



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Arden

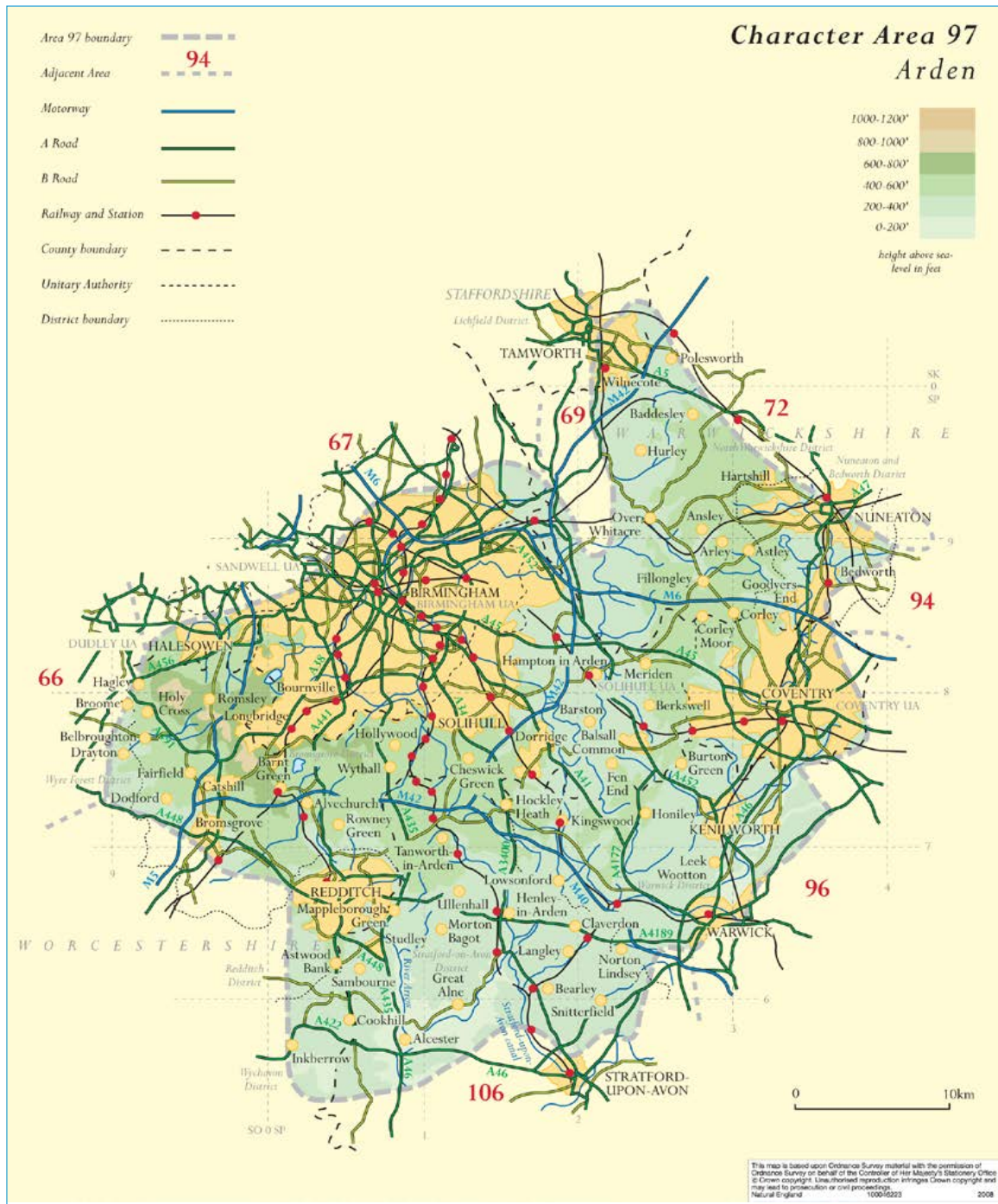
NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 97



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 12th- to 13th century hamlet of Rowington has hedgebanks lining the lanes that offered access for stock to grazing along the stream and in Yarningale Common. The hamlet was surrounded by a mix of open fields and closes, there being documentation for enclosure that relates to the first legible phase of farmhouses and barns dating from the 15th- to 17th- centuries. Photo © Historic England 29417/036



