



# Market Gardenhovels of the Vale of Evesham, Worcestershire

MARKET GARDENING HERITAGE PROJECT: 2021

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Parish Maps in separate document

Acknowledgements

# Hovels of Worcestershire

## Introduction

From 2018 to 2021, a project supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund allowed the market gardening industry that thrived in the Vale of Evesham to be recorded, shared and celebrated. The key focus of the Market Gardening Heritage project was local memories and buildings, as both were at risk of being lost without record. This summary focuses on the record of historic buildings that has been created. The project was run by Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service, in partnership with Cleeve Prior Heritage Trust and Parish Council, Vale Landscape Heritage Trust and the Worcestershire Farmsteads Project.

This booklet has been put together by one of the project volunteers, using the project summary report as the basis, but expanded to include details of the survey results for each parish within the project area.

## Market Gardens of the Vale of Evesham

### What is market gardening?

At one time, most of the population around Evesham and Pershore were employed in market gardening or a related industry. A wide variety of vegetables, fruit, herbs and cut flowers grown by independent growers were sold at markets up and down the country, from Glasgow to Covent Garden and Penzance. Of particular benefit to local growers was the establishment of a number of markets in the town itself, using High Street, Market Square and purpose-built buildings such as a shed on land near Evesham station, known as Smithfield Market.

Market gardening was a key industry and way of life for communities in and around Evesham, from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Orchards and small plots packed with fruit and vegetables shaped the local landscape. Even the land under the fruit trees was used, by growing daffodils, narcissi, wallflowers and Sweet Williams to sell as cut flowers.

Families were involved in helping on relatives' grounds. Many local trades were connected to the area's abundant production of food, from transport companies to canning factories, blacksmiths and basket makers. Unlike allotment produce, market garden crops were grown specifically for sale. Hand worked strip plots were generally 1-2 acres in size, but most full-time growers rented or owned several pieces of ground totalling 5-6 acres.

Most of the produce was transported by rail, until the advent of widespread lorry transport.

### Why did market gardening become so widespread in the Vale of Evesham?

Local conditions of soil and weather combined to make the area suitable for a wide range of fruit and vegetables, including orchards. Once the railways had opened in the Vale, in 1853 and 1868, the ease of transport to valuable markets encouraged the considerable expansion of the activity. At the same time, a nationwide agricultural depression encouraged farm workers to seek work elsewhere, thus providing a ready labour force. These factors were supported by the 'Evesham Custom', which

was a set of rules that landowners and market gardeners agreed to abide by; it had the backing of an Act of Parliament. It provided growers with compensation for their investments, such as planting fruit trees and other long-term crops, if the landowner no longer wanted them on the land and helped successful gardeners to rent the best land.

### Why did market gardening give way to commercial food growing?

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, falling prices and higher railway charges encouraged growers to form a co-operative, to buy inputs at a better price and to sell produce at higher prices. This marked the beginning of the move from very small, individual operations to the now large-scale businesses in the Vale today.

Once machines had become available, to be efficient they needed to work at scale. So, in the 1950's and 1960's small market gardens became much less profitable. The creation of supermarkets, the arrival of cheap imports into the country and the demand for produce all year round resulted in the amalgamation of land holdings into large scale operations based on glasshouses that dominate the landscape in the Vale.

A detailed history of market gardening is available in the online exhibition produced by the project, under the title 'Grown in the Vale', which can be accessed on the website <https://www.explorethepast/exhibitions-mgh>

### Vale of Evesham 'hovels'

As all gardeners know, a shed is essential for storing equipment, produce and providing shelter. Market gardening was no exception: rows of timber, corrugated iron and occasionally brick built structures once lined the ends of their grounds. These structures became the centre of the working life of the market gardener. Generally built to market gardeners' own design and requirements, each was unique in both design and function. Some doubled up as temporary accommodation for hired hands, some were used for keeping racing pigeons or brewing homemade alcohol and one even served as a monthly barber's shop!

Locally known as 'hovels' (or 'ovels'), these distinctive small buildings once dotted the landscape and were significant social hubs, as well as practical. Hovels are a distinctive and unique aspect of market gardening in the Vale of Evesham, as they do not appear to have been built in other market gardening regions. Since the rise of commercial horticulture and gradual decline of market gardening during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these small buildings have been slowly disappearing through abandonment and change of land use.

## Survey methods

### Extent of survey

A survey to record surviving hovels was undertaken by a team of 22 local volunteers. The first phase of the survey covered 11 core parishes. Due to available time and the dedication of volunteers, a second phase of the survey also took place, which covered a further 13 parishes. The core area was Evesham and ten surrounding parishes, from Wickhamford in the south to Harvington and Cleeve Prior in the north. The additional parishes were to the west of Evesham, as far as and including Pershore, plus two parishes to the south of Evesham and one to the east. Whilst the Vale of



Evesham is not a fixed area, the survey covered virtually all of the parishes most often considered to form the Vale.

## Phase 1

For the 11 parishes in the first phase, each was covered by a search of historic maps and aerial photographs. This was undertaken in autumn 2018 by staff at Worcestershire's Historic Environment Record. The possible hovel sites identified by maps and aerial photographs were classified as surviving, of unknown survival and gone.

Following training by Worcestershire Farmsteads Project, each volunteer team was assigned a parish and visited all 'unknown' sites to check their survival, as well as walking across the parish's footpaths to pick up any additional, previously missed hovels. Surviving hovels were recorded via photographs and a building record sheet (created by the project) that contained a written description and measured sketch of the building. Their condition was assessed as being either extant, ruined, demolished or absent. Where it was not possible to access hovels on private land but the building was visible from a public right of way, a partial record was taken from the footpath or road. A small number of sites were inaccessible and remain unrecorded.

## Phase 2

For the 13 parishes in the second phase of the project, recording methods changed to a more rapid walkover assessment. As these parishes were not covered by the 2018 search of historic maps and aerial photographs, no potential hovel sites had previously been identified. Instead, a volunteer team walked along the parish's public rights of way and recorded any visible hovels in as much detail as possible from the footpath or road. A full record with measurements was often not possible, but a partial record was considered to be better than none. Due to the walkover nature of the survey, it is possible that a few hovels on private land were missed. Absent hovels are also unrecorded for many of these parishes, although a list of historically detectable hovels has been compiled by a volunteer for five parishes (drawing on early edition Ordnance Surveys and 1949 aerial photographs).

