



Historic England

Farmstead and Landscape Statement

# Malvern Hills

NATIONAL CHARACTER AREA 103

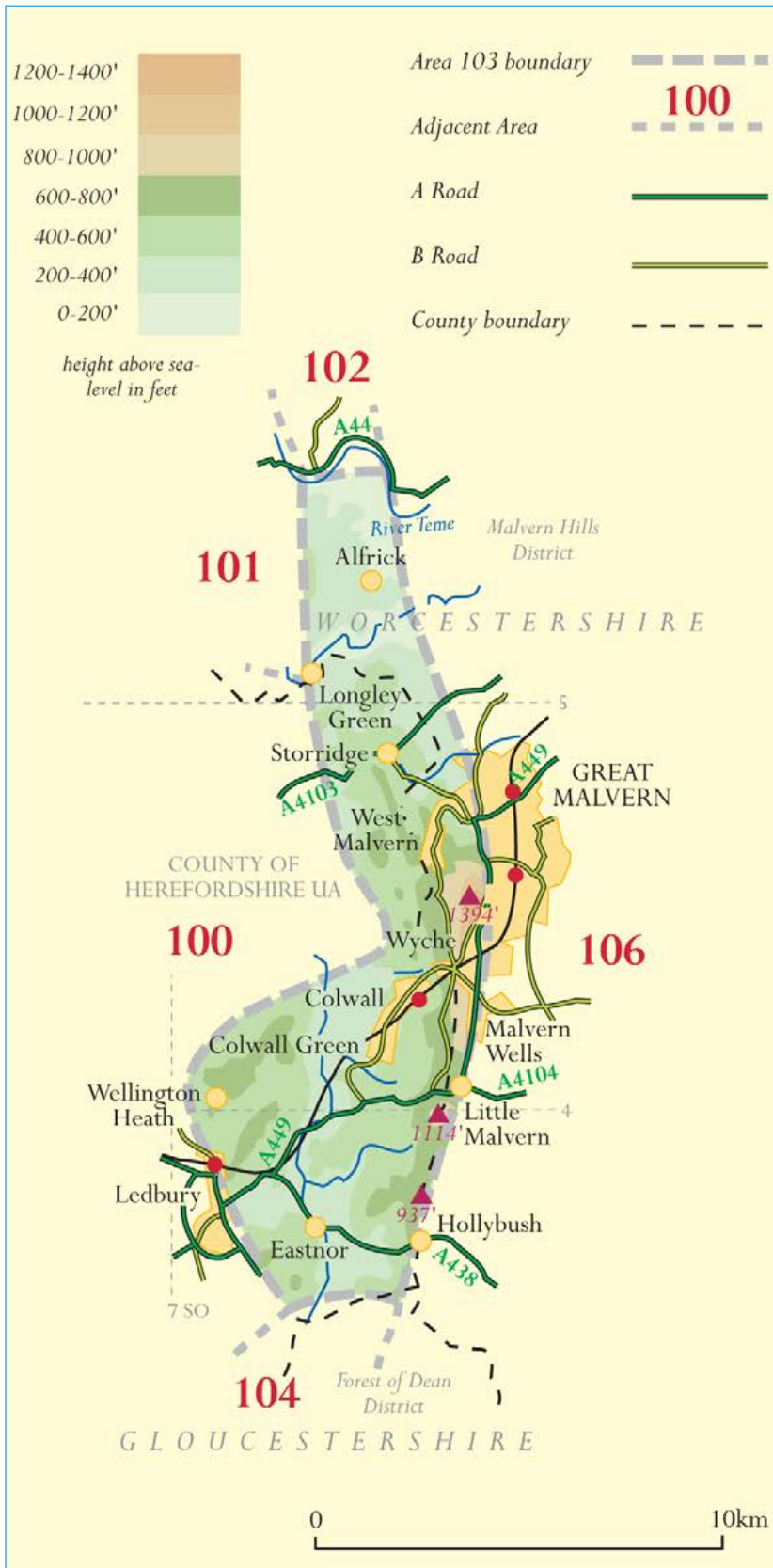


## Introduction

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>).

