



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

# Northamptonshire Uplands

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 95



## 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>).

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**Front cover:** Ironstone lends a distinctive character to the stone masonry of the Northamptonshire Uplands. The 17th-century gentry house to the left is attached to an 18th- or 19th-century working building constructed of cob. This earth walling tradition is another distinctive characteristic of the area, extending into the East Midlands and into the Feldon area of Warwickshire. Photo © Jeremy Lake



# Summary

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

This area consists of a long range of low, clay hills, which extends from the Cotswolds and the Cherwell valley in the south-west to the lowlands of the Leicestershire Vales around Market Harborough. It is a relatively open, rural landscape which is 2% woodland and 4% urban. A tiny fraction of the area (1%) falls within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

## Historic character

- There is a strong pattern of nucleated settlement, with (in Warwickshire) 34.8% of farmsteads in villages and 2.2% in hamlets.
- Low density of farmsteads in the landscape.
- The predominant pattern is of large (44.4%) to very large-scale (33.3%) farmsteads, with smaller-scale farmsteads concentrated in and around the villages.
- Medium to large-scale regular and loose courtyard farmsteads developed on the edge of villages and within fields of piecemeal and regular enclosure with little woodland.
- Loose courtyard plans most commonly developed with working buildings to two or three sides of the yard.
- Regular courtyard plans most commonly incorporate L-shaped ranges with additional buildings to the third side of the yard, and comprise multi-yard plans, full courtyards and U-plans.

## Significance

- Farmsteads Mapping (as part of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project) has shown that survival in Warwickshire is high, with 66% of farmsteads recorded from late 19th-century maps retaining more than half of their historic form.
- The area has a low level of survival of pre-1750 farm buildings, principally barns, although there are many fine, stone-built former farmhouses of 16th- to early 18th-century date.
- Isolated farmsteads with a range of buildings relating to clear field present evidence for shrunken and abandoned settlement.
- Farm buildings built of earth (cob) and thatched agricultural buildings are significant survivals.
- There are coherent, historic farmstead groups within or on the edge of villages.
- Outfarms are now 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 (28.6%, the national average being 32%).
- A relatively high proportion (37%) of farmsteads in this NCA remain in agricultural

use, although farmstead diversification has occurred to a higher degree than is typical of the region (with creation of retail and workshop facilities exceeding expectations) and with higher proportions of residents participating in business either farmstead-based or as directors of substantial companies (42 directorships per hundred farmsteads).

## Historic development

- Much of the area, particularly the clay plateau to the north-east and the Lias uplands of the south-east, was cleared for grazing in the later prehistoric and Roman period and there is scattered evidence for settlement of this period.
- Woodland, either residual or re-established, was mostly cleared by the 11th century.
- As in the Cotswolds plateau to the south, arable farming was gradually yet widely replaced by sheep farming for wool production from the 15th century, accompanied by the abandonment and shrinkage of villages.
- The consolidation of land into the hands of estates is reflected in the elaboration of major country houses, which are a particularly notable feature of the undulating hills and valleys of the southern edge, and 19th-century estate architecture. Smaller estates reflected in fine manor houses and gentry houses, some of medieval date, are another distinctive feature.
- Village enlargement in the 20th century is largely confined to the areas surrounding the larger urban centres – Banbury, Rugby, Daventry – which provide either direct employment, or commuting links to London or the West Midlands.

## Landscape and settlement

- The predominant pattern of nucleated settlement had developed by the 11th century. Open fields extended over most of the farmland in the medieval period. The area had been substantially cleared of woodland by this period, and remains largely unwooded except to the south.
- Tenant and freehold graziers tended to maintain or improve village farmsteads, this being reflected in the high numbers of farmhouses and some barns of the pre-1750 period. Many historic houses within the villages originated as farmhouses, changing their function as new steadings were built in the newly enclosed fields.
- Earthworks from former medieval villages and shrunken ends of settlements are a common characteristic of the area, together with nationally important survival of ridge and furrow reflecting the former extent of open field arable concentrated at the foot of dales and in areas of long-standing pasture.

