



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

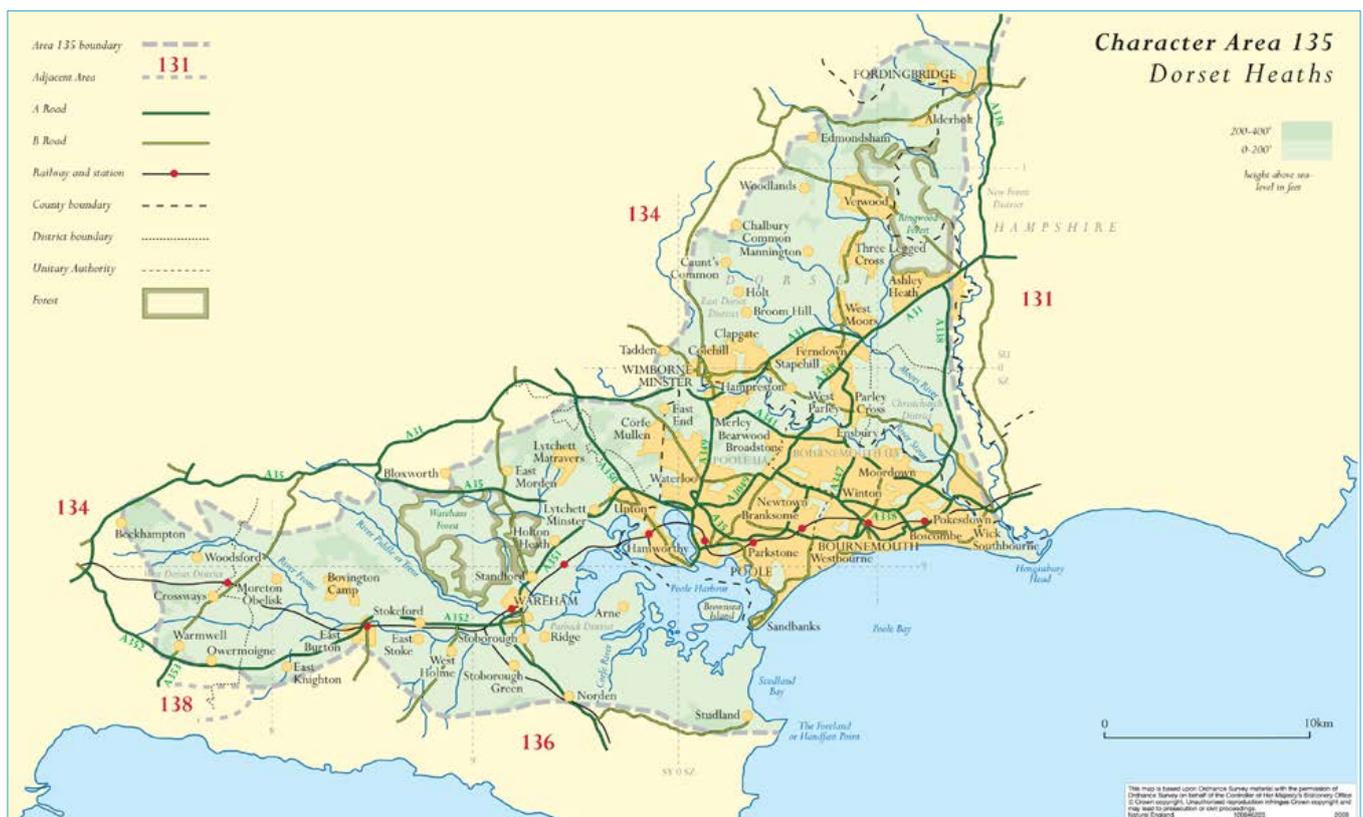
# Dorset Heaths

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 135



# 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 Dorset Heaths, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

**Front cover:** A loose courtyard plan farmstead with a 17th-century house and a three-bay threshing barn facing into the yard behind the house. This is a rare surviving example of this type of small-scale farmstead with early buildings. Photo © Bob Edwards

# Summary

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

The Dorset Heaths lie to the south of the Dorset Downs and extend south of Poole Harbour to the prominent chalk ridge of the Isle of Purbeck. To the east, the boundary with the New Forest is formed by the Avon Valley. Of the Character Area, 22% is urban and around 20% lies within the Dorset AONB. Protective designations cover 95% of the remaining heathland. A significant number of heaths are also designated as National Nature Reserves.

