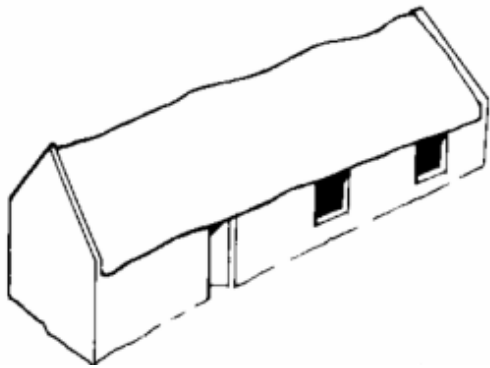




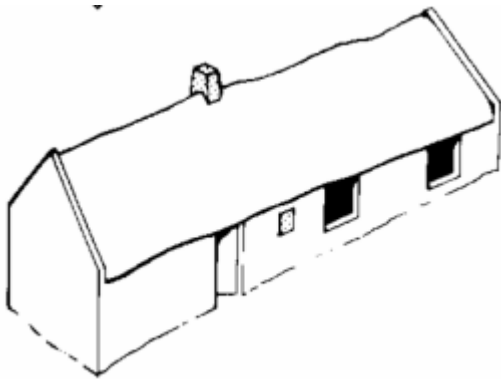
BROOKSIDE FARM, LITTLE AYTON

A cross-passage farmhouse of historical importance

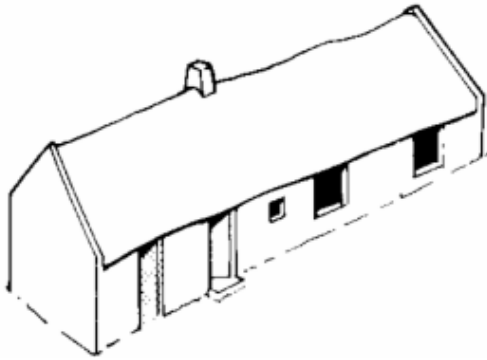
Old farmhouses on the North York Moors and in the surrounding countryside are usually of the 'hearth-passage' or 'cross-passage' design. Many were built in the 17th century, in dressed stone, when enclosure of the open fields resulted in farmhouses moved built in dressed stone, and often on the site of earlier houses, some dating back as far as the Scandinavian longhouse.



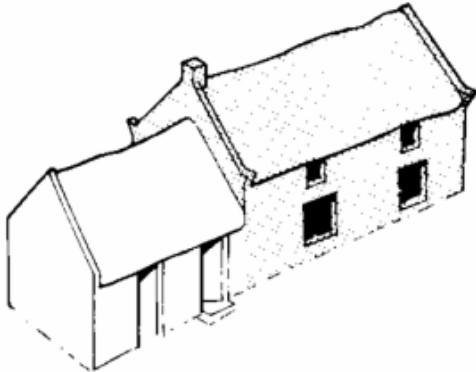
The typical cross-passage farmhouse was on a linear plan with a through-passage from front to back. There would be two living rooms to one side of the passage, and a byre for animals on the other side of the passage. The cross-passage was used by both people and animals.



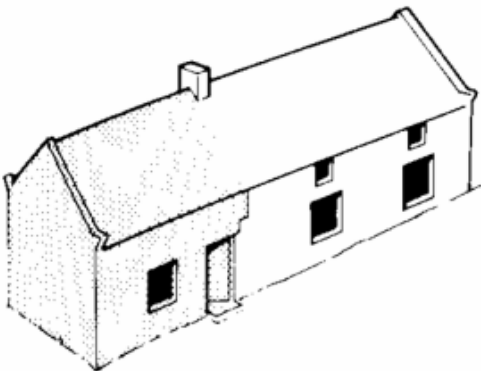
An early modification would be to add a hearth and chimney against the passage wall in the main living room. This room was the 'fire-house' or 'fore-house'. Often a little window was added to light the space by the hearth. The other living room was the parlour.



