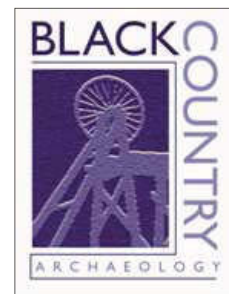
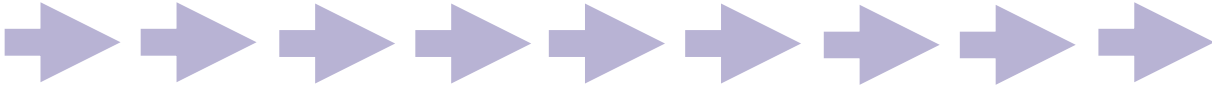
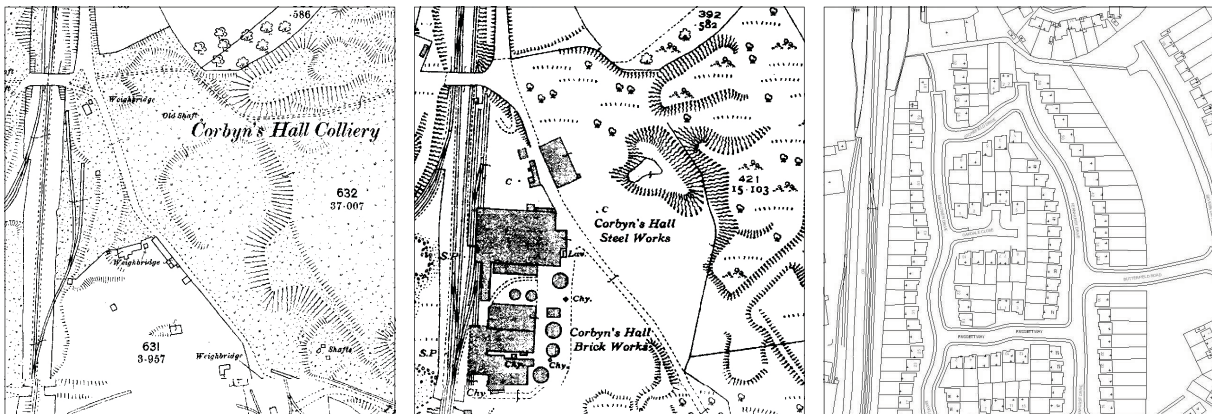


# The Black Country An Historic Landscape Characterisation

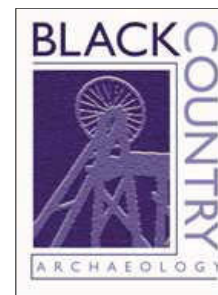
English Heritage Project Number 3638 Main

First Report  
2009



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## The Black Country: An Historic Landscape Characterisation\* Executive Summary



Anything more than a superficial glance at the modern Black Country reveals an intricate pattern of use and re-use of land, streets, buildings, and other structures. This complexity, a product of hundreds of years of recycling of physical resources to meet human demands, is easily misunderstood without the appropriate research tools.

This Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) aims to be a tool in understanding the landscape as it exists today, by placing it firmly in a context of the historical development of its constituent parts. The purpose of producing this understanding is to assist the sensitive management of the built environment in the future.

**Section 1** introduces the reader to some of the more general features of the process of HLC, to the particular landscape of the Black Country, and to the way in which HLC has been applied in this case.

HLC aims to be an open, transparent process of representing the landscape, and **Section 2** lays out in some detail the way in which the record has been assembled. This includes a discussion of the sequence of maps and aerial photographs which have formed the basis of the data, together with the systems of classification used to distinguish different types of modern and past landscape.

Although a subsequent publication will present more detailed analysis of the database, Sections 3 and 4 of this report outline some ways in which the data can be interpreted. **Section 3** considers how the HLC record can be used to produce broad overviews of land use, periods of origin and surviving character. It also shows how past transformations of the area (such as the historic switch from 19<sup>th</sup> century mining to 20<sup>th</sup> century suburban residential streets) can be represented and examined by HLC data.

**Section 4** analyses the data by using it to create more than 50 *Character Areas*—zones within each of which the landscape shares something in common. **Section 5** then goes on to profile the modern and historic environment within each of these Character Areas with a view to improving our understanding of the character and local distinctiveness of each location.

Following brief conclusions, a series of four **Appendices** provide the technical detail of the categories of landscape used within the data as well as a copy of the original project design.

The programme of Historic Landscape Characterisation in the Black Country is expected to continue until 2010. As mentioned above, a second report will use the data to provide a greater level of analysis of the Black Country landscape. Additionally, a number of reports have been prepared, and others proposed, to examine the data relating to particular areas or aspects of the landscape. Details of the outputs from the programme can be found at: [www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/hlc](http://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/hlc).

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\*English Heritage Project Number 3638 MAIN.

