Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Holderness

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 40

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).

Straight roads and dykes are also a prominent feature of this predominantly flat landscape. Photo © Jen Deadman

Front cover: Isolated farmsteads surrounded by small shelter beds of trees are a prominent feature of this predominantly flat landscape drained by ditches. Photo © Jen Deadman

This map shows the Holderness, 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.

Holderness is a low-lying, predominantly flat or gently undulating plateau of high-quality agricultural land used for large-scale arable farming and intensive livestock production. There are many glacial features in the landscape and the cliff coast is rapidly eroding. There is sparse tree and woodland cover and dispersed settlement in a generally flat landscape. The landscape is predominantly arable and horticultural, with agriculture accounting for 83% of land cover. Of the area, 7% is defined as urban and only 1% is woodland.

Historic character

- The landscape – which is crossed by rivers draining from the Yorkshire Wolds (NCA 27) towards the Humber Estuary (NCA 41) – is now predominantly arable, resulting from the final phase of drainage and reclamation commencing in the later 18th century.
- Courtyard farmsteads have generally developed around two or more sides of a yard. The largest, on the edge of settlements and on high-status sites and reclaimed land, have fully developed with fully-enclosed yards and multiple yards.
- Most farmsteads are built in cobbles, brick and pantile dating from the late 18th and mostly 19th centuries, and are dominated by combination barns for the processing of corn, the preparation of feed and the storage of grain above cart sheds and stables.
- The piecemeal enclosure of farming landscapes around villages and some isolated farmsteads contrasts with the rectilinear planned fields enclosed by drains and which provide the setting to most farmsteads established after the late 18th century.

Significance

- Pre-improvement era farm buildings, predating the late 18th century and built of timber-frame and local stone, are of exceptional rarity.
- Farmstead groups associated with moated sites and houses have additional significance in illustrating the development of the area from the medieval period.
- As in the Humberhead Levels (NCA 39) and the Humber Estuary (NCA 41), isolated planned farmsteads of regular courtyard plan with large barns and wheel houses can sit within their contemporary 19th-century fieldscapes, combining to form a landscape character that illustrates 19th-century approaches to land reclamation and planning.
- Complete, small-scale farms and smallholdings are now rare.

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 (25%, the national average being 32%).
- The Photo Image Project also recorded an above-average percentage (11.1%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.

Historic development

- The clearance of woodland, and then the raising of sea levels as the climate cooled towards the end of the 2nd millennium BC, led to this area's development for fishing, fowling and other marsh-edge activities combined with summer grazing for surrounding communities. It also offered navigable waterways that extended towards the Pennines and via the Trent into the Midlands.
- Much systematic drainage, driven by estates such as that of the Cistercian abbey at Meaux, was undertaken on the floodplain in the 12th and 13th centuries. This was associated with the development of estate farms or granges on monastic estates and of moated sites. Much of the fertile and seasonally-flooded carr land continued to be used in common by local communities, who also worked open fields around settlements in order to fatten sheep and cattle and grow corn and hay. Some of these settlements shrank or were abandoned between the 14th and 17th centuries, and increasingly large farms and estates began to take an increasing interest in agricultural improvement.
- The final phase of drainage, for example along the coastal fringe between Hornsea and Bridlington, was undertaken in tandem with the intensification of arable farming, fertility being sustained and enhanced by rotations using root crops and the production of farmyard manure. Industrial-scale pig rearing developed in parts of 19th-century Holderness.

Landscape and settlement

- Medieval settlement is usually on higher ground, around the edge of river valleys in the south of the area, and often surrounded by fields bounded by hedgerows resulting from the piecemeal enclosure of medieval strip fields. Hamlets and villages are widely dispersed, some being closely packed and nucleated and others strung out along roads.
- Isolated farmsteads surrounded by small shelter beds of trees are a prominent feature of the alluvial floodplain of the River Hull, intersected by straight roads, canals and dykes. Some of these relate to shrunken settlements, former monastic granges and specialist steadings, and a high concentration of moated sites. The scale and intensity of 19th-century and earlier reclamation means that surviving areas of carr woodland and wet grassland are now very rare and fragmented.
- The predominant patterns are of piecemeal enclosure, mostly of the 17th to 19th centuries. Fields around villages can retain long strip forms which remain from the medieval 'infields' (dating from the 9th to 11th centuries, and similar to strips in the Yorkshire Wolds and on the North York Moors and Vale of Pickering border) and trackways which led to more marginal farming areas and rough grazing. The boulder clay (glacial fill) over most of the area was enclosed first, whilst the peat soils around Hull were not enclosed until the late 17th and 18th centuries. Areas of common fields were enclosed by agreement from the 17th century onwards. In parts of the

area, isolated farmsteads formed part of this early enclosure.

