

National Character Area 104 **South Herefordshire and Over Severn**

Summary

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 LFA. Around 26% of the area falls within the Wye Valley AONB.

Landscape and Settlement

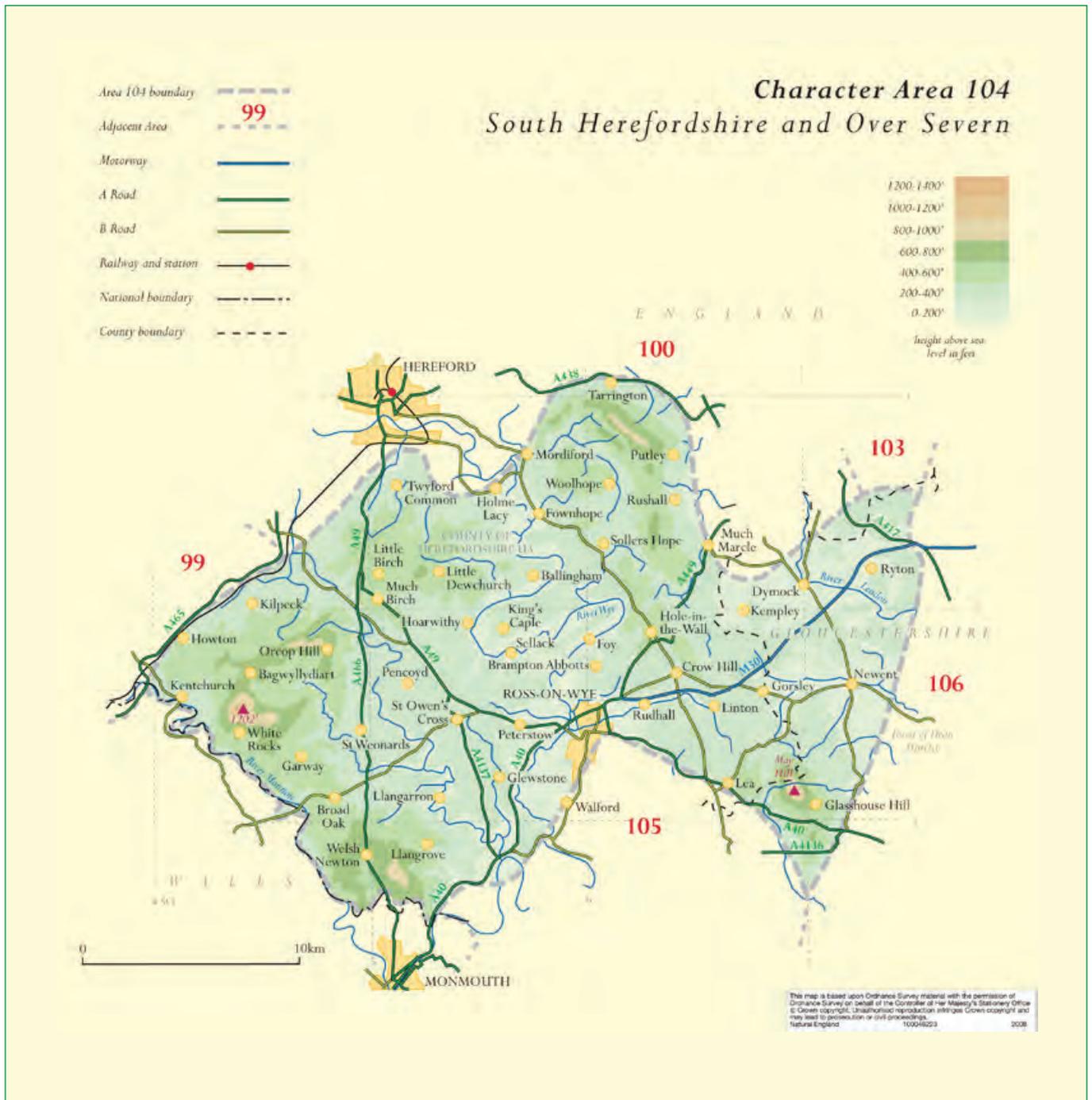
- High levels of dispersed settlement, with 4.2% of farmsteads in hamlets and 4.3% in villages.
- Medium density of farmsteads in the landscape, lower in some of the broad valleys.
- Large-scale farmsteads are predominant (45%), with small to medium-scale farmsteads concentrated in the Garway Hills.

