



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Shropshire Hills

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 65



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>).

This map of the Shropshire Hills on the following page shows the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it. The key area variations are:

1. Clee Hill Uplands and Western Uplands

A very high density of small farms and smallholdings – around the Stiperstones, Cordon Hill, the edge of the Stiperstones and on the Clee Hills – that developed in association with industrial development on the moorland edge.

2. Hills and Vales

The remainder of the Character Area is a complex landscape with a mix of dispersed and nucleated settlement where larger farms developed within the reorganised enclosed fields of the valleys and there are higher densities of farmsteads – set in piecemeal and small-scale irregular enclosures – on the valley sides and hills including the Clee Hills.

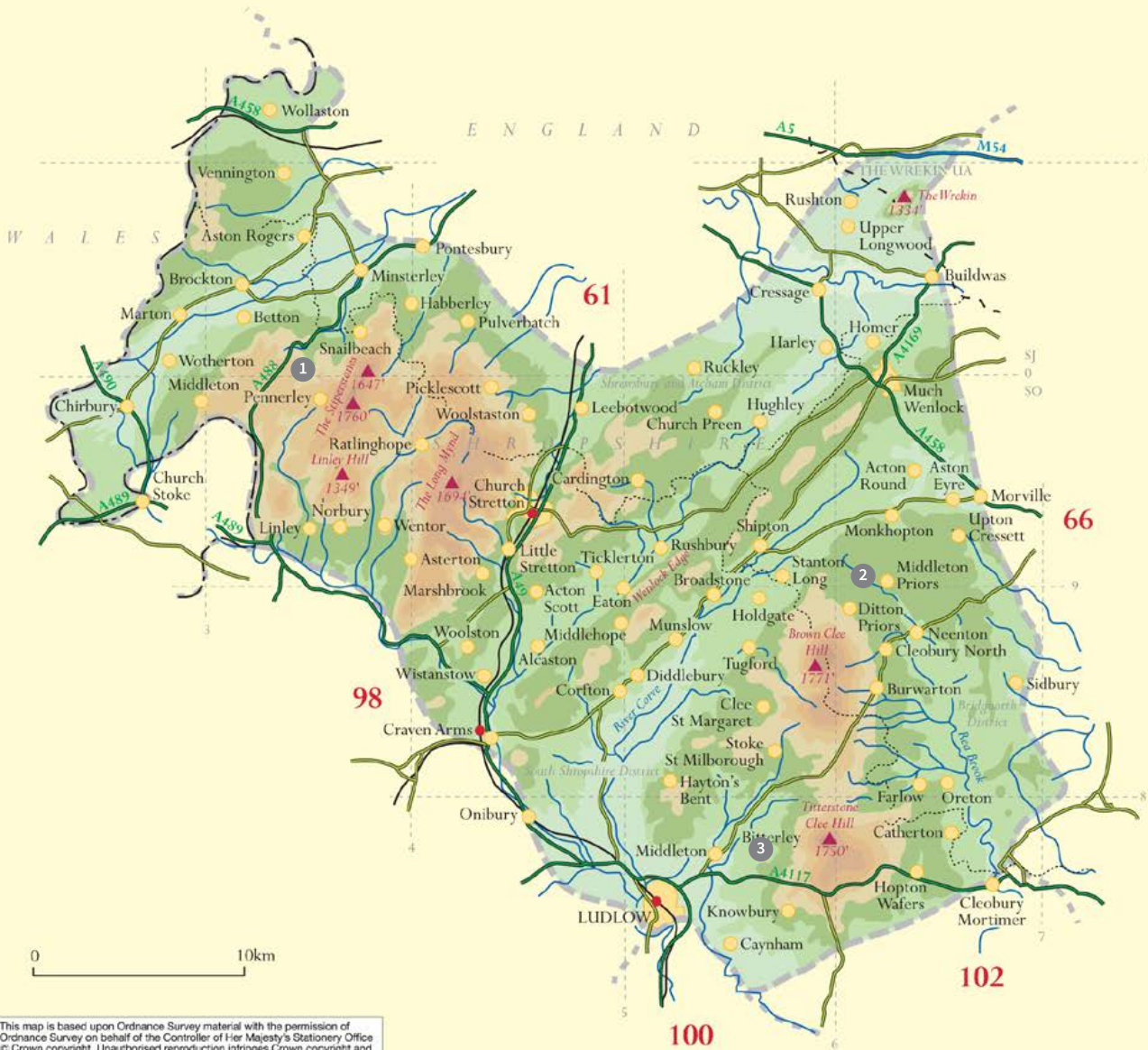
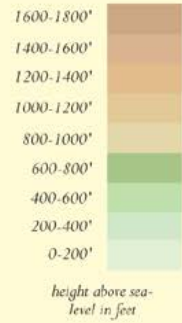
3. Teme Valley Fringe

A small area of mixed farming with fruit growing and hop yards, to the south – blending into the Teme Valley.

