

# CHESHIRE HISTORIC TOWNS SURVEY

## Over and Winsford

### Archaeological Assessment



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# **OVER & WINSFORD**

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT**

**Jo Clark**

### **1. SUMMARY**

The small medieval settlements of Over and Wharton, which lie 1.5km west and 0.75km east of the River Weaver respectively, have long since been subsumed by the expanding township of Winsford, which lies between the two on the banks of the river. Winsford's prosperity was founded upon the exploitation of brine in the 18th and 19th centuries and the efficient transportation afforded by the Weaver Navigation.

#### **1.1 Topography and Geology**

Over and Church Hill, 1km to the south where the parish church of St Chad is located, lie on a slight ridge which runs parallel with the River Weaver c 46m AOD. Winsford and Wharton, on the banks of the River Weaver, both lie c 30m AOD.

The Winsford Fault runs through the town just west of the River Weaver. To the west of the fault are Middle Keuper Beds, and to the east are Lower Keuper Saliferous Beds from which brine springs emerge. The drift geology of Over comprises a band of glacial sand and gravel and the surrounding area has a drift geology of boulder clay (British Geological Survey, 1965).

The soils of the surrounding area are generally pelo-stagnogley soils, which suffer from standing water and are difficult to cultivate (graded classes 3-4). A band of brown sands, which are graded classes 2-3 and suited to a mixture of arable and grassland, runs northwest-southeast past western Over. Along the course of the River Weaver are sandy gley soils and pelo-alluvial gley soils (Furness, 1978).

The A54 is the major route through Over and Winsford, running east over the River Weaver to Middlewich. The A5018 runs from the Weaver, north-east through Wharton and joins with the A533, which runs north to Northwich and south to Middlewich. The B5074 passes south-east through Town Fields, past St Chad's Church, and onto Church Minshall.

#### **1.2 Administrative Unit**

The church of the tenants of Vale Royal Abbey was made parochial at the Dissolution and the associated parish was called New Church or Whitegate. The township of Over was divided between Over Parish and Whitegate Parish, both of which are in Eddisbury Hundred and Middlewich Deanery. Wharton on the east of the Weaver was in Davenham Parish in Northwich Hundred and Deanery (Dunn, 1987, 20, 38). Today Winsford, which includes both Over and Wharton, is an Urban District and a Civil Parish in the District of Vale Royal.

### **1.3 Place Name**

The place name Over is recorded in Domesday (Ovre) and refers to the town's position on a ridge, therefore it translates as on 'the hill' (Dodgson, 1970, 171). Winsford is documented from the 13th century, and is taken from an old English personal name and the ford on the Weaver (Dodgson, 1970, 174). Wharton or *Wanetune* is recorded in Domesday and occurs in subsequent records in a variety of forms e.g. *Waverton* (1216) and *Wareton* (1288). Dodgson suggests that the name indicates either a "farm at a waving tree" or "farm at a quaking bog" (1970, 213).

## **2 SOURCES**

### **2.1 Historical**

There are few sources available, and even Ormerod's *History of the County Palatine and City of Chester* (1882) ignores the early history of the settlement. The history of the salt industry is covered in detail by Calvert (1915) and various publications by Cheshire Libraries and Museums (Cheshire Libraries and Museums, undated a, b, c and d).

Included in the Birch, Cullimore and Co., Chester solicitors collection held at the Cheshire Record Office (CRO DBC) are the Cholmondeley of Vale Royal's collection of deeds, accounts and estate records, including documents for the manor of Over from the 13th to the 20th century. This is clearly material that would repay detailed transcription and analysis, but it has not been possible to do this as part of the present survey.

### **2.2 Cartographic**

Over is marked on Saxton's county map of 1577 and Speed's county map of 1610. The earliest map to show both Over Church and Over, and the small hamlets of Winsford and Wharton, is Burdett's map of Cheshire (1777). This is also the earliest map to show the local road pattern. The tithe maps of Over (1846) and Wharton (1841) provide a useful snapshot of Winsford before the industrial boom that shortly followed. The Ordnance Survey 1:2500 First Edition of 1875 and the Second Edition of 1898 also help to chart this expansion.

### **2.3 Archaeological**

Before the present survey there were 40 sites recorded in the settled area in the County Sites and Monuments Record (CSMR), which are identified on Figure 1. Where sites and finds have been identified from the CSMR, the relevant reference is provided throughout this report. The present survey has added a further sixteen sites, chiefly industrial sites of 18th to 19th century date.

A group of seventeen pottery fragments were recovered from the topsoil in a garden in Chepstow Close, Winsford. Nine sherds were medieval possibly 13th century, the remainder were 17th-19th century in date (CSMR 2374). This area was once part of the open field and the medieval pottery fragments may therefore have been ploughed into the soil when the land was being fertilised.

A rescue excavation was carried out in the vicinity of Over Cross on Delamere Street in 1970 ahead of road works. This revealed a series of 17th, 18th and 19th century pits and a 17th century ditch, which was excavated to a depth of 1m (CAB, 1974, 34).

An assessment of salt works along the Weaver Navigation was carried out by Lancaster University Archaeological Unit in 1992. This identified areas of particular interest that were recommended for further work. In 1993 the Ironbridge Museum Trust Archaeological Unit began a programme of trenching, which was concentrated on the Moultonhall Works and the Bostock Works and this successfully revealed walls associated with the structure of salt pans. However, the archaeology is not limited to the subsurface; earthworks were noted up to 2m in height and brickwork was visible in some areas. A massive brine cistern belonging to the Bostock Works was also found to have survived in good condition (Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust Archaeological Unit, 1993, 124).

