

History in the Landscape:

An Historic Environment Summary of the South Devon AONB

South Devon AONB: Historic Environment

The following document provides a brief summary of the historic environment and archaeological interest of the South Devon AONB. The document has been prepared by the South Devon AONB Unit.

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1) Contributions of the historic environment to the key characteristics of the AONB

These are the historic features which contribute to the key characteristics of the AONB:

- The field patterns and the whole shape of the agricultural landscape (hedges, small fields, remnant orchards and so on);
- Maritime and military coastal features (forts, castles, lighthouses, day marks, lookouts, coastguard cottages, airstrips, aerial masts etc);
- Roads (ancient drove roads, ridge roads, sunken green lanes, hedges, turnpike roads, highway furniture);
- Settlement patterns (estuary towns, bridging towns, small nucleated villages, planned villages, estate villages);
- Building styles (stone, thatched, slate, cob, field barns, labourers' terraces, farm complexes);
- Landed estates (parkland, large houses, lodges, carriage drives, distinctive estate villages, alms houses);
- River and estuary usage (mills, limekilns, quays, fishponds, weirs, ship hulks);
- Abandoned quarries in some localities.

(See Map A for further information)

2) Landscape evolution

The evolution of the AONB landscape has been described by Robert Waterhouse in a series of Parish Heritage Appraisals, copies of which have been provided to the County Historic Environment Service. These studies incorporate ideas about prehistoric transhumance agriculture and land use from Win Scutt. Our understanding of this evolution is as follows:

- The basic skeleton of land ownership boundaries, territorial organisation and drove road routes was laid out in the Bronze Age and Iron Age, leaving a legacy of coaxial field system, barrows, hill forts, occupation settlements, and ridge routes. However, the presence and age of these landscape elements are not generally conspicuous today, as they have been extensively overlain or altered by successive phases of land use or been obliterated altogether by (for example) ploughing or urban development;
- In the early middle ages, the landscape was developed with a network of open fields and strip farming, with rough grazing on much of the coastal and estuary fringes, and the network of manor houses established. Although the period made an important contribution to landscape organisation, the tangible remains are (as with the Bronze Age and Iron Age) more difficult to read in the landscape today;
- The later middle ages saw the progressive enclosure of strip fields and coastal heathland, the establishment of villages and large estates and the construction of defensive fortifications and churches, and made a very significant contribution to the landscape we recognise today;
- The 18th and 19th century brought the introduction of turnpike roads, the rebuilding of large estate houses, additional military defences, the improvement of estate villages, the construction of railways and the gentrification of some towns. This is therefore also a highly significant period in shaping today's landscape;
- The 20th century brought holiday and recreation uses (chalet and campsites, hotels, golf courses, marinas), WWII and Cold War military features, road widening and straightening, new housing, communications infrastructure, mains utilities (overhead power lines), and car parks.

(See Map B for further information)

3) The nature of the archaeological and monumental resource

This can be summarised as follows:

- The AONB does have early field monuments such as hill forts and groups of burial mounds, but these are mostly modest in scale and inconspicuous in the landscape, and much of this resource has only been identified relatively recently from aerial photos. Two notable exceptions are Blackdown Rings hill fort and Bolt Tail promontory fort, both of which are more substantial and conspicuous but are still relatively low key in scale compared with comparable sites in other areas (*See Map C for further information*);
- There is evidence of early settlement and occupation but much is generally only visible as crop marks (Mount Folly at Bigbury for example) or has been concealed completely (such as Bantham, Mothecombe and Wembury, where early coastal occupation sites have been inundated by sand);
- Medieval castles survive at Dartmouth and Salcombe, though the latter is in ruined condition;
- Churches are a prominent feature of many villages, such as Stokenham, Holbeton, and so on, some of which have adjoining church houses now serving as pubs;
- Large landed estates, some of them referred to in the Domesday Book, continued to exert an important influence on the landscape with fine houses at Flete, Mothecombe, Sharpham, Kitley, Puslinch, Langdon, Widdicombe, Waddeton and so on, some with associated historic parklands especially at Flete and Sharpham;
- Highway features forming an important landscape component today include bridges (for example at Bowcombe on the Kingsbridge estuary and Aveton Gifford on the Avon estuary), toll houses on the turnpike road (for example near Yealm Bridge) and a scattering of milestones;
- Later coastal military fortifications are also locally conspicuous including the Victorian and Palmerstone Forts at Bovisand and Berry Head, and the WWII defences at Froward Point, for example;
- The legacy of monuments and remains associated with shipping and trade is of considerable importance to the area, including the historic harbours and many quaysides particularly of the Dart and Salcombe estuaries, the lighthouses at Start Point and Berry Head, the day mark at Brownstone on the east bank of the Dart, and so on;
- Large farmsteads, often with significant intact collections of late medieval farm buildings, make a significant contribution to the landscape. Examples include Yarde Farm near Salcombe, Leigh Barton near Churchstow and Wood Barton near Woodleigh (although these particularly important historic examples are tucked out of public view in quite remote locations);
- The many designated Conservation Areas within the AONB's towns and villages also make a significant visual contribution to the character of the landscape. These include important groupings of listed buildings from the 16th to the 19th centuries, while some settlements still have a good survival of the original medieval burgage plots (*See Map F for further information*);
- There are many shipwrecks off the coast of the AONB, some of which are given statutory protection. (*See Map G for more information*)

