CUMBRIA VERNACULAR BUILDINGS GROUP

NEWSLETTER Number Four Summer 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

- **Booking forms** to return before **31 July.**

  Wednesday 6 August, FURNESS VILLAGES TOUR and lunch at Gleaston Mill.

  Wednesday 20 August, *Extra event,* second visit to Alston.

  Saturday 20 September, SECOND AGM, and exploration of Hawkshead.

  Sunday 28 September, *Extra event,* follow-up to Sedbergh weekend.

  Wednesday 8 October, RYEDALE FOLK MUSEUM, YORKSHIRE.

- **Membership renewal form, due by 31 July.**

As we approach the **first anniversary of CVBG,** we hope that you have found membership good value and a worthwhile experience – a combination of deepening knowledge of Cumbria's rich built heritage, contribution to research, development of skills and enjoyment of the company of fellow enthusiasts. Events have been very well attended, with between a quarter and a third of our members at all but the residential weekend. The subscription will remain the same for 2014-2015, at £10 for an individual, £15 for two people at the same address and £25 for groups. For this, you receive the following benefits:

- 4 x newsletters by post;
- 4 x email updates in between;
- Programme of monthly events (2 study days, exploratory walks and tours around Cumbria, and one out-of-county tour);
- Christmas meal in an interesting venue;
- Recording groups, with training.

The programme for 2015 is in preparation. Your suggestions, offers and/or requests are welcome.

1. Alston Walkabout, 28 April, 2014.

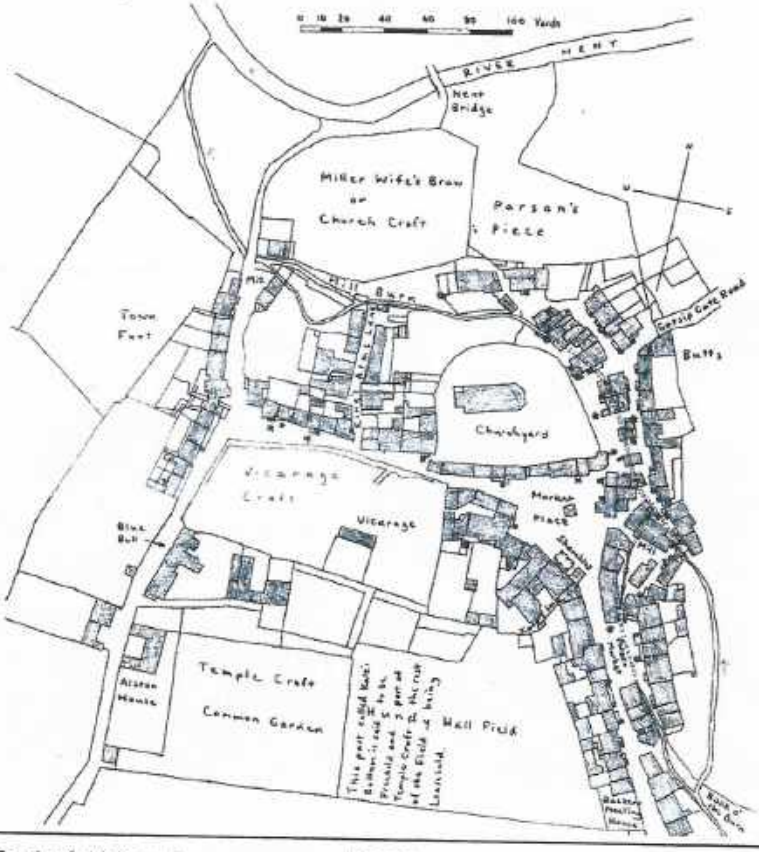
Alastair Robertson and Richard Wilson led members round this unique little town, high in the Pennines and at least twenty miles across bleak moorland from any other sizeable settlement. Alston Moor drains to the east, into the Tyne, Wear and Tees, and is historically in Durham Diocese. Alston once served the isolated farms and hamlets as a market town, and still retains urban features. Evidence of subdivisions and extensions to buildings reflect the fluctuating population, which waxed and waned with the fortunes of mining, principally for lead. The town is built of local stone, on a steeply sloping site, which has its influence on structures.

