

Cumwhitton village atlas

Telling the story of a village



**North
Pennines
National
Landscape**

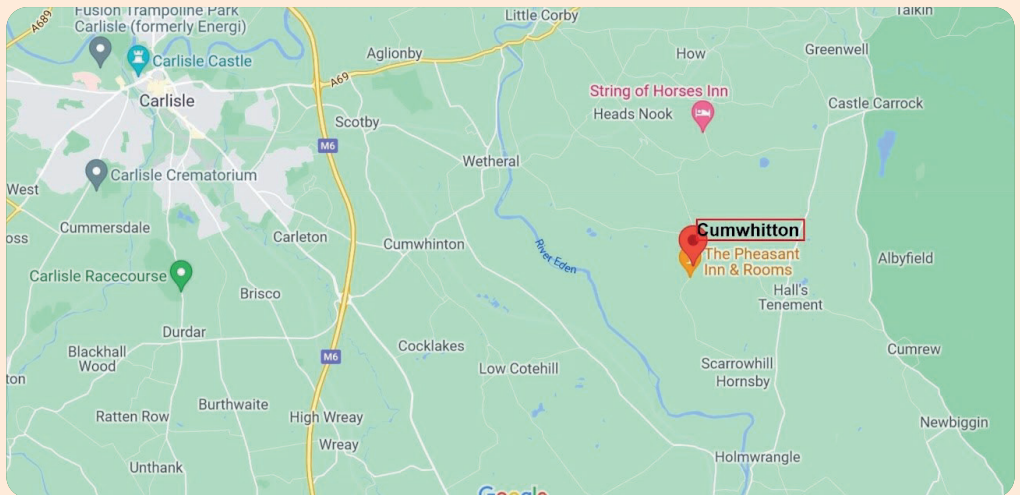


The story of Cumwhitton begins

Cumwhitton is located in the north of Cumbria, in the north-west of England. It is a small village and civil parish approximately 8.8 miles to the south-east of Carlisle. The village is located on the east side of the River Eden, which runs through Cumwhitton to the Solway Firth. The A69 Newcastle to Carlisle road lies some four miles to the north west, and Cumwhitton is just east of the M6. The nearest railway station

is located in Wetheral, 3 miles away. The village is sometimes confused with the nearby village of Cumwhinton in the parish of Wetheral.

In 2012 there were 111 households in the village and in the 2011 census the civil parish population was 310, which interestingly is exactly the same as the estimated population in 1688.



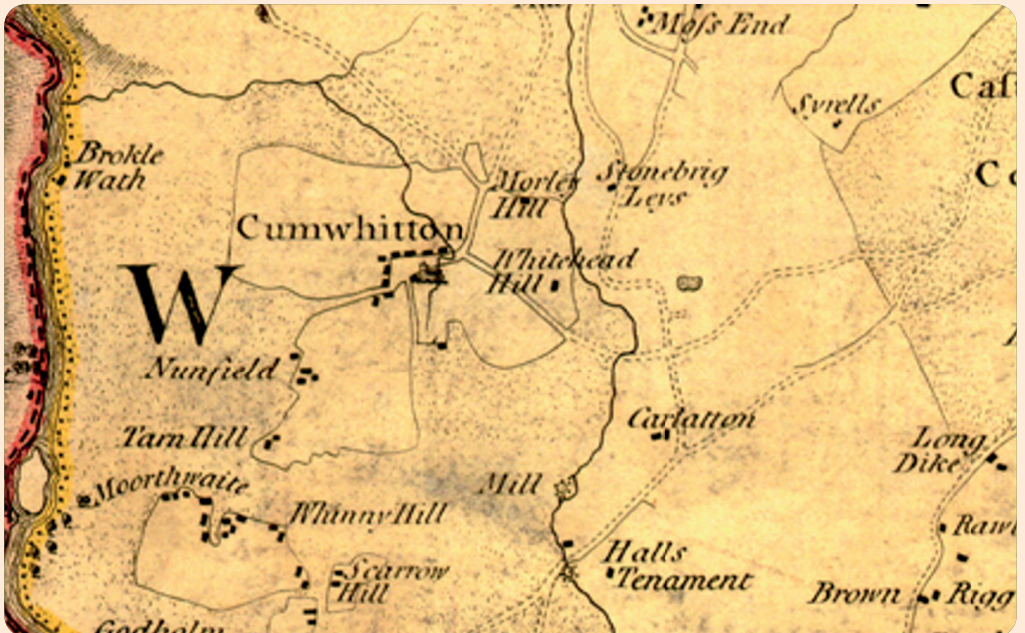
Map showing location of Cumwhitton, south east of Carlisle © Google Maps.

What's in a name?

There are a few possible routes to the etymology of the village name Cumwhitton. According to Eilert Ekwall's 1959 *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, Cumwhitton was 'Cumquetinton' in 1286 and 'Cumquittington' in 1294.

'Cum' is Welsh for valley and 'Whitton' comes from the Old English *hwitingatun*, so the name means 'the valley by Whittington'.

Another possibility is that the name Whitton literally means 'white farmstead', or 'farmstead of a man called Hwita', from the Old English words *hwit* + *tun*.

