

Staveley & District History Society

Journal Winter 2016-17

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The views expressed in articles in this Journal are those of the individual authors and not necessarily those of the Society.

Cover photo: Kentmere Church under renovation 2016, with thanks to Mike Darwell of John Coward Architects, Cartmel.

The next issue of the *Journal* (No 39, the Spring 2017 issue) will be published about the 10th April 2017. All contributions (letters, articles, etc.) are welcome at any time but should be with the Editor by early March.

From our historic buildings team

We are lucky to live in an area of great natural beauty, but inevitably facing great pressure from all sides to adapt to meet the demands of modern life. It is neither possible nor desirable to prevent such change. The buildings and street scenes all around us are part of our environment, and they are as vulnerable to being updated as any other features of the countryside and villages we live in.

It has been the subject of discussion within the Society over several years how we might best record the buildings of interest that are in our area before they are altered beyond recognition and fade from memory. This project is intended to provide a record for the future of what has been built in the past, and can still be traced, and whilst in no way is it intended to influence planning of the built environment it may be able to assist and inform future development in some way.

To record all local buildings in detail would be a mammoth task, so we have agreed that we will concentrate on those buildings that pre-date the Great War, and are shown in the Ordnance Survey maps of the first decade of the 20th Century. In order to keep the recording simple we are only requesting a small amount of basic information. Some of you may have more detail than will fit our brief questionnaire. If so please let us have that additional information in any convenient form.

As always storage is a challenge. We propose to keep a record of everything in electronic form as this is ideal for most purposes, whilst for other purposes a paper format is more appropriate but due to storage constraints only a limited amount of data will be retained in paper form. Options for storing original documents are limited, although we will consider how to store such items if requested.

If you live in a historic building, even if it has been adapted significantly since it was built, please complete our survey form and return it to the Society. Whatever the age of your house and any related buildings we would still like you to record its history – to the next generation it will be “historic”!

If you have queries or would like to discuss the project please contact the Society.

Margaret Beck and Peter Lansberry

Maureen Runswick

Sadly, Maureen died in August as a result of an accident in Ings. It would be remiss of us not to pay respect to her for the support she gave the Society, especially in its early years. Maureen’s husband, Adrian, (see Journal 19) was the driving force behind the Oral History Group in the early years of the Society. Hours of discussion of recordings and possible interviewees to help Joe Scott with material for *A Lakeland Valley Through Time* took place at their home at Moss Side. Never one to crave the limelight, a packed congregation for her funeral service at St James’ Church was ample evidence of the esteem in which she was held.

Taking the lid off Kentmere Church

The restoration and rehabilitation works on the roof structure of St Cuthbert's Church, Kentmere during this year have revealed a great deal of interesting and surprising facts. It has been possible to make investigations into the history of the building which could not otherwise have been made. Some of them have confirmed previous assumptions about the history of the building, others have shattered those assumptions. As is common when delving into the unknowns of historical events, more questions often arise than answers are discovered. This has certainly been the case at St Cuthbert's.



Interior of the church during restoration

There are no records known of who caused the structure as seen today – its walls and foundations - to be built, despite the obvious fact it represents probably the largest single investment in a building ever made in the habitation of Kentmere. It has been surmised for some time that the presence of an ancient yew tree in the churchyard which

is claimed to be over 1000 years old, dating back to the reign of William I and among the oldest in Europe, and that it has been planted in the middle of a previously circular graveyard, would indicate that worship had been taking place on that site from an early stage in the village's history. Kentmere was on a crossroads of routes from Furness Abbey to Shap and from east to west and we know that the monks carrying Cuthbert's body visited sites in what is now west Cumbria. So there is a strong possibility that Cuthbert's body may have been brought here and that the establishment of a place of worship on this site could date from then.