There is currently some discussion about the numerous houses which have, or clearly had, external staircases. These may be derived from a style of defensive house (with first floor domestic accommodation above the former livestock quarters), the bastle, which was peculiar to the Border area in the late sixteenth/early seventeenth centuries. Alternatively, they may in part, be a response to the urban tradition of "living over the shop" and the steep sites. This, and other questions which arose on the walk, require further research.

The walk started at the Market Cross, rebuilt several times since its original construction in 1765. Alastair has been investigating Alston's history for many years and was able to point out many details which otherwise may have been missed. Most of the buildings in *Front Street* have an eighteenth or nineteenth century appearance. The Friends Meeting House, (Quakers) of 1732, stands with its gable to the street, unlike the commercial properties. In the *Back o' the Beck*, and *The Butts*, back roads away from through traffic, there are many seventeenth century features – mullioned windows, moulded doorways and date stones. These relate to the granting of a one thousand year lease for land, in 1617.

At the top of the town, the old forge, once powered by the beck, and the mill dam and race are still evident. The water was used again, further downstream, by former corn and saw mills. Alston High Mill, originally for corn, and used until recently for various industrial purposes, still retains a water wheel and other machinery. Its future is under discussion. Our walk took us past the old fire station, early nonconformist places of worship, a school built for girls and infants in 1812 (now closed) and the parish church. A map of 1775 clearly showed how some buildings had been altered.

As we could not see the whole town in the time available, Alastair has invited us for a second visit to look at the western area of Alston. (See booking form.)



Part of Alston, from a map of 1775, re-drawn by Richard Wilson.

2. Sedbergh Recording weekend, 9 – 11 May, 2014, a joint event CVBG and YVBSG.

This weekend event is a regular feature of the Yorkshire group's annual programme. As Sedbergh was once part of the West Riding, and is now in Cumbria, both groups have an interest in the buildings. We are grateful to Mike Kingsbury, our treasurer who planned the weekend. Mike is a member of both groups, and also of Sedbergh History Society, whose members offered buildings for recording.

Six houses were recorded, in small groups: Wheelwright Cottage and workshop, in Sedbergh; Wardses Cottage and barn and Low Branthwaites and two barns, both at Frostrow; Crosedale Beck Farmhouse, on the Howgill road; and two houses in Dent, Flintergill House and The White House. Each group spent the Saturday measuring, drawing, taking photographs and working out the development of each building.

Members drawing up plans in The People's Hall, Sedbergh. (Photograph, Mike Kingsbury).

Friday evening was spent in Sedbergh, with dinner at The Bull Hotel, and a talk on the area's history from Kevin Lancaster, who also led a walk round the town on Sunday afternoon. On Saturday evening, dinner was at Farfield Mill, a woollen mill within living memory, and now an arts centre with a focus on textiles. June Hall gave a talk on Cumbria's buildings.

On Sunday morning, work began on writing up reports and drawing plans. This work will continue, along with historical research on the buildings.

Ten of the forty who attended are members of both CVBG and YVBSG, but only one of CVBG alone. The two bursaries went to Yorkshire members, as no one from Cumbria applied. It was a really worthwhile weekend, and we are grateful to YVBSG for sharing their annual event. Their next one, in 2015, to which we are invited, will be in the historic town of Beverley, East Yorkshire.

CVBG members are invited to a follow-up meeting in The People's Hall, Sedbergh, on Sunday, 28 September, 10.30am – 4.00pm, followed by a guided walk to farmhouses and cottages near Sedbergh. All are welcome, whether or not you were at the recording weekend. The meeting and buffet lunch are free. (See booking form.)

Drawing by Kevin Illingworth of the corbelled chimney on the gable of Low Branthwaites, now inside a later barn. Such chimneys are often associated with smokehoods, inserted to take smoke from early fireplaces. The present fireplace is recent.

