



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Cannock Chase and Cank Wood

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 67

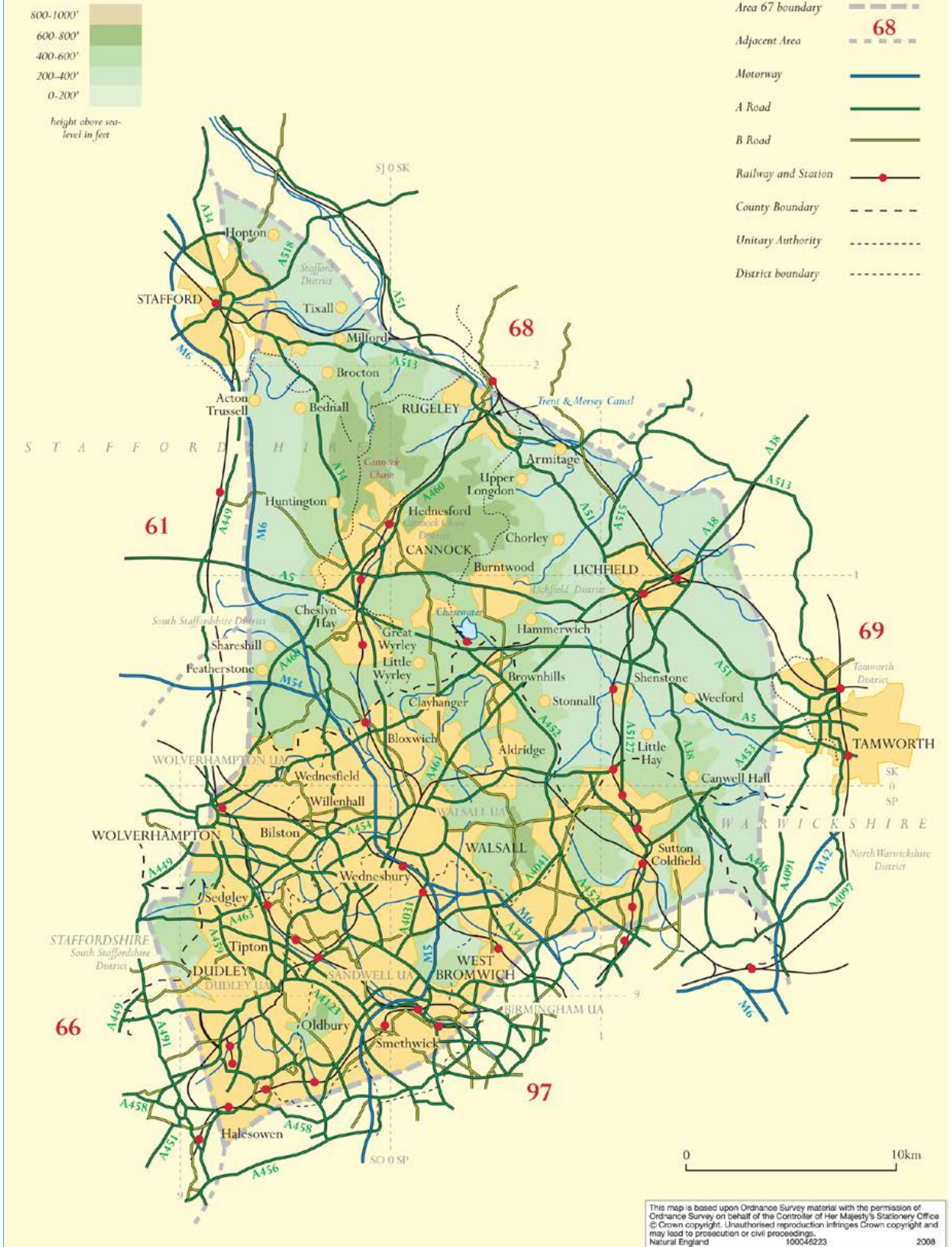


Introduction

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: An isolated regular courtyard farmstead dominates the foreground surrounded by large fields of planned enclosure the result of wholesale reorganisation in the 18th- to 19th-century. This site lies adjacent to the former Teddesley estate, whose influence is clearly legible within this landscape. A country house and landscape park was created in the late 18th century, although much of the parkland was probably re-designed in the 19th century when Teddesley was the home of the locally influential Littleton family. Much of the character of this parkland has been lost, but large woodlands, such as the shelter belt to the left of the farmstead and a number of surviving parkland trees, are testimony to its presence. The highly planned character of this landscape is typical of that lying on the western side of Cannock Chase in contrast to the landscape to the south and east. The Chase itself is indicated by the dense forestry plantation extending towards the top left of the image. Photo © Historic England 29001/009

Character Area 67 Cannock Chase and Cank Wood



This map shows Cannock Chase and Cank Wood, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it.

Summary

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

Cannock Chase and Cank Wood is a landscape dominated by its history as a former forest and chase and by the presence at its centre of the South Staffordshire Coalfield. It forms an area of higher ground, with the towns and large villages of the Black Country rising out of the lowlands of Shropshire and Staffordshire to the west. There are clear distinctions in this area between the core of Cannock Chase, where small-scale farmsteads and smallholdings are predominant, and the northern, eastern and western parts of the area where large arable-based farms developed. Of the area, 45% is urban, concentrated to the south and including Wolverhampton, Walsall and West Bromwich.

Historic character

- There is a mixed pattern of village-based and dispersed settlement, with 19th- and 20th-century development having subsumed many settlements.
- The landscape contains medium to low densities of farmsteads set in fields with hedgerows, but with very high densities associated with small farms and historic smallholdings around Cannock Chase.
- Farmsteads Mapping (as part of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project) has shown that very small and small to medium-scale farmsteads (20.3% and 23.2%) set in small-scale fields are dominant across the centre of the area, with areas of large-scale and very large-scale (29% and 13.8%) courtyard farmsteads with larger fields enlarged and reorganised in the 18th and 19th centuries concentrated to the east, north and west; these include E-plans, full courtyard plans and multi-yard plans.
