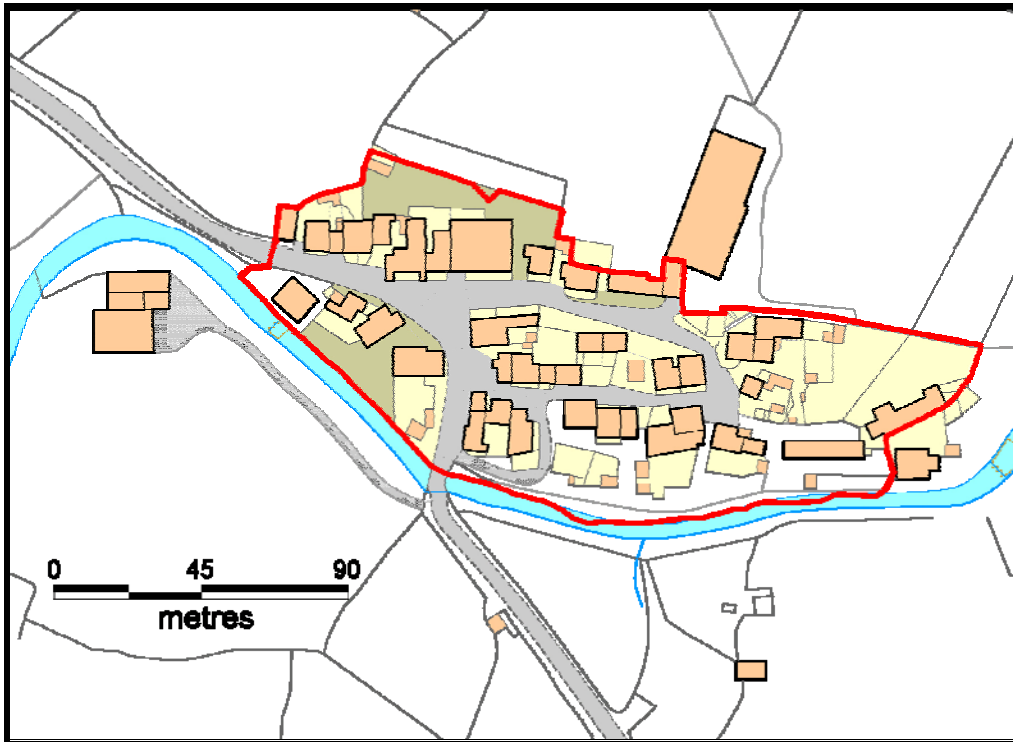


Thwaite, Swaledale – Conservation Area Character Appraisal

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1 Introduction

This character appraisal has been prepared as part of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority's Conservation Area Strategy. It has been prepared by Blaise Vyner Heritage and Arts Consultancy and follows on from two Conservation Area discussion meetings with the residents of Thwaite, held in July and August 2000.

2 The Location and setting of the Village.

Thwaite is situated low on the north bank of Thwaite Beck, enclosed by the valley side to north and south, from which attractive views into the village are obtained. The modern road enters the village from the south to cross the bridge over Thwaite Beck from where it passes across the west end of the village so that the main body of the settlement is hardly noticed, before it twists westwards and uphill towards Keld 3 km to the north. The largest settlement in the area is Reeth, situated some 15km due east.

3 Archaeological and historical background to the settlement

The place name is Norse, 'thveit' - a clearing, implying that this was woodland or a forested area in the 9th or 10th century. Other local names are Great Shunnor Fell, Norse, 'sjon' or 'sjonar' - a look-out hill, and Lovely Seat, Scandinavian 'saetre' - a seasonal outstation or shieling. It has been suggested that the settlement began as an intrusion into the territory of Muker - perhaps in the 10th century (Fleming 1998, 48).

Isolated farmsteads in a largely wooded landscape had probably existed from the Iron Age - from 600 BC - if not before, but there is little recorded archaeology. An enclosure, comprising an earthwork bank and ditch, is set on a small rounded knoll to the east of Thwaite. By analogy with sites elsewhere, this and other knoll-set enclosures in Swaledale are thought to belong to the pre-Roman Iron Age (600 BC to 70 AD).

