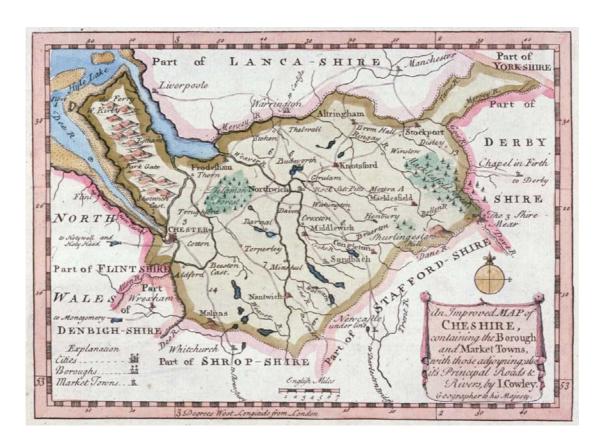
CHESHIRE HISTORIC TOWNS SURVEY

Malpas

Archaeological Assessment



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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.

MALPAS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Mike Shaw and Jo Clark

1. SUMMARY

Malpas was the medieval seat of the Barons of Malpas, one of Cheshire's major land owning families. It was a small market town and its historic centre retains much of its character, including its street plan, as there has been little intensive development. One reason for this may have been its proximity to Whitchurch, one of Shropshire's major medieval market towns, which lay only 7km to the south-east.

1.1 Topography and Geology

Malpas lies in south-west Cheshire close to the Welsh border, 17km south of Chester. It stands c 120m AOD on a ridge of high ground which forms a southern extension of the Mid-Cheshire Ridge, a ridge of sandstone which runs north-south through Cheshire.

The underlying solid geology is Malpas Sandstone, which is overlain by glacial sand and gravel. The surrounding gently undulating landscape comprises mainly boulder clay (British Geological Survey 1967). The overlying soils are brown earths, with stagnogleys in the surrounding area (Furness 1978, 209).

Watling Street passes north through Malpas to Chester. Other local roads include the B5069 which runs west – northeast (Bangor-is-y-Coed to Hampton Heath) and the B5395 which runs south to Whitchurch.

1.2 Administrative Unit

The township of Malpas lay within Malpas Parish and Broxton Hundred, in the Deanery of Malpas (Dunn 1987, 16). The modern settlement is in Malpas Civil Parish, Chester District.

1.3 Place Name

At Domesday the town was called *Depenbech* which means 'at the deep valley with a stream in it'. However, the Old English form was gradually replaced by the French name *Malpas* which means 'difficult passage'. Dodgson (1972, 39) suggests that the Old English name refers to the crossing of the Bradley Brook at Hough Bridge, 1.5km south-east of the present town, and that this may have been the original site of *Depenbech*.

2. SOURCES

2.1 Historical

There is little historical documentation available for Malpas. There is a short, draft archaeological implications report in the County Sites and Monuments Record (CSMR) (Cordon 1979) and a short paper on the town by Kenyon (1890). Useful information is also contained in Ormerod's *History of Cheshire* (1882) which provides manorial and ecclesiastical histories, and early town directories (for example, Bagshaw 1850).

The County Record Office (CRO) holds a large collection of deeds and other records of Malpas. Of particular value are the Cholmondeley family papers which date from the 13th century onwards. Some of the early deeds have been examined as part of this study but there has been insufficient time to undertake a systematic search.

2.2 Cartographic

Malpas is identified on Saxton's county map of 1577 and Speed's Cheshire map of 1610. Malpas also appears on Burdett's map of 1777 which is the earliest map to show the road network and a schematic representation of the town. The tithe map of 1841 and the Ordnance Survey (OS) First Edition 6" map surveyed 1873 are the most useful sources for detailed plans of the town.

2.3 Archaeological

Before the present survey there were twenty four sites recorded at Malpas in the CSMR, and these are depicted on Figure 1. Where sites or finds have been identified from the CSMR the relevant reference has been provided throughout this report. The present assessment has generated six new records.

