

CUMBRIA VERNACULAR BUILDINGS GROUP

NEWSLETTER Number Eight

Summer 2015



Cumbria Vernacular
Buildings Group

The study of "home grown" buildings in Cumbria, made for a particular purpose from materials to hand, using local skills and traditions.

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ENCLOSED

Membership renewal form.

Booking form for forthcoming events.

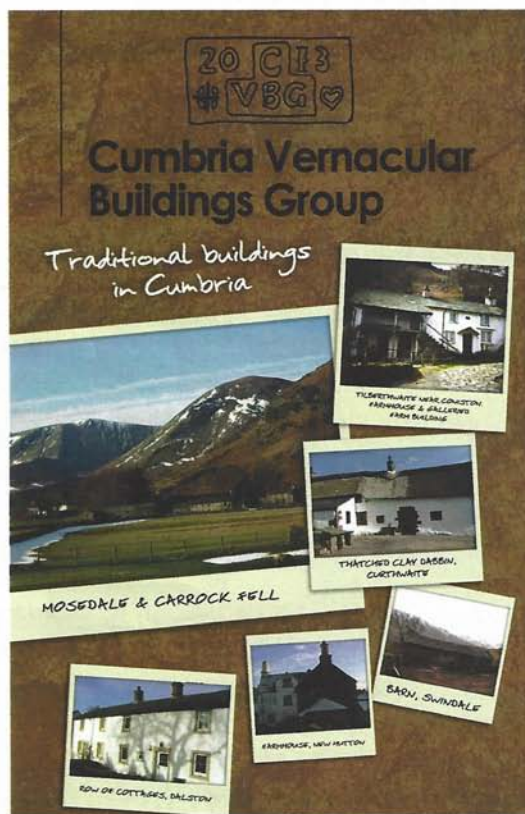
1. **June and July** this year are a quiet time for CVBG, as we are hosting the **VAG 2015 Conference, 7 – 11 July**. This has taken all our time and energy, but we hope that everything is now in place to welcome one hundred members from all over the country (and a few from further afield) to Cumbria.

When CVBG was founded, there were only six members of VAG living in Cumbria. Now there are fourteen – over 100% increase – and we hope this number will grow.

In 1965, our patron, Dr Ronald Brunskill, brought the VAG to the Eden Valley, then in Cumberland, exactly fifty years ago.

The handbook for the conference has been a collaborative effort, with content on the buildings we shall visit from Peter Messenger, Richard Wilson, Mike Kingsbury and myself. Dan Elsworth and his colleague at Greenlane Archaeology, Tom Mace, prepared the pages for printing. Helen Evans, Vicky Slowe and Claire Jeffery have also contributed to the work. Some of the material has been researched for the handbook and has not been published until now. We hope to make it available in a permanent form. Other CVBG members helping with practical arrangements are Barbara Grundy and Jill Durnford.

2. The **CVBG display** units, for which we had a generous grant from VAG, will be shown for the first time at the Conference. Subsequently we will use the display at our own events where appropriate, and when we give talks to other groups. If you are organising an event where the display would make a useful contribution, please ask. We are also looking for venues in libraries, record offices, colleges and even vacant shop windows.



3. The VAG conference will be based at Newton Rigg College, near Penrith. Andrew Humphries, former lecturer there, has kindly written the **history of agricultural education** in Cumbria, and his article follows. It is included in this newsletter by way of introducing the history of farm buildings. One of CVBG study days in 2016 will probably be on this subject.
1. **The 2016 programme for CVBG** is being prepared. If you have requests, suggestions, ideas for visits, themes for talks, etc., now is the time to let us know. Also, more training days will be offered, in recording buildings. We are looking for interesting and appropriate venues for the AGM and the Christmas lunch.
2. In October 2016, one of our study days will be shared with Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, (**CWAAS**), as part of their 150th anniversary programme. It will be on the theme of building resources, their location, extraction, building techniques, etc.

Newton Rigg College

Established 1896 as the Cumberland and Westmorland Farm School



Photo of the farm yard c.1898.

