



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

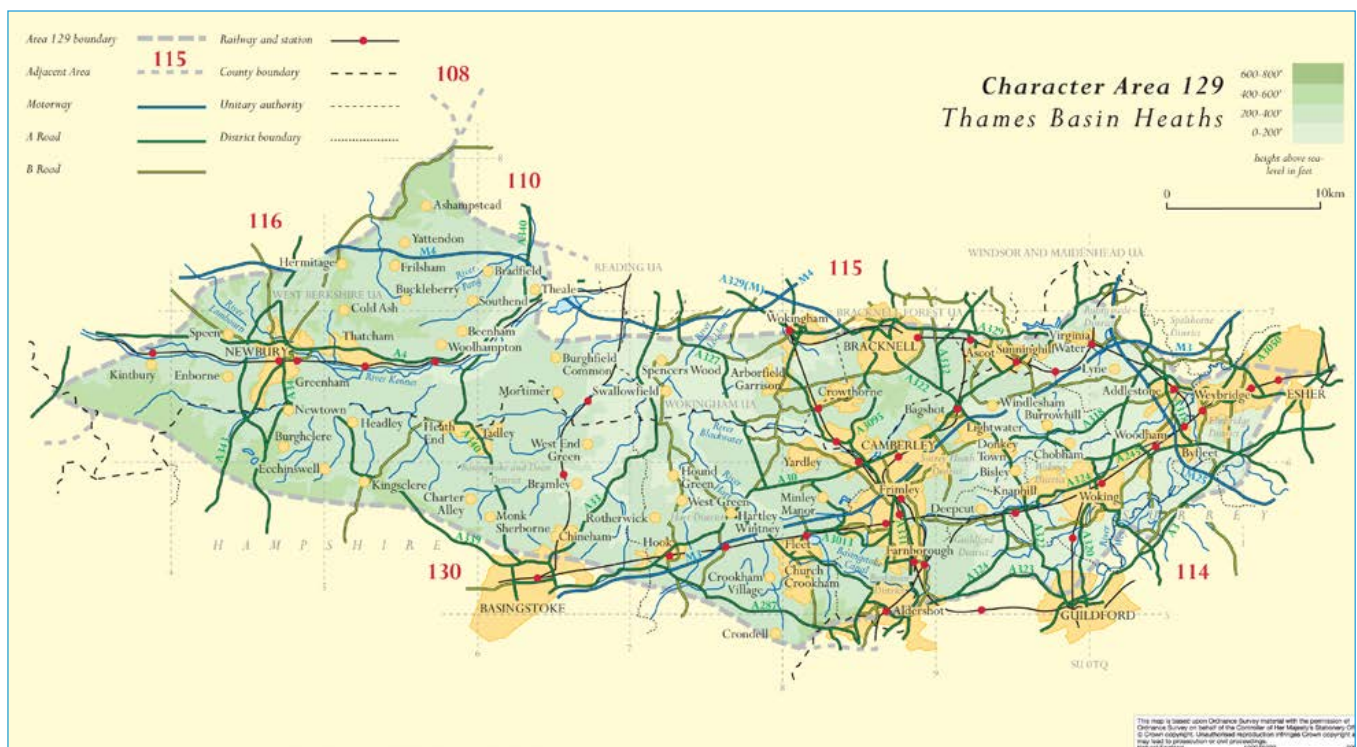
Thames Basin Heaths

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 129



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 Thames Basin Heaths, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

Front cover: The greensand ridge on the southern edge of the area, at the foot of the scarp of the Hampshire Downs, provided fertile soils. Several villages developed along or on the edge of it, with their open fields on the greensand. Old Burghclere, now consisting of a church, the rectory and Manor Farm with its 15th-century barn, is all that remains of the medieval village of Burghclere. The former streets and house plots of the village are preserved as earthworks in the fields around the shrunken settlement. Photo © Historic England 27297/014

