

# Assessing Farmstead Character and Significance: Preliminary National Guidance

April 2009

*This guidance can be used with the area statements and the Assessment Framework in order to understand the inherited character and significance of individual farmsteads, or those in an area. Refined guidance can be fully illustrated and linked on the Farmsteads Toolkit website. Please send any comments to: [farmsteads@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:farmsteads@english-heritage.org.uk)*

## CHARACTER

Farmsteads – and in particular traditional buildings of 19th century or earlier date - make a fundamental contribution to *local distinctiveness* and a *sense of place*, through their varied forms, use of materials and the way that they relate to the surrounding form and patterning of landscape and settlement.

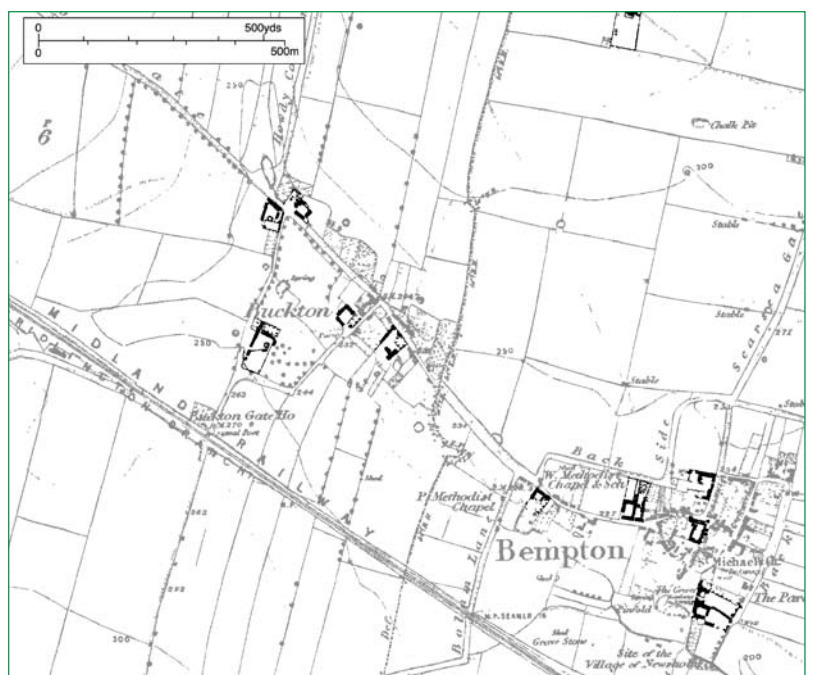
### 1 Historic Development

Distinct agricultural regions have developed from the medieval period, mixing or specialising to differing degrees in the production of corn, livestock or dairy products. They have been influenced by patterns of landownership, communications, urban development and industry, as well as the nature and intensity of earlier land use. Agricultural productivity has long been sustained by new techniques in crop and animal husbandry, and the restructuring and enlargement of farm holdings. The period 1750-1880, and especially the capital-intensive 'High Farming' years of the 1840s-70s, saw a particularly sharp increase in productivity, followed by a long but regionally varied depression that lasted until the Second World War.

### 2 Landscape and Settlement Context

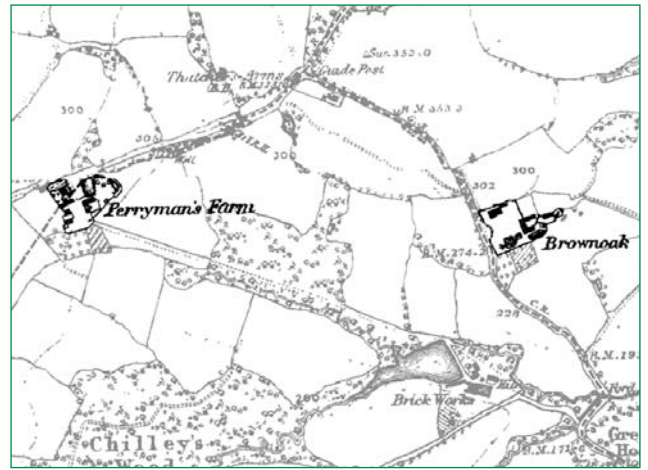
The size and density in the landscape of farms and their fields results from the type of farming – ranging from the largest corn-producing farms to the smallest dairying or stock rearing farms – and historical patterns of settlement and land use that can reach back into the medieval period and even earlier. In areas of nucleated settlement communities have worked the land from villages, and most or all isolated farmsteads were established after the enclosure of open fields or common land. At the other extreme are areas of dispersed settlement with few or no villages and which have been dominated by scattered dwellings and farmsteads. Other areas may have a mix of settlement patterns.