The map of the Character Area shows the numbers of the National Character Areas around it. There are four sub-areas:

1. **An inner ring to the conurbation**, with a mix of nucleated and dispersed settlement, and of some historic farmsteads, set within a greenbelt subject to extensive, 20th-century suburban development.
2. **A central band – the historic core of the Arden** – with the greatest concentrations of irregular enclosure, dispersed settlement and loose courtyard farmsteads including L-plan layouts with a third building to the yard. There are high numbers of 18th-century and earlier houses dispersed across this landscape.
3. **The southern and eastern fringe extending to Coventry**. This is an area with higher historic concentrations of villages and where many isolated farmsteads relate to the post-15th-century enclosure of former open fields. Large-scale, regular courtyard layouts are predominant, set within landscapes of larger fields and estates with planned woodland, and with some early groups – mostly on the edge of villages and in shrunken settlements.
4. **The Warwickshire coalfield, from Tamworth to Nuneaton**, where smallholdings developed alongside mining villages and the growth of larger farms continuing in the Leicestershire Vales.

Summary

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

Arden comprises farmland and former wood pasture lying to the south and east of Birmingham, including part of the West Midlands conurbation. Traditionally regarded as the land lying between the River Tame and the River Avon in Warwickshire, the Arden landscape also extends into north Worcestershire to abut the Severn and Avon Vales. To the north and north-east it presents a steep escarpment to the open landscape of the Mease/Sence Lowlands. The eastern part abuts and surrounds Coventry, with the fringes of Warwick and Stratford-upon-Avon to the south. Of the area, 32% is urban and almost 5% is woodland. The predominant pattern is of high to very high levels of dispersed settlement with village-based settlement in valleys and to south-east, set in varied patterns of fields that reflect medieval woodland clearance, post-medieval enclosure of common and later variations in historic farm size.

Historic character

- A medium to high density of farmsteads in the landscape is due to high levels of dispersed settlement, with 12.4% of farmsteads in hamlets and 8.6% in villages.
- Large-scale farmsteads (38.2%) are predominant with a mix of scales in many areas also reflecting a strong degree of local variation in farm and field size.
- Small to medium-scale farmsteads, concentrated in areas of irregular enclosure, most commonly comprise loose courtyard and L-shaped layouts with working buildings up to three sides of the yard.
- Large regular courtyard groups including multi-yard and E-plans are concentrated in areas of reorganised, larger-scale fields where larger-scale mixed farms developed.
- There are some linear farmsteads in areas of smallholdings and adjacent to former extensive areas of rough commons.

Significance

- There is medium rate of survival, with high rates of loss (21%) around expanding towns, but over 56% of farmsteads recorded from late 19th-century maps retain more than half of their historic footprint.
- There are relatively high numbers of 18th-century and earlier farmhouses and working buildings, with the strongest survival being within landscapes of irregular (often medieval) enclosure. Across these landscapes are also large numbers of 18th-century and earlier houses which were associated with working farms.
- Some farmsteads have a diversity of timber-framed buildings including rare surviving examples of cattle housing and stables as

well as threshing barns of varied scales. Unconverted examples are very rare.

- Field barns and outfarms are now very rare.

Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a medium proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (34.1%, the national average being 32%).
- The Photo Image Project also recorded an above-average percentage (14.5%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.
- A low proportion of farmsteads are in agricultural use (26%), with two-thirds of farmsteads in residential use. There is a relatively high participation of farmsteads in residential use in small businesses (7% of farmsteads are company registered offices) and a high participation in substantial firms at director level (over 40 directorships per hundred households) and a relatively high proportion of farmsteads in non-residential use outside of agriculture (7%).

