

National Character Area 103 **Malvern Hills**

Summary

This area lies on the boundary between Worcestershire and Herefordshire, and comprises a distinctive narrow ridge of rounded hills, rising from the Severn and Avon Vales to the east and the Herefordshire lowlands to the west. The River Teme forms the northern boundary, with the Herefordshire Plateau to the north-west. Nearly 5% of the Character Area is urban, 21% is woodland and nearly 7% is common land. Just over 86% of the area lies within the Malvern Hills AONB.

The area has a mostly dispersed settlement pattern set within landscapes of piecemeal and reorganised (including regular) enclosure interspersed with woodland.

Landscape and Settlement

- High levels of dispersed settlement, with 12.2% of farmsteads in hamlets and 2.4% in villages.
- Medium density of farmsteads in the landscape, high to the Suckley Hills to the north and low in the estate lands to the south.
- Large-scale (38.2%) farmsteads predominant and concentrated to south, but with an even mix of other farmstead scales that display a strong degree of local variation.

Farmstead and Building Types

- Generally small-medium scale loose courtyard farmsteads and regular L-plan groups, some with additional buildings.
- Larger farmsteads – mostly regular plans – set within larger-scale fields to the west.
- Some areas of former smallholdings, often of linear form, were absorbed into larger farms in the 19th century.
- Wide range of building types including threshing barns, cider houses and hop kilns.

Rarity and Significance

- High rate of survival except around Malvern (7% loss), with 72% of farmsteads recorded from late 19th century maps retaining more than half of their historic footprint.

Drivers for Change

- The proportion of farmsteads remaining in agricultural use is the lowest of any in the Region (21%) with three farmsteads out of four being converted to residential use with residents showing high participation in substantial business at director level (39 directorships per hundred farmsteads).
- 5-10% of listed working buildings have obvious signs of structural disrepair, and 20-30% with visible adaptive reuse.



I HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

- The Malvern Hills were an upland grazing area for the surrounding settlements from the prehistoric period, and has a long history as royal hunting forest from the 11th to 16th century when much land was granted or leased, and final disafforestation and division in 1632 concentrated on the Crown estates to the west. The 1884 Malvern Hills Act formalised management of the commons.
- Long history of arable cultivation in valleys, especially in Cradley Brook Valley, but acid/neutral soils of area best-suited to pastoral economy.
- Orchards developed to intensive scale of production from late 17th century, now concentrated on eastern edge, to west and to north, and hop fields from 18th century, concentrated on valley sides in north.
- Large estates developed in 18th and 19th centuries, most notably Eastnor Castle and its landscape laid out in early 19th century.
- Spring waters attracted visitors from at least medieval period, with scattered shrines linked to springs. Monastic houses at Great and Little Malvern and Colwall. Victorian and Edwardian villas, set amongst mixed ornamental woodland, are now a strong element in the character of the eastern slopes. On the western side of the hills around Colwall is some late 19th century and mostly 20th century modern housing within a strong pattern of conifers and woodland, giving the area a suburban character.
- Significant evidence of large scale quarrying along the length of the northern and eastern slopes of the Malvern Hills. Diorite was the main stone quarried with some limestone quarried from area, declining after 1924 Malvern Hills Act, with the last quarry closing in 1977. Both stone types mainly used for aggregate.

