

Identifying Features and Overview of Typical Features

What to look for

Natural or man-made?

Does the feature stand out within the immediate landscape? Does it look odd? It is likely that a feature that does not 'look' natural is man-made. In general natural 'lumps and bumps' have a less regular shape than man-made features.

Geology

Does the stone associated with the feature look the same as the natural stone in the area? If not, then it has been brought to the area. Also look out for artificial markings on stones – these may represent dressing of building stone, quarrying, rock art or boundary markers.

Associated features

Are there any similar features nearby? Archaeological features and monuments are often found close to features that are the result of the same activity and from the same time period. For example, if you have a small circular mound of stones, are there any close by? If there are, then your feature may be a cairn forming part of a cairn field. Are there known features of a specific date close to the feature? Can you see evidence for stone robbing (of a cairn or disused building) in a wall?

Location

The location of a feature is also important in identifying it. Is the feature in a prominent position? Does it run parallel to an existing track? Does it appear to sit on a break of slope? In what direction does it face? What is the view? These questions help you to compare the feature with known examples, and also get you thinking about what sort of feature might occupy such a location. It is also useful to look at the current land use. Does this give you a clue to the nature and age of the feature? For example, are you looking at a pile of stones that are a result of modern quarrying, or a linear earthwork created as a result of a modern trackway.

Vegetation

The height of vegetation can give clues to buried features. Ditch features allow for better growth, often producing taller, dense vegetation. In areas where there is something impeding root growth, such as stone, the vegetation tends to grow less well. On no account should vegetation be removed to reveal features.

Erosion and burrowing animals

Soil erosion can reveal archaeological objects, features and monuments. The most common things to look out for in the eroded areas are objects, an increase in or discrete patch of stone, and a difference in the soil from the surrounding soils (for example colour and fragments of charcoal). Similarly, burrows, although damaging to the features themselves, can also throw up this type of evidence indicating the presence of a man-made feature. If a feature is actively eroding it is important that it is recorded before it is lost. However, on no account should you dig into, or 'clean up' the eroding area as this may cause further damage to the feature and in some cases the vegetation and the deposit (soil/peat).

Features

Walls

Note the general thickness of wall, if there is any variation in the size of stone used (particularly in the height), differences in the building material, unusual wall lines (particularly s-bends), upstanding stones (orthostats – may form gateposts or be reused in the wall). Look out for carvings on the stones, for example initials, dates, cup and rings. This may indicate reuse of stone. Other elements that may be reused include mullions and querns.

HER keyword	Description/Identification	Include
Animal wash	Pool in a river with a fold sited on the bank. Fold has a narrow end or stretch of walling leading to the pool.	Note location and record fold as separately.
Barn	Rectangular stone-built structure. Interior may include stalls for livestock.	Record co-ordinate at each corner if possible and note key features.
Barrow	Generally regular and occupy prominent positions in the landscape. Often contain stonework covered over with earth and turf. Erosion of the overlying earth and turf reveals the underlying stonework.	Record co-ordinates at each corner or centre and note size.
Bield	Short lengths of wall built to shelter livestock. Sometimes forming a cross. May be remnants of earlier wall.	Note shape (e.g. linear), length and direction it runs (e.g. N/S).
Bridge	Structure spanning a space, typically a watercourse.	Note construction materials, number of spans, and what it spans.
Cairn	Accumulation of stones forming a roughly circular or oval mound. Stones vary in size, and mound may be low with little stone visible through the overlying vegetation. Often difficult to differentiate between clearance and burial cairns.	Record co-ordinates at each corner or centre and note size.
Carved stone	Markings carved or pecked into the surface of the stone. Motifs comprise grooves, rings, circles, and can appear both as an individual marking on the stone, or together with similar or a combination of motifs. Most common motifs are the 'cup' (a shallow, circular depression, sometimes referred to as a basin) and the 'cup and ring' marks (a 'cup' set within one or more concentric circles).	Note direction of the carved face (e.g. west facing)
Culvert	Man-made channel leading away from a natural water source, sometimes with a small associated pond or holding area. Often the channel is wetter than the surrounding area and is favoured by rushes. Where the diversion takes the water below ground, brick or stone-lined culverts or tunnels may be seen.	Record co-ordinate of each end and also intermediate points where appropriate. Note which side of feature recorded and width.
Ditch	Negative features used to define monuments, form boundaries and to act as drainage. Man-made ditches are cut in a fairly regular manner and often accompanied by a bank formed from the upcast material.	Record co-ordinate of each end and also intermediate points where appropriate. Note which side of feature recorded and width.
Dressing floor	Area for crushing and washing mineral ores ahead of smelting.	Record co-ordinates at each corner or centre and note size.
Earthwork	Artificial bank of earth.	Record co-ordinate of each end and also intermediate points where appropriate. Note which side of feature recorded, or if top, and width.
Enclosure	Land surrounded by a boundary. This boundary may survive as low-lying earthwork with or without stone.	Record co-ordinates at each corner or centre and note size.

