NEWSLETTER No. 35 – SPRING 2022

1. From the Chairman

We are sending this newsletter to you a little earlier than usual, to spread out contact with you, and catch up with the usual routine. There seems to be a more optimistic attitude regarding Covid, so let us hope we can return to a programme of live events soon. Meanwhile, the programme of Zoom talks will give a regular monthly structure to the year. You will find it on pages 11 & 12, for easy reference.

This time, we have several requests.

- It would be sensible to resume live events with outdoor meetings, so if any one, or group of you, could show off the village or house you live in, it would be good to hold these in various parts of Cumbria. Don't worry if you know very little about it – it will add interest for members to discuss features as we proceed. Please contact me if you can offer 'your place'.
- Our vice chairman, Paul Lewis, is giving up his room at Brougham Hall. This is where CVBG equipment, books, displays etc., have been stored. Unfortunately, because of Covid, we haven't been able to take full advantage of this privilege, such as holding committee meetings there, having access to our library, etc. Now we need an alternative space. If any member can offer storage, it would be most helpful. Somewhere safe, dry and accessible is required. If you are interested, a list of items can be provided. There isn't a lot of equipment, so we're not looking for a large space.
- Some time ago, several of you requested training but Covid intervened. If you live in a vernacular building, or know someone who does, and would like a record of it, please let me know, as we need to train people.
- CVBG has membership of several other groups – The Vernacular Architecture Group (VAG), the British Association for Local History (BALH), the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group (SVBWG) and Cumbria Local History Federation (CLHF). Each of these publish regular newsletters and journals. These publications are sent to either the chairman or the treasurer, but you are all welcome to read them, if you are not a member of any of them yourself. Again, suggestions for a central place where these could be accessed, are sought. Otherwise, they could be sent by e mail if that option is available or passed on in some way.
- Now the biggest ask! We will need a replacement treasurer at the AGM in September, as Mike Kingsbury is standing down. He has looked after our finances since we began in 2013 and we are in a good position. It need not be a difficult job for anyone who enjoys figures. Please read his request on page 8.
- For the next newsletter, in June 2022, a 'Then and Now' theme would be of interest. If you know of old photographs or descriptions of buildings which have changed radically, and have an up-to-date picture, please send them by the end of May.

Enjoy the coming spring, and opportunities to get out and about around the county.

Very best wishes

June L Hill

2. CVBG CHRISTMAS LUNCH, FRI. 3RD DECEMBER 2021 AT BROAD LEYS.

27 members attended this event, which was curtailed last year, due to Covid restrictions. It was a pleasure to meet with fellow members face to face, and in such magnificent surroundings. The house since 1952, has been the headquarters of the Windermere Motor Racing Boat Club, built in the Arts and Crafts style by Charles Vosey in 1899 for Yorkshire mine owner, Arthur Currer Briggs. Here we saw Vosey's use of straight lines, gentle curves, and open space. The west range looks out over Windermere and a terraced garden. The staircase has newels continued to the ceiling with stick balustrades and heart motifs, bedrooms have bird and bush design ventilation grilles, original window catches and an original bath in a bathroom. The interior retains many original fittings, panelling and fireplaces. After lunch we were invited to stroll around the house and inspect the many original features ■ **Mike Turner**

(Broad Leys information from historicengland.org.uk)

Members comments: -

"….. *great venue and very enjoyable lunch"* – **John McDowell.**

"….. *it was a very enjoyable occasion, and welcome after spending a long time in the wilderness"* – **Richard Wilson**.

"…… *lovely to see everyone"* – **Lynne Seignot.**

"….. *really enjoyed the lunch and the opportunity to meet up with so many others"* – **Stuart Harling**.

