

FIG. 1.—Lamonby Farm, Burgh-by-Sands.

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facing p. 149.

ART. XIII.—*Lamonby farm: a clay house at Burgh-by-Sands.* By Miss K. S. HODGSON, F.S.A., the Rev. C. M. L. BOUCH, F.S.A., and C. G. BULMAN.

Read at Kendal, September 2nd, 1953.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

By C. M. L. BOUCH.

IT is perhaps worthy of record that this Article and that which follows it are the fruits of the Society's system of Regional Groups, because at their meetings it is sometimes possible for papers to be read upon subjects which require further research, in the hope that, in the discussion which follows the reading of them, some of the doubtful points may be cleared up. Thus it came about that I read a paper upon "The local farm-house" at meetings of the Penrith and Carlisle Groups; as an outcome of the former meeting, I heard from Mr Brunskill, and the fruit I gathered resulted in his Article (p. 160 f. below), while in the discussion that ensued after the paper had been read at Carlisle, Miss Hodgson told me that she knew of some clay houses still standing, and promised to shew them to me. Of course, I gladly accepted; a date was fixed, the visit took place, and I was taken forthwith to Lamonby farm, the very fine example that is the basis of this Article. And that is why I feel it right that Miss Hodgson's name should stand at its head—because without her there would have been no Article. But when we discussed the matter, we both felt that the house could only adequately be described by someone with more technical knowledge than either of us possessed: so we asked Mr Bulman to make the accompanying plan and to provide the architectural account which follows

this introduction. Miss Hodgson has kindly taken the photographs, which are reproduced.

First let us see what can be gathered from the writings of visitors and local historians about these clay-daubins and clay houses. They would be the kind of houses described in Elizabethan times as those in which the poor lived—"such as a man may build within three or four hours, rude earth and timber shanties that would not readily burn".¹ When Miss Edith Wilson of Brigflatts addressed this Society there,² she referred to a collection of notes about the place gathered by Mr John Handley; these included a description of Brigflatts in 1652, and contained the valuable information that its houses were then built of wood and clay, with thatched roofs. The reference to clay houses in south Westmorland is all the more interesting because Celia Fiennes, while journeying through our district to Scotland in 1698, mentions passing through villages in the county with

"sad little hutts made upp of drye walls, only stones piled together and the roofs of same slatts, there seemed to be little or noe tunnels for their chimneys and have no mortar or plaister within or without."

But on the way from Penrith to Carlisle, though she is again struck by "the little hutts and hovels the poor live in, like barns", she adds the comment that "some have them daubed with mud walls, others drye walls". She also describes houses, just over the Border, and says that they looked "just like the booths at a fair", which suggests that these were clay daubins. She goes on:—

"I am sure I have been in some of them that were tollerable dwellings to these—they have no chimneys, their smoke comes out all over the house and there are great holes in the sides of their houses which lets out the smoake when they have been well smoaked in it; there is no roome in their houses but is up

¹ Quoted by Edward Hughes in his *North Country Life in the eighteenth century* (1952), xvi.

² Cf. p. 237, below.

to the thatch and in which are 2 or 3 beds even to their parlours and buttery.”³

It is interesting to compare this description with that given by William Stukeley on his visit to Netherby in 1725, quoted by Mr Eric Birley earlier in this volume—the houses in Longtown were “made of mud and thatched with turf, without windows”, and “the piles of turf for firing are generally as large and as handsome as the houses”.⁴

William Hutchinson, in his *History of Cumberland* (1794) gives many notes about housing conditions in the county⁵: at Holm Cultram, “the old houses are poor clay huts”; at Wigton, some few clay houses; the houses at Aikton, Kirkbampton and Orton were mostly of clay; at Bowness, Burgh and Kirkbride, some were of brick, others of clay; those at Grinsdale and Kirkandrews upon Eden were formerly of clay, but by now were mostly of brick; at Cumwhitton they were “not better than hovels, and covered with straw”; at Crosby upon Eden, “some clay walls and thatched”; at Stanwix, “ancient buildings all of clay, wretchedly contrived”; at Stapleton, “generally of clay and inconvenient”; at Kirkclinton, “generally of clay, low, mean, and ill contrived”; at Kirkandrews upon Esk, formerly “miserable hovels and poor village”. Under Great Orton, he has this note:—

“These clay houses are generally made up in a day or two for, when a person wants a house, a barn etc. built, he acquaints his neighbours who all appear at the time appointed; some lay on clay; some tread it, whilst others are preparing straw to mix it with. By this means building comes low and expeditious and indeed it must be owned that they have brought the art of clay building to perfection. They generally ground with stone about a yard high and a house thus built will stand, they say, 150 or 200 years.”

