



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

# Central North Norfolk and Mid Norfolk

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 78 & 84



## 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 regular courtyard multi-yard group on the edge of the park at Melton Constable was rebuilt in the mid-19th century around yards for fattening cattle, a large threshing barn and a two-storey combined granary and mill barn for making feed for the cattle. The classical-style farmhouse faces away from the working yards. Photo © Historic England 29334/012

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**Front cover:** Park Farm at Bylaugh, was built in about 1860 and is sited close to the Hall (at the top of the image) built in 1852. It is a regular multi-yard group that includes a covered yard for cattle, built to the latest scientific principles, built to the south of a large barn for processing the harvested corn crop and milling the feed for the cattle. Photo © Historic England 29119/045

# Character Area 78 Central North Norfolk



This map shows the Central North Norfolk 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.

These Character Areas lie to the north and west of Norwich, bounded to the north by the coastal cliffs fringing the North Sea around Cromer. This is a landscape predominantly under arable cultivation but interspersed by significant areas of woodland and remnant areas of heathland.

Central North Norfolk NCA is 91% open countryside with 84% of that under cultivation. Almost 5% is urban, containing the northern half of the city of Norwich in its bounds. Woodland accounts for 11% of the land cover. Just over 15% of the NCA falls within the Norfolk Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). 95% of Mid Norfolk is open countryside with 90% of that area cultivated. Of the NCA, 3% is urban, containing the southern half of the city of Norwich in its bounds. Woodland accounts for 4% of the total area.

## Historic Character

The historic character of these areas is closely inter-related:

Central North Norfolk is an area of poor soils, derived from morrainic gravels:

- The farming landscape comprised a mixture of large estates and smaller gentry farms. The farming economy of the area was based on arable production. Open fields survived into the later 18th century, interspersed with areas of earlier piecemeal enclosure.
- Cattle were also kept, making use of the adequate supply of pasture and meadow. Some new farms were built following the late-18th-century enclosure.
- Woodland survival is relatively high, much of it in parks.

Mid Norfolk is dissected by a large number of rivers with wide, shallow valleys, which are

the focus for the most part of the dispersed settlement pattern:

- Much of the settlement is around greens or commons, or on deserted medieval sites. The area suffered depopulation in the medieval period.
- Open fields survived in the valleys into the 18th century. Arable farming predominated in the more fertile areas, where there were larger estates than on clays to the south. Cattle were farmed where there was enough permanent grass.
- The sandier, more acid soils on the plateau were more likely to be managed as heath. The enclosure of much of the heath took place around 1800.
- Most farmsteads were redeveloped from the mid-18th century as U- or E-plans.

## Significance

- There is a high survival of pre-1750 (mostly 17th and early 18th century) farm buildings especially in Central North Norfolk, mostly high-status farm houses and some barns and stables. Farmsteads that have both a pre-1750 farmhouse and one or more early working buildings are of high significance. Coherent examples in late 18th and early 19th century designed landscapes are also significant.
- Rare examples of clay lump, timber frame and thatch.

## Present and future issues

- In Central North Norfolk, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a low proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (15.2%, the national average being 32%). In Mid Norfolk, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a medium proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (28%, the national average being 32%).

## Historic development

- The area has a long settlement history stretching into prehistory.
- Medieval manors, associated with warrens and deer parks, were notable features of this area, many forming the basis of 17th and 18th century country house estates of various sizes but generally smaller than the great estates to the west – North West Norfolk (NCA 76).
- The agricultural history provides contrasts between estate-dominated areas (mostly in Mid Norfolk) and those where owner-occupiers expressed their growing prosperity through the rebuilding of houses and barns in the 17th and 18th centuries.
- The economy was arable-based, but access to meadow and grass enabled the stocking of large numbers of bullocks and milking cattle. The less fertile heathland areas mostly remained open until the late 18th century when fields were enclosed and new farms laid out. The whole area – like adjoining parts of Norfolk – experienced major improvements in crop rotation from the late 17th century through the use of winter feed crops (notably turnips) and artificial grasses.

