Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

The Culm

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 149

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).

Bury Barton, sited to the east of the area between Crediton and Tiverton medieval 'barton fields', fields which – here with replanted boundaries – relate to high-status manors or sub-manors called bartons. Photo © Historic England 27857/054

Front cover: A Culm landscape at Rackenford to the north-west of Tiverton, looking towards a rare surviving area of rough ground (Rackenford Moor and Hares Down). Note the difference between the medieval enclosures with ancient boundaries around the moors, and the reorganisation of older fields with large, straight-sided enclosures. Older farmsteads are sited at the spring-line heads of small side valleys, with access to a variety of resources and offering shelter above the wet valley floors. Photo © Historic England 27856/029

This map shows the The Culm with the numbers of the neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

Higher and Lower Tresmorn on the Cornish coast. The farmsteads here date from the 15th century, one being a hall house and the other a longhouse in origin, and stand to either side of a shrunken farming hamlet with excavated evidence of occupation from the 10th to the 14th centuries – in timber, turf, cob and stone. Around the farmsteads are fields with the curved sides of medieval strips, the fields to the left resulting from 19th-century enclosure of rough ground and farmland. Photo © Historic England 29017/015

Summary

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

This area lies between Exmoor and Dartmoor and includes a long section of Atlantic coast and hinterland in both Devon and Cornwall. It is generally open, sparsely populated, and agriculturally poor, with heavy soils. There are also more productive and intimate valley landscapes and a range of distinctive, farmed-landscape features. Less than 1% of the Character Area is urban; 10% is woodland. Under 10% of the Character Area falls within the North Devon and Cornwall Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and a very small percentage (1%) within the Dartmoor National Park.

Historic Character

- The pattern is of predominantly dispersed settlement, including a high proportion of farmsteads of medieval origin (many having developed from farm hamlets).
- There is a diverse mosaic of field patterns, with common fields around hamlets, evidence of medieval infield-outfield systems as well as individual farmsteads with their own fields which can also be of medieval date.
- Farmsteads had access via droveways to the once common areas of rough ground across this area, which have since been taken in as farmland, some as areas of regular enclosure in the 18th and 19th centuries, and much over the 20th century, worked from existing farmsteads.
- Predominant farmstead plans comprise dispersed multi-yard layouts, often developed from medieval farm hamlets and with buildings set around scattered yards and routeways, and small-scale loose courtyard layouts, sometimes with the farmhouse attached to the working buildings. Larger-scale and regular courtyard plans are mostly associated with larger, arable-based and high-status farms.
- Key building types are threshing barns and mostly 19th-century multifunctional combination barns, housing for cattle (cow houses and open-fronted linhays), stables, cart sheds and pigsties.
- There are some field barns, including linhays, and outfarms.
- Slatestone and slate was commonly used for construction, with some use of granite and also cob. Some brick was used for farm buildings, usually as dressing and quoins, from the mid-19th century and rarely before.

Significance

- There is a high survival of traditional farmsteads and a high proportion of 18th-century and earlier working farm buildings, which are rare by national standards.
- Farm buildings of the 18th-century and earlier mostly comprise threshing barns (including combination buildings with cattle at one end), farmhouses and some early examples of linhays for cattle. Farmhouses mostly date from the 17th century, this area not being as agriculturally prosperous as the Devon Redlands or South Devon, but still having a high survival of earlier periods by national standards. There are some longhouses.

