



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

# Herefordshire Plateau

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 101

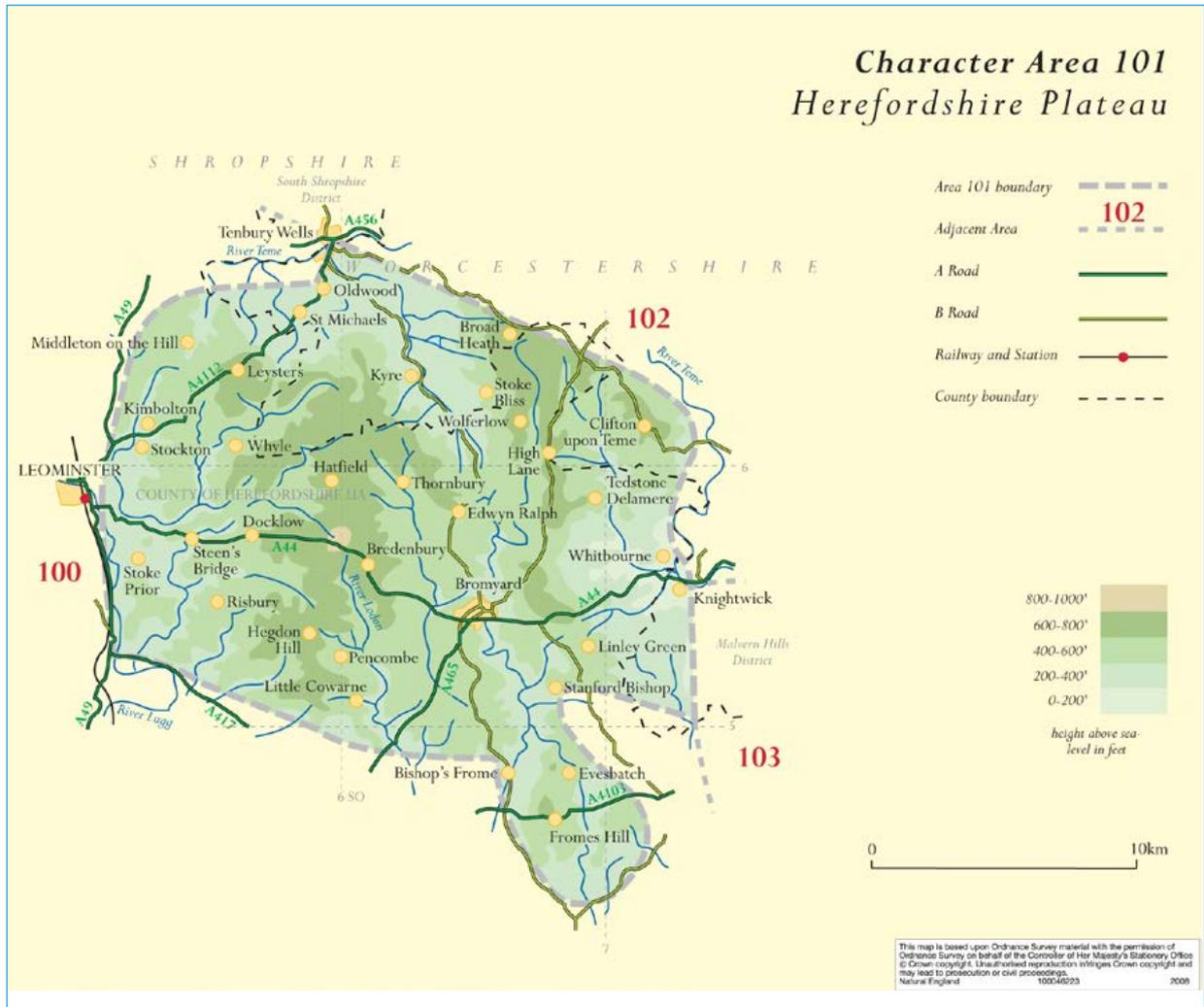


## Introduction

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>).

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**Front cover:** The landscape of the Plateau is more undulating than the Lowlands to the west and farmsteads were generally smaller in scale although substantial by regional standards. This group retains a 17th-century or earlier, timber-framed core, and was expanded and altered into its present form in the early to mid- 19th century. It is prominently sited in an area subject to piecemeal enclosure, reorganised in the 18th and 19th centuries with enlarged fields and straight boundaries. Photo © Jeremy Lake



This map shows the Herefordshire Plateau, 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.

