

CHESHIRE HISTORIC TOWNS SURVEY

Northwich

Archaeological Assessment



2003

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Environmental Planning
Cheshire County Council
Backford Hall
Backford
Chester
CH1 6PZ

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NORTHWICH

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Mike Shaw & Jo Clark

1. SUMMARY

Northwich is one of Cheshire's three historic salt making towns, a position held alongside Nantwich and Middlewich since the Roman period. Although this role has now declined it still possesses an important chemical industry, which developed directly from salt production. The town developed a number of urban features during the medieval period including a market and although there is no surviving borough charter, Northwich was referred to as a borough from the late 13th century.

1.1 Topography and Geology

Northwich lies c 15m AOD at the confluence of the rivers Weaver and Dane, rising to 35m AOD away from the floodplains of each river. It is 28 km east-north-east of Chester and 17 km south-east from Warrington. The surrounding area comprises undulating pasture and derelict industrial features. There are also a number of flashes caused by the subsidence and collapse of underground saltworks, as well as natural lakes or meres such as Budworth Mere to the north and Pickmere to the northeast.

The town's underlying solid geology comprises Lower Keuper Saliferous Beds, from which salt is extracted (British Geological Survey, 1966). Above this, deposits of alluvium run along the Weaver and Dane valleys and cover most of the area of the historic town. In the surrounding area there are deposits of boulder clay and to the north-west glacial sand and gravel (British Geological Survey Sheet, 1966). The soils are alluvial and suited to use as meadowland (class 4), and are surrounded by loamy soils, suited to grassland (class 3) (Furness 1978, 150-157, 116-32).

Northwich lies on the A556 between Chester and Manchester, which is a former Roman road. A short distance to the east the A556 is intersected by King Street, which is also a former Roman road and a major route from Middlewich and the south to Warrington and the north. A further major road (A533) leads north-west to Runcorn and south-east to Middlewich.

1.2 Administrative Unit

The historic core of Northwich covers a number of former townships. An area of Roman settlement on the west bank of the River Weaver lay within Castle Northwich township; the medieval salt making area lay within the small township of Northwich itself but settlement spread into Witton township to the east, and later into Winnington to the north-west and Leftwich to the south-east. All of these townships, apart from Leftwich, lay within the parochial chapelry of Witton, which was in turn a sub-division of the large Parish of Great Budworth. They also lay within Northwich Hundred. The original hundred was dependent upon Middlewich but was transferred

to Northwich, probably as part of a reorganisation of the hundred system in the 12th century (Dodgson 1970, 184).

Today Northwich is a Civil Parish within the Borough of Vale Royal. The present Civil Parish covers all or part of the townships of Northwich, Castle Northwich, Winnington, Witton cum Twambrook and Leftwich. For the industrial period it is necessary to widen out the study area to include parts of the adjacent Marston, Wincham and Marbury townships as many of the saltworks are located in these areas.

1.3 Place Name

Northwich is so named because it is the northernmost of the Cheshire salt wiches, (wic being used in the specialised sense of an industrial area). The name is first recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as *Wich* later occurring as *le Wiche* (1299) and *Wicus* (1320) (Dodgson 1970, 192). In Welsh, Northwich was called Haleth Ddu - the black salt pit, while Nantwich was known as Haleth Wen - the white salt pit, which demonstrates the importance of Cheshire salt to Wales.

2 SOURCES

2.1 Historical

There are a handful of sources available for the study of Northwich. Ormerod (1882) provides a summary of the town's later history; the Roman settlement is summarised in Watkin (1886), Thompson (1965) and in the Victoria County History (Harris and Thacker 1987, 198-202); and there is a popular history of the town by Curzon (1993).

The salt industry as a whole is included in the Monuments Protection Programme. A report for which has been produced and contains much information about the Northwich salt industry, as well as providing a useful summary of the industry in general (Gilman 1996). The history of the salt industry is covered in detail by Calvert (1915) and in publications by Cheshire Libraries and Museums (undated, a - f).

The County Record Office (CRO) holds records for Northwich, dating from the 13th century onwards and includes deeds, accounts and rentals, a number of which relate to salt houses in the 17th century. Unfortunately, time has not allowed for their study as part of the present survey.

2.2 Cartographic

Northwich is depicted on Saxton's map of 1577 and Speed's map of 1610. In both cases it is prominently marked and was obviously regarded as a market town and local centre. There is a 17th century plan of the centre of the town which, although a rudimentary survey, can be traced on the ground using later maps. There is a good late 18th century map of the town by Fenna and the tithe maps of Castle Northwich (1845) and Witton-cum-Twambrook (1846) provide detailed surveys of the area, as do the Ordnance Survey (OS) 1:500 maps of c1876 and the 6": 1mile maps of c 1874.

2.3 Archaeological

Before the present survey there were 58 sites recorded in the town in the County Sites and Monuments Record (CSMR), which are depicted in Figure 1. Throughout this document the relevant reference is provided for any records that have been identified from the CSMR. This survey has generated 38 new records.

There have been a large number of excavations in Northwich, although they have been restricted to the area of the Roman, as opposed to the medieval or later, town. Re-development of the Roman area has been piecemeal and consequently the archaeological investigations have tended to be small individual trenches rather than open area excavations, which would have led to the maximum retrieval of information. Reporting of results has been patchy and it has not always been possible to establish exactly what area was excavated and what the results were. A list of the work that is known to have taken place in Northwich can be found in Appendix 1.

The industrial sites to the north of Northwich have been studied as part a derelict land reclamation scheme - the Weaver Valley Rolling Programme (LUAU 1992; IGMATAU 1993).

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

3.1 Prehistoric

There are no known prehistoric sites in the surrounding area and only a handful of prehistoric finds are recorded in the CSMR, including a polished stone axe (CSMR 715) found near Whalley Lane, an axe hammer (CSMR 2144) discovered in the playing fields of Sir John Deane's Grammar School, and worked flints found during excavations on Castle Hill in 1972 (CSMR 717).

3.2 Roman

Professor G D B Jones untimely death has meant that his excavations at Northwich are unpublished, although it is intended that his work will be published posthumously. Meanwhile, useful sources of information include *Cheshire Past* (1992) and summaries in *Britannia* (1970/1971).

3.2.1 Communications

Excavations from 1966 onwards have established that Northwich was a Roman settlement of some importance, it appears to have been named in the 3rd century Antonine Itinerary as *Condate* (the confluence), which is doubtless a reference to its location at the meeting point of the Rivers Weaver and Dane. It lay on the east-west Roman road between Chester and York (Watling Street: CSMR 844), mid-way between Chester and Manchester, only 2km west of its junction with the north-south road between Middlewich and Warrington (King Street).

Sewer laying along the length of Chester Road from Darwin Street to the Iron Bridge exposed the agger of a Roman road, confirming that North Watling Street and

Chester Road follow the same route (Curzon, 1974, 31; CSMR 750/1/1). The course of the road was also confirmed in the late 19th century, when a section of the Roman road was exposed to the east of the Cheshire Lines Station at Greenbank (Harris and Thacker 1987, 218; CSMR 844/1/12). Where Watling Street crossed the River Weaver is unknown, although it is presumed to be in the vicinity of the Town Bridge (ibid).

