



## HOLYMIRE, KNARESDALE WITH KIRKHAUGH, TYNEDALE, NORTHUMBERLAND NY84344102

**A survey by North Pennines AONB Partnership *Altogether Archaeology* volunteers  
directed by Martin Roberts.**

### INTRODUCTION

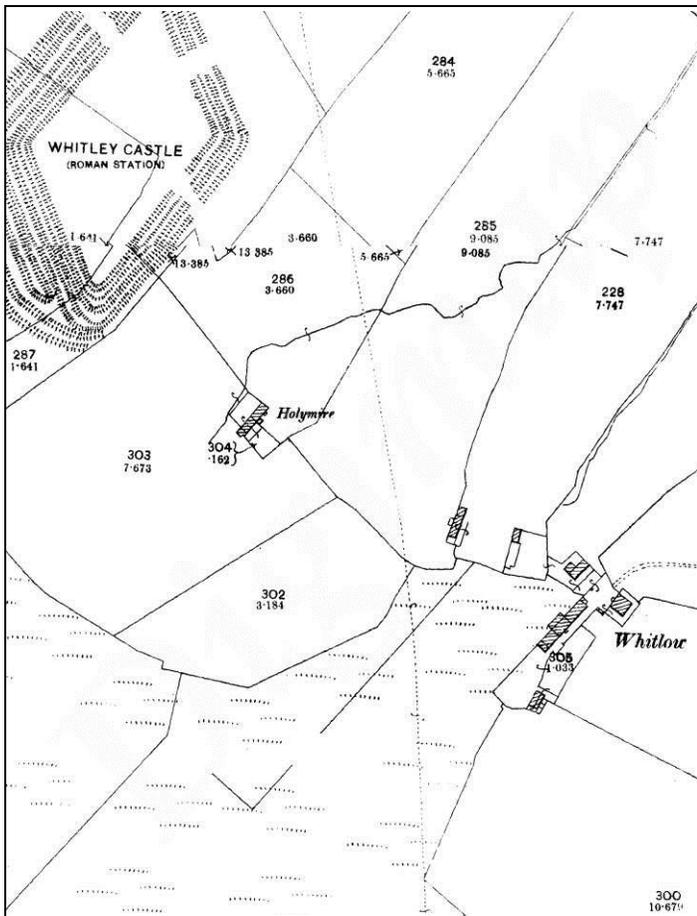
The small linear farmstead at Holymire stands at approximately 315m OD, on the SE facing slopes below Whitley Castle Roman fort. It was originally the highest of four dwellings, each incorporating a bastle, that lay, broadly parallel to each other, descending the slopes between the fort and the Gilderdale Burn. The Burn runs SW-NE to pass beneath the Alston - Slaggyford road before joining the River South Tyne.<sup>1</sup> The range has a late sixteenth - early seventeenth century bastle to the west and a longer, house-beside-byre farm unit to the east, probably of late eighteenth to early nineteenth century date. A gable lean-to was added to the end of the bastle in the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century the open fold yard that lay to the north was replaced with an enclosed cattle shed. The bastle, store and shed are roofed, the house, byre and hayloft, roofless and internally gutted.



*Holymire from the south-east*

## HISTORY

No documentary research was required in the preparation of this initial report. Such work should be undertaken ahead of any substantial changes to the building to inform its conservation and possible conversion.



*Second edition OS (c.1897) showing the four farmsteads of Holymire and Whitlow lying south-east of the impressive earthworks of Whitley Castle Roman fort.*



*Photograph of the south-east (front) face of the Holymire bastle taken by Peter Ryder in 1994.*

## DESCRIPTION

The farmstead is roughly facing down the slope to the SE, but for the purposes of the report the orientation shall be simplified along the cardinal points, i.e. the NE facing gable called 'east', the SE facing elevation, 'south' and so on. The farmstead comprises a two-storey *bastle* measuring 10.0 x 5.8m externally, with a two-storey house, byre and hayloft added to its east gable, measuring 12.2 x 6.1m externally. The western lean-to measures 5.1 x 5.8m and the cattle shed to the rear is 23.6 x 8.3m. The traditional range is constructed of sandstone rubble of varying coursing patterns, the rear shed has a sandstone north wall and concrete block gable ends. The *bastle*, small store and shed are roofed in corrugated iron, the house and byre, once stone slated are now roofless and most of its roof structure has collapsed. The buildings will be described externally, then internally.

