

The creation of ring-fence farms: some observations from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Northumberland*

by Ronan O'Donnell

Abstract

The creation of ring-fence farms is an aspect of agricultural improvement which has often been overlooked, and it is hoped that this article will provide a starting point for its examination. When farm consolidation is discussed it is usually either incidental to other issues or it is assumed to be largely a product of enclosure. The article presents four case studies of enclosure that reveal the importance of pre- and post-enclosure processes for the creation of ring-fence farms. It is shown that both landlords and tenants played a part in the process but that tenant farmers often led the way. Finally a number of barriers to farm consolidation are discussed, of which the most significant is found to be the presence of a large number of freeholds within a township.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was reasonably common for farms to be fragmented into several discrete parcels of land (e.g. Figure 1), in stark contrast to the modern ubiquity of ring-fenced holdings. This was partly a result of the continued use of unenclosed open field systems. Holdings in open field systems were particularly fragmented for reasons that remain a matter of debate. Fragmentation of holdings could also occur as a result of piecemeal enclosure, either of open fields themselves or of small pieces of common waste. Such small-scale and unplanned enclosures often resulted in people enclosing parcels which were separate from their existing holdings simply because the opportunity arose.

A number of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers discussed the difficulties of running a fragmented holding, and there appears to have been a consensus that such situations should be avoided. For instance, in 1801, John Lawrence wrote that 'In laying out farms, all possible care should be taken to avoid confusion and intermixture of property, and to contrive the most convenient access to different enclosures'.¹ Similarly, John Marius Wilson, writing in 1848, suggested that farms should be laid out so as to be 'Free from intrusion of other

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¹ John Lawrence, *The modern land steward* (1806), p. 173.

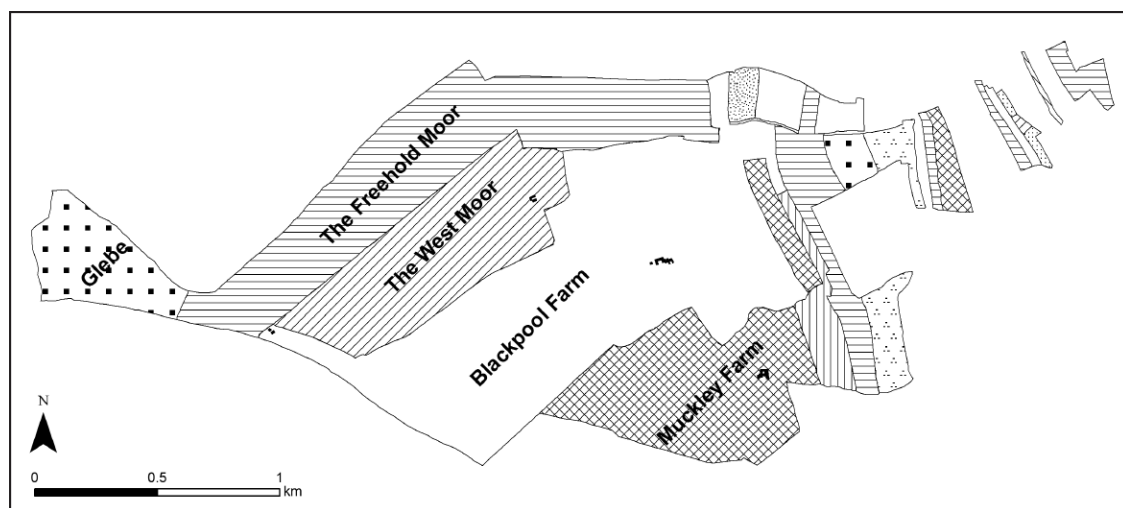


FIGURE 1. Plan of Freeholder's Quarter Longhorsley based on the tithe plan of 1842 (NRO, DT192M). Each pattern represents a different holding. Note that the holdings are very fragmented and that it is a very open township.

man's ground or intricacy, angularity and unequal distribution of its own parts'.² Usually contemporaries cite the inconvenience of divided farms as the justification for consolidation. Wilson is typical in suggesting that they were more expensive to farm as it took longer to travel between separate parcels, that it made spreading manure evenly more difficult, and that it prevented careful monitoring of all parts of the farm.³ In addition to these disadvantages, William Marshall, writing in 1804, pointed out that fragmented farms could be a cause of altercations between neighbours.⁴ Most commentators rarely gave more specific details than these and rarely attempted to evaluate the advantages of a ring-fence holding for particular agricultural systems. Nor did they explicitly link consolidation with enclosure, though this was common in the period, for instance the Board of Agriculture's *General Report on Enclosures* of 1808 states that 'Contiguity to the residence or farmeries of the proprietors is so much esteemed, that the immediate value of the lands must in some cases be made to give way to this general object of desire'.⁵ The drawing of a link between consolidation and enclosure is common in this period and has been adopted by modern historians, indeed most discussion of the topic occurs in studies of enclosure. General works on enclosure usually only comment on the benefits of ring-fence farms and the inconvenience of holding land in fragmented parcels. For example, Mingay discusses contemporary writing, including the preambles of enclosure acts, in which fragmented holdings are criticized, and thus he saw consolidation as a principal motive for enclosure.⁶ The convenience of ring-fence farms is also assumed in accounts of

² John Maurius Wilson, *The rural cyclopedia* (4 vols, 1848), II, p. 222.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ William Marshall, *On the landed property of England* (1804), p. 130.

⁵ Board of Agriculture, *General report on enclosures* (1808), p. 79.

⁶ G. E. Mingay, *Parliamentary enclosure in England: an introduction to its causes, incidence and impact* (1997), pp. 33-7.

the outcome of enclosure. For example, Mingay lists it as a major advantage to the occupiers of newly enclosed land. He does however recognize that it was not possible in many cases. For example, commissioners may have thought that two allotments should be made where proprietors owned both grazing rights and field land.⁷ As will be shown below, enclosure did not always result in consolidation, which could be brought about by other processes.

The most detailed study to date is that by Yelling who examined the relationships between different types of enclosure and farm consolidation. He shows that piecemeal enclosure often led to dispersed patterns of landownership. Yelling then went on to suggest that piecemeal enclosure separated consolidation from the extinction of common rights, in contrast to other forms which combined them. Piecemeal enclosure could aid in the creation of ring-fence farms by the larger proprietors because the extinction of common rights removed an obstacle to the rearrangement of land. Almost by definition, enclosure by unity of possession created ring-fence farms. Formal agreements differed drastically from piecemeal enclosure and often produced compact patterns of landholding. Finally, parliamentary enclosure often consolidated lands, but did not always make perfect ring-fence farms. This was because most enclosure acts required the commissioners to place allotments with regard to convenience. This was usually interpreted as a need to place them as close as possible to the proprietor's existing farm, often with the smallest proprietors being given priority because the larger owners could afford to build a new farmhouse.⁸ Such considerations mean that even the enclosure of commons, which made up a large proportion of parliamentary enclosure, could produce dispersed ownership patterns, though in many cases it did produce ring-fence farms through the construction of farmsteads on the newly enclosed parcels. Yelling's discussion however only covered the effect of enclosure on farm consolidation as it formed part of a larger work on the geography of enclosure in England.

There is a certain amount of evidence that consolidation occurred both before and after enclosure. Some studies which have treated the process incidentally hint at some of this complexity by illustrating the different mechanisms by which consolidation occurred. For example, Hoskins discussed pre-enclosure consolidation of open field strips by tenants, which could have led to the creation of ring-fence farms had it not been interrupted by later parliamentary enclosure.⁹ Others have found cases of elite involvement in consolidation. For example, Clay suggested that if the elite bought land at all during the period 1640–1750, they did so in order to consolidate their estate. He concluded that this was as much for non-functional concerns, such as power or personal satisfaction, as for financial reasons. Nonetheless, it could be profitable if it allowed improvements such as enclosure through unity of possession.¹⁰ This has also been observed by English in East Yorkshire where landlords often took a long-term view of their estates and were prepared to wait for the opportunity to acquire a particular piece of land.¹¹ Williamson also suggested that post-enclosure reorganization,

⁷ Ibid., p. 83.

⁸ J. A. Yelling, *Common field and enclosure in England 1450–1850* (1977), p. 125.

⁹ W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland peasant: the economic and social history of a Leicestershire village* (1965), pp. 232–24.

¹⁰ C. Clay, 'Landlords and estate management in England', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The agrarian history of England and Wales*, V, 1640–1750 (2 vols, 1985), ii, pp. 178–9.

