

A possible Apple Shed at North End Cottage – Inspection Visit Report 13/1/21

Introduction

Hanney History Group committee members Jane Taylor and Bill Orson visited the cottage on the 11th of January 2021 at the invitation of Mr Richard Voller, the owner. The aim was to measure and photograph the exterior. The interior was inaccessible as the owner wished to make it tidy and safe before granting entry. Mr Voller offered to take any requested photos when better access has been achieved. This may be in early March.

It should be pointed out that this was an interim inspection to assess overall condition and possible history. Neither of the team involved had specialist knowledge of local agricultural buildings. We are pursuing both map and verbal evidence of the age of the shed. Aerial photos have been hindered by the fact that until recently a large willow grew alongside the shed, partially obscuring it from the sky view. This tree was removed recently.

Inspection

The shed lies on a broad north- south axis alongside the driveway into the adjoining field. It has a doorway on the south face and two small windows on the east. These appear to be re-used frames added later? The north and west walls have no openings. The shed stands on a brick base and has a small buttress on the north west corner. This appeared to be a support rather than a stand for a churn or similar container.

The shed is thatched and although this roof is semi – intact at both ends , it has collapsed in the middle, particularly on the western side, with clear evidence of rotten support beams. The roof has a slightly unusually steep pitch for the area. Mr Voller has little knowledge of the previous history of the shed and no detailed knowledge of the property. He would be interested to find out more.

The main external dimensions are:

- West wall length – 15' 1"
- North Wall length – 9' 6"
- South Wall length 9' 7"
- Overall East wall length – 15' 7"
- Size of North window – 21" X 30" [49" from north end corner]
- Space between windows – 21"
- Size of South window – 17" X 30 " [46" from south wall corner]
- Doorway dimensions internal - 35" X 69"
- Roof side beams are 9'4" above floor level.
- Height of roof - to top of thatch from door frame top - 76".
- To top of ridge from doorstep floor - 12' 2".

Summary of Findings

The shed walls appear dilapidated but also structurally fairly robust. The roof is slowly imploding, although this is mainly in the centre, especially on the western side. It is obviously the main cause of dereliction, although the lack of access prevented a fuller examination. It had clearly been leaking for several years but appears fairly intact in the 2011 Google Earth street view.

The planking needs attention but is basically firm apart from a few areas of woodworm and places where splitting has occurred. The nails are well embedded and will need gentle and skilled handling to prevent damage if dismantling is considered. 90% of the planked structure appears to be original and at least 70% could perhaps be saved if relocation of the shed is planned. Some of the larger nails looked possibly handmade. The corner pillars appear to have rotted a little and brick corner plinths have been built up in some places.

The shed stands on a course of mixed house bricks used as a foundation. These did not appear to be especially substantial or old and they are not uniform. The brick support buttress on the north west corner did not appear to be providing much thrust and may have been placed to deter vehicles passing towards the field gate to the north from damaging the hut.

It will be necessary to examine the interior to judge the state of the supporting framework. The rot on the exposed beams is considerable. It seems probable that much of the interior framework will need to be replaced. All the wood used appears to be a local hardwood, possibly elm or oak. The planks are of two main approximate sizes - 11" and 9". Previous usage may have been to store fruit but supplementary buildings now on site appear to have mostly replaced its use as a shed. The added windows may have been to enable its use as a workshop? Permission to demolish has been granted but this is not planned for at least 8 weeks.

All the photos below were taken on January 11th 2021 at about 12.00 midday with the exception of the first, taken on August 5, 2020 as part of a report on 'The Character of East Hanney Buildings' as part of a Neighbourhood Plan submission [the photographer was unaware of the threat to the shed at the time but felt it was an important building in the conservation area, both visually and historically.]

The History of the Shed

North End cottage was not included in the listing of buildings in about 1980. This seems remiss as several similar structures in the Hanneys were included. The cottage is reputed to be one of those saved from dereliction in the later 19th century and it may be that its subsequent condition was again poor when the inspection took place. The age of origin is likely to be 17-18th century. A building appears on the site in the very accurate 1803 Enclosure map, but the shed does not. Some similar size outbuildings are marked.

The shed does not appear on any 6-inch OS maps from 1883 onwards. There are other buildings of a similar size and shape in nearby orchards on the 1883 map [See detail on map fragment attached]

Ann Fewins reports: 'I have just found my notes from 2006 which I did for the new owner at the time. My work at the time, starting with the Enclosure Map, made me look more closely at this old corner of East Hanney and conversations with one of the Tarrys of Tarrytown [as it was known] showed how many cottages were lost in the late 19th century agricultural depression. Housing conditions were so bad that East Hanney was featured in a late 19th century Government Report which gives full details of the opinion of the Inspector.

