

# An Urban Dairy

by

NINA JENNINGS

*Wellflat Farm is a late, clay-dabbin farmhouse, standing on the corner of Dalston Road and Talbot Road, Carlisle. It appears to have been a cattle farm for about 150 years from the early nineteenth century, and latterly an urban dairy as well, with the increasing sprawl of Carlisle's suburbs. (There is no sign of crucks.) It is interesting both as an urban dairy, as a late example of a clay farmhouse (these are more difficult to spot than earlier ones) and as the only clay-dabbin building found by the writer with a cellar beneath clay walls. The house was in poor condition in 1910 but comfortable and well maintained in the 1930s. The farm and business was abandoned in the 1960s, and it now lies derelict, awaiting development.*

The house does not appear on a map of 1807, though Well Flat field does<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 2) [Flat/tt means field]. This is not an official work, but it does suggest that the farmhouse is later. In 1823 Well Flatt was conveyed to four people, including John Wilson, Gent, of Well Flatt Cottage.<sup>2</sup> The Dean and Chapter of Carlisle Cathedral were lords of the manor, and Wilson probably held a customary freehold.

On the first OS map (1865) (Fig. 3) the farm and cottage are shown surrounded by fields and fronting Murrell Hill Road (the present Dalston Road). The 1901 map (Fig. 4) shows the farm already surrounded by Carlisle suburbs, although the Talbot Road and Dalston Road frontages are still clear. The third edition (1925) shows Talbot Road, Goschen Road and St James Road forming a block. Only Murrell Road was not built up. At the present time the farm is entirely surrounded by suburban housing; only its orchard remains.

In the Land Valuation Survey dated 1910<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 5) the property is described as Farm House, buildings, frontage and land called Wellflatt situated on Dalston Road.

- 1) House contains Kitchen and 3 rooms on ground floor; cellar, and ?3 Bedrooms
- 2) milkho. coalho. & ?2 WCs
- 3) Stable lofted, barn, & 2rm cottage
- 4) Byre for 5
- 5) Byre for 8, mealho. & shed
- 6) 2 pighulls & boilerho.
- 7) 2 boxes

House is part clay & part brick, slated, old, fair condition. Nos 2,3,4,6,7 are brick, slated, old, fair. No 5 part brick & clay, slated, very old and poor.