¹¹ B. English, *The great landowners of East Yorkshire* (1990), pp. 146–8.

perhaps including consolidation, in the Sandlings area of Suffolk may be the reason for the lack of piecemeal enclosure type field boundaries in the modern landscape despite their ubiquity on seventeenth-century plans.¹² There is no reason to view the contemporary comments on consolidation above, other than those in the *General Report on Enclosure* as being necessarily linked to enclosure. William Marshall's comments explicitly refer to post-enclosure processes. He discussed the ways that freeholders who own fragmented farms may remedy the situation. The simplest was by exchange, which could be achieved through arbitration. Where this was impossible landholders could sell and purchase pieces of land in order to create a ring-fence holding. This was usually reasonably easy as the land to be purchased was worth more to the purchaser as part of a compact holding than it was as a detached parcel to the seller.

The process of consolidation was, then, a complex one, and worthy of more attention than it has hitherto received. It is clear that consolidation occurred both before and after enclosure, so it will be argued below that it may be seen as a separate process to enclosure though one which might occur during enclosures. For the purposes of this article enclosure will be defined as the abolition of common rights, following Thirsk's 1967 definition.¹³ We may also define a related process of concentration in which a tenant or landowner collected parcels of land in one general area though without joining them. In practice there is only limited evidence for this process in the cases discussed here, though it may have been more common elsewhere. Certainly such behaviour could make actual consolidation easier at a later date. Four case studies will be used to illustrate and examine the process of consolidation and the actors involved in it.

I

The landscape of Northumberland of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries was one of open fields and commons with fairly large amounts of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century enclosure in some areas.¹⁴ The Northumberland landscape may be divided into four regions (Figure 2). The coast and central plain both stretch the entire length of the county and are largely dedicated to arable production. Within these two regions the pre-enclosure landscape was dominated by two- or three-field open field systems, with small parcels of common waste around their edges. It has been demonstrated that these field systems functioned in a similar way to the Midland system.¹⁵ Both regions saw relatively large amounts of enclosure by agreement and piecemeal enclosure during the early modern period as a result of the growth of industry in the county. In the extreme west of the county the Cheviot Hills form the Northumberland uplands. This area is much more pastoral, with large commons and only very small areas of open fields usually placed close to settlements. These areas saw much less early enclosure and were often subject to very late enclosure acts. Finally, Tweedside forms a unique region. This area has a harsh climate but particularly fertile, if somewhat heavy, soils. Tweedside was found to be particularly suitable for turnips so it attracted improving farmers in

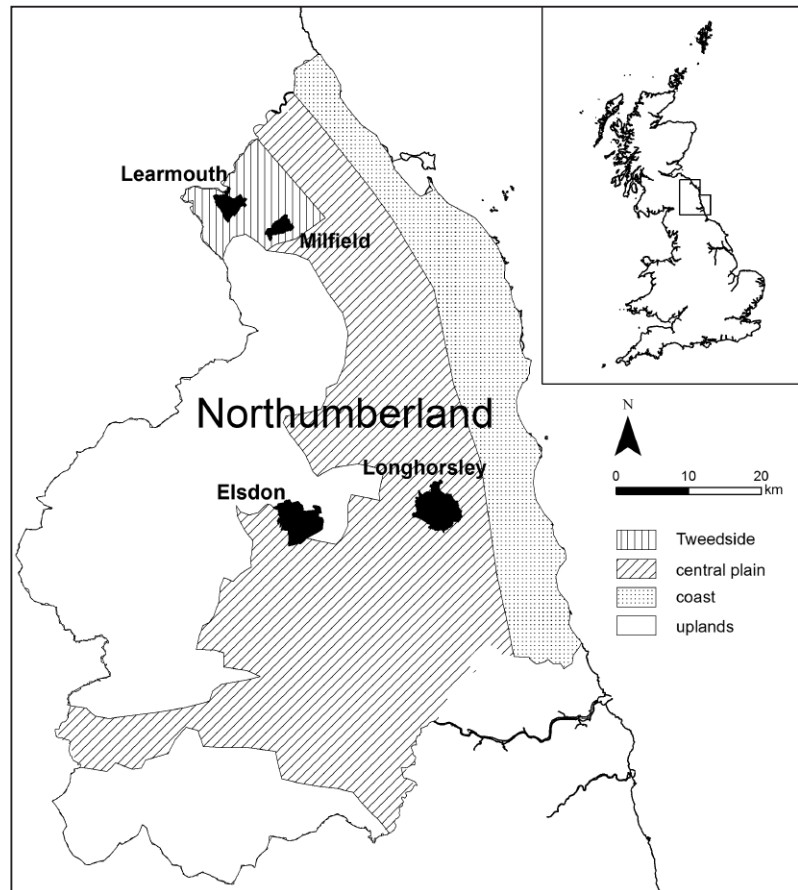
¹² T. Williamson, *Sandlands: the Suffolk coast and heaths* (2005), pp. 91–3.

¹³ J. Thirsk, 'Enclosing and engrossing', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The agrarian history of England and Wales*, IV, 1500–1640 (1967), p. 200.

¹⁴ R. A. Butlin, 'Field systems of Northumberland and Durham', in A. R. H. Baker and R. A. Butlin (eds), *Studies of field systems in the British Isles* (1973), pp. 93–144.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

FIGURE 2. The locations of the case study townships. Note that they include a wide range of farming regions. Regions based on R. A. Butlin, 'Field systems of Northumberland and Durham', in A. R. H. Baker and R. A. Butlin (eds), *Studies of field systems in the British Isles* (1973), pp. 93–144.



the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when such agriculture was seen as the cutting-edge. Thus, the landscapes to be studied present a variety of different conditions the effect of which on the process of consolidation will be demonstrated below.

The case studies themselves have been selected in order to cover as wide a range as possible of the environmental and social conditions pertaining within Northumberland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Milfield is in Tweedside. It had three major landowners; the Greys of Howick, the Ordes of Nunnikirk and the Blakes of Twizel, all of whom let their farms to tenants. The common was enclosed by agreement in 1789,¹⁶ while the rest of the township was enclosed earlier, probably by an agreement as the field boundaries in this area are particularly straight.¹⁷ Learmouth is also in the north of the county, immediately south of the Anglo-Scottish border. It is on the same fertile turnip land as Milfield, but was a closed township, owned almost entirely by the Greys of Howick. Elsdon is in the Northumberland

¹⁶ Northumberland RO [hereafter NRO] QRD6, Milfield enclosure award, 1789.

¹⁷ For more detailed discussion of the enclosure histories of these parishes, see R. O'Donnell, 'Conflict,

agreement and landscape change: methods of enclosure of the northern English countryside', *J. Hist. Geography* 30 (2013), pp. 1–13.

uplands. It was subject to a parliamentary enclosure of its common in 1731, the rest of the township being enclosed by piecemeal enclosure and small scale agreements before and after this date. In comparison to Milfield and Learmouth it was very open with nearly 80 landowners recorded in the tithe apportionment.¹⁸ Finally, Longhorsely is on the central plain. Longhorsely consists of three townships, Bigge's Quarter, Riddle's Quarter and Freeholder's Quarter. The second of these is too poorly documented to contribute to the discussion here, so analysis will focus on the remaining two. All three townships were subject to an enclosure agreement of 1664.¹⁹ This, however, only completed a process which had proceeded through piecemeal enclosure and small-scale agreement up to this point. Bigge's Quarter was a closed township, initially belonging to the Earls of Carlisle and from 1807 to Charles William Bigge. Freeholder's Quarter, as the name suggests, was an open township possessed by several freeholders.

II

As Yelling demonstrated, enclosure forms an important part of farm consolidation in many townships.²⁰ However, its results could vary and it rarely led to townships composed entirely of ring-fence farms. It will be argued below that pre- and post-enclosure processes are at least as important as enclosure itself. Nonetheless enclosure is significant in the creation of ring-fence farms, and as the most familiar process will be considered first.

Of our case studies Milfield has the highest proportion of consolidation by enclosure. Half of Milfield was enclosed around 1777 or shortly thereafter. It is unclear whether this enclosure produced ring-fence farms or not. By the time the second half was enclosed in 1789, however, these were certainly ring-fence farms as their locations can be determined from a comparison of the text of the enclosure award and the tithe plan.²¹ The documentation for the second enclosure is fairly good so some comment may be made concerning its contribution to the creation of ring-fence farms. By comparing the award made by the commissioners to the tithe plan it has been possible to determine the locations of the allotments. Most were laid out next to the ancient lands of the owner, thus ensuring consolidation. This was true even where the ancient lands lay outside the township, as in the case of Francis Blake, one of whose allotments was placed next to his estate at Crookhouse.²² There were however two instances in which the commissioners did not create the most compact farms possible. The first is an allotment to the Earl of Tankerville as the lord of the manor. It was put in quite a marginal location and awarded in two pieces separated by a road. The other example is an allotment made to George Grey for lands at Sandy House, which is in a separate township to Milfield.²³ It was placed next to George Grey's freehold at Sandy House but could have been placed near to his much more substantial leasehold farm at Milfield Hill, which was the property of the Earl Grey. It is possible that the commissioners did not want to do this because it may have created inconvenience in the future if the tenancy of Milfield Hill had gone to a different person. Alternatively, they may

¹⁸ NRO, DT164M, Elsdon tithe apportionment, 1840.

