



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

The Broads

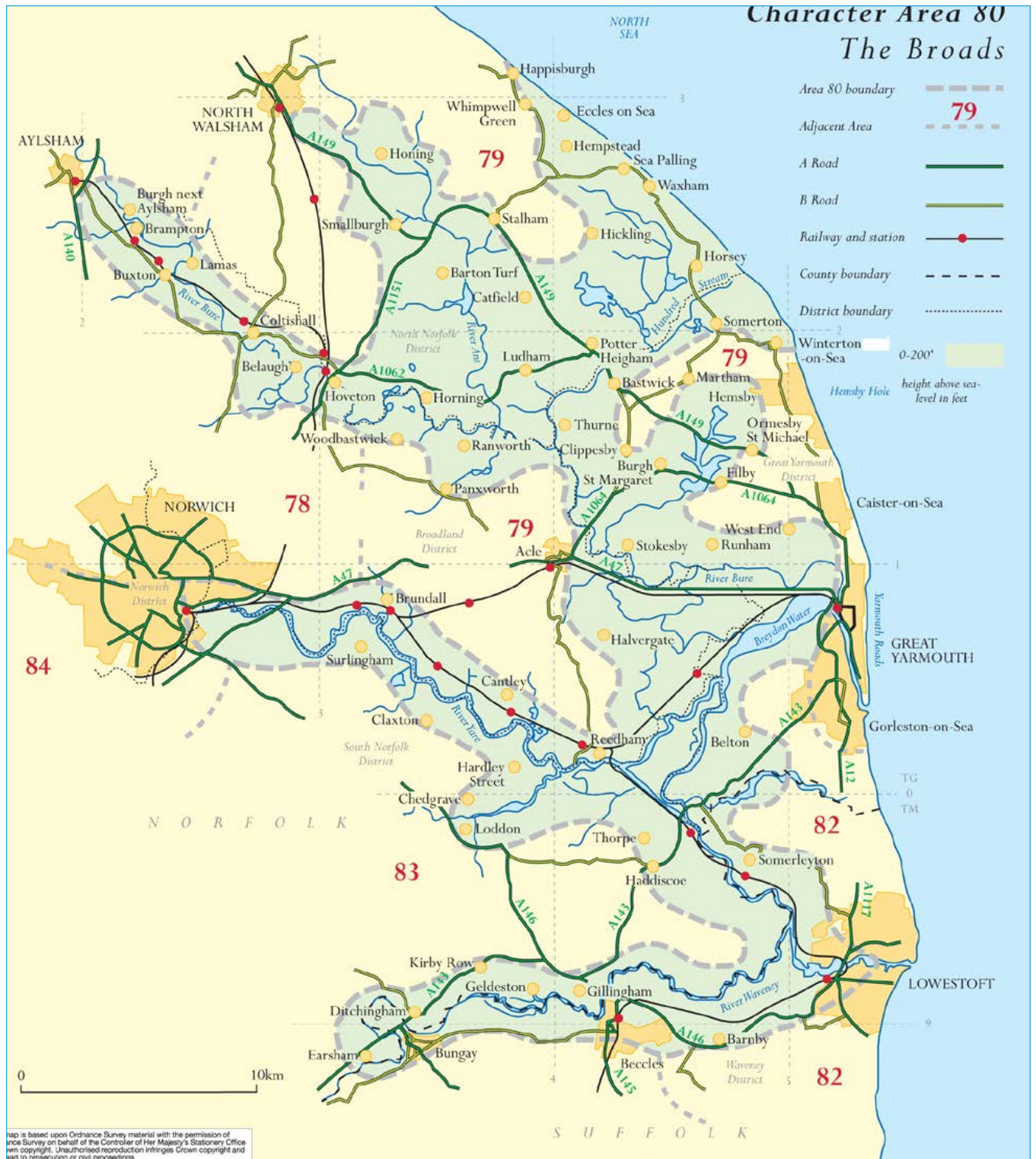
NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 80



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>).

