

## Chapter 1. Sefton Rural Fringes

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The Metropolitan Borough of Sefton lies to the north of Liverpool and embraces the coastal strip between Southport and Bootle and the area eastwards, across the valley of the River Alt, to the ancient townships of Lydiate, Melling and Aintree. Seventeen ancient townships, including parts of North Meols and Altcar, lie within the area of study (fig. 1.1)<sup>1</sup>. As a creation of local government reorganisation in 1974 the Borough takes its name from that of its most important landowners, the Molyneux family - earls of Sefton. Their principal residence was at Sefton Old Hall from at least the latter years of the 12<sup>th</sup> century until the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. After their removal to Croxteth Hall, nearer to Liverpool, they continued to maintain a household in Sefton township until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At its northern end the Borough includes only the coastal area between the historic township of North Meols (Southport) southwards to the estuary of the Alt. The Metropolitan boundary, therefore, does not wholly respect the ancient boundaries and excludes over half of North Meols, most of Altcar and the estate of Eggargarth (or Eggargate), which formerly lay in Lydiate. In the text which follows, 'Sefton' indicates the area now named as the Metropolitan Borough; the township or manor of Sefton, as the property of the Molyneux family, earls of Sefton, is differentiated as such.

### Topography and drainage

The archaeological evidence for settlement on the flat lands behind the coastal marshes and dunes, the peat mosslands and slightly elevated townships of Lydiate, Maghull and Melling, must be viewed in the light of varying sea-level and climatic changes and their effects on the landscape and its vegetation (Huntley, 1999; Plater *et al.*, 1999; Innes *et al.*, 1999). The district is low-lying at about 7-8m just inland of the coastal dunes between North Meols and Great Crosby and the greatest elevations are achieved at a little over 30m at Melling Mount in the east and at Bootle and Litherland in the south (figs 1.1, 1.2).

The district is drained by the River Alt and its tributaries, which have been straightened, culverted or embanked in an attempt to prevent flooding, and by the Rimrose Brook. These two curving, wide, flat-bottomed valleys effectively separate the south

of the district into zones of slightly more elevated land. East of the Alt are the townships of Melling, Maghull and Lydiate. Between the Alt and Rimrose Brook are Aintree, Netherpton, Sefton, Thornton, Ince Blundell, Great and Little Crosby, the three latter townships having access to the coast. Litherland (with Orrell and Ford) lies within the arc of the Rimrose Brook and also extends to the coast. North of the Alt a wide strip of mossland punctuated with small meres extends northwards to Martin Mere. West of the moss the coastal townships of Ravenmeols, Formby, Ainsdale, Birkdale and North Meols were effectively isolated until relatively recently from the rest of the district. Between North Meols and the Alt, natural drainage runs inland from coastal dunes to lengthy artificial drainage ditches which have defined the boundary between the coast and mossland since at least as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Lancs RO DDIn 63/12).

The moss is generally below 8m OD and several areas of standing water survived until the middle years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The largest of these, Martin Mere, lay in the east part of North Meols. In 1532-42 it was described by Leland as 'the greatest meare in Lancastreshire a iiii miles in lengthe and a iii in bredthe' (Farrer, 1903, 114) and, on her journey northwards in 1698, Celia Fiennes avoided the mere commenting that it was very hazardous to strangers and said to have parted many a man from his horse (Hillaby, 1983, 214). The first attempts to drain the mere were effected in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. They involved cutting a canal or sluice 24 feet (7.3m) wide, from the shore, through an embanked salt marsh and a moss or bog in North Meols. The canal extended for about one and a half miles (2.4 km) and continued into the lowest parts of the mere. Sea gates at Crossens controlled the flow of water. Due to the flat topography the outfall was insufficient and the channel was quickly clogged with sand and mud. In 1714 the flood-gates were raised by 20in (0.23m) but this resulted in long periods of standing water on the mere. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the sluice was lengthened and deepened, subsidiary drainage ditches were dug and a more sophisticated system of sea-gates was introduced. Good roads over the softest parts of the mere were

<sup>1</sup> Ford and Orrell were attached to the ancient township of Litherland; Linacre was attached to Bootle; Lunt and Netherpton were attached to Sefton; Eggargarth and Cunsough were attached to Lydiate and Melling respectively.

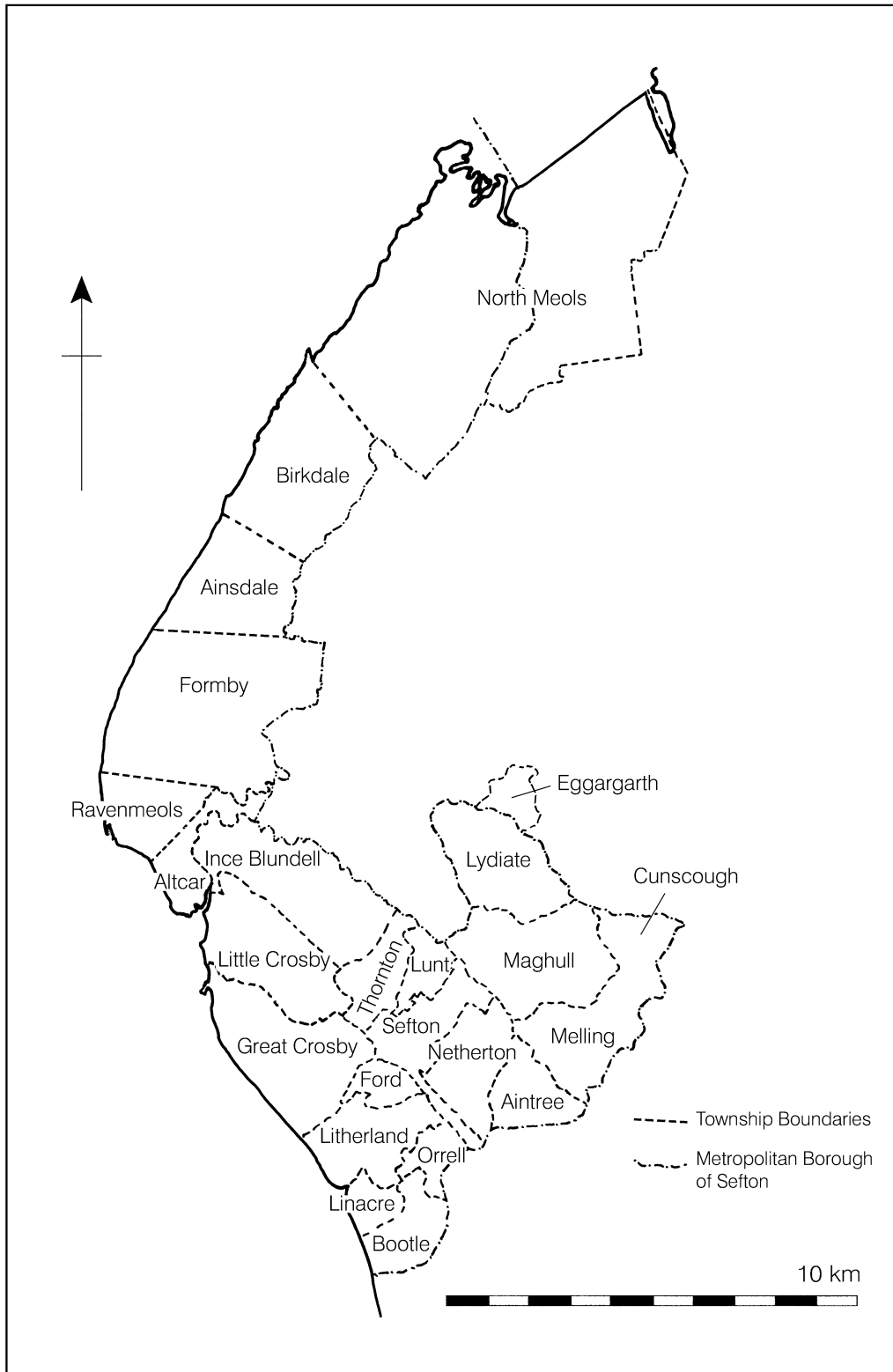


Fig. 1.1 Townships in Sefton

Ford and Orrell were attached to the ancient township of Litherland; Linacre was attached to Bootle; Lunt and Netherton were attached to Sefton; Eggargarth and Cuncough were attached to Lydiate and Melling respectively.

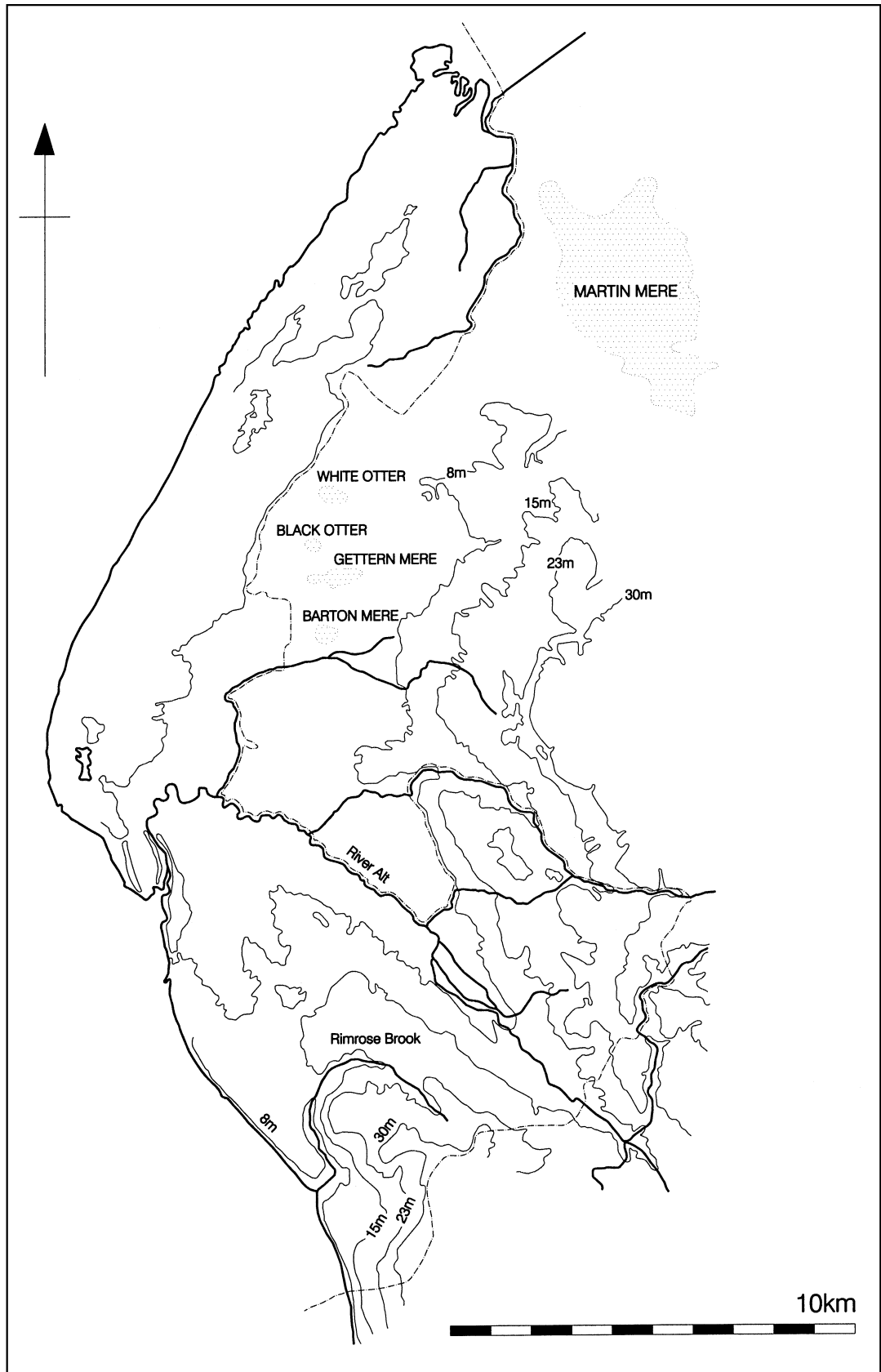


Fig. 1.2 Topography

effected by laying faggots covered with a thick layer of sand (Farrer, 1903, 119-122). Further improvements to the drainage were made in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, again in 1849, and in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gresswell, 1953, 51; Lancs RO DDSc 143/1-25) culminating in the construction of a new pumping station at Crossens in 1961. At North Meols, from 1809 onwards, measures were taken to protect and maintain the coast and reclaim the coastal marshes through the creation of a series of embankments (Gresswell, 1953, 62-65, fig. 18). Further south, the processes of dune development since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the measures taken to protect erosion through the planting of trees and marram grass<sup>2</sup>, have been the subject of much comment and research (Atkinson and Houston, eds 1993; Gresswell, 1953, 67-97; Smith, 1999). However, the effects of coastal change and management on the archaeology of the post-Roman period are still unclear.

A number of smaller meres lay on the mosses east of the coastal strip. Undoubtedly, they provided a useful source of food, as is suggested on a plan of 1557-58 where a fish was depicted in a pond on mossland east of Formby (PRO MR2). The same plan showed a causeway, perhaps of stones, extending into the middle of the mere. Some of the meres survived until the 19<sup>th</sup> century but, although the mosslands are now intensively cultivated, high tides associated with periods of high rainfall increase the level of the water table and can return extensive areas of the the mosses to standing water.

Records dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century are testimony to the need to improve the drainage. 'A message 4 perches long and 5 perches wide upon the diked river' indicates problems of flooding in Ince Blundell at that time (Lancs RO DDIn 53/2). The problems of flood control can be seen again in 1441 when Henry Blundell of Little Crosby took action against the abbot of Whalley for damage to lands in Little Crosby and Ince. This, he alleged, was a consequence of the monks' failure to repair a ditch. It was counterclaimed that the ditch was, in effect, the Alt along which the water flowed to and from the sea and for which the monks could take no responsibility (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 83, n.9). The region's small brooks and ditches play an essential role both in defining the boundaries between townships and estates and in draining the land and, since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, large-scale drainage schemes have been undertaken along

the Alt valley and its principal tributary, the Downholland Brook (Lancs RO DDX 10/3a). The problems of flooding were summed up by John Holt at this time. 'In some places where they are almost drowned in winter, as in Altcar, by the overflow of the River Alt, till lately drained, the families were frequently in such distress as to flee from home and seek refuge, and yet in summer seasons, this country is distressed for want of water, and that to a degree, as to require driving the cattle the space of a mile to drink, the springs being exhausted' (Holt, 1795, 141).

The Alt Drainage Act, passed in 1779 (19 Geo. Cap. 33), introduced an extensive programme which involved straightening the course of the Alt and its tributaries, cutting new main ditches between Aintree and the sea and the creation of new floodgates as the river entered the sea (Cook, 1989, 15). The problems, however, were not fully resolved and over 100 years later a survey and valuation was made of damaged lands in Sefton, Ince Blundell and Maghull (Lancs RO CSA 4, 1907). All the same, the land subject to flooding was probably fertile due to the regular deposition of mineral-rich alluvium and its reclamation resulted in an expansion of arable agriculture on to the former mosslands.

Isolation resulting from the awkward terrain was ameliorated by use of a route which ran parallel with the shore from the Rimrose Brook northwards through Hightown (Yates, 1786) and beyond the Ribble to Poulton-le-Fylde (Tyrer, ed., 1972, 30, fig. 1, 246-247). A pottery plaque made in 1716 shows how the shore was used by travellers on horseback and on foot (Harrop, 1985, 32, fig. 11) and, early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby concerned himself with making a bridge over Farmosspool. There were also bridges at the Alt and Jane's Bridge across the Martin Mere outfall at Crossens in North Meols. There is hearsay evidence that ships could be berthed at Altcar and Formby though nothing now survives to support this claim (Kelly, 1973, 26-27). Nonetheless Nicholas Blundell makes occasional reference to passengers arriving and departing from the 'Seaside' in Little Crosby (Tyrer, ed., 1968, 248-250, 265; 1970, 206) and Bishop Pococke, who arrived in Lancashire from the Isle of Man in 1750, wrote that he came into Liverpool harbour at about midnight on 30<sup>th</sup> June and the following day walked three miles to Grosby (*sic*). From there he went in the evening to Liverpool. Almost a year later he records that 'From Ormskirk I saw the pillars at Liverpool Harbour to direct the sailors, being only 3 or 4 miles from Crosby, where I landed from the Isle of Man.' (Cartwright, ed., 1888, 4-5, 208).

<sup>2</sup> The earliest known record of dune protection comes from 1560-61 when covenants included the preservation of starr grass in Ravenmeols (Lancs RO DDIn 49/11).

Since the focus of settlement at Great Crosby was some six miles from the Liverpool docks (indeed Pococke later refers to the wet and dry dock), and Little Crosby is further, it is difficult to identify the place where Pococke landed. But at this time, the term 'Liverpool harbour' described both the estuary and the coast northwards to the Ribble rather than a formal structure. Navigation charts show a small embayment on the north side of the Alt estuary, opposite Alt Grange and it now seems likely that this was regularly used as a landing place. Its changing shape in the years between 1736-37 until it was finally enclosed, reclaimed and, as Ballings Wharf, taken in for the Altcar Rifle Range in 1860, has been mapped (Lewis, in preparation) and the process of reclamation, with the construction of new floodgates following the Alt Drainage Act of 1779, has been summarised (Cook, 1989, 12-13, 15-19). Supporting evidence for such an embayment filled with small sailing ships at the mouth of the Alt comes from an oil painting by Harry Williams, (c.1845-c.1877)<sup>3</sup>. The channel into Liverpool was, however, very dangerous; as the port of Liverpool developed, from 1719 onwards landmarks and buoys were set and in c.1776 a lifeboat station, the earliest in the British Isles, was established at Formby Point (Tyrer, ed., 1972, 41; Yorke and Yorke, 1982, 13, 20).

## Geology

The solid geology consists of sandstones of the Keuper and Bunter series and Keuper Marl Waterstones though these outcrop but rarely in this low-lying landscape. Generally, the solid geology is overlain by thick deposits consisting of till and Shirdley Hill sands, peat and alluviums and silts of riverine or estuarine origin (fig. 1.3). The principal Soil Associations, and the character and land-use of the major soil groups found within them, are shown on table 1.1.

Four groups of soils - derived from sand, peat, alluvium and boulder clay (till) - are found in the district (Hall and Folland, 1967). The intensity of modern agriculture, particularly so far as arable cultivation and market gardening is concerned, is due to the easily worked nature of the sandy and peaty soils. The sandy soils are free draining within the soil profile and dry rapidly. However, due to their high permeability, they are subject to periodic, largely seasonal waterlogging by fluctuations in the regional ground-water table. Boulder clay soils are

usually mixtures of sands and clays in varying proportions. They are well suited to cereal crops but less use for intensive production than the sandy soils. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century it was observed that the original ground surface, represented by a soil layer up to four inches thick (100mm) buried under as much as two feet (609mm) of sand, could be found in fields on the coast at Formby (Holt, 1795, 8). Layers of buried soils are exposed as the beach dunes are eroded by wind and high tides (Smith, 1999, 35-36) but evidence of an early date for such soils has not been secured.

The contemporary diversity of soils has evolved largely through agricultural use. This diversity is likely to have been preceded by a soil landscape of much greater uniformity over more extensive areas than exist today. The degree to which these soils were exploited at any period of time, and the way in which the human community exploited or was limited by them, has been examined in greater detail in the township of Little Crosby (Gagen, 1982, unpublished).

## Soil improvement

The practice of marling on fine-textured soils, sandy soils and peatlands has been widespread in Sefton since the medieval period. It was used as a source of lime and nutrients and on sandy soil it helped improve soil texture and reduce the effects of wind erosion. Deposits of boulder clay provided a source for marl and many fields in the district still contain depressions or ponds which may represent former marl pits. Marl was usually spread on fields adjacent to where it was dug (Hall and Folland, 1967, 98-100). In his observations on agriculture in south Lancashire at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, John Holt remarked on the improving qualities of marl and described the process of extraction and disposal on the local fields and particularly on improvements to Bootle Marsh (1795, 111-126).