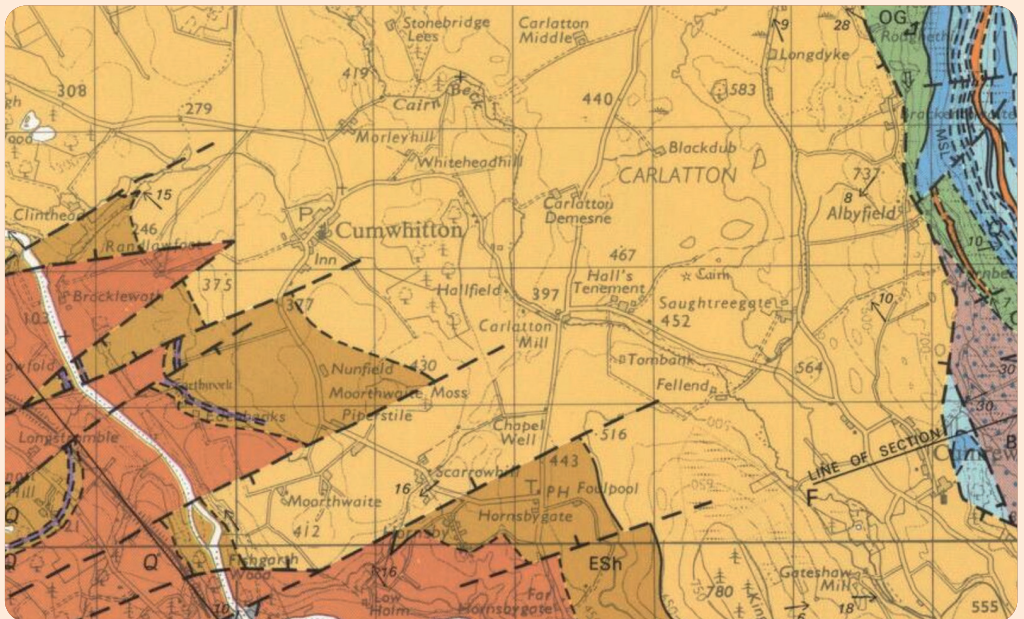


In the beginning: Cumwhitton's geology

Cumwhitton sits on top of rocks that are over 250 million years old. They include red sandstones of the St Bees and Penrith groups, and also shales and mudstones. This has led to the soil generally being free draining and sandy, not particularly fertile, but suitable for both arable and pasture farming.

The free draining, sandy soil has enabled the village to be a centre

for arable and pastoral farming throughout its history, making the economy predominantly agricultural. The sandstone will have been useful for building and there is evidence of some sandstone quarrying in the 19th century. The village also has an available water source with a stream connecting to the River Eden running through the village and a wellhead near the church.



Cumwhitton through time: Prehistory

The Palaeolithic (before 10,000BCE)

The main influence on Britain as a whole during this early period was the rapidly warming climate, which in turn saw dramatic increases in sea levels around the coasts. Ultimately, this was to lead to the creation of the English Channel, cutting Britain off from the rest of continental Europe.

The Mesolithic (10,000 - 4,500BCE)

Perhaps the most spectacular contribution to Mesolithic research in our wider area has come from investigations by Oxford Archaeology North where the Carlisle Northern Relief Road crosses the River Eden. Here, two wooden 'trident' spears dating from the very late Mesolithic were found, showing human activity along the river. Did the Mesolithic people reach as far as Cumwhitton?



Cumwhitton through time: Prehistory

The Neolithic (4,500 - 2,300BCE)

Many standing stones, cairns, and circles once dotted the landscape in this area. Many have now disappeared but one of the most intriguing survivors is Grey Yauds, now just a single stone. It was once part of a circle of 88 stones, some 50 metres in diameter, making it one of the largest in Cumbria.

This is a view of the last surviving stone from Grey Yauds stone circle, in the south-east of the parish. The view is looking north-east towards the large Bronze

Age cairn on Cardunneth Pike. Grey Yauds was still a complete circle until the agricultural improvements of the late 18th and early 19th centuries resulted in most of the stones being removed to clear the land. The surviving stone is probably the outlying stone, referred to in antiquarian sources as being five yards to the north-west of the main circle.

Along with other individual standing stones scattered across the parish, this site represents the first hard evidence of prehistoric life in the Cumwhitton area, dating back some 4000 years.



Grey Yauds, once part of a larger stone circle, near Cumwhitton © Bruce Bennison.

The Bronze Age (2,300 - 700BCE)

Overlooking the expanse of land towards Cumwhitton stands Cardunneth Pike, a huge stone cairn. It was partially excavated in the 19th century when a number of cremations were found contained within pottery urns.

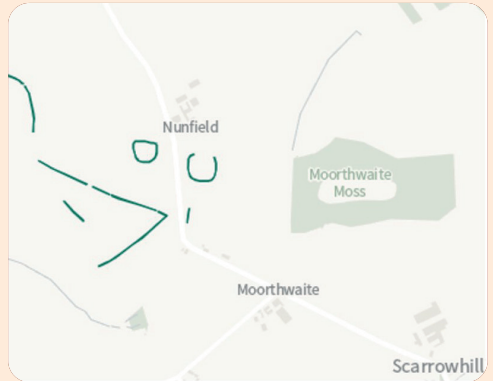


Cardunneth cairn © Bruce Bennison.

The Iron Age (700BCE - 43CE)

The rolling landscape around Cumwhitton would have been ideal for the growth of small farms during the Iron Age. Tantalising evidence for them survives as crop marks in the now much 'improved' fields.

The examples pictured are from Nunclose, south of the main village. The lines show archaeological features that are visible in the differences we see in crops growing on the surface. Buried features such as ditches, ancient field boundaries, and enclosures can affect how successfully crops grow above them.



Iron Age cropmarks in Nunclose, near Cumwhitton © Aerial Archaeology Mapping Explorer Historic England.

Cumwhitton through time: Roman Britain

Roman Britain (43 - 410CE)

This area of the Eden Valley was probably the breadbasket of the territory close to Hadrian's Wall, supplying the many military sites along the line of the wall.

