



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Quantock Hills

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 144



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>).

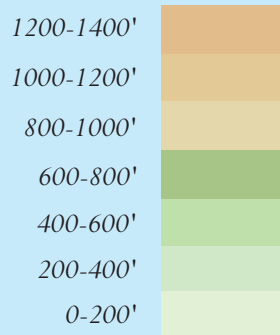


An anciently enclosed landscape, looking across Aisholt up to Durborough Farm and the moorland crests of Middle Hill and Aisholt Common (see map on page 6). Photo © Historic England 27977/050

Front cover: A farmstead on the plateau looking forwards, East Quantoxhead. Photo © Historic England 27978/011

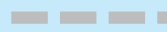
Character Area 144

Quantock Hills



height above sea-level in feet

Area 144 boundary



Adjacent Area



A Road



B Road



County boundary



District boundary



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This map shows the Quantock Hills with the numbers of the neighbouring National Character Area around it.

Summary

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

The Quantock Hills curve inland from the Bristol Channel and have a dramatic ridge land form with varied landcover including upland plateau, wooded valleys and rolling fields. Almost all of the Character Area (96%) lies within the Quantock Hills AONB, England's first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, being designated in 1956. Around 30% is designated as Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). None of the Character Area is classed as urban, reflecting its rural character.

Historic Character

- A mixed farming economy developed in this area from the 15th century in association with the development of larger manor houses and mansions (and parkland and 19th-century estate housing) and in the late 18th and 19th centuries, the enclosure of much remaining moorland. Extensive coniferous plantations have had a major impact since the early 20th century.
- Complex patterns of enclosure with earth boundaries characterise this area, mostly completed by the 17th century around villages and farmsteads. Loose courtyard and dispersed-plan farmsteads, many of the latter arranged with multiple yards, combine with the dominance of barns and cattle housing to reflect the importance of mixed farming.
- Farmstead groups with a strong estate character are linked to agricultural improvement, but others continued to develop within older dispersed farmstead layouts.
- Regular courtyard plans are mostly associated with estate farms that are larger and sited in late 18th- and 19th-century enclosure.
- Other key building types are open-fronted lincays for cattle, cider houses, wheel houses for mechanised threshing and combination barns which housed horses and cattle as well as crops.
- There is a rich mix of building stone, often rendered or limewashed and roofed in Welsh or Cornish slate and with pantiles.

Significance

- The area has a high survival, in a national context, of substantially complete farmstead groups with 18th-century or earlier farmhouses and 17th- and 18th-century farm buildings.
- Surviving use of timber frame is rare, as also is the use of cob.

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 (0%, the national average being 32%).

- The numbers of small farms, parkland and orchards were much reduced from the early 20th century.

Historic development

- The area was extensively settled in the prehistoric period. This is one of the few remaining moorland landscapes in southern Britain, of national importance for the legible survival of monuments dating from the Neolithic and especially the Bronze Ages. Sites include Bronze Age barrows, standing stones, Iron Age hill forts and smaller, defended enclosures (and wood clearance and field patterns) and Romano-British sites.
- The area is dominated by brown earths, many of which have been completely or partially podsolised. Older settlement is concentrated on the fringes of the area. Although much of the present settlement pattern of farming settlements and farmsteads was established in the 8th to 11th centuries, there was considerable ebb and flow of exploitation and settlement; earthworks and ridge and furrow within current areas of wood and heath attest to the pre-14th-century extent of cultivation and settlement on the plateau.
- Larger manor houses and mansions (Nettlecombe Court, Combe Sydenham, Crowcombe Court) dating from the medieval period are very characteristic of this area, especially its western edge, and include a high proportion that developed from medieval deer parks.
- Many deer parks developed into 18th- and 19th-century landscape parks and still survive as parkland today. It was probably during this time that the area's distinctive tree-ring enclosures were constructed on the moorland.
- Since the 15th century, the area has developed a mixed farming economy of corn with dairying and sheep and beef rearing.
- The estates across the area led intense agricultural improvement in the later 18th and 19th centuries, including catch meadow systems to the southern undulating hills, the use of local lime to dress its generally acid soils and the introduction of rotational systems of husbandry with root crops.
- Many small quarries once supplied road stone and building material, and there has been some major 20th-century exploitation (Triscombe Quarry and West Quantoxhead).
- In the late 18th and 19th centuries, copper was mined near Doddington and the area served as inspiration for both Wordsworth and Coleridge.
- In the 20th century, tourism has become a major element in the local economy – based both on the natural environment (long distance trails, etc.) and the cultural heritage.

