Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Yorkshire Wolds

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 27

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).

Large, brick-built, 19th-century farmstead set in an arable landscape but with buildings related to stock rearing. It comprises ranges of cattle byres set around former open yards covered over in the 20th century. Mature trees and thorn hedgerows border large regular fields of late enclosure. Photo © Jen Deadman

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Front cover: One of the planned courtyard farmsteads built as an integral part of the improvement of the Sledmere estate in the late 18th century – see map on p 7. Photo © Historic England 28482/025

This map shows the Yorkshire Wolds, 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.

The Yorkshire Wolds comprise a prominent chalk escarpment and foothills rising from the Vales of York and Pickering and falling to the plain of Holderness. The Wolds form an arc of high ground extending from the Humber Estuary west of Hull, to the North Sea coast north of Bridlington. Less than 2% of the area is classified as urban, with agricultural land accounting for 91% of the area. Woodland is limited at just 4%, though this is almost entirely made up of broadleaves.

Historic character

- This area witnessed the desertion of many settlements between the 14th and 17th centuries, when extensive sheep pastures were created in tandem with the development of large-scale estates and their associated country houses and parklands.
- Farmsteads continued to develop within villages whilst others developed on the sites of shrunken settlements, the patterns of fields around them resulting from a piecemeal process of enclosure.
- Planned regular courtyard farmsteads were established in association with changes which transformed this area in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. These placed the Yorkshire Wolds in the forefront of modern farming techniques, farmsteads sitting within designed landscapes marked by regular enclosures, plantations and estate architecture.
- There are few pre-1750 buildings, with the exception of those on high-status and manor farms and some buildings within villages. Occasional evidence is found for the raising of an early building to two storeys, normally within the fabric of the farmhouse.
- The later rebuilding of farmsteads and outfarms was commonly completed in two phases which comprised a set of buildings and yards focused on the production of corn and manure from yard-fed cattle, followed by extension and sometimes complete remodelling from the 1860s for the fattening of cattle. Distinctive building types are combination barns with first-floor granaries over cart sheds, horse-engine houses, substantial stable ranges, shelter sheds, calf houses and pigsties

Significance

- Some farmsteads relate to shrunken medieval settlements, ridge and furrow and also rare surviving relict common and their associated routeways.
- The evidence for the development of planned estate farmsteads and their designed landscapes in the late 18th century is highly significant 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.

- Many village-based farmhouses remain, whilst their working buildings have been lost. Working buildings with earlier fabric are of exceptional rarity and will provide important evidence for how this landscape developed.

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 (31.6%, the national average being 32%).

Historic development

- The Yorkshire Wolds are the most northerly of the chalk plateau landscapes in Britain, and share many of their key characteristics – extensive prehistoric clearance and settlement, low rainfall, sheep-corn agriculture, a high rate of settlement shrinkage and desertion and the development (much later than in the southern chalk downs) of large capital-based farmsteads with courtyard-plan farmsteads working newly enclosed land.

- There is extensive evidence for prehistoric settlement, burial sites and land use (including substantial boundaries) dating from the Neolithic period. Crop marks suggest field systems interspersed with enclosed and unenclosed farmsteads by and throughout the Romano-British period. The Roman period saw the expansion and intensification of agricultural activity, particularly of arable farming. At the end of the Roman occupation in the 5th century, the succeeding Angles and Anglo Saxons found the landscape already organised into a series of complex and well-established land holdings.

- More radical changes began in the late Saxon period when structured villages, large estates and the introduction of the three-field rotation system occurred. Many of these changes were instigated by local lords at Helmsley and Gillingham Castle and from the 12th century were influenced by Cistercian and Augustinian monasteries based in the North York Moors (Rievaulx, Byland Abbey and Newburgh Priory) and elsewhere.

- The farmed landscape was chiefly open arable fields, interspersed with deer parks and managed woodland. In the 12th and 13th centuries, markets developed on the edge of the area, for example at Malton in the Vale of Pickering and Driffield in Holderness. Grange farms managed by monastic and secular estates developed in the same period to produce corn and wool from the area's large flocks of sheep, and were often leased out to farming tenants in the 14th and 15th centuries.

