

CHESHIRE HISTORIC TOWNS SURVEY

Congleton

Archaeological Assessment



2003

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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.

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CONGLETON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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1. SUMMARY

Congleton was one of Cheshire's most important medieval towns. In the late 13th century the town was granted a borough charter and a market charter, and in the Cheshire Mize of 1405 its assessment was the second only to Nantwich. From the mid-18th century Congleton gained fame as a centre for silk manufacture.

1.1 Topography and Geology

Congleton lies in east Cheshire, 8km west of the border with Staffordshire. It is 53km east of Chester and 19km north of Newcastle-under-Lyme. Congleton is situated on the southern slopes of the valley of the River Dane at around 90 - 100m AOD, falling to 80m AOD by the river. To the west is the flat Cheshire Plain and to the east are the Pennines. The Cloud, which lies just 3km east of Congleton rises to a height of 343m AOD.

The underlying solid geology comprises Middle Keuper Marl, overlying which are fluvio-glacial deposits of sand and fine gravel. To the south are deposits of glacial sand known as the Congleton Sand, which are extensively exploited for foundry sand, and to the north in the area of the river Dane, are alluvium and river terrace deposits (Geological Survey of Great Britain 1953). The foothills of the Peak District comprise sandstone of the millstone grit series, which have been extensively exploited for building and walling stone, as well as for use as millstones (Evans *et al* 1968, 266).

The surrounding soils include brown sands and podzols to the north and west of the town, and stagnogleys to the south. The brown sands and podzols are coarse textured easily-worked soils, suitable for both arable and grassland, and are graded classes 2 - 3. Stagnogleys are the most common soil type of the Cheshire Plain. They are fine textured soils, suited to grass, and are graded class 3 (Furness 1978).

The town lies at a nodal point in the road network. The 'King's Way' (A34), was a major routeway from Manchester and the North West, to Newcastle-under-Lyme and the south. This is crossed by the east-west road (A54) running from Chester and North Wales to Buxton and the Peak District. Minor roads lead west to Sandbach, Nantwich and Wrexham (A534), east to Biddulph (A527) and Leek (now unclassified but formerly more important) and north to Macclesfield (A536).

1.2 Administrative Unit

Congleton was originally part of Middlewich Hundred. The dependency of the hundred was shifted from Middlewich to Northwich in the 13th-century, which

probably occurred as part of the general reorganisation noted under Bucklow Hundred (Dodgson 1970, 184). The township lay in the ancient parish of Astbury until 1868, when it became an independent parish. It was also part of Middlewich Deanery (Dunn 1987, 13).

1.3 Place Name

The derivation of the place name is uncertain. The final element is *tun*, meaning an enclosure or farmstead but the first element may be derived from *cung*, a turning or bend of the river or *conk-hull*, meaning a steep, rounded hill. Other spelling variations include Cogeltone (1086), Congun (c 1200), Congulton (c 1262) and Congerton (1547) (Dodgson 1970, 294-5).

2 SOURCES

2.1 Historical

There are a number of useful town histories including Yates' *History of the Ancient Town and Borough of Congleton* (1820), Head's *Congleton Past and Present* (1887) and more recently Stephens' *History of Congleton* (1970) and Thompson's *Congleton, the Archaeological Potential of a Town* (1981). Useful information is also contained in Ormerod's *History of Cheshire* (1882), and the town's textile industry has been studied as part of the survey of *East Cheshire Textile Mills* (Calladine and Fricker 1993).

The County Record Office (CRO) holds deeds and other records from the 16th century onwards and an extensive list of records are still held by Congleton Borough Council, which includes material dating from the 13th century onwards. Unfortunately, time constraints have meant that these primary sources have not been examined as part of the present survey.

2.2 Cartographic

Congleton is depicted on Saxton's county map of 1577 and Speed's Cheshire map of 1610. The earliest detailed map of the town is an estate plan of 1772 (CRO DSS 3991). There is also a map of 1818, which may be a copy of a late 18th century map (Leah *et al* 1997, 95; CRO D 4552/1). The tithe map of 1845 is the first to provide a detailed plan of the township, followed by the Ordnance Survey 25":1 mile map surveyed in 1873 and the 6": 1 mile map surveyed in 1874.

2.3 Archaeological

Before the present survey there were 23 sites recorded in the town in the County Sites and Monuments Record (CSMR), which are depicted in Figure 1. Throughout this document the relevant reference is provided for any records that have been identified from the CSMR. This survey has generated 30 new records, which are predominantly 19th century industrial sites.

A small amount of archaeological work has been carried out in Congleton. In 1996 a series of evaluation trenches were excavated to the north of High Street, on either

side of the Town Hall, and 30m back from the street frontage (Earthworks Archaeological Services 1996). This revealed medieval and post medieval deposits 500 – 700mm deep, below c 500mm of demolition material. The medieval deposits were rich in finds, suggesting medieval buildings were located nearby. A small amount of industrial waste was also recovered, which may indicate that iron smelting was carried out in the vicinity during the medieval period. Thereafter, there is evidence of continuous activity, although the earliest evidence of buildings came in the form of brick and stone-packed post holes, potentially timber structures of 18th to 19th century date.

Beneath the medieval layers, deposits of a probable prehistoric date, (including at least one pit) were discovered at around 800mm - 1.3m below the modern ground surface. No pottery was recovered, but one feature did contain a flint end scraper of probable Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age date.

Subsequent watching briefs carried out at the site located a ditch c 2m wide and 600mm deep. Its date could not be ascertained but the presence of a dark, possibly organically rich deposit at its base suggested potential recovery of palaeoenvironmental information (Earthworks Archaeological Services 1998a, 1998b)

In October 1999, a watching brief was carried out by Earthworks Archaeological Services to the rear of 2 Swan Bank. This revealed features and finds of 18th century date below which earlier remains potentially survive.

