

Westerhope (including Whorlton and Newbiggin)

The earliest evidence of human activity at Westerhope is the recorded discovery there of a Neolithic polished stone axe (HER 1253). Other prehistoric finds include a barbed and tanged arrowhead from Chapel Park and a flint arrowhead from the Hill Head Estate (HER 1251 and 1252), both of late Neolithic or early Bronze age origin. Later prehistoric settlement in the area is evidenced by a likely Iron Age enclosure shown on aerial photographs at nearby North Walbottle (HER ref, 1318). Little is known of the settlement history of the area before or during the medieval period, although it is likely that it was farmed - Black Swine Farm is recorded from the 18th century but may have earlier origins, as do Whorlton and Newbiggin which border modern Westerhope to the north. Whorlton was part of the manor of Newburn and was not separated from Newburn by definite boundaries until a comparatively late date. East Whorlton was said in 1825 to have consisted of one farmhold and four cottages; and West Whorlton or Whorlton House, and the farm, were occupied by Archibald Reed, Esq. A survey of the Lordship of Newburn undertaken for the Duke of Northumberland by J. Thompson in 1767 shows Whorleton (Whorlton Hall), Whorleton Moor House (Low Whorlton) and West Whorleton (Whorlton Grange – HER 1579). There are references in 1228-29 to a law suit concerning Newbiggin, and it is listed in other medieval documents with 8 tax-payers as 'Neubyging' Fawdon' which has been interpreted in the County History as "a settlement on the moor sent out from Fawdon". It was originally a member of the barony of Whalton in the ownership of the Greystoke family, then between the 15th-17th centuries in the hands of the Dacres and Howards, and the Bells of Woolsington from before 1826 to 1922. A map of 1789 appears to show two farms, High Newbiggin at the west end of the complex, and Low Newbiggin, in the Green, and with a pond, at the east end. By 1858 Newbiggin Hall (see below) had appeared beside (High) Newbiggin. The later history of the area continues to be associated with farming rather than industrialisation - the present Whorlton Grange (HER 1933) was built in the mid-19th century as a planned farm. Other farms present in the 19th century include Coley Hill Farm (HER 4956), Fell House Farm (HER 4955) and Hill Head Farm (HER 5082). However, some industrial activities were carried out in the area, including coal mining at North Walbottle colliery (HER 4235) and quarrying at the Whindyke Quarry (HER 4248) in use from the 18th century as a source of whinstone, and served by a trackway, the Whindykes Cartway (HER 1589). Along with the industrialisation of areas to the south of Westerhope came an increased demand for residential developments. A notable survival from the industrial period is James Street (HER 5157), a row of stone-built houses linked to a nearby colliery by a tramway which provided the houses with coal and removed refuse. Grand residences for industrialists were also built in this period, notably Newbiggin Hall (HER 1881), which replaced an earlier house of the Hudson family. In 1828 it was the residence of Henry, son of Matthew Bell MP of Woolsington. Later residents were Lt. Col. Charles James Reed, a brewer (c.1858-87), John Watson Spencer of Spencer's Steelworks in Newburn (from 1887), and from 1909 Gerald France MP. In the late 1950s the Hall was replaced with a public house which, in turn, has been destroyed. Later council estate developments have removed many traces of Westerhope's agricultural and industrial past. One of the few modern sites of local cultural heritage importance in the area is the site of a Second World War anti-aircraft battery (HER 5498).