Agricultural education has a history that is hard to define. Education and Institution are not the same. Before colleges were formally established progress depended on informal initiatives and individual leadership. Cumbria benefitted from 'an invisible college' that initiated the educational process from the end of the eighteenth century. John Christian Curwen (cousin of Fletcher Christian) established an experimental farm at Schoose near Workington of which some features survive. The farm was linked to the Workington Agricultural Society formed in 1805 which also provided a show that attracted both local and national leadership some 35 years before the Royal Show held its first meeting.



Schoose Experimental Farm c.1805.

His initiative encouraged those who followed and in 1874 the Aspatria Agricultural College was established by local leaders including Sir Wilfred Lawson as the second agricultural college in Britain and the first aimed at practicing farmers. A key figure was Dr Henry Webb who had studied agricultural education systems in France and Germany where governments were more enlightened in their commitment to agricultural science. Aspatria was a leading institution until its closure in 1914 when students were all engaged in the war effort. The college also prepared students for life in the colonies since the opening of the New World and its exports of cheap food to Britain caused depression that lasted more or less until World War Two.

In the meantime public funding appeared albeit in a strange way. Sir Wilfred Lawson was a leading advocate for the Temperance movement which persuaded government to reduce the number of licenced premises in the countryside. They obliged and agreed in principle to raise extra taxes on beer and spirits to compensate publicans who lost their licences. Just at the vital moment in 1890 in a parliamentary debate A.H.D.Ackland MP. proposed that the compensatory fund of 'Whisky Money' should be put to better use and given to the newly formed local authorities to use in rate relief and technical education.

The fund was large but county councils had no experience, no curriculum and no staff. Cumberland and Westmorland had the benefit of the Aspatria experience and established Newton Rigg and one of the first four Farm Institutes (1896) and became a leader in the field.

The summer dairy course for girls in front of the Byre



Henry Howard of Greystoke Castle, an Aspatria supporter led the process and found the farm at Newton Rigg which had failed to sell at auction. The pattern of courses was to have two summer dairy courses for girls. Butter was a key part of the Cumbrian economy due in part to the biscuit manufacture in Carlisle and the application of new technology and techniques was able to add to farm household incomes and give young women the opportunity to find gainful employment elsewhere if they chose. Boys came in winter since they could not be spared in summer. The community was very much like a family with Mr Lawrence an engaging and skilled principal and father figure and Mrs Lawrence as Matron. Mr Lawrence when appointed was allocated a salary of £300 p.a. *'to include the services of his wife as matron'*

The college proved to be a success , significantly due to the appointment of Mr Lawrence who had excellent interpersonal skills and was an acknowledge expert of his subject, being called to give evidence to several government commissions.

The core buildings were adapted for educational purposes and over time extended with prudent county council investment. The aim of Farm Institutes was not to educate leading national figures but squarely committed to family farming and progressive practice, In this; a culture of community participation characterised the institution for over a century.

Today the challenges for the college are different and undoubtedly more complex though paradoxically offering greater educational opportunities for the institution, its students and the wider community. The competing and sometimes conflicting positions of rural stakeholder interests towards rapidly changing methods of food production; increasing demand for a diversified rural economy; concerns about bio-diversity and other public goods have implications that as yet are unclear except that they are fundamentally important. Stewardship is gaining acceptance at the expense of exploitation supported by policies which claim to have due regard for the planet. Risks need to be understood if wise decisions are to be taken whether at ground level or in policy. The college, its staff and students need to foster a sense of responsibility and commitment to collaborative working. Agriculture at the heart of the college has functioned as an Art, a Science and a business. What we mean by agriculture has changed and the range of land use issues presents a complex of considerations for college strategy.

Andrew Humphries

Allonby Walkabout, 16 April. Allonby was once a thriving fishing and seafaring community on the Cumbrian coast, which had a fashionable period as a spa. The buildings reflect the various times of prosperity. A few houses show seventeenth century features, especially in their plan form. One such feature seen in a couple of houses, is the narrow bay at the gable end of a house, behind the chimney wall, where a cross passage is usually sited. Without doors, and covered in rendering, it is difficult to interpret this feature. Internal inspection may give an explanation.

