

A survey of longhouse structures in the Duddon Valley, Cumbria

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This paper describes the results of field and documentary archaeological investigations of 39 farming-related structures in the Duddon Valley, Cumbria, some of which have been identified as probable medieval longhouses. Of the five best-preserved structures, four are of the classic two-celled longhouse type, while one is single-celled and may represent a temporarily-occupied shieling. In four cases, several structures are arranged into small settlements. The surveys were conducted by trained volunteers from the Duddon Valley Local History Group under the guidance of professional archaeologists from the Lake District National Park and the National Trust, although this paper is the responsibility of the authors alone. The paper concludes with recommendations for protection of the sites, and for the excavation of some structures.

Introduction

THIS paper summarises information on Duddon Valley longhouses presented in detail in a report of the Duddon Valley Local History Group (DVLHG),¹ although it includes a more comprehensive comparison of newly-discovered sites with those reported previously in the literature.

The Ring Cairns to Reservoirs project, or R2R, completed archaeological surveys of much of the Duddon Valley during the years 2006-2008, which had resulted in the publication by DVLHG of a book about the archaeology in that area.² Among several thousand sites, R2R discovered the remains of a number of small buildings, mainly on the valley sides at altitudes of about 200-300 m. Some of these appeared to have the structure of medieval or post-medieval longhouses, and the present project was set up under the guidance of professional archaeologists to investigate these more closely and conduct detailed measured surveys of those structures which conformed most closely to the longhouse type. The project also conducted some historical research in an attempt to find written records of the structures under investigation.

Longhouses were rectangular or sub-rectangular, single-storey farmhouses roofed with timbers covered in reeds, bracken, heather or turf, which made their appearance in the UK in the early medieval period and replaced the pervasive round-house design in use throughout the Iron Age. Although it is possible or even probable that the longhouse pattern was introduced to Cumbria by Norse settlers in the ninth century, it should be noted that an earlier post-built example at Shap has been dated to the seventh-eighth century,³ and apparently rectilinear, single-celled drystone structures (described as 'steadings') that may be post-Roman have been reported from Waitby and Smardale, although these have not been securely dated.²⁴

The apparently windowless drystone walls of longhouses were generally little more than 1 metre high (even after taking stone tumble into account, although some may have been augmented with turf), and the A-frame roof timbers would have rested directly on these low walls. A detailed description of their main features can be found in Matthiessen *et al.* (2013)¹, but it should be noted that longhouses often consisted of two cells, one for human accommodation and one for livestock. Additional cells for storage were sometimes added. In the case of the larger single-celled structures, it is possible that the space was divided in two by a wooden or textile partition. Access for both humans and their animals was generally, but not exclusively, via a cross passage.

Longhouses were distinct from shielings, which were small, rectilinear, seasonally-occupied huts used solely by herders in the summer as part of transhumance practices. In contrast, longhouses were designed for continuous occupation by both farmers and their livestock. However, it is sometimes now impossible to distinguish between the two, and there were many variations on the basic theme outlined above. It should also be recognised that the type of single-storey drystone dwelling described in this paper is distinct from the often two-storey longhouses known as clay dabbins which are found in the arable country north of the Lake District massif *e.g.*⁴

Table 1 lists all the 24 longhouse sites that had been reported in Cumbria before the R2R project and the present survey had been completed, although a few others such as the longhouse complex at Pikeside Farm in the Duddon Valley (SD 183928) were also known.

Quartermaine and Leech (2012)⁵ state that, apart from the longhouse at Askham Fell, no other Cumbrian longhouses lie within enclosures (like many earlier roundhouses), and that they range in form from single-celled shapes, to three-celled structures with extensive associated field systems. In fact, the structure at Tongue House High Close (A) is also within a small enclosure. The structures reported by Quartermaine and Leech generally have a length to width ratio of 2:1, and range in length from 7.5 to 24 metres, with an average length of 11.5m and this holds approximately true for the whole set described in Table 1. The smaller ones are invariably single-celled, and while most have a single entrance on the long side, some have opposing entrances characteristic of cross-passage houses.

Based on the sites that have been dated, the longhouses in Cumbria range widely in age from early-medieval to post-medieval, showing that the design was durable and popular. The sites that have been dated more or less reliably include Parker's Croft, Shap (seventh to eighth century AD); Bryant's Gill, Kentmere seventh to tenth century (although this may be more properly described as a shieling); Stephenson Ground, Lickle Valley twelfth to thirteenth century; Crosbythwaite, Duddon Valley thirteenth to fourteenth century; Gatesgarth, Buttermere thirteenth to fourteenth century; Mill House, Kirkby Lonsdale thirteenth to fourteenth century; Great Grassoms, Bootle thirteenth to sixteenth century; Smithy Beck, Ennerdale fourteenth to sixteenth century; and Bank End Farm, Eskdale fifteenth century.^{3,6,7,5}

TABLE 1: Medieval or probably medieval longhouses previously recorded at 24 sites in Cumbria.

| Site name | Grid reference | Description | Dimensions (m) (and length/width ratio) | Comments | References |
|------------------------------|----------------|---|---|---|---------------|
| Askham Fell, Askham | NY 495 232 | Longhouse in a decayed drystone wall enclosure | 15.1 x 7.9 (1.91) | Medieval or early post-medieval | 5 |
| Bank End Farmstead, Eskdale | SD 139993 | Cross-passage longhouse with associated outbuildings | 25 x 5.5 (approx.) (4.54) | Probably built in the 1480s – historical records exist of a tenant in 1493. | 5; 6 |
| Baskell Farm, Duddon Valley* | SD 190936 | Faint turf-covered banks which may be foundations of a longhouse | 18.5 x 5.5 (3.36) | Medieval? | HER 36641 |
| Black Beck, Buttermere | NY 149172 | Longhouse, with circular stone field at one end | ?? | Alternative interpretation: a shieling. Possibly medieval. | HER 29779 |
| Bryant's Gill, Kentmere | NY 458031 | A sub-rectangular building with a strip of paving along its spine. | 10 x 5 (2.0) | This site has been excavated by Dickinson (1985) ¹⁷ . Numerous artefacts were found, including spindle whorls, whetstones, and worked iron and flint. Calibrated radiocarbon dates are mid-7th to late-10th century. The earlier of these dates is before Norse settlers arrived in Cumbria. | HER 33254; 17 |
| Cragstone, Sedbergh | SD 643936 | Probable medieval or later turf-covered longhouse associated with a large polygonal enclosure (22 x 20 m) | 10 x 6 (1.67) | Medieval or post-medieval | HER MYD33352 |
| Crosbythwaite, Duddon Valley | SD 192955 | Longhouse with centrally-placed opposing entrances, associated with at least 2 other buildings and extensive field system | 10 x 4.2 (2.38) | Medieval, based on morphology, and on find of 13th-14th century pottery | 5 |
| Gatesgarth Farm, Buttermere | NY 194149 | Interior cobbled floor and exterior cobbled yard. At least 2 other buildings on site. | 18 x ≥5 (≈3.6) | Some excavation has taken place. Site associated with a nearby medieval vaccary. Earliest documentary reference dated 1259. Pottery evidence suggests 13-14th century. | HER 32593; 18 |

