



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 66



Introduction

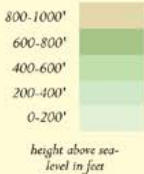
The Farmstead and Landscape Statements will help you to identify the historic character of traditional farmsteads and their buildings in all parts of England, and how they relate to their surrounding landscapes. They are now available for all of England's National Character Areas (NCAs), and should be 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 Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau on the following page shows the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it. There are four sub-areas:

1. **Northern coalfield** Area of smallholding around commons and small-scale dairy farming was associated with a wide range of industrial activity, mostly absorbed into the post-1960s development of Telford.
2. **Sandstone Plateau** Sandstone Plateau An area of village-based settlement and low densities of isolated, large-scale farmsteads, absorbed into West Midlands conurbation to south and with smaller farms on sandy soils to the south.
3. **West of the Severn Gorge** Higher densities of mostly medium-scale stock farms are set in hilly landscapes.
4. **Southern Area** including Wyre Forest High densities of small-scale farmsteads and smallholdings that developed as a largely dairying area that served the conurbation, around areas associated with woodland industries and in areas of small-scale, irregular fields resulting from medieval woodland clearance and planned 18th- and 19th-century fields with orchards..

Front cover: This regular courtyard farmstead was created as a model farm within Enville Hall landscape park, c 1747-8 and is attributed to the architect William Baker. It is typical of those architect-designed farmsteads associated with landed estates which are to be found in this area. Photo © Historic England 27767/025

Character Area 66 Mid Severn Sandstone Plateau



- Area 66 boundary
- Adjacent Area **102**
- Motorway
- A Road
- B Road
- Railway and Station
- County boundary
- 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.

This is an intensively farmed, rolling estate landscape, together with wooded landscapes in the Severn Gorge and Wyre Forest and the post-industrial landscapes of the Shirebrookdale coalfield. This area lies around the catchment of a central section of the Severn and the lower Stour rivers. To the west and south-west, the land rises out of the Severn Valley to the Shropshire Hills and Herefordshire Plateau. To the east, it rises out of the Stour Valley to meet the Black Country and Arden. In the south, the rolling landform gradually subsides into the Severn and Avon Vales while, in the north, there is a transition to the clays of the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain. Of the area, 16% is urban, 12% is woodland.

Historic character

- The area has a strong pattern of nucleated settlement combined with a medium density of farmsteads in the landscape which mostly date from the post-medieval enclosure of open fields by hedgerows. There are some areas of woodland with very high densities of farmsteads, of earlier date and set in earlier enclosures, to the east of Wyre Forest and to the south of Kidderminster.
- The predominant pattern is of large to very large-scale courtyard farmsteads (34.3% and 28.4% of farmstead plans, respectively), concentrated in the estate lands of the north. Regular courtyard plan farmsteads are dominant, particularly in areas most strongly associated with arable farming (especially on the sandstone plateau, where dry stone walls were made by estates). They are mostly multi-yard, U-shaped and of full courtyard form. There are large numbers of loose courtyard plans and regular L-plan steadings, often with a third range fronting the yard. Linear and dispersed cluster farmsteads are concentrated in areas of small farms and smallholdings with earlier irregular fields to the south (very small around Wyre Forest) and to the west of the Severn.
- Combination ranges of 18th- and 19th-century date are typical of this area, with shelter sheds and cow houses set around cattle yards.

Significance

- Farmsteads Mapping (as part of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project) has shown a medium rate of survival, with 13% of historic farmsteads recorded from late 19th-century maps lost, but 60% retaining more than half of their historic form.
- There is a low concentration in a national context of 18th-century and earlier farmstead buildings. These include a small number of timber-framed barns, often three-bay buildings.

Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a high proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (52.9%, the national average being 32%).
- A very high proportion of historic farmsteads has been converted to residential use (71%) with high resident participation at director level in substantial businesses (39 directorships per hundred farmsteads).

Historic development

- Extensive evidence can be found for Roman and prehistoric settlement and the formation of heathland through clearance of the free-draining soils on higher land between the rivers Stour and Severn. By the 18th century this area was dominated by large estates.
- Industrial development from the 16th century was closely linked to the navigation of the river Severn (including the ports of Bridgnorth and Bewdley) and the development of the canal system and the port of Stourport from the 1760s.
- The area was well-suited to the export of produce, especially to rising industrial populations in the Black Country and Birmingham.