¹⁹ NRO, 358/21/10, Longhorsley enclosure agreement, 1664.

²⁰ Yelling, *Common field*, pp. 120–45.

²¹ NRO, DT322S, Milfield tithe plan and apportionment, May 1842.

²² NRO, 00309/M/33, plan of the Crookhouse estates.

²³ NRO, QRD6, Milfield enclosure award, 1789.

have felt that allotments for lands in a particular township should be made in that township so as not to create detached portions. In addition to the allotments made in the original award an additional allotment was later made out of William Orde's allotment to one Mr Lowry who complained that he should have been awarded land.²⁴ This could not be placed next to Lowry's existing holdings as they consisted of houses and gardens in the village which did not border the common. On the whole then the enclosures of Milfield did create ring-fence farms, and it is quite likely that this was the intention of the enclosure commissioners. There were however a small number of instances in which they were unable to create ring-fence farms largely due to the situation of existing holdings.

In our other case studies enclosure was much less important for the creation of ring-fence farms, partly due to the constraints of existing holdings already observed in Milfield, but also due to greater importance being placed on other factors. At Longhorsley the legacy of earlier events was particularly important. An enclosure agreement of 1664, which appears to have largely or entirely enclosed common waste, seems to have allotted land in blocks, but earlier piecemeal enclosure had already established a fragmented pattern of landownership. The agreement of 1664 only awarded 961 acres and 11 perches of land, which is a small fraction of the 6205 acres within the parish. Examination of the forms of fields reveals a pattern of long, thin fields – some with reversed S-shaped boundaries – near the village, and rectangular fields with straighter boundaries further out. In some places the regular fields have names indicative of former common, such as 'The Freehold Moor' (Figure 1). This pattern is to be explained by piecemeal enclosure of an area of long thin fields followed by enclosure by agreement of the more regular areas. A 1719 plan of Bigge's Quarter shows that the pattern of occupation in the area of long thin fields was itself quite fragmented as the result of piecemeal enclosure. The enclosure of 1664 brought additional complexity to an already very fragmented pattern of ownership.

At Learmouth on the other hand, consolidation occurred several decades before enclosure. Enclosure was achieved by two processes. Firstly an agreement of 1778 enclosed some glebe and gave land in lieu of tithes creating a small ring-fence farm called Tithe Hill. The remainder of the land belonged to one owner and was farmed by one tenant, and so could be enclosed by unity of possession in 1799. The result of this enclosure thus had no effect on farm consolidation which occurred by pre-enclosure engrossment and in a way which will be described in detail below.

At Elsdon the process was more complex. It appears that in many cases the parliamentary enclosure of 1731 attempted to create ring-fence farms, but sacrificed this to other more important considerations. The enclosure commissioners fragmented holdings by awarding lands in more than one piece. In most cases this was to provide at least some land next to the original tenement, and it is thus most common near the villages and hamlets. For example, three of the allotments for farms in the hamlet of Hatherwick were divided in two, with one piece near the village and another further north. Bartholomew Hedley's allotment for Landshot was also split into three pieces, one next to the original tenement, one further east on the common proper, and the third on a small piece of common called East Fair Moor in the

²⁴ NRO, ZCU/16, correspondence William Orde to Mr Laidler, 22 Apr. 1791.

middle of the ancient land. Knightside and Spartishaw are also good examples. In these cases if the whole of Spartishaw allotment had been put next to the farm it would have surrounded Knightside, so a small piece was placed near to Spartishaw itself and the rest further south, splitting the Knightside allotment. These could be considered to be an unavoidable outcome and is certainly the consequence of the pre-existing pattern of landownership. They do however result just as much from certain factors, such as proximity to the ancient holding or land quality, being considered more important than compactness. This is all the more significant when it is realized that it would have been possible for the owners of the lands involved to have allowed the creation of ring-fence farms by making the entire township – including ancient enclosures – subject to the Enclosure Act.

In a few cases the enclosure commissioners did attempt to make compact allotments, possibly at the instruction of the landowners. This was difficult because the large number of proprietors meant that some allotments could not be placed next to the appropriate ancient holdings. There were, however, some strategies which the commissioners used to overcome this. The most common was to treat several farms owned by the same person as one. A certain area of land was allotted in proportion to the total area of the farms, which was then divided between each of the farms as convenient. This meant that each could be of the most suitable size for the space in which it was to be put. For example, part of an allotment to Matthew Reed for Shittleheugh was placed with his allotment for Killhouse on the other side of the township.²⁵ In this case the award specifies that this was at his direction, and it seems likely that this option could only be exercised with the owner's consent.²⁶ Similarly, Charles Francis Howard's properties at Heirshouse and High Carrick were treated in this way but not his tenement at East Hatherwick,²⁷ showing that this was not automatically done in cases of a proprietor owning several properties. Thus, we see that at Elsdon a number of factors were taken into consideration by the commissioners when placing the allotments. The result of this was that, although compact holdings were valued, other factors like the convenience of having land near earlier allotments or the differing quality of land across the township were sometimes thought more important, resulting in dispersed holdings. Some proprietors can be shown to have had a greater desire than others for compact holdings as they gave the commissioners instructions to this effect.

Piecemeal enclosure could also contribute to consolidation. Up to this point we have discussed piecemeal enclosure as a force for creating dispersed ownership patterns. However, by joining open field strips it did consolidate to some extent. This is best demonstrated in Elsdon where, by 1839, a large area of the remaining open field comprised one farm called Landshot, with only a few small strips around it. The remaining strips continued to be consolidated throughout the late nineteenth century. Often this was done by tenants who leased strips adjoining one another. A particularly good example is the case of Mr Gow who bought one strip in 1874 then attempted to buy a neighbouring strip later in the same year.²⁸ The sale of the second strip did not go through, however, probably because it was glebe. From 1895, however,

²⁵ NRO, QRD3, Elsdon enclosure plan, 1731.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ NRO, ZHE/14/3, correspondence, J. Snowball to C. S. Bell, 14 Apr. 1874, C. S. Bell to A. Proctor, 4 Oct. 1873 – 14 Apr. 1874.

he leased it²⁹ and so joined the strips in practice. Thus, piecemeal enclosure was often a step towards consolidation even though it did not usually result immediately in ring-fence farms.

The preceding discussion shows that while enclosure is important in the creation of compact farms it is far from being the only force at work in the process, and indeed could work to produce fragmented holdings. This supports Yelling's conclusions that different types of enclosure produced different levels of consolidation and that parliamentary enclosure often left detached parcels of farms.³⁰ It therefore goes some way to correcting a common implication that ring-fence farms result from enclosure in most cases. This article will go on to investigate some of the other influences and processes at work in the townships under consideration in order to reveal what they were and who was behind them.

III

In addition to enclosure the most obvious way in which ring-fence farms were created was by the joining of fields through purchase or by lease, essentially a process of engrossment. This process can be detected on both sides of enclosure in all of our townships. Both tenants and landlords participated in the process, however there is some evidence that tenants were more important. We have already seen the importance of tenants in piecemeal enclosure, but it can also be demonstrated in post-enclosure consolidation. This is perhaps clearest at Elsdon. An analysis of the 1840 tithe apportionment shows that occupation was much more consolidated than ownership (Figures 3 and 4 see pp. 50–51). There are many documented examples of tenants taking the leases of adjacent properties. Often these properties become almost permanently associated, as one was let to the tenant of the other habitually despite the fact that they were under different ownerships. This association led to physical changes to the properties in some cases as the boundaries between them were allowed to deteriorate. A farm called Bainshaw Bog provides a good example. This was formed from part of an allotment for Stichells,³¹ which was divided between Lowick and Alwinton glebe.³² At the time of the tithe commutation Bainshaw Bog was let to Andrew Brown who was also the tenant of the neighbouring Pearson's House. By 1864 this had been let to Michael and Thomas Thornton who had previously bought Pearson's house.³³ From the lack of field boundaries shown on the 1866 Ordnance Survey it appears that the Thorntons simply ran stock across the whole area. The Flatt Fell is similar and appears to have always been let to the tenant of Dunshield. At the time of the tithe commutation this was Edward Charlton, who first took the property in 1826.³⁴ By 1848 both had been let to Robert Fail.³⁵ The Flatt Fell became so closely associated with Dunshield that the boundaries between the two were allowed to fall into disrepair.³⁶ In

²⁹ NRO, DN/E/9/1/103, Alwinton and Holystone glebe terrier, 20 Mar. 1895.

