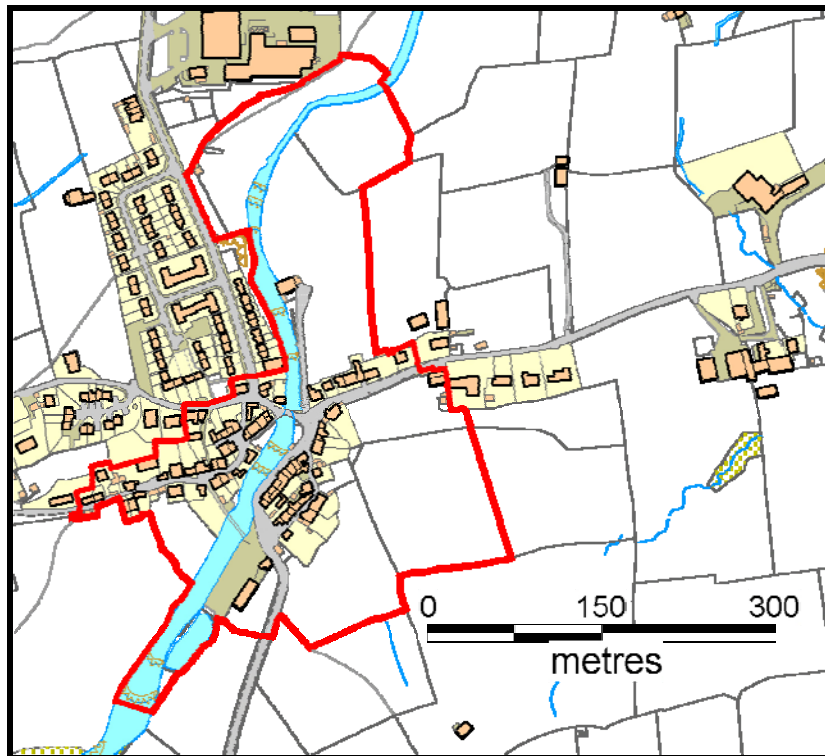


Gayle, Wensleydale – Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Designated – 01 March 2001



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1. Introduction

This character appraisal has been prepared at the request of Hawes and High Abbotside Parish Council in order to consider whether the settlement of Gayle may possess sufficient architectural or historic interest to be designated as a Conservation Area. It follows on from a public meeting held by the Authority's previous Building Conservation Officer with the Parish Council in Hawes in 1997.

2. The Location and Setting of the Village

The village sits in a narrow basin at the end of the compact valley of Sleddale at a point where Gayle Beck begins its steeper decent towards the lower valley of the River Ure in Wensleydale. The beck here is relatively wide and flat and reasonably slow flowing and thus offers a fording point for road communication, both for routes along the south side of Wensleydale and also down the valley from the Roman road and important medieval route of the Cam High Road which crosses the head of Sleddale on it's way towards Bainbridge.

The village is situated 600 metres to the south west of the market town of Hawes in the upper part of Wensleydale. Gayle today is a medium sized village of approximately 150 houses, although nearly 90 of these have been constructed in the last 30 – 40 years.

3. The Historic Origins and Development of the Settlement

The 19th Century writer Edmund Bogg suggests that the village " *is probably one of the most ancient in the dale*" and probably of "*Celtic founding*" but there is surprisingly little

evidence available which might shed light on the origins, or subsequent history of the settlement until the modern era. Earthwork remains situated near to Blackburn Hall, 500m to the east of the village, were excavated in the late 1970's. The inconclusive results of this work suggest that this feature may have been a partially defended shieling or summer outstation dating from the mid 9th Century. The relationship of this substantial feature to an almost adjacent field system, which survives as series of low earth-banks, was also difficult to establish with any accuracy.

The present day name is probably derived from a Norse topographical description – *seldalegale* – meaning a ravine situated in a ravine like valley. A vaccarie, or dairy farm, called Slebaledal, and a lodge called Sledabigail (possibly the same place) is recorded as having existed in the 13th Century and land at Hawes and Gayle was in Crown possession at the time of Richard II. No other material has come down to us from the mediaeval period. A survey of Crown land carried out by James I in 1603 reveals that, at that time, Gayle was probably the largest settlement in the upper dale with 42 men having land while near by Hawes only had 19 but this situation began to be reversed once Hawes received its market charter in 1700.

