

CHESHIRE HISTORIC TOWNS SURVEY

Farndon

Archaeological Assessment



2003

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Environmental Planning
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Front cover :

J Cowley, 1744 An Improved Map of Cheshire, Containing the Borough and Market Towns, with those adjoining; also its Principal Roads and Rivers
Cheshire and Chester Archives and Local Studies, PM 2/20.

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FARNDON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Mike Shaw and Jo Clark

1. SUMMARY

The small town of Farndon has a settlement pattern that dates back over 1000 years. The circular churchyard wall surrounding St Chad's, which is in turn surrounded by a circular outer enclosure (outlined in part by the route of the High Street) is all that remains of what appears to have been an important early medieval minster site. Although circular and oval churchyards are known from elsewhere in Cheshire, Farndon's concentric plan is unique. Its closest parallels are Celtic monastic sites and towns which grew from such centres (Bradley 1990, Fig 2).

1.1 Topography and Geology

The settlement of Farndon lies in the south-west corner of the county, 12km south of Chester. It is sited c 25m AOD on a slight bluff overlooking the river Dee, which forms the boundary between the county of Cheshire and the Welsh district of Wrexham (formerly Denbighshire). Farndon in its immediate context is surrounded by the low-lying Cheshire Plain - further afield are the foothills of the Welsh mountains 11km to the west and the Mid-Cheshire Ridge 7km to the east.

The underlying solid geology consists of Bunter Pebble Beds, above which are drift deposits of alluvium (British Geological Survey, 1967). The soils developed on these deposits are largely brown sands and brown earths (Furness 1979, 73-82). They are easily worked, fertile if nutrient and organic matter levels are maintained and can grow a wide range of crops (graded classes 2 – 3). By the river soils are alluvial and are suited to meadowland (ibid, 151-7), and to the east soils are loamy and ideally suited to grassland (ibid, 116-23).

A bridge crosses the River Dee connecting Farndon on the north bank with Holt on the south. The town is located at a nodal point in the road network. The A534, Wrexham-Nantwich road runs just to the south of Farndon. The B5130, which runs north to Aldford and onto Chester, runs due east of Farndon with Churton Road either its earlier route or a branch road from it.

1.2 Administrative Unit

Farndon lay in the ancient Parish and Chapelry of Farndon, in the Dudestan Hundred, later renamed Broxton Hundred, and in the Deanery of Chester (Dunn 1987, 14). Today Farndon is a Civil Parish in the District of Chester.

1.3 Place Name

Farndon is first recorded in AD 924 as *Fearndune* meaning fern hill. Other variations include: *Ferentune* (Domesday 1086), *Fardon* (1277), *Faryngton* (1391) and *Farne* (1575) (Dodgson 1972, 74).

2 SOURCES

2.1 Historical

There is little documentation available for Farndon. Useful information is contained in Ormerod's *History of Cheshire* (1882), which provides a good account of Farndon's manorial and ecclesiastical histories, and a recent parish history (Latham (ed), 1981).

The County Record Office (CRO) contains a collection of primary documents dating from the 13th century onwards, including a rental of 1629, which potentially contains valuable information. Unfortunately, analysis of these documents is beyond the remit of the present survey.

2.2 Cartographic

Farndon is identified on Saxton's County map of 1577 and Speed's County map of 1610. Two plans in the CRO, an estate map of 1735 and the tithe map of 1840, show the settlement in detail. The latter is the earliest to show individual property boundaries. These, together with the Ordnance Survey First Edition 6":1 mile map surveyed 1874 provide invaluable information about the early plan of the town.

2.3 Archaeological

Before the present assessment there were ten sites recorded in the settlement area of Farndon in the County Sites and Monuments Record (CSMR), which are depicted on Figure 1. Where sites and finds have been identified from the CSMR the relevant reference is provided throughout this report. Three new sites have been identified by this assessment.