- Lynchets and relict ridge and furrow testify to the shrinkage of arable cultivation and the desertion of upland settlements from the 14th century, followed by use of the upland plateaux as summer grazing of cattle and especially as sheep walk combined with barley husbandry. Lambs were sold to lowland graziers for fattening, whilst wool was dispatched to the clothiers of East Anglia and the West Riding.

- The restructuring of agriculture and the Dissolution of the Monasteries was accompanied by the post-medieval development of rural estates with their country houses, parklands and estate villages (for example Newburgh Priory, Hovingham Hall and Castle Howard).

- Landowners – notably the Sykes family of Sledmere and the Willoughbys of Birdsall – then played a key role from the mid-18th century in the transformation of the plateaux landscapes with large-scale enclosure (by

agreement and mostly parliamentary act) which involved the conversion of extensive pastures to a new arable system, based on the folding of sheep on turnips and the production of manure from yard-based cattle on steadings or outfarms. This new system boosted the production and export of grain via coastal ports to Scotland, London and the Low Countries.

Landscape and settlement

- There is evidence for prehistoric linear boundaries – marked by pits or a bank and ditch – for managing upland pastures, separating these from hunting areas and woodland; some align with medieval township boundaries.
- The present pattern of nucleated villages was established in the 9th to 13th centuries. There is a high concentration of deserted medieval settlement, many upland villages being deserted or shrinking to individual steadings in the 14th and 15th centuries (Wharram Percy is a notable excavated example). Large estates and parks, such as Sledmere, as developed with new enclosures, routeways and plantations from the 18th century, were central to the creation of designed landscapes for farming, amenity and rural sports across large parts of the Wolds.
- Enclosures around villages can retain very long infield strips (of 9th-century or later origin) set between trackways leading to outfield areas and then rough moorland grazing, similar to those in Holderness and on the Moors and Vale of Pickering border. Pre-18th-century piecemeal enclosure is largely confined to the valleys. Species-rich hedges and drystone walls are most likely to occur in these areas.
- Some isolated farmsteads are sited on monastic granges, many of which specialised in sheep rearing for wool production. Earthwork enclosures relating to medieval sheep husbandry and cattle farms (vaccaries) survive.
- Most isolated farmsteads date from post-1750 regular and large-scale enclosure which was driven by estates. These are concentrated on the plateaux, which is also crossed by earlier droveways and later enclosure roads with wide verges. Field boundaries mostly comprise drystone walls and mostly hawthorn hedges with relatively few hedgerow trees.
- Woodland is limited in extent, particularly on the chalk, and most of the landscape had been cleared of woodland by the late 11th century. Broadleaf woodland is mostly confined to steep slopes in the dry valleys to parts of the escarpment and western edge. The area to the west of the Wolds escarpment is comparatively well wooded and includes Scots pine woods planted in the mid- to late 19th century on less productive soils.
- Chalk pits, quarries, dewponds and sheep washes are found scattered across the landscape.

Farmstead and building types

Pre-1750 fabric is largely confined to farmhouses and houses which once served village-based and some isolated farms; there is also evidence for single-storey construction in surviving farmhouses in village centres. There are some pre-1750 lobby-entrance farmhouses and large and symmetrical double-depth farmhouses dating from the later 18th century. Regular courtyard plans are strongly associated with landscapes of regular enclosure and improvement by estates. Isolated steadings with pre-18 century fabric are very rare. The highly mechanised nature of farming by the mid-19th century is reflected in the numbers of barns with wheel houses.

Farmstead types

- There is fragmentary evidence for pre-18th-century farmstead layouts legible today, in the loose courtyard arrangements found in villages and linear farmsteads including longhouses. The excavations at the deserted medieval settlement at Wharram Percy have revealed development of both these plan types, and the development of a large, late 18th-century courtyard farm after shrinkage and abandonment of the medieval settlement.

- The defining characteristic of Wolds farmsteads is the dominance of large-scale courtyard-plan farmsteads and outfarms, including some of late 18th-century origin, commonly associated with enclosure landscapes, and have dewponds and large and symmetrical double-depth farmhouses dating from the later 18th century. Those on the Sledmere and other estates can be built to full courtyard and E-shaped plans with south-facing cattle yards. Regular multi-yard plans with evidence for the piecemeal growth of cattle yards are also common. Some farmsteads have their houses built as an integral part of U-shaped or L-shaped layouts. Smaller farms, most commonly found within villages, may be built around one or two sides of yards (loose courtyards).