### **3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY**

#### **3.1 Prehistoric**

There are no major prehistoric sites in the surrounding area and finds are few. East of Winsford Industrial Estate, a Bronze Age Palstave was discovered in 1985 (CSMR 827). A worked flint flake was found in a garden on Swanlow Lane, Winsford (CSMR 771) and a flint implement was found at Over (CSMR 770). Two stone heads were found in a garden on Wharton Road, Winsford in 1985. They belong to a group of stone heads from Britain which on stylistic grounds are termed 'celtic' but continue into the post-medieval period (CSMR 826) so their actual date is undetermined.

#### **3.2 Roman**

In the surrounding area there are two important Roman settlements: Middlewich, 3km to the east and Northwich, 6km to the north, are two out of the three major Roman salt towns in the county. Other major Roman sites in the surrounding area include the line of Watling Street, the Roman road between Chester and Manchester (CSMR 844) which is crossed by King Street, the Roman road that runs between Middlewich and Wilderspool (CSMR 436). Also a 1st century Roman *fibula* was found east of Winsford in 1985 (CSMR 825) and a rim of a large jar assumed to be Roman was discovered 600mm below the ground surface in 1982, 1km south of Over (CSMR 773).

A 6km stretch of very straight road runs towards Over from the west, and although writers have tended to be cautious in their assessment of it, the suggestion is that it linked Chester via Middlewich with Buxton (Harris and Thacker, 1987, 222). In c1667 it was recorded by Lord Brereton that while a salt pit was being dug close to the crossing of the Weaver in Winsford, a section of the Roman road was discovered at a depth of 2 yards. Several Roman coins were also found at this depth and even deeper (Ormerod, 1882, 182).

#### **3.3 Early Medieval**

It has been suggested that St Chad's church may be an Early Mercian foundation like the church at Farndon, which is also dedicated to St Chad. The remains of a curvilinear churchyard wall survive within the present churchyard, which is often an indicator of an early medieval foundation; and the discovery of a fragment of pre-Norman cross shaft with interlace also suggests early activity (Harris and Thacker, 1987, 241). Therefore it is likely that the original focus of Over was in the area around St Chad's parish church (known as Church Hill or Over Church) and it has been suggested that this may have been called *Chirchton*, which is a place name that appears in medieval documents (Dodgson, 1970, 171).

Both Wharton and Over were recorded in the Domesday Survey (1086):

*The same Earl hold OVRE [Over]. Four free men held it as manors. There [is] 1 hide that pays geld. The land is for five ploughs. There [is] 1 radman with 1 plough. There [is] wood ½ league long and as much wide. It was worth 6s now it is worth 5s.*

*The same Richard holds Wanetune [Wharton in Davenham]. Arngrim (Haregrim) and Alsige (Alsi) held it as two manors. (They were free men interlined). There [is] ½ hide that pays geld. The land is for 1 plough. It is there in demesne and 2 serfs, and 2 bordars. T.R.E. it was worth 4s, now 6s. He found it waste.*

(Harris and Thacker, 1987, 347 and 352)

Both settlements were small and apparently of an agricultural nature. Despite the 'harrying of the north', which William I undertook to suppress the country after the Conquest of 1066, Wharton appears to have recovered and even increased in value, rising from 4s to 6s. The area, which was to become known as Winsford was no doubt included in one or other of the entries for Over and Wharton.

Six kilometres north-west of Winsford is Weaverham, which was an important early medieval estate centre of the Earls of Mercia.

### **3.4 Medieval**

#### **3.4.1 The Manor**

Over was held by the Earl of Chester until 1270 when it was bestowed by Prince Edward, Earl of Chester, on the Abbey of Dernhall in 1269 and later confirmed in a charter, to the monks of Vale Royal (Ormerod, 1882, 180). Vale Royal held the manors of Darnhall, Over, Weaverham and Conersley (Harris and Thacker, 1987, 178).

Wharton was held by Richard de Vernon who was a baronial fief of the second rank (Harris and Thacker, 1987, 311). The township was subordinate to the barony of Shipbrook. There were a number of families who owned lands at Wharton during the medieval period, including the Clyves, the Bostocks, the Wevers, the Bulkleys and the Venables (Ormerod, 1882, 364).

#### **3.4.2 Settlement**

The monks of Vale Royal were granted a weekly market and a yearly fair at Over by Edward I in 1280 (Beresford, 1973, 74). The market was held on a Wednesday, although it is not known where the market place was located, while the fair was held on the vigil, feast and morrow of the feast of the Exaltation of Holy Cross (14 September) (Letters 2002). A borough charter was granted to Over by the Abbot of Vale Royal, Walter Deaur between 1294 and 1306 (Letters 2002; Beresford, 1973, 74). Over was a township in the Forest of Delamere, but after it was granted to the Abbey of Vale Royal it was no longer under forest jurisdiction. (Husain, 1973, 57-59).

Little is known about post-Conquest Over. It is recorded at Domesday that it was held as four manors, which has led Bostock to suggest that Over was the name of the area and not a specific manor until the 14th century when the borough was created, and that the focus of the settlement shifted north from St Chad's church to Delamere Street (Bostock, 1997, 11). Very little information survives regarding medieval Over, however two or possibly three 16th century cottages are known to have once stood at the former meeting point of the A54 and Swanlow Lane at the centre of Over (CSMR 1025).