Farmstead and Building Types

- Loose courtyard plans predominant across the character area, mostly with working buildings to two or three sides of the yard.
- Many farmsteads have an L-plan element formed by the addition of ranges to an earlier barn.
- Low numbers of larger regular courtyard plan farmsteads except in the Wye Valley where regular multi-yard and E-plan farmsteads are found.
- U-plan and full courtyard ranges are a distinctive feature, often the result of piecemeal development linking older buildings.
- Regular L-plan farmsteads, and high numbers of L-plan farmsteads with additional working buildings to the third side of the yard.
- Some distinctive areas of smallholdings, including around the Garway Hills.
- Timber-framed threshing barns, often encased and enlarged in stone, typically of five bays or more.
- 18th century or earlier cattle housing.
- Hop kilns and cider houses.

Rarity and Significance

- Medium rates of survival, with 60% of farmsteads recorded from late 19th century maps retaining more than half of their historic footprint.
- Recorded pre-1800 farmstead buildings comprise 11% of those recorded from late 19th century maps, half of these being of 17th century date. There is a high potential for early including timber-framed cores within later mass walling, but this area still has a much lower proportion of early buildings than its neighbours to the north. This indicates a later phase of rebuilding.
- 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.
- Some examples of multi-functional barns with integral cattle housing dating from the 18th century, linked to gentry estates.



Drivers for Change

- Historic farmsteads in this area have a highly distinctive pattern of use - the proportion remaining in agriculture being amongst the highest in the West Midlands (41%), with greater tendency to farm diversification (numbers of holiday homes being well above expectation for the West Midlands region) while only 52% have been converted to residential use.
- 10-15% of listed working buildings have obvious signs of structural disrepair, and 20-30% with visible adaptive reuse.

