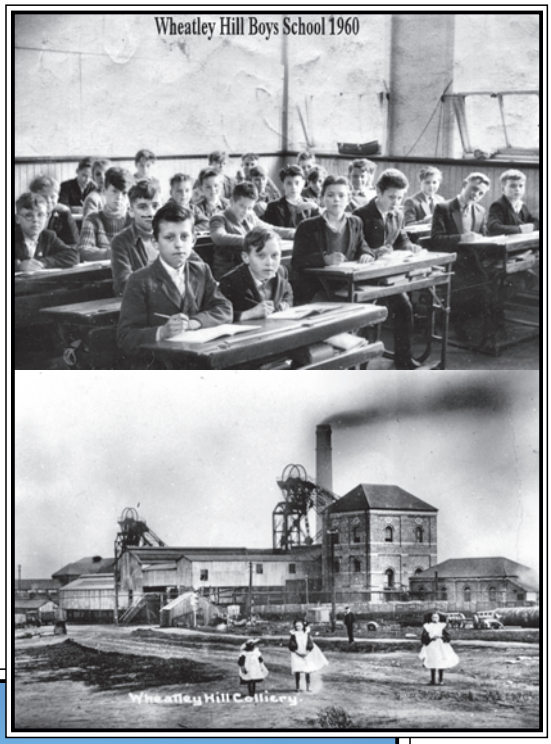
THE WHEATLEY HILL & THORNLEY VILLAGE ATLAS

'A SUMMARY'

TWO COMMUNITIES OF THE MAGNESIAN LIMESTONE PLATEAU



Edited by Alan Rushworth
with text and illustrations by
Alan Rushworth, Claire MacRae,
Marc Johnstone, Paul Williams,
Lizzie Willows and the Wear
Rivers Trust

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRACTICE LTD.

Limestone Landscapes

WHEATLEY HILL - THEATRES & CINEMAS
The Palace/Royalty

Courtesy of Wheatley Hill Heritage Centre, 1920s.

The Palace/Royalty

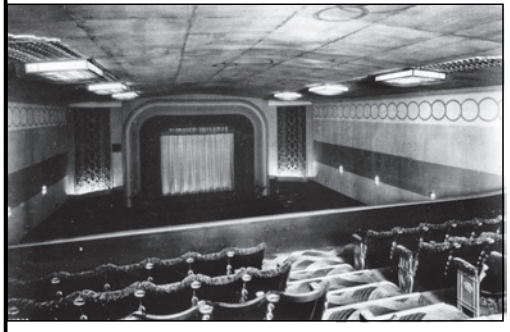
The Palace Theatre opened on Front Street 18th November 1913.

It was later remodelled and renamed The Royalty on 1st December 1938.

'On a Saturday matinee at the Palace children sometimes received an apple' (May Dyson)

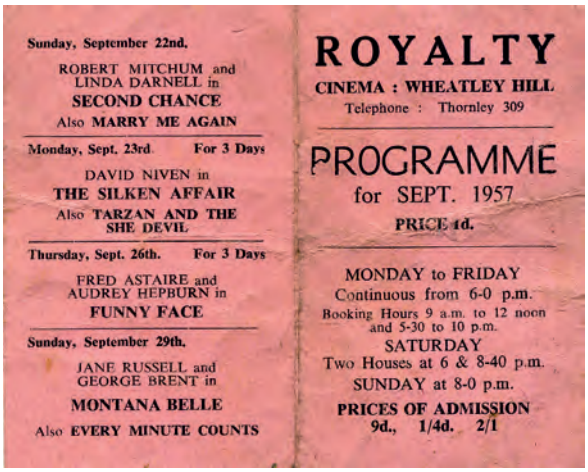
Courtesy of Tom Hagan via wheatleyhill.com

The Royalty 1930s, courtesy of Wheatley Hill Heritage Centre



Internal views of The Royalty 1930s, courtesy of Wheatley Hill Heritage Centre

There were 3 different films in a week ordinarily- Mon to Wed, Thurs-Sat and a different film on Sunday. Prices were 1/6-1/9d upstairs, 10d downstairs and bottom end fourpence. You could book your seat on Saturday and Sunday. The manager of the Royalty was called Smokey Joe' (Ena Patterson - worked at the cinema early 1940s).



Sunday, September 22nd.
ROBERT MITCHUM and LINDA DARNELL in
SECOND CHANCE
Also MARRY ME AGAIN

Monday, Sept. 23rd. For 3 Days
DAVID NIVEN in
THE SILKEN AFFAIR
Also TARZAN AND THE SHE DEVIL

Thursday, Sept. 26th. For 3 Days
FRED ASTAIRE and AUDREY HEPBURN in
FUNNY FACE

Sunday, September 29th.
JANE RUSSELL and GEORGE BRENT in
MONTANA BELLE
Also EVERY MINUTE COUNTS

ROYALTY
CINEMA : WHEATLEY HILL
Telephone : Thornley 309

PROGRAMME
for SEPT. 1957
PRICE 1d.

MONDAY to FRIDAY
Continuous from 6-0 p.m.
Booking Hours 9 a.m. to 12 noon and 5-30 to 10 p.m.
SATURDAY
Two Houses at 6 & 8-40 p.m.
SUNDAY at 8-0 p.m.
PRICES OF ADMISSION
9d., 1/4d. 2/1

'The Nimmo was the closest pub to the cinema. If you had no money on a Friday or Saturday night you could climb over the wall and pinch empty bottles from the pub, then take them hand them back in for money' (Irene Mcteer)

THE WHEATLEY HILL & THORNLEY VILLAGE ATLAS: A SUMMARY

THE HISTORY, GEOLOGY, HYDROLOGY & WILDLIFE OF TWO LIMESTONE LANDSCAPES COMMUNITIES

Edited by Alan Rushworth with text and illustrations by Alan Rushworth, Claire MacRae, Marc Johnstone, Paul Williams, Lizzie Willows & the Wear Rivers Trust

CONTENTS

Front cover: *main picture* – The south facade of Thornley Hall, probably built by John Spearman in the late 17th/early 18th-century, but perhaps incorporating elements of the Trollops' earlier manor house; *upper right* – A class at Wheatley Hill Boys School 1960; *lower right* – Wheatley Hill Colliery in the late 19th or early 20th century.
Back cover: *top* – Charter of 14 November 1478 separating the grazing lands of Thornley and Wheatley Hill and making a dyke between the two townships (Durham County Record Office D/Gr 303). Reproduced by permission of Durham County Record Office; *bottom L-R* – Old Wingate village looking E; Old boundary banks in Thornley meltwater channel; The grave of Peter Lee in Wheatley Hill Cemetery.
Title Page: *left to right* – Thornley Hall; the former chapel of rest in Wheatley Hill Cemetery now Wheatley Hill Heritage Centre.

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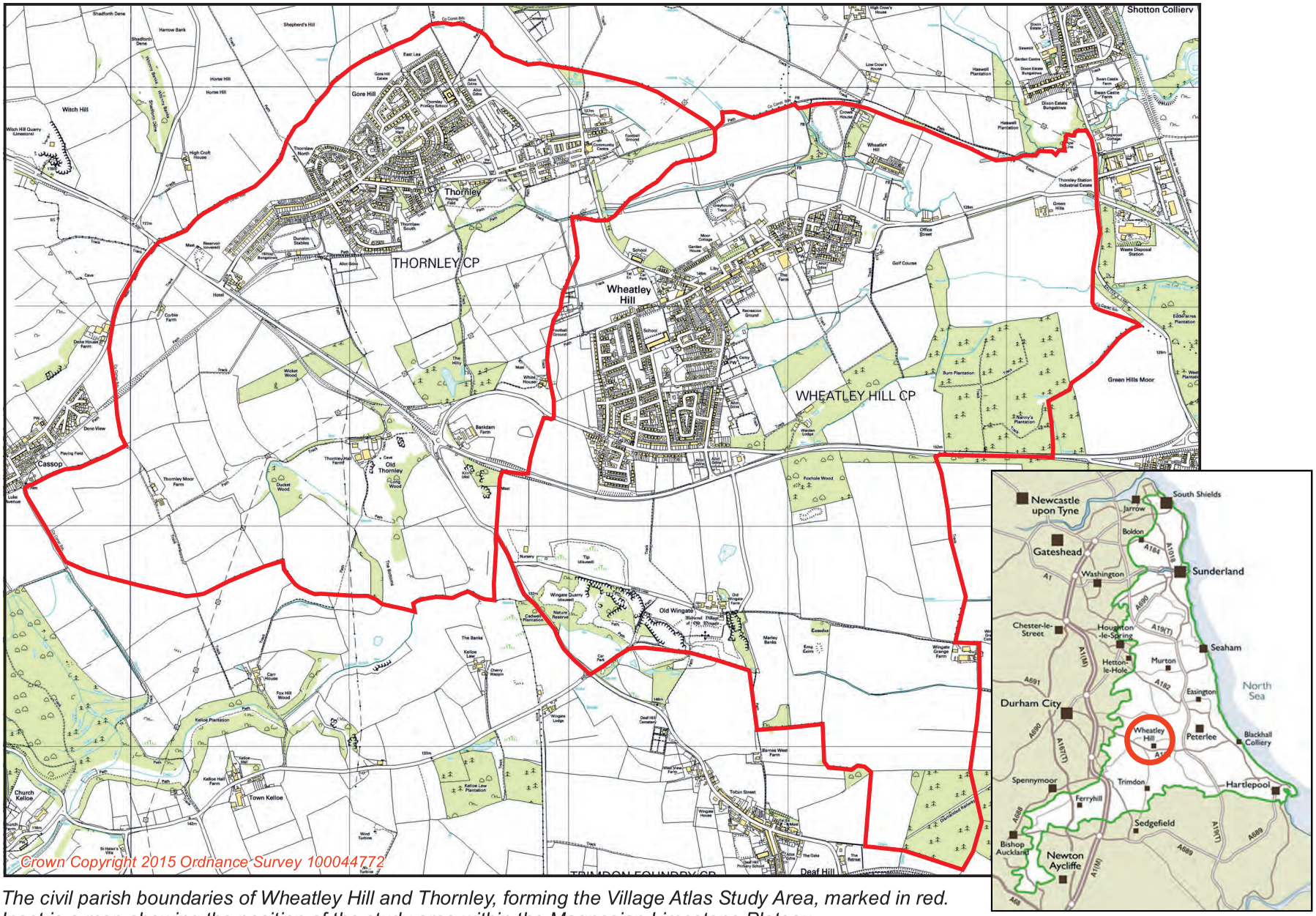
The Village Atlas Study Area



The civil parish boundaries of Wheatley Hill and Thornley, forming the Village Atlas Study Area, marked in red. Inset is a map showing the position of the study area within the Magnesian Limestone Plateau.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE COMMUNITIES AND THEIR LANDSCAPE

The Wheatley Hill & Thornley Village Atlas

This booklet is designed to provide an accessible summary of the known history, ecology and geology of Thornley and Wheatley Hill and their immediate surroundings. It draws on the work of the recently completed Wheatley Hill/Thornley Village Atlas, a wide ranging programme of work undertaken by members of the local community and a team of specialists directed by the Archaeological Practice Ltd. The Village Atlas was one of many projects focussed on the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau fostered by the Limestone Landscapes Partnership with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Durham County Council, and this booklet is intended to publish the results of the Atlas programme in a more concise and readily available form than the main Village Atlas report. Copies of the main report may be consulted at the following locations:

Thornley Library, High Street, Thornley; *Thornley and Wheatley Hill Civil Parish Offices*; *Wheatley Hill Heritage Centre,* Cemetery Grounds, Woodlands Avenue, WH; *Wheatley Hill Heritage Club; Durham County Record Office*, County Hall; *Durham CC Archaeology Section (HER)*, County Hall; *Durham University Library Archives & Special Collections*, Palace Green, Durham; *Durham Local Studies, Durham Clayport Library*, Millennium Place, Durham.

Amongst the material contained within are summaries of the area's ecology and geodiversity, a selection of the known historic sites, and a snap-shot view of the historic buildings, plus treatment of a wide range of topics from Wheatley Hill and Thornley's historic past. The maps and illustrations included here provide a comprehensive graphic portrayal of the two communities' historical development.

The Village Atlas covers the ancient settlements of Old Thornley, Old Wingate and the original hamlet of Wheatley Hill centred around Rock Farm, plus the 19th- and 20th-century pit villages of (New) Thornley and Wheatley Hill, treating all within the context of their surrounding landscape. Despite relatively similar histories, Thornley and Wheatley Hill still retain distinct identities as separate communities.

Landscape

The immediate landscape surrounding these communities was defined as the **Village Atlas Study Area** and corresponds to the two present day civil parishes of Thornley and Wheatley Hill' In addition the study area was informally extended to cover the area likely to have formed the territory of the medieval vill or township of Wingate (the settlement now corresponding to Old Wingate). The study area thus corresponds to the territories of three medieval township communities – Thornley, Wingate and Wheatley Hill. A 'township,' represents the demarcated territory traditionally attached to and exploited by ancient village communities, and forms a consistent territorial unit which can be analysed over time.

In broader landscape terms, the Study Area forms part of the **Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau**, a distinctive, low, upland plateau of magnesian limestone, extending from South Shields in the north to Hartlepool Headland in the south. It falls eastwards to the sea and southwards to the Tees plain and is defined in the west by a prominent **Limestone Escarpment** overlooking the Wear-Tyne lowlands. The plateau itself can be subdivided into two different zones, divided roughly along the line of the A19, with the **Clay Plateau** of Central East Durham to the west and the **Coastal Limestone Plateau** to the east. The majority of study area is encompassed by the **Clay Plateau**, though the transition to the spurs and dales of the **Northern Limestone Escarpment** occurs in the western half of Thornley Parish. The limestone is overlain by thick glacial drift on the Clay Plateau and is rarely expressed at the surface, forming a visually open landscape which is sometimes flat rather than gently undulating or rolling, with more mixed agricultural land use than further east.

Wheatley Hill, Thornley and the Magnesian Limestone Plateau

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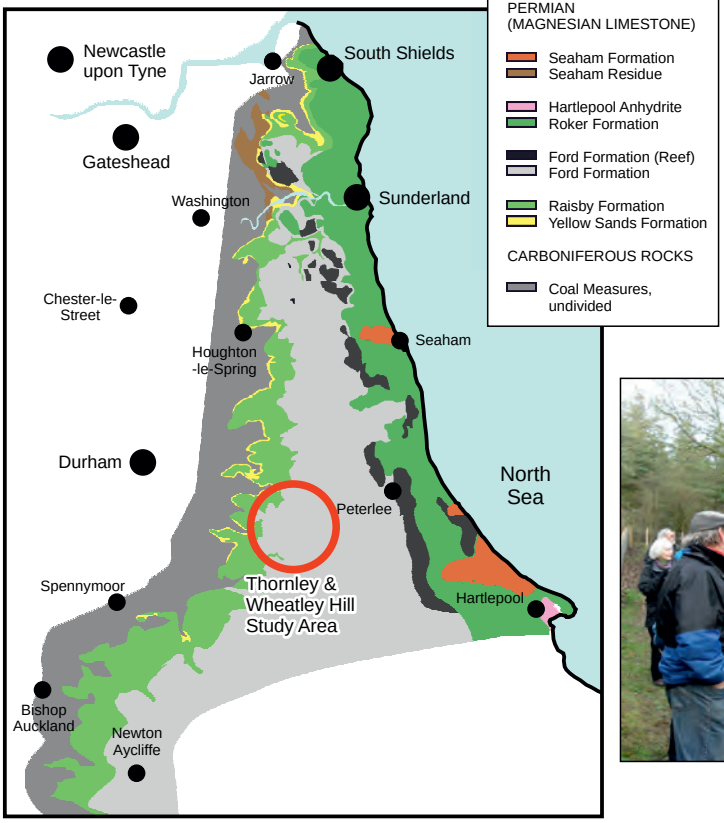
Geology & Landscape

Geology of the Magnesian Limestone area



Geowalkers examining an exposed section of magnesian limestone beside The Hilly

Wingate Quarry

The Meltwater Channel viewed from the north

The scar cut through the magnesian limestone bedrock by the Meltwater Channel at Old Thornley

2. THE GEOLOGY AROUND WHEATLEY HILL AND THORNLEY

The foundations of the solid geology of the area around the villages of Wheatley Hill and Thornley were laid down over 240 million years ago, but the landscape as we know it today has only evolved since the end of the last Ice-Age over 10,000 years ago. These two historical stages have combined to mould the countryside around the villages and provide the natural scenery we enjoy today.