By the later 17th Century Gayle has become renowned for its knitting trade a factor which no doubt influenced the establishment of one of the world's earliest textile mills at Gayle in c1784. The houses on either side of Clints House were originally built as workshops and warehouses to serve this burgeoning textile industry, although a proud local tradition of hand-knitting continued in Gayle until well into the 19th century.

Leases for the prospecting of coal were made in the early 18th Century and a colliery, which employed men and women from Gayle, was established at Storth, 3km to the south, by the end of the Century. The 1851 census records that 22 people from Gayle were employed at 'Storth Pits'. Stone was extracted from the Beck, opposite the Beckstones, in the late 18th Century for use on Alexander Fothergill's improvements to the Richmond – Lancaster Turnpike. Sandstone, for walling and for floors and roofs, and limestone for the liming of 'sour' agricultural land, was won from quarries at nearby Scaur Head and East Shaw Farm in the 19th Century and men from Gayle may also have travelled to the Burtsett slate and stone quarries to work during the boom years from 1850 – 1880. Gayle is recorded as having a butcher, Jeffrey Spenser, in 1803 and at the end of the 19th Century there were, apparently, four shops and at least one public house in the village.

Development in the 20th Century was not extensive until the 1960s and 70s when the Little Ings estate development was built to the west of Gayle Lane, followed by a smaller group on the narrow strip between the road and Gayle Beck in the 1990s. Further houses have been built on an individual basis, as infill in the West End area, and as a ribbon development of bungalows along Marridales. Taken together, this modern housing provision has more than doubled the size of the village in the last 40 years, resulting in a design style and layout of buildings which is completely alien from the historic core of the village.

4. The Architectural and Historic Interest of the Village's Buildings and Other Structures

Despite being a relatively small settlement and one which is mostly pre-disposed towards the architectural form of the small cottage or linked terraced row, there are in fact a surprisingly large proportion of interesting buildings to be found in the early part of the village. This is reflected in the comparatively high number of buildings and structures that are included on the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. It is instructive to compare Gayle, which has eleven listed structures, with it's near neighbour Hawes, a settlement which is almost three times the size of the older part of Gayle, but which only possesses five such structures. This probably reflects both the earlier origins of

Gayle and the relative prosperity that the village enjoyed during the 17th to late 18th Centuries before being eclipsed by the growth of Hawes after that period.

The significance of Gayle Mill to the historic importance of the village, and specifically to the history of textile milling and the development of water powered technology is attested to in it's Grade II* status. Built by the Routh family in circa 1784 its square, three-storey form makes a virtue out of solidity while the rhythmic regularity of its windows creates a series of handsome facades.

Old Hall, reputedly built for Matthew Weatherald, is asymmetrical and wholly vernacular in form. Decorative details which survive from the 17th Century include a series of altered mullion windows with chamfered surrounds and a small round headed fire window, while a small Palladian window adds a touch of classical fashion to a storied porch. The door into this porch possesses a moulded arris to it's surround which continues up to the lintel to partially enclose a pair of circular panels which contain the initials 'MAW' and the date '1695'. This important building has been somewhat spoilt by the application of a modern pebble dashed coat and is presently somewhat neglected externally.

Force Head in East End, is dated 1711 and has a more confident, renaissance inspired, balanced facade with a central door and end chimney stacks. Capitals and keystones, together with a moulded cornice and detached pediment, embellish the doorway, which also has a plain over light. The moulded architraves found on the door surround are also applied to the window architraves, which contain flat faced mullions. Simple railings, with a gate and cast iron standards surmounted by urn finials, bound the attractive front garden.

A near neighbour in the same row is the rather plain Sandemanian Chapel, now the Village Institute built as an Inghamite Chapel by the Batty brothers and James Allen of Gayle in circa 1755. The building is listed Grade II because of the way it illustrates the socially important changes that were brought about by the popularity of non-conformist religious movements during the 18th and 19th Centuries. The adjacent burial ground contains 18th and 19th Century tombs and is a vital space in this part of the village.