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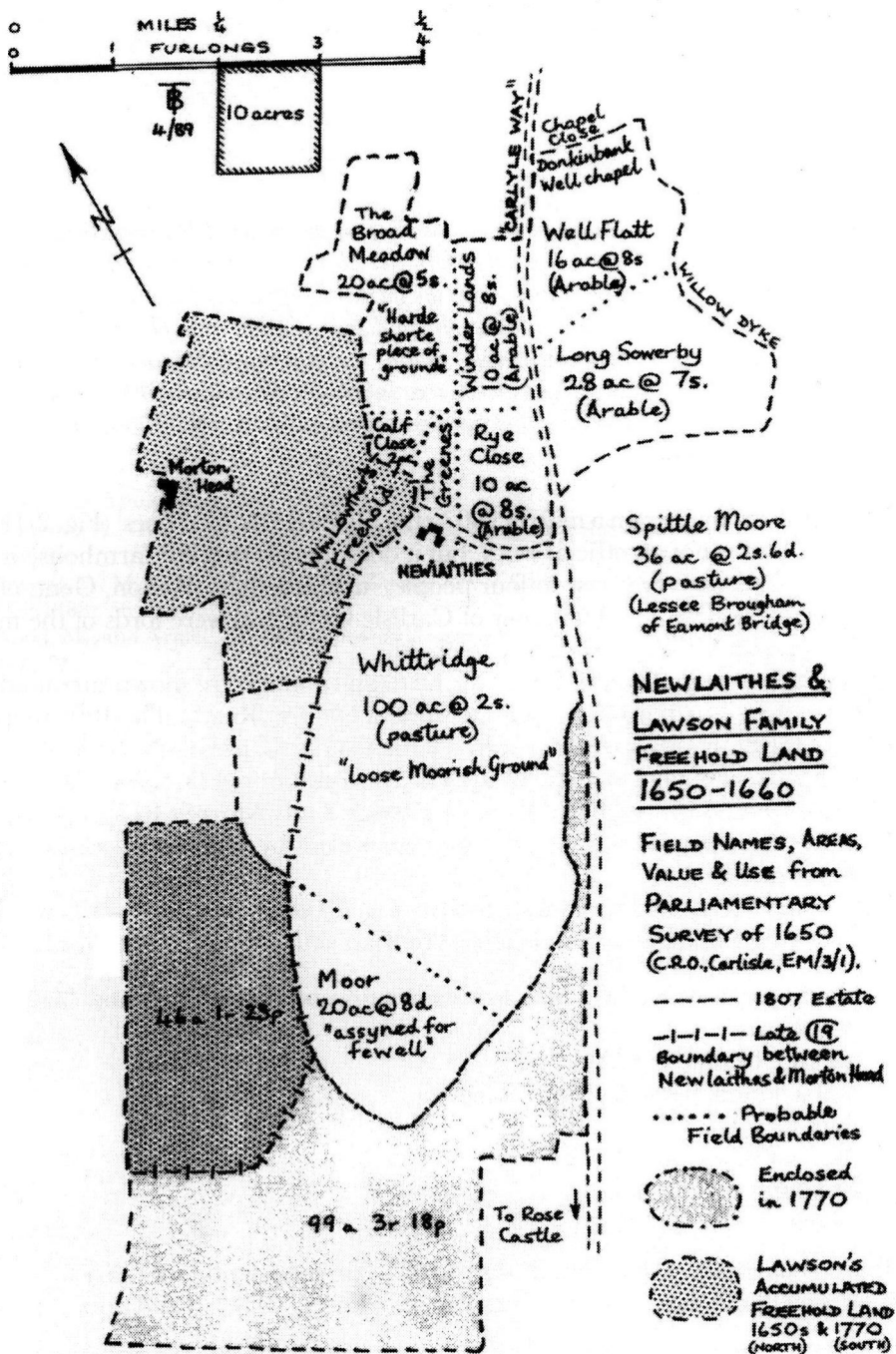


