

# NEWSLETTER No. 20 – SUMMER 2018



## 1. From the Chairman

It's that time of year again, when we ask you to **renew your membership of CVBG**. We hope you find it good value, for the £10 a year subscription for an individual. Since our foundation in 2013 there has been no increase. Somehow, our treasurer manages to maintain funds without raising the subscription, despite prices for almost everything else rising rapidly.

### **Annual General Meeting, Thurs. 13 Sept. 2018, 7.30 pm at Hutton in the Forest.**

With this issue of the Newsletter, is the notice and booking form for the AGM. Up to this year, it has been held on a Saturday, but this time, we are trying out a weekday evening. Maybe it will encourage a few more members to attend. The venue, Hutton in the Forest, is one of Cumbria's most historic houses, still in use as a family home. Lord Inglewood will show us round, before the AGM, while there is natural daylight, as the upper floor has never had electricity. The AGM is your chance to have your say about the group, and maybe to volunteer to join the recording group or even run an event, or a visit, or just make suggestions. We hope to have an outline programme for 2019 to bring to the meeting, and to confirm arrangements in time to send out a complete schedule with the September Newsletter.

Once again, I want to give continued thanks to the very able and willing members of the **CVBG committee**, almost all of whom have served since we were formed. They have a wide range of skills and experience which is greatly valued. Thanks also go to the members who volunteered to take responsibility for an event this year. I know that members have enjoyed these events so far, and there are still more to come. See the booking form enclosed.

**CVBG members travel** far and wide, especially in the summer. I'm sure that they notice vernacular buildings wherever they go – even while on holiday. If you have photographs, would you consider sharing them with fellow CVBG members, in the next Newsletter? All we need is a caption, giving the location (UK or abroad), and maybe a note of the feature or materials. Please send contributions to our secretary.

cont'd.../

**Five Years of CVBG.** We are considering publishing some form of book to mark our fifth anniversary. It would be made available to a wider public and would summarise our findings about traditional buildings in Cumbria. If you feel you could make a contribution, please do not hesitate to offer. One photograph, a short description or a longer article will be considered for inclusion. In 2015, we produced the handbook for the VAG conference, and it was very well received. Again, Mike Turner will be pleased to receive your contribution.

**Recording Group.** There was a pleasing response from members to assist in completing records of buildings studied by CVBG over the last five years. Thank you to all who are willing to take part in the work. We plan to get to grips with records once the holiday season is over.

**Visits from other regional groups.** As a result of the annual VAG conference held in Cumbria in 2015, two groups are planning to bring their members here. In September, the group from North Wales (Old Welsh Houses), will come for several days, based in Carlisle. Three of our members will lead their visits and give talks. The Yorkshire Vernacular Buildings Study Group also plan to look at some of the buildings we showed to VAG members ■

*June Hill*



Whitehaven Walkabout © Richard Speirs

## 2. Whitehaven Walkabout – Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> April

On a bright April day we met our guide, Anna Gray, at the Beacon. The first stop was the bronze sculpture by Colin Telfer of John Paul Jones who was born near Kirkcudbright but after a series of violent events fled to America and became an officer in the US Navy. During the American War of Independence (1775-83) he decided to attack the thriving port of Whitehaven but his efforts were scuppered by his disloyal crew who preferred the taverns of Whitehaven. His daring deed has gone down in the annals of history as the last time the English mainland was invaded from the sea. He is recognised in the US as “The Father of the US Navy”

The next stop was Wellington Pit which was sunk in 1838 and operated until 1932. Whitehaven was built over coal seams several of which were followed under the Irish Sea for 5 miles. Behind Wellington Pit is the flue chimney which is a fine structure known as the Candlestick as it is allegedly based on Sir John Lowther’s favourite silver candlestick. The Lowther coat of arms is carved into each side of the chimney. Sidney Smirke designed Wellington Pit and its outbuildings to look like a castle with a keep, round tower with slit windows and battlement walls.