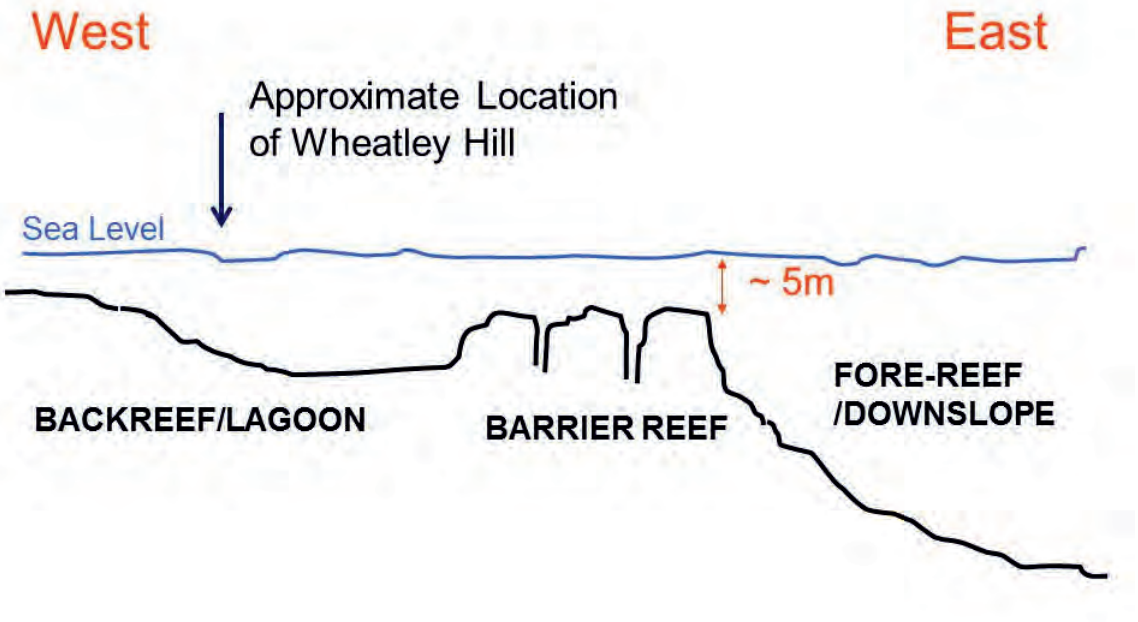
The solid geology bedrock of our area is formed of Magnesian Limestone, a rock laid down in a period of geological time known as the Permian period. The Magnesian Limestone is a series of sedimentary rocks deposited around 240 million years ago as sediments in a shallow sea. In the area around Thornley and Wheatley Hill, as in much of Co Durham, this solid bedrock is mantled by a series of soft, unconsolidated sediments of glacially derived drift deposits formed during the last ice-age, around 10,000 years ago. The last ice-age has also left its mark on the landscape by producing a series of surface features such as isolated hills, low ridges, and deep valleys, related to the numerous processes taking place during and after the advance and retreat of the ice. Some of these features are very prominent in the landscape today. Finally the landscape has also been modified by human activity, mainly agriculture and the exploitation of the area's natural resources.

At the beginning of the Permian period, about 280 million years ago, the surface of the Earth was a very different place to that we know today. At this time all the Earth's continents had become joined into one massive supercontinent known as Pangaea. This reorganisation also brought about significant changes across the area that is now Co Durham. The massive coal swamps that had dominated the region for over 30 million years had gone, and the once tropical rainforest climate was now replaced with something far more hostile. Co Durham lay amid vast arid plains in a land of deserts and low rainfall towards the centre of the supercontinent, far from any sea, at around latitude 20 degrees north, right in the middle of the desert belt. Vast dunefields built up over time as the roaring south easterly trade winds relentlessly piled the desert sands into mounds.

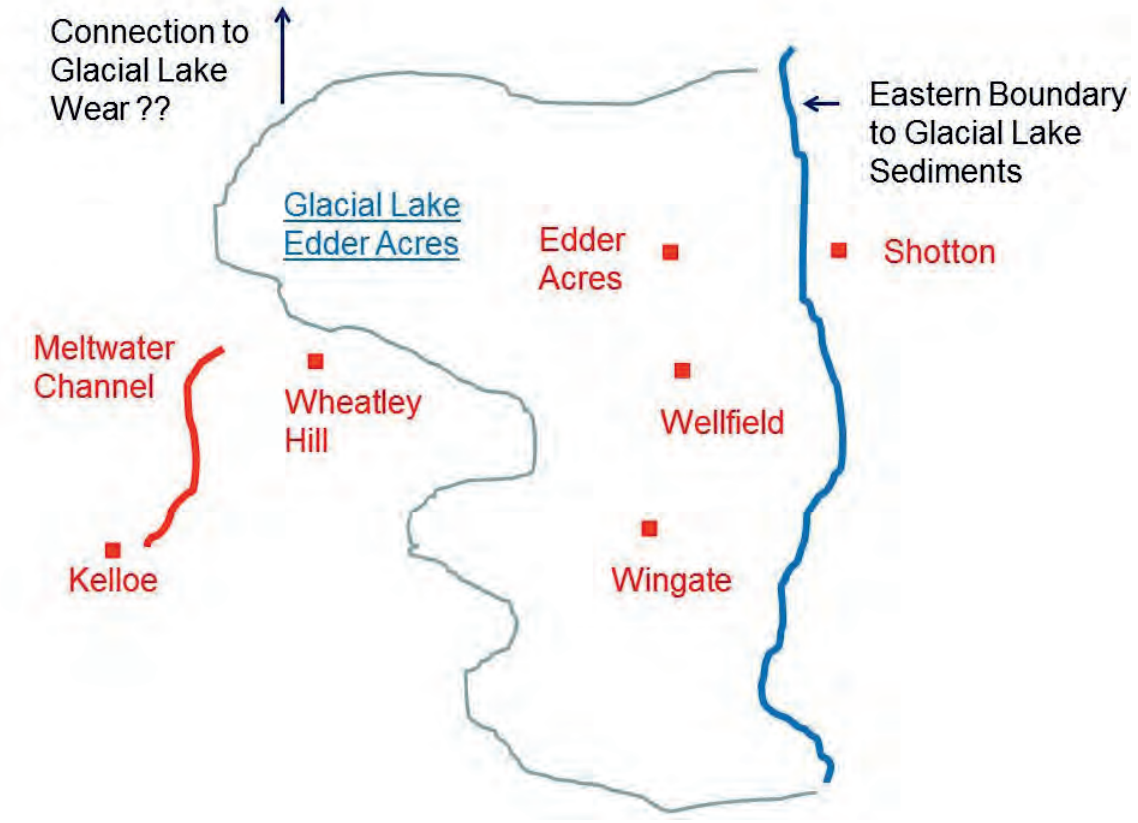
Eventually the climate began to get wetter again, as rainfall increased; and a shallow inland sea began to encroach across our region from the east, inundating our desert sand dunes that now formed the fringes to the western coastline of this shallow sea. This sea had much in common with the present-day Dead Sea, in being land-locked and shallow, and formed under an arid climate, resulting in higher than normal salinity. Initially Co Durham was on the very edge of this Zechstein Sea, as it is known, where its bottom muds are now preserved as the rock formation known as the Marl Slate. This shallow salty sea supported a range of newly evolving fish species, and their remains became preserved in the stagnant bottom muds. Today, the Marl Slate yields many well preserved fish fossils, and it now has world-wide recognition in being able to provide such excellent detail in the fish remains that the evolutionary development of these species can be unravelled. The Marl Slate can be seen today in the nearby area around Quarrington.

As the climate then got progressively wetter, the Zechstein Sea enlarged, and began to cover a greater area of Co Durham. In this more extensive sea, shelly creatures developed, and their remains became preserved as beds of limestone. But the climate was still hot, and under the intense sun the sea water suffered extensive evaporation, resulting in much higher salinity, and causing the formation of dolomite, a mineral containing calcium and magnesium carbonate. This dolomite was incorporated into the limestone, and resulted in the formation of the Magnesian Limestone. This sea then underwent phases of evaporation and replenishment as the climate swung between arid and wetter. The shoreline of this tropical Zechstein sea sat squarely within the boundaries of Co Durham, and just offshore a fringing barrier reef developed. Rather than a coral reef, this one was built of organisms something like sponges called bryozoans. The bryozoan colonies acted as a refuge for many shelly creatures, which lived in the safety of the reef. On the shoreward side of the reef the shallow lagoons collected lime muds and shelly debris, which formed the rocks that now make up those exposed at Wingate Quarry. Geologists refer to these rock strata

GEOLOGICAL HISTORY
From Permian Reef to Glacial Lakes



Diagramatic section through the Permian barrier reef and lagoon showing the approximate relative position of Wheatley Hill



Sketch map showing the postulated extent of Glacial Lake Edder Acres and the position of the Thornley-Kelloe Meltwater Channel

at Wingate as the “Raisby Formation” of the Magnesian Limestone, named from nearby Raisby quarry where these rocks are well-exposed. Further afield, the reef crest with its fossils is now preserved as a series of hills in the Sunderland area, such as Tunstall Hill and Humbledon Hill, and further south at Beacon Hill and Blackhall Rocks.

Our local area today provides no evidence of solid deposits younger than these, but younger strata from the Permian and succeeding Triassic periods are preserved southwards towards the Tees. They were probably deposited over our area too, but have been subsequently removed by erosion.

The next chapter in our story begins only a million years ago, when the Northern Hemisphere’s temperate climate began to cool, heralding the start of the last Ice Age. Over a period of more than 200,000 years Britain experienced a climate fluctuating between extreme cold and warmer conditions. During cold periods ice sheets would have developed, and at times these were extensive enough to cover the whole country. In their development they would have scoured the solid bedrock sweeping it in front of the advancing ice-front, only to dump this debris when conditions ameliorated. This debris would be left, subsequently to form landscape features as mounds known as “moraines” The ice-sheets themselves would also leave their mark, carving out valleys and grinding down the bedrock. The evidence of earlier ice-sheet activity in north-east England has been lost, probably due to erosion by the last major ice activity which took place between around 26,000 years before present, and 13,000 years before present. Advance of this last ice sheet eroded the bedrock and produced moraine deposits, and also initiated processes, the effects of which are now left preserved as major landscape features. At the base of moving ice-sheets melt waters would have carved out sub-glacial drainage channels, often following lines of earlier drainage systems, but also developed directionally along lines of ice-movement.

As the climate eventually warmed again the ice sheets finally began to melt and retreat at about 12,000 years before the present day. Numerous landscape features resulted from the deposition of muds and sands entrained within and below the ice, which were released on melting. Sinuous ridges of sands and gravels can be seen which mark the position of subglacial melt channels and are preserved today as landscape features known as “eskers” and “kames”.

Meltwaters would have flowed southwards and eastwards off the melting ice sheets producing their own range of features. Some of the most notable of these being characteristically shaped drainage channels, many of which may have been initiated originally as sub-glacial drainage systems under advancing ice. Many of them are steep sided, and give rise to the features of Castle Eden Dene, Hesledon Dene, and Hawthorn Dene nearby. Another significant landscape feature can be seen running south from near Thornley Hall towards Kelloe. In contrast to the narrow channels described above, with steep sides, others had steep sides and flat valley floors, and an excellent example of this type of channel is the one near Thornley Hall. The shape of this channel, with its steep sides and wide flat valley floor suggests that this channel was formed not by the gradual flow of water relentlessly grinding away the rock, but by the large-scale, possibly catastrophic, release of large bodies of water. This channel might have been initiated by drainage underneath ice sheets originally, possibly constrained in ice tunnels, and subsequently enlarged by flow of meltwater.

As the ice melting process continued, large bodies of meltwater collected in temporary lakes, dammed by ice barriers. Overflow and periodic breaching of these lakes would have released large volumes of meltwater, which would have flowed along these channels accentuating and sculpting them, giving them the characteristic shape that we recognise today. The presence of such a lake just to the north has been inferred by studying evidence from glacial deposits and channel orientations. Glacial Lake Wear, as it has been called, stretched from near Tynemouth along the Tyne to Dunston in its northern extremities, then south along the Team Valley to Chester-le-Street and Plawsworth, and across to Sunderland, with a branch down to Houghton-le-Spring.

This would have collected the meltwaters from a wide area. One much closer to Wheatley Hill and Thornley has also been postulated. An area of glacial lake sediments has been identified in the vicinity of Wheatley Hill, which may be linked with Glacial Lake Wear, or a separate area of meltwater ponding which has been named Glacial Lake Edder Acres. The lake sediments have been identified in the region of Wingate – Wellfield- Edder Acres, with an easterly margin running north to south through Shotton, and extending westwards towards Kelloe.

Glacial Lake Edder Acres may represent an isolated body of meltwater or be part of the bigger Glacial Lake Wear, connecting with it around and across the Durham Plateau, but there is no current evidence to substantiate this. The significance of this inferred lake to the village of Wheatley Hill is considerable, for parts of the civil parish would have been within the confines of the lake 10,000 years ago. The Thornley-Kelloe meltwater channel would have thus played its part in collecting the overflow from Glacial Lake Edder Acres, and distributing the meltwaters further to the south. Hence the Thornley-Kelloe channel gives us a direct link back to the time 10,000 years ago when Britain began to emerge from the last Ice Age, and this landscape feature now forms a priceless part of our geological heritage.

The final imprint on our local landscape was provided by the intervention of man in the exploitation of the area's natural resources of limestone, brick clay and coal. The Magnesian limestone would have been quarried initially on a very local basis to provide building stone in pre-18th-century times. Later, the use of lime mortar required limestone to be burnt in limekilns, and these would have started to appear in the landscape. These were very local operations, and little evidence of this remains today. By the beginning of the 19th century limestone quarrying and lime burning was on a much bigger, industrialised scale. Raisby quarry and limeworks was a major operation in the mid-1800s, with much of the lime being for agricultural use. The local limekilns near Thornley Hall were active in the 1860s, and would have utilised the locally quarried Magnesian limestone. They remain today as a reminder of those past times. Closer to Wheatley Hill, Wingate quarry was operational around or before 1840, producing limestone for ballast and burning, and it's presence is still very apparent today. The formerly worked faces now give an opportunity to study the geology of the region, while the limestone spoil heaps that once littered the area are now a natural wildlife habitat of great diversity and rarity. The Lake Edder Acres glacial lake clays were also exploited in the production of bricks, and the Wingate brickworks (Glass's) was established in 1840. No readily identifiable evidence of any brickpits remains today, but many local dwellings are likely to have been built from bricks made at these works. The establishment of coal mining in the area from the early 19th century onwards, exploiting the region's vast coal reserves, had a significant impact on our landscape. The three nearby pits of Wheatley Hill, Thornley and Wingate Grange produced vast spoil heaps, much of which still remains to this day. Now grassed over and reclaimed these produce significant features in the landscape as low hills, competing with those formed naturally of morainic drift for significance. Notable examples are seen between Wheatley Hill and Thornley.

And so the landscape of our area is a combination of these three influences – a solid bedrock of Magnesian limestone which underlies everything, and provides the solid foundation to the area. It makes its appearance only through isolated examples of natural weathering, but is prominent in the local disused quarries. The effects of the last Ice-Age, providing a range of surface depositional and erosional features that are very noticeable in the landscape. And finally the influence of man, in the remains of limekilns, disused quarries, and reclaimed coal-pit spoilheaps. All this has combined together to produce a greatly diverse landscape of significant natural beauty for us to enjoy.

3. ECOLOGY AND HYDROLOGY

Ecology - Wingate Quarry

Without doubt the jewel in the crown of the Wheatley Hill/Thornley Atlas area from both a geological and ecological perspective is the former limestone quarry of Wingate, which is now a Site Of Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Local Nature Reserve (LNR). It was County Durham's first LNR being dedicated in 1980 and was first notified as a SSSI in 1984 primarily because of the secondary Magnesian Limestone grassland that has developed since quarrying stopped in the 1930s.

History

Quarrying for limestone begun in earnest in the mid-18th century and the rock was used for building, making agriculture lime and as an additive in steel making. Nearby limekilns were built to burn the rock with locally produced coal and the resultant lime powder used to 'sweeten' the soil and as a building product for limewash and lime pointing.

Abandoned in the 1930s, the quarry floor was left to its own devices and over time has developed into a secondary magnesian limestone grassland, possibly one of the largest and most varied of its type. With this habitat being one of the scarcest due to agricultural land improvements and quarrying activities it is estimated that only 272 Ha remain in Britain with 179 Ha in Durham and Tyne and Wear (1993 figures).

Wildlife importance

Much of the quarry contains Magnesian Limestone grassland plants with typical species such as glaucous sedge *Carex flacca,* Quaking Grass *Briza media,* fairy flax *Linum catharticum,* small scabious *Scabious columbaria* and Greater knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa.*

Orchids present include Northern Marsh, Common Spotted and crosses of the two. Fragrant orchid and frog orchid, uncommon in County Durham are also found here along with the green-flowered Twayblade.

Possibly one of the more interesting plants of the floral community is **butterwort** (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) which has two special glands enabling it to entrap and digest insects. The first gland produces a sticky secretion which attracts the insect and as it becomes trapped the second gland produces enzymes that breaks down the digestible parts of the insect body.

Fauna

With a variety of caterpillar–loving plants, it is not surprising that on a hot summer's day the quarry can be alive with butterflies as well as a number of day-flying moths. Of particular note is the bird's foot trefoil plant which is the food plant of the rare Dingy Skipper, *Erynnis tages.*

A special project with Durham University: the Marbled White Butterfly:

Wingate Quarry, was one of the sites in this region identified in 1999-2000 as suitable for the translocation of free flying Marbled White Butterflies which were collected from sites in North Yorkshire. Since release, the introduced populations have managed to build a sustainable population.

Photo: Gary Whitton

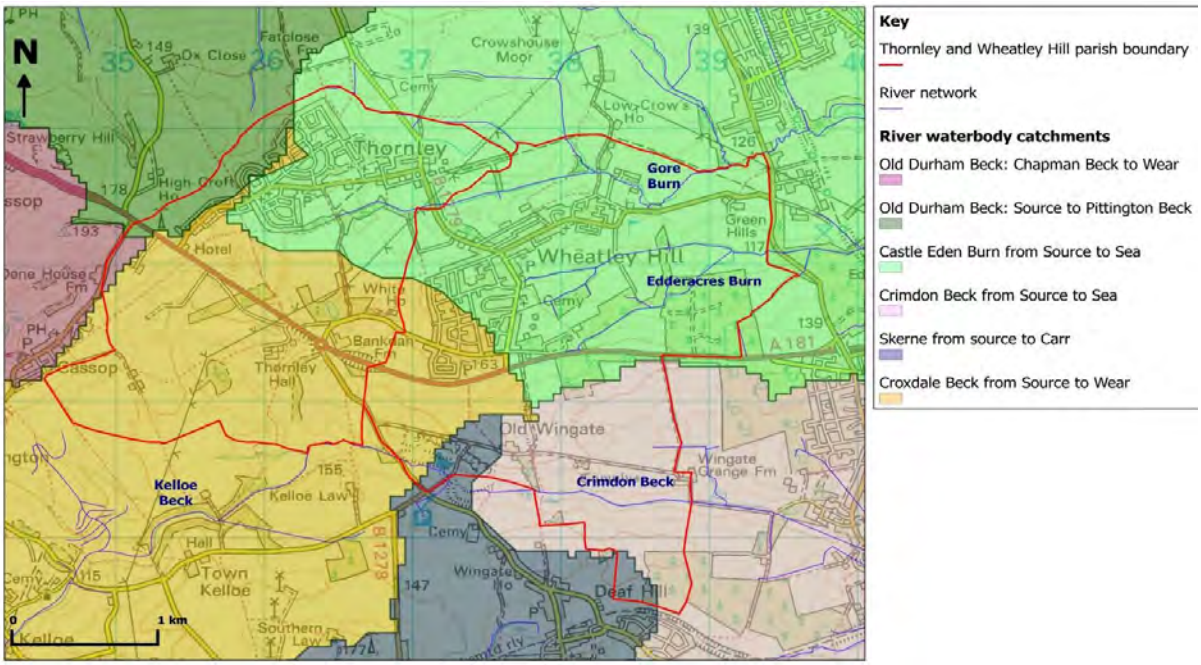
The project was aimed at helping species adapt to climate change. Computer models predicted that translocating species to more northerly suitable sites, bridging the gap from North Yorkshire, could play a role in helping wildlife survive in a warming world.

