# CHESHIRE HISTORIC TOWNS SURVEY

## Ellesmere Port

## Archaeological Assessment


## 2003

CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

ENGLISH HERITAGE

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## *Archaeological Assessment*

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# ELLESMERE PORT

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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## 1. SUMMARY

The settlement of Ellesmere Port grew from a small canal port called 'Whitby Locks', which was located at the junction of the Shropshire Union Canal (1796) and the River Mersey. The opening of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894 stimulated a further period of sustained industrial expansion, which has included the petrochemical plants at Stanlow and the Vauxhall motorworks.

### 1.1 Topography and Geology

Ellesmere Port lies on the east coast of the Wirral peninsula, surrounded by gently undulating land approximately 11km to the north of Chester, and 10km to the east of Neston. In the immediate vicinity of the Manchester Ship Canal (and the River Mersey) the settlement is at sea level, rising to c 40m AOD in the west. The River Gowy runs on a south to north alignment to the west of Ellesmere Port at Stanlow.

The underlying solid geology comprises Bunter Sandstone, above which are glaciofluvial deposits of till (reddish boulder clay) (Cheshire County Council 1992, 8-9). The soils developed on these deposits are typical argillic stagnogley soils, which are suited to grassland and graded class 3 (Furness 1978, 123)

There are a number of major roads that pass through Ellesmere Port, including the M53 to Birkenhead and just to the south of the town the M56 to Manchester. A network of main roads link the town with the major settlements of north (A41) and south Wirral (A550), Chester (A41 and A5032) and North Wales (A5117 and A550).

### 1.2 Administrative Unit

In the 19th century Ellesmere Port was included in the township of Whitby, the parishes of Eastham and Stoke and the Wirral Hundred (Dodgson 1972, 198). In 1871 the ecclesiastical parish of Ellesmere Port was created and in 1902 Ellesmere Port and Whitby became an urban district (Crosby 1996, 82). Today Ellesmere Port is a Civil Parish in the Borough of Ellesmere Port and Neston.

### 1.3 Place Name

Although the name of Ellesmere Port appears in canal records as early as 1796 (Crosby 1996, 95), it is recorded on the tithe map of 1837 as Whitby Locks. It was described by Ormerod in the 19th century as 'a petty port,

(named) from the termination of the Dee and Mersey branch of the Ellesmere Canal (i.e. the Shropshire Union), and its connection with the estuary of the latter river, taking place at this point' (Dodgson 1972, 198).

## 2 SOURCES

### 2.1 Historical

Aspinall and Hudson (1982) provide an authoritative account of the historical development of Ellesmere Port. General discussions of the settlement include Mortimer (1847), Sculley (1889), Rideout (1927) and Brack (1980).

Various records are held by the County Record Office (CRO) and the Ellesmere Port Boat Museum but unfortunately their analysis is beyond the remit of the present survey.

### 2.2 Cartographic

The small settlements of Whitby and Stanlow are depicted on the county maps of Saxton (1577) and Speed (1605-10). Burdett's 1777 map depicts Whitby as a small nucleated settlement, and the area of the later canal port as undeveloped. The canal port area is shown on the tithe map of Eastham (1837), along with the small settlements of Whitby, Overpool and Netherpool. The Ordnance Survey First, Second and Third Edition maps of 1881, 1912 and 1945 provide an overview of Ellesmere Port's development. Useful maps of the town's development are also provided by Aspinall and Hudson (1982), who provide plans of the canal port c 1802 and 1850.

### 2.3 Archaeological

Before the present assessment there were eight records identified within Ellesmere Port (excluding the industrial areas of Stanlow to the east, and the Vauxhall Car Plant to the west) on the County Sites and Monuments Record (CSMR), which are depicted in Figure 1. Throughout this document the relevant reference is provided for any sites or finds that have been identified from the CSMR. The present assessment has generated four new records.

The only archaeological work known to have been undertaken within Ellesmere Port was an excavation at Grange Cow Worth in 1966-7 (CSMR 18). The site was originally six acres square and enclosed by a moat. In 1965 the south-east arm of the moat was still visible and excavation in 1966-7 revealed undated buildings of several phases of potential medieval or post medieval date.

## 3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

A brief discussion is provided of the area before the development of the canal port c 1796.

## 3.1 Prehistoric

The only evidence of prehistoric activity in this area is a Bronze Age palstave found in Church Lane, Great Sutton (CSMR 14).

## 3.2 Roman

Roman activity has been identified in the surrounding area. To the east of Ellesmere Port near Ince, is a double ditched enclosure, which has been identified from aerial photographs as a Roman fortlet. Minor excavation of the site in 1994 revealed two rock cut ditches and a small number of post holes (CSMR 1958; SAM 27589). Finds include an early 3rd century coin, which was found on the site of the old Methodist Church at Whitby (CSMR 16). A second coin has been reported although its description and precise location were unrecorded (CSMR 40).

## 3.3 Early Medieval

There are no known early medieval sites or finds in the area of Ellesmere Port. Whitby, the town from which Ellesmere Port was later to grow, was not recorded as an individual manor at Domesday, but may have been included in the entry for nearby Eastham (Archives and Local Studies).

The Domesday Survey records that:

*The same earl holds ESTHAM [Eastham] (Earl interlined) Edwin held it. There [are] 22 hides that pay geld. The land is for as many ploughs. In demense are 2 ploughs and 4 serfs, and 14 villeins and 10 bordars with 6 ploughs. There [is] a mill and 2 radmen and 1 priest.*

*Of the land of this manor Mundret holds 2 hides, and Hugh 2 hides, and William 1 hide, (and Walter ½ hide added in the margin), Hamon 7 hides, Robert 1 hide, Robert ½ hide. In demense are 4 ploughs and 8 oxmen, and 22 villeins and 11 bordars and 5 radmen and 2 Frenchmen with 9 ploughs. The whole manor T.R.E. was worth £24 and afterwards £4. Now the earl's demense is worth £4, his men's [land] 112s.*

(Harris and Thacker 1987, 347)

Eastham was an extensive manor with a high value of £24 before the Conquest. This was much reduced in value at Domesday but the manor was populous and included a priest.

