

National Character Area 107 **Cotswolds**

THIS IS A LARGE AREA WHICH EXTENDS IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE, WILTSHIRE AND OXFORDSHIRE. A FULLY ILLUSTRATED VERSION IS BEING PREPARED WITH THE COTSWOLDS AONB PARTNERSHIP

Summary

The Cotswolds landscape forms the best known part of the oolitic limestone outcrop stretching from Dorset to Lincolnshire. The character area extends from Mells in Somerset to Brackley in Northamptonshire and is nationally renowned for its distinctive landscape. 65% of the area lies within the Cotswold AONB and 21% in the Cotswold and Upper Thames Tributaries ESAs. Only 4% is classed as urban. The key area distinctions are:

Landscape and Settlement

- Very strong pattern of nucleated settlement, with 41% of farmsteads in villages and 2.6% in hamlets.
- Medium-low density of farmsteads in the landscape.
- Broad range of farmstead scales, small/medium to large-scale (24.7 and 32.4%) being the most common.

Farmstead and Building Types

- Medium to large-scale loose and regular courtyard plans are predominant, often incorporating an L-plan barn range with integral stable and granary.
- Stone-built barns, typically of 5 bays with central threshing floor and porches, gabled ends and stone slate roofs
- Shelter sheds for cattle, either free-standing or built against barns
- Stables are common, and architecturally ornate examples are a key feature of this area.
- Outfarms and field barns of 19th century date.

Rarity and Significance

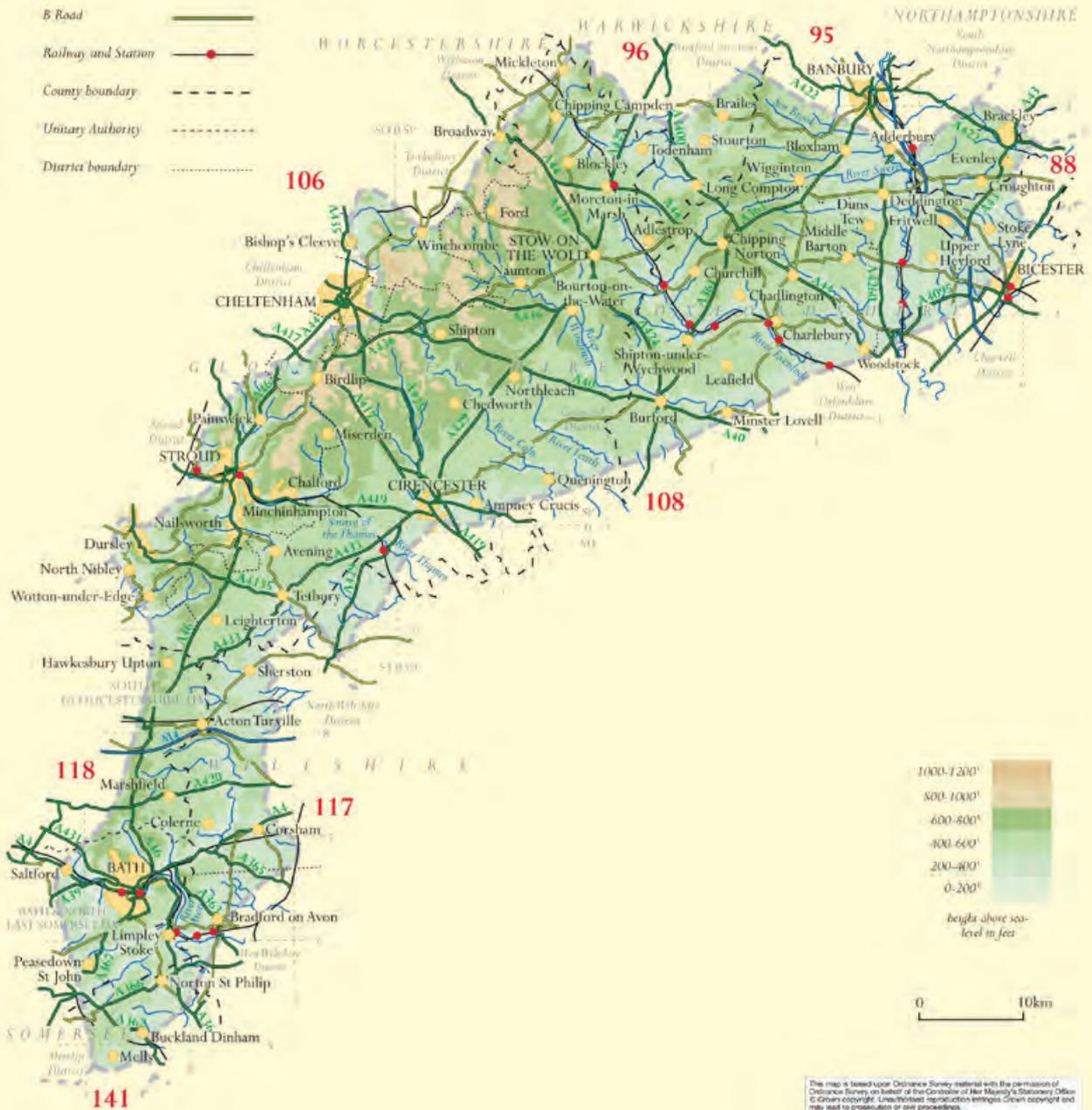
- High rate of survival within Warwickshire, with 73% of farmsteads recorded from late 19th century maps retaining more than half of their historic footprint.

