



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Dunsmore and Feldon

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 96

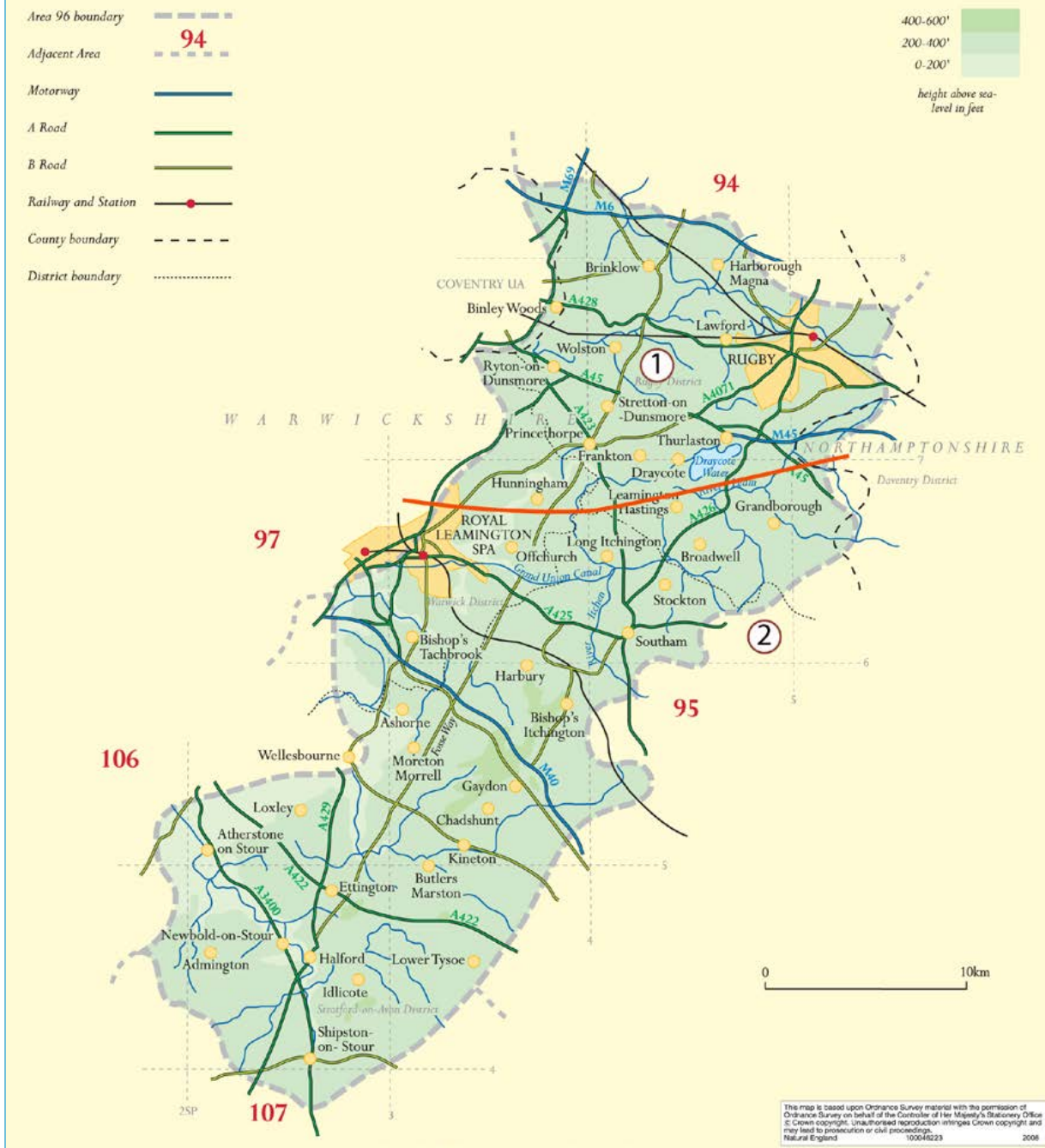


Introduction

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>).

