

HIGH HOUSE, HUGILL

The earliest buildings

High House Farm includes some of the oldest farmland in the area, since the Hugill Iron Age Settlement is in one of its fields, but we have no other evidence of occupation between the Iron Age and about the year 1500.

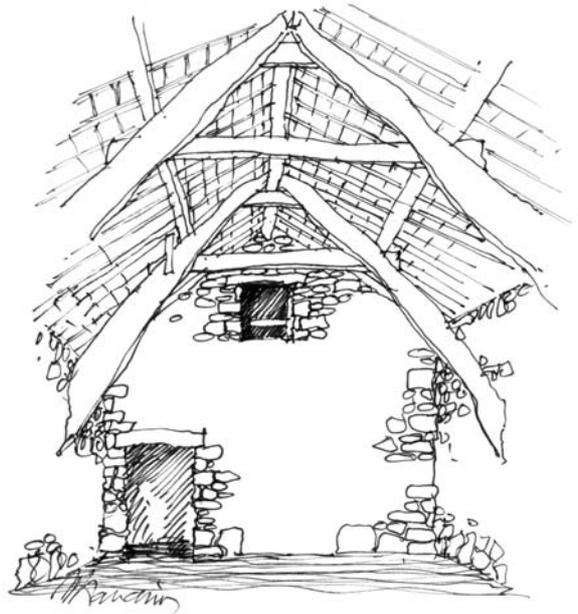
The 1995 survey of the High House buildings by English Heritage¹ suggests that its earliest parts date from the early 16th century. This fits with other evidence of a local expansion of population linked to the growing production of Kendal “cottons”. The Hugill open fields² were a little lower down, between Grassgarth and Low House, and it made sense for new enclosed farms at this period to be developed on the higher ground on the edge of the common where the all-important sheep grazed. Other large local farms like Brunt Knott, Over Staveley, or Brockstone, Kentmere are in similar positions.

These first buildings were quite impressive, already having the “hall and crosswings” plan of the present structure, and the large cruck barn. The hail was open to the rafters and probably had a lateral fireplace on the north side, like those at Hollin Hall. A spiral stair led from the east end of the hall to a large upstairs heated room in the east wing, but all the rest of the building was single storey open to the rafters. There was a cross-passage between the hall and the kitchen, which had a massive fire hood.

We know nothing about the early owners, though in the 1880s there was a three light window in the hall with a date 1562 and the initials T I E ‘painted’ on the glass³, and this may give some clue. A family needing this amount of accommodation must have been fairly wealthy by local standards. Perhaps their wealth came partly from dealing in cloth or wool — High House is less than half a mile from what was then the main Kendal - Ambleside road and was about halfway between these places.

The Braithwaites c1640 -1693

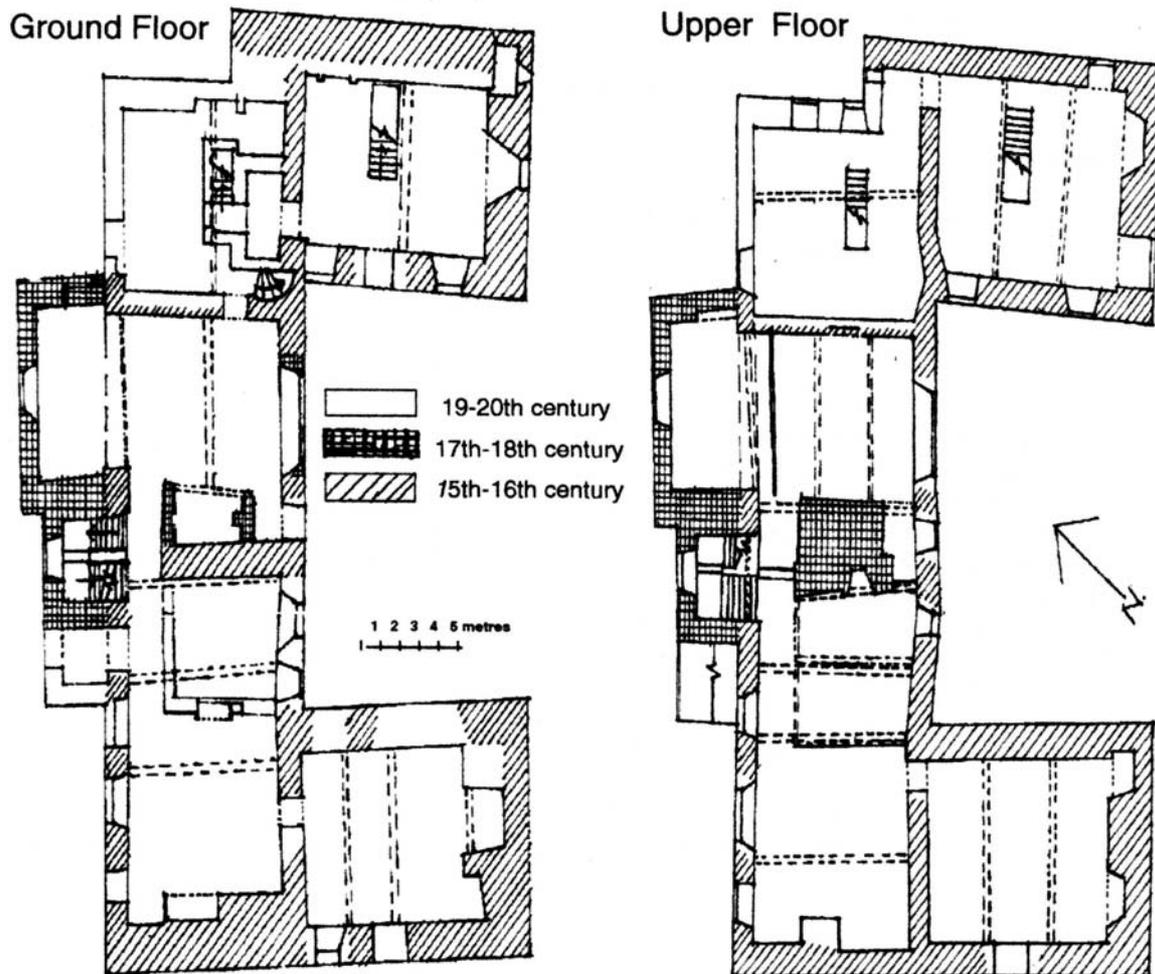
In 1641 a Mr. Charles Braithwaite of High House was fined by the Manor Court (for abuse of his rights in the common fields and for slander)⁴. These Braithwaites (or Braithwaites) had made their money in wool and cloth but had established their claim to gentility, a fact demonstrated by the use of the title “Mr”. The head of the Burneside