Front cover: A loose courtyard farmstead at Stokesay, next to Stokesay Castle and with access to meadow land along the river Onny. The emphasis in this mostly mid-19th-century group is on housing for cattle and their fodder, the earliest building (dating from the 18th century) being the weatherboarded combination barn which stored and processed some of the harvested corn group. Photo © Jeremy Lake

Character Area 65 Shropshire Hills

- Area 65 boundary
- Adjacent Area **98**
- Motorway
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway and Station
- National boundary
- County boundary
- Unitary Authority
- District boundary



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Summary

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

The Shropshire Hills are bounded by the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain to the north and the Severn Valley and Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau to the east. To the south-east lies the Teme Valley, on the edge of the Herefordshire Plateau, and to the south-west lie the Clun and North West Herefordshire Hills. The Shropshire Hills form an area of great diversity with steep-sided 'whaleback' hills of open moorland interspersed with settled valleys. Less than 1% of the area is urban, 8% is woodland. Nearly 50% of the area lies within the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Historic character

- There are high levels of dispersed settlement, with villages concentrated along river valleys. A broad variety of farmsteads is found across the area, set within fields bound by hedgerows and by dry stone walls on higher land. There are very high densities of small-scale farmsteads and historic smallholdings set in small fields around the Stiperstones and the Clee Hills. The vales are characterised by large to very large-scale courtyard farmsteads. Linear, L-plan (attached house) and small, loose courtyard groups (with buildings to one or two sides of the yard) are associated with the smallest upland farmsteads. Dispersed plans are concentrated around Clee Hill and the Western Uplands, particularly dispersed driftways and clusters.
- Timber-framed and stone-built barns are found on the lowland farmsteads but often converted to cow houses and the openings to the threshing bay blocked up.
- Two-storey and single-storey cow houses, including some rare 18th-century and earlier examples, are found on many farms.

Significance

- Farmsteads Mapping (as part of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project) has shown medium to high survival of historic farmsteads (higher away from the vales), with 69% of those recorded from late 19th-century maps retaining more than half of their historic form.
- There is a low concentration in a national context of pre-1750 farmstead buildings, but these include some notable examples of early, loose courtyard groups with 18th-century and earlier barns and animal housing.
- Some very rare surviving examples of smallholdings can be found, set within moorland edge landscapes.
- Use of graded slates is an increasingly rare feature seen in the west of the area.

Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a low proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (17.6%, the national average being 32%). The level of conversion of farm buildings is below the national average but recent years have seen the numbers of conversions, particularly for residential use, increase significantly.
- The Photo Image Project also recorded an average percentage (8%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.
- Increasing farm size through the amalgamation of holdings is leaving many farmsteads detached from agriculture. Dairy and mixed farming has decreased in favour of a concentration on arable farming, pig rearing and poultry.
- There is a relatively high proportion of farmsteads remaining in agriculture, which explains why indicators of non-agricultural economic activity are all relatively low (including minimal farm diversification or conversion to non-agricultural use, low participation in farm-based companies and low participation as directors of substantial companies).

Historic development

- There is extensive evidence for Late Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement sites and field systems.
- Late 11th- and 12th-century defended administrative centres (notably Ludlow, which developed around the medieval castle, seat of the Council of the Marches) and market towns were planted in the west of the area. Others (for example Much Wenlock) developed around ecclesiastical foundations. Church Stretton developed as a spa in the mid- to late 19th century.
- Rising population from the 16th century was closely linked to the increase in lead and coal mining and quarrying. In the moorland edge areas where these industries developed – particularly the Clee Hills and on the western flanks of the Stiperstones – smallholdings and ‘squatters’ cottages with access to common grazing on the moorland proliferated.
- Farming on the Clee Hills plateau was mostly small scale and pastoral, but with greater quantities of corn grown than on the uplands around the Long Mynd and the Stiperstones to the west.
- Arable cultivation and stock fattening developed on the loamy soils and valley meadows of the lower areas. Corve Dale was historically the richest in terms of arable cropping, although there are still extensive areas of poorly-drained land which remained as common into the 19th century. Underdrainage from the 1830s, and then the development of railways focused on the markets at Ludlow and Craven Arms, boosted corn production and stock fattening in lower Corve Dale and the Clee Hills.
- Intensive arable is now dominant in lower Corve Dale and on the eastern side of the Clee Hills plateau, with intensive mixed agriculture on dip slopes and valley bottoms elsewhere.

