



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

# Black Mountains and Golden Valley

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 99



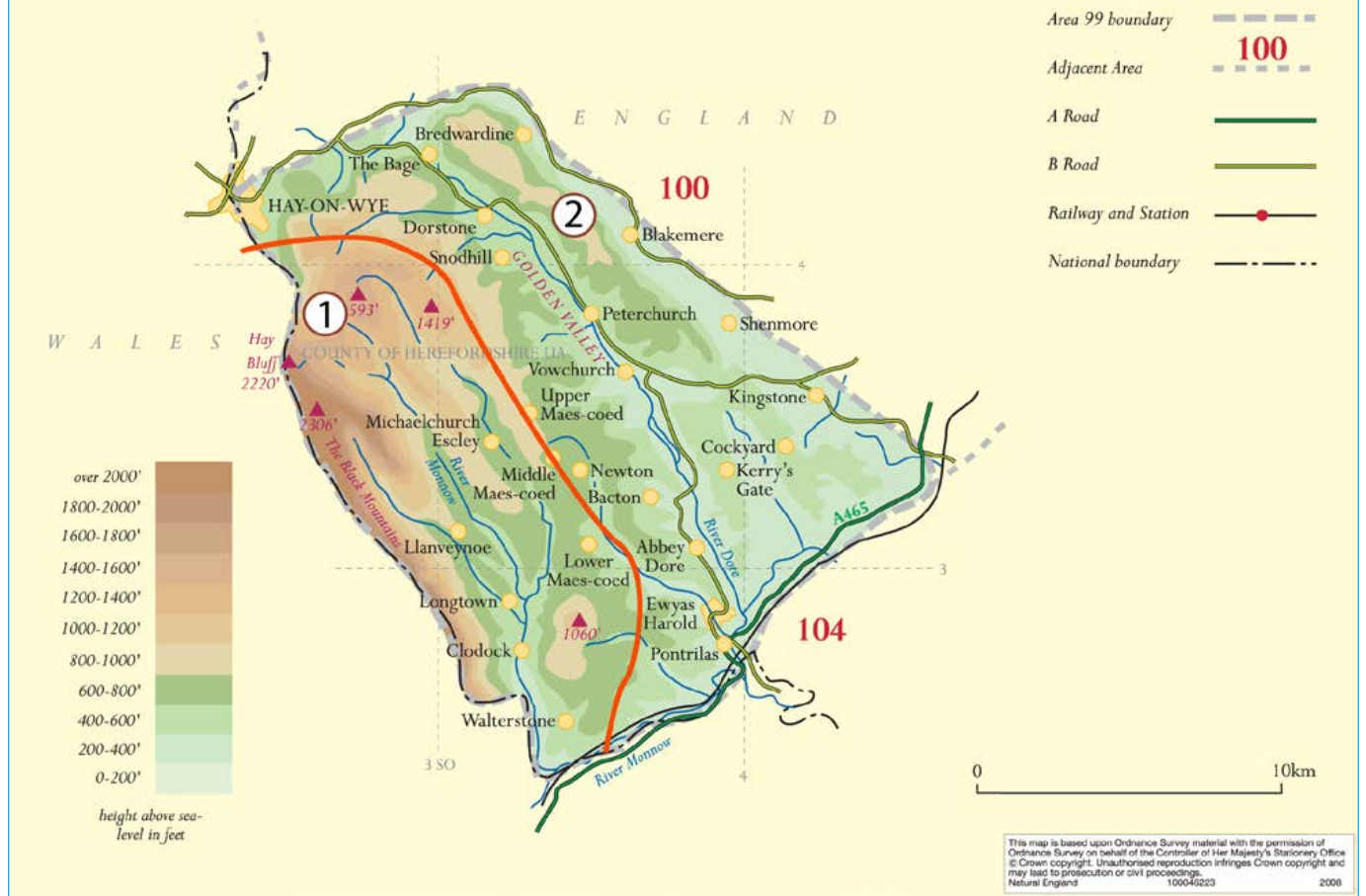
## Introduction

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:** The lower-lying parts of this area, especially in the Golden Valley, have been subject to several phases of reorganisation from the medieval period. This loose courtyard plan farmstead lies adjacent to medieval land, but the fields with straight boundaries and thorn hedgerows either slightly predate or date from the same period as the last phase of rebuilding of the farmstead in the early to mid- 19th century. Photo © Herefordshire County Council

# Character Area 99 Black Mountains and Golden Valley



This map shows the Black Mountains (1) and Golden Valley (2), with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around them.

