



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Marshwood and Powerstock Vales

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 139



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>).



The yards and buildings at Elcombe Farm, set in a narrow valley to the west of West Milton, developed along a driftway which enabled the movement of livestock to former common land on Gravel Hill. In addition to the 19th-century cattle housing, the group includes a mid-18th-century house and detached cottage. Photo © Historic England 29108/021

Front cover: 17th-century and earlier fields with species-rich boundaries surround Powerstock. The farmstead to the top left, rebuilt post-1950, relates to an area of 19th-century reorganisation. Many houses in the village date from successive phases of rebuilding, a major phase being in the 17th century. Most of the working buildings to most surviving farmsteads were rebuilt in the 19th century. Photo © Historic England 29109/010

Character Area 139

Marshwood and Powerstock Vales

Area 139 boundary



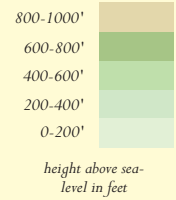
Adjacent Area

134

A Road



B Road



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This map shows the Marshwood and Powerstock Vales with the numbers of the neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

Summary

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

At the heart of this Character Area, the bowl-shaped vale of Marshwood is surrounded by a diverse landscape of steep greensand ridges and conical hills. To the south, the undulating hills extend to an attractive coastline of slumped cliffs, steep headlands and hidden valleys between Morecombelake and West Bay. This is a rural area (only 4% 'urban') centred on the market town of Bridport. All the Character Area is within the Dorset Downs and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the coastline is a Heritage Coast.

Historic Character

- Settlement consists of nucleated villages with numerous isolated farmsteads. Within the vale of Marshwood, settlement is almost entirely dispersed. This is associated with the medieval irregular enclosure of woodland and the 17th-century and earlier piecemeal enclosure of farmland including strip fields and rough pasture.
- Arable farming on areas of higher ground is evidenced by strip lynchets on hillsides but pastoral farming dominated across much of the area.
- Small- to medium-sized farmsteads often retain evidence for the rebuilding of farmhouses in the 17th century but farm buildings mainly date from the 18th and 19th centuries.

Significance

- Despite the medieval origins of many farmsteads, pre-1700 farm buildings are rare in this area.
- Some now-rare examples of cider houses survive, any with internal mills and presses being particularly significant.
- There are some rare surviving dairies with cheese lofts.

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 (37.5%, the national average being 32%).
- The redundancy of unlisted farm buildings, especially smaller scale buildings for cattle which are a distinctive feature of this area, puts them at particular risk from dereliction.

Historic development

- Evidence of prehistoric occupation of the area survives in the form of scattered burial mounds, particularly along the higher ground along the south part of the area. Several Iron Age hillforts lie in the areas fringing the Character Area and suggest that this area provided resources and was probably settled, although the extent of woodland probably restricted occupation across large parts of it.
- Rope making was a notable industry in Bridport from the 13th century and sailcloth was later made at Beaminster, both supplied by locally-grown hemp and flax. Gloving developed from the 18th century. The area was linked to coastal trade via Bridport, and from 1860 by rail (Salisbury and Yeovil Railway), which prompted the decline of Beaminster as a market centre.
- Although there were several attempts to create a deep harbour at Bridport, it appears that none were successful. West Bay was created as a harbour in the 18th century.
- The numerous individual farms of Marshwood Vale are mostly the result of medieval woodland clearance, termed assarting (many of the farm names include the element 'hay' meaning 'enclosure') and are linked to the development of a strong class of free tenants.
- Extensive strip lynchets on hillsides of the southern and eastern parts of the Character Area provide evidence for extent of arable farming on areas of very difficult terrain prior to the 14th century, and subsequently allowed to revert to pasture.
- Hemp and flax growing was a major aspect of agriculture on the area's clay soils from the 17th century.
- This was a major dairying area from at least the 16th century, converting from cheese to production of liquid milk after export was facilitated by rail from the mid-19th century.
- There were orchards on many farms and cider-making was locally important.

Landscape and settlement

- Mixed patterns of settlement, with nucleated villages (for example Powerstock) intermixed with a high density of hamlets and isolated farmsteads, some of which had manorial status or represent the site of shrunken settlements. The villages and hamlets can mostly be dated to before the 11th century whilst the majority of the isolated farms first appear in documents dating from the 12th to 14th centuries. There is a sharp boundary to the chalk downs (Dorset Downs and Cranborne Chase, NCA 134) to the east, where the settlement pattern is predominantly nucleated.
- The present dominant pattern of small, irregular fields on steeper ground and areas away from the nucleated settlements results from a long history of assarting, generally complete by the 14th century; these result from a long history of predominantly pastoral use, and are concentrated in the Marshwood Vale, on the Powerstock Hills and on steeper slopes of the greensand ridges.
- Open field arable was restricted to areas around nucleated settlement such as Whitchurch Canonicorum. This was typically enclosed by agreement from the 15th century, often in a piecemeal fashion, resulting in small, rectilinear fields with curved boundaries. Arable cultivation has historically predominated in the Brit Valley and on lower ground, resulting in more large-scale enclosure often complete by the 18th century.
- In the north of the area, some areas of quite extensive common land were enclosed by agreement in the 17th century, resulting in a field pattern of regular, rectilinear fields that are more typical of late 18th- or 19th-century enclosure.

