

# Fitted Press Cupboards and Built-in Wall Cupboards of the Lake District

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This article looks at a significant sample of Lake District press and wall cupboards within The National Trust's ownership, in an attempt to understand more about this distinct group of furniture. The sample includes thirty-two press cupboards and twenty-four built-in wall cupboards (also known as salt or spice cupboards) still *in situ*. The examples are mostly found in privately tenanted properties. A few of the houses offer bed and breakfast accommodation, but most are not open to public view.

A systematic survey of the construction, dimensions, alterations, condition and context of all the National Trust owned Lake District cupboards was undertaken between 2003 and 2006, and further work is planned.<sup>1</sup> Research on archive sources relating to each building, carried out in the mid 1980s has added a valuable amount of information to our understanding of the houses, their interiors and the people who lived in them, the social context and the detail of the cupboards themselves,<sup>2</sup> and surveys of the historic fabric of each building also carried out in the mid 1980s add to the understanding of their architectural context.<sup>3</sup> Conservation work carried out as a result of the survey also revealed further information about the cupboards.

This information combined provides a significant body of evidence to develop an understanding of the furniture, and arms us with information with which to challenge some of the ideas and assumptions about this type of furniture in the Lake District. Other examples from other regions and previous publications and articles have also provided valuable information to inform this study and are noted at the relevant points.

## SOCIAL CONTEXT

Today the County of Cumbria (and thus the Lake District within it) is made up of the old Counties of Westmorland, Cumberland and the northern parts of Lancashire. The central part of Cumbria is the Lake District National Park, the focus of this study.

The Lake District developed a distinct cultural identity, shaped by its geography, proximity to the Scottish border and ways of farming. Lake District dwellers, particularly the farming community of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were relatively prosperous and independent. This culture evolved from the manorial custom in which the tenants were 'tenants at will', free to pass their holding on to the next generation, in return for small payments and services to the lord.<sup>4</sup> This granted the tenants a great deal of freedom and security compared to lowland tenants, and allowed

<sup>1</sup> The Survey was carried out by the National Trust Conservator Caroline Cotgrove, Curator Sarah Woodcock, and Furniture Conservator Jeremy Hall of Peter Hall and Sons, between 2003 and 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Archival research carried out on behalf of The National Trust by Janet Martin.

<sup>3</sup> Vernacular Building Surveys (VBS) carried out on behalf of The National Trust by the VB team

<sup>4</sup> Denyer (1991), p. 15.



1 Jackdaw Cottage, Easedale, pencil drawing, 1889, showing a humble dwelling in which there is both a press cupboard and evidence that there was also a wall cupboard.

*Private collection*

them to develop rights. The status of owners or tenants of this type was on a par with yeomen, and was later revered by the Romantic Movement and Wordsworth in particular.<sup>5</sup> The status of Cumbrian farmers, their growth and decline is debated at length elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this study the records show that not only the families of yeoman or similar status but also more humble cottage dwellers took pride in the interior and furnishing of their homes. This is reflected in the fashion for carved oak cupboards, decorated with the owners' initials carved on the furniture. It was also the tradition to mark the ownership and date in stone on the outside of the building somewhere prominent such as above the door, or occasionally in decorative plasterwork friezes within. Examples also illustrate that even the most humble of dwellings enjoyed the practical benefits of a fitted wall cupboard and the status conferred by an elaborately carved press cupboard (Figure 1).

#### THE DWELLING HOUSE

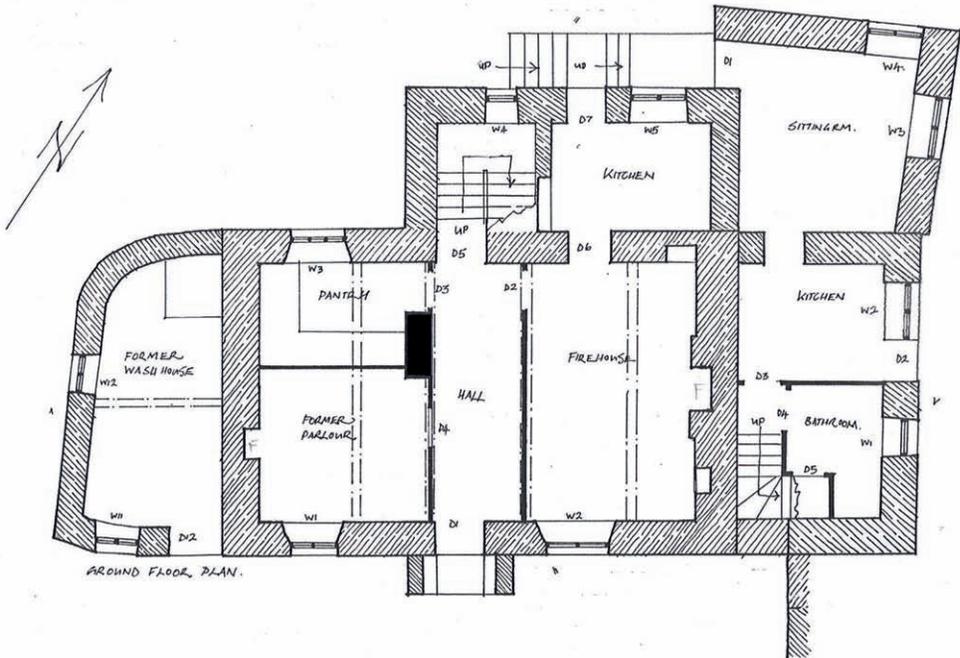
A typical arrangement of rooms in a farmhouse or cottage of this period in Cumbria comprises a 'firehouse' or 'house place', buttery and parlour, and/or occasionally a 'down house'. The down house (back kitchen or brew house) is not the norm; it was

