

NEWSLETTER No. 18 – WINTER 2017



1. From the Chairman

2017 ended on a high note, with CVBG's Festive lunch at Askham Hall. (See Claire's report on page 8). Splendid food in a splendid setting, enjoyed by 33 members of the group, followed by the freedom to look round the fine old building at our leisure. Special thanks go to Annette Gibbons, who made this all possible for us, and to Charles Lowther and his staff for their warm welcome. I am sure that some of us will return.

The programme for 2018 is well on the way to completion, and a summary is enclosed. It is good to see regular attenders and it would be great to see some of you who have not managed to come to many events, during the coming year. Please make an effort, as most occasions have been informative and enjoyable. We have so many interesting buildings in Cumbria and we try to visit different areas of the county throughout the year. Please book promptly for events.

I hope that many of you will be able to venture outside Cumbria in May, to the North York Moors, to enjoy a visit to the Ryedale Folk Museum at Hutton le Hole. It is a wonderful place, with examples of buildings from prehistoric dwellings to a twentieth century photographer's studio. It illustrates the development of domestic buildings over the centuries, like a three dimensional encyclopaedia. We are contemplating offering transport, as some of you may not wish to drive so far.

Thank you to all who have contributed to the newsletter during the year, and to the officers and committee for their unstinting support. In the coming year, more members are taking responsibility for organising events, so thanks to them also.

We are pleased that so many of you have renewed your membership in good time, and hope that those who still have to send in their subscription (still only £10, or £15 for two at the same address) will do so.

We hope you enjoy the bookmarks and postcards provided by Mike Turner, our busy secretary, as a small appreciation of your continued support.

Have a great time over the festive season, my best wishes to everyone ■

June L Hill

2. Demystifying Roof Structures, October 2017 – Hannah Kingsbury

In October three members of Cumbria Vernacular Buildings Group delivered talks all about roof structures at Soulby Village Hall.

Peter McGowan gave us a structural engineer's view of roof trusses. In his own words this is an "idealised" way of analysing structures. A structural engineer prevents failure. Peter explained that triangular framed trusses offer the most geometric stability. (He also made the point that trusses have to be "bolted" to be a truss.) However, he stated that vernacular buildings often do not have the same structural stability, as the members often do not meet at the nodes. This seems to defy the structural engineer, however vernacular buildings continue to stand for hundreds of years. St Oswald's church in Grasmere has a pot of issues with its roof, including the fact that the load is applied at points that do not meet up with purlins. In this case the church is not affected by these issues because of the size of the timbers that were used.



Image © Mike Kingsbury

Bob Greaves talked about roof trusses and other aspects of timber framing. There are three main different types of timber framed buildings: cruck, post and truss, and box framed. Bob also talked about different joints - in particular lap and scarf joints. Joints can be dated stylistically, with a major change taking place in the seventeenth century. One of the highlights of the day were the handmade 3D models of roof trusses and joints that Bob had made and brought along. This was great to see how seamless the joints are, and really helped to give a practical understanding to roof structures as attendees were able to disassemble them to understand how they were constructed and how they fitted together.

Peter Messenger started by telling us that one of the major issues of roof structures is all the terminology associated with it. His talk focused on the most northerly crown post roof truss in England, and the only one in Cumbria. This roof truss is located in the Guildhall Museum in Carlisle. This three-bayed building is situated on the corner of two streets. There is a different roof truss on the corner side of the building. This stylistic difference between the different sides perhaps indicates a social divide between the commercial and residential parts of the building. The crown post roof truss was only recently discovered. It was believed to be a king post roof truss. However this had been altered when the residential part had been repaired, and the pitch was then changed to meet the commercial wing. Luckily through just one small bit of evidence on the truss, it was found to have previously been a crown post. [Please note that the Guildhall Museum has restricted opening times, which are confined to the summer. Please check their website if you would like to visit.]

