



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

# South Purbeck

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 136



## 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>).



Blashenwell Farm is an isolated farmstead south-west of Corfe Castle village located at the foot of the scarp of the limestone ridge running across South Purbeck. The farmstead has an 18th-century house and threshing barn with a 19th-century dairy attached to the barn, forming an L-plan. In the later 19th century, a U-plan cattle yard was built beyond the barn giving the farmstead its present regular multi-yard character. Photo © Historic England 27842/031

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**Front cover:** The view from Blashenwell (p 2) towards Kimmeridge Bay, showing the reorganisation of fields in the post-medieval period over an earlier layer of field boundaries including long and narrow strips which date back to the first millennium and earlier. Photo © Historic England 27842/044





This map shows the South Purbeck with the numbers of the neighbouring National Character Areas around it.



These 'ladder' fields to the south of the village of Langton Matravers form a remarkable area of fields with long, continuous boundaries, the strips divided by cross boundaries. Many estate and parish boundaries respect some of these long boundaries suggesting that these divisions are of possible Saxon date. Photo © Historic England 27843/021

# Summary

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

South Purbeck, also known as the Isle of Purbeck, forms part of the South Coast of Dorset running west from Swanage and including St Albans Head and Lulworth Cove. The entire Character Area falls within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and most of the coast within this area lies within the Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site.

## Historic Character

- A large part of the fieldscapes and settlement of the area can be traced back to the development of late Saxon estates, creating a distinctive pattern of axial land units and fields.
- Small villages are intermixed with hamlets and isolated farmsteads, some of which represent the site of shrunken settlements and are associated with settlement earthworks.
- Medium scale farmsteads of loose courtyard or dispersed plan, regular courtyard farmsteads were usually created as a result of growth over time.
- Threshing barns, typically of five bays, and combination barns are characteristic.

## Significance

- There is a medium to high survival of traditional farmsteads in this area, complete examples being uncommon.
- Farm buildings dating from before 1750 are very rare and mostly comprise barns.
- There are some rare examples of cheese houses and cider houses.
- Farm buildings retaining locally distinctive stone slate (limestone) roofs are significant in terms of local character.
- Some farmsteads are associated with the earthworks of deserted or shrunken settlement.

## Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a high proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (40%, the national average being 32%).

## Historic development

- There is a high density of Romano-British and earlier settlement including villa sites such as Bucknowle (when pottery was manufactured locally).
- The main town of the area was Corfe, dominated by the castle which probably developed on the site of a Saxon royal residence. The town developed outside the gates of the castle where its market place was located. The Saxon burh and medieval market town of Wareham would have also served this area.
- The area's geology formed the basis of export industries from the Iron Age – the shales from Kimmeridge were widely traded in the Iron Age and Roman periods, whilst the limestone was used for buildings including the production of stone slates found on some Dorset villas. In addition to the limestone, Purbeck marble was a much sought after stone – used for its decorative qualities, especially from the 12th century – for items such as statues and fonts. In the 13th century, its use increased, being formed into architectural elements including decorative columns used in many cathedrals including Exeter, Salisbury, Worcester and Wells, as well as Westminster Abbey. Much of the marble was transported to Corfe where masons produced the items which were usually transported from Swanage or the small ports at Redcliffe, Stepe and Ower situated in the Dorset Heathlands to the north. The Purbeck marble industry declined from the 14th century but the limestone continued to be in demand and there are many quarries along the coast including the cavernous quarries at Winspit near Worth Matravers.
- Mixed farming was typical in the valley of the River Corfe where settlements had access to downland for grazing sheep, arable on the sides of the valley and good meadowland in the valley. Strip lynchets for arable were created on some of the steeper valley sides and coastal headlands in the 12th and 13th centuries but these largely reverted to pasture from the 14th century.
- The chalk downland was subject to enclosure from the 18th century although large areas of down still survive.
- Dairy farming increased in the later 19th century, supplying the expanding towns of Bournemouth and Poole with liquid milk, assisted by the arrival of the railway through to Swanage.
- Country houses and associated parks emerged as a feature of this area from the 16th century. Lulworth Castle developed as a hunting lodge.
- Swanage expanded into a resort in the Victorian period whilst tourists were also attracted to the picturesque qualities of coastal features such as Lulworth Cove and Durdle Door attracted tourists from the 19th century.
- The military has a substantial presence within the area with a camp at East Lulworth but most famously for the abandoned village of Twynham which was taken over as a training area in the preparation for D-Day but was never returned to its residents after the war. The ruins of the houses are a visitor attraction when the firing ranges are open.

