Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

Forest of Dean and Lower Wye

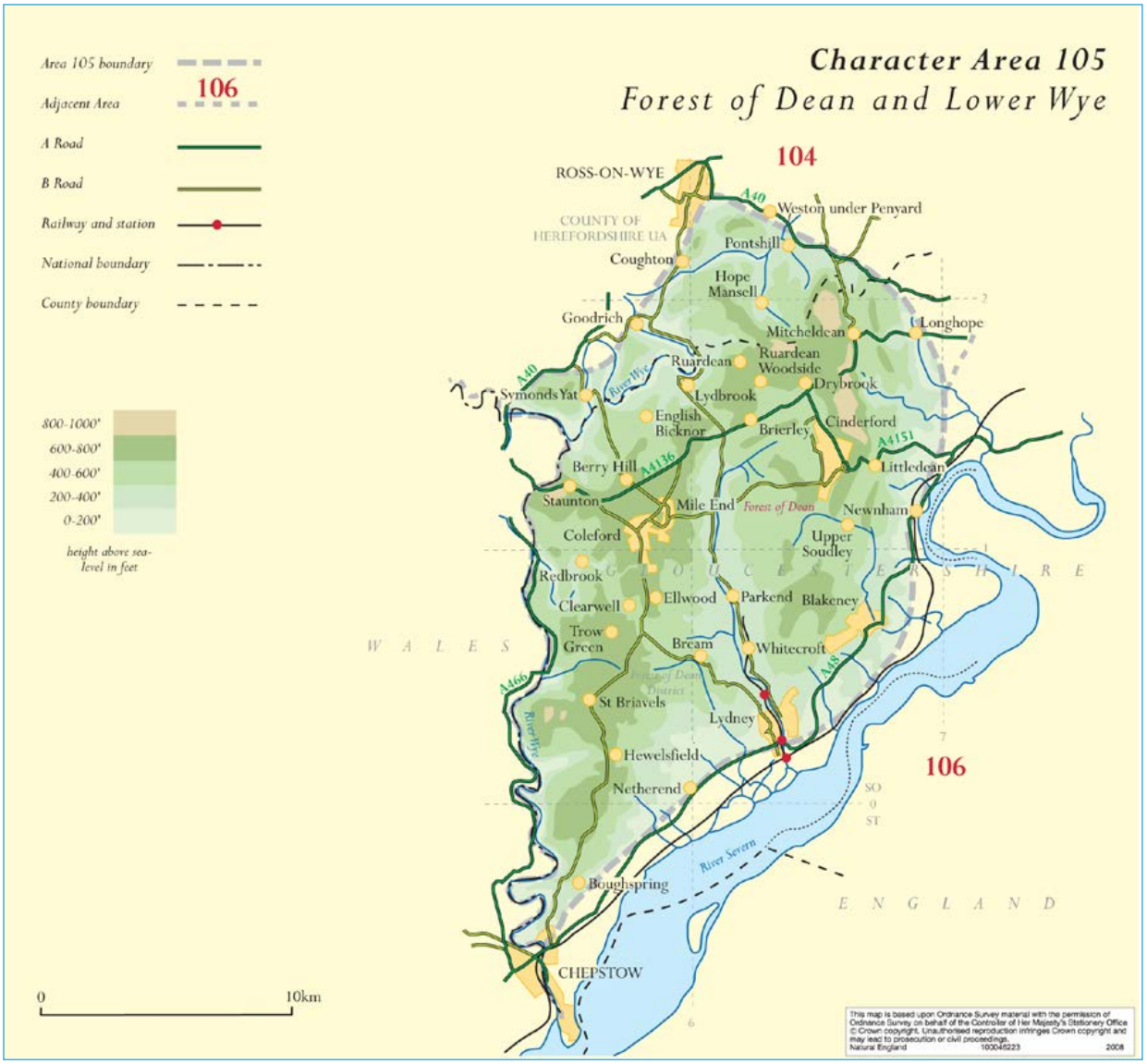
NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 105

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).