- A small cluster of linear plans in the central part of the area reflects the presence of small farmers either commoning or combining farming with an industrial activity. This area and other small farms have small to medium-scale, loose courtyard farmsteads and dispersed cluster plans, set within fields that often retain earlier piecemeal and irregular patterns of enclosure.
- A limited number of timber-framed farmhouses and a few timber-framed barns survive.

Significance

- Farmsteads Mapping (as part of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project) has shown a low overall rate of survival of historic farmsteads. This is due to high rates of loss (44%) around expanding towns and other settlements, with 21% of historic farmsteads recorded from late 19th-century maps retaining more than half of their historic form.
- Any survivals, reflecting the formerly rural Character Area, are rare in suburban areas. Some of these farmsteads may be associated with other relict features such as greens, historic lanes and paths and boundaries retained within housing developments.
- Buildings of the 18th-century and earlier in this area are exceptionally rare.

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 (21.4%, the national average being 32%).
- The Photo Image Project also recorded an above-average percentage (10%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.
- This area has the highest economic mass and a correspondingly low proportion of farmsteads remaining in agricultural use (25%), and a relatively high proportion in non-residential uses other than agriculture (7%).

Historic development

- A large part of the area to north is dominated by Cannock Chase, a royal hunting forest incorporating the large area of heathland which was granted to the bishop of Lichfield in 1290. A number of medieval parks fringed the Chase including the parks at Beaudesert, Haywood, Teddesley and Wolseley.
- Cannock and Rugeley developed as market centres from the late 12th century.
- Large parts of this area developed from the medieval period and particularly from the 16th century into an intensively-settled landscape with chains of small hamlets associated with industrial activities such as quarrying (limestone and dolerite), mining, furnaces, edge-tool manufacture (Cannock) and transport.
- Further open heathland developed as a result of woodland being cut to provide charcoal for the iron furnaces of the area in the 16th and 17th centuries.
- Dairying was significant on heavy, poorly-drained soils in the northern part of the area, where large estates such as Shugborough led land improvement and built some notable home farms.
- From the late 18th century, arable farming and horticulture intensified in importance on the sandstone-derived soils on the fringes of the growing urban areas of the Black Country.
- Enclosure between the 1770s and 1880s resulted in more rectilinear and large-scale fields, much of it aimed at ensuring control of mineral rights by landowners (especially on the lands of the Lords of Dudley).
- Deep coal pits and large scale mining developed from the late 19th century in the concealed coal measures beneath Cannock, Hednesford and Burntwood.

