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

- Membership card to July 2016 **OR subscription reminder.**
- Booking form for events in October, November and December 2015.

1. Preparation for the **Vernacular Architecture Group annual conference,** held at Newton Rigg College , 7 – 11 July, 2015, occupied the organising group of CVBG for many weeks. The effort proved worthwhile, as the hundred delegates enjoyed seeing Cumbria's buildings in three areas of the county. The weather put on three days of sunshine for the excursions – something we could not have predicted, but for which we were hugely thankful.
   By way of reporting on this important event, we are reprinting the accounts of each day's tour, from the VAG newsletter, each one written by a bursary student, as a requirement of their grant. The first one, by Caroline McGrath, will be followed by the others in subsequent newsletters. We hope you enjoy the objective views. Only the text is reprinted here, for which we thank the author and the editor of the VAG Newsletter.

"Day One : Central Lake District by Caroline McGrath

As a student of the Professional Archaeology MSc course in Queen's University Belfast, I have a particular interest in built heritage, and therefore I was delighted to be awarded a bursary to attend this year's spring conference in Cumbria. It offered a unique opportunity to learn about English building styles and interact with a diverse group of professionals and passionate amateurs alike.

The conference was based in Penrith's Newton Rigg College, an agricultural school which provided an appropriate base of operations. It featured a number of historic farm buildings, including the Gin Case, formerly a horse-engine house but today a bar, where many of the conference-goers socialised in the evenings. Though the weather forecast predicted a mixture of sunshine and showers, June Hall, the energetic and welcoming local organiser, promised blue skies for the duration of the conference.

The first day's activities centred around the Central Lake District, an area characterised by a combination of metamorphic and volcanic geology. Borrowdale slate is a common sight on the roofs of many vernacular houses in the region. The first villages we passed through were Clifton and Shap, where we saw the first of many traditional farmhouses and dramatic limestone walls criss-crossed the hills. The bus continued through steep river valleys, offering stunning views of the Cumbrian landscape.

Our first stop was Castle Dairy in Kendal, a collection of buildings believed to have been a fourteenth-century grange attached to Kendal Castle. Today, it consists of an H-shaped building featuring many examples of medieval features, including masons' marks on stones in the south-west passage. There was also evidence of reuse of masonry, such as a stone dated 1564 in the south elevation.

The next building on our itinerary was Cragwood Country House Hotel, where we stopped for a welcome break. The building is located in the beautiful environs of Lake Windermere and is a tasteful example of a nineteenth-century country house built in the vernacular style. The interior is decorated with specially-crafted wood panelling and staircase and distinctive plasterwork.

As well as admiring the house and indulging in a tea or coffee, this was an ideal opportunity to talk with other guests. There was a diverse range of attendees at the conference, from professional architects and conservators to archaeologists and students. I felt privileged to be given the chance to talk to people from different backgrounds and gain from their experience and knowledge.

Our next stop was Troutbeck, a village nestled in the valley of the same name. There we visited a wide variety of traditional houses and farm buildings. Most notable in this group is Thwaite, a two-storey sixteenth-century house with distinctive Cumbrian cylindrical chimney pots. William Rollinson, in his book *Life and Tradition in the Lake District*, provided an explanation for this characteristic shape, suggesting that 'in the absence of suitable freestone, the local rocks lent themselves to this form'.

Over the front door is a curved wooden lintel that may once have acted as a cruck blade. This feature appeared in a number of houses we visited over the course of the conference, for example as the lintel in an inglenook fireplace. An interesting feature of the house is a small chute to the left of the prominent front porch, which may have been related to an original garderobe on the first floor. The roof has a wrestler ridge, a distinctive feature where slates are notched and placed in an interlocking series at the apex of the roof. A disadvantage of this type of roofing was that it had to be waterproofed with moss or other absorbent materials.

