CHESHIRE HISTORIC TOWNS SURVEY

Neston

Archaeological Assessment

2003

CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

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NESTON & PARKGATE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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1. SUMMARY

Neston and Parkgate are neighbouring communities with a shared history and so are considered together in one assessment report.

Neston was the largest settlement on the Wirral peninsula until the late 19th century. The survival of five early medieval decorated cross fragments and the reference to a priest at Domesday suggests that Neston was an ecclesiastical centre in the early medieval period, potentially of high status, which is also indicated by the large size of the medieval parish of Neston. A quay was developed at Neston during the 16th century, although such activities are thought to have taken place since the medieval period. Its function as a port was hampered by the silting of the Dee estuary, which led to its eventual demise and the development of nearby Parkgate.

In the early 18th century Parkgate operated a number of ferry services, most notably the 'Irish Packet' to Dublin. By the early 19th century Parkgate had become a leisure resort with its pleasant aspect, a large visitor population, and the new vogue for sea bathing. Famous visitors include Lady Hamilton who visited for medicinal sea bathing, Handel who disembarked there in 1742 on return from Dublin where he had conducted the first performance of The Messiah and Turner who drew the view of Flint Castle from Parkgate (Pearson 1985, 15; Place pers com). However, during the early to mid-19th century the key economic base - the port, the ferry services and tourism rapidly declined, due primarily to the silting of the Dee, and competition from the developing towns on north Wirral, and the Liverpool conurbation.

1.1 Topography and Geology

Neston lies on the coast of the Wirral peninsula in north-west Cheshire. It is 18km north-west of Chester and 15km west of Ellesmere Port. Parkgate is 1.2km to the northwest, and has been gradually absorbed by Neston's expanding suburbs. To the west of Neston is a large area of salt marsh that has developed as the Dee estuary has silted up. The town lies c 10m AOD at the shore of the Dee, rising to 60m AOD inland. The surrounding landscape of the Wirral peninsula comprises gently undulating grassland.

The underlying solid geology comprises pebble beds of the Sherwood Sandstone Group (Geological Survey of Great Britain, 1975), with a drift geology of boulder clay in the surrounding area (Geological Survey of Great Britain, 1974). The soils to the north and south are stagnogleyic argillic brown earths, which are suited to grass and graded class 3 (Furness 1978, 92).

The A540 Chester to Hoylake road runs 1km east of Neston. The B5135 represents the old route through Neston and Parkgate.

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1.2 Administrative Unit

Neston lay within Wirral Hundred and the parish of Neston, which also included the townships of Leighton, Thornton Hough, Raby, Little Neston, Ness, Willaston and Ledsham (Dunn 1987, 14, 30). Neston was also included in Wirral Deanery (ibid 14).

Parkgate, which did not develop as a settlement until the post medieval period, lay within the Parish of Neston. Today both Neston and Parkgate lie within the Civil Parish of Neston and the Borough of Ellesmere Port and Neston.

1.3 Place Name

Neston or *Nestone* was first recorded at Domesday (1087). It also occurs as: *Nestuna* (1096-1101), *Neeston* (1338) and *Naston* (1351). In 1278 and 1300-7, two prefixes of *Magna* and *Parva* were recorded, which differentiate between the settlements of Great Neston and Little Neston. The place name has been interpreted as a 'Farm or enclosure at the Ness' or a 'farm belonging the village of Ness' (Dodgson 1972, 222).

The place name Parkgate first occurs in 1610. The name was a reference to the gates of the nearby Neston Park, which first occurs in the records c 1258. The medieval deer park of Neston extended up to the banks of the River Dee and it was on part of this land that the settlement of Parkgate developed, In 1724 Gastrell noted that 'some houses upon the Water-side in Great Neston area called Park Gates' (Dodgson 1972, 223; Place 1994, 11).

SOURCES

2.1 Historical

The primary sources for the history of Neston and Parkgate are Place's *The Rise and Fall of Parkgate* (1994); *This is Parkgate* (1999) and *Neston 1840-1940* (1996), as well as Pearson's *Neston and Parkgate* (1985). Ormerod's (1882) history of Cheshire also provides useful manorial and ecclesiastical background information.

The Cheshire Record Office (CRO) holds a number of detailed records for Neston and Parkgate, though analysis of these is beyond the remit of the present survey.

2.2 Cartographic

Neston is depicted upon Saxton's 1577 map of Cheshire and Speed's county map of 1610. Both of these maps also show 'The New Quay' to the west of Neston. The earliest maps to show Parkgate are Badeslade's Map (1741); 'Boydell's Map (1771) (showing the settlement as being larger than the adjacent Neston) and John Evan's 'Map of the Dee Estuary' (1795). Parkgate is first shown on a chart of the Dee estuary by Greenvile Collins (1693), while detailed surveys of both Neston and Parkgate are shown on the Mostyn Estate Map of 1732 at Bangor University (Place 1994). Later detailed surveys include the tithe map of 1847 and the Ordnance Survey (OS) First Edition 6": 1mile map surveyed in 1872-4.

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2.3 Archaeological

The County Sites and Monuments Record (CSMR) lists twelve records in Neston and six in Parkgate, 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. Eighteen new sites have been identified as a result of this survey. No archaeological work is known to have been undertaken at either Neston or Parkgate.

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

3.1 Prehistoric

There is no evidence to suggest that there was activity at Neston and Parkgate during the prehistoric period.

3.2 Roman

In 1866 a number of silver and copper Roman coins (CSMR 4) were found near Neston, two of which were of Constantine I (4th century). Other finds include a coin of Diocletian (3rd century) and rim sherds of two grey ware jars (Harris and Thacker 1987, 234), and in 1868 a Roman 1st century AD brass coin was found at Parkgate (CSMR 1). It has also been suggested that a possible Roman road ran along the south shore of the Wirral between Chester and Meols, passing through Neston en route (Laing ud, 34), although there is no evidence for this.

3.3 Early Medieval

Within the church of St Mary and St Helen are the remains of five early medieval decorated crosses (CSMR 2/1/2). The fragments consist of four shafts and one head, with one of the shafts re-used as a lintel in the belfry. The crosses are contemporary with, and related to, a group of circle headed crosses which occur along the western seaboard between Cumbria and Anglesey, in areas of Viking settlement (Harris and Thacker 1987, 279).