What had been the northern end of a medieval village, where the early street pattern could be traced, continued to sleep peacefully. North End Cottage was probably the first farmstead at that end of East Hanney. It is probably the small farmstead known as Haywards. It is possible to trace its history throughout the 19th century. Whereas many of the old cottages in Ebb's Lane became neglected and ruinous, the villager and benefactor James Robins Holmes - he of the first postal contraceptive service - appears to have been very distressed by the poverty and poor conditions he saw about him. He invested in several cottages in East Hanney, repaired them and let them at reasonable rents, so saving these old buildings. In Ebb's Lane the cottages he owned still survive today - Sunrise Cottage(s) and North End Cottage.

The Bill of Sale from the time of Holmes death in 1938 describes North End Cottage as 'a picturesque detached, half-timbered, thatched and tiled residence' and describes fully the four-bedroomed renovated cottage. Also in the garden and orchard was a 'weather-boarded and thatched building'. This seems to be the shed and would suggest it is perhaps 10+ years older still, even possibly relocated from elsewhere. Comments that this may have been for storage of fruit could have been true as Holmes also invested in orchards and a fruit business which was useful in offering some employment and beautifying the village.

Its earlier history may indeed have been as part of an earlier farmhouse / farm building. Most of the old farmhouses of reasonably affluent small farmers were divided up to squeeze in as many 'ag.labs' as possible so the materials must have been re-used when useful. It is possible that it was relocated from elsewhere in the village. ‘

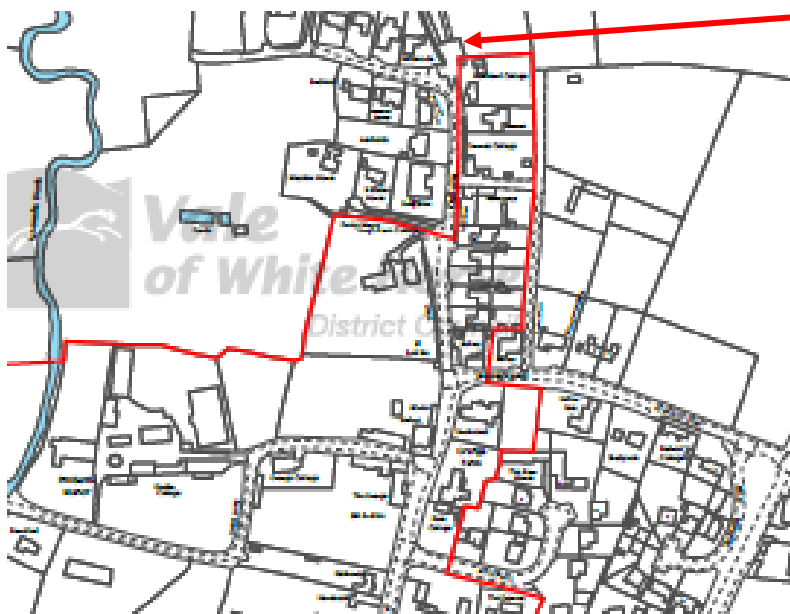
All the above evidence seems to suggest an age of 100 years plus is possible although the lack of the shed on later OS maps until 1970 is confusing. Villagers over 70 have confirmed the shed was there in their youth – 1950-60.

Finally a villager tells us that at some point in relatively recent years [?!] Pendon Museum surveyed the shed [and perhaps the cottage too?]. This is a normal Pendon activity and there may be a record. Due to Covid however, these seem to be hard to access but we are promised a further response by Pendon soon.

