CHESHIRE HISTORIC TOWNS SURVEY

Tarporley

Archaeological Assessment

2003

CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

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TARPORLEY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Jo Clark

1. SUMMARY

"Tarporley town consists chiefly of one long street, a considerable thoroughfare on the London Road, broad, cleanly and well paved, with respectable buildings and is by far the most sightly of the towns of the western hundreds" (Ormerod, 1882, 229). Very little has changed since this description was written, only the invention of the car bringing tourists and commuters has allowed the ribbon town to expand. Indeed for much of its history this small settlement resembled more of a village than a town.

1.1 Topography and Geology

The town is situated on a slight elevation at 100m AOD on the Mid-Cheshire Ridge, an outcrop of sandstone that runs north-south from Runcorn and Frodsham through Tarporley to Malpas in the south. From the ridge it commands a '…prospect of the Welsh mountains and the vale of Chester, and an exceedingly beautiful view of the castle and rock of Beeston, and the Broxton Hills.' (Ormerod, 1882, 229). It is surrounded by rolling countryside, the result of glacial activity. The nearest watercourses to the town are the Waterless Brook which runs to the west, and the Wettenhall Brook which runs to the south of the town.

Tarporley's underlying geology consists of Tarporley Siltstones, which are part of the Mercia Mudstone Group (British Geological Survey, 1986). The south of the town has a drift geology of fluvio-glacial deposits, while the surrounding area comprises either boulder clay or sand and gravel (Geological Survey of Great Britain, 1965).

The soils of north Tarporley are brown earth, while those in the south of the town are brown sands; both support a mixture of arable and pasture. The brown soils are graded class 2 and class 1 in exceptional circumstances, while the brown sands are graded classes 2-3 (Furness 1978, 66, 82).

The town lies on the Chester to Nantwich road (A51). This is now part of a by-pass that loops around the western side of the settlement, diverting traffic from its High Street. In the north of the town and to the south at Four Lane-Ends a number of roads converge.

1.2 Administrative Unit

At Domesday, Tarporley was included in the Hundred of Rushton. By 1180-1200 it was part of the Eddisbury Hundred (Dodgson, 1971, 160). Tarporley emerged as a separate parish c 1200 following rejection by the Papal authorities of a claim that it was a chapelry of Bunbury (Dunn, 1987, 32). It was also a medieval seignorial borough (Philips and Smith, 1994, 31). Today Tarporley is a township and civil parish within the district of Vale Royal.

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1.3 Place Name

Variations upon the name Tarporley are documented from the 11th century (*Torplei*, *Torpelei* etc.). The origins of the place-name are unclear and Dodgson refers to a number of unconvincing suggestions: it originates from a 'pear wood near a hill called *Torr',* i.e. torr, pere and leah**;** the spelling suggests old English *porperea-leah* i.e. a man who lives in a hamlet; or possibly the name may have some Scandinavian origin and been given the nickname the *Thorp-er's* by English neighbours (Dodgson, 1971, 295).

2 SOURCES

2.1 Historical

There are very few secondary sources available for the history of Tarporley. There is a parish history (Latham, 1973) and the post medieval history of Tarporley is the subject of an M.A. dissertation (Peate, 1996). The main source of information is Ormerod's *History of Cheshire* (1882).

In the Chester Record Office there are a number of detailed records, particularly in the Arderne family collection that may be of relevance to Tarporley but unfortunately, their analysis is beyond the remit of the present survey.

2.2 Cartographic

Tarporley is marked on the county maps of Saxton (1577) and Speed (1610). The earliest map to show a schematic plan of the township and the local road pattern is Burdett's map of Cheshire (1777). The earliest available plan of the town is dated to 1811. While useful, it was drawn on a very small scale and lacks the detail of the Tithe Award of 1839 and the Ordnance Survey (OS) First Edition 6": 1 mile map of 1874.

2.3 Archaeological

Before the present survey there were just 21 sites recorded in Tarporley 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 will be provided. The present survey has added a further eleven records, chiefly civic sites (e.g. schools, police station and chapels) of 18th to 19th century date.

No archaeological work is known to have taken place in Tarporley.

3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

3.1 Prehistoric

A number of prehistoric finds have been discovered within close proximity of Tarporley (Neolithic stone axe CSMR 874, flint scraper CSMR 875 and a Bronze Age barbed and tanged arrow head CSMR 2321) and while this does not suggest settlement, it does indicate prehistoric activity within the area. There are also

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suggestions of Bronze Age burials at Tarporley (Ormerod, 1882, 1, and Jackson, 1934, CSMR 1018). However, neither of these references has been substantiated.

