Historic England

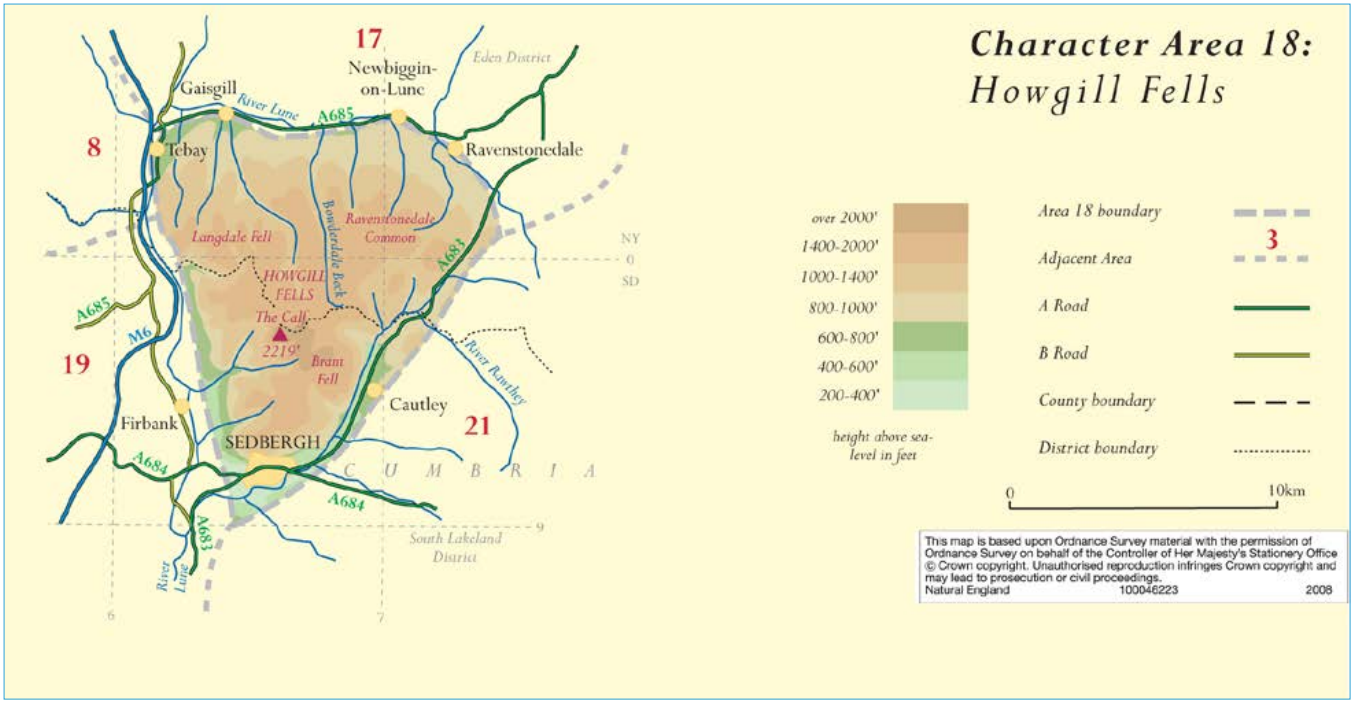
Farmstead and Landscape Statement

# Howgill Fells

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 18

# 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 map shows the Howgill Fells, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

**Front cover:** Farmsteads scattered within 17th- to 19th-century enclosures at Crooks Beck. Photo © Historic England 28572/ 47

# Summary

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

This area is located to the east of the Lune corridor, to the south-east of the Cumbria fells, north-east of the South Cumbria Low Fells and to the south of the Orton Fells. The area is bounded on the east side by the Yorkshire Dales and it covers a roughly triangular area to the north of Sedbergh on the eastern side of the M6. Around 46% of the area is within the Yorkshire Dales National Park..

## Historic character

- Farmsteads are mostly isolated or grouped together in hamlets. Most farmsteads relate to fields resulting from the piecemeal enclosure of the valley bottoms and sides.
- Linear farmsteads have mostly been subsumed into dispersed and courtyard groups of outbuildings which mostly date from the 19th century and rarely before.
- The farming prosperity based on cattle rearing from the 17th century onward is reflected in the rebuilding of farmhouses and their attached working buildings and in the development, from the mid-18th century (but rarely surviving from before the 19th century), of overwintering buildings for cattle and multifunctional bank barns.