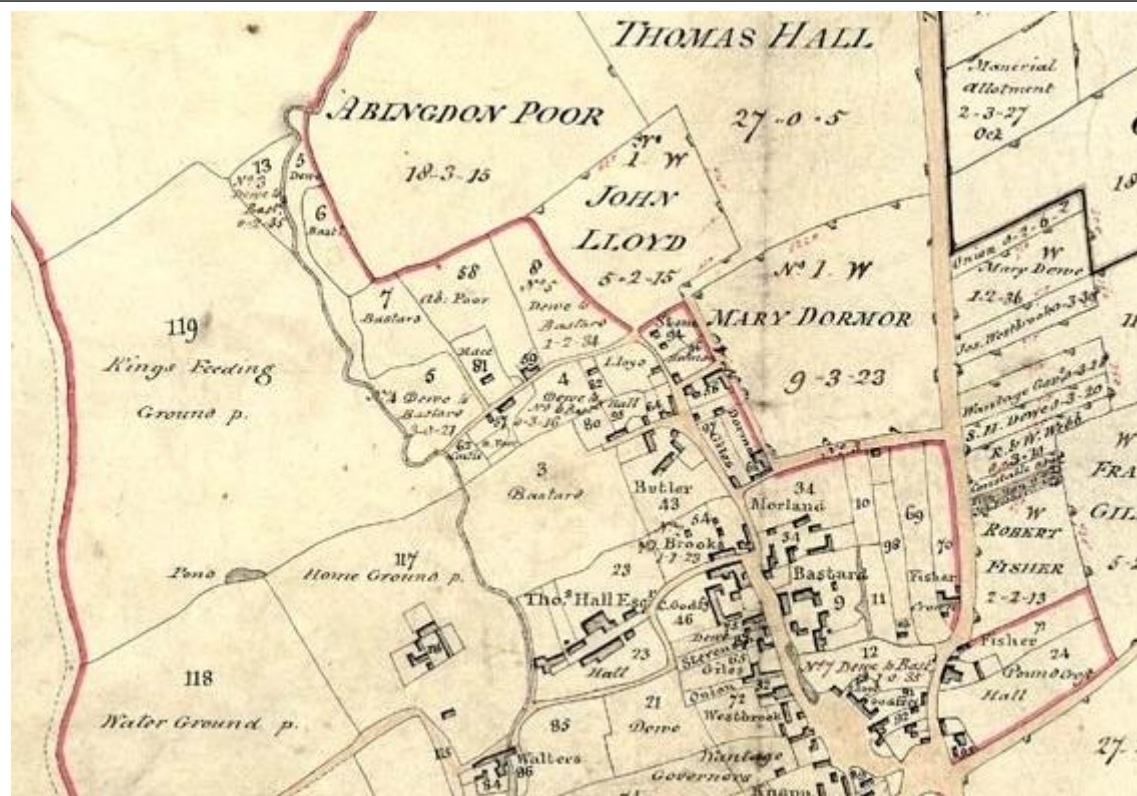


The Ebbs Lane area in the 1883 OS 6-inch map

This was at the height of the fruit farming period and Hanney was fairly full of trees, including the garden of North End Cottage



North End Cottage in the East Hanney Conservation Area Map showing the shed as a corner marker.