An archaeological evaluation was conducted at Roldane Mill in 2000 by Liverpool Museums Field Archaeology Unit. An assessment prior to the evaluation had suggested that a medieval chapel and water powered corn mill were located within the area of proposed development, as was the oldest silk mill in Congleton, known as the 'Old Mill'. Unfortunately, no evidence of the chapel could be found, and the medieval mill appears to have been destroyed by the construction of the Old Mill in the 1750s. The aim to locate the wheel pit of the Old Mill was also unsuccessful.

The most recent work carried out in the town was an archaeological watching brief undertaken in November 2000 by AAA Archaeological Advisors at 26 Howey Lane, (AAA Archaeological Advisors 2000) and an evaluation carried out in August 2001 by Marches Archaeology at 8-14 Moody Street (Marches Archaeology 2001) However, no pre-19th century archaeological features were identified at either of these sites.

3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

3.1 Prehistoric

Prehistoric activity is well-attested in the Congleton area. The Bridestones Neolithic chambered cairn (CSMR 154) lies at the southern end of the Cloud at c 270m AOD, 3km east of the town.

A number of prehistoric finds have been discovered in the immediate area, including a polished stone axe has been found at Buglawton 1.5km north-west of the town centre (CSMR 156) and a Bronze Age flat axe and an unfinished stone axe hammer

were found 1km to the south west by Padsbridge Farm (CSMR 1157/0/2; CSMR 1158). Within the town a Late Bronze Age hoard, comprising two spears, two spear shaft ferrules and a socketed axe, was found in New Street on the south-east edge of the town. This stylistically dates to the late Bronze Age Ewart Park phase (9th-8th centuries BC) (CSMR 147/1/1).

3.2 Roman

Coins have been found at three locations close to the town: immediately to the south (CSMR 160), to the south-east in the area of Bromley Farm (CSMR 159) and to the north (CSMR 161). Further afield a hoard of four silver spoons of the 4th century, one with a Chi-Rho symbol (the first letters of the Greek *Christos*, meaning Christ), have been found over the county boundary, at Whitemoor Farm, Staffordshire 3km southeast of the town, and a probable Roman camp has been located at Bent Farm, 2.5km southwest of the town, in Newbold Astbury parish (CSMR 1161/1).

Evidence of Roman activity in Congleton itself is confined to a possible coin hoard, consisting of six or seven small bronze coins and a large bronze of Commodus. These were found in 1859 in a garden on Howey Lane on the fringes of Congleton (Watkin 1886, 311; CSMR 160). Also a coin of Constantine I was found c 1910-15 in the centre of Congleton (CSMR 161).

3.3 Early Medieval

A small settlement is recorded at Domesday but the exact location of early Congleton is unknown.

The Domesday Survey records that:

The same Bigot holds Cogeltone. Godwin held it. There [is] 1 hide that pays geld. The land is for 4 ploughs. There are two [ploughs] with 2 villeins and 4 bordars. There [is] wood 1 league long and 1 wide and 2 hays there. It was waste and he found it so. Now it is worth 4s.

(Harris and Thacker (eds) 1987, 360)

Bigot who held Congleton in 1086 also owned extensive estates in Cheshire (Harris and Thacker (eds), 1987, 313). It was presumably laid waste in the aftermath of the rebellion of 1069-70 and had perhaps only partially recovered by 1086 as there is said to be sufficient land for 4 ploughs but only two in operation. Astbury, which is 2km south-west of Congleton, was the most important centre for the area, valued at 20s at Domesday and 8s in 1086. There was also a priest at Domesday, indicating that Astbury was already a parochial centre for the surrounding area.

3.4 Medieval

3.4.1 The Manor

Congleton descended with Bigot's other Cheshire estates as part of the Aldford and then the Arderne fee. By 1238 the Arderne fee was in the hands of Walkelyn

Arderne, who was active in the service of the crown and in 1254 was referred to as a marshall of the king's household (Stephens (ed) 1970, 23). He was active in the foundation of towns, and in 1254 he received royal grants to hold a market and fair at Aldford and (Nether) Alderley, as well as Elford (Staffs) and Normanby (Lincs). There is no evidence that he did the same at Congleton, although given his obvious interest it must remain a possibility that he at least encouraged some form of trading in the settlement.

Around 1270 Congleton passed to Henry de Lacy, Baron of Halton and later Earl of Lincoln. Subsequently the town formed part of the Barony of Halton and passed by marriage from the de Lacy family to the Duchy of Lancaster and then to the crown (ibid, 23-7).

The town was dominated by a small number of families who tended to hold the municipal offices, notably the Moretons and the Yates in the 14th to 15th centuries and the Greens in the 15th century (ibid, 39-41).

3.4.2 Settlement

Henry de Lacy conferred Congleton with a borough charter some time between 1272 and 1275. The burgesses were allowed to form a merchant guild, to elect their own officials and they were granted freedom from tolls elsewhere in the country. They were also allowed to elect their own mayor and other officials, but had to grind their corn at the lord's mill in Congleton. The newly-founded borough appears to have thrived - by the time of the death of Henry de Lacy in 1311 there were 80 burgages and the town was worth £15 4s a year (Stephens (ed) 1970, 29).

The town's bridge is first mentioned in 1407 when it is documented that the stone bridge was undergoing repairs (Thompson 1981, 7). It is likely that there was a crossing located here from a much earlier date. There was also a ford known as Strongford (iuxta Dane), located upstream from the town bridge, mentioned from 1443 onwards (Thompson 1981, 7).

A moot hall (CSMR 164/0/1) probably an early town hall, is documented in 1425-6 as being in need of repair and an *aula placitorum* (hall of pleas), which is recorded in 1427-8 is presumably the same building. By 1476 the Moot Hall had been replaced by a large, two-storey building with five shops and a prison at road level and a town hall above (Thompson 1981, 6).

The town's water was supplied by the river Dane and a number of wells. Three wells are known: the Stockpole, the Lower Well, and the Well at Lawn Street End. Concerns for health are shown by ordinances forbidding the washing and rinsing of clothes, the watering of horses and the washing of fresh meat in the wells and the laying of calf and sheep skins in the Dane between the mills and the bridge (Thompson 1981, 7).