³ *The Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, ed. Christopher Morris (1947), 196, 202 and 204.

⁴ For the full quotation, cf. p. 11 f., above.

⁵ No page-references are given here, as these may easily be obtained from Hutchinson's index.

Among the *Ballads in the Cumberland Dialect* by Robert Anderson, published in 1805, there was one entitled "The Clay Daubin", in which the "glorious fun and divarsion" that followed its erection are described. This book contained notes by Thomas Sanderson, who comments on this particular ballad as follows:—

"In the eastern and northern parts of Cumberland, the walls of houses are in general composed of clay and in their erection take seldom more than the space of a day. When a young rustic marries, the highest ambition of his heart is to be the master of an humble clay-built cottage, that might afford shelter to him and his family. As soon as he has selected a proper site, he signifies his intentions to his neighbours, who punctually muster on the spot where the intended building is to be raised, each individual bringing a spade and one day's provisions along with him."⁶

As it is hoped that those who read this Article will also read the next one, on the development of the small house in the Eden Valley, it seems desirable to shew how these clay houses fit into the historical sequence outlined by Mr Brunskill. Now the terms *clay house* and *clay daubin* are often used as though they were synonymous, but the latter really describes a rather different and more primitive structure. The real clay daubin was made by first putting up a framework of lathes, or springy rods, woven together, and then plastering them over with clay, often mixed with cow-dung or lime plaster. Such buildings could not carry a proper roof, and were often of a beehive shape.⁷ It is houses of this kind, true clay daubins, that Celia Fiennes, Stukeley and Hutchinson describe as "hovels" or as "mean beyond imagination". But where stone was easily obtainable—in the Lake District—an alternative form of building, with dry stone walls, seems to have been in use. This latter type is probably repre-

⁶ Quoted from *The Songs and Ballads of Cumberland and the Lake Country*, ed. Sidney Gilpin, 2nd ser., 2nd ed., 60 and 148-151. For a detailed description of the local custom of building a house by boons, or gifts in kind, in lieu of labour, see CW2 xxi 113 f.

⁷ For an ancestral type and a modern counterpart, see CW2 i 129-143.

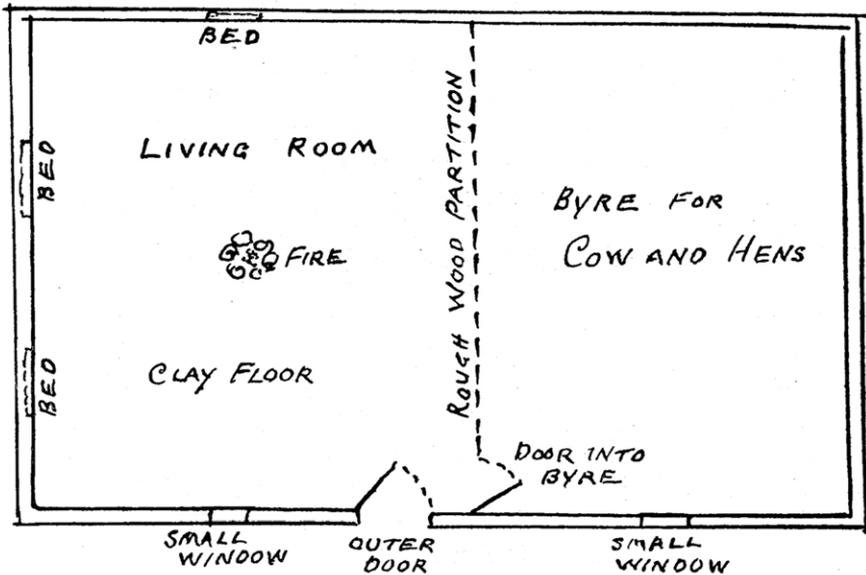


FIG. 2.—Crofter's cottage in the Isle of Skye.

facing p. 153.

sented in the house (still in use not long ago) in the Isle of Skye, of which a sketch and plan, made by our member Mr R. R. Sowerby, are reproduced. Mr Sowerby adds the following comment:—

“I can remember an aged inhabitant of the Lake District informing me that in his youth he could recall the demolition of two cottages in Matterdale that, from his description, were almost similar to these dwellings of the Highland crofter.”



Plan of Crofter's house.