*Murifeld* is a lost place in Over which according to a document of 1330 was separately chartered (Crosby, 1996, 51; Letters 2002). Dodgson (1970, 177) describes Murifeld or 'merry field' as the place where merry-making of various sorts took place. In the Abbey Rental list of 1334 there is reference to 'a burgage in Murifeld' that was rented by Henry le Dunne (Brownbill, 1914, 98).

The court of Over was a court leet and a court baron. The manor was governed by a mayor who was annually elected at the court of the Lord of Over and who held a small court for small debts (Ormerod, 1882, 182).

Wharton was a small medieval settlement which comprised two manors at Domesday. Very little is known of the history of this settlement. It did not have a borough or market charter.

Although the place name of Winsford is known from the medieval period, it seems that it remained a small sub hamlet of Over until the boom of the salt industry in the 18th and 19th centuries.

### **3.4.3 Economy**

Arable farming was an important aspect of the medieval economy of Over. This is evident in the long sinuous field boundaries in the surrounding area, which appear to respect the aratral curves of the ridge and furrow of the former open fields. The name 'Town Fields' is ascribed to part of the former field system, in the area east of Swanlow Road and north of St Chad's.

Data for Cheshire towns is rare because in the medieval period the shire was exempt from national taxation, having its own taxation system, the Mize. In the Cheshire mize (taxation) of 1405, Over was assessed at 36s 0d, the second largest sum in Eddisbury Hundred after Eyton and Rushton which were both assessed at 40s 0d (Booth 1985). Wharton was assessed at 26s 4d, the 22nd largest assessment in Northwich Hundred (Booth 1985).

### **3.4.4 Religion**

The foundation date of the parish church of St Chad is unknown. The earliest documentary reference to the church is in a charter of Earl Ranulf III, dated 1190-1194, in which he grants the church or rectory of Over to the nuns of St Mary's of Chester (Barraclough 1988, 224). The fabric of the church dates back to the early 14th century, although it was partly rebuilt in 1543 by Hugh Starkey and much altered by early 20th century renovations (Richards 1973, 247).

A medieval cross reputedly stood in the Town Fields area of Winsford although there is no trace of this (CSMR 775). A potential medieval cross base is also located at Salterswell (CSMR 774/0/2) as identified on the OS First Edition map of 1875.

### **3.4.5 The Surrounding Area**

The 14th century Cistercian Abbey of Vale Royal is located 3km north of Over. It was once the largest Cistercian monastery in England but it suffered at the Dissolution and little of the abbey survives. The large Vale Royal House was built in the 17th century, utilising the west and south ranges of the cloisters. The rest of the monastery was pulled down and has been the subject of excavation by Basil Pendleton (1911-12) and F.H. Thompson (1958). Knights Grange, 1km north of Over, was one of a number of granges originally belonging to the Abbey of Vale Royal, first mentioned in 1326 and said to have been rebuilt in the 17th century (CSMR 785/1).

Also, 1km east of Winsford Estate is a medieval moated site to the south of Bostock Hall CSMR 795/ SAM 13495), and 1km north-west of Winsford is the site of the 13th century moated grange and post medieval manor of Marton (CSMR 762/1/1; SM 13519).

## **3.5 Post Medieval**

### **3.5.1 The Manor**

After the Dissolution of Vale Royal Abbey, the manor of Over was granted to Sir Thomas Holcroft in 1546. The manor was then sold to Edmund Pershall and in the late 17th century purchased by Thomas Cholmondeley (Ormerod, 1882, 591). Church Hill just north of St Chad's was an ancient timber mansion, which after the Dissolution passed to the Holcrofts and then to the Pershalls (Ormerod, 1882, 182).

The Harper family acquired an estate at Wharton along with the manor in the post medieval period and this was eventually sold (including manorial rights) to the Local Board of Health of Winsford (Ormerod, 1882, 265).

### **3.5.2 Civil War**

A hoard of 246 silver coins from the reigns of Edward VI to Charles I was found in 1970 at Nixon Drive, Over. It has been suggested that the hoard may have been hidden at the time of the Battle of Middlewich in March 1643 or on the arrival of the

forces from Ireland leading up to the Battle of Nantwich in November 1643 (Moffat and Davey, 1973; CSMR 1024)

### **3.5.3 Settlement**

In the mid-19th century Over was described as 'consisting of one long, irregularly built street, and Over Lane, which crosses it at right angles and stretches as far as Winsford' (Bagshaw 1850, 632). The market at Over had fallen out of use c1780 but was revived in 1840 when a market house was built in Delamere Street (Ormerod, 1882, 180); and at Wharton, a list of the markets of Cheshire dated 1810 records that a weekly market for provisions was held at Winsford Bridge (Crosby, 1996, 91).

The Council School in High Street was built in 1876, the Darnhall Council School was founded in 1689, and the Verdin Grammar School in High Street was erected in 1895 and enlarged in 1933 (Kelly's, 1939, 473). Meadow Bank Council School was built in 1872 for 204 children. Wharton Church of England School was built in 1846. St Johns School was founded in 1858 and the Church of England School in Gladstone Street was built in 1909 (Kelly's, 1914, 692).

### **3.5.4 Economy**

A wide range of service functions were available in Over: eight beerhouses, four blacksmiths, seven boot and shoe makers, seven butchers, three chemists and druggists, five grocers, five linen and woollen drapers, six provision dealers, nineteen salt works, one boat builder, eleven shopkeepers, six tailors, two tinnerns and braziers, two watch and clock makers and four wheelwrights. However, farming was still an important aspect of the local rural economy and Bagshaw lists 27 farmers (1850, 623).

