

Widewath and its Buildings

Bampton and District Local History Society made a visit to Widewath farm in May 2013 as part of an exploration of the settlement once based in that area. The farmhouse is just inside the parish of Askham close to the village of Helton (see Figure 1). Some 300 meters to the south of the farmhouse and alongside Heltondale Beck, is a group of buildings, now ruined, that together with the farmhouse formed the settlement of Widewath. At this point the beck forms the boundary between the parishes of Askham and Bampton and so the settlement straddles the two parishes.

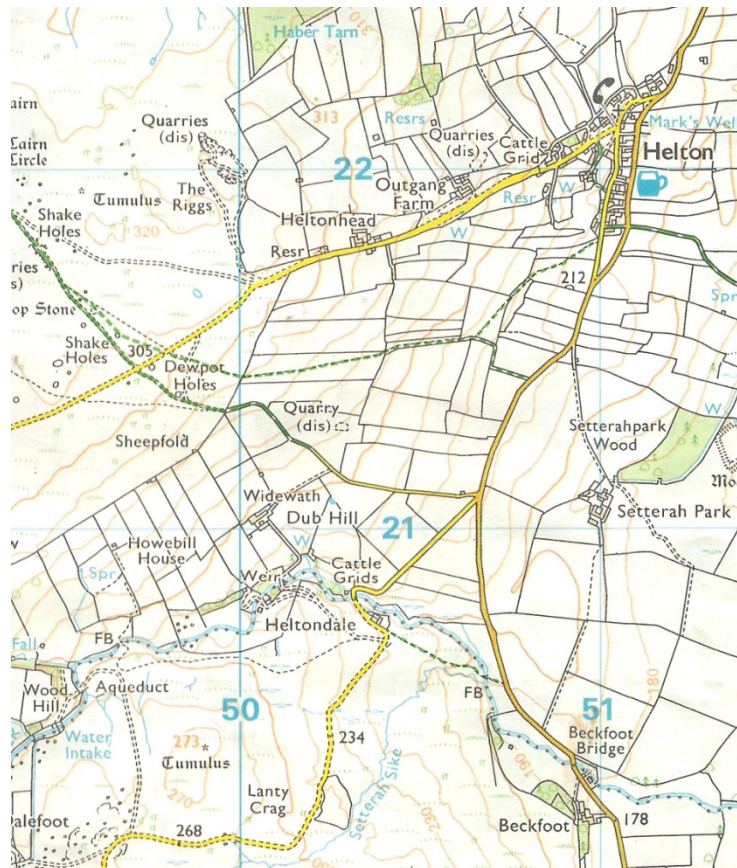


Figure 1. Location of Widewath

About 300 meters downstream from these ruined buildings and south east of the farm are the remains of Widewath Mill (grid reference NY50302085) that has recently been renovated.

The name Widewath derives from Old Norse and means a ford where willows grow.¹ At each of two packhorse bridges over the beck there is evidence of a ford.

Widewath farm is a distinguished building (see Figure 2a) described by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England² as:

¹ Diana Whaley. *A Dictionary of Lake District Place Names* (English Place Names Society,



Figure 2. Widewath Farm: (a) general view, (b) porch with date stone

‘Widewath, house 1,020 yards W. of [Setterah Park], was extended to the E and the porch added in 1674. The porch has rusticated angles and a gable enclosing an enriched panel with the initials R.M. (for Mounsey). The N.W. doorway has a triangular arch in a square head. The barn adjoining the house is of c. 1700’.

There is now a range of modern farm buildings adjacent to the farmhouse and barn.

Widewath appears to have been a significant settlement at the beginning of the 17th century but, apart from the present farm buildings, the significance and purpose of the other ruined buildings is uncertain. Table 1 attempts to record the various descriptions that have been used over time for the different buildings. The location of buildings A to D is shown on Figure 4.

The Bampton tithe map of 1836 (Figure 3: note the north direction in this map) does not show the present farmhouse but three other buildings are indicated, only one of which (Widewath House) is named. The 25 inch to the mile second edition ordnance survey map of 1898 shows all four buildings more clearly (Figure 4) and are here marked A to D, the latter being Widewath farmhouse but named Widewath on the map. The other three buildings are un-named although Widewath Mill is clearly indicated as being a corn mill at this date.

