NEWSLETTER No. 43 – SPRING 2024

Cumbria Vernacular Buildings Group

1. From the Chairman

A little over 10 years ago, our President June Hill held the inaugural meeting of the Cumbria Vernacular Buildings Group. Membership numbers have grown steadily since then and I am delighted to let you know that we now have more than 200 members, both nationally and internationally.

Just last week, our recording event at High Stott Park was attended by two visiting members from America and I must thank Kathleen Cole for writing the article on the visit included in this newsletter.

Attendances at our meetings is increasing too, with over 50 members and guests enjoying our February ZOOM presentation on the History and Buildings of the Lyvennet Valley. Our next event is on Thursday 11th April at Heron Corn Mill, Beetham near Milnthorpe, commencing at 11.00 a.m. when there will be no restriction on the number of attendees; I hope you can join me there for a fascinating insight into some of our industrial vernacular buildings. A notice with the arrangements for this event will be circulated shortly but you can always reserve a place by emailing me beforehand at 'paullewiscvbg@gmail.com'.

Sadly, the planned visit to Hartsop in April has been cancelled due to further planned roadworks on Kirkstone pass and illness on the part of the organiser. We hope to rearrange this event for 2025.

For those members who enjoy light-hearted exchanges on social media, our Facebook page is now sometimes viewed by over 100 members and guests, so if you want to join in, here is the link:-
https://www.facebook.com/groups/httpwww.cvbg.co.uk

Chairman

From Adrian Leather, Crosthwaite; " Happy to contribute as your 200th member.
My love of old properties started when I was involved in renovating old farm buildings with my family in the 1980s. I have been uncovering the history of our cruck Farmhouse and Barn and am keen to learn more from CVBG members about the original construction techniques and how to best preserve the original features. Alongside maintaining the Farmhouse and buildings my day job sees me run a Charity; Active Lancashire and I am also a Board member of Morecambe Bay Hospital Trust".

2. A History of the Lyvennet Valley and its vernacular buildings.
(Zoom presentation by Chairman, Paul Lewis 21st February, 2024)

The River Lyvennet (Celtic name in origin) runs through a beautiful valley with a fascinating history stretching over many centuries from Neolithic times. An example of this is the Stone Circle at Oddendale (Plate 1) which was designed and developed possibly in phases over hundreds of years and into Early Bronze Age. It had an emphasis on funerary use and maps of the area show there to be many ancient burial places. Ewe Close, near Crosby Ravensworth is a late Iron Age and Romano-British settlement, spread over three or four acres. It is situated close to the Roman road from Low Borrowbridge, near Tebay, to Brougham, near Penrith. Aerial footage clearly shows many remnants of a village and ancient field systems.

Plate 1

The Lyvennet flows through a number of villages, including Morland, a small settlement with history dating back at least 1500 years. This began perhaps because of the fresh water supply at the Powdonnet Well or Sacred Spring at the northern end of the village. The nearby grade 1 listed St Lawrence's Church in Morland (Plate 2) probably dates from 1041. It has the only Anglo Saxon Tower in Cumbria and is one of the oldest standing churches still in use.

