



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 15



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>).



This farmstead, located in a prominent position west of Hutton Henry, appears to have undergone radical changes between the years 1891 and 1897 when it evolved from a U-shaped plan to a fully enclosed courtyard with the house rebuilt to the south of its earlier position. It sits in fields of regular-shaped, medium-sized fields, with ridge and furrow evident in the fields adjoining to the south. To the north lies a relict strip of common land which formerly connected the village to commons to the west. Photo © Jen Deadman

Front cover: Crawleas, a large 19th-century planned farm set amongst dispersed farmsteads and mining towns in the west of the area. In the second half of the 19th century the farmstead was rebuilt as a large-scale, regular multi-yard layout to either side of an east-west track, replacing a small yard of buildings formerly sited on the south side of the track. The buildings included a large combination barn with granary over, to the left of the photograph, and an adjacent cattle yard, covered in the early 20th century. Photo © Jen Deadman

Summary

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

This Character Area extends in a broad triangle south-westward from the North Sea coast to the Wear valley and the Tees lowlands. Based on distinctive Magnesian Limestone rock, it comprises varied coastal scenery, a gently undulating low upland plateau, and a striking west-facing escarpment. Of the area, 23% is urban and just 4% is woodland.

Historic character

- Inland from the coastal conurbations, the landscape is characterised by small to medium-sized nucleated settlements (many of which developed rapidly in the 19th and early 20th centuries due to the exploitation of extensive localised coal measures), interspersed with isolated farmsteads and a scattering of shrunken medieval settlements often dominated by large 19th-century steadings.
- 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 large, regular fields reflect the ease with which the open fields of the medieval townships could be re-ordered in the 17th and 18th centuries as production was reorganised around larger, centralised farming units.
- Most farmsteads were rebuilt in the early to mid-19th century as regular courtyard layouts with engine houses built onto barns, granaries, cart sheds, stables and a wide variety of cattle housing. Whilst some are large scale, with buildings around two or more yards, most are smaller in scale than in the lowland areas to the north where very large farms with their associated workers' housing developed.

Significance

- Some farmsteads relate to shrunken medieval settlements, ridge and furrow and also rare surviving relict common and their associated routeways. They may also relate to early evidence of industrial transport infrastructure in the form of mineral tramways and wagonways, and to historic quarrying and coal mining sites.
- The survival of traditional farmsteads – as in the Tyne and Wear Lowlands (NCA 14) to the west – is markedly lower than in the lowland landscapes to the north, except in some of the landscapes to the south that have been less affected by 20th-century development.
- 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.
- Farmhouses with late 17th- and 18th-century fabric relate to a phase of rebuilding that extends into the Tees Lowlands (NCA 23), but recorded farm buildings of this date are very rare.

Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a high proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (83.3%, the national average being 32%).
- Most traditional buildings within villages have been converted to residential use.
- Traditional farm buildings are frequently subsumed or replaced by 20th-century, wide-span steel structures or are in the process of conversion to domestic use.

Historic development

- The area has retained extensive evidence for prehistoric activity from the coastal zone (rich and Mesolithic and Neolithic remains) to Bronze Age barrows on the limestone plateau and cropmark evidence for farms and fields extending into the Romano-British period.
- Arable production has been a feature of the plain since at least the medieval period, when large areas were managed for the production of grain and the fattening of cattle by monastic estates and the 'Prince Bishops' of Durham. Corn mills and some windmills also developed across this area from the late 18th century (for example Jackson's Mill, Easington, 1832). There was a marked increase in dairying in the 19th century, producing cheese and milk for the expanding industrial population. The fishing industry, although experiencing sharp decline in recent decades, also developed on an industrial scale in the 19th century.
- The Carboniferous Coal Measures, although producing coal of inferior quality for domestic and some industrial uses, were increasingly exploited over the 19th century to produce gas and coking coal for the region's iron, steel and engineering industries, deep pits being interconnected and linked to coastal ports by the Durham Coast railway.
- Limestone quarrying, begun by the medieval monastic estates, expanded rapidly from the late 18th century – producing first building and agricultural lime, then materials for steel and chemical manufacture.
- The settled landscapes across the north of the area were transformed as industrial villages were established and expanded next to the collieries in the 19th century. These typically imported terraces and rows into the rural landscape, built in contrasting urban brick and Welsh slate.
- Population growth stimulated the continued development of farms through the agricultural depression of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which hit other arable areas hard. As a consequence, many farmsteads display evidence for continued expansion, including the development of cow houses to facilitate the supply of liquid milk.

