

NORTH YORKSHIRE (W.R.)

HORTON IN RIBBLESDALE, Beecroft Hall. SD 799725. visited 16-5-84

Beecroft Hall, originally the seat of the Rectory Manor of Horton, stands in a slight hollow on the lower slopes of Moughton at just under 900 ft, approached by a farm track from the Horton-Selside road. The earlier approach was directly across from New Inn, where there is still a footpath. The house is two storeys high and two rooms deep on plan, built of stone roughly mortared over, with a slate roof.

The site slopes down from west to east. At the west end of the south front is an added block standing gable-end on, whose joint with the main building is inconspicuous. It has only one upper window facing south, with a hung sash of two panes to a sash; the gable has plain bargeboards. The main house front has a stone chimney at each end of the roof ridge; there are two square upper windows in recessed-splayed stone frames with a slate drip-course over each. The lower windows are larger and framed in cement but they also have narrow dripstones. The front door is framed in plain milled sandstone blocks. A plinth runs along the base of the wall.

The east gable end has rows of boldly-projecting through stones; there is a single circular window to the attic, placed well to the south of centre. The lower half of this end wall is covered by an added leanto stone shed.

The north wall of the main building is again marked by rows of through stones. Most of the windows have recessed splayed frames, except that of the kitchen which is framed in cement. In the western addition, which presents a gable end to the north, there is one sash window at each level and a back door.

The west end has a large stone cistern for collecting rainwater from the roofs built against it towards the northern end. There is a pair of low windows for the dairy at the southern end of the west wall.

Entering the house by the back door in the added block, one sees immediately on the left a fine stone doorway into the main house. The gritstone frame is chamfered and cut to a design of two semicircles flanking a triangle which resembles a doorway at Lawkland Hall. The surface within the triangle is uneven, but attempts to decipher an inscription there failed - we cannot be sure if there is anything under the paint or not. This is evidently the main entrance doorway of an earlier house, but whether it is in situ is another matter. Through the door one enters a fairly small kitchen, with a blocked fireplace in the west wall. There is an east-west ceiling beam with wide splays on both sides; the north window has been enlarged and is modern without splayed reveals.

A door on the far side of the kitchen leads to the staircase, which has turned balusters and a rather thick, flat handrail. It runs north to a half-landing lit by a two-light window, and has a cupboard underneath with steps down into it. Beyond this is a dairy with a rank of slate shelves against the south wall for cheeses, and slate slabs on two other walls, one with a drainage hole.

From the foot of the stairs a passage runs south to the front door between two parlours. A pair of narrow-chamfered ceiling beams crosses both rooms, but they appear to be in two lengths set into the thick stone cross wall on the east side of the passage. Both front rooms have early 20th century windows and modern fireplaces let into the wall thickness; in the west room there is a recessed cupboard to the south of the fireplace. The floors are surfaced with slate in slabs up to 1 x 3 metres size.

On the first floor the major bedroom is in the southeast corner and has a north-south ceiling beam. From its doorway a passage runs along the south side of the spine wall behind the other front room into the upper storey of the western addition. There are two small rear bedrooms, and above the entrance-passage are the attic stairs.

All the stone internal walls rise right up to the roof. At the back of the house, the ceiling of the stairwell is under the rafters, and over the rooms on either side of this the roof is supported by purlins set into the cross walls. These attic spaces are not floored. The southern half of the house, however, is roofed differently. There are two half-trusses with deep principals supporting four sets of overlapping purlins of substantial size, lightly trenched into the back of the principals. There are angled supporting struts as drawn, and numbered i or ii according to the truss; these attics are floored.

The ground floor of the western addition has a large dairy to the south with slate slabs round three sides and two east windows. A stone water-trough is bisected by the dividing wall between the two rooms. The north room is presumably a back kitchen, and has at some time had a set-pot with its flue running into the back of the kitchen chimney.

Historical Development.

Beecroft is an ancient site first mentioned in 1377; the earlier form of the name was Bygcrofte meaning barley field. The earliest feature of the present building is the stone doorway which is 17th century, probably dating from about 1660-1690. About that time we have evidence suggesting that the Wilson family, who owned Horton Rectory and its manor, were then living in Horton, and it seems likely that they were the builders of the house to which this door belongs. The two upper south windows and four of the back ones are re-used two-light mullioned windows of comparable date.