| | | | | | |
|--|-----------|--|--|---|---------------------|
| Gillertwaite, Ennerdale | NY 146140 | 2 structures, each surrounded by a bank and ditch earthwork. One is possibly of the cross-passage type. | ?? | This site may be associated with a medieval vaccary nearby whose existence was recorded in 1322. There may also be an association with a cairnfield on the same site. | HER 17818 |
| Gillertwaite, Ennerdale | NY 145141 | 3 rectilinear structures, at least one of which may be a longhouse | ?? | This site may be associated with a medieval vaccary nearby whose existence was recorded in 1322. | HER 17819 |
| Grange Scar, Little Asby, Kirkby Stephen | NY 678101 | 2 medieval longhouses (one 2-celled, one single-celled) linked by enclosure walls and banks. The shorter structure has opposing entrances. | 15.8 x 7.5 21 x 9 (2.11) (2.33) | It is possible that the longer structure was used for storage and not for domestic purposes. | 19; 8 |
| Great Grassoms, Bootle Fell | SD 135883 | 2 longhouses, one 3-celled and one 2-celled | 18 x 7 24 x 9 (2.57) (2.67) | Associated with a large banked enclosure. Probably medieval (13th-16th century). | 5 |
| Green How, Muncaster, Eskdale | ?? | 3-celled longhouse with side and end entrances | 21 x 6 (approx.) | - | 5 |
| Hartsop Hall Farm, Patterdale | NY 398114 | Turfed-over foundations sited within large rectangular enclosure (15 x 20 m) | 8 x 3.5 (3.50) (2.28) | Possible alternative interpretation is that this is a shieling. | HER 27221/ 32584 |
| Lanthwaite Green, Buttermere | NY 159205 | Possible longhouse within an enclosure (36 x 45 m) | ?? | Date uncertain | HER 1092 |
| Longhouse Close, Duddon Valley* | SD 245974 | Probable medieval longhouse with associated outbuildings and walls | 9 x 3.9 (2.31) | Near Longhouse Farm | (HER 38570) |
| Mill House, Kirkby Lonsdale | SD 635852 | Medieval longhouse-type dwelling | ?? | Site excavated in 1964-65, and pottery and other artefacts of 13th-14th century date found. Lynchets and ridge and furrow marks found nearby. | HER SD 68 NW 6 |
| Muncaster Fell, Eskdale | SD 137990 | Footings plus 1-2 courses of stonework alongside sunken trackway. | 13.5 x 5.0 (2.70) | - | HER 33560 |
| Parker's Croft, Shap | NY 562152 | Rectangular arrangement of post holes | Approx. 11 x 6 (1.83) | Dated on the basis of associated loom weights to 7th-8th century | 3 |

| | | | | | |
|--|-----------|--|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Scale Farmstead, Gosforth | NY 091056 | 5-celled structure which started as a single cell with additional cells butted on. Entrances to north and south. | ?? | Some walls less solidly built than others. | HER 8764 |
| Smithly Beck settlement, Emmerdale | NY 127149 | 4 structures, 3 of which are double-walled with an internal rectangular, single-celled drystone wall structure and an external rectilinear enclosure following the line of the building. | Up to 24 long and 11 wide (2.18) | These structures were excavated by Fletcher and Fell (1987) ¹⁸ . It is thought that the double-walled structures were primarily for insulation, although if the roof extended across both inner and outer walls, the space may also have been used for storage. 14th-16th century. | HER 3605; 20 |
| Stephenson Ground, Lickle Valley | SD 240945 | Oval-shaped longhouse structure, in association with a shieling and earlier Bronze Age structures. | 12 x 8 (1.50) | This site has been excavated ^{19,20} . Pottery and radiocarbon dates point to 12th-14th century. | HER 16527; 21; 22; 23 |
| Tongue House High Close (A), Duddon Valley* | SD 243976 | Medieval (or post-medieval?) rectangular longhouse with 2 cells, within a small enclosure and associated with an extensive wall system. | 10 x 4 (2.50) | Has an upstanding southern gable end approx. 1 m high. | HER 33590/ 36558/ 36559 |
| Tonguesdale Moss, Eskdale | SD 167992 | Possible medieval longhouse with rounded end | ?? | Subject to excavation (as yet incomplete). Some rig and furrow marks in vicinity. | Mark Kincey (pers. comm.) |
| Whelter Beck, Bampton, Haweswater | NY 469132 | Possible medieval longhouse associated with a small cairnfield | 7.6 x 5 (1.52) | - | HER 31415 |

*These sites were included in the present Level 2 survey.

TABLE 2: Level 1 data concerning the 15 Duddon Valley structures (located on 12 sites) originally considered to conform most closely to the longhouse pattern. None showed evidence of recent domesticity, and none were associated with the remains of a slated roof.

| Site name | R2R* site code (if any) | Grid reference | Altitude (m) | Site condition | Stream nearby? | Evidence of ancient agriculture? | Align-ment | Cross-walls? | Door openings or cross-passage? | Single or double walls? ** | No. of wall courses | External dimensions (m) | Internal dimensions (m) |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------------|------------|--------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Baskell Farm | no code | SD 19088 93681 | 225 | Good | Yes | Yes | NE-SW | Possible | Possible | Single | 1 | 18.5x5.5 | 18.5x5.5 |
| Dobby Shaw (B) | ctds01 | SD 23127 95562 | 210 | Moderate-poor | Yes | Yes | NNE-SSW | Possible | Yes | Double | 3 | 12.0x4.5 | 11x3 |
| Foss How | mcstr21 | SD 24223 98600 | 330 | Moderate-poor | Yes | Yes | N-S | Yes | Possible | Single | 1 | 7.0x2.9 | ? |
| Lad How (A) | mcwb12 | SD 21248 96147 | 226 | Moderate-poor | No | Yes | NE-SW | Yes | Yes | Single and double | up to 11 | 19.4x8.1 | 18.0x? |
| Long House Close (A) | lmlhc 30 | SD 24529 97375 | 294 | Moderate-poor | Yes | Yes | E-W | ? | Yes | Single | 1-2 | 9.0x3.9 | not recorded |
| Low Sella | lmsel 07 | SD 19814 92182 | 55 | Good | Yes | Yes | ENE-WSW | Yes | Possible | Single | 0 to 25+ | 17.9x7.1 | 16.6x5.7 |
| Newfield Wood (1) | lmsea 104 | SD 22221 95664 | 110 | Good-moderate | Yes | Yes | SSE-NNW | Yes | Possible | Single | 3-4 max | 13x5.4 | not recorded |
| Newfield Wood (2) | lmsea 104 | SD 22221 95664 | 110 | Good-moderate | Yes | Yes | SSE-NNW | Yes | Possible | Single | 3-4 max | 10.8x4.6 | not recorded |
| Pannel Holme (A) | mcph 05 | SD 20781 95910 | 243 | Good | Yes | Yes | N-S | Possible | Possible | Double | 1 | 11.9x4.7 | 10.0x3.0 |
| Pikeside Farm (A) | mcps 03 | SD 18320 92817 | 205 | Moderate-poor | Yes | Yes | ENE-WSW | Yes | Yes | Single | 0-2 | 17.5x5.2 | not recorded |
| Pikeside Farm (B) | mcps 04 | SD 18326 92803 | 205 | Moderate-poor | Yes | Yes | SSE-NNW | Yes | Yes | Single | 0-2 | 12.8x5.6 | not recorded |
| Pikeside Farm (C) | no code | SD 18332 92811 | 205 | Moderate-poor | Yes | Yes | N-S | Possible | Yes | Single | 0-2 | 18.1x5.8 | not recorded |
| Stephead Close | ctshc05 | SD 23277 96027 | 156 | Moderate-poor | Yes | No | E-W | Possible | Yes | Double | 4 | 18.0x7.0 | 15.0x5.0 |
| Tongue House High Close (A) | no code | SD 24303 97625 | 273 | Moderate-poor | Yes | Yes | NE-SW | Yes | Yes | Single | 3-6 | 9.8x3.4 | 8.9x2.3 |
| Tongue House High Close (B) | no code | SD 24287 97842 | 300 | Moderate-poor | Yes | Yes | N-S | No | Yes | Single | 3-6 | 10.6x3.8 | 9.4x2.7 |

