

# Ambrey Archaeology Ltd

## Historic Building Recording of Stables Barn, Valley Farm, Elmley Lovett, Droitwich Spa



Project AMB295

WSM81756 (Event No)

Version 1

Date: 14<sup>th</sup> April 2025

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## Summary

Ambrey Archaeology carried out an archaeological building survey of Stables Barn, Valley Farm, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire.

The project was commissioned by Lucy Righton of L A Righton Rural Planning Consultancy on behalf of her client, the Maiden Family Partnership, who have been granted planning permission by Wychavon District Council for the change of use of Stables Barn to residential, as an alternative to extant Class Q Approval.

A heritage consultation response issued by Wychavon District Council noted that the building stands within a 19<sup>th</sup> century farmstead and that the building proposed for conversion retains a significant amount of historic fabric.

Permission for the works was therefore granted, subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works in the form of a level 2 building record.

Valley farm is located about 1km south-west of the village of Elmley Lovett and 5km south-east of Stourport in gently undulating landscape comprising a mix of arable and pastoral fields.

Stables Barn forms the west side of a courtyard to the west of the farmhouse, other sides of which comprise single storey former agricultural buildings, now converted into residences and a threshing barn to the south.

Stables Barn is a rectangular building in two parts; a two storey section to the north and a single storey section to the south. It appears that both parts were built in one phase. It is built in brick in English bond and has decorative external features picked out in blue brick and cant bricks in the door and window jambs.

The ground floor of the two storey section is a former stable with wooden troughs at each end supported on decorative brick arches. These are placed beneath a hay drop from the loft above and there are the remains of fittings for hay racks. The building is of three bays and there are two bolted king post trusses in the hay loft above.

The central section of the building is a loose box with hatch to the adjacent loft and a storage area to one side. The southern section of the building has been converted into an artist's studio and there is no indication of its former function, though, given its proximity to the stable, it may have been a tack room or granary.

Buildings are shown at the site on the 1812 Ordnance Survey drawing of the area in a rough courtyard arrangement. The 1840 tithe map of the parish of Elmley Lovett also depicts farm buildings but in a different arrangement to the current courtyard and it is thought that the farm was entirely rebuilt in the 1850s.

## 1. Introduction

This document describes the results of an archaeological building survey carried out by Ambrey Archaeology at Stables Barn, Valley Farm, Droitwich Spa (NGR 385676 268566).

It was commissioned by Lucy Righton of L A Righton Rural Planning Consultancy on behalf of her client, the Maiden Family Limited Liability Partnership, who have been granted planning permission by Wychavon District Council (WDC) for the change of use of an agricultural building known as Stables Barn to residential (2 units), as an alternative to extant Class Q Approval (planning reference W/24/00268/FUL).

A Heritage Consultation Response issued by Aidan Smyth Archaeology and Planning Advisor to WDC notes that the building stands within a 19<sup>th</sup> century farmstead (WSM60650) and that the building proposed for conversion retains a significant amount of historic fabric.

Permission for the works was therefore granted, subject to conditions including a programme of archaeological works. The heritage consultation response states that a historic building recording at level 2 standard is appropriate to fulfil the requirements of the condition.

Prior to works a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) setting out a methodology and framework for the proposed works was produced by Ambrey Archaeology (Ambrey Archaeology 2025) and approved by WDC.

## 2. Objectives

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists defines the aims of building recording as 'a programme of work intended to establish the character, history, dating, form and archaeological development of a specified building' (Standard and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures, ClfA 2014).

## 3. Methodology

The survey takes the form of a level 2 historic building recording as defined by Historic England 2016 *Understanding Historic Buildings: a guide to good recording practice*. A level 2 survey is intended to create a descriptive record of the building and will comprise an introductory description followed by a systematic account of the building's origins, development and use.

The building survey was undertaken by Tom Rogers of Ambrey Archaeology Ltd on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2025.

Prior to fieldwork, a search of historic assets within 250m of the site was provided by Worcestershire Historic Environment Record (HER) and online sources including TheGenealogist.com were also accessed.

Recording was undertaken using pro-forma recording sheets and photographs were taken with a Nikon D3200 SLR camera. Additional low level aerial images were taken with a Mavic Mini 2 UAV.

Access to the building was generally good although for reasons of health and safety, the upper storeys of the building were only partially entered.

Provision has been made to upload the digital archive of the project via OASIS (OASIS Id: ambreyar2-533185).