In the afternoon attendees visited 4 churches located in Crosby Garrett, Kirkby Stephen, Church Brough and Great Musgrave. Most of these churches had undergone many building phases and there were a variety of roof structures evident. There was much discussion in the third church (St Michael at Church Brough). This church did not have trusses instead it was a slightly pitched roof consisting of rafters, purlins and beams. Although the corbels might have once have had a function, the arched braces appeared to be decorative in this case ■



St. Michael at Church Brough © Mike Kingsbury



Hagioscope © Twitter.com

St Andrew's Church at Crosby Garrett contained an interesting feature, a Hagioscope– “an opening through the wall of a church in an oblique direction, to enable the worshippers in the transepts or other parts of the church, from which the altar was not visible, to see the elevation of the host.”

3. Social Media – Hannah Kingsbury

We now have a Facebook and Twitter page. Please give us a like and follow – the handle is @CVBG2013. Check out the pages for updates on the activities of the group

and a monthly post on different Cumbrian vernacular features. Make sure to take a look at Father Christmas' chimney (the round stacks at Glencoyne Farm) for December's Feature of the Month ■



If you have any suggestions for Feature of the Month please send them (with a picture) to Hannah Kingsbury at m.kingsbury455@btinternet.com

4. Dendrochronology and Baltic Timber Marks: Dan Elsworth

Study Day, November 2017. (Illustrations courtesy of Greenlane Archaeology)

My presentation was made up of two parts, firstly a description of buildings I have been involved with that have been subject to dendrochronological dating and the challenges and pitfalls that this can entail, and secondly a discussion of Baltic timber marks, where you are likely to come across them and what they can tell us.

Dendrochronology

I have only dealt with a small number of sites where dendrochronological analysis has been carried out, all of which have been funded by grants from CWAAS. It's quite an expensive technique but it can be very useful and has the potential to give very accurate dates, although the important thing to remember is that it is the year in which the timber was felled that is revealed, based on the sequence of the tree rings, which can be matched against known sequences, rather than just how old the timber is. Typically, oak is used for this type of dating, although work on other species is being carried out, but it also needs to be substantial enough to have at least 50 growth rings and ideally run from the heart wood to the outer bark surface in order to get the very last year it was growing. Even then, in some cases the manner in which the timber has grown will affect the suitability of the timber and it won't be possible to get a date and I have seen a few examples of this now. The reason is not

Table 1: Details of tree-ring samples from the Cavendish Arms, Market Place, Dalton-in-Furness, Cumbria

Sample number	Sample location	Total rings	Sapwood rings*	First measured ring date (AD)	Heart/sap boundary (AD)	Last measured ring date (AD)
DIF-A01	North blade truss 1 (east cruck truss)	101	26C	1437	1510	1537
DIF-A02	South blade, truss 1	98	20	1426	1503	1523
DIF-A03	Tiebeam, truss 1	113	8	1410	1514	1522
DIF-A04	Collar, truss 1	160	58	-----	-----	-----
DIF-A05	Yoke, truss 1	84	10	1426	1499	1509
DIF-A06	Ridge beam, truss 1 – 2	168	h/s	-----	-----	-----
DIF-A07	North upper purlin, truss 1 – 2	79	9	1438	1505	1516
DIF-A08	South upper purlin, truss 1 – 2	90	h/s	1419	1508	1508
DIF-A09	North blade truss 2 (west cruck truss)	82	no h/s	1407	-----	1488
DIF-A10	South blade, truss 2	92	h/s	1433	1524	1524
DIF-A11	Collar, truss 2	84	h/s	-----	-----	-----
DIF-A12	Yoke, truss 2	80	h/s	1421	1500	1500

h/s = heartwood/sapwood boundary, i.e., only the sapwood rings are missing
 C = complete sapwood is retained on the sample, the last ring date is the felling date of the tree represented

clear, but it is perhaps to do with local techniques of woodland management such as pollarding. The other major issue is re-use of timber, which is very common, and generates a lot of issues because it is then impossible to be sure where it was first used.

