

# Solway Heritage

Discovering the character of the  
Solway Coast National Landscape



**Solway Coast**  
National  
Landscape

# Introduction



Bowness-on-Solway

For centuries, the Solway estuary has been a frontier. In the Roman period, it was a boundary between the Roman perception of 'civilised' Britannia and the barbarian north. In later years, the Solway demarcated the border between England and Scotland as it still does today. Lastly, the Solway is at the junction of sea and land – a juxtaposition that has shaped its history for thousands of years.

After the last Ice Age, the Solway Plain was half sea, half land – a water-saturated landscape of salt marshes, peat bogs, raised mires and mud flats interspersed with low, sandy hills.



A Roman ceramic head of a female found at Burgh-by-Sands  
Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery Trust, Carlisle

The Romans were the first to address the challenges presented by the environment. In AD 122, Hadrian's Wall was under construction, taking the shortest route across northern England between Wallsend in the east and Bowness-on-Solway in the west. Forts were established along the line of the Wall – *Maia* (Bowness-on-Solway), *Congavata* (Drumburgh), *Aballava* (Burgh-by-Sands) and *Uxellodunum* (Stanwix in Carlisle). Over time, each fort attracted an adjacent civilian settlement or *vicus* that provided Roman soldiers with food, drink, goods and services.



The Staffordshire Moorlands Pan bearing the names of *Maia* (Bowness) and *Congavata* (Drumburgh)

In post-Roman times, these early settlements expanded over the remains of the forts themselves. Today, the main road through Bowness-on-Solway follows the line of the *Via Principalis* through the former fort of *Maia*. A similar pattern can be discerned at Burgh-by-Sands.



Plan of Bowness-on-Solway with Roman fort outline

With the arrival of the Normans in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, baronies were established as power bases from which to control the local area and population. The Barony of Burgh was one of these. The Normans were masters of stone building and rebuilt many of the simpler Anglo-Saxon churches that existed at the time, often re-using Roman stone from Hadrian's Wall and its forts.

In 1150, Holme Cultram Abbey was founded as a daughter house of Melrose Abbey. From this time on, the distinctive landscape character of the

Solway Plain was largely defined by the monks of the abbey.

Wool was the valuable commodity of the day. The marshy 'wastelands' were drained to create fields for grazing sheep and for growing crops. New settlements appeared that focused on various monastic activities, such as Salt Coates (salt making), Swinsty (pig husbandry) and Calvo (calf husbandry). Larger settlements clustered around the port at Skinburness, the 'new' church at Newton Arlosh and the abbey at Abbeytown.

Edward I's ill-fated Scottish campaigns of the early 14<sup>th</sup> century unleashed much resentment among the Scots, which resulted in numerous attacks on English property. The poorly-defended abbeys of northern England were repeatedly targeted – Holme Cultram Abbey being no exception. This led to the building of defensive structures – tower houses, bastles (fortified farmhouses) and thick-walled church towers that could double-up as places of refuge.



Holme Cultram Abbey

Under more peaceful times in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, local farmers could reap the profits of their own endeavours. The small fields carved out of the 'waste' now produced earnings that could be ploughed back into farm investment. From around 1650, many farms were rebuilt or enlarged, often proclaiming the new wealth and status of their owners with elaborate datestones, moulded surrounds, classical pediments and other architectural features. Gradually, the humbler clay dabbin cottages were demolished or abandoned, so that only about 300 survive today.

Other buildings were erected for specific purposes: watermills and windmills, forges, tileworks and breweries.



Silloth Docks in 1904

Harbours were the gateways to sea routes that connected the Solway Firth to the wider world. Investment in port facilities resulted in improved access routes and the development of planned towns to accommodate visitors, such as at Port Carlisle and Silloth.

History and topography have shaped this area over millennia and forged distinctive landscape characteristics that are not found elsewhere. This booklet will introduce you to the heritage features of the Solway Plain that have survived the centuries of change so that we may appreciate the invaluable contribution they make to the Solway's 'sense of place' today.

## GETTING AROUND

### By bus

**Service 93** runs from Carlisle to Bowness-on-Solway via Burgh-by-Sands (Mon-Sat only).

**Service 60** operates between Skinburness and Workington via Maryport (Mon-Sat only).

Traveline website: [www.traveline.info](http://www.traveline.info)

### By rail

The Cumbria Coast Railway links Carlisle and Barrow-in-Furness with stations at Wigton, Aspatria and Maryport.

## Solway Coast National Landscape



### Solway Coast National Landscape

The Solway Coast National Landscape stretches along 59 kilometres of the Cumbrian coast from Rockcliffe near Carlisle towards Maryport. This designation aims to conserve and enhance the distinctive character and natural beauty of this special area and protect it for future generations.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- [www.solwaycoast-nl.org.uk](http://www.solwaycoast-nl.org.uk)
- **Holme Cultram Abbey exhibition**, Abbeytown.
- **Maritime Museum**, Maryport. [www.maryportmaritimemuseum.com](http://www.maryportmaritimemuseum.com)
- [www.ctfc.org.uk/explore-churches](http://www.ctfc.org.uk/explore-churches) (Churches Trust for Cumbria)
- [www.solwayshorewalker.co.uk](http://www.solwayshorewalker.co.uk)
- [www.holmestcuthbertparish.com/local-history](http://www.holmestcuthbertparish.com/local-history) (Holme St Cuthbert History Group)
- [www.solwaymilitarytrail.co.uk](http://www.solwaymilitarytrail.co.uk)

## COUNTRYSIDE CODE

### Respect other people:

- Consider the local community and other people enjoying the outdoors
- Leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available
- Do not go onto private property without permission

### Protect the natural environment:

- Leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under effective control

### Enjoy the outdoors:

- Plan ahead and be prepared
- Follow advice and local signs



Monkhill windmill





# Planned Settlements



*Aerial view of Anthorn*

Farms, villages and towns on the Solway Plain all developed in response to local conditions and socio-economic influences.

Some villages started as 'vici' or civilian settlements in the lee of a Roman fort to provide goods and services to the Roman soldiers stationed along Hadrian's Wall. Examples of likely fort-based villages can be seen at Burgh-by-Sands and Bowness-on-Solway. These developed organically over a long period of time rather than in a planned way.