Landscape and settlement

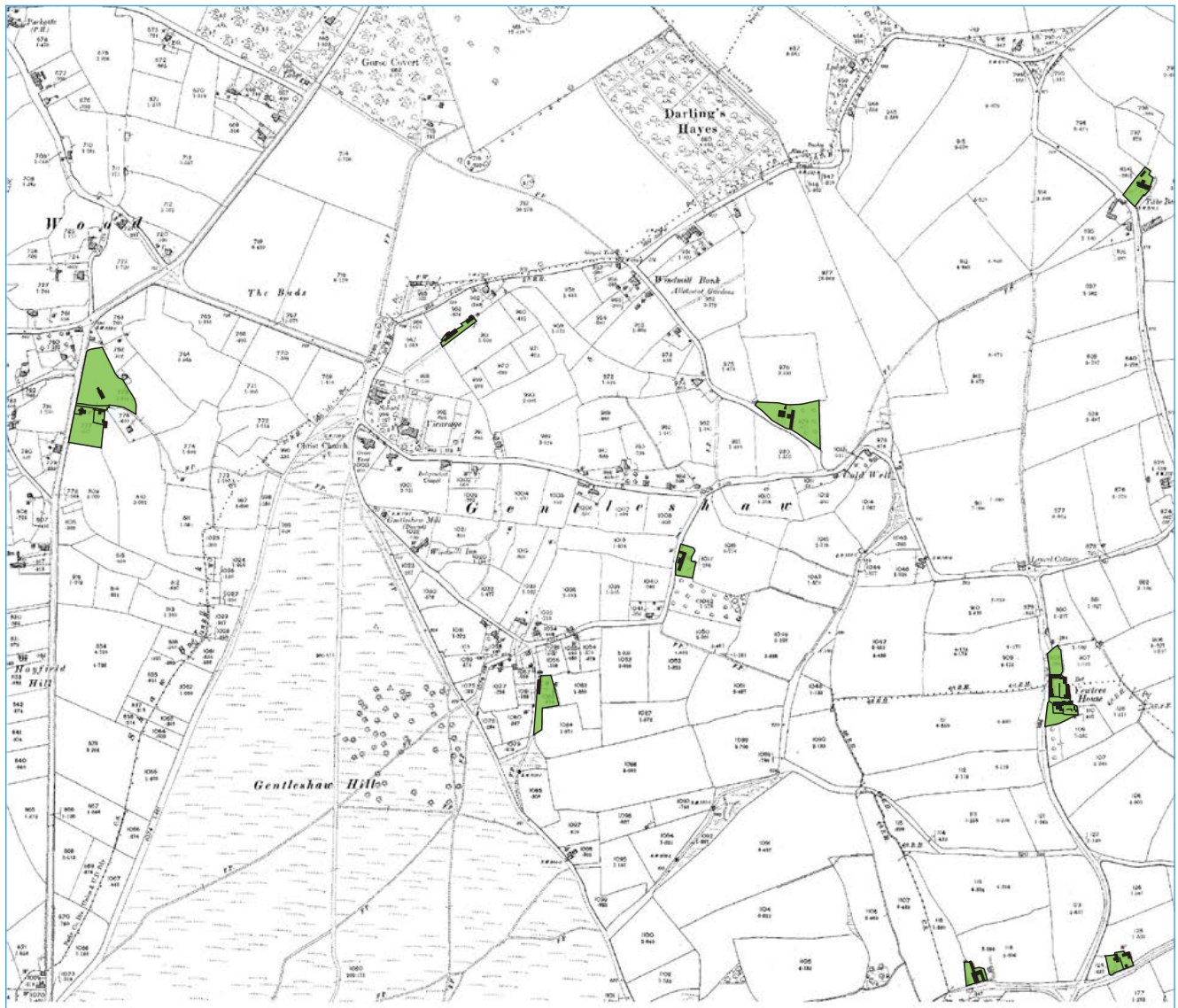
- Historically this was an area with a largely dispersed settlement pattern with numerous small hamlets and isolated farmsteads and cottages. Urbanisation in the southern part of the area has largely obliterated this pattern although some small greens and occasional farmsteads survive within the developed area.
- The fringes of the extensive areas of heathland and common were subject to encroachment and piecemeal enclosure from the 14th century by common-edge settlers.
- The predominant field pattern is derived from irregular piecemeal enclosure of strip fields of common arable and piecemeal enclosure of common arable. Fields are generally larger to the north and east and smaller to the south. There is a distinctive area of very small-scale irregular enclosure in the Cannock Wood to Armitage area, associated with numerous small farmsteads, small-holdings and cottages. There are some small areas of late 18th- and early 19th-century regular enclosure of former common land.
- The landscape has seen considerable change in the late 19th and 20th centuries as a result of military camps and training areas developed on the Chase, coniferous plantations, large scale coal mines and associated mining settlements such as Burntwood, and transport infrastructure.
- The southern part of the area was subject to rapid urbanisation during the 19th century with the expansion of the towns of Wolverhampton, Walsall and Dudley and the many former villages of the Black Country.



