

# Commemorating the Dead in Early Modern Newcastle

## Aims and Objectives

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To investigate and analyse the ledger stones and monuments to the Ellison family in St. Nicholas' Cathedral, Newcastle Upon Tyne to understand the extent to which Newcastle Upon Tyne followed traditional patterns over time regarding the commemoration of the dead in Britain.

### Introduction to Project

My research was conducted as part of an ongoing community research project at St. Nicholas' Cathedral, which is working to uncover the history of the people commemorated on the commemorative stones in the cathedral before they are moved as part of a Heritage Lottery funded renovation of the Cathedral. My research focused on stones commemorating the Ellisons, an influential local family. It sought to understand the patterns of commemoration in Newcastle, and contributed to the wider research which will be used to create heritage resources for the Cathedral.

## The Ellison Family

### Cuthbert Ellison

This 16th century ledger stone (Figure 5), is the earliest-known commemorative memorial in the Cathedral and was recorded by Thomas Welford in 1880, but can no longer be located. The date of Cuthbert Ellison's death is unknown, but likely dates to the late 16th Century. Cuthbert Ellison was the founder of the Hebburn branch of the Ellison family, and great Grandfather to Robert, below.



Figure 1: Cuthbert Ellison (From Carr, 1899)

### Robert Ellison

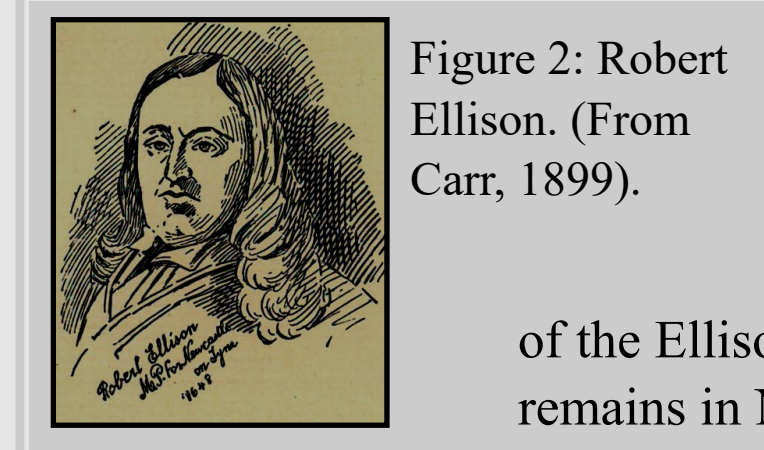


Figure 2: Robert Ellison. (From Carr, 1899).

Robert Ellison (great grandson to Cuthbert) bought land at Hebburn and renovated Hebburn Hall. This remained the home of the Ellison family until 1870, when it passed onto Ralph Carr. The name remains in Newcastle today, through union into the Ellison-Carr family.

### John Ellison

John Ellison, distant relative to Robert, was a Clerk of the Church of St. Nicholas. He died in 1807, over 100 years after the end of the Reformation. No imagery has been added onto the stone by John Ellison, as the 'memento mori' styles of imagery were largely no longer in use.

### Hebburn Hall

Hebburn Hall was the family home of the Hebburn branch of the family from the time the land was purchased and renovated by Cuthbert Ellison until 1870.