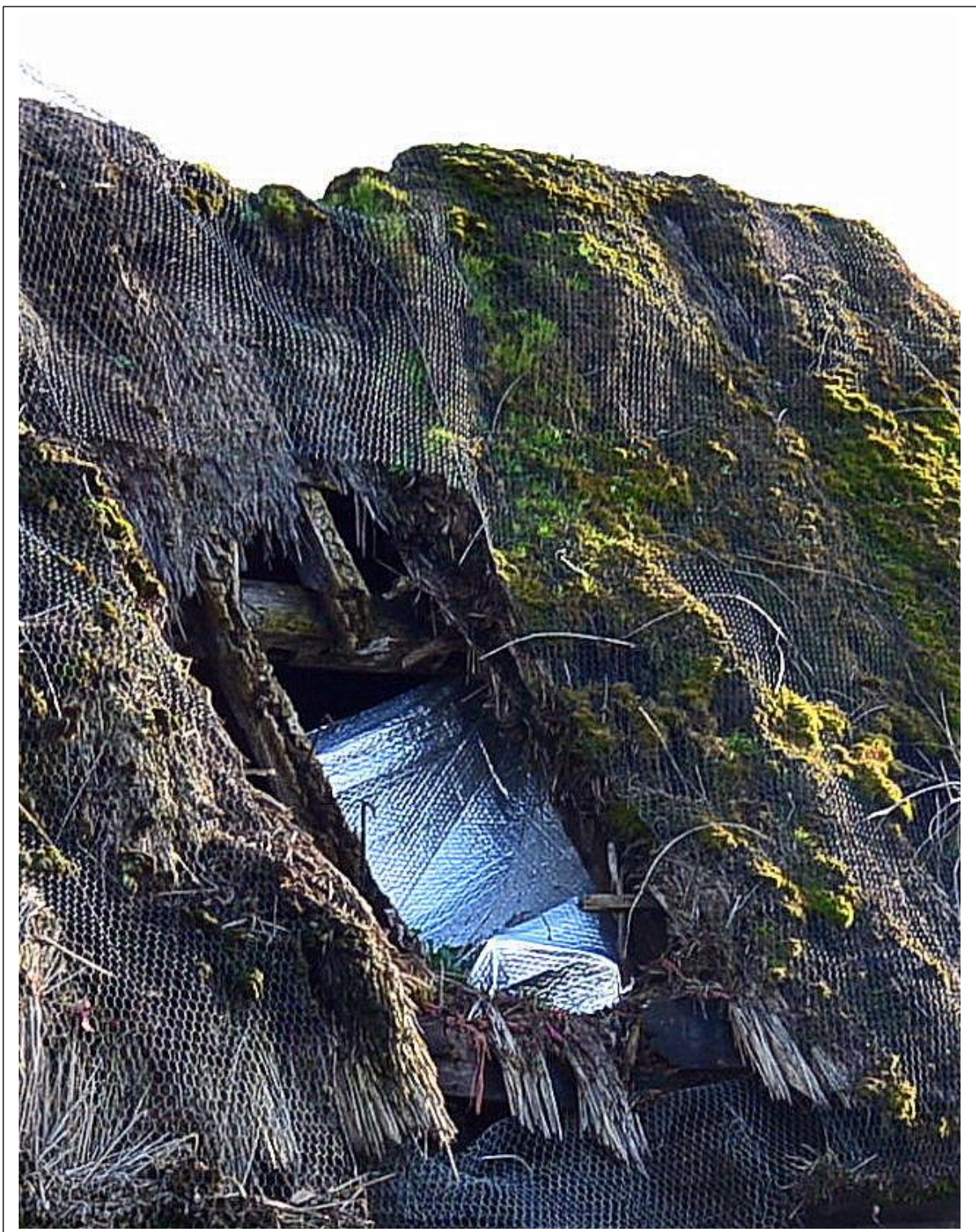




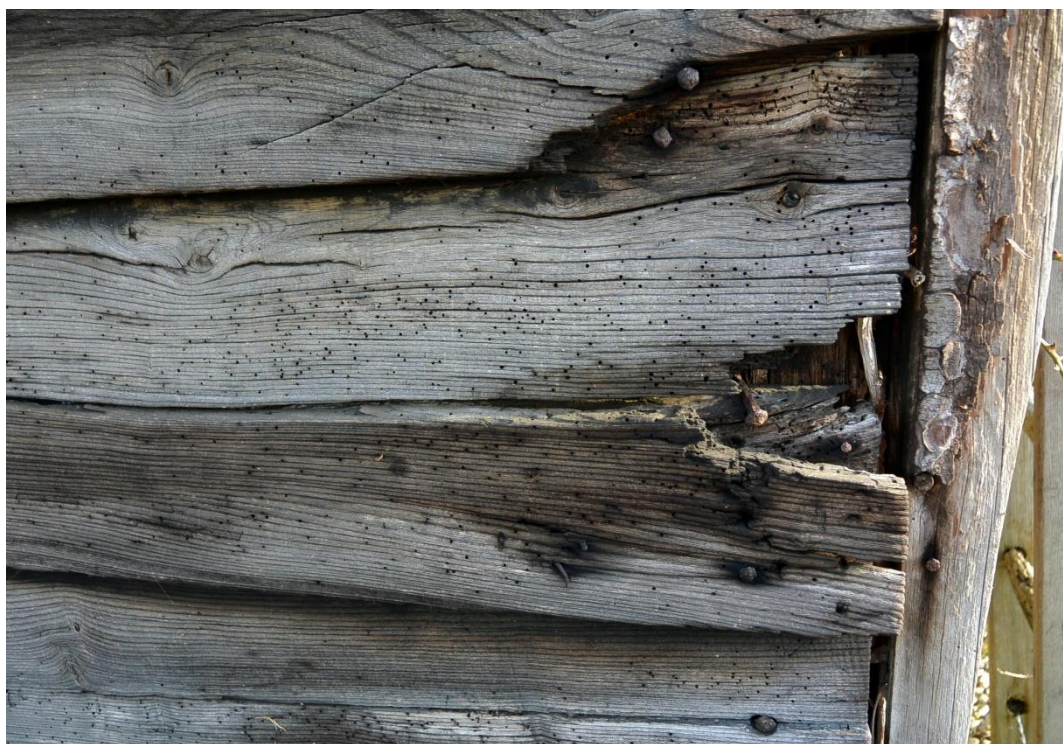
The shed from the north-west with North End Cottage



The door and southern face. The willow tree stood in front of the ladder.



Damage to the central portion of the western roof



Damaged south end of the west face with possible handmade nails?



Buttress or support on western face – about 20" high. Extensive woodworm here.



Additional brick support – south west corner



Damage on the west face and corner support



The North Face of the shed



Two views of the eastern roof and windows



The windows on the east face



The Ridge at the South Face



Opposite sides of the south face eaves



Footings of the front face of the shed and [above]the entrance doorstep