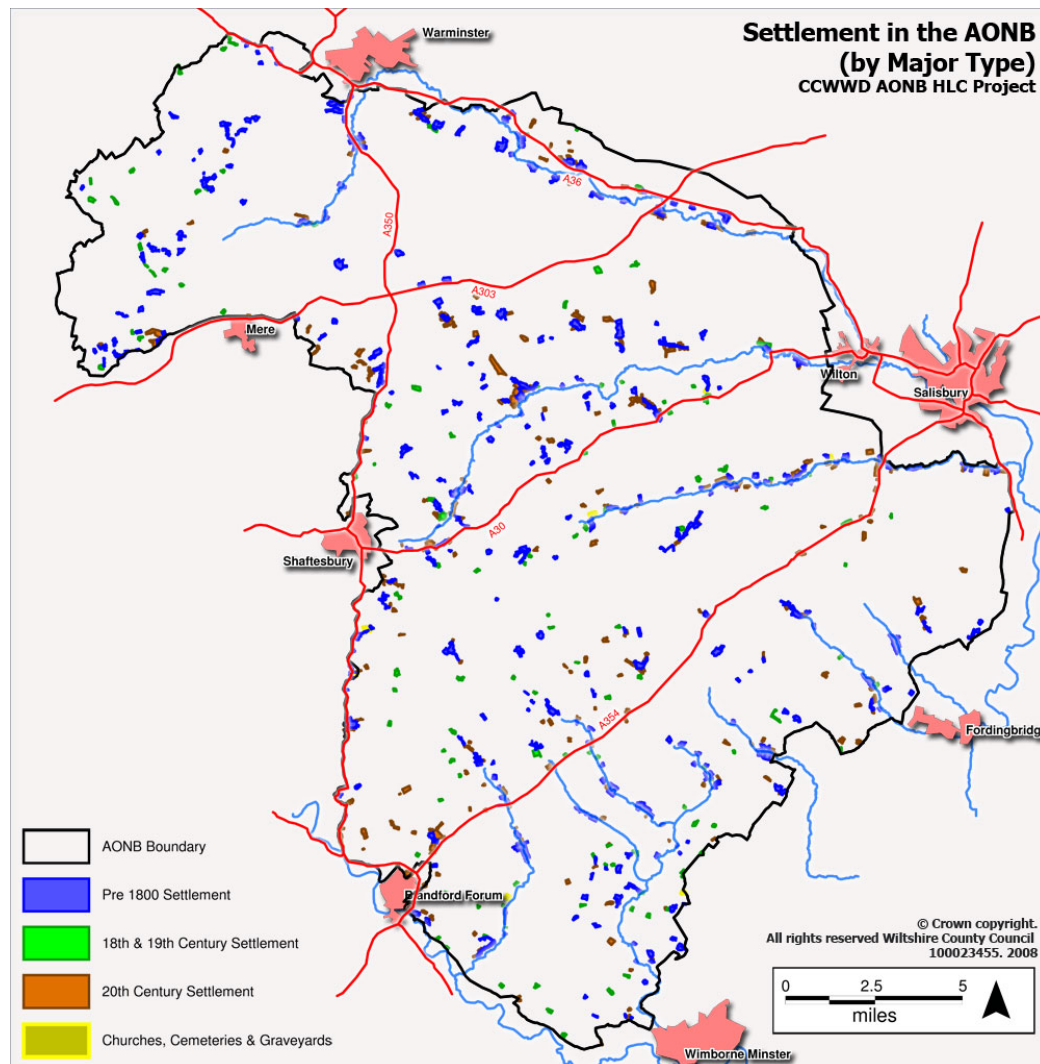


Figure 34 shows settlement in today's landscape in the AONB by major type.

The settlements identified as pre 1800 in date are in some instances linear in form especially along the river valleys. More commonly they are nucleated, having grown up around central foci such as churches, manor houses or more rarely greens and open spaces. The pre 1800 farms are often associated with areas of parkland or in relation to old manor houses. The nucleated settlements have in some instances grown and expanded dramatically in the 20th century especially in the Vale of Wardour, meaning that the original pre 1800 village now forms an historic core.

Over half of the examples of 18th and 19th century settlement are comprised of clusters of new farms which can be linked to the acceleration of the process of enclosure in this period and the intensification of farming. A few examples extend the footprint of existing villages but the majority of the settlement is located in new areas removed from existing settlement.