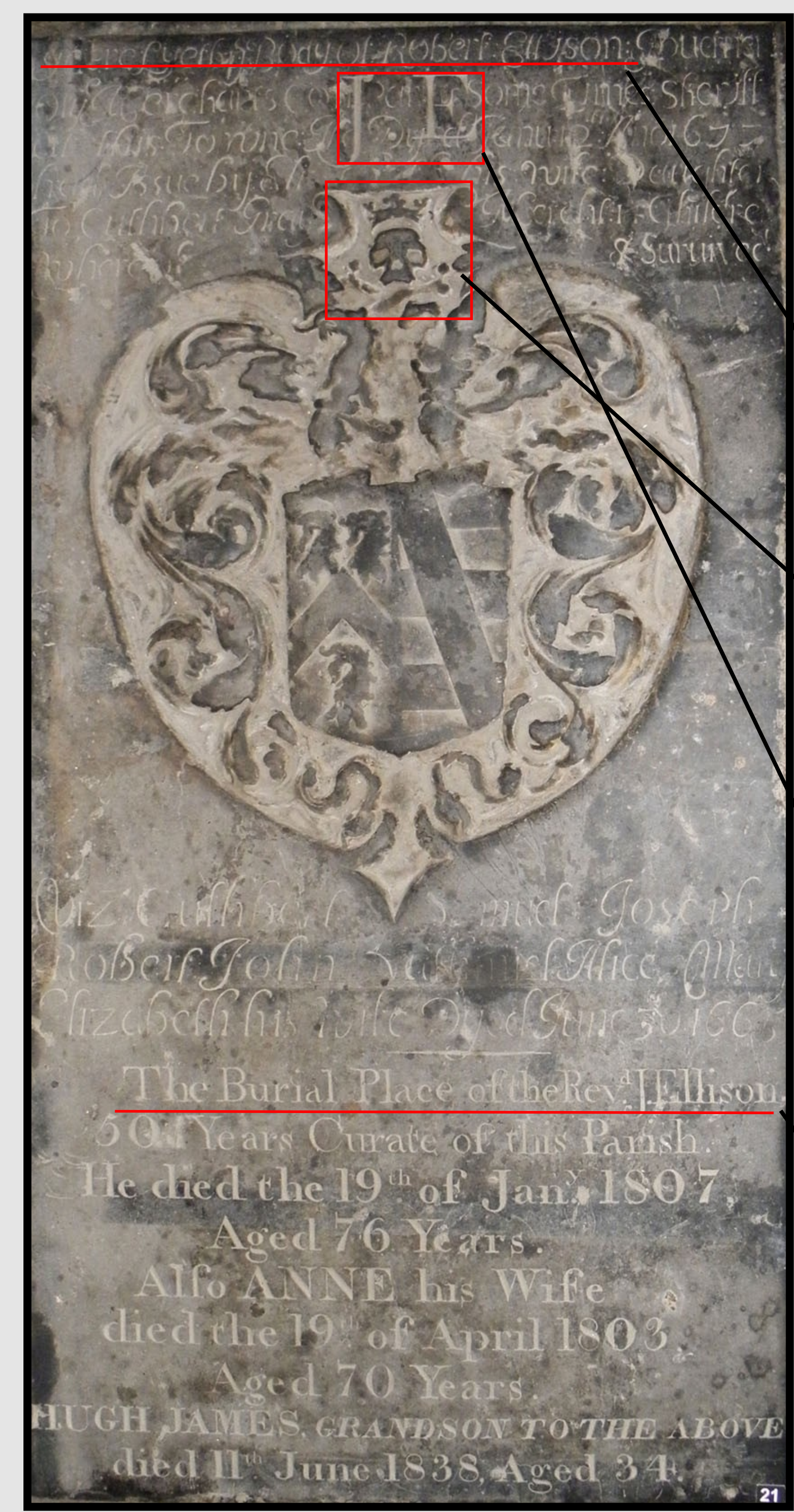


Figure 3: Hebburn Hall (From A. Hubbard, Pastscapes, 2015.)

### References

Carr, R. E. *The History of the Family of Carr*. London: Mitchell and Hughes, 1899.  
 Welford, R. *A descriptive and historical account of the monuments & tombstones in the Church of St. Nicholas, Newcastle-upon-Tyne*. London: Hamilton, Adams, 1880.  
 Hubbard, A. (2015) *Hebburn Hall*. [Accessed 02/10/18]. Available at: [http://www.pastscapes.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob\\_id=26612&sort=2&rational=a&class1=11&period=None&county=None&district=None&parish=None&place=Wing&recordsperpage=10&source=text&p=53&move=n&nor=609&recfc=0](http://www.pastscapes.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=26612&sort=2&rational=a&class1=11&period=None&county=None&district=None&parish=None&place=Wing&recordsperpage=10&source=text&p=53&move=n&nor=609&recfc=0)

## Analysis of the stones



### 'Thesu have mercy on the soule of Cuthbert Ellison'

Despite its date (1517-1648), this stone suggests retention of elements of pre-Reformation thought. The inscription begs for the mercy of Jesus on the deceased's 'soul', showing that the concept of the separation of the body and soul and the importance of the individual in his own fate (key elements of Reformation protestant thought) had not yet come to be commonplace language in Newcastle.

### 'Here Lyeth the body of Robert Ellison'

The use of the word 'body' on commemorative stones was a feature of Reformation thinking, relating to the idea that the body was entirely separated from the soul at death.

### Skull and Crossbones

A common symbol on 18th century grave stones, this was a symbol known as 'memento mori', which became popular after the Reformation because the relationship between the living and the dead was perceived to have changed; the living could no longer intercede for the souls of the dead. This imagery was used to remind people to ensure their own fate upon death by living a life deemed 'good'.