Woodland in Thornley and Wheatley Hill
Most of the woodland in Thornley and Wheatley Hill comprises new plantations, planted at the time of reclamation after the pits closed in the 1970s.

Gore Burn Wood – Wheatley Hill *(Gary Haley, Woodland Trust)*
In March/April 2012, a new 4.6 ha native wood was planted on Gore Burn Local Nature Reserve between Wheatley Hill and Thornley (NZ 370 397). This was funded by a grant from County Durham Environmental Trust (CDENT), along with grants from the Forestry Commission and donations from local people. A total of 4,900 trees and shrubs were planted, all native broadleaved species that you'd expect to find in natural woodland around the Wheatley Hill area, such as oak, ash, birch, hazel, goat willow and rowan. Alongside Gore Burn itself, species more suitable to wet conditions like willows and alder were planted. The first trees to be planted were put in the ground by local school children from St Godric's, Wheatley Hill Community Primary and Thornley Primary schools. This was followed by a planting event open to anyone on 24 March 2012 to which over sixty people, mostly local residents, came out and planted around 600 trees. The new wood will provide free public access for walkers, with large rides and glades included in the wood's design.

Hydrology
The Thornley and Wheatley Hill area has several small streams at the head of sub-catchments which either feed the River Wear or Tees or flow directly to the North Sea. These sub-catchments are characterised by moderate to bad ecological status arising from various water quality problems, as indicated in particular by the limited macroinvertebrate species that have been recorded in the area. The groundwater in the area is also in a poor state both chemically and in terms of the quantity to be found. This is due to over-abstraction, saltwater intrusion and pollution, a significant source of which will be closed mines. On a more positive note, the level of flood risk within the parishes is minimal.

The actual streams that run from or through the parishes are Kelloe Beck (the source of the Croxdale Beck catchment), Edderacres Burn and Gore Burn (tributaries of Castle Eden Burn), and the head of Crimdon Beck (in the Crimdon Beck catchment) (*see above*). These calcareous streams are all in their upper course (i.e. near the source) and the channels are therefore narrow in width and shallow in depth with low, gently-sloping banks. Indeed some of the streams within the parishes that are marked on Ordnance Survey maps can be described as ephemeral or seasonal as they are dry for at least part of the year.

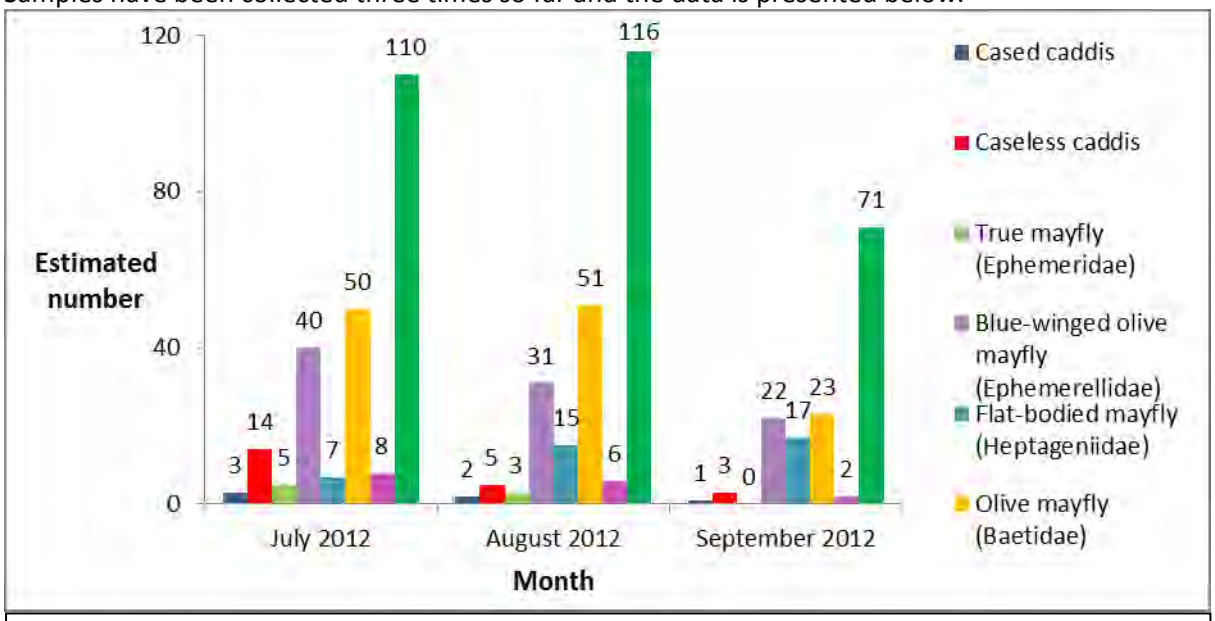


Thornley and Wheatley Hill Parishes intersect six separate waterbody catchments

THORNLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL RIVERFLY MONITORING

Thornley Primary School students are taking part in the Riverfly for Schools project which is being run by the Wear Rivers Trust and funded by the Environment Agency and other partners including the Limestone Landscapes Partnership. Riverflies is another name for aquatic macroinvertebrates and the project involves monitoring the populations of eight key groups by taking monthly samples. Teacher Oliver Johns has been trained in the sampling method and now takes children from the school out to catch and count riverflies. The sampling method is the same as used by the Environment Agency and the data will be passed on to the EA and used by the Wear Rivers Trust to help monitor water quality. The sample site is on Sherburn Beck in Sherburn Woods, just south of Sherburn Village. This is in the 'Old Durham Beck from Source to Pittington Beck' river waterbody catchment which Thornley Parish intersects (*see above*). A suitable Riverfly site was not available within the parish itself so a downstream site had to be chosen.

Samples have been collected three times so far and the data is presented below.



Numbers of eight key groups of riverflies in Sherburn Beck
**Although not a fly, freshwater shrimps are included as equally helpful biotic indicators*
Source: *Thornley Primary School*

The official ecological status of the waterbody is moderate and it is not recorded as failing for macroinvertebrate levels. Thornley Primary's data supports this: they have so far found some of each type of the key groups which shows that the water quality is not at all bad, but they have found more of the groups that are more tolerant of pollution (freshwater shrimps and olive mayflies) and fewer of the less tolerant species, indicating that water quality could be better.

As they build up a record of the riverfly populations at this site, an understanding of the natural fluctuations will be gained and this will provide a benchmark against which to check for declines which are out-of-the ordinary and therefore possible indicators of water quality degradation.

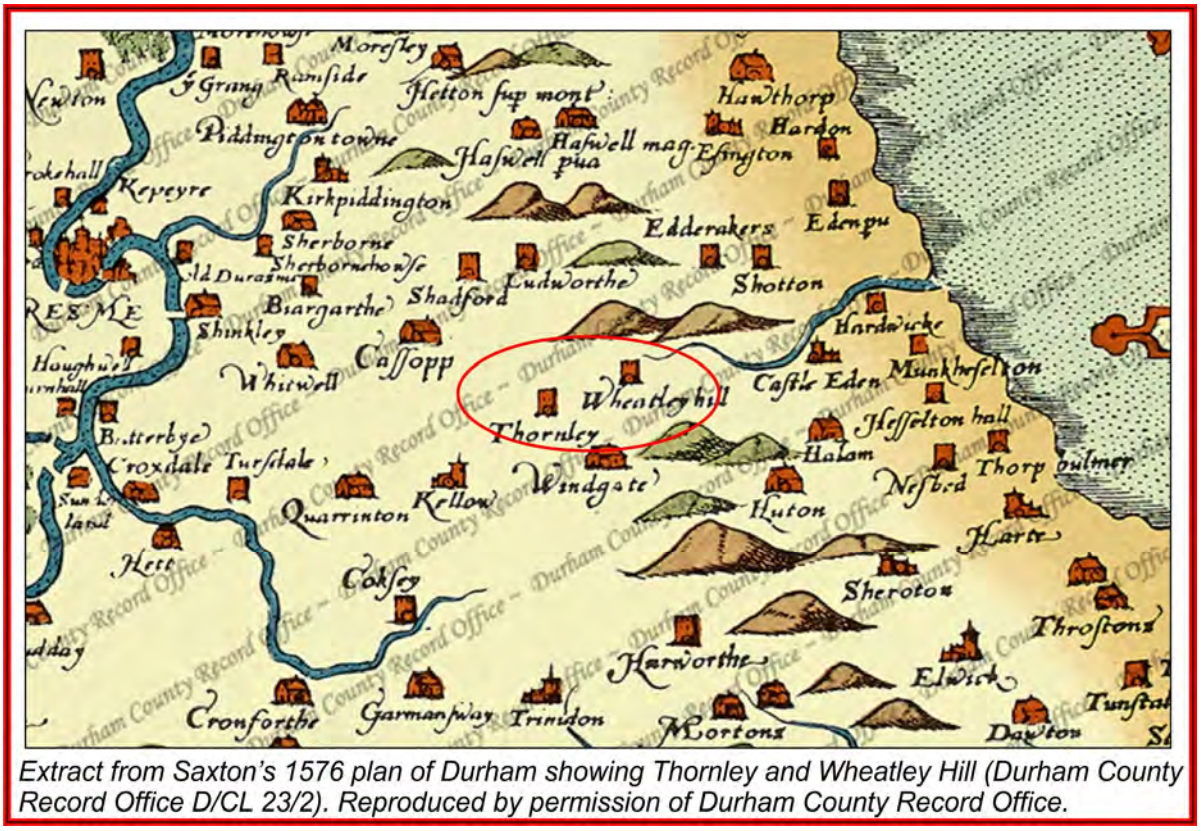
4. METHODS AND SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

How do we know what we know? A variety of source material provided the evidence used to compile the Wheatley Hill and Thornley Village Atlas, including:

- Historic maps
- Old photographs, prints and documents
- Archaeology – known sites & monuments
- Aerial Photographs
- Analysis of Historic Buildings

Summary gazetteers were prepared listing all the sites of significant cultural heritage interest in the Atlas Study Area derived from the Durham Historic Environment Record (HER) held in the Archaeology section at County Hall, Durham. The HER is also searchable online through *Keys to the Past* (www.keystothepast.info).

Site visits were undertaken to examine and photograph all archaeological or historical features of interest in the settlements and wider township areas, including the overall built environment and wider field systems. All buildings of note were examined and photographed in the course of site visits. Buildings of particular interest, such as Gore Hall, Thornley, were subject to detailed analysis.



Extract from Saxton's 1576 plan of Durham showing Thornley and Wheatley Hill (Durham County Record Office D/CL 23/2). Reproduced by permission of Durham County Record Office.

Atlas activities: Walks, Talks and Visits: Guided walks around Wheatley Hill and Thornley villages and their wider environs were undertaken to examine historic buildings, notable archaeological monuments, geological features and sites of ecological significance. A variety of ecological monitoring activities were undertaken. Activities with local schools included **Riverfly monitoring** with Thornley Primary School and **archaeological test-pitting** with St Godric's RC Primary School at Old Thornley.

FROM CHARTERS TO TRADE DIRECTORIES

Top: Indenture dated 14 November 1478 between 1) John Trollop, esquire, and heirs 2) Richard Bainbridge and Alice his wife regarding a division of lands and tenements betwixt the town and lordship of Thornlaywe and the lands and tenements of the grange place called Qwetlawy (Wheatley Hill); with terms for the construction and repair of a wooden dyke or fence between the two estates (Durham County Record Office D/Gr 303). Reproduced by permission of Durham County Record Office.

Below: Extract from Kelly's Trade Directory, 1879.

THORNLEY is a township and ecclesiastical parish, formed in 1844 from the parish of Kelloe, 1½ miles south-west from Thornley station on the Sunderland and Hartlepool branch of the North Eastern railway, 7 east from Durham by road, 11 north-west from Hartlepool, and 14 south from Sunderland by railway, in the North division of the county, Easington ward and union, county court district of Durham, Easington rural deanery, Durham archdeaconry and diocese. The church of St. Bartholomew is a plain stone building, erected in 1843, at a cost of £1,000: it consists of chancel, nave without aisles, and small porch, and contains 1 bell. The register dates from the year 1844. The living is a vicarage, yearly value £290, with residence and 1¾ acres of glebe land, in the gift of the vicar of Kelloe, and held by the Rev. William Mayor, M.A. of Durham University. The Catholic chapel of St. Godric is a plain building, and will seat 400 persons: there is a school annexed. The Wesleyans and Primitive Methodists have each a chapel. This village is chiefly supported by the extensive coal mines and coke ovens, which give employment to a large number of the inhabitants. Here is a library with news-room, supplied with periodicals and newspapers. Major Henry Charles Spearman is lord of the manor and principal landowner. The soil is heavy; the subsoil, limestone. The crops are of the usual kind. The area of the township is 1,148 acres; rateable value, £7,144; the population in 1871 was 3,059: the area of the ecclesiastical parish is 2,000 acres; the population in 1871 was 3,803.

Parish Clerk, John Gutteridge.

POST, MONEY ORDER & TELEGRAPH OFFICE & Savings Bank.—Mrs. Margaret Martin, postmistress. Letters arrive from Trimdon Grange at 7.20 a.m.; dispatched at 4.30 p.m

SCHOOLS:—

Board School, Thomas William Douglas, master; Miss Alice Ann Wilson, girls' mistress; & Mrs. Annie Douglas, infants' mistress

Catholic, Miss Mary Quinn, mistress

CARRIER TO DURHAM.—John Green, every saturday

Wheatley Hill, a colliery village, forms part of the ecclesiastical parish of Thornley, from which village it is distant one mile west and eight east from Durham. A Mission room in connection with the parish church was erected in 1873-4: the building is of brick.

POST & MONEY ORDER OFFICE & Savings Bank.—Wm. D. C. Blunck, sub-postmaster. Letters *viâ* Trimdon Grange, arrive at 8.45 a.m.; dispatched at 3.35 p.m

Board School, John Woodmass, master

Thornley.

PRIVATE RESIDENTS.

Binks William
Bright Samuel
Elliott John
Foran Rev. Jeremiah [Catholic]
Galt William Dalgarriennies
Laverick Rev. John [Primitive Methodist]
Lockyer Rev. Alfred [Wesleyan]
Magee Rev. John [Primitive Methodist]
Mayor Rev. William, M.A., J.P. [vicar], Vicarage
Nisbet William
Steel John

COMMERCIAL.

Adamson Joseph, *Good Intent*
Ainsley Thomas Trouthbeck, tailor
Bainbridge William, *New inn*
Bell Sarah (Mrs.), *Spearman's Arms*
Binks & Ellison, farmers, Gore hall
Binks Wm. & Son, spirit, ale & porter mers
Bramley George, hair dresser
Bright Samuel, surgeon
Brownless George, *Black Horse*
Burgess Mary (Mrs.), *Three Horse Shoes*
Cambell James, beer retailer
Clark Edward, butcher
Clark John James, butcher
Cradick Thomas, grocer
Dobson Thomas, butcher
Dunstone William, watch maker
Elliott John, grocer, draper, tailor, sewing, wringing & mangling machines & iron bedsteads, harmoniums & pianos
Emmerson Joshua, shopkeeper
Galt William Dalgarriennies, assistant surgeon
Green John, beer retailer
Greenwell Richard, beer retailer
Handysides George, shoe dealer
Harbert Ralph, tailor
Heatley Adam, farm bailiff to Thornley Colliery Co. Limited
Jackson Jane (Mrs.), *Old Thornley inn*
Jackson John, shoe maker
Jameson Ralph, grocer
Liddell William, grocer & draper
Lowery John, shopkeeper
Lynn John, *King's Head*
Mann Andrew, veterinary surgeon
Martin Margaret (Mrs.), grocer
Mitchell Richard, watch maker
Moon Jsph. Dobson, farmer, Crowshouses
Morland William, blacksmith
Nisbet William, surgeon
Park Matthew, tailor
Park Thomas, *Engine tavern*
Park William, *Dun Cow*
Pollard John, grocer
Pollard John, jun. butcher
Procter Christopher, cashier to Thornley colliery, Thornley hall
Ranaghan Nicholas, shopkeeper
Ritson William, *Colliery inn*
Roberts Thomas, *Queen's Head*
Rule George, tailor
Sayer James, marine store dealer
Simpson George, butcher
Smith Mary (Mrs.), shopkeeper
Stephenson Jesse, *Barrel & Grapes*
Swinburn William, butcher
Swinburne Robert, shopkeeper
Swinburne Simpson, *Robin Hood*
Tarbit Annie (Mrs.), shopkeeper
The Original Hartlepool Colliery Co. Limited (Philip Cooper, agent), Thornley colliery
Thompson Thomas, cabinet maker
Thornley Co-operative Society (Robt. Robinson, manager), grocers
Vann Samuel, grocer
Waller John, blacksmith
Wandless Bateman, greengrocer
Wellock Francis, linen draper
Youll Wm. stationer & assistant overseer

Wheatley Hill.

Harrison Rev. John L.PH. [curate]

COMMERCIAL.