## 3.4 Medieval

### 3.4.1 The Manor

Ormerod (1882, 424) suggests that at the time of the Domesday Survey, Whitby was held by William Malbedeng, Baron of Nantwich. Malbedeng later included it in a grant of lands to the Abbey of St Werburgh in Chester, which

held them until the Dissolution. The manor was subordinate to the Abbot's chief manor of Little Sutton (Sculley 1889, 155).

### 3.4.2 Economy

Agriculture is likely to have been a staple of the local economy and the existence of at least three monastic granges within the surrounding area (Grange Cow Worth, Ince Manor and Great Stanney) are indicative of this.

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 *Whitbey* paid 44 10d, a figure significantly higher than the nearby townships of Stoke (25s 6d) and Netherpool (25s 8d) (Booth 1985).

### 3.4.3 The Surrounding Area

A number of important medieval sites are located either within the large urban sprawl of modern Ellesmere Port or within its immediate vicinity. Stanlow Abbey (SAM 22590, CSMR 1710) is located on a low rocky promontory, north of the Manchester Ship Canal and in the Mersey Estuary. Associated with the abbey were three granges, as mentioned above, Ince Manor (CSMR 19, SAM 13518), Grange Cow Worth (CSMR 183) and Great Stanney (CSMR 21). Other sites include a moated site at Elton Green (CSMR , SAM 13436) and Hooton Deer Park (CSMR 51).

## 3.5 Post Medieval

### 3.5.1 Landowners

After the Dissolution, Whitby was granted by the Crown to John Glasier. The manor then passed to a number of individuals until the mid-18th century when it was purchased by the Duke of Westminster (Ormerod 1882, 424). Other principal landowners in the area included the Bunburys, the Poole family and the Stanleys. During the 19th century these large estates were dismantled prior to their sale (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 6).

### 3.5.2 Economy

#### 3.5.2.1 The Ellesmere Canal

By 1791 the estuaries of the Thames, Humber, Severn and Mersey were linked through a network of inland waterways. The Ellesmere canal was promoted at the height of this development by a cartel of Welsh coal, iron and limestone producers. In 1793 an Act of Parliament sanctioned the project, with the first section the 'Wirral Line' from Chester to the Mersey opened in 1796 to the design of Thomas Telford. The southern section of the canal from Frankton, Shropshire into Montgomeryshire was opened in 1797. The rest of the canal was completed on a piecemeal basis, and eventually formed the Shropshire Union Canal. By 1835 the expanded regional canal network

provided access to the north of the Mersey, Shrewsbury, the Severn, the South and the Midlands (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 5-7).

In 1845 the Ellesmere and Chester Canal Company merged into the Shropshire Union Railway and Canal Company (SURCC) (Sculley 1889, 156). The SURCC proposed to convert much of the canal into a railway, but were thwarted in their schemes and as a result the canal was leased to the London and North West Railway Company (LNWR) in 1847 (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 10).

### 3.5.2.2 Ellesmere Canal Port (1796-1850)

Until the mid-19th century the development of the port area was modest, due primarily to the high cost of local land. In 1802 the terminal complex consisted of a series of Locks, a small wharf, a tidal basin, two other basins, shooting butts, a lock keepers house, a tonnage clerk's house and a unique canal lighthouse (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 11). After an abortive scheme to develop the port facilities in 1810, work began on the construction of a pier head in 1816 to provide protection from the strong Mersey currents and in 1820 a small shipbuilding and timber yard was constructed. The economic potential offered by the expanding canal network encouraged the proprietors to commission Telford (between 1828-31) to design warehousing, a covered transhipment centre and company housing. The scheme was implemented by William Cubitt, and in 1833 a report to the General Committee of the canal company recorded 'warehouses and wharves on different levels for loading, unloading and transferring goods' (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 13). In 1835 the canal company assumed the responsibility for carrying goods over the Mersey, and during the following year purchased the port facilities. The commercial success of the port attracted a hostile bid from the proprietors of Liverpool Docks in 1836 when they attempted to bring Ellesmere Port within their jurisdiction. The proposal was eventually defeated, however the action impelled the canal company to consolidate and expand its facilities at Ellesmere Port and in 1843 Telford's scheme for a dock and entrance for seagoing vessels was completed. The complex now provided 67,000 square feet of floor space, sheds, warehousing, facilities for the maintenance of the company's fleet and berths for ships of up to 200 tons (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 13-14).

As well as freight, the canal company also operated a passenger service from the port. In 1816 they commenced a steam packet service across the Mersey, which continued to be an important service until the 1840s (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 14-23).

### 3.4.2.3 Ellesmere Canal Port (1850-1894)

The freight passing through Ellesmere Port comprised primarily ceramics from the Potteries and iron ore from Staffordshire, with the port offering specialised warehousing for these products. During the mid-1860s, trade with the Potteries increased significantly, and new crate and clay warehouses were erected. By 1886 additional land was purchased, with a proposal to create a

'new cut' specifically for the Potteries traffic, and temporary shedding and a paved area provided in 1869. Important as this trade was, the primary product passing through the port was iron, with a new iron warehouse built in 1884, and in 1889 the Chester Courant reported that thousands of tons of American Pig Iron were constantly being shipped through Ellesmere Port for distribution all over Staffordshire. Overcrowding at the port was a problem from the early years, and by 1871 the canal company considered a number of proposals to ease the situation, including increasing the vessels' loads and creating a 'passing place' along the canal. The problem was exacerbated by an increase in grain shipments, and although a new grain warehouse was constructed in 1871, an agent reported that overcrowding caused by the storage of grain was a key factor in the reduction of coal freight and forcing iron ore vessels to seek other ports (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 14-23).