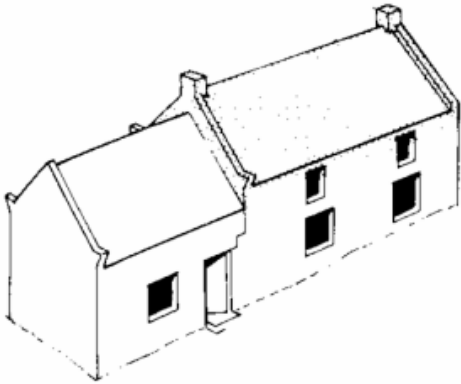
To improve the quality of the living accommodation, a separate entrance was made into the byre. Now the animals no longer shared the cross passage with the human occupants.



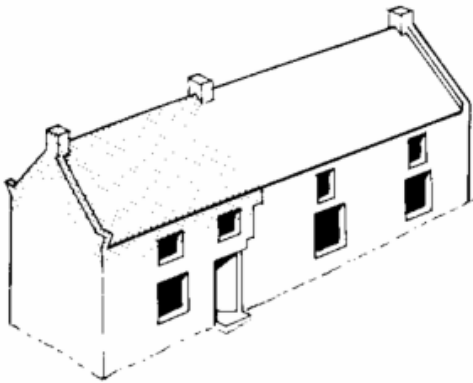
To increase living space, an upper floor would be added above the fore-house and parlour. Access was initially by ladder through a gap in the floorboards; later on a staircase would be added.



As the demand for more living accommodation grew, the byre-end was taken over for human occupation. The addition of an upper floor gave separate sleeping accommodation for living-in male and female farm workers.



With increasing prosperity and refined tastes, more height was created in the upstairs rooms by raising the walls of the fore-house and parlour. With the availability of cheaper coal, heating was now expected in all rooms. A new chimney was built on the end wall of the parlour, with new fireplaces in the upstairs rooms.



The conversion of the byre-end into living accommodation was completed by adding a third chimney and fireplaces, while raising the height of this end to match the previously-raised upper floor rooms. At this stage the entire house might be rebuilt, using the same stones and keeping the same plan.

Additional ground floor rooms might be added at the rear, such as scullery, wash-house, dairy, etc. The toilet would remain as an outside earth-closet until well into the 20th century.

There must have been many cross-passage houses within the parishes of Great Ayton and Little Ayton. Over the years many would be demolished or effectively lost through substantial modifications, or complete rebuilding, which obscured the building's origins.

The only example we have found locally of a cross-passage farmhouse is Brookside Farm at Little Ayton. It is a wonderful example of its type, with the traditional plan and all the typical later modifications.

What is more, unlike many such buildings, it has not been externally rendered, leaving the stonework visible. Careful examination of this stonework reveals how successive changes were made to the house: adding the hearth and fore window, raising the walls, adding outbuildings, and finally blocking up the original cross-passage.



Brookside Farm is set back from the lane between Little Ayton and Fletcher's Farm.

It is private property, and there is no right of way from the lane.

As the residents of Brookside Farm co-operated with us in surveying the property, we would ask you to co-operate with us and to respect their privacy.



Let's take a walk round the house ...



Some of the original features have been lost, notably the original stone mullioned windows. Older villagers remember them still being in place, but now there are only modern wood-framed windows, and an ill-assortment at that. Because the farm is owned by an estate, and is rented out, expenditure on the building has been kept to a minimum. This has preserved other features which may otherwise have been swept away in the name of 'home improvements'.



The north-west end wall. A large extension has been built butting up to the rear wall. The old earth-closet (with a corrugated iron roof) still stands, and the space between it and the extension has been roofed over.