Two pieces of archaeological work have been carried out at St Chad's Church. A trial excavation was carried out in 1998 by Chester Archaeology in the extension to St Chad's churchyard (Carrington 1998). The results of this work were negative, and the natural underlying geology was located at a maximum depth of c 0.75m below the modern ground surface. A further evaluation was carried out in July 2001 by Gifford and Partners in response to a planning application for a toilet and boiler room extension on the southern side of the church. This revealed a single sherd of Roman pottery, possibly associated with an occupation layer, a small amount of medieval and post medieval pottery and two inhumations (Gifford and Partners 2001).

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

3.1 Prehistoric

No prehistoric finds are known from Farndon itself and only a handful are known from the surrounding area. These include a mesolithic chert flake found 2km north of Farndon (CSMR 2508), a Bronze Age axe discovered c 2km north-east of Farndon (CSMR 2395), and a vessel potentially of Bronze Age date is thought to have been found in the area of Coddington, although the exact location of this is unknown (CSMR 1823).

3.2 Roman

A single sherd of 2nd – 4th century Romano-British grey ware pottery was recovered along with a piece of industrial slag waste during an evaluation at St Chad's Church, by Gifford and Partners in 2001. These finds came from either an occupation layer or the fill of a feature which extended beyond the extent of the trench (Gifford and Partners 2001).

In addition, the important tile and pottery factory at Holt lies adjacent to Farndon on the opposite bank of the river Dee. Pottery was produced here in the first quarter of the 2nd century and tile until the mid 3rd century, and goods were transported along the River Dee to the legionary fortress at Chester.

It has been suggested that a Roman road branched off Watling Street to Holt, crossing the River Dee at Farndon (Harris and Thacker 1987, 217-8), while the discovery of a hypocaust system at Crewe (CSMR 1787), 2km south-east of Farndon, suggests that this may have been the site of a Roman villa. Jones (1991, 77) has suggested that there might be an early Roman fort at Farndon, connected with the works depot at Holt.

3.3 Early Medieval

The parish church of Farndon is set within a circular churchyard, an indication of an early origin, as is its dedication to St Chad (Harris and Thacker 1987, 265, 269, 271). Higham has suggested that there was an early minster parish based on Farndon which encompassed the medieval parishes of Farndon, Aldford, Tilston and Coddington, including everything between the Dee and the southern end of the Mid-Cheshire Ridge (Higham 1993, 133-4).

Farndon has several characteristics which are indicative of a multiple estate; and possibly in the 10th century this was under royal patronage (Harris and Thacker 1987, 266). Two medieval sources describe Farndon as a 'royal town'; Edward the Elder died there in AD 924 and it is documented that Edgar was rowed along the River Dee from his palace at Farndon to Chester (Dodgson 1972, 74-5, 119, 124). The settlement plan, however, is more reminiscent of a monastic site and it is possible that since Farndon originally included Aldford, that the royal centre was located there instead. Examples of similar separation of palace and minster are known elsewhere (Blair 1988, 40-45).

There are two entries for Farndon at Domesday; one for land held by the Bishop of Chester, and the other for land held of Earl Hugh by Bigot. The latter holding, however, is thought to refer to Aldford. A transcription of the former is given below:

The Domesday Survey records that:

The same bishop holds Ferentone and held it T.R.E. There are 4 [hides] that pay geld. The land is for 5 ploughs. In demesne are two [ploughs] and 7 villeins with 1 plough. The wood there [is] 1 league long and ½ [league] wide. Of this land 2 priests hold 1½ hides of the bishop. There [is] 1 plough in demesne, and 2 Frenchmen and 2 villeins and 1 bordar with 1½ ploughs and 4 serfs. The priest of the vill has ½ plough and 5 bordars with 1 plough. The whole was worth T.R.E 40s, now 60s. It was waste.

(Harris and Thacker 1987, 233)

3.4 Medieval

3.4.1 The Manor

The Bishopric of Chester was transferred to Coventry in 1102, leaving Farndon with a distant landlord. The manor of Farndon remained in the hands of the Bishop although parts may have been subinfeudated or farmed by neighbouring gentry (Ormerod 1882, 742).

