

CHESHIRE HISTORIC TOWNS SURVEY

Burton

Archaeological Assessment



2003



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BURTON
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Vince Devine & Jo Clark

1. SUMMARY

Burton is a good example of a picturesque small medieval town, which possessed a church, and held the rights to a market and fair. It retains much of its medieval street plan, together with a number of 17th and 18th century timber framed buildings.

1.1 Topography and Geology

Burton lies in the south-west area of the Wirral peninsula at 25m AOD, rising to 68m AOD at Burton Wood, which overlooks the settlement and affords magnificent views of the Welsh hills. The surrounding Wirral landscape comprises mainly gently undulating dairy land. Much of the Dee Estuary on the English side has silted up, and this area 1km west of Burton is now marshland. The town is 14km north-west of Chester and 4.6km west of Ellesmere Port.

The solid geology of Burton comprises lower mottled sandstone, overlying which is a drift geology of pebble beds to the north and boulder clay to the south and east (Geological Survey of Great Britain 1965). The soils developed on these deposits are typical brown sands, most of which are under mixed arable and grassland with a little forestry near Burton and mainly graded class 2 (Furness 1978, 73).

The A540 Chester to Hoylake road runs 2km east of Burton. An unclassified road runs through Burton linking it with Ness and Neston to the north.

1.2 Administrative Unit

The small medieval parish of Burton, included just two townships - Burton and Puddington. Burton was included in the Wirral Hundred and Wirral Deanery (Dunn 1987, 12). Today Burton lies in the Civil Parish of Neston in the District of Ellesmere Port and Neston.

1.3 Place Name

'Burton' was recorded at Domesday Survey (1086) (Harris and Thacker 1987, 344). The township also occurs as *Burton* (1152), *Borton* (1240), *Bourton* (1363), and *Bwerton* (1592). The place name refers to a '*farm or enclosure at a fortification*', which is probably a reference to the nearby Iron Age promontory fort at Burton Point 1km south-west (Dodgson 1972, 211-12).

2 SOURCES

2.1 Historical

The principal secondary sources for the history of Burton are Beazley (1908) and Booth (1984). There are also a number of records of potential interest held at the Cheshire Record Office (CRO), including Parish Registers (1538-1897), estate papers and miscellaneous ‘parish bundles’ but unfortunately analysis of these records is beyond the remit of the present survey.

2.2 Cartographic

The earliest maps to depict the township of Burton are the county maps of Saxton (1577) and Speed (1610). Burdett’s map of 1777 provides a schematic plan of the town and the road network but the first map to provide a detailed plan of the town is the tithe map of 1847, followed by the OS First Edition 6": 1 mile map surveyed in 1872.

2.3 Archaeological

The County Sites and Monuments Record (CSMR) lists 26 entries for Burton, which are identified on Figure 1. Throughout this document the relevant reference is provided for any sites or finds that have been identified from the CSMR. The present survey has generated five new records.

The only archaeological fieldwork known to have been undertaken in Burton was an excavation within the churchyard of St Nicholas’ church (UID 628608), which uncovered a post medieval burial (RCHME 1997, 3); and a watching brief at Barn End, The Village, which was undertaken during renovation to the roof of the building. This work revealed smoke blackened thatch that was potentially several centuries old (Leah pers comm 2001).

3 HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

3.1 Prehistoric

Just one prehistoric find is known from Burton, a Neolithic arrowhead (CSMR 2317) which was found at Church Farm House. In the surrounding area, 2km to the south-west at Burton Point, is an Iron Age promontory fort (CSMR 9/1).

3.2 Roman

There are no known Romano-British archaeological sites or find spots at Burton.

3.3 Early Medieval

The location and extent of early medieval Burton is unknown. However, it was recorded at Domesday as including a priest, which is an indication that Burton was a parochial centre for the surrounding area.

The Domesday Survey records that:

'The same bishop holds BURTONE and held it T.R.E. There [are] 3 hides that pay geld. The land is for 7 ploughs. In demense are 2 ploughs, and 7 villiens and 4 bordars and a priest and 1 radman with three ploughs. There [is] 1 acre of meadow. T.R.E. it was worth 40s., now as much. When he received it 15s'

(Harris and Thacker, 1987, 344).

The manor was presumably laid waste in the aftermath of the rebellion of 1069-70, and although the value had risen to its pre-conquest level, just five ploughs were in use, even though there was said to be sufficient land for seven. The former value of the manor at 40s was relatively high.