#### 3.5.2.4 Ellesmere Canal Port (1894-Present)

Work began on the Manchester Ship Canal in 1887, with the canal opening for traffic in 1894. The construction of the canal stimulated an ambitious series of developments at Ellesmere Port: land was purchased along the length of the Ship Canal by the newly formed 'Manchester Ship Canal Pontoons and Dry Dock Company' and in 1893 they opened their pontoon and docks at Ellesmere Port, which had the capacity to unload vessels of up to 5,500 tons. The Ship Canal attracted many industries to Ellesmere Port and the surrounding area. It increased the prosperity of the region, and refocused development along its length. Initially the opening of the canal stimulated trade along the Ellesmere Canal, with a generous sliding scale of tolls offered to the canal company, including some toll free trade. It was calculated that this free traffic amounted to some 1,142,000 tons in 1898, rising to 1,685,000 tons by 1906 (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 40).

During the early 20th century the importance of the Shropshire Union Canal decreased as it began to face stiff competition from the rail network. In 1921 the London and North Western Railway (LNWR) canal operations ceased and during the following year the Shropshire Union Canal Company sold its fleet of barges (Brack 1980, 97). The canal was kept open for navigation, but commercial traffic was dramatically reduced throughout the 20th century, with the waterway now only used for leisure activities.

#### 3.5.2.5 Trade and Industry

The canal port attracted a number of industries to the area. During the mid-19th century a soap works was opened along the western side of the Shropshire Union Canal. However, this venture appears to have been a short lived, and the site was taken over by a palm nut oil producer. A second producer, the Black Diamond Oil Company was established in the town in 1870, which received its raw materials via the Shropshire Union Canal. During the late 19th to early 20th centuries the company relocated their storage facilities to the Ship Canal (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 40-1).

Good communications with Staffordshire and the Midlands, and a strong association with the iron industry attracted two iron manufacturers to Ellesmere Port. The earliest factory was Burnell and Sons, who in 1879 opened their site adjacent to the Shropshire Union Canal (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 59). The factory employed a workforce of 100 in 1902, a figure which had doubled by 1908. In 1904 the Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Company (one of the largest manufacturers in the West Midlands) opened a factory in Ellesmere Port and agreements were made with the Shropshire Union Canal for use of the canal water and the construction of a basin, and with LNW&GW Railways for sidings connecting to the main line (ibid 62).

Between 1905-12 at least three large flour mills were located at Ellesmere Port, including the Imperial Mill, which was connected with the Shropshire Union Canal Company's grain elevator and silo in the canal basin via a 'new cut' (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 76).

During the First World War (1914-18) the Stanlow marshes were drained by German prisoners of war, providing a large area of cheap development land. From 1922 work began on an oil refinery for the Shell Oil company, which included a quay. A second dock for 'Lobitus Oil' was constructed in 1933 and by 1949 the complex had expanded into one of the largest and most comprehensive refineries in the world, covering an area of approximately 2000 acres (Brack 1980, 100). By the 1960s the new generation of oil tankers were too large for the Ship Canal, and from this time crude oil was pumped along pipelines from deepwater terminals (Crosby 1996, 123).

In 1907 the German firm of Meister, Lucius and Bruning Ltd opened a dye works at Ellesmere Port. Upon the outbreak of the First World War the factory's German manager destroyed the scientific and production records, with production being impossible by 1915. During the following year production was commenced by a private concern, with the factory absorbed into the government aided 'British Dyestuffs' in 1918 (Aspinall and Hudson 1918, 84-5).

In c 1910 the Portland cement factory was established, with a deep water wharf on the Ship Canal and direct access to the Shropshire Union Canal and railway sidings. The factory prospered until the early 1930s, and was the second largest independent factory in the country (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 80-1).

As part of the war effort a chemical factory was opened at Ellesmere Port in 1917 to produce the chemicals used in the manufacture of munitions. The factory, which was built on land rented from the Portland Cement Company proved to be so inefficient that it was closed in 1918 (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 81).

Between 1930-4 the Bowater Company constructed a newsprint and paper mill along the Ship Canal at Netherpool, on a site which had previously been partially occupied by British Dyestuffs. The paper company built a wharf for the importation of raw materials, and was also served by a rail terminus. The

venture was highly successful, with a capacity to produce 120,000 tons of paper in 1932, and employing a workforce of 500 by 1945 (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 162-3).

In 1960 Vauxhall Motors established a factory on the site of Hooton Park Racecourse (later an aerodrome). By 1966 the works were employing 9,212 people and almost 12,000 by 1970 (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 221).

Many other trades and professions were practised by the residents of Ellesmere Port, a comprehensive list of which can be found in Slater's Directory (1848, 1869, 1892) and Kelly's Directory (1914, 1939). These trades included those associated with the canal such as carriers, warehousemen as well as a missioner to the 'Mersey Mission to Seamen', a charity which continues to work across the world today.

### 3.5.3 Settlement

The passenger services from Liverpool brought visitors to Ellesmere Port, and this encouraged the establishment of a small leisure industry. In 1823 the settlement was advertised as a bathing resort, and included bathing houses, public baths and a hotel, which were subsequently demolished during the construction of the canal basin in 1841 (Rideout 1927, 62).

Within the port complex were a small number of residences for the canal staff, such as the Lock Keepers cottage. However, it appears that the majority of the canal workers resided in the surrounding settlements. In 1817 six cottages were erected on land above the highest lock by a local landowner named John Grace (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 12). By 1831 Thomas Telford was commissioned to report on the accommodation needs of the canal port staff which then included clerks, porters and other labourers. A letter to the shareholders of the canal company in 1843 described:

'Whereas before the new works had been started the place contained only four cottages...it contains now nearly 100 houses...and other buildings and houses are constantly erecting' (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 13-14).

