The village of Muker stands on rising ground on the north side of a stream variously known as Skeb, Skeugh, Muker or Straw Beck. Here the stream occupies the pre-glacial valley of the Swale, which now flows in a narrow gorge to the north. The settlement, although relatively compact when viewed in plan, in fact consists of two separate elements. The older centre is probably the irregular conglomeration of buildings, divided by a network of lanes and alleys, on the higher ground to the north. Virtually adjacent, but at a lower level, are the later string of houses along the north side of the main road which runs along the north bank of the beck.

Muker has a rare survival in terms of the ecclesiastical history of the upper dale, an early Post-Reformation chapel. It was built in 1580 but inevitably heavily altered in the 19th century, although the tower appears to be largely original. A number of other buildings show evidence of the 17th or early 18th century. Ivy Cottage is relatively humble, but to the east is a larger house with mullioned windows, now a barn, and on the south of it a tantalising fragment including a 17th-century doorway with an unusually sophisticated joggled lintel, seemingly evidence of a house of some status. South View, close to the churchyard, may be of early 18th-century origin, and retains evidence of a steeply-pitched gable that indicates a heather-thatched roof. The later 18th-century Grange Farm and Armsleigh indicate a period of increasing prosperity, by which time the lower line of houses alongside the main road had developed, as witnessed by what is now ‘Swaledale Woollens’ dated 1818.

At the east end of the village, Bridge House is another witness to the economic success of this period being a three-storey late Georgian structure with a central arched doorway. A plainer three-storey building, Bramble Bottom House, overlooks the foot of the hill up to the older part of the village.

The ensuing Victorian period brought the Old School, with its chapel-like bellcote, and then a building which is probably Muker’s architectural highspot, the Literary Institute. This has a key location in the angle of the main road and its uphill branch, and is a showy little building with an eclectic mix of architectural motifs that have an early 1900s Arts-and-Crafts feel. In reality it was built forty years earlier, in 1867. By 1900 it could offer the local community a library of 600 books. Its original function ceased in the mid-20th century and it is now the base of the well-known Muker Silver Band. The Literary Institute certainly offers a contrast to a second community building a few metres to the north, the ‘Public Hall’ of 1922, severely utilitarian except for its porch which has architectural features of mid-19th-century character that may have been re-used from some older building. It follows the turn-of-the-century tradition, again seen with the similar hall at Keld, of allowing contributors to perpetuate their memory in named foundation stones. Towards the west end of the village the Methodist Church of 1934 is an attractive building, replacing a 19th-century predecessor. It needs a second glance to recognise its recent discreet conversion into a house.

For a more detailed discussion of reading rooms in the Dales see the essay titled ‘Education’ in the Themes/Domestic section of the website www.outofoblivion.org.uk. To find out about the general history and archaeology of the area, type ‘Muker’ in the Keyword Search box of the Out of Oblivion website and follow the links.
1. **CHAPEL HOUSE**

Towards the west end of the village is Chapel House, the former Methodist Church of 1934 replacing an earlier chapel (on a different site) of 1845 enlarged in 1870. In a rather belated Arts-and-Crafts style it has segmental-arched openings with attractive leaded glazing and a shallow canted porch with a gable behind. It provides a late example of the tradition of named foundation stones including, as a witness to growing ecumenism, one simply inscribed ‘THE VICAR’.

2. **OLD SCHOOL**

This building has a three-bay part with a doorway and renewed 12-pane sashes with, to the left, a chapel-like gable with two Gothic windows and a bellcote. Additional historic interest is provided by marble memorial tablets to the two Kearton brothers, and a note of cheerful surrealism by the fibreglass sheep scrambling over the ridge of the roof.

3. **MUKER LITERARY INSTITUTE**

In the angle formed by the main road and the one which rises to the church and upper village, and on arguably the most prominent site in the whole settlement, is the Literary Institute. Built in 1867, since 1994 it has become the practice room for the well-known Muker Silver Band. This is quite a showy little building (listed Grade II) built on a slope so that it has a full two-storey elevation to the south, yet the entrance porch in the west end opens onto the first floor. It is built of coursed roughly-squared stone with ashlar quoins and dressings. The porch has a round-headed arch, behind which rises a shaped Dutch gable with a spiked ball finial. The south elevation has a doorway and two sash windows on the ground floor, all with keyed round arches and ashlar surrounds. Above a first-floor band are three windows each of two shoulder-headed lights, their sills linked to form another band. In contrast to all this display, the north and east elevations are plain rubble walling.