* R2R: *Ring Cairns to Reservoirs* project

** Note that 'double wall' does not mean 2 completely separate walls (as in some longhouses in Ennerdale), but simply a double line of stones

To set this Cumbrian information in context, it should be noted that early-medieval longhouse-type structures have been found elsewhere in northern England, as well as more widely on Shetland, Orkney, the Outer Hebrides and the Isle of Man. These clearly trace the progress of successive waves of Norse immigrants who mainly originated in Norway and voyaged around the north of Scotland before settling in Ireland, their descendants later crossing the Irish Sea to Cumbria.^{16,22,23} Examples of early longhouses in northern England probably built by Norse people have been excavated at Gauber High Pasture, Ribbleshead and Simy Folds, Upper Teesdale^{10,11}, but no firmly identified Norse longhouses have yet been found in Cumbria itself. A rectilinear probable shieling that has been securely dated to 660-780 AD (*i.e.* possibly pre-Norse) has been excavated at Upper Pasture near Horton in Ribblesdale; no evidence of Norse involvement was reported.²⁷

Returning to the area described in the present paper, no longhouses in the Duddon Valley apart from Crosbythwaite have yet been dated, and it is possible that some of these might have been constructed by Norse colonists in early-medieval times (by analogy with the firmly-identified Norse longhouses found elsewhere in northern Britain). This is consistent with the view that the northern Morecambe Bay area around what is now Furness and Copeland was colonised from the tenth century onwards by Norse people originating in Ireland,⁸ and with the suggestion that later Norse immigrants in the eleventh and twelfth centuries were forced to make homesteads on the higher inland areas as the coastal estates were already occupied by earlier arrivals.⁹ It is of interest that the Old Norse farming-related words for 'shieling hut' (*skali*) and 'clearing' (*thveit*), are present in certain Duddon Valley (and many other) place names such as How Scale Haw and Seathwaite.

In potential contradiction to this view of Norse influence, however, few if any artefacts of indisputably Norse origin have yet been found in any Cumbrian longhouses, or even at the two domestic sites in northern England which are known to be from the Viking period (*i.e.* Gauber High Pasture, Ribbleshead; Simy Folds, Upper Teesdale).^{10,11} It is, of course, possible that no buildings of Norse construction remain extant, but that those buildings still visible were built to a pattern handed down informally from the period of Norse settlement. Indeed, despite the abundant place-name and linguistic evidence for Norse settlement in Cumbria,⁸ it seems probable on the basis of recent genetic analyses that Norwegian-Norse colonists during the latter quarter of the first millennium AD did not replace the majority of the pre-existing Cumbrian population, even though their cultural influence was probably considerable.¹²

In summary, Norse-style longhouses (but not necessarily longhouses constructed by Norse-speaking people) constituted the main type of farm dwelling in Cumbria for over 500 years and their remains are to be found all over the area, but at present we still know relatively little about the people who lived in them or their ways of life. Domestic artefacts from that period are rare, probably because most objects were either organic or easily degraded in the generally acid soils.

To crystallise the aims of the present project, there was a need to understand which of the many relict farmhouse structures in the Duddon Valley conform to the longhouse

pattern, and to document their precise layout and condition. Furthermore, as was apparent from the work of Quartermaine and Leech (2012),⁵ at least the larger Cumbrian longhouses appear to be associated with sometimes extensive field and enclosure systems, so there was also a need to investigate if such systems are to be found in the vicinity of Duddon longhouses in addition to those at Crosbythwaite. Finally, it was hoped that these field studies could be buttressed by historical information which might be present in various archives. This would assist an objective assessment of the possible age of the Duddon buildings, although it is appreciated that reliable dating is probably only possible by excavation. Indeed, it is hoped that this initial survey will form the starting point for one or more excavations, both to establish building dates and to investigate the lives of medieval Cumbrian farmers.

Methods

The project was divided into two stages. During the first stage, sites discovered during R2R or otherwise previously documented were assessed on paper for their potential conformity to the characteristics of longhouses (described above), and a long-list of 39 structures worth investigating further was drawn up (not presented in this paper). Each of these was then visited by a survey team that conducted observations of visible structures, completed a survey form, made a sketch plan, and took photographs (termed a detailed Level 1 survey). As well as information about the nature and condition of the putative longhouse itself, information was also sought about any structures such as ancient walls in the vicinity (within about 250 m) which were considered to be related to the longhouse.

During the project's second stage, the survey forms were evaluated, and with the assistance of the professional archaeologists from the Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA) and the National Trust (NT), a short-list of sites of greatest interest was compiled. This short-list comprised sites with buildings thought likely to be longhouses, and therefore worth surveying in detail. In several cases, sites had to be cleared of bracken before surveying began. Each site was then subjected to a measured survey (termed Level 2) using standard tape and offset methods, and the surrounding landscape was surveyed by a hand-held geographical positioning system (GPS – Ashtech MobileMapper MMCX) to record agricultural features such as enclosures which might be associated with the longhouse. In addition, some sites were overflown by a model aircraft (a 'quadricopter') carrying a digital camera which was used to obtain photographs which could be rectified using survey pegs visible in shot. Originals of all survey drawings, plus GIS outputs and photographs, are held in the DVLHG archive.

Searches were conducted for written records which might shed light on the history of longhouse sites. There was a surprising amount of archive material available concerning the Duddon Valley considering it is such a remote part of North West England. There are over 1000 references in the National Archives A2A catalogue concerning the names of the parishes alone. Documents are rather inconveniently spread amongst Barrow, Carlisle, Lancaster, Preston, Whitehaven and Kendal Record Offices. As Dunnerdale with Seathwaite Parish is part of Kirkby Ireleth, a Peculiar^a

