Ancient Rolling Farmlands

**Key Characteristics**

- Rolling arable landscape of chalky clays and loams
- Dissected widely and sometimes deeply, by river valleys
- Field pattern of ancient random enclosure. More regular fields linked to localised areas of late enclosure of heathland and common fields.
- Substantial open areas created by post-WWII agricultural changes
- Hedges of hawthorn and elm with oak ash and field maple as hedgerow trees. Localised areas of holly hedges.
- Scattered ancient woodland parcels containing a mix of oak, lime, cherry, hazel, hornbeam, ash and holly
- Network of winding lanes and paths often associated with hedges, creating visual intimacy
- Dispersed settlement pattern of loosely clustered villages, hamlets and isolated farmsteads of mediaeval origin
- Hamlets often associated with greens or the remains of greens
- Farmstead buildings are predominantly timber-framed, the houses colour-washed and the barns blackened with tar. Roofs are frequently tiled, though thatched houses can be locally significant

**Location**

This landscape type is found on the higher ground on the edges of the valleys in two principal areas:

- On the east and north sides of the Stour from the south side of Long Melford to the north side of Sudbury, and then from Great Cornard southwards to Bures St Mary, eastwards to Leavenheath and Stoke-by-Nayland, then on the east side of the Rover Box from Boxford southwards to Withmarsh Green

  **LDU: 133-36** (Polstead)

- On the south and west sides of the Stour from Ridgewell in the west through to Foxearth in the east, then southwards through Bulmer and Twinstead to the edges of Mount Bures.
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LDUs: 318-75 (Ashen), 318-104 (Bulmer parkland), 318-119 (Little Henny parkland) and 0-60 (Bures Hamlet).

Geology and landform

These are rolling clayland landscapes dissected, sometimes deeply, by river valleys. Although the main soil type is derived from chalky clays left behind by the great Anglian Glaciation, the dissection of this deposit by the area’s rivers has produced a variety of soil types. The heaviest clays that are prone to water logging are on the interfluvial plateaux, while lighter soils are found on the valley sides. In some areas there are also areas of sand associated with rivers. In places there are areas of glacial sand and gravel that were large enough to produce heaths.

Archaeology

There is a cropmark of a possible Neolithic long barrow on the southern outskirts of Long Melford and, nearby, two ring-ditches indicating flattened Bronze Age burial mounds. Two areas on the outskirts of Whitestreet Green in Polstead have produced evidence of Late Iron Age ‘Belgic’ cremation cemeteries. A Roman villa is known near Rodbridge Corner, which is one of number in the territory surrounding the Roman settlement that underlies Long Melford. The church at Little Cornard, not far away, has a large number of Roman bricks in its walls and towers. There is also a Roman building and tile kilns in the vicinity of Alphamstone church.

There is a small (15m diameter) circular embanked enclosure in Abbas Wood at Great Cornard that is undated, but could be early medieval. Another larger (94 x 80m), sub-rectangular banked enclosure is in Grange Wood at Nayland. This too is undated but may be related to the manor of Wissington/Wiston Grange that belonged to Hugh de Hosdene in 1086 and was later given by him to Thetford Priory.

Settlement

The settlement pattern in the two areas of this landscape type is similar, with dispersed farmsteads of medieval origin interspersed with some occasional small villages and hamlets. There is a frequent occurrence of small- to moderate-sized greens or tyes, frequently linear or triangular in shape. These greens mostly represent subsidiary settlements within their parishes and many were enclosed in the 18th and 19th centuries. After enclosure they were often infilled with housing and now survive only as place-names.

The farms are large but are predominantly owner-occupied rather than estate owned. The farmstead buildings are predominantly timber-framed, the houses colour-washed and the barns blackened with tar. Roofs are frequently tiled, though thatched houses can be locally significant.

