



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Suffolk Coasts and Heath

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 82



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>).



Early 19th-century barn with central threshing floor at Snape, with later lean-tos for housing cattle. Photo © Bob Edwards.

Front cover: This farmstead near Dunwich was remodelled in the mid-19th century, the house and the barn dating from the 17th century. The group testifies to its development as an arable-based farm, with a cart shed range to the right, a shelter shed next to the barn and a long range of loose boxes and stables. The dairy built onto the barn dates from the 1930s, and signals an increased demand for liquid manure and also conversion of the barn to cattle housing. Photo © Historic England 29152/013

Summary

See the National Farmsteads Character Statement for a short introduction to the headings below, including maps and tables.

This area lies on the North Sea coast between Harwich and Great Yarmouth, forming a band that extends between five and twenty kilometres inland. It is an area of contrasts, with the low coastline and more tranquil estuaries contrasting with a mosaic of arable farmland, heathland and coniferous woodland inland. Of the area, 7% is urban, 11% is woodland, 46% is farmed and 13% is classified as non-agricultural. About 22% of the land area comprises natural and semi-natural habitats. Of the area, 45% falls within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Historic Character

- This landscape has undergone major changes over the centuries, from the very early clearance of woodland to form extensive areas of heath and sheepwalk for sheep grazing, to the current trend towards high-input, irrigated, vegetable crops.
- The area of heath has diminished significantly since the 18th century.
- Medieval and post-medieval arable farming took place mostly within a framework of open fields, enclosed in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- Some new farms were established as part of the enclosure process.
- Because the 'upland' soil is poor (mainly acid sands), farms tended to be large, incorporating several soil types. Many farmsteads were developed as regular courtyards, often with outfarms and fieldbarns on marsh and heath.
- Sheep were grazed on the heaths, cows and bullocks on the marsh.

Significance

- Some early farm buildings survive, but far fewer than on the neighbouring clays. There is a low survival of pre-1750 farmhouses and barns in this area, including some pre-1550 buildings. Early survival is usually closely linked to high-status sites including some 17th-century or earlier, large 'estate' buildings.
- Thatch (longstraw and water reed) was the predominant roofing material for most farm buildings into the 19th century. Surviving examples are important to the local distinctiveness of the Character Area.
- There are some rare surviving field barns and outfarms.

Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a low proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (19.2%, the national average being 32%).
- However, the ever-increasing size of farms and the widespread installation of irrigation, enabling the growing of more specialist vegetable crops, means that ever more traditional buildings are redundant for agricultural purposes.

Historic development

- There is visible evidence of a long history of settlement – marked by a low to medium degree of dispersal – beginning with the prehistoric clearance of woodland which initiated the Sandling heaths, still marked by prehistoric burial mounds and other earthworks. Roman roads still provide the backbone of the transport links in the area.
- This was an area of significant wealth and importance in the Anglo-Saxon period, evidenced by the internationally important Sutton Hoo burials, and the development of early Christian centres in the 7th century.
- The medieval period saw the further development of coastal trade and port towns. Larger and later settlement is largely restricted to the northern and southern extremes of the area – the former fishing and shipbuilding ports of Yarmouth and Lowestoft to the north and the major commercial terminals at Felixstowe and Harwich to the south.
- Wealth generated by trade is evident in many country house estates set back along the major estuaries, for example, Bawdsey Manor (later 19th century).
- Medieval and post-medieval arable farming took place mostly within a framework of open fields, with further intake land on the reclaimed marshes. Enclosure in the 18th and 19th centuries was generally by private agreement, and often involved the establishment of farmsteads on new sites.
- There is a strong contrast between the mixed farming of the inland clays and the Sandling heaths and coastal marshes which, by the 18th century, were divided into large blocks of estate land, often with fieldbarns, for grazing sheep, dairy cows and bullocks. The heaths were mostly let as sheepwalks and by the 19th century, the area became renowned as sheep-breeding country. Farms straddling the varied soils and marshland could undertake mixed farming on a large scale.
- Modern drainage with long straight ditches has replaced the early, sinuous drainage ditches in some marsh areas, often going hand-in-hand with the conversion of marsh grazing to arable. Small ditched pounds, for the containment of stray animals, sometimes survive as landscape features in the marsh.
- The area of heath has diminished significantly since the 18th century, although some attempts to bring heath into arable production during the Napoleonic Wars resulted in failure, and the land has once again reverted to heath, leaving complexes of field boundary ditches and banks fossilised under the heather and bracken. Another significant change in this area is the impact of military airfields, research stations and anti-invasion defences.