It is in the 20th century that the main expansion of existing settlements has occurred and marks the increase of populations in villages across the AONB over the last 100 years. The most dramatic impact has been in the Vale of Wardour where settlements such as Tisbury have nearly doubled in size. Similarly in the river valleys the existing settlements have been extended and enlarged, with the exception of the Ebbles Valleys where there has been infilling between existing settlements. In the southern half of the AONB there has been an increase in the number of farms partially linked to the enclosure of formerly open downland.

6.8 Parks and Gardens in the AONB

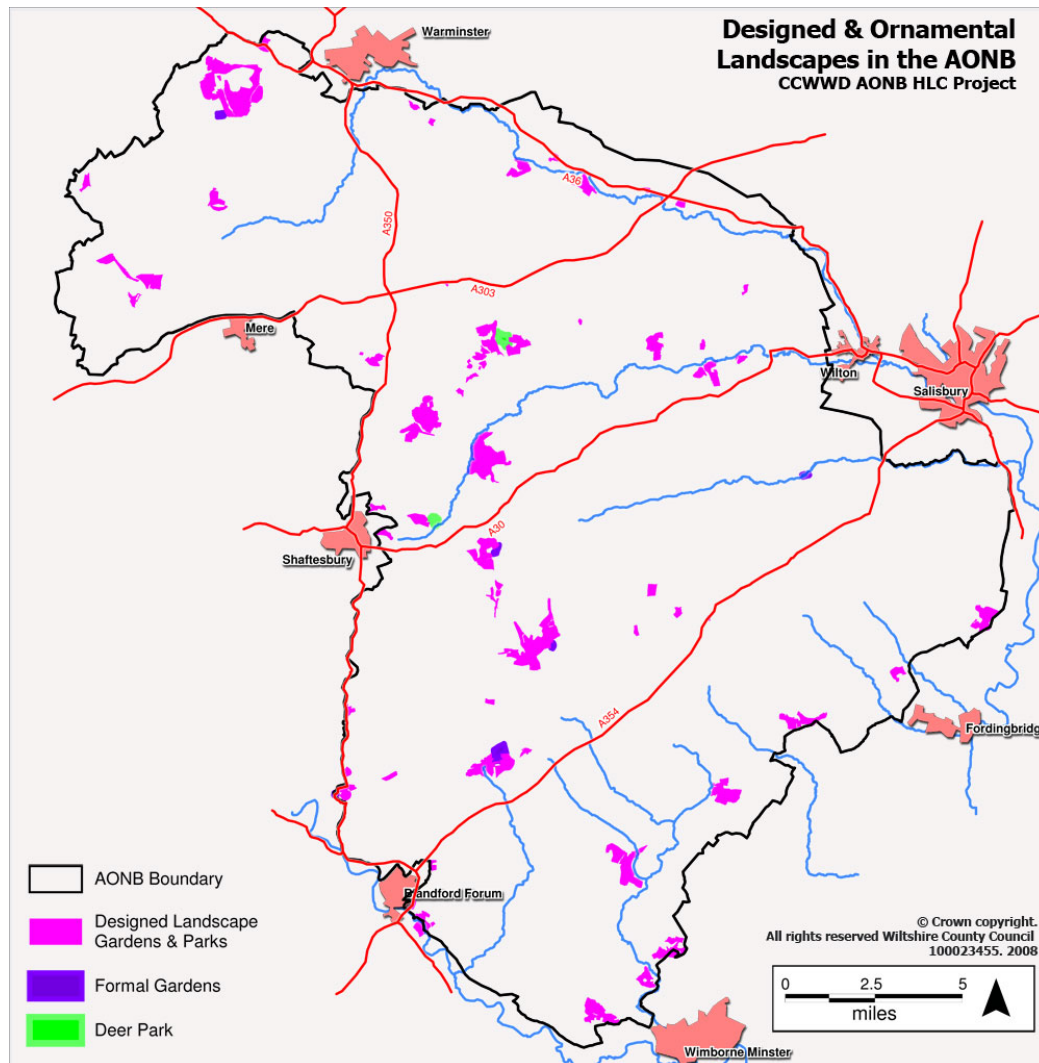
The Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB is, by and large, a landscape owned by estates both great and small. It is therefore dotted with landscape parks and historic gardens often associated with great houses. Some of these, such as Longleat and Stourhead, are of national renown and are widely visited; others are only known locally. All form important focal points in the landscape, and form areas which are not just pleasing to the eye but are also mentally stimulating and challenging. Many are associated with the remnants of older parkland features such as medieval deer parks; these are intrinsically linked with the medieval chase which forms such an integral part of the AONB.

Figure 35 illustrates the distribution of ornamental and designed landscapes through today's landscape in the AONB. These are widely distributed, with clusters in the Vale of Wardour and linear distributions across the south-eastern edge, and the greensand terrace in the northwest corner of the AONB.