Records of marling in Little Crosby date from c.1275 when Henry the Marler held a house and curtilage 'with a moiety of the Marled Erth next to Harkyrkes. ch on the south side' (Lancs RO DDBI 50/16). Massive earthworks in woodland in the south of Crosby Park probably mark the site of pits dug for the extraction of either marl for agricultural improvement or clay for brick making. The importance placed on marling by the lords of

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Dr Reg. Yorke and Mrs Barbara Yorke for drawing my attention to this painting, entitled *Near Altcar*, which is in the possession of the Walker Art Gallery, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, Liverpool, Cat. No. 1721.

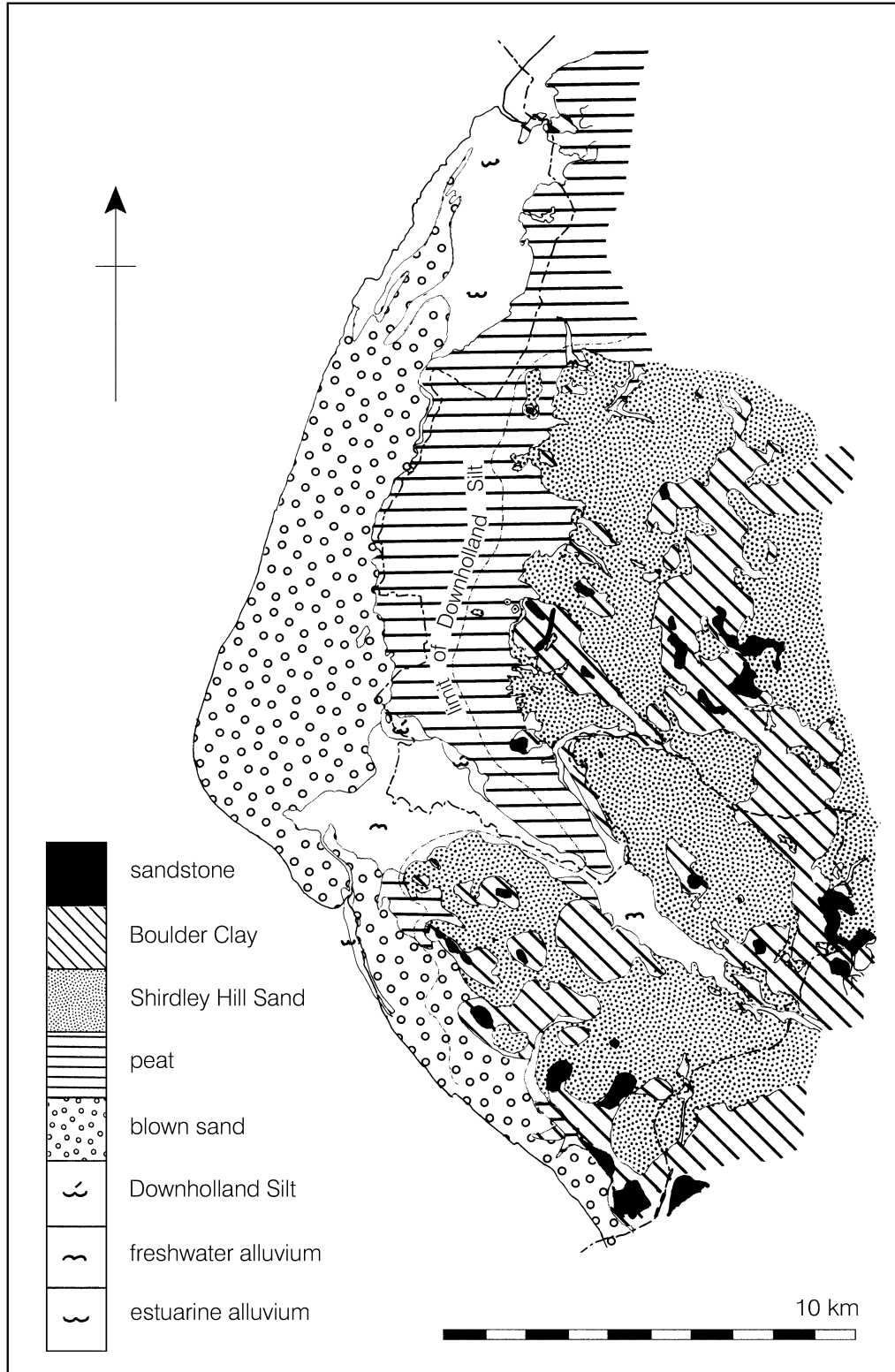


Fig. 1.3 Drift Geology

Little Crosby can be seen in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century and, in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, clay dug in the excavation of Nicholas Blundell's duck decoy at Little Crosby was spread on his fields (Blundell, 1933, 31-32; Tyrer, ed., 1968, 302). Though pits dug solely for clay for use in pottery production have not been identified, again in Little Crosby in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Nicholas Blundell noted that 'Thos. Syers and I, and c. went into the Ackers to Boar for Marl or rather for Clay for Brick' (Tyrer, 1970, 249). Some of the pits found both inside and outside the park walls at Ince Blundell could relate to the local manufacture of bricks for use in construction of the walls in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Elsewhere, from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century onwards night soil and road sweepings (for example, horse manure) were transported by canal in enormous quantities from Liverpool to places such as Melling and Lydiate for spreading on the fields (Coney, 1995). With the night soil, however, came household rubbish including broken pottery, glass and other debris. In the search for archaeological evidence material collected from field walking has to make distinctions between that derived from local occupation and artefacts introduced from further afield. For example, a field in Melling produced a scatter of early and later post-medieval material close to buildings south of St Thomas' Church with a thickening spread of 18th-century artefacts as the field fell away towards the canal. Almost certainly the items at the top of the field derived from the local settlement whereas those closer to the canal had been introduced as a result of night soiling.

## Natural resources

### *Geological materials (Table 1.1)*

Sandstone outcrops occur very occasionally in the south and east of the district where small quarries, such as those at Little Crosby and Lydiate, produced stone of varying qualities. These were described as 'stones', 'slates' and 'flags' and, at least in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, were used for walls

and roofing, highways and construction of a bridge (Tyrer, 1970, 64, 70, 271-2; 1972, 218-9, 247). Quarries at Maghull and Melling produced good grindstones (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 184), presumably for sharpening knives and other implements rather than for grinding corn for, in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby bought his millstones from Whittle-le-Woods, near Chorley (Tyrer, 1970, 101) where coarser gritstones are found. Stone from Melling was, however, used in the construction of the portico at Ince Blundell Hall in 1802-03 (Lancs RO DDIn 53/114) but this was probably removed when the Hall was altered in 1847-50 (Robinson 1991, 209). A small quarry dug into a ridge south of Ince Blundell Hall may have produced the stone for a folly tower built at the end of the ridge overlooking the driveway from the Lion Gate to the Hall (Hussey, 1958, 876).

Local clay has been used for brick-making from at least the early 17<sup>th</sup> century though, not infrequently, the early bricks contain large inclusions, are uneven in size and shape and warp or discolour on firing. At Little Crosby in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Nicholas Blundell dug and moulded clay into brick for use in construction of outhousing at Crosby Hall; he sent clay to Liverpool to see if it was suitable for pottery production and burnt 'a groce of pipes' in his own grate (Tyrer, 1968, 33, 42; 1972, 85). As elsewhere in south west Lancashire, however, Sefton has revealed no evidence for pottery manufacture in the medieval period. Furthermore, there is nothing to show that the situation changed as pottery production and the manufacture of clay pipes developed from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards in places such as Prescott, Rainford and Liverpool. Field names incorporating the word 'kiln' are found in most townships, often close to farms and in association with depressions which may be interpreted as clay pits. The name is likely to indicate either brick-making or the manufacture of ceramic field drains or, possibly, corn-drying.

<i>Soil Association</i>	<i>Major Soil Group</i>	<i>Parent Material</i>	<i>Farming System and Present Land-Use</i>
Ainsdale	Raw Sand, Ground water Peaty Gleys	Calcareous blown sand	Amenity and afforestation
Formby (series type)	Ground water Gley	Non-calcareous blown sand	Dairying and livestock rearing, mixed arable
Altcar	Organic soil	Fen and raised moss peat	Highly intensive arable (some unreclaimed mosses)
Downholland	Ground water Gley	Active and recent alluvium	Mixed arable, dairying and livestock rearing; rough grazing on unreclaimed salt marsh
Astley Hall and Sollom	Gleyed Brown Earth Gley Podzol	Shirdley Hill sand	Intensive arable
Salop and Salwick	Surface water Gley Gleyed Brown Earth	Medium to fine-textured till	Dairying and livestock rearing; mixed arable
Clive	Brown Earth	Triassic sandstone	Mixed arable; denuded heath; parkland and amenity woodland

**Table 1. 1: Soil Associations and agricultural potential (based on Hall & Folland, 1967)**

From the late 16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> century local Shirdley Hill Sand was exploited for use in the glass industry in Bickerstaffe, just beyond Melling (Hurst Vose, 1995). In more recent times considerable quantities of sand have been removed, particularly from areas east of the mosslands and the Alt, for use in the glass-making industry in St. Helens. Effectively such areas are now archaeologically sterile.

### **Salt**

There is a single reference, from the period 1204-11, to salt making in North Meols as ‘an acre in *Ratho* for a salt-pit’ (McNulty, 1933, 157). Salt-coal Hey, shown on an estate map of North Meols in 1736 (Lancs RO DDSc 151/24), lies beyond Sefton’s boundary but may represent the place. In Altcar, south east of Formby, a group of ‘salt fields’ is depicted on an estate map of 1769 (Lancs RO DDM 14/21). They lay on the edge of the Downholland Brook near its confluence with the Alt. There is no surviving evidence for salt-drying and the name could, perhaps, derive from excessive salinity resulting from periodic flooding.

### **Fish and fishing**

Fishing was undoubtedly an important aspect of the local economy. In the early 13<sup>th</sup> century there was an eel fishery on the Alt at Ravenmeols (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 49) and another at Otterpool in North Meols (Farrer, 1903, 12). At both places the fisheries were associated with watermills, the former in monastic hands, the latter controlled by the lord of the manor. In 1451 Henry Halsall held a *piscariam* at Ainsdale and Formby from Cockersand Abbey (Farrer, 1909, 1240). Its site is not known, but the coastal location perhaps indicates foreshore rights to fish rather than a constructed fishery. The decline of fishing and sale

of fish at Ravenmeols was recorded in 1554 (PRO, DL3, vol. 73, 162, no. 12). Licences to gather cockles were issued in Little Crosby, Altcar and Ravenmeols until the beginning of the present century (Lancs RO DDFo 26/11; ) and leases of fishing stalls survive from 1703-38 (Lancs RO DDIn 66/14). A more detailed study of fishing in Formby has been undertaken (Morton, 1981, unpublished) and evidence for the post-medieval arrangement of fishing stalls at Birkdale and Ainsdale has also been considered (Harrop, 1985, 18-20). In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Nicholas Blundell constructed a sniggery (*snig* = eel) for trapping fish and, at the same time, he dug a duck decoy (Tyrer, ed., 1968, 302) which was probably depicted in 1741 as a large round pond a little to the east of Crosby Hall (Lancs RO DDBI 48/42a). From Martin Mere came eels, pike, roach, bream and perch (Coney, 1992); probably such fish were also commonly found in the other mossland meres.

At least 16 canoes, of which two only survive, have been discovered in the area. Five can almost certainly be located to North Meols and the remainder were recovered from Martin Mere and its perimeter. One survivor, now at the Botanic Gardens Museum in Southport, was found at Holmes Fishery in 1899. This was probably near Meols Hall, at the medieval fishery at Otterpool noted above. On the basis of a single sample, a radiocarbon date of 1560  $\pm$  70 BP (calibrated to 535 AD) has been assigned to the Holmes Fishery boat (Beta-94788)<sup>4</sup>. The other canoe is now at Rufford Old Hall. Both have been examined and a report has been published (McGrail, 1978, 153-156 and 165-166).

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Joanne Jones, Keeper of Art Galleries and Museums, Sefton Council, for sight of the report.

## Rabbits

Along the coast, if not elsewhere, rabbits (coney) were an important aspect of the local economy in the provision of skins and meat; their remains were used to fertilise the soil and, it has been suggested, they played a significant role in agricultural improvement of the sandy soils (Harrop, 1985, 31-37; Tyrer, 1968, 204, 246). The dunes were used as warrens<sup>5</sup>, owned by local lords. Leases were granted to tenants who were appointed as warreners and warren houses survived in both Great and Little Crosby at least until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest identified reference relates to theft of rabbits from a warren in Litherland in 1626 and damage to a coney warren at Formby in 1651 (Lancs RO QSB 1/6/53; QSP 55/17). In 1666-67 a division of the warrens was agreed between the two lords of Formby (Lancs RO DDFo 34/1); after this 'neither could kill or capture conies with nets, dogs or ferrets within the others share' (Lancs RO DDIn 65/42). An undated plan with accompanying notes regarding Alt Grange in Ince Blundell relates to the warren (Lancs RO DDM 9/11) and may have been drawn up when Richard Molyneux of the Grange and Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby agreed the bounds in 1702 (Tyrer, 1968, 23). To mark this boundary a 'meer' stone was set up in alignment with two others and, four years later, further measures were taken to define the bounds with stakes (Tyrer, 1968, 106). Close to the boundary between Ainsdale and Formby, on the eastern limits of the dunes, a short surviving length of low embankment may be part of a former warren wall. At Morehouses (now Hightown), in Little Crosby, a low and wide embankment on Sandy Lane south of the modern settlement, may also represent the remains of a such a wall.

## Woodland

Some indication of the extent of woodland cover in the 11<sup>th</sup> century can be gleaned from Domesday (Farrer and Brownbill 1906, 283-285). Linear measurements of woodland were given in Lydiate (1 league x 2 furlongs) and Melling (1 league x ½ league) and implied in Maghull (2 leagues x 2 leagues)<sup>6</sup>. In Melling, the woodland name is preserved in the medieval estate of Cuncscough (O.N. *konungr* + *scogr*, the king's wood; Ekwall 1922, 119) and, perhaps, in the names *Waddicar* and the farm at Wood Hall with its associated

wood-named fields (Lancs RO DRL 1/54).<sup>7</sup> In 1240 a grant of land included 40 acres of land in *Maghullcunsho*; a further 40 acres was known as *Maghullwoode* (Lancs RO DDM 42/1). The grantee was permitted rights of pannage and wood for his hedges from all trees except oak and ash in *Maghullwood*. The extent of woodland in Maghull at this time is, perhaps, confirmed by the small area of arable land (four bovates<sup>8</sup>) assessed for the township in the early post-conquest period (Farrer and Brownbill 1, 1906, 283, n.1) in contrast to Melling's two carucates<sup>9</sup>. It seems likely, therefore, that the woodland extended from Maghull in the east through Cuncscough to Bickerstaffe and Simonswood and, perhaps, northwards into Aughton. Melling's woodland could have survived at least until after 1300 to be managed by Adam the Forester of Melling who illegally enclosed part of the waste only to have the hedges removed by the lords of the 'town' (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 210). In the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, the 'inheritors of Cuncscough' were permitted to take wood from Simonswood for making fences and rails (Cunliffe Shaw, 1956, 468); as an estate of several tenements granted to Cockersand Abbey in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, presumably Cuncscough had long since lost its own woodland.

In Lydiate, at least some woodland lay in the north-west at the boundary with Downholland and Altcar where the name *frith*<sup>10</sup> survives in Frithgate, Frith Lane and Frith Bridge. The Frith Stone, which appears to have been a boundary marker between the parishes of Altcar and Halsall (within which Lydiate lies), had been removed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, supposedly by the Abbot of Merevale (Cunliffe Shaw, 1956, 469-470). In 1276 two-thirds of the manor contained 60 acres of wood (Farrer and

<sup>5</sup> Their extent in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century is depicted on maps (Ordnance Survey 6 Inch Sheets 82, 90, 98).

<sup>6</sup> This assessment included Roby, Knowsley, Kirkby all in Knowsley district, Aughton [Bickerstaffe] in Lancashire and, on the coast, Little Crosby.

<sup>7</sup> The etymology is uncertain. Ekwall saw the first element as O.E. *wad* = woad or *weod* = weed (1922, 119, 164). Gelling includes *Waddicar* amongst names indicative of newly-broken arable (1991, 10).

<sup>8</sup> An alternative word for an ox-gang or as much land as one ox could plough in a year; varying between 10-18 acres (Shorter O.E.D.) though the area could vary depending on the quality of the soil.

<sup>9</sup> A ploughland; as much land as could be cultivated with one plough (and eight oxen) in a year (Shorter O.E.D.); between 60-180 acres, the area probably varied depending on the quality of the soil (Richardson, 1974 10); generally considered to be 120 acres (Jones, 1987, 200).

<sup>10</sup> O.E. *fyrhþ*, *gefyrrhþe* = wood or wooded country (Ekwall 1922, 11); possibly 'land overgrown with brushwood, scrub on the edge of forest' (Gelling, 1993, 191).

Brownbill 3, 1907, 201, n.15) and a 13<sup>th</sup>-century document adds supporting evidence for woodland in this part of the township - 'two acres 1 rood of new improvement in the wood of Lydyate; all his waste land in Lydyate except that in *Westekar* wood' (Lancs RO DDIn 56/7); fields called West Carr are near Frithgate. An assessment of vegetation in Lydiat Wood, north of Lydiat Hall, has indicated the survival of early species, oak being the dominant feature.

In time, rights to *housebote* and *haybote* for the repair of buildings and boundary fences probably affected woodland management and, in the latter half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, there was widespread plundering of the woods. Within 100 years there was a severe shortage of timber trees<sup>11</sup> in south west Lancashire (Cunliffe Shaw, 1956, 180). All the same, there seems to have been a sufficient amount of suitable material to continue the tradition of building both box-framed and cruck-framed structures at all levels of society at least until the 16<sup>th</sup> century (see below). Woodland survival until at least as late as 1717 is indicated in Lydiat and Maghull from whence Sir William Molyneux's tenants were required to provide him with charcoal (France, 1945, 153-5, 160-162; table 1.15) from which it might be assumed that areas of managed woodland survived in these townships. Ten years earlier, however, it seems that the estate at Little Crosby had no building timber and Nicholas Blundell ordered four trees to be felled on his estate at Ditton, near Widnes, for use in rebuilding two houses which had burnt down (Tyrer, 1968, 141).

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century there was some replanting, notably in Little Crosby where between 1702-28 Nicholas Blundell took a keen interest in experimenting with trees and plants (Tyrer, ed., 1968, 1970, 1972 *passim*). Surviving woodland in that township is probably, at least in part, a reflection of his activities. In Ince Blundell plantations seem to be of a similar, or slightly later, date and to be a response either to a need for shelter belts on the mossland fringes or of game cover. On the coast at Formby, attempts to plant 'with forest and fruit trees' were said to be encouraging and that, if successful, would provide useful shelter belts against the 'wintry blast' (Holt, 1795, 84). Holt commented, however, that in Lancashire there were no natural woods 'of any consequence to merit attention' and that although there were some good plantations, timber trees were in decline.

<sup>11</sup> Those needed for building construction.

Almost without exception, Sefton's hedgerows contain but a single species - hawthorn - and show no evidence of antiquity. Two or three in Melling and Lydiat may be of greater interest than the ubiquitous hawthorn barrier, but hedgerow counts can be confused by the inclusion in post-medieval leases, on the Molyneux estates if not elsewhere, of a clause to plant a certain number and variety of species each year. For example, in 1754 John Darwin of Sefton, yeoman, agreed to set eight plants or young trees of oak, ash, elm or other wood each year. If any should die it was to be replaced within 12 months (Lancs RO DDM 46/180).

