



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

# Leicestershire Vales

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 94



# 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>).

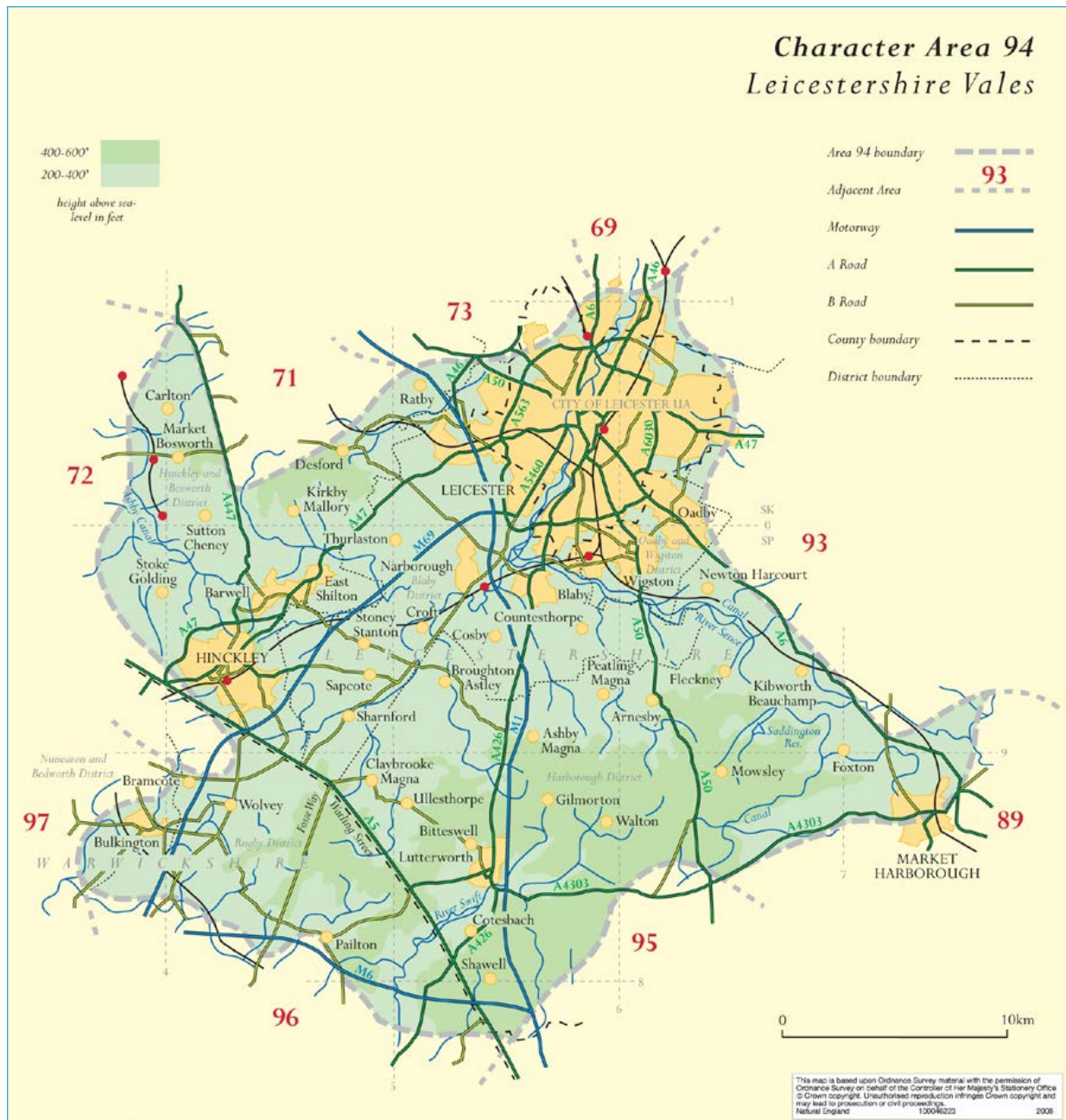


Large farmhouses can mark the first phase in the development of large farms within villages in the 16th to 18th centuries. Large village farm in the centre of the area with linked ranges set around a cobbled yard. This farmhouse is late 17th or early 18th century with fine brick detailing. Within villages smaller, less prestigious farmhouses often retain their timber framing. The outbuildings are of a later date. Photo © Jen Deadman.