## Historic character

- There is a predominant pattern of low densities of isolated farmsteads in the landscape, intermixed with small villages.
- The area contains some large areas of open heathland and woodland plantations, 19th-century enclosures of heathland and areas of 17th-century and later enclosure, often re-organised. There are small areas of possible medieval assarting in the north-east part of the area.
- Development in the 20th-century has had a significant impact on the north-east of the area.
- Small-scale regular and loose courtyard plans are common. Some larger farmsteads are found, particularly in the west of the area.
- Threshing barns on earlier farmsteads, usually of three to five bays long, are sometimes accompanied by a granary either standing on staddle stones or on brick arches. Multifunctional ranges are typical of farmsteads associated with 19th-century enclosures.

## Significance

- Generally, pre-19th century working buildings are very rare, and the area was subject to high levels of change over the 20th century.
- There are some rare examples of staddle barns, more commonly associated with the chalk downs and particularly unusual in a heathland context.
- Free-standing granaries are vulnerable to change.
- Some timber-framing and stone was used on the older farmsteads, and there is some rare survival of earth walling and thatch.

## Present and future issues

The Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a high proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use in this National

Character Area (38.9%, the national average being 32%).

## Historic development

- The heathlands are the result of clearance of woodland in or before the Bronze Age and its subsequent degradation through agriculture. Evidence of prehistoric occupation is seen in numerous barrows that survive on areas of open heath. Poole Harbour, one of the largest natural harbours in Europe, was an important landing stage in the Iron Age and Roman periods and salt-making was extensively practised around its shores.
- Settlement was concentrated in the river valleys and the important Saxon towns of Wimborne and Wareham were the major settlements of the area in that period. Fordingbridge, in the north of the area, developed from an earlier village as a market centre in the 12th – 13th centuries, although it never achieved formal urban status. Poole became a borough in the 13th century and a staple port for the export of wool, replacing Melcombe Regis, in the 15th century. Both Bournemouth and Poole expanded rapidly in the later 19th and 20th centuries, spreading across large parts of the heathland, and now the adjoining conurbations dominate this part of the coast.
- Pottery making was an important industry (associated with smallholding) in the Verwood area, with evidence of kilns dating back to the medieval period although the industry was at its peak in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- Other than small encroachments, the heathlands largely only provided rough grazing until the 17th century when some larger scale attempts at reclamation were made, with limited success. In the 19th century further improvement schemes by some large estates were attempted, some of which have also reverted to heath.
- On the sides of the valleys of the Stour and the Frome, there was some arable with better quality grazing on the floodplains.



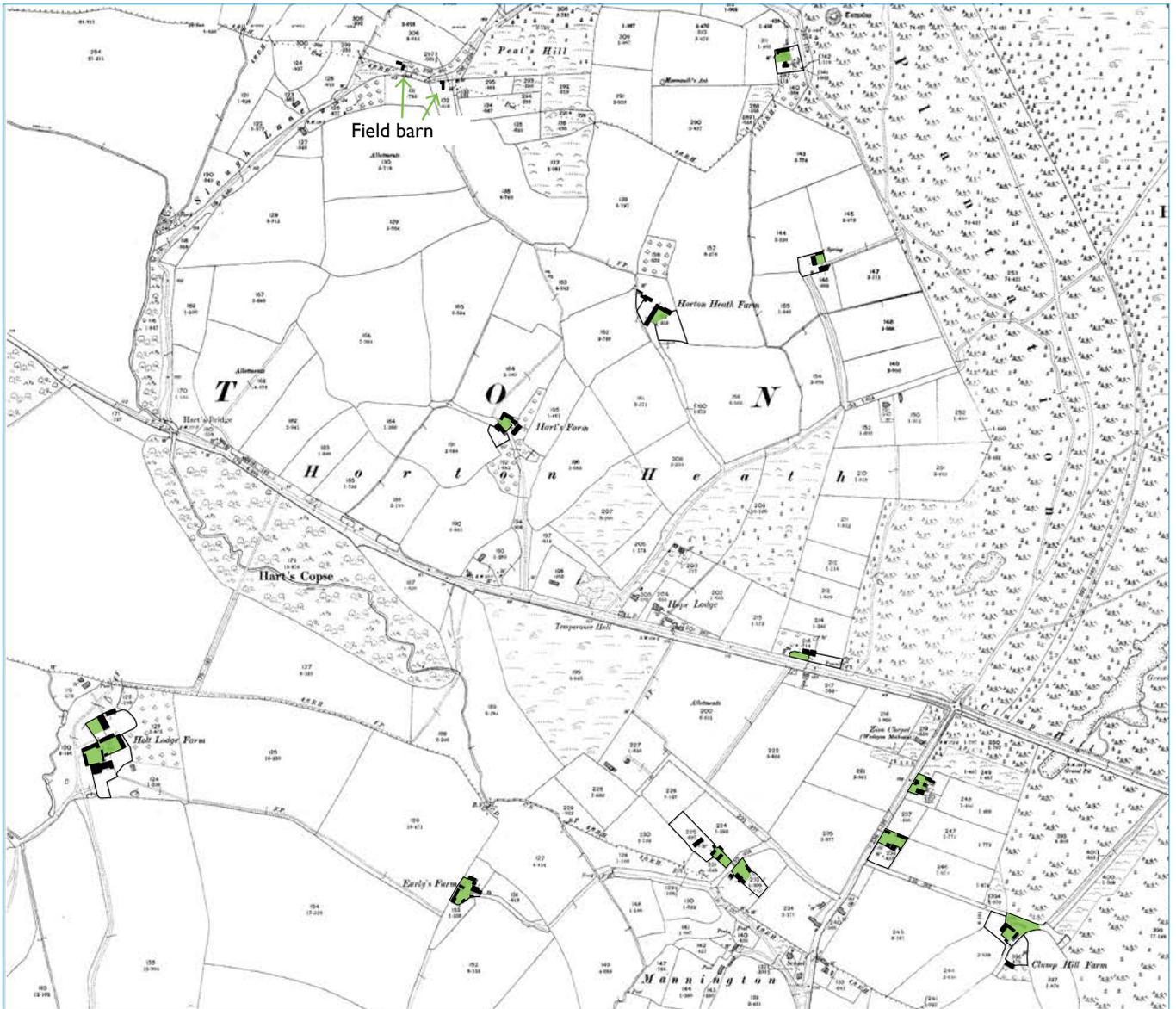
A medium-scale, late 19th-century, planned courtyard farmstead which replaced an earlier steading within a shrunken hamlet. The farmstead sits on the edge of former heathland enclosed in the late 18th or early 19th century, creating small fields with straight boundaries. To the south are older enclosures on the better quality land. Photo © Bob Edwards