These landscapes consist of 3 main features: -

1. Remnants of deer parks including park pales and boundaries.
2. Landscaped parks designed with a great house at its focus. They were often created around walked circuits, extensive views carriage drives, or water features and often consist of carefully crafted views. They consisted of large areas of grassland interspersed with individual and clumps of trees.
3. Small Formal gardens.

Figure 35: Designed and Ornamental Landscapes in the AONB



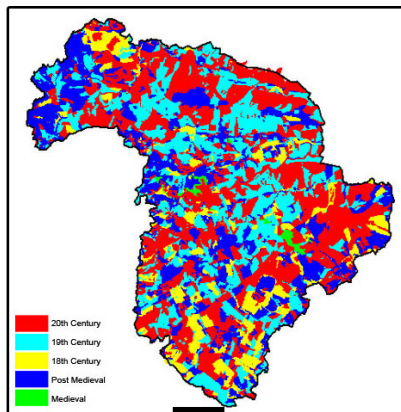
6.9 Landscape History

The Historic Landscape Characterisation has recorded details of the fossilised traces of previous land uses for just under half of the landscape of the AONB.

This overlaying evidence of historic land uses creates the character of the landscape as we perceive it today. Some areas of land in today's landscape may be characterised as predominantly 19th century for example but may also contain traces of earlier post medieval and medieval land use.

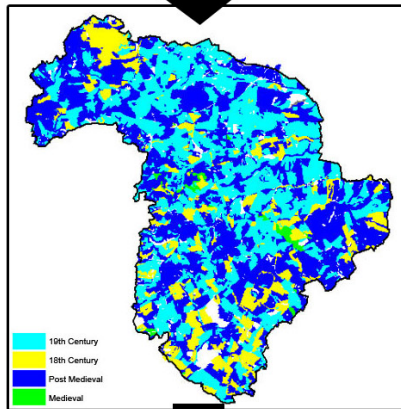
The way in which this time depth is built up can be seen in the series of maps (figure 36). It is possible to dig down through the layers in the landscape which have been created over time.

Figure 36: Landscape History by period



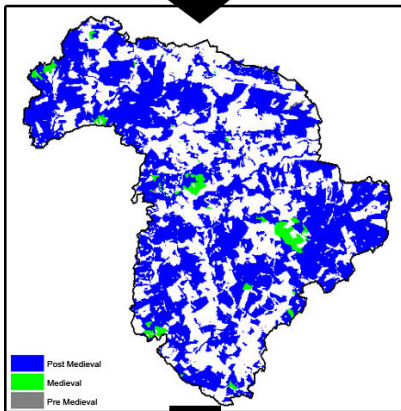
Character of Landscape Today

This map shows today's landscape - the predominance of red shows that over a third of the landscape of the AONB is 20th Century in character, while another third is predominantly 19th and 18th century in character.



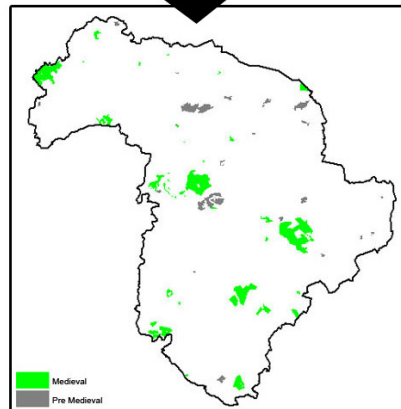
Removing the 20th century

This map neatly illustrates that nearly all the landscape which is predominantly 20th century in character today preserves traces of previous land uses in preceding periods.



Removing traces of the 18th and 19th CCentury landscape

Over 50% of the landscape preserves traces of the post-medieval landscape, spread throughout the AONB.

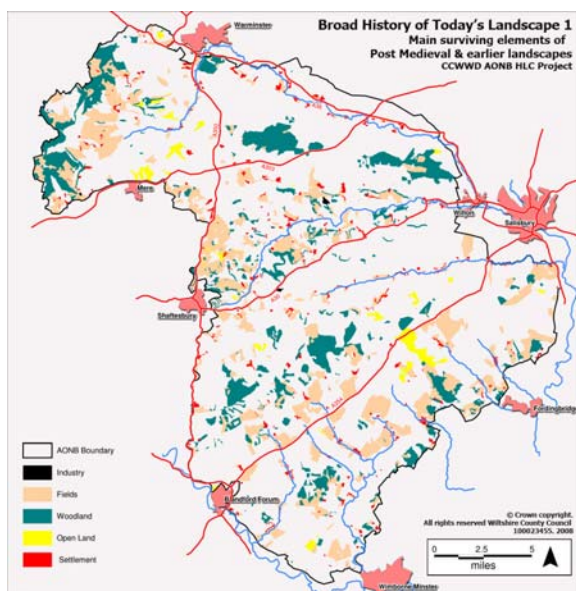


Removing traces of the post medieval landscape

We are then left with the oldest traces of past land use surviving in the landscape (a word of warning this map obviously does not show all the areas in the AONB where there is evidence of, for example, prehistoric activity, but only where this activity still effects the character of today's landscape).