© Barbara Grundy

From afar we could see Jonathan Swift's house where he is said to have been brought from Ireland at a young age by his nurse who was from Whitehaven. The house had wide-ranging views over the town and it is easy to imagine the young Swift looking down at the “midget Folk” of Whitehaven and creating Lilliput in Gulliver’s travels.



End of an Era sculpture by Colin Telfer © Flickr

From this high vantage point, the quays and grid layout of the town could be seen clearly. In 1600 Whitehaven was a small coastal village dependent on fishing, farming and salt-making, until the Lowthers capitalised on rich seams of coal in the area. In 1634 Sir Christopher Lowther built a quay to export coal and salt to Ireland. By 1700 80% of Ireland’s coal was exported from Whitehaven.

A growth in international shipping necessitated the building of additional quays to cope with the burgeoning trade. By 1750, Whitehaven was the 3<sup>rd</sup> most important port in the country after London and Bristol.

cont'd.../

Whitehaven developed into a centre of major coal and iron extraction resulting in the establishment of railway engineering and shipbuilding. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> C Whitehaven had produced over 1000 wooden ships which were involved with whaling and transatlantic trade with the Americas. Unfortunately, the American War of Independence (1775-1783) severely affected trade, particularly the lucrative tobacco trade with Maryland and Virginia. To keep trade buoyant the shipping magnates sought new commodities to carry overseas as part of the so called Trade Triangle between Africa, West Indies and Britain. The imported foodstuffs of sugar, rum, tobacco coffee, tea and spices gave rise to many Cumbrian specialities such as Cumberland Rum Butter, Grasmere Gingerbread, Kendal Mint Cake and Cumberland Sausage with its secret spices.



Gale Mansion © Barbara Grundy

In the afternoon Anna took us on a walking tour of the town starting with King Street and Lowther Street. The grid pattern of streets is one of the earliest examples in the country. Rules governing building height and width were relaxed but most are 3 storeys high. The buildings are a mix of vernacular Cumbrian and classical Georgian reflecting the wealth and status of the merchants, traders etc. Buildings abut each other with rendered facades enlivened by decorative porticoes. One of the finest houses is Gale Mansion built in

early 1730's by William Gale, a merchant trader with America. It is set back from the street with ornamental railings and central steps with a door surround of classical style – one of the earliest surviving examples in Whitehaven. To the left is an enclosed carriageway leading to rear stables and to the right and projecting onto the street is a separate wing that would have probably been a warehouse which had a cellar with a barrel vaulted ceiling where tobacco and rum would be stored. The merchants preferred to keep their wares close to home!

William Gale's older brother George married the recently widowed Mildred Washington in America and then brought her to Whitehaven with her 2 sons, John and Augustine who were sent to Appleby Grammar school to be educated. They returned to America where Augustine became the father of George Washington, the first president of the United States.

We visited St Nicholas' Church which was originally built in 1642 as a chapel of ease and was rebuilt in 1687 and 1883 but a disastrous fire in 1971 resulted in the

demolition of the majority of the church. All that remains is the tower and porch. It is the final resting place of George Washington's grandmother and there is a commemorative plaque in the grounds of the church. There is a decorative mosaic in the grounds in the shape of pit wheel laid in memory of the 1200 men women and children who lost their lives in the Whitehaven collieries. There is a separate memorial near Duke Street recording the names of children who lost their lives whilst working in the mines, the youngest was 8.



