

# National Character Area 63 **Oswestry Uplands**

## Summary

This is a small area of steep-sided, flat-topped hills, lying within the county of Shropshire. It is bounded by the Shropshire Plain to the east and south, the Welsh hills to the west and the River Ceiriog to the north. Almost 5% of the Character Area is urban, 9% is woodland. The area divides into three sub-areas:

- 1 *Uplands* – High densities of farmsteads concentrated within the valleys, on the moorland fringe and on areas of former moorland enclosed for agriculture in the 19th century.
- 2 *Industrial* – Farmsteads were inter-mixed with areas of smallholdings, particularly at Trefonen, Lynclys and Llanymynech.
- 3 *Lowlands* – Larger-scale farms have developed, with extensive parks and designed landscapes surrounding Oswestry.

### Landscape and Settlement

- Strong pattern of dispersed settlement, with 0.4% of farmsteads in villages and 17% in hamlets.
- High-very high density of farmsteads in the landscape, lower in the eastern lowlands.
- Predominant pattern of very small (45.1%) and small to medium-scale (22.4%) farmsteads, concentrated in the uplands, with large-scale farmsteads concentrated to north and to eastern lowlands.

### Farmstead and Building Types

- Linear farmsteads, L-plans with integral houses, dispersed plans and medium-scale loose courtyard plans concentrated in upland and industrial sub-areas.
- Larger-scale loose and regular courtyard farmsteads concentrated in the lowland areas to the east, around the Selattyn Hills and the southern part of the area around Afon Tanant.
- Two-storey multi-functional buildings are a key feature of the area, often combining barn, cattle housing, and stabling.
- A greater diversity of building types, particularly shelter sheds for cattle, in the lowland zone.

### Rarity and Significance

- Very high rates of survival, with 84% recorded from late 19th century maps retaining more than half of their historic footprint.
- This area has an exceptionally high proportion (20%, half of which are 17th century or earlier) of those farmsteads shown on late 19th century maps that are recorded as dating from before 1800. This reflects the long historical development, reflected in its landscape, of rural communities working the land from isolated farmsteads and hamlets. 15th-17th century farmhouses are testament to the increasing prosperity of the border with Wales in this period, as in the Clun Hills and other border areas to the south. There is a high potential for buildings of earlier date across this area, including timber frame within later stone and brick walling.
- There is a strong historic pattern of smallholdings in the upland and industrial zone, particularly around Trefonen. Legible survivals are exceptionally rare, 20th century development on smallholding plots being commonplace.
- The character of the area's traditional architecture is more similar to that of north-west Wales than the adjoining parts of England.

### Drivers for Change

- Above 20% of listed working buildings have obvious signs of structural disrepair; and 10-20% with visible adaptive reuse. High levels of dereliction in the upland and industrial sub-areas. High levels of conversion to residential use in the lowland sub-area to the east.
- Agricultural use of historic farmsteads has declined and given way to residential use so that the proportion of farmsteads used as dwellings (64%) is similar to the average for the West Midlands region.



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## 1 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