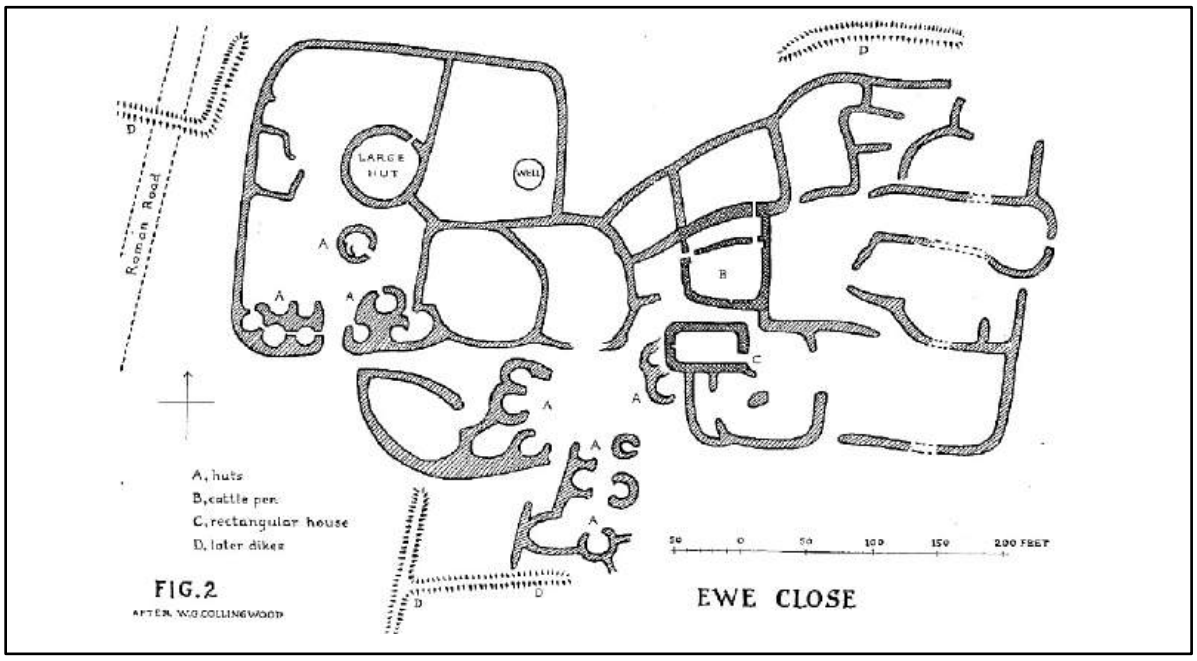
Near to the village of Mauds Meaburn stands the remnants (now conserved) of C14 Crake Trees Tower House, (see article by John McDowell in the previous newsletter). Maulds Meaburn Hall at the north end of the village was rebuilt in C16 for the Vernons and later altered further by the Lowthers. Maulds Meaburn is however now a shrunken village, showing clear signs of medieval farming, with remnants of old rig and furrow land use and the beginnings of tofts and crofts. Very little now remains of very early dwellings other than remnants of footings of what would probably have been cruck built and thatched crofts. Evidence exists of more crofts and tofts at nearby Kings Meaburn, with six scheduled ancient monument sites, including a pele tower built by Henry 11 There are records of the tower still being in existence in 1860 but it has now gone.

Plate 2

The oldest building in nearby Reagill is Reagill Grange,(Plate 3) probably late C16 and formerly a Grange of Shap Abbey. A striking building, it has a two storey porch and stair tower and some of the most northerly cylindrical chimneys. Newby Hall, a U-shaped house, was built for the Nevison family in the C17, more peaceful times and built without defence. Paul went on to discuss the impact of the plague on people living in the Lyvennet Valley and also the implications of the Parliamentary Enclosures Act.

Plate 3

He completed the talk outlining the development of small houses in Cumbria from around the mid C17. From two roomed cottages with thatched roofs and in some parts of Cumbria, a third unit (for domestic service or an agricultural building) attached by way of a cross-passage. Similar linear forms developed as people became more prosperous, progressing over time to double pile, double bay houses e.g. Greystone House and barn, Kings Meaburn, dated 1789. A desire to make houses look more symmetrical with a central door and a room in each corner gradually became more accessible to a larger number of people.