3.2.2 Fort

The important strategic position of Northwich, together perhaps with the presence of brine springs, led to the establishment of an auxiliary fort on the west bank of the River Weaver in the area now known as Castle, elements of which were excavated from 1983 onwards (Jones *et al* 1987; Jones 1991). Two periods of military occupation were identified: the first began around AD 70 and the second finished around AD 140 and there was apparently a gap between the two phases. During the second phase the fort was reduced in size. Excavations in the interior discovered the remains of barrack blocks and a major courtyard building interpreted as a *praetorium* (commandant's house) (CSMR 719/2/3).

A further rampart and ditch was discovered to the north-east of the auxiliary fort in 1970, which led to the interpretation of this area as also being an auxiliary fort (Jones 1971, 30) and much of the literature on Roman Northwich still assumes that there were two forts at Northwich. However, both would appear to be of a similar date, and recent reassessment (Jones 1992 and pers comm) has suggested that the rampart found in 1970 belonged to a military annexe of the main fort, rather than forming a separate fort.

In 1976 Waterloo Road was dug up for gas inspection, revealing the agger of a Roman Road, which Curzon suggests may have been one of the internal roads, as elsewhere in the fort buildings and streets run at right angles to the present road (Curzon 1977, 41; 719/1/1).

3.2.3 Industrial Activity

The excavations also revealed evidence of industrial activity, including a pottery kiln (CSMR 719/0/12) and iron working furnaces apparently in the area of the military annexe. An important find was the discovery of an iron auxiliary helmet in 1969 (Jones 1992).

The exploitation of brine springs during this period is demonstrated by the discovery of lead pans for use in saltworking. Four were discovered in the 19th century by the river to the south-east of the fort and a further one was found more recently in excavations at Ryders Place. A 1st century brine kiln was discovered close to the find spot of the four lead pans in 1968 (Harris and Thacker 1987, 201-2; CSMR 719/0/9, 719/0/11).

3.2.4 Vicus

The discovery of large quantities of pottery in excavations at Weaver Road, around 200m south-west of the fort area, suggests the presence of a civilian settlement

(*vicus*) outside the fort (Pierce 1988; Maude and Pierce 1993) and that Roman Northwich may be a more major pottery production centre than has hitherto been recognised. A rich collection of Roman material (large quantities of pottery dating to the 1st century AD, coins, spearheads, melon beads and a possible hearth) discovered over the years at properties along Queensgate indicates that activity extended north and west of the fort (CSMR 719/0/8 and 719/0/14). This may represent traces of a civilian *vicus* alongside Chester Road.

Excavations at the site of the old Zion Chapel in Beeston Street in 1974 revealed traces of an early 2nd century rectangular building. The archaeology had been badly damaged by ploughing and the construction of the chapel but features cutting the natural subsoil did survive including post holes and pits containing 2nd century pottery (Dent 1975, 38).

3.2.5 Cemetery

The discovery of cinerary urns off Winnington Lane (CSMR 719/0/1), around 400m north-west of the Roman settlement suggests an extramural cemetery lay in this area. A possible cemetery is also located along Watling Street to the south-west of Northwich. In 1882, what was apparently a small cinerary urn of light red ware was discovered during the construction of a house at the foot of Winnington Lane (Watkin 1886, 256; CSMR 719/0/5).

3.2.6 Decline

The chronology of settlement at Northwich is as yet imprecise. It is suggested that the auxiliary fort went out of use around AD 140 but civilian settlement probably continued at a reduced level. This is perhaps surprising in view of the importance of the brine springs and clearly more work is needed in order to provide better dating evidence. It may be, however, that the civilian settlement and the industrial activity was largely focused on supplying the needs of the Roman army and once the fort had gone there was an insufficient market to ensure the long-term survival of a large civilian settlement. Its location on the road network and a navigable river perhaps ensured some activity.

3.3 Early Medieval

The Domesday entry for Northwich indicates that by 1066 the settlement was once again an important salt-producing centre. Its value at £8 was the same as that of Middlewich, although some way behind Nantwich (£21). The township of Northwich appears to have been extremely small and presumably originated as a small industrial enclave. It is not known if brine exploitation continued from the Roman into the early medieval period or if salt production was resumed at a particular date.

The Domesday survey records that:

In the same Mildestuic hundred there was a third wich called Norwich [Northwich] and it was at farm for £8. There were the same laws and customs there as there were in the other wiches and the king and the earl similarly divided the renders.

...All the other customs in these wiches are the same. This was waste when (Earl) Hugh received it; it is now worth 35s.

(Harris and Thacker, 1987, 366)

Salt workers appear to have lived immediately east of the salt producing area along Witton Street, in the adjoining township of Witton cum Twambrook (*wic-tun* - village with a wic [Dodgson 1970, 194]). The church serving Northwich lay within Witton township and its dedication to St Helen, mother of Constantine, might indicate an early date, but need not do so (Higham 1993, 83). No early medieval artefacts are known from the town.

Witton was not the centre from which Northwich was administered, as most of the salt houses were attached to the Earl's manor of Weaverham, 4km to the west (Higham 1993, 199).

3.4 Medieval

3.4.1 The Manor

The manor of Northwich belonged to the Earls of Chester until the last one died in 1237. Subsequently Northwich became a royal manor but was farmed out to a noble family who collected the tolls in exchange for a set rent. Witton and Castle Northwich belonged to the Barons of Kinderton and joined with Witton was the manor of *Le Crosse*, to which saltworks and a portion of the profits of a lead smithy in Northwich were attached (Ormerod 1882, 154).

3.4.1.2 Castle

The area of former Roman settlement on the west bank of the River Weaver formed a separate township known as Northwich Castle and this has been referred to as 'Castellum' (Castle) since the 12th century (Dodgson 1971, 190). The name 'Castle' has led to the assumption over the years that there was a motte and bailey castle located here, and banks and ditches and two mounds of unequal height were recorded by 19th century writers, which added weight to this argument (Curzon 1993, 17; CSMR 722/1). The site is now too altered and affected by subsidence to be investigated but there are no contemporary references to a castle at Northwich. Instead, it is more likely that 'Castellum' arises from the location of the Roman fort in this area.. Curzon, for example refers to 'Castlefields' in Manchester, which is the site of a Roman fort (Curzon 1993,17)

3.4.2 Settlement

There is no surviving borough charter for Northwich, but it is described as a borough from about 1288 (Letters 2002; Stewart-Brown 1925, 111, 115). Neither is there a surviving charter for a market or fair, but a market was certainly held in the town in the medieval period (Crosby 1996, 48). Leland, writing in 1535, describes Northwich as a market town (Toulmin-Smith 1964, 4) and William Smith, writing at the end of the 16th century, recorded that there was a Friday market and two annual fairs (Ormerod 1882, 137).

Bridges over the Rivers Weaver and Dane lead into the town. The Weaver Bridge, generally referred to as Town Bridge, is first mentioned in 1351, at which time it may have been of timber, while the Dane Bridge first occurs in 1619 (Dodgson 1970, 194). However, there are likely to have been bridges or crossings at both points from an early period.