Although Swaledale contains a variety of earthworks, many of which appear to be evidence for field systems of Romano-British date, there is little earthwork evidence for early agricultural or settlement activity in the immediate vicinity of Thwaite.

Upper Swaledale appears to have had its own distinctive identity at least from the pre-Conquest period, and has been identified as the location of the 10th century kingdom of the Swale - 'Swaldal' in 10th century Norse (Fleming 1998). Settlements which placenames suggest were established at that time may have survived to become vaccaries (dairy farms) in the 12th century (i.e. post-Conquest). Walter de Gaunt established a hunting forest of Swaledale which took in all the old land of Swale. Away from the settlements the valley and hillsides were still wooded. Grants of land were made to Bridlington Priory and Rievaulx Abbey - both were involved in dairy farming. Early lead mining is not recorded, but had probably been important from the Roman period onwards.

It has been suggested that the later prehistoric enclosure on the knoll was later the site of the dairying settlement of Waylle, recorded in 1301 (Fieldhouse and Jennings 1978, 48). The location, like others in upper Swaledale, has a Norse topographic name 'hvall' - round hill.

After the Dissolution in the 16th century lands held by Bridlington Priory became the manor of Grinton, and lands held by Rievaulx Abbey became the manor of Muker. It is probably from this time that sheep farming developed intensively after a long period when dairy farming had co-existed with hunting forests. The area became the manor of Healaugh and parish of Grinton - an enormous tract of land from which was separated by the parishes of Muker in 1719 and Melbecks in 1838.

The extensive forest and woodland cover which had existed from prehistoric times would still have been reflected in extensive managed woodland during the medieval period and it is likely that the clearing of the ancient woodland reached a climax in the mid-19th century. Early 20th century photographs show that tree growth along the beck has regenerated since that time.

4 Economic development

Early settlement in upper Swaledale was comprised of widely scattered farmsteads dependent on mixed farming - grazing sheep and cattle, with only small areas of arable land. Woodland and mineral resources were exploited with varying intensity - the more intensive activity that developed during the Romano-British period dropped largely away until the medieval period, receding again until the 18th century. The 19th century saw prolonged economic development, coupled with a considerable rise in the population of the Dales, and the consolidation of the settlements which still reflect this industrial heyday, although the end of the century saw drastic depopulation.

Agriculture

Agriculture has always underpinned other economic activities. During the 1830s there was a series of bad harvests, and a sheep rot outbreak. Larger farms increasingly

grew cereals during this period, following the 1815 Corn Laws; oats were the staple cereal, rushes and bracken were used for animal bedding. In the second half of the 19th century mixed arable - potatoes, turnips, swedes, oats, and corn - was being abandoned for the pastoral farming of today. John Hardy tells how the Garth family of Crackpot bred the Swaledale sheep from black-faced moorland ewes and Leicester tup, the offspring had a thicker fleece (Hardy 1998, 82). Knitting of the resultant wool into stockings was an important source of income by the mid-18th century and continued into the 20th century.

Thwaite Fair was held in autumn: sheep were brought down in mid-October and until about 1900 sold privately, not through an auction. A pack of hounds, kept at Low Row, was used in a hare hunt during the morning and the inn was the centre of festivities.

In the late 19th century the population of Thwaite was in decline with the end of lead mining leaving industrial and domestic buildings in decay. Gardens and outbuildings which were destroyed by a flash flood in 1899 were still not rebuilt in the 1930s: 'There were so few people that there seemed no need to build the damaged houses up again, and not even another generation has had the heart to remake the gardens by the beck' (Pontefract and Hartley 1934, 87).

By the early 20th century the auctioning of sheep had become more important and Hawes Cattle Auction took trade from Thwaite, suggesting that farming was becoming more profitable. On Fair Day in the 1930s there were still pens on the roadside for animals; friends visiting and 'open house' hospitality. 1932 was a very bad year for sheep prices. By the 1930s property was being taken for retirement homes by farmers from dale.

Mining

Compared with other settlements in the dale, Thwaite appears to have been less involved in lead mining activities and may always have depended largely on agriculture. However, many of the village buildings seem to have been built during the periods of mining activity which affected all the upper dale.