The barn at High House in 1994. It was probably built in the early 16th century at the same time as the earliest phase of the house.

branch in the early 17th century was Sir Thomas Braithwaite and his son Richard was one of the Lords of the Manor of Staveley and Hugill. Gawen Braithwaite of Ambleside Hall, who owned land, mills and even a brewery, died in 1653 leaving to his son Robert “all those lands and tenements which I formerly bought for him at Hugill and Baysbrowne (Langdale)”⁵, and this “Mr Robert Braithwaite of High House” figures in the manorial records thereafter until his death about 1680 when his daughter Dorothy inherited High House and the Langdale lands. In the early 1680s Dorothy married Miles Atkinson, and they baptised four children from 1683-1693 in which year Dorothy herself was buried⁶.

High House is more or less halfway from Ambleside to Kendal, and was conveniently near the main road between the two, which then ran via Broadgate and Troutbeck, so the Braithwaites found it convenient. It is not surprising that while the house was owned by a family with these social pretensions it should be considerably remodelled - a gentry family needed room for guests and entertainment and a house which would impress neighbouring gentry like the Braithwaite cousins of Burneside or the Flemings of Rydal. Upper floors were inserted in the hall and the west wing, and the roof of this wing raised to provide the extra headroom needed. A new wooden staircase was added at the north side, and an extra room beside it, used as a dairy, took the place of the old



Plans of High House based on the 1995 survey

hall fireplace, replaced by a central one, with the round chimney which we see today. In 1674 Mr Robert Braithwaite was the only Hugill carved oak cupboard dated 1687, now in the kitchen, does not fit in with any known event and may have been brought from elsewhere.) In the three light window of the hail further panes of painted glass were inserted with the arms of the Bra(i)thwaite family, both the Ambleside and the Burneside branches⁷. These coats of arms clearly displayed the gentility of the family to anyone coming to the door.

We know from his writings that Thomas Machel the antiquarian did ride up to this door on his tour of Westmorland in 1692. "This High House", he reports, "belonged to the Braithwaites, an heiress whereof bestowed herself upon a country fellow. There are arms in the windows and in a parchment roll of matches. But she denying them to my memory. I passed them by."⁸ Clearly Machel thought that Dorothy had married beneath her and let the family down. She was Robert Braithwaite's sole heiress and about 1682 she married one Miles Atkinson "yeoman"⁹. She was buried in 1693 on

the same day as her fourth child was baptised.

The Jenkinsons 1698-184?

Miles Atkinson died in 1698, leaving his lands for trustees to sell in the interests of his children¹⁰. and High House was bought by William Jenkinson of Abbot Hall Kendal for £565. Jenkinson and his descendants lived at High House until the 1840s. They classified themselves as "yeomen" not "gentlemen", and living in a simpler style, may have converted some of the living accommodation into farm use, eg the stables in the west wing, but there is very little record of their activities. An abstract of title dated 1828 tells of a series of mortgages and re-mortgages from 1764 onwards. The shaky finances which this may imply fits in with the lack of building development.