### ***Turbary***

From the mosslands a plentiful supply of peat for fuel was available throughout the medieval period and rights of turbary were included in many leases until the drainage schemes of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries brought the land into cultivation. Writing in 1695, Camden stated 'in the moist and mossy soil turves are digged up which serve the inhabitants for fuel and candlelight' (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 46, n.1). Many tenants on mossland estates belonging to the Molyneuxes were required to carry turf to Sefton Hall at least until the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (France, 1945, 131-189). After the turf had been removed the 'after ground' was frequently enclosed and improved by the owners (Youd, unpub. thesis, 1958) so removing all evidence for peat cuttings from the local landscape.

### **Climate and environment**

The generalised picture of climatic change for the period (Lamb, 1981, 57-61) provides a context within which settlement in the region may be considered. A warm, dry climate in c.400 AD and for perhaps the preceding 150 years is indicated for the British Isles; such conditions could have allowed an expansion of settlement and exploitation of the marginal areas. But, with a deterioration towards colder summers and wetter conditions by the late 6<sup>th</sup> century, and little improvement before 650-700 AD, the mossland fringes may have been less manageable. Increasingly active storms and sand dune formation towards 700 AD could have placed pressure both on the coastal zone and, with a higher water table on the mosslands, a retreat to the areas east of the 25m contour seems likely. Amelioration over a period of drier, warmer summers and colder winters in the 8<sup>th</sup> century was followed by another period of stormy weather and dune building between 800-900 AD. The 10<sup>th</sup> century saw the beginning of the period of warmth experienced between c.980 AD and 1300 AD. By 1000 AD sea level appears to have been as high as it had been 600 years earlier.

Along the Sefton coast the results both of coastal erosion and dune building have had their effect. Recent work has shown evidence for a period of dune stability between  $1,795 \pm 250$  and  $1370 \pm 85$  (a general date range of [radiocarbon dates  $1795 \pm 250$  and  $1375 \pm 85$  a general date range calibrated to calendar years *c.*45 BC - *c.* AD 715]). By contrast, storms resulting in the formation of new dunes and burial of peat deposits seem to have occurred between 800-900 AD followed by a further period of dune stability at approximately 800 BP (*c.*1200) (Innes and Tooley, 1993; Plater *et al.*, 1999, 17). A period of storminess with particularly high sea levels after some centuries of an increasingly warm regime will tend to breach older dunes which have for a time protected a low-lying coast. Storms in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> to early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries caused sea floods in East Anglia (Lamb, 1981, 61) and, from the diaries of Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby and other sources we know of other great storms which brought devastation to the Lancashire coast and elsewhere in the early decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Tyrer, ed., 1968, 274; 1970, 126-127; 1972, 31-32, 147, 174, 230). Of these, the most damaging was that which raged for four days between 17-20 December 1720 when an area from Hesketh Bank southwards to Formby and up the River Alt to North End in Ince Blundell suffered the effects of marine inundation (Beck, 1954).

Today, the effects of sand-blow are all too apparent at Ravenmeols where the trunks of mature pine trees protrude eerily through a massive dune of redeposited sand east of the blow-out known as Devil's Hole (Smith, 1999, 26-27). Around the sides of such blow-outs, and along the shore where marine erosion has scoured the frontal dunes, evidence for earlier land surfaces can often be seen. Though these organic layers must have developed during periods of dune stability - and probably a high water table - none so far has been satisfactorily dated or produced unequivocal evidence for human intervention on the landscape in the post-Conquest period. Settlement on the Sefton coast, therefore, was susceptible both to flood damage at times of high rainfall coupled with high tides and to obliteration by sand blow at times of dry and windy weather.

Evidence for coastal reclamation can be seen at North Meols, where a series of parallel embankments bears witness to a gradual expansion westwards and northwards of land suitable for farming and settlement. The earliest embankment is probably commemorated in the name of Bankfield Lane, which runs in a northerly direction from Meols Hall towards the village of Crossens. Just east of the bank a group of small irregular-shaped

fields between the lane and the mossland may be amongst the earliest in the district (fig. 1.13). Timber remains noted during construction work at the gates of Meols Hall were interpreted as a landing stage (Bulpit, 1908, 64). Further south, attempts to stabilise the dunes, at least since the late medieval period, have been made by planting marram or starr grass and other artificial means (Harrop 1985, 28-31).

### Boundaries and ditches

It is generally considered that early parish and township boundaries follow topographical features, usually the course of a river or stream. The sinuous nature of a natural boundary can survive, at least on maps if no longer visible on the ground, and at Formby though the stream has been canalised it appears to reflect the former course of the Downholland Brook. The difficulties of maintaining township and estate boundaries in a landscape subject to flooding are evident from the documentary sources. With the exception of a few natural or semi-natural watercourses which still mark the division between some townships, many of the region's boundaries are characteristically long, straight ditches and banks or *cops* as they are locally known. Their use in assisting drainage is undisputed and most medieval grants of land include reference to dikes, sykes or ditches. In a landscape so dominated by ditches and banks, however, it is almost impossible to distinguish those of medieval (or earlier) origin from those of more recent creation.

For example, it appears that, unlike today, in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century the boundary between Ravenmeols and Ince Blundell was defined by the River Alt. It was noted in 1207 that a strip of land on the north bank of the Alt, extending westwards to the sea, did not belong to Altcar and that the north bank of the Alt was in Ravenmeols (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 222, n. 8). The juxtaposition of Ravenmeols with Ince Blundell is also suggested in a grant of a watermill on the Alt by William Blundell of Ince Blundell to the monks of Stanlaw (subsequently Whalley Abbey) (Farrer and Brownbill 3 1907, 49, 79). Now, however, a strip of land attached to Altcar intrudes between the two townships, thus giving Altcar access to the coast. The reason for the change is not clear but may date from an agreement between John of Lee, superior lord of Ravenmeols, and the abbot of Merivale to whom Altcar had been granted before 1238. The monks were given permission to drive their cattle along a road three perches wide (each of 20 lawful feet)<sup>12</sup> extending from the King's highway between

<sup>12</sup> 18.28 metres.

Raven Meols and Alt Bridge as far as the pasture on Alt Marsh (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 223). But even on estates retained by the Crown the boundaries were poorly-defined for between 1431-59 the lord of Little Crosby was in dispute with the king's tenants in Great Crosby. The bounds were agreed by arbitration and after the merestones had been set up a ditch was dug to mark the division (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 93).

Sand and sea incursion, together with the sale of former monastic holdings to new landowners, seem to mark a period of redefinition of many of the boundaries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (table 1.2). Straight divisions between many of the coastal townships and those on the mosslands in the 19<sup>th</sup> century appear to result from disputes and reorganisation at this time. All the same there are difficulties in identifying some of these boundaries. At Ravenmeols, in 1584, the northern boundary with Formby lay on the south side of Meols Lake (perhaps now represented in Kirklake Road) (Lancs RO DDFo 26/1). A stone mapped in 1848 as 'pedestal of a stone cross' (SD 2858 0680) may have been one of the 'meers and boundaries' between Ravenmeols and Formby. If so the boundary appears, defaced, in 1848 (six inch O.S. map, 1848 Sheet 90). The arrangement would have placed the medieval chapel of Ravenmeols (Farrer, 1900, 565) within Formby<sup>13</sup> indicating, perhaps, that there had been an earlier demarcation; the boundary defaced by 1848 could represent a further revision.

The improved mosses of Altcar and surrounding townships were the subject of dispute between the abbot of Merivale and the Halsall family in the early part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Cunliffe Shaw, 1956, 469-470). At North Meols in 1503-4 the definition of mossland ownership at the *Wike* provides a clear indication of the problems in defining boundaries on the fringes of Martin Mere (Fishwick, ed., 1896, 21-24). The boundary between Little Crosby and Ince Blundell resulted from a division of the mosslands in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Lancs RO DDBI 56/53). It is probably the long straight boundary ditch which still divides these townships

and was subject to regular inspection by the respective lords of these townships in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, particularly at times of flooding and when it needed scouring (Tyrer, 1970, 32-33, 50, 54, 216; 1972, 73, 225). The boundary between Maghull and Melling, finally established in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, also resulted in a straight division across the moss (Lancs RO DDM 42/31). That between Maghull and Cuncough, an estate which had belonged to Cockersand Abbey, was settled by arbitration in 1579 and six mere stones were set up (Gibson 1876, 34-35). This boundary followed a ditch which crossed the moss between North Cross and *Hengarh*. It, like many of the other new markers, probably created a clear division on what had hitherto been an area of intercommoning such as that suggested in 1557-58 when the lords of Halsall and Formby disputed their respective rights to graze cattle on Downholland Moss and Barton Moss (PRO MR2). Division of the warrens at Formby in 1667 also resulted in the creation of a long straight boundary which ran westwards from the Whickes, through Greenloons to the shore (Lancs RO DDFo 34/1). It is still defined by a low bank and shallow ditch, set with the occasional marker post (Lewis, 1992), and traces of the same

ditch survive in woodland on the eastern fringes of the dunes.

### Sefton before the Norman Conquest

The evidence for pre-Conquest settlement in Sefton is, like that of the Roman period, extremely thin. Though place-names suggest evidence for

<i>Date</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Adjacent Location(s)</i>	<i>Boundary</i>	<i>Source</i>
15 <sup>th</sup> C	Little Crosby	Ince Blundell	Mossland	Lancs RO DDBI 56/53
1503	North Meols	Martin Mere	Mossland	Fishwick, 1896, 21-24
1532-33	Birkdale	North Meols	Township	Lancs RO DDIn 45/6
1556	Birkdale	Ainsdale	Township	Farrer, 1903, 101
16 <sup>th</sup> C	Formby and Birkdale	Halsall and Renacres	Township	Lancs RO DDIn 63/12
1553-54	Formby	Altcar	Township	Farrer and Brownbill (eds.), 3, 1907, 199
1584	Formby and Altcar	Ravenmeols	Township	Lancs RO DDFo 26/1
16 <sup>th</sup> C	Maghull	Melling	Township	Lancs RO DDM 42/31
1579	Maghull	Cuncough	Township	Gibson, 1876, 34-35

<sup>13</sup> The medieval chapel, which was probably abandoned in 1739 following a period of stormy weather, is believed to have stood on or near the burying ground, now St Luke's Church, at the west end of Kirklake (Lewis, 1981b, 73).

settlement and the Domesday record tells of places and manors in the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, structural and artefactual evidence are quite lacking. This could be a consequence both of research bias and the effects of post-medieval agricultural

practices which have destroyed any evidence. To a considerable extent it could also be due to the dispersed nature of settlement throughout much of the district. Across south Lancashire and Cheshire archaeological evidence is emerging for repeated occupation, though not necessarily of continuity, of core areas from the Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon periods and that these sites lie, not infrequently within a short distance of medieval or even post-medieval farmsteads (Philpott, 1999, 200-201).

### *Place-names and Settlement*

Using place-names recorded in 1086 and the earliest evidence following the Conquest a cautious attempt can be made to evaluate the process of settlement (fig. 1.4; table 1.3). All the same, though identification of the linguistic origins of names could indicate places of primary settlement, it is entirely possible that names were superimposed on existing communities by subsequent settlers. In the absence of both documentary and archaeological evidence for pre-Conquest communities, analysis and interpretation of the process and nature of settlement must, therefore, be treated with caution.

In contrast with St Helens district (see Chitty, this volume), British place-names are rare though they survive occasionally on the mossland fringes. *Hinne* (Ince Blundell) was considered by Ekwall to have survived from Celtic origins (1922, 118). As a low sandstone outcrop, the 'island' was, perhaps, more favourable for early settlement than the surrounding wetlands and may have attracted settlement in the pre-Conquest period. Certainly the township's mosslands and those of Little Crosby contain good evidence for human presence in the early post-glacial period (see Cowell and Innes, 1994, 71-115 *passim*). East of the Alt, *Magele*<sup>14</sup> (Maghull) may also represent British influence and *Hasken*<sup>15</sup> (Haskayne) in Downholland, just beyond the bounds of Sefton, also suggests occupation on the very edge of the mosslands (Ekwall 1922, 225).

Ekwall considered that names such as Melling and Bootle indicate colonisation of the region from Northumbria, perhaps as early as AD 617-33 but that, after a period of Scandinavian influence in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century, a Mercian population was

established by AD 923 (Ekwall, 1922, 225, 230-231). In his study of Anglian and Scandinavian settlements, with particular reference to south west Lancashire, Wainwright provided an historical background on which the arguments for settlement in the area can be based (Finberg, ed., 1975). He, like Ekwall, claimed that the first Anglian settlement can probably be dated to the early 7<sup>th</sup> century. The usual interpretation is that the Battle of Chester in c.614-16 AD provided an opportunity for colonisation of Lancashire by English settlers and it is generally assumed that the river valleys of the Pennines provided the routes by which they arrived. The first local settlers to leave an impact on the place-names are thought to have been followers of *Mealla* who established themselves at

Location	Domesday vill	Other	Place name origin
coast	[North] Meols		ON
	Argameles	Birkdale	ON
	Ainsdale		ON
	Formby		ON
	[Raven] Meols		ON
	[Little] Crosby		ON
		[Great] Crosby	ON
	Litherland		ON
	Bootle		OE
	Alt valley	Ince [Blundell]	
		Scholes	ON
Sefton			ON
		Lunt	ON
		Aintree	ON
	Thornton		OE
Rimrose valley		Orrell	OE
		Ford	OE
inland	Melling		OE
		Cunscough	ON
		Hengarth	OE
		Thorp	ON
		Waddicar	OE
	Lydiate		OE
		Eggargarth	ON
Maghull		Br	

**Table 1. 3:** Place-name origins (after Ekwall, 1922)

<sup>14</sup> Possibly the first element *mag* derives from the British word meaning 'plain' combined with O.E. *halh* = nook or corner; M.E. *haugh* = low-lying, level ground by a river (Ekwall 1922, 11, 119-120).

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps identical with Heskin in Leyland hundred for which a Celtic meaning indicative of marshy land is suggested (Ekwall 1922, 120, 130).

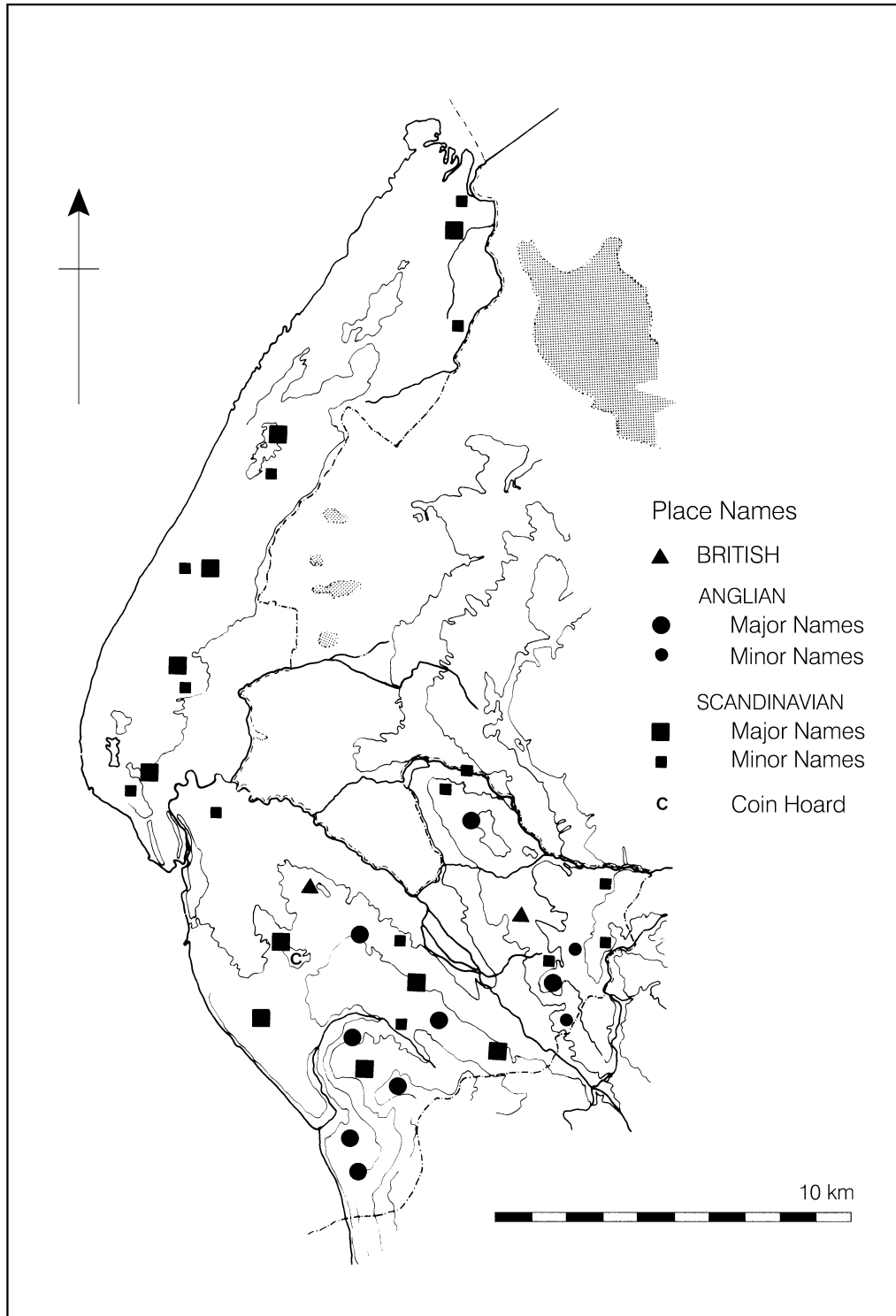


Fig. 1.4 Pre-Conquest Sefton: Place-names

Melling as a small independent community with its own leader. Ekwall suggested that the name equates with Melling in Lonsdale and that the two places were established by members of the same family (1922, 119). Wainwright considered their choice of Melling in Sefton, lying as it does at 119ft OD (26.27m), to be typical of Anglian settlements which generally preferred sites at slightly higher altitudes of 100-150ft OD (30.48m - 45.72m) (Finberg, 1975, 16).

Melling township is, indeed, the most elevated of Sefton's townships. From Aughton it extends southwards through Cuncough and Melling Mount along a gently sloping ridge to the River Alt. Situated between a river valley and the mosslands the place may have proved attractive for settlement and exploitation of a variety of natural resources. Indeed, at the supposed time of its settlement, the climatic evidence suggests that the coastal dunes may have been unstable and unsuitable for permanent occupation. Field walking in the vicinity of Melling Mount has produced a very small amount of Roman and medieval material suggesting the likelihood of early occupation. From here settlement may have spread northwards along the eastern margin of the mossland to Lydiate (O.E. *hlidgeat*, swing gate; Ekwall 1922, 120).

Bootle (O.E. *botl*, dwelling house; Ekwall 1922, 116) at the southern end of the coastal dune strip is also considered to represent evidence for primary Anglian settlement. Like Melling, it occupies an elevated position overlooking the Mersey estuary and the lower valley of the Rimrose Brook. Settlers here would, therefore, be well-placed to control movement from the coast into the Alt valley and mosslands. Thornton, on the west bank of the River Alt, occupies a very low and small sandstone outcrop; it is the only Anglian place name in the Alt valley cited in the Domesday record.

It appears that Anglian settlement, whether originally of Northumbrian or Mercian origin, probably continued undisturbed until the arrival of the Norse in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century. It is generally accepted that the Norse arrived as emigrants from Scandinavian colonies in Ireland and the Isle of Man (Finberg, 1975, 182-83, 193) and that their influence is distinct from that of Danish colonisation in eastern England before the 9<sup>th</sup> century, evidence for which seems to have extended no further west than the Manchester area. Smyth (1975, 75-92) considered a link between settlement of Lancashire's coastal areas in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century and expulsion of the Norse from Dublin in 902 AD. However, he argued that there is also a case for an expansion of Norse settlement from the

west coast of Scotland which may equally have led to the establishment of permanent homesteads. The evidence for an Irish-Norse origin of the invaders has been pointed out by Ekwall (1922) and the place-name evidence in major and minor names is overwhelming. Wherever their origin, it is now generally accepted that the Norse did not arrive as an invading army but as farmers and settlers seeking to colonise the area - though the process was probably not without some violent incidents (Finberg, ed., 1975, 192-95)<sup>16</sup>. Concealment of a coin hoard in c.915 at the *Harkirk* in Little Crosby (see below) may, indeed, reflect a period of unrest.