Shepherds Cottage is a two- storey farmhouse whose adjacent barn was converted into a living space in the nineteenth century. The house was sympathetically renovated by the present owners, retaining many of the house's original features. One of these is the panelling on the internal partition dividing the living room from the modern kitchen. The linenfold carving was revealed when the present owner removed a layer of black paint which had previously obscured it.

Low Hartsop was our next destination, where we saw a number of farmhouses and outbuildings, including the sole surviving example of a corn-drying kiln in the district. This building is believed to date from the sixteenth century, and can be accessed from a small stoke hole into which fuel was placed. The upper floor consists of slates laid on end to allow the heat from the fire to dry the grain, which was placed on a coarse blanket or woven mat.

Thorn House was a traditional farmhouse with a prime example of what is known as a 'spinning gallery'. There is little evidence that they were used for this purpose, but it is likely that they provided a sheltered space to work under. In addition to this, they may have been used to display textiles to their best advantage to visiting merchants.

Our final visit of the day was to a farmhouse at Glencoyne, situated in an idyllic hillside location beside Ullswater. The farm may date as far back as the seventeenth century, as a plaster panel in the eastern room on the ground floor prominently displays the year 1629. People have been farming sheep at this farm since the eighteenth century, and to the present day the owners maintain one of the largest flocks in the Lake District. The building is roofed with green slate and has stepped gables and two cylindrical chimneys. The house was notable for a number of apotropaic features, such as burn marks in a wooden chest in the front hall and 'RM' inscribed on the inside face of the bressumer beam in the living room.

In the evening we were treated to a talk by Victoria Slowe, director of the Ruskin Museum in Coniston, entitled 'Heck, Mell and Bink'. Though beset by technical issues, Victoria gave an entertaining and informative account on local building styles and examples of local furniture. The lecture provided an introduction to many terms used in English vernacular architecture with which I was unfamiliar. The heck of the title corresponds to the jamb wall of lobby-entrance houses in Ireland, separating the hearth from the mell passage, which led into the main body of the house. A bink was a dresser, fixed bench or shelf used to store utensils.

The entire conference was extremely well organised and planned, presenting the attendees with a broad spectrum of Cumbria's rich vernacular architectural heritage. I was impressed with how much was packed into a three-day conference, in addition to how well we were cared for over its duration. The experience was a particularly useful one for me, as it gave a valuable insight into the architectural tradition of Britain. This has allowed me to appreciate its influence on vernacular building styles of Northern Ireland and has greatly enriched my knowledge of the subject.

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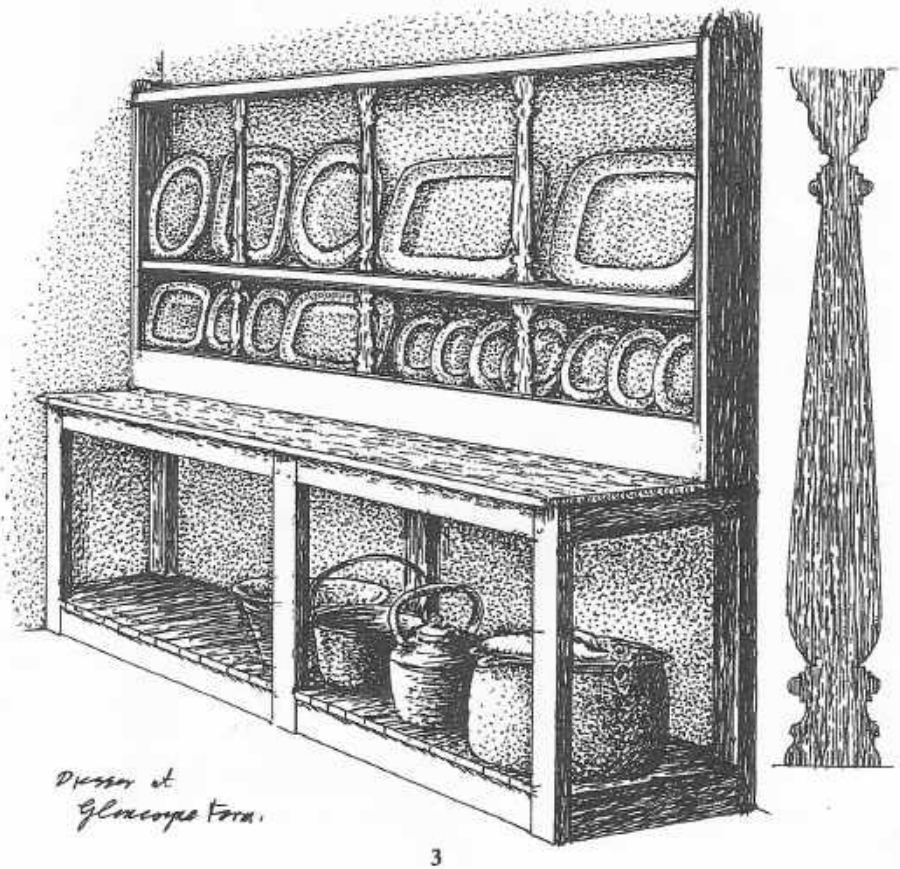
Drawing by Peter Brears, Reconstruction of fixed dresser at Glencoyne Farm. Only the upper shelves remain.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2. Visit to Drybeck Hall, near Great Asby.