- Woodland is now generally confined to the steep slopes and stream sides of the clay vale. The area was heavily wooded in the late

11th century, and 12th- or 13th-century place and farm names are indicative of woodland clearance.

Farmstead and building types

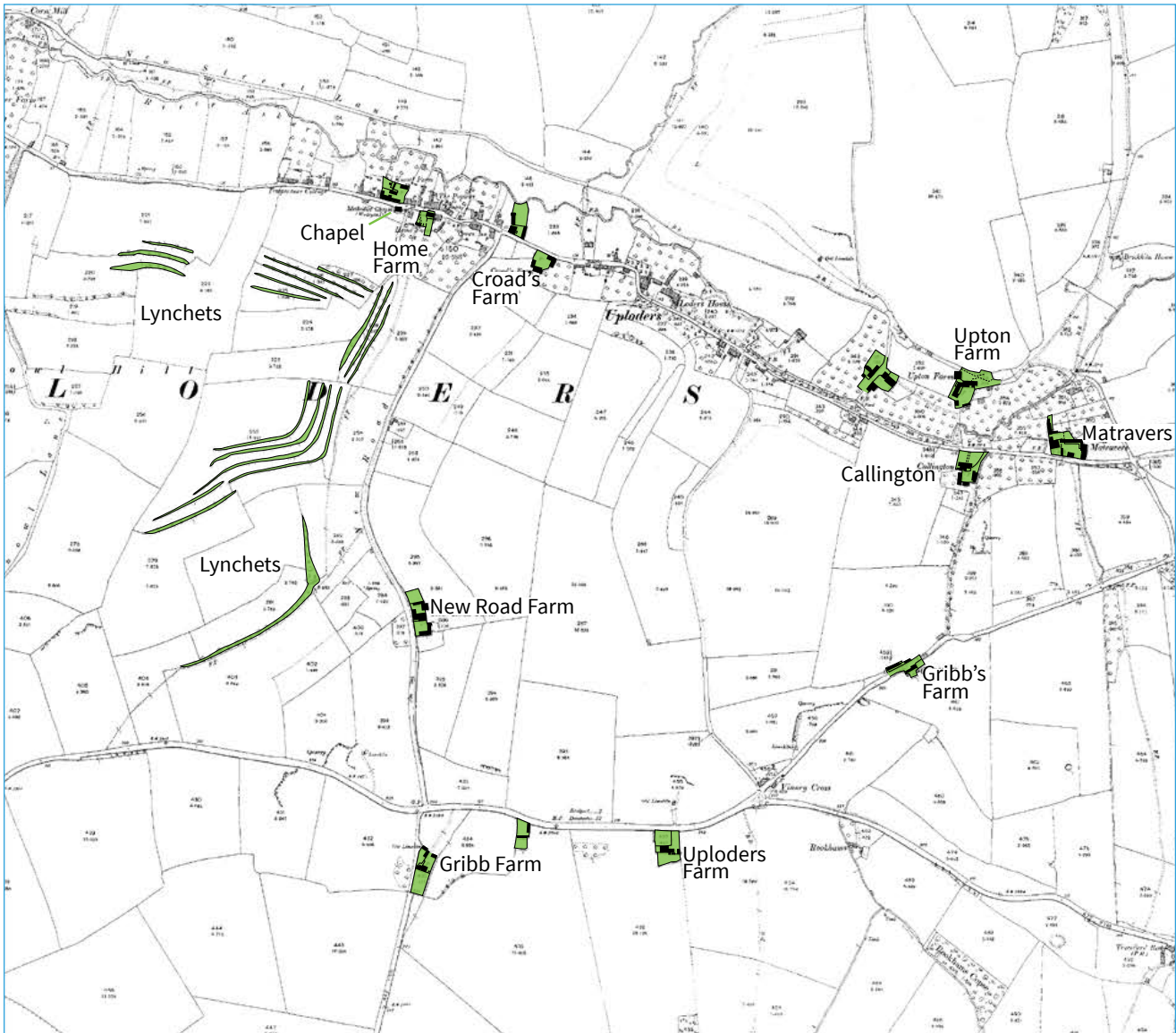
The area has a high survival of pre-1750 farmhouses in a national context, most of these dating from the 17th and early 18th centuries. There is also a moderate survival of farm buildings, mostly barns but also including some very rare stables and cowhouses, of this period.

- Dispersed and loose courtyard plan farmsteads predominate.
- Barns are stone-built; they are typically of three to five bays with a central threshing floor and integral stables. Porches are common.