An archaeological evaluation carried out in May 1999 by Chester Archaeology to the rear of the 19th century Jubilee Hall, was the first formal archaeological work in Malpas. The work was small scale but revealed a medieval deposit containing 13th century pottery and a flat bottomed feature, which extended beyond the trench and whose origin and function could not be properly established. Finds also included a possible piece of Roman pottery (Chester City Council 1999/2000, 4).

3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

3.1 Prehistoric

Only a small amount of prehistoric activity is attested in the surrounding area, the nearest major site being the hillfort of Maiden Castle at Bickerton 6km to the north. The only prehistoric find in the settled area is a spindle whorl (CSMR 2045) found near Smithy Cottages on Church Street, while part of a bronze axe (CSMR 2044) was discovered immediately north of the town but may originally have come from elsewhere.

3.2 Roman

Watling Street, the Roman road that linked Chester with London, Caerleon and the nearest centre of civil administration at Wroxeter (CSMR 1700) runs through Malpas along Old Hall Street and the High Street. Roman finds were claimed to have been

found in the area of Malpas Castle in the 18th century (CSMR 1688) including lamps, coins and tesselated pavements but no other finds of this date have been recovered and it seems likely that their identification as Roman may well be erroneous. The nearest major site in the surrounding area is the Roman town of *Mediolanum* (Whitchurch), 7km to the south-east. An important chance find of Roman date is a bronze diploma or military discharge certificate issued in AD 103, known as the Malpas diploma (CSMR 1707) although it was actually found at Bickley around 3km east of the town.

3.3 Early Medieval

Depenbech is mentioned at Domesday and was clearly an important settlement, for its value before the Conquest of £11 4s was one of the largest sums in Cheshire. Higham (1993, 135) has suggested that the Parish of Malpas derived from a large land unit which became a major estate of the Earls of Mercia. As such it would perhaps have attracted ancillary settlement and marketing, as dues and produce were brought to the estate centre.

The Domesday Survey states that:

(75) The same Robert holds Depenbech [Malpas]. (Earl interlined) Edwin held it. There [are] 8 hides that pay geld. The land is for 14 ploughs. In demesne are three [ploughs] and 1 bordar and ½ acre of meadow. Of this land 5 knights (milites) hold 5½ hides of Robert, and have there 3 ploughs, and 7 villeins with 2½ ploughs. There [are] 2 acres of meadow. T.R.E the whole was worth £11 4s. It was afterwards waste. Now, all included, it is worth 52s. It has 2 leagues in length and 1 in width.

(Harris and Thacker 1987, 349)

3.4 Medieval

3.4.1 The Manor

After the Conquest, Malpas was granted to Robert Fitzhugh, who as Baron of Malpas was one of the eight barons who served on the Council of the Earl of Chester. He was a leading landowner in Cheshire and Malpas continued to be the head of a large estate.

Robert Fitzhugh died without male heirs and his possessions were divided between his two daughters. Initially the Sutton and Egerton families held the major shares of the barony, although there were further sub-divisions. From the mid-14th century the Brereton family acquired extensive interests in the town, as did the Cholmondeleys from the 17th century onwards (Ormerod 1882, 592).

The manor house of the Brereton family was sited on Oldhall Street. Leland described it in the early 16th century as 'his fair place at the very ende of south strete' (Toulmin-Smith 1964, 30). The old manor house was destroyed by fire in 1767 and replaced with the present building. Cordon (1979, 9) says that the owners at the time of writing had uncovered a well '80 feet deep' which may have been the original water source for the manor house. However it has been suggested that the

site of the original Malpas Old Hall may have been to the south of the site of the present hall (Hayns 1988a).

3.4.2 Settlement

In a document dated 1288, reference is made to two burgages in Malpas (Beresford and Finberg 1973, 75). This demonstrates that there was burgage tenure in the town, despite the lack of a borough charter. In 1281, a grant of a weekly market and yearly fair was made to Philip Burnel, his wife and heirs (Cal. Charter Rolls II 1257-1300). The market was held on Mondays, while the fair was held on the vigil, feast and morrow of the feast of Oswald the King (5 August) (Letters 2002). There was still a market in Malpas in 1536 when Leland visited Malpas and described it as a little Sunday market having three streets (presumably High Street, Church Street and Oldhall Street) (Toulmin-Smith (ed) 1964, 30).

