



**North
Pennines
National
Landscape**

Fellfoot Forward Landscape Partnership Scheme Uncovering the Past project - village atlases

DigVentures' Community Archaeologist, Harriet Tatton, summarises the training that volunteers undertook in creating village atlases for Croglin, Hayton and Cumwhitton in 2022. The completed versions are available online.

Creating a village atlas can seem like a daunting task - where do you start, and how do you get the ball rolling? In this eight-step guide, we break the process down to help you unveil the hidden histories of a village.

Archaeologists often initiate their quest with a desk-based assessment, an important step in identifying potential archaeological sites. By meticulously analysing historical records, maps, and other sources, archaeologists can uncover hidden stories and pave the way for surveys and excavations on the ground. These desk-based assessments can also form an excellent foundation for a village atlas.

Step 1: Define the scope of your village atlas

Before delving into the details, the first step to take is to define the scope of your village atlas. This involves establishing the geographical boundaries, specifying the time period under consideration, and formulating the research questions that the assessment aims to answer. Determine whether the assessment will focus solely on the limits of the village or extend to the surrounding areas; do you know exactly where the boundaries of your village are? Will you stick to official boundaries? Or is the area you're looking at defined differently? It's crucial to strike a balance between the scope and available resources and budget, as a broader scope may require more time and effort. In other words, try not to bite off more than you can chew.

If you're working on an atlas as part of a wider group, it's worthwhile dividing up the tasks between people. You could divide the work up geographically, or by time period.

Resources:

- Local archives and historical societies often hold documents related to the history of the village. These might help you define your scope by providing evidence for older boundaries or changes in the landscape that could be relevant.
- National and regional planning authorities can provide information on geographical boundaries and land use regulations. Explore websites like gov.uk and local government resources.
- Consult the project manager for guidance on defining the scope. If you're undertaking the research yourself, local authorities or historical researchers might be able to provide guidance on scope.

Step 2: Assemble relevant literature and documentation

The gathering of relevant literature and documentation is a pivotal stage in the desk-based assessment and village atlas process. Archaeologists and researchers need to compile existing literature, historical records, and pertinent documents related to the chosen area and time period. This can encompass academic papers, historical texts, and archives from governmental bodies or local enthusiasts. The goal is to create a comprehensive repository of information that will serve as the foundation for the subsequent analytical stages.

It can also be useful to get a general overview of the area or time period you're studying. Have a look for books in your local library or online that might help you gain a sense of what to look out for as you continue your research. Understanding the history and key events for the area will give you a sense of what kind of archaeological features and characteristics to look out for as you consult maps and satellite images later. For example, a village that now sits in an area that was part of a Roman frontier, but was never settled, will have very different Roman archaeology to an area that had an established Roman town. Additionally, certain kinds of archaeology can also be highly regional, for example the square Bronze Age barrows that are specific to East Yorkshire. So, get familiar with what you might find and what you should look out for.

Books can provide a starting point for other resources too; consult the bibliography or reference section to dive deeper into particular areas of interest or relevance.

Resources:

- Access online academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and the British Library, offering scholarly articles and historical texts.
- Governmental archives like The National Archives (UK) or relevant local archives contain a wealth of historical documents.
- Libraries and local archives may have specific collections related to the area of interest.
- Regional or local archives may be treasure troves of information.
- Online resources such as Wikipedia might help you gain a general understanding, and will often have lists of references that you can consult as you get further into the project.

Step 3: Historical map comparison

Comparing historical maps is an intricate process that involves identifying changes in the landscape, land use, and buildings over time. This careful, comparative analysis is essential for uncovering insights into past human activities, alterations in building and land usage, and broader settlement patterns. Archaeologists scrutinise maps to detect shifts in the configuration of the land, providing crucial clues for understanding the evolution of the area. You might see your village growing as it became more populous, or even shrinking as people moved away.

You could start by finding the most recent map for your village, then work backwards to the oldest available to map changes through time, noting differences as you go. Can you see changes in land use, such as new housing or roads being built, buildings being renamed or used for different purposes? Can you see street names changing? Did the name of the village change? Can you find a time before your village appeared on a map, even?

Most villages will have maps that go back as far as the Victorian period, and occasionally there may be older maps available too. It's exceptionally rare to find maps that show any level of detail at a village or town level earlier than the 17th century; these will probably only show you a place name. While it's unlikely that you'll see your village depicted in detail, they can still give you useful information about relative size and boundaries.

Resources:

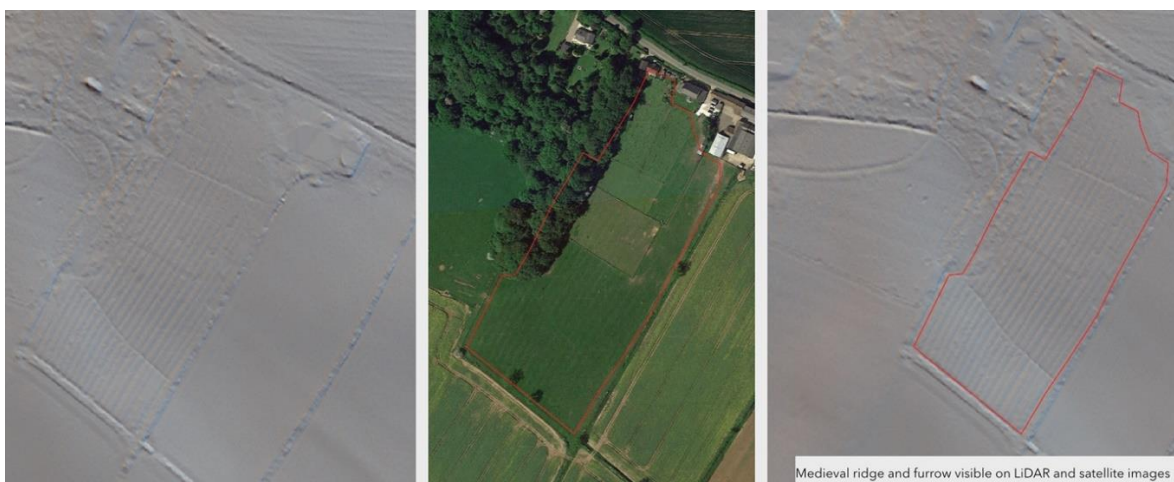
- Utilise the National Library of Scotland's map library and the British Library's map collection, both offering extensive digital collections of historical maps.
- Local historical societies or archives may possess maps specific to the village.
- Explore online platforms like Old Maps Online, providing access to a vast collection of historical maps.

