



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Mersey Valley

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 60



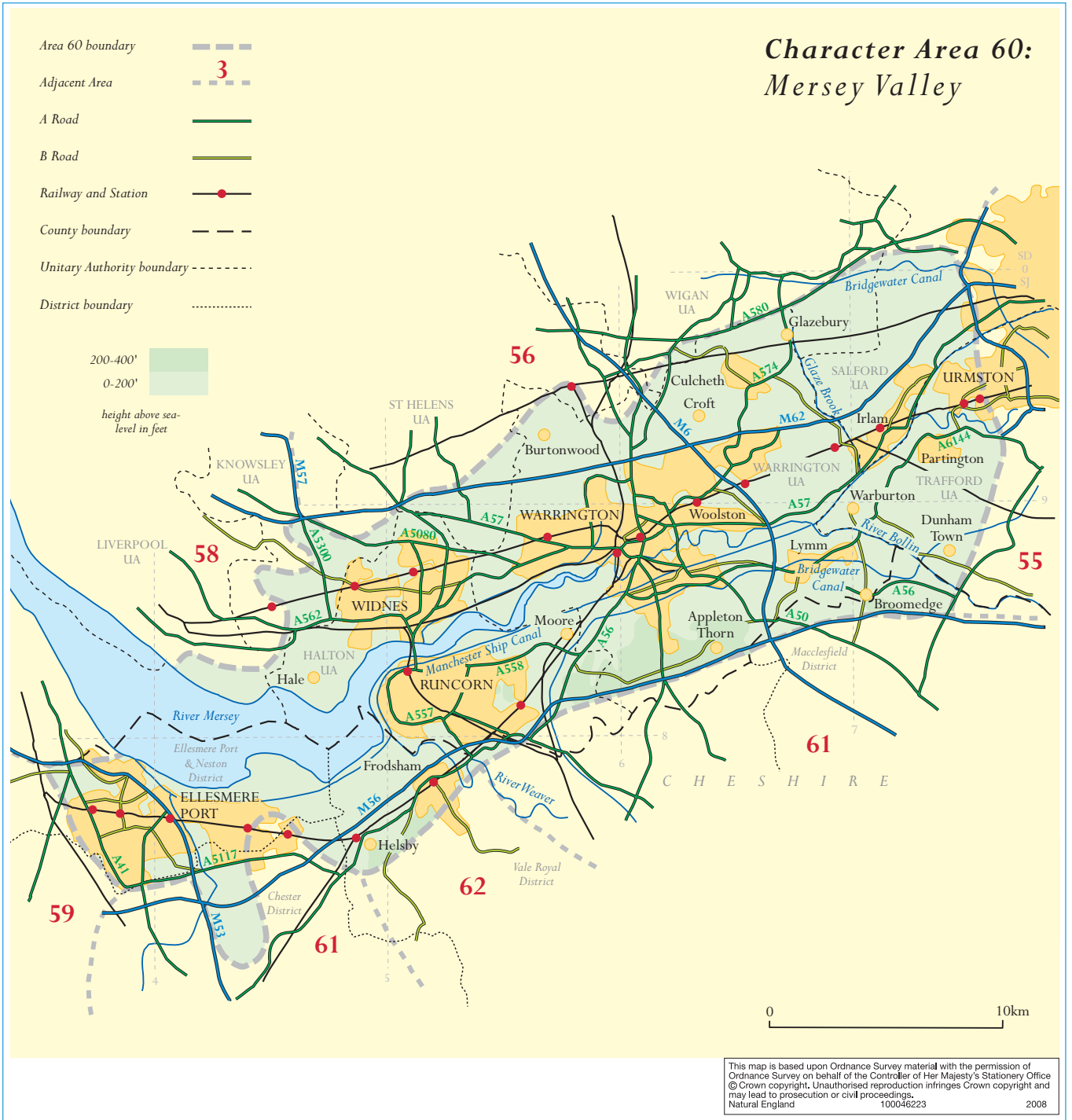
Introduction

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>).



A mid-19th-century farmstead in Chat Moss, subject to drainage and conversion to arable land earlier in the century. The farmstead comprises a threshing barn attached to a single-storey range of cattle housing. The fertility of this newly-reclaimed land was maintained by manure from farmsteads as well as nightsoil from surrounding settlements and the application of marl, clay and lime. Photo © Jeremy Lake

Front cover: Great Woolden Hall to the east of Irlam is located on high ground within an area of mosslands drained in the 19th century: to its west is an Iron Age or earlier promontory fort, probably built to guard access on higher ground through the mosslands. The 17th-century brick house is sited to one side of an early to mid-19th-century courtyard of farm buildings. Photo © Jeremy Lake



This map shows the Mersey Valley 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.

This area comprises the distinctive river-valley landscape focused on the Mersey and associated estuaries. It includes farmland, wetland and extensive industrial and urban development. Of the area, 32% is urban, 21% is arable, 13% improved grassland and 16% is semi natural, comprising salt marshes, sand and mudflats. A further 8% of the area is woodland.