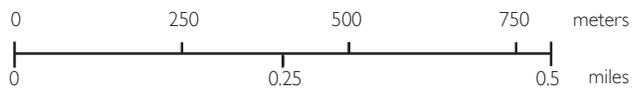
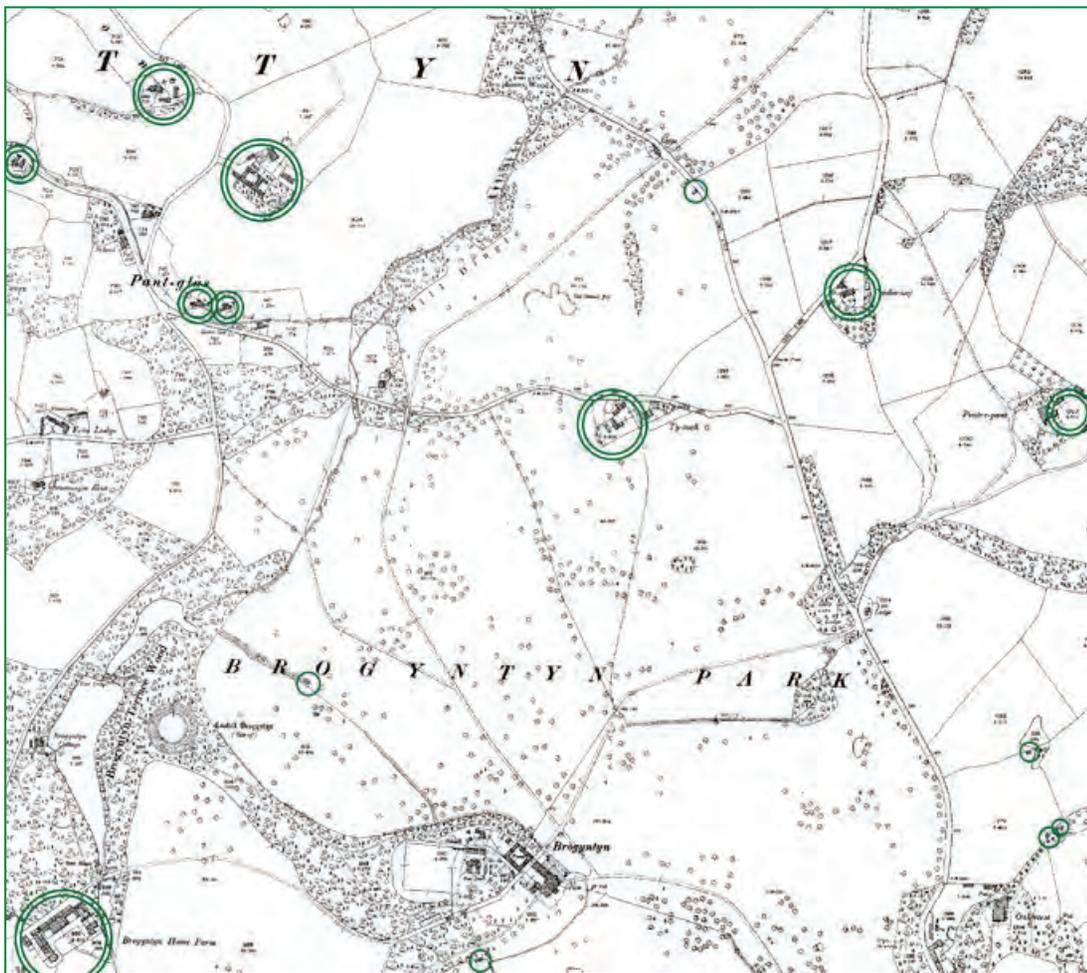
- The area has a long history as a frontier landscape, reinforced by the presence of Old Oswestry, Wat's Dyke (around Oswestry), the later Offa's Dyke, the Norman castle which formed the focus for the growth of Oswestry and motte and bailey castles.
- Deposits of lead and copper (e.g. Llanymynech) were being mined by the Iron Age/Romano-British period. Some lead mining and extensive quarrying of limestone in the southern Treflach hills, large-scale production commencing in 18th century, which was burned and then exported as quicklime and moved along the Ellesmere Canal, opened in 1796 and replaced by a railway in the 1860s. Coal mining also occurred around Trefonen and in the northern part of the area.
- Long history of cattle rearing on the hill farms, with extensive sheep grazing from the late 18th century. More arable-based mixed agriculture with cattle fattening developed on lowlands to the east and across most of the uplands in the 19th century.

## 2 LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT

- The upland and industrial sub-areas are marked by a strong pattern of dispersed settlement – established by the 14th century, often as a result of woodland clearance - with isolated farmsteads, connected by deep and winding tracks, and hamlets. As a result farmsteads, though abundant, are not prominent features of the landscape.
- Small irregular enclosure, generally of medieval date, is concentrated in the valleys where most ancient woodland also remains, with large-scale planned enclosure with conifer plantations to Selattyn Hills and other higher ground.
- Concentrations of small holdings - particularly at Trefonen, Lynclys and Llanymynech - developed in association with the mining and quarrying industries in the Treflach Hills.
- Larger farms developed away from the villages in the eastern lowland sub-area, in association with piecemeal reorganised enclosure reflecting the growth of farm holdings by the 19th century.



