

CHESHIRE HISTORIC TOWNS SURVEY

Widnes

Archaeological Assessment



2003

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

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WIDNES & FARNWORTH

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Mike Shaw and Jo Clark

1. SUMMARY

In 1849, the first chemical manufactory was constructed at Widnes by John Hutchinson and by the 1860s the town had grown into an international centre for alkali production. Before industry arrived at Widnes the area largely comprised moor and marsh and scattered farmsteads. Within the large sprawl of modern Widnes there are two small settlements that are known to have medieval origins: Appleton and to the north, Farnworth, a small medieval market centre and borough.

The modern town of Widnes covers a large area. This report covers the historic core of the town but does not include the formerly separate townships of Ditton and Upton, which lie to the west.

1.1 Topography and Geology

Widnes lies on gently sloping ground c 40m AOD at Farnworth in the north of the town and 10m AOD to the south in the vicinity of the Mersey estuary. The surrounding landscape is dominated by large conurbations: Liverpool is 22 km to the west, St Helens 14km to the north, Runcorn 3 km to the south on the opposite bank of the Mersey, and Warrington 12km to the east.

The underlying geology comprises predominantly Pebble Beds of the Sherwood Sandstone Group, above which are extensive drift deposits of boulder clay, alluvium, and glacial/fluvioglacial sand and gravel (British Geological Survey 1977).

To the north and west of Widnes are stagnogleys, which are suited to permanent pasture and are graded class 3, and to the south along the banks of the Mersey are calcareous alluvial gleys, which are suited to permanent grass and graded class 4.

Roads lead north (A568) towards Prescott and St Helens, west to Liverpool (A561), east to Warrington (A562) and south across the Mersey to Runcorn (A533).

1.2 Administrative Unit

Widnes was incorporated as a municipal borough in 1892 and it lay within the county of Lancashire until the Local Government Reorganisation of 1974 when it was transferred to Cheshire. In the Local Government Reorganisation of 1998 both Widnes and Runcorn were included in the newly-created unitary authority of Halton Borough.

The township of Widnes was one seven townships, which formerly lay within the chapelry of Farnworth, the large ancient parish of Prescott and the hundred of West Derby (Diggle, 1961, 6).

1.3 Place Name

Ekwall (1922) suggests that Widnes means *wide promontory*. The place name originally referred to the general area rather than a specific place and it is recorded from c 1200. Appleton (*apple orchard*) is recorded from 1182 and Farnworth (*fern enclosure*) from 1324 (Ekwall, 1922).

2 SOURCES

2.1 Historical

There are a number of histories of Widnes (Diggle 1961; Whimperley 1991; Poole 1906), a detailed history of the Widnes chemical industry (Hardie 1950) and a detailed booklet on the history of Spike Island, which was the original centre of the chemical industry in Widnes (Greatbatch and Mercer undated).

There are extensive primary sources for Widnes, and these are reviewed by Whimperley (1991). Of these, the records of Farnworth Manor Court and Halton Court Leet, which date from the 14th century onwards are of particular interest. Unfortunately, detailed analysis of these is beyond the remit of the present survey.

2.2 Cartographic

For the period before the 19th century, reliance must be placed on early county maps. For example, Saxton's survey of 1577 depicts Farnworth and Appleton and Yates' map of 1786, which describes the area as Widnes and also shows Marsh Hall and Peel [Hall], in addition to Farnworth and Appleton.

There is a series of detailed 19th century maps from which the growth of Widnes can be studied in depth. The tithe map of 1845 and the Ordnance Survey First Edition 6": 1 mile map surveyed in 1846-7 largely cover the pre-industrial period, while a detailed survey of 1875 by John Roper and the Ordnance Survey First Edition 25": 1 mile maps surveyed in 1888-91 cover the period of industrial development.

2.3 Archaeological

Before the present survey there were sixteen sites recorded in the settled area in the County Sites and Monuments Record (see Figure 1). A further 23 records, chiefly 19th-century industrial sites, have been added as a result of the present survey. Where sites and finds have been identified from the CSMR the relevant reference is provided throughout this report.

One archaeological watching brief is known to have been carried out in Farnworth. This work was carried out in 2000 by AAA Archaeological Advisors during development to the east of St Luke's church, and found that post medieval activity had reduced the survival of earlier deposits. There is no record of any archaeological work carried out in Widnes. However, a survey of the remains of Spike Island, including analysis of documentary evidence, was carried out by Greatbatch and Mercer (undated).

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

3.1 Prehistoric and Roman

There is no evidence to suggest that there was prehistoric or Roman activity in Widnes. However, potential prehistoric and Roman activity in the wider area was identified in 1881 when an artesian well was sunk 2km west of Widnes. This revealed a medieval jug along with two Roman coins, a Samian sherd, bones, stags horns and worked bog oak of potential prehistoric date (CSMR 74). Also located within the River Mersey a 1st century AD Roman coin was discovered (CSMR 113) and east of this a metal object also of 1st century date (CSMR 118). There may have also been an early crossing point of the Mersey located at the Runcorn Gap. This crossing is well documented in the medieval period and may have a much earlier origin (see 3.3.2 below).

