



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

South Coast Plain

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 126



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>).



This map shows the South Coast Plain, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

Front cover: A large, loose courtyard farmstead lying on the low, flat coastal plain surrounded by large, arable fields with few hedgerows. Photo © Bob Edwards

Summary

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

The South Coast Plain lies between the dip slope of the South Downs and the waters of English Channel, Solent and part of Southampton Water. The coastline includes several major inlets such as Chichester and Langstone Harbours which have particularly distinctive local landscapes. Of the Character Area, 38% is defined as urban, 45% is cultivated, with 11% of the land falling within the Chichester Harbour Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and 5% is Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), whilst 5% lies within the South Downs National Park.

Historic character

- Settlement, particularly to the east of the area, predominantly consists of small villages where farmsteads developed. Away from the villages and the extensive suburban areas there is a low density of farmsteads in the landscape.
- Loose courtyard plans, including those with an L-plan element, are typical of this area. Farmstead groups typically developed to include barns – often aisled to at least one side and predominantly dating from the 18th and 19th centuries – staddle granaries, stables, granaries and shelter sheds for cattle.

Significance

- There has been a high rate of loss of farmsteads due to physical expansion of settlements.
- There is a low rate of survival of traditional farmsteads. Substantially complete traditional farmsteads that have retained more than 50% of their historic footprint are relatively uncommon in this area.
- Some manor farms retain dovecotes dating from the medieval period to the 18th century.
- Thatch, once widespread, is now rare.
- Dated farmsteads are predominantly of 18th-century date.
- Detached granaries have been especially vulnerable to loss.

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

- The coastal plains provided highly productive land, the brickearth soils providing excellent wheat lands.
- An important part of the character of the coastal plain is the extent of urban and suburban development. Chichester developed on the site of a Roman town and there was a Roman antecedent to Havant. Medieval new towns include Portsmouth, Gosport, Fareham and Emsworth, whilst the coastal towns of Sussex are mostly 19th-century developments associated with the increasing popularity of sea bathing.
- The growing towns of the south coast, and the naval dockyard at Portsmouth, stimulated market gardening and fatstock farming, especially from the mid-18th century. With the arrival of the railways, market gardening expanded further, for example with strawberries being sent to London. Whilst horticultural activity has largely disappeared from the western part of the area, it remains an important element of the landscape south of Chichester.

Landscape and settlement

- The coastal plain was densely settled in the Saxon and medieval periods. Settlement in the eastern part of the area was predominantly nucleated with relatively low levels of dispersed farmsteads and hamlets. In the western part of the Character Area, isolated farmsteads were intermixed with a number of nucleated settlements that had developed urban characteristics by the 13th century.
- The general pattern of fields in the areas between the major conurbations is one of large, arable fields on the lower coastal plain with smaller fields on the upper part of the plain. The fields largely appear to have been created through a process of enclosure by agreement from the 14th century with some small areas of more regular enclosure which are mostly of 18th- or 19th-century date. Typically, the fields surrounding settlements are small, some boundaries reflecting former strips.
- Although the coastal plain offered some of the best soils of the country, the proximity of the urban areas has resulted in the large-scale loss of farmland to development and, in most cases, the total removal of high numbers of farmsteads, particularly in the Hampshire part of the Character Area. Areas where development pressure has been lower, support intensive arable farming, dairying and stock rearing and horticulture.

Farmstead and building types

The rich arable lands of the South Coast Plain, access to local urban markets and a coastal link to London allowed many farmers to rebuild their farmsteads, particularly in the 18th and 19th

centuries. This rebuilding means that there are very few surviving buildings of pre-1750 date. They are of a smaller scale than in the chalk downland.

Farmstead types

- As with much of south-east England, loose courtyard plans, typically with two or three detached working farm buildings standing around a yard area, are the most common plan form.