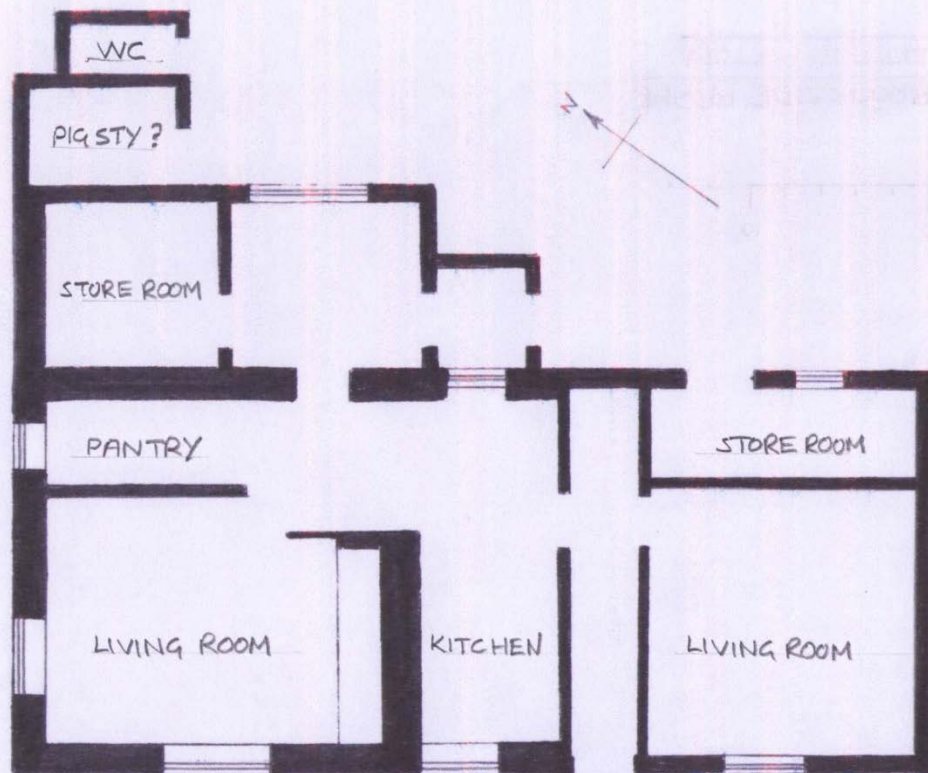


The rear of the house, showing the extension and a later, small porch. The old byre-end, to the left, has been virtually rebuilt and given a handsome chimney with two flues. The small window between the white door and the red gas cylinders, gives light to the staircase. The staircase was added when the byre-end was rebuilt, and replaced what was virtually a ladder leading up from the fore-house.

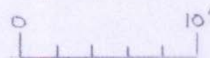


The south-east end wall. This is the rebuilt byre-end of the building, and the stone-work appears to be of a better quality than the rest of the building. However it is still a very plain building, with very simple kneeler stones. These are the horizontal stones, at the top corners of the wall, which support the coping stones coming down the gable end from the chimney.

The pitch of the roof at the byre-end is shallower than the main part of the house, resulting in a lower ridge. This suggests it was built for slates, which became available with the arrival of the railway in 1864. The main roof, with its 90° pitch, would have been designed for clay pantiles. An earlier, thatched roof would have required an even steeper angle of pitch.



BROOKSIDE FARM LITTLE AYTON





The original farmhouse would only have a ground floor. The roof may have been supported by timber 'crucks' (massive slightly-curved timbers arranged in an inverted V shape and built into the gable walls). It may have been roofed with heather thatch. Original construction possibly in the early 1700s.