The most ostentatious house in Gayle is Clints House in the Beckstones. Again, built for the Rouths as a house within a complex of combing and carding shops it has possible 18th Century origins. However, its front elevation is constructed from coursed watershot stonework and it uses slab sills and lintels for its window openings, details which suggest an early 19th Century date for construction. The decorative wooden door-case with its open Roman Doric pediment is a mid 20th Century addition, although it compliments the rather elegant 19th Century railings which enclose the shallow front steps and which rise to a prominent point in front of the door. A close inspection of the adjacent house to the south west, which is also listed Grade II, reveals a former double ground floor doorway and the blocked remains of a loading bay entrance to the first floor, which survive from the period when the building was used as a wool warehouse. Despite conversion in the 19th Century, this building still retains an attractive frontage.

The other listed structures in the village are the simple but elegant Gayle Bridge with it's single span segmental arch of rubble stone voussoirs, which dates to circa 1800 and a K6 style telephone box designed in the 1930s and prominently located by the bridge of the entrance to Gayle Mill.

Gayle also possesses other buildings which, while unlisted, still possess noteworthy architectural qualities in this local context. These buildings display either attractive architectural detailing, or they exhibit construction characteristics that are typical of their period. In general, they have similar qualities of age, style and materials and they bring a positive contribution to the special architectural quality of the area.

A good example is East House on Marridales. Its balanced front is built from well coursed rectangular sand-stone blocks and ashlar quoins and window surrounds. The centrally placed door has a flat hood supported by simple moulded brackets while a stone slate roof is finished with stone verge copings and carved kneelers. 19th Century sashes survive to the windows, but the ogee-moulded gutter is probably of 20th Century origin. The roadside elevation may be a later re-fronting of an earlier "L" shaped range. The attractive private garden area retains an earth closet and is boarded by simple iron railings.

Another building which demonstrates some degree of stylistic sophistication is the Methodist Chapel. It too has been modified and re-fronted. Built in 1833 as a smaller, Wesleyan Chapel, in 1879 its eaves were raised to accommodate an internal first floor gallery and it was provided with a new decorated front. This consists of rock-hewn rusticated stonework with a mixture of different cut stone windows and door surrounds with semi-circular heads, keystones, imposts and blank shield devices. The entrance has a heavy pyramidal pediment with moulded cornice and overlight and plain pilasters and capitals. The later, lower extension to the east has round headed windows in watershot ashlar block walling. This is a stylistically eclectic building that contributes considerably to the street scene.

Other notable buildings include Flag Cottage in the Gaits, which includes the remnants of a 17th Century moulded door surround with a carved date stone 1669 which was possibly brought to the site for incorporation into a recently remodelled front elevation. Two doors to the west is a house which displays some 17th Century round headed windows in its rear elevation in a house that otherwise appears to have been subject to a major 19th Century recasting.

Other interesting houses in the Gaits are East and West Cottages, a pair of tall 2½ storey semi detached cottages with additions to the rear. Late 19th Century sash windows survive and the stone gutter brackets, set in groups of three, and the gable chimney stacks are particularly prominent in views from Gayle Bridge. The front gardens have very attractive stone boundary walls with distinctive thin triangular copings. The cottage attached to Rowlands has an asymmetrical door and window layout and retains 19th Century joinery to its attractive roadside elevation. Ivy House/South View is interesting because, while located on the Gaits, it is positioned so as to face the beck, from where it is an extremely prominent landmark building especially from the foot of the Bence. That it has early 19th Century origins is evidenced by a bold ashlar door surround, but unfortunately, its architectural character has been somewhat eroded by unsympathetic modern window fittings.

The long house and barn range behind the Methodist Chapel has simple slab stone sills and lintels in a random rubble walling and original four pane sash windows survive. The eaves are supplied with small square stone gutter brackets and the stone slate roof has tall end stacks. The contemporary barn to the eastern end of the range is an attractive part of the composition.

Across the beck, on the east side of the village, a number of houses such as Beck House and Deurley House display attractive, mostly symmetrical elevations. The former probably dates from the early 19th Century, being double pile in plan and having slab stone lintels and stone gutter brackets which are typical of that period. The pitched stone slate pediment over the front door is a characteristic feature of Gayle being found in a number of houses in the village. Deurley House, an end terraced cottage, has had its front remodelled in the middle of the 20th Century as part of a conversion from a shop to a pair of cottages. However, a flat-faced mullion window to the rear suggests mid-late 18th Century origins and it may well have had a function in the group of textile processing buildings

originally built in this area. Likewise, Yarn House and Mallard Cottage at the south west end of the Beckstones were probably once 2½ storey warehouses. However, these have fared less well as a result of 19th and 20th Century alterations and the modern fenestration here is somewhat unsympathetic.