The first three sites I discussed were all in the vicinity of Barrow-in-Furness and were recorded prior to development; a barn at Sowerby Hall Farm, a barn at Roosecote Farm, and the former Cavendish Arms in Dalton-in-Furness. The first

two are recorded as granges of Furness Abbey in the medieval period, while the Cavendish Arms was considered to be one of the earliest standing buildings in Dalton. The purpose of getting the dates was that all three contained examples of raised cruck trusses or trusses that were similar in style, the hope being that we would get a sequence of dates that would allow a better understanding of the chronological development of crucks in the area, from perhaps the medieval period onwards. The dendro dating was carried out by Robert Howard and colleagues. However, dates for Sowerby Hall and Roosecote both came out in the first few decades of the 17th century, while the Cavendish Arms was consistently dated to about 1537, although it was clear that the timber in the trusses (right) was re-used. This demonstrates that all three were actually post-Dissolution structures and two related to a period of re-building by subsequent owners of the Abbey's estates, which is interesting in the light of recent research by Bill Shannon into surveys of the local woodlands that were being carried out at the same time and evidence for re-use of stone from the Abbey and its buildings in the following centuries.



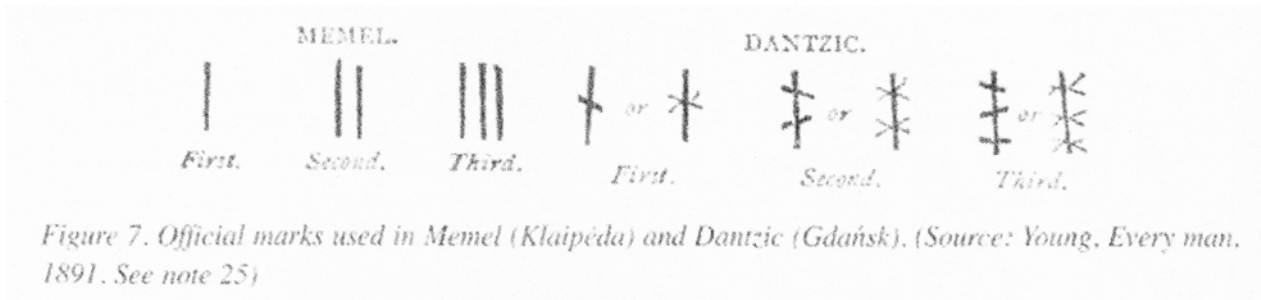
The other site discussed was the Castle Dairy in Kendal. This has been subject to a range of archaeological recording, initially prior to and during refurbishment of the building and the adjoining structure, but latterly as a result of damage caused by the flood of December 2015. The re-roofing allowed a rare opportunity to access the roof trusses, which are relatively elaborate and unusual survivals, and the dating of these was remarkably consistent. The dendro dating this time was carried out by Ian Tyers. All returned felling dates in the 1480s, which, in contrast to the three other examples, fits remarkably well with the known understanding of the building's development.

The lesson I have taken from my experience with this kind of analysis is to expect the unexpected and not to be surprised if the dates are wildly different from your initial thoughts, but also that they can be the perfect piece of evidence to clinch an argument. It's also worth mentioning that there have been relatively few sites in Cumbria subject to dendro dating, certainly compared to other parts of the country so if you know of a potentially suitable building and can come up with a good case for dating it then it's worthwhile trying bodies like CWAAS for funding.

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Baltic Timber Marks

While a very different piece of information that can be gleaned from timber these are also a useful piece of dating evidence, as they were typically only in use from the late 18th century to the middle of the 19th. They relate to a phase during which, after our own stocks of timber had become depleted and as the Industrial Revolution meant the need to reliable sources was increasing, large amounts of red pine were imported into the country from countries bordering



the Baltic Sea. The understanding of these has also been recently improved by the publication of an article in *Construction History* volume 31 part 2 (pages 157-175) for 2016: “Baltic Shipping Marks on Nineteenth-Century Timber: Their Deciphering and a Proposal for Classifying Old Timber” by Louis Vandenabeele, Inge Bertels, and Ine Wouters. This discusses the sources of such material and also what the marks actually mean; until that date there was relatively little information available. However, the reality is that in most cases such marks are very small and often hard to spot, comprising only shallow lines gouged into the surface but they have often been cut through leaving only part of the original set. Sometimes there are painted or printed marks, but the former are often on the ends of timbers and so likely to be hidden.