2 LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT

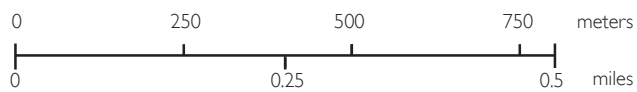
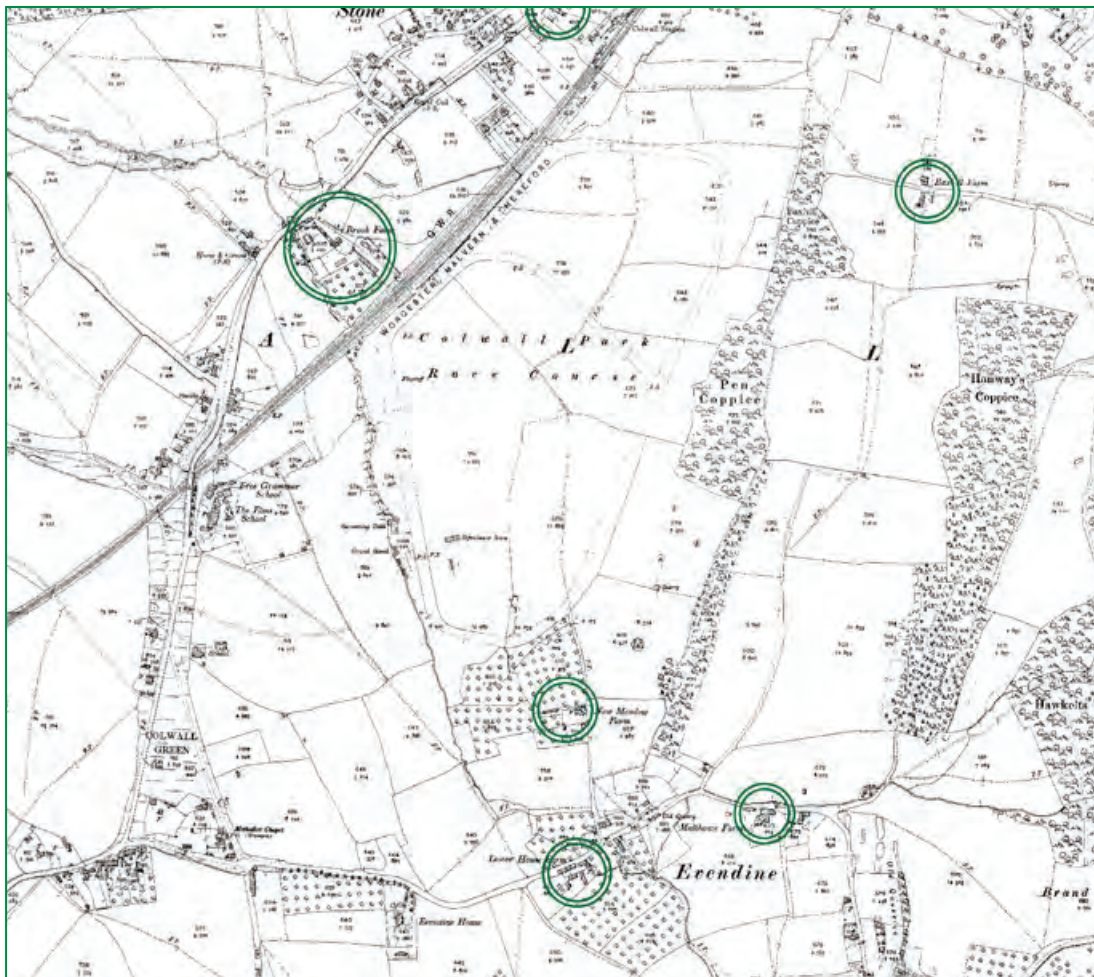
- Some nucleated villages to west, otherwise the Malverns is marked by dispersed settlement, with scattered farmsteads, hamlets and cottages, a pattern established by 14th century (including isolated 12th/13th century moated sites) and which intensified further because of the disposal of the Crown estates in the 17th century.
- Across much of the area fields are generally irregular and small in scale, the result of medieval and post-medieval woodland clearance. These fields are inter-mixed with surviving blocks of ancient semi-natural and replanted woodland (eg the Suckley Hills) and intakes from the hunting chase. The wooded slopes and ridges were subject to a long history of coppicing from the Iron Age for the pottery industry (kilns clustered to east).
- Extensive areas of larger fields – particularly south of Mathan and Colwall - reflect the piecemeal enclosure of areas of open fields and common land in association with the development of medium-large scale farms. There are also large blocks of planned private enclosure of the 17th-19th centuries.
- Strip lynchets and strips of ridge and furrow in small closes are witness to pre-14th century levels of arable production in areas of higher ground more suited to grass.
- Formerly extensive orchards still survive in part, particularly in the Leigh and Alfrick area where fruit production for urban markets peaked in the early 20th century.
- Country houses, together with their landscaped gardens and wider settings and large estate farms, developed as a major feature of this area.
- Some areas of distinct common-edge settlement, such as Wellington Heath, have been transformed by 20th century development.




A rare surviving example, to the west of the area, of a timber-framed linear farmstead of the 17th century or earlier where the house and working buildings are attached and in-line.



A loose courtyard farmstead to the west of the area with a timber-framed house and working buildings of the 17th century or earlier. Groups such as this are rare survivals, early buildings being concentrated on the western side of the Malverns.

