

CHESHIRE HISTORIC TOWNS SURVEY

Halton Borough

Introduction

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report is the result of a survey of Cheshire's historic towns, funded by English Heritage and carried out by Cheshire County Council during the period 1997-2001. In total the survey covered 37 historic towns in Cheshire and the Boroughs of Halton and Warrington.
- 1.2 Part 1 of the survey was an Assessment of the archaeological and historical evidence for the origin, growth and development of each of the county's historic towns.
- 1.3 Part 2 of the survey was the formulation of a Strategy for the planning, conservation and management of the archaeological resource of each town.
- 1.4 This report contains the Archaeological Assessments for four towns in Halton Borough: Halton, Farnworth, Runcorn and Widnes.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

- 2.1 PPG16 Archaeology and Planning (1990) placed archaeology within the planning process, and the period since its publication has seen a significant increase in the demand for informed advice on the archaeological impact of development proposals.
- 2.2 In the wake of PPG16, English Heritage recognised the need to review existing policies and published 'Managing the Urban Archaeological Resource' (1992), in which the concept of Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) was introduced.
- 2.3 It was recognised by Cheshire County Council that the origins and development of towns was one of the most neglected aspects of the county's archaeology. If informed advice were to be provided regarding the archaeological resource of the county's urban centres, as required by PPG16, then an Archaeological Assessment or 'Extensive Urban Survey' of Cheshire's historic towns was essential.

3 SELECTION CRITERIA

- 3.1 A large number of towns in Cheshire would have benefited from the production of an Archaeological Assessment report. However, time and resources were limited and a short list of 43, which was later reduced to 37 due to time constraints, was drawn up, based upon specific criteria.
- 3.2 A broad definition based on Reynolds (1977, ix) has been followed - whereby a town is regarded as a permanent human settlement, a

significant proportion of whose population live off a variety of non-agricultural occupations. Some of the towns in Cheshire may have only fulfilled this criteria for a short time, for example, settlements may have acquired or lost urban characteristics.

- 3.3 The towns were divided into four main periods: Roman, early medieval, medieval and post medieval.
- 3.4 Within the Roman category, the Victoria History of the County of Chester identifies four towns that were major sites in the Roman period: Heronbridge, Middlewich, Northwich and Wilderspool (Harris and Thacker 1987, 116). Grafton/Tilston was also included in the initial list as it has been suggested that it was of importance, potentially the *Bovium* of the Antonine Itinerary (Britannia 40, 1984, 255-7). However, as the assessment stage progressed it was felt that Grafton/Tilston and Heronbridge, although significant during the Roman period, were only marginally urban in the later periods and were therefore removed from the final list.
- 3.5 Within the early medieval category are four towns, three of which are described as *burhs* (defended settlements) in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle - Eddisbury, Runcorn and Thelwall. The fourth, Farndon was included as its street plan indicates an early church or monastery and a market place. It also continued to be an urban centre in the medieval and post medieval periods, as did Runcorn. Thelwall and Eddisbury were both important examples of a specific settlement type, but because neither strictly qualified as towns, it was decided to include them at the Assessment stage but not to produce a full Strategy.
- 3.6 Those settlements known to have had medieval market charters and/or fairs are included in the medieval category (Sylvester 1958, 27; Crosby 1996, 48; VCH Lancs Vol 3). Three additional settlements were also included in the initial list: Tarvin and Lymm, which are described as potential medieval markets in Crosby (1996, 48), and Wybunbury which possessed a medieval hospital and possibly a market.
- 3.7 The principal source for the post medieval towns is the 1901 census. All those towns described as urban districts were included with the exception of Hoole, which is a suburb of Chester. Chester was not included in the project as it is the subject of an Urban Archaeological Database (UAD), which will discuss the archaeology of the city in detail. Other sources examined include Burdett's map of the County Palatinate of Chester (1777) and Pigot's map of Cheshire (1840). Also considered were places described as towns by Ashmore (1982) and Philips and Smith (1994), which identified Disley and Tarvin as potential urban centres in the post medieval period. However, as time was limited the more marginal towns such as Disley, which was essentially a 20th

century dormitory town and Tarvin, which had marginal urban status throughout the medieval and post medieval periods, were removed from the list.

