



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

# West Cumbria Coastal Plain

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 7



# Introduction

The Farmstead and Landscape Statements will help you to identify the historic character of traditional farmsteads and their buildings in all parts of England, and how they relate to their surrounding landscapes. They are now available for all of England's National Character Areas (NCAs), and should be read in conjunction with the NCA profiles which have been produced by Natural England using a wide range of environmental information (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>). Each Farmstead and Landscape Statement is supported by Historic England's advice on farm buildings (<https://historicengland.org.uk/farmbuildings>), which provides links to the *National Farmsteads Character Statement*, national guidance on **Farm Building Types** and a fully-sourced summary in the *Historic Farmsteads: Preliminary Character Statements*. It also forms part of additional research on historic landscapes, including the mapping of farmsteads in some parts of England (see <https://historicengland.org.uk/characterisation>).









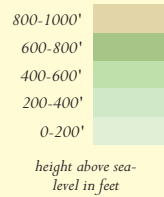
Steading set on the cattle grazed salt marshes of the Esk estuary against a backdrop of the Cumbrian Fells. Photo © Jen Deadman

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**Front cover:** These farmsteads at Branthwaite have farmhouses with attached cattle housing and dairies dating from the late 17th century and a further phase of investment with barns and more cattle housing dating from the late 18th century. The patterns of enclosure mostly relate to a phase of reorganisation belonging to the latter period when these linear farmsteads were expanded into courtyard arrangements. Photo © Historic England 28679/030

## Character Area 7: West Cumbria Coastal Plain

- Area 7 boundary 
- Adjacent Area  3
- A Road 
- B Road 
- Railway and Station 
- District boundary 



0 10km

This map shows the West Cumbria Coastal Plain, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

# Summary

See the National Farmsteads Character Statement for a short introduction to the headings below, including maps and tables.

This area is located on the western coast of Cumbria, extending from Maryport in the north to Barrow-in-Furness in the South. The area forms a narrow coastal strip, which covers a total area of nearly 50,000 hectares and includes both coastal landscapes and features associated with its industrial developments. The area is largely rural in character, with around 10% of the land being urban. The area has little woodland (4.4%) and just under 8% of the area is designated as either a National Nature Reserve (NNR) (1%), or Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (7%).

## Historic character

- Although located just to the south of the Solway Basin (NCA 6), this area's farmsteads are generally looser in their form and relate to landscapes with a mix of piecemeal and irregular enclosure around settlements and many isolated farmsteads of medieval origin, and the planned regular enclosure of common land.
- Despite the more informal layouts of many farmsteads, buildings rarely date from before the 19th century. Combination barns dominate farmsteads, buildings for housing cattle being also significant in number.

## Significance

- There is a low survival of recorded pre-1750 farm buildings, in contrast to the Solway Basin to the north, but the presence of many 17th-century and earlier farmstead sites raises the potential for earlier fabric.
- The area has some notable estate farms built to courtyard plans, such as Schoose Farm near Workington.

## Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a low proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (18.6%, the national average being 32%).



## Historic development

- Neolithic and Bronze Age activity, especially along the coastal plain south of St Bees, is widely reflected by the discovery of stone tools and flint scatters, and by the burial cairns and standing stones fringing the rising ground inland. The area was extensively settled by the late Iron Age.
- Roman control was firmly established with a fort at Ravenglass (c. AD 122) defending the approach to the Mitre, Esk and Irt valleys and the road to Hardknott Pass. Settlements developed along the Roman road running northward and linking the chain of coastal forts to Hadrian's Wall.
- The medieval development of the area was strongly influenced by monastic estates, principally the Priory of St. Bees and Furness Abbey, which exercised control over the coastal fringe and adjacent uplands. These developed arable cultivation in combination with wool production. Mixed farming continued into the post-medieval period, the fattening of cattle imported from Scotland and the adjacent Cumbria High Fells (NCA 8) increasing in importance from the late 17th century. Arable continued to be concentrated in low-lying areas, and increased in intensity (particularly of wheat), underpinned by the introduction of rotations using turnips, from the late 18th century. Limekilns, and the brick and tile works found across the area, also testify to drainage and agricultural improvement. Breweries, such as at Bankspring, north of Millom, testify to 19th-century barley production. Smaller pastoral farms remained as a significant part of the farming economy in the hillier landscapes to the south of Ravenglass and along the fringe of the uplands.
- The larger settlements in this area result from the development of the coal and iron-ore industries from the 17th century onward, in addition to shipping, fishing and shipbuilding. The development of the deep mines of the Lowther estates sustained the growth of the port of Whitehaven in the 17th century, and its planning from the 1680s. The introduction from the 1840s of railways furthered the growth of Whitehaven and also Workington, Barrow and Maryport. The extension in the 1860s of the South Durham and Lancashire Union Railway allowed coke from Durham to be brought to the iron furnaces of West Cumberland. Local industries fostered the survival of small farms in this area, through carting services (for example to transport coal) and the supply of liquid milk and other foodstuffs to the industrial populations.
- Conspicuous industrial wealth was concentrated in relatively few hands and led to the development of a small but influential number of parkland estates such as Muncaster Castle near Ravenglass, Workington Hall and Egremont Hall.