3.2 Roman

Ormerod (1882, 1) suggests that Tarporley High Street was part of a Roman Road called the Via Devana which ran from Chester to Colchester. However, this is just one of three separate accounts of the route that he mentions. Watkin (1886, 63) also suggests that a portion of Roman Road survives in the route of 'Road Street' in Tarporley. However, it has also been suggested that this street name derives from the Chapel of the Rood which was one of the names given to the Hermitage Chapel located nearby (Dodgson, 1971, 296). Other evidence of Roman activity is limited to a coin of Claudius II, which was found in the vicinity of Tarporley and dates to 268-270 AD (CSMR 879). Also, 1.5km to the north-east at Eaton-by-Tarporley is the only known Roman Villa in Cheshire. (Harris and Thacker, 1987, 211; CSMR 882/1).

3.3 Early medieval

The location and extent of early medieval Tarporley is unknown but it is included in the Domesday Book (1086).

The Domesday Survey Records that:

(251*) The same Gilbert holds Torpelei [Tarporley]. Wulfgeat (Ulviet) held it and was a free man. There [are] 2 hides that pay geld. The land is for 4 ploughs. In demesne is 1 [plough] and 2 serfs, and 4 villeins and 2 bordars with 1 plough. Wood 1 league long and 1 wide, and 1 acre of meadow. T.R.E. it was worth 20s., now 10s. He found it waste.*
(Harris and Thacker 1987, 360)

The Domesday entry indicates that Tarporley was a small agricultural settlement. Like many Cheshire townships, it had suffered devastation in the harrying of the north by Norman forces 1069-70, and had made only a partial recovery by 1086.

3.4 Medieval

3.4.1 The Manor

At Domesday, the landowner Wulfgeat was succeeded by Gilbert de Venables on seven estates, including Tarporley. The manor was then held by the Thorpley family who were probably descended from the Venables. In 1293 the de Greys held the manor and in 1388 Reginald de Grey of Ruthin is documented as holding in demesne a moiety of the town of Torpurlegh, also the patronage of the church, and of a chapel called the Hermits, near the town, from the King as Earl of Chester (Ormerod, 1882, 226).

In the medieval period the Township of Tarporley was in the Forest of Delamere (Husain, 1973, 56). The road running south-west north-east, dividing the forests of Mara and Mondrem (as they were known before they were conjoined to become Delamere), was called Peytefinsty Road and this ran past Tarporley and through

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Cuddington to Weaverham (Husain, 1973, 56). This appears to have followed much of the route of the pre-turnpiked A49 (see Burdett, 1777).

In 1353 Richard Done claimed the right to the post of Chief Forester of Delamere and Mondrem. This position then descended thorough the Done family until 1630 when it passed to the Crewe family and then in 1709 to the Ardernes. The post ceased to have a practical function in 1819 when the forest was enclosed.

3.4.2 Settlement

There is no surviving borough charter for Tarporley, but the charter was probably granted between 1281 and 1298 (Letters 2002). It is regarded as a seignorial borough (Philips and Smith, 1994, 31) and it was listed as a borough governed by a mayor in deeds of 1348 and 1396 (Bagshaw, 1850, 625). The first documented mayor is Richard Francis (1297). It is not known when this post ceased to exist but by at least the 19th century the government of the town has been in the hands of two constables (Ormerod, 1882, 229). There is also documentary reference from 1311 to burgages in Tarporley (Ormerod, 1882, 225).

Three wells are mentioned in the CSMR (880/0/1, 880/0/2 and 881/1). The first is a 16th century ducking well, now buried beneath a bungalow, and the second is a medieval well sited in the rear plot of 40 High Street. The third is the Salter's Well at Salterswell House, sited just north of the medieval settlement of Tarporley. It is suggested that this was probably a salt way and that the well was used by salt merchants (Dodgson, 1971, 297).

3.4.3 Economy

Tarporley was a small town, dominated by arable and pastoral farming. 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 of 1405, Tarporley was assessed at just 13s 4d, the 15th largest sum paid out of the 57 townships listed in the Hundred of Eddisbury. Eaton and Rushton had the largest assessment (40s 0d), followed by Frodsham and Over, both assessed at 36s 0d (Booth 1985).