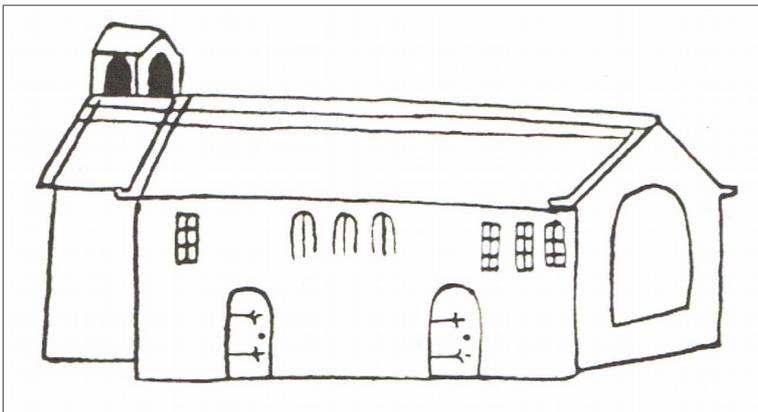
A recently discovered report written by an archaeologist in the 1860s claims that parts of the building could be dated within the 11th century. Fleeting references in various documents suggest antiquity, so it was decided during the rehabilitation work to try to provide a 'time-line' with forensic evidence to test the various hypotheses as to what had been done in the past.

One of the first investigations concerned the walls which were needed to stabilise the tented scaffold which would protect the works during the removal and replacement of the roof. The walls have been rendered for at least 100 years, so the nature of their construction was unknown. A core was drilled in the walls to ascertain the probable strength to resist pulling of the proposed ties to hold the scaffolding. The core confirmed expectations that the walls had not been constructed in the vernacular form of the ubiquitous stone barns of similar overall appearance in Kentmere and its adjacent valleys, because of their '4ft' thickness. All the bigger barns have '3ft' walls (some with '2ft' upper parts) constructed with two outer skins and a core of small stones. Such a construction will become increasingly prone to spreading if constructed with greater widths. The rubble core tends to act not as



Wall cavity for wooden beam securing door to tower

keying layer but as a granular mass; examples of such bulging can be found in a number of barns, yet St Cuthbert's church shows virtually no sign of any movement whatever, standing high and proud in a very exposed position. The core showed a form of construction more likely to have been used by masons familiar with military construction - a single massive stone making up the inner 3ft and only smaller stones providing a facing. Similar construction can be seen in Kentmere Hall's 'Peel' tower.



Machell's Sketch 1

Much of the information that has previously been relied upon can be found in writings of Thomas Machell (1647 - 1698). He was Vicar of Kirkby Thore and Chaplain to King Charles II. In his work entitled "Towards a History of the Barony of Kendal (1691/3)", he writes of the "*ancient chapel*" in Kentmere. His account of its appearance includes several important leads as

to the origins of the church, and his sketches include one of the building which looks remarkably like the one we see now albeit with a bell cote instead of a tower. From the strong similarities of the sketch in comparison with the building we see today,

seemingly corroborated by the wall investigations, the Rev Machell's comments form the basis of testing the 'time line'.

In Machell's writings his primary comment is that "*Kentmere [has] a large and high roofed chapel, formerly designed for lead, and has had a steeple, but not in living memory...*". Another comment illuminates this a little by referring to "*..heretofore having a square steeple*". These two comments would indicate that by 1691 the building had already been modified from a previous lead roofed structure with a square tower with a steeple - the latter thought to be most probably no more than a short four-sided pyramid within the tower edge and possibly not even that.



A failed joint in the roof

It is clear, therefore that the building which we see now (albeit without the upper section of the tower) is the same building which had already been constructed by the mid 16th century. Machell's drawing is extremely accurate. During the recent restoration work, clear evidence could be seen to support his comment that the building originally



Upper edge of main beams showing ledging and decay from lead

was built with a lead roof. The interior of the church today is dominated by the presence of a ceiling supported by eight heavy transverse beams, with one of them partially embedded in each of the end walls. Three lines of secondary beams run the length of the church, and support the rafters to which the ceiling is nailed upwards (don't stand on it!). Such a massive construction was clearly not designed or built to support merely the weight of the 10mm thick

boards of the ceiling. It was realised some time ago that the rafters provided the evidence for this construction. They are in the form of an inverted 'T' and typical of the ledging needed to support boarding for a flat(tish) roof with sheet material covering, such as lead. Furthermore the heavily decayed upper surface, yet with only slightly decayed lower surface, is consistent with decay from lead/acid corrosion, where condensation may have helped accelerated the decay. It is therefore clear that the rafters once supported a lead roof.