**Table A7: Open Land**

<b>Description:</b> (BroadTypeDesc)	<b>Scope:</b> (ScopeNote)
Ancient unenclosed	Ancient heath land/common/moorland from place name evidence/historical
Derelict land	For land that had once had buildings on it or where the map does not indicate what the land use is/was or where aerial photography shows no vegetation.
Marsh	For areas indicated as marsh land - on the modern mapping
Rough grassland/scrub	For land 'rough pasture' shown on modern maps & aerial photography. Rough pasture is largely grassland with some bushes.
Vacant plot	For small plots of land within settlement/industrial areas that are not defined as anything else. Only to be used if cannot fit comfortably into any other HLC type.

**Table A8: Field System**

<b>Description:</b> (BroadTypeDesc)	<b>Scope:</b> (ScopeNote)
Irregular enclosure	For other fields systems which do not fit the planned or piecemeal enclosures, but does include assarting & enclosure of waste at an unknown period, but probably pre 1750.
Other enclosed fields	For assumed field systems which cannot be identified as anything else - especially where they have been built upon at an early period a possible date for enclosure.
Paddocks & closes	Small fields closely associated with settlement.
Piecemeal enclosure	Field systems with at least two reverse S curves or dog legs and/or ridge & furrow (unless obviously planned enclosure) which indicate enclosed strip fields. This term will also include Staffordshire's term of 'Re-organised piecemeal enclosure'.
Planned enclosure	Fields which are regular with straight boundaries - appearance of being laid out as a piece by a surveyor. On the whole post 1750 (some may be slightly earlier).
Squatter enclosures	Small piecemeal fields associated with squatter settlement often in areas of collieries or former common land.

**Table A9: Woodland**

<b>Description:</b> (BroadTypeDesc)	<b>Scope:</b> (ScopeNote)
Deciduous woodland	Largely deciduous - may have a few coniferous trees, but not dominant and not plantation.
Mixed woodland	A mix of both deciduous and coniferous trees.
Orchard	For areas marked as orchards on the maps.
Plantation	Planned wood usually of coniferous trees - planted to generate income.

## Newton, Hamstead & Great Barr Character Area (SD02)

### SUMMARY:

This is largely a residential area comprising almost exclusively 20<sup>th</sup> century housing and, in this respect at least, it is not uncommon in its character within the modern Black Country. However, the area also includes significant areas of fields which continue to the north beyond the modern Sandwell boundary<sup>1</sup>. The junction of the M5 and M6 motorways is at the area's western edge and the area is crossed by several other wide roads.

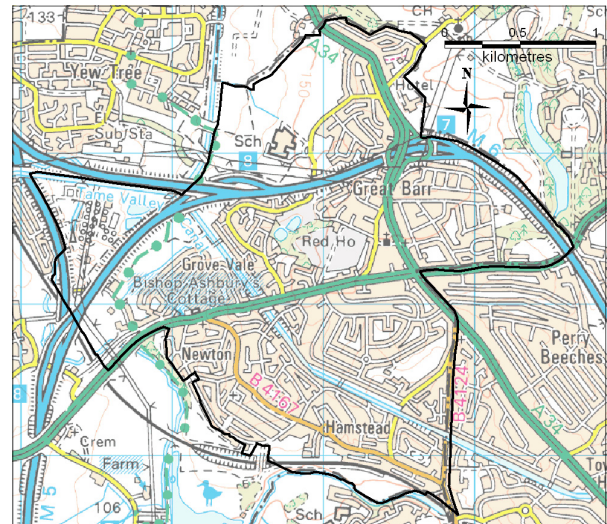
### GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY:

The area generally lies over sandstone, mudstone and conglomerate, and coal measures are only accessible at depth. The south-west of the area is in the valley of the River Tame while, within a short distance, the land rises by about 60m to its high point in the north-east at Great Barr (about 170m).

### MODERN CHARACTER:

This residential area borders the city of Birmingham and functions in many ways as a suburb of the city. Housing, which represented just over half of the area in 2000, is of generally lower density than in many parts of the Black Country. Around Great Barr, for example, there is a ring of inter-war semi-detached and detached housing, centred roughly around the wide junction of two large roads: the A34 north out of Birmingham and the east-west A4041 Newton Road. The junction, in the east of the area and visible on the adjacent map, includes a small retail centre and is known as Scott Arms after a landmark pub.

North of the A4041, which bisects the area, is also characterised by low density similar housing, albeit from a later period. It includes suburban properties from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a



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concentration of detached houses surrounding the inter-war Red House Park (in the centre of the area).

The housing in the southern part of the area is generally of a different character, with more small semis and terraces. The character of this area is also influenced by the former presence of one of the last collieries in the Black Country at Hamstead, on the southern edge of the area, which closed in 1965. Serviced by the Tame Valley Canal and the former route of the *London Midland & Scottish Railway* (both of which remain part of the modern landscape), the colliery also has contemporaries among the nearby surviving housing, such as the short inter-war terraces on James Road and Holland Road.

The large water reclamation works which occupies the western part of the area alongside the River Tame and the canal was established in the inter-war years, and thus predates the slip roads of the junction of the M5 and M6 motorways which was built in the late 1960s.