This type of house, in either of its two forms, may well represent the sort of dwelling in which all, below the rank of gentry or superior yeoman, lived in our district until the middle of the 17th century, when the dated houses studied by Mr Brunskill began to be erected by the farming community; the humbler type still continued to be used by cottars and landless peasants until the end of the 18th century.⁸ But the clay house at Burgh is a

very different kind of building, not to be confused with these "hovels". W. G. Collingwood has described how such a house was built⁹:—

"Where stone was not easily obtainable, a rough casing of boards was set up and into this was poured the clay in a semi-fluid state, layers of straw cut to the required length being laid on the wall every few inches . . . the floor was usually of clay, beaten almost to the consistency of stone by the constant passage of feet, flags being necessary only for the threshold and the hearth. The only mason-work required was in the jambs and lintels of the doors and windows."

But Lamonby farm was more elaborate than this. It stands on sleeper-walls of stone (compare Hutchinson's description, already cited), and the roof is supported by crucks. These can be clearly seen in the photographs given below (facing pp. 156 and 157). It is, in fact, quite a spacious and convenient dwelling, certainly much more spacious than the modern "prefab."; it is the counterpart in clay of the stone-built Eden Valley house which Mr Brunskill describes as version (b) of the statesman plan, though in this case there is no way into the byre from the cross-passage or hallen. All clay houses were not, of course, as elaborate as this one—the cottage attached to it is an example of a simpler type of building—but it emphasizes the point that a clay house could be a really substantial building and, when with byre and cottage attached, quite imposing.

Both Hutchinson and Sanderson (p. 151, n. 5 and p. 152, n. 6 above) noted that these clay houses were only to be seen around Carlisle: that is, in places where (in days when transport was limited) stone was difficult to get. Hutchinson's notes also shew that by the last decade of

⁸ "Cf. Lord William Howard's Survey of 1603 (*The Barony of Gilsland*, ed. T. H. B. Graham = this Society's Extra Series XVI), in which *stone houses* are specially noted, from which it seems reasonable to infer that they were comparatively rare, all other dwellings being clay daubins or the like; in the manors of Brampton, Farlam and Nether Denton there were only 3, 5 and no stone houses respectively — but in Brampton the lord himself had three "faire stone houses" . . ."

⁹ *The Records of Holm Cultram* by Grainger and Collingwood (= this Society's Record Series vii), 240.

the 18th century they were being generally replaced by houses of brick. It is fortunate, from the historian's point of view, that a few of them have survived into our own day.

As will be seen from the text both of this Article and of the following one, as well as from the plans illustrating them, the interior of the local house was divided up by an intricate system of doors, passages and screens, apparently with the object of protecting the fireside from the wind. All these parts of the house had their traditional names. As these varied in different parts of these counties, ordinary words have normally been substituted for them, in the body of these Articles. But a note of them will be found below.

| Part of House | Cumberland name | Westmorland name |
|--|--|--|
| Cross passage, leading from front to back door. | Mell-doors, throodoors, throogang or throogit (P. 117, 181) | Hallan (B. 201, 215) |
| Door into passage leading to kitchin or 'house' | Heck door (P. 90) | Mell door (B. 201, 215) |
| Passage into kitchin, etc. | Heck (P. 90) | Heck (B. 201 and P. 90) or Hallan (P. 86) |
| 'Partition that screened the wind from the fireside' (B. 202) | Hallan (P. 86) | Heck (B. 216) |

P. = *A Supplement to the Glossary of the Dialect of Cumberland*,
E. W. Prevost, 1905.

B. = *The Remains of John Briggs*, 1825.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION.

By C. G. BULMAN.

The plan (fig. 5) shows at once the disposition and extent of the structure. Its planning is interesting, for it shows the original layout almost unaltered, and stems from the earliest type of hut or shelter, with two compartments provided, side by side, one for the peasant and his family and the other for his stock. It is a long parallelogram, some 120 ft. long by 17 ft. wide, set almost due north and south, and end-on to the main road. The doorway and windows are on the long western side; some, at least, of the few openings on the eastern side are modern. The long parallelogram is divided roughly into two halves; one of these is subdivided into two cottages of unequal size, and the other, originally a byre, is now a large barn, open to the roof. The cottages are at the southern end, adjoining the main road, and are still inhabited. Both of them have a ground and first floor, but the total height of the building is so modest that the ceiling of the ground floor is little more than 6 ft. in height. The roof-space above is converted into bedrooms, in each case approached by a very narrow and awkward wooden stair, of the ladder variety; both rooms are extremely dark, being lit by only the smallest of windows. There is scarcely any walling above the upper floor-level, and the roof-slope starts almost immediately above the floor. The section given in fig. 5 clearly shows the arrangement. The only features of interest in the bedrooms are the great, almost unwrought, roof principals, very roughly shaped and assembled; the photograph reproduced on the opposite page illustrates them clearly.