Landscape and settlement

- The pattern of nucleated medieval settlement was established in the 12th and 13th centuries, after the 'Harrying of the North' in the late 11th century. Villages planned around greens were commonplace within the Palatinate of Durham, and survive best to the south of this Character Area. Farmsteads worked strip fields around these villages and had access to blocks of common land which rarely survive as species-rich grasslands. Woodland of the 17th century and earlier is concentrated in the incised valleys.
- There are a large number of deserted medieval settlements in this area (perhaps 15 to 20% of nucleations once present), resulting

from 14th-century and later enclosure and reorganisation. Many individual farmsteads developed from these settlements, developing from the 15th century on the area's monastic estates as they were leased out to tenant farmers and, with enclosure of common fields from this period, were either relocated to new sites or left in village centres. The result is that many farmsteads, although rebuilt in the 18th and 19th centuries, bear the name of the deserted village of which they are the only survivor. Many other isolated farmsteads were established generations after the initial enclosure of their surrounding farmland, as elsewhere in the region.

- Most of the arable fields were enclosed by the late 17th century, the remaining commons and pastures in the 18th century. Most fields are enclosed by hawthorn hedgerows with few

hedgerow trees, these relating to programmes of replanting and reorganisation. The pattern of fields is dominated by an intermixture of piecemeal, post-medieval enclosure, which can – despite successive reorganisation – retain the form of the strip fields which surrounded the area's villages, and the regular enclosure of remaining farmland and commons which mostly occurred in the late 18th and 19th centuries.

- Villages and the settings of farmsteads experienced profound change over the 19th century as pit villages were established and housing built for mining families and those working in related trades and industries. Farmsteads are often found enveloped by recent housing development, as at Horden and Cotsforth in Peterlee.

Farmstead and building types

There are some examples of medieval tower houses and post-medieval bastles (defensible farmsteads with living room above cattle housing), as more commonly found further north in Northumberland and in the North Pennines. Besides these, the earliest buildings on farmsteads are typically farmhouses, some of which in this area are late 17th or early 18th-century cross-passage houses with the chimney stack backing onto the passage, and rare surviving 18th-century or earlier barns.

Farmhouses and attached buildings may retain earlier phases of linear farmsteads, with working buildings attached in-line to houses. The extent of 18th- and 19th-century rebuilding appears to have swept these away, although this is a tradition that would be expected in this area.

Farmstead types

- Courtyard farmsteads, usually dating from two or more phases of rebuilding in the 19th century, are the dominant farmstead type, but noticeably smaller in scale than in the lowlands to the north of Newcastle. Houses are often attached to the working buildings, and most courtyard plans are regular in form with inter-linked buildings. Many farmsteads have an overall L-shaped, U-shaped or even a full courtyard plan. Larger-scale farmsteads include U-shaped, E-shaped and multi-yard plans, these typically having the farmhouses detached and facing into their own gardens. Some larger farms have farm workers' (locally termed hinds) housing, either storied or single-storied as found further north in the Tyne and Wear Lowlands (NCA 14) and Northumberland.
- The highly-mechanised nature of farming is reflected in the numbers of barns with wheel houses: it was common for the threshing barn to house a threshing machine and be placed in-line with a barn for the receipt of straw from the threshed sheaves of corn, which was then taken to the cattle yards. The importance of fatstock is reflected in the extensive ranges of shelter sheds and loose boxes for the fattening of cattle, and in the building of wide-span covered yards in the late 19th century. Larger farmsteads commonly date from rebuilding in the late 19th century, and often include the

