

CHESHIRE HISTORIC TOWNS SURVEY

Brereton

Archaeological Assessment



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

Front cover :

J Cowley, 1744 An Improved Map of Cheshire, Containing the Borough and Market Towns, with those adjoining; also its Principal Roads and Rivers
Cheshire and Chester Archives and Local Studies, PM 2/20.

BRERETON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Vince Devine & Jo Clark

1. SUMMARY

The modern settlement of Brereton is the small village known as Brereton Green. Historically the settlement was of a dispersed pattern, although it has been suggested that the village shifted in the medieval period to its present location, from a site adjacent to Brereton Hall and St Oswald's Church. It has been included in the survey as during the 14th century the right to hold a market and fair was granted to the Lord of Brereton Manor, and the holding of markets and fairs is considered to demonstrate economic features of urbanism.

1.1 Topography and Geology

The village lies in the south-east of the county on the Cheshire plain, an area of flat to gently undulating dairy farming land, at around 70m AOD. It is 3km north-east of Sandbach and 8km to the west of Congleton.

The underlying solid geology comprises Middle Keuper Marl. Above this is boulder clay and fluvio-glacial deposits of sand and gravel (Geological Survey of Great Britain 1953). The soils developed on these deposits are stagnogleys to the south, which are suited to mixed arable and grassland and are graded class 3, and brown sands to the north, which are suited to mixed arable and grassland and graded classes 2-3 (Furness 1978, 82, 116).

Brereton is situated on a major road between Warrington and Newcastle (A50), a route which has been important from at least the 18th century.

1.2 Administrative Unit

Brereton was part of Northwich hundred following the 13th century reorganisation that had shifted the focus of the hundred from Middlewich, and it was included in the Deanery of Middlewich (Dunn 1987, 11). It was originally part of Astbury parish (Ormerod, 1882, 81-92), the modern parish of Brereton being formed in 1936 from the former parishes of Brereton-cum-Smethwick and Davenport (Kelly's 1939, 60). The modern settlement is included in the Borough of Congleton.

1.4 Place Name

Brereton is first recorded in 1086 as *Bretone* meaning 'Briar farm' (Dodgson 1970, 274).

2 SOURCES

2.1 Historical

The few sources available for the study of the history of Brereton include Ormerod's *History of Cheshire* (1882), and 19th-century trade directories, for example Bagshaw's (1850).

There are a number of primary sources in the County Record Office (CRO), including a Knight's Fee of William Brereton from 1357, manorial records, Parish Registers from 1538 and leases from 1742 onwards, however, time has not allowed for their consultation.

2.2 Cartographic

Brereton is recorded on Saxton's map of 1577 and Speed's map of 1610. Burdett's county map of 1777 is the first to show an outline plan of the village but the only plan to show the township in detail prior to the Ordnance Survey First Edition 6": 1 mile map surveyed in 1873-5, is the tithe map of 1848.

2.3 Archaeological

Before the present assessment there were fifteen entries within the area of Brereton Green included in the County Sites and Monuments Record (CSMR), which are depicted on Figure 1. The present survey has generated six new records. Throughout this document the relevant reference is provided for any records that have been identified from the CSMR.

There has been no archaeological work carried out within the settlement of Brereton.

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

3.1 Prehistoric

No prehistoric sites or find spots are known from the settlement itself. There are however a small number of find spots in the surrounding area. These include flints (CSMR 2694), discovered 2km east of Brereton Green, and a Middle Bronze Age axe head (CSMR 2637/0/1) found 1km west of Brereton Green. Also of interest are two ditched enclosure sites located within close proximity to each other 1km east of Brereton Green, which are potentially of prehistoric or Roman date (CSMR 2441/0/1 and 2441/0/2).

3.2 Roman

No Roman sites or findspots are known from the settlement itself. Most notable from the surrounding area was a hoard of coins found 1km to the west at Duke's Oak Farm (CSMR 1100) in 1820, which was reputed to have contained some 507 coins, most of which were dated to the mid-3rd to early 4th centuries.

3.3 Early Medieval

No findspots or sites of early medieval date are known within a 3km radius of the settlement, and despite Brereton's entry in the Domesday Survey, the location and extent of settlement at this time is unknown.