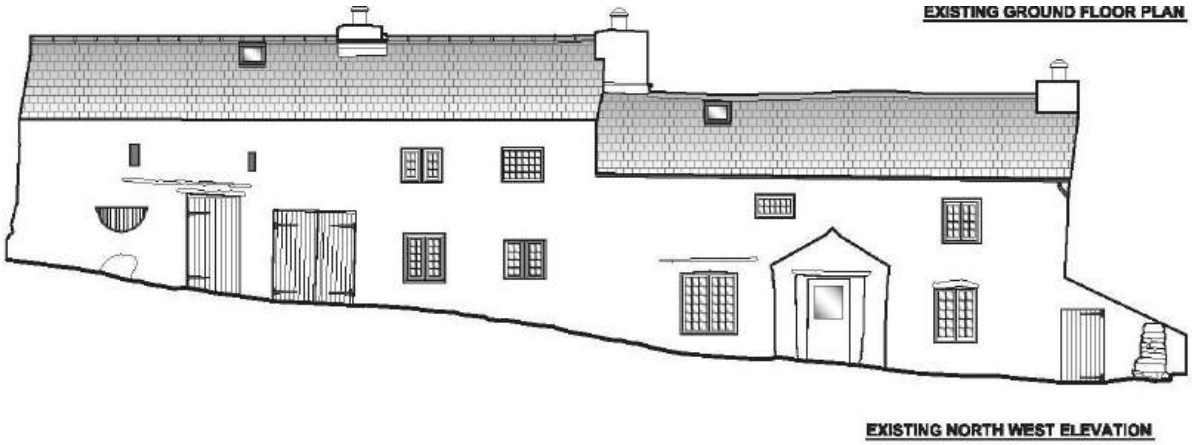
This is just a brief summary of what was a fascinating and fully illustrated talk, which was recorded and will be available on the CVBG website. See also John McDowell's report from the visit to Crosby Ravensworth and Crake Trees, as featured in the Winter Newsletter (42)▪

© Stephanie Hewison

3. Crabtree Beck, Loweswater – Tales of Piety and Tragedy

By Paul Lewis, CVBG Chairman

This early 17th century two-storey traditional building comprises solid masonry walls with pitched timber roofs finished with Westmorland slate laid in diminishing courses. Many of the original curved oak lintels remain and several of the window openings retain their central mullions although others have been removed (see Plate 1below).

