



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

# Severn and Avon Vales

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 106

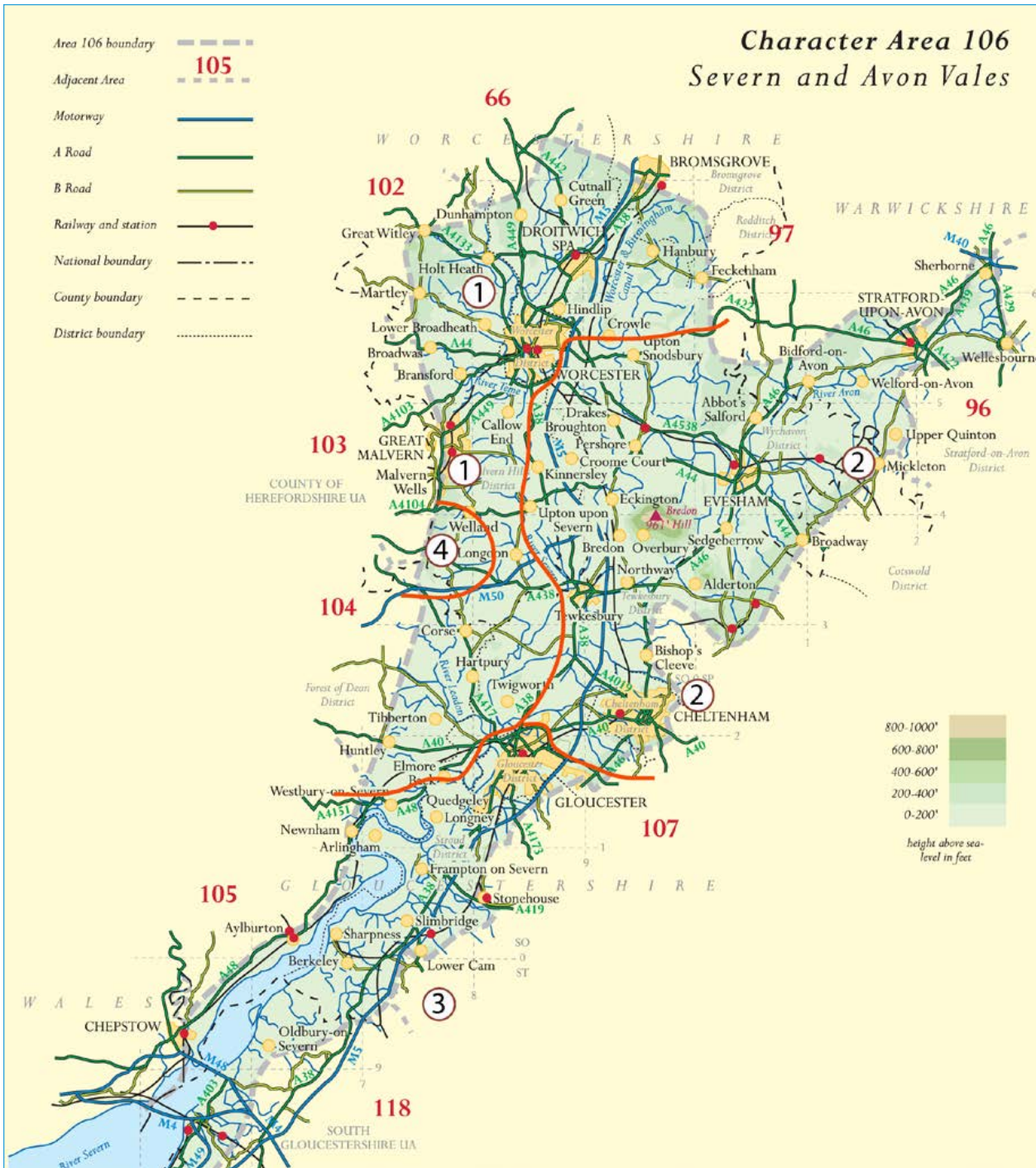


## Introduction

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:** Houses and farm buildings at Forthampton, dating from the 16th century, relate to the gradual enclosure of its open fields and the amalgamation of earlier plots. Photo © Historic England 29237/021



