

HIGH CROSS HILL,
NEAR COW DUB, DENT, NORTH YORKSHIRE
ARCHITECTURAL ASSESSMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May 2006, Ed Dennison Archaeological Services Ltd (EDAS) visited High Cross Hill, in Dentdale, Cumbria (at NGR SD77308650) and undertook a brief photographic, drawn and written survey of the ruined building.

The early history of the complex is not known, but the site is depicted on various 19th century maps and plans. Information from the census suggests that the building was occupied by the Harper family in the 1840s and 1850s, Robert Harper being a coal miner. The building appears to have been abandoned by 1861, and the Settle to Carlisle Railway was built close to the site in the early 1870s. The building appears ruinous on the 1896 and 1909 Ordnance Survey maps.

The earliest surviving building at High Cross Hill is the south part of the ruined range (Building B), which was built as an isolated field barn, probably during the mid to late 18th century or later, close to the "head dyke" which separates the enclosed land from the moorland. The internal layout suggests that the hay mew was positioned at the south end, with the shippon to the north. There may have been some kind of small outshut to the rear but this was subsequently altered/enlarged, perhaps to provide additional accommodation for beasts.

The north part of the range (Building A) was built as a dwelling, probably also during the mid to late 18th century or later; the two buildings may be separated by only a few years. The dwelling appears to be a variation of the two-unit small house type which occurs commonly in Cumbria from the mid 17th century to the early 19th century. The front door opens directly into a general living room, which was used for cooking, eating and general domestic tasks and which contained the only hearth. However, a trio of openings in the south wall, especially the wider central one, is an unusual feature. A further cell to the south, which might be expected to have accommodated a parlour and dairy/buttery is also rather narrow and if, as seems likely, the stairs were located here, there would have been little room for anything else. It is more likely that the buttery, dairy, pantry and other service areas were accommodated in another cell to the east.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 During work undertaken for the survey of the former Stone House marble works complex in Dentdale, Cumbria, a search was made of the moorland area immediately to the north and west of Stone House to trace part of the complex's water supply. As part of this work, the area around High Cross Hill was visited and, as the surviving ruined building appeared to be of some interest, a brief sketch, photographic and written survey was made, on 11th May 2006. The results of this survey are presented below.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Site Location

- 2.1 High Cross Hill stands in an elevated and isolated position on Rotten Bottom, some 800m to the north of Stone House and 600m to the north-east of Cow Dub, a short distance to the east of the Settle to Carlisle railway line (at NGR SD77308650) (see figures 1 and 2 and plate 1). There is now no easy access to the site, although prior to the construction of the railway, a track ran north-east from Low Cross Hill further down the valley side.
- 2.2 The site is located at the eastern edge of the enclosed pasture and moorland which is used for grazing sheep, and whilst sheep obviously use parts of the building for shelter, it appears not have been in any regular agricultural use for a considerable period of time.

Historical Background

- 2.3 On the 1846 Dent tithe map, the site is named as "High Cross Hills" (no. 2024), and is depicted as a rectangular building with small projections to the east and west sides (see plate 2). The complex lies on the edge of the enclosed land, and several field walls butt up to the building, the north half lying within field no. 2023 and the south half within field no. 2025. No access to the site is marked. Although it is difficult to be sure, the house does appear to be shown on Jeffrey's 1771 map of Yorkshire.
- 2.4 The Ordnance Survey 1852 6" map depicts a "Foot Path" running north-east in a straight line from Low Cross Hill, a small group of buildings further to the south-west, to the site which is named as "High Cross Hill". In 1852, the building is given an almost perfectly cruciform plan, although structural evidence suggests that this is a simplification of the small structures attached to the main range (see figure 3). By the 1896 edition, the main range appears roofless, although one of the smaller structures on the east side retains its roof, and the site is no longer named. The site is similarly depicted on the 1909 edition.
- 2.5 The section of the Settle to Carlisle Railway which passes by the site (Contract No. 2 – Dent Head to Kirkby Stephen) was built between 1869 and 1875 (Mitchell 1989, 26-36). The contract was started from the south, at Dent Head, and so it is presumed that the earthworks adjacent to the site would have been constructed in 1870 or 1871. It is not known whether the complex was ruined by then, although it is shown as ruined and abandoned on the detailed Midland Railway Company land plan of the line dated to 1912.
- 2.6 The 1841 and 1851 census returns provide details of the people living at High Cross Hill at that time. In 1841, the complex was occupied by Robert Harper (aged 35),