Our last port of call was to St James' Church whose plain looking exterior hides an exquisite Georgian interior – described by Pevsner as “serenely beautiful” It was built in 1752-3 by Carlisle Spedding who was a mining engineer in charge of Whitehaven collieries. The first minister was his son Thomas Spedding and there is a memorial to him at the top of the stairs. There are galleries on 3 sides supported by Doric columns and a tri-glyph frieze, carrying Ionic pillars above. There is a flat ceiling with stucco roundels. The painting of the Transfiguration in the apse is said to come from the Escorial in Madrid and was given to the church by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Lonsdale in 1869. The painting of Moses and Aaron is by a Whitehaven painter, Matthias Read. Thank you Anna for this very informative walkabout in Whitehaven ■

*Barbara Grundy*

### 3. Door Canopies in the Appleby/Shap area – June Hill



Door Canopy, Shap Green Farm © Roy Hill

Since coming to live between Shap and Appleby at the end of last year, I have noticed that several houses in the area, both in villages and the towns, have a distinct type of canopy over their principal entrance. They are semi-circular stone features, constructed of three pieces of shaped stone, and are in all but one instance of those seen, supported by stone brackets. Although they are clearly the product of a single stone mason, or workshop, no two are exactly the same. Brackets vary in their profile, from simple to elaborate. Some canopies are painted and others are of natural stone, probably sandstone.

They seem to represent a combination of the curved pediment and the Queen Anne shell porch, albeit a pale echo of the latter. Clearly they act as a simple shelter from the elements and deflect rain from the door. From the style of the houses where they are situated, a mid-eighteenth date is suggested. At this time most of the land in the area had been acquired by the Lowthers. Maybe their influence was brought to bear on local buildings.

Several questions arise, some of which I hope to answer after further study. Who was producing these canopies? What period is covered? Do similar canopies occur in other parts of Cumbria? Do they represent a re-fronting of older houses, to give a fashionable facade? Comments are welcome ■



Battlebarrow, Appleby © Not known

(NB - efforts have been made by Dents Newsagents, Appleby to find the author of this photograph, without success. Should the copyright holder be identified, we will be happy to make any necessary corrections to this effect).

#### 4. Ryedale Folk Museum, Hutton-le-Hole, North Yorkshire

Twelve members of CVBG spent several hours in lovely sunshine, browsing in and out of the re-erected houses and workplaces at their own pace, and absorbing the atmosphere of a different region from Cumbria. Ryedale Folk Museum has grown over the last fifty years or so, to tell the story of human habitation of a particular place. Most of the buildings are original, rescued from their locations. Only the iron age round house and the medieval peasant long house have been built, using archaeological evidence, as no house of humble status from that period remain above ground.

The **medieval long house** has one entrance an open hearth and an earth floor. Livestock and humans used the same door and there are no internal divisions. The window has a parchment screen but no glass. The single space provided shelter and a degree of security for the family and their animals. Here, people could work, prepare food, socialise, eat and sleep, store their crops and keep their few possessions.

**Harome Manor House** is a large open hall house, of cruck construction. At one end, narrow winding stairs lead to an upper space, open to the hall below. Later modifications were made as living standards rose, but most of these have been removed in the re-erection, to present it in its near original form.



© Lesley Frazer

**Stang End**, a ling (heather)-thatched farmhouse from Danby Dale, was undoubtedly the building that held most interest for our members. Cruck-built, with a cross passage, it was rebuilt in its original location in the seventeenth century. One feature puzzled our

members – the feet of the crucks protruded through the (later) stone walls, exposing them to the weather, although they stood on stone footings. Maybe the original (wattle and daub?) walls once covered them.

cont'd.../

Inside the house, treasures abound. The hearth has a wattle and daub smoke food, resting on a beam, in turn supported by a heck post. This is one of the fourteen or so witch posts so far recorded in the North York Moors. A handful have been discovered in Rossendale, Lancashire, but nowhere else. Kevin Illingworth has recorded the Lancashire examples. Many attempts have been made to explain these features. (See photograph). They seem to be apotropaic, that is to say, they are intended as a protection against evil, in the form of witches. They appear to date from the time of "witch mania", in the late Tudor/Stuart period, when it was believed that witches could enter the house through the door, the windows and especially down the chimney.