Building types

- Combination barns often incorporate, particularly on larger farms, first-floor granaries and mixing houses, stabling and cart sheds. Barns with a central threshing floor often flanked by a full-height hay mow and a lofted cattle end, can also be classed as combination barns. The latter, frequently mid- to late 18th century in date, were often retained when farms were developed and enlarged in the 19th century and can be identified easily within a later multifunctional range.

- 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. Steam power was widely introduced across the area from the 1840s, but few farmsteads retain chimneys for stationary engines.

- Freestanding combined granaries and cart sheds are a distinctive feature on small and large farms alike. Occasionally, the granary is set over a cow house, particularly on smaller farms. It can also be an element of a combination barn, especially on larger farms.

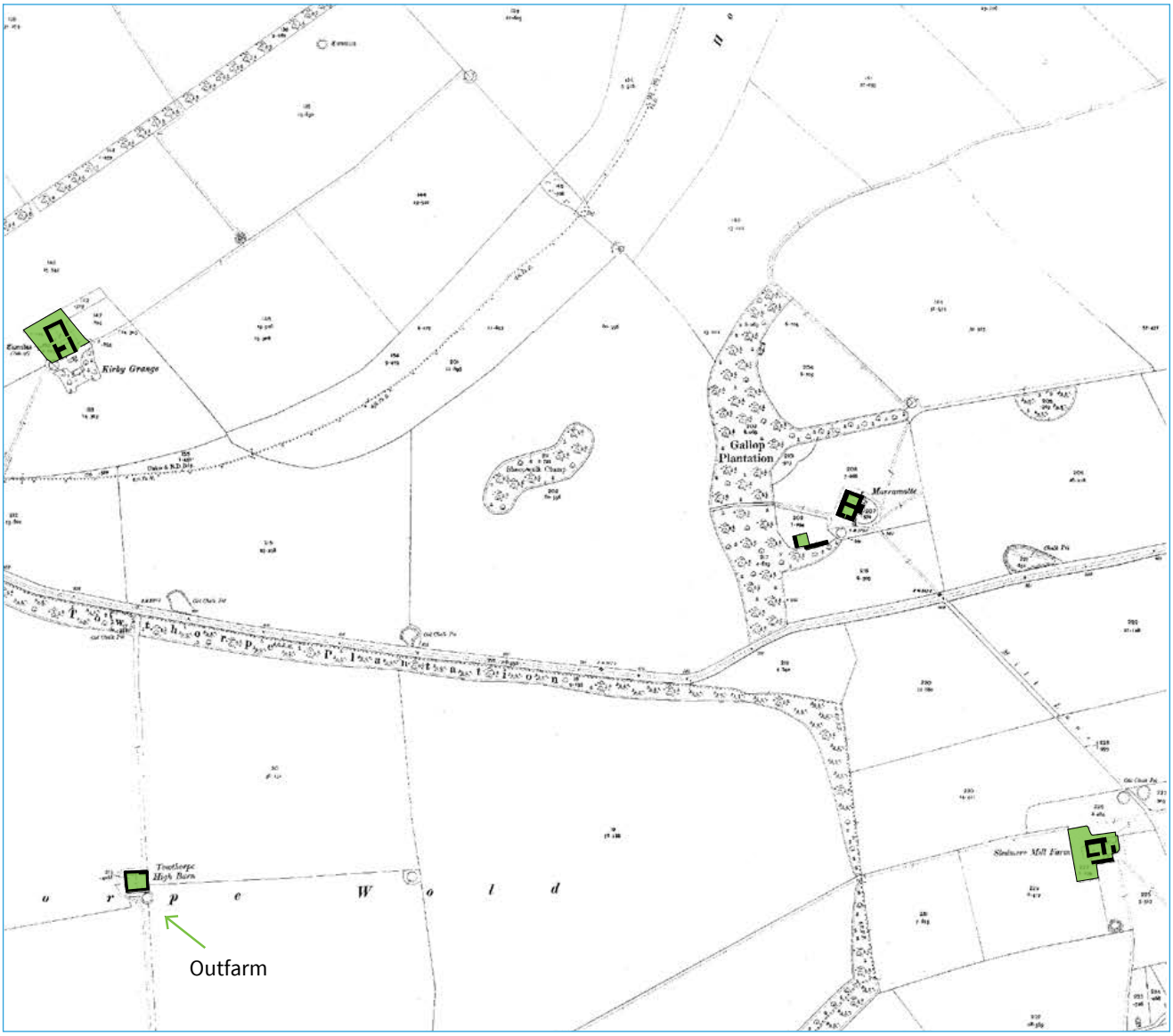
- Lockable implement sheds are often found as part of cart shed ranges.

