



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

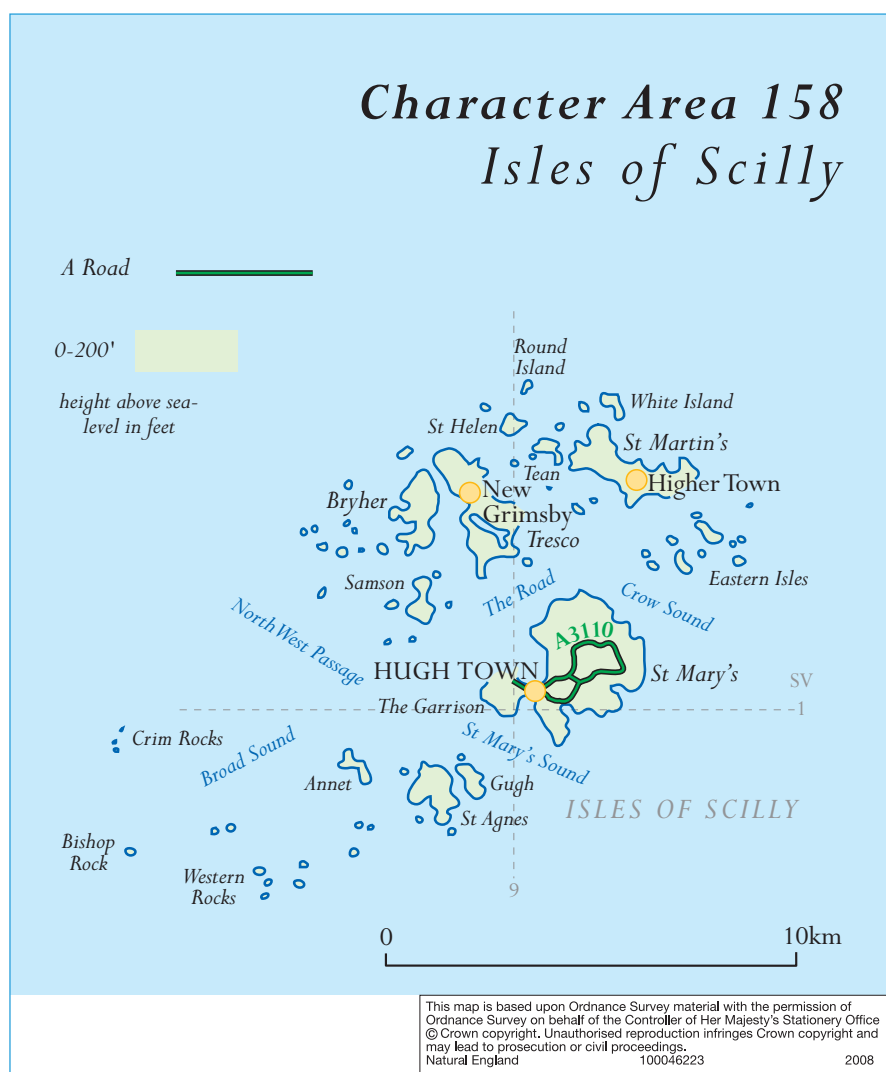
Isles of Scilly

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 158



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 Isles of Scilly Area.

Front cover: Each island has a distinct history and character: here on St Martin's can be seen 17th-century re-enclosure of abandoned medieval field systems, new intake from heathland rough grazing, and 19th-century subdivision of the fields into bulb strips. Photo © Historic Environment, Cornwall Council, 2009; F92-242.