Landscape and settlement

- There are contrasts between the areas with high densities of dispersed settlement that developed with woodland clearance by the medieval period, and areas dominated by village-based settlement with few isolated farms.
- Extensive, ancient and secondary woodland survives mostly along the steep slopes of the valleys.

Northern coalfield

- Heavier soils on the east Shropshire coalfield were associated with the extensive tracts of woodland in the early medieval period.
- The development of smallholdings around commons and small-scale dairy farming was associated with a wide range of industrial activity that exploited the woodland for charcoal production. These have been mostly absorbed into the post-1960s development of Telford.

Sandstone Plateau

- The plateau was characterised by mainly village-based settlement where many isolated farms developed in association with the enclosure of the open fields and commons that extended over large parts of this area in the medieval period.
- A sheep-corn economy based around estates and increasingly large farms developed after widespread settlement desertion in the 14th and 15th centuries.
- In the 19th century, this was one of the main areas of the West Midlands where the Norfolk system of four-course rotations using turnips was practised.
- The development of larger-scale farms in this area is reflected in areas of large-scale, planned and reorganised piecemeal enclosure, often intermixed with pockets of irregular fields reclaimed from woodland. Some blocks of very large, later 20th-century fields.

- Smaller farms and smallholdings – and smaller-scale fields with areas of remaining heath and common – remained a feature of the sandier soils around Kidderminster and Stourbridge, where dairying increased from the late 18th century.
- Extending from Upper Arley towards Kinver and southwards to Kidderminster is an area where larger farms developed in the 18th and 19th centuries (and many smaller farms were lost), within an area of irregular enclosure from woodland.
- The eastern fringe has been absorbed into part of the West Midlands conurbation, from Wolverhampton to the north to Halesowen in the south, and the towns of Kidderminster and Stourport, whose development from the 18th century has been closely linked to the growth and servicing of the conurbation.

Southern Area including Wyre Forest

- West of Kidderminster and Bewdley, the settlement pattern and the high density of farmsteads – especially around south-west of Bewdley – reflect the history of smallholding, orcharding (predominately cherries and plums) and woodland industries around Wyre Forest.
- This also developed as a largely dairying area that served the conurbation, with areas of small-scale planned enclosure.

West of the Severn Gorge

- The scale of farming was generally smaller than east of the Severn and focused on stock rearing and fattening, in a landscape that retained large blocks of woodland and common within a varied hilly topography

Farmstead and building types

Nationally there is a low concentration of 18th-century and earlier farmstead buildings, mainly comprising farmhouses and threshing barns in this area. They are found mostly along the Severn Valley and within loose courtyard groups