Dendrochronology tests were made on these beams. The cores proved to be of excellent quality with a very high correlation of growth rings. Interpretation of these by the Nottingham Tree-ring Dating Laboratory was unambiguous in concluding that the trees which gave rise to these timbers came from a single source. They had started their life as saplings in the age of Chaucer and Piers Ploughman towards the second half of the 14th C and matured through the period of the Hundred Years War to be felled together sometime between 1511 and 1516. They are of oak and as would have been the practice of the times these timbers would have been felled, cut to shape and installed 'green'. Each 'log' would have been about 2 tonnes in weight and thus it is reasonable to assume that they came from a close plantation, possibly the lower reaches of Hall Wood as access on the flat and without bridges probably only existed on the western shore of the Mere. The logs would most probably have been 'pit sawn' and given their moulding embellishments very close to the site, thus giving a reliable date for construction of the 'flat' lead roof being around the same period as the predicted felling date.

This would fit with the already known fact that a priest was appointed to the parish in 1453 and presumably before the church was built he would minister from the oldest part of the present building which now forms the base of the tower. The walls here are much thicker with a spiral stairway within the walls. The cell has clearly been



Joinery marks on the principal rafters

protected by a doorway to the upper floor. The door itself could be secured on the inside by an shaft of wood which slid into the walls on either side. The cavities for this device are still visible.

The current principal rafters forming the single ridge, pitched roof also have characteristics suggesting their history. The apex joint – a conventional pegged half lap – has the traditional joiner's marks for matched pairs and the precision of fit (save where later

movement has damaged the joint) of the common practice of pre-erection fabrication

and fit on the ground before installation on the roof itself. In stark contrast the mortice and tennon joints at the foot of the principal rafters and the tie beams are poorly formed and fitted. Most importantly, some are cut into the decayed ledging to take boarding. These details are extremely strong evidence that the ridged roof structure was built onto the original beams of lead roof in situ, with the new principal rafters lifted up into position and joined according to the joinery marks. An interesting feature was the understanding that in building construction of this era turf was often used to level the tops of the walls before the timbers were put in place. Evidence of that technique was discovered during the restoration work - the turf was still there.

It must be remembered that this was a troubled time in the church in England. This building in Kentmere was in place by the end Henry VIII's reign, built before the first



The roof space during restoration

printed version of the bible appeared in English, before the restoration of catholicism by Mary I, before the union of the crowns of England and Scotland and 100 years before the civil war involving Oliver Cromwell. It may well be that the lead roof was removed as a result of the civil unrest or it may simply have decayed because by the late 1600's the profile of the roof had been changed and it had been slated. The

roofing in lead appears to have been a particularly extravagant option as lead mining was not carried out in the immediate area, and unlike silver (which came predominately from the same ore) was not an organised industry with plentiful supply until more than a hundred years later. To have supplied the amount needed for the roof implies a productive smelter, but as yet a candidate source operating so early in time has not been found in the locally (the Kentmere valley mines were much later) and one has to assume that it most probably came from some distance away exemplifying the boldness of such an undertaking in so remote an area.

The sketch in Machell's book shows 2 doors on the south wall - and although only one door is in use now, evidence of the existence of the other door can clearly be seen in the plaster-work inside the church and in an the external view recorded in photographs taken during repair work in the 1960s. Again it is assumed that the people

used one door - most likely the one still in use - whereas the priest used the other door nearer to the altar. But Machell's sketch plan of the interior of the church indicates another door, in the north wall. It seems reasonable to believe the third door was also correctly represented when drawn c1693. This appears to have been known as the "Devil's Door" and which by tradition allowed the devil to escape at the time the building was consecrated and was closed up immediately afterwards. During the current works, the stonework was also investigated using thermal imaging techniques. The images indicated that relatively small stones were used in the facing and no obvious use of through stones as would be expected in the vernacular style. During these investigations, an anomaly was detected on the north wall. A small test removal of render revealed a selected stone judged to be a quoin stone of an opening. The thermal imaging showed the clear outline of a doorway. Unfortunately this could not be recorded at the time by the instrument as the scaffolding prevented a suitable view, but historical documents show that it should have been expected.

The questions obviously raised are why was such a large church built anyway and who was the person of such stature and wealth to have caused this building to be erected?

Much more research will have to be undertaken in an attempt to answer some of these questions. Until the early 1700s Kentmere was within the 'episcopal polity' of the Diocese of Chester and maybe records still exist there or are elsewhere following reorganisation before Kentmere became part of the Carlisle Diocese.

What about the legend of St Cuthbert? Why was the church dedicated to him and when was the dedication made?

