



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

South Devon

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 151



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>).



Malston Barton to the north of Sherford. To the rear of the 15th-century house, altered and extended in the 17th-century, is a cider house (formerly part of a now-demolished barn) of 17th-century or earlier date: it has a barrel-vaulted store for the storage of cider barrels. Photo © Historic England 29061/052

Front cover: South Hams landscape. Parallel, steep-sided valleys run towards the sea at Newton Ferrers. Large farms and field barns developed on the higher ground, often in association with 18th- and 19th-century enclosure, and smaller farms in the valley settlements which retain earlier patterns of enclosure. Photo © Historic England 29061/033



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



This farmstead at Osborne Newton is dispersed along a driftway, this being a type of plan found in areas where farms developed alongside routeways for moving stock to moorland grazing areas. The high-status, 17th-century house looks out over remnant orchards. The long range includes a combination barn, shippon (cow house) and stables. Photo © Historic England 29061/040

Summary

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

South Devon is a dissected, coastal plateau landscape with distinctive rias lying south of Dartmoor between the Bovey and the Tamar Rivers in south-west Devon. Of the area, 11% is urban and 8% is woodland. The area includes parts of Dartmoor National Park and both the South Devon and the Tamar Valley Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which together cover 35% of the area. It also includes stretches of The South Devon Heritage Coast, and the Tamar Valley and Tavistock area of the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site.

Historic Character

- Settlement is dispersed, with individual farmsteads and hamlets intermixed with low levels of nucleated settlement, towns and villages developing as market centres, ports, for rural industries and, from the early 19th century, for tourism.
- Arable-based farming developed with cider production, stock fattening, market gardening and, from the late 19th century, liquid milk production. Demand for produce was stimulated by rural industries, its ports offering easy access to markets and the demand for liquid milk from the mid-19th century.
- The pattern of piecemeal enclosure was mostly complete by the 17th century, and has developed alongside the growth of substantial farms in this area.
- Large threshing and combination barns (including bank barns) are a characteristic feature, arable farming being also facilitated and served by extensive stable ranges, cart sheds and granaries.
- There is also a wide variety of cattle housing, as in neighbouring NCAs, for rearing (calf houses), stock fattening (shelter sheds and lindhays) and dairying (cow houses and lindhays converted with stone walls into cow houses).
- Cider houses are often incorporated within multifunctional ranges.
- Most buildings constructed in stone and slate, cob and thatch are now-rare survivals from formerly more common construction methods.

Significance

- There is high survival of traditional farmsteads and a high proportion of 18th-century and earlier working farm buildings, which are rare by national standards.
- There are 18th-century and earlier farm buildings which mostly comprise threshing barns (including combination buildings with cattle at one end), farmhouses and some early examples of lindhays for cattle.
- Rare building types are cider houses, those with internal presses and mills being especially rare, and ash houses.
- There is some rare surviving cob and thatch.

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 (41.7%, the national average being 32%).
- The Photo Image Project also recorded an above-average percentage (15.6%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.

Historic development

- The present settlement pattern of hamlets and scattered farms was established by at least the 10th to 11th centuries, and the Domesday Book (1086) shows the eastern part of the area as among the most prosperous in Devon. This pattern of settlement replaced earlier patterns of scattered farms inherited from at least the Bronze Age.
- Arable-based farming linked to the emergence of large farms has predominated in the South Hams, and has encouraged the development of individual farms and the early completion (by the 16th century) of the piecemeal enclosure of medieval strip fields alongside high-status, medieval, ring-fenced barton farms. Stock fattening and cider production increased in importance in the 15th to 17th centuries.
- The area has a long history of exporting grain via the coastal trade. The remains of 18th- and 19th-century malhouses on the tidal inlets and elsewhere testify to the export of malted barley. This was the major cider-producing area of Devon, in part a commercial product for the merchant and fishing fleets based in nearby ports and victualling yards around the naval dockyard at Plymouth. Market gardening and orchards also became a characteristic feature of the Tamar Valley north of Plymouth.
- Dairy farming was predominant from the late 19th century in areas close to railway lines and thus with access to liquid milk trade. Farming is now mixed or arable, with some dairying and stock rearing.
- Manor houses are frequent, especially in the Tamar and Tavy valleys. Some are surrounded by small parks. The influences of major landowners – in the early period, monastic (Tavistock; Buckland), in the later, aristocratic families (particularly the Dukes of Bedford) – cannot be underestimated in capital ventures and landscape changes.
- Wool and cloth were major medieval industries, with many villages involved in carding, combing and spinning produce for sale at central markets such as Modbury; these continued as major industries in Ashburton and Buckfastleigh into the 19th century, and some buildings resembling linhays may have served to house these processes. The wealth generated from the cloth trade resulted in a golden era of church building in the 14th and 15th centuries, a legacy that remains a feature.
- Quarrying and mineral industries have left their mark and are important elements. Quarrying of slate was important from medieval times, the trade dying out due to competition from Cornwall and Wales. Similarly, tin and copper extraction and processing had a long history. Three of the four Devon Stannary towns – Tavistock, Plympton and Ashburton – developed in response to the availability of tin. Production in the Tamar area continued into the early 20th century.
- The opencast clay industry, developing from the mid-19th century in the Bovey Basin (and still on-going), has left a number of features, such as pottery works and the Stover Canal.
- Ports which benefited from the export of cloth are strongly characteristic of the area, road access being generally poor until the later 18th-century turnpikes and, later, rail. These include historic ports such as Kingsbridge and Totnes at the head of rias (drowned valleys), and the estuary locations of Dartmouth,