Summary

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

The Thames Basin Heaths, straddling the counties of Berkshire, Hampshire and Surrey, extend from the Thames Basin Lowlands in the east, across north Hampshire, north of the Hampshire Downs and through south-east Berkshire towards the dip slope of the Berkshire and Marlborough Downs. This area includes the urban areas of Newbury, Bracknell, Camberley, Aldershot and Weybridge. Of the Character Area, 20% is urban and 80% is open countryside, just over half of which (or 42% of the Character Area as a whole) is in agricultural use. There is a high proportion of woodland cover in the Character Area (25%). The remainder is semi-natural vegetation or common land with 17% forming part of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Historic character

- There is a high density of dispersed farmsteads in the landscape, especially in those areas with smaller-scale, irregular fields resulting from medieval woodland clearance, intermixed with small villages and hamlets. There are few areas of surviving heathland, which were associated with common-edge, small-scale farmsteads.
- Farmsteads typically consist of loose courtyard plans with detached buildings arranged around a yard. Some 19th-century farmsteads, built to house cattle for fattening or dairying, are more likely to be of L- or U-plan.
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Significance

- There are high numbers of pre-1700 farmstead buildings, mainly farmhouses, except in the heathland areas of smaller-scale farming.
- Farmstead mapping has been completed in approximately one third of the area. From this data, 63.8% of farmsteads retain farmstead character and 45.7% retain more than 50% of their historic form. This is average for those parts of the South East that have been mapped.
- Surviving traditional farmsteads are very rare east of Wokingham/Camberley/Aldershot. Most of those in the wood pasture parts of the area are conserved through residential use.
- Complete farmsteads which are representative of the arable farming typical of this area – with one or more aisled or unaisled threshing barns, stabling, cart shed and a granary, and sometimes with shelter sheds to yards – are rare.

- Small-scale heathland farmsteads, including some built to linear plans with medieval buildings, are extremely rare.
- Detached granaries have been especially vulnerable to loss.

Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a low proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (26.4%, the national average being 32%). The project also noted an above-average percentage (9.1%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working buildings showing obvious signs of structural disrepair.

Historic development

- Prehistoric clearance of woodland from the areas of light soils and their subsequent exhaustion through farming resulted in the development of heathland. Bronze Age barrows and Iron Age linear earthworks and a hillfort survive, often in areas of woodland. The Roman city of Silchester developed close to an Iron Age settlement and became a nodal point in the road system.
- The medieval Royal Forest of Pamber occupied a large area to the centre of the Character Area.
- Some urban centres developed from medieval market towns (for example, Newbury, Odiham, Kingsclere and Reading); others – especially in the heathlands to the east of this area – developed from military camps and as commuter towns serving London (for example, Ascot, Camberley, Aldershot and Woking increasing in size). Additionally, the area is crossed by several motorways and major roads.
- The areas of poorer quality soils and lower levels of settlement allowed the development of large parks and estates including Stratfield Saye, Dogmersfield and The Vyne.
- The Thames Basin Heaths is an area of varied soils and farming practice. Considerable parts of this area supported a sheep-corn system of agriculture, as found on the chalklands to the north, west and south, although there was also a greater level of fattening and dairying than found on the chalk, especially along the Kennet Valley. In eastern parts of Berkshire, sheep were important, although they were kept more for lambs and mutton to supply the London market than for their wool.
- Along the south Berkshire and north Hampshire border there are large areas of hungry, sandy soils, only providing rough grazing, broken by small areas of better soils in the Loddon valley and Foundry Brook that supported arable farming. Here, farms were much smaller and farmers employed a wood pasture economy similar to that of the New Forest, and often had involvement in other industries such as coppicing or brick making.
- Commercial nurseries are a common land use within this area, for example around Chobham and Bisley, where light, free-draining soils support a distinctive landscape pattern.