The 'Town Well' is marked on the OS First Edition 6": 1 mile map, surveyed in 1873 at the end of Well Street, 350m east of the town centre.

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. In the Cheshire mize of 1405 Malpas paid 64s, a similar sum to other small market towns such as Audlem (66s 8d) and Sandbach (60s 10d) (Booth 1985). It was the eighth largest amount paid in the county.

Agriculture was an important aspect of the towns economy. Remnants of the town's open fields are fossilised in field boundaries, and can be identified in the tithe award of 1841 as the 'Town Fields' and on the OS 1st Edition 6": 1 mile map of 1873 as reverse s-shaped boundaries, which is typical of enclosed ridge and furrow.

Malpas was noted as a centre of the linen trade in the 14th century and there was sufficient trade to support specialised cloth merchants. An inventory of a mercer in 1371 includes Welsh woollen cloth as well as local linen (Crosby 1996, 54-5). A windmill is recorded in documents of the mid-14th century (CRO DCH/C/254, 304), while a lease of 1659 (CRO DCH/C/542) refers to 'That part of the Milne field...where several milnes now erected by the Lord Cholmondeley and called the Windy Milne Banke...'. The mill's position is not given, but it may have been to the north of the town in 'Windmill Field' which is recorded in the Tithe Award. In addition, the High Street was known as 'Windmill' Street until the middle of the 19th century (Hayns pers comm 2001). The cropmark of a potential post mill has been recognised to the south of the village (CSMR 1690/1). A 'barkhousyard' next to the 'Walleway' is recorded in a document dated 1404 i.e. a 'tannery next to Well Street' (CRO DCH/C/324).

3.4.4 Religion

St Oswald's church is a large structure with a nave, chancel, western tower, and north and south aisles with chapels attached. It contains work from the 14th century but was largely remodelled in the second half of the 15th century (Richards 1947,

220-5). The church had two rectors from 1285 to 1885, perhaps as a result of the splitting of the lordship, and consequently there are two rectories - Upper and Lower. (ibid 224). It has been suggested that the existence of two rectors in the medieval period and the dedication of the medieval church to St Oswald may indicate that there was an early minster church and cult centre at Malpas (Harris and Thacker 1987, 269).

It has been suggested that there was a Cluniac cell at Malpas, dependent on the Cluniac house at Montacute in Somerset. It is now generally agreed however, that this cell was actually located at Malpas in Monmouthshire (Knowles and Hadcock 1971; Crossley and Wolley Dod 1949).

3.4.5 The Surrounding Area

There are numerous medieval moated sites in the surrounding area - for example, 2km north-west of Malpas are two such sites (CSMR 1697 and 1697/1/2). Another site of interest are the Dirtwich saltworks, 3km south of Malpas. These were part of the Barony of Malpas and are recorded from Domesday to the 19th century (CSMR 1696).

3.5 Post-medieval

3.5.1 The Manor

In the 19th century, the chief landowners in Malpas beside the Cholmondeleys and a Mr Drake, who was descended from the Drake family who had purchased their share of the barony, were the Rectors of Malpas (Ormerod 1882, 594).

3.5.2 Settlement

The town continued in reasonable prosperity through the 17th and 18th centuries and Malpas possesses a number of fine buildings of this date. Malpas Grammar School was in use until 1906 and is shown on the OS First Edition map of 1873. Also shown is Alport's School on High Street, founded in 1745, the buildings of which survive although it is no longer in use as a school (Hayns pers comm).

Malpas Grammar School (CSMR 1689/5) was founded in 1528 by Sir Randal Brereton who also built a school-house. It stood 'behind the market place' (Harris 1980, 240-1) and was rebuilt in the late 18th century. Although it struggled for much of its life, and had to be re-founded by Hugh, Viscount Cholmondeley in 1697, it survived until 1906 when the school buildings and site were sold.

Leland also records that Sir Randal Brereton founded a hospital (Toulmin-Smith 1964, 30). The present almshouses on the south side of Church Street were built in 1721 by Hugh, Earl of Cholmondeley, perhaps on the site of the earlier hospital. They have been restored on a number of occasions, so little of the original fabric remains (Cordon 1979, 7).