Medium to small scale loose courtyard groups, with houses and working buildings rebuilt in the mid 19th century, in the Selattyn Hills. The rolling topography and sunken lanes across the uplands restrict views across the landscape of farmsteads, although there are many of them. (© Natural England)



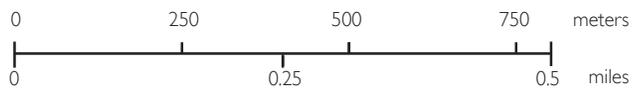
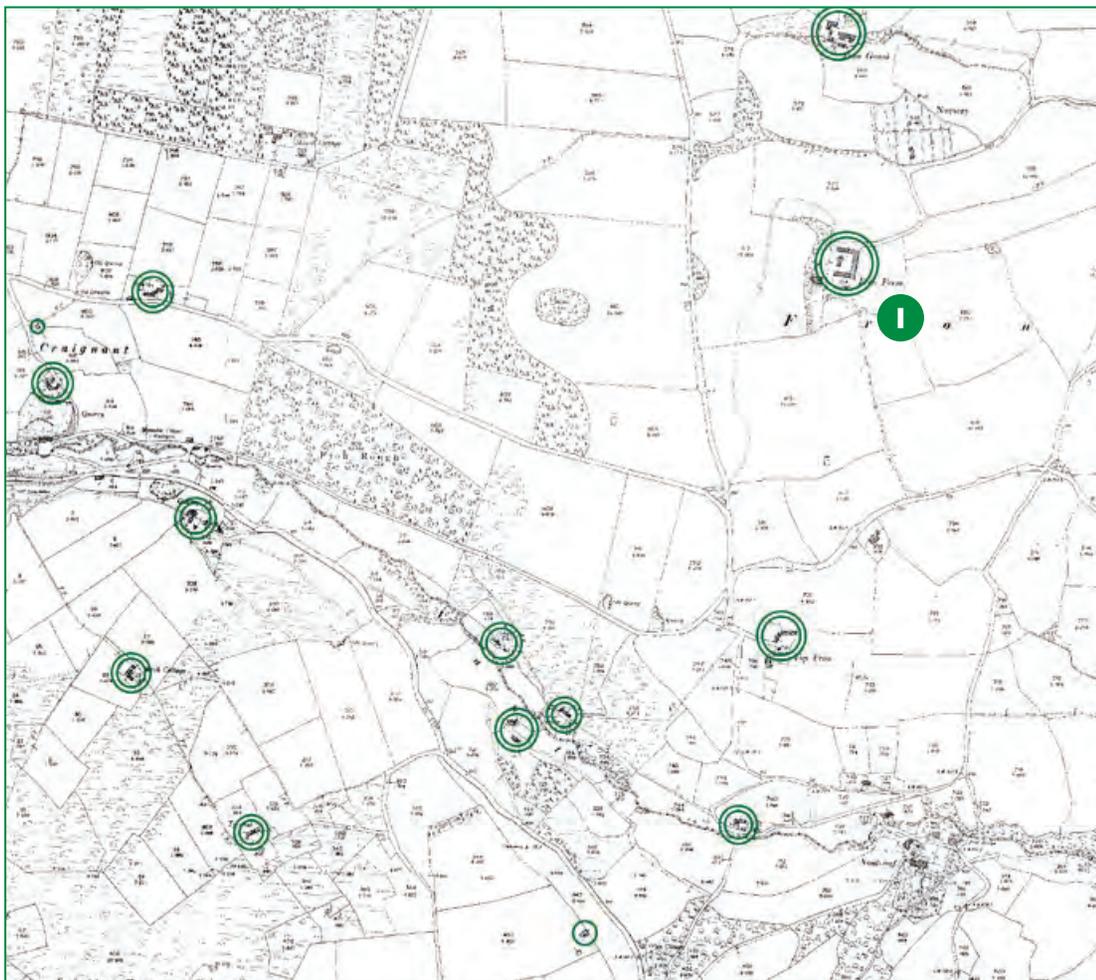
Farmstead



Outfarm

#### Brogyntyn Park

Large-scale farmsteads and estates with parklands developed in the lowlands to the east. This area of landscape is dominated by the landscaped park of Brogyntyn, its large scale planned Home Farm lying on the edge of the park to the south west. Beyond the park irregular fields created through piecemeal enclosure and possibly the clearance of woodland in the medieval period have left numerous wooded shaws and small blocks of woodland. These are associated with medium scale farmsteads, within fields that had been reorganised by the late 19th century with both the loss and the insertion/straightening of boundaries. 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



