ART. XII. – *An early 17th-century cruck barn in Great Langdale.*
By MARTIN HIGGINS AND JANET D. MARTIN.

THE farms of Langdale follow a pattern which is typical of the more isolated Lakeland valleys in which self-sufficient mixed farming was the norm, at least until the advent of cheap transport and artificial feedstuffs. A small farmhouse, usually of the 17th century, forms the nucleus round which threshing barn, byre, and shelter sheds are closely grouped, their size and number reflecting the relative quality of the surrounding land. This type of farmstead may be contrasted, for instance, with the long ranges of buildings and outlying hogg-houses of Patterdale.

The low cruck barn beside the Blea Tarn road stands out, therefore, as one of the few isolated buildings at the head of Great Langdale. On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that the barn has not always stood on its own, but was once part of a small independent farmstead. There are traces of at least two other buildings. One, which was almost certainly the farmhouse, is clearly marked by a level platform on the opposite side of the present road, and the gable of another can be seen in the field-wall to the north-east. Without excavation the function of neither building can be exactly determined.

The existing barn is of four bays, divided by three pairs of crucks. In normal circumstances these cruck trusses would be spaced at regular intervals of about 3·6 metres (12 feet), but here the bay beside the road is only half the size of the others. The most likely explanation for this is that all the bays were originally of the same size, and that the barn formed an L-shape with the building on the opposite side of the road. At a later date, after the farm ceased to be viable, the end of the barn was demolished in order to realign the road on an improved course closer to the beck. This L-shaped arrangement of house and cruck barn occurs at both High and Low Hallgarth in Little Langdale. The other local cruck barn at Blea Tarn has been rebuilt, but was apparently always in line with the house.

A typical cruck truss consists of a pair of curved oak timbers rising as an arch from the foot of opposing walls to the ridge, with a tie-beam halved across the blades to form a stable A-frame. The cruck blades at Wall End are almost straight. In order to provide sufficient headroom they do not meet directly at the apex, but are joined by a link-yoke, the ridge purlin being supported on a short king-post. This arrangement is unusual, but there is nothing to suggest that it is not original. Apart from the long tie-beam, lateral stability is ensured by an intermediate collar, and longitudinal stability by the use of wind-braces rising from the outside of the cruck blades to the back of the purlins. The small size of the barn required only one set of purlins to each pitch. These were originally trenched into the back of the blades, but those on the front pitch have been raised by the insertion of a blocking spar (properly called an outer cruck blade). The frames themselves would have been pre-fabricated on the ground, each joint being marked by scratched numbers on adjoining timbers, before being raised into position.

Until the middle of the 17th-century, buildings and boundary walls were constructed almost entirely from stones gathered from the surface of the surrounding land or from