Armstrong Thomas, *Nummo hotel*
Blunck William D. C. shopkeeper
Cradick Thomas, grocer
Harland Thomas, grocer
Hepplewaite William, butcher
Milburn Robert, farmer
Noble Mark, grocer
The Original Hartlepool Colliery Co. Limited (Philip Cooper, agent), Wheatley Hill colliery
Thursby John, grocer
Vann Richard Samuel, grocer
Walker James, grocer
Wilson John, stationer

Village Atlas Fieldwork Activities

TEST-PITTING AT OLD THORNLEY

Above, top right and far right: The pupils of St Godric's Primary School, Thornley, joined the Atlas programme to explore their community's past in May 2012, enthusiastically digging archaeological test pits next to Old Thornley medieval village.

FIELD-WALKING AT COBBY CASTLE, THORNLEY

Preparing the fieldwalking transects in March 2014. Cobby Castle is visible just left of centre in the upper view.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

Right: Historian Ian Roberts in discussion with long-standing local farmer, Mr Jack Robinson

CREATION OF GORE BURN WOOD - MARCH 2012

Community tree-planting in the new Gore Burn Wood

GEOWALKS WITH PAUL WILLIAMS

Walkers exploring the geology of Wingate Quarry

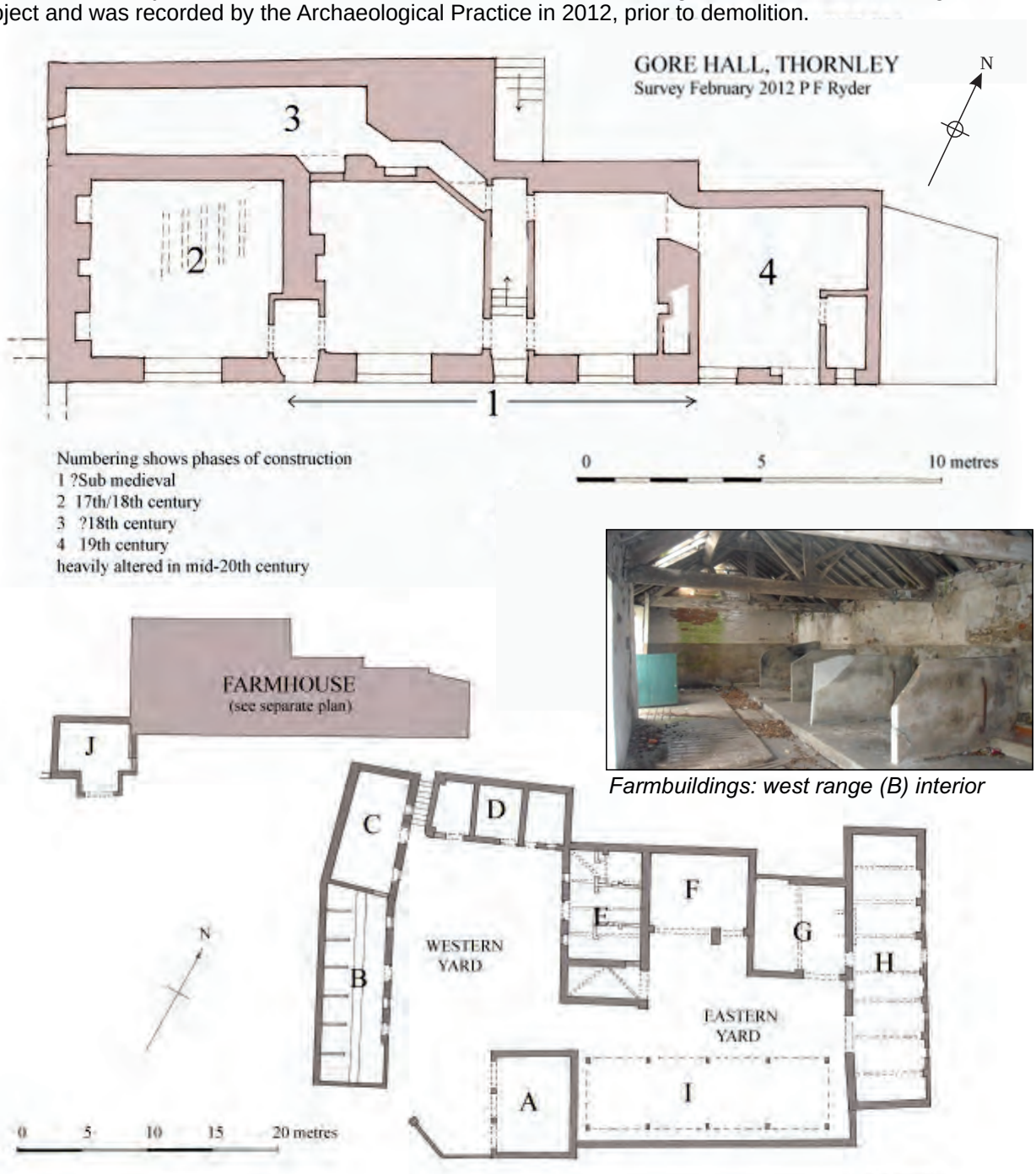
RECORDING GORE HALL:
From Dereliction to Demolition

The farmhouse south frontage.

View westwards in the roof space.

Demolition of the farmhouse.

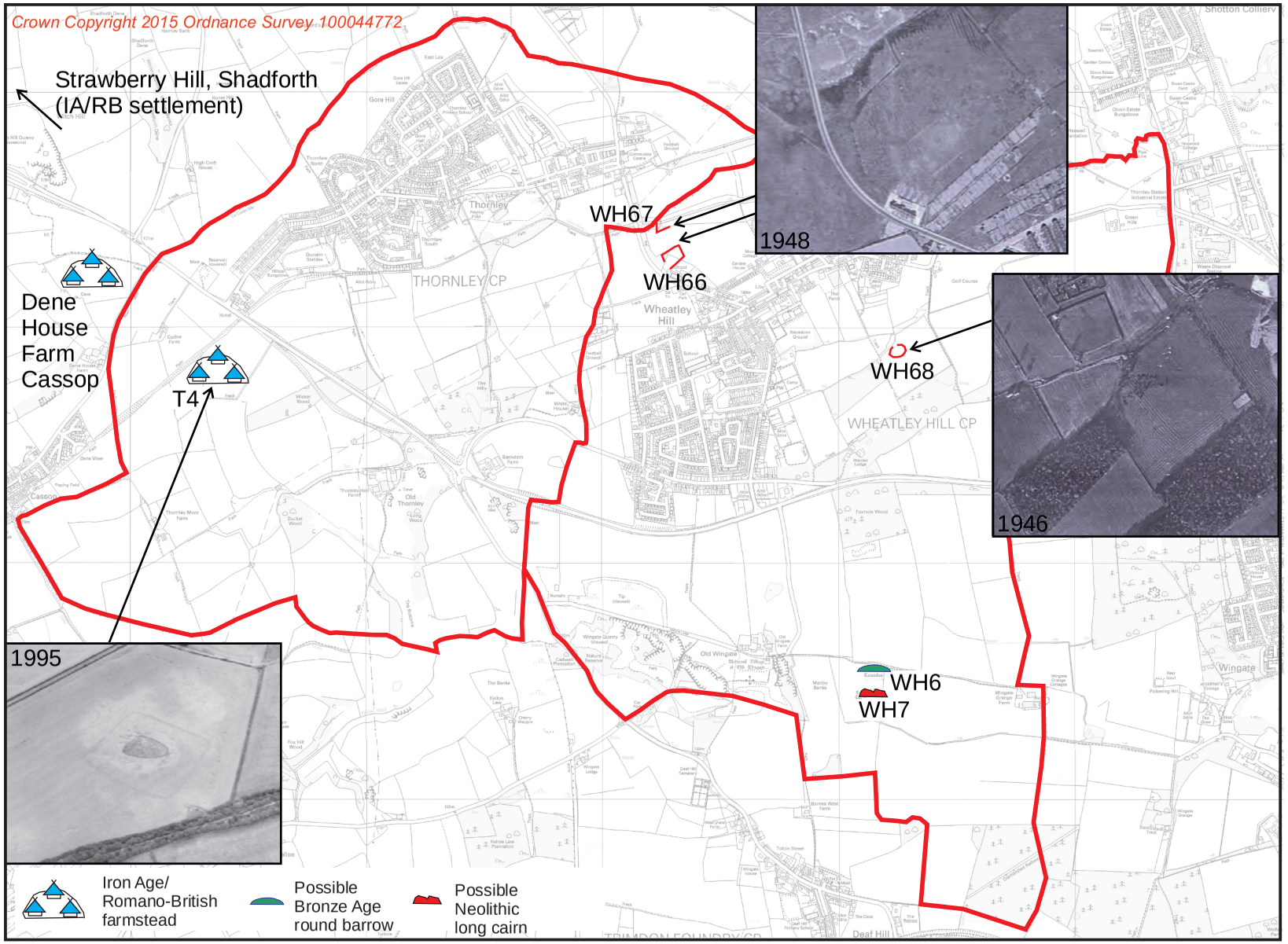
Gore Hall, an early farm first referred to in 1625, was identified as being derelict and at risk during the Atlas project and was recorded by the Archaeological Practice in 2012, prior to demolition.



Farmbuildings: west range (B) interior

Above: Plans of the farmhouse (upper) and farm buildings (lower) based on a survey by Peter Ryder and Richard Carlton in February 2012.

Prehistoric & Roman sites recorded in the Historic Environment Record



Numbers relate to the site gazetteer entries in the main report.

5. ORIGINS: THE PREHISTORIC AND ROMAN PERIODS

No trace has yet been found in the area around Thornley and Wheatley Hill of the earliest hunter-gatherer communities which occupied northern Britain in the **Mesolithic** era (Middle Stone Age: 10,000 – 4,000 BC) following the retreat of the Ice sheets and glaciers at the end of the last Ice Age. This may reflect the limited amount of field work in the area, though activity in this period does seem to have been focussed towards the present-day coastline and perhaps the now submerged Doggerland plain beyond. In contrast, two potentially important sites – both burial monuments – that may be associated with the farming communities of the subsequent **Neolithic** (New Stone Age: 4,000 – 2,300 BC) and **Bronze Age** (2,300 – 700 BC) periods, have been identified in the study area. These comprise a long cairn (WH7) and a round barrow (WH6), situated close together on the south side of the lane midway between at Old Wingate hamlet and Wingate Grange farm. Long stone or earthen mounds are typically associated with the earlier Neolithic period. Round barrows and cairns also occur in the Neolithic era but their use continued through into the Early Bronze Age. However the possibility cannot be excluded that these mounds represent spoil associated with much later quarrying shown adjacent on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map.

It is not until the **Iron Age** (700 BC – AD43) that we have evidence for prehistoric settlement sites in the vicinity of Thornley and Wheatley Hill. These have been identified as cropmarks on aerial photographs and take the form of large, rectilinear, ditched enclosures, which in some cases can be seen to contain ring ditches associated with round houses built of timber and wattle-and-daub. Thus, in the western part of Thornley civil parish, the site of 'Cobby Castle', as it is locally known (T4: listed in the County Durham HER as Thornley Dene House Farm – H1085), is one example comprising a squarish, sub-rectangular enclosure with an entrance in the middle of the east side. Internal features include a number of circular patches. Another enclosure was spotted a little further to the north-west, near Cassop, just outside the boundary of the Atlas area (Dene House Farm West – HER 387), and a third example has been recognised around a mile beyond that, at Strawberry Hill, near Shadforth. This last has two internal circular features (possible round houses) and a larger external ring ditch for a round house, implying a more complicated sequence, perhaps beginning as an unenclosed settlement or involving later expansion outside the enclosure. In addition a number of less diagnostic cropmarks have previously been identified on aerial photographs around Wheatley Hill (WH66-68), which may represent prehistoric settlements or monuments of some kind. Use of these rectilinear enclosed settlements may have continued on into the Roman period. And it is possible that Cobby Castle was reused in the Middle Ages (see below).

Aerial photograph showing Thornley Dene House Farm settlement ('Cobby Castle').

Views of the suggested Round Barrow and Long Cairn at Old Wingate

The 'tumulus' or round barrow viewed from the west

The long cairn viewed from the NW

The 'tumulus' or round barrow viewed from the north

The long cairn viewed from the north

6. THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Almost nothing specific is known regarding human settlement in the areas of Thornley and Wheatley Hill during the six and a half centuries between the end of Roman imperial rule c. 410 and the Norman Conquest. The only find documented in the HER is a silver ring of late 8th-century date, with a runic inscription, found when digging the foundations of Woodlands Avenue in 1993, and now held in The British Museum. Yet it is in this crucial period that Thornley and Wingate (Old Wingate) emerged as distinct places and communities, with Wheatley Hill perhaps established a little later in the 12th century.

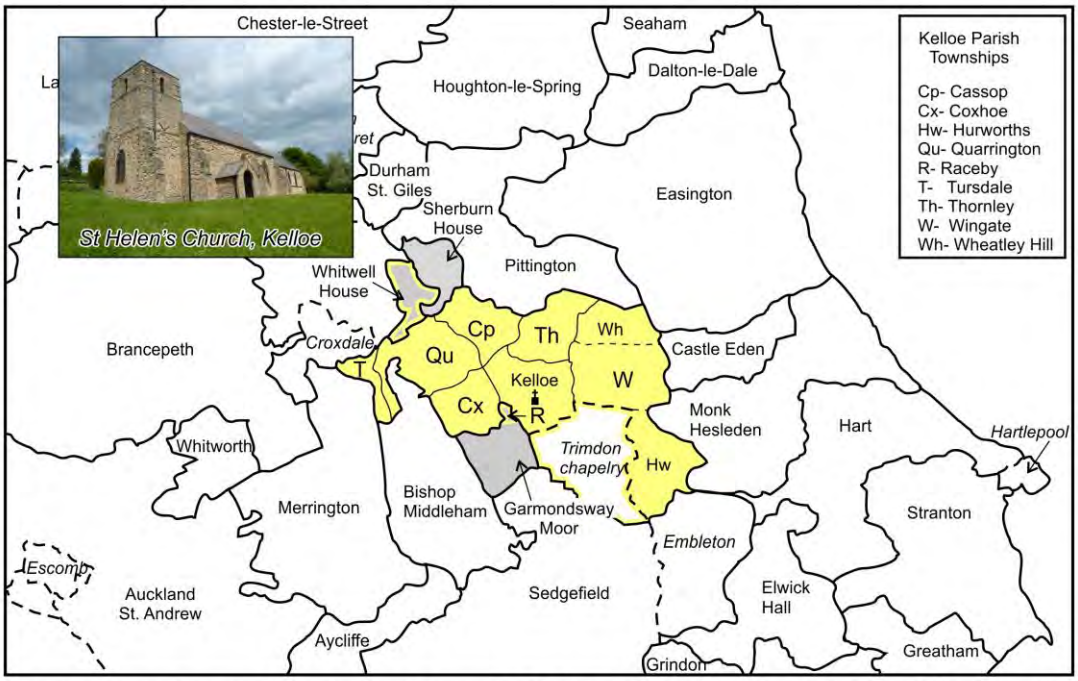
Anglo-Saxon silver ring dating to the late eighth century, discovered when excavating the foundations of 53 Woodlands Avenue in 1993. It has three bosses rivetted to it, only one of which still contains its original red glass. The ring is one of only a handful known in the country to bear a runic inscription; it reads "ring ic hatt", translated as "ring I am called".

Place names

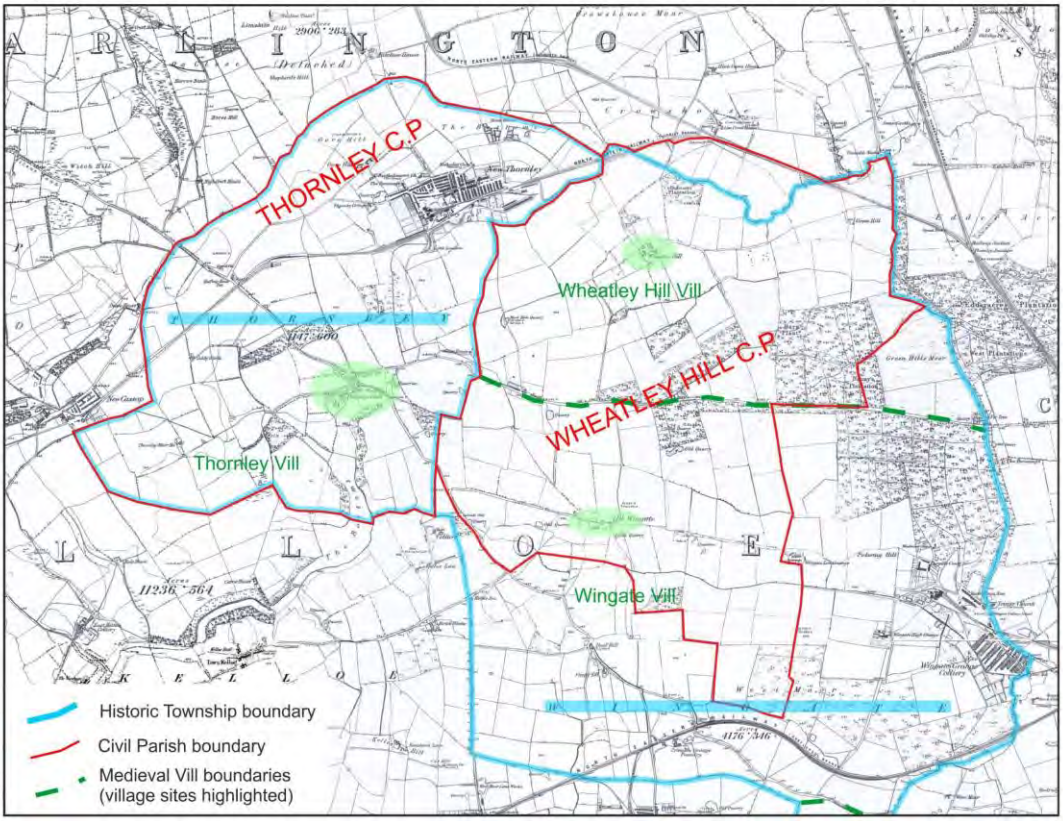
When our communities do first appear in the written historical record it is not as Thornley or Wheatley Hill, but rather as *Thornlawe* and *Whetlawe* or *Quetlawe*, derived, respectively, from Old English ***thorn + hlaw*** – 'Thorn-tree Hill' and ***hwæte + hlaw*** – 'Wheat Hill' (Watts 2002, 124, 137). The mutation to *–ley*, instead of *–law*, does not occur until the early 16th century (*Wheitleyhill* 1515; *Thorneley* 1522, with an intermediate form *Thornlaywe* recorded in the indenture of 1478 – DRO D/Gr 303 – see above *From Charters to Trade Directories*).

