

Murchington



Conservation Area Character Appraisal



Dartmoor National Park Authority January 2011

Conservation Areas were introduced through the *Civic Amenities Act 1967*. Section 69 (1) (a) of the Act gives the definition of a Conservation Area as:

‘an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance’

There are now over 9,000 Conservation Areas nation-wide. Local Planning Authorities are required to designate Conservation Areas, keep them under review, and if appropriate, designate further areas (Section 69 (2)). There are currently 23 Conservation Areas within Dartmoor National Park.

Designation brings certain duties to local planning authorities:

- ◆ to formulate and publish from time to time proposals for the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas and submit them for consideration to a public meeting in the area to which they relate (Section 71)
- ◆ in exercising their planning powers, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Areas (Section 72).

Conservation Area Character Appraisals aim to define and analyse the special interest which constitutes the character and appearance of a place. It is these qualities which warrant the designation of a Conservation Area.

An appraisal will provide a sound basis, defensible on appeal, for policies within the Local Development Framework and Development Management decisions. It can also form the groundwork for a subsequent **Conservation Area Management Plan**, which will contain defined issues, proposals and policies for the conservation and enhancement of the area. It is also intended that the document will be helpful to those involved in drawing up Enhancement Projects and Village Design Statements within the National Park area.

The main function of the Conservation Area Character Appraisal is to enable Dartmoor National Park Authority and the community to relate planning proposals to the Conservation Area.

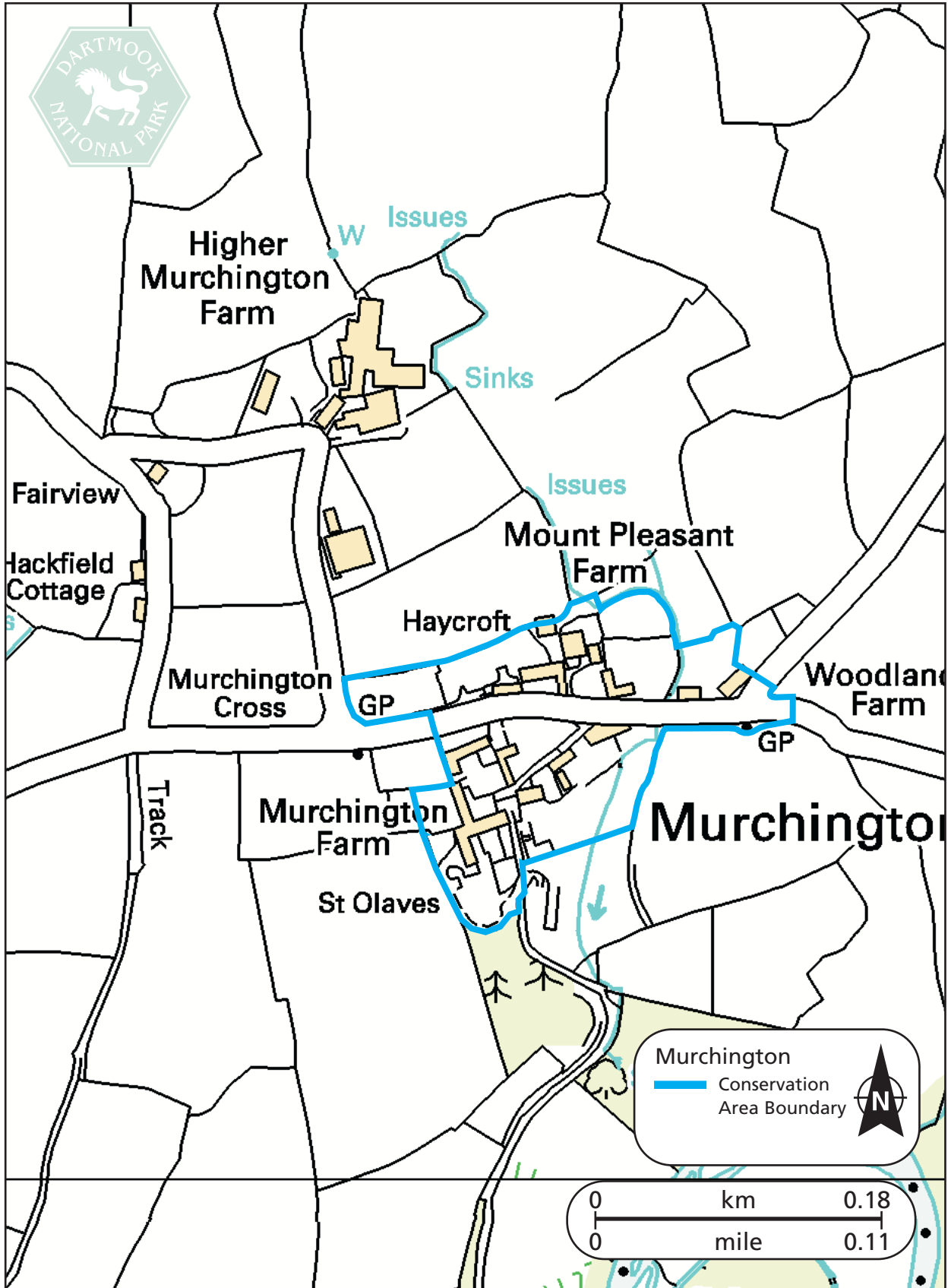
Defining the character of an area is not a straightforward exercise and it is not always possible to reach a truly objective view. The statement of character and appearance in this appraisal is based on various detailed methods of analysis recommended by English Heritage. A range of qualities are looked at including: historical development, building materials, and relationships between buildings and open spaces. However, character appraisals are not intended to be fully comprehensive and any omission does not imply that something is of no interest.

This Character Appraisal has benefited from several public consultations which have taken place through the Parish Council.

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Map 1 Conservation Area Location



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Introduction

Murchington is a hamlet lying, next to the River Teign where it rushes off the northeast edge of Dartmoor's high moorland mass. The market town of Chagford is less than a mile away southeast, on the opposite (south) side of the river, and reached across an ancient bridge crossing. Gidleigh lies a similar distance to the west, but although Murchington is so close to both and on the route that links them, it is actually located in the Parish of Throwleigh – whose parish settlement is more than twice the distance northwards and reached via an intricate network of narrow country lanes.

Standing in the hollow of a hillside that rises steeply from the wooded banks of the Teign, Murchington occupies a landscape that is full of contrast and exceptional in its beauty. A Conservation Area covering all the buildings in the hamlet was designated in October 1975. Based on the findings of this Character Appraisal, however, it was considered appropriate to re-align the boundary so that it followed the boundaries of the gardens and fields that were closely associated with the buildings.

Access to the southern part of the Conservation Area, and in particular St. Olaves, is restricted as the driveway is private and not a public road.

1. Hamlet History

Although Murchington is set in a farming landscape above the River Teign, the parish it occupies extends well into the Moor and, along with the neighbouring parish of Gidleigh, abounds with the remains of ancient settlement; of Bronze Age certainly, but possibly of Iron Age too, indicating the area has probably been occupied continuously for more than three thousand years. Not unlike many of Devon's small hamlets, and particularly those without an ancient ecclesiastical presence, documentary evidence for Murchington's history and origins is not readily forthcoming. The settlement was, however, recorded as a place name in 1330 (as Morcheston), but whether it existed before then, perhaps as part of the Domesday Manor of Throwleigh, isn't known. The probability is, however, that its origins are indeed medieval, since in a slightly later record of 1340, Messrs Richard, Walter and Robert Morch were taxed under Throwleigh, suggesting it was this family which gave name to the place.