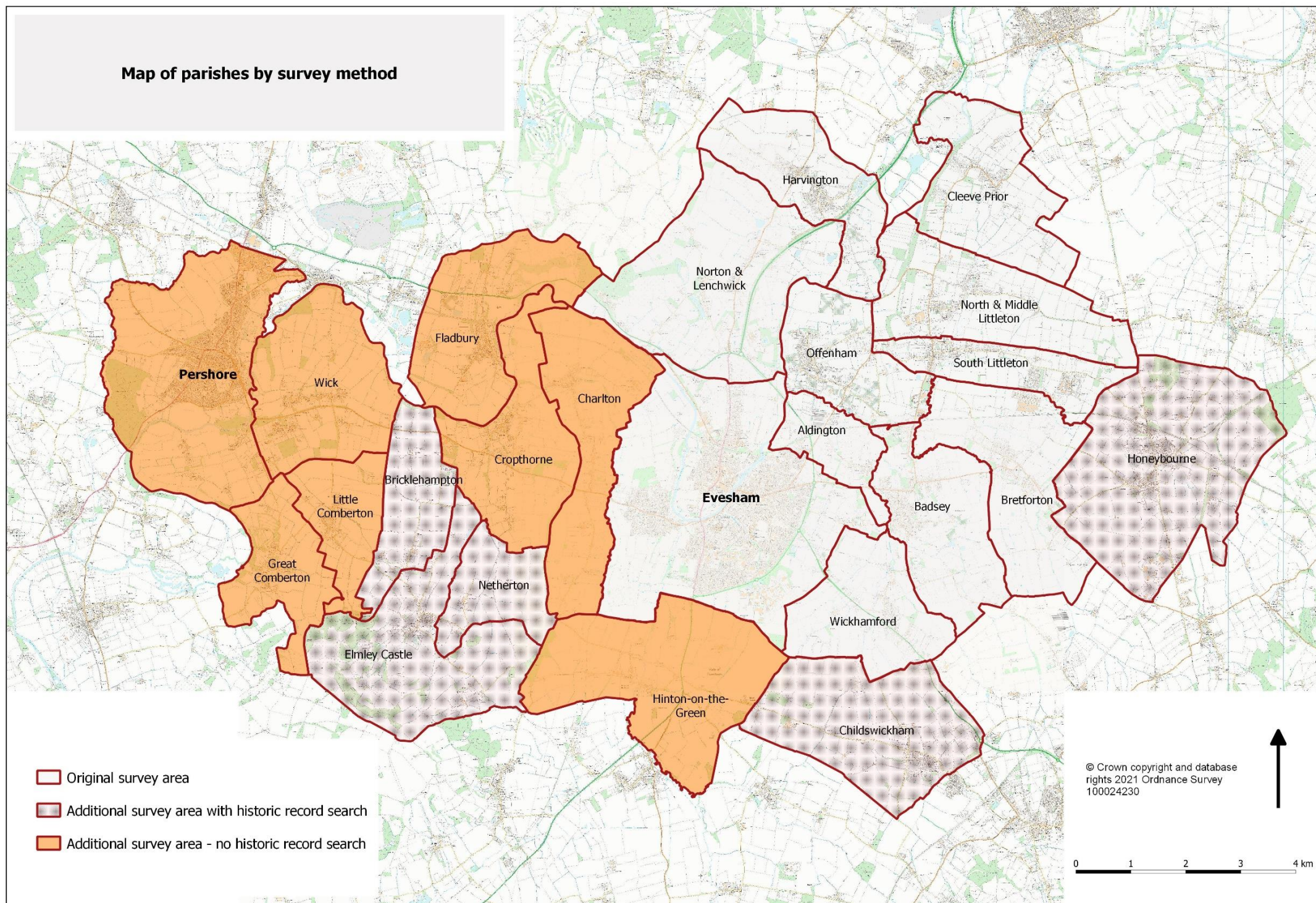
## Assessment of condition

Alongside a written and photographic record, the condition of hovels was assessed. Buildings were grouped into four categories, described below. This data was collected in order to understand how rapidly these buildings may disappear and provide a baseline to measure future condition against.

<b>Extant</b>	Building walls and roof intact: does not have to be used for original purpose
<b>Ruined</b>	Substantial remains of building visible above ground, but walls and roof not intact
<b>Demolished</b>	Site of building visible, but only low walls or floor surviving
<b>Absent</b>	No evidence of building above ground



## Map of parishes by survey method





## Survey results

The distribution of hovels across the Vale of Evesham, together with their survival and condition, is shown on the maps below. Details of the numbers of hovels identified by the survey, broken into parishes and their state of preservation, are given in the following table:

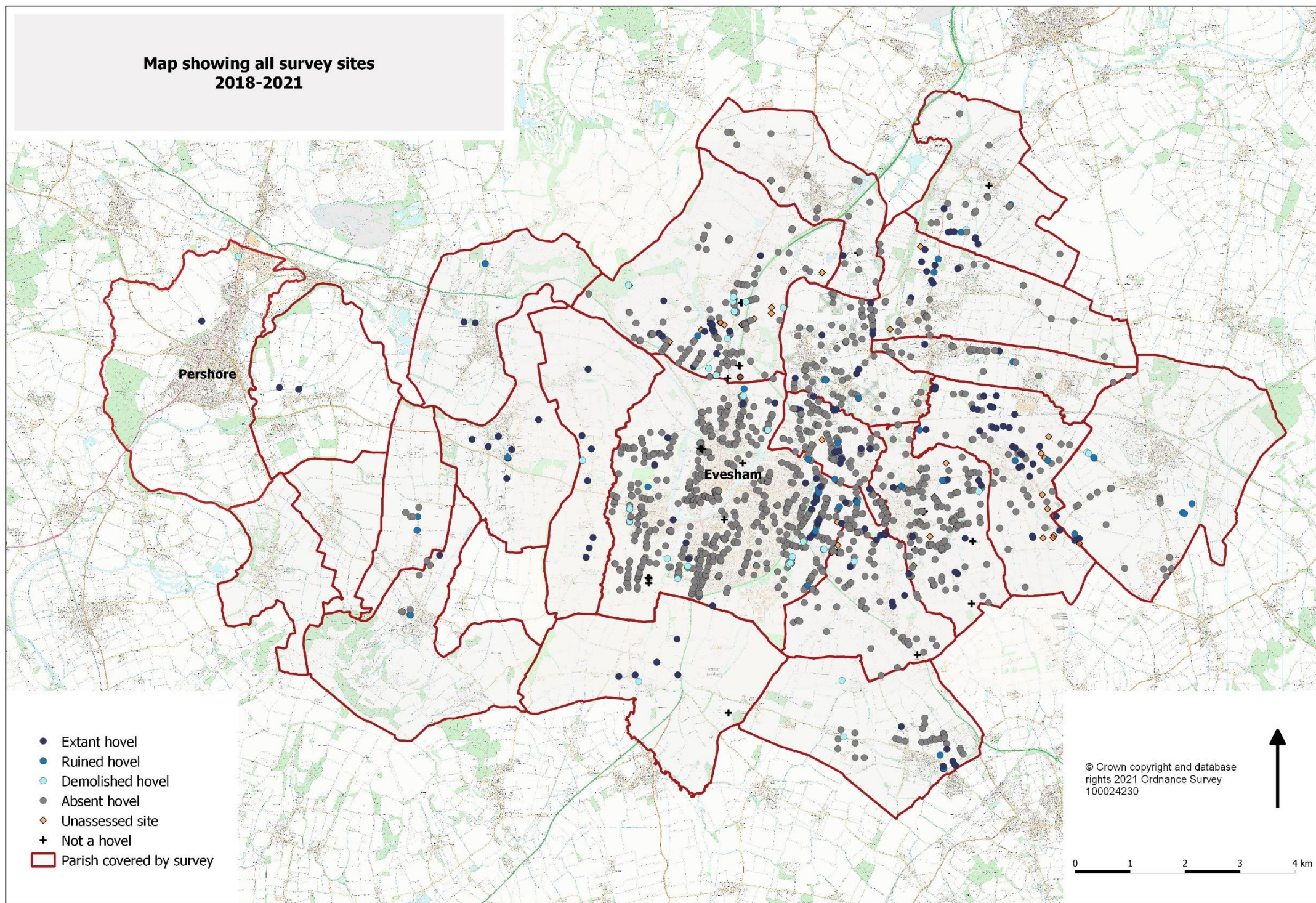
Parish	Surviving Hovels			Unassessed	Absent	Total
	Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
Aldington	15	2	0	1	102	120
Badsey	11	2	1	6	143	163
Bretforton	29	3	0	9	43	84
Bricklehampton	0	2	0	0	4	6
Charlton*	8	0	1	0	0	9
Childswickham	7	3	2	0	27	39
Cleeve Prior	7	2	1	0	15	25
Cropthorne*	8	1	0	0	0	9
Elmley Castle	1	2	0	0	6	9
Evesham	27	10	18	1	614	670
Fladbury*	2	2	0	0	0	4
Great Comberton*	0	0	0	0	0	0
Harvington	1	0	0	0	19	20
Hinton on the Green*	5	0	1	0	0	6
Honeybourne	2	6	2	0	16	26
Little Comberton*	0	0	0	0	0	0
Netherton	0	0	0	0	0	0
North & Middle Littleton	10	2	0	2	27	41
Norton & Lenchwick	18	1	10	15	109	153
Offenham	5	2	0	0	72	79
Pershore*	1	0	1	0	0	2
South Littleton	2	1	0	0	24	27
Wick*	2	0	0	0	0	2
Wickhamford	10	0	1	7	63	81
<b>Total for all parishes</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>1284</b>	<b>1575</b>
<b>Percentage of total</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>2.4%</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>81.5%</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Parishes in the additional survey area (phase 2 of the survey) are highlighted in yellow.*