## Landscape and settlement

- Medieval and later settlement is mixed, with a generally very high degree of dispersal. It includes numerous well-separated market towns and large villages, particularly to the north of the River Wensum. Surrounding these settlements is a broad pattern of dispersed hamlets, farmsteads, manor complexes and country house estates, more densely distributed south of the river Wensum.
- The predominant pattern of piecemeal enclosure of heathland common and wood-pasture was mostly complete by the 18th century, with the exception of the broad river valleys of Mid Norfolk where settlement was typically dispersed (around greens and commons, and on the sites of deserted medieval settlements) and where open fields remained into the 18th century. Mid Norfolk is dominated by piecemeal patterns of enclosure. It is dissected by a large number of rivers with wide shallow valleys.
- There are areas of 18th- to 19th-century regular enclosure, including areas of common land and heath which survive in part on the higher and sandier areas along the Cromer Ridge towards the coast. Isolated farmsteads

can relate to the earthworks of shrunken settlement and land use resulting from depopulation in the late medieval period.

- Areas historically dominated by estates are frequently accompanied by distinctive architecture and parkland, although there has been a significant loss to arable and other uses since the early 20th century. Historic parkland has seen a significant loss to arable conversion (about 31% in Central North Norfolk and 48% in Mid Norfolk) since the First World War.
- There has been a high level of post-1950 boundary removal throughout the area.
- Scattered plantations are survivals from 18th century estate management and later sporting interests. Hedgerow oaks and other standards are found in some areas. Oak and beech wood-pastures are still a characteristic of the estate farmlands and parklands on heavier soils.

## Farmstead and building types

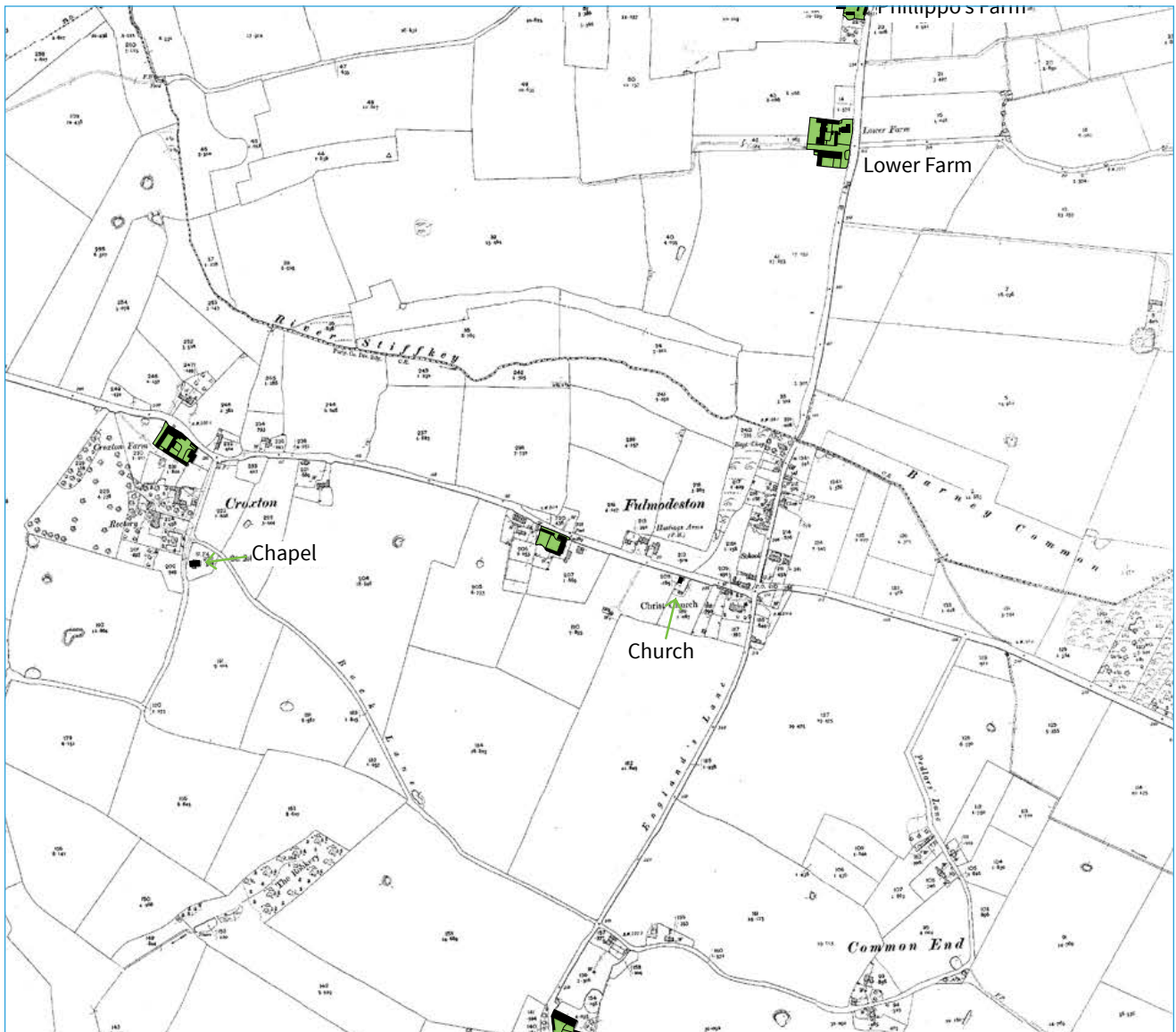
The area has a high concentration of pre-1750 farmstead buildings – mostly 17th and early 18th century barns and some stables – which are less numerous in the estate-dominated Mid Norfolk area.

