

**SWALEDALE AND ARKENGARThDALE ARCHAEOLOGY  
GROUP**

**REPORT OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**

**CARRIED OUT AT**

**USHA TOP, LOW ROW**

**SWALEDALE, NORTH YORKSHIRE**

**for**

**Mr & Mrs J Moon**



**Planning Reference R/03/42C/LB  
Archaeological Site Code UTS13  
YDNPA HER Event EYD7843.  
NGR SD9927997882**

**August 2013**

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## INTRODUCTION

Usha Top is a Grade II listed property situated on the south side of Swaledale opposite the main settlement of Low Row. It is accessed via a track leading off High Lane, an extension of Low Lane, which runs on the south side of the river Swale in a westerly direction from Scabba Wath Bridge. The access track is shared with Feetham Holme another Grade II listed property. Usha Top is a farmhouse with an adjoining southern enclosure together with a single storey outbuilding adjacent to the access track. To the south of the house lies a barn and yard, which are separately owned.

The entrance door on the southwestern corner bears a date stone of 1662 and it is believed the house has been occupied as a residence either as a single building or when it was converted for a period as two separate cottages.

The property was listed following inspection on the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1986 with the following description<sup>1</sup>:

*Usha Top GV II House. Dated 1662. Coursed watershot sandstone with ashlar dressings, stone slate roof. 2-cell axial stack plan of 2 storeys, added rear outshut. Crude quoins. Boarded door to left has chamfered quoined surround, deep lintel with triangular soffit has panel with date. A secondary doorway with boarded door inserted on right. 2 ground floor windows: left window has unequally-hung sash with glazing bars in stone surround, the lintel being an upturned 3-light mullioned-window lintel; to right 3-light, now 2-light, chamfered mullioned window with weather course above. Both first floor windows have unequally-hung sashes with glazing bars, the sill of the left window being a re-used drip mould. Raised coping on left. 3 stacks, at ends and a larger one between the 2 rooms. Harrison B. and Hutton B., Vernacular Houses in North Yorkshire and Cleveland, 1984, p 88. 'NYCVBSG Report', No 688. Listing NGR: SD9927997882*

The entry from Harrison And Hutton provides a little additional information:

*Usha Top, an isolated farmhouse in Swaledale... dated 1662 and only extended since by the addition of an outshut at the back for service accommodation. Other houses of the same plan have been noticed in Swaledale and we have recorded Harkerside Place and Grinton Manor (1670) in the same parish of Grinton. None of these is very large and a typical small example was recorded on the Wharfe-Nidd watershed when Grimwith reservoir was enlarged.*

In 1980 the North Yorkshire and Cleveland Vernacular Buildings Study Group and in 1990 the Yorkshire Vernacular Buildings Study Group also reported on Usha Top<sup>2</sup>.

## BACKGROUND

The current owners, Mr & Mrs J Moon, applied to the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) for Listed Building Consent, to renovate and alter the property. To support this application, in February 2013 an Architectural and Heritage Assessment<sup>3</sup> for Usha Top was prepared by the Paul Crosby Architect practice from

Kendal, Cumbria and a Significance Assessment<sup>4</sup> by Chartered Architect Sarah Wilkinson of Marrick. Listed Building Consent was granted on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2013 subject to certain conditions including an Archaeological Watching Brief (WB).

Swaledale and Arkengarthdale Archaeology Group (SWAAG) were commissioned by the owners to carry out the WB, the scope of which was defined in a Written Scheme of Investigation<sup>5</sup>. This was submitted to and approved by the YDNPA, in accordance with the Listed Building Consent, and a Consent to Continue letter issued on the 12<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