Landscape and settlement

- At the heart of the Quantocks is the high, heathland plateau, cut by deep, woodland-filled combs which create a characteristic landform of repeating ridges and valleys. A steep, wooded scarp faces west; the lower slopes are mostly pastoral livestock grazing. On the gentler eastern dip slope, below the higher, wooded, and pastoral coombes, arable cultivation and larger fields appear.
- The area has a mixed settlement pattern inherited from the medieval period. Scattered single houses, farmsteads, tiny hamlets and small villages are located along the springline or tucked into the narrow combs and valleys. Villages (for example Bicknoller, Crowcombe) are concentrated on the western scarp edge; like the several large parkland estates that fringe the area (also on the eastern slopes), they are at the junction with the richer,

agricultural lands of the surrounding Vale of Taunton and Quantock Fringes NCA.

- This complex pattern reflects the various phases of expansion and contraction and reorganisation of settlement in the area: reorganisation of settlement in the 8th to 11th centuries; medieval (largely pre-14th century) assarting from woodland and waste; a significant retreat of settlement and agriculture following 14th-century population decline, during which some farming hamlets shrank to individual farmsteads, and then post-medieval enclosure and associated settlement.
- Each village has, in addition, its own individual style due to the variation of building stones available within the area.
- Characteristic earth boundaries are sometimes faced with stone. These can be medieval or earlier in date (for example in the sheltered valleys or combes) or associated with late 18th- and 19th-century parliamentary enclosure of the plateau edge and higher land that had not been enclosed during or since the medieval period. Beech hedge banks also reflect late 18th- and 19th-century enclosure.
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- Abandoned quarries are a feature – most being small and scattered, but some, like Triscombe Quarry, having had a significant landscape impact.
- Lime kilns are a significant building type in the area. Both coal and limestone were being imported from Wales, which led to the development of coastal lime kilns – the remains of which can still be seen at Kilve and East Quantoxhead.
- Ancient woodland is concentrated on steep slopes, replaced after 1921 by Forestry Commission conifer plantations to the east and south – a major impact on the landscape.

Farmstead and building types

Farmsteads developed in association with a high survival, by national standards, of 17th-century and earlier farmhouses. Pre-1750 farmstead buildings, mostly combination barns, are concentrated on the home farms of gentry estates.

Farmstead Types

- Courtyard plans predominate, with regular courtyard plans dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries being dominant on enclosed moorland and in areas dominated by estates.
- Many farmsteads developed at the meeting point of routes and tracks, having multiple yards that – rather than being regular in their layout – have developed from the dispersed plans that are found across the south-west peninsula.
- There are some rare survivals of linear plans with farmhouses and working buildings attached in-line.

Building Types

- Some very large threshing and combination barns of 18th-century and earlier date, typically with lean-to additions, are mostly found on the home farms of gentry estates.
- Stables, granaries and cart sheds are also common features.

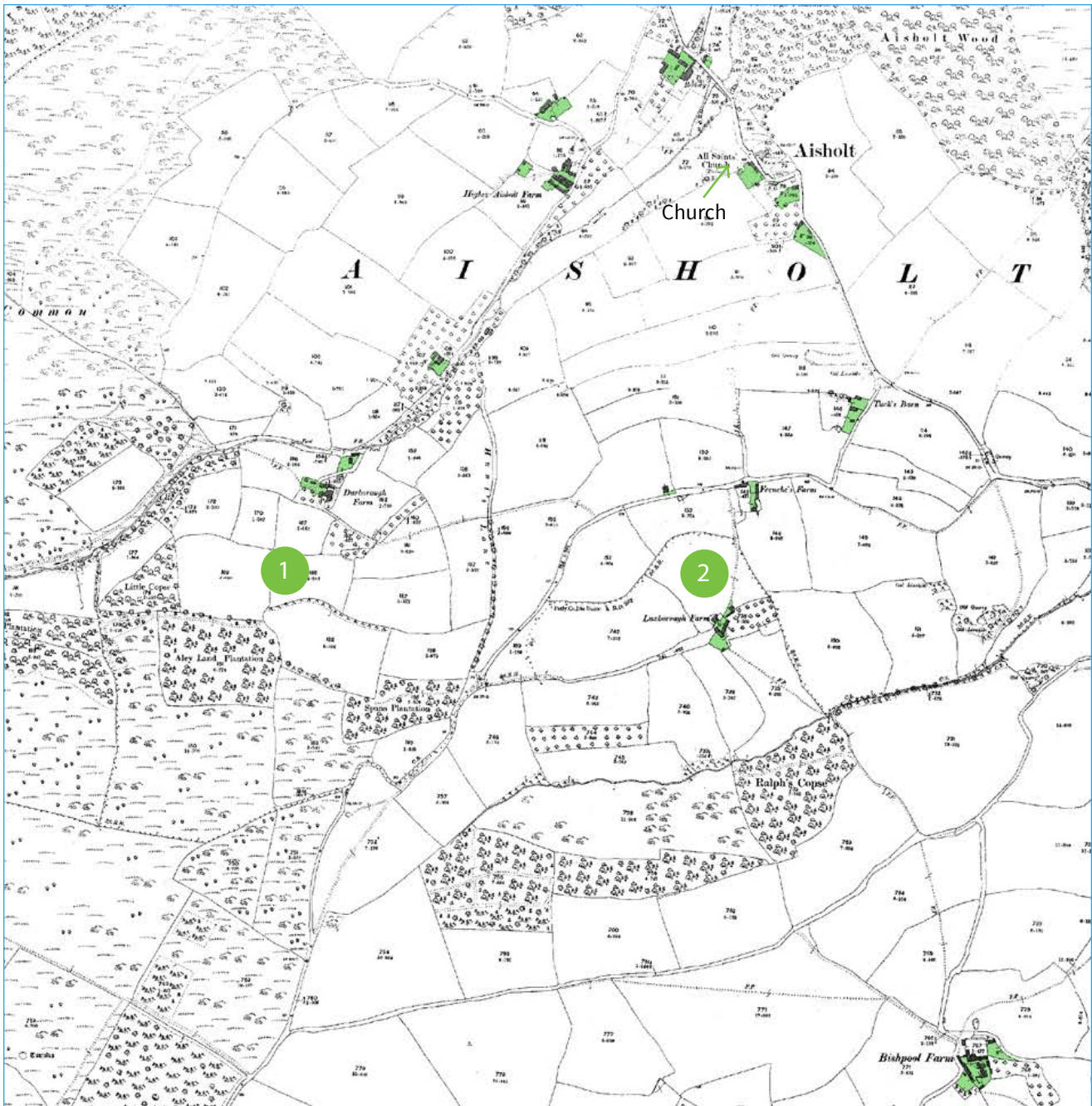
- Buildings for cattle typically date from the 19th century and include open-fronted shelter sheds and cow houses, some being two-storied, open-fronted linhays, arranged around yards and often connected to earlier barns.
- There are cider houses and pigsties, the latter being often associated with dairies attached to farmhouses.
- Outfarms and field barns are most commonly associated with late 18th and 19th century enclosure of moorland.



