

# Medieval Elwick

## The Elwick Village Atlas Project

Hartlepool

2014



TA 14/03



**Elwick Village Atlas**

**Medieval Elwick**

**July 2014**

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**TA 14/03**

This volunteer based project was funded through the Limestone Landscapes, Landscape Partnership Project

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## **Summary**

This project has documented the physical and documentary evidence for the medieval settlement of Elwick. It has identified a possible arrangement of the medieval 'open fields' and has identified previously unrecognised settlements in the area of the township. It also draws attention to the possible earlier pre-eminence of the settlement now recorded only as field names at 'Middleton' .

The work has clearly identified a number of avenues that could be more fully explored by local volunteers, particularly in relation to the continued recording of known ridge and furrow and investigation of the fields with former settlement names. As with so many medieval settlements the location of the immediately previous farmsteads remains a mystery.

The project was carried out by local people working with Tees Archaeology and has raised awareness of the medieval origins of the present settlement.

## **Acknowledgements**

This project could not have taken place without the funding from the Limestone Landscapes, Landscape Partnership scheme, which in turn is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The work was carried by volunteers from Elwick, principally Minna Ireland with the help of Helen and Peter Taylor and the support of Brian Footitt, chair of the Elwick Village Atlas Steering Group.

## Medieval Elwick

### Introduction

This study is the product of a 'Village Atlas' project carried out in 2013 – 14 and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of the 'Limestone Landscapes' project. Fieldwork was carried out by Helen and Peter Taylor and Minna Ireland plotted the fields and fieldnames onto maps using Aerial Photographs and the fieldwork provided by Mr & Mrs Taylor.

### Early Medieval Elwick

#### Hartness

Elwick lies in the Parish of Hart, which in its turn was part of a larger landholding, Hartness (Fig 1). Hartness comprised the area of land from Crimdon Dene down to the River Tees, containing the later parishes of Billingham, Greatham and Stranton. It is first recorded in a charter of Bishop Ecgrid of Lindisfarne, dated between 840-845 AD. This refers to the grant of 'Billingham in Heorternesse', (Hart 1975, 138) while in 913-915 'Raegnald a Viking, shares out the eastern lands of St Cuthbert, which he has won by conquest. The southern half between Ioden (Castle Eden) and Billingham, is given to Scule...' (Hart 1975, 141). In 1070 AD the area is recorded as having been occupied by the Scots during a raid (VCH 1928, 256).

After the Norman Conquest the area was given to the Brus family and is referred to in the founding charter for Gisborough Priory c. 1119 AD (VCH 1928, 256). A list of the villis in Hartness drawn up between 1146 and 1151 named Hart, Thorp, Elwick, Dalton, Stranton, Tunstall, Seaton and Owton (VCH 1928 256). The absence of Greatham and Billingham is notable and they may have been split from Hartness at the time of the Norman Conquest.

The name derives from the place name 'Hart' meaning stag and 'herness' meaning lordship, although the origin of this administrative unit is uncertain (Watts 2002, 54-5). The churches at Hart, Billingham and Greatham all have good indicators of 7<sup>th</sup> century AD Christian activity that link them to Hilde's monastery at Hartlepool. This suggests that they were probably part of a coherent, common administrative unit at this time. It is however possible that the origin of this administrative area stretches back to the time immediately after Roman occupation or even earlier.

Elwick should not therefore be seen as existing on its own, but as part of a larger interconnected unit which was of some antiquity.

### Elwick Place-Name

The name 'Elwick' is recorded as 'Ailewic' c. 1150 AD and as 'Ellewic' in a document dated between 1174 and 1189. The name is probably derived from an Old English personal name either 'Ella' or 'Aegela', of these the latter would be pronounced as in Aylworth (Glos). The '-wic' element refers to a dairy farm (Watts 2005, 39). The name suggests a relatively small settlement as opposed to a more substantial settlement which would have had a '-tun' ending.

It is impossible to say when the name was first applied to a settlement in this location. Place names would usually change with the owner of the settlement and it may well have had a different name when owned by a predecessor. It is only when place-names are written down that they fossilise and the same name continues to be used for ease of record keeping.

It is probable that the original 'Elwick' is in the vicinity of the present one but we may never know its exact location or what it looked like.

### Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture

The only other piece of evidence that bears on a settlement of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries AD are two pieces of carved stonework now built into the chancel arch of St Peter's Church, Elwick Hall. Both have round heads and could represent grave slabs, which distinguishes them from the more usual stone crosses of this period.

Christian communities began to produce stonework from about 700 AD. This was usually produced by skilled craftsmen resident in monasteries and was purely Christian in character. This changed with the arrival of Scandinavian influence in the area and the stonework became more secular, commemorating Scandinavian lords. Stone crosses were still the more usual monument type but as well as Christian themes these often showed images of Scandinavian mythology or of Scandinavian warriors.

