



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Agricultural Buildings Selection Guide

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Selection Guide

Agricultural Buildings

I INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

Historic farmsteads and their buildings make a major contribution to the richly varied character of our countryside, and illustrate the long history of farming and settlement in the English landscape. England has a huge range of geology, displaying greater variety within small areas than anywhere else in Europe: this is reflected in the often striking use of local materials and techniques in farm buildings, and in their relationship with the land itself. Farming practices have also varied enormously between regions resulting in a great diversity of building type and size and farmstead layout, ranging from the informal cluster of small buildings that have developed incrementally in the uplands of the north and west, to the monumental model farms associated with the Agricultural Revolution of the arable regions of the south and east.

This selection guide offers an overview of the development of farm buildings, and discusses the factors taken into account when assessing such buildings for designation. Because of the range of building types within this category, a survey is provided setting out their interest and designation considerations.

2 SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN SELECTING AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS FOR DESIGNATION

Setting farmsteads are an integral part of the countryside and their assessment for designation ought to take some account of their setting and the field and settlement patterns around them. Because farming is a multi-functional activity, farm buildings depend more than most on their context, not only within the wider landscape but also in relation to their immediate neighbours, including the farmhouse.

Local Significance and National Importance Agricultural buildings often lack architectural pretensions but provide some of the most important evidence for local building crafts and changing farming technologies, both traditional and innovative, across more than seven hundred years. Because many agricultural buildings are traditionally constructed, they may display features that are not widely distributed, and careful selection is necessary to ensure that characteristic regional constructional techniques of special interest are designated.

Alteration Farms are working places that have had to adapt in order to remain useful. Far from being dismissed as destructive alterations, evidence for change can sometimes be the key factor in determining a building's inclusion on the list.

3 HISTORY

Medieval Most medieval agricultural buildings are listed, many at a high grade. The most celebrated are the great barns of the ecclesiastical and monastic estates. These often have considerable architectural presence and may possess fine roof carpentry. The earliest dovecotes were built to serve castles, monastic buildings and manors. Surviving examples are always of special interest and show strong regional variation in their design and materials. Lower down the social scale, substantial farm buildings erected by prosperous freeholders and peasant farmers survive from the fourteenth century onwards. These are of exceptional importance and provide the earliest above-ground physical evidence for wealth generated solely from agriculture at a level below the great landed estates. Complete examples are worthy of listing at a high grade.

1540-1750 Larger farms and estates benefited from the great land sales that followed the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530-40s. The resultant increase of average farm sizes – particularly in more capital intensive arable areas such as the downland of Hampshire – was accompanied by a general increase in agricultural incomes and productivity, sustained by the introduction of new crops and crop rotations and techniques, and the emergence of increasingly market-based and specialised regional economies. Substantially complete pre-1750 farm buildings are rare and often provide the first evidence for the development and strengthening of regional traditions and building types, for example the timber-framed west midlands barns that replaced small medieval cruck barns, the split-level bank barns in Cumbria, and the growth of the southern English downland farmsteads with their groups of large barns specialising in the storage and processing of corn. The majority of surviving threshing barns date from this period. It is very rare for farmsteads to have more than a barn and house dating from this period.

1750-1880 This is the internationally most important period of farm building development in England. Complete farmsteads and buildings pre-dating 1840 are rare.

The agricultural revolution of this period was underpinned by an increasing level of government interest and involvement, especially from the 1790s, and saw energetic exchanges of ideas, both at the local level of farmers' clubs and nationally via the Royal Agricultural Society of England, founded in 1837. This was accompanied by the reorganisation and enlargement of holdings, the final phase of the enclosure of open fields (mostly in the midland counties) and the wholesale enclosure of moors, heath and other 'waste' land (often by parliamentary Act). Underpinning all this were rising grain prices and increased demand from a growing urban population. The widespread adoption of improved grasses and winter feed-crops such as turnips, accompanied by the production of good manure by livestock wintered in yards or buildings, played a major role in boosting agricultural productivity.