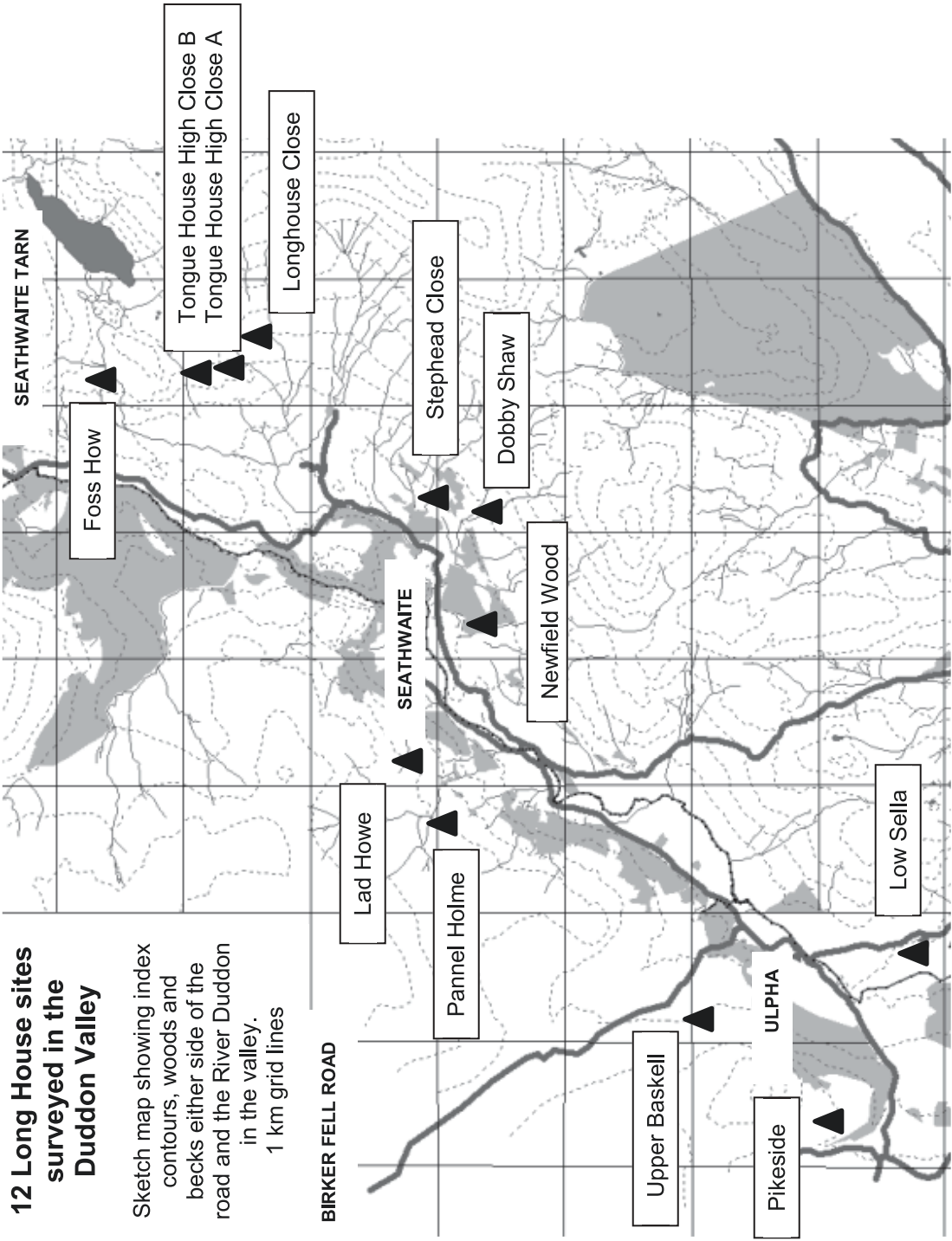


FIG. 1. A map showing the locations of the 12 surveyed sites in the Duddon Valley.

of the Diocese of York, many of the wills in this area are to be found in the Borthwick Collection.^b

Records consist mainly of legal documents but these are very diverse. They include wills, probates and inventories, deeds, feoffments^c, conveyances, bonds, leases, agreements and many church and manorial documents. Unfortunately the coverage of manorial documents is rather patchy. Some records exist from the early seventeenth century but very few from earlier times. Records from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries are quite common.

It has been borne in mind when reading early documents that familiar names may not have been referring to the buildings we see today. They may refer to other buildings on the same or nearby sites. This is because the 'great rebuilding in stone' described by Professor W.G. Hoskins¹³ took place in Cumbria between 1650 to 1750 and it is likely that the movement from the old to the new properties was gradual and that old sites continued to be occupied for many years.

Level 1 survey results

Level 1 data for the 15 Duddon Valley structures (on 12 sites) originally considered as representing possible longhouses are shown in Table 2, and the site locations are shown in map form in Fig. 1. The main findings arising from these initial surveys are as follows:

- The 15 structures vary considerably in terms of altitude (55-330m), site condition (good – poor), alignment (all points of the compass), existence of cross-passages, numbers of wall courses (0-25+) and external dimensions (7.0x2.9m to 18.0x7.0m). However, almost all are near surface water, have evidence nearby of ancient agriculture, and most have cross-walls or lateral door openings. None show evidence of domesticity such as nettle patches or fruit trees, suggesting that they may not have been recently occupied. Furthermore, fallen roof slates were not visible anywhere, suggesting that the structures had been roofed with thatch or turf.
- In one of the 15 cases (Low Sella), the structure had evidently possessed two storeys in post-medieval times, but the ground plan and other features suggested it may have been a longhouse originally. In another case (Pannel Holme A), the structure is traversed by a later field wall. In other cases, extensive degradation appears to have been caused by robbing of stone and damage by livestock (*e.g.* Stephead Close and Baskell Farm).
- In a few cases (*e.g.* the two structures in Tongue House High Close), there appears to have been little disturbance since the day human occupation ceased.
- In four cases (Pikeside Farm, Newfield Wood, Dobby Shaw and Longhouse Close), two or three longhouses or associated outbuildings are present on each site as a closely associated group or settlement. There is also a series of five

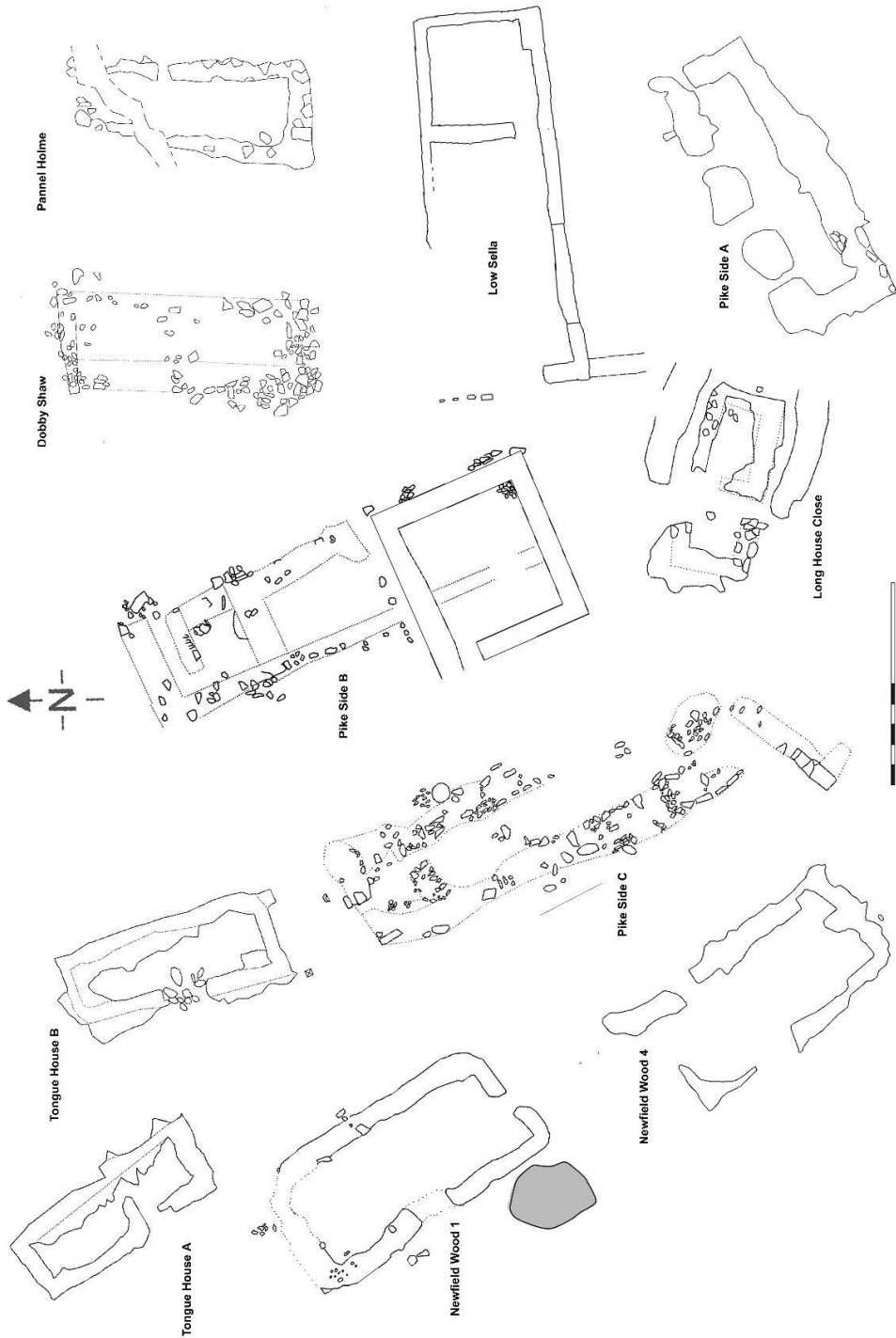


FIG. 2. Comparison of 11 of the 15 tape-and-offset surveyed structures, all oriented with respect to magnetic north and shown at the same scale (scale bar = 10 m).

structures (Lad How A and B, Pannel Holme A and B, and Moor House), not all of which may be longhouses, which nevertheless lie in the same general area as each other (the high ground west of Hall Dunnerdale and Wallowbarrow Crag), at similar altitudes (202–243m), and with similar orientations (approx. NE-SW). A sixth structure which also appears to form part of this group, at High Grim Crag, has not been surveyed.