Wynd House and its attached later cottage and cart shed are a particularly attractive part of the street scene in The Wynd. The complex form of this group and particularly its roofscape, the survival of 19th Century joinery to most of the openings, and the good quality detailing to the cart shed opening all combine to make a positive contribution to the architectural interest of the area.

The above section describes the key groups of buildings and the more significant individual examples which demonstrate noteworthy architectural characteristics in the local context of Gayle. It should also be noted, however, that some buildings do not make a positive contribution to the special interest of the settlement. The reasons for this will vary. Sometimes, it is a result of poor adaptations, or alterations that have been made to properties through the exercising of Permitted Development Rights. This can vary from poorly scaled and designed extensions, and additional porch forms and materials, or the loss of front gardens for parking etc. The introduction of PVCu doors and windows or other non-traditional joinery details can also have a harmful impact on the special architectural or historic character of individual buildings and in Gayle approximately 40% of the unlisted buildings in the village have been so affected.

5. The Form and Character of the Village and its Relationship to the Adjacent and Wider Landscape Setting

There can be little doubt that the historic core of Gayle possesses a unique character and appeal that makes it truly special. The term 'locally distinctive' could almost have been coined with Gayle in mind and, even today, when the pressure for and the effects of change are often so great, Gayle for the most part retains, a timeless quality.

The architectural writer Pevsner is, perhaps, being a little fanciful when he describes the village as being:

"almost as intricate as an Italian stone village"

but, in its rugged windswept Pennine context, the village could be seen as sharing similar aspects of complexity and of compactness. Much nearer the mark in defining the essential character and interest of the village are local historians Ella Pontefract and Marie Hartley. In an eloquent description they see the village as having:

"Qualities which make for quaintness: hills rising above it, houses grouped around the beck, narrow alleys, a bridge, a mill, each so perfectly placed that a first view is startling"

That brief sketch identifies all of the key aspects which combine to make up the character of the village: the narrow lanes and winding passageways which run between the small grey stone cottages and houses; the range of breathtaking views that are available from various points in the village but particularly from the vicinity of Gayle bridge; and, most importantly for the form of the village, the topographical setting and the role played by the beck, which plunges downwards from the heart of the village, in a series of shallow waterfalls, towards the landmark presence of Gayle Mill and the pepperpot form of Hawes church tower in the background.

The beck is, then, at the very heart and soul of Gayle. It divides the village into two very distinct areas of differing character. To the west the village is compact and clustered into small plots of a very high density. There are hardly any front gardens of substance and those few rear spaces that exist are almost all hidden from view. This results in a townscape that appears to consist entirely of small public spaces in the form of lanes and passageways. While in plan, the orientation of these buildings is almost always along the contour in a more or less south west to north east axis, on the ground there seems to be little real legibility as the routes through the built area have few visual links to each other and there are no landmark buildings or focal points for people to navigate towards.

Most of the buildings here are arranged into a number of terraces or short rows along either side of the Gaits, with Hargill and the Garris forming short offshoots from a small, informal, central square. The latter has little in the way of a communal focus, although a late 19th Century drinking water fountain is still located, unobtrusively, against the blank gable wall of a house. There is no significant building or other focal point here and this space seems to have been created almost by accident rather than design. The high ratio of building height to street width and a lack of clear visual routes combine to create a strong sense of enclosure. The only exceptions to this occur when gaps between buildings are encountered which allow for views towards the more open space offered by the beck.

Hargill is an attractive row of individually built stone cottages situated next to the beck but separated from it by a row of small gardens. The cottages are of differing periods and display evidence of various rebuilds. The sloping topography here leads to an arrangement of differing floor levels, and a corresponding randomness in the positioning of windows, all under an irregular roofline which steps down towards the north east to terminate in the hipped shape at Bridge End. An attractive, narrow, roughly cobbled, public pathway separates the house fronts from a number of small, individual gardens set along side the beck, each bounded by well constructed stone boundary walls topped by good quality narrow triangular copings. These cottages, pathways and gardens create an extremely attractive and harmonious scene which, because of its simplicity, lack of ostentation and its location, adjacent to the beck, adds considerably to the rich character of the village.