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**Front cover:** This farmstead at Cosford near Rugby was rebuilt as a regular courtyard plan with an integral farmhouse facing away from the farmyard in the mid-19th century. The 17th-century, timber-framed barn relates to the emergence of a small number of farmsteads as a result of the shrinkage of the village and the enclosure of its open fields – note the earthworks and ridge and furrow. Most of the parish had been enclosed by the early 18th century. Photo © Historic England 27968/007





This map shows the Leicestershire Vales, 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 Leicestershire Vales extend between the towns of Hinckley, Leicester and Market Harborough, and comprises a series of low-lying clay vales and river valleys. Farmsteads mostly developed within settlements in the medieval period after which the present pattern of isolated farmsteads developed.

## Historic character

- The river valleys, and the Nene terraces in particular, contain a dense and varied array of archaeological evidence representing clearance and settlement from the Neolithic period onwards. Romano-British settlement was equally dense, if not more so, with villas and hamlets associated with the larger centres such as Leicester. The network of Roman roads still influences the character of the area.
- Anglo-Saxon settlements colonised the post-Roman landscapes within the valleys, establishing estates and later townships which would define the landscape of the early medieval period.
- The elaboration of manors and the development of grand houses was a particular feature of the area in the 18th and 19th centuries, reflecting agricultural, industrial and commercial wealth generated both within the county and abroad by the major landowning families of the day. Parkland remains a significant component of the valley landscapes.
- Agricultural production developed in relation to the expanding markets of the industrial towns, and was heavily biased towards livestock for meat and dairy produce, combined with corn production.
- The principal towns developed as market centres from the medieval period, and as stopovers on the Great North Road. They expanded rapidly as industrial centres in the late 18th and 19th centuries, and many farm buildings around Hinckley to the west were adapted into workshops as the local stocking-knitting industry moved from domestic to industrial production.
- Development from the 20th century has been a major factor along the main transport routes, especially in the vicinity of the major urban settlements.

## Significance

- Farmsteads Mapping (as part of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project) has shown that historic farmsteads have medium to high rates of survival outside villages in Warwickshire, with 69% recorded from late 19th-century maps retaining more than half of their historic form.
- Farm buildings from the 18th century and earlier are rare, especially on isolated farmsteads where houses and buildings mostly date from after 1750.

## 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%).
- Very few village-based farmsteads survive in agricultural use. A high proportion of isolated farmsteads remained as the foci of enlarged agricultural holdings over the 20th century, and remain in farming use.

## Historic development

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- Development during the 20th century has been a major factor along the main transport routes, especially in the vicinity of the major urban settlements.

## Landscape and settlement

- Medieval settlement was predominantly nucleated – villages and hamlets – and this has remained the main characteristic of the valleys, lowlands and hills in this area, where the separate villages can be seen clustered around tall church spires. Low densities of isolated farmsteads date from after the enclosure of the open fields that extended across most of the landscape in the medieval period.
- Although significant enclosure had certainly taken place before 1750, many open fields remained and the dominant settlement type was the linear village with farms concentrated within it.
- Enclosure across this area displays a mix of regular and piecemeal patterns, and was usually linked to the conversion of ploughland to pasture. There are areas of pre-18th century irregular piecemeal enclosure, particularly in the valley sides and close to settlements, but extensive enclosure of much of this area was not formalised by parliamentary acts until the late 18th and 19th centuries. Boundary

reorganisation and removal in the 19th and 20th centuries has affected large areas, in combination with the development of large isolated farmsteads.

- There are some areas with well-retained ridge and furrow cultivation strips, and isolated farmsteads sited next to the earthwork remains of shrunken settlement.

- Ancient woodland is scattered and fragmentary, and often relates to the boundaries and margins of medieval and later open field townships. Large, wooded areas are principally those maintained in parkland by the estates.

## Farmstead and building types

Pre-1750 farmhouses and farm buildings are mostly concentrated within villages, or more rarely found associated with isolated sites which developed on a piecemeal basis – most often on or adjoining shrunken medieval settlements.

