



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 61

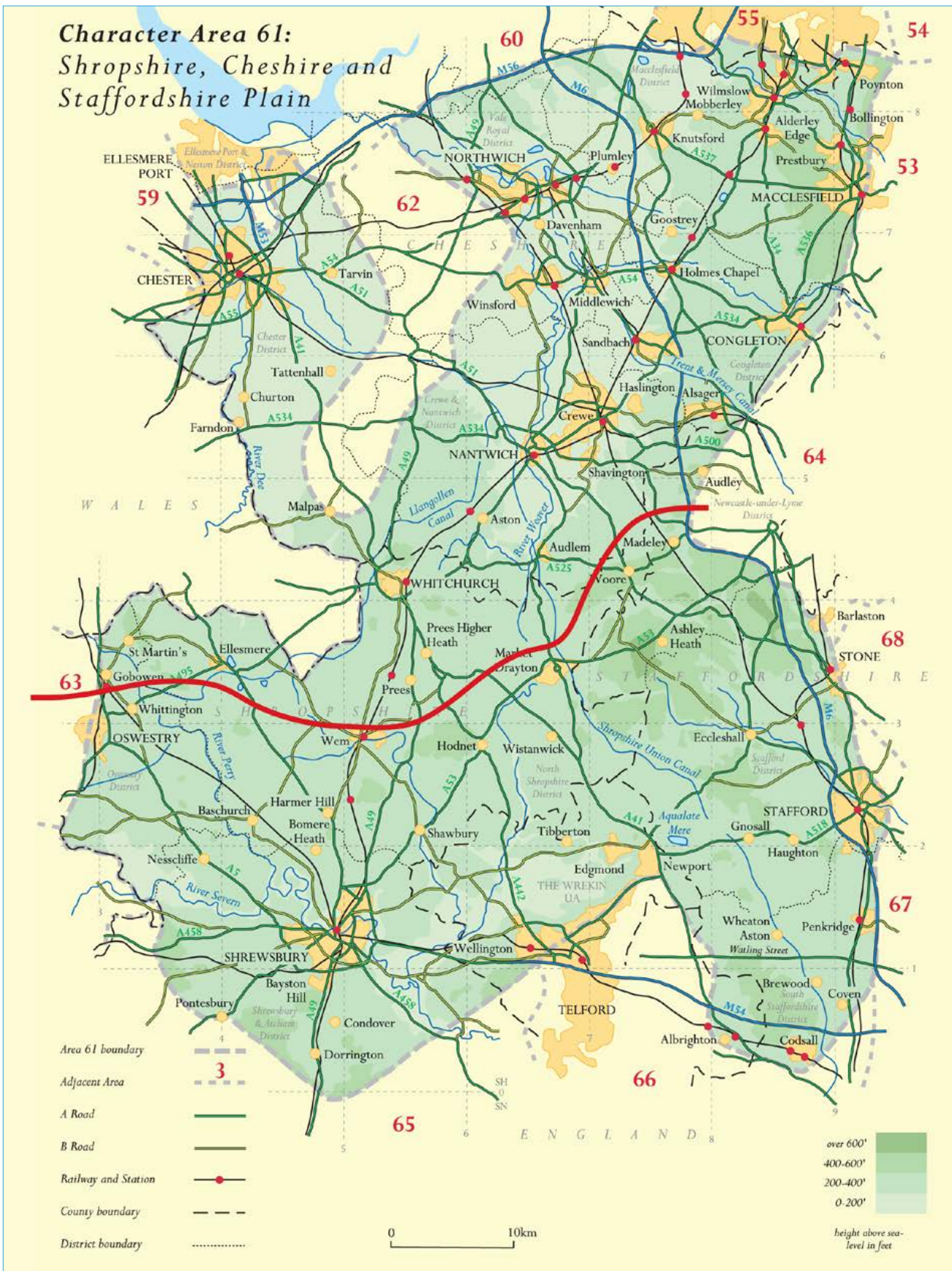


Introduction

The Farmstead and Landscape Statements will help you to identify the historic character of traditional farmsteads and their buildings in all parts of England, and how they relate to their surrounding landscapes. They are now available for all of England's National Character Areas (NCAs), and should be read in conjunction with the NCA profiles which have been produced by Natural England using a wide range of environmental information (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>). Each Farmstead and Landscape Statement is supported by Historic England's advice on farm buildings (<https://historicengland.org.uk/farmbuildings>), which provides links to the *National Farmsteads Character Statement*, national guidance on **Farm Building Types** and a fully-sourced summary in the *Historic Farmsteads: Preliminary Character Statements*. It also forms part of additional research on historic landscapes, including the mapping of farmsteads in some parts of England (see <https://historicengland.org.uk/characterisation>).