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Extractive pit	Surface workings for mineral and clay extraction.	Record single co-ordinate and note which side taken and size.
Farm building	Structure associated with a farm with an unknown function.	Record co-ordinate at each corner if possible and note key features.
Feature	Natural feature of archaeological interest, e.g. coppiced alder.	Record location and type.
Field boundary	Limit of a field. May be a hedge, wall or bank.	Note type and any significant or unusual features.
Findspot	Location of an artefact found on the ground surface.	Describe artefact and location.
Ford	Crossing point across a shallow body of water.	Note construction, if any.
Gate	May be blocked or unblocked.	Note type (e.g. hand) and also gatepost/s.
Grindstone	Revolving stone/stones for grinding, sharpening or polishing.	Note type, size, completeness. Also note if part of a wall / rubble or in situ (e.g. small stone set vertically and supported by two uprights).
Hollow	Depression. May have been dug out.	Record co-ordinate at centre of hollow. If on edge, note which side taken and size.
Hut circle	A circle or oval of dry-stone walling with a single entrance. May survive as an earthwork with occasional stone visible in the earthen bank.	Record co-ordinate at centre and note size.
Kiln	Oven/furnace structure for firing, drying or hardening materials.	Record co-ordinate at each corner if rectilinear, otherwise centre and note size.
Linear feature	Unknown man-made feature in a straight or curved line.	Record co-ordinate of each end and also intermediate points where appropriate. Note which side of feature recorded, or if top, and width.
Lynchet	Bank or ridge on the downslope of a hill. Formed by soil movement and erosion as a result of ploughing above, or from the creation of cultivation platforms (also called 'terraces').	Record co-ordinate of each end and also intermediate points where appropriate. Note which side of feature recorded, or if top, and width.
Mill	Structure containing machinery to carry out processing (e.g. grain). Water-powered mills were either sited on a river, or had a man-made channel or conduit (termed a 'fall trough' or 'goit') taking water from a river to a mill pond.	Record co-ordinate at each corner if possible and note key features.
Mine building	Structure at site of mine.	Record co-ordinate at each corner if possible and note key features.
Mine shaft	Tops of shafts are circular or oval depressions with a mound or 'rim' around the circumference at ground level. Some also have a platform or 'apron'. Often found in groups and individual features vary in size and depth. May be the remains of bell pits, ventilation shafts, or extraction activity.	Record co-ordinate at four points (e.g. N/S/E/W), or one co-ordinate and note location of point taken and size of shaft.
Mound	Man-made feature representing the accumulation of material or a deliberate single event.	Record co-ordinate at centre and note size.
Orthostat	Upright stone. May be built into a wall or found within a field.	Note any associations with other features.
Pit	Can be natural or man-made and often difficult to determine. Include further observations where relevant.	Record co-ordinate at centre of pit. If on edge, note which side taken and size.
Pit alignment	Long lines of pits possibly representing early boundaries. Sometimes visible on the ground as crop marks, and often visible on aerial photographs.	Record co-ordinate at centre of each pit and note size. Note direction of alignment.
Platform	Defined flat area.	Record co-ordinate at each corner if possible, otherwise centre and note size.