Visit to Drybeck Hall

Wednesday 19 August 2015

Lord Anthony Hothfield was a most genial and informative host and guide on this evening visit by some 20 CVBG members to Drybeck Hall, his home near Great Asby. Lord Hothfield is descended from the Clifford family through Lady Anne Clifford's daughter and the Tufton line. His great uncle was the last Lord Hothfield to live at Appleby Castle.

1. Drybeck Hall, south front.

Drybeck Hall is a classic Cumbrian cross-passage house with downhouse, as shown in Brunskill's ***Traditional Buildings of Cumbria*** (see below). Much essential restoration has been done over 30 years. It is a very comfortable and welcoming house of local red sandstone with many interesting and vernacular features including

- Fine stone frontage with mullion windows, though part of the house has subsided a little.
- Date stone **WS • GS 1679**. WS may be William Shepherd from Appleby.
- Downhouse, hallan cross-passages, heck partition, fire window and maybe a hidden spice cupboard.
- Bressumer beam with a possible carved Witchmark (found by June), about 5 cm high. In the C17 these invoked protection against witches from the Virgin Mary, represented by intersecting lines creating crosses and M's or two overlapping V's for 'Virgo Virginum' ('Virgin of Virgins').

2. Lord Hothfield, left, greeting CVBG members.

- Cruck and pegged roof beams
- The main stairwell is in an outshut, outside the main walls; other stone stairs to the barn.
- Memorabilia of Lady Anne Clifford (1590 – 1676), including signed documents and five portraits of her at different ages, some of them incorrectly titled (on the painting) 'Margaret Countess of Cumberland', her mother. (The Great Picture of Anne Clifford is in Abbot Hall, Kendal)
- The attached bank barn is now a large living room where many books, articles, photographs and paintings, some originally from Appleby Castle, on the Clifford and Tufton families were displayed (some on a table tennis table), including the newly published Anne Clifford's Great Books of Record (in Cumbria Archives, Kendal).

