



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 118



Despite some reorganisation,
the field boundaries around the

Introduction

This document sets out the historic character and significance of traditional farmsteads and buildings in their landscape context, and is one of a series produced for all of England's National Character Areas as produced by Natural England (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>). It complements Historic England's advice and research on farm buildings (<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/caring-for-heritage/rural-heritage/farm-buildings/>), which provides links to the *National Farmsteads Character Statement*, in the same format as this document, guidance on *National Farm Building Types* and a fully-sourced summary in the *Historic Farmsteads: Preliminary Character Statements. Historic Farm Buildings: Extending the Evidence Base* (2009) provided a summary of techniques for developing the evidence base, including the Photo Image Project (referred to in the Summary below) which compared 1980s to recent photographs of listed buildings in order to identify trends in conversion and dereliction.



Isolated medieval farmstead at North End, set in a landscape of medieval and post-medieval field boundaries. The house was rebuilt in the 17th century and has a detached brewhouse, a feature of this area. The barn and cattle date from an early to mid-19th-century rebuilding. Photo © Historic England 29097/003

Front cover: Despite some reorganisation, the field boundaries around the 13th-century manorial farm at Yate Court were mostly formed by the 17th century and relate to the large courtyard farmstead with its 16th-century, six-bay barn and farmhouse (see p 10). This is an area of medieval dispersed settlement and ancient enclosure, many farmsteads having houses and other buildings of 15th- and 16th-century date. Photo © Historic England 29096/051



This map shows the Bristol Avon Valleys and Ridges with the numbers of the neighbouring National Character Areas around it (© Natural England).



Tyntesfield, Wraxall, showing the large Victorian house with its late 19th-century estate yard and model farm complex including a large covered cattle yard at the bottom of the photograph. Photo © Historic England 29081/012

Summary

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

This area is flanked by the Somerset Levels and Moors and the Mendip Hills to the south, the Cotswolds to the east and the Severn and Avon Vales to the west, separating it from the Severn Estuary. It has a complex geology and settlement pattern, strongly influenced by the Avon Valley and Bristol at its centre. Over 21% of the land is urban, 56% is cultivated and 6% is woodland. This Character Area has little 'common character' and has been identified more as a result of 'exclusions' from other Character Areas.

Historic character

- This is an area of mixed settlement, both villages and isolated farmsteads of medieval origins being present and associated with irregular and piecemeal enclosure that was mostly complete by the 17th century.
- The area was also affected by the development of consolidated estates in the late 18th and 19th centuries, resulting in the building of planned farmsteads and the reorganisation of farmland with straight boundaries and survey-planned enclosure.
- The mixed farming economy, with rich meadows and arable land, gave rise to the development of courtyard plan farmsteads from the late 16th century, many of which have early 18th-century and earlier farmhouses and barns.

Significance

- There is a moderate survival of pre-1750 farm buildings in a national context, mostly barns but also including dairies that are mostly attached to houses. Any farmstead groups with barns and other working buildings of 18th-century or earlier date are highly significant in a national context.
- There are some, now rare, examples of surviving cider houses, any with internal mills and presses being particularly significant.
- Intact examples of late 18th- to mid-19th-century planned farmsteads are of increasing rarity.

Present and future issues

- The Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a high proportion in this National Character Area of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (45.2%, the national average being 32%).