Front cover: The landscape around Wheaton Aston to the south-east of the area is dominated by well-preserved small-scale fields of piecemeal enclosure created between the 14th and 18th centuries, relating to the establishment of farmsteads away from the village – a contrast to the medieval pattern of dispersed settlement to the north of the Character Area. Ridge and furrow earthworks survive across this area indicating that medieval open fields, belonging to the village of Wheaton Aston, once dominated this landscape. The farmsteads developed into regular L-shaped courtyards that are typical of much of this Character Area. Photo © Historic England 27999/016

Character Area 61: Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain



This map shows the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it. The area is historically broadly divided into two parts: a dairying area to the north of a line from Ellesmere-Wem-Market Drayton, and larger farmsteads based on corn production and fatstock to the south. Throughout the area there remained large areas of unimproved mossland until enclosure in the late 18th and 19th centuries. These were particularly extensive to the north of Telford (Weald Moor) and east of Oswestry, and to the south there were also substantial areas of heathland.

Summary

See the National Farmsteads Character Statement for a short introduction to the headings below, including maps and tables.

This is an extensive, gently rolling pastoral plain interrupted by sandstone ridges. It extends from the broad Mersey Valley in the north to the Shropshire Hills in the south. To the west it is bounded by the hills of the Welsh borders, and to the north-east are the Pennine foothills. To the east and south-east are the developed areas of the Potteries, Needwood and Cannock Chase. The area includes the county towns of Shrewsbury, Chester and Stafford. Of the total area, 7% is urban, 4% is woodland. There are two sub-areas:

- a northern sub-area where dairying predominated
- a southern sub-area where arable-based farming developed.

Historic character

- Farmsteads relate to fields bounded by hedgerows. Courtyard farmsteads with working buildings of mostly 19th- and early 20th-century date are found across the area, and relate to the reorganisation of fields with straight boundaries, often retaining earlier patterns of piecemeal and irregular enclosure. The largest farmsteads with threshing barns and built around yards for fattening cattle are concentrated to the south, where arable farming predominated. T- and L-shaped regular courtyard farmsteads with housing for dairy cattle are a characteristic feature of the northern part of the area.
- Linear and L-plans where the farmhouse is attached to the working buildings are found concentrated in the northern sub-area, within 19th century and earlier fields close to heaths and mosses..

Significance

- Farmsteads Mapping (as part of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project) has shown medium to high rates of survival, with 71% of farmsteads recorded from late 19th-century maps in Shropshire and Staffordshire retaining more than half of their historic form.
- There is evidence across the area for the rebuilding of farmhouses in the late 16th and 17th centuries. Early timber-framed buildings are concentrated in the southern sub-area, including threshing barns and multi-functional ranges which were clad in brick and incorporated within regular courtyard plan farmsteads.
- There are some very rare surviving examples in a national context of timber-framed cow houses in the northern sub-area.
- There are some notable examples of planned farmstead groups across the area. Architect-designed groups date from the late 18th century, and include the fine Domestic Revival style groups of the late 19th century on Cheshire estates (including the Tollemache and Duke of Westminster).

Present and future issues

- The Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a medium proportion in this National Character Area of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (34.8%, the national average being 32%).
- The Photo Image Project also recorded an above-average percentage (9.4%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.
- Three out of five farmsteads in Shropshire and Staffordshire are now in residential use – a proportion similar to that typical of the West Midlands Region as a whole – while the proportion remaining in agriculture (36%) is slightly above the regional average.

Historic development

- Dairying became the dominant industry across much of the northern area from the 16th century, resulting in the extension of permanent pasture and substantial increases in cattle, especially in the period 1840-1900. Mixed farming was important to the east and in parts of Shropshire and Staffordshire.
- The area experienced growth of market centres from 12th century. From the 15th century, some centres to the east, such as Macclesfield, and Congleton, developed further as trading centres for the textile industry, taking the finished product from rural weavers, and, from c 1750, the silk industry. Market towns (e.g. Nantwich) also prospered from the leather industry. Crewe developed as a rail hub from the 1840s.
- Large estates developed from the 16th century, and increased in tandem with the growth of surrounding industrial centres from the 18th century. Increased interest of large landowners in improving agriculture from the late 18th century often resulted in the consolidation of holdings, re-organisation of fields and the provision of new farm buildings.
- There is a fundamental distinction between the northern and southern parts of the Character Area, with the border between the two parts running on a line between Oswestry in the west and Stone in the east.

Northern sub-area

- In the northern half of the Character Area the generally wet but mild climate favoured pastoral farming. Dairying became the major element of farming in the area from the 15th to 16th centuries onwards, and oats (the main crop) were grown as cattle and horse feed as well as for bread, serving industrial markets in Lancashire, east Cheshire and the Potteries.
- Cheese production particularly increased in importance in the 17th century, and the emergence of larger dairy farms was marked by farm amalgamation and boundary loss and the development of timber-framed farmhouses and cattle ranges before rebuilding in brick from the 18th century.
- The increasing supply of liquid milk to urban areas (especially in the Potteries and Lancashire) from the 1850s, sustained by purchased feeds, followed the development of the railway system.

Southern sub-area

- Mixed, arable-based agriculture, combined with stock fattening and some dairying, was generally concentrated in this area. The growing of corn and the fattening of yard-based cattle was concentrated within the Severn and Tern valleys with access to the grain markets (in particular barley for malting) of Shrewsbury.
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- Drainage of wetlands (such as Weald Moor) enabled the development of the fattening industry from the 16th century in parts of Shropshire. There were also areas of heathland in east Shropshire and west Staffordshire, which were subject to both enclosure and improvement by estates and the growth of small farms and smallholdings.
- During the 19th century, stock farming, combined with four-course rotations using turnips, increased in importance and prompted the drainage of wetlands such as Weald Moor in Shropshire.
- Canals – and then later, rail – enabled the development of cheese production in the later 18th and 19th centuries, replaced by liquid milk by the early 20th century.