2. Settlement Plan

Some of the buildings surviving in the hamlet probably have late medieval origins, the earliest ones are likely to be farmhouses such as Haycroft, Mount Pleasant, Murchington and probably others like St. Olaves Cottage. Their three-room and cross passage plan forms are typical of the period, and Mount Pleasant and Murchington are known to have originally been built with open halls that were later floored over. (This may well be true of Haycroft as well). They are clustered near an angled junction along the lane that passes east-west through the hamlet, where a track (private drive) leads off southwards down towards the River Teign and the nearby Holy Street Manor and corn mill.

Without a parish church and churchyard, or a pub or open village green, there is no obvious physical focus to the hamlet – other than, perhaps, the broader section of highway at the junction with the track leading south. Indeed, it may be that originally the former orchard in the angle of the junction held some significance as a community space (a town place); its triangular shape being similar to greens found in other settlements along the eastern fringe of the Moor.

Historic maps, and the surviving buildings themselves, suggest Murchington's development since the 16th century has been gradual but consistent, with the 17th century probably the period when building activity was at its greatest. Not only were the principal farmhouses improved and possibly extended, a number of cottages and farm buildings were also constructed then. Haycroft Cottage is one, prominent on the lane and possibly starting life as a bake house serving Haycroft Farm. Others were on the track near Murchington Farm, including 1 and 2 St Olaves, which actually butt up to Murchington Farm and help enclose the yard at its front. Two surviving agricultural buildings of the period are both threshing barns; one (part lost) adjacent to Mount Pleasant and the other lying between St Olaves Cottage and Woodlands. Additionally, a third threshing barn (part lost) at Woodlands Farm must have been at one time a substantial and significant agricultural building.

By the time the tithe map was drawn in 1840, several other substantial buildings had been built, including some whose age are not clear as they have since disappeared. Those lost include a building immediately to the south of 1 and 2 St Olaves, and a pair just to the west of Woodlands Farm. Whilst alongside the track, beyond the confines of the hamlet to its south, a range of cottages with outbuildings has also since been lost.

Among the buildings that survive today are the farmyard range northeast of Murchington Farm and the long outbuilding attached to the front of Haycroft that extends as far as the lane frontage. The more significant survivors, however, are Little Mead, which was called the Star Inn in the 19th century, and Woodlands Farm, which is somewhat smaller than the principal farmhouses being attached to the remains of a large threshing barn on the roadside.

Late in the 19th century, building activity appears to have involved as much demolition as construction. In 1889 the pair of buildings just west of Woodlands Farm made way for St. Andrew's Chapel, built in connection with St Mary's Church at Throwleigh. A little earlier, it seems, Woodlands was built to replace existing cottages on its site. Likewise, the building to

the south of 1 and 2 St Olaves was removed when the cottages were combined and extended to create a large house, with extensive gardens to the south where the demolished building once stood. This was the time when the name St Olaves first originated, prior to the house being divided and extended again in the 20th century to create the three dwellings that exist today.

Since the early 20th century, the pattern of buildings in the hamlet has remained largely the same, the most significant changes being the conversion of the chapel and the farm buildings northeast of Murchington Farm to residential use.

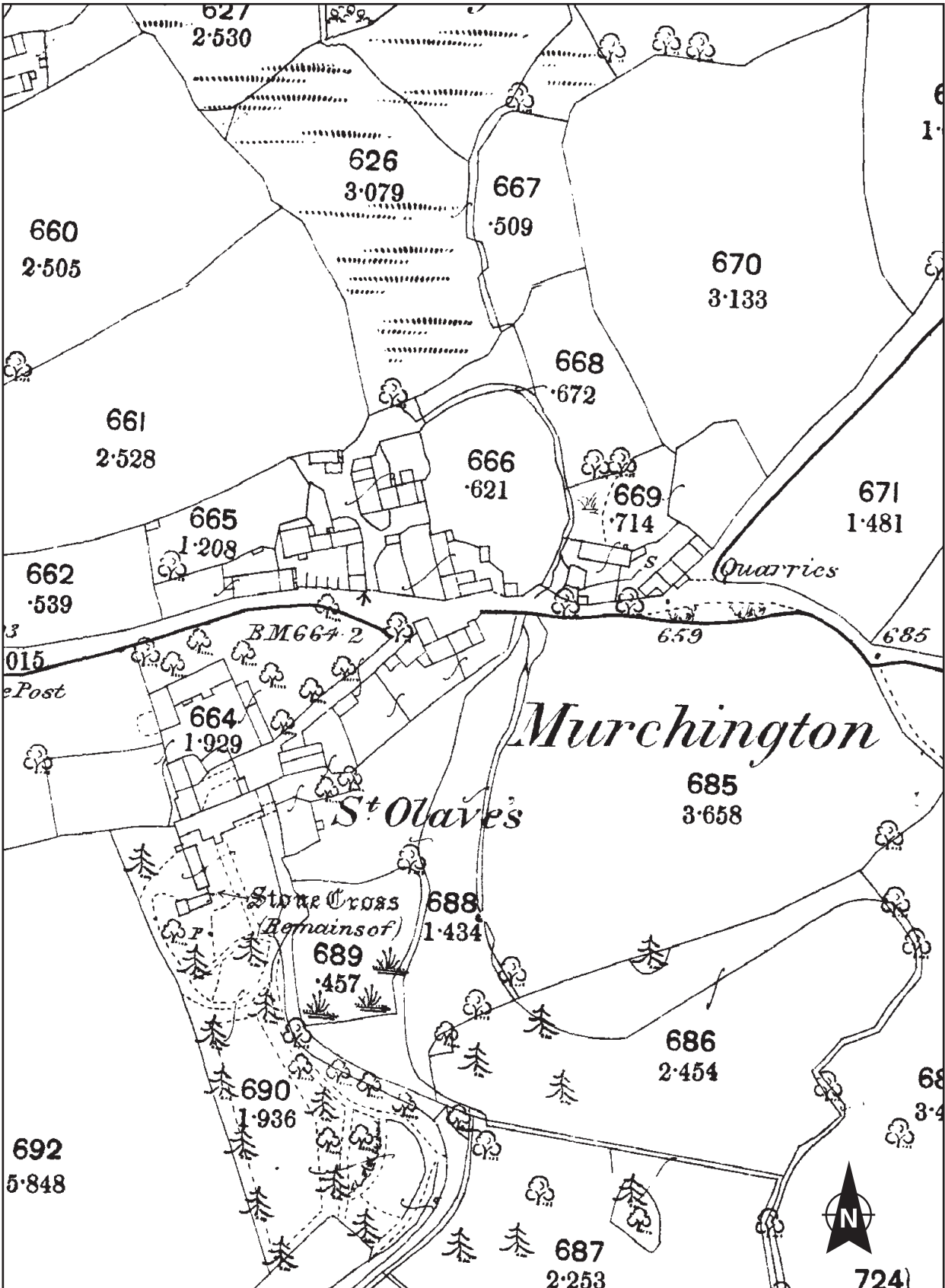
Map 2 Tithe Map 1840



Historical Footnote:

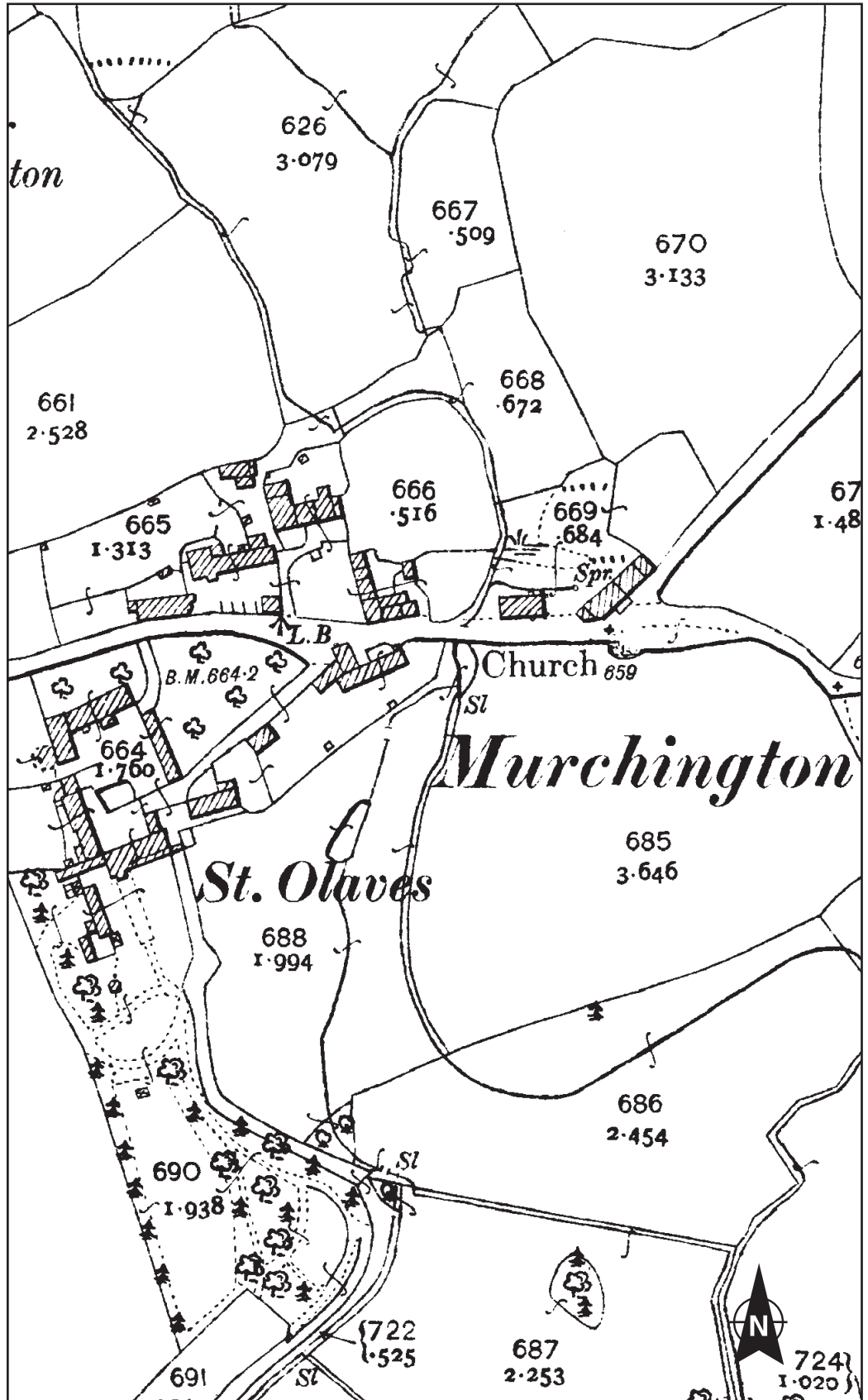
The tithe system provided the traditional means of supporting the clergy in England for many centuries. However, over time abuse of the system led to the *Tithe Commutation Act 1836* which empowered the newly formed Tithe Commission to commute tithes paid 'in kind' to an annual money payment. A Commutation Agreement required the creation of a large scale Map showing each plot of land in the tithe district and an accompanying Apportionment listing relevant details. The *Tithe Act 1936* provided for the gradual redemption of all tithes by the end of the century.

Map 3 First Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1886



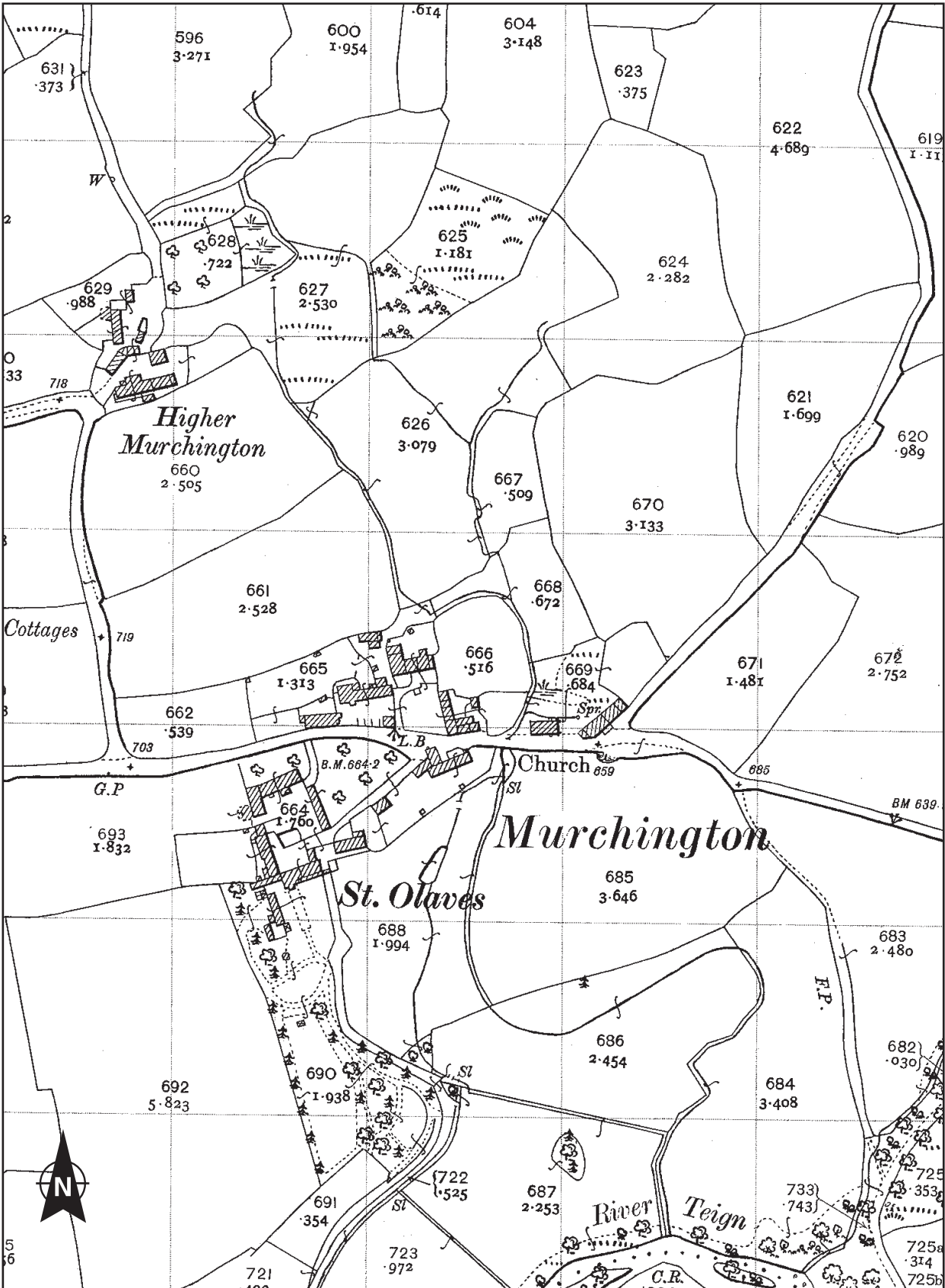
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Map 4 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1905



