Countryside Character
Volume 2:
North West

The character of
England's natural and
man-made landscape
The Countryside Commission aims to make sure that the English countryside is protected and enhanced, and can be used and enjoyed now and in the future.
Countryside Character

Volume 2:
North West

The character of
England's natural and
man-made landscape
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Neolithic stone circle at Castle Rigg, Cumbria High Fells.
Foreword

As soon as I saw the Character Map of England I realised that it should have been one of the front pages of my school atlas. Not only does it reflect influences such as geology and landform, but it also records the effect of thousands of years of human activity within an ever-evolving natural world. Thus it, and the supporting descriptive documents, are not merely a celebration of the diversity of our country but they are also an important educational and planning tool - for today and tomorrow.

For unless we recognise and understand the special and local nature of the variety of character within England, we can never hope to protect it, conserve it or even put right some of the damage we have done to it.

A better understanding of what we have now is at the heart of achieving sustainable development in the future.

The landscape descriptions and maps presented here, set out the qualities of today's countryside. They do not ascribe values to particular aspects of the countryside. That is for others to do in a way which is appropriate to the particular purpose for which they want the information. The new Countryside Agency will use it to inspire its work. Our aim is to protect the countryside and ensure that it can be used and enjoyed, and handed on in good shape to future generations.

We have a unique legacy to bequeath to our children - a legacy not just of biodiversity; not just about landscape or history. It is the juxtaposition of town, country and coast; of land form and land use; of history and modern progress; it is, in two words, England's Character; and this book, along with its companion volumes, will tell you what that means.

Richard Simmons
Chairman, Countryside Commission
Introduction

The character of England

Think of England and the chances are that you will conjure up an image of the countryside.

That image might be of a willow lined river, quietly meandering through pastures, where cows graze. It might be of a windswept fell, cloaked in purple heather and bounded by crumbling grey stone walls. It might equally be of pylons marching across fields of yellow rape set against a steel grey sky. Or perhaps of dark sunken lanes cutting through chalk ridges crowned with beech and ash woodland. Your image, whatever it is, will grow in your mind as you begin to add in other things you associate with it - a distant church spire, the song of skylarks, the angular horizon of slag heaps, the sudden view across open downland to a hidden vale below.

This is the character of England’s countryside. This and much more. We may each have our own particular image, a personal response to our own backgrounds and experiences - together these images reflect the rich and diverse character of England’s countryside as a whole. Many different elements combine to create this character. Because of this there is tremendous variety in that character. To recognise the variation in countryside character is to understand how the many influences upon it combine to give a sense of place, to set a tract of countryside apart from adjacent areas. That is what this publication does.

Everywhere has character. As a society, we already place a higher value upon some areas of countryside than the rest. We do this with legislation, for example, designating National Parks; by spending public money to help look after areas - through schemes such as Environmentally Sensitive Areas; and through our own behaviour, by going to certain places on holiday, for instance. Countryside character is present in all these areas and in the rest of the countryside. Recognising and understanding countryside character is equally important across the whole of England. How we choose to respond to that understanding is the next step, which is not undertaken in this publication.

Most of us have a strong sense of local pride. As we move rapidly towards a global society, we increasingly value the ‘anchor’ that our local identity gives us. We have pride in both our immediate surroundings, whether it be town or country, and also in seeing that we are part of something that is different, that has a unique sense of place. The character of the countryside is an important part of what many of us take

two examples which show how the key characteristics of the North West combine to create character areas.

Bowland Fells

This is a grand and isolated landscape, dominated by a central upland core of deeply incised gritstone fells which support moorland and blanket bog. Once forest on all but the highest land, woodland clearance from as early as 3000 BC led to the expansion of heathland and blanket bog, together with the cultivation of permanent pasture seen today.

The area is bounded by the vast lowlands of the Bowland Fringe. Incised cloughs and valleys link the fringe with the upland pasture and moorland. Stone walls, originally built as part of the enclosures of the 16th and 17th Century, and scattered farms and villages give the pasturage a more cultivated appearance. In contrast, the vast open sweeping moorlands are wild and isolated in their character, many now managed for grouse.

Manchester Pennine Fringe

This is an area that weaves a rich and interesting story of industrial development and today has a strong cultural and industrial heritage. It occupies a transitional zone between the densely populated Manchester conurbation and the wild open moorlands of the Southern Pennines and Dark Peak.

Historically much of the economy of the area was pastoral. However, the growth of the textile and mineral extraction industries during the 18th and 19th centuries resulted in the industrialisation of the river valley bottoms, with agriculture pushed onto the valley sides.

Today traditional agriculture continues to decline owing to heavy urban fringe pressures such as recreation, farm diversification and housing development. Where agriculture remains, the land is predominantly improved or rough grassland used for stock rearing. Valuable tracts of countryside also remain along the steep sided river valleys where the land is unsuitable for farming or development. These rips are often important for both wildlife and recreation.
The Character of England:
landscape, wildlife & natural features
pride in, it may be that we live in the countryside, or that it provides our workplace. It may be that we visit it often, or travel through it. It may even be that we have only experienced it through other media - literature, art, television. But for one or all of these reasons, we identify and take pride in the character of England's countryside.

The irony is that as we increasingly begin to appreciate our local distinctiveness, we are also beginning to realise how vulnerable that distinctiveness can be. In an age of mass production, standardisation, economies of scale and international markets, those elements of our countryside that have traditionally been driven by local influences are being quickly eroded. The materials and style of new buildings, the breed of cattle in the field, the shape of the hedgerows, the village sign, the farm gates and buildings are just a few examples. In all of these there is a trend towards uniformity: it is becoming ever more difficult to identify from your surroundings which part of the countryside you are in. It is, therefore, more important than ever that we understand what contributes to the character of England's countryside. Then, we can recognise the impact on this character of the decisions we take, both as individuals and as a society.

The Countryside Commission and countryside character

The Countryside Commission has been concerned with the whole of England's countryside.

The English countryside is a priceless national asset. It is fundamental to our national identity as well as a rich source for our local identity. This is reflected in popular public opinion (Public Attitudes to the Countryside, Countryside Commission, CCP 481, 1997, £1). The most remarkable aspect of England's countryside is its diversity. The Commission believes that it is in the national interest to protect and strengthen this diversity. Our work to identify and describe the character of England, which we are publishing here, is intended to:

- raise awareness of the diversity of countryside character we enjoy;
- increase understanding of what contributes to that character and what may influence it in the future; and
- encourage everyone to respect the character of the countryside and take account of it in everything that they do.

The Commission has long been associated with areas of the countryside that have been designated as being of national importance (such as the National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). It has also been active for many years in trying to encourage greater understanding and more active management of the wider countryside. Through this work, it became apparent that we lacked a consistent and comprehensive understanding of what gave the countryside of England its character. This is an essential starting point for guiding our own policies and decisions and for encouraging others to take account of the impact of their own decisions on the countryside.

The Commission has long worked with other bodies to develop the technique of landscape assessment (landscape assessment guidance, Countryside Commission, 1993, CCP 423). This identifies those things that are having an influence on a tract of countryside and describes how the landscape reflects this. It has been applied at a wide range of scales, for a variety of purposes. Even so, much of England's countryside had never had such an assessment carried out which made it impossible to build up a national picture using landscape assessments.

The Countryside Commission identified the need for a new approach, which looked at the whole of England's countryside. This would use a consistent approach nationally. It would need to be at a broad enough scale to give national coverage, whilst ensuring that significant variation in the character of the countryside was picked up. It would provide a consistent national framework within which more detailed local landscape assessments would sit. This approach is described in more detail below.

How we have defined the character of England's countryside

Our approach to mapping and describing the character of England's countryside can best be described as a combination of computer based statistical analysis and the consistent application of structured landscape assessment techniques. We initially piloted the approach in the south west of England (The New Map of England: A Celebration of the South Western Landscape, Countryside Commission, CCP 444, 1994, £20) from which a successful methodology was developed that was suitable for extending to the national scale. The south west pilot study produced a map of cohesive landscape character areas.

