Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Mid Northumberland

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 12

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).

Small, isolated farmstead in an area of dispersed settlement south of Alnwick in the north of the area. The moors and Rothbury Forest are visible to the west. Scattered areas of conifer cover are found throughout. Not unusually for the area, the farmhouse was originally a bastle house of 16th-century origin, altered and adapted in the 18th and 19th centuries. The U-shaped yard to the rear is of the latter period. Photo © Jen Deadman

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Front cover: Fairnley Farm, Rothbury, a planned farmstead set in regular enclosures. It is one of the earliest examples of a farmstead built to a design by Daniel Garrett, in 1764, with additions of 1840. Photo © Historic England 28562/001

This map shows the Mid Northumberland, with the numbers of the 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, which lies inland of the Northumberland coast between Ponteland and Alnwick, is an upland fringe transitional landscape between the coastal plain to the east and the Pennine uplands to the west. Only 1% is urban area and there is 6% woodland cover. Of the area, 31% is Less Favoured Area (LFA) land.

Historic character

- Patterns of piecemeal and regular enclosure of fields testify to a process of post-medieval agricultural change that is more evident in this landscape than in other lowland areas of Northumberland.
- The courtyard-plan farmsteads that dominate the south and east of this area, and their landscape context of large-scale fields enclosed by strong hedgerows in the late 18th and 19th centuries, bears a strong resemblance to the coastal plain areas of Northumberland to the east. There is a greater variety of farmstead plan types with more evidence for phasing from the 17th century and even earlier in the remainder of the area, including linear and dispersed-plan farmsteads close to moorland and a variety of loose and regular courtyard types.
- This variety of scale and time-depth is reflected in farm buildings that offer evidence for moorland-edge farms with an emphasis on stock rearing to large-scale complexes of barns with engine houses, granaries, cart sheds and stables in the context of cattle yards and buildings which demonstrate the importance of stock fattening and later dairying.

Significance

- The area's mechanised courtyard farmsteads, together with those in the Tyne Gap and Hadrian's Wall, Cheviot Fringe, Sandstone Hills and the South East Northumberland Coastal Plain, comprise a nationally significant testament to late 18th- and 19th-century agricultural improvement – matched only by the comparable scale of farmsteads and their enclosed landscapes in the Lothians and other parts of Scotland.
- The evidence for horse, water and steam-powered threshing is highly significant and early in a national context. Any surviving examples of internal machinery – the gearing for horse wheels, mill wheels, boilers and fixed threshing machines – are of exceptional rarity in a national context.
- This area has a higher survival of 18th-century and earlier buildings, including those that have evidently been heightened and extended, than in other parts of the estate landscapes of Northumberland. Working buildings with 18th-century and earlier fabric, including traces of heather thatch, are of exceptional rarity and will provide important evidence that can inform understanding of how this complex landscape developed.
- The earthworks of shrunken and abandoned settlements, and of earlier cultivation (ridge

and furrow, and cord rig), are, as a result, a distinctive characteristic of this area.

Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a medium proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (23.9%, the national average being 32%). The Photo Image Project also recorded an above-average percentage (9.4%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.

Historic development

- This area experienced extensive woodland clearance and settlement by the late Iron Age. The close proximity to Hadrian's Wall (southern area boundary) and Dere Street supported a hinterland of Romano-British farms and settlements largely known from cropmark evidence.

- Modern settlement follows closely the medieval pattern of nucleation which was mostly established in the 12th and 13th centuries – small villages sited on ridges in the south-west or on the crossing points of rivers. Border conflict and unrest is evident in these strategic locations and the number of them which cluster around greens where stock could be confined in relatively safety.

- A number of these settlements were abandoned or reduced in size through the 14th and 15th centuries in particular, leaving earthwork traces of their former extent. Estates continued to played an active role in the restructuring of agriculture, including the relocation of farmsteads to new sites and the development over the 18th century of rotations using root crops and artificial grasses. Lime kilns enabled the application of lime to aid fertility and tile drainage was commonly employed in the 19th century.