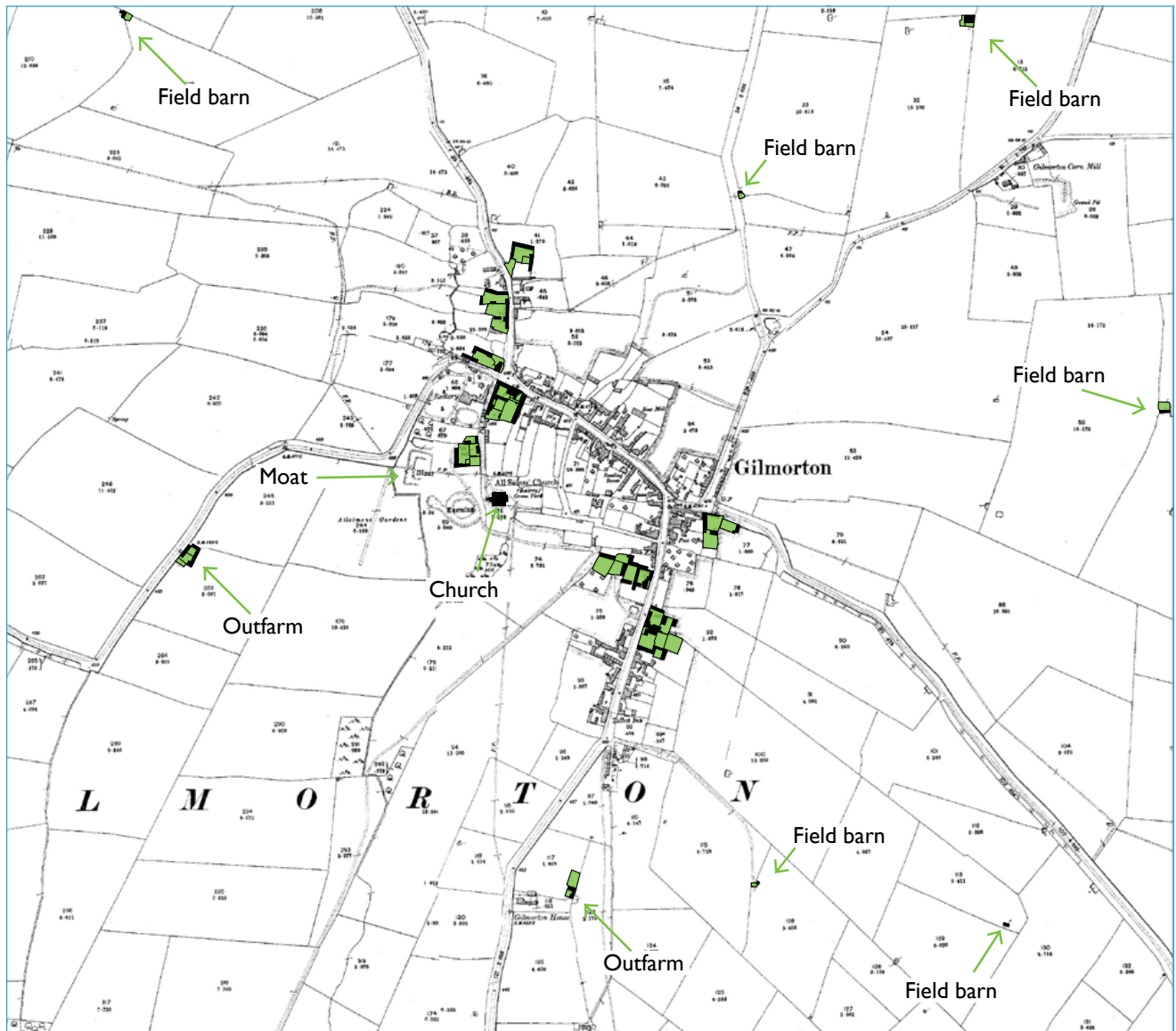
### Farmstead types

Medium to large scale courtyard farmsteads are characteristic of this area and mostly comprise:

- Loose courtyard plans with working buildings to two or more sides, these being the most likely to illustrate piecemeal development
- L-shaped plans with working buildings to three or four sides
- U-shaped, full regular courtyard and multi-yard plans.