As part of the study, we asked a cross section of the public if they identified with the character areas produced - they did. On the strength of the pilot study, the Commission decided to develop the methodology for use nationally.

The National Mapping Project

The character of the countryside is the result of many different factors or variables. It is the way in which these combine that gives broad areas of the countryside a cohesive and distinctive character. The National Mapping project looked at how these variables combined across England as a basis for the mapping of distinctive character areas. The approach involved:

- identifying the variables that needed to be included;
obtaining information on each variable for every 1 kilometer square of England; these are called the national data sets;

- combining all the national data sets through a computer based statistical analysis technique, known as TWINSPLAN;

- using the results of the TWINSPLAN analysis to inform the mapping of cohesive character areas.

The variables - these included physical influences (geological, topographical and soils based) and cultural and historical influences (human activity). They were selected by an inter-agency group which the Commission set up to oversee the countryside character work, following a lot of background research on availability of data and the feasibility of national coverage. In particular, the involvement of English Nature and English Heritage was essential in this process, ensuring that both the ecological and historical dimensions were properly reflected.

The national data sets - 17 national data sets were used. These are described in the box opposite. They were put together in a variety of different ways. Some simply had to be extracted from existing source material (eg altitude), others required interpretation of existing information (eg surface geology and ecological character). Some had to be specially created through empirical research (eg field pattern and density and industrial history).

Each data set has a number of attributes. The number of attributes varied between data sets. For example, the settlement pattern data set has only seven attributes, relating to the extent to which settlement is dispersed or clustered together. By contrast, the surface geology data set has 27 attributes reflecting the variety of solid and drift deposits occurring. For each data set, every kilometre square of England was assigned an attribute; hence, each kilometre square has 12 attributes. Full information on the attributes is contained in a Technical Report (Countryside Character Initiative National Mapping Project, technical report of the computer phase, June 1997, Chris Blandford Associates - unpublished). A map of each of the national data sets was produced, illustrating the distribution of all attributes across the country. Some examples of these as they relate to the North West region are shown in Figures 1 - 5 overleaf.

TWINSPLAN analysis - the details of this process are set out in the Technical Report. The basic principle is that all the kilometre squares in the sample (the whole of England) can be divided up into a number of groups on the basis of the presence or absence of a particular attribute. This subdivision continues until an appropriate number of end groups are reached, each of which will contain kilometre squares with similar attributes. The map which resulted from this then informed the definition of character areas.
Examples from the Countryside Character Programme National Mapping Project related to the North West region

Figure 1
FARM TYPES
Reproduced and adapted from an original provided by FPCA.

Figure 2
ECOLOGICAL CHARACTER
This is copyright material and should not be copied without the express permission of the
Cromlech Trust and Land Research Centre.

Figure 3
VISIBLE ARCHAEOLOGY
Based on information supplied by kind permission of ROCHE.

Figure 4
WOODLAND COVER
Based on the Ordnance Survey Map © Crown Copyright 1998
Licence No. GO/16/134.

Figure 5
SURFACE GEOLOGY
Geological map © HEC, all rights reserved. Topographical map
© Crown Copyright reserved.

For all the above figures, these visual representations derived from IDRISI Image for information purposes only. Geodetic is an approximation.
Map images were derived from the TWINSPLAN analysis using all the national data sets and four selected physiographical data sets, respectively. They illustrate how physical factors, such as landform and geology, strongly influence character at the regional and national scale and how historical and cultural factors are significant in providing the more local variation on these broader patterns.

Informing the character mapping process outlined above was then used to help inform the definition of character areas, broad tracts of countryside exhibiting a cohesive character. This was also based upon a more conventional landscape assessment approach, which drew upon the knowledge and experience of a wide range of people involved in countryside planning and management, a considerable body of existing landscape assessment work and some limited additional fieldwork. The results of the TWINSPLAN process were used to validate this more subjective view of countryside character and ensure that the character areas were defined in a consistent way across the whole of England.

The Character of England map: a joint approach

English Nature and English Heritage have both been closely associated with the development of the countryside character approach. English Heritage, as the government agency responsible for the historic dimension of the countryside, has worked closely with the Commission in developing and sourcing the cultural and historical data sets, and advising on the broader process of characterisation. English Nature have similarly worked with the Commission in respect of the soils derived data sets (ecological character and land capability) but their involvement in the mapping process has been more fundamental.

English Nature developed a similar approach to identifying and mapping the countryside according to the distribution of habitats and natural features, which they refer to as natural areas. This work was brought into the definition of character areas with a view to a single joint map of landscape, wildlife and natural features being produced. This was achieved, and the map is shown on page 7. Both English Nature and the Commission now work from the basis of this joint framework. Both recognise all the character areas identified on it. However, because physical influences are of primary importance in determining ecological variations, English Nature often aggregate the joint character areas into their larger natural areas.

Describing the character of England

Having identified and mapped the character of England, we have gone on to describe each of the character areas shown on the map. It is the descriptions for the character areas in the North West that are contained in this publication.

The descriptions have been developed through the wide ranging consultation process referred to above, which also informed the character mapping. Views from interested parties have been sought and material drawn from a great variety of sources. Nationally, over 800 people have contributed, through meetings, seminars and written comment.

For each area, the description seeks to evoke what sets it apart from any other. It aims to put our mental image of that area into words. Each description also provides an explanation of how that character has arisen and how it is changing, and gives some pointers to future management issues. The descriptions are not intended to prescribe any particular course of action as a response to that; only to inform the decision making process.

The character of England shaping the future

The material contained in this publication describes the character of England's countryside at the end of the 20th century. This character has evolved over thousands of years, as a result of a complex interaction between nature and human activity. The pace of change over that time has ebbed and flowed and will continue to do so. The character of England is dynamic.

The identification and description of the character of England's countryside does not mean that we are seeking to 'freeze' that character at this moment in time. The purpose of the work is to ensure that we understand - from a widely accepted common reference point - the character of England's countryside. Only in this way can we all take proper account of that in all the decisions we make which will have a bearing on it. Greater awareness and understanding will engender greater respect and local pride. This will inform and shape change to make a positive contribution to strengthening countryside character.

We envisage this happening in a number of ways; for example by:

- focusing national policies - decisions and activities that have a major bearing on the character of the countryside are often driven by national and international policies, such as land use planning or the Common Agricultural Policy. There is increasing recognition that such policies need to be developed and applied more flexibly at a regional scale to improve their effectiveness and make them more responsive to local needs and priorities. The character of England provides a framework which can be used to provide a regional resolution for such policies, so that they take more account of the needs and opportunities within each region.
- **Giving national meaning to local action** - encouraging local pride lies at the heart of ensuring that the character of England continues in all its diversity into the future. Local people have the greatest potential of all to recognise and strengthen local distinctiveness. The character of England provides a national context for local action, strengthening the link between local and national heritage, and providing a source of information and ideas to feed into local decision making.

*Countryside Character* is being published in 8 volumes, following the boundaries of the administrative areas of the Government Offices for the Regions:

- North East
- North West
- Yorkshire & the Humber
- East Midlands
- West Midlands
- The East
- South East
- South West

(Merseyside is included in the North West volume and London is included in the South East volume).
Lancashire and
Amounderness Plain

Key Characteristics

- Relatively flat and gently rolling plain broken by isolated hills such as Parbold Hill, Beacon Park and Ashurst’s Beacon.
- Large-scale agricultural landscape with a patchwork of pasture and arable fields and blocks of wind-sculptured mixed woodland.
- Medium- to large-scale field pattern with a high density of field ponds to the east and extensive drainage systems of raised ditches and dykes to the west.
- Remnants of lowland mires and mosses in the west.
- Salt marshes are prominent at the heads of estuaries.
- A rectilinear network of lanes and tracks, usually without fences or hedges.
- Predominantly isolated brick farmsteads in rural areas with the main urban settlement concentrated in the planned Victorian coastal resorts and inland towns.