## 4. Location, topography and geology

Valley Farm is located about 1km south-west of the village of Elmley Lovett and 5km south-east of Stourport (NGR 385676, 268566, Figure 1). It is located in gently undulating landscape comprising a mix of arable and pastoral fields with intermittent woodland at a height of approximately 47m AOD (Plates 1 and 2). The Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway runs 130m to the east of the farm. A small stream, a tributary of the Hadley Brook, flows roughly southward to the west of the farm.

Stables Barn forms the west side of the square, concreted courtyard to the west of the farmhouse (Plate 3). To the north are single storey former agricultural buildings now converted into residences. An unconverted threshing barn runs along the south of the courtyard while to the east a wall divides the courtyard from the garden to the rear of the farmhouse, behind which are former pigsties.

Bedrock at the site is recorded as the Sidmouth Mudstone formation part of the Mercia Mudstone Group. No superficial deposits are mapped (BGS, 2025).

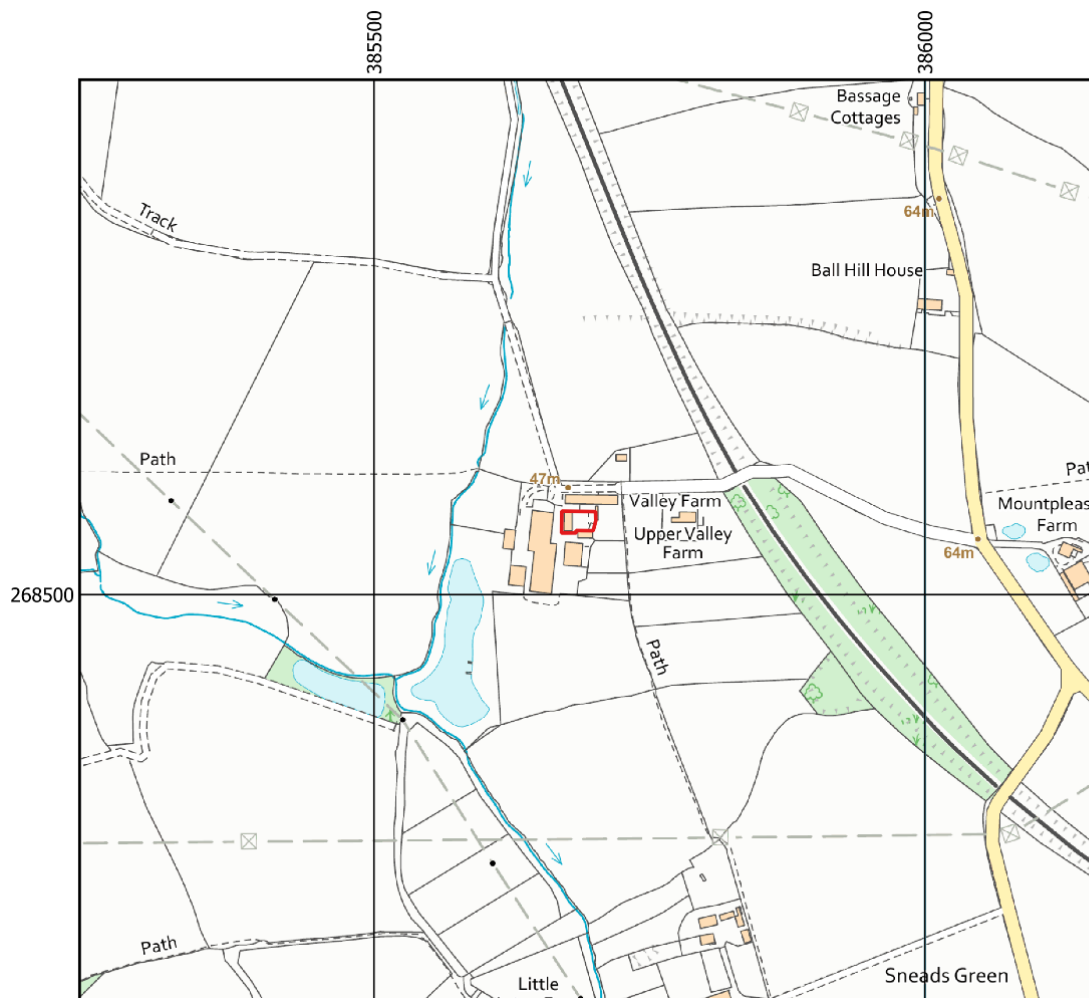


Figure 1. Site location

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## 5.2. Map regression and history

On the 1812 Ordnance Survey drawing of Kidderminster (OS214, Figure 2) a U-shaped set of buildings are shown in the location of Valley Farm, but the map does not have sufficient detail to draw many conclusions from this arrangement. However it shows that a farm is likely to have stood in this location.



