Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Background Area **T1** Theme Supplementary Method
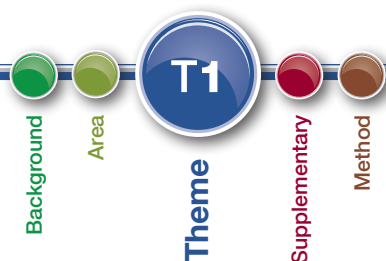
Historic Environment
Action Plans

Theme 1: Ancient Boundaries
and Land Ownership
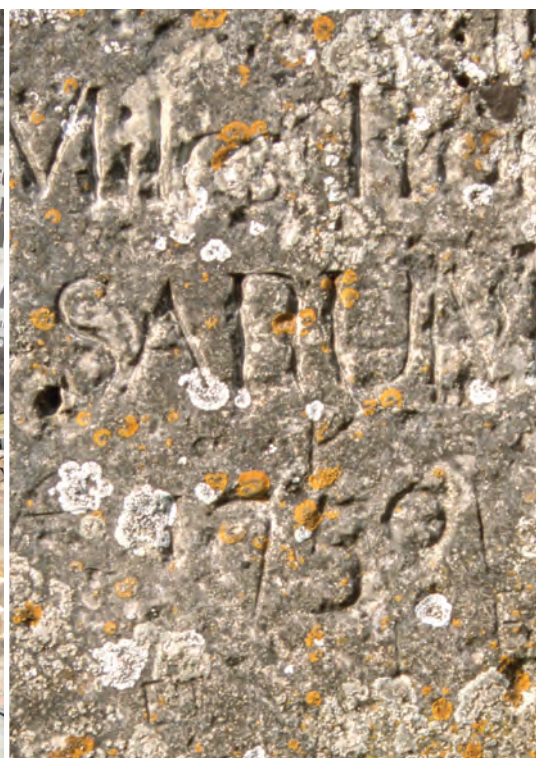
This document forms part of a suite of documents which together comprise the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB Historic Environment Action Plans.

The HEAPs provide a summary of the key characteristics of the historic environment of the AONB at a landscape scale, they then set out the significance, condition and forces for change affecting the historic fabric and character of this special landscape and identify proactive actions to conserve and enhance these special characteristics. These summaries are divided into two groups:

1.   Summaries of the historic environment of the AONB by area
2.   Summaries of the historic environment of the AONB by theme

These core documents are accompanied by documents which provide background information, supplementary information and detail on the methodologies used to create these documents.

A series of icons help you navigate this suite of documents:

Background - Provides an introduction to the AONB Historic Environment Action Plans and provides background information on the history and archaeology of the landscape **(B1 to B10)**

Area - Summarises key characteristics of discrete geographical areas within the AONB, they then set out the significance, condition and forces for change affecting the historic fabric and character of each area and identify proactive actions to conserve and enhance its characteristics **(A1 to A12)**

Theme - Summarises key characteristics of historic environment themes, each document then sets out the significance, condition and forces for change affecting the historic fabric and character of each theme and identify proactive actions to conserve and enhance its characteristics **(T1 to T14)**

Supplementary - A series of documents which explore supplementary issues of relevance to the Historic Environment Action Plans **(S1 to S2)**

Method - Introduces the methodology behind the production of the Historic Environment Action Plans **(M1 to M3)**

Contents

Introducing the Theme Statements

Fourteen distinct Historic Landscape Themes have been identified in the AONB. These were chosen by the HEAP Steering group as representing the topics which best encapsulate the historic character of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB.

The theme descriptions aim to provide an overview of each theme which encapsulates the main features of the Historic Environment present and include both the archaeological and historical, the very old and the more recent.

The process through which the Historic Landscape Character themes were identified, and mapped, and the sources of information used to create these descriptions is documented in the methodological statement 'Creating and Describing Historic Character Themes'.

Introduction to Theme 1: Ancient Boundaries and Land Ownership

"you see a great dike and vallum (Verndike) upon the edges of the hills to the left of Pentridge, to which I suppose it gave name; this crosses the Roman road, and then passes on the other side, upon the division of the hundred."

William Stukeley 1723

The aim of this theme statement is to provide an overview of the impact that land ownership and ancient boundaries have had on the AONB landscape and on the evidence of physical surviving remains of these activities in today's landscape. The AONB from the late Iron Age onwards has been a marginal area on the boundary between peoples, places and identities. This has had an important impact on its historic character.

Bokerley Dyke

Summary of Key Characteristics

- The ancient county boundaries of Dorset, Hampshire and Somerset run through the area. These boundaries are associated with 'gates', large trees and coppices, and banks. A network of ancient parish boundaries also sit within this framework, again associated with key ancient trees and in some instances deliberately coinciding with Prehistoric monuments.
- The frontier of Saxon influence in the 6th Century is marked by the Bokerley Dyke. This frontier can be read in the spread of material culture, and the distribution of Old English and Saxon place names in the landscape. The same approximate area is also the boundary of late Roman Civitates and the furthest eastern extent of the Durotriges in the Iron Age.
- The Medieval systems of land division, the systems of Hundreds, has had a profound impact on the character of the landscape. In the early Medieval period these were created independent of county or parish boundaries. These boundaries are not legible in the landscape, but they formed the basis on which land was transferred to ecclesiastical magnates such as the Abbeys of Shaftesbury, Winchester and Glastonbury in the Medieval period. They remained in church lands until the Dissolution when the same land parcels were granted to the nobility. This resulted in a great continuity of both land ownership and groupings of holdings in the AONB landscape.
- The ecclesiastical Medieval pattern of land ownership is represented by the network of ruined houses and other forms of religious houses. The impact of the direct landownership of the religious houses is more subtle, for example, the desertion of the village at Tarrant Rawston was on the orders of the Abbess of Shaftesbury.
- The Post Dissolution pattern of major land ownership is much more legible, for example, in the Hundred of Chalke, inherited by the Earl of Pembroke from Wilton Abbey. The influence of the Wilton Estate can be seen in the establishment of great avenues of trees across the tops of the downland.

Links to other Historic Landscape Character Statements

This statement forms one of 14 AONB wide Historic Landscape Character Theme descriptions. These are accompanied by a series of 12 Historic Landscape Character Area descriptions which cover the whole of the AONB. These documents together build up a picture of the key characteristics of the Historic Environment of the AONB at a landscape scale. These statements combined inform the Historic Environment Action Plans created for the AONB landscape.

Other Themes of particular relevance to this theme are:

Theme 5: Hunting Landscapes

All the Historic Landscape Character Areas are of relevance to this theme.

to

History and Context

It is very difficult to identify the location of early pre Medieval cultural or administrative boundaries with any certainty. However patterns in material culture, settlement, coinage and burial practices mean that several boundary zones can be identified crossing the AONB before the establishment of the more familiar system of counties. These include the influence of different Iron Age tribal groupings; the late Roman civitas, or administrative areas; and a boundary halting the spread of Saxon culture across the AONB in the 6th Century AD. A good case can be made for associating these Saxon boundaries with physical features in the landscape.

