The village of Keld is actually little more than a hamlet. It huddles around a junction of tracks on a shelf above the limestone gorge of the Swale. At this point the pre-glacial valley reunites with the upstream section of the river before it cascades down into the narrow and geologically-recent gorge on the north and east sides of Kisdon Hill. Keld shows in microcosm the usual elements one finds in Swaledale villages. There is relatively fragmentary evidence of 17th and 18th-century vernacular - the remains of a cantilevered stack on Kirkbeck, the re-set datestones, both of 1687, on Birk Hill and the barn in the field to the east of the village.

The 18th century brings increasing prosperity. Park Lodge of 1760 is a good-quality farmhouse, very up-to-date for its period, using regularly-squared stone and cut dressings. Further to the east in the same row of houses, fronting Keld's rudimentary green, Tute House ushers in the 19th century with its round-arched doorway and taller windows.

From the 19th century as well come the buildings that testify to the omnipresent influence of nonconformity. At the centre of the village is the United Reform Church, an 1860 rebuilding of an Independent Chapel of 1818. The church has an attached manse or preacher’s residence and is accompanied by a Chapel School of 1842 and Village Institute of 1861, both dedicated to the betterment of the local population and with good-quality but relatively simple architectural detail.

The school has a little bellcote with cut-out heart-shaped panels. The Institute relies on the well-cut and almost decorative tooling of its quoins and dressings. All rely on local materials, with stone flag roofs. Methodism seems to have taken second place. Keld’s second chapel of 1841 is located on the main road at the top of the hill, outside the village centre, and is a humbler building.

The 20th century brought the Public Hall and Reading Room (dated 1926) - a common early 20th-century addition to the suite of public buildings provided by Dales villages, which previously had been almost entirely chapel-based. It is a relatively plain structure and keeps up the tradition of named foundation stones often seen in chapels a decade or so either side of 1900. Apart from relatively minor alterations to existing buildings, Keld’s remote location means that it has been spared later 20th-century redevelopment.

For a more detailed discussion of nonconformity in the Dales see the essay titled ‘Places of Worship’ in the Themes/Religion section of the website www.outofoblivion.org.uk. Keld lies in Muker parish which also contains important archaeological remains. Type ‘Muker’ or ‘Keld’ in the Keyword Search box of the Out of Oblivion website and follow the links.
Plan showing featured buildings

2. PUBLIC HALL AND READING ROOM
A plain gabled building with a tablet stating that it was originally a Public Hall and Reading Room, built by subscription in 1926. It has a series of named foundation stones, as do many nonconformist chapels of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, intended perhaps to give the subscribers a small measure of immortality. The children of the 19th- and early 20th-century rural working class left school early but for the men at least, there were opportunities provided for them to continue their education afterwards. Nearly every village in the Yorkshire Dales was provided at some time with a Reading Room or Literary Institute. Nonconformist communities particularly valued the opportunity for sober education provided by such places and this coincided with the interest of the middle classes in keeping their workers out of public houses.

3. VILLAGE INSTITUTE
The Institute of 1861 has its principal room on the first floor, with a window of three stepped round-arched lights in the south gable end. The opposite end has a chapel-like entrance with steps up to a gabled porch (with the date ‘1861’ in the tympanum of the round-arched door) and a tall round-arched window on either side. The square-headed windows in the side have typical mid 19th-century stone surrounds (with a single upright block for each jamb) and the angle quoins, identical to those of the United Reform Church, have distinctive pecked-and-margined finish (not ‘rusticated’ as in the list description). An obvious straight join midway along the rear (east) side of the building shows that earlier fabric is incorporated.

4. CHAPEL SCHOOL
The former school appears as a simple single-storey block with a porch set left-of-centre, probably an addition as a date tablet ‘BUILT BY SUBSCRIPTION AD 1842’ is now just above its roof. The windows at the front have simple stone surrounds. At the back the ground falls away and there is a basement. The four windows above have jambs in common walling stone, and renewed glazing. A chimney caps the south gable and an interesting little bellcote the north one, made of two slabs with heart-shaped panels cut out, bearing the inscription ‘A. METCALFE AD 1847’. The school was founded by James Wilkinson, minister of the chapel, who was also involved in the building of the adjacent Literary Institute.

