# NEWSLETTER No. 52 – SUMMER 2026

## 1. From the Chairman

I wish to warmly thank members and the committee for their support over the last three years of my tenure as Chairman. I shall step down from the post at the Annual General Meeting on 5th September, secure in the knowledge that CVBG has grown in membership whilst remaining financially sound and producing an interesting range of events, newsletter articles and engagement for its members.
I shall remain as a committee member to support the new Chairman, continuing to lead the Recording Group that is now providing a steady stream of reports, newsletter articles and data for ZOOM presentations.

I hope to see you at our Annual General Meeting that will be held from 11.30 a.m. at Kirkbampton Village Hall CA5 6HX on Saturday, 5th September 2026. Tea and coffee will be served from 11.00 a.m. Once our formal meeting has finished, we will have the pleasure of a presentation by Jamie Quartermain, Archaeologist who will talk of his researches and observations of the famous Coombe Gill Mill in Borrowdale.

Some other dates for your diary:

- 4th August – Cockermouth walkabout, including a tour of Cockermouth Castle
- 10th September – 'Place Names of Cumbria', a ZOOM presentation by Dr. A. Lloyd
- 17th October – President's Day, Maulds Meaburn Village Hall
- 11th November – ZOOM presentation, 'Hollin Root Old House' by Paul Lewis
- Christmas lunch – to be confirmed

With kindest regards

## 2. Hollin View Old House - Update on tree ring data - Paul Lewis

After recording the Old House in the spring of this year, CVBG have supported the owners with grant funding to instruct tree ring dating of a curved timber hearth beam, this appearing to be an original timber element that held no evidence of previous use. This further investigation was considered important as there is documentary evidence that the site was tenanted in 1556 and tree ring dating may help date the structure.

Investigation was carried out by Alison Arnold and Robert Howard of NTRDL, based in Nottingham. An image of the samples taken is shown in Plate 1. The owner elected to extend the survey to the truss, ceiling and some purlin timbers also.

Plate 1

Plate 2

Analysis identified a felling date of the mid-sixteenth century (AD 1532 – 57) for the hearth timber (see Plate 2). The ceiling beam and purlin dated to the mid-seventeenth century (AD 1656). The testing for the trusses was inconclusive.

The hearth timber date therefore aligns closely with the written tenure details of 1556 and confirms the structure as an early single storey 2-bay single pile farmhouse with animal house. The dating of other timber elements speaks to a mid-17$^{th}$ C refurbishment when the roof and ceiling arrangements were updated. By 1691 the Old House is known to have been vacated in favour of a new 2-storey double pile house within the curtilage ▪

## 3. Lorton Study Day – 9th May at Lorton Village Hall

### Village, Hamlet and Farmstead in the Lake District.

**Speaker-Angus Winchester, Emeritus Professor of History at Lancaster University.**

Angus began by outlining the content of his talk which would trace the historic settlement pattern and the establishment of hamlets and farmsteads in the Lake District valleys from pre-medieval roots through to the Great Rebuilding.

Structure of landholding

After the Norman Conquest, structure was imposed by Norman castles, with the Lake District looking outwards to castles on the outskirts. These included the honour of Cockermouth, Egremont Castle (Copeland), round to Eskdale then Millom. It also included Greystoke Castle, Kendal Castle and on to Furness Abbey and the Hawkeshead area. Divisions occurred in how land was ordered between lowlands and uplands. There were fewer overlords ruling as there were lords of their own manors with their own tenants around them. Angus showed a map illustrating demesnes (land attached to a manor for personal use, rather than being rented out), portions of estate land and a manor house to a 'lesser' lord who became a tenant. The map also showed free chases (privately owned forested hunting reserves, owned by a nobleman).

Gentry seats gradually dwindled with few showing on Lysons map of 1816. A good example of a former gentry seat is Kentmere Hall, now part of the range of buildings that is a working farm.

Cores of early settlement and peripheries of colonisation

A lot of the Lake District valleys had cores of settled land with defined boundaries, probably from well before the Norman Conquest. This included some areas of less desirable looking land on the peripheries and on the frontier of medieval colonisation. Many 'thwaite' place-names (Old Norse-*pveit*), meaning a clearing, a piece of land cut off and separated, indicate the whereabouts of areas of colonisation at this time and were often found in clusters; examples in the Cocker Valley include Littlethwaite, Brackenthwaite, Lanthwaite, Thackthwaite and Gillberthwaite. Names including 'erg' denote a shelter, temporary dwelling or sheiling used during the movement of stock to higher grazing during the summer time.

© Mike Turner

Villages: High and Low Lorton

Lorton, the 'ton' meaning farmstead, estate or village-where people live, began as one settlement, probably pre-Norman in a well-drained, fertile, wide valley floor. The subdivision into High and Low Lorton most probably came about when High Lorton and its lands were granted to Carlisle priory. Both are linear villages separated by a long, narrow road.