## EXTERIOR

### South elevation

The small western *store*, of squared, almost regularly course rubble, capped with a concrete coping, has a single door with iron lintel and a small window with thin timber lintel. It is worth noting now that the absence in this building of decently sized stone lintels over openings, so much a feature of North Pennines vernacular is unusual, and presumably a reflection of the geology of the surrounding area. The store abuts the earlier *bastle*, accommodating the offsets of the *bastle's* west gable.

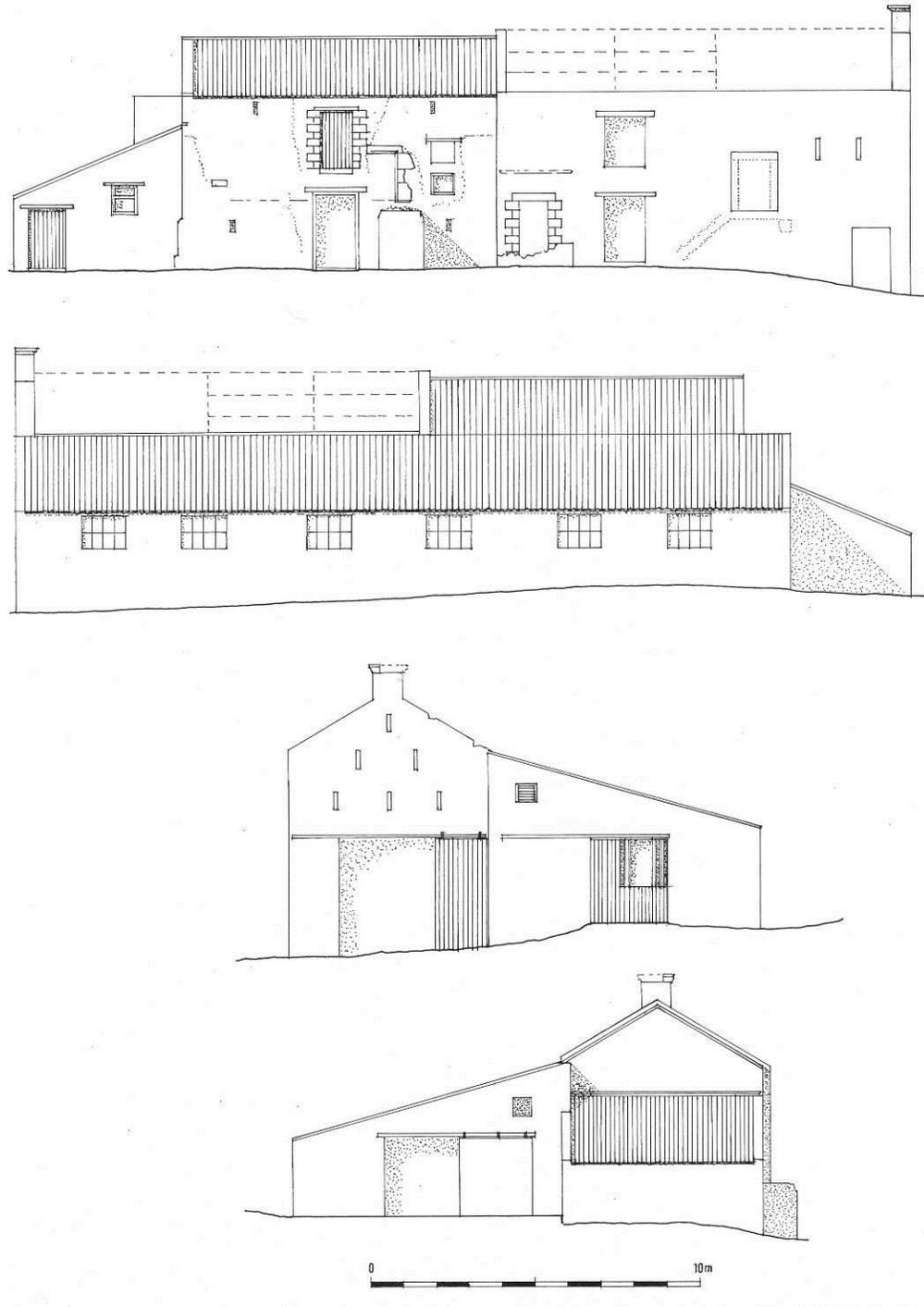
The *bastle* elevation has a number of significant features within it. The original stonework can be identified by its regular coursing of roughly squared rubble stone. This contrasts with the other areas on this elevation of random rubble, only occasionally brought to courses. These more poorly constructed areas of walling identify the raising of the *bastle*, by approximately 1.2m, and a substantial area of rebuilding in the middle of the building. At ground level there is, from the west, an original byre vent, then a relatively modern door opening, a substantial block of masonry projecting out from the building, and another original byre vent. At first floor level is a pitching eye opening edged in concrete block similar to those used in the rear shed. Alongside and set below it to the east is the original first floor door opening to the *bastle*, at least its lintel and right (eastern) jamb survives, with substantial dressed stonework with a thin chamfer. Some of the larger stone jambs have pecked chisel marks which suggest to Paul Frodsham they may have come from the Roman fort. The left jamb of this doorway was destroyed when the pitching eye was inserted. The projecting block of masonry below the original doorway at first suggest truncated stone steps, but it does not lie directly beneath this doorway but slightly to the east. As discussed later, it is probably a buttress to resist serious movement in this south wall. Beside the original doorway is a small window with very thin stone lintel and directly above it a blocked opening with a stone slate dripstone that may also originally have served as its lintel. Both these openings appear to be secondary features. At the very top of the wall, in the added masonry, are two small vents.