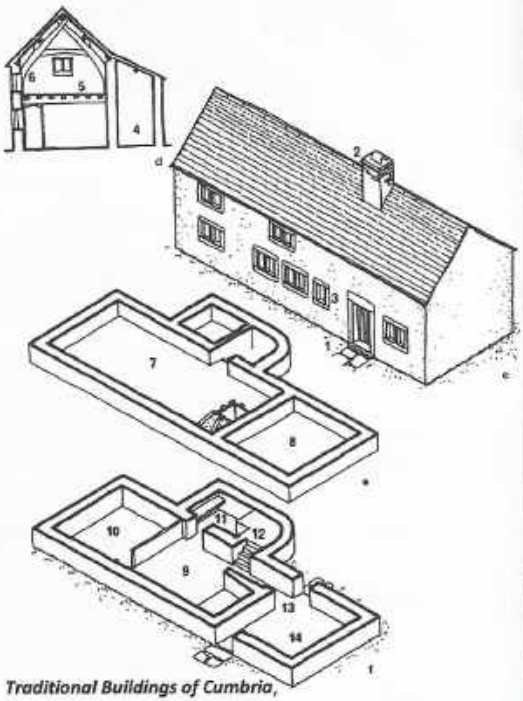
June Hall warmly thanked Lord Hothfield for his hospitality and we adjourned, past the cast-iron fingerpost ("16") in Drybeck, to admire the cast-iron kitchen range in **The Three Greyhounds** in Asby. Mike Lea, photos by Mike Turner

3. Inscribed protection mark inside bressumer over inglenook, see photograph 6.

4. Decorated doorhead over main entrance.

5. Roof trusses in attic, showing curved principal rafters.

6. Inglenook, fire window, heck (wooden screen forming entrance into hall from cross passage), & bressumer.



Traditional Buildings of Cumbria, R.W. Brunskill (2002) p. 69

3. **Third Annual General Meeting of CVBG, and tour of Cartmel Fell, 19 September, 2015**
28 members attended the AGM, held in Cartmel Fell parish hall, Jennifer Forsyth made arrangements for the day, with help from Beryl and John Offley. A big thank-you to them.
The chairman, June Hall, reported on the second full year of the Group, a year dominated by the national VAG conference with a hundred VAG members at Newton Rigg College– a huge challenge for our young organisation. Fourteen members of CVBG attended full time, with others attending evening lectures or helping with the organisation. The handbook has been very well received. Thanks are recorded to everyone who helped to make this a very successful conference.
Events during the rest of the year were well supported and enjoyed by members. The only one cancelled through lack of support was the proposed trip to Ryedale Folk Museum on the North York Moors. Members are strongly recommended to visit the museum, if they are in the area, as it gives a great insight into the development of domestic building from medieval times.
Mike Kingsbury reported on financial matters, which are in satisfactory shape. We can maintain the annual subscription at £10, single, £15 for two at the same address and £25 for groups. The current booking system for events is struggling, as many late bookings cause inconvenience for those providing food.
The new display panels had their first showing at the VAG conference and formed the setting for the AGM.
Officers June Hall, Chairman, and Mike Kingsbury, treasurer and Membership secretary, were re-elected, as were committee members Dan Elsworth, Helen Evans (website), Claire Jeffery (library), Vicky Slowe and Richard Wilson. Jan Hicks resigned as secretary as did Michael Mullett, and they were replaced by Barbara Grundy and Peter Messenger. **There is a vacancy for a secretary.**
After an excellent buffet lunch, members emerged into bright sunshine, to follow Jennifer Forsyth round the area. Her book about the buildings, Cartmel Fell, A Patchwork History, is available from Jennifer at £19.95. Tel. 015395 35821.

Tour of Cartmel Fell. Notes.
Height, former Friends Meeting House. Built 1677, before the Act of Toleration, 1689, with money from Lawrence Newton. Now a dwelling, on the market. Interior retains several "Quaker" features, including panelled screens, dividing spaces, and folding partition to the women's meeting room. Fine seventeenth century oak stair with turned balusters. Later sash windows. Porch and distinctive roofed gateway. Burial ground nearby.
Thorphinsty Hall, (earliest mention, 1275/6),now divided into three dwellings, overlooks the Winster valley to the east. Based around a medieval tower. Building alterations in 2002 revealed early features in the south wing – a large hearth, blocked doorway complete with draw bar in situ, and an external stair to an undercroft. The north wing faces the road,with several mullioned windows, the upper ones superseded by sashes higher up, indicating a raised roof. Inside this section, an inglenook fireplace with neck, several wall cupboards, a possible cross passage now occupied by a staircase,
The nearby cruck barn, now also a dwelling, retains four fine cruck trusses, open to the roof in a large hall.
Hodge Hill, said to date from 1560, and at one time a restaurant, was viewed from the outside. The rendered walls conceal the structure, but diamond-paned mullioned and transomed windows, iron gutters on curly brackets, and round and oval chimney stacks, have an "Arts and Crafts" feel about them. This is very near to the Bowness group of vernacular revival houses, and pews by the Charles Simpson workshop were seen later in the church. The two sturdy oak doors with iron fittings are fine examples of early craftsmanship. There is a small external gallery.

