

# NEWSLETTER No. 15 – SPRING 2017



## 1. From the Chairman

Our secretary, Mike Turner, has been working hard on our behalf, and apart from producing another edition of the Newsletter, has made copies of a DVD summarising the Group's activities during 2016. A copy is included for you. I hope you enjoy the review, as it gives members the chance to glimpse events they were unable to attend, and if you were present, you may even see yourself. Please feel free to use the DVD at local history meetings, or among friends, and maybe encourage new members to join us.

The booking form for the next few events is included also. I sincerely hope that members will do their best to attend the tour of Honister slate mines, and the visit to bastles north of the Border. CVBG member Niall Logan, chairman of the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group, is organising this event for us, and members Charles and May McKerrell have generously invited us to tea, on the way back, at their home in Loch Maben. Please do your best to support these visits.

In July, members Stuart Harling and Nigel Mills will lead a walkabout round the village of High Newton, near Cartmel. Village walkabouts usually involve a good number of members, so I hope this one will be no exception.

We always need reports for the newsletter, so please feel free to volunteer your account of any event. You don't have to be an expert to make useful comments. In fact, observations are most welcome from newcomers to the subject. Of course, photographs are especially welcome.

Your committee work hard to keep CVBG as active and relevant as possible. We are already looking ahead to 2018, so if you have a suggestion for a visit, or a request for information on a particular aspect of vernacular buildings, please make these known to us ■

*June Hall*

## **2. A request from the treasurer**

The CVBG has quickly grown into an organisation with over 150 members and an annual income in the last 3 years ranging from £3825 to £5437 with expenses and a bank balance to match. For the peace of mind of both members and the treasurer it would be desirable if an independent person (who does not need to be a qualified accountant) has a look at the accounts in order to verify that they have been fairly produced. We are currently seeking a member (or the partner of a friend of a member) to volunteer to do this. The year end is on 31<sup>st</sup> July each year and the accounts are presented to members for approval at the AGM held in September each year. If you want to know more or wish to volunteer please contact either myself or June Hall, Chairman ■

Thank you.

**Mike Kingsbury, CVBG Treasurer**

## **3. Built Landscape Heritage Awareness Campaign**

Have you any photographs or information about historic dry stone structures in Cumbria ? or in the wider North West ?

CVBG members help and assistance is sought to record the many dry stone walls of historic significance, and their numerous, varied, and frequently intriguing built-in features, before they disappear.

As part of a Heritage Lottery Fund project, the Dry Stone Walling Association wants to create an archive of photographs and information about local walling styles and historic features. Initially the project covers Cumbria, Lancashire, Cheshire and Greater Manchester, but it will be extended nationally.

The aim is to capture public interest and raise awareness of the aesthetic and historic value of dry stone walling in the landscape. The archive will be produced digitally for website access.

The Dry Stone Walling Association is seeking images and associated information about any historic dry stone structures including location, approximate age, stone type [if possible] and any general information about the wall/feature, using the format below to record this and any additional information:

### **PHOTO PROJECT TEMPLATE**

**Name of feature:** eg stile [squeeze], stile [step]; bee-bole/s; pintle stone; well; etc.

**Location:** [ideally a 6-figure grid reference, or GPS, or description of whereabouts]

**Brief Description:** eg memorial seat/horse trough/drinking fountain, built into wall

### Types:

- dry stone walls [different types]
- church walls
- vertical interlocking flag walls
- block walls
- hog-holes
- fox traps/goose bields
- hare smoots
- bee-boles
- pin folds
- wash folds
- sheep enclosures
- coffin rests on coffin roads
- gate stoops, [initials, dates]
- wells
- cairns
- historic or archaeological interest
- geological and natural history significance



Gate stoop at Dub How, Esthwaite © Vicky Slowe

**Contact Details:** your phone number or email, please

**Images** may be sent directly to: [ken.howarth@btinternet.com](mailto:ken.howarth@btinternet.com)

Ken can also be reached on 01539 559394 ■

**Vicky Slowe**

#### **4. Training days, January and February, 2017**

CVBG was generously given access to a most interesting house at Tirril, between Eamont Bridge and Pooley Bridge. Five members attended both sessions. Three were completely new to recording, and two had enough

experience to measure and draw on their own. The house has quite a complex history, and two visits on cold wet days in winter were perhaps not ideal for making a thorough record.