## Significance

- There is an exceptionally high survival of traditional farmsteads, as in many of the other northern England uplands. This significance is heightened by the fact that the farmsteads and working buildings, including their field barns, sit within a landscape which retains visible evidence for land use and settlement from the early medieval period. Of special significance in a national context, and for the uplands of northern England, are:
- Farmstead groups, with little change to their traditional form, are substantially complete.
- Farm buildings of 18th century and earlier date, are rarer than in the Orton Fells and Cumbria.

## 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 (6%, the national average being 32%). The project also noted an above-average percentage (12.5%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working buildings in the Orton Fells as showing obvious signs of structural disrepair.
- The rate of redundancy for traditional farm buildings has accelerated in recent years, as in other upland and upland fringe areas of England, due to the replacement of stalling by loose housing and the replacement of hay production by mechanised bulk handling.
- Fieldwork suggests that the deterioration of fabric and the related loss of small agricultural buildings is more commonplace in the

Howgills than in the Yorkshire Dales and Lake District National Parks.

## Historic development

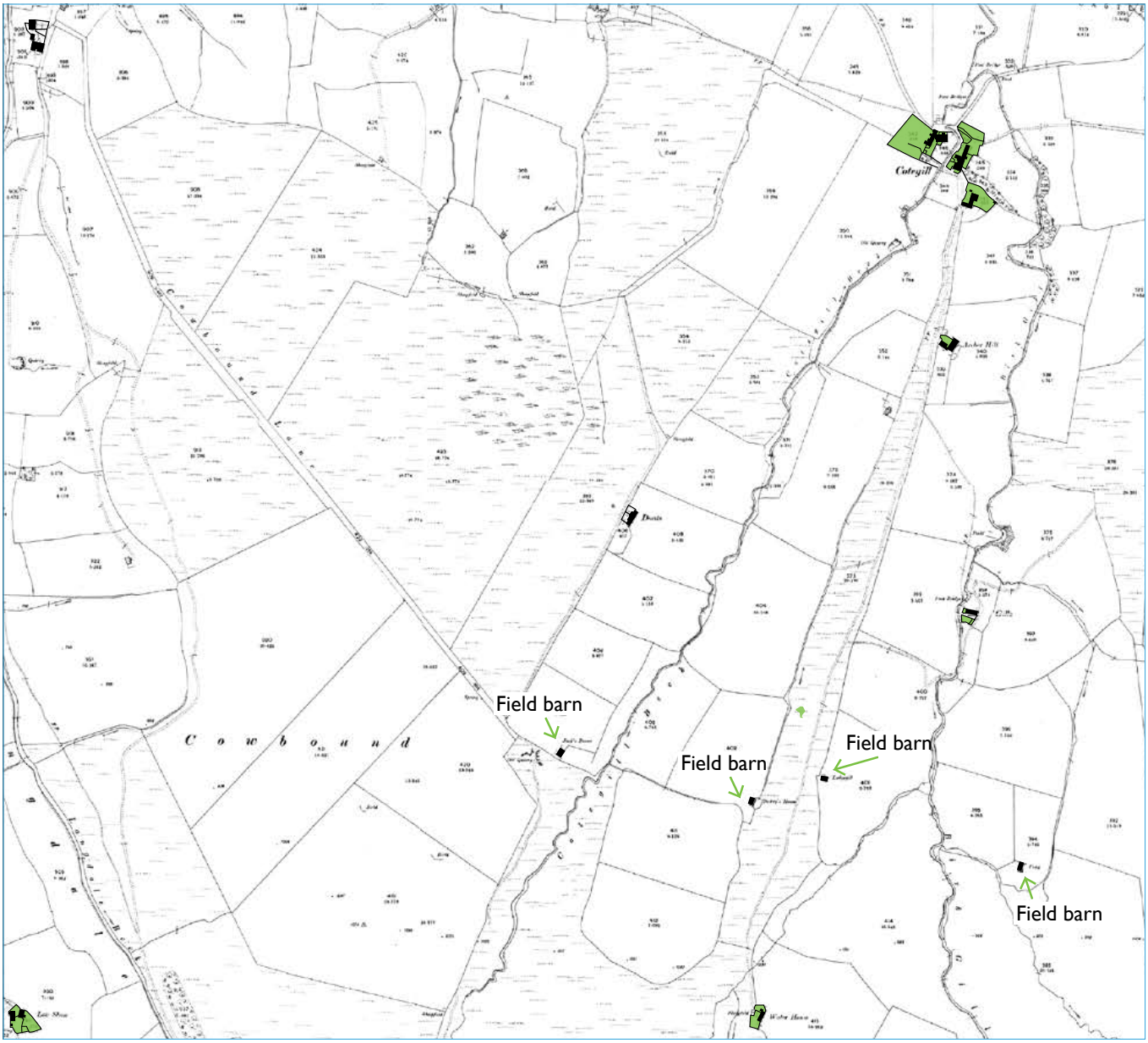
- The fells result from the clearance of the native upland forests in the Neolithic and Bronze Age to provide grazing land. They have been utilised for centuries by surrounding communities for summer grazing, with peat, heather and bracken cut for fuel, bedding, roofing and fodder. Rights of Common are still held by families farming in adjacent valleys and form a major part of the local farming economy.