The Domesday Survey records that:

'The same Gilbert holds BRETONE [Brereton]. Wulfgeat (Ulviet) held it. There [are] 2 hides that pays geld. The land is for 4 ploughs. In demense is 1 [plough], and 2 oxmen, and 2 villeins and 3 bordars. There [is] 1 acre of meadow. Wood 1 league long and ½ [league] wide, and a mill worth 12d. Of this land 2 of his men hold 1 hide and have 1 plough with 2 serfs, and 2 villeins and 4 bordars. T.R.E it was worth 20s., now the same. He found it waste'.

(Harris and Thacker 1987, 361).

The Domesday Book records an agricultural manor, which included arable land, meadows woodland, as well as a mill where local grain could be processed.

3.4 Medieval

3.4.1 The Manor

At Domesday, Brereton was one of the six dependencies of the Barony of Kinderton, but shortly after it was granted to the Brereton family (Richards 1973, 68). The Breretons continued to hold the manor into the late post medieval period and a comprehensive account of the Brereton's lineage is provided by Ormerod (1882, 81-89).

3.4.2 Settlement

In 1305-6 Henry son of Gilbert de Brereton was granted two acres of land, two parts of an acre and two parts of a meadow in Brereton (Ormerod 1882, 82). Another grant dating from 1431-2 listed 16 messuages, 400 acres of land, 20 of meadow, 10 of wood and 100 of heath (Ormerod 1882, 83).

Brereton Hall was constructed by Sir William Brereton in 1585 (DoE 1987, 5). It is not known whether there was an earlier medieval manor house. However, just predating the construction of Brereton Hall, a deer park (CSMR 1101/3) is depicted on Saxton's map of 1577 to the east of St Oswald's church. This may have had a hunting lodge associated with it or perhaps a manor house. Meanwhile, Ormerod (1882, 86) describes a park located to the north of the hall.

It is suggested that a possible deserted medieval settlement (CSMR 1101/0/0) is located in the vicinity of Brereton Hall and St Oswald's church (Beresford and Hurst 1971, 184). The evidence upon which this is based is an entry in the gazetteer of Beresford and Hurst in their book *Deserted Medieval Villages* (1971, 184).

Unfortunately, the gazetteer does not contain any supporting evidence for this statement. Most likely it is based upon the concept that churches are usually located within close proximity to its congregation and; since Brereton Green lies some way to the south of St Oswald's church, it might be considered logical that at some point the settlement has been translocated.

Water may have been obtained from the nearby River Croco and Sanderson's Brook, or via wells such as those shown on the Ordnance Survey Maps of 1873-5 at the National School and Brereton Hall.

3.4.3 Economy

In 1367-8 Sir William Brereton was granted a charter conferring upon him the rights to hold a market and fair at Brereton. The weekly market was to be held on a Thursday whilst the annual fair was held on the Feast of St Peter (Ormerod 1882, 82). The staging of the market appears to have been a speculative venture, whose commercial viability has been described by Crosby as a '...total failure' (1996, 49). However, the local economy was successful, as indicated by the Cheshire Mize Survey of 1405 when *Brerton* paid 79s 4d (Booth 1985), the third highest sum in the Bucklow Hundred. 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.

The mill recorded at Domesday may still have been functioning during the early 15th century as the grant of 1431-2 (see above) also recorded '...a third part of the profits of a water mill in Brereton' (Ormerod 1882, 83). There are two possible locations for this medieval mill: the first (CSMR 1111/1) is a site 0.7km north-east of Brereton Green, whilst the second is at Park Mill located 2km north and no doubt within the boundary of the former park. Additionally rights to a fishery at Brereton Mere were recorded in 1431-2 (Ormerod 1882, 83).

3.4.4 Religion

There was a chapel at Brereton at the time of Richard I (1189-1199), which was traditionally said to have been built by a Crusader knight in thanks for his safe return from the Holy Land. A chapel at Brereton was granted land by Ralph de Brereton in the reign of Henry III (1216-72) (Ormerod 1882, 82). Ormerod also records that according to Dwarris, Gilbert de Brerton, son of Ralph de Brerton, was rector of the church in the 13th century (1882, 95).