The two slabs at Elwick fall into the category of Scandinavian period monuments probably designed to honour secular nobles. One of the slabs shows a cross the other a number of figures, both would have been painted originally making the designs stand out even more. The slab with the cross dates to the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> centuries (fig 2) and is quite a common monument type at that period. Most have designs on front and back which suggests that they were stood vertically in the ground rather than laid flat on the top of a grave (Cramp 1984, 76).

The second slab may be slightly later, possibly dating to the 11<sup>th</sup> century and depicts a number of figures (fig 3). It appears to show the figure on the right throwing a stone at the other two figures who are crouching with their arms protectively across their bodies. The



interpretation of this is uncertain. It may show the stoning of St Stephen or even something that happened locally (Cramp 1984, 76).

These two stones tie in with the documentary evidence to suggest that part at least of the settlement of Elwick was in the immediate vicinity and it is quite possible that there was a church on the site of the present one at this time, although probably constructed from timber rather than stone (see below).

## **Elwick Medieval Settlement**

### Introduction

For the purposes of this document the medieval settlement is taken as comprising the village, church and manorial complex with its fishponds and the surrounding fields. In examining this area the situation is complicated by the presence of two administrative units: the Parishes of Elwick Hall and Hart. The parish of Elwick Hall includes the church and manorial site as well as a large tract of land to the west. The village of Elwick and the land immediately around it lies in the Parish of Hart. It is clear that this division is artificial and that the village, church and manorial complex should be seen as a single functioning unit. The date and reason for the split is uncertain, it almost certainly post-dates the Norman Conquest. It may be worth noting that the whole area of Hartness (see above) was held by the Brus family after the Norman Conquest and they gave the churches of Hartness to their new foundation of Gisborough Priory (1119 AD). The church at Elwick was retained by the Bishop of Durham and this desire by the Bishop to have a foothold in the area may lie at the heart of the split.

### Documentary Information

As referred to above, the manor of Elwick was held by the Brus family after the Norman Conquest and was part of their huge landholding either side of the River Tees. This was intended to allow them to control access to the river and maintain a hold on the area at a time when the Norman conquest of the north was still uncertain.

The manor of Elwick contained both the village and the manor and church and passed to the Nevill family via the marriage of one of the daughters of the Brus family. The manor was always subordinate to that of Hart and continued in the Nevill family until 1570 (VCH 1928, 236). It was run by a bailiff who was responsible for collecting rents and holding courts. Interestingly one of the terms of tenure was that tenants had to haul the bailiff's coal from

Spennymoor colliery (VCH 1928, 236). This is no doubt the origin of the road name 'Coal Lane' which still continues in use.

The village was involved in a dispute between Gisborough and Tynemouth Priors over a grant of tithes by the Brus family. Both religious houses had been granted tithes from Hartness, it just was not clear which tithes. In 1212 it was agreed that amongst others Tynemouth Priory should have the tithe of corn of Elwick and of the demesne land, that is the lord's own farmland in the village (VCH 1929, 262)

There are a number of individual references. One identifies a 'Seflat' in Elwick in about 1150, 'flat' was another name for a plot of land in the fields (VCH 1928, 254). In 1536 there is a reference to a mill (VCH 1928, 239), although it is not clear if this is a water mill or a windmill.

### The Church, Manor House and Fishponds

These features all lie to the west of the village at the other side of Char Beck and they should be viewed as a single complex (fig 4). The church would have been built as a private chapel of the lord of the manor and for that reason was positioned for the convenience of the lord, next to his manor house. It is presumed that the medieval manor house was in much the same position as the current Elwick Hall. This supposition is reinforced by a presence of a routeway leading from the medieval fishponds to towards the current hall.

### *The Church*

The appointment of the clergy at the church of St Peter, Elwick Hall was in the gift of the Bishop of Durham throughout the medieval period and in 1327 Walter de Cumba left land in Elwick to fund a chantry chapel to sing for his soul and those of other benefactors (VCH 1928, 241). The building comprises a chancel with a north vestry, nave with north and south aisles and a tower on the south aisle forming a porch into the church (figs 4 & 5).

In 1995 Peter Ryder carried out an archaeological assessment of the church on behalf of the Diocese of Durham and this account draws heavily on that (Ryder 1995). The building is largely constructed of Magnesian limestone, using cut and rubble masonry and the earliest architectural feature of the present church is probably the west end of the nave and the lower courses of the chancel which date to the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, although it has been suggested that the core of the nave walls may be earlier. Ryder dates the south arcade to the early 13<sup>th</sup> century and the north arcade a little earlier. He suggests that the lower stage of the tower over the porch may be 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of the clasped

buttresses shown in a 19<sup>th</sup> century print. This feature of a tower over a porch is also found at Hutton Rudby, North Yorkshire where it is of 15<sup>th</sup> century date.

The church was heavily remodelled in the 1660s and the medieval chantry chapel may have been demolished at this time and the north wall of the north aisle re-built using material from it.

Ryder's most interesting observations however relate to a possible survival of pre 12<sup>th</sup> century elements in the church. The Anglo-Scandinavian stonework has been noted above but Ryder also calls attention to a small blocked window on the south wall, immediately adjacent to the porch. This has gritstone dressings which mark it apart from the other architectural features in the church and may pre-date the use of limestone for most of the structure (fig 6).