- The difficult landform has constrained settlement and there is a noticeable absence of recorded archaeological features on the high fells – in striking contrast to the Yorkshire Dales.

- At a lower level, along the main routes and river valleys there is evidence for continuous occupation since prehistoric times. The more fertile valley floors traditionally have been cut for hay and provided winter grazing, as well as infield grain crops. Medieval lynchetts testify to the past importance of arable farming on the lower slopes. The predominant industry however, has been the rearing of cattle with sheep increasing in numbers from the later 18th century.

- The pattern of pastoral husbandry in this area is long established, with clear evidence for Iron Age and earlier settlements and cultivation terraces. Most early settlement, dating from the 8th to 10th-century period of Norse colonisation, was probably located around the fringes of the fells, leaving the higher ground to be used as summer grazing. Temporary dwellings (termed shielings), which were erected on these summer pastures, became permanent settlements as small, irregular-shaped fields were carved from the wastes. Shieling sites can be found in many places, especially on the lower western slopes of The Calf and Langdale Fells.

Isolated linear farmstead on the moor edge close to the road connecting Newbiggin-on-Lune with the isolated hamlet of Weasdale. It has a direct link to an old drove road leading off Ravenstonedale common. The linear range comprises a farmhouse and combination barn set in a small, stone-walled enclosure and is of 18th- or 19th-century date. It is set amongst a mix of large and small irregular-shaped fields, hinting at piecemeal enclosure through to the 19th century. Photo © Old Cumbria Gazetteer/J and M Norgate




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

0 0.25 miles

N

## North Howgill fringe

In the northern Howgills deep rills, intersecting the fells, run north to the river Lune. The small hamlets of Gaisgill, Longdale, Midfield and Cotegill are set at the foot of steep-sided valleys and linked by a minor road following the Lune valley east–west. Drove roads lead onto fell tops from linear plan farmsteads, some of which developed into courtyard plans with additional detached barns and other buildings,. This settlement pattern is common around the fringes of the fells. Field barns and isolated steadings lie on the margins of the moor, and sheepfolds abound. Names such as Intake and New Field evidence enclosure of moorland. The buildings in this area were built or substantially remodelled in the early to mid-19th century, sometimes retaining earlier cores.


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

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N

## Ravenstonedale village and Newbiggin-on-Lune

Immediately to the west of Ravenstonedale, a narrow track leads through improved pasture up to common land. Typically, as in the hamlet of Greenside (1), several farmsteads, Low Greenside, Greenside, and High Greenside, line the route. Here the outlines of medieval strip fields indicate that this is a shrunken medieval settlement. High Greenside, a sheep farm, is set on the moorland edge with associated isolated field barns adjacent to the open fells and protected by shelter beds.

Ravenstonedale, in common with other villages, comprises a main street and a back lane culminating in a small green at Town Head. Medieval field strips running at right angles to the village tofts are still evident, bisected by approach roads and tracks, noticeably to the east of the village. Bank barns and other former agricultural buildings are still in evidence behind the street front, with small field barns dotted along the roadside leading into the villages. The linear farmsteads were mostly rebuilt in the 18th and 19th centuries, and sometimes (as at 2) have bank barns attached in-line.

- The present settlement pattern was formalised in this early medieval period. After the Norman Conquest, most of the fells were technically hunting 'forest', a term indicating legal status as a hunting ground rather than woodland. As such, the fells and dales were under the direct control of large landowners. Parks were established, that at Ravenstonedale evidencing a quantity of 'pillow mounds' relating to the Norman custom of rabbit farming within a contained area. Peasant farmers were allowed to settle and the sites of many hill farms have probably been occupied since the great wave of colonisation between c 1150 and c 1300.