Cowmire Hall. Across the valley, the Barratts, descendants of the Briggs, first known owners of Cowmire, who added to the house in 1699, made us welcome. Again, a tower forms the core of the house with vaulted undercroft (now containing a bathroom). Round headed mullioned windows
now light the tower, and are very similar to those in the church. The 1699 frontage of five bays has a doorway with a semi-circular hood. Elaborate oak stair serves three storeys – ball finials, pendants and turned balusters.
In the **church**, (correctly the Chapel of St Anthony, built as a chapel of ease to Cartmel parish church in c 1504), the Cowmire pew is a fine example of oak furniture. It was used a a schoolroom at one time, and scratched counting grids can be seen on the seats. Three decker pulpit, other family pews, colourful stained glass from c 1520, and many other notable features contribute to the charming interior.

4. **Mullions and transoms.**
Richard Wilson contributed this article, in response to the request for information in Newsletter Seven.

Mullion and Transom Windows

The CVBG's recording exercise last winter at Middles Farm, Mosedale, drew attention to the unusual style and arrangement of windows on the façade. Stone mullioned windows in earlier buildings, and sashes in later ones, are a much more common sight in Cumbria than the 'cross windows' to be seen at Middles Farm. Tall windows, with horizontal subdivisions, had of course been in use since medieval times, but they were restricted to high status buildings, such as churches and the halls of manor houses, and were strongly associated with the Gothic style. Modified versions of the type, square headed, with lintels instead of arches, were a familiar feature of large houses through the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods; Levens Hall is probably the best-known example in Cumbria. There are several possible reasons for their rarity in vernacular buildings, but it seems the most important one is that the adoption of sliding sashes became widespread only a few years after cross windows had come into common use, and they quickly became obsolete and unfashionable. Ronald Brunskill, in 'Traditional Buildings of Cumbria', mentions research by Howard Colvin and Blake Tyson on the origins of the window type. They suggest that three individuals with knowledge of current architectural fashion helped to introduce Renaissance ideas to the region. William Thackeray, who is known to have worked at Rose Castle and Drawdykes, Carlisle, in the 1670s, was the pioneer; slightly later, Thomas Machell, of Crackenthorpe Hall, working with a local mason, Edward Addison, encouraged neighbours to adopt the Wren-inspired designs he'd seen while at Oxford. Although this activity mostly concerned the 'polite' end of the architectural spectrum, there is plenty of surviving physical evidence that some of the more superficial characteristics of the Renaissance were imitated on more modest structures, perhaps as a way of 'keeping up with the Joneses'. Middles Farm is a good example, even though it was stylistically a little behind the times when built in 1722. It seems very probable that the house was reconstructed to more generous proportions on an existing footprint, the original plan layout being retained. This, or a conservative outlook which contrasted with the architectural pretension, caused visual disruption to the elevation. Symmetry was an essential ingredient of Renaissance composition, but in this instance the windows have been spaced to suit the functions of the interior rather than for the sake of aesthetics.