Ryder further comments on the thickness of the south wall and the position of the doorway that bears no relationship to the arcade. This leads him to suggest that the south wall may survive from an earlier phase of building.

In conclusion the present church is ostensibly of 12<sup>th</sup> century date, however there are a number of strong hints in the form of the sculpted stone and gritstone dressings of a Pre-Conquest church on the same or nearly the same site.

### *The Manor*

The location of the medieval manorial site is almost certainly occupied by the present Elwick Hall (fig 7). The current building is of mid 18<sup>th</sup> century date with later additions and there is no record of the structure that preceded it. The presence of the fishponds does suggest that it may have been quite a high status building as they are not a common accompaniment to local manor houses, although there is a nearby example at Hart.

### *The Fishponds*

Elwick has a fine set of medieval fishponds and while they do not carry much water today their shape and organisation can be clearly made out. Medieval fishponds were constructed by nobles and religious house to ensure the provision of fish on a Friday and provide diversity in the medieval diet. A variety of fish would have been bred and the whole complex would have been intensively managed with dedicated workers.

The Elwick complex has a number of discrete components; there is a trapezoidal shaped pond at the north end with a long arm running directly south off the south west corner, it then turns a right angle to the west and turns a further right angle to the south (figs 8 & 9).

At the southern end the ditch expands into a wide oval, creating another small discrete pond.

The large pond contains two islands, both towards the north-west corner; one just in from the corner and the other further into the pond. These would have been constructed to encourage wildfowl to use the site and provide an additional source of food.

There is a clear pinch point where the arm leaves the main pond and this may have contained a sluice gate. It is quite possible that each arm of the ponds had a sluice gate to allow better control of breeding fish; and to make them easier to catch. The main species of fish kept in the medieval period were eel, tench, pickerel, bream, perch, and roach.

A trackway runs from the south-east corner of the first arm from the pond leading towards the site of the present day hall and to the south of this there is a rectangular enclosure and slight platforms. This may represent structures associated with the pond or with the hall.

### The Village

The village has a quite distinct plan with two rows of properties either side of a village green (figs 10 & 11). This reflects a deliberately planned settlement that has been laid out from east to west on a steep east to west slope. At the eastern edge of the village there is a steep slope onto a plateau from which there is a second marked slope to the western half of the village which lies on slightly flatter ground. There is also a marked north-south slope across the village with the northern properties occupying significantly higher ground.

The plan form at Elwick is typical of those throughout north-east England and reflects an episode of village establishment following the Norman Conquest. While any kind of certainty about the date of establishment of the village is difficult it almost certainly took place in the period 1100 to 1125 AD. Archaeological excavations on villages of this type have consistently been unable to provide dates earlier than this and it was not until this period that Norman overlordship in the north of England began to be consolidated.

The village plan of the medieval period is almost certainly that shown on the 1839 Tithe Map and on the First Edition of the Ordnance Survey about fifteen years later (figs 10 & 11). The Ordnance Survey map is clearly more topographically accurate and will be used for this discussion. In the medieval period as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and today the farm buildings would have tended to cluster at the front of the properties. The large areas behind the buildings would have been used for livestock, growing vegetables and some crops, carrying out craft activities and probably for orchards.

The principle building type would have been the cruck built long house with animals quartered at one end and people at the other with the two separated by a cross-passage from which access could be gained to either side. The crucks (paired curved timbers) may have been based on padstones or low stone walls and the roof would have extended very close to the floor. The insides would have been smokey and dark! The main building would have been accompanied by other cruck buildings used as byres and for storage.

Examination of the 19<sup>th</sup> century map of Elwick shows three blocks of properties that are quite distinct (fig 12). The first block lies on the northern side of the village where there are eight properties, although the Tithe Map only shows seven and the thin middle property seems to have been split sometime between the compilation of the two maps. These are all large farms with their boundaries extending a considerable distance to the north.

The second block of properties lies at the eastern end of the south row where there are about five farmsteads of a considerable size with an extensive area of land behind the buildings. The size of these properties is similar to those on the northern side and probably indicates the same type of tenure.

The block of properties on the western end of the south row is very different. It is much smaller and compact with the properties occupying nowhere near the same amount of space. In a farming economy where the amount of land is critical to success this would suggest a lesser level of wealth and status for the holders of these properties.

There is no direct information from Elwick about the nature or number of medieval farmers. We can however turn to sources of information from settlements in the region to help flesh out the picture. In 1183 AD the Bishop of Durham commissioned a survey of his landholdings and the resulting 'Boldon Book' provides a great deal of useful information (Austin 1982). Boldon Book has three basic types of medieval farmer; the leaseholder, the villein and the cottager.

