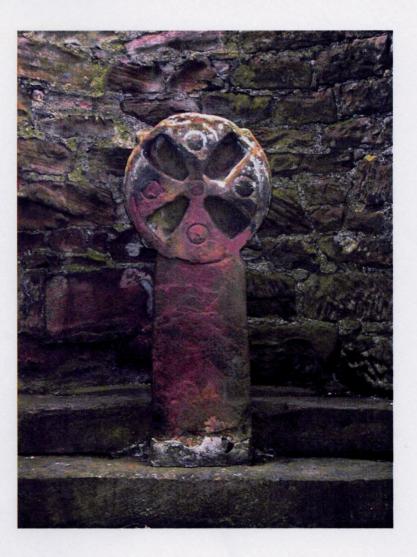


EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY



Archaeological Assessment Report

ST BEES



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 English Heritage has initiated a national series of Extensive Urban Surveys. Several counties have commenced such projects, funded by English Heritage, including Cumbria County Council that is undertaking the survey of the small towns of Cumbria. The survey is intended to provide a current view of the archaeological resource in each of the towns building on earlier surveys and consists of three phases: Data Collection, Data Assessment and Strategy. The first stage, Data Collection, draws together the accessible history of the town, the archaeological knowledge and historic buildings data. The second phase, Data Assessment, leads to the production of a report which presents a brief history of the town, (this document is not intended as a definitive history), an analysis of the plan of the town, an assessment of the archaeological and historic buildings data, and an assessment of the survey and allows for the identification of areas of archaeological importance to be discussed in the Strategy Report.
- 1.2 The results of the survey are available in hard copy and as a digital database held by Cumbria County Council.
- 1.3 The project study area is the historic urban core of each town as defined by the extent of the built settlement as shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey (OS) Map (Map A).
- 1.4 The primary sources consulted in the preparation of this report include the Ordnance Survey (OS) first edition maps and early plans held at Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle. Other documentary evidence, mostly secondary sources, were consulted at the Cumbria Record Office, Kendal and at local libraries. The Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) held at County Offices, Kendal was also used. A number of secondary sources were consulted when writing the historical overview of the town.
- 1.5 New information is being added to the Sites and Monuments Record all the time. This study is, therefore, accurate at the time it was produced and the SMR should always be consulted for changes and additions since that time.

2. LOCATION & GEOLOGY

2.1 Location

- 2.1.1. St Bees is situated on the west coast of Cumbria, 4.5 miles south of Whitehaven.
- 2.1.2. St Bees lies within Copeland District.



Figure 1. Location of St Bees

2.2 Geology

2.2.1. The underlying geology of the area is primarily Triassic St Bees Sandstone, red and grey sandstone with partings of red mudstone (IGS, 1976). The coastal area around St Bees head has been designated as a Heritage Coast.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS UNDERTAKEN IN ST BEES (Map B).

3.1 Event 27.01: Coastal Survey

3.1.1. Between 1959 and 1981 Cherry and Cherry (1973, 1983) surveyed the coastal strip between Whitehaven and Silecroft. The greatest use of the area was by people following a hunting and food gathering tradition and although there is evidence of Neolithic occupation it was not until the Early Bronze Age that significant habitation re-occurred. Twenty four sites around St Bees were recorded together with a number of finds of single artefacts; the totals of flints from each site vary from seven at the site described as Tarnflat I, to more than nine thousand at the site described as Rottington V. The site at Rottingham V, has a supply of fresh water from Rottington Beck, shelter from the north and easy access to the beach.

3.2 Event 27.02: Golf Course

3.2.1. A trial excavation was undertaken on the golf course field in 1976 (Bonsall, 1983). The aims of the excavation were to define more precisely the density and horizontal extent of the flint scatter, and to obtain a larger and more representative sample of the flint industry in an attempt to provide a possible date of occupation. The excavation produced only 31 worked flints and no finished tools. The excavation failed to produce any clear indication of the age or nature of the prehistoric occupation.