In 1848 Ellesmere Port was described as 'a village and modern port in the township of Whitby', it was 'one time called Whitby Locks' and consisted of 'a small number of houses; but since the erection of extensive warehouses and a commodious dock, by the Ellesmere and Chester Canal Company, several handsome dwellings have been built' (Slater 1848, 42). The town is even described as having a 'flourishing and cheerful aspect' (ibid).

The commercial expansion of the port led to an increase in the working population, whose housing was predominantly provided by the canal company. To aid this building programme, William Graham offered to build a brick and tile works, whilst in 1863 Messrs Willington and Sons were commissioned to construct a number of three storied houses. The building programme undertaken in Ellesmere Port incorporated a degree of social ranking. Along Mersey Street were a number of larger houses, including

those of a civil engineer and a curate, with most households employing servants. Residents of Pool Street included a carriers clerk, the county constable and a master joiner, whereas Porters Row and the houses on Primrose Hill were primarily occupied by either canal employees or manual dock workers. The tenants of these properties enjoyed a fair rent, with the opportunity to rent separate garden plots for as little as 6s 6d per annum. Dock Street provided the 'town centre' for the community with a number of shops and three public houses (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 17-24).

The industrial expansion stimulated by the opening of the Ship Canal in 1894 inevitably resulted in an increase in the population of Ellesmere Port and the surrounding area. In 1908 the Ellesmere Port and Whitby Urban District Council anticipated accommodating this rapidly expanding industrial population by applying for the incorporation of large tracts of land in Great Stanney, Stanlow, Netherpool and Overpool (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 48). In 1902 Ellesmere Port possessed a building stock of some 804 houses, a figure which had risen to 2,183 only ten years later, with an increase in population from 4,082 in 1901 to 10,366 in 1911. This rapid rise in population was creating an overcrowding problem by 1910. Some housing was provided by the industrial concerns located in the town, such as the Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Company, who owned 8% of the housing stock in 1914 (ibid 109).

Most of the town's new buildings were, however, a result of speculative private building, with houses rented out. In 1913 the council purchased five acres of land with the purpose of building 60 houses. However, the outbreak of the First World War and the partial closure of the iron works temporarily resolved the overcrowding problem. Despite the Great Depression, Ellesmere Port continued to develop as an industrial centre during the inter-war period, with a 63% rise in the population between 1921 and 1939. A significant amount of urban development was now undertaken by the local council. Between 1919 and 1933 the council had built 1,489 houses at Ellesmere Port, with private building accounting for a further 432 (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 109). After 1945 the industrialisation of Ellesmere Port continued, with council and private building continuing at a pace.

#### 3.5.3.1 Schools

In 1867 a National School was opened with places for 101 pupils, which was enlarged under the direction of the Education Department in 1873 (ibid 27). In the early 20th century three new schools were built in Ellesmere Port: the Church of England boys school on Church Street (1902), and the mixed schools in Cambridge Road (1910) and John Street (1913)(ibid 52).

### 3.4 Religion

By the late 1860s a new church was proposed for the increasing population at Ellesmere Port. The Anglican Church of 1842 was therefore replaced by Christ Church, which became the parish church of the new Ellesmere Port ecclesiastical parish in 1871 (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 27).

The Wesleyan Methodists built a chapel in 1840, which could accommodate a congregation of 90 persons. There are also records of three meetings held in private houses, each having a congregation of about 40 persons. In 1871 a large Primitive Methodist Chapel was built (including a school room), which could accommodate 400. Other Methodist chapels were built on Queen's Street (1900), Heathfield Street (1908) and on Whitby Road (1914). A Roman Catholic church was built in Enfield Road in 1910 (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 26-53).

### 3.5 Population

The population of Whitby in 1664 has been estimated as 105 (MacGregor 1992). From 1801-1971 population data is available from the census returns, which are printed in the Victoria County History (Harris, 1979, 202-240), and for 1981 and 1991 census data has been reproduced under Class Licence Number C01W0000125 with the permission of the Controller of the HMSO.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1801** | 170 (Whitby Township) | **1901** | 10366 (Ellesmere Port and Whitby UD) |
| **1811** | 75 | **1911** | 10253 |
| **1821** | 164 | **1921** | 12891 |
| **1831** | 170 | **1931** | 18267 |
| **1841** | 767 | **1951** | 32653 (Ellesmere Port UD) |
| **1851** | 833 | **1961** | 44681 |
| **1861** | 732 | **1971** | 61637 |
| **1871** | 920 | **1981** | 63315 |
| **1881** | 1488 | **1991** | 31378 |
| **1891** | 5107 | | |

### 3.6 Transport and Communications

The road running through Whitby and parallel with the northern shore of the Wirral, which is shown on Burdett's map (1777), was turnpiked in 1787 (Harrison 1886, 80).

A railway link was provided at Ellesmere Port in 1863 via the Birkenhead Railway, Hooton to Helsby line, with a station built between the canal port and Whitby (Aspinall and Hudson 1982, 24). The Birkenhead Railway was absorbed by the Great Western and London and North Western Railways in 1860 (Greville 1954, 121).

### 3.7 The Surrounding Area

Ellesmere Port is part of a much larger industrial landscape, which owes much of its development to the River Mersey. This includes Birkenhead and Liverpool to the north, and Runcorn and Widnes to the north-west.

## 4 PLAN COMPONENTS

The study area has been divided into 9 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 the extent of Ellesmere Port c 1802, shortly after the construction of the Ellesmere Canal in 1796 (after Aspinall and Hudson, 1982, 11). The Port is then mapped c 1850, which includes Telford's redevelopment of c 1843 (after Aspinall and Hudson, 1982, 22). Further development of the canal port is then mapped c 1872 from the OS First Edition 6": 1 mile map and c 1912 from the OS Third Edition map, which includes the development arising from the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894.