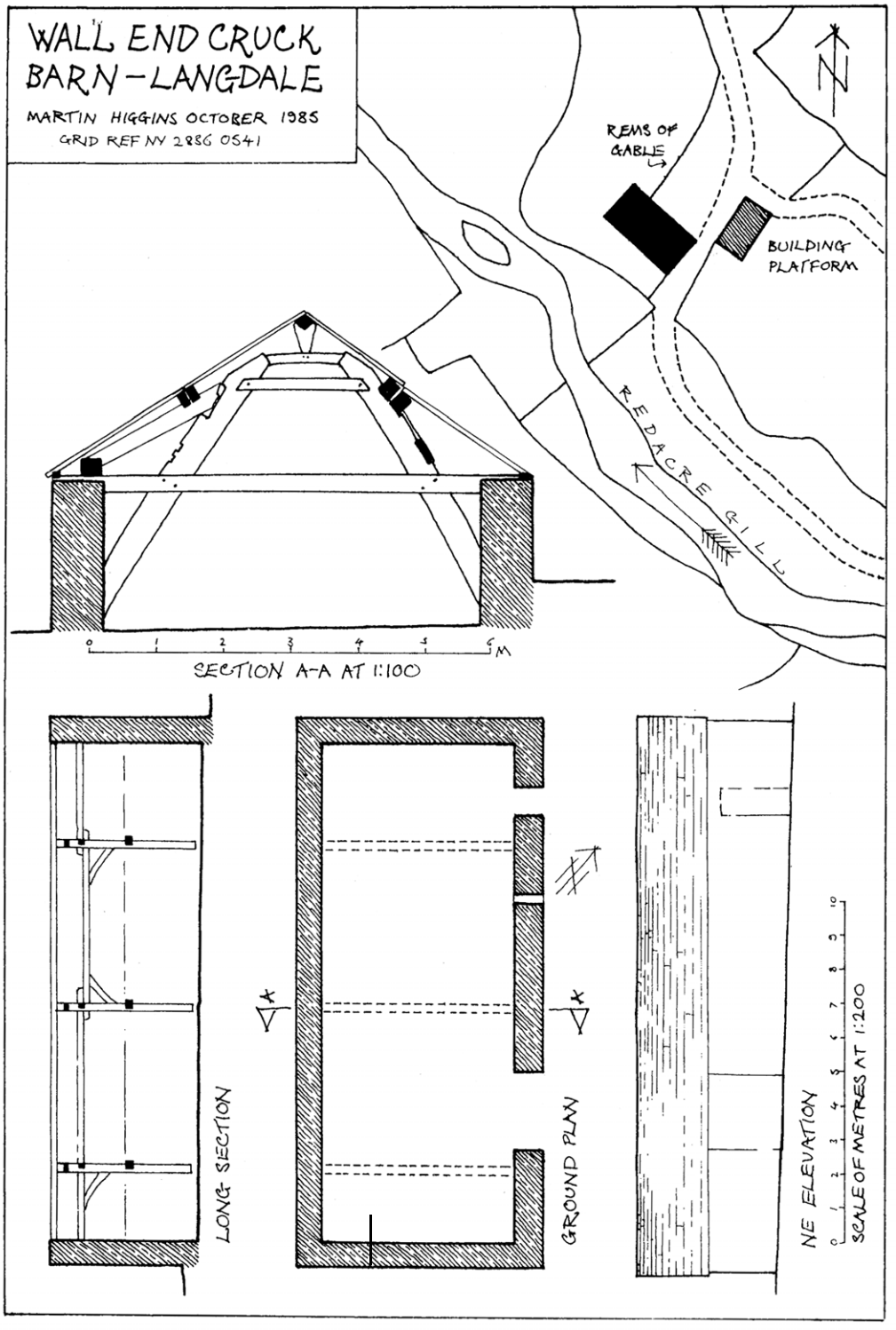

FIG 1.

the bed of a nearby beck.[1] This old farmstead stands beside Redacre Gill, so the majority of its stones are water-worn cobbles. This style of walling can be seen in the north-west gable of the barn, and in the gable of the otherwise demolished building in the field-wall. Building with cobbles is like building with turnips, and if water is allowed to freeze within the wall it will dislodge stones and cause the wall to collapse. To help prevent these bursts later rebuildings of cobble walls included layers of thin, flat stones wherever possible. The ideal source of such stones was earlier roofing slates, discarded in favour of the thinner, more waterproof ones seen on most local buildings today. A plentiful supply of these was available following the demolition of the rest of the old farmstead, and they can be seen as levelling within the three rebuilt walls of the barn, and in the field-wall along what was the south-east edge of the farmstead, the latter blocking the old road. There is also additional weather-proofing in the form of turf capping to the walls of the barn.

As three walls of the barn have been rebuilt its original purpose is not known. The rough cobble floor suggests that it was for the storage of hay rather than for threshing, and the present arrangement of the doorways does not provide for winnowing. By the time that the walls were rebuilt threshing would probably have been carried out in the main barns at the present Wall End farm.

The history of the settlement at Wall End is bedevilled by the fact that no deeds survive until the present century.[2] It can, however, be pieced out to some extent from other sources. Notable among these are wills, and it is one of these which probably enables this barn to be dated to within a few years. There were originally four farmsteads at Wall End. One of them belonged in 1612 to a Charles Satterthwaite, who made his will on 11 November of that year.[3] He had evidently no children of his own. His wife Mabel must have been a widow when they married, for the will speaks of step-children called Dickson, and there are bequests of goods to them. The farmstead at Wall End, however, was his, and he left half of it to Mabel for her widowhood, and the other half to his nephew and godson John Satterthwaite, the son of his brother Robert. John was to inherit the whole property after Mabel's death. The will then continues: "Item I [will?][4] that Robert my brother shall builde one Barne at the Walend in Langdale of three paire of trees within the terme and space of three yeeres followinge, and to the buildinge thereof I give unto him all my wood and tymber both at Walend and hackeath and xs which he oweth me". Charles Satterthwaite was buried at Grasmere on 17 November 1612, and the will was proved on 8 December. The inventory of his goods has not survived, and I cannot at present explain his connection with Hacket, at the foot of Little Langdale, where there was another group of small farms.

While it is not possible to say with utter certainty that the cruck barn at Wall End is the barn specified in the will, it is a four-bay barn of the right date, and it seems beyond much doubt that it was erected by Robert Satterthwaite according to the terms of his brother's will, and therefore between 1613 and 1616.

Notes and References

[1]. The clearing of loose stones from fields had an obvious advantage for cultivation. At Wall End there is also a field clearance cairn in the higher meadow south of the barn.

[2] I hope to deal with the histories of the three dalehead farms at Wall End, Stool End, and Middlefell Place in a later article. [J.D.M.]

[3] Lancashire Record Office, WRW/K.

[4] The MS is blotted here.

PLATE I – Wall End Farm, Great Langdale. Building 5.

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