Landscape Character

This is an area of high grade agricultural land which extends southwards from Morecambe Bay in the north to the outskirts of Liverpool in the south. The eastern boundary of the Plain is continued by the Bowland Fringe. It is divided from the industrial landscape of the Lancashire Coal Measures in the southeast by the Upholland ridge, a Millstone Grit outcrop, which punctuates the plain. The southern boundary is formed partly by the city of Liverpool which extends from the Mersey Estuary beyond the hills of Ashtead and Walton.

The plain is a rich patchwork of lush pasture and arable fields on a relatively flat to gently rolling coastal landscape. This rural landscape is dissected by a complex network of drainage channels which reinforces the angular form of the field pattern and is a reminder of the area’s heritage of moses and mires. Wimbranleigh Moss SSSI is the only substantial area of lowland peat mossland which remains today, although there are other small isolated examples across the plain. The Ribble Estuary bisects the plain at Preston.

A long distance view towards the coast from Harrock Hill showing typical features of the reclaimed mosslands of the southern plain. Improved pasture land gives way to predominantly large-scale, open arable farmland, with infrequent hedgerows and woodland.

The northern plain is, predominantly, improved pasture with isolated arable fields. It is a neat, ordered landscape of medium-sized fields with field ponds, clipped hedgerows and drainage ditches. This is a medium- to large-scale landscape with blocks of wind sculptured mixed woodland that punctuate the relatively flat to gently rolling plain. The combination of woodland blocks and isolated individual trees create a well composed parkland character. Views to the east are seen against the dramatic backdrop of the Forest of Bowland.

The southern plain has a different physiographical history to that of the plain north of the Ribble and this is reflected in the land use of the area. It is predominantly highly productive arable land with large fields. There is widespread loss of hedgerows and many field boundaries are simply ditches in areas where there is no need for
stockproofing. The boundaries to the network of lanes and tracks which criss-cross this area, are commonly without fences or hedges. The lack of hedgerows and hedges, combined with the essentially flat topography and large arable fields creates a large-scale sweeping landscape. Views to the coast are highly influenced by urban fringe development in the Selton Coast at Fornby, Ainsdale, Southport and other settlements. Trees and woodland tend to be large angular blocks of mixed species which accentuate the regular field pattern.

The plain to the east is predominantly formed by clay soils and contains much ancient wood pasture of an unplanned nature with a high density of field ponds formed by the extraction of clay for agricultural use.

There are extensive long-distance views across the plain which are punctuated by woodland blocks and brick-built farmsteads. There provide vertical accents in an otherwise flat, horizontal landscape. The surface texture of the plain is a continually changing patchwork of colour and texture related to the various crops and changing seasons.

**Physical Influences**

Although Permian-Triassic red mudstones, siltstones and sandstones ('New Red Sandstone') constitute much of the floor of the Lancashire Lowlands, the solid rock geology rarely emerges from beneath its thick covering of glacial and post-glacial deposits. The plain's lush green pasture and rich arable land are a creation of the last two centuries.

**Character Area 32: Lancashire and Amounderness Plain**

- **Area 32 boundary**
- **Adjacent area**
- **A Road**
- **B Road**
- **Railway and Station**
- **County boundary**
- **Unitary authority boundary**
- **District boundary**

- **600-600'**
- **200-400'**
- **0-200'**

Height above sea level in feet.
Prior to this, the area was predominantly marshland formed by rising sea levels after the last glaciation. As the ice-sheet retreated it left behind a blanket of glacial till which now forms the coastal cliffs north of Blackpool. It also created many badly drained hollows which soon became filled with post-glacial peat giving rise to the mosses and mires which dominated the area until only recently. Place names incorporating 'moss' and 'mere' are numerous today and are associated with an abundance of well-maintained ditches and drains.

View from Scorton looking towards Blackpool. In the northern plain, lough pasture bordered by hedgerows interspersed with small blocks of woodland are typical features.

The plain to the south of the Ribble Estuary has a similar post-glacial history to that in the north. Again, glacial deposits, soils and contours combine to produce the gently sloping plain flanking out to fenland at the coast. A low cliffline in the till plain a few miles inland marks the old shoreline of the former lake of Martin Mere and is still traceable intermittently from the river Ribble to the river Dee. It is best seen at Grindleton Bank near Preston and at Hill House east of Formby. The drift geology hereabouts is mainly wind-blown Shireley Hill Sand with small patches of underlying till and marine clay. In addition, there are major areas of basin peat in the east around Simonswood Moss and coastal peats south-east of Hightown. The basin and coastal peats together with podzolic soils overlying the Shireley Hill Sands produce high quality Grade 1 and 2 soils over much of the area.

Agricultural drainage systems of steep-sided ditches with localised reed beds and steep embankments are a dominant feature of the Lancashire and Aunsworthness Plain and are responsible for the dramatic transformation from marshes to a rich and ordered landscape of neat fields.

Historical and Cultural Influences

The western coastlands of the Lancashire and Aunsworthness Plain remained sparsely populated until the end of the 18th century. There is some limited evidence of the area being settled in the Mesolithic period and later by the Vikings and Angles and there is evidence of a Roman fort at Kirkham. However, the barren sand dunes of the present coast, the mosslands studded with mires and the heavy clay soils of the densely forested glacial drift plain combined to make this an inhospitable landscape not conducive to early settlements.

The salt marshes of the Wyre (seen here) and Ribble estuaries are important for their landscape and nature-conservation value. Heavy industrialisation of parts of the coast is common.
The drainage of the marshes and coastal fens during the 19th century transformed the marshes into high-grade pasture and arable land and saw the development of Victorian resorts such as Blackpool. A striking feature of the plain is the lack of historical links to the distant past. Another factor which has influenced the development of the modern landscape, relates to the drainage schemes of the 18th century. A few isolated windmills built to drain the water and grind the first crops of corn have also survived on the plain.

**Buildings and Settlement**

The development of settlements on the plain is a relatively recent occurrence and coincides largely with the drainage of the marshes in the 19th century and further expansion during the industrial revolution. However, the plain still retains rural in character with isolated brick farmsteads, small villages and numerous manor houses located along the network of country lanes.

The main areas of settlement which influence the plain are located at the planned Victorian coastal resorts such as Blackpool, Lytham St Anne’s and the large inland towns of Ormskirk, Kirkby and the new town of Skelmersdale. The city of Liverpool forms part of the southern boundary to the Lancashire and Amounderness Plain as it rises beyond the hills of Aughton and Walton from the Mersey Estuary.

**Land Cover**

This is mainly an area of open, high-quality farmland. The plain in the north is predominantly lush green pasture supporting a high density of livestock within a landscape of well-trimmed hedgerows and carefully enclosed copses and spinneys. The plain in the south is Grade 1 and 2 agricultural land. The coastal fens are intensively farmed for vegetables, potatoes and cereals. Further inland the slightly higher ground is also farmed for cereals and vegetables.

The field pattern in this area is large-scale with widespread loss of the field structure of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Woodland is sparse outside of historic estates such as Knowsley Park. The varied range of crops on the Lancashire and Amounderness Plain gives a seasonally changing surface texture and colour.

**The Changing Countryside**

- Disused airfields and former RAF and army camps.
- Changes in land use including increased numbers of golf courses, motorbike scrambling, horseriding and caravan parks.
- Changes in agricultural practices resulting in loss of traditional field structure.
- Loss of localised reed beds and field ponds.
- Loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- Lack of woodland management resulting in the significant loss of woodland cover.
- Urban encroachment and expansion of greenhouses.
- Conflict between boat activity and other recreational users in the Wyre estuary.

**Shaping the Future**

- The retention and appropriate management of hedgerows needs to be addressed.
- The conservation of remaining lowland moors is important for the character of the area.
- There is scope for the conservation and management of field ponds.
- The retention of contrasting landscape types within the character area should respect the differences between the Fylde and the South Lancashire Plain.