Lime Grove is built of several locally sourced materials –calcifareous limestone, river cobble, sandstone, hand made brick and green slate. Together, they create lovely contrasts in colour and texture. The house gives the impression of being a mid-Georgian, symmetrical building with the main front of painted stucco, incised to resemble ashlar. Over the front door is a datestone with the inscription,



Image © Mike Turner

***John and Ruth Rittson 1765 To know thy self is a proof of wisdom***

cont'd.../

John Ritson (the spelling of the surname varies), and his wife Ruth were well-known Quakers in the district. John was a joiner, and the house owners have been able to buy an example of his work, a beautifully made barometer (right). Apart from that one item, no other furniture from the house remains, although from both John's will of 1801 and Ruth's of 1809, we know something of the contents.



When the main block of the house was built in 1765, it was a partial rebuild. A section of the building to the left of the main block, remains from an earlier structure (left). It is one room deep in plan, and contains several features which are difficult to explain.

These include a low doorway at the back of the house, now blocked, which could have been one door of a former cross passage, behind the main fireplace complete with bread oven, in the next room. There is also an intriguing corbelled chimney which would have served to take the smoke from a fire on the ground floor, via a smokehood, but just where the fireplace was, and how it fitted into a former plan is not clear.

The "new" block of the house is double pile in plan, and the two front parlours obviously date from 1723. However, the back rooms, which include the one with the bread oven, may be much earlier (right). The central front door led into a passage, now incorporated into the larger of the two parlours. The front windows are interesting, in that they are mullioned on the ground floor, with sash windows above.



(All images this page © Mike Turner)

How the house fared after the deaths of John and Ruth is not explained. They had no children, but left the property to a nephew, with the instruction that it was to be a place where Quakers were welcome to visit and to stay. The house should be kept so that *"If he or some of his family, that is member of our Society Chouse to live in this said house and lett the doors be open to friends that come to Tirril meeting but if there be none sutable or Chouse to live in the said house, then I order it to be lett to some friends to live in.... so long as there is a meeting in Tirril..."* There are signs that it may have been divided to provide accommodation for Friends, maybe on a short term basis, and this may go some way to explain some of the anomalies of the building.



Loft in house looking east, showing centrally located splayed braces © Clive Bowd

Our small working party measured and drew plans of some room interiors, and the two experienced members managed to draw an elevation, despite snow,



Recording in progress, despite the wintry conditions, Image © Mike Turner

rain and bitter cold. They did manage to examine the roof timbers also. A report based on our findings is being compiled. Our base for operations was the upper floor of the former barn, at right angles to the house, and now used as a sculpture gallery. Our thanks to the hosts, and to the group members for their willing participation in what I hope was a very worthwhile experience ■

## June Hall

## 5. Swarthmoor Hall Vernacular Interiors study day

The vernacular interiors study day was held at Swarthmoor Hall, near Ulverston, Lancashire North of the Sands. The house is well known as the 'cradle of Quakerism'; in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century it was home to Thomas and Margaret Fell who provided protection and hospitality for early Quakers. George Fox visited and following the death of Thomas Fell, married the widowed Margaret. The hall, which is open to the public, has six historic rooms to view, and a fine selection of 17<sup>th</sup> century furniture.

Peter Brears gave a fascinating talk on vernacular interiors, with many examples gathered from antiquarian accounts, old photographs and personal experience. The most stimulating part of his talk was derived from analysis of Swarthmoor Hall's household accounts from the third quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (*The Household accounts of Sarah Fell of Swarthmoor Hall* (1920)).

Plotted on monthly graphs these clearly illustrated the seasonality of household and commercial production, from the purchase of salt in the autumn to preserve meat for winter, and wool and linen production, with wool clipping and flax gathering taking place in summer. Various phases of processing took place over the winter months, followed by dyeing and bleaching of the finished products in spring.

Peter Brears' new book *Traditional Food in Cumbria* (published February 2017) is available from Bookcase publishers priced £20.



Image © Mike Turner



Image © Clive Bowd

Our second speaker was furniture maker Frank Wood. A member of the Vernacular Furniture Society, Frank has been putting together a database of Cumbrian furniture, which is well known for having carved dates and in this regard is virtually unique in Europe. Carved dates peak during the 1680s, around the time of 'the great rebuilding' and the construction of the many smaller vernacular farms and cottages that form the basis of our studies. Part of Frank's research has been to look at various floor plans and work out if fixed cupboards are contemporary with the original building; normally they are built into panelling opposite the firehouse.