3.4.3 Economy

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. Despite the setbacks experienced by most of the country in the 14th century (see 3.4.3.5), by 1405 Congleton was the most important town in East Cheshire and this is demonstrated by the Cheshire Mize (taxation) of 1405, from which Chester was excluded. The largest sum was paid by Nantwich (£7 3s 0d) followed by Congleton (£4 53s 4d) (Booth 1985).

Agriculture was an important part of the town's economy. References to agriculture are contained in the borough charter, which granted burgesses the right of common pasture for their animals in the fields of Congleton and of taking turves and peat. Remains of the once open fields are shown on the map of 1818, which shows field boundaries with a distinctive reverse S-shape curve that are typical of enclosed medieval ridge and furrow..

The town woods were located on the north side of the river Dane, in the area of the town park. South-east of the town was Congleton moss, which was a valuable source of peat.

3.4.3.1 Market and Fairs

Henry de Lacy obtained permission in 1282 for a weekly market to be held on a Saturday and two annual fairs (Letters 2002). These were worth 10s in 1295-6 and by 1304-5 had increased in value to £1 10s. In 1430 Henry VI granted a licence for a further annual fair (Stephens (ed) 1970, 33). Also, of significance is the fact that the market was held on a Saturday, which tends to indicate a more important urban settlement (Dyer 1994, 288).

A town or market cross was in existence by 1385 (Stephens (ed) 1970, 20) and was replaced on a number of occasions. Fragments of these crosses are now preserved in Congleton Park and in the grounds of The Parsonage, Buglawton (CSMR 164/0/12).

3.4.3.2 Trade

Merchants were prominent in the life of the borough and many members of influential families had mercantile dealings. For example in the mid-15th century members of the Green family were described as mercers (probably dealers in fine textiles) and drapers (dealers in woollen cloths) (Stephens (ed) 1970, 40).

References to other occupations include a glover, weaver, carpenter, barker (tanner), as well as butchers, bakers and innkeepers (Stephens (ed) 1970, 41). There was also a fulling mill on the river Dane by the 14th century, which demonstrates that cloth was made in the town at this time. When this mill was first constructed is uncertain but it was worth £2 6s 8d in 1362-3. However, it fails to appear in the manorial records of 1369-70, which suggest that it had fallen into disuse soon after (Stephens (ed) 1970, 34). Another local industry was bell-making, orders of which survive from the late 15th century (ibid, 41).

An important source of income was quarrying for millstones from a quarry called 'Milstonbergh' in Congleton Wood and some of the stones were sent far afield. For example, two of the best millstones were ordered to be sent to the castle at Halton in 1378-9. The quarry was let out by the lord of the manor and was worth £2 2s a year by the end of the 14th century (ibid, 33).

3.4.3.3 Corn Mills

A corn mill (CSMR 164/0/2) is mentioned in the de Lacy accounts from 1294 onwards. The complex included a mill pool and a dam and connected with it were a bakehouse and 'meldhall', mentioned in 1361 (Stephens (ed) 1970, 31-2).). It was rebuilt after the flood of 1451 that devastated the town, and may have been moved at this time to the site described as the 'Old Corn Mill' on the OS First Edition 6": 1 mile map surveyed in 1874. Yates (1820, 19) states that 'at this period the King's mills were in a state of decay, and the burgesses of Congleton...petitioned Henry the sixth for permission to cut a new channel for the river, and also to remove the mills to the spot where they now stand'. A weir on the river, now of stone but said to have originally been of timber (Congleton Civic Society undated), may belong to the same period of replanning. It has been suggested that there may have been a second medieval corn mill in Congleton situated upon the Howty Brook (CSMR 164/0/3).

3.4.3.4 Decline

By the late 14th century, England had endured a number of hardships, including the effects of famine, the Black Death and numerous other pestilences. This had an effect on the country's economy, not least that of Congleton. Hence the lord's mill, valued at £8 pa in 1295-6, was leased for £10 6s 8d in 1356-7 and £12 in 1361-2 but by 1378-9 it was valued at only £6 13s 4d; and the lease of the millstone quarry was said to be worth nothing in 1475-6 and only 3s 4d in 1477-8. The value of the fair and market also declined from the mid-14th century onwards (10s in 1295-6 and £1 10s in 1305-6, but leased for only £1 in 1356-7) (ibid, 33). Thereafter, they were let with other properties within the borough but their value continued to decline (Stephens (ed) 1970, 32).

3.4.4 Religion

Congleton was dependent upon the parish church of Astbury until 1868. However, there were two chapels in the town: the Upper or Higher Chapel (CSMR 164/1) lay on Chapel Street at the northern end of the town, and the Lower Chapel (CSMR 164/3) was located at the river crossing to the north of the town. The date of foundation for both chapels is uncertain, although there is reference to a 'chapel of Congleton' by 1379 and there are frequent mentions of both chapels in the early 15th century (Thompson 1981, 7).

3.4.5 The Surrounding Area

There are a large number of medieval sites in the surrounding area. These include the cropmark of a medieval moat 3km west of the town centre (CSMR 1151), a

medieval moat at Astbury 1.5km southwest , and a deserted medieval village at Newbold Astbury, 2km to the south (CSMR 1185).

3.5 Post Medieval

3.5.1 The Manor

In the reign of Charles I, the manor of Congleton was granted out in fee farm (the chief residents of the borough paid the Exchequer a fixed sum for the privilege of collecting and retaining the borough's revenues). Having passed through various hands, the manor was held by Sir Charles Shakerley in the late 19th century (Ormerod 1882, 36).

3.5.2 Settlement

Congleton suffered from further visitations of the plague in 1603-4 and 1641, but it recovered and towards the end of the 17th century it was described as 'a large and noted town' (Stephens (ed) 1970, 48).

