

# National Character Area 101 **Herefordshire Plateau**

## Summary

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 AONB. The key distinctions are between:

1. The eastern fringe adjoining the Teme Valley and the Malverns, where the farmsteads relate to high densities of 18th century and earlier former farmhouses (including cottages) which are dispersed across the landscape.
2. The main area with low densities of farmsteads and where the few other historic houses are concentrated within settlements.

## Landscape and Settlement

- High levels of dispersed settlement, with 6.4% of farmsteads in hamlets and 3.6% in villages.
- Low density of farmsteads in the landscape, lower towards the Herefordshire Lowlands. This is an area with generally medium to large-scale farms, smaller than the adjacent Herefordshire Lowlands. These are set within landscapes that generally reflect piecemeal enclosure and the resiting of farmsteads away from settlements in isolated locations.
- Larger-scale farmsteads (41.7%), underpinned by a stronger tendency to medium (28.1%) than very large-scale farmsteads (19.4%, concentrated in the broad vales).

## Farmstead and Building Types

- 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.

A rich variety of building types, often on the same farm, 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.

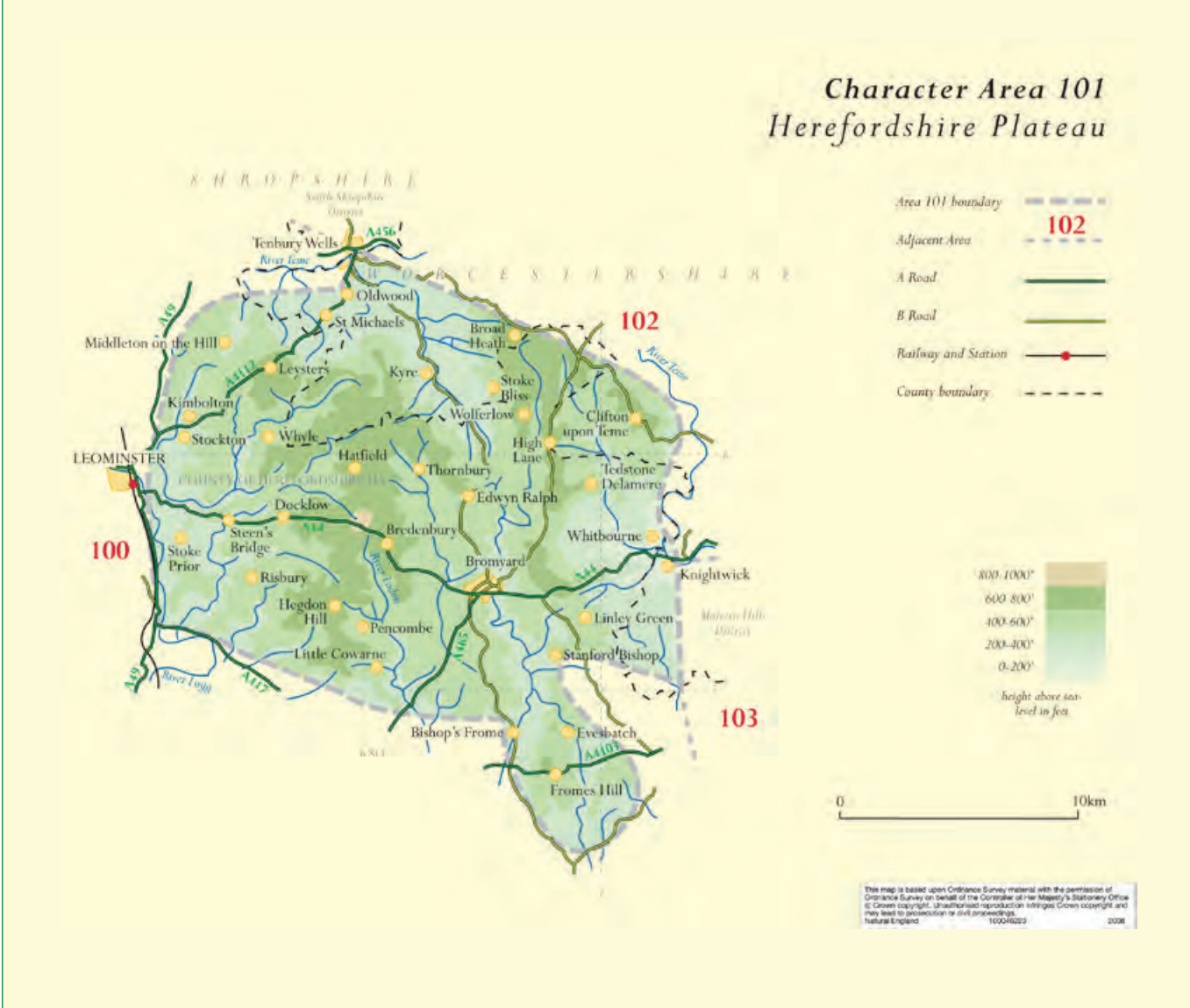
## Rarity and Significance

- Medium high rates of survival, particularly to east, with 61% of farmsteads recorded from late 19th century maps retaining more than half of their historic footprint.
- Recorded pre-1800 farmstead buildings comprise 29% of those recorded from late 19th century maps. This is a high figure, and the high number (8%) of pre-1600 buildings relate to widespread landscape and settlement change from the 15th century. High potential for early timber-framed cores with later mass walling.
- Some very rare early surviving examples of hop kilns, cider houses and cow houses, typically timber-framed and often embedded with later rebuilding in brick and stone.