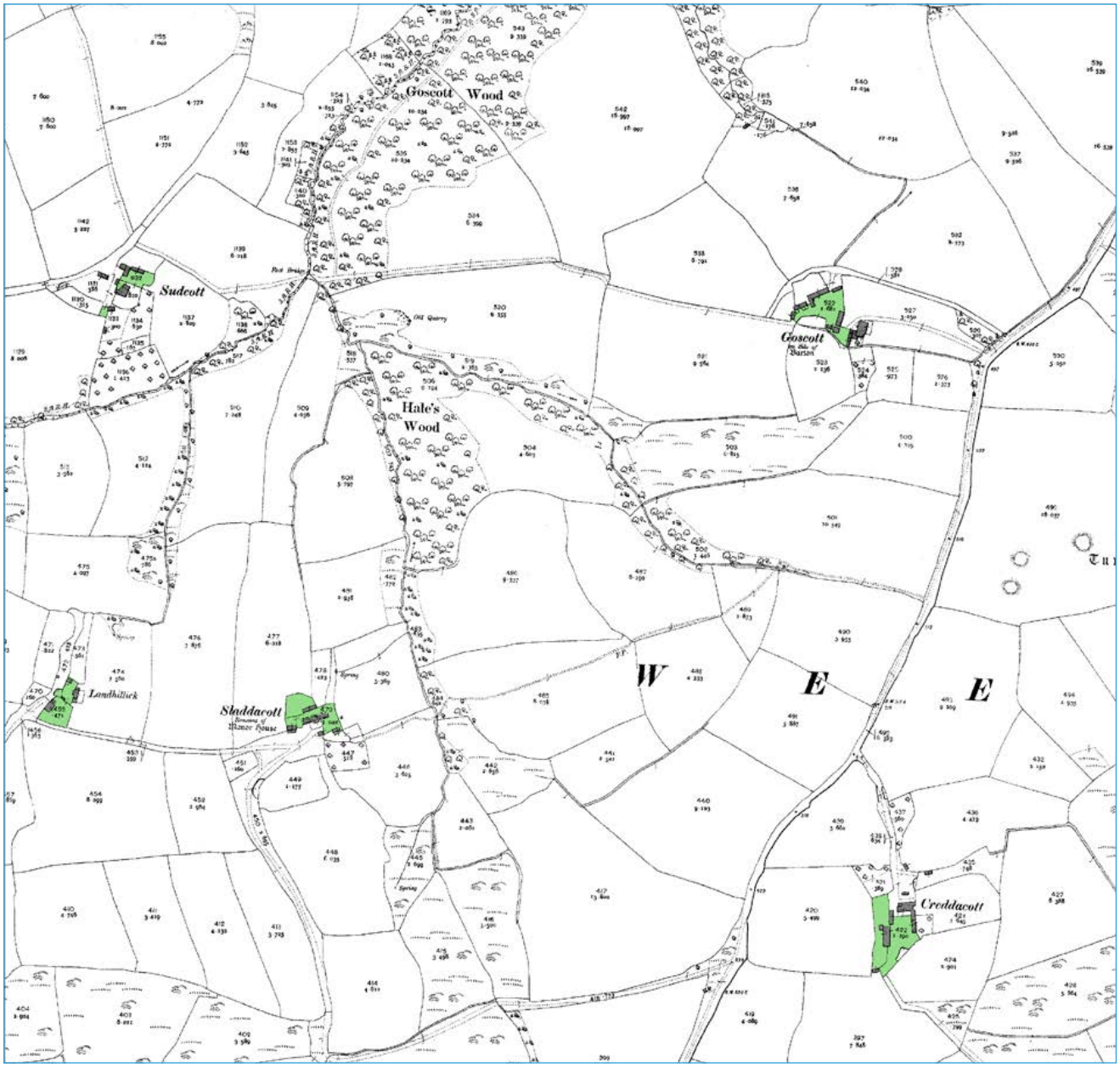
- Any examples of farmhouses including longhouses with unconverted are of outstanding importance in a national context.
- Rare building types are cider houses, those with internal presses and mills being especially rare, and ash houses.
- Farmsteads sited next to unenclosed moorland are now rare. Small blocks of moorland continued to characterise the Culm into the early 20th century, but have since become much more scarce.
- Some farmsteads retain domestic buildings converted into working farm buildings – evidence of former hamlets or resulting from new detached houses.
- There is a significant national concentration of cob and combed wheat reed thatch, including smoke blackening in domestic areas, in this area.
- 'Rag' slate roofs are now rare survivals.