3.4 Medieval

3.4.1 The Manor

In 1102, Bishop Robert de Limesey moved the diocesan seat from Chester to Coventry, and despite being remote from Cheshire, the bishopric continued to hold a large estate in Cheshire, including the manor of Burton, although by the 15th century parts of the manor were leased out (Crosby 1996, 38; Ormerod 1882, 554; Mortimer 1847, 214). For a short period (between 1358-60) the See was vacant, resulting in its Cheshire lands being acquired by the Black Prince, who at that time held the title Earl of Chester (Booth 1984, 12).

3.4.2 Settlement

In 1298 the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield commissioned a survey of his estate, which recorded 47 tenants in the manor of Burton (Booth 1984, 8). In the same year Burton was valued at 2s 4d for the purposes of the 'Peter's Pence' ecclesiastical tax. This tax was charged at 1d per household, with only the poorest members of society exempt, and in Burton this accounted for 36% of the population. When the See's lands were in the possession of the Black Prince (between 1358-60), the accounts of the County Sheriff recorded that 27 tenants were resident at Burton (Booth 1984, 12). It is unclear as to whether this survey was selective, or if the figures actually represent a fall in population, perhaps arising from the effects of the Black Death.

3.4.2 Economy

It has been suggested that 'Burton in Wirral clearly developed as a nucleated village on which its episcopal landlords made some efforts to graft urban characteristics' (Higham 19, 204-5). In 1299 the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, Walter Langham, obtained a market charter for Burton and another charter which allowed his estates a significant degree of independence from the Crown. Langham was an important figure in the reign of Edward I, rising to the position of Lord Treasurer. The charter of 1299 authorised the holding of a Thursday market and a three day fair which was to be held over the feast of St James the Apostle (24th-26th July). Initially the market enjoyed some success, and is described as 'probably the dominant market of the

Wirral' (Booth 1984, 10). After this time, the commercial fortunes of the market may have begun to decline, with the market possibly being redundant by the close of the 14th century (Crosby 1996, 49).

Data for Cheshire towns is rare because in the medieval period the shire was exempt from national taxation, having its own taxation system, the Mize. The settlement appears to have enjoyed some commercial success, and was valued at 57s 8d in the Mize taxation of 1405, a respectable figure when compared to the nearby settlements of Neston (43s 2d), Little Neston (30s 4d), and Ness (25s 8d) (Booth 1985, 8).

As with other small contemporary medieval settlements it is likely that agriculture was the main economic activity. In 1298 approximately half of the total area of the manor (760 acres) was used for arable (Crosby 1996, 45). Fishing was no doubt also an important aspect of the local economy and it is documented that the inhabitants of Burton held '...rights of fishing the River Dee' (Rideout 1927, 10).

A mill was recorded at Burton during the early 14th century, and again in the Reeves accounts of 1360. The structure was extensively repaired in 1472-3 and Booth has suggested that it may have stood on Station Road, close to 'Mill Nook' fields (Booth 1984, 243). Other trades are referred to in 1298, when Gilbert the Cutter, Alexander the Smith, and Richard the Cobbler were mentioned (Booth 1984, 9).

A number of references suggest that Burton may have been served by a port or quay. In 1373 Thomas Hopwell was convicted of stealing a sail from a ship anchored at Burton; in 1371 Sir William of Windsor sailed from Burton in order to commence his position as Governor of Ireland; and during the 14th century, John Hawk a resident of Burton, was Master of 'The Trinity', a vessel engaged in trade with Ireland. Burton may also have provided a ferry service to North Wales, as part of a communications network which linked South Lancashire with the above, via a ferry across the River Mersey (Booth 1984, 10).

3.4.3 Religion

The record of a priest at Domesday suggests that Burton possessed a church at that time. The location, nature and extent of this early church is unknown, but it is likely to have occupied the same site as the medieval church. The present church of St Nicholas has architectural features dating from the 12th century in the porch and beneath the tower (Richards 1947, 83), and Norman capitals are said to have been recovered from the graveyard during the 18th century (Pevsner and Hubbard 1971, 121). With the exception of the Massey Chapel at the east end of the north aisle, which was built in 1380 and survived the restoration of 1554, the rest of the church was reconstructed in 1721 (Richards 1947, 83).