4) Distinct vernacular styles

The geology varies across the AONB and provides a variety of good quality building stone, extracted from a large number of small farm-scale quarries as well as a small number of (now derelict) larger commercial quarries. The stone used locally in building was as follows:

- The most pervasive was slate, used for walls, roofs and boundary walls, with the slate having considerable variation in quality and colour;
- Limestone outcrops at the western end and the eastern end of the AONB form an important component of the buildings in the Berry Head area next to Brixham, and around Yealmpton and the Plymouth fringe;
- The grey mica schists and the hornblende or green schists of the south of the AONB form a distinct component of buildings and boundary walls lying south of the Start Boundary Fault which links Hope Cove with Hallsands;
- There are also smaller areas of harder volcanics, which are used in buildings around, for example, the Ashprington area;
- Buildings used lime mortar extensively (there are many derelict limekilns), with a pervasive use of lime render and lime wash to increase protection from rain. Some cob was used, especially in farm buildings, and some thatch remains in use in the villages.

While the underlying geology dictates the spatial variation in building materials, there is some degree of unity provided by the construction styles cutting across the area:

- A particularly dominant style is the use of plain two storey stone houses, with thick walls, small sash and casement windows, lime render and lime wash, and little decoration. These are typical of agricultural labourers' and fishermen's cottages and are a dominant feature in many villages today; Small terraces of coastguard cottages are locally distinctive on the coast;
- More affluent and formal building styles characterise the central cores of the main towns, particularly in Modbury and Kingsbridge, as well as Dartmouth and Salcombe where three or four storey buildings with dressed stone, ashlar, decorative renders, decorative hung slates, brick work and larger windows lend a distinctive character;
- There are some distinctive estate villages with a locally special pattern of ornate chimneys, fenestration, brick work and roof detailing, particularly at Noss Mayo, Newton Ferrers, and Ashprington.

5) Settlement form

Settlement form varies considerably but the spatial variation is dictated by topography:

- The rivers and estuaries are key determinants of the location and form of the AONB's key settlements, with Dartmouth and Salcombe as the dominant harbour towns and Kingsbridge, Yealmpton and Aveton Gifford located at estuary bridging points. The relative size and significance of these settlements is determined by the respective size of the five different estuaries, with the Dart being the most navigable river followed by the Kingsbridge estuary, and then followed by the Yealm, Avon and Erme estuaries;
- Away from these main estuary towns, a dominant settlement form for the AONB's villages comprise compact, dense nucleated villages set back from the coast often in sheltered combs, such as South Milton, Holberton, Slapton, Ringmore and so on, some of which still have relatively intact late medieval cores. It is said that the location of these, set slightly inland, was to avoid the danger of piracy, although some later villages were established on the coast such as at Hope Cove, Beesands and Hallsands;
- Alongside the main A379 turnpike road, the villages have a more linear form straddling the road. These include Charleton, Chillington, Strete, Stoke Fleming, Frogmore, Yealmpton,

and Brixton. Some of these, such as Chillington, are understood to have been planned or “planted” settlements;

- There is a small number of plateau villages, such as Malborough, East Prawle, Kingston and East Portlemouth, which being on more level ground and being less constrained by land form, are more radial and less dense in their layout;
- Many settlements have significant late 20th century bungalow or housing estates on their periphery (such as Wembury, Chillington, Charleton, Stoke Fleming), significantly altering their shape, size and appearance, and the relationship between the village core and surrounding countryside.

6) Designed parklands and gardens

There are important gardens and parklands from different periods. These include the Sharpham Estate (late 18th century), the Flete Estate (16th? century but largely reworked in the late 19th century) and Coleton Fishacre (early 20th century). These estates generally occupy fine vantage points overlooking the estuaries, and are mostly secluded, pastoral, wooded, with parkland trees, carriage drives, lodge houses and, in some cases, associated estate villages. These houses and estates were not however at the more ostentatious or flamboyant end of the spectrum and much of the surviving estate parkland would not easily be distinguished from the adjoining farmland by the lay person. In terms of public access, some of the smaller estate gardens (Coleton Fishacre and Overbecks for example which are both owned by the National trust) provide access to the gardens but much of the other estate land is generally secluded and inaccessible to the public and its contribution to the landscape of the AONB is therefore not as widely appreciated as it otherwise would be. (*See Map E for more information*)

7) Hedgerow and wall patterns

The AONB has 4,000 kilometres of field boundary, laid out at an average density of 12 linear kilometres of hedgerow per square kilometre of land area. This conceals local variation, with large organised fields on plateau tops (for example, around Malborough, Bigbury, Kingston and Ringmore Parishes), with smaller more irregular enclosures on the valley sides (such as Woodleigh, Loddiswell, North Huish and Diptford Parishes in the Avon Valley). These variations are to a large extent dictated by topography. There are significant areas where the field pattern is carefully organised, with intact patterns of rectangular fields set within a framework of extensive parallel boundaries, which can be clearly identified from the map south west of Strete, west of Slapton, south of Beesands, and around Prawle. However, while topography appears to exert the strongest influence on hedgerow and wall patterns, there are more complex variations which are harder to read. For example, some coastal fringe land was densely enclosed with tiny fields by the Iron Age (at Decklers Cliff for example) while just near by some remained as open strip fields until very late (Rickham still shows as a large open strip field on the tithe map of 1841 and wasn't enclosed until later in the 19th century), while nearby other areas of coastal rough grazing were successively improved and enclosed from the 16th to 19th century. In some localities, the field boundary layout appears organised and appears to be a legacy of the original prehistoric coaxial field system, while others have developed in a more organic and haphazard way. This adds up to a highly variable pattern of boundaries, dictated by a mix of topography, soils, exposure and land ownership.