This map shows the Severn and Avon Vales, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it. Key sub-areas are:

1. **West of the Severn and north of Worcester**  
 Varied densities of isolated farmsteads relate to scattered woodlands and mixture of piecemeal and regular enclosure.
2. **East of the Severn**  
 Generally low densities of isolated farmsteads and little woodland, because in contrast the settlement pattern was village-based and large farmsteads developed within the villages, in association with the enclosure of the fields.
3. **Vales of Gloucester and Berkeley**  
 More of a mixed pattern of settlement and fieldscapes, its development closely linked to the Severn and the Cotswolds.
4. **Malvern Fringe**  
 High densities of small farms and smallholdings inter-mixed with large farmsteads, relating to use and enclosure of marshland and common.

# Summary

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

This Character Area encompasses the lower valleys of the River Severn and the River Avon, and is flanked by the Forest of Dean and the Malverns to the west and the Cotswolds to the east. It is a diverse, gently undulating landscape. Of the Character Area, 9% is urban, approximately 77% is cultivated and nearly 3% is wooded. Over 6% lies within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

## Historic development

- This is an area of strong contrasts with high to very high densities of dispersed settlement to the west and north, and strongly nucleated settlement to the south-east.
- Across the area there are medium to large-scale regular and loose courtyard farmsteads, often prominent in the landscape, which result from the development of larger farms. These larger-scale farms are the most likely to have remained in agriculture, and they are often associated with areas affected by 19th- century enclosure and reorganisation or enlargement of fields. There is also a strong underpinning element of smaller-scale farmsteads, mostly of loose courtyard and dispersed cluster type with (often localised) distributions of linear, L-plan (house attached) and dispersed cluster types.
- There are some cider houses and hop kilns, the latter concentrated to west.

## Significance

- Farmsteads Mapping (as part of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project) has shown that the rates of survival of historic farmsteads are medium in a regional context, with 64% of those recorded from late 19th-century maps retaining more than half of their historic form.
- There are some highly significant survivals of pre-19th-century farmstead buildings – mostly as timber-framed farm buildings (barns and more rarely animal housing) and farmhouses of 16th and 17th-century date. These are either isolated or sited on the edge of settlements, within which are notable survivals of timber-framed houses (dating from the 15th century) with no surviving farm buildings.
- Some very rare examples of timber-framed cow houses survive.
- There are field barns (for cattle as well as corn) and other buildings as well as threshing barns.

## Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a high proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (36.5%, the national average being 32%).

- The Photo Image Project also recorded an above-average percentage (10.1%, the national average being 7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.
- Although the proportion of farmsteads converted to residential use (66%) is little

higher than the regional average, participation of residents in business activity (whether farm based or as directors of substantial companies) is relatively high – with particularly high levels of engagement at farmsteads easily accessible to substantial urban areas.

## Historic development

- The transitional nature of this area is strongly reflected in its contrasting patterns of landscape, architecture and settlement.
- There is extensive evidence for later prehistoric settlement, including major woodland clearance and dispersed farmsteads (round houses visible as crop marks) in the first millennium BC.
- Urban centres developed across this area in the Roman and Saxon periods (Worcester, Gloucester, Pershore, Evesham and Winchcombe), followed by the foundation of a royal estate centre at Berkeley Castle and abbeys at Tewkesbury (1087) and Gloucester (1089). Evesham and later Stratford-upon-Avon developed as planned towns in the 12th and early 13th centuries, by the Abbots of Evesham and Bishop of Worcester. Cheltenham experienced strong growth as a spa town from 1830s.
- Rivers were vital routes for communication and commerce. Weirs, fish traps and tidal mills (for example, at Tewkesbury) testify to the Severn’s importance to the area’s economy. Local industries and urban growth of Gloucester and Worcester were stimulated by the opening of canals from the late 18th century.
- The fattening of cattle and sheep combined with the growing of corn was a major part of the area’s economy, arable being mostly concentrated on the heavy but fertile soils of the Lias Clay landscapes to the east. There are also from at least the 17th century, fruit orchards, particularly for cider and perry.
- Railways and access to expanding urban markets contributed to the intensification of horticulture and growth of smallholdings, particularly on the gravel terraces of the Vale of Evesham, upper Avon and Leadon Valley.