The staircase has rather chunky turned balusters and a thick, flat handrail suggesting a date around 1700.

In 1723 Mrs Jane Wilson died and was buried at Horton, and at some time between then and 1738 the house was let to a tenant. An inventory of 1738 mentions a hall, a little parlour and a back room; the parlour loft and the loft over the house (= hall); there was also a turfhouse which was lofted, possibly but not necessarily part of the house. These rooms suggest a house like this in plan:



and with only lofts rather than a proper upper storey. This might almost be a 16th century cruck house from the description; it certainly does not appear to be the sort of house the present staircase could have been built for, and the rooms do not correspond to the present rooms which are two large parlours and nothing that could be called a hall or house. In 1739 the tenant was John Carr.

In 1742 'a reckon and three pairs of bedstocks in the garrets' were among the items added to the tenant's inventory. Garrets suggest the roof-space over chambers, while lofts sound like substitutes for chambers: was the house rebuilt between 1738 and 1742 in its present form? It can only be said that the plan is appropriate to that period, and the roof although most extraordinary dates from about then.

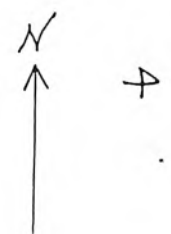
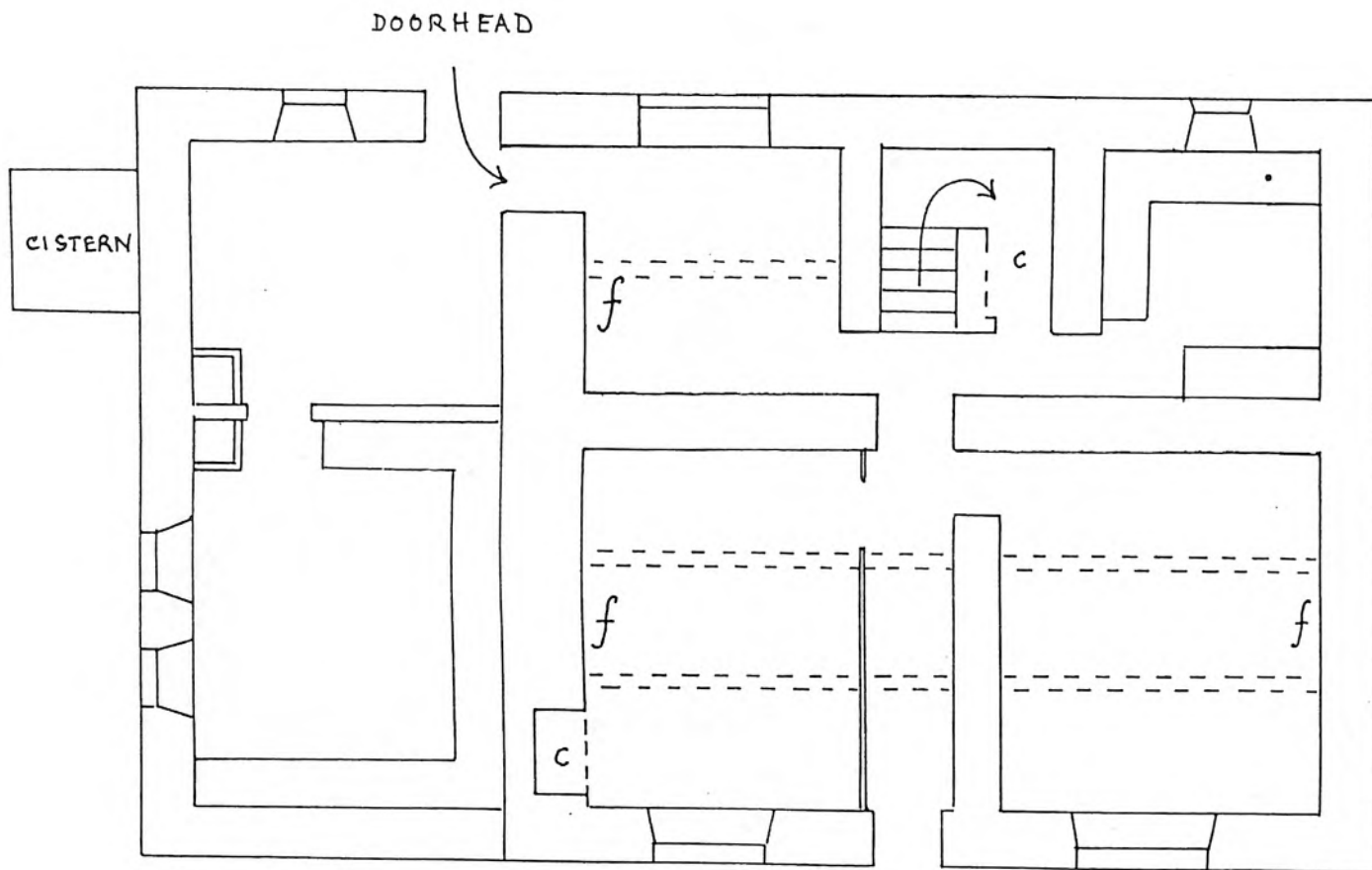
In 1772 John Jackson paid £70 rent for Beecroft Hall, and he was still the tenant ten years later. A lime kiln was built at Beecroft in that year and 300 loads of coal bought for use in it. Thomas Carr, carpenter, mended some doors at the Hall in December 1772.