Above: Larger-scale farmsteads and fields developed, as here in this view looking towards Awre on the Severn, within a framework of medieval dispersed settlement and fields mostly enclosed by the 17th century. Photo © Historic England 29099/050

Front cover: Small-scale farmsteads and smallholdings at St Briavels. Photo © Historic England 29098/040



This map shows the Forest of Dean and Lower Wye, 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 Forest of Dean and Lower Wye Character Area is bounded by two rivers: the Severn and the Severn Estuary to the south and the Wye to the west. To the north lies the South Hertfordshire Plain whilst to the east are the Severn and Avon Vales. Just under 6% of the Character Area is urban, over 48% is cultivated and around 40% is wooded. Approximately 26% of the Character Area lies within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); 4% of land is designated as Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and 24% is common land.

Historic development

- The medium density of farmsteads in the landscape, lower to the plateau, reflects a strong pattern of dispersed settlement, with 2.1% of farmsteads in villages and 10.4% in hamlets.
- Large-scale farmsteads (45%) are predominant, with significant numbers of small to medium (24.7%) and very large-scale (20%) farmsteads. Loose courtyard plans are common, usually with working buildings to two or three sides of the yard. U-shaped plans are the most common form of regular courtyard plans.
- Smallholdings were a characteristic feature of the area.
- Relatively few examples of timber-framed threshing barns survive; most are stone or brick-built.
- There are split-level combination barns.
- There are cider houses.
- Lime kilns are related to iron ore smelting.

Significance

- The rate of survival of farmsteads is high within Herefordshire, with 61% of those recorded from late 19th- century maps retaining more than half of their historic footprint.

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 (20%, the national average being 32%).
- This area (within the Herefordshire part) shows a highly distinctive profile with a high proportion of farmsteads remaining in agricultural use (39%) and a (relatively) high level of conversion to non-residential uses outside of agriculture (including provision

of holiday homes, equestrian facilities and offices to a greater degree than typical of the region as a whole), and despite the relatively low proportion which is in residential use, there is high participation in directorship of substantial business (55 directorships per hundred farmsteads).

Historic development

- There is little evidence for extensive settlement in the prehistoric period.
- Iron was produced and exported via the Severn and the Wye from the late Iron Age and Romano-British period – charcoal from woods being used for smelting hearths and, from the early 17th century, blast furnaces. Production peaked in the 17th century: smelting ceasing in 1864, with minor ore extraction continuing to the end of the 19th century. Extensive remains include blowing houses. There are also remains of associated industries such as copper works (since the late 17th century), with others developing in the late 18th and 19th centuries, including tin plate, machine engineering, brick making, wire works and tanning (very little remains). Quarrying was also a very important local industry which continues today.
- Coal was worked from at least the Roman period, its small-scale excavation by a distinct body of 'free miners' who also worked smallholdings, resulting in a multitude of small pits, based on thin seams close to the surface. There was exploitation from deep pits in the late 19th to mid- 20th centuries (the last deep pit, Northern United, closed in 1965).
- Cistercian Abbeys both in and surrounding the area, at Tintern, Flaxley and Abbey Dore, have impacted on the Forest of Dean's development, notably through the exploitation of its ore and timber resources.
- There was a valuable timber industry, supplying charcoal, fuel, materials for shipbuilding, building construction and in later years for the coal industry (for example, pit props and support timbers).
- From at least the late 17th century, the agriculture of the area has been primarily characterised by dairying with some livestock rearing (notably sheep, with the privilege of free grazing in the statutory Forest), arable being concentrated on the free-draining soils of the plateau south of Coleford. There has been cider and perry-making since the 17th century, particularly prevalent in areas such as Blakeney (known for the Blakeney Red perry pear, grown from the 1600s). There are also plum orchards, especially at Blaisdon.

Landscape and settlement

- The predominant dispersed settlement pattern is evident by the late 11th century but, in contrast to areas to north, the levels of dispersal are low. Industrialisation has driven both the continued rate of dispersal in the medieval period and later – notably in the clusters of probably subsidiary common-edge settlement – and the formation of market centres (notably Coleford and Lydney) and other settlements.
- There are remnant medieval and earlier woodlands, indented by piecemeal assarting, with extensive later oak plantations (particularly for the ship building industry), and following the setting up of the Forestry Commission in 1919 (in 1924 it took over the management of the Forest from the Crown Office of Woods), coniferous woodland was planted to replace areas of poorer quality broadleaves and for a higher volume of timber production. Woodland retains extensive evidence for industrial management (coppicing and banks), and evidence for quarrying and extraction of coal and iron.
- The creation of a Royal Forest in the 13th century forced settlements to be restricted to the margins and around iron ore deposits. Much of the encroachment onto areas of

former Forest common by squatters occurred during the late 18th and early 19th centuries (for example, around Cinderford and Berry Hill, some of which have become small towns). At the same time, networks of lanes developed linking complex fields and dwellings in dispersed settlements such as St Briavels and Hewelsfield Commons where some medieval field boundaries survive. The wooded common of The Hudnalls – now a tract of small fields, narrow lanes, scattered houses and thick hedges, known for its wildflower meadows – was created by early assarting being grazed by cattle and sheep, by the 16th century.