Step 4: Analyse aerial imagery

The examination of aerial imagery, including satellite photos and drone footage, is a key step in identifying anomalies within the landscape that might hint at archaeology. Archaeologists look for subtle indicators such as crop marks, variations in soil composition, and topographical features that may indicate the presence of buried archaeological sites. This stage serves as a preliminary survey to pinpoint potential areas for more in-depth investigation during fieldwork.

You can use tools like Google Earth to look at satellite images of particular places from different periods in time; 2006 and 2018 were particularly good years for summer crop marks due to prolonged hot summers and archaeologists usually look at images from these years to spot previously unknown archaeological features in the landscape. Focus on open areas such as gardens, parks, and fields when looking for cropmarks and parch marks. You can look for unusually straight lines, squared or circular markings, and other anomalous shapes in the landscape.

You can cross reference your findings with the maps you've found – do your crop marks relate to an earlier structure?



Resources:

- Use Google Earth and other satellite imagery platforms for preliminary analysis.
- National mapping agencies, such as the Ordnance Survey (UK), often provide aerial imagery databases.
- Consider local drone enthusiasts who may have captured relevant footage, or hire drone service providers for specific surveys.

Step 5: Study topography and geology

Understanding the natural features of the landscape is paramount for archaeologists. Topographical and geological map analysis aids in identifying areas with archaeological potential. In regions where LiDAR data is available, archaeologists can unveil features that would be obscured by vegetation such as forests or scrubland when looking at satellite imagery or drone footage.

Similarly with aerial imagery, shapes to look out for include unusually straight lines, circular or square earthworks, and distinctive shapes or anomalies that deviate from natural geological formations.

Again, you can cross reference with your maps to see if any features you notice relate to earlier buildings.

Resources:

- Access geological surveys conducted by national geological agencies or academic institutions such as the British Geological Survey.
- Obtain LiDAR data from agencies or organisations specialising in geospatial data, such as the Environment Agency or the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.
- Utilise topographical maps from national mapping agencies like the Ordnance Survey (UK).

Step 6: Consult archaeological databases

Accessing archaeological databases, such as Historic Environment Records (HERs) and local/regional archives, is a crucial step in building upon existing knowledge.

- This involves extracting information on previously documented sites or artefacts within the target area. Researchers must ensure they are not overlooking previously identified sites, and this step establishes continuity between past and present archaeological investigations.

HER databases differ between regions, so don't be put off if you need to take some time to get your head around how it all works.

Resources:

- Explore Heritage Gateway – this allows users to access almost all (Historic Environment Records (HERs) in one place.
- Explore Historic Environment Records (HERs) maintained by local authorities or archaeological trusts if the HER relevant to your village is not on Heritage Gateway.
- The Archaeological Data Service (ADS) in the UK provides a repository of archaeological data.

- National heritage organisations, such as Historic England, the National Trust, and Forestry England, have databases of registered archaeological sites.

Step 7: Engage with local communities

Community engagement is a valuable aspect of compiling a village atlas. You may wish to consult with the communities residing in or near the chosen area, seeking insights, anecdotes, and oral histories that may lead to the discovery of overlooked archaeological sites. Local knowledge often provides a unique perspective and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the area's history.

Oral histories might already have been collected in the area, so it's worth getting in touch with local history or heritage societies and organisations such as local museums to see what work has already been carried out in the area.

Resources:

- Attend community meetings, local events, or town halls to engage with residents.
- Explore social media platforms or community forums where locals discuss the history of the area.
- Investigate oral history projects that may have been conducted by local historical societies, museums or other heritage organisations.

Step 8: Use a GIS software to map your data (optional)

The optional use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology enhances the desk-based assessment by allowing archaeologists to analyse spatial data and create detailed maps. GIS facilitates the visualisation of patterns, identification of clusters of activity from different time periods, and the precise mapping of potential sites within the defined area. These maps serve as valuable tools for presenting findings in subsequent stages, including the creation of a village atlas.

This step is optional, as while it can be of great value for visualising your data, it's not part of the data gathering process, and won't add new data to your atlas. If you decide that you'd like to use GIS software, there are lots of how-to guides on YouTube and other websites to help you get to grips with it.

Resources:

- Employ GIS software such as ArcGIS, QGIS, or online platforms like Mapbox.
- Access spatial data repositories like OpenStreetMap for base maps.
- Enhance proficiency in mapping techniques through tutorials and courses on GIS platforms.

Each of the steps could be described in much more detail to describe how to best use the resources at your disposal, but this guide should give you the basic principles and a good footing to get started. Often, the resources pointed out here that are for public access have built-in user guides, and the organisations who run them are there to help you get to grips with their databases and facilities too.

The best of luck with your village atlas.



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