Historic development

- The Avon was a major transport corridor from the prehistoric period. There are extensive prehistoric remains of many periods, including crop mark and excavation evidence (from the M5 corridor) for a heavily populated landscape in the Romano-British period, with field systems relating to villas and farmsteads and, to the south, a local economy geared to the supply of food to lead-mining settlements in the Mendips. Roman villas – many of which, it has been postulated, were built on the back of the lead-mining wealth of the region – lay either side of the Avon valley and on the fertile soils north of the Mendip Hills (in the south of the area).
- The area is dominated by the port of Bristol, which expanded rapidly to become England's second largest city from the 12th century – exporting corn and especially wool and cloth, and importing wine and wool from western France. From the 17th century, imports included sugar and tobacco, and exports included gunpowder, lead and copper from local manufactories. Slave trade underpinned major expansion and prosperity in the 18th and early 19th centuries, the latter period seeing renewed efforts to deepen the Avon and remodel and extend the city docks. Later, the city lost transatlantic trade to Liverpool and other ports, Avonmouth taking its place as a major port from the early 20th century.
- Market centres developed from the 12th century at the port of Thornbury and the planned town of Chipping Sodbury. Coal was mined in Kingswood Chase from at least the 13th century, stimulating common-edge settlement, and its development on a large scale from the late 18th century – for supplying Bristol, Bath and other urban markets – resulted in the expansion of settlements such as Radstock, Paulton and Midsomer Norton. Export was facilitated through the completion of Somerset Coal Canal in 1805, linked to the Kennet and Avon Canal at Limpley Stoke. Coalfields became linked by rail to Bristol from 1873. The last pit closed in 1973.
- From the late 18th century, Clevedon, to the south, developed on a modest scale as a seaside resort.
- Many parks and mansions developed in the area from the medieval period. Smaller gentry houses are a distinctive feature.

Landscape and settlement

- A strong pattern of village-based settlement was evident by the late 11th century and was associated with strong control imposed by landowners, and which persisted even in the mining areas. Settlements are clustered around scarp-foot springs in limestone areas, isolated farmsteads on the ridgetops mostly dating from 18th- and 19th-century enclosures and of earlier date in sheltered valleys. Villages in the clay vales are intermixed with a medium degree of dispersed settlement comprising scattered farmsteads and hamlets, including many of medieval or earlier origin. In the former mining areas, the settlements are interspersed with rows of cottages and isolated houses strung out along the minor roads, and common-edge and squatter settlement such as Coalpit Heath.
- The predominant patterns are of piecemeal enclosure from open fields and common, intermixed with woodland. These range from small and irregular pre-14th-century fields to areas which retain patterns of post-medieval enclosure such as in the valleys south and east of Bristol – the fields in dairying areas in particular becoming smaller in the post-medieval period. There are some areas of large-scale and regular enclosure, especially to the downland on the limestone ridges. There was much post-1940 boundary loss.

- Long standing areas of grassland and unimproved pasture (concentrated on wetter valley bottoms and dry downland slopes) are

both rich in species and in the surviving visible evidence of earlier cultivation and settlement (ridge and furrow and village earthworks).

Farmstead and building types

The area has a moderate concentration in a national context of pre-1750 farmstead buildings, including some barns of medieval (mostly ecclesiastical) estates and recorded longhouses of 15th- to mid-17th-century date.

Farmstead types

- Courtyard plan farmsteads are dominant. Loose courtyard farmsteads mostly have working buildings to three or four sides of the yard. Regular courtyard plans, the largest with multiple yards, are typically associated with reorganised regular or large-scale enclosure. There are some isolated dispersed plan farmsteads, evidently of early origin and at the meeting point of routes and tracks.

Building types


- Stone-built threshing barns are common, typically of five bays with a central threshing floor but including some larger barns.
- There are many combination barns, typically with a cow house, stabling and first-floor

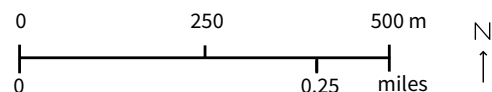
granary, some of early date (18th century or earlier).

- Single-storey cow houses and shelter sheds to cattle yards are a common feature, occasionally dating from the 18th century but mostly of 19th-century date.
- There are examples of late 19th-century, wider-span buildings for cattle, effectively providing small, covered yards.
- Small pigsty ranges are found, being associated with dairying on farms, but are increasingly uncommon.
- Cider houses and dairies with cheese lofts over can be found associated with some farmhouses, often linked to the house.
- There are some malshouses, again attached to other buildings or a farmhouse.
- There are some 19th-century outfarms and field barns.