3.4.3 Economy

Although the economy of the town was dominated by the salt industry there were other industrial and commercial functions in Northwich. A list of tolls for goods crossing over Northwich bridge in 1353 indicates the types of goods coming into the town, including a wide range of carcasses, fleeces, hides and skins - perhaps indicating the existence of a tanning and gloving industry; fish - presumably for eating; alcoholic drinks; cloth; dairy products; building materials; household goods; metals and glass; and millstones (Curzon 1993, 25). Assuming that a proportion of these goods were for sale within the town it suggests that there was a thriving and varied local economy in medieval Northwich.

3.4.3.1 Saltworking

The extraction of salt was the chief function of Northwich and its importance is demonstrated by the care taken in regulating the industry in the Domesday Survey. However, Northwich and Middlewich were both second to Nantwich for salt production. 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 Northwich paid 67s 2d (Booth 1985), the sixth largest amount in the county, although less than the other salt towns (Nantwich paid £7 3s and Middlewich 76s 10d). By 1605 there were estimated to be 1296 salt pans in operation in Nantwich, as opposed to 646 in Middlewich and 452 in Northwich (Hewitt 1929, 119).

Saltworking was carried out on the banks of the River Dane. William Camden, writing at the end of the 16th century, records that there was a single brine pit with stairs down into it (Camden 1610). William Smith, writing around the same time, says that the brine was then carried in wooden troughs covered with boards to the salt houses (Ormerod 1882, 137).

The salting area, which measured eight acres, stretched from the Town Bridge to Boundary Street until it was extended to The Cut after 1784. Two acres close to the salt houses were known as 'Crum Hills', where the impurities from the salt process were tipped (Curzon, 1993, 27).

Salt was transported over great distances; to Ireland via Chester, to Wales via Shotwick, northwards through Warrington to Lancashire, eastwards through Siddington and Macclesfield into Derbyshire and via Stockport and Longdendale into Yorkshire. Roads radiate out from the Cheshire salt towns for this purpose; they are often marked by salt-related names such as 'Saltersford' (Crump 1940).

3.4.3.2 Mills

Leases of the mill at Northwich occur in documents from around 1332 onwards (Ormerod 1882, 158). Presumably a second mill was built soon afterwards as c 1343 leases refer to the 'mills' of Northwich. In c 1359 it is recorded that 'the mills of Northwich should they be wholly destroyed by floods were to be rebuilt at the expense of the prince'. In 1389 repairs to the pond of the mill belonging to the Earl of Huntingdon are recorded, and in the following year repairs to the mill itself are documented (ibid).

3.4.4 Religion

Northwich was served by St Helen's Church at Witton, which lay in an isolated position, 700m east of the town. It was a parochial chapel of the Parish Church of Great Budworth, which lies 3.5km to the north. St Helen's Church contains work from the 14th century onwards, with much Perpendicular work (late 15th to early 16th centuries) and extensive Victorian restoration (Richards 1973).

3.4.5 The Surrounding Landscape

In the surrounding area there are a number of medieval sites, including the water mills of Witton 1km to the north of Northwich (CSMR726/1), the site of a medieval cross 2km south-east (CSMR 2122/1), and Leftwich Old Hall medieval manor house 1.5km south (CSMR 2380/1).

3.5 Post Medieval

3.5.1 Civil War

Northwich was fortified and garrisoned by Parliamentary troops under Sir William Brereton in 1642-3 (Ormerod 1882, 162). No trace of these defences remain.

3.5.2 The Manor

Northwich was granted to the Stanley family, later Earls of Derby in 1484, and stayed in the family's hands until the late 18th century. A local board was founded after the Local Government Act of 1863 and it purchased the town in 1871 (Ormerod 1882, 159). The Urban District Council of Northwich was created in 1894.

3.5.3 Settlement

Northwich continued to thrive as a town and was described by William Webb in the early 16th century as '...a market town well-frequented' (Ormerod 1882, 7). Northwich was one of four Cheshire towns used as a venue for the Quarter Sessions from the mid-16th to mid-18th centuries (Phillips and Smith 1994, 52, 56).

Witton Grammar School (CSMR 723/2; Harris 1980, 244-7), later Sir John Deane's School, was founded in 1557 by Sir John Deane, priest of St Bartholomew the Great, Smithfield. The first school building was erected in 1558 close to Witton Chapel. It had a slate roof and wattle and daub walls and survived until around 1744 when having become 'quite ruinous and decayed' it was pulled down. Beside it stood a

master's house with a thatched roof. It was replaced by a new two-storeyed house in the mid 17th century. A new school building was erected in 1747, which stood very close to the east end of Witton Chapel on its south side facing the graveyard, until it was demolished in 1869. Its successor, a brick building, and a new master's house, built in 1878, were sold to the Urban District Council in 1911. A new school was built on the south side of the town in 1907-8 (ibid).

During the 19th century many new schools were founded and by 1850 twelve 'academies' were recorded in the area (Bagshaw 1850, 463).

3.5.4 Economy

3.5.4.1 Saltworking

The 17th century saw a period of great technological change in the salt industry. Pumps were installed to raise the brine, coal replaced wood as a fuel for heating and iron pans replaced lead ones. Despite these advancements there was a drastic decline in salt production. In 1593 there were said to be 89 salt houses in operation, out of an earlier total of 107, but by 1682 there were said to be only 23 leads in production in Northwich. However, it is not entirely clear whether the new iron pans were larger than the old lead ones or if new unregulated brine pits were operating outside the town. In the longer term Northwich was to benefit from the changes. It lay closer to sources of coal and the opening of the Weaver to navigation allowed the cheap import of coal and export of salt, so by the end of the 17th century Northwich was producing three times as much salt per week as Nantwich or Middlewich (Cheshire Libraries and Museums undated c).

Towards the end of the 17th century rock salt was discovered at Marbury to the north of Northwich. Its increasing exploitation in the 18th century provided a new source of raw material and attracted new investment in the industry. Towards the end of the 18th century a better quality bed of rock salt was discovered, which provided a further boost to the industry. The total number of rock salt mines in the Northwich area has been estimated at around 74, but at any one time there were probably only around a dozen in operation (Cheshire Libraries and Museums undated d).

The salt industry expanded rapidly in the 19th century, reaching a peak in the 1880s (Cheshire Libraries and Museums undated d). Northwich was overtaken by Winsford as a producer of white salt in the 1850s but remained the predominant area for the production of rock salt. Additionally, from 1873 it was increasingly important in the provision of brine for the chemical industry. By the late 19th century brine was being pumped directly from Northwich to salt and chemical works on the River Mersey (Cheshire Libraries and Museums undated f).

3.5.4.2 Subsidence

Before the 19th century the amount of brine that was extracted was too small to have a significant effect but from around 1820 large scale exploitation began to cause subsidence. Mining to the north of the town led to massive subsidence and the creation of large flooded areas such as Ashton and Neuman's Flashes, and large-

scale pumping of brine affected the town itself leading to localised collapse and subsidence of buildings (Cheshire Libraries and Museums undated g).