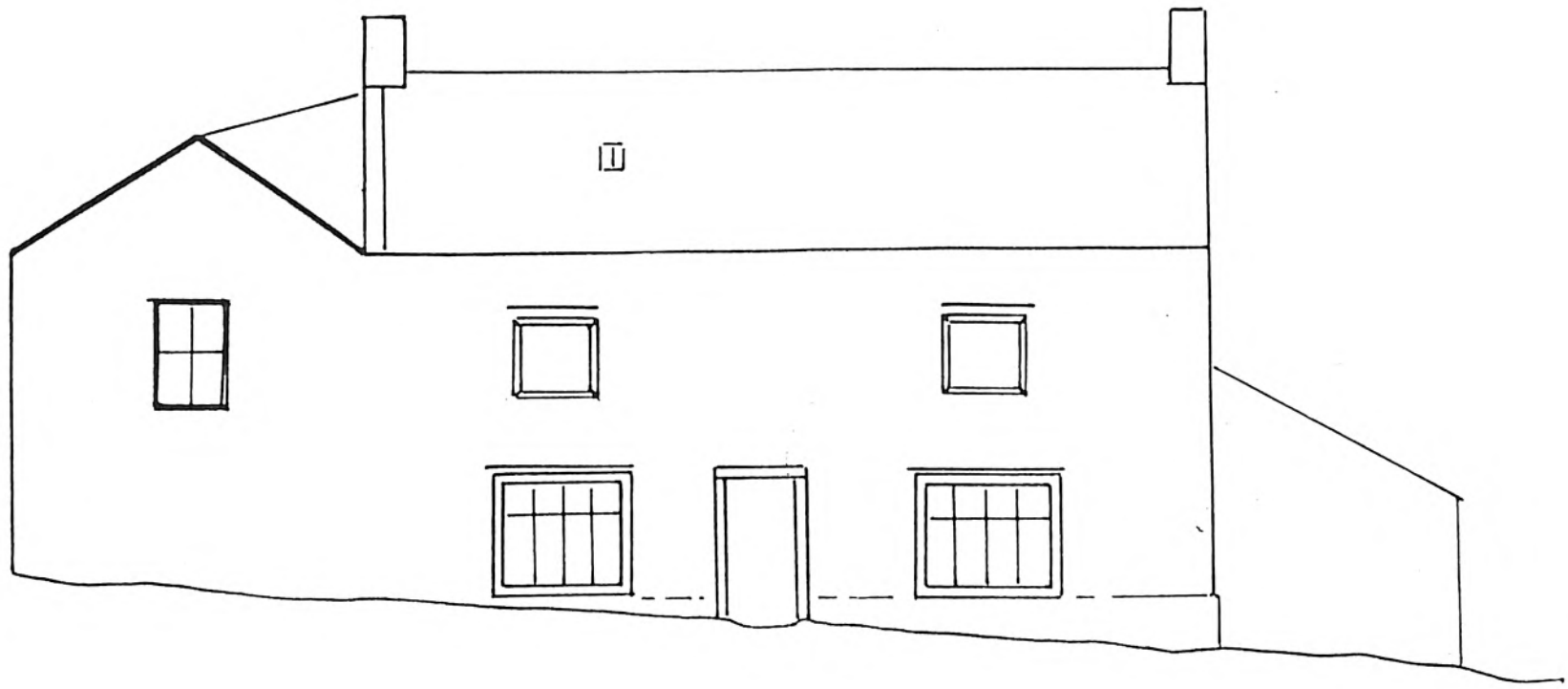
In June 1774 packthread was bought 'for lines for setting out Beecroft Hall - 3d'. In November 1774 bills were paid for glazing £2-16-10, plastering £4-13-0, as well as for walling and for roofing materials though unfortunately the sums for these are included with work elsewhere; 2000 lath nails and 6000 tearing (= plastering) nails cost 19s 6d, and 700 four-foot sap laths 12s 10d. Matthias was paid for steel to make a new lock and handle for the outer door, 5s 6d. Perhaps the most significant sum was for 11 yards of hewed rigging for the roof (16s 6d): the roof of the western addition is exactly 11 yards long, whereas that of the main roof is 18 inches longer so that amount of rigging would not be enough for it. It seems likely, then, that the accounts are for the western addition to Beecroft Hall.