# Summary

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

This area lies within the south-west corner of Herefordshire. It is bounded by the Welsh half of the Black Mountains and the Brecon Beacons to the west, the Wye Valley and Herefordshire lowlands to the north and east and the River Monnow to the south. It is a border landscape between the upland moors to the west and the cultivated, settled valleys to the east. Nearly 11% of the Character Area is woodland, and almost none of the area is urban (much less than 1%). Almost 58% of the area is Less Favoured Area (LFA). There are two sub-areas within this Character Area:

1. Black Mountains – High densities of farmsteads are generally set within small-scale fields resulting from medieval woodland clearance and later reorganisation.
2. Golden Valley – Medium to low densities of farmsteads are set in larger-scale fields with historic water meadows.

## Historic character

- There are high to very high levels of dispersed settlement, with most farmsteads being isolated or (12.4%) in hamlets; farmsteads in villages (8.6%) are concentrated in the Golden Valley.
- The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project has shown that the predominant pattern is of small to medium-scale (33.2%) to large-scale (29%) farmsteads across the area, but with a marked tendency for smaller-scale in the Black Mountains where high densities of very small-scale farmsteads (22.7%) are concentrated. Linear, small-scale loose courtyard and dispersed plans are concentrated in the Black Mountains and L-shaped farmsteads with additional buildings and regular multi-yard plans result from the development of large farms in the Golden Valley.
- Barns are typically of five or more bays in the Golden Valley, but smaller and often with housing for horses and cattle in the Black Mountains.
- Cow houses, including some rare 18th-century or earlier examples in a national context, are often combined with stables.
- Shelter sheds are either free-standing or built against barns.
- Some cider houses can be found, mainly in the Golden Valley.

## Significance

- Farmsteads Mapping (as part of the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project) has shown that the rate of survival in a regional context is high, with 63% of farmsteads recorded from late 19th-century

maps retaining more than half of their historic form.

- Recorded pre-1800 farmstead buildings (including houses) comprise 21.5% of those recorded from late 19th-century maps. This is a very high proportion in a national context, also notable being a high proportion (16%) of 17th-century recorded farm buildings. In addition, many earlier cores remain concealed by later stone and brick walling.

- There are some rare examples (in a national context) of early weatherboarding with wattle and cleft oak infill to the upper panels of barns and other buildings
- There are some very rare examples (in a national context) of early cattle housing, of a type found across the border in Wales, and longhouses.

## Present and future issues

- The Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a very low proportion in this National Character Area of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (4.5%, the national average being 32%).
- The Photo Image Project also recorded a high percentage (23.8%, the national average being

7.5%) of listed working farm buildings that show obvious signs of structural disrepair.

- The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project has shown that the area has the lowest economic mass in the West Midlands region and the highest proportion of farmsteads remaining in agricultural use, with relatively low participation in business.

## Historic development

- Extensive evidence exists for prehistoric settlement. A Roman road runs through the valley.

- The area has a long history as a frontier landscape with Welsh place names remaining a strong element and Offa's Dyke forming the



Along the Golden Valley, farmsteads are generally located within villages as here in Vowchurch. On the edge of the village is a large farmstead with a large threshing barn and low shelter sheds to a cattle yard. Adjacent to the church is a smaller loose courtyard steading. Beyond the village are fields with well-wooded boundaries indicating that they are the product of piecemeal enclosure from the late medieval period and contrast with the regular fields with low thorn hedges in the foreground. These fields are the product of the enclosure of the former open fields. Photo © Bob Edwards

western boundary of the Saxon kingdom of Mercia.