A farmstead now located on the edge of the urban expanse of Walsall: the modern housing developments are visible just beyond the farmstead. The farmstead is associated with an area of late enclosure of common with regular fields which was fringed by a number of farmsteads, two of which survive. These farmsteads and their landscape are significant survivals within the West Midlands conurbation. Photo © Bob Edwards



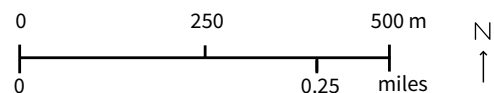
Cannock Wood landscape, pictured below. Photo © Bob Edwards



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

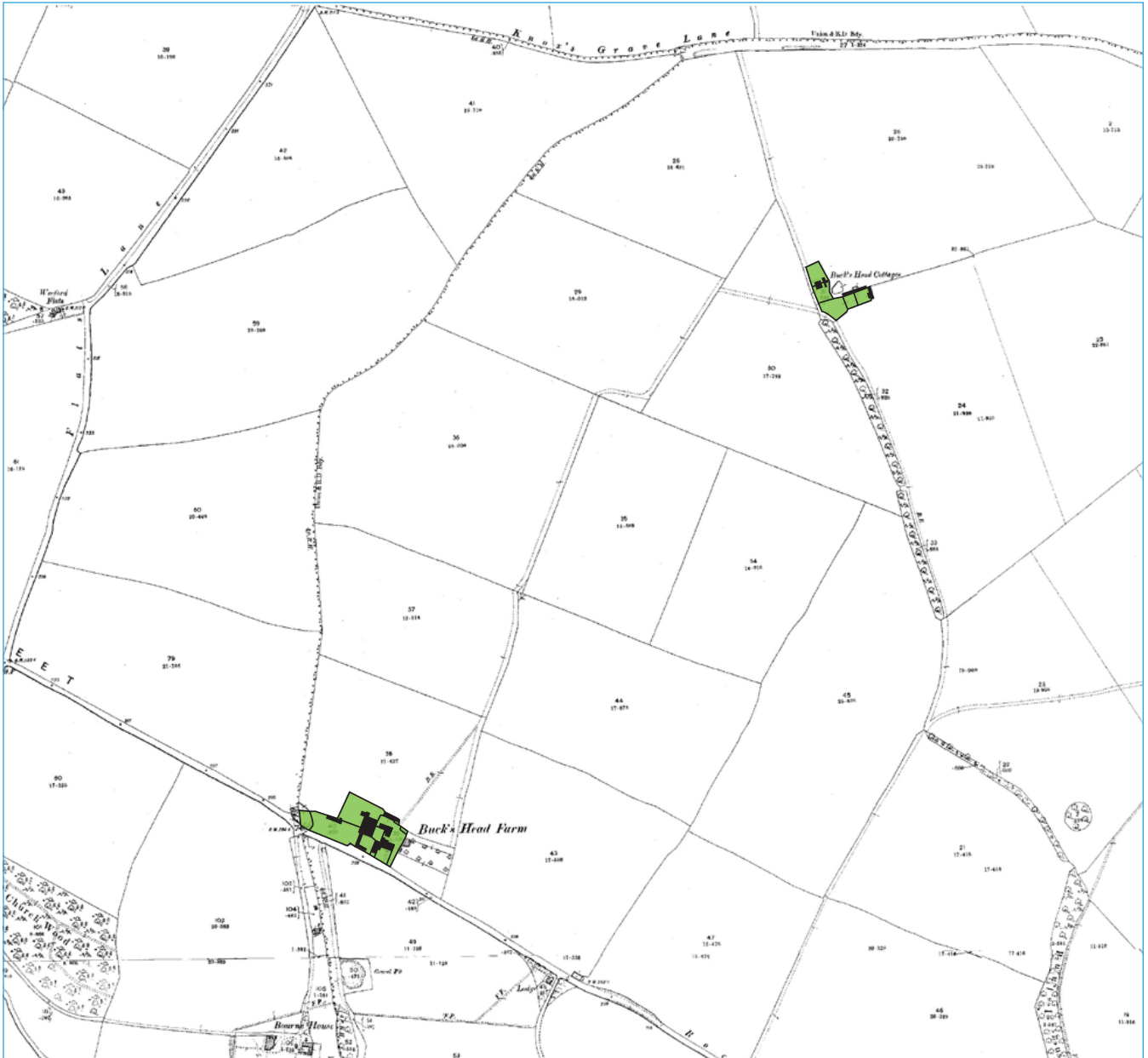


Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



Cannock Wood landscape, pictured above

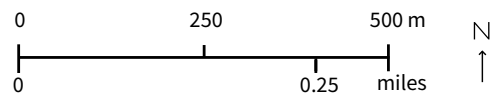
In the centre of the Character Area, fringing the areas of surviving heathland, is a landscape of small, irregular fields served by a network of narrow lanes and associated with small farmsteads. Many of these farms were created through piecemeal enclosure of common land. To the northern edge of the extract larger fields of an estate are visible whilst to the east medium-sized fields associated with slightly larger fields are generally the product of piecemeal enclosure, although there are some small areas of regular enclosure. These may be the result of reorganising earlier enclosure or the enclosure of remnants of common. Photo © Bob Edwards



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.



Buck's Head Farm, off Watling Street in Hints parish near Lichfield

The western, northern and eastern parts of the area surrounding the higher, sandstone area of Cannock Chase are characterised by medium and large fields that are often the product of reorganised piecemeal enclosure. Blocks of fields with straight boundaries are set within a framework of irregular holding boundaries and lanes. Within this landscape are large farmsteads, typically with regular courtyard plans, located on isolated sites or within hamlets or small villages. The buildings here date from the mid 18th century. Photo © Bob Edwards



A full regular farmstead, designed by the architect Samuel Wyatt circa 1803, forms one of the country's earliest model farms lying at the heart of Lord Anson's estate at Shugborough. The complex comprised open-fronted shelter sheds for cattle and, in the foreground, a barn with its threshing and other machinery powered by a water wheel fed from the mill pond shown towards the bottom of the image. The Temple of the Winds, divided from the farm by a belt of trees, forms part of an earlier phase of landscaping at Shugborough Park in the late 18th century. The ground floor of the temple was converted to a dairy by Samuel Wyatt as part of the works on the model farm. Photo © Historic England 29002/034