Colonisation: from summer grazings to permanent settlement (1)-Wythop

The area of Wythop which had been largely uninhabited and used for grazing in the forest of the Derwent fells was presented to John de Lucy in 1260 by his mother

Alice de Lucy. The intention was to improve and colonise the land which was achieved by 1307 with Wythop becoming a separate manor.

Colonisation (2)-Newlands Valley

Colonisation in this area took place more slowly and was gradually taken in from the hills and the swampy valley floor. This was drained (probably by monks from Furness Abbey) and pastoral sheep farming became the basis for the local economy.

Colonisation (3)-Buttermere

Buttermere, with its flat valley floor, was probably colonised 1215-1327. Some of the land was held by Cockermouth with farms around the edges; newer farms were established on the fellside -Wood House, High House and Bowderbeck. The upland areas belonged to feudal lords who received money from colonisation.

Monastic land holdings in the Lake District

Small pockets became monastic land holdings with half of Borrowdale held by Fountains Abbey. Smaller holdings were Shap, Calder and St Bees.

Path from Gatesgarth, Buttermere ©Mike Turner

Vaccaries: lordly cattle ranches

There were many livestock breeding farms, or vaccaries in the Pennines in the Middle Ages but they were much less common in the Lake District. Those that existed were at the heads of valleys, such as Ennerdale and at Wasdale Head, where four were recorded (owned by the barons ot Egremont and dated 1322). Monastic vaccaries were found at Brotherilkeld (Furness Abbey 1292), at the head of Eskdale, at Stonethwaite (Fountains Abbey 1302), and also high up in Borrowdale. Nothing is known about the way these vaccaries were run, only that such farms were known to exist in these locations. Records do however exist from a vaccary at Gatesgarth, Buttermere which lay in the part of the honour of Cockermouth belonging to William de Fortibus, Earl of Albermarle. With his death in 1260, followed by that of his wife Countess Isabella (1263), detailed records of this tiny part of a huge estate were taken over by the Crown and preserved. Between 1282-3 records show the following livestock at Gatesgarth:
1 mare and foal, 2 bulls, 46 cows, 30 bullocks and heifers and 24 calves.
It is thought that the cattle were kept, not for their meat but for milk, their skin, and tallow for candles. The bullocks could be kept and once mature, used as draught animals and the heifers kept as breeding stock.

Late-medieval change:desertions.

As time went on, Lords of the Manor found it not worthwhile to farm themselves and they leased out their land. The black death (1346-1353), cattle plagues and famine devastated populations and over time land was, in some cases, divided into smaller units. Pastures were shared with other farmers and some desertions took place. It was a period of great change. An example of a deserted settlement is at Rannerdale in the Buttermere Valley with the outline of the site still just visible in winter time.

The 'Great Rebuilding'.

Over time, conditions gradually began to improve with an increasing population and an improving economy. Valleys became more densely settled with holdings sometimes divided. This enabled more families to make a better living with farming sometimes combined with tanning and textiles. More fragile and rudimentary early buildings were replaced by mainly stone built houses. The stone was sourced, where possible, from local quarries. Roof levels were often raised, chimneys built and thatched roofs replaced with slates or stone flags. Small mullioned windows replaced unglazed slots.

Angus showed examples of two houses built during this period (Orthwaite Hall, Udale -1675 and Crabtreebeck, Loweswater -1660 and two datestones from others of a very similar period. Also, a photograph from the village of Tallentire which had been visited by Thomas Denton on his 'Perambulation of Cumberland', 1687-8. He is quoted as praising the use of building materials, particularly the 'blew slate'….'the best blew slate quarries in England about these Skiddaw mountaines'.

Customary tenantright

This referred to the working of land descended through ancestry with an 'ancient yearly rent' but with a tenure 'tantamount to freehold' and 'at the will of the lord subject to the customs of the manor'. This tenure could include periodic fines on a change of tenant but also on a change of lord. Courts would uphold the tenant's rights.

Yeoman 'dynasties': Place and Ground names

These farming tenants who were 'landowners in all but name' became known as 'yeomen'. A number of these yeoman occupied farms stayed in families for many generations. Examples include; Hudson Place, Jackson Ground, Iredale Place and Jenkinson Place. Stability of tenure helped wealth remain in these families.

Near Godferhead ©Mike Turner

Wealth behind 'Great Rebuilding'

Wealth was being generated through trade and this was often on show in some way in a building. A slide of stained-glass panels dated 1638 at Tolson Hall, Burneside, near Kendal shows symbols representative of cloth exported to the West Indies and early imports of tobacco in return.

A further building phase took place in C18 which showed alterations or additions to many C17 homes. A slide showing Godferhead, Loweswater, clearly shows the impact of C18 wealth in the two stages of the building.