3.5.3 Economy

The town's prosperity was largely based on agriculture. Cattle and cheese were its staple products in the 1830s and in 1841 farming was the largest employer in the district (Crosby 1996, 89). Around the middle of the 17th century Malpas had 19 inns, by far the largest number of any township in Broxton Hundred, which suggests an importance as a coaching stop.

The town was largely bypassed by the Industrial Revolution. Writing around 1819, Ormerod (1882, 597) says that 'The buildings are generally mean, and the whole place has contracted that neglected appearance which is the sure consequence of the non-residence of the principal proprietor'. Bagshaw (1850, 134) describes Malpas as 'a place without manufactures and enjoying but little trade, it is, however, surrounded by a great farming district...The market...is but thinly attended; butter is the principle commodity bought for sale'. The market was at this time on a Wednesday and there were three annual fair days. The majority of the inhabitants listed in the Directory are farmers but non-farming occupations such as boot and shoe makers, chemists, drapers, grocers, joiners, ironmongers, shopkeepers, surgeons, tailors, watch and clock makers, and a hairdresser are also listed by Bagshaw (ibid, 137-8).

3.5.4 Religion

Within St Oswald's church the Brereton and Cholmondeley chapels contain tombs of the two most influential families in the town, dating from the 16th century onwards (Ormerod, 1882, 597). The Rectory is Listed Grade II and was built c 1760 on a new site by Reginald Heber (ibid 610). It was much altered in the late 18th and 19th centuries with a rear wing and attached buildings demolished (DoE, 1985).

The Ordnance Survey First Edition 6" map shows three Methodist chapels in the town: Primitive and Wesleyan Methodist chapels off Old Hall Street and an Independent Methodist chapel (subsequently replaced by a combined United Reformed and Methodist Church) on High Street.

3.5.5 Population

Malpas's population in 1664 has been estimated as 550, the largest in Broxton Hundred (MacGregor 1992). From 1801 - 1971 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	906	1901	1139
1811	938	1911	1166
1821	1127	1921	1098
1831	1004	1931	1101
1841	1022	1951	1219
1851	1054	1961	1310
1861	1037	1971	1493
1871	962	1981	1510
1881	939	1991	1545
1891	1164		

3.5.6 Transport and Communications

The route from Whitchurch - Chester that ran via Malpas was gradually replaced by the road that became the modern A41. This process was presumably accelerated after 1739 when the A41 was turnpiked. The road west to Bangor-is-y-coed was turnpiked in 1767 (Harrison 1886).

3.5.7 The Surrounding Area

There are a number of 17th-century timber framed buildings that survive in the surrounding area - for example, Lower Moss Farmhouse 1km to the south-east (CSMR 1693/1).

4. PLAN COMPONENTS

The town has been divided into 15 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. The origins, nature, form and development of the town are all still incompletely understood. A broad outline of its development can, however, be attempted, which can be tested and refined as further work is carried out. Although a settlement is known to have existed in the early medieval period, the site of this is unknown, therefore two possible locations of *Depenbech* are suggested.

EARLY MEDIEVAL c 450 - 1066 (Figure 2)

Two alternatives are suggested:

- COM 1 Roman Road
- **COM 2a -** Location of Settlement: the site of the castle and church within the medieval town
- **COM 2b -** Location of Settlement: to the south of the medieval town, around the site of Hough Farm, by Bradley Brook

MEDIEVAL c 1066 – 1540 (Figure 2)

- **COM 3** Malpas Castle
- **COM 4** St Oswald's Church
- **COM 5** Market Place
- **COM 6** Burgages north Church Street
- **COM 7** Burgages south Church Street
- **COM 8** Burgages west High Street
- **COM 9** Burgages east High Street
- **COM 10 -** Tenements west High Street
- **COM 11 -** Tenements south end of Church Street
- **COM 12 -** Tenements east High Street
- COM 13 Tenements west Oldhall Street

POST MEDIEVAL c 1540 – 1875 (Figure 2)

COM 14 - Settlement

MODERN c 2000 (Figure 2)

COM 15 - Settlement

4.1 Early Medieval (Figure 2)

The settlement of Malpas originated as the centre of a large estate of the Earls of Mercia. However, the early medieval settlement need not necessarily have been in the area of the present town and two alternative sites are therefore suggested: **COM 2a** and **COM 2b**.