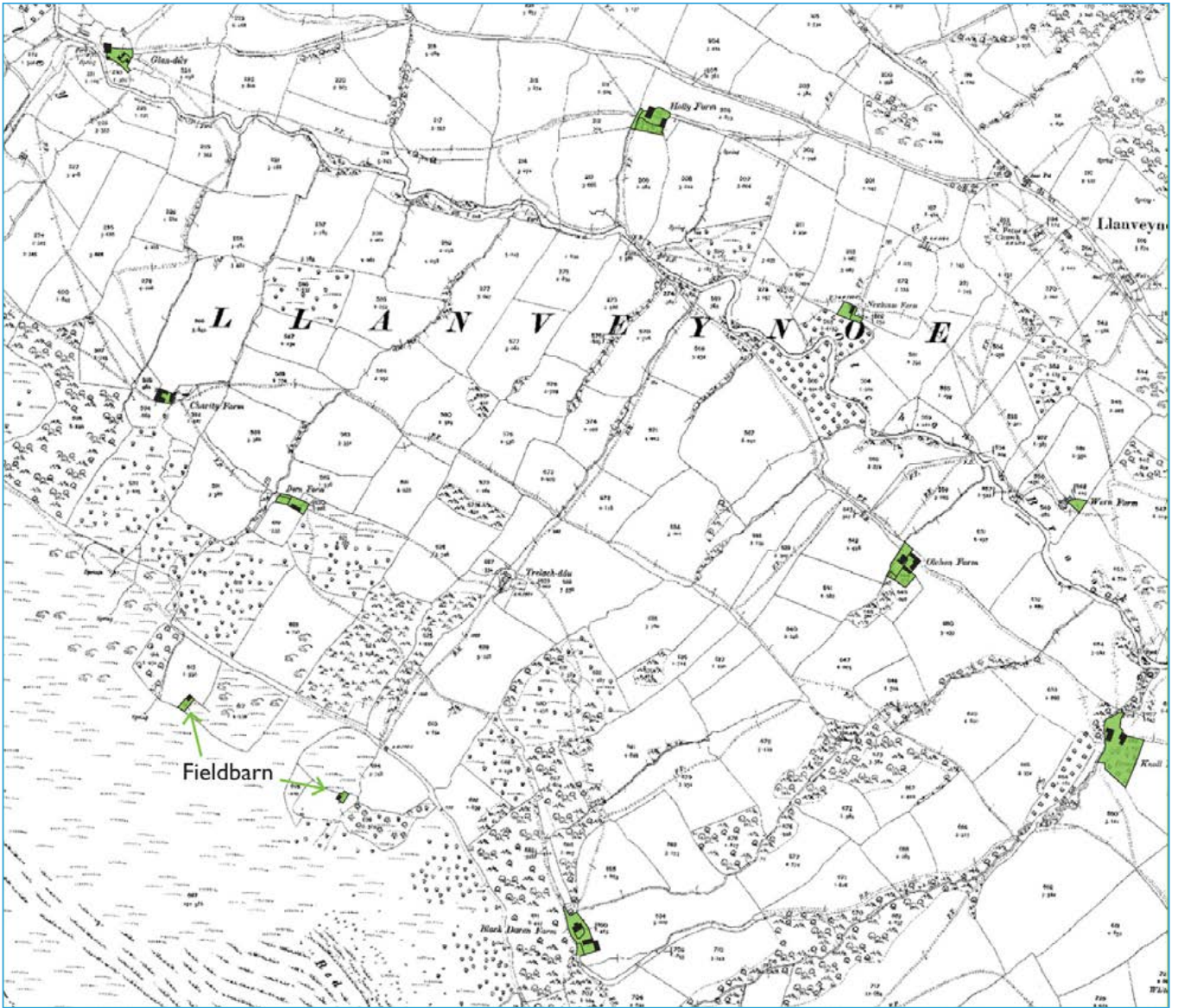
- From the late 11th century into the 12th century, and as a result of the Norman Conquest, there is a high concentration of earthen motte and bailey castles, the large castle at Hay forming with the Black Mountains a defensive barrier to the west. Some defensive sites formed foci for development of small, manorial centres in the medieval period, including some moated sites of the 12th to 14th centuries, which typically developed into large farmsteads.
- Estates were a major influence on the agricultural development of the Golden Valley

from the medieval period, firstly centred on the Cistercian abbey at Abbey Dore (founded 1147) and from the 15th and 16th centuries on gentry estates and some country houses with landscaped gardens.