The impact of trade in coal and tobacco is depicted in a painting of Whitehaven by Matthias Read in 1730. Yeoman farmers in the Whitehaven area became involved in North Atlantic trade with west Cumbria being the gate to the Irish Sea. A slide showed the fine home of Isaac Fletcher (1714-1781), yeoman farmer, legal adviser and leading member of the Quaker community. He was involved in brewing, importing Irish yarn, running a stocking factory in Cockermouth, importing graphite from America and mining lead from Galloway and Northern Ireland. He

acted in partnership with fellow Quakers, Whitehaven merchants and other yeomen in each of these projects.

Parliamentary enclosure: new farmsteads on former common land.

© John McDowell

In early C19, thousands of acres of common land were gradually enclosed to improve it, even when it was not always improvable. New fields were demarcated with straight boundaries, miles of new walls were built and as necessary, new field names allocated. Some new farmsteads were established on such land, for example Hatteringill farmstead overlooking the Lorton Valley. It was built high up on unsuitable land and is now just piles of stones. Evidence of stack stands for an oat crop remain (platforms built to raise haystacks above damp ground). Many changes have taken place over the decades in and around Lorton with the development of new businesses and industries. Angus referred to the brewery workers' cottages in High Lorton with steep flights of steps to first floor entrances, and Jenning's Malthouse, now the Village Hall (Yew Tree Hall, see image above right) in which this gathering was held.

Angus's talk ended with a slide of the elegant Lorton Park, originally built on the site of the northernmost farmstead on the village street. Bought by the Dodgson family of Embleton in 1809, it was rebuilt around 1830 by John Dodgson as a Regency villa.

*Grateful thanks to Angus Winchester for his most interesting and enlightening talk.*

**Stephanie Hewison**

## Lorton Continued – *Afternoon Session*

### 'My Journey as a SPAB Scholar' A talk by Sarika Jhawar

In the afternoon we were treated to a beautifully illustrated & personal heritage journey from Sarika. She studied architecture in India with an emphasis on design and creation of new buildings, there was little taught on vernacular buildings. She was aware of works by a Sri Lankan architect who blended European modernism with local vernacular tradition and wished to learn more. She completed a Masters Degree in Vernacular Architecture at Oxford where Paul Oliver, a renowned architect and architectural anthropologist, had taught. The Paul Oliver Vernacular Architecture Library (POVAL) is a massive archival collection. He wrote a 3 volume 'Encyclopaedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World', published in 1997. Sarika quoted from his book 'Dwellings, The House across the World, 1987' where both symbolic and cultural meaning is brought to life in the architecture and structure of domestic buildings.

With her interest in heritage conservation Sarika embarked on a SPAB Scholarship and undertook an intensive 9 month learning journey covering 14,000 mile, using 12

ferries to explore over 200 sites in Great Britain & Ireland. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) was founded by William Morris, Philip Webb and others including women like Rhoda & Agnes Garrett in response to work of Victorian architects whose enthusiastic restoration caused irreparable damage to historic buildings. An example being St Albans Cathedral which was 'restored' to Gothic imagined perfection.

Ruskin Memorial © Mike Turner

The Manifesto of the SPAB extends protection to all 'times & styles' and these conservation principles to respect what's there are continued in today's practice. A local connection to Cumbria is through John Ruskin, philosopher, writer & early environmentalist who in later life lived at Brantwood by Coniston Water. His writings inspired Morris in the 19th C Arts & Crafts Movement. 'William Morris & John Ruskin: A New Road on which the World Should Travel' published in 2019 explores the various intersections of their achievements.

KINTSUGI is the Japanese art of mending broken objects in which the damage is considered part of the history of an object to be celebrated and where the repair is highlighted and SASHIKO is a form of Japanese embroidery used to decorate and reinforce clothing to increase durability and longevity. Sarika discussed honest/conservative repairs in buildings with reference to Kintsugi & Sachiko, a repair may be evident using new material, be sustainable and yet keep the majority of the original fabric where practical. Not everything is meant to be conserved however; each culture has its own ideas. We saw views of fabric where the marks tell a story such as in the protection of churches and vernacular buildings against evil spirits, with symbols placed at vulnerable areas such as fireplaces, doors and windows as a ritual protection. She showed photographs of these symbols and of wear & tear in masonry from years of use; the fabric tells a story.

The SPAB Scholarship addresses the need for an architect to gain practical experience with traditional buildings, materials and techniques. It teaches the philosophy of sympathetic repair of old buildings and the importance of understanding and appreciating them before beginning the work. Sarika met many leading building conservation professionals and saw a wide range of trades & repair techniques. The topics covered vary each year but aim to cover the philosophy of repair and conservation, the history of vernacular construction in the UK and the materials of building (stone & slate, timber, brick & tile, mortars). Through site visits she gained firsthand experience of careful and considered repair along with excellence in skilled crafts. There were opportunities to discuss and ask questions of architects, surveyors, engineers, conservators and crafts people at building sites, offices, workshops & yards and to see skilled repairs with hands on experience where possible.