<sup>5</sup> Winchester (1998), pp. 86–114.

<sup>6</sup> Duxbury (1994); Uttley (2007).

HIGH OXENFELL FARM  
BUILDING 1

0 1 2 3 4 5 6  
SCALE OF METRES AT 1:100  
T. WHITTAKER APRIL '86.



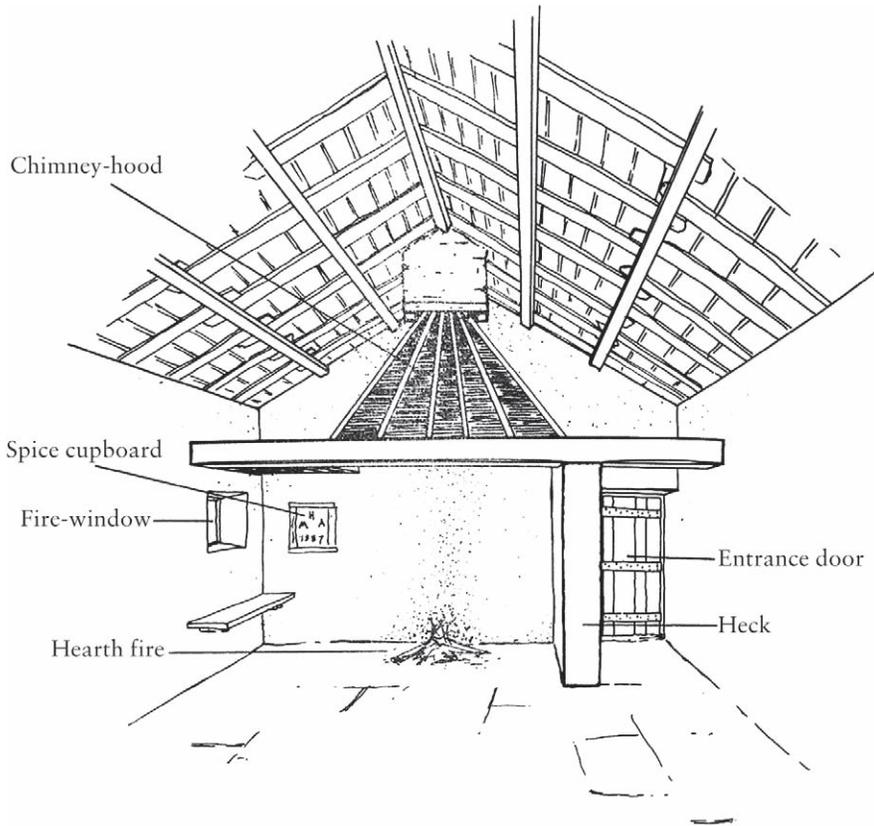
- 2 Floor plan of High Oxenfell, showing a press cupboard (coloured in black) in the wall opposite fireplace within dividing partition wall.

*The National Trust*

usually found in more prosperous farmhouses, and often added on as the fortune of the family grew. This combination on the ground floor is supplemented with lofts or chambers for sleeping and storage above. The entrance is often located within the gable via a passage between the house and the cattle housing, by the fire. The hearth is separated from this type of entrance with a partition often called a 'heck'. Alternatively the main door is to the front of the dwelling opening into the fire house, a location which became more common from the late seventeenth century onwards (although there are many variables on this layout both over time and geographically across the Lake District). The rooms are described in detail in contemporary records and commented on, for example, by James Clarke in 1787, when he describes this layout in his tour of the area (Figure 2).<sup>7</sup>

The firehouse was at the heart of family life, the main cooking and circulation space and the main room of the house where guests were received. It was dominated at one

<sup>7</sup> Clarke, (1787)