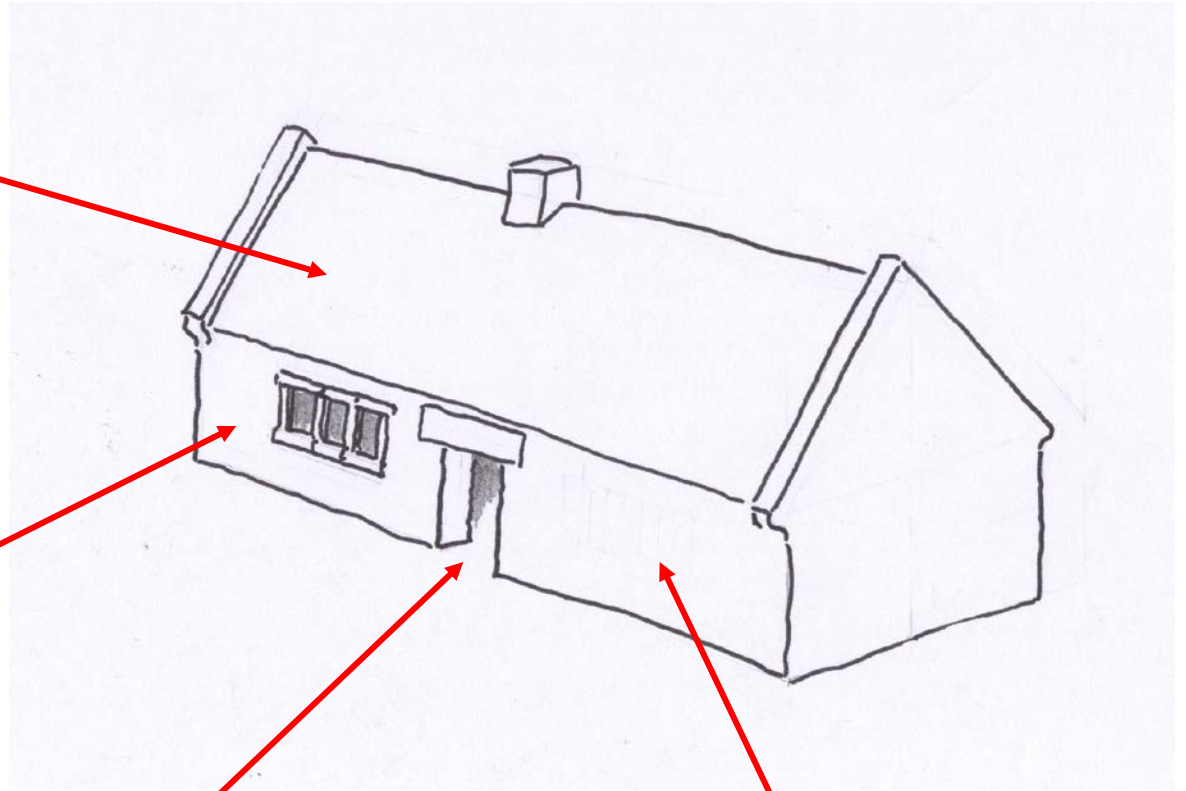
What Brookside Farm may have looked like when originally built

Space in eaves reached by
ladder

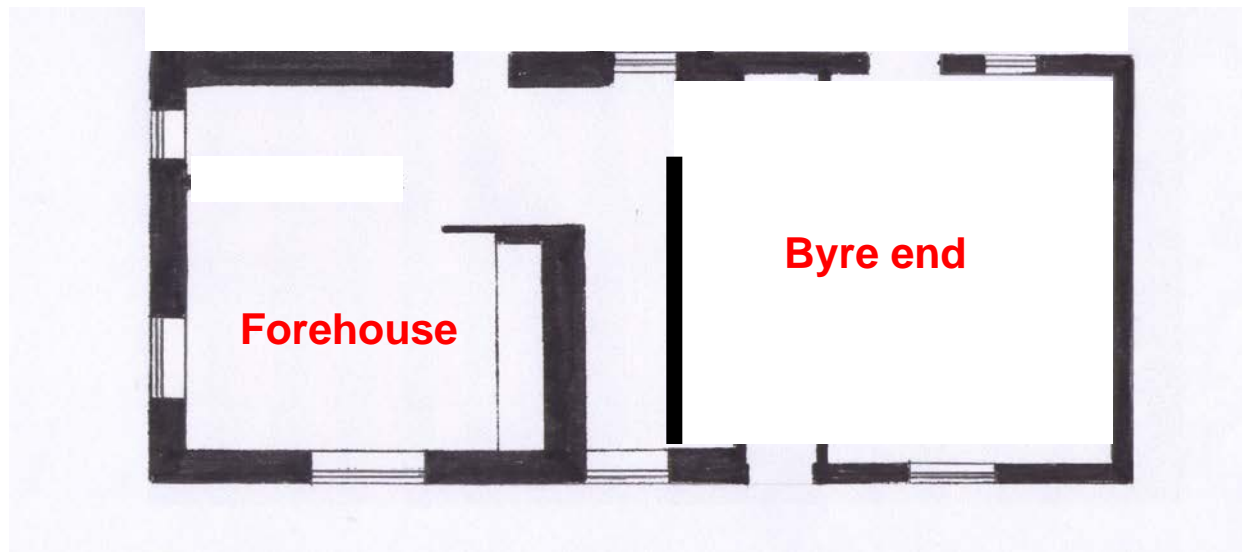
Living space

Cross-passage with massive
stone lintel

Byre for animals



The forehouse of the original building had 18" thick stone walls made by laying two courses of 9" stones side by side. The byre walls were only 9" thick. The right-hand wall of the cross-passage was removed when the cross-passage was converted into the present kitchen.