A field barn for fatstock – a late example of a traditional building, dating from after 1907 – sited next to a contemporary, semi-detached pair of farmworkers' cottages. Photo © Historic England 27978/014



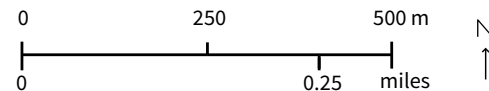
Many farmsteads are strung along routeways leading to upland grazing: this type of 'driftway plan' is found across the upland fringe and upland areas of the south-west peninsula. The farmstead at Durborough (to the left) has an early 17th-century thatched house, a pigsty set in an orchard and open-fronted cattle housing. The display front of the farmstead at Bishpool (right) results from a mid-18th-century remodelling of an earlier house. This faces the farmyard with its large, 18th-century or earlier barn. Lean-tos for cattle housing are attached to the barn, and the other buildings – primarily stables and cattle housing – are strung along the routeway.



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.



Aisholt

The field patterns and farmsteads here, testify to medieval enclosure and later intakes, all linked by droveways up to the rough grazing and extensive woodlands of the high combs and open moorland common. Durborough, the topmost farm in the valley and leading up to rough grazing on the high moor, has a 17th-century house and may represent a later intake. The older farmhouses are typically 16th-century or earlier. By the 19th century, most farmhouses, including the 15th-century hall house at Holcombe Cottage up the main valley towards Durborough, had been reduced to cottages or smallholdings. The remnant medieval field patterns appear to be centred on these holdings, some of which developed as larger farmsteads with dispersed or regular multi-yards at the meeting points of routeways. There is a group of cottages or smallholdings in the centre-right of the map area, where names suggestive of late enclosure occur – French's Farm, Shepherd's Barn, Tuck's Barn. These may reflect later piecemeal enclosure of the older fields, none of them being associated with orchards, and perhaps also part-time employment, either as labourers on the bigger farms or working in local quarries.

Materials and detail

- The variation of building stones available within the area has led to distinctive variation in local character. Red sandstone is generally the dominant building material; Devonian Sandstone of the Quantock Hills is much used in the wider area. Also found are Devonian Hangman Sandstone from the hills to the north, Devonian Ilfracombe Slates (with thin limestones) and Morte Slates to the south, Red Triassic sandstones to the south and east and Liassic limestone towards the coast.
- Slate and thatch are traditional roofing materials; stone-built, thatched cottages are a particularly characteristic feature of this area.
- The larger manor houses and mansions are also of Devonian Sandstone, although red brick has commonly been used in the larger country houses and estate buildings that are scattered about the Quantock landscape.



Historic England

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Please refer to this document as:
Historic England 2020 Farmstead and Landscape
Statement: Quantock Hills. Swindon: Historic
England.

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Product code: 52258 RRL code: 148/2020

Publication date: February 2020 © Historic England

Design: Historic England and Chantal Freeman, Diva
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