*Skinburness*



In the medieval period, concerted efforts were made to convert the wetlands of the Solway Plain into usable land through drainage. Over time, a distinctive settlement pattern emerged of farmsteads aligned along the main access roads and overlooking the 'wastelands' beyond. An 'occupation road' behind the farms provided access to narrow strip fields at the rear. This settlement pattern is clearly seen at Newton Arlosh, Boustead Hill and old Anthorn.

At Skinburness, a small port was developed by the monks of Holme Cultram. Later landowners sought to expand on trade via the Irish Sea and its connections to main shipping routes further south. To this end, the wealthy Lowther family developed the port at Whitehaven in 1634 and laid out a new town in the 1660s. Other prominent local families followed suit. The Senhouses established docks at Maryport in 1749 and the Curwens

developed Workington Port in the 1770s for their coal and iron trade, all with planned settlements in their wake. Silloth was no exception. The arrival of the railway in 1856 expedited the development of a new port along with an elegant planned town.



*Silloth Docks, 1920s*

The growth of Carlisle during the early 1800s precipitated the need for improved ways of importing raw materials and exporting finished goods. An Act of Parliament allowed the construction of a canal in 1823 from Carlisle to the nearest navigable point on the Solway Firth at Fisher's Cross (later renamed as Port Carlisle). The canal was replaced by a railway in 1854.

## SKINBURNESS

After 1150, the monks of Holme Cultram established a small port at Skinburness to export their wool, grain, timber, leather, salt and other

goods. By 1300, Edward I was using the port as a naval base for his Scottish campaigns. A year later, Skinburness was granted the right to hold a weekly market and an annual fair. The town was becoming prosperous, but it was not to last. Around 1304, a violent storm breached the sea dyke and devastated the port and its town. The surviving

inhabitants relocated to a 'new town' at Arlosh. Skinburness managed to survive, but much diminished in size. Its medieval layout can still be discerned to the north of the village where a line of farmsteads overlooks the road and salt marshes beyond, with strip fields behind the farms.

*Aerial view of Skinburness looking north*



## NEWTON ARLOSH

The disaster that befell Skinburness c. 1304 helped create another village further inland. In 1305, the abbot of Holme Cultram requested that the liberties and privileges given to Skinburness be transferred to a 'new town' at Newton Arlosh.

The village follows the established pattern of medieval planning with farms fronting a road which overlooked the common and waste. Behind the farms, narrow strip fields were laid out.

Map of Newton Arlosh in 1865



## PORT CARLISLE

From the early 1800s, Carlisle's manufacturing base was rapidly expanding, and in need of improvements in transport. In 1823, a canal was dug from Carlisle to Fisher's Cross (renamed as Port Carlisle) on the Solway Firth. From here, coastal vessels could take goods and passengers to larger ports such as Whitehaven and Liverpool.

Port Carlisle expanded in anticipation of a steady stream of visitors. A hotel, two public houses, public baths and



Carlisle Canal by Matthew Nutter (1795–1862)

an elegant Georgian terrace were built fronting the sea and the canal.

Unfortunately, the port suffered from siltation and the canal struggled to attract enough business. In 1853, the canal was drained and replaced by a railway the following year. Between Drumburgh Junction and Port Carlisle, a horse-drawn 'dandy' operated until 1914.



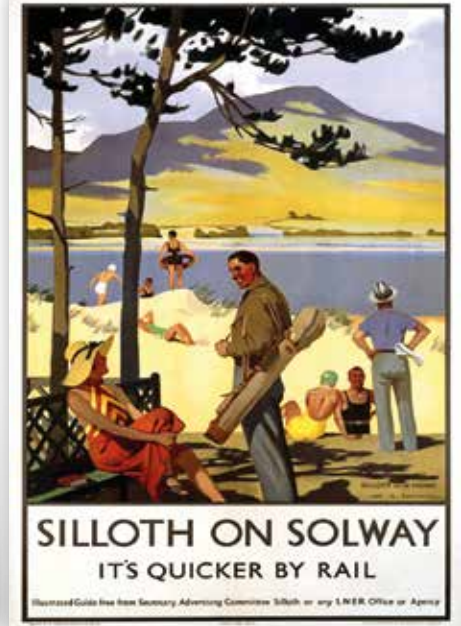
Last day of the 'dandy' service to Port Carlisle, April 1914.

## SILLOTH

The creation of Silloth as a seaside town was promoted by the developers of the Carlisle and Silloth Bay Railway in 1854. The following year, the Senhouses of Maryport started constructing a new dock at Silloth and, at the same time, work began on laying out a gracious seaside town on a grid pattern. Today, Silloth is a fine example of Victorian planning with its wide tree-lined streets, elegant Italianate buildings overlooking the Green, and a pleasant promenade along the sea front.



Silloth, 1960s



The monks of Holme Cultram had 'sea lathes' (grain barns) along the coast from which the name 'Silloth' is likely to have been derived.



Silloth today

# Religion



St Michael's Church, Bowness-on-Solway

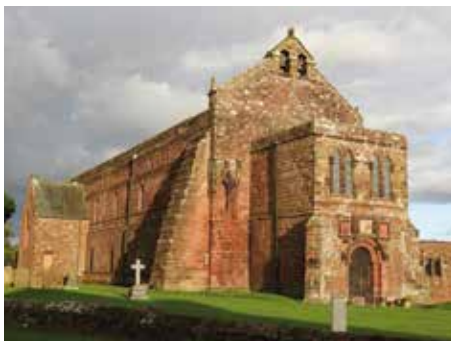
The distinctive landscape character of the Solway Plain was largely defined by the activities of Holme Cultram Abbey from 1150 onwards.

The abbey was given large tracts of 'wasteland' on the Solway to turn into productive usage. Cistercian monks were masters of land and water management. Throughout the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Abbey systematically changed the landscape of the Solway forever. Marshes were

drained, sea dykes thrown up, and farms developed for sheep grazing and for growing crops. The monks also fished, smelted iron ore, tanned leather and produced salt (a valuable commodity for preserving meat and fish for trade over the winter). Granges were established to store their grain, and the small port at Skinburness was developed to export their products; in particular from sheep – mutton, bone, horn, skin and most importantly, wool.