Marton Mere is one of the few remaining meres in the area. Blackpool (one of the major conurbations) and its tower are visible from many parts of the area.

**Selected References**


Lancashire County Council (c 1990) *Lancashire, A Green Agenda*.


**Glossary**

*podzolic*: resembling a podzol in possessing a leached layer of soil.

Many of the smaller settlements on the plain remain rural in character. The canals have historically provided important communication routes.
Lancashire Valleys

Key Characteristics

- The broad valley of the river Calder and its tributaries running northeast/southwest between natural backdrops of Pendle Hill and the Southern Pennines.
- Intensely urban character derived from main towns of Blackburn, Accrington and Burnley which have developed rapidly since the industrial revolution.
- A strong industrial heritage, associated with cotton weaving and textile industries. Redundant or under-utilised mill buildings, mill lodges and ponds.
- Profusion of communication routes along the valley bottom including the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, the Preston-Colne rail link and the M65 motorway.
- Victorian stone buildings well-integrated into the landscape.
- Numerous large country houses with associated parklands particularly on northern valley sides away from major urban areas.
- Remnants of agricultural land fragmented by industry and scattered development.
- Field boundaries, regular to the west and irregular to the east are degraded around the urban areas, formed of hedges with few hedgerow trees and, at higher elevations, of stone walls and post and wire fences.
- Small woodlands are limited to cloughs on valley sides.

Landscape Character

This is a visually contained landscape which would have once shared many characteristics with the rural valley of the river Ribble in the north. However, the development of industry and settlements has created a landscape with an intensely urban character. The remnants of agricultural land are now fragmented by industry and scattered development which severely disrupt the continuity of the field patterns. Field boundaries on the urban fringes are hedgerows that are generally degraded with an overall absence of hedgerow trees. At higher elevations, the field boundaries are stone walls and post and wire fences many of which are ineffective and in poor condition.

The main towns in the area are Blackburn, Accrington, Burnley, Nelson and Colne which have developed rapidly since the industrial revolution. The expansion of these towns has also been aided by the dense transport network which lines the valley bottoms. These include the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, the Preston-Colne rail link and the M65 motorway. The buildings are predominantly Victorian stone terraces generally in good condition. There are substantial areas of contemporary industrial development which have replaced the traditional textile industries. However, there are numerous examples of industrial heritage which remain. These act as reminders of the historical importance of local industrial development to the character of the landscape.

Developments in industry, housing and communication routes give the valleys a strongly urban character, as seen here at Huncoac near Accrington.
The extensive surface exposure of bedrock has given rise to many extractive industries in the area, including stone quarrying and coal mining. These areas are now generally well-vegetated and grazed by sheep. Most of the more conspicuous dereliction has undergone land reclamation schemes with some reclamation by domestic waste landfill.

The surrounding fells of Pendle and the South Pennines are an important natural backdrop which dwarf the settlements in the valley bottom. The moorland tops are linked to the valleys by small wooded cloughs which extend up the steep slopes.

**Physical Influences**

The character of the Lancashire Valleys is dominated by the key towns of Blackburn, Accrington and Burnley, which occupy a broad trough underlain by Coal Measures. The presence of the coal accounts for the early industrialisation of the area. Coal has been worked at depth and by open-casting at the surface. The bottom of the trough is covered in glacial deposits, mostly till. In the Penicuile/Whitworth area, west of Blackburn, extensive sand deposits impart a special landscape character. Bedrock resources have been quarried where the overburden is thin. The main materials extracted were sandstone, worked on a small scale for local building, and mudstone, worked for brick-making in large pits at Accrington. The Millstone Grit outcrop of Pendle Hill forms part of the northern boundary to this area and, when combined with the fells of the South Pennines, creates enclosure and serves as an important backdrop which dwarfs the scale of the settlement in the valley bottom.
The main river is the Calder which cuts out of the trough through a gorge in the gritstone ridge at Whalley. It joins the river Ribble at the edge of the area to the north-west of the town.

Scattered settlements on valley sides are comprised of older stone buildings, often of the longhouse type, and isolated blocks of stone terraced houses perched at precarious angles on the steep slopes. There are also several large country houses along the Calder valley including those at Read Park, Huntrype, House and Gawthorpe, Dunkenhall and Towneley Halls.

Land Cover

This is predominantly an area of built-up land with major towns such as Blackburn, Accrington and Burnley spreading across the valley bottom. In addition to these urban developments the remaining land cover is a mix of pasture with areas of acid and neutral grassland and areas of semi-natural woodland/scrub. The field boundaries in this area are hedgerows with few hedgerow trees which give way to stone walls and fencing on higher ground. Field boundaries adjacent to urban/industrialised areas are frequently degraded indicating low economic viability.

Woodland is limited to small woods with areas of grassland flushes and wetland comprising of oak, alder and sycamore which extend along steep-sided narrow cloughs, such as Priestly Clough, Accrington; Spurn Clough, Burnley; and Darwen Valley. There are also small areas of woodland/scrub associated with abandoned industrial land.

There are several areas of parkland connected to large country houses. This area also bears the scars of extractive industries. Some of the quarries have undergone land reclamation schemes by domestic waste landfill such as Rowley and Brandwood and at Accrington Whitney Hill.

A neglected mill close to the Leeds and Liverpool Canal at Brierfield illustrates the area's historic associations with the cotton weaving and textile industries.

The Changing Countryside

- Development pressures in the valley bottom particularly associated with junctions on the M65.
- Rationalising farming operations leading to the conversion of traditional farm buildings to alternative uses.

Settlement within the Lancashire Valleys is extensive. There is a high proportion of built up land which includes the towns of Blackburn, Darwen, Accrington, Burnley, Nelson and Colne. Buildings are predominantly constructed from stone and are generally in good repair. There is substantial new industry in the area as well as many artefacts of the area's industrial heritage.

Historical and Cultural Influences

Prior to the expansion of settlement and industry during the 19th century, this area would have been used predominantly for agriculture and would have had a similar rural character to that of the river Ribble further north.

The development which links these valleys began as a cottage industry during the 16th century and was predominantly an area of weaving rather than spinning. Traditionally wool came from the South Pennine hillsides and flax from the low-lying country of the Lancashire and Aire Valley. Each district was specialising in the production of one type of cloth. Blackburn was a centre for fustians and most woollens and worsteds were manufactured in Burnley and Colne. The textile industry grew rapidly and, with new machines, the domestic system was replaced by factory systems which further accelerated the growth of these weaving communities. The proliferation of mills and associated residential development has created a fragmented landscape with a heavily industrialised character. Since the 1920s the textile industry has been in steady decline with many mills becoming derelict or converted to other uses.

Buildings and Settlement

The hills of the Southern Pennines and the Forest of Bowland provide a scenic backdrop to the valley bottoms. Woodland in the area is scarce, but some clough woodlands have been retained on the valley sides.
- Pressures on remnant farmland adjoining urban areas causing degradation of field boundaries and alternative uses such as golf courses.
- Loss of hay meadows and reduction in biodiversity.
- Loss of industrial heritage features along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

**Shaping the Future**

- The restoration of field boundaries especially those adjacent to urban areas needs to be addressed.
- The conservation of remaining hay meadows is important as wildlife and landscape features.
- Opportunities are available for areas of new woodland especially on degraded farmland and derelict industrial sites surplus to current needs.
- The retention of valuable, industrial, heritage features should be considered especially along Leeds and Liverpool Canal.

The river Calder running through agricultural land at Padiham. In the valleys, grazing land - commonly with poorly maintained field boundaries - is found on the fringes of the urban areas.

Semi-natural woodland, improved grassland and hedgerows are characteristic of the more rural Ribble valley landscape.

**Selected References**


Lancashire County Council (c 1990), *Lancashire: A Green Audit*.


**Glossary**

cloaths: ravines; steep valleys
Southern Pennines

Key Characteristics:

- Large-scale sweeping landform with an open character created by exposed gritstone moors at an altitude of 400 m - 450 m, deeply trench by narrow valleys and wooded cloughs.