Level 2 survey results

Full details of each of the 15 Level 2 surveys are given by Matthiessen *et al.* (2013).¹ 11 of the 15 structures are compared in outline in Fig. 2. The remaining four structures (Baskell Farm; Foss How; Lad How A; Stephead Close) have been excluded from further consideration as they are considered to have been too heavily modified or degraded to permit reliable conclusions. Six of the structures in Fig. 2 are oriented in a NW-SE direction but the rest do not fit this pattern. Overall, it can be seen that the 11 structures are of varying external length (between 7.0 and 18.1m), but the ratio of length to width is more uniform, varying between 2.28 and 3.36. Most have side entrances on one of the long walls, but evidence for cross-passages is largely absent, possibly due to the obscuring effects of stone tumble. However, there is evidence for a cross-wall in four or five cases.

Two small settlements (Newfield Wood and Pikeside Farm) are shown schematically in Fig. 3. Whereas the three Pikeside Farm structures shown in black shading are of the longhouse pattern (with more recent structures in grey), those in Newfield Wood are more degraded although structures 1 and 4 appear to be the remains of longhouses (see Fig.2). The wider area of Newfield Wood contains a number of ancient walls which may be related to the settlement, but the dense woodland prevents accurate surveying. However, a GPS survey of the area around the Pikeside Farm site (Fig. 4) shows a large number of clearance cairns and some ancient walls, although it is not known if these were associated with the longhouses. Two other sites (Dobby Shaw and Longhouse Close) also include small clusters of building structures, but in these cases there is apparently only one longhouse at each site, and the other buildings may have been used for storage.

As at Pikeside Farm and Newfield Wood, most of the other structures have some traces of ancient agriculture in the vicinity – generally low walls probably associated with cattle rearing. There are no signs of rig and furrow ploughing.

A clear example of a longhouse set in its surrounding agricultural landscape is provided by Tongue House High Close A. Fig. 5 is a tape and offset survey of this structure showing that it is surrounded on three sides by a wall, and on the fourth side by a rock outcrop. The wall appears to be of a similar age to the longhouse, and of a similar height and composition (3–6 courses of drystone). There is only one entrance to the longhouse, adjacent to a cross-wall, but the enclosure wall contains two gaps with the appearance of entrances. Plate 1 shows a rectified aerial photograph of the site taken from a quadricopter.

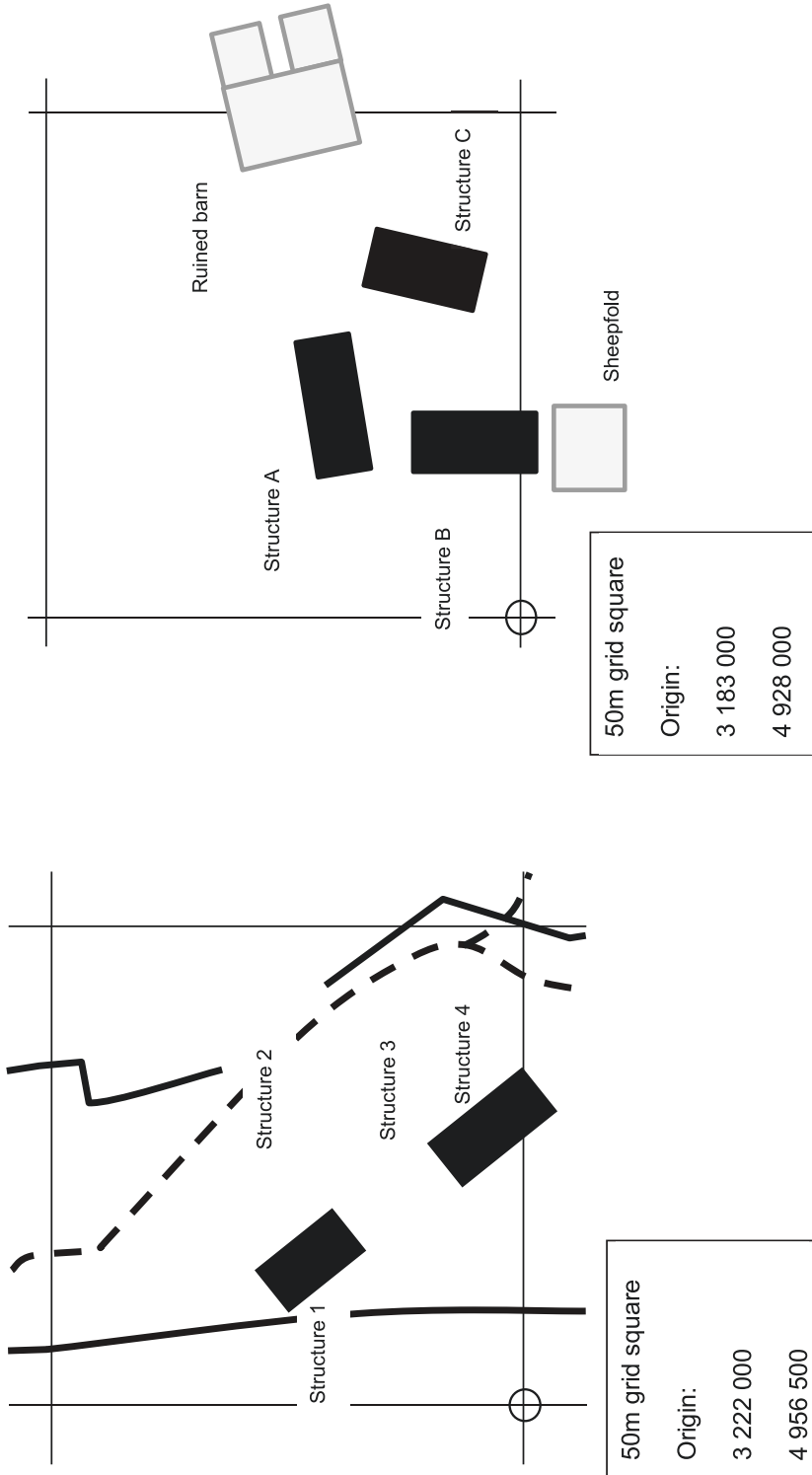


FIG. 3. (left) – Schematic diagram of structures in Newfield Wood. The solid lines represent walls, and the dashed line represents a small stream. (right) – Schematic diagram of structures at Pikeside Farm, longhouses in black shading. More recent structures are shown in grey.