- Rare surviving examples 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.
- Some farmsteads channelled water power from their surrounding landscapes, and evidence can survive in the form of leats, mill wheels etc.

**Drivers for Change**

- Here economic mass is amongst the lowest of any National Character Area and the proportion of farmsteads remaining in agricultural use with diversification is amongst the highest in the West Midlands.
- 15-20% of listed working buildings have obvious signs of structural disrepair; and 20-30% with visible adaptive reuse.



## 1 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

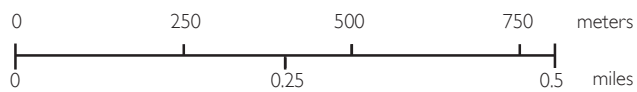
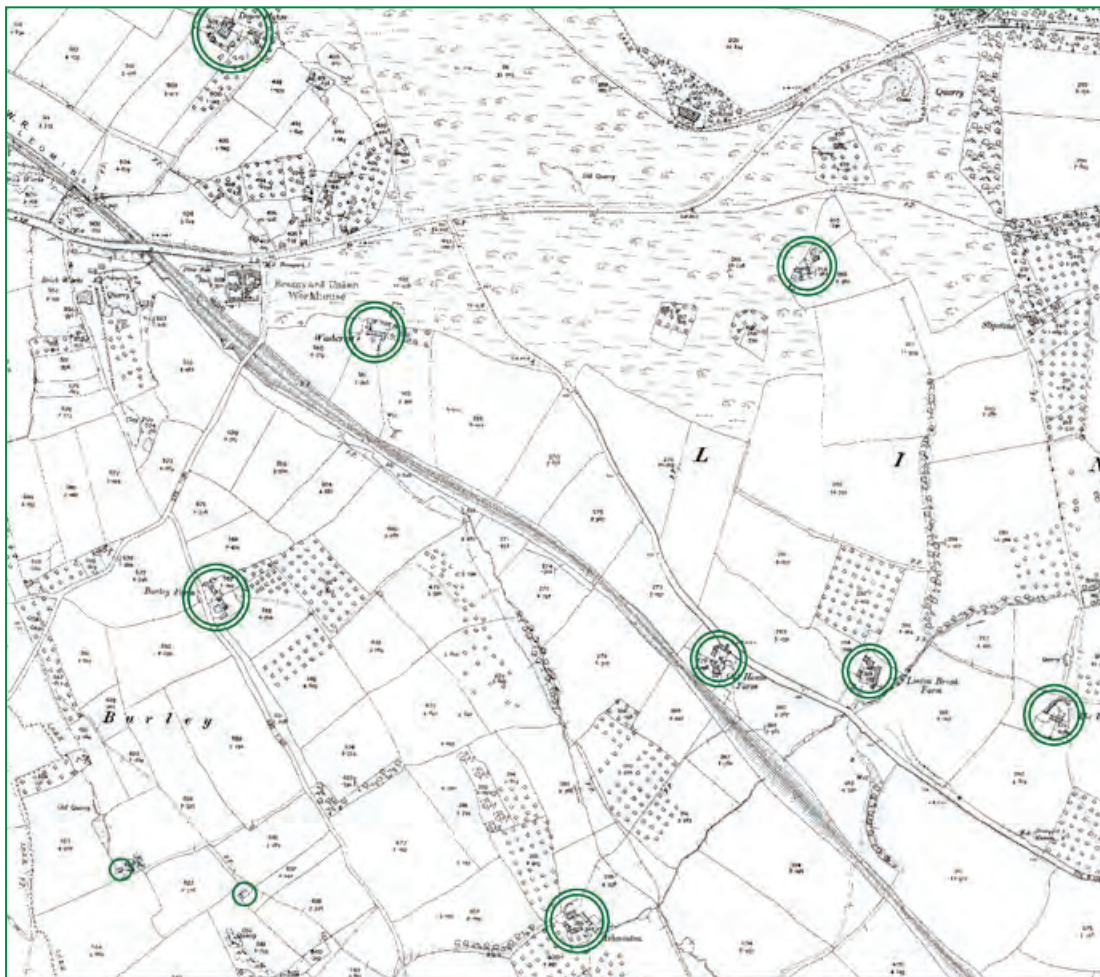
- Extensive evidence for prehistoric and Romano-British occupation.
- Arable cultivation historically concentrated in Wye, Lugg and Frome river valleys with mixed agriculture elsewhere.
- This area developed as part of the central Herefordshire plain, as primarily a corn–livestock region with the dominant cereal 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 than in the more open Herefordshire Plain, but generally larger than in the Teme Valley to the east.
- Orchards grown for cider making from at least the 14th century, and hop fields from 18th century, typically planted on the valley floors and intermixed with arable.
- Extensive water meadow systems along the wide river valleys developed from 17th century.
- 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.
- Predominant patterns 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. Later 20th century very large fields are a major feature to south of area.
- Some distinctive areas of smallholdings developed around areas of common land (eg 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 in the medieval period.
- Older orchards, once very extensive, 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, 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.