The late Anglo-Saxon administration system of shires, hundreds and vils established by the Crown, and the system of parishes established by the church provide the first physical boundaries in the AONB which can be identified with certainty across the whole landscape, being recorded in written records and existing as traceable features on the ground. These were adopted and transformed by the Normans from the 10th century onwards, and represent the origins of the counties and civil parishes which represent the basis of government in the AONB today.

The systems of hundreds is largely forgotten in today's landscape but had a major impact on the landscape of the AONB due to the effect on patterns of land ownership and control. Grants of land by the Crown were often based on hundreds, which meant that land owners, especially ecclesiastical holdings, could potential own groupings of manors which conformed to the area of hundreds. In addition ecclesiastical and lay powers granted control over the administration of hundreds, known as liberties', had even more ccontrol over land use within these areas. Other hundreds remained under the control of common law and the shire courts.

This Medieval picture of land ownership and boundaries is further complicated by the Medieval hunting areas of the Cranborne Chase, Selwood and Grovely Forest and the 'rights' and 'hunting law' which went with them, and which are discussed in theme 5.

In the AONB by the 14th century at least half of the AONB was controlled by ecclesiastical powers who owned or sublet the main manor in each parish, a small amount was retained as crown lands and the rest was owned by a myriad of smaller landowners. In some cases these were concentrated into larger blocks, as with the control the Hungerford family gained over the estates of the Wylye valley.

With the reformation and dissolution of the monasteries in the 15th century, the ecclesiastical landholdings were often transferred whole sale to new lay powers who would become the new power brokers of the area, including the Earls of Pembroke, Shaftesbury and Wilton.

There has therefore been great continuity of land ownership within the AONB, which did not fragment until the agricultural depression of the 1920s, and the large scale sell off of country houses and land which occurred across the UK. Despite this trend large estates remain dominant features of land ownership within the AONB. This includes estates deriving from the post reformation period including the Cranborne, Shaftesbury and Wilton estates, and land holdings which are more recent in origin including Fonthill.

Key Secondary Sources

The Late Iron Age sites of the AONB and the evidence for Durotrigian coinage and ceramic styles is discussed by Mark Corney in a paper on 'The Romano-British nucleated Settlements of Wiltshire' in *Roman Wiltshire and After* (2001) published by the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Museum.

The evidence for the transition from Roman to Saxon influence is looked at in a series of papers in *Roman Wiltshire and After: Papers in Honour of Ken Annable* (2001) edited by P. Ellis and published by the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society.

The importance of the shire boundaries in the early Medieval period is discussed by Katherine Barker in an article in *The Chase, The Hart and the Park* (2009) published by the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB.

The Victoria History County of Wiltshire provides a comprehensive overview of Medieval and Post Medieval administration and land ownership, including descriptions of 'Feudal Wiltshire', ecclesiastical houses and parishes described by ancient hundreds. Volumes of relevance include 3, 5, 8, 10, 13, and 15.

The website a "Vision" of Britain, provides useful descriptions of the Medieval and later administrative divisions in England www.visionofbritain.org.uk.

For more information on sources see Background document 10

The line of the Bokerley Dyke at West Woodyates

Landscape Scale Characteristics and Components

1. Early Cultural and Administrative Boundaries

1.1 Late Iron Age Tribal groupings

Background

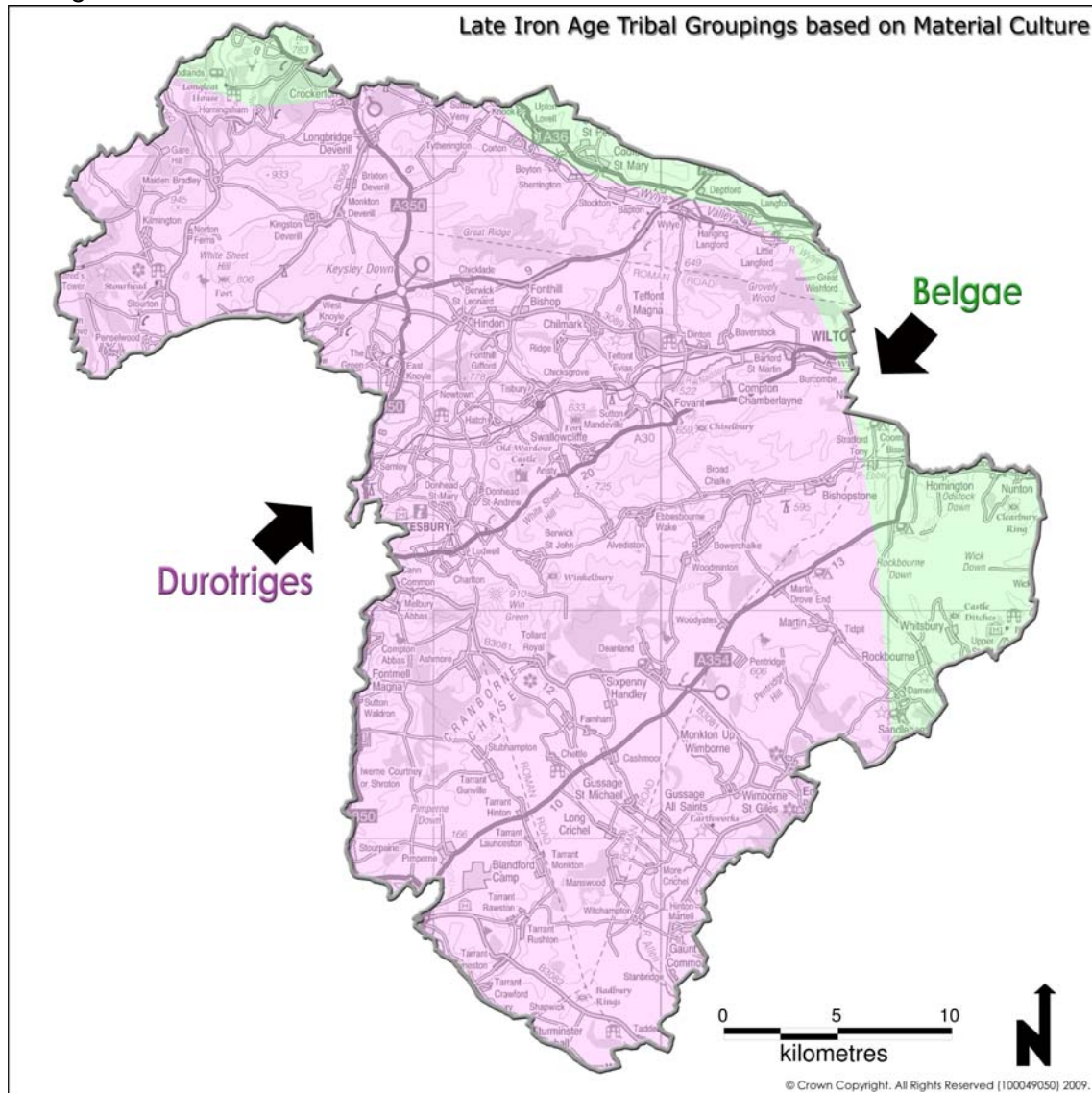Late Iron Age Tribal Groupings based on Material Culture

Figure One

The Wylye Valley and the area to the west of the River Avon appear to form the boundary between two late Iron Age tribal groupings, 400 BC to AD43. These are the Durotriges and the Belgae (see *Figure One*). Although this does not necessarily reflect two distinct rigid political or economic entities, there are physical difference in material culture (coinage, pottery) and settlement patterns.