Landscape and settlement

- Inland, the pattern of medieval settlement was dominated by small isolated villages, with a scatter of isolated farmsteads and cottages in between.
- Most of the formerly extensive areas of heaths and common arable across the Sandlings and coastal fringe were enclosed for the first time in the 18th to mid-19th centuries, often in association with new farmsteads. These large-scale regular enclosures have seen very little subsequent change and are intermixed with 19th- and 20th-century pine plantations. Areas of older plantation woodland occur within the estates and parklands.
- The more fertile soils of the inland river valleys and claylands had undergone extensive piecemeal enclosure by 1700 and few new farms were created here after 1750. The inland alluvial valleys contain strip-like patterns of irregular, drained meadow enclosure and small-scale fields of medieval to 17th-century date. These early, co-axial fieldscapes survive particularly well around Falkenham

and further north around Wrentham and Blundeston.

- Elm is still one of the most common hedgerow species, but Dutch elm disease has

accentuated the post-war loss of hedges and still rumbles on, leaving a legacy of straggly, dead and dying hedges.

Farmstead and building types

- There are some pre-1550 farmstead buildings, including aisled barns. Pre-1750 buildings, particularly farmhouses and barns (typically of five bays) retain evidence for earlier reused fabric. Early survival is generally high status, contrasting with the lower status but higher level of early survival on the claylands to the west (NCAs 83 and 87).
- Most farmsteads originated as dispersed plans, with a barn and stable but no evident yard as a focal point. Inland clayland farmsteads typically developed as loose courtyard layouts with one or more threshing barn, granary, stabling and cart shed. Estate farmsteads were typically redeveloped in the late 18th to mid-19th centuries as U- or E-plan regular courtyard steadings with large barns, combined cart shed and granary ranges and south-facing cattle yards.
- Field barns and outfarms are concentrated in the Sandlings and coastal fringe areas.



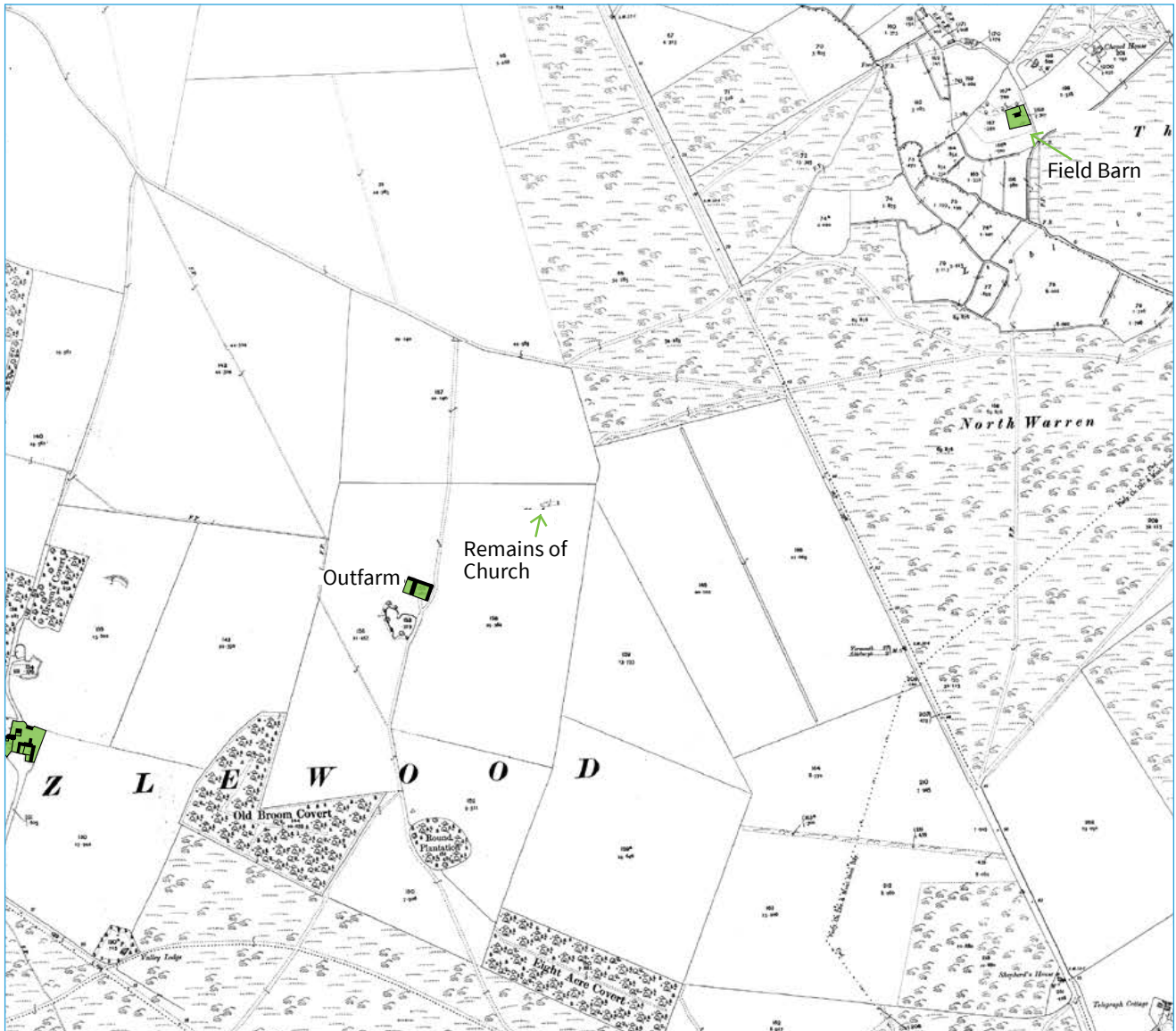
Mid- to late 19th-century housing for dairy cattle flanks the entrance to this farmyard at Capel St Andrew. Photo © Steve Podd