In 1281/1282, Hugh de Thorpley obtained a grant of a weekly market at his manor and an annual fair of three days. Ormerod records that the market was held on Wednesdays, while Letters notes that it was held on Tuesdays. The fair was held on the vigil, feast and morrow of the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross (14 September) (Ormerod, 1882, 226; Letters 2002). These privileges were transferred to Reginald de Grey in 1293 and were to remain in the de Grey family until the reign of Henry VIII, when they were sold by the Earl of Kent to Hugh Dennis. The location of this market is unknown and by the time the Market Hall was constructed in the mid-18th century, it had evidently fallen out of use some time before.

3.4.4 Religion

The Parish Church of St Helen is set back from the High Street, on the west side of the town. The exact date of the foundation of St Helen's is unknown. At its earliest it

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can be traced back to c 1200 when the claim that Tarporley's church was a chapelry of Bunbury was renounced (Dunn, 1987, 32). In 1298 the first Rector at Tarporley is documented (Ormerod, 1882, 234).

The arcades of the nave are 15th century but most of the church has undergone extensive restoration, particularly in the late 18th and mid-19th century (Richards, 1947, 317). In the churchyard is a 15th or 16th century cross base and shaft, which is now surmounted by a sundial. Traditionally this is thought to be the base of the old village cross of the nearby village of Eaton (CSMR 880/1/2). According to Ormerod, like Prestbury, Nantwich and Frodsham, Tarporley appears to have been a one of the minor centres of ecclesiastical authority (Ormerod, 1882, 229).

3.4.5 The Surrounding Landscape

There are a handful of notable sites that lie within the environs of Tarporley. Approximately 0.5km west of Tarporley in Hermitage Field is the site of a 13th century chapel (CSMR 869/1) and 3km to the south of Tarporley is the 13th century Beeston Castle.

3.5 Post Medieval

3.5.1 The Manor

The manor passed from Hugh Dennis to the Hintons, and it was purchased c1590 by the Dones who, since roughly the 13th century, had resided at Utkinton Hall to the north of Tarporley. The history of the town was to be closely tied to this family, as it was to subsequent dominant families. After the Dones, the manor passed to the Crewe family in 1630 and then in 1709 to the Ardernes. The Manor House to the south-west of St Helen's church was built c 1585.

3.5.2 Civil War

Tarporley was the scene of a minor skirmish in the Civil War. This took place on 21 February 1642 between Sir William Brereton's forces (who were forced to retreat) and the Royalists from Chester. In the meadow near the church, a few traces of entrenchments thrown up by the Parliamentarians were visible in the mid-19th century (Bagshaw, 1850, 625 and CSMR 870).

3.5.3 Settlement

Reverend William Cole, writing in 1775, said that "it was a disused market til Sir John Crewe built them a very handsome Market House and procured them a market on Thursdays, which however is not yet greatly frequented" (Cole, 1913, 295). This was built next to the Swan Hotel (built 1769), from materials brought from Utkinton Hall. The date of its construction is not known. During the 19th century the market appears to have shifted to a more conducive site at Four Lane-Ends, which had a good road connection to the canal network. It was noted for its important weekly Corn Market, which was one of the most considerable in Cheshire in the 19th century (Peate, 1996, 41).

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In 1831 Tarporley was described as one long street which is well paved and terminated at the end by the ancient manor house (Freeman et al, 1966, 172). A number of buildings were constructed in the 19th century: the Almshouses which had been built by the Crewe family in 1704 were rebuilt in 1826 (Kelly's, 1939, 431) and demolished in 1962; the public hall on Forest Road, which was used for public meetings and concerts was built in 1851 (Kelly's, 1939, 431); and a police office and residence for a constable was erected in 1849 (Bagshaw, 1850, 626) and demolished in the early 20th century (Latham, 1971, 81). The town was supplied with gas from works erected in 1862 by a limited company, and this was extended in 1908 (Kelly's, 1939, 431).

In 1636 the Done Recreation Room was built by Dame Dorothy Done behind St Helen's church as a Free School. It was restored and a reading room added in 1888, and then enlarged in 1930. A National School was founded in 1849 and extended in 1887. The British School was founded in 1877.

3.5.4 Economy

Farming continued to dominate the local industry. However, a wide range of services were also available in Tarporley: seven Hotels, Inns and Taverns, three blacksmiths, three boot and shoe makers, two butchers, six linen and woollen drapers, eight shopkeepers, five tailors and two wheelwrights. In addition, there were Carriers to Chester on a Wednesday and Saturday, and to Warrington on a Monday (Bagshaw, 1850, 628).