3. Bastles and Peles Tour, 15 June, 2014

Twenty-five members met at Askerton Castle, near Bewcastle, to start the tour of defensive buildings of the Border lands of Cumbria. From the middle ages until the Union of the Crowns in 1603, wars between England and Scotland, and between families, had a devastating effect on society, landscape and settlement. Raids and destruction over several centuries have left little record in buildings, apart from the stone structures which were the subject of our visit.

Those who had the means and the power to defend their homes erected buildings which could be defended, on both sides of the present Border. The terms used to define these buildings are still a subject of discussion. **Tower** houses, built by the landed gentry from the fourteenth to the mid sixteenth centuries, are characterised by very thick stone walls, often in excess of four feet/1.3m, having rooms arranged vertically, with living quarters above a non-domestic space. The ground floor may have housed some livestock, although the **barmkin** (defensible wall usually accompanying towers) would have been the principal protection. The term **pele** is generally used for such a house, although it originally referred to the outer wall, (from Latin *palus*, as in pale, palisade, palace, etc.). Variations on the spelling occur in Peil Castle, off the Furness peninsular, Peel Castle, Isle of Man, and elsewhere. Incidentally, in Lithuanian, *pilis* means castle.

Towers were self-contained buildings, although many have been extended over time. Some may have had earlier timber structures, such as halls, attached, but none survive.

The **bastles** (also referred to as *peel houses* or *strong houses*) form a unique development in domestic architecture and only occur in the Borders and upper Clyde valley. They appear to date from the late Elizabethan period, to the early sixteenth century, when tenant farmers were in a position to build homes they could defend. The term *stone house* may apply to bastles, but Brunskill suggests that they are in a separate category. Many have been altered and transformed out of all recognition, but by knowing what to look for, more are being identified. This is a recent field of study, and CVBG can contribute by being observant. The drawings by Richard Wilson in the following article, were made for the field visit, but serve to point out the main features of bastles.

The ground floor, usually entered by a door in the gable wall, was for livestock. The floor to the upper storey was sometimes vaulted in stone, but more usually consisted of massive oak beams, closely spaced, and supporting stone flags. The theory was that if the enemy entered the ground floor, to set fire to the building, only the outer surface of the beams would burn. There was no internal stair to the first floor, but there may have been a means by which the person who went in with the cattle, and barred the door from inside, could use a ladder to reach the upper room, through a trap door, or removable flagstone.

Entrance to the domestic first floor was by a door in the long wall, reached by a ladder which was drawn up. External stone stairs do exist and some may be contemporary with the building. Windows were few and small, with iron bars. Internal divisions do not survive, but at least one hearth was usual. Plan sizes vary, but are usually rectangular, up to 40 feet in length. No original roofs are extant, but thatch is the least likely option. Flag stones are improbable, but turf, readily available, easily replaced and less flammable, seems a plausible option. Dated examples are rare.

CVBG members at Askerton Castle. (Photograph, Kevin Illingworth).

The tour.

Askerton Castle. First recorded, 1295. Evolved over several centuries. East range, two towers linked by a three-storey range, heavily restored in the nineteenth century. First licence to crenellate, 1391. Thomas Dacre's improvements date from the 1590s, according to dendrochronology. Garderobes may date from this time. Members enjoyed attempting to work out the possible development of the building.

Triermain Castle, described as a ruin in 1580, is only represented by a fragment of a tower. Licence to crenellate, 1340.

Upper Denton, Vicar's Pele. This is unique, in having been built as a vicarage. We approached it on foot, crossing the main railway line from Carlisle to Newcastle. The ancient church, now disused and in a burial ground, and the former vicarage which replaced the pele, form an interesting group of buildings. Very ruinous. Bastle-like features, but smaller in plan, being just over 15 by19 feet internally, with massive walls. Fireplace evident on upper floor.

Temon. Farm on the county boundary beside the A69. Two farmhouses (one with ornate doorway of c1700, the other, placed "back-to-back", later) replace the bastle, now used as a barn. Much altered, but with evidence of roof-raising. Small windows with iron bars, and "quenching holes" or stone chutes on the north side.