'Wharton' or Winsford, is described in the mid-19th century as a township or market town on the east bank of the river, the inhabitants of which are chiefly engaged in the salt works, "...which are carried on to a greater extent in this township than in any other place in England" (Bagshaw, 1850, 473). There was less variety of service here than at neighbouring Over: ten beer houses, three boot and shoe makers, twelve shopkeepers, four tailors, nine farmers and sixteen proprietors of salt works. Winsford bone and button manufactory and boat building yards are also listed (Bagshaw, 1850, 474).

#### **3.5.4.1 Saltworking**

The earliest reference to salt production at Winsford is dated 1723 and refers to the 'Winsford Salt Works' (Calvert, 1915, 597). The real growth of Winsford began after 1796, following George Dudley's prospection for brine. He struck a powerful source and opened the first works in Winsford that used brine pumped from boreholes. Much of the land at that time was owned by Thomas Cholmondeley who let out plots on 50 year leases. The eventual abandonment of salt taxes in 1825 provided an added incentive, as did the early 18th century improvement of the River Weaver up to Winsford Bridge. By 1840 Winsford had eclipsed Northwich in the production of white salt, although Northwich continued to dominate the rock-salt trade (Chaloner, 1961, 73). By 1860 there were 416 pans and over 1000 workers in Winsford. Brine

was pumped from a depth of 46-64m and rock salt was mined in large quantities (Ashmore, 1982,72).

The Moultonhall Works were located 1km north of Winsford Bridge, on the east bank of the Weaver. The works were leased for 50 years from 1858 and expanded considerably between 1877 and 1898 (Lancaster University Archaeology Unit, 1992). The Bostock Works were due south of the Moultonhall Works. Very little is known about these rock salt mine works, which appear on the OS First Edition map of 1874-5 as a large complex of buildings and in 1908 were described as containing 62 pans, timber built pan houses, three brine shafts and a brine cistern (Lancaster University Archaeology Unit, 1992). The Birkenhead and Liverpool Salt Works was located on the east bank of the Weaver. To the north-east were the Wharton Works where in 1915 there was a rock-salt mine and a 12 acre works. Directly north of the Birkenhead and Liverpool works were the Meadowbank Works, which began in 1844 with the sinking of two shafts and continued to operate until 1892, then reopened in 1928 when the last Northwich mine was closed (Ashmore, 1982, 72).

#### **3.5.4.2 Cotton Mill**

A cotton spinning and doubling mill stood in Well Street, Over. It was built in 1869/70 by Messrs Abraham Haigh and Son, who also built houses for the mill workers. The mill was destroyed by a fire in 1874, and its chimney pulled down in 1904 (Winsford Record, 1997). Also a fustian mill was opened at Over Mill, John Street in 1886 (Curzon, 1997,78).

#### **3.5.4.3 Religion**

St Chad's church has undergone a number of renovations and phases of rebuilding (1870, 1904 and 1926), that have lengthened and widened the structure, and it therefore retains little of the original fabric or plan (DoE, 1986, 112).

A cross stands 10m from the south wall of St Chad's chancel (CSMR 793/1/2). It was erected in 1543 as a preaching cross and remains in its original position. The top of the cross has been removed and since 1745 it has been adorned by a brass sundial. It may have replaced an earlier cross. An 18th or 19th century cross stands on Delamere Street, consisting of nine steps with the doorway of the village lockup (now blocked) incorporated into the base of the cross (CSMR 788).

Christ Church on High Street was originally erected in 1844 by the trustees of the Weaver Navigation Co. However, subsidence caused it to be taken down and rebuilt in 1882 on the same site (Kelly's 1914, 692). St John's Church on Delamere Street, Over was built in 1863. The Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Swanlow Lane was built in 1861 and a Wesleyan Chapel in High Street built in 1883. The United Methodist Chapel in High Street was rebuilt in 1877. There are Primitive Methodist Chapels in the High Street built in 1869 and Chester Road built in 1876 (Kelly's, 1914, 692). At Wharton, Christ Church was built in 1843 and rebuilt in 1849. A Methodist Chapel was erected in 1884 on Winsford Hill and two others were built on Station Road in 1860 and 1893 (Kelly's, 1939, 467).

### **3.5.5 Population**

Over's population in 1664 has been estimated from the Hearth Tax returns as 470 (MacGregor, 1992, 38), which was the largest settlement in Eddisbury Hundred. Wharton's population in 1664 has been estimated from the Hearth Tax returns as 155, and was the 25th largest settlement in Northwich Hundred (MacGregor, 1992, 38). From 1801-1971 population data is available from the census returns, which is printed in the Victoria County History (Harris 1979, 202-240), and for 1981 and 1991 census data has been reproduced under Class Licence Number C01W0000125 with the permission of the Controller of the HMSO

	<b>Over</b>	<b>Wharton</b>
<b>1801</b>	881	753
<b>1811</b>	1796	888
<b>1821</b>	2157	853
<b>1831</b>	2601	1060
<b>1841</b>	2816	1400
<b>1851</b>	3167	1775
<b>1861</b>	3774	2234
<b>1871</b>	5038	2597
<b>1881</b>	6534	3507
<b>1891</b>	6835	3605
<b>1901</b>	7063	3319
<b>1911</b>	7300	3470
<b>1921</b>	7354	3602
<b>1931</b>	7306	3692
<b>1951</b>	12738	
<b>1961</b>	12760	
<b>1971</b>	24932	
<b>1981</b>	26965	
<b>1991</b>	27535	

Up to and including 1871 the above figures refer to the populations of the townships of Over and Wharton. After 1871 the figures refer to the civil parishes of Over and Wharton and after 1951 to the population of Winsford Civil Parish, which includes the populations of Over and Wharton (Harris 1979, 202-240).

