

Dotland deserted: enclosure, economic change and personal ambition in early modern Northumberland

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There are well over 160 deserted or shrunken villages in Northumberland. The remains of several are still visible on the ground, but many have disappeared or survive only in the cropmarks of aerial photographs—the faint traces of rural depopulation and economic and social change over several centuries. Some were shortlived industrial or mining ventures, many others the consequence of agricultural improvement.¹ While the broad patterns and timescales are generally well understood, we can rarely piece together more precisely the sequence of events for an individual settlement. However this can be achieved for the small settlement of Dotland, thanks to the survival of useful estate documents, and relevant parish and manorial records. Their story illustrates the economic pressures at work in Tynedale in South Northumberland in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a key period in the history of the local market town, Hexham, and surrounding district. They also remind us of the importance of individual people in effecting change.

Dotland lies three miles south of Hexham town in ‘the Shire’, the only part of the once much larger Regality of Hexhamshire to retain the name today. Earthworks on the 2½-inch OS map are labelled ‘medieval village (site of)’, the 1839 tithe map shows a single large farm, and contemporary directories referred to Dotland as ‘formerly a town’.² The surrounding upland hill country was relatively poor farmland but the first settlers at Dotland chose a site 750 feet above sea level in beautiful rolling country, commanding fine sweeping views to the north as far as the Cheviot hills, east across the woods of Corbridge Common towards Newcastle, and south to the open moorland above Blanchland. The ground rises gently to the west, giving some protection from the prevailing wind. A line of springs lay a few yards to the south. The settlement was probably first laid out, to a deliberate plan, by the archbishopric of York in the eleventh or early twelfth century and later developed by Hexham Priory.³ It had clearly suffered some depopulation by the time of the ‘Black Book’, a fourteenth or fifteenth century survey of the priory estates. This listed ten husbandlands (of fifteen acres each) and ten cottages (of 1-3 acres each) at Dotland, probably indicating the extent of the original settlement—around twenty households. However, it named only six tenants, reflecting the debilitating results of the long period of war, lawlessness and plague that ravaged this border county. A survey taken at the time of the Dissolution suggests a similar number of tenants at Dotland.⁴ Superficially this justifies the labelling of Dotland as a deserted *medieval* village, but a reconstruction of the community in the seventeenth century tells a different story.



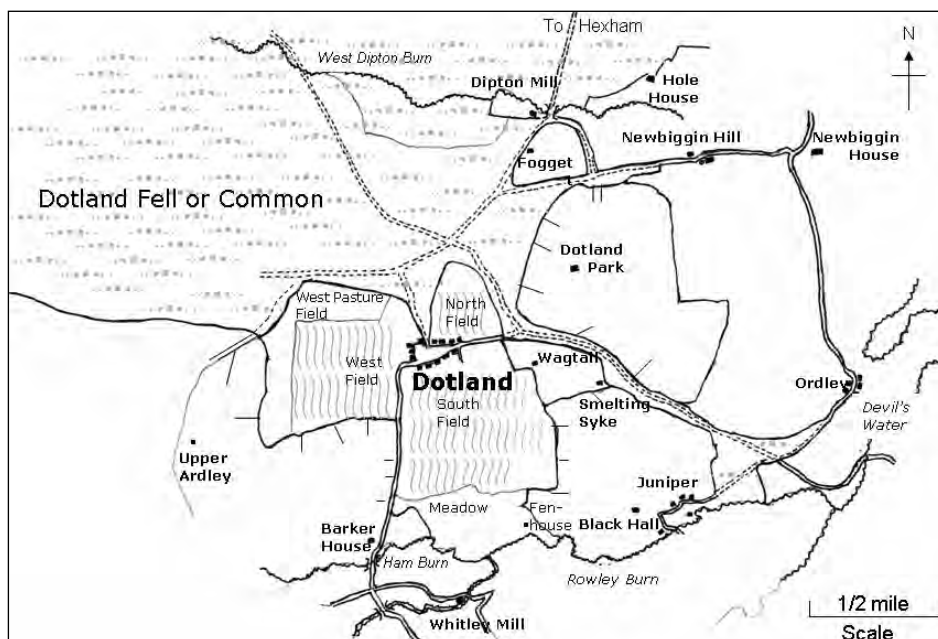
1. An aerial view of Dotland in 1986, showing the earthworks of part of the village site. South Field lies to the bottom left of the photograph, North Field to top right. The original medieval bank of the west field can be seen to the left of the road at the top. Part of the village lies under the nineteenth and twentieth century farm buildings shown here above the square farmhouse, built in 1807. Dotland Town Foot is at bottom right
(Crown copyright, National Monuments Record)

The landscape

The local landscape in the seventeenth century can be reconstructed using later maps. A valuable abstract of title to the ownership of Dotland from 1666 to 1755 has survived, summarising earlier wills, deeds and mortgages which have now largely disappeared.⁵ Figure 2 is a tentative reconstruction of the area in the late seventeenth century, drawn from these sources and from field-name evidence. This was predominantly a landscape of dispersed farms surrounded by their own enclosed fields, with the occasional larger settlement such as Dotland and Ordley.⁶ Dotland sat in the middle of four large open fields, parcels of which were described in 1686 as:

lye[ing] intermixt in the sev[era]l territories & Townfields of Dotland: One parcel containing 3 riggs in the south fields of Dotland ... one parcel containing 3 Riggs and 2 Butts in the West Pasture field of Dotland next to a certain Place called the Crook; One parcel in the West Field of Dotland containing 1 Yoaking with a Butt at the Head thereof & a Balke to the same belonging adjoining to a Parcel of Ground called Marys Headland; One parcel containing 1 Yoaking in the North Field of Dotland; the Balkes to the Parcels of Ground.

