CUMBRIA VERNACULAR BUILDINGS GROUP

NEWSLETTER Number Three Spring 2014

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.

ENCLOSED

- List of members and contact details.
- Sedbergh weekend booking form and bursary offer. May 9 – 11.
- Bastles and Peles visits – booking form. 15 June, and Tithe Barns, 5 July.

1. Our membership continues to grow. **A warm welcome** to those who have joined CVBG recently. Now standing at 94, maybe we will have a hundred members by the time of our second AGM in September. Mike Kingsbury, treasurer, has made arrangements for subscriptions to be paid through the bank, for those who prefer to do that. Details in the next Newsletter, in time for subscription renewals, due on 1 August.

This issue of the Newsletter is in what we hope will be its regular format. We plan to mail out four issues a year, around 25 March, June, September and December, with up-dates by e mail in between. Recording groups continue to work around the county, and are arranged informally from members in the vicinity of the buildings. Please let us know if you wish to be involved.

2. Forthcoming events.

- Monday, 28 April. **Walkabout Alston**, 2pm – 4pm, with Alastair Robertson and Richard Wilson. Free, but please book. Meet at the Market Cross in the centre of Alston.

- Friday evening to Sunday afternoon, 9 – 11 May, **Sedbergh Recording Weekend**, organised jointly with Yorkshire Vernacular Buildings Study Group, who have generously offered one of their two bursaries of £150 to CVBG members. See enclosed forms. This should be an invaluable opportunity to practise recording with experienced people.
- Sunday, 15 June, Guided visits to **Bastles and Peles, Defensive Buildings of the Border.** 10.30 – 4.30. Car travel. Bring a packed lunch. Free event, but please book.
- Saturday 5 July, Mike Lea will lead a visit to **Tithe Barns at Crosby Garrett and Great Musgrave.** Picnic by River Eden, and Rush Bearing at Musgrave church, 2pm. Please book.

3. Reports on events attended

- **Vernacular Architecture Group winter meeting, Leicester, 4 and 5 January, 2014.**

120 members attended this annual event, for which the theme was, ***Attention to Detail.***

Opening the conference, *David Clark* spoke about a building in Oxford which was studied as it was being demolished, giving an opportunity to record previously unseen details of construction.

James Ayres looked at the persistence of craft skills in vernacular buildings.

Tony Buxton used probate inventories to explain the use of rooms in seventeenth century houses, using the town of Thame as a case study.

Several speakers had looked at the range of marks on timber, and what they can reveal about the history of buildings. *Joe Thompson* spoke about roof joints in rafters and was able to demonstrate the order in which they were assembled. *John McCormack* and *Duncan James* discussed the purposes of various peg holes in timbers, as supports for shelves, bars and even ladders during the construction phase of the building.

Dan Miles described assembly marks on timber, using Arabic numerals while *Duncan James* gave examples of Roman numerals used for the same purpose. This was sometimes idiosyncratic, eg VVV for 15. *Nick Hill* showed rare red ochre marks on timbers and asked for other instances which members may have seen. *Lee Prosser*'s presentation was concerned with the marks on timber imported from the Baltics. Thought to represent tallying systems, for batches of

wood from Gdansk (Poland), Memel (now Klaipeda in Lithuania) and Scandinavia, scripts represented cultural traditions of counting now lost.

Several members gave short papers on fixtures and fittings, such as doors, windows and latches. *Nick Hill* showed examples of the enigmatic burn marks, made by tapers, on furniture and internal timbers. He showed that they could not have been the result of accidental burning, and explained the experiments he had carried out to replicate the seemingly random marks, the purpose of which remains unexplained.

Patrick Baty gave a fascinating insight into the analysis of paint and the information which scientific study can reveal. *Lucy Jessop* spoke about the recent study by English Heritage of buildings on Alston Moor. She concentrated on surviving bastles, many of which have been subject to later alterations, but which still retain evidence of the former arrangements for living at first floor level.

Mike Williams described the development of textile mills in south-west England, from vernacular structures, to purpose built factories, concluding a vast range of papers which gave much encouragement to look carefully at buildings for details which can tell a great deal about their construction and use.