- The Black Mountains developed as a mostly pastoral cattle-rearing economy with some growing of corn, the high ground serving as communal pasture and a source of fuel for surrounding communities.
- The fertile soils of the Golden Valley supported a strong, arable-based economy as well as cattle fattening and dairying. Turnastone Court, Vowchurch, is famous as the place where Rowland Vaughan developed the art of

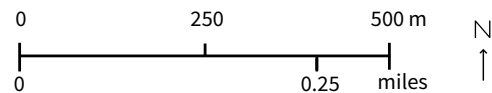


Farmsteads in the Black Mountains were usually served by only one or two working buildings, and were sited within anciently enclosed hillsides with access to the moorlands. Photo © Bob Edwards



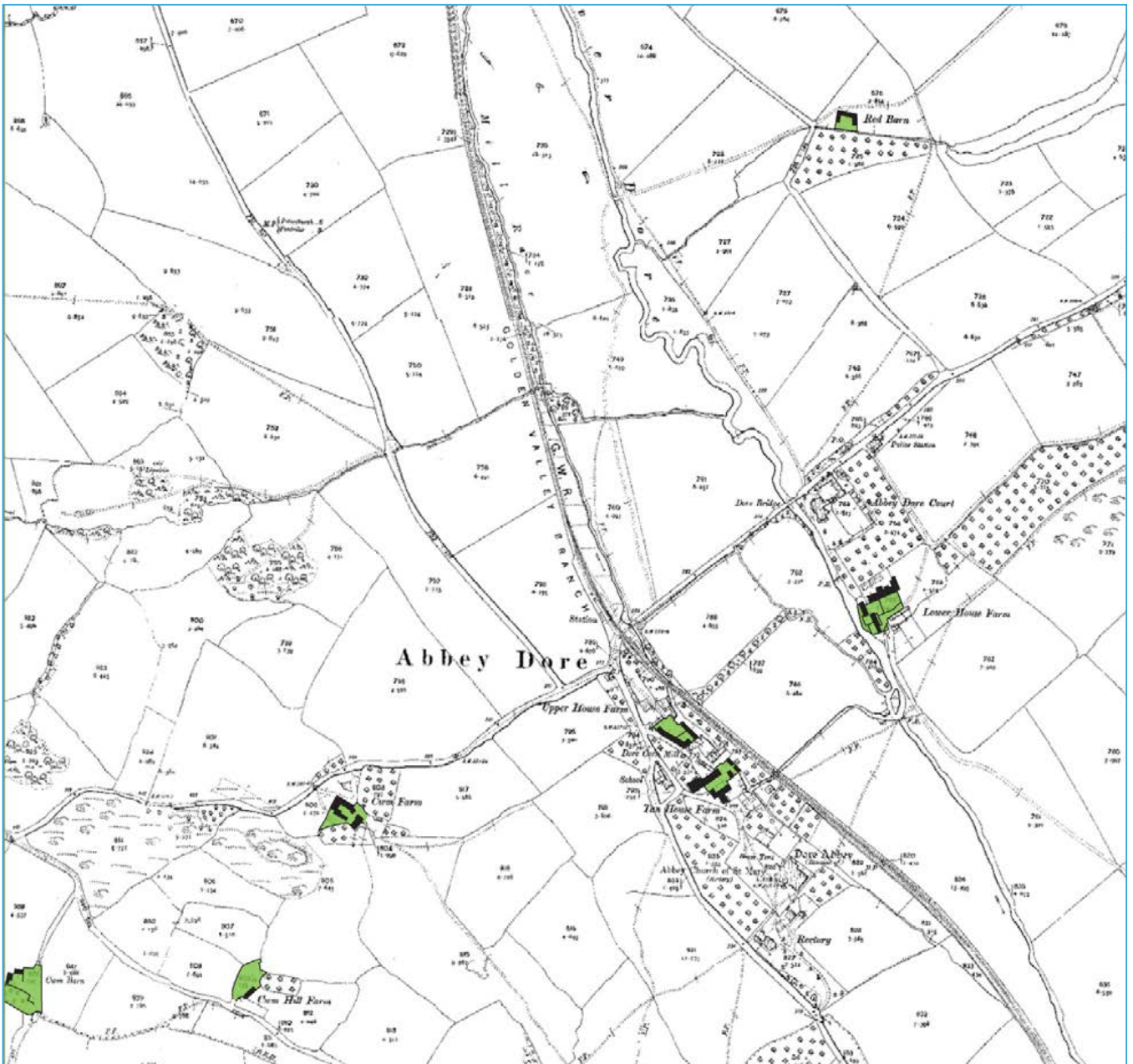
Maps are based on 2nd edition 25° Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England. © Crown Copyright [and database rights] 2020. OS 100024900