## Landscape and settlement

This is a contrasting area, with high to very high densities of dispersed settlement to the west and north, and strongly nucleated settlement to the south-east.

### West of the Severn and north of Worcester

- To the west, the predominant settlement pattern of high to very high levels of dispersed had developed by the 14th century, there being few nucleated villages.
- Moated sites are common.
- Extensive areas of common, and settlements with ‘green’ names in common-edge locations are indicative of continuing woodland

clearance and subsidiary settlement after this period.

- The present enclosure patterns, generally small to medium-scale and irregular, derive from the piecemeal enclosure of medieval common fields, fields cleared from woodland in the medieval period, common land and common arable.

## East of the Severn

- The area to the east is dominated by village-based settlement with many isolated farmsteads sited within the planned and piecemeal enclosure of formerly extensive open fields. There are some areas of earlier dispersed settlement: medieval moated sites, farmsteads and hamlets standing on shrunken medieval settlements.
- Many historic houses within the villages originated as farmhouses, changing their function as new steadings were built in the newly enclosed fields.
- Older, isolated farmsteads are concentrated in areas of medieval woodland clearance along the edge of the Cotswolds scarp slope and other hilly areas (for example, Bredon Hill, Dumbleton Hill and Robinswood Hill).
- There are significant levels of 20th-century field amalgamation, creating large arable fields.
- Horticultural industry in Vale of Evesham has resulted in farmed strips interspersed with orchards, and the County Council fostered development of smallholdings from the 1890s.
- Ridge and furrow and village earthworks (For example, Weston-sub-Edge) – especially close to the Cotswolds scarp where pastoral farming has been dominant since the 14th century – reflect the medieval dominance of open-field arable cultivation and nucleated settlement

## Vales of Gloucester and Berkeley

- This is an area with a mix of village-based settlement, with few isolated farmsteads set within large-scale fields enclosed from open fields, and areas of ancient dispersed settlement and irregular enclosed fields intermixed with woodland, resulting from the clearance from woodland and drainage of land around the Severn.

- Drainage in the Vale of Berkeley along the Severn between Bristol and Gloucester, enabled by channels and rhines, was linked to land reclaimed in the Roman period and in the 12th and 13th centuries.
- The smaller size of fields in many parts – in contrast to the areas east of the Severn further north – reflects a long history of pastoral farming. The Vales of Gloucester and Berkeley provided rich pastures for cattle and for overwintering sheep brought down from the Cotswolds.
- Cheese production was a major industry by the 18th century, combined with fattening of pigs on whey. On heavier soils, Fuller's teazle was grown for the cloth industry, which developed on an industrial scale around Stroud by the early 19th century.

## Malvern Fringe

- This area is distinguished by a high density of smallholdings and small farms intermixed with large farmsteads set in landscape of large-scale, reorganised piecemeal and regular enclosure.
- Malvern Forest and Chase is an area from the River Teme to the River Severn, and from Corse Lawn to the Malvern Hilltops that was placed under Forest Law by William I in 1083. This land remained mostly untouched until 1631 when it was disafforested and sold by Charles I, resulting in new farmsteads around medieval settlements such as Moreton Folliott (Castlemorton), Birtsmorton, Berrow and Longdon.
- Smallholdings developed around extensive areas of common, such as Castlemorton, Hollybed and Coombegreen.
- Farmsteads are sited around Longdon Marsh, which was not drained until the late 18th century.