The oldest landscapes in the area are those of the remaining fields in its north-west, which continue beyond its boundary towards Barr Beacon, in Walsall<sup>1</sup>.



Inter-war housing arranged in short terraces on Spouthouse Lane, Hamstead, in the south-east of the area, seen from the aqueduct carrying the Tame Valley Canal.

<sup>1</sup>See *Barr Beacon & Aldridge Fields* Character Area profile.



## HISTORIC CHARACTER<sup>2</sup>:

Until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century the this area consisted largely of agricultural land. It was only in the period between the wars that residential development began to spread.

The Tame Valley Canal had been one of the later canals to be built in the Black Country, being opened in 1844. It connects the Walsall Canal in the east to the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal in the west. The hill at Great Barr necessitated the excavation of a deep cutting for the canal where a bridge takes Newton Road over it, whereas only a kilometre away an aqueduct is needed to carry the canal over Spouthouse Lane (see photo over page).

The area's only colliery was at Hamstead and, after the earlier shallow, open workings elsewhere in the Black Country, it was a late attempt to extract the remaining coal from some depth: sinkings began in 1875 and only reached the coal five years later at a depth of more than half a kilometre.

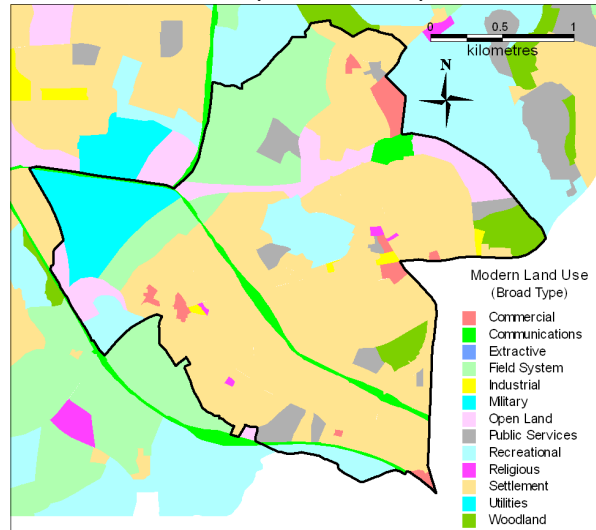
Before the discovery of coal there, Hamstead was only a small hamlet. However, in the early 1880s when the colliery began commercial extraction the population increased dramatically. Miners and their families converged on the area from other mining areas in the country, including South Wales and the north-east of England. Hamstead Village was thus born to serve the colliery, and the two were inter-dependent until the colliery closed. It was the last colliery to be operational within what is now Sandwell, closing in 1965.

The main Birmingham to Walsall Road runs through the eastern part of the ward with a major junction at the Scott Arms where it crosses the Newton Road. The roads themselves are on ancient routes but the Scott Arms was originally an 18<sup>th</sup> century coaching inn: which flourished because of its position at the road junction. The Georgian building was demolished in 1966 and replaced by a modern brick one, set well back from the road to accommodate the busy junction. The inn has given its name to the both the road junction and the nearby shopping centre.

In more recent times motorways have also made their mark: the M6 runs through the area with two junctions, one with the Birmingham to Walsall road and the other with the M5. Both motorways were opened in 1970.

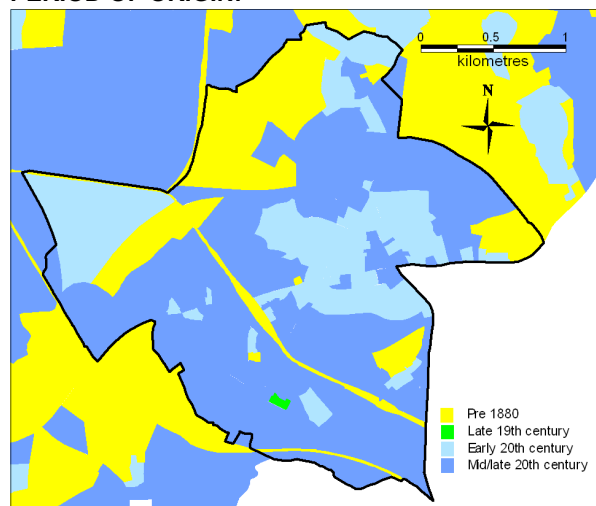
The east of the area is land previously belonging to Great Barr Hall (the home of the Scott family, after

## MODERN LAND USE (BROAD TYPE):



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## PERIOD OF ORIGIN:



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whom the Scott Arms public house was named). At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the hall and grounds were taken over by the Walsall and West Bromwich Guardians. Some of what was the park has now been covered with housing, and most of the remainder, including the Hall itself, now lies in Walsall. The Red House, in a public park in the centre of the Character Area, is another of Great Barr's big houses. Owned by a succession of local industrialists, it had a number of uses before it was closed in the 1920s. The adjacent park was opened to the public in 1929, during the residential development of the wider area.

<sup>2</sup>This summary draws in part on work previously published in Sandwell MBC's ward profiles (1996).