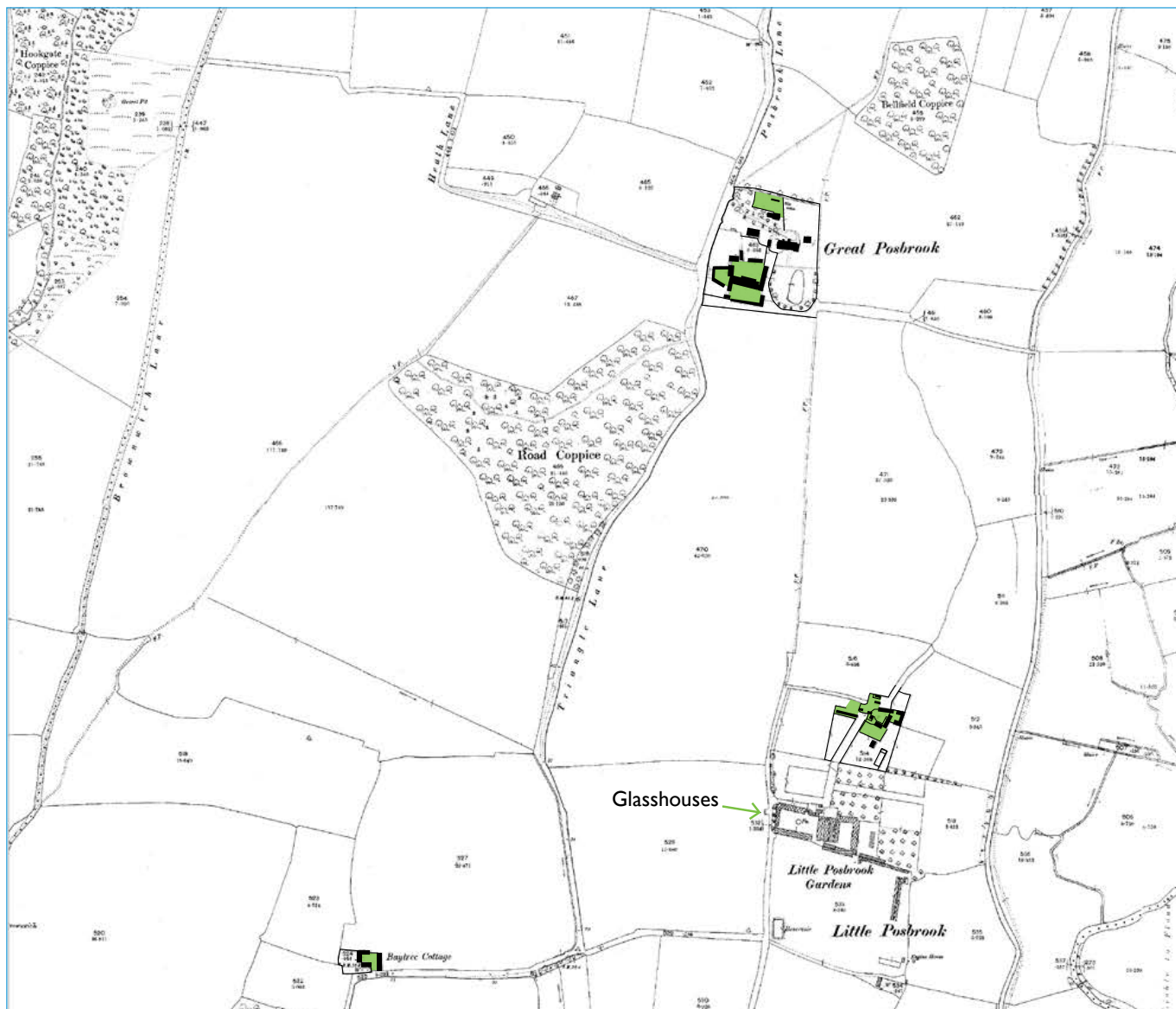
- Small, regular L-plan steadings, either formed by a barn and a later cattle shed attached at right angles or built as a single phase, are widespread.
- Regular multi-yard plans, probably reflecting the management of stock, are found predominantly in the eastern (Sussex) part of the Character Area although in smaller numbers than is typical of the Low or High Weald.
- Unlike most other arable areas in the South East, the Character Area contains higher numbers of dispersed plan farmsteads, both clusters and dispersed multi-yards..
- There are relatively few large, regular courtyard plan farmsteads. Full courtyards with buildings to all sides of the yard are the most common form of the larger courtyard plans. E-, F- and T-plans are uncommon.

Building types

- Early barns are often timber-framed and aisled, resulting in low eaves which emphasise the importance of the roof over the walling. Most barns are built in brick or cobble with brick dressings and are unaisled or aisled to one side only and have half-hipped roofs. The majority of barns are of 18th- or 19th-century date.
- Free-standing granaries are rare. There are a few examples of timber-framed granaries on staddle stones with either brick infilling or weatherboarding, dating from between the 17th and early 19th centuries. Granaries are sometimes found over cart sheds with granaries over, these usually being of 19th-century date. It is probable that grain was commonly stored in a loft in the barn.
- Buildings for cattle are either open-fronted shelter sheds set around a yard and often attached at right angles to a barn or are enclosed, single-storey cow houses. Buildings for cattle are predominantly of 19th-century date. Earlier cattle buildings would be considered important.
- Cart and implement sheds would have been found on most farms. They may be incorporated into one of the ranges of regular U-plan yards or other regular courtyard plans.
- Dovecotes are found on some high-status farms.
- Field barns were once a common feature but many have been lost from the landscape. The surviving field barns are an important remnant of a once widespread building type.
- Glasshouses remain a feature of the landscape in the area south of Chichester.