Whilst there are no confirmed Roman sites within the Cumwhitton area, there are examples of Roman activity close by. In Gelt Woods, two miles south of Brampton, the Rock of Gelt is situated in a Roman quarry where soldiers quarried stone for the rebuilding of Hadrian's Wall in 207CE. What makes the site unique is the wonderful carvings that the soldiers left behind, which

makes this one of only a handful of Roman quarries in England which feature inscriptions.

The graffiti carved into the red sandstone of the Gelt is just one example of, perhaps bored, Roman soldiers filling their time by leaving their names, and those of their units, on the walls of the gorge.

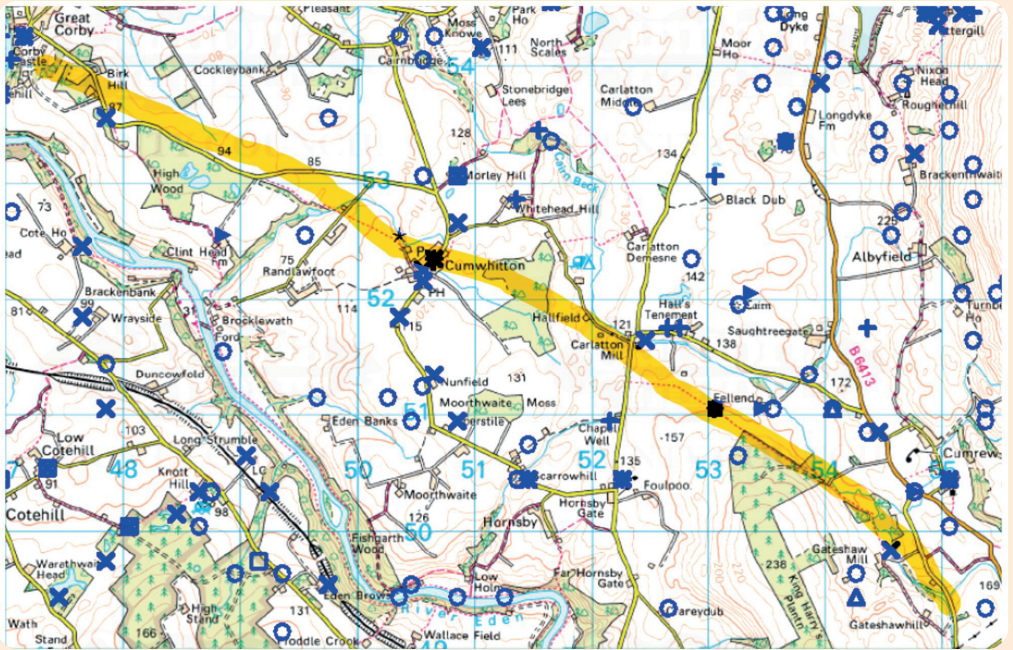
One of the inscriptions reads: APRO ET MAXIMO CONSVLIBVS OFICINA MERCATI

'In the consulship of Aper and Maximus' which enables the inscriptions to be dated to the time when Aper and Maximus were consuls of the Roman Empire in 207CE.



A Roman figure carved into the quarry face at Hadrian's Wall quarry, discovered during recording work by Historic England and archaeologists from Newcastle University

© Jon Allison, Newcastle University.



Map with historic structures marked © Cumbria Historic Environment Record online.
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There is also the possibility that a Roman road runs from just north of Gateshaw Mill, past Cumwhitton Church and intercepts a modern road at the east end of High Wood. It would be seen as a typical Roman agger, an ancient Roman embankment or rampart, or any artificial elevation.

The agger was an embankment that gave Roman roads the proper draining base, acting as a ridge that supported the road surface. This possible agger appears to be heading towards Corby Castle. The projected road line meets the River Eden just a few metres upstream from Corby Castle.

Cumwhitton through time: early Medieval

The early Medieval period (410 - 1066CE)

In March 2004, a Cumbrian metal detectorist found a brooch in the plough-soil on farmland belonging to Townfoot Farm, on the western edge of Cumwhitton. The site was investigated and, in total, six burials were found, dating to the early 10th century, though almost no skeletal material survived in the acidic soil. The cemetery comprised the graves of two women and four men. Based on the grave goods, which included swords, spears, jewellery, the remains of spurs, and a possible horse harness, they were likely to have been high status individuals. It is possible that they were first generation settlers, buried in a Norse style but potentially with a leaning towards Christianity because the graves were all aligned roughly east-west.

Cumwhitton's Viking burials are particularly special because very few Viking graves have been discovered in western Europe. Since February 2016, the Cumwhitton finds have been on display in Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery in Carlisle, in their 'Vikings Revealed' area.



Some of the brooches from the Viking burials found in Cumwhitton
© Oxford Archaeology.

Cumwhitton through time: Medieval period

The Medieval period (1066 - 1550CE)

The Medieval period was a time of churches, farming, ridge and furrow, and tithes. **St Mary's Church**, in the centre of Cumwhitton, is a Grade II listed building which dates back to at least the 12th century. The east window is probably Anglo-Saxon, the south wall is Norman, and the north arcade of three bays was built around 1200.