Landscape scale impact

The area shaded purple on *Figure One* is associated with the pre Roman coinage of Durotrigian origin. The area is also associated with Durotrigian ceramic styles and with distinctive nucleated settlements. These form multiple ditch systems frequently shaped with banjo enclosures. Banjo enclosures are curvilinear in outline, with the central enclosure being bounded by an earthwork comprising a bank and internal ditch; excavated examples are often associated with occupation evidence.

Notable concentrations of these nucleated settlements can be found associated with Great Ridge and Grovely Wood on the West Wiltshire Downs, including sites at Ebsbury, Hamshill Ditches, Hanging Langford Camp and Stockton Earthworks and in the Gussages. These represent highly ordered landscapes with enclosed and unenclosed settlements continuing in usage through the Romano-British period.

1.2 Late Roman Administrative Boundaries

Background

With the collapse of the Roman Empire, around 410 AD, the landscape of the AONB was initially subsumed within several self governing Civitas. This included the Belgae civitas to the east, the Durotriges to the west and possible the Dubonni in the far north western corner of the AONB. See *Figure Two*.

Landscape Scale impact

The impact of the end of Roman rule in the AONB and the interpretation of the fifth century in particular is difficult because the use of coinage and the mass production of pottery died away. However the boundary of two of the civitas, between the Durotriges to the west and the Belgae to the east, may be represented by the line of the east facing Bokerley Dyke.

Similarly 'Teffont' in the north of the AONB means 'spring on the boundary'. The limited archaeological evidence suggests that between AD 450 and AD 675 there was contact and intermingling between the indigenous population and immigrants in Wiltshire. This evidence includes the adoption of 'generic' novel styles of buildings such as the Grubenhause (a sunken feature building) which is absent from West Wiltshire, and the use of new burial customs including deposition in prehistoric barrows and the accompaniment of inhumations with distinctive Anglo-Saxon artifacts, including brooches and pins.
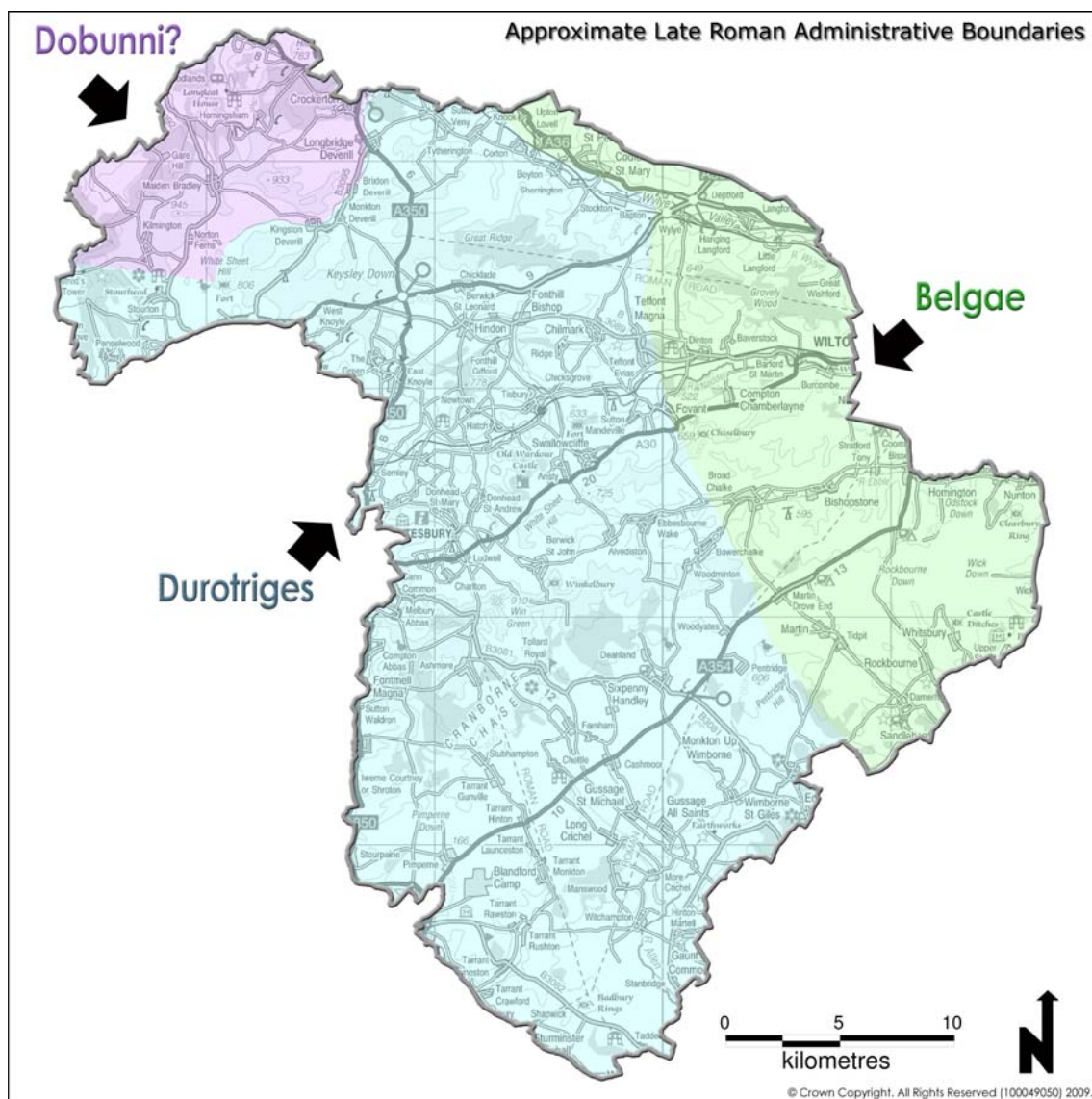
1.3 6th Century Saxon Boundaries

Background

Evidence from place names and burials can be used to chart the sphere of Saxon
influence across the landscape of the AONB. During the late 5th and 6th centuries AD,
there appeared to be a boundary running north south across the AONB dividing the in
coming Saxon culture in the east and the indigenous culture in the west. See *Figure 3.*

Landscape Scale Impact

During late 5th and 6th centuries AD Anglo-Saxon burials are evident as far west as
Teffont in the Nadder Valley, and Warminster in the Wylye Valley, but absent from the
extreme South West of Wiltshire going into Dorset, including the Upper Wylye and the
Deverills. It is possible that the existing Civitas boundaries such as at Teffont or

Bokerley Dyke representing the 'frontier' of Saxon influence at this period, possibly indicated by the final built up phase of the bank.