Here are the individual ridges (*riggs*, *yoakings*) of communal ploughing and the butts in which the ploughteams of oxen would turn at the end of the strips, with each



2. Seventeenth century Dotland

tenement's strips 'intermixt' with each other within a four-field system. The north and south fields are fairly easy to map, but the boundary between the west field and the west pasture field is speculative: the pasture field was perhaps a later enclosure where the land slopes away to the north, the best south-facing land having been enclosed early. The pattern on the ground points to an original two-field system at Dotland (the west and south fields) of perhaps 100 acres each, which would be consistent with the cultivated acreages listed in the Black Book. Elsewhere in Northumberland there is evidence that where common arable land was adjacent to wasteland, the waste was frequently ploughed up, creating new fields of unequal size.⁷ These new fields were often temporary, ploughed for a few years until the meagre fertility of the thin soils had been exhausted.⁸ Others became a permanent part of a three- or a four-field system, as appears to have been the case at Dotland, with the adoption of the west and north fields. The hay meadows must have been to the south, on the damper ground close to the Ham Burn. Up to 400 acres of arable, pasture and meadow were worked by Dotland's tenants, depending on how much woodland remained.

There was also a wide tract of unenclosed rough grazing on the fell, covering most of the land between Hexham and Dotland and up to the open moorlands to the west between the Shire and Allendale. The common land opened out in a widening strip down the north-facing slope beyond Dotland, allowing direct access from the village tenements to the fell. The 'in ground' of the farm at Dotland Park was separated from the land at Dotland and Wagtail by a thin strip of common land running south-eastwards to the Devil's Water. This carried a drover's route to the south from the old Hexham to Carlisle road, allowing cattle from the Borders to bypass the town itself. The district was not purely agricultural. There had long been a corn mill at Whitley Mill, and by the mid-seventeenth century the fast-flowing streams running to the Devil's Water and the Tyne had been tapped for water power to drive corn, fulling and

lead-smelting mills at Dipton, and at Dye House where a small industrial hamlet was emerging.

The village layout is open to conjecture but the earliest available detailed map of the area (see figure 3) is suggestive of a village tapering towards the house still named Dotland Town Foot to the east. The adjacent field marked 'No.33' was named 'Green Head'. This would be consistent with other regional villages with rows of cottages on either side of a wide green; by 1820 only a few cottages remained at the western end of the site



3. Estate map of 1820: Dotland Town Foot was incorrectly labelled Wagtail by the surveyor. (NRO G 309/3: reproduced with permission of Northumberland Collections Service)

The community

What of the people who lived at Dotland and worked the land? From the 1680s the Hexham parish registers contain details of residence and occupations alongside the bare facts of baptism, marriage and burial allowing Dotland's inhabitants to be identified. Other sources include the abstract of title, the 1663 ratebook, the 1664 and 1674 hearth tax returns for Hexhamshire Low Quarter, lists of churchwardens and, sporadically, the manor court records. A partial reconstruction of the community can therefore be attempted. There were at least twenty households at Dotland in the late-seventeenth century, when the community was as populous as it had been in the High Middle Ages. This implies a its population of between 75 and 100, perhaps one-seventh of that of the Shire in which it was the largest single settlement.⁹ Between eight and ten of these households farmed the open fields. It is probably coincidental that there were also ten medieval farm holdings, because the number had dwindled to six in the sixteenth century, but it is tempting to see significance in the number of the *other*, non-farming, half of the households in the 1680s. Were the ten or so heather-

thatched cottages around the green regularly patched up, or crudely rebuilt,¹⁰ to provide rudimentary housing for the transient and landless in country otherwise characterised by dispersed farmsteads?

After 1603 the determined efforts by local landowners to reduce the customary rights claimed by tenants were successfully resisted in Hexham.¹¹ Tenants with copyhold leases became, to all intents and purposes, owners—and were often referred to as such. They were able to sell their own land as long as they and the purchaser respected the customary ritual of surrendering at the manor court, which then admitted the new tenant for a nominal rent and entry fine. At Dotland this produced a two-tier structure of landholding. By the mid-1670s only Gilbert Dodd and his family worked their own copyhold land. The other occupiers were sub-tenants of the copyholding ‘owners’. The Dodds had around 100 acres of land, a quarter of the total, and half a dozen sub-tenants farmed holdings of around 40-45 acres, leaving three others farming 10-20 acres each. The original medieval cottage plots had evidently been absorbed into larger holdings. The Rowland family looms large in each category. One branch had several of the holdings under copyhold leases, while various brothers and sons within another branch, apparently only distantly related to the first, worked the land as their sub-tenants.

The sub-tenancies themselves took on a degree of formality, with fathers succeeded by sons. Richard Swindall, living at nearby Yarridge and Hole House in the 1690s, was ‘of Dotland’ within two years of his father’s death there in 1699. Part of the tenement of about 40 acres farmed by Joseph Bell in 1668 was occupied by his son Robert in 1690, nine years after his father’s death. John Errington farmed the other half, suggesting that holdings might still be fragmented rather than consolidated. This was farming on a small scale and on a traditional pattern: oats and bigg (barley) growing in the intermixed strips in the open fields, stock grazing the fallow field and fell, and hay cut down in the meadow.¹²

Dotland’s small farmers typically needed an additional source of income. In 1686 William Simpson, blacksmith, shared a tenement of some 40 acres with John Aynsley, a weaver. There were other weavers, joiners, tailors, coopers and labourers, and some classified simply as ‘poor’. Careful use of the baptism and burial registers indicate a high level of infant mortality at Dotland during this period, compared to the national average (see Table 1).¹³

Table 1 Infant mortality

deaths under the age of one year, per 1000 births		
England and Wales	1675-1724	192
Whickham	1650-1749	160
Dotland	1661-1716	190-230

In most rural areas infant death rates were typically much lower, and even in ‘semi-urban’ Whickham, growing rapidly with Tyneside’s coal industry, infant mortality was significantly below the national average over a broadly comparable period. Yet the small, breezy hilltop community of Dotland stands in stark and sombre contrast, registering rates of infant mortality at least as high and perhaps significantly greater. Until further research is undertaken on other communities in Tynedale it is unclear

if—measured by infant mortality—Dotland was worse than the district as a whole, but unhealthy and poor it certainly was.