**Farmsteads within and on the edge of settlements** can be appreciated in relationship to other historic buildings and distinctive patterns of enclosure, which can retain the small-scale or narrow profiles of earlier closes and strips.

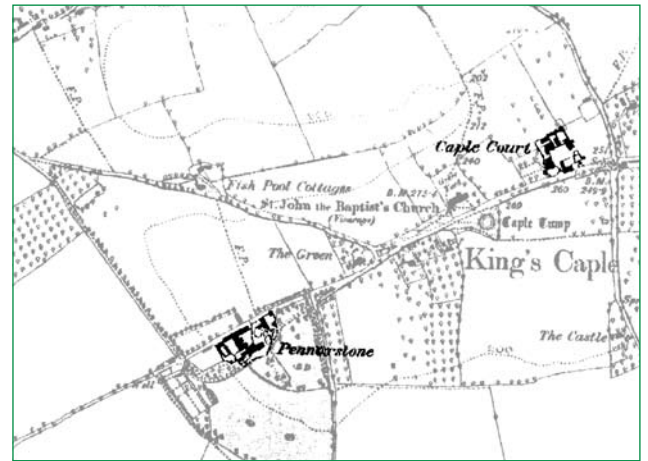


**Isolated farmsteads can be:**

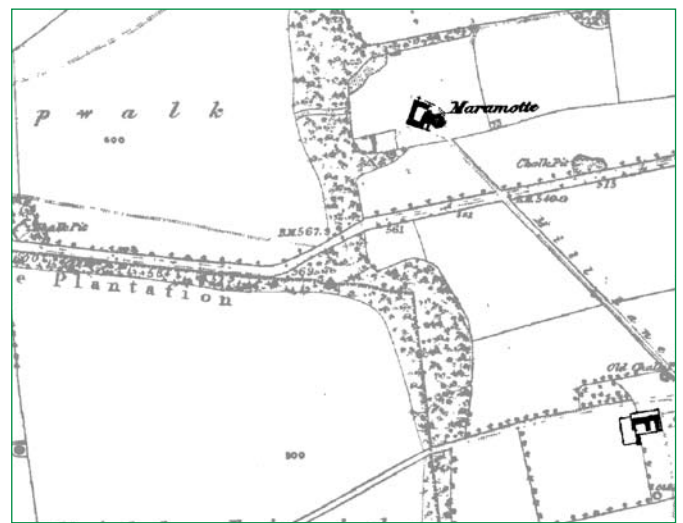
- sited among small-scale and irregular fields, which can result from land and woodland clearance in the medieval period or earlier.



- sited amongst piecemeal patterns of enclosure, which may date from the medieval period.



- sited amongst regular patterns of enclosure, which are most commonly associated with the period after 1750 and the replanning of common land or earlier enclosed landscapes, sometimes with new farmstead sites.



**3 Farmsteads and Buildings**

A farmstead is the homestead of a farm where the farmhouse and some or all of the working farm buildings are located, some farms having field barns or outfarms sited away from the main steading.

**Dating**

Most traditional farmstead buildings date from the 19th century, survivals of earlier periods being increasingly rare. Over the 20th century – and especially since the 1950s – farmstead functions have been met in all areas by standardised sheds. A clear distinction can be drawn between wide-span multi-purpose sheds, dating from the 1950s and which are vital to the modern industry, and earlier more specialised buildings which in their scale, form and use of materials more closely resemble the domestic and industrial architecture of their surrounding areas.

## Farmstead Types

The character of farmsteads has been shaped by their development as centres for the production of food from the surrounding farmland. The principal function of farmsteads has been to house the farming family and any workers, store and process harvested crops and dairy products, provide shelter for livestock, carts and implements and produce manure for the surrounding farmland. Farmsteads required access to routes and tracks, and working buildings were placed in relationship to yards and other areas for stacking crops and managing livestock. Buildings also express their principal historic functions, which were to house the farming family and any workers, store and process harvested crops and dairy products, provide shelter for livestock, carts and implements, and produce manure for the surrounding farmland. Houses faced towards or away from the yard, and may be attached or detached from the working buildings. Variations in farmstead form, scale and dates reflect agricultural and local traditions, landownership, farm size and a variety of historic functions.