3.3 Event 27.03: Priory Paddock

3.3.1. The area around the Priory Paddock was partially excavated in 1979 and 1980 by Leicester University. The findings from the excavations were published in the *St Bees History Newsletter* (O'Sullivan, 1979 & 1980). A proposed extension to the parish church into a field immediately west of the cloister of the medieval priory prompted the excavation. The excavation established that the cemetery extension was within a medieval enclosure and contained structures of a medieval date which were interpreted as outbuildings of the priory. There was also a wooden trackway. The site was waterlogged and as a result many of the wooden and leather finds were well preserved.

3.4 Event 27.04: 'St Bees Man'

3.4.1. 'St Bees Man', (SMR 6849) is a preserved medieval body found in the course of excavation at St Bees in 1981. The main aim of the excavation programme was to identify the site of the Anglo-Scandinavian church and settlement thought to be in the vicinity of the medieval priory. In 1981 it was hoped to locate the site of the early church in the ruined south chancel aisle. Several burials were found in the course of the excavation. These fell into two stratigraphic groups, the first presumably belonging to the monks' cemetery of the period 1120-1300. The second group seemed to represent a secular population. The burial vault, which contained the preserved body, belonged to the latter group (O'Sullivan, 1985). The preserved body was wrapped in a shroud impregnated with bees wax and then wrapped in lead. An autopsy was carried out on the body (Tapp et al, 1985), and the body's dentition was investigated (Leek, 1985).

3.5 Event 27.05: Priory Paddock

3.5.1. In 1996, an excavation took place in Priory Paddock in advance of the site being developed into a wildlife garden. Previous fieldwork in the area had identified that in some areas significant archaeological deposits survived within Priory Paddock to the depth of c.1m below the ground surface. The trenches, in this later evaluation, were excavated to a depth of 0.5m as the maximum extent of the proposed development was to be 0.4m below the present surface. The excavations revealed that, given the evidence from the previous excavations, the archaeological deposits associated with the Priory were only present below the maximum depth of the excavated trench (LUAU, 1996).

4. THE HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

4.1 Placename evidence

The original form of St Bees Head was simply the Old Norse term, *berg*, or 'hill'. The earliest recorded name of this place appears to have been *kirkiubjr*, meaning near a church. To this was added *Beghoc*, the Irish diminutive of the name of the Saint (Armstrong et al, 1977). Therefore creating the name Kirkby Begoc meaning 'church-village of St Bega' (pers. comm. Winchester, 2001).

4.2 Prehistoric Period (Map C)

Key Points

Evidence (flint scatters) to indicate prehistoric occupation of the St Bees area.

Core and Outlying Settlement

- 4.2.1. Between 1959 and 1981, Cherry and Cherry (1973, 1983) surveyed the coastal strip between Whitehaven and Silecroft. Major sites including St Bees were recorded. The greatest use of the area was by people following a hunting and food gathering tradition and although there is evidence of Neolithic occupation it was not until the Early Bronze Age that significant habitation re-occurred. Twenty four sites around St Bees were recorded together with a number of finds of single artefacts; the totals of flints from each site vary from seven at the site described as Tarnflat I, to more than nine thousand at the site described as Rottington V. The site at Rottingham V, has a supply of fresh water from Rottington Beck, shelter from the north and easy access to the beach.
- 4.2.2. A trial excavation was undertaken on the golf course field in 1976 (Bonsall, 1983). The aims of the excavation were to define more precisely the density and horizontal extent of the flint scatter, and to obtain a larger and more representative sample of the flint industry in an attempt to provide a possible date of occupation. The excavation produced only 31 worked flints and no finished tools. The excavation failed to produce any clear indication of the age or nature of the prehistoric occupation (ibid.).
- 4.2.3. Recent work by Hodgkinson et al (2000), as part of the *North West Wetlands Survey*, suggests that St Bees was not the focus for Mesolithic groups. They consider that, in line with Bonsall's theory, Williamson's Moss and Monk Moors in the Esk Estuary were the main foci, with the hinterland being exploited to a lesser extent.

4.3 Roman Period

Key Points

Possible evidence of Roman activity in the vicinity of St Bees

Core and Outlying Settlement

4.3.1. The Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) notes the find of a Roman coin, a Sestertius of Hadrian in a garden near Sandwith School in 1990, the exact location is unknown (SMR 19158). The SMR also records a cropmark site at St Bees on an aerial photograph (SMR 17834. The cropmark is a large sub-rectangular feature, the shape roughly that of a Roman fort. There also appear to be other features. However, more photographs and ground inspection are needed to confirm the presence of archaeological features.