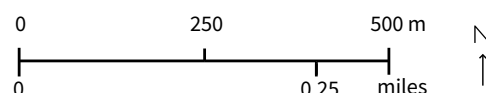
A courtyard plan with an L-plan range providing shelter sheds for cattle and stabling with a barn (its roof just visible) to the third side of the yard. Unusually, the house is attached to the L-plan range. Photo © Bob Edwards



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.




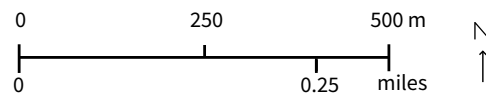
Posbrook

In the western (Hampshire) part of the Character Area, isolated farmsteads are commonly dispersed across the flat landscape. Many of these farms were very large with two or more threshing barns and later yards for cattle, creating regular, multi-yard plans as at Great Posbrook and Little Posbrook. There were also some smaller farms which typically have loose courtyard plans. The fact that the small farmstead in the south-west of the extract was called 'Peartree Cottage' rather than 'Farm' might suggest that it had lost its link to agriculture by the late 19th century. These farmsteads stood within a landscape of generally large, irregular fields created through piecemeal 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. © 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.



North Mundham

East of Chichester Harbour, settlement consists of a mixture of small villages and hamlets and isolated farmsteads. Surrounding many of these villages are small fields and paddocks with medium to large fields beyond, and many have considerably expanded in the 20th century. These fields show evidence for both piecemeal enclosure – irregular fields to the south of North Mundham – and more regular enclosure with straight boundaries to the north, possibly representing formal enclosure of open fields. Farmsteads often remained in the villages as the smaller and more compact parishes meant that there were not the great distances between farms and fields that could be seen in the long, narrow parishes on the adjacent downs. Small and medium-scale farmsteads were evident at the end of the 19th century, mainly having loose courtyard plans or small to medium-scale regular courtyard plans. Field barns and outfarms were built within some of the fields and within the park to the north.



L-plan ranges consisting of a barn and a single-storey range, here providing stabling but alternatively with a shelter shed, are common across the area on smaller farms. Photo © Bob Edwards



This large, aisled threshing barn serves as a clear reminder of the dominance of arable farming on the fertile soils of the coastal plain. Photo © James Webb



Five-bay barns are typical across the area, as in this aisled barn. Photo © Bob Edwards



A small, three-bay, timber-framed threshing barn with an attached stable range. Photo © Bob Edwards



Cobbles from the beach were widely used for farm buildings, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries. This five-bay barn retains timber-stud work above eaves level and has a half-hipped roof rather than the hips of earlier barns. Photo © Bob Edwards



The tree trunks around this building obscure the fact that it stands on staddle stones. It is uncertain whether this was a staddle barn or a very large granary. A tie beam bears the date 1724, which would suggest it was a granary, as most staddle barns were built in the decades around 1800. Photo © Bob Edwards



An early example of a timber-framed staddle granary, possibly of 17th-century date, with brick infill panels, located on a large manor farm. Photo © Bob Edwards



This 16th-century timber-framed building probably comprises a threshing barn with attached stable, a rare surviving example of its type. Photo © Bob Edwards



An early 20th-century brick range providing loose boxes for cattle. Photo © Bob Edwards



Large arable farms needed large teams of horses to work the land, reflected in the size of this early 19th-century stable with a large hayloft over. Photo © Bob Edwards



High-status farms would sometimes have a dovecote. This late medieval, circular dovecote has been partially rebuilt after being allowed to fall into decay. Photo © Bob Edwards



Galleting is the insertion of small pieces of stone into the mortar joints, here done for decorative effect. Although not common, galleting is a highly distinctive feature of the area. Photo © Bob Edwards

Materials and detail

- Timber-framing was typically used for medieval houses and barns, with the barns being clad in weatherboarding. Timber-framing continued in use for some farm buildings, particularly in Hampshire, although brick was widely used from the 18th century.
- In the Sussex part of the Character Area, flint and cobbles taken from the beaches were used for some farm buildings, including barns. The cobbles were often laid in courses, giving a distinctive appearance.
- There are some examples of the use of sandstone in farm buildings, though it is not a common feature. Occasionally, such stone work is galleted, with small pieces of stone set into the mortar joints.
- Brick and flint was used, especially in areas adjoining the South Downs, in the later 18th and 19th centuries.
- The extensive arable of the area provided straw for thatching and so this was the traditional roofing material. Thatch survives on a small number of farm buildings and is more commonly seen on houses within the Character Area.
- Plain clay tiles produced in the adjacent clay lowlands to the north in Hampshire and in the Weald would have also been available and are the most common roofing material seen on historic farm buildings. Welsh slate is found on some 19th-century buildings.



Historic England

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