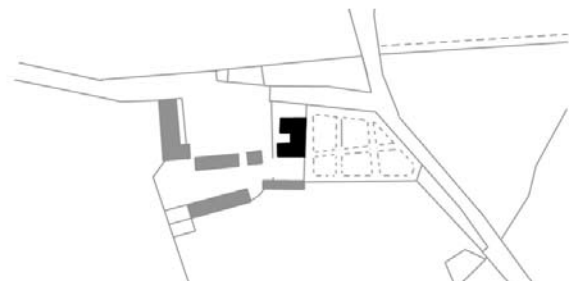
### Main historic farmstead types:

The main historic farmstead types are shown below, the working buildings being shown on grey and the houses in black:

**Dispersed plans**, which have no focal yard area and where the buildings are clustered, set out around multiple dispersed yards or sited along a track.



**Loose courtyard plans**, where mostly detached buildings have developed in piecemeal fashion around one or more sides of an open cattle yard.



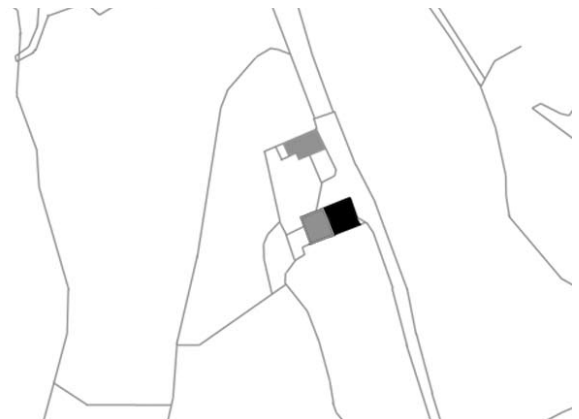
**Regular courtyard plans**, where buildings are carefully planned as linked ranges and often result from a single phase of building. Farmsteads can be arranged as full courtyard, L-, U-, and E-plan arrangements, always with one or more yards for the collection of manure.



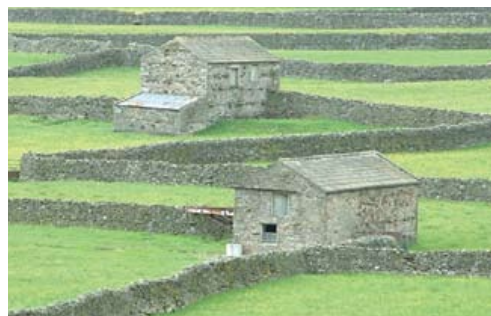
**Linear plans** where houses and working buildings are attached and in-line, and which are now most common in northern and western pastoral areas.



**Parallel plans**, the least common type and where the agricultural buildings lie opposite the main house, which is sometimes a linear farmstead range.



**Field barns** and **outfarms**, which are detached from the main group. These may have been built with yards, and been provided with access tracks.



## 4 Materials and Detail

The construction, form and detailing of buildings is key to local distinctiveness and sense of place. The range of materials used reflect England's huge diversity in geology, and differences in building traditions and wealth, access to transport links and the management of local timber and other resources. This has contributed to great contrasts and variety in traditional walling and roofing materials and forms of construction, which often survived much longer on working farm buildings than farmhouses.

Historic farmsteads reflect England's huge diversity in geology, and differences in building traditions and wealth, estate policy, access to transport links and the management of local timber and other resources. This has contributed to great contrasts and variety in traditional walling and roofing materials and forms of construction, which often survived much longer on working farm buildings than farmhouses. Buildings in stone and brick, roofed with tile or slate, increasingly replaced buildings in clay, timber and thatch from the later 18th century. Building materials such as softwood timber, brick, slate and iron could also be imported onto the farm via coastal and river ports, canals and rail. There also appeared in the 19th century a range of standard architectural detail, such as part-glazed and ventilated windows and the use of cast and wrought iron for columns and other detail. Prefabricated construction in industrial materials made

its way onto farms from the 1850s, but did not become dominant and widespread until after the 1950s. Since this date large multi-functional sheds have served the requirements of the agricultural industry.

The style of a farmstead building results from its form, scale, architectural detail and use of materials, and may reflect local traditions, the policies of estates and national models.

**Vernacular buildings** are characteristic of their locality, rather than following national models or being designed by architects, agents or engineers. They often use locally available materials, although they may include the use of imported brick, slate and other materials as these became available in the area. They will often display evidence for successive change, with farmsteads and buildings developing and being added to over time.