*\*No historic map or aerial photograph search to identify historic (absent) hovels was undertaken in these parishes.*

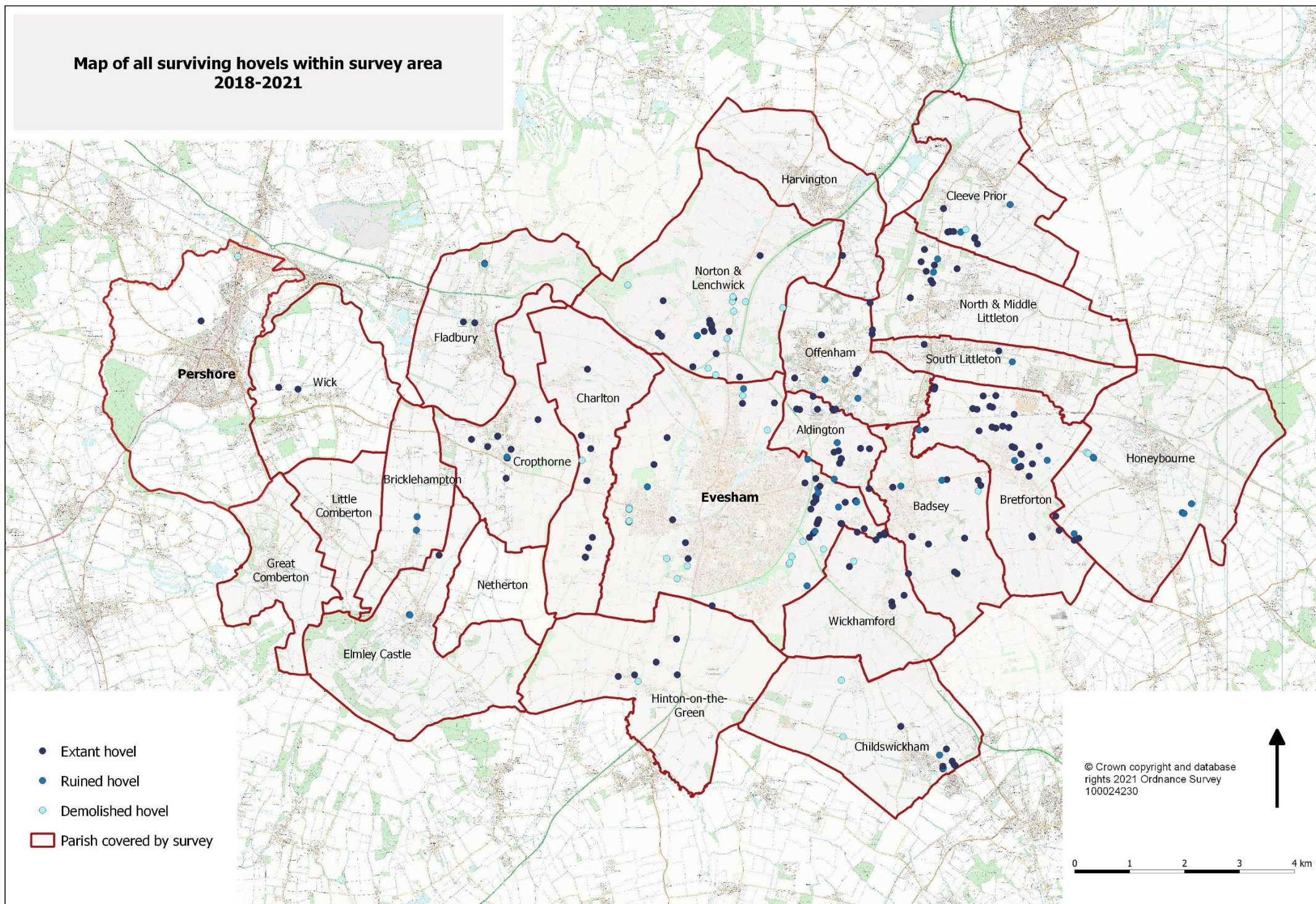


**Map showing all survey sites  
2018-2021**





**Map of all surviving hovels within survey area  
2018-2021**





## Number of hovels

The number of hovels built across the Vale of Evesham is greater than anticipated prior to the survey. Whilst the survey has not established the date of their construction (and in most cases this would be impossible to pin down due to continual patch repairs) it is inevitable that they weren't all in use at the same time. However, given that a search for absent hovels wasn't undertaken in eight parishes, the total number of hovels built over time will be higher than the 1575 identified.

A relatively small number of buildings highlighted by the historic map search, just 23, turned out to not be a hovel when visited. Due to this low proportion, it is likely that the 1284 records of absent hovels are a relatively accurate reflection and does not contain too many buildings used for other purposes.