³⁰ Yelling, *Common field*, pp. 120–45.

³¹ NRO, QRD3, Elsdon enclosure award, 1731.

³² NRO, DT164M, Elsdon tithe apportionment, 1840.

³³ NRO, ZHE/14/3, Lease of Bainshaw Bog, 12 May 1864, NRO, ZBS/26/1, will of Robert Thornton, 29 Oct. 1814.

³⁴ NRO, DT164M, Elsdon tithe apportionment, 1840, ZHE/14/4 rough notes probably by John Bell.

³⁵ Durham University Special Collections [hereafter DUSC], DRPI/1/1848/T12/1–2 will of Thomas Thornton, 14 Jan. 1848, NRO, ZHE/14/13, 1852 survey of Flatt Fell.

³⁶ NRO, ZHE/14/13, valuation of lands at Elsdon, 1868.

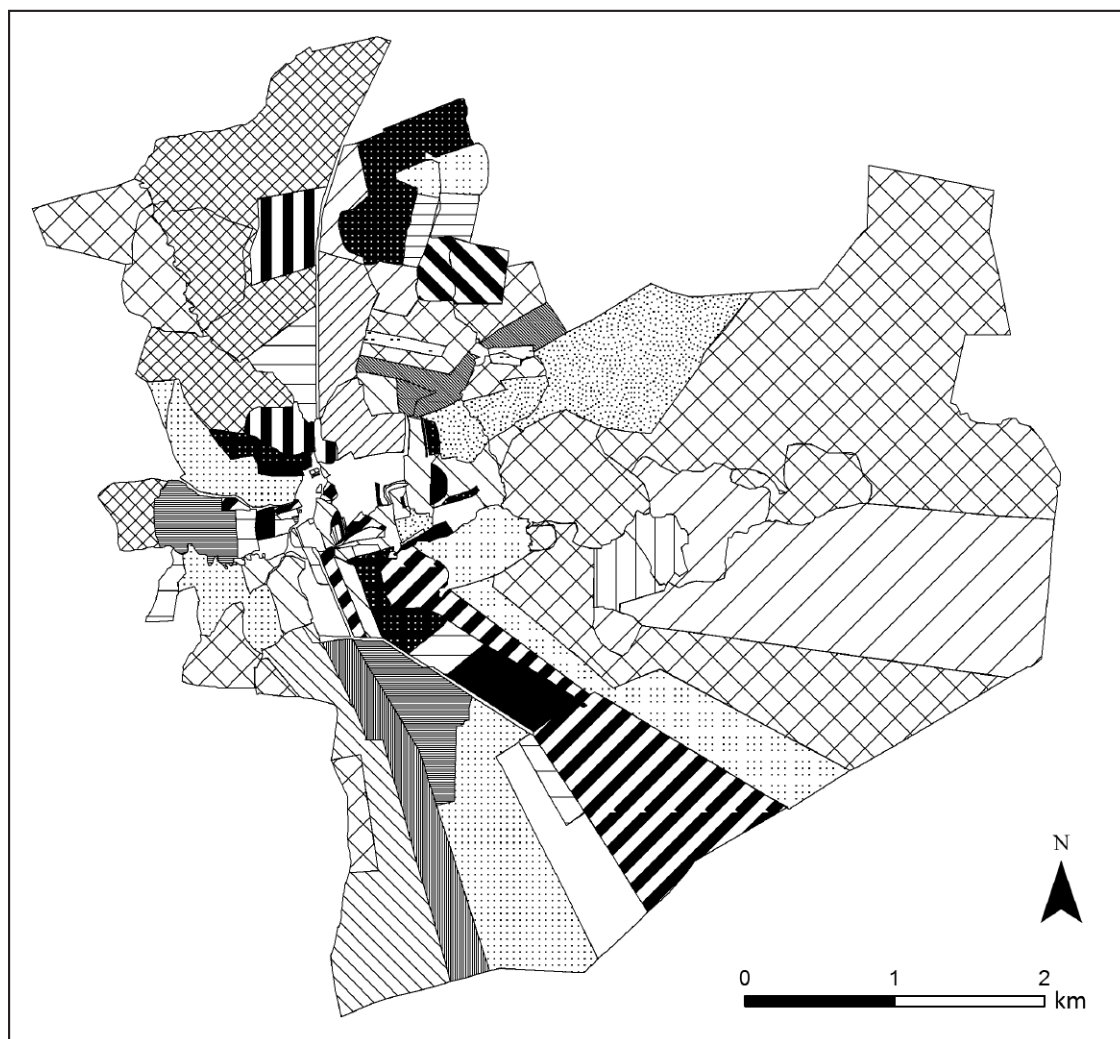


FIGURE 3. Plan showing the pattern of farm occupation in Elsdon based on the 1840 tithe plan (NRO, DT164M), each pattern represents a different occupier. Note that the occupation is much more consolidated than ownership shown in Figure 4.

both these cases the properties in question were commonly let together, and were thus, very close to the ideal of a ring-fence farm, albeit one rented from two owners.

There are also cases of landowners joining farms by purchase, though, in Elsdon at least, these are less frequent than those made by tenants. Knightside and Spartishaw farms provide one example. By 1840, the ancient land of these two farms had been joined together to form Knightside and Spartishaw, while the enclosure allotment had been joined to the neighbouring Redshaw.³⁷ A similar process happened at East Nook, where all the allotments for East Nook and two for Landshot were joined together. By 1840 they were owned by William Orde,

³⁷ NRO, DT164M, Elsdon tithe apportionment, 1840.

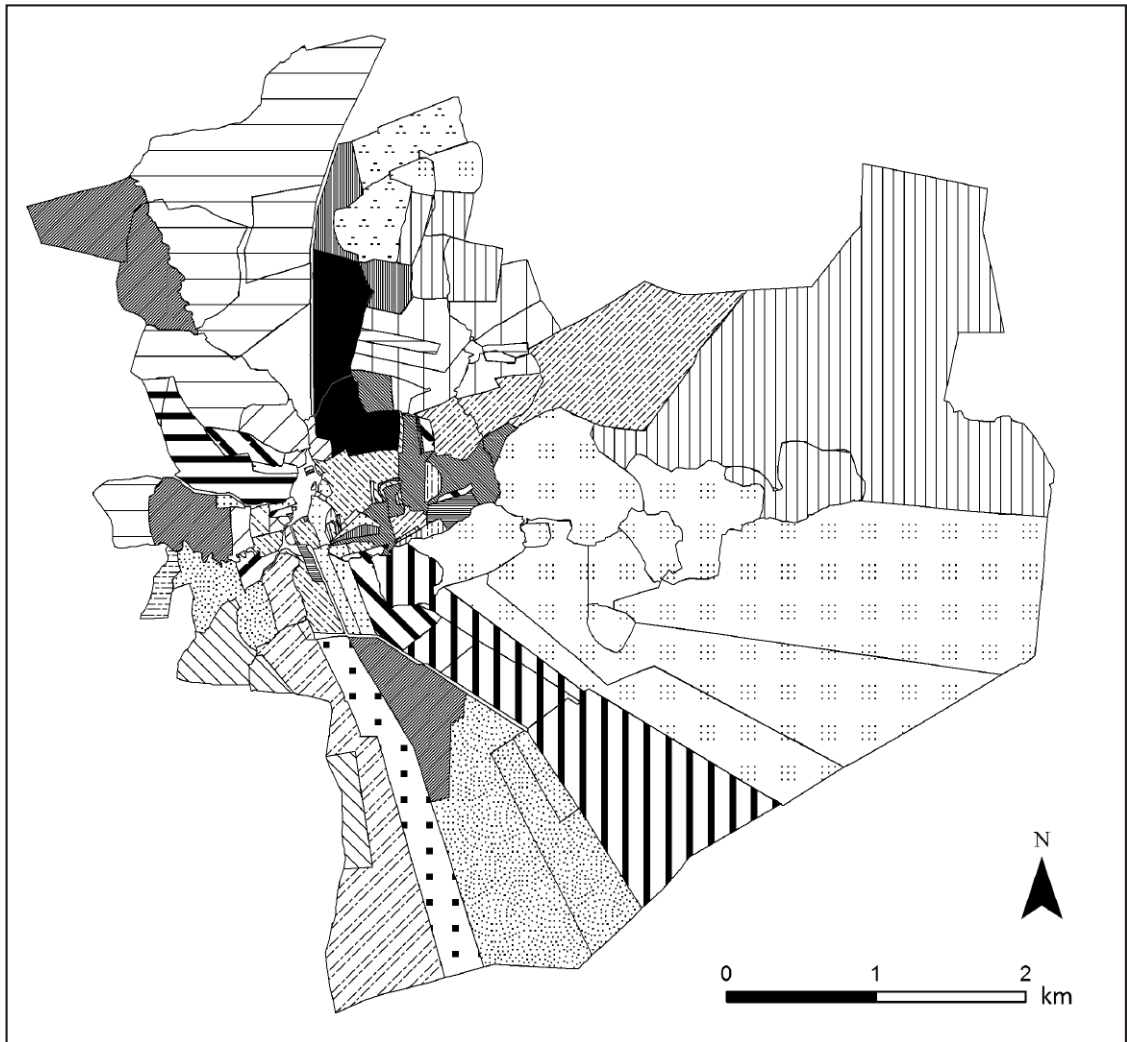


FIGURE 4, Plan showing the pattern of ownership in Elsdon based on the 1840 tithe plan (NRO, DT164M), each pattern represents a different owner. Note that ownership is much less compact than occupation shown in Figure 3. Also note that the dotted and striped properties are particularly dispersed and result from a number of different purchased of separate parcels.

who, perhaps significantly, was also the owner of Knightside and Spartishaw.³⁸ Among other examples, three very small allotments in a detached piece of common called East Fair Moor had been joined by 1840.³⁹ One of these allotments was made to Thomas Hedley who also owned a farm in the hamlet of Hudspeth.⁴⁰ By 1840 the three allotments had become part of Hedley's Hudspeth farm,⁴¹ suggesting that he or one of his successors had joined them.