- The development of major estates had a profound effect on the extent of agricultural improvements from the 17th to 19th centuries, which in the latter period was focused on the production of corn and improved pasture, the final phase of survey-planned enclosure and the building of some large, mechanised farmsteads with farm workers' (locally termed hinds) housing. The improvement of roads, centred on the market town of Morpeth on the Great North Road, played a significant role in stimulating improvement prior to the development of the railway system.

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Landscape and settlement

- The lower-lying areas to the south and east support fodder and arable crops within large regular fields enclosed by thorn hedgerows, some of these being of 17th- and 18th-century date. Higher altitudes support livestock in a mixture of rough pasture and improved leys, divided by dry stone walls.

- The areas surrounding villages which had been common arable from the medieval period were enclosed in wide and regular patterns defined by hedges or, at higher altitudes, dry stone walls. The remnants of the former arable fields – ridge and furrow and sometimes cord rig – are widespread. The result is a mix of piecemeal and regular enclosures which can date from the 17th century or even earlier. Some isolated farmsteads date from this period, but most are 19th century in date and associated with further reorganisation of the farmed landscape – often in turn related to the amalgamation and enlargement of farms.

- Hedgerow trees are generally few. Isolated farmsteads can relate to shelter belts and planted, semi-native broadleaved woodland, the extensive estate lands as improved from the late 17th century having a strong designed character. Semi-natural broadleaved woodland (oak, oak-ash and alder) is confined to the steep sides of valleys and the margins of rivers (notably the Coquet and Wansbeck).

Farmstead and building types

Although recorded pre-1750 fabric is rare by national standards, there is extensive evidence in this area (more so, it seems, than in the coastal areas) for multi-phase building and rebuilding which extends to the 17th century and even earlier, complementing the evidence for piecemeal enclosure and reorganisation of farmland.

The earliest buildings on farmsteads – besides tower houses and bastles – are typically farmhouses, some of which in this area are early 18th-century, cross-passage houses with the chimney stack backing onto the passage. Many farmsteads have retained single-storey workers' (termed hinds) cottages, which may be attached to farmhouses; there are some instances noted of two-storey workers' housing attached to farmhouses.

Farmstead types

- Tower houses, mainly dating from the 13th to the 16th centuries, offer the most dramatic evidence for unsettled Border conditions and the status of their owners. Today they often stand alone but were more usually part of a complex of manorial buildings. Defensible bastles, where the lower floor was used to house animals and the upper for domestic use, were most commonly built in the late 16th and 17th centuries – unsettled conditions persisting after the Union of Crowns under James I and VI in 1603.

- Linear farmsteads, with buildings attached in-line to the farmhouse, continued to be built into the second half of the 19th century. They are found associated with smaller farmsteads, including those engaged in quarrying and other industries, in moorland-edge locations, alongside roads and within settlements. Dispersed-plan farmsteads, where the buildings were scattered within a stock pound, are now rare and concentrated in moorland-edge locations.

- There is a much wider variety in the types and scales of courtyard plans than in the coastal areas to the east, offering evidence of the piecemeal development and varied size of farmsteads in this area. Loose courtyard plans often incorporate one long range with multiple buildings (not including the farmhouse) with a loose scatter of other ancillary buildings. Regular U- and L-shaped courtyards are more

likely to be of a single phase and associated with medium-scale mixed farms.

- The largest regular courtyard plans, often with buildings to four sides of single or multiple yards, are associated with the area's large arable-based and stock-fattening farms. These have often been rebuilt in the 19th century, in order to house fatstock, and typically retain a barn range with evidence for machine threshing (wheel houses can survive) and extensive ranges of stabling, cart sheds and cattle housing. Large granaries are typically sited over cart sheds and sometimes stables. These farmsteads were often extended with additional open and covered yards and wide-span cattle housing.

- A key feature of this area, as in neighbouring parts of Durham and Northumberland, was the mechanisation of threshing from an early date. By the late 18th century, the horse gin, which had been used in mines for centuries, was adapted to provide rotary power for turning the first threshing machines. They are seen adjacent to a purpose-built threshing barn which is frequently connected through to other ranges in the yard. Water power and steam power also appeared at a remarkably early date in a national context: by the 1830s on large, regular courtyard plan farmsteads.

