CHESHIRE HISTORIC TOWNS SURVEY

Knutsford

Archaeological Assessment

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KNUTSFORD

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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1.   SUMMARY

The modern town of Knutsford comprises three settlements: Nether Knutsford, Over Knutsford and Cross Town. Both Nether and Over Knutsford had medieval boroughs, and it is the borough of Nether Knutsford that is thought of today as the town's historic centre. The town did not develop into an industrial centre; instead it became a desirable location for the residences of the affluent and aristocratic, and accordingly the town contains a large number of Georgian and Victorian buildings. Knutsford is one of Cheshire's best preserved historic towns and therefore it is a popular tourist attraction.

1.1   Topography and Geology

The town lies on the Cheshire Plain 40km west of Chester at around 50m AOD. To the north and west of Knutsford is an extensive area of wetlands, characterised by Tatton Mere, Tabley Mere and Tatton Mere.

The underlying solid geology comprises Lower Keuper Saliferous Beds. The overlying drift geology consists of glacial sand and gravel, with a band of boulder clay running along King Street (British Geological Survey 1961).

The soils in the surrounding area are sandy gleys, suitable for mixed arable or grassland and are graded classes 2-3 (Furness 1978).

Knutsford is situated at a nodal point in the road system: the A50, the former main road from London and the south, runs north to Warrington and Liverpool, the A537 runs east to Macclesfield and the A5033 runs west towards Northwich.

1.2   Administrative Unit

Modern Knutsford comprises what were formerly two separate townships, Nether and Over Knutsford. Both lay within Bucklow Hundred and Knutsford Chapelry, a division of the Parish of Rostherne, until 1741 when Knutsford became an ecclesiastical parish in its own right (Dunn 1987, 28). In 1895 Knutsford Urban District was created. The modern town lies in the Borough of Macclesfield.

1.3   Place Name

The place name of Nether Knutsford first occurs in Domesday Book (1086) as *Cunetesford* i.e. 'Knut's' 'ford'. A local tradition associates the name with King Canute but this is likely to be a romanticism. The place name also occurs as: *Knotesforde* (1281), *Knotteford* (c1292), *Knodesford* (1354) (Dodgson 1970, 73). Meanwhile, Over Knutsford, formerly referred to as Knutsford Booths, appears as *Bothes* (1230), *(le) Booths* (1398) and *Knottesfordeebothes* (1281),

Overknottesforde alias Knotesforde Bothes (1557). The 'booths' were herdsmen's shelters of the out pastures. Booths was manorially divided into Knutsford Booths and Norbury Booths, therefore Knutsford Booths is the part of the Booths belonging to Knutsford, later becoming known as the higher town of Knutsford or Over Knutsford (ibid, 77).

2 SOURCES

2.1 Historical

There is an early town history by Green, *Knutsford: Its Traditions and History* (Green 1859), which contains material of interest as well as less reliable legends and surmises. Otherwise reliance has to be placed on county histories, especially Ormerod's *History of Cheshire* (1882) and directories such as Slater's (1848).

There is a large amount of documentary material for Knutsford in the Public Record Office, British Library, John Rylands Library and Cheshire Record Office (CRO). RE Yarwood, formerly of the West Yorkshire Archaeological Service, has begun cataloguing these records and has lodged a copy of his work so far with the Cheshire Sites and Monuments Record (CSMR).

2.2 Cartographic

Knutsford is identified on Saxton's county map of 1577 and Speed's county map of 1610, and Booths is depicted to the south of this. The earliest map to show a schematic plan of the town and the road pattern is Burdett's map of Cheshire (1777). There are maps dating to 1786, 1820/25 and 1870 that show the Egerton family holdings in Knutsford, which provide a useful outline of the street pattern but do not show the full extent of the town. The first maps to show the whole town in detail are the tithe maps of 1847. Further detail is provided by the Ordnance Survey (OS) First Edition 6": 1mile map surveyed in 1872-6.

2.3 Archaeological

Before the present survey there were eighteen sites recorded in the settled area in the CSMR, which are depicted on Figure 1. Where sites or finds have been identified from the CSMR the relevant reference has been provided throughout this survey. The present survey has added a further eighteen records to the CSMR.

Three watching briefs and a desk-based assessment and evaluation have taken place in Knutsford. The first watching brief was carried out by the University of Manchester Archaeological Unit (UMAU) in 1995 at a site called Royal Court, east of Tatton Street and north of Minshull Lane. This revealed 19th-century deposits, which perhaps indicates that this area was outside the medieval and post medieval town. The site is located at the top of a steep escarpment, 5m higher than that of King Street to the east, which may explain why this area was void of medieval material. However, at the site of the second watching brief just below this site and west of King Street, there was a large assemblage of medieval and post medieval material (UMAU 1995). This work was carried out by Earthworks Archaeological services in 1996 at 96 Kings Street, to the rear of the Angel Public House. Pottery

dating from between the 15th and 18th centuries was revealed, as was leatherwork and wood preserved in moist conditions above the clay subsoil. The large amount of leather shoes recovered from this site, suggests that shoe making was practised in the immediate vicinity in the late medieval period (Earthworks 1996). A third watching brief was carried out by AAA Archaeological Advisors in 2000, during management work at the Church of St Helena and St John in Cross Town. Three grave slabs dating from the period 1170 to 1250 were revealed (Bradley and Gaimster 2001).