- Mosaic of mixed moorland and blanket bog with enclosed pasture of varying qualities at lower elevations, largely defined by dry stone walls.

- Valuable wildlife habitats on the open moorland and the moorland fringe including semi-natural boggy mires, acid flushes and wooded cloughs.

- Reservoirs common throughout the area.

- Densely populated valley bottoms with stone buildings extending along valley sides set against the backdrop of the moorland tops.

- Gritstone towns centred around key features of industrial heritage such as textile mills and other industrial development. The area is the home of many industrial settlements on the moorland fringe.

- Main road, rail and canal routes located along valley bottoms. Historic packhorse trails traversing the exposed moorland tops.

- Intrusive features, including windfarm developments, numerous transmission masts, overhead power lines and sandstone, gritstone and clay quarries, mainly on the fringe of the area.

- Extensive views from elevated locations in all directions.

Landscape Character:

The area lies between the northern boundary of the Peak District National Park and the southern boundary of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. It lies between the great conurbations of Lancashire and Greater Manchester to the west and West Yorkshire to the East. Over seven million people live within an hour’s drive of its centre and the conurbations generate increasing demands for transport, mineral extraction, power transmission and generation and urban encroachment as well as an intense pressure for recreation, sport and tourism.

Dense settlements, such as Haslingden, extend up the valleys. The proximity of the population to the surrounding uplands is a distinctive feature of the area, putting it under heavy recreational pressure.

This is a large-scale sweeping landscape of exposed upland moorland and pasture. The area shares many characteristics with the Bowland Fells and the Dark Peak but the evidence of man’s intrusion into this landscape has removed the sense of unspoilt wilderness which distinguishes the other regions.

Agriculture in the majority of this area is limited to sheep grazing on upland pasture with some beef and a little small-scale dairy farming in the valley bottoms. The production of eggs, chicken meat and pig products is also of considerable importance in some areas. The farming economy in the area is unique - the majority of the holdings are small and are worked on a part-time basis. In landscape terms this is reflected in small fields defined by stone walls and post and wire fencing often in poor condition which suggests marginal economic viability. There is a dynamic relationship between different types of moorland vegetation with areas of heather and grassland fluctuating in response to changing management regimes. In the north east, the valleys of the Aire and the Wharfe are bounded in places by steeply sloping sides with extensive areas of landslide...
which support permanent grassland, sheep grazing and some dairying. Examples include Ilkley which is between Keighley and Bingley.

This area is a valuable water catchment area and, as such, contains a large number of reservoirs which form a major contribution to the overall landscape character.

The moorland plateau is dissected by three main river systems which drain eastward - the Aire, the Colne and the Calder. The valleys of the Roach and the Thorne drain the western and south-western parts of the area. The valleys themselves are heavily populated and contain the major communication routes with the exception of the main trans-Pennine route, the M62, which crosses the tops between Huddersfield and Rochdale. In general, settlements have been contained by the harsh topography of the steep valley sides. However, the confluence of the Worth and Aire valleys is associated with a gently sloping alluvial fan, raised above the level of the floodplain, which has allowed the town of Keighley to expand rapidly and become a large sprawling conurbation. The moorland plateau affords extensive views across these valleys and towards the plains of Lancashire and the low-lying conurbations of the woollen towns in Yorkshire. This further reduces the sense of isolation associated with other upland moorland locations. There are many other man-made influences which detract from the natural beauty of this area. Quarrying, in the main, restricted to the moorland fringe with the exception of the heavily quarried valley at Whittworth. Other intrusions include wind farms, transmitter masts and, in several places particularly to the west of Bradford and above Bacup, large spans of 400KV overhead power lines which become prominent features visible from long distances. Despite this there is a sense of grandeur and spaciousness to be found in these moorland tops.
The area has a strong industrial heritage associated with the textile, engineering and manufacturing industries. It is, in fact, the seat of the woollen and cotton textile industry and the landscape reflects the transformation from cottage industries to much larger commercial industries. Indeed, the central feature of the majority of the towns and villages which line the valley floors are the textile mills which dominate the urban skyline and dwarf the stone terraces which radiate from them. The smoke blackened terraces with their sloping rooflines extend up the valley sides to the moorland edge.

**Physical Influences**

In the middle of the region, around Haslingden and Ramsbottom, thick, coarse-grained sandstones ('gritstone') are generally horizontal and separated by softer mudstone and siltstone beds. This creates a terraced landscape of plateaux and interlocking escarpments corresponding to the layers of sandstone and mudstone. Isolated beds of sandstone also form mesa-shaped hills across the area. The region is cut by numerous faults and has several deeply-trenched glacial erosion features such as Cliviger Gorge. To the south of the area, as it passes between Rochdale and Huddersfield, the Pennines are at their narrowest. The slopes to the west are steeper than those to the east. Accordingly, the scarpas on the west are less populated and elevated. One of the most prominent of these escarpments is Blackstone Edge, west of Huddersfield. The escarpment is formed by Kinder Scout Grit and was referred to by Defoe as the English Andes. Between here and the western edge of the Yorkshire coalfields there is a succession of similar crag-capped edges running parallel to the main valleys such as the Colne and Calder Valleys.

To the north-east of the area the distinctive long ridge of Millstone Grit, Rombalds Moor, is separated from the core of the Southern Pennines by the valley of the river Aire. Glacial till occurs within the Aire Valley but is largely absent on the upland areas of Rombalds Moor and Skipton Moor. The valley is relatively wide and flat and the bottom is enriched with alluvium. During the last ice-age glacial moraine ridges blocked drainage of the valley forming a series of glacial lakes, the deposits of which are preserved beneath the alluvium.

Familiar features of this region are waterfalls. The alternate bedding of the hard grit and the softer shales promote their development - examples include Lumb Falls near Hebden...
Bridge and the falls in Marsden Clough at Hohnbridge. Other waterfalls, such as Dolly Folly near Meltham, are created where a fault line crosses the valley bringing grit against shale and resulting in massive gritstone walls over 30 feet high.

The sweeping landform of Worsthorne Moor is characteristic of the uplands of the South Pennines.

**Historical and Cultural Influences**

The transformation of the landscape in the 18th and 19th centuries, as a result of the switch from handloom weaving to the factory system, has left a legacy in the area. Villages, enclosures, commons, packhorse trails and canals are preserved in a landscape where convincing glimpses of a much earlier, prehistoric past can also be discerned. Historically, access to the area was poor with little more than packhorse routes traversing the moorland tops. However, there is evidence that a Roman road once crossed the moors, west of Haddington, linking Manchester to Ribchester. The Wharfedale and Airedale valleys have served as important routeways across the Pennines from the earliest times.

Agriculture based on sheep and cattle has always been an important activity. Sheep grazing on the moorland commons was ad hoc and fluctuated, in response to climatic and economic changes, resulting in abandoned stone farmsteads and irregular, degraded stone wall enclosures dotted across the plateaux. Many of the abandoned homesteads were also the result of deliberate depopulation by the early water companies. In contrast, the relatively better quality land to the north-east gave rise to extensive Parliamentary enclosure which has resulted in strong regular patterns of medium-sized walled fields on the lower plateaux and slopes. The dramatic landscape of the region has attracted the attention of several literary figures. The most notable of these were the Bronte sisters who lived in Haworth and used the surrounding landscape as a setting for many of their novels such as Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights. Earlier it impressed Daniel Defoe and, more recently, Ted Hughes. The association with the Brontes is a major tourist attraction of the area and many of the road signs are in several languages.

The steep-sided valleys are now densely populated as a result of the rapid expansion of small villages involved in the textile industry. The growth of the textile industry concentrated people into the industrial valleys. Evidence of this changing society is seen by the ruins of isolated farmsteads and cottages on surrounding hillsides. The population of these valleys steadily increased and the expansion of home weaving led to the building of stone cottages with large ‘weavers’ windows’. The introduction of water power caused the industry to prosper still further in these valleys. The rapid streams provided such power and later supplied the lime-free water needed for other stages in textile manufacture. These settlements are dominated by large mill buildings with chimneys and extensive rows of terraces clinging onto the hillsides. The greatest expansion of the industry took the bulk of the population onto the lower ground further to the east where the valleys open out onto the Coal Measures. The decline of the Lancashire textile industry followed the slump of 1920. Today some mills have found alternative uses but many remain derelict.