Isolated farmsteads can relate to:

- shrunken medieval settlements.
- post-medieval piecemeal enclosure generally defined by thick, mature and woody hedgerows (for example, around Charwelton Hill to the east of Banbury and in the Ironstone Hills to either side of the A14,

around Cold Ashby to the east and Holdenby to the south).

- areas of large-scale regular enclosure of the 18th and 19th centuries, concentrated east of the River Chelmer, within the centre of the Ironstone Hills (either side of the A428) and across the northern part of the clay plateau.
- Post-1950 boundary loss concentrated across the undulating hills south of Daventry, and combined with holding reorganised around new roads across the Brampton Ironstone Hills, to the north of Northampton, and along the M40 corridor south of Banbury.

## Farmstead and building types

The area has a low level of survival of pre-1750 farm buildings, principally barns, although there are many fine, stone-built former farmhouses of 16th- to early 18th-century date

### Farmstead types

- The dominant pattern is of medium to large-scale loose and regular courtyard plans, the latter mostly comprising full courtyard, multi-yard and U-plan steadings. There are also significant numbers incorporating L-plan ranges with additional buildings to the third or (more rarely) fourth sides of the yard.
- Loose courtyards mostly comprise steadings with working buildings to two or three sides of the yard.

### Building types

- Threshing barns are often attached to the farmhouse. Some barns incorporate animal housing at one end.
- Small barns (three to four bays) often survive in villages.



Large farmsteads, served by isolated field barns and outfarms, are a distinctive feature of the open, arable farming landscapes of this area. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Buildings of smaller-scale farmsteads rarely survive in this area. This late 17th- or early 18th-century house is attached to a small, thatched threshing barn in the centre of the village. Photo © Jeremy Lake



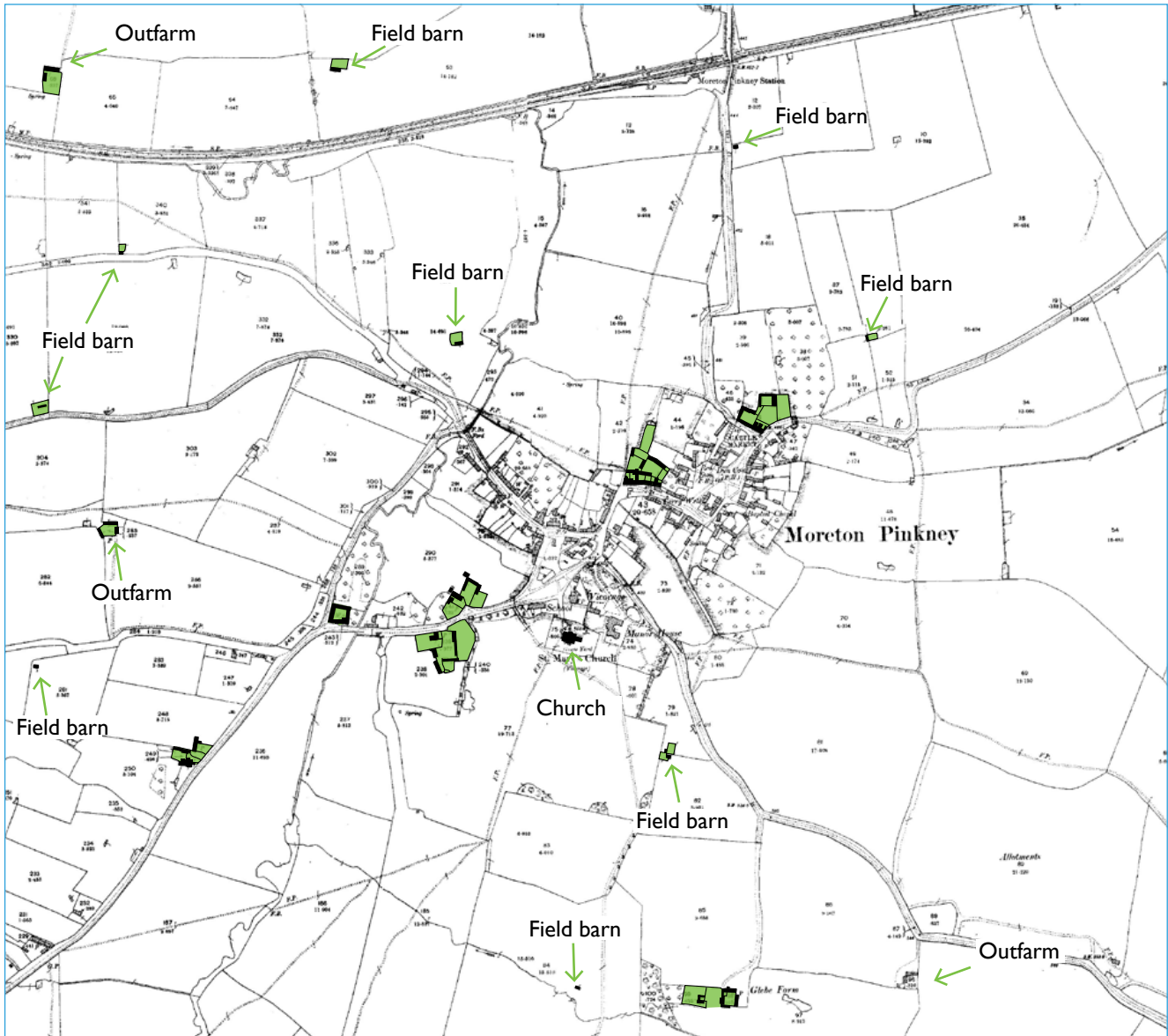
Many village-based farmsteads, now mostly in residential use, make a positive contribution to the character of settlements in this area. The buildings are predominantly 19th century, with some earlier barns, whilst the character of many of the houses dates from rebuilding in the late 16th and 17th centuries – as in the Cotswolds to the south. Photos © Jeremy Lake