*Local place names are indicative of the Abbey's activities – Salt Coates, Abbey Cowper (barrel making), Swinsty (place where pigs were kept), Calvo (place where calves were kept) and Raby (place where working dogs were kept).*

Most of the churches in the area were endowed to the abbey and either built by the abbey (as at Newton Arlosh) or rebuilt on earlier foundations. Many



Holme Cultram Abbey

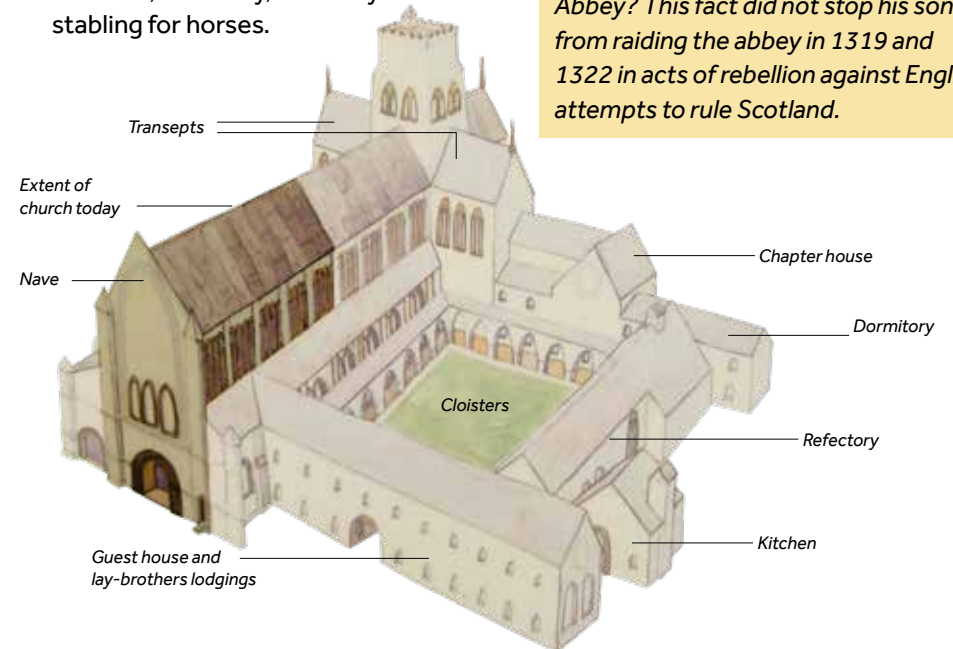
have Roman masonry incorporated into their construction that came from Hadrian's Wall or from one of the many Roman forts in the area.



St Bride's Church, Kirkbride

## HOLME CULTRAM ABBEY

The abbey became hugely wealthy on the proceeds of sheep farming and wool production and, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, was much larger than you see today. The chancel extended further to the east, and to the south were the cloisters, refectory, infirmary and stabling for horses.



All was to change in 1538 with the dissolution of the monastery by Henry VIII. Local people petitioned the king's chancellor, Thomas Cromwell, to preserve the church for worship. This was granted but only the lowered nave of the church and some outbuildings were left standing. The cloisters, transept and chancel beyond were demolished, leaving the abbey church much reduced in size.

Today, the abbey has undergone extensive renovation following a major fire in 2006 and is in better shape now than for many years. Inside the porch, a fine Norman archway welcomes visitors and a spiral staircase provides access to a viewing gallery. An exhibition on the abbey and its impact on the local area can be viewed in the southwest range, along with various artefacts from recent archaeological digs.

*Did you know that Robert the Bruce's father is buried at Holme Cultram Abbey? This fact did not stop his son from raiding the abbey in 1319 and 1322 in acts of rebellion against English attempts to rule Scotland.*



St John's Church, Newton Arlosh

## ST JOHN'S CHURCH, NEWTON ARLOSH

After the destruction of Skinburness in 1304, the inhabitants were relocated to Newton Arlosh by the monks of Holme Cultram Abbey. One of their first acts was to build a new church with thick walls and a defensible tower and nave.

After the dissolution of the abbey in 1538, the church was neglected and became a ruin.

*'...the Chapel of Newton Arlosh did decay, the door stood open and sheep lay in it ... the roof fell down and the lead was taken away ... and converted into salt pans.'*

Description of 1580, taken from *A History of St John's Church, Newton Arlosh* by M Salmon, 1991.

In startling contrast to the exterior, the interior creates a light, airy space. The restoration work was undertaken in 1843, thanks to the generosity of Sara Losh of Wreay. She enlarged the church, added a semi-circular apse and inserted two rams heads in stone to mark the original position of the altar.

The church is normally open, otherwise a key can be obtained from the rector – see church noticeboard for contact details.

The font at St Michael's Church, Bowness-on-Solway

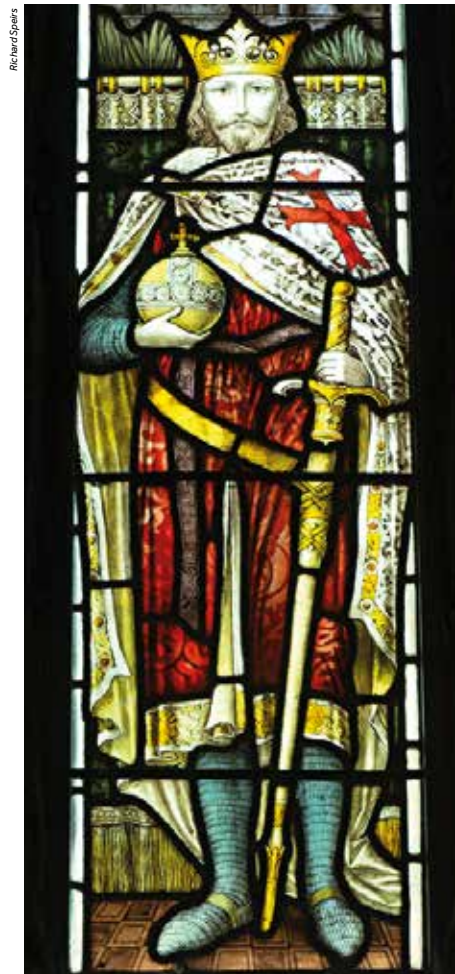
## ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH, BOWNESS-ON-SOLWAY

The headland at Bowness stood at one end of a 'wath' or crossing point over the Solway Firth into Scotland. This may have been the route early Christian missionaries such as Saint Kentigern (or Saint Mungo) and Saint Ninian sailed between Scotland and England. Although St Michael's Church is of Norman construction, it is built of recycled stones from the Hadrianic fort of *Maia* and probably stands on a site of religious significance dating back to Roman times.