The parish registers tell us that the William Jenkinson of 1757, then aged 55, and "Mary Wilson his servant" had illegitimate twin daughters, Mary and Alice, and that in July 1766 William, now 64, made amends to Mary Wilson

by marrying her, just in time for the birth in September of a son Thomas. In 1775 when the twins were 18 one of them had an illegitimate child. Again in 1838 Thomas's daughter Margaret (aged 32) found herself in the same condition. It seems to have been a family habit.

Thomas had a family of ten children and was still at High House in 1841 aged 74, with his wife and his son William aged 50. But by the time of the 1851 census they have gone.

It was in Thomas's time that an important change to the farm took place, the enclosure of the common, and the allocation to High House of 79 extra acres of rough grazing to add to the 106 acres of the farm. This was a time of prosperity for local farming; the population of the Staveley area doubled between 1801 and 1851, and so did the demand for food, still much of it produced locally in this age before the railway. So the extra farm buildings attached to the old barn may have been added then, as cattle and corn became more important than sheep. But Thomas took out a £1000 mortgage in 1828 and it looks as if the shaky finance of earlier times still continued. By 1841 he was an old man, and whether the farm was doing well or badly, none of his sons took over from him. In the 1851 census his daughter Margaret was married to John Hayton, butcher and grocer of Staveley village, and with them lived George Jenkinson "clergyman", one of Thomas's sons. But High House was farmed by a tenant, Christopher Armstrong.

The Addison's c.1850-c.1900

By 1861 the farm was probably owned by John Addison, gentleman of Strickland Place, Kendal¹² and it was certainly farmed by his brother George who was to stay there until the 90s by which time the farm actually belonged to his son Robert. It seems likely that a second set of important changes took place at this time, though some of them may have been the work of Thomas Jenkinson in the 1820s and 30s. A iron range was put into the kitchen and the old fire-hood taken down giving much more room, so part of the old cross passage was made into a pantry and the 1687 cupboard moved from the hall and re-inserted in the new partition. A new porch was added over what had been the back door of the cross passage which now became the main entrance, a new south door was opened from the hall, and two new staircases were inserted in the east wing which in effect converted it into two self-contained cottages. There is no sign of these in the 1851 census but one of them is there in

1861, lived in by George Addison's sister Hannah and her husband Edward Hayton, wine merchant. Edward's shop was in Highgate, Kendal¹³, and we know that he sold wines in Troutbeck Bridge¹⁴ so again the position of the house was of importance. In 1891 there are two cottages there, one lived in by an Irish waterworks inspector and his wife and the other by a Gloucestershire tunnel miner working on the Thirlmere pipeline and his wife and daughter. The oral evidence¹⁵ of George's granddaughter, Edith, gives a vivid picture of life in High House in the early 1880s, much of which might have applied in the days of the Jenkinsons a century before:-

It's a small hill farm. It belonged to my uncle, the eldest son really and not to his father. He had it left to him from his uncle you see, so that his father was his tenant He had about 20 milkcows and 3-4 horses and 50-100 sheep. We made enough butter to be sold. They had their customers in Windermere, certain houses where they always got so much butter each week and eggs. Wednesday was the churning day and then the oldest went to Windermere with the butter and eggs on the Thursday morning and got the groceries for the week. Then they used to go to Kendal on a Saturday. They had so many customers in Kendal too. We used to have men that lived with us, with the family you know and we all lived together in the kitchen, and the men always had the table across by the window, and Grandpa would sit at the end and the men would sit, the eldest son next to him and the next one and then perhaps the headman and the girl was generally at the end. The men got up about half past five in the morning and would go straight and milk the cows and feed the horses. [for sleeping] The boys (well the men) were above the kitchen. It was just a bare wooden floor (with knotholes) and the kitchen was always warm. There were 3 beds in the lads' room three double beds and of course it was always warm - it was the warmest place in the house, and they were always warmer than anyone else. We were right at the other end. We had a maid who used to feed the calves and that sort of thing. She was one of the family, sort of, you see. We all worked together and we all slept together in one bedroom, a big bedroom with two double beds.