Historic character

- This is an area of mixed settlement set within landscapes adapted from piecemeal and earlier irregular patterns of enclosure, with the regular, 19th-century enclosure of mossland.
- A wide variety of farmstead layouts responded to the patterns of farming, both in areas having easy access to seasonal grazing and – where more regular in layout – the improvements undertaken by estates and the drainage of mossland.
- Buildings are dominated by two-storey combination barns and housing for cattle, with cart sheds and stables.

Significance

- There is very significant survival of 17th- and 18th-century combination barns and cattle housing.
- Intact, small-scale farms and smallholdings are very 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 (31.8%, the national average being 32%).

Historic development

- The boundary between English Mercia and Danish Northumbria and perhaps earlier Roman polities and pre-Roman tribal groups, the Mersey channel long provided a natural barrier of water, tidal flats and marshland.
- The mixed pattern of agriculture in this area, with summer grazing to the mosslands north of the Mersey, was intensified in tandem with drainage and the growth of larger farms from the late 18th century, and with intensive farming in the 19th century, to provide meat, dairy, arable and horticultural products for

growing urban markets. Improvement was mainly focused on arable-based farming to the north of the Mersey and with a greater emphasis on dairy farming for the supply of cheese and, from the 1870s, liquid milk.

- The Industrial Revolution brought significant developments in transport which stimulated agricultural improvement and industry. These facilitated the supply of coal for steam-powered factories and considerable reductions in transport costs, firstly with the Bridgewater Canal, opened in 1761 and the first in Britain to not follow a

natural watercourse, and the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in 1830. The ports at Runcorn, Widnes and Ellesmere Port were connected to this canal system. The Lancashire coalfields supplied local industries including the chemical industry which developed as a major feature of this area. The Manchester Ship Canal, opened in 1894, enabled Manchester to develop as a port connected to global markets. These settlements developed significantly over the 19th and 20th centuries, with the New Towns at Runcorn and Warrington bringing further urban development.

Landscape and settlement

- The predominant patterns of fields across the area, which are bounded by hedgerows and with ditches to areas of drained land, is one of piecemeal enclosure that was complete by the later 18th century. There are areas of earlier, irregular and ovoid enclosures – most clearly legible to the east of the area – resulting from the medieval clearance of woodland and reclamation. This was then subject to much modification in the 18th and 19th centuries, as farms grew in size and were reorganised by estates and their tenants in order to supply growing markets.
- Large areas of the mosslands to the east, including Chat Moss and Rixton Moss, were drained and enclosed in the 19th century.
- Virtually no ancient woodland survives in this area.

Farmstead and building types

Pre-1750 buildings are very rare and include significant early examples of storeyed cattle housing.