## Landscape and settlement

- Significant nucleations are clustered around mine workings and ports. Cottages and terraced rows are a distinctive feature of the settlements in the coalfields, and the wider settings of farmsteads can take in mines and quarries.
- Villages, generally smaller in scale than in the Solway Plain (NCA 6), are concentrated on the better soils of the coastal plain with isolated farmsteads – originating in the medieval period as individual farms or larger settlements – being more common further inland. The patterns of irregular and piecemeal enclosure around these settlements and farmsteads contrast with landscapes of regular enclosure, sometimes associated with the foundation of new farmsteads, which are concentrated where extensive areas of mossland and common land were drained and improved. The outer boundaries of ring-fenced farms, and some internal boundaries, also have high potential for medieval origins.

- Settlement, including farmsteads dating from the medieval period, is more dispersed to the south of the area: soils were poorer here, and farms have remained comparatively small in scale. The highest levels of dispersed settlement, including small farmsteads and smallholdings where by-employment played an important role, are found in industrial areas.
- Traditional boundaries are thorn hedges with hedgerow trees along the coastal plain, with stone walls and hedgebanks used alongside minor roads, and increasingly prevalent where the land rises away from the coast.
- Belts of mixed and conifer woodland plantations provide shelter alongside farmsteads and settlements, with broadleaved ancient woodland being restricted to the shallow valleys.

## Farmstead and building types

- Although noticeable, there is less evidence in this area than in the Cumbria High Fells and the Solway Basin (NCAs 6 and 8) for the rebuilding of farmhouses in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, and certainly there are fewer recorded earlier survivals. However, many isolated farmsteads in landscapes of earlier enclosure are of medieval origin and may – together with their surrounding boundaries – have retained earlier cores and fabric. As well as farmsteads, cattle were held in pounds as at Ellerbeck Bridge (NY 091300).

### Farmstead types

- Linear farmsteads date from the late 17th to the 19th centuries. Dispersed and loose-courtyard plan farmsteads are much more common than in the Solway Basin (NCA 6). The smallest farmsteads may have a single combination barn facing the farmyard, sometimes with minor service buildings. Regular courtyard U-plan and L-plan are most commonly found in landscapes of regular enclosure. The area's estates also designed some impressive courtyard farmsteads, including some with two or more cattle yards.

### Building types

There are two-storey and part-lofted combination barns. Storeyed barns typically have the storage and threshing area and granary above cattle housing, cart bays and stabling, with taking-in and winnowing doors to the upper floor. Barns can also be built with large doors to the storage and threshing areas, with lofted areas at one or both areas. These barns, which often have a granary or wool loft and additional cattle housing in projecting wings or outshots, are found on almost every farmstead. They demonstrate the importance of both arable farming and cattle in this area.

- There are some bank barns, mostly of early to mid-19th-century date.
- Minor buildings include calf houses and pigsties, the latter often as lean-tos.
- Wheel houses for horse-powered threshing machinery are associated with the larger farmsteads.
- There are some field barns and outfarms, mostly of 19th-century date.