The south elevation of the *house, byre and hayloft* is set about 300mm forward of the *bastle* wall, and slightly overlaps its gable. It is finely constructed in regularly squared and coursed sandstone, neatly scalped and dressed, in almost flint-like fashion. The entrance doorway to the house is dressed with alternating ashlar blocks tooled and margined with the tooling pattern especially well done on the lintel. This doorway was protected for much of its life by an added porch, extant in 1994, when Peter Ryder recorded the ground floor of the *bastle*<sup>2</sup> (see photo on page 2, above<sup>3</sup>), but now only the eastern corner is partially standing. To the east are two large sash window openings, the ground floor blocked, the first floor still open. They have thin rubble lintels that match the surface dressings of the main wall and course in with it, so form part of the original building. The lower opening shows the technique of laying long stones in the coursing immediately above the lintel, effectively as corbels to carry a still longer stone in the course above, all to spread the loading above around the window rather than onto its vulnerably thin lintel. Further east is a wide blocked opening mid-height in the wall, with evidence, especially in late afternoon raking light, of the position of stone steps in the wall up to it (now infilled with rubble) and a socket for a stone lintel (also filled in) for the under steps store. This would have been the opening into the hayloft over the byre. The absence of any dressings and the considerable width of this opening strongly suggest that when it was filled-in the large monolithic stone head, jambs and threshold (typical of the North Pennines) were all removed for reuse elsewhere on the farm.<sup>4</sup> At the

end of the elevation is a blocked doorway to the byre close to the gable, and high in the wall above two ventilation slits to the hay loft, all original features.

### East elevation

The east gable of the hayloft and byre has a large twentieth century vehicular opening in it, with three tiers of vents above to the hay loft. Above that, crowning the gable is a dressed stone chimney stack, quite typical of many on neighbouring farms, nothing unusual one might think, apart from the fact that there appears to be no



*External elevations (from the top), south, north, west and east*

flue or fireplace beneath, not now nor ever. Indeed the top vent is situated approximately 300mm below the stack. The stack is unstable, has lost some of its ashlar masonry and is on the point of collapse. The side wall of the cattle shed is built of concrete block with a large vehicular opening and small window in it, with a steep concrete ramp as an apron.

### **North elevation**

The north elevation of the **cattle shed** has six bays of stonework, each with a metal window within it, all reflecting the six-bay steel roof structure inside, covered with corrugated iron sheeting. Beyond, the fragments of the house-byre roof structure remain, evidently once covered in stone slate, and the corrugated iron roofing covering the bastle.



*General view from the west*

### **East elevation**

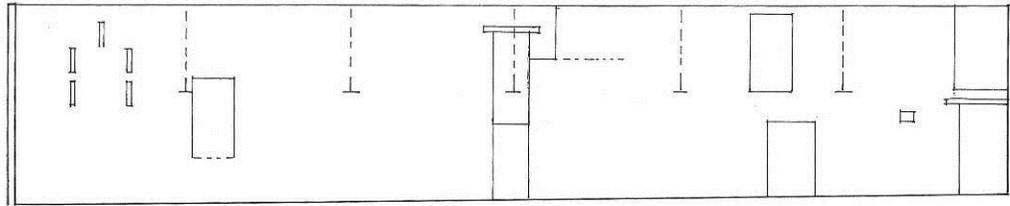
The east gable of the cattle shed is similar to that at the west end, with blockwork walls, small window and a large opening. Its upper walls overlap and sit on top of the east wall of the stone store, whose south wall is plain rubble without features.