The ornate font is one of the treasures of the church. It is richly decorated on all four sides with vines and intercrossing strapwork.

### A right old ding-dong!

*In 1626, Scottish raiders stole the bells from the church and were given chase. To lighten their load, they jettisoned the bells into the Solway at a place now called 'Bell Dub'. Shortly afterwards, men from Bowness mounted a counter-raid to replace their bells by stealing those from churches on the Scottish side of the Solway. These bells can be seen at the back of the church to this day.*



Stained glass window of King Edward I, St Michael's Church, Burgh-by-Sands

## ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH, BURGH-BY-SANDS

Erected upon the Roman fort of *Aballava* on Hadrian's Wall, the church's original foundations are of unknown date but the visible sections are Norman. Not surprisingly, many Roman stones are used in its construction. The stone carvings of mythological beasts in the undercroft of the church are believed to be Anglo-Saxon and probably came from an earlier church that stood on this site.

Burgh Church is unusual in originally having two towers at either end of the church. The western tower housed the bells, whilst the eastern tower (commonly described as the vicar's pele) protected the priest from Scottish raids. The east tower had the effect of blocking the chancel, so the church is devoid of an east window.

It was to this church that the body of Edward I was brought following his death on Burgh Marshes on 7 July 1307.

## ST BRIDE'S CHURCH, KIRKBRIDE

The church stands on top of a Roman camp that was linked to a small wharf on the River Wampool below. The present church was built around 1189, largely of stones from the camp. However, by the early 1700s, the church had deteriorated so much that the Bishop of Carlisle remarked that *'it looks more like a pigsty than the house of God'*. The narrow north door, slim lancet windows and deep bar holes on the main south doorway are defensive features that were probably inserted to protect the congregation from Scottish raids in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century.

*The last person to die in the **Battle of Waterloo** of 1815 is buried here. Lt Joseph Taylor Clark's headstone states 'he fell gloriously fighting for his king and country on 18 June 1815'.*

*To find it, count three rows eastwards from the porch and look for the inscription on the rear of the gravestone.*



### ST JOHN'S CHURCH, CROSSCANONBY

Founded by canons from the Augustinian priory in Carlisle, this interesting church contains many antiquities from pre-Christian times. The chancel arch is thought to have been brought here from the Roman fort at Maryport. There are also some Roman millstones and a curious 'thunderbolt' stone with symbols

of a cross, figure and thunderbolt carved on it. A hogback tombstone can be found adjacent to the chancel wall, providing evidence of Norse occupation of this area.



Viking hogback tombstone

Outside is an unusual tombstone to John Smith, a local salt tax collector, which bears a relief of the man working at his desk. Duty on salt was often twice as much in Scotland, leading to a thriving trade in smuggling salt into England until the tax was abolished in 1823.



John Smith tombstone



Quaker Meeting House, Allonby

### QUAKERS

The Society of Friends (otherwise known as Quakers) enjoyed strong support from people living on the Solway Coast.

Rather than adhere to traditional religious tenets, Quakers advocated freedom to worship as they wished. In an inherently hierarchical society, this was viewed as blasphemous, and Quakers were widely persecuted for their un-Christian beliefs. As a result, they chose to meet in their own homes or in the open air. It was only after the 1689 Act of Toleration that Quakers felt confident enough to start building meeting houses at Allonby, Beckfoot and Mawbray.

Quakers believed in equality for all – even in death. In Quaker burial grounds, all the gravestones are the same height, of a simple design, and inscribed

only with the name and dates of the deceased.

To find out more, visit the Quaker Burial Ground at Beckfoot where an interpretation panel provides more information.

*In 1665, a secret wedding took place in the dunes at Mawbray when Thomas Ellwood of Allonby married Mary Ritson of Mawbray. This was one of the earliest recorded Quaker marriages within Britain.*



Quaker burial ground, Beckfoot

# Fortified Solway



Drumburgh Castle

For 2000 years, the Solway has been a frontier zone. Its position on the border between what is now England and Scotland, with easy access to the sea and major north–south trade routes, resulted in the area being fought over for strategic control from Roman times.

In 122 AD, the Romans began construction of a military frontier across northern England. Hadrian's Wall, as it became known, stretched from Wallsend in the east to Bowness-on-Solway – a distance of 80 Roman miles (73 English miles). The Wall was punctuated by milecastles every Roman mile with two turrets set between each milecastle. These

structures, along with the forts at Bowness (*Maia*), Drumburgh (*Congavata*) and Burgh-by-Sands (*Aballava*) have since provided a convenient source of dressed stone for later buildings. The fort at Maryport (*Alauna*) and Milefortlet 21 were extensions of the Roman fortifications that continued down the Cumbrian coast.

The Normans arrived on the Solway in 1092 and exerted their control with the establishment of the Barony of Burgh. A Norman motte and bailey 'castle' at Beaumont was built on top of a Roman turret (a site now occupied by St Mary's Church).

Edward I's attempts to quell the Scottish nation led to great resentment and vengeful raids on English property from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The Scots, led by Robert the Bruce, attacked Holme Cultram Abbey in 1319, followed by another raid in 1322. Over time, the Anglo-Scottish Wars



Statue of King Edward I, Burgh-by-Sands

deteriorated into family feuds and a culture of endemic lawlessness by the notorious Border Reivers for the next 300 years. This was a time when self-defence was required in the form of thick-walled towers or bastle houses (a type of defensive farmhouse). These fortified farmhouses are relatively scarce in a region with little natural building stone, and the only surviving examples are conveniently close to (and built of) the Roman wall. The mighty edifice of Drumburgh Castle (more correctly a large bastle) is the best example of a fortified structure on the Solway.

For ordinary people, their only hope of protection was in the local church. The church towers at Burgh-by-Sands



Pill box at Grune Point

and Newton Arlosh were deliberately constructed with the dual purpose of acting as both bell tower and a place of refuge, whilst at Kirkbride it seems that the whole church had built-in features to help defend its congregation from attack.

During the Second World War, airfields were built at Silloth and Kirkbride as maintenance units for aircraft and for training pilots and crews. Silloth was a base for Lockheed Hudson aircraft in the 1940s but had such a bad reputation for crash landings and take-offs that Moricambe Bay was otherwise known as 'Hudson Bay'.