The cross-passage, now blocked off, is exactly in the middle of the building.

The massive stone lintel above the original cross-passage entrance, far bigger than would be needed for the present kitchen window, window, is vital evidence in understanding the building.

Closer examination shows that the cross-passage entrance has been blocked up below the present window.





This was originally a stone mullioned window, giving light into the forehouse.



Spout House, at the Sun Inn, Bilsdale, gives you an idea of how Brookside Farm would have looked when it was built. Spout House is open to the public and is well worth a visit.



Probable sequence of modifications at Brookside Farm

- 1** Forehouse raised to provide upper floor, late 1700s
- 2** Byre end demolished
- 3** Byre end totally rebuilt on original plinth, early 1800s
continued on next slide



- 4 Lean-to built
- 5 Free-standing privy built
- 6 Gap between privy and lean-to filled with duck house or pigsty
- 7 Outside porch added



The first major modification would have been to raise the walls of the forehouse to give an upper storey, so as to increase living space. The upper walls use 10" stones, thinner than the original 18" walls below.



The animals would have been evicted from the byre end, which was then demolished.



The byre end was then rebuilt, re-using some of the original stone with some new stone. It had 10" thick walls, a slate roof and internal walls in brick. A new staircase gave access to the upper floor, and a doorway was opened up in what had been the external gable-end wall of the forehouse, now an internal wall between the old and new upper floors.



The wood-framed windows are now a modern assortment of wooden framed, but earlier some would have been the traditional 'Yorkshire slides', with their horizontally-sliding sashes. The evidence for this is in the dimensions of the window openings, relatively wide but lacking in height.



The join between the rebuilt byre end and the forehouse (which had been previously raised to an upper floor) provides evidence for the rebuilding.

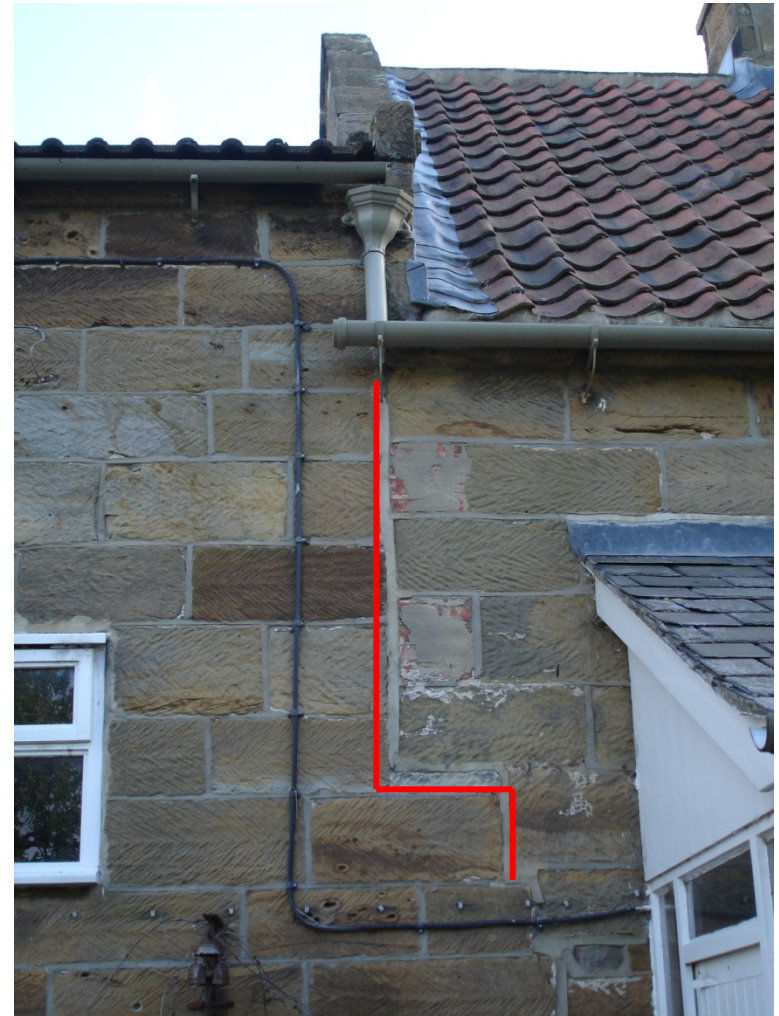


The rebuilt byre end had a new front entrance. This replaced the old cross-passage entrance to the left, which was filled with stonework and a new window.