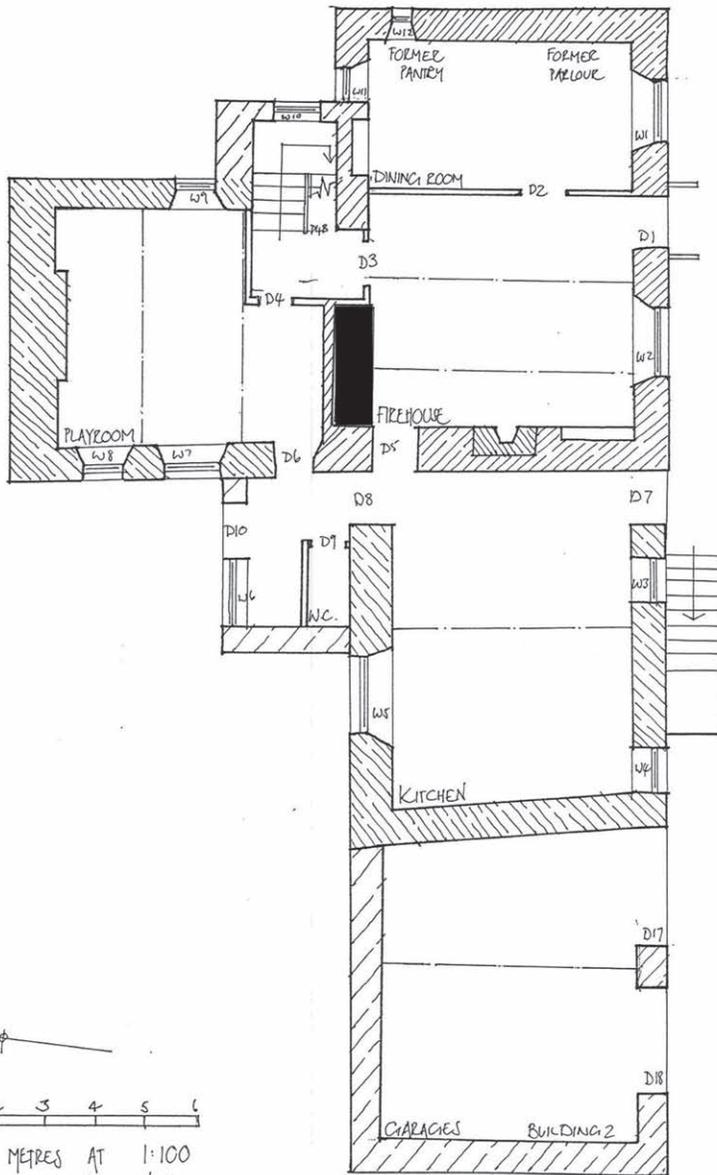


3 Illustration showing the layout of the firehouse in a typical Lake District farmhouse. Reproduced from Denyer (1991).

*The National Trust*

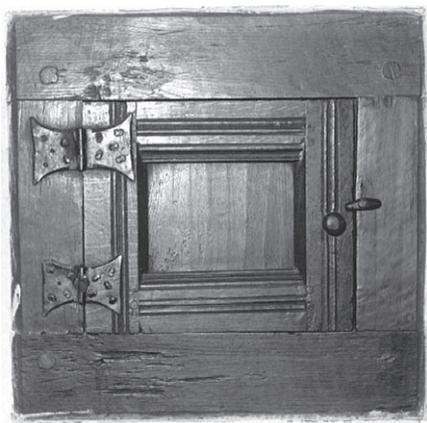
end by the large fireplace, with its fire hood, lit by a fire window and often providing a small built-in cupboard in the wall (Figure 3). In many cases the fire was visually counterbalanced with an elaborately carved press cupboard on the opposite wall, built into the timber partition between two rooms. This is often stated as the expected position to find a press cupboard; however, this sample shows that an equal number survive in a position placed at right angles to the fire, in the back wall, facing the front door. It may well be the case that the location related more to the position of the entrance at that time to ensure that it was seen (Figure 4). In either location, the effect is successful in maximising the impact of this prestigious, showpiece item to attract the attention of arriving visitors, catching the light of the fire. Occasionally we find examples which are free standing, but most likely they have been liberated from their original built-in position. The house layout described above and the inclusion of built-in wall and press cupboards are also characteristic of parts of Ireland, Wales, Yorkshire and Lancashire, but each area has a distinct decorative style of the particular region which helps to locate, broadly, their origins. Cumbria for example displays a common use of interlace, fern and lozenge combinations.