By 1584 a grammar school had been founded adjacent to the Higher Chapel and the corporation was responsible for its maintenance. No visible remains of this survive today (CSMR 164/2). References in 1588 and 1600 to the old schoolhouse imply that it was of some antiquity and Head (1887, 235) states that 'it is assumed to have been founded in the 15th century'. A new grammar school was built by the corporation in 1814, which closed in 1901. In the early 19th century, Sunday schools were the chief medium of education for the children of the poor. By 1840, however, at least two public day schools had been established and others soon followed (Stephens (ed) 1970, 272-92).

The old 15th-century timber-framed town hall was replaced in 1804-5 by a new one of brick and stone, and in 1823 an assembly room with market hall beneath were added. This building was in turn replaced by E W Godwin's town hall of 1864-6 (DoE 1975,12).

3.5.3 Economy

Agriculture continued to have an important role in the town's economy and a number of leading citizens were farmers. However, it was becoming more common for Congleton's tradesmen to engage in agriculture on a part time basis (Stephens, 1970, 53-4).

3.5.3.1 Trades

There were a number of leather trades carried out in Congleton, with tanners, glovers, shoemakers and skimmers all featuring in the borough records. Of the 75 people whose trades were recorded in the 1660 poll tax, 40 worked with leather. The town was particularly noted for 'Congleton points', leather laces with metal tags at the ends. Other 17th century trades include mercers, drapers, tailors, weavers and smiths (Stephens (ed) 1970, 55-6), and felt hat making (Phillips and Smith 1994,

54, 98). Bell founding continued to be carried out in the town and by the early 17th century the Lower Chapel was used as a bell foundry. Also a forge (later the site of Forge Mill), is shown north-west of the town on the estate map of 1772, which may have been in operation from an earlier date (ibid 55).

3.5.3.2 Textile Industry

In the mid-18th century Congleton was transformed into a textile manufacturing town. The original industry, and always the dominant one, was the manufacture of silk. The opening of the Old Mill in 1753 by Nathaniel Pattison and John Clayton saw the introduction of water-powered silk throwing in the town. Pattison and Clayton were 'among the first exponents of the factory system and they were among the initiators of the first factory and industrial-based economy in the world' (Calladine and Fricker 1993, 10). By 1771 the mill employed over 600 people and dominated employment in the town (Stephens (ed) 1970, 139).

Despite fluctuations in its fortunes the silk industry continued to dominate the town. In the 1830s Congleton produced more silk than its larger neighbour, Macclesfield, and by 1850 there were over 50 silk mills in the town, employing around a third of the population (Ashmore 1982, 35). Mills were sited throughout the town, not only on the River Dane but also on minor streams, such as the Howty Brook. Buglawton became an industrial suburb in its own right and by 1820 it had become the local centre for cotton production.

Ribbon weaving is recorded from 1754 and by 1860 there were twelve firms specialising in this industry (Ashmore 1982, 35). Cotton spinning is recorded from 1784 and by 1817 there were five cotton factories in the town (Stephens (ed) 1970, 142). However, the demand for textiles was volatile and unpredictable. In 1832 Congleton and Buglawton had 45 factories employing 2,219 people, but there were still 1,700 people unemployed and soon after, eighteen mills were reported to be idle (Stephens 1970, 143).

Many industrial sites have changed use and some of these changes can be identified from the OS First and Second Edition maps. For example, the Vale Mill is recorded as a silk mill in 1873 but had been given over to fustian cutting by 1898, and the Albert Works, which was an iron foundry in 1873 had also been given over to fustian cutting by 1898.

3.5.4 Religion

The Lower Chapel was still in use in 1549 but it had fallen into disuse by 1566, when it was described as standing at the north end of the bridge and forming part of the bridge defences. By the 17th century it was used as a municipal storehouse and in 1630 it was let to bell founders. Then in the 18th century it was used as a poorhouse before finally being demolished in 1814 (Stephens (ed) 1970, 55; Head 1887, 165-6).

In the 16th century, Camden described the Upper Chapel as being built of wood apart from the chancel and the 'little tower', which were presumably of stone (Gibson 1722, 676). Two aisles and a porch were added in 1614 (Stephens (ed) 1970, 216). The present church of St Peter was built in brick in 1740-2, with a stone tower added

in 1786 (Pevsner and Hubbard 1971, 182). Gastrell states that there were 'no wardens nor Parochial rights' at Congleton but burial rights were granted in 1687 (Gastrell 1987, 26). St Peter's remained dependent upon Astbury until 1868, when it became an independent parish church.

St Peter's was the only Anglican church in the town until the mid-19th century when a flurry of church building saw the building of St James' in West Street, St Stephen's in Brook Street and St John's, Buglawton. The Roman Catholic church of St Mary's, on West Road, was built in 1826.

Congleton emerged as a centre of religious dissent and by 1811 Methodism was clearly the dominant dissenting sect in the town (Stephens (ed) 1970, 201). By 1760 several members of the Manchester Methodist Circuit were from Congleton and all were employed in the silk industry. A Methodist chapel was built on Wagg Street c 1766 (Calladine and Fricker 1993, 149).

3.5.5 Population

Congleton's population in 1664 has been estimated as 1,900 (MacGregor 1992). From 1801 onwards population data is available from Census returns (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	3861	1901	10707
1811	4616	1911	11309
1821	6405	1921	11762
1831	9352	1931	12885
1841	9222	1951	15502
1851	10520	1961	16823
1861	12344	1971	20341
1871	11344	1981	23853
1881	11116	1991	25241
1891	10744		

3.5.6 Transport and Communications

Communications improved with the turnpiking of the roads into Congleton from the 1760s onwards. The Congleton to Astbury road was diverted along West Street, rather than continuing along Wagg Street as it had done previously, and was turnpiked in 1781.

The Trent and Mersey Canal opened in 1777 passing c 8km to the south of the town at Lawton, where a wharf was built to which Congleton carriers ran regular trips. The canal brought obvious benefits to the town, not least a reduction in the price of coal. However, it was not until 1831, with the opening of the Macclesfield Canal, that Congleton had its own access to the canal system via a wharf at Hightown, 1km from the town centre. Unfortunately, the canal was not a success as it had arrived too late, and was soon over taken by the North Staffordshire Railway Company which, after an abortive start in 1837, was finally built in 1848 with connections to Macclesfield, Stoke, Stone, Stafford and Birmingham (Stephens (ed) 134-5).