## **PROPERTY DESCRIPTION**

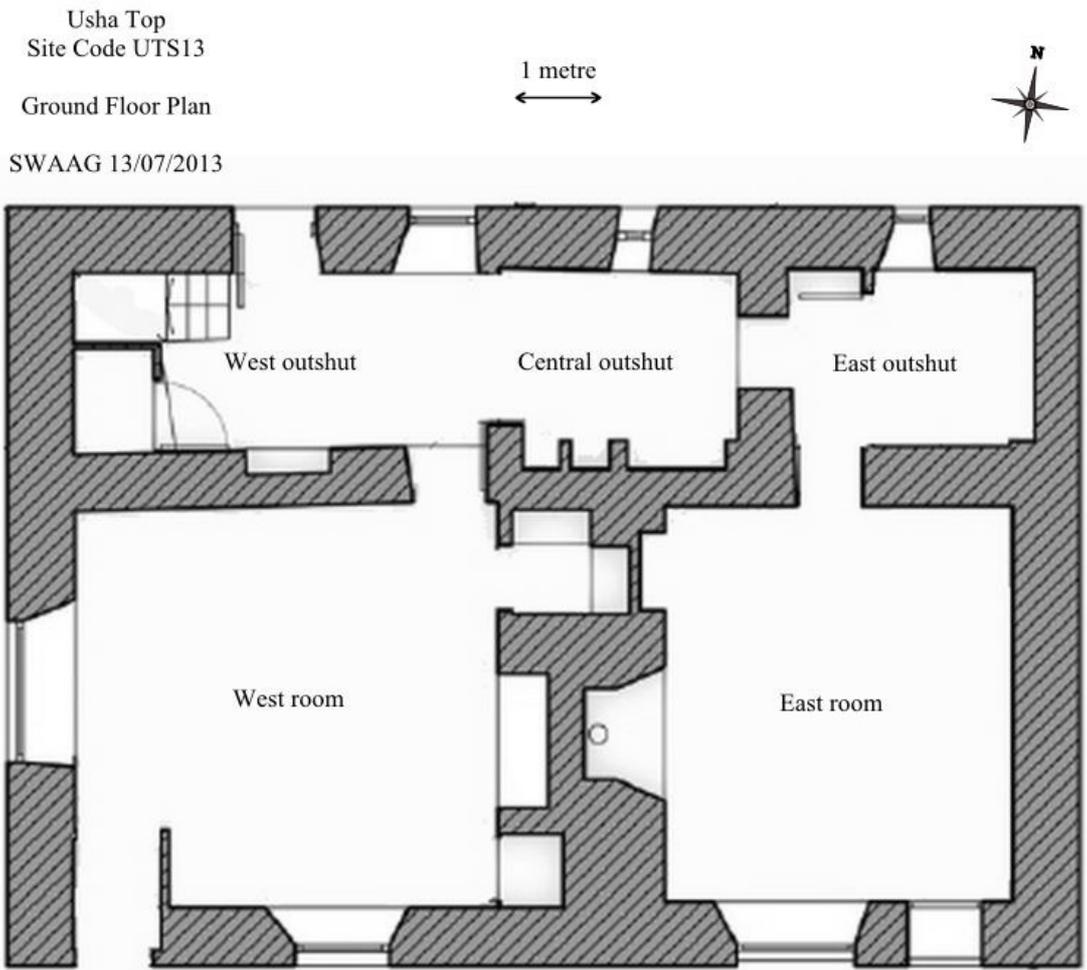
As described in the Paul Crosby report<sup>3</sup>, Usha Top is a stone farmhouse with a stone slate roof built of fairly large roughly dressed sandstone with a simple two-cell plan and a central stack. Chimneys exist at either end to serve bedrooms at the first floor level although no such fireplace exists in the west end of the building. To the North face of the building is a continuous outshut, which has been extended and raised at the western end to two storeys and contains the staircase.

Closer inspection reveals a history of alterations and improvements and the development of the building is reported as follows:

- 1) Mid/late C17<sup>th</sup> two-cell farmhouse with heather thatched roof, with central outshut to the rear.
- 2) Mid to late C18<sup>th</sup>, roof heightened, windows remodelled, outshut extended to the west and heightened, together with new staircase.
- 3) Early C19<sup>th</sup>, house converted into two separate cottages, re-roofed, new first floor structure, ceilings added to first floor rooms, doorway between east and west rooms at ground floor blocked, single storey outshut added to east end.
- 4) C20<sup>th</sup>, house returned to a single residence rear outshut raised again at west end, windows added in west gable, fireplace and floor to east room altered.

On the south wall above the original doorway is a 1662 date stone. A second entrance door at the east end dates from the C19<sup>th</sup> when Usha Top was converted into two cottages.

The current layout of the ground floor is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: The current layout of the ground floor at Usha Top**

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of an Archaeological WB are to identify, record, excavate and possibly sample any features of archaeological interest revealed during the relevant works.

The specific aims are to

- Record archaeologically (written, graphic and photographic records as appropriate) any archaeological features revealed by the works.
- Recover any archaeological artefacts and environmental materials exposed by the works.

## **SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY**

The application for listed building consent outlined the planned works. The WSI and subsequent WB were designed to seek to assess archaeology that may be exposed during the works relating to the lifting of stone floor flags and the excavations

required for the installation of underfloor heating together with any additional ground disturbance required for plumbing.

Floor flags were present in all ground floor rooms except the east outshut which had a concrete floor. The majority of the flags in the east room were modern.

Prior to lifting, a record was made of the floor flags in the west room and central and west outshuts.

Following lifting of the stone flags and breaking up of the east outshut concrete floor the exposed ground surfaces were monitored, as excavation proceeded in spits, for archaeological features, until the required depth or natural deposits were reached. The excavated materials were also monitored for archaeological artefacts.

The recording of the floor flags was carried out on the 13<sup>th</sup> July and the WB fieldwork during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

## **RESULTS**

Initial inspection revealed that the flags in the west room and the west and central outshuts appeared contemporaneous and those in the outshuts contiguous. Bearing in mind the likely development of the building and considering the differing dates for the building of the outshuts it seemed likely that the stone flags in the west room and outshuts might not date from the original construction. The implications of this possibility were borne in mind as the WB progressed

The stone flags in the west room and west and central outshuts were recorded before lifting and appropriate levels taken by reference to a local datum. A description of the methodology and resulting documentation are given in Appendix I for the flag floor records and Appendix II for the levels.

### **West Room**

The entrance door at the southwest corner of the building opens into an internal wooden screen and thence into the room itself. The west room measures 4.59 x 4.38 metres excluding the cupboards. A large C19<sup>th</sup> range dominates the east wall of this room and the large floor flag in front of the range has been cut out to accommodate a cast iron grate overlying an ash pit [103] which measured 0.6 x 0.4 metres with a depth of 0.5 metres (Figures 2 & 3). A scale drawing of the ash pit can be found in Appendix I and additional images in Appendix IV.