3.4.2 Settlement

The present bridge over the River Dee was built around 1345, with extensive rebuilding probably in the early 19th century. It was referred to by Leland as a great stone bridge and of ten arches with the remains of a guard house in the middle by Pennant. In 1857 vestiges of a tower and gateway still remained but the bridge was described as being of eight arches. There is likely, however, to have been a crossing from a much earlier date (CSMR 1791/0/1; SAM 124).

Little is known about the development of medieval settlement but the monastic centre no doubt attracted secular settlement, and it is during this period that the present street pattern, appears to have been established.

3.4.3 Economy

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 town was not granted market or borough charters. However it had a successful economy as indicated by the Cheshire mize of 1405 (Booth 1985) when Farndon paid 48s, a relatively large amount, similar to that paid by Aldford (49s), Halton (45s) and Great Neston (43s 2d).

The majority of the population were no doubt engaged in agriculture. The 1735 map depicts distinctive reverse S-shape boundaries, which are typical of enclosed open

fields. Townfield Lane, which runs north-west from Churton Road, also bears witness to the former presence of open fields. Sources that refer to other aspects of the local economy are limited to a reference to a smithy in the centre of the village in 1300, and a mill held by Ralph Egerton (Latham ed. 1981, 21,24).

3.4.4 Religion

The earliest surviving architectural feature in the church of St Chad is the 14th century tower (DoE 1984). However, the circular churchyard and parochial arrangements indicate that there was a much earlier church on the site.

3.4.5 The Surrounding Area

A handful of medieval sites are recorded in the surrounding area. Of these, a site of particular note is the Sanctuary which was located at King's Marsh (CSMR 1798), 1.5km east of Farndon. It was one of three sanctuaries within the ancient Earldom of Chester where those seeking the protection of the earl could stay for a year and a day. Other sites include the medieval moat at Wetreins farm (CSMR 1788), which is 1.5km to the south east of Farndon and the remains of the shrunken medieval settlement of Caldecott Green (CSMR 1784), 2.5km south-west of Farndon.

3.5 Post-Medieval

3.5.1 Civil War

An account of the Battle of Farndon Bridge, a Civil War skirmish that took place in 1643, states that the Parliamentary side ‘...advanced that night to Farne, which is a little towne on the Cheshire side - over against the Holt in Wales where the enemy kept a garrison’ (Latham ed. 1981, 27). The east window of St Chad’s Church contains 17th century glass depicting Royalist figures (CSMR 1791/1/1).

3.5.2 The Manor

The manor of Farndon was held under lease from the bishopric by Roger Barnston of nearby Churton in 1816 (Ormerod 1882, 743). In 1850 the Marquis of Westminster is listed as the lord of the manor, patron of the curacy, and impropiator of the tithes (Bagshaw 1850, 129).

3.5.3 Settlement

There are a number of 17th and 18th century descriptions of Farndon as a ‘town’. William Webb, writing around the 1620s, reported that ‘Farndon... continued for a good length, reaching down to the foot of an exceeding fair stone bridge..’ (King 1656, Part 2, 54). Also Thomas Pennant recorded in 1778 that he ‘...reached Farn or Farndon, a small town on the Dee’ (Latham (ed) 1981,39).

One of the earliest racecourses in the country was established at Farndon Hay in 1631 (CSMR 1797/1; Ormerod 1882, 743). This was located by the River Dee immediately upstream of the bridge.

Farndon School was built around 1629 on the east side of Churton Road and was endowed with the rent of the croft on which it stands (Bagshaw, 1850, 129).

3.5.4 Economy

There were ten inns in Farndon c 1650 which suggests that there was considerable passing trade in the town (MacGregor 1992). By 1780 the number of inns at Farndon had declined to only five (ibid). In 1850 a range of trades and professions were present in Farndon. There were now just three inns, along with a number of grocers, shopkeepers, butchers and shoemakers as well as more rural craftsmen such as blacksmiths, farriers, saddlers and wheelwrights (Bagshaw 1850, 129).