# Farmstead and building types

Small to medium-scale (27.4%) and larger-scale (33.9%) farmsteads are predominant, interspersed with significant numbers of very small (16.4%) and very large-scale (20.8%) farmsteads.

## Farmstead types

- Across the area there are medium to large-scale regular and loose courtyard farmsteads, often prominent in the landscape, which result from the development of larger farms. These larger-scale farms are the most likely to have remained in agriculture. There is also a strong underpinning element of smaller-scale farmsteads, mostly of loose courtyard and dispersed cluster type with (often localised) distributions of linear, L-plan (house attached) and dispersed cluster types.
- Loose courtyard farmsteads are a significant feature across the area. They mostly have working buildings to two sides of the yard, with lower and broadly equal numbers with buildings to one or three sides of the yard.
- Significant numbers of regular L-plans and medium to large-scale farmsteads incorporate L-shaped ranges (mostly a barn and attached animal housing) with an additional building to the third side of the yard.
- Loose courtyard and L-plan steadings with additional detached buildings to all four sides of the yard are less common, but they form part of the dominant pattern of medium to large-scale farmsteads across the lowlands of the south-eastern West Midlands and extending into the East Midlands.
- Medium to large-scale regular courtyard plans are dominated in turn by multi-yard, U-shaped and full courtyard plans. These are concentrated in areas of regular enclosure and piecemeal enclosure reorganised in the 18th and 19th centuries.

## Building types

- Large farmstead groups across the area have large houses and barns, stables and shelter sheds to yards that reflect the growth of prosperous farms from the 15th century.
- Some barns are of medieval (mostly ecclesiastical) estates with notable concentrations along the Cotswolds Fringe where these estates were active in the clearance of woodland in the 12th and 13th centuries.
- Barns are typically of three to five bays, some to the west of the area with integral cow houses.
- Cider houses, often integrated into combination ranges, are most commonly 19th century, earlier survivals being rare. Some malt houses survive, again attached to other buildings or the farmhouse.
- Hop kilns are found predominantly to the north-west and west of Worcester.
- Field barns for cattle developed within the orchards, in order to enrich them with manure, and there are some very rare surviving examples.
- There are some isolated threshing barns - some of 18th-century or earlier date, and timber-framed.
- Large outfarms developed as a distinctive feature of landscape where farmsteads working large holdings remained within the villages, especially to the east (for example, around Bredon Hill) and in areas of market gardening (for example, Pershore).
- Field barns are associated with areas of market gardening – clusters of small, individual

buildings (often in groups of two or three).  
There was a marked increase at the end of the

19th century, followed by significant loss since  
the late 20th century.