This period witnessed major developments in farmstead plans and building types. After the 1790s, and especially from the 1840s, farm building design and layout were affected by a number of factors. Most important among these were the application of scientific principles to planning that led to the more rational use of buildings and communication between them (the use of multi-functional barn ranges and tram lines, for instance); the extension of mechanisation (horse, water, wind and - from the 1820s - steam power) for working threshing and other machinery; the import of fertilisers and feed such as oilcake; the accommodation and feeding of ever-increasing numbers of livestock in yards that facilitated the recycling of straw and manure to boost the fertility of the land; and the

introduction (particularly from the 1840s) of new materials such as imported softwood, machine-made brick, cast-iron fittings and mass concrete. In some areas, but not everywhere, this led to a dramatic break with earlier building traditions, a tendency that was further boosted by the emergence of a professional building trade, the rise of pattern books, and the frequent gentrification of the yeoman class.

1880-1940 These years saw a prolonged depression from which farming did not recover until the Second World War. Very little from this period fulfils the listing criteria. Buildings tended to be of the cheapest materials such as corrugated iron and many were prefabricated, such as Dutch barns. Only the wealthiest farmers and landowners continued to build model or experimental farms, which could be of some architectural sophistication. Where these survive they justify serious consideration.

1940 to the Present The intensification and increased specialisation of farming in the post war period was accompanied by the introduction of wide-span multi-purpose sheds in concrete, steel and asbestos able to accommodate large machinery and the environmental control of livestock and on-farm production, particularly of milk. The exceptions are in the national parks (first established in the later 1940s) and in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (a designation first assigned in 1956), where traditional materials have been more widely used.

4 FARMSTEADS AND FARM BUILDINGS: SUMMARY OF SELECTION CRITERIA

When considering an agricultural building for designation, the following points are considered.

Date How an individual structure or farmstead group relates to the periods of development identified above. Broadly speaking buildings are more likely to be listed the older and rarer they are.

- **Pre-1750** Before the age of revolutionary improvements, all buildings that are reasonably intact are eligible for listing.
- **1750-1840** A period when English agriculture was the most advanced in the world. There is a presumption to list most buildings of this date which survive well. Even moderately intact examples of model farms are historically so important that they should be protected.
- **1840-1880** An age of increasing demand and technological change: selection is made on grounds of innovation and/or intactness; architectural quality will be relevant too.
- **1880-1940** A period of depression and low investment. Little is listable, save for those examples of special architectural interest. Exceptionally intact examples, especially if they have group value, or buildings that buck the trend, may be eligible.
- **Post-1940** A period of mass production and prefabricated units: little is of intrinsic interest and eligible for listing.

Rarity and Completeness Agricultural buildings that pre-date 1750 and contain sufficient evidence to illustrate their original form should be listed. Rare individual features such as horse engines or that illustrate significant innovative changes should be seriously

considered. Intact examples provide irreplaceable evidence of form and function and should be considered both in a national and a regional context.

Context Some buildings, by virtue of alteration or late date, may lack strong intrinsic interest when judged against purely architectural grounds, but relate to an outstanding group of structures or a field system that is strongly representative of the character and development of regional farming and vernacular traditions and national patterns in farming history. This can strengthen the case for designation. Survivals of farm buildings in built-up areas may, conversely, have an extra claim to special interest on account of their rarity.

Architectural Quality This relates especially to both planned and model farmsteads designed by professional architects and engineers, but also to those structures which may have strong intrinsic interest in terms of materials and the display of craftsmanship.

Documentation Buildings that are clearly dated (including well documented examples) can enable an accurate interpretation to be made of their significance and this may strengthen the case for listing.