---

**Front cover:** Across the Malverns, fine, timber-framed houses bear testament to the development of prosperous and substantial farms by the 17th century, but the working buildings on these large farms were often rebuilt to regular plans in the mid- to late 19th century. Photo © Bob Edwards



This map shows the Malvern Hills, with the numbers of neighbouring National Character Areas around it. Major subdivisions are:

1. The Suckley Hills to the north, which has the highest density of 17th-century and earlier houses and farmstead buildings set within irregular enclosed farmland which is well-preserved and intermixed with the highest survival of ancient woodland.
2. The remainder of the area, where much of the earlier pattern of irregular enclosure was reorganised with larger fields and straight boundaries, and the woodland re-shaped into designed blocks, in the 18th and 19th centuries.

# Summary

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

This area lies on the boundary between Worcestershire and Herefordshire, and comprises a distinctive narrow ridge of rounded hills, rising from the Severn and Avon Vales to the east and the Herefordshire Lowlands to the west. The River Teme forms the northern boundary, with the Herefordshire Plateau to the north-west. Nearly 5% of the Character Area is urban, 21% is woodland and nearly 7% is common land. Just over 86% of the area lies within the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

## Historic development

- The area has a mostly dispersed settlement pattern set within landscapes of piecemeal and reorganised (including regular) enclosure interspersed with woodland.
- There is a medium density of farmsteads in the landscape: high to the Suckley Hills to the north and low in the estate lands to the south.
- Large-scale (38.2%) farmsteads are predominant and concentrated to the south, but with an even mix of other farmstead scales that display a strong degree of local variation.
- Small to medium-scale, loose courtyard farmsteads and regular L-plan groups, some with additional buildings, are common. Larger farmsteads – mostly regular plans – are set within larger-scale fields to the west.
- There are some areas of former smallholdings, often of linear form, which were absorbed into larger farms in the 19th century.
- A wide range of building types includes threshing barns, cider houses and hop kilns.

## Significance

- The rate of survival of farmsteads is high except around Malvern (7% loss), with 72% of those recorded from late 19th- century maps retaining more than half of their historic footprint.

## Present and future issues

- In this National Character Area, the Photo Image Project (2006) recorded a medium proportion of listed working farm buildings converted to non-agricultural use (28.6%, the national average being 32%).
- The proportion of farmsteads remaining in agricultural use is the lowest of any in the Region (21%) with three farmsteads out of four being converted to residential use with residents showing high participation in substantial business at director level (39 directorships per hundred farmsteads).

## Historic development

- The Malvern Hills were an upland grazing area for the surrounding settlements from the prehistoric period, and has a long history as royal hunting forest from the 11th until the 16th century, when much land was granted or leased, and final disafforestation and division in 1632 concentrated on the Crown estates to the west. The 1884 Malvern Hills Act formalised management of the commons.
- There is a long history of arable cultivation in valleys, especially in Cradley Brook valley, but the acid/neutral soils of the area are best-suited to pastoral economy.
- Orchards that were developed to an intensive scale of production from late 17th century, are now concentrated on the eastern edge, to the west and north, and hop fields from 18th century are concentrated on valley sides in the north.
- Large estates developed in 18th and 19th centuries, most notably Eastnor Castle and its landscape, laid out in the early 19th century.
- Spring waters attracted visitors from at least the medieval period, with scattered shrines linked to springs. Monastic houses are at Great and Little Malvern and Colwall. Victorian and Edwardian villas, set amongst mixed ornamental woodland, are now a strong element in the character of the eastern slopes. On the western side of the hills around Colwall is some late 19th-century and mostly 20th-century modern housing within a strong pattern of conifers and woodland, giving the area a suburban character.
- There is significant evidence of large-scale quarrying along the length of the northern and eastern slopes of the Malvern Hills. Diorite was the main stone quarried, with some limestone quarried from the area, declining after the 1924 Malvern Hills Act, with the last quarry closing in 1977. Both stone types were mainly used for aggregate.

