



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

South Herefordshire and Over Severn

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 104



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: Large-scale farmsteads had developed across large parts of this area by the 18th century, as witnessed by fine Georgian houses (often with earlier timber or stone-walled cores) such the one that dominates this group. Photo © Sam Hale

Summary

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

This area lies in south Herefordshire and north-west Gloucestershire, and is bounded by Garway Hill to the west, the Woolhope Dome to the north-east and May Hill to the south. This undulating landscape is generally of good agricultural quality, though less so on the steeper slopes and higher ground. Less than 1% of the Character Area is urban, 11% is woodland and 2% is Less Favoured Area (LFA). Around 26% of the area falls within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Historic development

- There are high levels of dispersed settlement, with 4.2% of farmsteads in hamlets and 4.3% in villages.
- There is medium density of farmsteads in the landscape, lower in some of the broad valleys.
- Large-scale farmsteads are predominant (45%), with small to medium-scale farmsteads concentrated in the Garway Hill area.
- Loose courtyard plans are predominant across the Character Area, mostly with working buildings to two or three sides of the yard.
- Regular L-plan farmsteads are also common. Larger farmsteads usually developed as U-plan and full courtyard ranges, and also as L-plan ranges with additional working buildings to the third or fourth sides of the yard. The largest are concentrated in the Wye Valley, where regular multi-yard and E-plan farmsteads are found.
- There are some distinctive areas of smallholdings.
- Timber-framed threshing barns, typically of five bays or more, are often encased and enlarged in stone.

Significance

- The rates of survival of farmsteads are medium, with 60% of those recorded from late 19th-century maps retaining more than half of their historic footprint.
- There are some examples of multifunctional barns with integral cattle housing dating from the 18th century, possibly earlier, linked to estates.
- Most pre-19th century buildings in this area comprise threshing barns, examples of other farm building types being exceptionally rare and mostly confined to stables on high-status sites.
- Cattle housing can date from the 18th century or earlier.
- There are hop kilns and cider houses.

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 (22.7%, the national average being 32%).
- The Photo Image Project also recorded an above-average percentage (15.5%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.
- Historic farmsteads in this area have a highly distinctive pattern of use – the proportion remaining in agriculture being amongst the highest in the region (41%) – with greater tendency to farm diversification (numbers of holiday homes being well above regional expectation) while only 52% have been converted to residential use.

Historic development

- Some evidence exists for settlement in the prehistoric and Romano-British period, but is not as strong as in the lower-lying areas to the east and west
- Major market centres at Ross-on-Wye, Newent and Dymock developed from the medieval period.
- There is a high concentration of motte and bailey castles (late 11th- and 12th- century) and moated sites (mostly 13th- to 14th-century). Medieval manorial centres are characterised by grouping of a motte, church and, later, manor house (e.g. Peterstow), and parks developed as a feature of this area. Welsh influence is evident in place-names to the west, the Garway Hills area remaining part of the Welsh diocese of St David's until the 19th century.
- Hills to the south and west provided summer grazing for surrounding communities. Fertile soils have supported a prosperous and long history of mixed agriculture; pasture fields (particularly in the steep-sided valleys) now take a small proportion of a land cover that is dominated by intensive arable cultivation.
- Orchards were developed to an intensive scale of production from the late 17th century and were very extensive.
- A horticultural industry developed in the 19th century in the Leadon Vale around Dymock and Newent in the south-west of the area.
- Water meadows developed along the broad river valleys (particularly the Wye valley) 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, and the building of outfarms.

Landscape and settlement

- The predominant pattern of dispersed settlement intermixed with small villages mostly results from:
- 14th- to 17th- century movement away from small villages. Farmsteads were resited in association with the piecemeal enclosure of the open fields that had expanded over most of the farmed area and blocks of common land. The growth of large farms in the Wye Valley is reflected in the size of fields.
- The clearance of woodland (mostly before the 14th century), especially in the hillier land to the east and west of this area, led to a pattern of isolated farms and hamlets set within irregular-shaped fields interspersed with ancient woodland.

- Extensive evidence exists for medieval settlement and land use, in the form of shrunken villages, ridge and furrow and lynchets, especially in the Wye Valley.
- Church-manor groupings which have pre-11th-century origins are a distinctive feature of the settlement pattern.
- Older orchards, once very extensive, are now found mainly at the edges of settlements and farmsteads and to the north and east of the area.
- Ancient woodland is more abundant than in the Lowlands to the north and confined to steeper slopes.
- There are copses and shelterbelts that mostly date from the late 18th century throughout the Character Area.