During the 7th century AD the sphere of Saxon influence had finally subsumed the rest of the AONB, represented by the Saxon burial barrows at Alvediston, and Maiden Bradley.
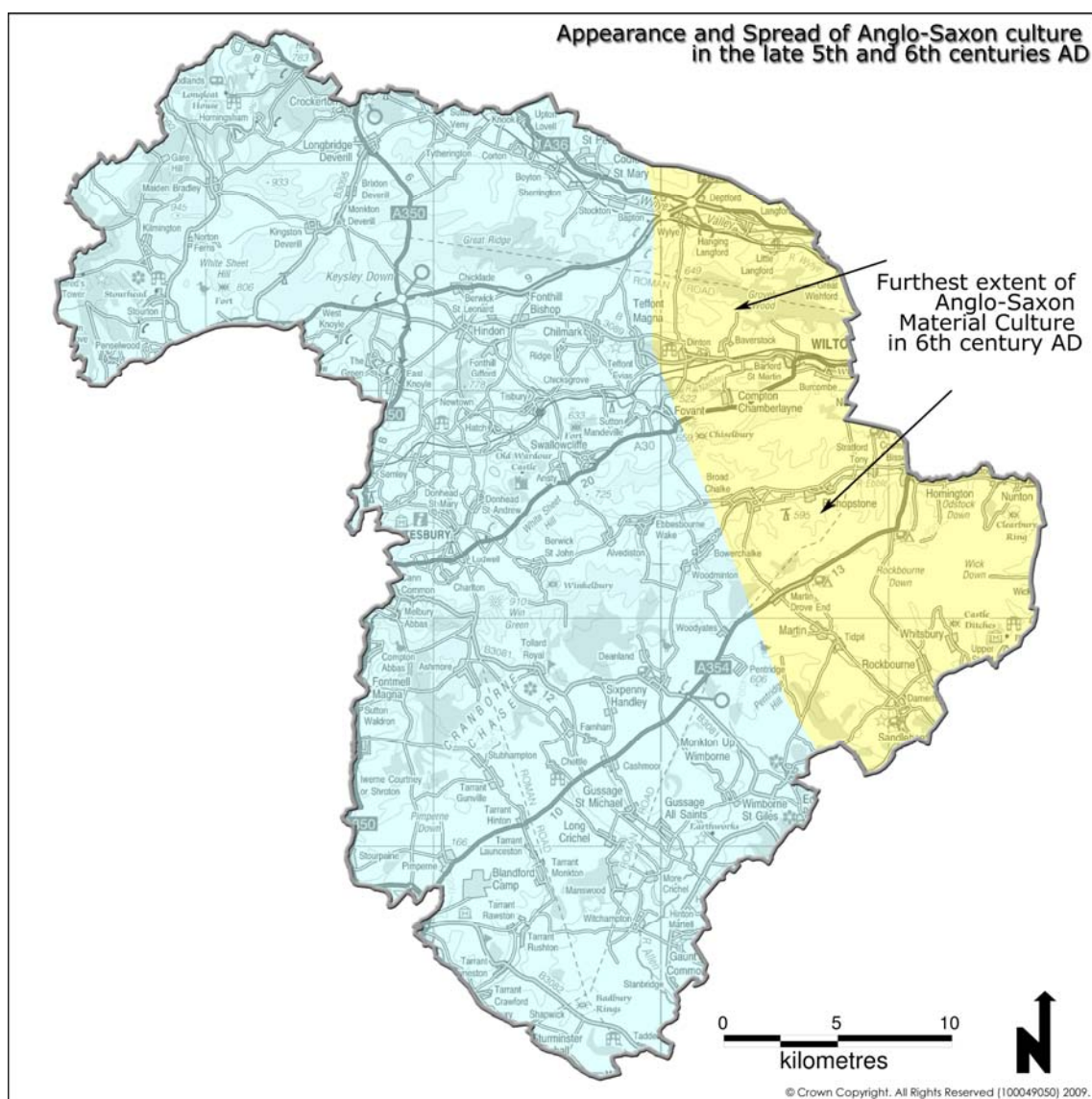

Figure Three

2. Medieval Shire Boundaries

Background

The ancient counties are historic subdivisions of England. These were first established for administration by the Normans and in most cases based on earlier Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and shires. The AONB forms the boundary between four ancient shires,

Dorset, Hampshire, Somerset and Wiltshire. The location of these shire boundaries in some locations differ markedly from the modern county boundaries. See *Figure Four.*
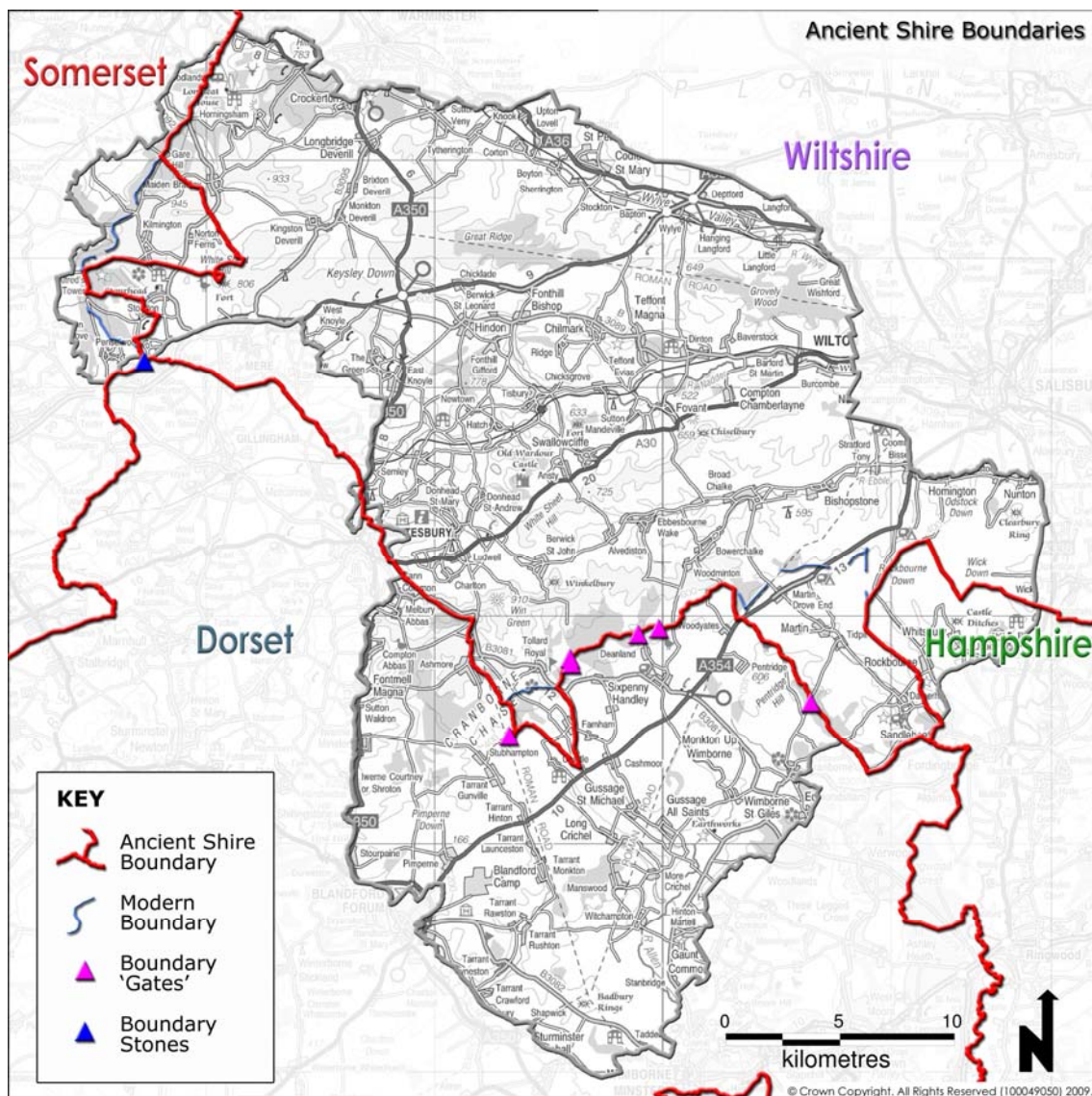
Figure Four