Landscape and settlement

Across the area, a combination of industrial development and planning policies have led to the development of nucleated settlements over the later 19th and 20th centuries, often in combination with the enlargement of farms and the removal of boundaries. These overlie earlier and robust patterns of enclosure and settlement, dating from the medieval period, which are:

- High to very high levels of dispersed settlement. Those isolated farmsteads and hamlets with ‘green’ names in common-edge locations are indicative of continuing woodland clearance and subsidiary settlement.
- Mostly small villages, with larger hamlets and villages concentrated in west Cheshire.
- A high number of moated sites dating mostly from the 12th to 14th centuries.
- Parklands and estate landscapes developed from the 16th century with regular fields and planned farms, the latter resulting from the activities of improving landlords such as the Grovesnors (Dukes of Westminster) in Cheshire, the Marquis of Stafford and in Shropshire the Leveson-Gowers (Dukes of Sutherland) and the Ansons (Lords Lichfield). Across much of this area estates were also interspersed with individual holdings.
- Patches of former common land, including heathland on sandier soil and mosses. These were used for pasture and taking fuel. They were subject to piecemeal enclosure by small-scale farmers and – especially in the

late 18th and 19th centuries – regular planned enclosure by estates.

- Areas of broadleaved and mixed woodlands on steep slopes of sandstone ridges or along the side of watercourses. Woodland is mostly coniferous where soil is sandy.

Northern sub-area

- There are some areas of small-scale irregular fields dating from woodland clearance before the 14th century, but the patterns of enclosure reflect the enlargement of fields between the 17th and 20th centuries, as dairy farms in many areas (especially in south Cheshire) grew in size. These are surrounded in some areas by irregular fields created through medieval assarting.
- Extensive areas of ridge and furrow, either farmed in closes or in open fields, survive enclosed by hedgerows that do not cut across them. Open fields survived late in some locations (e.g. at end of 18th century around Market Drayton).

Southern sub-area

- In the southern half of the plain, extensive open fields were subject to post-14th century enclosure, leaving a predominant pattern of piecemeal enclosure intermixed with later boundary removal.
- On the extensive tracts of light sandy soils in north-eastern Shropshire and to the west

and south of Stafford there are larger areas of planned enclosure of former heathland.

- The extensive valley mire systems to the north of Telford (e.g. the Weald Moors) and east

of Oswestry (e.g. Baggy/Tetchill Moor) were subject to successive phases of improvement from the late 16th century onwards, culminating in their drainage and enclosure in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Farmstead and building types

There are few pre-18th century working buildings in a national context within the Character Area. Early buildings include a scattering of barns and rare surviving cattle houses (usually on high-status sites) with higher concentrations in the arable farming southern sub-area. Many brick and stone buildings comprise the re-cladding of earlier large-scale timber-framed barns and farm buildings, testifying to the development of large farms in this area by the 18th century.