© S.Harling

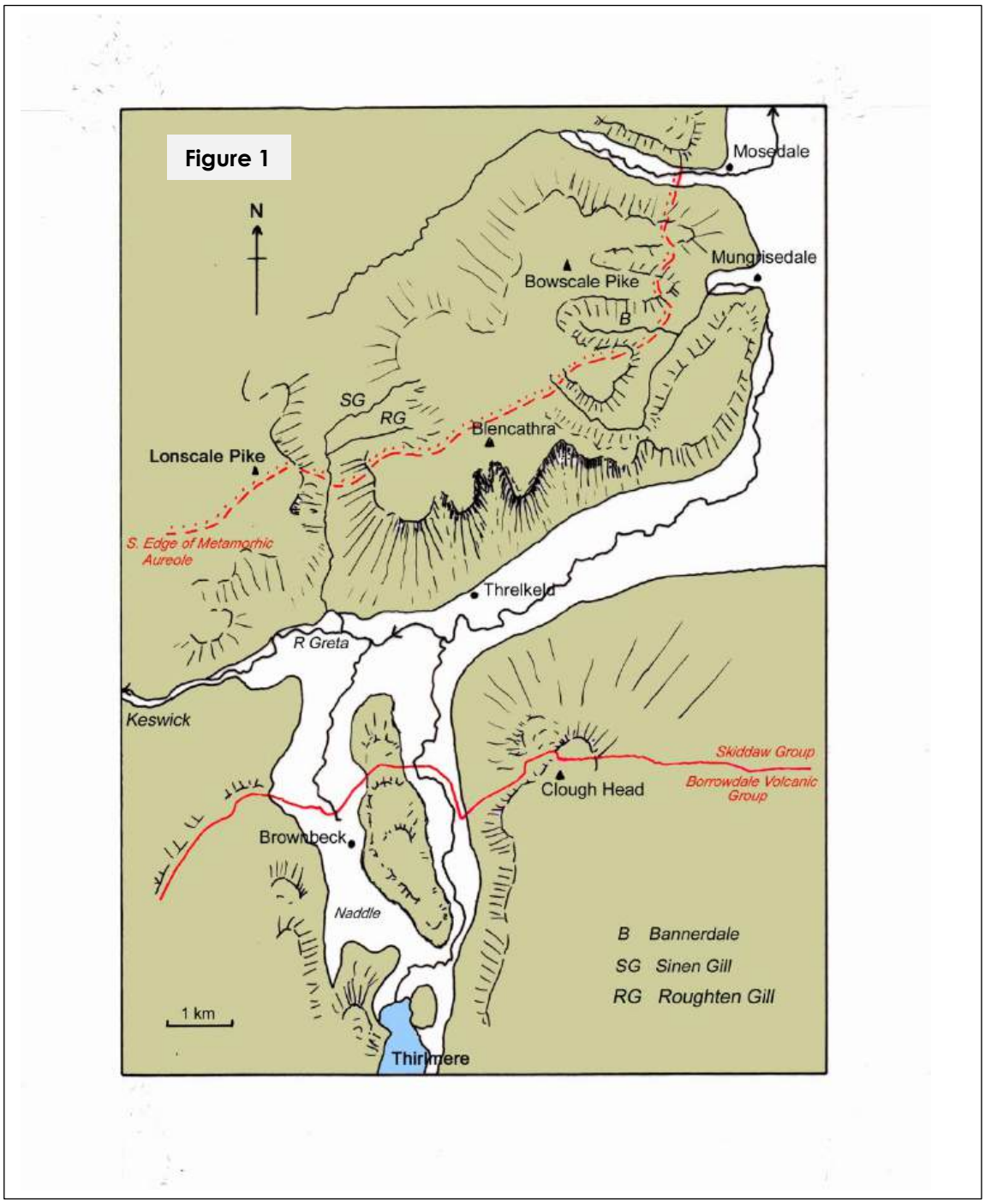
Vosey's eye for detail; Heart coat hook and ventilation grille

Members having a leisurely chat at lunch in the dining room, note the panelling and fireplace. © (L) Stuart Harling (R) Richard Wilson.

SELECTION OF MEMBERS PHOTOGRAPHS FROM BROADLEYS.

(Images copyright of: Lynne Seignot/John McDowell/Malcolm Bates/Richard Wilson/Stuart Harling)

3. A note on some roofing 'slates' at Naddle, near Keswick - Alan Smith



Recent renovation work on a barn at Brownbeck, Naddle, near Keswick (see map, Figure 1 above, NY 302214) has afforded the opportunity to look at some roofing material that is now rarely seen on Lakeland buildings. The complete roof of an attached barn at the property has been stripped and the extremely dark (almost black) colour of the 'slates' and their general appearance prompted the architect and builder to question the origin of this material. The roof was in a very poor condition and was clearly of some age, well over 100 years and probably much older.