The 1735 estate map shows extensive areas of the township still unenclosed. However, by the time of the 1840 tithe award map most of the parish had been enclosed.

3.5.5 Religion

Due to large scale destruction at the time of the Civil War, when the church largely had to be rebuilt, most of the fabric of the church of St Chad dates from the mid -17th century onwards except for the 14th century tower (Pevsner 1971, 218).

Chapel House, a mid-17th century building on the south side of High Street was the site of the Rock Congregational Church which opened in 1889. Around the same time there was also a place of worship for Plymouth Brethren (Kelly 1892, 272). The location of this is unknown.

3.5.6 Population

The population in 1664 has been estimated as 225 (MacGregor 1992). From 1801-1871 population data is available from the census returns printed in the Victoria County History (Harris 1979, 202-240) and for 1981 and 1991 census data has been reproduced under Class Licence Number C01W0000125 with the permission of the Controller of the HMSO.

1801	357	1901	564
1811	337	1911	546
1821	429	1921	573
1831	423	1931	560
1841	521	1951	668
1851	558	1961	818
1861	557	1971	1162
1871	598	1981	1594
1881	556	1991	1594
1891	560		

3.5.7 Transport and Communications

The east-west road through Farndon, from Barnhill to Wrexham, was turnpiked in 1782, while the north-south road from Chester-Worthenbury was turnpiked in 1854 (Harrison 1886).

Farndon lay a considerable distance from any railway line, the closest station being at Broxton, 8km to the east, on the now defunct Chester-Whitchurch line.

3.5.8 The Surrounding Area

Within the surrounding villages a number of post medieval buildings survive many of which are Listed. Two examples from Churton by Farndon include a 16th century timber framed manor house and a 17th century standing building, both of which are Listed Grade II.

4 PLAN COMPONENTS

The town has been divided into eleven components (prefixed by **COM**). These have been tentatively sub-divided by period, although there is a need for a great deal of further work to define the date of these plan components more closely. Many 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. In others only a general area can be delineated and a tighter definition can only be achieved by further fieldwork.

EARLY MEDIEVAL c 540 –1066 (Figure 2)

COM 1 - St Chad's Church

COM 2 - Monastic Enclosure

MEDIEVAL c1066-1540 (Figure 2)

COM 3 - Farndon Bridge

COM 4 - Market Place

COM 5 - Tenements, north of High Street

COM 6 - Tenements, north of High Street

COM 7 - Tenements, west end of High Street

COM 8 - Tenements, east end of High Street

COM 9 - Tenements, east end of High Street

POST MEDIEVAL c 1874 (Figure 2)

COM 10 - Settlement

MODERN c 2000 (Figure 2)

COM 11 - Settlement

4.1 Early Medieval (Figure 2)

The circular churchyard of St Chad's (**COM 1**), surrounded by an outer ring (**COM 2**) is indicative of an important early monastic or minster site. As the monastic buildings fell out of use, the outer ring became developed but the layout of the site became fossilised in the town's street plan. This is of great importance nationally as well as locally.

No doubt in use at this time, if not much earlier, was the bridge over the River Dee (**COM 3**). A crossing dating back to the Roman period may have been a factor in the decision to site a monastery here.

4.2 Medieval (Figure 2)

Although there is no formal market recorded at Farndon there is a noticeable widening of the High Street at its junction with Churton Road leading down to the river crossing as far as River Lane (**COM 4**). Such a feature is typical of medieval street markets which may have originated in the early medieval period as a product of the commercial activity attracted by the monastic site. Noticeably the 19th century maps indicate that this is where the town's inns were located.

It is not known when the monastery fell into disuse. However, it is likely that **COM 2** would have been in-filled soon after. Settlement no doubt clustered around the monastery as it continued to do so around the church in later periods. **COMs 5** and **6** north of High Street, are densely packed areas of settlement that cluster along the street frontage. This density perhaps indicates a pressure for space in this area, indeed the tenement boundaries are irregular which suggests that they were not planned but rather a product of ad hoc development.