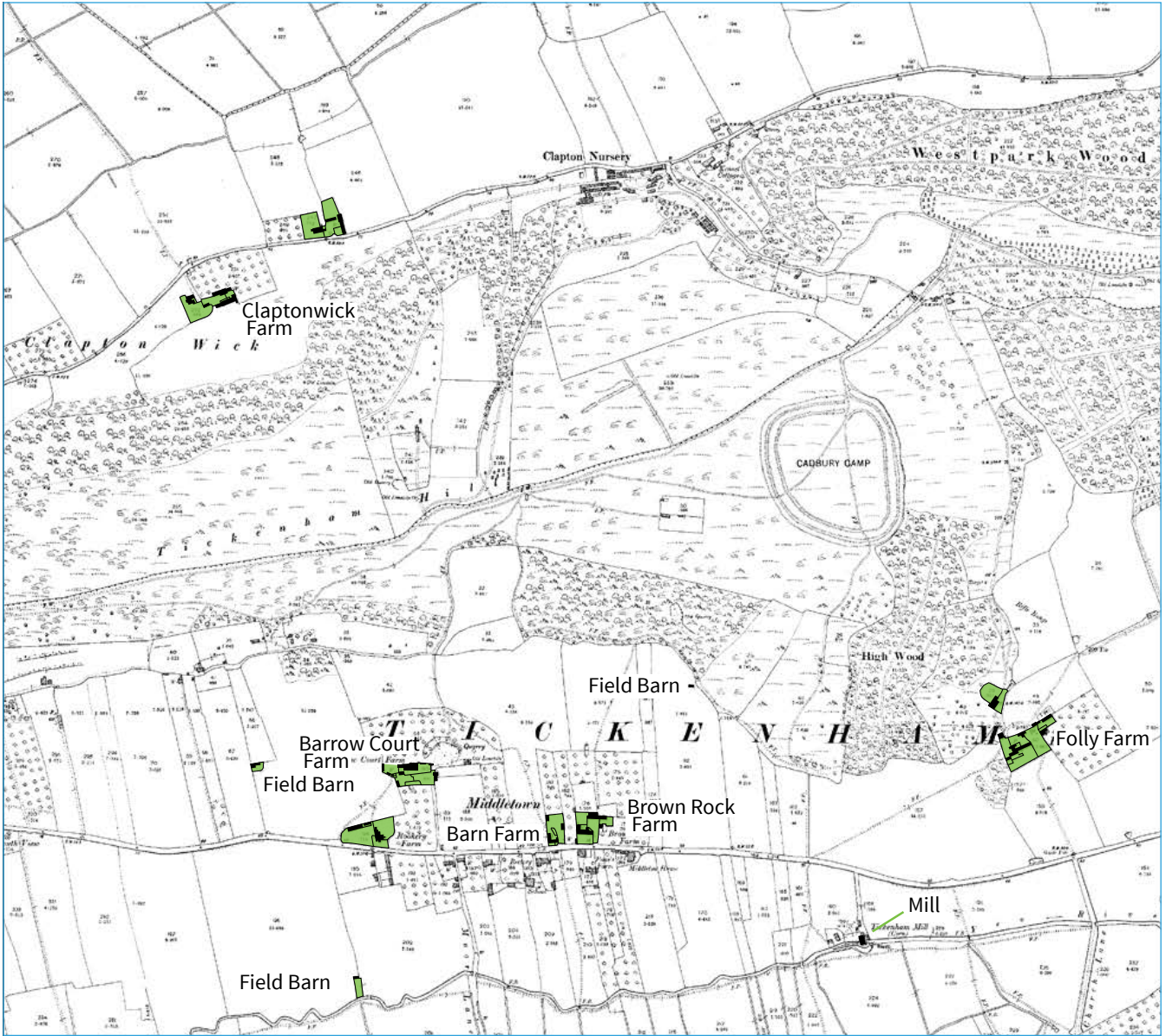
Maps are based on 2nd edition 25" Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England. © Crown Copyright [and database rights] 2020. OS 100024900

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




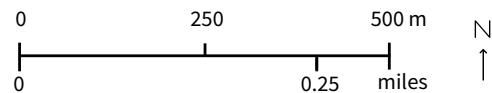
Chew Stoke

The landscape around Chew Stoke is characterised by the long narrow fields representing the piecemeal enclosure of former arable strips of open fields particularly evident to the east of the village. By the end of the 19th century, a number of farmsteads remained within the core of the village which was surrounded by orchards. Some of these farms, including Yew Tree Farm, retain farmhouses of 15th- to 17th-century date. Within this broad pattern of enclosed strips there are areas around North Hill Farm and Paganhill Hill where former strips are not evident. The 15th-century date of North Hill Farmhouse suggests that this farm may have been a ring-fenced farm from an early period and this may be the case at Paganhill Farm where the house dates from the 17th century.