## Survival and condition

Over 1500 hovel sites have been identified in the Vale of Evesham. Of these, only 250 survive, which is just 16% of the total that once existed. An assessment of each building's condition shows that a third of surviving hovels are already in the process of collapse, meaning that just 171 – approximately 1 in 10 hovels – are extant with four walls and a roof.

Most extant hovels are also in a state of decay, often covered or surrounded by brambles, ivy and other dense vegetation. A few hovels do continue to be used, often for storage, but the vast majority appear to have been abandoned.

## Construction

There is a wide variety of construction styles seen in the few extant hovels. These buildings are as varied as the individuals who built and used them, as they were typically built with whatever materials were to hand and to meet the grower's own purposes. In many cases, it appears that the hovel started off small, but as the needs of the owner changed extensions were added until the structure became quite large. Photographs of various types and conditions of hovels are shown below.

The most common building type is a timber frame, with corrugated sheets on the walls and roof. A mix of corrugated metal and wooden cladding is also frequently seen. The basic design is a rectangular structure with a single door and window, often on the same elevation, with the other three elevations fully clad. The roof is often mono-pitch, higher over the door and sloping slightly to the rear. The inability to survey inside hovels meant that there is a limited record of the interiors. However, where visible, the floor is typically compacted earth and most did not contain any internal features, although shelves and a work bench are the most common fixtures encountered.

Those best preserved are generally built of brick with tiled roofs and are sometimes two-stories high. A few still have evidence of a brick chimney and are likely to have been used as accommodation for seasonal or temporary workers.





Photo 1: Basic Design



Photo 2: Extended version



Photo 3: Timber construction



Photo 4: Brick construction



Photo 5: Brick hovel with chimney



Photo 6: Lorry wagon repurposed as a hovel





**Photo 7: Extant hovel**



**Photo 8: Ruined hovel**



**Photo 9: Demolished hovel**



**Photo 10: Overgrown hovel**

## Distribution

It is clear from the parish breakdown that Evesham had the highest number of hovels: 43% of the total. However, due in large part to the town's significant growth, only 8% of sites survive and only 4% are extant. These proportions are significantly less than the average for the survey area as a whole.

Those parishes covered by the first phase of the survey also have significantly more hovels (both surviving and historic) than the parishes surveyed later on. This pattern reflects the industry's origins, which began with a small number of market gardens around Evesham during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century then a rapid expansion following the arrival of the railway. From the 1870s, farmland in surrounding villages was divided up into market garden plots at a rapidly growing rate.

A search for historic hovels was not undertaken in many parishes west of Evesham or around Pershore itself, so the true distribution of hovels here is not known. Consequently, the smaller numbers of surviving hovels west of Evesham could either be a result of lower survival rates or due to fewer hovels being built here in the first place. However, it is most likely that this pattern reflects the true distribution of hovels as there are no

significant difference in land use or building work that would have caused lower survival rates west of Evesham.

A study of historic maps and records suggests that the nature of market gardens differed slightly across the Vale, with a greater focus on vegetable growing east of Evesham and a larger emphasis on fruit trees around Pershore. It is therefore possible that this difference accounts for the skewed distribution of hovels, with fewer needed and built around the orchards of Pershore.

On a local scale, short rows of hovels can be seen – especially around Evesham and Lenchwick. In many cases, these rows line up with trackways depicted on historic maps, demonstrating growers' preference for building hovels at the end of their typically elongated market gardens. Locating hovels alongside trackways and roads is likely to have been a purely practical choice, as produce was historically left out by them for collection.

## Accessing survey records

Survey records and photographs of all recorded hovels are stored with Worcestershire's Historic Environment Record (HER), along with an overview of each parish. This free public database can be accessed by visiting the HER desk on level 2 of The Hive in Worcester or submitting an online enquiry via Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service's website. A limited version of the HER is also available online through the Heritage Gateway website.

Alongside the hovels survey, the Market Gardening Heritage Project restored three hovels as public heritage sites, collected oral histories and created online resources for educational and reminiscence use. Hovels were significant social hubs as well as practical buildings, as captured in the recorded oral histories. To listen to these memories and find out more about market gardening, including the people behind it all and industry's nationwide reach, visit the project online at <http://www.explorethepast.co.uk/>.

## Summary

This survey is the first systematic record of market gardeners' hovels across the Vale of Evesham. It provides a snapshot of the variety, location and condition of these unique historical buildings as of 2018-2021. From these records, it is evident that hovels were an integral part of the area's market gardening with over 1500 being built, yet they are rapidly being lost to changing land use and decay. As of 2021, approximately 170 hovels survive as intact buildings. There is no doubt that this number will dwindle significantly over the coming years, but a written and photographic record of them has been preserved for future generations.

The following section includes the parish summaries, in alphabetic order. These can be found in the county's Historic Environment Record (see above). Maps for each parish are included in a separate document.

## Parish Summaries

## Aldington

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
15	2	0	1	102	120
17					
14.2%			0.8%	85%	100%

Aldington Parish lies at the heart of the market gardening area of the Vale of Evesham. The historic maps show a widespread scatter of hovels across the whole parish, although as the statistics show, only a small proportion now survive. These hovels are concentrated in two areas; the northwest of the parish and in the centre. There is no obvious explanation for the loss of hovels in the southern parts and northeast of the parish. Modern, commercial-scale horticulture and agriculture in the parish has replaced the small market garden plots, thus removing the need for a myriad of separate structures.

The surviving hovels demonstrate a diversity of construction and size. Small, medium and large, the large ones either extended or built as a series of separate but adjoining hovels. Mostly mono-pitched roofs, but a few with pitched roofs. Usually timber framed structures, clad with corrugated iron, although a few clad in timber. A few more solid structures have block walls. One surviving hovel comprises an old van (railway?) with sliding doors on the side adjoining a larger conventional structure; produce trays still inside. About half of the surviving hovels appear to be in some modern, storage use; for example, one contains bales of hay. The other half are probably unused as they are in varying degrees of deterioration, with brambles, ivy and other vegetation beginning to take over.



WSM 71074 Series of joined hovels



WSM 71078 South East elevation



WSM 77576 South elevation  
(all photos - DA & JE Evans)



WSM 77580 South elevation



## Badsey

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
11	2	1	6	143	163
14					
8.6%			3.7%	87.7%	100%

Badsey is one of the parishes in the core of the market gardening area of the Vale of Evesham. As a consequence, the parish had a very high number of hovels one hundred years ago, scattered throughout the parish, although of a lesser density in the very south of the parish. The surviving hovels are also well spread through the parish, but are grouped along the Badsey/Bretforton road, Willersey road and Sands Lane. The survival rate of hovels is low, which is probably due to the very large number in the first place. As very small landholdings became amalgamated, only one hovel would continue to be needed, so others would then fall into disuse. Also, the market gardening land is easily accessible to the village, so more plots may have been managed from the village rather than needing a shelter/store on the plot.