At little more than half-way along the front is the main entrance to the principal cottage, and this also gives access to the cross-passage which provides entrance to the cottage and also to the yard or garden on the east side. This is the original planning. It might have been

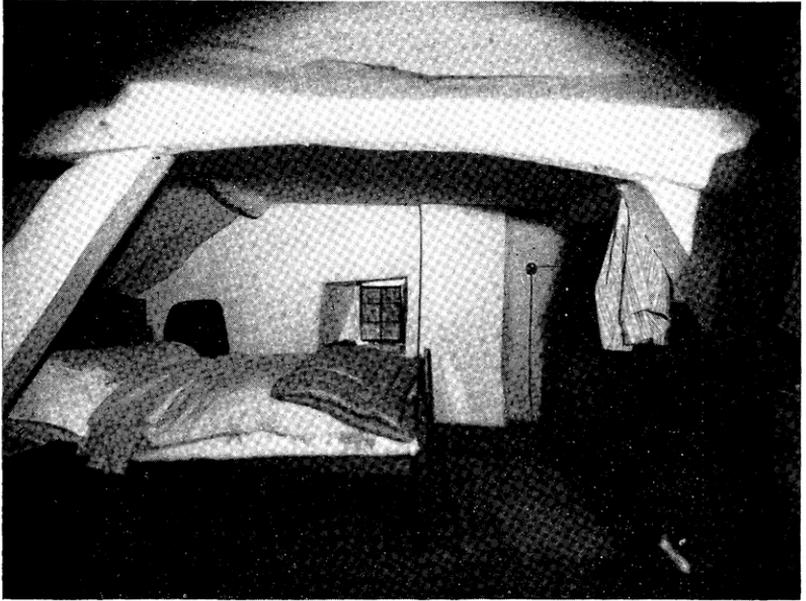


FIG. 3.—A Bedroom, Lamonby Farm Cottage, Burgh-by-Sands.

facing p. 156.



FIG. 4.—The Barn, Lamonby Farm, Burgh-by-Sands.

facing p. 157.

expected that a doorway would also have been provided into the barn from the cross-passage, opposite the door into the living-room; this was the usual planning in the rather more ambitious farm-houses of the 17th and 18th centuries (for which, see Mr Brunskill's Article below). There is no sign of such an opening in this cottage, but there is some later brickwork patching on the barn side of the wall at this point, and it may be that an original doorway has been eliminated here.

So much for the planning of the cottages. The remainder of the building is given over entirely to one great barn, formerly (as has been observed) a byre. It is over 50 ft. long internally, the intermediate wall being a later addition in brick, only built to half height. Unlike the cottages, the barn has no intermediate floor, and the great constructional timbers, rising full height and spaced at intervals of approximately 10 ft. apart, are impressive despite their crudity. The photograph reproduced on the opposite page shows this interior.

The construction of the building is simple in the extreme, providing an interesting example of the "cruck" type of structure which was used in most houses of the humbler type from the early Middle Ages onwards. In this type, large timbers (preferably curved) were used, set out in pairs opposite one another and inclined so as to meet at the top; these timbers formed the frame or skeleton around which the remainder of the house was constructed, and we can still see them today, in this structure at Burgh, performing their original function.

The whole building was no doubt put together by unskilled labour, with the assistance, perhaps, of the village carpenter. First a foundation-trench was dug for the whole of the outer walls, and in this was inserted the base-course, consisting of massive cobble-stones, some of them approximating to the size of small boulders; these were set in clay and built up to a height of some 2 to 3 ft. above ground level. It must have taken a considerable

amount of labour and effort to transport some of these stones and lay them in position; it was, however, a very sensible and practical arrangement, for this rough cobble-walling formed at once a substantial foundation for the clay-built wall above, and an efficient damp-proof course to the cottage living-rooms.