- Cattle housing: fatstock was housed in open-fronted shelter sheds opening onto cattle yards. Single-storey cow houses and calf houses are found as a freestanding element of a loose yard or as linked ranges around a planned yard. Covered yards placed within the courtyard are a common element and are often a late 19th- or early 20th-century insertion in an older yard. On larger mid- to late 19th-century estate farms, parallel ranges designed as an integral component of a yard complex are a common feature. Looseboxes for cattle with multiple doorways are also featured.

- Outshots added to barns for housing cattle are common.

- Cart sheds are a distinctive element of the arable farm. They are generally open fronted and comprise up to ten bays. Entries are arched, or defined by brick piers or cast iron columns. They can form part of a range or be free standing.

- Stables are frequently incorporated into a yard range and generally lofted over. The importance of horse breeding in the 19th and 20th centuries is emphasised by the presence of planned stable yards on some of the larger gentry farms.



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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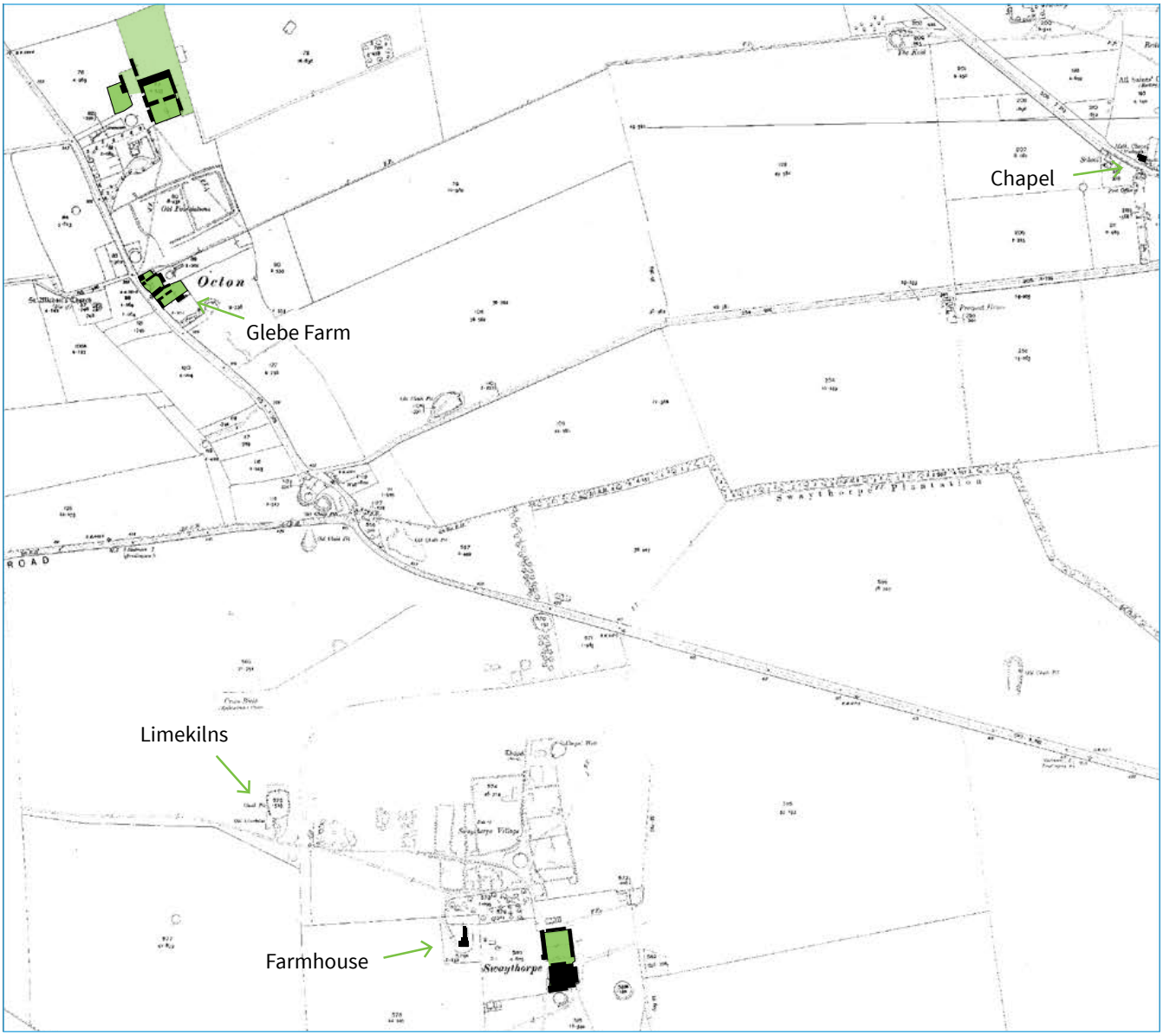
Sledmere