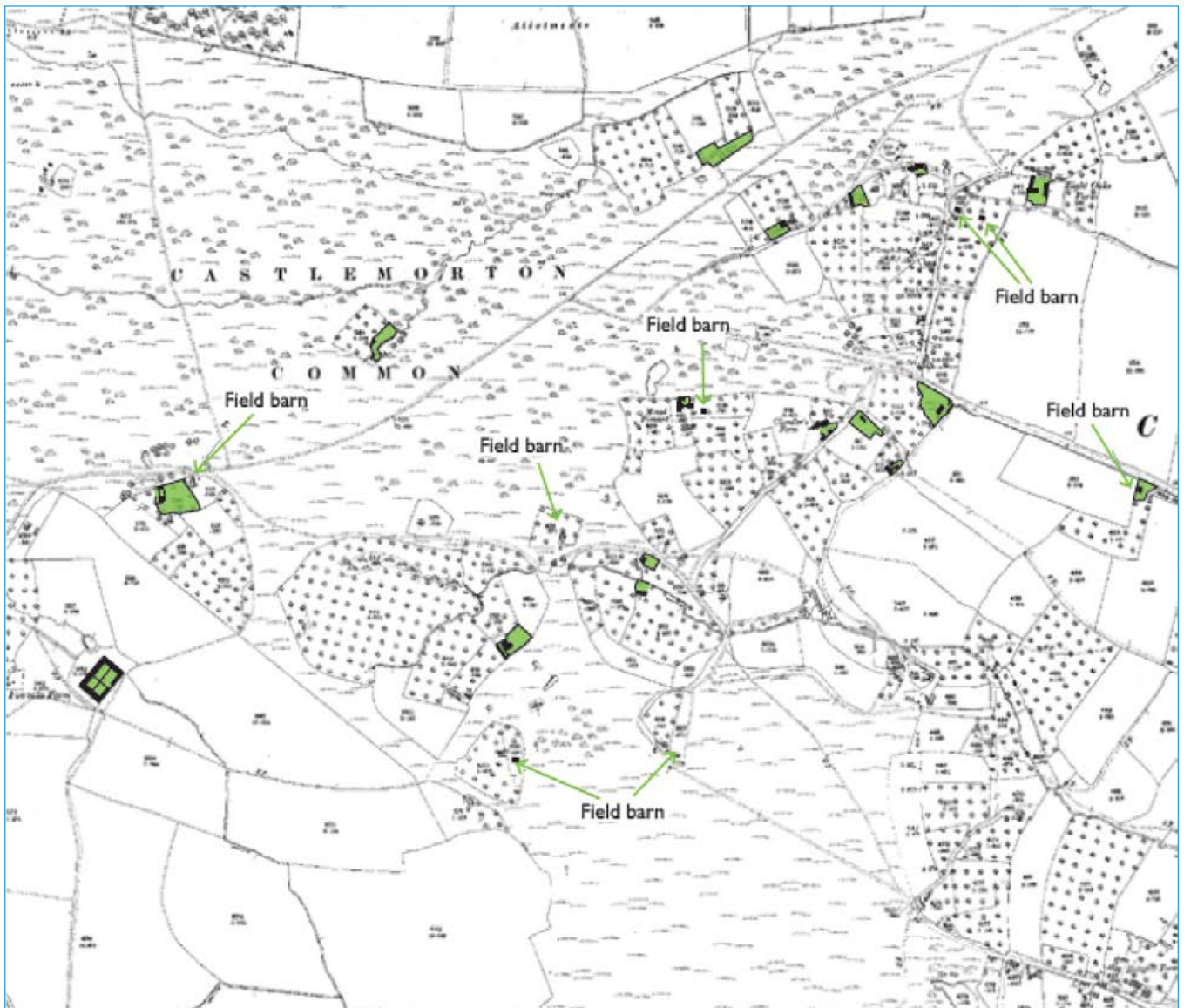


This type of small-scale, loose courtyard layout is common in this area. Note the timber-framed barn, the early to mid-19th-century cattle yard to the right and the house which probably dates from the late medieval period. Photo © Historic England 29238/022



Large-scale farmsteads often developed around earlier houses, which testifies to the emergence of large farms between the 15th and 17th centuries, often intermixed with small-scale farmsteads. The regular courtyard U-plan here dates from the mid-19th century, the image showing a granary for storing grain and mixing feed above a cart shed range with stables to the left and a polygonal horse-engine house attached to the threshing barn to the right. Photo © Historic England 29237/041

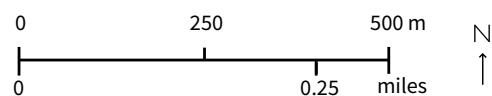




Maps are based on 2nd edition 25" Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England. © Crown Copyright [and database rights] 2020. OS 100024900



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



## Malvern Fringe

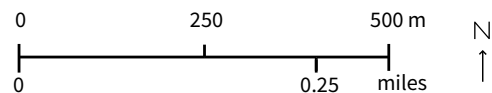
The open common as at Castlemorton, at the foothills of the Malverns, was part of an area that remained under Forest Law until the 17th century. Fringing the common were very small farms and smallholdings set in medium-sized, irregular fields, some of which may be of medieval origin. The curved boundaries of the fields to the south-east suggest the presence of medieval strip fields farmed from a linear string of settlement. The availability of common grazing and employment in nearby quarries resulted in the development of small farmsteads and small holdings encroaching on the fringes of the common, and sometimes the creation of small 'islands' of fields within the common. The farmsteads associated with this phase of settlement are typically small; often loose courtyards with one or two working buildings or regular L-plans, but in almost all cases the buildings themselves are also small in scale. The few field barns that have been recorded here are usually associated with the orchards and were probably fruit stores. In striking contrast the large regular plan steading of Fairoaks Farm is set in large fields resulting from the 19th-century reorganisation of earlier piecemeal enclosure from the common.