Map evidence indicates that at the time of the Tithe Award (1839) there was a quarry to the north of the town just off Forest Road and a disused quarry is recorded on the OS First Edition Map of 1874 just to the east of the National School. Also recorded on the tithe map is the name 'Brick Kiln Field', which is located on the west side of the High Street at the very north end of the town.

There were eight inns in Tarporley in 1630; this declined to six in 1797 but by 1822 the number of inns was restored to eight (MacGregor, 1992, 38).

3.5.5 Religion

The church of St Helen continued to act as the parish church but there was increasing provision for Protestant Nonconformity from the 18th century onwards. In the south of the town a Baptist Chapel with its own graveyard was constructed in 1866. A Primitive Methodist Chapel was erected on land bought in 1846, on the east side of the main street in the north of the town but by 1922 the building had ceased to function as a Chapel and was sold. A Wesleyan Methodist Chapel was built c 1791 on the east of the High Street (now the site of Richmond Manse) and later replaced by a new Chapel in 1868.

The date of the old Rectory is unknown. Pevsner's comments are limited to the staircase which was brought from Utkinton Hall. On the available map information the earliest that it can be traced back to is 1811.

3.5.6 Population

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Tarporley's population in 1664 has been estimated from the Hearth Tax returns as numbering 255 (MacGregor, 1992, 38). This would make it just the tenth largest settlement out of the total 64 townships in the Eddisbury Hundred. The largest population at this time was at Over (475), followed by Tarvin (400) and Barrow (375) (MacGregor 1992, 38). From 1801-1971, population data is available from the census returns (Harris 1979, 233-234) 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	674	**1901**	1454
1811	701	**1911**	1414
1821	800	**1921**	1391
1831	995	**1931**	1355
1841	1114	**1951**	1538
1851	1171	**1961**	1552
1861	1212	**1971**	1722
1871	1243	**1981**	1774
1881	1350	**1991**	2308
1891	1419		

3.5.7 Transport and Communications

Tarporley High Street is sited on the Chester to London road. The road north-west to Chester and south-east to Nantwich was opened in 1769. The road north-east towards Acton was turnpiked in 1782 and at least the Tarporley section of this followed a new route. This was called New Road (OS First Edition 1874) and later called Forest Road (OS Second Edition 1898). The earlier route of this road began just to the north at the same place as the road north to Utkinton Hall, following a less direct route than the New Road (Burdett, 1777). The road south to Whitchurch was turnpiked in 1830 (Harrison, 1886, 80).

The emergence of the coaching trade in the early 19th century reflected a period of prosperity in Tarporley. The Swan Hotel was an important coaching inn. This business peaked about 1820 but by 1850 coaching was 'stone dead' (Sylvester, 1971, 84).

As the canal system became established, trade shifted away from Tarporley to Beeston Wharf. The first section of the Shropshire Union Canal, which connected Chester and Nantwich, was built in 1772-9. This was then connected with an outlet into the Mersey at Whitby, which was shortly after renamed Ellesmere Port. Finally in the 1820s and 1830s a section was built to Wolverhampton and another to the Trent and Mersey Canal at Middlewich.

Prosperity was further reduced by the creation of the Crewe to Chester Railway in 1840, which followed the Gowy Valley and missed out Tarporley. A station was opened at Beeston (2 km to the south) and in 1874, this was called the Beeston Castle and Tarporley Station (Peate, 1996, 16).

3.5.7 The Surrounding Landscape (Figure 1)

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Within the immediately surrounding area there are a number of large halls; for example, 1km to the north is Utkinton Hall, 0.5km north-east is Portal Hall and 0.5km east was Arderne Hall (demolished c.1959).

4 PLAN COMPONENTS

The town has been divided into nine components (prefixed by **COM)**. These have been tentatively sub-divided by period, although there is need for a great deal of further work to define the date of these plan components more closely. In some cases tightly defined plan components can be identified. In others only a general area can be delineated and a tighter definition achieved by further fieldwork.

The origins, nature, form and development of the settlement are still incompletely understood. A broad outline can however, be attempted, which can be tested and refined as further work is carried out. There is no evidence at Tarporley for any prehistoric or Roman settlement, although it is likely from spot finds in the area that there was some activity within the area during these periods. Also, while it is likely that there was settlement during the Early Medieval period, there is no evidence available to explain the location or the extent of this. Therefore, the plan components commence with the medieval period. The OS First Edition 6": 1mile map of 1874 has been used to define the extent of the town in the post medieval period.