Front cover: Ufton, showing the earthworks of shrunken settlement to the north and west of Town Farm. Archaeological excavations have recovered evidence of settlement desertion in the 14th- and 15th- centuries, and farms continued to be abandoned as large farms such as Town Farm (with its late Georgian house and courtyard arrangement of buildings) emerged. Photo © Historic England 29244/002

Character Area 96 Dunsmore and Feldon



This map shows Dunsmore (1, to north) and Feldon (2), with the numbers of the neighbouring National Character Areas around it. Dunsmore and Feldon is an area of village-based settlement and large estates with a low density of isolated farmsteads. The area contains two sub-areas:

Feldon Feldon is predominantly an open landscape and is sparsely wooded. Medium to large-scale, regular fields result from 18th- and 19th-century parliamentary enclosure or the reorganisation of earlier piecemeal enclosure of the open fields. These are inter-mixed with pockets of surviving piecemeal enclosure on the plateaux, dating from the 14th century onwards, with smaller, more fragmented, field patterns around parklands and to the fringes, where isolated farmsteads and hamlets were established before the 17th century.

Dunsmore Extensive areas of piecemeal enclosure – which were subject to extensive planned enclosure in the 18th and 19th centuries – surround the sandy soils of Dunsmore, with larger, geometric, thorn-hedged fields on the former heathlands. There are large blocks of ancient woodland and game coverts which were planted for fox hunting.

Summary

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

This area occupies most of the eastern part of Warwickshire. The area is bordered by Leamington Spa, Coventry and Rugby in the north. The area is bounded by the Northamptonshire Uplands to the south-east, by Arden to the west and the Cotswolds to the south. Dunsmore is a primarily agricultural landscape with extensive arable and improved pasture, although it retains a heathy character and has extensive woodlands. Feldon is characterised by open pastoral farmland on heavy clay soils. Of the area, 7% is urban, less than 4% is woodland, and 1% is in the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Historic character

- There is a strong pattern of nucleated settlement, with 22% of farmsteads in villages and 1.8% in hamlets.
- The density of farmsteads in the landscape is medium to low, with higher densities in the Dunsmore area to north.
- Large (45.9%) and very large-scale (29.4%) farmsteads are predominant, with large-scale farmsteads concentrated in the Dunsmore area.
- Medium to large-scale loose courtyard plans, mostly with working buildings to three sides of the yard, are predominant. Loose and regular courtyard plans incorporating L-shaped ranges are another key feature of the area, most commonly with an additional working building to the third side of the yard. Regular courtyard multi-yard, L- and U-shaped plans, are concentrated in the Dunsmore sub-area.
- There are five-bay threshing barns, often with shelter sheds making an overall L-plan.
- Stables and granary/cart shed ranges are found in this area.

Significance

- The rate of survival is medium – some loss (10%) around towns and other settlements, but 73% of farmsteads recorded from late 19th century maps retain more than half of their historic footprint.
- For pre-1750 farmstead buildings there is medium to low survival. Those that survive are primarily timber-framed and stone houses and to a lesser extent threshing barns, concentrated in villages. Survival of smaller and coherent groups is 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 (34%, the national average being 32%).
- The Photo Image Project also recorded an above-average percentage (19.2%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.
- This area is characterised by the low proportion of its farmsteads remaining in agricultural use (36%), by the relatively high proportion of farmsteads where offices and workshops have been created and by the high participation of farmstead residents as directors of substantial companies (52 directorships per hundred farmsteads).

Historic development

- This area, dissected by the Fosse Way military road, was extensively settled by the late Iron Age.
- Arable production and a sheep-corn economy was historically concentrated on the sandy soils of the plateaux summits and along the clay loams of the main river valleys. The shrinkage and abandonment of villages between the 14th- and mid16th- centuries was accompanied by the emergence of wealthier farmers and landowners involved in extensive grazing for the wool trade.
- Enclosure with hedgerows accelerated from the late 17th century. It boosted fertility through rotating arable (sown with clover and rye grass) in combination with the fattening of cattle and sheep and, to a lesser extent, dairying. It was linked to the amalgamation of smaller farms and the appearance of large farmsteads in villages, and some in the open landscape. The 18th and 19th centuries enclosure of extensive Dunsmore Heath, an area of inter-commoning, was focused on boosting arable production.
- Major urban areas are Rugby, which greatly expanded as a railway town in the mid- to late 19th century, Dunchurch on the main London to Coventry road and the spa town of Leamington, which developed from the early 19th century. The development of the canals and later railways enabled agricultural produce to be transported to the growing urban area of Birmingham.