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 (31.6%, the national average being 32%).

Historic development

- It is likely that many of the ridgetops had already been cleared of vegetation by the second millennium BC, and there is substantial evidence of Iron Age and Roman activity.
- By the time of the Domesday Book (1086), the area was as densely settled as on the good red sandstone soils of south Devon; the population expanded until the end of the 13th century, when the density of settlement on the Culm peaked.
- The area is threaded by historic droveways which provided access to rough ground and to neighbouring Exmoor and Dartmoor. Much of this land was taken in by freemen under licence from the lords of the manors in the medieval and post-medieval periods.
- The fragmented but widespread rough ground on hilltops and wet valley bottoms encouraged the development from at least the 15th century of a cattle-rearing and sheep economy in combination with arable farming on better-drained soils.
- Sheep and the wool industry contributed significantly to the shape of the landscape. Enduring features in the landscape are the deep-cut tracks resulting from the use of packhorse trains carrying wool, traversing difficult terrain.
- Orchards for making cider developed across much of the area. Water meadows developed on valley bottoms from the 16th century, possibly earlier. Catch meadows developed in the 18th and 19th centuries (and probably from at least the 16th century as on Exmoor) on the valley sides, to capture water from streams and use leats to irrigate and promote early growth of grass.
- Arable cultivation was historically concentrated on the coastal headlands of the Hartland peninsula and around Bude. It expanded considerably from the late 18th century, productivity on often-marginal land being boosted by farmyard manure, including from field barns, and the use of lime from limekilns to boost its acid soils.
- The cider industry developed on a large scale to the east of the area, close to Exeter, although not on as large a scale as the Devon Redlands or South Devon.
- Coastal and market centres had developed from the medieval period. Inland market and



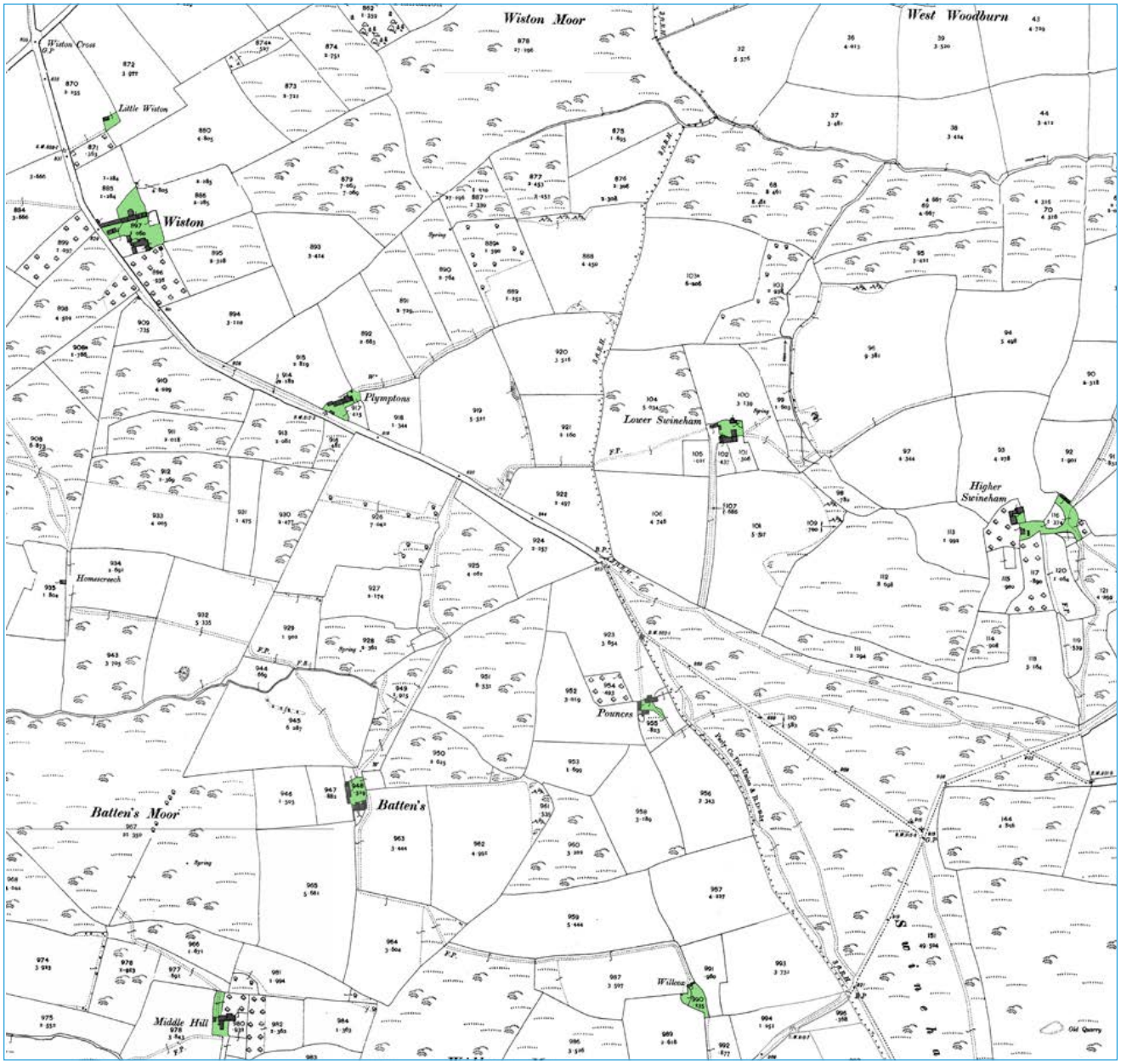
Maps are based on 2nd edition 25" Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England.