The construction detail of the boundary hedges varies. The predominant type is a hedgebank largely composed of soil with a face and top surface of grass and natural vegetation, measuring between 1 and 2 metres high and between 1 and 2 metres wide. There is however a variable component of stone facing to these hedges and indeed in some places dry stone walls are used with no soil infill, for example at certain sites around the Wembury area. One particular locally distinctive variation is the use of single rows of large upright slabs as boundary walls and these can be seen at Bolberry Down and around Prawle Point.

8) Battlefields

It is understood that there are no registered battlefields within the AONB but there were Civil War engagements at Modbury and at Salcombe Castle.

9) Industrial archaeology and military features

Industrial archaeology includes the following features:

- In addition to numerous small farm-scale stone quarries, there is also a small number of larger derelict quarries which are locally important features, and these include Berry Head and Yealmpton area (for limestone) and Beesands (for slate);
- There was a commercial clay quarry and brick works active at Steer Point near Brixton until 2011;
- There are extensive remains of ship building and maritime archaeology on the Dart (at Dartmouth and at Noss-on-Dart), and at Salcombe;
- There are disused railways following the Avon valley from South Brent to Kingsbridge) and from Plymouth to Yealmpton, and an operational steam railway between Paignton and Kingswear on the Dart.

Although this industrial archaeology is significant to the landscape in certain localities, generally the landscape of the AONB is characterised more by its agricultural archaeology than by its industrial archaeology.

There is a significant body of military remains spanning a wide range of historical periods:

- There are Iron Age hill forts at Blackdown Rings and Bolt Tail, along with other less conspicuous ones;
- There are late medieval castles at Dartmouth and Salcombe;
- There are Civil War earthworks at Gallants Bower (Dartmouth) and at Rickham Common opposite Salcombe Castle, although the latter site is not conspicuous today;
- There are significant 18th and 19th century military complexes including Berry Head, Fort Bovisand, Watch House Battery, Staddon Heights, and the Dartmouth Royal Naval College;
- There are WWII remains at Froward Point, RAF Bolt Tail, Prawle, Slapton Sands, the Dart estuary, and various pillboxes scattered along the coast;
- There is a Cold War regional control centre with underground and above ground structures at Soar.

These military structures make a significant contribution to the character of the coastal fringe, but are in highly variable condition. While some have been actively conserved and brought into guardianship or protective ownership, others are deteriorating through neglect and a number of important structures have been demolished over recent years. The latter include the flying boat slip way at East Portlemouth, the WWII observation posts at Bolt Head and the shore-based naval gunnery school installations at HMS Cambridge, Wembury.

10) Other historic features

One important area for which South Devon is known more widely, is the use of the Slapton Sands area and the estuaries for practice landings and embarkation in preparation for the D-Day landings in 1944. The memorial and Sherman Tank on display at Torcross continue to attract a considerable number of visitors.

The history of the ruined fishing village of Hallsands is of great interest and is of almost iconic value to the area. Some of the structures remain but there has been rapid deterioration and erosion over the last 15 years.

11) Quantity and extent of designated sites and buildings

The historic environment section at Devon County Council is best placed to provide these statistics and maintains a comprehensive Historic Environment Record (See Map A for more information). In addition to this resource English Heritage maintain the record of Scheduled Ancient Monuments and records of listed buildings (the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest) within their administrative areas. (See Maps C and D for more information.)

12) Contribution to statutory sites and buildings

Information is already covered in section 3 above.

13) Spatial variation across the AONB

There are important types of historic features which are spatially highly variable and distinct across the AONB, with their distribution determined by function and topography. For example:

- Historic military fortifications are mostly located on cliffs and at estuary mouths;
- Features relating to navigation, trading and maritime history are mostly located around the estuaries;
- Large country estate houses and parklands usually occupy prime positions overlooking estuaries;
- The key towns are located either at estuary harbours or at estuary bridging points;
- The principle road network principally cuts east to west across the AONB linking the various estuary bridging towns and settlements, while the prehistoric network of drove roads, it is understood, are aligned north to south linking with Dartmoor along the plateaux and ridges.

There is also spatial variation of field patterns, partly determined by topography: Larger fields are located on the plateau tops, suitable for arable cultivation, while smaller fields are more likely to be located on the steeper slopes and estuary sides, which are more suitable for pastoral agriculture. The spatial variation is also determined by other historic factors which are more complex to read today.

14) Cultural associations

The South Devon AONB has been significantly affected by in migration and population movement, which has had the effect of diluting some of the cultural traditions and associations of the area.

However, there is a significant maritime related culture expressed through the large number of regattas and boating events. The rural and agricultural traditions continue to be expressed through agricultural shows, village fates and fairs, wassail events and apple days, and so on.

The area remains popular today with painters and photographers, although there are no particular noteworthy names with a strong historic association. The best known figure from the arts with an association with South Devon is Agatha Christie, who had a holiday home at Greenway on the Dart (recently reopened to the public by the National Trust), and who wrote and set some of her novels on Burgh Island.