together with his wife Jane (32), and their five children, Thomas (6), Jane junior (6), Elizabeth (5), Mary (2) and Margaret (4 months); Robert Harper was born in Lancaster and is recorded as a coal miner (PRO HO107/1322/4 p.4). The family were still there in 1851, this time with six children, Thomas (18), Elizabeth (15), Mary Ann (12), John (7), Robert (5) and James (2); both Robert Harper and his eldest son Thomas were coal miners (PRO HO107/2276 f.168, p.19). No return is given for 1861, which suggests that the house had been abandoned, and Robert Harper and family had moved to Low Cross Hill where he was described as a farmer of 37 acres (PRO RG9/3176 f.49, p.4). By 1871 they were living at Thistley Holme, just north of Cow Dub, where Robert Harper was a miner and farmer of 40 acres (PRO RG10.4250 f.52, p.16).

3 ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

- 3.1 The existing structure of the site is described below, starting with the plan form, materials, structure and architectural detailing, followed by a description of the external elevations and a circulation account through the floor plans. The site is basically formed by a range comprising two main buildings (Buildings A and B), and therefore to aid description, the different rooms of each building are identified by a unique number reference system, being labelled "A1", "B1" etc in a logical sequence from north to south (see figure 4). The range is set on a north-west/south-east alignment but, for the purposes of this description, it is assumed to be aligned north-south.
- 3.2 As stated above, in its existing form, High Cross Hill consists of a linear range of two ruinous buildings with smaller attached structures to the rear (east). The range is terraced into a gentle west-facing slope, and the ground also falls away more sharply from south to north, so that the south part (Building B) is essentially a single storey, while the north part (Building A) has two full storeys (see plate 1). All parts of the range are built of squared limestone brought to courses with intermittent courses of through stones and edge-laid quoins to the corners; the west elevation of the south part (Building B) rises from a projecting stone plinth. Both parts of the range were originally covered with shallow pitched roofs, and were probably originally roofed with stone slates, although all traces of the roof structure had gone by the time of the survey (May 2006). The range has overall maximum dimensions of 18.20m long (north-south) by 9.30m wide (east-west), with the wall thickness varying between 0.55m-0.70m.

Building B

- 3.3 The earliest part of the range is the south part (Building B) which is clearly butted by the north part (Building A). The south part comprises a rectangular field barn (B1), 10.40m long (north-south) by 5.95m wide (east-west) (see plates 1 and 3). The west elevation has partly collapsed but it once had a doorway set slightly to the north of centre; there is an external rubble spread to the west of the doorway. There is a small window to the north of the doorway, and a larger window positioned towards the apex of the south gable. The interior is partly filled with rubble but there are no clear indications, such as lines of joist holes, that it ever had an internal hayloft. The remains of an inserted cross wall run across the interior towards the north end. There are doorways positioned at either end of the east wall; that at the south end is now blocked.
- 3.4 The north doorway leads into the north cell of the small outshut positioned to the rear of the barn, which appears to have been the only part of the range still roofed in 1896. The outshut was once covered by a stone slated lean-to roof, sloping

downwards from west to east, and it comprises two small cells of approximately equal size. The north cell (B2) is lit by a small window with a stone lintel and the remains of a timber frame in the east wall (see plate 4); there may once also have been a slightly larger window towards the west end of the north wall. A slightly curving drystone field wall runs north from the east end of the north wall.