More clues are provided by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments in Westmorland report in 1936. Building A, here named as ‘Old Widewath’, is described in more detail:

‘Old Widewath, house 2^{1/4} m N.W. of the church [Bampton Parish Church], contains some original moulded ceiling-beams, a fireplace with a corbelled head and a panelled cupboard of c. 1700. A doorway is dated 1727. Condition – Bad’

² *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Westmorland* (Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1936)

Source	Date	Building A	Building B	Building C	Building D
Grid reference		NY50082079		NY50022082	NY50052101
<i>Parish</i>		<i>Bampton</i>	<i>Bampton</i>	<i>Askham</i>	<i>Askham</i>
Bampton Tithe Map	1836	Un-named	Un-named	Widewath House	Not shown (Askham)
OS 25"	1898	Un-named	Un-named	Un-named	Widewath
Royal Commission Historic Monuments	1936	Old Widewath ("House, 2.25 miles NW of Bampton Church")	Barn of Old Widewath	Barn ("200 yards south of Widewath")	Widewath ("1,020 yards west of Setterah Park")
N. Pennine Archaeology ³	2009	Building 1, dwelling	Building 2, barn	Old Widewath?	Widewath Farm
Current conclusions	2013	House at Old Widewath	Barn at Old Widewath	Widewath House, latterly a barn, now demolished	Widewath Farm

Table 1. The buildings of Widewath

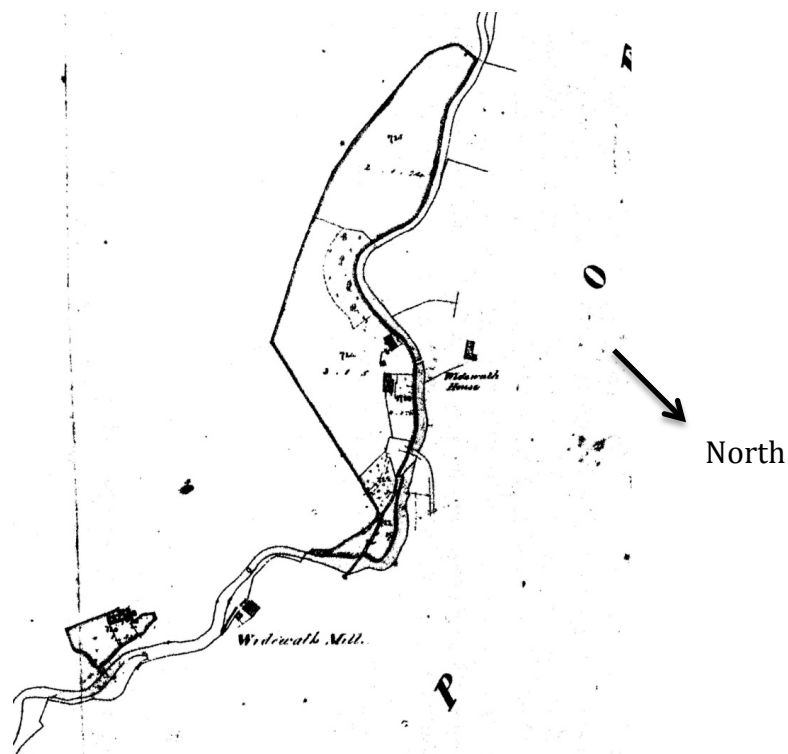


Figure 3. Portion of the Bampton Tithe map (1836)

³ Private Archaeology Report (2009)