There was a priest recorded in Neston at Domesday (1086) and the crosses suggest that there was a church with an early medieval foundation, potentially a high status institution. Also the parish of Neston was large, including eight townships and this may have reflected the importance of an earlier ecclesiastical administrative unit (Harris and Thacker 1987, 279).

The Domesday Survey (1086) records two entries for Neston, both in Wilaveston Hundred. The first was held by the church of St Werburgh (Chester):

'*Nestone* [Great Neston in Neston] *and William* [holds] *of it. There* [is] *a third of a part of two hides that pays geld. The land is for one plough. It rendered and renders in farm 17s. 4d.*'

The second portion was held by William Fitzneil:

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'*Arni (Erne) held it and was a free man. There* [are] *two* [third] *parts of two hides that pay geld. The land is for four ploughs. In demesne are two ploughs and one serf. A priest and four villeins and two bordars have three ploughs the T.R.E. it was worth 20s. and afterwards as much, now 25s.*'

(Harris and Thacker 1987, 345, 356)

The manor of Neston was therefore divided, and held in two moieties by the church of St Werburgh and William Fitzneil. The manors were managed using a system known as 'subinfeudation', where the manor was not held directly by the lord, but was instead granted to a '*mesne lord*'. The latter moiety was held by a thegn named *Arni*, and was a core part within his large estate of manors (Higham 1993, 132). The combination of a priest, an unusual formula and a very low hidation, could suggest that '...the church [at Neston] was endowed with uncatalogued tax exempt land' (Higham 1993, 132).

There is no archaeological or historical evidence to suggest early medieval activity at Parkgate. Parkgate was not recorded during the Domesday Survey (1086), but any settlement located within this area may have been included in the manor of Neston.

3.4 Medieval

3.4.1 The Manor

At the close of the 11th century the manor of Neston was reunited. William (the son of William Fitzneil) exchanged the church's lands for his moiety of the manor of Raby. The manor passed to various individuals during the medieval period (Sulley 1889, 180-1).

As for the early medieval period, any medieval settlement in the area later known as Parkgate, was no doubt included in the manor of Neston, although Parkgate developed across the boundary of the townships and manors of both Great Neston and Leighton (Place pers com).

3.4.2 Settlement

Little is known about the infrastructure and morphological characteristics of the medieval settlement of Neston except that it contained a church, an anchorage and perhaps a market place.

3.4.3 Economy

As with other contemporary settlements it is likely that agriculture was the principal occupation amongst the residents of Neston, with evidence of medieval field systems surviving in the surrounding landscape. 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 Cheshire Mize Survey of 1405 records the value of the settlement as being worth 43s 2d, a figure comparable to Runcorn (42s 8d) and Wyleston (44s 10d) (Booth 1985).

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3.4.3.1 Markets and Fairs

There were no market or fair charters granted to Neston in the medieval period and in the 1590s a proposal to establish a market at Neston was defeated by an alliance between the corporations of Chester and Liverpool (Crosby 1996, 90), '...the citizens of Chester complained that the Neston market interfered with the city's market tolls' (Bidlake 1936, 24). Twice the City of Chester ensured that there was no market at Neston until 1727. This jealously and the competition from nearby Burton, which had a market and more importantly by the 14th century held an annual fair, is likely to have prohibited the creation of a market at Neston during the medieval period (Place 1996, 1-2).

3.4.3.2 Trade

Evidence for trade at medieval Neston is contained in the Chester Customs Accounts, which record that during the 14th and 15th centuries ships carrying cargoes of wine and Spanish iron anchored at Neston (Wilson 1969). In addition, a reference from 1282 records a fleet of around sixty ships from the Cinque Ports which were anchored off Neston, prior to Edward I's military campaign against the Welsh (Pearson 1985, 8). This possible wharf may have been located in the south-west of modern Neston at Denall Quay (CSMR 3), as recorded during the reign of Edward II (1307-27) was '...the appointment of a Collector of Customs of Wines to the King's use in the Ports of Denewall' (The Cheshire Sheaf 1906, 88). The Neston anchorage developed into the New Quay (or Key) providing an embarkation point for Ireland. The 'New Haven' or 'New Quay' (CSMR 2292) was first mentioned in 1541, although building may have commenced earlier in the reign of Henry VIII.

3.4.3.1 Religion

The fate of the possible early medieval church at Neston is unclear. It may have been replaced by the church founded in c1170 by Ralph de Montalt, baron at the court of the Earl of Chester (Richards 1973, 255). In 1092 the minster church of St Werburgh was re-founded as a Benedictine abbey, by Earl Hugh Lupus (Carrington 1994, 73), and the abbey's chronicle records that the dying Ralph Montalt, presented Neston church to St Werburgh 'Because of [his] evil deeds' (Pearson 1985, 8). In 1258 this grant was challenged by Roger de Monalt (nephew of Ralph), whose soldiers expelled the monks from the church. The dispute was finally settled when the abbot of St Werburgh offered another manor in return for the living of the church (Pearson 1985, 8).

The present church of St Mary's and St Helen's retains some re-used Norman masonry fragments (Pevsner and Hubbard 1971, 290). Also, within the church are four medieval grave covers and a headstone (CSMR 2/1/2).

3.4.5 The Surrounding Landscape

Other medieval sites in the surrounding area include a deer park (CSMR 52), and a medieval cross base (CSMR 2314) to the north of Neston. There are also several windmill sites to the east of Neston (CSMR 12, 26, 57).

3.4.3.2 Post Medieval

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3.5.1 The Manor

The manor of Neston was held by the Mostyn family from 1672 until 1849 (Sulley 1889, Place 1996).

3.5.2.1 Settlement

The commercial success of the New Quay undoubtedly had an effect upon the infrastructure of Neston, as in 1889 it was described as:

'...quaint and interesting, with an old-world air...but there is very little antiquity. Doubtless the whole was rebuilt - and subsequently rebuilt - during the period of its greatest prosperity. A few houses bear dates prior to the 18th century, but the bulk were built early in that era' (Sulley 1889, 179-80).

