



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

South East Northumberland Coastal Plain

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 13



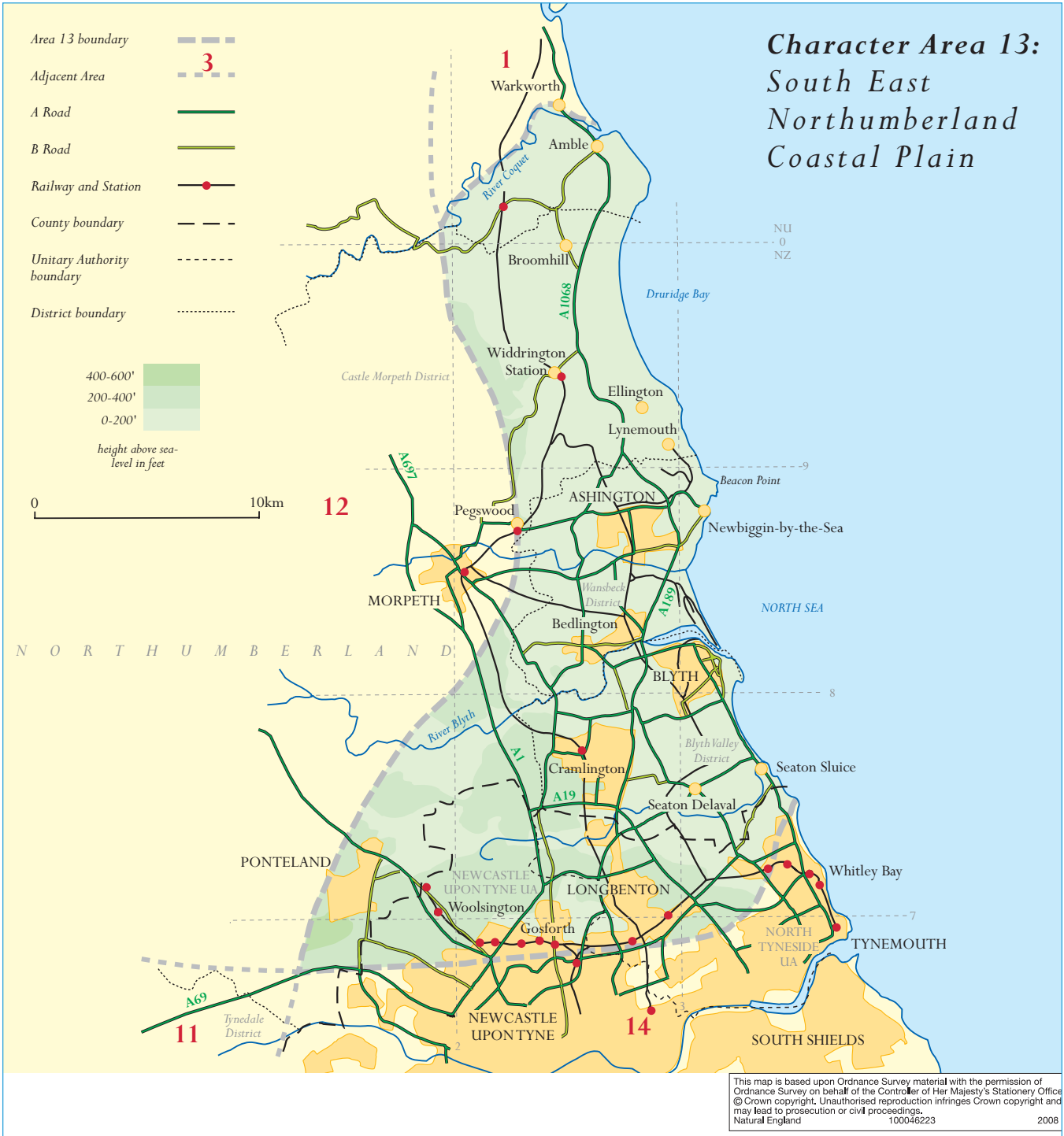
Introduction

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>).



Mid-19th-century, brick-built farmstead to the south-west of the area. Photo © Jen Deadman

Front cover: A regular U-plan farmstead at Hemscott Hill to the north of Cresswell, built c 1840 within fields reorganised by the same period. Photo © Historic England 28563/057



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

Summary

This area extends southward from the river Coquet to the northern edge of the city of Newcastle, and inland to just east of Morpeth. It encompasses the low-lying plain of the Northumberland coalfield, a low coastline of rocky headlands and sandy bays, and extensive urban and industrial development to the south. Of the Character Area, 17% is urban and 5% is woodland.