Historic development

- Arden was historically a wood pasture region of woodland on the loam and clay-based soils, and heaths on light soils, where dairying and stock farming has been more important than grain production. From the late 17th century the expanding urban population of the coalfields and Birmingham stimulated an increase in barley production, and strengthening of the dairy industry, including the export of cheese to London and Birmingham via the canal network. Significant areas of orchard were planted to provide produce to the Birmingham conurbation.
- Pastoral farming combined with dispersed settlement fostered the development of a prosperous and independent class of freeholders since the medieval period, reflected in high numbers of high-status moated sites of the 12th to 14th centuries, pre-18th-century farmstead architecture and gentry houses.
- Heathlands provided a focus for common-edge smallholding and, in part, the framework for the development of manorial deer parks in the medieval period, for example Paddington, Stoneleigh.
- This inherited pattern of rural development has in turn provided the framework for exurban development – including the conversion of farmsteads – into the rural Arden beyond the suburbs of Halesowen and south-west Birmingham, Redditch and Bromsgrove.
- Industrialisation of the Arrow Valley and Redditch in the 18th and 19th centuries was focused on the needle industry, making use of earlier, water-powered corn mills. Development of the coalfield in the north-east was linked to the coking and smelting industries.

Landscape and settlement

- The wood pasture economy of much of the Arden is still reflected in abundant tree and woodland cover, including mature hedgerow oaks.
- The predominant pattern of high to very high levels of dispersed settlement had developed by the 14th century, set within irregular-shaped fields cleared from woodland, particularly within sub-area 2 (see NCA map)

which had been a relatively sparsely populated area in the 11th century.

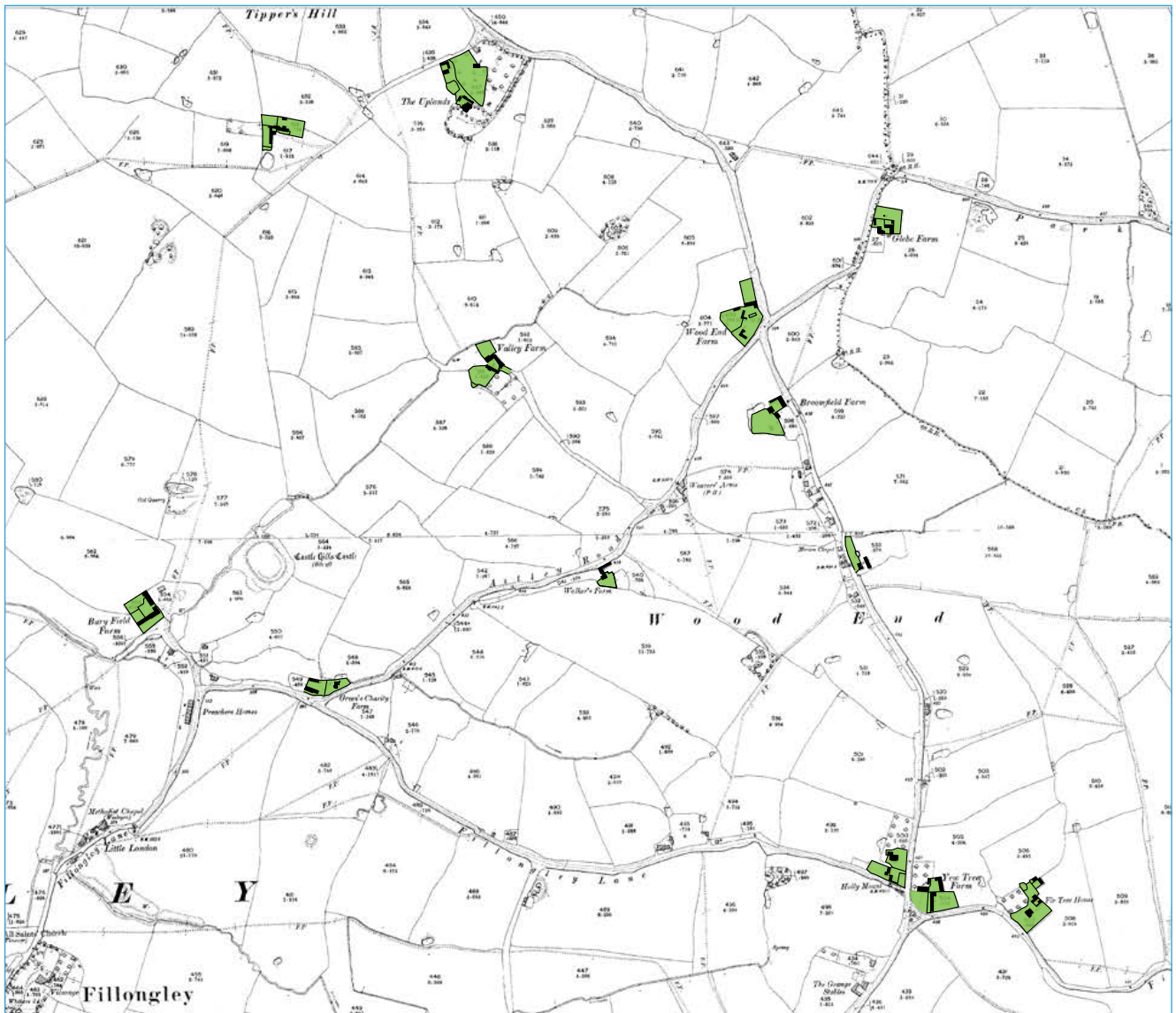
- In contrast, sub-area 3 in NCA map contains extensive evidence of Roman and earlier settlement and developed a more nucleated settlement pattern, concentrated in the river valleys, in the Saxon period. Some farmsteads moved out of the villages in association with the piecemeal enclosure of former open fields and common land from the 15th century. Many historic houses within the villages originated as farmhouses, changing their function as new steadings were built in the newly enclosed fields.
- Elsewhere, many existing settlement nuclei originated as markets in the medieval period (for example Tanworth in Arden) and expanded into their present form as service and residential centres over the 19th and 20th centuries.
- Across the Arden landscape, the present scale of fields and historic farmsteads reflects varied patterns of historic farm size and development:

- Some areas with high densities of dispersed settlement are dominated by small to medium-scale, irregular fields derived from medieval woodland clearance.
- The largest fields and farms in the broad river valleys and in the southern band are dominated by estates from Warwick to east of Birmingham.
- There are areas where the medieval pattern of dispersed settlement sits within enlarged fieldscapes dating from the reorganisation and growth of farms, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries – sometimes earlier. Large fields and fields with straight boundaries often sit in a broader framework of irregular boundaries and meandering lanes.
- Small to medium-scale, rectilinear fields were created by late 18th and 19th-century enclosure of heathland commons.

Farmstead and building types

Farmstead types

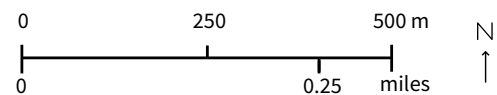
- Small to medium-scale farmsteads, concentrated in areas of irregular enclosure, most commonly comprise loose courtyard and L-shaped layouts with working buildings up to three sides of the yard.
- Large, regular courtyard groups, mostly regular E-, U-shaped and multi-yard plans, concentrated in areas of reorganised larger-scale fields where larger-scale mixed farms developed – particularly to the southern and eastern fringes.
- There are some linear farmsteads in areas of smallholdings and adjacent to former extensive areas of rough commons.
- There are some row plans in the north-west of the area.
- Dispersed plans are relatively rare but a small group of dispersed multi-yards exists to the south-west of Birmingham.



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.