Landscape and settlement

- There is a predominantly nucleated settlement pattern with a low density of isolated farmsteads sitting within a landscape of piecemeal and planned enclosure of the open fields, which extended from the villages over large parts of this area.
- Larger farmsteads developed within or on the edge of villages. The domestic architecture of some villages has been influenced by estates. Many historic houses within the villages originated as farmhouses, changing their function as new steadings were built in the newly enclosed fields.
- The earthworks of pre-15th- and 16th- century former villages and shrunken settlements are a common characteristic of the area, together with the ridge and furrow remaining from the formerly extensive open fields which, covered large parts of this area (for example, at Radwell and Tysoe) prior to enclosure.

- The great majority of isolated farmsteads were formed as part of the enclosure of open fields, between the 16th and early 19th centuries, with some on sites of medieval hamlets and villages. There are some earlier isolated farmstead sites in the Feldon valley in the south and the steep scarps to the west.
- Much of the woodland is planned. Ancient woodlands and large country houses set in mature parkland are concentrated to the west.

Farmstead and building types

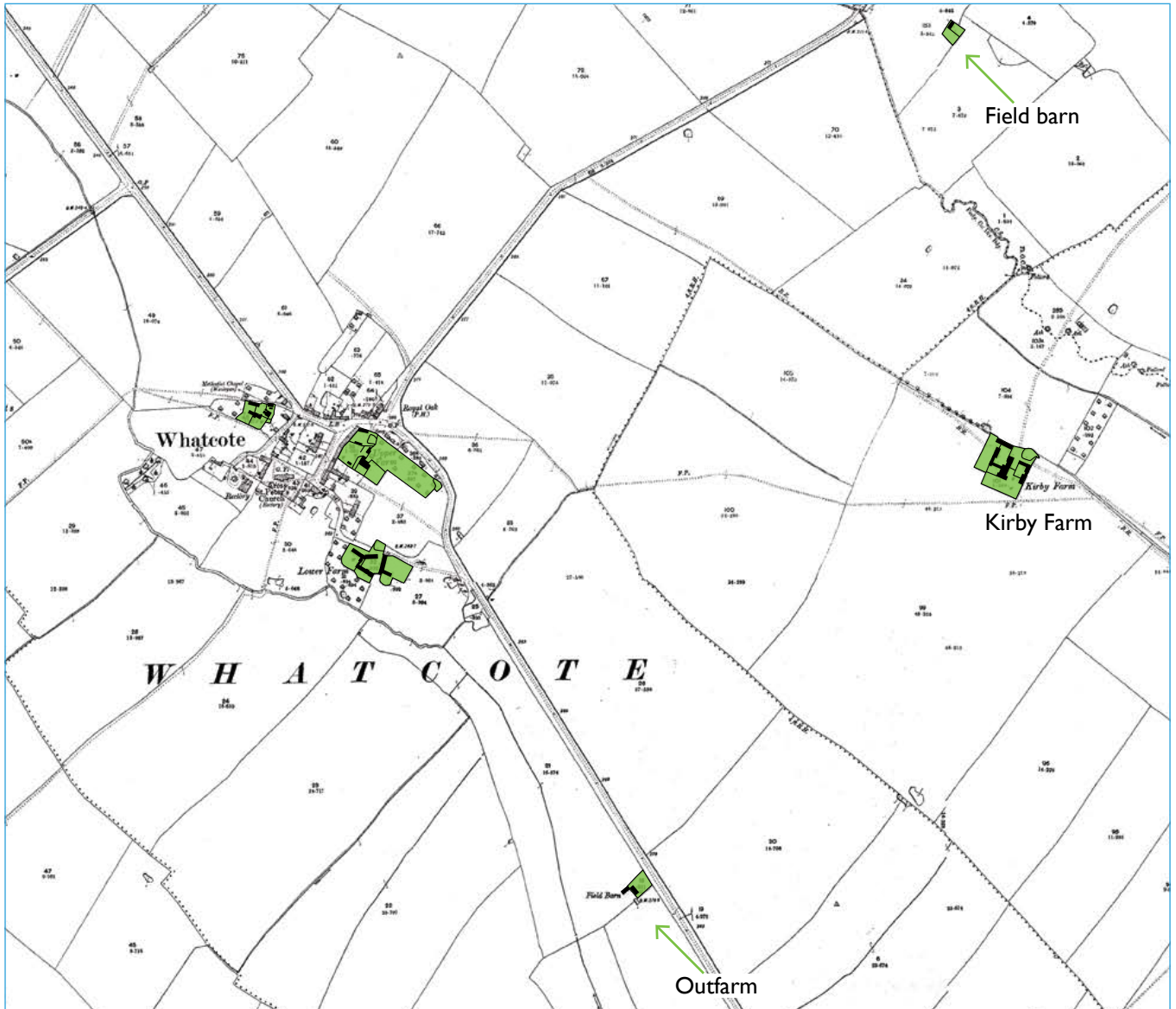
There is medium to low survival of pre-1750 farmstead buildings. Those that survive are primarily timber-framed and stone-built farmhouses and to a lesser extent threshing barns, concentrated in villages. Survival of smaller and coherent groups is rare.