- 3.5 A doorway at the east end of the central wall links the north cell to the south cell (B3); there is a straight joint positioned to the west of the doorway. The south cell is of a similar form to that to the north, with a small window in the east wall and possibly another in the south. The south cell was once open to the west; the junction between its south wall and the east wall of the barn (B1) is formed by a properly constructed quoined corner, suggesting that at least part of the outshut is contemporary with the main building; in contrast, the west end of the north wall butts the barn.

Building A

- 3.6 The later north part of the range (Building A) comprises a two storey dwelling, measuring a maximum of 8.70m wide (east-west) by 8.00m long (east-west). The west elevation is of three bays and is relatively well preserved, with a central ground floor doorway with interrupted jambs and a stone lintel, flanked by quite large windows (see plate 5). These windows, like all surviving windows within the building, are provided with thinly cut monolithic lintels, sills and jambs. Above the doorway, a line of projecting stone slates marks the position of a small porch apparently shown here in 1846, although there is no obvious evidence on the elevation face for such a feature having been removed. On the first floor there is a single window to each bay, smaller than those on the ground floor, but similarly constructed. There is a small blocked ground floor window at the west end of the north gable, with a much larger opening at the east end. The latter has a stone lintel and tapers inwards slightly towards the top. It may have originally been a purely internal feature and been broken through at a later date (see below), although the surviving evidence is ambiguous. Beyond the opening, the remainder of the north gable (the north wall of a single storey room (B2) at the rear of the house) is blank apart from a small blocked window.
- 3.7 The central doorway in the west elevation was blocked at the time of the survey, but it formerly led into the largest (A1) of the three cells within the dwelling. This room was heated by a large fireplace in the centre of the north wall, with a substantial stone lintel over, supporting a tapering and slightly projecting flue rising to the apex of the gable (see plate 6). Projecting stones line either side of the upper part of the fireplace opening, while to the east, the wall is thickened to support a large flat slab forming the base of the opening described above in the north gable; internally, there is a small square recess beneath the flat slab. If this feature was once purely internal, rather than being open through the wall, it may have formed a bakestone of the Sedbergh type, used for making haverbread (Hartley & Ingilby 1968, 39-61), although this would need further investigation to confirm. A small window or other opening survives at the north end of the east wall, whilst the south wall is formed almost entirely by three doorways (see plate 7). The central doorway is wider than those flanking it, and is fitted with a substantial stone lintel. The doorway to the east is set at an angle across the south-east corner of the room.
- 3.8 All three doorways lead into a narrow cell (A3) lit by a single window in the west wall and two in the east wall. The latter are set within recesses, with a small shelf or step incorporated into the base. A ruinous inserted cross wall runs across the western end of the cell, and a doorway at the east end of the north wall leads into the cell

(A2) to the north. This cell appears always to have been a single storey outshut on the rear of the dwelling, perhaps accommodated beneath a catslide roof, but it had partially collapsed at the time of the survey. There is a small blocked window in the centre of the north wall, with drystone field walls running east and north from the north-east corner.

- 3.9 The first floor of the dwelling was not easily accessible; however, from within Building B it could be seen to consist of only two cells. The largest, positioned directly above cell A1 on the ground floor, was unheated but was lit by windows in the west wall. It was accessed from an angled doorway at the east end of the south wall, leading from the second cell positioned above A3 on the ground floor. This second cell was lit by windows in the east and west walls, and has a tall recess positioned at the west end of the north wall, possibly formerly another doorway into the larger cell to the north (see plate 8).