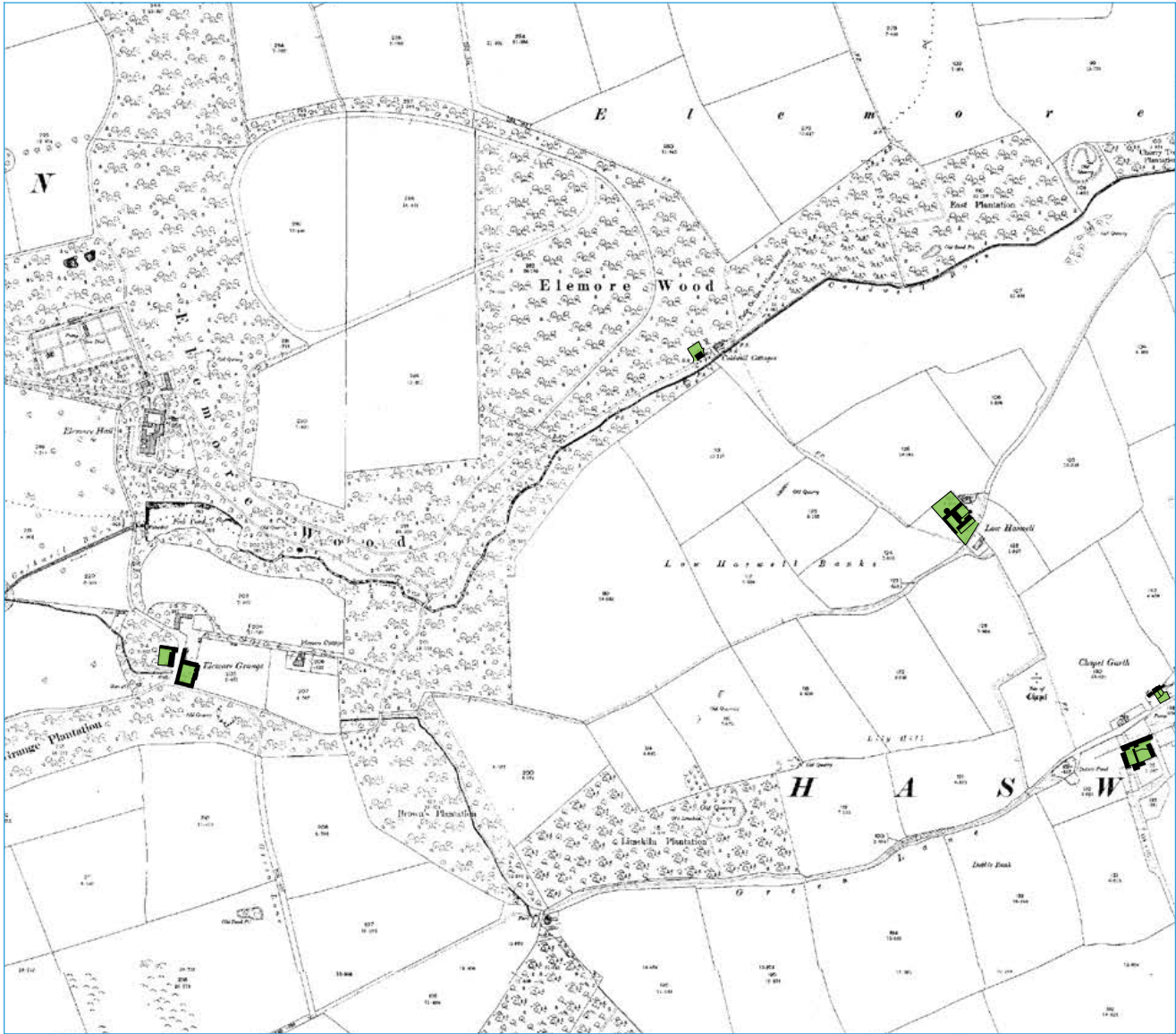
fabric from earlier, 19th-century courtyard farms.