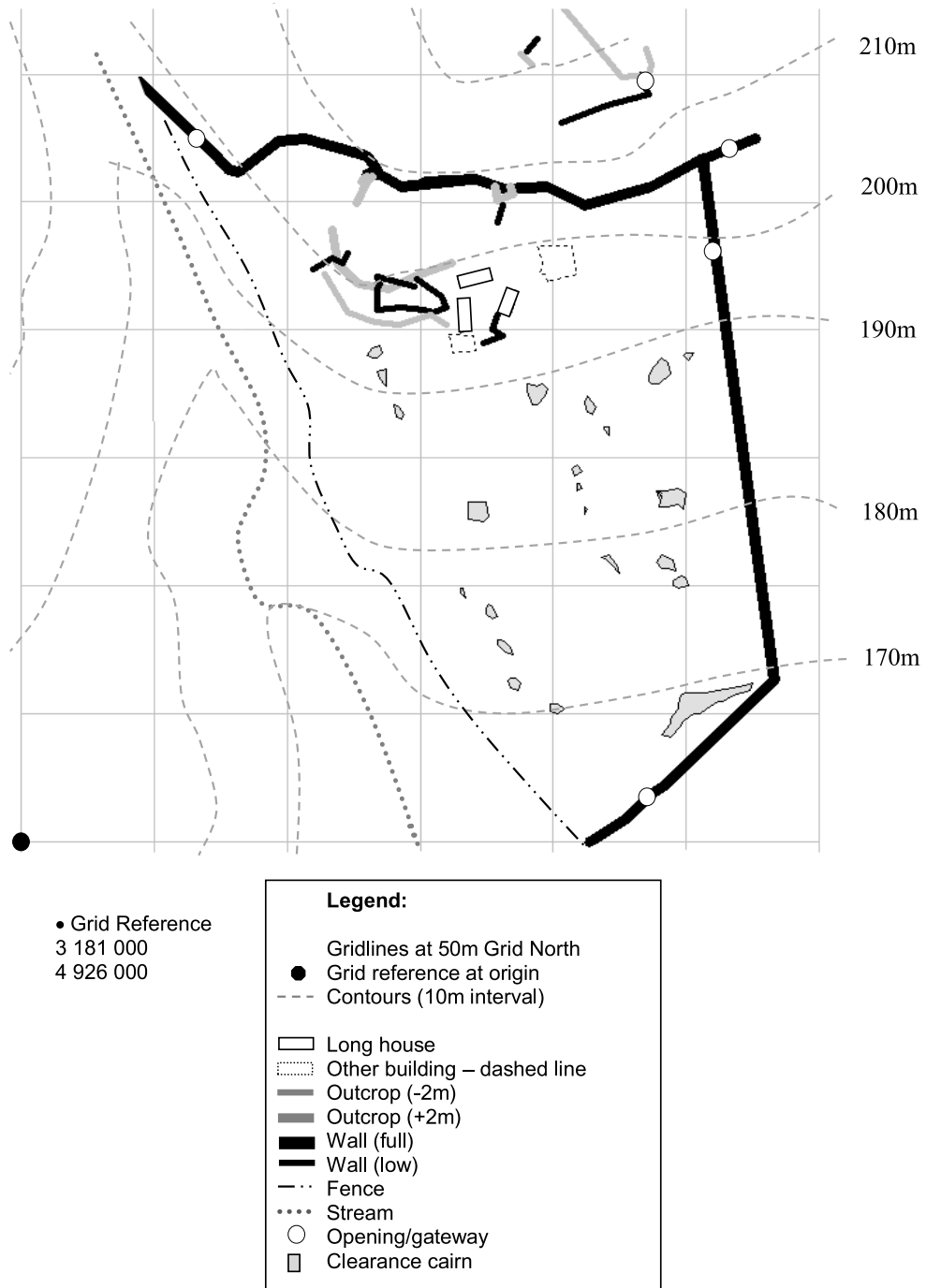


FIG. 4. GPS survey of the area around the Pikeside Farm site, showing many ancient clearance cairns. It is not known if these cairns are associated with the longhouses, or are of an earlier date.

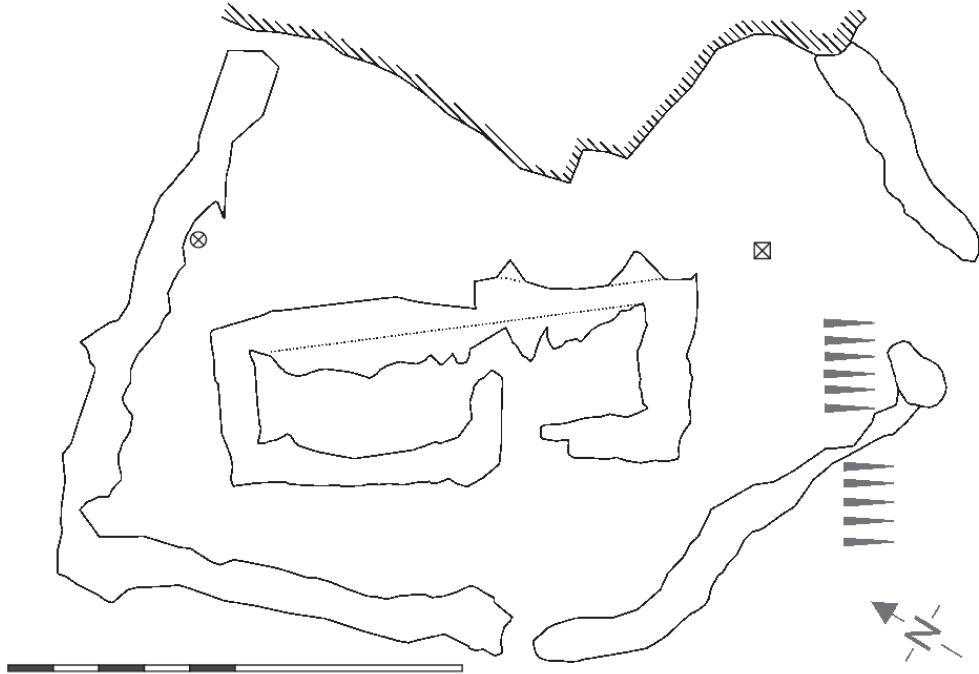


FIG. 5. Tape and offset survey of Tongue House High Close A, showing enclosing wall with two entrances, and rock outcrop to the north east. The building structure itself features a cross-wall and a single entrance on the southwest side. Survey points – circle: 3 24302 4 97631; square: 3 24310 4 97623. (Scale bar = 10 m).

A GPS survey of the area surrounding Tongue House High Close A is shown in Fig. 6. The network of low walls links up many rocky outcrops to make several small fields, and appears to be of a similar age and composition to the longhouse itself. It seems possible that these fields were used for grazing small cattle, as the walls would not have presented a barrier to more mobile livestock such as sheep or goats unless they were topped by some kind of palisade.

Considering the dataset as a whole, a few points stand out. There are four structures in relatively good condition (Long House Close; Dobby Shaw B; Pikeside Farm B; Tongue House High Close A) which seem to conform well to the ‘classic’ two-celled longhouse type. One other well-preserved example (Tongue House High Close B) appear to be of the single-celled type. It is possible that this latter structure may in fact have been a shieling rather than a permanently-occupied longhouse. It should be noted that all of these five examples, while in an apparently adequate state of preservation, are heavily overgrown with bracken, a fact which might make excavation problematic.