Front cover: View of Tunstall, Halvergate, looking towards the Broads. This settlement has its core a church-manor group characteristic of this area. Both farmsteads were progressively rebuilt from the late 18th century. Photo © Historic England 29128/008



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

Summary

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

The Broads is a low-lying area on the eastern edge of East Anglia, between Norwich and the North Sea coast. Its boundary follows the edge of the floodplain of the rivers Yare, Bure and Waveney and their tributaries as well as the flat, river-valley land and some lower valley slopes to the west. Of the Character Area, 94% is open country and the remaining 6% is urban. Three quarters of the open country is in agricultural use (or 70% of the whole Character Area). Some 8% of the Character Area is woodland and the remainder is open water or semi-natural habitats; 52% of the Character Area has National Park status and 3% is designated as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Historic character

- The drained marshlands of the Broads have very low densities of traditional farmsteads. Most farmsteads within the Character Area are found on the higher ground that overlooks the marshes or in the upper parts of the valleys that feed into the Broads.
- Large-scale drainage and enclosure of the marshlands commenced in the medieval period, usually being undertaken by monastic institutions. These early drainage schemes are usually represented by a pattern of irregular, sinuous drains defining the fields. Later phases of drainage are characterised by straight drainage systems.
- Most farmsteads originated as loose courtyard plans but the addition of cattle housing to earlier buildings has often resulted in the development of regular courtyard plan types, often with an L-plan range and detached buildings to additional third or fourth sides. There are occasional examples of larger regular plans including regular multi-yard plans, again usually the result of development over time.
- The barns, stables and cattle housing reflect the mixed agriculture practised by farmsteads located on the edges of the marshes. Cattle housing can include a locally characteristic building type that consists of a storage area for turnips with housing for cattle, often in loose boxes.

Significance

- There is a high survival of traditional farmsteads in this area.
- There is a medium survival of pre-1700 farm buildings, mostly high-status farmhouses and some barns including some important examples of 16th-century secular barns.
- Farmsteads that have both a pre-1700 farmhouse and one or more early working buildings are of high significance.
- Examples of the locally distinctive combined turnip stores and cow houses are significant.

- Some barns in this area, as elsewhere in East Anglia, display an exceptionally early use of brick by national standards.
- Reed thatch was the predominant roofing material for most farm buildings. Surviving examples are important to the local distinctiveness of the Character Area.

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 (10%, the national average being 32%). This is certainly an underestimate of the present figure, the sample in this area being too small to provide statistics for structural disrepair.
- Fieldwork suggests that the deterioration of fabric and the related loss of small agricultural buildings is more commonplace than in surrounding areas

Historic development

- Settlement from the Neolithic period onwards has been found on localised raised areas of the floodplain and along the edges of the marshland. At this period the landscape was very different with, for example, the estuary of the Yare extending considerably further inland before the development of the spit which resulted in the silting up of the estuary.
- Romano-British settlement may have been extensive on the fringes of the valleys, where they could exploit the grazing of the marshes. In the 3rd century a fort, part of a line of forts protecting the eastern and southern coast of Britain, known as 'Forts of the Saxon Shore' was built at Burgh Castle protecting the estuary of the Yare.
- The Broads, as defined by the open expanses of water in the valleys and floodplains of the Rivers Bure, Waveney and Yare, largely result from the extraction of peat in the medieval period. Peat cutting was a major activity, especially until the 14th century, providing fuel for Norwich and its hinterland and for the smoking of herring at Yarmouth and other coastal settlements. Flooding caused by climatic changes and sea surges, and also possibly because of population collapse after the Black Death in the 14th century, led to decline in this activity.
- The grazing offered by the marshlands was largely used for sheep in the medieval period, accessed by farms located along the edge of the marshes and farms located away from the marshes. From the 15th century, cattle replaced sheep as the most important stock with young beasts being brought into the area for fattening from the west of England, Scotland and even Ireland. Arable farming was not completely absent from the drained marshland areas although it was restricted by most landlords for fear of reducing the value of the land. Episodes of inundation by the sea in the lower Yare are known to have forced the abandonment of arable land in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.
- The area had strong trading and cultural links with the Netherlands, reflected in the use of Dutch engineers for drainage schemes and the architecture of the area, particularly in towns such as Beccles.
- In the 18th and 19th centuries, several canals were constructed including works in the upper Bure in the 1770s, the North Walsham and Dilham Canal in the 1820s in the Ant valley and in 1830 the creation of the New Cut between Reedham and Haddiscoe which was part of an ambitious scheme to improve navigation between Norwich and Lowestoft.
- Periods of agricultural recession and storm damage to drainage mills often led to the abandonment of some areas of marsh in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, whilst

the management of reed beds for thatching materials declined markedly after World War I due to shortage of labour.