Regional Diversity Certain farm buildings will have extra claims to interest if they embody regionally distinctive building methods and uses, especially if these are rare. English Heritage's Regional Farmstead Character Statements promote better and more accessible understanding of the character of farm buildings. They present for the first time, in a single place, information on farmstead buildings at a broad regional and landscape scale. The information they draw together will enable the farmsteads of each region and landscape character area to be better understood within a regional as well as a national context, in relation also to their surrounding fields and settlements. Regional Character Statements appear on the HELM website at:

<http://www.helm.org.uk/server/show/category.10116>

Other work on farmsteads and characterisation can be found at:

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/characterisation/farmsteads>

Historical Interest Well-documented historical associations of national importance may increase the case for listing. Farmsteads may be the location where new machinery or farming systems were pioneered, for example. Others may have witnessed events of social importance such as the establishment of Chartist settlements or of squatter homes in the inter-war years known as 'Plotlands' settlements or the provision of 'Homes for Heroes' after the First World War. But there should normally be some quality or interest in the surviving physical fabric of the building itself to justify protection. Either the building should be of some architectural merit or it should be preserved in a form that directly illustrates and confirms its historic associations.

5 SPECIAL INTEREST: FARMSTEADS AND BUILDING TYPES

Architectural Interest (including plan and function)

Farmsteads perform several basic functions. The farmhouse provides shelter for the farmer and his family; the agricultural buildings provide for the housing and processing of crops, the storage of vehicles, implements and fodder and the accommodation of livestock. Building functions fall into two broad types: multi-functional buildings, on the one hand, and specialist buildings on the other. This latter category includes structures specialising in crop processing and storage (barns, hay barns, cider houses, oast houses, maltings, granaries etc.) or designed to accommodate animals (ox and cow houses, shelter sheds, stables, pigsties etc.) and birds (dovecots and poultry houses).

The relationship between farm-based activities determines how buildings are arranged around the farmstead, and how they relate to the house. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed increased efforts to unite these activities into one range, especially in pastoral areas with little corn and longer winters and where there was an obvious advantage in having cattle and their fodder in one enclosed building.

The need to unify and integrate these functions became much greater after 1750. By the nineteenth century there is a clear distinction between *planned farmsteads* designed as a set piece, often by an architect or agent and in accordance with ideas being spread through national journals and other publications, and *evolved farmsteads*, traditional groups loosely built around yards whose buildings reflect more traditional building techniques and regional farming systems.

Listing buildings on planned and model farmsteads Complete planned farmsteads of the period up to and including the 1830s are of national significance and should be designated, the best at a high grade. Some display technological interest through their plan form and, especially on home or estate farms, may have strong architectural interest being built to impress and using the most fashionable styles of the day. More discrimination should be used for the 1840-80 period, with attention being focused on:

- 1 Farmsteads that are exceptionally complete (with internal fittings etc.);
- 2 Distinguished examples of estate architecture; or
- 3 Farmsteads that in terms of their planning (the housing of steam- or water-powered machinery in projecting mill barns, and the conveyance of fodder to livestock along clear flow-line principles etc.) are at the cutting edge of developments in farm planning.

Listing buildings on evolved farmsteads Substantially complete examples of farm buildings of the 1750-1840 period are of sufficient interest and rarity to merit protection, especially if they relate to a listed farmhouse and/or earlier barn. Later buildings are worthy of designation if they relate to exceptionally complete examples of evolved farmsteads (that is, farm complexes that have developed over time rather than been constructed to a plan). Of particular interest are examples of building types relating to highly specialised local economies, notably cider and oast houses. Post-1840 examples merit designation if they display particular technological virtuosity, survive exceptionally completely or again relate to very complete evolved groups; architectural interest may be a consideration too.

The predominant farmstead plans These are subject to much variation and are closely related to farm size, terrain and land use, as follows:

Linear plans This group comprises farmsteads with farm buildings attached to and in-line with the house, and include the 'longhouse' (where the family and animals used the same entry and the cattle were stalled at the lower end) of the western uplands and the 'laithe house' (where the farmhouse and agricultural buildings form a continuous range) of the Pennines. Linear plans were ideally suited to small stock rearing and dairying farms and to buildings ranged along the contours of a hillside. This farmstead plan remained in use in upland areas of England into the nineteenth century.