Some families were hit particularly hard. Spare a thought for Thomas Rowland, a sub-tenant whose baby daughter Elizabeth was buried six weeks after her baptism in 1681. She was followed to the grave four years later by her mother Mary and her two-month old sister, also Mary. Nicholas Pearson, a tailor of Dotland lost three young daughters in the space of seven months in 1709. By 1713 he had moved—or perhaps escaped—down the hill to Dalton. We cannot know how much hardship and desperation went unrecorded in the poor backwoods of the Shire at this time, but there are occasional glimpses. In the summer of 1706, Margaret Lighton, a poor widow of Dotland, petitioned the quarter sessions in Hexham because she had obtained no relief from the parish overseers for her daughter Mary, who was ‘lame from her infancy and very much troubled with Infirmity and being noe wayes able to help her selfe nay not soe much as putt on her owne Cloathes. Altho she is about sixteen years of age and ever since she was borne ye petitioner has endeavoured to keep her & maintaine her—yet in a mean condition and never was troublesome to the parish but is not able to doe itt longer’.¹⁴ Young Mary, ‘a poor spinster’, was buried four years later.

Our most vivid images of historical poverty are those which accompanied the industrial revolution: the grim and dark Victorian urban squalor described by Dickens, the pinched dirty faces and bare feet captured in early photographs. The general absence of such graphic imagery in the historical record of earlier times should not fool us into seeing the pre-industrial world as a happy sunlit meadow before it fell under the heavy shadow of those dark satanic mills. Dotland’s families scratched a hard, thin living from their cold hilltop in the late seventeenth century. The ‘little ice age’ must have been keenly felt by the inhabitants of those draughty hovels. As we chart the course and causes of the decline of this small community, bear this in mind before deciding whether to lament it.

The Rowland family

On 28 November 1666 William Rowland of Dotland Park hastily made his will, being ‘sicke in bodie but of whole sound and perfect remembrance,¹⁵ and was laid to rest in Hexham Abbey the very next day. He could only have been in his 40s, had a young family, and there were affairs to settle. He was the most prosperous of Dotland’s copyholders, with five tenements—all let to sub-tenants, and accounting for just over half of the land. How they were accumulated over the previous century is unknown, but Dotland was apparently seen by the Rowlands as the foundation of the landed estate to which a prospering family could aspire.¹⁶ Any such long-term plan was set back by William’s early death. Three tenements were bequeathed to his eldest son John, aged eight, and the other two were set aside to provide for his widow Eleanor, and younger sons and daughters.

Looking back from the 1680s, this probably seemed merely a temporary setback. We know nothing of John Rowland’s upbringing and have no direct evidence of his character, but the zeal with which he resumed the acquisition of property at Dotland, at the age of 22, suggests a desire to achieve his family’s destiny and indicates great energy. In November 1680 he acquired his mother’s tenement. This was not straightforward, as within two years of her husband’s death Eleanor had remarried, to Robert Jopling (one of the witnesses to William’s will). He had plans to build his own estate in the area. Presumably young John and his siblings were brought up in the family home of Dotland Park, but the head of the house was not a Rowland. The land

acquired by Jopling at Dotland and nearby Newbiggin Hill, soon after his marriage to Eleanor, was evidently promised to his own two daughters, John's younger half-sisters, for John later had to buy it from them, long after his stepfather's death in 1675.

John Rowland was a young man in a hurry, buying three more of Dotland's tenements by 1685 to add to the three he had inherited. In 1681 he paid £160 for a tiny holding that had changed hands for £120 only eight years before. Buoyant as the local land market might have been, sellers saw an eager young man coming. Rowland, though, probably considered it a fair price to help bring half of Dotland back into the family's hands. He married Catherine Charlton around 1682, and when their first child, Eleanor, was baptised in August 1683 he was referred to as 'Mr John Rowland of Dotland Park'. At the manor court that year he was foreman of the jury and described as 'gentleman'. He was a minor public figure in Hexham for most of his adult life, variously serving as churchwarden, manor court jury foreman, and for many years as a governor of the grammar school, where perhaps he had been educated.¹⁷ Despite these responsibilities, Dotland remained the focus of his attention—and land acquisition was not undertaken for its own sake. We can be fairly certain that he sought the enclosure of Dotland's open fields, to increase the productivity and value of the estate.

Agricultural change and enclosure in Tynedale

The rapid growth of Newcastle and its coal industry drove the economic development of the region throughout this period. In contrast to the slight fall in the national population in the second half of the seventeenth century, the population of County Durham increased by about 60 per cent between 1666 and 1736, concentrated in the industrial area along the south bank of the Tyne, and it is reasonable to postulate a comparable trend across the river in Newcastle and its environs.¹⁸ Although contemporary travellers, especially those from the south, complained about the local roads, Hexham was not isolated—the leather trades, in particular, must have been stimulated by the rapid growth of the regional metropolis 25 miles away. Parish registers and the hearth tax returns of 1664 and 1674 suggest a town population of some 1,500-1,600 in the 1670s, growing to reach 2,000 in the 1690s.¹⁹ Periodic local concern over incoming 'foreigners' is unlikely to have been coincidental.²⁰ The established trade in grain between East Anglia and Newcastle could have accounted for only a small proportion of what was needed to feed a growing population.²¹

The development of Tyneside put great pressure on agricultural resources throughout the region, encouraging a greater concentration of arable farming on the better lands in the Tyne valley, and leaving the uplands to more extensive cattle- and sheep-rearing. But the prevalence of open field systems in Tynedale, in the hills as well as the valleys, was a hindrance, so enclosure became increasingly attractive, allowing greater freedom of action by individual farmers, improvement of drainage, and more advanced rotations of those crops best suited to the land. The later seventeenth century saw extensive enclosure of open field systems in Tynedale, with three different approaches: mutual agreement between the landholders; piecemeal fashion as neighbours exchanged and consolidated strips to create units large enough to enclose *within* fields which remained open; or a single enterprising owner acquiring the whole of the land. Thus, the copyhold tenants of Acomb enclosed their land by mutual agreement in 1694, and at Warden in the same year the manor court decreed that after 'the next harvest after the corne is of the ground they shall have all there land that is undivided measured by four or more judicial men and stob'd out by the s[ai]d

men, so every one may have there portion'.²² In contrast, at Corbridge in the 1720s the copyholders and vicar unsuccessfully petitioned the lord of the manor, the duke of Somerset, for leave to enclose. Not until 1776 were the fields of Corbridge enclosed.²³