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The earliest surviving building at High Cross Hill is the south part of the range (Building B), which was built as an isolated field barn, probably during the mid to late 18th century or later, close to the "head dyke" which separates the enclosed land from the moorland. Although field barns (described as "field houses") are known to have existed in Wensleydale by the early 17th century (Reynolds 1998, 78), and field survey elsewhere in the Dales has demonstrated that field barns often overlie the earthworks of medieval buildings, the High Cross Hill example was probably constructed at some point after the surrounding land was enclosed. It is not known precisely when this enclosure initially took place, but it is likely to have been in the late 16th or early 17th centuries when stone walling became the preferred method of constructing and stockproofing the head dykes (Lancaster 2001, 21). It is also known that Cross Hills was one of a small number of farms in the area owned by John Elam which were then sold to William Thompson in the 1830s (Stacey 1995).
- 4.2 The internal layout of Building B suggests that the hay mew was positioned at the south end, although there are no breathers in the walls here, with the shipp on to the north. There may have been some kind of small outshut to the rear from the start but this was subsequently altered/enlarged, perhaps to provide additional accommodation for beasts. Despite its location close to the boundary between enclosed land and open moorland, which is sometimes characteristic of a hogg house, there is no clear evidence to suggest that the building was ever used as such (Menuge & Deadman 2004, 157-172).
- 4.3 The north part of the range (Building A) was built as a dwelling, probably also during the mid to late 18th century or later; the apparent lack of any original openings in the north end of the barn might suggest that a dwelling was always planned here, and the two buildings may be separated by only a few years. The dwelling appears to be a variation on the two-unit small house type discussed by Brunskill, which occurs commonly in Cumbria from the mid 17th century to the early 19th century (Brunskill 2002, 65-67). The front door, located approximately centrally, opens directly into a general living room (A1), which was used for cooking, eating and general domestic tasks and containing the only hearth. However, the trio of openings in the south wall, especially the wider central one, appear to be an unusual feature. The cell to the south (A3), which might be expected to have accommodated a parlour and dairy/buttery is also rather narrow and if, as seems likely, the stairs were located here, there would have been little room for anything else, although Harrison and Hutton do provide at least one example of a tiny dairy accommodated beneath the stairs of a rear outshut (Harrison & Hutton 1984, 97). It is more likely that the

buttery, dairy, pantry and other service areas were accommodated in the cell to the east (A2).

- 4.4 Comparison with other parts of the Yorkshire Dales suggests that any holding served by High Cross Hill would have been small (Reynolds 1998, 76), and the only access route appears to have been from Low Cross Hills to the south-west. The fact that members of the Harper family were recorded as coal miners is of interest, and it is assumed that they were working in the nearby Cow Gill mines. However, it is likely that the Harpers were also farming the area around High Cross Hills, and the prevalence of miners/farmers has been noted elsewhere in the Yorkshire Dales (White & Darlington 2004, 147). When the Settle-Carlisle railway was constructed through the area in c.1870, the access to the site was severed and the landholding was cut in half. It is not totally clear whether the coming of the railway caused the abandonment of the site, but the lack of any occupiers in the 1861 census return suggests that the house was already out of use by then. It was certainly largely ruinous and roofless by 1896.