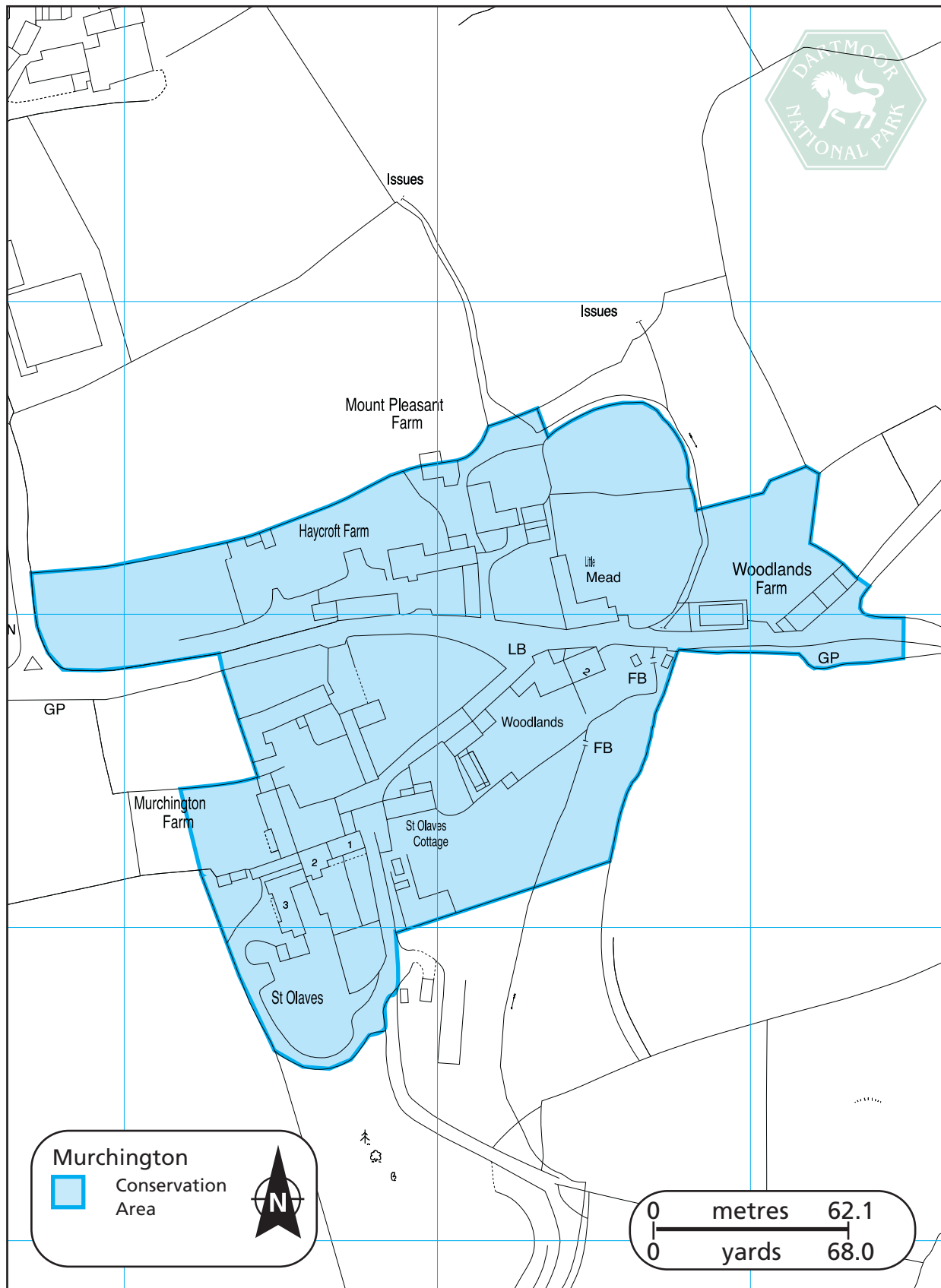
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Map 5 Ordnance Survey Map 1954



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Map 6 Conservation Area: Murchington Settlement



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3. Building Types, Materials and Styles

Although the historic buildings in Murchington are few in number, limited in type, mostly vernacular in style and constructed from a limited range of materials, in a visual sense they possess considerable variety. There is a combination of reasons for this. Most are detached and occupy sites that relate to the highway in different ways. Their origins span at least three hundred years, and, in an historical sense, there is considerable variety in the way each of the buildings has been improved and developed by their owners. So while, for example, the three principal farmhouses were built around the same time with very similar plans, they have differences now that set them apart, including their overall form and scale, the detailing of their windows and doors, and the way their associated outbuildings are arranged and related to them.

Common to all, however, is their rubblestone construction, albeit here and there supplemented by bands of cob along the higher sections of walls e.g. at St Olaves Cottage [Figure 7 page 18]. Appearances suggest that probably all started life with their stonework exposed, including the principal elevations of the older dwellings which are now either plastered e.g. Woodlands, Haycroft and Murchington Farms, or white-washed e.g. Mount Pleasant and part of Little Mead. All the farmbuildings are untreated, including the threshing barn attached to Woodlands Farm – the farmhouse itself seemingly rendered to differentiate it from the working building and give it a more dignified character and appearance.



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Figure 1 The weatherings inset into this stack suggest the roof was formerly clad with thatch.



© DNPA

Figure 2 The gable end of Little Mead that was probably hipped or half-hipped when the roof was formerly clad in thatch.

It is likely too that every roof in the settlement was thatched until slate was introduced in the 19th century – since all the earlier buildings either retain the material, are slated but have chimney stacks evidencing a former cladding of thatch [Figure 1 above], or are clad in corrugated iron – a material that found favour in rural areas as an economical replacement for thatch, particularly on agricultural buildings, but sometimes on domestic ones as well e.g. Woodlands Farm [Figure 8 page 18].

The ridges of the thatched roofs are all plain, not ornamental, and therefore entirely in keeping with local tradition. Most of the roofs are hipped or half-hipped, whereas gables are more common on roofs that are slated or had their thatch replaced with slate. At Little Mead, it seems the east gable end was probably hipped or half-hipped when its roof was clad in thatch [Figure 2 page 13]. The slate that replaced it is characteristic of Murchington, being a most attractive grey-blue colour, which is generally light not dark. The cladding of walls in slate is not characteristic, however, although the practice of protecting verges with slates is indeed evident and adds interest and character to the scene [Figure 3 below]. Brick, on the other hand, is a material that is conspicuous by its absence.