There is much evidence of piecemeal enclosure in Hexham's open fields. To take but two examples, in 1669 there was '1 close containing 7 acres arable, meadow or pasture lying in Hexham East Field nigh by Halliwelldean called Broad Close', and in 1685 'an inclosure of ground ... lying in Gillygatfeilds in Hexham in a place there called Hellpool containing by estimation one and a half acres of arable ground'.²⁴ Piecemeal enclosure was a more viable option in Hexham than total enclosure by mutual agreement, given the number of copyholders and the large fields, but as late as 1754 some land was still open. The enclosure of a few strips at a time left a pattern of small narrow fields immediately around the built-up area of the town. Piecemeal enclosure also occurred in smaller settlements, such as at Slaley, where sixteenth and seventeenth century surveys show small enclosures within the great north and south fields, and today long narrow fields extend north and south from the linear village.²⁵

Enclosure by a single landowner is less easy to detect because no written agreement was necessary. We do not even know the full extent of the smaller open field systems, where land was brought easily and early into the hands of a single owner and then silently enclosed. In the Shire below Dotland the Black Book mentioned 'Dalton field', a term which typically meant open field but here probably amounted to no more than 100 acres.²⁶ The six holdings which the Black Book lists at Yarridge, now the site of Hexham racecourse, are likely to have been ploughed communally, an island of cultivation high on the ridge surrounded by the rough grazing of Hexham Common. A 1635 rental shows Yarridge to have been in the hands of a single copyholder, and the land was perhaps already enclosed.²⁷ In 1583 Fallowfield, above Acomb, was a small and shrunken village still surrounded by open fields, but in 1663 it was in single ownership and probably enclosed.²⁸ Careful study of early settlement patterns would reveal many more examples.

Enclosure by a single landowner might have devastating consequences for the local community. Sir Edward Radcliffe dealt briskly with Dilston in the 1630s by introducing new 21-year leases, enclosing the East Field and Town Field, and removing the old village from the land north of his new mansion.²⁹ This exemplifies the stereotype of enclosure, much criticised from Tudor times onwards. Excavation and documentary research into the deserted village of West Whelpington has shown that the village was finally depopulated between 1719 and 1722, a few decades after it was bought by a Newcastle merchant: 'The depopulation of this and other Northumberland villages needed no more than a landlord with spare capital and a tenant willing to take a lease with the expectation of making a profit'.³⁰

Dotland enclosed

The opportunities created by Newcastle's economic growth 25 miles to the east were surely clear to the young John Rowland. Those around him with long memories must have been aware of the increasing value of good land since the turn of the century. Thus, the rental value at Hole House, with well-sheltered meadows and grazing down near the Dipton Mill, showed a fourfold increase between 1608 and 1663, as did the Rowland tenements at Newbiggin Hill and other nearby farms in the Shire for which a comparison can be made.³¹ These were all separate farms, unconstrained by communal open field farming. Unfortunately Dotland was not included in the 1608 survey, so we cannot tell whether it was getting left behind, but a tentative calculation

of rental value suggests that it generated less than 3s per acre in 1663 compared with 4s at nearby Newbiggin, a difference that would have been noticeable enough.

Rowland might initially have tried to achieve the enclosure of Dotland by orchestrating an agreement with the other copyholders. In 1680 there were five, and two of those were his mother and his brother. The manor court offered a forum. He is first mentioned as juror at the Anick Grange manor court in 1680, and from 1683 was often its foreman.³² The office was usually seen as a chore, and many jurors were fined for non-attendance, but only Rowland sat for Dotland at those annual meetings between 1680 and 1694 for which records survive. He might have seen—and perhaps had heard from his stepfather, a jury foreman in the 1670s—that manor courts were not invariably a useless medieval relic. Surviving records show that an active and enterprising participant could wield substantial local influence, sitting in judgement over the minor byelaw infringements of his neighbours and confirming the exact entitlement or extent of copyholds brought for jury attention by the manor's steward. Nevertheless, if he sought enclosure by agreement he was unsuccessful, and so direct acquisition of land continued. By 1686 Gilbert Dodd was the only copyholder outside the Rowland family.

Enclosure was inevitably followed by high outlays on ditching, hedging and walling, and it is doubtful whether Gilbert Dodd had the resources to spare. In 1663 he had sold part of his copyhold, perhaps to cover an earlier debt, and in November 1686 this land, a 'parcel of Ground containing by Estimation three riggs ... being in the south fields of Dotland & bounding on the [said] John Rowland on the East and West', was in turn bought by Rowland from Robert Yarrow of Simonburn. The piecemeal enclosure of Rowland's land continued. He was still only 29, while Gilbert Dodd was much older. Perhaps the latter's eldest son William would in time prove more tractable.

But money was a problem. The abstract of title does not suggest that any of Rowland's purchases between 1680 and 1686 (some £450 in total) needed the support of mortgage borrowing, but from May 1687 this changed. Dotland purchases were offered as security for loans. In February 1686 his wife Catherine died, followed by their younger daughter Bridget almost exactly a year later. John's hopes for posterity rested upon the survival of his elder daughter Eleanor, to whom he bequeathed his Dotland property in a new will in July 1688.³³ He pushed on with his acquisitions, paying £500 to his Jopling half-sisters in 1690 to buy their Dotland tenement, together with the land at Newbiggin Hill and the Dipton Mill bought by their father (for only half that sum) twenty years earlier. But now everything had to be borrowed, including the full £500 of that purchase. The younger half-sister came back for more, selling her residual rights in that property for a further £298 in 1695. A few months earlier John had bought Wagtail and Smelting Syke, 50 acres of land immediately east of Dotland. By then he had seemingly given up trying to buy out either the Dodds or his own brother Thomas, who still held the tenement inherited from his father, although long since removed to Newcastle where he was a pewterer.

This purchase brought Rowland's Dotland holding to 320 acres, sufficient to allow reorganisation and improvement. He had already invested in a new and substantial house: a 'capital message' appears in the records for the first time in 1691. While this might have improved his rental income Rowland's financial position remained difficult. A sequence of notes from creditors during the late 1690s recorded the increasing size of his debt: from £1060 in 1696 to £1312 by April 1701. The evidence of his earlier borrowings shows that Rowland had barely kept abreast of interest

payments until 1696, and from then the annual interest charges must have amounted to far more than his gross rental income from Dotland. They remained unpaid.³⁴

His response was that of many in his predicament. He borrowed more. A further loan of £208 was obtained in 1701, and another £400 less than a year later. His Dotland collateral was still good, but he was now borrowing heavily against his original inheritance, as well as his later purchases. He intended to press on with ditching, walling, enclosing and reorganising, for a remortgaging deed of February 1704 referred to his tenements in Dotland as 'the whole into four parts to be equally divided'. But this still excluded his brother's land and that of the Dodds. Rowland still had a plan, but two years after borrowing more money he had yet to drive it through, and in fact he never would. In all likelihood, he simply could not afford it.