**Ellesmere Port c 1801 (Figure 2)**

**COM 1 -** Shropshire Union Canal
**COM 2 -** Canal Port

**Ellesmere Port c 1850 (Figure 2)**

**COM 3 -** Canal Port and Settlement

**Ellesmere Port c 1872 (Figure 2)**

**COM 4 -** Canal Port and Settlement
**COM 5 -** Settlement in the Surrounding Area
**COM 6 -** Birkenhead Railway

**Ellesmere Port c 1912 (Figure 2)**

**COM 6 -** L&NW&GW Joint Railway
**COM 7 -** Canal Port and Settlement
**COM 8 -** Manchester Ship Canal
**COM 9** - Shropshire Union Railway

**Ellesmere Port c 2000 (Figure 3)**

**COM 10 -** Settlement

### 4.1 Canal Port c 1802 (Figure 2)

The extent of settlement c 1802 has been identified from Aspinall and Hudson (1982, 11) as **COM 1**. The canal port was relatively small at this time consisting of shooting butts, dwellings, a stable, a pumping house, a wharf, two ponds, two basins, a tidal basin, a lock and a lighthouse. The Ellesmere Canal (later known as the Shropshire Union Canal), which was the impetus for the growth and development of the canal port is identified as **COM 2**.

### 4.2 Canal Port and Settlement c 1850 (Figure 2)

The extent of the port and settlement of Ellesmere Port c 1850 has been identified from Aspinall and Hudson (1982, 22) as **COM 3**. Between 1833 and 1843 the port was remodelled to the designs of Thomas Telford, the main feature of which was a multi-levelled warehouse. Unfortunately, this building was destroyed by fire during the 1970s. Settlement was confined to the west of the port along Lower and Upper Mersey Streets and to the south along Porter's Row and between Dock Street and Pool Street.

### 4.3 Canal Port and Settlement c 1872 (Figure 2)

The extent of the canal port and settlement of Ellesmere Port c 1872 has been identified from the OS First Edition 6": 1mile map as **COM 4**. During the second half of the 19th century, the volume of trade passing through Ellesmere Port increased dramatically with grain and the raw materials and manufactured products of the ceramic and iron industries being the principal goods serviced by the port. Between 1837 and 1881 a number of specialised warehouses were constructed to store and tranship these goods. The increase in the workforce necessitated the construction of new housing, which increased the area of settlement around the port complex. Much of the housing was built or purchased by the canal company and then rented to its employees.

Settlement within the wider area, including Overpool, Whitby and Whitby Hall, which are now part of the modern township of Ellesmere Port, has been identified as **COM 5**.

The route of the Birkenhead Railway, Hooton to Helsby branch line, which was opened in 1863, did much to stimulate development during the later 19th century and this has been identified as **COM 6**.

### 4.4 Canal Port and Settlement c 1912 (Figure 2)

The extent of Ellesmere Port c 1912 has been identified from the OS Third Edition 6": 1 mile map and is depicted as **COM 7**. This includes the expansion of the canal port, both domestic and industrial, and the development that occurred within the surrounding area i.e. Whitby, Overpool, and Little Sutton etc.

The opening of the Manchester Ship Canal (**COM 8**) stimulated a rapid and sustained phase of development. The embankment of the canal was developed with factory buildings, warehouses, wharves, railway branch lines and a small chemical works to the east of the canal port, which was a forerunner of the extensive Stanlow petrochemical plant. Domestic development was generally undertaken to the west of Station Road and Whitby Road. This development, which began to conjoin Whitby and Ellesmere Port, comprised terraced housing, churches, public houses and a school.

By 1912, villages in the surrounding area had also undergone expansion. Development continued to the south along Whitby Road and development adjacent to Whitby comprised small houses, both terraced and detached. Development at Whitby Heath included a number of larger buildings, some of which were located within large enclosed areas, and included farms, a nursery, two large houses and a brick works. Three kilometres to the west of Ellesmere Port, settlement appears to have taken advantage of the L&NW&GW Joint Railway (the former Birkenhead Railway: **COM 6)** and there is a noticeable increase in development in this area. Meanwhile Overpool, which lies away from the canal and rail network, had failed to undergo any expansion since 1872. The Shropshire Union Railway (**COM 9**), a branch line of the GW&L&NW Joint Railway, was established at this time and this provided industries in the vicinity of the canal port with access to the rail network.

### 4.5 Modern c 2000 (Figure 3)

As industrial development became focussed upon and along the Ship Canal, the role of the Shropshire Union Canal decreased, with the canal port finally becoming a museum and tourist centre. The inter-war years witnessed a significant expansion in the population of Ellesmere Port, which had been attracted to the town by the employment opportunities offered by a growing industrial base. Spatially the area of domestic housing has trebled since 1912, primarily comprising large areas of terraced ‘workers’ housing.

From the establishment of the first oil refinery during the 1920s, the Stanlow complex to the east of the canal port rapidly expanded to become one of the world’s largest petrochemical complexes by the late 1940s.

Other significant developments of the 20th century include the Bowater’s paper plant, which was established along the embankment of the Ship Canal during the 1930s. This successful plant was served by a wharf along the canal frontage and a rail terminus.

As with the inter-war period, the post-war period has witnessed a massive expansion in the industrial and urban extent of Ellesmere Port. Industrial development continued at Stanlow, and the Vauxhall Motor Works was established to the west of Ellesmere Port during the 1960s. Domestic settlement has included the construction of large areas of council and private housing, which is supported by a social infrastructure of a shopping centre,

schools, recreation grounds, a hospital, a sports stadium and a leisure centre. The extent of modern Ellesmere Port including Stanlow, has been identified as **COM 10**.