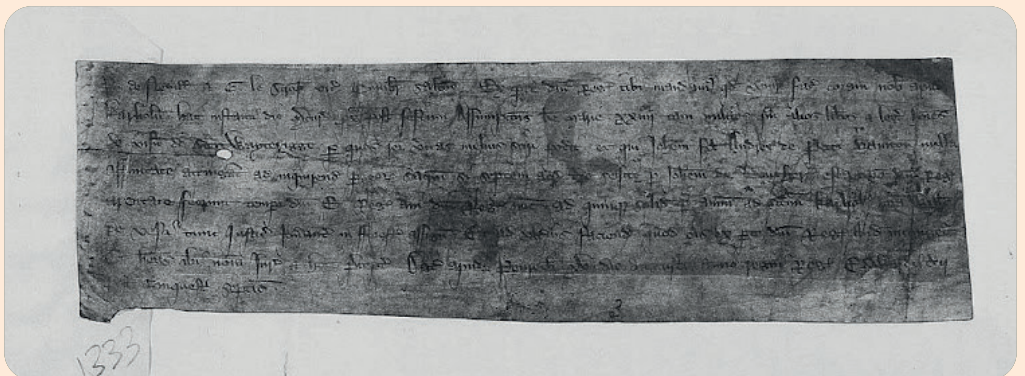
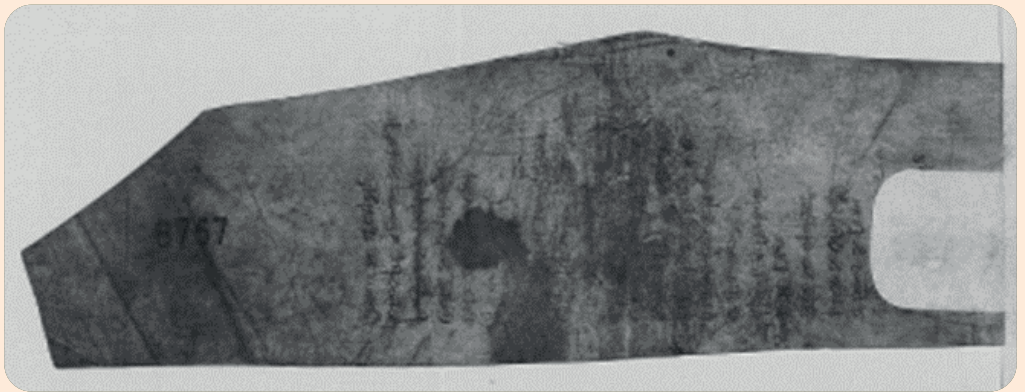
Inside the church, the plain octagonal bowl font is dated 1662 and most of the fittings and furnishings you see are late 19th or early 20th century. The building has a variety of stained glass windows, many by artists unknown and one by L. C. Evetts from 1962.



Cumwhitton through time: Medieval period

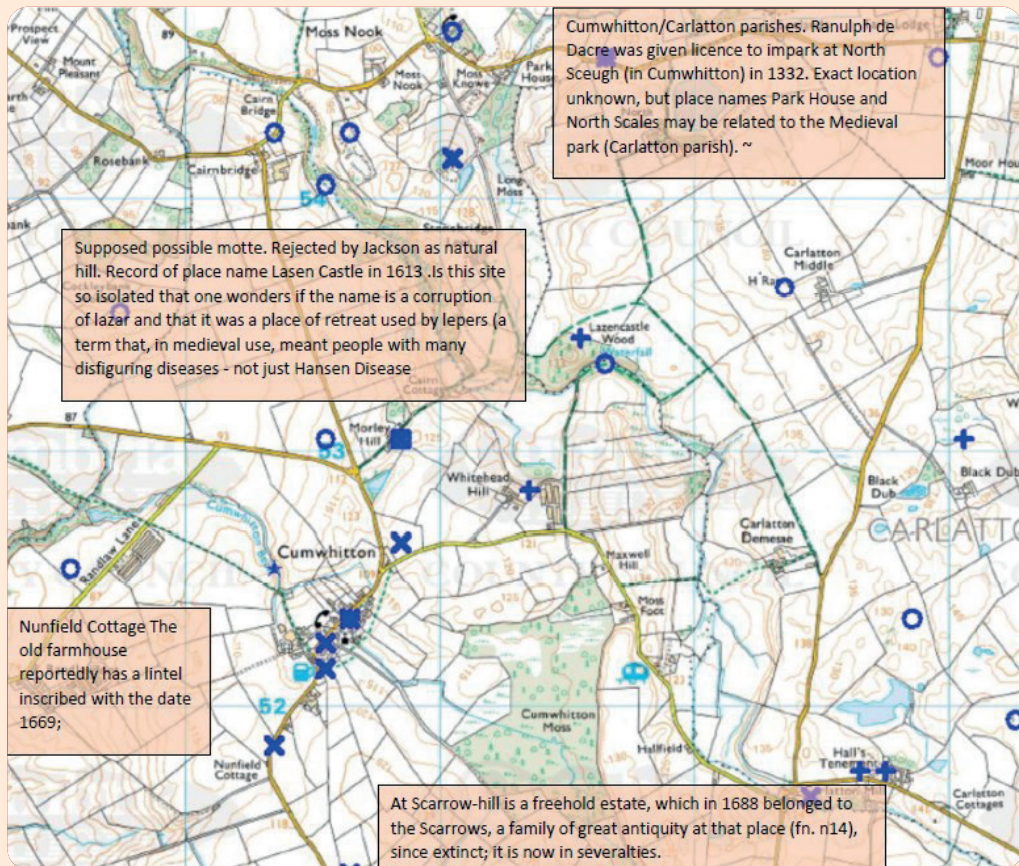
The 1333 jury list (below) includes Edmund de Cumquityn from Cumwhitton. He was ordered to attend for jury duty in Carlisle during the reign of Edward III, to settle a land dispute. The text reads:

“Writ of Edward III to Neville and Scrop ordering them to bring before them at Carlisle a jury of the view of Scalthwaiterigg to know the truth of the matter and to enquire of land seized by John de Louthur, and which were arrented in the time Edward, grandfather of the king, and do what seems best for the king.”



This map comes from the Cumbria Historic Environment Record online and shows the locations of known medieval and post-medieval sites in the area.

The annotations have been added to illustrate some of the significant sites for these time periods.

