

Scarrow Hill in the Seventeenth Century

A Reconsideration of Vernacular Architecture c.1600 near
Naworth, Cumbria.

Summary

This paper reconsiders vernacular architecture c.1600 near Naworth, Cumbria. Firstly the authors own property, Scarrow Hill is discussed. Dating evidence both dendrochronological and through research conclude that Scarrow Hill can be securely dated at 1601.

Scarrow Hill is then compared to three nearby properties, all built of stone, all included in the 1603 Gilsland Survey and all still extant. Uses for the four buildings are considered with an emphasis on bastles (fortified farmhouses). Bastles are the established vernacular architecture for the area and period and were built as a result of the reiving and instability of the border area.

The conclusion suggests that not all stone buildings were bastles as two extant buildings clearly existed in 1603 and show no evidence of ever having been fortified. The suggestion is therefore that bastles in the Naworth area are likely to be earlier in date than previously thought.

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Figure 1 Scarrow Hill April 2006

Scarrow Hill is a privately owned stone house in a field, surrounded by farm land owned by Naworth Castle Estates. The history and architecture of Scarrow Hill is unusual for two reasons. Firstly the building is fully extant, and therefore the historic walls and roof can be studied in detail. Secondly the present building shows no evidence of fortification although, as set out below, there is evidence of the timbers within it dating from 1601. This in turn may raise questions about the need for, purpose of and dating of bastles at the same period in the Naworth area.

Today, Scarrow Hill has become a rather isolated victim of history. It lies at grid reference NY56956185. This is on the very edge of the parish of Brampton in north east Cumbria, near the Northumberland border. Scarrow Hill is now separated from neighbours by the A69 trunk road and by the Newcastle to Carlisle Railway, but it was not always so. The Military Road was built in 1758 and the railway in 1838. Both road and railway are at skew alignment to the building.

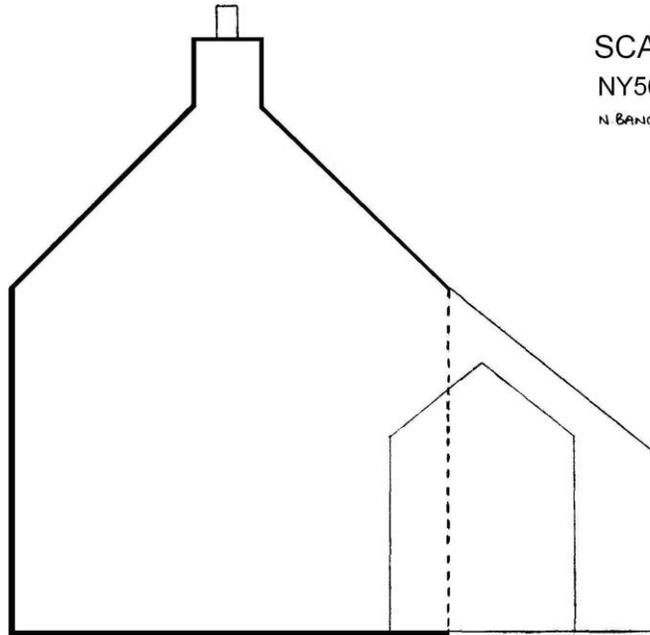
The Place-Names of Cumberland, part one by A.M.Armstrong, A Mawer, F.M.Stenton and Bruce Dickens¹ gives various spellings for Scarrow Hill in Brampton. These are Scareckhilles, 1603; Scarrowhill, 1626; Skarehill, 1675; Skarhill, 1699; Scarrow Hill, 1784. The meaning is likely to be 'Projection of land marked by a shieling'. A shieling was generally a place or simple hut where graziers would be temporarily housed when herding animals on high ground in the summer – part of the system of transhumance. Today this projection of land is dissected by both road and railway embankments.

The original or phase 1 building of Scarrow Hill presents a relatively simple two-story, four-bay, structure, aligned roughly east-west. The bays are formed by three intermediate principal rafters with tie beam and collar trusses. The collars of each truss are slightly cambered and the trusses carry double, backed, purlins to each pitch. There are no trusses at the gable ends.