- The large medieval landowners kept control of the heads of some valleys, establishing large cattle ranches (known as 'vaccaries'). Some fell pastures were granted to monasteries until the Dissolution in the 16th century.

- By the 16th century, these lordly farms had been leased and the dales were heavily populated by small farms, consisting of arable and meadow land on the valley floor and common rights on the open fells.

- Between c 1600 and c 1800 the number of farms declined as holdings were amalgamated, the open fields were enclosed and flocks and herds increased in size.

- The 19th century saw the great wave of Parliamentary Enclosure, during which thousands of acres of fell side and moorland were enclosed and divided into large, rectilinear fields by dry stone walls, though much common land survived. Sheep and cattle farming was the mainstay of the economy. Farming incomes were supplemented by spinning, weaving and production of woollen cloth.

## Landscape and settlement

- The Howgill Fells comprise a discrete group of steep sided, rounded hills, sharply incised by a number of gills and reaching heights of over 600m. Dominated by the unusual and dramatic form of the hills, dissected by narrow, deep valleys, the consequently largely inaccessible Howgill Fells retain a sense of remoteness and wilderness.

- Small settlements and dispersed farmsteads are also in sheltered valleys at the base of the gills or along the lower fertile reaches of the rivers Lune and Rawthey, and are sited within fields that result from the piecemeal enclosure of arable and meadow land.

- The few larger settlements are sited on the main thoroughfares which skirt the fells. The planned linear villages of Newbiggin-on-Lune and Ravenstonedale are situated within a mile of one another at the north-east corner of the Howgills, now by passed by the main east-west arterial route. Immediately to the north lies Ravenstonedale Park, former rabbit warren and site of several abandoned settlements.

- Isolated steadings are sited on the steep valley sides above the rivers Rawthey and Low and High Branthwaite to the south-west above the River Lune. Irregular boundaries to the fields around them indicate medieval clearance from woodland. The presence of old woodland is also evidenced in place names such as Adamthwaite, Narthwaite and Murthwaite, areas of ancient woodland that are still evident on the eastern side of the river Rawthey. Today, small, mature, broadleaved woods – formerly managed sycamores – provide shelter for settlements and farmsteads. Hedgerow trees are typical on the valley floors, and stone walls at higher altitudes.

- Larger, more regularly-shaped fields, evident at a higher level, were determined by parliamentary enclosure which took place from the late 18th through to the 19th century with further enclosure occurring in the early 20th century. Stone walls typically rise straight up the valley sides to the moorland edge.

- Access to and from the vast tracts of common land is via drove roads or walled intakes set

on spurs linking the settlements to higher ground. Ancient tracks skirt the moorland edge above the valleys, occasionally passing over the moor top, connecting settlements north and south.

# Farmstead and building types

A common theme here as in other upland areas is the bringing together of key functions – storing and processing corn, housing animals and their fodder – into one single combination barn. These, and the field barns and outfarms for housing corn, cattle and hay, mostly date from the late 18th century. They largely swept away earlier generations of smaller, single-storey (and often thatched) barns and field houses. The majority of farmstead buildings appear to be 18th or 19th century in date, with some evidencing an earlier arrangement within their fabric. Some farmhouses are dated to the late 17th century, and relate to a wave of rebuilding that swept across Cumbria and the Yorkshire Dales between around 1650 and 1750. This phase of rebuilding of the farmhouses was accompanied by an increase in cattle and the building of new cattle housing and working buildings. There are few early single-storey buildings, and evidence for raising is not as common as other areas. This suggests a tendency to rebuild rather than raise, in contrast to the Cumbrian fells and the Yorkshire Dales. There is also little evidence for the alternate rebuilding and raising of the domestic and agricultural ends of linear farmsteads, which indicates long historic development and sometimes their origin as former longhouses, dating from the 16th century or earlier.

## Farmstead types

The farmstead plan forms encountered in the Howgills are similar to those found in the neighbouring South Cumbria Low Fells, the Orton Fells and the Yorkshire Dales. The majority of traditional farmsteads in the Howgills overwhelmingly catered for the housing of cattle and the storage of hay and fodder. Farmsteads were originally linear in form but the increase in the upkeep and overwintering of cattle in the 18th century gave rise to the development of the dispersed and loose courtyard groups evident today which have often subsumed earlier linear layouts.