## Landscape and settlement

- Settlement across the area is predominantly dispersed with low, to very low densities of scattered farmsteads and hamlets. Only in the valleys of the Stour and the Frome was there a higher density of settlement with some small villages and larger farmsteads.
- Charter evidence shows that the heathland north of Wimborne in the north-east of the area was being farmed by the 10th century. Documentary sources indicate that there was continued expansion into this heathland and woodland during the 13th to 15th centuries; small irregular fields in this area are characteristic of piecemeal medieval enclosure and woodland clearance.
- There was further enclosure of the heathland from the 17th century, especially to the west and along the valleys, as well as the piecemeal enclosure by agreement of open field strips around some settlements such as Wool.
- The 19th century saw some major attempts to improve the poor sandy soils of the heath, often by gentry such as the Framptons at Moreton and Sturt on Brownsea, creating medium to large, regular fields. Much of the enclosure was by agreement but there were pockets of parliamentary enclosure within the area. Such enclosure was not always accompanied by the construction of new farmsteads; where built, they tend to be small regular courtyard farmsteads. In contrast, much heathland was enclosed by squatters, smallholders and enterprising smaller farmers who created small, irregular closes associated with cottages, small farmsteads and hamlets such as New Moreton, created in the late 18th or early 19th century.
- In the area to the north of the Bournemouth/ Poole conurbation, small settlements such as Verwood, Ferndown and West Moors expanded rapidly in the 20th century and, with some development along the roads linking these settlements, this part of the character area has a very suburban feel. Occasionally, historic farmsteads have been subsumed within this growth but many have been lost or altered beyond recognition.

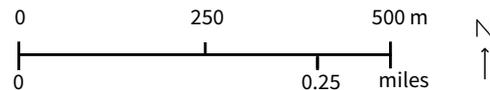


A small-scale farmstead consisting of a farmhouse and a combination building associated with the 19th-century reclamation of former heathland on the edge of Wareham Forest. Note the straight road and thorn hedgerows. Photo © Bob Edwards



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.



## Horton Heath

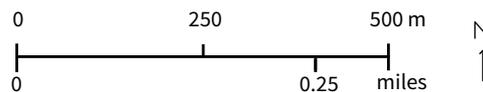
The heathland in this north-eastern part of the Character Area was subject to enclosure from the 10th century at least. New farms appear in the documentary record during the 12th and 13th centuries, often accompanied by small, irregular fields of piecemeal enclosure such as those seen within the central sub-oval area. Here, there are small to medium-size farmsteads of typically loose courtyard form or with L-plan ranges. The larger fields along the western side of the map are also irregular but seem to have been subject to some reorganisation resulting in some straight boundaries and much larger fields. Holt Lodge Farm reflects this larger-scale landscape with its regular multi-yard farmstead. Enclosure of heathland continued into the 19th century and the small, regular fields on the eastern side of the map are the product of this period of encroachment. Together with the small, often brick-built farmsteads are a number of smallholdings represented by a cottage and one or two small outbuildings.