As well as bringing occupants to the cottage parts of the house, the Thirlmere pipeline brought a hut to the edge of the farm where in 1891 lived an overlooker with his wife and four children and fourteen other navvies. The waterworks also built an office, later used as a farm store and which is still there in what came to be called "Office Field". George Addison's granddaughter Edith saw her first sign of the waterworks men one evening in 1886 or 7 as she was going home from school

One night in front of me then was a man and when I got up to him it was a very cold winter and he had a drop at the end of his nose - I will never forget that, and he was hammering in a peg by the roadside and they were preparing for the Manchester Water Works. There was tunnel entrance there in our field and we had huts there for the men, and they also had there a small church - it's the one I think that is on the road to Windermere. That Captain Chapman used to come on a Sunday before we got this chapel and have a service on the rocks on a fine Sunday afternoon. Well it was there until the Water Works were finished. We had two of the men that worked in the tunnel - it was going through to Troutbeck. They took me one night up to the tunnel, one of these men. There was tram-ways. Well it got so long they had to put up a thing for the air and the machinery was in a great big building, It was very dirty. The fellow picked me up and carried me. Well that was few days before it went through and it was wonderful - they met just like that. In the end my Aunty went - I think it was the night before they joined up. These men lived with us for I think about 2 years. They were really Gloucestershire miners. They used to come and meet me when I was coming home on a Friday night because it was dark long before we got up to the house. One of them couldn't write and he had a sweetheart, and my aunty used to write his love-letters for him. She said, "I'll get him married before I'm finished with him." There was a big open cutting and all these huts. Where the man was putting in the stake (when he had the drop on the end of his nose) they built a square room. Well it was their office and when they went away they left that good well-built stone building by the side of the road and it was very useful because they could take a bigger load to there. Then there was two more hills to go up and they took so much off the horse and left it there safe and dry.

The 20th Century

For most of this century the buildings changed very little. Farming became less prosperous, and machinery meant that fewer farm hands were needed, so there was plenty of room in the old buildings and no surplus to finance change. The farm changed hands several times in the early years of the century, and in the 1920s became part of the estate of the Somervells of High Borrans and was farmed by tenants. William Whitwell was the farmer from 1920, and in 1958¹⁶ he bought it outright, and he and his sons and grandson farmed at High House until 1994.

In the 1920s and 30s the total farm income is said to have been about £1000 a year, about half of it from a milk and dairy products round in Windermere and half from the sale of wool and lambs.¹⁷ As the Lakeland tourist industry

developed the two cottages were usually let as weekend cottages or second homes, one of them by 1930¹⁸. The other was lived in by a farm worker when one was employed, but from 1953 by George Whitwell and his family. When, on William's death, they moved into the main house it too was let to summer visitors.

Electricity came to the farm in 1955, and a bathroom was put in in 1964.

The recent changes have been much more sweeping. The growth of tourism and the coming of easy transport, central heating and modern communications gave houses of traditional character an increasing value in a new market, and in 1994 the Whitwells sold the farm to Messrs Black of Ambleside, who thoroughly modernised the house and converted it into two dwellings marketed in 1995 at a combined price of £470,000. At the same time machinery and motor transport made it possible to farm much larger areas than in the past. So the land was sold on to Browfoot farm, Ulthwaite.

It is interesting that a factor which may help to explain why High House was built here four hundred years ago - its position intermediate between the central part of the Lake District and the communication centre of Kendal - still helps to give it value today, even though its original function as a farmhouse has completely gone.

Notes

- 1 Royal Commission on Historical Monuments. Historic Buildings Report on High House. HMSO 1995
- 2 Hugill Enclosure Award 1838 WQR 1/6 KRO
- 3 Report of C&WAAS visit to the Hugill Settlement and High House 1881. Kendal Library K5 1/913.031
- 4 Court Rolls of the Marquess Fee SC2/207/119 PRO
- 5 Report of C&WAAS visit to the Hugill Settlement and High House 1881. Kendal Library K51/913.031
- 6 Kendal and Hugill Parish Registers
- 7 Report of C&WAAS visit to the Hugill Settlement and High House 1881. Kendal Library K51/913.031
- 8 J Ewing "The Antiquary on Horseback" Kendal 1963 p 112
- 9 Miles's Will 1 June 1698. LRO
- 10 Will probate 22/1/1698 Richmond Wills WRW/K LRO
- 11 Notes by J A Martindale. WPR/68/1 KRO
- 12 Report of C&WAAS visit to the Hugill Settlement and High House 1881. Kendal Library K51/913.031
- 13 Mannex Directory of Westmorland etc. 1851
- 14 Receipt at the Sun Inn, Troutbeck Bridge
- 15 Memories of Edith..... (née Barnes) recorded 1977 by the Ambleside Oral History Group Tape A. Edith was a granddaughter of George Addison
- 16 Information from Dorothy Whitwell 1996
- 17 Information from Graham Blamire 1996. His family were summer tenants of the small cottage from 1939 and his information as from memory of the farm accounts of William Whitwell
- 18 Nancy Price *Shadow on the Hills* 1935

This paper is based on research by Morison Harding and Joe Scott, which formed the basis of a lecture/discussion meeting of the Society on 12th March 1996