The villein is the most numerous and represents the normal medieval farmer. He will typically hold two bovates (a bovaté could be anywhere between 8 and 20 acres but would be standardised at each settlement). This land would be held from the lord of the manor and in return the villein would have the kind of obligations set out for Boldon . That is:-

‘each of whom,... Pays 2s 6d of scot–penny and half of a scot-chalder of oats and 16d of carriage–penny and 5 wagonloads of wood and 2 hens and 10 eggs and works during the whole year 3 days a week (*for the lord of the manor–RD*) except for the weeks of Easter and Whitsun and thirteen days at Christmas and in his work he does four obligatory days in the autumn during the reaping with all the establishment of the household except for the housewife. And moreover they reap 3 roods of ripe oats and (each) ploughs and harrows 3 roods of oat stubble. And moreover each plough of the villein ploughs and harrows 2 acres and at that time they have subsistence once... (*from the lord of the manor – RD*) and then they are exempt from the work of that week, but when they are doing the great obligatory days they have a subsistence... (*from the lord of the manor – RD*). And in their works they harrow when needed and they carry loads and when they carry them each man has one loaf...’ (Austin 1982, 13).

The leaseholder stands above the villein in that much of the work that was owed the lord was waived in exchange for a rent payment. At the base of this agricultural pyramid was the cottager. The cottager would hold either a small amount of land or no land at all. Again Boldon serves as an example:-

‘...there are twelve cottagers each of whom holds 12 acres and works for the whole year 2 days a week except during the holidays named above (*see excerpt above – RD*) and renders 12 hens and 60 eggs’ (Austin 1982, 13)

It is also worth noting that the Lord of the Manor managed his estate in two different ways. As set out above he would tenant the land with villeins, leaseholders, cottagers etc. and he would also farm some of his land directly, usually under the control of a bailiff. This land was known as ‘demesne land’ and it was on this land that the villein worked on those days he owed the lord.

How then does this pattern of working the land fit into the picture at Elwick? The large properties on the north side of the village and those at the eastern end of the south side could equate to the landholdings of villeins or leaseholders and would suggest that there were about thirteen medieval farmsteads.

This leaves the block of smaller properties at the western end of the south row. The Tithe map of 1839 shows these as a single block of properties that were owned by John William Williamson. In 1763 Dr William Williamson bought the estate and tithes of Elwick, taking over as Lord of the Manor. This block of land was therefore held directly by the Lord of the

manor and may well have been occupied by households, perhaps the equivalent of cottagers, who were required to work solely on the demesne.

This lower status of tenant probably also applied to the properties on the north side of the road leading out of the village towards the church. These are in a typically marginal location with no significant amount of land attached to them and if they are occupying the site of medieval properties then these are most likely to be simply labourers who lived on whatever spare piece of ground was available.

### The Fields

Medieval fields were managed in common and the holdings of each farmstead were spread throughout the fields. There was little in the way of hedges or substantial boundaries. The land was split into strips with each farmer holding a number of strips spread throughout the fields. Each of these strips was ploughed individually with a team of oxen pulling the plough up one side of the strip and down the other. The soil was always turned towards the middle and over time this created a ridge with a furrow between strips. This resulted in the ridge and furrow we can see today.

Ridge and furrow has a reversed 'S' shape which is a result of the ploughman beginning to swing the team before the end of the strip is reached. There is usually a headland at the end of each block of strips where the plough is taken out of the ground and turned to go back down the strip and these provided the routes through the fields. The strips were grouped into furlongs, but this was not a set size as it is today, just a name for a block of strips all running in the same direction.

Open fields in Co Durham were enclosed from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards but we do not know when this happened at Elwick. Enclosure involved exchanging the scattered strips for blocks of land so that each farmer had a consolidated holding. This allowed more efficient farming and led to farmers moving their houses out of the village to be in the middle of their blocks of land.

Enclosure did however often preserve the furlong blocks of strips and this can be seen in instances where ridge and furrow still survive in fields and where the field boundaries preserve the curves of the ridge and furrow.

As part of this project the Tithe Map (1839) fieldnames and land use was plotted, as was any evidence of ridge and furrow (either surviving or showing on Aerial Photographs).

Field names may provide evidence of earlier settlements and this is probably the case with the 'Middleton' field names to the north west of Elwick, 'Ginley' to the north east and 'Morley' to the far west (fig. 13). 'Middleton' is more suggestive of a substantial settlement while 'Ginley' and 'Morley' indicate medieval farmsteads on newly cleared land. There is

also a place name 'Craddon' to the east of the village. This name is given to the beck and at least nine fields. The derivation of this name is uncertain and while it may refer to a previous settlement it may also relate to the local topography. It should be noted that this name runs along both sides of Craddon Beck and this suggests that it relates to this particular topography in some way rather than indicating a previous settlement site. The name may derive from either (or neither) of two that are quite close; 'Crathorne' is derived from 'kra' which is Old Norse for a corner of land and 'thorn' which is Old Norse for a hawthorn tree and one could envisage the beck sides being lined with hawthorn (<http://kepn.nottingham.ac.uk/map/place/Yorkshire%20NR/Crathorne>). Alternatively 'craggan' is a Scots dialect word for an earthenware pot and it is just possible that clay for pottery was extracted from this area or pottery actually made there (<http://www.dsl.ac.uk/>).