HIGH WRAY BUILDINGS (#2)



SCALE IN METRES AT 1:100  
J.T. GREEN APRIL '87  
GROUNDS FLOOR PLAN

4 Floor plan of High Wray Farm, showing the position of the press cupboard (coloured in black) in the back wall, facing the front door and at right angles to the fireplace.  
*The National Trust*



5 (above) Undecorated wall cupboard,  
Causeway House Farm.  
*Robert Thrift*



6 (right) Decorated wall cupboard,  
High Arnside Farm (see 7, opposite).  
*The National Trust*

#### FITTED WALL CUPBOARDS

The term commonly used today to describe the fitted wall cupboard located next to the fireplace is ‘spice cupboard’. They are also referred to as salt cupboards, mural cupboards, salt boxes and keeping holes. The origins of these names are unclear, whilst I have been unable to find any contemporary reference to the name ‘spice cupboard’ relating to these cupboards in inventories, it is the term commonly applied by architectural historians writing on this group of building types from the early twentieth century onwards.<sup>8</sup> There are references to spice being exported at Whitehaven in Cumbria in the 1690s, indicating that spices are at least being transported through the area.<sup>9</sup> Salt was important to farm households because it was used to preserve meat. Examples of stone built-in cupboards in Yorkshire, known as salt boxes, are described in an article about cupboards of this kind in the Yorkshire Dales.<sup>10</sup> Practically speaking, it seems very sensible to keep salt and spices in this location, close to the cooking, kept dry by the heat of the chimney. However the built-in cupboards of this type in Cumbria do not have small drawers, like freestanding spice cupboards of this period do, leaving open the question of how the spices were stored within the cupboard.<sup>11</sup> The Irish tradition, where they are referred to as ‘keeping holes’ follows the same pattern, suggests that items such as tobacco and other precious family items were also kept in this type of cupboard.<sup>12</sup>

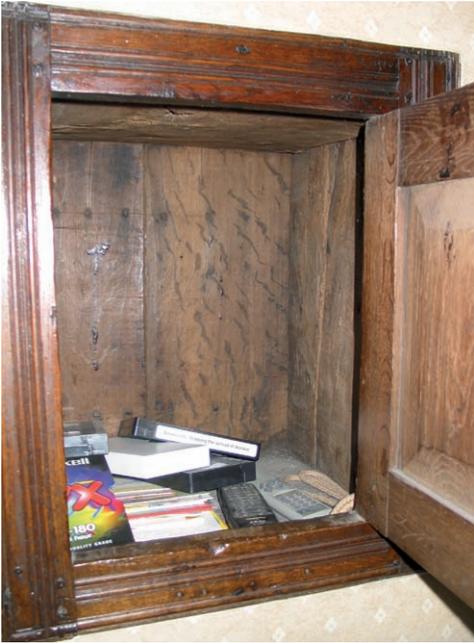
<sup>8</sup> RCHME (1936); Brunskill (2002), pp. 181–82; Rollinson (1987), p. 22; Denyer (1991), pp. 20–21.

<sup>9</sup> Carlisle Record Office, D/LONS/W3/80.

<sup>10</sup> Franks (1970).

<sup>11</sup> Knell (1988), pp. 146–49.

<sup>12</sup> Kinmonth (1993), pp. 125–26.



7 (above) Interior of 6 (opposite),  
lined in oak.  
*The National Trust*



8 (right) Two-door wall cupboard,  
Common Farm.  
*Robert Thrift*

Fitted wall cupboards in the Lake District are commonly built into the stone wall where they are positioned between the hearth and the fire window. They can either be plastered internally or can be lined in oak (Figure 7). They commonly have a single oak door, within an oak frame and can have one or two shelves within. The doors can have leather or iron hinges attached to the face of the door or wood or metal pintle hinges projecting from the top and bottom of the hanging stile. Although most in this sample are plain (Figure 5), some do have carved decoration, initials and dates displayed on the main panel (Figure 6). They are also found with two doors in different arrangements (Figure 8), and they are mostly, but not exclusively, found in houses with press cupboards.

The dated examples are mostly eighteenth century and the occurrence of a fitted wall cupboard seems to span more readily all status levels. In the sample of twenty-four fitted wall cupboards studied here, sixteen are without any surface carved decoration, eight are dated, with only two dating from the seventeenth century, the rest being dated in the early eighteenth century. Some of the dated examples are also initialled and decorated, but the majority just show the initials and date without elaborate decoration (Figures 9 and 10). Most follow the common construction pattern having



9 (right) Wall cupboard, dated  
1721, High Tilberthwaite.  
*The National Trust*

10 (below) Two wall cupboards  
at Townend, Troutbeck, one plain  
and one dated and initialled  
'G E B 1672'.  
*The National Trust*



a single door with no decoration. The majority of plain (undecorated) wall cupboards (in contrast to the press cupboards which are mostly decorated) could indicate that they were a more utilitarian rather than a show piece of furniture, which the sample does bear out. It could also suggest that they were more fashionable in the eighteenth century when the trend was towards a plain finish, a theory also borne out by this sample.