3.5.4.3 Trade and Industry

Bagshaw's Directory of 1850 (454-466) gives a good idea of the range of trades and industries present in the area at this time. The entry for the townships of Northwich, Anderton, Castle Northwich, Leftwich, Winnington and Witton include 28 salt work proprietors (eleven of which were rock saltworks), ten salt agents, four shipbuilders, four sail makers, 33 shoe makers, 57 shopkeepers, 24 grocers and tea dealers and 29 tailors. Its role as a stopover point and entertainment centre is demonstrated by 41 hotels, inns and taverns, thirteen beerhouses and two temperance hotels.

3.5.5 Religion

The Chapel at Witton continued to serve the community at Northwich and was created a parish church in the late 19th century (Richards 1973). Holy Trinity Church in Castle Northwich was erected in 1842 by the trustees of the Weaver Navigation to serve the boatmen (Curzon 1993, 53). St Paul's Church in Leftwich was erected in 1849. It suffered from subsidence, however, and was subsequently demolished (ibid).

During the 19th century a number of Methodist chapels were established at Northwich, including the United Methodist Chapel on Witton Street (1854), the Primitive Methodist Chapel on Witton Street (1877), the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel on Witton Street (1881) and the United Methodist Chapel on Middlewich Road (1881).

3.5.6 Population

The population of Northwich township in 1664 has been estimated as 560 (MacGregor 1992), although to this should perhaps be added a proportion of the inhabitants of Witton-cum-Twambrook, Winnington and Castle Northwich townships.

From 1801-1971 population data is available from the census returns printed in the Victoria County History (Harris, 1979, 202-240). Before the creation of the Northwich Urban Sanitary district in 1881 the census data underestimates the true urban population as Witton-cum-Twambrook and Northwich Castle townships are not included. For 1981 and 1991 census data has been reproduced under Class Licence Number C01W0000125 with the permission of the Controller of the HMSO.

| | | | |
|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|
| 1801 | 1338 | 1901 | 17611 |
| 1811 | 1382 | 1911 | 18151 |
| 1821 | 1490 | 1921 | 18381 |
| 1831 | 1481 | 1931 | 18732 |
| 1841 | 1368 | 1951 | 17489 |
| 1851 | 1377 | 1961 | 19542 |
| 1861 | 1190 | 1971 | 18136 |
| 1871 | 1244 | 1981 | 17098 |
| 1881 | 12246 | 1991 | 18316 |

3.5.7 Transport and Communications

The Chester to Manchester road was turnpiked in 1769 and the Northwich to Runcorn road in 1819. The old route to Warrington and the north from Middlewich, however, was replaced by a new route through Knutsford, which was turnpiked in 1753 (Harrison 1886).

The River Weaver was improved from Frodsham Bridge as far as Winsford Bridge by 1732 and the Weaver Navigation played a major part in the development of Northwich as a centre of the salt industry. Vessels of up to 160 tons could sail as far as Northwich Bridge (Ashmore 1982, 51). The Trent and Mersey Canal, opened in 1775, passed in a loop to the north of Northwich because of objections from the Trustees of the Weaver Navigation. However, the canal passed salt deposits near Marston, and many of the later salt mines were based along its banks.

The CLC (Cheshire Midland) railway line from Knutsford reached Northwich in 1863 and was extended to Helsby in 1869. The LNWR line from Sandbach, which joins the CLC west of the station, was opened in 1868. The station building is of 1897 (Ashmore 1982, 52).

3.5.7 The Surrounding Landscape (Figure 1)

A number of post medieval sites and buildings are recorded on the CSMR, including Grade I listed Winnington Hall, a timber framed mansion house 2km to the northwest (CSMR 697/1), Grade II Platts Hall, a 17th century manor house (CSMR 729) and the Civil War battlefield of Winnington Bridge, c 2km northwest (CSMR 695/1).

4 PLAN COMPONENTS

The settlement has been divided into 14 components (prefixed by COM). These have been tentatively sub-divided by period, although there is need for further work to define the extent and date of these components more closely. Many components would have spanned more than one period but are discussed under their earliest likely date of occurrence. In some cases tightly defined plan components can be identified while for others only a general area can be delineated and a tighter definition can only be achieved by further fieldwork.

For both the Roman and early medieval periods, approximate areas of activity have been identified, which will require further refinement as work is carried out in these areas. For the medieval period potential settlement and saltworking areas have been identified from the available 17th and 18th century map data; and for the post medieval period settlement and industry has been identified from the OS First Edition 6": 1mile map of c 1874.

ROMAN c AD 43 – 450 (Figure 2)

COM 1 - Watling Street?

COM 2 - Phase 1 Fort

COM 3 - Phase 2 Fort
COM 4 - Settlement?

EARLY MEDIEVAL c 450 – 1066 (Figure 2)

COM 5 - Saltworking?
COM 6 - Settlement?

MEDIEVAL c 1066 – 1540 (Figure 2)

COM 7 - Saltworking
COM 8 - Settlement - Northwich
COM 9 - Settlement - Witton
COM 10 - Settlement - Castle Northwich
COM 11 - Witton Chapel

POST-MEDIEVAL c 1872 (Figure 2)

COM 12 - Settlement
COM 13 - Weaver Navigation
COM 14 - West Cheshire Railway

MODERN c 2000 (Figure 3)

COM 15 - Settlement

4.1 Roman (Figure 2)

It is during the Roman period that we have the first evidence of settlement and saltworking. Northwich lay mid-way between Chester and Manchester on Watling Street, the Roman road that connected the two. Watling Street has been approximately identified as **COM 1** and while its route through the settlement has been partially confirmed by sections revealed during works eg along Chester Road, exactly where it crossed the River Weaver is unknown, although presumed by many to be in the vicinity of the Town Bridge. However, as this area has been heavily disturbed the likelihood of locating this crossing is small.

A fort was first built in Northwich c AD 70. Two phases of occupation have been identified, the first depicted as **COM 2** and the second as **COM 3**. Occupation lasted until around AD 140 but there may have been a hiatus between the two phases. Until recently it was believed that there were two forts at Northwich, however Professor GDB Jones is known to have reconsidered this theory and instead decided that what had been interpreted as a second fort was in fact a later military annexe. One of the fort's uses may have been to protect and control the saltworks. Both the saltworking and the fort would have attracted settlement and a *vicus* is known to have developed within this area. However, the extent of information about the *vicus* and saltworking at Northwich is insufficient for precise areas to be defined. An approximate area of activity has been outlined (**COM 4**), which requires further definition as new evidence is revealed. There is also evidence of a cemetery at Northwich but again its area cannot be defined at present.

Settlement is likely to have continued after AD 140 but no doubt at a reduced level. Nevertheless, its position on a major road and the exploitation of brine springs perhaps ensured its continuation.

4.2 Early Medieval (Figure 2)

The area outlined as the potential extent of early medieval saltworking has been identified as **COM 5**. This area, which comprises the extent of Northwich township on the east bank of the Weaver, has been identified from the distinctive boundaries shown on the tithe map of Witton. Whether this area originated as a saltworking enclave within Witton township and later assumed its own identity as Northwich township, is unknown. This area lies away from the Roman area of activity, which suggests that there was no continuity of salt production from this time, but this remains to be established.

