NEWSLETTER No. 50 – WINTER 2025

1. From the Chairman

As we approach 2026, I am confident that our programme of events for next year will have broad appeal for members. I am particularly grateful to several new members who will be making their own contributions.

April will see members enjoying an early view of St Wilfrid's Chapel at Brougham Hall, following its restoration by the Churches Conservation Trust; combined with a guided tour of Brougham Hall with its historical links back beyond the 16th century, there will be much to explore.

On 9th May Lorton Village Hall will host us for a talk by Angus Winchester, historian and author on the medieval development of the Lake District landscape and its villages. Our day will then be enhanced by a talk by Sarika Jhawar, National Trust Architect who will share her experiences of her travels as SPAB Scholar.

Early summer will provide us with a chance to explore Hardrigg Hall, Skelton with its medieval tower and historic farm buildings. It is also hoped that Newbiggin Hall Farm, nr. Appleby will also open its doors to members during the summer months.

Please keep abreast of the email notices that will confirm the arrangements for each event, all of which will be posted on the CVBG website as more details become available.

Particular thanks goes to Mr. & Mrs Holmes of Hollin Root, St Johns in the Vale for opening their original 16th century house for historic recording in January; this building and others like it will continue to provide a rich source of information that we can use in newsletters and ZOOM presentations, thereby reaching all the membership with our latest discoveries.

With kindest regards

Editors Note: The cover of this newsletter No 50, is representative of the present design, the early editions, although relevant, were in a different format.

2. Craggs Barn, Dent. A restoration project nearing completion.

There were twelve of us on this repeat visit to Craggs Barn which is grade II listed. We are incredibly grateful to James and Sara Woolgrove for allowing us to revisit their home. We last visited two years ago, also in November; a report is in our Winter 2023 Newsletter.
As the restoration project nears completion, we were keen to learn how the development has progressed. James & Sara welcomed us and led a tour; we were not disappointed. The caravans have gone and they are enjoying living in the house. Whilst still a work in progress much has been achieved. James thinks it will always require work and never be finished!

The change of use has required adequate insulation and heating while complying with building regulations with regard to the structural aspects.
This involves an air source heat pump, under floor heating for the domestic areas downstairs and radiators on the upper floor along with insulation of floor, ceiling, walls & floor. The external heat source box is in a stark white colour; James is confident it will weather and blend in better. The 12kW heat pump was running and quiet; it is situated on a base 1m from the workshop door on the west gable. The heated water runs in 1.5km of under floor pipes, the heat travels to the colder areas to maintain a constant 20 deg C. At the time of our visit, it was running at ¼ capacity and works with 485% efficiency, James & Paul discussed much technical data such as the coefficient performance.
The outshut (outrigger lean to) part of the barn to the south had a previous concrete floor which was removed to 400mm and replaced by 300mm of geocell for thermal insulation on a layer of geotextile which was laid on the soil. There is a mesh layer to which heating pipes are attached, lying on a second layer of geotextile and encased in limecrete. The floor is tiled with limestone plates resulting in a fine finish.
There is a strip of cork between floor and external walls, a 1½ inch hot lime application (hemp, perlite & quick lime) to the solid stone walls, another coat will be added before a silver sand finish. There is 200mm of flexible wool fibre insulation under this catslide roof with an airtight but vapour permeable membrane below (thought to have a 100 year life expectancy). There is free airflow, above the insulation, under the newly laid slates with one block of inset solar panels and skylights to upper floor spaces.
The divider wall from the main barn is still to be rendered, stone quoins and original woodwork will be picked out. The insulation is so efficient that there is only a 0.4 deg C difference in floor, ceiling & wall temperature.

The main entrance on the south elevation enters a lobby with a downstairs WC adjacent, there is a door leading to an office and another into the main barn workshop. The stud walls are of wood wool board with a hot lime wash & are fireproof. The barn ventilation holes have airbricks inserted & an insect proof mesh internally. The domestic quarters have automatic vent units in the office, kitchen & en-suite bathrooms; the fans are constantly on (unless shut in windy conditions), speed is loading dependant and extracts air, creating negative pressure to control

the humidity created by living in the building. A log burner in the hearth is set back into the dividing wall, the flue exiting behind the solar panels. An attic area of the lower roof over the outshut houses the Solar PV system equipment; there are also storage batteries to store excess power produced by the solar panels for use after dark in running the house. Two impressive manifolds are located below the stone stair; copper pipe of 35mm diameter runs to and from the heat pump, 28mm to these manifolds and 15mm pipe to radiators. Use of a crimping tool helped achieve a change in diameter which reduces the noise of the flow.
The outshut houses an open plan living room with dining and kitchen areas leading to a larder and the corridor into new accommodation at the east end of the main barn. This is the former shippon and old stable where the stall is retained; here a hemp cast forms a stud wall separating the master bedroom & en suite (now with shower tray rather than a wet room) from a dressing room. There are two windows on this gable where doors had been previously and the third door has been filled in, timber lintel and adjacent wall storage retained.

(Figure 1) Group arriving

(Figure 2) East end with Northside to road.