The wall cupboard found in High Arnside, Coniston is a rarer example of a dated, initialled and decorated cupboard of this type (Figure 6). The settlement of High Arnside takes its name from Arni, a Norse settler who established a summer pasture here in the eleventh century. The property passed to Furness Abbey and thereafter to a number of families. The initials on the wall cupboard relate to Henry and Elizabeth Robinson. Elizabeth, an only daughter, inherited from her father under-age, including the farm, heirloom furniture and farming gear. When still a minor she married in 1685. The wall cupboard is dated and initialled HER 1697, below a foliate design and set into the door panel.

The well-appointed house interior with nicely detailed plank-and-muntin panelling and seventeenth-century doors throughout indicates a house of some status. Although there is no press cupboard, the later section of panelling opposite the fireplace indicates that there may have been a cupboard in this position which has since been removed.

#### PRESS CUPBOARDS

For the purposes of this article the term ‘press cupboard’ as defined by John Gloag below has been applied to this specific type of fitted furniture:

A large cupboard with recessed superstructure containing smaller cupboards with a narrow shelf in front of them. Sometimes described as a hall cupboard. This type often assumed to be a court cupboard was introduced during the second half of the 16th Century and was made throughout the 17th Century and much later in some country districts.<sup>13</sup>

The term has been found in use in contemporary inventories,<sup>14</sup> although more often they seem to be referred to just as ‘cupboards’. Press cupboards were distinct from court cupboards, hall or livery cupboards, although the terms have been interchanged and the relevant application debated by furniture historians.<sup>15</sup> Typically they are large two-tier cupboards with some carved decoration, often incorporating a date and initials. They are the glory of Lake District farmhouse interiors, acting almost as altars to the family, in which they could store and display their precious or even everyday possessions (Figures 11 and 12).

A press cupboard normally comprises two tiers, the upper tier being recessed six inches or so with a shelf in front and a projecting carved frieze above, with either turned drop finials (pendants) or balusters (pillars) at each end framing the top tier. The common assumption that the balusters were replaced later with shorter pendants is not confirmed by this sample, as the dates on the cupboards do not tie in with this

<sup>13</sup> Gloag (1952), p. 374.

<sup>14</sup> Shakespeare Centre archive, DR 469/451.

<sup>15</sup> Knell (1988), pp. 146–49.



11 (left) Press cupboard, dated 1714, No. 2 The How.  
*Robert Thrift*

12 (above) Press cupboard, dated 1688, No. 1 The How.  
*Robert Thrift*

progression. The sample has significantly more cupboards with pendants (32) spanning the full date range of the sample (1628 to 1735) than balusters (3) framing the upper recessed tier, and those with balusters span the period from 1628 to 1688 (Figures 13 and 14), However there are no cupboards with balusters in this sample after 1688, so it does show some indication of a trend towards balusters in the earlier phase.

The middle and lower tier are arranged in a variety of forms including doors, fixed panels and later drawers more akin to examples found in the eighteenth century. The door arrangements vary but are invariably arranged in a symmetrical layout. The upper canopied tier is thought to derive from the more elaborate medieval dresser plate cupboards, and livery cupboards.<sup>16</sup>

The body of the cupboard is framed and panelled, with mortice-and-tenon joints secured with wooden pegs. The door hinges can be pegged with a wooden or metal peg (pintle hinge) between the upper and lower edge of the door into the frame or the hinges can be surface mounted iron hinges in a variety of forms including H, strap and butterfly form. The door hinges are the most vulnerable elements and there is often evidence to show that they have changed a number of times over the life of the cupboard (Figure 15). The doors are fastened with a toggle or knob in timber or metal and sometimes there are internally mounted locks with key holes.

The carved decoration is often confined to the upper tier and frieze but can extend to the lower parts of the cupboard in more elaborate cases.

<sup>16</sup> Chinnery (1979), p. 298.



13 (left) Press cupboard, baluster detail, Oak Cottage.  
*Robert Thrift*

14 (above) Press cupboard, pendant detail, Causeway  
House Farm.  
*Robert Thrift*



15 Hinge detail, showing surface mounted metal hinge, Bannerigg Farm.  
*The National Trust*

## DECORATION — METHODS AND MOTIFS

Methods and styles of decoration are varied, but largely comprise combinations of the following elements:

1. Mouldings, including a moulded frieze rail and inner edges of the door and fixed panel frames.
2. Incised lines created by a gouge to create decorative motifs and inscriptions.
3. Stamped shallow surface decoration to create a matted ground to contrast with the smooth polished areas; the stamps can include dots, squares, stars and moon shapes, usually punched in regular rows.
4. Sunk areas where the background is taken back from the planed surface leaving a raised design, often found on panels and friezes
5. Inlaid work is very occasionally found on the more decorative and later cupboards.
6. Inscribed decoration using a simple pair of compasses to create circles, arcs and star/flower shapes, as sometimes found in stone and plasterwork.