## Landscape and settlement

- There are some nucleated villages to the west, otherwise the Malverns is marked by dispersed settlement, with scattered farmsteads, hamlets and cottages; a pattern established by the 14th century (including isolated 12th- and 13th- century moated sites) and which intensified further because of the disposal of the Crown's estates in the 17th century.
- Across much of the area, fields are generally irregular and small in scale, the result of medieval and post-medieval woodland clearance. These fields are intermixed with surviving blocks of ancient, semi-natural and replanted woodland (for example, the Suckley Hills) and intakes from the hunting chase. The wooded slopes and ridges were subject to a long history of coppicing – since the Iron Age – for the pottery industry (kilns are clustered to the east).
- Extensive areas of larger fields – particularly south of Mathan and Colwall – reflect the piecemeal enclosure of areas of open fields and common land in association with the development of medium to large-scale farms. There are also large blocks of planned private enclosure of the 17th to 19th centuries.
- Strip lynchets and strips of ridge and furrow in small closes are witness to pre-14th-century levels of arable production in areas of higher ground more suited to grass.
- Formerly extensive orchards still survive in part, particularly in the Leigh and Alfrick area, where fruit production for urban markets peaked in the early 20th century.
- Country houses, together with their landscaped gardens and wider settings and large estate farms, developed as a major feature of this area.

- Some areas of distinct common-edge settlement, such as Wellington Heath,

have been transformed by 20th-century development.

## Farmstead and building types

### Farmstead types

- Loose courtyard farmsteads are mostly small in scale, with detached working buildings to one or two sides of the yard.
- By the later 19th century, concentrations of linear farmsteads in areas of smallholdings (for example, Old Storrige Common) had been absorbed into larger farms.
- Farmsteads are small-scale regular L-shaped, mostly comprising a barn with additional shelter shed and some with additional working buildings to three or four sides of the yard.
- Some medium to large-scale regular courtyard farmsteads, mostly U-shaped and multi-yard plans.