Both major and minor Scandinavian names are numerous on the coast and along the Alt valley but are comparatively rare on the higher land east of the coastal plain (Finberg, ed., 1975, 185-86). The Norse, perhaps, arrived in a sparsely-populated landscape at a time when the coastal strip and Alt valley had either been too hostile and unattractive for permanent occupation or had been abandoned by earlier settlers due to adverse climatic and environmental conditions. The suggested amelioration at the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, which may have been accompanied by an increased water level leaving the coast in isolation, could have allowed them to settle peaceably. On the other hand, it can be argued that if the Norse had penetrated areas east of the mossland their influence on place names may have been less noticeable where English communities were already established.

Whilst some place names such as *meols* (dunes) are indicative of the topography, townships with the *byr* suffix (Formby, Great Crosby and Little Crosby) indicate settlement before Domesday and, indeed, Ekwall considers that the names 'as a rule' indicate fairly important places (1922, 9). A religious association is also implied both in the Crosby names and at the *Harkirk* (grey or hoary church), which probably occupied the most elevated location in Little Crosby, a church or chapel of some antiquity is indicated. Litherland (O.N. *Hlíðarland*, slope and land) occupies an important site on a sandstone outcrop overlooking the Rimrose Brook, upriver from Bootle, and on the route between the Mersey estuary and the Alt valley at Sefton. Norse control of the valley above Bootle is, perhaps, indicated. Inland Cuncough (O.N. *konungr* + *skógr* king's wood), the lost place Thorp (O.N. *þorp* village, hamlet) and Eggargarth (probably O.N. *ekra* + *garðr* small ploughed enclosure) (Ekwall 1922,

<sup>16</sup> See also Edwards (1998, 1-7) for a summary of the background to Scandinavian influences in Lancashire.

119-120) remind us that Scandinavian influence did penetrate the hinterland and had some effect on minor place names.

Though the size of the population at this time is unknown, Scandinavian influence on the language is noticeable. The 'Wapentake' rather than the 'Hundred' was the principal unit of regional court administration and the term was to survive until the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (see Tyrer, 1972, 244-45). The Scandinavian *ora* of sixteen silver pennies was sometimes used in the reckoning of money and values (Finberg, 1975, 214-15). The mixture of terminology is best seen in the Domesday assessment for West Derby hundred (Farrer and Brownbill 1, 1906, 269-286) in which townships with names of Scandinavian origin were sometimes assessed under an English system (Ravenmeols assessed as one hide), or of English place-names assessed under the Scandinavian system (Melling assessed as two carucates). The terms 'carucates' (or ploughlands) together with their lesser parts of 'bovates' (or oxgangs)<sup>17</sup>, continued in use throughout the medieval period. Apart, perhaps, from their continuing use on estates held by the Crown and granted to its tenants (such as Great Crosby), such terms seem to have translated into the tenorial terminology of freely-held estates and were based on a notional indication of the ancient extent of cultivated land (Lewis, 2000, 65-66).

### ***Archaeological evidence***

Though the place names suggest the archaeological potential, the evidence is elusive. The only artefactual material comes from the *Harkirk* in Little Crosby where a hoard of silver Anglo-Saxon, Viking and Continental coins, perhaps associated with silver ingots, was recovered in 1611 (Dolley, 1966, 50). This was a time when persecution of those who persisted in the Catholic faith led to their exclusion from burial in Sefton churchyard and William Blundell, lord of the manor, established a burying ground at the site of the *Harkirk* (Tyrer, 1967, 19-37). A stone wall was built and, to complete the work, ditches were dug leaving a gap for entry. A sandy bank was formed on the inner edge of the ditch. During the work about 'fower score' pieces of silver, recognised as coins, were discovered on the bank, apparently scattered in the sandy upcast. Blundell made drawings of thirty-five of the coins and these were engraved on a copper plate (Lancs RO DDBI 24/12). Though the coins have not survived, and it is likely that some were melted down for conversion to church silver for use at Crosby Hall chapel, examination of the plate has

shown that the hoard was of Scandinavian origin and dated to c.915 AD (Dolley, 1966, 27, 50). The coin content indicates that the hoard comprised 'loot' rather than currency and the period of unrest attributed to northern England in the first two decades of the 10<sup>th</sup> century perhaps supports this suggestion. Deliberate concealment at a recognisable location, such as a chapel, with the intention of retrieval at a later date could place the *Harkirk* at least in the early years of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, if not before.

The earliest known reference to the *Harkirk*, however, appears in a single document of c.1275 (Lancs RO DDBI 50.16). The reference to 'marled erth next to Harkyrkes .ch on the south side' implies perhaps that the chapel was still standing but any association between it and Sefton parish church eludes explanation<sup>18</sup>. Excavations close to the memorial chapel, which now marks the site of the burying ground, were undertaken in the 1950s and 1970s (Tyrer, 1953; Barker, 1971, unpublished). Neither succeeded in locating the *Harkirk* but they did expose a stone wall. This, perhaps, was the wall which defined two sides of the burial ground in 1611; a series of ditches in the vicinity may also be part of the same phase of construction.

Though the log boats from North Meols and Martin Mere may also be of pre-Conquest date no other sites have been identified for this period; the likelihood that they lie beneath present settlement must be accepted, especially in view of the area's limited amount of well-drained land suitable for occupation. The slightly elevated embanked areas of Little Crosby and Ince Blundell, both of which occupy the highest parts of their respective townships, together with the rural areas of Lydiate, Maghull and Melling, offer the best potential for further study though any remains are likely to be severely truncated by agricultural activity.

<sup>17</sup> See notes 8 and 9 for an explanation of these terms.

<sup>18</sup> Little Crosby is one of ten townships or hamlets in Sefton parish.

## Sefton in the 11<sup>th</sup> century: the Domesday Survey

Sefton lies in the wapentake or hundred of West Derby which, in 1086, was one of six assessed in the area *Inter Ripam et Mersham* and granted to Roger of Poitou by the Conqueror. It seems that these hundreds represented a massive royal estate which survived into the post-Conquest period though a Norman hierarchy was introduced between the Crown and the mesne lords (Lewis, 2000, 24-41; Farrer and Brownbill 1, 1906, 269-286). As such, therefore, the area was controlled by the Crown's representatives from an administrative centre at West Derby.

Although the Domesday record for West Derby hundred was more detailed than for the remaining five hundreds, it is both summary and incomplete. Unlike Cheshire and other counties, it records only the situation in 1066 with an even more terse list of names of the post-Conquest grantees and no detail is given of the places assigned to them (Terrett, 1962). This, perhaps, can be explained at its most simple level by the Crown's continuing interest; there was no need for detail such as that required in regions where the Crown's estates were

intermingled with those of other lords and their tenants (Hamshere, 1987, 160-164).

The survey gives an impression of being unsystematic, but reconsideration has shown some evidence for consistency which, in turn, seems to suggest something of the relationship between the mesne lords and the Crown in 1066 (Lewis, 2000, 22-29). The names of the principal townships or manors were recorded (fig. 1.5); woodland, as in many other regions of England, was recorded by linear measure and some indication of the value of cultivated land was given through assessments of hides, carucates or bovates (fig. 1.6; tables 1.4, 1.5). Since many villar boundaries across the mosslands were not defined until relatively late, it is not possible to identify the precise acreages of the Domesday villas. Analysis does suggest, however, that the cultivable resource in some villas was more highly developed than in others.

Fourteen places were named to which should be added Great Crosby and Aintree; these two villas probably belonged to the King's demesne. Omitted were Netherton and Lunt - which were probably included with Sefton - and Orrell and Ford, which may have been included with Litherland. Second

Vill	Occupier	No. of manors	Assessment	Woodland	Value
[Great]Crosby	King Edward	[ <i>bereuich</i> ]	[4 carucates]	[forest]	
[Little]Crosby	Uctred	[1]	[3 carucates]	[woodland]	
Maghull	Uctred	[1]	[½ carucate]	[woodland]	
Lydiat	Uctred		<i>VI.bouat træ</i> [6 bovates of land]	1 league long x 2 furlongs wide	64d
Litherland	Aelmer		<i>dimid hida</i> [½ hide]		8s
Thornton	Aski		<i>dimid hida</i> [½ hide]		8s
Argameles	Wigbert		<i>II.car træ</i> [2 carucates of land]		8s
Melling	Godiva		<i>II.car træ</i> [2 carucates of land]	1 league long x ½ league wide	10s
Ince [Blundell]	3 thanes	3	<i>dimid hida</i> [½ hide]		8s
[Raven] Meols	3 thanes	3	<i>dimid hida</i> [½ hide]		8s
Formby	3 thanes	3	<i>III.car træ</i> [4 carucates of land]		10s
Bootle	4 thanes	4	<i>II.car træ</i> [2 carucates of land]		64d
	priest		<i>I. car træ ad æcllam Waletone</i>		
Ainsdale	3 thanes		<i>II.car træ</i> [2 carucates of land]		64d
Sefton	5 thanes		<i>I. hida</i> [1 hide]		16s.
[North] Meols	5 thanes		<i>dimid hida</i> [½ hide]		10s

**Table 1. 4:** Summary of landholdings in 1066

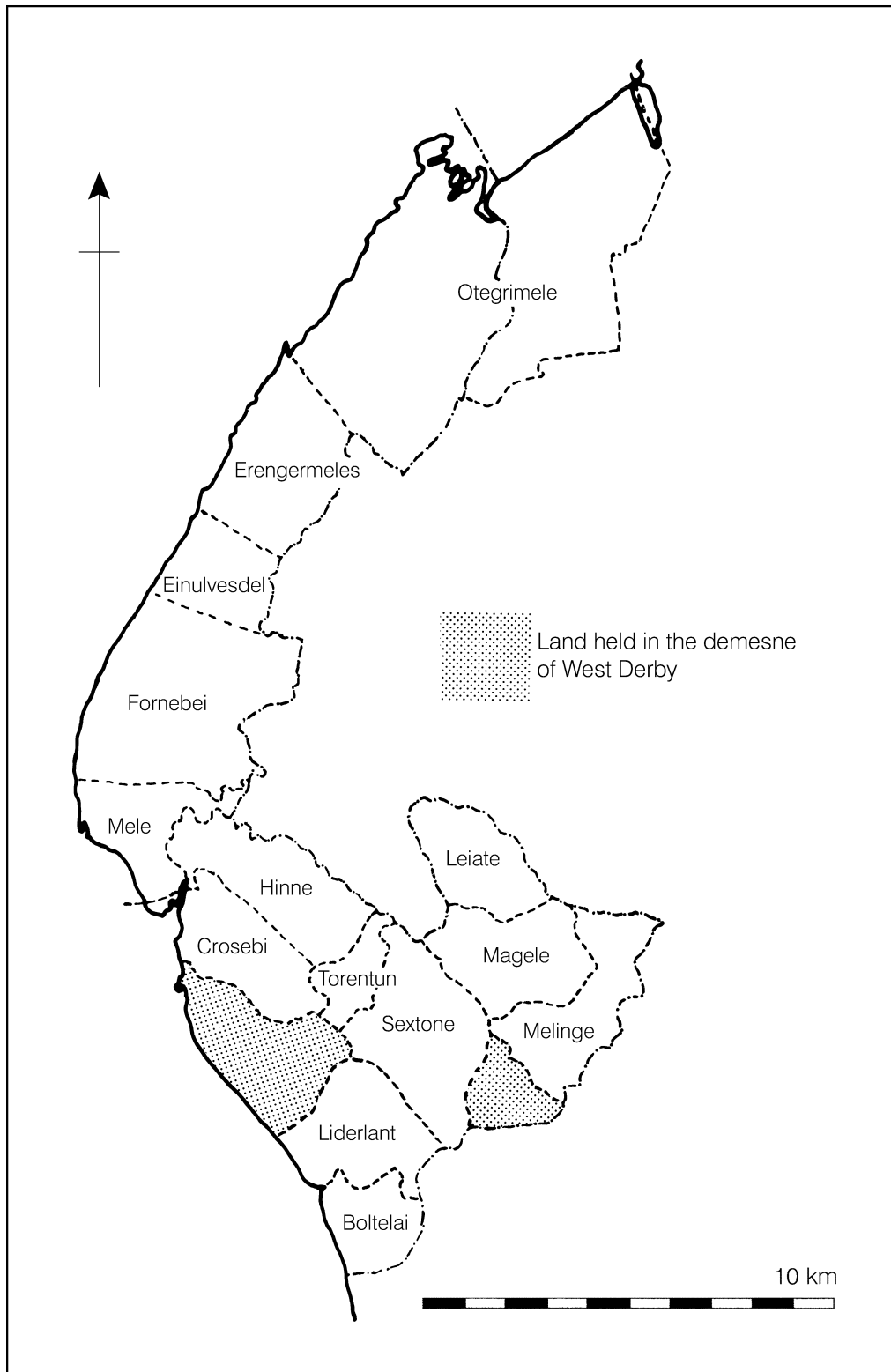


Fig. 1.5 Domesday Estates

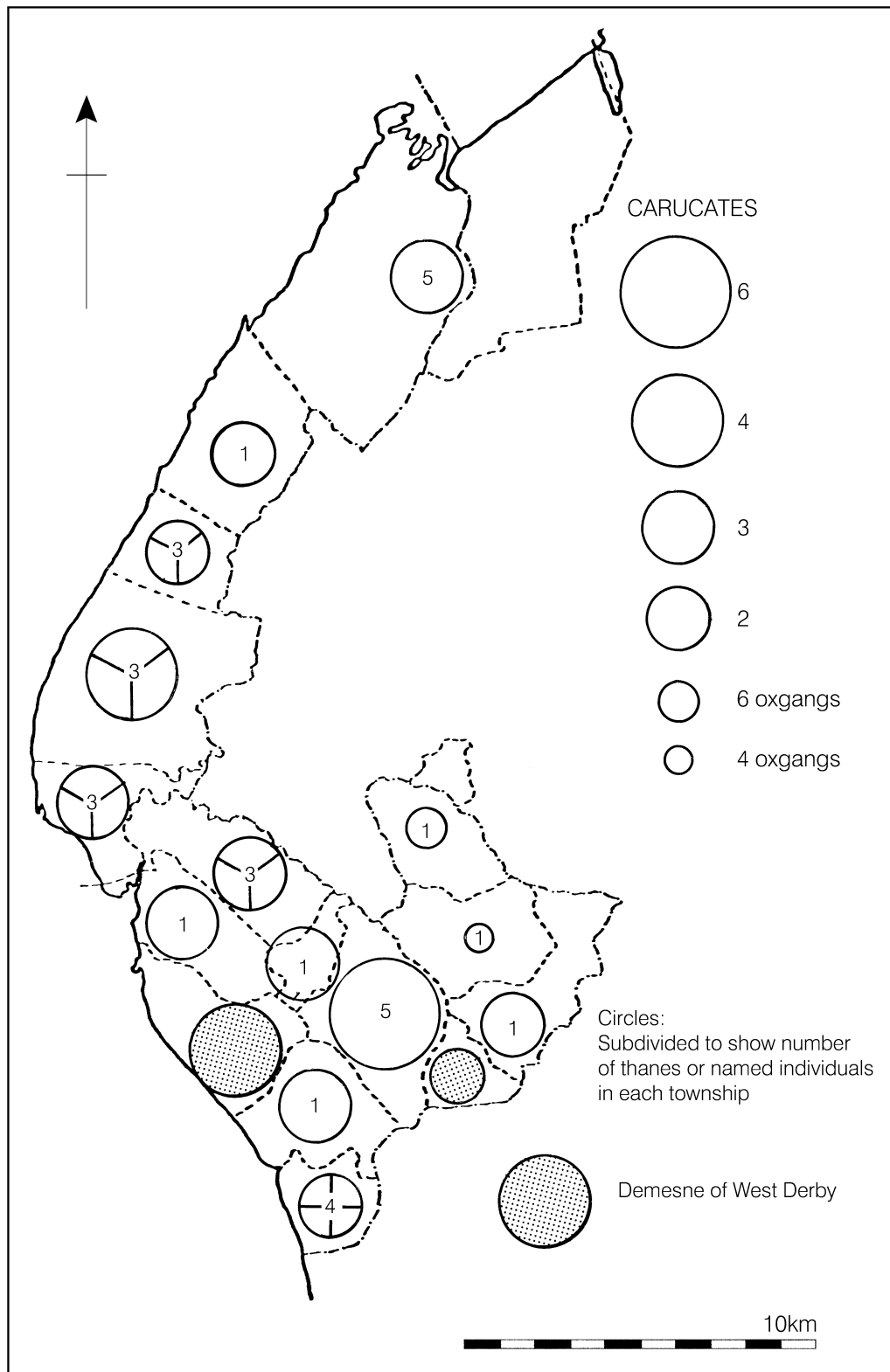


Fig. 1.6 Domesday landholdings of carucates and oxgangs  
 The size of each circle represents the size of the landholding assessed (in carucates or oxgangs) in each township. Sub-divided circles represent places where more than one *estate* or *manor* is indicated. The number within each circle represents the number of *named individuals* or *thanes* cited for each place.

only to the king in the number of estates he held, Uctred's property lay in 17 estates distributed throughout the Hundred. Only three, however, lay in Sefton. He had access to the coast at Little Crosby and, beyond Sefton, to the Mersey estuary at Kirkdale and Speke (Lewis, 2000, 28-29, fig. 18). Inland, his estates in Maghull and Lydiate lay within the woodland belt. Uctred's dominance and control of a varied economic resource show him to be an important individual; it seems likely that he was the Crown's chief representative and administrator for the hundred, if not for all the lands between Ribble and Mersey.

In addition to Uctred, four named individuals each held a vill in undivided lordship (table 1.5). Perhaps, such people also held official responsibility for administration and management. Though speculative and uncorroborated by evidence in the pre-Conquest period, the characteristics of their respective vills may suggest what these duties could have been. With traces of nucleated settlement and well-developed open field systems in Thornton and Litherland (both of which abut the Crown's demesne at Great Crosby), Aski and Aelmer may have managed established communities whose principal concern lay with the organisation and production of the arable. Wigbert, perhaps, was responsible for pastoral or vaccary farming on the coastal dunes and mosslands in Argarmeles;

Godiva would have managed Melling's woodlands (which abutted those of Uctred in Maghull, Kirkby and Bickerstaffe). None of these people, however, can be traced in the post-Conquest records.

The term 'manor' appeared only in six vills. Four of these - Ince Blundell, Ravenmeols, Formby and Bootle - contained several manors and, in each, the number of manors corresponded to a similar number of unnamed thanes. By contrast, in Sefton, Ainsdale and North Meols the term 'manor' did not appear though, between them, these places were held by no fewer than 13 thanes. Perhaps this indicates that manorial rights in these places had been divided as a consequence of partible inheritance prior to the middle years of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In neither instance, however, can we be sure of the number of individual settlements or homesteads in each of these places.