St Oswald's was rebuilt during the 15th century in Perpendicular style, and it is likely that until this rebuilding the church was constructed of timber, which is still shown in the partition which divides the nave and chancel of the present church. The Brereton family held the advowson, which they may have obtained shortly after Domesday (Richards 1973, 68).

St Oswald's was originally a chapel within Astbury parish, but during the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547) it was made the parish church of Brereton-cum-Smethwick.

3.4.5 The Surrounding Area

There are a number of medieval sites in the surrounding landscape, examples of which include a medieval moat 2km south west (CSMR 1097) and a deserted medieval village at Davenport 2.5km north-east (CSMR 1186).

3.5 Post Medieval

3.5.1 The Manor

The manor was held by the Brereton family until the early 18th century. Upon the death of the childless fifth Lord of Brereton it passed to the Holtes of Aston (Warwickshire). In 1817 an Act of Parliament enabled the dismemberment of the estate in order to service the debts of the Lord of the manor (Richard's 1977, 68).

3.5.2 Settlement

Part of Brereton Hall was converted into a school, probably during the 19th century. A Free School with a master's residence was built at Brereton in 1829 (Bagshaw 1850, 450). This school is probably the National School, School Lane shown on the Ordnance Survey First Edition map of 1873.

3.5.2 Economy

The market and fair appear to have lapsed by the post medieval period. Agriculture was the primary occupation amongst the residents of Brereton during the 19th century. In 1850 there were 29 farmers recorded, and in 1914, 38 out of the 42 trades recorded were associated with agriculture, including a corn miller (Bagshaw 1850, 449, Kelly 1914, 200). However, in 1850 there were a small number of non-agricultural trades and professions practised amongst the residents of Brereton, including a shopkeeper, a boot and shoemaker, a blacksmith, and a veterinary surgeon (Bagshaw 1850, 449).

3.5.3 Religion

Much of the church of St Oswald's medieval architecture has survived presenting 'an unusually complete late perpendicular church' (Department of the Environment 1986, 4).

Bagshaw (1850, 449) records that a small Independent Chapel and a New Methodist Chapel were built in Brereton Green, although their precise location is unrecorded. The Methodist chapel may be the 'Calvinistic Methodist' chapel on School Lane shown on the Ordnance Survey First Edition map of 1873.

3.5.4 Transport and Communication

Brereton Green is situated on a major routeway that connects Warrington and the 'Potteries'. This road was turnpiked in 1730 and is now part of the A50 (Harrison 1886, 80).

3.5.5 Population

The population in 1664 has been estimated as 375 (MacGregor 1992, 100). From 1801 onwards population data for Brereton parish is available from the Census returns (printed in Harris 1979, 208), 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	556	1901	552
1811	587	1911	529
1821	624	1921	506
1831	661	1941	469
1841	667	1951	613
1851	649	1961	817
1861	592	1971	960
1871	620	1981	1037
1881	613	1991	1065
1891	568		

3.5.6 The Surrounding Area

The surrounding area contains a number of 17th century buildings. Two cottages, The Cottage and Holly Cottage lie 1.3km south of Brereton (CSMR 1104/0/1; CSMR 1104/0/2), and Duke's Oak Farmhouse (CSMR 1102/1) 0.5km west are all Listed Grade II.

4. PLAN COMPONENTS

The settlement has been divided into 5 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 a tighter definition can only be achieved by further fieldwork.

The primary documentation for Brereton has been little studied and there has been no archaeological work carried out in the settled area. Hence any analysis of its likely history relies largely on map evidence and topographical inference. In these circumstances it is only possible to present a model for development to be tested and refined in the future.

Although a small settlement is recorded at Domesday, there is no evidence available to indicate the whereabouts of this in the early medieval period. Therefore, components commence with the medieval period.

MEDIEVAL c 1066 – 1540 (Figure 2: The Development of Brereton)

COM 1 - St Oswald's Church

COM 2 - Deer Park? Site of Deserted Village?

COM 3 - Manor House?