### Farmstead types


- Most farmsteads developed as loose courtyard plans, and surviving examples commonly have detached working buildings to three or four sides of the yard.
- Many farmsteads, particularly in Mid Norfolk, were redeveloped from the mid-18th century as U- or E-plan steadings with large barns, combined cartshed and granary ranges and south-facing cattle yards.

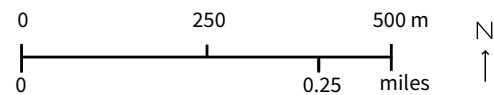
### Building types

- Threshing barns are typically of three to five bays and have later cattle accommodation added on in the form of outshots. Some barns have integral stables at one end.
- The size of stables, granaries and cart sheds is also an indication of the size of farms and the scale of arable farming. Stables sometimes form part of multi-functional ranges combined with cart sheds, granaries or cow houses.
- Smaller barns of three to four bays survive in some of the villages and smaller farmsteads.
- Loose boxes and shelter sheds to cattle yards.



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

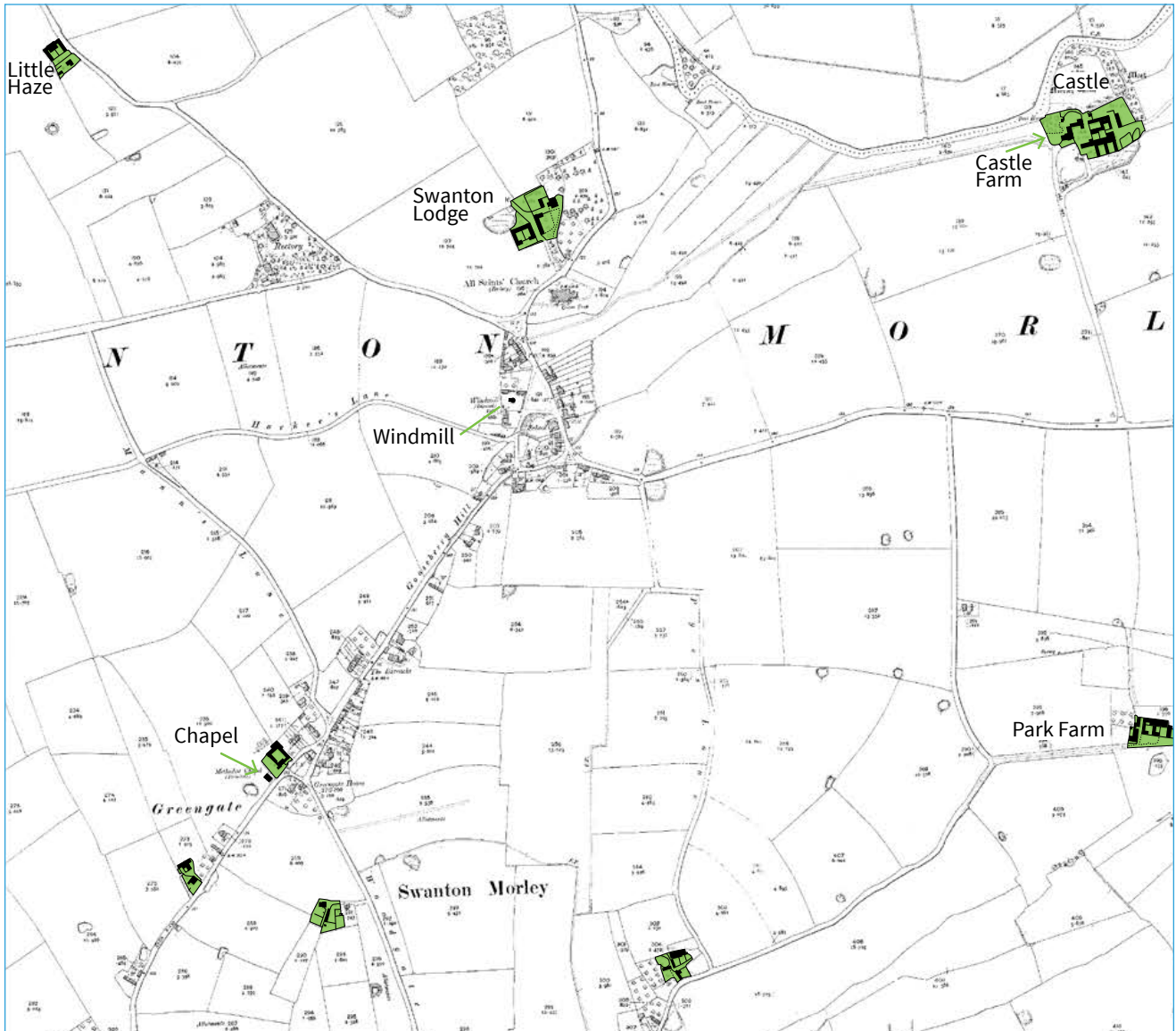
 Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



### Fulmodeston (78 Central North Norfolk)

The small village lies on a crossroads, surrounded by a complex mixture of small and large, regular and irregular fields, much of which was rationalised in association with the redevelopment of most farmsteads as regular courtyard plans in the 19th century. The grassland ribbon along the River Stiffkey would have served for fattening bullocks and grazing dairy cattle. Along the network of lanes are isolated farmsteads and (to the north-east) an out-barn. To the west lies the shrunken hamlet of Croxton, with a church, rectory and farm, plus a few scattered cottages, while to the south-east is the hamlet of Common End. Barney Common is a reminder that the hamlet of Barney lies at the north end of the parish. At the lower centre edge of the map is the isolated Hall Farm, which (just off the map) evidences more piecemeal development and has the remains of St Mary's church as a neighbour; this is truly hamlet and shrunken settlement country.