Farmstead types

- Farmsteads are medium to large-scale loose courtyard plans, mostly with working buildings to three sides of the yard. The smallest-scale steadings of this type, with a working building to one side of the yard, are the least common.
- Loose and regular courtyard plans incorporating L-shaped ranges are another key feature of the area, most commonly with an additional working building to the third side of the yard.
- Regular courtyard multi-yard, L- and U-shaped plans are associated with medieval and post-medieval piecemeal enclosure of heath and common in Dunsmore.
- Five-bay threshing barns, often have shelter sheds making an overall L-plan.
- There are stables and granary/cart shed ranges.
- Numbers of small plan types (L-plans with attached house and a few linear plans) in Dunsmore are Higher compared to the Feldon valley (where they are almost completely absent).

Building types

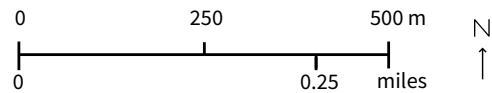
- Threshing barns are generally five bay.
- Stables and granary/cart shed ranges, some of 18th-century or earlier date, testify to the importance of arable farming in this area.
- Field barns and outfarms including some of 18th-century or earlier date (very early by national standards) are a particular feature in the landscape. Field barns, including some purely for cattle, were a distinctive feature of the earlier enclosed landscapes of the Feldon where holdings were more intermixed than in Dunsmore to the north (where larger outfarm groups dominate).