Plympton, Salcombe and Newton Ferrers. The number of fishing ports declined from the early 19th century, Brixham remaining as one of the region's most significant ports. Plymouth had developed from the medieval period into the region's major port, its naval dockyard and barracks becoming a major draw on the agricultural produce of the area from the late 17th century.

- Tourism began in the 18th century and accelerated in the 19th century with the arrival

Landscape and settlement

- The majority of the area consists of mixed farming, with fields enclosed by hedge banks and narrow winding lanes.
- Most of the area is characterised by a mix of arable and pasture fields, with larger fields on the higher, flatter land and a more intact, smaller, irregular field pattern on the valley flanks. The granite batholith, with its associated rich mineral veins, that underlies the Tamar Valley west of Tavistock gave rise to the 19th-century tin and copper mining industries.
- The predominant dispersed settlement pattern comprises a high concentration of scattered farmsteads and hamlets, including a high proportion of medieval or earlier origin. This ancient pattern of settlement is intermixed with a large amount of nucleated settlements, evident by the late 11th century but continuing to develop in 12th and 13th centuries.
- Farmsteads were sited in villages, in hamlets or individually with access to infield areas ploughed into strip fields, the outfield areas located in large fields or enclosures being subject to intermittent cultivation and sometimes retaining strip fields.
- There is evidence from at least the 14th century for piecemeal enclosure. This was generally complete by the 16th century but continued into the South Hams in the 17th century, characteristically retaining curved shapes of medieval strips to at least one of the longer sides: these are generally concentrated on valley sides close to settlements. Larger-scale enclosure of this type is also found, representing enclosure (typically by larger and amalgamated farms) at the outset of larger groups of strips, and are particularly characteristic of the South Hams. Some medieval fields – on grange farms (such as at Buckland Abbey) or high-status barton farms – were enclosed from the outset, these typically retaining more regular patterns of medieval enclosure, often with post-medieval subdivision within them.
- There is evidence for shrunken settlements associated with these various phases of enclosure and rationalisation.
- Larger fields, the result of both boundary loss and enclosure of the late 18th and 19th centuries, are mostly found on high, flatter land and the high coastal plateaux.
- There are few hedgerow trees near the coast. Sometimes extensive estate woodland and parkland contrasts with semi-natural oak woodland, which is concentrated in the valleys cut into the inland plateau.
- Around the Bere Peninsula, the favourable, mild micro-climate encouraged market gardening and the planting of cherry orchards. Remnants are still found on the valley sides. Strawberry and daffodil farms remain a colourful feature of the Tamar Valley.
- In addition to the agricultural landscapes are the Industrial heritage of the mineral mining in the Tamar Valley, with mine chimneys, quarries

of the railways. Concentrated around Torquay (the 'English Riviera'), the population of Torbay rapidly expanded at the beginning of the 20th century. Despite the railways extending to Totnes, Kingsbridge and Kingswear (opposite Dartmouth), tourism did not impact greatly on the rest of South Devon until the later 20th century. Even with the development of the fashionable hotel on Burgh Island in the 1930s, the area beyond Torbay remained a relatively unknown tourist destination.

and mining settlements, and the distinctive

landscape of ball clay extraction in the Bovey Basin.