4 LIST OF TOWNS COVERED BY THE PROJECT

Chester District:

Aldford
Farndon
Malpas

Borough of Congleton:

Alsager
Brereton
Congleton
Middlewich
Sandbach

Borough of Crewe &

Nantwich:

Audlem
Bunbury
Crewe
Nantwich
Wybunbury

Borough of Ellesmere Port & Neston:

Burton
Ellesmere Port
Neston
Parkgate

Halton Borough:

Halton
Farnworth
Runcorn
Widnes

Borough of Macclesfield:

Alderley Edge
Bollington
Knutsford
Macclesfield
Nether Alderley
Wilmslow

Borough of Vale Royal:

Eddisbury
Frodsham
Great Budworth
Northwich
Over
Tarporey
Winsford

Warrington Borough:

Lymm
Warrington
Wilderspool
Thelwall

5 PROJECT AIMS

5.1 Archaeological Assessments

- 5.1.1 To produce a detailed synthesis of the historical and archaeological background for each of the historic towns. Sources used include data held by the County Sites and Monuments Record (CSMR), archaeological reports detailing the results of field work, tithe maps, historical Ordnance Survey maps, county and local histories and trade directories.
- 5.1.2 To examine the development of each town through analysis of urban morphology, including GIS mapping of plan components.
- 5.1.3 To assess the potential for the preservation, nature and extent of archaeological deposits in each town and to discuss any existing designations: Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, etc.
- 5.1.4 To identify research objectives for the archaeology of each town.

5.2 Archaeological Strategies

- 5.2.1 To prepare Archaeological Strategies for each town, intended to be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by the local planning authorities.
- 5.2.2 To identify where possible, an *Area of Archaeological Potential (AAP)*, based upon the Archaeological Assessment report, divided into a number of *Archaeological Character Zones*.
- 5.2.3 Where an AAP cannot be designated because of the dispersed nature of a town, or because it is thought inappropriate e.g. Thelwall and Eddisbury, archaeological potential is considered in terms of sites identified in the County Sites and Monuments Record (CSMR) and not as Archaeological Character Zones. In these cases instead of a Strategy, an Archaeological Statement has been prepared, which includes a list of existing designations.

6 LIMITATIONS OF THE PROJECT

- 6.1 The project has run for a period of four years, over which time a number of perspectives within the archaeological community have shifted, particularly with regard to post medieval archaeology and the relationship of archaeology to built heritage. However, it was felt that

the project should maintain consistency, and that changes should not be made part way through that would compromise the original project design.

- 6.2 The emphasis of the project is placed squarely upon the below-ground archaeological resource and its potential. It does not include an in-depth discussion of the built heritage, nor a strategy for the preservation of the above-ground resource.

7 INTRODUCTION

- 7.1 This report is the result of a survey of Cheshire's historic towns, funded by English Heritage and carried out by Cheshire County Council during the period 1997-2001. In total the survey covered 37 historic towns in Cheshire and the Boroughs of Halton and Warrington. Four towns in Halton Borough were included in the survey: Halton, Farnworth, Runcorn and Widnes.
- 7.2 Part 1 of the survey was an assessment of the archaeological and historical evidence for the origin, growth and development of each of the county's historic towns. Also included in Part 1 is a discussion of the background to the project, including an explanation of why certain towns were chosen and what the criteria was for their selection.
- 7.3 Part 2 of the survey, which is contained in this document, was the formulation of a strategy for the planning, conservation and management of the archaeological resource of each town.