(June Hall, January 2014)

- **Aspects of North West Architecture:** a review of the study day 8th February 2014 in honour of John Champness

The Centre for North West Regional Studies (recently renamed as the Regional Heritage Centre) at Lancaster University held a study day in honour of John Champness in February. John Champness had a varied career but for over 25 years he worked for Lancashire County Council, latterly as their County Conservation Officer within their Planning Department. He wrote a number of books on the architecture and history of Lancashire including "*Country Houses of Lancashire and their Builders*" and "*Thomas Harrison: Georgian Architect of Chester and Lancaster 1744-1829*" both of which are still available to purchase from the website: http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/users/cnwrs/

Whilst much of John's published work was focussed on "polite" rather than "vernacular" architecture there are few really grand houses that have been built in Lancashire. He drew inspiration from the architectural articles that to this day still appear in every edition of

Country Life. He lists 24 of these in his book of houses that have been featured from the Lancashire area though some of these are actually in Cumbria such as Hutton-in-the-Forest, Rigmaden Park and Sizergh Castle and some like Holker Hall which are now in Cumbria. One of the best talks of the day was given by Dr John Goodall, the current Architectural Editor of *Country Life*, on the subject of "*Country Life and the English Country House: the story of an unlikely partnership*". What some members may be interested to note is that by the end of 2014 their back catalogue of architecture articles will be available online (for a subscription) or through some libraries.

Another excellent talk was given by Dr Alan Crosby of the British Association for Local History "Music in a Lancashire country house: Rufford Old Hall in the 1730s". In 1735 an inventory of the contents of the house was drawn up because the then owner, Sir Thomas Hesketh, fell on hard times and all his possessions had to be sold. Probate wills and inventories are an invaluable source for any house or local historian but even for a well to do yeoman farmer were usually only about a page long. This one was considerably larger and it has been possible to recreate the music that was being played from the musical instruments and sheet music listed in the inventory.

Another talk of interest was given by Peter de Figueiredo, a Historic Buildings Advisor, on "Lancaster Castle: Past and Future". The prison within the castle was closed in 2012 and most of the interior fittings associated within the prison have now been stripped out revealing a number of previously hidden architectural features. There is a rare opportunity to visit the Castle for the first time in its 900 year old history on 26th April when the Society of Architectural Historians are leading a visit (see www.sahgb.org.uk for details – tickets £40 including lunch) which will include the Norman Great Tower, the thirteenth century gatehouse and other medieval fortifications

(Mike Kingsbury, February 2014)

- **Vernacular Architecture in the Northwest**, Lancashire Local History Federation, Haslingden, 22 February.

Four papers were presented at this well attended meeting. It was good to see the regional characteristics of our neighbouring county.

First, Kevin Illingworth, a member of CVBG, from Hebden Bridge, showed slides of buildings from all over *Lancashire*, to illustrate the regional features he has noticed on his travels. He drew attention to the details occurring in different localities; the coving under jetties on

timber framed buildings around Levenshulme; the late 17th century single-storey stone porches in the Milnrow area; the dual purpose buildings for hens, over pigsties ("hennery-piggeries") in the Birch district; and the "Settle area" decorated doorheads occurring in the Forest of Bowland.

Kathy Fishwick talked about *Weavers' Cottages*. She concentrated on the period between the invention of spinning machinery in the 1770s, which speeded up yarn/thread production, and the establishment of the factories or mills of the 1820s. More yarn led to the construction of purpose-built loom shops. These took various forms. Additions to farmhouses were built by entrepreneurs, with outside steps, for taking in the yarn and for the weavers to use, and rows of cottages with loomshops on the first floor, or adjoining the living accommodation are recognisable today, by the large windows, lighting the work rooms.

Cotton requires a damp atmosphere, therefore weaving was done on the ground floors or in basements, while wool is best woven in dry conditions, usually on an upper storey.