A machine-gun pill box was constructed at Grune Point and radio masts erected at Anthorn as a Cold War early warning system. Nowadays, Anthorn broadcasts the Greenwich time signal used by banks, GPS devices, train operators, navigators and the BBC 'pips'.

To explore the military importance of the Solway, visit [www.solwaymilitarytrail.co.uk](http://www.solwaymilitarytrail.co.uk)

Lockheed Hudson



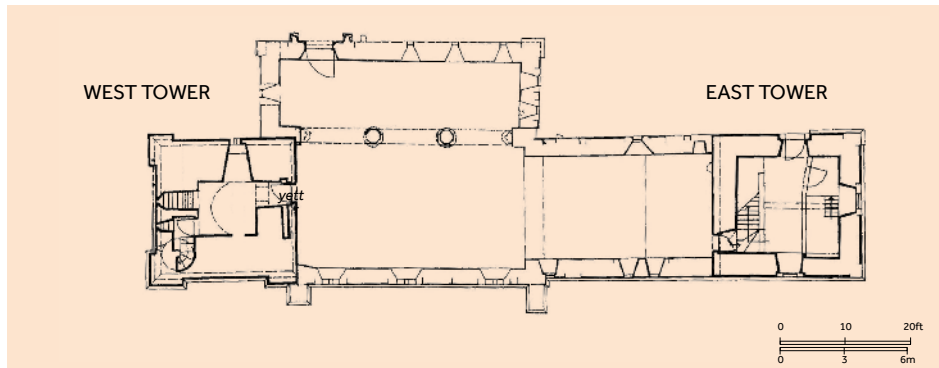


St Michael's, Burgh-by-Sands church tower

## BURGH-BY-SANDS CHURCH TOWER

This massively thick-walled tower was built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century out of what remained of the Roman fort. At the time, the Solway was subject to periodic attacks by the Scots, so the tower was always intended to double up as a bell tower and a place of refuge. Entry was through a heavy iron-barred gate (or 'yett') that could only be accessed from inside the church.

Another tower (the vicar's pele) was built at the east end of the church to protect the priest. Only the base remains today (part of the vestry). In 1703, Bishop Nicholson commented: *'...the bells hang in a good square steeple at the west end, and there has been another in the east. But this is now half broken down.'*



Ground-floor plan of church showing location of both towers

D. Perrin and J. Robinson

## NEWTON ARLOSH CHURCH TOWER

The church here owes its existence to the misfortune of Skinburness when the village was totally destroyed during a storm in 1304. A 'new town' was established further inland at Arlosh, centred on the church of St John. The early 14<sup>th</sup> century was a turbulent time, so the tower was deliberately constructed to act as both stronghold and belfry.

The entrance into the church is just 31 inches (79 cm) wide. Only one person can pass through at a time, which makes forced entry very difficult. Access to the tower was through an iron-framed internal door designed to resist attack by fire. A spiral staircase led to the upper floors, with daylight entering through narrow slit windows. A lookout would be stationed on top of the tower to alert everyone to a possible raid. The villagers would then herd their livestock into the church itself and find refuge in the tower until the danger had passed.



St John's Church, Newton Arlosh



Drumburgh Castle

## DRUMBURGH CASTLE

*The stones of the Pict Wall were pulled down to build Drumburgh.  
For the Wall is very near it.  
John Leland, 1539.*

Largely constructed of stones from Hadrian's Wall, Drumburgh Castle was built to guard the Sandwath ford over the Solway. It began as an unfortified house in the 13<sup>th</sup> century with a ground-floor entrance (the arch can still be seen behind the external stairs). In 1307, a licence was granted to crenellate (add battlements) to the house. By 1593 it was described as *'neither castle nor tower, but a house of strength and a very fit place for defence.'* Viewable from road.

*See if you can spot two Roman altars, a cast-iron pump and stone eagles on the roof. Stone eagles can also be seen on the churches at Bowness-on-Solway, Holme Cultram and Newton Arlosh.*

# Maritime Solway

The juxtaposition of land and sea has shaped the history and heritage of the Solway area throughout time. Hadrian's Wall utilised the Solway estuary as a defensive element in the building of this world-famous structure in AD 122. The Hadrianic fortifications continued down the coast to Maryport and beyond using the same system of turrets and milefortlets but without a linking wall. Milefortlet 21 is visible at Crosscanonby, whilst to the south a Roman port was established at Maryport.

During the early medieval period, the sea was the highway – and harbours were gateways to the wider world. Boats and ships plied the waters of the Solway, transporting materials such as coal, timber, salt, wool, iron ore, as well as smuggled goods.

Fishing villages were dotted along the coast; many using the age-old method of haaf-netting to catch fish. Some of these villages developed into ports, with wharves and quays to facilitate the transportation of goods and

passengers. Port Carlisle, Skinburness, Sillioth and Maryport all developed from simple fishing villages.



Traditional haaf-netting

Shipping expanded with the development of ship-building. Thomas Henry Ismay of Maryport founded the White Star line (owners of the Titanic), whilst Fletcher Christian of Ewanrigg Hall became famous for leading the mutiny on the Bounty in 1789.

Salt was essential for preserving meat and for medicinal purposes, and many salt-making enterprises were established along the coast. Although most can no longer be identified, local place names such as Salta and Salt Coates belie their former use. The best-preserved salt-making remains are on the beach at Crosscanonby.

Nowadays, the coast is more commonly used for recreational activities and enjoying the magnificent sunsets.

A broadside ship launch at Maryport



## ALLONBY

Whilst Maryport was predominantly occupied with shipbuilding, at Allonby they were more interested in ship-breaking. Old wooden hulls were towed into the wide bay to be broken up on the beach.

Over time, Allonby evolved from a small fishing village to a fashionable sea-bathing resort. Fine Georgian houses were built for those who wanted to benefit from the sea air, briny waters and fine views over the Solway, followed by the grand Victorian Baths in 1835 that provided a suite of heated saltwater pools for bathing.