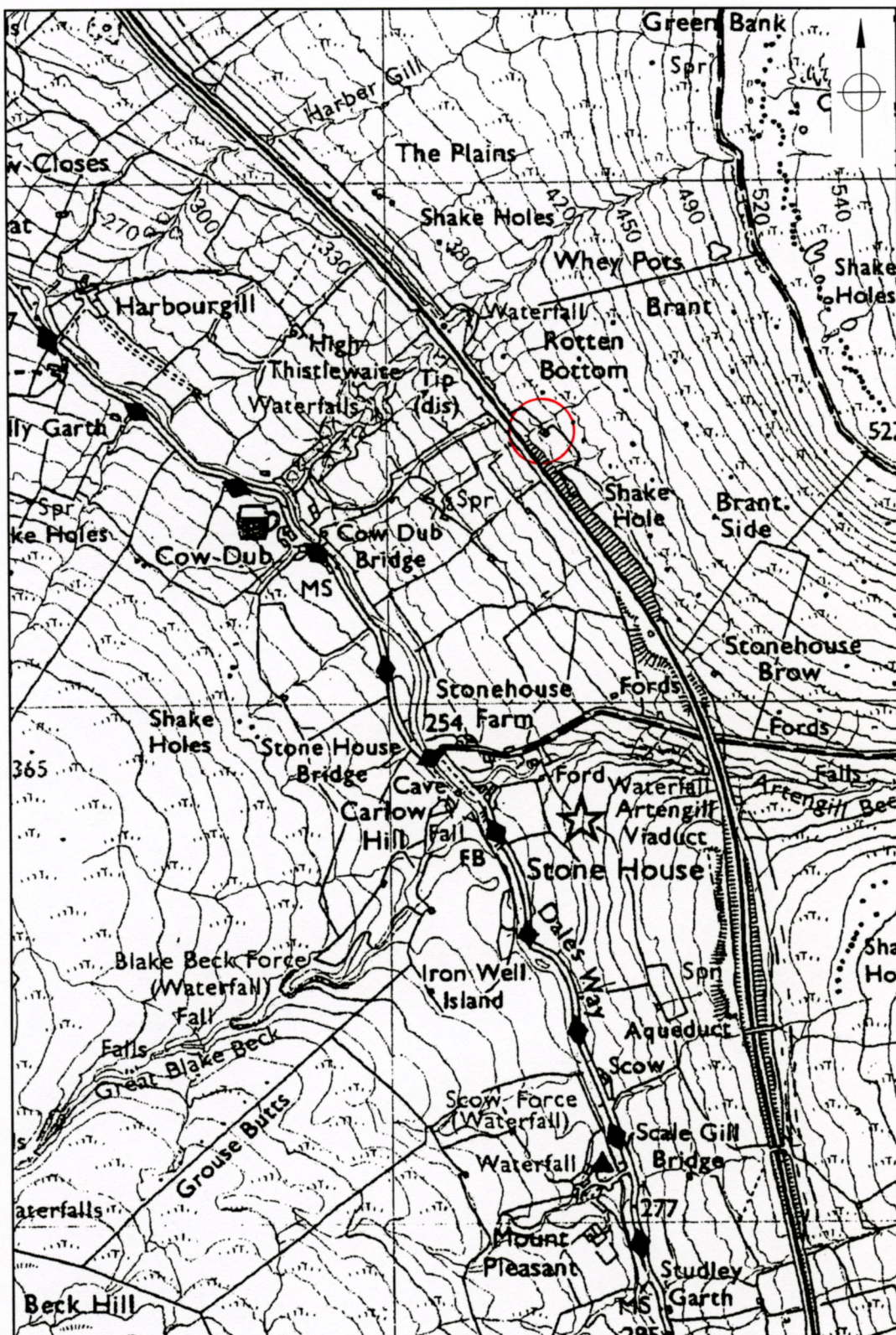
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Primary

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1846 Dent tithe map (West Yorkshire Record Office, Sheepscar, BD114)
1852 Ordnance Survey 6" to 1 mile map (sheet 64)
1896 Ordnance Survey 6" to 1 mile map (sheet 64)
1909 Ordnance Survey 25" to 1 mile map (sheet 64/16)
1912 Midland Railway Company land plan