Fig. 1  
Newlaithes and Lawson Family freehold land, 1650-60

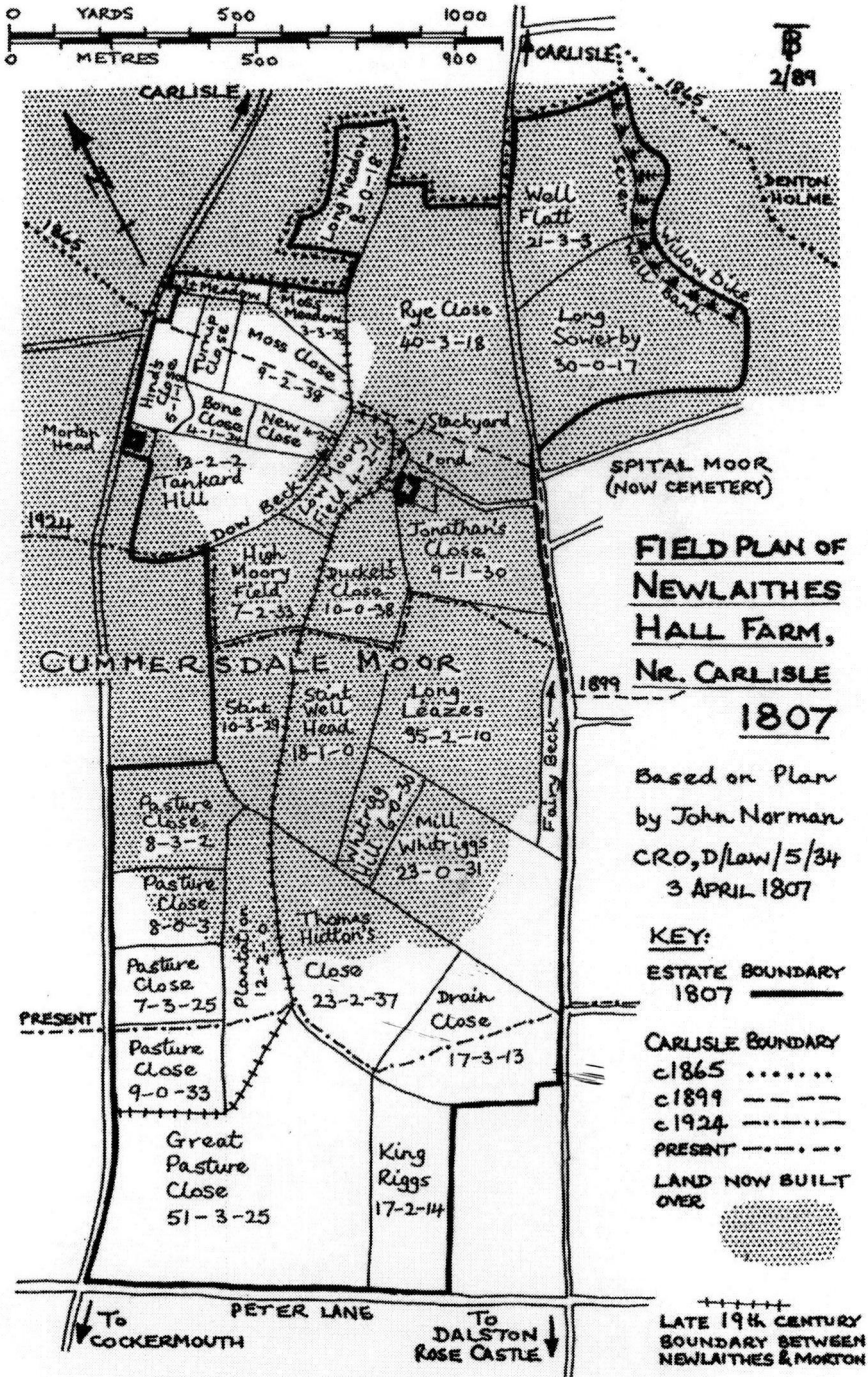


Fig. 2  
Field plan of Newlathes Hall Farm, 1807





- 8) Byre erected in 1911 for 12 cows, brick, slated.
- 9) 2 roomed one storey cottage, brick, slated, fair.

Land is all in grass, good quality and probably as valuable without the homestead as with.

Occupier J. Hurst Junr.

Owner Ecclesiastical Commisrs.

Agricultural value @ £80 per acre = £2969

With twenty-five cows, thirty-seven acres of good land and customers on the doorstep, it is not obvious why the buildings of this substantial dairy farm had been allowed to deteriorate.

Miss Eite has lived all her life across the road at No. 92 and in the 1930s and 1940s Masie, the farmer's youngest daughter, was her playmate and best friend. The two little girls had plenty of freedom in those days. When the farm cellar flooded they would paddle in it (strictly forbidden) and the water would come almost over the tops of their wellies. Miss Eite says that the Wylies were tenants of Mr Hurst, who also had another farm. Mr Wylie ran the dairy. The heater for sterilising the equipment and for pasteurisation was situated at the far end of the brick byre which runs off at right angles from the farmhouse outshut. Two of Mrs Wylie's sisters and their husbands in succession lived in part of what is now No. 97, converted from a byre. There was a mounting block at the front, now gone. The farm kept a bull, and cows were pastured in the fields at the back, the one by the cemetery wall, the one at the bottom of Skiddaw Road and also the one behind No. 92, all now built over. There was not much traffic and the cows used to be driven across the Dalston Road. The neighbours used to fetch their milk and cream (no butter) in jugs. There was a fire in 1935, but Miss Eite remembers the farmhouse as comfortable and well maintained. On May Day the farm used to parade a float. However the fields were being increasingly built over, and Mr Wylie had to take his cattle further and further afield for pasture. In 1961 Mr Hurst died, and in 1963 Mr Wylie's farm and dairy business closed. The first OS map shows the little cottage to the south of the orchard as part of Wellflatt, but in Miss Eite's time there was no connection. It is likely to be a former bothy.