Inside, the right hand wall of the cross-passage was knocked down, and rebuilt over to the right, doubling the width of the old cross-passage and allowing it to be converted into a new kitchen.



When the fore-house was raised, it had a steeply-pitched roof, probably with clay pantiles. When the byre-end was rebuilt, use of slate allowed a shallower pitch. This is now roofed with modern concrete tiles. The fine chimney on the byre-end is, architecturally, the most refined aspect on the entire house. It is very similar to other chimneys in the locality, suggesting the use of the same builder/stone mason.



The join between the rebuilt byre-end and the fore-house (previously raised to an upper floor) is clearly visible in the stonework.

The top of the fore-house gable end (now in brick) is exposed but has been rendered over to simulate stone.





The newly-raised walls of the byre-end were higher than those of the previously-raised fore-house, so the fore-house gable end wall had to be re-shaped to accommodate the byre-end roof line.



When the byre-end was rebuilt with its upper floor, most of the existing fore-house gable end became an internal wall. It was rebuilt in brick, with the stone no doubt being re-used elsewhere. This brick wall was keyed into the existing stonework of the rear wall, and the exposed bricks rendered over to resemble stone.



Sometime after the fore-house was raised, a lean-to was built onto the rear. Perhaps surprisingly, the absence of any keying of the new stonework into the existing building has not caused any problems, and there is no cracking visible along the join.



The new extension seems to have incorporated a piece of wall, with much rougher stonework, that was part of an earlier, much smaller, lean-to.



The traditional toilet arrangements for country dwellings was the earth closet; a hole in the ground with a plank across it. For obvious reasons this was housed in a small privy outside the house.



The gap between the privy and the lean-to was then filled in with a small building – a duck house or possibly a pigsty.



The arrangement of the fore-house at Brookside Farm would have been very similar to that of Spout House at Bilsdale, shown here. The entrance to the fore-house, from the cross passage, is to the left of the hearth. The high-backed settle reduced draughts and provides a cosy seat by the fire.



The hearth at Spout House. The range would be a later addition, and would have burned peat or coal. A store cupboard next to the fire, which would have rarely have been let out, was use to store materials that needed keeping dry, especially salt.



Brookside Farm salt cupboard to the right of the fire place.

The substantial wooden beam across the chimney opening has been covered with wall paper and painted. This shows the changes in fashion; while today exposed beams are much sought-after, previously they were seen as looking better if covered-up.



Later work revealed the original beam across the chimney opening. The mid-20th century fireplace look incongruous. Note the wooden panels, probably originally internal shutters, at the side of the window opening.

Hand-made hinges on the salt cupboard door. This 'H' pattern is typical of the 17th and early 18th centuries. They would have been secured with hand-made nails.





The main beam supporting the upper floor has several holes cut into it which are nothing to do with its present function. These suggest that the beam was previously part of a different structure, and was re-used here. This recycling of beams was fairly common.



An example of the rather makeshift construction methods employed in the past. The partition wall between the fore-house and the old steps up to the first floor was a timber frame with brick infill. The bricks were laid on edge, to give maximum area with minimum number of bricks.

If you would like to know more about traditional buildings in Cleveland and the North York Moors, there are two excellent books (although both are out of print, you should be able to see them at the library):

Vernacular Houses in North Yorkshire and Cleveland

Barry Harrison and Barbara Hutton

ISBN 0 85976 091 X

John Donald Publishers Ltd, Edinburgh, 1984

Houses of the North York Moors

ISBN 0 11 300014 6

Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1987

We would like to record our thanks to the tenants of Brookside Farm, Janet Stonehouse and Nigel Smith, for their help and co-operation in carrying out the survey of the building. A fire inside the house had necessitated major repair work, giving us the opportunity to look at its construction in detail.

Brookside Farm was surveyed by members of the Great Ayton Community Archaeology Project (Cath Small, Ken Taylor, Bob de Wardt, Dave Taylor and Ian Pearce) in May 2009.

This presentation was arranged by Ian Pearce in February 2011 and the copyright held by the Great Ayton Community Archaeology Project .