The original stone stair rises from the corridor under an existing wooden canopy to a landing area, here the remaining en suite bedrooms are lit by gable windows and one skylight and sit partly above the engineering workshop which is separated from the former shippon by a second dividing wall (this runs north to south). A doorway from the landing accesses a new wooden stair to descend into the main barn, this large workshop area is noticeably cooler and unheated save that coming from the hot water cylinder in the plant room of the partitioned off engineering workshop at the east end of the barn. The cylinder runs normally at 43 deg C but is heated to 60 deg C once a week to kill any Legionella. The main barn door, to the road, is for deliveries. The owl hole in the west gable of the main barn will be maintained as such.

It is a project which is of much interest to those caring for historic buildings. We were impressed by the efficiency of the energy saving measures employed, as well as the use of traditional building materials, in this sensitive restoration which has retained original features despite conversion to a dwelling.

John McDowell

3. Cumbria: a vernacular architecture reading list and primer

Winter arrives; as dusk falls, either the next Met Office-named storm, or Jack Frost, may well beckon. Where place to sit and rest, near hearth and heck, is snug and warm, the flickering light from fire window may just signal abroad that the CVBG newsletter reader, latest copy taken from secure spice cupboard shelf, is at home and settling down for a peaceful read.

Newsletter No. 50 (Winter 2025/26). Whilst an achievement by itself, such a well-deserved milestone for the Group, 12.5 years on now since June 2013 beginnings, well warrants a newsletter contribution that in part reflects on the work of the first CVBG Patron, Ronald, Ron, 'R.W. Brunskill'. In addition, the books and articles described below offer a chance to better understand the differing vernacular architecture of Cumbria, as well as furniture built within.

Introduction

This is the second of a small series of pieces proposed for upcoming CVBG quarterly newsletters. The aim of each is to highlight reference books and web links that can help the reader develop a deeper understanding of vernacular architecture, and Cumbria as a locality (for long a relatively remote corner of Northern England), which has distinctive types of historic buildings, as well as furnishings used within homes. For Part 1 of this series: 'The Place-Names of Cumbria', see Newsletter 49: Autumn '25.

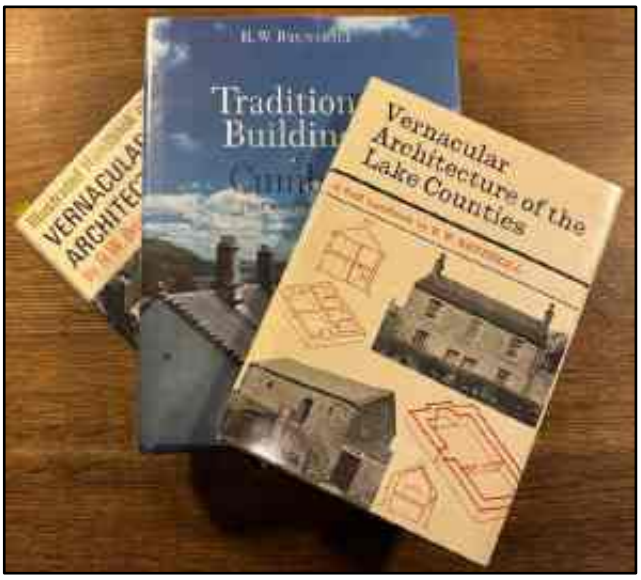
R.W.Brunskill

No Cumbria vernacular architecture primer should start without a focus on R.W. Brunskill, whose extensive studies of vernacular architecture in Britain were formative and aspirational books, introducing a wider audience to the character and styles of regional historic buildings lived in by local families. The importance of Brunskill's 1974 seminal work: 'Vernacular Architecture of the Lake Counties' cannot be understated in helping explain Cumbrian buildings to a wide audience. This newsletter contributor has long kept Brunskill's Lakeland reference book alongside W.G. Hoskins' 1955 'The Making of the English Landscape', too Pevsner County-focussed architectural guides. Such classic works have a timeless appeal, primers for those seeking to better understand the history, architecture and people within landscapes surrounding us. Whilst landscape history, over the past 70 years of research, has been shown to be ever more complex, Brunskill benefitted from observing extant buildings in-situ. Nevertheless, early discussion of a 'Great Rebuilding' has too been reassessed; as many more historic buildings have been identified, it is now clearer that a house built in one period was often later improved, then altered, and extended over centuries (Machin, 1977).

Brunskill's earlier (1971) 'Illustrated Handbook of Vernacular Architecture' became, over several updates, a core text for students of architecture. The glossary of terms within is richly illustrated, most double spread pages describing a term with accompanying hand drawn illustrations and photo examples. For example, see

various staircases illustrated on p110-111, pig-stys and dovecots on p152. Various specialist books on architecture followed, to be noted in a future newsletter piece that includes Brunskill's wider literature.