Summary

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

The Isles of Scilly comprise over 150 granite islands scattered across 200sq km, set out in the Atlantic some 40km south-west of Land's End. Of these islands, only about 50 support vegetation and only five – St Mary's, St Agnes, St Martin's, Treco and Bryher – are currently inhabited, covering a total area of just over 14sq km. The islands display a striking diversity of landscapes, some very ancient, including lowland heath, small pastures enclosed by stone walls and banks, tiny hedged bulb fields and a varied coastline. The richness of the archaeology and landscape is reflected in a very high density of designations; 129 listed buildings, over 250 scheduled monuments, some 900 identified historic assets in total, the entire Character Area is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Heritage Coast, Conservation Area and Special Area of Conservation. The urban area is limited to the small town of Hugh Town on St Mary's, and woodland cover is minimal (although the thick shelter-belts and hedges have significant landscape impact in specific areas).

Historic character

- Historically, this is a mixed agricultural economy, interspersed with part-time fishing and maritime work, etc. Strong variations exist between islands in terms of continuity of occupation, degree of enclosure and amount of rough-grazing and animal husbandry, etc. Many farms now earn an income from tourism, either in accommodation or in retail.
- Hugh Town and Old Town on St Mary's form the principal settlements, with small hamlets and solitary farmhouses elsewhere on St Mary's.
- Settlement patterns on the off islands (Treco, Bryher, St Martin's, St Agnes and Gugh) vary, with small clusters of buildings around quays or in sheltered spots and solitary farmhouses located in the centre of smallholdings.
- Distinctive patterns of small fields enclosed by evergreen hedges, called fences locally, protect the bulb and vegetable fields from salt spray and strong winds.
- The predominant pattern is of linear, dispersed and loose courtyard layouts, most commonly with a combination barn to one side of the yard.
- There was widespread rebuilding of farmsteads in the 19th century, including the conversion of former single-storey dwellings into cattle housing and other functions.
- Large numbers of cottagers linked to labour-intensive flower growing, and non-traditional processing sheds and glasshouses, broke down the 'normal' pattern of farmsteads in the late 19th century.
- Key buildings, broadly similar to those in West Cornwall, are two-storey combination barns (first-floor lofts were probably used for chitting potatoes as well as storing hay

and fodder); barns with central cart entries for loading hay or corn; single-storey cow houses and low and small-scale buildings close to the farmhouse, commonly pigsties and calf houses. Field barns, which represent a rebuilding of earlier or more impermanent

field shelters for cattle, are scattered across the landscape.

- Although less common now, early 20th-century maps and photographs show a landscape with extraordinarily dense numbers of glasshouses.

Significance

- The whole island group has a uniquely dense concentration of historic assets.
- The bulb-field strips and tightly enclosing hedges, fences, etc. form a unique landscape.
- Traditional farm buildings are always less significant in scale and design than on the mainland; glasshouses are the most distinctive type, and increasingly rare.
-

Present and future issues

- In this Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a low proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (14.3%, the national average being 32%).
- The Photo Image Project also recorded an above-average percentage (16.7%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.
- The mix of archaeological and habitat-sensitive sites, tourism, agriculture and horticulture, and particular sensitivity to climate change, create a unique landscape and unique pressures.
-

Historic development

- The extent of the islands was much greater historically due to lower sea levels – remains of prehistoric settlement and fields now lie under shallow tidal waters, as well as extensive evidence elsewhere across the islands, particularly visible on coastal and downland areas.
- Human habitation on the Scillies was largely at a subsistence level until the late 19th century, based on eking a living from both the marine environment and the land.
- There is a long history of mixed farming, based on cattle, sheep, and pigs. For most of the post-medieval period the crops grown were potatoes, barley, wheat, peas, oats and a grain called pillis.
- Potatoes were grown in large quantities, with some farmers gathering two crops a year and the introduction of better and earlier varieties during the 19th century led to a surplus for export. Enough barley was grown to supply all the Islands with beer, bread for the poorer families and feed for cattle and pigs. Only a little wheat was produced locally, sacks of flour being imported from the mainland, but sufficient quantities of peas, oats and pillis were grown to serve the local need. The pillis was ground and used as an alternative to oatmeal.
- Agriculture was combined with other occupations – fishing and kelp-burning were described in 1814 as the principal occupations on the Islands. Boat-building, piloting, victualing and piracy have at other times been significant.
- The level of occupation of the whole group, and individual islands within it, has varied

considerably over time, with various key episodes of investment and improvement in the historic period, especially:

- The 12th-century foundation of Tresco priory
- Repopulation (by ‘incomers’) and development of 16th-century nationally strategic fortifications complexes
- Organised resettlement of, for example, St Martin’s by Godolphin Lords of islands in the 16th (?) and 17th centuries
- In 1834 Augustus John Smith became the Lord Proprietor of Scilly; the abbey garden

on Tresco was laid out, and a boat-building industry was developed

- Improved transport networks – via Penzance and other ports – facilitated the development of market gardening (horticulture, potato and bulb growing) from the 1870s.
- By the turn of the 20th century, over 40 tonnes of flowers were being shipped to markets in London several times a week.
- Historic settlement patterns were marked by a considerable ebb and flow, but continued to be based around hamlet and churchtown patterns.

Landscape and settlement

- The predominant settlement pattern comprises a high degree of dispersal of scattered farmsteads and hamlets, including some of medieval or earlier origin, but many of post-medieval origin.
- Hugh Town is the only (small) urban settlement on the islands, developing largely from association with, and supplying the major garrison stronghold at Star Castle.
- Across the islands is a rich mix of fieldscapes:
 - Small-scale and irregular patterns of prehistoric fields
 - Some enclosed fields of medieval date (there appears to have been very little large-scale laying out of medieval strip fields)
 - Post-medieval enclosure of earlier farmland and rough ground, both piecemeal and extensive areas of regular enclosure fields, most clearly seen in the 17th-century re-settlement and re-organisation of the landscape of St Martin’s.
 - There was much 19th-century regular enclosure on all the main islands, particularly the subdivision of older fields for bulb growing, market gardens and orchards.
- This process has created a unique pattern of small fields enclosed by high dry stone or stone-faced earth boundaries, called fences locally, with tall evergreens such as *Pittosporum* protecting the bulb and vegetable fields from salt spray and strong winds.
- Larger, more substantial stock-proof stone-faced earth walls (Cornish ‘hedge’), usually 19th- to 20th-century, divide off the open rough-grazing areas.
- Hamlets and farmsteads nestle within this intimate landscape, linked by twisting ancient tracks and lanes.
- There is sometimes subtle but highly significant variation between all the major islands, for instance:
 - **St Agnes** almost all fields are anciently enclosed land, subdivided for bulbs; almost exclusively dry stone or stone-faced boundaries with shelter-planting on one side
 - **Bryher** boundaries consist mainly of hedges, with intermittent dry stone walls
 - **St Martin’s** there is much less anciently enclosed land and a greater proportion of bulb strips than the other islands, as well as a larger percentage of modern enclosures.

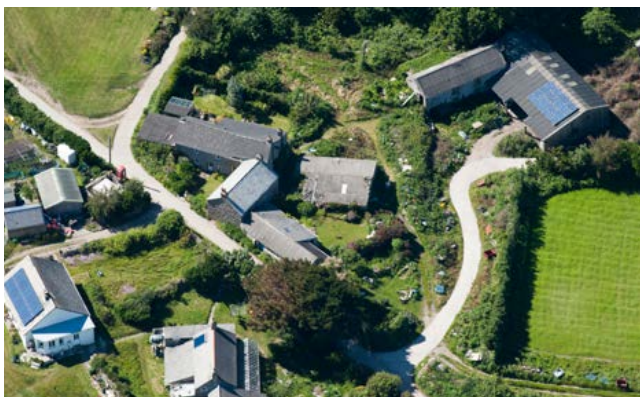
- **St Mary's** there is much greater evidence of continuity of early (at least medieval) settlement; much greater percentage of associated anciently enclosed land than any other islands and much less subdivision of flower fields into strips. As well as lining the stone walls and 'Cornish hedges', in some cases the boundary is formed by a hedge or line of elm trees alone. A type of 20th-century enclosure unique to St Mary's is the garden allotment, for example at Porth Cressa.
- **Tresco** anciently enclosed land is not nearly as intact as on the other islands; There was much 19th- and 20th-century removal of boundaries and rebuilding of walls to a 'house style' consisting of neatly built stone-faced stone walls (or stone-faced earth walls) with vertically-set coping stones. Bulb fields are larger and less uniform than on other islands.