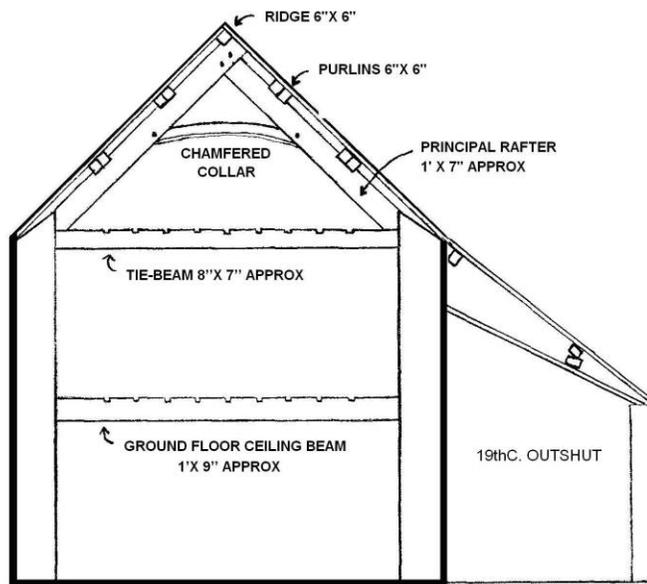
The phase 1 dwelling is built of neatly squared stone. This stone looks identical to that still extant on Hadrian's Wall at Banks less than two miles away. Indeed, Hadrian's Wall is visible from the upstairs windows at Scarrow Hill. It is therefore probable that the phase 1 building was built from stone robbed from Hadrian's Wall at a time when this practice was deemed acceptable.

Measured drawings showing the elevations, section and ground floor plan of today's building are shown in Figures 2 and 3. The original or phase 1 building is shown outlined in bold. The dimensions of the phase 1 building are 12.05 metres by 5.83 metres. The current doorways and window openings are not original.

SCARROW HILL
NY569619
N BANCROFT 13/3/2010



WEST ELEVATION



CENTRE PRINCIPAL RAFTER AND TIE-BEAM
LOOKING EAST

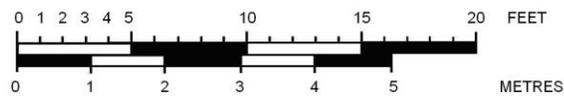


Figure 2 Measured drawings of Scarrow Hill showing the principal rafter and tie-beam truss roof.

Tree ring analysis of 14 samples obtained from the roof and one ground floor ceiling timber of Scarrow Hill has produced a single site chronology BRMDSQ01. This comprising all 14 samples and having an overall length of 143 rings. These rings were dated as spanning the years 1459 to 1601. Interpretation of the sapwood on the samples indicates that all the dated timbers, those of the roof proper, the tie beams, and a ground floor ceiling beam, were all cut as part of a single programme of felling in 1601².

Research of the people who lived at Scarrow Hill further suggests a building erected in 1601. Part of the will of Thomas Hall³ of Scarrow Hill in the parish of Brampton 1595 states –

I give and bequeathe: Unto Janet my daugh
ter the wyfe of John Bell two oxen that one in his owne hande
the other one blacke he had in hylter & two kyme also halted
one kalfe, three ewes & two lames, these goodes I give her if
her husbande John Bell doo not shame the byldinge of one
hope of expectations but if he do shame the **byldinge of one
house of my expectations** then I will & commande that he
have none of these goodes but have husbande John Bell to take
that he maie get by law of my expectations, for I do saide
repay any thinge before god. I did promyse him such
thinges but repay good will to helpe him to that **by byldinge
of one house of two paire a seales** and soo upon good will I maid
him **the greate timber of two paire of seales readie** and he so
woulde not fetch it, and soo I sould it to one Robart Pair
man for xxiiij s

Thomas Hall 1595 Will transcribed and annotated by Catherine Bancroft

Clearly the building of a house is important to Thomas Hall and he is trying to set out his plans in his will. For emphasis, the parts of the will that refer to his hopes of building a house are in bold. 'Seale' is an old Cumbrian word referring to willow⁴, or in this case oak. The pairs of oak were therefore probably the principal rafters for the roof of the house.

A house at Scarrow Hill is mentioned in the 1603 Gilsland Survey⁵. The Survey states that Gregory Hall has a 'tenement and close called Skarechilles: more toward the southeaste: by Denton becke in parte on the east and the com pasture on all other partes'. This comprised of 16 acres, one rood and zero perches, with a value of 2s. 6d. Furthermore John Robinson's copy of the 1603 Gilsland Survey map⁶ shows a building on the site of the current building at Scarrow Hill with the land more toward the south east. The original map was severely damaged by salt water in the Humber Estuary.