During the 1230s the See of Coventry and Lichfield transferred the prebend of Burton to the church at Tarvin. This act enabled the income from Burton's church to be diverted into nearby St Andrew's Hospital at Denhall (CSMR 10/1), with the master of the hospital undertaking the duties of rector at Burton (Booth 1984, 24). An archaeological survey carried out at the hospital in 1998 by the RCHME revealed a number of building platforms as well as remains potentially related to medieval and

later quays. Denhall is known to have been an outport for Chester in the 15th and 16th centuries and potentially had earlier origins. In 1283 it is recorded that Edward I sent for his ship ‘which is at Danewell or Parcum laden with wine’ (RCHME 1998, 22).

3.4.4 The Surrounding Landscape

Within the surrounding area are a number of medieval sites including St Andrew’s medieval hospital at Denhall (CSMR 10/1) 1km west of Burton and the site of a windmill at Mills Nook 0.5km west (CSMR 43).

3.5 Post Medieval

3.5.1 The Manor

In 1806, the manor of Burton was purchased from the Bishop of Lichfield, by Richard Congreve. It had previously been held (since 1755) under lease by his great grandfather Rev Richard Congreve (Ormerod 1882, 554). Richard Congreve (jnr) began the construction of Burton Hall c 1805 in an area that had formerly comprised fields and cottage gardens (Booth, 1978, 33).

3.5.2 Settlement

A Subsidy Tax roll of 1545 records 32 names at Burton, and in 1663 Hearth Tax figures recorded 41 residences (Booth 1984, 71). Although these figures do not take into account the poor, there appears to have been a slight growth in the population of Burton.

In 1561 Burton possessed five licensed houses, a figure which had risen to 15 in 1607 but had declined to eight by 1615 (Rideout 1927, 13, Booth 1984, 54). Two inns were recorded at Burton during the 19th century, The Stanley Arms in 1843 and the Royal Oak in 1851, with a victualler listed amongst the trades practised in 1850 (Booth 1984, 54; Bagshaw 1850, 655).

There was potentially a school at Burton in 1665 when Edward Steel was documented as being a licensed schoolmaster, although where he taught is unrecorded. During the following century Thomas Wilson, the Bishop of Sodor and Man, returned to his birthplace of Burton and in 1724 he founded and endowed a school, which was built on common land at the western end of Burton, with a master’s house added in 1732. The school continued to serve the community until 1963 (Booth 1834, 102-10).

3.5.3 Economy

Agriculture continued to be the principal employer in Burton until the 20th century (Booth 1984, 15). For example, between 1602-12 the manor court proceedings recorded a scythe, geese, bees, sheep and crops. In the late 17th and early 18th centuries the agricultural regime changed from arable to pastoral, with an emphasis on the production of cheese (Booth 1984, 58-70). In the age of ‘improvement’, which had commenced in the 18th century, improvements were made to housing and

farming practice and at Burton improvement also included the enclosure of the commons where generations of villagers had held the right of common pasture. Soon after Richard Congreve had bought the manor he arranged for enclosure to be undertaken and an Act of Parliament confirmed this. By 1817, 405 acres were enclosed to the north of the village and along the shore and marshland (Booth, 1978 31).

A windmill (CSMR 41/0/1) may have been built or rebuilt at Mill Wood on the present mill site in either 1629 or 1771. A corn miller was recorded in 1850 (Bagshaw 1850, 243), however production appears to have ceased by 1888 (Booth 1984, 244).

A fledgling cloth industry may have been established in Burton during the early 17th century, when in 1605 amongst the possessions of William Meare was 'one payre of linen cards', whilst an inventory of 1637 included a spinning wheel. By the 18th century the level of production appears to have risen as the court ordered that no hemp or flax was to be washed in Dunsten or in any quarry on 'The Hill' (Booth 1984, 61-66).

Probate documents record that between 1595 and 1703 husbandmen, yeomen, a warrener and a ships carpenter were amongst the trades practised in Burton (Booth 1984, 64).

Other trades recorded during the 19th century include a schoolmaster, a shopkeeper, and a blacksmith (Bagshaw 1850, 655).

3.5.4 Religion

By the time of the Reformation in the mid-16th century, the architectural fabric of the medieval church was in a poor state of repair, and in 1721 the building was described as '...now so ruinous that it gives way outward...' (Booth 1984, 116). In the same year a 'Church Brief' appeal raised sufficient funds to allow the commencement of a rebuilding programme (*ibid*).