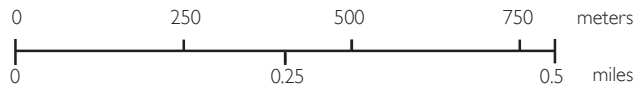
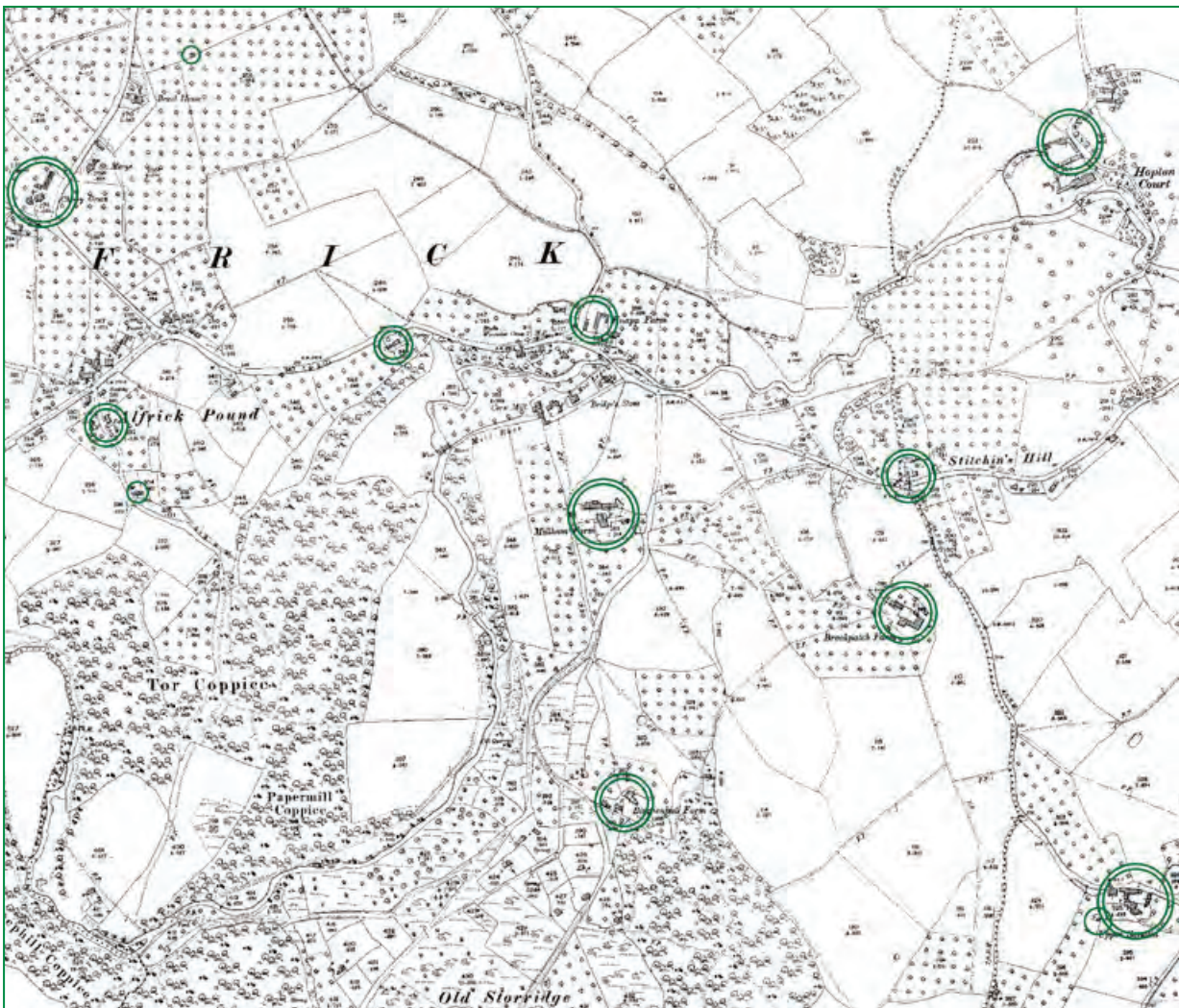




-  Farmstead
-  Outfarm

Colwall

In the southern part of the Malverns some larger regular multi-yard farmsteads were intermixed with small-medium scale farmsteads within a landscape of irregular piecemeal enclosure. These fields were largely the result of medieval and post medieval clearance of woodland but also, near Colwall, the enclosure of former arable fields. Clearly visible to the east, extending northwards from Evendine, is a designed estate landscape with plantations, and in Colwall Green to the west are some small timber-framed houses of 17th century and earlier date that have long been decoupled from the land. Map based on OS 2nd Edition 25" map © and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2005) Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024