The early 19th century - the period of the Napoleonic Wars and the Peninsular War (1808-14) was the period of greatest mining activity. However, between 1825 and 1833 the price of lead dropped from £33 to £13 per ton. From this time onwards there was continuing decline, although new mines were opened and individual mines had periods of great prosperity, especially during the Crimean war (1853-56) (Hardy 1998).

5 Settlement structure and fabric

Settlement layout

It is not clear when a nucleated settlement was first established at Thwaite; the Tithe Award map of 1839 shows the village very much as it is now, and no buildings older than around 1760-1780 have been identified. It may well be that consolidation of the settlement from a few closely spaced farms into a village proper was only a development of the 18th century.

The north side of Thwaite is neatly marked by a row of buildings with a common frontage, in contrast to the somewhat haphazard placing of buildings to the south. An early twentieth century photograph, published by Wood (1989, 184), shows the back

of this row clearly. This frontage extends along the street which formerly extended as a route eastwards out of the village towards Muker as a path above the north bank of Thwaite Beck, across the south-facing slopes of Kisdon Hill. The route is still partly marked by surviving field boundaries. While it has been suggested that a second, south, row is evident in the village plan (Fleming 1998, 113), the earliest map (1839) points up the contrast between the neat arrangement of buildings along the north row and the much more informal arrangement of buildings to the south. The layout of these buildings combines with the absence of gardens and boundaries to suggest that they were established on what was once an open green area, which now survives only as irregular patches between the buildings.

Although Thwaite is now crossed by a road leading from the east over the present bridge, this may be a fairly late restructuring of the village plan, since the path along the north side of the river might have provided a more reliable all-weather route. The present substantial bridge was widened in the nineteenth century, probably when the road to Hawes market became important to the farming community. The west side of the present bridge incorporates a narrower pack-horse bridge, which may be 18th century in date. There appears also to have been an earlier, or alternative, river crossing by ford downstream from the present bridge.

The turbulent nature of the beck, with sudden rises in water level, suggests a path to Muker along the north bank would have provided a more reliable all-weather route, to be preferred before a bridge was constructed.

Little building work has been done in the village during the last hundred years. However, improved road communications has led to easier access into the dales and some houses have been bought by families whose higher incomes are generated from outside the dale.

In common with other settlements in the upper dale, there are few trees within the village, so that the yews outside the former Chapel make a distinctive contribution, as does the group of trees on the south side of the beck near Rowantree Hall.

Building materials

Building materials used in Thwaite are very homogeneous. While some river rubble is present in outhouses, most buildings are constructed from angular blocks of local Yoredale stone. Stone dressing styles vary slightly, the variation perhaps being down to the source of the material as well as to the chronology of construction. One house in the north row is rendered. Otherwise, mortar is little in evidence, with some walls having the appearance of dry stone construction, the pointing having washed out leaving a rubble core bound with mortar. Roofing is with Yoredale sandstone slates. Exposed rock in the river-bank was an obvious source of stone for building, while field clearance, mining and the re-use of buildings were other sources of stone. Better stone – for wall ‘throughs’ and roofing slates - was more probably obtained from quarries.

Street furniture

There is little in the way of street furniture, which is limited to a K6 telephone box, the early 20th century North Riding County Council bridge number plate, and several houses which possess extended quoin slabs on which to place delivered milk.

The architectural and historical interest of the existing buildings

Most of the listed building coverage for Muker parish relates to outlying farms and

Thwaite has only one listed building: the Grade II Congregational Chapel and its boundary railings. Built in 1863, of coursed water-shot sandstone, it has stone slate roof, and round-arched side windows with sill and impost bands. Since the 1980s it has been in use as two houses, the north gable end having been altered for domestic use. The decorative cast iron railings still survive.

Only a few traces are visible of village buildings constructed earlier than around 1760, but a more detailed examination might reveal parts of earlier structures. A number of houses with relatively small square windows, large stones for jambs and lintels, and large stone quoins and kneelers might suggest that some housing is of the mid-18th century. A few outbuildings, both single and two storey, also have the square windows, tie-stone jambs, and heavy stone lintels of this period.