### The wreck of the *Hougomont*

*On 9 October 1902, the Hougomont left San Francisco bound for Liverpool with a cargo of wheat, barley, 32,000 cases of tinned fruit and 24,000 cases of salmon. On reaching the Mersey, bad weather forced the barque north to Maryport to await a tow back to Liverpool. During the night of 26 February 1903, hurricane-force winds struck the coast, driving the Hougomont north into Allonby Bay. By daybreak, most of her cargo was strewn on the beach. It is said that the people of Allonby dined out in style for several months thereafter!*



An antique print of Allonby, with fishing-boats; Bartlett, 1842



Crosscanonby Salt pans

## CROSSCANONBY SALTPANS

Salt making was a highly important industry, as salt was needed for preserving meat and fish and for medicinal purposes. There were many salt pans along the north Cumbrian coast, but the ones at Crosscanonby are among the best preserved in England.

They were constructed around 1650 by the Senhouses of Netherhall. Salt-laden sand (sleech) was gathered from the shore and deposited into the elevated sleech pit. Fresh water (and sometimes sea water) was allowed to trickle through the sleech and collected in an adjacent brine pit. The brine was gently boiled in iron pans until the liquid condensed to form salt crystals.

# Farms & working buildings

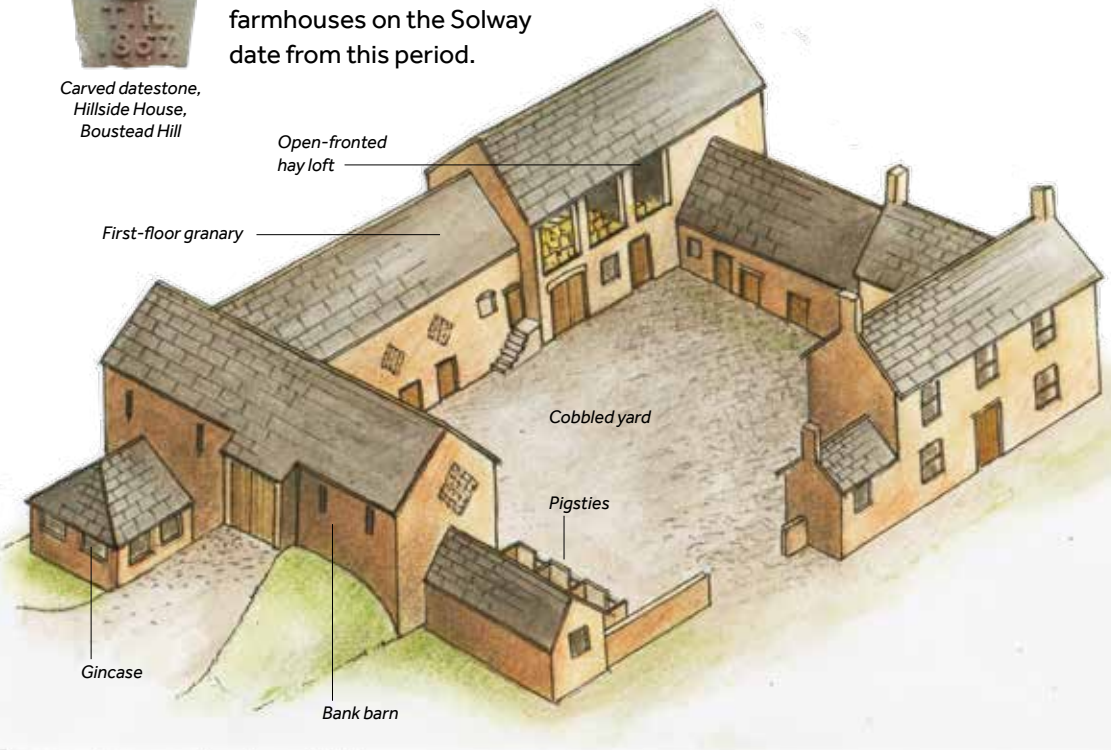
The Cistercian monks of Holme Cultram Abbey were the first to increase productivity of the land by draining the wetlands to create fields for sheep and cereal crops. Once the abbey had been dissolved in 1538, many tenant farmers could start reaping the rewards of farming through their own efforts and expressed their growing wealth by rebuilding their farms in stone and later in brick. Many acknowledged their new status by inserting a datestone recording the event along with their initials. Many elegant and substantial farmhouses on the Solway date from this period.



Carved datestone, Hillside House, Boustead Hill

The oldest farmhouses took the form of a 'long house' (a house with adjacent byre separated by a cross-passage). This layout kept humans and animals apart, though the cross-passage was shared.

Farm layouts can vary enormously. Some are ranged around a courtyard. Others can be U- or L-shaped, linear, parallel, or simply an assortment of dispersed buildings with no recognisable pattern. The choice of farm layout was related to local topography, type of farming and the availability of space and money.



Part of a farm courtyard at Burgh-by-Sands



Mill Grove farmhouse, Abbeytown

Power to work the farm came initially from humans and horses, and later from wind or water power. Gincases provided shelter for horses to drive a horse engine (or gin) and could be semi-circular, square or polygonal.



A former gincase at Wormanby Farm

The type of farming determined what buildings were needed. Arable farms had barns and granaries; pastoral farming required accommodation for animals and lofts for animal feed. Mixed farming needed both. Farm buildings can usually be identified from their typical features, e.g. a hay barn will often have open sides to allow air to circulate, while a threshing barn is usually orientated to face the prevailing wind to aid the process of separating the grain from the chaff.

Other 'working' buildings include windmills, watermills, forges, tileworks and breweries. These were once common on the Solway but, as times change, their existence can often only be inferred through the remains of old buildings, photographs, historical records and place names.

## EASTON HALL

This grand façade with its nine windows, swan-necked pediment over the door (dated 1724) and finely-moulded architraves is one of the finest in the area. Such decoration was meant to proclaim the family's wealth and status. Viewable from road.



Easton Hall

## EAST COTE LEADING LIGHT

The rear of two lights that helped to lead ships towards the approach channel for the port of Silloth. It was originally built in 1864 as a mobile structure laid on a short rail track, allowing the light to be re-positioned



East Cote  
Leading Light



if the channel shifted its course. The lighthouse was withdrawn from service in 1959. It was rebuilt in its original style in 1997.

## HANDMADE BRICKS

At East Farm in Newton Arlosh, a remarkable collection of hand 'stamped' bricks can be seen inserted into a barn wall. Close inspection reveals the repeated signature of 'Robert Waite' and the date of 1755 on bricks adorned with hearts and scrollwork. Other bricks depict a man and a woman holding a heart, whilst another proclaims: '*Your consent is my content*'. This 'marriage proposal' must rank as one of the most unusual ways of professing love.