## 5 HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

### 5.1 Above Ground Remains

Most of the canal port complex is included in a designated Conservation Area. There are 24 listed buildings in the Ellesmere Port area, all of which are listed Grade II including the lighthouse, the Ellesmere Port railway station and a number of canal warehouses and ancillary buildings. There are, however, a number of good quality buildings within the town, which are not listed (e.g. the Dudley Road Arts and Crafts housing group). There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within Ellesmere Port.

There are a large number of industrial buildings which are of potential archaeological and historical interest. Ellesmere Port is obviously still very much a working town and a number of industrial processes are still in operation. However, a number of industries have been closed and it is the reclamation of land and the reuse or demolition of these buildings that is likely to require archaeological intervention and building recording. Other buildings and sites of potential interest also survive within the village centres that have gradually become absorbed by Ellesmere Port.

### 5.2 Below Ground Remains

The lack of archaeological work carried out at Ellesmere Port makes it impossible to assess the nature and extent of archaeological deposits. The area has been heavily developed, which is likely to have destroyed any earlier features. Work at Grange-Cow-Heath successfully identified medieval and post medieval deposits prior to construction taking place on the site but to what extent these deposits were truncated by development is unknown. However, there is likely to be an abundance of industrial archaeological deposits surviving in Ellesmere Port, the nature and extent of which remains to be assessed.

## 6 PRIORITIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

### 6.1 General

The study of Ellesmere Port forms part of the national research priority T6: the study of industrial archaeology (English Heritage, 1997, 53) and T7: patterns of craftsmanship and industry (English Heritage 1997, 54).

### 6.2 Post Medieval

- Examine the development of the canal port.
- Examine the development of industry, its range and diversity, and its relationship with the canal and rail communication network.

- Examine the nature and extent of surviving industrial buildings and complexes, and significant features of the canal port.
- Assess the need for a programme of building recording.
- Establish the location of settlement and date phases of expansion and contraction.
- Establish the nature of buildings and activities on settlement plots.

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## 7.2 Maps

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# 8 ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Ellesmere Port and the Surrounding Area
Figure 2: The Development of Ellesmere Port
Figure 3: Ellesmere Port c 2000

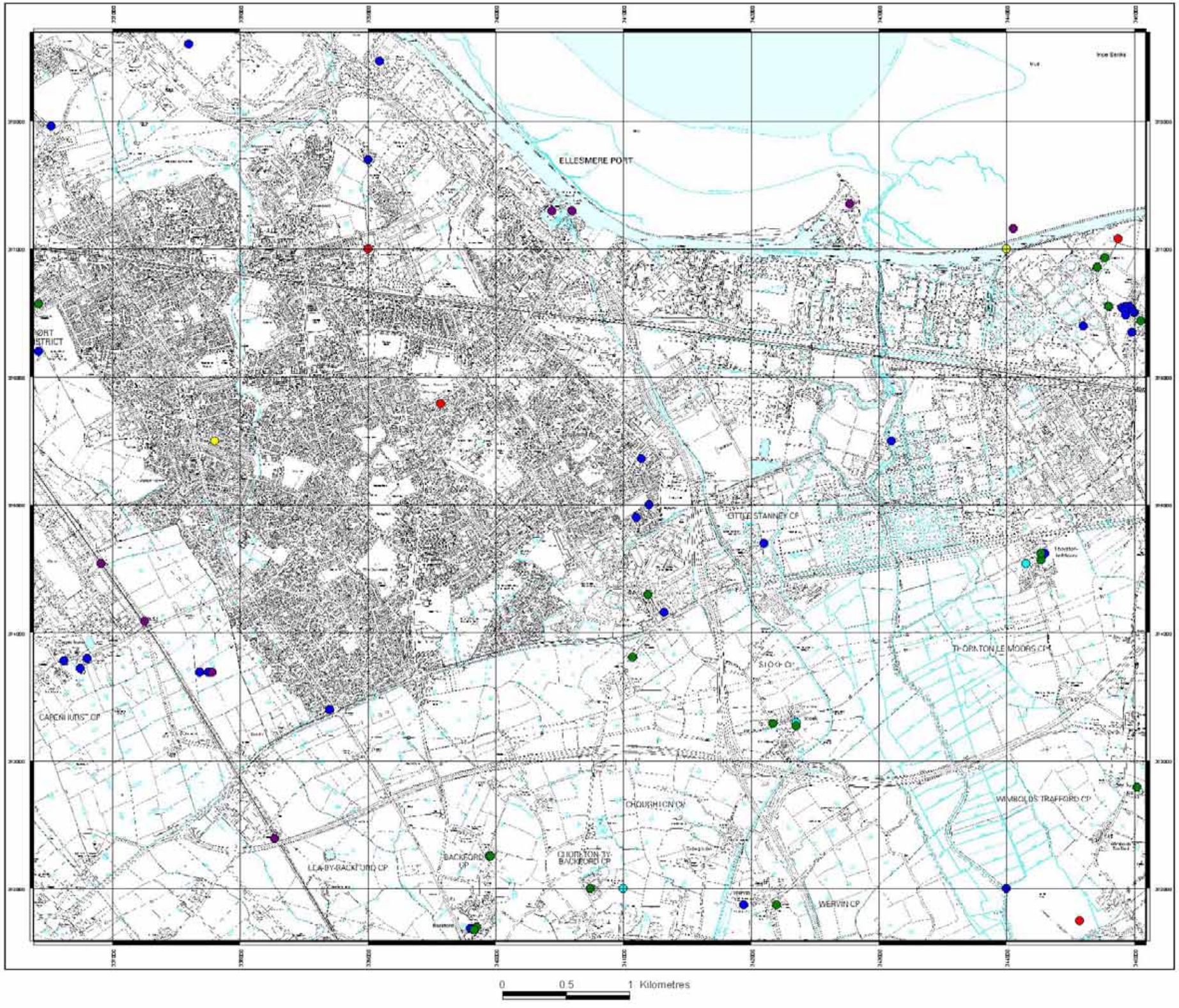


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Figure 1
Ellesmere Port and the Surrounding Area

