

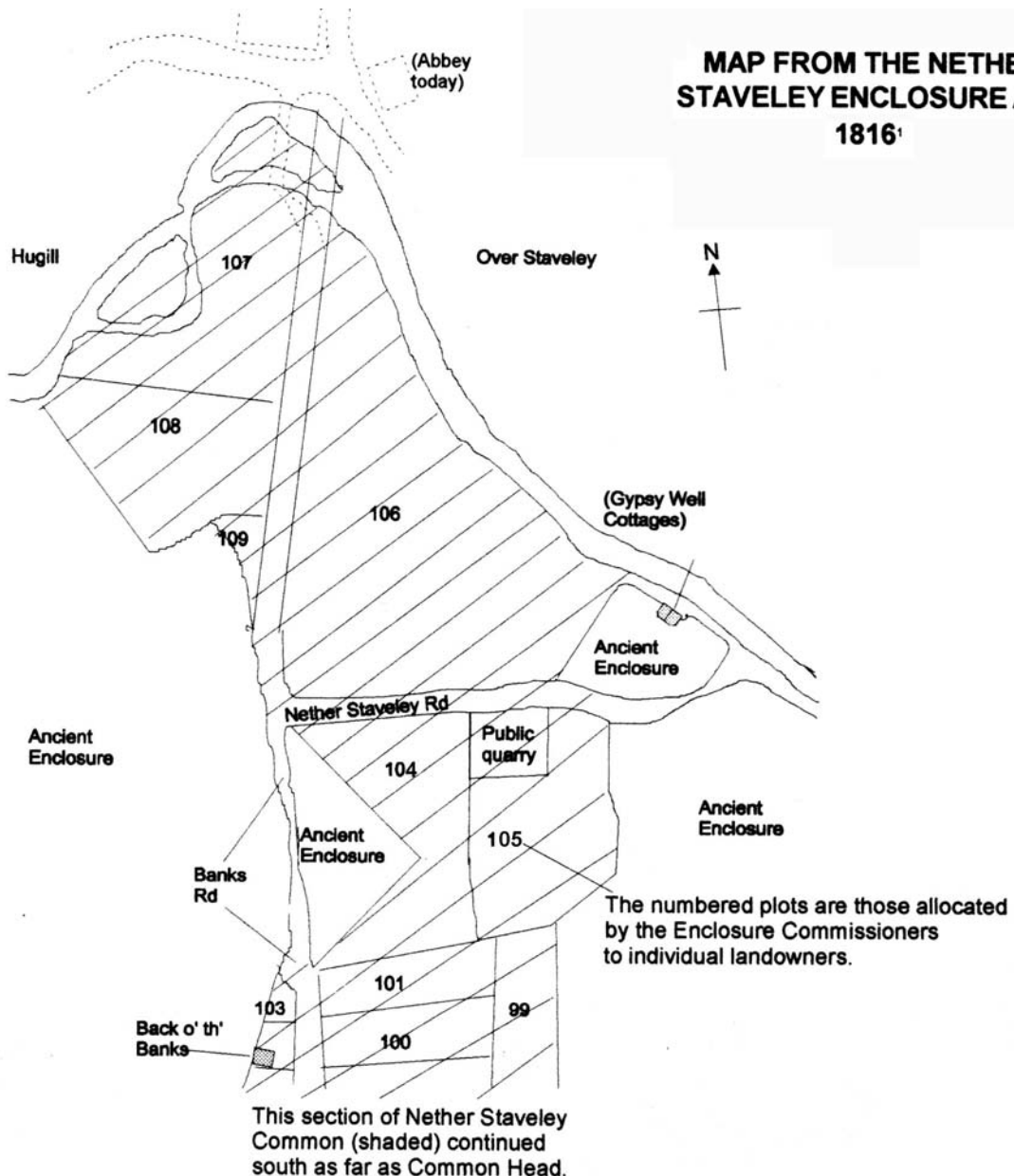
STAVELEY BANKS AND GYPSY WELL

by Joe Scott 1998

Until the 19th century Staveley village was entirely on the north side of the Gowan, except for two buildings, the Eagle & Child Inn, and Gypsy Well cottages. The south side was known as "Staveley Banks". The Staveley fairs had been held there since the 14th century, and this is probably why most of this area remained unenclosed common land until the Enclosure Act of 1816.¹ At that time this part of the common still stretched back as far as Common Head. The only bridge over the river Gowan was the "New Bridge" near the Eagle, but presumably there were many fords and stepping stones along the Gowan as it ran beside the common.