Consulting the records, we find:

... a gentle eminence, which has long been known as Seven Wells Bank – a name which explains its own origin. Only one of the seven remains, and on the stone which marks the spot is the following inscription in medieval Latin ... which may thus be rendered 'I Brother Ubeskud, lay under a rock a round a mouthed stone, and dedicated it to the Venerable St Bede on the eighth day of December' ... tradition pointed to the spot as the well at which the early Christians baptised their Saxon converts. A chapel under the same invocation once stood near, the foundations of which may still be traced.<sup>4</sup>

In 1829 we have Wilson John, Gent, Well flat.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1841 census John Mathers, Farmer, and three other households at Well Flatt.

In 1847, Mathers John, yeoman, Well flat.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1851 census John Mathers is a farmer of fifty acres and there are two other households including Ralph Forster, husbandman. The latter is an agricultural labourer in 1861, but by 1871 he is described as a farm bailiff. However in the 1881 and 1891 censuses we find in the three households only one agricultural labourer and no farmer.

In 1884 we find, Parker, Mr Arthur, Well flat.

Storey, William, (hind) Farmer, Well flatt.<sup>7</sup>

In 1860 Cummersdale is described as being of 1,911 acres and situated two miles south-west of Carlisle. The population is given as:

1801	382
1811	462
1821	512
1831	488
1841	620
1851	699 <sup>8</sup>

By 1901 the population was 901.<sup>9</sup>

The farmhouse was measured and recorded in 2003 (Figs 7 and 8), but the precarious state of the remaining slates made some measurements difficult and dangerous. There are two very tall brick chimneys, both axially symmetrically situated across the ridge. The outer walls are faced with brick and rendered. The eastern gable window has a stone sill and no 'ears'. The south-facing, main front of the house has a small non-opening cellar window, and on the ground floor two sixteen-pane sashes without 'ears' but with pintles for outside shutters; the sills are stone and the lintels brick. Immediately above these windows are two larger dormers, an unusual feature in this area. These have 'ears'. Entering the door in the gable through the latticed porch, we find a small entrance lobby leading into a passage which in turn leads to a dog-leg wooden stairs with a cupboard underneath. To the right of the passage a door in the thin partition gives into two living rooms, both papered (as are all of the downstairs rooms) and with 1930s-style tiled fireplaces. On the other side of the passage the wall is brick, with two arches. There is a large blocked door under the arch in the rear room. It can be seen that the wall between the outshut and the main building is not straight. The western end bends to the south, in order to accommodate the stairs to the upper floor. This bending was not measured and is not shown in the plan. The two rooms in the outshut are separated by a passage bounded by thin partitions; in one direction we come to a brick barn, partly converted for domestic use, and in the other are stone stairs leading down to the cellar. This has sandstone sconces mounted on brick piles on all four sides, in a niche on the stairway and even against a large pillar supporting the ceiling. The floor has sandstone flags. This is only the second clay dabbin with a cellar which the writer has seen; the other, at Howard Cottage, is under a brick extension.

Returning to the ground floor and mounting the stairs to the upper floor, we find three rooms along the west face (Figs. 7 and 8). The central one is lit only by a skylight and is only slightly more than a metre wide. It is bounded by two open trusses, with an unusual spacing for crucks or trusses. This was where the hired man slept in the 1930s and 1940s. There was a fireplace in the eastern room, but this has now collapsed. In