Many substantial farmsteads, successively rebuilt, were sited next the fine, late 16th- and 17th- century houses of the gentry who drove the agricultural development of much of this area. Here are the gate piers to a 17th-century house, facing away from the working buildings accessed from the road. Photo © Jeremy Lake

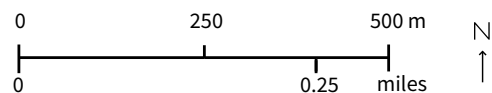
Smaller farmsteads of loose courtyard form developed in areas of medium to small-scale, piecemeal enclosure, close to villages. Photo © Jeremy Lake





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.



## Moreton Pinkney

Nucleated settlement is predominant across this Character Area. Despite the enclosure of the former open fields that surrounded the village, most of the farmsteads remained within the village. The larger farms, having multi-yard plans, are all found on the edges of the settlement. Smaller farms, most likely to have been long detached from agriculture, survived within the village at the end of the 19th century but are difficult to identify. The fields around the village are generally of medium scale and are irregular in shape, indicative of piecemeal enclosure. The shape and boundaries of some fields to the north-west retain the outlines of medieval cultivation strips: these fields contain numerous field barns. In contrast, the fields to the south have been reorganised and enlarged over time.





Large, regular plan farmsteads, some with multiple cattle yards, also continued to be built on the edge of villages into the late 19th century. Brick, as seen here, was commonly intermixed with stone in the northern part of this area. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A large, 17th-century threshing barn within a gentry farmstead. It is sited in fields that were enclosed by this period, on the edge of a village in the south of the area. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A five-bay, 18th-century threshing barn, typical of this area, within a village. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Many farmsteads were built with cattle sheds facing into yards with wide, arched openings, as seen here. These strongly resemble the hemmels seen in those areas of Northumberland where large-scale arable farming also developed. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Outfarms, with threshing barns and walled cattle yards, were built to serve the large farm holdings that developed across this area. Few remain and most are in poor condition, as they are poorly sited for alternative uses. Photo © Jeremy Lake

## Materials and detail

- Granaries can be found above cart sheds, stables or cow houses.
- There are shelter sheds to cattle yards.
- Field barns and outfarms were a common feature, but are now increasingly rare.
- The main constructional materials, as used from the 16th century, are ironstone, with limestone in the north.
- Some farm buildings and houses are built of cob.
- The roofs are Pantile and plain clay tile.
- There is some survival of thatch on farm buildings.



# Historic England

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