

# National Character Area 106 **Severn and Avon Vales**

## **Summary**

This Character Area encompasses the lower valleys of the River Severn and 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. 9% of the Character Area is urban, approximately 77% is cultivated and nearly 3% is wooded. Over 6% lies within the Cotswolds AONB. There are four sub-areas within the character area (see map on p.2):

- 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 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.

## **Landscape and Settlement**

- Contrasting area with high to very high densities of dispersed settlement to west and north, and strongly nucleated settlement to south east.
- Strong pattern of nucleated settlement, with 23.2% of farmsteads in villages and 13.8% in hamlets.
- Medium density of farmsteads in the landscape, in patches of high density to west of Severn and to north.
- Small to medium-scale (27.4%) and larger-scale (33.9%) farmsteads predominant, but interspersed with significant numbers of very small and very large-scale farmsteads.

## **Farmstead and Building Types**

Across the area there are medium-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 plans are dispersed across the area, mostly of a small-medium scale. These are associated with significant groups of timber-framed farm buildings and houses.
- Regular courtyard plans often associated with areas affected by 19th century enclosure and reorganisation or enlargement of fields.
- Some cider houses and hop kilns, the latter concentrated to west.

## **Rarity and Significance**

- High rate of survival within Herefordshire, with 61% of farmsteads recorded from late 19th century maps retaining more than half of their historic footprint.
- Recorded pre-1800 farmstead buildings in Herefordshire comprise 12.5% of those recorded from late 19th century maps. There is a high potential for early including timber-framed cores within later mass walling, but this



## I HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

- The transitional nature of this area is strongly reflected in its contrasting patterns of landscape, architecture and settlement.
- Extensive evidence for Romano-British and earlier prehistoric settlement, including major woodland clearance and dispersed farmsteads (round houses visible as crop marks) in 1st millennium BC.
- Urban centres developed across this area in Roman and Saxon period (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 12th/early 13th centuries, by 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 (eg at Tewkesbury) testify to the Severn's importance to the area's economy. Local industries and urban growth of Gloucester and Worcester stimulated by opening of canals from 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. Also from at least the 17th century fruit orchards, particularly for cider and perry.
- Railways and access to expanding urban markets contributed to intensification of horticulture and growth of smallholdings, particularly on the gravel terraces of the Vale of Evesham, upper Avon and Leadon Valley.

## 2 LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT

### *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 indicative of continuing woodland clearance and subsidiary settlement after this period.
- The present enclosure patterns, generally small-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.