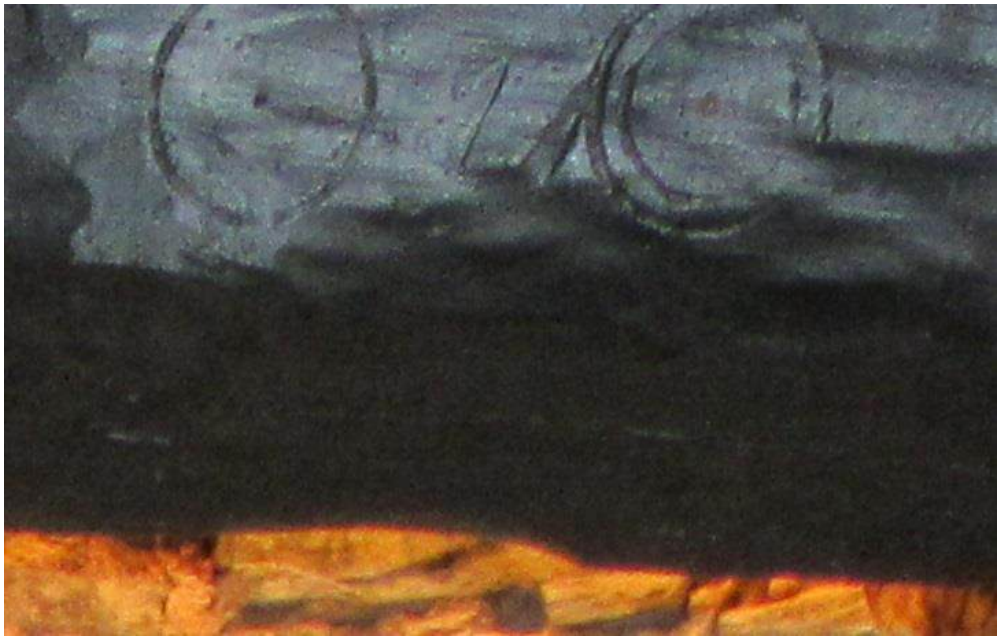


1. Front elevation

The layout of the property rises in 3 successive stages to the north, the accommodation being laid out in traditional long-house style; former agricultural spaces appear to have been adapted for residential use. The original dwelling appears to have comprised a traditional fire room and parlour; there is a date stone of 1660 on the front of the building but the presence of a hooded fireplace would suggest an earlier date for the original construction. A famous Quaker

preacher was born here in 1631 so the datestone does not reflect the original phase.
Within the fire hood a later chimney breast and stone fireplace have been erected, depicting a date of 1669; the adjacent bread oven appears to have been added around 1750, based upon the evidence of the handmade brickwork in the upper section (see plates 2,3 and 4 below). The inglenook is served by food holes, spice cupboard and a fire window, now closed. Apotropaic marks are evident on the fire beam.

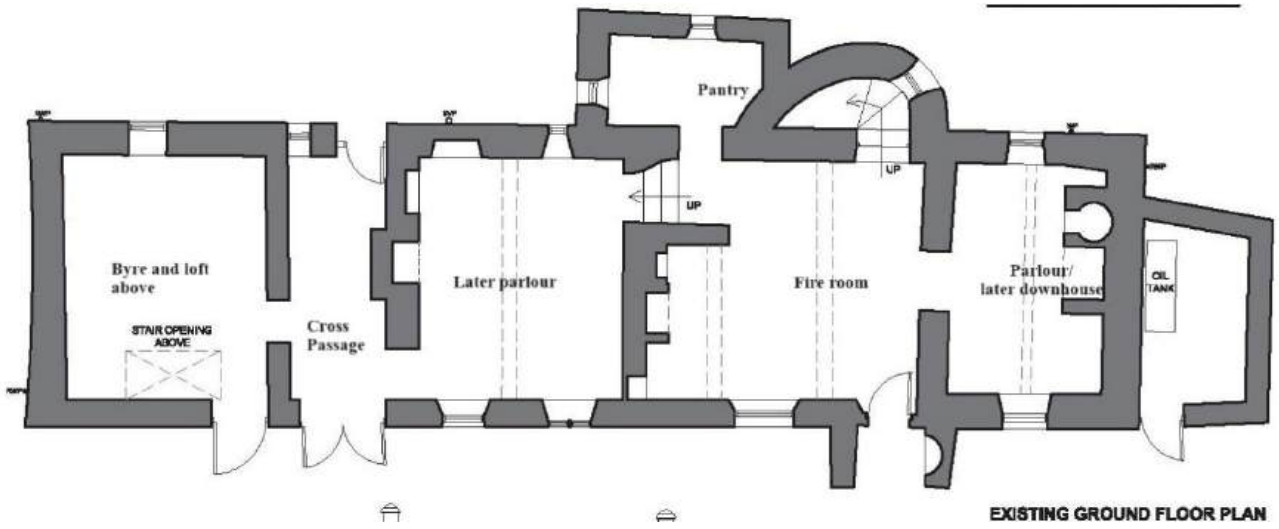
2. The inglenook with its 18th C fireplace and later bread oven



3. Apotropaic marks on the fire-beam

In the middle of the ground floor accommodation there is a later parlour with a fireplace that appears to date from around the 1750s. A larder with stone shelving and adjoining half-moon staircase with stone windings appear to have been added at about the same time (see Ground Floor plan, Plate 5). The staircase is very unusual, its skewed elliptical shape reflecting the constraints of building next to the beck (see also the 3D image of the rear elevation below, Plate 6). The earlier parlour appears to have been adapted to a down-house with bread oven around that time.