Dispersed plans The buildings appear to be haphazardly arranged around the farmstead. In some hamlets, for example well into the nineteenth century in west Cornwall, the buildings (and holdings) were intermixed with those of other farms and often sat astride public roads. Dispersed plans were typically found on smaller farms in stock rearing or dairying areas, where a large straw yard for cattle was not required.

Parallel plans and L-shaped plans These often developed out of earlier linear and dispersed plans. They are found in similar parts of the country, but also occur in Cheshire and Staffordshire dairy farms.

Loose courtyard plans Characterised by single or double yards flanked by buildings on three or four sides. There are excavated and documented examples of this layout dating from the thirteenth century but it became most strongly associated with large arable farms. For example, many farmsteads on the downlands of southern England (notably in Berkshire) have one or more barns providing shelter to a south-facing yard or yards.

Regular courtyard plans Formal courtyard layouts, where the barns, stables, feed stores and cattle shelters were ranged around a yard or yards and carefully placed in relation to one another in order to minimise labour and conserve manure, were recommended from the mid eighteenth century. These courtyard farms are documented from that time, but no surviving groups can be dated to before the 1790s. The earliest examples are courtyard or U-plan with the barn forming the central block and shelter sheds, stables and enclosed cow-houses the two side wings. From the 1820s and 1830s, extra yards made E or even double-E plans.

Regional Diversity Regional variation was very marked, even across small areas. For example, in northern East Anglia the older timber-framed farm buildings are concentrated on the heavy clays of the wood-pasture landscape of south-east Norfolk and Suffolk, while the large planned farms of brick or brick and flint are found on the later enclosed areas of heath nearby. The diversity of form and scale is the direct result of how developments in farming practice and size varied from place to place. Individual farm buildings could be small-scale and dispersed, as in the wood pasture landscapes of the Kentish Weald or the moorlands of west Cornwall, or set out in strong linear groupings, as in many upland areas of northern England or east Cornwall, or highly integrated in planned layouts, most commonly in lowland areas with larger arable-based farms managed by progressive landlords.

Some areas of the country specialised in the production of crops such as hops or fruit that resulted in regionally distinctive buildings like the oast houses of the south-east and west midlands and the cider houses of Herefordshire and the south-west. Many traditional farm buildings display features that are not widely distributed, and careful selection is necessary to ensure that the special values of characteristic regional farm buildings are accorded proper protection.

Specific Agricultural Building Types: Development and Designation

Barns

Barns are generally the oldest and most impressive farm buildings to be found on farms and dominate the statutory lists. The traditional threshing barn plan, with its bays providing storage for the crop flanking a floor where it could be threshed and winnowed, prior to storage, remained comparatively unaltered between the twelfth and early nineteenth centuries. Those associated with medieval clerical estates are particularly celebrated, such as the mid fourteenth century Abbey Barn, Glastonbury (Som.), or the c.1300 Great Coxwell Barn (Oxon.). These buildings constitute outstanding survivals, and will be scheduled or listed in the highest grade. Instances where barns have been dismantled and re-erected are quite common, and judgment will be needed as to the level of special interest of the resulting structure.

There is marked regional variation. Barns tended to be small in dairying or stock rearing areas. In the arable areas of south and east of England, they could be large and were sometimes built in groups to provide shelter to cattle yards. Outside the most specialised arable areas, barns could be multi-functional, housing cattle, horses, grain, farm carts and implements. Sophisticated one and two-storey multi-functional barns such as the bank barns of Cumbria, the Pennines and the south-west emerge in the late seventeenth century. Dated barns are rare and *in situ* dates may increase the case for designation.

Mechanisation Threshing machines were introduced from the later eighteenth century. They were usually powered by horses accommodated in a projecting wheel house (once a common feature in the north east and south west); occasionally water and even wind power is encountered. These did away with the need for large cross-ventilated threshing bays, so smaller door openings can be a revealing clue: Samuel Wyatt's home farm at Shugborough (Staffs.) of the late 1790s is an early example of this. Horse engines and original threshing or winnowing machines are exceptionally rare. Steam power was exploited by the 1830s, especially in areas such as Northumberland with easy access to coal supplies. The introduction of the portable steam engine and threshing machine in the 1850s heralded the end of the traditional barn but many were converted into cow houses and fodder processing and storage buildings after the 1880s.