Figure 3. Extract of Ordnance Survey Drawing 214 Kidderminster with location of Valley Farm circled

More detail is shown on the 1840 tithe map of the parish of Elmley Lovett (Figure 4) on which four buildings are shown. One to the east, possibly a farmhouse, forms an approximate U shape with several projecting wings. To the west is a long, rectangular building while between these is a smaller building, possibly also rectangular. The tithe apportionment for 'Valley' (parcel 381) is described as *house, Garden and Orchard* owned by Brook Forester esq and occupied by James Davenport.



Figure 4. Extract of 1840 tithe map of the parish of Elmley Lovett

By the time of the 1885 edition 25 inch map (Figure 5), the courtyard is clearly recognisable and, apart from the addition of modern barns, there is little difference between this arrangement and the surviving buildings. By this time, the railway has been built to the east of the farm with a bridge to provide access.

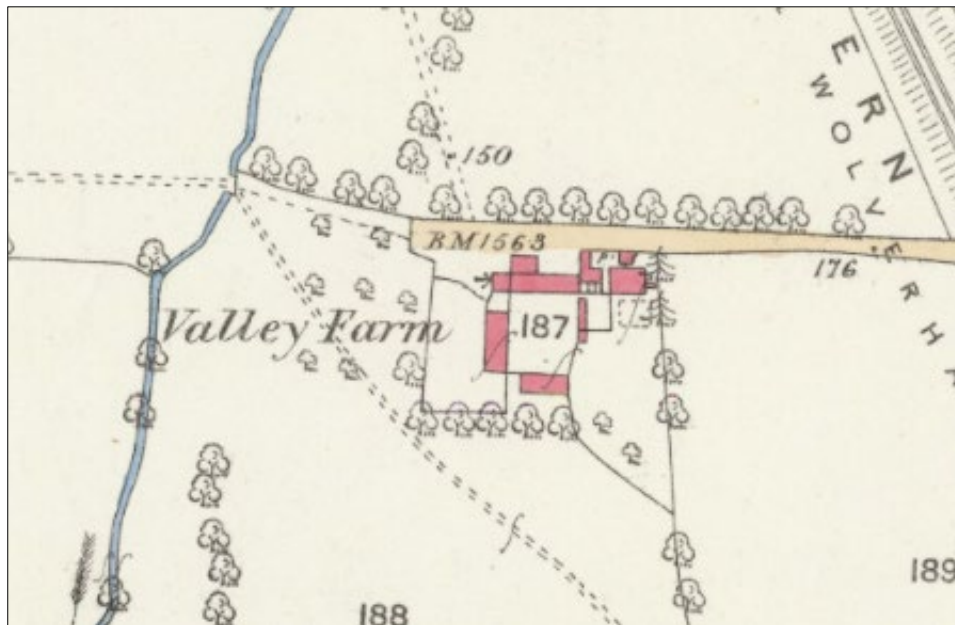


Figure 5. Extract of Ordnance Survey Worcestershire sheet XXI.4, published 1885

A similar arrangement is depicted on the 1903 edition (Figure 6), except that a building has been built on the east side of the courtyard.