Landscape and settlement

- Across much of the Character Area, settlement is sparse. Occasional small, isolated farms and cottages are located within the flat marshland although in the north-east hamlets and small villages developed, for example at Horsey and Sea Palling, behind the protective sand dunes. The area also includes some areas of marshland fringe where farmsteads, hamlets and small villages such as Somerleyton and Halvergate are located. There is more settlement in the upper valleys, particularly of the Rivers Ant and Bure to the north and the Waveney to the south, where villages and isolated farmsteads are intermixed. Many of these farmsteads and villages are of at least late Saxon origin as evidenced by several Saxo-Norman churches, many of which possess the round towers characteristic of the region's early medieval ecclesiastical architecture, particularly along the Yare and Waveney valleys. These areas were amongst the most densely populated areas of England in the late 11th century.
- Field patterns are principally defined by drainage over most of the Broads. Earlier phases of enclosure, often led by monastic institutions, are characterised by irregular and often curvilinear ditches as can be seen for example, in the Chedgrave and Wickhampton Marshes near the confluence of the Yare and Waveney. Drainage works of the 18th and 19th centuries typically produced more regular enclosures, as on the Langley and Caxton Marshes on the Yare or in Barnby, on the Waveney. The drainage of the marshes required pumps which were driven by wind mills; there were around 110 mills in the Broads by the late 19th century. In addition, steam pumps had been introduced by the 1840s.
- In the upper parts of the valleys off the valley floor, fields are generally irregular and small to medium in scale. These are often the product of piecemeal enclosure from the medieval period. Here, multi-species hedgerows with trees can often be seen. Some areas of such enclosures have been subject to extensive boundary removal in the 20th century.

Farmstead and building types

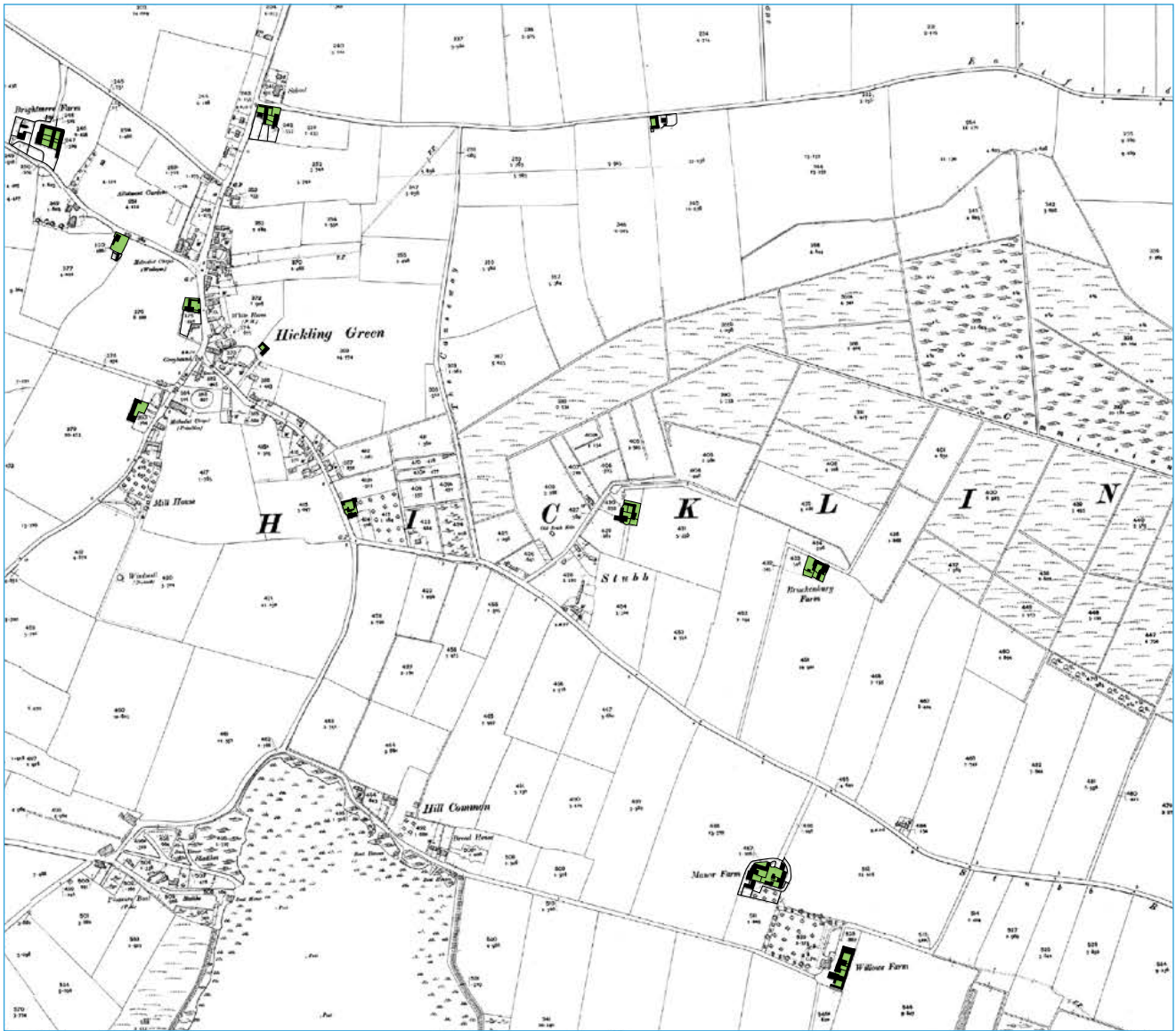
Generally, there are few pre-1700 farm buildings compared to surrounding areas.