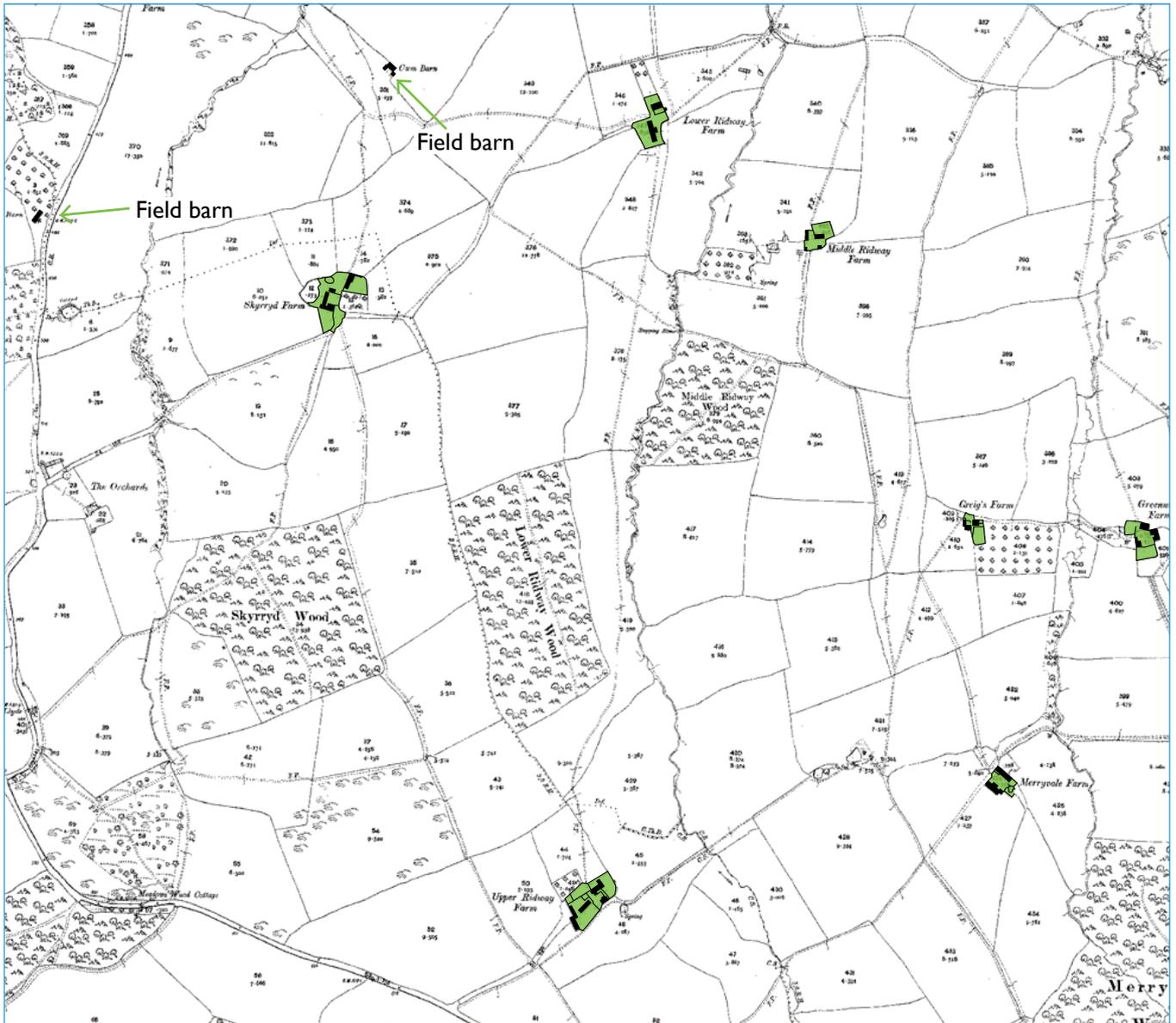
Farmstead and building types

Farmstead types

- Farmsteads were generally smaller in scale than in the Herefordshire Lowlands to the north, and this is reflected in the low numbers of large-scale regular courtyard farmsteads (multi-yard and E-shaped plans) which are concentrated in the Wye Valley. Houses were attached to their working buildings in a much higher proportion of farmsteads.
- Loose courtyard farmsteads – mostly with working buildings to two or three sides of the yard – are widely distributed across the area, and are often associated with smaller fields resulting from piecemeal enclosure and are also centred on the valley-bottom villages.
- There are significant numbers of regular L-plan steadings, mostly comprising attached barns or a barn and animal housing.
- L-shaped complexes (comprising two barns or a barn with attached cattle housing) are found, with additional buildings to the third or (rarely) fourth sides of the yard: the latter show a concentration extending from the Garway Hill area into the Golden Valley.
- Regular U-shaped plans are another distinctive feature, and reflect the development (more often in piecemeal than planned fashion) of barns and cattle housing around a single yard.