Another aspect of his work has resulted in the identification of particular sub-regional carving styles, local to specific valley systems. Frank has been studying the extensive collection of furniture at Swarthmoor Hall, and provided an excellent commentary during the afternoon tour. If you have any Cumbrian vernacular pieces, then Frank would love to hear from you!



Image © Clive Bowd

Our third speaker was local furniture restorer Andy Blundell, who brought with him a collection of Cumbrian chairs. Andy, with knowledge of the local antiques industry and some historical sleuthing, has identified a previously unrecognised chair style found in the Appleby area. The beautifully carved chairs in question are made not of ash, which is common in the period, but from apple wood, the derivation of which provided Andy with his biggest clue. Appleby was a centre of apple growing until the introduction of the railways and the availability of cheaper imports meant that many local orchards went into decline, thus providing apple wood to Westmorland furniture makers. Andy's historical research has identified two

makers, one from Appleby and one from Kendal, both working in mid to late nineteenth century. If any of our members have or know of any chairs like the examples pictured, Andy would love to hear from you. His email address is [info@antiqueandy69.co.uk](mailto:info@antiqueandy69.co.uk)

After lunch, Dan Elsworth provided us with a whistle-stop history of the hall, and an account of archaeological investigations of a substantial great barn and a house with a further addition (all now demolished) once making up one side of a large courtyard farm. We then embarked on a tour of the interior and (rain-swept) exterior of Swarthmoor Hall, which has many fine early features and Arts and Crafts style additions ■

**Helen Evans**



Cage-newel staircase © Kevin Illingworth

## 6. Traditional Farm Building Survey of the Solway Plain



Ramp to Bank Barn porch, Lord's Close Farm, Allonby

As part of an HLF scheme, the Solway Wetlands Landscape Partnership has organised a number of projects investigated various aspects of the landscape of the Solway Plain. One of these was a survey of traditional farm buildings, an intrinsic part of the Solway landscape. The purpose of the survey was to attempt to identify how many traditional farmsteads had survived, what buildings were prominent, what condition they were in and what had been the impact of farm building conversion.

The work was carried out by volunteers who were given basic training in what they were likely to find. This included recognising the plan of the farmstead, what types of building were likely to be found, what materials might be found and recognising specific internal features and forms of construction. 400 farms were identified in the area and requests to allow access were sent out. 20 volunteers were recruited and 229 farms were eventually visited with 203 actually being surveyed. The survey identified those farmsteads with some of the typical Cumbrian farm buildings such as Bank Barns (14), Gin Cases (18) and Granaries (22). A database has been compiled of the results and it is hoped to continue the survey work with the help of some of the volunteers. The preliminary results of the survey, which included grading the architectural or historic interest of the farmstead, shows that 81 farms were considered to have significant interest and of these there were 17 where the interest was considered to be exceptional.

One of these was Rogersceugh which sits on a raised drumlin in the middle of Bowness Moss. The present planned farm of about 1800 was part of the Lowther Estate which replaced an earlier farmstead that was in an unfit state. More recently the property was acquired by Natural England and the RSPB, however the farm buildings are in a poor state of repair, with parts that have now collapsed ■



Two-storey Gin-case, Wolsty Hall

**Text & Images © Peter Messenger**

## 7. Vegetable materials for Vernacular Building

Vernacular buildings derive a great variety of materials from the plant world. This report concentrates on those most commonly found in such buildings. Starting from the ground up, turf was used in the construction of Hadrian's wall but as a vernacular material it has also been used for walling cottages. Locally its main use was to provide an underthatch into which the upper layer of thatch could be pushed between the sods or alternatively was pinned in place with short pointed sticks. The turf underthatch example shown here has the turf laid grass side down and can be laid as individual 'tiles' of turf or as long rolls. The upper layer of thatch in this instance is heather, bunches were tied



together and then pinned in place. Thatch itself can consist of a wide variety of vegetation including reed, straw (predominantly wheat but sometimes rye) and occasionally bracken. Reed normally has the longest lifespan, bracken the shortest. Today local derived thatch is rare. This example of heather

thatch had to be brought into the area. Reed can still be obtained from Norfolk but often comes from abroad.