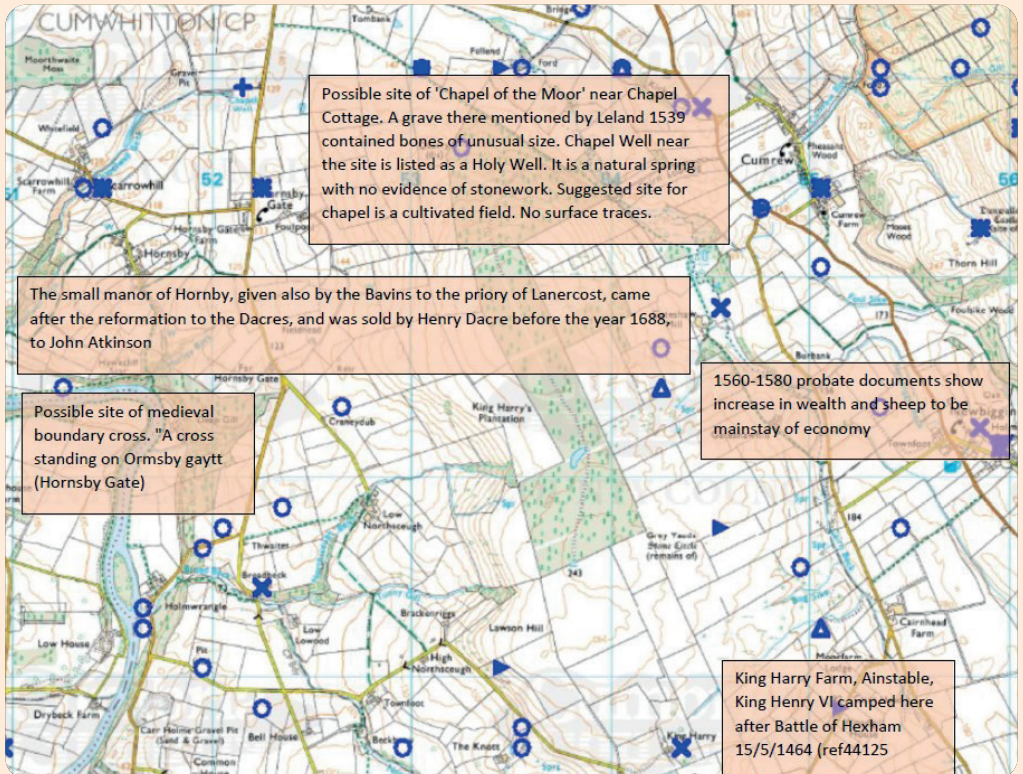


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Cumwhitton through time: post-Medieval period

This map comes from the Cumbria Historic Environment Record online and shows the locations of known medieval and post-medieval sites in the area.

The annotations have been added to illustrate some of the significant sites for these time periods.



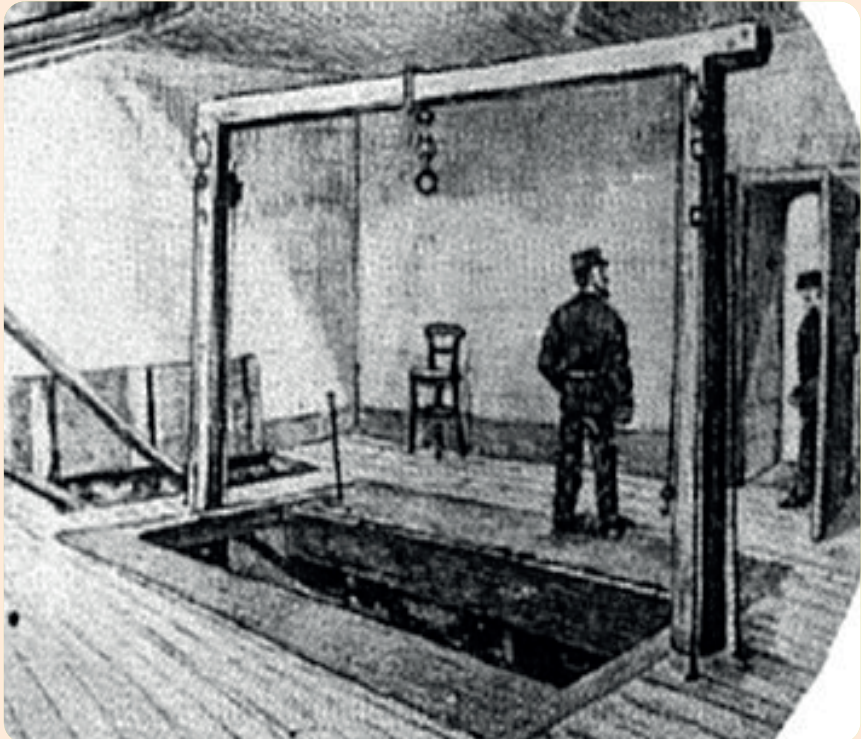
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Cumwhitton through time: industrial period

The industrial period (1750 - 1837CE)

Murder most foul. In 1820, newly married and expecting their first child, James Lightfoot and his wife Mary Nicholson lived in Cumwhitton. James was accused of murdering his best friend, Thomas Maxwell, on 19 May by

shooting him and stealing 15 shillings. In August 1820, he was found guilty by a jury and executed by hanging. He went to his death still protesting his innocence. He was described by witnesses to his character as a good looking, strong young man of 21, with a very kind and gentle manner.



Cumwhitton through time: Victorian period

The Victorian period (1837 - 1901CE)

Three poachers, two of whom were the local Cumwhitton blacksmiths, father and son, Robert and William Robinson, were caught taking salmon at a noted salmon spawning ground, at Brocklewath on the River Eden. During the arrest there was a skirmish and two of the arresting men were badly injured and one subsequently died.