7. PARISHES AND TOWNSHIPS

Each village community was the focus of a defined territory, known as a **township** or ***vill***, which the settlement's inhabitants exploited. The townships were grouped into larger ecclesiastical territories, termed **parishes**, for the purposes of religious worship. The vills of Thornley, Wingate and Wheatley Hill formed part of Kelloe Parish. Like many parishes in Northern England, Kelloe was very extensive, encompassing several township communities. The medieval vill of Wheatley hill was later absorbed into Wingate township. Townships were ultimately transformed into the **civil parishes** of today.



Above: The ecclesiastical parishes and chapelries (italicised) of East Durham c.1800 with Kelloe parish and its townships highlighted in yellow. Ex-parochial townships are shown in grey. Below: medieval vills, early modern townships and modern civil parishes correlated on a 1st edition OS background.



8. THE MIDDLE AGES

Murder, gift and retribution

Thornley and Wingate first emerge into documented historical record in the late 11th century, just after the Norman Conquest. At that stage they evidently formed part of the extensive landholdings of the Community of St Cuthbert (*congregatio sancti Cuthberti*), the religious community descended from St Cuthbert's Anglo-Saxon monastery on Lindisfarne, which relocated to Chester-le-Street and then Durham during the turbulent period of Viking invasions in the late 9th and 10th centuries. During this period the Community became the dominant landowner in the area between the Tyne and the Tees. Thornley and Wingate are recorded in a charter setting out a loan made by the Community and by Walcher, Bishop of Durham, to a woman named Ealdgyth in 1071/1080:

> Walcher the bishop and all the Congregation of St Cuthbert have granted to Ealdgyth the land at Thornhlawa for this payment, that is as follows, that if she leave it needfully, be it in death or in life, the payment is eight oxen and twelve cows and four men. And also he has loaned her the land at Windegat all the while that she have need of it.
> (Cambridge Corpus Christi College ms. 183, fol. 96v; in Old English, *trans*. Craster 1925, 194; cf. *DEC* no. 1; dated: 1071-1080)

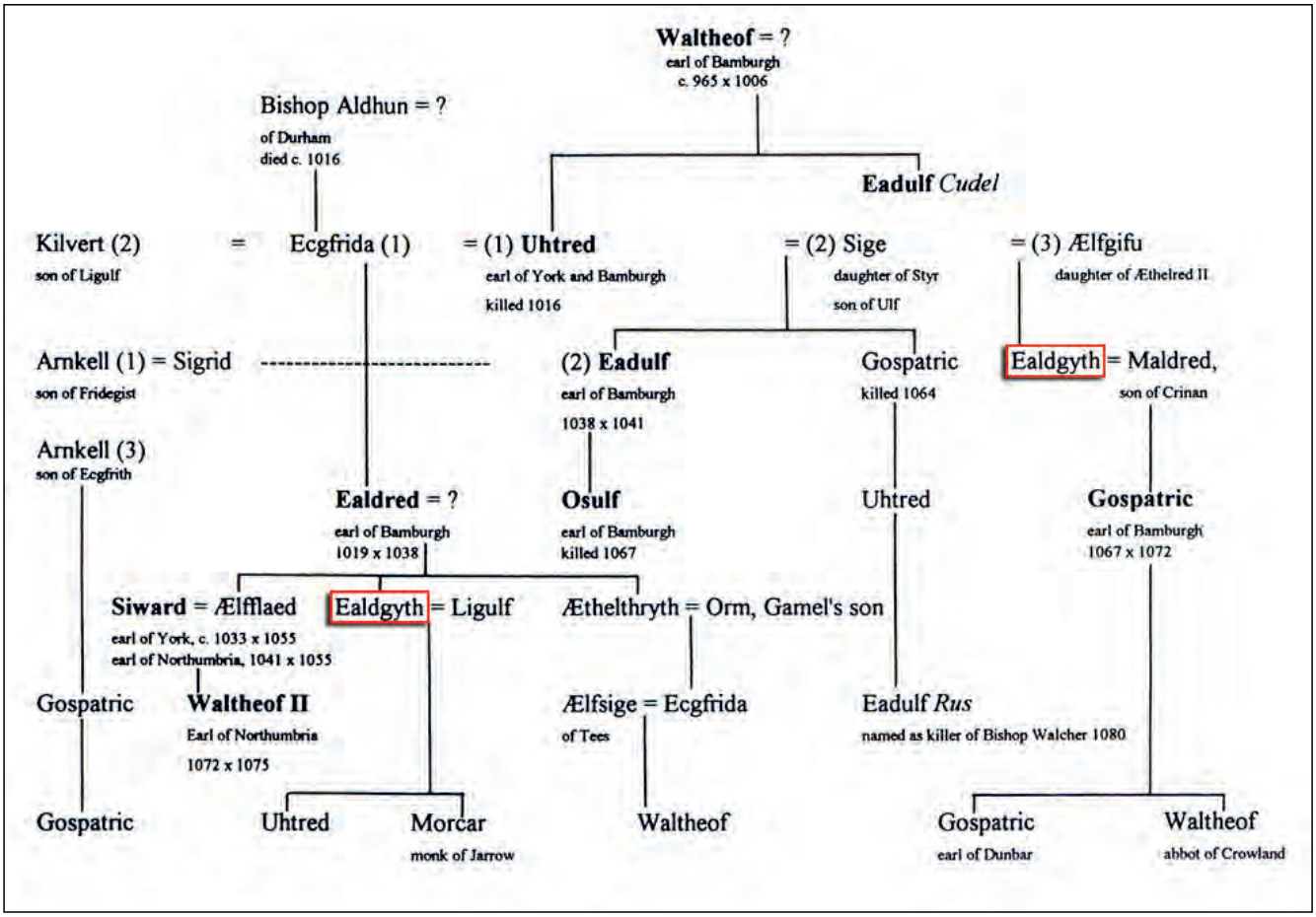
It has been suggested that this Ealdgyth should be identified with the woman of the same name who was the wife of a prominent local noble called Ligulf, one of Bishop Walcher's principal advisers. Ligulf was assassinated by two of Walcher's other ministers in 1080, perhaps with the bishop's connivance, following a bitter quarrel. The murder poisoned relations between the bishop and the Northumbrian nobility, led by Ligulf's kin, and the grant of Thornlaw and Wingate may have been an attempt on the part of the bishop to buy off the opposition by compensating Ligulf's widow. If so the measure failed utterly for Walcher was soon lured into a meeting with the enraged Northumbrian nobility at Gateshead where he and his retinue were set upon and killed. King William I had to send his eldest son, Robert, north with an army to quell the ensuing revolt.

Civil war and Thornley Castle

Thornley is next mentioned in the 1140s, when it figures even more directly in the turbulent events of the period known as The Anarchy, when the throne of England was contested between Stephen and Matilda, daughter of Henry I. As a spin off from the wider civil war, a dispute broke out over the succession to the bishopric of Durham, between the former Scottish chancellor, William Cumin, and William de Ste Barbe, who had been elected by the Prior and Convent of Durham Cathedral according to proper canonical procedure. Following the outbreak of all-out conflict in 1143 the supporters of William de Ste Barbe erected a castle (*munitio*) at Thornley (*in loco qui dicitur Thornlaw*), part of an effort to blockade the approaches to Durham. In the following year Hugh Fitz Pinceon, lord of Thornley, switched sides and handed the *castellum de Tornlauum* over to William Cumin. However events were now moving against Cumin, whose initial backers, King David of Scotland and the latter's son Henry, Earl of Northumbria, had concluded that William de Ste Barbe, a properly elected bishop with widespread local support, could not be ousted. They now threw their weight instead behind Ste Barbe, who made his triumphal entry into Durham in October 1144. As a result of his treachery Hugh Fitz Pinceon was obliged to grant his vill of Wingate to another local lord, Hugh Burel (doubtless a supporter of William de Ste Barbe), but he held on to his Thornley estate, though the castle was probably demolished.

Thornley Castle and Cobby Castle

So what of Thornley Castle itself? It has traditionally been suggested to have lain at Old Thornley (Surtees 1816, 83), but no earthworks can be identified there that would form a convincing timber castle. However there is another intriguing candidate. The roughly square, ditched enclosure identified through aerial photography in a field further to the north and interpreted as a settlement of Iron Age or Romano-British date (c 1000BC-AD 400). Labelled the Dene House Farm enclosure by



The geneology of the House of Bamburgh in the eleventh century, with noblewomen named Ealdgyth highlighted.

Aerial Photograph looking SW showing Cobby Castle (in the centre) and its proximity to the Durham-Hartlepool road.

archaeologists, the local farmers know it as Cobby Castle. Today the site comprises a low mound set within the rectilinear enclosure (which itself can only be seen as a cropmark from the air). This may represent the denuded remains of a small motte which was perhaps surmounted by a timber tower. In other words the earthworks of the ancient Iron Age settlement enclosure may have attracted the attention of Bishop William de St Barbe's followers as a site which could be conveniently adapted to their purposes. It was strategically located next to the main Durham to Hartlepool highway controlling the approaches to the cathedral city. The enclosure's existing earthworks may have been refurbished, but the defences need not have been very elaborate as the site was essentially a temporary siege castle, an encampment for the bishop's troops blockading this route to Durham.

The origins of Wheatley Hill

Wheatley Hill is first mentioned in a charter whereby Hugh Burel agreed to swap his lands at Smeaton (Yorks), Wingate *and Wheatley Hill* (Wuetlawe) for land at Perci and Mureres in Normandy held by Henry du Puiset (son of Hugh du Puiset, bishop of Durham):

> Hugh Burrell, to those both present and future, greetings. Know that I give, concede and by this present charter confirm to Henry du Puiset, and his heirs, Windegate and Wuetlawe and Smithetun, with all appurtenances, and all my rights in England, in exchange for his land of Perci and Mureres, according the agreement between us … (c. 1180)
> (Original: DC Cart II, f. 107b; Published: *Finchale Charter* no 4, pp. 3-4)

In an earlier charter of 1144, which recorded the grant of Wingate to Hugh Burel, that vill is referred to as 'Wingate entire' (*Windegata integre*). The term 'entire vill' or *villa integra* had a technical meaning signifying a territorial administrative unit embracing more than one settlement. This may signify that Wheatley Hill was already in existence by the mid-12th century as a subordinate settlement of Wingate – a smaller village or hamlet created on what had hitherto been the common waste of Wingate as the rural population expanded over the course of the 12th century – but only achieved the status of a separate vill or township later in the century.

The suggested likely form of the medieval hamlet of Whetlawe (Wheatley Hill) superimposed on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey plan.

9. THE VILLAGE SETTLEMENTS

Three medieval village settlements fall within the Atlas study area – Old Thornley, Old Wingate and Wheatley Hill. The 1:2500 1st edition Ordnance Survey shows that these had all declined in size by the mid-19th century, forming what are termed shrunken medieval villages, but none were entirely deserted. This remains the case with Old Thornley and Old Wingate (indeed that latter has declined further with the loss of virtually all the southern row since 1860), with the result that the earthwork remains of those two settlements are sufficiently well-preserved to merit protection as scheduled ancient monuments (SAMs 1019914 and 1019912). Wheatley Hill however has been absorbed within the modern colliery village.

Medieval villages of the 11th-15th centuries typically consisted of two principal components reflecting a bipartite economic structure. On the one hand there were the tenements of the peasant tenantry who cultivated the majority of the village's land. On the other there was the manorial complex associated with the home, or 'demesne', farm of the lord. The tenants would pay rent either in kind, largely in the form of labour (bondmen), or in cash (husbandmen) on their holdings. The bondmen were unfree peasants tied to the manor, compelled to provide a set number of days of labour on the lord's demesne, an imposition which was often greatly resented. With the husbandmen they formed the core of the vill community, both groups of holdings would generally at least notionally be of equal size, comprising a house plot, generally referred to as a 'messuage' in manorial documents, set in its enclosed toft, with two oxgangs or bovates totalling 24-30 acres of arable land scattered in strips around the open fields, plus some pasture and meadowland and grazing rights on the common moor.

Thus all three villages were probably predominantly composed of fairly regular rows of farm tenements, with the manorial complex slotted somewhere into this framework (on the site of Thornley Hall for example). The tenements each consisted of a toft, a fenced plot containing the homestead of a peasant family with the house itself (in some cases taking the form of a longhouse providing accommodation for both humans and animals), plus any ancillary buildings, such as a barn, a garden for vegetables and herbs, yards and small enclosures. A larger enclosure, known as a croft or garth, might also be attached, extending back from the rear of the toft homestead, to provide pasture or cultivable land immediately adjacent to the farm and separate from the common fields of the vill. Looking at the 1st edition Ordnance Survey the arrangements are clearest at Old Wingate, but broadly similar arrangements can be reconstructed at Old Thornley and Wheatley Hill. Old Wingate and Old Thornley originally probably formed regular row green villages.

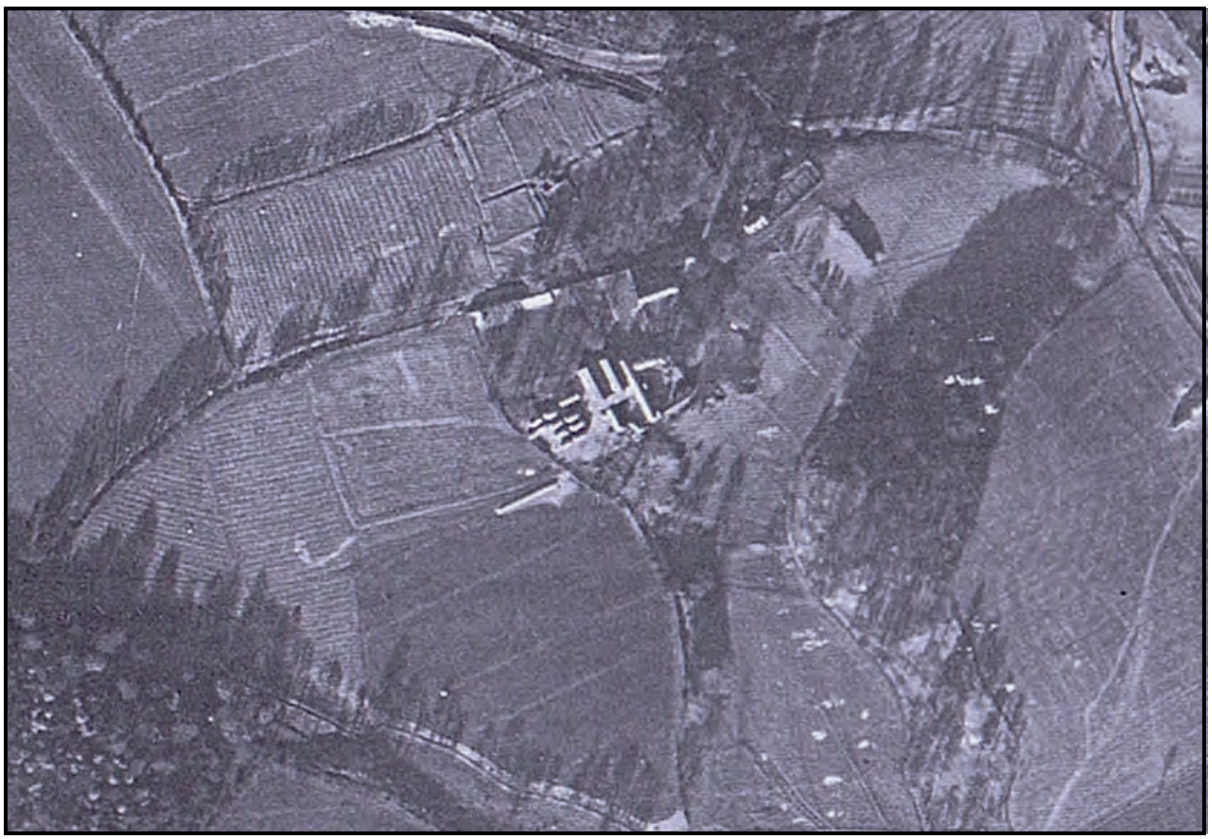
Surviving buildings

In addition to the earthwork remains Old Wingate also contains surviving buildings of probable late medieval date. Rock Farm in Wheatley Hill represents another surviving 16th-century structure.