4. **BRIDGE HOUSE**

Bridge House shows that by the beginning of the 19th century even somewhere as remote as Muker could leave Swaledale vernacular behind and provide quite a handsome late-Georgian house. Bridge House is of three storeys and three bays, with a round-arched doorway with a radial fanlight and alternating surround of ashlar blocks. It is a spacious house, two rooms deep, and has 12-pane sash windows.

5. **ST MARY THE VIRGIN’S CHURCH**

The Parish Church is a Grade II* listed structure. In plan it is a simple rectangle 20.7 by 6.6m internally, with a west tower and a small south porch. It is built of rubble (with ashlar dressings) with a stone slate roof. There is documentary evidence of the church having been built in 1580, but many of the features of the building date only from an 1891 restoration. Inside there is little that is pre-Victorian. The walls are all plastered and whitewashed. On the north of the sanctuary is an old stone shelf, with an 18th-century headstone set on the wall alongside. This is partly obscured by the early 20th-century reredos, which also presumably hides two moulded corbels on the east wall, which the Victoria County History describes and dates to the 14th century. In the south wall of the sanctuary is a stone inscribed ‘SG 1769’. Old photographs show a very different interior before the restoration, with a full-length gallery on the north, and pulpit facing the gallery, midway along the south wall.

The list description sees the roof as substantially of 1580, although remodelled in 1761. In fact, except perhaps for the re-use of old purlins, nothing really looks pre-18th century.

Just outside the south porch stands an old font, of uncertain Post-Reformation date, which has its own Grade II listing. Its small circular and simply-moulded bowl certainly does not seem to fit its octagonal shaft.

6. **ARMSLEIGH, IVY COTTAGE AND CORNER COTTAGE**

Near the church an island site is occupied by a block of three houses, from west to east Armsleigh, Ivy Cottage and Corner Cottage. Armsleigh is taller, with shaped kneelers and a rear wing with a big projecting chimney stack on its rear gable, and is probably of the later 18th century. Ivy Cottage is older, probably mid-17th century, and has rough elongated quoins and one chamfered window that has lost its mullions on the ground floor, whilst Corner Cottage is a little first-floor house, retaining its external stone stair. It has a rear outshut with a segmental-arched cart entrance, now reduced to a window, in its east side.

7. **SOUTH VIEW**

Immediately to the west of the churchyard is South View. This is a much-altered and extended house, although its east end does show the distinctive steep line of a former heather-thatched gable, and a contemporary blocked window below it with a simple dripstone.

MUKER Plan showing featured buildings

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MUKER Plan showing featured buildings

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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:
VILLAGES:
Carperby
West Burton
Thornton Rust
Aysgarth
Thoralby
Newbiggin

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

WARD: Hawes and High Abbotside:
VILLAGES:
Gayle
Burtersett
Sedbusk
Hardraw
**Ashlar**
Good quality cut stone with a smoothly-tooled surface.

**Band**
Horizontal ashlar courses standing proud of the wall face. If moulded or chamfered it would be termed a ‘string course’.

**Bay**
Elevations can usually be divided into a series bays on the basis of their architectural features - a bay might contain one window on each floor level. If referring to a timber-framed building, or a roof structure, the bay would be the section between each pair of posts, or between each tie-beam and set of principal rafters.

**Canted**
Set at an angle, usually of 45 degrees.

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

**Joggled lintel**
A lintel made up of a series of blocks, the joints between which are shaped or stepped so as to interlock.

**Kneelers**
The overhanging shaped stones at each end of the coping of a gable, very typical of the late 17th and 18th centuries.

**Outshut**
The rear part of a building, often an addition, usually lower than the main body of the structure, where the roof slope is continued down to a lower level than at the front.

**Purlins**
The horizontal members of a roof structure that lie on the roof slope, parallel to the ridge and carried on the backs of the trusses.

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

**Reredos**
Decorative panelling or structure behind the altar at the east end of a church.

**Shoulder-arched windows**
A shoulder-arched opening has a shaped head formed in effect by a corbel at the head of each jamb.

**Shoulder headed light**
Each light (division) of a window has a shoulder-arched head.