A desk-based assessment and evaluation were carried out at The Royal George, King Street, in December 2001 and March 2002 respectively, by the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside. Although this site lies occupies a position fronting onto the main medieval street through the town, no medieval features were revealed during the evaluation. There was no great build up of deposits to the rear of the 18th century building and the only features present were of later post medieval date (National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside 2001 and 2002)

3.   HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY : (Figure 1)

3.1   Prehistoric and Roman

The only prehistoric find known from Knutsford is a Neolithic stone axe found in the south-west area of the modern town (CSMR 1239). A Palaeolithic handaxe was found to the east of the town in 1973 (CSMR 2767) but it is likely that this is from a secondary context. No evidence of Romano-British activity has been discovered in the town.

In the surrounding area the prehistoric landscape is dominated by the sites located in Tatton Park c 2km to the north of Knutsford. Excavations by Dr N J Higham have revealed the remains of settlement dating to the Mesolithic (CSMR 1294), Neolithic (CSMR 1295, 1296), Iron Age and Romano-British periods (CSMR 1297), as well as early medieval and medieval settlement (CSMR 1298).

3.2   Early Medieval

There is little evidence of early medieval activity at Knutsford. However, the small settlement of Nether Knutsford is mentioned at Domesday, which records that

The same William [Fitznigel] *holds Cunetsford* [Knutsford] *and Erchenbrand* [Erchebrand] [holds it] *of him, who also held it as a free man. There is ½ hide that pays geld . The land is for 2 ploughs. It was and is waste. Wood ½ league long and 2 acres wide. It was worth 10s.*

(Harris and Thacker 1987, 356)

Ormerod suggests that this entry at Domesday may have included both Knutsfords (1882, 493). It was waste in 1086 as were many east Cheshire manors, indicating that it had suffered devastation after the Cheshire rebellion of 1069-70.

3.3 Medieval

3.3.1 The Manor

As recorded at Domesday, Nether Knutsford was held by Erchebrand from William Fitznigel, Baron of Halton. By the late 13th century William de Tabley, Lord of Over-Tabley, held both Knutsfords (Nether and Over) from Sir Richard Massey of Tatton. Subsequently the manor was divided amongst Tabley's heirs, and Over Knutsford came into the possession of the Legh family (Ormerod 1882, 483-493).

3.3.2 Settlement

William de Tabley granted a charter to the burgesses of Knutsford (Nether Knutsford) and Knutsford Booths (Over Knutsford) in 1292. They were allowed to elect their own mayor or bailiff but must grind their corn at the lord's mill and have their bread baked at the lord's oven 'within the four gates of the town'. At the same time, 1292, he obtained a charter from Edward I for a Saturday market in Nether Knutsford and an annual fair to be held on the vigil, feast and morrow of the feast of Saints Peter and Paul (29 June) (Ormerod 1882, 488-9 and Letters 2002). William de Tabley perhaps acted without the authority of his overlord, Sir Richard Massey, and in 1294 it is documented that the 38 burgages in Knutsford were divided between them (Ormerod 1882, 483-4). In 1332 'another' weekly market was granted on a Friday, implying that the Saturday market was still in existence (Letters 2002). Ormerod records that there were about twelve charterers in Over Knutsford in the 17th century, which may indicate the original number of burgages located there (1882, 494). A grant for a Wednesday market and a two day fair at Over Knutsford was obtained in 1335 (Lysons 1816, 671). Higham (1993, 163) has pointed to the place name *Chapmanswiche* (trader's market) in Ollerton to the south of Knutsford, which may indicate the site of a precursor to the market at Knutsford.

By the 14th century, there are references to the *noua villa de Knottisford,* which was distinct from *le Oldton de Knotesford* (Dodgson 1970, 73-4). This, Dodgson suggests may refer to the new borough of Nether Knutsford, while the old town was probably located towards Cross Town. A medieval cross was discovered at Cross Town (CSMR 1240/0/1) and it is presumably from this that the settlement was named. This may have been the market cross of the 'old town' (ibid).

Norbury Booths Hall moated site, a medieval manor house of the Legh family with remains dating from the 14th century onwards, lies immediately east of Over Knutsford. It was replaced by the adjacent Booths Hall in 1745 and is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 13449). Leland recorded that there was a deer park in Knutsford 'Le of Bouth half a mile from Knutsford hath a park' (Harrison, 1902). This perhaps belonged to Norbury Booths Hall.

There was a school at Knutsford from at least the reign of Henry VIII, and it is recorded that a pupil from there was sent to university in 1536 (Harris 1980, 234-5).

3.3.3 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. In the Cheshire Mize of 1405 Knutsford paid a sum of 40s (Booth 1985). It is a similar assessment to that of Halton (45s) and Runcorn (42s 8d), also in Bucklow Hundred.

Medieval documentary references include a miller (*Radulfus Molendarius*), a wheelwright (*Elias Rotarius*), a harpist (*Hugo le Harper*) and perhaps a fisherman (*Robertus Pis[ca]tor*) (Ormerod 1882, 490). However, much of Knutsford's wealth was presumably based upon agriculture. To the west of Nether Knutsford is the common land of the Heath and to the east is the Moor.