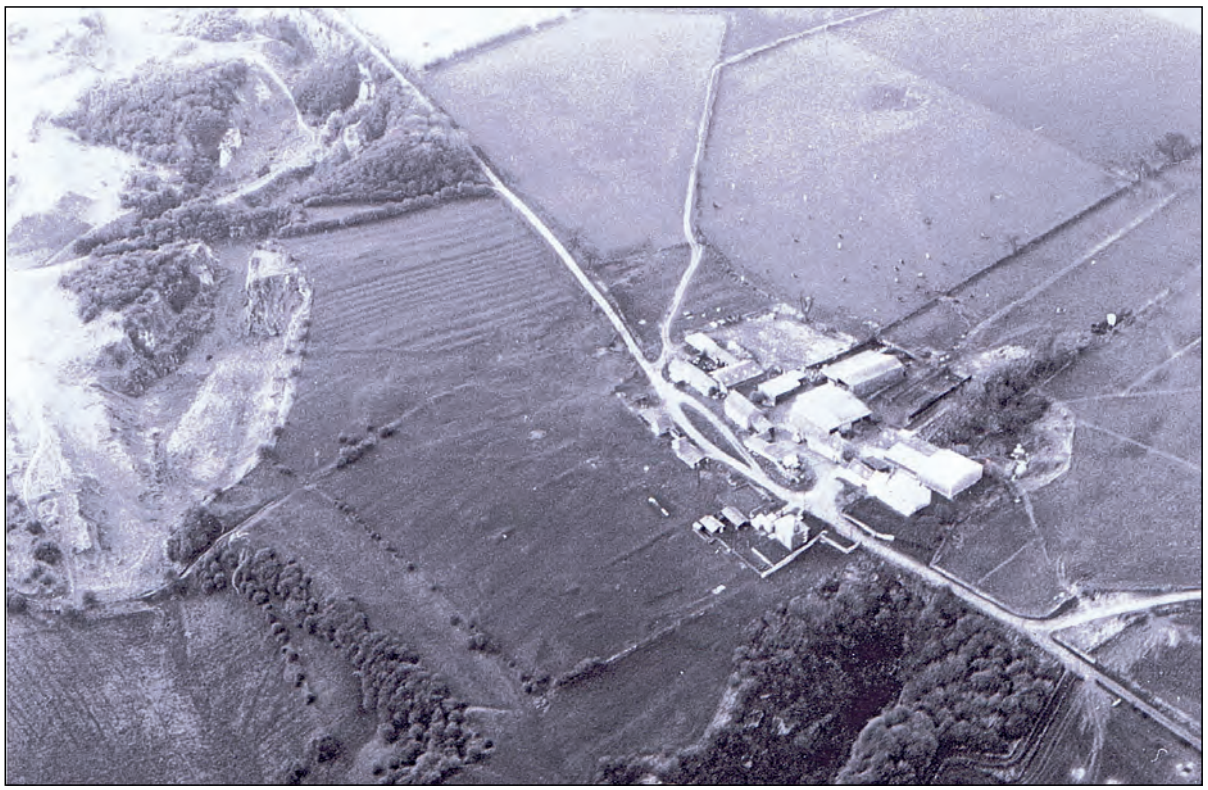
Old Wingate: Fieldwork undertaken as part of the Atlas revealed two buildings in the north row at Old Wingate which contained features indicative of a late medieval or very early modern date. Both were undergoing rebuilding works which entailed the loss of significant historic features and accordingly were recorded. The roof of 'Sutton Newbold', in the second range from western end of the village, was supported by a surviving, truncated principal truss typical of 15th- and 16th-century buildings in County Durham. Similarly an internal cross wall in the westernmost building contained triangular vents, again characteristic of late or sub-medieval buildings in the county.

Rock Farm: Standing on the south side of the main street in Wheatley Hill, Rock Farm was once owned by members of the Bainbridge family and probably marks the site of Richard Bainbridge's 'grange-place' mentioned in a 1478 charter (DRO D/Gr 303). The roof timbers yielded a dendro-chronological date of 1570, contemporary with the occupancy of Francis Bainbridge. It boasts a host of architectural features including a beautiful 10 foot inglenook fireplace which graces the main hall, a beehive bread oven and a parlour door with partially surviving mouldings.

The Medieval Village Earthworks

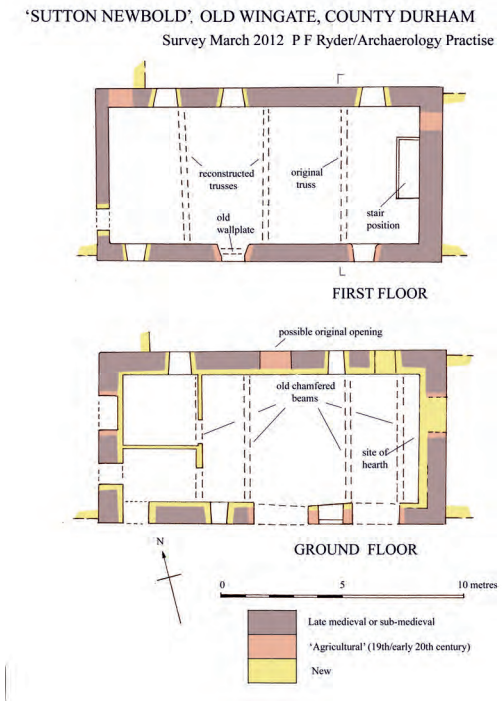


Vertical aerial photograph of Old Thornley medieval village site (RAF/CPE/UK/1841/Fr 3021), taken on 13 November 1946. Note the late medieval or early modern ridge and furrow which has over-ploughed the village toft compartments, particularly evident on the north (top) side of the lane.

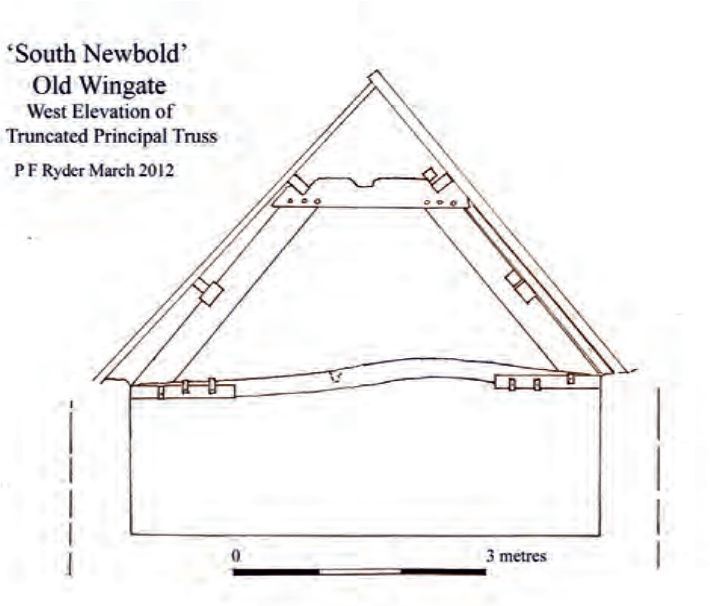


Oblique aerial view of the Old Wingate medieval village site, from the south-east, taken in 1988.

Surviving Late Medieval Buildings 1: Old Wingate

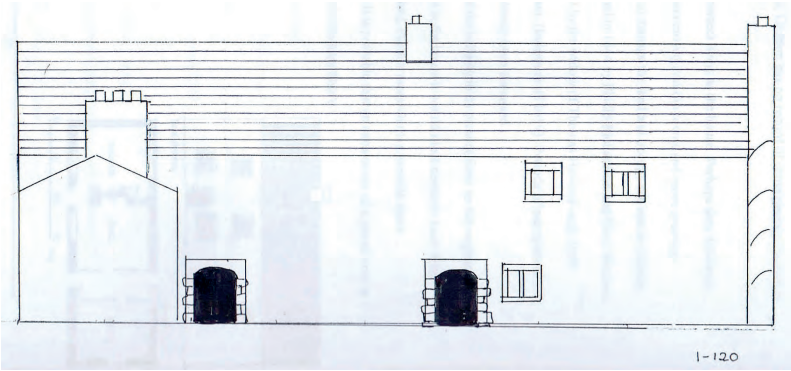


Triangular vents, characteristic of late or sub-medieval buildings in Co Durham, apparent in the internal cross-wall of the western building (Barn C) at Old Wingate.

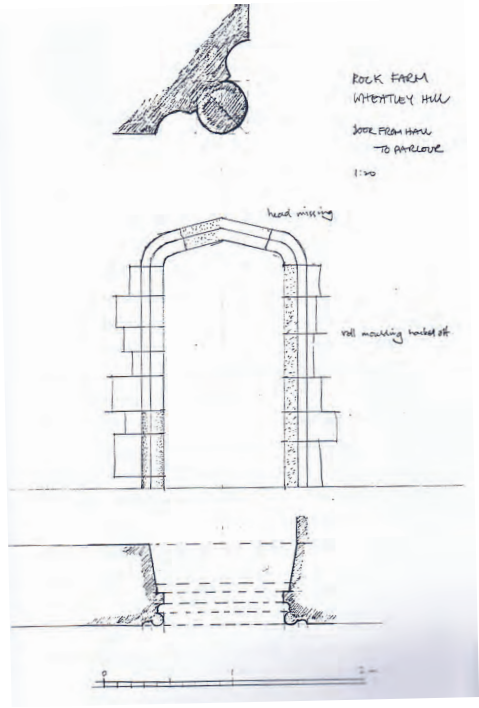


Surviving Late Medieval Buildings 2: Rock Farm, Wheatley Hill

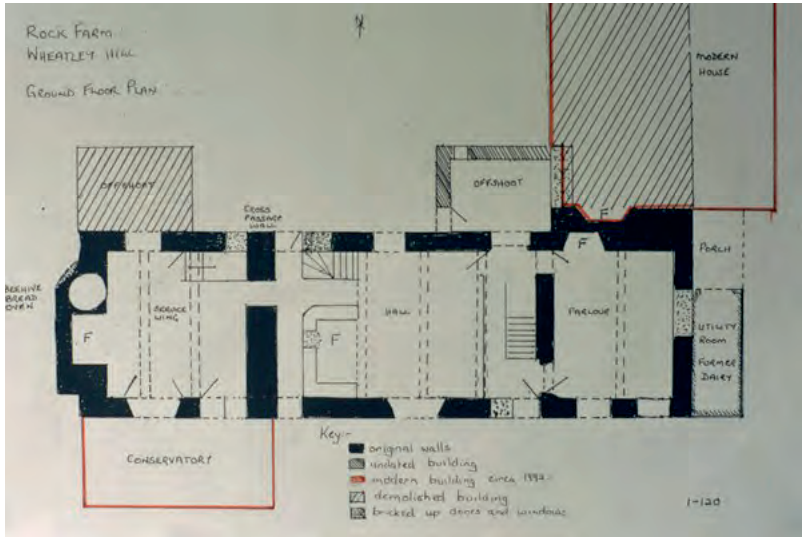
(All drawings and photographs provided by Connie Gregory)



Interpretative restoration of the north wall elevation



Parlour door exposed during renovation works

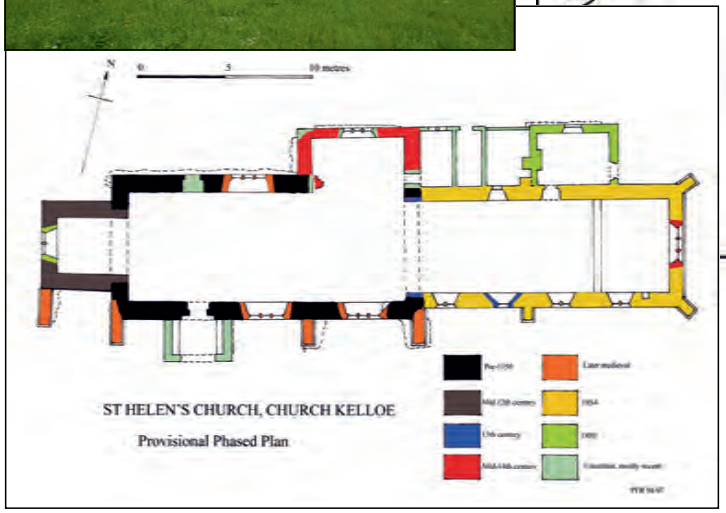


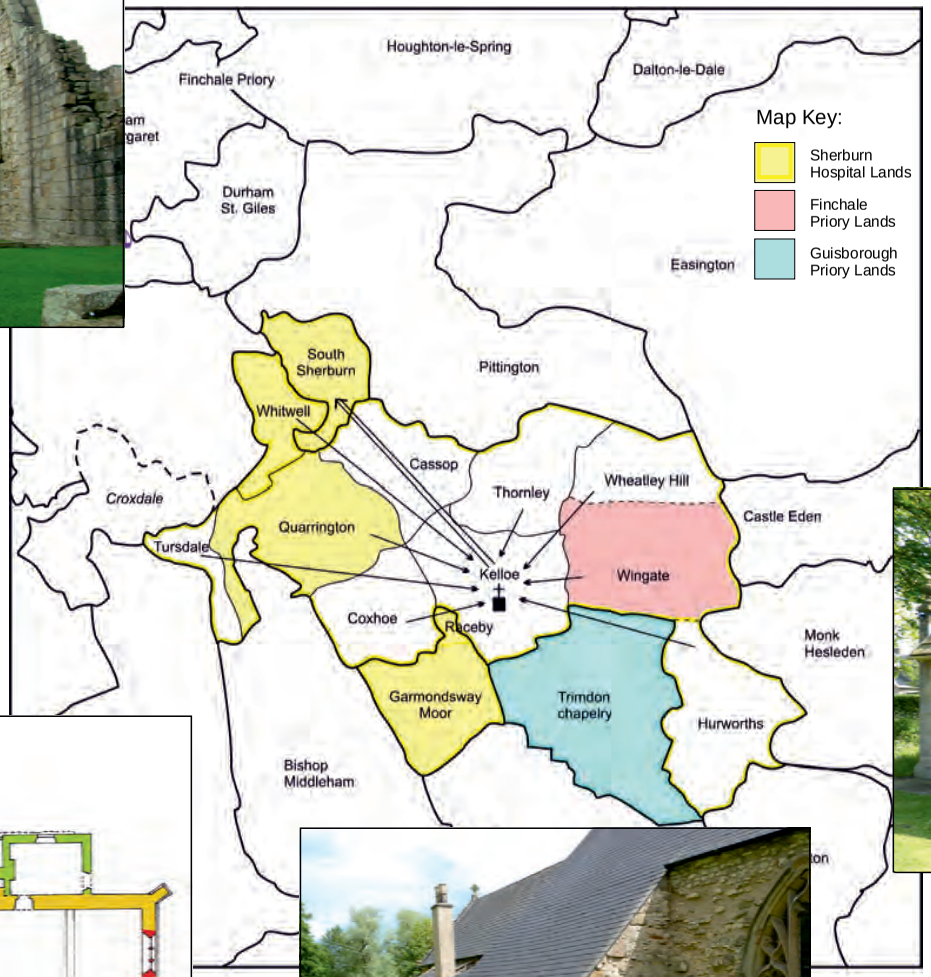
Ground floor plan of Rock Farm

Hall fireplace and heck passage exposed

The Medieval Church

Finchale Priory





Sherburn Hospital gatehouse

Thornley House, Sherburn Hospital. The Lord of Thornley had the right to nominate an inn-brother to the hospital.

*Exterior view of the **Thornley Porch** at St. Helen's,Kelloe, from the NW. Originally a chantry chapelsupported by income from land in Thornley and Kelloe.*

The Parish Church of St. Helen, Kelloe. *Plan and view from the SW*

10. 1500-1800: FROM VILLAGES TO HAMLETS & FARMS

Economic and demographic conditions in the countryside during the late Middle Ages were very different from those in the 11th-13th centuries, when population was increasing and agricultural settlement was expanding. Following the catastrophic plague of 1349, known as the Black Death, the population may have been halved and did not begin to recover until the 16th century. This inevitably impacted upon the village settlements, resulting in a shortage of farm tenants, who consequently now demanded more generous terms. By 1478 Wheatley Hill was referred to merely as 'a grange place' (i.e. a farm), rather than a vill or township, in an agreement drawn up by the main landowner there, Richard Bainbridge (*Greenwell Deeds*, no. 303). Thornley and Wingate may still have counted as villages but they were doubtless less populous than previously.

From the 16th century there is evidence for the establishment of new farmsteads located outside the villages. The first to be recorded was **Wingate Grange**. This probably originated as the demesne farm or grange belonging to Finchale Priory, the lord of Wingate, and may initially have been situated in or adjacent to Wingate village itself. At some stage the farm was relocated 1 km eastward to the present farm of Wingate Grange. The shift had already occurred before Finchale Priory was dissolved in 1539, as implied by the will of Christopher Hall dated to 1567. This declared that one of his leases for the grange, which he bequeathed to his wife, was issued by Durham Priory (of which Finchale was a dependent cell) and must therefore have taken out before 1539:

> **Will – Christopher Hall of Wingate Grange, gentleman**, 10 Dec 1567 (*Wills & Inventories* III, 40)
> To my wife … my farmhold of Wingayt Grange, where now I dwell, which I have by the force of two several leases, the one from the Queen's majesty and the other by the late Prior and Convent of the late monastery of Durham (i.e. pre 1539)

A second example, **Gore Hall Farm**, Thornley, was a 17th-century farmhouse, which until recently stood in the northern part of modern Thornley village. The Gore is first mentioned as a distinct parcel of land in the will of Thomas Trollop in 1558 (*Wills & Inventories* I, 174-6, no. cxxviii) and by 1625 there was clearly a farmhouse, 'The Gore House', with attached, enclosed farmland:

> ***Greenwell Deeds* no. 367**: 25 May 1625
> John Trollop confirms to Alexander Davyson for sum of £2,470 the closes and grounds in Thornley named **Thornley Gore** divided into 7 several closes with **the house called the Gore House** and all other buildings, and meadows, viz. : East Fence, North Meadow field West Meadowfield, on the north side of the street there; with all commons, common of pasture etc

Another early farm was **Green Hills** in the east part of Wheatley Hill. This too was mentioned as a distinct parcel of land in 1575 and 1616 and a farmstead probably followed shortly thereafter.

Enclosed fields and closes

The creation of these farms was related to the changing form of the rural landscape, itself. The open townfields and moorland common of Thornley were divided up and enclosed at some stage before 1607. Documents of the later 16th and 17th-century in fact contain frequent reference to closes, often specifically named, implying the process of enclosure was relatively advanced in Thornley (cf. *Greenwell Deeds*, nos. 330 (1570), 350 (1607), 364 (1625) etc.). Thus 'Moore Close' and 'The Moore' was listed amongst the closes in 1570 and 1607 respectively, implying that enclosure had even at least begun to encompass the common moor by this stage.