### **Internal (north) elevation of the traditional range**

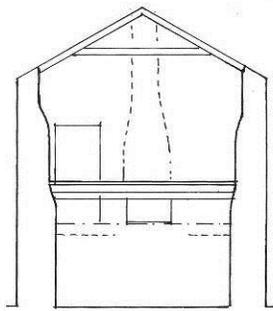
The north masonry wall of the main range is visible from inside the cattle shed. The elevation is partially obscured by cattle stalls, farming equipment, the steelwork of the shed's roof structure and poor light, all of which made surveying difficult, however a number of features are still visible. Starting at the western (*bastle*) end, there is a doorway into the shed abutting the bastle gable. Further east there is an inserted ground floor doorway into the bastle. Above is a blocked doorway and just under the eaves to the east is a vent.

At the junction with the later house, byre and hayloft, the walling construction is instructive, indicating the sequence of building. First comes the bastle to the right (west), then the house and byre abuts it and rises above it, building its gable off the bastle's gable. Then still later, the bastle is raised by about 1.2m to approximately the

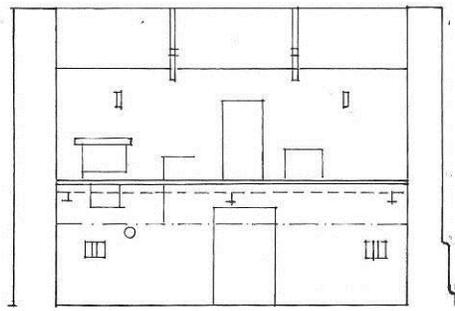
same height as the house and byre. Just beyond the bastle gable is a full height panel of concrete blockwork, appearing to be two blocked openings above one another, possible a window above a doorway? The right jamb of both openings is formed by the end of the bastle. The left jamb of the upper opening has large stonework, suggesting the opening is primary, while the left jamb of the lower opening is less convincingly original.



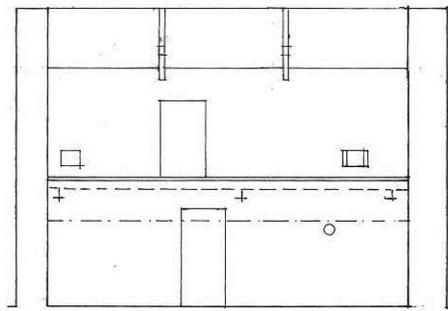
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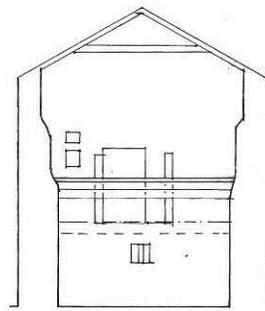
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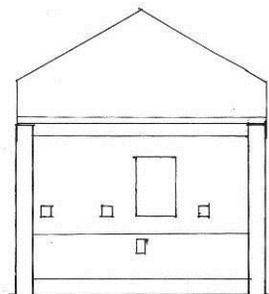
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D



E



F



*Internal elevations: North wall (A), Bastle interior – east, south, north and west (B-E), exterior west wall (F)*

The remaining length of the house is featureless, until the byre/hay loft is reached. Here there is a blocked door opening mid-wall, though only one of its jambs is clearly visible, situated opposite the blocked opening in the east wall, so presumably a pitching eye. Alongside, to the east, are five blocked vents to the hay loft. It should be noted that unlike the neatly coursed masonry of the front (south) wall, this wall is built of roughly coursed rubble stonework.



*Blocked first floor doorway to bastle (left). House doorway and ruined porch (right)*

## INTERIOR

The principal spaces described below are the small store, the two floors of the bastle and the gutted interior of the house, byre and hayloft. The cattle shed, briefly described above, has no internal features of significance, beyond an impressive depth of manure, which made surveying 'challenging'.

### **Small store**

The small store has plain stonework on three walls but it abuts the relatively unaltered west gable of the bastle, well-constructed in regularly coursed, squared rubble sandstone, with two offsets towards its base. There is a single vent in the middle of the lower courses of the gable. Above is a row of cut-off beam ends that must have supported a floor, accessible from the original first floor of the bastle next door, through a doorway cut into the gable wall, through the middle of the original fireplace.