Walls without render showed the use of cobbles from the shore, as building material. Another common feature is the use of pilaster strips at the corners, often emphasised with contrasting paintwork. Several three storey buildings give a slightly urban feel to the place, especially in the tightly grouped area round the Square, with its cobbled road, once the main thoroughfare, before the present coast road was built. Many of the houses once presented their backs to the sea, to avoid the worst storms, but some have been given new fronts to face the sea view across the Solway to Scotland.

Quaker influence is evident in Allonby. The Friends Meeting House, created in 1703, by converting a single storey cottage, then adding a meeting room, with a pedimented entrance in 1732. Again, the back wall faces the sea. This building has reverted to use as a dwelling house, since the meeting closed in 2009.

North Lodge was built by a leading Quaker, Thomas Richardson, originally from Darlington, who married an Allonby girl, Martha Beeby. Her family had a fish curing business on the shore. He established six almshouses, for local old people, in a long building, with two storey pavilions at each end, and single storey cottages either side of a two storey "occasional residence" for himself and his wife in the centre. It is altogether different from the rest of Allonby's buildings, but not as sensational as the Reading Room, on the shore. This amazing structure of red brick, recently rescued from a sad state, was designed by the famous architect Alfred Waterhouse, in 1861, for Joseph Pease, notable for his involvement with the Darlington and Stockton Railway, and a relative of Thomas Richardson. The Reading Room, provided the means of self-education for the inhabitants of Allonby. The ground floor was built as an open area where the high tides could do little damage. Another unusual building is the former sea-water baths and assembly room, of 1835, facing into the cobbled street, with immense ionic columns forming an entrance porch. The back of the building, faces the sea, and has a long balcony.



7. **Grasmere, 10 May.** As guests of the Wordsworth museum, CVBG gathered for a day to consider Grasmere as it would have been in the time when William and Dorothy Wordsworth lived at Dove Cottage, (1799 – 1808). Jeff Cowton, curator, used the evidence of drawings, paintings, maps and written descriptions to recreate the village as they would have known it. Our task in the afternoon, was to look for surviving buildings, most of which are built of slate.

CVBG Members In Grasmere On The Old Road To Ambleside



June Hall gave an illustrated talk on slate as a building material, from the quarry to the finished walls and roofs. The possibilities and constraints of the material are evident in the structures themselves. Finely carved detail is absent, but the simple lines of slate buildings allow the texture and colour of the rock to be seen. Dry stone walling, or walls with recessed mortar; drip courses above door and window openings; roofing in diminishing courses, with swept valleys; inclined slate on chimney-tops, known locally as "chimney devils"; cylindrical chimney stacks; two or four-piece porches; all these elements were seen on the walks after lunch. One group looked round the Dove Cottage area, up the lane which was once the main road to Ambleside, and the other group drove across to Easedale, favourite walking territory for the Wordsworths, to see a farmhouse they often visited.

Honister Slate Quarry



- 8. Forthcoming events.** Booking forms are enclosed for the next three events.
- Wednesday 19 August. Drybeck Hall, near Appleby, arranged by Mike Lea.
 - Saturday 19 September, AGM and visit to Cartmel Fell, led by Jennifer Forsyth.
 - Wednesday 14 October, Joint event with SVBWG and NEVAG, at Lanercost Priory.
- 9. Membership renewal is due on 1 August.** Form enclosed. We are able to keep the annual subscription to £10.00 once more, and aim to give good value. The newsletters account for the biggest expenditure. Our numbers are steadily growing, and attendance at events is good. Thank you for your support.

Bee Boles At West Curthwaite.



Look for bee boles in your area and send photographs for a future article on the subject.

June Hall

CVBG Committee, 2014-2015

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- **Vicky Slowe**, Director, Ruskin Museum, Coniston, Ambleside, LA21 8DU information@ruskinmuseum.com
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