### Building types

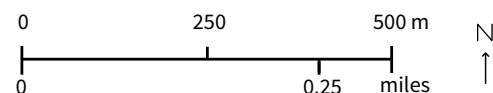
- Early working buildings are mostly three to five-bay threshing barns, as well as some larger and high-status, timber-framed barns (including aisled barns), mostly of 16th- to 18th-century date. Many barns have integral animal housing at one end.
- Some timber-framed buildings have originated as stables and cow houses, these being rare surviving examples of their type.
- Farm buildings from the 19th century often illustrate successive phases of development and an increased emphasis on arable production (combination barns, granaries, cart sheds and stables) and the housing of cattle in shelter sheds and often in single-storey cow houses and loose boxes.
- Field barns are a distinctive feature of the area, and relate to village-based farms in landscapes of piecemeal enclosure. Outfarms, often developing into U-plans and sited next to workers' housing, are concentrated in landscapes of regular enclosure.



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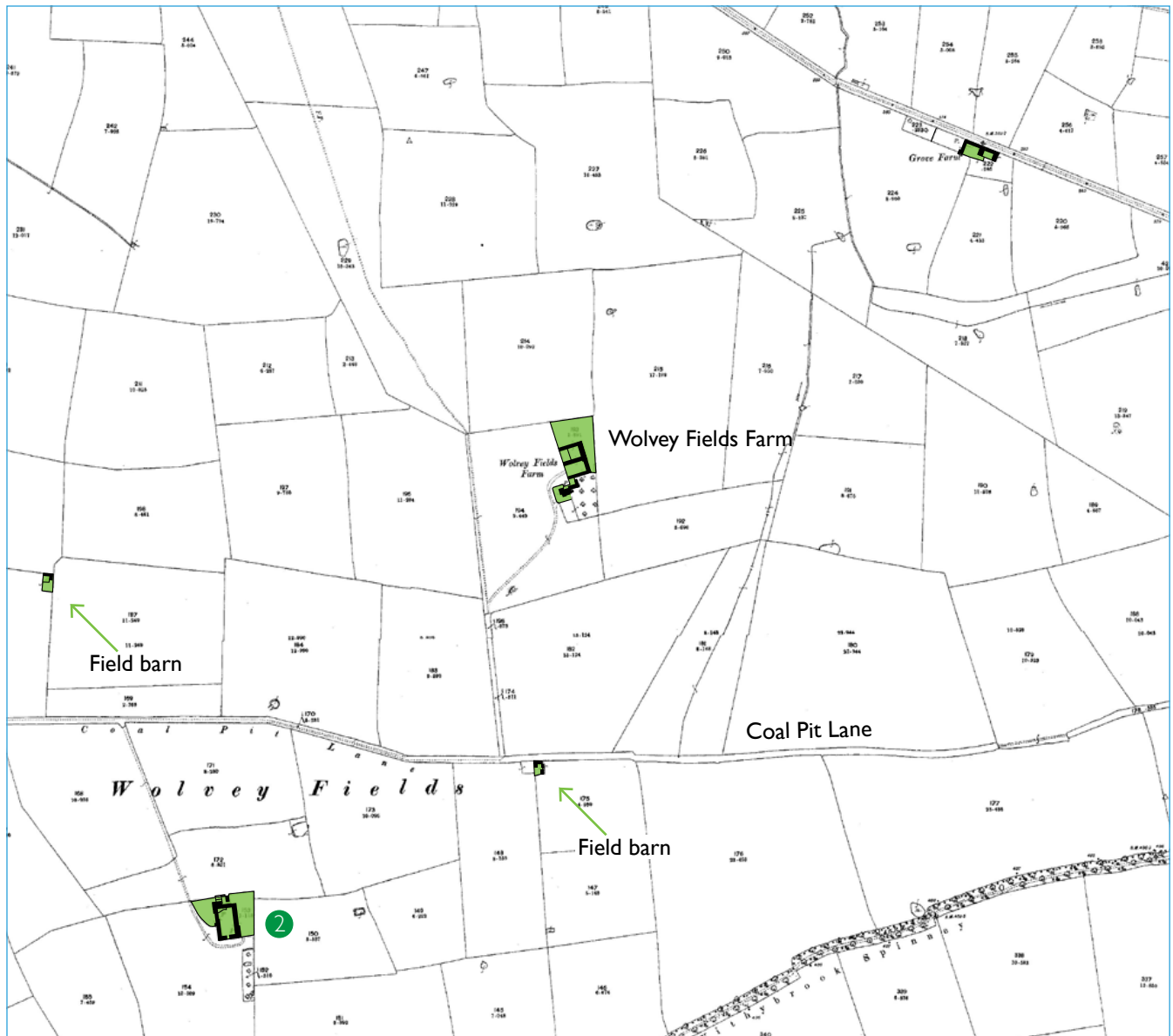
Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