Landscape and settlement

Clee Hill and Western Uplands

- Chains or clusters of smallholdings and small farms, with small-scale regular and irregular fields, developed on the moorland fringe. Sizable tracts of heathland and rough grassland on acid soils persist on the higher ground, most notably on the Stiperstones, Long Mynd and Clee Hills.
- Some areas of larger-scale planned enclosure of moorland during the 18th and 19th centuries was driven by estates and intended to improve pasture for cattle and secure mineral rights.

Hills and Vales

This is a varied area with a wide range of farm size and farmstead type, often intermixed, but with broad distinctions between:

- The large farms of the estate farmlands of the broad river valleys – principally Corve Dale and towards Morville, the northern area which merges into the Shropshire Plain. Here settlement was village-based, and isolated farms mostly developed in association with the

enclosure of open fields and sometimes the shrinkage of settlements from villages.

- Elsewhere in the higher ground, including the Clee Hills Plateau, farms were historically smaller, although numbers had been greatly reduced through amalgamation especially over the later 18th and 19th centuries. Farmsteads can still be located in villages, but there are also high densities of isolated farmsteads and hamlets associated with smaller-scale fields, the result of generally pre-17th century enclosure of common fields intermixed with more ancient enclosure patterns (usually the clearance of woodland in the medieval period), and later boundary removal and reorganisation.
- Some isolated farmsteads relate to moated sites of 12th-14th century origin and shrunken medieval settlement.
- There are notable concentrations of parkland and designed landscapes, some of the former originating as medieval hunting chase and deer parks and including some fine 18th century houses (e.g. Morville).

Farmstead and building types

Farmstead types

- Small linear farmsteads, dispersed farmsteads and the smallest loose courtyard farmsteads (with working buildings to one or two sides of the yard) are largely associated with the small farms and smallholdings (and largely planned enclosures) of part-time farmers in the Clee Hill and Western Uplands. Few of these remain in agricultural use. Significant concentration around the Stiperstones, Cordon Hill, dispersed around the edge of the Long Mynd and dense concentrations on the Clee Hills.
- Dispersed plans are concentrated around the Clee Hill and Western Uplands, particularly dispersed driftways and clusters. They appear to have developed as stock pounds sited off

tracks linking the hill pasture valley slopes and upstanding common land.

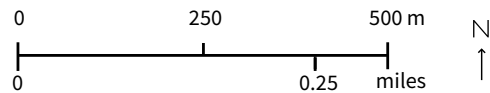
- Loose courtyard farmsteads are concentrated around the moorlands and away from the estate farmlands of the low ground and vales. These include some groups with 18th-century or earlier houses and working buildings. The smallest, with detached working buildings to one or two sides of the yard, are concentrated in areas of historic smallholdings. Larger examples, with buildings facing three or four sides of the yard, are concentrated away from the moorland edges and away from the estate farmlands of the valleys.