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

Historic character

- Farmland is intermixed with mining and other industrial areas which, despite medieval origins, are largely the result of the expansion of older settlements and the planning of new ones in the 19th century.
- Farms of different types and scales developed to serve these communities, but – as with other parts of lowland Northumberland – arable combined with fatstock production and sheep farming came to dominate agriculture in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- The farmed landscape is characterised by fields enclosed on a piecemeal basis from the 16th century and reorganised with enlarged fields and straight boundaries in the late 18th and 19th centuries; plantations are also associated with this later phase.
- Most farmsteads were rebuilt in the early to mid-19th century as courtyard layouts – often with regular layouts of buildings around two or more yards – with engine houses built onto barns, granaries, cart sheds, stables and a wide variety of cattle housing.

Significance

- The area's mechanised courtyard farmsteads, together with those in the Tyne Gap and Hadrian's Wall, Cheviot Fringe, Sandstone Hills, Mid Northumberland 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.
- Working buildings with 18th-century and earlier fabric, including traces of heather thatch, are of exceptional rarity.

Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area (NCA), the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a medium proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (21.1%, the national average being 32%). The Photo Image Project also recorded an above-average percentage (26.7%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.

Historic development

- This area, which was extensively settled in the prehistoric and Romano-British periods, is now dominated by the impact of industrial expansion of the late 18th to 20th centuries, with a more rural character to the north of the area.
- Coal has been worked in the area since at least the 13th century, largely on a small scale and leaving characteristic bell pits across the landscape. During the 18th and 19th centuries, improved technology linked to increased demand gave rise to deep mining and the development of nucleated mining settlements. Single-storey workers' housing, mirroring the single-storey housing found scattered across much of Northumberland, continued to be built into the 19th century; two-storey terrace housing was built in increasing numbers from the 1830s to 1840s.
- Transport links for coal and for the produce needed by the urban populations increased throughout the 19th century; railways linked the coalfields to enlarged ports (Amble and Blyth).
- Settlement expansion was directly linked to mining, creating a landscape of industrial and urban character interspersed with agricultural land and the emerging parklands surrounding country houses and institutions. Along the coast, settlements developed around fishing, salt working and coastal trade.
- As in the Northumberland Coastal Plain (NCA 1), large estates extending into the Pennine and Cheviot uplands of Northumberland have been a major influence on the landscape from the medieval period. As elsewhere in estate-dominated Northumberland, a first phase of the 16th to 18th centuries was followed by often total reorganisation and the final phase of enclosure in the late 18th and 19th centuries. This occurred in tandem with the reorganisation of many settlements and the appearance of large farmsteads with farm workers' (locally termed hinds) housing.
- Arable production has been a feature of the plain since at least the medieval period. Extensive reorganisation of the medieval landscape from the 17th century, driven by estates, resulted in intensive grain cultivation, cattle fattening, dairying for local and distant markets, and much more large-scale sheep farming. As with other lowland and upland fringe areas of Northumberland, rotational farming using roots and artificial grasses was introduced across this area over the 18th century, helping with farmyard manure and the application of lime (from limekilns that dot the area) to boost yields; this system of farming was facilitated by the reorganisation and continued enclosure of farmland, large-scale and regular enclosed fields being centred on large farms or farming hamlets. Tile drainage manufactured in local tile works (for example at Widdrington) was another feature of this area.
- A small number of small industrial farmsteads were built to serve 19th-century planned villages (such as Ashington) with liquid milk and other produce.

Landscape and settlement

- Medieval settlement was largely nucleated and related to the cultivation of large open fields across the relatively fertile soils of the coastal plain, farms also making use of the salt marshes to graze cattle and sheep. Some settlements to the north still retain something of the character of this period (for example Warkworth, Newbiggin and Widdrington).
- The large, regular fields reflect the ease with which open fieldscapes could be re-ordered in the 17th and 18th centuries as production was reorganised around large farming units, many linked to coal-enriched country estates.
- Hedgerow trees are generally few. Woodland clearance was extensive in the medieval

period and survival of ancient woodland is sparse and largely restricted to river valleys. Coniferous shelterbelts and mixed plantations

are a feature of the 19th-century farming landscape. Tree cover and hedgerow trees increase towards the south-west.

Farmstead and building types

The area has a very low survival in a national context of pre-1750 farmstead buildings, which can include former longhouses (the remnants of the former village settlements) converted into outbuildings and some rare surviving examples of pre-19th-century threshing barns. There are some tower houses and defensible bastles, less numerous than in the Northumberland Coastal Plain (NCA 1).

Farmstead types

The predominant pattern is of large, regular courtyard farms, commonly developed as L-plans and U-plans or around two to four yards with extensive ranges of shelter sheds and loose boxes for the fattening of cattle. These farmsteads commonly date from rebuilding in the 19th century, and largely swept away earlier generations of smaller, single-storey (and often thatched) buildings. The earliest buildings on farmsteads are typically the farmhouses, some of which in this area are early 18th-century cross-passage houses with the chimney stack backing onto the passage. The 19th-century rebuilding of farmsteads (in some rare instances with fabric of the late 18th century) was commonly completed in two phases that comprised:

- building as a courtyard farmstead, usually powered by horse or more rarely steam or wind, focused on the storage and processing of corn and the production of manure from yard-fed cattle
- extension and sometimes complete remodelling from the 1860s for the fattening of cattle, often with additional wide-span cattle housing and covered yards.