- Coastal farmland from Hornsea to Bridlington was subject to extensive, early to mid-19th century regular enclosure, with straight roads and tracks, and the formation of new farmsteads.

Farmstead and building types

Most farmsteads in this area were newly built or rebuilt in the 19th century, with a small number dating from the late 18th century. Earlier recorded buildings, almost all of these being houses rather than barns and other buildings, are very rare.

Farmstead types

- The great majority of farmsteads are regular courtyard plans. Those on smaller farms including those that remained within settlements tend to be built to L-plans, but most are large in scale by national standards with buildings arranged around south-facing yards in U-plan, E-plan, full courtyard and multi-yard arrangements.
- Some early sites, including moated, are associated with looser ranges of detached buildings, often with evidence for piecemeal development, set around a yard.
- Worker's housing, attached to or within the main body of the house (usually above a back kitchen) or more usually in the form of mid- to late 19th-century houses, are associated with isolated farms.

Building types

- Building types illustrate the importance of this area for arable farming, including threshing barns, combination barns, large granaries and stable ranges, and cart sheds. Open areas for yard-fed cattle and stack yards further indicate the heavy reliance on arable cultivation.
- The buildings found in these farmsteads relate very strongly to arable exploitation, including threshing barns, combination barns, large granaries, and cart sheds. Open areas for yard-fed cattle and stack yards further indicate the heavy reliance on arable cultivation.
- Pre-19th-century threshing barns are rare. There are some early 19th-century and earlier threshing barns, commonly with loading hatches flanking the cart entry.
- Most steadings have combination barns dating from the late 18th century, with threshing barns to the centre or at one side of stabling, cart sheds or cattle housing (loose boxes and shelter sheds), with first-floor granaries and mixing houses. Dedicated threshing barns tend to be quite large in relation to other farm buildings. Horse engine houses (horse gins), which powered threshing and fodder-processing machinery in barns, are now rare.
- There are many examples of late 19th- to mid-20th-century Dutch barns in the area, potentially reflecting extensive hay production on the former wetlands.
- Small farms and smallholdings developed as a distinctive feature of the area. They are typically concentrated in villages, or on former turbaries around the Isle of Axholme, and represent a locally significant survival of a specific agricultural type.
- There are some outfarms for cattle, which may have internal stone piers to aisles.

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.