Robert was known as a notorious poacher but aged 50, the judge asked the jury to go easy on him. All three were found guilty of manslaughter and Robert was sentenced to 12 months hard labour and the other two received 10 years penal servitude.



Victorian buildings

Around 1810 - village pub created

The Red Lion was opened in an extended 17th century farm cottage.

1830s - the Vicarage

Built in the 1830s and now a Grade II listed private house.

1891 - Wesleyan Methodist Chapel

Built in 1891, when it closed it was converted into a private dwelling.

1897 - Well head

The well head, on the village green in front of St Mary's Church, was probably erected to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee on 22 June 1897. It is made of dressed red sandstone, with a semicircular front retaining wall. The round-headed recess has a moulded surround with flanking reeded pilasters, block entablature, and a dated triangular pediment. The original pump is now replaced by a tap and it was Grade II listed in 1984.

1901 - Public Hall and Reading Room

The Public Hall and Reading Room remains at the centre of village life as Cumwhitton's village hall.



Cumwhitton village hall

© www.cumwhitton.com

Cumwhitton through time: twentieth century

The 20th century

The local inn was originally a 17th century farm cottage which, around 1810, was extended and became a pub called The Red Lion. It was taken over by the state in 1916 in order to 'manage' the drunkenness of the local 'navvies' who had arrived in Carlisle to help create ammunition for the war effort.

Alcohol content was significantly reduced in beer and spirits and it became illegal to buy a round for your mates, due to the fear that someone would reduce the area to a big hole through being tired or hungover.

Subsequently, The Red Lion changed its name to become The Pheasant Inn when it was sold into private ownership in 1973.



Cumwhitton through time: present day

The 20th century to the present day

Cumwhitton remains a thriving village into the 21st century with a strong sense of community. There are several local amenities which are regularly used for village events, including the village hall, play park, pub, St Mary's Church, and a village green.

The first and second Cumwhitton Viking Festivals, organised to celebrate the village's special Viking past, were held in February 2018 and 2019.



Images:
Cumwhitton's village website
© www.cumwhitton.com



Cumwhitton through time: present day

Cumwhitton village hall

The village hall remains an important village resource with various special and regular events being held, including monthly coffee mornings.

One such special event was the 'Cumwhitton at War' exhibition in July 2019. Recording memories of the past and remembering those from the parish in WWI and WWII, it also marked the end of a project to restore the War Memorial Clock in St Mary's Church.



Cumwhitton play park

The play park is another important village resource. It was the location for 'Summer Celebrations in the Play Park' in July 2021. Money raised went to the upkeep of the park.



Images:
Cumwhitton's village website
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The changing face of Cumwhitton village

1603 Gilsland Survey map

Probably the earliest extant plan of Cumwhitton is from the Survey of the *Barony of Gilsland*, carried out around 1603, which shows Cumwhitton and the surrounding area. North is towards the top left of the picture below. The Survey was accompanied by a Field Book, the original of which, along with the plan, is held in the Cumbria Record Office in Carlisle.

Along with the Field Book text, this represents an excellent introduction to the layout of the village in the late 16th to early 17th centuries.

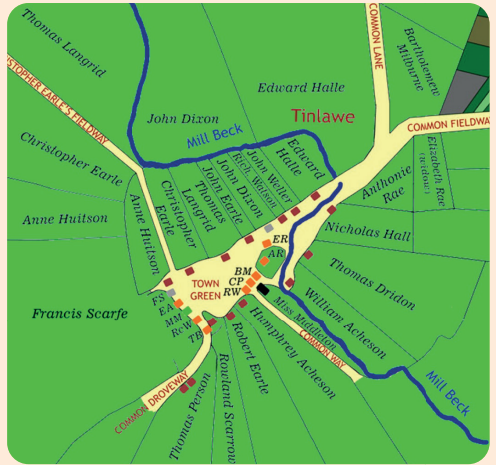
The field pattern shows how the main fields of the village were laid out and the names within them record the tenants who farmed them. These can be followed up using the Field Book and their relative holdings compared.



The Archives Catalogue (CASCAT) reference for the plan is DHN/P/232, the text of the Field Book (CASCAT reference DHN/C/188/1) was transcribed by T. B. H. Graham and published by the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society in 1934 (Extra Series Volume 16).

Comparing the Gilsland Map with modern maps shows how much of this early layout survived enclosure and carried on into the present day.

Gilsland map redrawn for clarity showing field layout and landowners in 1603.



Redrawn Gilsland map

© www.cumberlandsarrow.com

The modern village layout shows that little has changed in 400 years in the general village layout.



Modern map of Cumwhitton

© Cumbria Historic Environment Record.