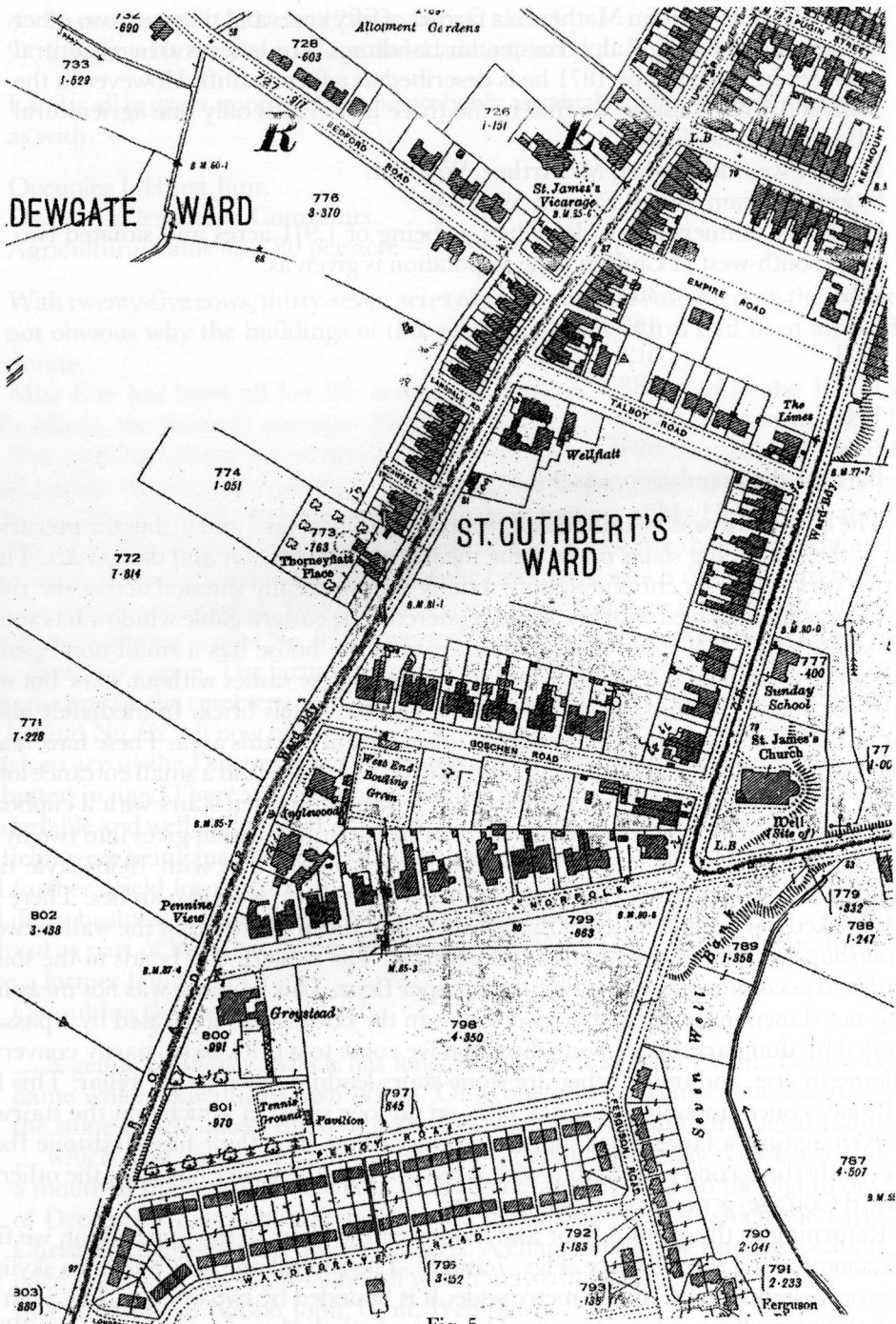
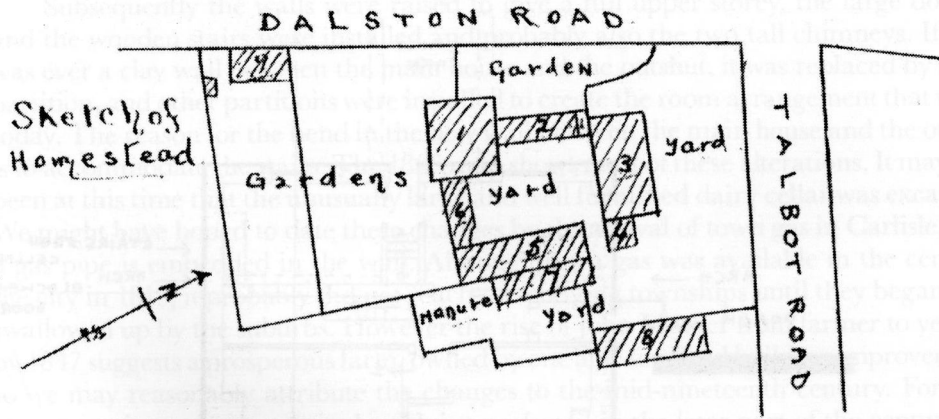