The surviving hovels are mostly small, with a mono-pitch roof, constructed of timber with corrugated sheet cladding. Some have timber cladding to the walls. Two brick hovels remain, one of which has recently been converted into an office. It is a small rectangular building with a pitched roof. A number contain a collection of contents, indicating recent or current use, although most are in very poor condition. One small brick hovel has been maintained in good condition and is now used as a shop for the selling of asparagus. One surviving hovel is constructed of concrete blocks, which is unusual. Other than the brick hovels, the remaining ones all have varying degrees of vegetation growth alongside or encroaching on the structure, which is likely in due course to lead to the collapse of the structure. Surveyors found one hovel with a well and one with a water pump; water was a definite asset if it was available; most hovels had no obvious source of water.



WSM 71080 West elevation



WSM 71080 Interior showing timber frame  
(Tracey Calcutt & Joe Gobbin)





WSM 71083 Re-purposed lorry body



WSM 71410 Hovel used for selling asparagus  
(Gill & Ken Pawson)



WSM 71413 Fireplace in restored hovel  
(Tracey Calcutt & Joe Gobbin)



WSM 71419 East elevation  
(Tracey Calcutt & Sarah Everett)



WSM 71419 Interior  
(Tracey Calcutt & Sarah Everett)



WSM 71419 Interior  
(Tracey Calcutt & Sarah Everett)

## Bretforton

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
29	1	0	9	43	84
32					
38%			11%	51%	100%

The parish of Bretforton lies in the eastern area of the Vale of Evesham with the parish of Honeybourne to its east. The large number of hovels indicates the scale of market gardening in the parish, although the number and the density is lower than those parishes at the heart of the Vale of Evesham horticultural activity.

Hovels, absent and surviving, are scattered throughout the parish, although the density declines in the south of the parish. The proportion of hovels that survive is good.

Of the surviving hovels, a significant number are large hovels and many of the surviving hovels have pitched roofs. The surviving hovels are constructed of various materials; generally timber framed, but clad with corrugated sheets or timber or concrete panels or a mixture of these. Where it has been possible to see inside, they generally have earth floors. Roofs are generally of corrugated sheeting.

Eleven of the surviving hovels are recorded as in use, with nine of these still connected to market gardening and two used for storage. Most of the other recorded hovels have been abandoned or are not in use.

A team from Bretforton History Group created the survey records for the Parish, drawing on local memories of historic and surviving hovels.



WSM 72839 A & B West elevation



WSM 72845 East elevation



WSM 72841 North elevation with extension

(all photos – Fiona Gibson, Celia Grant & David Peets)



## Bricklehampton

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
0	2	0	0	4	6
2					
44%			0	66%	100%

Bricklehampton lies west of Evesham, outside the main centre of market gardening and orchards. This location is reflected in the small number of hovels recorded.

Two, ruined hovels were found and recorded. They are located close to the sites of the four absent hovels, which were found on a survey of Google maps of the 1940's. The cluster of 6 lies to the north of the village, in an area which is shown on an OS map of 1924 as small orchards and allotments. The structures are not shown on the map of this date, but this may be because they were not regarded as structures worthy of mapping, given the nature of their construction.

The two remaining hovels are of basic construction; timber frame, with mono-pitch roofs of corrugated sheeting and walls of corrugated sheets or timber panels. Both are overgrown with brambles and partially collapsed making it very difficult to identify size.



WSM 73504 North West elevation  
(Terry Woodfield)



WSM 73504 North West inside

## Charlton

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
8	0	1	0	0	9
9					
100%			0%	0%	100%

Charlton is a very elongated parish, narrow west-east and long north-south. In the north it is bounded by the River Avon and approximately half way down the length of the parish it is dissected by the Evesham-Pershore Road B4084. The main settlement of the parish is located near the northern boundary and there are scattered residential and agricultural premises throughout the parish. South of the B4084 the 1924 OS map shows that most of the land is either orchards or allotments, as is most of the land between the highway and the village. The land north of the village is low lying and much of it is prone to flooding from the River Avon.

The recorded hovels are aligned along the length of the parish; three south of the B4084, four north of the B4084 and one close to the village. The hovel near the village is unusually large, comprising three 3m wide bays and it has a water tank alongside. All are timber framed with corrugated sheeting roofs. Other than the large one which has walling of timber plants and panels, the others have walls covered with corrugated sheeting. Two hovels have pitched roofs, otherwise the roofs are mono-pitched. Five of the 8 surviving hovels are in good condition and appear to be in use.



WSM 72550 East elevation



WSM 72556 North-East elevation

(Ken & Gill Pawson)



WSM 72535 East elevation

(Terry Woodfield & Ken MacDonald)

## Childswickham

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
7	3	2	0	27	39
12					
31%			0%	69%	100%

Childswickham lies to the south of the main area of market gardening in the Vale of Evesham. However, there was a significant concentration of hovels in and near the village. This reflects the presence of orchards within and around the village, especially on the southwest facing slopes in the northwest of the parish. One isolated hovel existed near the hamlet of Murcot in the north of the parish and an outlier group was found on either side of the Hinton Road. It is not obvious from OS maps of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century what these were related to, but may well have been market gardens (unmarked on the maps) rather than orchards.

The structures range from small, mono-pitched hovels to large, pitched roofed, two storey hovels. One brick structure remains and is in good condition. Generally, structures are timber framed with corrugated sheeting and earth floors (where these can be seen). A few remain in use for storage and thus are maintained, but a couple in use are falling down.



WSM 73545 South East elevation & interiors







WSM 73549 South West elevation



WSM 73550 South East elevation



WSM 73551 South & East elevations  
(all photos – Terry Woodfield)



WSM 73555 South East elevation



## Cleeve Prior

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
7	2	1	0	15	25
10					
40%			0%	60%	100%

Cleeve Prior is the most northerly parish surveyed, lying on the east side of the River Avon. Its northern boundary co-insides with the county boundary, bordering Warwickshire. The southern part of the parish, adjoining North Littleton, was the main area of orchards and market gardening and thus where existing and lost hovels have been recorded. Anecdotal evidence from one of the few remaining market gardeners in the parish, who still has a strip of rhubarb production, is that north of the lane to Island Barn, were individual strips of land growing rhubarb, each with its own hovel, probably a dozen or more. Now, only 2 of these remain.

Overall, the parish has a good proportion of surviving hovels, despite not being in the centre of the Vale's market gardening area.

All of the remaining hovels are constructed with a timber frame with corrugated sheeting to the roof and sides. Usually a single door and window, but some had more than one of each, depending upon the size of the building. Roofs are predominantly mono-pitched. Floors usually of dirt.

The parish contains one of the three hovels that are being restored by the project, but it is the most significant of all hovels surveyed. Not only is it largely intact structurally, when found, it contained a large collection of items that had been used by the owner; a veritable time capsule. The full story can be found on the project website <http://www.cleevepriorchroniclers.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/230-Edit-Vale-Hovels-Market-Gardening-Heritage-NO-ADS-SMALL-1.pdf>. And information about visiting the restored hovel can be found online: [www.explorethepast.co.uk/project/market-gardening-heritage](http://www.explorethepast.co.uk/project/market-gardening-heritage).