At Nether Denton, we saw two bastles, the first, **Denton Foot.** This is now a fine house, but shows its origins with a ground floor livestock entrance in the east gable, a first floor entrance, now blocked, on the south wall, and windows which retain their iron bars on the north wall. The rubble walls are about four feet thick. Unusually, there is a datestone, now re-set over a window, in raised letters and numerals – CB 1592 – thought to relate to Christopher Bell, then a tenant of the Gilsland barony.

With permission from the Naworth Castle estate, we walked through woodland and across fields to see the **Stonehouse.** Again, this is a unique survival, being a high-status bastle. Walls are of dressed stone, and two fireplaces can be seen, one on the south wall, finely corbelled. Doors and fireplaces are chamfered, and windows have iron bars, one mullion remains. Until recently, the roof trusses remained *in situ*, but are now fallen and deep in vegetation. The upper floor was clearly sub-divided.

This was a day when we saw some of the earliest domestic buildings in Cumbria, which, although mostly ruined or greatly altered, reveal a turbulent time in the social history of the county and the human response to Border strife.

References –

Brunskill, RW, 2003 *Traditional Buildings of Cumbria*, Cassell

Hyde, M, and Pevsner, N, 2010 *Buildings of England, Cumbria*, Yale University Press

Ramm, HG, McDowell, RW, and Mercer, E, 1970 *Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England), Shielings and Bastles*, HMSO

Ryder, P, 1996 *Bastle Houses in the North Pennines*, North Pennine Heritage Trust

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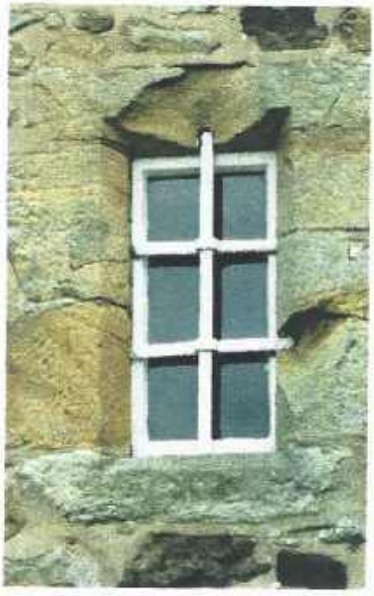
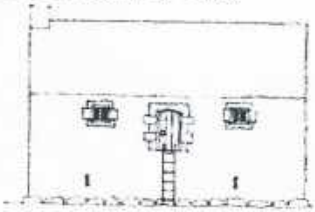


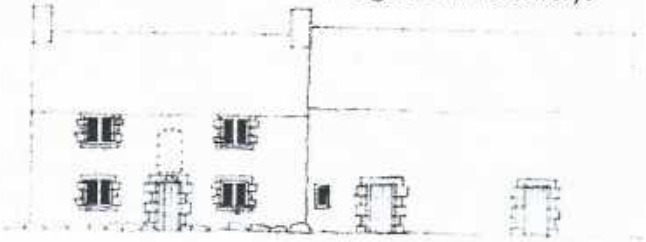
Denton Foot bastle, details. (Photographs, Kevin Illingworth).
Left: Window with interlaced iron bars in situ.
Right: Datestone, 1592.

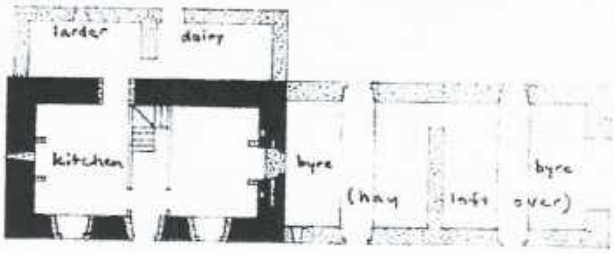
4. The development of Bastles (Drawings by Richard Wilson)