© Lynne Seignot

They bear a St Andrew's cross above a number of horizontal bars. The house consists of a hall (living room), entered by way of a hallan, or narrow passage, a cross passage and what was originally accommodation for livestock. This latter was re-modelled to provide a parlour, with dairy and cheese press. The parlour contains beds, as parlours were first used for sleeping. Stang End is furnished with simple contents – fixed settle inside the heck, chest, trestle table in the hall and curtained bed, with straw mattress supported by ropes, in the parlour.



What were these instruments used for? © Sarah Nicholson

**The White Cottage** has seen many changes over time. What was originally a cross passage house has been modified to provide increased privacy and a second storey, as living standards changed. Where the livestock were once housed, (the cross passage and downhouse), a kitchen now occupies the space, with a cooking range, made, incidentally, at nearby Wrelton, one of several foundries in the area. A passage way has been constructed against the back

wall and the middle room, previously the hall, with the main hearth, reduced in width. The passage leads through to a stair (not open to the public) and to the parlour, the third unit of the original house. The house is filled with Victorian artefacts ("clutter"!), and shows how life had changed since medieval times, and the simple possessions on display in the peasant house.



Next to the White Cottage is a washhouse filled with all the paraphernalia of washday before electricity. Wood and zinc predominates. The garden path leads to the privy. Like everywhere else in the museum, activity brings the buildings alive. Gardens abound with flowers and herbs; chickens stroll around; there is a line of spotless washing drying in the sunshine; sheep graze a paddock; and crops grow in small fields. There are often volunteers baking, making rugs, (real) babies in cradles and crafts people working outdoors or in the numerous retail shops and workshops around the museum.

This summary does not have space to record the numerous wonderful collections on display, from archaeological finds to a photographic studio, from a medieval glass making kiln to the personal collection of two brothers, gathered over many years. Those who went on this visit will return. Hutton le Hole is a delightful village and the area is full of interest ■

June Hill.

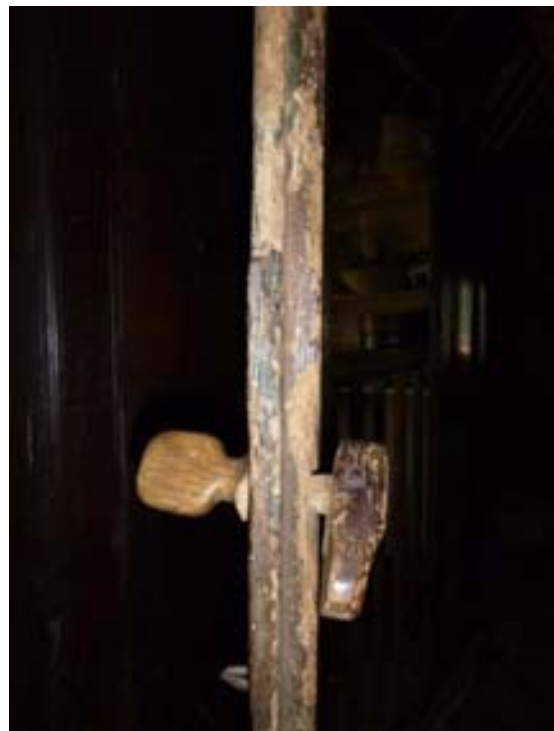


Images ©

(Left) Fabric window - Lynne Seignot

(Bottom left) Doorway - Lesley Frazer

(Bottom right) Simple but effective door catch - Greg & Sarah Nicholson



## 5. Askham Walkabout – Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> June

On a day blessed with bountiful sunshine, we embarked on a gentle walking tour of Askham village near Penrith to seek out the vernacular and the unusual. CVBG member Christine Craghill, a qualified local historian with a particular interest in vernacular architecture and a local resident, gave us an overview of the village's beginnings as a planned medieval settlement, recognised by the existence of narrow tofts behind the houses with open 'greens' in the central area for grazing cattle and sheep.