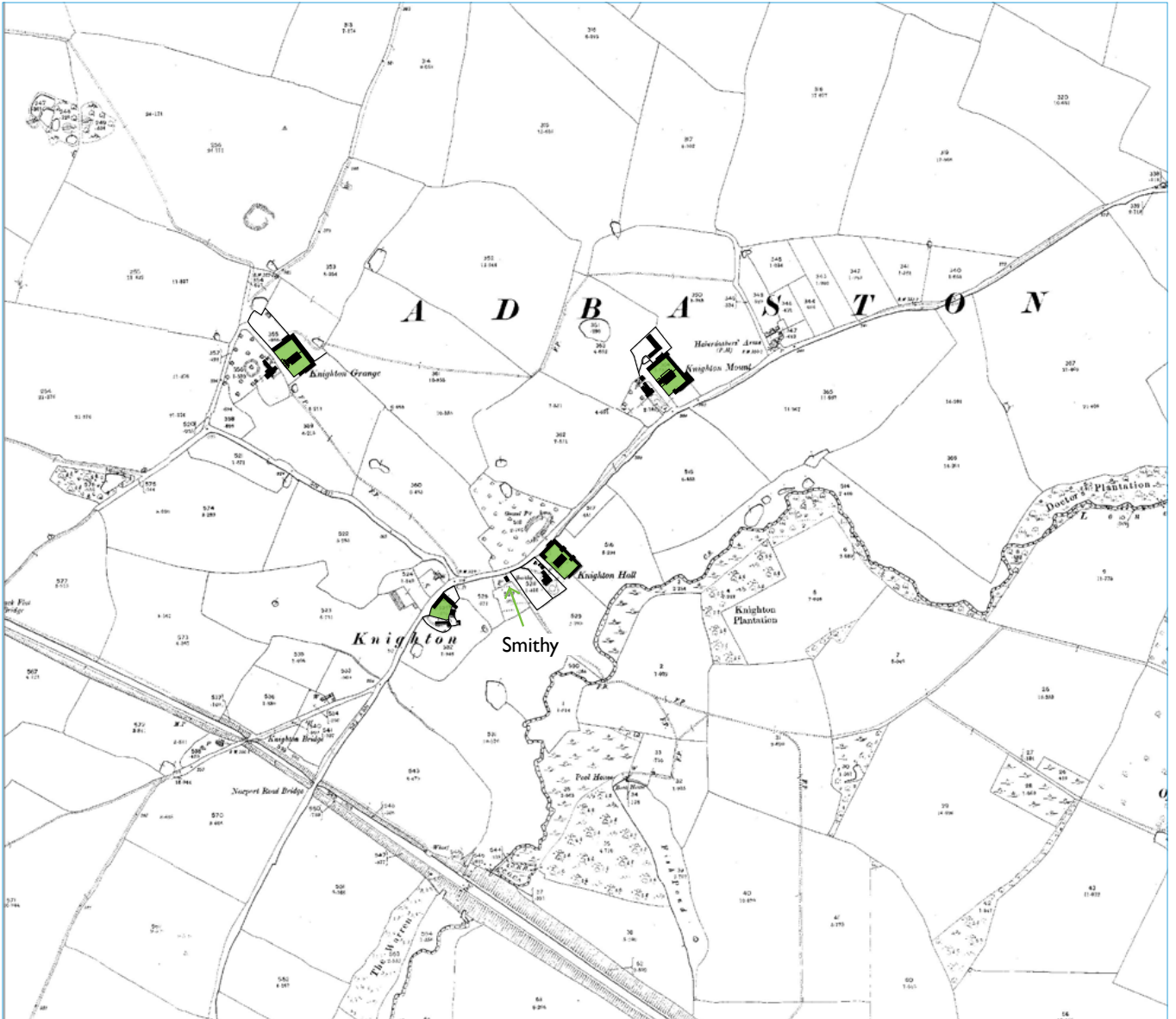
Farmstead types

- The whole area is dominated by planned farmsteads of 18th- and mostly 19th- and early 20th-century date, which are associated with the reorganisation and enlargement of holdings and the removal or reorganisation of earlier boundaries of 18th- and 19th-century date.
- Large-scale regular courtyard farmsteads with yards for fattening cattle (multi-yards, E- and F-plans) are concentrated in the southern area and display the ability of large farms to grow and process corn in combination with the yard-feeding of cattle.
- Larger, loose courtyard plans, with buildings to three or four sides of a yard, are concentrated in the southern sub-area but are evident across the area especially on farmsteads with a broad range of 19th century and earlier buildings. They can have a more formal layout.
- Linear and L-plans, where the farmhouse is an integral part of the working buildings, are found across the Character Area but are concentrated in the north (adjoining the Oswestry Hills, Wales and northern England, where they are more common). They are often associated with incremental encroachment onto common land. Small farms and smallholdings in these areas are part of either the small-scale, regular enclosure of heathland in the 19th century or the more ancient patterns of settlement within irregular fields on the edge of moors.
- The smallest loose courtyard plans, with one detached building set around a yard, are concentrated in east Shropshire and west Staffordshire heathlands and on the small farms in northern dairying areas. They are often found in combination with the linear and L-plans above, and many with a single, multi-functional building (for a horse, cattle and fodder) reflect the adaptation of small farms and rural households that were well-placed (for example around Crewe) to supply the liquid milk market to the conurbations.
- Regular Courtyard L- and T-shaped plans with 'drifthouses' (throughways and areas for unloading hay) separating two-storey cow houses are found on dairy farms in the north of the area (in north Shropshire, north Staffordshire and south Cheshire), mostly dating from the mid- to late 19th century and including distinctive estate styles (e.g. the Crewe Hall, Duke of Westminster and Tollemache estates in south Cheshire).
- Elsewhere, L-shaped plans, including those with an additional detached building to the third side of the yard, are generally sited away from the parts of the southern area where larger, regular plan multi-yard farmsteads developed.
- Regular, U-shaped plans are concentrated in the southern area but are found across the Plain. Some have developed from L-shaped dairying ranges.

- Covered yards of the mid- to late 19th century are strongly associated with areas of larger farms.

Building types

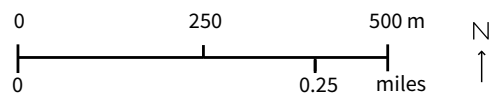
- Timber-framed farmhouses of 17th-century and earlier date, and large three-storey Georgian farmhouses of mid-18th- to early 19th-century date are found across much of the area.
- There are some large cruck and box-framed barns to home farms of gentry estates, including some with evidence of vertical subdivisions for multiple functions including livestock.
- In the northern half of the area, two-storey, multi-functional ranges are characteristic, providing cow houses, stables and crop storage and processing areas. These date from the late 18th century (most are mid- to late 19th century) and can be marked by large cart entries with smaller flanking doors (sometimes to gable end) for cattle, and pitching holes set in the gable or sides to allow hay to be thrown into the upper floor for storage.
- Brick combination barns with lofted cow houses at either end of a threshing or storage area, are mostly of late 18th century and early 19th century.
- In the southern half of the Character Area – and especially in north Shropshire in landscapes that have retained coherent survival of 18th century or earlier assarted and piecemeal enclosure – there are some rare surviving single and two-storey ranges for cattle, of 18th-century or earlier date, either brick or timber-framed. Timber buildings were often built from the outset with brick infill, and given an external coat of whitewashed render.
- Traditional threshing barns with large opposed doorways are uncommon and are concentrated in the Shrewsbury area; threshing was largely mechanised by the mid-19th century, and wheel houses are an occasional feature in Shropshire and Staffordshire.
- Shelter sheds onto yards for fattening cattle are characteristic of the southern half of the plain.
- There are single-storey cow house ranges; two-storey cow houses include rare surviving timber-framed examples concentrated in areas which have retained smaller-scale irregular fields (e.g. around Wem and Prees in Shropshire).
- Pigsties were a feature of most farms, especially in the northern area, as waste milk from dairying was a major element in the diet of pigs until the mid-20th century.
- Hen houses often combined with pigsties.
- Hay barns were built on many farms.