Also in the picture above and right, are the oak rafters, part of the structural timber that makes up the roof. Timber battens (onto which slates/tiles can be fixed) are laid horizontally on the rafters which rest on the much larger purlins which in turn are supported by the roof truss. The heavy oak truss has a vertical king post rising from the horizontal tie-beam. Principal rafters follow the line of the roof, joining the end of the tie-beam to the top of the king post. Half way up the king post are curved wind braces which prevent the truss from tilting over. In the background can be seen the clay dabbin gable wall. This material is made up of clay, sand and gravel that is mixed with water and straw. The ends of the straw can be seen in the photograph and it is this



material which helps to bind the clay dabbin mixture together and regulate the rate at which it dries out. In clay dabbin construction straw not only goes into the mix but it is also laid independently on top of the clay layer, again helping to bind the layers while absorbing some of the moisture from the mix. This method of construction can be seen below.

Timber is clearly used in a wide variety of locations in vernacular building. Large timbers are used for beams to support floors, roofs and staircases. Smaller timbers make rafter, battens, framing for windows and doors. Cut into thin boards these can be used to create boarded floors,



doors and panelling. Timber windows take a variety of timber sizes right down to the intricate mouldings of the glazing bars. A use could be found for just about any vegetable material. Twigs could be used to pin thatch and slates while oak pegs can be used as pins to hold a timber framework together such as those in the roof structure above. Straw and Hemp ropes were common features of thatched roof construction and grass could be used as a binder in an earth render ■

**Text & Images © Peter Messenger**

## **8. CVBG Grants Scheme**

The Committee of the Cumbria Vernacular Buildings Group (CVBG) has agreed that the time is right to set up a grants scheme in support of the study and presentation of vernacular buildings within the county of Cumbria.

Grants are available both for research projects and for the promotion or presentation of the subject. Possible topics include (but are not limited to) building recording, historical research and dating. Anyone applying must be a CVBG member.

The projects should contribute to an end product such as publication to a wider audience. It will be a specific requirement of the grant offer that a report for the CVBG newsletter or other CVBG publication be provided.

It is a specific condition of an application for dating that the building(s) are adequately recorded as part of the project, if this has not already been done.

Individual grants will be restricted to a maximum of £200 with a total fund available each year of up to £1,000. Requests for 100% funding are permitted but it is envisaged that it is more likely that the application will represent partial support with the remainder of the project cost being provided by other sources including other grant giving bodies.

Applications may be made at any time during the year using the form that will shortly be available on the CVBG website. Decisions will be made by the CVBG Committee. Applications should ideally be submitted electronically by email to facilitate a decision being reached (as the committee only formally meets a few times a year at infrequent intervals – receiving an application by email will enable it to be circulated between meetings to all committee members for a decision).

**Full details and conditions of the scheme will be published in due course on the CVBG website.**

It is hoped that the scheme will encourage members to increase our understanding of vernacular buildings within Cumbria and to spread this knowledge to a wider audience ■

**Mike Kingsbury**

## **9. Site used for clothes washing in Silverdale**

There is a site called Woodwell in Bottoms Wood in Silverdale (OS Map OL7 grid ref SD 465 743) just across the Cumbria border south



of Arnside in North Lancashire. This site is similar to another site reputedly used for the same purpose in Askham, although here the site is entirely in the open. In a small recess at the base of the limestone cliff at the back right of the site is a spring which never runs dry even in the severest of droughts.

General view of site

This water collects in a man-made trough which in turn is channelled into a square-shaped basin which historically was used for watering cattle. It is also collected into a long and narrow pool used in the past for washing clothes though the surrounding dry stone wall does not allow much room for this activity. The alternate view is that it was used to wash sheep. Perhaps it was used for both at different times. The site today is very pretty and tranquil and ceased to be used as a source of water by locals when piped water from the Haweswater reservoir was introduced in the village after WW2 ■



Spring dripping into a man-made trough in recess at base of cliff.



Area used for washing clothes (or sheep?)

**Text and Images © Mike Kingsbury**



### **ABOUT YOUR DVD**

The DVD has been optimised for replaying on most computers and other DVD devices in widescreen format. There may (will) be exceptions; there can be no guarantee it will play in all circumstances. However, it has been produced with modern equipment, software and DVD media.