**Designed buildings** usually form part of regular-plan late 18th/19th century groups based on national models, and more commonly result from the building programmes of estates than individual farmers. The groups are usually built in a single phase, sometimes in a recognisable architectural style, and are usually marked by a consistent use of local or imported materials.



**Industrially-produced buildings** comprise factory-made prefabricated structures using steel/iron frames and corrugated iron cladding (eg Dutch barns as used from the later 19th century) and examples of 1914-40 concrete and industrial brick structures (eg silage towers) and groups.



# SIGNIFICANCE

## I Visual and amenity value

This is a visual and perceptual judgement of:

1. the contribution that farmsteads make to the character and appearance of the area, particularly in long and middle-distance views. This requires consideration of the siting, distribution and prominence of farmsteads, and their scale, form and use of materials, in relationship to:

- physical form of landscape;
- the type and density of settlement;
- the patterns and forms of fields and boundaries;
- woodland and other planting.

2. whether these farmsteads sit within areas with good public access and amenity, which is particularly relevant in areas of high amenity value such as AONBs and National Parks where visitors contribute to the local economy.

## 2 Change and Survival as a Historic Group

The survival of farmsteads as historic groups, and the degree to which they have changed since c1950, can be determined by a site visit and/or comparison of modern and historic maps showing the arrangement of buildings and spaces.

Ordnance Survey maps and observation of the site can be used as benchmarks for measuring change, particularly useful being maps from the late 19th/early 20th centuries (after which few traditional groups or buildings were built) and the period from the 1950s marked by multi-functional and standardised sheds and working areas. County record offices and websites can also hold the earlier tithe maps, which date from the 1830s-40s.

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**Substantially intact** – farmstead is largely unaltered from its traditional form

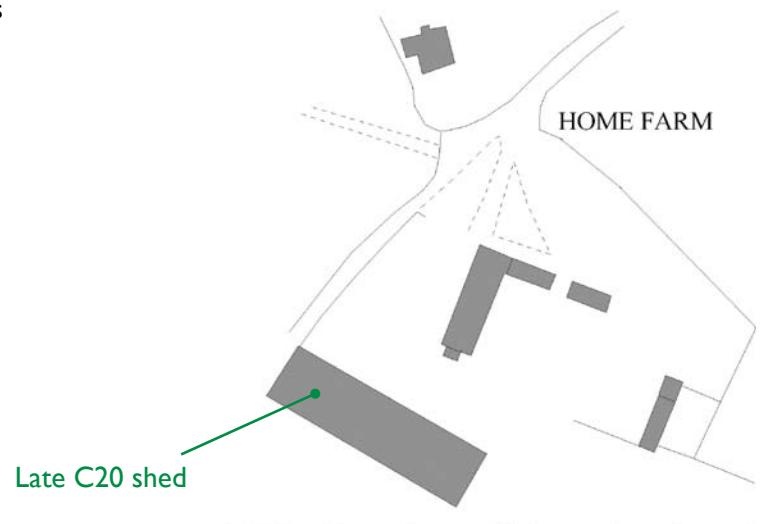


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**Partial Loss** – less than 50% loss of buildings



**Significant Loss** – more than 50% loss of buildings



### 3 Rarity and contribution to local character

#### Rare survival (national)

Rare survivals are both substantially intact as historic groups and in addition include:

- Home farm groups in or on the edge of historic parkland with buildings relating to the working of an estate (eg sawmills, forges, adjacent kitchen gardens etc).
- Planned and model farmsteads with good survival of internal fittings and fixtures (see Buildings: Materials and Detail below).
- Small-scale common-edge or heathland groups.
- Small-scale groups in important rural-industrial landscapes (eg North Pennines lead mine, Cornwall ore mine, West Pennines textiles) which are associated with families engaged in farming and industrial production.
- Rare examples of formerly common farmstead types, as noted in regional and character area descriptions (forthcoming).
- Pre-19th century examples of field barns, and those surviving in coherent historic landscapes and with a strong visual relationship to other farmsteads and features.

Some areas (and farmsteads) may also be associated with significant estate centres, such as medieval monastic estates and estates in the forefront of 18th-19th century agricultural improvement, be associated with art and literature or with famous personalities.

#### Strong contribution to local character and distinctiveness

Representative survivals are both coherent as historic groups (in the categories of substantially intact and partial loss as identified above) and contribute to locally distinctive patterns of traditional architecture.