- Holdings are generally small and field sizes variable, from small to medium, of medieval to 19th century date. Larger fields developed on arable-based plateaux where farms were typically larger.

Farmstead and building types

Farmstead types

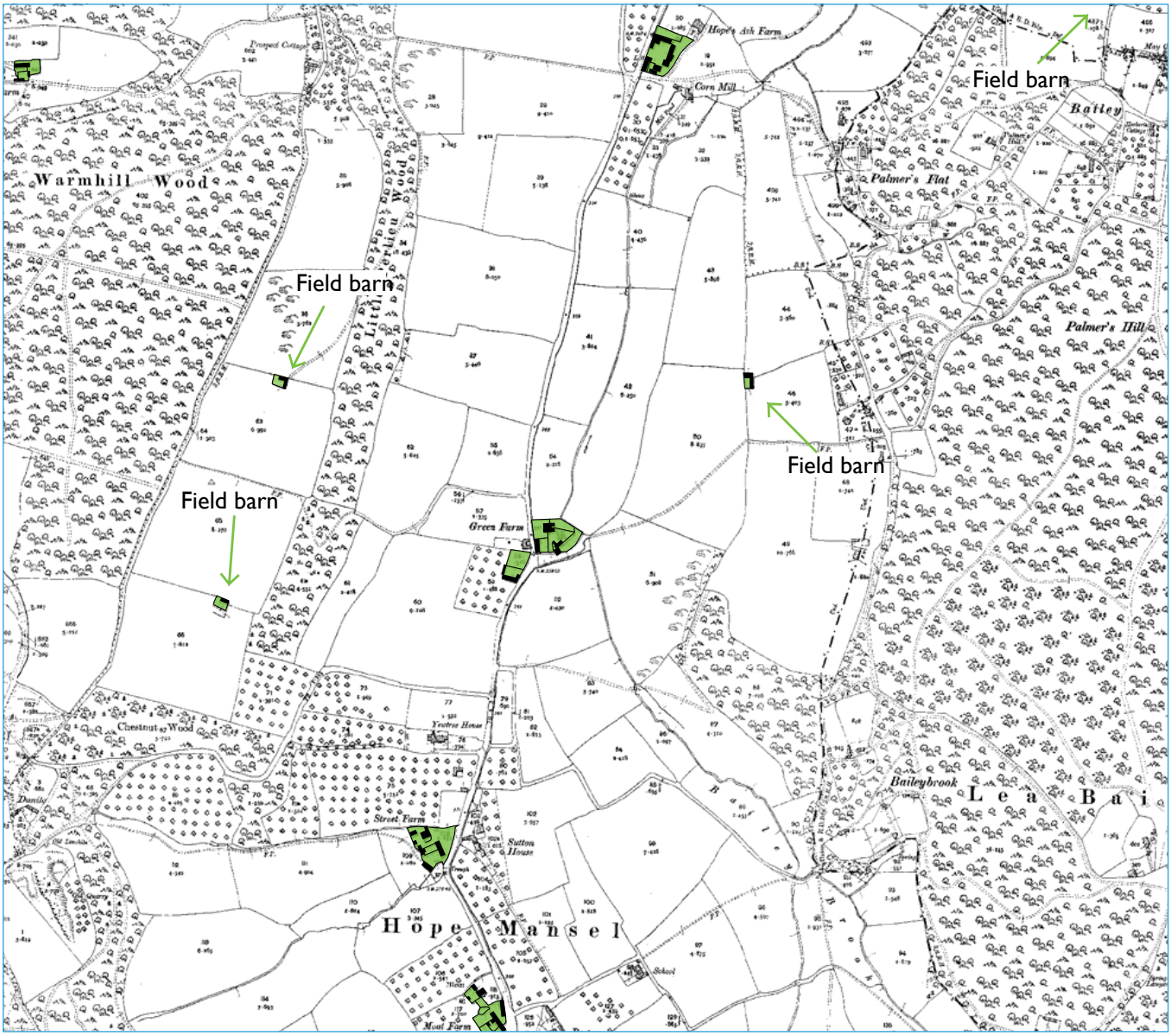
- The predominant pattern is of medium-scale loose courtyard and regular courtyard plans, with working buildings often to three sides of the yard. These can incorporate L-shaped ranges comprising a barn and attached animal housing, and U-shaped plans are a feature of landscapes subject to regular enclosure and reorganisation by estates.