### **Bastle**

The **ground floor** reveals evidence of features on both floors of the original bastle, as the current first floor of steel joists and modern timber, is now set approx 1.1m above the original floor level, which was quite low on the ground floor. The rubble walling is limewashed throughout, but with evidence of some plasterwork on some parts of the original first floor walls. This would have been a byre and in the middle of its north gable wall is the blocked splayed doorway of the original byre, substituted by a later opening cut through to the house alongside,

on the south. Above, in what would have been the first floor, is an inserted door opening on the west side and the remains of an inserted fireplace. On the south wall are two original vents and a stub of the original floor beam, an undressed tree trunk, matched by a stub in the north wall. An area of walling disturbance at the western end of this wall, at the same height, suggests a beam may have been slotted in here too. The central section of this wall with its modern opening has been largely rebuilt, so there is no evidence of further beam holes. However, one might conjecture, noting the known positions of beams, that a central beam crossed here making a four-bay floor structure. The west gable has a single central vent, and then above, the corbelled stonework that supports the jambs and hearth of the first floor fireplace, with the later doorway to the store cut into it. On the north wall is an inserted doorway and beam stub to the east. The first floor structure is softwood timber joists running east-west, supported on three steel joists.



*Ground floor of bastle; west wall showing byre vent, first floor fireplace and later opening cut through to store (left). North wall of bastle at east end showing later house built over gable end and later raising of bastle to same height (right)*

The **first floor** is reached via a ladder in the cattle shed, though an inserted doorway in the bastle's north wall. The first floor now represents the upper part of the first floor of the original thick walled bastle, later raised approximately 1.2m, its masonry walls battered back to make the wall thinner. The thicker bastle walls still have evidence of plasterwork while the later raised walling is plain rubble. Features of both periods are evident. In the north wall, in addition to the inserted doorway, are two small alcoves low down in the wall, presumably primary features of the bastle. In the east gable is an inserted doorway and the top of the inserted fireplace. In the south wall there is a new central door opening, with to the east, evidence of the blocked original doorway, and beyond a blocked window opening. In the rubble stonework west of the inserted opening there is a suggestion of a further blocked window opening, not evident on the exterior. In the centre of the west gable wall are the remains of the stone rubble jambs of the fireplace with inserted doorway to store, and beside it on the south side, two small alcoves, one above the other, probably salt boxes on the warm and dry gable wall. The roof structure over the bastle is now a later softwood construction of collared trusses, with no evidence of the original roof timber, which would almost certainly have been of oak.