8 PURPOSE

- 8.1 This report is intended to act as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the archaeological policies contained in the Halton Borough Local Plan.
- 8.2 It is intended to provide clear guidance to planning authorities, property owners, developers and their agents on the archaeological impact of proposed development, and the likely need for archaeological work prior to, or during, development.
- 8.3 Each town has been divided into a number of *Archaeological Character Zones (ACZs)*, based on the results of its Archaeological Assessment. Together, these Character Zones form an *Area of Archaeological Potential (AAP)*.
- 8.4 The AAP focuses upon the historic core of each town. Outside the AAP are sites that also have archaeological potential, but because they have not been identified as contributing to the character of the towns historic core, they have not been included in the Strategy documents.

- 8.5 Where it has not been possible or practical to identify an AAP, for example in Alsager and Brereton, archaeological potential will be considered in terms of sites identified on the County Sites and Monuments Record (CSMR) and not as Archaeological Character Zones. Instead of a Strategy, an Archaeological Statement has been prepared for these towns, which includes a list of existing designations.

9 STATUTORY AND POLICY CONTEXT

9.1 Statute

- 9.1.1 Nationally-important archaeological sites and their settings are statutorily protected as Scheduled Ancient Monuments under Part I of the *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979*. Works affecting them require the written consent of the Secretary of State, except those falling within the provisions of *The Ancient Monuments (Class Consents) Order 1994*.
- 9.1.2 Buildings of special architectural or historic interest are statutorily protected by listing under the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*. Listed Buildings may not be altered or demolished without the written consent of the local planning authority or the Secretary of State. Under the same act, local authorities are empowered to designate as Conservation Areas any areas of special architectural or historic interest.
- 9.1.3 Buildings in ecclesiastical use are exempt from listed building controls under the *Ecclesiastical Exemption (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Order 1994*, but are subject to an independent system of controls under the *Faculty Jurisdiction Measure 1964*.
- 9.1.4 Historic parks and gardens are included in a *Register of Parks and Gardens of special historic interest in England* (English Heritage 2000), and historic battlefields in a national *Register of Historic Battlefields* (English Heritage 1995). Although not statutorily protected, the preservation of their character and setting is a material consideration in the planning process.
- 9.1.5 Other legislation affecting archaeological remains include Section 25 of the *Burial Act 1857*, which requires a Home Office licence for the removal of human remains, and the *Treasure Act 1996*, which sets out procedures for the reporting and assessment of finds of treasure.

9.2 National Policy

9.2.1 *Planning Policy Guidance 16: Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990) provides guidance on the preservation of archaeological remains in the planning process. The need to preserve archaeological sites (both scheduled and unscheduled) is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications, and PPG16 stresses the need for early assessment of their archaeological impact and the desirability of preserving archaeological remains *in situ*.

9.2.2 *Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment* (Department of the Environment, Department of National Heritage 1994) provides guidance on the preservation and protection through the planning process of conservation areas, historic landscapes, historic buildings, battlefields, and historic parks and gardens.

9.3 **Structure Plan Policy**

9.3.1 The County Structure Plan *Cheshire 2011, Replacement Structure Plan* (1999) contains policies for the protection and enhancement of Cheshire's natural and manmade heritage.

9.3.2 Policy R1 sets out the need to protect heritage sites and features from loss or damage, taking into account their designation, irreplaceability, and setting, and the need for measures of mitigation or compensation where loss occurs.

9.3.3 Policy R2 provides for the designation and protection of Areas of Special County Value (ASCV), designated by virtue of their landscape, archaeological, historic or nature conservation value.

9.4 **Local Plan Policy**

9.4.1 *Halton Unitary Development Plan Revised (2nd) Deposit Version (2001)* contains policies for the protection and preservation of the Built Environment of the Borough.

9.4.2 Policies BE8 - 11 and BE14 - 15 require the preservation of the character, setting and appearance of Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.

9.4.3 Policy BE4 sets out the need to preserve scheduled ancient monuments and other nationally important archaeological sites. BE5 sets out the need to preserve other sites of archaeological importance. BE6 refers to archaeological evaluations and the need for pre-determination evaluation for sites of known or suspected archaeological importance.

10. ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS

10.1 General

10.1.1 Archaeological works required by any development proposal will vary according to its location, nature, scale, and likely impact. They will also be governed by the potential significance of the archaeological remains, such as the likely survival of particularly rare, well-preserved (eg waterlogged) or deeply-stratified deposits.

10.1.2 Archaeological works should be carried out by a fully-qualified professional archaeological contractor or consultant. The County Council maintains a *Select List of Archaeological Contractors and Consultants* who have agreed to the County Council's *General Conditions for Archaeological Contractors and Consultants* (Cheshire County Council 2000).

10.1.3 The programme of archaeological works should be carried out in accordance with a written brief prepared by, or agreed with, the local planning authority's archaeological adviser. More complex programmes should be designed in accordance with *Management of Archaeological Projects* (English Heritage 1991). Archaeological works may include one or more of the elements described below.

10.2 Desk-Based Assessment

10.2.1 Where known or suspected archaeological remains exist, but there is insufficient archaeological information to determine a planning application, it may be necessary for the applicant to commission a *desk-based assessment* of the proposed development area.

10.2.2 This would normally consist of consultation of the County Sites and Monuments Record, an examination of available sources such as early maps, air photographs and published documents, and a site inspection.

10.2.3 A report on the results would be submitted in support of the planning application. This would include an assessment of its archaeological impact, and any measures proposed to mitigate this. The local planning authority may defer a planning decision until this information is available.

10.3 Field Evaluation

10.3.1 In some cases it may be necessary to supplement the information available from a desk-based assessment by *field evaluation*. This may take the form of field walking, geophysical survey or trial trenching.

10.3.2 As with desk-based assessment, a report on the results would be submitted in support of the planning application, and include an assessment of its archaeological impact and any measures proposed to mitigate this. Again, the local planning authority may defer a planning decision until this information is available.

10.4 Preservation *in situ*

10.4.1. Wherever possible, important archaeological remains should be preserved *in situ*.

10.4.2 In exceptional cases, the importance of the archaeological remains will be such that the need to preserve them outweighs the merits of the proposed development. In such cases, the local planning authority may decide to refuse planning permission.

10.4.3 In practice, the archaeological impact of a development can often be prevented, or substantially reduced, through sympathetic design of its foundations or layout. This may be secured through a planning condition or legal agreement.

10.5 Excavation

10.5.1 Where preservation of archaeological remains *in situ* or by design is not possible, full excavation and recording before development is a second best option.

10.5.2 Such excavation should include a full programme of post-excavation assessment and analysis, followed by publication in a suitable form. It may be secured through a planning condition or legal agreement,

10.6 Watching Brief

10.6.1 In cases where small-scale development is proposed, and where the threat to archaeological remains is minimal or doubtful, an archaeological watching brief may be carried out.

10.6.2 This involves the observation and recording by an archaeologist of any archaeological remains coming to light during the course of development, and the preparation of a brief report on the results. It may be secured through a planning condition or legal agreement.

10.7 Building Recording

10.7.1 Where a development proposal involves the alteration or demolition of a Listed Building or other building of architectural or historic interest, it may be necessary for the applicant to commission a programme of building recording.

10.7.2 This may include one or more of the following: assessment, evaluation, measured and photographic recording, a watching brief during development, analysis and publication (4.2-4.6, above). It may be secured through a planning condition or legal agreement.

11. DEVELOPMENT OUTSIDE THE AREA OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

11.1 It is important to stress that areas lying outside the Area of Archaeological Potential (AAP) may nevertheless be of potential archaeological interest. Such areas need not be of direct relevance to the origin and development of the historic town, but may contain other types of archaeological remains which merit equal protection.

11.2 The boundaries of the AAP and Archaeological Character Zones are based upon current knowledge. They are therefore subject to amendment as new information comes to light. Where development is proposed immediately outside the AAP, it may be necessary to test its validity through limited archaeological works, such as a watching brief.