



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Pevensey Levels

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 124

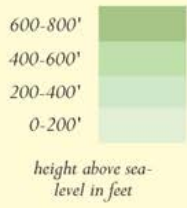


Introduction

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: A farmstead located on the edge of the reclaimed marshland. Typically, this farmstead is dominated by its large sheds which have largely replaced or obscured its traditional working buildings. Photo © Bob Edwards

Character Area 124 Pevensey Levels



Area 124 boundary	
Adjacent Area	
A Road	
B Road	
Railway and Station	
District boundary	



This map shows the Pevensey Levels, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

The key sub-areas are:

1. South-west marshland fringe
2. North-east marshland

Summary

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

The Pevensey Levels are the largest tract of wetland in East Sussex, lying between Bexhill and Eastbourne. The land consists of low-lying, reclaimed wetland, mainly under pasture with some arable. It is an open landscape, with only 0.5% woodland cover, whilst 21% is defined as urban and 37% comprises Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Historic character

- This area has a low density of isolated farmsteads set within a distinctive pattern of fields reclaimed from marshland since the Saxon period, the earlier sites being concentrated on the eastern side of the area and including some shrunken villages and moated sites.
- The farmsteads are mostly small to medium-scale courtyard plans, usually rebuilt in the 19th century.

Significance

- The farmsteads of the Pevensey Levels have experienced lower levels of change than the other coastal marshland areas in the south-east of England (Romney Marsh and the Thames Estuary). Of recorded farmsteads, 73% retain some farmstead character, whilst 51% retain more than 50% of their historic form, about average for the region, based on recorded farmsteads.
- There is a low survival of pre-1700 farm buildings in this area: 6.3% of farmsteads have a pre-1700 farmhouse – usually timber-framed and often remodelled in brick and cobble. There is a slightly higher percentage of farms with a listed 18th-century farmhouse (7.6%).

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%).

Historic development

- Reclamation of the marshes from the Saxon period was principally aimed at creating grazing land, mainly for the cattle of communities surrounding the Levels. Although the loamy soils offer high quality agricultural land, there has not been the increase in arable over pasture that has been seen in Romney Marsh. Arable is generally limited to small areas of higher ground.
- Protection from the sea was offered by some natural protection, and the construction of sea defences in the 13th century and the Crooked Ditch in the 14th century.
- Inundation by the sea from the 14th century caused extensive flooding and the abandonment of much of the north-east of the area, leaving several deserted villages and abandoned moated sites.
- Further attempts to keep the sea at bay were made in the 16th century. Concrete defences were constructed in the early 19th century and mid-20th century.

Landscape and settlement

- There is low density of farmsteads in an open landscape. Settlement in this area was predominantly dispersed, with a few small nucleated villages some of which were deserted in the 14th to 16th centuries. These deserted sites include both village sites and moated farmsteads.
- reflect the piecemeal reclamation (or 'inning') of the area although it is known that some monastic institutions such as Battle Abbey were also involved in the reclamation. The relative permanence of the ditches and the continued pastoral use of much of the area means that this landscape is a remarkable survival of a medieval field system in a lowland context.

North-eastern marshland

- This is an area of very few farmsteads in a flat marshland landscape. Within the heart of the area farmsteads of medieval origin are usually located on small areas of slightly higher ground.
- Few of the fields of the Levels are hedged; most are bounded by drainage ditches resulting in a very open landscape.
- The fields of the area are predominantly small and many are highly irregular, which may

South Western marshland fringe

- Farmsteads are predominantly found on the west side of the area where the land rises above the level of the marshland with some areas of significantly higher ground.
- Hedges and fences are mainly seen alongside roads and tracks. The fields were largely created through piecemeal enclosure.

Farmstead and building types

This is an area with an average density of surviving farmsteads but few retain buildings pre-dating 1800. Many of the sites of the lost farmsteads have been subsumed within the urban development of Eastbourne and Langney.

Farmstead types

- As with much of south-east England, loose courtyard plans, typically with one or two detached working farm buildings standing around a yard area, are the most common plan form.
- Small, L-plan and U-plan arrangements with a barn and a cattle shelter shed attached at right angles were found on some farmsteads and outfarms.
- There are few large, regular courtyard plan farmsteads but there are a small number of regular 'multi-yard' plans which reflect the management of stock.
- A small number of dispersed plans with little or no evidence for planning in their arrangement are found in the area.

Building types


- Barns are not a strong feature of the marshland landscape, given the predominance of cattle in the farming of the area. A few timber-framed and solid-walled barns are found in the area, especially on farmsteads to the west of the area which had access to arable land on the slightly higher ground of the west of the Levels.
- Cattle buildings consist of open-fronted shelter sheds and enclosed, single-storey cow houses, typically of 19th-century date.
- Outfarms and field barns were once a common feature but many have been lost from the landscape. Single buildings with an attached yard were typical but also there were also some small L- and U-plans. The surviving field barns are an important remnant of a once widespread building type.
- There are a small number of oast houses within the Character Area.

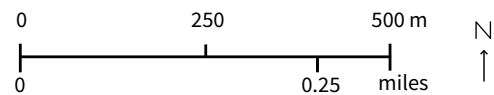


View towards farmstead with a large mid-late 18th century house at Hankham. Photo © Bob Edwards



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.



Hankham

The Pevensey Levels Character Area divides into two distinct areas: the flat, reclaimed marshland of the north-eastern part of the area and slightly higher ground to the south-west. This map extract covers the boundary between these two zones. The small, irregular fields of the marshland, largely bounded by drainage ditches, contrast with the larger fields bounded by hedgerows on the higher ground. Farmsteads were concentrated on the higher ground to the south-west and around the edge of the marsh, with few located within the marshes. The larger farms of the area consist of regular multi-yard plans as at Montague, which has a fine group of 18th century buildings, but the majority of farmsteads were of smaller, loose courtyard or dispersed plan types or regular L-plans.



The larger, usually higher-status farmsteads in the area were often of regular multi-yard plan, reflecting the combination of arable farming and stock management. Photo © Bob Edwards



A regular L-plan consisting of a threshing barn with an attached, single-storey range which was probably a shelter shed for cattle. Photo © Bob Edwards



A small, dispersed plan farmstead with its buildings across the road from the farmhouse. Photo © Bob Edwards



A rare survival of an 18th-century, brick-built barn with a hipped roof. The single door possibly indicates the presence of animal housing in one end. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large threshing barn reflecting the extent of arable on the higher ground to the south-west of the area. Photo © Bob Edwards



A five-bay, 19th-century barn built of cobble with brick dressings and having a half-hipped slate roof. Photo © Bob Edwards



A small stable with a granary above. Photo © Bob Edwards



An unusual mansard type roof on this possibly three-storey 19th-century building. Photo © Bob Edwards



Hops were grown in the area, particularly on the higher ground to the south west, and there are several surviving oast houses. Photo © Bob Edwards



Outfarms and field barns were a common feature of the landscape in both the marshes and on the higher ground. Many have been lost or are ruinous as is the case of this field barn. Photo © Bob Edwards

Materials and details

- Timber-framing was typically used for early houses and farm buildings with the farm buildings being clad in weatherboarding.
- Cobbles and brick are the characteristic materials seen in surviving farm buildings.
- Plain clay tile is the typical roofing material for farmhouses and farm buildings.



Historic England

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