5. UNITED REFORM CHURCH
The United Reform Church is a good example of a smaller Dales chapel, with its attached manse. It stands on or near the site of a chapel that was in existence as early as 1540, the ruins of which were replaced by an Independent (later Congregational) Chapel in 1791, rebuilt in 1818. The church itself is a rectangular block, 9.8 by 6.3m externally, set east-west, with a narrower west end of the south side responsible for such architectural display as the building provides. It has a round-arched door with an alternating surround, under a panel with a sundial dated ‘1840’ and then a round-arched window with the inscription ‘KELD CHAPEL REBUILT 1860’ on a panel in its head. The gable above is capped by a bellcote. All the dressings of the porch have the same finish as the angle quoins.

Inside the chapel, the benches would appear to be original, but the panelled and carved woodwork of the dais, which has a decorative wrought-iron front, is probably of the late 19th or early 20th century. Above the dais is a plain semicircular arch, with on either side a marble memorial tablet, both of local historical significance. The gallery is reached by a stone stair within the porch. There is a small graveyard attached to the chapel, dropping down an uncomfortably steep slope to the east.

6. BARN ON OLD THWAITE ROAD
This small barn or outbuilding is a typical piece of small-scale local vernacular, with an external stone stair to an upper doorway in its west end and extensive use of through stones (seen in many of the buildings in the village, including the United Reformed Church). It has clearly been raised in height, and might originally have been heather thatched.

7. FIELD BARN
Also of interest, 100m or so to the south-west, outside the village proper, is a field barn with the lintel of its north door, almost certainly re-used, inscribed ‘1687 IADARA’.

Park Lodge is Grade II listed. It has a datestone (‘J:E / G:E:A / 1760’) over its plain stone-surround door. Its windows are of typical 18th century almost square form, with stone surrounds as well. In addition those on the ground floor have simple flagstone labels or dripstones. The associated farm buildings stand to the west, where a barn of late 18th- or 19th-century date is surrounded by 20th-century sheds.
This leaflet and others in the series were produced by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority as part of the Private Spaces Public Places project. This European Union funded project was undertaken during 2003-5 in selected villages in the Richmondshire area of the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The project’s aim was to enable communities to take a more active role in the management and enhancement of the historic character of their villages, and to promote a common outlook on their future development. An Historic Environment Consultancy firm was appointed by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority to complete character appraisal documents in consultation with each community. The documents include an appraisal of the historic character of the village, and form the basis for the development of an agreed action plan targeting specific enhancement projects.

Electronic versions of the village character appraisal documents, along with a copy of this leaflet are available on www.yorkshiredales.org.uk from the Understanding/Historic Environment page.

PARTICIPATING VILLAGES

WARD: Aysgarth:
- Carperby
- West Burton
- Thornton Rust
- Aysgarth
- Thoralby
- Newbiggin

WARD: Grinton and Upper Swaledale:
- Grinton
- Muker
- Gunnerside
- Low Row
- Keld
- Grinton

WARD: Bolton Manor:
- Castle Bolton
- West Witton

WARD: Hawes and High Abbotside:
- Gayle
- Burtersett
- Sedbusk
- Hardraw
GLOSSARY
Private Spaces Public Places Village Heritage Project

Alternating door surround
In which the blocks that make up the sides (jambs) of the doorway are alternately ‘long’ and ‘short’.

Angle quoin
The large blocks, usually cut square, forming the angles of a building.

Ashlar
Good quality cut stone with a smoothly-tooled surface.

Cantilevered stack
A chimney stack that sits on top of a narrower gable end, its overhanging faces being supported on pairs of corbels.

Dressings
The cut stones – e.g. quoins and in the surrounds of openings – as opposed to the unshaped rubble of some wall fabric.

Jamb
The vertical side of a doorway or window.

Keystone
A keystone is the central stone of the head of an opening, usually but not always arched. It is sometimes emphasised by its face standing proud of the others, and usually of a wedge shape.

Pecked-and-margined finish
A decorative finish to dressings and quoins, in which the surface of the stone is given a pecked (indented) finish, with a smooth border or margin around it.

Quoin
Large corner stone located at the right angle of two external walls, the finish of which may differ from the main wall.

Tympanum
In an opening that has both a horizontal lintel and an arch above (e.g. in some Norman doorways), the panel between lintel and arch.