A whole spectrum of buildings was visited from Irish Cottages, churches, houses & windmills to Westminster Abbey. Her visits were not only to buildings but also a ship, HMS Unicorn, which despite incorporating metal is well preserved but now moving to dry dock nor the old & crumbly, such as a disused World War II military training dome which is now an art space/ sound installation. We heard of the problems at Hill House in Helensburgh, a National trust for Scotland property, built by Charles Rennie Mackintosh as an experimental building with an external Portland cement render which was not watertight; the walls became saturated, crumbling & threatened the interiors. A protective steel frame and chain mail tent structure is now in place. The walls have now dried sufficiently for the cement to be chipped off with a view to replacement by a breathable surface render.

Sarika covered the role of members of a community having an awareness of the value of heritage such as those who stepped in to make repairs to a pub using traditional materials or others fighting demolition of an Art Deco cinema in Glasgow. She was enthusiastic about the Dunbar Conservation Area regeneration Scheme (CARS) where initiatives include traditional skills training within this sustainable heritage project and provides work for youth in the community. She has encountered challenges including the sourcing of straw for thatching; the shorter variety of wheat now grown is of no use. Ireland is growing some wheat specifically for thatching, previous use was of Marram grass there and so the craft is impacted as that is now protected. Lime was quarried in Shap for iron smelting but with electric furnaces this is no longer needed & the quarry will close down, global changes will have local impact on the sourcing of lime. She was impressed by the generosity of people in sharing their knowledge, time and for the hospitality given. During her scholarship she recorded what she had seen with her own drawings rather than notes, a sketch book is submitted to the SPAB library. Research findings show that living in close proximity to historic assets boosts wellbeing. She had many meaningful conversations around conservation and with craftspeople which was not adversarial becoming better equipped to apply the insights to practice. There is a need for conservation industry including an appreciation of craft. Sarika is now working for the National Trust as a conservation architect.

Dunbar Regeneration ©Mike Turner

It was an excellent presentation which provoked searching questions and observations from an interested audience ▪

**John McDowell**

## 4. Vernacular Architecture Group-Spring Conference – Stirling

Around 56 delegates attended this Conference of which at least 9 are CVBG members. We were based on the campus of Stirling University; the 1960's buildings are set around a loch in the landscaped estate of Airthrey Castle. The theme of the conference was 'Variety' and our neighbours in the Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group (SVBWG) were much involved in arranging the programme along with the VAG committee. A previous conference held in Scotland was based in Dundee in 1981. As usual there was a comprehensive handbook containing our programme & itinerary, detailed information, drawings & plans for many of the places to be visited. We had 3 days out, transport by coach and a daily lecture after dinner.

I asked the CVBG attendees for contributions as to what was of most interest to them and am grateful for the helpful replies received. The advice was to focus on buildings closest to our own vernacular style.

The first lecture covered 'Environment, Materials and Vernacular Buildings in Scotland': use of thatch, coppiced timbers, recycling of wood used especially hardwood, stone & harling, lime render & slate were all discussed.

10th June - **The City of Stirling**

We followed a well thought out & documented self-guided walk past town houses, shops & historic buildings of the city centre with visits to Cowane's House, a stabilised ruin built from around 1603 but unroofed by 1877, Holy Rude Kirk and then lunch at Cowane's Hospital, built as an Almshouse which became the Guildhall. Whilst many of the early houses are of local whinstone with sandstone quoins, lintels etc. & were originally harled much harling was intentionally removed by the time of the Edwardian era with subsequent water penetration of the stone & structural decay. Historic Environment Scotland now advocates the reintroduction of breathable lime harling.

Great Hall at Stirling Castle ©JohnMcDowell

We had an extended tour of Stirling Castle in the afternoon; high status buildings of the Stewart dynasty surround the Inner Close on castle rock summit. We saw richly reconstructed rooms in the Palace with replica 'Stirling Heads',painted oak carvings on ceilings. The Great Hall at the Castle is an example of the reinstatement of mustard coloured harling.

The evening lecture on the Scottish Built Culture and their Patterns of Place: covered examples from Neolithic times, the Souterrain, Crannog, Broch, Moss house (excavated out of sphagnum moss), turf built, clay 'biggins'/mud & stud dwellings, shielings with stone foundations (soft capping each season when rebuilt in timber), Creel house (wooden frame, turf clad), Croft houses & steadings.

11th June **- Highland Fringe**

Claire Jeffery's personal favourite was the library at Inverpeffray, originally established in 1680 as Scotland's first free public library, now housed in a building dated 1762 which still contains the founders' collection as well as more recent bequests. We also viewed the adjacent Chapel, internal consecration marks were visible (also seen in the church viewed in Stirling). Moirlanich Longhouse, near Killin is a cruck framed cottage with a byre under one roof, a rare survival of a type of

building which was once common in the Highlands and of similar dwellings around Loch Tay. Built with local materials in stone with crucks of elm, ash & sycamore resting on flat stones, with tie beams & purlins of ash & pine. Turf & thatch remnants of local material (rush rye, wheat & oat were all used at different times) remain under the corrugated iron (wriggly tin) roof. The hangin' lum' (canopied chimney hood) over the fire is of timber & paper mache. Typically furnished including many artefacts, the space divided by wooden partitions and with blackened roof timbers we got a good impression of how these spaces were lived in and used. It was inhabited until 1968 but felt as if the family had only just left.