Identified on the modern OS 1: 10 000 map is a site depicted as the 'Quaker Graves' to the rear of the church of St Nicholas. This apparently refers to two graves, which lie alongside the path that runs through the wood to the back of the church. All that is known about these graves are that they were deliberate burials outside consecrated ground. As there is no evidence of Quakerism in Burton, their true origin remains a mystery (Booth, 1984, 48).

3.5.5 Population

In 1664 the population of Burton was estimated at 230 (Mac Gregor). From 1801-1971 the population figures are available from the results of the Census, which are published in the Victoria County History (Harris 1979, 210), and for 1981 and 1991 census data has been reproduced for Burton under Class Licence Number C01W0000125 with the permission of the Controller of the HMSO. The population of Burton remained relatively stable, at around 300 between 1801 and 1921, rising to over 400 in 1931. After this date (up to and including 1971) the population figures were included in those for the whole of the Neston Urban District (*ibid*).

1801	288	1901	222
1811	300	1911	264
1821	326	1921	282
1831	313	1931	438
1841	282	1951	9726
1851	291	1961	11865
1861	265	1971	16879
1871	272	1981	2519
1881	257	1991	2935
1891	266		

3.5.6 Transport and Communications

The main routeway along the south coast of the Wirral peninsula was turnpiked in 1787, giving access to Chester in the south, and to West Kirby, Hoylake and Birkenhead to the north (Rideout 1927, 29).

The Chester to Birkenhead railway line was built in 1841, with the Parkgate branch line being completed in 1866. The closest stations to Burton were located at Willaston and Neston (Pearson 1985, 31).

3.5.7 The Surrounding Landscape

Within the surrounding landscape are a number of 17th century buildings, which are listed Grade II. Examples include Burton Point Farm (CSMR 42) 0.9km south-west and Barn Farm Tithe Barn 1km south-east (CSMR 41/3/1).

4 PLAN COMPONENTS

The town has been divided into 16 components (prefixed by **COM**). These have been tentatively sub-divided by period, although there is need for further work to define the extent and date of these components more closely. Many components would have spanned more than one period but are discussed under their earliest likely date of occurrence. In some cases tightly defined plan components can be identified while for others only a general area can be delineated and a tighter definition can only be achieved by further fieldwork.

Plan components commence with the early medieval period. Post medieval Burton has been identified from the OS First Edition 6": 1mile map of c 1872.

EARLY MEDIEVAL c 540 – 1066 (Figure 2)

COM 1 - Church

MEDIEVAL c1066 – 1540 (Figure 2)

COM 2a - Port at Denhall?

- COM 2b** - Port at Burton Point?
COM 3 - Tenements, north of Village Street
COM 4 - Tenements, south of Village Street
COM 5 - ? Tenements, north of The Rake
COM 6 - ? Tenements, north of Village Street
COM 7 - ? Tenements, south of St Nicholas Church
COM 8 - ? Tenements, south of Village Street?
COM 9 - Market Place
COM 10 - Tenements, south of Village Street

POST MEDIEVAL c 1872 (Figure 2)

COM 11 - Settlement

MODERN c 2000 (Figure 2)

COM 12 - Settlement

4.1 Early Medieval (Figure 2)

The available evidence, including the identification of a priest at Domesday suggests that there was an early medieval church located at Burton. The likely location for this is the site of the present church of St Nicholas (**COM 1**), which is known to have been built during the post conquest period, then restored in the 16th century and rebuilt in 1721. On the tithe map of 1847 the churchyard is depicted as sub-circular in shape, which is a common form during the early medieval period and this may indicate the extent of the early medieval churchyard. The modern churchyard has since been extended to the west.

No doubt there was settlement located within the vicinity of the early medieval church. However, there is no evidence to suggest the location and extent of this.

4.2 Medieval (Figure 2)

Burton appears to have possessed two quay/port areas during the medieval period, one potentially located at Denhall at the site of the medieval hospital of St Andrew's, has been identified as **COM 2a**; the other at Burton Point has been approximately identified as **COM 2b**.

The length of Village Street, which is the main road through Burton, potentially indicates the extent of the medieval settlement. To the north of Village Street is **COM 3**, which at the time of the tithe map (1848) was divided into seven regular tenements, with buildings fronting onto the street and boundaries running at right angles to the street frontage. This block of regular shaped tenements is defined by The Rake, a 'back lane' that would have provided access to the common pasture that lay to the north of Burton. **COM 5** has been identified as a potential area of medieval settlement as suggested by its close proximity to the medieval church and the regular boundary divisions within this block of land. However, its location to the rear of The Rake suggests that any development within this area post dates **COM 3** although it was void of settlement at tithe (1848). One possible explanation is that

during the medieval period **COM 5** may have comprised small enclosures attached to the rear of the tenements in **COM 3**.