The key farmstead types which had developed up to the end of the 19th century, and which are still evident today, are:

- Linear and L-plan farmsteads with integral farmhouses, where the house and working buildings are attached and in-line, are the dominant farmstead types. As in the Yorkshire Dales, they are frequently extended to form an L-shape and may have the odd related detached ancillary building. Some are sited on level ground, others running with the contours and banked into the hillside. Ramped cart entrances to the loft are common.

- Courtyard plans – and especially small-scale loose courtyards – are the most common plan form in the Howgills. Here, the buildings are loosely grouped around one or two sides of a small yard area, arranged to accommodate the lie of the land. The farmhouse is frequently sited a short distance away from the yard and working buildings but may be a part of a linear range in its own right. Some steadings form a disparate arrangement of buildings around a nominal yard, whilst others have the multi-purpose combination barn as the focal point of the design. Detached farmhouses are strongly associated with farmsteads that were established on new sites or wholly rebuilt from the later 18th century.

- There are some dispersed plans, which usually developed around the fringes of moorland, possibly as pounds for holding livestock, where the buildings, and sometimes the yards, are dispersed within the boundary of the farmstead or dispersed along a routeway.

## Building types

- Bank barns, mostly 19th century in date, are highly distinctive of the area and often large in scale. They provide large storing and threshing areas at both ground and upper levels, above the cattle housing. Variant bank barns, built across the slope with the entry to a cow house (byre) in the gable end, are mostly 18th century in date: these typically had entries inserted into side walls to enable better access to stalls. Bank barns built along the slope (termed 'true bank barns') were built from the mid-18th century on most holdings.

- Wholly or partly-lofted combination barns, with entries for cattle in one or both ends, are part of a distinctive Cumbrian building tradition.

- Stabling is often found within the main body of the barn and sometimes in outshots, which also provided extra housing for cattle.

- Granaries and cart sheds are uncommon, as the Howgills economy was mainly pastoral. There is evidence for granaries in the form of broad, stone steps to first-floor loft doors in working buildings or sometimes houses.

- Cart sheds or cart standings are frequently incorporated into the barn, but again there was little provision for carts due to the pastoral nature of the farming system. The single-storey, detached cart shed is a more unusual feature.

- Small, multifunctional buildings are frequently found set close to the house, including single-storey calf houses and pigsties, with or without a hen loft over them.

- Pigeon lofts in barns and house porches are well documented. Free standing dovecotes are unknown.

- Field barns, including some bank barns, the earliest of which date from the 18th and even late 17th centuries, are found at the heads of valleys and some valley sides. Field barns are common on the lower slopes and valley bottoms, particularly in the east of the area. They are also a distinctive feature of the moor edge and along the roadside. They are variable in their design, from single storey to multi-gabled with outshots. They frequently take the form of a bank barn, either sitting across or along the contours.

An isolated farmstead in an area known as Fell End in East Ravenstonedale, which comprises a scatter of small hamlets and associated outlying farms. It is set tight under the fell side against the roadside in a narrow valley bottom. It is served by a drove road which leads on to the fell top, to a small area of medieval enclosure. The farmstead is dispersed in its layout, with two small field barns by the roadside to the east. Photo © Old Cumbria Gazetteer/J and M Norgate

Linear plans. Working farm situated in the Lune valley on the west side of the Howgills. Here, the rear wing represents the oldest phase of the building. Originally single-storey (indicated by dotted line), it was raised and subsequently fronted by a new farmhouse added to the gable at right angles – probably in the 18th century. Photo © Jen Deadman

Deserted, isolated, roadside linear farmstead at Firbank, west Howgills. The early to mid-19th-century house is flanked either side by adjoining agricultural buildings, not necessarily of the same phase. Animal housing is located at ground-floor level, with hay lofts above. The rendered house section has long since lost its whitewash. Photo © Jen Deadman

One of the farmsteads shown on the front cover. This is a clustered group of late 18th- and 19th-century buildings dominated by two large combination barns for housing cattle, storing hay and processing corn. Note the sheep pens and the detached field barn. The house was rebuilt in the early 19th century, around an earlier core, and faces away from the farmyard into its own garden and the public approach. Photo © Historic England 28572/056

One of the farmsteads shown on the front cover. Note how the mid-19th-century farmhouse faces into the private garden and road, and the combination barn (with stone steps to the loft) which housed all the fodder, cattle and horses required for the farm. Photo © Historic England 28572/052

