

National Character Area 72 **Mease/Sence Lowlands**

Summary

An area of gentle rolling topography surrounding the Rivers Mease, Sence and Anker which extends from Burton upon Trent in the north to Nuneaton in the south. The area is 6% urban and 61% arable and horticulture. Ancient woodlands account for a relatively high proportion of the existing woodland stock (26%).

Landscape and Settlement

- Strong pattern of nucleated settlement, with 19.2% of farmsteads in villages and 3.8% in hamlets.
- Low density of farmsteads in the landscape.
- Large to very large-scale farmsteads (37.9 and 26.9%) of farmsteads are predominant, the smaller scale farmsteads concentrated in the villages.

Farmstead and Building Types

- Medium to large scale regular courtyard farmsteads including regular L-plans with a range to the third size of the yard, U-plans and some multi-yard and E-plans.
- Loose courtyard plans, with working buildings to two or often more sides of the yard, are most strongly associated with pre-19th century buildings.
- Threshing barns found on older farmsteads, combination ranges on regular courtyard farmsteads built from the 18th century.
- Granary and cartshed ranges.
- Shelter sheds for cattle.

Rarity and Significance

- Medium-low rates of survival, due to the historical movement of farmsteads away from villages and the continuing development of larger isolated farms.
- 52% of historic farmsteads recorded from late 19th century maps (in Staffordshire and Warwickshire) retain more than half of their historic footprint.
- Recorded pre-1800 farmstead buildings comprise 7% of those recorded from late 19th century maps, 17th century and earlier buildings being exceptionally rare.

Drivers for Change

- A relatively small proportion of farmsteads remain in agricultural use, two-thirds being used for dwellings but relatively high participation in non agricultural farm based business (10% of farmsteads in Staffordshire and Warwickshire are company registered offices).
- 0.0-0.5% of listed working buildings have obvious signs of structural disrepair, and 20-30% with visible adaptive reuse.
- There is a low survival of pre-1750 farmstead buildings, mainly threshing barns usually clustered in settlements although there are occasional examples in isolated farmsteads.



Across this area the large-scale farmsteads which developed in the 18th and 19th centuries became the foci of large holdings in the period after 1950, when large sheds have become a vital part of the infrastructure of working farms.

I HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

- A long history of mixed farming with a bias towards livestock, which helped to drive enclosure of the landscape from the 14th century. Pastoral farming was further enabled through depopulation and the shrinkage or abandonment of villages in the 14th to 16th centuries. Enclosure helped to boost production through the rotation of arable cropping in combination with the fattening of cattle and sheep. It was linked to the amalgamation of smaller farms and appearance of large farmsteads in villages and also some in the open landscape.
- Smaller manor houses and gentry houses, as well as a substantial number of country houses and landscaped parks which developed in the 16th and 17th centuries, testify to the farming wealth of this area and its estates.

2 LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT

- The predominant settlement pattern is nucleated with generally small-scale hilltop villages, except those in the most accessible locations which expanded rapidly in the 19th and 20th centuries, and now include quite large commuter populations. Many historic houses within the villages originated as farmhouses, changing their function as new steadings were built in the newly-enclosed fields.