To the south of Village Street is **COM 4**, which comprises a similar pattern to that of **COM 3**, although tenements are perhaps less regularly laid out, particularly in the western area of the component. However, **COM 4** is partly bounded by a common rear boundary, although this pattern was disturbed by the construction of Burton Hall c 1805.

Settlement was no doubt clustered within the vicinity of the church and **COM 7** defines an area of such settlement to the south of the churchyard. Also, south of this is **COM 8**, which is an area of irregular settlement that may be of medieval or potentially post medieval origin. Why the church is set back from the main road is unclear, potentially the churchyard may originally have been on a larger scale, later undergoing encroachment. Alternatively **COM 7** may have formed part of a medieval market place, which was later in-filled.

A medieval market was established at Burton by the See of Coventry and Lichfield in 1299. However, this may have legitimised an earlier market rather than sanctioning a new event (Crosby. 1996, 48). Two potential market places have been identified: **COM 9**, a rectangular area to the south-west of the churchyard and a street market identified by **COM 10** held in Village Street.

COM 9's close proximity to the churchyard is a common feature of medieval market places, particularly since the market was established by the church. When this rectangular area was in-filled is not known but the buildings that presently occupy this area date to the 17th century (DCMS 1999).

COM 10 is identified as a broad widening in Village Street, which is the main road that runs through the village. This cigar-shaped widening, which is clearly depicted on the tithe map of 1848 and the OS First Edition of 1872, is typical of medieval street markets, and its close proximity to the main area of medieval settlement (**COMs 3 and 4**) would also make it a favourable location.

4.3 Post Medieval c 1872 (Figure 2)

The development of early post medieval Burton is unmapped but is likely to have been on a small scale and to have comprised redevelopment of the historic core. The extent of Burton c 1872 has been identified from the OS First Edition map and this is depicted as **COM 11**. The main areas of post medieval development are: Burton Hall, which was built c 1805 and enlarged in 1904 (Booth 1984, 245), and set within extensive grounds (Department of the Environment 1974, 11); the Bishop Wilson School founded in 1724-5 to the north of the village by Robert Wilson, Lord Bishop of Sodor and Man; and the windmill on Mill Lane, which may have been built or rebuilt on its present site in either 1629 or 1771. It is unclear as to whether this structure replaced an original medieval mill. Also, in east Burton is the site of a smithy.

4.4 Modern c 2000 (Figure 2)

Modern development has been limited to small scale expansion on the peripheries of Burton, especially to the north-east and north-west, along Dunstan Lane and Neston Road. The extent of modern Burton c 2000 has been identified as **COM 12**.

5 HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

5.1 Above-Ground Remains

Much of Burton's historic street pattern survives to the present day, including its historic core. The settlement retains a good building stock, dating from at least the 17th century onwards. Most of Burton is included in Conservation Area and to the west of the settlement there are three Scheduled Ancient Monuments: Burton Point Iron Age Promontory Fort (SAM 25695), St Andrew's medieval hospital at Denhall (SAM 23645) and Burton Hall ice house (SAM 30384). To the south of Burton are the gardens of Burton Hall, which are listed Grade II in English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens.

Within Burton there are 26 listed buildings, including a Dovecote, Gate piers, a sundial and a telephone kiosk. Of these, one is listed Grade II*: St Nicholas church, the rest are Grade II. Of particular note are Rose Cottage, an early 17th century cottage with brick noggin, and Church Farmhouse which is dated 1670 and has a cruck frame. Also the watching brief carried out at Barn End, which revealed smoke blackened thatch several centuries old, may indicate similar survival elsewhere.

5.2 Below-Ground Remains

The lack of archaeological work carried out at Burton has meant that it is impossible to assess the nature and extent of any below ground remains. However, Burton's historic core does not appear to have undergone significant modern development, which suggests that the survival of earlier archaeological deposits is likely to be quite high. Also, in the area of the potential ports (Burton Point and Denhall), evidence of maritime archaeology might survive along with palaeo-environmental data and organic remains. However, bedrock outcrops can be observed throughout Burton, which implies that only very shallow archaeological deposits are likely to survive.