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

0 250 500 m
0 0.25 miles
N

Goscott – Sladdicott

Medieval farmsteads are sited at the head of valleys, above the wet wooded floors and below the exposed moors accessed by droveways. Each farmstead has a dispersed multi-yard layout, typical of early layouts in this area, and is set within its own discrete field system with smaller irregular enclosures around each steading and some evidence of medieval strips in curved boundaries.



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

0 250 500 m

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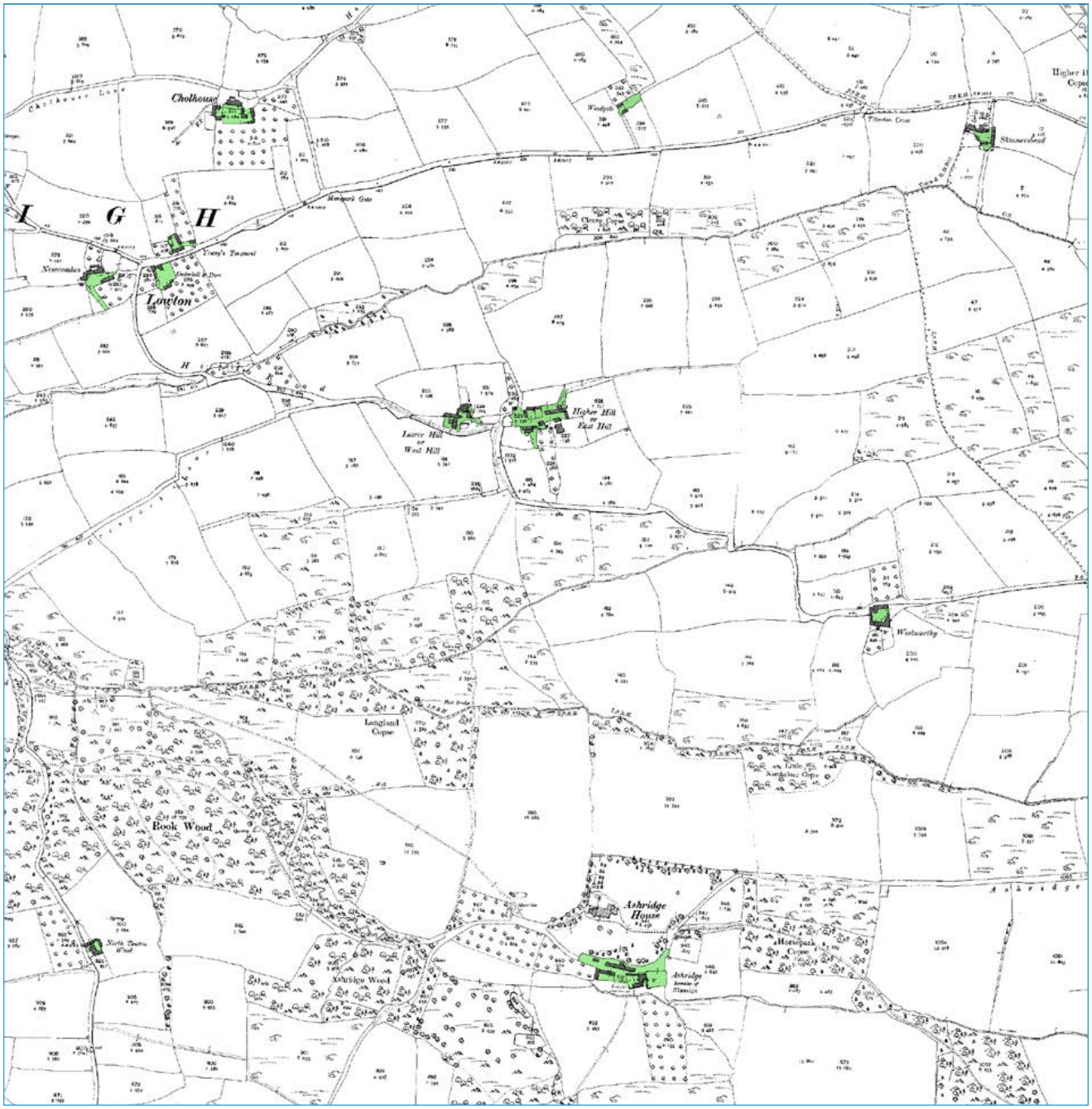
Whiston

A typical Culm landscape, showing 19th-century to medieval farmsteads and their enclosed fields sited amid scattered pockets of remnant moorland.



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.

0 250 500 m

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North Tawton area

These farmsteads, including many of medieval origin but with buildings mostly resulting from 19th-century rebuilding, developed to serve a mix of agricultural, moor and woodland landscapes. They are set in east–west valleys leading to the main valley of the River Taw. The older farmsteads tend to be at the head of side combes – just below the high former moorland of the ridge tops – but above the wet, wooded, valley floors. Farmsteads with informal loose courtyard or dispersed layouts stand in the heart of associated medieval field systems, most showing signs of 19th-century reorganisation of the fields. In contrast the east–west road running across the top of the map extract is associated with regular, early 19th-century enclosure of moorland. The larger fields around Ashridge Farm, the home farm to Ashridge House, reflect a process of enlargement also reflected in the scale of the farmstead which is set out along a routeway.

wool centres developed in the medieval period such as Launceston, Okehampton and Great Torrington.

- Clovelly and Bideford became prosperous ports, the latter more important than Barnstaple by the 18th century. Appledore developed as a fishing port and boat-building centre.

- Bude developed as a seaside resort from the late 19th century.

- There were some small-scale industries including quarrying, lime burning and coal mining (of thin beds known as 'culm', mainly used for lime burning) near Bideford, and later for the manufacture of paint pigments.

- The arrival of the railways stimulated the development of a dairy industry in the late 19th century, enabling the export of liquid milk to nearby resort and other towns and further afield.

- Most of the farms – many purchased as freeholds in the land sales of the early 1920s – have remained small by national standards. It is now predominantly a dairying area, although beef cattle and sheep are also significant.