The Herefordshire Plateau is a gently rolling plateau lying mostly within the county of Herefordshire, but also in Worcestershire to the north and east, with abrupt edges down to the Lugg, Teme and Frome river valleys. It is bordered by the Herefordshire Lowlands to the south and west, the Teme Valley to the north and east and the Malverns to the far south-east. Less than 1% of the Character Area is urban; 5% is woodland and less than 1% is within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

## Historic character

This is an area with generally large to medium-scale farms, smaller than the adjacent Herefordshire Lowlands. There is a medium density of farmsteads in the landscape, lower towards the Herefordshire Lowlands. There are high levels of dispersed settlement, with 6.4% of farmsteads in hamlets and 3.6% in villages. These are set within landscapes that generally reflect piecemeal enclosure and the resiting of farmsteads in isolated locations, reflected in:

- L- and U-shaped plans, often created through the linking of earlier buildings to enclose two or more sides of a yard
- the predominance of loose courtyard plans, usually with working buildings flanking two or three sides of the yard
- some larger-scale regular courtyard farmsteads, mostly to multi-yard plans,

but less common than in the larger-scale farmlands of the Herefordshire Lowlands to the south-west

- some distinct areas of common-edge settlement, including linear and dispersed cluster plans.
- There is a rich variety of building types, in particular:
  - timber-framed threshing barns, weatherboarded with wattle infill to upper panels
  - single-storey and two-storey cow houses
  - cider houses and hop kilns.

## Significance

- There are high to very high rates of survival of farmsteads, particularly to east, with 61% of those recorded from late 19th-century maps retaining more than half of their historic footprint.
- Some very rare early examples survive, of hop kilns, cider houses and cow houses, typically

timber-framed and often embedded with later rebuilding in brick.

- Rare examples survive, of early weatherboarding with wattle infill to upper panels of barn ranges.

- Field barns were a distinctive part of the landscape, and are now increasingly 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 (30.5%, the national average being 32%).
- The Photo Image Project also recorded an above-average percentage (15%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.
- Here, economic mass is amongst the lowest of any National Character Area in the West Midlands region and the proportion of farmsteads remaining in agricultural use amongst the highest, though the tendency to farmstead diversification has been stronger than generally found in the Region (numbers of holiday homes and caravans being above regional expectations).

## Historic development

- There is extensive evidence for prehistoric and Romano-British occupation.
- Historically, arable cultivation is concentrated in the Wye, Lugg and Frome river valleys, with mixed agriculture elsewhere.
- This area developed as part of the central Herefordshire plain, primarily as a corn–livestock region with the dominant cereal being wheat. Cattle, many of which were bought in, were fattened for the butcher and pigs were also an important part of the system, often living in the orchards.
- The topography and other factors sustained the survival of smaller farms to a greater extent than in the more open Herefordshire Plain, but farms are generally larger than in the Teme Valley to the east.
- Orchards were grown for cider making from at least the 14th century, and hop fields from the 18th century, typically planted on the valley floors and intermixed with arable.
- Extensive water meadow systems along the wide river valleys developed from the 17th century.

## Landscape and settlement

- The predominant pattern is of dispersed settlement, in part established by the 14th century but also resulting from the later abandonment and moving away of farmsteads from villages. Medieval manorial centres (for example, Edwyn Ralph and Leysters) are characterised by grouping of a motte, church and, later, a manor house.
- Surviving nucleated settlements had developed along river valleys and spring lines by the 13th century, Bromyard developing in this period as the major market centre of this area.
- The predominant patterns are of piecemeal enclosure, generally complete by 18th century, and since when there has been increasing boundary removal in arable areas, the slopes to the higher land being characterised by smaller fields subdivided principally for stock management. Very large, later 20th-century fields are a major feature to the south of the area.
- Some distinctive areas of smallholdings developed around areas of common land (for example, Bringsty Common and Bromyard Downs).

- Away from the valleys, woodland remnants survive as small, scattered blocks, and there are areas of small-scale irregular enclosure and small farms resulting from woodland clearance during the medieval period.
- Older orchards, once very extensive, are now found mainly to the west, at the edges of the hamlets and around the farm houses.
- Formerly extensive water meadow systems and hay meadows are now greatly reduced. Water meadows developed along the broad river valleys helped – alongside the production of clover and rotations using grasses – to boost cattle numbers and agricultural production. Underdrainage of the water meadows from the mid- 19th century was associated with the rebuilding of large farmsteads for yard- and stall-fed cattle.

