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REVEALING CHESHIRE'S PAST

Changing Times

5 Post Medieval



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Post Medieval Life

Post medieval Cheshire had a productive agricultural landscape and prosperous market towns.

Timber-framed buildings were the homes of the working population and at the other end of the scale; wealthy landowners rebuilt their medieval houses in brick and stone.

Cheshire had a well-established landed gentry who exerted their influence

The Civil War (1642-49)

A large number of Cheshire families were Royalist supporters but most of Cheshire was under Parliamentary control from the beginning of the Civil War. The Battle of Nantwich in 1644 saw the Royalists defeated, leaving only Chester as a Royalist stronghold. Royalist reinforcements coming to the aid of the besieged city of Chester were defeated at Rowton Moor just outside the city in September 1645.

Following the execution of Charles I, the Commonwealth was established by Oliver Cromwell and with it came military rule and strict observance of the Puritan religious code.

During this time, many medieval and Saxon stone crosses were destroyed. The medieval crosses marked public spaces like markets as well as places of pilgrimage or prayer. The bases of these crosses can be seen in a number of churchyards. Some were converted into sundials.

The Commonwealth did not last long and in 1660, the monarchy was restored.

the people who lived in Cheshire in the post medieval period.

A spectacular hoard of Tudor and Stuart coins is believed to have been the considerable fortune of John Walker - a prominent and wealthy Congleton businessman who owned the field the coins were found in. It was buried between 1670 and 1675 and contained over 3000 coins in four separate pots, one of which had the initials J:CW.

We also know the names of many different traders by the trade tokens they issued. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the royal mints were only producing high value coinage so traders issued copper tokens for everyday use. The token would show the name of the trader and where it could be spent.



Who lived in Cheshire?

A variety of documentary sources and surviving evidence mean we are able to put names to many of

over the administration of the county. This replaced the control the medieval church had once held, before the Dissolution of the monasteries reduced its power.

16th century

1536-40

Dissolution of Monasteries

1583

Fire of Nantwich
Coin of Elizabeth I (1555-1603)



17th century

1644

Battle of Nantwich

1645

Battle of Rowton Moor

18th century



Congleton Hoard

Where Did They Live?

Wood was cheap and was therefore the most practical building material in the medieval and post medieval periods.



Above: The Crown Hotel in Nantwich – One of many buildings rebuilt after the Fire of Nantwich in 1583.

Left: 16th century timber-framed church at Siddington



There are hundreds of surviving post medieval timber-framed buildings across Cheshire, from farmhouses and barns to pubs and churches. In contrast, there are not many examples of medieval timber-framed houses in towns or rural areas.

Some medieval timber-framed houses were rebuilt or extended, as at Little Moreton Hall where a new timber-framed house was built within the medieval moat.

Many medieval moated houses were abandoned and fell derelict. This happened for a number of reasons as families died out, fortunes were lost and some land was confiscated during the Civil War.



Belgrave moat (above), south of Chester was held by a number of different families, but was not lived in as a main residence and so was probably not maintained. By the early 17th century it had been abandoned and was used as coppice woodland.



The Mansion, Tatton Park

Brand new homes were occasionally built on a new site. Tatton Hall was built to replace the manor house of Tatton Old Hall. The old hall remains but the present house has been substantially altered since it was first built around 1760.



Old Hall, Tatton Park

Rural Life

The rural landscape changed as dairy farming expanded. The conversion of arable land to pasture began in the late medieval period and continued on a larger scale in the 16th and 17th centuries. Common land and previously uncultivated areas were enclosed to create new pasture.

Dairy farming was important to the economy as it supported both cheese production and the leather industry.

Cheese making was carried out on a large scale and thousands of tonnes of cheese were exported for sale in London. Dairy products were also sold at Cheshire's many markets.

Wildfowling was an important source of fresh meat, and duck decoys were used to trap wildfowl, using nets over a narrow stretch of water. Hale Duck Decoy is a rare surviving example of a 17th century artificial duck decoy. It is pentagonal in shape and has recently been restored.