3.2 Early Medieval

There are no known sites or find spots dating to the early medieval period in Widnes, and there is also no documentary evidence of early medieval activity. Neither Farnworth, Appleton or Widnes are mentioned in the Domesday Book. However, Lancashire was poorly recorded at Domesday.

The dedication of the church at Farnworth to St Wilfrid might suggest an early origin, but it was presumably always subordinate to and later than the parish church of Prescott. There is evidence of early medieval activity on the opposite bank of the Mersey at Runcorn, where in AD 915 a *burh* or fortified stronghold was established by Aethelflaed to protect the Mercian boundary from invasion by the Vikings. The River Mersey formed a natural frontier between English Mercia to the south and Danish Northumbria to the north (Higham 1993, 11).

3.3 Medieval

3.3.1 The Manor

After the Norman conquest the Barony of Widnes was granted to Yorfrid who died in 1133. Widnes then passed through marriage to William Fitznigel, Baron of Halton, and became incorporated within the Barony of Halton. After the death of Henry de Lacy in 1310 the barony passed to the Earl of Lancaster and thence became crown property as part of the Duchy of Lancaster (Farrer and Brownbill, 1907, 387).

3.3.2 Settlement

In the middle of the 14th century Henry, Duke of Lancaster, granted a charter to his tenants freeing them from labour services on payment of an annual rent and setting up a manorial court (the *halmote court*) at Farnworth. There was a small borough at Farnworth, for there are mentions of burgages from the late 14th century onwards and in the 15th century a Sunday market is also documented (Farrer and Brownbill 1907, 389). A reference to fourteen burgesses in Widnes in 1355-6, each paying 1s rent for properties there (Beresford 1981, 63) no doubt also refers to Farnworth. Farnworth wakes are documented from the 18th century and perhaps replaced an

earlier fair. They were held over three days in October but were abolished in 1865 (Diggle 1961, 10).

In 1328, an extent of the Castle of Halton gives the following account of Widnes: 105 acres in demesne, farmed out at 70s, a water mill and a windmill, worth 53s 4d. Certain customary tenants held 24 messuages, 2 cottages, 144 acres and c. rendering 44s. In the vill of Appleton there were 16 customary tenants, holding 32 messuages, 15 oxgangs of land and a third, 144 acres, and paying 65s 0¾ d (Farrer and Brownbill 1907, 387).

The upper estuary of the Mersey was always difficult to cross but one crossing point was located at the Runcorn Gap which, although dangerous, could be crossed on foot at the lowest tides. A precise date for the establishment of a ferry is unrecorded, however during the 12th century when the Baronies of Halton and Widnes were united, a link between the two may have been desirable. The earliest reference to a ferry dates to before 1190 when ‘...Wgoon and his heirs shall find the necessities for the passage of half the ship of Widnesse for ever for all who wish to cross there for the love of god’ (Starkey 1990, 10).

A grammar school was founded at Farnworth in 1507 by William Smith, which is an early foundation and possibly the first in the North West. The original school may have been held in the Cuerdley chapel (a chapel in Farnworth Church) but by the 17th century it was located in a building by the church of St Wilfrid. In 1829 it was described as ‘a commodious school with a room over it; though an old building it is in tolerable condition’. By 1864, however, it was considered unfit and the building was abandoned. A new school was built in 1883 to the south of Farnworth (Poole 1906, 107-9).

3.3.3 Economy

The inhabitants of Widnes were no doubt largely dependent upon agriculture. There was extensive waste land on Widnes moor and Widnes marsh, where turf could be cut or cattle grazed on payment of an annual fee to the lord of the manor. Another source of income was fishing on the River Mersey, which until it became polluted in the 19th century abounded with fish such as salmon. Within the borough of Farnworth a wider range of functions appears to have been carried out. For example, there are references in the 15th century to tailors and mercers setting up stalls in the market held there (Farrer and Brownbill 1907, 389).

3.3.4 Religion

There was a church at Farnworth from at least the late 12th century, which was dedicated to St Wilfrid until the 19th century when it was changed to St Luke. It was a dependent chapelry until the 19th century although there were attempts to secure its independence from Prescott from the end of the 13th century onwards (Farrer and Brownbill 1907, 389-92).

The present church contains work from at least the late 12th century. There is a 14th century tower and other work of the 15th and 17th centuries, with 19th century restoration (Pevsner 1969, 111-2). Two chapels are attached to the church, Bold

chapel, founded in the 15th century but rebuilt in the 19th century, and Cuerdley chapel, founded by William Smith, Bishop of Lincoln, in the early 16th century (ibid).

Within the churchyard is a cross, the base and plinth of which are medieval and the cross 19th century (SAM 25704). There are said to have been four further crosses in the Widnes area (Cuerdley cross, Cronton cross, Simm's cross and Plumpton's cross) and Whimperley (1991, 35) has added a fifth – Whitfield cross. However, only Cronton cross now survives. The original purpose of the crosses is uncertain; traditionally they are said to mark the resting places of coffin bearers but they may have identified significant boundaries or been used as wayside preaching crosses (ibid, 34).