Key Points

- Nunnery supposedly founded c.650 and allegedly destroyed by the Danes.
- Priory founded in c.1120 on the site of the Nunnery. Ransacked by the Scots in 1314.
- Priory destroyed at the Dissolution of the Monasteries, however Norman church survived.
- 'St Bees Man', well preserved medieval body found in 1981.

Core and Outlying Settlement

- 4.4.1. A **nunnery** was allegedly founded at St Bees c.650 by Bega (Slater, 1998). The earliest traditions concerning St Bega come from the 'Life and Miracles of St Bega the Virgin', a 12th century manuscript. Legend has it that Bega, the daughter of an Irish King, fled the court to avoid an arranged marriage and landed on the Cumbrian coast. Here she asked the local lord for land on which to build a nunnery (Marsh, 1999). That Bega existed is doubtful.
- 4.4.2. In c.1120, William de Meschines founded a **priory** at St Bees for a prior and six Benedictine monks as a cell of St Mary's Abbey, York (<u>www.stevebulman.f9.co.uk/cumbria/stbees.html</u>).
- 4.4.3. At the foundation of the priory, the Norman monks were clearly taking over as a going concern, a centre of Bega-veneration. The name of the last witness of the foundation charter, *Gillebecoc*, means the devotee of *Beghó*. He also speaks of a priest, possibly hereditary, who was the servant of that cult (Todd, 1980).
- 4.4.4. The monks appear first to have improved or rebuilt an existing Church, putting over its main door **the Dragon Stone**, now to be seen opposite the Great West Door. Later, about 1180, the present church was begun (www.instinct-training.co.uk/ti/wc/chw6.htm).
- 4.4.5. The Priory cloister and its associated buildings are no longer standing but the church remains substantially complete (Slater 1998). Its structure embodies much of the original building in the Norman style, notably the nave arcades and the West front (www.instinct-training.co.uk/ti/wc/chw6.htm, 2001). The south transept has plain Norman windows and the nave and the south aisle west wall are Late Norman (Pevsner, 1967). In c.1200 a new chancel was erected. The chancel now forms part of the school founded by Archbishop Grindal of York in 1583 (Slater, 1998).
- 4.4.6. The Priory was ransacked by the Scots in 1314 following their victory at Bannockburn (Marsh, 1999). However, the Norman church survived until the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s when Henry VIII's commissioners removed the lead from the roof. The building was left open to the weather and soon decayed. Nevertheless, the church continued to be used for worship and repairs were eventually started again in 1611 (www.instinct-training.co.uk/ti/wc/chw6.htm, 2001). At the time of the dissolution, such was the value of the priory, only two religious houses were more endowed in the county (www.stevebulman.f9.co.uk/cumbria/stbees.html).
- 4.4.7. There is a collection of cross slabs, as well as other sculpture, both pre- and post-conquest. Ryder (2000) records 19 cross slabs but mentions nine other stones recorded in 1875 (Knowles, 1875 & 1877, SMR 3465).
- 4.4.8. 'St Bees Man', (SMR 6849) is a preserved medieval body found in the course of excavation (see section 3.4) at St Bees in 1981. It is thought he was a member of the secular population and died c1120-1300 (Leek, 1985).
- 4.4.9. **Town Development**. Many of the boundaries in St Bees Township form a regular pattern, which may suggest that the settlement was planned. The separation of the village in St Bees township from the church and main road junction in St Bees Abbey add support to the suggestion that there was a planned resettlement in St Bees. It is suggested that a resettlement of

the population in a planned village on the south east side of the Pow Beck was related to the foundation of the priory at St Bees and the arrival of monks from Yorkshire. Many of the planned villages of Yorkshire are related to monastic foundations in the area and their origins lie in the 11th or 12th centuries. A similar series of events may have occurred in St Bees at this time (Brightman, 1982). However there is an absence to date for medieval *urban* settlement at St Bees (pers comm, Winchester, 2001).

