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HISTORIC FARM BUILDINGS

Audit and evaluation

Historic farm buildings are a much-valued rural feature but under pressure in many parts of the country. English Heritage and the Countryside Agency have joined forces to commission research that will provide a better understanding of the changes taking place

The pace of change in the countryside is accelerating at a rate unprecedented in modern times, and historic farm buildings are not immune from this process. Important factors are the decline of traditional rural employment and small-scale farming; its widespread replacement by larger capital-intensive enterprises; the problem of declining farm incomes and depopulation in upland areas (invariably those with the greatest number of designated landscape areas); and the effect of national and European policy. Massive economic and social pressures arising from the current and severe agricultural depression have been worsened further through the recent outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease. Shifts in government policy and new initiatives for the diversification of the rural economy are also likely to result in increased development pressures.

The need for research

If decisions on the management and protection of historic farm buildings are to be well-founded, it is essential that the resource is accurately described and changes monitored. Only from this base of knowledge can the impact of modern

farming practices, the pressures for development in the countryside, and the impact and effectiveness of the planning system on the management of the resource be properly assessed. Surprisingly little is known, however, about the effect of the planning system on the management of the historic farm building resource. There is a need for research to determine the nature both of statutory development policy and non-statutory guidance at a national and local level and the extent to which they are based upon an appreciation of the traditional farm building resource. Also, to what extent do they encourage or discourage conversion and re-use, and to what extent do they take account of the variety of farm building types? To find some of the answers, English Heritage and the Countryside Agency have formed a partnership to undertake an audit and evaluation of English farmsteads. The Countryside and Community Research Unit (CCRU) of Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education is conducting the research on their behalf over a 13-month period between March 2001 and March 2002.

Haymaking in the Yorkshire Dales is being replaced by silage making, which does require the field barns that are a prominent feature of some of these upland dales



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Traditional historic farm buildings are often unsuited to the demands of modern commercial farming. This is part of a Grade I listed longhouse and stable in Dartmoor

Audit and Evaluation Research Project

Part 1 Quantifying the listed resource and identifying trends:

The aim of Part 1 is to provide baseline data on the character, management and threats to listed farm buildings in rural areas. This will provide robust data to inform English Heritage, the Countryside Agency and other policy makers of the extent and nature of change to the management of the farm building resource. A number of different data sources are being used to build a picture of the listed resource, including analysis of building at risk surveys, photographic records and local authority planning applications. The results will provide a set of indicators to monitor changes taking place to the listed farm building resource.

Part 2 Understanding the issues and identifying best practice:

The aim of Part 2 is to identify and describe factors that precipitate change in the historic farm building resource. This phase of research encompasses the whole resource (listed and unlisted). A literature review, combined with a series of interviews with key policy makers, is being undertaken to identify macro-pressures for change that bear upon on the rural economy and to provide a context for detailed analysis of statutory development policy and non-statutory guidance at the local level.

A postal questionnaire sent to Conservation Officers and their planning authorities will give a comprehensive picture of the management of the resource at local level. This is being combined with a desk study of development plans and written guidance to identify examples of best practice. By evaluating the effectiveness of policies that affect historic farm buildings, this research will provide valuable information to aid development of future policy.

The project has already generated great interest within central and local government and among professional and voluntary organisations that deal with historic farm buildings. This is borne out by the very high response rates the research team have obtained from their survey work to date. Over 62 % of local authorities, for example, do not monitor changes to the listed resource; only 12 % of those who have kept a buildings at risk register keep it updated annually. Almost all would value the publication of frameworks for understanding of the listed and unlisted resource (see Lake, 30–1). This feedback is building a detailed picture of the complex factors that affect the management of the historic farm building resource in different parts of the country. The report will be available in August. □

Jeremy Lake
Inspector of Historic Buildings
Listing Team

Peter Gaskell
Senior Research Fellow
The Countryside and Community Research Unit
Cheltenham and Gloucester College of
Higher Education

Traditional historic farm buildings are often unsuited to the demands of modern commercial farming. Listed examples, as here, cannot survive without some form of viable use