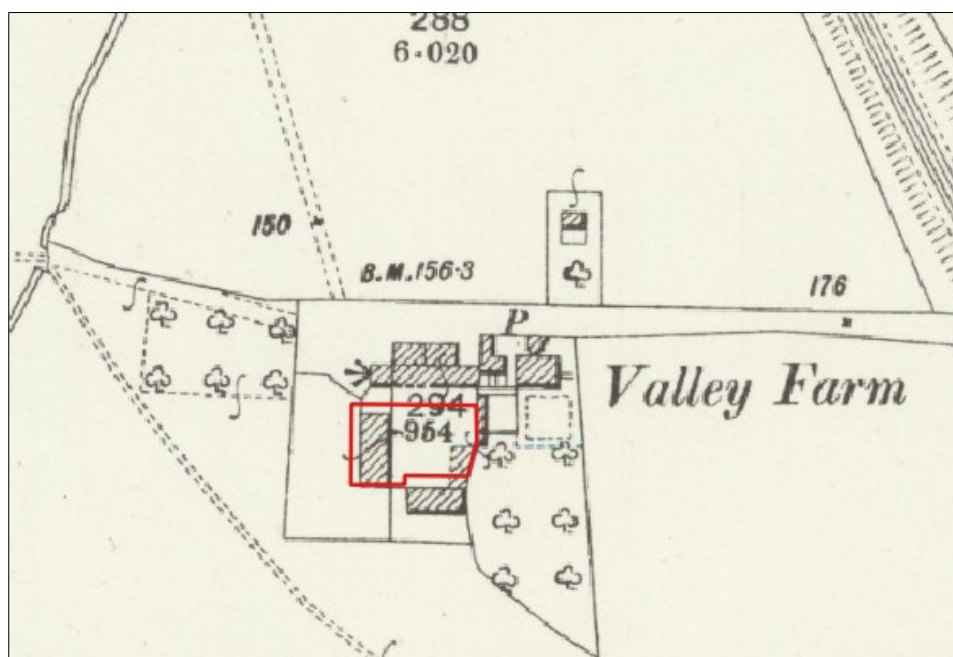


Figure 6. Extract of Ordnance Survey Worcestershire sheet XXI.4, published 1903

The farm was sold in about 1920 and sale particulars (kept by the owner) record the following:-

*The Farm Buildings consist of Three Pigsties and Granary over, Three Calf Pens, Cowshed for nine and feeding passage, Calf Pen, Two closed cattle sheds, two bay open Waggon Shed and two trap houses, four bay open cattle shed, Three Stall Cart Horse Stable, Three Stalls and Loft, Loose Box and Granary, two bay open cattle shed adjoining barn and Chaff House and six bay Dutch Barn .*

It is thought that Stables Barn comprised the Three Stall Cart Horse stable, Three stalls and loft, loose box and granary.

An aerial photograph supplied by the owner which was taken in the 1960s (Figure 6) shows Dutch barn type buildings occupying the courtyard, an arrangement also shown on Ordnance Survey maps of this period.



*Figure 7. Extract of 1960s aerial photograph of Valley Farm taken from the south-west*

## 6. Building Recording

*A plan showing external photograph directions is presented as Figure 8 and internal floorplans and photograph directions are shown on Figure 9. Elevations, reproduced from Greenspace Architects Ltd's drawing 22-01/A1002 are presented in Figure 10.*

### 6.1. General appearance

Stables Barn is a rectangular building (16.7m x 6.2m) which stands on the west side of the courtyard with its long axis orientated north-south. It is in two sections, that to the north being a two storey building while to the south it is of one storey (Plates 4 and 5). Both have simple gable roofs of plain ceramic tiles although the ridges are at different heights. The bricks are laid in English bond with lime mortar, repaired in places with cement based mortar. The bricks measure 9 ½" x 4 ½" x 3" and are mid red although blue bricks are used in specific locations as described below. At ground level there is a slight plinth formed by a row of bricks set slightly forward. There are there are small low brick buttresses against the corners of the building on the west side (Plate 6).

There is no obvious break in the brickwork between the two sections of the building which, coupled with the similarity in detail, would suggest that they were built in a single phase.

### 6.2. External description

The **west elevation** of the two storey section of the building (Plate 7) has a central door flanked by a window on each side. These are under segmental brick arches comprising two rows of headers, the upper of which is of blue bricks. Both door and window jambs are formed of cant bricks, those at the door resting on squared red sandstone blocks (Plate 8).

The ground level on this side of the building is lower than floor level and the door is reached by a slight step to the doorstep which is formed of blue bricks laid side to side and slightly moulded at the outer edge. The door is a stable door, ledged and braced, and divided into two sections; above and below. The latch is an unusual type comprising the general arrangement for a thumb latch internally although this is worked externally by an upward curved handle (Plate 9). It is likely that this was made by a local blacksmith. The windows are wooden framed with two fixed panes over a ventilation panel of vertical slats (Plate 10). The sills comprise two rows of blue cant bricks offset to produce a slope.

There are two doorways in the single storey section of the building (Plate 11) the brick details of which are the same as that described above. The doors are of plain ledged and braced type, though both have the distinctive latch.

Set to the north of the southernmost door is a lozenge shaped ventilation panel formed of half bricks.

The **south elevation** of the single storey building (Plate 12) is a plain gable, the only feature being the scar of the former building attached to this side of the building (Figure 6) with a shallow gable roof, offset slightly to the west. The ground level here rises westward so this end of the building is slightly shorter on the east side.