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Pond	Can be natural or man-made and often difficult to determine. Variety of shapes and sizes.	Record co-ordinate at four points (e.g. N/S/E/W), or one co-ordinate and note location of point taken and size and shape of pond.
Quarry	May be obvious, with large 'chunks' of an area having been removed and still clearly visible. Also less obvious and visible as odd-shaped earthworks representing shallow extraction pits and spoil heaps.	If large it is likely to be on the OS mapping, so record a co-ordinate and note approximate size. If small, record co-ordinate at each corner if possible, otherwise centre and note size.
Rabbit smoot*	Small opening at base of wall to allow rabbits/hares to pass through. Sometimes used for trapping.	Note if blocked and type of blocking.
Revetment	Retaining wall/construction.	Note type of material forming wall, and material it retains.
Ridge and furrow	Long linear 'banks and ditches' running parallel and close together. May not respect current field boundaries as they are part of the Medieval pre-enclosed fields. Later 19th century ploughing often much wider or much narrower and respects one or more of the current field boundaries.	Note presence within field, including direction and if respecting any boundaries. If not respecting boundaries, look for evidence in neighbouring fields.
Shed	Small structure built and used for storage, shelter, or a workshop.	Record co-ordinate at each corner if possible and note key features.
Sheep creep*	Lintelled rectangular opening in wall to allow sheep to pass between pastures.	Note if blocked and type of blocking.
Sheep fold	Rectangular or curved enclosures with one entrance/exit. Sometimes found accompanied by walling or earthworks for channelling the sheep into the fold.	Record co-ordinates at each corner or centre and note size.
Shepherds hut	Temporary, seasonal dwelling often in upland locations.	Record co-ordinate at each corner if rectilinear, otherwise centre and note size.
Shooting stand	Position for shooting game. Screened by earth, stone or wood.	Record co-ordinate at centre.
Slag heap	Accumulation of waste material from mineral processing activity.	Record co-ordinate at four points (e.g. N/S/E/W), or one co-ordinate and note location of point taken and size and shape of pond.
Spring	Water source.	
Stile	Steps crossing over a wall.	Note type and number of steps.
Stream	Natural water flow from a source.	
Trackway	Includes hollow ways, green lanes bounded by hedges/walls, routes linking industrial sites/features, pack horse routes.	Record co-ordinate of each end and also intermediate points where appropriate. Note which side of feature recorded, or if centre, and width.
Trap*	Device for catching animals / birds.	
Trough	Narrow, open container. Generally for animal feed or water.	Note type, if known, and any associated features.
Tunnel	Underground channel with vaulted roof. May be used for sort tunnel under a track/road linking fields.	
Vaccary	A medieval cattle farm. Term also used for simple cattle enclosures.	Record co-ordinates at each corner or centre and note size.
Wall end*	A clear end of a wall. Might be free standing (e.g. the end of the wall next to a stream) or in the wall where the wall has been extended (may indicate change of builder/build type/later addition).	
Wall join*	A wall join may be a standalone corner, or a place where several walls meet. Evidence for earlier joins may also be visible.	Note if a standalone corner or a continuous wall. Identify which is the joining or the butting wall. Also note where an old wall has come off but is no longer there.

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Warren	Area of land within a boundary for raising rabbits. Ditch and bank within warren may indicate the breeding area.	Record co-ordinate at each corner if possible, otherwise centre and note size.
Water pipe	Pipeline supplying water.	
Water tank	Structure for water storage.	Record co-ordinate at each corner if possible and note key features.
Waterway hole*	Deliberate hole in the base of the wall for the passage of a definitive waterway.	

Table F.1: Keywords used by the project (= not in Historic England's 'Monument Type Thesaurus')*