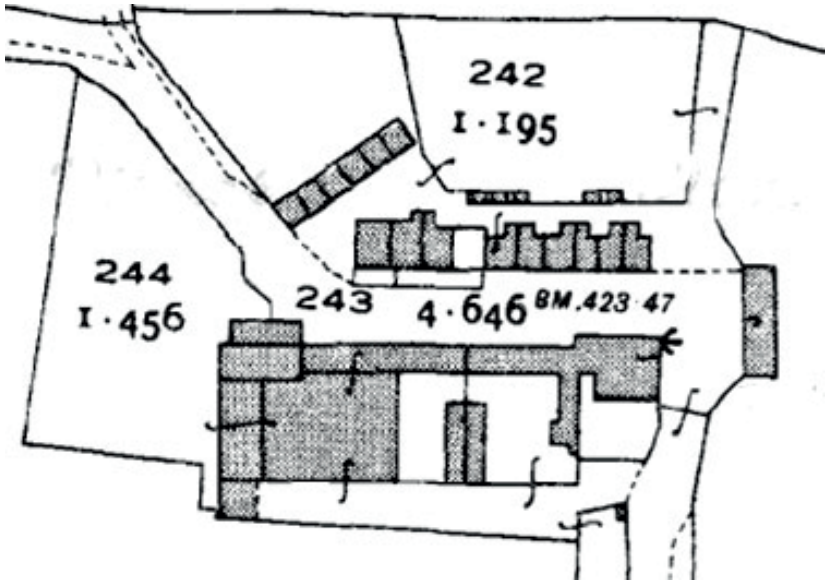
Enclosure enabled the creation of coherent, compact farmholds dividing up the township territories, each holding centred on its farmstead, instead of the latter being clustered in villages as previously. Accordingly many other farms were established during the later 17th and 18th centuries, In the aftermath of enclosure. By 1839/1842, when the tithe maps for Wingate (incorporating Wheatley Hill) and Thornley townships were produced, there were 9 principal farmholds there, 5 of which were situated outside the old villages, which had by this stage shrunk to little more than hamlets, as the 1st edition Ordnance Survey plans make clear.

The first of the new farms: Wingate Grange, Green Hills & Gore Hall

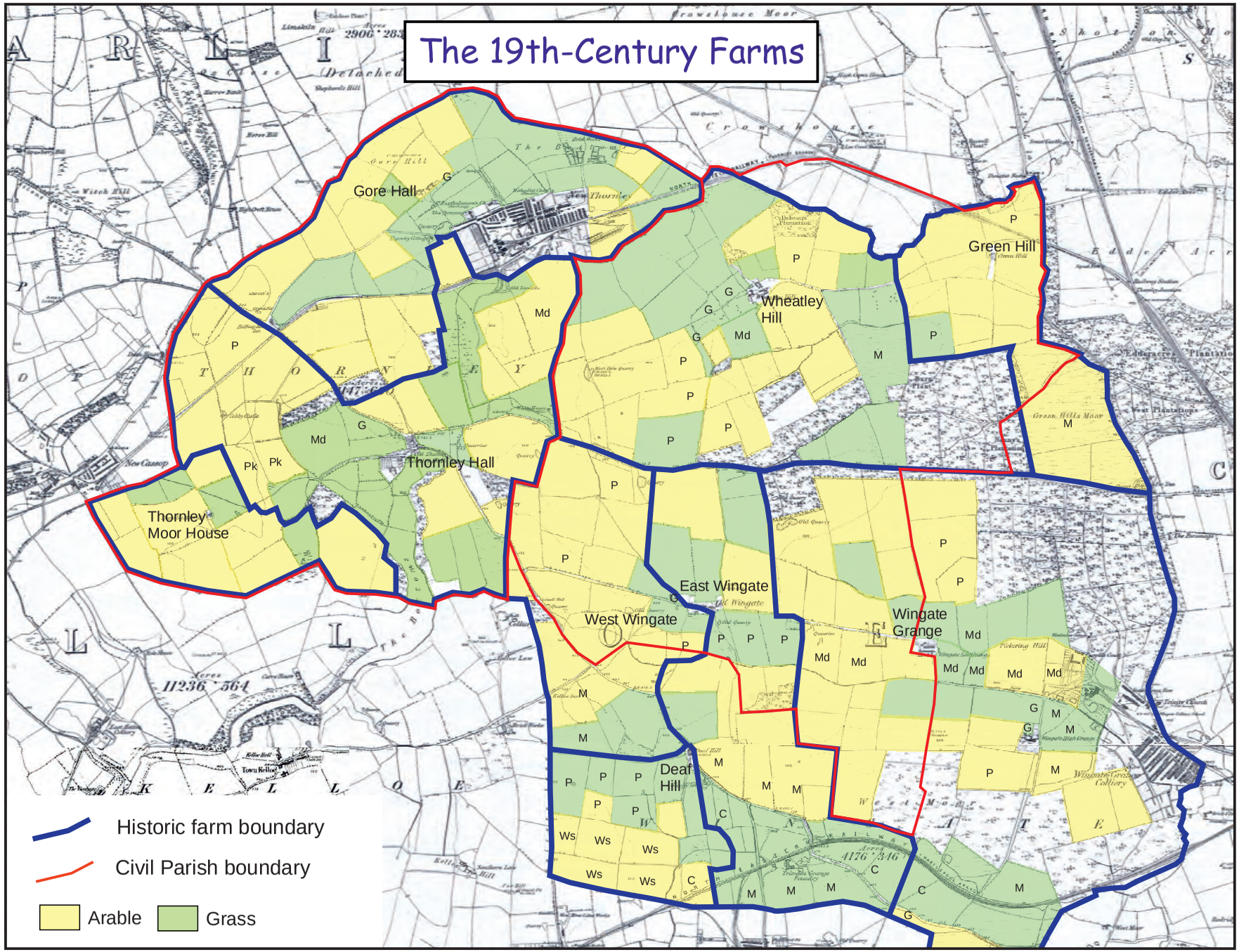
An old photograph of Gore Hall, Thornley

Aerial photograph of Green Hills Farm 1964

The west end of the north range of Wingate Grange Farm, showing the earliest fabric associated with the large quoins in the north wall.



1st edition Ordnance Survey plan of Wingate Grange



Farm holdings and land use as recorded on the mid-19th century tithe maps for Thornley and Wheatley Hill.

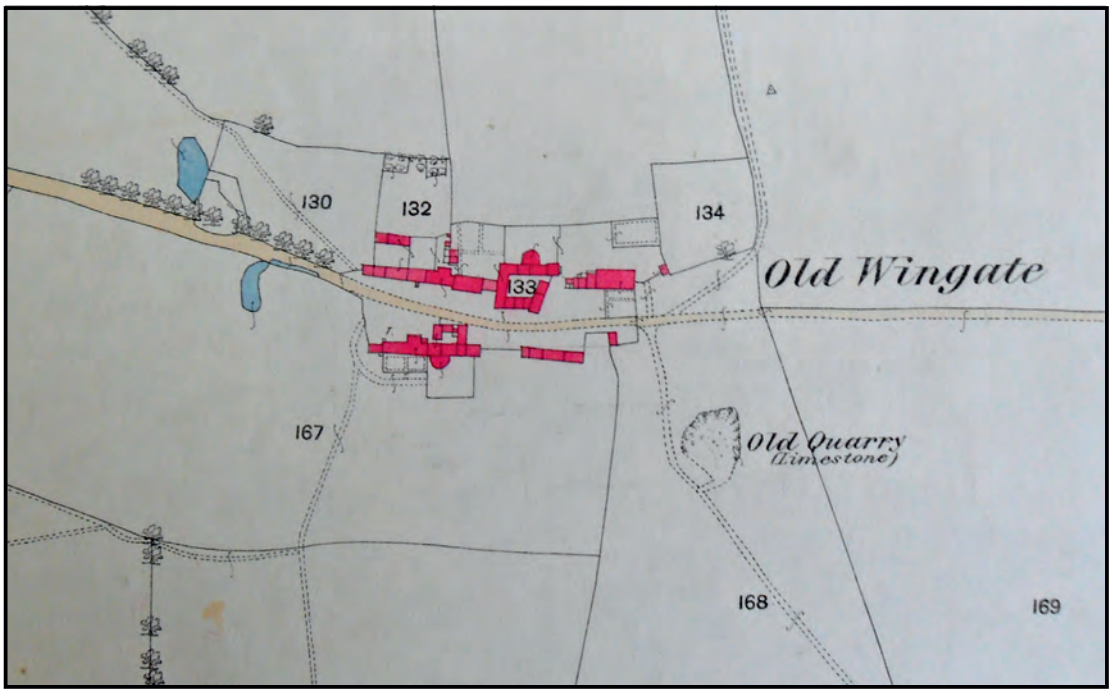
Old Thornley

0 100m

The Shrunken Villages

Extract from the 1st edition 1:2500 Ordnance Survey plan showing the medieval village sites of Old Thornley, Wheatley Hill & Old Wingate.

Wheatley Hill



Old Wingate

11. ON THE EVE OF CHANGE

When Christopher Greenwood's map of County Durham was published in 1820 it depicted the East Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau as a landscape of farmsteads, hamlets (many shrunken former medieval villages like Old Thornley, Old Wingate and Wheatley Hill) and occasional villages. This was still an overwhelmingly rural world with a predominantly agrarian economic base.

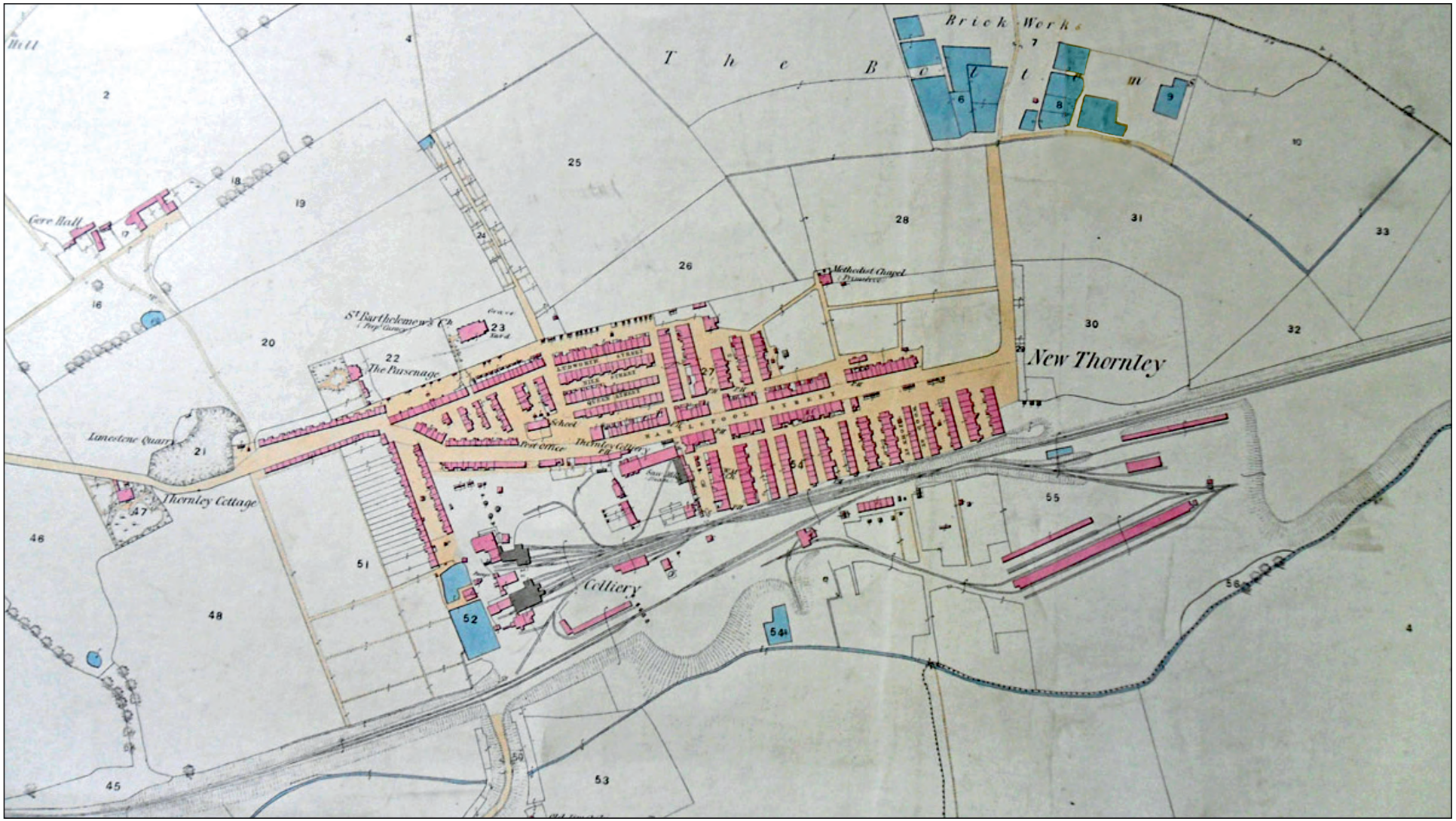
The environs of Thornley and Wheatley Hill just prior to the sinking of the collieries, shown on Greenwood 's 1820 Map of County Durham (Durham County Record Office D/St/P 20/2). Reproduced by permission of Lord Strathmore & Durham County Record Office.

THE TRANSFORMATION BEGINS

However change was afoot. The successful sinking of a coal mine at Hetton in 1820-22 showed it was technically feasible to exploit the 'concealed coalfield' which extended beneath the magnesian limestone of the plateau. This unleashed a wave of similar colliery developments across the plateau. Just over 20 years later the world portrayed by J T W Bell's Map of the Great Northern Coalfield was utterly transformed, with a network of railways serving many deep coal mines (including Thornley sunk in 1834-7) and newly created pit villages interwoven amidst the older rural settlements.

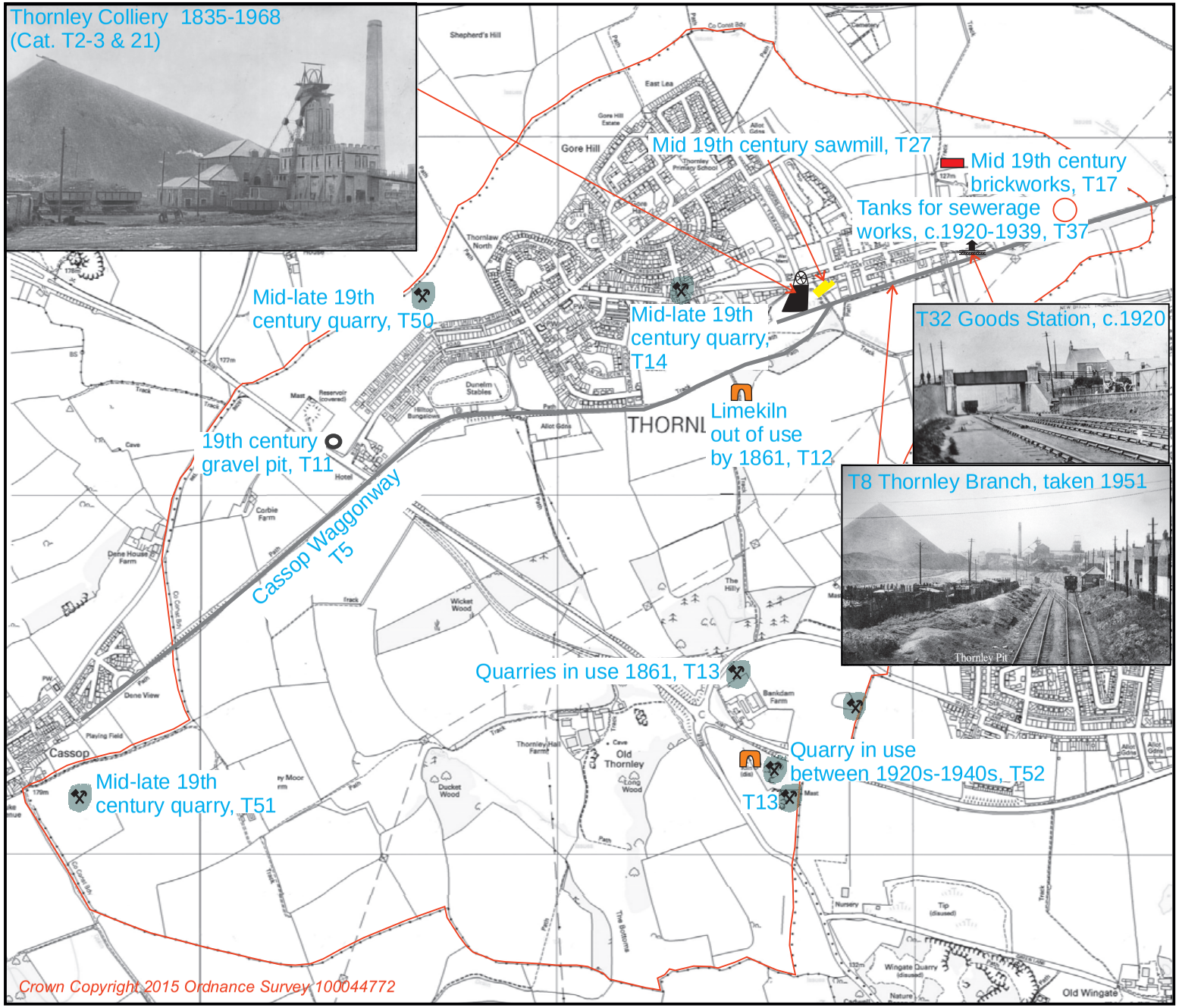
Extract from J T W Bell's 1843 Plan of the Great Northern Coalfield (Durham County Record Office, Londonderry Estate Archives D/Lo/P 242/1), showing coal mines and railways around Thornley and Wheatley Hill. Reproduced by permission of Lord Londonderry and Durham County Record Office.

NEW THORNLEY



The colliery village of New Thornley shown on the 1st Edition 1:2500 Ordnance Survey Map (surveyed 1857, published c.1860).

THORNLEY INDUSTRIAL GROWTH



WHEATLEY HILL INDUSTRIAL GROWTH

Industrial features and monuments in Wheatley Hill

12. THE NEW COLLIERY VILLAGES

On the Thornley tithe map (DRO EP/Ke 31/2) of 1844 and the 1st edition Ordnance Survey plan (1857) a new settlement is shown in the north-east corner of the township, the pit village of New Thornley. Much larger than ancient medieval village site of Old Thornley, its straight, regimented rows of terraced housing present a stark contrast to the surrounding rural landscape.