## Landscape and settlement

- Prehistoric remains of many periods survive in areas of unimproved pasture and on the downland ridge that runs east–west across the area.
- By the 11th century, a complex pattern of estates was in existence across the area; the boundaries of most of these estates can still be traced on the ground. The associated settlements are predominantly small, nucleated villages.
- Earthwork remains of deserted and shrunken medieval settlements and their associated

field systems survive (for example North Egliston and East Lulworth) and many isolated farms and hamlets are the result of settlement shrinkage from the 14th century onwards.

- There is a presence of large landowners and estates, including the Bankes of Corfe and the Welds of Lulworth.
  - The predominant pattern of piecemeal enclosure by agreement was mostly complete by the late 18th century:
  - Smaller and more irregular fields are to the north and west.
  - Larger fields are to the south and east, including a remarkable series of long narrow
- Strips marked by continuous boundary walls extending up the slopes of the limestone plateau. These land units are divided by cross boundaries creating a 'ladder' effect.
- Small quarries are concentrated on the limestone plateau. There are areas of surviving common land – most famously at Corfe Common – which are concentrated on the thinner and waterlogged soils. These were historically associated with some small farms and smallholdings.
- Shelter belts and copses are common in the more sheltered parts of the area. Woodland cover is most extensive as a result of estate management in Lulworth Estate and other areas of East Lulworth.

## Farmstead and building types

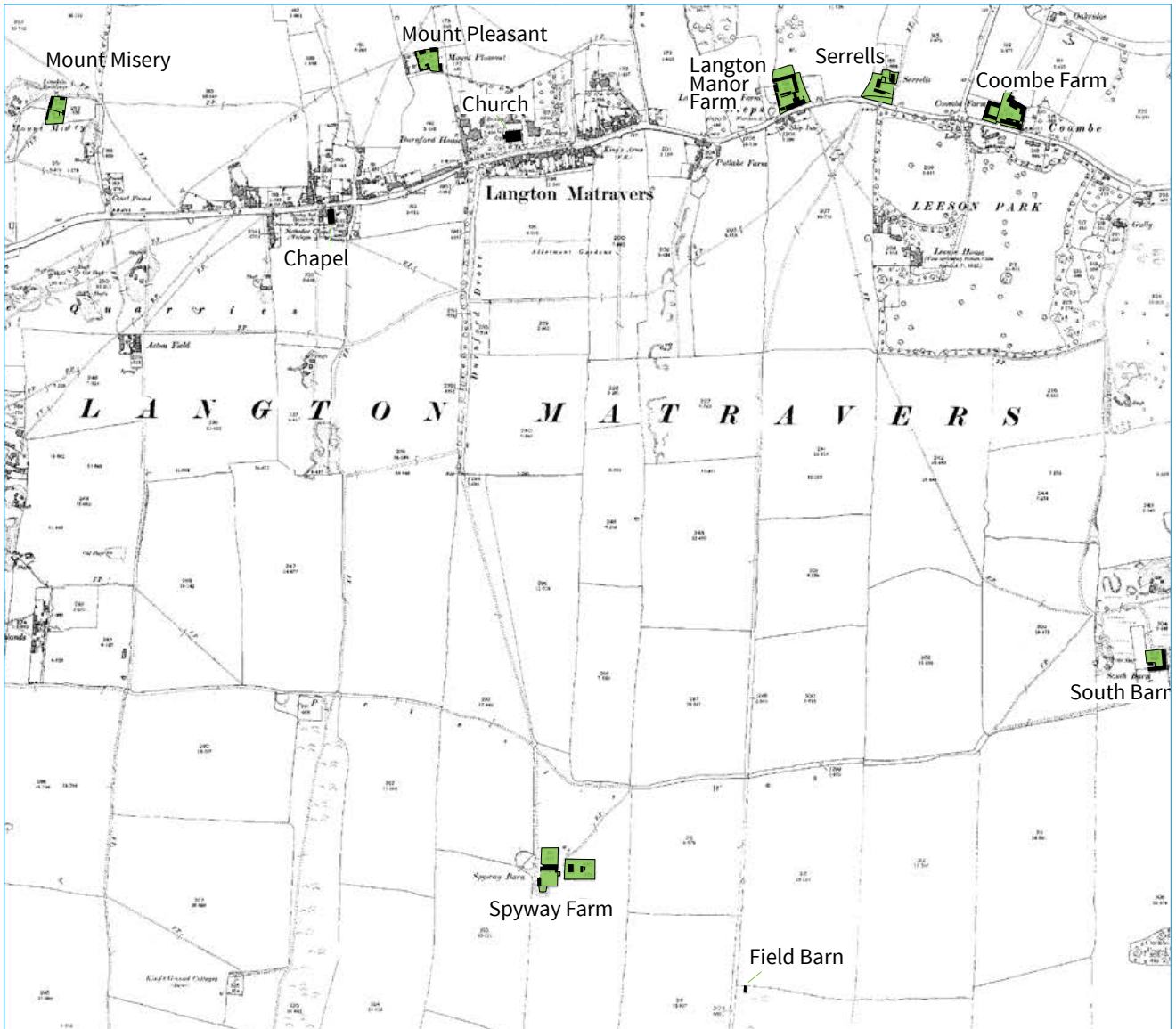
There is a medium to high survival of traditional farmsteads in this area but a below-average survival of farm buildings other than farmhouses dating from before 1700.