The building at Scarrow Hill shows no evidence of any fortification and therefore seems to have been erected as a two story building with walls averaging 0.62m at the ground floor. The roof on stone walls (of a similar thickness to those at Scarrow Hill), is very much in keeping with buildings c1600 in the Skelsmergh area near Kendal, Cumbria⁷. The tiebeam-and-full-principals truss braced with a collar, and usually supporting two pairs of side purlins is the most common regional roof type in North East England of the later sixteenth century and the seventeenth century⁸.

The crucial issue about Scarrow Hill has to be the survival of the complete roof and its origin. This is particularly so considering its dendrochronology date in conjunction with relatively thin walls for 1601, which is considered to be in the middle of the 'bastle building period'. If the roof came from elsewhere and was put on to an 18th century building there would be some evidence or sign of dismantling, replacement of some timbers, re-alignment of purlins, new peg holes, enlarged mortices or new trenches. There is no evidence of such at Scarrow Hill. Everything in the roof appears untouched and whole and is in remarkably good condition. The only exception is the tie-beams which have been hacked about. The tie-beams have been incorporated within internal walls, probably from the Victorian era when the house was divided into two cottages, through to 1981 when these internal walls were removed. As a result of these changes the tie-beams are not in the same excellent condition as the remainder of the roof. Most of their bark has been removed, but enough remains to date them to 1601.

The evidence, both dendro, extant and archive is therefore overwhelming in suggesting that the phase 1 building at Scarrow Hill was erected in 1601.

In the immediate vicinity of Scarrow Hill are three other stone buildings also mentioned in the Gilsland Survey of 1603 and all three are also still extant. The survival of four stone buildings from this period, in close proximity, is unusual. Their similarities and differences, together with their possible uses is of fundamental importance to the study of vernacular architecture locally. In 1601 Gregory Hall of Scarrow Hill would have known the nearby buildings well and this is likely to have influenced his decisions regarding the size, shape, construction and use of the building he was to erect.

Naworth Stonehouse stands on the eastern edge of Naworth East Park in an elevated position (NY571626). This building has walls of 1.2m in thickness and was established as a bastle by Ramm et al⁹. A bastle is a two-story, fortified farmhouse with living accommodation on the first floor and an area where animals could be kept downstairs at times of raids or inclement weather. They came into being as a result of the lawlessness and instability in the border area prior to the Union of the Crowns in 1603. The building known as Naworth Stonehouse is of a higher quality than an ordinary bastle and has some windows to the ground floor. The main living accommodation was clearly on the first floor as evidenced by two first floor fireplaces and first floor windows. The dimensions measure 16.4 metres by 7.1 metres¹⁰. The survival of part of the original roof shows that the building never comprised more than two story's. The roof, now completely fallen, is according to Ramm et al 'quite different from the remains of bastle roofs described and has king-post trusses, with the principal rafters rising from the tie-beams'. The 1603 Gilsland Survey records this property as 'The Rowe Denton Mill Anthonie Robinson a tenemt voc Calgarthhill and ground inclosed adjoyninge more easte at the southeaste corner of the Parke: by the demeanes of the maner in part easte: buttinge south upon the common'. It is of note that this property is described as a tenement and no mention is made of it being a stonehouse. Nevertheless this building has been established as a bastle as mentioned previously. The walling is good squared and coursed rubble and looks identical to the masonry at Scarrow Hill.

Denton Foot (NY572624) stands in a hollow near the Castle Beck on the eastern edge of Naworth Park. Now modernised and used as a dwelling, it is built of rough random rubble with ashlar dressings⁹. The main body of the farmhouse is formed by a rectangular structure 12.8 metres by 7.3 metres externally over walls 1.2 metres thick¹¹. The Gilsland Survey records that Christopher Bell had a tenement with 26 acres of enclosed ground here, but does not say that the tenement was a stonehouse. The datestone (CB 1594) has been used by Peter Ryder¹² as dating evidence for the building of bastles. However, Curwen¹³ regarded the dated lintel of 1594 as the rebuilding by Christopher Bell.