Building types

Building types display the evidence for the scale of arable farming and cattle management in this area:

- Threshing and attached straw barns on larger farmsteads are a distinctive type of building associated with mechanised threshing, which extends into the Lothians and other parts of Scotland subject to agricultural improvement. The first floor of the threshing barn had doors for pitching in sheaves of corn and contained the threshing machine, the corn being bagged on the ground floor after it was threshed. The position of the hole which took threshed grain from the threshing machine into the grain bins below can be detected by the trimming of the joists around it, usually visible from below. The straw barn, positioned in-line or at right angles to the threshing barn, is typically lower with slit vents in the side walls, and housed straw before it was spread around the stock yards. Power could also be conveyed to animal-processing machinery in the ground floor of either building (most commonly the threshing barn).

- Wheel houses, locally termed horse gins, which had been used in mines for centuries, were adapted from the late 18th century to provide rotary power for powering threshing machines. They were built adjacent to the barn in which the threshing machine and other fodder-processing machinery was housed.

- There are lean-tos for housing water wheels, the evidence for which can also be seen in the construction of a mill pond and a leat (sometimes underground) to convey the water to the wheel.

- Steam engine houses can be shown to have replaced earlier horse and water power. From the early 19th century, the fixed steam engine was installed on some of the larger farms, appearing at the same time as horse-powered systems. Typically, little remains other than the boiler and engine, usually housed together in a lean-to against the side of the barn close to the chimney stack.

- Granaries, often marked by stone steps, were frequently built as an upper storey over a cart shed, stables or hemmel (see below), the free circulation of air below the floor helping to keep the grain dry.

- Open-fronted cart sheds and implement sheds with lockable doors were usually sited next to farm entrances and facing routeways.

- Stables were either lofted or single-storey with ridge ventilators.

- Low ranges of cattle sheds and associated yards often run in parallel or are linked around the perimeter of the yard. These include hemmels, a form of open-fronted shed for fatstock particular to north-east England. The

increased importance accorded to fatstock in the second half of the 19th century is also reflected in evidence for the rebuilding of farmsteads with more yards and buildings for cattle, including loose boxes (marked by multiple doors), wide-span buildings and covered yards which also preserved the manure's nutrients. Most covered yards date from the early 20th century.

- Byres (cow houses with stalls for the small numbers of milk cattle) and pigsties, the latter often marked by yards with feeding troughs, are usually placed close to the house.

- Smithies were found on the largest farmsteads.