**Figure 2: The C19<sup>th</sup> range and ash pit grate in the west room**



**Figure 3: The west room ash pit**

The stone flags [100] with a thickness of 40-45mm were removed manually. They had been laid on a loose levelling layer [101] of a dark friable silty soil which varied in depth from 25 to 75mm. Below this a more compact yellow layer [102] of weakly cemented silty clay overlaid the natural deposits [104] which were very similar in appearance to [102] but with a less compact, more friable texture.

The connection between the east and west rooms to the north of the west room range was reopened by the building contractors.. This revealed further alterations that had taken place when the building was divided into two cottages. The original dividing wall between the east and west rooms was originally 36 inches (c0.92 metres) deep. However an additional section of masonry has been added to the west of the original wall (Figure 4) in order to accommodate the fire surround in the west room. It was not possible to confirm a similar addition to the wall on the southern face of the range, as this remains rendered.



**Figure 4: The north facing wall of the re-exposed connection between the west and east rooms.**

## East Room

An external door in the southeast corner of the building leads via a modern glazed secondary door to the east room, which measures 3.79 x 4.41 metres. The room has a large stone lintel over the fireplace and a trapdoor in the ceiling adjacent to the east wall is evidence of an internal staircase, which had been removed.

The floor [200] was made up of approximately 70% modern concrete flags with the remainder being reused stone flag all laid on a layer [201] of brownish friable loose coarse sand. Beneath this was a modern plastic damp proof membrane (DPM) [202]. Underneath the plastic membrane was a layer of reddish brown firm compact medium sand c30mm deep [203].

Beneath this layer of sand [203], was a compacted soil floor [204] of varying depth (2–15 mm). The deposition of domestic debris and presumed resultant footfall and compaction, had resulted in a dark almost black colouration to parts of this layer. Nutshells and other plant debris were detected in the thicker sections. A quantity was collected for possible environmental analysis. This domestic debris extended over a large part of the central area of the room stopping short of the fireplace and the south wall. Natural deposits [205] were then reached.



Figure 5: East room layers [203], [204] and natural [205] *in situ*

## East Outshut

The east outshut measuring 2.71 x 2.02 metres is accessed from a door in the north wall of the east room and also connects with the central outshut. A layer of concrete [400], approximately 50mm deep, overlaid a 30mm sub base [401] and natural deposits [402].

## Central Outshut

Situated between the east and west outshuts this measured 2.73 x 2.03 m and was thought to have been a dairy<sup>2</sup>. However at some point before the flags were laid, the central outshut had been used as a coal store, as beneath the usual levelling layer [301] the compacted soil floor [302] was heavily contaminated with coal dust (Figure 6). Natural deposits [303] were then reached.



Figure 6: Central outshut layers [301], [302] and natural [303] *in situ*

## West Outshut

Connected to and essentially a continuation of the central outshut, the west outshut had doors connecting to the west room and the outside. It also contained the staircase and under stairs electricity meters and distribution boards and measured 4.76 x 1.99 metres. The two layers and natural deposits in the central outshut were also present here.

## **FINDS**

The finds were restricted to the three levelling layers, [101], [201] and [301] found immediately below the lifted stone flags.

### **West Room [101]**

Five sherds of post-medieval pottery included two refits, showing fresh breaks, from a dark brown glazed redware vessel, possibly a teapot, and a light brown glazed straight handle, possibly from a pipkin. A fragment of clay tobacco pipe stem, window glass and a piece of a post-medieval moulded glass vessel were also found. An unidentified ferrous metal object, a fragment of a slate pencil (35mm) and a piece of leather (c160mm x 20mm max) which appeared to be an offcut, completed this assemblage

### **East Room [201]**

Perhaps somehow reflecting the modern replacement of the floor only a fragment of a clay tobacco pipe stem and a small sherd of tin glazed pottery were retrieved. However a cold chisel <1> of length 200 mm with a cutting edge measuring 28 mm was also found in this layer. A photograph of the chisel is included in Appendix IV.

### **West and Central Outshuts [301]**

The largest assemblage of finds came mainly from the central outshut and included 32 sherds of post-medieval pottery many of which seemed to originate from the same cream glazed redware dish or pancheon. One 90 mm nail and another unidentified ferrous object (60mm long, c3mm in diameter and sharply pointed at each end), a wooden peg/plug 60mm long with diameter of 20mm tapering down to 5mm and two pieces of post-medieval window glass were also noted.

## **Conclusions**

Although the combined assemblage is small, the finds are consistent with the domestic occupation of Usha Top from the middle of the C17<sup>th</sup> but do not contain anything that is particularly noteworthy.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

A similar archaeological sequence was seen in all the ground floor rooms.

The finds from the layers beneath the flags and the presence of compacted soil floors confirmed the initial theory (see RESULTS above) that the floor flags were not laid at the time of the construction of Usha Top. The original floors would have been simple compacted soil.

Once the stone flags were removed, and we assume these were removed in the east room when the modern DPM was installed and the floor relaid, levelling layers were found directly on top of the original compacted soil floors. In the west room however we speculate that the top “crust” of the compacted soil floor had been largely

removed when the flags were laid so the compacted levelling layer [102], which was not seen in other rooms, is actually the lower layer of the compacted soil floor.