There is reference to a mill at Knutsford in the medieval period. This may have been that of Booths Mill, which was located on Marthall Brook 2km to the north-east of Nether Knutsford (CSMR 1304), or there may have been a mill sited further downstream in Nether Knutsford (CSMR 1292). Field names recorded in the tithe apportionment may help to identify the location of this (Bott, 1983). Booths Mill, which is now demolished and built over, was still an active corn mill in the 19th century, and is shown on the OS First Edition 6": 1mile map of 1872-6.

3.3.4 Religion

A church dedicated to St Helena stood beyond Cross Town, and close to the Booth Mere. All that survives of this parochial chapel is its churchyard, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM 25728), as the church was demolished in the 1740s to make way for the new church of St John the Baptist that was built in 1744 in King Street (Richards 1973). The earliest documented date for this church was 1476, but during management work on the site in 2000, three grave slabs dating from the period 1170 to 1250 were revealed (Bradley and Gaimster 2001). There was also a chapel of ease situated within Nether Knutsford with a school house adjoining, as well as a private chapel at Toft, which was established in 1398 to the south of Nether Knutsford (CSMR 1256/1) (ibid).

3.3.5 The Surrounding Landscape

Tatton Old Hall lies c 2km north of Knutsford. Its origins date back to the 15th century, when the great hall was first built (CSMR 11298/1/1). The Old Hall was replaced by the present Tatton Hall in the 17th century, which is Listed Grade I (CSMR 1289/2/1). There may have been a deer park associated with the Old Hall (CSMR 1298/3), and it is possible that there was once a medieval village located within Tatton Park named Norshaw, which was later deserted (CSMR 1292).

3.4 Post-medieval

3.4.1 The Manor

By the 17th century the manor of Nether Knutsford was a possession of the Brereton family, the owners of Tatton, and subsequently descended with Tatton to the Egertons. The manor of Over Knutsford remained in the hands of the Legh family (Ormerod 1882, 483-93).

3.4.2 Settlement

Knutsford did not develop into an industrial centre, and instead became a popular residential area for wealthy county families. It was described in the middle of the 19th century as deriving much of its support from 'the opulent gentry residing in the neighbourhood' (Bagshaw 1850, 550). The Egerton family of Tatton Hall demonstrated their disdain for local industry by pulling down a number of houses and workshops at the north end of King Street to improve the entrance to Tatton Park (Bilsbrough 1983, 37).

The town was a venue for judicial sessions from 1575. A sessions house stood near the racecourse but was replaced by the present Sessions House on Princess Street in 1818. At the same time a gaol was built behind it. It housed up to 700 prisoners but was pulled down in 1930. Also, the Old Courthouse on Chelford Road was built around an old Courtroom, which is 17th century in date (CSMR 1241/0/9). In 1741 the schoolhouse, which stood next to the chapel of ease in Nether Knutsford (see 3.3.4) was demolished and a new one built at the same time as the new church of St John. By 1867 the school was languishing and the schoolhouse was described as 'a mean and inconvenient building'. New school buildings were opened in 1887 but the school did not prosper and was closed down in 1910. The school buildings were demolished in 1969 (Harris 1980, 234-5)

Race meetings were held on The Heath from 1729 to 1875 (Bilsborough 1983, 40). A grandstand is shown at the south-east corner of the course on the OS First Edition map of 1872-6.

The author Mrs Gaskell lived in Knutsford as a girl with her aunt in the early 19th century and the town is thought to have been the inspiration for *Cranford* (Kelly's 1892, 550).

3.4.3 Economy

In the early 17th century William Webb noted the 'market greatly frequented and the town extraordinarily well-traded' (King 1656, 97). The market was still held on a Saturday and there were three annual fairs. A Market Hall was erected in 1872 in Princess Street at the expense of the Earl of Egerton (Kelly's, 1892, 550).

A small amount of industry is known at Knutsford. For example, a number of cottage industries are attested in the 18th century, particularly the making of silk buttons, and a row of Weavers cottages at the north end of King Street indicates the presence of small-scale weaving. A silk mill was established in 1753 and gave its name to Silk Mill Street which runs between King Street and Princess Street. It was converted into three dwellings in 1818 and then into a public house in the 1890s (DCMS 1999). By the mid-19th century there was a tannery at the north end of King Street and this is shown on the tithe map of 1847 and the Ordnance Survey map of 1876.

Nether Knutsford was an important coaching stop. In the early 17th century there were 36 inns in the town, which was by far the largest total in Bucklow Hundred, with just nine in Over Knutsford. By 1753 there were 25 inns in Nether Knutsford, still the

largest total in Bucklow Hundred, and three inns in Over Knutsford (MacGregor, 1992, 16).

3.4.4 Religion

Rev Norman Hook recorded that in 1744 the parochial chapel under the jurisdiction of the Vicar of Rostherne was little used, as worship was held in an old building, to which a Grammar School was attached, at the bottom of Church Hill in King Street. In 1740-1 the parochial chapel was recorded as being in decay and the tower fallen into ruin. In 1741 an Act of Parliament was obtained for making Knutsford a parish independent of Rostherne. St John's church was built on a new site in King Street. It was consecrated in 1744 and was designed to serve all five of the townships in the old parochial chapelry (Richards 1973).

