



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Low Fells

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 19



Introduction

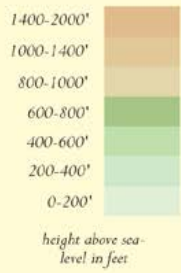
The Farmstead and Landscape Statements will help you to identify the historic character of traditional farmsteads and their buildings in all parts of England, and how they relate to their surrounding landscapes. They are now available for all of England's National Character Areas (NCAs), and should be 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>).

The map on the following page shows the Low Fells, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it. It subdivides into the following areas:

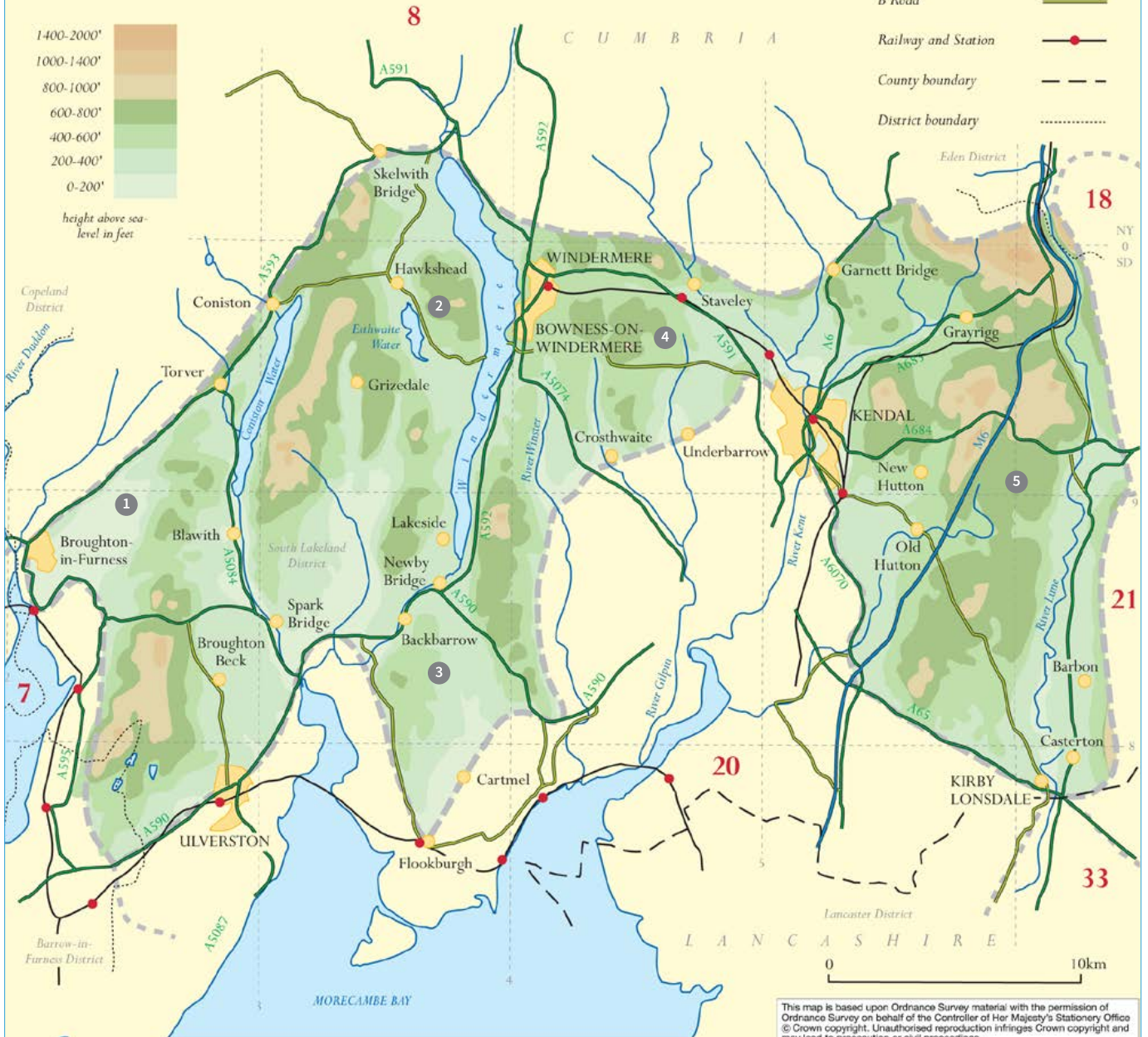
1. The west of the area is characterised by low hills, some of which were subject to planned enclosure in the late 18th and 19th centuries. The remainder is open low fell, still farmed in common. Settlement is largely restricted to the valleys, and aside from the large nucleations at Broughton, Coniston and Millom, is mainly dispersed in nature, consisting of discrete settlements and small nucleations. Settlements are surrounded by ancient enclosures and there is little evidence of former arable common fields. Farmsteads, located on the valley bottoms, are generally dispersed in character and small.
2. Grizedale Forest, bounded east and west by Coniston Water and Lake Windermere, is dominated by large areas of woodland plantation. The valleys and lower lying ground, mostly in the northern half, are less wooded, and comprise areas of former open field in the valleys, around which are ancient enclosures, with intakes on the higher ground. Isolated farmsteads are set within this landscape of ancient enclosure, but also intermixed with early industrial settlement and large areas of woodland planted from the late eighteenth century onwards in areas of intaking and planned enclosure. Field boundaries are a mix of hedgerows and stone walls.
3. In the Furness Fells to the south, there is much ancient woodland, which served the local iron and gunpowder industries, and farmsteads are intermixed with higher densities of industrial settlement and houses.
4. To the east beyond Windermere, the character is defined by expanses of post medieval enclosures, both intakes and 19th-century, planned enclosures, which extend onto the high moorland. The enclosures are large, and irregular in shape, defined mainly by topography. In the Underbarrow Fells area is a high density of dispersed farmsteads within landscapes of ancient irregular enclosure. The farmsteads are mostly of smaller-scale courtyard and dispersed plans.
5. In and around Kendal and the east, the land flattens out with larger fields, resulting from regular and piecemeal enclosure. Farmsteads are large, including some of the regular courtyard type.