Thanes were required to observe the laws of the king's West Derby manor and to perform a number of duties in that manor (Farrer and Brownbill 1, 1906, 285). William Farrer believed that the status of thanes in north-west England appeared more servile than in some other parts of England and that, following the Conquest, there was a considerable levelling tendency when thanes became half-free villeins and villein status gained in freedom and rights (1899, 7). This may have been so but in 1066

Location	Parish	1066 occupant	Domesday vill	1066 carucates converted to statute acres <sup>1</sup>	Statute acres per vill in the late 19 <sup>th</sup> century	Estimated proportion of township assessed in 1066
coast	<i>NM</i>	5 thanes	[North] Meols <sup>2</sup>	360	8,467	4%
	<i>NM</i>	Wigbert	Argarmeles	240	2,214½	11%
	<i>W</i>	3 thanes	Ainsdale	240	1,459	16%
	<i>W</i>	3 thanes	Formby	480	4,502	11%
	<i>W</i>	3 thanes	[Raven] Meols	360	658 <sup>3</sup>	55%
	<i>S</i>	Uctred	Little Crosby	360	1,811	20%
	<i>S</i>	King Edward	Great Crosby	480	2,168	22%
	<i>S</i>	Aelmer	Litherland	360	1,205 <sup>4</sup>	30%
	<i>W</i>	4 thanes and priest	Bootle	360 <sup>5</sup>	1,207	20%
Alt valley	<i>S</i>	3 thanes	Ince [Blundell]	360	2,315½	16%
	<i>S</i>	5 thanes	Sefton	720	2,836½ <sup>6</sup>	25%
	<i>S</i>	Aski	Thornton	360	773½	47%
inland	<i>H</i>	Godiva	Melling	240	2,137	11%
	<i>H</i>	Uctred	Lydiate	90	1,995	5%
	<i>H</i>	Uctred	Maghull	60	2,098	3%
Total				4,950	37,423	13%

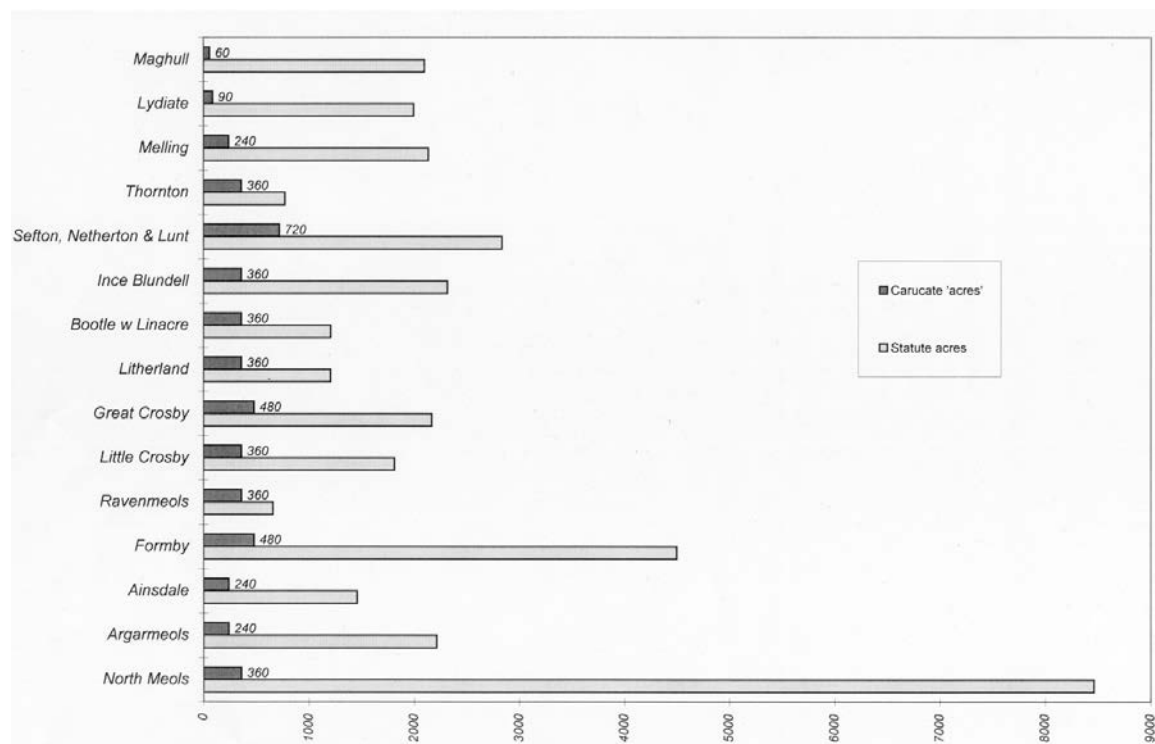
1. Each carucate considered to represent 120 statute acres (Jones, 1987, 200).
2. Following boundary reorganisation in 1974 much of North Meols is now in Lancashire.
3. The relatively low statute acreage for Ravenmeols may be accounted for by loss to the sea in the 14th century and again in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and absence of mossland to the east of the township.
4. Excluding Orrell and Ford which together accounted for a further 727 statute acres.
5. Includes two carucates held by four thanes and a carucate held by the priest.
6. Includes Nethererton and Lunt. Sefton itself extended to 1,233½ acres.

Parishes: *NM* = North Meols; *S* = Sefton; *W* = Walton; *H* = Halsall

the local thanes, though doubtless servants of the Crown, do appear to have held direct responsibility for their property suggesting that they were recognised as people of some status in the region's social hierarchy. It also suggests, perhaps, that the manors - or estates - were physical entities each with its own farmstead or hamlet. However, although the tenurial divisions can with some certainty be followed through the post-Conquest period, there is neither topographical nor archaeological evidence to show the detail of the settlement pattern at this time.

In recording the value of each place, Domesday tells of hides<sup>19</sup> (*hida*) or carucates<sup>20</sup> of land (*car tra*), and specifies that each hide contained six carucates of land and that the thanes customarily paid 2 *ora* of pence (32 pennies) for each carucate. This mixture of Mercian and Scandinavian units of assessment reflects the cultural influences in the

region. There is some consistency in the use of '½ hide' rather than 3 carucates, whereas 2 and 4 carucates indicate lesser or greater proportions of the whole. With regard to measurement, it is generally accepted that a carucate or ploughland represents 120 statute acres and that Domesday carucates refer to units of taxation. They are, however, considered to represent land under cultivation and elsewhere the relationship between the tax assessment and township area has been examined (Harvey, 1981, 193-97). In Sefton, comparison of the modern statute acreages and topography with the carucal assessments of the 11<sup>th</sup> century has produced some interesting results (figs 1.6, table 1.5; table 1.6).



**Table 1.6:** Comparison of carucate acres (taken from Domesday survey, estimating each carucate as 120 statute acres) and statute acres (of individual townships in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, taken from Farrer and Brownbill (eds.))

<sup>19</sup> A measurement of land; the amount required by one free family with its dependents; as much land as could be tilled with one plough in a year (Shorter O.E.D.). Said to be synonymous with the carucate or ploughland (Richardson, 1974, 10) but the West Derby survey indicates that this cannot be so in this region.

<sup>20</sup> See note 9 above.

Allowing for redefinition of township boundaries in the centuries following the Conquest, it seems clear that in the 11<sup>th</sup> century the highest concentration of profitable land lay in the Alt valley - in Sefton township (25%) and Thornton (47%). Each abutted Litherland (30%) and Great Crosby (22%) (table 1.5; table 1.6). Since the low acreage of the 19<sup>th</sup> century reflects the loss of much of the medieval township of Ravenmeols to the sea (see below), the high proportion estimated for that vill can almost certainly be considered as biased. By contrast, the low proportion of assessed land in North Meols in the 11<sup>th</sup> century probably relates to the limitations of cultivable land until drainage schemes, of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and later, brought extensive areas of mossland into cultivation. Development of the arable in Lydiate and Maghull was probably constrained by woodland survival though it seems that, also with access to the Alt, in Melling the area of cultivated land was comparable with that under timber.

Though the assessments cannot be used as evidence for actual measurement of land under the plough, they do demonstrate its cultivable potential in a locality where mossland and coastal dunes limited productivity. Across the district as a whole, taking cognisance of the predominantly moss and marshland landscape and accepting that modern township boundaries may not bear a precise relationship with the situation in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the assessments of cultivable land do appear to show that much of the landscape could have been well-developed. It seems also that, with greater emphasis on cultivation in townships along the Alt valley and south of its estuary, this part of the district may have been more heavily populated than elsewhere. Furthermore, with woodland east of the Alt, a long coastline and a topography which gave easy access to extensive areas of pasture and meadow, a varied economic resource could have been available to Sefton's inhabitants.

### Post-Conquest redistribution of lands

After 1066 the Conqueror granted all the land between Ribble and Mersey to Roger of Poitou but by Domesday it was in the king's hands. Roger had granted estates to several individuals and in such grants the origins of the baronies of Widnes, Penwortham and Warrington can be seen. Great Crosby was retained as part of West Derby's demesne (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 100) and other vills such as Aintree came to be held in thanage tenure or by serjeanty suggesting that the Crown continued to retain an interest. However, the process was not straightforward and, in many instances, overlordship or tenorial allegiances are not recognisable until John's Great Inquest in 1212

(Farrer, 1903). All the same, over the following centuries the succession of the principal

<i>Vill</i>	<i>Overlord</i>
North Meols	barony of Penwortham
Argarmeols	barony of Penwortham
Ainsdale	Crown demesne ⇒ serjeanty
Formby (¼)	thane of Woodplumpton
(¾)	Crown
Ravenmeols	Crown demesne ⇒ serjeanty
Little Crosby	barony of Widnes
Great Crosby	Crown
Litherland (½)	fee of Sefton
(½)	two estates ⇒ lord of Sefton
Bootle	thane of Woodplumpton
Ince Blundell	barony of Warrington
Sefton	fee of Sefton
Thornton (⅔)	barony of Warrington
(⅓)	fee of Sefton
Aintree	thane
Lydiate	barony of Warrington
Melling	thane of Melling and Upholland
Maghull	barony of Widnes

**Table 1. 7:** Summary of estate redistribution after the Conquest

landholdings can, not infrequently, be identified through the carucates<sup>21</sup> with which such holdings are associated (Lewis, 2000, 157 *et seq.*).

Estates were granted to individuals under varying types of tenure (fig. 1.7; table 1.7). Ainsdale and Ravenmeols were probably taken into the demesne and in 1154 they were granted out in serjeanty (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 49). In the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, Roger, son of Ravenkil thane of Woodplumpton, whose family may have had interests between the Ribble and Mersey since before the Conquest, held Bootle and a quarter of Formby in thanage. The remaining three-quarters of Formby were taken into the demesne and subsequently each was granted to lords from whom the tenorial descent may be traced with comparative ease (Lewis, 2000, 218-220; Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 46-49).

Melling was also held in thanage in 1160 (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 209) and had passed in joint ownership, presumably as a consequence of

<sup>21</sup> Though probably originating from the assessment of cultivated areas, and with possible fragmentation as estates were divided through partible inheritance, notional carucates must be distinguished from oxgangs (bovates) allotted to subtenants as units of cultivation as, for example, the 24 messuages and 21 oxgangs held in Great Crosby in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century with a further 11 oxgangs held by the free tenants (Farrer, ed. 1907, 96).

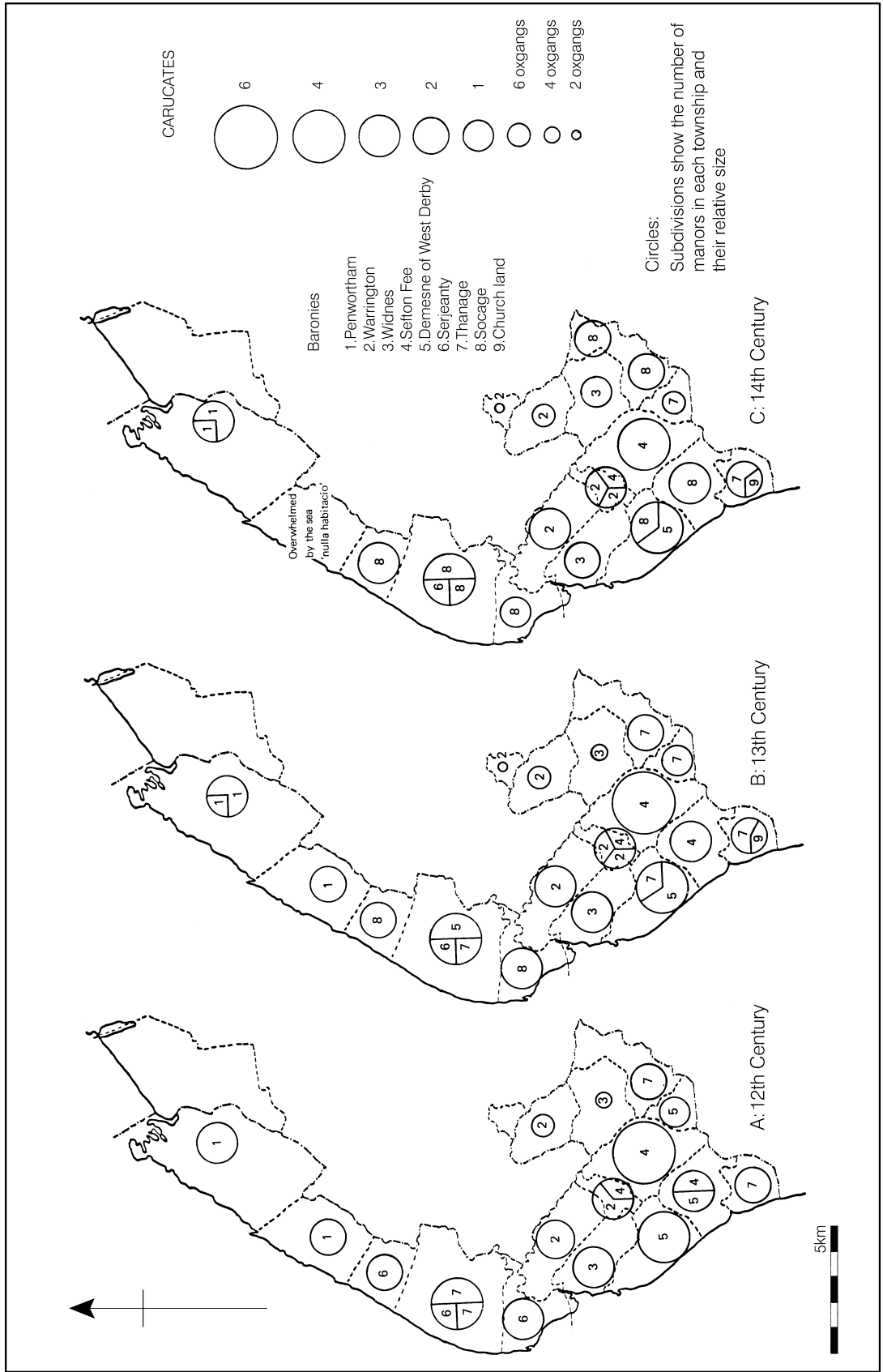


Fig. 1.7 12th-14th century land holdings

partible inheritance, to two sons by 1193. Half Litherland went to two individuals and the other half was attached to the Sefton fee. By c.1100, in exchange for half of Toxteth, the whole of Litherland had passed to the Molyneux family by whom it was retained alongside the Sefton fee (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 95). During the 12<sup>th</sup> century the whole of Sefton vill and one-third of Thornton was granted to a predecessor of Robert de Molyneux, lord of Sefton at the time of Henry I (Farrer and Brownbill 1, 1906, 280) and was to form the basis of the fee of Sefton. Most of its possessions lay close to Sefton township itself and it is here, close to the River Alt, that the district's only resident feudal lord established his household. The moated house which, unusually for south Lancashire, stood near the parish church, continued as the family's main residence until their removal to Croxteth Hall in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; after this it probably fell gradually to decay (Lewis, 1981a, 53-54).

Re-assignment of land certainly resulted in fragmented holdings from the point of view of the superior lordships i.e. the crown and the baronies. With the exception of the Sefton fee, the capital messuage of each barony lay some considerable distance beyond Sefton's bounds – at Warrington, Widnes or Penwortham – and, even within Sefton district, their estates were fragmented. The reason for this is not clear. On the one hand, fragmentation gave a varied land resource of arable, pasture, timber and turbarry and could be viewed as a valuable asset. On the other, dispersal could be seen as the Crown's strategy to weaken the powerbase of local lords. Whatever, at a local level it seems that the imposition of a Norman hierarchy had little real effect on day to day management of the region and also that mesne lordship of many of the pre-Conquest landholdings continued in unbroken descent (Cunliffe Shaw, 1956, 9; Lewis, 2000, 42-47).

Documentary study of Ince Blundell and Sefton townships has shown that, although each was held by thanes in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the imposition of military lordship in the post-Conquest period did not result in similar management regimes in each (Bakewell, 1982). Whilst a conventional hierarchy of manorial tenure and responsibilities can be seen in Sefton township there are indications of greater tenurial freedom in the Barony of Warrington's estate in Ince Blundell. The contrast perhaps derives from Sefton's role as the demesne of a local resident lord whereas in Ince Blundell the whole vill was granted to sub-tenants and one or more local lords interposed between them and the feudal lord.

From the early 13<sup>th</sup> century land tenure can be traced a little more securely. The Great Inquest of 1212 cited the names of the principal landholders, the type of tenure and the extent of land assessed in each township (Farrer, 1903; fig. 1.8). Conspicuous was the addition of Eggargarth, at Lydiate, to the cultivable assessment suggesting, perhaps, an increase in value as a consequence of woodland clearance. Here, and in Lydiate, Maghull and Melling, the 14<sup>th</sup> -century documents seem to support evidence for woodland clearance and assart.

The pattern of superior lordship was not to experience any great changes until the 16<sup>th</sup> century though, with the exception of the Sefton fee, the baronial overlords seem to have become gradually less interested in their satellite estates. At a local level, though partible inheritance was to result in subdivision of estates and marriage was to introduce new landlords (though not infrequently estates reverted to the female line in default of an heir), the overall structure of the region's estates seems to have survived more or less intact. The Dissolution was perhaps the catalyst for change. Although ownership by local families (such as the Molyneuxes of Sefton, the Blundells of Ince Blundell, the Blundells of Little Crosby and the Formbys of Formby) was to survive through to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, others were not so fortunate. A new generation of property owners, such as the Irelands of Lydiate, were to expand their estates by buying up the former monastic lands only to suffer sequestration either for their religious beliefs or their Royalist loyalties - if not both. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century a combination of confiscation, absentee landlords and management by agents was to result in decline from which the former Ireland estates in Lydiate failed to recover.