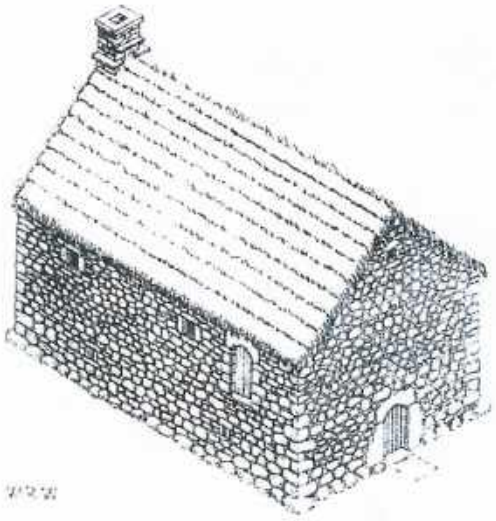
1. Typical bastle as built, c. 1600



2. Living accommodation 'moves downstairs. It was sometimes found necessary to raise the first floor to increase headroom in the converted undercroft. Extensions, often built end on to the original building, compensated for the loss of the bastle's byre. Mullioned windows replaced the small openings; sash windows became common from the mid-eighteenth century.

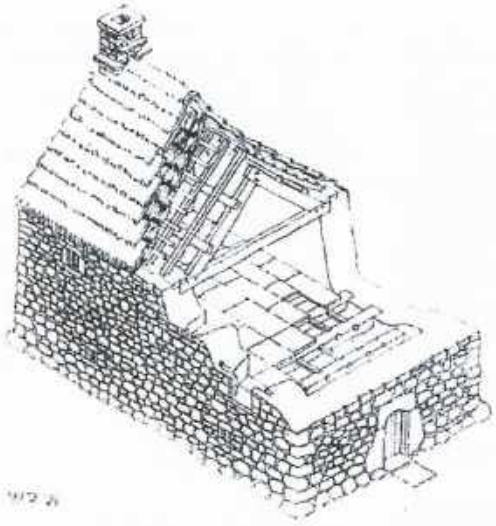






Isometric drawing of typical bastle.

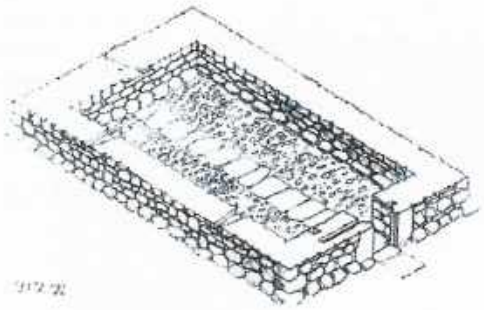
Dimensions and features based on Clarghyll Hall, Alston; roof truss on a demolished bastle at Melkridge, Northumberland.



Interior of domestic accommodation.

All doors were secured with drawbars; windows were small, with iron stanchions. Most floors consisted of closely-spaced heavy oak beams supporting large stone flags; some in Northumberland had stone vaults. No original roof coverings survive; while some steeply pitched gables exist, suggesting heather-thatch, it seems likely that most were covered with less combustible materials.

The trusses of demolished bastles at Melkridge and Haltwhistle were pitched too low for thatch, and probably supported stone flags; where these were not available, living turf, perhaps on a heather base layer, might have been a cheaper alternative.



Interior of byre. The door was harr-hung, pivoted at top and bottom, and was secured by one or more drawbars. Ventilator slits were very narrow. A hatch or removable flagstone enabled the farmhand to retreat into the upper floor after barring the byre door. Rough paving and cobbles drained towards the door.

5. Leeds Symposium on Food History and Traditions, York, 17 May, 2014.

This study day, entitled *Jacks and Jaggers*, consisted of papers on kitchen technology in England, from 1600 to the Second World War. All the papers contained information relevant to vernacular houses, which will help in dating certain features we may find in the rooms we visit.

Peter Brears is a well-known food historian and writer who was formerly Curator of the York Castle Museum, the foremost folk museum in the North. He spoke about cooking with steam and with charcoal in English kitchens. We heard about an early form of pressure cooker, introduced in 1682. Steam was used in the early nineteenth century, to keep food hot, by means of heated shelves and boxes, especially in large houses and institutions such as hospitals and barracks.