Landscape scale impact

The boundaries of the ancient shires across the AONB are, in most places, substantial features. They tend to be associated with well formed boundary features, including ditches, banks, boundary stones, and boundary pits. They can also be associated with earlier features including prehistoric boundaries. They tend to be of great botanical interest, including mature wooded hedges, veteran trees and ancient pollards, and coppices.

The ancient county boundary between Somerset and Wiltshire runs north–south along the north western edge of the AONB. Selwood is mentioned as a boundary in Saxon charters. This boundary deviates from the modern county boundary at Kilmington. It has never been surveyed but is most likely associated with veteran trees and banks.

There is a boundary stone situated at the junction of three counties, Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire, traditionally known as Egberts Stone.

The ancient county boundary between Dorset and Wiltshire runs east west across the centre of the AONB, and runs through the heart of the Cranborne Chase. This ancient boundary is associated with 'gate' place names such as Woodyates, and Bloody Shard Gate. These place names demark former crossing points on the boundary. Boundaries between parishes run east-west through the heart of woodland coinciding with the county boundary.

The southern downland belt is crossed by the ancient county boundaries of Dorset, Wiltshire and Hampshire which deviates from the course of the modern boundary near the parishes of Damerham and Rockbourne.

Chase Woods from West Woodyates, the borderlands between Dorset and Wiltshire

3. Ancient Parishes

Background

The parish system in England begins with the establishment of a minster church or estate churches founded by Anglo-Saxon or Norman landowners. A tithe was paid by the parish inhabitants to support the church. The boundaries of these ecclesiastical areas are often referred to as 'ancient parishes'. Each ancient parish had at its core a parish church which was controlled by a patron who had the legal right to appoint the parish priest, this right was called an 'advowson'.

The pattern of ancient parishes survived the reformation and they started to be distinguished from civil parishes after 1597. The majority of distinct civil parishes were created between 1845 and 1975. These local government administrative units increasingly diverged from the ancient parish boundaries, commonly in the AONB this was represented by several parishes being merged.
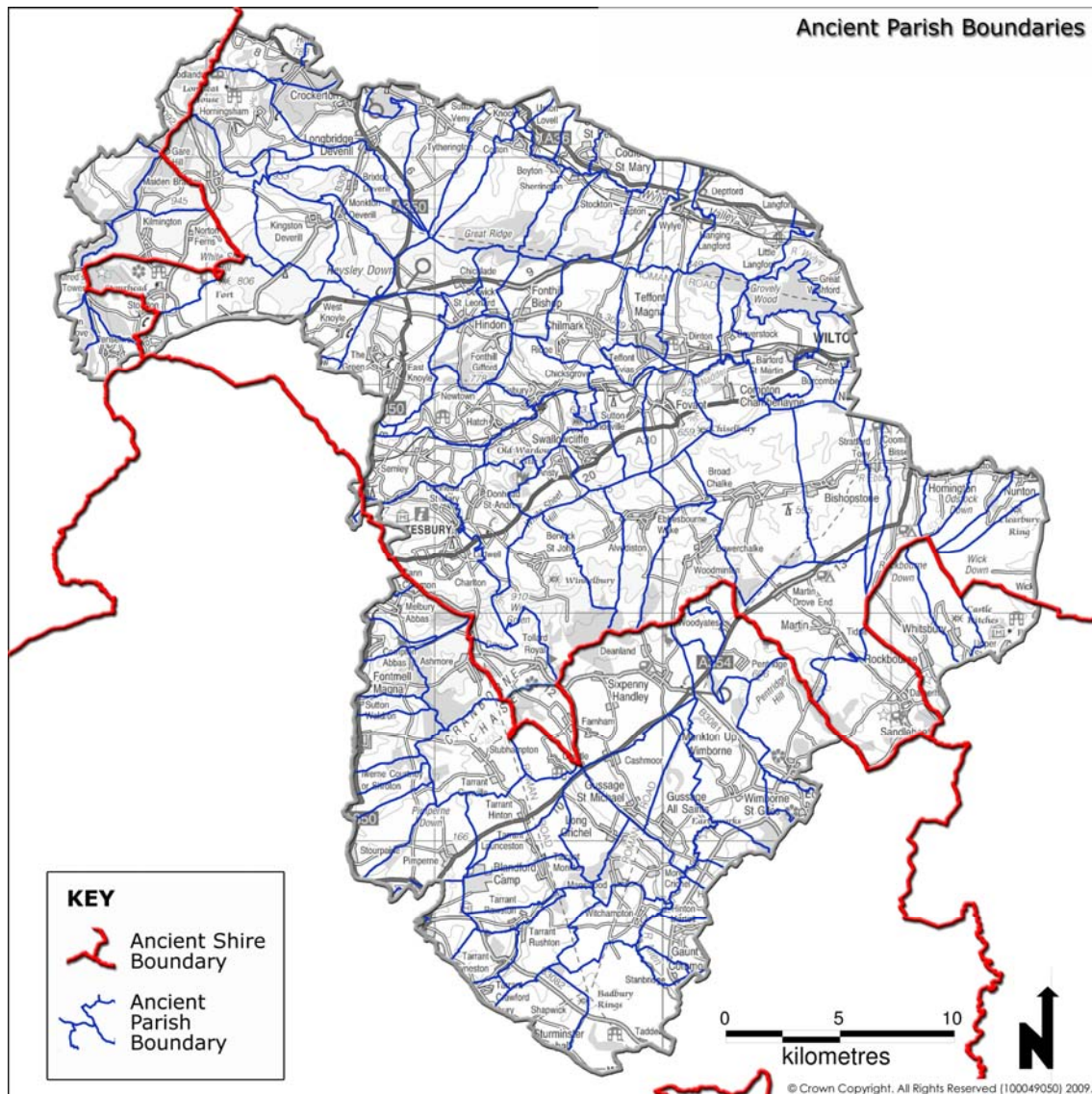
Landscape scale impact

Figure Five

There are 104 civil parishes in the AONB today compared with 121 ancient parishes. Many of the ancient and civil parish boundaries still coincide, but many other parishes have been merged

Ancient parish boundaries within the AONB tend to be associated with well formed boundary features, including ditches, banks, boundary stones, and boundary pits. They can also be associated with earlier features including prehistoric boundaries. They tend

to be of great botanical interest, including mature wooded hedges, veteran trees and ancient pollards, and coppices.