Building types

- Late 17th- to early 19th- century threshing barns and shelter sheds to cattle yards are strongly characteristic.
- Split-level combination barns, with very small areas for storing and processing the corn crop, were most commonly associated with both dispersed/unplanned and courtyard groups of the mid- and later 19th century.
- Cider houses date from the18th century, distinguished by wide doors, and either built as separate buildings or incorporated into combination ranges. There are often cider houses to cellars of domestic houses.
- There is an abundance of lime kilns, lime being used to flux furnaces for smelting iron ore.

A regular L-plan farmstead typical of the smaller scale farmsteads in the Forest of Dean. Photo © Sam Hale

Farmsteads are often set against substantial blocks of woodland, but within fields that result from a centuries-long process of farm amalgamation and reorganisation. Photo © Sam Hale



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.

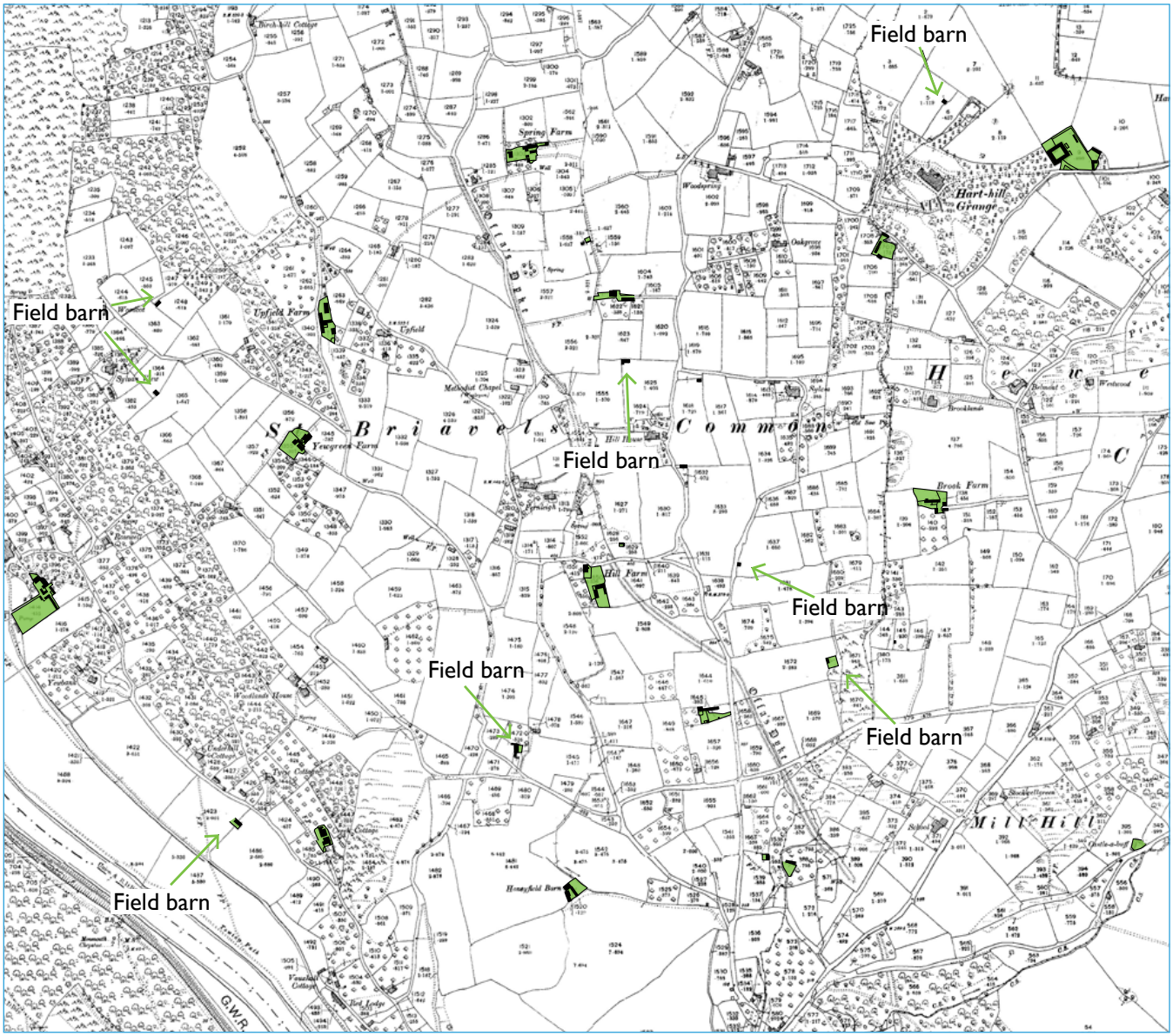
0 250 500 m

0 0.25 miles

N

Hope Mansel

Hope Mansell lies at the southern end of a long, narrow unit of land running along a valley bounded by woodland to both sides (the east side of Warmhill Wood to the west and roughly along the west edge of Lea Bailey to the east). Strung along the road that runs down the valley is a series of farmsteads with medium-sized irregular fields running along and up the sides of the valley, probably created through the clearance of woodland from the medieval period onwards. The farmsteads are generally small to medium-scale, loose courtyard plans (working buildings to one to three sides of the yard). At least some of these farms may be of medieval origin, as the presence of the moat at Moat Farm indicates. The presence of orchards to the north of Hope Mansel reflects the importance of the cider industry in the Forest of Dean from the 17th 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.

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N

St Briavels Common

St Briavels Common in the Forest of Dean is an area of former common land which, despite the small, irregular fields, was not enclosed until the 19th century. This area was subject to encroachment by squatters from the 17th century. Although attempts were made to prevent such encroachments, by the early 19th century many small farms and cottages had been built on the common, usually associated with small closes. Some of the new properties were farms typically with small-scale plan types including loose courtyards with buildings to one side of the yard and small, regular L-plans. Amongst the farming community on the common there was one large house set in a small, park-like setting with a regular courtyard farmstead and numerous small houses owned by cottagers who found employment in woodland industries, mining or quarrying.