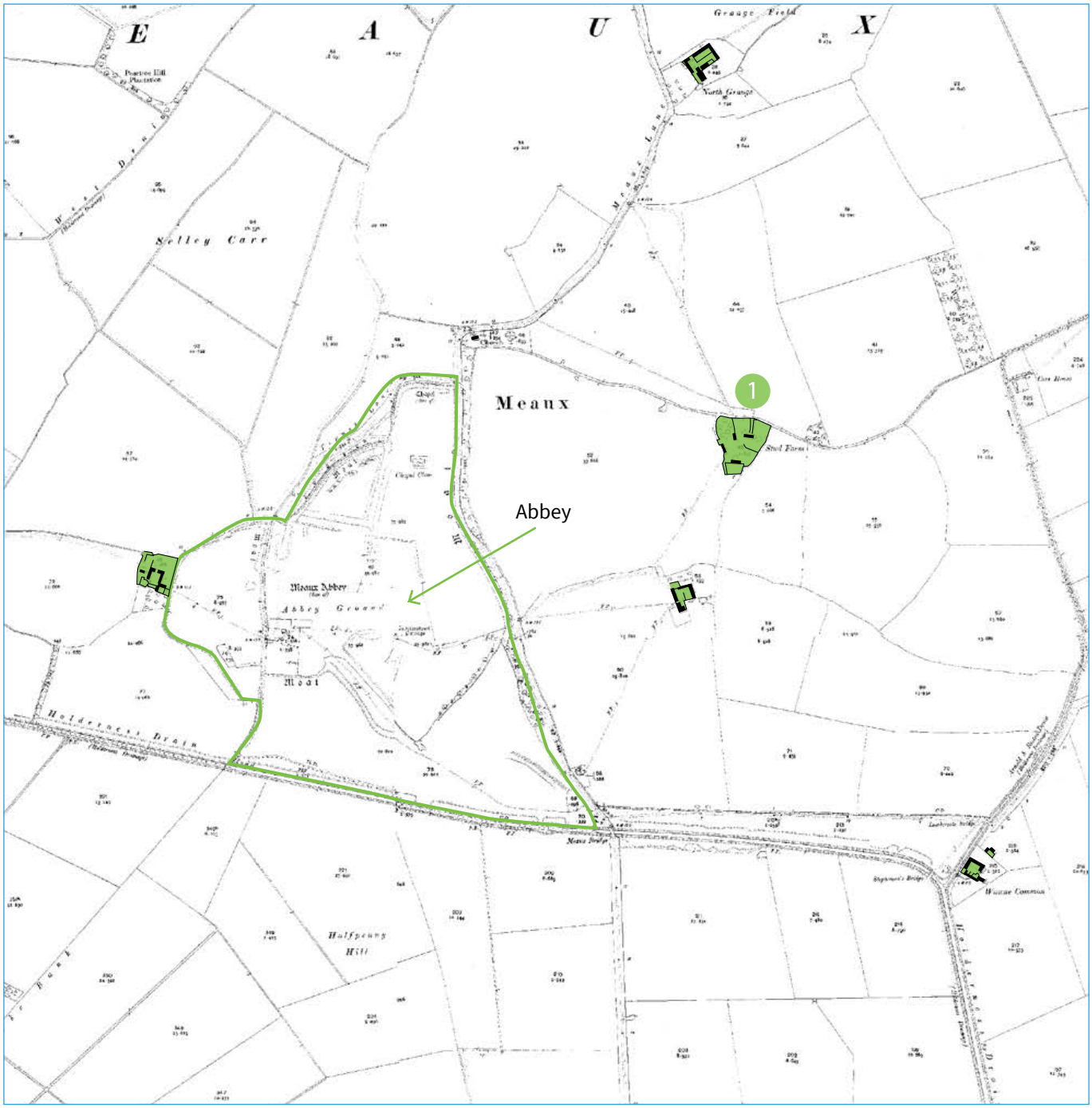
0 250 500 m

0 0.25 miles

N

Ellerby

The settlements of Holderness were usually sited on the higher ground, often on the better-drained sand and gravel deposits. The common plan was a long street-village, sometimes with discrete ends. The number of medieval villages and hamlets has been reduced, as here at Ellerby in Swine township, to one or two farmsteads and a cluster of houses. Others, like Monkwith, in Tunstall, and Cleeton, in Skipsea, have been eroded by the sea. Note the moated site to the south-east, at Woodhall Farm, and the way that the field boundaries are aligned from the south-west to the north-east, including those enclosed from medieval strips to the west of the village and the regular enclosures with plantations, close to the park at Burton Constable Hall to the south-east.



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

Meaux

The fields in the landscape around Meaux Abbey are defined by drainage ditches, many dating from the medieval period. Meaux Abbey, founded in c 1150 as a daughter house of the Cistercian Abbey at Fountains Abbey, is situated on a slight rise in the valley of the River Hull, almost opposite Beverley. Its name meaning `lake with a sandy shore' indicates its former watery situation. Note the irregular boundary and dispersed plan form of Stud Farm (1), at the core of a group of irregular fields, in contrast to the way in which the other farmsteads have been reorganised from the mid-18th century around south-facing yards.

These early to mid-19th-century farmhouses face away from farmyards, next to plantations and overlooking an intensively cultivated arable landscape of large, regular shaped fields. Photo © Jen Deadman

Regular multi yard steading on the outskirts of Old Ellerby. The aerial photo of 1963 shows a well-organised farmstead with late 18th- or early 19th-century buildings arranged around two yards. To the north, an enclosed walled yard is flanked on one side by a large combination barn – the largest agricultural building in the complex. Adjoining shelter sheds allow cattle free range within the yard, in the lower corner of which is a meal house. Beyond to the north is a range of open-fronted cart sheds.
In the foreground are two more cattle yards, including pigsties and a room for heating swill (marked by the chimney stack) close to the farmhouse. Beyond to the left are two hay ricks representing a now defunct farming tradition. The farmhouse faces away from the working buildings with a degree of privacy created by the barn sited at right angles at its western end. The worker's (hind's) accommodation is a self contained unit integral with the farmhouse. By 2004 only two ancillary buildings had survived. Today the farmstead is assimilated into another holding and the farmhouse let. Photo © Jen Deadman

An early 19th-century farmhouse with additional workers' housing in the left-hand bay. Brick copings to gable ends are a typical feature of this area. Photo © Jen Deadman

Corrugated iron was used as a cheaper roofing material from the late 19th century. Photo © Jen Deadman