-  Farmstead
-  Outfarm

#### Craigant

This map of an area in the north of the Uplands shows contrasting landscapes. The larger-scale farmsteads (including the regular U-plan Fron Farm - see (1) marked above) to the east sit within landscapes with large-scale fields created through piecemeal enclosure and (to the west of the road) planned enclosure. To the south along the river valley are small to medium scale irregular fields created through piecemeal enclosure. To the north-west the planned enclosure of common land has produced blocks of regular fields, often small in scale, reflecting the small size of many of the farmers who had rights on the common. To the south-west however, the process of enclosure has been intermittent; the 'finger' of enclosure pushing out into the common being typical of 19th century piecemeal encroachment associated with small farms and smallholders. 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

- Some dispersed multi-yards and clusters which are predominantly found on the lower ground, in contrast to the more numerous dispersed driftway plans. The latter are almost exclusively found in upland areas, particularly on tracks linking the hill pasture valley slopes and upstanding common land. These reflect their long development as sites for holding livestock en route to rough upland pastures and also into richer lowland areas for fattening.
- Loose courtyard plan farmsteads are common and found across the area. The smallest (with a working building to one or two sides of the yard) are concentrated along the valley slopes of the upland and industrial sub-areas. They are associated with small fields with irregular boundaries, piecemeal enclosure and, to the south, squatter enclosure. Larger loose courtyard plan farmsteads, with working buildings to 3 or 4 sides of the yard, are few in number and concentrated on the lower slopes and in the lowland sub-area.
- Full regular courtyard, U-plan and regular multi-yard plans are less common and concentrated in the lowland sub-area and along the valley of the Afon Tanant, with some in areas of regular late 18th-19th century enclosure and enlarged fields in the upland and industrial sub-area.
- Linear farmsteads predominate around Llanymynech and the industrial areas to south. Lighter concentrations are seen elsewhere along with L-plans (house attached), mainly in the hill farming areas. In other areas these are associated with more ancient

field patterns of small irregular fields, sometimes enclosed from the margins of common. Most were converted into housing as they fell out of use over the 20th century, and legible survivals are now uncommon.

- Some linear farmsteads incorporate longhouses of 17th century and earlier date.
- Dense concentrations of smallholdings around Llanymynech and the industrial sub-area to south. Redevelopment on smallholding plots in the 20th century has resulted in extreme rarity of legible smallholding groups in this area.

#### Building Types

- Two-storey multi-functional buildings – incorporating barn, stabling and cattle housing with fodder storage - are common across the area and comprise the principal or only structure in the farmstead group. Stables and detached cartshed/granary ranges comprise the most common detached structures in the farmstead group.
- The increased importance of corn production and cattle fattening in the lowland sub-area is reflected in larger barns, cattle housing, stables and cartshed/granary ranges, with shelter sheds for cattle.

### 4 MATERIALS AND DETAIL

- Local limestone rubble (sometimes whitewashed and occasionally rendered) is widely used, with brick being more common in the lowland areas. This can hide earlier timber-framed cores.
- Gabled, Welsh slate roofs.



Almost all of the surviving small-scale linear farmsteads in the southern industrial part of this area are in residential use. This example stands close to a former quarry.



This linear farmstead in the uplands is strikingly similar in its overall form and character to those found on the other side of the border in Wales. It comprises a stable and cowhouse to the left of the threshing barn and a mid 19th century symmetrically-planned house.



A loose courtyard group in the uplands, set close to a densely wooded valley and within irregular fields resulting from the clearance of woodland.



Large-scale regular courtyard plans are usually encountered in the eastern lowlands and upland fringe of this area, where large estates were influential in the mid-late 19th century. This example is at Brogyntyn Home Farm (p.4).



Small-scale buildings for a variety of purposes (cattle housing to left, pigsties to right) were typical of the smallholdings of the industrial part of this area. Few survive.



This L-shaped range in the lowlands comprises cattle housing to the right. At the junction between the two ranges is brick walling to a former threshing bay – with a stable on its left and further to the left a brick-built cart shed/ granary range.



The L-shaped courtyard ranges found across much of this area could also be single-storey, as with this cattle housing and interconnecting fodder room on an estate farm in the uplands. © Shropshire County Council.



Brick was commonly used as well as, or instead of, local stone from the mid 19th century in the lowlands.



Combined granary/cartshed ranges are a feature of the whole area, demonstrating in the uplands (as here) the expansion of arable farming in newly-improved and enclosed areas.



A small-scale combined cowhouse and stable in the uplands.

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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