The Naddle valley lies at the lower end of Thirlmere and runs northwards into the main valley of the River Greta, a few kilometres south and east of Keswick (Figure 1). Most of the valley and surrounding fells lie on the volcanic rocks of the Borrowdale Volcanic Group and in fact the walling of the farmhouse and of the barn is constructed of very local volcanic lavas and tuffs. Some of the walling blocks can actually be identified from a particular fellside exposure of these rocks a few hundred metres away. The roofing however, is not from the local rocks and proved to be 'slates' derived from somewhere on the outcrop of the Skiddaw Group rocks which cover a large area of this part of north Lakeland. The west-east junction line between these two major groups of rocks is shown by the red line on Figure 1. These Skiddaw Group rocks, which traditionally and rather misguidedly were always called 'Skiddaw Slates' do not provide good roofing materials. Slates on Lakeland roofs are dominated by the 'green slates' from the volcanics, (Honister, Kirkstone, Elterwater etc..) or the greyer slates from the Silurian Windermere Supergroup of South Lakeland (Kirkby Moor, Burlington etc..).

Apart from their dark colour and rather matt texture, these slates from the barn at Brownbeck were remarkably variable in size. They had been laid as a graduated set with the largest at the bottom and the smallest at the top. Some of the largest were up to 60-70 cms long and almost half that in width. Most were crudely cut at

Fig 2: Two examples of the slates.

Intact slate at right shows broken flaky surface. There are very small pit holes where the cordierite particles have been weathered out. Note extensive overlap.

Broken fragment at left shows typical sizeable peg hole. Quartz veining at top edge is also typical of many specimens-another product of the metamorphism of these rocks.

varying angles at their tops and some were rather misshapen. They had been fixed with wooden pegs of considerable size, many of the fixing holes being over 1 cm in diameter. Most of the larger slates had two or even three fixing holes, often irregularly spaced suggesting bespoke fixing on site. The rough edges of the slates were frequently crumbling, and surface flaking of the material was noticeable.

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On average the slates were between 15 and 20 mm thick, but many were thicker and bulkier. (The two illustrations Figures 2 and 3 previous page) show some of the features).

As such these Skiddaw Group slates on Lakeland roofs are not rare, but there are very few examples of their use left. Records show that certainly back in the 18th and early 19th centuries their use was more common, but their lasting qualities were always inferior to the volcanic and Silurian slates. The Moot Hall in Keswick for example was originally roofed with Skiddaw slates from Applethwaite, (Underskiddaw). There are a handful of other buildings around where this material can still be seen – for example St Kentigern's Church, Mungrisedale and some houses in Mosedale. The author is aware of some other locations in Buttermere, Borrowdale and in the area around Blencathra, but there are likely to be more in North Lakeland.
Close examination of the slates from Brownbeck has enabled the source of this material to be identified with much greater accuracy. Many of the slates contain the long lath like crystals of the mineral andalusite. More importantly many also contain the dark grey and black mineral cordierite. This latter mineral often weathers out into very small pits on the surface of the slates (small holes that look like woodworm holes). The presence of both of these minerals confirm these are thermally altered slates that have been in close contact with the small underlying intrusion of the Skiddaw Granite that lies beneath part of the Skiddaw Group in a discrete area north of Blencathra. The southern limits of the aureole of this intrusion (the zone of thermal metamorphism - ie. alteration) is shown by the dotted red line in Figure 1. We can therefore pinpoint fairly closely where these slates originated. The fact they come from this very limited thermally altered zone may well partly explain why they have lasted for a considerable time. This material is a 'hornfels' which is known geologically to be a hardened material, strongly cleaved and hence capable of being split into sheets. It can be found in large pieces as gateposts, large flags or as 'slate' slabs in the Mosedale and Mungrisedale areas. The most likely source of these slates is either Bannerdale (approx. 15kms away) or the Roughten Gill/Sinen Gill areas (7-8kms away) See Figure 1. Elsewhere in this area exposures of this material are generally not found.