These hand-made bricks were probably made nearby. The clay would be extracted from a local pit and shaped in wooden moulds to form rectangular blocks. Once the blocks had dried out, they were placed in a kiln to be fired.

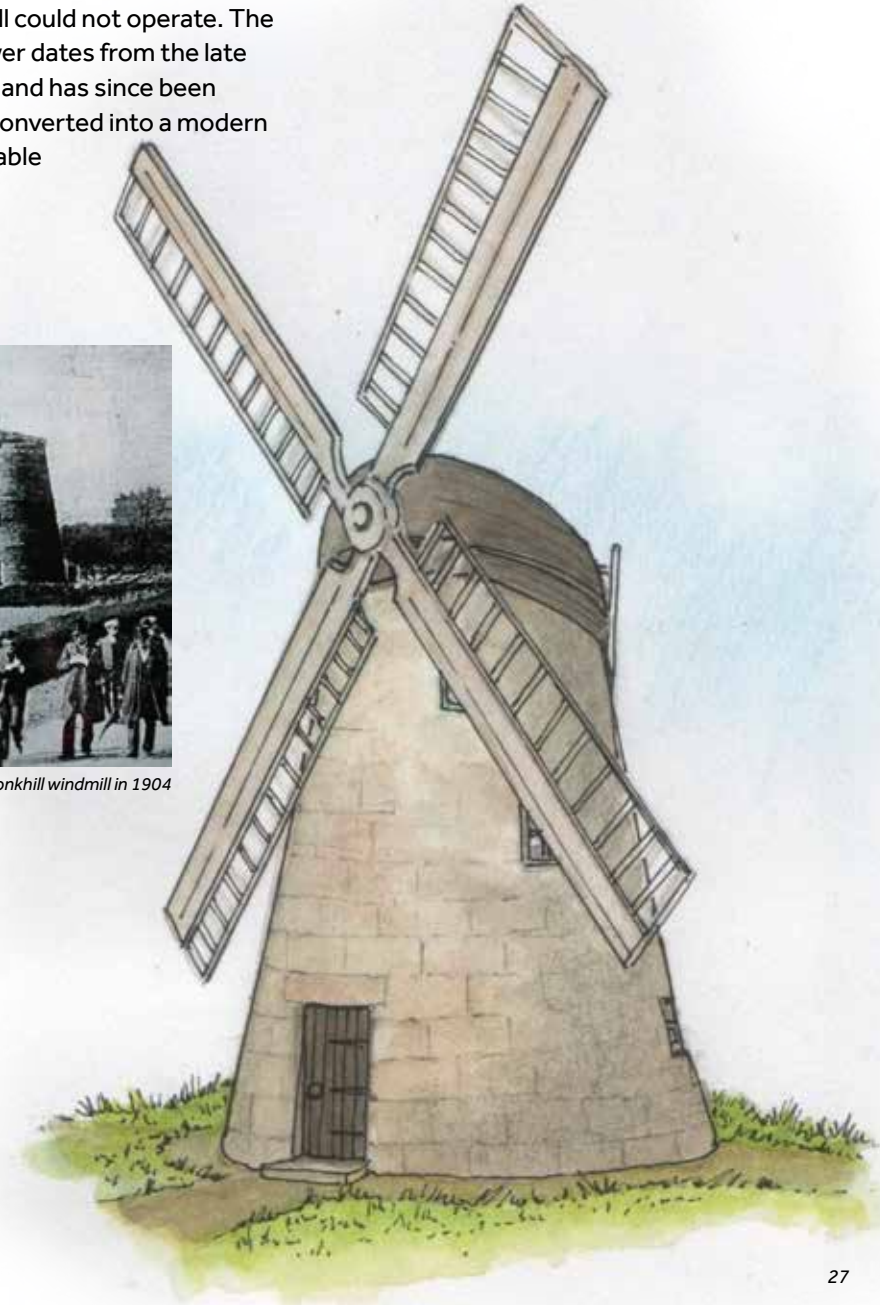


## MONKHILL WINDMILL

Monkhill once had two corn mills: one powered by water, the other by wind – the latter being used for grinding corn when drought conditions meant the watermill could not operate. The windmill tower dates from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and has since been sensitively converted into a modern home. Viewable from road.