The valley sides also bear the scars of extractive industries such as stone quarrying and coal mining at Bacup, Haslingden, Edenfield, Cliviger and in the Aire Valley between Keighley and Bingley. Many have been in operation from the early 18th century.

A result of this industrial expansion has been the establishment of an improved communication network including the East Lancashire Railway, Rochdale Canal and upgraded ‘A’ roads and bypasses.

**Buildings and Settlement**

Settlement in the South Pennines is either peripheral to the upland core or strung out along the major valleys that penetrate it. Nodal points at valley junctions are especially important, as at Littleborough, Todmorden, Hebden Bridge and Keighley. There is a fringe of smaller, intermediate settlements at mid-height between this outer fringe and the central core. It spreads up the slopes from the major settlements. This mid-height zone is wider in the east of the area than it is in the west thus conforming to the physiography of the area. Construction is predominantly out of local gritstone and in a vernacular style that complements the natural features and contributes to the
overall aesthetic quality of the landscape. The settlement pattern has evolved from a dual economy in which textiles predominated. As textile manufacturing was mechanised, settlements evolved and expanded at sites where power, water at first and then coal, became available.

Small towns, such as Haslingden, Rawtenstall, Bacup, Todmorden and Hebden Bridge, lie in the deeply incised valleys forming linear bands of development along valley bottoms. These towns are often industrial in origin deriving power from the rivers for the textile industry and exploiting the natural resources for quarrying and mining. The skyline of these settlements is often dominated by the mill chimneys which tower above the small stone terraces. Early the most dominating tower in the central area of the Southern Pennines is Stoodleigh Pike. The town of Keighley in the Aire Valley underwent rapid expansion during the 19th and early 20th centuries based on engineering and manufacturing. Because of the gender topography the town has been able to spread out in contrast to the previously mentioned settlements.

Land Cover

This area is predominantly upland heather moorland, acid grassland and rough pasture although some of the heather moor has been lost to grassland in many areas due to changes in management. The effects of enclosure, over-grazing, uncontrolled burning and atmospheric pollution have reduced the once varied vegetation to one dominated by purple moor-grass (Molinia caerulea), wool-grass (Nardus stricta) and cotton grass (Eriophorum spp.). The core of the area however supports the mosaic of natural upland habitats which include blanket bogs, heather moor and wet heath which are rare enough to be of European importance.

The main agricultural land use is sheep grazing. The field pattern is small to medium and defined by stone walls and post and wire fencing. These are often degraded in many areas. To the east, in Airedale, trees become more frequent than on the uplands and birch and oak are abundant. Much of the land on these lower slopes is improved pasture with well-maintained field boundaries.

The area is an important water catchment area with numerous reservoirs in the head streams of the major river valleys. It is crossed by many drainage channels which feed into these reservoirs, such as at Rivington, Haslingden Grane, Belmont and Entwistle. Woodland in the area is sparse and in the west predominantly comprises 20th century coniferous plantations associated with the reservoirs. In the eastern part of the area there are more 19th century beech and sycamore woods. Occasional wooded cloughs extending to these altitudes are often grazed and in poor condition.

There are many quarries in this area, most of which are abandoned stone quarries, largely covered with vegetation and grazed by sheep or completely infilled. However, there are several active quarries on the moorland edge at Bacup, Haslingden, Edgfield, towards Cliviger and in the vicinity of Haworth.

The area contains several transmission masts, a 24 turbine windfarm at Cliviger and the 22 turbine windfarm at Eyamend Moor. There are also several country parks at lower elevations developed near reservoirs for example at Fiver Park, Jumbles and Ogden.

Reservoirs such as Hurstwood, commonly surrounded by coniferous plantations, occur throughout the area. The former coal workings, shown to the left of the photograph, are further evidence of the area's strong historical links with industry.

The Changing Countryside

- Fluctuating transitional moorland edge due to conversion and reversion of rough grazing and pasture.
- Over-grazing of areas of common land by large operators.
- Major shifts in land ownership as farms are taken over by non-farmers.
- Conversion of barns and derelict farmsteads.
- Introduction of windfarms and cellular phone/cable transmitter masts.
- Decline in the textile industry and the evolution and transformation of the industrial base in the valley settlement.
- Dereliction or conversion of many mills for alternative use.
- Urban fringe pressure around larger conurbations resulting in erosion of paths, fly-tipping and disturbance to wildlife.
Growth of recreation as a major land use bringing a potential for erosion and increased car borne traffic.

Development of a by-pass network which is incomplete and results in bottlenecks on unimproved roads.

The significant pressure for improved access to this area has resulted in proposals for the M65 cross-Penine link. However this proposal is on hold but would have a considerable impact upon the landscape character and future development of the area.

**Shaping the Future**

- The reduction in sheep grazing on open moorlands would increase biodiversity, contribute to landscape character and encourage traditional management of heather moorland.

- The sympathetic conversion of redundant farm and mill buildings should be considered on the edge of urban areas. The retention and reuse of industrial heritage features, particularly mill buildings in valley bottoms, is important.

- The management of marginal farmland, subject to pressures from its urban fringe location, should be addressed.

- The appropriate treatment of redundant quarries should be considered. This might include restoration in sensitive locations or ecological enhancement. These sites may be of geological importance and of scientific or educational value.

- There are opportunities to retain and manage ecologically-rich acid flushes, wooded cloughs and existing woodlands. There is scope for the creation of native woodland.

- The retention and restoration of traditional stone wall field boundaries and fences is important.

The north east of the character area, such as the area around Whitley Head, has relatively better quality land which gave rise to extensive Parliamentary enclosure. This has resulted in strong regular patterns of medium-sized, walled fields on the lower plateaux and slopes.

**Selected References**


Lancashire County Council (c 1990), *Lancashire A Green Audit*.


**Glossary**

*cloughs*: ravines; steep valleys
Manchester Pennine Fringe

Key Characteristics

- Transitional zone between wild open moorlands and densely populated urban areas with an abrupt boundary where the town stops and the countryside starts.
- 18th and 19th century stone and brick-built industrial buildings, including mill lodges and reservoirs originating from the woollen and cotton industry, along the valley bottoms provide important heritage features.
- Broadly similar elevational range of 100-300 metres largely comprising ridges and steep-sided valleys with fast-flowing rivers.
- Stock rearing and rough grazing on improved grassland between urban areas.
- Field boundaries include dry 'gritstone' walls at higher elevations and hedgerows at lower elevations with predominance of holly along valley bottoms.
- Countryside with an unkempt appearance due to heavy recreational demands and diversification of farming into uses such as haulage and riding schools.
- Mineral extraction related to the quarrying of local sandstones creates prominent scars on the landscape.
- Historic trans-Pennine communication routes, especially railways and canals, form important part of the cultural landscape.
- Woodland cover is sparse overall with concentrated pockets confined to narrow, steep-sided river valleys.
- Overspill housing estates including high-rise blocks form unsympathetic elements in the landscape.
- Elevated vantage points providing extensive views across adjacent Manchester conurbation.

Landscape Character

The Manchester Pennine Fringe occupies the transitional zone between the open moorlands of the Dark Peak and Southern Pennines and the densely populated urban conurbation of Manchester. The area wraps around Manchester from Bolton in the north-west to the edge of Hazel Grove in the east and includes the industrial towns of Bury, Rochdale, Oldham and Glossop.

This transitional area has a different character from the plain which it surrounds and its backdrop of the Pennine Moors. The broadly similar elevational range of 100-300 metres helps to unify the character of this fringe area. Within this range there are ridges and valleys. Its character is a combination of these topographic features with historical mineral extraction, industrial heritage and existing land use.