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

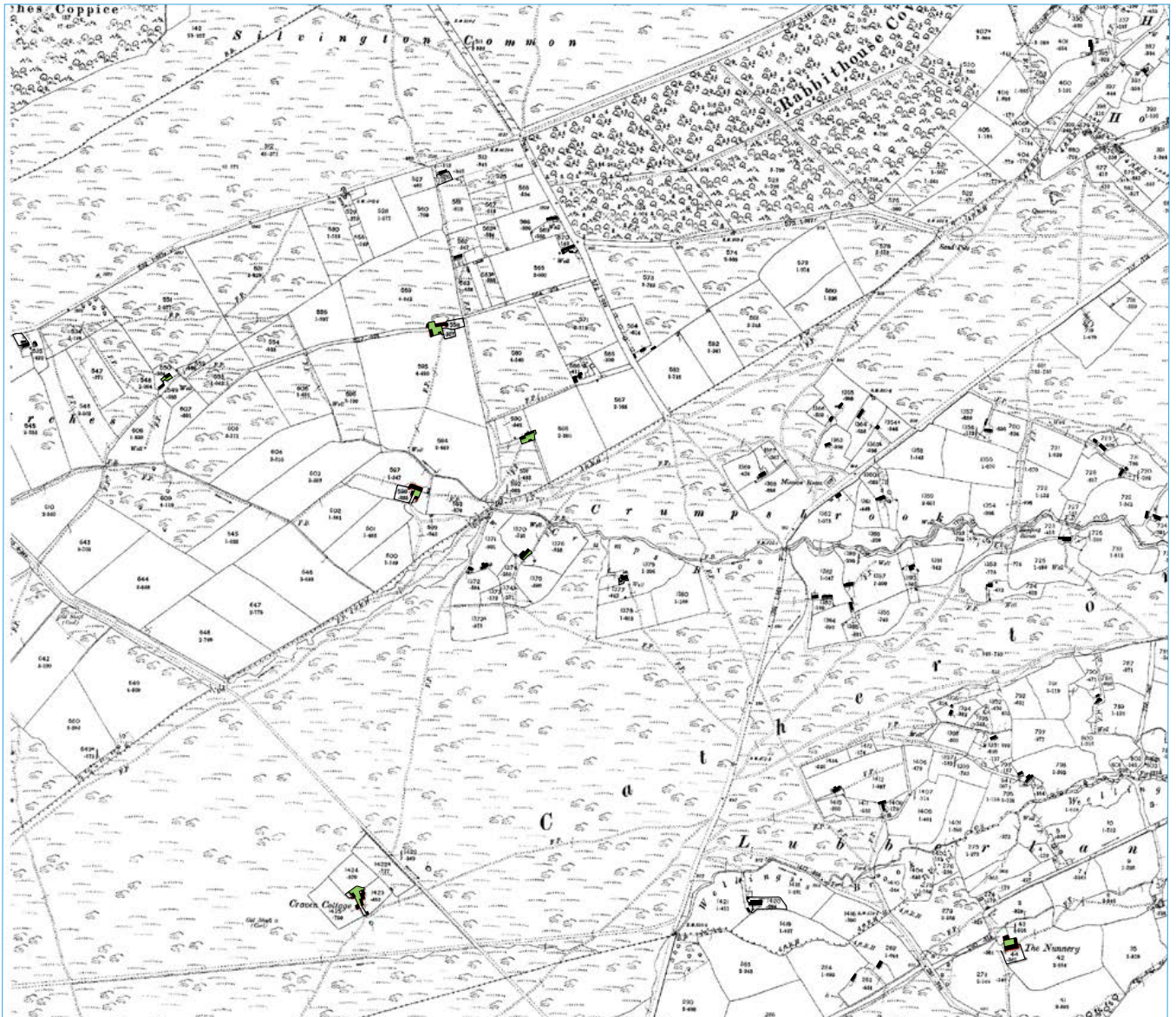


Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



Wentnor

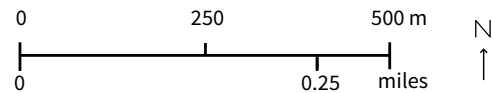
In the lowland areas, dispersed farmsteads are inter-mixed with small villages and hamlets around which former open field strips may be fossilised by enclosure boundaries. The strip fields were farmed from farmsteads located within the village, where farm buildings line the village street. Beyond the area of former strip fields are irregular fields of piecemeal enclosure, some of which may have been farmed from new farmsteads created at the time of enclosure. To the eastern edge of the extract are regular fields with straight boundaries representing the enclosure of common land in the 19th century within which some small new farmsteads were built.



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



Clee Hills

The upland parts of the Character Area were a focus for industrial activity from the medieval period, particularly coal mining and quarrying. Mining was typically carried out through the use of bell-pits, evidenced by low mounds scattered across the common (seen in foreground of photo). These industrial activities attracted 'squatter' settlement: smallholdings and cottages which encroached onto the edges of the common and were associated with small, often irregular fields for hay, the common providing grazing for cattle, sheep and horses. Some areas of the common were enclosed in the 19th century, creating a regular pattern of fields with some small farms and smallholdings. Such enclosure was principally driven by the need to protect the mineral rights of local estates rather than agricultural improvement.

- Large-scale, regular courtyard farmsteads (multi-yard, F- and E-plans) reflect the need to process corn and fatten stock in yards on the largest farmsteads in the vales which specialised in the fattening of cattle as well as large-scale corn production. They correlate to estate farmland and timbered plateau farmland and to the small areas of principal and pastoral settled farmland. These plan forms strongly correlate to the landscape following the line of Corvedale, Apedale, the flat-bottomed valley around Bishops Castle, the Rea Valley into the Vale of Montgomery, and along the northern boundary of the area where the Shropshire Plain meets the hills.
- Other regular farmstead types reflect the smaller size of farms away from the vales: regular L-plans with multifunctional ranges are less apparent on the estate farmlands of Corvedale, except at its south-eastern end where stock farming developed around the rail head at Ludlow.
- Regular courtyard U-plans are scattered across areas of late enclosure in the uplands, and are most evident on the timbered plateau farmland surrounding the Cleve Hills, where the abundance of mature hedgerow trees and scattered woodland reflects a long history of enclosure and dispersed settlement. A significant number also run along Wenlock Edge, set between the boundary of the wooded hill estate land and the main estate farmland on the valley bottom, most are located within small villages or hamlets.
- The farmsteads associated with these landscapes tend to be of medium to large size and include L-shaped steadings with additional buildings to three or four sides of the yard.