³⁸ NRO, DT164M, Elsdon tithe apportionment, 1840.

³⁹ NRO, QRD3, Elsdon enclosure plan, 1731, DT164M, Elsdon tithe plan, 1840.

⁴⁰ NRO, QRD3, Elsdon enclosure award, 1731.

⁴¹ NRO, DT164M, Elsdon tithe plan, 1840.

At Milfield tenants and land owners also consolidated parcels of land following enclosure despite the extent to which enclosure had already consolidated farms. One instance occurred when Lowry sold his allotment to John and George Grey, who were tenants of the Greys of Howick, effectively joining it to their farm at Milfield Hill. The only other case is when the Earl of Tankerville leased his allotments to the tenants of Francis Blake against whose farm they abutted. In both these cases lands were amalgamated to form a ring-fence farm in practice by joining lands of different owners under one occupier.

At Longhorsley the tenants also appear to have created ring-fence farms in the decades following enclosure, though they must have required the consent of the landlord who may even have encouraged it. Comparison of plans of 1719 and 1773 shows the effect that changes in tenants had on farm boundaries (Figure 5).⁴² An example of this is the area in the west of the township which is marked as Henry Kirsop's, Widow Hume's, Young's, Carnaby's and Town's Farms on the 1773 plan (Figure 5). The boundaries of these seem to result from a series of events which occurred between 1740 and 1743 and which can be reconstructed from rentals. In 1740 the farms in this area were held by William Grey, William Bell and Margaret Leighton; Ralph Young and Ralph Carnaby held farms in Todburn bordering this area.⁴³ It is not possible to determine exactly which parts were held by each tenant without the book of survey which accompanied the 1719 plan. This plan shows a small parcel in the south-west, which is probably that belonging to William Grey (Figure 5).⁴⁴ On the east of this is a much larger area stretching from the north to the south edges of the map. Further to the east is an area in which some or all field boundaries may be depicted. From the descriptions in some 1719 leases these last two areas must have been divided between at least two farms.⁴⁵ In 1740 a man called Thomas Pinkney took both William Bell's and William Grey's farms, uniting most of the land in this area.⁴⁶ At the same time George Leighton inherited his mother's farm.⁴⁷ The opportunity seems to have been taken to rearrange the boundaries of the farms in this area, creating the east-west boundary between widow Hume's and Henry Kirsop's farms on the 1773 plan.⁴⁸ Further changes occurred in the following year, when Pinkney left. Part of his lands was let to Thomas Hume and Edward Towns as partners and the rest to Ralph Carnaby and Henry Young who were also partners.⁴⁹ The fact that Carnaby and Young only paid £24 per annum in rent suggests that they were enlarging their own or, in the case of Henry Young, their relatives', farms in neighbouring Todburn.⁵⁰ This seems to be confirmed by the 1773 plan which disguises the tenurially complex situation showing the Longhorsely land simply as extensions of their separate farms in Todburn and drawing a boundary straight through the Longhorsley farms

⁴² DUSC, HNP1967/Lambert Plans, fos 6v-7r, plan of Longhorsley, 1719, and N190/97 plan of Longhorsley and Hayclose, 1773.

⁴³ DUSC, N113, rental of Longhorsley and Hayclose, 1740.

⁴⁴ DSUC, HNP1967/Lambert Plans, fos 6v-7r, plan of Longhorsley, 1719.

⁴⁵ DUSC, N12/29-34 and DUSC, N31/2, 29 Apr. 1719.

⁴⁶ DUSC, N113, rental of Longhorsley and Hayclose, 1740. The analysis carried out here required examination

of the whole sequence of rentals, which makes directing the reader to a single rental for a piece of information difficult. Where particular rentals are cited here they are the rental following the change referred to in the text.

⁴⁷ DUSC, N113, rental, 1740.

⁴⁸ DUSC, N190/97, plan of Longhorsley and Hayclose, 1773.

⁴⁹ DUSC, N113, rental, 1741.

⁵⁰ DUSC, N113, rental, 1741.

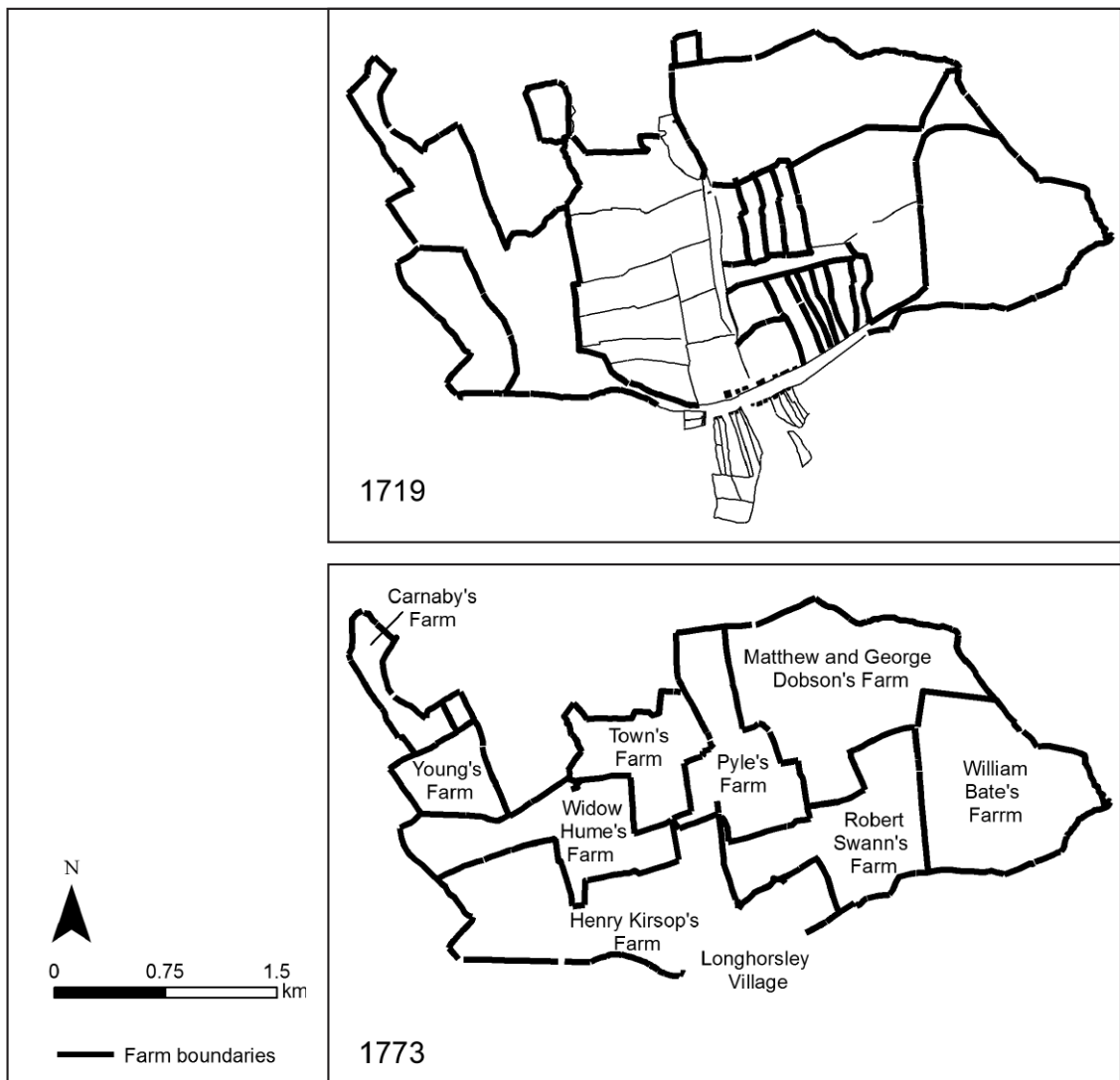


FIGURE 5, Plans of Bigge's Quarter, Longhorsley in 1719 (based on DUSC, HNP1967/Lambert Plans, fos 6v–7r) and 1773 (based on N190/97). Note that farms become consolidated between the two plans as described in the text.

which were still a single farm in the rentals (Figure 5).⁵¹ Thus, the 1741 changes created the northern boundary of Hume's Farm and the boundary between Carnaby's and Young's farms, which seems to simply be an extension of the boundary of their earlier farms. The final change to the boundaries in this area was the division of the jointly held farm of Town and Hume in 1743 creating the final boundary of the 1773 plan (Figure 5).⁵² Kirsop later replaced Leighton before the 1773 plan was made.