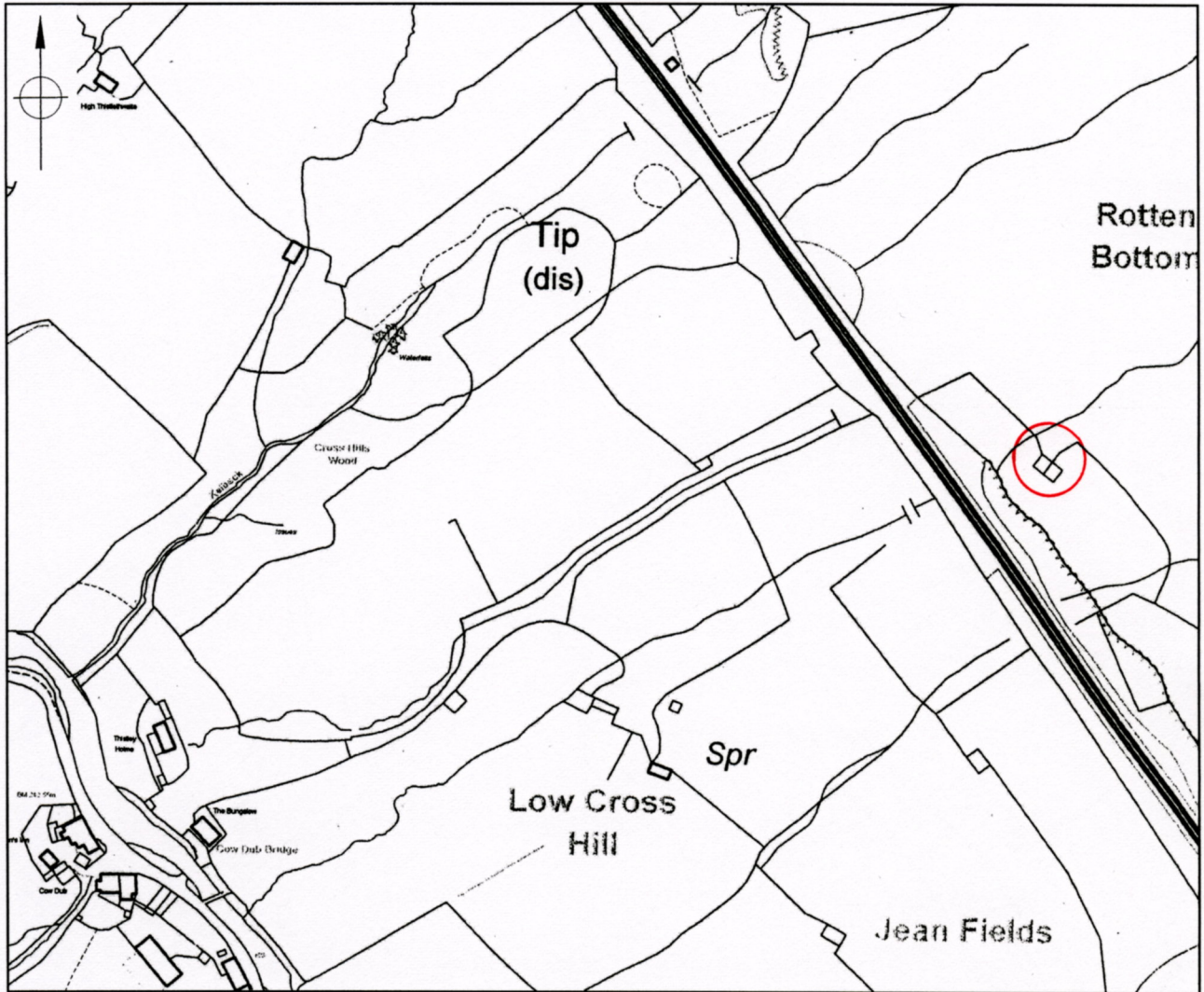
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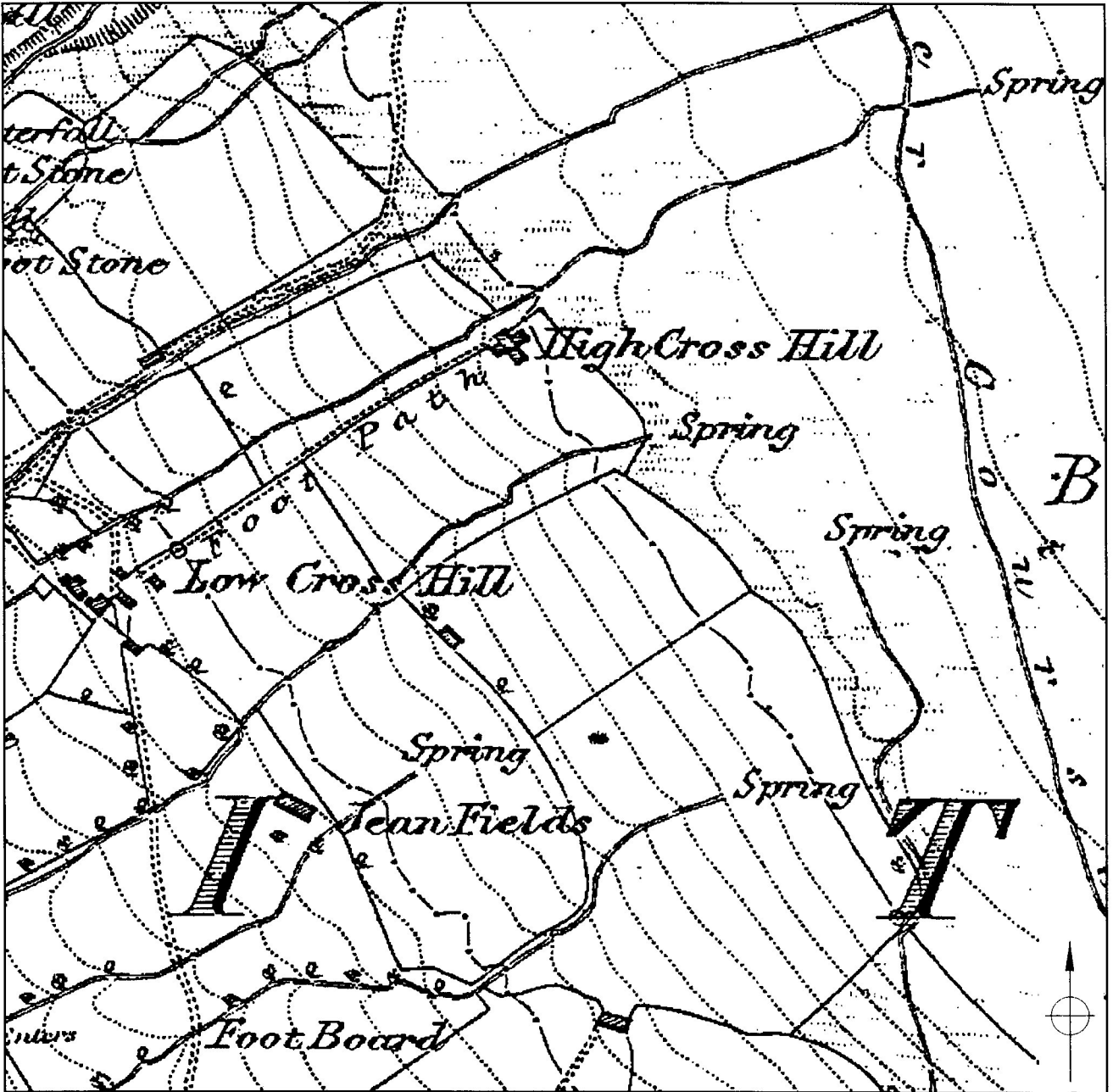
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| PROJECT | | HIGH CROSS HILL, DENT | |
| TITLE | | GENERAL LOCATION | |
| SCALE | DATE | NTS | NOV 2006 |
| EDAS | | FIGURE | 1 |