POST MEDIEVAL c 1873 (Figure 2: The Development of Brereton)

COM 4 - Settlement

MODERN c 2000 (Figure 2: The Development of Brereton)

COM 5 - Settlement

4.1 Medieval (Figure 2)

St. Oswald's church (**COM 1**), which was rebuilt in the 15th century, replaced an earlier structure that can be traced back through documentary sources to a foundation in at least the 13th century. There is insufficient evidence to suggest that St Oswald's church has an early medieval origin, but this should be borne in mind as a possibility to be tested against the archaeological and historical record.

Brereton Hall, the seat of the Lords of the Manor, was built in 1585. It is not known whether it had a medieval predecessor but, if it did, a likely location would be on the same site as the later Brereton Hall. It is common to find churches and manor houses located close together and this possibility is illustrated as **COM 3**. However, if instead there were a lodge associated with the deer park, where the lord could stay on hunting trips, this would be more typically located within the park rather than on the periphery. This is obviously something that would benefit from further research.

The deer park is also little understood. It is roughly outlined as **COM 2**, as an attempt to provide an approximate indication of its location and extent. However, this is based very loosely on Saxton's small scale map of 1577 and the OS First Edition of c1873. Again this is something that would benefit from further research, particularly if the park pale could be identified on the ground. Whether the creation of the park caused the displacement of the medieval settlement of Brereton is unknown but this also remains a possibility to be tested against further evidence.

The Domesday description of Brereton describes a sizeable agricultural manor, but does not record any associated features of this settlement. Medieval Brereton, as post medieval Brereton, is most likely to have had a dispersed settlement pattern. Therefore, even if the settlement were shifted as a result of the emparking of Brereton Hall, this may have involved relocating just a small number of farmsteads. Also, any settlement that was focussed upon St Oswald's church may have been transplanted as a unit to a new site at Brereton Green, or following the dispersed pattern, farmsteads may have been scattered across the surrounding area. Again this is something that requires much greater scrutiny. The location of medieval settlement is therefore unknown and has not been illustrated.

Boundaries to the south of the church partially depict what appears to have been a sub-circular enclosure. Whether this was associated with the park, church, manor house or perhaps an earlier feature is unknown and would benefit from further analysis.

4.2 Post Medieval (Figure 2)

Burdett's map of 1777 is the earliest available map to show an approximate layout of Brereton Green, and this shows just four buildings located where Newcastle Road South meets the road that leads to St Oswald's church. This suggests that the remainder of post medieval Brereton township was dotted throughout the surrounding area. Even in the 20th century Brereton Green was to be described as a 'scattered settlement' (Kelly's, 1939, 60). However, c 1873 when the OS First Edition was produced, a small settlement was clustered at the intersection of Newcastle Road South and the road leading to the church and manor house.

Of particular interest is the Bear's Head Hotel on Newcastle Road (CSMR 1103), which possesses a date stone of 1615 (Department of the Environment 1986, 4). Also included within **COM 4** are the early 18th century rectory and Dairyhouse Farm, which is immediately north of this. Located at Brereton Green are a Post Office, Calvinist Methodist chapel and the National School, which was built in 1829. The park attached to Brereton Hall, which has been very roughly outlined, is surrounded by lodges that may well indicate the boundaries of this later park.

4.3 Modern (Figure 2)

The extent of the modern settlement is outlined as **COM 5**. Only a small amount of modern development has been undertaken at Brereton, mainly along St Oswald's Crescent, which is a new development south of School Lane. A by-pass has also been constructed (A50).

5. HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

5.1 Above-Ground Remains

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the settled area of Brereton and it is not included in a Conservation Area. There are eleven Listed buildings within Brereton: Brereton Hall is Listed Grade I, St Oswald's church and the Bear's Head Hotel are Listed Grade II*, and the remainder are Grade II. The latter group includes a 17th-century cottage, a stable block and Gazebo at Brereton Hall (Department of the Environment 1986, 3-11).

Although a by-pass has been constructed, the original street layout appears to be little altered.

5.2 Below-Ground Remains

There has been no archaeological work carried out at Brereton Green, therefore the extent and survival of archaeological deposits cannot be assessed.

6. PRIORITIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

6.1 General

The study of Brereton forms part of a national research priority to examine the origins and development of medieval small towns and rural markets (Priority H5; English Heritage 1997, 49). Work at Brereton would fit into a number of these national priorities, particularly the following processes of change:

- PC6 Late Saxon to medieval
- PC7 Transition from medieval to post medieval traditions (c1300-1700AD)

6.2 Early Medieval

- Establish the location, nature and extent of settlement during the early medieval period.

6.3 Medieval

- Establish the precise location of settlement areas and date their phases of expansion and contraction.
- Establish the nature and extent of buildings on settlement plots.
- Establish the date of foundation of the medieval church, examine phases of expansion and contraction.
- Examine evidence for medieval trade and industry.
- Establish the foundation date of a manor house at Brereton.
- Establish whether there was a predecessor of Brereton Hall?
- Establish the location, foundation and boundaries of the deer park.

6.4 Post Medieval

- Establish precise location of settlement areas and date their phases of expansion and contraction.
- Establish the extent of the park and gardens of Brereton Hall.
- Examine any evidence for post medieval trade and industry.

7 SOURCES

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7.2 Maps

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8. ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Brereton and the Surrounding Area

Figure 2: The Development of Brereton

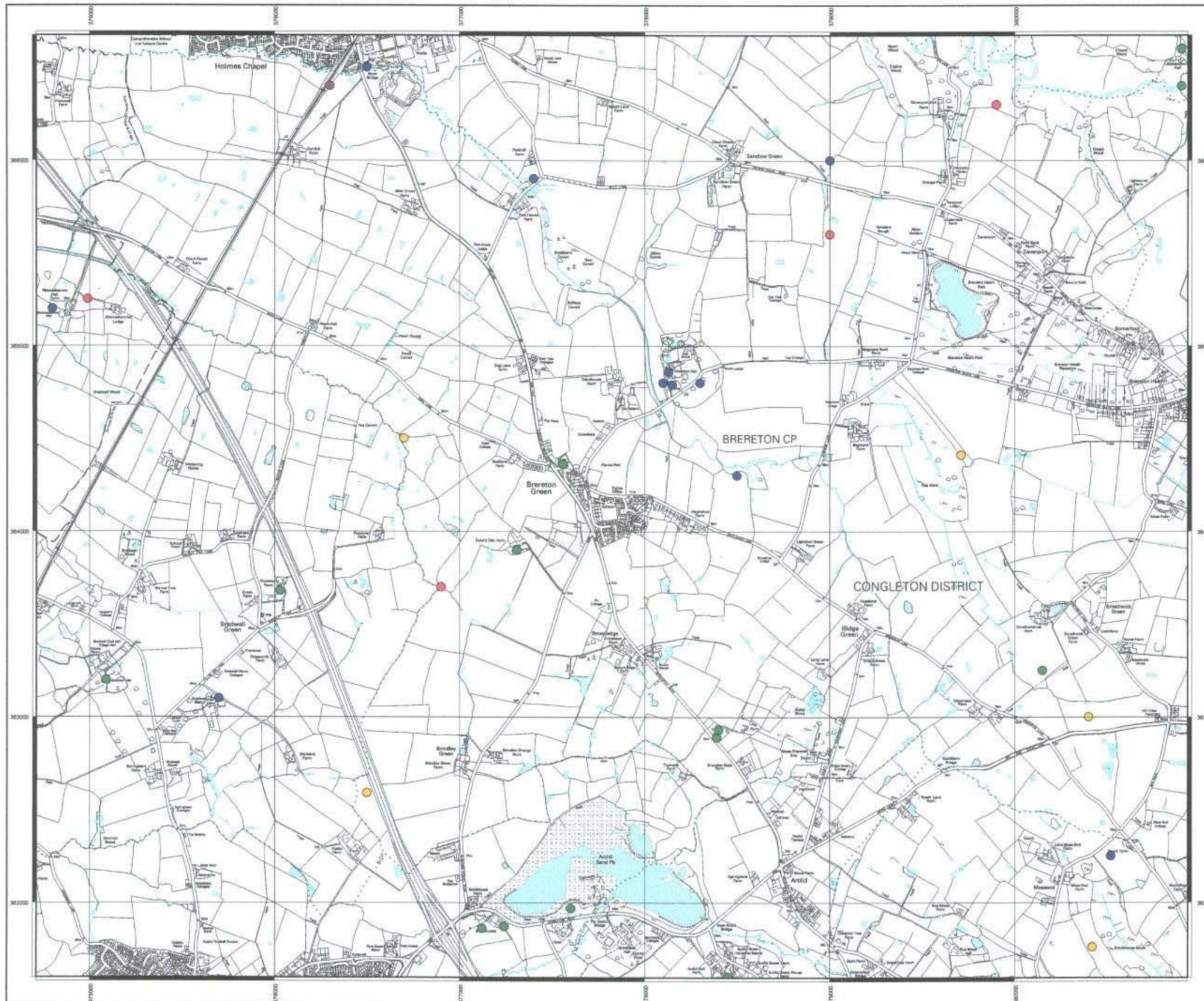


Figure 1
Brereton and
the Surrounding Area

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

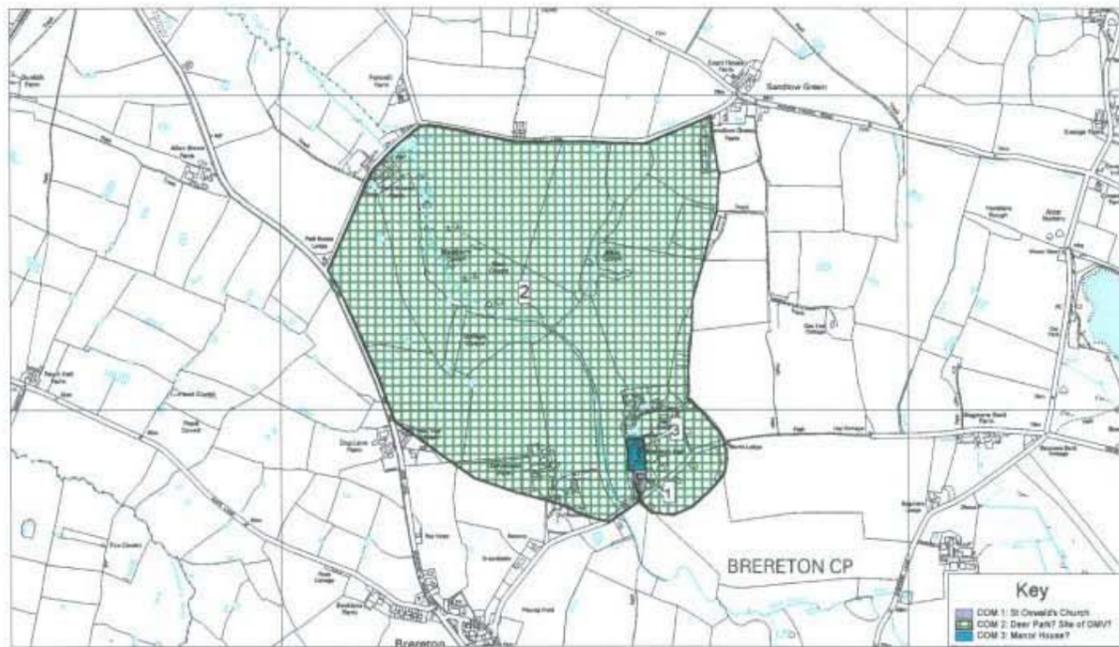
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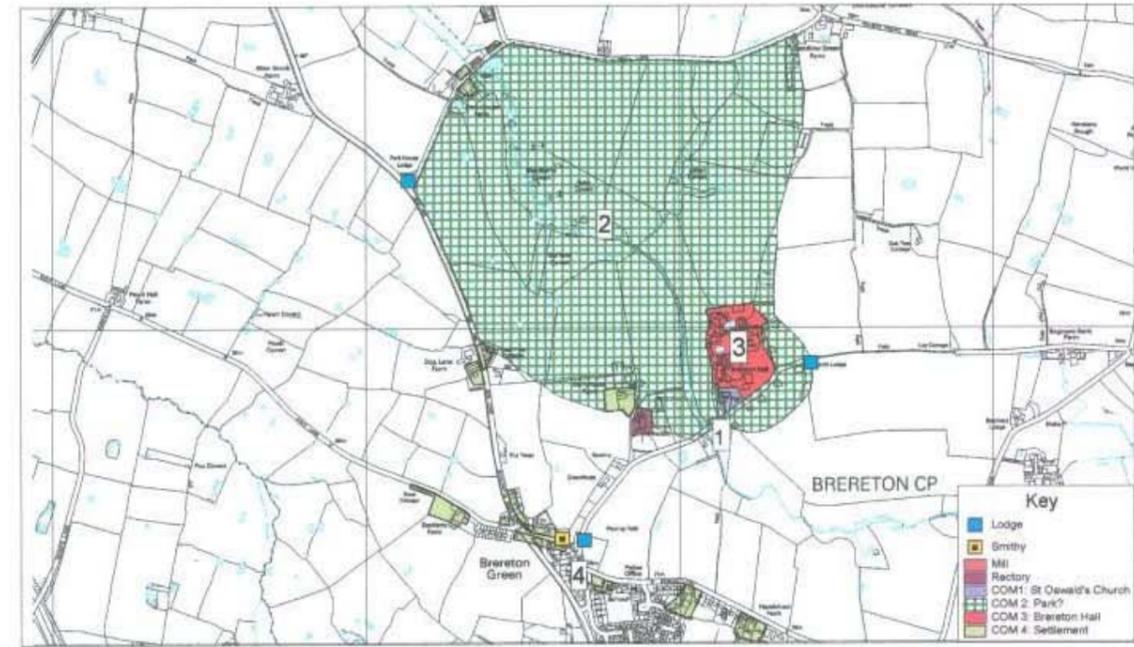
Figure 2: The Development of Brereton