Most of the domestic buildings in the hamlet have a rural, vernacular style, which is characterised mainly by their long, low forms and the informal arrangement of their windows, most of which are traditional, flush-framed, painted timber casements, in various multi-paned patterns [Figure 4 page 15]. Only Woodlands, with its projecting gabled wing, has a more polite architectural style, with tall vertical-sliding timber sashes, chimneys with moulded caps, and projecting eaves and verges – all typical of its late 19th century age [Figure 5 page 15].



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Figure 3 The use of slates to protect roof verges is a distinctive feature

Other than the church-come-chapel, with its restrained, somewhat gothic style, the majority of the other buildings in the hamlet were built to serve an agricultural purpose; the most significant today being the three which have not been converted to domestic use. Characterised by uncluttered roof slopes and walls with few openings, they contribute greatly towards

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Figure 4 A typical timber casement window made with flush frames

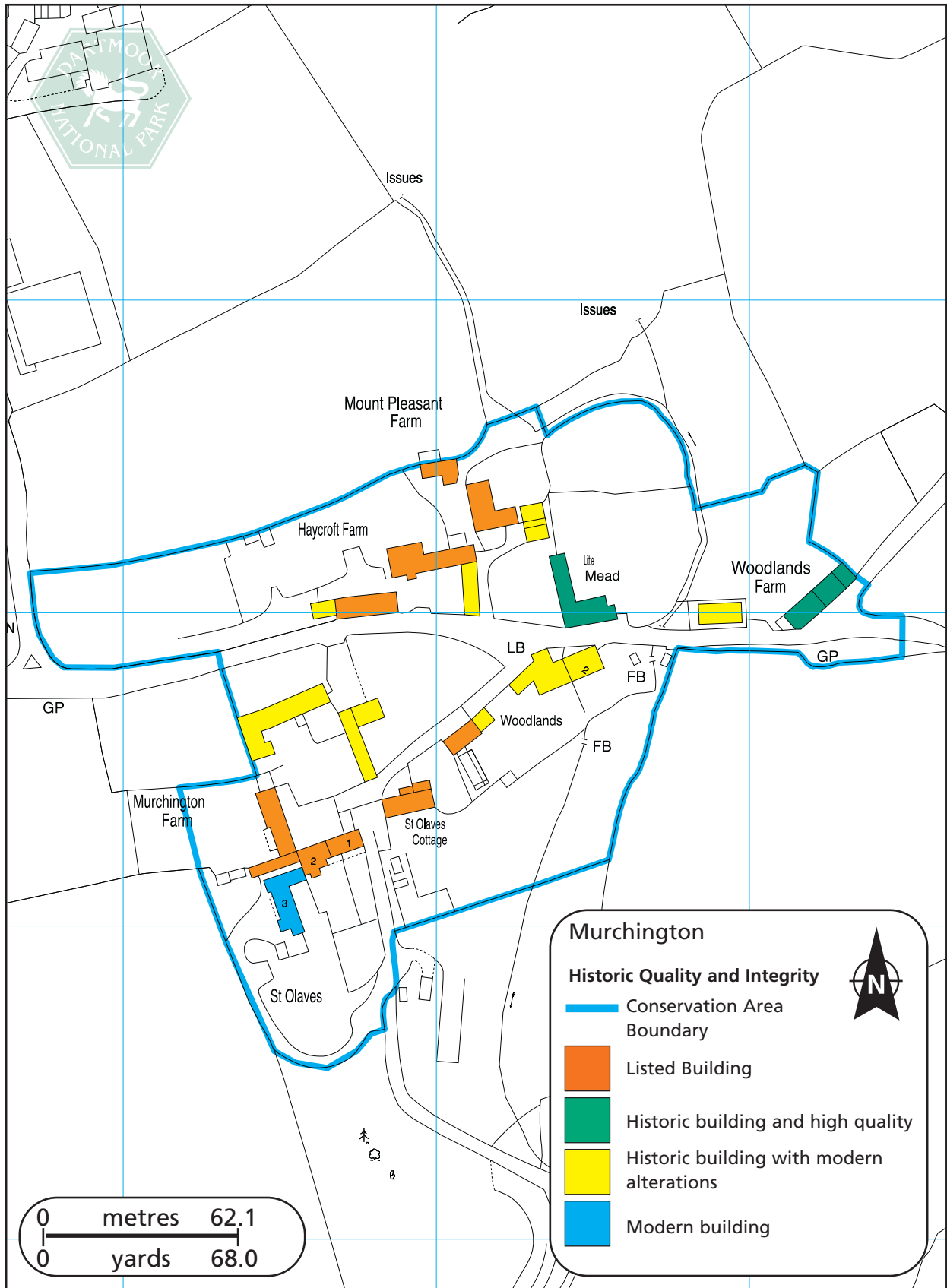
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Figure 5 Woodlands

Murchington's appearance as a traditional, rural and essentially agricultural settlement. That they are all threshing barns (with large threshing doors) adds historical interest as well, suggesting, perhaps, that cereal production was a significant element of the mixed farming that was carried on.

Map 7 Conservation Area: Historic Quality and Integrity



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4. Key Buildings

There are nine listed buildings in Murchington, all of them Grade II and all included within the boundary of the Conservation Area. They include three farmhouses, four cottages and two unconverted barns. While all make a positive contribution towards the Conservation Area's character and interest, other non-listed buildings do likewise, and the examples that follow are representative of the hamlet's key qualities that characterise its origins and development as a small, essentially agricultural, settlement on the fringe of the Moor.

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Figure 6 Mount Pleasant Farmhouse

Mount Pleasant farmhouse: grade II

One of the three principal farmhouses in Murchington which are the settlement's oldest surviving buildings dating from the 16th century. Mount Pleasant's vernacular characteristics are typical of the three, including its long, low form, thatched roof and the informal arrangement of its flush-framed casement windows. The painting, rather than rendering, of the stonework of its front elevation perhaps better preserves its essential rural character.

Listed Buildings Footnote:

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport is required to compile lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest for the guidance of local planning authorities. Conservation policies are often based on these lists. The re-survey of all Dartmoor parishes was carried out during 1985-88.

A listed building is 'a building of special architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. There are about 500,000 listed buildings in England. Nationally, 2% are grade I listed, 4% II* listed and the balance of 94% are grade II listed. Within Dartmoor National Park there are 2,563 listed buildings.



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Figure 7 *St Olaves Cottage*

St Olaves Cottage: grade II

Although apparently much rebuilt in the late 19th or early 20th century this cottage, a former farmhouse, probably has 16th century origins. It's thatched roof and rubblestone walls preserve its original character, while the pair of granite-mullioned windows in the end elevation are late 19th century additions, intended to add a touch of rustic charm. The render band beneath the eaves suggests the top of the wall was completed in cob.



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Figure 8 *Woodlands Farmhouse*

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Woodlands Farmhouse and Little Mead: not listed

With Woodlands probably dating from about the late 18th century and Little Mead appearing by about 1840, these two substantial dwellings have several similarities, including their white-painted front elevations, 19th century casements and the traditional open fronted lean-to porch. Both, too, have a larger-than-cottage appearance, not only Woodlands Farm with part of an earlier threshing barn still attached, but also Little Mead, with its lengthened, four-window-wide frontage and extensive wing at the rear.