Little is known about the nature and extent of Parkgate before the 18th century. At the seaward end of Boathouse Lane (at the north end of the modern village) an inn, known as the Beerhouse is recorded from 1613. The stretch of water near the Beerhouse is recorded as Beerhouse hole, an anchorage with slightly deeper water than elsewhere and this may have been the impetus for the first settlement at Parkgate. The first description of Parkgate may come from Jorevin de Rochford, a traveller, who in the late 1660s described 'the little village of Birhouse…(with) some large storehouses for the keeping of mercandize to be embarked for Ireland…' (Place 1994, 20).

The first mapped evidence of a settlement here is shown on Greenvile Collins' survey of 1686 (Place 1994, 2). During the 18th century there were a number of fine houses of rich merchants and professional people (Pearson 1985, 15), and in 1857 it was recorded that: 'The place consists mostly of Lodging Houses, which present a long irregular range, forming a side of the street facing the Dee' (Kelly 1857, 177). The development of Parkgate is reflected in the Listed buildings, which primarily date from the 18th century. These buildings include Balcony House a three storied 18th century structure, 'Overdee' a two storied 18th century house, and 'South Cottage' a small early 18th century house (Department of the Environment 1974, 25-35).

During the early 19th century a number of houses appear to have been built on the High Street in Neston, whilst during the middle of the century several terraces of sandstone cottages were built off Bridge Street. From the 1870s new brick terraces were constructed on Brook Street and New Street, the latter being the company houses of the Neston Colliery, and large 'Victorian Villas' were built on Chester Road, Gladstone Road and Hinderton Road, presumably to house the prosperous professionals of the town. Between 1900 and the 1930s the Urban District Council encouraged the local construction companies to build more houses by offering a series of grants, resulting in a large expansion of the town (Pearson 1996, 164-71). In 1841 there were 368 houses in Neston (Bagshaw 1850, 655) rising to 506 by 1889 (Sulley 1889, 178).

In 1867 a 'Local Board' was elected, which assumed the role of town council. Under the Board's direction a waterworks was constructed at Little Neston, and a sewage

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plant was built to the south of Church Lane. The Board was replaced by the Neston-Cum-Parkgate Urban District Council, who provided a new sewage plant, and in 1907 a public library. Other institutions in Neston included a Post Office (1882), a gasworks (1882), the Town Hall (1889), and a telephone system (1889) (Pearson 1996, 35).

3.5.2.1 Schools

In 1610, land was granted on Windle Hill, Neston to build a school. The school which was abandoned by 1779 was possibly located at the junction of Quarry Road and School Lane (Place 1996, 99). The 'National Society' or 'Neston Charity' School was opened in 1825 on the site occupied by the present Town Hall, while a Parish infants school was opened at Little Neston in 1841. In 1859 an elementary school for infants and juniors was opened in Liverpool Road, Neston, while a school for infants was opened at Parkgate the following year (Place 1985, 100-1).

Parkgate was renowned for its boarding schools for young gentle-persons, from as early as 1804. These schools were often advertised by extolling the healthy pursuit of sea bathing (Place 1996, 109).

3.5.3 Economy

3.5.3.1 Neston Port

An anchorage may have existed at Neston as early as the 13th or 14th centuries, however the construction of the 'New Haven' or 'New Quay' (CSMR 2292) was significant for the development of the town. In 1540 a group of Chester merchants petitioned the King's Council to grant them aid in order to build a new quay at Neston. The reason for this request was to protect Chester's sea borne trade, which was under threat due to the silting of Chester's port. Work on the New Quay may have begun in the reign of Henry VIII (1509-47), although there is some doubt as to whether this early construction work was ever completed (Woodward 1970, 2). The new quay was to be located at 'Lightfoot Pole', a sheltered location approximately 1km from Neston. Construction work began in 1545, however soon after, the project was running over budget, forcing the cartel of merchants to appeal to the government for extra funds in 1555. The government imposed a levy, that was to be collected in churches throughout the land but as late as 1598 there were still concerns about the lack of progress, which resulted in the appointment of an 'overseer' named John Middleton. The engineering project was hampered by particularly strong tides, which were affecting the construction of the sea wall. However, by the turn of the century the project appears to have been completed, with a large number of passengers and merchandise passing through the port. In 1615 William Webb recorded that:

'*The well known parish, church, and port of Great Neston and the usual place where our passengers into Ireland do so often lie waiting, the leisure of the winds, which make many people better acquainted with this place than they desire to be, though there be wanting no convenient entertainment, if no other want lie in the way; and here is the station of the ships called 'The New Quay' where they embark and disembark both men, horses, kine and other commodities or the back of this Neston.*'

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(Pearson 1985, 11-12)

Neston Quay was a stone pier built into the river at right angles to the shore, on the boundary of the townships of Great and Little Neston (Place 1994, 16). The quay provided access to and from European markets, with fish, timber, and pitch being imported from the Baltic states, and wine from France and Spain. Exports included tanned calf skins and salt. Neston acted as a transhipment point for Chester, with goods being transferred onto smaller vessels before continuing onto Chester, whilst passengers transferred to a coach service. Some of the ships licensed to sail from Chester included the 'Trinitie of Neston', the 'Marten of Neston', and the 'Katherine of Neston', all of which were recorded in 1571. After the 1690s Neston Quay went into decline and the last reference to its use is in 1704 (Place 1994 17-19).

3.5.3.2 Parkgate Port

During the 18th century, the quay at Neston was in decline, as the silting of the Dee estuary prevented the docking of cargo and passenger ships. By 1743 the New Quay had become known as the 'Old Quay'. When the River Dee was canalized with the opening of the New Cut in 1737, another New Quay (which later became Connah's Quay) was formed at its outer end. The Old Quay at Neston was abandoned after 1704 and in 1799 its stone was bought by Sir Thomas Mostyn, and some of the stone blocks were reputedly used to build the sea wall at Parkgate (Place 1994, 17-19; Pearson 1985, 10-13). However, the downturn in the economic fortunes of Neston was to provide the commercial incentive for the development of Parkgate, which was a busy anchorage throughout the 18th century (Pearson 1985, 19). Unlike Chester and Neston, Parkgate never possessed a quay, and before 1810 had no sea wall nor landing stage. Vessels anchored in the estuary, sometimes along way from the shore and goods and passengers being rowed ashore.