- Shelter sheds to cattle yards are a common feature, occasionally dating from the late 18th century but mostly of 19th-century date.
- Cider houses were often integrated into combination ranges from the late 17th and most commonly the 19th centuries.
- There are some 19th-century outfarms and field barns.

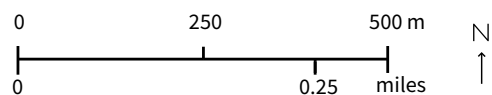


A loose courtyard farmstead group with buildings to three sides of the yard with the 17th-century farmhouse set away and some distance from the working area. Note the large farm pond. Photo © Historic England 29107/036



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



Uploders

The village of Uploders is an irregular row of farmsteads and cottages lying along the valley of the River Asker. Within the western part of the village, small farms lie close to the road and form the main corner of the settlement with, at the east end, a group of four considerably larger and higher-status farms. Most of the buildings of these farmsteads are of 18th- or 19th-century date; Upton Manor Farm has a 16th-century farmhouse which may have originated as a longhouse, the former byre having been rebuilt. Orchards are found in close proximity to the majority of the farms, beyond which to the north are large fields of piecemeal enclosure, some boundaries of which possibly reflect the presence of former open fields. To the south of the valley, the strongly undulating landscape retains evidence for strip lynchets, the earthworks of narrow, arable strips on steep hillsides created in the 12th and 13th centuries, when population pressure resulted in relatively marginal land being brought into arable use. The strips were largely abandoned in the 14th century. Away from the village are several isolated farmsteads, set alongside the network of lanes crossing the landscape surrounded by fields of piecemeal and reorganised piecemeal enclosure. The farmsteads are mainly of loose courtyard form, and so illustrate piecemeal development. Some of the larger farms have more than one yard area. The fields to the west, above the lynchets and west of Gribb Farm appear to be the result of enclosure by agreement, whilst the fields in the south-east part of the map include many straight boundaries indicating 18th-century or later enclosure or the reorganisation of an earlier field. None of the farmsteads in the southern part of the area retain buildings which are listed, suggesting that traditional buildings within these farmsteads are of a relatively late date.



A mid- to late 19th-century, regular courtyard group with an L-plan range and a detached building to the third side of the yard. The large glazed opening is a modern insertion giving what was a two-storey cow house a barn-like feature. Photo © Bob Edwards



Isolated farmsteads, many of medieval origin with buildings recorded as dating from at least the 16th century, can be seen scattered across the landscape at Dottery. They are linked by a network of lanes, and many of the irregularly shaped fields of ancient enclosure retain wooded hedgerows and interspersed areas of woodland. Photo © Historic England 29106/007



This earth-walled stable or cow house is a rare surviving example of the use of cob in the area, possibly reflecting the once more widespread use of earth for the construction of farm buildings which have been replaced by stone in the later 18th and 19th centuries. Photo © Bob Edwards



Pigsties on the dairy farms of this area would have been common but many have been lost. This unusual thatched example did not have yards attached to the sties. Photo © Bob Edwards



Barns are slightly more common on farmsteads in the Powerstock Vale than in the Marshwood Vale. This 16th- or 17th-century barn on a high-status farmstead combines a threshing barn with a stable and its hay loft to the right. Blocked doors to the left suggest that there was once more animal housing within the building whilst external steps to the gable gave access to a granary. To the rear there is later horse engine house. Photo © Bob Edwards



With limited arable across much of this area, particularly in the Marshwood vale, cart sheds were generally small. Larger examples, such as this at Wythertone Farm, are mainly found on farms that have barns, illustrating the large-scale arable cultivation. The right-hand end of this cart shed was a carpenter's workshop. Photo © Bob Edwards



Many barns in this area have double doors to one side only with a small door opposite for obtaining a through draft for winnowing. The end-bay was lofted and probably served a different function from the three bays of the barn, defined by the ventilation slits and door to the threshing bay. Photo © Bob Edwards



In the Marshwood Vale, the largest farm building is typically a two-storey cow house providing housing for cattle beneath a hay loft. These buildings are usually of late 18th- or 19th-century date, reflecting the introduction of improvements in cattle husbandry, as many cattle were simply wintered outdoors. Photo © Bob Edwards



A small, late 19th-century L-plan range of buildings for dairy cattle. Photo © Bob Edwards



A late 19th-century cow house built on one of the Earl of Sandwich's farmsteads. The market for liquid milk developed in the late 19th century and stimulated the construction of cow houses for milking. Windows, as seen here, enabled ventilation. Photo © Bob Edwards



A late 19th-century, four-bay threshing barn with a tiled roof indicating that threshing by hand continued as standard practice in this area, due the low wage rates in rural Dorset. Photo © Bob Edwards

Materials and detail

- A range of building stones – including Ham Stone, often used in churches, manor houses and some farm houses – is found in the Character Area. Limestone, chalk and flint are also seen. Chalk block is usually banded with stone or flint.
- Brick began to be widely used from the 18th century.
- Straw thatch is seen across the area, although plain tiles are predominant.



Historic England

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