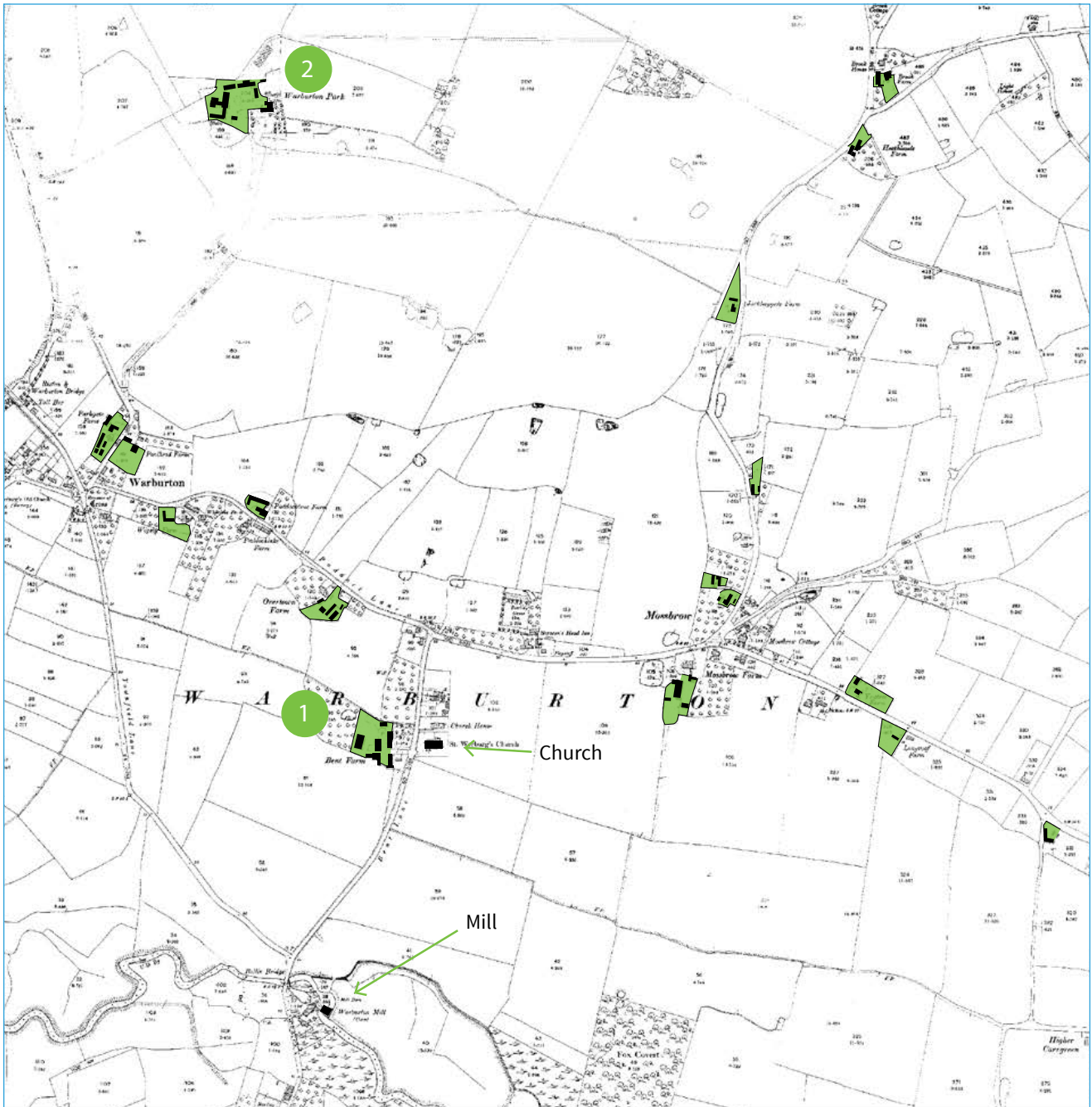
Farmstead types

- Farmsteads within settlements have mostly developed on a piecemeal basis, with detached buildings set around yards. Smaller farms that developed from the medieval period around mossland either developed as linear farmsteads, dispersed layouts of buildings or with buildings to one or two sides of courtyards. Most new farmsteads resulting from the drainage and enclosure of mossland are regular in their layout, but often with detached buildings rather than having them interlinked. These include very small farms and smallholdings.
- Historic maps show that many farmsteads in areas of reorganised piecemeal and irregular enclosure have developed from dispersed layouts within what appear to be stock enclosures, although by the early 19th century many had also been reorganised as courtyard layouts. Some are U- or E-plan groups with shelter sheds for cattle, but most include L-plan elements and have ranges to three or four sides of the yard, including extensive cattle housing. Some of the latter include high-status complexes dating from the 17th century.


Building types

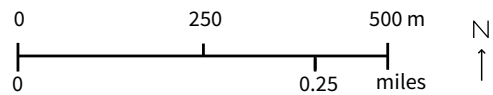
Two-storey, multi-functional ranges are characteristic, providing cow houses, stables and crop storage and processing areas. These mostly date from the late 18th century and can be marked by large cart entries and smaller flanking doors (sometimes to the gable end) for cattle, and pitching holes set in the gable or sides to allow hay to be thrown into the upper floor for storage. Other characteristic building types include:

- combination barns for housing cattle, fodder and processing corn, usually with large cart entries, the earliest of these dating from the 17th century
- two-storey cow houses with hay lofts, dating from the 17th century
- single-storey ranges for cattle, mostly cow houses for dairy cattle but also including shelter sheds and loose boxes for fatstock, most of which are mid- to late 19th century
- stables and cart sheds, sometimes with first-floor granaries, the scale of which can provide an indicator of the size of farms and the scale of arable farming, particularly at its high point in the mid-19th century
- pigsties, pigs being fed on by-products of dairying in the farmhouse dairy.



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.



Warburton

This is an area of largely dispersed settlement with dispersed farmstead layouts and 17th-century and earlier timber-framed barns and houses, set within fields which, although enlarged and realigned in the 19th century, have retained clear traces of much earlier patterns which include routeways for moving stock to grazing grounds. Examples include Bent Farm (1) with a 16th-century cruck barn and house and Warburton Park Farm (2), relating to larger fields, with a 17th-century or earlier timber-framed cow house.



These buildings in and around Ince illustrate the importance of housing cattle in this area from the 17th century. To the top left is a late 17th-century, former linear farmstead built of coursed and dressed sandstone, and later converted into cattle housing. As in the Cheshire Plain to the south, brick was used from the late 18th century to build or extend from lower sandstone ranges substantial buildings for housing dairy cattle with hay lofts. Photos © Jeremy Lake

Materials and detail

- Brick has been used in this area for gentry and other high-status houses from the 17th century, and came into more general use from the second half of the 18th century. It is now the predominant building material, roofing in Welsh slate and clay tile roofs also being the most common. Red sandstone was also quarried and used for walling. Often, brick was used to heighten early buildings in this material.
- Timber-frame was commonly used for houses and then farm buildings into the 18th century. Although it is now apparently rare, it can survive within buildings later re-clad in brick.



Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by
Jeremy Lake.

Please refer to this document as:
Historic England 2020 Farmstead and Landscape
Statement: Mersey Valley. Historic England:
Swindon

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Product code: 52174 RRL code: 064/2020

Publication date: February 2020 © Historic England

Design: Historic England and Chantal Freeman, Diva
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