The predominant land use of the area is agriculture with stock rearing and rough grazing on improved grassland between urban areas. Fields of varying sizes are enclosed by dry stone walls at higher elevations and hedges at lower altitudes. There is evidence of farming decline around some of the larger conurbations where dry stone walls are not being repaired and maintained.

The Croall Irwell valley at Kearsley exhibits typical features of the area. Grassy and wooded valley sides surround the developed valley bottoms, which contain both old and new industrial buildings and houses.
Much of the countryside tends to have an uncared-for appearance due to heavy recreational usage from adjacent urban areas. Farm diversification into a range of urban uses further contributes to the decline of farmland.

**Physical Influences**

The Manchester Pennine Fringe runs along the edge of the Millstone Grit uplands of the Southern Pennines and the Dark Peak. This fringe area has been carved partly from the Millstone Grit and partly from the overlying Coal Measures, all of which dip south and cast off the high ground and beneath the Manchester plain. Glacial drift cover is extensive only on the lower ground.

The Manchester Pennine Fringe owes much of its character to the pronounced landform with deeply incised steep valley sides and localized woodlands, and to its proximity and visual links to the adjacent Pennine moors. The area is at a lower elevation than the moors ranging from 100 to 300 m AOD.

**Historical and Cultural Influences**

Traces of early colonisation of the area survive chiefly in the form of barrows on high ground. A number of Roman roads crossed the area linking Manchester with Ribchester in the Lancashire Valleys as well as Castleshaw and Ilkley in the Southern Pennines. A diverse medieval landscape developed with substantial surviving woodland in the south, thinning out to the north. Much of the economy of the area was pastoral, with arable cultivation close to settlements. Fields were enclosed, by private treaty, in the early post-medieval period.

Occasional and indirect references to textile manufacture in this area have been found in manuscripts as early as the late 13th century. At first the wool used came from sheep...
reared on the slopes of the Pennines and the flax from the Lancashire and Anson Roundness Plain. By 1700 each district within the area was specialising in the production of one type of cloth. The Marple, Hazel Grove and Ashton-under-Lyne (the latter just inside the Manchester conurbation) areas produced almost all the linen cloth. Bolton was the centre for fustians (cotton/wool/flax mix) and most woolens and worsteds were manufactured in Bury and Rochdale. The 18th century witnessed not only big increases in the production of these traditional textiles but also the development of cotton cloth manufacture. By the early 19th century cotton had almost entirely replaced wool and linen in Lancashire mills. This area became economically linked with the southern states of America and the port of Liverpool in a most profitable enterprise which lasted until the slump of 1920. Textile Lancashire never recovered from this blow. Today, some old cotton mills have found alternative uses but many are derelict.

The growth in the textile industry and a big increase in population produced a concentration of people in the industrial centres in the lower, wider valleys. Archaeological evidence of this change is seen in the ruins of isolated farms and cottages on the hilltops and abandoned sites of water-driven mills in small Pennine valleys. Development of the steam engine made it possible for mill owners to move from inconvenient upper valleys and build their new mills where communications and house building were much easier.

Manchester owes its size and importance largely to the development of the cotton trade in the Pennine Fringe but also to coal mining and engineering and to the communications which radiate from it.

**Buildings and Settlement**

Urban areas tend to be located in the valley bottoms and around the foot of the escarpments. The marginal character of the farmland, the neglect of many traditional landscape features - such as dry stone walls, buildings and woodland - and the proximity of urban development all give this area a distinctive fringe character.

Stone walls, narrow winding lanes and stone farmhouses give a consistent upland feel to these areas. Extensive long-distance views are possible from elevated vantage points across urban development in the valleys. There is evidence of decline in farming fortunes particularly around the urban areas. The recent development and expansion of large conurbations, particularly the establishment of housing estates with conspicuous high rise blocks, has tended to obscure the evidence that they were originally a series of upland settlements.

The presence of large, sprawling industrial conurbations has a pronounced effect on many of the landscapes surrounding them with dense settlement patterns and well-used roads.

On the northern edge of the character area, settlements often abruptly abut farmland which, typically, is improved or rough pasture, as seen here at Egerton. At lower levels poorly maintained hedgerows are the common field boundary.

**Land Cover**

The lower, steeply undulating foothills to the fringes are of variable quality grassland with some small hedges and walls, wooded valleys and scrub on steeper slopes. Stock rearing and rough grazing is practised in a regular pattern of fields, varying in size with topography. The traditional agricultural base is in decline due to urban fringe problems caused by trespassers, vandalism, severance of buildings and housing development pressures. The agricultural land classification ranges from Grade 2 (Ashton Moss, Tameside) to more typical Grades 3b - 5 elsewhere.

Much of the area has seen evidence of industrial activity resulting from naturally occurring minerals and coal. Industries have included coal and ironstone mining, glass making and stone quarrying. The area is affected by a number of intrusive extractive industries, particularly quarrying (around Glossop), landfill, brickworks and the extraction of sands and gravels (around Rochdale).

On the eastern edge of the character area, Mossley is a typical valley settlement. The developed valleys are closely surrounded by upland moorland.
Woodland is sparse overall though there are concentrated pockets confined to narrow steep-sided stream valleys which cut into the smoothly undulating, upland, pastoral landscape. Evidence of a substantial woodland covering large parts of the area can be traced back to the period following the Ice Age and there are references to well-wooded river valleys from medieval times. The industrial revolution completely changed the appearance of this well-wooded landscape and the decline continued until the second world war.

**The Changing Countryside**

- Traditional agricultural base in decline with an increase in farm diversification and gentrification into alternative uses including riding schools, barnage and farm building conversions.
- Changes to farming practices have led to poorly-maintained walls and hedges and their replacement by fences.
- Pressure to rework old quarries as well as open up new sites.
- Increase in recreational demands for walking, cycling and horse riding and other urban fringe pressures.
- Closure of redundant reservoirs.
- Increasing evidence of landowners wishing to infill and level their land by upping operations.
- Change of use of railway lines to recreational walking and cycle routes producing a wider spread of recreational activity into countryside areas.
- Drainage of rushy meadows and reduction in the number of high-rich hay meadows.

**Shaping the Future**

- The development of redundant reservoirs as sites of biological importance or recreational facilities should be considered.
- Areas of community woodland could be established particularly around the edges of urban fringe areas, following the examples of the Red Rose Forest and Rochdale woodlands.
- There is scope to retain and manage species-rich hay meadows as valuable landscape and ecological areas.
- The restoration and maintenance of stone wall and hedgerow field boundaries should be considered.
- Sympathetic conversion of redundant farm buildings for alternative uses on the edge of urban areas.
- Industrial heritage features, in particular old mill buildings and lodges, should be retained.
- Appropriate treatment of non-operational quarries.

On the fringes, parts of the countryside can have an unkempt appearance. This has resulted from past land activities, heavy recreational pressure and encroaching development. Horse riding is a popular pursuit in the area.

**Selected References**


Because of its proximity to urban areas, the countryside is well used by local people.
Manchester Conurbation

Countryside extends throughout the Manchester Conurbation following the network of corridors formed by the numerous rivers and, to a lesser extent, canals, railways and roads which thread through the urban fabric.

The conurbation nestles under the Pennines and extends through Manchester City Centre to other surrounding towns in neighbouring districts. River valleys have influenced the pattern of development and now have some of the last remaining tracts of countryside in the character area.

The Mersey river valley is the largest stretch of continuous countryside within the conurbation, dominated by its heavily meandering river within a broad flood plain. Typical land uses include golf courses and water treatment works. These, together with the heavy recreational demands and proximity of the M63 and frequent major road crossings, produce a suburban character to the countryside areas.