The **east elevation** of the two storey section of the building, which overlooks the courtyard (Plate 13) mirrors the west elevation except that the ground level here is higher and there is no step to the

doorways. The central door has been covered with plyboard and the northern window with corrugated metal sheeting.

On this side there is only one door in the single storey section at the northern end, although the lower half of this has been blocked with breeze blocks while the upper section has a cover of corrugated metal sheeting (Plate 14). One adjacent window is similarly blocked while another to the south comprises two fixed panes in a wooden frame. There is a lozenge shaped ventilation panel at the southern end of the building.

The **north elevation** (Plate 15) has a hay loft door at first floor level under a segmental brick arch, also of two rows of headers, the upper of which is blue. There is no evidence of tallet steps having been in this location. The sill is of blue brick stretchers. There is a small triangular ventilation panel at the apex.

## 6.2 Internal description

The ground floor space of the two storey section of the building is a single space with bare brick walls, formerly limewashed (Plates 16 and 17). The floor is of concrete and a recently dug test pit in one corner of the room shows that this does not cover an earlier surface.

The exposed joists of the floor above are carried on two substantial transverse beams, partially set into the wall and also resting on moulded brick pilasters in which the upper four rows are set progressively forward to form a wider space on which there is a wooden pad (Plate 18). The beams are squared with no chamfer and there are clear circular saw marks (Plate 19).

At the northern and southern ends of the building are wooden feeding troughs, each supported on four shallow arches of moulded brick (Plates 20 and 21). The horizontal front member of the trough is set into the wall on either side and supported by a post between each arch and has tether rings attached.

Above each trough is a gap in the floorboards to form a hay drop from the loft above. On the south side wall there are some remaining fittings for a former hay rack which has been removed.

Either side of the doorway in the western wall are wooden pegs for holding tack (Plate 22).

The hay loft above, accessed by a ladder through the hay drop, is also a single space open to the rafters (Plate 23). This area was only partially entered due to the slightly dilapidated state of the floorboards.

The walls are of painted brick and there are ledged and braced hay doors in both the northern and southern gable walls, the door to the north being central while that to the south is offset to the east.

Two internal trusses define three bays. These are of king post form with raking struts to the principal rafters although these are strengthened by an additional strut at a steeper angle which joins the principal rafters at the same position (Plate 24). It is likely that these are later additions. The purlins are trenched and these also appear to have been strengthened in sections by additional sections above (Plate 25). There is felt beneath the slates, indicating that this section of the building has been re-roofed relatively recently and was perhaps strengthened at this point.

The single storey part of the building is divided into two main spaces. The northern (central) of these comprises a single bay divided unevenly into east and west sections by a wall into which a later doorway beneath a steel lintel has been formed. The western part of this bay is a small, bare space

with white painted walls and a concrete floor (Plate 26). The eastern part of this end of the building (Plate 27) has a brick floor with gullies leading to a floor level aperture in the east wall (Plate 28). The remains of a lath and plaster ceiling are attached to the rafters and the off centre door from the hay loft is in the north wall (Plate 29). It is thought that this room was probably a loose box with a door (now partially blocked) leading onto the courtyard and an easy means of dropping hay from the adjacent loft.

The southern part of the building was, in recent years, converted into an artist's studio (Plates 30 and 31). It has a concrete floor, the wall is lined with painted chipboard and there is an inserted ceiling.

The roof space above this section of the building was not accessible, but a central truss, creating a two bay space was visible through a hatch. The truss is of queen post form in which the principal rafter does not extend above the straining post. There is a single trenched purlin central to the principal rafter.

A similar form is present in the trusses of the adjacent threshing barn except that here, an upper purlin is supported on the upper face of the queen post, as might be expected. It may be that a similar arrangement was employed in this part of Stables Barn which was adapted at a later date.

## 7. Discussion

Stables Barn is a well preserved building which appears to have seen little alteration. Some of the stable furniture such as the hayracks and possibly stalls have been removed and the concrete floor in the main stable area, probably replaced an original brick floor with channels, as has survived in the central space, but in general there has been little adaptation or addition to the building. Although the southern space has been converted to an artist's studio, this is largely through covering, rather than removing, historic fabric.

The building appears to have been built in a single phase. There is no break in the brickwork between the single and two-storey sections on either east or west wall and the detailing around the doors and windows is very similar on both sides. Similar patterns are to be found on other buildings within the courtyard, particularly apparent on the unconverted threshing barn (Mill Barn) to the south.