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

1:28000

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# Figure 2: The Development of Ellesmere Port

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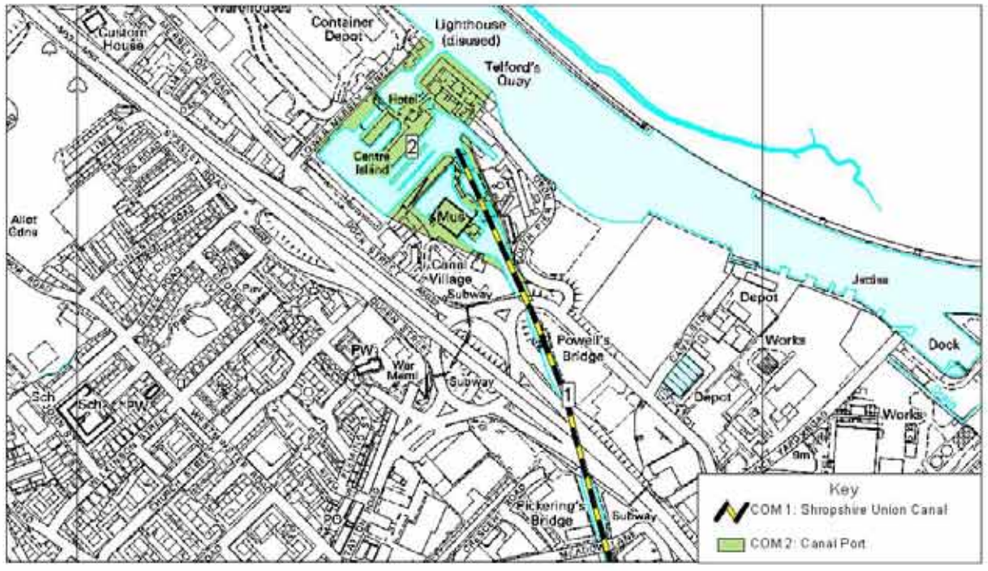


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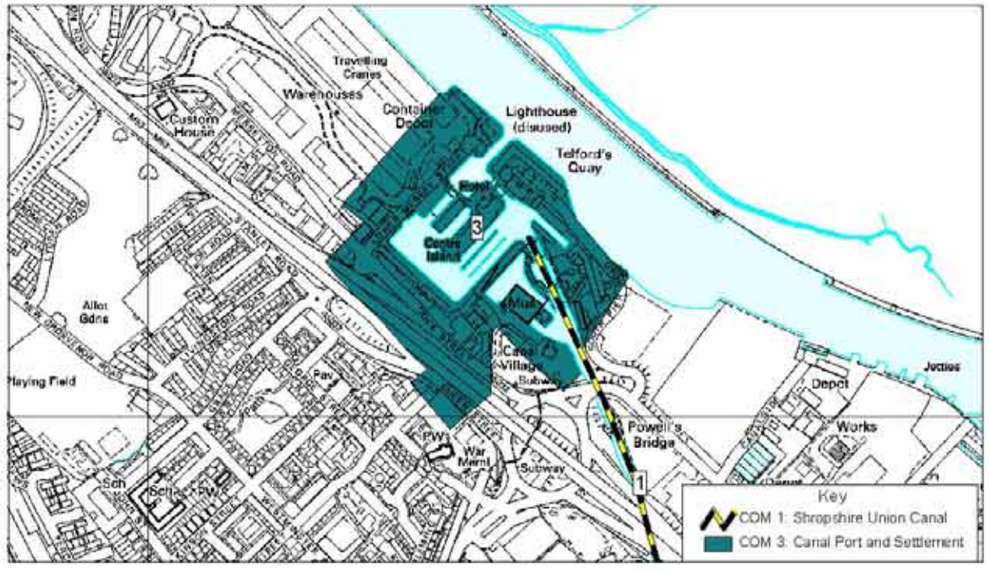


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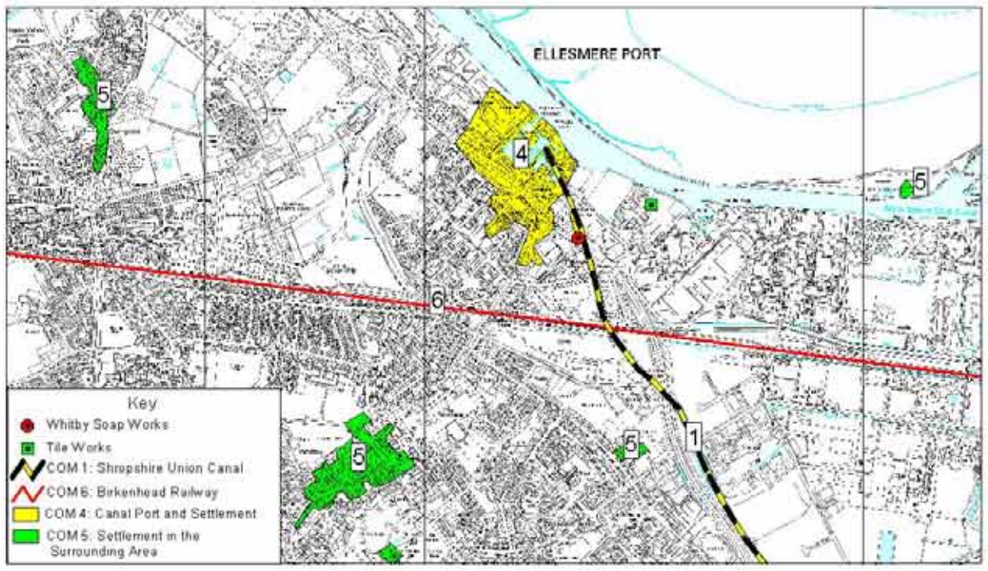