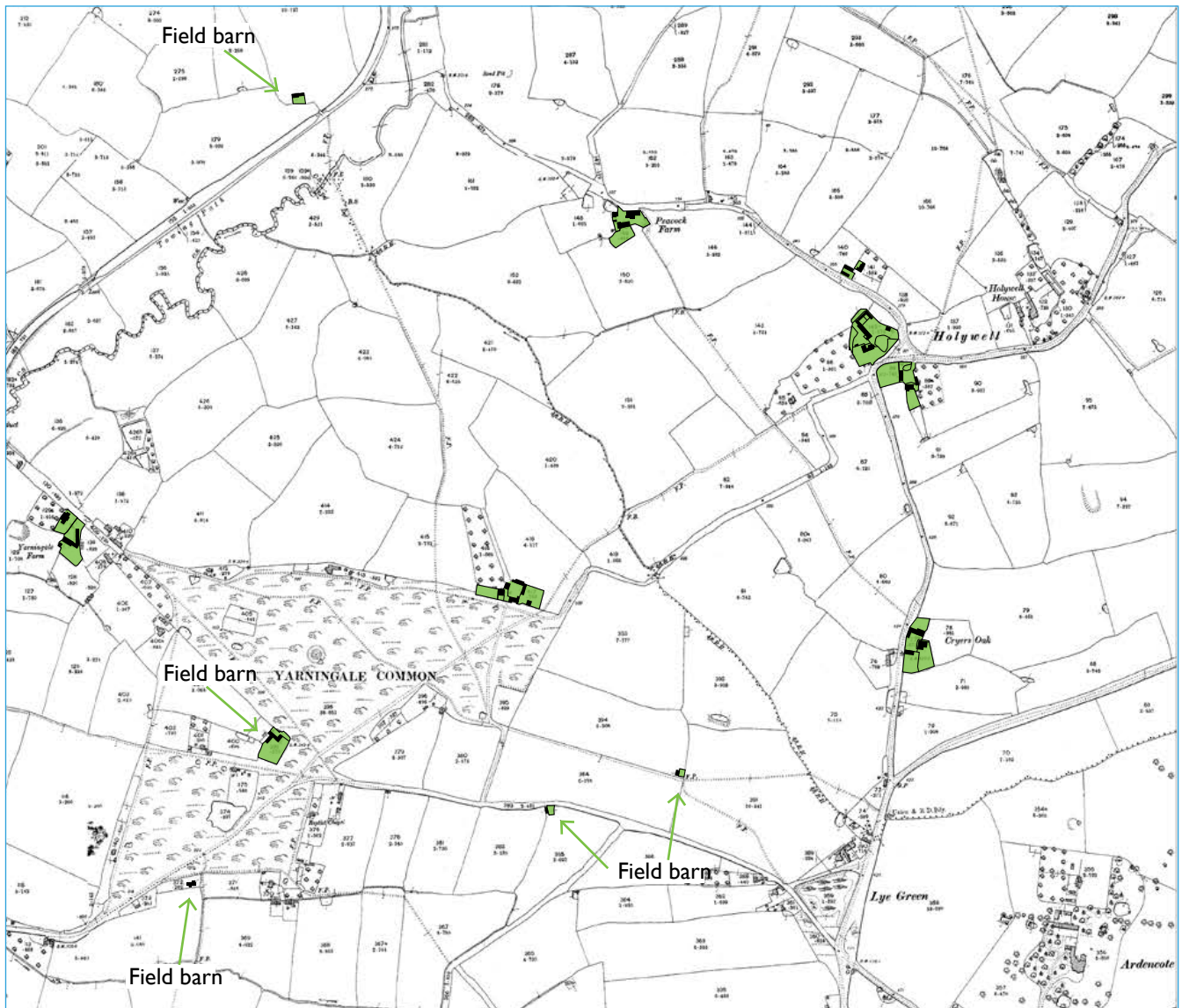


Fillongley

The core of the Arden is an area characterised by dispersed settlement; hamlets and isolated farmsteads sit within a landscape of small, irregular fields and linked by a network of lanes and paths. The fields within this area are largely the result of the clearance of woodland from the 14th century, although the larger fields on the western edge of the map were probably created when a medieval deer park associated with Castle Hills Castle was given over to farming. Many of the farmsteads in this area are of medieval origin, often retaining timber-framed farmhouses and barns of 16th- or 17th-century date, typically forming small, loose courtyard groups with working buildings to one or two sides of the yard.



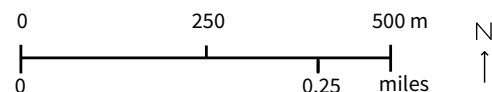
Photo © Bob Edwards



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



Yarningale Common

Within the landscapes of ancient, irregular enclosures, the Arden also contained areas of unenclosed common into the late 19th century. Some small areas, such as Lye Green, were the focus for settlement from the medieval period. Larger areas, such as Yarningale Common, were subject to gradual encroachment and partial enclosure; the east and south-east of the common has a series of semi-regular fields suggestive of enclosure by agreement whereas the small 'islands' of intakes and the narrow plots on the north and west edges are characteristic of squatter encroachments. The larger farms associated with the enclosure of the common tend to be small to medium-scale regular plan types as opposed to the loose courtyard plans found amongst the ancient enclosures. Additionally, field barns are found in some of the later enclosures whereas they are largely absent from the earlier, irregular fields, possibly reflecting fields that were associated with the older farms which had previously had common rights.