A sea wall was eventually built at Parkgate c 1810, but for the fashionable society who frequented the resort for sea-bathing, rather than for the benefit of shipping. The middle section was constructed first, from the Watch House to the bastion in the wall known as the 'Donkey Stand', where a tall, narrow building stood that was originally built as a customs house and became Parkgate's first Assembly House in the 1780s (Place 1979, 21). The south end of the sea wall from the Donkey Stand to the South Slip was built c 1830 while the north section from the Watch House to the north slipway was built in the 1840s (ibid).

A variety of commodities passed through the port at Parkgate and this trade is illustrated by the regular sale of goods that had been confiscated by the customs service, which included linen, cotton, brandy, rum, wine, hair powder, soap, starch and vinegar (Place 1979, 7). Parkgate also began to develop as a ferry port, and the settlement may have acted as the main ferry port on the Wirral for services to Ireland from the 17th century (Crosby 1996, 73). The Irish Packet service continued to flourish into the early 19th century. Another early ferry was the Parkgate to Flint service, which was established by 1740 (Pearson 1985, 74).

The development of the ferry trade, coupled with the mid-19th century fashion for sea bathing, saw Parkgate become one of the best known resorts in the country (Pearson 1985, 16). The influx of 'tourists' encouraged a large number of inns to be

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established at Parkgate. One innkeeper was Joseph Manlove, proprietor of the George Inn, who in 1784 placed an advertisement that:

'Informs the ladies and gentlemen and others that, for their better accommodation during the bathing season, he has purchased an additional Bathing machine on an entirely modern construction in which ladies may bathe with the utmost ease and secrecy' (Pearson 1985, 18).

Bathing was not only undertaken as a leisure pursuit, but also for its medicinal properties. In 1784 Parkgate was visited by a 'Mrs Hart' who treated her skin condition by bathing in the sea. The treatment was an apparent success, as 'Mrs Hart' was later to find fame as Lady Hamilton, friend to Admiral Lord Nelson (Pearson 1985, 16-17).

Entertainment on offer in Parkgate could be found in the Billiard Room, which later became the Assembly Room, where 'Card and Dancing Assemblies' were held. This building is now known as Balcony House. A race meeting was first held at Neston in 1728 which coincided with the Spring Fair. The race track was originally near the later site of Hinderton Hall (to the north-east of Neston), but was subsequently moved to 'Park Fields' in Parkgate (Pearson 1996, 20). The races were 'lively' affairs and there were often: 'Rowdy goings-on at Neston Races [resulting from the] drunken aftermath of the hiring fairs' (Place 1996, 7). The races continued until 1895 (Place pers comm).

3.5.3.3 Fishing Industry

During the 18th and early 19th centuries Neston possessed a large herring fishing and curing industry. Mortimer, writing during the 1820s, noted that 'The fisheries...were formerly considerable, but are now much neglected' (Pearson 1985, 25). The reasons for this decline included the discontinuation of a bounty payment (established in 1750), competition from the more efficient Cornish fleet, and the over-fishing of the existing stocks. Until 1809 a 'Herring House' for the curing of fish was located in Parkgate (Place 1996, 50) and by 1841 only thirteen out of 235 employed residents of Neston were fishermen (Pearson 1985, 25).

An associated trade was the collecting of shell fish and fishing for flatfish. The laying on of the railway in 1866 stimulated the industry, and in 1893, 23,200 bags of Cockles and Mussels were 'exported' via Parkgate Station (Place 1996, 52). The harvesting of shell fish continued until the 1930s.

3.5.3.4 Trade and Industry

Trades undertaken at Neston in 1834 included bakers, blacksmiths, shoe makers, butchers, brewers and maltsters (Pigot and Co 1834, 46-7). In 1850 the retail shops within Neston included grocers, butchers, bakers and tailors, all of which were located on or around the High Street (Place 1996, 89-94).

It was recorded in 1834 that as '...a place of trade Neston is unimportant, being a town supported chiefly by the number of visitations to it in the summer season' (Pigot and Co 1834, 460). This early tourist trade probably stimulated a prosperous public

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house and brewing industry, with Neston renowned for the number of its pubs (Pearson 1996, 179). The earliest reference to drinking establishments recorded in the town date from 1561 when two inns were recorded (Bidlake 1936, 24). By 1834 there were two inns and twenty taverns and public houses in Neston, Little Neston and Parkgate collectively (Pigot and Co 1834, 46). If there was any delay in the sea crossings from Parkgate, the passengers often preferred to stay in Chester, ahead of favorable weather. In order to 'encourage' trade, the innkeepers of the town often fabricated favorable weather reports, as recorded during the 1740s:

'I have learned at Parkgate, that it is a common custom of the publicans to send up false intelligence to Chester; that the company may come down to lie under the long lash of their bills' (Pearson 1985, 15).

The inns of the town were supplied by the Neston Brewery, which may be the same establishment on Bridge Street that is shown on the Ordnance Survey First Edition map of 1872. The influence of the Brewing industry is evident in a number of place name elements in Neston such as Brewhouse Croft and Brewhouse Meadow mentioned in 1677 (CSMR 46).

During the late 19th century, the practice of market gardening developed on the Wirral, in order to supply Liverpool with fresh vegetables (Crosby 1996, 90), although it is unclear whether this activity was practised in the Parkgate and Neston area.

Occupations recorded at Parkgate during the 18th century include barbers, apothecaries, doctors, pawn brokers, lawyers, chaisemen and carriers (Pearson 1985, 15). The Rope Walk, which is now part of a footpath between Parkgate Station and Leighton Banastre, potentially indicates the presence of a rope making site from the 18th century onwards (CSMR 63/0/3). However, it has also been suggested that the Rope Walk was laid out c 1814 as a promenade for visitors when the weather was too rough to walk along the Parade (Pearson, 1985, 20).

In the early 19th century the largest employers in the area were the collieries. The Ness (or Denna) Colliery (CSMR 30/1) was opened in 1757 and was owned by the Stanley family who lived at Denna Hall. Coal was mined in three seams and galleries were excavated under the estuary. The colliery worked until c 1855 when the mine was closed. Due to boundary disputes, Coal was also mined in Little Neston by the Cottingham Family, who had pits on both sides of Colliery Lane (now Marshlands Road). The last-known mining activity here took place in 1852 (Place 1996, 61)

The 1841 census records that there were 94 colliers resident in Neston, with the same number in the parishes of Ness, Little Neston and Great Neston. The record for 1851 describes a collier proprietor named James Gregory who employed 120 men. In 1874 a new company was formed and mining continued in Little Neston until 1927 (Place 1996, 61).