It is worth putting the use and presence of these materials on record. They represent the use of quite geologically specific materials and the creation of roofing slates of a distinctive type that are likely to gradually disappear from our vernacular buildings ▪

Figure 3 (page 7). A selection of slates taken from the Brownbeck Barn roof. Note irregular tops and the variability of sizes and shapes. There are the remains of a wooden peg in the slate at the front of central pile (to the right of white cross marked on tile).

Fig 3: Selection of slates.

4. **A NOTE FROM THE TREASURER**

The CVBG Bank Account is held at the HSBC, so as many of you know they now charge **40p** for every cheque paid into our account. If possible, can you please pay by direct bank transfer (BACS) for your membership renewal, events, etc.

Can I also remind you that I am stepping down as Treasurer at the AGM in September, so a replacement is needed. The role is as simple or as complicated as you want to make it, but some familiarity with Excel spreadsheets would be useful.

If you are potentially interested, please contact myself or June Hill.

Thank you

Mike Kingsbury

Then and Now

Image © Westmorland History Society Archives

Image left: This image shows how the nearest pub to the church looked some years ago. The most notable feature is the 'Westmorland hood' over the door. These intriguing stone canopies can be seen elsewhere in Appleby, at least two surviving, and clear traces of others which have left semi-circular marks over doorway. Several examples can be seen on village houses in the vicinity, particularly in King's Meaburn.
Image right: This is the same building as it looks in 2022. See how many changes you can find, apart from the obvious two-the change of name and the removal of the hood above the door. The pub underwent a thorough renovation about three years ago, which included a new roof.

5. A Note on Clay Dabbins by Peter Messenger

Clay dabbins are found on both sides of the Solway Firth and are built of the region's most common building material. Earth. In this case this is unburnt earth consisting of the mineral fraction of the soil (this can be sand, clay and some gravel) mixed with straw and water. It becomes a building material when various amounts of these materials are mixed together. Originally this mixing was done by humans or animals treading boots or hooves into the mixture. Today it is far easier to use mechanical means. Once mixed it is laid on a cobble or rubble plinth with a fork.

There are different methods of creating these mass walls. In South West England and the Midlands, for example, the material can be laid to a height of a metre before it is necessary to let the wall dry out. The reason for this is the wall contains a significant amount of water and this has to dry out enough for the labourers to stand on top of the wall, which is a necessary part of compacting the material and keeping the sides vertical.

The Solway Clay Dabbin wall is built differently. The layers or lifts are usually no more the 10 – 12 cm deep and often much less, and each layer is separated from the next by a thin layer of straw. The straw helps to dry out the dabbin mixture while more layers are added. The result of this is the building process can be continuous. The folklore about Dabbin construction relates that a cottage (probably of a single bay) could be built in a day with a rudimentary roof fixed over it. The occupier of such a dwelling, if it was allowed to stand, could obtain a small parcel of land for his or her subsistence.

A survey recently identified that at the beginning of the 20th century there were around 1200 clay structures on the Cumbrian side of the Solway. Some were derelict, others were in poor condition. A survey at the beginning of the 21st century could only find just over 300 clay buildings Some of these were also derelict or in poor condition. Since 2000, on average, one of these surviving clay buildings is destroyed, including several which were listed buildings. At one time there were similar numbers of clay buildings in Dumfriesshire and Galloway. Only four can be identified today.

These clay dabbins are a significant type of vernacular architecture using earth as their principal building material, now rare in this region. Earth is still sometimes considered to be a 'temporary' building material with a short lifespan. The dated examples that we have proves that if they are properly maintained these buildings can be as permanent as any building material. Some dabbins have date-stones giving an indication of when some part of

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the building was built or extended. Examples such as the Cottage at Ratten Row near Durdar, dated 1689, has dendro-dates that provide evidence of its earlier origins. The earliest phase dating to c. 1505 and a later phase of c. 1580s. The dates found on lintels and elsewhere in these buildings are mainly from the 17th - and 18th - century.