The Sledmere estate is the dominant feature of the central Wolds landscape, and was celebrated at the time as an exemplar of the sheep-corn system of agriculture which developed in tandem with enclosure on the Wolds from the late 18th century. Sir Christopher Sykes designed around 14 farmsteads on his estate, after the enlargement of the park at Sledmere House. Marramatte Farm to the north-west (illustrated on the cover), a farm complex serving a 414-acre mixed arable holding, was built in 1778-9 following the enclosure of land three years earlier. The original farmstead had a rectangular fold yard with a long barn/stable/granary block to the north-west, shelter sheds to the north-east and south-west and a farmhouse with a farmworker's house to the south-east. Pavilions at either end of the south elevation were for pigs and hens, but their profile was also intended to feature in the view from Sledmere House. Given the elevated position, a dew pond was important and was originally sited in front of the house. In the 1860s the shelter sheds were rebuilt and a new range erected to divide the fold yard into two smaller yards. The entrance to the yards was moved from south to west. Pantiles were replaced by Welsh slate. A new dew pond was introduced to the west and the original pond filled in. A separate range of buildings to the north-west was rebuilt twice during the 19th century. Such phases of rebuilding are found across the Wolds, most within a framework of designed landscapes and planned farmsteads and outfarms, as here.



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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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Octon and Swaythorpe

Farmsteads have developed around shrunken medieval settlements at Octon and Swaythorpe, the latter being described as sheep pasture in the early 17th century. The earthworks of house platforms include 14th-century and earlier longhouses, which, as the famous excavation at Wharram Percy has shown, comprised a standard type of farmstead, sometimes with additional yards and other buildings, across the Yorkshire Wolds. At Octon, there is a very rare example of a surviving longhouse (see image on page 11) in addition to the large-scale planned layouts that were built as an integral part of late Georgian enclosure and improvement, alongside the widespread introduction of liming (note the lime kilns) to enrich the soils.

- Pigsties with characteristic feeding chutes are typically sited close to the house, or on larger farms are incorporated in the yard range.

- Smithies are found on the largest farmsteads.

Outfarms, generally comprising buildings around a yard, were built to store and process corn, house cattle and produce their manure for surrounding fields. They are generally of 19th-century date, late 18th-century examples being rare. Field barns, mostly built for the over-wintering of cattle and the storage of hay, are uncommon. This partly reflects the importance accorded to yard-fed cattle within farmsteads. The majority comprise either an open shelter with or without hay storage.