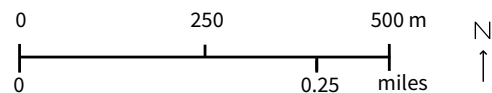




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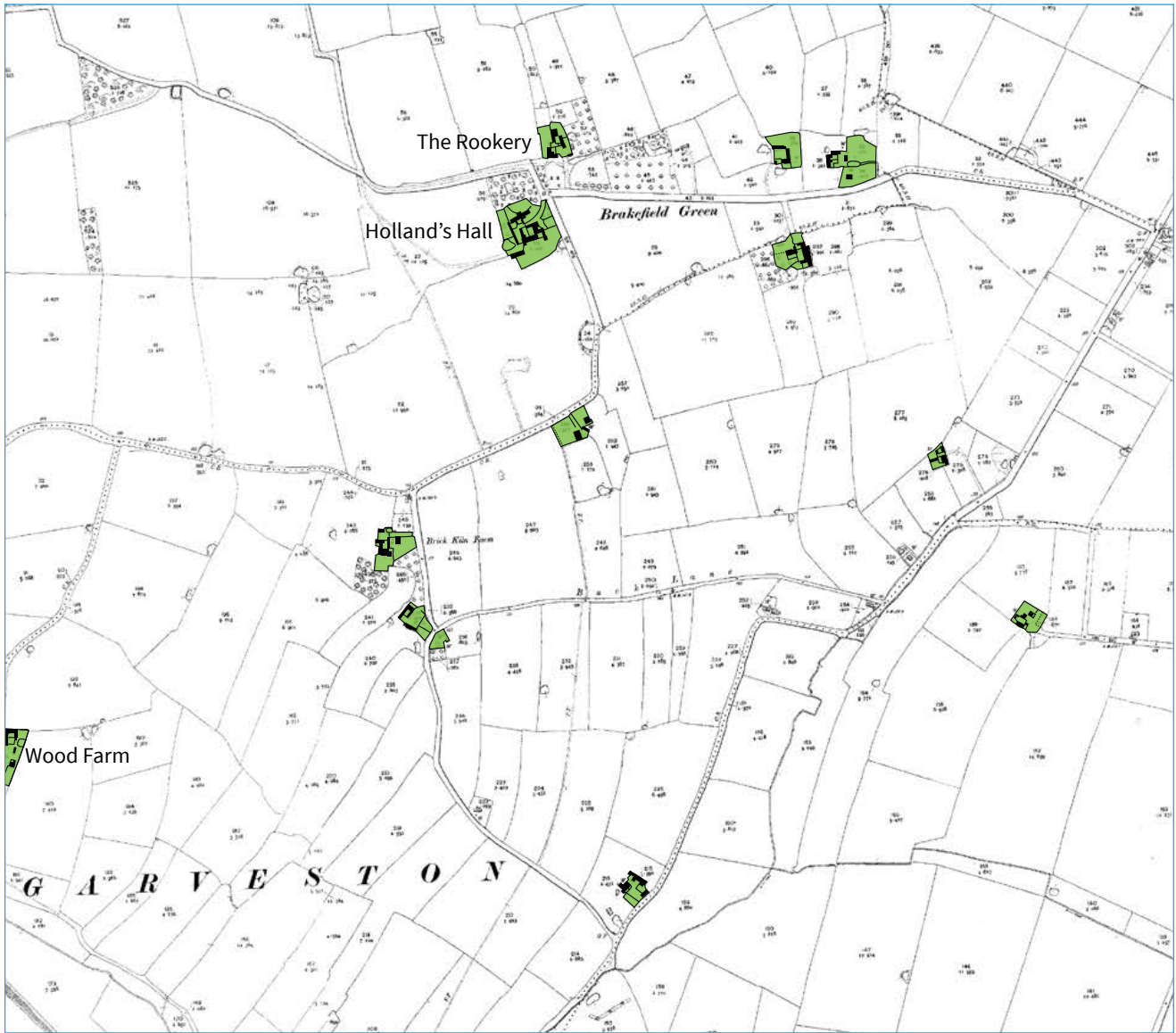


Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.