3.3.5 The Surrounding Area

There are a number of moated sites such as Peel House (CSMR 79/1), which is of at least 15th century date, in the surrounding area. Other prominent houses include Marsh Hall, Appleton Hall, Lower House and Upper or Widnes House.

3.4 Post Medieval

3.4.1 The Manor

In 1728 the manor was leased to George, earl of Cholmondley, from whom it has descended to the present Marquis of Cholmondley as lessee (Farrer and Brownbill 1907, 387).

3.4.2 Settlement

The town of Widnes began to develop in the 1830s as a result of improved communications, although it did not truly develop as a town until the 1860s. As late as 1841 the population of Widnes was only 2,209 and it was still a rural township, with 80% of land under cultivation and only 3.6% occupied by buildings (Greatbatch and Mercer, undated, 11). The first chemical factory was built by John Hutchinson in 1849 but even by 1858 Widnes was not of sufficient importance to appear in Slater's *Directory of Lancashire*. However, by the time of the 1867 edition it was described as 'a very populous and important place with extensive chemical works, soap works, and an oil mill'. The chemical industry created a large amount of waste and by 1888 Widnes was described by the Daily Post 'the dirtiest, ugliest and most depressing town in England' (Diggle 1961).

As the town began to grow, the area around Victoria Square gradually developed as a civic centre. A market hall and grounds were opened in 1875, St Paul's church was dedicated in 1884, the town hall was opened in 1887 and the library and technical college were opened in 1895-6. This effectively created a civic centre set around a road junction (ibid, 74). So in the vicinity of Victoria Square at least, Widnes had an air of dignity not out of place in any other prosperous town or city at the time. However, beyond the square the town's reputation was limited to its industry and what cause for celebration there was more often than not came from outside the town (Whimperley 1991, 146).

The shore of the Mersey was for a time a tourist resort. Visitors came across from Runcorn on the ferry or from further afield by coach, and were catered for at the Boat House Inn, commonly known as Snig Pie House after the local delicacy, an eel pie (Diggle 1961, 13). The boat house is marked on Yates' map of 1786. Widnes continued to attract visitors, indeed the opening of the railway in the 1830s increased its accessibility and attractiveness as a holiday destination. Increasing levels of pollution from the 1850s onwards, no doubt made the area less attractive but there was nevertheless a need to provide leisure activities for an increasing population and by 1875 a promenade had been constructed on the West Bank and the Boat House Inn had been replaced by the Mersey Hotel. The promenade was extended and the Victoria Gardens opened in 1903 and inland, Victoria Park in Appleton was opened in 1900 (Whimperley 1991, 146). Recreation could also be found in the large number of public houses in Widnes, indeed in 1876 there were 57 public houses to choose from (Diggle 1961, 61).

3.4.2 Economy

Agriculture continued to dominate the local economy until the establishment of the chemical industry in the mid-19th century. Prescott to the north was an important watch making centre from the 18th century and this craft spilled over into the surrounding settlements; hence in 1824 Baines's Directory records seven people engaged in watch manufacture in Farnworth and Appleton and two in related industries (file manufacturer and wire pinion drawer). There were also two sail canvas manufacturers in Farnworth and a tanner near Appleton (Baines 1824 707).

It was the desire of coal owners in St Helens to free themselves of the stranglehold of the St Helens Canal Company that led to the development of Widnes, as it was they who financed the building of a railway line from St Helens to the Runcorn Gap in 1833. The intention was primarily to bring coal from the St Helens coalfield down to the river Mersey for shipment. At the railway terminus at Spike Island, the world's first purpose built railway dock was constructed to transfer coal from the railway wagons to sailing barges (Greatbatch and Mercer, undated, 5). The owners of the canal company fought back by extending their waterway from Fiddlers Ferry near Warrington to Widnes, which opened to traffic in the same year (Greatbatch and Mercer, undated, 10).

Within a year, traffic on the rail and canal reached a total of 74,600 tons per annum and after a period of intense competition the two companies were combined into the St Helens Canal and Railway Company in 1845. The new company improved and extended the rail system, modernising the line to Runcorn Gap and opening new branches from there to Garston in 1852 and Warrington in 1853. In 1864 the St Helens Railway was absorbed into the London and North-Western Railway, who extended the line to Runcorn with the building of a railway bridge across the Runcorn Gap, which opened in 1865, and also built a short length of line, known as the 'Widnes Deviation'. Also in existence by 1893 were alternative east-west routes – the Sheffield and Midland Joint Railway, which ran just to the north of the London and North-Western line and the Cheshire Lines Railway, which ran through the northern end of Widnes and adjacent to Farnworth (ibid).

The ferry and the railway bridge with its adjacent footway, were the only means of crossing the Runcorn Gap until 1905 when a Transporter Bridge was opened. This structure was a famed and treasured local amenity but was demolished in 1961 after the opening of the present road bridge (Whimperley 1991, 146).