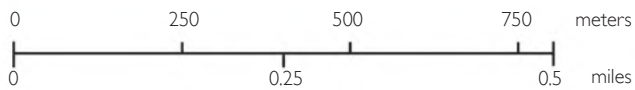
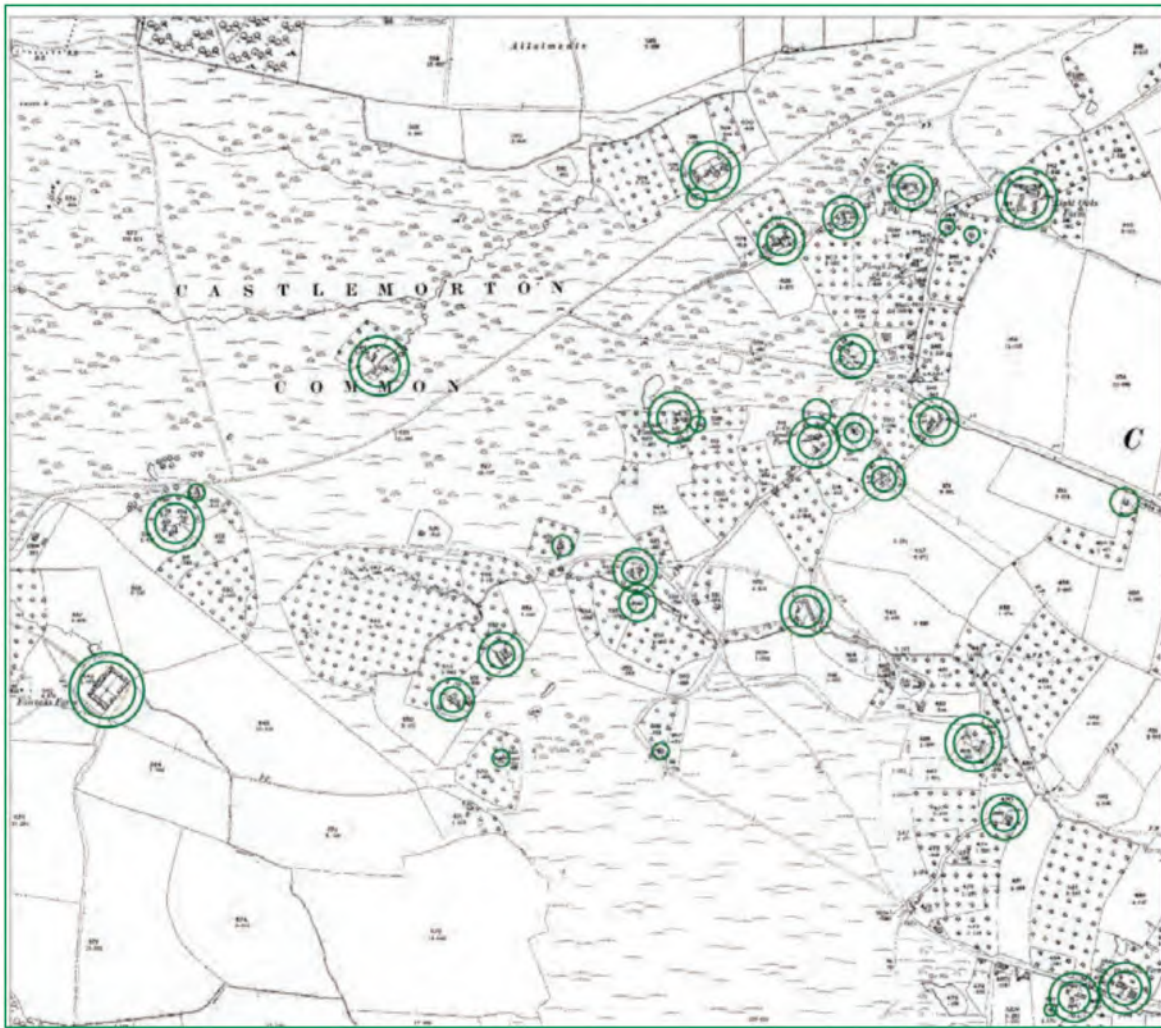
### *East of the Severn*

- 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 (eg Bredon Hill, Dumbleton Hill and Robinswood Hill).
- 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 (eg Weston Subedge) - 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 inter-mixed with woodland resulting from 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 12th/13th centuries.
- The smaller size of fields in many parts – in contrast to the areas east of the Severn further north – reflect a long history of pastoral farming. The Vales of Gloucester and Berkeley provided rich pastures for cattle and for over-wintering sheep brought down from Cotswolds.
- Cheese production a major industry by 18th century, combined with fattening of pigs on whey. Fuller's