### **Churches and chapels**

The pre-Conquest ecclesiastical structure in the area is not clear. Following the defeat of the Britons at Chester in AD 613, Northumbrian influence brought religious dependence on the See of York. At the close of the 10<sup>th</sup> century parochial responsibility was transferred from York to the Mercian diocese of Lichfield to which it remained attached until the Reformation. There is a strong possibility that a proportion of the parishes, into which Lancashire was divided during the later medieval period, had already been established

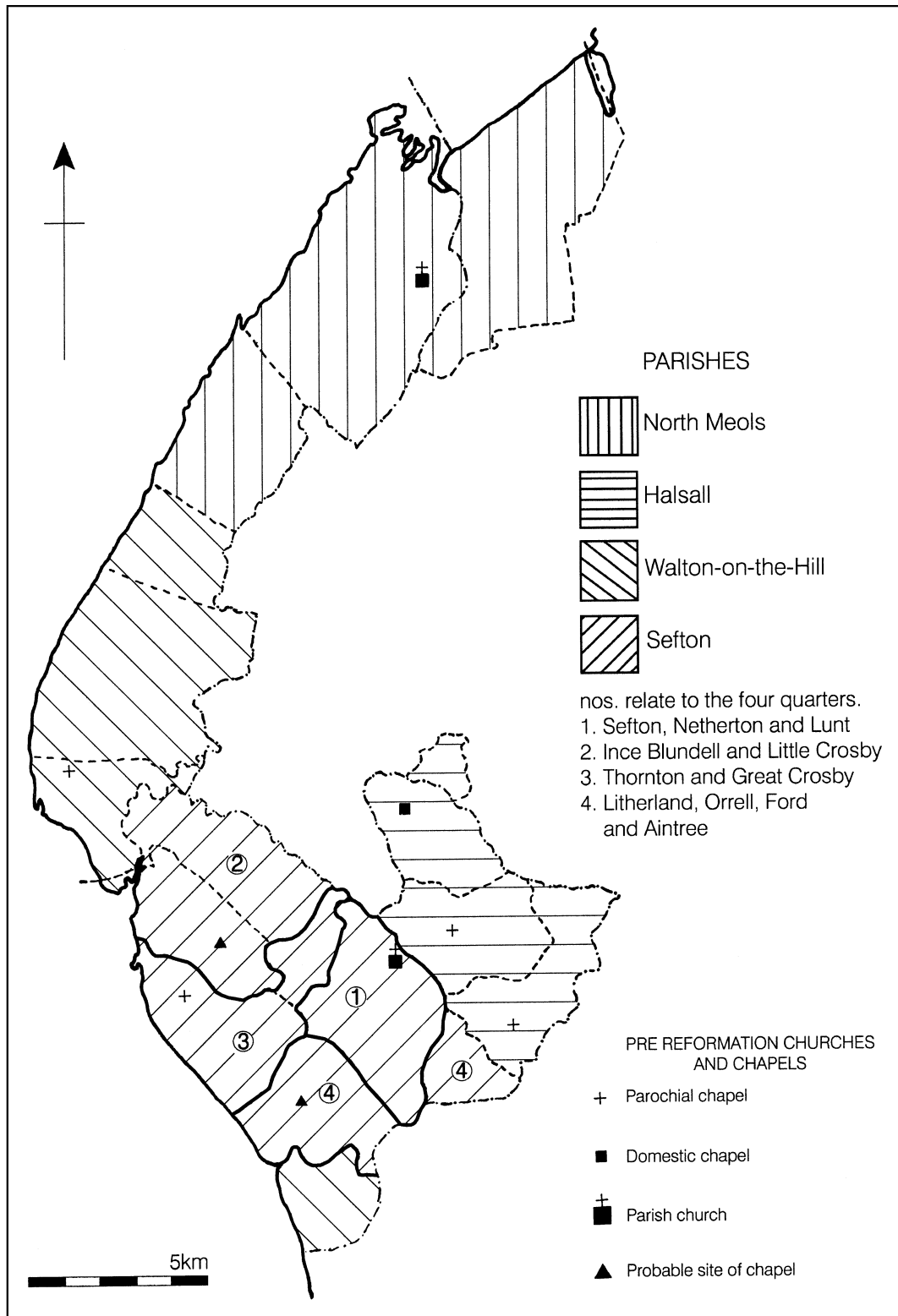


Fig. 1.8 Ancient Parishes

before the Conquest (Farrer and Brownbill 1, 1906, 1-6). The Domesday survey failed to notice any church or chapel in the district though the entry for Bootle states that 'A priest had one carucate of land at Walton church' (Farrer and Brownbill 1, 1906, 284). There is no evidence for a church or chapel in Bootle and the entry has been interpreted as 'the priest of Walton had the ploughland [in Bootle] in right of his church' (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 32). Presumably the church held land in Bootle in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. However, on the available evidence, it seems that the parochial structure within Sefton (fig. 1.8) was subject to change in the early post-Conquest period.

Sefton contains parts of four medieval parishes each of which served two or more townships. Three of the parishes, Walton-on-the Hill, Halsall and North Meols, were undoubtedly created before the Conquest; the fourth, Sefton parish, may not have been established until the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Only the parish churches at North Meols and Sefton lie within the district.

### **Walton-on-the-Hill**

The extensive parish of Walton-on-the-Hill originally extended from Liverpool to Ainsdale – a distance of about 15 miles. The mother church at Walton, dedicated to St Mary, contains the remains of an early decorated cross shaft. It seems that the parish became fragmented, perhaps in the early post-Conquest period, with the intervention of two new parishes, Sefton and Altcar. As a consequence, ten townships continued to be attached to the mother church; of these, Ainsdale, Formby and Ravenmeols in the north and Bootle in the south, lie in Sefton district.

Isolation from the mother church appears to have been remedied by the foundation of at least one chapel which probably served Ainsdale, Formby and Ravenmeols (Lewis, 1981b, 73-74). A chapel, in Ravenmeols, is inferred from late 12<sup>th</sup>-century grants to Cockersand Abbey (Farrer, ed., 1900, 565-66). It appears to have survived sand and sea incursion faced by the rest of the township in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries (see below) and in 1650 was recorded as 'an ancient pochiall chapell called Formby Chappell' (Fishwick, 1879, 82). Despite repairs in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century it was abandoned following storms and sand inundation in the 1730s and a new chapel was built further inland in 1746<sup>22</sup>. In 1855 a modern church, dedicated to St Luke, was built at the north side of the old burying ground which had continued in use despite its isolation;

simple grave markers used in the 18<sup>th</sup> century may have come from the old building. This, according to a report in 1894, when a portion of the old church wall was discovered during grave digging, had stood a little to the south-east of the present structure.

### **Sefton**

The parish of Sefton intrudes on that of Walton-on-the-Hill (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 62) leaving Ravenmeols, Formby and Ainsdale in isolation from the mother church. It seems likely, therefore, that Sefton parish was a relatively late creation and the possibility that it appeared alongside the new fee of Sefton granted to the Molyneuxes cannot be ignored. The earliest record of parochial independence appears in 1203, and the church, dedicated to St Helen, was probably founded in Sefton township itself at about this time.

Anciently the parish was arranged in four quarters comprising the following townships: *i.* Sefton, Netherton and Lunt; *ii.* Ince Blundell and Little Crosby; *iii.* Thornton and Great Crosby; *iv.* Litherland, Orrell and Ford and Aintree (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 58). Possibly these divisions echo an earlier parochial arrangement associated with Walton parish and there is slight evidence for a chapel or church in each quarter.

#### *i. Sefton, Netherton and Lunt*

The parish church at Sefton has been discussed extensively (Caröe and Gordon, 1893; Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 59-66). A holy well, the only one in the district and like the church dedicated to St Helen, lies a short distance to the north of the church. The dedication is believed to show Northumbrian influence (Brownbill, 1904, 32-34) perhaps lending support to the notion of an earlier chapel. Near the river and close to the moated Old Hall and watermill, the site of the church is both low-lying and isolated from the rest of the community. This seems to have consisted of small groups of farmsteads or hamlets distributed around the fringes of the quarter.

The church contains little architectural detail earlier than the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, a late 12<sup>th</sup> century capital, found when the old schoolhouse near the churchyard wall on the north-west was pulled down, is perhaps indicative of the first structure (Cox, 1896, 103; Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 59, n.9). There is early 14<sup>th</sup> century work in the north chapel and west tower, brasses and monuments date from the 13<sup>th</sup> century but the greater part was rebuilt in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A medieval grave slab decorated with a cross was built into the ceiling of one of the

<sup>22</sup> Dedicated to St Peter.

turrets (Allen, 1894, 29; Caröe and Gordon, 1893, 6); but may be the same as a 13<sup>th</sup> century slab found during restoration and now in the Molyneux chapel (Williams, 1995, 90). There are a few pieces of old stained glass probably dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the rebuilding took place. Decorated woodwork on the pew ends has also been dated to this period and may be by the same hand as work at Lydiate Hall (Lewis, 2000, 296).

Churchwardens' accounts for 1684-85 record re-walling and paving in the vicinity of the church. 'Flaggs for platt stones' were obtained from Knowsley delph and other stone came from Male (Maghull) stone delph (Lancs RO DDBI, 31/4). It appears that the original path to Sefton watermill lay through the churchyard; if so, the wall which now surrounds the church probably dates from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1755 twenty loads of stone from Maghull Chapel, where the medieval nave was being demolished, were sold for use at Sefton Church (Cheetham, 1923, 14) though no records of substantial alterations to the church have been noted at this time.

#### *ii. Ince Blundell and Little Crosby*

Ince Blundell and Little Crosby may have been served by the *Harkirk* (see above). The site still retains its religious significance and a small late 19<sup>th</sup> century chapel stands close to the post-medieval burying ground. However, since these two townships are separated from each other by a strip of poorly-drained land, 600m wide at its narrowest point, a site at *Harkirk* would not allow easy access for a community living at Ince Blundell.

#### *iii. Thornton and Great Crosby*

Evidence for an early church in Great Crosby rests solely on the place-name suggesting a 'settlement with a cross'. In this quarter, both Thornton and Great Crosby show good evidence for settlement nucleation which is in marked contrast with that in the Sefton quarter. Now demolished, the church at Great Crosby, dedicated to St Michael, was first mentioned in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and in 1650 it was described as 'an ancient litle chappell well scituated' (Fishwick, 1879, 85). It stood in the centre of the village by the green; a cross base near the site bears the inscription 'St Micheal' (*sic*) (fig. 1.18).

#### *iv. Litherland, Orrell and Ford and Aintree*

The possibility of an early church or chapel in Litherland appears in several documentary sources. An undated document witnessed, amongst others,

by John the clerk<sup>23</sup> referred to two perches of land in Litherland 'excepting a religious house or (*sic*) the chief lord of the fee' (Lancs RO DDM 38/4). Another undated grant was witnessed by Peter the Chaplain (Lancs RO DDM 38/1) and John de Wolleton, chaplain, was plaintiff in a dispute regarding a quarter of the manor in 1392 (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 96, n.6). In 1505 land which included 'Sperthe in Longchurchfield also two selions called two Hollands in Shortechirchfield' (Lancs RO DDM 38/64; Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 97, n.6) was held by one of the Molyneuxes from which it seems that the church had no concern in this property.

There is nothing to show that the name 'Churchfield' derived from Sefton's glebe. The earliest available terrier, 1663, recorded church property only in Sefton township, and that of 1701, which covered a similar area, stated 'as fawr as wee knowe or have heard Those particculey afforesaid is all the Glebe lands that doe belong to the parsonage of Sephton' (Lancs RO DRL 3/12). Furthermore, in 1650 the church surveyors recommended that a church should be built at Litherland, being more than two miles from Sefton church (Fishwick, 1879, 85) so indicating that at least by the 17<sup>th</sup> century Litherland was dependent upon the mother church.

The location of Litherland's medieval fields is known from a survey and plan of 1769 (Lancs RO DDM 14/43; fig. 1.9). These former open fields occupied the highest point in the township and amongst them was the Church Field but the map gave no suggestion of a building in this location. If the field name does reflect the site of an early church, it was isolated both from the nucleated village, which lay on lower ground a little to the south, and the hamlet of Ford, a similar distance to the north.

The evidence suggests, therefore, that each quarter in Sefton parish could have maintained its own chapel, perhaps dating back to a time when the townships were attached to Walton-on-the-Hill. These could have become redundant when Sefton

<sup>23</sup> John de Massey, also known as 'the clerk', was rector of Sefton church in 1339-1364 (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 63, n.1).

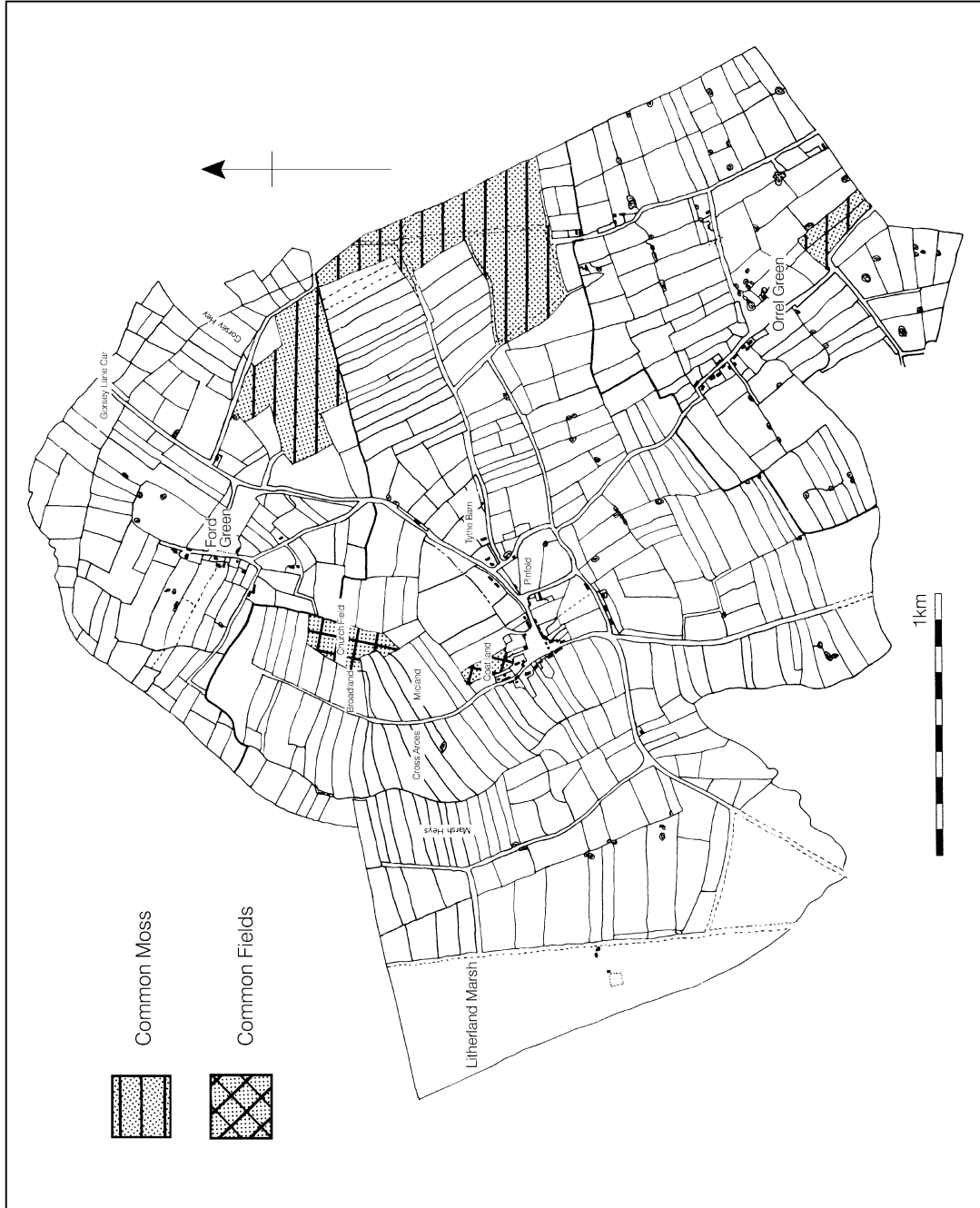


Fig. 1.9 Litherland, Orrell and Ford, 1769 (Lancs RO DDM 14/43)

parish was created in the late 12<sup>th</sup> or early 13<sup>th</sup> century. Though field survey and excavation have failed to produce evidence for the site of the *Harkirk*, archaeological remains may survive at Litherland where the area is still not entirely occupied by modern houses.

### *Halsall*

The extensive parish of Halsall includes five townships of which Maghull, Melling and Lydiat fall within the bounds of Sefton. The mother church, dedicated to St. Cuthbert, is at Halsall some five miles or so north of Lydiat. Being even further from Halsall, in the medieval period Maghull and Melling were served by their own chapels.

### *Melling*

Melling chapel, dedicated to the Holy Rood, was re-dedicated to St Thomas when it was rebuilt in 1834 perhaps to the north of the medieval site (Williams, 1995, 88) and it has since been enlarged. It stands on a low sandstone eminence making it highly visible in the generally flat landscape. It can be traced from the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century when 'land of the church' and 'two sailuns by the chapel' were noted in a grant to Cockersand Abbey (Farrer, 1900, 536, 538). A view of the old chapel shows a double nave with two 14<sup>th</sup> century windows at the west end and a square, embattled tower (Gregson, 1817-1824, 221). The graveyard has been used at least since the early 14<sup>th</sup> century (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 214); it has been suggested that a grave slab decorated with a carving in relief of a stepped and floriated cross and a small, plain shield, known locally as the 'Crusader's stone', dates from c.1150 (Williams, 1995, 88-89). The slab lies some 20m south of the present church and the churchyard also contains the base of an ancient cross. By 1556 there was a priest's house with land; this house lies a short distance west of the church. In 1650 the Commonwealth surveyors found 'an ancient pochiall chappell with a ffaire yord well walled out called Melling Chapel, alsoe a Mansion Howse with glebe lands worth Three pounds *p ann...*' (Fishwick, 1879, 86).

### *Maghull Chapel*

Unlike Melling, the chapel of ease at Maghull, known as the Unsworth Chapel, occupies a low-lying and unremarkable location sandwiched between the turnpike road and the Leeds and Liverpool canal (Yates, 1786), and a short distance west of the church of St. Andrew. A description of the chapel has been published (Cheetham, 1923, 1-67). Though it now contains only a small amount of medieval detail, it is the only surviving chapel in the district to retain some elements from the 13<sup>th</sup>

century. There were several phases of alteration in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and again in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The old nave was dismantled in 1755 when stone was sold for use at Sefton church and 'nineteen loads of stone were otherwise disposed of' (Cheetham, 1923, 14). During one phase of alterations part of an arch was removed to Maghull Manor where it was incorporated into an external wall. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the building was described as an 'ancient chancel with a small aisle or chapel to the north' (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 220). A small area of painted wall plaster survives south of the chancel window. It is in very poor condition and the design is uncertain. It has been described variously as 'not unlike an angel's wing' (O'Mahony, 1924, 3-4) and 'the head of a woman wearing a wimple' (Hordern, 1977, 11). It is one of three pieces of medieval decorated wall plaster on Merseyside, the others being in churches at Lower Bebington and Eastham in Wirral.

In 1550 the chapel was valued at 30s. but at about this time the rector of Halsall complained that he had been ejected from adjacent property; in the period between 1590-c.1610 there was no preacher (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 220). In 1650 the church surveyors found 'an ancient chappell called Male Chappell... and about a rood of ground lying about the said chappell fitt to be enjoyed therew<sup>th</sup>.' (Fishwick, 1879, 87). The Glebe Terrier for 1778 stated there was no chapel yard, this perhaps being one of the pieces of land lost in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In 1825 the estate comprised a house of four small rooms and a milk house, each built of brick and slate. There were also a three-bayed barn of stone, brick and slate, a tithe barn near the chapel and a number of fields (Lancs RO DRL 3/3-5).

### *North Meols*

North Meols parish contains two townships - North Meols (focused on Churchtown) and Birkdale (formerly Argarmeols). The earliest reference for a church dates from c.1140-9 (Tupling, 1958, 13). At this time the building was referred to as the *capella* of Meols though within a short time confirmations of a grant to the Abbey of Evesham referred to it as an *ecclesia* (Hulton, 1853, 1-5). The church, like that at Halsall, is dedicated to St Cuthbert but Farrer dismissed the possibility that North Meols and Birkdale had originally belonged to Halsall parish (1903, introduction). Other writers have been less certain and postulated that the North Meols dedication reflects its early affiliation to the mother church at Halsall (Brownbill, 1904, 19-44; Tupling, 1958, 1-16).

The present church was built in 1730, on the site of an earlier building which had been burnt down, and

further alterations were made in 1860 (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 226). It stands at the heart of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century (and probably medieval) settlement, a short distance west of Hall Green and Mill Holm (fig. 1.12). The rectory was at Crossens, a mile or so north of the church. Its position may have been determined by a grant of two oxgangs in North Meols and some land by Albert Bussel, lord of the manor, to the Abbey of Evesham (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 229, n.18). In 1696 the house had 'three bayes of building 16 yards long and 16 yards in breadth' and a garden adjoined the property. There were also two barns, each of three bays, a stable and cowhouse containing four 'little' bays. Glebe land was in the hands of three tenants (Lancs RO DRL 3/8). A new rectory, nearer the church, was built in 1825.

### ***Post-reformation religious buildings***

Following the Dissolution worship in the Catholic faith persisted - with varying levels of secret worship and ritual - throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. It has already been noted that refusal to bury Catholics in Sefton parish churchyard led William Blundell to make a burial ground at the *Harkirk* in 1611. By 1626 it appears that about 84 burials had taken place (Tyrer, 1967, 27-28) but following a hearing in the Court of the Star Chamber it was ordered that the walls should be pulled down and the 'ground laid waste'. Despite this, the burial of Catholics here continued until 1753.