Front cover: Redscar, Underbarrow, from the south-east, showing the medieval farming hamlet characteristically set at the junction of the farmed landscape – reorganised and underdrained in the 19th century – and the moorland grazing. Farmhouses date from the late 17th century, and bank barns of early to mid-19th-century date comprise the largest farm buildings. Photo © Historic England 28583/005

Character Area 19: South Cumbria Low Fells



- Area 19 boundary
- Adjacent Area
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway and Station
- County boundary
- District boundary



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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 south of the central core of the Lake District. Its gentle pastoral landscape provides a contrast with the more dramatic Cumbria High Fells to the north. Of the area, 75.9% is countryside and just over half (53.4%) is within the Lake District National Park. There are relatively small areas of land which are commons or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), and 15.8% of the area is wooded.

Historic character

- Farmsteads share many characteristics with the High Fells to the north, but the landscape is gentler. Many woods served local industries, and areas of estate farmlands lend a parkland character to some areas.
- Farmsteads are mostly isolated or grouped together in hamlets.
- Farmsteads mostly relate to fields dating from piecemeal enclosure since at the least the 15th century. There are some areas of regular enclosure, with larger fields and farmsteads. Higher densities of small-scale farmsteads are found in the rural-industrial landscapes that are a feature of this area, and in the areas of small-scale, irregular fields that were cleared from woodland in the medieval period.
- The farming prosperity, based on cattle rearing from the 17th century onward, is reflected in the number of long, low, stone farmhouses stretching far up the fertile vales, and in the development, from the mid-18th century, of overwintering buildings for cattle and multifunctional bank barns.
- Linear farmsteads have mostly been subsumed into dispersed and courtyard groups of outbuildings that mostly date from late 18th century.

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 prehistoric period. Of special significance in a national context, and for the uplands of northern England, are:
- Working buildings with 18th-century and earlier fabric, most commonly found attached to houses or found on high-status farmsteads
- Cruck-frames, which represent extremely rare survivals of a once-common building tradition
- Many small farms or smallholdings associated with industry.

Present and future issues

- 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.
- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a medium

proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (30.8%, the national average being 32%). This is much higher than in the High Fells to the north. This figure partly reflects a combination of high property prices and the fact that nearly half of this NCA lies outside the National Park – where much lower rates of conversion have been observed.