3.5.7 The Surrounding Area

Scattered throughout the surrounding area are a number of Grade II, 17th-century timber framed buildings. These include Brook Farmhouse, 2.5km to the south of central Congleton (CSMR 1164/1) and Crossley Hall Farm manor house, 3km north-east of Congleton (CSMR 146/1/2). Also of interest, is a 16th-century plague stone at Astbury Marsh, which is Listed Grade II and sited 2km south-west of Congleton (CSMR 1159). It was used to wash and exchange money during the plague.

4. PLAN COMPONENTS

The town has been divided into 24 components (prefixed by **COM**). These have been tentatively sub-divided by period, although there is need for further work to define the extent and date of these components more closely. Many components 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 a general area can be approximately delineated and a tighter definition can only be achieved by further fieldwork. The origins, nature, form and development of the town are incompletely understood. However, a broad outline of its development can be attempted, to be tested and refined as further work is carried out.

Although a small settlement is documented at Domesday, the location and extent of this is unknown and consequently it is not possible to map early medieval Congleton. Plan components therefore commence with the medieval period.

The post medieval settlement, as defined c 1874 from the OS First Edition 6": 1 mile map, has been planned as just one component since it would be impossible to identify each individual mill and row of terraces as separate plan components.

MEDIEVAL CONGLETON (c 1066 - 1540) (Figure 2)

- COM 1** - Town Bridge/Lower Chapel
- COM 2** - Town Mill
- COM 3** - Higher Chapel/ St Peter's Church
- COM 4** - Tenements, west of Mill Street
- COM 5** - Tenements, west of Swan Bank/ Mill Street
- COM 6** - Tenements, west of Wagg Street
- COM 7** - ? Burgage Plots, south of High Street
- COM 8** - ? Burgage Plots, south of High Street, west of Moody Street
- COM 9** - ? Burgage Plots, south of Lawton Street
- COM 10** - ? Burgage Plots, north of Lawton Street
- COM 11** - ? Burgage Plots, north of High Street
- COM 12** - Tenements, east of Mill Street
- COM 13** - Tenements, east of Mill Street
- COM 14** - Tenements, north of West Street
- COM 15** - Tenements, south of West Street
- COM 16** - Tenements, west of Moody Street and east of Wagg Street
- COM 17** - Tenements, north of Chapel Street
- COM 18** - Tenements, west of Canal Street

COM 19 - The Grammar School

COM 20 - Market Place?

COM 21 - Market Place?

COM 22 - Market Place?

POST MEDIEVAL CONGLETON c 1874 (Figure 2)

COM 23 - Settlement

MODERN CONGLETON c 2000 (Figure 2)

COM 24 - Settlement

4.1 Medieval (Figure 2)

The medieval town has been divided into 22 components, comprising the bridge and the Lower Chapel (**COM 1**), the town mill (**COM 2**), the Upper Chapel (**COM 3**), settlement areas (**COMs 4-18**), the Grammar School (**COM 19**) and market areas (**COMs 20-22**).

Although the earliest reference to the town bridge (**COM 1**) dates back to 1407 when the stone bridge was repaired, it is likely that there has been a bridge crossing the river at this point since a much earlier date, perhaps replacing an earlier ford or ferry. From at least 1413, the Lower Chapel is known to have been closely associated with the bridge but excavations carried out in 2000 at the Roldane Mill complex, failed to locate the site of this.

Reference is made to the lord's mill at Congleton at the time of the granting of the borough charter (1272-5) (Head 1887, 34). It was rebuilt after the flood of 1451 and may have been moved at this time to the site described as the 'Old Corn Mill' on the OS First Edition map of 1874 (**COM 2**). However, the work carried out at the Roldane Mill complex in 2000 revealed that the construction of the Old Mill in 1753 had destroyed the remains of the medieval mill.

The Upper Chapel or Higher Chapel, now the site of St Peter's Church (**COM 3**) was in existence by 1418, although it may have been founded much earlier. St Peter's church, which was built c 1740, remained dependent upon the parish church at Astbury until the mid-19th century.

Within **COMs 4, 5 and 6**, tenements have been identified that appear to have medieval characteristics: buildings are clustered along the street frontages, and surviving boundaries, which run at right angles to the street, appear to define what were once long, narrow tenement plots. This pattern survives best in **COM 6**. By 1874, **COM 5** contained a number of inns, and, considering its location on the main north-south route through the town and its close proximity to a potential market area (see **COM 20**), this use may have much earlier origins. It is not clear when this area of Congleton was first developed. Together **COMs 4, 5 and 6** have a regular plan, which is suggestive of a formal medieval origin, but this area appears to be outside the medieval Borough, which potentially lies to the east along High Street (**COMs 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11**).

The regular plan of components **7-11**, and their location at the commercial heart of the town, suggests that this may be the area of the medieval borough laid out following the granting of a borough charter c 1272. **COM 7** contains tenements that front onto High Street. The width of these properties is small (4-8m), which perhaps indicates the pressure for space in this area, causing tenements to be sub-divided in order to maximise access to the street frontage. **COM 8** contains long, narrow tenements that front onto the south side of High Street, as does **COM 9** to the south of Lawton Street. To the north of Lawton Street, **COM 10** contains long, narrow tenement plots, and the King's Arms, a 17th century building although much altered, lies towards the west end of this component. Tenement plots in **COM 11** are also long and narrow, and the town hall lies towards the eastern end of the area. It is not known whether the present Town Hall stands on the site of the medieval Moot Hall.

COM 12 is an area of narrow tenements north of High Street and east of Mill Street. It is difficult to discern any common plot width. Lengths are c 20-30m but are probably governed by the sinuous course of the Howty Brook (now culverted) rather than any standardised measure. To the north of **COM 12** is **COM 13**, which runs north along Mill Street to the Town Bridge. Here the settlement pattern is irregular, although tenements do front onto Mill Street and run at right angles back to the Howty Brook.