Farmstead types

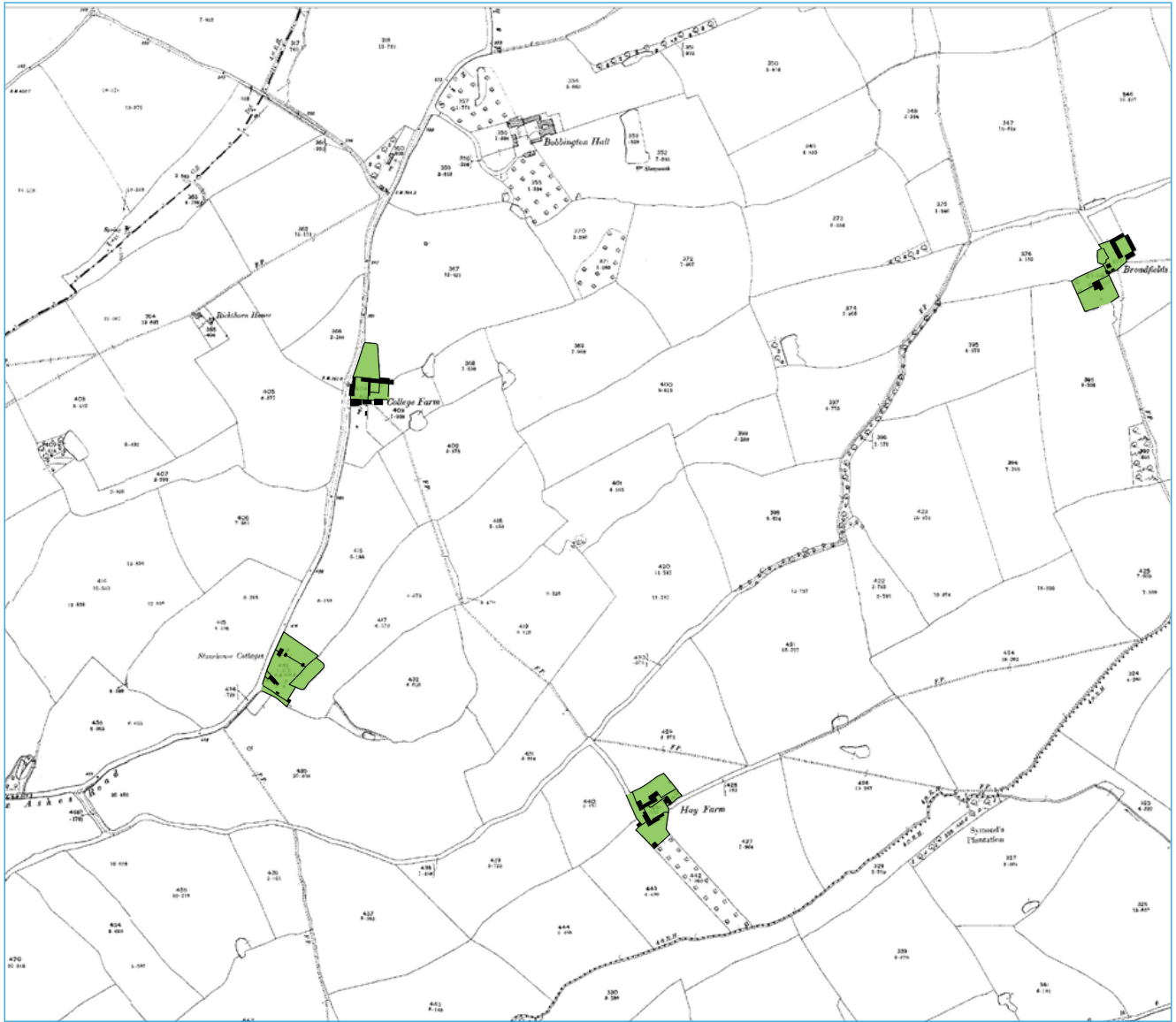
- Large-scale regular courtyard plan farmsteads are dominant on the sandstone plateau. These are mostly regular multi-yard plans, with also E-, F- and especially full-courtyard and U-shaped plan types. Regular L-plans are set away from the main arable farmland of the sandstone plateau, and tend to cluster along the valley slopes, particularly in the southern area and to the west of the Severn gorge.
- Some of the loose courtyard steadings with buildings to three or (rarely) four sides of the yard include large threshing barns of 18th-century or earlier date.
- There is a large number of regular and loose courtyard L-shaped steadings with buildings to three or four sides of the yard, representing the new-build or growth of farms in arable and especially stock farming areas.
- Linear and dispersed cluster farmsteads, associated with the smallest-scale farms, are concentrated in blocks of ancient woodland and common to the west of the Severn gorge, to the south of the area adjoining the Teme Valley (west of Bewdley) and in the coalfields. There are occasional examples in the Black Country where industry and farming could be combined.
- Small-scale, loose courtyard plans with working buildings to one or two sides of the yard are concentrated in areas of planned and small-scale 18th- to 19th-century enclosure to the south.

Building types

- Farmhouses, typically of brick and tile, date from the 18th or early 19th century, some incorporating 17th-century or earlier timber-framed houses.
- Threshing barns usually form part of a range with cow houses and stabling. There is occasional survival of earlier timber-framed barns, often small, three-bay buildings but larger across the plateau.
- Cart shed or granary ranges in the 19th century were often incorporated into planned ranges.
- Stables can be substantial buildings on the plateau, due to the importance of arable farming. There are some early survivals.



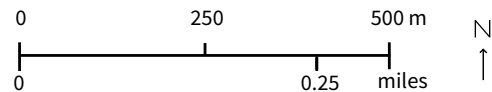
This landscape lies to the far south of the county near Kinver and adjacent to the county boundary with Dudley Metropolitan Borough. It is a landscape dominated by large isolated traditional farmsteads; one lies to the left above the road and the other to the right below the road. These farmsteads are still closely associated with the planned enclosure which was created, out of what remained of the medieval Kinver Forest, in the late 18th century. The curving boundary above the road is the legacy of an earlier land use perhaps indicating the site of former woodland or a deer park (the farmstead to the left is 'Iverley Park Farm'). Where the land was not deemed suitable for agriculture woodland was either planted or allowed to develop. The woodland shown to the bottom right, part of a much larger area, lies on steeply sloping land. The deciduous trees may reflect those trees which would have been found in the area when it had formed part of the Royal Forest. The other buildings in the photograph relate to development influenced by the suburban expansion of Dudley in the mid- and late 20th century. Photo © Historic England 2770/005