On the Essex side, between Haverhill and Sudbury, there is a distinctive group of places that all share a common name – Belchamp Otten, Belchamp St Paul, Belchamp Walter, plus a lost Belchamp St Ethelbert (Bello Campo Sancti Adelberti 1230, which was

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incorporated into Ovington in 1473). The modern forms of the name have been influenced by the French for a 'beautiful field', but this is really an Old English name that meant something like 'the settlement on the baulk or ridge', referring to the peninsula of land that lies between the Stour and the Belchamp Brook. Belchamp St Paul was given to St Paul’s Cathedral in London in AD 939 (the gift of Bylcham being confirmed by King Athelstan c.970). Paul’s Hall and the church form a neat church-and-hall complex of likely Late Saxon date. The existing Hall is a timber-framed building of early 16th-century date, but there is also a 7-bay aisled barn that was rebuilt c.1200 incorporating a pair of posts that are two centuries older. There is another hall-and-church complex at Belchamp Walter. This Belcham was willed by the Anglo-Saxon noblewoman Leofgifu to ‘her lady’ (the queen) c.1040, having freed all the men on the estate. It takes its present name from Walter de Teye, its owner in 1297, being earlier called la Contesse (1285) after the Countess of Oxford. There are other hall-and-church complexes at Gestingthorpe (another of Leofgifu’s possessions – Gristlingthorp was given to the abbey at Bury St Edmunds) and at Ovington. The Ryes at Little Henny (a brick house built in 1809 for Nathaniel Barnardiston) also represents a former a hall-and-church complex, but the adjacent church of Little Henny was already in ruins by the 18th century and the hall now bears a name derived from its owner in 1269, John de Ry. The park around the house was developed by Barnardiston to complement his new house on the site of the old hall. At Ridgewell the hall and church form a loose group on the eastern edge of the village, which has formed around a small green. Foxearth church and its moated late 13th-century Hall also form a loose hall-and-church group.

The church at Stoke-by-Nayland is referred to in the will of Ealdorman Ælfgar of Essex, c.AD 950, and in 1000-2 as the ‘holy foundation at Stoke (halgan stowæ et Stocæ) in which my ancestors lie buried’ in the will of his daughter Ælfflæd, the widow of Ealdorman Brihtnoth (the doomed hero of the Battle of Maldon). The gifts to this church by the families of the ealdormen of Essex suggests that they intended it as a major monastery, but in that they were thwarted by royal intervention after Ælfflæd’s death and the bequests ended up powering the growth of the abbey at Bury St Edmunds. The property now called Stoke Priory was built by Isaac Hoy in 1829 and named in memory of this early monastery. The settlement that has grown up around the church has developed around two small adjacent greens (Church Street and The Downs) on one side, with two parallel streets (Back Street and Polstead Street) forming a further two sides. The church has a prominent position overlooking the Stour valley and its lofty tower features in several of Constable’s paintings.

Bulmer Tye is shown as a long narrow green on 18th-century maps but has lost its green character (it is recorded as Bulmere Tye in 1310, suggesting that it and the main village of Bulmere probably take their name from a former mere in the valley of the Belchamp Brook). There were similar linear greens at Alphamstone Green, at Cornard Tye and at Whitestreet Green in Polstead, but they too have lost their green character. Smaller, mainly triangular greens, are recorded at Borley Green, Twinstead Green (Twinstead Tye 1600), Homé’s Green in Bures, Cuckoo Tye in Long Melford (Thurgoriostye 1442, Cowckhouse Tye 1580 and finally evolved into Cuckoo Tye by 1783), Newman’s Green in Acton, Bures Green, Sacker’s Green in Newton, Dorking Tye in Assington, Hagmore Green in Boxford, and Withemarsh Green in Stoke-by-Nayland. This may be the
Wythermerested of 1327, but much earlier Withemarsh formed part of one of the estates of the noblewoman Ælfflæd and is named in her will, 1000-2, as Wifæermirserc and Hwifermirsce (‘the quivering marsh’). The avenue that leads from this green to Gifford’s Hall was already in existence in 1783. Potters Tye Farm on the Long Melford/Acton boundary is a relict of a triangular green which had characteristically complicated name evolution – Tallichetye in 1442, Tallydge Tye 1580, Talage Tye 1660/1, Stalage Tye 1783 and Stalhouse Tye 1873. Highlanders Farm in Long Melford is a relict of Cox Green and the isolated late medieval house at Sawyer’s in Bures is the last surviving property on the former Sayers tye, which takes its name from its 14th-century owners.

Claret Hall in Ashen is on the site of a Domesday settlement called Clare, which later acquired a French diminutive ending to become Clarette (1125-47) or ‘little Clare’ to distinguish from the larger Clare on the Suffolk side of the Stour. Abbas Hall in Great Cornard takes its name from its ownership by the Abbess of West Malling in Kent; Cornard having been granted to it by Robert fitz Hamo, the Norman conqueror of Glamorgan (d. 1107). The existing house was built for the steward of the abbess’s manor in Cornard and its 2-bay aisled hall has been dated to c.1290 by dendrochronology. Moated Clees Hall (Cleys Hall 1640) in Alphamstone takes its name from John Clee who was living in 1372, but was earlier the ‘manor of Fytz Jeffreys’, named after Ralph fitz Geoffrey de Alfameston, living in 1248. It was also called Fytz Jeffrys Stubbyng, suggesting the property was formed from a woodland assart.