The range of motifs used in decorating the cupboards is wide and includes the following types of decoration shown in Figures 16 to 25; arcading, lunettes, S-curves/scrolls, lozenges, strap-work, guilloches, ferns, gadrooning, rosettes, floral motifs, fleurs-de-lys, feather and leaf forms and interlace. The possible origins of the motifs



16 Punched decorative detail,  
Low Hallgarth.  
*Robert Thrift*



17 Shallow inscribed circle and  
daisy motif, High Oxenfell.  
*Robert Thrift*



18 Fleur de lys motif, High Wray  
Farm.  
*Robert Thrift*



19 Stylized leaf and flower motif,  
Low Hallgarth.  
*Robert Thrift*



20 Floral motif, Low Hallgarth.  
*The National Trust*



21 Running circle motif, No. 2  
The How.  
*Robert Thrift*



22 (above) Arcading detail, Low  
Hallgarth.  
*Robert Thrift*



23 (right) Lozenge, and interweave  
details, No. 2 Stang End.  
*The National Trust*



24 Interweave detail.  
*The National Trust*



25 Interweave detail, The How.  
*The National Trust*

are discussed in detail in Susan Denyer's book, *Traditional buildings and life in the Lake District*. Some of the motifs can be said to be derived largely from Elizabethan and Renaissance models (e.g., arcading and strap-work, as illustrated below), also found on other types of furniture of the same period found in the area. H. S. Cowper suggested in 1902 that the distinctive interlace and scroll patterns commonly found in this sample have Celtic or Nordic origins, relating to fifth- to eighth-century examples such as the stone crosses and hog's back grave stones surviving on the margins of the Lake District.<sup>17</sup> This tradition is certainly strongly embedded in the place names and language of the region, but its relation to carved woodwork is debatable. Whatever its origins, the manifestation in seventeenth-century furniture carving is a distinctive style specific to the Lake District, while sharing some elements with other northern counties and Wales.

There is no evidence of painted decoration on the cupboards, which are generally stained and polished and always dark in appearance. Victor Chinnery suggests that this is a result of soot, age and a local polish made up of bulls blood, beeswax and vinegar;<sup>18</sup> however the knobs are often in a contrasting wood, the main body being oak, the knobs being ebony or yew for example, either for durability or decorative contrast.

#### DATES AND INITIALS: THE FAMILIES

Typically the cupboards are embellished with three initials which can be identified from records as the forename and surname initials of the most recently married couple of the house, together with a date. This information is most commonly found on the upper frieze above the recessed tier, but can also be incorporated into door panels. It is often assumed that the year relates to the marriage and that the cupboard is a celebration of the marriage; however, this sample suggests otherwise.

Of the sample of thirty-two press cupboards, twenty-six have dates and initials. For fourteen of the initialled cupboards we have been able to identify the owners from family records. The press cupboards are clustered by date mainly between the 1670s and 1690s. In only two examples where initials have been identified does the year relate directly to the marriage date of the couple; the majority are of a later date than their marriage. It has also been suggested that the date relates to the rebuilding or updating of the house rather than the marriage year.<sup>19</sup>

A number of the owners/tenants have been identified as Quakers and one as a Baptist, nonconformist faiths being strong in this part of the country at that time, although there was still a majority in the mainstream Anglican faith. Where the wealth is recorded at death in the inventory they fall within a reasonably wealthy bracket of the yeoman class (i.e., £100 or more in value at death, compared to the average labourer who may have a wealth of up to £15 in the 1670s, for example).<sup>20</sup> Whilst many farm for a living, this includes both sheep and dairy farming; it can also include woodland

<sup>17</sup> Denyer (1991), p. 39

<sup>18</sup> Chinnery (1979), p. 492.

<sup>19</sup> Denyer (1991), p. 41

<sup>20</sup> Whittle (2009).



26 Press cupboard dated 1628,  
High Wray Farm.  
*Robert Thrift*



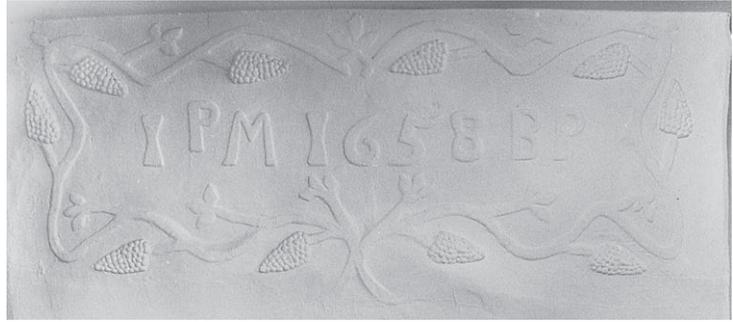
27 Press cupboard, dated 1828, Common  
Farm (one of two).  
*Robert Thrift*

management for the provision of bark for tanning, and coppiced wood for a variety of trades. Some are also tanners and some own more than one property, so have other rental incomes. Fortunate inheritances also enhance the wealth of many individuals. Whatever the income, it seems many chose to demonstrate their wealth and attachment to family ties in the development, furnishing and decoration of their homes. All the houses below have both press and spice cupboards. They span a period of over 100 years and illustrate a range of wealth and status levels.