Landscape and settlement

- Rural settlement is predominantly dispersed with hamlets and scattered farmsteads, some of which are moated. The density of dispersed settlement is high by national standards and, where associated with small-scale and irregular fields, results from pre-14th-century woodland clearance and secondary settlements (often with an 'end' place name)

on or near marginal lands. Medium-scale fields are characteristic of more arable-based areas, resulting from enlargement of farms and sometimes retaining the curved profiles of medieval strip fields.

- Farmsteads of 17th-century or earlier foundation developed along the spring line at the foot of the chalk scarp of the Hampshire Downs.
- Small and medium-sized landscape parks are a particular characteristic of the Character Area. Many parks developed from medieval deer parks, or were created in areas where unenclosed heathland permitted the creation of new landscape parks in the 19th century.
- Until the mid-19th century, there were large areas of unenclosed heathland which were subject to improvement by estates, typically producing regular fields bounded by hawthorn hedges.
- Small farmsteads, originally located in common-edge locations, typically date from the 16th to 19th centuries.
- On areas of heathland there has been considerable tree planting, mainly coniferous.
- The eastern part of the Character Area has been subject to considerable suburbanisation, supported by the presence of motorway and rail infrastructure. The west of the area retains its rural character to a greater extent.

Farmstead and building types

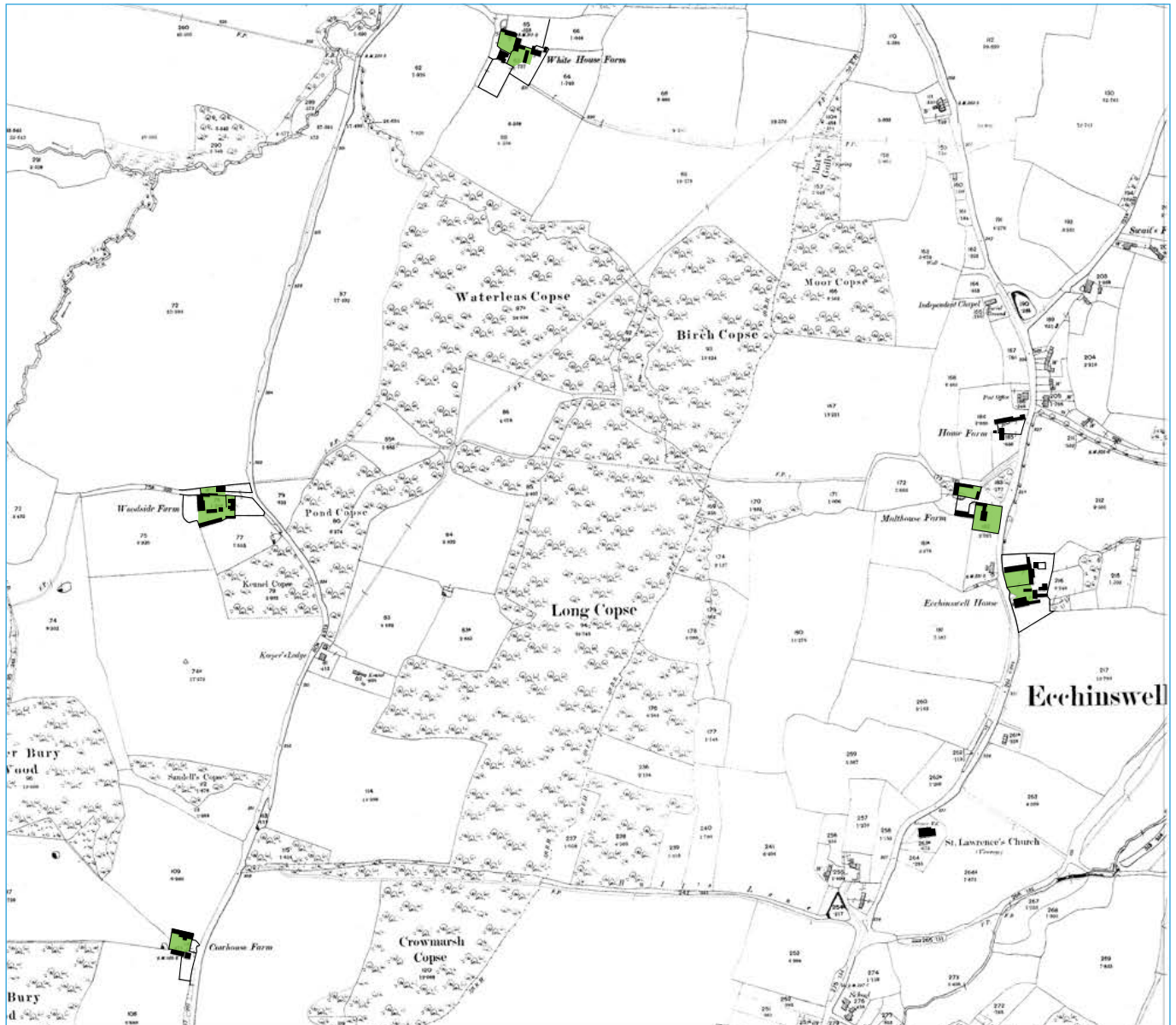
There is a high survival of 18th-century and earlier farm buildings. Historically, farms in this area were small and there is a high density of farmsteads in the landscape. Small farm size often meant that there was little capital to replace buildings, so medieval and 16th- and 17th-century farm buildings often survive.