MEDIEVAL c 1066 – c 1540 (Figure 2)

COM 1 - St Helen's Church
COM 2 - Market Area?
COM 3 - Tenements
COM 4 - Burgages?

POST-MEDIEVAL c 1839 (Figure 2)

COM 5 - Settlement
COM 6 - Manor House
COM 7 - Rectory and Gardens

POST MEDIEVAL c 1874 (Figure 2)

COM 8 - Settlement

MODERN c 2000 (Figure 2)

COM 9 - Settlement

4.1 Medieval (Figure 2)

It is not understood why the medieval church of St Helen (**COM 1**) is set back from the High Street. Perhaps at the time of its construction there were buildings or some form of restriction that prevented it from being built next to the street frontage, or was

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the church yard originally much larger? Tarporley was granted a market charter in the late 13th century and a common medieval feature is the close proximity of the market place to the church. Was the area in front of the church perhaps cleared to make way for the laying out of the market place, or did the market encroach upon the churchyard? The High Street is noticeably wider in this part of the town, which suggests that this also had a marketing function. This potential market place is identified as **COM 2**.

Often medieval churches were established beside the residence of the Lord of the Manor but there is no evidence for there having been a manor house at Tarporley until the 16th century.

Tarporley was a Seigneurial borough, having been granted borough status by the early 14th century and burgages are also recorded at this time. The borough is apparently characterised on both sides of the High Street by long, narrow burgage plots, which may have been laid out by the landowner as an attempt to regulate and take advantage of the successes of the market town. Running along the rear of the burgages is an almost continous rear boundary and path way that would have separated the settlement from the open fields. The exact length of the plots is difficult to determine, and if they did extend as far as is represented then they are unusually long. However, it is important to remember that not all of the plot would have been built upon, with buildings focussed upon the street frontage. The northern limit of this settlement component is unclear. **COM 3** does not reflect this formal layout pattern and it is suggested that this settlement area, which is in close proximity to the church of St Helen, pre-dates **COM 4.**

4.2 Post Medieval Settlement c 1839 (Figure 2)

During the post medieval period the settlement began to expand north and south along the High Street. Significant developments include the Done Recreation Room, which was built in 1636 by Dame Dorothy Done, behind St Helen's church as a Free School. However, it seems that the extent of the medieval settlement had reduced in size, with former burgage plots standing vacant and under-developed. It is not known when this contraction occurred. The extent of settlement at Tarporley c 1839 as identified from the tithe map of that year is depicted as **COM 5**.

The Manor House (**COM 6**) was built c 1585 to the south-east of the church of St Helen. There is no evidence to suggest that it had a predecessor.

The date of the construction of the Rectory and its associated gardens (**COM 7**) is unknown.

By the mid-18th century the market had fallen out of use and the area in front of the church had been in-filled. When this occurred is not known but the decline of Tarporley as a market town was set to continue with the post medieval market hall recorded as "under subscribed" by Reverend Cole in 1775.

4.3 Post Medieval c 1874 (Figure 2)

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The extent of settlement at Tarporley c 1874 has been identified from the OS First Edition 6": 1 mile map and depicted as **COM 8**. Tarporley has evidently only experienced limited growth since 1839, the development to the west largely comprising gardens associated with the rectory. This limited growth is no doubt a result of the lack of communication via the canal and rail networks.

4.4 Modern c 2000 (Figure 2)

The majority of the town's expansion occurred during the 20th century, principally in the southern and eastern areas of the town. This led to the absorption of such areas as Rhuddall Heath.

5 HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

5.1 Above Ground Remains

There is one Scheduled Ancient Monument in Tarporley: the medieval cross base in St Helen's churchyard (SAM 30371), which is also listed Grade II. There are 27 listed buildings in Tarporley. All are listed Grade II, apart from Portal House (built early 20th century), the Swan Hotel (built late 18th/early 19th century), the Market Hall (built mid/late 18th century), the Parish church of St Helen (15th century origins and extensive 19th century alterations) and Road Street House (built early/mid 18th century), all of which are listed Grade II*.

Little survives in Tarporley pre-dating the 18th centuries, except for the Parish church and cross base, the Done Recreation Room and the Manor House.