COMs 7, 8 and **9** are less densely populated components as shown on the 1735 estate map but their proximity to the centre of the settlement suggests that they may have been prime locations for medieval settlement.

4.3 Post Medieval (Figure 2)

Farndon underwent little expansion during the post medieval period, as indicated by both the 1735 estate map and the OS First Edition 6": 1 mile map surveyed in 1874. The extent of settlement in 1874 is identified as **COM 10**. By this date there had been small scale expansion along Barton Road, possibly in the form of squatter settlement along roadside verges. Limited expansion also occurred to the north; with the construction of Farndon School in 1629. The croft on which it stands is marked as School Croft on the 1735 map. Also a 'Tythe Barn' is identified on the 1735 map, within the triangular area at the bisection of Churton Road.

4.4 Modern (Figure 2)

The modern settlement of Farndon (**COM 11**) has expanded east along Barton Road, with housing estates established to the north and south. A housing estate has also been built to the north-west of Farndon and small scale expansion has taken place along Churton Road.

5. HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

5.1 Above Ground Remains

The unusual concentric pattern of Farndon's early medieval core remains fossilised in the street pattern of the town. There are eighteen Listed buildings within Farndon. One of these, Farndon Bridge, is Grade I; two, St Chad's church and Holly Bank, Barton Road, are Grade II*; and the remainder are Grade II - the majority of which are houses dating from the 17th to the 19th centuries. Farndon Bridge is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM124). Most of the historic core of Farndon is a designated Conservation Area.

5.2 Below Ground Remains

The limited amount of archaeological work carried out at Farndon means that the survival and preservation of the archaeological deposits has not been fully assessed. However, the discovery of Roman, medieval and post medieval deposits and pottery near to St Chad's Church in 2001, does demonstrate that archaeological deposits do survive. Therefore given that there has been little development, surviving deposits in Farndon will potentially be undisturbed.

6. PRIORITIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

6.1 General

The study of Farndon 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 Farndon would fit into a number of national priorities, particularly:

- PC6 The late Saxon to medieval period
- PC7 Transition from medieval to post medieval traditions (c1300-1700AD) (English Heritage 1997, 44-5)

6.2 Roman

- Establish whether there was there a Roman settlement at Farndon?
- Did a Roman road run through the settlement and was there a Roman river crossing connecting the township with Holt?

6.2 Early Medieval

- Establish the nature and extent of the early medieval church and potential monastic precinct. When was the monastery founded and by whom? What was the nature and extent of this? Was it of Celtic or English type? What was its relationship to the present church site?
- Establish whether there was a royal palace at Farndon, or elsewhere, perhaps at Aldford?
- Establish the location, nature and extent of settlement during the early medieval period.

6.3 Medieval

- Establish the foundation date, nature and extent of the church of St Chad. Date its phases of expansion.
- Establish the precise location of settlement areas and date their phases of expansion and contraction.
- Establish the nature of buildings on settlement plots.
- Examine evidence of medieval industry and trade.

6.4 Post Medieval

- Establish precise location of settlement areas and date their phases of expansion and contraction.
- Examine evidence of post medieval industry and trade.

7. SOURCES

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7.2 Maps

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8. ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Farndon and Surrounding Area

Figure 2: The Development of Farndon.