One reason for the location of an estate centre at Malpas would no doubt have been its location by the Roman road (**COM 1**), which afforded easy communication within a large estate. **COM 2a** is located in the area of the later castle and church, the administrative and ecclesiastical centre of the town, and close to the Roman road. **COM 2b** is located by Hough Farm overlooking the Bradley brook. A settlement here would still be on the route of the Roman road and would better fit the place name evidence as presented by Dodgson (1972) (1.3 above), i.e. by a deep valley with a stream in it.

4.2 Medieval (Figure 2)

After 1066 Malpas became the seat of the Barony of Malpas, which was largely based upon the earlier estate of the Earls of Mercia. A castle was founded and if the estate centre was not already in this area it was presumably at this time that the settlement was moved from its previous location. The castle (**COM 3**) is likely to have been built soon after the Norman conquest, probably by Robert Fitzhugh as the administrative centre of the barony of Malpas and as protection against the Welsh. When the castle fell out of use is uncertain. Its value as a defensive centre may have diminished after Edward's conquest of Wales towards the end of the 13th century but it no doubt continued to be an important administrative centre of the barony.

A large mound, which is generally assumed to be the castle motte, still survives (**COM 3**). Hayns questions how much of this mound was removed as part of the efforts to bring the first piped water supply to Malpas. In 1835, the Marquis of Cholmondeley and Thomas Tyrwhitt-Drake, the two principal land-owners in the area, constructed a waterworks to the south-east of the town. From here, water was forced by a steam engine into a reservoir, which was constructed inside the Castle Hill or motte. This reservoir was subsequently enlarged in 1885 (Hayns 1988b). These 19th century interventions suggest that the motte at Malpas has been subjected to some disturbance, although the extent of this is difficult to gauge.

Associated with the original medieval motte there would also presumably have been an outer court or bailey. Topographically the most likely location for this would be to either the south or the north of the motte (within **COM 4**). Here the land is elevated

high above the surrounding area, the churchyard of St Oswald's lies c 2m above Church Street. Had the bailey been to the south of the motte then this would include the site of St Oswald's church and churchyard. Could the church have originated as a chapel within the castle?

The role of Malpas as an estate centre would have attracted a certain amount of commercial activity and it would appear that at some point before c1230 the landowner decided to regulate and take advantage of this by creating burgages. Marketing may also have been encouraged and formalised by the laying out of a market place, perhaps at the gates of the castle. A rectangular block of land to the south of Church Street and to the west of Oldhall Street (COM 10), now occupied by a series of properties with a narrow frontage and a long plot, may have originated as a planned, rectangular market beside the castle and adjacent to the main north-south and east-west routes. A more obvious market area has been identified at the centre of the town (COM 5), at the junction of High Street and Church Street. A market cross (CSMR 1689/4/1) marks the spot; this dates to 1873 but the base is medieval and of 14th century style.

The early settlement areas are probably those clustered around the castle and market place (COMs 6-10). In particular COMs 6, 7, 8 and 9 appear to be areas of planned settlement, and all share the common characteristics of long, narrow tenements with buildings clustered at the street frontage. Of particular interest is the rear boundary of COM 7, which stands proud of the boundaries of its neighbouring components. This appears to identify an area of settlement separately laid out, perhaps an area of burgage plots. Within COM 8 the boundaries that run at right angles to Church Street appear to overlie those that run at right angles to High Street. Does this indicate that the Church Street tenements post-date those of the High Street as a later phase of settlement crowded around the market place? **COM** 10, which is located on the corner of the High Street and Oldhall Street, does not contain long, narrow tenements and may also have been developed at this time. **COM 11** at the western end of Church Street, lies beyond the area of what appears to have been the planned settlement. Much of the outlined component is empty but it is suggested that this area was settled before the dramatic population loss of the 14th and 15th century; when the Black Death and associated disasters probably caused this area of settlement to fall out of use. The common back boundary of this component indicates that this area may have marked the maximum extent of medieval settlement. COM 12, east of Oldhall Street and south of Well Street is a small area that was probably developed as a result of the town's commercial activities, as a desirable location close to the street market.