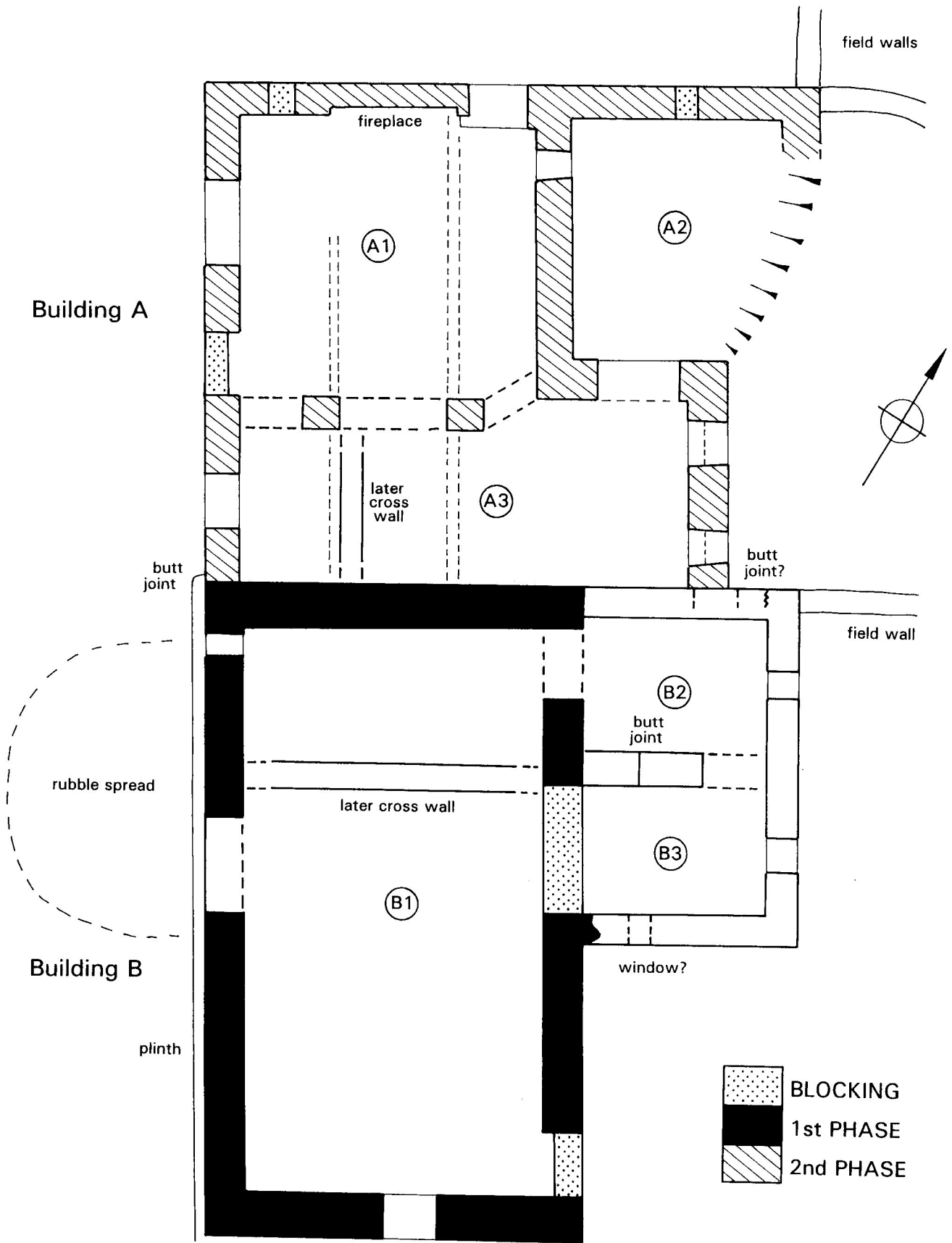
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| PROJECT | | HIGH CROSS HILL, DENT | |
| TITLE | | DETAILED LOCATION | |
| SCALE | NTS | DATE | NOV 2006 |
| EDAS | | FIGURE | 2 |