The majority of the town falls within a Conservation Area. Only the areas of most recent development in the south and south-east of the town have been excluded from this designation. The Conservation Area extends east along Forest Road and down Cobblers Cross Lane, incorporating Portal House and gardens.

5.2 Below Ground Remains

There has not been any archaeological work carried out at Tarporley, so the quality and survival of buried archaeological deposits has not yet been assessed. However, given the limited extent of development, it is likely that the archaeology of the town has undergone only small scale destruction.

6 PRIORITIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK

6.1 General

The study of Tarporley would form 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 Tarporley would fit into a number of priorities particularly the following processes of change:

- PC6 The late Saxon to medieval period

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

(English Heritage 1997, 44-5)

6.1 Early Medieval

- Establish the extent and date of the early settlement at Tarporley

6.2 Medieval settlement

- Establish the foundation date of the church, establish its form and phases of building and explain its location.
- Establish precise location of settlement areas and date their phases of expansion and contraction.
- Establish the nature of buildings and activities on settlement plots; determine whether there is a discernible difference between the planned 'burgage' properties of **COM 4** and what has been posited as an earlier area of settlement **COM 3**.
- Examine evidence for trade and industry.
- Establish the extent and location of the medieval market place and when it fell out of use.
- Establish whether there was a medieval predecessor to the manor house and if so where this was located.

6.3 Post Medieval

- Establish the nature of buildings and activities on settlement plots and date their phases of expansion and contraction.
- Examine evidence for trade and industry and establish its date and nature.

6.4 General

- Examine the local road network for existing and lost routes and establish a chronology.
- Establish whether any potentially date to the Roman period.

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7.2 Maps

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Burdett, P P, 1777, *A Survey of the County Palatine of Chester* (The Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire Occasional Series Volume 1 1974)

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Map of Tarporley Township 1811 (CRO P22/3004/3/2)

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Speed, J, 1662 *The County Palatine of Chester with the Most Ancient Citie Described* (reprint of the 1610 original) CRO PM1/11.

Tithe Award, Tarporley Parish, 1839 (map: CRO EDT 384/2; apportionment EDT 384/1)

8 ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Tarporley and the Surrounding Area
Figure 2: The Development of Tarporley

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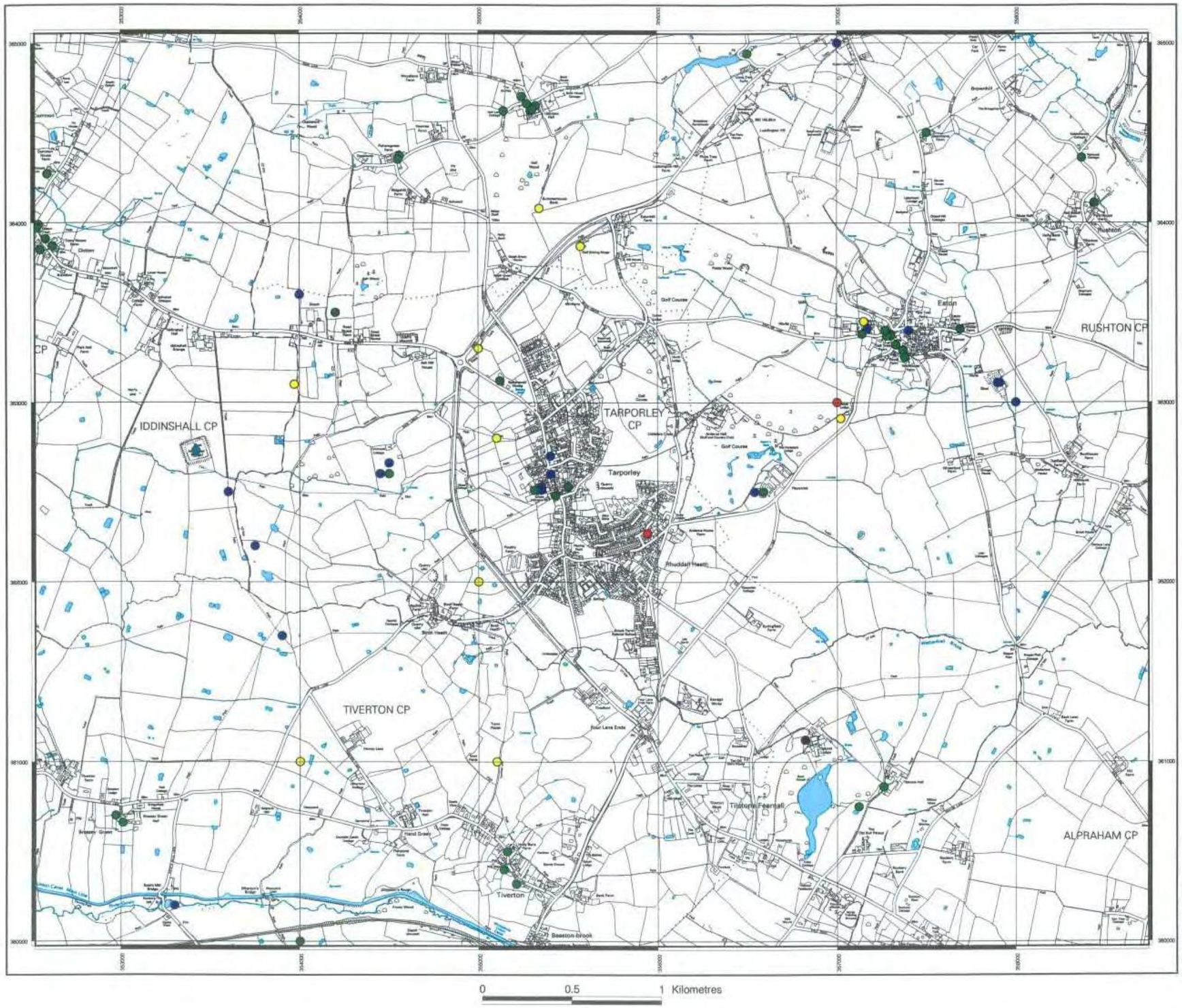