Mention could be given here to the local agricultural varieties and breeds which are themselves an important historic feature of the area. These include the South Devon breed of cattle, a number of herds still being kept in the area today, and local varieties of apple specific to South Devon orchards.

There are small local museums at Kingsbridge, Dartmouth and Salcombe which provide valuable insights into the cultural traditions and history of the area.

15) Integration of the historic environment into the AONB Management Plan

The following positive trends relating to the historic environment will be identified in the AONB Management Plan:

- The maintenance and management of the historic field pattern (hedges, but also orchards) integrates well the management objective of the historic environment, with the landscape, biodiversity and soil stabilisation.
- The management and conservation of the hedgerow pattern is probably the most important landscape scale historic environment issue for the AONB, and this has been significantly assisted through the agri-environment grant programmes. However, many hundreds of kilometres of hedgerow remain in neglected or unmanaged condition and are in need of active management, while many other hedges are inappropriately managed by (for example) repeated heavy flailing;
- The bulk of the listed buildings, village and town Conservation Areas and distinctive houses remain in current use and are generally well maintained and cared for, through significant investment by private owners;
- The National Trust owns over half the coast line of the AONB and this protective ownership has allowed a number of significant conservation projects to be undertaken, such as at Froward Point WWII installation or the quayside at Greenway; as well as to the houses and gardens at Coleton Fishacre, Overbecks and Greenway;
- A small number of sites in English Heritage custodianship are well preserved, such as Dartmouth Castle and Bayard's Cove at Dartmouth;
- There are many examples of conservation projects undertaken by enthusiastic local community groups, such as the large limekilns at Frogmore by the South Hams Society;
- Projects by the AONB service and local authorities have also had a useful impact, such as the Life into Landscape Project which undertook repair work to over 50 green lanes, and supported the management or restoration of hedgerows and orchards.

There are however also significant threats to the historic features which will be highlighted in the AONB Plan including:

- The major damage or demolition of some features caused by ploughing of field monuments, the demolition of historic military features referred to above, past road improvement schemes, and redevelopment schemes (the historic boatyard at Noss-on-Dart is a topical example of the latter);
- The deterioration of many features through neglect, in particular military structures and estuary structures like limekilns which have no current use;
- Major damage has been caused to the setting of some historic settlements by recent housing.

Summary

The South Devon AONB instills a strong sense of profound time depth, but this derives not so much from individual monuments or sites but from the dense cultural tapestry of features and elements which are each fairly “ordinary” in themselves but which combine to provide great impact and coherence at a landscape scale.

Some elements of the AONB’s historic resource are in good heart and are being actively conserved and maintained. Other elements however, particularly those with no current beneficial use, are in poor and rapidly deteriorating condition and the AONB Management Plan will have to acknowledge that the level of resources currently available to address this is wholly inadequate and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.

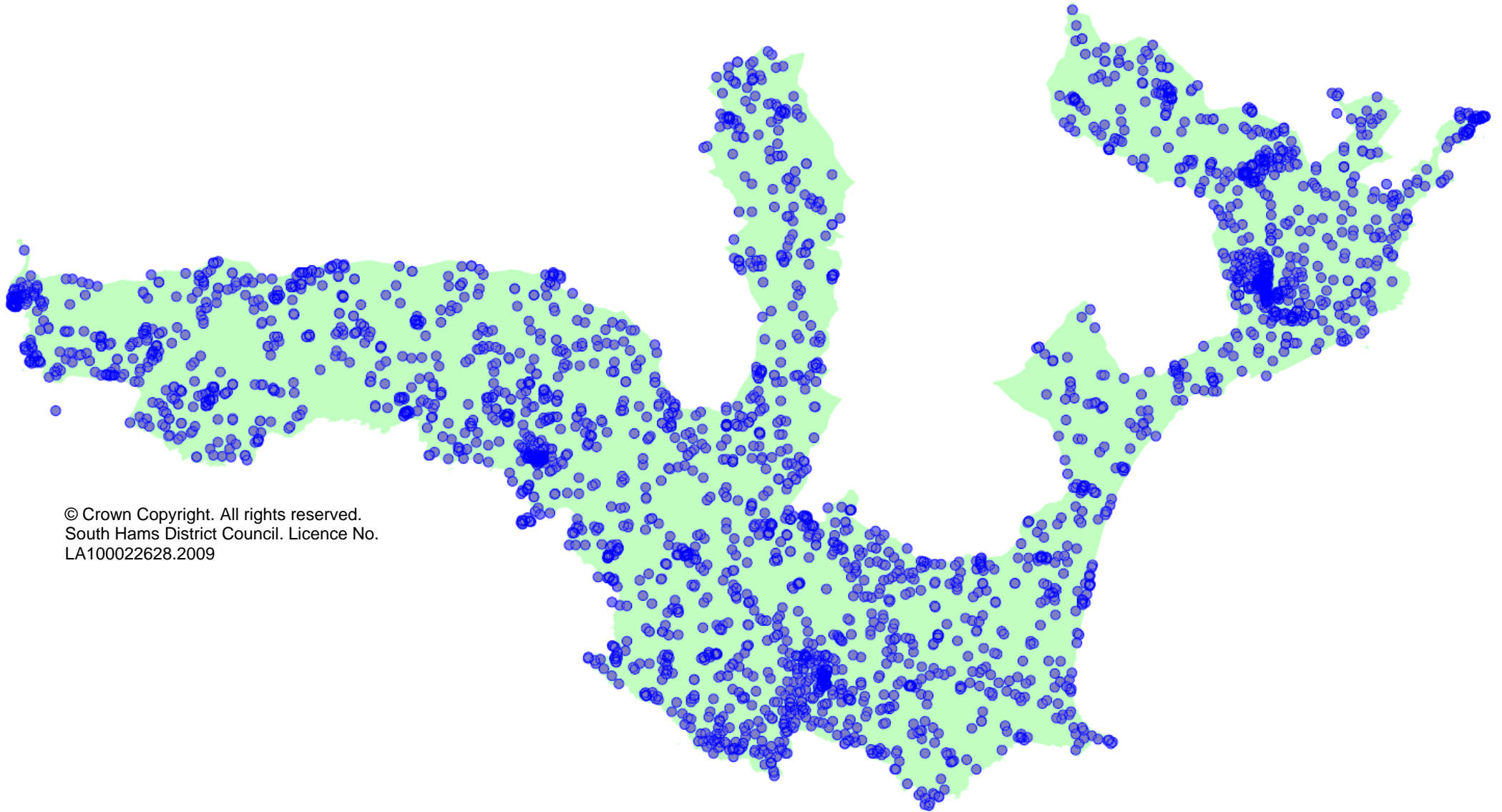
The AONB has:

- 3481 entries in the Historic Environment Record,

these include:

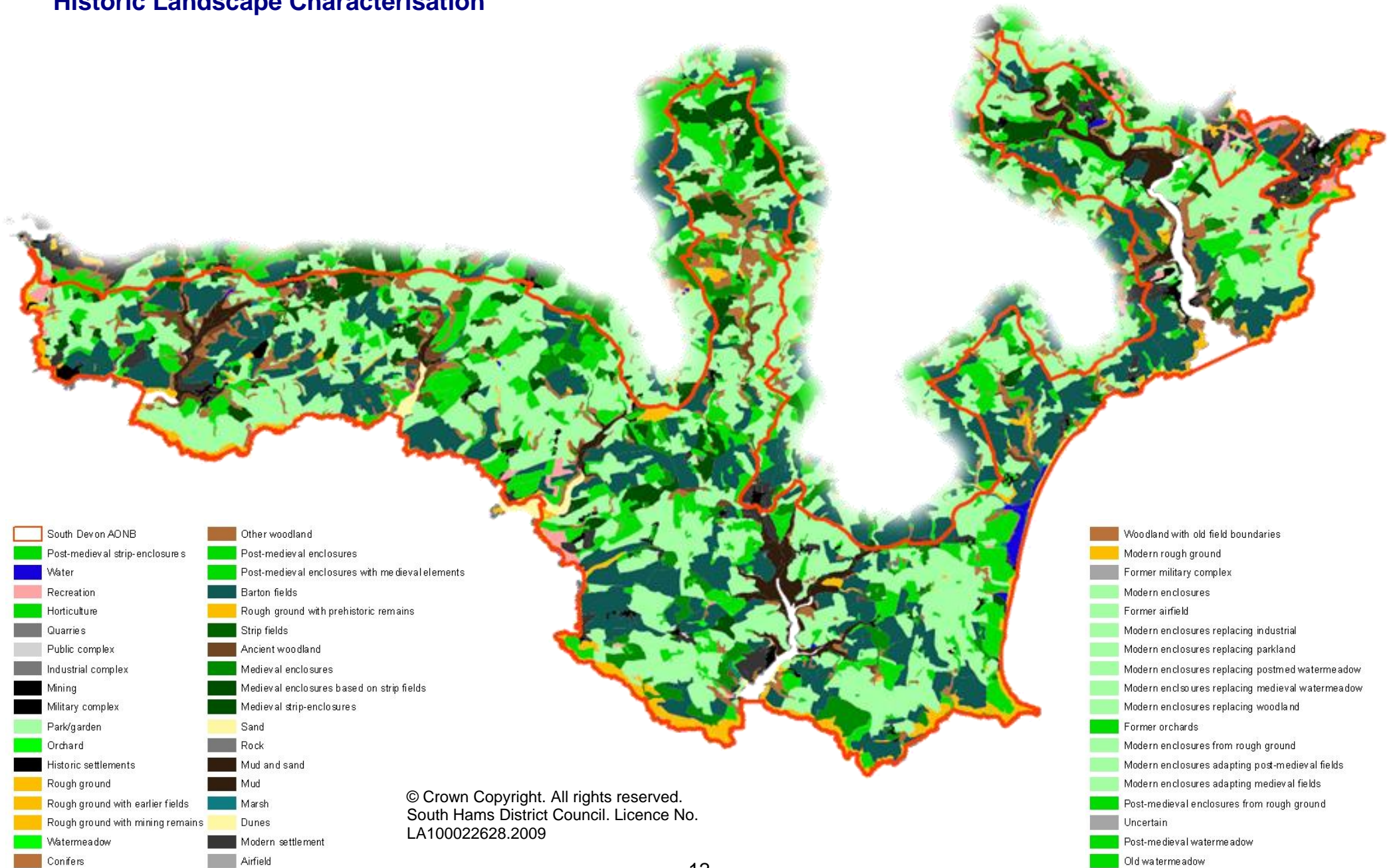
- 65 Scheduled Ancient Monuments;
- 565 hectares of registered historic parkland spread across 7 sites;
- 39 Conservation Areas;
- 1309 listed buildings;
- 4 protected wreck sites lying just off shore.