## 2 LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT

- Predominant pattern 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 are characterised by grouping of a motte, church and later manor house (eg Edwyn Ralph and Leysters).



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-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.



-  Farmstead
-  Outfarm

**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-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. 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 TP002



### 3 FARMSTEAD AND BUILDING TYPES

#### Farmstead types

- Small-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 and also east of Abberley.
- Some areas of smallholdings, such as Bringsty Common, retain the main concentrations of linear farmsteads, dispersed clusters and L-plan (house attached) farmsteads which are otherwise rare.

#### Building types

- Substantial barns, often more than one to a farm and sometimes integrated into substantial combination ranges. Lean-tos for cattle common, and open-fronted shelter sheds dating from 18th century.
- Rare surviving examples – shared with other areas

along the Welsh border – of 18th century or earlier single-storey and 2-storey cowhouses.

- Cider houses, distinguished by wide doors, 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 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.

### 4 BUILDING MATERIALS

- 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 increasingly used for traditional buildings from 18th century, and brick from the mid/late 18th century.



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.



A large U-plan range, with cattle housing in the foreground and a large barn range to the rear.



A loose courtyard group with buildings to three sides of the yard.



A loose courtyard group with a timber-framed barn (to right) and the house rebuilt in the late 19th century.



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



Some of the smaller farmsteads that remained into the 20th century have a single multi-functional range of buildings facing the farmyard.



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



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



Barns were typically of 5 bays. This example displays the square panel timber framing found along the Welsh borders.



Barns were often built with stone gable ends and weatherboarded timber to the storage bays.



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



Large multi-functional ranges, or combination barns, developed as a characteristic feature of this area. Most were built in the early-mid 19th century, but many contain earlier cores.



Single-storey cowhouses, 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 part open fronted haylofts similar to linhays of south-west England and Wales





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



A large granary located above a 4 bay cartshed indicative of the importance of arable on this farm.



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.





A high status stable block built close to a high status house of the mid 18th century.



Field barns were often built in the corner of fields, but few survive and they are not adaptable to other purposes if not in continued farming use.

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.



If you would like this document in a different format, please contact the English Heritage Customer Services Department:

Telephone 0870 333 1181

Text phone 01793 414878

Email: [customers@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:customers@english-heritage.org.uk)