⁵¹ DUSC, N190/97, plan of Longhorsley and Hay-close, 1773.

⁵² DUSC, N114, rental, 1743.

In the eastern half of the township there was a similar degree of consolidation of leasehold farms including the amalgamation of several small strips which had originated through piecemeal enclosure. On the 1719 plan the strips are in two groups with an east-west finger of land between them, possibly an area of common grazing around a track and almost certainly a former headland.⁵³ The strips to the north of this were added to a piece of land taken from George Dobson the younger's farm to the north and some land to the west to create Pile's farm. Robert Pile was the tenant of this in 1773, but had only come to it through his marriage to Ann Dobson.⁵⁴ She had, in turn, inherited it from her first husband William who had it from his grandfather William. This elder William split a large farm between three sons, one of whom was the younger William's father John.⁵⁵ The farms from which land had been taken to create the 1773 Pile's Farm were probably those of George Dobson, who still held his farm in 1773, and James Dobson, which having been rented by William Grey had mostly become Town's and Hume's farms through the changes described above.⁵⁶ Both James and George were also sons of William Dobson senior. While the boundaries of Pile's Farm cannot have been created by the division of William Dobson's land between his sons in 1699, it may be that the tenantry of these farms by close relatives aided the quite complex alterations which were carried out. Nonetheless, such alterations could not have been carried out without at least the consent of the landlord, and may have been entirely his decision.

The group of strips to the south of this were also amalgamated to form Robert Swann's farm along with the headland between the two groups of strips and some of the block of land to the north-east of this.⁵⁷ It was actually divided between George Dobson's farm and Robert Swann's farm though it is not possible to show whose it had been before this time. This led to the removal of several of the boundaries between the strips in order to create large fields.⁵⁸ These alterations are more difficult to connect to the tenants of the farm. Robert Swan's predecessor in the rentals is another George Dobson,⁵⁹ who held the farm until 1748. There is no evidence that either he or Swann divided his farm or joined it to others. It is possible that the two George Dobsons were related, though clearly not directly, and that such blood ties may have helped negotiation. An alternative possibility is that the farm was created for Robert Swann, which may explain why the rent was increased by £1 on his arrival.⁶⁰ In this case it could be that the landlord created a new farm when George Dobson left in order to make it easier to let. Finally, the 1773 farm may be a combination of both changes made by George Dobson the elder and those made for Robert Swann's arrival. Thus, in three of our four townships, processes of engrossment contributed to farm consolidation for decades or even centuries after enclosure. These processes were performed by both landlords and tenants but on the whole tenants seem to have led the way.

Very similar processes operated before enclosure, and at Learmouth led to complete consolidation before enclosure by unity of possession in 1799. Learmouth had been the property of

⁵³ DUSC, HNP1967/Lambert Plans, fos 6v-7r, 1719 plan of Longhorsley, 1719.

⁵⁴ DUSC, N116, rental, 1755.

⁵⁵ DUSC, N108/12, p. 84 lease, 13 Sept. 1700, DUSC, N113 rental, 1739.

⁵⁶ DUSC, N112-7, rentals.

⁵⁷ DUSC, HNP1967/Lambert Plans, fos 6v-7r, plan of Longhorsley, 1719.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ DUSC, N115, rental, 1748.

⁶⁰ DUSC, N111, rental, 1774.

the Greys of Howick in its entirety since the medieval period, so the engrossment here is nearly entirely the work of the tenants. The process began before the earliest documents, but can be picked up in its early stages in a rental of 1708.⁶¹ This lists eleven tenants at Learmouth. Of these, six: John Hall, John, William and Widow Crawford, Lionel Bolton and Ralph Archibald, held farms. The remaining tenants held a malt barn and kiln (Thomas Tebbitt), a mill (William and Thomas Bolton) and a cottage (Stephen Elliot and John Murdy). The evidence of engrossment is limited but present as John Hall held two separate farms, one called Learmouth and Cornhillhaugh, and another called Hurtch Law and Mill Land. In 1712 two of the farms of the 1708 rental, those of John and William Crawford and Lionel Bolton, and the Malt barn and kiln held by Thomas Tebbitt were engrossed by a Thomas Gregson of Sunnilaws. The lease describes this property as “those six farmes com[m]only called the West side of Learmouth”,⁶² which suggests that Bolton and the Crawfords had also engrossed farms. This was the beginning of a sequence of events which ultimately led to the whole of Learmouth coming into the tenure of one Anthony Compton.

In 1719 Anthony Compton of Berwick-upon-Tweed began to acquire tenancies in Learmouth. This is recorded in a 1719 lease of a farm called Hurch Law and Mill Land.⁶³ The rent of £22 7s. *od.* is close to either the farm of Widow Crawford or that of John Hall in the 1708 rental. Unfortunately the 1719 lease records Anthony Compton as the occupier so it is not possible to determine which. By 11 June 1724 a lease shows that he had also acquired a farm called Cornhillhaugh and Learmouth. The rent of this is the same as that of the holding of John Hall (£110) so they are probably the same farm, though, as before, Compton was already in possession by a lease of the previous 22 June. Following the occupation of Cornhillhaugh and Learmouth, Compton surrendered his 1719 lease,⁶⁴ presumably so that it would expire in the same year as that for Cornhillhaugh. This was described as six farms, and was let for £72 per annum. It must represent a larger farm than in the 1719 lease of Mill lands and Hurch Law, and probably shows that Compton had taken one or both of the farms of Ralph Archibald and Widow Crawford. In 1729 Compton acquired the mill from John Gregson.

It appears that by 1729 the whole township was in the hands of two people: Compton and Gregson. Compton completed his acquisition of the township in 1733 when Gregson surrendered his lease of Learmouth Westside.⁶⁵ Compton then surrendered his leases of Learmouth eastside, Mill lands and Hurch Law and Cornhillhaugh, and replaced them with new leases. The final act of consolidation was an agreement made to enclose the glebe between 1778 and 1793.⁶⁶ The exact details of this are unknown but Ralph Compton (at length the heir of Anthony Compton), and Sir Henry Grey, the owner of the Learmouth farms, had jointly acquired the glebe and most of the tithes in 1778.⁶⁷ Grey then allotted lands to Compton in exchange for his portion of the glebe and some tithes.⁶⁸ This essentially enclosed the glebe, thus

⁶¹ DUSC, GRE/X/P80, rental, 1708.

⁶² DUSC, GRE/X/P72, lease, 1712.

⁶³ DUSC, GRE/X/P73, lease, 1719.

⁶⁴ DUSC, GRE/X/P73, lease of Mill lands and Hurch Law.

⁶⁵ DUSC, GRE/X/P74, lease, Learmouth Westside, 1733.

⁶⁶ DUSC, GRE/X/P276, map with a note concerning the tithes and glebe, 1793.

⁶⁷ DUSC, GRE/X/P29, Lease for a year of Learmouth Glebe and certain tithes, 28 Oct. 1778.

⁶⁸ DUSC, GRE/X/P276, map with a note concerning the tithes and glebe, 1793.

dividing the whole of Learmouth into two ring-fence farms, one Tithe Hill, owned outright by Ralph Compton and the other, much larger, farm rented by him from Grey.

We can now appreciate the importance of pre- and post-enclosure processes in the creation of ring-fence farms. It has also been shown that both landlords and tenants were involved in these processes, though tenants may have been slightly more important. The caveat to this is that landlords determined to whom farms were let and would have had at least to agree to any boundary change. This may have allowed them to encourage engrossment by selecting tenants who wanted to join parcels of land, or by suggesting boundary changes while negotiating the lease. This however would not explain the cases observed in Elsdon where tenants joined lands owned by more than one landlord.