Andrew Lowe gave his talk on *Bank barns, Bee boles and Boskins*, a review of the farm buildings of the Lake District. Bank barns were generally built along the slope, with a ramp to the vehicle door, and a winnowing door on the opposite wall. This was an important feature, and often carried a dated doorhead. Dates recorded range from 1659 to 1805. Farm buildings in South Lakeland have canopies on brackets, over entrances, while further north, porches with side walls are usual. Other features shown included bee boles, (niches in stone walls, where straw bee skeps were protected from the weather); pigeon houses, often in gables of barns; stack stones, on which temporary frames were placed at hay time or harvest, to raise stacks off the ground; livestock stalls; and wrestler slates – interlocking slates at the ridge of buildings, a feature seen in only one other location, the Tarn Valley on the Massif Central of France.

Michael Nevell spoke about Lancashire buildings, showing examples of buildings from c1500 to 1850. These included halls, farmhouses and more examples of weavers' workshops, some surviving in central Manchester.

- **Beyond the Building**, Day School and AGM of Yorkshire Vernacular Buildings Study Group, in cooperation with Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Leeds, 15 March, 2014.

Yorkshire Vernacular Buildings Study Group

The talks in the programme examined sources for the historical context of buildings, other than the fabric itself.

Gill Cookson presented images – old photographs, topographical illustrations and paintings, early editions of Ordnance Survey maps, tithe and enclosure maps, building plans and aerial photographs. Many of these can be found on the internet.

Alison Armstrong looked at the historic landscape of Craven, to demonstrate the information which can be gained from understanding settlement patterns, land use, ownership, etc., eg medieval monastic holdings, deer parks, forest, and enclosure of common pasture.

Ian Bailey explained the background to the 1910 Land Tax documents, and the detailed descriptions of every property in the country. Summaries are held in county record offices, while The National Archives, Kew, hold the full reports, which often include sketch plans and information on room use.

Barbara Rearden and **Mary Twentyman** gave examples of buildings they had researched with their local history society, Low Moor, Brighouse. Unlike the usual procedure of vernacular architecture enthusiasts, who start by examining existing buildings, they began by using documents, in this case, the rent book of the Low Moor Company (ironworks), 1846 to 1888. They then went "house hunting" to locate the buildings.

David Cant completed the programme with a talk which summarised documentary sources for building history. He demonstrated this by looking at records used in researching a house, Old Edge, at Heptonstall, which included a rare building contract between the owner and a stone mason, relating to changes evident in the structure.

The AGM followed, and members were reminded of the joint YVBSG/CVBG recording weekend at Sedbergh, 9 – 11 May. (Booking form enclosed).

(June Hall, March 2014)

4. CVBG Study Day, "Out of the Ground – Materials used in Cumbrian Vernacular Buildings", 8 March, Burgh by Sands.

Thirty three members (a third of our members), made their way to Burgh, on the Solway, on one of the first fine days this year. For some, it was their first visit to this secluded corner of Cumbria, which has a very "separate" atmosphere. All the speakers are members of CVBG.

Dr Alan Smith, Keswick. Cumbrian Stone

Stone is the dominant building material in Cumbria. It was the natural and obvious construction material to use throughout most of the County. Cumbria has an unrivalled variety of rock types – igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic, ranging throughout the geological timescale. Although the geology of much of the area is complex, the literature and map coverage is very good, although records of quarrying are poor and it is often difficult to trace back accurately to actual sources of stone.

Two particular difficulties for the study of vernacular buildings in the County are the practice of rendering of buildings to improve weatherproofing and the large areas of Lowland Cumbria where the bedrock is covered with superficial materials. This latter point was particularly relevant to the Burgh-by-Sands area and was illustrated by the speaker and by the visits to local buildings.

The speaker reviewed the seven main groups of rocks in Cumbria, illustrating them with pictures of the main rock types and some typical buildings. The four main rock groups of the upland area of the Lake District (The Skiddaw Group, the Volcanic rocks, the Silurian sediments of the south and the large number of granites and other intrusives) are all hard, resistant materials, often difficult to work for construction and hence reflected in the generally rugged nature of vernacular buildings. Imported materials came into these areas for buildings of importance and high status or for particular purposes. Walling material was everywhere to hand, but was often irregular in shape, heavy and difficult to dress. Good roofing slates do occur, but were local in distribution and hence had to be transported greater distances at cost. The lowland areas of Cumbria underlain by Carboniferous limestones and sandstones and by Permo-Triassic rocks provided easier sources of freestone and other construction materials.