Associated with the colliery was the colliery quay (CSMR 3), built in the 1760s, constructed to dispatch coal to destinations including the Isle of Man and Ireland. The first reference to the shipping of coal dates to 1766 (CRO QDN/1/5). The quay was last used for coal in 1851 (Place pers comm) after which time coal was transported by rail to the sidings at Parkgate (Place 1996, 61 & 71).

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The geology of the Wirral peninsula provides a high quality sandstone that is used for building. Before 1814 a quarry was located at the junction of Mill Street and Park Street, but was closed after the 1870s, following complaints about noise levels (Place 1996, 74). A local building industry was established in Neston. During the later 19th century the largest of these companies was owned by William Pritchard, who built both the gas works on Church Lane and Neston Town Hall (Place 1996, 76).

The Deeside Electric Works was established at Moorside in 1882, but by 1887 the site was abandoned, due to the relocation of the business to Helsby. In 1896 the site was redeveloped by the Neston and Parkgate Hygenic Laundry and Cleaning Company. By 1914 the successful venture had a workforce of 80 employees, but the works had closed by the 1950s (Place 1996, 79). During the inter-war period a 'fine art' studio was established on Hinderton Road, producing high quality silver work. However the workshop ceased to trade in 1939 (Place 1996, 88-9).

A windmill (CSMR 47), is depicted on a number of historic maps, the earliest of which is Burdett's map of 1777, and the Ordnance Survey map of 1872 records it as being a flour mill. It is located within the modern development of Leigton Road in north Neston.

3.5.3.5 Markets and Fairs

Ormerod asserts that Neston's market was unchartered, noting that 'The market has been held for a great number of years without charter and without any notice of it on part of the manorial land' (Ormerod 1882, vol 2, 534). However in 1728 Sir Roger Mostyn succeeded in obtaining a charter for a market and a fair, after two previous attempts had failed. A weekly market was held as well as three fairs, on the 2nd of February, the 1st of May and the 29th of September (Place 1994, 244; Pearson 1985, 26). The market was held at 'The Cross', however in the late 18th century it was 'moribund' (Crosby 1996, 90), and in 1860 it was described as being 'obsolete' (White 1860, 615). Place suggest that both the market and the fairs lapsed with the sale of the Mostyn estate in 1849, which has regulated them (Place pers comm).

3.5.3.6 Decline

Between 1732-7 a section of the River Dee below Chester (The New Cut) was canalised, in order to provide the various river barges access to the city. Although the scheme achieved its objectives as far as Chester was concerned, it was to spell disaster for Parkgate. The engineering works diverted the natural course of the river away from the Wirral to the Welsh side of the estuary, and therefore accelerated the process of silting (Pearson 1985, 22-3), which drastically affected Parkgate's river-bourne trade. In the early 19th century much of the Packet trade to Ireland was lost to Liverpool, and the Parkgate packet service ended in 1815 (Place 1994, 257).

However, it was not the loss of shipping which resulted in the decline of Parkgate, rather it was the decline of the resort for sea-bathing in the 1840s. Richard Ayton visited Parkgate in 1813 and was not impressed:

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'*It was built solely for bathers, but has the misfortune to be in the worst situation that could be desired for their accommodation. We are generally in these kinds of establishments to give up all other conveniences for the sake of salt water, but here that it is given up too for two thirds of a day, and in exchange for it one has the satisfaction of seeing from every window of his house a dismal waste of sand, and that too, so soft and so intersected by deep furrows, that it is not passable with comfort or safety by man or horse. One may reckon indeed, with certainty on a dip everyday, but it is exceedingly annoying to be remodelling your engagements and inclinations according to the irregularity of the tides attendance*' (Pearson 1985, 19).

However the resort continued to flourish in the 1820s and '30s, when its sea wall was extended as a promenade facility. Its decline can probably be linked to the sale of the village in 1849 by the Mostyn family and the rise of the new resort of New Brighton. Visitors still came to Parkgate for a seaside holiday until c 1939, but in small numbers (Place 1996, 192).

3.5.4 Religion

Between 1874-5 St Mary and St Helen's Church, Neston was demolished, and the present structure by Francis Doyle was built (Pearson 1985, 33). In 1888 a window by Burne Jones was added, whilst other windows were replaced in 1901, 1906, and 1927 by those designed by Morris and Company. The 14th-century tower remains, but was restored during the 17th and 18th centuries (Pevsner and Hubbard 1971, 290).

A Wesleyan chapel was located on Parkgate Road, Neston in 1762. The movement appears to have lapsed shortly after this time, but returned to the Mission Hall in 1899. In 1829 some fifty Swedenborgians were active in the town, although by 1850 their chapel had been demolished. Presbyterians met at Moorside Lane in 1884, and had been represented in the town from at least 1871. Other nonconformist groups included the Salvation Army and the Open Bretheren (Pearson 1996, 119-139).

St Thomas's Church, Parkgate was originally built as a Congregational Chapel in 1843 (Department of Culture, Media and Sport 1999, 52). In 1858 it was converted to Presbyterian worship and is recorded as such on the First Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey map of 1872. In 1910 it was first used by the Church of England and seven year later it was converted into the Church of St Thomas (Place 1979, 25).

3.5.5 Population

The population of Neston in 1664 has been estimated as 310 (MacGregor 1992, 120). From 1801-1971 population data for Neston Parish is available from the census returns, which are printed in the Victoria County History (Harris 1979, 224); 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	2901(Neston AP)	**1901**	4154
1811	2909	**1911**	4596

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1821	3216	**1921**	5195
1831	3518	**1931**	5676
1841	3809	**1951**	9726 (Neston USD)
1851	3578	**1961**	11865
1861	4049	**1971**	16879
1871	4334	**1981**	Neston: 18895 Parkgate: 3445
1881	3405 (Neston and Parkgate USD)	**1991**	19290 3789
1891	3577		

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). Another turnpike road connected Parkgate (via Neston) to the Birkenhead and the Mersey ferries and in 1835 a new road was opened that provided a direct link along the northern coast of the Wirral peninsula from Chester to Birkenhead. This route bypassed Neston and Parkgate and contributed to their decline.