Costen’s Hall in Little Cornard (now demolished) was previously known as Caxton’s or Cawston’s, taking its name from Richard de Caketon, who was alive in the 1290s. The Hall has been demolished but its farm buildings largely survive. These are a striking group of brick buildings set around an octagonal courtyard. They date from 1844 and were built for George Mumford, the tenant of Lord Walsingham. Peyton Hall in Bures Hamlet was the property of Robert de Peytone c.1320 and Gedding Hall in Leavenheath was the property of Edmund de Geddyng in 1327.

Leavenheath is largely a creation of the 19th and 20th centuries. 18th-century maps show a large heath on the borders of Assington, Polstead, Nayland, Stoke-by-Nayland and Wissington called Leaden Heath (Levynhey 1292, Levenesheth 1351, Leaden or Leaven Heath 1838). The 1292 form of the name suggests that this was originally a hey or wood. The heath was enclosed in 1817, giving a landscape of straight roads and geometric land units. Leavenheath became a separate chapelry in 1863 and a parish in 1868. Parts of the former heath saw substantial residential development in the 20th century, including the creation of a new village green. Cock Street is a settlement on the former eastern edge of the heath and Honey Tye is on its southern edge. The nearby Polstead Heath was also enclosed in 1817 and has similarly seen residential development on the post-enclosure land parcels.

Pentlow Tower is a landmark on the southern side of the Stour. This 28m (90ft) tall hexagonal brick tower was built by rev. Edward Bull in 1859 as a monument to his parents. It is said to command a view of 41 churches in the surrounding landscape.
Landholding and enclosure pattern

The enclosure pattern over a lot of the landscape retains much of the organic pattern of ancient and species-rich hedgerows and associated ditches. The hedges are frequently high and wide and have a strong visual impact. There are however some areas of field amalgamation and boundary loss, especially on the interfluves between the numerous small valleys. The dissected form of this landscape has reduced the scope for the really extensive field amalgamation found in some other parts of the county. It has ancient woodland scattered throughout in blocks that are often larger than the surrounding fields.

There was some Parliamentary enclosure of common-field arable in the Sudbury area: at Belchamp Otten and Belchamp Walter (1840) on the Essex and at Great Cornard (1813) on the Suffolk side. This has given some larger, more regular and, despite the enclosure, still relatively open fields.

There were also some substantial heaths in the area to the east of Sudbury. These were enclosed in the 18th and 19th centuries and now only survive as place-names associated with late field boundaries, as at Leavenheath and Polstead Heath.

South of a line between Hadleigh and Sudbury orchards become a much more prominent land use.

Trees and woodland cover

The woodland cover is largely ancient semi-natural woodland consisting of oak, lime, cherry, hazel, hornbeam, ash, holly and elm. The presence of small-leafed lime in many of the woods in the eastern part of the area is especially noteworthy.

There are only scattered parcels of woodland in the western part of this landscape type, but there is a more significant group between Bulmer and Twinstead, comprising Parsonage Wood, Butlers Wood (taking its name from the Botiller family, landowners here in the 14th century) Waldegrave Wood and Twinstead Hall Wood – but even here 19th-century and earlier maps indicate that there was formerly more woodland here.

Abbas Hall Wood in Great Cornard is supposed to be the wood portrayed in Thomas Gainsborough’s early masterpiece of c.1748 that was later entitled ‘Gainsbough’s Forest’, with the additional subtitle of ‘Cornard Wood’ in 1828 (now in the National Gallery). A church tower with a spire is glimpsed through the middle is taken to be Little Cornard, but that church has only a small (?19th-century) pointed lantern on its tower rather than a spire. An earlier version of this scene, painted c.1740, has recently (2009) come to light.