### The initials 'J.E'

Part of the second entry on the Ledger stone, of Reverend J. [John] Ellison, engraved over the previous writing for Robert Ellison, over 100 years later. Proximity to the altar was believed to bring the soul closer to God, and to indicate social status, so stones were often re-used, or cut into and moved to make space for new burials. This practice continued after the Reformation, suggesting that the new beliefs were not fully shared by the social elite.

### 'The Burial Place of the Rev. J. Ellison'

The latest of the commemorations on these two stones, the wording is at this stage more neutral, no mention of either the body or the soul. 'Memento Mori' styles of imagery were no longer used.

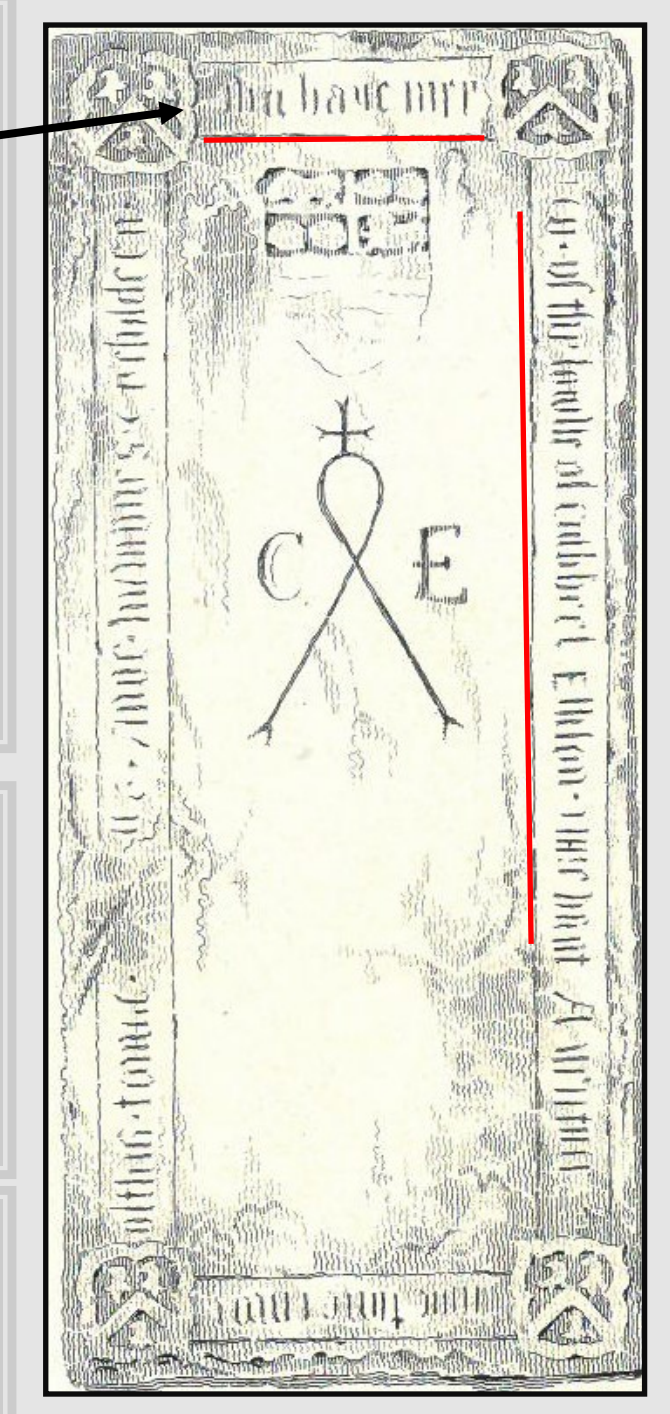


Figure 5: Illustration of the stone of Cuthbert Ellison and family (From Welford, 1880).

### Conclusion

My research shows that members of the social elite in Newcastle were buried and remembered in a similar fashion to those around the rest of Britain, as the Reformation affected all areas similarly. However, I detected elements of resistance to the changes brought about by the Reformation, evidenced in the language used on the stone of Cuthbert Ellison. Therefore, probably due partly to distance from the Capital, where these changes originated, the social elite of Newcastle followed less strictly the ideals of burial and commemoration practices in Britain.

Figure 4: The ledger stone to Robert Ellison and family, and Rev J. Ellison and Family.