In 1858, owing to an increase in population the Parish of St Cross was carved out of St John's Parish. It comprised Cross Town and the whole of the township of Over Knutsford, and the new church, which was built in 1880-1, was dedicated to the Holy Cross or St Cross (ibid).

Knutsford was 'a notable centre of nonconformity' (Crosby 1996, 78). A Unitarian Chapel was built at the south end of King Street in 1689 and there is a Wesleyan Methodist Church of 1864-5 on Princess Street (Pevsner and Hubbard 1971, 251-2). The Congregational Church above Brook Street was erected in 1866 (Kelly's 1892, 550).

3.4.5 Population

Nether Knutsford's population in 1664 has been estimated from the Hearth Tax returns as 620 and that of Over Knutsford as 260 (MacGregor (ed) 1992). Their combined total is larger than any other settlement in Bucklow Hundred. From 1801-1971 population data is available from the census returns printed in the Victoria County History (Harris 1979, 202-240). The Urban District of Knutsford was created in 1895, after which time the populations of both Knutsfords were counted together. For 1981 and 1991 census data has been reproduced for Knutsford under Class Licence Number C01W0000125 with the permission of the Controller of the HMSO.

	Nether	Over Knutsford		
1801	2052	320	**1901**	5172
1811	2114	243	**1911**	5760
1821	2753	231	**1921**	5415
1831	2823	217	**1931**	5879
1841	3185	225	**1951**	6617
1851	3539	208	**1961**	9389
1861	3485	204	**1971**	13776
1871	3597	206	**1981**	13628
1881	3895	410	**1991**	13352
1891	4240	403		

3.4.6 Transport and Communications

As befits a coaching town, the major roads around Knutsford were improved at an early date. Hence the main road to the south, the A50, was turnpiked in 1753, and the roads to Macclesfield (A537) and the road to the west (A5033) were turnpiked in 1769 (Harrison 1886).

Knutsford was joined to the railway network in 1862-3 when the Cheshire Midland Railway from Altrincham to Northwich was opened (Greville 1954, 143).

3.4.7 The Surrounding Landscape

Other than Tatton Hall, the manor house of the Egerton Family, there are a number of manor houses and halls in the surrounding area. These include Bexton Hall, a 17th century house (Grade II*), 1.5km south of the centre of Knutsford (CSMR 1233); Toft Hall, a 17th century house (Grade II*), 2km south of Knutsford (CSMR 1255), and Dukenfield Hall, another 17th century hall Listed Grade II*, 2.7km south-east of Knutsford (CSMR 1253/1/1).

4. PLAN COMPONENTS: (Figure 2)

The town has been divided into 16 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 these should be treated as a model against which future evidence should be tested.

The Domesday Survey indicates that there was a small early medieval settlement of Nether Knutsford but the location of this is unknown. It is likely that settlement at this time was of a dispersed nature, consisting of farmsteads scattered throughout the surrounding countryside. It is impossible to map the settlement at this time and the plan components for the settlements of Nether and Over Knutsford therefore commence with the medieval period. Given the lack of evidence available this is a tentative representation, particularly that of the settlement of Crosstown and Over Knutsford.

MEDIEVAL 1066 – c 1540 (Figure 2)

COM 1 - Parochial Chapel of St Helena
COM 2 - Church Attached to Grammar School?
COM 3 - Booths Corn Mill & Mill Pond
COM 4 - Norbury Booths Hall
COM 5 - Burgages, east of King Street?
COM 6 - Burgages, west of King Street?
COM 7 - Tenements, west of King Street
COM 8 - Tenements, north of Market Green
COM 9 - Tenements, south of Market Green
COM 10 - Market Green
COM 11 - ?Tenements, west of the B5085, Crosstown
COM 12 - ?Tenements, east of the B5085, Crosstown

COM 13 - ?Tenements, Over Knutsford

POST-MEDIEVAL c 1872-6 (Figure 2)

COM 14 - Cheshire Midland Railway
COM 15 - Settlement

MODERN c 2000 (Figure 2)

COM 16 - Settlement

4.1   Medieval (Figure 2)

Early settlement may have been located in the vicinity of the parochial chapel of St Helena (**COM 1**), about which little is known other than a reference to it being of 14th century date. However, until the granting of the borough charters in 1292, it is likely that the settlement of Over and Nether Knutsford was of a dispersed pattern. Another medieval chapel of ease is thought to have stood adjacent to the Grammar School on King Street but the exact location of this school and chapel is not known. Therefore two possible sites have been identified, on either side of Church Street (both identified as **COM 2**), which need to be tested against future evidence.

A mill at Knutsford is known from documentary sources but it is not known whether this refers to Booths Mill **(COM 3)** or a site located further downstream. Booths Mill, which continued to grind corn into the 19th century was clearly depicted upon the OS First Edition map of 1872-6, and it is from this map that the potential outline of the medieval mill pond has been derived. The extent of surviving archaeological deposits within this area is likely to be limited due to the fact that the mill has been demolished, the mill pond in-filled and the area re-developed.