It is clear that the buildings, though largely functional, were also designed with appearance in mind. Attractive detailing such as the canted bricks softening the door and window frames, the blue brick rows in the segmental arches, and the unusual decorative arches beneath the feeding troughs was clearly intended to give the impression of a modern and well-designed farm.

The function of the room to the south is not clear due to its conversion to a studio but, given the proximity to the stable, it may have been a tack room.

Map analysis would suggest that the building was built after 1840 but there are some aspects of the stables which might suggest an earlier date. For instance, Wade-Martins (1991) notes that the use of hay lofts above stables became less common after 1800 as it was found that the heat from horses and the weight of the hay could cause the hay chamber floor to rot. Furthermore, the earlier design of stables was to have the troughs and hay racks along the ends of the building (as with Stables Barn) whereas later stables had the stalls arranged on the long axis.

However, in this case, the use of English bond brickwork, imported softwood cut with a circular saw, bolted king post trusses and the brick detail would all suggest a 19<sup>th</sup> century date and it is probable that the entire farm, as depicted on the tithe map was replaced in the 1850s by the surviving buildings. Lake and Edwards (2010) note that the period from 1750 to 1880 saw a sharp increase of productivity following improvements of the agricultural revolution, in which the rebuilding of farmsteads played a prominent role. This would tally with a date of 1854 on the farmhouse as suggested by the landowner.

Courtyard farms became popular in Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> century following the publication of an English translation of Palladio's *Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* in 1720 (Wade Martins 2002). This form, in which an area was enclosed and sheltered by threshing barns, stables, cattle sheds and often a farmhouse, suited the new methods being adopted in the ongoing agricultural revolution, particularly the collection and spreading of manure and was adopted and adapted to circumstance across the country.

## 8. Acknowledgements

Ambrey Archaeology would like to thank the following for their help with this project: Lucy Righton for commissioning the works, Mrs Maiden for providing access to the buildings and helpful background information and Aidan Smyth of WDC for monitoring the project.

## 9. Sources consulted

Ambrey Archaeology 2024 *Written Scheme of Investigation for a historic building survey at Valley Farm, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire* unpublished document

British Geological Survey (BGS) 2024, onshore geindex, [https://mapapps2.bgs.ac.uk/geindex/home.html?\\_ga=2.194768175.300901648.1685436584-1817132713.1685436584](https://mapapps2.bgs.ac.uk/geindex/home.html?_ga=2.194768175.300901648.1685436584-1817132713.1685436584)

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chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnbpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.explorethepast.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Worcestershire-Farmsteads-Character-Statement-2014-tagged.pdf

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### 9.1. Cartography

Ordnance Survey Drawings - Kidderminster, Worcester (OSD 214), Stevens, Henry – Draughtsman