Important houses in the district had their own domestic chapels. These may have survived from the earlier period and often a resident priest fulfilled the religious needs, not only of the lord of the manor and his immediate family, but also of the wider community (see Tyrer, 1968, 1970, 1972 *passim*). A private chapel in Lydiate is known from at least the early years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Known as St Catherine's Chapel on the evidence of alabaster tablets carved with the image of St Catherine and said to have come from the building (Nelson, 1916), it stands isolated and roofless a short distance south of Lydiate Hall. Though described by Thomas Pennant in 1773 as a chapel of ease to Halsall Parish, and as Lydiate Abbey by 19<sup>th</sup>-century antiquarians (D'Arcy, 1990, 15-16, 18), there is no evidence to support either claim. Certainly it was not recognised by the church surveyors in 1649-55 (Fishwick, 1879, 87). Since the 1970s there have been several phases of archaeological re-evaluation of the building and its enclosure. The walls have been consolidated and a survey of loose building stones and grave memorials has been made, together with a study of

the masons' marks (D'Arcy, 1990; O'Hanlon, 1977; Lewis and O'Hanlon, 1990; Lewis, 1993).

The earliest known post-reformation records of Catholic worship in Sefton township date from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century when a chapel in the old hall was served by Benedictines or Carmelites until 1792 (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 74). The chapel of St Benet in Nethererton was opened in 1793, on land granted by the lord of the manor of Sefton (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 74). The 'Chapel Garden', lying a little to the west of Sefton Old Hall in 1769 (Lancs RO DDM 14/47), is thought to relate to the rectory house which stood close by.

### ***Monastic interests***

In 1066 no monastic house held any land between the Ribble and Mersey (Farrer and Brownbill 1, 275). Subsequently, although a number of monastic houses in Lancashire and Cheshire, and occasionally further afield, received grants in *frankalmoin* from estates in Sefton (fig. 1.10, table 1.8), their influence was limited. Most gifts appear to have been of fairly small, disparate pieces of land which, almost certainly, were re-granted to the donors to be held by their tenants in return for rents and dues. With rare exceptions it is now almost impossible to identify the location of these small holdings.

However, there were small estates with granges at Alt Grange in Ince Blundell and Cuncsough in Melling. The Cistercians, first established at Stanlaw and subsequently at Whalley Abbey, appear to have kept a few monks at Alt Grange. The whole of Altcar, a township mostly in Lancashire but with important access to the coast, was granted to another Cistercian house, Merevale Abbey in Warwickshire. At Altcar there were one or two monks, but this did not rank as a cell (Farrer and Brownbill 2, 1908, 102). The brethren on these estates were responsible for improving the mossland areas in their possession though on occasion it brought them into dispute with their neighbours (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 223). Further north at Ainsdale grants to Cockersand Abbey in 1190-1213 and 1220-1250 made reference to the brethren's barn and house (Farrer, 1900, 573, 581), but whether such buildings were actually occupied by members of the order

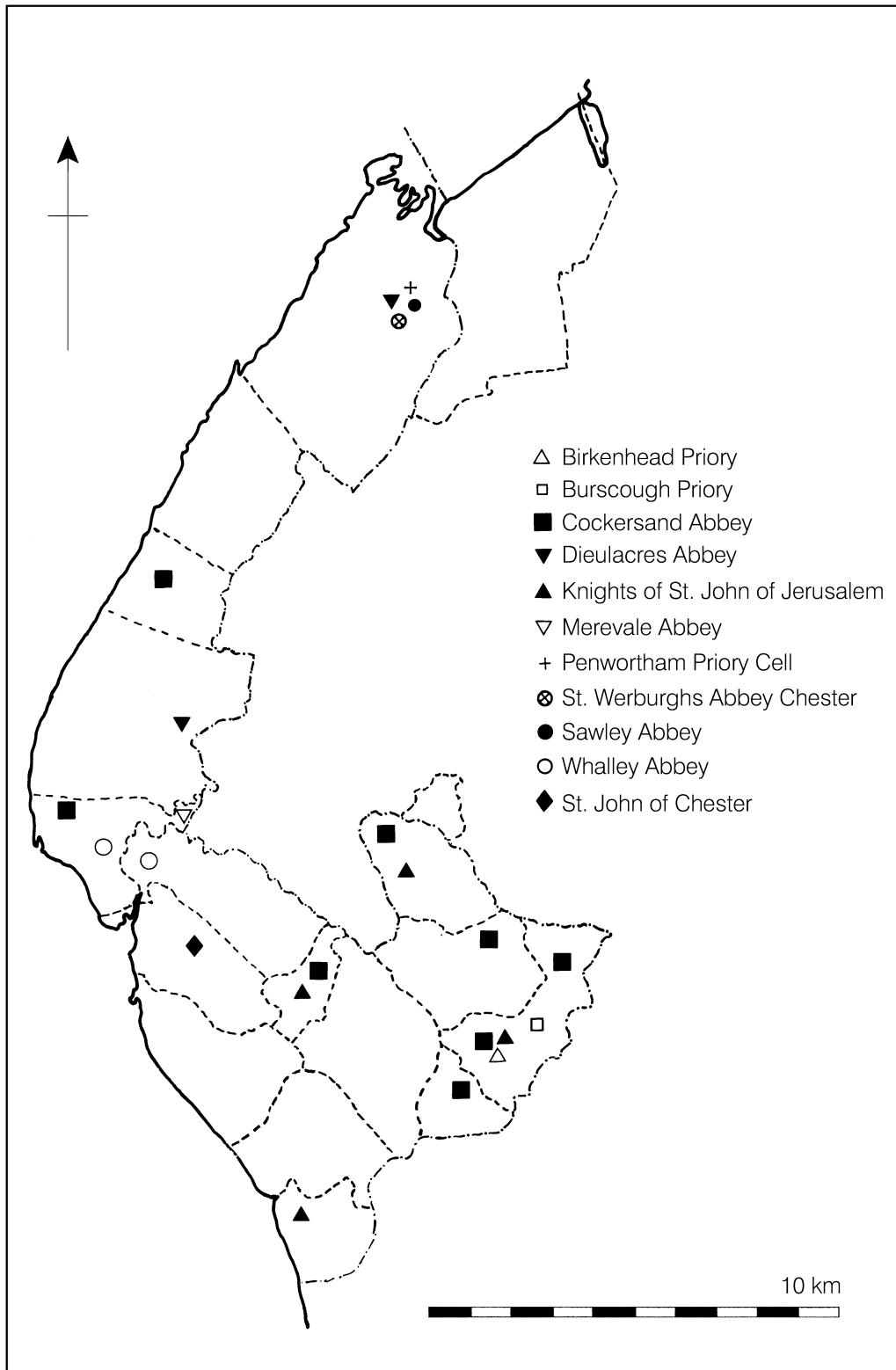


Fig. 1.10 Estates granted to monasteries 'Monastic Lands'

Aintree	Ainsdale	Altcar	Bootle	Formby	Ince Blundell	Little Crosby	Lydiate	Melling	Maghull	North Meols	Raven- meols	Thornton
⑤	⑤	▽	⑩	①	④	①	⑤ ⑩	△ ⑥ ⑤ ⑩	⑤	① ⌘ ⊗ ③	⑤ ④	⑤ ⑩

**Key:**

△ - Birkenhead Priory (Benedictine)

⑥ - Burscough Priory (Augustinian)

⑤ - Cockersand Abbey (Premonstratensian)

① - Dieulacres Abbey (Cistercian)

⑩ - St John of Jerusalem

▽ - Merevale Abbey (Cistercian)

⌘ - Penwortham Priory (Benedictine)

① - Hospital of St John, Chester (Knights Hospitallers)

⊗ - St Werburgh, Chester (Benedictine)

③ - Sawley Abbey (Cistercian)

④ - Whalley Abbey (Cistercian)

**Table 1. 8:** Monastic houses in receipt of grants of land

is uncertain and the location of the monastery's fields is quite unknown. The chapel of Meols (presumably to become in time the parish church at North Meols) was granted to Penwortham Priory (near Preston) as a cell of Evesham Abbey and remained in the possession of that house until the Dissolution. However, the church escaped taxation in *c.*1291 'on account of its insignificance' (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 227).

**Cockersand Abbey**

The majority of local grants were made to the Premonstratensian house of Cockersand Abbey on the Fylde. Its Cistercian-like involvement in land reclamation appears to have had the greatest effect in Cunsough (Melling) and, probably, Ainsdale.

In the late 12<sup>th</sup> century the whole of Cunsough was granted to Cockersand (Farrer, 1900, 534-35) and with grants which included agreements for pannage it would appear likely that the area was still wooded. Clearance was probably effected under monastic influence and crops in the 16<sup>th</sup> century were oats, barley and flax (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 213). There is no evidence to suggest that the monks were ever resident in the area but early in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, at a time of civil disorder in south Lancashire, the grange was raided and half a quarter of mixed corn was taken (Tupling, 1949, 77). In the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries eleven tenements in Cunsough were held from the Abbey by lay tenants (Farrer, 1909, *passim*). In 1451 the capital messuage, which is generally accepted as the moated homestead of Cunsough Hall and was perhaps the 14<sup>th</sup> century grange, was held for boons of four capons and a rent of 40s. (Farrer, 1909, 1240). After the Dissolution, Cunsough, together with other Cockersand property in Melling, Lydiate and Thornton, passed to Lawrence Ireland of Lydiate. In 1561 Lawrence Ireland and his son, William, drew up a lease of Cunsough Hall (Farrer

and Brownbill 3, 1907, 213) and it seems that the family retained a direct interest in the property until at least 1637. Edward Ireland's inventory of that year shows that the two-storeyed house had a parlour, a hall with a chamber above, a chamber at the head of the stairs and others over the kitchen and buttery. In addition there were a storehouse, milkhouse and brewhouse; corn on the ground was valued at £10 compared with that at Lydiate and Eggargarth which was valued at £73 (Gibson, 1876, 41-42). There is, however, little now at Cunsough to betray its medieval origins.

The names *Thorp*, *Hengarth* and *Hengarthleache* appear in grants to both Cockersand and Burscough in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Farrer, 1900, 531, 534). It is not clear whether *Thorp*, perhaps an early farmstead, was included within the lands or whether these names were used to define the boundaries which butted *Thorp* (see below). The area known as *Rughthwaite*, which was granted to Cockersand in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century (Farrer, 1900, 532), seems to have straddled the boundary of Melling with Maghull. At a later date it may have included the site of Old Manor House in Maghull which, perhaps, was the farmstead attached to this tenement. It has already been noted that the township boundary between Maghull and Melling was not defined until the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the mossland (perhaps *Hengarthleache*) was divided (Lancs RO DDM 42/31).

Cockersand also received grants in *frankalmoin* in Lydiate and Maghull. A 13<sup>th</sup>-century grant for Orshawhead<sup>24</sup> in Lydiate included pasture for four oxen, 12 cows, three mares with their offspring, pannage for 20 pigs, with sheep and goats at the monks' discretion (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907,

<sup>24</sup> This estate has not been located.

201, n.11). Woodland survival coupled with an economy based on animal husbandry farming seems to be indicated. But Orshaw seems also to have been adjacent to a 'portion of the townfield of Lydiate' suggesting that the township had some form of common field and, in a grant of the same date (c.1190-1220), the site of the watermill was excluded from the gift (Farrer, 1900, 634-38). So far as is known the only watermill in Lydiate was at Eggargarth, a portion of which was also granted to Cockersand (Farrer, 1900, 541). Though the precise extent and location of Orshaw has not been firmly established, there seems little doubt that it lay in the north of Lydiate and was probably bounded, at least in part, by Mairscough Brook which separates the township from Downholland. By 1451 only two tenements were held in Lydiate and there can be little doubt that one was represented in Orshaw. The other was probably at *Tunsnap* which was partly bounded by Maghull brook (Farrer, ed., 1909, 635-6; 1240, 1242). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Richard Orshaw's free tenement comprised two messuages with 100 acres of land, 20 of wood and 100 acres each of pasture and meadow in Lydiate (Fishwick, 1896, 174).

Cockersand received numerous grants of land in Ainsdale. In contrast to those in Lydiate, Maghull and Melling where woodland clearance and assart were probably effected under monastic influence, in Ainsdale the monks seem to have been given land in a township where, by 1190-1213, there was system of open fields, meadow and pasture. Their impact on the landscape, therefore, was probably not entirely one of innovation and extensive land improvement but one which continued established farming practices, and there is some indication for the introduction of sand to improve the marshes (Farrer, 1900, 588; Hallam, 1981, 180). With a grant of land dated to 1190-1213, in which reference was made to the brethren's barn and house (Farrer, 1900, 573, 581), it seems that some monks may have been in residence. The wealth of field names supplied in the monastic grants has indicated substantial evidence for Scandinavian influence in the area (Finberg, 1975, 202-4).

### **Whalley Abbey**

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Cistercian house of Stanlaw Abbey (which transferred to Whalley in 1296) received a grant of land in Ince Blundell and, by 1283, the monks' official in charge was called the 'Granger of Alt' (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 83, n. 9). Also in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century the superior lord of Ravenmeols, which at this time lay on the north side of the River Alt, granted a licence to William Blundell of Ince to erect a mill on the river, with the right to take eels at the sluice.

Subsequently, the mill was given to Whalley (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 49). This brought the monks into conflict with the Cistercian house of Merevale Abbey which held land in the neighbouring township of Altcar. The Whalley monks had raised their own flood gates too high and obstructed the Merevale openings through which the Alt floodwaters escaped. The mill also obstructed the flow of water, thus endangering the abbot of Merevale's crops (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 223, n. 1) but, with subsequent works to improve the drainage along the lower course of the Alt, the site of the watermill cannot now be located.

The monastic property can be identified as Grange Farm and its estate (Lancs RO DRL 1/40) which came to the Molyneux family after the Dissolution and was subsequently the seat of a younger branch of that family. The Grange stood in isolation as a single group of buildings and there is nothing to show that it ever developed into a hamlet or village. On the west side of the dwelling-house a high dune bank with a stone revetment, probably of 18<sup>th</sup> century date, protects the building from tidal movement up the River Alt. The house was enlarged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but appears to include an earlier building, perhaps of 18<sup>th</sup> century date. The barn is generally of hand-made brick with some indication of a stone plinth. Its tie-beam roof trusses are of no great antiquity, and the whole building received a new roof in the 1970s. It is difficult, therefore, to associate the building with any of monastic origin though it probably stands near the site of the medieval grange. As in Cuncough, it would appear that monastic influence exerted considerable change on the landscape in the north of Ince Blundell, though here the improvements involved reclamation of marginal mosslands, marshes and dunes rather than woodland clearance. Many of the field boundaries have been obscured since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century though traces of earlier boundaries or water-courses can occasionally be seen.

### **Settlement and lost settlement** (Fig. 1.11; table 1.9)

Christopher Taylor has noted that the English landscape of the 11<sup>th</sup> century was not one of nucleated villages, with their accompanying systems of strip fields, but rather that the only recognisable features which survive from the pre-Conquest landscape are likely to be parish or estate boundaries and some churches. Furthermore, he observes that Domesday book does not record villages but is a description of the property, perhaps with rights which might equate with the manorial structures of the following centuries, held by various lords and their tenants. Excavation of

	Church/ chapel	Moated site(s)	mill	Nucleated settlement	Dispersed settlement	Arable Strips	Enclosed fields	Overlordship
North Meols	*		water	*			*	Penwortham
Argarmeols (Birkdale)					?	?		Penwortham
Ainsdale				?		*		Crown *serjeanty
Formby		B	water and wind		*	*		Crown *serjeanty and thanage
Ravenmeols	*				?	*		Crown *serjeanty
Ince Blundell		C	water and wind	*		*		Warrington
Little Crosby	?	A	wind	*		*		Widnes
Great Crosby	*		wind	*		*		Crown demesne
Ford					?hamlet	?		Crown *Molyneux or thanage
Litherland	?			*		*		Crown *Molyneux and thanage
Orrell					hamlet	?		Crown *Molyneux or thanage
Bootle			water			?		thanage
Linacre					hamlet	?		thanage *St John
Thornton		B	wind	*		*		Warrington and Molyneux
Sefton	*	AB	water	?	*	?	*	Molyneux
Netherton			?water		*		*	Molyneux
Lunt					*		*	Molyneux
Aintree			water				?	thanage
Lydiate		B	wind		*		*	Warrington
Eggargate			water					Crown *serjeanty
Maghull	*	AC			*		*	Widnes
Melling	*	AAB	wind		*		*	thanage

**Table 1. 9:** Summary of medieval settlement

deserted settlements in England has shown that features representing pre-Conquest occupation usually bear little relation to the settlement plan of the later medieval period. Moreover, in a number of instances it has been demonstrated that the nucleated village was a product of no earlier than the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Taylor, 1983, 124-8).

In Sefton, identification and understanding of the settlement pattern in the post-Conquest period has been dependant very largely upon examination of the earliest estate plans and consideration of field names. These include large numbers of fields called 'moss', 'marsh', 'moor' or 'pool'. From such indicators of land quality, coupled with consideration of the topography, areas of land suitable for settlement and arable cultivation can be isolated from those which only became viable for occupation after extensive drainage programmes of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and later.

It has already been noted that the region was one of extensive parishes which served several townships. The church at North Meols and chapels at Melling, Maghull, the *Harkirk* and Ravenmeols had probably been established by the 11<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier, but hard evidence for the form of the settlements

they served is elusive. With the possible exception of estates focused on North Meols, Great Crosby and Thornton, it seems likely that the pattern of Domesday settlement was one of isolated farmsteads, small hamlets or loose-knit communities each of which had access to a mixed land resource. It seems also that this pattern prevailed well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, in some instances, survives to the present day. Though there is documentary evidence for settlement loss since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, there is little to suggest that such loss was a consequence of deliberate relocation by oppressive landlords. Nor is there any good evidence for desertion or depopulation as a result of death, disease or economic change resulting from a transfer from arable cultivation to pastoral farming. Moreover, since the landscape contains no visible traces for desertion, the precise location of some lost places has proved difficult to identify. Particularly along the coast the effects of sand and

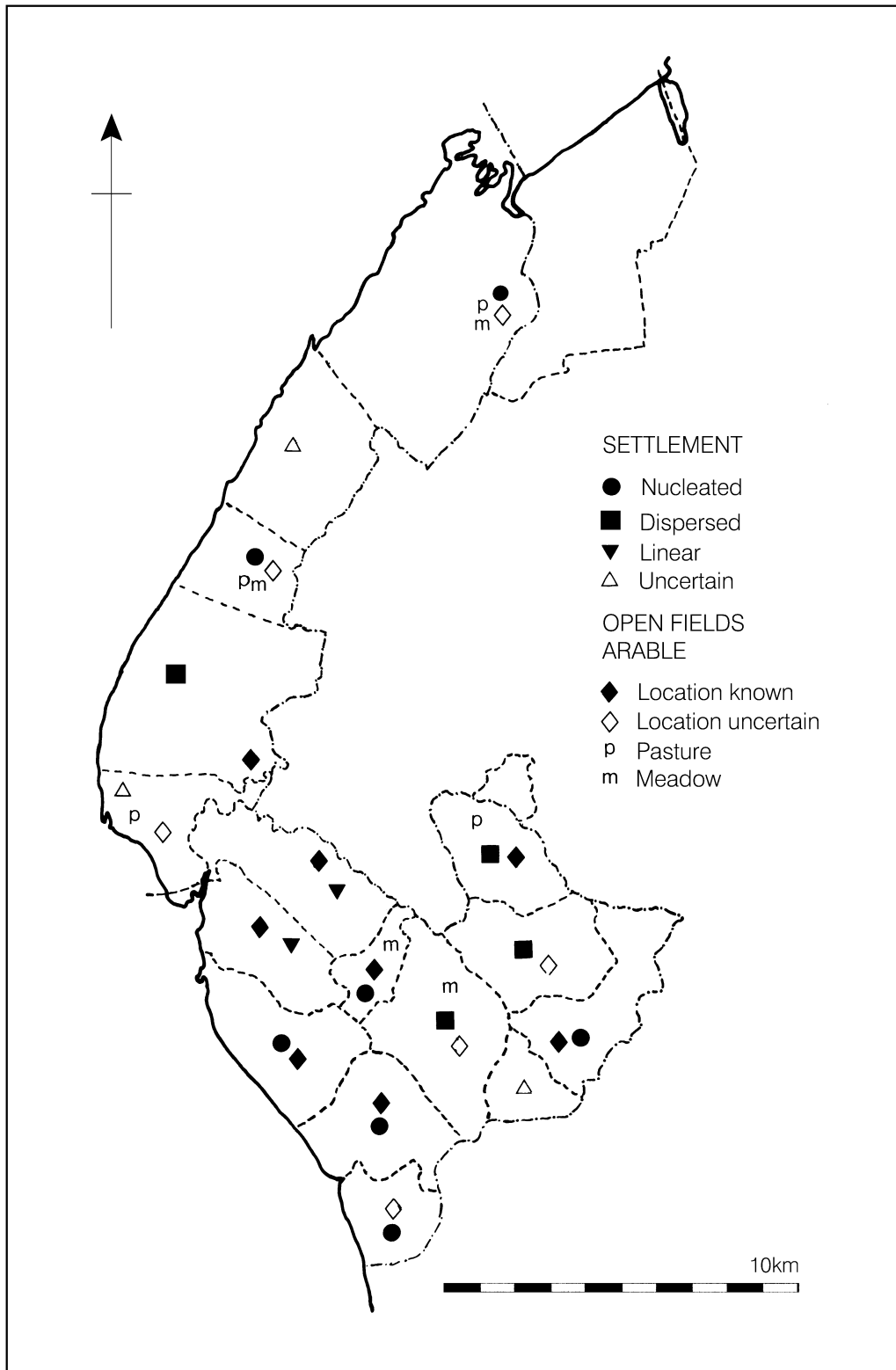


Fig. 1.11 Medieval settlement

sea incursion in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Farrer, 1915, 67-95), and again in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (Tyrer, 1968-1972, *passim*) caused distress though the effects on settlement and the economy are not easy to discern.