Maps are based on 2nd edition 25" Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England. © Crown Copyright [and database rights] 2020. OS 100024900

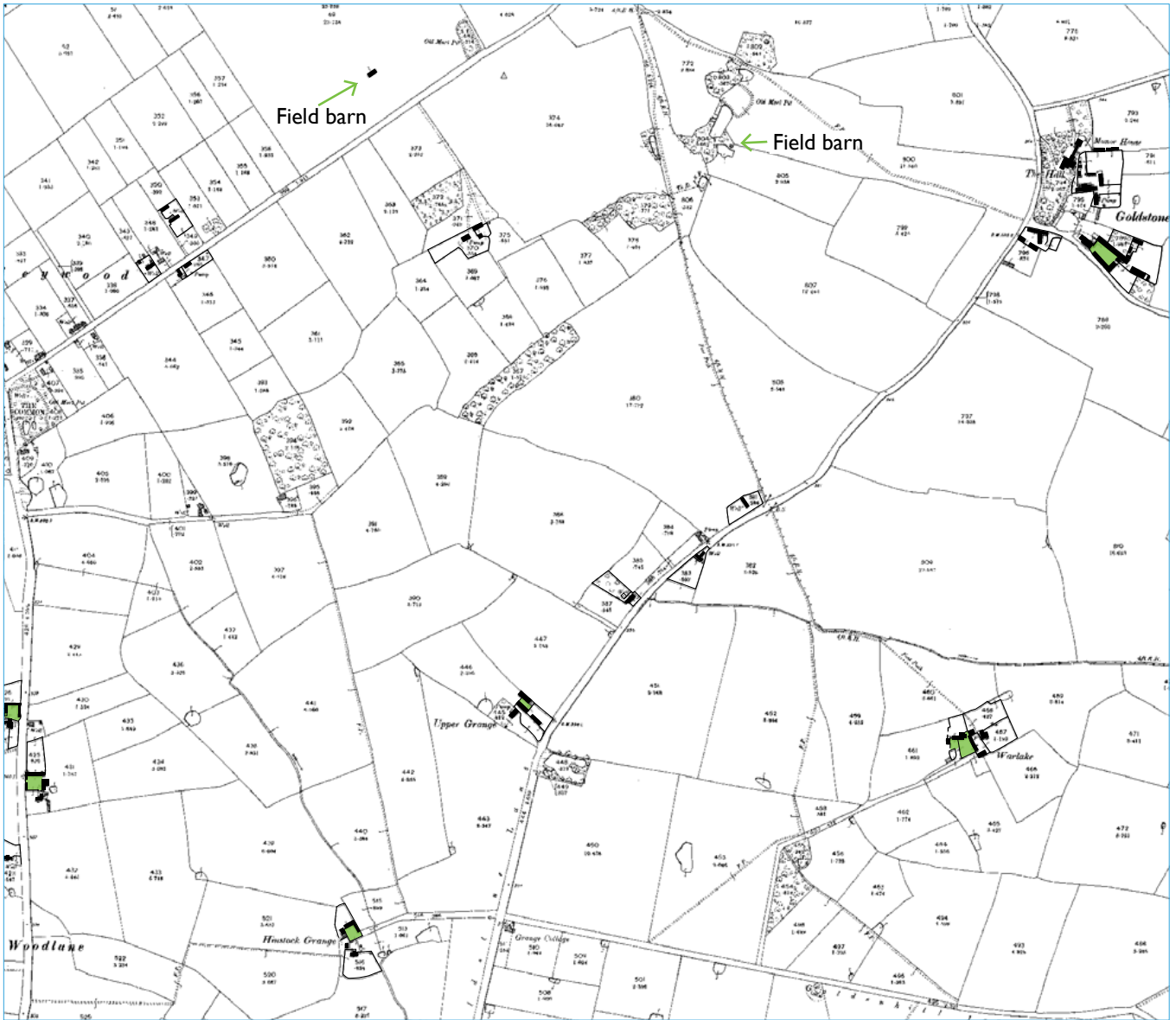


Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.