Farmstead types

- Medium-scale courtyard plan farmsteads are predominant across the area, often having linked ranges forming an L-plan with detached buildings to additional third or fourth sides of the yard. Typically, these plans consist of shelter sheds for cattle attached to barns, the latter usually being earlier in date.
- Regular courtyard plans are also common, again largely formed by linked ranges of barns and shelter sheds. Such plans typically include regular L- or U-plans and more rarely H-plans as at Waxham barn, or E-plans.
- Smaller marshland-edge farmsteads can have a more dispersed cluster plan character, as found in other marshland areas of England such as Romney Marsh in Kent.

Building types

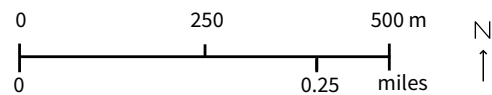
- Barns in the area typically range from three to five bays although there are some examples of larger, higher-status secular barns of 16th- and 17th-century date. Some barns have integral stables and cattle housing, this being a typical feature of early barns across the Claylands of Norfolk and Suffolk further to the south.
- Stables of 18th-century date are usually of two storeys. As with barns, the earliest and largest examples are associated with the higher-status farmsteads. Stables on many farmsteads were small although where a farm had access to arable within the neighbouring Character Areas they could be larger. Stables of mid- to late 19th-century date are usually single-storey buildings. Stables often face into a horse yard.
- Granaries are rare and where found are usually located above cart sheds. Most are 19th century in date.
- Cattle housing is an important element of nearly all farmsteads. Open-fronted shelter sheds are most commonly found. These are usually ranged around a yard but can also be found as lean-to structures built against the barn. Open-fronted sheds that are not associated with a yard area suggest that cattle could also be tethered within them.
- Loose boxes for the fattening of cattle are a highly distinctive feature. A building type of particularly local distinctiveness, being confined to this area and the adjacent Flegg and North East Norfolk NCA (NCA79), has a root store for turnips with loose boxes along the sides for cattle which faced into the root store.
- The limited extent of arable on farmsteads within the drained marshes means that cart sheds were generally small buildings, typically of three bays. Farmsteads on the edge of the marshes also worked the fertile arable lands largely within the Flegg and North East Norfolk NCA, and here cart sheds can be larger with four to five bays being typical.
- Windmills were essential for managing the water levels of the marshland and so were fundamental to the agricultural economy of the area. They were usually isolated structures but occasionally form part of farmstead groups. Surviving examples are a highly characteristic feature of the landscape of the Broads.