### **3.5.6 Transport and Communications**

A number of routeways meet at Stock's Hill to the east of St Chad's church, where they once joined a ford on the River Weaver, which is now lost - submerged when subsidence created Bottom Flash (Dodgson, 1970, 175). One of these routes is Welsh Lane, which runs to the south of St Chad's. This, Dodgson suggests, probably marks a branch route used by Welsh salters who were trading with Middlewich. The main routeway passed from Middlewich to Winsford Bridge and along Over High Street, then on to Kelsall and Chester (Dodgson, 1970, 47). Dodgson does not attribute a date to these routes but they are possibly medieval if not earlier. The road east, connecting Winsford to Middlewich (A54) was turpiked in 1752 (Harrison, 1886).

The River Weaver was made navigable to Northwich and Winsford by 1732. The Weaver Navigation Trustees resisted proposals for the Trent and Mersey Canal to pass through Winsford because they did not want to jeopardise their monopoly of trade on the river (Curzon, 1997,55). Instead the Weaver was improved with the channel deepened and locks modernised (Curzon, 1997, 55). The Weaver Navigation was crossed by a substantial iron girder bridge, which was erected in 1857 and rebuilt in 1929 by Cheshire County Council (Kelly's, 1939, 474).

The proposal to run the Grand Junction Railway through Wharton was rejected for similar reasons to that of the Trent and Mersey Canal. Instead it passed through Crewe where a new town developed as a result. Winsford and Over Station, the terminus of the Cuddington branch of the Cheshire Lines Committee railway (West Cheshire Railway) was built on the west bank of the river in 1870 and closed in 1930 (Greville, 1954, 143). Eventually the Over and Wharton branch line of the London and North Western Railway (LNWR) was constructed in 1882 (ibid 136).

### **3.5.7 The Surrounding Area (Figure 1)**

A number of 17th century buildings survive in the surrounding area, for example, Catsclough Cottage just to the north of Winsford, Bradford Mill House 2.5km north and Dairy House Farmhouse 2km south.

## **4 PLAN COMPONENTS**

The town has been divided into twelve components (prefixed by **COM**) and tentatively sub-divided by period, although there is a need for a great deal of further work to define the date of these plan components more closely. Many would have spanned more than one period but are discussed under their earliest likely date of occurrence. In some cases tightly defined plan components can be identified, in others only a general area can be delineated and these should be treated as a model against which future evidence should be tested.

Plan components commence with the early medieval period, and the potential location of the early medieval church and settlement at Over. Wharton and Winsford were both small, dispersed settlements during the medieval period, and this pattern persisted until salt production began in the 18th century. Over meanwhile appears to have had an element of nucleation, which it has been possible to map approximately as plan components, although it is likely that much of the rest of the settlement was dispersed and consisted of scattered farmsteads. For the later period, the OS First Edition map of c 1874 has been used to define the extent of settlement and industry.

### **EARLY MEDIEVAL c 450 - 1066 (Figure 2)**

**COM 1** - St Chad's Church

**COM 2** - Settlement?

### **MEDIEVAL c1066 – 1540 (Figure 2)**

- COM 3** - Burgage Plots, south of Delamere Street
- COM 4** - Burgage Plots, north of Delamere Street
- COM 5** - ?Tenements, south of Delamere Street
- COM 6** - ?Tenements, north of Delamere Street

### **POST-MEDIEVAL c 1874 (Figure 3)**

- COM 7** - Settlement
- COM 8** - Industry
- COM 9** - Weaver Navigation
- COM 10** - West Cheshire Railway
- COM 11** - London and North Western Railway (LNWR)

### **MODERN c 2000 (Figure 3)**

- COM 12** - Settlement

#### **4.1 Early Medieval (Figure 2)**

At Over, the sub-circular shape of the churchyard, the dedication of the church to St Chad and the discovery of an interlaced sculpture fragment, all point to there having been an early medieval church on the site of the present church of St Chad's (**COM 1**). It is unlikely that this early church would have existed in isolation as the present church survives today, and it is suggested that there was settlement located in the immediate vicinity. However, the exact location and extent of this is unknown, and only an approximation can be attempted. **COM 2** is therefore intended to provide a rough indication of its location. Topographically the area to the north and east of the church is flatter and may have been more conducive to settlement than the steeper slopes of the west and south, and perhaps settlement was located further east towards the ford across the Weaver that was lost when the Bottom Flash was created. Further archaeological analysis of this area, potentially including excavation will be required in order to define and identify the nature and extent of this settlement.

#### **4.2 Medieval (Figure 2)**

The focus of the settlement of Over appears to have shifted 1km north, when the medieval borough was created c1300, and this has been approximately mapped as **COMs 3** and **4**. The regular, long, narrow tenements south of Delamere Street (**COM 3**) are typical of planned medieval burgages and are bound by what appears to be a 'back lane', which is a typical characteristic of medieval town planning, allowing access to the rear of the burgage plots and the common fields, which may have lain beyond. To the north of Delamere Street is another homogenous plan component comprising long, narrow tenements, which are typical of planned burgage plots. How far the borough extended along Delamere Street is unknown and this requires further definition. However, the tenements outlined in **COMs 5** and **6** appear to post date that of the borough. Here tenements are irregular in plan and a piecemeal development can be inferred, as opposed to a period of formal planning. This development may have occurred in the later medieval period and perhaps even

the early post medieval period. Further analysis and archaeological intervention is required if the nature and extent of medieval Over is to be satisfactorily understood.