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

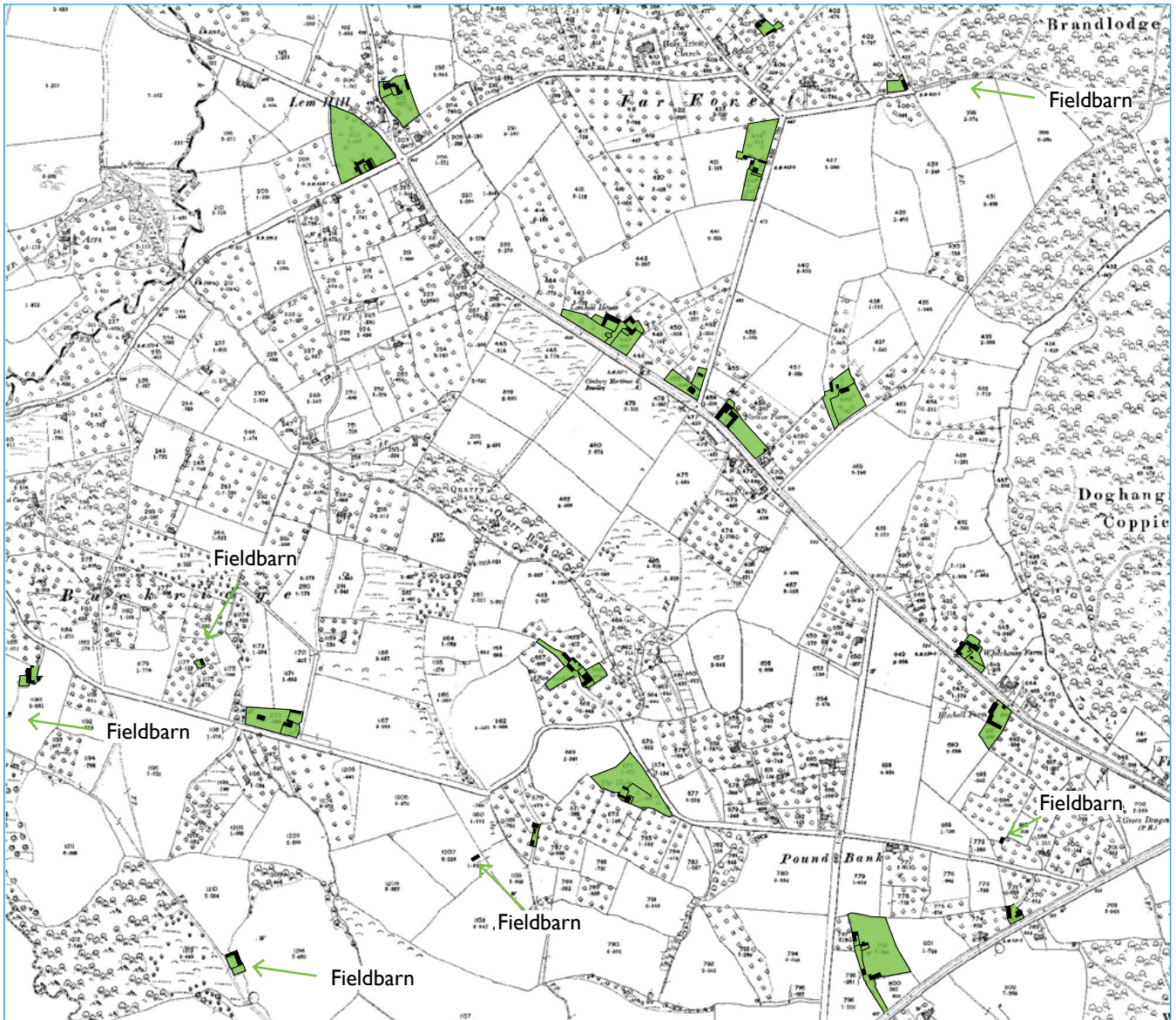


Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.