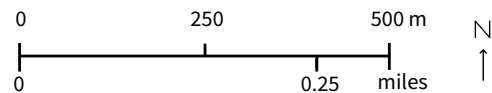
### Swanton Morley (84 Mid Norfolk)

Road names in '-gate' attest to the Norse influence in this part of East Anglia. The settlement pattern itself is a mixture of hamlets and more isolated farms, set within a framework of enclosures with ruler-straight boundaries and earlier enclosed fields with curvilinear boundaries. Farmsteads have mostly been redeveloped as large-scale, regular courtyard multi-yard plans. The church stands slightly detached from these hamlets, while Castle Farm, by the river, is totally isolated. The number of infield ponds and pits is noteworthy; many still survive, although the present field pattern itself has been substantially altered. At either end of Gooseberry Hill, buildings appear to have encroached onto former greens.



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



### Thuxton (78 Central North Norfolk)

A classic landscape of piecemeal enclosure to the south-west of the map, with more regular geometric enclosure to the south-east and north-west. Scattered farmsteads abound, including some around Brakefield Green. Note the mix of regular and loose courtyard plans, the latter evidencing a longer process of piecemeal development. The parish boundaries are noticeably following roads or the edge of former common land.



The 17th-century thatched barn and house in this group near Great Plumstead were built – typically for this area – close to each other with the house facing into the main yard area. A large, brick and tile range of multifunctional buildings was then built in the mid-19th century. Photo © Historic England 29124/008



A regular multi-yard plan near Great Plumstead. The house and the threshing barn closest to it date from the mid- to late 18th century. All the other buildings including the other threshing barn were rebuilt in the early to mid-19th century, when the house was refronted to face its own garden facing away from the working yards. Photo © Historic England 29124/022



This large regular multi-yard arrangement is set in fields that are also regularly laid out and result from the same broad phase of late 18th- and 19th-century improvement. Photo © Historic England 29124/037



This 17th-century group at Morton on the Hill comprises one of the finest examples of Low Countries influence (the early use of brick and of crow-stepped gables) in the region. Photo © Steve Podd



The late 18th-century brickwork to this five-bay barn at Brisely probably disguises an earlier timber-frame. It faces a cattle yard with brick dressing to flint walls. Photo © Bob Edwards



This mid-19th-century field barn for cattle and their hay crop has become the focal point of a large isolated group of later farm buildings. Photo © Bob Edwards



Extensive ranges of cattle buildings added to farmsteads, mostly of mid-19th-century date, as here, are another key characteristic. Photo © Bob Edwards



Mid-19th-century cart shed with unusual use of raked timbers to support projecting roof. Photo © Bob Edwards



The early (17th century and earlier) use of brick is a distinctive feature of this area, as on the left at Sparsholt (early 17th century) and – marked by its crow-stepped gables – at Stibbard (right). Photo © Bob Edwards



Outshots for housing cattle added to a 17th-century barn at Runhall. Photo © Bob Edwards



Decorative use of brick in ventilation slits and quoining is another feature, as at Dunton (left) and East Raynham (right). Photo © Bob Edwards



Small farms remained within villages and besides greens, this group of buildings at Hoe being a rare survival of a house with an attached range of farm buildings including pigsties. Photo © Bob Edwards

## Materials and detail

- In both Central North Norfolk and Mid Norfolk wealthy farms and other buildings of the 18th century are characteristically built in red brick with pantiled (frequently black-glazed) or pegtiled roofs.
- There are some pre-18th century timber-frame houses and barns.
- Some clay lump farm buildings survive from the mid-19th century.
- Flint walls and thatch are concentrated in Central North Norfolk.



# Historic England

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