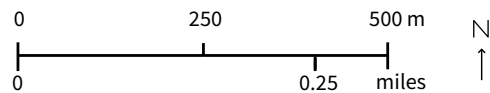
Knighton, Staffordshire

This is a landscape of medium-scale, piecemeal enclosure with some remnants of ridge and furrow which has been subject to relatively little re-organisation or boundary loss. This is despite being part of a large estate which invested in three regular E-plan farmsteads in the 19th century. The presence of the Shropshire Union Canal may have had an influence on the development of these farmsteads; a wharf would have allowed produce to be quickly transported directly to the expanding urban markets of the Black Country. One older farm survives at Knighton; the farmhouse is a pre-17th-century, timber-framed house.



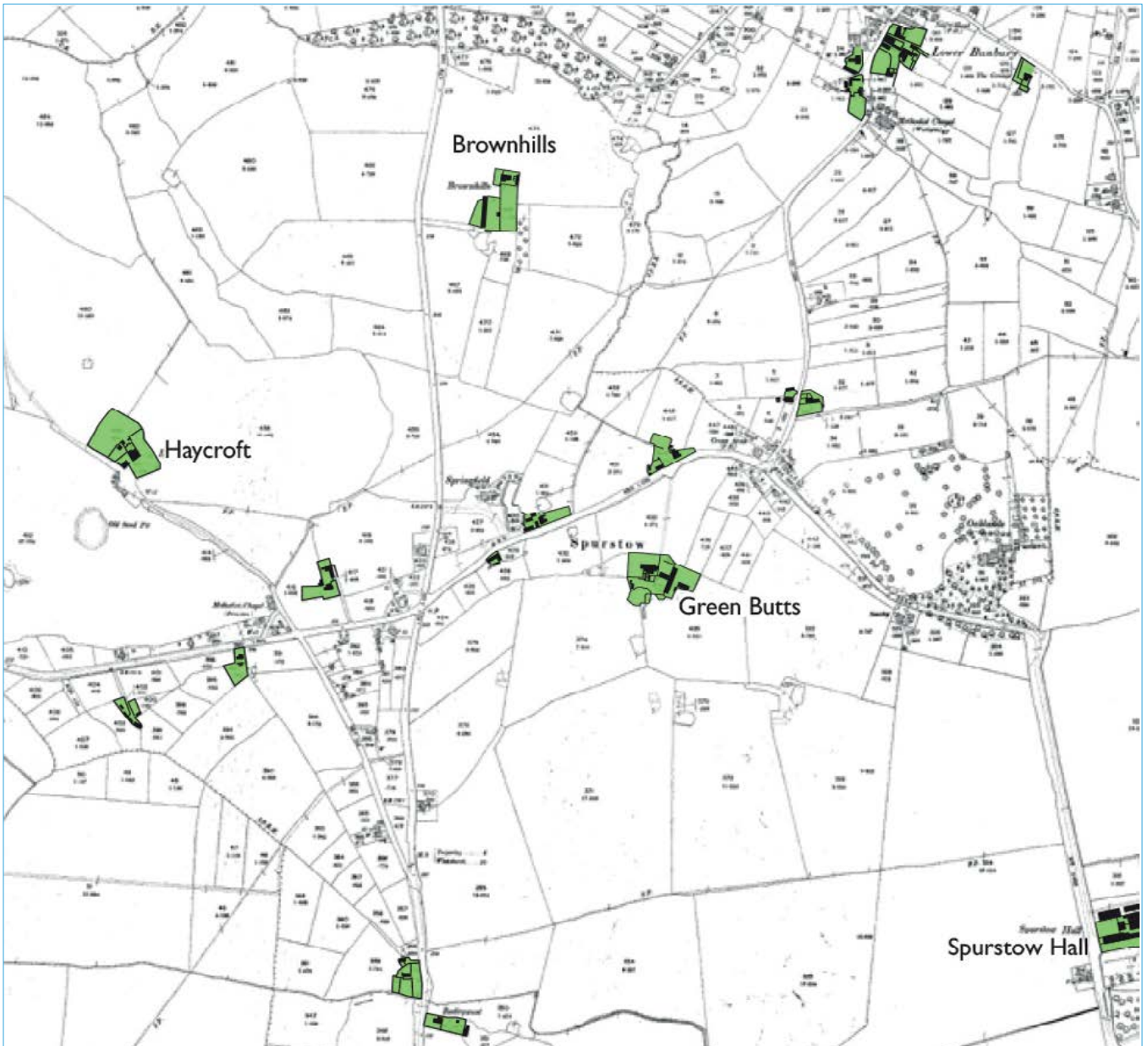
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 Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



Near Hinstock, Shropshire

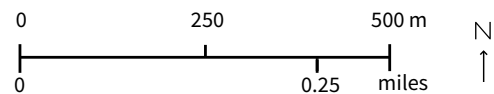
This landscape shows three distinct phases of enclosure. Large, piecemeal enclosure fields to the north-east surround the hamlet of Goldstone with its two large farmsteads. Smaller, irregular fields stretch away to the south-west; whilst there are many straight boundaries, the survival of occasional irregular boundaries hints at an earlier field pattern of piecemeal enclosure (by the 17th century) that has been re-organised in the 18th or 19th centuries. Surviving farmsteads here have buildings of 17th- and 18th-century date with medium-sized, loose courtyard farmsteads. To the north-west is an area of enclosure of common land creating small, regular fields, accessed by straight roads and tracks. These small fields are associated with small loose courtyard farmsteads with a building to one side of the yard and smallholdings.