Wath, north Howgills. Steading comprising a loose arrangement of buildings set against a track leading to the upland grazing. Photo © Jen Deadman

Bank barns Large bank barn of eight bays comprising cow house and stable with full-length loft over, in the west of the Lune valley. Access to the loft is via two large wagon entries at the rear. Photo © Jen Deadman

This bank barn on a steading close to the river Lune is set into the hillside on three levels. It contains, in one structure, all the traditional working functions of the farmstead. The threshing barn, which fronts the main range at right angles, has the standard arrangement for a bank barn of hay mew to the left with shippon at a lower level to the right, above which is a loft area. Photo © Jen Deadman

The rear entry accesses the upper floor of the next level, which is for hay storage. Below is another shippon with calf pens in an outshot. Outshots are used to house sheep for husbandry purposes. The sheep dip is situated to the immediate right of the photograph. Photo © Jen Deadman

Cart sheds or cart standings are frequently incorporated into the barn, singly rather than as a series of open fronted bays as seen in lower lying areas. This is a stand-alone example. Photo © Jen Deadman

Blocked cart entry at lower level of ramped barn. Photo © Jen Deadman

**Stables** Stable at end of combination bank barn with accommodation for agricultural workers above. Blocked windows evident on front elevation and gable end. Photo © Jen Deadman

Small, free-standing stable and calf house with loft over. Entrances into yard and field. Planked forking hole has small entrance for hens. Smaller entrance with perching ledge under eaves to left. Photo © Jen Deadman

**Pig houses** Pair of single-storey pig houses with small walled yard. Blocked feeder in wall to left. Photo © Jen Deadman

**Pigeon lofts** Pigeon loft in gable end of barn. Photo © Jen Deadman

**Outfarms** Large roadside barn to east of Newbiggin-on-Lune, Ravenstonedale, early 19th century. Truncated cruciform design with outshots. Ramped entrance to loft. Photo © Jen Deadman

**Field barns** Small, two-storeyed bank barn with typical small porch, dated 1818. Set close to moor edge and adjacent to drove road leading onto common land. The first-floor joists are of uncut forked branches, and halved timbers form the floor boarding. The stall partitions are of stone slate. Photo © Jen Deadman

Unusual, single-storey barn set in meadow land close to the river Rawthey. Photo © Jen Deadman

# Materials and detail

- Stone is the dominant building material of the Howgills, providing a cohesive character to the structures in the landscape. Evidence for building in wood is fragmentary despite the historically wooded nature of the area. There is a distinct lack of early, single-storey buildings although there is some evidence to suggest the raising from one to two storeys within extant fabric. Scarring on gable ends, suggestive of an earlier, steeper roof-line of ling or heather thatch, is elusive.

- Local grey-blue ragstone or hard sandstone from the Millstone Grit and Yoredale Series rocks is generally employed in construction, and is laid as random rubble or roughly-coursed, hammer-dressed blocks. River cobble, or beckstone, is commonly used either on its own or combined with the ragstone. Small quarries are common, and the quality of the stone is variable.

- Watershot masonry, developed in the 18th and 19th centuries, is a distinctive feature of this area, as well as the Cumbrian Fells and the northern Pennine uplands. The angle of tilt on the coursed masonry effectively throws off excessive rain water. Thin layers of stone slate are sometimes used to level coursed work and as drip moulds over openings.

- Corner quoins and dressings to openings are generally of loosely-squared sandstone or ragstone blocks, sometimes picked out in a different colour to the walling material. Softer, red sandstone, which can be more easily worked, is sometimes dressed with a tooled effect.

- Through stones, tying the outer and inner building skins together, are a common feature in local vernacular buildings, and comprise roughly finished stone blocks seen to protrude through the outer wall, forming a linear or random pattern on the exterior.

- Sandstone flags or Cumbrian slate are used for roofing both buildings and the ubiquitous barn porch. Welsh slate had made an appearance by the 19th century.

- Buildings frequently evidence a coat of ‘slobbered’ render, lightly applied over walls. Farmhouses are frequently whitewashed as are the surrounds to cattle entries, this forming part of a distinct tradition in the uplands of Cumbria.

Large, fell side sheepfold at Crosedale, Sedbergh, set adjacent to beck on level platform of land. It was enlarged in the 20th century with corrugated iron. Photo © Old Cumbria Gazetteer J and M Norgate

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