

Chopwell

The earliest recorded evidence of human activity at Chopwell is a bronze age barrow (HER 337) identified in 1975. Chopwell Grange (HER 496) is known to have been in existence since the mid 12th century, occupying a tract of land lying largely on the north bank of the Derwent. It was granted by Bishop Hugh Pudsey to Newminster Abbey in the time of St. Robert, the first abbot (1138-59), and in the following century came to be called a grange, or in the 14th century, a manor, when there is reference to the abbot's east sheep pen. On a map of 1721 a large house or tower is shown on the site of the later Chopwell Hall, which is assumed to be the site of Chopwell Grange, although West Chopwell may have also been part of the same complex. Following the Dissolution: Chopwell was split into farms, with the rest, including Chopwell Woods being reserved by the Crown in the later 16th century. Chopwell Woods were an important feature in the medieval period, when it is recorded that they were used to supply timber for castles such as Bamburgh and Dunstanburgh, as well as for shipbuilding. A road made from tree trunks at Blackhall Mill (HER 5191) is thought to have been a roadway used for the transport of timber. The area settled into an economy based largely on farming - West Chopwell farmhouse is probably of comparable date to the original Chopwell Hall, probably dating from the early 18th century. However, small-scale coal working using surface quarrying techniques probably occurred from an early period and became more important in the 18th century. A large number of coal shafts are marked on early Ordnance Survey maps around the village (e.g. HER 3390-4), and some survive as visible remains. Local wagonways used for the transportation of coal include the Bail Hill Wagonway (HER 3351) and the Chopwell Way (HER 3342). The 19th century saw the opening of Chopwell Colliery and Armondside brickworks (HER 3385), which it supplied with fuel. The Colliery remained in operation until 1960, using the Garesfield and Chopwell railway for coal transportation (HER 3465). Industrial development, particularly coal mining led to the construction of extensive housing developments, along with schools, chapels and other public buildings.