### **4.3 Post Medieval (Figure 3)**

By 1874 settlement (**COM 7**) had spread along High Street uniting Over, Winsford and Wharton in a linear pattern. It was during the mid to late 19th century, thanks to the expanding salt industry (**COM 8**) that Winsford achieved large scale growth. This development was precipitated by the opening of the River Weaver (**COM 9**) for navigation in the early 18th century and then by the development of the rail network in the 19th century (**COM 10** and **11**), which provided a new method of transporting goods to and from Winsford. Salt works spread north from the top of Bottom Flash, parallel with the River Weaver for c 2km, following the band of Lower Keuper Saliferous beds from which brine springs emerge. Other industries attracted to Winsford included brick works, a salt and bone works on the east bank of the Weaver, and a cotton spinning and doubling mill on Well Street, within the immediate vicinity of which, terraced houses were constructed, presumably to house the mill workers. In 1882 the Winsford and Wharton branch line of the LNWR (**COM 11**) was constructed and in 1886 a fustian mill was opened on John Street.

### **4.4 Modern (Figure 3)**

Settlement has steadily expanded at Wharton, filling the area between the tracks of the LNWR to the east and the River Weaver to the west, and the area to the east of this has been developed by the large Winsford Industrial Estate. In Over there has been large scale development of housing estates and this has engulfed all of the earlier settlement, although St Chad's church retains its isolation to the south.

## **5 HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL**

### **5.1 Above-Ground Remains**

There are two Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the Winsford area: the site of the medieval moated grange of Marton (SAM 13519) and the medieval moated site just south of Bostock Hall (SAM 13495). There is one Conservation Area that covers a block of fields surrounding St Chad's Church and another north-east of Winsford in the environs of Bostock Hall. There are 26 listed buildings in the urban area of Winsford. All are Grade II apart from St Chad's Church which is listed Grade II\* (Department of the Environment, 1986).

Little survives in Winsford pre-dating the industrial period. Other than St Chad's church there are no standing buildings that would suggest to the passer by that Over had any history pre-dating the 19th century.

### **5.2 Below-Ground Remains**

Although the records of the excavation carried out in Delamere Street, Over in 1973 are scant, the excavation revealed a number of post medieval features including a 17th century ditch that was excavated to the depth of 1m (Curzon, 1974, 34). Since the 1970s, Winsford has undergone intensive development which is likely to have

destroyed a lot of archaeological deposits. However, this excavation shows that in Over, where later ground disturbances have not been too great, there is a strong possibility that archaeological deposits may survive.

There also appears to be good level of preservation of industrial remains, for example at the site of the Bostock Works, the massive brine cistern of 1.8 ha survives in good condition and trenching has revealed survival of the remains of Moulton Hall salt works.

## **6 PRIORITIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK**

### **6.1 General**

The study of Over and Winsford 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 the study of industrial archaeology (Priority T6; English Heritage 1997, 53). A recent report on the salt industry emphasises the importance of the Cheshire salt towns (Gilman ed 1998). Work at Over and Winsford would fit into a number of these national priorities, particularly:

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

### **6.2 Roman**

- Establish the route of the Roman road through Over to Middlewich.

### **6.3 Early Medieval**

- Establish the location of early medieval Over. Was this the site of the settlement of *Chirchton*?
- Establish the foundation date and the form of the Saxon church at Over.
- Establish the nature and extent of any settlement at Wharton and Winsford Bridge.

### **6.4 Medieval**

- Establish the date of the foundation of the medieval church; establish its form and phases of building.
- Establish the precise location of settlement areas and date their phases of expansion and contraction, in particular identify when settlement shifted from Over Church to Over.
- Establish the nature of buildings and activities on settlement plots; is there a discernible difference between 'burgage-type' properties on Delamere Street and those that appear to post date the creation of the borough?
- Examine evidence for trade and industry, establish its date and nature
- Establish the location of the market place of Over, when it was used and when it fell into disuse.

## 6.5 Post Medieval

- Establish precise location of post-medieval brine working, number of brine pits and techniques in use.
- Establish the precise location of settlement areas and date their phases of expansion and contraction.
- Establish nature of buildings and activities on settlement plots.
- Examine evidence for trade and industry, establish its date and nature.
- Examine the development of saltworking, establish the expansion and contraction of the industry at Winsford