Historic Environment Records



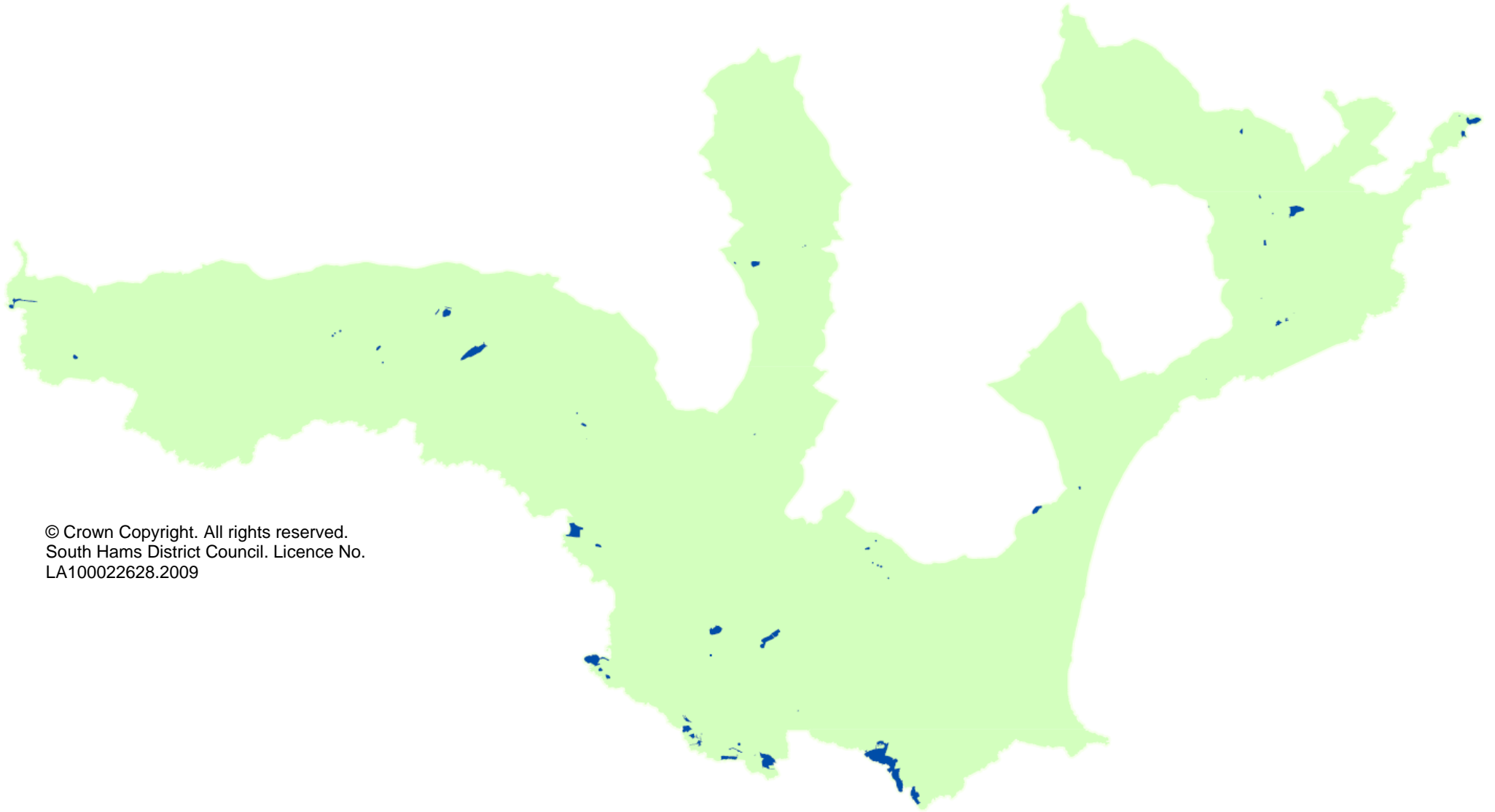
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Historic Landscape Characterisation