A particular delight of 'Vernacular Architecture of the Lake Counties' is in its numerous architectural drawings and plans, which accompany chapters detailing: the region, large houses, small houses, cottages, farm buildings, urban and industrial vernacular, arts and crafts revival, as well as materials and construction, architectural details, and time-scale comparisons between styles of building. Two suggested vernacular village trails complete the book. For example, Chapter 2 (1974 1st edition, p50-65) discusses and illustrates two-unit cottages, the cross passage and downhouse plan, buildings attached to the cottages, outshut extensions, double pile houses with rooms at front and back, each form including hand-drawn plans. Chapter 3 (2002, Cumbria edition, p64-83) benefits from the photos that illustrate typical building style houses within the County.

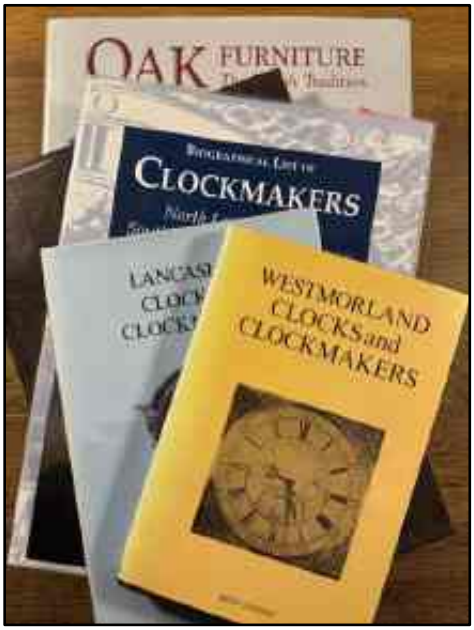


Lake Counties was re-published (2nd Edition 1978, 3rd 1987). In 2002, 'Traditional Buildings of Cumbria, the County of the Lakes – the final version - was published in a slightly larger and glossier style. Whilst a purist may wish to refer to their prized 1st edition copy alone, it is sensible to view both 1974 and 2002 versions of these books alongside each other when reading/ researching, there being a wide range of differences between versions.

Two early published papers examine the vernacular architecture that helped develop Brunskill's undergraduate, master's and doctoral studies, and career focus. Developments of the Small House (1953), and separately, the Large House (1957), in the Eden Valley, were published in the CWAAS journal. The development of Brunskill's charted time-scale classifications, for different building types, are clear within this earlier research. A complete listing of Brunskill's published works have been given to new CVBG members as a leaflet.

A vernacular architecture book very well worth reading is Susan Denyer's 'Traditional Buildings & Life in The Lake District '(1991, in association with the NT). Whilst too looking at vernacular house (Chapter 3) and barn plans (Chapter 6), as well as construction materials, Denyer in addition offers a focus on domestic interiors. Chapter 2 describes a range of features within cottages and yeoman farmhouses – the fire, partition or heck, chimney hoods, how food was cooked, cupboards, windows and light, the buttery, parlour and lofts. Chapter illustrations, photos and descriptions offer a real feel for what it would be like to live within such properties. For the relative beginner, the sketch on p20 showing hearth, fire, chimney hood, spice cupboard and fire window, heck and doorway, straightforward in view, gets the positioning of these key features across better than any other Cumbria volume. Animal husbandry and crops are also dealt with in separate chapters. Bank barns, and galleried barns, very distinctive architectural styles in the North, are covered by both Denyer and Brunskill.

It is not only books that can support the reader in understanding what was found within domestic vernacular houses. Two articles from the Journal Regional Furniture (available online) are excellent. Peter Brears (2018) discusses and illustrates the range of oak furniture that was built into, designed for, and is distinctive to Cumbria (and the Northen Counties). Cat-malisons (the cat's curse) kept salted hams, bacon and mutton safe! Cupboards, lockers and shelves had their own functions. North Country dressers have very particular locality styles, as have chests and seat furniture with their distinctive styles of wood carving. Decorative carving is a particularly useful indicator of date within Cumbria. Sarah Woodcock (2010) examined built in and fitted styles of cupboards found within Lake District NT properties. 'Spice cupboards' are better described as fitted wall cupboards and would typically be positioned between fire window and hearth. Press cupboards, built in or free standing, typically two tiered, sometimes carved and dated, constructed with a variety of doors, panels and latter drawers, offer storage space for the home. Dates, decorations, and in particular initials carved into such furniture, can offer a link to a particular family, often given on marriage.



There are a range of specialist antique furniture reference guides of particular interest when examining Cumbrian furniture. A useful example is Victor Chinnery's 'Oak Furniture, the British Tradition' (1979, 2016), which includes sections on Lancashire (1640-1720), and separately, Westmorland and the Lake District (1650-1750) domestic furniture. The distinctive animal forms, often carved on domestic Lake District furniture are well illustrated (p443 on). Westmorland, in particular, through families such as Jonas Barber (Snr and Jnr) of Winster, made some of the greatest early 30 hour and 7-day duration brass dial longcase clocks in Northern England (Cave-Brown-Cave, 1979). Dynasties of families married into small town or hamlet clockmaking businesses across the North; Gillows of Lancaster former apprentices likely helped influence clock cases. Brian Loomes (1974, 1975) extensively researched the makers of Westmorland and Lancashire longcase clocks, their histories later extended by Stewart (1996).