The enclosure commissioners planned two new

roads "Banks Road [now Station Rd] commencing at the Staveley Beck [the Gowan] at the Kentmere Road end [Abbey Square] to the end of an ancient road leading to Holling Howe [Hollin Hall]" and "Nether Staveley Rd [now the Banks] branching out of Banks Rd and extending east over Staveley Banks to an ancient lane between enclosures." A few years later a new bridge was built to the west of the line of "Banks Rd" so as to use a natural island in the Gowan, but the property boundaries of the Act had already fixed the line of the road. The commissioners allocated part of the common which is still a public open space (beside Hill Cottage) as a quarry for wall-building.



The Gypsies, their Well and the Well Cottage

The Staveley fair was an important one - at the "back-end fair" in 1856 4,330 sheep were sold² - and it is not surprising that it attracted gypsies and others with things to sell. Those selling their wares at Staveley must have camped beside the convenient well on the edge of the fairground often enough to give it its name.

The first actual mention of a cottage is in 1724, when John Wattson of Gowan Bridge conveyed half an acre and "Egyptian Well cottage" to William Graves, innkeeper, probably of the Eagle & Child.³ So by 1724 someone had managed to enclose this piece of the common, with the permission of the Lord and the Manor Court and had built a cottage there. We have some clues as to who this may have been - a 1737 document refers to this same cottage (rent 4d a year plus an "entry fine" of £1) as "Scotson's Cottage". Now Anne Scotson, spinster, of Nether Staveley died in 1702.⁴ She was probably the Anne, daughter of Richard Scotson, who was baptised on May 19th 1661 in Staveley Chapel⁵ - no other family of Scotsons is mentioned in local records. So it seems possible the Scotsons built the first cottage here. Anne had two rooms, the house [kitchen] and the chamber [bedroom] as we can see from the inventory made after her death.

A true and perfect inventory of all the goods chattells & debts of Anne Scotson of Nether Staveley deceased appraised the 25th day of Jenuary Anno Dni, 1702. by William Rigg, William Brockbank and Thomas Bateman as followeth⁴

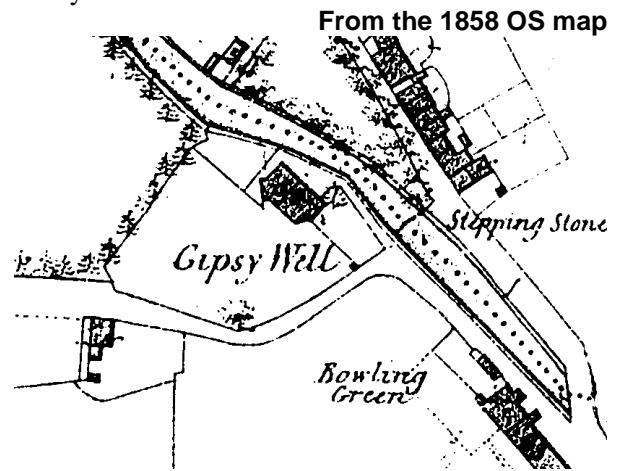
	£	s	d
Hir apparel	0	5	6
In the house - chests chaires etc.	0	9	6
In the chamber - bedstocks bedding etc.	0	10	9
In flireing & other things	0	4	4
Dung	0	0	6
Summa Bonorum [total assets]	1	10	7
Debts owing by ye deceased			
ffuneral expenses	0	19	6
to Richard Briggs	0	5	0
to William Hodgson	0	0	7
to James Borricke	0	0	6
to Margaret Pearson	0	0	7
to John Jopson	0	0	3
to William Grigg	0	1	0
to William Atkinson	0	1	7
Summa Debitorum [total debts]	1	9	0

Anne also owned the customary tenancy of the cottage and its half acre of land - that's why it was worth her while to make a will. It would be a one

storey cottage of local stone with a thatched roof and a peat fire.