Tongue House High Close A

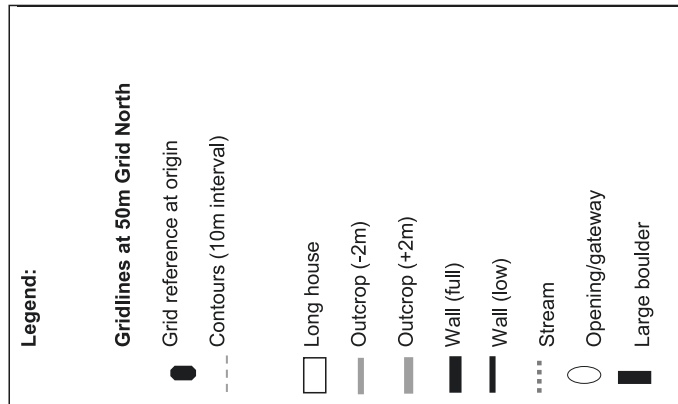
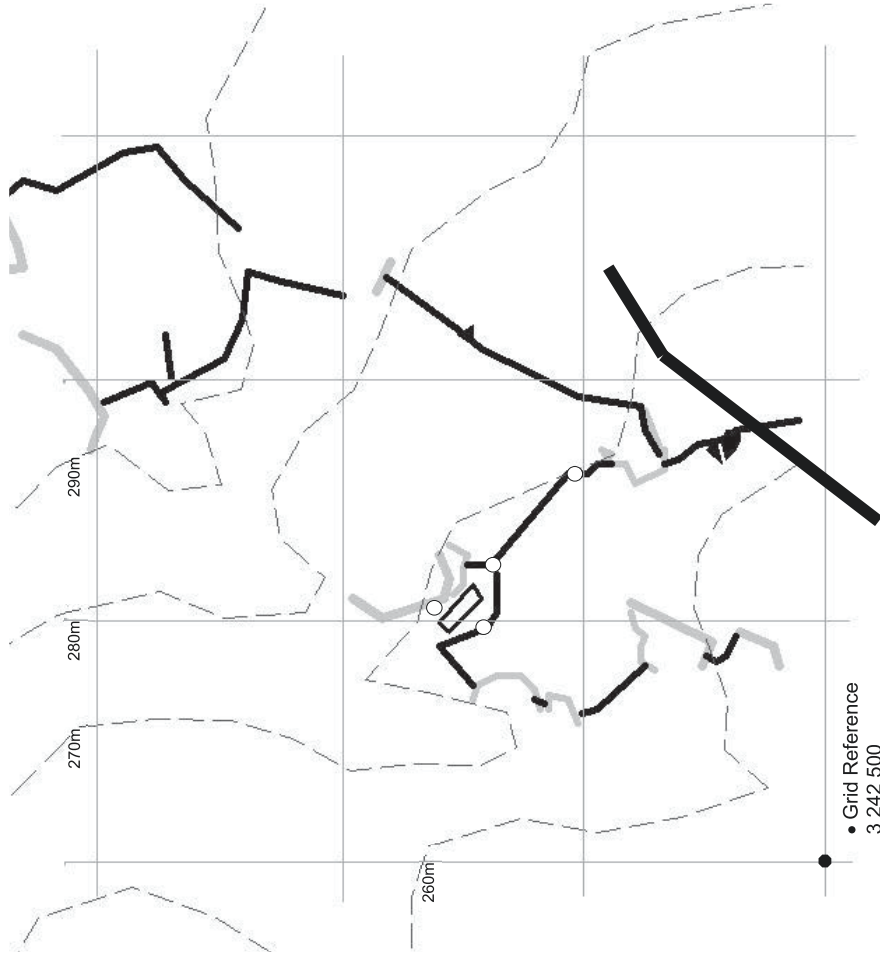


Fig. 6. GPS survey of the area around Tongue House High Close A. As well as the post-medieval wall to the south east, this diagram shows a series of low walls which appear to be of an earlier date. The early walls link a series of rocky outcrops and appear to be approximately contemporaneous with the longhouse itself.

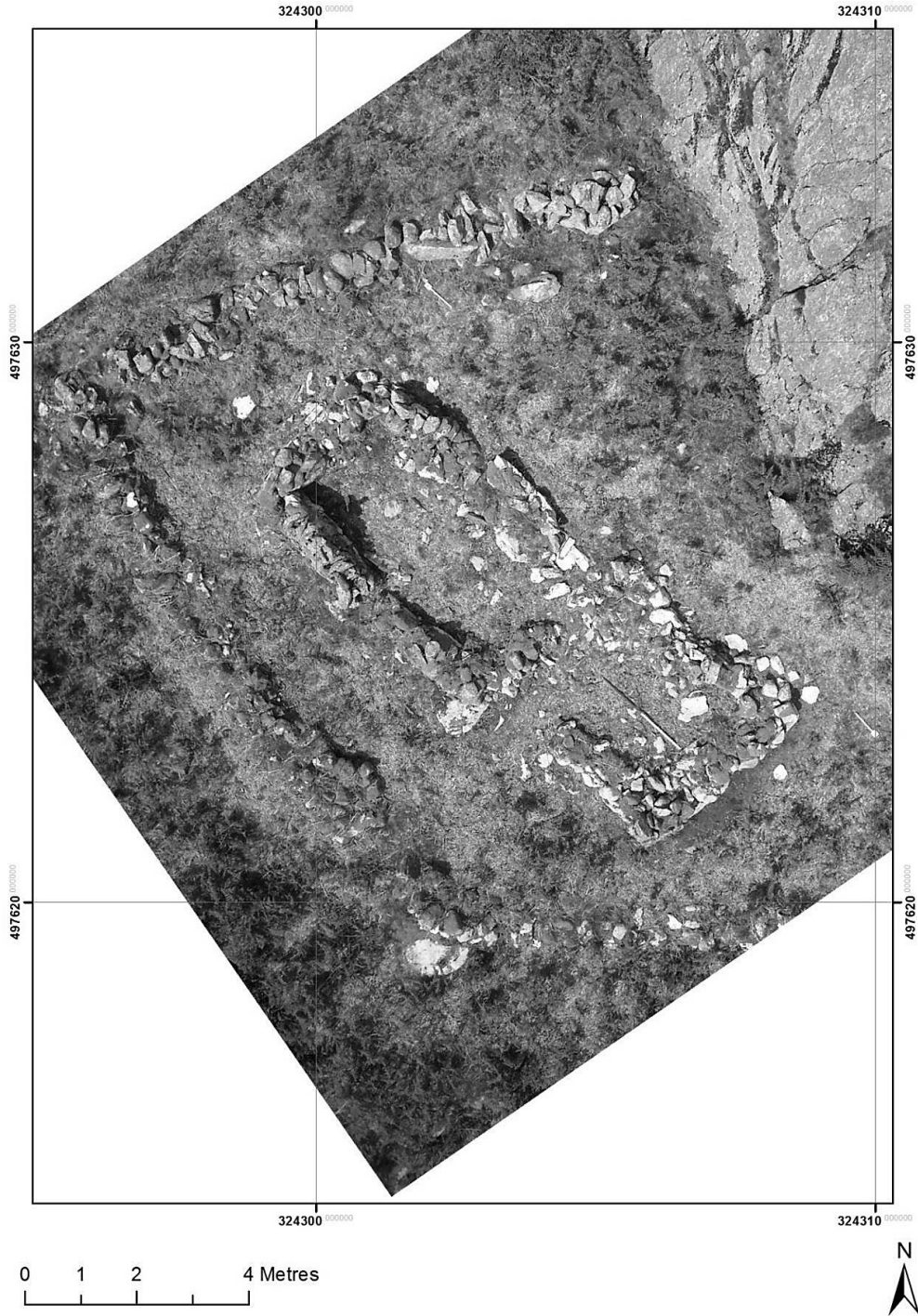


PLATE 1. Rectified aerial image of Tongue House High Close A. Note that the heavy bracken infestation was cleared before the site was photographed.

Historical information

Probably because of the limited number of early records, we have found no traces in the archives of the establishment of any of the putative longhouse sites or indeed of any of the farms in the Duddon Valley. It is also the case that the first and later editions of Ordnance Survey mapping make no mention of ancient structures at any of our survey sites apart from Low Sella. However, it is worth considering the general process of settlement in the Lake District valleys to give an indication of when the sites might have first been farmed.

Angus Winchester^{14,15} presents useful information from manorial records. Using this, it is possible to look at social and population changes and trace their effect on settlement patterns. This has obvious implications, in general terms, for the establishment and abandonment of the sites we have been studying.