Figure 1
Farndon and the Surrounding Area

Sites and Monuments

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

1:15000

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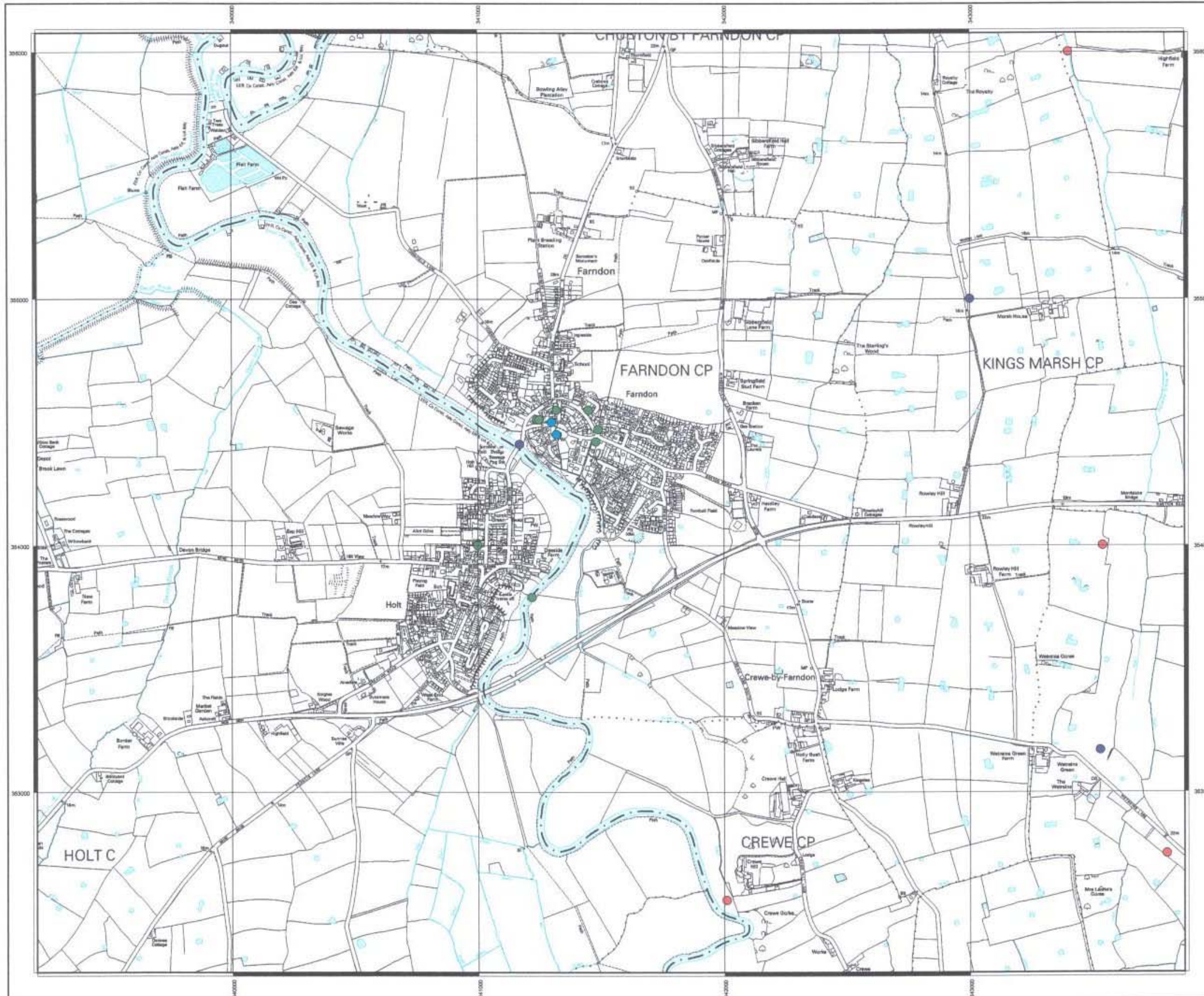
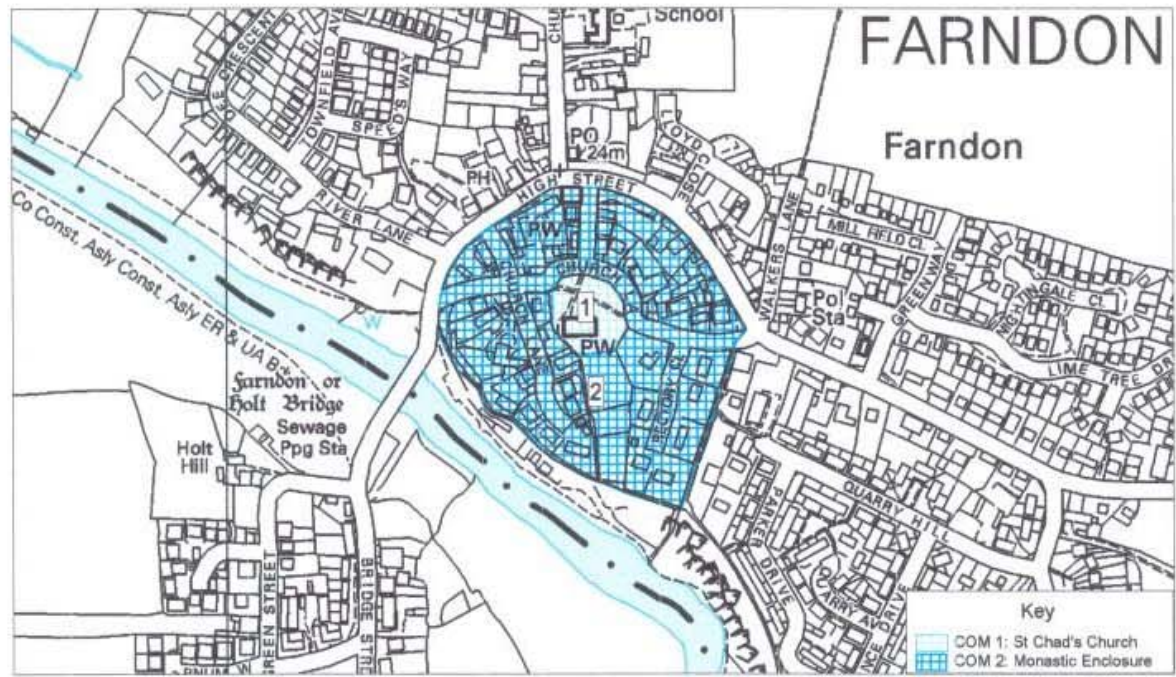
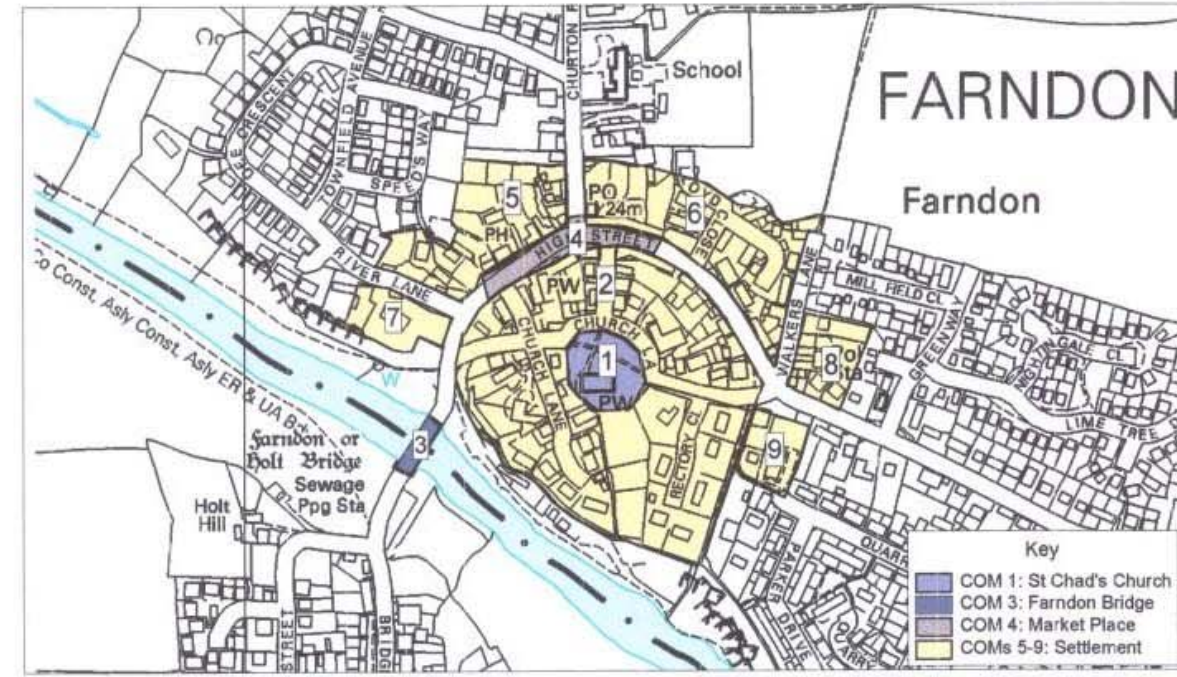