In the Dales most of the new-built houses of the later eighteenth century were two rooms wide and a single unit deep, the main entrance being placed off-centre and opening directly into the living room; the upper floor rooms were built part in the roof space. In Thwaite this characteristic two-room plan continued to be built into the early nineteenth century, with end chimney stacks serving the cooking and living rooms. It is significant that because there has been little rebuilding or development in Thwaite during the 20th century, the majority of buildings still reveal this form.

Historically, demand for additional housing, or for the provision of extensions to existing buildings, came from either family members who worked in the lead mines or other industrial processes, or from landless industrial workers in the area. Expanding populations in the industrial centres created a demand for butter and cheese, which resulted in increased cattle farming and milk production and the evolution of the surviving landscape of stone-walled fields and field barns which surround the village. Within the village some farmhouses were rebuilt, or extended at the rear, to include a dairy where milk was processed before transportation out of Swaledale.

During the early and mid-19th century the village appears to have been in decline and some houses may have been deserted as families emigrated out of the dale. The remaining houses were maintained and some effort was spent improving them later in the century, including rebuilding and refacing. Refacing would improve the weather-proofing, and is also an indication of prosperity. The house in the north row which has been rendered may also have received a raising of the eaves and changes to its windows.

The changes made to buildings may have included extending them to the front, onto formerly open green areas. The present size of Kearton House, when compared to the site on the 1839 tithe map, appears to be rather deeper in plan. The door lintel, carved in the 1970s with bird and animal motifs, commemorates the lives and work of the Kearton brothers, famous as pioneers of wildlife photography (born 1862 and 1871). Low walls, erected to prevent animals from straying into the properties define front gardens.

A characteristic of new stone walling in the middle and later 19th century is that it is often made from high quality shaped blocks, presumably cut in the quarry. Such walling no longer required large quoins or jambs. Tall sash windows become a feature of the later houses as transportation became easier and improvements in manufacturing technology allowed glass panes to become larger. Sash designs changed from 12 or 16 panes to four- and finally two-pane sashes by the early 20th century.

The variety of village building types which existed by the middle of the 19th century

can almost all be identified in the present buildings. They include a smithy and public house flanking the road by the bridge, a second public house, a meeting house and barns and byres. By the 1880s an elaborate chapel, a cobbler's shop and a house with cellar which was run as a dame school were in use. The 1863 Congregational chapel survives today as two private houses. The present residents have identified the former joiner's workshop, but the dame school and cobbler's shop has not yet been identified.

6 Existing land use in and around the village, and the contribution made by public and other open spaces

Thwaite is still a farming community and the village has three working farms within the settlement. The village is surrounded by enclosed fields which are today down to pasture and meadowland. Unlike some other Dales villages, there is little evidence - such as balks around the field edges or ridge and furrow - for former arable agricultural activity. Public views into the village can be gained from the road approaches into the valley from the north and south, the most obvious points from which to appreciate the general east-west arrangement of the settlement. Also of significance is the Pennine Way Long Distance Footpath which passes through the village on its way upwards towards Kisdon Hill and viewpoints from this path show the form of the village off to good advantage.

Once in the village the through road offers only a narrow view of the enclosing dale sides, in contrast to the more open views east down Swaledale afforded by the lane fronting the north row.

The topography of the narrow dale here imposes some degree of linearity on the settlement pattern which is further marked by the need to maximise the light available to each house. As a result, the east-west roads present a further contrast: on the one side are south facing house fronts, on the other the backs of other properties. A preference for maximising light is also reflected in the general absence of trees within the settlement.

Although the majority of the buildings have a similar status, and most appear to have been built over a relatively short period of perhaps 70-100 years, there is a noticeable variation in roof pitch and height. This provides considerable visual interest within the settlement and is, from the through road, given greater emphasis by the background of the green dale sides.

A further characteristic of the village is the very limited amount of public space, the most significant area being outside the Kearton Guest House, at the junction of the north row, and on the road leading down to the bridge. However, small and irregular spaces are found between and around buildings, emphasising the randomness of much of the plan-form of the settlement. These are, for the most part, grass-grown and used for grazing.