Drivers for Change

- Within Warwickshire this area is characterised by low economic mass with two-thirds of historic farmsteads in residential use but a relatively high proportion for the West Midlands (7%) in non-residential use other than agriculture.
- 0.5-5% of listed working buildings have obvious signs of structural disrepair; and 30-40% with visible adaptive reuse.

Character Area 107 Cotswolds

- Area 107 boundary
- Adjacent Area **106**
- Motorway
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway and Station
- County boundary
- Unitary Authority
- District boundary



I HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

- The area was extensively settled from the prehistoric period and there was little woodland by the 11th century. Much of the land was in large estates and many smaller manor houses and gentry houses developed in this area. 14th century witnessed abandonment and contraction of settlements, including some being replaced by sheep walks. The area's importance as a major centre of broadcloth production from the late 14th century is reflected in the quality of its churches (predominantly in late Gothic Perpendicular style), merchants' houses and domestic architecture – latter including evidence for open attic areas for handlooms lit by dormer/gable windows.
- Post-14th century expansion of valley-bottom settlements in the centre and south of the area (eg Brimscombe) linked to development of fulling mills (including some double corn and cloth mills) along streams. In 17th-19th century cloth industry, which sold both 'white' and dyed cloth for export, concentrated in the valleys around Dursley, Stroud, Chalford and Painswick.
- Thin, well-aerated, brashy soils derived from limestone are common on the plateau and steeper slopes, particularly to the west. More fertile, deeper, clayey soils of alluvial origin are present along the valley floors and on lower-lying land to the south and east.
- The decline of open-field arable agriculture, evident by the late 14th century, was followed in many areas by its conversion into open pasture for grazing sheep. By 17th century sheep rearing was concentrated in the north and cloth-making to the south. The next major phase in the arable exploitation of the Cotswolds was linked to agricultural improvements of the 18th and 19th centuries. Much of the high ground of the plateau is now arable, with pasture to the valleys especially on the steeper slopes.
- The Kennet and Avon Canal, which connected Bristol to London and was completed in 1810, enabled export of stone and coal from the region, and import of sugar from Bristol and luxury goods (for example from the Potteries and Birmingham). It was supplanted after the opening in 1841 of the Great Western Railway in 1841.