### **West Room Interpretation**

The exposure of the addition to the dividing wall between the west and east rooms (see Figure 4), affords the opportunity to add to the knowledge about the building phases at Usha Top and to provide further information as to when the stone floor flags were actually laid.

It is apparent from Figure 2 that an infill has been inserted adjacent to the inner face of the left hand upright of the fire surround in order to incorporate the fitting of the range, which is smaller than the original fire surround opening. We therefore propose that the modifications associated with the fire surround and range in the west room occurred in two phases.

Firstly, the dividing wall was substantially widened to give the necessary additional depth for the fitting of the stone fire surround and associated fireplace. Secondly, some time later, the left hand infill was added and the range fitted. We believe the ash pit was added when the range was installed. It would seem reasonable that the fire surround was inserted at the same time as the connection between the east and west rooms was blocked off to form two cottages so as to provide cooking and heating in what became “West End Cottage” (see phase 3 of the building development scheme, page 4).

This then leaves the question as to when the stone floor flags were laid. Two possibilities present themselves; 1) at time of the original division into two cottages during the installation of the west room fire surround, and 2) when the range was added sometime later.

Further evidence is available from the relative positioning of the floor flags, the fire surround, infill and range.

The large flag in front of the range was sitting slightly under the range itself and had to be slid out to free it from underneath the metalwork. Again referring to Figure 2 this large flag is the same width as the range, which suggests the two are contemporary. Had the large flag been laid at the time of the installation of the fire surround then it might have been expected to extend to across the whole width of the opening.

In addition, there is evidence that this large flag had been installed, at a later date, as a replacement for earlier flags which had been removed to accommodate the range and ash pit. To the left edge of the large flag are a series of very small stones, which have the appearance of fillers intended to make up a small gap. These stones, which are clearly seen on the floor drawing in Appendix I, are much smaller than anything else seen in the room and we suggest that these were in fact used to fill in the gaps left when earlier flags were lifted and the new large flag installed.

We therefore propose that the stone floor flags were laid when Usha Top was divided into two cottages possibly as a result of the need for additional accommodation for

lead mining or textile workers<sup>3</sup>. At this time the dividing wall between the west and east rooms was widened and the stone fire surround in the west room installed. This would include flags being laid into the fireplace formed by the new surround.

At a later date the west room was further updated to include the range and ash pit. The range was smaller than the fire surround opening and so an infill was added to the right hand side of the left upright. The floor flags in front of the fire surround fireplace were lifted, although those forming the base of the fireplace itself were left *in situ*, and can still be seen towards the back of the range fire basket. The ash pit was dug and the large floor flag laid with the smaller stones infilling the gaps at its left hand edge. The range was then installed, partially overlapping the large flag.

As a result of carrying out the Watching Brief at Usha Top it has been possible to add to the knowledge surrounding the development of the building since it's construction in the second half of the C17<sup>th</sup>. It seems clear that Usha Top would originally have had beaten earth floors throughout and as domestic situations dictated, the fireplace, floor flags and west room range were added over an extended period of time. It is not unreasonable however, to assume that these developments were typical, if not even fashionable, for this type of building in the Dale at that time.

Although we cannot be certain as to when these events happened, a further study of the ranges of the period with or without an ash pit, might be able to shed further light on when the Usha Top range was installed.

A sample of the east room floor [204], contaminated with domestic debris, was taken and although this could be subjected to environmental analysis it is doubtful whether this would significantly add to our understanding of the developmental timescale of Usha Top or similar properties in the Dale.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SWAAG would like to thank Jeremy and Jane Moon for commissioning this work and Tony Sunter and his staff from Tony Sunter Build Ltd for their co-operation during the execution of the fieldwork. Robert White of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority as always gave helpful advice and encouragement for which SWAAG members are grateful.

SWAAG is grateful to those members who contributed to the Watching Brief report:

Mike Walton

Flora and Graham Smith

Rob Nicholson

Peter Denison-Edson

Philip Bastow

Stephen Eastmead

## REFERENCES

1. <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/protection/process/national-heritage-list-for-england/>
2. Yorkshire Vernacular Buildings Study Group, Report No. 688 & supplement, 1980/1990, *Usha Top Farm Grinton*; Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Leeds
3. Architectural and Heritage Assessment for Usha Top, Low Row; Paul Crosby Architect, Kendal, February 2013
4. Significance Assessment for Proposed Works at Usha Top, Low Row; Sarah Wilkinson, Marrick, February 2013
5. A Written Scheme of Investigation for and Archaeological Watching Brief at Usha Top, Low Row; Swaledale and Arkengarthdale Archaeology Group, July 2013

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## Appendix I

### RECORDING METHODOLOGY & DRAWINGS

In the west room a series of 10 overlapping vertical images were taken, each one centred approximately on a 1 x 2 metre area of flags.

Each of these images was inserted into separate layers in a graphics software package in such a way that they could be manually placed to exactly match areas of overlapping flags.

The latest image to be added was made visible/invisible repeatedly until it could be seen to exactly overlap the preceding image.