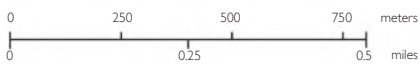
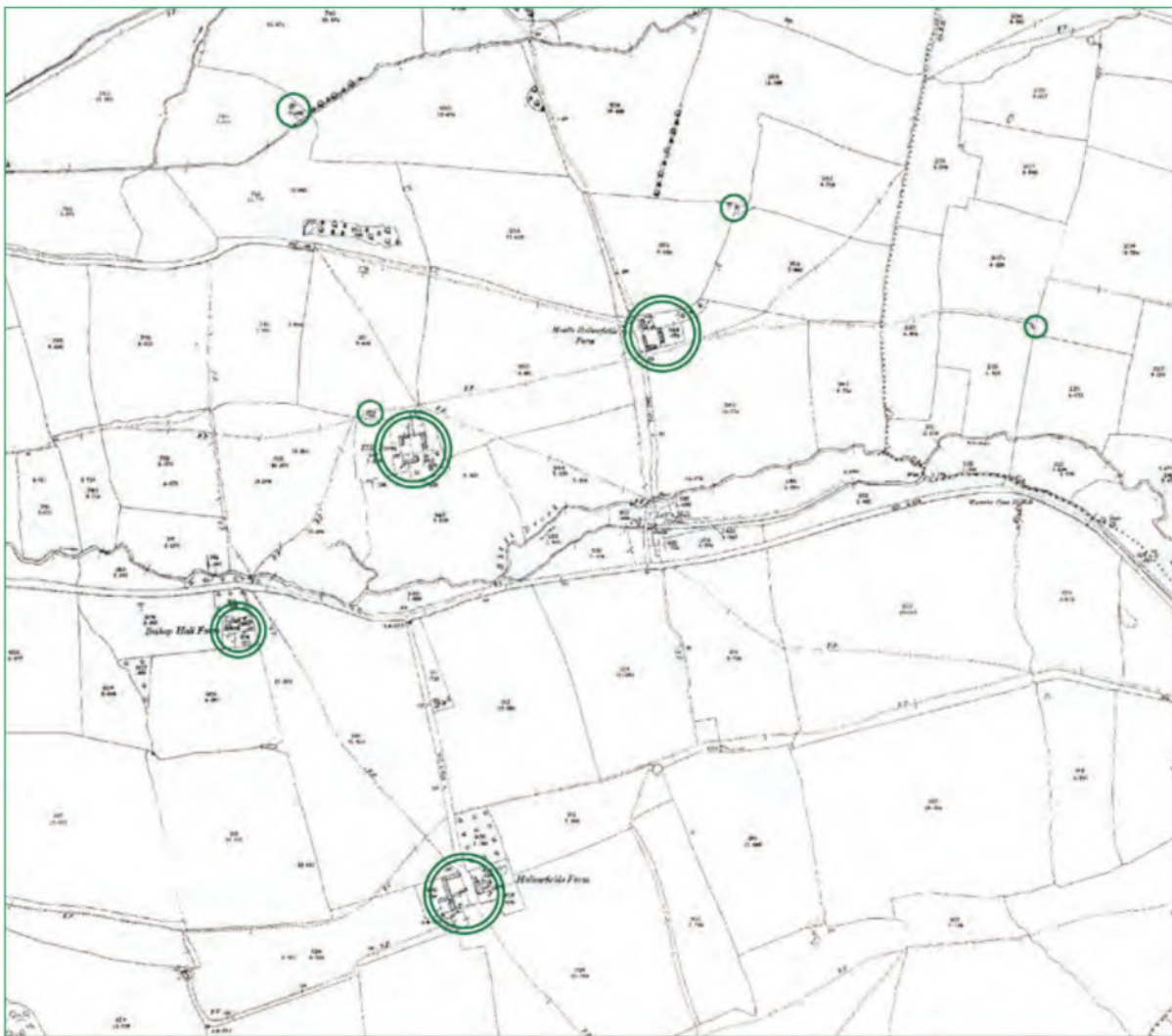