Mid- to late 19th-century housing including a sliding door as introduced onto farms from the 1850s. Photo © Steve Podd



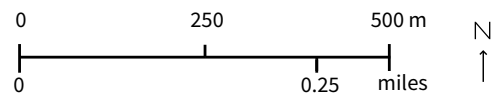
An 18th-century or earlier, three-bay threshing barn, typical of smaller farmsteads in its small scale and use of timber-frame in this area, now in residential use. Photo © Steve Podd



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



Haselwood

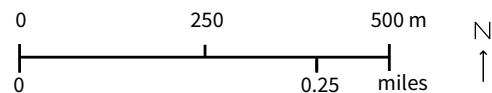
The outfarms and comparative lack of farmsteads points to farming on a large scale. The landscape displays much late enclosure, with a long, ruler-straight road and similar field boundaries imposed upon it, although the map shows that much heathland still remains unenclosed. The wide landscape is broken by occasional plantations and coverts. The site of a church (centre) suggests desertion in the distant past. To the north-east, the small, irregular marsh fields are a reminder that this Character Area comprises a contrasting mixture of marsh and heath.



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



Sudbourne

The broad expanse of grazing marsh to the south, with its tortuously meandering ditches and small parcels, contrasts sharply with the large rectangular fields to the north, where the sandy soil once supported large areas of heathland, small pockets of which still remain. A more regular area of marsh (centre right) may be a rationalisation of an earlier irregular drainage system. The farmsteads were rationalised with regular courtyard layouts, the cattle yards at Crag Farm making a very large-scale multi-yard plan. Carrs (wet woodlands) occupy the wetter marsh areas. Crag pits are a reminder of the underlying geology of this area; crag was applied to the land as a soil improver. Scattered farms with ranges of regular and loose courtyards predominate.



A late 18th-century threshing barn with a gabled porch, its brick construction typifying the rebuilding of farmsteads from the late 18th century in this area. Photo © Steve Podd



A rare surviving small farmstead group, the house (reclad in brick) originating in the 17th century or earlier and facing the road with a three-bay barn facing into a former yard. Photo © Steve Podd



Mid-19th century, brick-built stable and attached hay barn at Butley. Photo © Steve Podd



The use of timber-frame on brick plinths continues into the mid-19th century, the barn and attached buildings here having weatherboarded walls made of machine-sawn softwood. Photo © Steve Podd



Farmstead group at Saxmundham, the cart shed in the foreground facing towards the main entry into the yard. Photo © Steve Podd



Many farmsteads had provision for substantial hay crops taken from meadows on the edge of the marshes. This mid-19th-century brick hay barn is typically open-fronted; many other hay barns may have been lost due to their insubstantial construction. Photo © Steve Podd



Mid-19th-century cart shed with doors and implement shed in the right-hand bay. Photo © Steve Podd

Materials and detail

- Timber-framing predominated until the 18th century, and weatherboarded timber-framing is a typical feature of the area.
- Use of brick and clay pantiles dates from the later 17th century and is now strongly characteristic, being strongly associated with late 18th- and 19th-century rebuilding. Colour-washed render and a significant Dutch influence in the form of shaped gables are highly distinctive.



Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by
Jeremy Lake with Bob Edwards.

First published by English Heritage 2013. This
edition published by Historic England 2020.

Please refer to this document as:
Historic England 2020 Farmstead and Landscape
Statement: Suffolk Coasts and Heath. Swindon:
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Product code: 52196 RRL code: 086/2020

Publication date: February 2020 © Historic England
Design: Historic England and Chantal Freeman, Diva
Arts