To the south and east of Cannock Chase small-scale irregular fields, enclosed by mature hedgerows, dominate the landscape. Lines of mature trees indicate the presence of now lost hedgerows, revealing a process of field enlargement which has occurred from the middle of the 20th century. To the foreground right a small regular courtyard 'L' plan farmstead survives relatively unaltered; such small-scale farmsteads were once common across the landscape lying to the south and east of Cannock Chase. They often represented small holdings whereby the occupiers subsisted by combining farming with working in local industry, which in this area was dominated by iron working and coal mining. Photo © Historic England 27995/037

Farmstead and building types

There is a low concentration of pre-1750 farmstead buildings in a national context as the area was subject to extensive rebuilding in the 19th century.

Farmstead types

- There are large-scale courtyard farmsteads on estates in the north and east, including full courtyard plans and E-plan steadings dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. Regular L-plan arrangements with additional buildings to the third or fourth sides of the yard are common. Ranges often display evidence of being multi-phase buildings with straight joints in brickwork marking episodes of extension.
- A number of linear and small to medium-scale L-plan farmsteads survive in the central part of the area. These fringe the heathland plateau, reflecting an historic concentration of small farms within this central part of the area.
- Small to medium scale farmsteads also have low numbers of loose courtyard plans, mostly with buildings to two sides of the yard.
- Dispersed, multi-yard plans can be found in the central and eastern part of the area. There are few other dispersed plan type farmsteads.

Building types

- Threshing barns, typically dating from the 18th century, can be seen on many farms. There are occasional, early timber-framed barns (including aisles) surviving within barns which have walls rebuilt in brick. Blocked openings to threshing bay are indicative of a change of use of the barn.
- Estate farmsteads often include features such as dovecotes and clock towers within the courtyard ranges.
- There are cow houses and shelter sheds.
- Hay barns of 19th-century date were built in brick on larger farmsteads.
- There is occasional survival of malt houses.
- Stables are found on most farms.



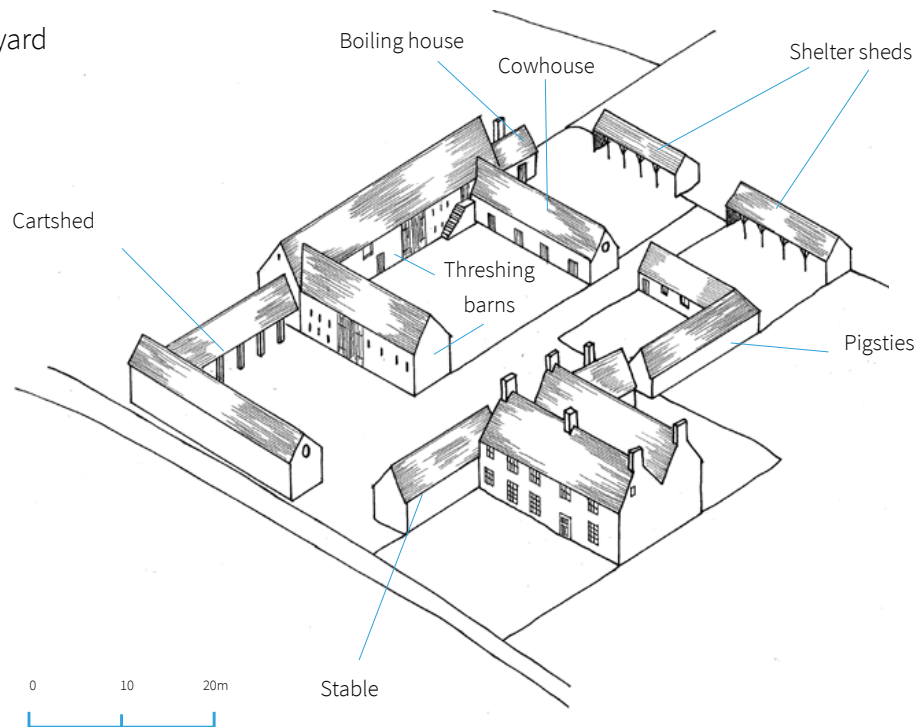
Regular courtyard L-plans are a common feature of the area. L-range plans are found on farmsteads of all sizes ranging from small, single-storey ranges to large, two-storey combination ranges incorporating barns, cattle housing, stables and granaries. Photos © Bob Edwards