Some brief case studies of buildings in the Keswick area illustrated the difficulties of finding and working the local rocks, the use of locally 'gathered material' in early buildings, the impact after 1850 of the quarrying of the 'Lakeland Green Slates' from the local volcanic sequences and the widespread rendering over of walls. The practice of

opening quarries for particular buildings and the re-use of stone were also discussed.

David Tyler and **Helen Evans** (of Jack in the Green Lime) gave a talk on the varied uses of lime plasters and mortars in Cumbrian vernacular buildings. David and Helen trained as archaeologists before getting involved in conservation so have a unique perspective on the historic buildings on which they work.

Topics covered included lime production and the lime cycle, lime plastering, rendering and pointing. Dave explained some of the damp issues that present themselves in old houses can be due to inappropriate modern materials being used in recent decades and that lime plaster (including the replacement of wooden lathwork) lends itself very well to repairs.

The second part of the talk was a case study illustrating the recent repair of a lath and lime smoke hood in a south Cumbrian hall house following a chimney fire. The works were wholly undertaken using traditional methods and materials (including a parging mix made from lime, cow dung and lots of hair!) The audience was treated to a visual and anecdotal account of the works, as well as samples of wooden laths, lime plasters and a very sooty hairy lump of old chimney parging!

Dave Tyler at work around the spice cupboard dated 1656 at Crosslands, near Gatebeck, the home of John Audland, farmer and linen draper, and one of the first Quakers.

Smoke hood reconstruction in traditional lathwork, lime plaster and timber, by Dave Tyler, at Natland Hall, near Kendal.

For more information on lime plasters and mortars, repairs to old buildings and links to useful building conservation websites and books, see: www.jackinthegreenlime.co.uk/cumbria.html

Peter Messenger, Silloth

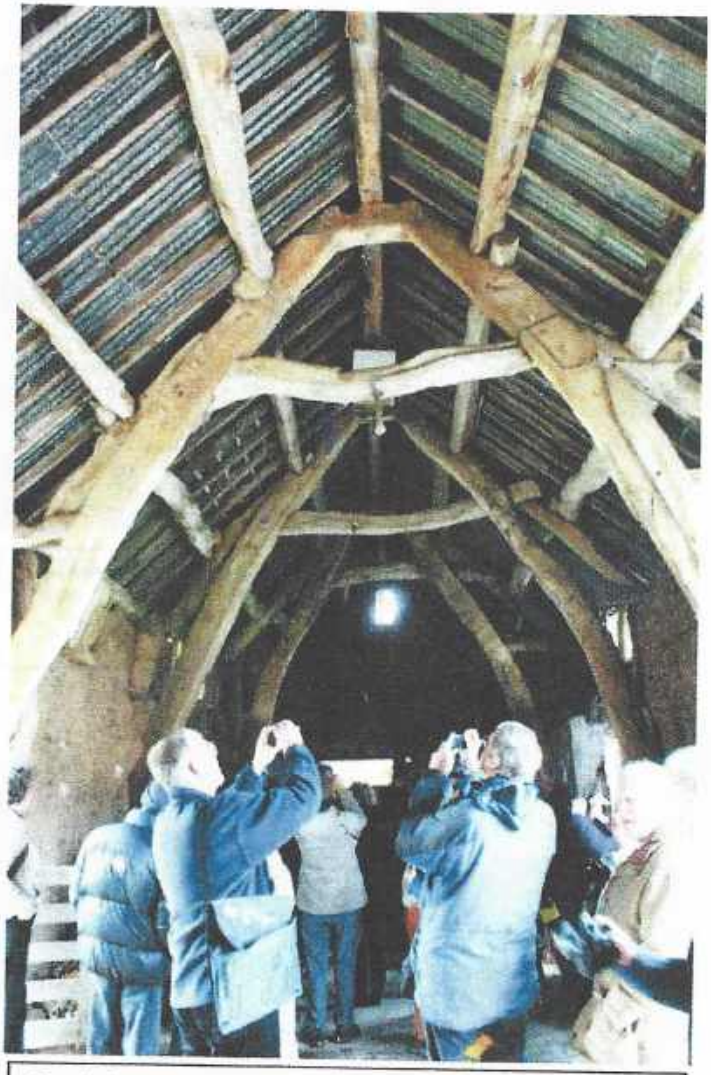
Most of the clay 'dabbins', as they are known locally, are quite modest structures. Nearly all are rendered and it is often impossible to detect that a building is built of clay until the building starts to decay. When render is removed, falls off or a clay wall collapses (sometimes without warning) the structure becomes visible and the clay layers, each of which is usually between 50-150mm deep, are separated by thin layers of straw which are only millimetres thick. Examples of this form of construction have been found in Wales and Scotland but they don't appear to exist anywhere else in England but on the Solway Plain. They were once very common on both sides of the Solway but clearance and improvement has reduced this to three surviving examples. In Cumbria examples date from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, including cottages, farmhouses and farm buildings, many of which are cruck framed. Numbers have been diminishing over the last century or more, as the use of unburnt clay as a building material eventually ceased and the craftsmen, capable of maintaining these buildings, died out.