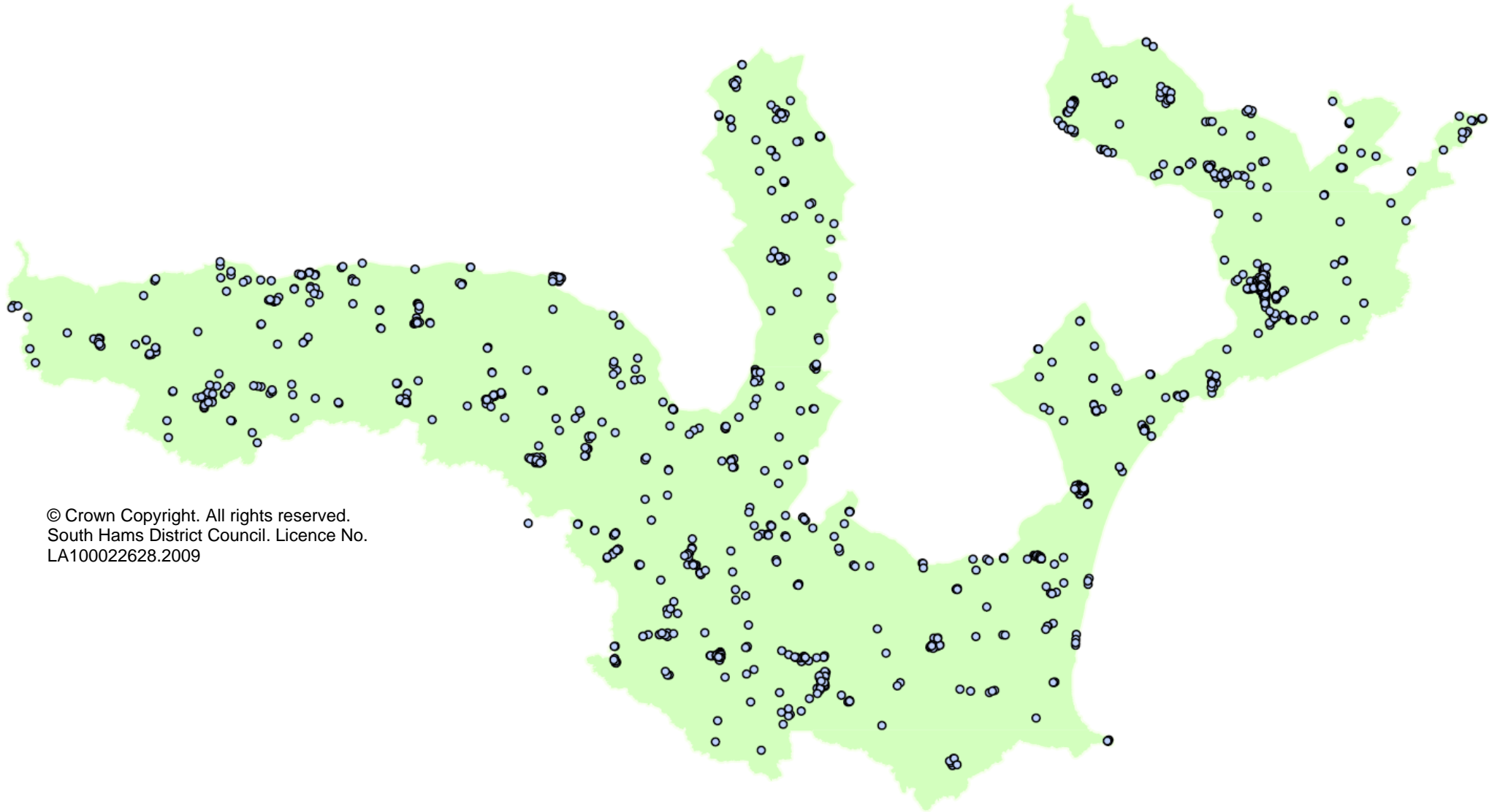
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Scheduled Ancient Monuments



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Listed Buildings



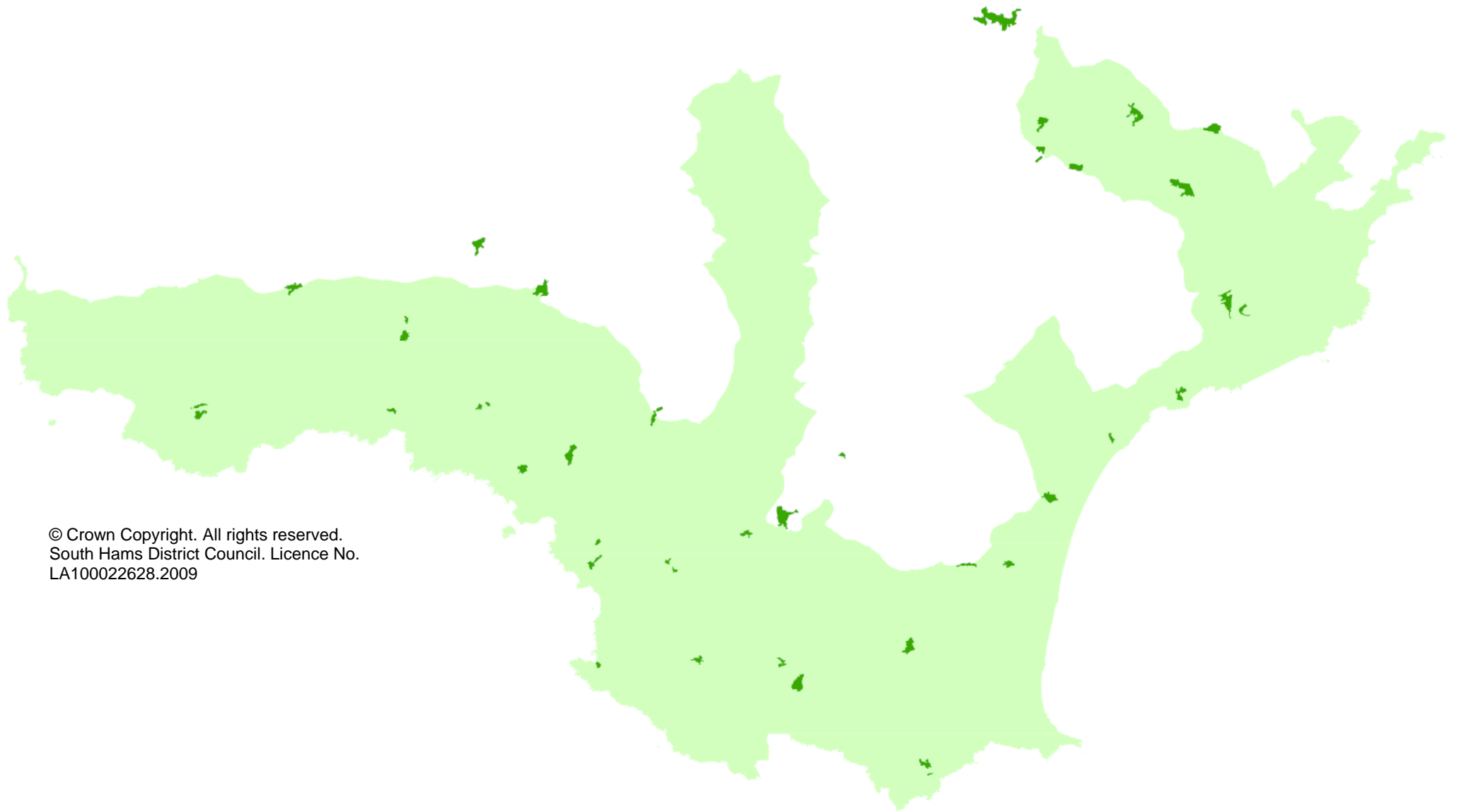
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Registered Parks and Gardens