Figure 9 Porch of Woodlands Farmhouse

© DNPA



Figure 10 Little Mead



© DNPA

Figure 11 Porch of Little Mead



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Figure 12 Barn next to Mount Pleasant

Barn next to Mount Pleasant Farmhouse: grade II

Typical of the three pre-19th century threshing barns in the settlement (including the one attached to Woodlands Farmhouse), its survival today owes much to the availability of corrugated iron sheeting as an economical replacement for thatch. Characteristically, its roof is a dominant feature with an uncluttered appearance, while wall openings are few indeed. The rounded corner of the barn, and of the lean-to pigsty at front, doubtless served the dual purpose of aiding the manoeuvring of heavily laden carts and safeguarding the buildings' structure, but their existence adds considerably towards their visual character.

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Figure 13 Farmbuilding attached to Haycroft Farmhouse

Farmbuilding attached to Haycroft Farmhouse: not listed

One of the few farmbuildings in the settlement built in the late 18th or early 19th century, this one survives with its essential characteristics intact, including its uncluttered slate roof and the absence of openings in its rear elevation. The painted windows in the gable elevation, and the emphasised stonework pointing, are nevertheless features that tend to erode its original, agricultural character.

5. Local Details and Street Furniture

As might be expected in such a small agricultural settlement, the narrow lane and track which serve it are typical of rural areas, being mostly bounded by hedge banks and dry stone walling [Figure 14 below] with stretches of exposed bedrock or grassy verge where the lane is confined or otherwise enlarged. The cottage-garden strips in front of Little Mead and Woodlands Farm are equally typical of dwellings alongside country lanes – being rather more natural than formal – but creating more the character of a settlement are the boundary walls fronting Mount Pleasant and Haycroft Farms, with their mortared joints and ornamental, rise-and-fall copings [Figure 15 below]. The clipped hedge and finely squared granite gate posts at Haycroft, and the ironwork railings fronting part of Woodlands reinforce this sense of place, which is complemented also by the well-tended, turf-topped rubblestone wall opposite [Figure 16 page 23].



Figure 14 The lane through the hamlet

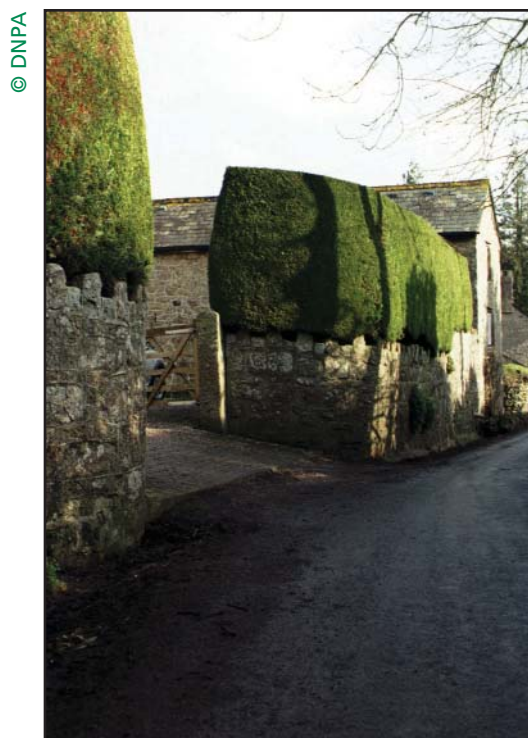


Figure 15 The boundary of Haycroft Farm

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Figure 16 *The turf-capped wall opposite Woodlands*

But for the cast iron letter box set into the end gable wall of Woodlands, historic artefacts such as mounting blocks, crosses and the like, are largely absent.

6. Spaces and Views

Spaces

There are no significant open public spaces in Murchington, and as much of the settlement also lies hidden from the lane that passes through it (down an unmetalled track) it possesses a somewhat private air. In a visual sense, however, a private open space on the north side of the lane is of particular value, providing a most attractive setting for, and permitting views of, the characterful buildings beside it, including Mount Pleasant Farmhouse at the rear and the long wings of Haycroft Farmhouse and Little Mead on each side [Figure 17 below and refer to Map 8]



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Figure 17 The rear wing of Little Mead from across the private open space

Views

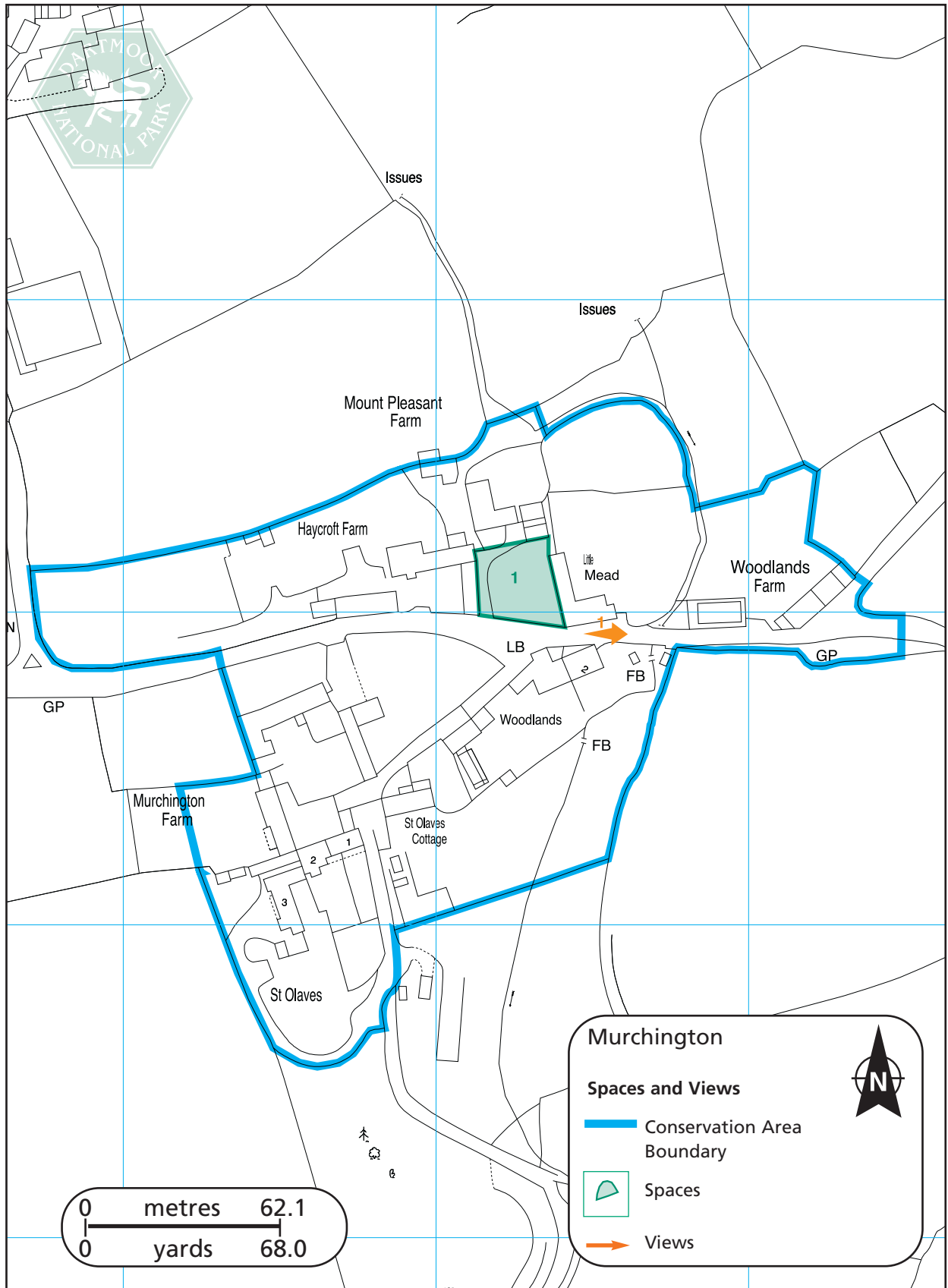
Although Murchington is small and set in a farming landscape, the lane and track (private drive) which serve it are mostly enclosed by buildings and hedges, which means that the surrounding fields are normally well hidden from view. Only towards the east of the lane does its historic relationship with the countryside, and the nature of its setting within a hollow, become obvious [Figure 18 below and refer to Map 8].