The Time Capsule Hovel, as restored.



WSM 71124 Before restoration



WSM 71124 After restoration

WSM 71124 Interior views, before restoration



Other hovels



Still in use at a rhubarb field  
WSM 71421 East elevation



WSM 71425/6 East elevation

(all photos by Ken & Gill Pawson)

## Crophthorne

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
8	1	0	0	0	9
9					
100%			0%	0%	100%

Crophthorne lies west of Evesham, in the secondary area of market gardening and orchards.

A turn of the century OS map shows a large area of orchards in and around the village, most lying north of the Evesham to Pershore road. The orchard areas extended as far as the river to the east of the village, as the land lies above the general level of the flood plain. One area of allotments is shown on a map of 1930, lying north of the village but on land above the flood plain. The most northerly part of the parish is low lying and at risk of flooding, thus limiting the potential for tree growth and cultivation.

A single hovel was found south of the Evesham to Pershore Road, on Smokey Lane. It is the best-preserved building within the parish, being constructed of brick, with a pitched roof. It has been well maintained and retains its old water boiler in one corner. The building appears to be used for storage. Apparently, it was lived in by a German ex-prisoner of war after the war, as he did not wish to return to Germany. He worked on the associated land.

Six of the other 8 extant hovels all lie in the village. Five are in a perilous state, although one in the nature reserve area still contains items, including an old car, that were and are stored there but with no obvious user. They appear all to have been constructed as single-storey buildings, with timber frame and timber and corrugated cladding. The two outlying hovels, one to the north-east of the village and one due west, are both in better condition. They are both single-storey buildings; timber framed with corrugated cladding. The one in the north-east appears to be in use for storage.



WSM 72548 East elevation  
(Ken & Gill Pawson)



WSM 73414 North West elevation  
(Terry Woodfield)



## Elmley Castle

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
1	2	0	0	6	9
3					
33.3%			0%	66.7%	100%

Elmley Castle parish lies to the south west of Evesham and most of the parish area is on the north flank of Bredon Hill. This location is outside the main area of market gardening and orchards, which is reflected in the small number of hovels recorded. The OS maps of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century show a concentration of orchards in the village and the map of 1924 shows a large area of flat land north of the village as allotment gardens. The few hovels identified as surviving or absent are either on the west side of the village or within the allotment garden area. Two surviving hovels are near the village and one in the allotments.

The one extant hovel is situated in what is now a garden of a house, but on an allotment/market garden sized plot. It is large, with a pitched roof extending down to a height of about 1m at the sides. It is covered with corrugated sheeting. It is used for storage. The two ruined hovels are overgrown with vegetation, but the structure remains visible. One is a small unit, clad in timber and sheeting with a mono-pitched roof and the other one is small but with a pitched roof, also of corrugated sheeting.



WSM 73455 South West elevation



WSM 73457 South Elevation  
(all photos – Terry Woodfield)

## Evesham

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
27	10	18	1	614	670
55					
8.2%			0.1%	91.6%	100%

Evesham Parish was at the heart of the market gardening area in the Vale of Evesham. The map of the locations of hovels shows a widespread distribution, including many in the centre of the town. The only parts of the parish with no signs of hovels are the areas of floodplain of the River Avon and in two areas in the south of the parish.

By the late 1800's orchards had become established all over the parish, with the exception of the floodplain, including all of the land within the river loop. This meant that many were within easy reach of the housing of the orchard owner or tenant. In this case it is likely that hovels were built close to the housing for the main purpose of storage of seed, tools and produce, due to the generally small size of houses and their lack of suitable space. Where orchards required tending further from the housing, hovels served the same purpose, plus providing somewhere for the grower to shelter and rest during the day before returning home.

It was not until the maps of the early 1900's that the use of land for allotments was separately shown. This appears to reflect a marked change from all orchard fruit growing to a mixture of orchards and market gardening. Market gardening offered the opportunity for generating income virtually all year round, with the rotation of crops to include fruit, vegetables and flowers from all four seasons. All of the cultivated land in the parish was in easy reach of the railway station in Evesham, thus allowing for the daily distribution of produce north to Birmingham, south to Cheltenham and beyond, west to Worcester and east to London. As Evesham grew, commercial operations were established to utilize the local produce. For example, the town included jam factories and canning plants.

The large number of hovels, which is the most of any of the parishes in the heritage project survey, reflects the very small land parcels that individuals owned or tenanted. Over 100 years ago such small parcels were sufficient to provide a subsistence living for the operator, but as time went on, it became more difficult to survive on the income from the small plots, so they were gradually amalgamated.

The evidence of hovels, shows two general patterns; a scatter and parallel rows of hovels in close proximity to one another. The latter are in evidence in the areas along the Cheltenham Road, River Isbourne and between Broadway Road and Badsey Road beyond the by-pass.

The small percentage of hovels recorded as surviving, with an even smaller percentage actually extant, reflects the growth of the town. Housing, retail, industry and roads have all used land in the parish previously either covered in orchards or used for market gardening. The extant hovels are all to be found on the very margins of the parish, most notably to the east of the by-pass, where other than Vale Park, development has been resisted.

There is a wide variety of styles of construction in the few extant hovels. Those best preserved are generally built of brick, with tiled roofs. A few surviving hovels are two-storey, but most are single-storey. The most common building type is of timber frame, with corrugated sheet cladding, on the walls and roof. Most of the

extant hovels are in a state of decay, often covered or surrounded by vegetation such as bramble. None of the surveyed hovels show any sign of a modern use and most appear to be abandoned. A few still have evidence of a brick chimney, which was associated with the need to generate heat to dry produce and to enable temporary residence during busy times.



WSM 71093 South West Elevation

(Terry Woodfield & Jane Mason)



WSM71093 North West Elevation



WSM 71098



WSM 71435

(Graham Smith)



WSM 71441 East Elevation

(Terry Woodfield & Jane Mason)



WSM 71441 East Elevation 2 weeks later





WSM 71444 South West Elevation  
(Terry Woodfield)



WSM 71573 South Elevation  
(Terry Woodfield & Chris Woolstencroft)



WSM 71578 North Elevation



WSM 71584 South East Elevation  
(Terry Woodfield & Nina O'Hare)

## Fladbury

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
2	2		0	0	4
4					
100%			0%	0%	100%

Fladbury lies to the west of Evesham; its south and east boundary runs along the River Avon. The low-lying land in the south of the parish is within the river's flood plain, thus was unsuitable for market gardening or orchards. The higher land in and to the west of the village and to the north of the Pershore-Evesham road had extensive orchards one hundred years ago. The two extant hovels lie close to the southern edge of the railway line (Worcester – Evesham), in orchard areas which have now been adopted by the village as a community orchard and nature reserve. The two ruined hovels lie north of the main road.

The two extant hovels are both small, single-storied, with a timber frame and corrugated sheeting cladding.

What can be seen of the two ruined hovels, amongst the overgrown vegetation suggests that these also were small, timber framed with corrugated cladding.