After Nina Jennings book on the 'Clay Dabbin' came out in 2003 English Heritage took a greater interest in these structures. Since then it has been responsible for supporting research and training as well as promoting the better care of Cumbria's Clay Dabbins. Training for builders and for homeowners in construction and repair techniques has been very successful and, shortly, the final dendrochronology sampling reports will be available.

The work that has been undertaken has revealed an example of clay building in Long Marton (in the stone belt of the Eden valley); over a thousand documented examples of clay buildings, as recorded in 1910-15; and we now have dendro-dates for timber in clay buildings ranging from the late 15th century to the late 18th century. Finally evidence is coming to light of clay walled construction where shuttering has been used rather than the traditional 'quick process' that is normally found in Cumbria. One possible explanation is that this method was used, apparently in the mid 19th century, at a time when the traditional craft skills had been lost. An alternative is that the community effort that made a laborious process manageable was no longer available and shuttering was considered to be more effective and economic.

The Messenger and the King! Peter Messenger speaks to the CVBG, beside the statue of Edward 1, who died on Burgh Marsh in 1307.
(Photograph: Bob Greaves)

Cottage, Burgh by Sands: clay walls contain fragments of 18th century pottery and clay pipe.
(Photograph: Bob Greaves)



Cruck barn at Cross Farm, Burgh by Sands.
(Photograph: Mike Kingsbury)

Clay built, cross-passage house, thatched of 1615, with attached farm buildings on the longhouse plan. Lamonby Farm, Burgh by Sands.
(Photo: Kevin Illingworth)

Dan Elsworth, Ulverston. Timber in Cumbria: Use and Re-Use

Cumbria is not blessed with large numbers of timber framed buildings; there are few certain examples and other possible ones, but they are far from common. My talk therefore concentrated on what is found in terms of timber in vernacular buildings in Cumbria. Timber was obviously used for building from an early date, as shown by archaeological evidence, and there are some examples of well-preserved complex elements of timber buildings of Roman and medieval date in Carlisle. However, Brunskill suggested that timber supplies had been so seriously damaged during the medieval period that they were hardly worth a mention, but Alfred Fell's *The Early Iron Industry in Furness and District* refers to several documents that list timber and woodland formerly belonging to Furness Abbey. Nevertheless, woodlands do seem to have been badly damaged by the activities of the iron industry felling wood for producing charcoal. Bloomsmithies were ultimately abolished by the Crown to preserve woodland, leading to some paying 'bloomsmithy rent' in order to be allowed to carry on their trade. Again, archaeological evidence from towns such as Cockermouth shows that timber was extensively used

in medieval buildings, but often in conjunction with other materials such as stone or clay.