COM 14 and **COM 15**, to the north and south respectively of West Street, contain tenements of irregular size. From the 18th century onwards this area was developed with large houses, which may mask the earlier settlement plan. However, there is insufficient evidence to determine whether this area was developed during the medieval period or later.

COM 16 lies to the south of **COM 7**, west of Wagg Street and east of Moody Street. Here settlement is secondary to that of **COM 7**, and while it may have been developed during the medieval period, it may also have been a product of post medieval settlement. This can only be resolved as new evidence is discovered. Of those tenements fronting onto Wagg Street, plot size varies with smaller properties clustered towards the commercial core at the northern end of the street, and larger properties to the south. A Wesleyan Methodist Chapel was built here in 1766 and by 1873 there were silk mills utilising the water of the Howty Brook. Properties fronting onto Moody Hall are widely spaced, and not typically laid out. However, this later layout of wealthy industrialists' houses (notably Moody Hall, a fine Georgian House built by the Reade family, leading Congleton silk manufacturers, in 1777) may mask underlying medieval structures. The settlement pattern is similar to that of **COM 17**, located north of Chapel Street where properties of diverse sizes front onto Moody Street and Chapel Street and are located away from the town's main market areas. The extent to which this area was developed in the medieval period is unknown but its location adjacent to the Higher Chapel was no doubt of importance.

COM 18 is an area of diverse properties that front onto Chapel Street and Canal Street (formerly Dog Lane) and are situated away from the main market areas. The extent to which this area was built up during the medieval period is uncertain but as for **COM 17**, its close proximity to the Higher Chapel may have been of importance.

A Grammar school (**COM 19**) is thought to have been founded in the 15th century, on a site adjacent to the Higher Chapel. Nothing of the school survives above ground.

Three potential market areas have been identified in Congleton: **COMs 20-22**. Both **COMs 20** and **22** are triangular components, located at nodal points in the road network. **COM 20** is located at the junction of the main north-south (Mill Street/Wagg Street) and east-west (West Street/High Street) roads. This became in-filled, with properties fronting principally onto Duke Street (formerly Duck Street) and Swan Bank (formerly Clay Bank). **COM 22** is situated where the Leek/Biddulph road (Canal Street, formerly Dog Lane), meets the High Street. It was later in-filled with properties fronting onto High Street/Lawton Street, Albert Place/Canal Street and Colehill Bank. When these areas were in-filled, and when or if they were used as market areas, is unknown.

The High Street widens noticeably between Moody Street and Kinsey Street, which is a typical characteristic of a medieval street market place (**COM 21**). It may have been deliberately laid out when the Borough was established in the late 13th century. 'Le market stede' is recorded in 1386, however which road it refers to is unclear and since 'High Street' is not recorded until 1660, it may well have been the medieval name for this street (Dodgson 1970, 295). Also a market cross is shown at the west end of High Street on the 1772 Estate Map.

4.2 Post Medieval (Figure 2)

The plan of early post medieval Congleton is not known, as there are no surviving maps from this period that provide a complete plan of the town. Instead what has been identified is the extent of settlement and industry c1874 as depicted by the OS First Edition 6": 1 mile map (**COM 23**).

Any increase in population during the post medieval period is likely to have resulted in an increased density of settlement in already occupied areas. Away from the old town, however, there would appear to be some settlement on common land by the western edge of West Heath (as depicted on the estate plan of 1772). This area is marked as Crossledge Hill on the 1874 Ordnance Survey map, and it may have been subject to squatter settlement from the 16th century onwards, as there are references to slum dwellings at Crossledge (Stephens [ed] 1970, 45). *Groslach forge* is marked on the 1772 Estate Map east of Forge Wood and adjacent are pools called *Big Pool* and *Long Pool* and fields named *Big Smithy Meadow* and *Little Smithy Meadow*. This later became the site of The Forge silk mill.

The introduction of the first silk mill in the town in 1753 saw the commencement of an age of burgeoning prosperity and expansion. Mills were situated not just along the River Dane but also its tributary streams and there was a spill over of manufacturing into the surrounding areas, particularly Buglawton. Silk mills predominate, although soon afterwards some were converted to other uses, especially fustian cutting. There was a fourfold increase in the population between 1801 and 1861, and worker's housing became interspersed with mills. Development occurred in Buglawton township, comprising mills by the River Dane and the Daneinshaw Brook, terraced housing, and the construction of the church of St John

the Evangelist, built to serve the new community. Development also occurred along the road to Buglawton. There is an area of predominantly terraced housing to the east of Willow Street, interspersed with small silk mills, St Stephen's Church and Brunswick Street Wharf.

In the West Heath area expansion comprised a mixture of wealthier housing and short lengths of terrace houses. In the West Road/West Street area there was a mixture of terraced housing and mills, and by 1874 St James' church and a school had been built to serve the new community. In the area to the west of the town bridge were a number of mills situated along the river Dane and interspersed with terraced housing, especially around Antrobus Street. West of the town bridge and in the vicinity of the Howty Brook are a number of industrial sites, including Brook Mills, which were silk mills dating from 1785 and 'the largest surviving complex of silk mills in Congleton' (DoE 1975). Also located in this area are the Gas Works, Victoria Street, Market Street and the Market Square constructed between the tithe map of 1845 and the OS First Edition map of 1874.

An area of development to the south-east of Congleton was located in the vicinity of Park Lane and Canal Road, and comprised large houses, silk mills situated beside minor water courses and areas of terraced houses. To the south, development comprised mills situated along the Howty Brook and other watercourses, terraced houses and a vicarage for St Peter's Church.

4.3 Modern (Figure 2)

The modern township of Congleton (**COM 24**) has expanded beyond all recognition. Housing estates have spread in all directions, creating a large conurbation that includes Buglawton to the northeast, Mossley to the southeast and West Heath to the west.