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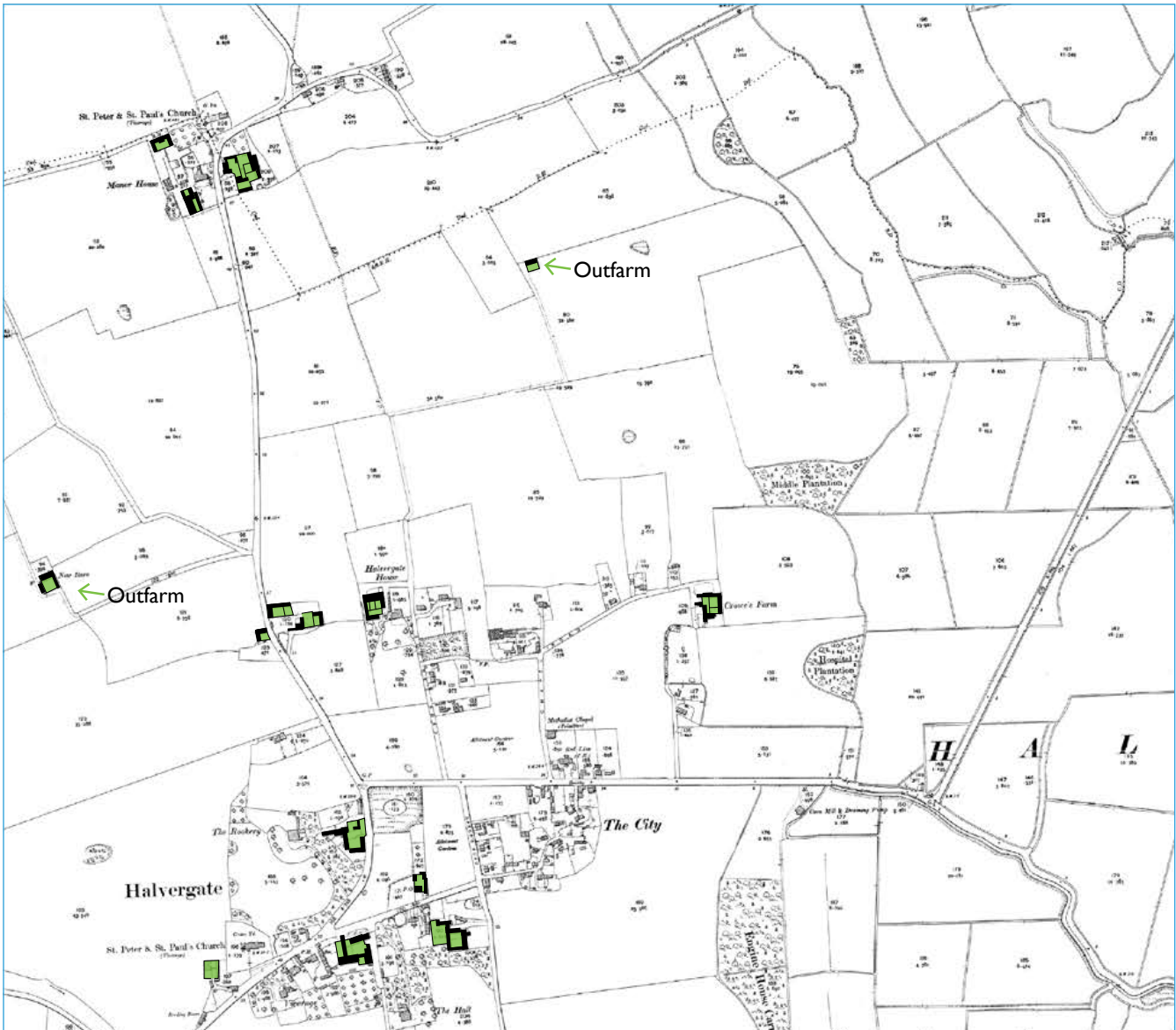


Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



Hickling Green

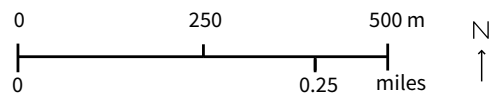
Hickling Green is a small village standing on the edge of the Broads. Here the pattern of former strip fields survives, particularly along the lane to the south-east and to a lesser extent stretching away from the east-west road at the north of the map. Generally, there appears to have been relatively little amalgamation of the fields except around Manor Farm and Brackenbury Farm and within the area immediately south of Hickling Green. Extending into the map from the east is an area of marshland divided into pasture by a regular system of drainage ditches. Small and medium-scale courtyard farms are typical with a few farms, such as Willows Farm near Manor Farm, having larger, regular multi-yard plans. In the north-west corner of the map is Brightmere Farm which has a regular E-plan.



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.