Farmstead types


- Farmsteads typically consist of loose courtyard plans with detached buildings arranged around a yard.
- Some 19th-century farmsteads, built to house cattle for fattening or dairying, are more likely to be of L- or U-plan.

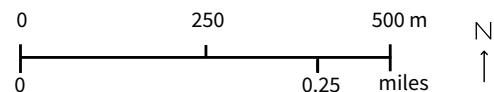
Building types

- This area, that stretches into the downland areas to the north, west and, to a lesser extent, to the south, lies within one of the main concentrations of timber-framed, aisled barns in the country. Barns are typically of five bays, sometimes being the result of the enlargement of three-bay barns.
- The eastern end of the area also has a significant concentration of pre-1550 barns.
- Free-standing staddle granaries are also characteristic.
- Staddle barns, a late 18th-century variation on the threshing barn, are occasionally found in the adjacent downland Character Areas.
- There are some examples of timber-framed hay barns, usually of 19th-century date, which reflect the greater emphasis on pastoral farming than in the Hampshire Downs to the south. These buildings, partly open-sided, can be set upon staddle stones.



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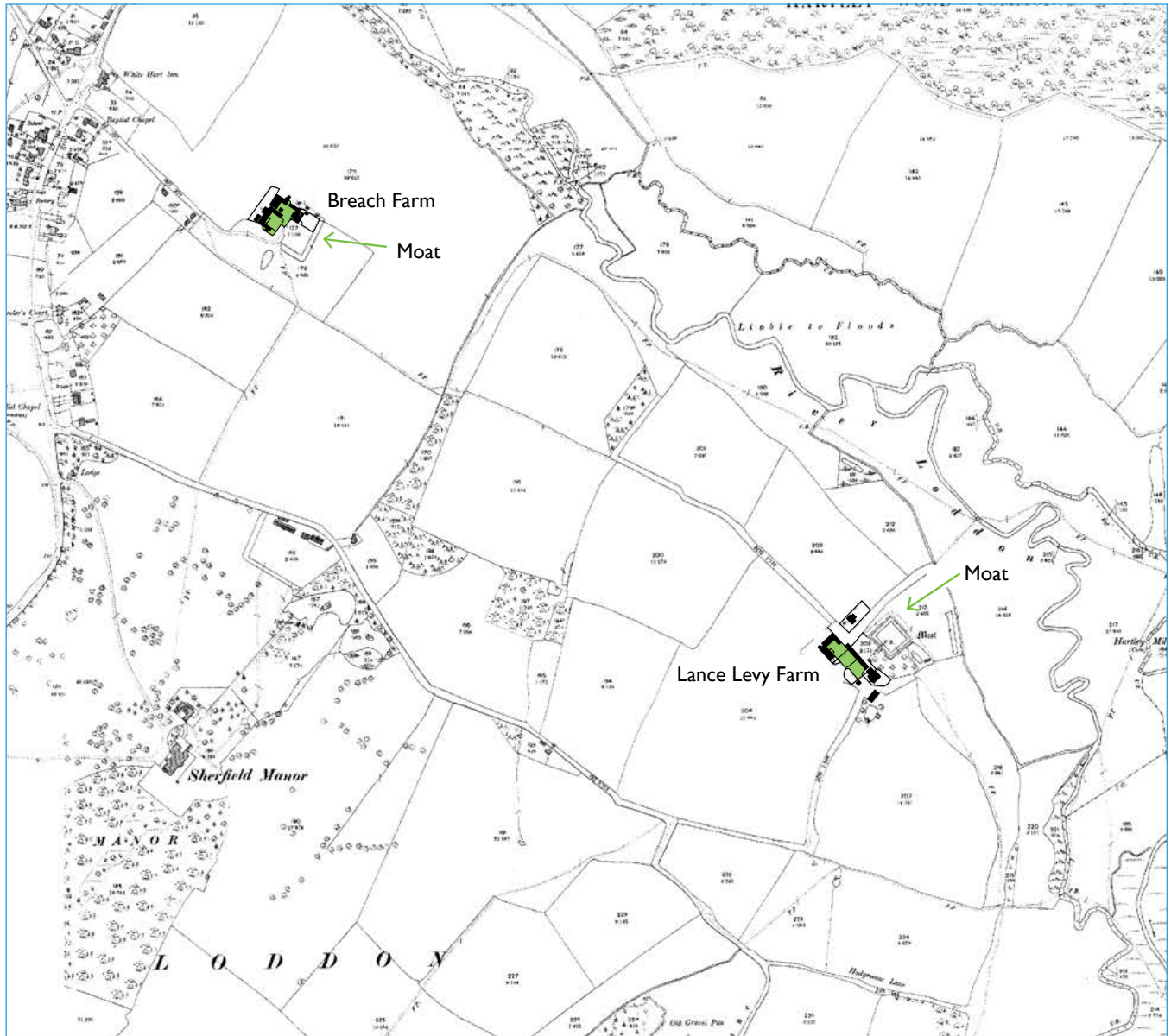
 Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



Ecchinswell

The parish of Ecchinswell, together with its neighbour, Sydmonton, stretched from the chalk of the Hampshire Downs in the south, across a region of fertile greensand where the open fields of the village were located, and onto the clays of the Thames Basin to the north, where the village itself was sited (to the south of this map extract). The northern part of the parish was an area of wood pasture where assarting of the woodland was underway in the late Saxon period and continued until the 14th century at least. This resulted in a landscape of generally small-scale fields and small, scattered farmsteads, usually sited alongside the network of lanes that cut across the area. Whilst the fields mapped in the late 19th century still reflect this process of piecemeal enclosure, there had since the late 18th century been considerable reorganisation of both farmsteads and fields: scattered holdings were consolidated into ring-fenced farms and numerous small farmsteads were removed from agriculture, sometimes leaving only the house and in some cases resulting in complete demolition of the farmstead.

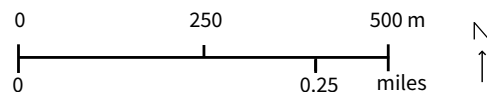
Cowhouse Farm stands on the site of a field barn which may survive within the farmstead that was created during the reorganisation. The surviving farmsteads typically have loose courtyard plan forms with five-bay barns, some of which were extended from earlier, three-bay barns, granaries and stables.