5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL POTENTIAL

5.1 Above-Ground Remains

Congleton's historic core is largely included in two designated Conservation Areas. The first includes settlement along West Street and Swan Bank, while the second focuses along High Street and the environs of the church of St Peter. However, this does exclude the area of modern development that has occurred along Bridge Street and part of the High Street. Within modern Congleton there are 119 Listed buildings. None are Grade I, two are Grade II*: the Town Hall and a pair of mid-18th century wrought iron gates at 61 West Street, and the remainder are Listed Grade II. Of particular note are a number of half-timbered inns of 17th century date, particularly the Lion and Swan and the King's Arms, and Georgian buildings along West Street and Moody Street (Pevsner and Hubbard 1971, 184). Many mill sites survive, although their original use has long since been changed and their workings removed, for example, Brook Mill which is Listed Grade II. However, the Listing dates from 1975 with some spot listing thereafter, particularly of features along the Macclesfield Canal, and accordingly the list is not as comprehensive as some more recent surveys.

Much of the town's historic street pattern survives to the present day, especially in the upper town. The pattern in the lower town has been disrupted by the insertion of Mountbatten Way.

5.2 Below-Ground Remains

The limited amount of archaeological work carried out in the town precludes detailed assessment of the survival and preservation of archaeological deposits. Nevertheless, the evaluation carried out close to the town hall demonstrates that important archaeological deposits survive albeit truncated by later development. A certain amount of destruction of earlier levels can be expected by the construction of large mills in the Dane valley, which has been demonstrated by archaeological work at the Roldane Mill complex.

6 PRIORITIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

6.1 General

The study of Congleton 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 Congleton 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.
- Examine the location and extent of the medieval borough.
- Examine the crossing of the Dane - when was a bridge first constructed?
- Establish the foundation date of the medieval chapels, their location, nature and extent.
- Examine evidence for medieval trade and industry, including the location of the corn mill.
- Establish the foundation date of the Grammar School.

6.4 Post Medieval

- Establish precise location of settlement areas and date their phases of expansion and contraction.

- Examine evidence of post medieval trade and industry - was there evidence of industrial growth prior to the arrival of the silk industry?
- Establish the location of industrial sites, examine the extent of above ground survival.
- The mills have already been intensively studied as part of the East Cheshire Textile Mills Survey (ECTMS). Whilst no priorities for further work were defined by the ECTMS, recording during demolition or redevelopment may provide opportunities for the discovery of previously concealed features.

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8. ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Congleton and the Surrounding Area