Some 300 acres of poor upland soil in a county with plenty more of the same might not seem a big prize, but John Rowland was not the only one to see its potential. By the turn of the century a great deal of money was being made in Newcastle, and in time-honoured fashion much of it found its way back to the land. As well as being the most secure asset, unenclosed and unimproved land had potential for dramatic growth in value. Rowland's main creditor in the 1690s was James Reay, 'gentleman' of Fawdon or Coxlodge. Within months of lending Rowland £600 in 1691 Reay bought up his two other outstanding Dotland debts at a premium, and lent more to him as the 1690s progressed. Often, by such processes, the creditor eventually acquired the land, and this may have been what Reay expected, but there were far bigger players in this game. One was the Newcastle lawyer John Ord.

John Ord

Ord was born a year earlier than John Rowland, to an apparently comfortable Newcastle family. His wealth and influential position on Tyneside were helped by his background and two judicious marriages, but also owed much to his business ability and political skill. His most important and enduring role was as agent and lawyer for the north-eastern estates and interests of the diplomat and landowner Edward Wortley Montagu of Yorkshire. Trusted with considerable independence of action by Wortley, Ord was one of the five colliers who in about 1708 formed 'the Regulation', a supplier monopoly largely orchestrated by the energetic Gateshead merchant and entrepreneur William Cotesworth and the patrician Henry Liddell of Ravensworth. While others in 'the Regulation' were wary of Ord, correctly believing that he saw Wortley's interest as superior to that of the cartel, his shrewd judgement, command of the law and wily political talent made him indispensable, especially in harness with Cotesworth. In 1717, for example, Ord took a deft and discreet lead in determining how to collude in a clandestine shipping monopoly of the Newcastle to London coal trade.³⁵

An effective operator, he remained within the circle of regional power and influence but without the additional visibility that comes from aspiring to be at the very centre. For nearly twenty years he was entrenched within Newcastle's civic community as under-sheriff of the city, but appears not to have pursued the spectacle and trappings of the highest positions of public leadership. He endowed a charity school in 1705 with the stipulation that his patronage was to be kept secret until after his death. Perceptive contemporaries realised that Ord's consummate subtlety of action was not to be confused with a lack of determination. The redoubtable Lady Bowes of Gibside railed in 1716 that 'Old Wortley ... and J[ohn] O[rd] are two of the greatest r[ogues] that ever a county was blest withal; they will by right or wrong come at any means to

purchase estates, but at last go to the D[evil]'.³⁶ Ord would have taken this as a compliment.

As early as 1686, in his determination to secure a lead mining lease at Blanchland, he urged his own London agent to offer cash and to 'break not for [the sake of] 20s, 40s or £3'. Later, as the owner of lead mines there and at Hunstanworth, he was not afraid to take on the London Lead Company, using his control of the water supply to their Shildon mine engine as leverage in a dispute. At first denying he had cut off the supply, he 'at last did remember that there was a Passage through his Ground for water. And that he would write to his Agent in the Country to set free the water that it might have free course to Shildon. And all the other grievances were referred to the Commissioners Agent'.³⁷

Amid his wide range of other activities, he set his sights on Dotland from 1704. Rowland's landlord at Dotland Park was Sir William Blackett, and it was probably he, in the course of his business dealings with Ord, who brought Dotland—and the perilous position of John Rowland—to Ord's attention. In February 1704, acting anonymously and using John Clutterbuck, a prosperous city neighbour, as his trustee, Ord advanced Rowland a new mortgage of £2300 secured on Dotland. This allowed Rowland to clear his outstanding debt of £1934. The balance must have been needed to pay other creditors, for none of the new principal had been paid off a year later. Rather, a further £141 of interest charges was added. Rowland hung on. Ord perhaps felt that if Rowland knew who he was dealing with he would be more inclined to succumb, and in May 1705 revealed that Clutterbuck was merely acting in trust for him. By the summer of 1706 Rowland owed Ord £2540, secured against his entire estate at Dotland, Newbiggin Hill and Dipton Mill. But it took another, more personal, tragedy to sway him. That same summer Rowland's unmarried daughter Eleanor died, aged 23. With her died any hope Rowland had of preserving Dotland for his descendants. Within two months, in October 1706, Ord had taken possession of Dotland, the deal sweetened by a further £200. Ord knew that money talked, but he also knew the importance of understanding the other needs and motives of those with whom he dealt.