Palmer (1944) describes and lavishly illustrates with photos, some 60 historic farmhouses, many from the late C17th, found within Westmorland – a useful resource, when both looking at such properties and comparing similar. Perriman and Johnson (1998) offer a comprehensive research guide and gazetteer on medieval fortified buildings in Cumbria. Their book details surviving buildings within Cumberland, Westmorland, Lancashire North of the Sands, and Sedbergh, by District and Civil Parish. Many properties listed include architectural outline plans and photos. Birdoswald, for example, originally a Roman fort, then tower, later bastle, has an impressive set of scale plans (p135). The book starts with a comprehensive bibliography. Ryder (2025) examines the lesser defensible buildings of Cumbria, their towers, halls and bastles. The approach here aims to focus on the original layout of buildings, which over the centuries would be greatly adapted. The gazetteer provides current photos, outline plans and descriptions for some 169 properties across the County. The RCHM (1970) detail the history and function of seasonal upland sheilings, as well as fortified bastles, across the North – Westmorland, Cumberland and Northumberland. Numerous examples are described and illustrated.

Cumbria, in addition, presents a range of unusual, very specific, fortified building types. Bastles, pele towers, and fortified halls highlight inherent uncertainty regarding security and safety throughout the times of the Border Reiver raids of the later medieval period. Cumbria also offers examples of specific locality building material styles, for example, the clay dabbin farmhouses and barns of the Solway Plain (Jennings, 2003), and the arts and crafts revival of vernacular styles (Hyde et al, 2014). Jennings' study of clay dabbins buildings, in particular, is a delight, with chapters based upon research into some 150 farmhouses, cottages and farm buildings. Examples are illustrated with comprehensive plans, diagrams, illustrations and photos, the construction and stability of clay, wooden cruck frames and thatch considered. Living conditions on the Solway Plain are discussed, along with a chapter on the development of clay buildings and farmhouses over time.

Sources of information: defining Cumbria

Cumbria, an administrative non-metropolitan County, The Lake District at its centre, was formed in 1974; the County Council was abolished in April 2023. In understanding Cumbrian architecture and furnishings, it is best to study a variety of books, often written before 1974. Resources are available that cover the historical area from which Cumbria was formed: the historic Counties of Westmorland, Cumberland, parts of Lancashire 'North of the Sands,' and in addition a small part of the West Riding of Yorkshire. For many visitors, the Lake District National Park will be the focus of interest.

Suggested further reading

Brunskill, R.W. 1953. The Development of the Small House in the Eden Valley from 1650 to 1840. *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*. 53, p160-89.
Brunskill, R.W. 1957. The Development of the Large House in the Eden Valley, 1350-1840. *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*. 57, p72- 96. Available at: https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/library/browse/details.xhtml?recordId=3197031
Brunskill, R.W. 1970. *Illustrated handbook of Vernacular Architecture*. London. Faber and Faber.
Brunskill, R.W. 1974. *Vernacular Architecture of the Lake Counties*. London. Faber and Faber.
Brunskill, R.W. 2002. *Traditional Buildings of Cumbria, the County of the Lakes*. London. Cassell.
Denyer, S. 1991. *Traditional Buildings and Life in the Lake District*. London. Victor Gollancz.
Hoskins, W.G. 1955. *The Making of the English Landscape*. London. Hodder and Stoughton.
Hyde, M., Whittaker, E. and Corbett, V. 2014. *Arts and Crafts Houses in the Lake District*. London. Frances Lincoln.
Jennings, N. 2003. *Clay Dabbins: Vernacular Architecture of the Solway Plain*. Cumbria. Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society.
Machin, R. 1997. The Great Revival. A Reassessment. *Past and Present*. 77. P33-56.
Palmer, J.H. 1944. *Historic Farmhouses in and around Westmorland*. Kendal. Westmorland Gazette.

Brears, P. 2018. A social History of Oak Furniture in Cumbria. *Regional Furniture*, xxxii, p1-26. Available at https://share.google/CnUwNmXTbKmikJ9Zd
Cave-Browne-Cave, B.W. 1979. *Jonas Barber, Clockmaker of Winster. Ulverston*. Reminder Press.
Chinnery, V. 2016 (rev edn). *Oak Furniture. The British Tradition*. Woodbridge. ACC Art Books.
Loomes, B. 1974. *Westmorland Clocks and Clockmakers*. Newton Abbot. David & Charles.

Loomes, B. 1975. *Lancashire Clocks and Clockmakers*. Newton Abbot. David & Charles.
Stewart, Susan. 1996. *Biographical List of Clockmakers: North Lancashire and South Westmorland 1680-1900*. Lancaster University. Centre for North-West Regional Studies.
Woodcock, S. 2010. Fitted Press Cupboards and Built-in Wall Cupboards of the Lake District. *Regional Furniture*, xxiv, 2010. 917-39. Available at https://share.google/EbJWTQAOK6LE4r5k2