To the south of Booths Mill and east of Over Knutsford is the site of the medieval, moated manor house of the Legh family, Norbury Booths Hall (**COM 4**). This dates back to the 14th century and references suggest that there may have been a deer park associated with it. It was replaced in 1745 by Booths Hall, which was built to the north-west of the Old Hall.

Nether Knutsford principally lies along two parallel roads, King Street (A537) and Princess Street (A50). Cordon (1980) has suggested that these streets are part of a grid plan layout. However, King Street seems to always have been dominant and it may be that the original settlement lay either side of this street (**COMs 5, 6** and **7)**. **COMs 5** and **6** both contain long, narrow tenements, with buildings clustered along the street frontage, which are typical of medieval burgage plots. Perhaps both of these plan components were formally laid out as planned settlement in the late 13th century, following the granting of a borough charter to William de Tabley in 1292. No archaeological work has been carried out in these areas but a number of boundaries survive, running at right angles to King Street, which appear to outline the medieval tenements that once occupied these areas. **COM 7** does not demonstrate the same morphology as that of **COMs 5** and **6;** here tenements are short and irregularly laid out. This is the only area in Knutsford to have had any archaeological work carried out, the results of which are very encouraging - in particular that carried out at the

Angel Public House; where leather goods and wood were well preserved, along with a pottery assemblage dating from the 15th to 18th centuries. However, work carried out to the north-west of this along Tatton Street revealed deposits of 19th century and later date, which appears to indicate that this area of **COM 7** was outside the medieval town. How true this is of the remainder of **COM 7** can only be tested against archaeological evidence.

COMs 8 and **9**, to the north and south of the market respectively, are small, irregular tenements that most likely post date the creation of the borough and the laying out of the market place (**COM 10**). The market place begins as a wide area in Tatton Street, broadening into a large triangular shape as it runs west towards the Heath. Its Tatton Street end was perhaps the normal market area with the western end utilised when there was a fair. The market area is identified as Market Green, on the OS First Edition map of 1876. What appears to be a later market place is located on King Street (see figure 3). However, this may also have been a planned medieval market place, formally laid out following the granting of a market charter at the same time as the borough charter c 1292.

The extent of settlement at Crosstown during the medieval period is unknown. **COMs 11** and **12**, have been identified as potential areas of medieval settlement. It was during the construction of the Church of St Cross in the mid-19th century that a medieval cross was discovered, which may indicate the location of a medieval market and settlement that perhaps predates the creation of the borough in Nether Knutsford. **COM 12** is a more convincing area of medieval settlement than **COM 11**, with long, narrow tenement plots and buildings clustered along the street frontage. If a market was held at Cross Town, one possible site may be the triangular area located at the junction of Hollow Lane and the B5085.

The location of the medieval settlement of Over Knutsford is proving difficult to identify. The earliest available map to depict the settlement in detail is the tithe map of 1847, which identifies a number of houses dotted along Brook Street and Chelford Road. However, there are no surviving boundaries or obvious tenement plots indicative of medieval settlement; instead the plan is typical of 18th and 19th century development. This post medieval and later development may mask an underlying medieval settlement pattern, therefore a very broad area (**COM 13**) has been outlined in an attempt to locate medieval Over Knutsford, which should be treated as an approximation to be refined as further evidence is discovered. With the exception of the borough, it is likely that much of the medieval settlement was of a dispersed nature.

4.2   Post Medieval c 1876 (Figure 2)

The prosperity of Nether Knutsford as a market town continued into the post medieval period. It was perhaps fortunate that the nearest competing markets of Altrincham and Northwich were both some distance away (approximately 10km). However, Knutsford failed to attract industry, indeed the OS First Edition map of 1872-6 identifies just two tanneries and a brick and tile works. The extent of settlement by 1872 is identified as **COM 14,** which shows the beginning of the Knutsford conurbation, as Cross Town and Over Knutsford were beginning to merge with Nether Knutsford. This expansion was no doubt encouraged by the arrival of

the Cheshire Midland Railway (**COM 15**) in 1862-3, as recorded by Ormerod 'there is a handsome and convenient railway station; villas and other houses are steadily increasing and the town has lately been lighted with gas' (1882, 493). Expansion of settlement at Cross Town includes the construction of St Cross's church in 1880-1.

4.3   Modern c 2000 (Figure 2)

The extent of modern Knutsford has been identified as **COM 16**. Knutsford continues to be a wealthy residential area and the historic nature of the town, coupled with its close proximity to Tatton Park, has led increasingly to a role as a tourist centre. The population of the town trebled between 1871 and 1971, from 3,803 to 13,776. The presence of Tatton Park has allowed little expansion to the north but there has been expansion to the west, south and east, effectively joining together the previously separate settlements of Nether Knutsford, Cross Town and Over Knutsford. The most notable development has been to the south on either side of Legh Road, where a series of villa-style buildings were erected in the late 19th to early 20th century.