The 'T' shaped form of a Garris House terminates the open space beyond Hargill's gardens and effectively acts as the eastern end of the narrow street known as The Gaits. Beyond Garris House a pair of houses known as Ivy House and South View are arranged so that their fronts face towards the beck. The well proportioned front elevations and small front gardens, with their tall dry stone boundary walls set right against the side of the beck, are a particularly attractive and prominent part of the view which one sees from the Bence, the road which climbs steeply out of the village towards Deurley and the upper reaches of Sleddale.

The narrow street known as the Gaits forms a more linear axis, with almost all of its buildings being set against the edge of the narrow street. Those to the northern row tend to follow a more consistent building line than those to the south which are arranged in a more irregular grouping that is only broken by the gap left to allow access down the contour towards the ford. Beyond the house known as The Flags, The Gaits continues as late 19th century ribbon development ending today, at The Hill, in a collection of attractive small outbuildings with local vernacular characteristics.

The area to the east of Gayle Beck is similar in terms of its building density to the eastern group of buildings but here, a slightly more formal pattern occurs as a result of the deliberate planning involved in creating the complex of textile warehouses and outbuildings around an informal courtyard area in the mid-late 18th century. Two rows of buildings are aligned in parallel, with the Beckstones and the more irregular grouping from Beck House to the Old Hall facing the beck and the narrow passage of The Wynd being located behind.

The buildings fronting Gayle Beck are mostly taller and generally have a more formal, designed character. Windows here are usually carefully arranged to provide symmetry and they are often grouped around central doorways. More ostentatious decoration is provided, ranging from the ornate door head in the porch at Old Hall to the classical door-case at Clints House. In a modest imitation of the latter feature, a number of other properties in this row have been given door hoods in the form of pitched stone slate pediments.

The stonework to most of these houses is of good quality with many of the elevations displaying cut sand-stone blocks laid to regular or watershot courses. Although most of these buildings were subject to quite significant alterations in the 19th and 20th Centuries when they were converted from commercial to domestic uses they still retain, as a group, a charm and architectural sophistication which is all too rare in most dale's villages. These qualities are significantly enhanced by the provision of decorative cast and wrought iron railings which demark some of the very characteristic shallow plots which front these houses.

To the rear of this group The Wynd has a series of small cottages built individually and to varying masses, which sit right up against the passageway. Wynd House and its attached cottage is older, somewhat larger and more complex in form and its cart house extension projects slightly into the passage to reduce the narrow width of The Wynd still further. This undulating passage narrows again at the angled turn at Corner Cottage and here, an area of real interest is further enhanced by the various small lean-to extensions; the provision of stone steps to access lofts or raised doorways; and the number of small boundary walls and railings which exist. However, this interest is undermined by a number of intrusive modern factors. The array of overhead wires and rusting metal supply poles which are situated next to Rose Cottage and Gayle Farmhouse are particularly detrimental while the recent insertion of modern doors and window fittings also impacts on the special interest of this area, the PVCu bay window in the row being particularly harmful in this respect. The Wynd continues as a narrow passage to exit at a point near to the bridge. The special character of this arrangement of buildings and public thoroughfares is most clearly observed from the large expanse of The Green where the ends of each of these rows can be seen to form a clear physical demarcation of the settlement form.

Gayle Bridge probably affords the best viewpoint from which to observe the special character and appearance of the village. It also offers a further dramatic vista, this time downstream, towards the landmark form of Gayle Mill. Foreground interest here is provided both by the steepening gradient of the beck, as it falls away over a series of limestone shelves to the west side of the mill, and also by the visual axis provided by the mill's stone head race which collects water, from directly under the Bridge. Beyond the mill a widening panorama opens up with Bealah Bank forming a graceful curve to enclose both the beck and an arrangement of small rectangular meadows which flank the beck on its short journey towards Hawes. This view- point, and the return view back towards the built form of the village from Bealah Bank, is of tremendous importance to the special interest of the village and it is fortunate that the modern development along Gayle Lane is mostly shielded from view by the presence of various mature trees along the riverbank.