Castle Menzies near Aberfeldy was visted next as an example of an early mature Z plan building in the transition period between the older fortified tower house and later domestic mansions. Acquired by Clan Menzies Society in dilapidated condition in 1957, some 18th C extensions were demolished, and a phased interior restoration continues.

The evening lecture was 'A Vernacular Furniture Tour of Scotland' & covered pieces with emphasis on the Scottish variety: press cupboards, chairs (of oak & pine in a range of styles, including celebrating alliances), linen press, box beds, panelled doors, settles & dressers.

Justin comments: 'The furniture within a vernacular home can be as fascinating as a building; such adds context to the way of life of the homeowners. I was gobsmacked at the difference in 'form and function' of a Scottish Highland dresser to those of England and Wales. The Highland dresser, to the top of its base unit, has a table top, which protrudes several inches to each side, and front. This was a working surface, for making bread or preparing food. Why was a Scottish dresser so different? Scottish 'blackhouse' crofts are a subset of longhouses, and mainly found to the west, in particular the Hebrides. With very thick outer walls, they are so named because the blackhouse did not have chimneys, instead a central hearth, literally in the middle of the croft's living room. As such peat smoke rose and blackened the thatch roof, killing bugs. With space limited, furniture had to be placed at the side of a room, the dresser required to in addition function as a table. English and Welsh dressers, whilst varying in form (open or enclosed base,

Scottish Dresser ©Justin Wood

and style), were essentially sideboards, for storage and display. Scottish vernacular furniture can be highly distinctive and regional.'

12th June - **Forth-ward**

A morning visit to Bannockburn House: A remarkable historic house dating back to 1654, which evolved to a laird's mansion with remarkable plasterwork & interiors. Owned by a trust the community rescue is ongoing and formidable.

Culross, an important mining centre and port which was saved from redevelopment by its subsequent decline. The National Trust for Scotland purchased Culross Palace in 1932. Our visit was a delight, it was a merchant's house (rather than a royal residence) with fantastic original wall decoration & ceiling paintings in the painted chamber. The west block dates from 1597 and the north wing 1611. There are ornate dormer windows, crow stepped gables and pantile roofs; there are also apotropaic marks in the palace, to avert evil. A superb terraced garden behind has views across the Firth of Forth. Other buildings in Culross have been saved by the NTS Little Houses Scheme and are lived in; we had time to follow a suggested village trail and an outside view of striking buildings which are covered by harl & limewash such as the Study c. 1610 which stands near the Mercat Cross.

Culross Palace & Forth View © John McDowell

Sauchie Tower, an impressive tower house near Alloa was built (1430-40) from pink sandstone ashlar, externally11.5m x 10.5m, with walls 1.6-2m thick but the 3m thick west wall has mural chambers on first three levels. Now ruinous, it was built as a status symbol as much as for defence, and had domestic touches such as private chambers, window seats and ornate fireplaces. We had guided visits to two of the four storeys via a circular turnpike stair in NW corner. The ground floor was originally split into two levels and the attic would also have had chambers. Bartizans (small corner turrets) rest on corbels, some loss of parapet but there is a hexagonal cap-house with a pyramidal roof.

The plan is for continued restoration and adaptation as holiday accommodation.

In the final lecture our speaker considered 'The Future of Vernacular Buildings' and an emerging theme which could be summarised as "Buildings need people." There being little point conserving a building unless there are those to care for it. We met some of those people on our visits. The Variety of buildings that were chosen to visit all had vernacular merit and certainly appealed to me. Andrew Carter really enjoyed Stirling and all the wonderful buildings we went to look at. He's organising a joint event with the SVBWG in the spring, most likely for a day on the Solway ▪

## 5. Interesting Feature in Stirling

An intriguing feature from the recent 2026 Annual Vernacular Architecture Group (VAG) Spring Conference in Stirling.

Set within the rather austere-looking Sauchie Tower, an early C15th stone tower house, in Clackmannanshire, its exterior belying a treasure trove of internal features, was an arched recess suggestive of a piscina.