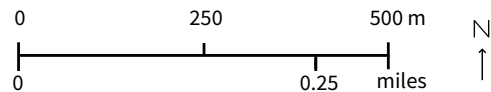
Bobbington

Large, isolated farmsteads with regular courtyard or loose courtyard plans with buildings to all three or four sides of the yard are characteristic of the sandstone plateau part of the Character Area. The fields are largely the result of piecemeal enclosure of former arable and commons, a process that was largely completed before the 18th century, resulting in irregular fields with wavy boundaries. Some of these farmsteads contain buildings dating from the 17th century at least, and their piecemeal development is reflected in the loose courtyard farmsteads in this area. The occasional straight boundary suggests that some reorganisation of the fields had taken place by the late 19th century.



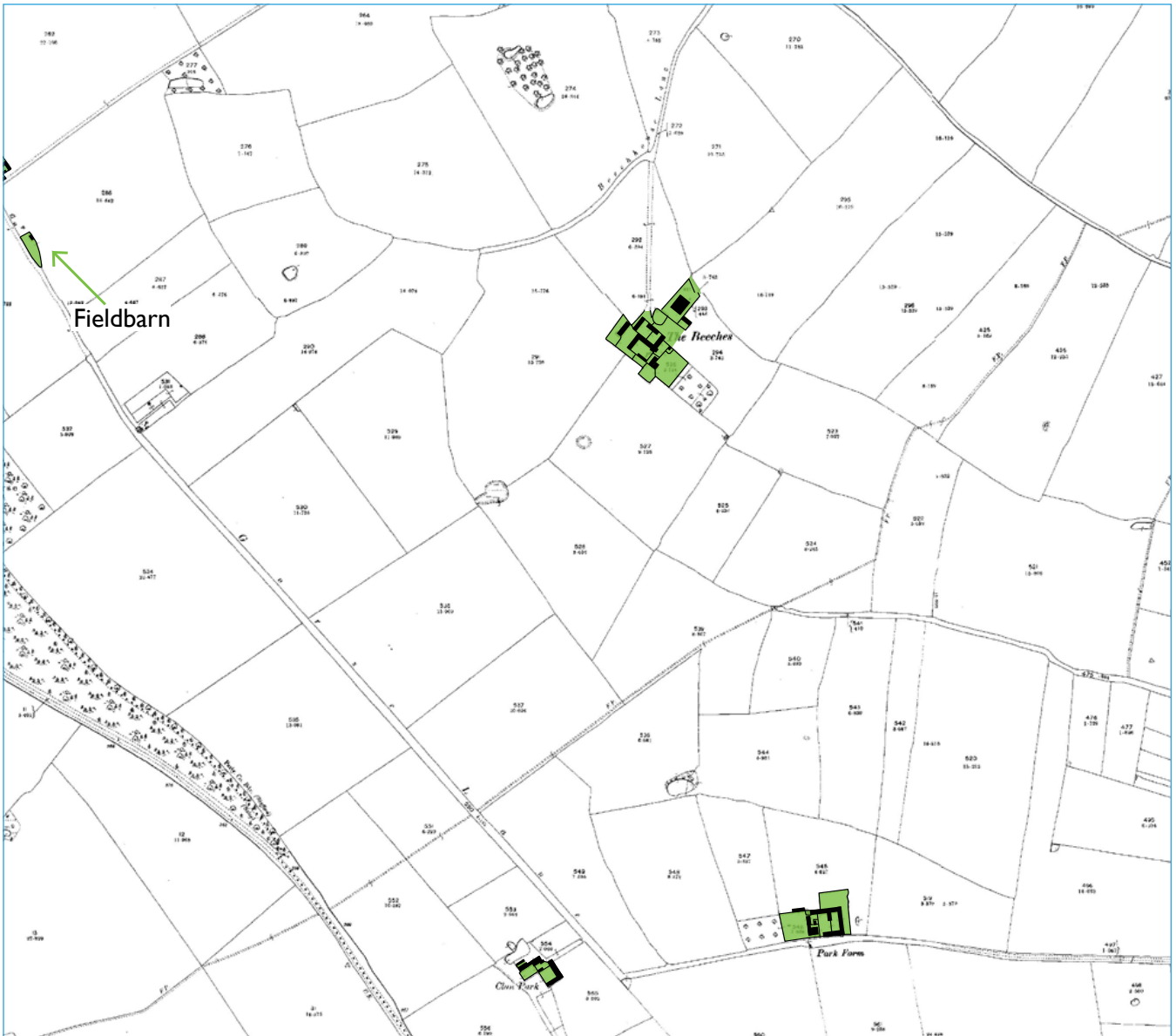
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 Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.