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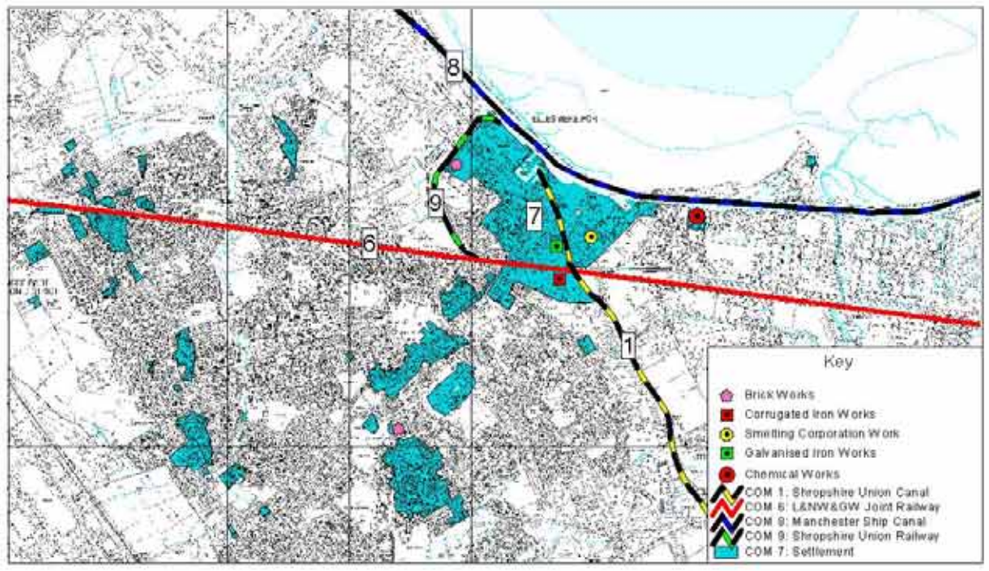


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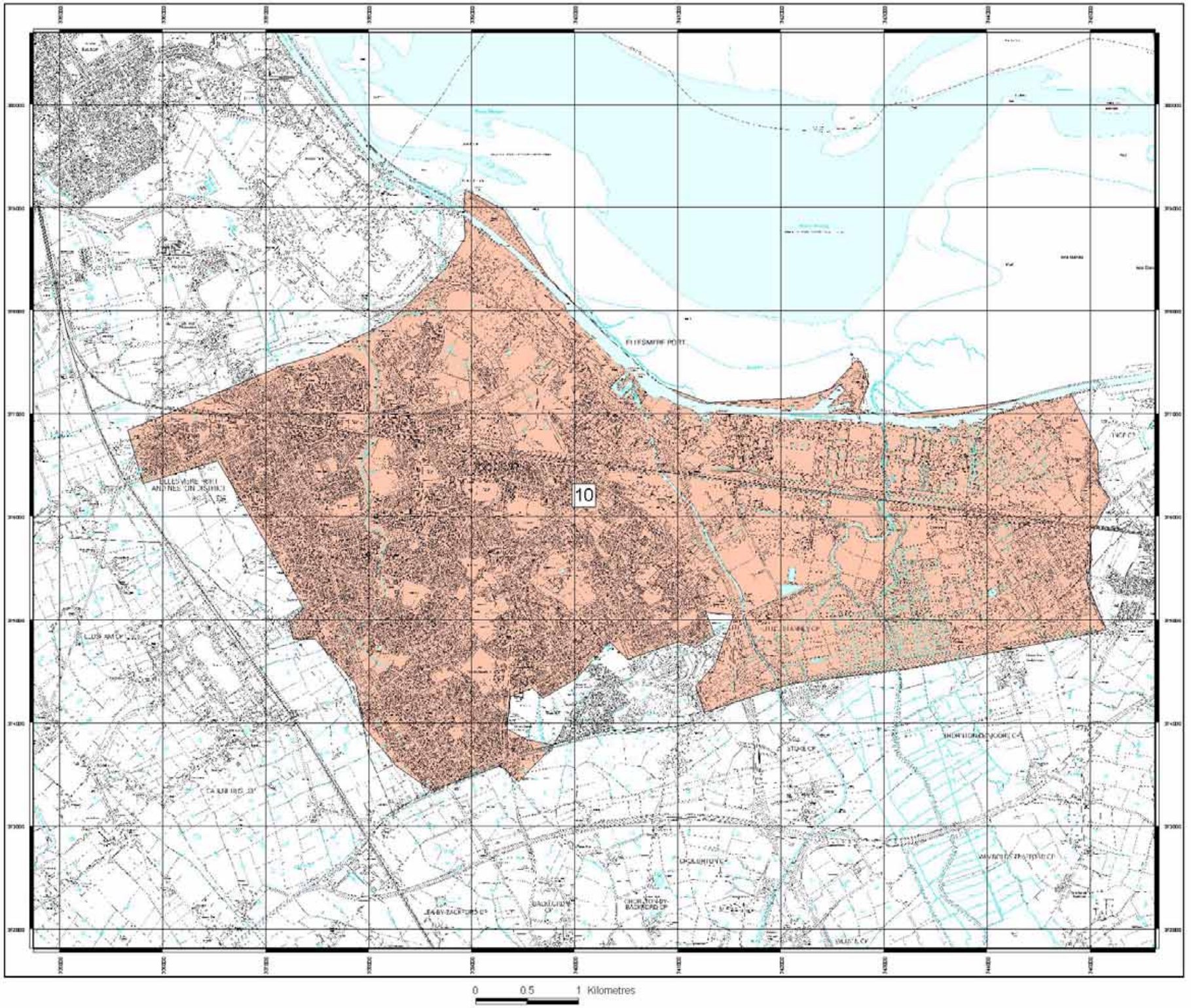


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Figure 3:
Ellesmere Port c 2000

Key

COM 10: Settlement

1:35000