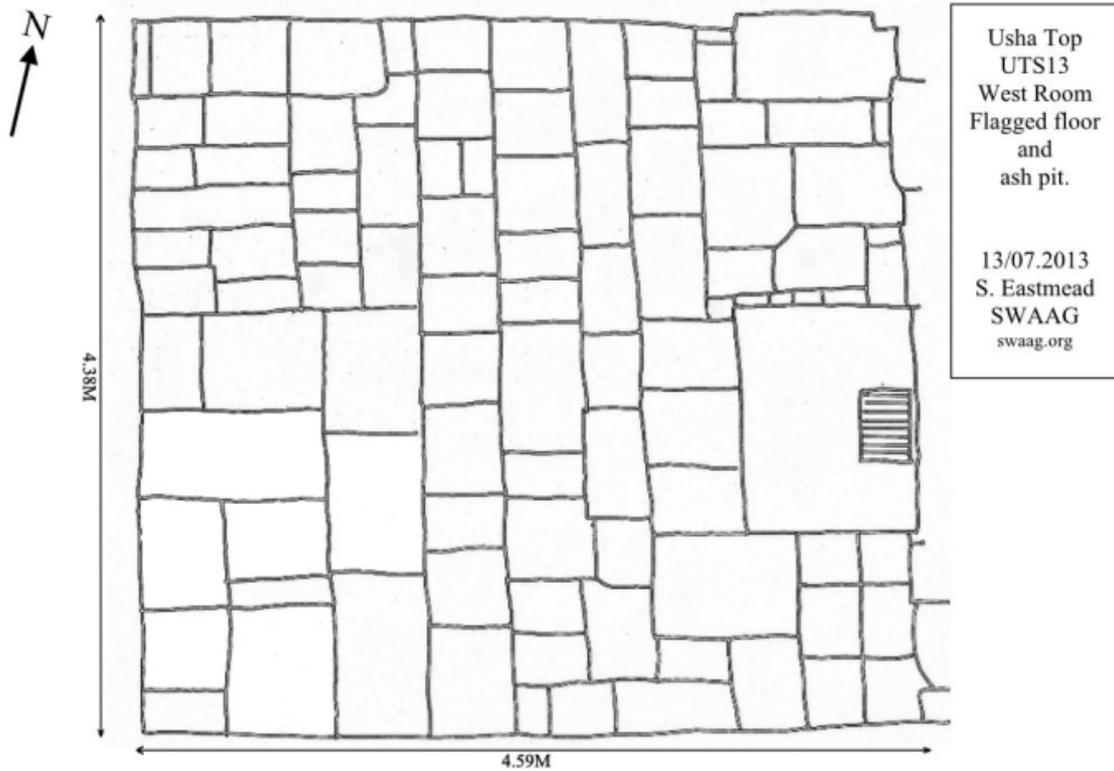
The mosaic of ten images was then printed ensuring that they were printed 1:1.



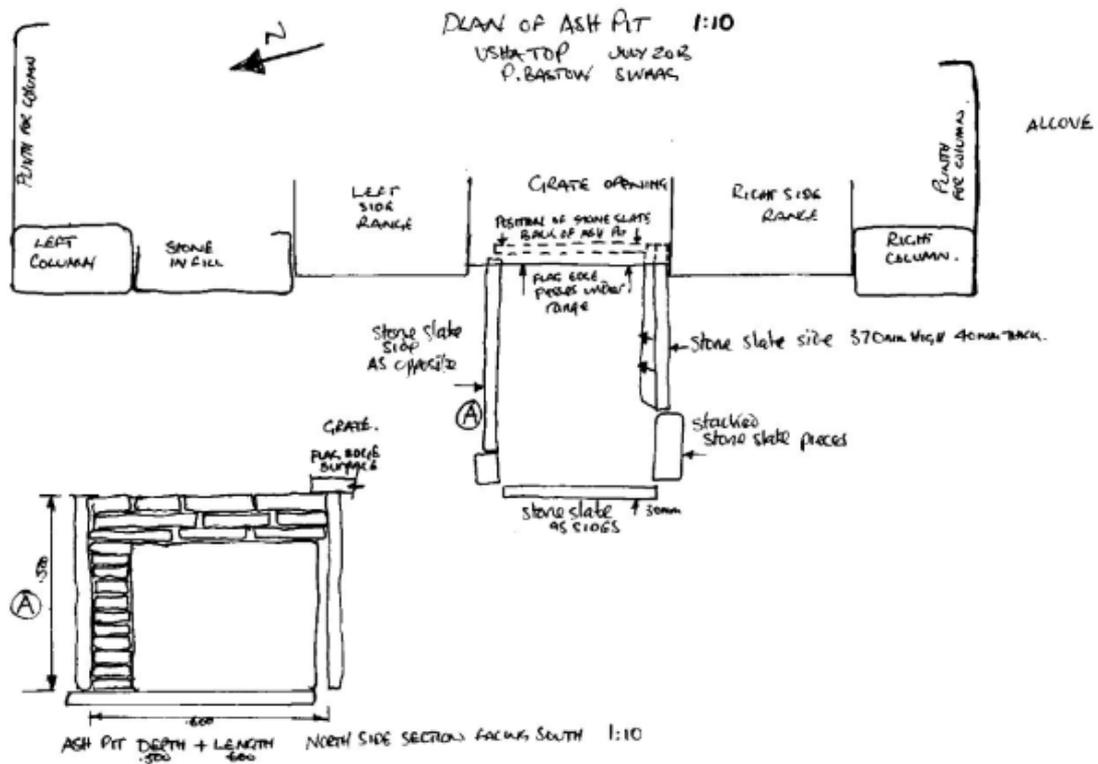
A clear film was placed over the image and the flags carefully traced by hand. The film was then scanned and the digital image inserted into the graphics software.