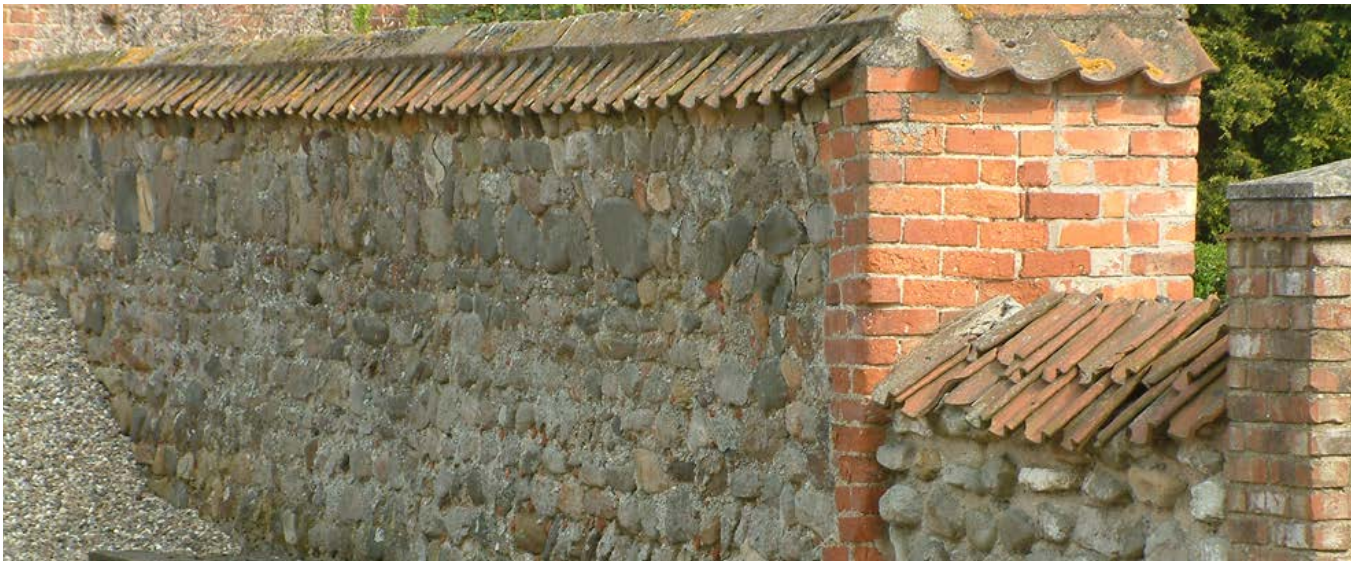
Isolated 18th-century steading with regular yard arrangement of single and two-storey buildings set behind the farmhouse. Note the steeply-pitched pantiled roof, characteristic of the area. Pantiles with their distinctive wavy profile and orange/red colour are the dominant roof cover, virtually replacing thatch by the 19th century. Photo © Jen Deadman

Regular L-plan ranges attached to farmhouses are a distinctive characteristic of smaller-scale farmsteads, with combination barns (here including a granary over two cart bays) attached to single-storey cattle housing. Photo © Jen Deadman

The combination barn, frequently the largest agricultural building on the farm, is multifunctional. This large barn has provision for four cart bays (one blocked) stabling and tack room for saddles and harness at ground floor level, with a hay loft and granary over. The traditional pantile roof has been replaced. Photo © Jen Deadman

Fine, early 18th-century high status farmhouse with cogged and dentilled course at eaves level – a decorative feature common to all Yorkshire lowland areas. Note the decorative brick pediment to the attic window. The ancillary building adjoining the farmhouse comprises courses of diagonally laid cobbles. Towards the coast, cobble is frequently used as a building material. Photo © Jen Deadman

Corner dressings and vent dressings are frequently of brick as in this cobble-built byre. Photo © Jen Deadman



The yard wall also has brick dressings and is capped with the ubiquitous pantile. Photo © Jen Deadman

Materials and detail

- Historic farm buildings are typically constructed from red brick and red pantiles, and mostly date from the mid-18th century. The area is known in a national context for the early use, from the 14th century, of brick for building high-status houses and churches.
- Pantile roofs frequently have tumbled and dentillated eaves.
- Brick intermixed with cobbles is found in coastal areas.
- Mud and stud construction, and thatch for roofing, may have been in more general use for smaller houses and ancillary buildings before the 19th century.
- Evidence for pre-17th-century timber-framing is generally confined to towns (for example in Beverley).

Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by
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