Figure 26 shows a press cupboard from High Wray Farm, dated 1628. Together with Figure 27, it is the earliest dated example in the sample. Both are highly decorated with carving in both the upper and lower tier. High Wray Farm demonstrates sophisticated carved decoration, including a Jacobean strap-work, jewelled frieze and carvings of thistles, acorns and fleurs-de-lys within larger lozenge designs in the lower cupboard door and the initials, dates and, uniquely in this sample, the words 'Anno Domini', within the panels of the upper tier door rather than in the frieze. The detail in the framing of the right hand upper and lower doors indicates a change in design at some stage either in the construction or life of the cupboard.

Figure 27 is a press cupboard from Common Farm, Windermere. In this example the cupboard is built into the back wall at right angles to the fireplace. Common Farm

28 Plasterwork  
showing a date of 1658  
and initials of John and  
Mary Philipson and  
their son Brian,  
Causeway House Farm.  
*Robert Thrift*



houses two press cupboards of different dates, possibly from two farms on the site (one later demolished). They both show elaborate interlace and barbed fern motifs. The earlier cupboard, dated 1628, incorporates a Green Man motif in the frieze, a very unusual motif and unique in this sample. The upper doors house panels decorated with barbed interlace patterns and the lower central door is also decorated with a lozenge housing an interlace pattern; the lack of symmetry in the lower part may indicate that it has been altered and moved to be re-housed. The later cupboard, dated 1715, is decorated with interlace in the form of spiralling ferns with floral motifs in the upper tier only, with an asymmetrical door arrangement below. This relatively old fashioned style of decoration on this particular cupboard may be explained if it was being matched with the earlier cupboard.

Causeway farm near Windermere is most likely named after the Roman road from Kendal to Ambleside which runs through the farm yard. It has three main phases of development, all within the seventeenth century, and is of a very high quality reflecting the wealth of an important Cumbrian family. It formed part of the Richmond fee of the barony of Kendal to which rent was paid (13s. 10d.) in the early 1600s. It was sold a number of times from 1610 onwards until John Philipson of Applethwaite bought it for £320 in June 1614. His son, also John, baptised in 1628, built the older part of the existing farmhouse. It is his initials, along with his wife Mary's which are on the press cupboard dated 1661. The embossed plaster panel above the fireplace also shows their initials and the date of 1658 along with the initials of their son, Brian (Figure 28). They also installed an initialled bed (no longer *in situ*) and the long oak table which is still in the house. The fittings of the house, along with the landholding of John Philipson, demonstrate considerable wealth and property. Philipson died in 1714 in his mid 80s with £170 to his name, and the wealth continued to grow through the generations thereafter.

The press cupboard is free-standing in this case, and heavily decorated (Figure 29 and 30). It is a two-tier construction with a recessed upper tier, a dated and initialled frieze with drops, a middle tier with carved frieze and central fixed panel, and lower tier unusually open with turned baluster legs at the front and plain stretchers. It is fully symmetrical at all stages with interlace panels and repeated running, semi-circular decoration to the friezes incorporating stylized leaf motifs. It has matching strap hinges.

Wall End' is a simpler farmhouse of the seventeenth century with eighteenth-century additions. It houses a dated wall cupboard and a press cupboard with different dates



29 Press cupboard, dated 1661,  
Causeway House Farm.  
*Robert Thrift*



30 Detail of 29.  
*Robert Thrift*

and initials. The press cupboard, dated and initialled 1725 RGIG, probably relates to John Grigg (a Baptist) and his second wife (first wife known to be Margaret) Ruth Grigg. The Wall cupboard shows the initials EGS for Ephraim and Sarah Grigg. Ephraim acted as overseer for the poor in 1747 and was a church warden, and was also a Baptist. A rent was paid to the Richmond Fee of 5s. 5d. in 1667. This suggests a smaller or poorer holding than Causeway Farm. In 1717 it belonged to John Grigg and thereafter to Ephraim.