1 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

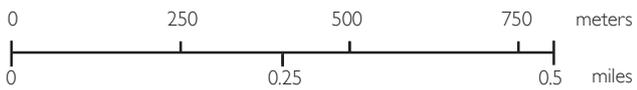
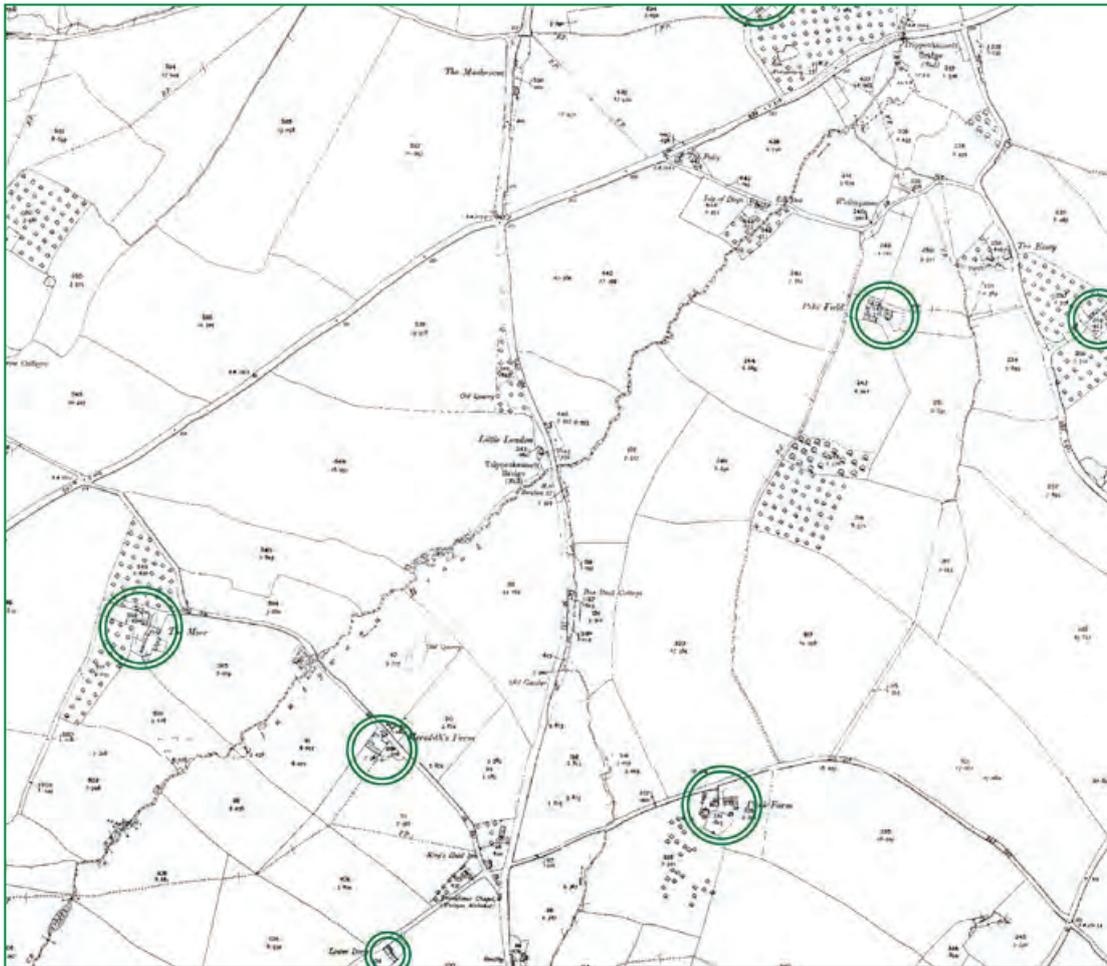
- Some evidence for settlement in the prehistoric and Romano-British period, but not as strong as in the lower-lying areas to the east and west
- Major market centres at Ross-on-Wye, Newent and Dymock developed from medieval period.
- High concentration of motte and bailey castles (late 11th and 12th century) and moated sites (mostly 13-14th century). Medieval manorial centres 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 evident in place-names to 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 prosperous and long history of mixed agriculture, pasture fields (particularly in the steep-sided valleys) now taking a small proportion of a land cover that is dominated by intensive arable cultivation.
- Orchards developed to an intensive scale of production from 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.

2 LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT

- The predominant pattern of dispersed settlement inter-mixed with small villages mostly results from:
 - 14th-17th century movement away from small villages. Farmsteads were re-sited in association with the piecemeal enclosure of the open fields that had expanded over most of the farmed area and also 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 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-14th 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.



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. (© Sam Hale)



Near Kilpeck

In the hillier parts of the character area small dispersed farmsteads set within a landscape of small - 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. 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

3 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 also centred on the valley-bottom villages.
- 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) with additional buildings to the third or (rarely) fourth sides of the yard: the latter show a concentration extending from the Garway Hills 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, typically 5-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 associated with cider houses.
- Enclosed cowhouses and open-fronted shelter sheds for cattle either built against barns or as separate

ranges dating from 18th century.

- Some very rare surviving examples 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. 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.

4 BUILDING MATERIALS

- Timber-framing predominant until 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 area 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 inter-mixed 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 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, often associated with an owl hole.
- Larger farmhouses and gentry houses built with distinctive hipped roofs from later 17th century.



Linear farmsteads, such as this example of the early-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.



Medium scale loose courtyard plans that developed over time are characteristic of the area. (© Sam Hale)



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



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



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



A substantial five-bay threshing barn characteristic of this area.



Combination barns are a characteristic feature of this area. This example has a stable and cartshed to one end. (© Sam Hale)



Cattle housing was commonly provided in lean-to structures built against the sides of barns. (© 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 in the Garway Hills has a granary sited over cartsheds in the lean-to, and a stable to the right. (© 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. (© 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.

A large late 19th brick cow house range with hay loft over; its style reflecting an estate style of architecture. (© Sam Hale)



Outfarms served some of the more distant arable fields. This example is now in office 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.



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