4. Inside the fire-hood with its lime plaster and food holes



5. Ground floor layout

6. Rear elevation showing the unusual stair enclosure and later adjacent pantry

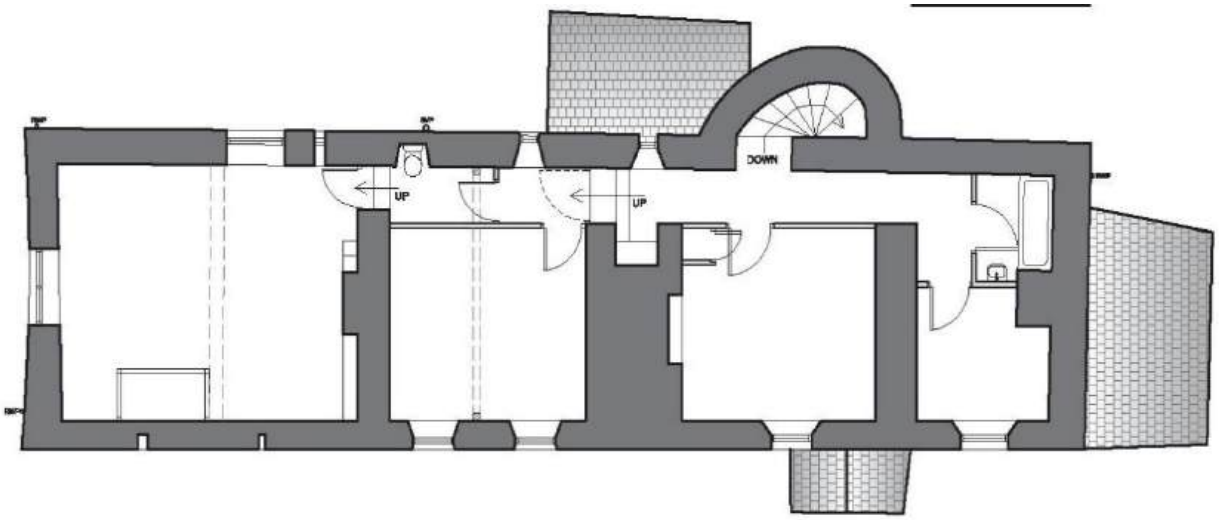
Beyond the later parlour is a cross-passage in which graffiti on the plasterwork dates to the 1690s (see Plate 7). North of the cross passage is another room which may originally have been a shippon.

At first floor level the original layout of the rooms remains evident but the original muntin and plank partitions are lost. The riven oak plank floors remain throughout the lower house and many of the original curved window lintels remain; the collared trusses and purlins remain throughout in hand-worked oak.

At first floor level the living accommodation has been extended successfully in phases throughout the building. The enclosed fire hood is depicted as a rectangular enclosure of some size (see First Floor plan, Plate 8); shapes of this kind are usually good clues to the presence of a fire hood.

7. 17th C graffiti in the cross-passage

8. First Floor Plan



EXISTING FIRST FLOOR PLAN

The architecture of the building reflects a high level of historic significance with its remaining hooded fireplace with later fire breast, fireplace and bread oven being a visible sequence of building alteration. The later addition of pantry and curved staircase reflects the vernacular tradition of sequential development into the early 18th century as the use of loft ladders became less common and food storage more sophisticated.

Crabtree Beck is also culturally important as it was the birthplace of John Burnyeat, sometimes called "The Saint Paul of Quakerism" who was born there in 1631, the son of a Quaker farmer and a friend of George Fox, the Founding Father of the Society of Friends.

John Burnyeat joined the Quakers in 1653. In 1658 he was imprisoned in Scotland after making an unsuccessful attempt to introduce Quakerism there. Similar attempts in Ireland found him imprisoned several times for his beliefs. Around 1662 he sought out George Fox to discuss his beliefs and was shortly afterwards arrested and imprisoned for 3 months.