One of the uncertainties about Elwick is the number of open fields it possessed. Medieval field systems usually had three or four open fields, less frequently two and some form of crop rotation was practiced with these fields. Research elsewhere in the north-east has shown that crop rotation was most commonly practiced by furlong. Analysis of the field boundaries from the 1892 Ordnance Survey map might suggest that there were originally three open fields, one to the east of the village and the others to the north and south (fig 14).

There are a set of moor names at the northern edge of the 'north' field and it is common to find these around settlements. In this context they refer to rough grazing rather the type of landscape we associate with the North York Moors. The 'north' field also has an area of 'intake' which generally refers to a piece of land recently taken into cultivation. It is unusual to find a name like this so close to a settlement and it is just possible that this was the first part of the settlement of 'Middleton' that was cultivated once the settlement shrank (see fig 13).

The field layout to the immediate west of Elwick has a very clear boundary to the south of and parallel to Coal Lane. This may indicate that there was a corridor of land here that was only taken into cultivation relatively late and would have been the equivalent of 'moor' in the medieval period. The name 'Coal Lane' probably preserves the medieval duty on the tenants of Elwick had to haul the bailiff's coal from Spennymoor colliery (VCH 1928, 236).

The plotting of the 1839 land use by Minna West clearly demonstrates that the fields were largely arable at this time and this was almost certainly the situation in the medieval period and the evidence for ridge and furrow across the full area of the township confirms that most of it was arable at this time.



## Conclusion

Elwick has the two-row green plan typical of northern villages which were planned after the Norman Conquest and these can be dated from the last decade of the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards. We shall probably never know exactly when the settlement plan of today was actually laid out. There are however some hints of what may have been the situation in the couple of centuries before the Norman Conquest. We can probably assume that the manor /church complex was more or less in its present location and that there was a settlement of some kind in the vicinity of the present village (perhaps on the higher ground at the east end of the settlement). The fieldname evidence suggests other settlements at 'Middleton', 'Ginley', 'Morley' and perhaps 'Craddon'. This spread of settlements suggests a more dispersed pattern of settlement that was deliberately changed to the more concentrated (nucleated) type of settlement that Elwick represents today. This again would have been a result of the deliberate Norman policy to concentrate populations.

Finally it is worth considering the 'Middleton' name in more detail. It is suggestive of a settlement between others and is therefore a secondary name dependant on previously established settlements and names for its meaning. It is however worth noting that '-tun' names were generally applied to settlements of a significant size, in contrast to '-wick' names which generally applied to individual farms. It is therefore possible that 'Middleton' was originally the more important settlement but that changed when the new Norman settlement was established on the former site of Ella's dairy farm.

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## Figures

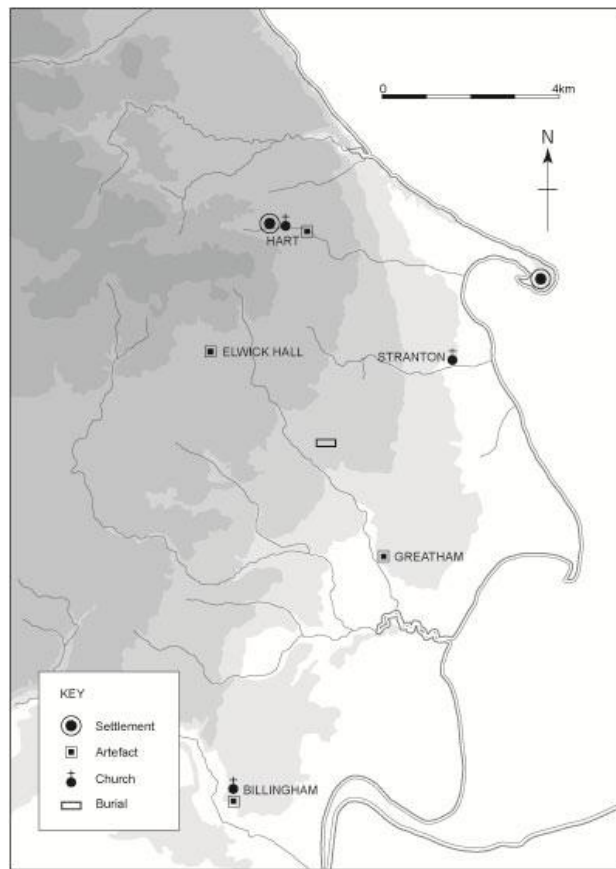


Fig. 1: The area of Hartness showing sites of the 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries AD



Fig. 2: Anglo-Scandinavian Grave Slab (1)



Fig. 3: Anglo-Scandinavian Grave Slab (2)



Fig 4: Map of Elwick showing the village, hall, church and fishponds (Ordnance Survey 1896)