Tithe map of the parish of Elmley Lovett 1840 IR/29/39/56

Ordnance Survey Worcestershire sheet XXI.4, 25 inch to the mile published 1885

Ordnance Survey Worcestershire sheet XXI.4, 25 inch to the mile published 1903

Figures 8-10



Figure 8. Plan showing exterior photograph directions

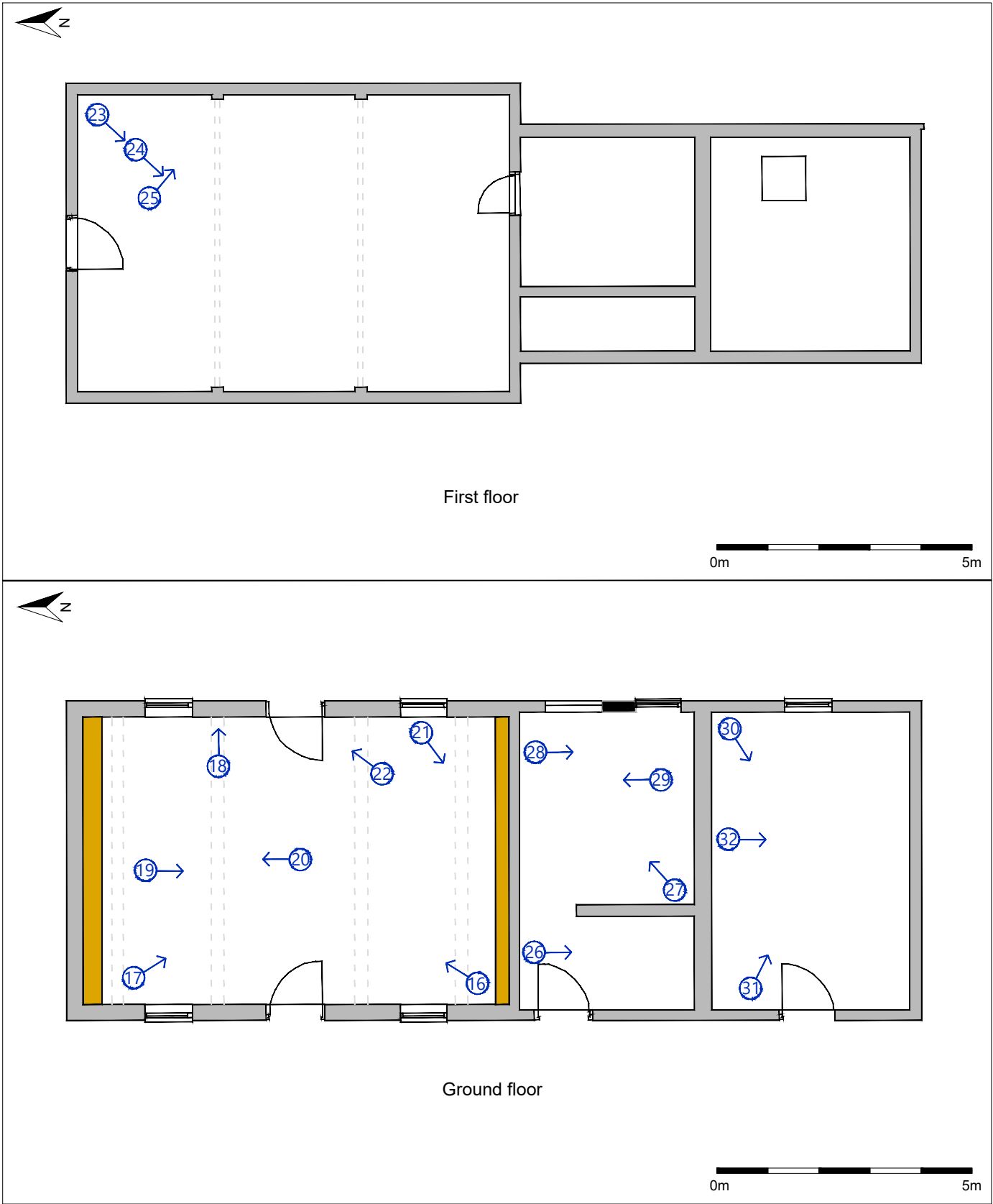
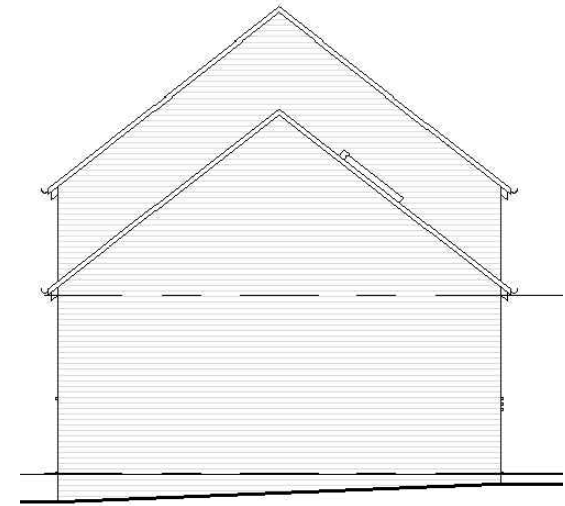


Figure 9. Ground and first floor plans showing photograph directions



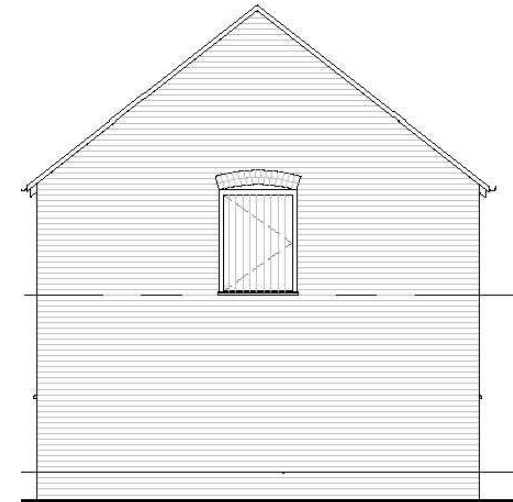
East elevation



South elevation



West elevation



North elevation

*Figure 10. Stables barn elevations  
reproduced from Greenspace Architects Ltd Drawing no 22/01 - A1002*