- The coastal areas in particular have been the focus of considerable development of the tourist industry from the late 19th century, and increasingly since the mid-20th century. Development of long-distance foot and cycle trails has extended access into the heart of the area.

Landscape and settlement

- The area is characterised by fertile brown earths, mainly on valley sides, interspersed with poorly-drained and heavy soil on the hilltops and valley bottoms, producing areas of rough ground with wet heath and mires.

- Open, often treeless, ridges are separated by an intricate pattern of small valleys. The Culm meets the sea abruptly as sheer and dramatic cliffs, only broken in a few places by small coves, occasionally with fine, sandy beaches. Larger bays are at Bude and Bideford, and at the Taw–Torridge estuary, with its mud and sand flats.

- The area has high levels of dispersed farmsteads and hamlets, many farmsteads resulting from the contraction of hamlets between the 14th and 19th centuries. Farmsteads had access to infield areas ploughed into strip fields, with outfield areas located in large fields or enclosures being subject to intermittent cultivation and sometimes retaining strip fields. The result is a variety of field types, varying from long, narrow, former common fields to irregular, older fields on the valley sides and rectilinear enclosures on the high ridges and wet valley bottoms.

- Patterns of encroachment or intake from the waste – typically under license from manorial landlords – are a feature. Some are medieval, but most result from the later reclamation of moorland. Small blocks of moorland continued to characterise the Culm into the early 20th century, but have since become much more scarce.

- There are some villages, many having developed as trading settlements in the medieval period, which are most often a closely grouped collection of simple, even austere, cottages huddled around defendable central squares or 'burys'. A few towns, such as Great Torrington, formed around medieval marketplaces, and Launceston developed along the main route into Cornwall and was its main administrative centre until 1835.

- There are occasional fishing villages (such as Clovelly) in sheltered coves.

- There is little tree cover on the plateau. Small farm woodlands and copses are dispersed throughout the area; large woodlands are found in the valley sides. Orchards, a widespread feature in the 19th century and which had developed from the 16th and 17th centuries,

have been subject to much loss in the last 100 years.

- Given the size of the area, there is relatively limited impact through designed landscapes, although there are ten Registered Parks and Gardens covering 1,017ha.

Farmstead and building types

Buildings of the 17th century and earlier are less common in adjoining landscapes such as Dartmoor, Exmoor and the Devon Redlands, due to the area's relatively lower wealth and the extent of 18th- and 19th-century rebuilding. Farmsteads can retain former farmhouses now incorporated into working buildings, as a result of the shrinkage of farming hamlets into farmsteads.

Farmstead types

- There is a small number of linear farmsteads, with working buildings built in-line with integral farmhouses and occasionally extended into L-shaped plans: these may have medieval origins but they are also characteristic of the later 18th and 19th centuries on smaller farms. Most have been absorbed into larger farmsteads with other working buildings and yards, but included amongst them are some very rare surviving examples of 15th- to 17th-century longhouses which have a shared entrance for humans and cattle.

- The widespread rebuilding of farmsteads proceeded in parallel with the amalgamation of holdings and yard feeding of cattle in the 19th century.

- Dispersed plans, typically with multiple yards for holding cattle, are usually found around the fringes of former rough ground and often alongside or at the meeting point of routeways. They are a distinctive feature of south-west England, and of other upland and wood pasture areas in England. Some appear scattered due to being sited as the land lies, whilst others are amalgamated from hamlets.

- Courtyard plans take various forms from loose courtyards with detached buildings (commonly to one or two sides of the yard) to regular (often planned) groups of interlinked buildings. Regular planned courtyards, whether L- or U-shaped or (rarely) enclosed on all sides, are the most likely to have been planned in the early to mid-19th century and often occur in areas of regular or reorganised enclosure. The largest developed from the late medieval period on larger and high-status farms, including 'barton farms' and some developed or remodelled in the early to mid-19th century, with wheel houses for threshing machinery.