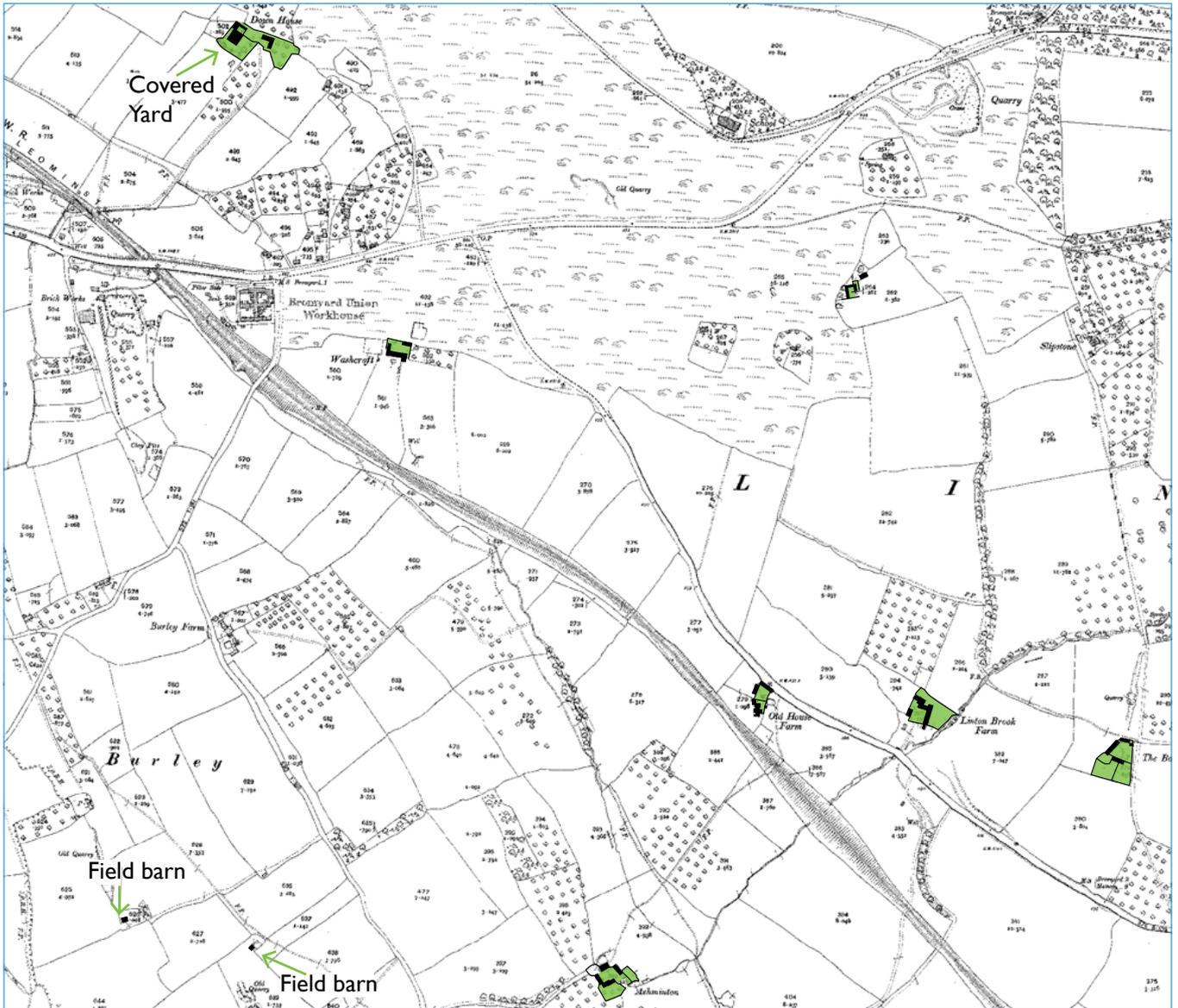
## Farmstead and building types

### Farmstead types

- There are small to medium-scale loose courtyard plans, usually with working buildings to two or three sides of the yard.
- Regular courtyard L- and U-plans are the most common regular farmstead types in this area. They are usually located away from settlements and associated with irregular fields or piecemeal enclosure.
- Courtyard farmsteads incorporating L-shaped ranges, most commonly with an additional working building to the third side of the yard.
- Regular multi-yards farmsteads – indicating larger farm enterprises geared around corn production and stock fattening – are often located within or around settlements with access to the rich grazing lands of the valleys, particularly to the south-west of the area, also east of Abberley.
- Some areas of smallholdings, such as Bringsty Common, retain linear farmsteads, dispersed clusters and L-plan (house attached) farmsteads which are otherwise rare.

### Building types

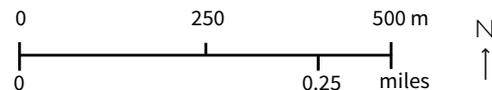
- There are substantial barns, often more than one to a farm and sometimes integrated into substantial combination ranges. Lean-tos for cattle, and open-fronted shelter sheds dating from the 18th century are common.
- There are rare surviving examples – shared with other areas along the Welsh border – of 18th-century or earlier single-storey and two-storey cow houses.
- Cider houses, distinguished by wide doors, are incorporated into 18th-century and later combination ranges which can include hop kilns – some of these buildings with earlier timber frame cores or re-casings in stone of earlier timber buildings. Hop kilns are a distinctive feature.
- Field barns were a distinctive part of the landscape, and are now increasingly rare. The cattle within them played a vital role in supplying manure to fertilise the orchards and hop yards within which they were situated. There are some examples of isolated threshing barns, which also served dispersed holdings, and outfarms for processing harvested corn and producing manure, which are concentrated in areas of large-scale, 19th-century improvement.