Farmstead and building types

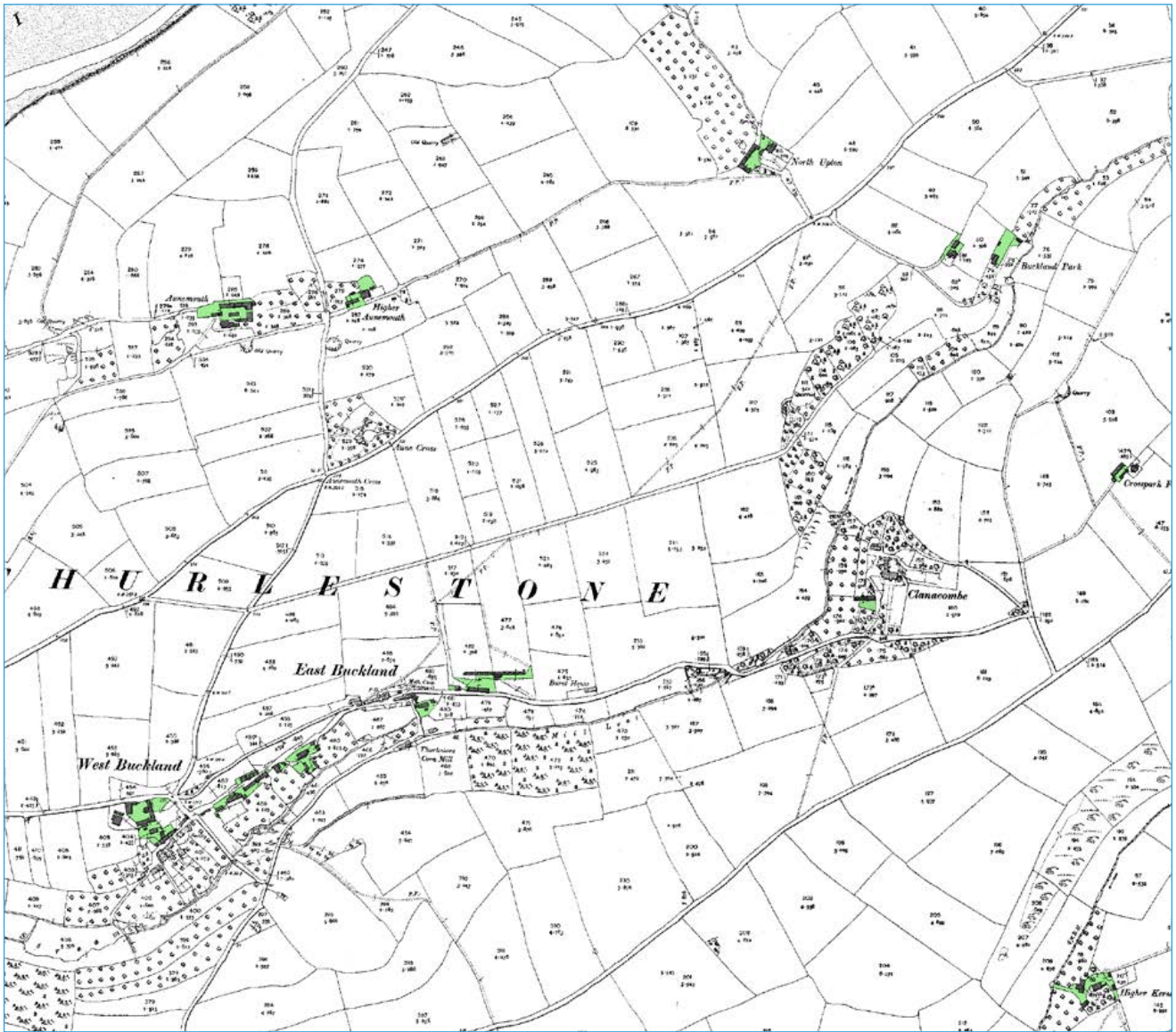
The area has a high concentration of pre-1750 farmstead buildings by national standards, most houses and some working buildings dating from a 17th to early 18th century phase of rebuilding.

Farmstead types

- The area has a mix of linear, dispersed, loose and regular courtyard layouts. Courtyard manor farms are characteristic.
- Courtyard-plan farmsteads are now dominant, often with buildings to three or four sides of a yard and often also with more than one yard. Many farmsteads had cattle yards for fattening added in the mid- to late 19th century.
- Regular layouts mostly date from mid- to late 19th-century reorganisation, and are mostly L- and U-plan layouts but with some large-scale examples built around three or four sides of the yard in the South Hams and on the Duke of Bedford's farms near Tavistock.