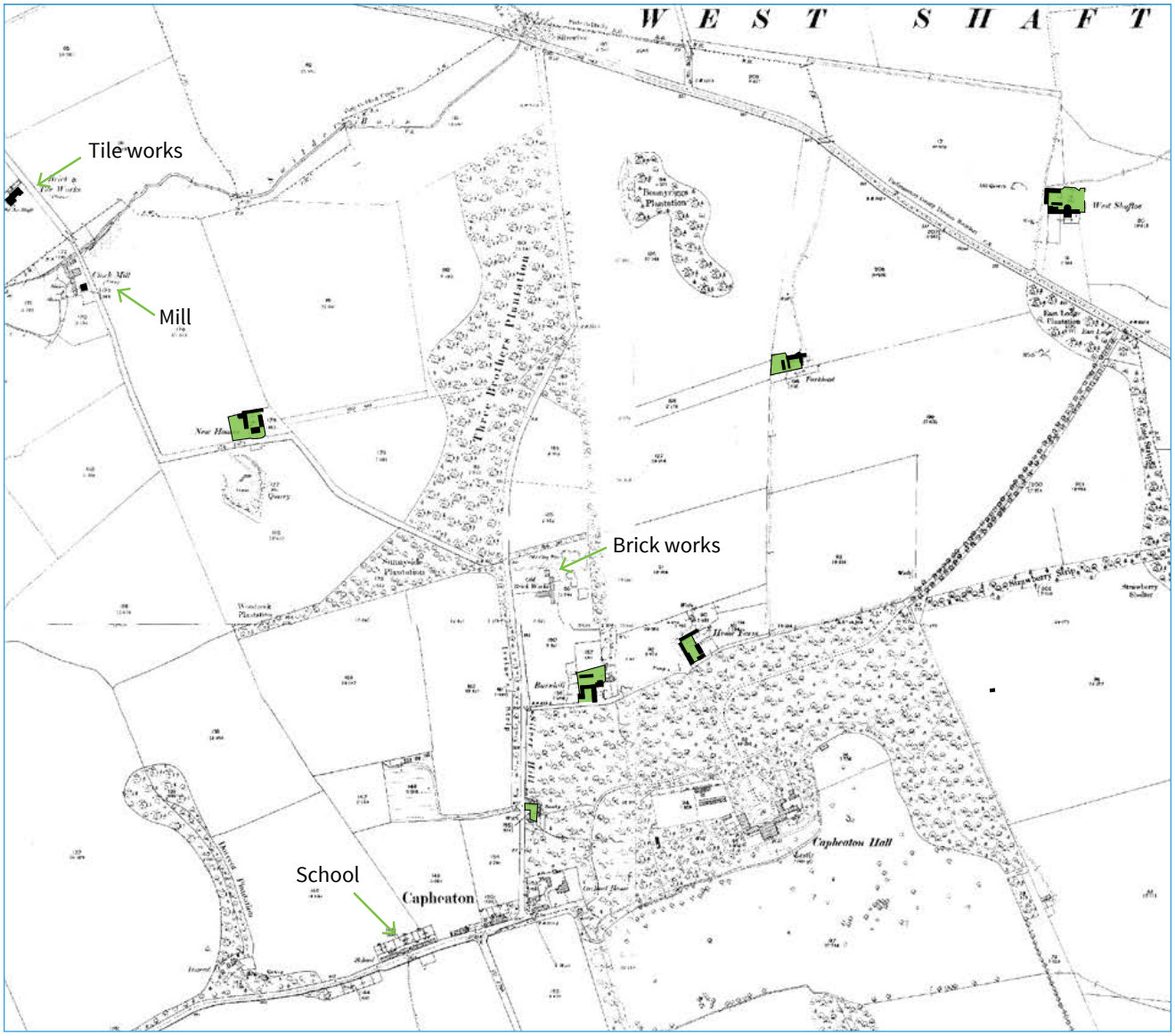
- Farm workers' cottages (locally-termed hinds) were most commonly associated with the largest courtyard farmsteads and sited (sometimes along with riding horse stables) close to the farmhouse.

Ridge and furrow is widespread, particularly around isolated steadings with evidence for continuity of occupation since medieval times. This 19th-century farmhouse with its huddle of courtyard buildings is set in a landscape evidencing much earlier occupation. Photo © Jen Deadman

The present farmhouse and buildings across the road at West Fenwick replaced the bastle in the 18th- to early 19th centuries. The long front range is comprised primarily of byres for cattle with a full-length loft over, stabling and a granary. To the front is a walled enclosure, to the rear a yard with a loose arrangement of ancillary buildings, one of which is a small single-storey structure with crucks, latterly used as a cow house. Photo © Jen Deadman

The former bastle of West Fenwick is now incorporated into a range of farm buildings. The bastle, of late 16th- or early 17th-century date (and marked in the photograph by the lean-to), was altered and extended in the late 18th or early 19th century to function as a combination barn with further buildings added to either end. The gable wall at the east end is over a metre wide and contains the original ground floor entry into the byre, above which would have been the living accommodation. Photo © Jen Deadman

Corridge Farm in Wallington illustrates successive phases of 17th- to 19th-century improvement that are found across the estates of this area. The house and L-plan range of farm buildings, although rebuilt in their present form in the mid-19th century, have 17th- and 18th-century origins. To the east (right) is a walled garden with an attached dovecote. Photo © Historic England 28561/037



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

0 250 500 m

0 0.25 miles

N

Capheaton Estate

Capheaton House was built at the centre of a formal park in 1668 by the Newcastle architect Robert Trollope for Sir John Swinburne. To its west is the planned village and its school, built for Sir Edward Swinburne who died in 1786, the later 18th century seeing a further transformation of the park and the estate lands around it with plantations, regular enclosures and regular courtyard plan farmsteads. Some of these, such as Barnhill Farm just to the north of the park, date from the early 18th century. As elsewhere in this area, tileworks and brickworks provided materials to enable drainage of land and construction of new buildings.

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.