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



Loddon Valley

Within some of the larger valleys that cut across the area are larger fields created through piecemeal enclosure. Set within these fields are farmsteads that are of medieval origin, some of them moated, as at Breach Farm and Lance Levy Farm. Some of these farmsteads also retain early buildings; Breach Farm has a cruck-framed, five-bay barn of 15th-century or earlier date. At Lance Levy, the earliest element is a re-used 16th-century, three-bay building converted to form part of an L-plan range of threshing barns. Both of these farmsteads developed regular multi-yard plans through the addition of buildings, particularly shelter sheds, in the 19th century. Away from the valley, areas of poorer heathland offered the opportunity to develop estates with landscape parks in the 18th and 19th centuries.



Many of the farmsteads within the broad valleys – as here at Speen – were rebuilt to regular plans in the mid-19th century, within landscapes with enlarged fields, thorn hedgerows and planted copses and blocks of woodland. Photo © Historic England 27295/034



Loose courtyard plans with detached buildings set around a yard were the predominant farmstead type across the Character Area. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large, aisled threshing barn dating from the 17th-century on a large, arable farmstead which had three threshing barns in an area of fertile soils suited to arable farming. Photo © Bob Edwards



Barns in this wood pasture landscape are typically of three to five bays. This 17th-century, aisled barn has rebuilt aisle walls. The hayloft door at the far end indicates that this was a multifunctional barn with a floored bay and probably animal housing. The hipped roof is an important element in the character of this building. Photo © Bob Edwards



Manor Farm, Old Burghclere is dominated by its massive aisled barn built in the 15th century by the bishop of Winchester. Later buildings were constructed around the barn, creating a number of regular yard areas. Photo © Historic England 27297/024



Within the river valleys, larger farms are to be found. This farmstead has an L-plan range of barns. The barn in the foreground is a 17th or early 18th-century, five-bay barn, aisled to the rear. The far range consists of a 16th-century, three-bay building that was originally floored throughout and was converted to a barn with the addition of bays at either end and aisles to both sides, probably in the early 19th century. Photo © Bob Edwards



A staddle barn, a type of threshing barn that appears to have only been built in the decades around 1800 and is concentrated in west Berkshire and west Hampshire. Photo © Bob Edwards



A rare survival of a 17th-century, timber-framed stable. Photo © Bob Edwards



A two-storey staddle granary. Photo © Bob Edwards



Cart sheds were common to most farmsteads, typically located alongside a track leading into the farmstead. These buildings have been vulnerable to loss and are rarely listed. Photo © Bob Edwards



A small, early 19th-century stable with a hay-loft over on a small farmstead. Photo © Bob Edwards



A late 19th- or early 20th-century cart shed and granary, its size indicating the importance of arable cropping in this area. A hatch over one of the bays allowed sacks of grain to be lowered into a waiting cart. The roof was almost certainly originally constructed for corrugated metal sheet. Photo © Bob Edwards



Cattle housing typically takes the form of open-fronted shelter sheds ranged around the yard. This rare example has two three-bay sheds set back-to-back serving two adjoining yard areas. Inside, mangers formed from elm planks survive, together with evidence that cattle were tethered in these sheds. Photo © Bob Edwards

Materials and detail

- Until the 17th century, timber-framing was the dominant building tradition. Timber-framing continued in use for barns and some other minor farmstead buildings.
- Brick generally replaced timber for housing by the 18th century and was often used to encase or front earlier, timber-framed buildings. There are some important examples of 16th- and 17th-century brick barns.
- Plain tile is the predominant roofing material, and together with corrugated iron, this has largely replaced straw thatch.
- From the mid-19th century, slate became more common; on some estate buildings it was laid 'economically': leaving small gaps between each slate in the row to minimise the quantity required. Tile also continued to be used on new buildings.



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This guidance has been prepared by
Jeremy Lake and Bob Edwards.

First published by English Heritage 2013. This
edition published by Historic England 2020.

Please refer to this document as:
Historic England 2020 Farmstead and Landscape
Statement: Thames Basin Heaths. Swindon:
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Product code: 52243 RRL code: 133/2020

Publication date: February 2020 © Historic England

Design: Historic England and Chantal Freeman, Diva
Arts