Historic development

- The fells result from the clearance of the native upland forests in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages 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. Earthworks are of Romano-British and earlier, small farming settlements.
- The soils of the area are relatively fertile in comparison with the thinner cover on the High Fells to the north or over the limestones to the south.
- The Low Fells developed as a stock-rearing area with some corn production for local markets. Kendal has served as the principal market town since the 12th century, growing in size alongside other settlements in response to the demands of tourism since the mid-19th century. The area shared in the growing prosperity of farming from the late 17th century, as a result of the growth in trade in Scottish cattle, mostly for rearing and sale for fattening further south.
- Rural industries developed as a major feature of this area. An abundance of water power and availability of raw materials, either locally or easily obtained, led to the development

of corn and fulling mills and the proliferation of industries from the medieval period. The influence of the monastic houses and in particular the Cistercians (Furness Abbey and Cartmel Priory) was central to the medieval development of the area, through their control of much of the farmland and the fostering of the wool trade and industries such as metal-ore mining and smelting. Local farms were engaged in production of bark for tanning and woodland products for woodworking and hurdle making, and in particular the spinning and knitting of wool and the supply (sometimes production) of flax for linen cloth and hemp for ropes, sacks and other coarse fabrics. This dual economy may have contributed to farmsteads remaining smaller than in the High Fells to the north.

Landscape and settlement

- The area is more gentle and pastoral than the High Fells to the north and stretches from above the Duddon estuary in the west through the wooded hills and valleys of Broughton, the Crake and Furness Fells, through Grizedale Forest to Coniston Water, Windermere and the more rugged landform of Whinfell to the more undulating, open farmland to the east.
- The period from 1600 to 1750 made a lasting imprint on the buildings and landscape of the area; increased prosperity both in farming and the southern Lakeland industries (spinning and weaving) spurred a wave of rebuilding in stone within the scattered villages and throughout the dispersed pattern of more isolated farmsteads.
- Patterns of rectilinear fields – small to medium in scale in the centre and south-west, larger to the east – generally reflect the farm amalgamations of the mid-18th to early 19th centuries, except in the near vicinity of villages where older patterns persist. These are particularly notable along the rising ground east of the Lune, where medieval dates are suggested for surviving earthwork boundaries associated with possible deserted settlement remains (such as Holme and Killington).
- Nearly 16% of the area is wooded. Small mature broadleaved woods and shelter belts, formerly managed, provide shelter for settlements and farmsteads. Lakeland industries were strongly dependent on woodland management (primarily coppicing) and charcoal burning, which are concentrated in the central and western parts of the low fells.
- Late medieval to 17th-century industrial remains are a significant component of the landscape, especially ironworks, bobbin mills and potash kilns around Grizedale and Furness Fells between Coniston Water and Windermere.



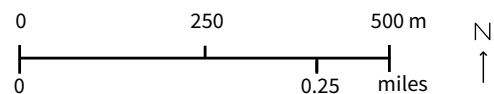
The Underbarrow area east of Windermere has a high density of isolated farmsteads within landscapes of ancient and irregular enclosure. The undulating landscape is scattered with small pockets of deciduous woodland and hedgerow trees. The farmsteads are mostly of smaller scale courtyard and dispersed plans. 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