5.   HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

5.1   Above-Ground Remains

Knutsford contains a stock of buildings perhaps unrivalled in Cheshire outside of Chester. A total of 68 buildings or groups of buildings in the town centre have been Listed (Department of the Environment 1974), 33 of which are on King Street. The Unitarian Chapel at the southern end of King Street is Grade I, seven are Grade II*, St John's Church, St Cross Church, Sessions House, Bexton Croft House, 98 and 125 King Street, Former King's Coffee House and Gaskell Memorial Tower. The remainder are Grade II. The buildings date from the 17th century onwards and include a fine series of Georgian buildings as well as the distinctive Italianate-style buildings erected for Richard Harding Watt in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including the Gaskell Memorial Tower and King's Coffee House, the Ruskin Rooms and the Old Steam Laundry. Pevsner and Hubbard (1971, 253) opine that 'Legh Road can boast the maddest sequence of buildings in all England'. Knutsford is today largely a Georgian town with Victorian additions. No medieval buildings survive but its medieval layout has influenced the pattern of later development.

The historic core of the town and an area of late 19th to early 20th century villa style developments to the south-east of the town, centred on Legh Road, are designated Conservation Areas.

There are two Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the Knutsford area: the site of St Helena's parochial chapel and its burial ground (SAM 25728) and Norbury Booths Hall moated site and associated features (SAM 13449). Also, Tatton Park which lies immediately north of Knutsford has been included in English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens of special historic interest in England (Number 1477; Grade II*).

5.2   Below-Ground Remains

The work carried out at the Angel Public House on King Street has revealed that well-preserved archaeological deposits do survive within Knutsford. How true this is of the remainder of the town can only be determined through a programme of evaluation.

6. PRIORITIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

6.1 General

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

- 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.

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 parochial chapel of St Helena, examine phases of expansion and contraction, and explain why the dedication was later changed to St John. Is there evidence for settlement associated with this site?
- Examine evidence for medieval trade and industry.
- Establish the location, nature and extent of the boroughs of Nether and Over Knutsford.
- Examine the location of the market places for both Nether and Over Knutsford.
- Establish the location of the medieval water mill.
- Establish the location of the Grammar School and the chapel of ease adjacent to this.

6.4 Post Medieval

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

7. SOURCES

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7.2   Maps

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Nether Knutsford 1786 (CRO DET 1424/24)

Nether Knutsford 1820/1825 (CRO DET 1424/34)

Nether Knutsford 1870 (CRO DET 1424/47)

Tithe map of Nether Knutsford, 1847 (map: CRO EDT 287/2; apportionment EDT 287/1)

Tithe map of Over Knutsford, 1847 (map: CRO EDT 316/2; apportionment EDT 316/1)

Ordnance Survey First Edition 6": 1mile map sheet 27 surveyed 1872-6

8.   ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Knutsford and the Surrounding Area
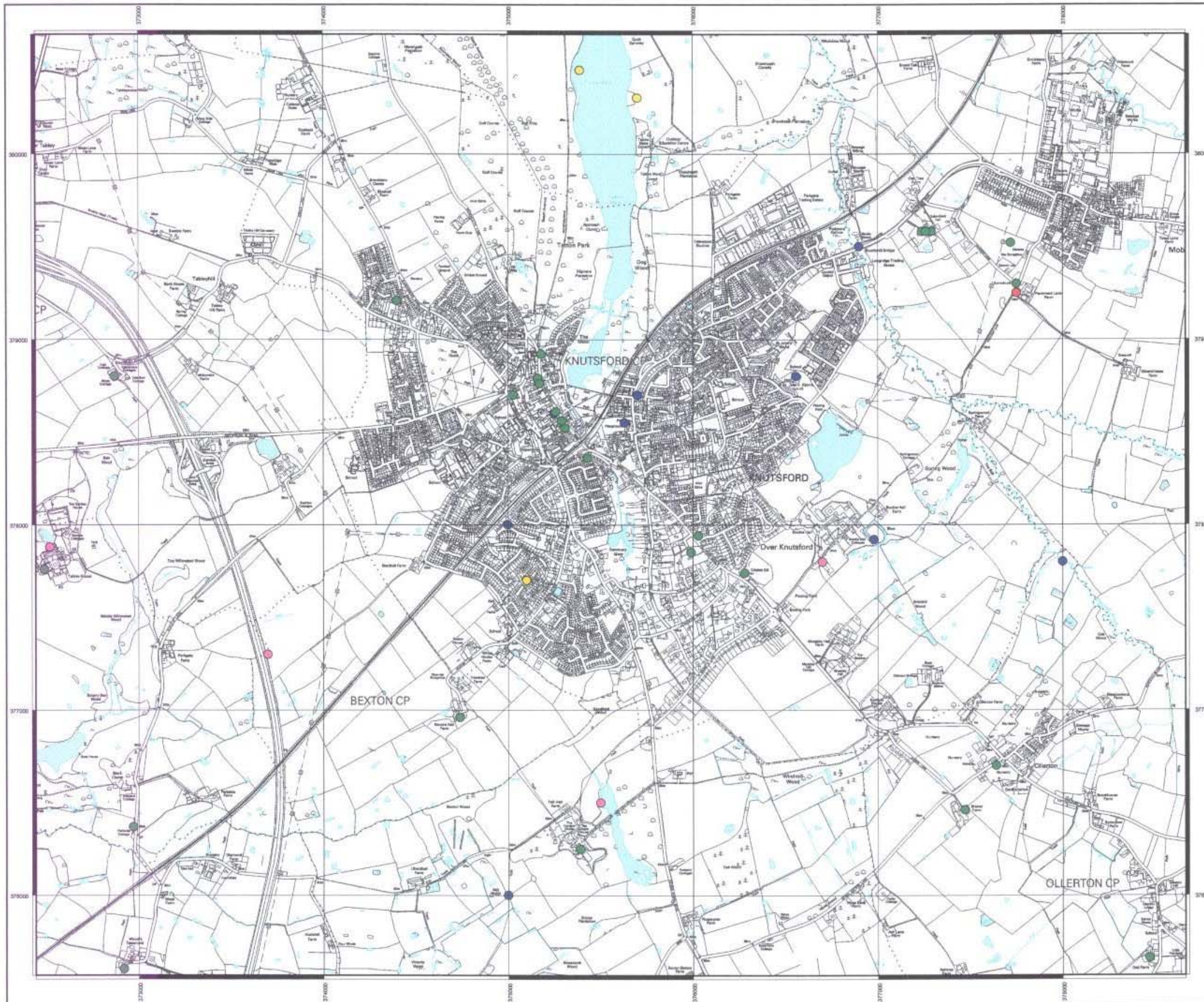Figure 2: The Development of Knutsford