The Chester to Birkenhead railway line was built in 1841, with the Parkgate branch line completed in 1866. The line terminated at Parkgate, with stations at Willaston, Neston and Parkgate, and in 1886 the London and North Western Railway Company (LNWR) extended the line to West Kirby (Pearson 1985, 25). The first station was built to the south of Station Road although when the line was extended the line was moved to the north. The Great Central Line between Chester and Birkenhead was constructed in 1896, passing through the eastern section of Neston (Sylvester and Nulty, 1958, 59). The provision of a rail service stimulated some of the town's late 19th century expansion (Pearson 1985, 31).

3.5.7 The Surrounding Landscape

Sites in the surrounding area include a number of 17th century Grade II and II* Listed buildings, for example, the farm building to Leighton Hall to the north of Neston (CSMR 31/1) and Goldstraw Farm to the south (CSMR 44/1).

4 PLAN COMPONENTS

The towns have been divided into 11 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.

Plan components commence with early medieval Neston. Parkgate does not occur as a plan component until the post medieval period.

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EARLY MEDIEVAL c 540 –1066 (Figure 2)

COM 1 - Church
COM 2 - Settlement?
COM 3 - Settlement?
COM 4 - Settlement?

MEDIEVAL c 1066-1540 (Figure 2)

COM 5 - Tenements, east of Bridge Street
COM 6 - Tenements, east of High Street
COM 7 - Tenements, east of Park Street?
COM 8 - Market Place?

POST MEDIEVAL c 1872 (Figure 2)

COM 9 - Birkenhead Railway
COM 10 - Settlement

MODERN (c 2000) Figure 2

COM 11 - Settlement

4.1 Early Medieval (Figure 2)

The presence of five early medieval crosses and the Domesday reference to a priest suggests that there was an ecclesiastical institution at Neston during the early medieval period. This early church may have been of a high status, as the later medieval parish was extensive. The existence of an associated secular settlement is unrecorded, although morphological elements of the town plan may indicate settlement from this time. **COM 1** identifies the site of the medieval church of St Mary and St Helen's, founded by Ralph de Montalt in c1170, and potentially the site of the early medieval church. When the early medieval church fell out of use and whether there was continuity between the two is not known.

The angular shape of the churchyard suggests that its boundaries may have been altered, although rectangular churchyards can be a feature of early medieval and medieval churchyards, which 'may conform to the crofts of a regular village plan' (Friar 1991 ,75). Potentially the church is situated within a wider 'enclosure' formed with **COMs 2** and **3**, and bounded by Church Street, Bridge Street, Church Lane and Parkgate Road.

COM 4 to the north outlines a sub-circular enclosure and potential area of early medieval occupation. The date of Parkgate Road is unknown but it is possible that this is of a medieval date and therefore **COMs 2** and **4** may have once been part of the same component.

4.2 Medieval (Figure 2)

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The church of St Mary and St Helen (**COM 1)**, which includes architecture fragments from the Norman period was rebuilt in 1874-5. There are four medieval grave covers and a headstone located in the churchyard and within close proximity of the church are potential areas of medieval settlement: **COMs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6** and **7**, and a potential market place **COM 8**. No buildings survive from the medieval period, with most of the historic core being redeveloped especially during the 18th and 19th centuries.

COM 2 lies to the north of the medieval church and forms the south-western boundary of the potential medieval market area (**COM 8**). This component contains a number of characteristics which are typical of medieval settlement, for example buildings front on to the High Street and Parkgate Road, there are common rear property boundaries, and 'alleys' provide access to the rear of tenements. The dominant frontage appears to be that of the High Street, which perhaps suggests that the Parkgate Road was a later development. Also Mill Street and Church Lane follow a similar alignment, which suggests that the two may have originally been part of the same road.

COM 3 is adjacent to the medieval church, and includes a number of buildings that front onto Bridge Street. Although there is only one internal property boundary, there is a uniform rear defining boundary (aligned north-north-west to south-south-east), which may be of medieval origin. However, the area was developed during the post medieval period by the large industrial complex of Neston Brewery. The circularity of **COM 3** is also suggestive of a 'green', and since the 19th century at least the western area of the component has comprised undeveloped land. Whether this area was settled during the medieval period is unclear.

COM 4 is also a potential area of medieval settlement and despite post medieval development a number of features survive, including tenements which front onto the High Street and alleys that provide access to the rear of properties. To the rear of tenements are long narrow fields, which run back to Mill Street and perhaps indicate that this area was taken out of the medieval field system.

COM 5 to the east of Bridge Street and the south of Chester Road outlines a small area of potential medieval settlement. Here long narrow tenement plots front onto Bridge Street and run at right angles to it.

COM 6 outlines a large block of long, narrow medieval tenements that front onto the High Street. The tenements share a common rear boundary to which alleys provide access. Both Brook Street and Raby Street may have originated as alleys.

A possible area of medieval tenements has been identified east of Park Street and west of Liverpool Road (**COM 7**). Tenements are irregular in shape and may post-date some of the more regular tenements of **COM 4** and **6**.

COM 8 identifies the likely location of the medieval market place at 'The Cross', the meeting point of the High Street and Parkgate Road, which may indicate the site of a market cross. The granting of a market charter gave Royal leave to establish a market, although in practice the charter often simply 'legalised' an earlier informal market (Miller and Hatcher 1995, 158-9). This scenario may be evident at Neston, as in the 1590s a proposal to establish a market was rejected (Crosby 1996, 90),

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and yet there are also complaints that Neston's market was in competition with Chester's (Birdlake 1936, 24). The triangular shape is typical of a medieval market, as is its close proximity to the churchyard of St Mary and St Helen. This area is shown as a market on the Mostyn Estate Map of 1732.

4.3 Post Medieval c 1872 (Figure 2)

The construction of the 'New Quay' to the south-west of Neston, provided the incentive for the development of the town from the 16th century until the mid to late 18th century. Post medieval expansion was small scale and much of the development at this time appears to have comprised redevelopment of the medieval core. An important aspect of Neston and Parkgate's post medieval development was its rail connections. In 1841 the Chester to Birkenhead railway line was built, the Parkgate branch line of this (**COM 9**) was completed in 1866. The line terminated at Parkgate, with stations at Willaston, Neston and Parkgate. The original station was built to the south of Station Road in Parkgate, but was moved to the north side when the line was extended to West Kirby.