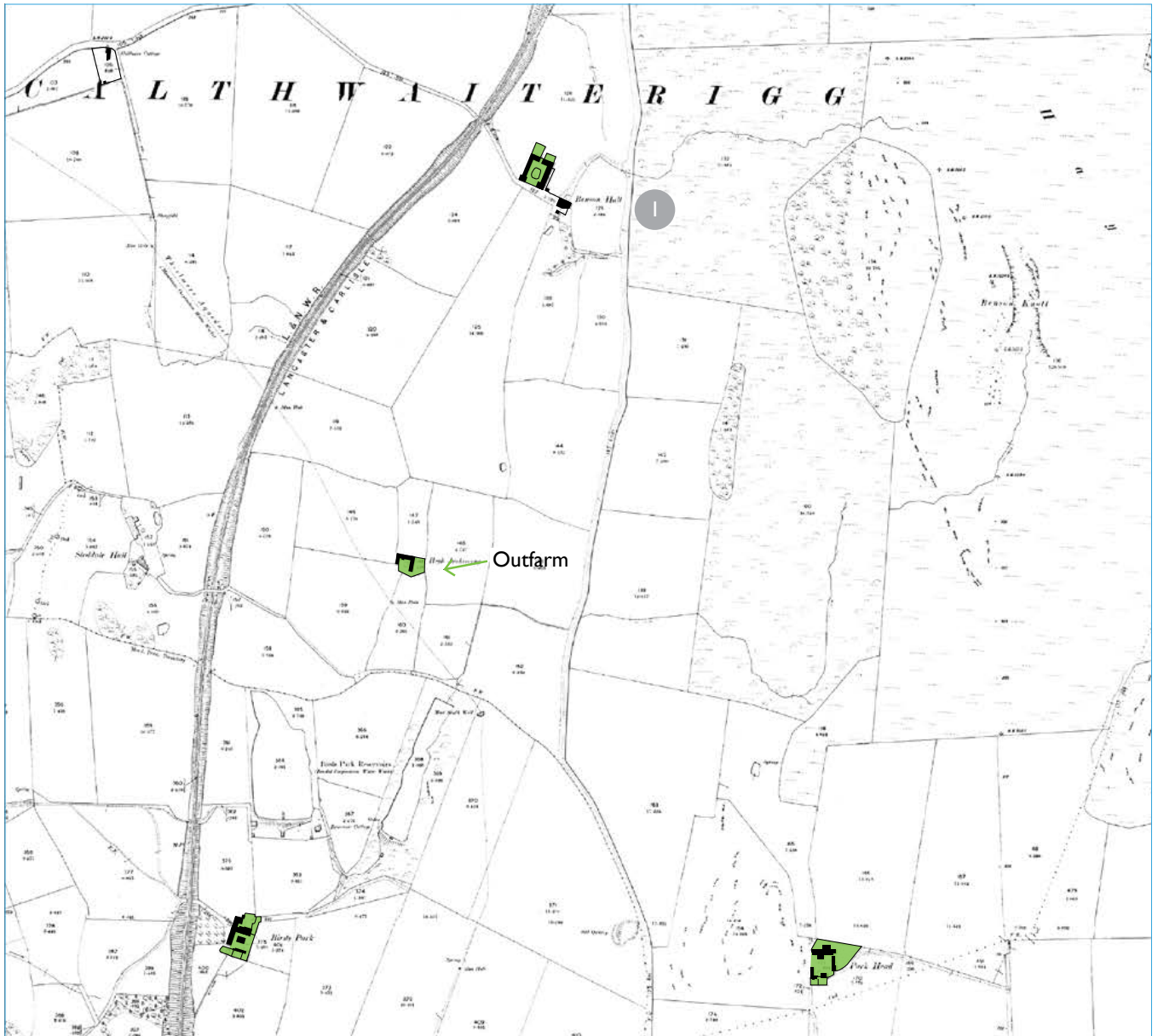


Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



Cumbria Low Fells

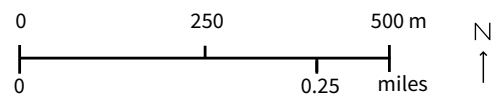
Although many of the houses and barns in this area were built or rebuilt in the late 18th and 19th centuries, many probably have cores dating from the late 17th century. Dispersed farmstead layouts and irregular enclosures indicate a medieval pattern of scattered settlement which centred on the church. Clearly visible is a string of small, isolated farmsteads set under the fell side, along a spring line, with larger, regular fields of late enclosure on the fell side above. The pattern suggests piecemeal development of the landscape with later reorganisation in the 18th and 19th centuries.



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.



East of Kendal

This landscape, reorganised in the 19th century, developed on low ground around a small area of fell. There are hints of earlier strip cultivation, most noticeable in the top right quadrant. The landscape is highly organised, with several areas of plantation set within the large, regular fields. The immediate area is dominated by Benson Hall (1), a farmstead of 16th-century origin, developed and improved through the 18th and 19th centuries. The quadrangular layout of farm buildings is also indicative of its relatively high status. Farmsteads, built to large-scale, regular and loose courtyard plans, are dotted around the periphery of the area bearing names such as Park Head Farm and Birds Park, and the fields to the south of Benson Hall (which retain some earlier more irregular boundaries) were served by an L-shaped outfarm. The whole is suggestive of a complete reorganisation of the landscape in the 19th century, possibly at the cost of earlier settlement patterns.