Figure 1
Knutsford and the
Surrounding Area

Sites and Monuments Record

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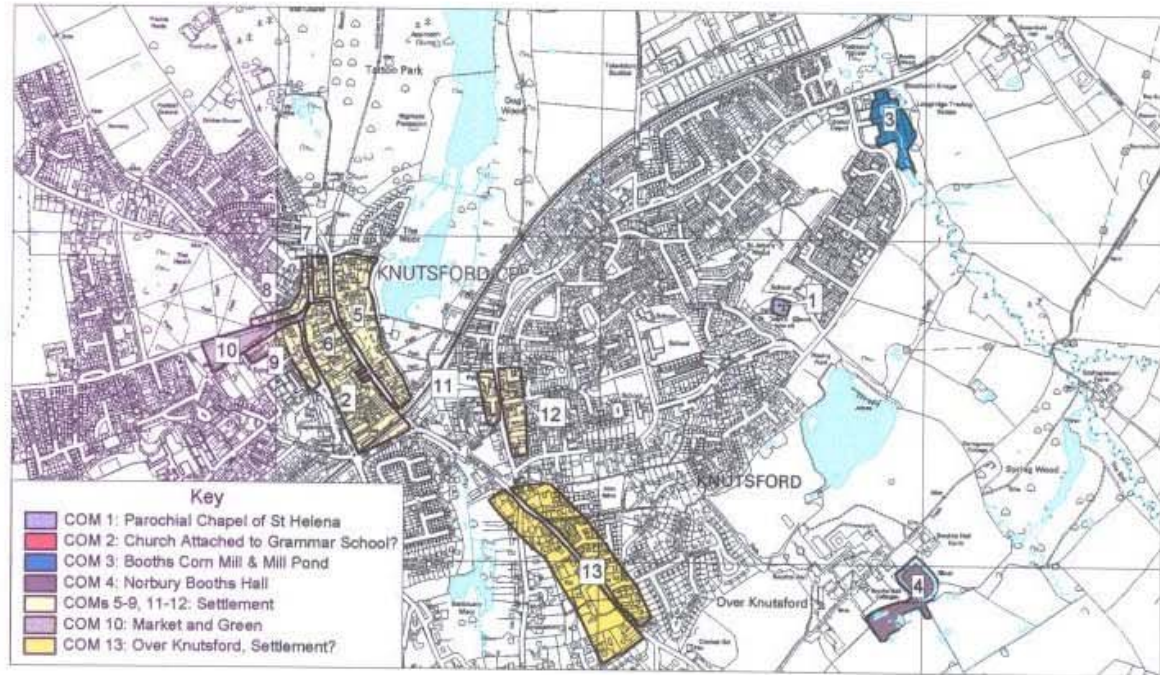- Early Medieval
- Medieval
- Post Medieval
- Modern