Denton Mill (NY572623) has thinner walls than the previous two buildings. As its name suggests this building was built as a mill, but again as a two story building. Of the existing range of buildings, the earliest element was a simple rectangular two-story building measuring c.11.5 metres by 5.80 metres¹⁴. These dimensions are very similar to those of Scarrow Hill which measures c.12.0 metres by 5.80 metres. The earliest reference to a mill on this site appears in Robinson and Perriam¹⁵, which states that in 1598 one 'Lancelot Carleton has Denton Hall and Mill'. Denton Mill is again mentioned in the 1603 Gilsland Survey immediately following Christopher Bell (Denton Foot). 'the lord hath a watermill more south at the beckside called Denton Mill'. Further mentions of Denton Mill can be found in the Naworth Household Accounts in 1611-1612, 1621¹⁶ and 1648¹⁷. According to the building survey¹⁴ there is no evidence for the former existence of any demolished structures within the vicinity of the present mill buildings, indeed, the mill occupies the best natural site at the base of the steep hillside before the slope levels out.

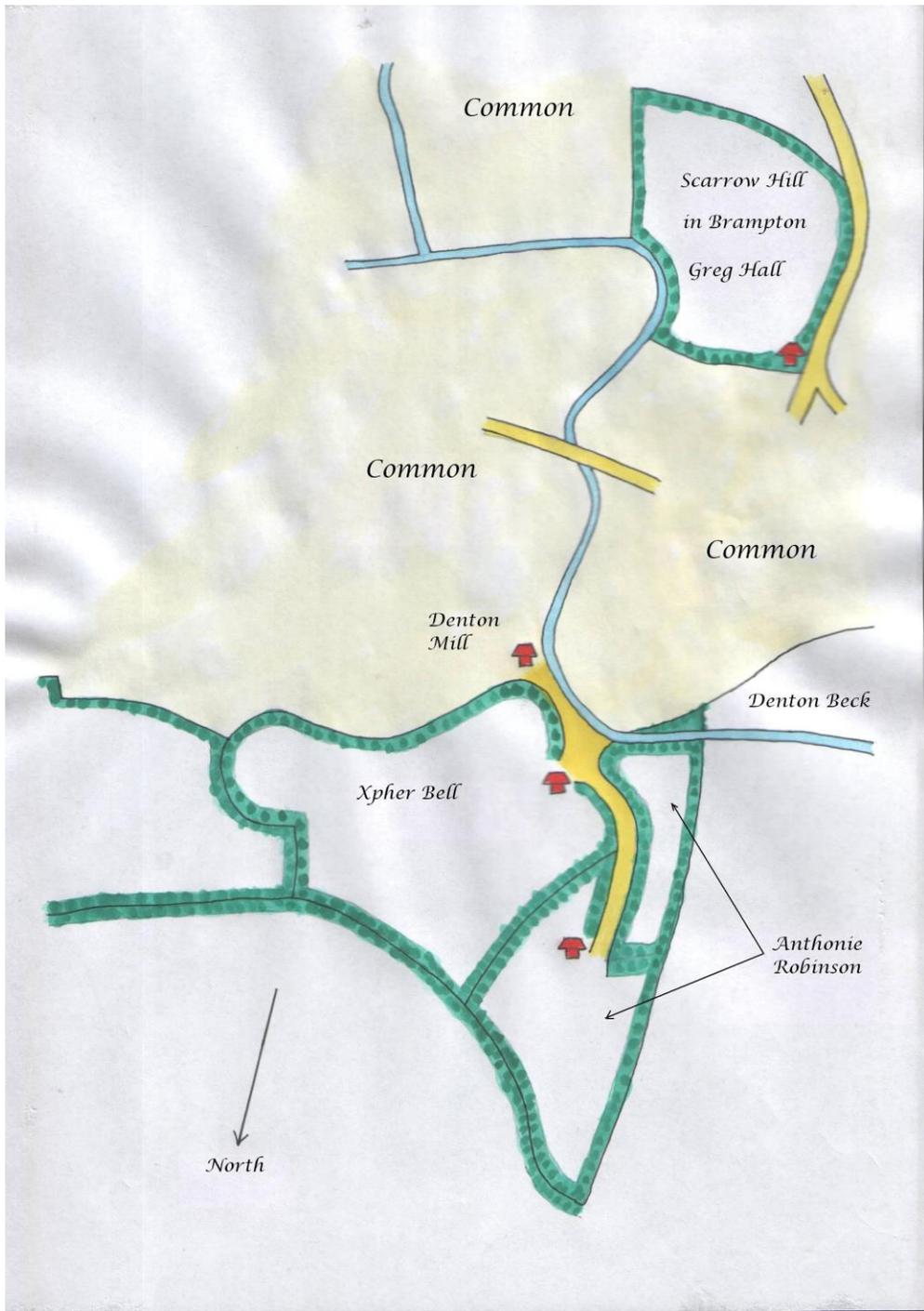


Figure 4 Copy Map based on the 1603 Gilsland Survey

A copy of the 1603 Gilsland Survey Map¹⁸ for the area under discussion, is shown in figure 4. Anthonie Robinson's tenement called Calgarthill (now ruined and known as Naworth Stonehouse), Christopher Bell's tenement (now known as Denton Foot) and Denton Mill are clearly shown within Nether Denton Parish. Gregory Hall's tenement is shown at Scarrow Hill and is marked as in Brampton. The four buildings shown on the 1603 map all correlate to the buildings marked at the same locations on modern day Ordnance Survey Maps.

Evidence suggests that the most likely purpose for Scarrow Hill was as a blacksmith's forge and house. A blacksmith's hearth on the ground floor at the west end would be the most likely plan, with living accommodation above. The flue is a four foot wide recessed slot, 14 inches deep (Figure 3). The recessed slot runs straight from ground floor to roof height. This slot is integral to the original four walls, although the smoke hood has long since been removed. The concept of Scarrow Hill as a multipurpose building would be in keeping with the local tradition. The earliest reference to a blacksmiths at Scarrow Hill is in the will and inventory of Gregory Hall¹⁹ in 1607. This inventory lists 'tools of smith craft' and there is evidence of trade with Hexham and Newcastle in that debts are owed to Thomas Clowsson of Newcastle and Anthonie Parker of Hexham. The Naworth Household Accounts are again useful in that in 1650 Thoms Hall, Brampton is recorded as paying £1 10s. in part of his fines for Scarrhill²⁰. Tom Hall is also paid in the same year 10s. for 'mendinge the Boerers and wimbles', 4s. 2d. for 'steeleinge the Boerors' tooles', 6s. 10d. for 'steeleinge the Chisells', 3s. for 'mendinge hacks, picks'²¹, 1s. 10d. for 'shooeinge horses'²² and 8s. 6d. 'for fire Iron and other work'²³.