View of Park Head (see south of map on previous page) showing fields reorganised in the 18th or 19th century around the farmstead with its mid-18th-century house and early to mid-19th-century farm buildings set out in a regular L-plan arrangement. Photo © Historic England 28583/045 and 28583/ 50

Farmstead and building types

Most traditional buildings date from the late 17th century, and few predate this period. The period from 1600 to 1750 saw a wave of rebuilding that swept across the area, followed by an increase in the provision for winter housing for cattle.

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 evidence for raising buildings and longhouse derivatives is sparse, reflecting the extent of wholesale rebuilding in this area. Farm amalgamation accelerated in the period from 1750 to 1820 and coincided with the introduction of more hardy sheep breeds and the rebuilding of yeoman farm houses. 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.

Farmstead types

- Linear and L-plan farmsteads with integral farmhouses, where the house and working buildings are attached and in-line, are less common than in the High Fells to the north and the Howgills to the east. Many have been absorbed into courtyard and dispersed groups.
- Courtyard plans are mostly small in scale, with working building on one or two sides of the yard. They have often absorbed earlier, linear farmsteads. Detached farmhouses are strongly associated with farmsteads that were established on new sites or wholly rebuilt from the later 18th century, but they also occur on higher status sites.
- There are some dispersed plans, usually around the fringes of moorland, where the buildings and sometimes yards are dispersed within the boundary of the farmstead or dispersed along a routeway.

Building types

- Bank barns, dating from the late 17th century at first on the home farms of large estates, are a characteristic feature of the landscape but not as dominant as in the High Fells. The cattle housing is at the low end of the barn with a loft above accessed from land at a higher level. Both the ‘variant’ bank barn (built across the slope) and the ‘true’ bank barn (built along the slope) are evident in equal measure, and mainly date from the 18th century.
- Single-storey and part-lofted combination barns were typically built with the threshing area flanked by cattle housing and stabling and often with additional cattle housing in projecting wings or outshots.
- Granaries – where grain was stored in lofts over the threshing floor in combination barns, or in small lofts adjoining the farmhouse against the gable stack – were accessed from external steps and were normally set over a cart shed.
- Cart sheds are frequently found as an addition at the gable of a combination barn, sometimes with a loft over, or as a simple lean-to. They can be incorporated in outshots or be free standing in a yard.
- Minor buildings include calf houses and pigsties, the latter often as lean-tos.
- Field barns include some bank barns, mostly built for the overwintering of cattle and the storage of hay. The earliest of these date from the late 17th century and are found at heads of valleys and some valley sides.



Area north of the Furnace Fells. Farmstead situated in a small hamlet in an area dominated by early 20th-century coniferous plantations, and set amongst fields which evidence reorganisation from earlier enclosure. The barn in the foreground was purpose-built to house a tannery, and is a very rare survival. Photo © Jen Deadman



Grizedale village, with a farmstead in the middle ground, looking out towards the Dunnon estuary. Here, beyond the fell edge where isolated farmsteads sit in small fields of early enclosure, is the large expanse of the estuary plain – a fertile landscape. Photo © Jen Deadman



Small isolated farmstead set in planned 18th- and 19th-century enclosure on low hills characteristic of the west of the area. The mountainous reaches of the Cumbria High Fells are visible in the distance. Photo © Jen Deadman



Linear plans Linear or L-shaped farmsteads, where the house and working buildings are attached and in line, are common farmstead types. This example in Staveley-in-Cartmel comprises a farmhouse and large combination barn in line. The farmhouse, much altered, looks out over a small yard area with small ancillary buildings on the perimeter. Photo © Jen Deadman



Linear, 18th-century farmstead, with possible earlier origins, in an isolated position on the north Cartmel Fells. The farmhouse is flanked by a hay barn and combination barn which do not share the same roof-line. The range of buildings sits within a walled field where there is a levelled open area to the front with access to a number of small stone enclosures. There is no defined yard area. There are no other ancillary buildings, although evidence suggests smaller structures may have existed in the vicinity of the enclosures. Photo © Jen Deadman



Courtyard plans The loose courtyard plan, where working buildings are arranged around one or more yards for cattle is common to the area. Here the buildings, dominated by the large bank barn, are set around three sides of the yard. Photo © Jen Deadman