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Figure 1:
Tarporley and the Surrounding Area

Sites and Monuments

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

1:20000

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Figure 2: The Development of Tarporley

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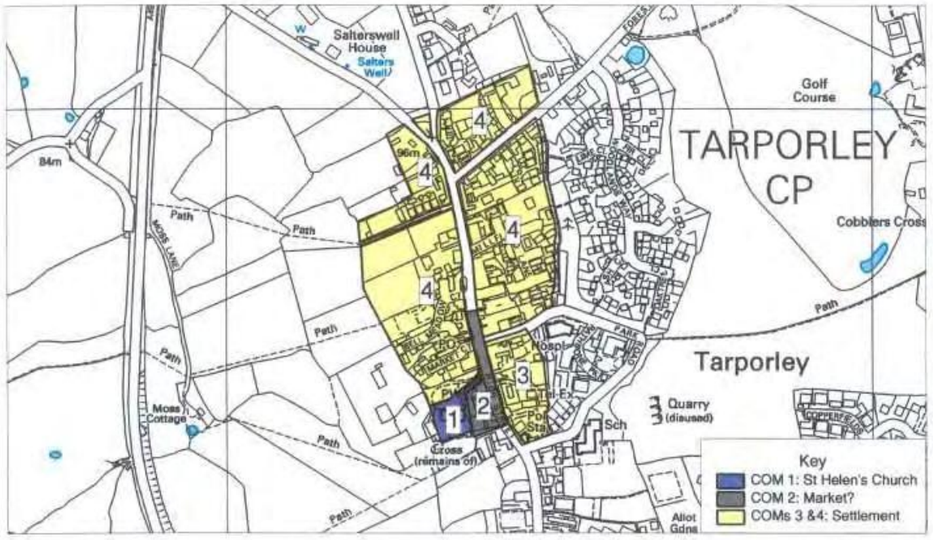

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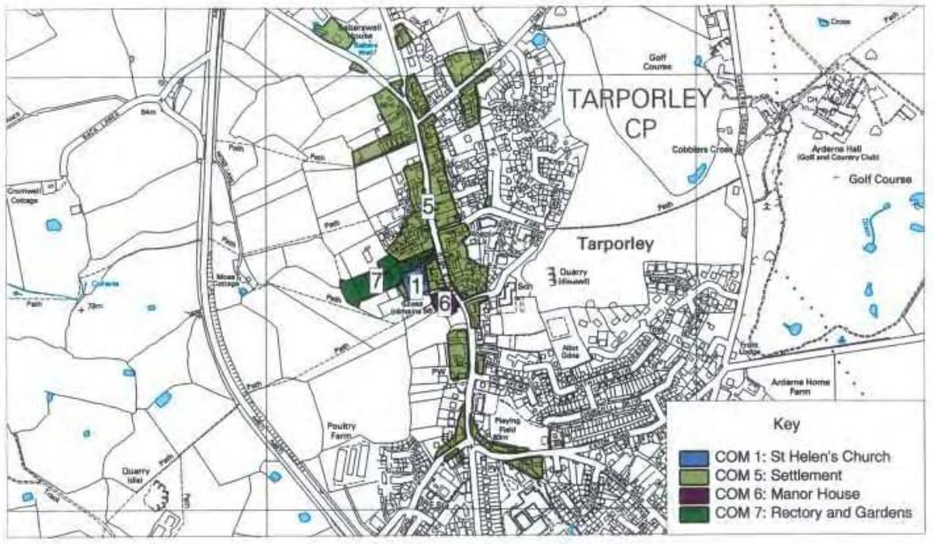