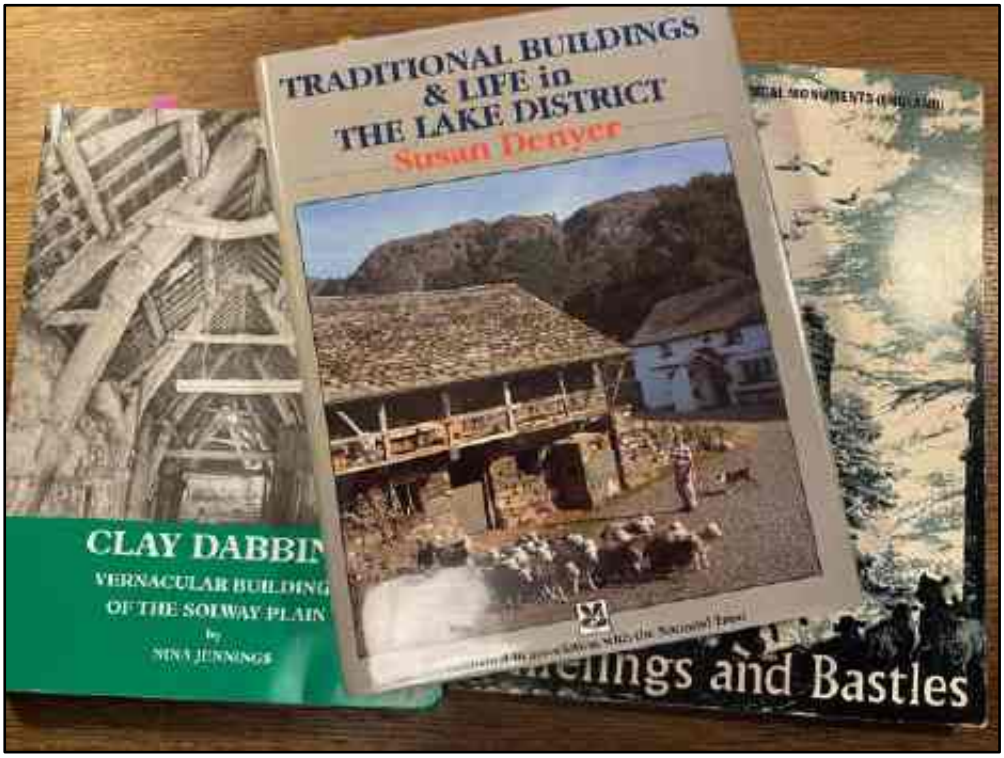
Later CVBG newsletter contributions will seek to cover:

- The broad architecture found within Cumbria. Reference books include the Pevsner Guides to notable buildings by hamlet, village and town, both rural and urban. Also, The Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Westmorland.
- Key resources and textbooks on vernacular architecture across Britain. Cruck frame buildings. Regional building styles and available materials.
- Popular works on the history of Cumbria, and how architecture fits within.

CVBG Library

A new library of CVBG books is now held in The Old Court House, Shap. An inventory of titles was emailed to all CVBG members in November 2025. Contact the CVBG Secretary with requests to borrow titles.

Dr Justin Wood



4. HOLLIN ROOT OLD HOUSE A RARE SURVIVOR FROM THE 16TH CENTURY

With the kind permission of Mr. P. and Mrs. A Holmes

By Paul Lewis, Chairman

Very rarely have single storey 2-unit houses survived in Cumberland; Brunskill tells us that many were rebuilt up to 2-storeys after 1650, often with offshuts to accommodate dairies and pantries. However, here at Hollin Root Old House in St John's-in-the-Vale there is documentary evidence that the property was tenanted by John Hodgson in 1556 when the riparian landowner was the Radclyffe family, the Earls of Derwentwater. We can thank the efforts of the current and previous owners for an exceptional compilation of historic deeds, plans and conveyances that shine a light on ownership from the 16th century up to today.

The place name 'Hollin Root' has its origins in Old English, reflecting the long-established reverence in which the Holly tree was held from pre-Christian times. It was a known custom of shepherds to feed their flocks the tender sprouts of the holly, so perhaps this part of the vale was noted for its holly trees from a time when Cumbria was more influenced by Anglo-Saxon Northumbria than the later Norse phases of settlement nearby at Threlkeld and Crossthwaite.

Research work by Helen Marr, a previous owner, has established that the original land holding extended to only 10 acres, and other than some additional grazing acquired during later enclosures, that same small core holding remains. This system of small land holdings appears similar to those known to have been held in late medieval times by the Tenants of Troutbeck, Windermere where leaseholds extended to no more land than was needed to support five cattle, or 'chattels.'

The earliest impetus for improvement in tenants' fortunes appears to have been a change of tenure in the farms of the area by the Earl between 1648 and 1689; thereafter, land was held on a system of ground rent alone, the land and buildings being owned free of other rents and obligations.

Plate 1: East Elevation

In 1689 the property was bought by Thomas Wilson and his wife, Katherine, who promptly set about building a new 2-storey gable-entry house close by on the same plot; the work was finished in 1691, and the original house was abandoned as the principal residence. Whilst it may have been lived in thereafter by other family members for a time, its use appears to have relegated to farm storage, saving it from major rebuilding.

When Thomas Wilson died in 1713, his will and testament show us how the late medieval system of land holdings was beginning to change as a process of aggregation was underway. On his death, he bequeathed to his wife Katherine 'all those closes and parcels of ground called…. Near Stonethwaite, Far Stonethwaite and Stonethwaite Moss together with two grasses in White Moss….(and) all those messuages and tenements called Hollin Root which I have in my present possession.'