6 PRIORITIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

6.1 General

The study of Burton forms part of a national research priority to examine the origins and development of medieval small towns and rural markets (Priority H5; English Heritage 1997, 49). Work at Burton would fit into a number of these national priorities, particularly the following processes of change:

- PC6 Late Saxon to medieval
- PC7 Transition from medieval to post medieval traditions (c1300-1700AD)

6.2 Early Medieval

- Establish the nature and extent of settlement during the early medieval period.

- Establish whether there was an early medieval church, examine its location and foundation date.
- Examine whether there was continuity between the early medieval and medieval churches.

6.3 Medieval

- Establish the precise location of settlement areas and date their phases of expansion and contraction.
- Establish the nature and extent of buildings on settlement plots.
- Establish the date of foundation of the medieval church, examine phases of expansion and contraction.
- Examine evidence for medieval trade and industry.
- Establish the foundation and location of the market places. Were they of medieval origin?
- Examine the location, nature and extent of the medieval ports at Burton Point and Denhall.

6.4 Post Medieval

- Examine evidence of trade and industry.
- Examine the nature and extent of post medieval development and expansion.
- Examine evidence for Protestant nonconformity at Burton.

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7.2 Maps

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8 ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Burton and the Surrounding Area

Figure 2: The Development of Burton

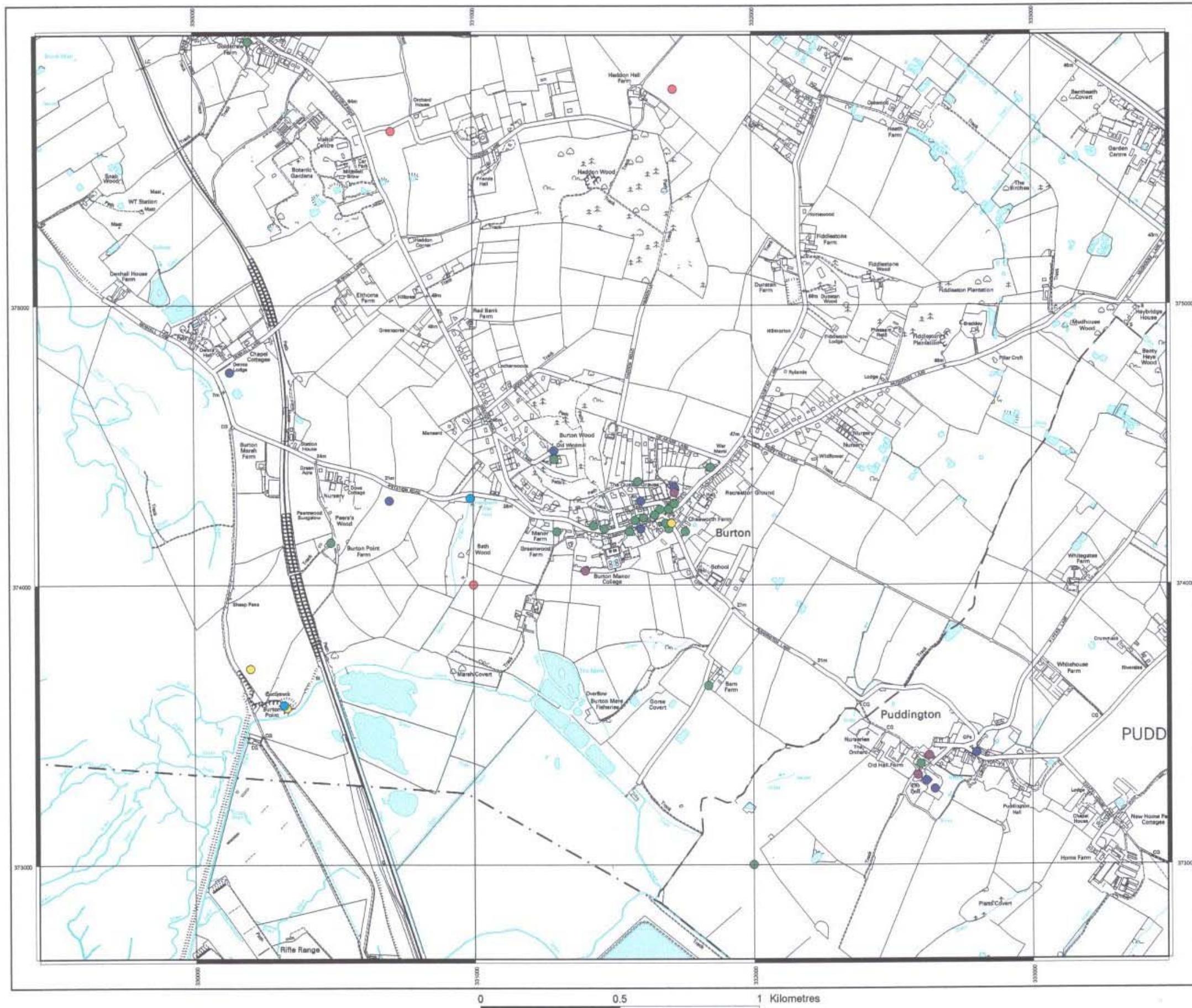


Figure 1
Burton and the
Surrounding Area

Sites and Monuments

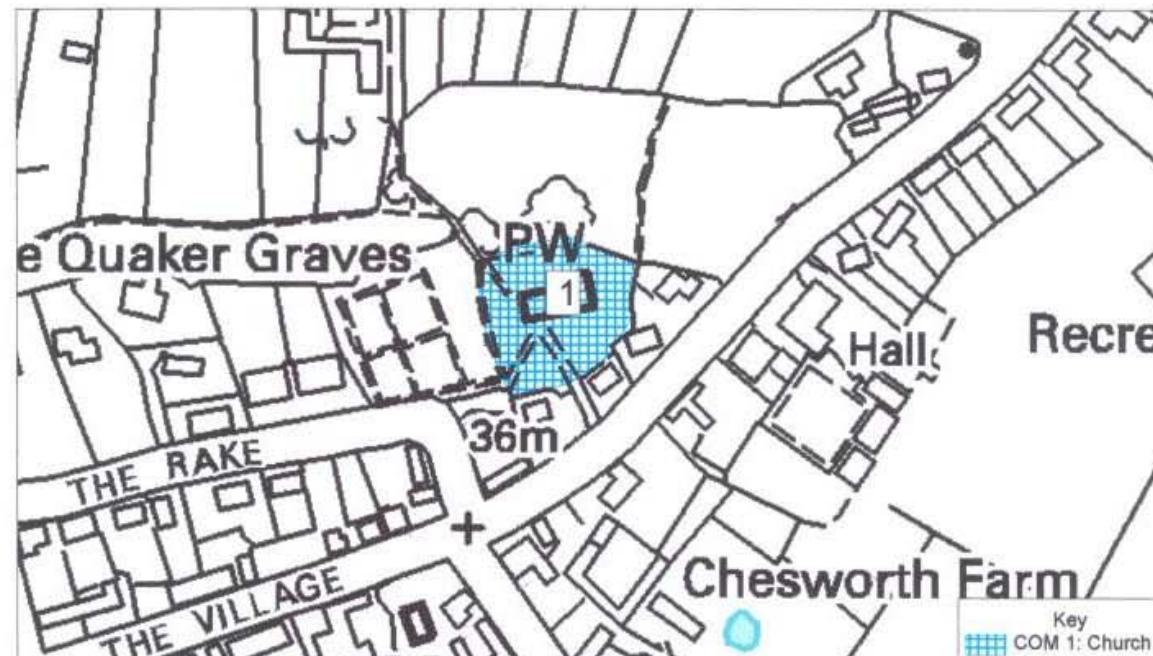
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- Romano-British
- Early Medieval
- Medieval
- Post Medieval
- Modern