Fig. 5: Church of St Peter, Elwick Hall

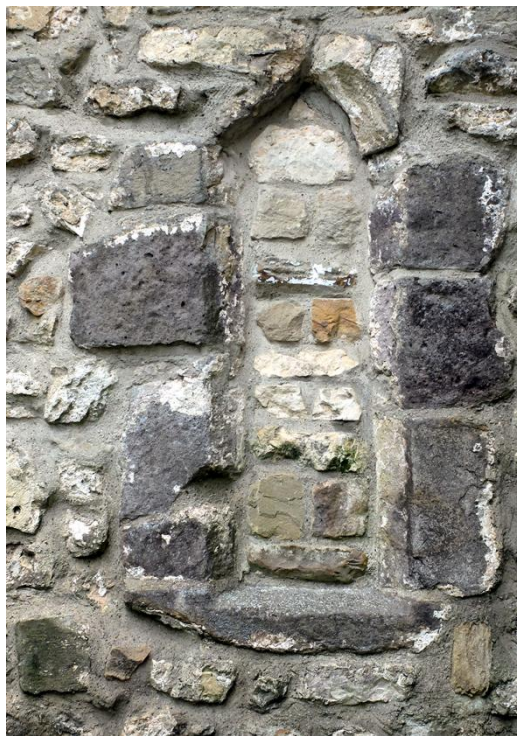


Fig. 6: Gritstone Window, Church of St Peter, Elwick Hall,



Fig 7: Elwick Hall (courtesy of H Thompson)