Again in 1658 Tom Hall is paid 8s. 4d. for 'worke to the carts' and 4s. 8d. for 'shooeing of carthorses'²⁴. Interestingly, in 1648 Tom Hall's wife is paid 9s. 8d. 'for a Rundlett of Ale I had wch my master desired to paye for, and for other Ale sent my master and Lady'²⁵. In the 18th century Scarrow Hill is named as an Inn or Alehouse on several Alehouse Recognizance Registers²⁶.

In the will and inventory of Thomas Hall 1664 everything is left to Thomas' brother William Hall²⁷. In 1675 there is a Grant of Messuage of Scarrow Hill²⁸ to Henry Farlam, in which William Hall is described as a blacksmith of Scarrow Hill.

Only one year of Hearth Tax records have survived for Brampton Parish. The year that survives is 1664 and Thomas Hall is listed as having only one hearth²⁹. An external forge in a separate building would have been required to pay hearth tax for a second hearth and clearly only one hearth tax was paid at Scarrow Hill. Indeed, only furnaces were exempt Hearth Tax, but not forges³⁰. Smith' forges and bakers' ovens were liable³¹. Therefore as Scarrow Hill only had one hearth this is likely to be within the building and not a separate building as with a more modern forge. The recess for the chimney would have accommodated a forge at ground floor level. There would have been a smokehood and living accommodation on the upper floor. The one hearth on the ground floor acting as a forge would have kept the whole house warm and the hearth could also be used for cooking and brewing of ale if necessary.

In conclusion, the evidence suggests that Scarrow Hill was built in 1601 as a multi - purpose building. A forge on the ground floor and living accommodation above. The building would have been within the local vernacular architecture tradition of multipurpose buildings such as bastle houses and watermills. The lack of any evidence of fortification at both Scarrow Hill and Denton Mill is unusual given their antiquity and locality. This would suggest that the bastle houses in the Naworth area date from a period earlier than c.1600. New buildings c.1600 were clearly not bastles and therefore suggest a level of stability and peace without any great risk of border reiving. By 1600 the reiver's world was fading. Elizabeth 1 was well into her 60's and it had been understood for some time that James of Scotland would succeed as king of a united Britain. According to Moffat³² this meant no border between separate jurisdictions, no ability to play off one sovereign and their representatives against another, and the more astute of the heidesmen began to turn their minds to the future. Perhaps Gregory Hall was looking to the future when he built Scarrow Hill in 1601.

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