Farmstead inland north of Millom in the south of the area – an area of dispersed settlement and isolated farmsteads. The form of the linear farmstead, later extended into a loose courtyard plan, suggests an early date, the undulating landscape of small irregular fields also evidencing piecemeal enclosure. Photo © Jen Deadman

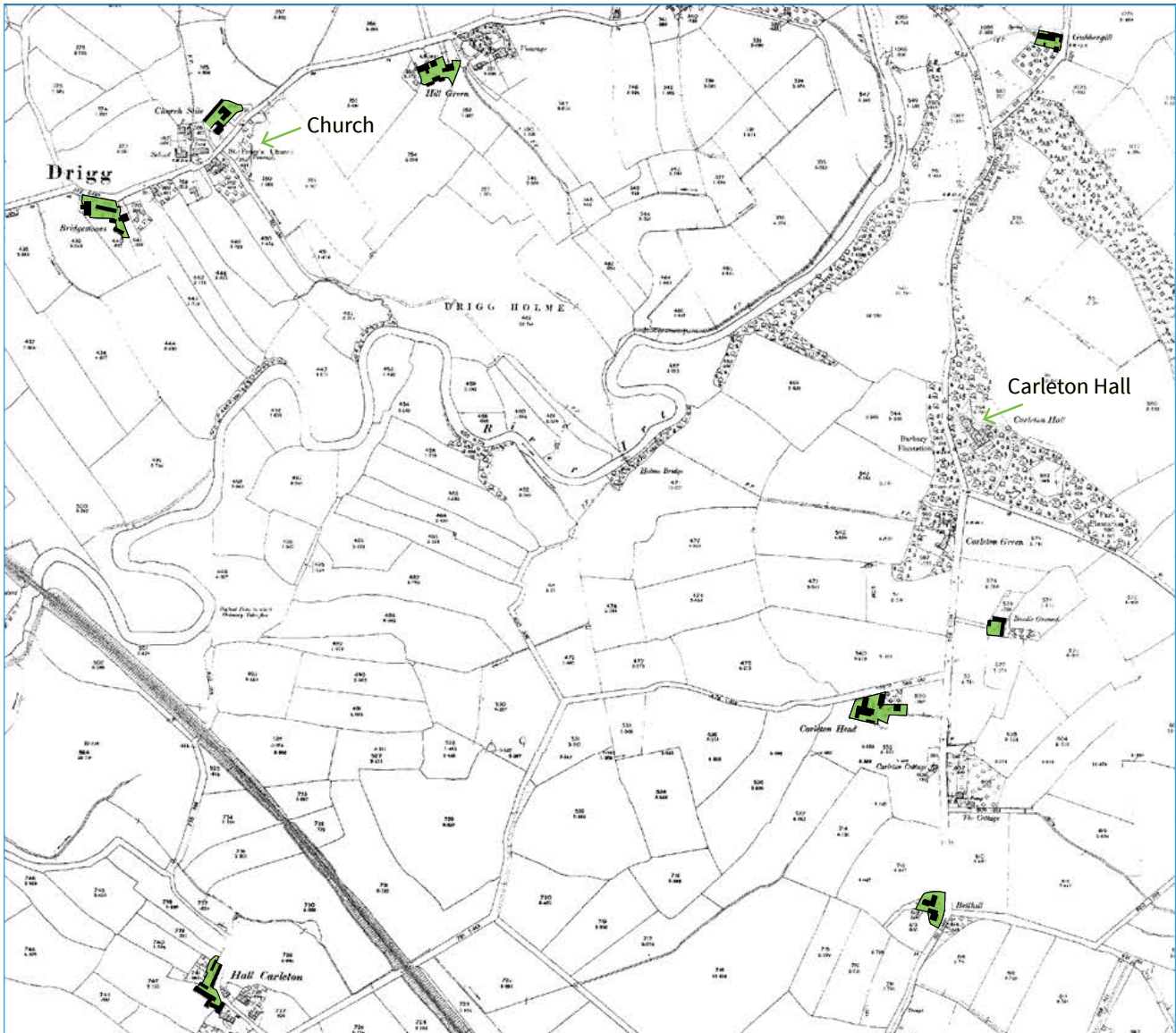


Early 19th-century linear farmstead including two houses for an extended family in the east of the area, set against a backdrop of the Cumbrian fells. The combination barn was the main and sometimes only agricultural building within the steading. Photo © Jen Deadman



Linear farmstead below the fell edge on the narrow coastal strip to the south-west. The barn is double pile with the rear range a later 18th- or 19th-century addition. The farmhouse is dated 1706 with the date of 1827 possibly celebrating alterations to the farmhouse. Photo © Jen Deadman

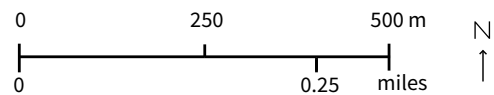




Maps are based on 2nd edition 25" Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England. © Crown Copyright [and database rights] 2020. OS 100024900



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



## Drigg

The farmsteads and houses (including Carleton Hall) in this area date from the mid-18th century, and relate to a landscape of piecemeal enclosure (retaining the form of medieval strip fields to the south of Drigg), the drainage of meadows around the river Irk. The irregular boundaries of some farmsteads hint at their earlier origins, whilst others were reorganised as regular courtyard groups.