The potential area of early medieval settlement has been identified as **COM 6** from the place name *Witton*, which Dodgson translates as village with a wic or saltworks. Settlement has therefore been suggested as lying along Witton Road, but the nature and extent of this remains to be established.

4.3 Medieval (Figure 2)

In addition to its role as a saltworking settlement, the medieval settlement of Northwich also acted as a market for the surrounding area and as a minor manufacturing settlement. Although never chartered, it was regarded as a borough from at least the late 13th century and markets and fairs were also held in the town. Indeed it was perhaps its success as a town at an early date, which precluded the need to have the town's rights recognised by the granting of a borough charter (unless it was granted a charter which has been lost).

A plan of Northwich dating to c 1600 identifies a brine pit located to the east of the Dane Bridge and north of the River Dane. The saltworks that would have made use of this brine pit are identified as a number of small plots on what was called 'Seath Street', which ran parallel to the Dane. Unfortunately this medieval street pattern, which can be identified on the OS First Edition map of c 1874, has been destroyed by modern development. However, it has been possible using the 17th century map and the OS map of c 1874 approximately to identify the area of medieval saltworking, although this is likely to be an artificial division and settlement and saltworks were no doubt less clearly divided.

The area to the north of the saltworks is more obviously identified. Settlement, including buildings drawn as houses gable end on to the street frontages and a distinctive market place, has been identified as **COM 8**. Streets in this area are called 'Apple Market' and 'Swine Market' on Fenna's map of 1793.

Settlement in Witton township is identified as **COM 9**. Here long, narrow properties have been identified from the 1721 map of the Manor of Witton along Witton Street, and those are likely to have originated in the medieval period. This area comprises a mixture of small properties, probably artisan housing, and larger properties with

narrow frontages, which extended up to 100m from the street frontage and resemble the dwellings of burgesses elsewhere. How far settlement extended along Witton Street remains to be established but by 1721 tenements at the eastern limits had evidently encroached upon the former town fields.

4.4 Post-Medieval (Figure 2)

The extent of settlement in the post medieval period has been identified from the OS First Edition map of c 1874 as **COM 12**. By this time Northwich, Castle Northwich and Witton had rapidly expanded through industrial development and the settlement itself had undergone large-scale growth. A wide range of industrial activities have been identified at Northwich, including saltworks, alkali and bleach works, forges, foundries and tanneries. This development had been encouraged by the creation of the Weaver Navigation, which allowed the transportation of coal and salt from the early 18th century onwards and is identified as **COM 13**. Two lines of the West Cheshire Railway, which were absorbed by the Cheshire Lines Committee (CLC) are identified as **COM 14**.

4.5 Modern (Figure 3)

Chemical factories, including a large ICI plant; were established to the north of Northwich along the banks of the River Weaver. The heyday of chemical production is long past and manufacture has been reduced, leaving vast industrial complexes to undergo reclamation. Housing estates have meanwhile expanded in all directions, especially at Leftwich to the south and Hartford to the west.

5 HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

5.1 Above Ground Remains

Little survives in Northwich pre-dating the 19th century. The losses normal in a settlement which thrived in the post-medieval period have been exacerbated by the problems of subsidence. The only surviving medieval work is in the church at Witton. There are no scheduled ancient monuments in Northwich. Much of the historic town is included in a Conservation Area and there are 34 listed buildings, two of which are listed Grade I (Winnington Hall and the church of St Helen) and the remainder Grade II.

Unique to Northwich are the liftable timber-framed buildings. Due to the problems of subsidence a series of light, timber-framed buildings with jacking points incorporated into the base plate were built in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. Many are in Tudor style and highly decorated.

5.2 Below Ground Remains

The issue of the survival and depth of archaeological remains is especially difficult for Northwich because of the amount of subsidence and in-fill over the last two centuries. Archaeological work in the area of the Roman town at Castle Northwich has clearly established that archaeological deposits do survive here at around 1m below the present ground surface. Work by the west bank of the river, however, has led to suggestions that archaeological deposits have been removed by more recent development (Earthworks Archaeological Services 1998) or been destroyed by

subsidence and subsequent in-filling (UMAU 1997). Conversely, in some areas of the town, archaeological deposits may be buried beneath areas of made-up ground (Fielding pers comm), and so further work is required to clarify the effect of subsidence and in-fill in Northwich.

6 PRIORITIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

6.1 General

The study of Northwich 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). Other research priorities include the study of Roman military and civilian interaction (Priority H1), and study of the remains of the industrial period (Priority T6). Work at Northwich would fit into a number of national priorities, particularly:

- PC4 Briton into Roman
- PC5 Empire to Kingdom
- PC6 Late Saxon to medieval
- PC7 Transition from medieval to post medieval traditions (c1300-1700AD)

6.2 Roman

- Ensure the full publication of all work carried out on the settlement to date
- Establish the exact area and dates and phases of the Roman fort (confirm the line of the southern defences)
- Establish the exact area, date and nature of the 'military annexe' and its relationship to the fort
- Establish the nature, date and extent of the civilian settlement. In particular how long did it survive after the abandonment of the fort?
- Establish the exact line of Watling Street and its date of construction
- Establish where the Roman brine springs were and when they were exploited, were they exploited before the Roman period?
- Did the brine springs influence the siting of a fort here?
- Was there a port or wharf on the River Weaver?
- Establish the location of cemeteries.

6.3 Early Medieval

- Establish the date of inception of early medieval brine working, its location, and techniques used
- Establish the site of brine workers settlement; was this located in Witton township?
- Establish whether there was continuity between Roman salt production and that of the early medieval period

6.4 Medieval

- Establish precise location of medieval brine working and techniques in use. Does the brine pit mapped c 1600 survive?
- Establish the foundation date of Witton church; establish its form and phases of building
- Establish the location of settlement areas and date their phases of expansion and contraction
- Establish the nature of buildings and activities on settlement plots; is there a discernible difference between 'burgage-type' properties on Witton Street and those elsewhere?
- Examine evidence for other trade and industry

6.5 Post Medieval

- Establish the location of settlement areas and date their phases of expansion and contraction
- Establish the nature of buildings and activities on settlement plots
- Examine evidence for trade and industry, other than saltworking and establish its date and nature
- Examine the development of the chemical industry at Northwich. Assess the need for a programme of building recording prior to reclamation
- Establish the effect of subsidence and infill on earlier archaeological deposits.