Many parish boundaries follow the lines of ancient droveways, abut the ancient shire boundary, or respect topographical features such as the edge of the chalk escarpments.

Across the AONB the shape and location of the parish boundaries varies, see *Figure Five*:

- In the north west of the AONB, the ancient parishes are irregular in shape and run east west from the county boundary, encompassing a slice of the higher wooded ground and the greensand terrace below. These are important historic boundaries, again, associated with veteran tresses which also coincide with the ancient hundreds.

- The chalk river valleys of the AONB are crossed by linear parishes which take in a slice of valley and downland; those in the Ebble are much larger, relating much more closely to the pattern of ancient hundreds.

- The ancient parish of Grovely Forest is notable because here the area of the parish and the Medieval hunting forest coincide.

- The ancient parishes in the West Wiltshire Downs are comprised of a series of thin and linear parishes running north-south. The spine of the Downs and the forests of Great Ridge and Grovely Wood forms the boundary which separates these parishes.

- The parishes in the Vale of Wardour are smaller and irregular. They are more rectangular on the northern side, and contrast strongly with parishes elsewhere in the AONB.

- Several ancient parish boundaries meet at Chetterwood (Moor Crichel, Long Crichel, Tarrant Launceston, Tarrant Monkton and Tarrant Rushton) suggesting that the estates from which they developed had shared woodland as a common resource.

- The parishes in the south western corner of the AONB run northeast - southwest across this area, providing a slice of downland hills and heath land which lies outside the AONB's eastern border.

- The ancient parish boundaries across the Southern Downland Belt are irregular in shape and become increasingly larger to the south. Those on the western side of the area incorporate a slice of downland, and the Stour Valley which is beyond the border of the AONB.
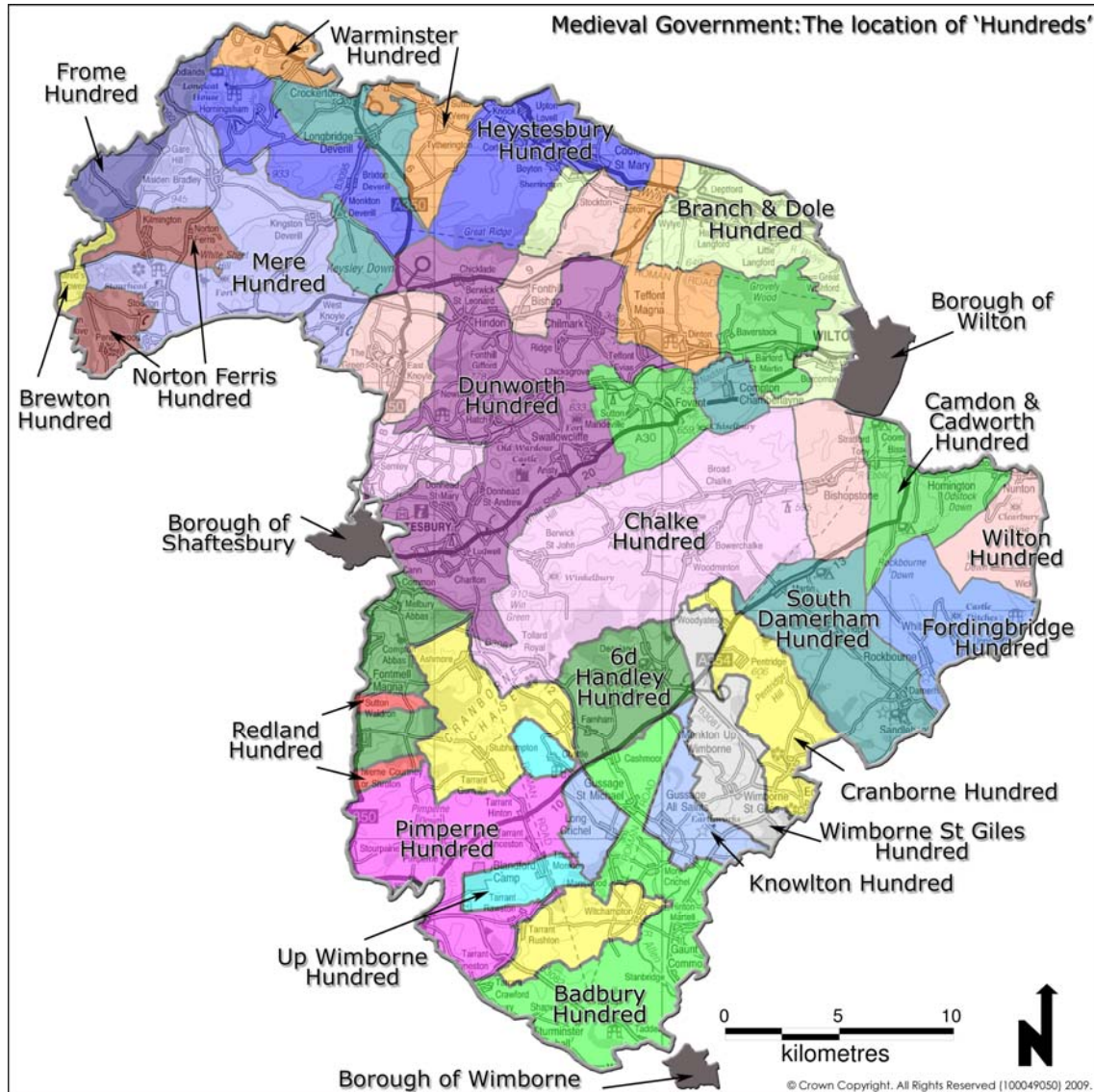
4. Ancient Hundreds

Figure Six

Background

In England a hundred was the division of a shire for administrative, military and judicial purposes under the common law introduced into England from the 7th century AD. Hundred boundaries were independent of both parish and county boundaries, although often aligned, meaning that a hundred could be split between counties, or a parish could be split between hundreds. Hundreds were subdivided into tithings which supported arrangements for the management of estates, taxation and criminal law. This formed the basis of major patterns of landownership from the 7th century AD.

The system of hundreds was not as stable as the system of counties, and lists frequently differ on how many hundreds a county has. The principal functions of the

hundred became the administration of law and the keeping of the peace. The importance of the hundred courts declined from the 17th century, and most of the powers were extinguished with the establishment of county courts in 1867.

Some hundreds were established as 'Liberties'. These specially privileged areas were created to encourage larger landowners to take a more active share in the preservation of law and order. Liberties were not only jurisdictional but administrative and fiscal, but were separate to manorial courts.

In Wiltshire the earliest liberties and immunities were given to religious houses or ecclesiastical lords. There is evidence to suggest that the Chalke, South Damerham, Heystebury and Warminster Hundreds were established as early liberties.

The difficulties for the Wiltshire tenant which resulted from the creation of honours and privileged areas were intensified by the scattered nature of the estates.