The ceilings are unusually high for a modest single pile farmhouse, and it is for this reason that there was a change in window proportions in the later 17th century. It became necessary to provide more light to the interiors, which could only be achieved by increasing the height of the window openings. The mullions required additional support as they became longer, and the increased window area required further subdivision, both to accommodate the small leaded panels used at the time, and also to allow the fitting of vertical security bars. A horizontal element, in the form of a transom, placed above eye level, was an obvious solution to these problems. The majority of these windows were of four lights, giving them a strongly vertical emphasis, and the alternative name 'cross windows', but sometimes they could be larger, as at Townend, Troutbeck, and Clarghyll Hall, Alston. One of the other reasons that mullion and transom windows are fairly uncommon is that they were quite rapidly superseded by the development of counterbalanced sash windows. These could only work effectively in tall narrow openings, and it is likely that many cross windows were replaced with sashes only a few years after original installation. Townend and Clarghyll have retained their older styles simply for the reason that the larger openings could not be adapted for sashes. In common with mullioned windows, cross windows could be either integral with the wall, with stone dressings, or alternatively they were in the form of timber frames, inserted into a structural opening. Middles Farm's windows are of the former type; concern about the additional expense and difficulty associated with the removal of loadbearing stonework might explain why they were never replaced with sashes.

Townend, Troutbeck.

Window after repair.

Clarghyll Hall

Middles Farm, Mosedale, front dated 1723.

5. Book review.

Book review

Arts and Crafts houses in the Lake District by Matthew Hyde and Esme Whittaker, photographs by Val Corbett, published by Frances Lincoln 2014

This book is about the vernacular revival (which took place from the nineteenth century onwards) rather than vernacular architecture as such, but I would recommend it to anyone who is interested in Lakeland houses and building traditions. It is a beautifully produced book, illustrated with dozens of stunning photographs by Val Corbett, and was a runner-up in the Lakeland Book of the Year award. Both the authors are respected architectural historians: Matthew Hyde wrote the new Pevsner volume for Cumbria, which was published in 2010, and Esme Whittaker is a native Cumbrian who wrote her PhD on the Arts and Crafts house in the Lake District. The book concentrates on a selection of houses which were built before the First World War in the Windermere area, mostly as holiday homes for wealthy industrialists, of which Blackwell is probably the best known. The book looks at the work of nationally known figures such as Voysey at Broadleys to local architects such as Dan Gibson who designed Brockhole. It includes plans and some old photographs and original drawings, and there is also detailed information about interior decoration and local craft industries. The book also has a list of places to visit and a comprehensive bibliography and index. At £35 for the hardback and £20 for the paperback it is not cheap, but it would make an excellent present, and is a pleasure to read and handle as well as a thoroughly researched book to refer back to.

Claire Jeffery

6. Recent events.

11, 12 and 13 September, June Hall took part in the first national festival of the **Heritage Craft Alliance**, at their headquarters, Thorp Perrow Arboretum, near Bedale, North Yorkshire. This organisation promotes the training and qualifications, and arranges apprenticeships for traditional skills necessary for the repair and reconstruction of heritage buildings. Stone masons, blacksmiths, lime plasterers, painters and gilders, demonstrated their trades. CVBG display panels generated considerable interest.
www.heritagecraftalliance.co.uk
A talk on Cumbrian vernacular buildings was given to a party of **American visitors** to the Lake District, at Bowness on 17 September, and again, the display was used.

7. Forthcoming events.

- **Please book in good time, for the CVBG events up to the end if 2015, form enclosed.**
- The 2016 programme is in preparation. It will include a joint event on 13 October, with **CWAAS** as part of their 150th anniversary celebrations. More details to follow.
- Saturday 24 October, 2015, at Carlisle, 10.00 – 4.00, the Shepherds Hotel. CVBG will have a stand at the joint event of **Cumbria Local History Federation and Cumbria Family History Association.**
- **Lake District National Park Authority annual archaeology day,** Theatre by the Lake, Keswick, 10.00 – 4.00, Sunday 11 October, 2015. Full programme of talks, many relevant to our studies. Conference, £13.50, plus £6.25 in lunch required. Details on LDNPA website. Booking deadline 5 October.

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The deadline for contributions to the winter newsletter is 30th November 2015.

www.cvbg.co.uk