Fig 5  
Third OS map, 1925





FROM IR 58 LAND VALUATION, 1910,  
MAP XXIII 7 H & J Reference No 10076

Fig. 6

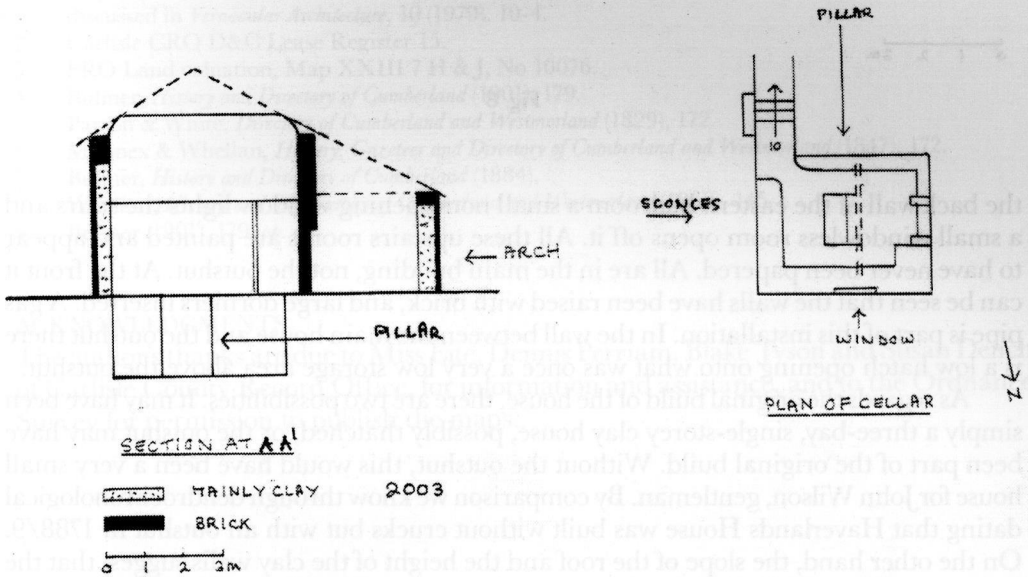


Fig. 7

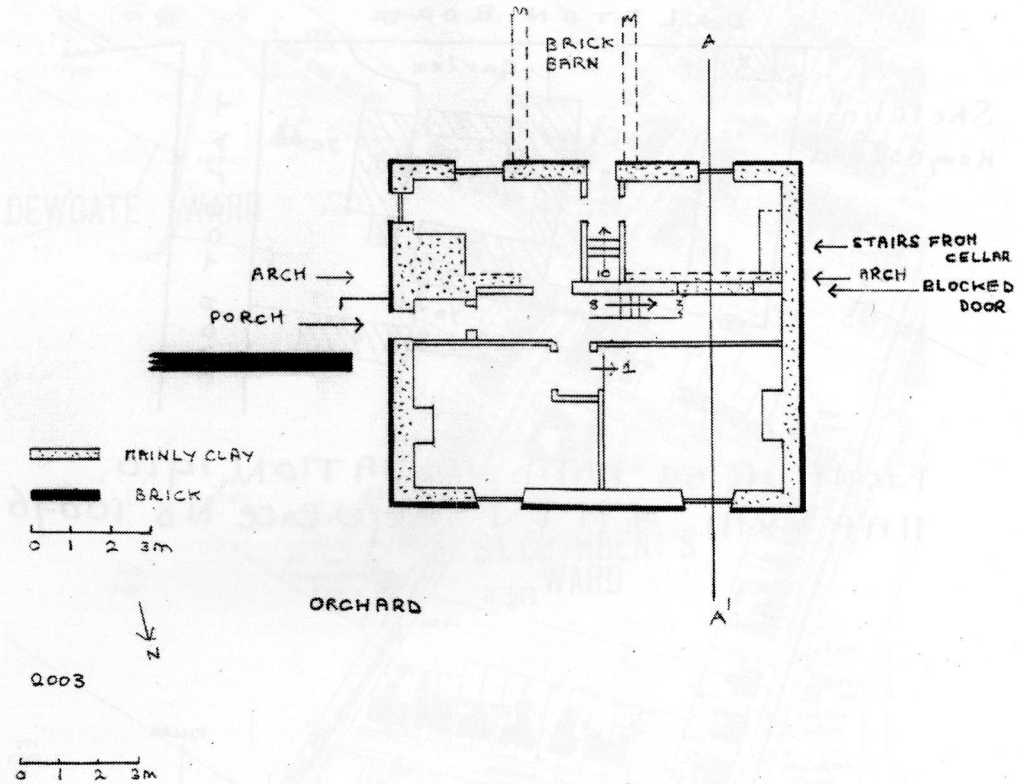


Fig. 8

the back wall of the eastern bedroom a small non-opening window lights the stairs and a small windowless room opens off it. All these upstairs rooms are painted and appear to have never been papered. All are in the main building, not the outshut. At the front it can be seen that the walls have been raised with brick, and large dormers inserted. A gas pipe is part of this installation. In the wall between the main house and the outshut there is a low hatch opening onto what was once a very low storage area above the outshut.

As regards the original build of the house, there are two possibilities. It may have been simply a three-bay, single-storey clay house, possibly thatched, or the outshut may have been part of the original build. Without the outshut, this would have been a very small house for John Wilson, gentleman. By comparison we know through dendrochronological dating that Haverlands House was built without crucks but with an outshut in 1788/9. On the other hand, the slope of the roof and the height of the clay walls suggest that the outshut is a later addition. Whichever is the case, from the absence of a building on the 1807 map, the apparent absence of crucks, the style of the downstairs windows and the unusual floor plan, the earliest build appears to have been late eighteenth century or more likely early nineteenth century.

Subsequently the walls were raised to give a full upper storey, the large dormers and the wooden stairs were installed and probably also the two tall chimneys. If there was ever a clay wall between the main house and the outshut, it was replaced by a thin partition, and other partitions were installed to create the room arrangement that we see today. The reason for the bend in the new wall between the main house and the outshut is