Evidence for change of use may be of great importance, as with all agricultural buildings. Barn interiors are generally open and plain, but careful inspection may reveal much evidence for re-used timbers (which can relate to much earlier building traditions), former floors, partitions, doors and windows. Alterations such as the expansion of barn space by taking down divisions, extending the building, or adding porches or building an entirely new barn are all changes which are part of the farm's history. Repairs are inevitable too, but the intactness or interest of the carpentry is likely to be an important consideration when alteration has taken place. A late barn could well be eligible for listing as part of an evolved group. Threshing floors, often of wood and sometimes of stone flags, brick or earth, are now very uncommon.

Field barns were built in areas where farmsteads and fields were sited at a long distance from each other. They can be simply threshing barns, or – increasingly from the eighteenth century in upland areas – multi-functional, accommodating cattle and sheep, together with their fodder. More elaborate 'outfarms', typically with shelter sheds for cattle flanking the barn and yard, were built in some areas from the late eighteenth century.

Detached hay barns are usually open-sided with roofs supported on high brick, stone, timber or iron piers, sometimes with brick gable walls perforated by ventilation slits. Most examples date from the late nineteenth century and are not worthy of designation unless they possess distinctive architectural character, or are associated with significant farmstead groups.

Barn conversions Many barns have been adapted for residential or business use in recent years. Judgment will be needed when determining the designation-worthiness of such buildings. Conversion should ensure that the fabric and spatial interest of barns is preserved, so far as is possible, so as to ensure that the special interest of the barn is prolonged. Constructional interest of the structure, authenticity of fabric and group value with other buildings are key factors in assessing such cases.

Granaries

Detached granaries are generally of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century date, and many distinctive examples of those built on mushroom-shaped staddle stones (to prevent rats from climbing up) have been protected. Granaries were often built over stables and cartsheds, and combined cartshed/granary ranges are found from the eighteenth and even the late seventeenth centuries in parts of the south and east. Complete granary interiors, with wooden partitioning to grain bins, are very rare. Cartsheds often face away from the farmyard and may be found close to the stables and roadways, giving direct access to the fields.

Other crop-related buildings

As the widespread use of fodder crops such as turnips and the in-wintering of cattle spread it brought about a need for storage. In some of the better-planned farmsteads the root and fodder stores would be incorporated into the cattle housing, usually located close to where the cattle were stalled and access provided between the two. On smaller farmsteads the root store may be a separate building or form part of a combination building. Examples are predominantly nineteenth century in date, and will fulfil listing criteria if part of complete planned layouts or outstanding evolved farmstead groups.

Large, solidly constructed corn-drying kilns survive from the seventeenth century especially in the north-west and south-west. Corn mills that form part of the farmstead are increasingly rare, particularly those that retain evidence for drying and stowage (such as oast houses) and the milling of apples and pears for cider and perry. They should be carefully considered for listing. Post-1840 examples will fulfil listing criteria if they form part of an outstanding farm complex.

The massive concrete grain silo has an important place in the annals of the Modern Movement but few have been listed. Attached to industrial-scale mill complexes by a harbour, river or railway line, they can be powerful landmarks and the most ambitious and complete deserve careful scrutiny (see the **Maritime and Naval** and **Industrial** selection guides).

Oast houses grew out of the introduction in the sixteenth century of hops to the brewing process. Hops need to be dried if they are to keep, so oasts – or kilns - were developed, with drying floors placed over ovens. The distinctive cone-shaped vents emerged in the eighteenth century, the better to direct air through the ovens and up into the drying floors. Kent was the leading hop-growing area, and its distinctive round

oast houses became standard in the early nineteenth century. Worcestershire oast houses were more likely to be square in plan. Intactness and date are likely to be key factors in assessing designation-worthiness.