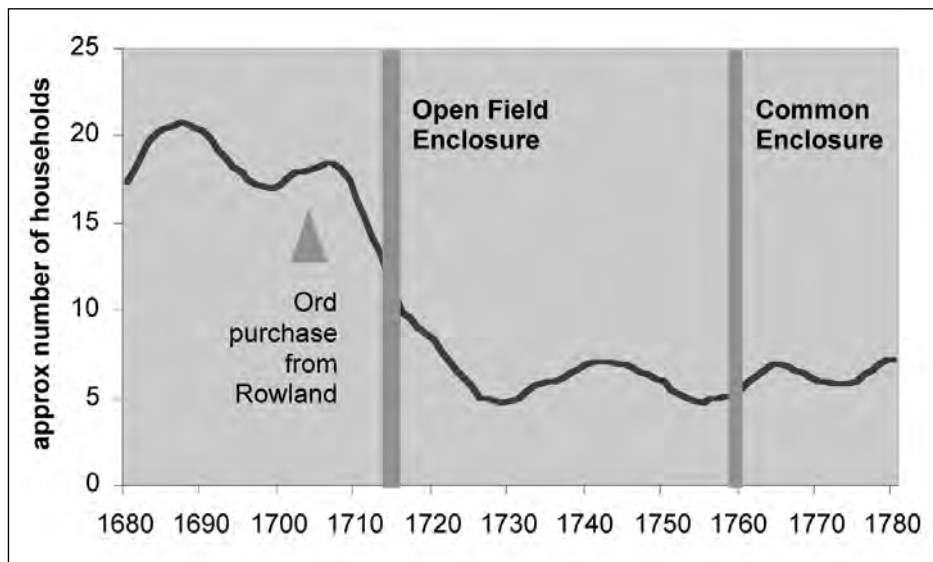
The eighteenth century

John Rowland saw out his days at Dotland Park, serving as a governor of the grammar school until at least 1718 and doing occasional duty as churchwarden. But his own inheritance, together with any dowry from his long-dead wife Catherine, and 35 years of purchase and investment, was reduced to Ord's final £200. He died in 1732, having seen Ord also buy out his brother's tenement (by then in the hands of his nephew, another John, of Newcastle) and that of the Dodds, within days of each other in May 1714. William Dodd, Dotland's last copyhold occupier, went quite cheaply. His ninety acres cost Ord just £200.³⁸ A 1721 rental of Ord's estate suggests that enclosure followed.

Dotland was split into four holdings, probably those foreseen by Rowland, and Ord kept the largest of these in hand.³⁹ The 1721 rental value, some 7s per acre, was more or less double that of 1714 (and in the case of Dodd's farm even higher). It is likely that the regular field pattern shown on the OS map was created between 1714 and 1721, perhaps immediately after the harvest of 1714. John Ord died in 1721 and the estate passed to one of his younger sons, James, fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. His agent appears to have been unsatisfactory, for in the 1740s, when James Ord eventually tired of Dotland and sold it, the price obtained was less than its probable

1721 value. One can imagine his father turning in his grave.⁴⁰ The new owners, the Claverings of Axwell, were from the same small network of landed Tyneside coal proprietors as John Ord.

Under their ownership there was a further dramatic change to the local landscape: the enclosure of the common land on Dotland Fell in 1760. In 1754 the adjacent Hexham East and West Commons had been enclosed by private Act of Parliament on the initiative of Sir Walter Blackett MP, lord of the manor of Hexham and active local improver.⁴¹ His land at Dotland Park would have entitled him to a significant proportion of Dotland Fell, so it seems likely that he was also the instigator of this enclosure. Whereas in Hexham there were many small copyholders, the small number of interested parties at Dotland meant that its enclosure could be achieved more cheaply and efficiently by private agreement. The enclosure of Dotland Fell, from the Dipton Mill to Dotland village, from Juniper to the high open moors, extinguished the old grazing rights and replaced them with the new fields in proportion to the acreage belonging to the 'in ground' farms. The modern road pattern was laid down, and was shown on the accompanying map.⁴² In less than fifty years the local landscape changed far more than in long centuries before or since, but by then there were far fewer inhabitants for this to affect.



4. Estimated households at Dotland (nine year rolling average)

The consequences for Dotland

As figure 4 implies, references to separate Dotland families fall noticeably from 1710. In some cases the record of a burial provides the final mention of a long-standing family name, perhaps indicating the passing of the last impoverished occupant of a dilapidated cottage. Although the scrupulous detail with which the parish registers had hitherto been kept deteriorated from 1716, the decline in Dotland references predates this. The long-term picture is clear. A 1745 list of tenants, and parish register entries for that year, suggest that there were just seven households in Dotland; six can be deduced from entries on the 1762 militia roll.⁴³ The twenty or so households of the late seventeenth century were reduced to six by the 1760s, but this almost certainly

happened during the short period following Ord's purchase of the estate, as the open fields were enclosed and the estate reorganised.

It would be easy to characterise this as the traditional stereotype of enclosure, with John Ord, the wealthy city lawyer, cast in the role of heartless new owner without a personal attachment to the land, destroying the ancient village, evicting its occupants, and converting the communal ploughland to sheep pasture. The actual course of events was less dramatic. John Rowland had been making some changes for at least the previous 15 years, and some of his borrowings in the 1690s were probably directed towards equipping himself to farm the land directly, or reducing the number of sub-tenants, or both. There were four or five Rowland cousins at Dotland in the late 1680s, most of whom were his sub-tenants, but only the poor widow Margaret seems to have remained a decade later. New names appearing in the parish registers suggest that cottages vacated by long-standing residents were temporarily reoccupied, but many of these people also disappeared after a few years. Some described as 'yeomen' are later recorded as labourers, implying a move to a landless state. Yet it is likely that people were drawn away rather than pushed out. The last mention of Edmund Rowland at Dotland was in 1694, but by 1701 he was farming two miles away at Eshills and when he died in 1726 left over £40.⁴⁴

Though the population of Dotland was falling, it was rising in the Shire as a whole. Baptism entries indicate a rise from around 700 during the second half of the seventeenth century to around 750 in the first decades of the eighteenth, and in 1713 the parish priest estimated a figure of over 800.⁴⁵ Lead was mined locally at Hackford and Burntshieldhaugh, and much more was carried over the fell from Blanchland and Allendale for smelting at Dukesfield and Blackhall,⁴⁶ while woven cloth was fullled at Dye House, Lamb Shield and Dipton mills. Whatever the short term fluctuations, the eighteenth century was a time of expansion—from the 1760s onwards the Hexham and Whitley Chapel registers show that a by-product of the enclosure of Dotland Fell was the appearance of new cottages along the new roads. By 1801 the population of the Shire was over 1000.