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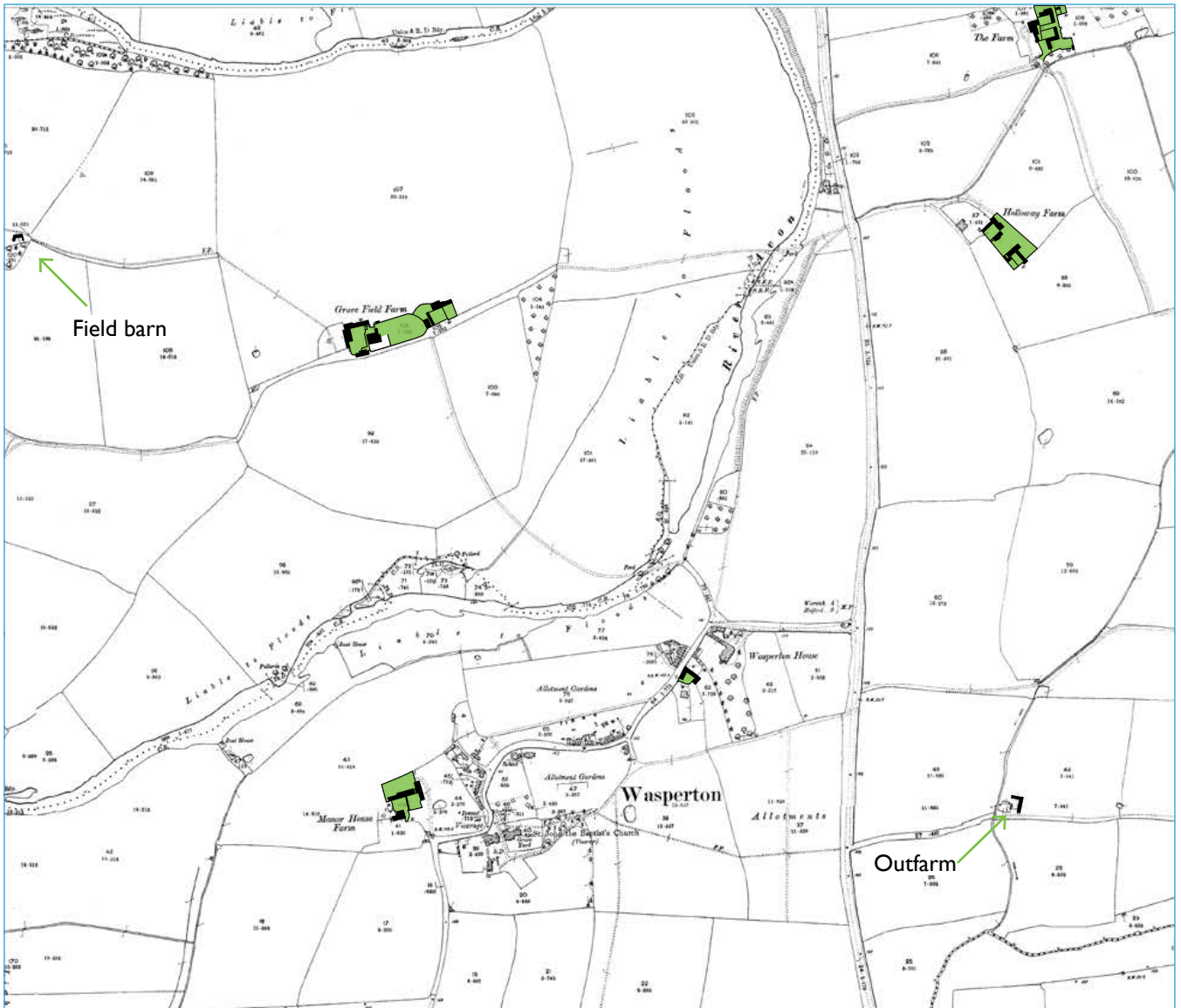


Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



## Hanbury Vale

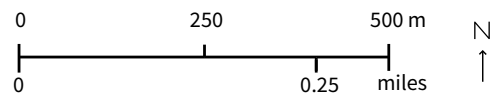
West of the River Severn settlement was predominantly nucleated although the villages were intermixed with considerable numbers of dispersed farmsteads. Of the four farms in this extract, three retain evidence for 17th-century buildings. These medium-scale farmsteads are set within a landscape of generally medium-scale fields although there is a marked difference between the fields north of the stream compared to those to the south which are larger, as is the regular multi-yard farmstead at Hollowfields Farm. Both sets of fields appear to be the result of piecemeal enclosure, probably enclosure of former open fields, clearly a process that was largely complete by the 17th century. The fields to the north also contain a number a field barns, a feature that is absent from the fields to the south, perhaps reflecting a greater inter-mixture of land holdings in contrast to the reorganisation of the landscape evident to the south.



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



## Avon Valley

To the east of the River Severn settlement is a mixture of nucleated villages intermixed with dispersed farmsteads. Here, in the valley of the River Avon, the village and farmsteads are sited on the gravel terraces above the flood plain which have been intensively farmed from the Iron Age. East and south of the river the curving field boundaries hint at the former presence of medieval open field strips, enclosed from the 17th century, by agreement. Two large farmsteads remained in the village after enclosure, both high status farms; Manor Farm retains a medieval house. The isolated farms probably moved out of the village at the time of, or soon after, the enclosure of the open fields. These farmsteads developed into multi-yard plans, reflecting the importance of stock fattening alongside arable to the agricultural economy of this area, with buildings dating from the 18th century or later. Map based on OS 2nd Edition 25" map © and database right Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Ltd (All rights reserved 2005) Licence numbers 000394 and TP0024



Large-scale courtyard farms developed between the 15th and 17th centuries in the Avon Valley, as here at Wilmcote. Shown to the right are the 18th- to 19th-century buildings at Glebe Farm where a mid-17th-century dairy was added to the early 16th-century house which is documented in 1587 as occupied by Agnes Arden – the stepmother of John Shakespeare, William Shakespeare’s father. The high status of Palmer’s Farm to the left – named after the prosperous yeoman Adam Palmer, who died in 1584 – is marked by the a 16th-century dovescote, and the plan form of the house with its hall range, parlour wing and dairy (built in phases between c 1569 and 1581). The buildings around the yard now form a regular courtyard arrangement, and although they were mostly rebuilt in the later 18th and 19th centuries they include a refaced earlier timber-framed barn. Photo © Historic England 29448/047



Large farmsteads often developed from the 14th century, close to the sites of farming settlements. This site near Worcester has a house, stable and large barn dating from the 17th century or earlier, reflecting changes still observable in the settlement change and piecemeal enclosure of the surrounding landscape. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A loose courtyard group built of Lias limestone in the south-east of the area. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A defining characteristic of this area is the loose courtyard groups with working buildings to three or more sides of the yard. Those with timber-framed barns (typically of five bays) and other buildings (principally stabling and cattle housing) had developed into their present form by the 18th century. Buildings in brick and stone were later added, but where they survive, these groupings are distinctive and significant for their early date. Photo © Bob Edwards



Dairy farms are a strong characteristic of the Vale of Gloucester and Berkeley, this group having a five-bay threshing barn to one side and a cow house and dairy attached to the right. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Many estates developed within this area, and were responsible for the rebuilding of large, regular courtyard farmsteads within landscapes newly enclosed from common land or reorganised out of earlier farmland. Photo © Bob Edwards