Building types


- Building types display the evidence for the scale of arable farming and cattle management in this area:
- Combination barns, with threshing floors and granaries above animal housing and sometimes cart sheds, are found on many farms and are typically the largest (and often the only) traditional farm buildings on farmsteads. They are similar to those found extending towards the North Pennines to the west and the Tees Lowlands to the south.
- Some (typically larger farms) have threshing and attached straw barns, a distinctive type of building found in the lowlands and upland fringe areas of Northumberland to the north.
- Wheel houses, locally termed horse gins, provided rotary power for powering threshing machines from the late 18th century. They were built adjacent to the barn in which the threshing machine and other fodder-processing machinery was housed.
- There were some steam engine houses, but less common than in the lowlands of Northumberland.
- Grain production is characterised by granaries (frequently built as an upper storey over a cart shed), cart sheds, implement sheds and stables.
- Cattle sheds and associated yards 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 sheds 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, often marked by yards with feeding troughs, are usually placed close to the house.
- There were smithies on the largest farmsteads.
- Some outfarms and field shelters were built for cattle.

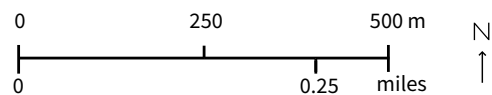


Shelter shed remaining from a farmstead at Old Cassop, a small, linear hilltop village of medieval origins overlooking an open landscape characterised by dispersed farmsteads. Of up to six village farmsteads recorded as existing in the 19th century, only two remain as working farms. Small irregular-shaped fields of piecemeal enclosure contain evidence of ridge and furrow on the hillside. Photo © Jen Deadman



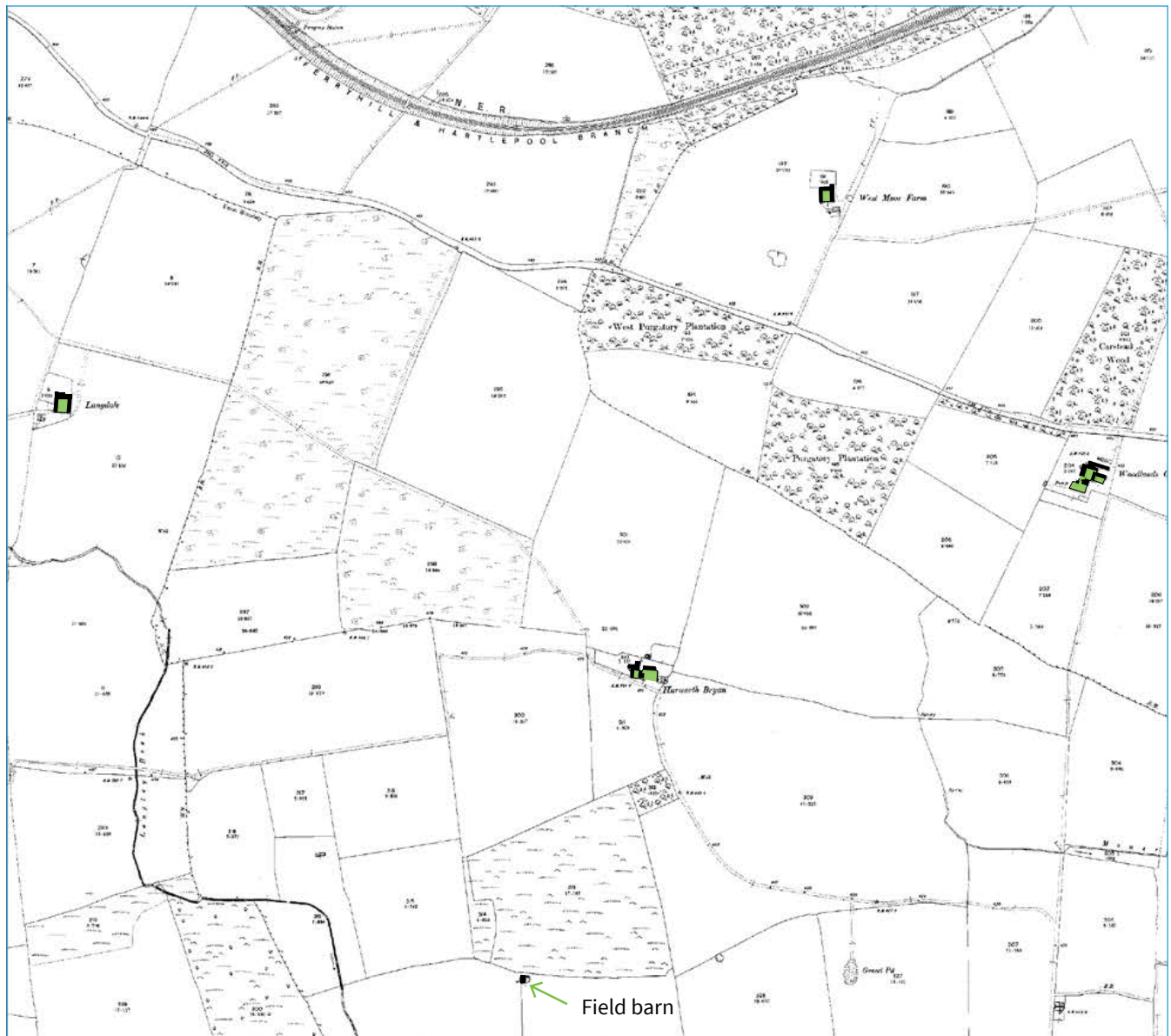
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 Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