## Gilmorton

The Leicestershire Vales is one of the classic landscapes of central England where nucleated settlement had developed by the 11th century. Villages were surrounded by their open fields which extended across most of the landscape. Enclosure of the open fields was underway before 1750, and many of the boundaries of the fields around Gilmorton retain the curved forms of medieval strips into which the great open fields were subdivided. Most of the farmsteads remained in the village, and developed into large courtyard groups which also required small field barns or outfarms out in the fields. The houses within these villages were subject to a first phase of rebuilding in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, followed by another major phase of enlargement and rebuilding in the mid- to late 18th century and finally the rebuilding of farmstead buildings in the early to mid-19th century. These marked the final phase of enlargement of village-based farmsteads. In contrast, smaller groups which developed along the roads leading to the village, and the largest farms in the post-1950 period, developed on larger, isolated farmsteads.

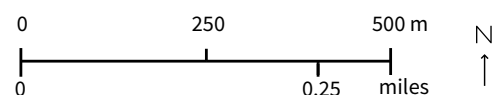




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## Wolvey Fields

The Leicestershire Vales is an area of nucleated settlement where villages were surrounded by their open fields. Enclosure of the open fields was underway before 1750 but many were not enclosed until the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Wolvey Fields reflects the name of one of the former open fields to the village of Wolvey. The fields south of Coal Pit Lane have less regularity in their shape and boundaries than the fields to the north of the lane, suggesting they are either of different phases of enclosure or the area to the north had been reorganised by the late 19th century – although slight curves in some of the boundaries still hint at the earlier pattern of open field strips. Two new, large, regular plan farmsteads have been built within the new enclosures, replacing farmsteads that were once located in the village, Wolvey Fields Farm having an E-plan, the one to the south-west a full courtyard plan.





Large, village-based courtyard farmsteads may require covered driftways to provide access to the yard. This range of mid-19th-century buildings are attached to a large, symmetrically planned mid-18th-century house, testament to the growing wealth of this area. It is clear that almost all earlier buildings were swept away in the mid-19th century, as farms expanded in size and arable farming placed new demands on farmstead infrastructure. Earlier timber-framed cores are most likely to survive in village-based farmsteads. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A large number of farmsteads have remained within villages, but relatively few remain in agricultural use. This is Priors Marston. Photo © Bob Edwards



The great majority of isolated farmsteads date from the 18th and in particular the 19th centuries and are sited either along the road or down their own tracks, the latter being commonly associated with farmsteads in areas of late regular enclosure. This example dates from the later 18th century. Photo © Bob Edwards



Timber-framed buildings most commonly survive within villages, and are associated with those smaller farms that remained in agricultural use into the 20th century. Many, as here, suggest that they have originated as cow houses or stables, or as combination barns with animal housing at one end. Photo © Jen Deadman



A mid-19th century cart shed with the central narrow door opening to steps to a first-floor granary. Photo © Jen Deadman



This L-plan range, comprising a combination barn attached to a row of workers' housing, illustrates the development of large arable-based farms requiring large workforces in the mid-19th century. There is now no trace of the platform for a horse walk that powered threshing machinery in the barn, and to the left is a through-entry to a farmyard. Photo © Jen Deadman



Raised ridge tiles and hatches for throwing out manure indicate a row of loose boxes, attached to a hay barn. Photo © Jen Deadman



Outfarms may illustrate different episodes of development from the late 18th century. This barn served a regular U-plan outfarm on the Shenton estate, and was extended and raised in the mid-19th century from an earlier single-storey structure. It is sited next to five farm workers' cottages. Photo © Jen Deadman



Small-scale field barns for sheltering cattle and sheep were a common feature of the area, but are not capable of reuse. Few remain. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Surviving elements of timber frame and different phases of brick construction are visible in this farmyard facing the village street in Ashby Magna. Photo © Jen Deadman



Earth walling and phases of 19th century brick construction in Foxton. Photo © Jen Deadman

## Materials and detail

- Red brick construction, with limestone and use of render, is typical of the area, both in the older village cores and in the more regimented terraces of the area's industrial towns and villages.
- Timber-framing is largely confined to the smaller farms that remained within villages.



# Historic England

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