From medieval times, charcoal was used for cooking, in specially built stoves (*cf* Skipton Castle, late seventeenth century, one of only two known to survive), and in chafing dishes of ceramic, brass or iron, on table tops. Because the fumes were harmful, a new form of stove with ventilation was introduced by Elizabeth Raffald, the author of *The Experienced English Housekeeper* first published in 1769.

Giles Cowley spoke about iron and steel in kitchens, from the point of view as a practising blacksmith. He described the processing required to produce wrought iron objects.

Tony Weston outlined the evolution of the weight-driven spit-jack, used to turn meat-roasting spits in front of an open fire. (Note – we find many instances of spits and other cooking devices in probate inventories,

especially in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.) The earliest mention found by the speaker, of a clockwork jack is 1628. One illustration showed features on a wooden chimney lintel, which were made to accommodate such a jack and its working parts. David Eveleigh spoke about the development of gas cookers, and Michael Finlay shared his knowledge of jaggers, or pastry cutters, from his large collection.

As is usually the case, the people there and the books on sale added interest to the day.

(June Hall, 2014)

6. Tours for Local History Groups.

This month, I led two groups round vernacular buildings. Lazonby History Group came to Newbiggin where we looked at about twenty houses which date from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Based on a two or three-unit plan form, most have or had a cross passage. In some cases, it is clear to see the "up-house" and "down-house" arrangement, described clearly by Brunskill. Most houses are of single-room depth, and consist of hall (main living room) and bower (parlour), with a service room containing the cross passage and space for storing such necessities as the meal ark and the ale barrel. Cow houses are attached to one end, in line with the main house, but with no internal access.

Most of these houses had mullioned windows when built, most of which have been altered to take sashes. There are some datestones. One interesting feature is that roughly half the houses face south while the rest face west. It is usual for early houses to face south, regardless of the proximity of the road, or the lie of the land, so that the sun warms the rooms, and the dairy is sited on the north, or cool, side. They are interspersed, in a seemingly random manner and at present, no explanation is available. Some of these early houses in the village were given additional wings in the nineteenth century.

Upper Eden History Group toured three properties not usually available to the public. Henry Howard gave a tour of Johnby Hall, near Greystoke, where his family has lived for centuries.

Sycamore Cottage, Newbiggin. (Photographs, June Hall).

First mentioned in 1200, this fortified house has three storeys, the ground floor being vaulted. The staircase tower rises to a ribbed stone vault. Over the entrance, an ornate inscription dates from 1583, when the Musgrave family came into the property.

Hardrigg Hall, Ellonby, first mentioned in 1378, has a late fourteenth century tower, now ruined. The blocked first floor doorway suggests that it was probably the solar attached to a contemporary hall. The remains of springing for a ground floor vault and a spiral stair can be seen, with fireplaces on the upper floors. Standing below the present farmhouse is a cruck barn, with five trusses. A few wind braces remain. The barn appears to be of at least two phases, and the roof has been raised.

Greenthwaite Hall stands just outside the Greystoke Castle Park wall and is part of the estate. Half the building is one of the seventeenth century large houses which Brunskill describes as "multi-storey porch, rising above the eaves". The earlier wing, from the previous century, forms an F-shaped plan. The whole house is a feast of mullioned windows, moulded doorways, drip moulds, string courses and some unusual Jacobean strapwork panels in stone.

7. Lancaster University, Regional Heritage Centre, is a new organisation within the Department of History. It incorporates the former centre for North West Regional Studies and is linked with Cumbria County History Trust. For courses and other activities, see www.lancs.ac.uk/users/cnwrs. To join the mailing list, contact Christine.Wilkinson@lancaster.ac.uk

8. More Latin Inscriptions. Jane Penman has seen the following inscription on Millbeck Hall, Crosthwaite parish, near Keswick. The inscription reads –

1592 QUORSU MW
VIVERE MORI MORI VIVERE
NICHOLAUS WILLIAMSON

It can be translated in several ways, one version being "wherefore live to die, to die is life". The same words, dated 1590, appear on a fireplace in Blencow Hall, Greystoke parish, in Henry Blencow's time. Further investigation is needed to see if there is a family connection. (Any offers?). This is one of the earliest dated doorheads in Cumbria. Note the ogee arched lintel, which is a lingering stylistic element from the medieval period.