Its present windows are mid 19th century, and in 1851 Richard Knowles was farming 412 acres from Beecroft Hall.

Only minor alterations have been made since. The house is now uninhabited because of the proximity of the quarry, although there are hopes that it may be brought into use again.

Barbara Hutton.

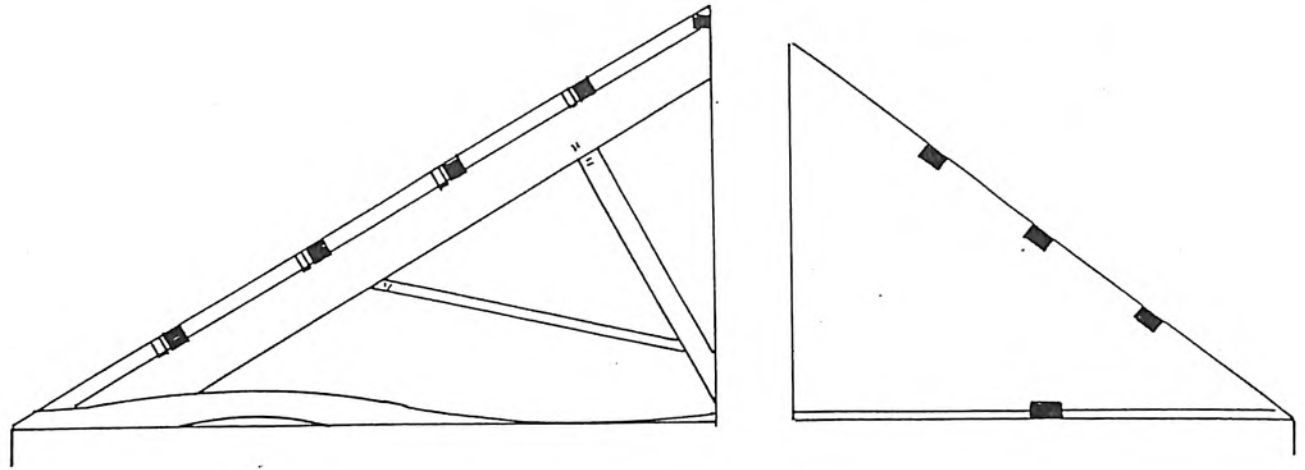




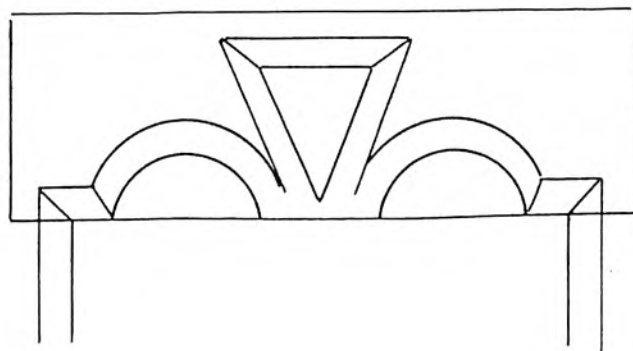
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SOUTH ELEVATION 1:100

6



ROOF SECTION 1:50



SKETCH OF DOORHEAD - NOT TO SCALE