COM 13 is the site of the Old Hall, the manor house of the Brereton family on Oldhall Street.

4.4 Post Medieval (Figure 2)

The extent of the settlement at this time is identified as **COM 14**. There is no reason to expect a large amount of growth during this period given Malpas' failure to attract much by way of industrial activity. Any population increase was probably absorbed as infill within the existing settled area and an example of this is the 18th-century almshouses on the south side of Church Street, opposite St Oswald's church, the

churchyard of which underwent small scale expansion to the north sometime between 1841 and 1873. Only later in this period can we recognise limited growth, for example to the north of the settlement on the eastern side of High Street the Alport Endowed School was built on the edge of the settlement in 1709.

Expansion between 1841 and 1873 included properties built to the north of town on the west of High Street. Here tenements are wider than those in the centre of town, which suggests that there was little pressure for space when they were built. It is here that a non-conformist chapel was built in 1862, originally serving the Congregationalists. This chapel was later demolished and the replacement building opened in 1995 to serve the former United Reformed, Wesleyan Methodist and Primitive Methodist congregations (Hayns pers comm). All but the westernmost area of Well Street, (properties both to the north and to the south) were developed between 1841 and 1873. The OS First Edition map surveyed in 1873 depicts the central portion of buildings on the south side of Well Street occupied by a Gas Works. Slight expansion also occurred along Oldhall Street, for example a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel was opened in 1875, but was burned down in 1891. A replacement chapel was opened in 1892 and was demolished in 1985. The former chapel stables, built in 1901, have been converted in garages (Hayns pers comm)

4.5 Modern (Figure 2)

COM 15 represents the extent of the township c 2000. Between 1871 and 1971 the population of Malpas almost doubled. The increased population was partly absorbed by an increased density of settlement within the town, and partly by growth, with housing estates to the east and less dense settlement to the north and west.

5. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

5.1 Above Ground Remains

The lack of intensive development at Malpas has ensured that it has retained its medieval street pattern as well as a large number of surviving post medieval buildings. Many of the cottages and houses date from the 17th and 18th centuries, with a particular concentration along Church Street. Fifty one structures are listed; all are Grade II, apart from the Church, which is Grade I, and The Old Printing House and the gates at the south-west corner of the churchyard, which are Grade II*. The historic core is a designated Conservation Area and there are two scheduled ancient monuments within Malpas: the castle motte (SAM 13420) and Malpas market cross (SAM 25710).

5.2 Below Ground Remains

As so little archaeological work has been carried out in Malpas, the survival and preservation of deposits cannot be fully assessed. However, the discovery of a medieval pit containing 13th century pottery to the rear of Jubilee Hall in 1999, does demonstrate that archaeological deposits do survive. Also the discovery of a sherd of Roman pottery supports the unconfirmed report that Roman mosaics, lamps and other items were found in the town during the 1730s (Chester City Council,

1999/2000, 5). Therefore, the lack of development that has occurred in Malpas suggests that archaeological remains will have survived undisturbed in most areas.

6. PRIORITIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

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

6.1 General

- PC6 The late Saxon to medieval period
- PC7 Transition from medieval to post medieval traditions (c1300-1700AD)

6.2 Early Medieval

- Establish the location, nature and extent of settlement during the early medieval period.
- Establish whether there was a Saxon church on the site of St Oswald's and the nature and extent of this.

6.3 Medieval

- Establish the precise location of settlement areas and date their phases of expansion and contraction.
- Establish the foundation date of the castle and the nature and extent of this, in particular the location of the bailey.
- Establish the nature of buildings on settlement plots.
- Examine evidence for any medieval industry.
- Establish the foundation date of the church of St Oswald, date phases of expansion.
- Establish whether there was a planned market place.
- Establish the location of the Cluniac Monastic Cell.