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.



Failand Ridge, Tickenham

Tickenham is a row village strung along a road along the south side of the Failand Ridge, which separates the Gordano Valley from the Somerset Levels: Cadbury Fort is an Iron Age hillfort. The higher ground of the ridge is largely wooded or rough grazing whilst to the north and south, farmsteads lie along the roads that skirt the ridge between the high ground and the flat, low-lying levels to the north and south. On the south side of the ridge, Middletown is a hamlet with a cluster of farmsteads and cottages with long, narrow plots stretching back from the road. Other than Barrow Court Farm, where the house dates from the 15th century, most of the farmhouses and buildings are of 18th- or 19th-century date. The barn to the north of Folly Farm, to the east, is dated 1731. To the north of the ridge there is a hint of former open field strips opposite Clacton Nursery with, in the north-west corner of the map, the straight boundaries of late enclosures on the levels.



The farmstead next to the church at Chew Stoke has a farmhouse built in about 1600, with additions and farm buildings built in 1887. These are late additions in traditional style. Photo © Historic England 29089/022



Yate Court is a medium-scale courtyard-plan farmstead with a five-bay barn, stabling and a long range of cattle shelter sheds, reflecting the importance of cattle on many farms in this area. The site dates from at least the 13th century. The medieval house stands close to an 18th-century or possibly earlier stable with steps to an upper-floor granary and detached bakehouse/brewhouse. The 16th-century barn to the bottom left is attached to an L-plan, 19th-century cattle yard. Photo © Historic England 29096/045



An early 19th-century farmhouse and part-ruinous five-bay threshing barn. Photo © Bob Edwards



A small number of linear plans can be found in this area, typically with cattle housing attached to the farmhouse. This example is of late 18th- or early 19th-century date. Photo © Bob Edwards



A loose courtyard group with late 18th- or early 19th-century buildings to two sides of the yard – a lofted cow house and a smaller building which may provide some stabling and storage. Photo © Bob Edwards



This small farmstead in Barrow Gurney has a dispersed cluster of small buildings relating to its early 18th-century house with its attached dairy. Note the stable with a possible granary over – a hoist arm protrudes from above the upper door and cattle housing. Photo © Bob Edwards



A small, mid-19th-century loose courtyard group with two small shelter sheds for cattle and a lofted cow house. Photo © Bob Edwards



A single-storey, mid-19th-century cow house for housing dairy cattle. Photo © Bob Edwards



A small farmstead with its buildings set in a long row. These include an unusually small barn flanked by a shelter shed for cattle attached to a hay barn (to the left) and a granary over stables to the right. Photo © Bob Edwards



This large farmstead has a covered entrance into the yard with the 18th-century or earlier threshing barn set at right angles to the road. The end bay of the barn at least has a hayloft at upper floor level. Single-storey cattle housing backs onto the road. Photo © Bob Edwards



This combination barn range has a threshing barn of probably three bays with a lofted stable to the right. Photo © Bob Edwards



A small field barn providing housing for cattle or sheep with a hay loft over. Photo © Bob Edwards



A two-storey stable with a hayloft over the stables. Nest boxes for pigeons have been built into the upper part of the gable. Photo © Bob Edwards

Materials and detail

- An extremely varied use of materials was enabled by water transport and, later, tramways and rail. Remnants of 17th-century and earlier timber frame are concentrated in Bristol and other towns.
- Cotswolds stone was used for churches and other high status buildings from the medieval period, and was commonly used from at least the 16th century for farmhouses and other traditional buildings to the north.
- Liassic limestone is a feature to the west, a continuation of the Vale of Gloucester, also Pennant sandstone from the Bristol area and Carboniferous limestone from Avon, and slag blocks from metal works north of Bristol are also a feature.
- Brick was used from the 16th century for high-status buildings and was used commonly from the later 18th century in most of the area.
- Thin render coats and limewash were commonly applied to walls.
- There was some use of Pennant and Cotswold stone slates; the predominant roofing material is pantile to the south and plain tile to the north, with some remnants of thatch.



Historic England

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