Winchester^{14,15} describes three main periods of colonisation, the first being pre-Norman Conquest. Around AD 900, Cumbria experienced colonisation, mainly by people of Norse origin. Place names are an important piece of evidence for this, as well as pollen remains in peat deposits which show extensive woodland clearance taking place at that time. It should be noted, however, that the Norse immigrants were probably settling a pre-existing agricultural landscape established at least as early as the late sixth century, and it is likely that they bought or rented less-used parts of the valleys in the more mountainous central areas of the Lake District.

There were later signs in peat deposits of woodland regeneration, suggesting a period of abandonment before a second wave of colonisation in 1150-1300. The areas brought into cultivation were mainly marginal lands. In the Duddon Valley these were usually up the valley sides roughly at 200 to 300 m. They have low ambient temperatures, late frosts and often waterlogged soil. They are at, or near, the limit of cultivation and may have been farmed only when the climate improved or there was increased pressure of population, but are likely to have been abandoned when these conditions changed.

At this time, some summer shielings also became permanently settled. There is evidence of transhumance as late as 1300, the herder and his family moving to summer pastures with the animals and staying in shielings, but this practice was becoming much less common on the Cumbrian Fells by the fourteenth century.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there was another period of decline. Reasons include the Black Death, harvest failures and animal plagues. This led to decline of the human population and abandonment of the marginal land. The third period of colonisation lasted from approximately 1450 to 1550. Once again there was growing prosperity and renewed enclosure of the 'waste' to increase the area under cultivation. By the sixteenth century forests for the most part were divided into township communities similar in population to neighbouring areas. At this time the limit of improvable land had been reached and boundaries between farmland and waste remained stable until the Parliamentary enclosures in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

This period was also characterised by the controlled division of holdings between family members to allow some younger sons to take half the family holding, for example. In the Millom Rental of 1510 (cited in Winchester, 2000¹⁵) there is a reference to this occurring in the Duddon Valley: “*William Bayssebrown, Roger Bayssebrown and the widow of Roland Bayssebrown held together a tenement and rend yearly ...22s.*” This may account for the many small groups of tenements^d, often with the same name, we find scattered over the Duddon Valley. Examples are Hazel Head, Baskell and Longhouse. It may also explain why several of the sites we have surveyed contained a number of (long)houses grouped together. By the mid-sixteenth century, manorial courts were making strenuous attempts to stop this trend and taverning (sub-letting) was forbidden in many manors.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was a significant expansion of enclosed pasture into the wasteland with individual intakes on the fell-side. Many of these were shared by a group of tenants. The head dyke could embrace a string of farms each holding land in severalty. Ring fenced farms were comparatively rare. Many settlements were hamlets of two or more farms, the land of which lay intermingled and sometimes included small areas of shared arable land and meadow. This may be how many of the farms in the Duddon Valley such as Pikeside and Baskell were organised.

In the period leading up to 1700, there was a transition to modern upland farming. There was a change from subsistence farming with a few cottagers to larger estates in the hands of fewer, wealthier individuals with an increasingly landless population. The majority of those living in the Duddon Valley in the late Middle Ages were small-scale subsistence farmers, but the power and wealth of a small section of the population started to grow in the sixteenth century when the price of wool multiplied five times while the tenants’ customary rents remained fixed. Later some tenants diversified into mining and woodland industries. Gradually, wealthier members of society were able to take over their neighbours’ land and add it to their own.

In summary, it has not been possible to use the historical record to date any of the structures described in this paper. It is possible that they date back as far as the original Norse colonisation (approx. 900 AD), but probable that most were constructed at any time up to the late-medieval period.

Comparisons with other Cumbrian longhouses

Comparison of Tables 1 and 2 shows that the 15 structures we have studied in detail fall well within the range of longhouse types reported from elsewhere in Cumbria. They are all simple one- or two-celled structures with a length to width ratio of 2.28-3.36, whereas those already recorded elsewhere range from single-celled to five-celled, with length-width ratios of 1.50-4.54. The lengths of the Duddon Valley structures range up to 19.4m, while some others reach 24 and 25 m. Only one of the 15 Duddon Valley structures appears to have double walls (Longhouse Close), and this is similar to the existing dataset in which the only double-walled structures are the longhouses at Smithy Beck in Ennerdale. Only one of the structures in the Duddon (Tongue

House High Close A) is located within an enclosure, while only those enclosures at Smithy Beck are of a comparable small size – others are much bigger.

One interesting feature is the almost complete absence of round-ended longhouses in Cumbria. None of those described by the present survey fall into this category, and the only such structures reported from Cumbria are the excavated longhouse at Stephenson Ground in the Lickle Valley, and the structure still subject to excavation at Tonguesdale Moss, Eskdale. It is conjectured that buildings with rounded ends may be a relatively early feature. Examples of round-ended longhouses are generally those built by the original Norse colonists as they migrated down the western seaboard of Scotland (*e.g.* the Drimore longhouse on South Uist¹⁶). If this conjecture is correct, it would imply that most of the longhouses found to date in Cumbria were probably not built by the earliest Norse colonists of the British Isles.

Consideration of the surrounding agricultural landscapes also shows similarities between the Duddon and elsewhere. Only two longhouses have been reported as associated with rig and furrow plough marks (Mill House, Kirby Lonsdale; and Tonguesdale Moss, Eskdale), neither of which lie in the Duddon Valley. Most appear to be associated with old wall systems arranged to form enclosures, and it seems likely that the main farming activity was stock-raising rather than arable agriculture.

In summary, the longhouse structures in the Duddon Valley are fairly typical of those in Cumbria as a whole, but they add considerably to the information available on this type of early farmhouse.

Conclusions

The surveyed sites were probably settled during one of the three periods of expansion and colonisation in the medieval period, although evidence from elsewhere in Cumbria suggests that the landscape may already have been used for agriculture as early as the sixth century. Several of the sites (Pikeside, Baskell and Low Sella) have names derived from Old Norse suggesting they may have been settled during, or soon after, the period of Norse colonisation of Cumbria. However, this of course does not prove that the structures themselves are Norse. It is likely that some of the sites, especially those near the limits of cultivation, were abandoned during the periods of adverse conditions in the later medieval period.

None of the sites, except for Low Sella, appear on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps, indicating they were abandoned and ruinous before the mid-nineteenth century. Furthermore, several sites, notably Pikeside and Sella but possibly also Baskell and Stephead, are likely to have been abandoned as a result of their lands being taken over by wealthier neighbours, the buildings falling into disrepair and being vacated probably in the early-modern period.

Four structures in relatively good condition (Long House Close; Dobby Shaw B; Pikeside Farm B; Tongue House High Close A) seem to conform well to the 'classic' two-celled longhouse type, while one well-preserved example (Tongue House High

Close B) appears to be of the single-celled type which could have been a shieling rather than a permanently occupied longhouse. All five well-preserved structures lie on the valley sides between 200 and 300m, and all are surrounded by traces of early stock rearing.

Several sites appear to represent small farming settlements, including Dobby Shaw, Longhouse Close, Newfield Wood, and Pikeside. A comparison of the Duddon Valley longhouses with those found elsewhere in Cumbria shows that they are fairly typical of the region as a whole. However, many sites are seriously infested with bracken. We therefore recommend that those deemed most at risk should be included in a regular programme of bracken clearance as part of the work of the Lake District Archaeology Volunteer Network.

Finally, we recommend that careful consideration should be given to a programme of excavations at one or more of the sites in good condition listed above, in order to obtain firm dating evidence, as well as evidence concerning the lifestyles of the medieval farming families who occupied these buildings.

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Notes

- a. A peculiar is an area exempt from the direct jurisdiction of the bishop.
- b. Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York.
- c. A legal transfer of land or property giving the new holder the right to sell or pass on to heirs.
- d. At this time, a tenement was any rented accommodation.

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