The extent of settlement at Neston and Parkgate c 1872 is depicted as **COM 10**. Development in north Neston in an area west of Liverpool Street and east of Park Street, included a stone quarry that was closed in the 1870s following complaints about the noise of 'blasting' (Place 1996, 52). This area also included a small terrace of housing, and the National 'Top' School, which opened in 1859 (Place 1985, 100-1). A large vicarage set within in its own grounds, was also depicted on the OS First Edition Map to the north east of The Leightons.

To the east of Neston a triangular area located between Buggen Lane, Parkgate Road, and Mill Lane contained what appears to have been orchards, a possible farm complex and a large house set within grounds. To the south of Parkgate were a small number of buildings including a Presbyterian chapel. 'The Hermitage', which is an early 19th century Regency building is located to the south of Church Lane. In the surrounding area the OS First Edition Map depicts field boundaries, which appear to be the remains of medieval strip fields.

A mid-18th century windmill is located on Leighton Road (Grade II). The mill is shown on Burdett's map of 1777, and by 1872 (Ordnance Survey First Edition map) it was recorded as a flourmill.

Parkgate began to flourish in the early 19th century as a port, ferry terminal and as a tourist resort. The construction of the seawall, which began in the early 19th century provided a commercial infrastructure from which the town was able to develop.

A limekiln has been identified from the OS First Edition map to the north of Parkgate. It is impossible to determine the scale of production from the map alone but the kiln was ideally placed for the transportation of lime via ship. South along the coast from the kiln is the site of the Pengwern Arms Inn and west of this is a 'slip' (a sloping pier) from which access could be made to sea borne vessels. To the east of the Inn is an isolated area of settlement, which outlines the location of 'Richville', a large house within extensive grounds. This is now part of a hotel complex.

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To the south are a number of buildings lining the sea front. The pressure for hotels and boarding houses to have a position on The Parade overlooking the sea has meant that properties were laid out fronting onto the road with long, narrow gardens or yards to the rear. The businesses identified on the OS First Edition map include the Union Hotel and the Chester Hotel. The 18th century Balcony House, 17-19 The Parade and South Cottage may represent the remnants of the original sea frontage at Parkgate, which ran along The Parade. (Department of the Environment 1974, 30). In the 18th century there were a number of fine houses belonging to rich merchants and professional people in Parkgate (Pearson 1985, 15). However, by the mid-19th century the settlement was described as 'consisting of mainly Lodging Houses' which ranged along The Parade (Kelly 1985, 177). By 1812 Balcony House had become the venue of the new Assembly Hall.

4.4 Modern (Figure 2)

The modern extent of Neston and Parkgate is depicted as **COM 11**. Neston has greatly increased in size and it now encompasses the previously separate settlements of Parkgate, Little Neston, Denhall and Ness. This development has included a large amount of housing, industrial complexes and civic amenities.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL POTENTIAL

5.1 Above-Ground Remains

Both Neston and Parkgate have designated Conservation Areas. There are 45 listed buildings in Neston and Parkgate of which the majority are Grade II. The church of St Mary and St Helen's, the early 18th century Moorside House and the chapel of Mostyn House School are listed Grade II*. There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Neston or Parkgate.

5.2 Below-Ground Remains

As no archaeological work has been carried out at Neston or Parkgate it is impossible to assess the survival of archaeological deposits. Post medieval and modern development will no doubt have had an impact upon the archaeological resource but without intervention the extent of this cannot be determined. The waterfront, including the Old Quay at Neston is an area of potential archaeological importance. Here evidence of maritime activities might survive along with palaeo-environmental data and organic remains.

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6 PRIORITIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

6.1 General

The study of Neston 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 Neston 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 potential location and foundation date.
- Examine the relationship between the early church and the fragments of circle headed crosses. Were they contemporary?
- 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 place, was it of medieval origin, were there other market areas?
- Establish the location of the medieval anchorage.
- Establish the nature and extent of maritime trade.

6.4 Post Medieval

- Examine the nature and extent of activity at the New Quay, establish the relationship of the New Quay to the medieval anchorage.
- Examine the origins of settlement at Parkgate; is there any evidence of activity during the medieval period?
- Examine Parkgate's development as a transhipment centre.
- Examine Parkgate's waterfront development and maritime activity; what was the date and extent of the quayside?
- Examine evidence for trade and industry.
- Examine the expansion and redevelopment of Neston.
- Examine the development of Parkgate as a centre for tourism.

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8 ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Neston and Parkgate and the Surrounding Area
Figure 2: The Development of Neston and Parkgate