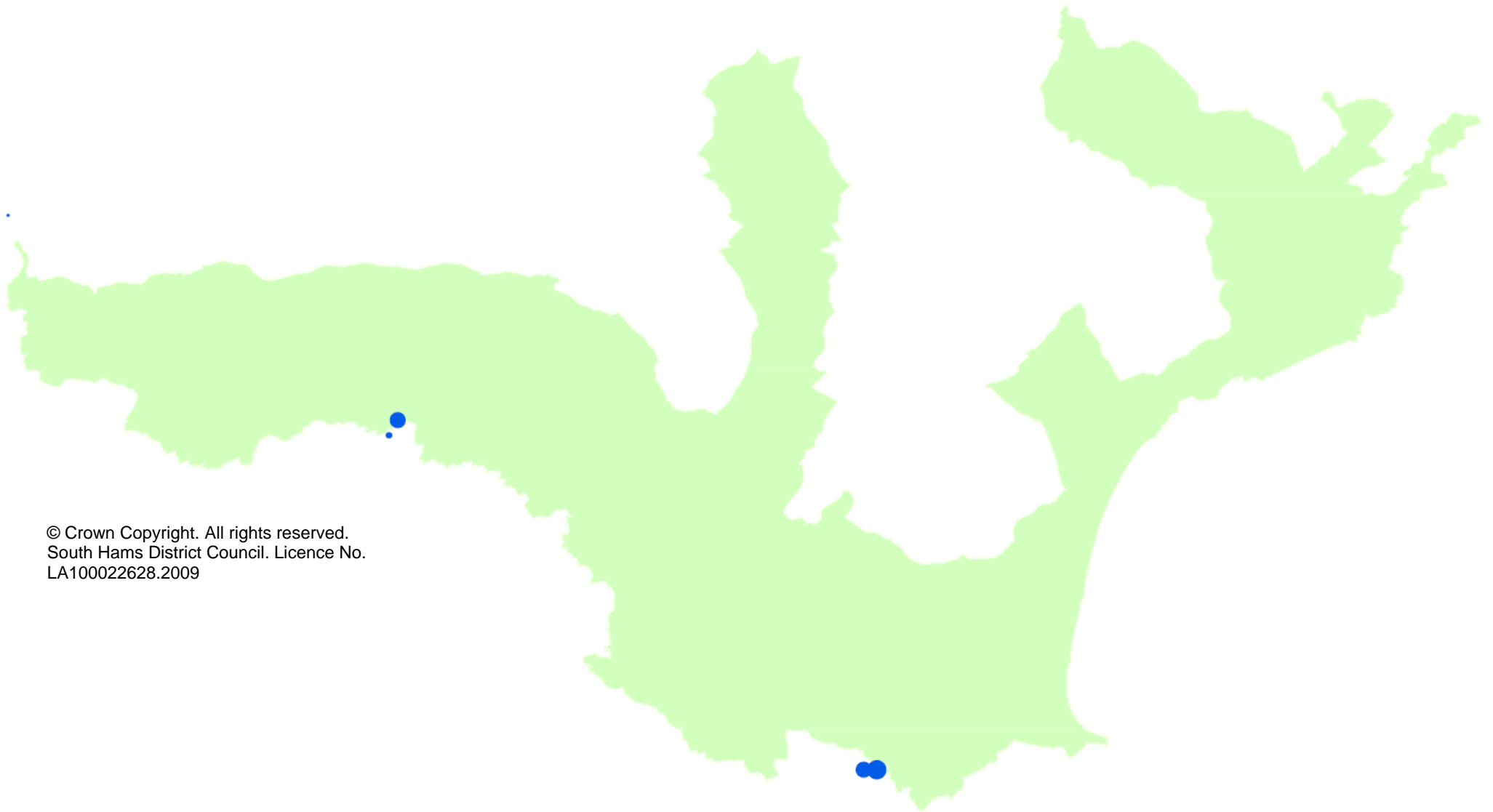
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