

From the archive: A focus on Staithes

Staithes is a village in the civil parish of Hinderwell. The settlement straddles Redcar and Cleveland on the Cowbar Nab side of Staithes Beck and North Yorkshire on the southern side. During the nineteenth century, Staithes was the largest English fishing station north of the Wash. There was a thriving coastal trade. Staithes families owned nearly 20,000 tonnes of shipping and more than a hundred master mariners came from the town. The Staithes Shipping Company and the Staithes Iron Company flourished in the nineteenth century. The opening of the Whitby, Redcar and Middlesbrough Union Railway in 1883 meant that fish could be transported without the need of pack horses carrying their cargo to Grosmont. Over time, the fishing industry declined and the railway was closed in 1958. However, there is

still evidence of where the railway viaduct stood.

The sea brought trade and prosperity to the area. However, fishing was a hard life. Whole families supported the venture, from ship making, sailing cobsles, helping to beach the boats and preparing fish for market. Women played an important part in the business, including line baiting and pushing the boats out into the water.

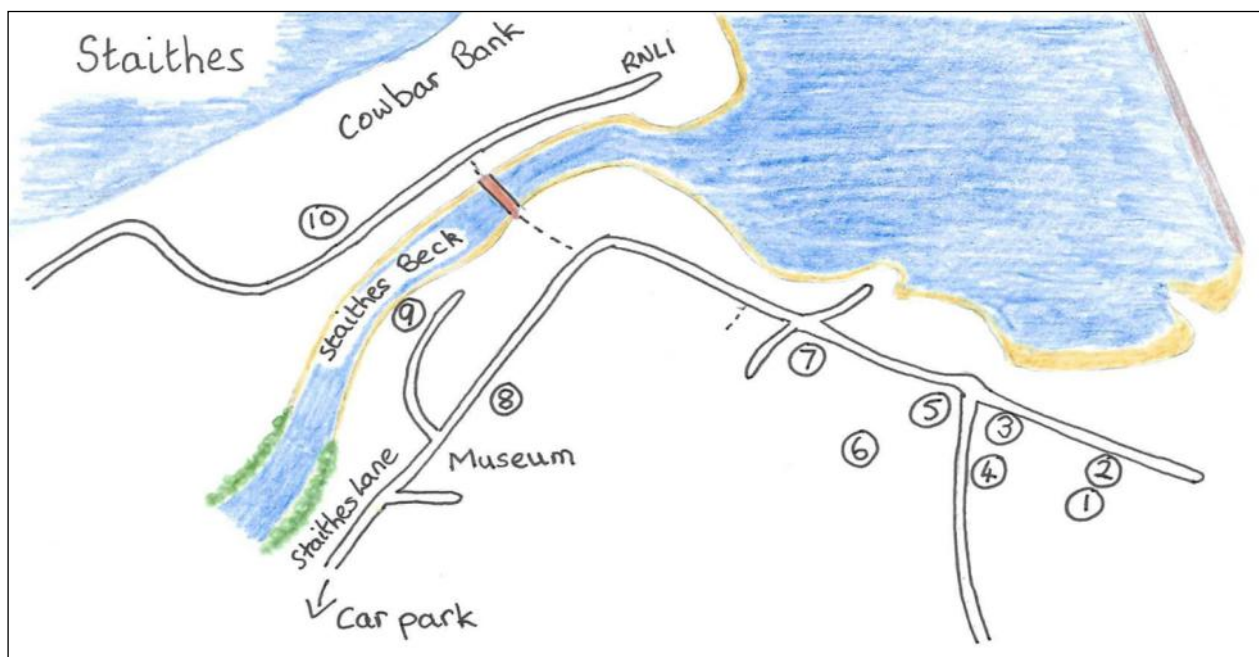
The sea brought wealth, but also danger to Staithes. There are numerous accounts of storm surges flooding the area and destroying properties. There is an account from October 1849 of several houses being carried away, but a grandfather clock was carried to safety in a hand cart. Postcards from 1908 depict the sea flooding the High

Street and causing destruction. Work started on the much needed breakwater in the 1920s.

Today, Staithes attracts many tourists who come to see the narrow streets and passageways. The buildings are in close quarters and often wrap around each other. This shows the need for accommodation when Staithes was at its height in commercial activity. Residents had to compromise on living space, internally and externally. Some of the gunnels are still used to store lobster pots and this gives a sense of the smells and sights that would have been commonplace in the past.

The YVBSG has recorded 13 buildings in the village. The reports featured below can all be found in the YVBSG online archive.

Mary Cook



1. Shale Cottage (YVBSG 0934). It is likely that this was originally a very low single-storey thatched fisherman's cottage. The roof was raised and a crab boiling building added. The fireplace was moved to the south gable wall. This was possibly an end-lobby-entry cottage.

Other buildings recorded by the YVBSG in the village but not featured in this article are:

Sunny Side (YVBSG 0924)
Gugs Cottage (YVBSG 1051)
Laura Knight Studio (YVBSG 1871)



2. Harbour View (YVBSG 0933). This building is all that remains of a group of thatched cottages which were apparently arranged in a square. Storms washed away the other buildings. The outer wall was likely to have been built to protect the cottage from the scourge of the sea.



3. Sea Drift Shop (YVBSG 0926). A jointed cruck truss can be seen in the roof of this building, with the lower parts extending into a bathroom and a bedroom. This dates the building to about 1750.



4. Kirkhill House (YVBSG 0925). Sadly, this house is now in need of some restoration. Likely built in the 1760s, the house was furnished with panelling, moulded door frames and a 'very fine' central staircase.



5. Captain Cook's Cottage (YVBSG 1055). Local tradition says that this building incorporates materials from the haberdashers and grocery shop where James Cook was apprenticed in 1745.



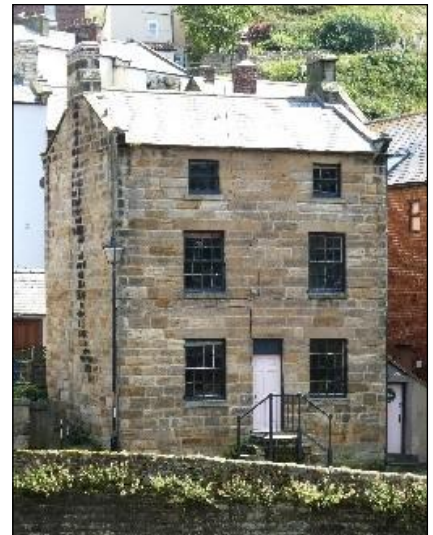
6. Friendship Cottage (YVBSG 1900). This building contains a pair of raised crucks across the centre, tentatively dated to about 1750. Staithes' oral tradition claims that Friendship Cottage was once a Quaker meeting place, but no documentary evidence has yet been found to support this in Quaker records.



7. Sea Crest (YVBSG 1077) stands on a huge platform of natural rock, originally the base of a cliff, with the gable facing across the harbour. A lean-to kitchen belongs to the cottage but is structurally separate from it. Such 'detached kitchens' are a common feature of fishing villages on the North Yorkshire coast.



8. Greystones (YVBSG 0937). This handsome building on High Street has a front and back range, built at different times. It is likely that these were two dwellings. The floor level is different in each range.



9. Beckside (YVBSG 0938). This is a tall sandstone house, two-and-a-half storeys high and almost square on plan facing west across Staithes Beck and lying a little to the south of the bridge.



10. Numbers 4 and 5 Cowbar Bank (YVBSG 1941). A pair of cottages with a raised cruck between no 4 and no 5.