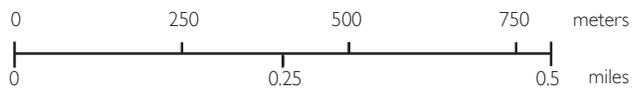
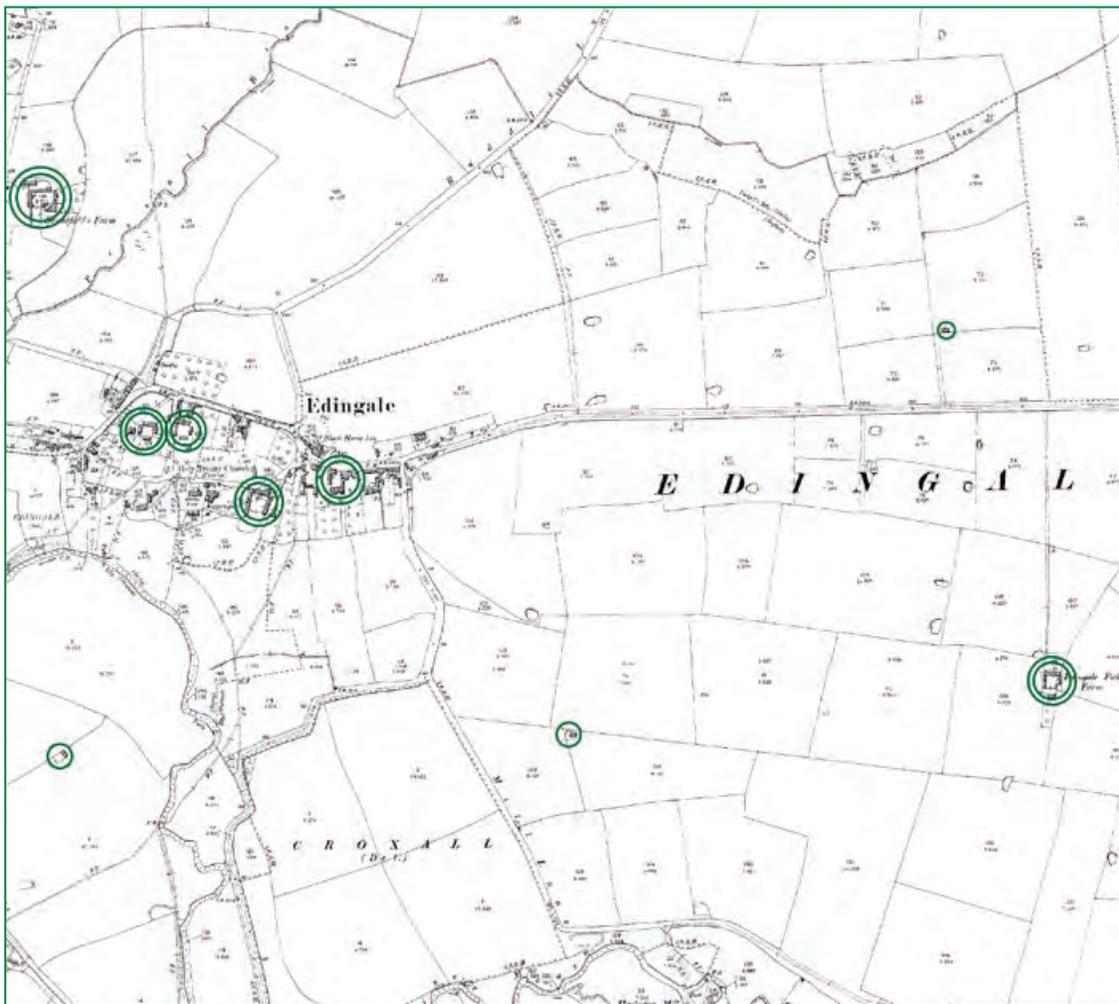
- Low densities of dispersed settlement (isolated farmsteads and some hamlets) mostly dating from the 17th century onwards associated with the enclosure of the open fields.
- The area was substantially cleared of woodland by the 11th century, and in the medieval period farming communities based in villages worked open fields which extended over most of the landscape.
- Early piecemeal enclosure - small scale irregular and well-hedged pastures - survives best around villages and along the narrow river margins. These often retain curving boundaries of piecemeal enclosure and fossilised ridge and furrow earthworks under permanent pasture.
- The greater part of the area is dominated by the patterns of general enclosures (by private agreement as much as by parliamentary acts the late 18th and early 19th centuries) of the remaining open fields and in particular heaths and commons resulting in medium and large scale rectilinear field patterns, straight enclosure roads, well-spaced farmsteads.
- The majority of the historical woodland is broadleaf plantation, created in blocks in the enclosure landscapes of the early 19th century, often serving to shelter the farmsteads of the period, or to provide coverts and shooting cover for the estates.



Village-based farmsteads have remained as a characteristic feature of this area.



A regular courtyard plan with early-mid 19th century buildings prominently set within a landscape of regular large-scale enclosure, with straight thorn hedgerows.



Edingale

This area is characterised by nucleated villages surrounded by their former open fields, here seemingly largely enclosed by agreement with evidence of the former strips visible to the south of the village and in some of the wavy field boundaries beyond. However, the straight boundaries suggest that the earlier piecemeal enclosure has been subject to reorganisation with the straightening and removal of boundaries in places. Whilst many of the farmsteads remained in the village some moved out into new enclosures. Edingale Field Farm to the east probably bears the name of the former open field, and has the house clearly detached from its regular U-shaped range of working buildings. The medium scale farmsteads that remained in the village are typically of loose courtyard form with 2/3 sides or L-plan form with buildings to the third side. 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

- Pre-1750 farmstead buildings rarely survive, and almost all comprise threshing barns within villages.
- Most of the surviving historic farmsteads are those rebuilt as regular courtyard layouts (predominantly L- and U-plan, with some full courtyard and multi-yard plans) in the early to mid-19th century with combination barns and often large cartshed/granary ranges.
- Loose courtyard plans, with working buildings to two or often more sides of the yard, are most strongly associated with pre-19th century farmsteads.

Building Types

- Some 18th century and earlier threshing barns, usually in village locations but occasionally associated with the early phases of enclosure.
- Multi-functional 19th century ranges incorporating the barn, stabling, granary and cattle housing.
- Cowhouses, sometime with a hayloft above, and shelter sheds.

4 MATERIALS AND DETAIL

- Some timber-framed structures survive, mainly threshing barns.
- Brick, plain clay tile and pantile are the dominant building materials.



This L-plan farmstead with attached house may have developed from a linear plan built within an area of planned enclosure.



A loose courtyard plan with early-mid 19th century buildings set within a large-scale regular enclosure landscape. The buildings are formally arranged and the large threshing barn and open-fronted cartshed range testify to the importance of arable farming in this area.



Regular L-plan ranges with buildings to the third side of the yard located within and to the outer edge of villages.





Some timber-framed barns and other buildings survive, usually within villages. Brick (right) largely replaced timber-framing from the 18th century. Both the barns are 5 bays in length with a central threshing floor; which was the standard plan for barns from the 16th to the mid 19th centuries.



The mid-late 19th century saw the construction of many cowhouses for dairy cattle. Earlier timber-framed barns (as on the left) were often converted in cattle housing once they became redundant.



A late 18th or early 19th century field barn down its own straight track in a landscape of regular large-scale enclosure. The architectural treatment of this barn, with its coped gables at each end, is more typical of East than West Midlands traditional architecture.

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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