



Farming the historic landscape

Caring for farm buildings



This leaflet has been designed to help farmers, land managers and farm advisers recognise the importance of traditional farm buildings and provide some guidance on taking care of one of the countryside's important assets.

WHY ARE TRADITIONAL FARM BUILDINGS IMPORTANT?

The countryside of today and tomorrow is also the countryside of yesterday. Its historic buildings and sites are fundamental to its diversity, attractiveness and fascination, and traditional farm buildings are among its most numerous and dominant historic features. The history of much of English agriculture is encapsulated in traditional farm buildings. Farmsteads and buildings are as important to the character of the countryside as the field patterns and boundaries associated with them, helping to create local identity and sense-of-place. The great diversity found in English farmsteads and buildings relates to the varying geology, farming practices, settlement patterns, land tenure and building techniques found across the country.

Modern farming practices have led to major changes within many farmsteads. New machines require larger buildings, and animal welfare and hygiene require new standards in buildings. Economic pressures may mean there are limited resources available for maintaining increasingly redundant traditional farm buildings while amalgamation of farms has left some farmsteads totally redundant.

HOW DO FARMSTEADS AND FARM BUILDINGS REFLECT THE HISTORY OF FARMING IN AN AREA?

Although farmsteads and their buildings generally serve the same function – the production and processing of crops, animals or animal products – there has long been regional variation in the balance between these activities. Historically, most farms would have been mixed to an extent, but some areas increasingly specialised in stock rearing, fattening or dairying while other areas concentrated on grain or the production of crops such as hops and fruit.

The sites of historic farmsteads in the landscape can show how agriculture developed. In some areas, most farms are in villages and hamlets, as they have been since Saxon times. Woodland clearance by the 14th century in some areas resulted in farmsteads set within small irregular fields scattered across the landscape. Such historic farm sites, often held by freeholders, can have a range of buildings of different dates representing investment in the farmstead over centuries. Great landowners with capital to invest in improving large areas of poorer land, such as heath or moor, developed new farmsteads in accordance with the 'modern' ideas of the 18th and 19th centuries. Enclosure of the open fields and commons sometimes resulted in the creation of farmsteads on the new holdings.

The layout of the buildings within the steading is also important in understanding how historic farm buildings functioned. Linear farmsteads may have a range of buildings, including the farmhouse, built into a row or two parallel ranges. On some farmsteads, the buildings are randomly located near the farmhouse, whereas planned farmsteads have their buildings arranged around a yard and positioned to save labour. Some 19th-century planned farmsteads incorporate mechanisation such as steam engines and tram-ways, and the yard may be covered to protect the manure from the rain.

The barn is often the largest and most important building on most farmsteads, although there is great diversity in barns across the country. The large timber-framed aisled barns of the south-east or the Cotswold stone barns of Gloucestershire, for example, demonstrate the importance of cereal production in those areas. In dairying and stock rearing areas, the barns tend to be smaller and often incorporate other functions. In the north-west and south-west of England, bank barns were commonly built into a slope to allow level access into two storeys, to provide a threshing barn over the cattle housing or stables.

A Agri-environment schemes are a major source of funding for the repair of historic farm buildings, such as this cow house in the Lake District National Park. Photograph Defra.

B Historic farm buildings contribute to the diversity, attractiveness and fascination of the countryside. Field barns are a particularly distinctive and valued feature of the Yorkshire Dales landscape. Photograph Peter Gaskell.



Other buildings of the farmstead can also show regional differences. Granaries are usually free-standing buildings on staddle stones in the south-east and East Anglia, but they are typically built above other buildings such as cartsheds or stables in the west.

Specialist buildings such as oast houses are regionally distinct. Other buildings with specific uses include dairies, cheese lofts and cider houses. Although not as distinctive as the oast house, they are characteristic of their regions. Farmsteads can also include a wide range of other buildings, such as dovecotes, pigsties, well houses, ash houses, workshops, stores and mill buildings, which all contribute to their historic character.

WHY CARE FOR HISTORIC FARM BUILDINGS?

It is important that traditional farm buildings are cared for because:

- They are a vital element in defining the character of the countryside
- They are a finite historical and archaeological asset, forming an important resource for understanding the development of farming in an area
- They may be listed buildings, or lie within the curtilage of a listed building, and so are legally protected
- They often have a wildlife benefit, for example, as bat roosts
- They are economically valuable. Many farm buildings have the potential for alternative uses; protecting the asset now may mean a future project will be financially viable
- They represent significant environmental capital in their materials and construction

Wherever possible, historic farm buildings should be kept in active farm use, as this is the best way of safeguarding their historic character.

Funding for their maintenance and repair may be available from Defra, from English Heritage or from some local authorities (see contact details on the back page).

LISTED BUILDINGS

Listed buildings are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 because they are considered to have special architectural or historic interest. Copies of the Lists of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest are available at the offices of local planning authorities.

Works that affect the character or interest of a listed building or a building erected within the curtilage of a listed building prior to 1948 will require Listed Building Consent. Works that require consent can range from demolition to re-painting.

General maintenance and like-for-like repairs do not require permission, but local authorities may require a consent application for larger programmes of work, such as re-roofing. It is a criminal offence to carry out unauthorised works and the penalties for this can be heavy. If there is uncertainty about whether Listed Building Consent is required or not, contact the Local Authority Conservation Officer.

MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR

The regular inspection, maintenance and repair of traditional buildings is essential if expensive future repairs are to be avoided. Water is the biggest enemy of most historic buildings. Ensuring that a roof remains watertight can prevent serious damage to timber roof structures. Keeping gutters and downpipes correctly aligned and clear of leaves and other debris will prevent water over-spilling and running down walls, damaging weatherboarding, timber-framing, or washing mortar from masonry, all of which damages the fabric. Earth-walled buildings are particularly susceptible to damage from water penetration. Climbing plants such as ivy can keep areas of a building damp, damage masonry and hide defects that, if left unattended, could result in the need for costly repairs. Such maintenance usually requires no special skills or equipment other than the proper use of a ladder.

Repairs to a traditional farm building should be undertaken in a sensitive way using appropriate materials, techniques and styles. Where possible, repair existing features rather than replace with new. Using the wrong material could result in damage to the building. For example, using cement mortars instead of lime mortar for historic masonry can result in spalling and erosion, leading to the need for expensive repairs. Earth-built structures are particularly vulnerable when cement renders are used. The use of inappropriate materials or techniques may affect the special character or interest of the building: if in doubt, seek advice.

For simple on-line advice on building maintenance, visit www.maintainyourbuilding.org.uk

THE NEED FOR INFORMATION

Effective conservation or restoration requires a thorough understanding of the building or site. Obtaining specialist advice early on in any conservation or restoration programme will minimise the risk of expensive delays, unexpected problems and the destruction of important information about the past.

The importance of the building in terms of its architectural, historic and landscape value will often need to be assessed at the beginning of a conservation scheme, even if the building is not listed.

Careful analysis of a building may reveal important information about the way the building was constructed, altered and used in the past. Often the evidence is in small details, such as empty joints and peg holes in timber. Provision for properly recording and reporting on the meaning of such features may be required. On farmsteads that have medieval origins, there may also be archaeological evidence for earlier buildings or uses on the site.

D Keeping historic farm buildings in active farm use is the best way of safeguarding their character: thatched cowshed at Over Wallop, Hampshire. Photograph Hampshire County Council.

E Interior fixtures and fittings are an important aspect of historic character and should be retained wherever possible. Interior of traditional cow house attached to a timber-framed barn, Norfolk. Photograph English Heritage.

F Agricultural buildings other than barns and farmhouses, such as this pigsty in the Dales, are under-represented in the statutory lists but make an important contribution to the character of the farmyard. Photograph Defra.



Where a major conservation scheme is being undertaken, analysis of the importance of a building, its fabric and particular elements within it, such as animal stalls, should inform the work of other specialists, such as architects and structural engineers, guiding decisions on the use of particular conservation techniques. Architects, surveyors or structural engineers employed to manage and advise on schemes should be experienced in the conservation of traditional buildings. Building contractors should have proven experience of the traditional building techniques required. The Local Authority Conservation Officer should be able to provide contact details of historic building consultants able to undertake survey and analysis of farm buildings.

CAN HISTORIC FARM BUILDINGS BE IMPORTANT FOR WILDLIFE?

Yes, the possibility that there is a wildlife value to the building – as a home for owls, for example, or a bat roost – also needs to be considered.



The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 protects bats and their roosts. It is illegal to intentionally or recklessly disturb bats or their roost, or obstruct access into a building they use. Advice from English Nature should be sought.



G Repair work provides local employment and keeps craft skills alive. Ecclerigg Barn in the Lake District under repair. Photograph Andy Lowe Lake District National Park.

H Farm buildings should be regularly maintained to avoid dereliction and the need for expensive repairs. Particular attention should be paid to keeping roofs intact and preventing the growth of vegetation. Photograph Hampshire County Council.

I Building character can often depend on details, such as the chequer-board pattern of the tiled roof of this Dorset barn. Any works to the roof should respect and retain this pattern. Photograph Bob Edwards.



HOW CAN I GET ADVICE ON CARING FOR HISTORIC BUILDINGS OR GRANT-AID?

You can obtain advice on how to manage historic buildings on your land or on grant schemes from the following organisations:

- **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs:** Under Defra agri-environment schemes, Rural Development Service advisers can help with advice on grants for environmental land management and building conservation. A list of local offices is available on the Defra website at www.defra.gov.uk by selecting *Contact Defra*
- **Local Authority:** Your Local Authority Conservation Officer should be the first point of contact if you require general advice about the management of listed buildings and the need for Listed Building Consent. Some local authorities may also be able to offer grant assistance for traditional repairs
- **English Heritage:** Your local English Heritage Regional Office can give advice on the management and repair of listed historic buildings. For Grade I and II* listed buildings that are considered 'at risk', there may be grant assistance available. A list of regional offices is available on the English Heritage website at www.english-heritage.org.uk by selecting *Contact Us*

REMEMBER to take account of historic farm buildings when you develop plans for farm diversification, development or make applications for agri-environment schemes.

For copies of this leaflet, please contact English Heritage Customer Services Department on 0870 333 1181 or email: customers@english-heritage.org.uk
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