### House, byre and hayloft

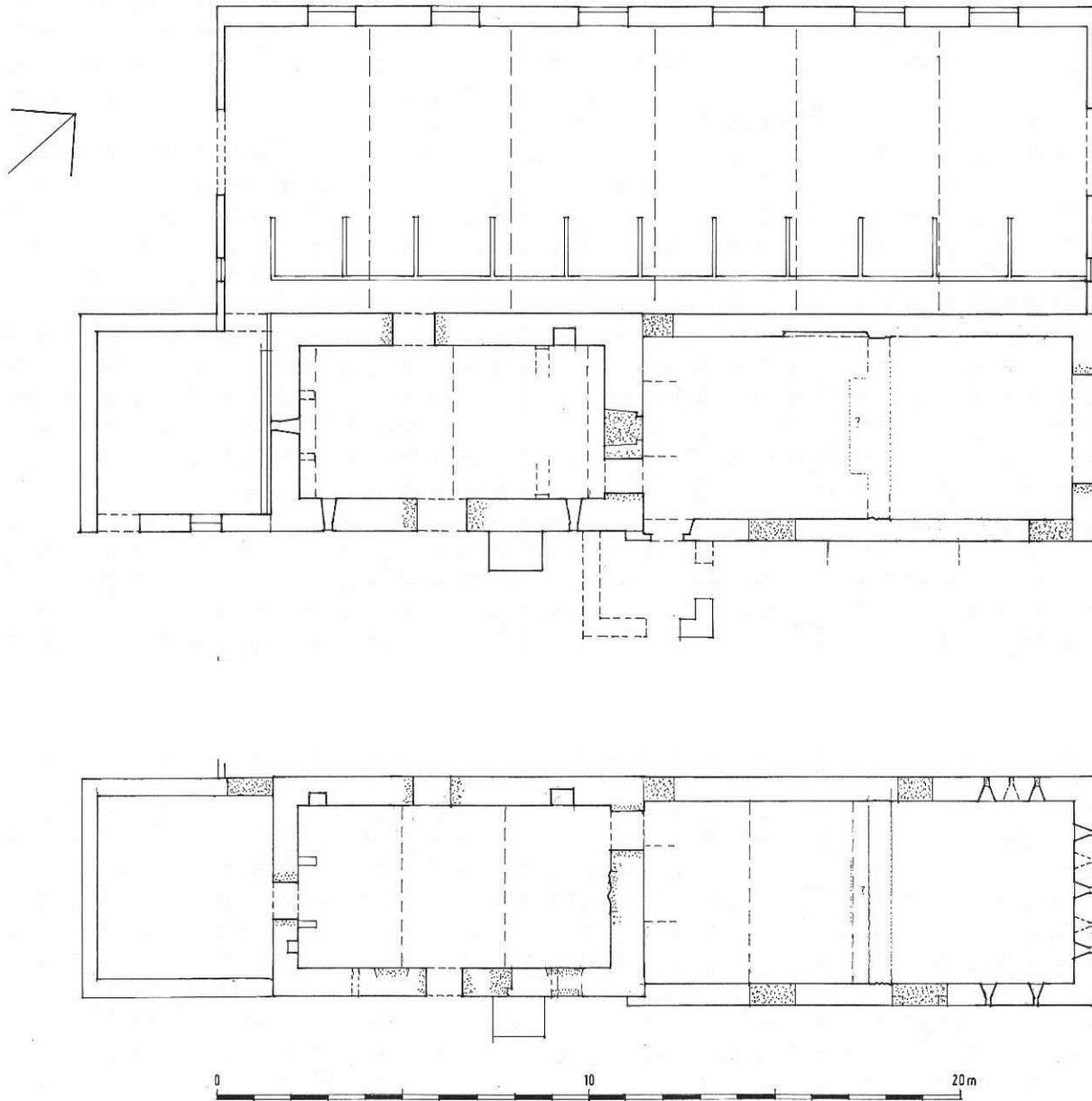
The interior of the house, byre and hayloft is now one large gutted space, filled with building debris and rusting farm machinery, and covered by the precarious and failing softwood trusses, purlins and rafters of its roof structure. Its gable end stack is set to fall. Consequently there was no physical access to the interior to survey it, and the description here, and subsequent interpretation of the spaces, is based on viewing the interior from the opening in the west gable.

On the interior of both walls there is a clear vertical band of smeared mortar which has been spread over the core of the removed cross wall that separated the house from the farm building though, on the north side at first floor level, the absence of exposed core indicates there was clearly an interconnecting door between house and hay-loft. In the ground floor house part of this *north wall*, the wall has been cut back by approx 100-150mm for a length of about 3m and, perhaps with the eye of faith, it is just possible to make out the line of a single flight staircase? This evidence must be set against the much clearer evidence on the *west gable* of the house of another steep single flight staircase, rising from the front door to a bedroom corridor at the rear of the house, with evidence of large walk-in cupboard in the space above the staircase/front lobby. This west gable also shows the interconnecting first floor door back into the bastle. In 1994, at the base of this west gable, now almost lost in vegetation and debris, Peter Ryder saw the chamfered squared-headed surround to the original byre doorway.<sup>5</sup> It still exists, just visible, but could not be closely inspected.



*House interior looking west (left). Hayloft vents in north wall (right)*

There are two blocked windows in the house, on the *south wall*, one on each floor. Moving into the space occupied by the byre and hay loft, the two first floor door openings, opposite each other on the north and south walls, are clearly visible. At the eastern end of the building, in the upper level of the hayloft the display of vents (six to the west, five to the north and two to the south) is impressive, especially their wide spays to the interior.



*Ground floor plan (top), first floor plan (bottom)*

## DISCUSSION

Little is currently known about the documentary history of Holymire and the tentative history of the building offered here may be enriched and modified by such research. This work should be undertaken before any substantial work of repair or modification is undertaken on the building, as it may highlight areas of significance in the fabric, as yet unappreciated.

In particular it is interesting to see a cluster of four bastles (Holymire and Whitlow I, II and III according to Peter Ryder's 1994-5 survey). What were the relationships between the occupiers, all members of one family perhaps?