Hale Duck Decoy



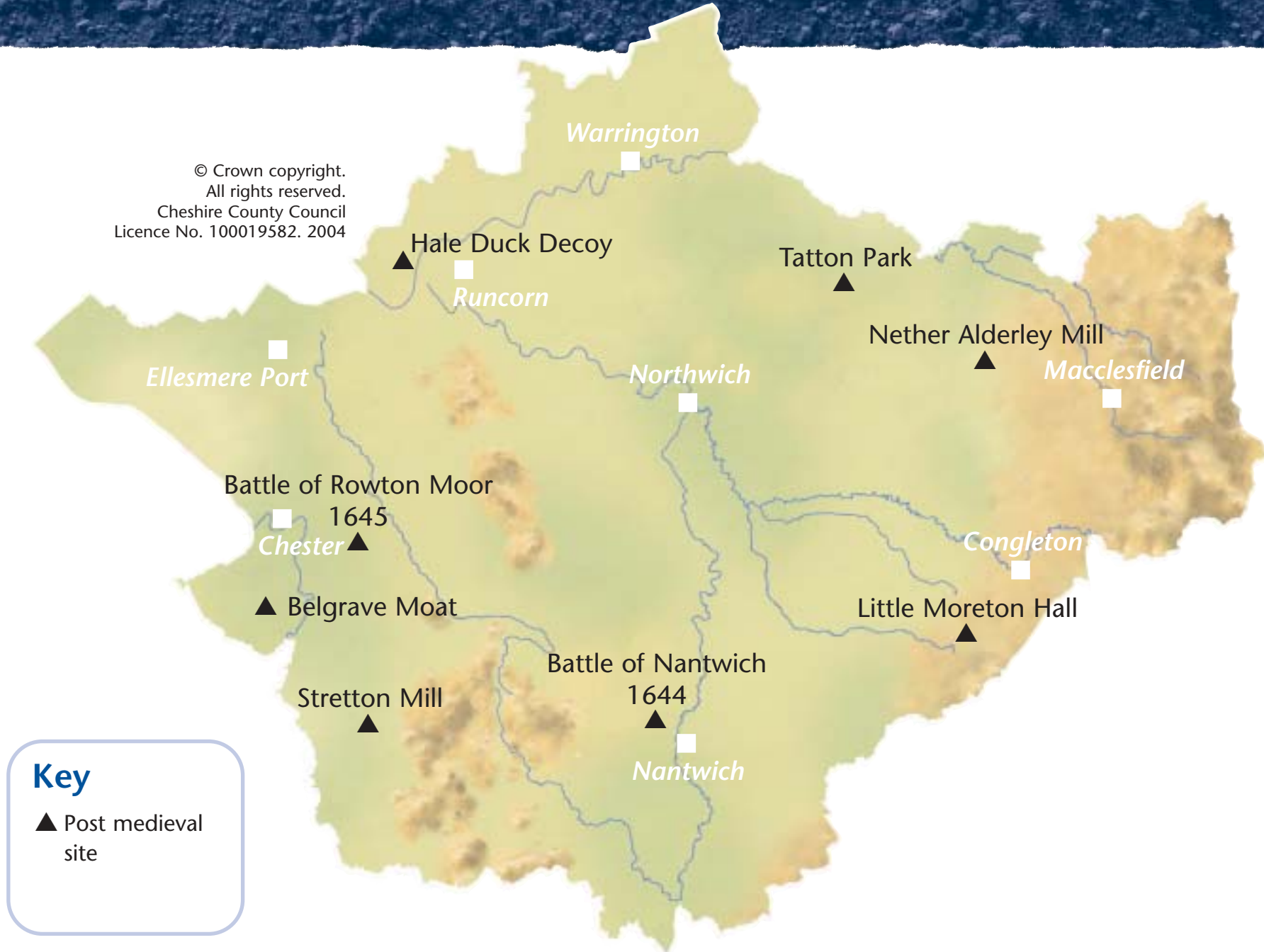
18th century Buttermarket in Audlem

Did you know...