- 4.4.10.**Salt-pans**. The St Bees Register contains several charters relating to the grants of *salinae*, rights that were extended to salt-pans as far south as Millom and the Duddon Estuary, and as far north as the Scottish coast (Brightman 1982).
- 4.4.11.**Coal.** There were coal workings around St Bees as early as the 13th century (Myers 1993).

Key Points

- St Bees School founded by Archbishop Grindal in 1583
- The prosperity of nearby Whitehaven had influence on economy of St Bees
- Farmers as tenants of the school rather than land-owning family gave degree of autonomy

Core and Outlying Settlements

- 4.5.1. **St Bees School.** A school was founded by Edmund Grindal, Archbishop of York (1570-1575) and of Canterbury (1575-1583). He was born in 1519 into a farming family in a village close to the future site of the school. In his will he provided for a free Grammar School at St. Bees. It opened its doors four years after the Archbishop's death. Across the road from the Priory Church stand the oldest buildings of St. Bees School, founded in 1583, forming three sides of a quadrangle, open to the west and facing the Church. The centre of St Bees School is the courtyard opposite the chancel of the church, toward which it opens (www.instinct-training.co.uk/ti/wc/chw6.htm, 2001). Its north side is the original schoolhouse of 1587 (Pevsner, 1967). The northern wing may incorporate some of the stones from the old priory buildings that had been demolished in the preceding half-century.
- 4.5.2. Later Expansion of School. The south and east wings of the quadrangle date from 1844 when the school was transformed from a small rural grammar school to an independent boarding school. The boarding capacity of the school had been greatly increased with the construction of schoolhouse in 1886 and two years later the Station Hotel, as it then was, became an additional boarding house. The swimming baths followed in 1898 and the gymnasium in 1899. The expansion continued throughout the 20th century. In the 1950s a hall and a science block were built; later the Abbots Court Hotel became an additional boarding house and in the last few years a sports hall and a business management cCentre have been added to the school's facilities (www.instinct-training.co.uk/ti/wc/chw6.htm, 2001).
- 4.5.3. Economy of St Bees. Until the nineteenth century the livelihood of the inhabitants of St. Bees came almost entirely from the land or the sea. To the north-west of Pow Beck, the farms were occupied by tenants of the Lowther family, who were based in Whitehaven. South-east of the Beck, after 1609, the farmers held their land as tenants of the St Bees School under thousandyear leases at low, fixed rents (www.instinct-training.co.uk/ti/wc/chw6.htm, 2001). This gave them considerable independence. As a result, the town of St. Bees has none of the uniform appearance of those towns and villages that were dominated by the interests and requirements of a dominant land owning family. The results of the independence can be seen in the eighteenthcentury rebuilding of many of the farmhouses that lined the west side of the Main Street. As the prosperity of nearby Whitehaven increased on the profits of trade in coal and iron ore, the economy of St. Bees became increasingly dependent on that of its large neighbour. St. Bees was joined to Whitehaven by a turnpike road soon after 1739. The number of farms dwindled through amalgamation, and as the nineteenth century went on people increasingly found work in the industries of Whitehaven. However there was employment within coal workings and quarries close to the town and in local small-scale industries such as a flour works (Myers 1993).

4.5.4. **Expansion of the town**: The tourists, brought to the village by the new railway in 1850, were on the increase, as the working classes gained the spending power to take holidays by the sea. The railway also brought commuters from Whitehaven and Workington to the cleaner air of St. Bees, and the turn of the century saw the building of the last new houses in the Main Street until after the Second World War.

5. THE TOPOGRAPHY OF ST BEES

5.1 Introduction

Each of the identified components has been given a unique reference number that relates to the associated map. For example the reference number 27.001 is comprised of a town code (27 for St Bees) and a unique number (.001 for the medieval tenements). See Appendix A for a list of all components.

5.2 Medieval Components (Map D)

5.2.1. Tenements

Component 27.001

Due to the scarcity of sources for St Bees it is difficult to determine with certainty the extent of the medieval town. It is likely to have been similar to the extent of the town as shown on the 1st edition OS map of 1863.

5.2.2. Priory

Component 27.002

The site of the medieval priory, former nunnery, Norman church and graveyard, where archaeological work has demonstrated the existence of significant archaeological deposits.

5.2.3. Road Network

Component 27.003

The road network is thought to have remained unchanged since the medieval period.