Source: Ordnance Survey 1852 6" map (sheet 64)

| | | | |
|---------|----------|--------------------------|---|
| PROJECT | | HIGH CROSS HILL, DENT | |
| TITLE | | | |
| | | ORDNANCE SURVEY 1852 MAP | |
| SCALE | DATE | | |
| NTS | NOV 2006 | | |
| EDAS | | FIGURE | 3 |



| | | | |
|---------|------|----------------------------|----------|
| PROJECT | | HIGH CROSS HILL, DENT | |
| TITLE | | GROUND FLOOR PLAN (SKETCH) | |
| SCALE | DATE | AS SHOWN | NOV 2006 |
| EDAS | | FIGURE | 4 |



Plate 1: General view of High Cross Hill, looking north.



Plate 2: Section of 1846 tithe map showing Low Cross Hills and High Cross Hills (north to right).



Plate 3: View of west side of High Cross Hill, showing earlier barn to left, looking north.



Plate 4: North cell (B2) of outshut to rear of barn, looking east.



Plate 5: West (main) elevation of house (Building A), looking north-east.



Plate 6: Fireplace and recess in north wall of house (A1), looking north-west.



Plate 7: South side of internal wall of house (A1), looking south.



Plate 8: North side of internal wall of house (A3), looking north-west.