3.4.2.1 The Chemical Industry

The decision by the newly-formed canal and railway company to exploit its monopoly and raise freight charges on the canal and railway in 1848, and again in 1854 had important consequences for Widnes. St Helens had previously been a centre of the alkali industry but the increase in freight charges threatened its viability. The Leblanc process of alkali production required large quantities of raw materials, especially salt, limestone and coal, and Widnes was better sited to import these at minimal cost. Additionally the process was highly polluting: for every ton of soda produced, nearly two tons of solid waste, known locally as *galligu*, was left as a by-product. The underdeveloped area of Widnes, with its sparse population must have therefore provided an attractive location for this heavily polluting industry (Greatbatch and Mercer, undated, 6-9). Accordingly chemical works were founded in the area around the new docks, the first being John Hutchinson's No 1 works on the east bank of the St Helens Canal, which were opened in 1849. This was followed by a plethora of new chemical works, including Hutchinson's No 2 works to the west of the canal, which were opened in 1859 (ibid 13-14).

Initially the chemical industry, and many of the other works, was clustered around the railway docks and the canal in the area known as Spike Island. In 1865, however, the Phoenix Chemical Works were opened at West Bank and this area gradually became developed. At the same time further chemical works were opened by the West Bank Dock and to the east along the line of the east-west railways. These developments led to a decline in the use of the Spike Island (ibid 22).

Towards the end of the 19th century, the Widnes chemical industry as a whole was threatened by the development of new methods of alkali production. The highly polluting nature of the Leblanc process led to the search for more environmentally friendly, and cheaper processes; but these new processes were to be carried out elsewhere. For example, the Solvay process, which gradually superseded the Leblanc process and became the dominant method of producing alkali by the 1890s, was carried out at Winnington, near Northwich, from 1874. Also the electrolyte process was developed at the end of the 19th century and a factory for the production of chlorine and caustic soda by this process was established on the opposite bank of the river Mersey at Weston Point, Runcorn, in 1897. The development of these new techniques dealt a fatal blow to the Widnes chemical manufacturers, who continued to use the inefficient and outdated Leblanc process (ibid 22).

The second most important industry in Widnes was soap manufacture. William Gossage opened the William Gossage and Sons Soap Works on the west bank of the St Helens canal in 1854. By the end of the century Gossages supplied over 50% of Britain's exports with markets as far afield as China and Ceylon (ibid 16). In 1911 Gossage became part of Brunner-Mond, the large chemical complex who

increasingly dominated the Widnes chemical trade. Eight years later it passed to the Lever Bros and the works were closed by Unilever in 1932 (ibid 17).

Many of the other industries in the area relied on the chemical industry for their business. For example, the 1888-91 Ordnance Survey map depicts a shipbuilding yard on Spike Island where the sailing barges (*Mersey flats*) used for river transportation, were built.

3.4.3 Religion

The spiritual needs of Widnes' growing population could not be met by the existing church structure. Already by 1844 a Sunday service was being held at a schoolroom in Widnes dock and a new church, St Mary's, was opened in 1858. This was unfortunately built upon chemical waste that had shrunk and decomposed and caused the building to become unsafe. It was demolished and a site chosen for the new church of St Mary's, which was dedicated in 1910, by the Victoria Gardens and Promenade, having demolished 42 houses to make way for it (Whimperley 1991, 132). As mentioned above, St Paul's church in Victoria Square was dedicated in 1884, the south-east tower built later in 1907 (Diggle 1961, 121).

St Bede's Roman Catholic church, was built at Appleton in 1847 and a Methodist chapel constructed in Newtown in 1862 (Diggle 1961, 40). A detailed list of the numerous churches constructed in Widnes is contained in Diggle (1961).

3.4.4 Population

For 1801-1971 population information can be obtained from the Census returns, and for 1981 and 1991 census data has been reproduced under Class Licence Number C01W0000125 with the permission of the Controller of the HMSO. The population of Widnes was small until industry really began to take a hold in the 1860s. Thereafter it underwent a huge expansion, and the population doubled between 1851 and 1861. However, after 1891 the town's population actually decreased and since then has shown only limited growth.

1801	1,063	1901	28580
1811	1,204	1911	34541
1821	1439	1921	38860
1831	2209	1931	40619
1841	3211	1951	48795
1851	3211	1961	52168
1861	6905	1981	54478
1871	14359	1991	55708
1881	24935		
1891	30011		

3.4.5 The Surrounding Landscape

In the 19th century, Widnes was part of a large industrialised urban landscape. The port of Liverpool is 22 km to the west of Widnes, famous for imports of cotton, which supplied the mills of Lancashire and Cheshire. The coal producing town of St

Helens is 14km north of Widnes, and Runcorn, whose development began after the creation of the Bridgwater Canal in the 18th century, is 3km to the south.

4 PLAN COMPONENTS

The town has been divided into 13 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 through fieldwork.

The earliest evidence of settlement in the Widnes area dates to the medieval period and it is therefore with this period that the plan components commence. However, it is likely that during this period the overall settlement pattern was predominantly of a dispersed type.

With a settlement as large and complex as Widnes during the industrial period, it would be possible to divide the town into an infinite number of different components. However, such complexity is not appropriate for this level of assessment and accordingly it has been decided to divide the town into two simple components – industrial areas and settlement areas - at dates dictated by the available map coverage c 1847 and c 1891.