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## **8 ILLUSTRATIONS**

Figure 1: Over and Winsford and the Surrounding area

Figure 2: The Early Development of Over

Figure 3: The Later Development of Over and Winsford

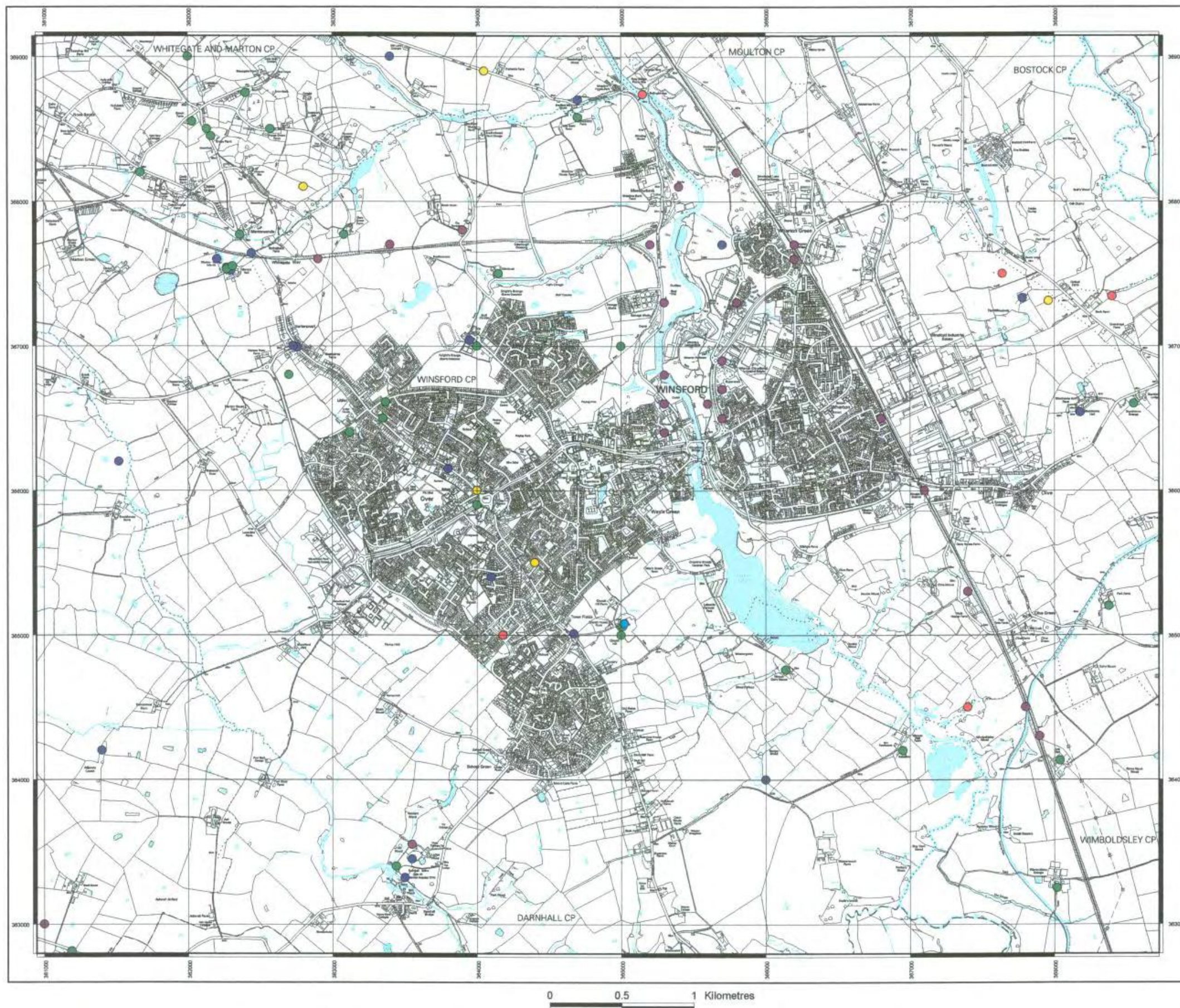


Figure 1  
Over and Winsford  
and the  
Surrounding Area

Sites and Monuments

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

1:25000

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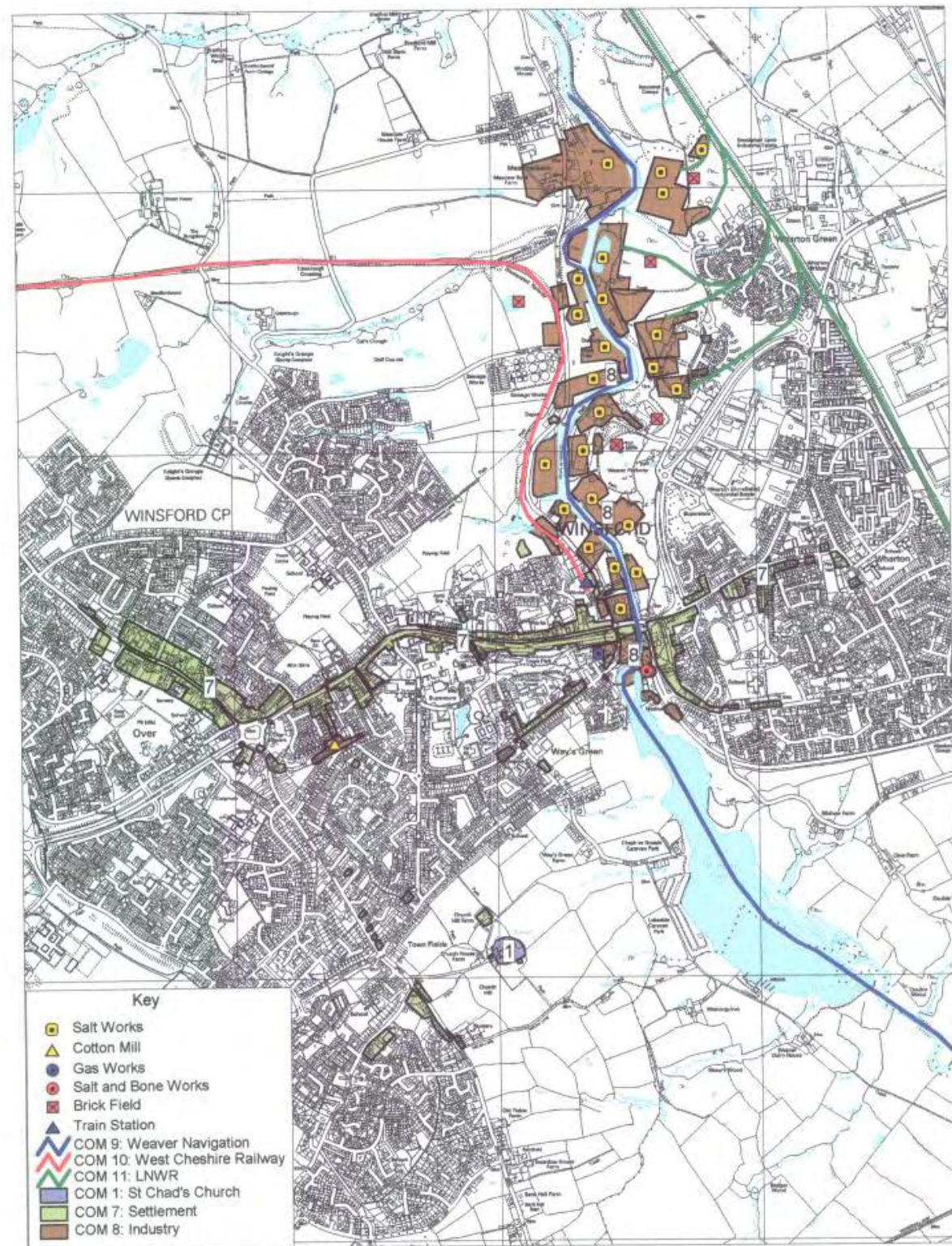