One of the VAG delegates, drawing on decades of work in conserving medieval buildings, guided us through a careful exploration of the recess, supporting its more likely purpose as a 'laver' or 'lavabo' for hand-washing. It was fascinating to learn about this feature, a less common survival outside of larger religious settings, and particularly interesting with there being an intact drain to the outside and intact metal hook for suspending the ewer ▪

**Sian Carlton**

## 6. Tower House visits from Skelton - June 2026

We met in the Reading Room of the Toppin Memorial Hall in Skelton. Following refreshment & as an introduction to the day we reviewed some historic tower houses, halls & castles in this central part of Cumberland:- Hutton in the Forest is nearby, the Pele tower there has a vaulted basement and a Renaissance Gallery (CVBG have held an AGM there)[1], a Baroque hall range as well as Neo-Gothic and Victorian additions. Scales Hall is also close by & was visited in 2022[2]; it is a courtyard house with a late medieval South hall, 17th C cross wings & a 16th c gatehouse. Warnell Hall is further North, near Sebergham, there is evidence of a tower solar to the West end of the main hall with arms of the Dentons & 1683 over a central door. Thistlewood Tower by High Bridge is medieval with a 17th C house attached which replaces the hall block. Rose Castle, previously the Bishop of Carlisle's residence, dates from 1487-9. The Strickland Tower to the NE remains along with a rebuild of various additions after being sacked & roofless. The Percy Tower has a door lock from Lady Anne Clifford. At High Head Castle, 16th C Tudor range remains are behind the service wing but is in a poor state; the Palladian Mansion here is a very fine ruin since a fire in 1956. At Brackenburgh a tower house remains, although much altered, adjacent to a mansion of 1902 by Sir Robert Lorimer. Catterlen Hall has a 14th C tower which was heightened later; there is basement evidence of a previous tower to the SE, the ranges to the S & W are rebuilding of an earlier timber frame hall. Further South is Greystoke Castle, originally a fortified tower house it has a 14th C tower surrounded by an 1840s rebuild. Johnby Hall has a datestone, 1583, on a projecting turret entrance with arms of the Musgraves; it is closer in form to the 16th & 17th C houses on the Scottish side of the Border.

The 14th C Tower at Catterlen Hall © Google Images

Greenthwaite Hall near Greystoke has an F shaped plan of 1580s including a 3 storey gabled porch and an arched fireplace. According to Anthony Emery 'For quality and completeness, Yanwath Hall.... is the finest late medieval house in Cumbria'. In the CVBG Occasional Paper (Number one, June 2017), Peter Messenger details the impressive complex of buildings with the main development in 14th C & 16th C phases. Yanwath has a 3 storey tower and the roof as drawn by Machell c.1350 is as seen today. Hutton John, a fortified tower house, 1282, of the de Hoton family & a later seat of the Hudlestons is just South of the A66.

Great Blencow, on one side of the River Petteril, has origins to the family of that name. Adam de Blencowe was given lands in the area by King Edward III in 1358 and was granted arms by the Lord of neighbouring Greystoke. Across the river there are interesting buildings including the farms & cottages of Little Blencow; we passed through there on our first visit of the day to Blencowe Hall on the Greystoke Road.

[1] See CVBG Newsletter No 21

[2] See CVBG Newsletter No 37

**Blencowe Hall**

This Grade I listed building has 2 fortified Pele towers. The older North tower is believed to date from c. 1475. A gatehouse wing gives access to the cobbled courtyard through an archway. The long hall range was altered & extended in 1590 by Henry Blencowe, date, initials, arms and a Latin tag are over the entrance door from this courtyard. The South tower of c.1620 was also added by him. He was knighted by James I & was married to a sister of Sir Richard Sandford of Howgill Castle (near Milburn in Westmorland) which also has two towers. The Blencowe family sold the hall to the 11th Duke of Norfolk in 1802. The South tower has a large gash on the garden front, top to bottom. This has been attributed to Cromwellian Parliamentary forces who took Penrith in 1648, when Rose & Greystoke Castles were also burnt, soft ground or underground water may however be responsible. Both towers became ruinous but the hall range continued as a tenant farm until 2005. Marcus Binney wrote a piece on Blencowe Hall for the Times (16 Sept. 05), when it was for sale, which he also included in a book 'In Search of the Perfect House: 500 of the Best Buildings in Britain' published in 2007. The hall was purchased by Charles & Christine Rowley of The Rowley Estates and we are very grateful for them in allowing CVBG to visit. The buildings were sensitively restored 2006-8 and are now luxury holiday accommodation.

Blencowe Hall
An engraving from 1794

The Solar, North Tower © John McDowell

We were met on arrival by Joanna who was very attentive and helpful in giving us the opportunity to view both inside & outside the hall on our visit. The architect's challenge was to bring the towers back into use along with modifications to room layout during the restoration to suit modern living. The 'gash' was retained, having significant visual impact and being an important part of the buildings history. A steel frame was used to support the leaning external wall and a new glazed wall inserted behind the breach is set back so that raw edges of broken masonry remain visible. There are small glass balconies and balustrades on 1st & 2nd floors. We were impressed by the blend of traditional methods and materials used with modern techniques & design. New external doors, floors and beams of oak, internal walls finished in lime plaster & a lime wash paint. The range

of reception rooms suits the accommodation for up to 24 guests and included the large North tower Solar on 1st floor. Original features such as stone fireplaces including the arched one in the old farmhouse kitchen, now called the snug and doorways along with a stone spiral stair in a corner of the North tower which leads to a new 'cap house' at 3rd floor level for roof access. This tower (11.7m x7.2m with walls 1.2m thick) was re-crenelated using site evidence, salvaged material and historical illustration for rebuilding the parapet. There are 12 bedrooms, mainly en-suite, named to reflect the history and associations of Blencowe Hall. On outside inspection, the masonry is of sandstone with some 'relieving arches' taking the weight off the straight stone window heads. Most windows are mullioned, many with Tudor style hood moulds and bell-shaped carved stops. The roof has two rows of sandstone with green slates above; the towers are roofed with lead. An 18th C buttress supports the South wall of the gatehouse wing and at one corner of the courtyard the former chapel has been restored to the original dimensions. The gardens complement the hall.