What about Bernard Gilpin - The Apostle of the North - who was born at Kentmere Hall to "*a distinguished family*" in 1517? He would have seen this church being built and may even have worshipped there before going up to Queen's College Oxford and before proceeding to fulfil an interesting and at times dangerous career as the church in this country underwent so many changes. Were his family engaged in building the church - even though Machell says it was "*reported to have been built by one Airay of this dale*"?

The building has fallen into disrepair more than once in its time and the last major restoration was undertaken at the instigation of Admiral Wilson, who owned Kentmere Hall at the time but was a resident of The Howe in Troutbeck. It was he who remodelled the interior of the building in the 1860s, refurbished the roof and raised the tower. Much of the work was done using second hand materials, including some of the roof timbers and, in particular, in the internal furnishings. All of what we see now inside the church is all the result of the Victorian re-ordering. It has been assumed that up to that time the majority of the church was a large open space arbitrarily divided, maybe with a screen at about the position of the present chancel step. That would be where the altar was positioned and the priest ministered at the east end of

the church. It has been thought that the rest of the building may have been more of a community meeting place without furniture or flooring and rushes would be strewn on the floor. However some recently discovered correspondence from the archdeacon in the 1860s suggests "*the removal of the wall and box pews*". So it now appears that there were older pews which were removed to make way for the ones which are there today. More research will have to be done to discover what was meant by "*the wall*". Similarly more research will need to be done concerning the reports of the burial of a Vicar - the Rev. Thomas Brocklebank - in the church in the early 1700s.

There is still a great deal of work to be done. This is only the first installment. Watch this space.

Robert Courtier and Iain Johnston

Tales from the Tapes: Slate and slate quarrying. Part 4

The fourth and concluding instalment of the interview of John Williams of Kentmere by Joe Scott in November 1991

JW: They all said there was far more slate ever made in the Fat Lamb than was made in Kentmere quarry. And they would just spend up, they would keep enough back to employ George Stillwell who was the landlord of the because he had a taxi, a trap, later on a motor taxi and bring them back Sunday night or Monday morning.

JS: Are you talking now about the 20s and 30s the time you remember?

JW: They would come back up and that was it for another month.

JS: They were single men?

JW: No they weren't, a lot of them. Where their families lived, nobody knows. Probably they cared less. You realise that they are a race apart, there's no doubt about it...but they knew their job, they worked well, its all they knew. Maybe its all they could do?

JS: Some people, a dresser like you father could make a good living out of it.

JW: Yes, a very good living. Even now the dressers at a lot of places work on contract. I used to have quite a bit of slate offcuts from Honister to make garden ornaments. Often I'd be up there about half past two in the afternoon and coming away with a load of stone and the dressers would be going home on their motorbikes and saying 'right, that's me for the week.' They had made all they wanted to make and that was it. And nobody could say nay, they weren't employed by anybody.

JS: They were their own boss?.

JW: Entirely. When they decided it was time to go home, they went home. But if they went home they didn't get paid.

JS: What happened at Park Brow Quarry...is that the one this side of Kentmere Hall?

JW: Oh, we've only ever known it as Kentmere Hall Quarry, but there was very little slate, nearly all building stone. There was only about three foot probably, a three foot vein of stone that was fit to make into slate and even that was bloody awful slate. Any places around, they only ever used it for farm buildings and things like that.

JS: Weren't there big slabs for gravestones and that sort of stuff?

JW: We got quite a few big slabs, kerb stones, gravestones that sort of thing. We didn't do bad with it but it was still very rotten stone. Didn't stand up to the weather or the wear and tear of the shoes. Now, Burlington stone, you could have used Burlington, lovely stuff, lovely to work but it hasn't got the centuries of life in it.

JS: But Kentmere, personally I've got a bee in my bonnet about memorial stones.

JW: I'm not very keen on them myself but they're useful in history. You've got a record there of this chap in Kentmere churchyard who was a quarryman killed in the quarry, 1801. That's the first quarrymen mentioned. Quarrying, there was very little in the early days, its 19th century it got going.

JS: Well, Kentmere Quarry has been going for some considerable time...because it wouldn't get mentioned in the Parish records otherwise. Most of them were Methodists you see and in those days they wouldn't be welcome. Probably held their own meetings up at the quarry. They were probably all, primitive or that sort of thing, there were so many of them were Welshman. What about the ending of the quarry, its fairly accurate in the thirties, the second world war?

JW: Yes that finished it, it stopped at the beginning of the first, and second world war. They were all damned glad to get away to France, nothing else to do. After the war my uncle and my father and my brother started to try and re open but unfortunately, it was closing down. It was alright when they were paying the labourers a shilling an hour.