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7.2 Maps

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Plan of Northwich (with list of owners), c 1600 (CRO DDX 444)

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8 ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Northwich and the Surrounding Area

Figure 2: The Development of Northwich

Figure 3: Modern Northwich c 2000

Appendix 1: Archaeological Work in Northwich

| Site | Excavator | Date | Reference | Summary |
|---------------------------------|---|---------|---|--|
| Castle area | Curzon J B | 1967 | Curzon 2001 | Trial excavation established archaeological potential of the area |
| Waterloo Road area | Northwich Archaeology Group & University of Manchester. Co-ordinated by Jones G D B | 1967-70 | <i>Archaeological Journal</i> 128, 1971 | Section through line of the north defences north of Waterloo Road. Two phases of timber buildings in the fort's interior. 1st century pottery kiln excavated and Roman military helmet found |
| Old Zion Chapel, Beeston Street | Dent J S | 1974 | CAB 3, 1975, 53 | The site of the old Zion Chapel was trial trenched then stripped, revealing rectangular timber building and 2nd century pottery. |
| Queensgate, Castle | Unknown | 1974 | CAB 3, 1975, 60 | Large quantities of Roman pottery, some metalwork and two coins were found in the garden, dating to c AD 100. |
| Waterloo Road | Curzon J B | 1976 | CAB 5, 1977, 41 | Agger of Roman road seen during observation of gas pipe trenches |
| Ryders Place | Jones G D B | 1978 | CAB 9, 1983, 84; Jones 1992 | Evidence of two-phase northern rampart |
| Bowling Green, Castle | Jones G D B, Reynolds, P | 1983-6 | <i>Manchester Archaeological Bulletin</i> 1 | Excavations at the fort revealed a number of features including remains of the <i>praetorium</i> |
| Hope Street | Unknown | 1984 | Jones pers comm. | Excavation in area of garages |
| Ryders Street | Reynolds P & Jones G D B | 1989-90 | Reynolds 1989, <i>Cheshire Past</i> 1, 1991, 10-11 | Excavations revealing north-west defences of fort |
| Pleasant Street | Jones G D B | 1990 | <i>Cheshire Past</i> 1, 1991, 10-11 | Evidence of multiple timber buildings, forming part of row of barracks flanking the western defences of the fort |
| Weaver Road | Pierce D | 1987-90 | <i>Manchester Archaeological Bulletin</i> 3, 1988, 21-25 & 8, 1993, 80-86 | Excavation in the <i>vicus</i> area to the south-east of fort revealed late 1st and early 2nd century dump of Roman pottery |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------|--|-------|---|--|
| Queensgate, Castle | Jones G D B | ?1990 | Jones pers comm | Test pits in a garden from which much Roman material had been recovered failed to reveal any features |
| Queensgate, Castle | Tindall A S | 1991 | CSMR 719/0/14 | Watching brief during excavation of foundations revealed Roman pottery, cobbles and traces of a hearth. |
| Rear of 31-37 Chester Road | Tindall A S | 1992 | CSMR 719/0/15 | A watching brief during construction identified Roman deposits c 700mm below surface. |
| Castle Street | Lawson Price Environmental | 1996 | Lawson Price Environmental 1966 | Archaeological desk based assessment of land at Castle Street, Northwich. |
| Castle Street | University of Manchester Archaeological Unit | 1997 | University of Manchester Archaeological Unit 1997 | An archaeological watching brief on land between the Roman fort and the medieval town. No Roman deposits were encountered. |
| Spencer Street | Earthworks Archaeological Services | 1998 | Earthworks Archaeological Services 1998 | An archaeological watching brief at land at Spencer Street. The area had been extensively disturbed by ship building activities. |
| Castle Street | CgMs Consulting | 2000 | CgMs Consulting 2000 | Archaeological desk based assessment of land at Castle Street, Northwich. |
| David Street, Castle | Marches Archaeology | 2001 | Marches Archaeology 2001 | Evaluation revealed 18th century and later features. No indication of Roman activity on the site |
| Queensgate, Castle | Tindall A S | 2002 | CSMR 719/0/17 | Roman pottery and cobbles revealed during excavations for a garden pond |