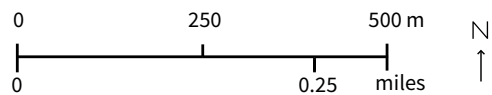




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Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



## Ullock

The farmsteads in Ullock relate to the development of larger farms out of the medieval hamlet, which probably comprised a cluster of longhouses and outbuildings with yards. Crakeplace Hall to the west has a 16th-century house, and like many high-status sites developed by the 19th century into a formally arranged courtyard. Most other farmsteads developed into courtyard groups with bank barns and cattle housing around earlier cores of 16th- and 17th-century fabric, all reflected in the piecemeal patterns of enclosure that extend over the same period.





Drigg, showing combination barns and other buildings arranged around courtyards and attached in-line along the village street. Photo © Historic England 28580/029



The late 17th-century linear farmstead at Far Braithwaite has a 1683 datestone over the dairy entrance and attached late 18th-century barn, and is sited opposite a very large mid-19th-century barn which mostly comprises housing for cattle. Photo © Historic England 28579/028





This early 19th-century combination barn forms part of a roadside steading near Seascale. Note the first-floor threshing door over a central cart entry flanked by doors to cattle housing. Photo © Jen Deadman



Whilst farmsteads on the upland fringe are constrained or shaped by the topography, those on areas of early to mid-19th-century enclosure – as here, near Seascale – are typically more compact and formal in their layouts. Photo © Jen Deadman



Early 19th-century bank barn at Drigg. The barn is ramped, providing a threshing floor and hay storage at the upper level with cattle housing below. Photo © Jen Deadman



Steps to granary in lean-to attached to a large early 19th-century combination barn. Photo © Jen Deadman



At a more modest level, this small village farm comprises a small, loose yard of single-storey buildings set behind the farmhouse with a combination barn lying to one side. The decorative effect of coursed red sandstone interspersed with irregular black stone is seen throughout the coastal strip. Photo © Jen Deadman





This combination barn at Drigg has been extended to adjoin the house, with an arched entry providing access to the yard behind. Note the rendered treatment to the house, which also offered opportunities to pick out doors, windows, pilaster strips and string courses. Photo © Jen Deadman



Large, late 18th- to 19th-century combination barn in Drigg associated with a small yard and rebuilt farmhouse. Built mainly of sea cobbles, it was raised at a later date in coursed sandstone. The earlier roof line is evident in the gable end. As elsewhere, there is a small yard fronting onto the roadside before the barn. Photo © Jen Deadman



Loose yard arrangement in the village of Stank on the outskirts of Barrow in Furness to the south. The village is comprised solely of several small working farms dominated by combination barns. Note how the roofline of the barn has been raised in red sandstone over the earlier yellow stone common to the south of the area. The voussoirs to the gable-end doorway for cattle indicates an early 18th-century or even earlier date. Photo © Jen Deadman



Apart from the combination barn which houses most of the functions of the steading, yard buildings are small and frequently single storey. Here, pigsties with



Loose boxes attached to barns are common, as here, in a loose yard close to Workington. Photo © Jen Deadman



Field barns are uncommon. This small bank barn is set on hilly ground north of Millom where the coastal plain meets the fells. Photo © Jen Deadman



## Materials and detail

- The area displays a varied mixture of materials in traditional buildings, including red sandstone, yellow towards the south, limestone, cobbles, Welsh and Cumbrian slate. Brick was commonly used from the mid-19th century and is rarely found before that

date. There are some survivals of earth-built buildings of the type commonly found in the Solway Basin (NCA 6).



# Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by  
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First published by Historic England 2013. This  
edition published by Historic England 2020.

Please refer to this document as:  
Historic England 2020 Farmstead and Landscape  
Statement: West Cumbria Coastal Plain.  
Swindon: Historic England.

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Product code: 52121 RRL code: 011/2020  
Publication date: February 2020 © Historic England  
Design: Historic England and Chantal Freeman, Diva  
Arts