Figure 2: The Development of Congleton

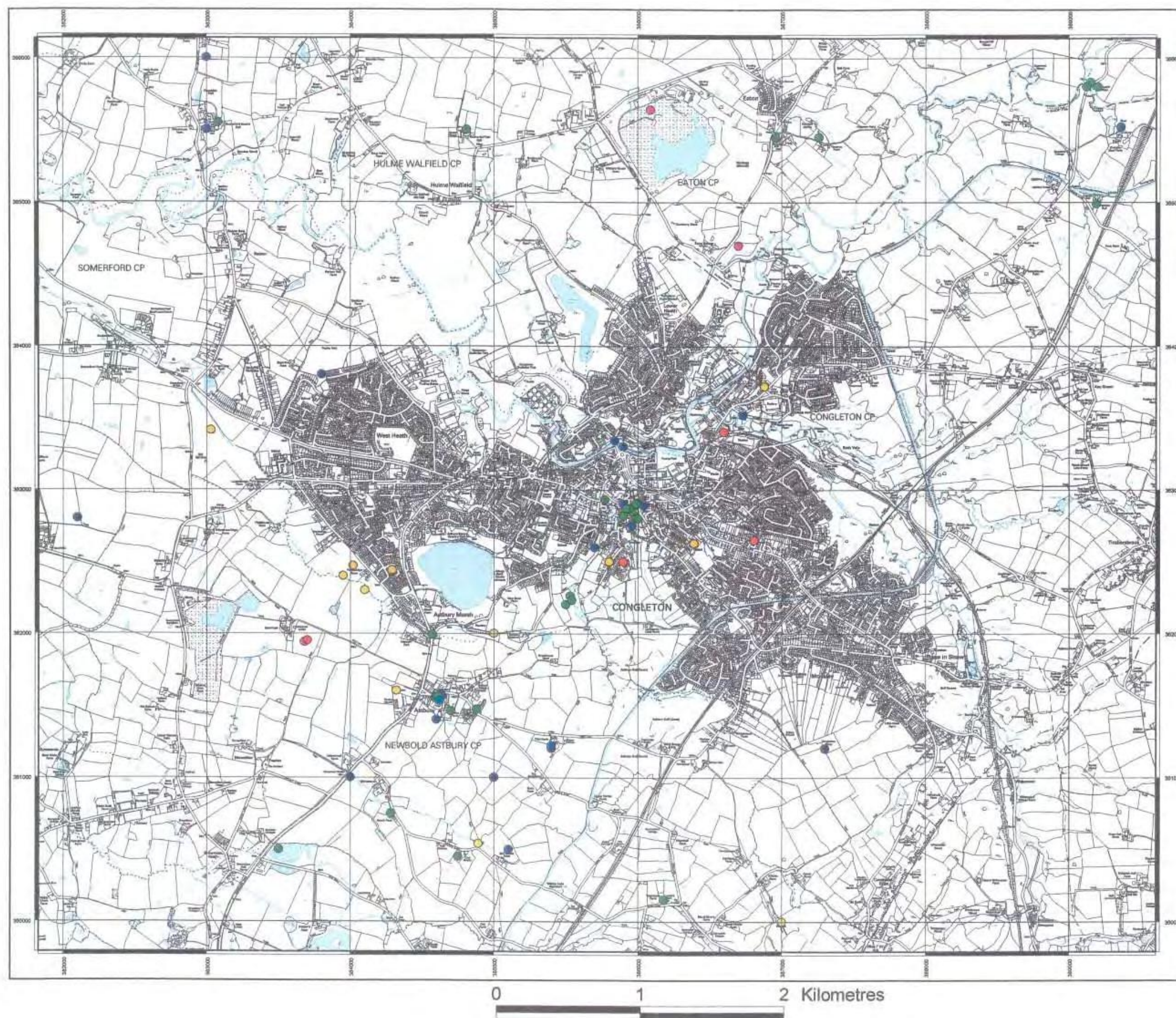


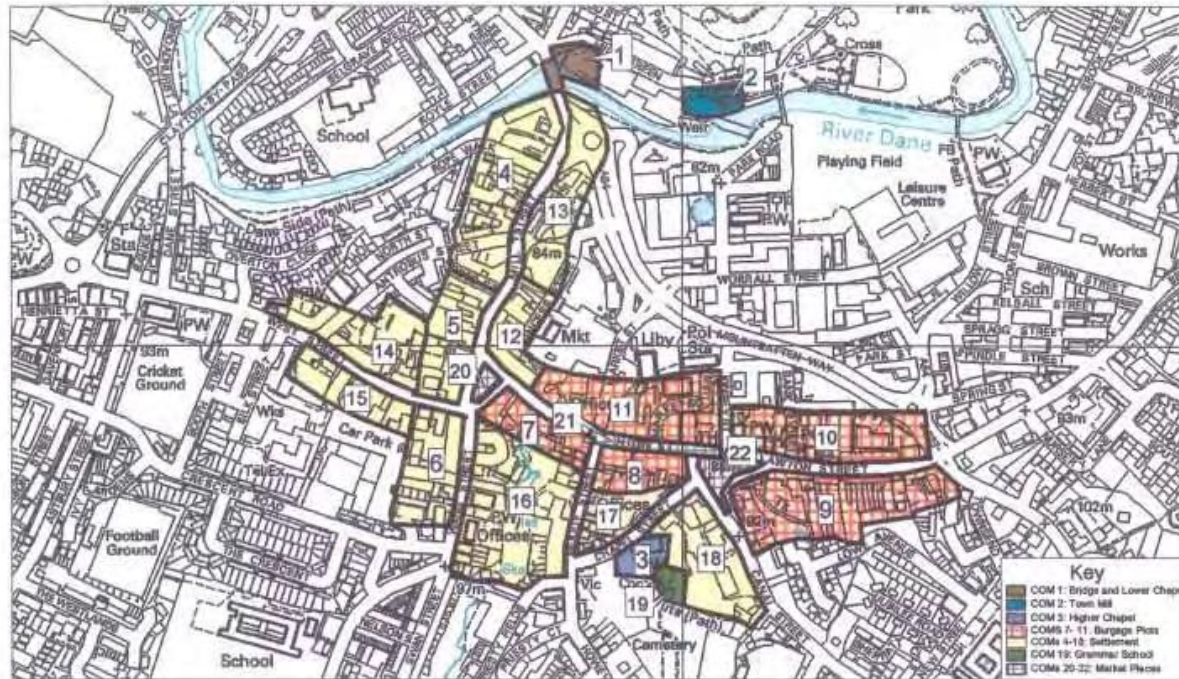
Figure 1
Congleton and the
Surrounding Area

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

1:25000

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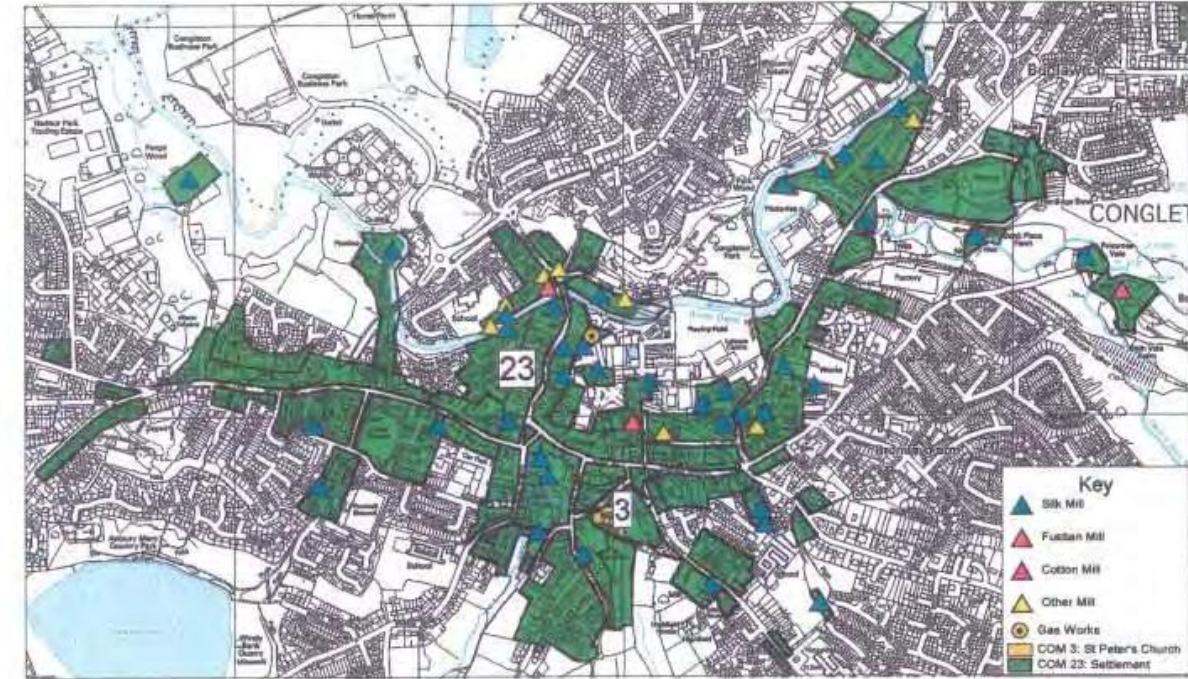
Figure 2: The Development of Congleton



Medieval

0 100 200 Metres

1:8000



Post Medieval c 1874

0 200 400 Metres

1:17000



Modern c 2000

0 0.5 1 Kilometres

1:40000



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