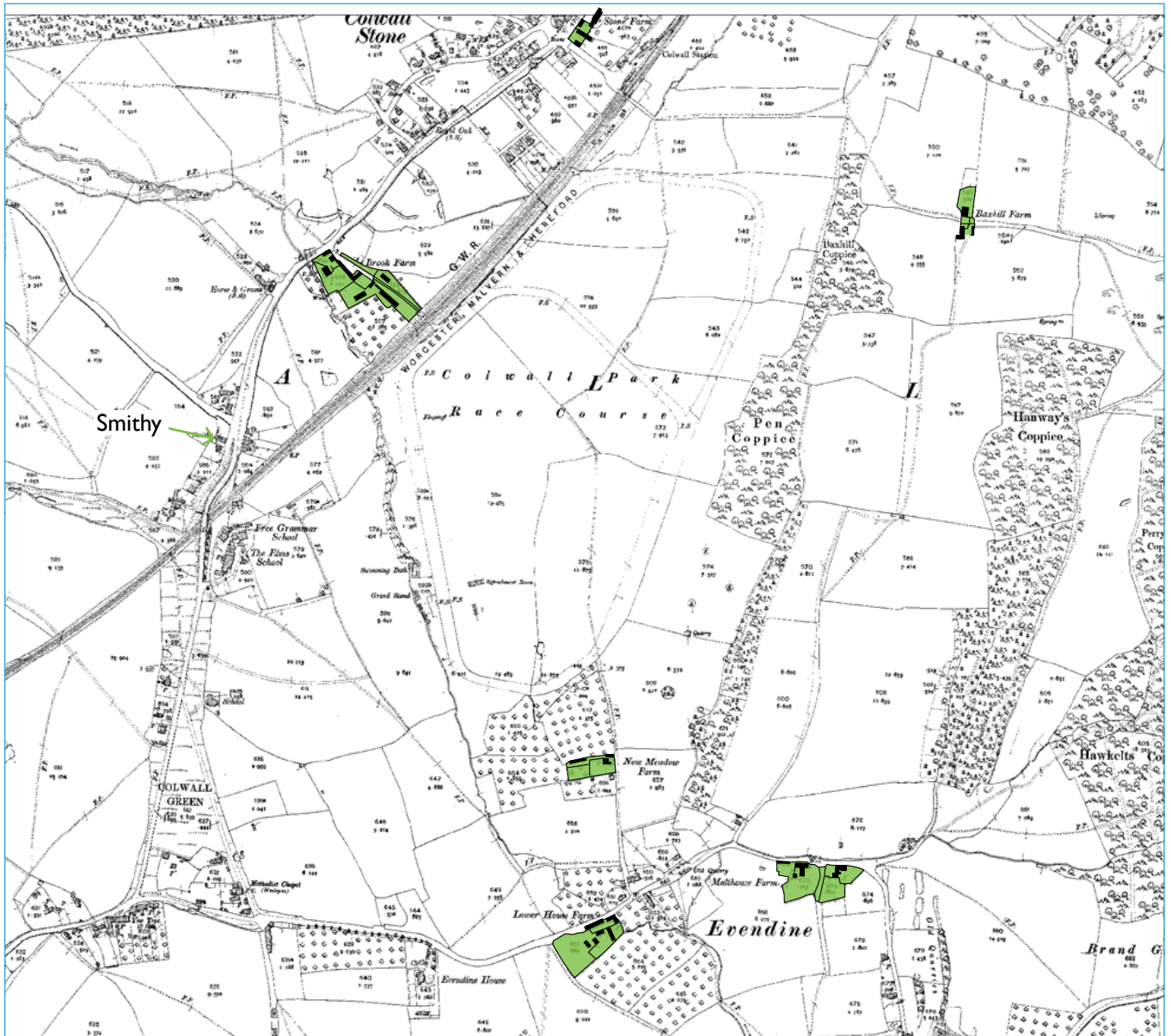
### Building types

- Threshing barns are commonly found with shelter sheds making an L-plan. Combination barns are also common.
- Granaries, set above other buildings including stables and cider houses, are accessed by external steps.
- Hop kilns are usually of mid- to late 19th-century date.
- Buildings for cattle include two-storey cow houses and single-storey open-fronted shelter sheds.
- Cider houses, distinguished by wide doors, are incorporated into 18th-century and later combination ranges which can also include hop kilns, some of which have earlier, timber-frame cores.

## Materials and detail

- There are some 17th-century and earlier timber-framed buildings, including medieval cruck houses, particularly around the Suckley Hills. Timber-framed farm buildings are typically with weatherboarding or have brick infill panels.
- From the 18th century, stone and slate are a major element for most buildings.
- Brick is strongly characteristic of lowland farming areas to the west.
- Plain clay tile and Welsh slate are the most common roofing materials.

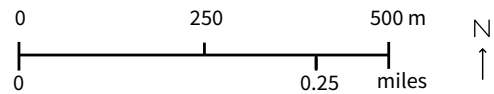




Maps are based on 2nd edition 25" Ordnance Survey maps, which show farmsteads after the last major phase in the building of traditional farmsteads in England.  
 © Crown Copyright [and database rights] 2020. OS 100024900