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. Many farmsteads have retained single-storey workers' (locally-termed hinds) cottages.

- Some farms retain the evidence for linear farmsteads, with houses attached in-line to the working buildings. Archaeological and documentary evidence across Northumberland suggests that these, and longhouses where the domestic ends and byres for cattle were interconnected and shared the same entrance, were common prior to the 18th century. Most were swept away and lacked the capacity to be extended or adapted, although some buildings may retain evidence for alternate rebuilding and raising to two storeys.

Building types

- Building types display the evidence for the scale of arable farming and cattle management in this area:
- Threshing and attached straw barns are found on larger farmsteads, a distinctive type of building associated with mechanised threshing which extend 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).

- From the late 18th century, the wheel house, locally termed the horse gins, which had been used in mines for centuries, was adapted to provide rotary power for powering threshing machines. The horse gins 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, the latter with ridge ventilators.
- Low ranges of cattle sheds and associated yards often ran in parallel or 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.
- There were byres (cow houses with stalls for the small numbers of milk cattle) and pigsties, the latter often marked by yards with feeding troughs, which are usually placed close to the house.
- Smithies were found on the largest farmsteads.
- Farm workers' cottages and grieves' (managers') houses, were most commonly associated with the largest courtyard farmsteads and sited (sometimes along with riding horse stables) close to the house.
- Some field shelters for cattle generally comprise open-fronted sheds (hemmels) either with an associated yard, or open to the field.



Mid-19th-century, brick-built farmstead, showing a loading door to the first-floor mixing room on the right. Photo © Jen Deadman



Farm at Widdrington with late 19th-century former steam-engine shed and associated chimney replacing the wheel house. Photo © Jen Deadman



Part of a large, regular multi-yard farmstead on the coastal strip, showing the large threshing barn (with a pantile roof) and set in piecemeal and regular enclosure resulting from early to mid-19th-century reorganisation. Photo © Jen Deadman



This farmstead at Hemscott on the coastal strip was built in 1840 to a U-shaped plan form with a wheel house and further additions in the late 19th century. The yard comprises linked ranges set to the north-west and east with a wheel house adjoining the west range. Visible on the photograph are two parallel stock sheds. Photo © Jen Deadman



Part of a regular courtyard farmstead comprising three interlinked yards in the estate village of Bothal, headquarters of the extensive Welbeck Estates in Northumberland and sited within a landscape of collapsed mine workings. Photo © Jen Deadman



This farmstead and its landscape at Briedene, sited next to a burn just to the north of Whitley Bay, exemplifies many of the key characteristics of this area – the rebuilding of farmsteads with horse-engine houses in the early to mid-19th century and the associated improvement of the landscape for arable-based farming with straight routeways and field boundaries, leaving traces of earlier fields in the occasional sinuous boundary. Photo © Historic England 2857/010 and 018



The first phase of building this brick-built farmstead in the mid-18th century (the house and stables to its west) at North Linton preceded the expansion of the collieries around. Note the early to mid-19th-century, south-facing yard to the north, with a large granary range. Photo © Historic England 28563/047



To the east of the above farmstead is Ulgham Grange, which stands on the site of a 12th-century grange of the Cistercian Newminster Abbey. The house and working buildings have fabric dating from the 17th and 18th centuries, but were heightened, extended and replanned in association with the reorganisation of the farmed landscape around it in the early to mid-19th century. Note the row of farmworkers' cottages to the bottom right. Photo © Historic England 28563/022



Detail of early 19th-century cart shed/trap house with granary over and adjoining stable range. The use of coursed sandstone with well-defined quoins to corners and openings and roofs of blue slate with stone ridge and copings is characteristic of 18th- and 19th-century farm buildings of the area. Photo © Jen Deadman



Long, late 18th-century range extending to the east of a farmhouse west of the estate village of Longhirst. It was formerly an L-shaped plan form with two walled yards to the front elevation and a yard area to the rear, beyond which was an orchard. houses stables, a cart shed and shelter sheds – the latter with access to the right-hand yard via an arcade of three arched entries. A full-length granary with 12 slatted windows is set above, approached from the rear by external stone steps. An open-fronted shed formed the east return, but was demolished in the 20th century. The building is of brick on the front elevation with tooled stone dressings to openings, and clearly indicates the scale of arable farming as practised from the late 18th century in this area. Photo © Jen Deadman

Materials and detail

- There was extensive rebuilding of the rural building stock from the late 18th century. Grey sandstone, with red pantiles or grey slate (Scottish and later Welsh) are the

predominant building materials, with use of brick becoming more noticeable towards the south-west.



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