By the 14th century a third of the Wiltshire hundreds still remained in royal hands and two-thirds were held by subjects. But It is apparent that many lords of private hundreds owned few manors within their hundred. In the main, the estates held by religious houses were more compact than the lay landowners. Moreover estates held by laymen in the 15th century were more compact than the land holdings of the 12th and 13th centuries.

Figure Six shows the late arrangement of the hundreds as depicted in 18th century county maps such as Greenwood and is also based on information in the Victoria county history of Wiltshire.

Landscape scale impact

No research has been undertaken in the AONB to see if the boundaries of ancient hundreds differed from the ancient parish boundaries which were within them, and whether separate ancient hundred boundaries in the form of banks and ditches can be distinguished on the ground.

Patterns of landownership in the Medieval period in the AONB often, but not exclusively, related to the administrative system of hundreds. For example the estates of the Abbess of Wilton were nearly all situated along the valleys of the Nadder and the Ebble corresponding with the hundred which was in the Abbeys hands by the 13th century. This does not mean that the abbey owned all the land within the hundred, however they did tend to own many of the main manorial estates within each parish which they either sublet or administered directly. For example the manor within the parish of Broad Chalke was held by the abbey until dissolution, while the manor within the parish of Ebbesbourne Wake had been granted away into private hands by 1066.

This history has had a physical impact on the landscape of the AONB. The sustained pattern of landownership in the Ebble means that a vast part of the Chalke Hundred which was granted to Wilton Abbey in 10th century was subsquently passed to the Earls of Pembroke at the Dissolution. This long history is visible in the landscape through the great avenues established by the Earls of Pembroke.
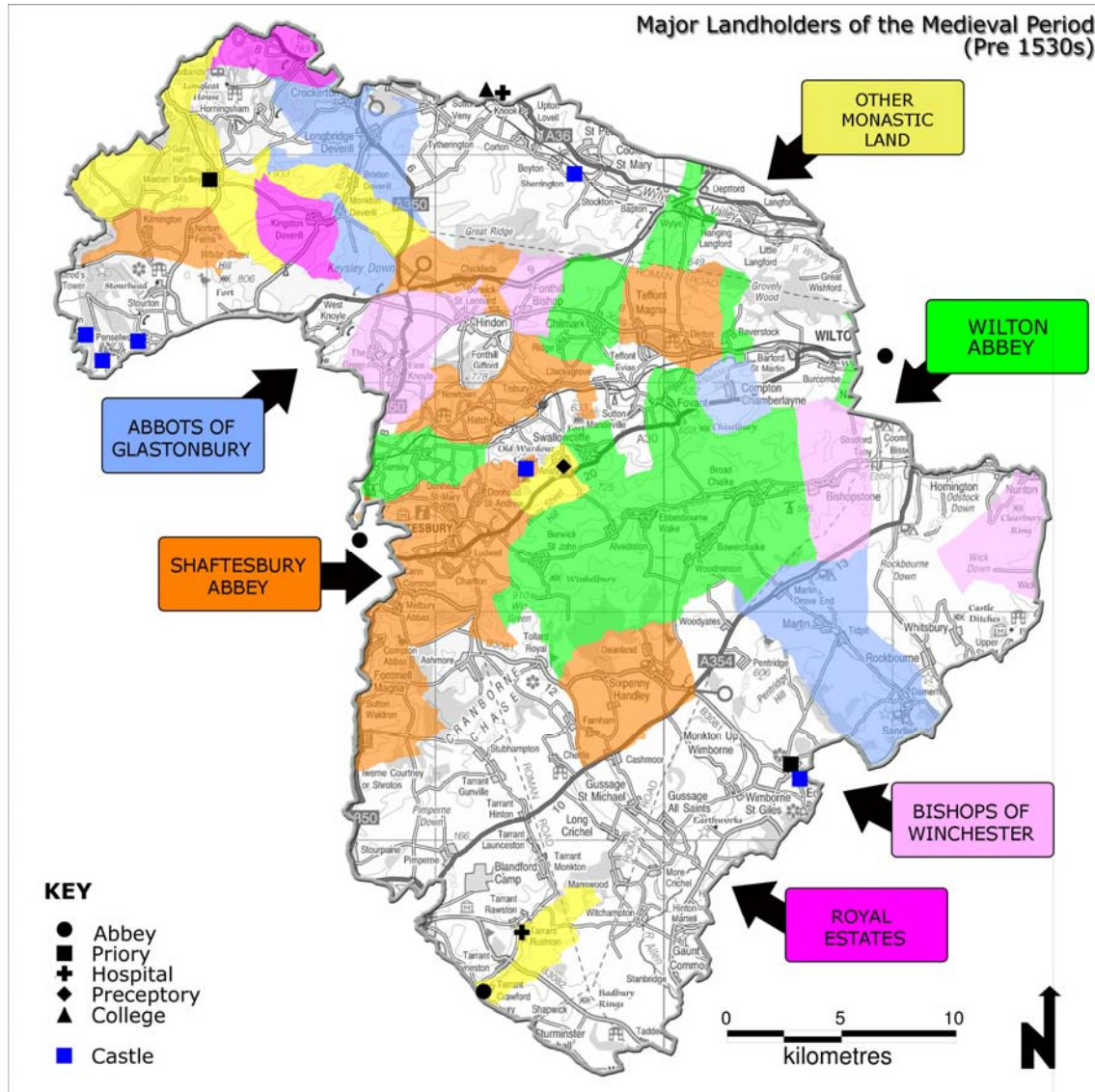
5. Pre Reformation Land Owners

Background

During the Medieval period large parts of the AONB were owned by ecclesiastical magnates, including the Abbeys of Shaftesbury, Wilton, Glastonbury, and the Bishops of Winchester. See *Figure Seven*. Smaller areas of land were also held by other monastic institutions, these include:

- The priory of Maiden Bradley
- The priory of Longleat
- The priory of Witham
- Preceptory of Ansty (House of Knights Hospitallers)
- College of St Peter and Paul, Heytesbury

- Hospital of St John and St Katherine, Heytesbury

Landscape scale impact

Archaeological evidence of the earthworks of the former Priories at Maiden Bradley and Witham Friary. The latter which has been excavated.

Medieval ecclesiastical influence in the Wylye Valley is represented by the remains of a hospital at Heytesbury which survives as almhouses, and which were rebuilt in 1679.

The influence of the Abbey of Shaftesbury in the Tarrant Valley is visible in the abandoned settlement at Tarrant Crawford. The original settlement was relocated to make way for a nunnery in the 13th century and in time the new site was also deserted. In addition Shaftsbury Abbey exerted a great influence over the northern half of the Melbury escarpment in the Medieval period.

In the Vale of Wardour the influence of the monastic estates on this area is very notable. This includes ecclesiastical landowners such as Shaftesbury and Wilton Abbey in the Medieval period. This legacy is represented by the great tithe barn at Tisbury and the remains of a Knight's Hospitallers Preceptory at Ansty.

6. Post Reformation Land Owners

Background

The impact of the reformation and dissolution of the monasteries AD 1536-1541 in the AONB was that many former monastic landholdings in the AONB were transferred to new lay magnates. This included the Earls of Pembroke and Shafesbury. See *Figure Eight*.