Stables

After the barn, the stable is often the oldest building on the farmstead. The value of horses as draft animals meant that stables were well built and often placed near the house and given a certain level of architectural and decorative treatment. Stables needed to be well ventilated with plenty of light for grooming and harnessing. Free-standing stables began to be built from the sixteenth century. They are normally two-storey buildings with a hayloft above and the horses stalled across the building, along the gable walls, with a central door between two windows along one side. The floors were cobbled, and later of brick, with drainage channels laid across the floors. High status examples could have plastered ceilings to prevent dust falling through into the horses' eyes, and attain high levels of design and finish. Complete interiors – with stalls, mangers and feed racks – of the nineteenth century and earlier, whilst not as rare as cattle stalling, must be noted and, where of sufficient quality, may make a building suitable for designation. Mounting blocks may deserve inclusion too.

Livestock accommodation

Cattle housing was well-documented in the medieval period. Longhouses survive in parts of the north and west of England and are usually the only evidence for cattle housing before the seventeenth century. Any evidence for cattle housing from before the late eighteenth century is exceptionally rare and significant. As with barns, there is marked regional diversity. Cow houses, either free standing or as part of a combination barn, were typically built for dairy cattle. They can take the form of shelter sheds built around yards. In Devon and Somerset they appear as the 'linhay', an open-fronted two-storey building with hay storage above; they may be placed underneath threshing barns as in the bank barns of Cumbria, or as part of field barns (such as those which dot the Craven Dales in Yorkshire). The folding of stock in yards became more general in the nineteenth century and manifested itself in distinctive building types such as small open-fronted shelter sheds with their own yards in the north-east. Very few cow house interiors of the nineteenth century or earlier have survived unaltered because hygiene regulations for the production of milk have resulted in internal arrangements.

The most significant examples of *covered yards* – developed to house cattle and conserve their manure - are on the most expensively designed planned and model farms of the 1850s to 1870s. Examples dating from this period are nationally important. It became increasingly common from the 1880s to roof over former open yards with timber- or metal-framed superstructures.

There is hardly a farmstead without late nineteenth-century adaptations for increased livestock accommodation. These additions will rarely merit protection unless associated with an exceptionally complete traditional farmstead or as a major example of planned farmstead architecture, such as those designed by James Douglas on the Duke of Westminster's estates in Cheshire which are all provided with extensive hay barns and accommodation for dairy cattle which supplied urban markets with dairy produce.

Purpose-built *dairies* detached from the farmhouse are very rare. From the late eighteenth century, and particularly on gentry and aristocratic estates, dairies could be highly ornamental, with decorative tile-work and stone counters for hygienic butter

production (see also the **Garden and Park** selection guide). All examples will merit serious consideration for listing, the best at a high grade.

Pigs were kept on most farms but little evidence for *pig sties* survives even in dairying areas, save in Cheshire and Staffordshire. Pigs were often left to run in yards amongst the cattle. As a building type, they deserve to be considered for listing if they are part of outstanding farm groups.

Pigeons provided an important winter food source in the medieval and early modern periods, and the most ambitious dovecots were sufficiently well built and decorative to survive. They were the exclusive right of manorial lords and clergy, which made for monumental construction. Some, such as the fourteenth-century example at Kinwarton (War.) have been scheduled as ancient monuments. Considerable numbers survive from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, sometimes as part of farm groups or as isolated eyecatchers (as at Rousham, Oxon.). *Dovecots* are traditionally lined internally with nesting boxes and sometimes with a fixed gibbet-like 'potence' ladder; a few buildings have nesting boxes on the outside. Droppings were highly prized as fertilizer.

Rabbit warrens tended to be an isolated series of mounds within walls, sometimes associated with what may have been a warren keeper's house. Such structures as do survive are generally more appropriately managed through scheduling.

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Information on some agricultural categories (e.g., dovecotes, farmsteads, monastic granges, rabbit warrens) is also to be found among the Monument Class Descriptions for scheduling monuments (available on the English Heritage website at: <http://www.english.gov.uk/mpp/mcd/index.htm>).