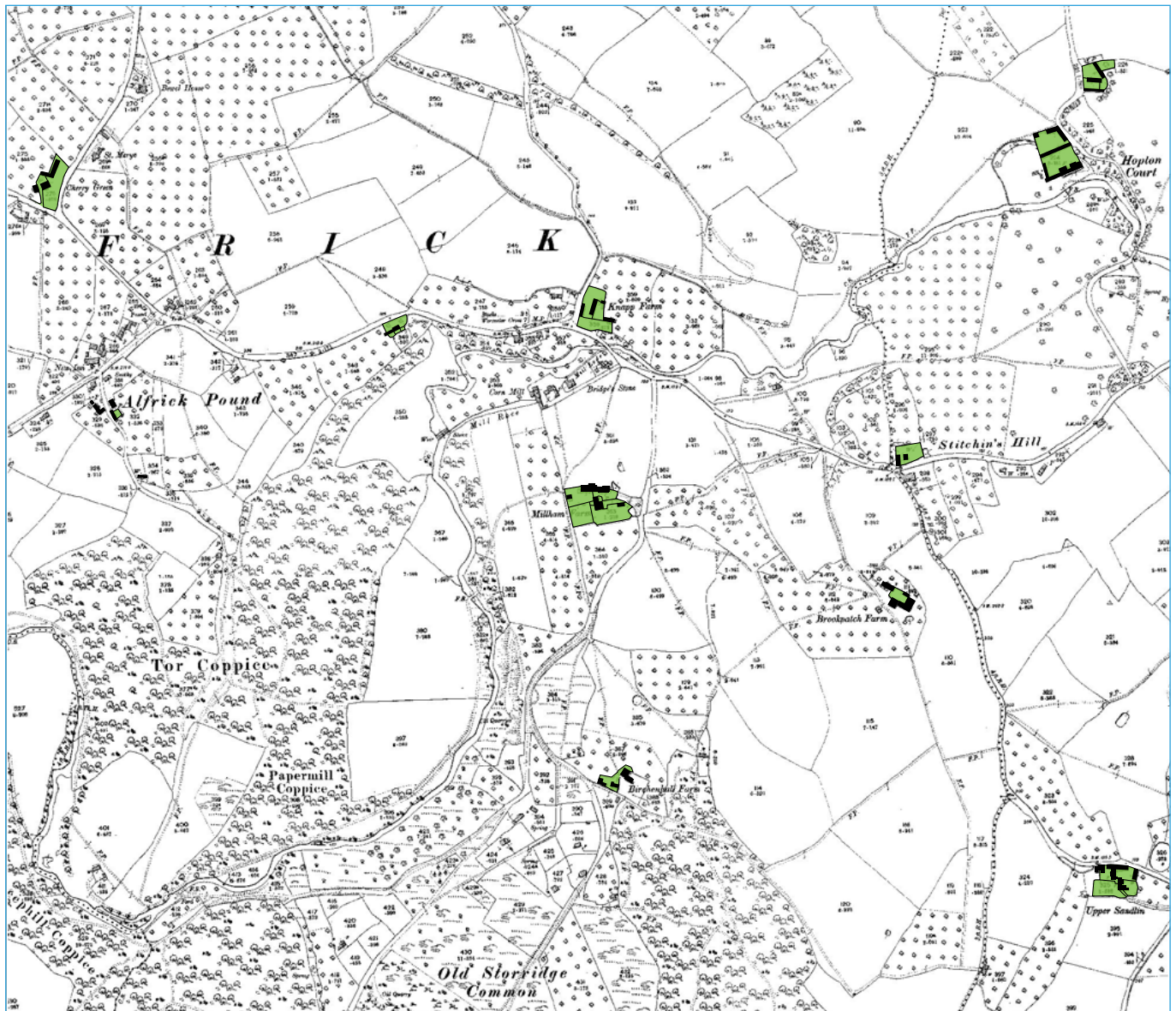


Farmstead, showing the buildings in black and the boundaries of the main yards (highlighted in green), working areas and gardens.