The image was orientated and resized proportionately to best fit A4 paper size. Labels and actual room size measurements were then added.

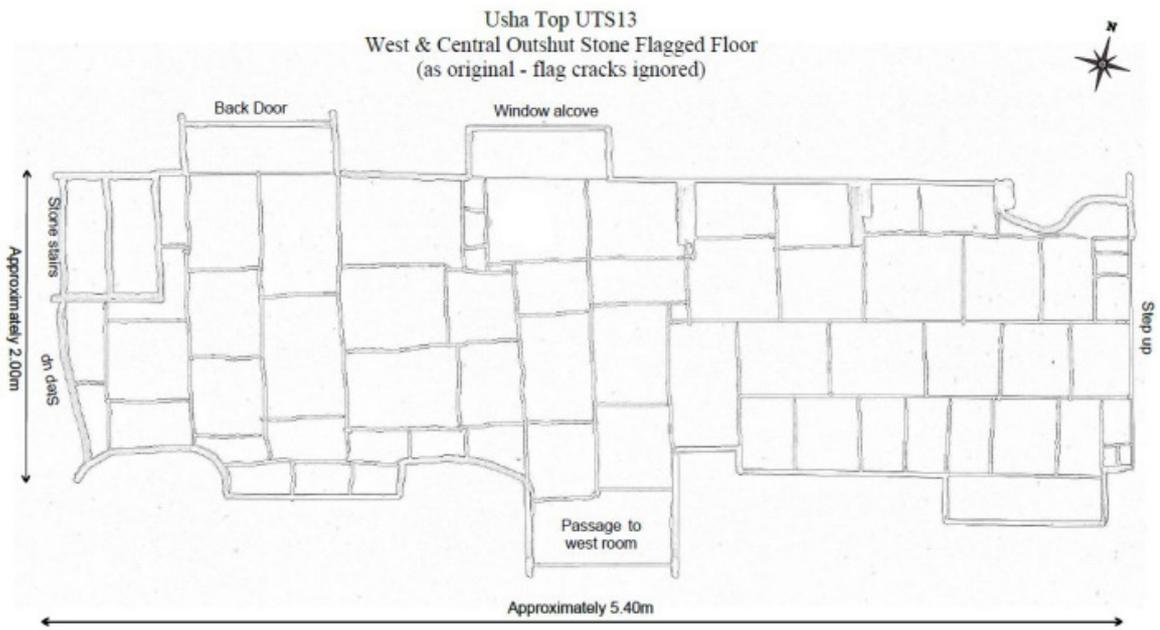
The individual images, the mosaic, the film drawing and the final drawings are all contained in the archive as images and/or pdf files and the film drawing itself.



West room flagged floor



West room ash pit



**West and central outshut flagged floor**

## Appendix II

### FLOOR LEVELS

The architectural plans used the entrance in the north wall to Usha Top as a local 0 height datum to compare ground floor heights. There is an OS spot height 287m where the access road leaves High Lane. The digital map and a handheld GPS both suggest that the back of Usha Top is approximately 270m AOD.



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kindly supplied by the North Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority.

The ground floor room levels were measured by backsight measurement to the 0 datum and taking two foresight measurements in the outshut (FS1 and FS2) opposite the west and east room doorways respectively.

The Dumpy Level was then located in the centre of each room where a backsight measurement to the appropriate outshut intermediate datum could be taken, followed by a series of foresight measurements around the room.

## Usha Top Site Code: UTS13 Ground Floor levels

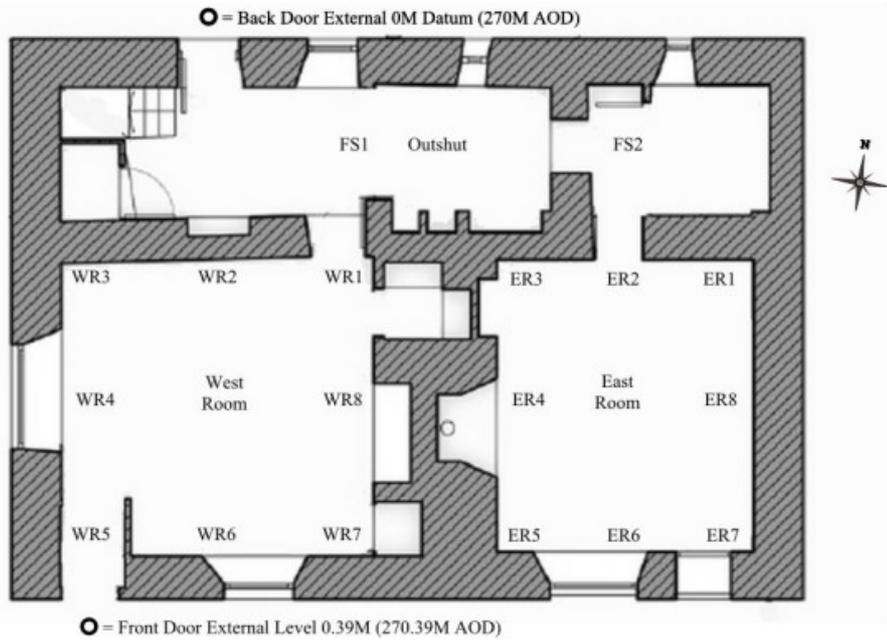
Approximate OS Elevation External Back Door Datum = 270M AOD