to accommodate the stairs. The 1865 map shows most of these alterations. It may have been at this time that the unusually large and well furnished dairy cellar was excavated. We might have hoped to date these changes by the arrival of town gas in Carlisle, since a gas pipe is embedded in the wall. Although town gas was available in the centre of the city in 1819, it probably did not reach the outlying townships until they began to be swallowed up by the suburbs. However the rise of John Mather from farmer to yeoman by 1847 suggests a prosperous farm, owned by one able to afford building improvements, so we may reasonably attribute the changes to the mid-nineteenth century. For some reason, maintenance seems to have been neglected in the later part of the century, but resumed by the 1930s. Presumably by the 1960s the increasing distance from available pasture, together with the contrast between agricultural and 'developmental' economics, led to the demise of this urban dairy (Fig. 8).

Since this paper was researched and written the building has been demolished.

#### NOTES

1. Carlisle CRO D/Law/5/34 3 April 1807, Field plan of Newlaithes Hall Farm. Reproduced by Blake Tyson 'Newlaithes Hall, Carlisle', *CWAAS* (1990), 236. Inconsistencies between these maps are discussed in *Vernacular Architecture*, 10 (1979), 10-4.
2. Carlisle CRO D&C Lease Register 15.
3. PRO Land valuation, Map XXIII 7 H & J, No 10076.
4. Bulmer, *History and Directory of Cumberland* (1901), 179.
5. Parson & White, *Directory of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1829), 172.
6. Mannex & Whellan, *History, Gazeteer and Directory of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1847), 172.
7. Bulmer, *History and Directory of Cumberland* (1884).
8. Whellan, *History and Topography of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1860), 145.
9. Bulmer (1901), 179, *op. cit.*

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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