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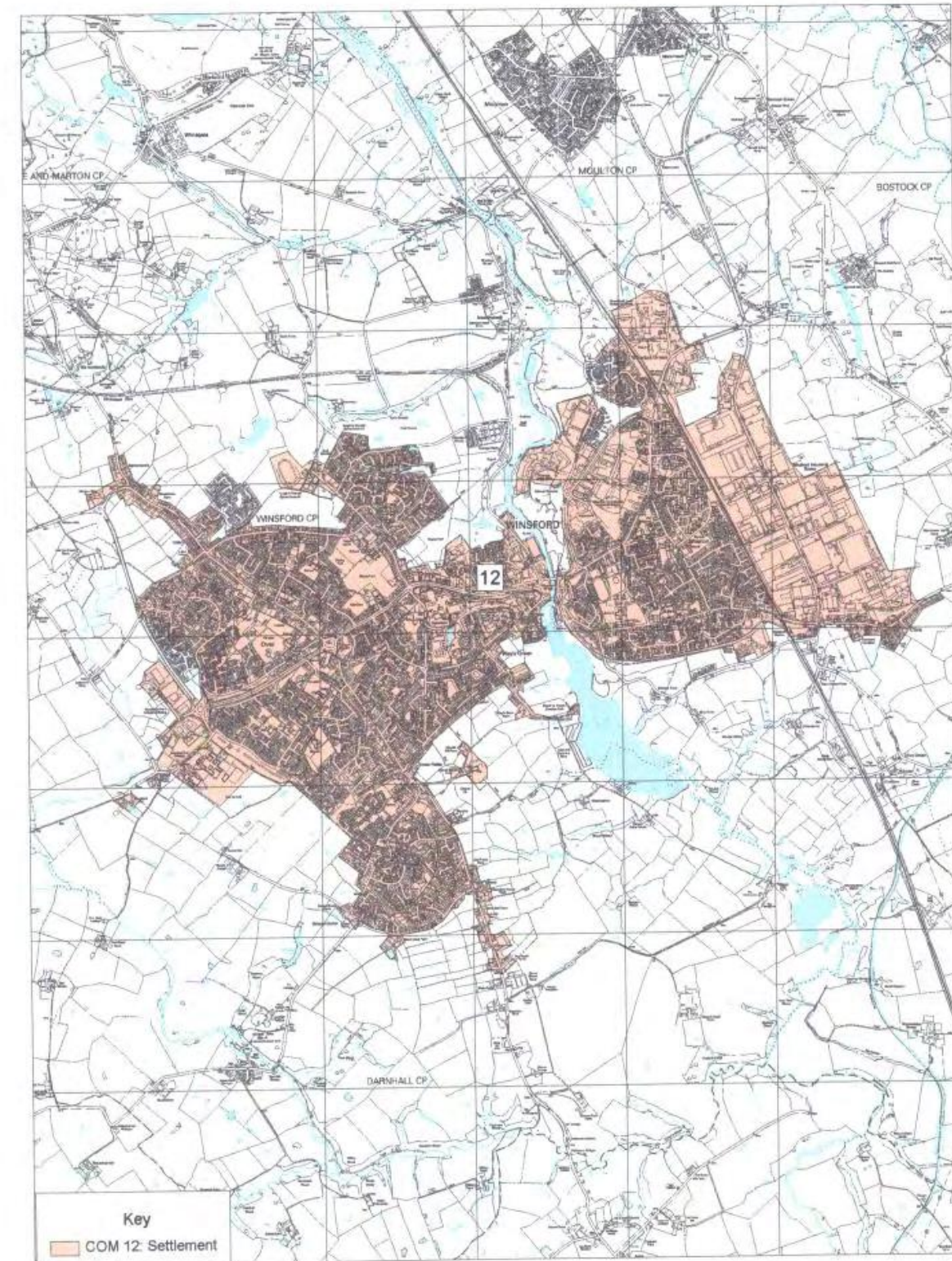
Figure 3: The Later Development of Over and Winsford



Post Medieval c 1874

0 200 400 Metres

1:20000



Modern c 2000

0 0.5 1 Kilometres

1:35000

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