Farmstead and building types

- The predominant pattern is of linear, dispersed and loose courtyard layouts, most commonly with a combination barn to one side of the yard
- There was widespread rebuilding of farmsteads in 19th century, including the conversion of former single-storey dwellings into cattle housing and other functions.
- Large numbers of cottagers linked to labour-intensive flower growing – and non-traditional processing sheds and glasshouses – broke down 'normal' pattern of farmsteads in the late 19th century.
- Single-storey cow houses and two-storey cow houses with windows to first-floor lofts which were probably used for chitting potatoes as well as storing hay and fodder
- Low and small-scale buildings close to the farmhouse, commonly pigsties and calf houses
- Although less common now, early 20th-century maps and photographs show a landscape with extraordinarily dense numbers of glasshouses.
- Field barns, representing a rebuilding of earlier or more impermanent field shelters for cattle, which are scattered across the landscape.

Key buildings, broadly similar to those in West Cornwall, are:

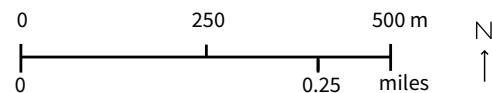
- Two-storey combination barns as in West Cornwall, with external steps or ramps to upper-floor threshing areas
- Barns with central cart entries for loading hay and corn



Middle Town, St Agnes. Dispersed or loose courtyard group – two cottages or farmhouses look over a small shared space by the road, each with attached linear and/or parallel ranges. The detached combination barn (threshing barn, cow house and stables) at top right is listed; with hole for a drive shaft which powered threshing machine, it was an advanced type of farm building situated on an island once noted for its fertile corn-bearing soil. Photo © Historic England 29032/011



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



Most features of the Scilly landscape can be seen here on St Agnes: the dominance of the maritime situation; extensive rough grazing on the coastal and low upland areas; scattered settlement connected by ancient winding tracks; above all anciently- enclosed farmland subdivided into bulb strips. There are generally far more such subdivisions now, even than shown on the 1907 O.S. mapping. St Agnes also retains the least altered pattern of Anciently Enclosed Land in the Islands. Despite the landscape impact of the luxuriant hedges and the few trees in the centre of the island (see photograph on next page), the enclosures have almost exclusively dry stone or stone-faced boundaries, with shelter-planting on one side, rather than being fully planted hedges in themselves.



Middle Town, St Agnes

Informally grouped cluster of small farmsteads, isolated barns, cottages, glasshouse and packing sheds and other non-agricultural buildings set around small pasture paddocks; further out are the bulb-strips. The farmsteads are for the most part of dispersed plans, with some short linear groupings, and loose courtyards that have grown up over time rather than being planned units. Photo © Historic England 29032/003



North Farm, Higher Town, St Martin's. A 17th- to 19th-century farmhouse, with adjacent brew house or dairy forming a loose courtyard (left) with a combination barn at top, a cow or calf house, and below that a strong, linear range (now including various workshops, bakery, etc.) Photo © Historic Environment, Cornwall Council, 2009; F92-297.



Trenoweth, St Mary's. A substantial dispersed multi-yard, including an unusually large listed mid-19th-century Scillonian barn, very similar in form to the chall barns of Cornwall. Set around a driftway – a rare survival as so much of the ancient pattern on the Islands was reorganised – although St Mary's preserves perhaps more of the ancient structure of fields and settlement patterns; the 18th-century farmhouse is one of the older inhabited structures surviving on Scilly. Photo © Historic England 29023/034



St Mary's. Simple, informal linear group along the roadside – late 18th-century double-pile farmhouse, with low, single-storey multi-purpose ranges adjacent; early 20th-century glasshouses and flower-sheds were later introduced to rear of the plot. Photo © Eric Berry.