WSM 72533 East Elevation



WSM 72533 Interior



WSM 72534 South Elevation

(all photos - Terry Woodfield & Ken MacDonald)



## Harvington

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
1	0	0	0	19	20
1					
5%			0%	95%	100%

Harvington parish lies to the west of the River Avon, which separates it from the main area of market gardening in the Vale of Evesham lying to the east of the river.

The historic maps show a scatter of hovels throughout the parish, although the Victorian maps show only a very limited extent of orchards and these are concentrated around the settlement of Harvington. By 1926, the OS map shows a wider distribution of orchards throughout the parish, although they are interspersed with other agricultural land. This suggests that the growing conditions for the orchard trees were not as favourable as on land in the core parishes of the Vale of Evesham market gardening area.

Only one hovel survives in the parish. It is typical of the hovels associated with market gardening, being single storey and clad with corrugated sheeting. It is however large and this is probably the reason that it has survived, as it is of a sufficient size to make it useful for storage in connection with commercial scale farming. It is however partly overgrown with bramble and other vegetation, indicating that it is not being maintained today as a useful structure on the farm.

The now demolished hovel of which a photograph survives was also typical of hovels, but of the more solid, permanent type. It was single-storey, brick built with a pitched, tiled roof. It had a timber lean-to on the side, which may have been for a toilet. It was demolished to make way for the Norton-Lenchwick by-pass, which was opened in 1995.



Photograph from Anchor Lane, looking towards Longlands (c. late 1980's – early 1990s). Demolished during the construction of the Norton – Lenchwick Bypass, which opened in 1995.



WSM 71100

## Hinton-on-the-Green

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
5	0	1	0	0	6
6					
100%			0%	0%	100%

Hinton on the Green lies due south of Evesham. OS maps from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century show some isolated areas of orchards and small orchards in the village. There is no reference to market gardening in the parish on the old OS maps. The small number of hovels identified during the walkover survey reflects the limited amount of fruit growing in this part of the county.

One of the extant hovels that remains in use is located to the east of housing. In discussion with the landowner, it became apparent that the plot of land within which the hovel is situated was used as a market garden and is now in use as a domestic allotment. It is a small timber framed structure with corrugated cladding. The other extant hovel remaining in use is a two-storey brick structure with a pitched, tiled roof and a single storey lean-to; it has recently been renovated.

The other extant hovels are of timber framed construction with corrugated cladding. They vary in size and are largely overgrown with vegetation.



WSM 73079 North-East elevation



WSM 72449 East elevation



WSM 73083 East elevation

(all photos - Ken & Gill Pawson)



## Honeybourne

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
2	6	2	0	16	26
10					
38%			0%	62%	100%

Honeybourne lies at the eastern extremity of the survey area, with its eastern boundary also the Worcestershire county boundary. The land in the north and east of the parish lies 10m or more above the height of the parishes to the west, as the land begins to rise up eastwards into the Cotswold escarpment.

All of the hovels identified in this survey are clustered in the south of the parish. There is a concentration in the southwest, close to the Bretforton parish and along the Gloster Ades Road. A few of the absent hovels lie close to Icknield Way, some in the very south of the parish and some just south of the village. Three of the surviving hovels lie south-east of the village.

None of the surviving hovels remain in use. All of the surviving hovels were simple structures; timber-framed with corrugated sheeting or timber planking cladding and are now overgrown to some extent.

There is reference in the survey notes to the likelihood of the demolition of the two surviving hovels when the area was developed with nursery buildings.



WSM 73301 South East Elevation



WSM 73301 West End inside



WSM 73085 East Elevation  
(all photos - Terry Woodfield)



WSM 73300 North Elevation

## North and Middle Littleton

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
10	2	0	2	27	41
12					
29%			5%	66%	100%

The parish of North and Middle Littleton lies in the heart of the Vale of Evesham and the market garden and orchard area. OS maps from 100 years ago show a wide expanse of both orchards and allotments, located east of the steep river valley side that runs north-south through the west of the parish. The map shows orchards and allotments in and around the two villages, but few to the east and only scattered allotments to the east.

The pattern of hovels established during the original map survey and subsequent field surveys closely reflects the pattern of recorded orchards and allotments. Although two structures shown on old maps and identified as possible hovels, but are now absent, lie close to the river in the flood plain. These are unlikely to have been associated with either allotments or orchards as both activities avoided the land at risk of flooding. Many of the other absent hovel sites lie in the areas now developed for commercial growing and processing. Also, the scatter of four absent hovels along Blakes Hill Road, were associated with small growing areas, which were probably abandoned at an early stage of commercialisation of growing, which has become concentrated west of the B4085.

Ten of the surviving hovels, surveyed, lie on or close to the B4085, in North Littleton. Two of these lie in a field now planted as a community orchard and have been the subject of repair by the Market Garden Heritage Project. Information about visiting the restored hovels can be found online: [www.explorethepast.co.uk/project/market-gardening-heritage](http://www.explorethepast.co.uk/project/market-gardening-heritage). These two are typical of many hovels, being single-storey, timber framed, corrugated sheet clad, with earth floors. They are illustrated below.

The extant hovels are generally in a good condition and of a range of sizes, from small to large. Of the latter, these were sub-divided into separate sections, or they were built in stages, with extra sections added as necessary. Three of the hovels have evidence of separate toilet rooms attached. No brick buildings were found.



WSM 71126 Northeast elevation  
(all photos - Gill and Ken Pawson)



WSM 71125 South elevation



West elevation.





## Norton and Lenchwick

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
18	1	10	15	109	153
29					
19.0%			9.8%	71.2%	100%

The parish of Norton and Lenchwick is large and lies within the core area of market gardening in the Vale of Evesham. Therefore, it had a large number of hovels, as shown on the historic maps. A significant proportion, nearly a fifth, are recorded as surviving, although a third of these are now demolished. A number of the absent hovels were removed as they were on the route of either the A44 north Evesham by-pass or on the A46 dual-carriageway route through the parish.

Most of the hovels were in the south and east of the parish, associated with the predominance of orchards on the lower lying land. These orchards were established at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, expanding the activity that had been established in Evesham in the previous few decades. The OS map of 1926 shows some land devoted to allotments, interspersed between the main orchard areas in the south. A few were on the higher land in the northwest part of the parish, associated with the later planting of scattered orchards and some limited areas of allotments, as shown on the OS map of 1926.

The parish has a number of examples of rows of hovels in close proximity to one another. This pattern reflects the ownership of the land a century ago, when 6-acre holdings were tenanted from the Duke of Orleans' Wood Norton Estate. Each gardener needed their own hovel for storage and shelter. The strips ran parallel to each other, with a narrow frontage to an access. The shelters were designed and built to a high specification by a team of craftsmen. Of the 20 built, 5 remain. The best example is the row of surviving hovels located on either side of Lenchwick Lane.

Many hovels were single storey, some with a pitched roof, others with a monopitch roof. There are many two storey hovels surviving, which generally have a pitched roof. Most are timber framed with corrugated sheet cladding and roofing. A few survive that have a brick gable end with chimney and one is fully constructed of brick, with a tiled roof. One example of a 'Nissan hut' style survives, constructed of corrugated sheeting in an arch shape.