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.



### Bromyard Down

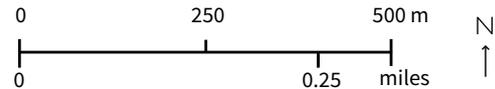
This extract shows the transition from the fields enclosed by agreement from former open fields – mostly covering the area to the south-west of the railway line and in the north-west corner – to surviving, open-common land of Bromyard Down. Some of the boundaries of the small to medium irregular enclosures reflect the curving lines of the medieval open strips and were probably created by the 17th century. The larger fields north-east of the railway and south-west of the line at the bottom of the map are also irregular but result from the enclosure by agreement of part of the common. The third phase of enclosure in this area is represented by small, irregular fields pushing out into the common, particularly in the area north-east of the workhouse, and is associated with squatters and smallholders who utilised the downs for pasturing animals.



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.



### Stoke Lacy

The dispersed character of settlement on the Herefordshire Plateau is clear in this extract; numerous isolated farmsteads and the hamlet of Stoke Cross are linked by a network of narrow lanes and paths with extensive orchards and small, irregular fields. These fields are the product of piecemeal enclosure of woodland, common and areas of open field. This process of enclosure was largely completed by the 18th century although small commons such as Crossfield Common to the south survived into the late 19th century. Subsequently, some of the fields were subject to reorganisation including enlargement and the straightening of boundaries – such as in the north-east corner. Farmsteads in this area are typically of loose courtyard origin, often having an L-plan element with timber-framed houses and barns of 16th-century or earlier date or stone-built barns of 18th- and 19th-century date.



Loose courtyard farmstead east of the church at Clifton on Teme, the early 17th century house forming one side of the yard. The buildings were re-clad and rebuilt in the mid 19th- century, and include a threshing barn, stables and cattle housing. The stables to the left comprise a rare survival dating from the 17th century. Photo © Historic England 29436/051



Many farmsteads in this area retain evidence for how they developed into their present form from the 17th century or earlier, with a mix of timber frame, brick and stone. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A very large threshing barn, built in the late 18th century as part of a large, L-shaped regular courtyard farmstead at the centre of a small estate. Photo © Bob Edwards



Former linear farmsteads are difficult to identify, as they often provided housing for no more than three cows. They are concentrated in areas of former and surviving common land, as here at Bromyard Common. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Intact groups of buildings serving smallholdings, as here at Bringsty Common, are very rare. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Barns were typically of five bays. This example displays the square-panel, timber framing found along the Welsh borders. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Barns were often built with stone gable ends and weatherboard timber to the storage bays. Photo © Bob Edwards



An example of storeyed cattle housing in weatherboard timber frame. The Plateau includes some very rare examples of 18th-century and earlier cattle housing, as found elsewhere along the Welsh borders. Photo © Bob Edwards



Large, multifunctional ranges, or combination barns, developed as a characteristic feature of this area. Most were built in the early to mid- 19th century, but many contain earlier cores. Photo © Bob Edwards

## Materials and detail

- There is a high concentration of timber-framed buildings, including a high proportion of 16th-century or earlier date.
- Weatherboarding is a common form of cladding for timber-framed buildings, particularly barns, and is often associated with tall, stone plinths and gable walls.
- Old Red Sandstone was increasingly used for traditional buildings from 18th century, and brick from the mid to late 18th century.



Single-storey cow houses, closely resembling those built along the Welsh border, are a characteristic feature. Some are 18th century and of great rarity in a regional and national context. Both of these examples have formerly open-fronted haylofts similar to lincays of south-west England and Wales. Photo ©Bob Edwards



A first-floor granary, marked by its external steps, above a ground-floor cider house marked by its wide doorway for taking barrels. Photo ©Bob Edwards



A large granary located above a four-bay cart shed, indicative of the importance of arable on this farm. Photo © Bob Edwards



**Pigsties and hop kilns** The Plateau was a landscape which offered a diversity of farming economies, including dairying. Pigs fed on the waste from dairying. Hop kilns are 19th century in date, but often adjoin earlier, timber-framed ranges. Photos © Bob Edwards and Jeremy Lake

**Right and below:** A large granary located above a four-bay cart shed, indicative of the importance of arable on this farm. Photo ©Bob Edwards





# 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 on farmsteads  
in Worcestershire see the Worcestershire  
Farmsteads Guidance at [www.worcestershire.  
gov.uk/archaeology/farmsteadsguidance](http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/archaeology/farmsteadsguidance)

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