MEDIEVAL FARNWORTH c 1066-1540 (Figure 2)

COM 1 - St Wilfrid's Church (Farnworth)

COM 2 - Medieval Borough (Farnworth)

19TH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT:

WIDNES c 1847 (Figure 3)

COM 3 - Settlement (Farnworth)

COM 4 - Settlement (Appleton)

COM 5 - St Helens Canal

COM 6 - St Helens Railway

COM 7 - Railway docks

COM 8 - Industrial Areas

WIDNES c 1891 (Figure 4)

COM 9 - Railways

COM 10 - West Bank Docks

COM 11 - Industrial Areas

COM 12 - Settlement Areas

MODERN c 2000 (Figure 5)

COM 13 - Settlement

4.1 Medieval (Figure 2)

Before 1833, when the railway from St Helens was first built, the Widnes area was very much a backwater. The settlement pattern was generally dispersed, comprising individual houses and farmsteads, but with two exceptions, the settlements at Farnworth and Appleton, both of which have medieval origins.

There was a church at Farnworth from at least the late 12th century and this has been depicted as **COM 1**. This would have acted as a focus of settlement and at some point in the medieval period and known from the mid-14th century, a borough was founded to the south of St Luke's church. There is also documentary evidence of a market, and examination of the settlement plan suggests that the borough was formally laid out as planned settlement (**COM 2**). Long, narrow burgage plots ran at right angles to Farnworth Street, a single, straight street, (formerly Church Street), which runs south from the church. Also a common and partially surviving rear boundary, appears to have run along the back of the burgage plots on both sides of Farnworth Street, which is a typical feature of planned medieval settlement.

Farnworth seems to have had only limited success as a borough, although it was the meeting place of the manorial court from the 14th century and a grammar school was founded in the town in the early 16th century. By the 19th century, there were a number of open plots at the southern end of Farnworth Street, which might suggest that there had been a reduction in population or perhaps not all of the burgages were originally occupied.

By contrast Appleton, which is located at a bend in a minor road running north from the Runcorn Gap to the Liverpool to Warrington road, shows no sign of medieval planning or attempts at urbanisation. It was, however, of sufficient importance to give its name to the area as a whole in medieval taxation records, perhaps indicating that the settlement at Appleton preceded that at Farnworth. Yet, the nature and extent of medieval Appleton is less clearly defined than that of Farnworth and it is not therefore possible to map medieval Appleton.

4.2 Post Medieval (Figures 3 and 4)

There appears to have been very little settlement growth in the Widnes area during the post medieval period. Although, what appears to have been slight expansion to the south of Farnworth along Derby Road, is depicted on Yates' map of 1786.

There could be no greater contrast than Widnes before 1833 and the extent of the town c 50 years later. Essentially a thriving chemical industry had developed in an area that was almost totally deserted marshland. Figure 3, depicts the small towns of Farnworth (**COM 3**) and Appleton (**COM 4**) c 1847. However, by then the infrastructure for the ensuing growth was in place: the St Helens Canal had been extended (**COM5**), and the Runcorn Gap Railway (**COM 6**) and railway dock (**COM 7**) had also been constructed. There was as yet, however, little industrial development (**COM 8**) and settlement was still largely restricted to the old, established centres of Appleton and Farnworth and to individual houses and farmsteads (not plotted).

Figure 4 depicts Widnes c 1891, by which time the settlement had reached its peak. Widnes was now a large and thriving town with a population of around 30,000. A more effective dock had been created at West Bank (**COM 10**) and there was a plethora of railway lines (**COM 9**), including one crossing the river Mersey at Runcorn Gap. Additionally industrial development (**COM 11**), which had initially centred around Spike Island, had now spread to the West Bank and to the east along the lines of the railways and canal.

Settlement c 1891 was extensive and has the appearance of being unplanned (**COM 12**), with the development of terraced housing within and between the industrial areas around Newtown and in the area to the north around Simm's Cross. Settlement continued at Farnworth and Appleton, the latter in particular acting as a desirable settlement for wealthy industrialists, allowing them to live away from the worst of the pollution that their factories were creating. The beginnings of a civic centre at Victoria Square are also noticeable at this time.

4.3 Modern (Figure 5)

The modern extent of Widnes is depicted as **COM 13**. The town is large and includes a large number of industrial estates and housing developments, e.g. to the south at Kingsway and to the east at Halton View. Early in the 20th century there were a number of important civic developments – for example, the laying out of Appleton Park and the Victoria Promenade, and the construction of the Transporter Bridge. Road access was also greatly improved with the replacement of the Transporter Bridge by a road bridge in 1961.

With the decline of the chemical industry, Widnes lost its central function and its population actually declined between 1891 and 1901: its subsequent growth has been steady rather than spectacular. The loss of the town's economy and the lack of a suitable replacement is still apparent over 100 years later, and large areas of derelict land are evident particularly to the south. In 1974 the *Welcome to Widnes* project was launched, designed to improve the environmental quality of the area. There have been extensive programmes of reclamation in the town and much of the debris of past industry has been cleared away. At the same time there have been attempts to provide an interpretation of the past, particularly the history of the chemical industry, through the creation of the Catalyst Museum and displays at Spike Island.