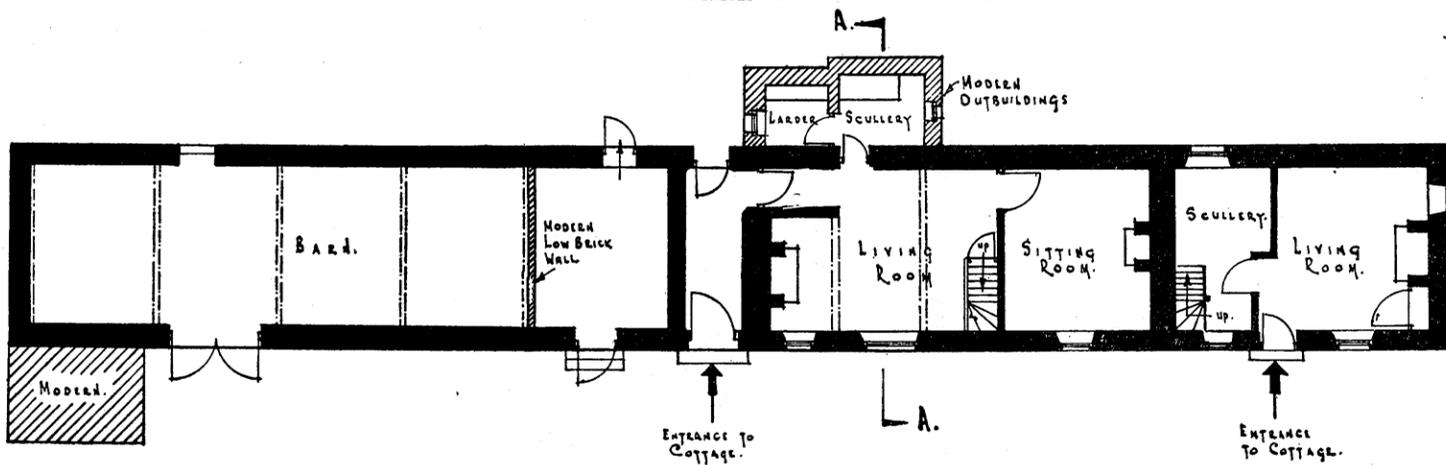
The stone base-course also provided a foundation for the timber crucks, which were next erected, opposite each other and about 10 ft. apart; the carpenter was possibly brought in at this stage. Timbers were selected, where possible, which could be worked into angled beams, as shown on the section (fig. 5). They were probably pieced together on the ground first, to see that they fitted; they were then taken apart, and reassembled in position, the tie-beams and purlins being placed in position to form the roof. The whole structure was thus homogeneous, with the crucks rising directly from the base, to form the framework of the house and also, at the summit, the roof-principals. The main timbers are roughly trimmed and are not finished in any way; they are approximately 12 in. by 9 in., while the tie-beams are 9 in. by 6 in.

When the cobble base-course and the timber crucks were in position, a substantial clay wall was then erected above the base, and enclosing the lower portion of the timbers, to a height of some 7 or 8 ft. and a thickness of some 2 ft. Presumably some kind of temporary wooden shuttering was used (as described by W. G. Collingwood, cf. p. 154 above), being raised a foot or two at a time, as the clay walls rose. The clay was well rammed, to make it hard and rigid, and every few inches a layer of straw was inserted to bind it. It is difficult to make a sharp edge in clay, without it crumbling; here, it is interesting to note, all the original edges and corners are well rounded off.

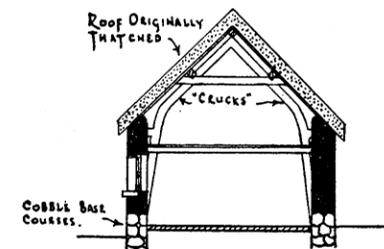
After the walls had risen to sufficient height, and all the roof-timbers and rafters were in position, the roof itself was thatched, with two or three courses of stone



FIRST FLOOR PLAN.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN.



SECTION A-A.

SCALE: EIGHT FEET TO ONE INCH.

FIG. 5.—LAMONBY FARM AND COTTAGE, BURGH-BY-SANDS.

facing p. 158.

slabs inserted above the eaves to give additional protection to the walls. The thatching was finally removed in 1920 and (as is usual nowadays) was superseded by the inevitable but less picturesque corrugated iron.

Externally, the walls were coated with whitewash, and many successive coats have formed a thick skin. This annual whitewashing gives the outer face of the clay walls the necessary protection from the weather, and if it is carried out, the life of the clay wall is prolonged indefinitely. Certainly, no trace of damp could be found in the sitting-rooms of the cottages; and, providing that proper attention was paid to the roof-covering, and the external whitewashing was done regularly, all appears to have been well, and the cottage interiors kept dry and comfortable.

The floors, it should be noted, are formed of stone flags, laid (no doubt) on rammed clay.

The natural question which remains is, the age of the present building. This presents a problem, for there are no architectural features of any kind to suggest a date, and the fire-grates and other fittings appear to be modern; but it may be 200 years old, or even more. The important point, however, is not the exact age of the structure which we see, but its survival into the present age, to give us an almost perfect example of those traditional methods of humble building which persisted unchanged for many hundreds of years, but are now obsolete. Its real interest lies in its structure, built by unskilled local labour, with such materials as were ready to hand. Few houses of this type remain inhabited now, and another generation will know them no more.