The press cupboard at Taw House, Eskdale, is dated 1723 (Figure 31). John and Sally Vicars married in 1719. It is later in style and typically simpler in decoration and incorporating drawers. Coleridge describes a visit here in a letter to his wife Sarah;



31 Press cupboard, dated  
1723, Taw House Farm.  
*Robert Thrift*

unfortunately he does not describe the interior, but he does talk about the family and the service to the Lord.<sup>21</sup> The press cupboard is typical of the later style with no decoration, except for some moulding, the date, and initials. The inclusion of drawers and

<sup>21</sup> Griggs (1956), II, pp. 256–58.



32 Press cupboard, dated 1735, Jackdaw Cottage.  
*Robert Thrift*

the use of brass rather than wooden handles also indicates the changes in fashion into the eighteenth century.

The latest dated example of a press cupboard in this sample, dated 1735, is found at 'Jackdaw Cottage', Easdale (Figure 32). The press cupboard is distinctive in that it has an extra upper narrow display shelf above the upper recessed tier, presumably to display plates and similar slim objects. This is unique in this sample but shows

<sup>22</sup> Thornborrow (1997).



33 Detail of press cupboard at High Oxenfell, with inscription NT fect, shown just to the right edge of the image.

*Robert Thrift*

similarities to the canopied cupboards found in Yorkshire described in a previous article in this Journal by Peter Thornborrow.<sup>22</sup>

#### THE MAKERS

It is extremely rare to find any evidence of the maker marked on the cupboard, and no archival records have been located in this research to identify the maker of a specific item of furniture. In the sample used for this study only three have possible evidence of a maker's mark, one of which may tally with the records of a local craftsman. Elsewhere examples have been found at Springhill in Northern Ireland, where the maker and date is displayed loud and clear on the frieze: 'John Smith made this 1714'. Stylistic similarities have been studied within the group by various scholars, most notably by Beatrix Potter who believed she could identify a stylistic group in the Coniston area with both structural and decorative similarities within a four-year date span, and it could be argued that there are stylistic groupings in different areas of the Lake District.<sup>23</sup> However, because of the degree of variety also found within the wider sample it is difficult to say with any certainty that individual makers or groups of makers can be identified.

One of the three cupboards found in this sample with a possible maker's initials is a press cupboard at High Oxenfell, near Coniston. 'NT FECT' is inscribed alongside the initials 'W & C S' and a date of 1673 on the main rail above the central cupboard

<sup>23</sup> Denyer (1991), p. 41.



34 (above) Detail of press cupboard at Low Hallgarth, showing possible maker's inscription.

*The National Trust*

35 (top right) Low dresser, Grove Farm, showing initials 'SP' and date 1756 on underside of drawer.

*Jeremy Hall*

36 (right) Low dresser, 1756, Grove Farm.

*Jeremy Hall*



which in this case, unusually, it does not have a recessed top tier (Figure 33). Nicholas Turner has been identified in the records as a local carpenter active at this date, but no definitive link has been made between him and the cupboard.

The second press cupboard found with a possible maker's initials is at Low Hallgarth, Little Langdale. In this case the initials IB are incised lightly on the face of the right hand corner pillar, with the main initials and date centrally placed as is usual, in this case 'JHM 1682' relating to John and Margaret Holme (Figure 34).

The third cupboard with such evidence is a later piece, which although built in, is a dresser rather than a press cupboard, so not quite of the same category, but is worth a mention because of its rare date and initial mark inside, and because it shows a transition from built-in furniture to another type of cupboard. This piece is found, alongside a press cupboard, at Grove Farm, Windermere. It revealed a date and initials

— 1756 SP — when it was dismantled for repair (Figures 35 and 36). The initials do not tally with the ownership records in this case, indicating that it may well be the maker's inscription inside the cupboard.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The study of this substantial sample of fitted cupboards has inevitably raised more questions than it has answered. It has confirmed that there are many exceptions to previous assumptions made about the cupboards of the Lake District. In particular the following points previously assumed can be challenged:

- i. The notion that the dates and initials relate directly to the marriage celebration. The dates seem largely to relate to a date some years after the marriage. This raises questions about the timing of the motivation to commission a cupboard. Is it commissioned at the marriage and takes some years to complete? Does it relate to the upgrading of the house, the birth of children, or further inheritance and therefore wealth to commission a cupboard?
- ii. The position of the press cupboard in the house. A location built within the internal partition opposite the fireplace has been assumed as the norm. This sample shows that equal numbers are built into the masonry of the rear wall, facing the front door. It could be that the motivation for the positioning of the cupboard relates to the maximising of visual impact on entry to the house. If so, the cupboard position relates more closely to the location of the main door at that time.
- iii. The chronological development of decorative details, specifically the upper tier turned baluster being superseded by drop finials has not been confirmed by this sample. Only three of the sample of press cupboards have balusters, (with a possible fourth one which shows evidence of being truncated) and they span the date range as do the drop finial variety.
- iv. The origins and inspirations for the decorative motifs are intriguing and worthy of further study.

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