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.



## Winfrith

In the western part of the area much of the enclosure of the heathland occurred in the 18th and 19th centuries, instigated by local estates, intermixed with earlier, more irregular fields of piecemeal enclosure. The enclosures of this period are generally regular in form with medium-sized fields as can be seen in the northern part of the map. This phase of enclosure rarely resulted in the construction of farmsteads on new sites. It was associated with the rebuilding of medium-sized farmsteads, usually as brick-built, regular courtyard plans which incorporated a barn together with extensive housing for cattle. The map also shows that some fields remained as or reverted to rough grazing. The heathland also offered an opportunity to create smallholdings which used the heaths for grazing animals and farmed a number of small paddocks where hay could be grown for winter fodder.

## Farmstead and building types

This area has a low survival of pre-1750 farmstead buildings, although some farmhouses of 17th century date survive.

### Farmstead types

- Higher status early farmsteads consist of a loose courtyard group with a stone-built, 17th- or 18th-century threshing barn, a stable and later buildings for cattle. In some cases, there is an L-plan element within the group.
- Regular courtyard groups are typically smaller forms although there are some larger plans, including full regular plans, often the result of 19th-century additions to an earlier group.
- Smaller farmsteads representing heathland-edge settlement have often lost their farm buildings.

### Building types

- Stone-built or brick threshing barns, rarely exceeding five bays, are found on the larger farmsteads.
- Staddle barns, where the barns are elevated on mushroom-shaped staddle stones as used for granaries, were a feature of this area.
- Granaries are concentrated in the west of the area, associated with larger farms.



This courtyard farmstead on Brownsea Island, believed to have been built to the plans of a model farm displayed in the Great Exhibition, has detached ranges to three sides of the yard and was built as part of a failed attempt to improve heathland. Photo © Bob Edwards



A full regular-plan courtyard farmstead which usually for this type results from development over time rather than being a single phase of development. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large regular L-plan courtyard range located on the edge of enclosed heathland. Photo © Bob Edwards



A rare surviving example of a small 18th-century combination building, thatched in combed wheat reed, with a probable barn to the left and cow house and stable on the right. This comprises the principal working building on a heathland-edge farmstead with a 17th century house. Photo © Bob Edwards



A five-bay threshing barn, probably of 17th or 18th century date, in an area of wood pasture subject to assarting and piecemeal enclosure from the medieval period. Survivals of early buildings in these early enclosed landscapes are very rare in this area. Photo © Bob Edwards



A brick and slate 19th century five-bay threshing barn with later outshots on a heathland fringe farmstead. Photo © Bob Edwards



A rare example of an earth-walled three-bay barn in an area of early enclosure in the north of the character area. Photo © Bob Edwards



A brick combination range with barn, stable and hayloft of mid-to-late 19th-century date. Photo © Bob Edwards



Staddle barns were a form of threshing barn – so-called because the barn is raised on staddle stones – built over a short period around 1800 and are concentrated within West Hampshire, West Berkshire and East Wiltshire. This is a characteristic building of the southern English downs, but it is a rare survival within this Character Area. It stands on a larger farm benefitting from the fertile lands along the Avon Valley. Photo © Bob Edwards



Free-standing granaries are rare in Dorset, this example being raised on brick arches rather than the staddles stones more commonly seen to the north and east. Photo © Bob Edwards



A 19th century granary and cart shed with cast iron columns to the open front of the cart shed. Photo © Bob Edwards



An outfarm with a five-bay earth-walled threshing barn, its yard bounded by a brick wall. Photo © Bob Edwards

## Materials and detail

- Brick and slate or plain, clay tile are the predominant building materials for farm buildings across the area. Profiled clay tiles are also frequently seen.
- There are occasional examples of timber-framing used for farm buildings, particularly in the north-east of the area; timber-framing is mostly seen in houses, especially in the urban areas and villages.
- Stone was used on the older farmsteads. For finer buildings in the area, Portland limestone from Purbeck was relatively easily available. Coarse brown ironstone and dark brown 'pudding stone' was used for building in and around the heaths.
- There are some rare survivals of earth walling.
- Thatch survives on some farm buildings.



Earth walling was once common but surviving examples are increasingly rare. Photo © Bob Edwards



# Historic England

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