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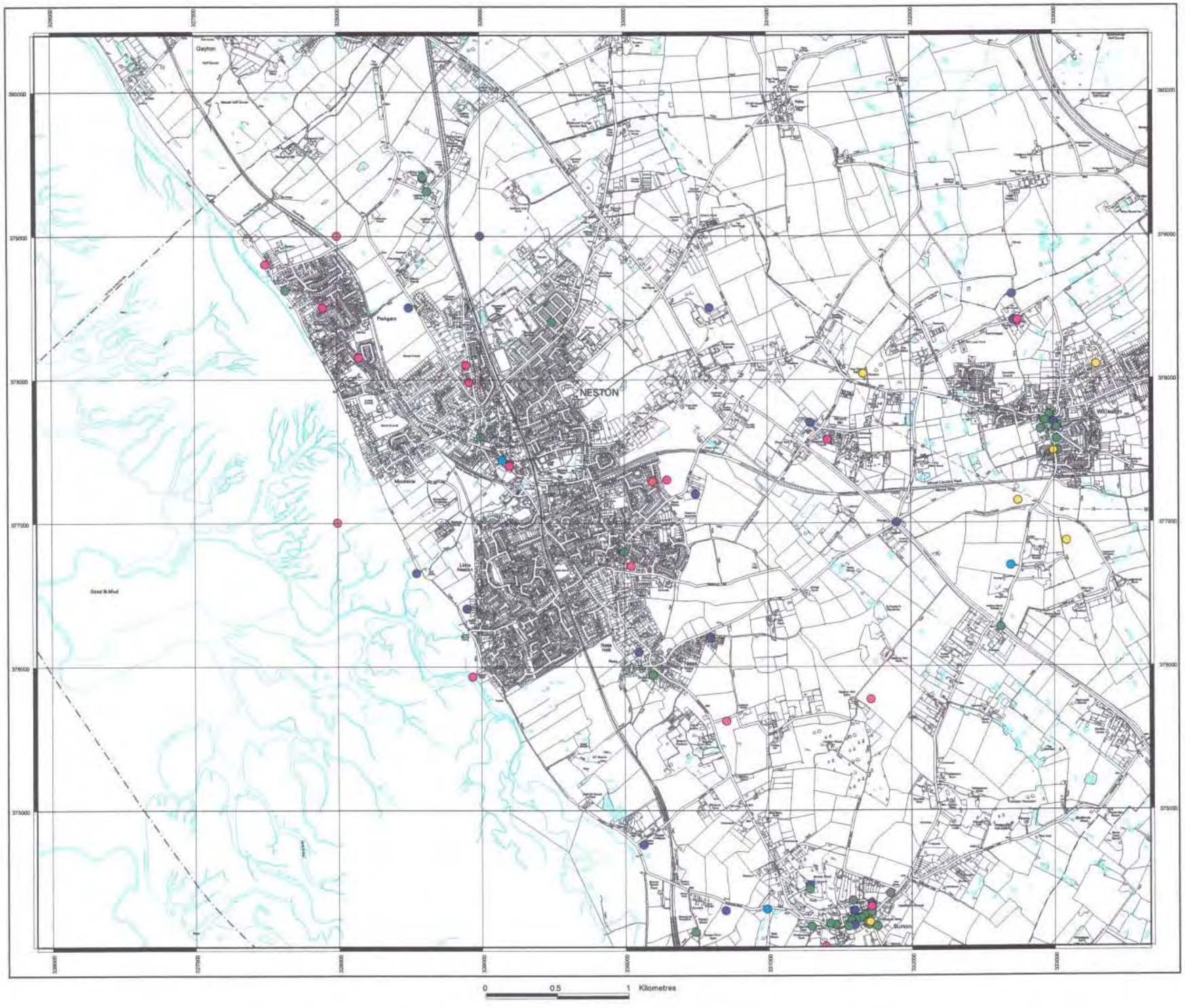

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Figure 1
Neston and Parkgate and the Surrounding Area

Sites and Monuments
- Prehistoric
- Romano-British
- Early Medieval
- Medieval
- Post Medieval
- Modern

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Figure 2: The Development of Neston and Parkgate

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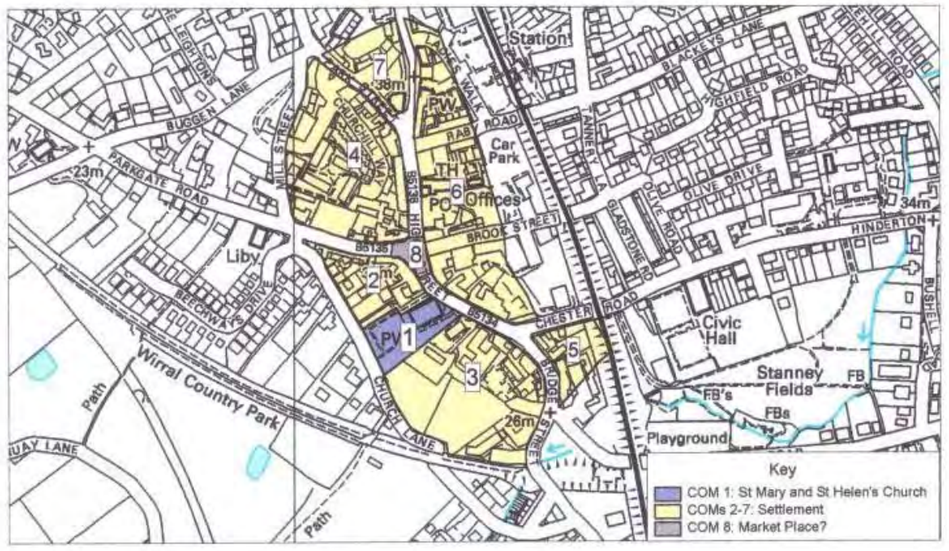
Early Medieval

0 100 200 Metres

1:6000

N



Medieval

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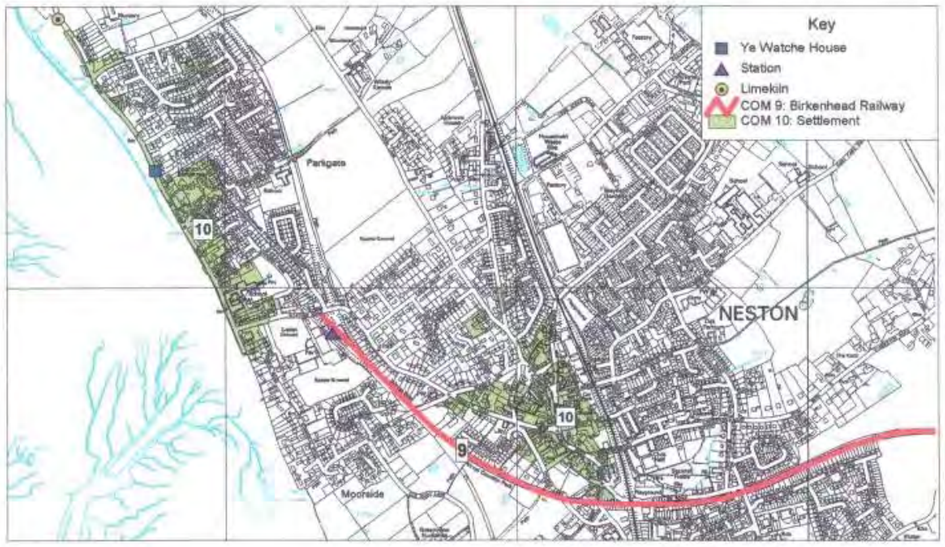

Post Medieval c 1872

0 200 400 Metres

1:18000

N

Modern c 2000

0 0.5 1 Kilometres

1:39000

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