It would also be good to know how the group developed. Was development gradual or in one specific period of particular threat.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE BUILDING

What is offered here is a probable sequence of building development at Holymire, of four main phases.

- 1 The building of the bastle – late sixteenth to early seventeenth century
- 2 The addition of the house, byre and hayloft to the east, with the construction of the western lean-to store as a possible minor part of this phase. Probably late eighteenth to early nineteenth century.
- 3 The raising of the bastle to match the height of the new house and byre, with the raising of its first floor to tie in with that of the house. This phase was certainly not contemporary with the new house, but sometime after. Say, provisionally, early-mid nineteenth century. There are also a number of changes to the bastle that are hard to date. Some may have precede Phase Two, some post-dated Phase Three. These changes may be covered by a date range as wide as mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century.
- 4 The final main building phase is the construction of the cattle shed and the changes made to the traditional buildings at the same time. This appears to be an early twentieth century phase.

### **Phase One: The bastle. Late sixteenth to early seventeenth century**

The bastle conforms to the usual Northumberland type, thick-walled with a gable end byre door and a first floor doorway to the living accommodation in the side wall. This latter doorway would have been reached by a ladder, withdrawn into the house in times of threat. There are three surviving byre vents. The line of the original first floor structure is determined by the surviving stubs of one of its main floor beams at the west end, and the suggestion of a beam slot for another at the eastern end. This floor may have been covered in timber boarding or even flagged in stone as in some of the Allendale examples. Turning to the evidence of the original first floor, although Peter Ryder suggests that the corbelled fireplace in the west gable is a later insertion, the stonework surrounding its corbels may be all part of the primary construction. The upper part of this fireplace is unfortunately missing so suggesting a definite date for it is impossible. The east gable fireplace is clearly an insertion to judge from its surrounding masonry, full of packing stones, but the date of insertion cannot be guessed. Some time, probably a long time after the bastle's construction, the front wall began to bow out. An attempt to stabilise it with a buttress (may be more?) was made, one of which survives, but the central portion of the bastle's south wall was largely rebuilt in rubble stonework. The final changes made to the bastle are discussed in Phase Three.

### **Phase Two: House, byre and hayloft. Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.**

The additions made to the east of the bastle conform in lots of ways to the development of farms, and miner-farmer small holdings in particular, that the North East Vernacular Architecture Group has seen in Weardale. Firstly, its relative position is familiar; the development is linear against the gable of the existing bastle, running along the contours of the sloping hillside.

The farming unit of a house and byre (possibly a stable) with hayloft above, can be seen on many North Pennines farms. Though the interior of this range has been gutted, its walls reveal a good deal of evidence of how it was arranged inside, though it should be repeated that close inspection was impossible because of the building's parlous condition.

The division between the domestic and agricultural halves of the building is clear as is the presence, originally, of a doorway link between their first floors (bedrooms to hayloft) on the east wall. The house was entered close to its western gable, probably into a single room, with the fireplace and cooking range in the (now missing) cross

wall between house and byre. There would probably have been a narrow staircase, partially set into the rear (north) wall rising to the first floor. It may be, however, that the very slight evidence for this staircase is a misreading of the stonework and that the very obvious line for a staircase on the west wall, immediately accessible on entry, is the original staircase line and not a later replacement. This would at least explain the purpose of the oddly located original window on the first floor of the north wall, hard up against the gable – it would have directly lit the staircase. This would leave the ground floor recess needing explanation. It could have been to gain valuable inches for a bed recess, but its position beside the fireplace makes this unlikely. More probable is that it was made to accommodate a particular piece of cherished family furniture, a dresser perhaps. Such structural modifications were made at Cleugh House, Wearhead, Co Durham where floor joists were part cut away to accommodate just such a dresser. <sup>6</sup>

The byre was certainly entered through a primary phase doorway at the eastern end of the east wall. Whether there were other openings in the east gable, now largely gone in a later alteration, is unknown, but unlikely. It is probably, however that there would be some vents here as there are none in the north or south walls.