There are some examples of linear farmsteads, as in this 18th-century group, sited next to roads and close to areas of former and surviving common land. Photo © Jeremy Lake

Five-bay barns are found across this area, where substantial corn-producing farms often developed. Photo © Jeremy Lake

The corner of a farmyard with a first-floor granary marked by the steps, and a threshing barn to the right. Photo © Sam Hale

A multifunctional combination barn of 18th-century date. Photo © Sam Hale

Another multifunctional barn with a wide doorway to a cider cellar on the right, this representing an 18th-century example of a combination barn on the home farm of a gentry estate. These formed models for farmers to develop in the following century.
Photo © Sam Hale

Cattle housing projecting from a multifunctional combination barn of early to mid- 19th-century date. Photo © Sam Hale

Another high-status example close to the River Severn, converted into cattle housing in the 19th century with the added brick gables.
Photo © Sam Hale

This combination barn is linked to a two-storey cow house with hayloft, facing into a yard on the other side. Photo © Sam Hale

Pigsty with monopitch roof. Pigsties were the most common type of building to remain on smallholdings, and were built in large numbers in this area in the 19th century. Photo © Sam Hale

Materials and detail

- There is low survival of timber frame, probably because of extensive rebuilding of domestic architecture in stone, from the 18th century.
- Buildings are of Old Red Sandstone and Drybrook and Tintern Sandstone, Carboniferous Limestone and quartz conglomerate. There is a wide range of materials, from the dull, pinkish grey to warm, pink-browns of the sandstones, and occasional grey limestones.
- Brick is combined with sandstone and some pebble dash.
- Roofing is of dark grey Welsh slate or dark brown pantiles, occasionally stone slate. A thin coat of render and limewash is commonly applied to stone walls.
- There are some distinctive gabled houses, as used in the Severn and Avon Vale (NCA 106), used from the late 17th century.

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/

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