The HLC dataset can be used to produce maps of how each time period identified contributes to today's landscape in the AONB. These maps represent the dominant current Historic Landscape Type in the landscape and not the previous traces of land use history recorded as previous Historic Landscape Types.

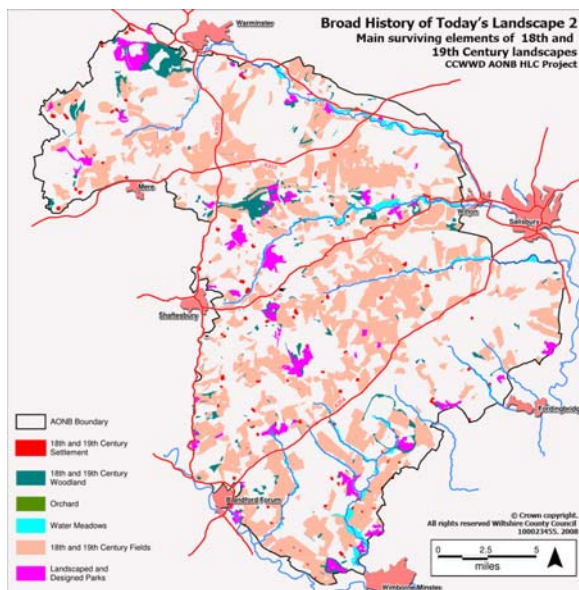
The history of today's landscape in the AONB is explored further in Figures 37-39



Main surviving elements of post medieval and earlier landscapes.

This map shows the oldest landscape elements which survive in today's landscape – note the blocks of old woodland which exists across the West Wiltshire Downs, along the north west edge of the AONB and across the wooded Chase Downlands and the predominance of ancient fields, and settlement in the Vale of Wardour. Conversely the only intact elements remaining in the Vale of Wylye of these older landscapes are the settlements.

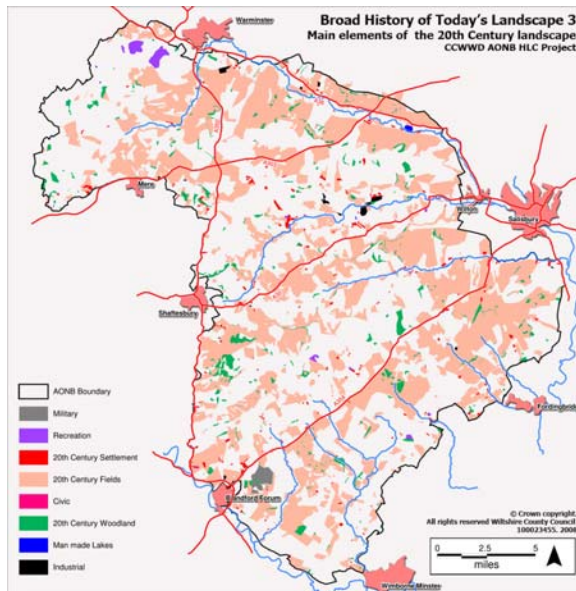
Figure 37: Broad History of Today's Landscape 1



Main surviving elements of 18th and 19th century landscapes.

The map shows the dominance and impact of the new enclosures which were created at this time, especially across the Southern Downland Belt, and the West Wiltshire Downs. This is also the period when the prominence of the landscaped and designed park was at its height. It must be remembered, however, that many of these parks also contain traces of earlier stages in their development, and that the estates and parkland that they represent were also a dominant feature of the medieval and post medieval landscape.

Figure 38: Broad History of Today's Landscape 2



Main surviving elements 20th century landscapes

Fields with primarily 20th century characteristics dominate the Wylye Valley and the eastern edge of the AONB. New scattered woodlands have also been planted especially across the Chase Downlands. Novel land uses have also started to creep into the AONB including areas for recreation around Longleat, the military camp at Blandford and light industrial areas and estates.

Figure 39: Broad History of Today's Landscape 2