After touring Barbados, Virginia and New England as a missionary of the Quaker movement, he was again imprisoned in 1668-70 in London. He moved to live in Ireland from 1673 where he lived for the rest of his life but was imprisoned again in Dublin in 1676 but released in 1683 and was then married. He died in Kilconner in County Carlow in July 1690 aged about 59 having been a Quaker Minister for nearly 23 years.

In 1828 a tragedy occurred at Crabtree Beck when a mining dam collapsed higher on the hillside. A wall of water swept away Joseph Turrrell (35) of Crabtree Beck and his two year-old son, John. They were buried at Loweswater on the 26th and 29th July respectively. The Coroner concluded accidental death at the inquest on 13th of that month. Miraculously, Joseph's wife, Sarah and their daughter survived ▪

Paul Lewis BSc(Hons)MRICS
RICS Accreditation in Building Conservation

4. Maulds Meaburn Houses by June Hill - CVBG President

Before Covid brought everything to a halt, we held a day workshop in Maulds Meaburn, to look at the facades of the houses in the village which appeared on the 1st edition of the OS map of 1859. Since then, nothing has been done to follow up this initial activity.

Although the village has an Anglo Saxon name, and a remarkable surviving plan which dates to the Norman reorganisation of land, the standing buildings represent around 500 years of history, from the late middle ages to the mid nineteenth century. The village is surrounded by archaeological relics from prehistory and fields which show the ridge and furrow of former arable cultivation.

In March of this year, I called a meeting of house owners and people keen to either do further research or share their local knowledge. There was considerable interest. I have arranged another meeting for **Tuesday 9 April at 7.30 pm in the village institute.** Those who came to the workshop in 2019 are most welcome as are other members of CVBG with an interest in helping with the research ▪

Meaburn Hall, showing the late medieval solar wing to the right.
The rebuilt single storey hall is on foundations of an earlier date.© J.Hill

5. HIDING IN PLAIN VIEW-FORMER BASTLE HOUSE NR GARRIGILL, ALSTON

By Paul Lewis, CVBG Chairman

2012 appearance.

It was 2012 when I was called to survey a house in the North Tyne valley when I noticed evidence of earlier windows buried in the masonry; the height of the building spoke further to the original status of the house. As it happens, the owner took my advice and removed all the cement mortar from the walls and re-pointed in traditional lime mortar. There was an unexpected bonus – not only were 17th century mullioned windows exposed but also the smaller window openings and first floor door opening of its origins as a defensible bastle house. It also explained why the walls were over 1 metre thick and the roof made from cruck frames. We will hopefully be able to make a study of bastle houses in the area in 2025 ▪

2014 appearance.

6. THE HISTORIC BUILDING DOCTOR – CHAPTER 5 TRADITIONAL PAINTS

By Paul Lewis BSc(Hons)MRICS CVBG Chairman

1. National Trust Shop, Grasmere (Google Image)

"In whitewashing or colour-washing the outside walls there are two objectives: the protection of the wall from the weather and the production of a colour suitable to the object coloured and pleasing to the eye" - from Louden's Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture 1853.

In this simple statement Louden explains how the most common of traditional paints, limewash, performs at both functional and aesthetic levels. It was understood for centuries that solid masonry walls must remain breathable and water resistant, as well as beautiful. He expanded further, "Limewashes do not prevent the atmosphere from evaporating the moisture of the wall in dry weather yet exclude from its surfaces driving rains." It was understood that walls should not be totally waterproof but should act dynamically to absorb and dispel moisture by evaporation.

This simple material was readily available wherever limestone was found within travelling distance. Once burnt in a kiln, the quicklime so produced would be slaked with water to make a putty that would be stored in air-less vats for a year or so before use. The putty could then be mixed with water to make a paint that would be applied in 4-5 layers, curing slowly by combining with carbon dioxide from the air and increasing in opacity with each application. Properly applied, limewash can provide a finish that can last 10 – 12 years.