Halvergate and Tunstall

Halvergate is a slightly scattered village containing a number of higher-status farmsteads, which stands on the edge of the Broads just a few metres above sea level. To the north of Halvergate is the hamlet of Tunstall which includes the ruined church of St Peter and St Paul with two high-status farmsteads. Most of the medium to large scale farmsteads are courtyard groups probably of loose courtyard origin but have developed into groups with L-plan ranges and buildings to the third or fourth sides of the yard. Occasionally there are multi-yard groups. The surrounding fields range in sizes from small paddocks around the edge of the settlements to larger and often irregular fields beyond. Many of these fields have straight boundaries but the presence of some sinuous boundaries and the zig-zag lines of others suggest they are the result of piecemeal enclosure which has been subject to a level of reorganisation in the 19th century. To the east is the enclosed marshland with boundaries defined by ditches and few hedges, if any. Two phases of enclosure are evident here: sinuous boundaries of earlier enclosure to the north and straight boundaries creating regular enclosures to the south.



Hall Farm, Waxham. A notable manor farm – set in a medieval moated site and with the medieval parish church - characteristically sited next to the medieval church, and in its overall form comprising a regular multi-yard. To the left is the barn of c. 1570 flanked by cattle yards. Part of the mid-19th-century regular courtyard arrangement survives. Also dating c.1570 is the enclosing wall and gatehouse to the manorial complex. Photo © Historic England 29191/034



A characteristic regular multi-yard plan at Lessingham, showing the late 17th- and 18th- century house and two threshing barns. Also belonging to this earlier phase is the stable block and cartshed facing the road. The cattle yards include a covered yard attached to the nearside barn. Photo © Historic England 29191/046



At the core of this farmstead at Somerleyton, as rebuilt in the mid 19th century around an earlier barn, is a cattle yard with a lean-to for cattle – another typical feature – also added to the barn. Photo © Historic England 29350/020



A regular courtyard arrangement with buildings built around all sides of the yard at Somerleyton. Note the farmhouse, characteristically detached and facing into its own garden, and the earlier reed-thatched threshing barn with its 19th-century lean-tos. Photo © Historic England 29350/ 039



The fields of the marshlands are defined by drainage ditches rather than hedges. Farmsteads, either isolated or in small villages as here at Halvergate, stand on the edge of the drier ground overlooking the marsh. Photo © Bob Edwards.



In the north of the Character Area the drained marshland has long been used for arable as indicated by the size of the barn at Waxham. This low-lying area is protected from the sea by a bank of sand dunes which are just visible forming the horizon either side of the barn. Photo © Bob Edwards.



The majority of farmsteads originally developed as loose courtyard plan groups with detached buildings set around a yard. Often these detached buildings became linked or had ranges added to the open sides of the yard, creating regular plan types. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Courtyard groups with an L-plan range and an additional building to the third side of the yard are common within this Character Area. Photo © Bob Edwards.



There are few formally-planned regular courtyard farmsteads within this Character Area, particularly the larger plan types as these were usually associated with large, often estate-owned farmsteads of which there were few in the Broads. This E-plan farmstead is, therefore, a rarity. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Within this Character Area there are some important early, secular barns such as this large, late 16th-century cobble and brick barn at Waxham. The barn is of at least nine bays with three threshing floors and has diaper patterning in brick to the gable end. This detailing, together with the impressive size of the building, demonstrated the wealth of its owner. The later addition of single-storey shelter sheds to both sides of the barn resulted in a regular H-plan. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Barns This seven-bay, 17th-century barn is part of a manor farm located on the drier ground on the edge of the marsh. The lower part of the wall displays diaper patterning in brickwork but has chequer pattern above possibly indicating rebuilding. The upper parts of the gable have also been rebuilt in red brick. Photo © Bob Edwards.



A mid-18th-century brick-built barn, having a hipped roof rather than the gables typical of earlier barns. To the rear was a single-storey lean-to, possibly for cattle. This barn was one of two barns on this farm, the second barn being a slightly smaller, late 17th-century or early 18th-century, three-bay, brick building. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Small three-bay barns are found on the smallest farms in the character area, and surviving examples are rare. This example probably dates from the early 19th century and forms part of a small U-plan courtyard group. Photo © Bob Edwards.



A large 19th-century brick barn with distinctive ventilation holes in the brickwork. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Stables This large stable range of a high-status farmstead reflects the numbers of horses required on a farm where there was extensive arable land. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Although there was very limited arable on the marshland the farmsteads surrounding the marshes had access to the fertile arable land. Therefore most farms had stables for the working horses. Many date from the 18th century and are two-storey buildings with a hayloft above stables. Photo © Bob Edwards.