It has been an innovative restoration deserving of the many conservation awards received. The traditional yet contemporary style of the interior is perhaps too modern for some but the heritage project has ensured the survival of a much loved building for future generations to appreciate ▪

**John McDowell**

Looking towards the South Tower ©John McDowell

Hall range of 1590 ©John McDowell

## Hardrigg Hall, Ellonby, Skelton.

This visit formed the second part of a day in the Skelton area, having visited Blencowe Hall in the morning-see report by John McDowell.

**Hardrigg Hall ruined tower**

This seldom seen and rather little-known Grade II listed tower sits in full and rather intriguing view from a tiny road to Ellonby, leading from the B5305 from Penrith to Wigton.

The ruined Tower © Stephanie Hewison

The tower, which as we've already heard, was one of many built in the manor of Skelton, is part of the Inglewood Estate. This area, known originally as Inglewood Forest, stretches approximately from just north of Penrith to Carlisle and is still marked on some Ordnance Survey maps. The buildings within this area varied considerably in size and status and offered a certain amount of protection to the families living within them. The manor of Skelton had been held by the Boyvill family from C12 but on the death of Helewise de Boyvill, was divided ultimately between six heiresses, one portion of which passed to the Southaik family. Hardrigg Hall became the Southaik's strongold and dates from C14 or early C15. It is built from pink and grey sandstone with very thick walls and is described by local historian, F Hudleston as '*one of the smaller class but the stonework is of unusually fine workmanship, and the remaining stones are of unusually large dimensions.*' All that remains now is the complete east wall and partial north and south walls. Hudleston refers to what is left of the tower as '*the most interesting, for it gives us an excellent vertical section of a well built Border Tower which has most of the traditional features of a fourteenth century pele.*

© John McDowell

The length of the tower is over 8m and its width would have been approximately 6m. The top of the parapet would have been around 9m although this is difficult to gauge as the plinth is no longer visible and the ground level may have been almost 1m lower than it is today. Whilst the arch of the basement has gone, in the eastern wall, the springing stones remain of the original vault. In the south eastern corner, a fine shoulder-

arched doorway leads into the small remaining basement of the intact stair turret. Immediately opposite is a blocked round-arched doorway which would have been an external entrance but is now blocked by the gable end of the C19 farmhouse. The angle-arched newel staircase leads upwards from the basement with a round-arched doorway leading to the first floor (solar)and its fireplace with a massive lintel. A further round-arched door leads to what would have been an upper room, with a smaller fireplace. Several members enjoyed going to the top of the stair turret with its stunning outlook.

It is thought that the extensive demolition of the tower took place to provide stone for the building of the farmhouse and attached barns. Clearly, as the farmhouse was built predominantly from smaller stones than those on the outer faces of the remaining tower walls, the inner smaller stones from the walls must have been plundered in great quantities. It was also noted that that the walls of the farmhouse have, at a later date, been raised by three courses above the height of the adjoining barn.

Discussions took place about the narrow gap on the northern side between the gable end of the farmhouse and the tower. This extends inwards only as far as a section of wall, relating to the tower, blocks the gap and continues into the farmhouse. This section of wall is now boxed in inside the house. It is unknown what was on the site before the farmhouse was built but this was clearly part of an earlier wall or structure.

Possible reasons were also discussed as to why the tower wasn't further plundered for its fine stone. Was it left to provide shelter for the house or perhaps as a status symbol from the time of the tower's occupation? Further research would be of interest.

**The Cruck Barn at Hardrigg Hall Farm**

The cruck barn is just a short distance away from the farm buildings and tower and on a different orientation and its appearance rather belies the interior. Alterations to the barn have taken place over the centuries including changes to openings and raising the height at the eaves. Whilst the shallowness of the roof pitch suggests otherwise, the roof was probably originally thatched using readily available material from the area such as straw or possibly reeds. The roof now however comprises ten courses of sandstone slabs with seven diminishing courses of Welsh slates continuing to the sandstone ridge.