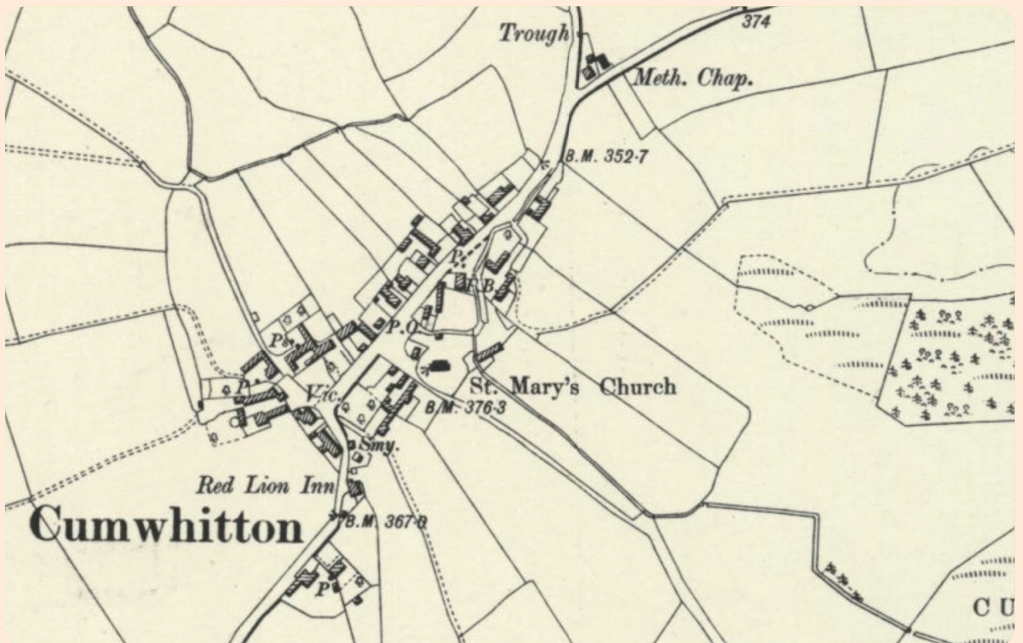


1884 village description by T. Bulmer in *History, Topography and Directory of East Cumberland*

"Cumwhitton lies on the east side of the River Eden, and is bounded on the north by Great Corby, on the south Leath ward, on the east by Cumwhitton and Carlatten, and on the west by the above-named river. In 1847, and for some years subsequently, there were 5,670 acres in the parish subject to assessment; at present the

rateable acreage is only 5,170, of which the gross estimated rental is £4,875 15s. 6d., and assesses value of £4,388. This, like many other purely agricultural parishes, has witnessed a decrease in its population during recent years; in 1841 there were 533 inhabitants, and in 1881, 497.

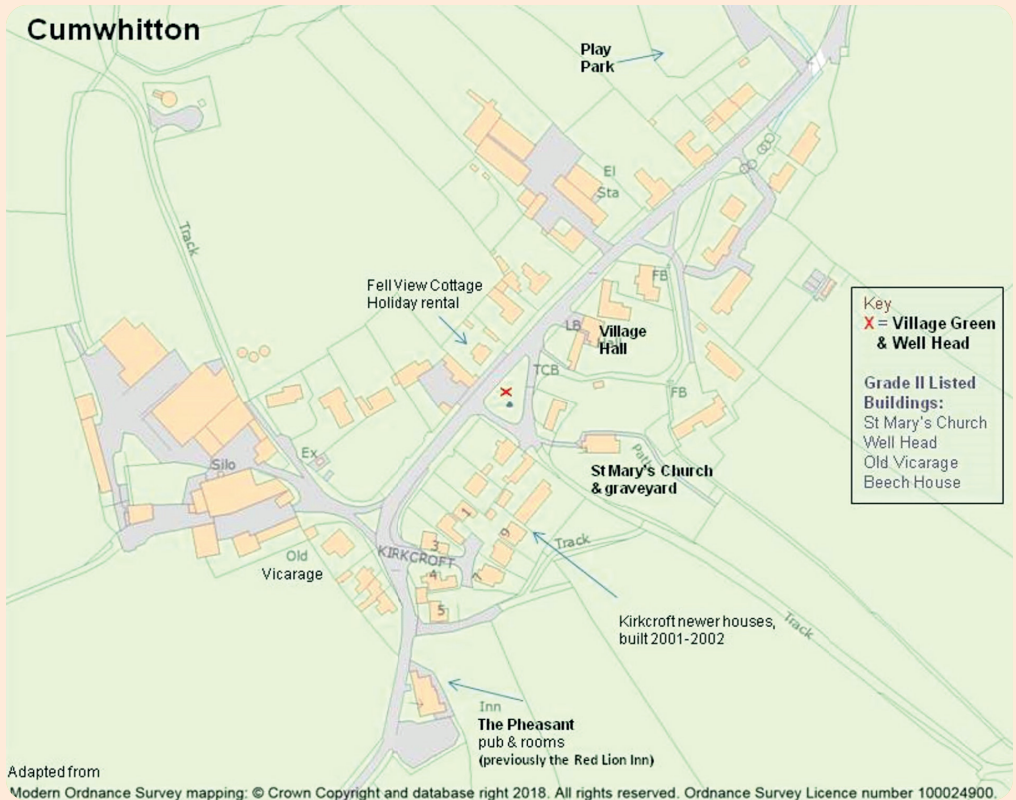
The soil is light and stony, producing barley, oats, a little wheat, and excellent potatoes. The climate is cold but invigorating and healthy."



Map of 21st century Cumwhitton

Cumwhitton today is a thriving village, with a strong sense of community. There remains links with the past with listed buildings, including the Well Head, as well as new developments,

such as the Kirkcroft houses, built from 2001, that partly developed a lower part of the village green (as recorded on the 1603 Gilsland Map).