Inscription on Millbeck Hall, Crosthwaite parish, near Keswick. (Photograph, Jane Penman).

If you know of any other Latin inscriptions over doors or windows, please let us know.

9. Dating Raised Cruck Buildings in Furness – Exclusive News!

In the second CVBG newsletter (December 2013) I reported on the work being carried out by Nottingham Tree-Ring Dating Laboratory to date three raised cruck buildings in Furness, via a grant from CWAAS. The assessment of samples from all three sites has now been provided, with some surprising results. The three sites are all in the vicinity of Barrow-in-Furness, and comprise, the former Cavendish Arms in Dalton-in-Furness, a barn and house at Roosecote Farm, and the barn at Sowerby Hall Farm. The latter two are certainly connected to Furness Abbey, having been listed amongst granges owned by Furness from the medieval period, as well as both being listed in the earlier Domesday survey, while the Cavendish Arms is thought to have been connected to Dalton Castle, which served as the courthouse for the Abbey. All three sites have good surviving examples of raised crucks, with those at Sowerby the most elaborate and including wind braces and additional supporting pieces.

Robert Howard from the Nottingham Tree-Ring Dating Laboratory taking samples from Sowerby Hall. (Photograph, Dan Elsworth).

Dendrochronology sample from Sowerby Hall. (Photograph, Dan Elsworth).

The expectation was that the large barn at Sowerby Hall, which has long been thought to be of monastic date, would be the earliest. The dates from the samples, however, show that all of the buildings post-date the Dissolution of Furness Abbey, and that the Cavendish Arms is actually the earliest of the three, consistently giving a felling date 1537. Roosecote and Sowerby Hall both gave dates nearly a century later, of the first two decades of the seventeenth century. While unexpected these dates are interesting. 1537 is the year in which Furness Abbey was closed, the early seventeenth century dates correspond with the acquisition of much of its former estates by the Preston family. The dates therefore seem to suggest a renewed phase of building after the Dissolution, perhaps as a result of sources of timber becoming available. Indeed, it appears from the samples that they originated from a single source, perhaps one of the woodlands listed as belonging to Furness Abbey, such as Sowerby Wood.

It is intended to produce a more detailed account of the results in due course, although the potential for further work on similar buildings or on living trees nearby is also being considered.

(Dan Elsworth, Greenlane Archaeology)

10. Requests.

Photographs. A group of CVBG members is preparing the panels for which we have been awarded a grant by the Vernacular Architecture Group. The content, in words and images, will illustrate the geology and building materials of Cumbria's vernacular buildings. These include slate, sandstone, limestone, cobble, clay and timber for walls, with thatch, flagstones, Westmorland and Welsh slate for roofs. Also, buildings from different periods will feature on a "pop-up" panel. Another panel will include architectural details, internal, as well as external, typical of Cumbrian buildings in different parts of the county, for example, round chimneys, dated doorheads, walling techniques, etc.

We need good photographs from around the county and invite members to contribute photographs they may feel are suitable for inclusion. We would welcome any member who has particular **skills in graphic design** to join a meeting after the Furness villages tour.

11. Forthcoming event

Cumbria Family History Society will hold a Family History Fair, "Connecting Cumbria Online", on Saturday, 30 August, 10.00am – 3.00pm. The venue is The Lakes Leisure Centre, on Burton Road, Kendal. Admission £3.00. Under 14's free.

CVGS have booked a stand at this event. Offers of help welcome.

See www.cumbriafhs.com or contact [redacted] for further information.

The deadline for contributions to the next newsletter is 1 September.

CONTACTS

Note There is a vacancy for the secretary's post.

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Helen Evans (Website) [redacted] LA11 7PJ [redacted]

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www.cvgs.org.uk [redacted]