Elemore estate, Haswell

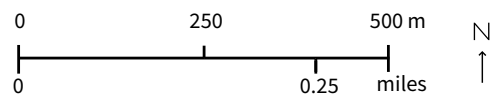
To the west of this area, which lies to the north-west of Durham, is Elemore Hall which was rebuilt around an earlier core in 1749-53. A late 18th-century barn lies just to its north, close to the kitchen gardens. Regular courtyard plan farmsteads with wheel houses are sited within an estate landscapes with plantations dating from this period, Chapel Garth to the south-east having a medieval parochial chapel.



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



Trimdon

Many of the farmsteads and fields within this area to the east of Trimdon Colliery result from the enclosure of rough ground in the later 18th and early 19th centuries. The less regular grouping of buildings at Hurworth Bryan to the centre – and set alongside a routeway predating enclosure – are earlier, and were recorded as having raised cruck trusses to its steeply pitched barn roof – probably intended for heather thatch.



Slaughter house at Sheraton Hall Farm. Photo © Jen Deadman



Sheraton Hall Farm is a large, 19th-century planned farm located in the small village of Sheraton west of Hartlepool. Immediately to the south-east lies the deserted medieval village with tofts, crofts and ridge and furrow clearly evident. The early 19th-century U-plan farmstead was rebuilt as a covered yard complex in the late 19th century. A combination barn, with adjoining loose boxes for the fattening of cattle, processed the corn crop and fodder for the cattle in the covered yard. The farmstead also has an open-sided straw barn and a slaughter house. Photo © Jen Deadman



Small, early to mid-19th-century steading located at the south end of a linear village north of Easington. It comprises a small yard of linked single-storey ranges with a brick wheel house adjoining the west range. Formerly of a U-plan design with the farmhouse forming an extension of the roadside range, an east range was added at the end of the 19th century to form an enclosed yard and the house rebuilt to the south, away from the working buildings. Such waves of 19th-century rebuilding typify this area. Photo © Jen Deadman



Elemore Grange to the south of Elemore Hall (see map on p 9) includes a late 18th-century timber yard and associated buildings – built of dressed sandstone, contrasting with the mid-19th-century brick farm buildings. Photo © Historic England 28529/009



The ruins of an 18th-century farmstead at Hurworth Bryan (see map on p 10), note also the ridging resulting from 19th-century drainage. Photo © Historic England 28530/005



One of the two remaining working farms at Old Cassop, this small steading comprises a loose yard plan with some buildings retained after alterations to the yard in the late 19th century. Here, as elsewhere in this area the farmhouse had been moved from its position as an east extension to the rear range to a site west of the yard and away from the working buildings. Photo © Jen Deadman



Open-fronted cart shed with granary above, the latter accessed by external stone steps. Note the brick supporting column and detailing above the arched cart entries. Here, as elsewhere, the building is of random rubble set under a blue slate roof. Photo © Jen Deadman

Materials and detail

- Traditional buildings use local Magnesian limestone for walls and slates, pantile and Welsh slate being also used for roofing in this area.



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