5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL POTENTIAL

5.1 Above-Ground Remains

The only Scheduled Ancient Monument within the historic core of Widnes is a Standing Cross in St Luke's churchyard, Farnworth (SAM 25704; SMR 83/1/1). The base and plinth are medieval but the cross itself is 19th century. Within the broader area the moated site of Lovell's Hall (SAM 13435; SMR 73) lies in Ditton at the western edge of the Farnworth borough.

There are sixteen listed buildings in the historic area of Widnes. Two of these – the church of St Luke and the railway bridge over the Mersey - are Grade II*, and the remainder Grade II. Apart from the church the only listed building to pre-date the 19th century is an 18th century house called The Hollies, Derby Road. There are two Conservation Areas within the town: Victoria Square – the civic centre around the town hall; and the West Bank Promenade.

Much of the pre-industrial landscape of Widnes has been removed by subsequent industrial growth. In turn much of the early industry has been removed by later development or by reclamation schemes. Some industrial complexes do survive, however, and may justify a programme of recording.

5.2 Below-Ground Remains

The lack of archaeological work carried out at Widnes makes an assessment of the resource impossible. However, development at Farnworth and Appleton has generally been small-scale and archaeological deposits may well survive below ground in these areas, although the watching brief carried out to the east of St Luke's, Farnworth in 2000 suggested that post medieval activity had reduced the survival of earlier deposits.

Evidence of the numerous industrial works located at Widnes may also survive below ground, and archaeological investigation of former industrial areas earmarked for development should be a priority. Industrial archaeology is a resource which Widnes has in abundance, but because of the limited work that has been carried out in the town, the nature, extent and survival of below ground remains is insufficiently understood.

6 PRIORITIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

6.1 General

The study of Widnes, Appleton and Farnworth 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). In addition it would make a contribution to Priority T6 the study of industrial archaeology (English Heritage, 1997, 53) and T7: Patterns of craftsmanship and industry (including agriculture) (English Heritage 1997, 54).

Work would also fit into a number of national priorities, including the following process of change:

- PC7 Transition from medieval to post medieval traditions (c1300-1700AD) (English Heritage 1997, 44-5)

6.2 Medieval

- Establish the date, location and extent of settlement and date phases of expansion and contraction at Widnes, Farnworth and Appleton.
- Establish the foundation date of the medieval church of St Wilfrid, Farnworth

- Establish the foundation date of the borough of Farnworth, and examine its extent.
- Examine the nature of buildings and activities on settlement plots.
- Examine evidence of trade and industry, establish its nature and date.
- Examine the relationship between Farnworth and Appleton, - did one precede the other?

6.3 Post Medieval

- Establish the location of settlement and date phases of expansion and contraction.
- Establish the nature of buildings and activities on settlement plots.
- Examine evidence for trade and industry, establish dates and nature of the trade.
- Examine the development of the chemical industry, its range and diversity, and its relationship with the communication network
- Examine the nature and extent of surviving industrial buildings and complexes.

The chemical industry is currently being assessed as part of English Heritage's Monuments Protection Programme and it is hoped that this will lead to a formulation of policies regarding the protection and assessment of Widnes' chemical industry.

7. SOURCES

7.1 Bibliography

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7.2 Maps

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Ordnance Survey First Edition 25 inch map of Widnes, published 1893-6, surveyed 1888-91

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William Yates' Map of Lancashire, 1786 (CRO CENTRAL)

8. ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig 1: Widnes and the Surrounding Area

