

Whitrigg, Field Broughton: Preparing a House History



Sketch by Douglas McCleery

As a boy, I was always fascinated with buildings and architecture but chose law as a career. However, having purchased an old property in 1976 and having been told by a friend, the late Arthur Frearson (an architect who lived nearby), that it dated from the mid-1700s, I was eager to pursue enquiries as soon as time permitted.

I was too busy with family and work for very many years and the old house needed new wiring, plumbing, windows, staircase, kitchen, bathroom, and garage. Traces of a spiral staircase were found when the staircase was being removed.

It was in the 1980s that I bought a book "How old is Your House ?" and from then I have been keen to explore the history of our home. To me the fascination is the building and not really the previous owners. I know others concentrate on the history of the former owners.



The following pointers might help anyone else pursue a similar interest in their own or a neighbouring house.

- I began to look at books on vernacular buildings and to identify interesting features of my house. Books by R. W. Brunskill, especially his book “Traditional Buildings of Cumbria”, are particularly helpful.
- I looked at the title deeds to discover when the house was built and who had previously owned it. To my disappointment, the deeds only showed owners from 1928 when the house was sold from the Hibbert Estate. I was not able to discover when the house was built.
- I had been given a copy of the sale particulars of 1928 by the lady from whom we bought the house and that was of great interest but did not enlarge my knowledge of the origins of the house.
- I talked to neighbours but, even though one of our neighbours had lived next door all his life and was in his 90s, he could, of course, only tell me of what he knew.
- I went to the local Archive Offices in Kendal and Barrow and found my house on old maps going back to about 1800. That was exciting ! In doing so I also discovered much of interest about the village and locality. The people at the Archive Offices are most

helpful and nobody should be nervous of going there and asking the most basic questions. A helpful response will always be received.

- I also looked at census records but these only go back to 1841 and it proved impossible to identify the house. It might not have had a name in its early days, being simply “The house of Mr & Mrs” . Often only farms and large houses had names.
- My wife and I attended a course in 2003 on “Traditional Lake District Buildings” given by Andy Lowe, who has spoken to our Society several times, and we were confident by then that the house showed features appropriate to one built in the 1700s. I believe Andy still gives those courses now
- In 2013 I took a course on “Recording Vernacular Buildings” and joined the Cumbria Vernacular Buildings Group on its formation later that year. We study building features and the recording of plans of buildings throughout the County. Attending those monthly meetings and getting to know others with similar interests helped tremendously.
- I also took photographs of the various features of our house (including those of quite recent origin - even those we had added - as all information will be of great use and interest in the future) and I incorporated those into a narrative recording what I had discovered. In putting that together I was amazed how much I had found out. I was able to speculate how the house developed into its present form as, of course, all occupiers make changes and it is often difficult to speculate when changes took place.
- I am now able to offer the opinion that part of the house very much pre-dates the rest, that an extension was added at the back and that it is more than likely that the original opinion of my friend Arthur was correct ! I always knew it would be. What he knew from his studies I have now come to accept but in doing so I have enjoyed the reading and research I have undertaken to date and my knowledge will continue to grow as I learn more about house history: so my study is still ongoing !

Stuart W. Harling September, 2017