0 used for relative levels

Comment	Back Site	Forward Site	Delta M	
Dumpy Outshut Doorway	1.326	-		Datum (270M) 0 used.
Outshut FS1		1.290	0.036	
Outshut FS2		1.172	0.154	
West Room B/S to FS1	1.436			
WR FS1		1.357	0.115	See plan
WR FS2		1.320	0.152	See plan
WR FS3		1.305	0.167	See plan
WR FS4		1.293	0.179	See plan
WR FS5		1.262	0.210	See plan
WR FS6		1.283	0.189	See plan
WR FS7		1.298	0.174	See plan
WR FS8		1.248	0.224	See plan
East Room B/S to FS2	1.312			
ER FS1		1.290	0.176	See plan
ER FS2		1.284	0.182	See plan
ER FS3		1.315	0.151	See plan
ER FS4		1.305	0.161	See plan
ER FS5		1.299	0.167	See plan
ER FS6		1.291	0.175	See plan
ER FS7		1.284	0.182	See plan
ER FS8		1.276	0.190	See plan
Measured rise to front door datum 0.180 M from WR FS5			0.210+0.180 = 0.39M	External Front Door height 0.39M

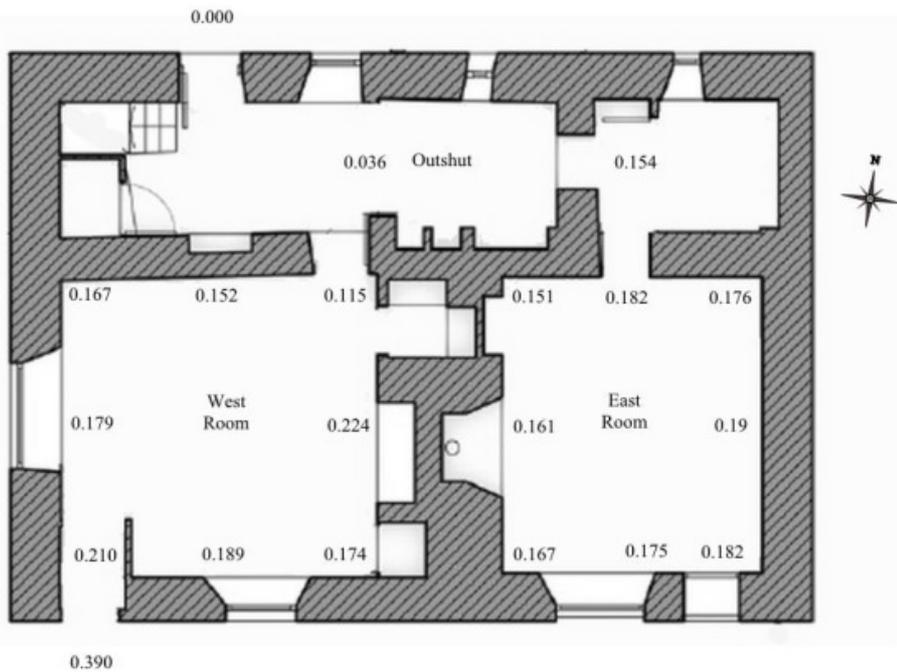
Relative Ground Floor Levels measurement locations

Usha Top  
Site Code UTS13  
Ground Floor Levels  
SWAAG 13/07/2013



Relative Ground Floor Levels in metres

Usha Top  
Site Code UTS13  
Ground Floor Levels  
SWAAG 13/07/2013



Room Sizes  
(metres)