To the south-east of the area is a large house in a parkland setting. Such large houses appeared in the Arden in greater numbers from the late 17th century in tandem with the growth of Birmingham, the countryside attracting some of the wealthier industrialists who could take the opportunity to become landowners. The landowners around the expanding urban areas could supply the market, and profited from the growing population – a process made easier with the development of the canals.



This farmstead on the Wroxall Abbey estate, which belonged to Wroxall Priory in the medieval period, was rebuilt as a regular courtyard plan in about 1870. This followed a complete reorganisation of the landscape, with regular enclosures replacing the earlier pattern of irregular enclosures and dispersed medieval settlement. Note the large threshing barn and the cattle yard devoted to the production of manure to increase productivity. Photo © Historic England 29178/029



Farmsteads at Old Milverton, showing 17th- century and earlier origins to the fabric of houses and barns as well as the impact of early to mid- 19th- century rebuilding. Note how the houses and the 17th- century, timber-framed barn are aligned to the routeway, a typical feature of this area. Photo © Historic England 29416/053



Farmstead at Heath End, Snitterfield, rebuilt as a regular courtyard plan in the mid- 19th- century but relating to a medieval farming hamlet still surrounded by irregular enclosures. Note the cart shed to the left, facing into the routeway. Photo © Historic England 29415/051



A hamlet of three farmsteads located to the east of Birmingham, near the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal. Two of the farmsteads are detached from agriculture, one having little surviving farmstead character, whilst the other consists of a medieval house and barn. The third farmstead remains in agricultural use but its historic buildings have been totally replaced by large sheds. The small, irregular fields – some reflecting open field strips – have been swept away, creating large arable fields: a process which accelerated with the development of large farms, well-placed to export produce by canal and then rail in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Photo © Bob Edwards



A roadside farmstead in the core of the Arden. Much of the Arden is characterised by its network of lanes linking the dispersed farmsteads of the area. Hedgerows along these lands and many field boundaries are rich in species diversity. Photo © Bob Edwards



Roadside threshing barns to two farmsteads in residential use, with farmhouses of 17th-century and earlier date. Photo © Bob Edwards



It was common for farmhouses to be attached to the working buildings. This early 19th-century house has a stable and larger threshing barn in timber frame to the right, and cattle housing (in brick) attached to another threshing barn in timber frame on the left. Photo © Pete Gaskell



This group, close to the deserted settlement at Kinwarton in the south of the area, includes a single-storey animal house extending forwards from the barn. This arrangement is seen elsewhere in the Avon valley area, extending across the Severn Valley into the Teme Valley. Early animal housing is very rare. Photo © Jeremy Lake



The rear of a large timber-framed barn. Threshing barns typically had large threshing doors for winnowing the corn crop. As in other wood-pasture regions of England, it is probable that many barns combined animal housing. Investigation of buildings such as this will indicate whether they were subdivided into animal housing and lofts for their fodder. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Timber-framed threshing barns are commonly associated with timber-framed houses of the 17th century and earlier, which testify to the prosperity of farmers in this area. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Barns were commonly extended and refronted in brick, as in this example, converted to residential use in the suburbs of Birmingham. The window openings are not purely domestic: it was common for barns to be converted into housing for dairy cattle in the late 19th century. Photo © Jeremy Lake



An example of an early to mid 19th-century threshing barn, altered in order to ensure continued agricultural use in the later 20th century. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Large, multifunctional combination barns were commonly built in brick in the early to mid 19th century, and brought many functions together into a single building. This example includes a threshing barn flanked by a stable (right) and cattle housing at the lower end to the left. Photo © Jeremy Lake

Materials and detail

- Timber-framing was the dominant building form until the 17th century.
- Brick was increasingly used from 17th century and is now dominant.
- Some use of sandstone for walling and plinths, particularly in the north of the area.
- Plain clay tile and Welsh slate widely used for roofing.



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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/> For more on farmsteads in Worcestershire see the Worcestershire Farmsteads Guidance at www.worcestershire.gov.uk/archaeology/farmsteadsguidance

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