Fig. 8: Aerial Photograph of the medieval fishponds at Elwick



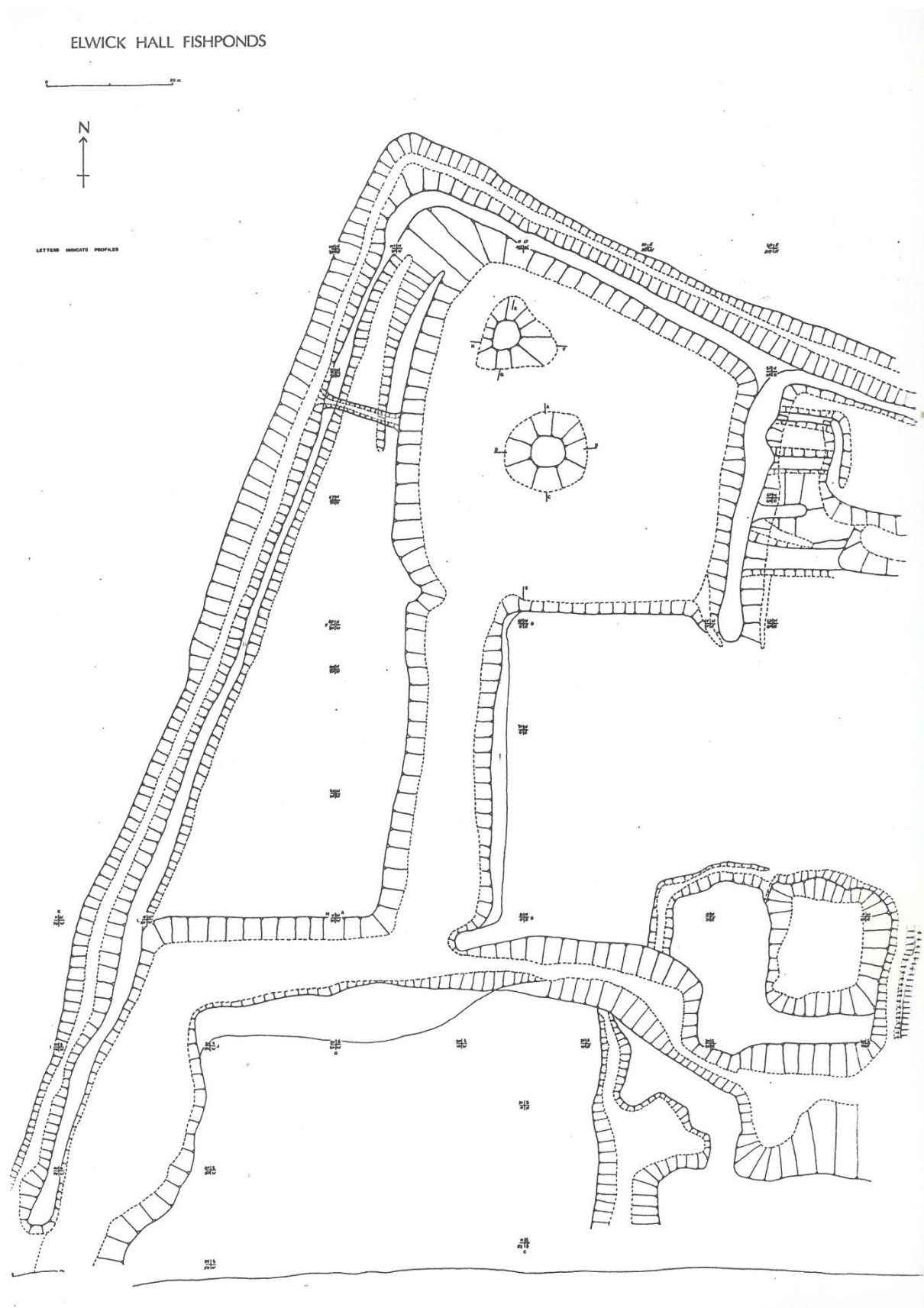


Fig. 9: Plan of the medieval fishponds at Elwick



Fig. 10: 1839 Tithe Map of Elwick

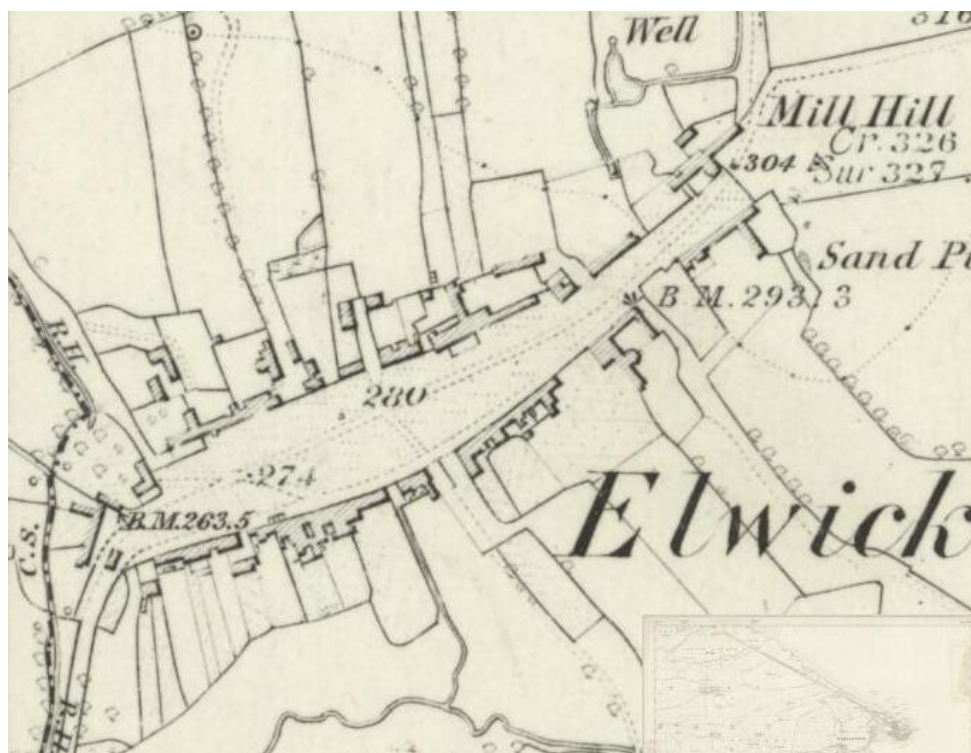


Fig. 11: Elwick in 1856 (1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey)