Building types

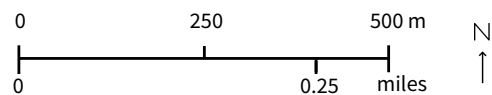
- The earliest, and often largest buildings are barns for storing and threshing the corn crop and sometimes for other functions such as housing animals. Cattle buildings (shippens and linhays) and yards are the dominant feature of the area's farmsteads, and stables, cart sheds and other ancillary buildings are commonly much smaller in scale.
- Single-storey threshing barns are most likely to be of 18th-century or earlier date.
- Multifunctional, storeyed combination barns often have steps to upper threshing floors or granaries and include stables, shippens, 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 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.
- Root houses can be found in association with housing for farm animals, and may have chutes for tipping the crop into them.
- 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.
- Field barns and outfarms, typically built to serve the remoter parts of larger farms, are a distinctive characteristic; examples date from the 18th century and include some built gable-end into slopes and with cattle or stack yards.



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.
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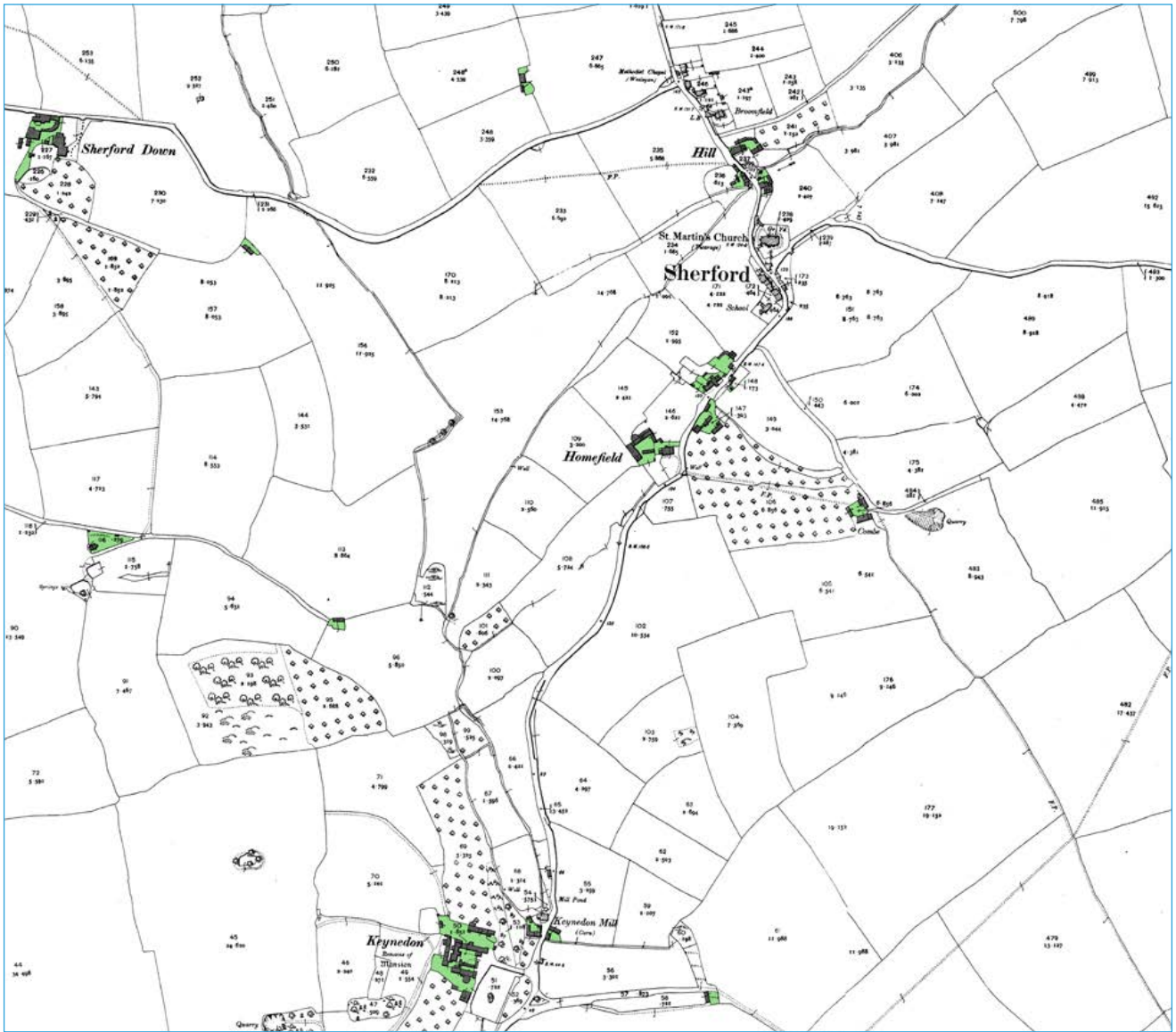


Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



East and West Buckland – Thurlestone

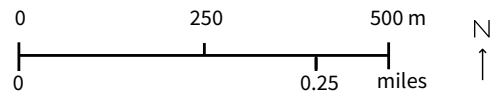
A South Hams landscape with a characteristic mix of large arable-based farms and smaller farms within orchard plantations strung out along the valley. Most developed into courtyard layouts, fields being enclosed, enlarged and replanned from the late medieval period. There are scattered manorial sites with their medieval barton fields in this area, such as Clanacombe with its 16th-century house and dovecote to the east, which later developed into a small country house. Some earlier linear layouts survive along the valley bottom, small farms and smallholdings (notably at West Buckland) also being sustained by numerous quarries and fishing.



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



Sherford

Large barton farms are visible to the south and west of this map. At Kynedon, to the south, the forecourt of the medieval courtyard house became barns, the brewhouse, dairy and bakery continuing to serve the house. Longhouses, for housing people and cattle in a single range with a shared entrance, are also documented in the 17th century. Threshing barns and ranges for fattening cattle dominated the rebuilding of farmsteads around courtyards in the 19th century.



These two farmsteads, now in residential use, developed along the valley bottom at Stadbury. This was originally perhaps a single manorial or barton holding – Higher Stadbury to the right is 16th-century; Lower Stadbury, in the centre, although mainly 18th- to 19th-century, may incorporate older material. The farm buildings include a hipped granary with pigeon openings, a two-storey combination barn, two large barns in one long run, the older and lower of the two being probably 18th-century; there is also a horse engine house for powering threshing machinery. Photo © Historic England 29061/015



This farmstead at the head of a combe near Bigbury was rebuilt in the mid-19th century, and is dominated by the farmhouse (a late example in the Georgian tradition) and a large combination barn with hay lofts and threshing barns above stables and housing for cattle. Photo © © Eric Berry



An early 19th-century combination barn, now in residential use, with a winnowing door for creating a through-draught for winnowing threshed corn over the threshing floor. Photo © Eric Berry



Another early to mid-19th-century combination barn with a canopied door to the threshing floor above housing for cattle. Photo © Eric Berry



An early 19th-century combination barn with a shippon (cow house) to the left and a cart shed in a lean-to to the right. Corrugated iron has been in common use since the later 19th century. Photo © Eric Berry



A range of pigsties. Photo © Eric Berry



Field barns were built in the late 18th and 19th centuries, often built into hillsides, as here, in the South Hams. Photo © Eric Berry



An early to mid-19th-century malthouse range near Kingsbridge. Many malthouses, well-placed for the export of malted barley taken in from the area's arable farms, developed along the creeks of the south coast and the Tamar valley. Photo © Eric Berry



Three canopied doors indicate the exceptionally large scale of this barn with its three threshing floors. Photo © Eric Berry



Lime kilns provide an indication of agricultural improvement and the enrichment of soils from the late 18th century. Photo © Eric Berry



Pre-19th-century farm buildings are less common in this area than in the Devon Redlands and Dartmoor to the north and east of this area. The thatched building is a rare surviving stable range. Photo © Eric Berry



High levels of investment in the early and mid-19th century have resulted in the rebuilding of many earlier farmsteads, and of a wide variety of combination barns. This late 19th-century bank barn has a sliding door (as introduced from the 1850s) and a small entry for the drive shaft of a mobile steam engine. Photo © Eric Berry

Materials and detail

- The use of stone is dominated by local Devonian sandstone, shale and slate, the latter being locally used for slate hanging on walls. A particularly local feature is the use of white granite laid as a single, decorative, course.
- Thatched or local slate roofs, with corrugated iron or tin was much used on farm buildings.
- There is some surviving cob, which is now less common than in the Devon Redlands to the north.
- Some timber-frame, although used to great effect in Totnes, Dartmouth and other market centres, is now limited to open-fronted lincays, some now with weatherboarded fronts.



Historic England

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

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