JS: Wages had gone up so much and you couldn't get workers at that rate.

JW: No, but you did get, particularly lads that were coming back from the war, they were quite prepared to come and work and they had a better idea of what was going on than they had before they went away. Anyway we fuddled on until about 1956, something like that. It might have been before that because I went away to work.

JS: You didn't work it yourself?

JW: I did up to about 1952 I think, I tried to struggle on but it was very frustrating as I say because I had a rough idea of what should be happening.

JS: You'd be in your 20s?

JW: Yes, early twenties.

JS: What were you doing yourself?

JW: Well most of the time I was rock handling.... I put everything in the van....
(malfunction whilst recording as this point)

JW: Another one that was at the school at the time was Gladys Michell from up the road here. They went away, they were in Canada for all their working lives but came back here three or four years ago, to retire. You probably didn't hear the Border programme on the Kentmere Valley. The girl who did the recording interviewed five different people out of the valley.

JS: No. Recently?

JW: Yes, six months ago, I've got a copy I can let you have it sometime. But she talked to me about Kentmere school and she talked to Gladys, who is Gladys Banks, about Kentmere School, and you would have thought we were talking about two different things.

JS: Two different stories. Well that's alright, all you can do is to say what your memories are; people have to listen to the evidence and make their own minds up.

JW: Yes. I mean that we differed on fundamentals...our attitude was obviously very different.

JS: There surely can't be very many left who went to school. Most of the people I know who live in Kentmere are off-comers.

JW: Yes, Arnold Walker would be at school there and of course his sister. But I started in 1933 and 1937 when I moved on and it was a happy little school but I think there were only about eleven people there when I left.

JS: Yes, you went on to Windermere?

JW: Yes, but you get these people saying what wonderful thing these little tiny schools are, I'm not at all happy about it totally. Alright, but when you are a big fish in a small pond, like one in eleven at Kentmere school, maybe as bright as most of them and you finish up going to even a place like Windermere, in those days the Grammar School had only about 65 boys there at that time. But you were a very tiny minnow in a 65 boys school. Took a lot of getting used to did that.

JS: A big transition of course going out of the valley, by bus? You went by bus?

JW: Oh we went by bicycle to Staveley and then on by train. In those days of course people didn't go by bus. Buses weren't the thing. You went by train. I thought it was an excellent most magic days when I was a lad, I enjoyed it immensely.

JS: But the Kentmere village school was a place for one teacher, one room, eleven children.

JW: Yes, sometimes, well that's to say there was probably about twenty when I first started. Actually the year when I started was when they started moving the eleven plus out.

JS: Down to Staveley?

JW: Down to Staveley, because they went in a horse and cart, a horse and trap, it was a closed cart.

JS: I've read the log book of Staveley School. It says, the Kentmere children were late today, but waited in the usual place but the car or something didn't come.

JW: They used to call the thing "the chariot" but it was a two wheeled cart. Just piled them all in and hoped for the best.

JS: Horsedrawn?

JW: Yes. The teachers there, of course, were extremely devoted. They really were. The one who was there when I started was an old lady called

Mrs. Ross who was an absolute old tyrant. But she was good and she could teach and her husband was a quarryman, he was a Cornishman. I think she came from roundabout the Lands End area as well. But, she was a very domineering old woman but she really could get things across, in her own words. She probably wouldn't have gone down well at all today. Anyway she was married to old Tom Ross, at least we gave her the benefit of the doubt. He was a grand old chap, a real old Cornish miner. They lived in the old mill and old Thomas retired eventually, under protest, because they ran the Post Office as well.

JS: Do you mean Mrs. Bialy?

JW: They lived where Mrs. Bialy lives (*Lowbridge*), the Post Office ran from there and the mill was behind it and at the age of 86 he started to work this old mill into a house and my brother's still living in it. He got it finished and he moved into it and lived in it for several years. He did all the work himself, no one else helped. It was a bit of a hotchpotch but in those days nobody bothered about planning permission.

JS: Probably a very good investment because, because of the sort of place to put your money.

JW: It would be the first conversion I think in the area.

JS: There were plenty more later.

JW: I'm all for it even if they are used for holiday cottages. Saves them from ruin. If you don't like the people who have got it this year it doesn't matter, because it'll be somebody different next anyway.



Lowbridge and Greenquarter