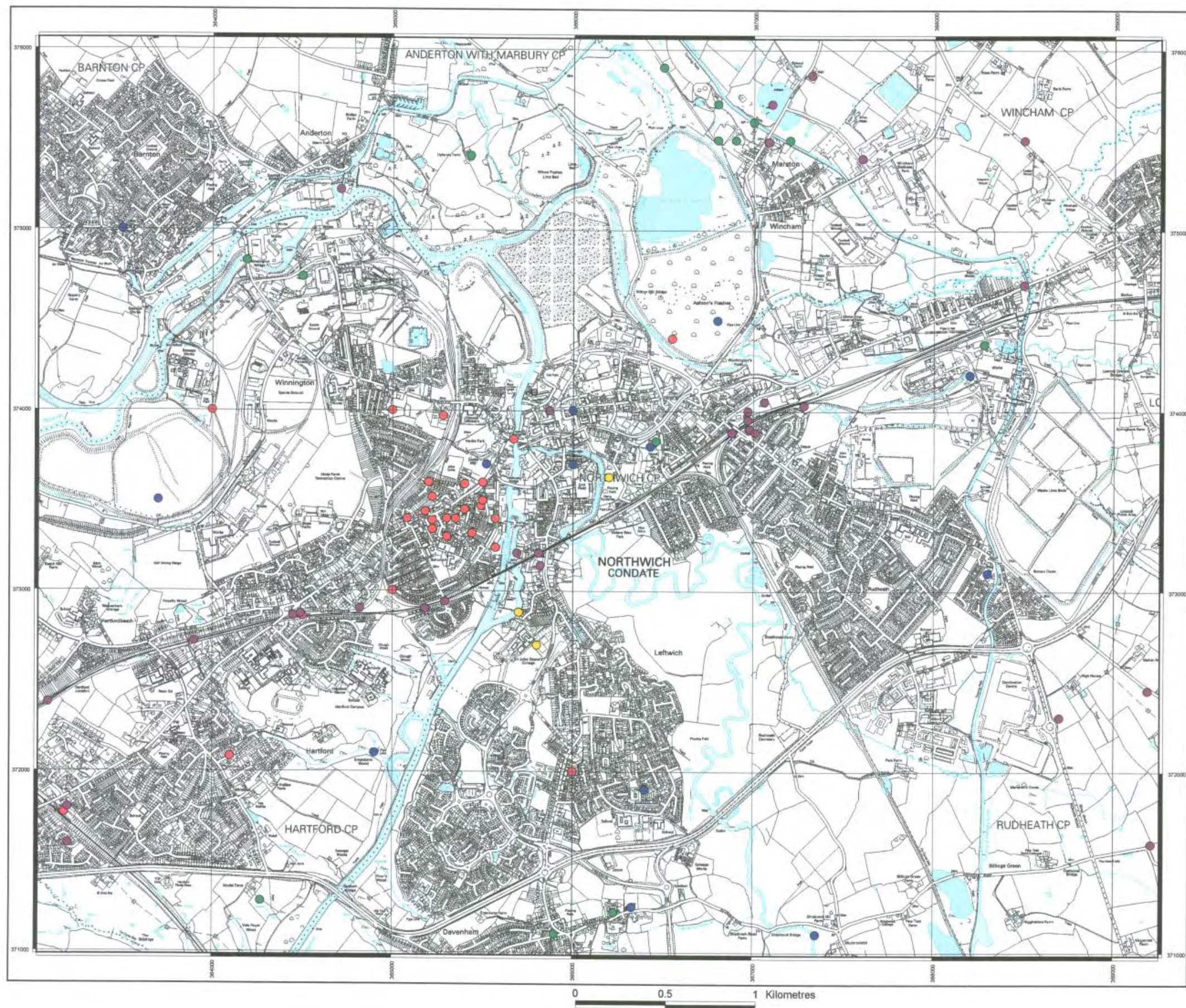


Figure 1
Northwich and the
Surrounding Area

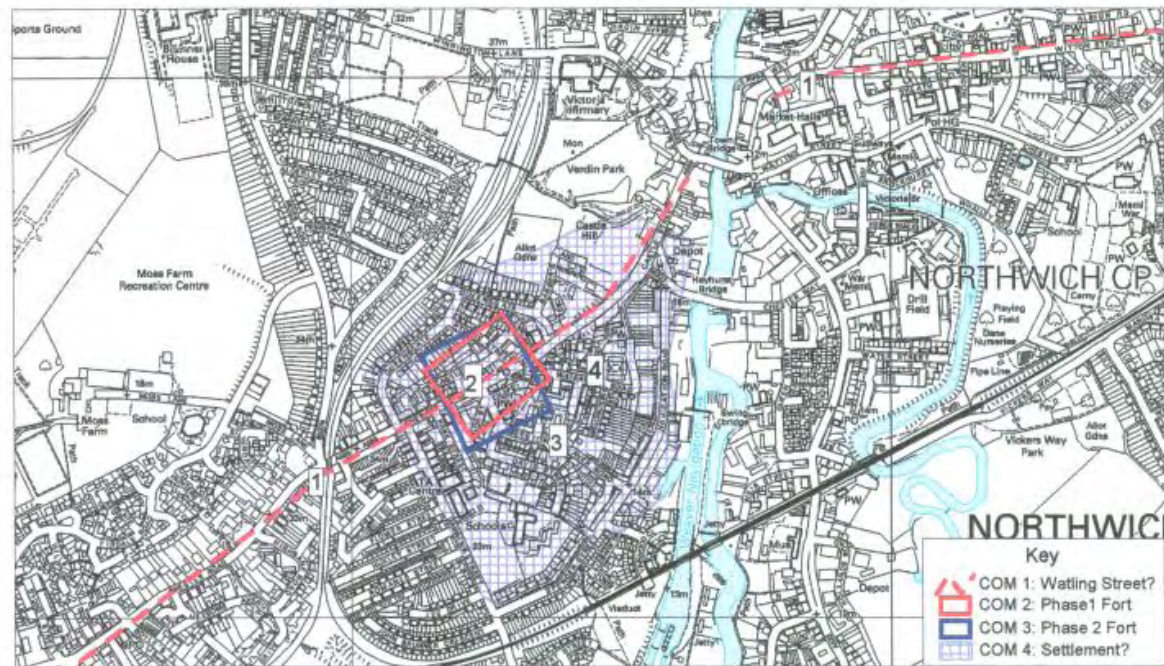
Sites and Monuments

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

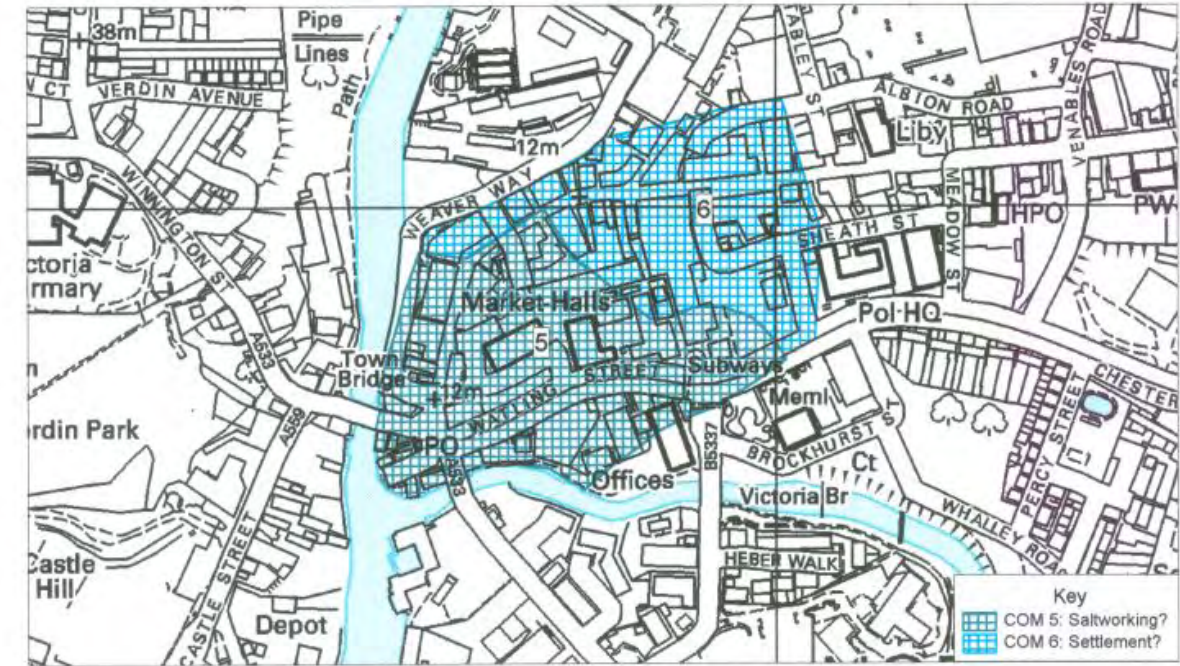
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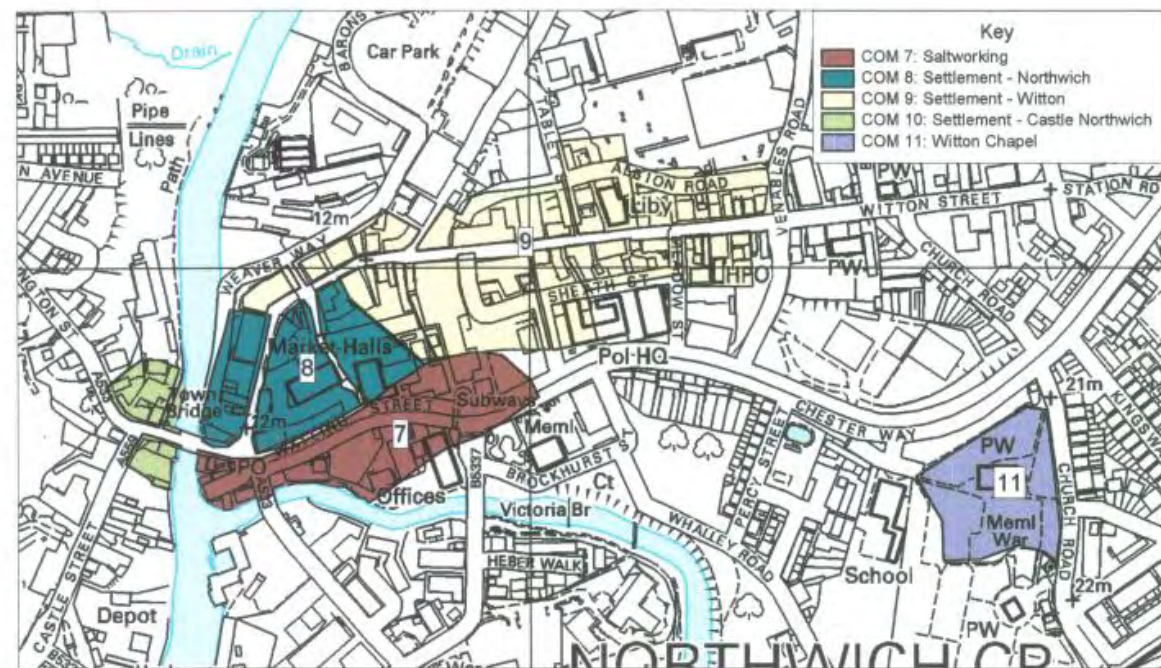
Figure 2: The Development of Northwich