-  Farmstead
-  Outfarm

#### Malvern Fringe

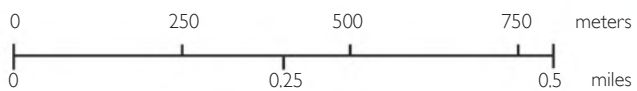
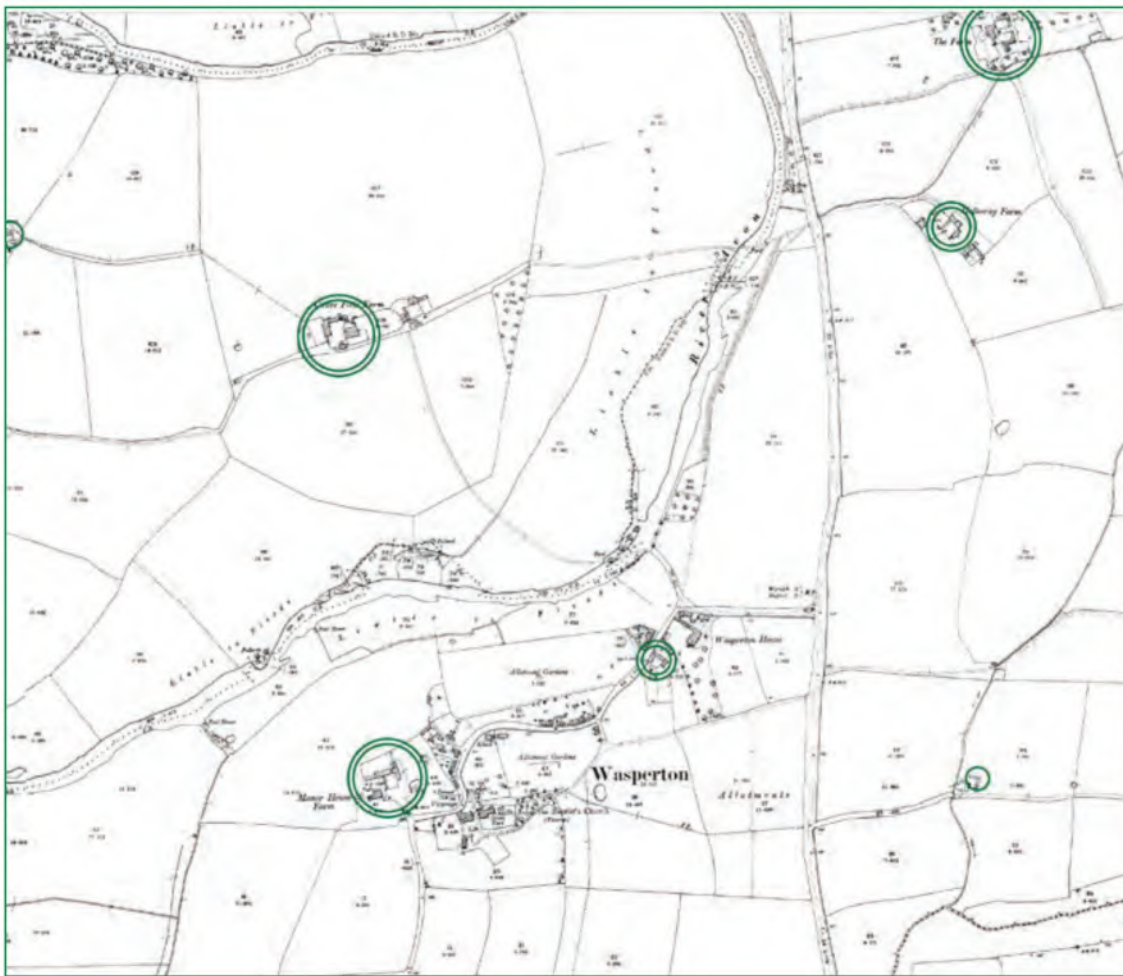
The open common as at Castlemorton, at the foothills of the Malverns, was part of an area that remained under Forest Law until the 17th century. Fringing the common were very small farms and smallholdings set in medium-sized irregular fields, some of which may be of medieval origin. The curved boundaries 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 Fair Oaks Farm is set in large fields resulting from the 19th century reorganisation of earlier piecemeal enclosure from the common. 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



-  Farmstead
-  Outfarm

#### Hanbury Vale

West of the River Sever 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. 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



Farmstead



Outfarm

#### 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 by agreement from the 17th century. 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



teazle for the cloth industry – which developed on an industrial scale around Stroud by the early 19th century - grown on heavier soils.