IV

In addition to the engrossment discussed above ring-fence farms were also created by the construction of new farmsteads on detached portions of farms. This was only ever done by landlords because a farmhouse was fixed capital and therefore their property. This, obviously, could only occur where the detached piece was large enough to support an entire farm. Perhaps more importantly it could only be done when the landowner was wealthy enough to make the necessary investment. An obvious example is the creation of Wark West Common Farm near Learmouth. In 1799 a parliamentary enclosure allotted land on Wark Common for rights held by the owner of Learmouth.⁶⁹ This allotment was detached from the other Learmouth farms because Learmouth township does not adjoin Wark Common. Shortly thereafter a farm was built on the allotment and appears on the first edition Ordnance Survey.⁷⁰ In this case the owner was the Earl Grey, who certainly had the capital to invest in building work. Similar examples may be seen in Elsdon. Here farmhouses were constructed on five detached enclosure allotments. Of these Pearson's House is the only one for which documents survive. This was built on the allotment for an open field holding called Burnstones. It was almost certainly built after the purchase of the farm by a Mr Thomas Pearson in 1766.⁷¹ Pearson was wealthy, and had made his fortune from owning a quarry at Walbottle.⁷² In this case then the construction of a new farmstead awaited the arrival of someone with the money to build it. It is possible that the detached allotments on which no new farms were built were always owned by people without the means to build on them.

Thus, we have seen that two types of pre- and post-enclosure processes, farm building and engrossment, sit alongside enclosure in the creation of ring-fence farms. We have also seen that both tenants and landlords were involved in these processes and that an ability to invest was necessary. The importance of wealth is also evident in townships where ring-fence farms did not form.

⁶⁹ NRO, QRA 63/1, Wark enclosure award, 1799.

⁷⁰ First Edition Ordnance Survey.

⁷¹ NRO, ZBS/26/2, lease and release of a moiety of

Burnstones, 28–29 Feb. 1820.

⁷² NRO, ZBS/26/2, Will of Thomas Pearson, 30 May

1773.

V

And so we turn to considering the barriers to farm consolidation. Two of our townships, Elsdon and Freeholder's Quarter, Longhorsely, never became dominated by ring-fence farms. Freeholder's Quarter is less well documented than Elsdon but provides a clear example of the type of landholding pattern to be discussed. Nearly all the farms in Freeholder's Quarter comprise a group of small closes near the village, usually including a house, and in most cases a block of land further out in the west of the township (Figure 1).⁷³ This pattern probably resulted from piecemeal enclosure of lands near the village followed by the enclosure of more peripheral lands by agreement. Very few of the closes of any one farm lie next to one another, suggesting that little attempt had been made at consolidation. The difference between Freeholder's Quarter and the other two Longhorsley townships may be because Freeholder's Quarter contained several freehold farms, whereas the other two townships were almost entirely owned by one person each. This means that the boundaries shown on the tithe map of Freeholder's Quarter are ownership boundaries as well as occupation boundaries. As a result, for parcels in Freeholder's Quarter to be amalgamated actual purchases, requiring large amounts of capital, were necessary rather than just the renegotiation of leases as in the other two townships. This may imply that there was no lack of willingness on the part of the owners of Freeholder's Quarter to create ring-fence farms, simply a lack of the capital to do so.

Elsdon has already been discussed in detail, and also had a large number of freehold farms. In Figure 4 each pattern represents a different freeholder. Often these properties are quite fragmented, for instance the striped lands which belong to William Laidler and the dotted lands belonging to Thomas Thornton are both spread across most of the township. In both of these cases, and many others, the creation of a ring-fence farm would require several, possibly quite expensive, transactions. It is quite likely that it was the greater amount of capital required to purchase freehold farms, in comparison with renting leasehold farms, which prevented ring-fence farms becoming common in open townships.

In addition to this there were also cases of landowners and tenants who were prepared to create fragmented holdings and thus had little regard for farm consolidation. There are several cases of people purchasing lands which are separate from one another. The best example of this is Thomas Thornton. He came from Harwood, to the south of Elsdon and purchased several farms between 1810 and 1825.⁷⁴ The first was Scotch Arms, which was purchased jointly with his father in 1810 (see Figure 6 for the locations of all these properties).⁷⁵ Robert and Thomas also jointly owned Mill Lands, so this was probably bought under a similar arrangement.⁷⁶ He bought Townfoot Farm from Eleanor and Robert Blakey on in 1816. Following this he purchased Burnstones in two parts from Francis and Thomas Pearson in 1820 and 1825.⁷⁷ Finally, Thomas Thornton bought Low Mote from Alexander Hall in 1824.⁷⁸ Few of these purchases adjoin pieces

⁷³ NRO, DT192M, tithe plan of Freeholder's Quarter. 1814.

⁷⁴ E.g. NRO, ZBS/26/2, release of a moiety of Burnstones, 29 Feb. 1820.

⁷⁵ NRO, ZBS/26/2, release of Scotch Arms lands, 12 May 1810.

⁷⁶ NRO, ZBS/26/1, will of Robert Thornton, 29 Oct.

⁷⁷ NRO, ZBS/26/2, lease and release of a moiety of Burnstones, 28–29 Feb. 1820, ZBS/26/2 lease and release of a moiety of Burnstones, 17–18 May 1825.

⁷⁸ NRO, ZBS/26/2, Conveyance of Low Moat, 11 May 1824.

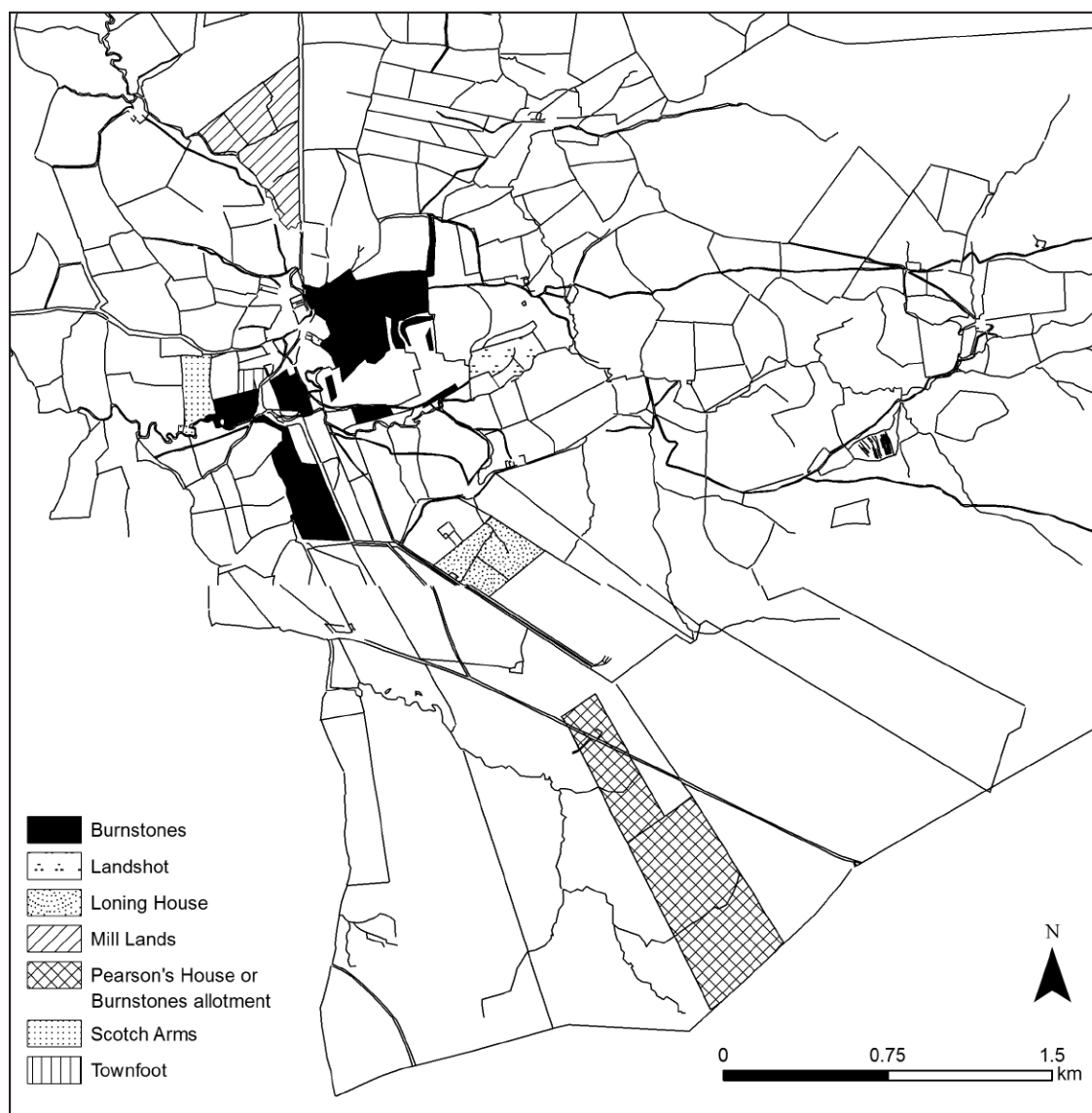


FIGURE 6. Plan of the estate built up in Elsdon by Thomas Thornton in the early nineteenth century. Note that it does not form a ring-fence farm.

of land already in his possession, so it is unlikely that Thornton intended to create a ring-fence estate. It might be noted, however, that they are concentrated in the centre of the township, apart from some outlying pieces which were bought in the same transactions as more central lands. It may be significant that, though Thornton was a farmer, he did not farm his lands in Elsdon but let them to tenants. Many of these tenants did join pieces of land together to make near-ring-fence farms. There are, however, also cases of tenants taking detached pieces of land.