Dotland was not completely deserted and neither was it completely changed. The remaining half-dozen or so eighteenth-century households included the Simpsons, blacksmiths since at least the 1660s who were still at their Dotland forge until at least 1745. The smithy itself is recorded on various occasions through to the 1850s, when there were still six households left. An 1828 county directory also records a cartwright, tailor and shoemaker at Dotland, conveniently placed astride the road from the Shire into Hexham.⁴⁷ The Robert Bell listed on Ord's rental of 1721 was almost certainly the same man, born at Dotland in 1658, who had learned husbandry from his father on the ancient open riggs. Enclosure did not necessarily even mean a wholesale conversion to pastoral farming and a consequent reduction in the labour force for ploughing, sowing, reaping and threshing. Thus, a 1724 deed refers to 100 acres of 'land' at Dotland and Newbiggin, a term normally implying arable. In 1793, 35 per cent of the value of farm stock auctioned at Dotland Park was the 'value of corn sown'. The price of corn rose sharply with the onset of the Napoleonic Wars, but throughout the Shire so did the value of pasture and common grazing for the Galloway ponies that brought huge volumes of lead ore over the fells.⁴⁸ At Dotland 184 acres were still in arable use in 1854.⁴⁹

Patterns of land use and farm holdings changed slowly. The disappearance of longstanding sub-tenants by the 1690s suggests that at least some of the reduction took place before John Ord bought the estate, and an account book from the 1770s shows that there were still four tenants half a century later.⁵⁰ The names of the farmers listed

there, and in the 1762 militia roll, disappear only gradually from the records. It was the great wartime farming boom of the 1790s, and the subsequent depression, that brought the greatest changes. In about 1807 the estates were consolidated into two large farms, Dotland East and West, coinciding with the building of the large square farmhouse which dominates the landscape to this day.⁵¹ When the leases came up again in 1820 they were combined into the one large farm of 850 acres shown on the 1839 tithe map.⁵²

What remained of the old settlement was swept away in 1854, with a change of tenancy at the farm and the construction of new barns and byres.⁵³ The open space of the old village green was carved up by the drystone walls of the road to Hexham. The place where once people met by the well, exchanging rumours in the still evening about how much money young Mr. Rowland owed, was now a yard in front of solid Victorian outbuildings. The Rowlands and the Ords were forgotten. The world had moved on, leaving little but a few crude courses of roughly-worked sandstone in the paddock across the road and the gentle myth that Dotland had been ‘formerly a town’.

Conclusion

Dotland was never much more than a hamlet, but it survived over several centuries, its population fluctuating between six and twenty households for much of that time. It suffered two significant falls in population, both quite rapid. The medieval decline, linked to plague and border violence, was suffered in common with the rest of the region and beyond. But the early-eighteenth century fall in population stands in contrast to expansion and growth elsewhere. Opportunities created by one of the nation’s most important centres of economic development, just about visible on the eastern horizon, drew some people away from the marginal settlement on its cold hill. Yet money generated by that same growth engine came to Dotland to enclose its fields and improve its farming—not to rebuild its poorer cottages. Given the duration of Tyneside’s impact on the region, enclosure and the fall in Dotland’s population might have occurred at any point from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. It was the happenstance of interlocking personal histories which dictated the precise course and timing of events and, in this particular case, introduced delay. Such was surely always the case, but we are rarely able to pick out the individuals who made up the masses. Few are the glimpses of the multitude of characters, relationships, opportunities and the seizing of moments which, when added up, become the broad and anonymous sweep of economic and social change.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

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| <p>1 R. Newton, <i>The Northumberland landscape</i> (Hodder & Stoughton, 1972) pp.105-112</p> <p>2 Northumberland Record Office [NRO] DT 244/M Hexhamshire Low Quarter tithe map and apportionment (1839); <i>Kelly's Directory of</i></p> | <p><i>Durham, Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland</i> (1858)</p> <p>3 A.B. Hinds, <i>A history of Northumberland</i> vol.3 Hexhamshire pt.1 (Andrew Reid, 1896) pp.130, 139</p> |
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- 4 J. Raine, *The Priory of Hexham* (Surtees Society vol.64, 1865) pp.10-11, 162
- 5 NRO ZG1 DO Abstract of the title of Charles John Clavering Esq. to an estate at Dotland, 1666-1755: all references in this article to tenants, tenement descriptions, land transactions, deeds, mortgages and land valuations at Dotland are taken from this document unless otherwise stated.
- 6 R.A. Butlin, 'Northumberland field systems', *Agricultural History Review* vol.12 (1964) p.106
- 7 This practice, derided by the agricultural improver Arthur Young during his tour through Northumberland in the 1760s (*A six months tour through the North of England*, 1770) was certainly used to exploit the upland wastes within Hexhamshire until as late as the eighteenth century.
- 8 The original Hexham parish registers, and eighteenth-century copies, are at NRO (EP/184/1-5) but the transcription by Wood in the Newcastle City Library and the later copy by Mitchell in Hexham Library have been used here. The early lists of churchwardens were copied by George Ritschel in about 1700 (NRO EP/184/68). Dotland was within the manor of Anick Grange, whose surviving records are in the NRO (672/A/16/11-117). For hearth tax returns see D. Smith, *Northumberland Hearth Tax: Part IV* (Journal of the Northumberland and Durham Family History Society vol.9 no.4, 1984) pp.92-3
- 9 Based on the 4.3 multiplier of households to total population (T. Arkell, 'Multiplying factors for estimating population totals from the Hearth Tax', *Local Population Studies* vol.28, 1982). Caution is required in applying this to a small number of households, hence the use of a range of 75-100. The estimate of the Shire's population in the 1680s is derived from the average annual number of baptisms registered to families given a Shire location, using the generally accepted multiplier of 30 for the pre-industrial period.
- 10 They appear to have been at West Whelpington (D.H. Evans, M.G. Jarrett and S. Wrathmell 'The deserted village of West Whelpington, Northumberland: Third report, Part two' (*Archaeologia Aeliana* 5th Series vol 16, 1988) pp.175-177). Dotland's remaining houses were still being rethatched with heather or ling at least as late as the 1770s (NRO 309/G4/6)
- 11 S.J. Watts, *From Border to Middle Shire: Northumberland 1586-1625* (Leicester UP, 1975) p.164
- 12 Few probate inventories for Hexhamshire survive among the records at the Borthwick Institute for Archives [BIA]. Those for the late-seventeenth century mention small herds of cattle and sheep and small amounts of oats and bigg.
- 13 Sources for table: England & Wales: E.A. Wrigley, R.S. Davies, J.E. Oepfen, and R.S. Schofield, *English population history from family reconstitution 1580-1837* (Cambridge UP, 1997) p.219; Whickham: derived from D. Levine and K. Wrightson, *The making of an industrial society: Whickham, 1560-1765* (Oxford UP, 1991) p.208; Dotland: a range is given in view of the relatively low baptismal total of 130 during the period analysed
- 14 NRO QSB/24 p.15: unfortunately we have no Hexham overseers' accounts for this period; a few listings of those in receipt of charity relief were made by Ritschel at Easter and Christmas between 1707 and 1712. They usually included the names of poor widows who lived at Dotland (NRO EP 184/5).
- 15 BIA Prerog Jun 1668 vol.49, f407
- 16 No Rowlands were Dotland copyholders in the 1536 survey (Raine, *Priory of Hexham*, p.162). By 1632 a William Rowland (presumably William Rowland snr, d.1651) appears on the Anick Grange manor suit roll among the Dotland copyholders (NRO 672/A/24/1).
- 17 NRO EP 184/68, 672/A/16/40-71; BIA Hex 4/1-3
- 18 R.A. Houston, *The population history of Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge UP, 1995) p.16; P. Brassley, *The agricultural economy of Northumberland and Durham in the period 1640-1750* (New York, 1984) pp.41-43
- 19 Comparing the hearth tax returns and the baptism registers suggests significant under-recording or exemption of houses for hearth tax purposes. However, on the assumption that this was roughly constant between town and 'Shire', the proportion of the households enumerated in the four wards of Hexham town in 1664 allows estimation of the share of baptisms which 'belonged' to the town alone. For the 1690s, the actual baptism locations given in the register have been used to isolate town baptisms from those of the Shire.
- 20 A. Rossiter, 'The government of Hexham in the 17th century' (*Hexham Historian* no.6, 1996) pp.31-34
- 21 Brassley, *Agricultural economy*, p.43
- 22 J.C. Hodgson, *A history of Northumberland vol.4* (Andrew Reid, 1897) pp.139-140; NRO 672/A/16/60
- 23 Given that the positive impact of enclosure on land values was well understood by landowners and their agents, the long delay at Corbridge is curious, and worth further investigation (W.R. Iley, *Corbridge: Border village*, Walter Raymond 1974, pp.89-91)
- 24 From presentments to the Hexham Manor Court grand jury: NRO 672/A/2A/121, 672/A/2A/158. Anna Rossiter (*Hexham Historian* no.6) provided an excellent summary of the organisation of Hexham manor and its voluminous records.
- 25 J.C. Hodgson, *A history of Northumberland* vol.6 (Andrew Reid, 1902) pp.354-358
- 26 Raine, *Priory of Hexham*, pp.10-11.
- 27 NRO 2762/E/X17
- 28 M.W. Beresford, 'Fallowfield, Northumberland: an early cartographic representation of a deserted village', in *Time and place: collected essays* (Continuum International, 1985)