0 250 500 m
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Ordnance Survey map of **Matfen Estate**

The Matfen estate was acquired by John Douglas of Newcastle in the late 17th century, who depopulated the village and dispersed the farms within reorganised farmland: East Matfen medieval village, planned to either side of a street in the late 11th or 12th century, and its open field system lies just to the east of this map. The farmhouse and buildings at East Matfen in the centre of the map date from the mid-18th century. All these large regular courtyard layouts had become fully mechanised by the early 19th century, with horse-engine houses projecting from their barns, and scattered field barns. Note the brick and tile works to the south-east.

The farmhouse and buildings at East Matfen (see map on previous page) date from the mid-18th century, the stables and the main elevation of the house being aligned to the road. East Matfen Photo © Historic England 28561/020

East Shaftoe, another estate landscape centred around the medieval tower house at East Shaftoe Hall and with Romano-British and earlier settlements within surviving areas of rough ground not taken in for improved agriculture. Photo © Historic England 28561/026

This group at Healey Cote south-west of Longframlington again has 18th-century origins, the house and working buildings being heightened in the early to mid-19th century. Photo © Historic England 28563/015

Mid-19th-century stables with attached loose box. Photo © Jen Deadman

Isolated, late 19th-century smallholding on reclaimed moorland in the north of the area with evidence for small-scale quarrying close by. It comprises simply of a single-storey house with a cow house and integral cart shed attached. The cart shed entry in the gable end has been enlarged. Several small enclosures lie adjacent to the house. Photo © Jen Deadman

Linear steading in an area of dispersed farmsteads to the west of Morpeth set in small fields of piecemeal enclosure with evidence for ridge and furrow. A single-storey cow house adjoins the farmhouse with a combination barn adjoining to the west. To the rear are two walled enclosures. Photo © Jen Deadman

Part of a farmstead at Stanton, which was extended into a large-scale mechanised courtyard farm in the early to mid-19th century but retains elements of an earlier 17th-century farmstead including (to right) a three-bay byre with the remaining stubs of raised crucks in situ. The steep pitch would suggest the latter was originally thatched. Photos © Jen Deadman

A threshing barn, its doorway enlarged, with a hexagonal wheel house (right) adjoining to the rear. Photo © Jen Deadman

The long range on this farmstead to the west of Hartburn comprises a two-storey combination barn, 18th-century in date, raised in the 19th century and adjoined to the right by a two-storey granary block built in two phases, retaining its original stone slate roof. At first-floor level is a granary running the full length of the building, with stables and cart sheds below. The farmhouse, which is dated 1722, presents a symmetrical, five-bay façade to the road. The evidence for various phases of construction is typical of Mid Northumberland, many farmhouses retaining 17th- and 18th-century cores. Photo © Jen Deadman

To the rear is a long range of hemmels: open-fronted sheds for cattle (below). Photo © Jen Deadman

18th-century farmstead in Kirkheaton village. Here, a long yard runs parallel with the street, fronting a long, low range of hemmels and cart sheds. The farmhouse is set at right angles at one end of the range, the combination barn (right) at the other. Photo © Jen Deadman

Shield Hill, one and a half miles north-east of Morpeth, consists of two farms: West Shield Farm and East Shield Farm which form a joint township with Hebron. Both were constructed in the mid-18th century. West Shield farm comprises a U-shaped plan form of linked buildings divided into two yards by a central range. Photo © Jen Deadman

Materials and detail

- Traditional buildings are characterised by the use of local grey sandstone, with red pantiles or grey slate (Scottish and later Welsh) being the predominant roofing materials. Brick was used for quoins and dressings in the 19th century, some later 19th century buildings to the south-east being built of brick.
- Heather thatch was common before the 19th century, and evidence for this can be retained in steep-pitches retained in fabric: surviving examples are extremely rare.
- Evidence for early fabric also comes in the form of cruck blades reused as lintels and constructional timber.
- Extensive rebuilding of the rural building stock from the early 18th century saw the widespread use of sandstone (rubble or dressed) Roofing – Grey slate generally – some examples of stone slate surviving. Also, there was some use of pantiles. More brick is found towards the south-east in 19th-century buildings. Raised crucks survive in some ancillary buildings.

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