2 LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT

- Present predominant pattern of nucleated settlement developed 10th-12th centuries, replacing earlier more dispersed pattern of hamlets and farmsteads. Farmsteads developed within or on the edge of villages, as they expanded, and can relate to other historic buildings in the 'Cotswold style', surrounding fields or the wide central greens or commons typical of this area.
- Very low to extremely low levels of dispersed settlement. Some isolated farmsteads are on sites of medieval high-status sites or relate to shrunken hamlets or villages and can be associated with earthwork remains of medieval settlements and associated field systems. Others can represent new sites established from the 16th century relating to piecemeal enclosure of the landscape of former open fields - concentrated on the scarp, in Wiltshire and Warwickshire, in valleys to north and east of Stroud and central valleys between Moreton-in-Marsh and Bourton-on-the-Water. Farmsteads with associated regular and large-scale enclosure of similar date, either of former open fields or of long-term pasture (including open fields laid down to grass from medieval period), are most common to the centre and east of the area.
- Common edge settlement, the result of increasing population resulting from the wool trade pushing at available space, common in Stroud Valley area.
- Dry stone walls to higher area, hedgerows more common on scarps and in valleys where assarted fields (both medieval and post-medieval in date) are concentrated in Stroud valley area. Medieval or earlier woodland concentrated on Cotswolds scarp and valley edges, in Stroud valley area, By Brook Valley in Wiltshire, around Chedworth, in Cirencester Park and in the remnants of the Wychwood to the east. High ground: occasional woodland blocks and shelterbelts (typically 18th century or later) with dry stone walls but also with hedges. Valley bottoms: water meadows and tree-lined scarp slopes: scrub, beech woodland, hedges and tree clumps, and some species-rich grassland.
- Designed landscapes mostly dating from the late 17th century a distinctive feature, often built around medieval and earlier estates and associated with 19th century estate villages. Consolidation of the large estates from 16th century led to the area's fine country houses and historic parks, with landscapes ranging from formal late 17th century to picturesque 19th century and early 20th century Arts and Crafts (Rodmarton).

3 FARMSTEAD AND BUILDING TYPES

Farmstead types

Regular courtyard steadings are predominant. They are concentrated on the plateaux areas most subject to 18th-19th century regular enclosure, and the areas of reorganised piecemeal enclosure (where large farms developed between the 15th and 19th centuries) found across large parts of the Cotswolds. These are mostly of the multi-yard type, and often incorporate an L-shaped range (see building types below). U-shaped plans and full courtyards (with buildings to all four sides of the yard) are also common.

- Loose courtyard plans occur in these same areas, mostly with buildings to three sides of the yard.
- Smaller-scale farmsteads with working buildings to one or two sides of the yard remained within settlements and are also found on the scarp edges where farms were typically smaller in scale.
- L-plan and regular-plan farmsteads, including outfarms and field barns,

Building types

- Barns are stone-built; they are typically of five bays with a central threshing floor. Gabled roofs of stone slate, and porches (sometimes full-height with first-floor granaries) and lean-tos for cattle are common.
- Many combination barns, typically with cowhouse, stabling and first-floor granary, some of early 18th century or earlier date
- Granary/cartshed/stable ranges are commonly attached to barns, making an over L-plan to the principal building in the farmstead group.
- Shelter sheds to cattle yards are a common feature, and they include some rare surviving 18th century examples.
- Stables are a common feature, and one high status and gentry farmsteads they can be large in scale and architecturally ornate.
- 19th century outfarms; field barns found throughout area but concentrated on the Cotswold scarp.

4 BUILDING MATERIALS

- Quarrying from the Roman period (Bath) developing into a major industry by the medieval period supplying stone for building churches and other buildings in the surrounding areas, and in the 18th and 19th centuries (facilitated by the canals in particular) the towns of Bath and Cheltenham.
- Most farmsteads in local limestone and stone slates.

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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