Farms in this area required much seasonal labour to assist with the harvest and sheep husbandry. To the rear of this late 19th-century house is a first-floor room formerly set aside for sheep dippers and other seasonal workers. Originally entered via a ladder from the kitchen below, it was isolated from other first-floor rooms. Photo © Jen Deadman

Smithies were also a feature of the large farms that developed in in this area. Photo © Jen Deadman

Large cattle yards, often two or more to farmsteads, are a distinctive feature. This three-sided yard at Burton Fleming is in part bounded on the fourth side by the farmhouse of an earlier, 17th-century date. A north–south range comprising open shelter sheds effectively divides the yard into two working areas. Within the yard are a smithy, stables (dated 1830), an open shelter shed and loose boxes. The barn, originally with lower steeper roof reconstructed in 1823 (dated tie beam), is sited on the northern perimeter of the yard. Adjoining to the north is a further large fold yard with a single-storey range on its eastern boundary. Photo © Jen Deadman

One of the most distinctive aspects of this area is how many of its farmsteads are formally arranged, with buildings that illustrate the importance of arable husbandry from the late 18th century. This shows the classical proportions and detailing to Marramatte Farm, one of the farmsteads with flanking pavilions built to the designs of Sir Christopher Sykes (see front cover and map on p 9). Photo © Mike Williams/Historic England

This barn, sited on the boundary of a small fold yard, is of hand-made brick with tumbling in the gables. It is typical of barns built c 1800, but incorporates some sandstone rubble walling from an earlier build. Photo © Jen Deadman

Two courtyard farmsteads with late 18th- and early 19th-century houses, next to the early 19th-century Bempton Mill. Many windmills were built in the East Riding of Yorkshire, including some of the earliest documented examples in England, dating from the late 12th century. Photo © Historic England 28481/052

Despite the transformation of this area from the late 18th century, fragments of earlier landscape and farmsteads can survive away from villages. Glebe Farm at Octon, clad in 19th-century brick around chalk walling, is sited next to a sinuous routeway and within enclosures that predate the regular planned fields around it and contain the earthworks of a shrunken medieval settlement. The farmhouse is constructed from cruck trusses felled in 1670, and comprises a rare surviving example of a longhouse that pre-dates the enclosures and rebuilding that dominates this area. Photo © Historic England 28482/024

An early 19th-century, formally planned and designed farmstead within a regular enclosure landscape just north of Towthorpe Wold, with an early 20th-century Dutch barn and shelter belts that also typify this area. Photo © Historic England 28482/042

This large-scale, regular multi-yard farmstead at Towthorpe (note the very large granary/cart shed range with its arcaded ground floor to the centre) was built in the early to mid-19th century. It touches on another theme in this area, as it is sited within the earthworks of a shrunken medieval settlement which by the 16th century was developing into courtyard farms and by 1772 was largely deserted. Photo © Historic England 28482/061

Tumbled-in brickwork to gable ends is a typical feature of this area and continues as a tradition into northern East Anglia. Photo © Jen Deadman

Part of a large barn at Burton Fleming. Its roof was raised in 1823, and, as with many barns in this and surrounding areas, the threshing floor has opposing winnowing doors that are too narrow to admit carts for unloading the harvested drop. Photo © Jen Deadman

Late 18th-century multifunctional barn at Marramatte Farm (see front cover) with stables, a threshing floor, store/feed preparation rooms and lofts. A first-floor granary was inserted in the mid-19th century. Photo © Mike Williams/Historic England

Chalk walling to an 18th-century building, extended in 19th-century brick. Photo © Jen Deadman

Open-fronted shelter sheds, facing a cattle yard into which straw from the barn was taken after threshing. Photo © Jen Deadman

Two loose boxes with doors and slatted windows to aid ventilation. Photo © Jen Deadman

Materials and detail

- Traditional buildings, mostly dating from the mid-18th century, are mainly brick, with limestone to the west and chalk near Flamborough Head. Buildings in the fringes of the scarp are predominantly stone-built, with some earlier buildings, with a vernacular based on limestone with red brick detailing and red pantiles. 'Tumbled-in' brickwork is a distinctive feature of this and the eastern part of England extending to North Norfolk.
- There are very rare remnants of generally 17th-century or earlier timber-frame – the latter often surviving as cruck-frames in farmhouses with later stone infill or cladding.
- Earlier fabric of stone or chalk is often found encased within brick buildings.

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