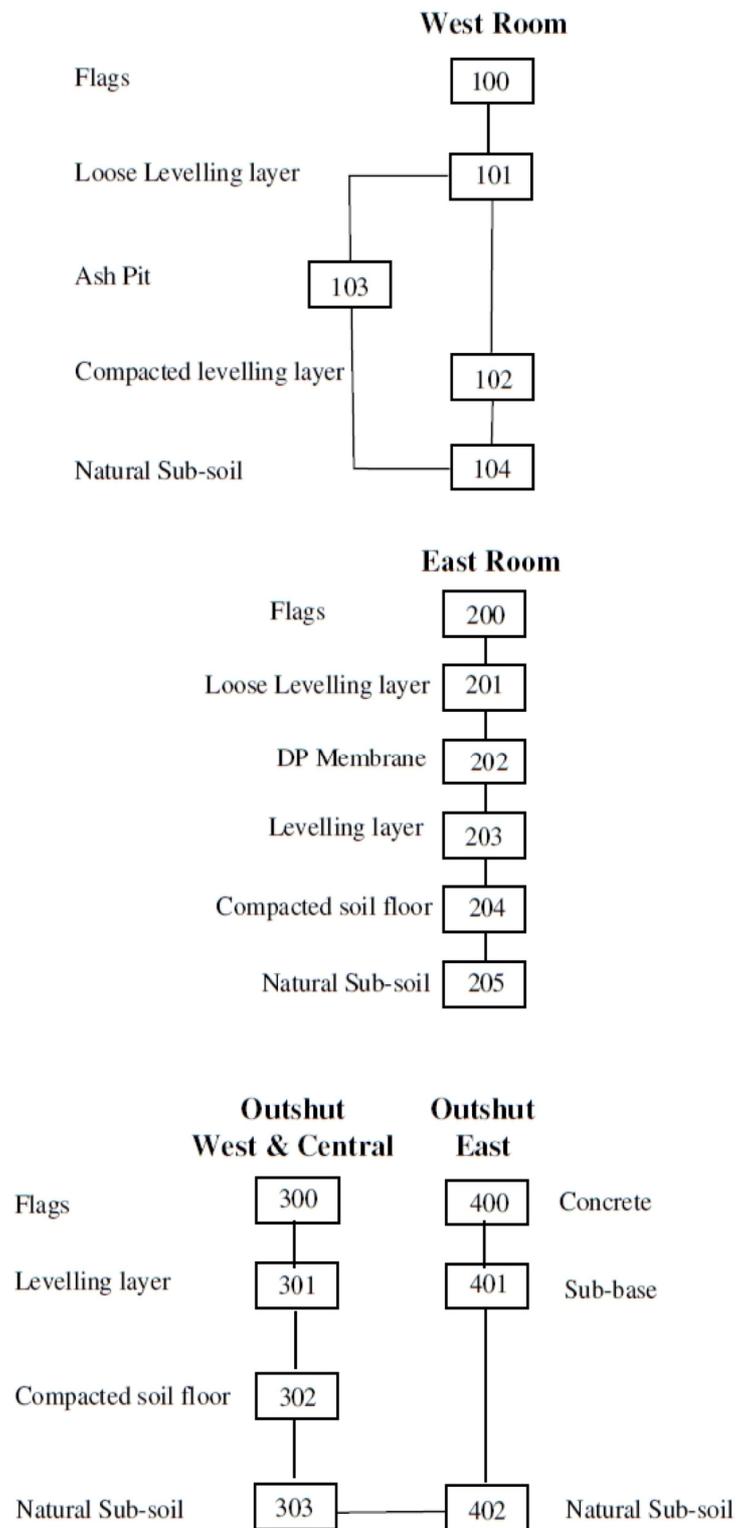
Usha Top  
Site Code UTS13  
Ground Floor Levels  
SWAAG 13/07/2013



### Appendix III

#### USHA TOP UTS13 - STRATIGRAPHIC MATRICES

The context sheets are contained in the Swaledale Museum archive and the digital archive.









## Appendix IV

### ADDITIONAL IMAGES

This appendix includes some additional views of each room and the reopened connection between the east and west rooms. The archive lodged with the Swaledale Museum contains even more images and videos on DVD. The corresponding digital archive omits the videos due to their file size, however the main video can be seen on YouTube by following this link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLHuDoT6IYw&feature=youtu.be>

#### Exterior images:





**West room and passage images**







**East room images**





**Outshut east image**



**Outshut central images**





**Outshut west images**





**Find image : Cold chisel [201] <1>**

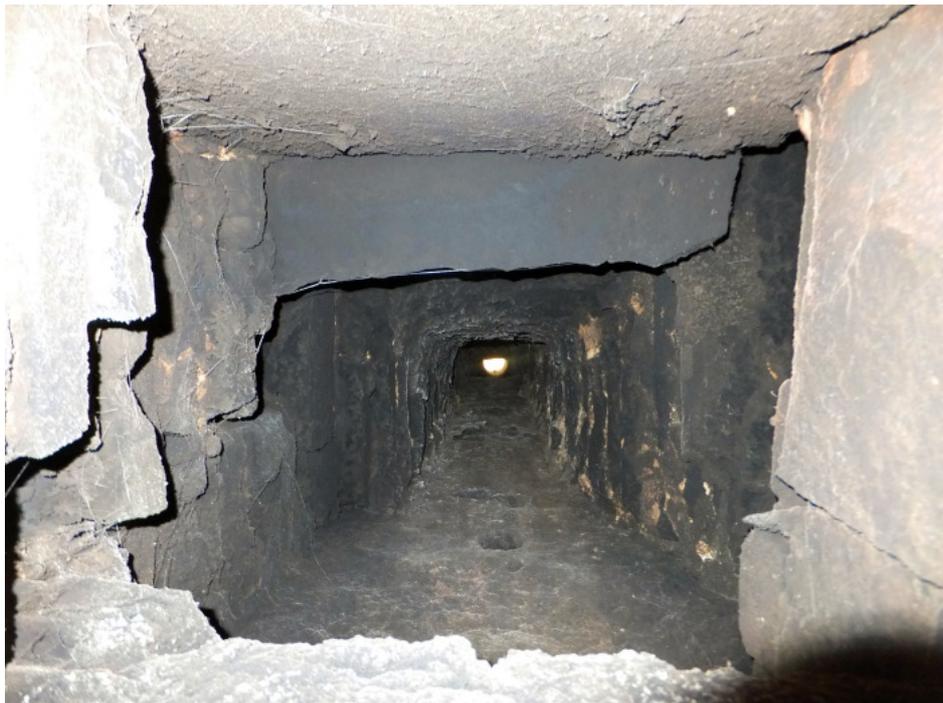


**Upstairs fireplace image**



**West room internal chimney flue construction images.**





**West room passageway chimney flue construction images.**





**West room ash pit construction images.**



**Looking east.**



**Looking north**



**Looking south**