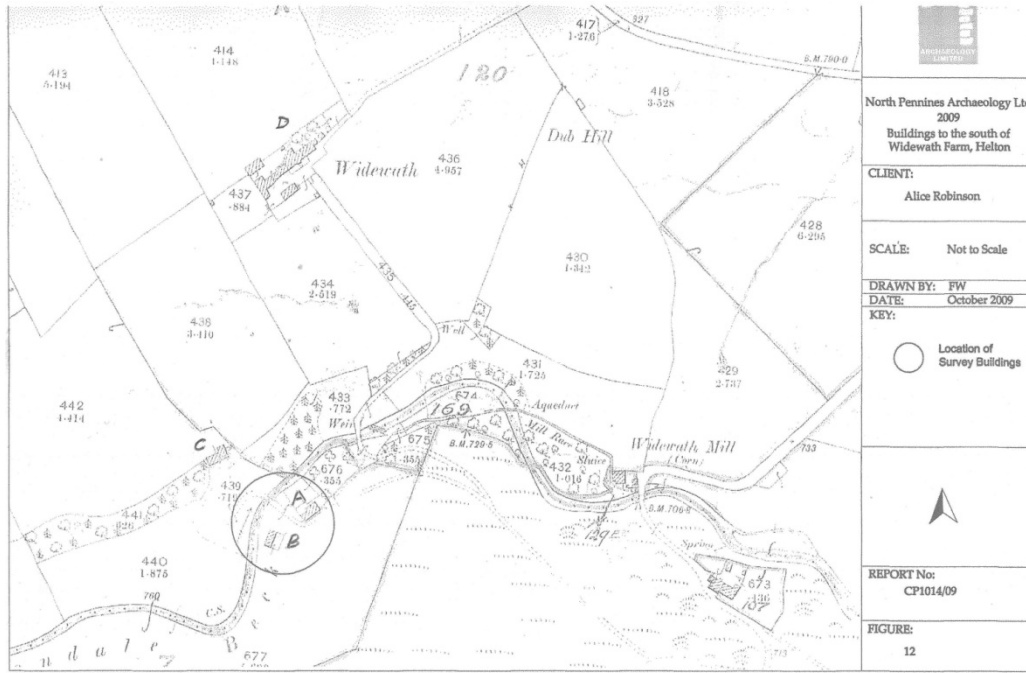


Figure 12 : Second Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1898 (25" to 1 mile scale)

Figure 4. Extract from 25 inch to the mile second edition ordnance survey map (1898)

The record card for 'Old Widewath' (Figure 5) identifies it as being a two storey building made of 'local stone rubble, rough cast or plastered' with a slate roof and being 'of early to mid seventeenth century date'. A floor plan is also given. Today the building is in a ruinous state with little still standing (Figure 6). The remains of a garden attached to the house can still be seen with evidence of fruit trees and soft fruit bushes.

B.

RECORD CARD FOR SECULAR MONUMENTS.

(N.B.—Detail of special interest is to be entered here, but described fully on a separate card.)

1. Name and situation of Monument (with owner's Name and Address). *Old Widewath. 2 1/4 miles N.W. of the Church, on S. side of Heltondale Beck*

2. General appearance: (a) No. of storeys. *Two*
 (b) Building materials. *Local stone rubble, rough cast or plastered.*
 (c) Roofs. *Slate*

3. Historical development (with dates and small sketch plan).
The house is of early to mid seventeenth century date

4. Special features (if any).

Figure 5. Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments in Westmorland: Survey Notes, (1934)

About 100 meters to the south-west of this house are the ruins of another building (building B) that appears to have been a barn (Figures 7 to 9) and is described in the Royal Commission report as *'the barn adjoining the house is of c. 1700'*. The gable ends and walls are still in reasonable condition and, as can be seen from the modern photographs, there is a small walled enclosure on the eastern side of the building.



Figure 6. Remains of house at 'Old Widewath': looking west



Figure 7. Barn adjacent to 'Old Widewath' house showing walled enclosure: looking north

Both the house and barn are on the eastern (Bampton parish) side of Heltondale Beck. A beautiful packhorse bridge over the beck (Figure 10) connects to a section of rising ground at the top of which was a further building (building C) but of which no obvious trace can now be found. Although this is in Askham parish, it is shown on the Bampton tithe map where it is named 'Widewath House'. The Royal Commission report describes it as :



*Figure 8. 'Old Widewath' barn:
looking south-west*



*Figure 9. 'Old Widewath' barn:
looking south*

'Barn, 200 yards S. of [Widewath i.e. Widewath farm], has two rows of loop-lights and three original doors with square heads'

There are suggestions that part of the present field wall in this area might have been part of the house but this can only be speculative. It seems likely, however, that the Widewath House of the Bampton tithe map (1836) had become a barn by the time of the Royal Commission report 100 years later and has since been demolished.



Figure 10. Packhorse bridge at Old Widewath

A short distance downstream from the bridge at Old Widewath is a second, somewhat more substantial packhorse bridge (Figure 11). The track over this leads northwards up to Widewath Farm while to the south access can be gained to the open fell.

For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Widewath was owned and occupied by members of the Mounsey family who also owned Setterah Park. The Earl of Lonsdale was recorded in the 1836 Tithe Map as the owner of Widewath Mill.



*Figure 11. Packhorse bridge downstream of 'Old Widewath'
(Grid reference NY50122084)*

Acknowledgements

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John Garside
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