Building types

- Cattle housing is a particularly distinctive characteristic of this area. Single-storey and two-storey timber-framed cow houses mainly date from the 18th and 19th centuries with very rare earlier examples. Sizes vary from small buildings for 8 to 12 cattle, to large ranges within planned L-plan farmsteads.
- Small numbers of timber-framed threshing barns and cow houses survive.
- Threshing barns usually form part of or are absorbed into late 18th- or 19th-century combination ranges which are a feature of most farms.
- There is much evidence – in the form of blocked openings to the large threshing doors and inserted openings to animal housing and lofts – for barns being converted to cattle housing and other uses.
- Some rare examples of horse engine houses attached to barns survive.



Linear farmstead on a former smallholding adjoining common land. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Large, regular plan farmstead to the east of the area, more typical of the lowland dales. Photo © Bob Edwards



Loose courtyard plan farmstead in the hills to the west of the area, with 17th- or 18th-century house, barn and animal housing. Photo © Jeremy Lake



The largest timber-framed barns are concentrated in the arable west of the area. This has been extended into an L-plan – a common form. Photo © Bob Edwards



The majority of barns are stone built and incorporated into combination ranges. The threshing door was blocked (and given pigeon holes) in the late 19th century when additional doors were inserted for its conversion to a cow house and stables. Photo © Bob Edwards



Open-sided, stone-built hay barns are found in small numbers, especially on larger farms across the lower lying parts of the area. Photo © Bob Edwards



Cattle housing Buildings for cattle are found on nearly all farmsteads in the area. There are some 17th- and 18th-century timber-framed buildings for cattle (a, b and c) but commonly cattle were housed in enclosed, single-storey buildings of late 18th- and 19th-century date, ranging from small cow houses to large ranges or forming part of combination ranges (d and e). Open-fronted shelter sheds are also found facing into yards (f). Photos © Bob Edwards



Cart sheds Granaries are found on the larger farmsteads of the area and were usually incorporated at first-floor level within combination ranges or located over cart sheds (left). Photo © Bob Edwards



Stables are found on all but the smallest farmsteads but the larger examples are found on the farms with greater areas of arable in the lowland areas. Many stables are incorporated into combination ranges. Photo © Bob Edwards



Free-standing dovecotes are a feature of some of the larger farms, which are often manor farms, of the area. Most are of 18th- or early 19th-century date. Dovecotes may also be incorporated into other buildings such as barns or stables. Photo © Bob Edwards



There are some rare but significant survivals of very small buildings that provided accommodation for labourers, often found close to the farmstead. Externally, these buildings may appear similar to cow houses but the presence of a fireplace and a narrower doorway evidence their domestic function. Such buildings contribute to the social history of rural communities. Photo © Bob Edwards



Timber-framed farm buildings, either weatherboard or with brick infill, are most commonly seen in the western part of the area. There are some very rare examples of cleft-oak panels (right). Photo © Bob Edwards

Materials and detail

- Timber-framing was widely used for farmhouses and barns until the 17th century. Stone was also used from the medieval period for high-status houses and some farm buildings; stone continued as the predominant building material into the 19th century.
- Building stones used within the area and on the Clee Hills include igneous rock to west, sandstone around the Clee Hills and limestone on Wenlock Edge.
- Weatherboarding is a common form of cladding for timber-framed barns and other farm buildings, and is often associated with tall, stone plinths and gable walls in the western part of the area. A similar combination of weatherboard framing (often in softwood) and brick walls is associated with barns of late 18th- to early 19th-century date. As elsewhere in the Welsh Borders, panels to timber frames might be infilled with wattles or cleft oak.
- Brick was used from the 17th century, often in-filling timber-frame panels. From the 18th century, brick was used in some larger farmsteads, particularly in the west of the area.
- Clay tile and thin Welsh slate are typical. Thick and roughly edged slate, often graded in size, is now increasingly rare.



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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 this NCA. For
the Summary Report of 2009 see [https://
historicengland.org.uk/images-books/
publications/west-midlands-farmsteads-
landscapes/](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/west-midlands-farmsteads-landscapes/)

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