## Colwall

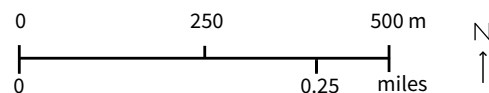
In the southern part of the Malverns, some larger, regular multi-yard farmsteads were intermixed with small to medium-scale farmsteads within a landscape of irregular piecemeal enclosure. These fields were largely the result of medieval and post-medieval clearance of woodland but also, near Colwall, the enclosure of former arable fields. Clearly visible to the east, extending northwards from Evendine, is a designed estate landscape with plantations, and in Colwall Green to the west are some small, timber-framed houses of 17th-century and earlier date that have long been decoupled from the land.



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.



## Alfrick

This area consists of a mixture of woodland (some being regenerated woodland on former common land), remnants of common and small to medium-sized irregular fields, some of which are orchards. The fields to the south around and within the woodland and common are typical of the piecemeal taking-in of woodland and common, a process that accelerated with the disafforestation of the Malverns in the early 17th century. Within Old Storrige Common to the south, are areas of very small fields and cottages representing encroachment onto the common. Further smallholdings may be seen fringing the former common land. To the north and east of the area, the fields are less irregular than the intakes to the south but mostly have wavy boundaries, created through the piecemeal enclosure of former arable from the 16th and 17th centuries, although some straight boundaries suggest that these fields have been subject to some reorganisation. This is an area of predominantly dispersed settlement. The majority of the medium-scale farmsteads lie in an arc around the former edge of the common, positioned so as to have access to both the fields and common for stock. To the north-east, Hopton Court is a large, manorial farmstead in what may be a shrunken settlement.





A rare surviving example, to the west of the area, of a timber-framed linear farmstead of the 17th century or earlier, where the house and working buildings are attached and in-line. Photo © Bob Edwards



A loose courtyard farmstead to the west of the area, with a timber-framed house and working buildings of the 17th century or earlier. Groups such as this are rare survivals, early buildings being concentrated on the western side of the Malverns. Photo © Bob Edwards



17th- century and earlier farmstead groups in timber frame testify to the development from the 14th century of prosperous farms. Many dating from the early 17th century followed the disafforestation of the Malverns. Photo © Bob Edwards



Large-scale, regular courtyard farmsteads are concentrated to the south of the area. When built anew or rebuilt in the 18th and 19th centuries, their houses faced away from the farmyard. Photo © Bob Edwards



Small farms and smallholdings developed around areas of common, and most of the former passed out of agricultural use over the 19th and 20th centuries. To the rear of this house at Colwall Green is a single-bay cottage, and both date from the 17th century. Photo © Bob Edwards



Smallholding landscapes have rarely survived, and working buildings were demolished or rebuilt in the 20th century. Photo © Bob Edwards



Some substantial timber-framed barns of the late 16th and 17th centuries have survived, with the distinctive square panel timber framing typical of the western English carpentry tradition. Photos © Bob Edwards



In the mid- to late 19th century, when much of the Malverns was developed with suburban-style villas and houses, the large farms of this area were provided with industrial-scale buildings such as this combination barn (left) and hop kilns and stowage. Photo © Bob Edwards





# Historic England

This guidance has been prepared by Jeremy Lake with Bob Edwards.

First published by English Heritage 2013. This edition published by Historic England 2020.

Please refer to this document as:  
Historic England 2020 Farmstead and Landscape Statement: Malvern Hills. Swindon: 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 this NCA. For the Summary Report of 2009 see <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)

We are the public body that looks after England's historic environment. We champion historic places, helping people understand, value and care for them.

Please contact [guidance@HistoricEngland.org.uk](mailto:guidance@HistoricEngland.org.uk) with any questions about this document.

[HistoricEngland.org.uk](http://HistoricEngland.org.uk)

If you would like this document in a different format, please contact our customer services department on:

Tel: 0370 333 0607

Email: [customers@HistoricEngland.org.uk](mailto:customers@HistoricEngland.org.uk)

All information and weblinks accurate at the time of publication.

Please consider the environment before printing this document

Product code: 52116 RRL code: 006/2020

Publication date: February 2020 © Historic England  
Design: Historic England and Chantal Freeman, Diva Arts