Landscape scale impact

In the north west of the area, the Post Medieval land ownership was dominated by three major landowners with the same pattern remaining in today's landscape. This included the Thynnes (later Marquess of Bath) at Longleat, The Dukes of Somerset at Maiden Bradley and Lord Stourton, later the Hoares, at Stourhead. The designed park and house at Stourhead was passed into the management of the National Trust in the 20th century. There has therefore been a continuity of land holdings reflected in the historic land patterns present.

In the Wylye Valley the continuity of land holdings is represented by the influence of the Hungerford's in the Wylye Valley. Their landholdings were based on the pattern of ancient hundreds.

On the West Wiltshire Downs the influence of Shaftesbury Abbey pre reformation, and the Earls of Pembroke post reformation, is represented by the longevity of management in Grovely Wood.

The continuity of landownership is felt in the Allen Valley through the influence of the Earls of Shaftesbury centred on Wimborne St Giles. This is represented by the creation of the parkland through which the river cuts.

In the Vale of Wardour post reformation major magnates, such as the Lords Arundell, Earls of Pembroke and the Beckford's, controlled much of the area and this legacy is legible by the influence of 'estate style' and the large numbers of grand houses and parks.

Across the Cranborne Chase Shaftesbury Abbey exerted great influence in this area in the Medieval period as major land owners. Post reformation five landowners vied for control of the area, the Frekes, the Arundel's, and the Earls of Pembroke, Shaftesbury and Salisbury.

In the far south of the AONB, the Bankes family have had a considerable influence on the landscape in the vicinity of Kingston Lacy in the Post Medieval period. This includes the establishment of Kingston Lacy park and the great avenue of trees associated with it.

Figure Eight

17
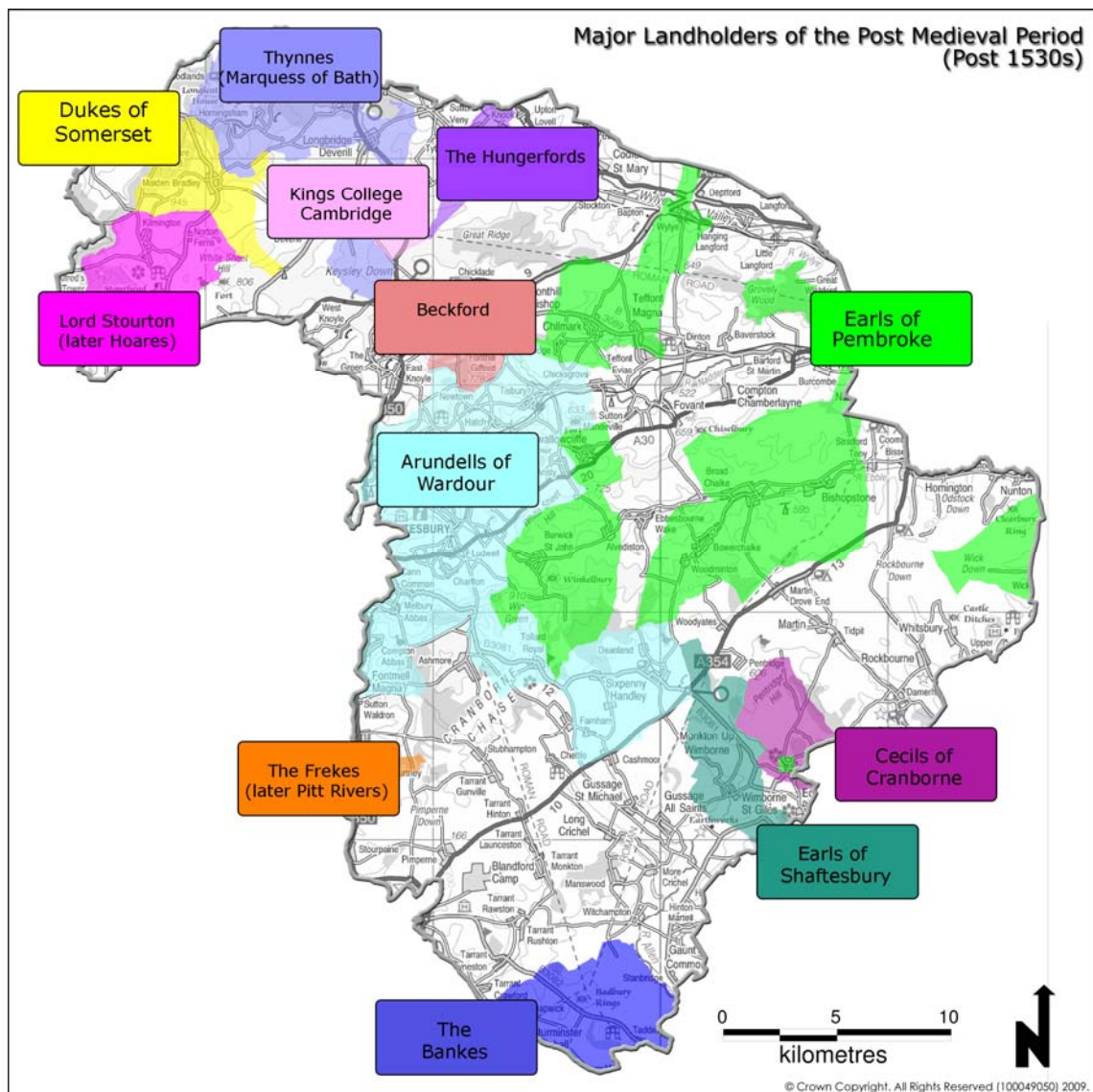
Historic Environment Actions

See Background paper 9 for a full list of Historic Environment Actions and the stages identified in their implementation.

ACTION 15: Increase understanding of Medieval landscape elements of the AONB by academics, teachers and public.

The Threat and the Opportunity - There is perceived to be a lack of appreciation of the Medieval components of the AONB's landscape: settlements, buildings, castles, fields, pastures, woodlands, roads, mills, hunting chase, parks, etc, all of which contribute greatly to the fabric and character of the AONB as it survives today.

The Potential Mechanism - The lack of appreciation of the Medieval components of the AONB landscape could be combated by a seminar and the creation of a research framework that encourages and sets out a range of achievable goals for further research in the area.

ACTION 18: Identify key characteristics of hundreds and associated beneficial management

The Threat and the Opportunity – The Medieval hundreds in the AONB are associated with unique patterns of historic land use and management. For example the Chalk Hundred centred on the Ebble Valley was the focus of a consistent pattern of landownership until the 20th century. This has resulted in a recognisable and locally distinctive historic landscape character in the area which is not widely recognised and understood. The distinctive patterns of land use that underpin that character may be in danger of erosion through management that may not be based on historical awareness.

The Potential Mechanism - This action aims to help deal with the erosion of the distinctive landscape scale character of the Hundreds in the AONB first through study of changing land management and then through the use of the results of that to inform the raising of awareness among land managers and farmers.

Historic Environment Action Plans

www.historiclandscape.co.uk

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ENGLISH HERITAGE