Fig 2: Medieval Farnworth

Fig 3: Widnes c 1847

Fig 4: Widnes c 1891

Fig 5: Widnes c 2000

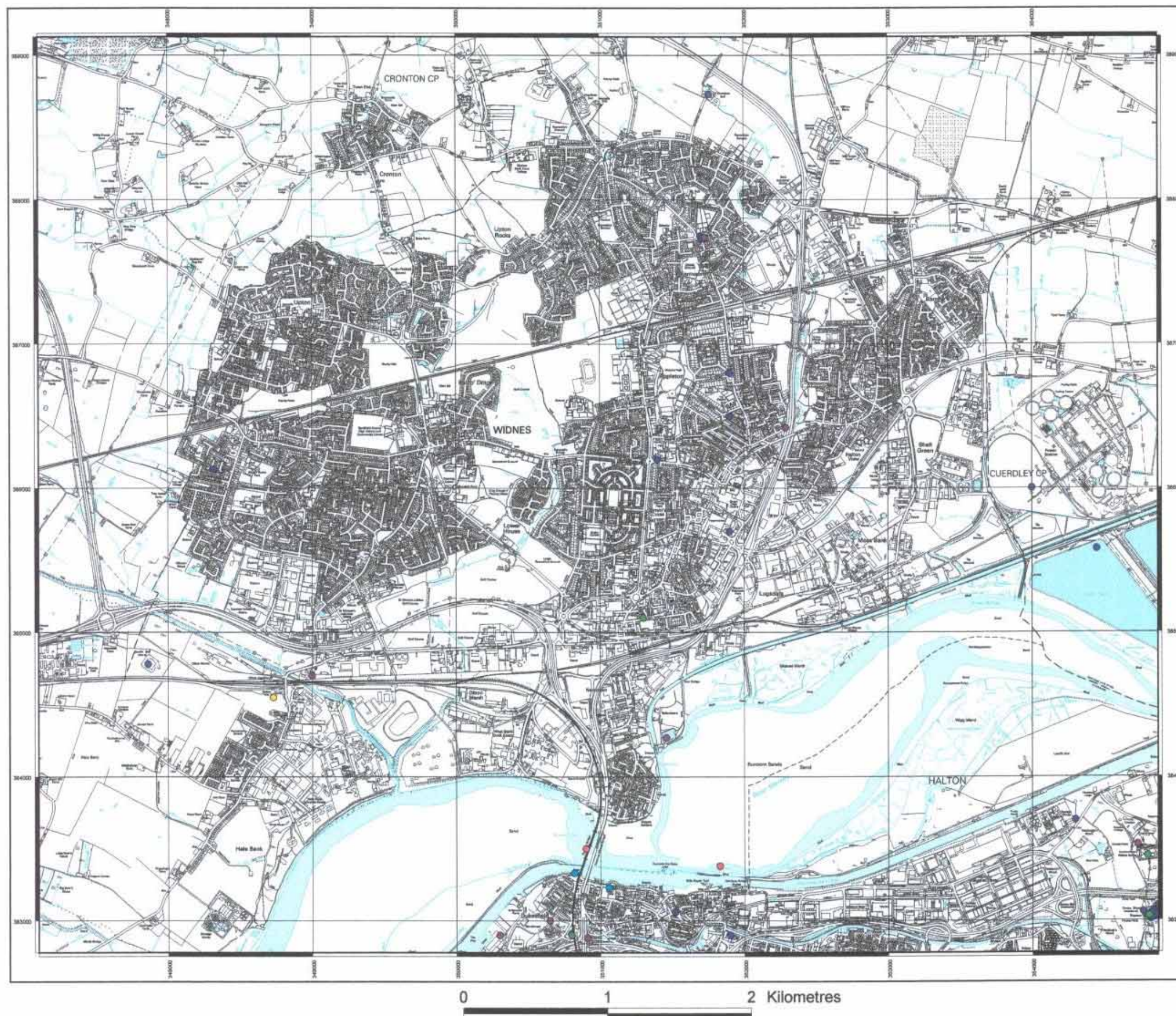


Figure 1: Widnes and the Surrounding Area

Sites and Monuments Record

- Prehistoric
- Romano-British
- Early Medieval
- Medieval
- Post Medieval
- Modern