A detailed record of the history of hovels in the parish can be found at <http://lenchwickhovel.uk/index.html>.

One recently restored hovel:







WSM 71104 South Elevation



WSM 71104 North and East Elevations



WSM 71110 South West Elevation



WSM 71735 South West Elevation



WSM 71729 South and East Elevations  
(all photos - Ken and Gill Pawson)

## Offenham

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
5	2	0	0	72	79
7					
9%			0%	91	100%

Offenham lies in the centre of the growing area of the Vale of Evesham. Most of the parish land was used for orchards and allotments, as shown on the OS map of 1930. Only a small area of the parish was shown as land liable to flood, in the northwest corner where the River Avon turns south, making it unsuitable for cultivation or orchard trees. At this time, there was a small village centred on the church; the remaining housing was scattered along the various roads in the parish.

The location of the hovels, both surviving and absent reflects the almost complete coverage of the parish with orchards and allotments. The large proportion of absent hovels reflects the transformation of growing into a large-scale, commercial operation, with the amalgamation of small holdings into large ones and thus the lack of any need for small buildings. Indeed, most will have been cleared to make way for large greenhouses and other associated structures.

A few remain, mostly alongside the principal road through the parish, the B4510. In this location, they were on the very edge of the land holding and thus did not need to be cleared out of the way, although during the course of the project, one hovel found in the initial survey had been removed by the time of the detailed survey, to allow improvements to a field boundary, with a new field gate and fencing erected.

Of the surviving hovels, two appear to still be in use for storage. The other 5 are either ruined or in a very poor condition, either with cladding missing or overgrown.



WSM 73078 South East Elevation  
(Ken & Gill Pawson)



WSM 71744 West Elevation  
Gill Pawson providing scale

## Pershore

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
1	0	1	0	0	2
2					
100%			0%	0%	100%

Pershore is at the western fringe of the area of market gardening and orchards typical of the Vale of Evesham. The parish was dominated by orchards in the late 1800's and early 1900's, especially in the southern half, with no record on the old OS maps of allotments as the OS recorded market gardens at that time. The surviving hovel (two buildings on adjacent plots) is in the midst of the orchard area and thus probably served a fruit growing business. The demolished hovel, lying near the railway, is beyond the main orchards, but there was a scatter in this northern part of the parish.

The extant hovels are of simple design. One is single storey, clad with corrugated sheeting on a timber frame and the neighbouring one is larger, double height, clad in a mixture of timber boards and corrugated sheeting. Openings are not obvious, due to overgrowth with vegetation and as a result of limited visibility from the public footpath from which the survey was conducted. They are accompanied on the site by 2 old static caravans, so it is possible that the site and its structures are still in some use.



WSM 73533 South East corner  
(Ken & Gill Pawson)



## South Littleton

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
2	1	0	0	24	27
3					
11%			0%	89%	100%

The parish of South Littleton lies in the heart of the Vale of Evesham and the market garden and orchard area. OS maps from 100 years ago show a wide expanse of both orchards and allotments, located east of the steep river valley side that runs north-south through the west of the parish. The map shows orchards and allotments in and around the village, but few to the east and only scattered allotments to the east, either side of Shinehill Lane.

The pattern of hovels established during the original map survey and subsequent field surveys closely reflects the pattern of recorded orchards and allotments. The density of hovels identified by the survey is typical of the main area of cultivation in the Vale 100 years ago. Many of the absent hovel sites lie in the areas now redeveloped for housing, including those which were on long allotment plots, especially along the north side of Shinehill Lane.

One of the extant hovels is of unusual construction, comprising rendered stone walls with a timber and corrugated sheeting roof. It is largely intact, although becoming overgrown with ivy. Its internal partitions remain, but it appears not to be in current use. The other extant hovel is of standard timber framed construction, single storey, clad with corrugated sheeting. It is not obviously in use. The third surviving hovel is now completely overgrown and largely collapsed.



WSM 72665 North Elevation



WSM 72665 Internal View



WSM 72667 North Elevation

(all photos - Terry Woodfield & Ken MacDonald)

## Wick

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
2	0	0	0	0	2
2					
100%			0%	0%	100%

Wick is peripheral to the main area of market gardening around Evesham.

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the village had many orchards, but they were sited close to the houses. Land both to the north and south of the parish had no orchards or allotments shown on the OS maps of that time. Therefore, it is likely that most of the orchard cultivation and harvesting could easily be managed from a nearby house, without the need to construct a building on land outside the village limits.

The two surviving hovels are both located close to a village road, on the north side of the village. Both are on land shown as orchards on the 1884 and 1905 OS maps, so are the exceptions to the local situation. Both are large, by hovel standards, being equivalent to about 3 times the area of the small hovels in the core market gardening area. One has a pitched roof, with a brick chimney, the other has a mono-pitch roof. Both are constructed of timber, mostly with timber cladding and corrugated sheet roofs. Both are partially overgrown, but are still intact and one is used for storage.



WSM 77465 West Elevation



WSM 71115 East Elevation

(Ken and Gill Pawson)

## Wickhamford

Surviving hovels			Unassessed hovel sites	Absent hovels	Total hovels in parish
Extant	Ruined	Demolished			
10	0	1	7	63	81
11					
13.6%			8.6%	77.8%	100%

Wickhamford is within the core market gardening area of the Vale of Evesham. As a consequence, the parish had a large number of hovels from when market gardening was carried out on small plots.

The OS map of 1921 shows much of the parish covered with orchards and allotments (now understood to have been small market gardens). The hovels identified from historic maps were scattered throughout the parish, the locations reflecting the distribution of orchards and allotments. At this time the village was small, therefore the owners of the orchards and allotments would have lived at some distance away, possibly in Evesham, which was only 2-3 miles away, thus needing storage and shelter on their land.

Three of the surviving hovels are located close to the present village edge, but these were only recorded during the walkover survey. They are located on an area shown on the 1921 map as in allotment use. It is possible that these have survived because they have been put to a modern use such as storage in association with a nearby property. The other surviving hovels are located either close to the parish boundary, as in the north and west or near a parish road. All of the surviving hovels are of small or modest size, generally with a mono-pitch roof. All are constructed of timber and corrugated sheets in varying proportions. None have any features of particular interest. Where it was possible to look inside, it appears that some of the hovels are still being used and thus have been retained in a usable condition.



WSM 71120 North and West Elevations



WSM 71121 East and South Elevations



WSM 72264 North and East Elevations

(all photos – Chris and Barbel Woolstencroft)



## Parish Maps

Contained in separate document.

## Acknowledgements

Twenty-two local volunteers generously gave their time and enthusiasm to undertake the survey and scour the countryside for hovels whilst vegetation was low (and weather cold!). A significantly larger area than originally planned has been covered, which is all credit to their dedication.

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The image on the back cover has kindly been supplied by Ian Gibson.