Figure 2: The Development of Farndon



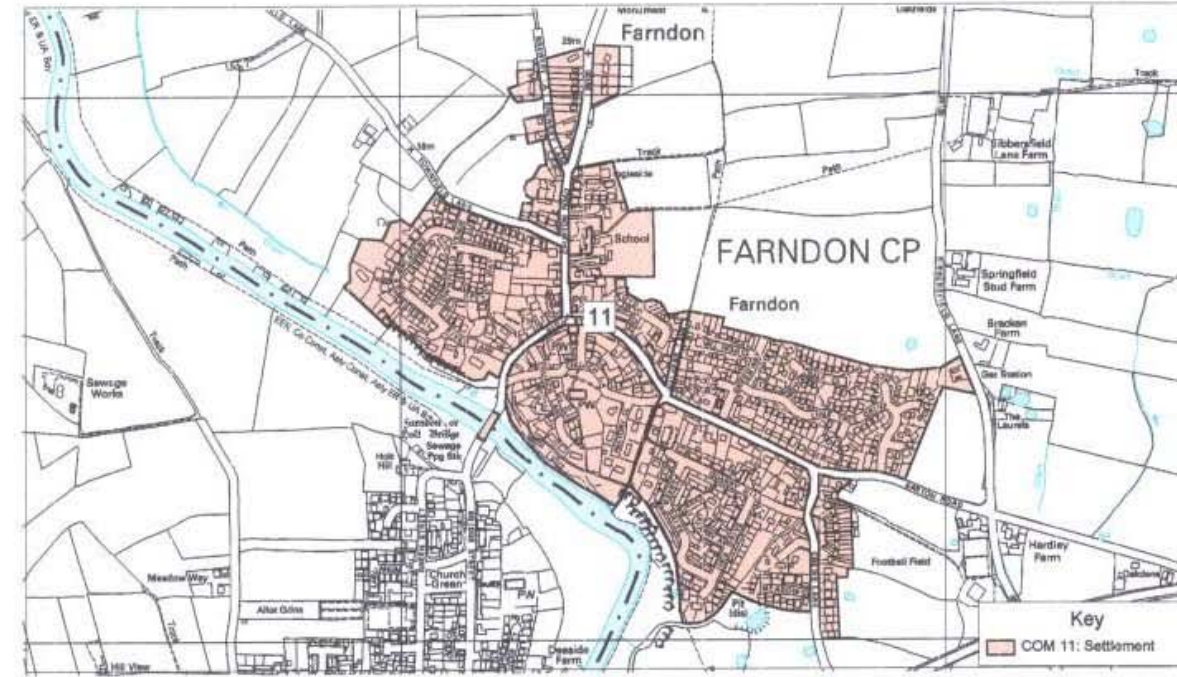
Early Medieval 0 100 200 Metres 1:6000



Medieval 0 100 200 Metres 1:6000



Post Medieval c 1874 0 100 200 Metres 1:7000



Modern c 2000 0 200 400 Metres 1:12000

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