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

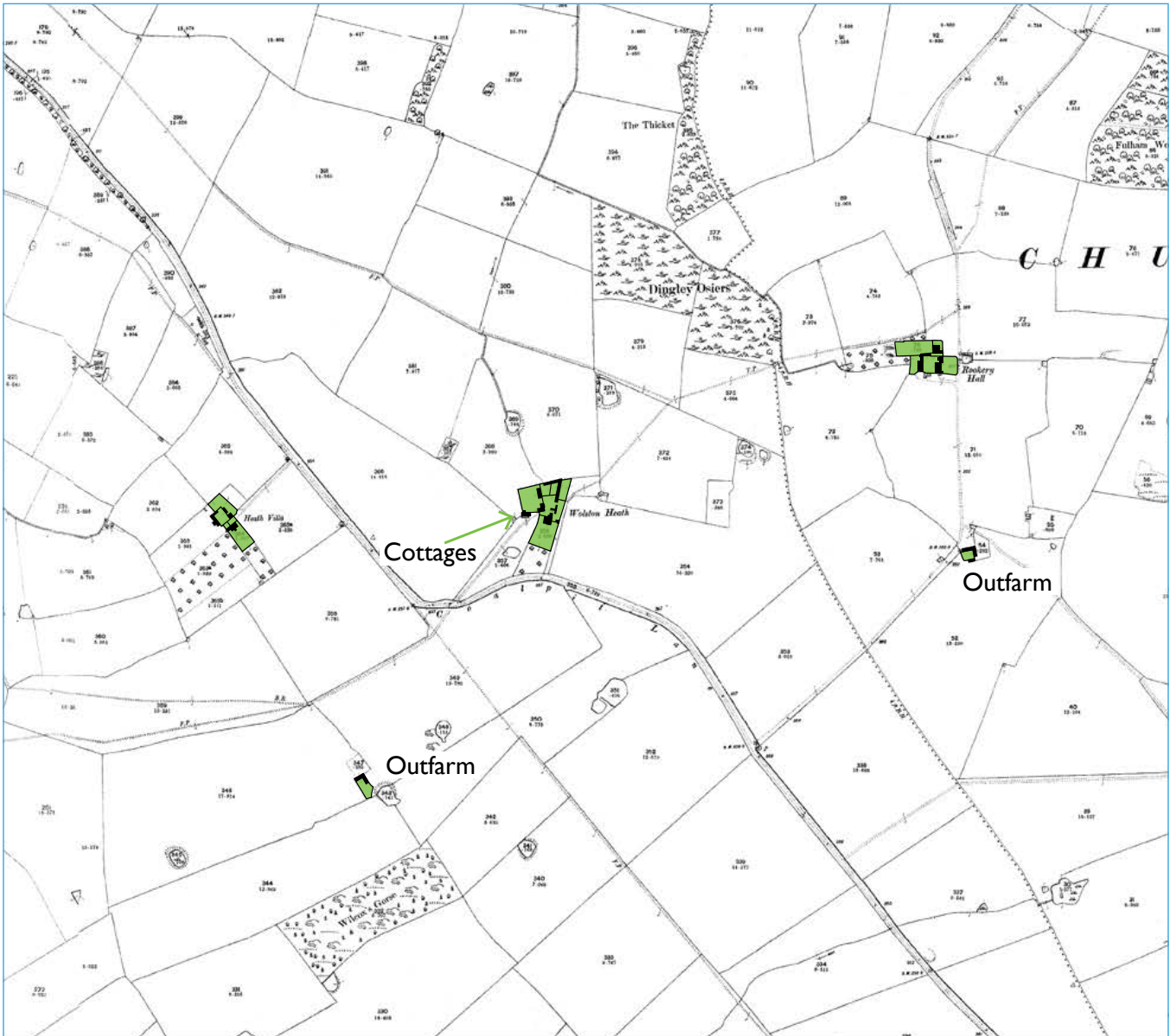


Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.




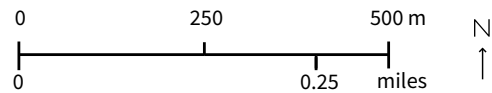
Whatcote

Whatcote is a typical Feldon village, formerly surrounded by the slopes of its open fields which have been subject to piecemeal enclosure, the boundaries following the lines of the medieval strip fields. Most of the medium-scale farmsteads remained within the village after enclosure, although Kirby Farm appears to have been relocated to sit within its enclosed fields. Field barns and outfarms serving some of the more distant fields were a feature of this landscape, although many have been lost since the late 19th century.



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



Wolston Heath

Whilst the Feldon was generally an area of nucleated villages and open arable fields, substantial areas of heathland and common characterised Dunsmore to the north. The irregular fields to the northern part of this area are of an earlier date than the more regular fields of the 18th and 19th centuries. The medium-scale regular courtyard farmsteads within the area lie on the boundary between the two phases of enclosure, with outfarms and field barns serving some of the regular enclosure fields to the south.