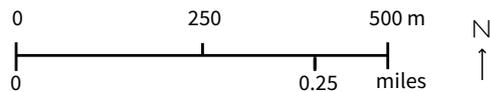
Building types

- Substantial barns are typically five-bays or more and often more than one to a farm in the Wye Valley area.
- Some combination barns have a corn-storage and threshing area on the upper floor with cattle housing and stabling below.
- Granaries typically form part of combination ranges or are associated with cider houses.
- Enclosed cow houses and open-fronted shelter sheds for cattle are either built against barns or as separate ranges dating from the 18th century.
- Some very rare surviving examples 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. Cider houses were often combined with accommodation for farm labourers on larger farms, and attached to the house.
- Hop kilns may form part of combination ranges – some having earlier, timber-framed cores – or built as separate structures.



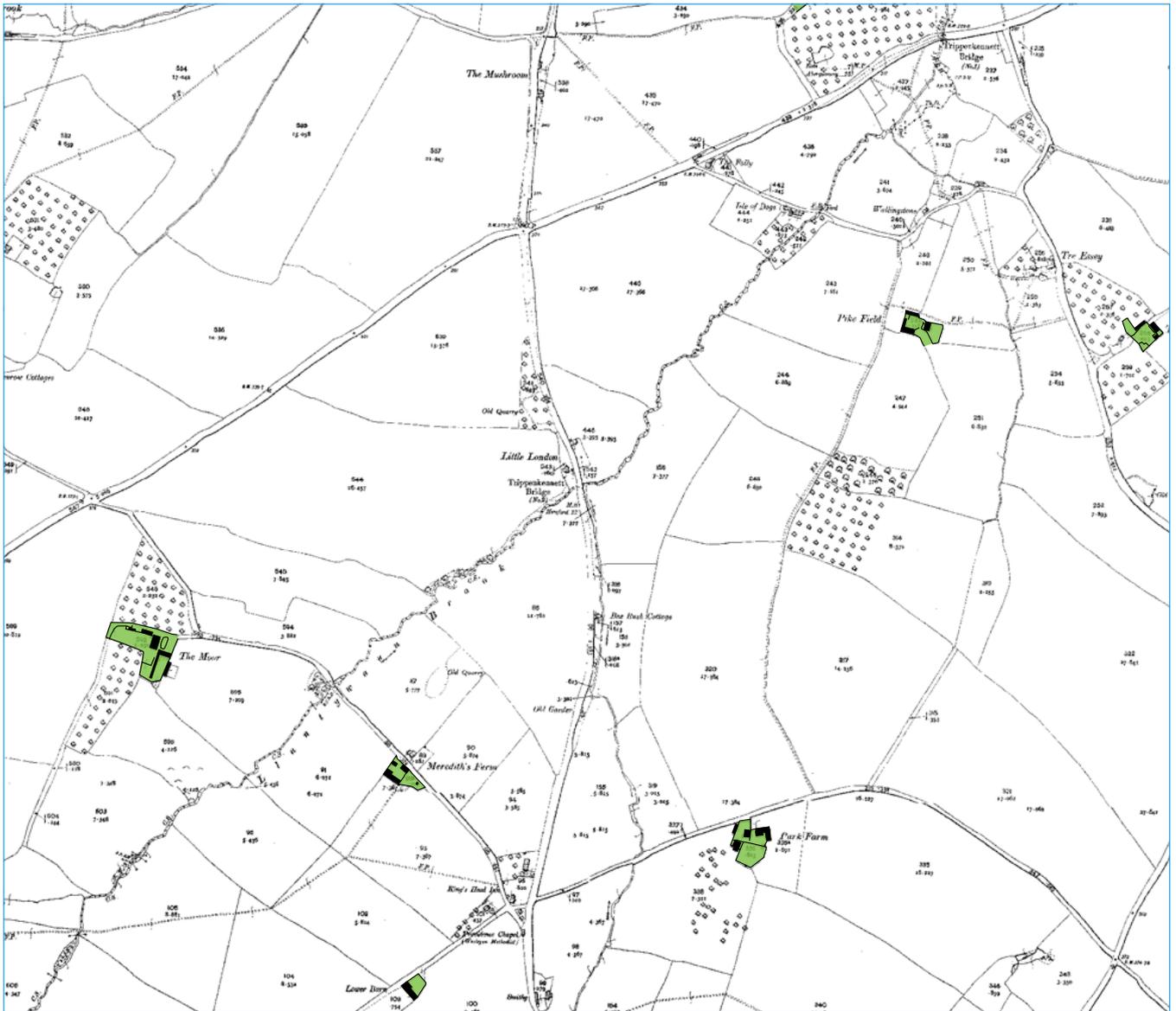
Maps are based on 2nd edition 25" Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England. © Crown Copyright [and database rights] 2020. OS 100024900