*Bastle: first floor west gable showing top of fireplace, salt boxes and inserted doorway (left)  
 Bastle: exterior of west gable with fine squared coursed rubble with offsets, vent and inserted doorway (right)*

The hayloft above was entered by stone steps on the south wall through an impressive monolithic stone door surround. Whether this was a practical place to pitch-in hay is unlikely, as it was too high for a cart. More likely the rear (north) doorway was used being lower because the land is higher on the north side. It should be noted that the south wall of the farmstead is very much its best face, certainly as far as the house and byre are concerned. The combination here of regularly coursed squared rubble, the neatly tooled house doorway and, most probably, the hayloft's impressive door surround contrasts markedly with the north face of plainer detailing and rougher rubble. One could argue that considering the direction of the prevailing weather, the north wall (actually facing north-west) should be the better constructed wall, but even in the deepest North

Pennines, where the farm is almost certainly approached from the south east, considerations of aesthetics and may be personal vanities, still trump more practical considerations.

The construction of the house and byre led to new openings on both the ground and first floors back into the bastle. The old byre entry was now blocked by the new stairs so a new opening was constructed , one at the foot of the staircase, with another off the top landing. The first floor opening it should be stressed, related to the original lower first floor level in the bastle.

**Phase Three: Raising of the bastle. Mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century.**

At some time after the completion of the house and byre, the old bastle was raised to the level of the new building, adding about 1.2m to its wall tops. The walls were tapered back on its long sides from about 850mm thick to about 600mm. The absence of plaster on the raised walls, new door openings on ground and first floor on the north side, and the introduction of high level vents all suggest the upper floor ceased its residential use and was used as another hayloft. At the same time, or later, a west end lean-to store was built with a first floor platform accessed through a new doorway cut through the redundant fireplace.



*Phase Four changes to traditional range.  
New openings in east gable of former byre and hayloft (left) and bastle south wall ((right)*

**Phase Four: Cattle shed and accompanying alterations. Early twentieth century.**

With the construction of the large blockwork and steel roof trussed cattle shed on the north side of the farmstead, probably in the first half of the twentieth century, major changes were also carried out to the existing buildings. The bastle's first floor was raised with a new construction of steel and softwood. New door openings were made in the centre of the bastle's south wall where a wider ground floor byre opening was inserted with a slightly narrower pitching eye above.

It is possible that this major work extended to the final abandonment of the Holymire as a dwelling and its sole use as farm buildings. The gutting of the whole house, byre and hayloft end of the building may have taken place at this time, as the cross wall removal here is not due to casual decay and collapse, but a deliberate operation, complete with tidy rendering of the exposed core walling, probably to create a large single volume. A large vehicular opening was added in the north gable at this time.

The removal of the internal walls and especially floors would have rendered this end even more vulnerable to structural movement. Despite these works, nothing collapsed the walls remained upright. However abandonment of the house and byre occurred either through the collapse of part of its roof structure or a deliberate act of stripping off its stone slate roof, with some of its roof trusses later collapsing.

## SURVEY LIMITATIONS

It is worth mentioning in this report that the survey was undertaken in difficult conditions with a volunteer survey team of 19 people, most of whom had never undertaken a building recording exercise before. The inaccessibility of the house and byre interior, due to its parlous structural condition and building debris, has already been mentioned. So too has the difficult conditions in the cattle shed where deep manure, cattle pens, farm equipment and a generally dark interior, made surveying very hard. Survey sheets generally recorded dimensions accurately and the one or two rogue measurements were corrected by other survey work. The survey team is to be congratulated in completing the whole survey, capable of later drawing-up without revisits, and all without mishap.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Holymire was surveyed on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2014. The survey team of 19 was drawn from the Altogether Archaeology volunteers of the North Pennines AONB. The team members were Tony Metcalfe, Barbara Metcalfe, Roy Lawson, Liz Ryan, Jean Warnes, James Pease, Ian Reedman, Richard Wilson, Hils Hawkins, Joan Raine, Freda Lodge, Jackie Snow, Cameron Bennison, Mike Powell, Ruth Ansell Davies, John Henderson, Gail Hildreth, Alex Jackson and Liz Kerry. The group were supported by the AONB archaeologist, Paul Frodsham and the report author, Martin Roberts. Thanks to owner Elaine Edgar for allowing access.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Ryder, *Towers and Bastles in Northumberland: A survey in 1994-5. Part IV Tynedale District, Vol2 Haltwhistle to Whittington Parishes*, p. 118, 125-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Photo obtained from Keys to the Past. Ref 5940. [www.keystothepast.info/Pages/pgDetail.aspx?PRN=N5940](http://www.keystothepast.info/Pages/pgDetail.aspx?PRN=N5940)

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Richard Wilson for this observation

<sup>5</sup> *Op cit.* Ryder

<sup>6</sup> NEVAG Buildings Studies, Vol 2 (forthcoming)