A small single-storey stable of possible early 19th century date and a later attached stable. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Granaries are uncommon in this area. Where found, they are usually located about the cart shed and date from the 19th century. This example has been built against the gable of an earlier barn, the cart shed typically facing away from the yard. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Cattle housing The most common form of cattle housing is the open-fronted shelter shed, a single-storey building that faces into a yard. Most are of 19th-century date. Examples from the 18th century are very rare and significant. Photo © Bob Edwards



Shelter sheds could also be built against the side of a barn. Here, a three-bay shelter shed is accompanied by two loose boxes for cattle. Photo © Bob Edwards.



This barn-sized building was probably also a root store with loose boxes for cattle in the contemporary aisle to one side. This building is of 19th-century date.



The hipped roof and aisles to this building, at Freethorpe in NCA 79 (North East Norfolk and the Flegg), give it a very distinctive form. The double doors provide access to a root store for feeding turnips to cattle which are housed in loose boxes in the aisles. This building type, recorded in the late 18th century but mostly 19th century in date, is confined to The Broads and the area around it. Photo © Susanna Wade Martins



Cart sheds A five-bay bay cart shed located at the entrance into a courtyard group. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Hay barns This low, open-sided building is a rare surviving example of a hay barn. Photo © English Heritage.



Workshops A timber-framed, single-storey shed that may have served as a workshop. Photo © Bob Edwards.

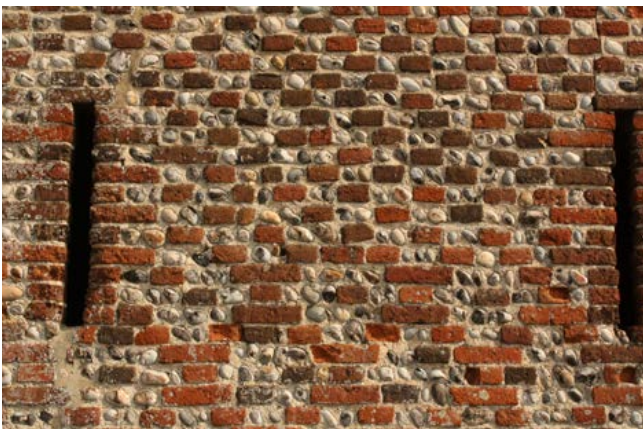


Windmills The drainage of the marshland depended on the use of windmills to drive the pumps. Most of these windmills stood alone in the marshland but occasionally they are associated with small farmsteads. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Outfarms and field barns

Outfarms or field barns are not a common feature of the drained marshland but occasional examples are found within the areas of higher ground surrounding the marsh which fall within this Character Area. This regular L-plan complex has a low barn at the far end with shelter sheds and cow housing in the attached range. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Some barns in this area, and elsewhere in East Anglia, display an exceptionally early use of brick by national standards. This 17th-century barn has diaper brickwork to the lower part and chequer work to the upper part of the wall. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Tumbled brickwork, the setting of bricks at an angle to form the coping of the gable, is a characteristic of Norfolk architecture. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Whilst flint cobbles were commonly used in farm buildings, broken or knapped flint is less frequently seen. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Timber-framing is occasionally seen used in the sides of barns which have brick gable walls, possibly as a way of providing ventilation for the stored crop. Reed thatch is the traditional roofing material on almost farm buildings. Photo © Bob Edwards.



Pantiles are now the predominant roof material for farm buildings. These are mostly red in colour but occasionally black glazed pantiles are found. Photo © Bob Edwards.



There is a relatively high number of traditional farm buildings that are in a poor state of repair within this Character Area, usually located on isolated farmsteads. Photo © Bob Edwards.

Materials and detail

- Brick is the dominant building material of the area. The area includes some early examples of brickwork, where it can be combined with pebbles. Such brickwork can display lozenge-shaped patterning of 17th-century date. Features of brick buildings include tumbled brickwork to gables which can be stepped or have brick copings.
- There is some limited use of flint in farm buildings, again combined with brick.
- Reed thatch was the traditional roofing material for most farm buildings. Although thatch has often been replaced by pantiles, there are numerous surviving examples of thatch.
- Pantiles are now the predominant roofing material of the area. Occasionally, black glazed pantiles were used.
- There is limited timber-framing within the area. Framing can be found used in combination with brickwork on barns where the gable walls and plinth are of brick with the sides in-filled with framing, or for smaller buildings.



Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by
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