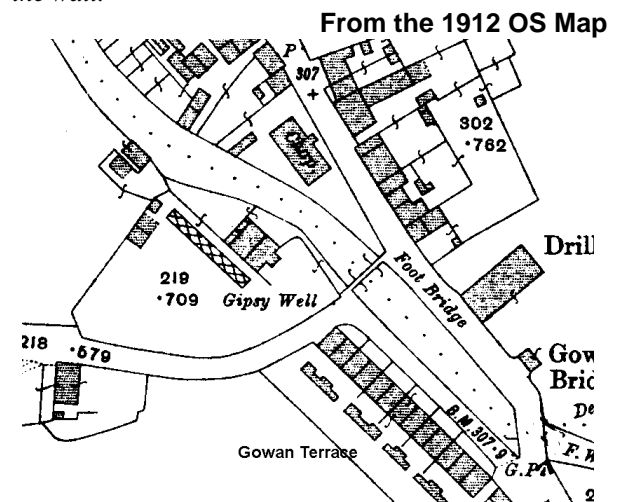
The Cottages in more recent times

The patch of land with its well and its cottage changed hands many times and by the time of the 1816 enclosure there were two cottages, probably by now with a slate roof. At this time they were owned by John Noble of Moss Side, a wealthy yeoman, who died in 1817 and the property then passed to a succession of his descendants who let it to tenants. In 1851⁶ Brian Bowness, mason, lived in one and William Taylor, master carpenter in the other, both with large families. Was it they, perhaps who rebuilt in the modern style with two storeys?



By the time of this map Hill Cottage had been built, and also several cottages between the Eagle and Child and its bowling green. The two cottages are much the same shape as in 1816, and are known in the 1851 census as "Well Cottages". The well itself is shown as a rectangular shape in the corner.

By 1912 the cottages have been rebuilt once more, Gowan Terrace has taken the place of the old Eagle cottages and the bowling green, and the well is replaced by a dot representing the tap in its alcove in the wall.



The well as water supply

There were lots of wells around the village and usually plenty of rain, so real problems of water supply were unlikely till the rapid rise in population in the years 1820-50, when the bobbin trade made Staveley into an industrial village. But in the later 19th century public health was a serious national problem. A Kendal Rural District Sanitary Authority was set up in 1872, and in January 1875 there were seven cases of typhoid along the Gowan in Staveley. The "Inspector of Nuisances" suggested laying a 1 inch pipe 70 ft. from the well overflow at Hill Cottage (Mr Wilson's) to Gypsy Well, although in June he reported "I feel quite satisfied that the spring which was proposed to be the supply for Staveley will not be sufficient." New pumps were installed in the village, one of them near the old church. The inspector reported that gypsy well was supplied from a rock in the field "gypsy well field" and he installed a brick tank to hold 360 gallons and a pipe to the well. He also took another pipe from this tank to a cistern under the pump by the old church, so that it could supply water for 230 people living within 100 yards. Probably it was at this time that the tap was installed in an alcove beside the road, at the end of Gowan Terrace.⁷



Gypsy Well tap 1998. The houses on the site of Gypsy Well Cottages are now known as Yew Tree and Springwell Cottages

This system staggered on for the next 50 years. In 1926 engineers planning the present water system for the village reported, "Gypsy well tap supply – quality is doubtful and liable to pollution. In summer the supply dwindles to a dribble and the inhabitants often have to wait several minutes for a bucketful." and "Churchyard pump – supplied from an old boiler underground."⁸ A proper mains system was then installed, but it was several years before all houses were connected to it, and people remember the gypsy well tap in use in the 1930s.



The pump by the old church tower photographed about the year 1900. A pipe from Gypsy Well fed into the underground tank of this pump. The alcove for the pump was rebuilt in the 1930's, and a plaque commemorating the 1620 dispute placed inside it. The date, 1876, when the pump was installed can still be seen on the keystone of the archway.

Notes

1. KRO WQRI Strickland Kettel & Nether Staveley Enclosure Award 1816
2. Westmorland Gazette 11th Nov. 1856
3. KRO WDX/608
4. LRO Richmond Wills WRW/K
5. Staveley Chapel Registers KRO
6. 1851 Census Enumerator's Returns
7. Minutes of the Kendal Rural Sanitary Authority KRO WSRD/SW
8. Letter to SWRDC March 1926. Copy in S&DHS papers.