1:25000

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Figure 3: Widnes c 1847

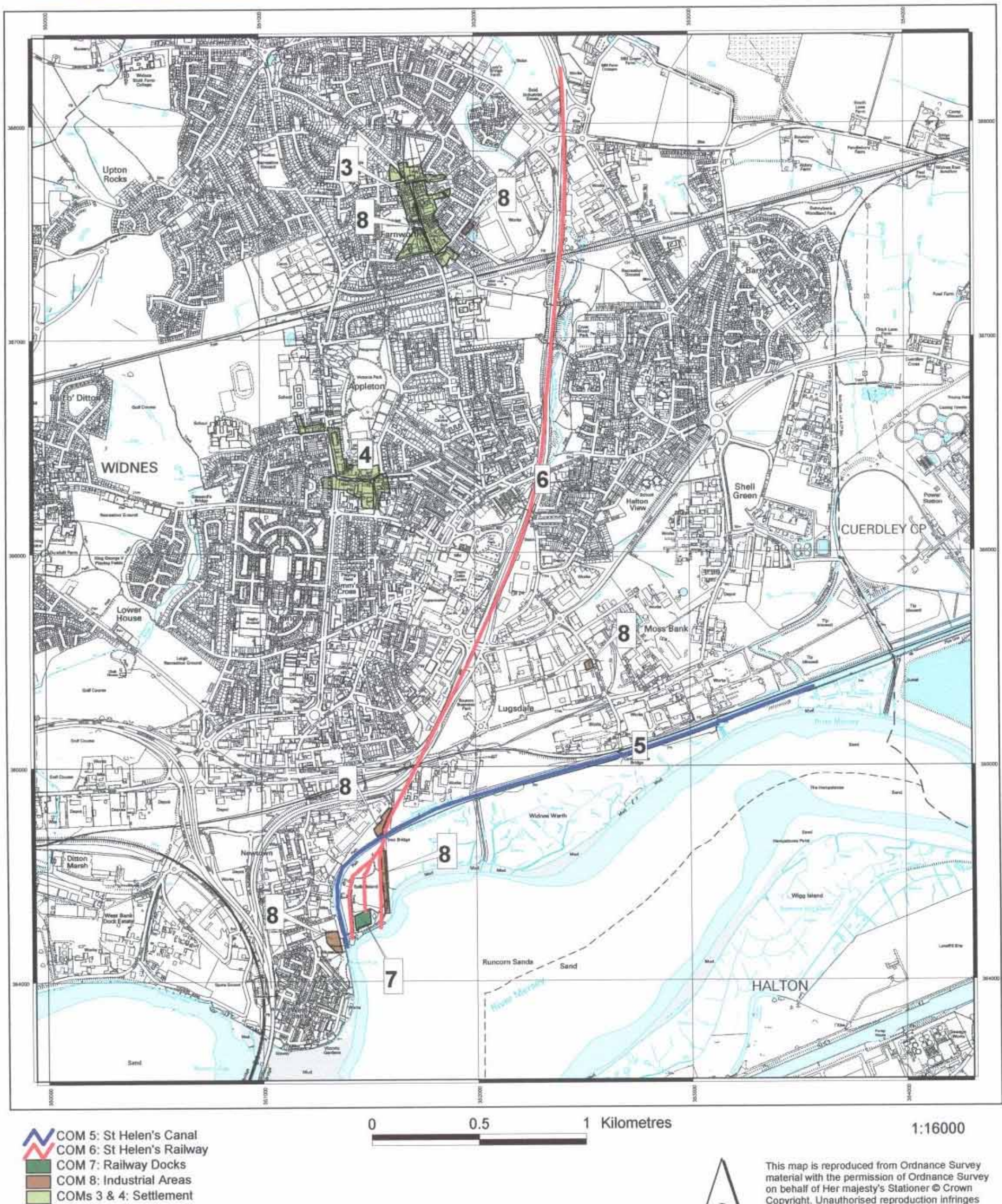


Figure 4: Widnes c 1891

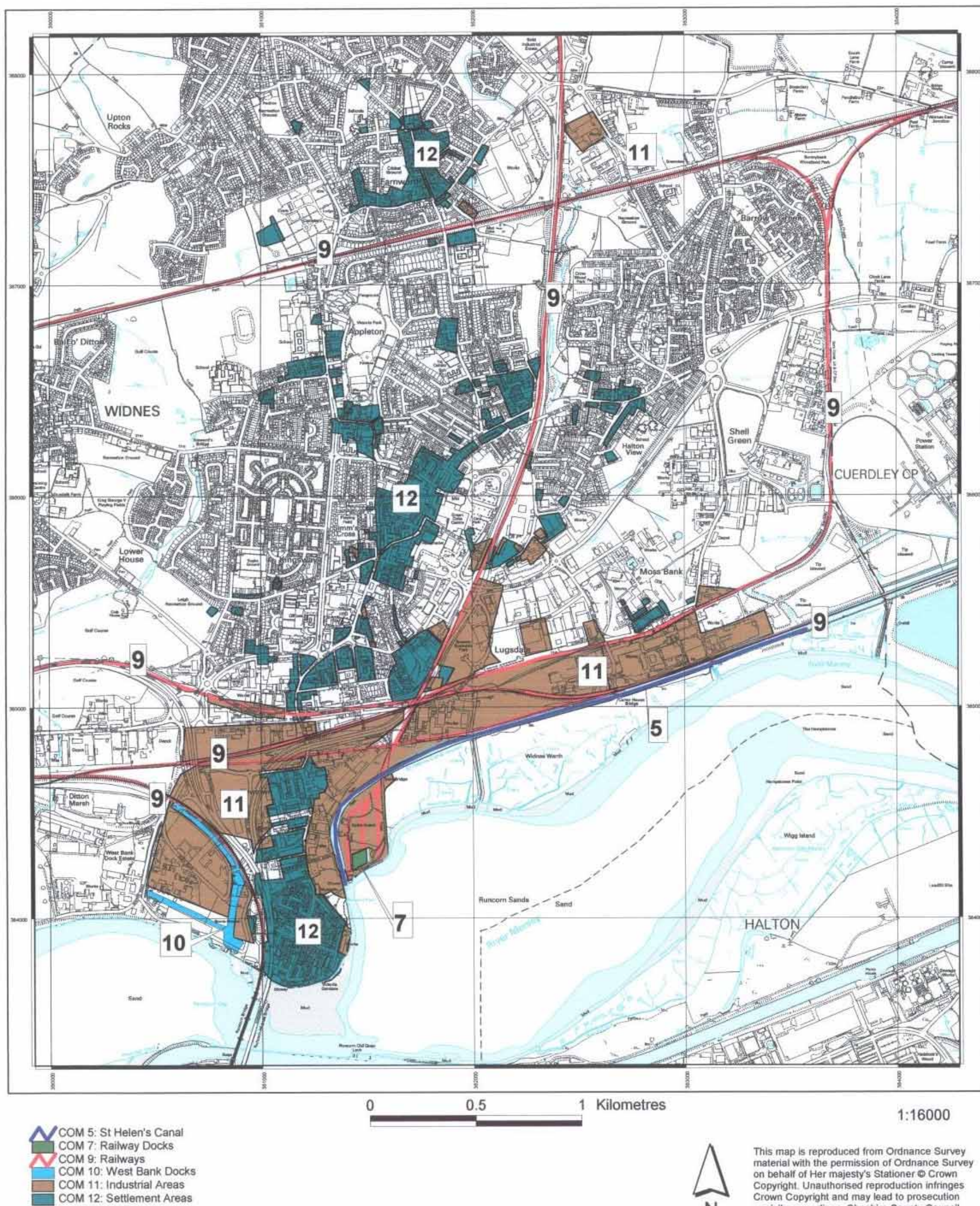


Figure 5 Widnes c 2000