1:13000

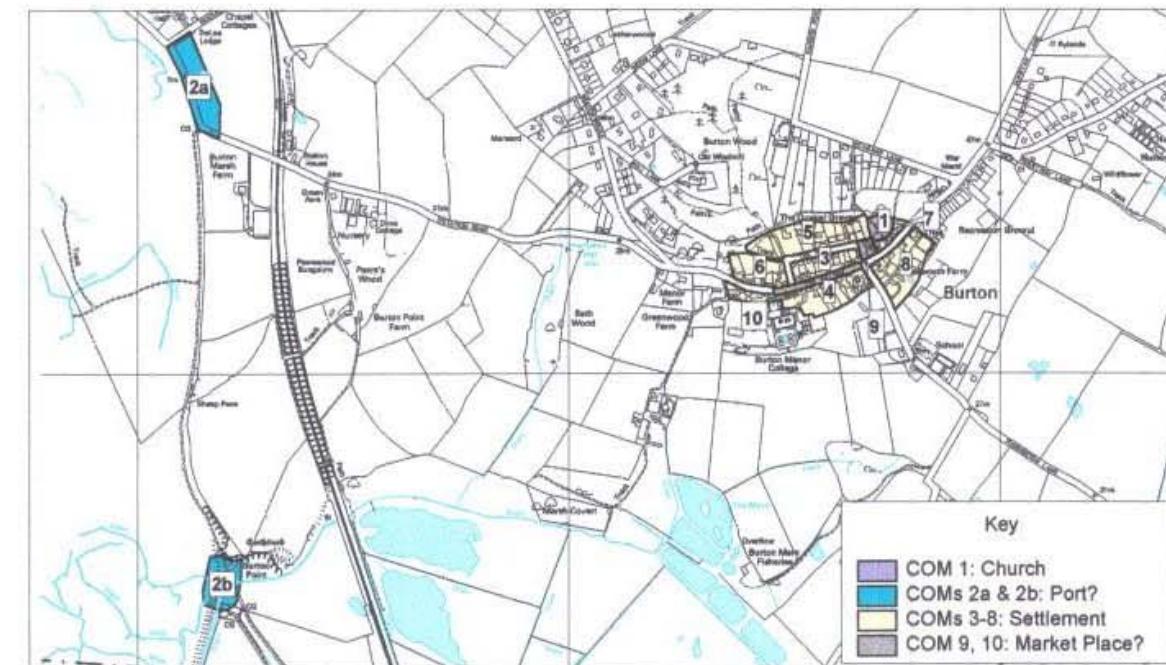


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Figure 2: The Development of Burton



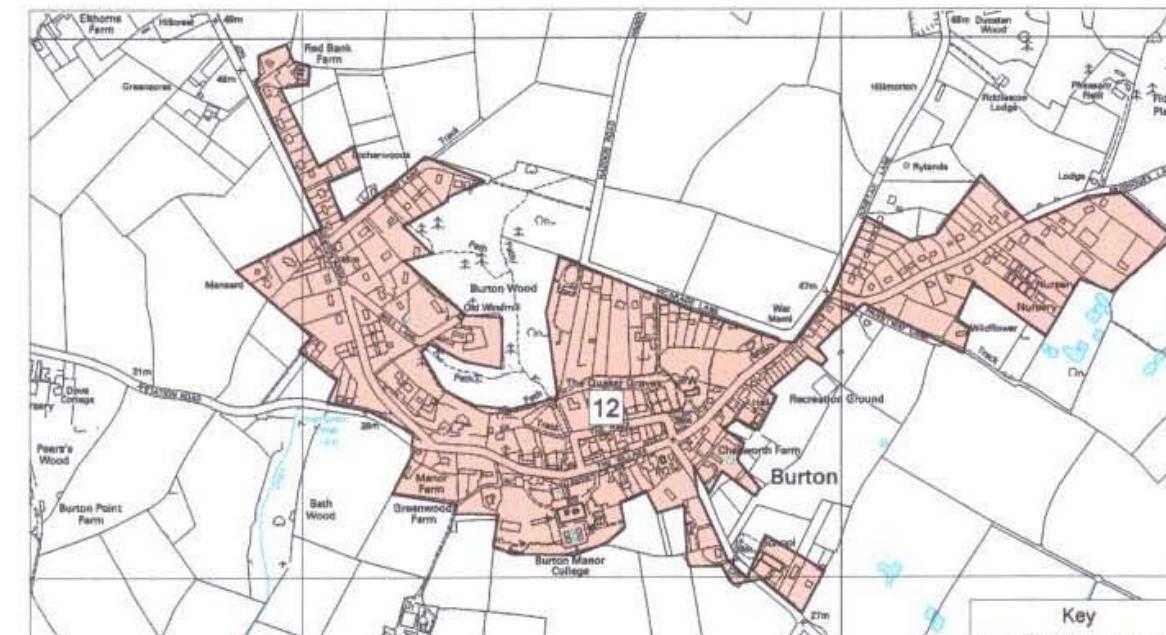
Early Medieval 0 50 100 Metres 1:2500



Medieval 0 300 600 Metres 1:15000



Post Medieval c 1872 0 100 200 Meters 1:6000



Modern c 2000 0 200 400 Metres 1:12000