Askham lies in the lee of Askham Fell, and therefore protected from the prevailing south-westerly winds. With two streams flowing through the village (both now culverted) it was an ideal location for a farming community to develop. Many of the houses in the village have datestones, recording their year of building or, more often, their re-building, and in most cases these fall between 1650 and 1800.

In the morning, we explored the upper section of Askham from the crossroads to the cluster of farms at **Town Head** that led out onto the open common of Askham Fell. We spotted bank barns (numerous barns had been converted into dwellings), fire windows, stone mullions, raised quoins, graded roofing slates and the tell-tale signs of former inglenook fireplaces. Their erstwhile presence is often given away by the appearance of external stone brackets/corbels beneath the chimney stack. We also looked at the layout of houses. Some clearly displayed a longhouse plan with through-passage separating the house and barn; others were L-shaped with later barns attached. **Cross Cottage** with its central chimney was likely to be on the baffle-entry plan – not numerous in Cumbria. A baffle entry (sometimes also called a lobby entrance) is where the front door opens onto a lateral short passageway, or lobby, behind which are two back-to-back inglenook fireplaces, one in the 'firehouse' and the other in an adjacent kitchen known today as a 'downhouse'.



One of more interesting houses was **The Laburnums** – a large Victorian style house with earlier Georgian detailing at the rear. Attached to this is a smaller and older cottage. The visual evidence, especially at the rear, suggests that the large house was plonked down over the lower end of the earlier longhouse building, leaving the upper end of the longhouse still standing and attached (but as a separate dwelling) to the new house. It was a remarkable sight once we understood the development of the building!

At **School House**, we debated why the lower courses of roofs had heavier sandstone flags rather than slates. Was this done to protect the roof from up-gusts? There seemed to be no definitive answer to this. **Hilltop House** was another conundrum; an L-shaped house with a date-stone of 1650, but which wing was older?

At **Beech House** we were shown around the barns: one at the back and one adjacent. The house bore a datestone of 1708, but the barns are thought to be of an earlier date. Nearby **Keld Head** was up for sale. Although somewhat dilapidated, it demonstrated several timescales of building with the possible integration of an earlier 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> house (at the rear) into the larger early 18<sup>th</sup> century house which in turn was integrated into a 19<sup>th</sup> century bank-barn. In the afternoon, we explored the lower half of the village, starting at the **Old School House**, which was apparently on the site of an old lime kiln. This operated as a school up to 1989, when it was closed and turned into a dwelling house.

**Park View Cottage** was an exercise in identifying various window types. Here we spied a horizontal sliding sash, Georgian sash, Victorian sash, a casement window and a skylight at the rear.

Across the road and set back from the street line was **Lowside Cottage** with a clearly visible fire window. **Sawmill Cottage** was next – a double-fronted house with visible ‘relieving arches’ on the front elevation – a clear indication that it was meant to be rendered. This house appeared to be of mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century build but an internal staircase at the rear, made of stone rather than wood, indicated that this part of the house might be older than the two front rooms.



**Midtown**, a late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century house but with a 19<sup>th</sup> century date stone (presumably to mark a renovation date) has just undergone internal alterations and at present is having a cobbled front laid down. This house did have a large firehouse room with equally large

inglenook fireplace that housed a blocked rectangular fire window on the front wall. The adjoining house (at present for sale) which is of early 20<sup>th</sup> century appearance, was originally an upper barn attached to **Midtown**.

Finally, to end the day on a quirky note, we paused outside **Clark Hill** to admire its elaborate datestone bearing the initials L & D H and the date of 1674. Group member Anna Gray explained that the house was occupied by a butcher (Henderson) who'd taken the opportunity to display his trade by cleverly combining the initials and numbers in such a way as to resemble a pig's head.



It was a nice touch to an informative day organised by Christine, with the help of Lyn Cole (a long-time Askham resident) and the lively debate of those who participated, all of which helped us to better understand the built history of this lovely Lakeland village ■

*Anna Gray*