

## WATCHMAN'S HUT

Most villagers will know of the Watchman's Hut, situated up against the wall of the old bridge, close to the old Wheatsheaf Inn now the new Co Op store. It is a small nearly square structure with a low open entrance facing the road. The walls are stone slabs, the roof is pitched and tiled with heavy stone slates.

The hut is part of the Old Bridge, which is a scheduled monument. The bridge was built in 1609, but the hut appears to be a later addition. I am not aware of any factual information about when it was built or its original purpose. It is generally assumed that it was a shelter for a watchman checking on traffic over the bridge during the night though there is an alternate suggestion that it was part of the Toll Booth when the road through the village was a turnpike. In the past it has had the alternative name of Mary Brady's House: she was a tramp who visited Baslow occasionally and used the hut to sleep in.

Whatever its history it is a unique feature of the village which has recently become an icon in features promoting Baslow. It is an interesting, memorable and important part of our heritage.

Unfortunately its condition is worsening. Pointing is falling out, the stone is eroding, and there is a suggestion that the whole edifice is gradually tipping forward. It is only a matter of time before it falls down, perhaps catastrophically, though I have heard unofficially that it is at present safe.

Historic England and the Derbyshire Highways Department are both aware of the situation and have been for a while but the latter cannot take action until they can establish who has the ownership of or responsibility for the structure. This is a legal problem not easy to settle though in the end it may come down to who will pay for repairs. In my uneducated opinion this could well mean taking it down, providing proper foundations and rebuilding – not cheap.

The Parish Council is aware of the facts and is trying to expedite action – hopefully before it falls down.

David Dalrymple-Smith June 2019

The hut was taken in hand by the Peak Park, Derbyshire County Council and Historic England. It was taken down completely and rebuilt with some stones replaced (looking new and out of place but this is the current way of doing it). It remains leaning into the road, however it should last for another century or two.

David Dalrymple-Smith Feb 2021