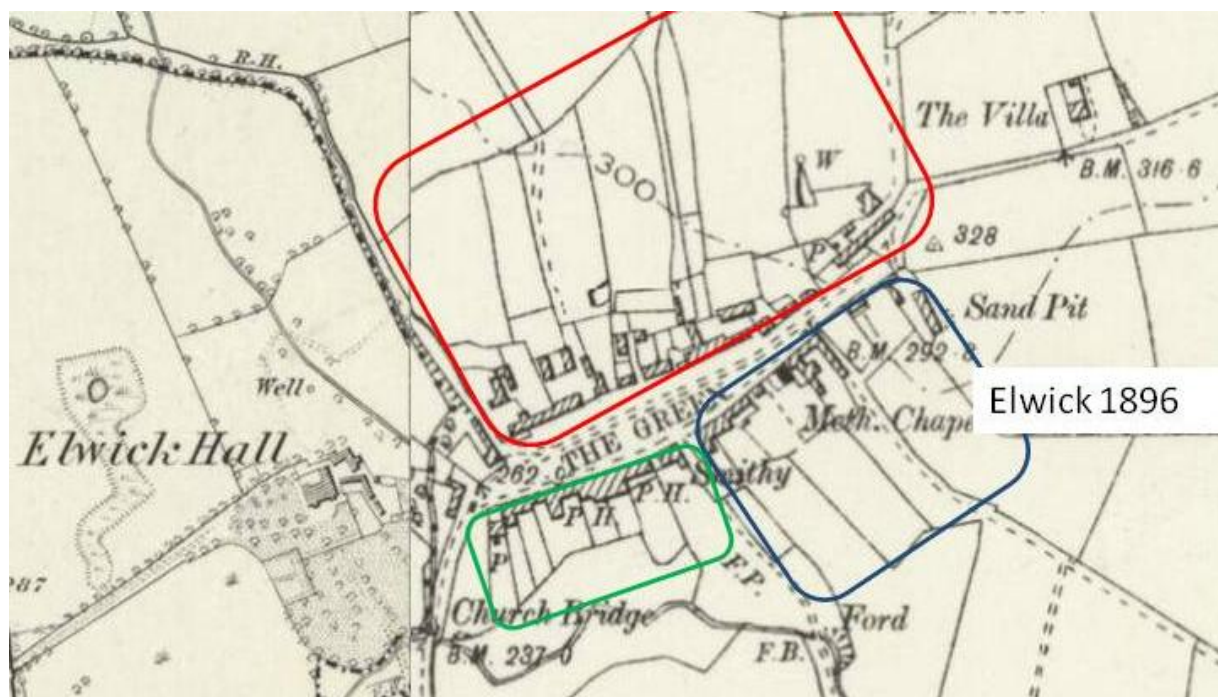


Fig. 12: Medieval property blocks in Elwick

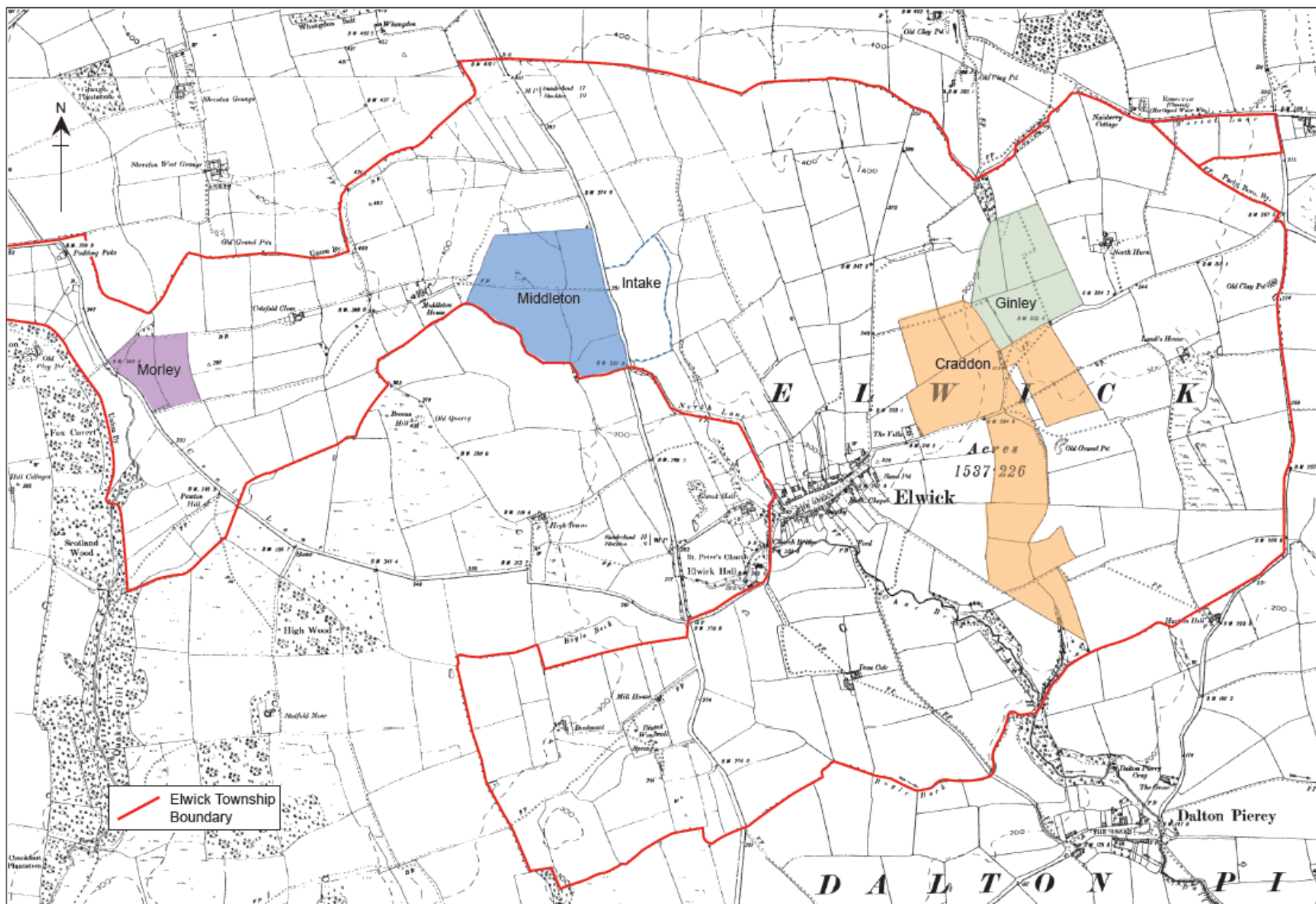


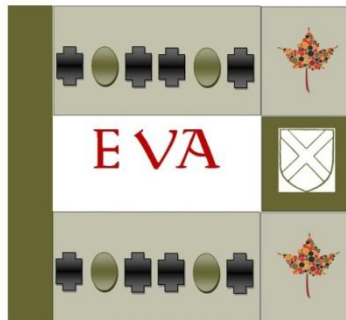
Fig 13: Medieval Settlement names in the Elwick area







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**Elwick Village Atlas**

**Limestone  
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