#### Malverns 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 (William I – 1083) placed an area from the River Teme to the River Severn and Corse Lawn to the Malvern Hilltops under Forest Law. 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 Folliot (Castlemorton), Birtsmorton, Berrow and Longdon.
- Smallholdings developed around extensive areas of common, such as Castlemorton, Holybed, Coombegreen.
- Farmsteads sited around Longdon Marsh, which was not drained until the late 18th century.



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.



The Severn (as here) and Avon provided a routeway for the export of agricultural produce, before the introduction of the railways. Large-scale arable farms developed along the rich soils to its west, and dairying farms alongside the wetlands and pastures to its east.



Large farmsteads also developed within and particularly on the edge of villages where they could more easily expand, as here in the Avon Valley. This group comprises a 17th century or earlier house, an attached stable or cowhouse and threshing barns, all in timber frame partly reclad in brick.



A loose courtyard group built of lias limestone in the south east of the area.

### 3 FARMSTEAD AND BUILDING TYPES

#### Farmstead types

Across the area there are medium-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-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-large scale farmsteads across the lowlands of the south-eastern West Midlands and extending into the East Midlands.
- Medium-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 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/13th centuries.
- Barns typically of 3-5 bays, some to west of area with integral cowhouses.
- Cider houses, often integrated into combination ranges, are most commonly 19th century, earlier survivals being rare. Some maltings 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.
- 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 (e.g. around Bredon Hill) and in areas of market gardening (eg Pershore).
- Field Barns associated with areas of market gardening – clusters of small, individual, buildings (often in groups of two or three). Marked increase at the end of the 19th century, significant loss since the late 19th century.

### 4 BUILDING MATERIALS

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





A defining characteristic of this area are 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 these groupings are distinctive and significant for their early date where they survive.



Dairy farms are a strong characteristic of the Vale of Gloucester and Berkeley, this group having a 5-bay threshing barn to one side and a cowhouse and dairy attached to the right.



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



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.



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



Linear farmsteads are hard to identify, and most had by the 20th century been converted to sole residential use.



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.



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.

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.



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

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





Other large farmsteads had developed by the 17th century into large complexes 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.



A rare surviving example of a timber-framed cowhouse 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.



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.



Mid 19th century brick stables with characteristic split-level doors.



Small-scale timber-framed buildings are very rare.



Fine farms, some ornamented with dovescotes as here at Mary Arden's House at Wilmscote, developed along the Avon Valley from the 15th century.





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



Field barns and outfarms were built to serve land at some distance from the main steading. Fieldbarns (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.

This is one of the **Farmsteads Character Statements** for the National Character Areas. Further illustrated guidance on historic character and significance, under the same headings, is provided in the **West Midlands Farmsteads Character Statement**. They result from *The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project*, which has mapped the historic character and use of farmsteads across the region, and developed planning tools to inform future change. A *Summary Report* summarises the results of the whole project for the whole region and sets out policy and land use implications, and recommendations and next steps for further work.

The *Rarity and Significance* and *Drivers for Change* headings, and other elements of the main text, are based upon the mapping and interpretation of historic character. These records are stored in the relevant local authority *Historic Environment Record* and there is a *Historic Farmstead Characterisation Report* for each county and the Central Conurbation. These have been used as a baseline to determine the patterns of current use, as summarised for each area in the *Drivers for Change* section. There is a *Farmstead Use Report* for the region.

Also under the *Drivers for Change* heading are percentages of listed working farm buildings with visible structural failure and evidence of adaptive reuse. These are based on comparison of 1980s with 1999-2006 photographs, from the *Photo Image Survey* (University of Gloucestershire for English Heritage, 2009). In the West Midlands 27% of listed working farm buildings have evidence for residential reuse (national level 30%), 3% other (national 4%) and 70% (national 66%) have no other evidence for other use. 18.9% have evidence for structural failure (national 8.9%).

**The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project** is a collaborative project led by English Heritage with the county and metropolitan authorities. This document has been written by Jeremy Lake of English Heritage's Characterisation Team with assistance from Bob Edwards of Forum Heritage Services. All photographs are by English Heritage and Forum Heritage Services unless otherwise acknowledged.



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