

# HISTORIC FARM BUILDINGS

## Characterisation

*Management of historically important farm buildings that give local and regional character to the countryside is increasingly supported by thematic survey, landscape characterisation and frameworks for evaluation*

*Although none of the small field barns that characterise the northern gritstone valleys of the Yorkshire Dales has been listed, they form an integral part of a highly distinctive and specialised agricultural landscape. Parts of Swaledale have now been included in a Barns and Walls Conservation Scheme, managed by the Yorkshire Dales National Park in partnership with English Heritage*

Farm buildings have always been replaced or adapted to meet the needs of evolving farming practices, and they will need to change in the future. Because there are so many surviving, their exposure to demolition or obliteration has provoked little reaction. Their diversity and apparent great number – an estimated 1.2 million buildings dating from before 1914 in England and Wales – has also presented obstacles to their inclusion within broad conservation programmes, unlike linear landscape features such as walls and hedges. The Historic Buildings Resurvey of the 1980s resulted in many exciting discoveries and new additions to the lists, from cruck-roofed field barns on the Cumbrian fells to medieval timber-framed barns in East Anglia. The fieldwork conducted on these parish-by-parish surveys, however, drew our attention to the lack of well-researched criteria for selection and the all-important context within which informed decisions concerning future designations and management should operate.

### Thematic surveys

In order to remedy this situation, English Heritage's Listing Team started a series of

thematic surveys of farm buildings to analyse present statutory lists and produce frameworks for future assessment. Norfolk provided an ideal county in which to compare and contrast the statutory lists (last updated in the early 1980s) with the results of detailed survey work undertaken by the Centre for East Anglian Studies in 1986–7. Historical development, regional variations within the county, building types and dating were all considered. The report concluded with appendices including recommendations for (exemplar) listing and analysis of the lists. The thematic survey of Norfolk farmsteads and the general leaflet, *Understanding Listing: The East Anglian Farm*, were both produced by English Heritage's Listing Team in 1997, and described in *Conservation Bulletin* the following year.<sup>1</sup>

It became increasingly apparent during subsequent survey work in Suffolk that the thematic *listing* approach was in danger of becoming inequitable, principally for the reason that access depended on the goodwill of individual owners. Draft reports for Cumbria and Devon have, therefore, concentrated on the broad evaluation and analysis of the built resource. An initial report has also highlighted the importance of planned and model farmsteads in the development of agriculture in the 18th and 19th centuries, the range of building types surviving, and both the chronological and spatial distribution of known surviving examples. A gazetteer of all known examples was compiled and distributed to county Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs) and relevant Conservation Officers in 1999, and a publication will be available in April.

### Need for guidelines

It was evident that listed farm buildings form only a fraction of what can be defined as 'historic' and contributory to regional character and distinctiveness. Nevertheless, it was also evident that plotting the distribution even of listed buildings by type and date strongly relates to associated historic landscape character, as the maps compiled for the Norfolk pilot study clearly showed. It follows that characterisation of the built resource must, where possible, complement



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landscape characterisation work at both the broad level and in the more detailed regional studies now underway (see Fairclough, 10–11).

Frameworks for evaluation, rather than characterisation in its purest sense, can also comprise tools for positive management of the built environment by organisations and individuals. A recent review of Countryside Stewardship Schemes, for example, identified the need for specific training in the identification and protection of historic and archaeological features. The adaptive conversion of historic farm buildings promoted by the Rural Enterprise Scheme and the Rural White Paper highlights the need for even the most basic kind of guidance on regional character and acceptable levels of adaptation.

Clearly, definition of the market (planners, conservation and agri-environment practitioners, economic development officers, owners and their agents and architects) dictates what shape characterisation should take, through the use both of examples and observations on the listed and unlisted resource. To establish a methodology that is both nationally applicable and comprehensible to its users, English Heritage and the Countryside Agency are producing exemplar reports for discussion and future refinement at county and regional level. The latter could match government regions, reflect past and present cultural, agrarian and economic

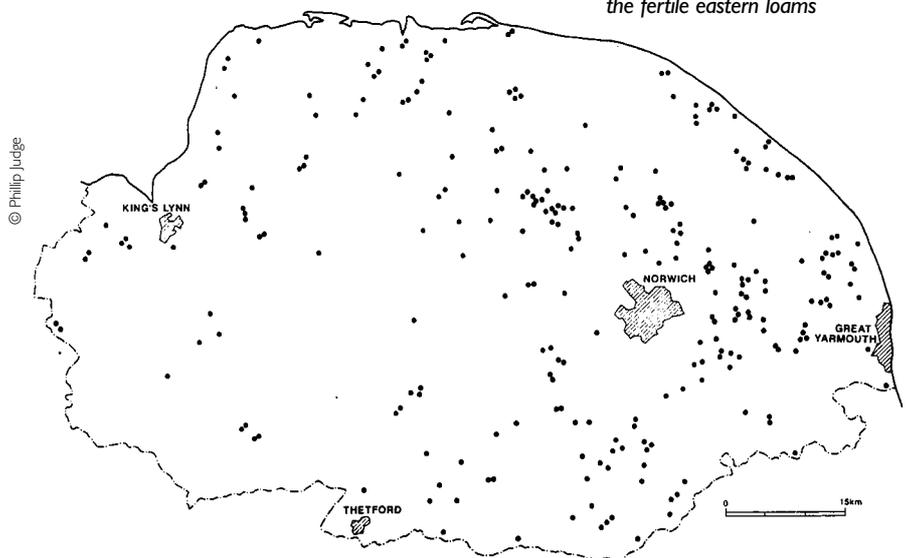
diversity, and integrate guidance on conversions and acceptable adaptations to listed and historic buildings in both continuing agricultural use and new adaptive reuses.

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(1) Lake, J and Hawkins, B 'Thematic listing surveys of farm buildings', *Context* 58 (July 1998), 24–5; Lake, J 'New strategy to save farm buildings', *Conservation Bulletin* 34 (July 1998), 22–3.

*Park Farm, a Grade II listed group on the Alnwick estate, Grade II, designed by John Green for the Duke of Northumberland in 1827. Our thematic survey has examined model farmsteads, which show that British farming, often led by the great landlords, was at the forefront of the development of commercial agriculture on a global scale*

*Map showing the distribution of listed farm buildings within Norfolk dating from between 1700 and 1800. Increased productivity led to new building in the fertile eastern loams*



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