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



## Llanveynoe

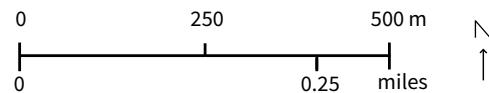
This extract shows small, irregular fields dating from the medieval period, that stretch up the hillside to the higher, open moorland of the Black Mountains. The fields have a distinctive 'grain', their boundaries either following the contours or cutting across them. Within the fields are small farmsteads, typically of loose courtyard form with working buildings to one or two sides, which are linked by a network of tracks and paths. Tracks climbing the hillside provided access between the valley-based farmsteads and the common grazing on the hill. The tracks running along the contours such as the two paths heading east and south-east from Charity Farm (1) may mark the limits of different phases of enclosure of the upland: Charity, Barn, Black Doren Farms and Trelach Ddu were possibly once common-edge farmsteads subsequently subsumed by later enclosures. On the edge of the common, two small areas of enclosure have breached the line of the latest common edge track.



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.



## Abbey Dore

The Golden Valley, so named because of its fertile farmland, contained a number of nucleated villages. Their communities worked open, arable fields in the medieval period, which were enclosed by piecemeal enclosure over a long period of time. The managed flooding through water meadows of the valley floor from the 17th century helped to increase cattle numbers and the development of large courtyard farmsteads. These often have regular multi-yard plans reflecting the management of stock with some arable production. A U-plan outfarm served as one of the large farmsteads in the village. To the south-west smaller, more irregular fields probably represent the clearance of woodland on the valley side from the medieval period and the enclosure of common. Here, smaller farms – including linear plan farmsteads – are found.



building water meadows to encourage early grass growth in the spring for his stock. He published a book explaining his methods in

1610. Agricultural produce from this area was exported after the arrival of the railway in 1881.

## Landscape and settlement

- Across the area, long-standing areas of grassland and unimproved pasture are both rich in the surviving visible evidence of earlier land use and settlement (ridge and furrow,

house and defensive platforms, water meadow systems in the Golden Valley). There are clusters of common-edge settlement with smallholdings.

### Black Mountains

- The predominant settlement pattern is of high to very high levels of dispersed settlement.
- The generally small-scale and irregular pattern of enclosures around farmsteads and hamlets,

intermixed with blocks of woodland, results from woodland clearance in the medieval period.

### Golden Valley

- Larger fields with a mix of regular and semi-regular boundaries result from a long process of piecemeal enclosure and reorganisation of formerly extensive communal open fields which lay around the larger nucleated settlements.
- Many villages (for example, Longtown) were formed around Norman castles (and also the pre-Conquest castle at Ewyas Harold) and date from the late 11th to 13th centuries.
- Water meadows, developed along the broad river valleys, in conjunction with the production of clover and rotations using grasses, helped to boost cattle numbers and agricultural production. Under-drainage of the water meadows from the mid- 19th century was associated with the rebuilding of large farmsteads for yard- and stall-fed cattle.

## Farmstead and building types

There is a high concentration of 18th-century and earlier buildings, with earlier timber-framed cores to many houses, barns and other working buildings. Larger and gentry houses were built with distinctive hipped roofs from the later 17th century.