### Farmstead types


Dispersed and loose courtyard plan farmsteads predominate. Ranges added to earlier cores were often attached to the barn forming a regular L-plan or, on larger farms, formed linked ranges to additional cattle yards. Despite the presence of a number of large estates, larger regular courtyard plans are not a strong feature of the area.

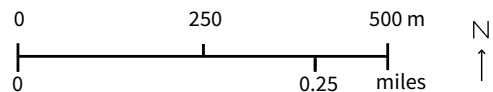
### Building types

- Stone-built threshing barns are common, typically of five bays with central threshing floor but including some larger barns. Hand threshing continued as a feature of this area into the late 19th century, although there is at least one example of a barn with water-powered threshing machinery.
- There are many combination barns, typically with a cow house, stabling and first-floor granary, some of early (18th-century or earlier) date.
- 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 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

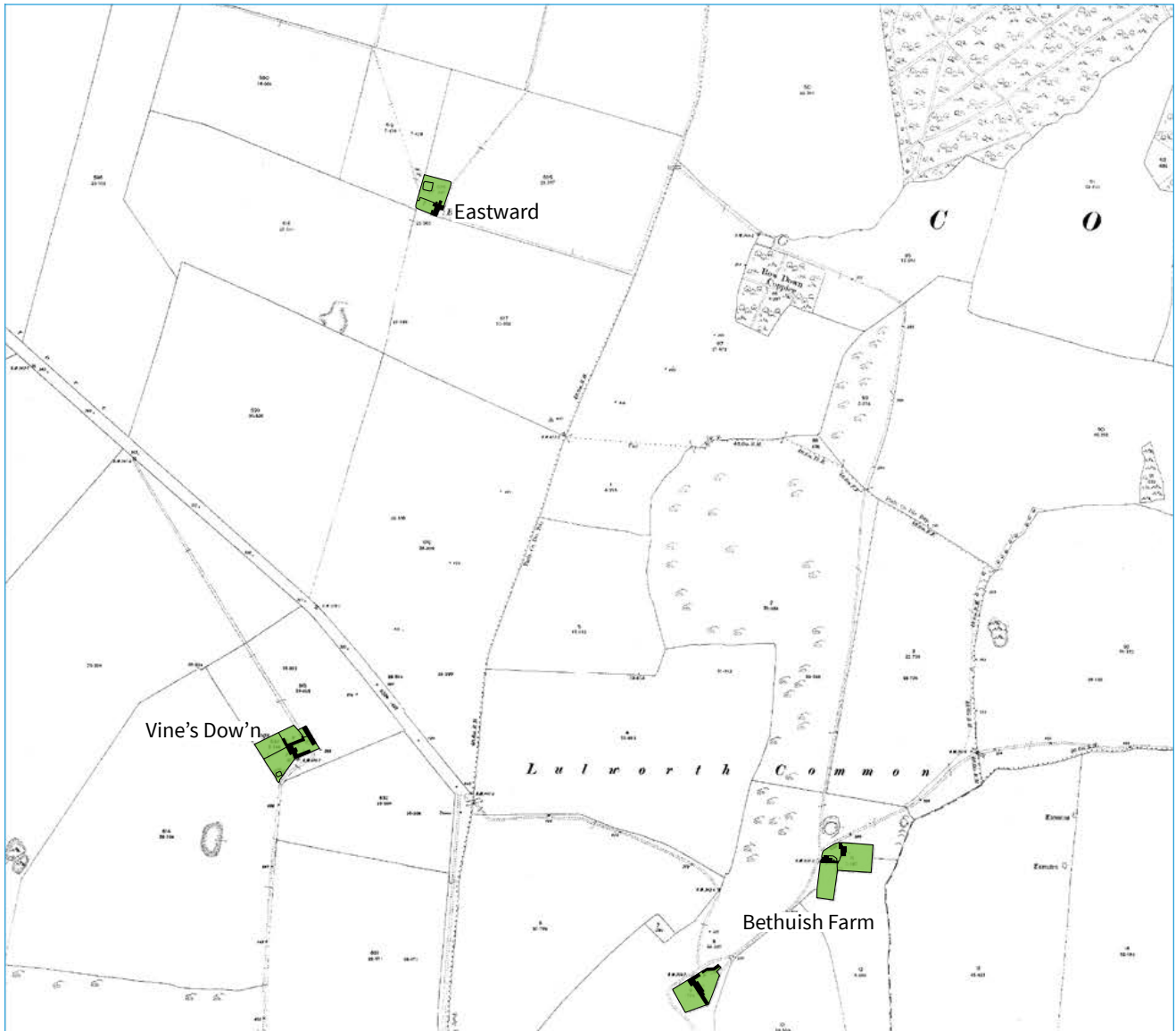
 Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