This farmstead at Halford was probably established in association with the enclosure of the parish's open fields, described as still open in 1616. The farmhouse was built in about 1800 and the threshing barn was built to the south-west of the complex facing the prevailing wind. Note the thatched cart shed. Photo © Historic England 29178/036



A late 18th- century farmstead established after the enclosure of Harbury in 1779. Photo © Historic England 29414/021



Village-based farmsteads remained as a characteristic feature of this area into the 19th century, but relatively few (concentrated as here in the south of Feldon at Tredington, where the open fields remained into the 19th century) are now still legible in the context of their settlements. Photo © Bob Edwards



Many isolated farmsteads sited in landscapes enclosed in regular fashion from the 18th century were sited down their own straight tracks. Photo © Bob Edwards



Some of the isolated farmsteads in Dunsmore were built close to the sites of shrunken or deserted villages, and developed as the focus of enlarged farm holdings. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Farmsteads and outfarms can be prominently sited in the open landscapes of Dunsmore, as seen here. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Mature and well-treed hedgerows, as seen here to the north of the Feldon area, are a feature of the fields that were enclosed in piecemeal fashion out of the communal fields that surrounded the area's villages in the medieval period. To the foreground are the remnants of medieval ridge and furrow. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Proximity to large urban conurbations enabled the development of exurban landscapes from the middle of the 20th century, with horse paddocks and converted farmsteads of a distinctive suburban character. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Linear farmsteads survive close to extant and historic areas of common land, as here in this 18th-century or earlier range, east of the Fosse Way in Dunsmore. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A linear plan farmstead in a village in the south of the area. Photo © Bob Edwards



Loose courtyard plans are concentrated within villages and in areas that were gradually transformed through piecemeal enclosure. The villages close to the Cotswolds and the Northamptonshire Uplands are the most likely to have retained buildings of 18th-century and earlier date, as here, next to this 17th-century house in the parish of Tysoe. Photo © Ben Morton/ Warwickshire County Council



A loose courtyard plan built of Liassic limestone to the south of the Feldon. The early to mid- 19th-century threshing barn and (to the rear) the threshing barn testify to the importance of arable farming in this area. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A regular plan farmstead in the Feldon where the buildings are interlinked, the threshing or combination barn being the largest in the group, with early 20th-century Dutch barns to the left. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A rare surviving example of a small-scale threshing barn, refronted in the 19th century in a distinctive mix of banded lias and ironstone. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A very rare surviving example – for this area in particular – of a large 16th or 17th-century barn, originally timber-framed, on the edge of a village in the Feldon area. Its scale testifies to the development of a prosperous class of Feldon farmers by this period, and has enabled the building to be adapted and used through the changes of the 19th and 20th centuries. Early barns are concentrated to the south of the area, close to the Cotswolds and the Severn and Avon Vales. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A late example of a threshing barn, built in the mid-19th century and now serving as the dwelling for a working farm. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A regular plan farmstead where the buildings are interlinked, its low profile being typical of the Dunsmore area, where the rebuilding of farmsteads seems to have occurred at a later period in the 19th century than in Feldon. Threshing barns are rare, suggesting that this rebuilding occurred after the introduction of mechanisation. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A combined cart shed and granary range, serving a large, regular plan farmstead in Dunsmore. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Open-fronted shelter sheds are a distinctive feature of this area. Many of these, with low eaves, would have been built to shelter sheep, which were a key part of the agricultural economy across those landscapes with the lightest soils. Photo © Warwickshire County Council



A small field barn for cattle, of a type found in areas, as seen here, of large-scale, regular enclosure where large farms required structures sited away from the main stabling. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Walling in cob is a distinctive feature of the eastern part of the Feldon area, part of a tradition extending eastwards into the Northamptonshire Uplands. Photo © Bob Edwards

Materials and detail

- Timber framing was used for buildings into the 17th century, subject to replacement by stone and brick. Timber frame is now relatively rare in the area.
- Red brick, sometimes with blue brick or ironstone details, and stone is now dominant; lias is concentrated in the central part of area, with red/brown ironstone concentrated near the western fringe of the Northamptonshire Uplands.
- Roofing is mostly in plain clay tiles and Welsh slate.



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Project**, led by English Heritage (now Historic
England), has mapped the historic character,
survival and use of farmsteads across the
whole region which includes this NCA. For
the Summary Report of 2009 see [https://
historicengland.org.uk/images-books/
publications/west-midlands-farmsteads-
landscapes/](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/west-midlands-farmsteads-landscapes/)

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