### Farmstead types

- Farmsteads in the Golden Valley are mostly larger in scale than in the Black Mountains. These mainly comprise regular multi-yard and larger loose courtyard groups: these often include an L-range of an earlier barn with a later cow house or shelter shed attached and additional detached buildings to the third or (more rarely) the fourth side of the yard.
- In the Black Mountains there is a greater variety in scale. This area has the main concentrations of dispersed cluster plans, linear plans including some longhouses, and small loose courtyard farmsteads with buildings to one or two sides of the yard. Dispersed plans (clusters and multi-yards) are mainly found on the edge of areas of planned upland enclosure, reflecting their long development as sites for holding

livestock on the edge of the rough upland pastures.

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## Building types

- Barns in the Black Mountains are typically of three to five bays, often with evidence for cattle housing or stabling at one end.
- Barns in the Golden Valley are generally of five bays or larger, where large combination barns with cattle housing developed in the 19th century.
- Cattle housing is a major feature of this area. Lean-tos to barns and shelter sheds to cattle yards are common in the Golden Valley,

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and single-storey cow houses in the Black Mountains. There are some very rare surviving examples of 18th-century or earlier single-storey and two-storey cow houses. Stables are sometimes combined with cow houses.

- Cider houses, distinguished by wide doors, are incorporated into 18th-century and later combination ranges; some of these buildings with earlier timber frame cores.



A 17th-century longhouse (beneath the corrugated iron roof) positioned in an isolated position within hills of the Black Mountains. Longhouses, where the farming family and livestock used the same entrance, are scattered along the Welsh border and increase in number across the border into Wales. The farmstead also had a small cruck-framed cow house with a later shelter shed attached on the far side of the yard. The living accommodation was upgraded in the 19th century with the addition of the two-storey house to the end of the longhouse, when the former living area was converted into additional cow housing.

Photo © Bob Edwards



A medium scale, loose courtyard group with shelter sheds and barns to three sides of a yard, the farmhouse occupying the fourth side, lying within an area of piecemeal enclosure on the south side of the Golden Valley. Photo © Bob Edwards



A small, three-bay, cruck-framed cow house located within the foot hills of the Black Mountains. Examples such as this are very rare surviving examples of building types and traditions that were largely swept away in the 18th and 19th centuries. Photo © Bob Edwards



Cattle were also housed in lean-tos added to barns. Photo © Bob Edwards



Many farm buildings in this area were reclad in stone (as with this barn range in the Black Mountains) and brick in the later 18th and 19th centuries. Photos © Bob Edwards



The rear of a small threshing barn in the Black Mountains. Note the small winnowing hole which is sited opposite the entry to the threshing floor. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A combination barn in the Black Mountains, of a type commonly found in Wales. The doors in the gable end provide access to a cow house. Photo © Bob Edwards



Cattle housing with large hay lofts was an important part of the larger farmsteads of the Golden Valley. Photo © Bob Edwards



A 19th-century shelter shed on a large farm in the Golden Valley, where the fattening of cattle on arable-based farms was more important. Photo © Jeremy Lake



A timber-frame combination range, with a first-floor door on the right to the granary and a threshing bay to the left. Photo © Bob Edwards



Field barns and outfarms were a feature of the area, but most have fallen into disuse and are difficult to reuse. Photo © Bob Edwards

## Materials and detail

- Timber-framing, including cruck construction, was widely used until the 18th century. Timber-framed buildings, particularly barns, are typically weatherboard but with tall stone plinths and gable walls. There are some rare surviving examples (in a national context) of horizontal timber boarding that is slotted into the frame. Woven wattle and cleft oak infill to the upper panels of timber-framing in some barns provides ventilation for the crops stored inside.
- Sandstone was the predominant building material in 18th- and 19th-century buildings,

and is often given a thin coat of render or limewash. Stone buildings often hide earlier timber-frames, which may be left exposed in less-visible elevations.

- There was some use of brick from the 18th century but from the 19th century it was used increasingly, especially to the east of the area.
- Roofs are mainly gabled but there are some hipped roofs. Welsh slate is predominant but some stone slate roofs survive.



# Historic England

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Jeremy Lake with Bob Edwards.

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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/  
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landscapes/](https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/west-midlands-farmsteads-landscapes/)

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