- Most farmsteads contained a mowhay for ricking corn, hay, turf and furze; all have a kitchen garden, and many have orchards, especially in the more sheltered parts of the lowlands.

Building types

- The earliest and often largest buildings are barns for storing and threshing the corn crop and sometimes for other functions such as housing animals. Cattle buildings (shippons and linhays) and yards are the dominant feature of the area's farmsteads, and stables, cart sheds and other ancillary buildings are commonly much smaller in scale.

- Single-storey threshing barns are most likely to be of 18th-century or earlier date.

- Multi-functional, storeyed combination barns often have steps to upper threshing floors or granaries and include stables, shippons, cider houses and sometimes other functions. Some date from the 18th century but the great majority are 19th century.

- Bank barns date from the late 18th to the late 19th centuries.
- There are horse engine houses or evidence of water power (leats, reservoirs, water wheels etc.) for horse or water powered threshing and fodder-processing machinery. Many barns had external 'horse walks' which have left little trace but holes for drive shafts.
- Freestanding granaries are rare and mostly 19th century in date, evidence for granaries being most often found adjacent to threshing floors or storage bays in barns.
- Freestanding stables are usually lofted and include 18th-century and earlier examples.
- Open-fronted, one- and two-storey linhays are typical of this and surrounding areas, usually facing into cattle yards but also found as small field barns. In the Culm they can comprise extensive ranges, including some dating from the 17th century, which can extend as L-plan or even full courtyard ranges. The growing importance of dairying in the later 19th century led to the conversion of many linhays into enclosed cow houses, marked by the construction of stone walls with door and loft openings between the linhay piers or posts.
- Some field barns and 19th-century outfarms occur, though very rarely. They are always small units around the high moor fringe.
- Single-storey and lofted cow houses (shippons) date from between the mid-18th and late 19th centuries.
- Smaller calf houses with multiple doors are typically found close to the farmhouse, and can closely resemble pigsties. Easily recognisable features of pigsties are feed troughs built into external walls and small yards built for each cubicle. They can be sited close to the dairy in the farmhouse because pigs fed on whey, which was a waste product of dairying.
- Root houses can be found in association with housing for farm animals, and may have chutes for tipping the crop into them.
- Farm-bird housing is often found in the form of goose houses and hen houses.
- Ash houses for storing ash from domestic fires over winter, and for fertilising fields in the spring, are a uniquely distinctive feature of this and adjacent areas, particularly Dartmoor.
- Cider houses can be difficult to detect because they were often incorporated into other ranges, especially stabling and combination barns.
- Cart sheds were often built as lean-tos and sometimes as detached buildings facing onto routeways.

A farmstead to the north of Stoodleigh Beacon, sited at the junction of routeways for driving stock to moorland. The site has retained its dispersed multi-yard plan form, and the farmhouse, which includes a cider house, is a 17th-century remodelling of an earlier house. Photo © Historic England 27856/009

This farmstead at Wiston retains a long, 18th- or 19th-century threshing barn and shippon, and a granary and cider house is attached at right angles to the early 18th-century house. Photo © Historic England 27856/023

High-status farms developed as large courtyard layouts. Bury Barton (see p 2), which developed within the Taw valley, developed as a barton from the late 14th century. The medieval hall house is attached to an early 19th-century cider house and store, and has a service entrance to the farmyard flanked by a barn (with a horse engine house of c 1850 in the angle of the yard), stables and linhays dating from the 16th century. Linhays face into the early to mid-19th-century outer yard, and there is a 15th-century chapel to top left of the image. Photo © Historic England 27857/041

This loose courtyard arrangement of detached buildings between Torrington and Bideford, has developed from at least the 16th century and, like other courtyard farms in this area, demonstrates the development of mixed arable-based farming in this area – a threshing barn of c 1700, a granary for seed corn in the yard and early to mid-19th-century stables and a shelter shed. The oldest farm buildings, including a 17th-century combination barn with a cow house, developed in close proximity to the rear of the farmhouse, rebuilt in the early 17th century but with probable medieval origins. Photo © Historic England 29011/018