Monkhill windmill in 1904



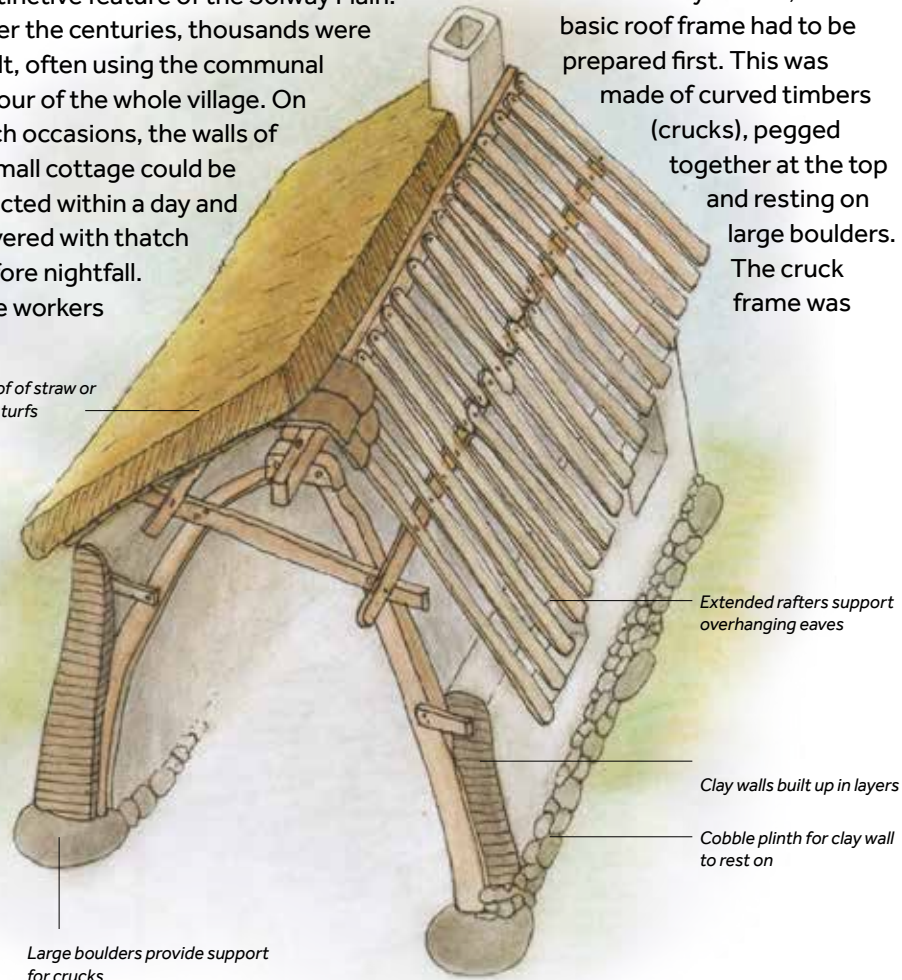
# Clay dabbins

Local buildings were built of materials that were close at hand and, more importantly, free. In north Cumbria that meant clay, cobbles and boulders for walls; timber for a roof frame; and turf, reeds, straw, heather or bracken for the roof. The most common structure built was a clay dabbin – for cottages, houses and farm-buildings. They are still a distinctive feature of the Solway Plain. Over the centuries, thousands were built, often using the communal labour of the whole village. On such occasions, the walls of a small cottage could be erected within a day and covered with thatch before nightfall. The workers

were rewarded with a party when the work was finished.

Before the First World War, there were at least 1300 dabbins in existence, but today scarcely more than 300 survive. Some are in a derelict condition, but others have been lovingly restored by their owners.

To make a clay dabbin, a basic roof frame had to be prepared first. This was made of curved timbers (crucks), pegged together at the top and resting on large boulders. The cruck frame was



propped up while the walls were then built. The first part was to build a low cobble plinth as high as the boulders. A clay dabbin mixture of clay and straw was laid on this low wall and covered with a thin layer of straw. Alternating layers were then built on top until the required height was reached. Openings were left for windows and doors. Once built, the walls were covered with a lime render (mix of lime putty, sand and animal hair) as weatherproofing. Finally, a thatched roof (made of reed, straw, heather or bracken laid on a bed of turf) would be added.

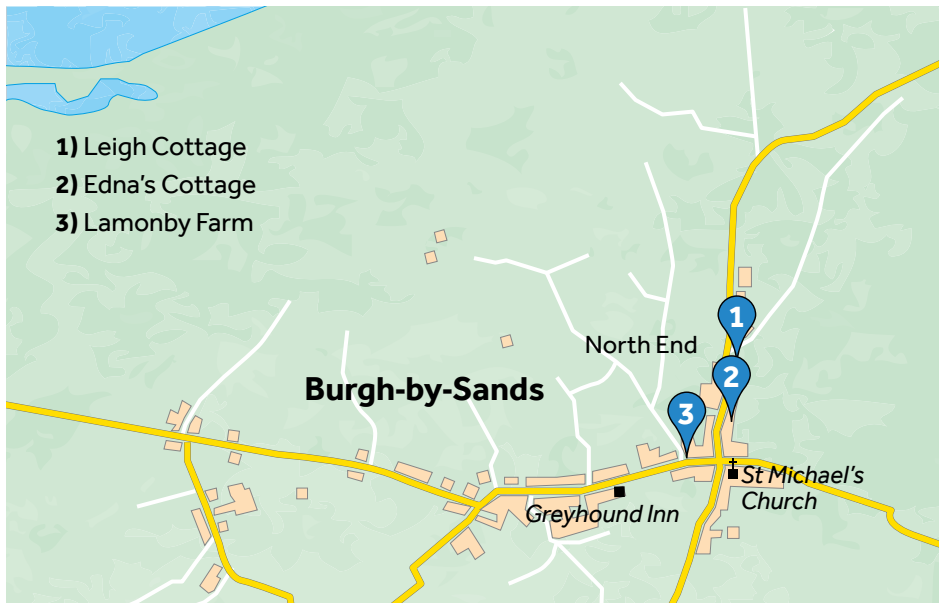
In earlier buildings, the roof was supported by crucks. In later years, the crucks were replaced with triangular trusses that rested directly on top of the clay wall. A prominent feature of thatched clay dabbins are deep overhanging eaves that protect the walls from rain.

When covered with render, clay dabbins are not easy to spot. Look for walls that may have bulges or uneven surfaces. Boulders are usually visible, and the window and door recesses are deep with rounded edges.

*Interior of a cruck barn, Great Orton*



*Historic England*



Location of clay dabbin cottages in Burgh-by-Sands

### 1) LEIGH COTTAGE

Here you can see the techniques used to build this clay dabbin cottage. Notice the large corner stone and the boulder plinth. Close inspection of the exposed 'dabbin' reveals numerous small pebbles held within the clay matrix. You might even be able to pick out the thin layers of straw that separated the clay dabbin mix as each course was laid one on top of another. Viewable from road.



Leigh Cottage, Burgh-by-Sands



Edna's Cottage, Burgh-by-Sands

### 2) EDNA'S COTTAGE

A fine example of a restored clay dabbin cottage with a thatched roof and deep overhanging eaves. The lime render protects the clay wall behind. Compare this with nearby Leigh Cottage, which has exposed clay walls while in the process of being restored. Viewable from road.



Lamonby Farm, Burgh-by-Sands

### 3) LAMONBY FARM

This clay dabbin is typical of a Cumbrian longhouse (where animals and humans lived under the same roof). Both animals and humans used the cross-passage that divides the byre from the house. At a later date, a separate door was created for the byre. Note the small windows and overhanging eaves. Viewable from side lane.



Campfield Marsh clay dabbin completed



Campfield Marsh clay dabbin under construction

### CLAY DABBIN AT RSPB CAMPFIELD MARSH RESERVE

In 2016, the first clay dabbin to be built for over a century was completed at Campfield Marsh. Volunteers used

traditional materials and techniques throughout the whole process under the guidance of an expert in earth buildings. An exhibition on the history, construction and maintenance of clay dabbins can be found inside the building.

### Clay dabbin maintenance

- Protect clay walls with a lime render. Never use cement render.
- Ensure water cannot penetrate the top of the wall by regularly examining the roof cover and guttering.
- Remove plant growth close to the wall and, where the ground level is high outside, reduce this where possible.
- Cracks and voids in clay walls can be repaired, but find a professional earth-walling contractor to do this.



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