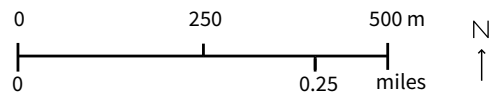
Buckeridge

In contrast to the large farms and fields seen in north of this Character Area, the southern area – including the Wyre Forest – is characterised by fields of various phases of enclosure from the woodland and common on the edge of the Forest. To the south are irregular fields intermixed with woodland typical of medieval assarting (woodland clearance), whilst to the north are small, regular fields of later enclosure and encroachment by smallholders. This is a landscape with a high density of small, dispersed farmsteads and smallholdings where woodland industries such as coppicing and charcoal burning provided opportunities for by-employment to supplement any income from agriculture.



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



Sheinton

The farmsteads in this part of the Sandstone Plateau are lower in their density, larger in scale and more regular in their planning than in Bobbington. Here, two large farms sit close to the junction between two forms of enclosure. To the north-east are irregular, medium-scale fields representing piecemeal enclosure, probably pre-dating the mid-18th century. In contrast, to the south-west are regular fields, divided by a straight road of late (18th- to 19th-century) enclosure of former common land.



The enlargement of fields and farms in the 18th and 19th centuries – which accelerated a long historical process as farms moved out of villages – has provided much of the northern and eastern part of the sandstone plateau with its present historic character. Photo © Bob Edwards



Smaller-scale farmsteads are more commonly found in the wood pasture landscapes to the west and south of the area. Photo © Bob Edwards



In the southern part of the area around the Wyre Forest, smaller farmsteads and smallholdings including linear plans are intermixed with medium-scale farms. This linear farmstead is the product of development over time with buildings added to the gable end of the farmhouse. Photo © Worcestershire County Council



This L-plan range comprises a low building for cattle and a larger barn range. Unusually for the 20th century, the house rather than the working buildings has been demolished and rebuilt. More typically, post-1950 sheds and working areas are separately accessed to the left. Photo © Bob Edwards



This farmstead originated as a loose courtyard plan. Over time buildings have been added to create long ranges to two sides of the yard, although the ranges remained detached from each other. Photo © Bob Edwards



A regular courtyard farmstead near Enville with a late 18th-century farmhouse facing into its garden, with working buildings reflecting mixed dairying with arable production. To the rear of the house and its dairy are pigsties and calf houses. Attached to these are a two-storey cowhouse with a hay loft and a long hay and corn barn with stables facing the yard and a cart shed facing the road. Photo © Historic England 2900/03



A large-scale, U-shaped farmstead rebuilt in the mid-19th century to the north of this area. The mid- to late 18th-century house to the right shows that the farm had already become the focus of an enlarged holding by this time. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large-scale, regular L-plan courtyard with a building to the third side of the yard, typical of the north and east of the area. Ventilation holes mark the threshing barn and loft above the right-hand stable of the range to the right. A covered driftway providing access to the fields is positioned in the angle of the L. A cow house with a circular pitching window in the gable end stands to the left. Photo © Bob Edwards



Brick-built barns feature on most farmsteads in this area. This barn is of four bays but barns of five bays are common. Photo © Bob Edwards



The rear of a small combination building with animal housing either side of a central passage which may have served as a threshing bay within the Wyre Forest. Photo © Bob Edwards



An 18th-century or earlier three-bay, timber-framed barn, typical of the smaller farmsteads in the wood pasture area which extends from the Wyre Forest and across the Severn, extending towards Kinlet. Photo © Bob Edwards



Forming part of a regular U-plan range, the granary is located next to the barn and above an outward-facing cart shed. Large combined cart shed and granary ranges are typical of the large, arable-based farmsteads of the area, some dating from the mid- to late 18th century. Photo © Bob Edwards

Materials and detail

- Timber-frame is predominantly of the 17th century with sandstone for higher status buildings. Occasional timber-framed farm buildings survive.
- Use of brick and sandstone for traditional architecture increased from the late 17th century.
- Brick is predominant for farm buildings. Ventilation patterns are a feature of barns.
- Roofs are plain clay tile and some Welsh slate.



Historic England

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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/) 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](https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/environment/eLand/planners-developers/HistoricEnvironment/Projects/Historic-Farmsteads.aspx). For
more on farmsteads in Worcestershire see
the Worcestershire Farmsteads Guidance at

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