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



Llandowdy

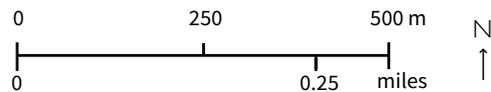
Dispersed settlement is predominant within this Character Area, the result of movement of farmsteads out of villages in the 14th to 17th centuries, during which time the former open fields and areas of common were subject to piecemeal enclosure, creating irregular fields. Within this extract, the fields to the south-west have the slightly curving boundaries that reflect the former strip fields but further north it appears that the fields have been subject to considerable reorganisation: here the removal of some boundaries created larger fields leaving pronounced kinks and turns where boundaries have been removed. Medium-sized farmsteads are typical of this area, with courtyard plans with an L-plan element and buildings to the third side of the yard being common.



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



Near Kilpeck

In the hillier parts of the Character Area, small, dispersed farmsteads set within a landscape of small to medium-scale, irregular fields were created through the clearance of woodland in the medieval period. Blocks of woodland and boundaries with mature trees survive from the former expanse of woodland. The farmsteads are typically of loose courtyard form with one or, more commonly, two buildings to the yard although some regular L-plan farmsteads are also found.



Linear farmsteads, such as this example of the early to mid- 19th century, are difficult to identify as almost all have passed into residential use. They are usually found along roads or around common land where smallholdings remained. Photo © Bob Edwards



Medium-scale, loose courtyard plans that developed over time are characteristic of the area. Photo © Sam Hale



An L-shaped farmstead group of the early to mid- 19th century, with a stable projecting from a threshing barn. Photo © Sam Hale



An L-shaped farmstead group, part of a larger complex with other detached buildings set around a yard, with additional lean-tos for housing cattle. Photo © Sam Hale



A regular courtyard group with barn, cattle housing and fodder stores that has developed from a loose courtyard origin. Photo © Sam Hale



A substantial, five-bay threshing barn characteristic of this area. Photo © Sam Hale



Combination barns are a characteristic feature of this area. This example has a stable and cart shed to one end. Photo © Sam Hale



Cattle housing was commonly provided in lean-to structures built against the sides of barns. Photo © Sam Hale



Cattle housing is often extensive, the building on the right being a wide-span building of a type developed in the High Farming years of the mid-19th century. Photo © Sam Hale



There are examples of bank barns with the threshing floor on the first floor, often marked only by a small winnowing door. This example on Garway Hill has a granary sited over cart sheds in the lean-to, and a stable to the right. Photo © Sam Hale



Farmsteads with a two-storey, timber-framed building with an attached single-storey range are a common feature, this form of structure extending eastwards into the southern part of the Severn and Avon Vales. These were absorbed into a regular L-plan by the mid-19th century. Photo © Bob Edwards



A large, late 19th-century, brick cow house range with hay loft over, its style reflecting an estate style of architecture. Photo © Sam Hale

Materials and detail

- Timber-framing is predominant until the 18th century for all but high-status houses and churches. Timber-framing, including cruck trusses, may be found in buildings later encased in stone
- Weatherboarding is a common form of cladding, particularly for barns, and in the western part of the region is often associated with tall, stone plinths and gable walls.
- Stone and brick, the latter concentrated in the Leadon Vale around Dymock and Newent, became the standard building materials from the 18th century.
- Limestone was often intermixed with Silurian sandstones, and a thin render coat and limewash was commonly applied to stone walling. This served as a protective layer over the often thickly-bedded mix of materials, and the friable sandstone.
- Gabled roofs are predominantly of Welsh slate but with some use of pantiles or stone slate.
- Stone-built barns of 18th- and 19th- century date often have date stones set in the gable, frequently associated with an owl hole.
- Larger farmhouses and gentry houses were built with distinctive hipped roofs from the later 17th century.



Outfarms served some of the more distant arable fields. This example is now in office use. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by Jeremy Lake with Bob Edwards.

First published by English Heritage 2013. This edition published by Historic England 2020.

Please refer to this document as:
Historic England 2020 Farmstead and Landscape Statement: South Herefordshire and Over Severn. Swindon: Historic England.

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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Product code: 52218 RRL code: 108/2020

Publication date: February 2020 © Historic England
Design: Historic England and Chantal Freeman, Diva Arts