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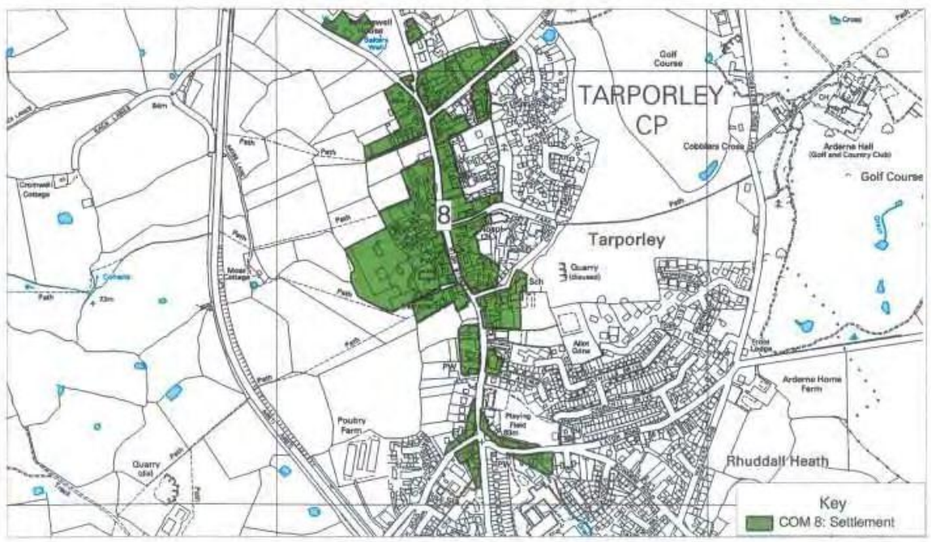
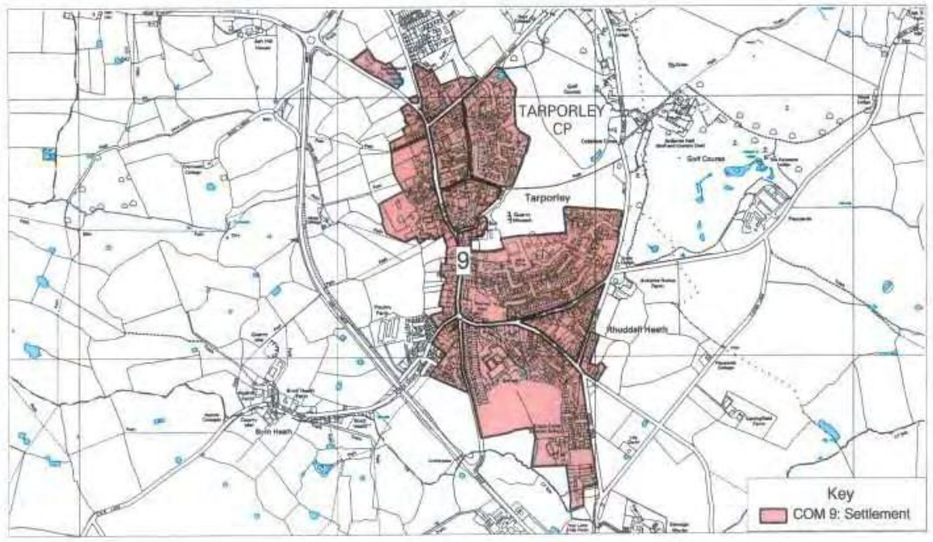


Post Medieval c 1874 0 200 400 Metres 1:12000



Modern c 2000 0 300 600 Metres 1:20000

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