Nina Jennings, author of 'Clay Dabbins, Vernacular Buildings of the Solway Plain' who has extensive knowledge of cruck buildings, visited this barn in 2003 and

Cruck Barn Interior ©John McDowell

© Stephanie Hewison

described it as a '*splendid cruck barn'*. On entering this six-bay barn, it certainly is striking, with five full crucks, all reused and very varied, with one row of purlins on each side, some staggered and three scarf joints. Nina Jennings observed that '*the lath and rafters are sawn, as is the ridge pole in the northernmost bay, but the rest of the ridge could be contemporaneous with the crucks'*. Only two pairs of crucks have tie beams. The crucks at either end of the five pairs appear to be original to the shape and possible dimensions of the building when it was thatched, with additional timber between the cruck and the wall. The central three pairs of crucks on the whole form a broader span and enter the walls at a slightly higher point. Windbraces are in place, uncommon in this area. There are no visible pads other than a huge stone protruding from the north eastern corner.

It does appear that at some point, the building may have been widened, with crucks adapted to accommodate this? Nina Jennings describes the building as being '*very considerably altered and it may possibly even have been rebuilt and/or extended using some of the old materials.* When describing the barn, Pevsner writes that '*It seems likely that the stone walls are secondary'*. This building clearly has a very interesting past and dendrochronology could perhaps reveal some useful information. Is it possible that as alterations were made to the barn, it also benefited from the plentiful supply of stone from the demolition of the tower just a hundred meters or so away?

Many thanks to Mary and Alistair Wilson for the opportunity to explore two intriguing and very different buildings on their busy working farm ▪

**Stephanie Hewison**

**Cruck Barn, Hardrigg Hall ©John McDowell**

## 7. A Cruck Frame Barn in Great Langdale at Wall End Farm

In November 1612 there were four farm tenancies at Wall End, one of which was owned by Charles Satterthwaite. When he died in that year his will provided for his Godson, John to build a barn at Wall End with three pairs of trees (crucks) and this can be identified as the barn still standing today (see Plate 1). The barn sits alongside the road to Little Langdale, just south of the Langdale Pikes.

At some time in the 19th century it appears that the apex of the crucks was removed and the pitch of the roof was changed from over 50 degrees to the lower pitch seen today; sawn roof rafters were inserted. This change most probably corresponded to a change from thatch roof finishes to slate. The closed crucks are supported on the front and rear walls and the 19th century alterations to each cruck incorporated the addition of a saddle and king block at the ridge. Whilst the original curved braces remained to the crucks to the rear side, blocking pieces were used to carry the purlins on the front of the building and the original braces were removed along this side (see Plate 2); this caused some instability in the structure that became evident later.

In April 1934 the Record Card for Secular Monuments was compiled by G E Chambers; he described the barn as follows:-

"Barn 150 yards south east of the house (is) built of rounded beck stones, roughly coursed, each course resting on small flat stones; roof with slate. The interior has three large cruck trusses, unevenly spaced and with a plan of 18 foot 6 inches. The principals are only slightly curved and spring from the ground. The last 2 feet of the apex have been cut away when the rafters were renewed. At the level of the top of the wall are heavy collars, halved into the principals and towards the top are collars, also halved. The side purlins have wind braces."

The farmhouse and barn were first listed in January 1967 as Grade II Architectural and Historic Interest; the most recent amendment is dated March 1974. At this time the building is described as "barn to south east is probably C16, stone rubble with lean-to canopy on two sides, shippons attached to the rear, and with three crucks inside."

The National Trust records of 1982 show that the barn was used by the Tenant farmer for over-wintering calves. The record identifies that approximately 80 years earlier the barn was re-roofed and one purlin, the ridge and all the rafters were replaced with sawn softwood members.

In 1985 an Historic Building Survey was carried out by Martin Higgins where the early history of the barn and the farm were researched as noted above. The report identified that the canopies and rear shippons had been removed by that time. Having identified accurately the date of the building as 1612 -1615, Higgins notes that the building was in the process of being renovated and re-roofed. Higgins identifies that whilst there is evidence of a closed window beside the smaller door, hinting at the presence of a former shippon, no internal partitions remained at that time.

In his book "Traditional Buildings of Cumbria" R W Brunskill identifies earliest known examples from documentary evidence for cruck barns to 1357 at Maudes Meaburn, Westmorland but clarifies that clear evidence crucks is rare. In this instance the will of a former tenant dates the barn accurately to 1612-1615 and in that sense makes Wall End most unusual and rare.

In 2018 severe structural movement had resulted in the road-side gable bulging to the point of collapse due to the racking of the crucks in that direction; urgent stabilisation works were required. The roof slates and the rafters were set aside for reuse and the purlins were carefully detached once a system of steel supports was installed to hold the crucks in position. The crucks were carefully realigned to the vertical plane and the roof structure reinstated, complete with its longitudinal braces (See Plate 3).

Extra stiffness was needed to avoid similar movement in the future, so a system of cable ties and bottle screws were added along one side. A heavily decayed cruck blade (See Plate 1) was strengthened with a steel plate, rather than remove the original timber materials. The gable wall alongside the road was partially rebuilt with lime mortar, all in line with the principal of minimum intervention ▪

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