Cheshire Cheese is England's oldest named cheese. Roman pottery cheese presses have been excavated and Cheshire cheese makers are mentioned in the Domesday Book.

Post Medieval Cheshire

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Towns, Trade and Industry

There are numerous documentary sources for commercial activity in Cheshire towns. Chester was still the main town and tax records show it was exporting a variety of



18th century wine bottle

Cheshire goods including clothing, coal and lead. It was also importing goods from France and Spain, in particular wine.

The trades of the salt town of Nantwich are uniquely recorded in a list of those businesses destroyed by the Great Fire in 1583. They include mercers (dealers in cloth), shoemakers and butchers.

Tanning was an important though smelly business. Saddlers, shoe and glove makers were just a few of the related trades. Maps of Nantwich show tanning pits on the edge of the town. They were usually located there because of the terrible smell.

In Warrington, early industrial development included copper smelting, coal mining and glass making.

Textiles

Textile production flourished in the east of the county in Congleton and Macclesfield. The spinning and weaving of linen, wool and silk was a domestic industry in Cheshire long before the industrial revolution.

Crops such as flax and hemp, and wool from sheep, provided the raw ingredients for cloth making.

Salt

The brine springs of central Cheshire were still worked to produce salt that was exported across the country.

Open pan evaporation of brine was operating in the salt towns of Cheshire, and the use of coal as fuel and iron for the evaporating pans boosted production. By 1605, the number of salt-pans operating in Nantwich was 1,296, with 646 in Middlewich and 452 in Northwich.

Existing transport by road and packhorse could not meet the demands of the new level of production. The River Weaver was made navigable as far as Winsford but not to Nantwich and Middlewich. This, and the discovery of rock salt at Marbury in the 17th century, eventually led to the decline of the brine works in Nantwich and Middlewich and the rise of Northwich as the main source of Cheshire salt.

Towns, Trade and Industry *continued*

Mills

Grain crops were also grown as the number of mills across the county show. Both wind and watermills were used to process these crops. Cheshire has a number of working watermills that were built at this time. The oldest two are Nether Alderley and Stretton, which date to the 16th century.

Mills were not exclusively used for grinding grain; waterpower was used to operate different types of machinery. Lymm Slitting Mill was built in the 1600s and was used first as a cornmill then a slitting mill (for making nails), a foundry and finally a textile mill. Pulled down in 1835, it was excavated in the 1960s.



Nether Alderley Mill



Pit for water wheel at Lymm Slitting Mill

Sites to Visit

Opening times vary; please check before planning a visit

Sites

Hale Duck Decoy

Access only by guided tour from Pickering's Pasture Local Nature Reserve
Tel: 0151 425 4706
www.halton-borough.gov.uk/nature

Post medieval buildings

Little Moreton Hall

Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 4SD
Tel: 01260 272018
www.nationaltrust.org.uk
Admission Charge



Nether Alderley Mill

Congleton Road, Nether Alderley
Macclesfield, SK10 4TW
Tel: 01625 584412
www.nationaltrust.org.uk
Admission Charge

Stretton Mill

Stretton, Nr Broxton, Cheshire
Tel: 01606 41331
Admission Charge

Tatton Park and Tudor Old Hall

Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 6QN
Tel: 01625 534400
www.tattonpark.org.uk
Admission Charge
Access to Tudor Old Hall by guided tour only

*For more sites open to the public see:
www.visit-cheshire.com*

Civil War displays

Congleton Museum

Market Square, Congleton, CW12 1ET
Tel: 01260 276360
www.congletonmuseum.co.uk
Admission Charge

Nantwich Museum

Pillory Street, Nantwich, Cheshire, CW5 5BQ
Tel: 01270 627104
www.nantwichmuseum.org.uk

Warrington Museum & Art Gallery

Bold Street, Warrington, WA1 1JG
Tel: 01925 442392
www.warrington.gov.uk/museum

www.cheshire.gov.uk/archaeology