The largest group of surviving ancient woodland is at Cornard and Assington, where Assington Thicks, Mumford’s Wood and Lord’s Wood were all once part of a larger Assington Thicks. (Mumford’s Wood commemorates George Mumford of nearby Costen’s Hall, whose farm buildings are referred to above).
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Leadenhall Wood is a much reduced fragment of a larger wood that formerly fringed the northern edge of Leaden Heath. There was also woodland on the southern edge too – Rowley Grove and Breach Grove still survive but Kingsfield Wood and Farthing Grove have gone. There were also woods around the edges of Polstead Heath: Stack Wood on the north, Howe Wood and King Harry’s Grove on the west side, and Millfield Wood on the south – though some are reduced in size. The occurrence of these heath-edge woods supports the idea that the heaths themselves were once probably wooded too (see about Leaden Heath, above).

Between Polstead and Withermarsh there is another group of ancient woods – Mark Wood, Long Wood and Hazel Grove.

The hedgerow trees are of typical clayland composition, oak, ash, field maple and blackthorn, with suckering elm, which is especially abundant in those areas with the lightest soils, where it often makes up almost all of the woody component of the hedgerows. In some places there are ‘landowner-distinctive’ boundaries such as the predominantly holly hedges found around the Gifford’s Hall Estate in the Brett Valley. Oak trees are usually prominent and compliment the parcels of woodland in this area, adding to the generally wooded feel of the landscape. In terms of crop production, cereals and oilseed rape dominate the cropping, the latter making a significant visual contribution.

Visual experience

The clay plateau extending between Ridgewell in the west to Foxearth in the east is very gently undulating, just one step up from flat, mainly in arable cultivation but with a sprinkling of improved pasture and small geometric woodlands, including a young oak plantation. Throughout there are widely spaced isolated houses. This is an open, empty-seeming landscape, consisting of horizontal elements, with few trees. Where they are present, as in alder shelterbelts around former orchards (now grubbed out and returned to pasture and horse paddocks) the local landscape appears more treed; there are some low hedges, and some mature trees within hedges, or skinny tree rows, but these are not strong elements. The Belchamps have a remote feel, not being on the road to anywhere in particular.

The area towards Bures in the south is on sloping ground with extensive views, including the settlement of Bures and the more wooded Suffolk side of the Stour valley. This is an open area, with no woodland, a lack of settlement and a sparse transport network, which give it a remote quality. The field pattern is mainly small to medium scale, with sinuous to curving field boundaries. Roadside hedges are tall but may be lost or gappy within fields and there is a contrast between the sunken lanes enclosed by tall hedges and the more open arable landscape.

The area to the east of the Stour is a flat to gently rolling plateau intersected with stream and river valleys, creating very articulated and diverse landforms. It is generally in arable cultivation, occasionally irrigated, interspersed with woodlands and some pasture and sprinkled with small hamlets. Although the A134 is a major route through this unit, elsewhere there are narrow lanes edged with holly and field maple, with large field oaks and an occasional conifer plantation. To the south of Boxford there are fairly extensive

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orchards. Horse pastures may be edged with low white fences which jar with the more natural hedged landscape around. Houses can be of red brick with slate or thatch roofs, Victorian or late Georgian or, much more frequently, timber-framed with colourfully painted plaster.

**Condition**

Although there are some areas of extensive field amalgamation overall the landscape is largely intact, and accessible thorough a dense network of winding roads with wide verges. In some places there are significant areas of development pressure and land-use change to commercial activities. These tendencies are especially noticeable on the outskirts of Sudbury. The creation of pony paddocks is also a growing feature. In these areas the rural agricultural character of the landscape is clearly diluted.

**Land management issues and options**

**Geology, soils, landform and drainage**

**Archaeology**

- Conservation of upstanding heritage assets
- Identify priority sites for arable reversion to protect buried heritage assets

**Settlement and the built environment**

- Maintain and enhance the landscape setting through sensitive and appropriate development control
- Conserve and enhance the open areas and boundary features of the greens and tyes
- Conserve traditional farm buildings and their settings

**Landholding and enclosure pattern**

- Maintain the historic pattern of field boundaries and ditches
- There is considerable potential for restoration and replanting of hedges in this landscape. There are also opportunities to support the management of woodlands and reduce the isolation of woodland blocks within this landscape
- Changes in land-use that effect character and condition of the landscape, such as the expansion of horse pastures. Support the use of best practice that minimises the impact of these changes on the wider use through use of sympathetic materials and sitting.
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Trees and woodland cover

- Maintain the balance of tree cover

- Woodland management - encourage and support the removal of conifers from ancient woodland sites as well as appropriate deer management to maintain the condition of these important historic landscape features

- There are opportunities to create re-create some of the lost woodlands within this landscape, but the locations must be chosen to reflect the local landscape character and to avoid archaeological sites