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Figure 18 View east along the through lane

Map 8 Spaces and Views



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7. Modern Development

Other than the erection of various garden outbuildings and greenhouses, modern development in Murchington has largely taken the form of conversions to existing buildings. While this has ensured the preservation of the buildings concerned it is unfortunately the case that the process of conversion has sometimes resulted in a loss of original character and the introduction of features which do not relate sympathetically to local building traditions and styles, such as standard, non-traditional window types and large roof lights on prominent elevations (e.g. on the chapel). On the other hand, the intrinsic character of most of the historic houses and the unconverted barns has nevertheless been well preserved through continued good maintenance and repair [Figures 19 and 20 below].



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Figure 19 Haycroft Farmhouse



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Figure 20 The unconverted threshing barn at Woodlands Farm

8. Archaeological Potential

The archaeological potential for Murchington lies first in the early 16th origins of its three principal farmhouses, Murchington, Haycroft and Mount Pleasant and to the number of cottages, including Haycroft Cottage and St Olaves, which date to the 17th century.

In addition the tithe map reveals that there have been some changes and loss of buildings since the mid 19th century. Woodlands occupies the site of an earlier building shown on the map, two cottages once stood where the now converted St. Andrew's Chapel is, and further buildings are shown to the south of 1 and 2 St Olaves. These are all areas which should be seen to be particularly sensitive archaeologically.

9. Trees

The tree cover is extensive with a wide range of species and age classes in and the Conservation Area.

There is a wide distribution of mature trees throughout the Conservation Area and it is the number of trees rather than specific individual specimens which add to its character.

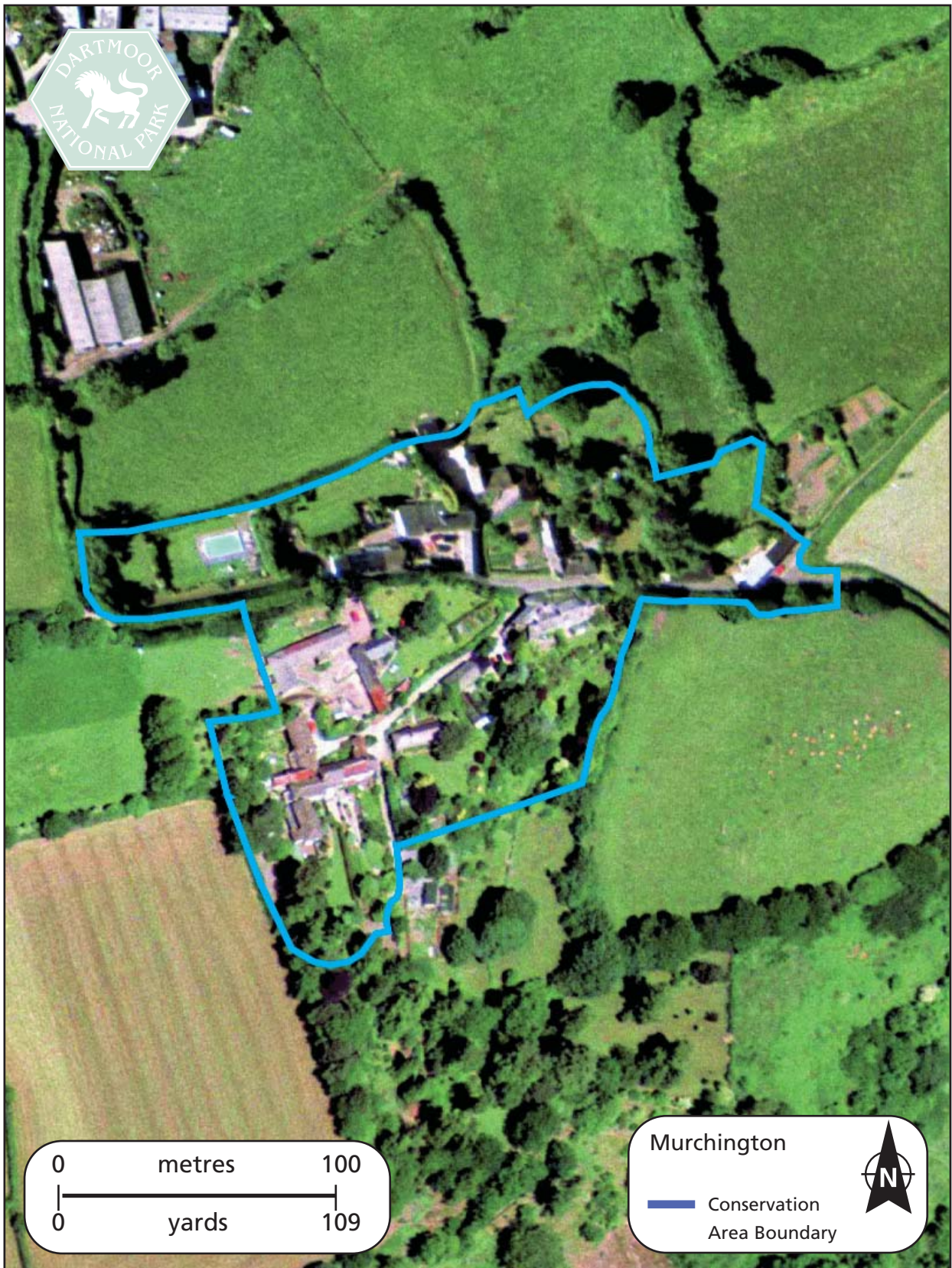
Extensive planting has already taken place in the gardens of the larger properties within the Conservation Area, but there are numerous other sites which are suitable for further planting. Outside of the Conservation Area there are many potential tree planting sites.

Outside the Conservation Area the trees growing on the gardens to the south of Murchington contribute to the setting of the Conservation Area.