Other river valleys include those of the Irwell, Ick, Medlock, Tame and Guyt which are more sinuous and narrow than the Mersey but nevertheless form important countryside corridors throughout the area. Many of these have large areas of woodland along their valley sides providing a buffer with neighbouring urban development. These valleys are also important as recreational areas with large expanses of playing fields, numerous golf courses and water treatment works set within an overall managed countryside. Numerous country parks and Victorian urban parks are associated with the river valleys, often connected by recreational trails.

Chorlton Ees in the Mersey Valley is easily accessible from adjacent urban areas and heavily used for recreational and educational purposes.

All the river valleys contain sizeable areas of open grassland and other semi-natural habitats. There are pockets of farmland within the river valleys, many of which are viable farmsteads though many are given over to urban farming uses such as horticulture. Parts of the river valleys and corridors associated with the canals have areas of derelict land.

In many places the rivers are canalised but these provide valuable wildlife corridors and, being close to where people live, are important for informal recreation.

Forces for change within the countryside areas of the conurbation include ongoing pressure for development, landfill, woodland planting and recreational usage.
Development pressures include housing expansion from adjoining urban areas, business park developments particularly associated with key road intersections, expansion of water treatment facilities and pressures for landfill, related to major development sites and infrastructure projects. Woodland expansion in the Red Rose Forest is likely to bring about changes to the character of the valley landscapes though these may well be directed toward the poor quality amenity grassland and not at the expense of semi-natural habitats.

This semi-natural habitat in Prestwich Forest Park is typical of areas throughout the river valleys. Horse riding is a popular pursuit and throughout the conurbation there are numerous stables and land use for horstock culture.
Lancashire Coal Measures

Key Characteristics

- Fragmented landscape created by complex pattern of mining and industrial activity intermixed with housing set within a soft but varied topography.
- Elevated landscape of gently corrugated hills and valleys running northwest/southeast.
- Low-grade agricultural land found both in expansive tracts of medium to large open, arable fields north of St Helens and often in degraded isolated pockets.
- Strong cultural identity significantly influenced and scarred by heavy industry and past and present coal mining activity. Derelict and reclaimed mine workings particularly south of Wigan.
- Densely populated area with scattered settlement pattern based around the development of mines and industry.
- Extensive areas of derelict land, landfill sites and spoil heaps, particularly around Wigan and St Helens.
- Hedges, hedgerow trees and small woodlands, mostly in poor condition, are generally limited to the area around Canwood, Billinge Hill and northwest of Wigan.
- Numerous flashes, resulting from subsidence of former mine workings, and a scattering of small ponds.

Landscape Character

The Lancashire Coal Measures surround the towns of St Helens and Wigan and extend from the Mersey Valley in the south to the Lancashire and Merseyside Plain in the northwest. This is an elevated landscape rising to 170 metres at Billinge Hill and falling abruptly to the Lancashire Plain, Merseyside and the Mersey Valley. The area is dominated by its industrial heritage associated with mining activities. It is the complex mosaic of degraded farmland, scattered urban centres, active mineral sites and derelict or reclaimed workings, and ‘flashes’, which gives this area a strong and distinctive identity.

South of Wigan the character area is dominated by the effects of past and present mining activity, as seen here at Sutton, where reclamation of the former colliery is being undertaken.

The pattern of settlement and land use, together with a soft but varied topography, has created a very fragmented landscape. The division into landscape tracts is largely determined by the form of urban areas which creates a physical barrier between areas of more open landscape. In addition to this, however, there are distinctive differences in the predominant land use and character of these parcels which helps further to divide the area. The landscape to the northwest of Wigan is separated from that to the east by the urban sprawl of Standish. It also differs due to its more complex, undulating landform and greater incidence of trees and woodland both of which reduce the scale of the landscape and create visual enclosure. By contrast, the distinctive local landscape to the south of Wigan is dominated by the effects of past and present mining activity.

The field pattern is predominantly rectangular and is defined by degraded hedgerows or past and wire fencing. There are some areas of arable farming but frequently the drainage has been severely disrupted by colliery subsidence and the land is little more than recreational open space, utilised in many instances for horiculture.

However, it is industrial influences which give this area a strong cultural identity. Coal mining and industrial activity, intermixed with housing, dominate the majority of the
landscape and have left behind a legacy of derelict land, spoil heaps, landfill sites and numerous subsidence flashes.

**Physical Influences**

The Lancashire Coal Measures are manifested by a patchy layer of glacial drift deposits and so are geologically and geomorphologically distinct from the Pennine uplands. The Upholland Ridge forms the western boundary to this area. Although the Coal Measures extend further west, out of the area towards Ormskirk and Huyton, they are buried there beneath a thick and continuous covering of drift. Only to the east of the Upholland Ridge does the underlying bedrock geology become apparent.

The Ridge is the result of differential erosion leaving an upstanding faulted slice of resistant Millstone Grit within the Coal Measures, rising some 150 metres and providing a vantage point between the Lancashire and Ameaningess Plain and the Lancashire Coal Measures.

**Historical and Cultural Influences**

The regional characteristics are derived from the human activity associated with the mining and working of coal from the extensive coal seams which run through the area. The area is now densely populated following the rapid expansion of a few small villages during the industrial revolution. Little evidence of the pre-18th century landscape remains.

The 'flashes' and the waste heaps on the Coal Measures are today's reminders of 19th century extraction methods which replaced the hundreds of separate, shallow coal-pits with fewer, larger mines tapping the richer deep seams. This industrial change caused a concentration of colliers in

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**Character Area 56:**

Lancashire Coal Measures
towards such as Wigan and Worsley and in colliery villages such as Billinge and Tyldesley. The siting of glass and copper industries on the Coal Measures steadily transformed a crossroads, chapel and inn into the centre of modern St Helen’s and later railway transport made possible the building of Wigan on what was virtually a virgin site.

The coal seams in this area were principally mined to provide power for the local cotton industry which has suffered almost complete extinction since the 1950s. The Lancashire coalfields, in common with the rest of the country, have experienced the demise of deep coal-mining and its replacement by open-cast operations.

This loss of deep coal mining has left a legacy of dereliction. However, subsidence hollows are now being filled, colliery waste tips levelled and new housing estates are spreading. Whittow has described how many of the smoke-blackened dwellings are being demolished and the veneer of industrial grime is slowly disappearing.

The spread of new housing estates has increased the recreational pressure on remaining greenspaces. This former railway line near Wigan has been converted into a path popular with local people for dog walking.

**BLand Cover**

This is mainly an area of industrial development with several large tracts of Grade 3 agricultural land and isolated pockets of former farmland within the urban fabric.

The landscape tracts to the north of Wigan have a generally wooded character which both reduces the scale of the landscape and creates visual enclosure. The field pattern is predominantly rectangular and defined by degraded hedgerows and post and wire fencing. To the south the landscape is dominated by the effects of present and past mining activities with areas of open-cast, spoil heaps, subsidence flashes, landfill sites and derelict land.

The gently undulating farmed landscape over Billinge Hill exhibits landscape features, such as hedgerows and scattered trees, that are less common in the area.
The Changing Countryside

- Changes are associated with the decline of traditional deep coal-mining and the move towards open-cast operations. They include landscaping of spoil heaps, reclamation of derelict land and loss of traditional deep mining structures.
- Expansion of large-scale open-cast operations and the subsequent reclamation scheme.
- Urban fringe pressures on farmland and changes in farming practices have caused degradation and loss of field boundaries and infilling of ponds. Dense populations of the urban areas have placed heavy demands for community use on open space areas and led to increased pressures for landfill.

Shaping the Future

- The retention and management of ponds and subsidence flashes is important.
- There is scope for the restoration and enhancement of degraded land south of Wigan through major forestry planting.
- The conservation of important elements of industrial heritage would help retain the area's strong cultural identity.
- The conservation and enhancement of important open countryside between scattered urban areas should be addressed.

Selected References


Mersey Forest Team and Land Use Consultants (1992), *The Mersey Forest Landscape Assessment*.


Glossary

*flush*: a water body caused by mining subsidence

Land is often flat and low lying with a large field pattern and few landscape features, such as in the Sankey Valley Park, St Helens.