Maps are based on 2nd edition 25" Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England. © Crown Copyright [and database rights] 2020. OS 100024900



Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



Spurstow, Cheshire

This northern part of the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain was predominantly a pastoral area, since at least the late 16th century, focused on the production of butter and cheese. All the farmsteads in this area were affected by a comprehensive programme of rebuilding in the mid- to late 19th century, in particular for the housing of cattle and hay. Within this area were the large farms of estates such as Spurstow Hall inter-mixed with medium and small-scale farmsteads set with a landscape of medium-scale irregular fields. These had been created through a long process of piecemeal enclosure, the slightly curving boundaries of the small and narrow fields to the north reflecting their enclosure from open field strips. As farms grew in size and took over smaller holdings, a process evident here by the 17th century, fields became larger. To the south-west, very small fields alongside the roads may, in part, represent enclosure of roadside waste associated with small farms and possibly some smallholdings. The three medium-scale farmsteads illustrate typical plan types seen in this Character Area; Green Butts has a regular T-plan range, Haycroft has a regular L-plan with the yard partly covered and Brownhills has a long range forming a large example of a loose courtyard plan with a building to one side of the yard. These ranges provided two-storey cattle housing with haylofts, dating from the mid-19th century with the rare exception of the 18th-century, timber-framed buildings absorbed into the later remodelling at Green Butts.



Seighford, Staffordshire. Two farmsteads in the context of the late 16th-century Seighford Hall, the farmstead on the right having a 17th-century threshing barn which is a rare survival in this area. Photo © Historic England 27961/034



A regular courtyard 'U' plan constructed of brick and typical of the larger farmsteads to be found in the mixed farming areas to the south of the area (this one is in Staffordshire). The working buildings had originally stood adjacent to the late 18th-century, three-storey farmhouse, but were rebuilt on a new site on the opposite side of the road in the mid-19th century. The new arrangement appears to be a reflection of the social aspirations of the occupier, with the farmhouse sited with its back to its working buildings. Photo © Historic England 27701/003



A regular U-plan range with a combination barn and extensive stabling and outward facing cart shed bays, which reflects the importance of arable farming in the southern sub-area. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large-scale, regular courtyard farmstead, built in the early to mid-19th century, in the heathlands of the southern sub-area. Photo © Shropshire County Council



A large, regular courtyard farmstead enclosing two yards, one of which was later covered, east of Shrewsbury. Photo © Bob Edwards



A smallholding near Nantwich with a 17th-century house and small, late 19th-century, brick buildings. Many smallholdings have been removed from agriculture and their working buildings demolished. Photo © Bob Edwards



A regular L-plan farmstead in the dairying north of the area with two-storey ranges for cattle with haylofts above. Photo © Bob Edwards



A timber-framed threshing barn near Shrewsbury. This is five bays in length, but many barns in this area and around the Severn are larger. It displays the square panel-framing, typical of the western English carpentry tradition. This barn was extended with brick stable and granary ranges in the 19th century. Photo © Bob Edwards



Across the area, particularly in Shropshire, timber-framed barns were often encased in brick – here the gable end was left exposed but often the framing is completely hidden externally. Photo © Bob Edwards