In 1745 the Earl of Derwentwater rode with the Jacobite Rebellion of that year, and following execution for treason, his estates were confiscated by the Crown and awarded to the Greenwich Hospitals, to whom ground rents would have then been paid thereafter. References for the hospitals still appear within the deeds of some local properties.

Plate 2: Inglenook with stone hood above

Plate 1 above shows the 2-unit dwelling with an attached animal house, but no cross passage, a feature that would often appear in later evolutions of this simple floor plan. Internally, there is an impressive stone-built fire hood over an inglenook (Plate 2), and whilst the internal partitions have been removed, the earlier locations of a fire window and spice cupboard remain discernible. Accommodation appears to have be limited to a fire room with gable entry, hallan and heck, with a parlour and further sleeping accommodation in the loft. There are no internal or external staircases, suggesting that a ladder stair was the original provision, now lost.
Map regression shows how one alteration was carried out in the 19th century to provide a possible loose box on the west side. In 1823 Greenwood's map (Plate 3) depicts Hollin Root but provides little detail. A later early 19th century map in the owner's archive is characteristic of a Tithe Map so can be dated to the 1830's and

40's (Plate 4). The Old House has a clearly rectangular footprint, but by 1862, the Ordnance Survey's first map shows an offshut on the west side.
The CVBG recording team will shortly be conducting a detailed survey of the old house and members will be able to learn more about the details of this rare survivor when a ZOOM presentation is given later in the year.

Plate 3: Greenwood's Map of 1823

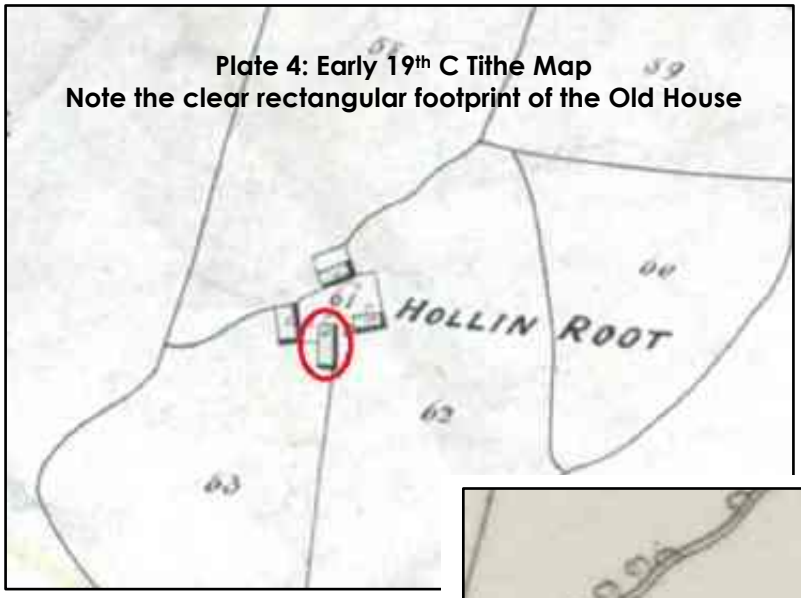


Plate 4: Early 19th C Tithe Map
Note the clear rectangular footprint of the Old House

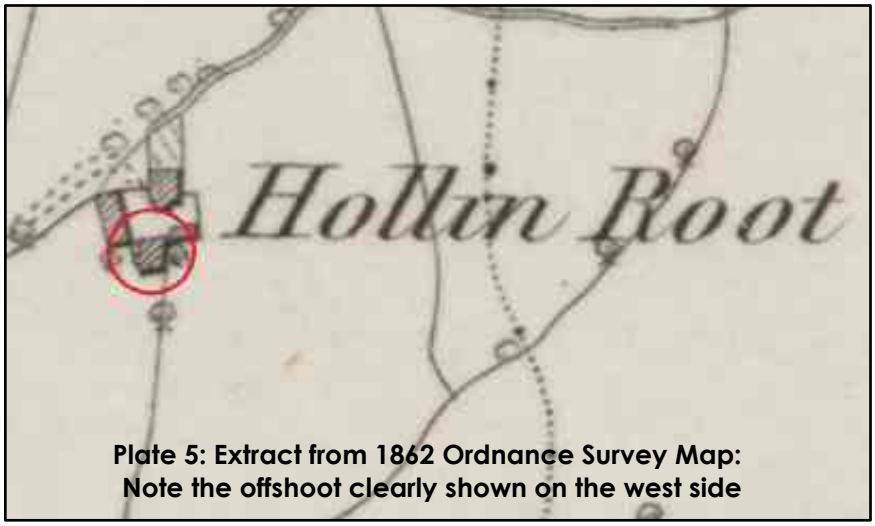


Plate 5: Extract from 1862 Ordnance Survey Map:
Note the offshoot clearly shown on the west side

P. Lewis. Dec 2025

5. Christmas Lunch 2025 - The Punchbowl Inn, Askham

A warm welcome awaited us at this Grade II listed C18 pub, situated at the bottom end of the lovely, planned village of Askham and above an ancient crossing of the River Lowther. Thirty-nine members filled the comfortable Breakfast Room which, with its roaring fire, we had to ourselves for the afternoon.