The examples I have observed are typically found in more coastal areas, which is perhaps to be expected given that the timber from the Baltic was obviously brought in by boat and while I have come across a small number of documentary references to timber arriving in this manner, there is undoubtedly more research that can be done. Where the marks are particularly intact it is in theory, based on the work cited above, possible to glean a lot of information from the marks, principally the port of origin but also details about the size and quality of the original timber. There is a lot more work to be done recording examples, if only to reveal their distribution, although it can be difficult telling them apart from other types of marks in some cases ■



5. A note on bookings by Mike Kingsbury

The programme for 2018, which all members have received with this newsletter, is again fully packed with events that hopefully will appeal to members. In a departure from previous years there are even some months with more than one event scheduled.

The deadline for booking each event will be given on the booking form that is circulated with each newsletter. In the past these have been up to 10 days or more before the event and this year we will try, where possible, to reduce this to around one week before.

There are a number of reasons why we need to do this:-

- If the event includes a buffet lunch we need to give numbers to the caterer.
- Detailed instructions of the event including final programme details and location are sent out by email to all attendees
- A list of participants is also included in the email to facilitate car sharing
- Some venues / locations are restricted for space
- We also need to know final numbers in advance to help with the planning of some events

If members need to cancel a booking I will send them a refund but only if this is done before the booking deadline.

Members also use varied methods to pay for events:-

- Completed booking form sent to me in the post with a cheque for the required amount – this is my preferred method though members don't always sign the cheque (I had three unsigned cheques in 2017)
- Booking by email but please transfer the money into the CVBG bank account promptly
- Or you book and pay me on the day – **my least preferred method**

As a committee we want to make it easy for as many members as possible to attend events but in return can I ask that members do not make this difficult and time consuming for us.

Thank you and enjoy the programme of events during 2018 ■

EDITORS NOTE

Enclosed with this newsletter is our updated and recently re-printed membership leaflet, if you know someone who may be interested in joining our group, please feel free to pass it on. Alternatively you could display it on a workplace or office noticeboard; perhaps you may be a member of a local community group, U3A, history society or other similar organisation, can we spread the word? M.T.

6. Christmas dinner, Askham Hall, 7 December: Claire Jeffery

33 CVBG members gathered for Christmas dinner in the splendid setting of Askham Hall. We were welcomed by Charles Lowther, who grew up in the house and whose family have owned it since the mid-1700s. Charles gave us a brief history of the house, which is now run as a hotel and restaurant. The family have tried to keep the feeling of a home, and the furnishings and art are a deliberate mix of old and modern.

The core of the house is a bastle, which dates back to the end of the thirteenth century. This is one of a number of bastles on the Lowther estate, including the one at Yanwath which CVBG members visited earlier this year. Charles described how the house was enlarged and remodelled several times, including in the seventeenth century, when the grand staircase was built. It was substantially modernised in the 1930s to make it habitable for Charles's grandfather, when electricity and plumbing were installed, and many windows were replaced.



The lounge where we met is part of the original bastle. The "stone room" next door has a vaulted ceiling, and a staircase built into the thickness of the wall. We dined in what Charles described as the medieval hall, which is in the range of buildings across the courtyard. Until recently it was just used for storage, but it has now been restored and since March 2017 has become a party space. It provided a fitting setting for our

lamb feast. Afterwards we were able to take coffee in front of the log fire in the lounge, and explore the rooms on the first and second floor of the original bastle, which are now used as guest rooms. One guest room had an en-suite wardrobe, sadly now blocked and replaced by a modern bathroom.

Although not strictly vernacular, Askham Hall proved an ideal venue for the CVBG Christmas dinner, and we are very grateful to CVBG member Annette Gibbons for facilitating the event. We look forward to returning to Askham village for a walkabout as part of our 2018 programme ■

(Images © Mike Turner)