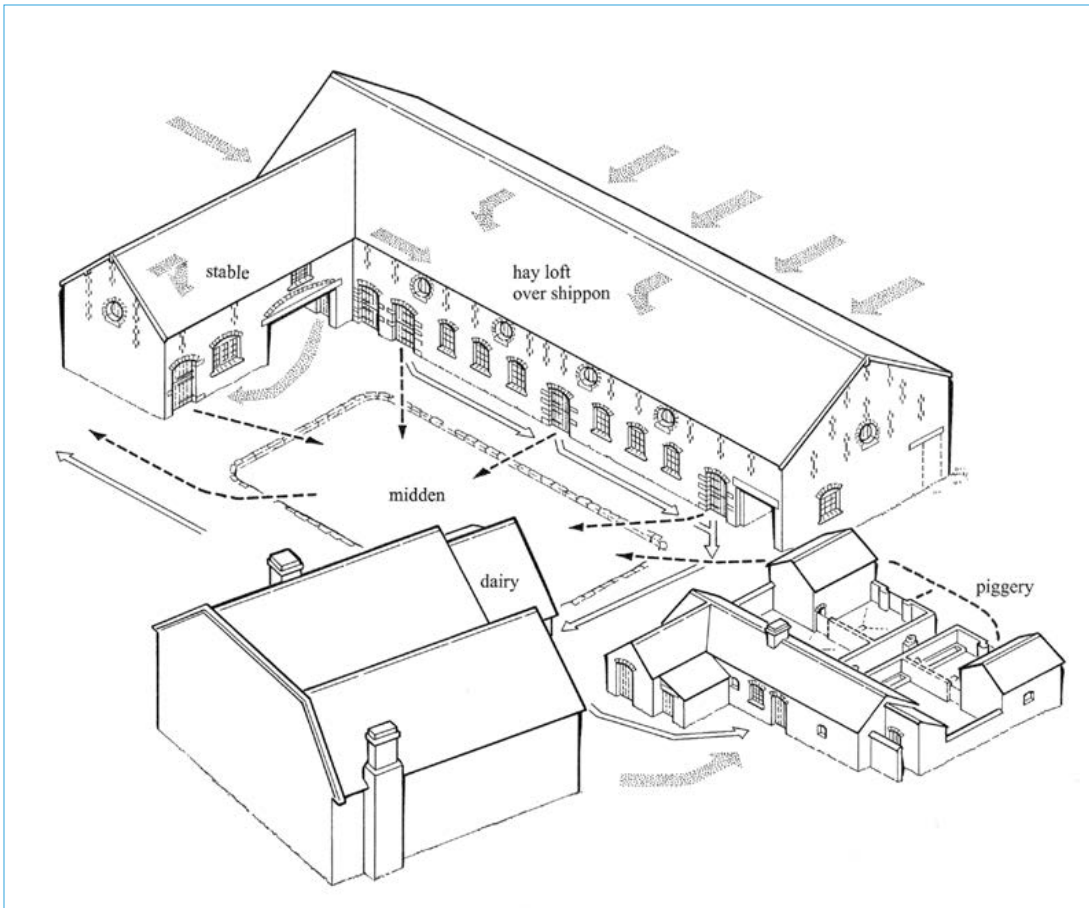


By the late 19th century, large estates in Cheshire such as the Westminster and Tollemache estates were able, after more than a hundred years of amalgamating and improving farms, to build dairying farmsteads in both a picturesque style and on an industrial scale. Photo © Bob Edwards



Rebuilding with L-shaped multifunctional ranges was so extensive that few earlier buildings for the housing of cattle have survived. These are very rare, and form part of a distribution of timber-framed cow houses along the Welsh borders. The only other areas in England with early timber-framed cattle housing are in the former dairying areas in the claylands of East Anglia and the stock rearing and fattening areas of the Weald in south-east England. Some examples also survive in the Lancashire Plain.

The straight bracing and proportions to the timber framing of this building indicate an 18th-century date. Careful investigation will reveal the disposition of doorways and loft openings, and the existence of loft floors and even stalling. This example is in north Shropshire, where early survivals are concentrated away from the influence of larger, improving estates. Brick infill was a feature of many of these buildings, and they may also have been covered in a thin coat of plaster with limewash. Photo © Bob Edwards



Whole farmsteads, as built or rebuilt from the mid-19th century, were characterised by detached buildings and were L-shaped. These display a wide range in scale, but the fundamental principles that underpinned their planning remained the same – the hay that fed the cattle over the winter was stored in lofts or sometimes large hay barns, the manure was taken into a central midden and the pigsties were sited close to the house: pigs were fed on whey, a by-product of making cheese and butter. Drawing © Historic England



A small, timber-framed farm building, probably a cow house, on a small loose courtyard standing in north Shropshire. Photo © Shropshire County Council



From the late 18th century, barns in the area – especially to the south – were usually incorporated into large brick-built, multifunctional ranges where, with mechanisation, the barn could be reduced to an upper floor room with no large threshing doors. Photo © Shropshire County Council



In western Staffordshire, the landscape is dominated by large farmsteads in very low densities. This farmstead is associated with planned enclosure probably created in the late 18th century; the wider landscape also reveals evidence for planning in the straight roads and the plantation woodland known as 'Folly Wood'. This is an estate landscape created under the hand of the Chetwode baronets of nearby Oakley Park. Photo © Historic England 27962/012



Two-storey cattle houses with haylofts with circular pitching holes and hayloft doors above area characteristic of the area, particularly within the northern sub-area where dairying was dominant. Some early examples survive but most are of 19th-century date. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Pigsties were a common feature, especially on dairy farms. Here the pigsties are combined with a hen house above creating a 'poultiggery'. Photo © Bob Edwards



Small farmsteads and smallholdings on the heathland areas had small-scale buildings, usually for cattle. Photo © Bob Edwards

Materials and detail

- Red brick and plain clay tiles or Welsh slate are the dominant building materials for farmhouses and farm buildings.
- Red sandstone rubble walling is often used in boundary walls. Dressed sandstone is used for window and door openings on some buildings and occasionally for whole buildings, particularly in the west of the area.
- Timber-frame is regularly seen in farmhouses with later farm buildings in Cheshire and Shropshire; this is less common in Staffordshire.
- Small numbers of timber-frame farm buildings survive, again largely in the southern part of the area.
- There is occasional, rare survival of straw thatch on farmhouses but this is not seen on farm buildings.



Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by
Jeremy Lake with Bob Edwards.

Please refer to this document as:
Historic England 2020 Farmstead and
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The **West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project**, led by English Heritage (now Historic England), has mapped the historic character, survival and use of farmsteads across the whole region which includes part of this NCA. For the Summary Report of 2009 see <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/west-midlands-farmsteads-landscapes/>. For more detailed guidance on farmsteads in Staffordshire see the Staffordshire Farmsteads Guidance at <https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/environment/eLand/planners-developers/HistoricEnvironment/Projects/Historic-Farmsteads.aspx>.

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