2. Townend House, Troutbeck with its limewash walls and lead paint to joinery and rainwater goods; the use of lead paint is now licenced by Law due to its toxicity.

William Wordsworth railed against the glaring white walls of the Victorian villas that were being erected around him in the Lake District. He would have been more familiar with the coloured washes like those of the National Trust Shop in Grasmere (see Plate1). In central and southern lakes mineral earths and pigments were often added to create deep ochre and brown washes. Paint analysis established that Allan Bank (1803) was originally a dark ochre colour when Wordsworth came to live here soon after it was built (see Plate 3). In contrast, Townend (Plate 2) began with a light ochre finish but changed to white with the passage of time.

A technique often used by experienced owners or builders was to make hot limewash using the quicklime as it came from the kiln, but it is an extremely dangerous process so **DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME!** The quicklime was added directly to water in a tin bath, a little at a time, and gradually stirred to the consistency of single cream. However, this highly exothermic reaction could produce temperatures of over 150 degrees centigrade if not managed correctly and violent boiling and spitting could occur, causing skin burns and severe eye injuries. Nevertheless, the resultant limewash would have superior adhesion to the hard slates and granites of the region. This is the preferred method of manufacturing and applying limewash now followed by National Trust on their properties in Cumbria but is conducted solely through experienced operatives.

In modern times, the use of oil and polymer-based paints to walls have not always been beneficial, obstructing the natural drying process and retaining moisture in the masonry, sometimes with unsightly consequences or inducing surface degradation, as at the Moot Hall, Keswick (see Plate 4). Some sandstones are vulnerable to surface degradation in these conditions when mineral salts form at surface of the stone as moisture can no longer dissipate through the mortar joints. Sadly, the local 19th century custom of applying oil paints to window and door masonry is currently causing similar widespread problems.

At the Moot Hall, the degree of damage to the masonry warranted removal of the oil-based paint to restore a breathable surface; this was achieved using high pressure steam to strip the paint from the stone. Where a decorative finish was needed, a modern mineral paint was used that was as breathable as limewash but with an expected life of around 20 – 25 years.

3. Allan Bank, Grasmere finished with a modern mineral paint to walls of lime renders and modern cement-based renders

Mineral paints have become the modern breathable alternative to limewashes, but they achieve a mono-tone finish (see Plate 3) that does not always achieve a sympathetic appearance on older vernacular buildings, such as the National Trust shop in Grasmere (Plate 1). Careful thought is always needed to consider the character of the walls and how light will play upon them.

Internally, limewash had several uses to both walls, ceilings, and high-level woodwork. In cow houses, limewash was periodically applied, its caustic chemistry helping to control moulds and fungi; spiders hate limewash too! Some National Trust tenants are still required to do this as part of their tenancy.

To make wall finishes more durable from rubbing and dusting, milk fat or linseed oil were added to limewash; these mixes can still be obtained from suppliers today to a range of standard colours. Historically, some people would use pigments to create their own colours, a practice still followed today. The common use of limewash to walls helped with the control of dampness as its high breathability would help moisture escape from walls both internally and externally.
It was only later in the 19th century after the advent of the railways is chalk-based distemper used, and only then ceilings.

4. Oil-based paints employed on the masonry of the Moot Hall, Keswick

The painting of internal woodwork became more common in the 18th century when linseed oil was used as the basis for decorative finishes. It is only in the late 19th century and early 20th century are petrochemical oils and solvents used in paints for their quicker drying qualities. In both, lead pigments could be used so it is always prudent to use a proprietary testing kit to check if lead oxides are present; if so, preparation can be limited to dry scraping and a special face mask can be used.