Examples of surviving medieval timber are relatively rare, but tend to be in the form of elaborate trusses, or cruck frames. Later (c1600 - 1800), timber will typically be found in one of a number of places, primarily as roof trusses, where cruck frames continue but are gradually replaced by tie beam types although re-use of pieces of former crucks is common. Timber will also be found used as lintels and beams, with re-use again common but also associated in the former case with timber mullion windows, as well as in more decorative items, which can be useful for dating, or for internal (non supporting) walls. Other elements of interest that can be associated with timber include geometric symbols (the 'daisy wheel'), perhaps to ward off evil spirits, carpenter's marks and levelling marks, taper marks, and pegs or holes.

In the later period (c1800 - 1900) timber began to become more uniform following the introduction of powered saws, and truss types begin to have standard forms. One feature to look out for, however, is the presence of imported Baltic timber, a reddish coloured wood, often evident because of rows of lines and other symbols marked across it.

In general the key issues with timber in Cumbria are selected and specific use, and lots of re-use.

5. June Hall led **Short courses at Brampton and Workington**, in February and March (four weekly afternoon sessions at each venue), which reached new people, several of whom have joined CVBG. Invitations to record houses were made, there, and at a talk she gave to Brampton and Longtown Rotary Club in March.

6. Cumbria Archive Service, revised opening times from 7 April 2014.

From 7th April 2014, opening hours will be as follows:

Barrow: Closed Mondays; open Tuesday-Friday 9.30-13.00, 14.00-17.00 and Wednesday evening 17.00-19.00. Open the 1st Saturday every month 10.00-13.00, 14.00-16.00.

Carlisle: Closed Mondays; open Tuesday–Friday 9.30-12.30, 13.30-17.00. Open the 2nd Saturday every month 9.30-12.30, 13.00-16.00.

Kendal: Closed Mondays; open Tuesday-Friday 9.30-1700.

Whitehaven: Closed Mondays, open Tuesday-Friday 9.30-12.30, 13.30-1700 and Wednesday evening 17.00-19.00. Open every other Saturday 9.00-13.00.

7. Latin Inscriptions.

Jane Penman has translated an inscription over a door at Eamont Bridge. From the Westmorland Hearth Tax returns, we know that HP was Henry Pecke. In 1674 – 75, he paid tax on one hearth, representing a modest house.

Jane writes –

The Latin text reads: *OMNE SOLUM FORTI PATRIA EST*

This is part of a line from the Latin poet Publius Ovidius Naso, known to the English as Ovid, who is ranked alongside Virgil and Horace as one of the greatest Roman poets. It comes from his poem *Fasti*, a long work which describes the origins of Roman festivals and in doing so gives information about many myths and traditions. The *Fasti* was published in 8 AD but left incomplete, because it was in this year that Ovid was banished by the Emperor Augustus to Tomis, a remote town on the Black Sea where he lived miserably for the rest of his life; he was never allowed to return to Rome.

Ovid (43 BC – AD 17) lived most of his adult life under Augustus, who eventually exiled him because he considered his poetry subversive. The tone of Ovid's love poetry, which is light-hearted rather than passionate and offers instructions on seduction, was not in keeping with Augustus' back-to-basics moral reform policies. However, there may have been underlying political reasons as well.

Ovid's poetry, particularly his *Metamorphoses*, enjoyed huge popularity in all later periods and had great influence on western art and literature (Shakespeare draws on it, most famously in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *Midsummer Night's Dream*). The *Fasti* fluctuated in popularity more than Ovid's other works, but was widely read in the 15th to 18th centuries.

Why was this extract chosen by HP of Eamont Bridge?

The entire elegiac couplet goes:

omne solum forti patria est, ut piscibus aequor,

ut volucri vacuo quicquid in orbe patet.

'The whole earth is a homeland to the brave, as the sea is to the fishes, as the empty air that lies open before a bird.'

- At the least, HP probably wanted to establish his credentials as a man of grammar school education who knew his classics.

- The choice of this particular text, with its credibly egalitarian tone, might reflect non-conformist sentiments.

- The words are used as the motto of the Lewis family of Warner Hall, from Brecon in Wales. There might be a connection, or it might be just coincidence, since the text is well known and might appeal to a family with a warrior ethos as much as to one with egalitarian principles.

8. **The Newsletter** is for members. Contributions of news, questions, observations, photographs, drawings, etc., are welcome. The deadline for the Summer issue is 1 June, to any of the committee.

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