5.3 **Post-medieval Components (Map E)**

5.3.1. Tenements

Component 27.005

The tenement plot in use in the medieval period continued in use during the post-medieval period. Again because of the few documentary sources for St Bees, the exact nature of the post-medieval settlement is uncertain.

5.3.2. Priory

Component 27.006

The Norman church survived until the Dissolution in the 1530's, when the lead was removed from the roof by Henry VIII's commissioners and the building, left open to the weather, and soon decayed. Nevertheless, the church continued to be used for worship and repairs were eventually started again in 1611. The church was again restored between 1855 and 1858 by Butterfield (Pevsner 1967).Landscaping of the vicarage gardens occurred in 1816 (LUAU 1996).

5.3.3. St Bees School

Component 27.007

St Bees School was founded in 1583 and the oldest surviving school buildings are of this date. These buildings may incorporate some of the stones from the old Priory buildings. The school expanded from the mid-19th century.

5.3.4. Road Network

Component 27.008

The road network remained unchanged in the post-medieval period.

6. **RECENT DEVELOPMENT (Map F)**

Recent development is defined as development that took place post 1945.

There has not been extensive redevelopment within the historic core of the town. Pockets of recent residential development and the expansion of the school may have destroyed archaeological deposits.

7. LISTED BUILDINGS (Map G)

There are a number of Listed Buildings in St Bees dating mainly to the 18th and 19th century, although the school and other buildings date to the 16th century. The Listed Buildings are represented on Map G and in Appendix C. The information used in compiling this data set is based on the listing descriptions provided by the Department of Culture Media and Sport and its predecessors.

8. THE POTENTIAL OF ST BEES

The aim of the Data Collection and Data Assessment phases of the project is to enable the identification of areas of archaeological importance within each town to inform the strategy phase of the project. The areas of archaeological importance are shown in the strategy report, part C, Map C.

8.1 Research Framework

- Further archaeological work and documentary research to determine the nature and extent of the medieval and post-medieval settlement at St Bees and to confirm or disprove the theory that the town is a medieval planned settlement.
- Further archaeological work and documentary research to establish the relationship between the village south of Pow Beck and the religious site to the north.
- Further work to establish whether the medieval settlement at St Bees had any urban characteristics.

8.2 Archaeological Preservation

Archaeological work undertaken at Priory Paddock has demonstrated that significant, waterlogged deposits exist here and the preservation of archaeological finds is good. However, no archaeological work has been undertaken within the settlement at St Bees, but archaeological work in similar towns has shown the potential for uncovering archaeological remains.

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MAPS

1st Edition OS map 1893

2nd Edition OS map 1899

APPENDIX A

Component number	Period	Type of Site	Page number
C27.001	Medieval	Tenements	10
C27.002	Medieval	Priory (Parish Church)	10
C27.003	Medieval	Street System	10
C27.005	Post-medieval	Tenements	10
C27.006	Post-medieval	Priory (Parish Church)	10
C27.007	Post-medieval	St Bees School	11
C27.008	Post-medieval	Street System	11

LIST OF COMPONENTS

APPENDIX B

SMR No.	SITE NAME	SITE TYPE	PERIOD
1180	Eaglesfield/ St Bees car park	Flint Finds	Prehistoric
1181	Eaglesfield/ St Bees Flint Finds	Flint Finds	Prehistoric
1182, 1183	St Bees Flint Finds	Flint Finds	Prehistoric
17803, 17804	St Bees Golf Course	Flint Scatter	Prehistoric
17802	Monkscroft Flint Scatters	Flint Scatter	Prehistoric
19158	St Bees	Coin Find	Roman
1193	St Bees Priory Cross	Cross (LB)	Medieval
3465	St Bees Church, Nunnery, Finds	Church, Nunnery, Finds (LB)	Medieval
6849	St Bees Priory, 'St Bees Man'	Burial	Medieval
19130	52 Main Street	Bee Boles	Post-medieval
11563	High House Reservoir	Reservoir	Unknown
11912	Row Bridge Coal Depot	Coal Shed	Unknown
11999	Outrigg Quarries	Quarry	Unknown
12000	Fleatham House Quarry	Quarry	Unknown
17834	St Bees Cropmark Site	Cropmark Site	Unknown