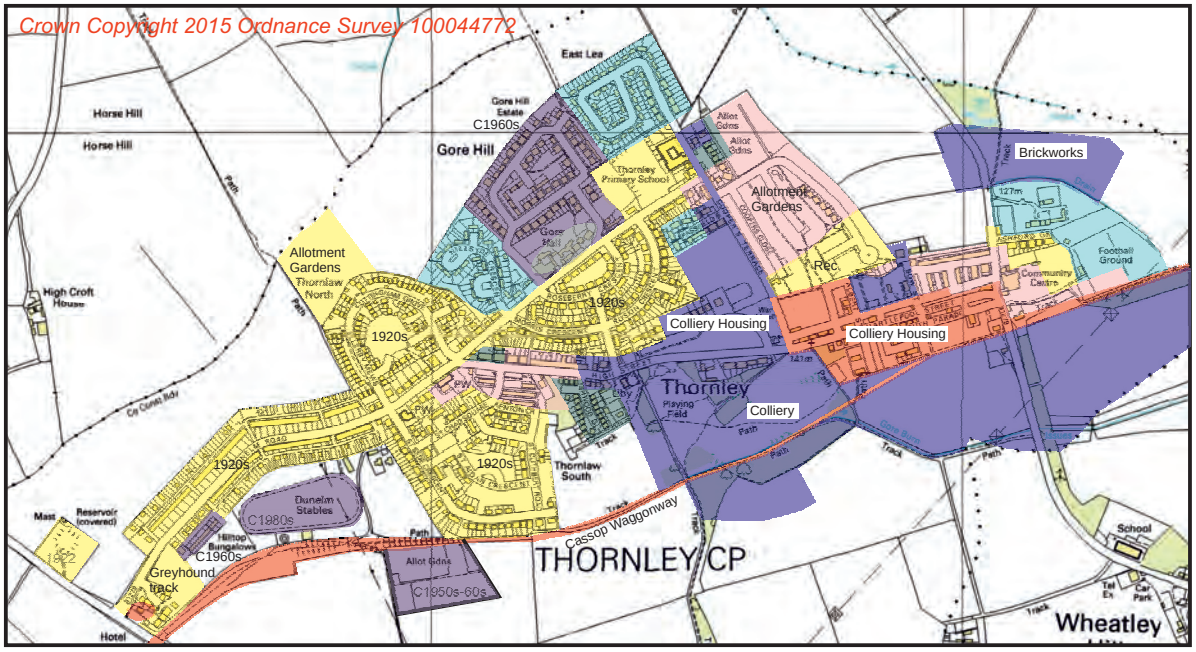
A similar development followed at Wheatley Hill following the sinking of a mine there in 1869 by the Hartlepool Colliery Coal Co. From then until 1968 and 1970, when Wheatley Hill and Thornley Collieries, respectively, closed, the economic and social life of these two mining communities was dominated by their collieries. Other industries were also present in the locality, including the railways that connected to the collieries and carried away their output, the brickworks which typically accompanied deep coal mines and the stone quarries which were such a common feature of the magnesian limestone plateau, notably Wingate Quarry, but none of these was as voracious in their appetite for labour as were the collieries.

The two villages expanded steadily over the course of the late 19th and early to mid-20th centuries, a process which can be charted on successive editions of Ordnance Survey plans. In the course of this expansion the two settlements were furnished with a wide range of facilities, acquiring a quasi-urban character so typical of the Durham pit villages at their peak. Thus they possessed a comprehensive range of shops, pubs, clubs and institutes, most notably the Wheatley Hill Miners Welfare Hall and Recreation Ground, plus schools, and a full denominational range of churches and chapels. There were 2 or 3 cinemas in each village with further entertainment provided by greyhound tracks. Closure of the two collieries in 1968/70 posed severe problems for what had hitherto been relatively vibrant communities, greatly reducing the number of local job opportunities. Though most of the miners employed at the time of closure found work at other mines, this obvious route to very local employment was closed off for the next generation of young men, a factor intensified as the entire Durham coalfield was shut down over the course of the next 20 plus years, with Easington Colliery being the last to close in 1993. Other economic trends, including the decline of smaller cinemas in the face of television and then the multiplex, and the concentration of grocery and other retailing in huge supermarkets at the expense of local shops, also tended to reduce the range of facilities available in communities like Thornley and Wheatley Hill.

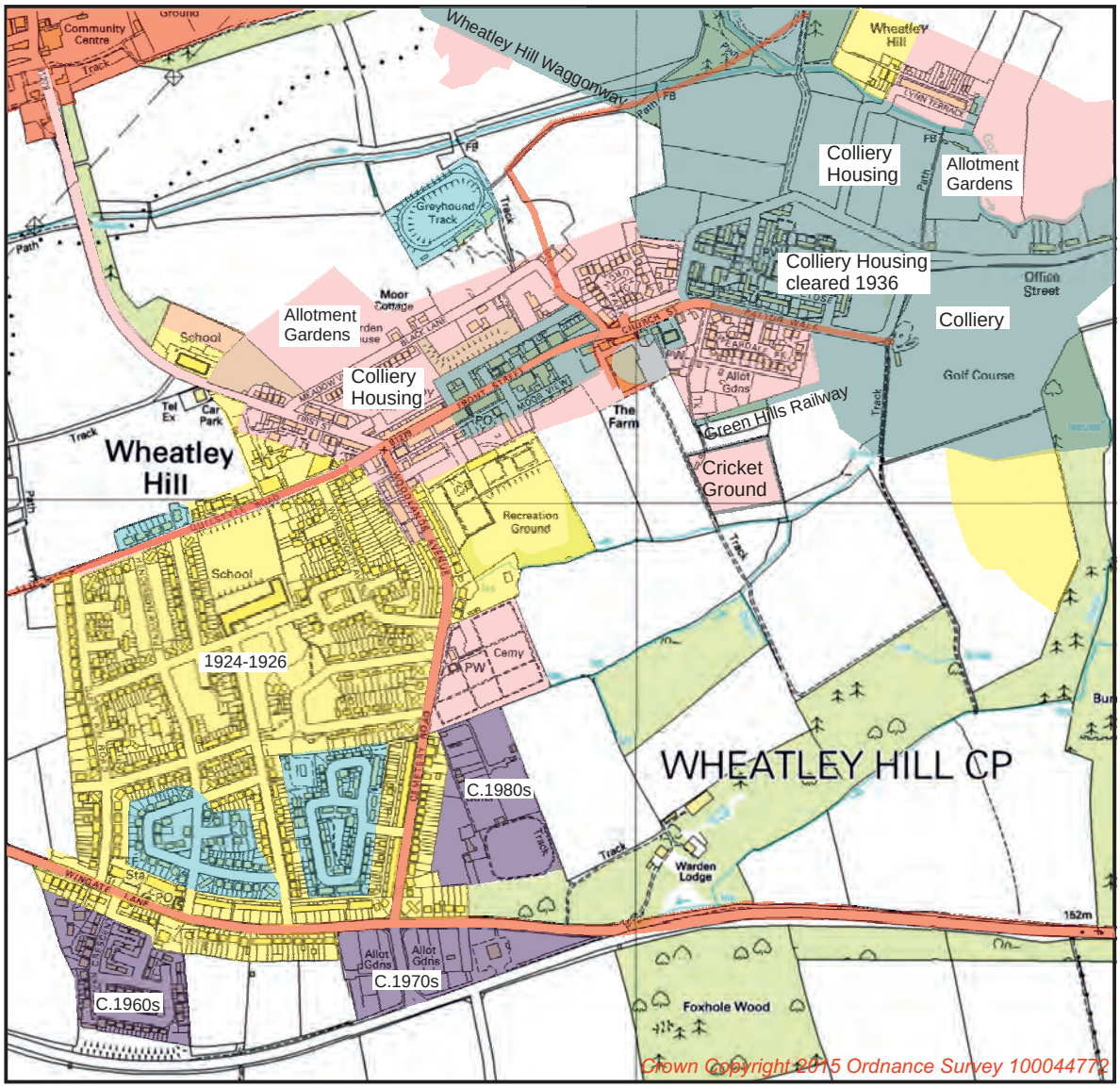
It seems likely that the economic future for the two communities will largely be as dormitory villages, with residents finding work in the main regional centres, in Durham, Tyneside, Wearside, Peterlee and further south. Their health will therefore be dependent on that of the wider regional economy. There is nothing new in such radical change as medieval nucleated villages have contracted to smaller hamlets in the 16th-18th centuries and then saw explosive growth as pit villages. In adapting to the new role, however, it is hoped that the communities manage to maintain their distinct identities, based on their fascinating past and the wider geological and environmental heritage. The Village Atlas has tried to contribute to that process which will be fostered in the longer term by the activities of the local History Club and the Heritage Centre in Wheatley Hill.

Key to the phases of growth on the plans opposite

SETTLEMENT GROWTH



Plans showing the growth of Thornley and Wheatley Hill on modern Ordnance Survey base plans. The plan does not indicate when buildings or areas fell out of use, rather it shows the pattern of growth of the villages.



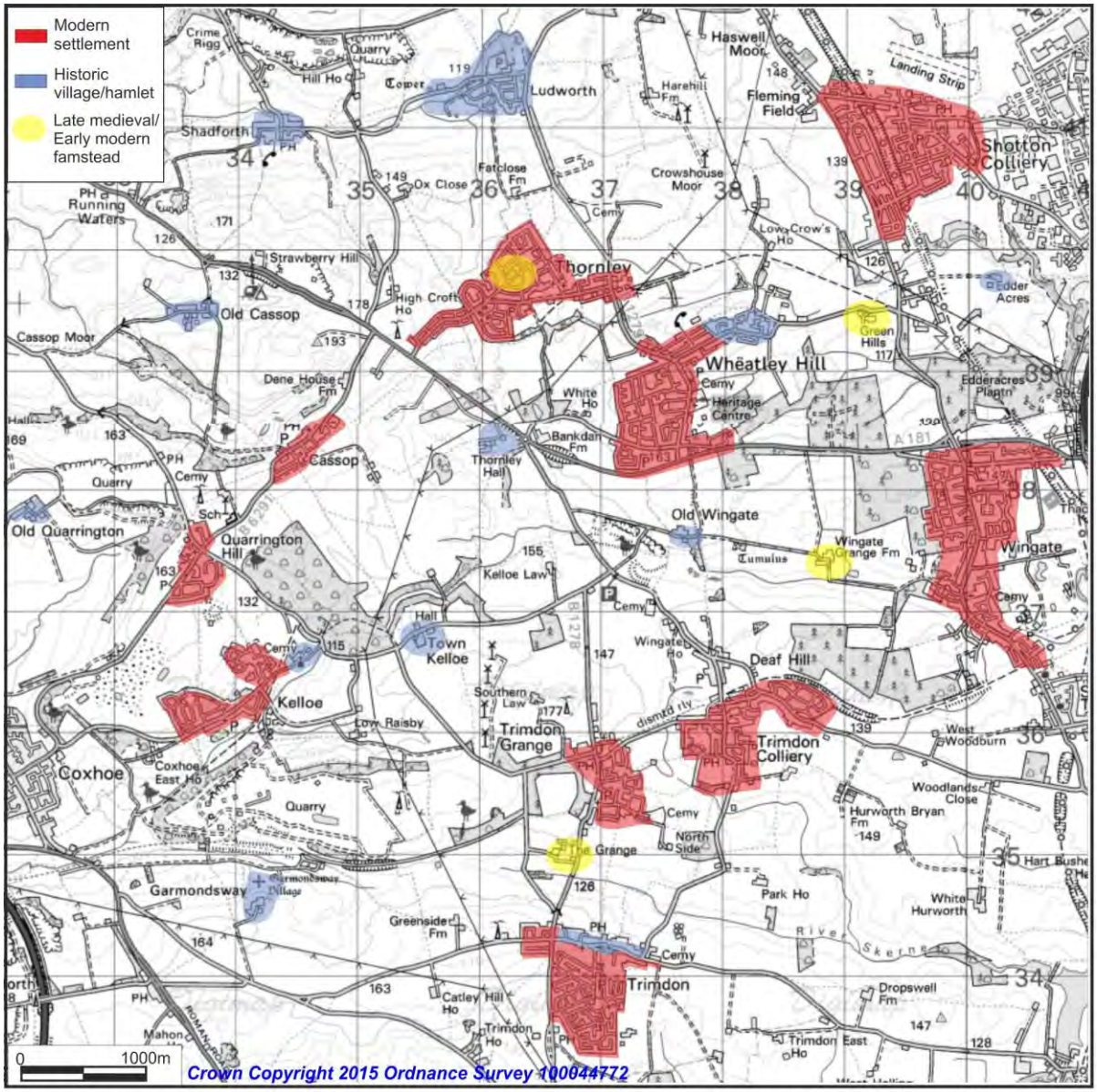
13. CONCLUSIONS: SETTLEMENT & LANDSCAPE

Prehistory, the Romano-British period and the early medieval era are manifested only by a few isolated monuments, cropmark sites visible from the air and stray finds – a thin skeleton on which to hang a body of speculation. Determined fieldwork will be required to fill out this picture. From the high Middle Ages onwards (roughly from the 11th century), however, clear traces of three successive and quite different patterns of settlement can be seen in the landscape. Based on our present state of knowledge these can be summarised as follows:

1. The nucleated villages of the high Middle Ages – Old Thornley (*Thornlaw*), Old Wingate (*Windegate*) and Wheatley Hill (*Quetlaw* or *Whetlaw*).

2. Beginning in the later medieval period and developing through the 16th-19th centuries, a pattern of dispersed farmsteads and hamlets replaced the earlier, nucleated village communities. The earliest farmsteads were Wingate Grange, Gore Hall and Green Hills.

3. From the 1830s onwards new villages were established around the mines being sunk throughout the East Durham Plateau, often on different sites from the old medieval villages. These new settlements grew to a considerable size, attaining a quasi-urban character.



The different phases of settlement on the Magnesian Limestone Plateau around Thornley and Wheatley Hill

THORNLEY SHOPS

Several images from Hartlepool St, Thornley
Courtesy of Wheatley Hill Heritage Centre

FURTHER READING:

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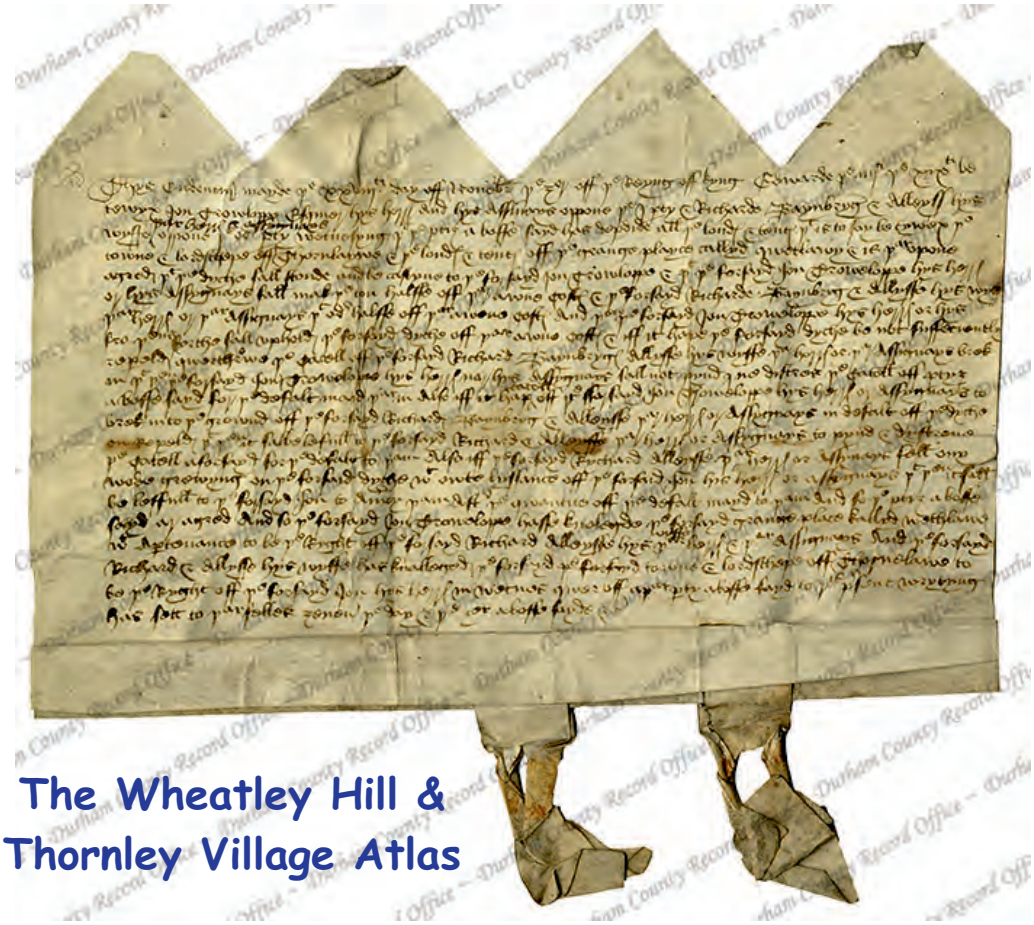

The Wheatley Hill & Thornley Village Atlas

This booklet, a summary of the main Wheatley Hill and Thornley Village Atlas report, explores the landscape and history of the two villages from their geological origins to the present day. The area has a rich and fascinating story to tell, whether it is the remains of a channel carved by glacial meltwater, the fascinating Permian geology of the exposed rock faces and the rare plants and wildlife in Wingate Quarry, the enigmatic traces of prehistory which have yet to be investigated or the two important medieval village sites with surviving earthworks (both scheduled ancient monuments). And of course there is a proud history of coal mining from the mid-19th to the late 20th centuries. Thus, as the two villages enter the 21st century, it is clear that their inhabitants have good cause to be proud of their collective heritage, both natural and cultural.

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