6.4 Post Medieval

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

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8. ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Malpas and the Surrounding Area

Figure 2: The Development of Malpas

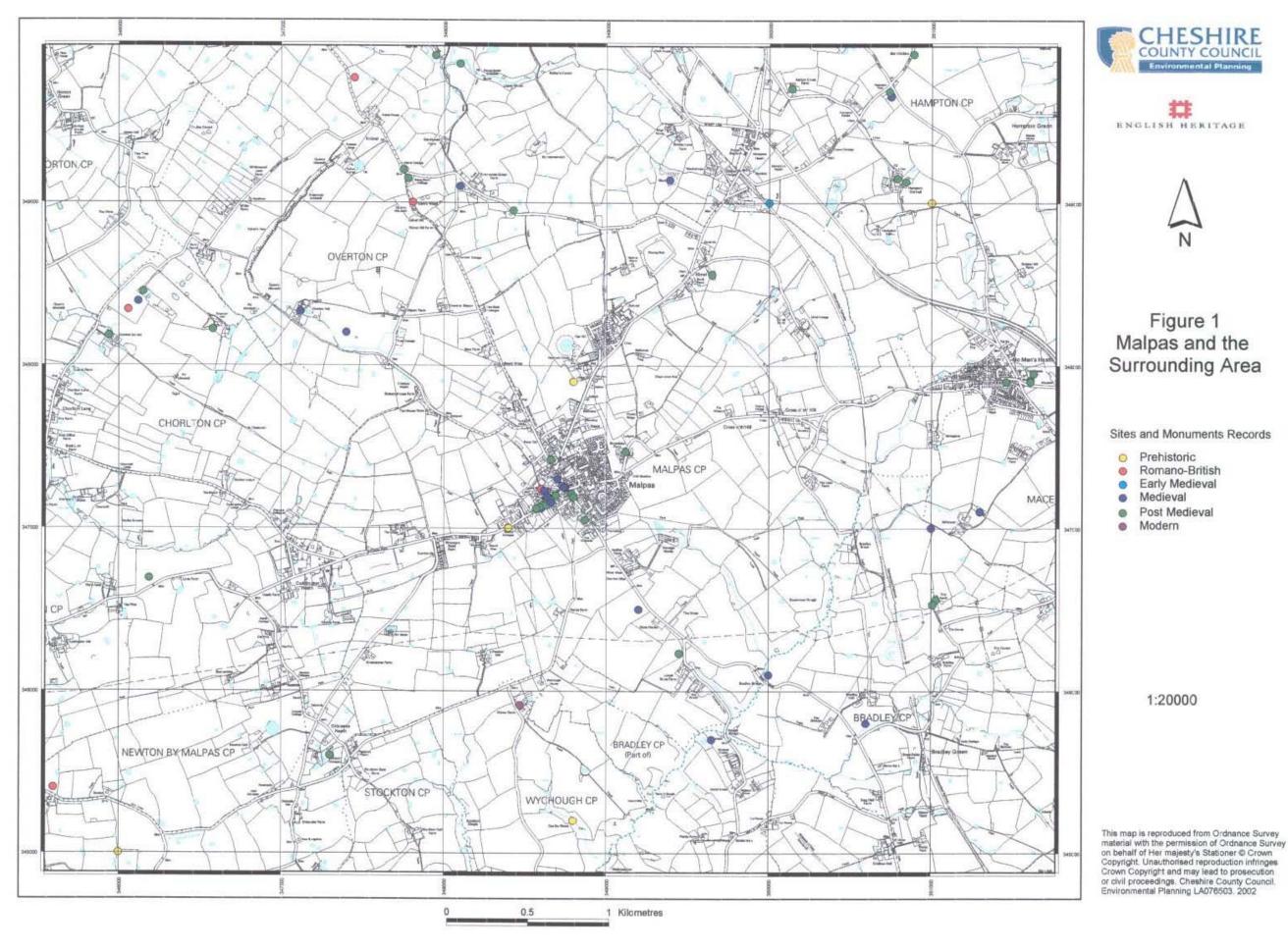




Figure 2: The Development of Malpas



