

Edgar Wheelers Hovel-The whole picture

Time capsule

One day in 1993, a local market gardener left this shed (known locally as a 'hovel') for the last time in five decades, leaving behind his tools, seed packets, reading book and all. Overgrown and forgotten, this building stood untouched for over 20 years before being rediscovered. It is one of the last market gardening hovels that used to line the road between here and the Littletons.

We now know that the owner of this time capsule was a Mr Edgar Wheeler from North Littleton, who held this strip of ground for almost 50 years. Step inside to be transported back to the days of traditional Vale of Evesham market gardening.

Who was Edgar Wheeler?

Thanks to relatives and local residents, we know a bit about the man who worked this strip of ground for nearly 50 years.

Born in the neighbouring Littletons in 1905, Edgar Wheeler worked on the railway before becoming a fulltime market gardener. Whilst many growers rented their land, plots were increasingly sold off to individual gardeners and in 1946 Edgar purchased two narrow strips of market gardening land here in Cleeve Prior. Frank, his brother, worked the adjacent strip, although by all accounts the two brothers didn't always get on.

This hovel stands at the end of the southern plot, on which Edgar grew a wide range of crops, including cherries and asparagus. In order to protect his cherry trees from birds, Edgar sometimes slept in the hovel so he was there to scare them off at first light!

"He had worked them on the traditional Evesham system – rows of plum, cherry, apple trees spaced widely enough to fit gooseberries, whitecurrants, asparagus and narcissi between them, and a vegetable patch so that the work (and the income) was spread round the year." Greening the Village

Description of Edgar's land, which was later bought by the Cleeve Prior Heritage Trust.

[The above quote may be better in its own box, like a photo – perhaps placed at an angle, but still connected to the main text box?]

Life beyond work

Not everything in the hovel relates to market gardening. Edgar Wheeler was a keen **football** fan and involved with the Littletons Team, whose matches he reported on for a local newspaper.

Many hovels were used by growers for brewing **homemade alcohol** - cider, perry or fruit and veg based wine. Unsurprisingly, it tended to be strong stuff! There are also tales of **racing pigeons**, which were popular from the late 19th to mid 20th century, being kept in old hovels.

Victorian concerns over the effects of alcohol led to the creation of various temperance movements and teetotal brass bands. Through the *Band of Hope*, the local **Bretforton Temperance Band** was founded in 1895 and thrived, but its association with temperance wasn't to last - after a few years it was renamed as Bretforton Silver Band. With many members being market gardeners, weekly band rehearsals started later in the summer months when planting and harvesting required longer working hours.

Asum Grammar

A broad dialect was spoken by the majority of Evesham residents and surrounding villages until the mid 20th century. Asum grammar comes from the local name for Evesham (or Eve-a-shum) and common features include dropping aitches, replacing *ea* or *ai* sounds with *y* and running several words into one:

yer - hear

byuns - beans

Ow bist? - How are you?

Werst bin? - Where have you been?

Oi spec usullbee pullin unyuns this marnin - I expect we'll be pulling onions this morning

Asum can still be heard around and about, but its use has faded over the years. Market gardens, Evesham produce auctions and local pubs are among the last places where this broad local accent was regularly heard.

Now yu know, ow 'bout a joke?

"Ast yerd bout ol' Arry?"

"No."

"They sez e'd juss'd garn owt t' pick sum byuns fer tay an dropp'd down dyud."

"Wot did iz missis do?"

"Wot cud 'er do, 'er 'ad t' open a tin a pays."

By kind permission of Will Dallimore, The Badsey Society.

Dig deeper

Curious to hear how Asum really sounded? Listen to recordings through the Market Gardening Heritage app, along with memories of Edgar Wheeler, children's activities and more.