This is one of three farmsteads named Beere to the north of Staddon Moor, at the head of a valley combe surrounded by former moorland and sited upslope from a deserted medieval settlement. This farmstead has again shrunk in size, and retains an early 17th-century house and an 18th- to 19th-century farm building (a barn, stables and cow house) to two sides of the yard. Photo © Historic England 27858/010

Another example of a farmstead with its house dating from the 15th century, at Westcott Barton, also with a large 17th-century threshing barn with two threshing floors aligned to the routeway. Photo © Historic England 27858/031

Higher Tresmorn (see p 3) has a late medieval house sited at the core of a dispersed arrangements of yards, also typical of this area. Photo © Historic England 29017/013

A threshing barn (left), attached cow house and a cob-walled farm buildings at Sutcombe. Photo © Eric Berry

Farmsteads commonly face, or are at the junction of, routeways, with walls to the yards as here, in this early to mid-19th-century group to the west of Shebbear. Photo © Eric Berry

A characteristic mid- to late 17th-century group at Samford Courtenay, the wide doorway to the right of the stack being to a shippon (cow house). Photo © Eric Berry

17th-century stables and shippon (cow house) in cob and thatch at Sampford Courtenay. Photo © Eric Berry

An early 19th-century combination barn with a shippon in its downslope end, one of a large farmstead serving the arable-based farm at Eastleigh Manor to the east of Bideford. Photo © Eric Berry

A 17th-century or earlier farmstead at Goldworthy west of Bideford, with attached working buildings and to the left an early 19th-century threshing barn. Photo © Eric Berry

Another farmstead group that has developed around a routeway at Goldworthy. Photo © Eric Berry

Cob walling to a barn, with ventilation holes formed by slates. Photo © Eric Berry

Small-scale farmstead groups with pre-19th-century buildings are rare in this area, as here, on the edge of Black Torrington. This outbuilding is a bakehouse or brewhouse. Photo © Eric Berry

A mid-19th-century shippon (cow house) with a hay loft. Cow houses, including linhays, were built in great numbers in this area in the mid- to late 19th century, often forming their own additional yards (as here) and resulting from the need to house fatstock and, increasingly, dairy cattle. Photo © Eric Berry

Stables built at one end of a combination barn are another distinctive feature and date from the 17th to early 19th centuries. Photo © Eric Berry

A mid-19th-century linhay, formerly open-fronted and walled-in as part of the move from fatstock which favoured sheds facing yards to dairy cattle which were stalled in cow houses. Photo © Eric Berry

A late 18th- or early 19th-century granary, raised on piers to keep the grain dry and out of the reach of vermin. Photo © Peter Child

Small field barns for cattle, often built of cob and including some of pre-19th-century date (which is rare nationally), are a characteristic feature of this area. Photos © Eric Berry

Materials and detail

- The great majority of farm buildings are constructed in slatestone, dry-laid rubble (earth bonded) or ashlar in large units in some buildings, but generally bonded in lime mortar. There is only occasional use of granite, near the Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor borders.

- Cob (earth) was formerly predominant across much of this area.

- Roofing was with local slate, which has mostly replaced combed straw thatch. Small-sized Devon (or Cornish) slates (peggies) were traditionally laid in diminishing courses and bonded with lime mortar. Some roofs (to the west) were 'ragged' with large slates and usually nailed directly to rafters, obviating a need for battens; these are now very rare. Eaves and gables were set tight to walls; hips were uncommon in slated roofs.

- Devon slate production declined in the mid-19th century as Welsh 'tally' or sized slates became more available, and ended in the early 20th century. North Cornwall remains a slate-producing area.

- Lime torching (usually full torching) was used to the underside of slated roofs on an individual building basis, but more commonly to stables and barns, also granaries; likewise, lime plastering to interior walls.

Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by Jeremy Lake with Eric Berry and Nick Cahill, Cornwall Historic Environment Service.

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