Trees in Conservation Areas Footnote:

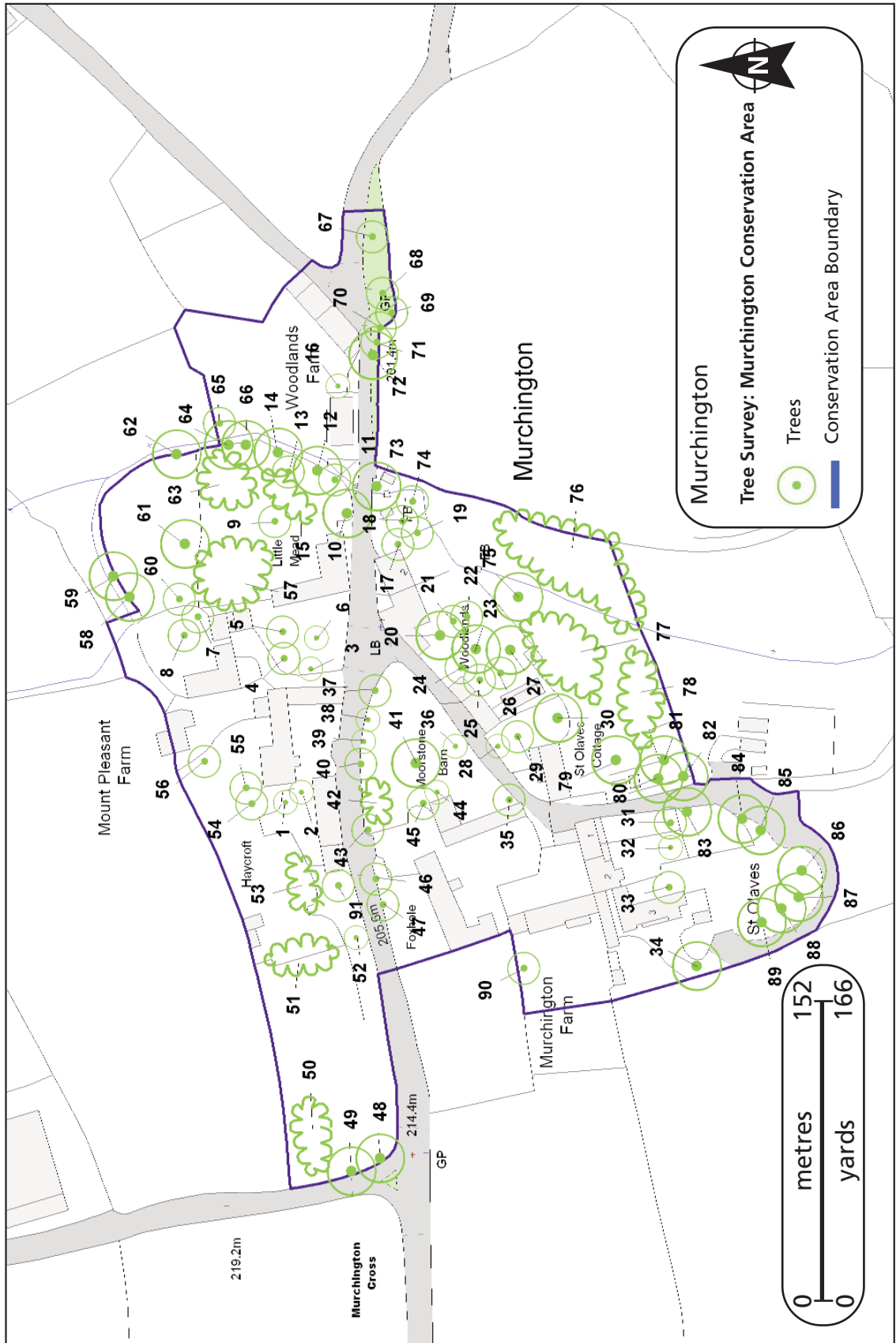
The *Town and Country Planning Act: Section 211* makes special provision for trees in Conservation Areas not subject to a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). Anyone who wishes to cut down or carry out works to a tree in a Conservation Area must give the Local Planning Authority 6 weeks prior notice. The purpose of a Section 211 Notice is to give the Local Planning Authority the opportunity to protect the tree with a TPO. A tree is not defined in the Act, but a Section 211 Notice is only required for a tree with a diameter exceeding 75 mm in diameter. Trees in a Conservation Area already protected by a TPO are subject to the normal TPO controls. A Tree Preservation Order is an order made by the Local Planning Authority in respect of trees and woodlands. The principle effect of a TPO is to prohibit the cutting down, uprooting, lopping, wilful damage or wilful destruction of a tree without the Local Planning Authority's consent.

Map 9 Conservation Area: Trees and Boundary



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Appendix A: Tree Survey: Murchington Conservation Area



Tree Survey: Land Adjacent to Murchington Conservation Area

(see Tree Survey map page 38)

Number	Species	Age Class	Number	Species	Age Class
1.	Cypress	Young	56.	Pine	Semi-mature
2.	Cypress	Young	57.	Apple orchard	Mature
3.	Apple	Young	58.	Oak	Mature
4.	Apple	Semi-mature	59.	Oak	Mature
5.	Apple	Semi-mature	60.	Beech	Semi-mature
6.	Apple	Young	61.	Cedar	Mature
7.	Beech	Semi-mature	62.	Beech	Mature
8.	Apple	Semi-mature	63.	Group of mixed broadleaves	Semi-mature
9.	Beech	Semi-mature	64.	Oak	Mature
10.	Western red cedar	Mature	65.	Ash	Semi-mature
11.	Poplar	Semi-mature	66.	Beech	Mature
12.	Western red cedar	Mature	67.	Maple	Semi-mature
13.	Birch	Semi-mature	68.	Cherry	Semi-mature
14.	Beech	Mature	69.	Sycamore	Semi-mature
15.	Group of mixed trees	Semi-mature	70.	Cherry	Semi-mature
16.	Cherry	Young	71.	Cherry	Semi-mature
17.	Cherry	Semi-mature	72.	Oak	Mature
18.	Spruce	Semi-mature	73.	Beech	Mature
19.	Birch	Semi-mature	74.	Birch	Semi-mature
20.	Birch	Mature	75.	Cypress	Mature
21.	Maple	Semi-mature	76.	Group of mixed trees	Semi-mature to mature
22.	Cherry	Semi-mature	77.	Group of mixed trees	Semi-mature to mature
23.	Cedar	Mature	78.	Group of mixed trees	Semi-mature to mature
24.	Laburnum	Semi-mature	79.	Cypress	Mature
25.	Lawson cypress	Semi-mature	80.	Apple	Mature
26.	Lawson cypress	Semi-mature	81.	Spruce	Mature
27.	Birch	Mature	82.	Fir	Mature
28.	Laburnum	Young	83.	Western red cedar	Mature
29.	Holly	Semi-mature	84.	Maple	Mature
30.	Pine	Mature	85.	Cypress	Semi-mature
31.	Apple	Semi-mature	86.	Spruce	Mature
32.	Pear	Young	87.	Western red cedar	Mature
33.	Cypress	Semi-mature	88.	Western red cedar	Mature
34.	Scots pine	Mature	89.	Wellingtonia	Mature
35.	Holly	Semi-mature	90.	Holly	Semi-mature
36.	Rowan	Young	91.	Robinia	Semi-mature
37.	Douglas fir	Semi-mature			
38.	Pine	Young			
39.	Apple	Young			
40.	Ash	Semi-mature			
41.	Sycamore	Mature			
42.	Group of ash	Mature			
43.	Ash	Semi-mature			
44.	Cypress	Young			
45.	Pittosporum	Semi-mature			
46.	Sycamore	Semi-mature			
47.	Sycamore	Semi-mature			
48.	Oak	Mature			
49.	Oak	Mature			
50.	Group of mixed conifers	Semi-mature			
51.	Group of cypress	Semi-mature			
52.	Ash	Young			
53.	Group of mixed conifers	Semi-mature			
54.	Cypress	Semi-mature			
55.	Cypress	Semi-mature			

The survey was carried out from publicly accessible land.