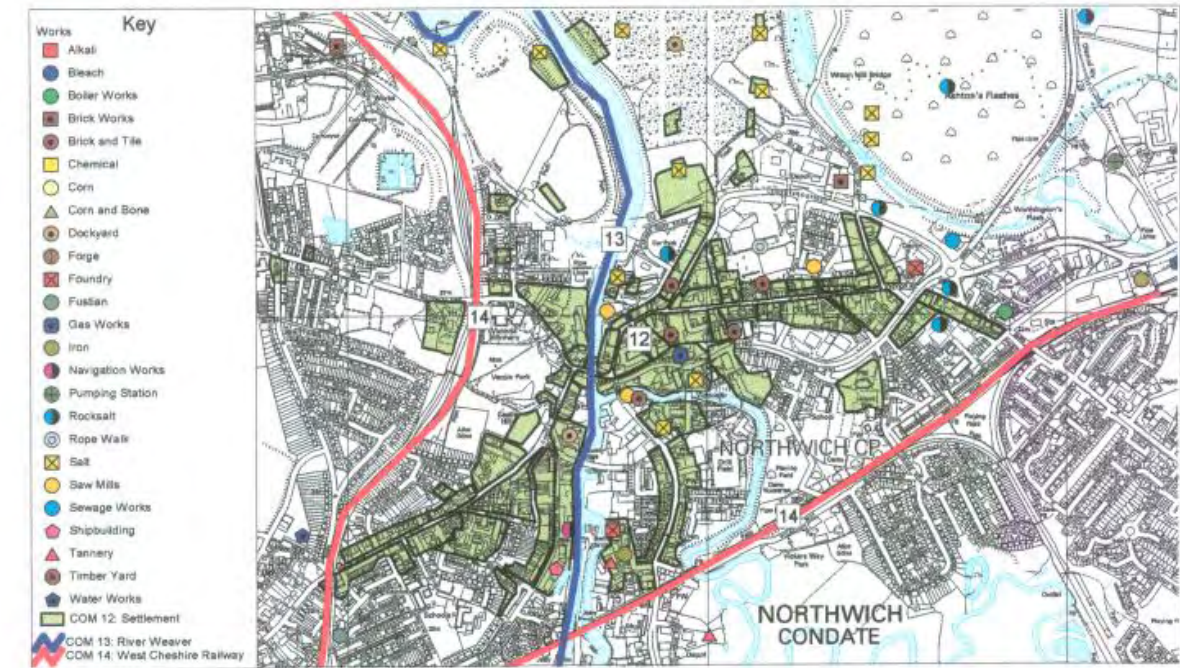
Roman 0 200 400 Metres 1:12000



Early Medieval 0 100 200 Metres 1:5000



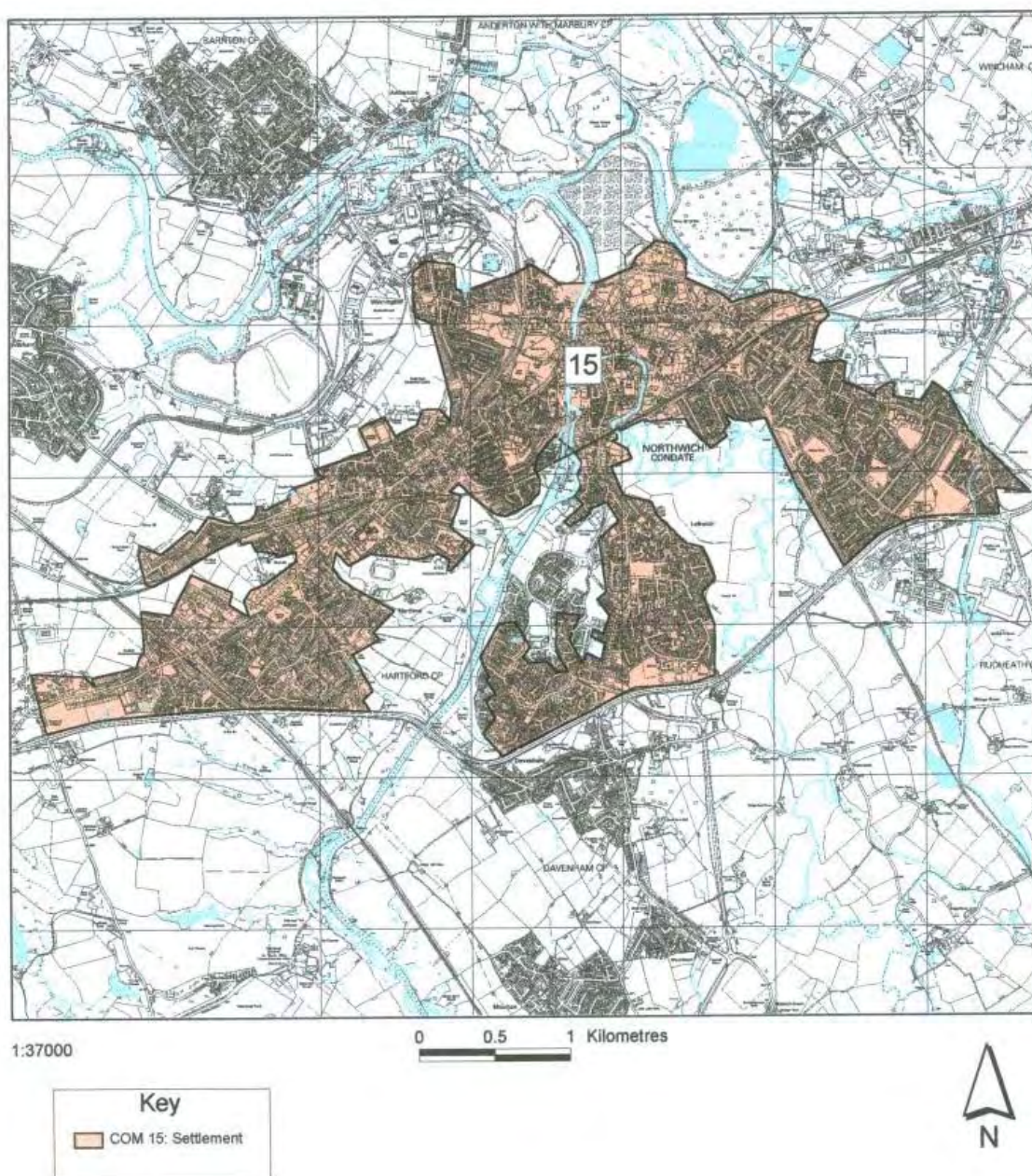
Medieval 0 100 200 Metres 1:6000



Post Medieval c 1874 0 200 400 Metres 1:18000

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Figure 3: Modern Northwich c 2000



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