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-  Farmstead
-  Outfarm

Alfrick
This area consists of a mixture of woodland (some being regenerated woodland on former common land), remnants of common and small-medium sized irregular fields some of which are orchards. The fields to the south around and within the woodland and common are typical of the piecemeal taking-in of woodland and also common, a process that accelerated with the disafforestation of the Malverns in the early 17th century. Within Old Storrige Common to the south are areas of very small fields and cottages representing encroachment onto the common. Further smallholdings may be seen fringing the former commonland. To the north and east of the area, the fields are less irregular than the intakes to the south but mostly have wavy boundaries, created through the piecemeal enclosure of former arable from the 16th/17th centuries although some straight boundaries suggest that these fields have been subject to some reorganisation. This is an area of predominantly dispersed settlement. The majority of the medium scale farmsteads lie in an arc around the former edge of the common, positioned so as to have access to both the fields and common for stock. To the north-east Hopton Court is a large, manorial farmstead in what may be a shrunken settlement. Map based on OS 2nd Edition 25" map © and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2005) Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024

3 FARMSTEAD AND BUILDING TYPES

Farmstead types

- Loose courtyard farmsteads are mostly small in scale, with detached working buildings to one or two sides of the yard.
- Concentrations of linear farmsteads in areas of smallholdings (eg Storridge Common) had by the later 19th century been absorbed into larger farms.
- Small-scale regular L-shaped farmsteads, mostly comprising a barn with additional shelter shed and some with additional working buildings to 3 or 4 sides of the yard.
- Some large-scale regular courtyard farmsteads.

Building types

- Threshing barns commonly with shelter sheds making an L-plan. Combination barns are also common.
- Granaries set above other buildings including stables and cider houses accessed by external steps.

- Hop kilns, usually of mid- to late 19th century date.
- Buildings for cattle including two storey cow houses and single storey open-fronted shelter sheds.
- Cider houses, distinguished by wide doors, incorporated into 18th century and later combination ranges which can also include hop kilns, some of which have earlier timber-frame cores.

5 MATERIALS AND DETAIL

- Some 17th century and earlier timber-framed buildings, including medieval cruck houses, particularly around the Suckley Hills. Timber-framed farm buildings are typically weatherboarded or have brick infill panels.
- Stone and slate a major element from 18th century for most buildings.
- Brick strongly characteristic of lowland farming areas to the west.
- Plain clay tile and Welsh slate are the most common roofing materials.



Across the Malverns, fine timber-framed houses bear testament to the development of prosperous and substantial farms by the 17th century, but the working buildings on these large farms were often rebuilt to regular plans in the mid to late 19th century.



17th century and earlier farmstead groups in timber frame testify to the development from the 14th century of prosperous farms, many from the early 17th century following the disafforestation of the Malverns.



Large-scale regular courtyard farmsteads are concentrated to the south of the area. When built anew or rebuilt in the 18th and 19th centuries, their houses faced away from the farmyard.



Small farms and smallholdings developed around areas of common, and most of the former passed out of agricultural use over the 19th and 20th centuries. To the rear of this house at Colwall Green is a single-bay cottage, and both date from the 17th century.

Smallholding landscapes have rarely survived, and working buildings were demolished or rebuilt in the 20th century.



Some substantial timber-framed barns of the late 16th and 17th centuries have survived, with the distinctive square panel timber framing typical of the western English carpentry tradition.



In the mid-late 19th century, when much of the Malverns was developed with suburban-style villas and houses, the large farms of this area were provided with industrial-scale buildings such as this combination barn (left) and hop kilns and stowage.

This is one of the **Farmsteads Character Statements** for the National Character Areas. Further illustrated guidance on historic character and significance, under the same headings, is provided in the **West Midlands Farmsteads Character Statement**. They result from *The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project*, which has mapped the historic character and use of farmsteads across the region, and developed planning tools to inform future change. A *Summary Report* summarises the results of the whole project for the whole region and sets out policy and land use implications, and recommendations and next steps for further work.

The *Rarity and Significance* and *Drivers for Change* headings, and other elements of the main text, are based upon the mapping and interpretation of historic character. These records are stored in the relevant local authority *Historic Environment Record* and there is a *Historic Farmstead Characterisation Report* for each county and the Central Conurbation. These have been used as a baseline to determine the patterns of current use, as summarised for each area in the *Drivers for Change* section. There is a *Farmstead Use Report* for the region.

Also under the *Drivers for Change* heading are percentages of listed working farm buildings with visible structural failure and evidence of adaptive reuse. These are based on comparison of 1980s with 1999-2006 photographs, from the *Photo Image Survey* (University of Gloucestershire for English Heritage, 2009). In the West Midlands 27% of listed working farm buildings have evidence for residential reuse (national level 30%), 3% other (national 4%) and 70% (national 66%) have no other evidence for other use. 18.9% have evidence for structural failure (national 8.9%).

The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project is a collaborative project led by English Heritage with the county and metropolitan authorities. This document has been written by Jeremy Lake of English Heritage's Characterisation Team with assistance from Bob Edwards of Forum Heritage Services. All photographs are by English Heritage and Forum Heritage Services unless otherwise acknowledged.



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