We had pre-ordered our meals from an interesting menu and it began with a choice of delicious freshly baked breads with yeast butter for everyone. These were followed by particularly good starters for those who had ordered them, with preparation and cooking being clear to see through the large hatches into the kitchen alongside us.
The quality of the freshly cooked food was incredibly good, with fabulous flavours and well presented by the creative chefs in the kitchen.
Our meals were served by attentive staff members, Laura and Gary. The gaps between the courses allowed time to chat, to participate in the raffle and also to discuss in team's possible answers to the fiendish questions posed in the annual Christmas quiz. Working in teams of four or five, the eventual winning team was 'PACS' (initials of team members) with twenty points.

Those who had ordered deserts went on to enjoy more delicious food followed by mince pies which came for everyone with teas and coffees.
These were also excellent but in some cases were taken home to eat later!
Overall, an exceptionally delicious meal in a relaxing environment.
With thanks to the staff at The Punchbowl Inn, Askham.

Report and Images – Stephanie Hewison

6. Stone-Built Drying Kilns in Cumbria: Some New Evidence

For those of us who attended the VAG conference in Cumbria in 2015, one of the highlights was undoubtedly visiting the drying kiln in Hartsop – many of our members have no doubt seen it since. Unusually, perhaps uniquely the drying floor is constructed from stone (slate) joists, which would have supported a 'kiln hair;' a woven mat probably of horse hair, designed to prevent the grain from falling into the hearth below[i].

Other examples of such kilns and details about their construction, the source of the stone and so forth, are, to my knowledge, not forthcoming. I was therefore intrigued to discover, on purchasing a copy of *Two Thousand Five Hundred Cumberland and Westmorland Folk*[ii], several unexpected references two what are clearly the same type of structure. These were all from the mid-18th century and also contained information about where the stone for them was obtained.

The earliest is an account from 1746 for the construction of at least one kiln and related structures at Thornthwaite Mill, east of Ullswater[iii]. Amongst the general purchases of loads of lime and general building stone it includes the acquisition of 55 stone '*whelps*', slate from '*Mosedale quarry*', and 31 load of '*laths from Mosedale Quarry & Wrangdale gill*' as well as '*carriage of the loads from Mosedale*'[iv]. Clearly these 'laths' were made of stone. Wrangle Gill appears to be Wrengill Quarry in Longsleddale[v].

An explanation for 'whelps' is provided by another account, for a '*new house for a kiln to dry corn*' at Dalemain Mill in 1748/9. Again, the usual purchases of stone and lime are listed, but also another '*55 whelps got at Penrith Fell for the kiln… They were 4 foot 4 inches long & 14 inches broad*'[vi] Clearly 'whelps' were considerable pieces of stone and of a size big enough to suggest that they correspond to the stone joists supporting the kiln floor at Hartsop. The account from Dalemain also includes the purchase of '*700 stone laths… for the new kiln & carriage from Patterdale down Ullswater to Waterfoot*'[vii] demonstrating that they were taken from a quarry to the south and then transported by water. A further '*21 horse load of stone laths weighing 14 stone*' was also acquired and brought from the quarry at Mosedale via Brampton[viii]. The term 'stone laths' no doubt represents the same element seen in the Hartsop kiln that formed the kiln floor. The account from 1748/9 also includes a useful description of the actual construction of the kiln itself:

'*All the inside work of the kiln: making the lanthorn* [lantern?]*, walling the fore breast & sloping the kiln round about & laying on the stone beams & dressing the stone whelps & setting them on & also dressing the stone laths & setting them on & plastering the kiln pot*'[ix].

A third account from 1752 repairs to the '*Powley Mill Kiln*', presumably referring to a mill and kiln at Pooley Bridge, again refers to '*10 horse loads of kiln laths got at Mosedale slate quarry… every load weighing 14 stone*', which were again transported via Bampton Grange, as well as '*6 horse loads of kiln laths got at the slate quarry at Wrangle Gill*' that were also taken via Bampton Grange[x], but presumably by land. Another description of the building of the kiln is also given:

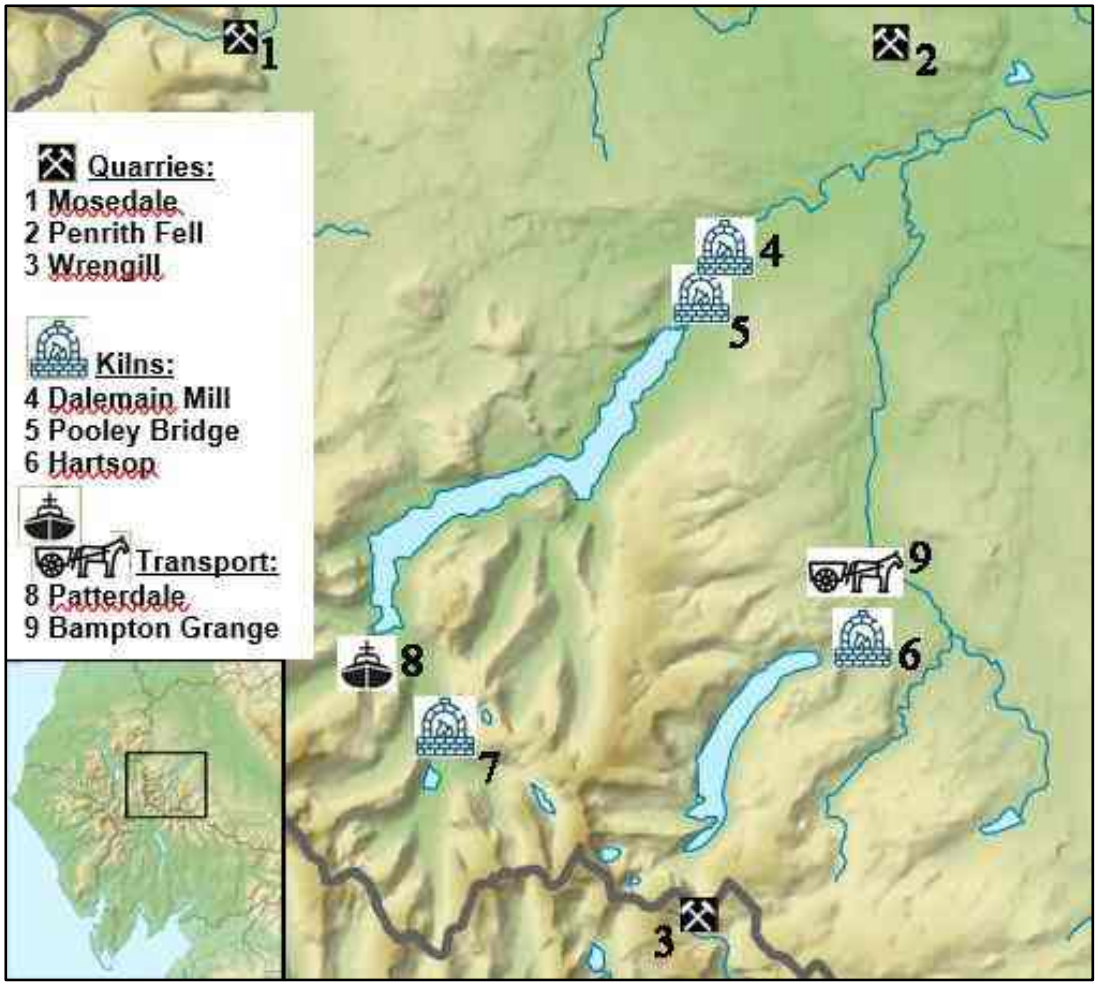
'*Making the guts or inside of the kiln at Powley mill all anew of stone that is making the fire place & lanthorn raising the fore breast & sloping all the inside of the kiln & raising four pillars to lie the stone beams on and dressing the whelps & laths & setting them & fixing them*'[xi].

Interestingly, it also mentions the fitting of a 'wire cover on the kiln'[xii] – whether this is indicating that the kiln floor was covered with a metal cover rather than horse hair is not clear.
While there is clearly considerable potential for further research into this subject, these three records demonstrate that, far from being ubique or even unusual, the kiln at Hartsop was just one of many constructed in the same manner. The information collated by Wilkins provides a rare insight into the construction of such structures and demonstrates that they were part of a network of quarrying and transport that extended from at least Mosedale and Penrith Fell in the north, to Hartsop in the south, and all around the Ullswater area.

Does this potentially mean that more surviving examples of such kilns might exist within this region? Was stone used to build drying kilns in a similar way elsewhere, or did it rely on the ideal type of material being present? Was this a tradition that was only found in the 18th century[xiii] or did it have much earlier origins? Hopefully more records will become known that will help to elucidate the subject.

Daniel W Elsworth

N.B. Detailed figure and acknowledgements overleaf.



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[i] Vernacular Architecture Group, 2015, *Spring Conference 2015: Cumbria*, unpublished handbook, p.20-21.
[ii] Wilkins, F, 2006, *Two Thousand Five Hundred Cumberland and Westmorland Folk*, Wyre Forest Press: Kidderminster.
[iii] Lakes Guides, nd *Mill, Bampton (2) Suggested Thornythwaite Mill*, https://www.lakesguides.co.uk/html/lgaz/lgazfram.htm gives a possible location based on Jefferey's map of 1770.
[iv] *Op cit*, 25.
[v] Lakes Guides, nd *Wrengill Quarry, Longsleddale*, https://www.lakesguides.co.uk/html/lgaz/lk12892.htm
[vi] Wilkins 2006, 105.
[vii] *Ibid*.
[viii] *Ibid*.
[ix] *Ibid*.
[x] *Op cit*, 22.
[xi] *Ibid*.
[xii] *Ibid*.
[xiii] The kiln at Hartsop is suggested as perhaps being as early as 16th century (VAG 2015, 20), but has not, to my knowledge, been independently dated.