Two-storey combination barn, with external steps to upper floor threshing areas; not in domestic use, but much re-use of old windows; note the pantile roof. Photo © Eric Berry.



Barns with cart entry for loading (mostly) hay. Photo © Eric Berry.



St Mary's. Early 20th-century glasshouses – concrete blocks, timber windows and corrugated roofing; an increasingly rare building type replaced by modern metal-framed structures, or by plastic polytunnels. Photo © Eric Berry



The listed farm buildings at North Farm, St Martin's – combination barn to right (with masonry suggesting older origins than the 19th-century date given), cow or calf house in centre, linear range to left. As the list description says – a group of farm buildings which exemplify the types found on mid-late 19th-century Scillonian farms. Photo © Eric Berry.



The listed farm buildings at North Farm, St Martin's – combination barn to right (with masonry suggesting older origins than the 19th-century date given), cow or calf house in centre, linear range to left. As the list description says – a group of farm buildings which exemplify the types found on mid-late 19th-century Scillonian farms. Photo © Eric Berry.



Ennor Castle. Building types and building materials – thatch, pantile, glasshouse, and dry stone walls... (all gone...). Photo from the Gibson Archive.



St Agnes, Middle Town. Granite is the predominant traditional building material; squared and coursed stonework, even on farm buildings, show a degree of traditional local craftsmanship. Photo © Eric Berry.



Granite is also found as simple, rough dry stone walling, and more random rough-coursed construction. Photo © Eric Berry.



St Martin's. Pantiles are surprisingly common – like coastal areas in Cornwall, they were often imported in the 19th century alongside Bristol and Somerset coal. Photo © Eric Berry



Traditional slate roofs – here lime washed as in West Cornwall – are increasingly rare; non-Cornish imported slate, or man-made substitutes are increasingly dominant. Photo © Eric Berry.



A variety of corrugated materials are extensively used, both for roofing and walling. Note also the concrete blocks – almost ubiquitous in the early 20th century flower-industry buildings. Photos © Eric Berry.

Materials and detail

- Granite is the predominant traditional building material
- Much use was made in the early 20th century of concrete block construction.
- Roofing material traditionally included thatch (including heather-thatching), alongside, and

gradually replaced by imported material – Somerset pantiles and the once predominant Cornish slate – now gradually being replaced by a variety of modern roofing materials, particularly corrugated metals and asbestos-fibre, etc.



Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by Jeremy Lake.

Please refer to this document as:
Historic England 2020 Farmstead and Landscape
Statement: Isles of Scilly. Swindon: Historic
England.

For more guidance on farmsteads and
landscapes in Cornwall see the Cornwall
Historic Farmsteads Guidance at [https://
www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment-and-
planning/strategic-historic-environment-
service/guidance/technical-guidance/
cornwall-historic-farmsteads-guidance/](https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/strategic-historic-environment-service/guidance/technical-guidance/cornwall-historic-farmsteads-guidance/)

We are the public body that looks after
England's historic environment. We champion
historic places, helping people understand,
value and care for them.

Please contact
guidance@HistoricEngland.org.uk
with any questions about this document.

HistoricEngland.org.uk

If you would like this document in a different
format, please contact our customer services
department on:

Tel: 0370 333 0607

Email: customers@HistoricEngland.org.uk

All information and weblinks accurate at the
time of publication.

Please consider the environment before printing
this document

Product code: 52272 RRL code: 162/2020

Publication date: February 2020 © Historic England

Design: Historic England and Chantal Freeman, Diva

Arts Product code: 52258 RRL code: 148/2020