In the areas of small, irregular enclosures fringing the common land there are small, linear and L-plan (house attached) farmsteads. These are typically associated with small farms, often worked on a part-time basis in association with industrial activities such as mining or quarrying. Photo © Bob Edwards

The area has examples of farmsteads that have two ranges linked to form an L-shaped element and additional buildings to three or four sides of the yard. To the rear of this group is a large, multifunctional barn attached to a single-storey cow house that, together with another detached cow house, faces the former cattle yard. Photo © Bob Edwards

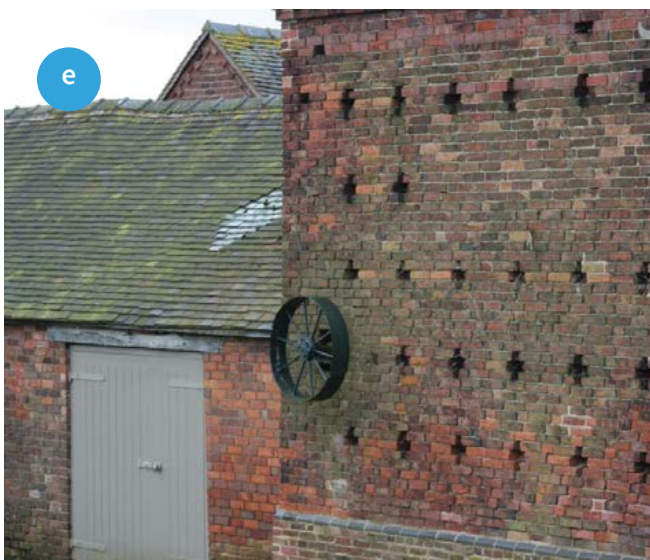
Regular multi yard



The larger farmsteads of the west and east in particular can have multiple yards either arranged in a formal E- or F-plan arrangement or with larger groups of yards grouped together, although these yards may not be defined by regular, linked ranges of buildings. Drawing and photo © Bob Edwards



Within the area, there are some large, regular courtyard plan farmsteads associated with the parks of country houses. These home farms often reflected the ideas of best practice in terms of animal housing and labour saving, current in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Photo © Bob Edwards



There are a small number of timber-framed or brick-built threshing barns dating from the 17th and early 18th centuries (a, b and c) but most barns in the area form part of combination ranges, often part of L-plan farmsteads (d). The barn element is usually defined by the large doors to the threshing bay and ventilation slits to the crop storage area, although it is common to see that the threshing doors have been blocked indicating a move away from arable and the introduction of new uses such as cattle housing. Occasionally, evidence for the use of mechanisation for threshing and processing feed can be found in the form of external fly wheels and internal gearing which was powered by portable steam engines (e). Photos © Bob Edwards



A timber-framed, two-storey cow house. Early 17th- and early 18th-century buildings for cattle are nationally rare but there are a few examples of timber-framed or brick examples surviving in the Character Area. Photo © Bob Edwards



A small, brick-built cow house typical of the small farms and smallholdings that can be found on the edge of the heathland. Photo © Bob Edwards



Open-fronted shelter shed with hayloft above forming part of a regular courtyard farmstead. Photo © Bob Edwards



Granaries are found on the larger farmsteads of the area and were usually incorporated at first floor level within combination ranges. 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 east and west of the area. Most stables are incorporated into combination ranges. Photo © Bob Edwards



Cart sheds are also a feature more associated with the larger farmsteads of the area. Typically, they are single-storey ranges but can also be incorporated within multifunctional ranges. Photo © Bob Edwards



Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by
Jeremy Lake with Bob Edwards

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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).

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