Medieval

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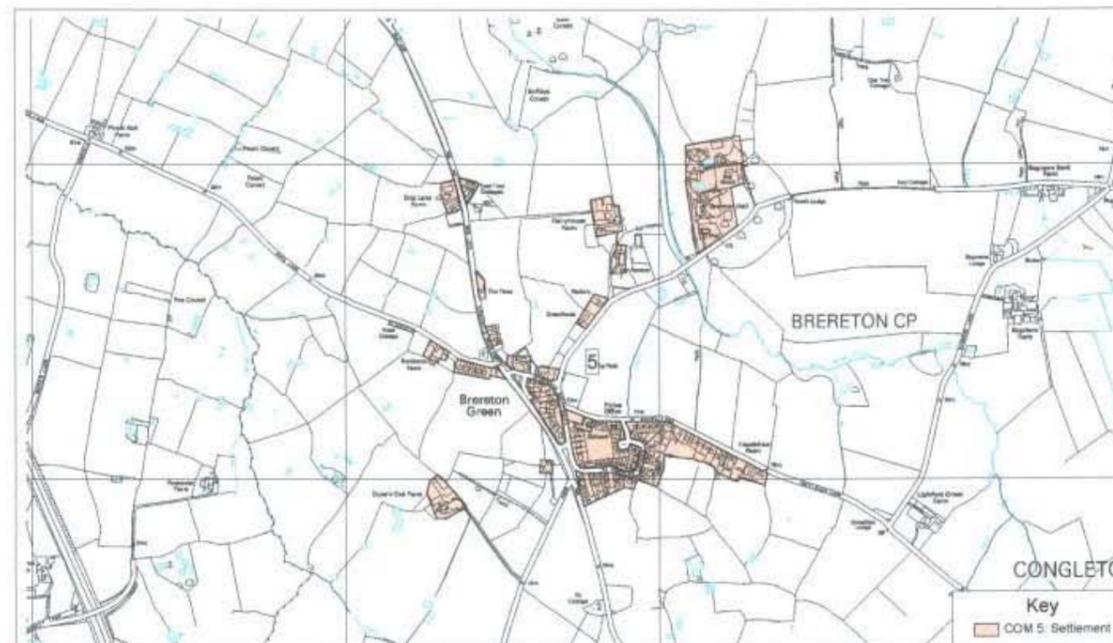
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Post Medieval c 1873

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Modern c 2000

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