There are a number of good examples that can be seen from the roadside. Probably the best place to start would be Burgh by Sands. At the crossroads near the Church, turn up North End to see two good examples. Travelling westwards from the same crossroads, taking care to mind the traffic, about twenty yards along the main road there are two larger, white rendered houses. On the left is Cross Farmhouse and you can get a glimpse of the cruck-framed clay dabbin barn through the archway that leads into the courtyard. On the right, set at right angles to the road, is Lamonby Farm, a thatched, cruck framed clay dabbin house and a cruck-framed barn. A further good example can be found at West Curthwaite, south of Dalston. This is Meadow Bank farmhouse which bears a date of 1666. All of the properties mentioned above are listed and descriptions and location maps can be found on the Historic England website through its 'Search the List'. The clay dabbin at Campfield RSPB Reserve (see below), just west of Bowness on Solway, can be visited every day and is usually open for internal inspection. Inside there are displays on its construction and the history of the clay dabbin on the Solway Plain ▪

Image© Peter Messenger

6. CVBG Programme of Zoom talks for 2022

Second Mondays. All events except for February and March, will be on the second Monday of each month at 7.30 pm. It may be necessary to change talks and speakers as the year unfolds**. Members of CVBG will be sent a link to each talk from March onwards, a day or two before the event.**

February, WEDNESDAY 23, 6.00 pm.
Cumbria Action for Sustainability, Reno… …t 33a, Chapel Street, Appleby.
CVBG member Chris Morphet h… …volved in this project, with his business Lake District Lim… …attended our Appleby study day in 2019 will remember Chris show… …ound the building.
Individual application… are required for bookings, to – www.cafs.org.uk
There are not many places left to book, but the event may be recorded, in which case, you will receive information.

Event date passed

March, Monday 7
Niall Logan, Chairman of SVBWG
Wretched Huts and Despicable Hovels
Niall, who has hosted our annual visits north of the border, takes a look at primitive housing in Scotland.

April, Monday 4
Peter Messenger, CVBG committee
Clay Dabbins, old and new
Peter gets to grips with the Cumbrian version of clay structures, both what we can see and what has been lost.

May, Monday 9
John McDowell, CVBG committee
Vernacular Buildings of Ulster Folk Museum
This is a splendid opportunity to look at building traditions outside of Cumbria, to contrast them with those familiar to us.

June, Monday 13
Dan Elsworth, CVBG committee
House at Underbarrow, near Kendal,
Dan uses his archaeological expertise to analyse the development of the house and record surviving features.

July, Monday 4
Richard Wilson, CVBG committee
Living Upstairs: Bastles and bastle derivatives,
Bastles are unique to the Border region and Cumbria has many examples to see. Richard has made a special study of this building type, which influenced houses in their vicinity.

August, Monday 1
Paul Lewis, Vice Chairman, CVBG
Harby Brow Tower, near Wigton.
The development of a Cumbrian tower house.

September, Monday 5
Andrew Carter, CVBG member and owner, with others
Ona Ash, a cruck built, thatched house of 1695, near Kirkoswald
Not many such houses survive in Cumbria, in good condition, almost unchanged since they were built. Here is a chance to see every aspect of this fine example.

October, Monday 3
David Cant, Former Chairman, Yorkshire VBSG and CVBG member
Ships' Timbers Ahoy! - how to recognise re-used timbers.
Timber was such a precious resource in Cumbria, that nothing went to waste. While rumours of ships' timbers abound, how can you recognise the real thing?

November, Monday 7
Hannah Kingsbury, committee member, CVBG
Update on Westmorland Dales Projects, including the Field Barns Survey
Many of our members have been involved in these projects as volunteers. This talk brings us up to date with current developments.

December, Monday 5
June Hill, Chairman, CVBG
Around Cumbria: a Celebration of Vernacular Buildings.
Cumbria is rich in examples of vernacular buildings from medieval times up to the early 20th century Vernacular Revival, varying in social status, materials, styles and fashions of each type. We'll round off the year with a feast of images.

N.B. We have a limited amount of 2022 Calendars remaining, which are available at £2 each <u>including</u> postage. Please contact the secretary for information. secretary@cvbg.co.uk