## Plates



*Plate 1. Low level aerial view south-east of Valley Farm*



*Plate 2. Low level aerial view south-west of Valley Farm*



*Plate 3. Low level aerial view of the courtyard farm arrangement with Stables Barn facing, Mill Barn to left (south) and converted single storey buildings to the right (north)*



*Plate 4. Low level aerial view north-east of Stables Barn*



*Plate 5. North and west elevations of Stables Barn, view south-east, scale 1m*



*Plate 6. Low buttress at south-west corner of Stables Barn, view north-east, scale 0.3m*



*Plate 7. West facing elevation of northern section of Stables Barn, view east, scale 1m*

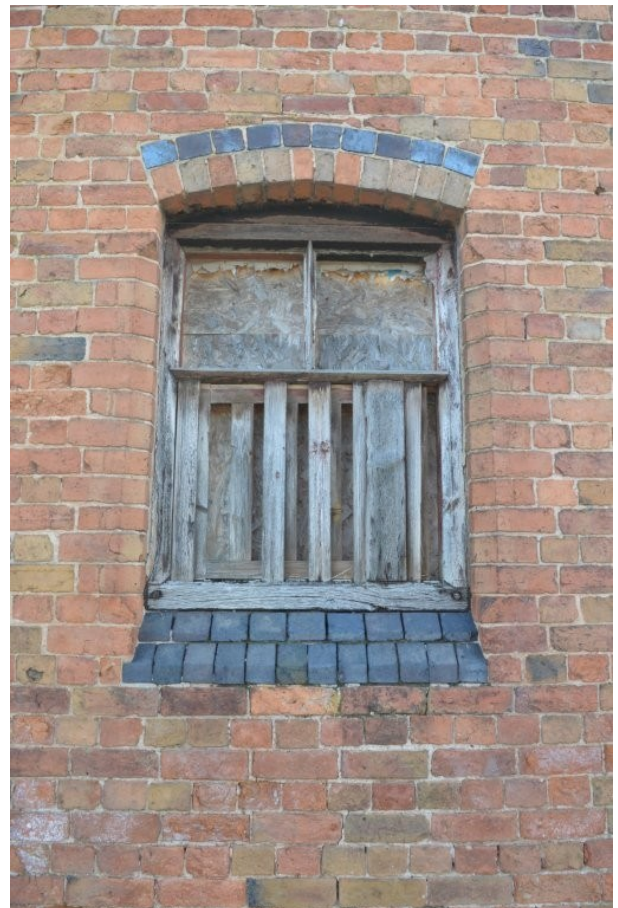


*Plate 8. Doorway in northern section of Stables Barn, view east, scale 1m*



*Plate 9. Detail of door latch, in northern section of Stables Barn*

*Plate 10. Window in northern section of Stables Barn, view east*





*Plate 11. Western elevation of single storey section of Stables Barn, view east, scale 1m*



*Plate 12. Southern gable of Stables Barn, view north, scale 1m*



*Plate 13. Eastern elevation of Stables Barn, view west, scale 1m*



*Plate 14. Partially blocked doorway in eastern elevation of Stables Barn, view west, scale 1m*

*Plate 15. Northern elevation of Stables Barn,  
view south-east, scale 1m*



*Plate 16. Stables on ground floor of two storey section, view north-east*



*Plate 17. Stables on the ground floor of two storey section, view south-east, scale 1m*



*Plate 18. Brick pilaster supporting transverse beam in stables, view east, scale 1m*



*Plate 19. Circular saw marks on transverse beam above stables, view south*



*Plate 20. Feeding trough at northern end of stables, scale 1m*



*Plate 21. Feeding trough at southern end of building, view south-west, scale 1m*



*Plate 22. Tack pegs either side of eastern door in stables*



*Plate 23. The hay loft, view south-west*



*Plate 24. Roof trusses in hay loft, view south-west*



*Plate 25. View south-east showing strengthened purlin in east pitch of hay loft roof*



*Plate 26. West section of central area, view south, scale 1m*



*Plate 27. East side of central section, view north-east, scale 1m*



*Plate 28. brick floor in eastern side of central section, view south, scale 0.5m*

*Plate 29. Remains of ceiling and hay door in north wall of central-east section*



*Plate 30. View west-south-west in southern room of building, scale 1m*



*Plate 31. View north east in southern room of building, scale 1m*



*Plate 32. View into attic space above southern room*