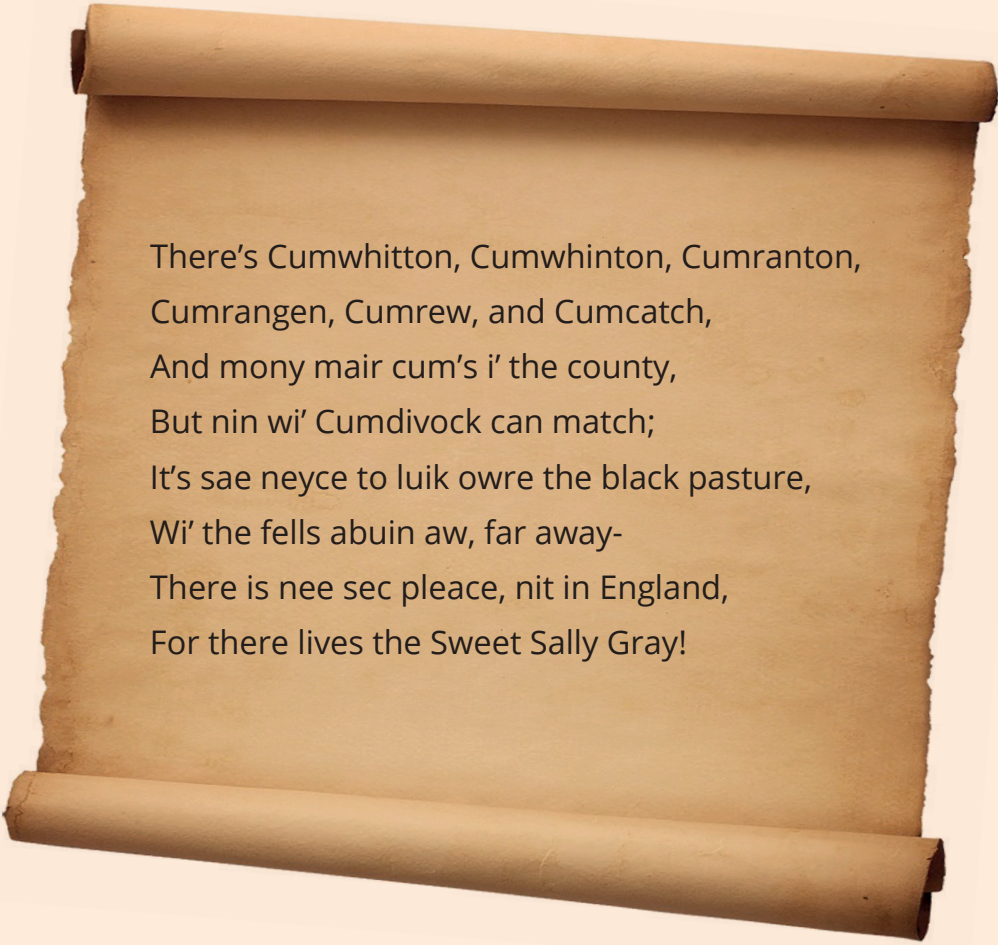


Poets and painters of Cumwhitton

Poetry and Cumwhitton

Robert Anderson (1770-1833) was a Cumbrian writer from Carlisle, particularly known for writing ballads in the Cumbrian dialect.

One of these is titled 'Sally Gray' and Cumwhitton is mentioned in the second verse:



There's Cumwhitton, Cumwhinton, Cumranton,
Cumrangen, Cumrew, and Cumcatch,
And mony mair cum's i' the county,
But nin wi' Cumdivock can match;
It's sae neyce to luik owre the black pasture,
Wi' the fells abuin aw, far away-
There is nee sec pleace, nit in England,
For there lives the Sweet Sally Gray!

Poets and painters of Cumwhitton

The Dryden Family, with links to England's first Poet Laureate in 1668

John Dryden (1631-1700) was appointed Poet Laureate in 1668 by Charles II and there has been an unbroken line of Poet Laureates ever since.

His family are mentioned in an old written text, remaining in the family, made in the reign of Elizabeth I. It appears that Erasmus Dryden, Esq., of Canons-Ashby, who was an ancestor of the poet Dryden, then had some estates in Cumwhitton parish, and the present possessors are of the same family.

Mannix & Whellan's 1847 History, Gazetteer and Directory of Cumberland notes:

"Cumwhitton, ... mostly belonging to resident yeomen, but the Earl of Carlisle is lord of the manor and principal owner of the soil, which has been greatly improved, by assiduous and skillful cultivation, within the last twenty years. These estates have passed for centuries in a regular line of descent in the same families, and some of the distinguished name Dryden have been settled here for several generations."



John Dryden.

Poets and painters of Cumwhitton

Famous Cumwhitton painter, William James Blacklock

William James Blacklock (1816-1858) moved to Cumwhitton with his family when he was just two years old. He studied at the Academy of Art in Carlisle and went on to become famous for his paintings of Cumbria, the Lake District, and the Scottish Borders.

Blacklock moved to London in 1836 and achieved success, exhibiting four pictures at the Royal Academy of Arts that year. William Gladstone, sometime before he became Prime Minister in 1847,



bought one of Blacklock's paintings 'Lanercost Abbey'. Blacklock returned to Cumwhitton in 1850 and was buried in the village when he died in 1858. His obituary described him as a "truthful and unpretending artist, who wooed nature rather than popular favour".



In 1851, Blacklock exhibited 'An old Mill near Haweswater' at the Royal Academy in London.

This village atlas has been put together by a group of volunteers who had never met before but shared an interest in this very pretty Cumbrian village and worked together through an eight week course, 'How to tell the story of a village', as part of the Fellfoot Forward Landscape Partnership Scheme's Uncovering the Past project.

Bruce Bennison
Sheila Hirst
Keith Sargeant
Lara Thompson

The Fellfoot Forward Landscape Partnership Scheme, led by the North Pennines National Landscape team and funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, was a major project to conserve, enhance and celebrate the natural and cultural heritage

This atlas represents the team's hard work over the eight week period of the course, and beyond. It has been researched and compiled by volunteers who are not professional historians. As such, a document like this could never be a comprehensive history of a place. Instead, it tells the story of this village as the volunteers have come across it and hopefully serves to inform and inspire you to carry the work further and add your own research. You never know what stories are just under the surface, waiting patiently to be uncovered.

of a special part of the North West of England, stretching from the Cumbrian fellside of the North Pennines National Landscape and UNESCO Global Geopark to the River Eden, and running north from Melmerby to Hallbankgate.

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