L-shaped plans A 19th-century, regular L-plan farmstead – a common type in this area – set hard against the roadside. The farmhouse is set close to but apart from the working buildings. This integrated, planned L-shaped unit makes good use of a small plot. The house is detached to the rear. Detached farmhouses are strongly associated with farmsteads which were established on new sites or wholly rebuilt from the later 18th century. Photo © Jen Deadman



Dispersed plans This farmstead lies to the east of the Furness fells in an area of isolated steadings set in small irregular fields characteristic of ancient enclosure. The farmhouse is of gentry status and possibly an 18th-century rebuild or remodelling of an earlier structure. The working buildings are set either side of a lane which passes close to the fell side. On the fell side above are large rectilinear fields of 18th- to 19th-century enclosure, divided into 'allotments'. Photo © Jen Deadman



Combination barns The combination barn allows for various activities under one roof. This combination barn is of a style common to all areas of Cumbria. Here it is a component part of a 19th-century farmstead set in late enclosure fields.

The barn provides cattle housing at a lower level, with a threshing floor and loft above accessed by a ramped cart entry to the rear. An outshot at the back provides further animal accommodation and a side outshot (a cart house). The front elevation is punctuated with cattle entries, allowing access to a yard or holding enclosure adjacent to the road. Barns of this style are prominent roadside features, with the entries frequently set hard up against the road side. These barns are distinguished by the full-length pentice above the entries, and sometimes, as in this example, above the winnowing door at first-floor level. Photo © Jen Deadman



This combination bank barn, built along the slope, is one element of a dispersed plan, 18th- to 19th-century farmstead, straddling the roadside. The cattle are housed at the lower, road side level and the hayloft and threshing floor accessed by a large cart entry at the higher level to the rear. As is common to this style of building, the rear outshot combines the cart entry porch and a stable. Photo © Jen Deadman



Combination barn on a remote farmstead which fulfils all the above functions, but on a smaller scale. Again, the loft is accessed from the field side at the higher level via a cart entry. The opposed door, visible on the photograph, is set approximately two feet above ground level. The entry to the byre is also on this road side elevation. Photo © Jen Deadman



This combination barn is one element of a farmstead with a dispersed layout. Here the outshot flanks the cart entry on both sides, providing a double cart shed and animal housing with a small hay loft over. Photo © Jen Deadman



Field barns Field barns, including some bank barns, were mostly built for the overwintering of cattle and the storage of hay. The earliest of these date from the late 17th century and are found at the heads of valleys and some valley sides. Most are small, with stalls for five or six cattle and a hayloft over. This field barn sits at the junction of two fields and accordingly has two entries, each serving one field. It is presently used as a sheep shelter. Photo © Jen Deadman



A small bank barn overlooking the river margin in a valley bottom still affords shelter for a handful of cattle. The entry is in the bottom gable end, the taking in door for the loft accessed by a revetted bank at the upper end. It is surrounded by a small walled enclosure. Photo © Jen Deadman



Pigsties Pigsties are often lean-to structures, although they are sometimes found freestanding on the yard curtilage. This double sty lies adjacent to a cart shed on the perimeter of the yard. It has a small, walled enclosure to the front, and each sty is independently accessed. Each is served by a through feeder. Photo © Jen Deadman



Granaries Granaries are frequently set against the house stack above a cart shed in order to take advantage of warm dry conditions and a good circulation of air. They are accessed by external steps. On this small farmstead, the granary is set above a cart shed against the house gable. The cart shed is accessed from the yard area behind. A small combination barn is sited on the opposite side of the lane from the farmhouse with only a short distance



Calf houses Calf houses and stables are found in outshots, incorporated in combination barns, or as freestanding structures. Here, set awkwardly against the road side close to the farmhouse is a single-storey building with simple roof vents and a single, small roof light. Its function is uncertain, but possibly served as a calf house with two boxes. Photo © Jen Deadman



Cart sheds In this 19th-century example, the cart shed adjoins the combination barn on the road side elevation. The building also incorporates a stable and has a loft over. Photo © Jen Deadman

Materials and detail

- Traditional building materials (to the south) are sandstone, slate and limestone for walling, and local slate for roofing.
- There is fragmentary evidence for cruck-framing, often in the form of re-used timbers.



Historic England

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