#### Unrepresentative farmstead groups

These do not reflect any locally observed traditions of farmstead and domestic architecture. They will typically be more industrial in their form and style.

## 4 Contribution to historic landscape

This question focuses on whether the farmstead as a historic group (see 2 above) survives in relationship to its surrounding historic landscape, including patterns of settlement. The extent of change can be understood through direct observation and the comparison of modern and historic maps.

### High contribution

The most significant will be:

- substantially intact groups which can also be understood in the context of the historic landscapes they developed within, usually as a result of little observable change in the post-1950 period.
- those surviving in clear visual relationship to the remains of earlier land use and settlement - the remains of shrunken or deserted sites (eg monastic granges), settlements (eg deserted medieval villages, platforms of farmsteads) and legible field systems (eg ridge and furrow).

### Some contribution

Farmsteads fitting into this category will be more difficult to read in relationship to their landscapes, because of the degree of change observable to the group (partial-significant loss as identified in section 2) and/or the surrounding landscape, due to later buildings, infrastructure, boundary removal and loss of woodland etc.

### Low contribution

It is difficult or impossible to read or appreciate the historic character of the farmstead and its landscape as a whole, as a result of the degree of major change to the farmstead (major loss as identified above) and/or the surrounding landscape.

## 5 Wildlife and habitats

Farmstead buildings and their landscape settings provide, or can provide, important habitats for local fauna and flora. Local authorities now have a duty (through the NERC Act 2006) to take nature conservation into account.

- Establish what wildlife live in or gain benefit from the site and buildings.
- Are there any protected species such as barn owls or bats?
- Are there nesting areas/routes that need minimal disturbance?
- What opportunities are there to maintain and enhance wildlife habitats through careful planting that fits with local landscape character?

## 6 Individual interest and rarity of the building/s

Rare survivals are:

- Examples of pre-1750 buildings.
- Examples of unconverted building types (eg threshing barns) in areas of high conversion.
- Highly specialised buildings, principally kilns for drying corn, maltings, dovecotes, sheep shelters, goose houses, well houses, sawmills, forges/smithies.
- Buildings with clear recorded evidence for non-agricultural/ industrial manufacture such as cloth (eg in the West Pennines), flax (eg in South Somerset) and cutlery (eg around Sheffield).

Representative buildings typical of their area will be recognisable examples of their type and locally distinctive through their form and use of materials.

Unrepresentative buildings are clearly not locally distinctive in their form or use of materials.

## 7 Materials and Detail

Use guidance to identify typical and rare features.

Particularly rare or vulnerable fabric includes:

- Thatch, in particular long straw thatch, heather thatch and solid thatch.
- Historic timber cladding (feather-edged weatherboarding, vertical boarding set into studwork).
- Mud and stud walls (eg in Fylde of Lancashire and East Midlands)
- Wattle or split lath infill to timber frames permitting ventilation.

Rare original features are:

- Particularly vulnerable historic floors (eg lime ash floors, rush withy floors, threshing floors).
- Doors and windows of pre-19th century date, eg mullioned windows, sliding shutters to windows.
- Dairies with internal shelving etc, barns with in situ threshing machines and other processing machines, horse engine houses with internal gearing, oast houses with internal kilns and other detail, cider houses with internal mills and/or presses.
- Tramways to planned industrial complexes with good survival of other features (below).

Typical original features, of 19th and early 20th century date, are:

- Stalls and other interior features (eg mangers, hay racks) in stables and cattle housing of proven 19th century or earlier date.
- Doors (usually planked/ ledged and braced, from c1850 on horizontal sliding rails) with iron strap hinges and handles, and heavy frames.
- Windows, often of a standard type nationally, that are half-glazed, shuttered and/or with hit-and-miss ventilators.
- Historic surfaces such as brick, stone-flag and cobble floors to stables and cattle housing, with drainage channels.
- Industrial fittings (iron or concrete stalls, mangers etc) to planned and industrial complexes, including to inter-war county council smallholdings.

Unusual features of historic interest, often difficult to spot, include:

- Tallies near threshing floors in barns for noting production of grain, and numbers to grain bins.
- Ritual marks for protecting produce or livestock, which are usually in the form of 'daisy wheels' or 'Mary marks'; or graffiti recording names of workers, sales etc
- Graffiti or artwork, such as soldiers' graffiti, which is tied in with significant cultural events or occupation.
- Constructional marks are those associated with the transport and prefabrication of structural carpentry and timber frames, eg shipping and carpenters' marks.

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