LIST OF SELECTED SMR ENTRIES

(LB) - Listed Building

APPENDIX C

LISTED BUILDINGS

SMR No.	REFERENCE	BUILDING TYPE	DESCRIPTION	CENTURY	GRADE
21504	NX91 SE 8/54	Farmhouse, cottage, barn	Moorleys Farmhouse to north east of How Man	1731	II
21505	NX91 SE 8/55	House and barn	Scalegill Hall	17 th	II
21506	NX91 SE 8/56	Wall	Garden walls to south and west of Scalegill Hall	19 th	П
21507	NX 90 NE 10/57	House	Gill Farmhouse	1803	II
21508	NX 90 NE 10/58	Cottage	Gill Cottage	1803	II
21509	NX 91 SE 8/59	Farmhouse, cottage & barn	How Man to south west of Howman Bridge	1732	II
21510	NX 9711 12/60	House	Grindall House	19 th	II
21511	NX 9711 12/61	Wall and gates	Wall and gates to Grindall House	Unknown	II
21512	NX 91 SE 8/62	School	St Bees School, building around quadrangle to the south west	16 th	II
21513	NX 91 SE 8/63	Walls	Railings and gate closing the west side of the quad at St Bees School	1842	П
21514	NX 91 SE 8/64	House	Abbey Farmhouse	1679	II
21515	NX 91 SE 8/65	Barn range	Barn range adjoining south end of Abbey Farmhouse	18 th	II
21516	NX 91 SE 8/66	Priory/ Parish Church	Church if St Mary and St Bega, dates from c.1120	1120	Ι
21517	NX 91 SE 8/67	Chancel	Chancel to Priory Church, St Bees School	Late 12 th	Ι
21518	NX 91 SE 8/68	Wall	Wall to west of Priory Church nave, 19 th century with medieval fragments	19 th	Ι
21519	NX 91 SE 8/69	Cross	Cross in church yard to the north of the Priory Church	10 th or 11 th	Ι
21520	NX 91 SE 8/70	Sundial	Sundial in church yard to the north east of the Priory Church Chancel	1649	П
21521	NX 91 SE 8/71	War Memorial	War Memorial in the church yard, north of lynch gate	20 th	II
21522	NX 91 SE 8/72	Lynch gate	Lynch gate to north east of priory Church chancel	20 th	II
21523	NX 91 SE 8/73	Library	Library to south east of Priory Church	1863	II
21524	NX 91 SE 8/74	Road Bridge	Pow Bridge over Pow beck	1585	II*
21525	NX 91 SE 8/75	War Memorial	War Memorial adjoining south end of west parapet to Pow Bridge	20 th	II

21526	NX 91 SE 8/76	Hall house	Manor Stead and house adjoining	16 th	II*
21527	NX 91 SE 8/77	House	16 Finkle Street	1818	II
21528	NX 91 SE 8/78	House and cottage	Mayfield and adjoining house	19 th	II
21529	NX 91 SE 8/79	Barn	Barn to north east of High House	1810	II
21530	NX 91 SE 8/80	House and cottage	Croft House, High House Road	18 th	Π
21531	NX 91 SE 8/81	Houses	Nos. 1-11 Lonsdale Terrace	19 th	П
21532	NX 91 SE 8/82	Hotel	Manor House Hotel, Main Street	18 th	Π
21533	NX 91 SE 8/83	House	52 Main Street	1870	II
21534	NX 91 SE 8/84	Walls	Forecourt walls etc to 52 Main Street	Unknown	II
21535	NX 91 SE 8/85	House	81 Main Street	1838	II
21536	NX 91 SE 8/86	House	82 Main Street	1838	II
21537	NX 91 SE 8/87	Cottage and house	102 Main Street and adjoining barn	18 th	II
21538	NX 91 SE 8/88	House	115 Main Street	18 th	II
21539	NX 91 SE 8/89	Cottage	Property adjoining south end of 125 Main Street	17 th	II
21540	NX 91 SE 8/90	House	Stone House, Main Street	172	II
21541	NX 91 SE 8/91	House	Ashley House north east of 16 Finkle Street	19 th	II
21542	NX 91 SE 8/92	Houses	1-5 Vale View	19 th	II