1:20000

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Environmental Planning. LA076503. 2002
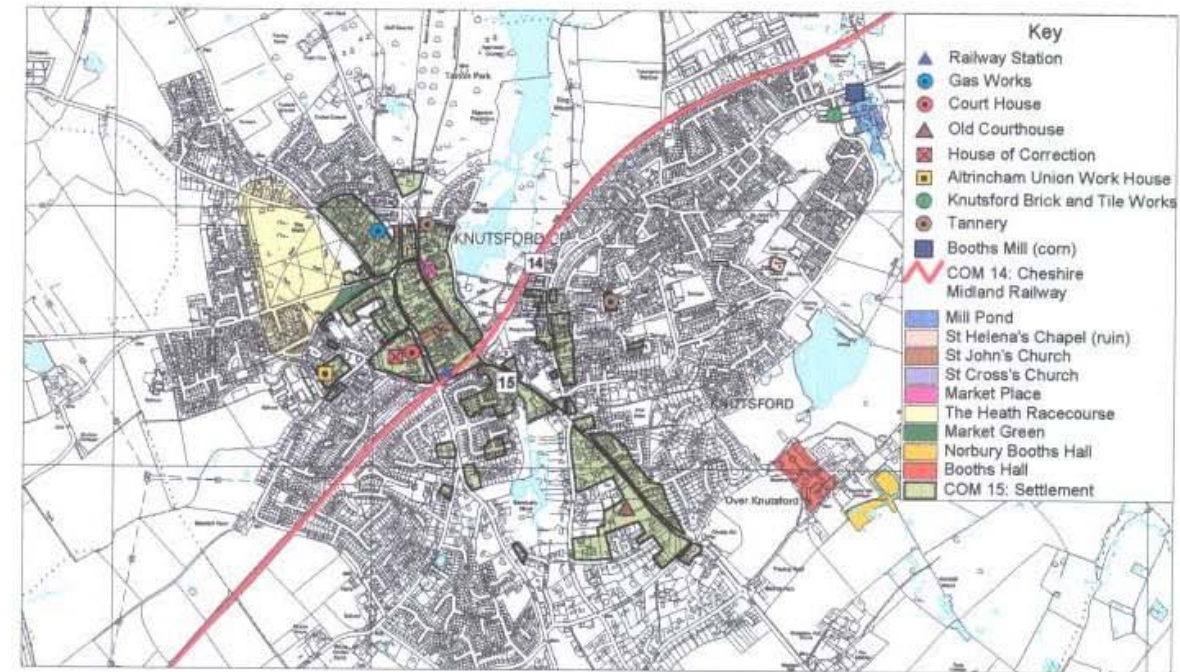
0   1 Kilometres
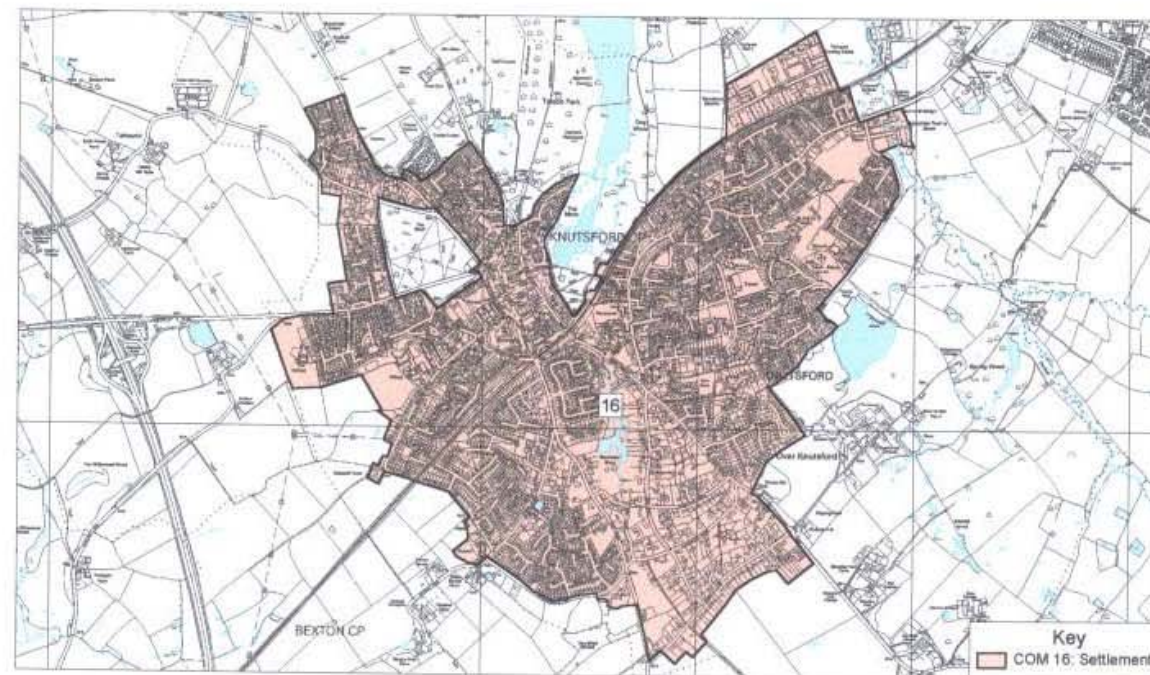
Figure 2: The Development of Knutsford

ENGLISH HERITAGE

CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
Environmental Planning

Medieval

Key
COM 1: Parochial Chapel of St Helena
COM 2: Church Attached to Grammar School?
COM 3: Booths Corn Mill & Mill Pond
COM 4: Norbury Booths Hall
COMs 5-9, 11-12: Settlement
COM 10: Market and Green
COM 13: Over Knutsford, Settlement?

0   200   400   Metres

1:20000

Post Medieval c1872-6

Key
Railway Station
Gas Works
Court House
Old Courthouse
House of Correction
Altrincham Union Work House
Knutsford Brick and Tile Works
Tannery
Booths Mill (corn)
COM 14: Cheshire Midland Railway
Mill Pond
St Helena's Chapel (ruin)
St John's Church
St Cross's Church
Market Place
The Heath Racecourse
Market Green
Norbury Booths Hall
Booths Hall
COM 15: Settlement

0   500   1000   Metres

1:25000

Modern c2000

Key
COM 16: Settlement

0   0.5   1   Kilometres

1:30000

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