The modern paint industry has now responded to the needs of traditional buildings with a variety of breathable, non-toxic painting materials and many of the traditional paint recipes can still be sourced from specialist suppliers. Clay paints have now been developed for internal walls that offer high breathability and produce a deep matt appearance of high opacity. They are particularly useful for application by spray to large wall areas of bare masonry. Mineral paints are available for external walls but should not be used internally due to their high bond

strength that can contribute to the loss of paint stratigraphy in historic buildings where elaborate painting schemes may exist under modern finishes.

Traditional linseed oil paints are popular once more and achieve a flexible, durable finish for woodwork, albeit with a longer drying period between coats. With the banning of highly volatile petroleum oils in paints, manufacturers have now produced ranges of water-based eggshell paints that are available in a range of sheens and avoid the high gloss finish more appropriate to modern buildings.

As discussed in earlier chapters, the need to maintain breathability of the fabric is a foremost consideration when considering redecoration of traditional buildings. In some circumstances, removal of modern oil and polymer-based paints may need to be considered, as discussed above. Once the existing materials of the fabric and their finishes is understood, both traditional and modern paint equivalents can now achieve the functional and aesthetic objectives to which Louden referred in the middle of the 19th century ▪

7. **The Puzzle of High Stott Park House and Cottage** by Kathleen Cole

On 28 March Paul Lewis led a three-hour expedition to High Stott Park House and Cottage, located near Lakeside and the West shore of Windermere. He began by sharing that such dwellings were part of the 'great rebuilding' that occurred throughout Cumbria beginning in the mid-1600's due to greater political and economic stability, and improved health and safety. At varying times throughout its history, the building now shared by these two dwellings was expanded, divided, modified, re-purposed and modernised many times over, creating quite an architectural puzzle. Although owners Keith James and Mark and Judith Horsely have long conducted their own research, Paul and about a dozen CVBG members were eager to help unravel its story.

The elegant southern elevation of Stott Park House.

Working in small groups, we closely examined the exterior and interior for clues. Experienced members coached newer ones to look at features such as the shapes of the building and its extensions; window sizes, placement, and sill materials; the spatial arrangements of rooms and doors; varying thicknesses of walls; styles of fireplaces; ironmongery including hinges, handles, and door and window latches and locks; and last but not at all least, exposed beams holding up the ceilings, floors, and roofs. Paul used a drone to take photos of the complex array of rooflines and further illuminate phases of construction.

We learned how Stott Park Cottage, which now comprises the northern and oldest 'half' of the building, began in the traditional manner: as a linear range of two rooms divided by a wall with a fireplace, and one room leading directly into the other. The entire building would have been one-room deep, with a ladder used to get to the first floor. The south end of the range once contained a cantilevered and covered spinning gallery, and although long since walled in, its platform and the beams that still hold it up (with remaining timber posts) remain exposed. A cow byre would have been located below the spinning gallery, and a much larger barn behind it.

The traditional linear arrangement of Stott Park Cottage.

Stott Park House, which comprises the southern and 'younger' half of the building, was likely developed in the 1700's, when the byre and barn were significantly modified to create an elegant three-storey home for a prosperous yeoman farmer in the new Georgian style. The key exterior element noted by the group was the symmetry of the South facing front, and the tall windows with their chamfered edges and large panes of glass. Inside, way up on the second floor, we saw evidence of how the original roof beams of the barn had been modified to raise the height of the wall and make the impressive Georgian front.

Although a date stone above the door to Stott Park Cottage claims the building to be from 1712 this merely refers to one of its many phases of development. Its beginning could very well date back to a much humbler dwelling from Tudor times, with many changes in fortune and style in between. These eventually led to the separation of the building into two dwellings, culminating in the large Georgian

Stott Park House. A lovely interior curved wall on the ground floor of the House posed a bit of a mystery, and members joined in a later review to consider its origins that hint at an even earlier phase. Modern kitchens and baths have continually been added through the years, making the entire building a fascinating study of phases ▪

An early spinning gallery survives in part, enclosed within later fabric.

The recording team and owners enjoying a break and review of findings.