- 29 H.H.E. Craster, *A History of Northumberland* vol.10 (Andrew Reid, 1914) p.276
- 30 Evans et al, *West Whelpington*, p.152
- 31 Nether Ardley and Cooks House: 3x increase; Nether Eshells and Winter House: 5x. increase (Hinds, *Northumberland vol.3*, pp.90-91)
- 32 NRO 672/A/16/40-71
- 33 This will is among the Allgood family papers: John Rowland entrusted the custody and tuition of Eleanor, should he die while she was a minor, to Thomas Allgood of Hexham. Two other members of Rowland's circle of minor local gentry were likewise appointed: Roger Wilson of Walwick and William Pearson of Hexham (NRO ZAL/20/8).
- 34 Perhaps £50-£65 gross rental value/year at 3-4s/acre from 320 acres; the annual interest charge in 1699 and 1700 was over £100.
- 35 E.T. Hughes, *North Country life in the 18th century* (Oxford UP, 1952) pp.174-175, 198, 208-215; A.W. Purdue, *Merchants and gentry in North-East England 1650-1830* (Sunderland UP, 1999) pp.34-35
- 36 E. Mackenzie, 'Institutions for education: charity schools', *Historical Account of Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Including the Borough of Gateshead* (Eneas Mackenzie, 1827) pp.445-451; J.M. Ellis (ed), *The letters of Henry Liddell to William Cotesworth* (Surtees Society, 1987) p.231
- 37 NRO ZPA/7 [Item 3, 2nd list]; NRO 3410 vol 4 p.39; R.A. Fairbairn, Allendale, *Tyndale and Derwent lead mines* Northern Mine Research Society vol.65, 2000) p.85
- 38 C.G.A. Clay, 'Landlords and estate management', in J. Thirsk (ed), *Agrarian History of England and Wales*, Vol 5, Pt 2, 1640-1750 (Cambridge UP, 1985) p.173
- 39 NRO 324/O.1/45
- 40 Had Dotland gone instead to James Ord's elder brother Robert in 1721, it might have remained in the family to this day, with the estate Robert's son William bought at Whitfield in 1748. 'The township of Dotland [and several] farms thereof & those adjoining' was advertised for sale in 1743 (*Newcastle Courant* [NC] 14 May 1743). It fetched £5,300 in 1745 (NRO ZGI Do). At a valuation of 26 years purchase the equivalent estate was worth over £5,600 in 1721.
- 41 G.W. Ridley, 'The inclosure and division of certain wastes and commons in the Manor of Hexham' (*Archaeologia Aeliana* 5th ser. vol.2, 1974) pp.213-222
- 42 NRO ZGI XXXII/4
- 43 NRO ZGI Do: militia list [NRO microfilm of original at Alnwick Castle]
- 44 BIA Prerog, 1726 vol.79 f176
- 45 G. Ritschel, *An account of certain charities, containing a catalogue of several benefactors, who have given or left anything to pious and charitable uses, in Tyndale-ward in the county of Northumberland ... a brief account and description of the parish and parish-church of Hexham* (John White, 1713) p.64
- 46 Fairbairn, *Allendale ... lead mines*, pp.21-24
- 47 *Parson and White's History, Directory, and Gazetteer of the counties of Northumberland and Durham* (1828)
- 48 Mares, foals and colts accounted for a further 31 per cent of the farm value (NRO 672/A/35/4).
- 49 NRO 309/G4/3
- 50 NRO 309/G4/6
- 51 NC 6 Dec 1806
- 52 NC 11 Nov 1820
- 53 The 1861 census shows just three households (the farm, adjacent cottage, and Dotland Town Foot are shown on the 1865 Ordnance Survey map); change of tenancy: NRO ZCL/B/109 and NC 2 June 1854

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