Such tenants were prepared to create farms of dispersed closes by renting fields individually. One example is James Brown, who was tenant of the Flatt and Moat Hills from the Duke of

Northumberland⁷⁹ and part of Scotch Arms from Thomas Thornton.⁸⁰ Some notes made by the surveyor Thomas Bell record that James Brown rented the Flatt in 1839. Before 1847 he acquired Moat Hills, which is directly opposite the Flatt but separated from it by a road.⁸¹ A James Brown is recorded as the tenant of the fields belonging to Scotch Arms in the 1848 will of Thomas Thornton; Brown was dead by 1848 but this is only around a year afterwards and such descriptions of farms can be out of date. These fields did not join to Brown's other tenements, so by taking this lease he only increased the size of his holding and did not make a ring-fence farm. Mote Hills, due to its small size, was often joined to other property by tenants. For example, Archdeacon Singleton, whose rectory is opposite Moat Hills but separated from it by a road, rented it in 1825.⁸² Andrew Amos at least tried to rent it, as he wrote a letter expressing his interest in 1848. In this letter he says that one of his reasons for wanting it is that he already held the Haugh.⁸³ So he appears to be attempting to build up a farm in Elsdon, though again, the Haugh does not physically join to Moat Hills. Amos also held the enclosure allotments for Burnstones and Townfoot and a house in Red Hall field from Thomas Thornton.⁸⁴ Robert Fail, who was tenant of Low Mote, Burnstones, the Flatt Fell and Dunshield,⁸⁵ is a further example. He tried to purchase freehold land at Cheek Gate and Bainshaw Bog in the 1870s, and was to become the tenant of these in 1896 according to an 1895 glebe terrier.⁸⁶

In these two townships, then, we see the interplay of several different factors in preventing or slowing the creation of ring-fence farms. Perhaps most important is the division of the townships into several dispersed freehold farms. This meant that in order to join parcels of land their freeholds had to be purchased. This would have been much more expensive than the renegotiation of leases required in more closed townships and so was less frequent. It also meant that lack of wealth could reduce the ability of farmers to consolidate their lands, as a wealthy landowner would be more likely to be able to make the purchases necessary to create a ring-fence farm. Indeed the importance of wealth has already been observed at Learmouth where Anthony Compton who was a particularly wealthy tenant was responsible for joining leasehold farms. Finally, several instances of both tenants and landowners creating dispersed holdings have been observed at Elsdon suggesting that ring-fence farms were not considered essential in all cases.

VI

While the case studies described here do not allow estimation of the importance of different processes by which ring-fence farms were formed, and probably fail to demonstrate some processes that operated in other places, they do allow an appreciation of the complexity of

⁷⁹ NRO, ZHE/14/13, valuation of Flatt and Moat Hills, 1852.

⁸⁰ DUSC, DRPI/1/1848/T12/1-2, will of Thomas Thornton, 14 Jan. 1848.

⁸¹ NRO, ZHE/14/13, valuation of Flatt and Moat Hills, 1852.

⁸² NRO, ZHE/14/13, valuation of Moat Hills, 1852.

⁸³ NRO, ZHE/14/13, correspondence, A. Amos to

T. Tate, 22 Jan. 1848.

⁸⁴ DUSC, DRPI/1/1848/T12/1-2, will of Thomas Thornton, 14 Jan. 1848.

⁸⁵ Ibid.; NOR, ZHE/14/13, survey of Flatt Fell, 1852. It is possible that he held these consecutively rather than at the same time.

⁸⁶ NRO, DN/E/9/1/103, Alwinton and Holystone terrier, 20 Mar. 1895.

consolidation, and the place of enclosure within it. Enclosure has certainly been shown to be important for farm consolidation. This was especially clear at Milfield, where the final part of enclosure left a near-perfect pattern of ring-fence farms. Of our townships it best fits the traditional view that enclosure was the principal agent of farm consolidation.⁸⁷ The remaining four, however, suggest that Milfield may in fact be exceptional. Enclosure also contributed to consolidation at Elsdon and Longhorsley where piecemeal enclosure, enclosure by agreement and parliamentary enclosure all created blocks of land which were more easily made into ring-fence farms later. Indeed at Elsdon the commissioners often added to fragmentation by allotting several different plots for one farm. There is some evidence, however, that they avoided fragmentation, as they occasionally joined the allotments for the farms of one owner in order to create conveniently sized parcels. This is somewhat similar to the conclusions of Yelling who found that the role of enclosure in farm consolidation varied depending on the type of enclosure.⁸⁸

However, pre- and post-enclosure processes are at least as important. Indeed at Learmouth the enclosure of 1799 dealt with an already ring-fence farm, as a result of engrossment of leasehold farms which occurred in the early eighteenth century. At Elsdon, Longhorsley and Milfield tenants and landowners contributed to post-enclosure consolidation by buying or renting neighbouring fields. Wealth was often necessary for both pre- and post-enclosure consolidation which required either buying land or renting and stocking an enlarged farm. It is probably no coincidence that Anthony Compton, the most successful engrosser studied here, was an Alderman of Berwick-upon-Tweed.

It seems to have been quite common for tenants to be involved in consolidation. Certainly at Elsdon the pattern of occupation in 1840 is much more compact than that of ownership, while at Bigge's Quarter, Longhorsely the tenants appear to have created ring-fence farms through a piecemeal process of renegotiation of farm boundaries at the arrival of new tenants. In the last instance it is possible that the landlord encouraged this and was more prepared to let to tenants who would take a ring-fence farm, however this would not explain the cases of tenant consolidation at Elsdon where there was no single powerful landlord. The role of tenants in the process is perhaps unexpected given the fact that many studies which describe farm consolidation incidentally to their main objectives often discuss cases of strong landlord involvement.⁸⁹ It is possible that such cases are more regularly reported because better documentation makes them more obvious in the absence of the detailed local examinations carried out here. Landlords were however solely responsible for the creation of ring-fence farms through farmhouse construction. This represents an additional method of farm consolidation, though one which often required large capital investment.

Finally, the open townships studied here, Freeholder's Quarter, Longhorsley and Elsdon never came to be dominated by ring-fence farms. This may suggest that it was more difficult to create ring-fence farms in townships where purchases were required in order to join parcels of land together. The desirability of ring-fence farms should not be over-emphasized however as many Elsdon tenants and landowners were prepared to farm dispersed holdings, and certainly

⁸⁷ Mingay, *Parliamentary enclosure*.

⁸⁸ Yelling, *Common field*, pp. 120–45.

⁸⁹ See references in nn. 10–13 above.

the opportunity to create ring-fence farms offered by the 1731 parliamentary enclosure was not taken. This re-evaluates the traditional picture of ring-fence farms as being universally favoured.

It is notable that there seems to be very little relationship between the farming system and the desirability of, or process by which, ring-fence farms were created. It is possible that Learmouth's early consolidation was an indirect result of its suitability for turnip rotations as this led to it being occupied by an improver who wanted a modern farm. Similarly Elsdon's incomplete consolidation may result from the relative poverty of its inhabitants which in turn results from its less fertile conditions. It may also be that without crops to transport from the fields to the farm that a ring-fence farm is less necessary in a largely pastoral economy. However, Freeholder's Quarter, which saw similar slow consolidation, is in a more fertile grain-focused area. Given the very general advantages cited by contemporary writers it is probable that the desirability for ring-fence farms transcended the differences between farming regimes, though examination of a wider geographical area would be required to confirm this.

It is hoped that the article presented here provides a starting point for the examination of a neglected subject. It cannot pretend to make a definitive statement on the formation of ring-fence farms from a small sample of townships from one corner of England, and from only a small range of the farming systems which operated in the country. It does however make a number of important suggestions which go some way to refuting the common assumption that enclosure created ring-fence farms and that these were necessarily desirable. It is hoped that future work elsewhere will expand the list of processes by which ring-fence farms came into being which has been started here.