## Langton Matravers

The 'ladder' fields to the south of the village of Langton Matravers stretch down to the coast, and may possibly date back as far as the Saxon period. The village is an irregular row settlement alongside the east-west road running along the limestone ridge of South Purbeck. Few if any of the buildings on these farmsteads date from before the 18th century. There are few isolated farmsteads within this field system; in this extract, there are two outfarms at Spyway Barn and South Barr and a field barn to the south-east of Spyway Barn which has a listed barn and a shelter shed of early 19th-century date.

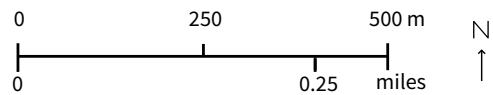




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Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



### Lulworth Common

The fields across the former Lulworth Common indicate phases of enclosure of the common. To the south-east the irregular fields with curving boundaries may represent late medieval or early post-medieval encroachment onto the common. This process was certainly underway by the 17th century, as indicated by Belhuish Farmhouse. The straight boundaries and roads of the western part of the map indicate probable 18th-century enclosure of the common. The Vines Down was probably built as an outfarm with a cottage for a labourer in the late 18th century, possibly serving a farm in the village of East Lulworth.





A former regular U-plan farmstead with a five-bay threshing barn, a cattle shelter shed to one side, now missing its roof, and stabling opposite built as part of the enclosure of common land at Vines Down in the 19th century. Photo © Historic England 27842/004



A late 19th-century, wide-span cattle shed effectively providing a covered yard where the cattle were sheltered from the weather and their manure protected from dilution by rain. The louvred ridge vent and vents at the gable provided ventilation. Photo © Bob Edwards



A late 19th-century cart shed with a granary above – the arm of a winch for raising and lowering sacks of grain survives above the loft door. The cart shed bays are divided by cast-iron columns. A small stable building is attached to the gable of the cart shed. Photo © Bob Edwards



A small outfarm consisting of a three-bay shelter shed and a small building for storage for fodder. Photo © Bob Edwards



Unusually for this area, this large, 18th-century barn has a water wheel to power threshing machinery. Photo © Bob Edwards





A cattle yard on a large farm defined by single-storey, 19th-century buildings which were partly open-fronted and which had been largely blocked with later infilling. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large, 18th-century threshing barn of around ten bays in length with a single threshing bay. Such large barns are unusual and this example represents the investment of one of the large estates. Photo © Bob Edwards



A range of pigsties dating from the late 18th or early 19th centuries. The sties are divided by stone slab partitions. Photo © Bob Edwards



This range, attached to the 17th-century and earlier Dunshay Manor house, was constructed, or possibly remodelled, in the 19th century to form a cider house with a cellar at the lower level and an upper floor access by the door to the left. Photo © Bob Edwards



A dovecote incorporated into is what effectively the porch of a threshing barn with two lean-to buildings, probably for stabling or cattle either side, creating a relatively formal, designed appearance to this mid-19th-century building. Photo © Bob Edwards



A four-bay cart shed, typically located alongside the track leading up to the farmstead. Photo © Bob Edwards

## Materials and detail

- The majority of traditional buildings are of Purbeck or Portland Stone although iron-rich ironstone can be found combined with limestone. Flint from the chalk was also used to a limited extent.
- Whilst the limestone also provided stone tiles, Welsh slate was widely used on 19th-century buildings, usually with low-pitched, half-hipped roofs. Plain clay tiles are also found.
- Brick has had limited use in the area – mainly being found used as quoins and dressings to openings in 19th-century, stone buildings. There are some higher-status brick houses of early 17th-century date but brick was not widely used until the 18th century.
- There was an occasional use of cob.
- Later 19th-century buildings such as cart sheds can be found with cast iron columns and other fittings.





# Historic England

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