Many L-shaped groups developed into larger steadings with working buildings to additional sides of the yard: these are a distinctive characteristic of the arable vales across the south of the West Midlands. This group built in limestone, to the east of the area, relates to a 17th-century house sited in land enclosed by this period. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Some medium to large-scale groups, such as this storeyed, L-shaped farmstead, developed close to common land. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Linear farmsteads are hard to identify, and most had by the 20th century been converted to solely residential use. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Smallholdings developed around the extensive heaths and commons west of the Severn in particular, but few remained in the late 19th century or are legible today. Castlemorton Common, close to the Malverns, is one such area. Photo © Bob Edwards



The largest cruck barns, such as this example in the Vale of Gloucester, are the most likely to have survived rebuilding by larger capacity barns in timber-frame from the 16th century. Photo © Jeremy Lake

Large-scale, timber-framed barns testify to the development of large, arable-based farms across much of this area, often alongside and intermingled with a wide variety of farmstead types and scales. This example was converted into cattle housing and reroofed in corrugated iron in the early 20th century. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Five-bay threshing barns are a typical feature of this area. This early to mid- 19th century example retains the heavy doors to the threshing floor. Photo © Bob Edwards

Many barns were built in combination with shelter sheds for cattle or cart sheds, making an L-plan in the corner of the yard. This is an early to mid- 19th-century group, built in the limestone characteristic of the south-east of Worcestershire. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Other large farmsteads had developed into large complexes by the 17th century, with two or more threshing barns, and a driftway providing access to the main yard. Evidence for early fabric is often concealed by later rebuilding in stone and brick: note the timber-frame exposed in the gable end of the barn to the left of the driftway. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A rare, surviving example of a timber-framed cow house or stable. Buildings such as this in timber frame are very rare, and otherwise are concentrated in the wood pasture landscapes of East Anglia, the Weald of Kent and Sussex and to the west of the West Midlands region. Photo © Jeremy Lake



The area has retained some very significant examples of working buildings other than barns, particularly cattle housing and stabling, as here on this group in domestic use. Photo © Bob Edwards



Mid- 19th-century brick stables with characteristic split-level doors. Photo © Bob Edwards



Small-scale, timber-framed buildings are very rare. Photo © Bob Edwards



Fine farms, some ornamented with dovecotes as here at Mary Arden's House at Wilmcote, developed along the Avon Valley from the 15th century. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Dairies were commonly built to the rear of the farmhouse in a lean-to, as here in Mary Arden's House at Wilmcote. Photo © Jeremy Lake



Field barns and outfarms were built to serve land at some distance from the main steading. Field barns (left) were also built, sometimes for the sole use of cattle and the benefits of their manure, in fruit growing areas managed from urban centres, not farmsteads. Most have now gone. Photo © Bob Edwards

## Materials and detail

- Extremely varied use of materials was enabled by water transport and, later, tramways and rail.
- There is extensive use of timber-framing, with some notable surviving farmstead groups including cruck-framed buildings.
- Brick was used from the 16th century for high-status buildings and by the mid-18th century had replaced timber-frame.
- Cotswolds stone was used for high status buildings from the medieval period, and commonly used from at least the 16th century for farmhouses and other traditional buildings close to the scarp. A distinctive tradition of multi-gabled farmhouses developed in the south in the late 17th century. Liassic limestone is a feature of the Vale of Gloucester, with thin render coats and limewash commonly applied to walls; also Pennant sandstone was imported from the Bristol area and Carboniferous limestone from the Avon and Wye rivers, and slag blocks were imported from metal works north of Bristol.
- The predominant roofing material is pantile to the south and plain clay tile to the north, with extensive use of Welsh slate and some remnants of thatch. There are some Pennant and Cotswold stone slates to the south of the area.





# Historic England

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Jeremy Lake and Bob Edwards.

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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 part of 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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