As previously noted, the district falls into three general topographical categories: the coastal townships north of the Alt, those south and west of the Alt and the remainder east of the mosslands and the Alt valley. The principal characteristics of medieval settlement and cultivation within these topographical groups and their townships, together with an indication of overlordship, appear on table 1.9. Except, perhaps, at Great Crosby on the Crown's demesne and east of the Alt valley with its dispersed settlement and enclosed fields, no clear pattern can be discerned to lend any level of predictability in recognition and understanding of individual archaeological sites within the district.

### ***Coastal townships north of the Alt***

Sandwiched between the shoreline and the mosses, settlement in these townships has been particularly vulnerable to the varying effects of dune building, coastal erosion and a fluctuating water table.

#### *North Meols*

The community at North Meols (Churchtown), which focused on the church and Hall and was a short distance from a watermill on Otterpool, was probably established by the time of the Conquest. The church is known from the 12<sup>th</sup> century and in 1219-20 a charter for a market and fair had been granted though it was withdrawn in 1224 'because it would be to the injury of the neighbouring markets if it should be held' (Farrer, 1903, 9; Richardson, 1974, 237). Given the particular isolation of North Meols the reason for withdrawal seems somewhat strange. It is uncertain where competition with another market might have been though the Crown may have been anxious to protect a trade in fish at Formby or Ravenmeols.

To the north and west extensive marshes below high water level provided little protection from the sea. Certainly the coast either side of the Ribble estuary as far south as Formby was severely damaged by storms in December 1720 (Tyrer, 1972, 30-32). In North Meols a series of lengthy sea banks, now marked by a road which runs parallel to the coast, may represent attempts to ameliorate the worst effects of high tides and a high water-table. East of the township was Martin Mere where the water-table would be particularly high during periods of high rainfall and sea-level adjustment. Here again, it seems that an embankment, now marked by

Bankfield Road, provided the community with some protection from rising waters. The place must have remained isolated until reclamation of the Mere, which started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, was finally successful and permanent routeways to the north and east became established.

The earliest evidence for settlement comes from an estate plan of 1683 (Lancs RO DDSc 151/23; fig. 1.12). Though this relates to property of only one of North Meols' lords, there is no reason to suppose that the loose-knit community focused on the church and Meols Hall is likely to be any different in overall arrangement from the earlier settlement pattern. A cluster of buildings stands on a knoll of boulder clay at Crossens, a short distance north of North Meols village (fig. 1.13). The 1683 plan shows a small nucleated settlement of tofts and crofts adjacent to Crossens Field. The name, meaning a headland with a cross or crosses (Ekwall, 1922, 126), can be traced from at least as early as c.1250 when William de Coudray granted his salt-pit at Crossens to Sawley Abbey (McNulty, ed., 1933, 157). Topographically the boulder clay knoll can be satisfactorily equated with a low headland, but there is no clear evidence for an ecclesiastical association with the place and the crosses could have been boundary markers.

#### *Argarmeols and Ainsdale*

The location and nature of medieval settlement in Argarmeols and Ainsdale is quite unknown. Like North Meols, both townships suffered storm damage in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, until after the advent of the railway in 1848, the settlement pattern in both townships was one of isolated farms with occasional small clusters of buildings around a common (Harrop, 1985, figs. 19-21, 30; Lancs RO DRL 1/10; DRL 1/27). The failure of early cartographers to notice these places, and their first appearance on William Yates' map of 1786, has been noted (Harrop, 1985, 14).

In 1066 Argarmeols (which was resettled as Birkdale in the post-medieval period) was held by a single individual and contained two carucates of land. From this it may therefore be supposed that the land had some cultivable value. However, Argarmeols had disappeared by 1346 when it was claimed *que villa modo adnichilatur per mare et est ibi nulla habitacio* (Feudal Aids, 1904, 86; fig. 1.8c); the lords of the manor continued to plead its loss until the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

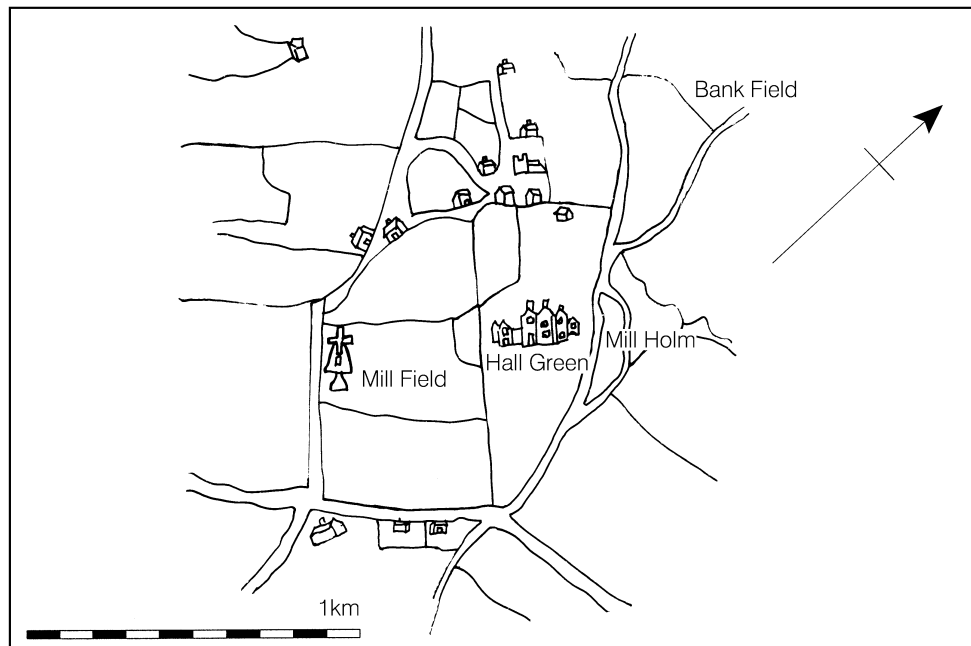


Fig. 1.12 North Meols, 1683 (Lancs RO DDSc 151/23)  
 The Hall stands at Hall Green; the church is the building with a tower and turrets, west of Hall Green and Mill Holm.

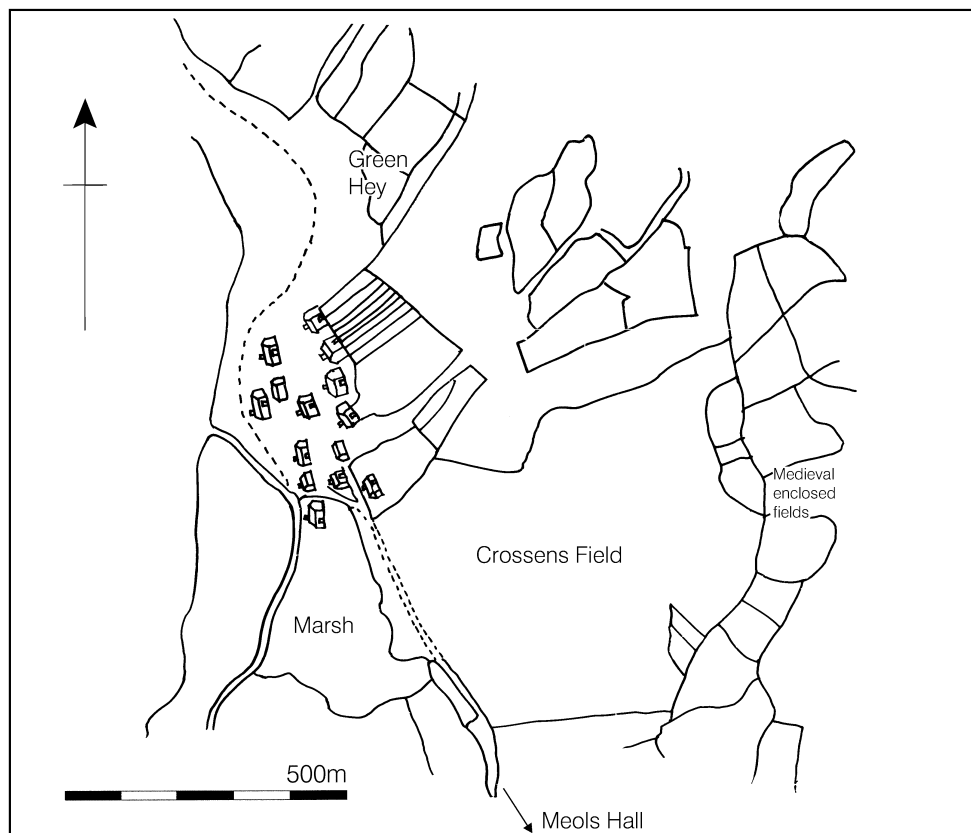


Fig. 1.13 Crossens, 1683 (Lancs RO DDSc 151/23)  
 The early fields are those described as 'Medieval enclosed fields', east of 'Crossens' Field

It seems likely that Ainsdale's origins date from at least as early as the arrival of Scandinavian settlers at the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. By Domesday there were two ploughlands (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 50) but, with evidence from the large numbers of grants to Cockersand Abbey at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, it is clear that the topography supported a mixed economy (Farrer, 1900, *passim*). However, the focus of such activity has not been identified. Ainsdale appears to have suffered a similar fate to that of Argarmeols though perhaps not quite as drastically in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. All the same, by 1555-56 it was claimed that 'there was a certain town in times past called Aynesdale ...[and that]... the town time out of mind had been and still was 'overflowen' with the sea 'so that there remains no remembrance thereof now'' (Fishwick, 1897, 96). None of the field systems described in the monastic documents has survived to allow identification in the post-medieval period and, like Argarmeols in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, settlement was sparse with a small nucleation at the east of the township adjacent to the windmill (Lancs RO DRL 1/27).

### *Ravenmeols and Formby*

At Ravenmeols and Formby, though documentary evidence for open fields can be seen in 13<sup>th</sup>-century and later documents (eg. Lancs RO DDFo/13/3-12; Lumby, 1939, 183-187), the settlement pattern with which they were associated is far from clear. After the Conquest each township was, quite clearly, assigned in different forms of tenure to different lords but, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the boundary between the townships seems to have become blurred and today Ravenmeols is commemorated in no more than the name of a lane (fig. 1.14).

In Formby, fields abutting the mosslands were allocated in narrow strips to land owners and their tenants. Of the landowners, the most important in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were the Blundell (of Ince Blundell) and Formby families. The former had succeeded to three portions of the medieval manor whilst the Formby family's interest in the fourth portion seems to have descended in an almost unbroken line since at least as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Ravenmeols passed to the Molyneuxes of Mossborough in Rainford and Wood Hall, Melling in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Lancs RO DDFo/26/2).

Though evidence for Formby's common-fields is clear, that for the location and arrangement of the settlement itself is lacking. It has been quite impossible to identify and locate the messuages of those responsible for managing the portions which came to the Blundells and, with the exception of the Formby family, it seems that from the medieval

period until the 20<sup>th</sup> century none of the other lords was resident. Farms and cottages were dispersed along sandy lanes which, unlike the modern north west to south east orientation of the main roads, probably favoured an east-west direction from the mosses and common fields to the dunes and shore. A possible exception can be seen in the south of Formby (fig. 1.14) where the circular pattern of lanes was probably bisected by the road which now runs northwards from Altcar to Old Town. Formby Hall, in the north-east, was isolated not only from the common fields but, even after the foundation of a new church in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, stood a mile or so from this new focus. It was only with the re-establishment of the Catholic church in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that the place developed some semblance of nucleation.

However, whilst Formby's open fields survived until the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lancs RO DRL 1/27; fig. 1.14), sand and sea incursion at Ravenmeols had probably destroyed much of the township before the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the late 12<sup>th</sup> century a grant to Cockersand Abbey recorded two *lands*, one between the churchyard and the highway and the other on the north next to the church ditch, and a parochial chaplain was identified in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century (Cunliffe Shaw, 1956, 341; Lewis, 1981b, 73). Early 13<sup>th</sup>-century grants suggest an open-field economy (Lumby, 1936) and breeding of sheep, cattle, horses and pigs is inferred (Farrer, ed., 1900, 565-567; Cunliffe Shaw, 1956, 341, 402-404). Field names indicate that the township contained some marshland and a ditch divided it from Formby. By 1289 the amount of land attached to the manor seems to have been reduced by half from three Domesday carucates, equivalent to 24 oxgangs, to seven oxgangs held in demesne and five in service (Farrer, 1915, 62). From such evidence it has been considered that half the manor had been lost (Farrer and Brownbill (eds.) 3, 1907, 49), probably to a combination of marine erosion, sand inundation, and flooding.

In 1428 and 1442 reference was made to the highway from Altcar to *Oldforneby* (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 48, n.4; Lancs RO DDFo 13/5). Property in *Holde Forneby* was granted in 1499 (Lancs RO DDIn 49/4) and in 1532 part of the vill was referred to as the 'old town' (Lancs RO DDFo 14/2; see fig. 1.14). In 1554 a review of stallage on the shore at Formby claimed that fishing in the area had decayed. 'A passage and waste of ground by the sea-side called Ravenmeols (where) the passage used to be taken by those who

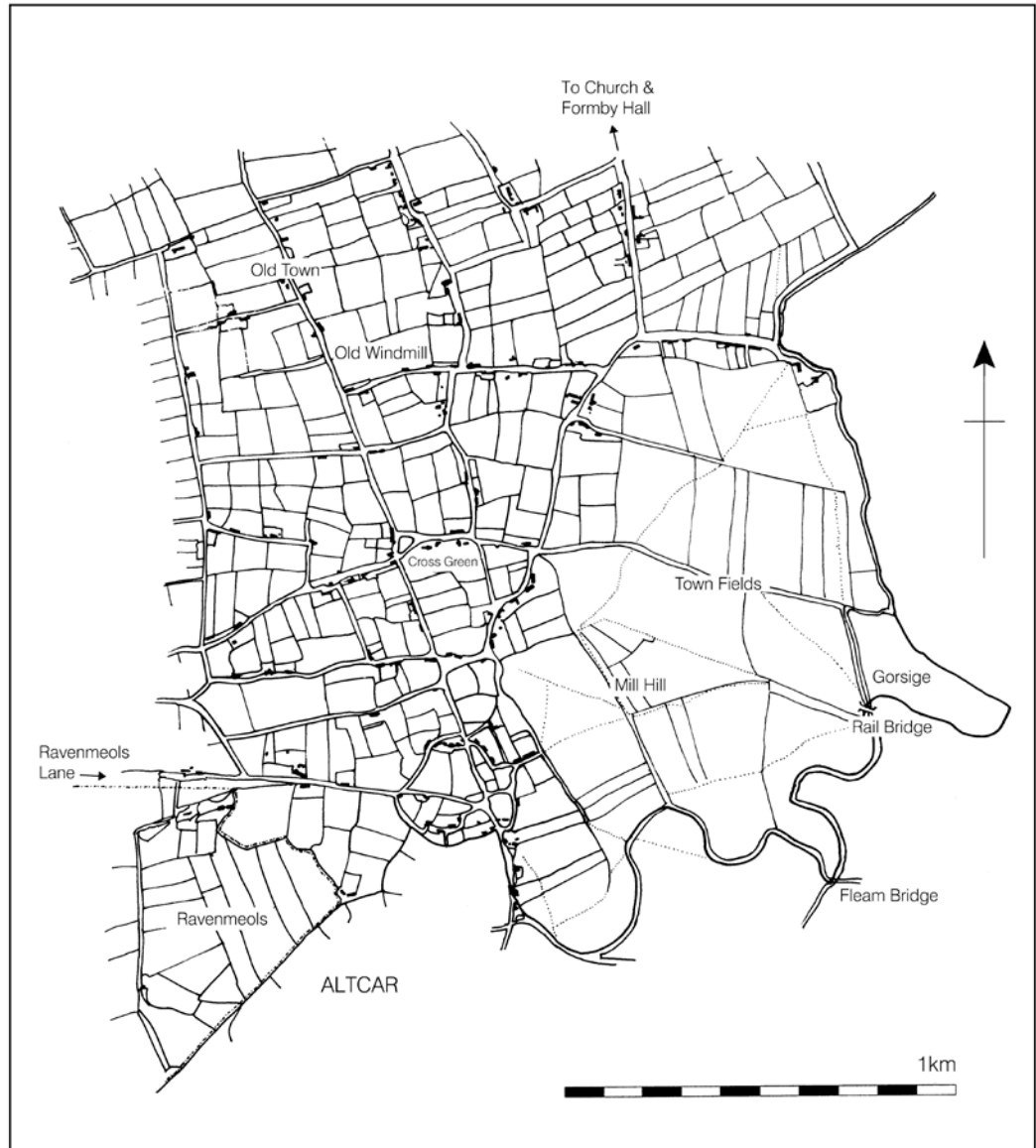


Fig. 1.14 Formby, 1845 (Lancs RO DRL 1/40)

came to the sea to buy fish...had decayed as there was no such fishing as formerly; also there had been formerly levied of the said waste ground money for its herbage, but the waste had been ruined by sea and sand' (PRO, DL 3, vol. 73, 162, no. 12). A plan of Formby and adjacent lands was made in 1557-58 in response to a dispute over grazing rights on the mosslands (PRO MR2)<sup>25</sup>. On the plan was the legend 'heare thold town did stand'; it lay within 'Formby lordshipe' and was close to the church which, in fact, was in Ravenmeols. It seems that Ravenmeols' status as an independent vill had been lost since, in 1577, *Formbye chap.* was depicted on Christopher Saxton's map. Sand dunes, now planted with trees, extend up to the boundary of the present churchyard and it is likely that medieval settlement, if such existed in this location, has long been buried. In the 1790s, and again in the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, attempts were made to stabilise the dunes at Formby and Ravenmeols by the planting first of mixed species and latterly of pines (Smith, 1999, 59-60).

Old Formby is, perhaps, commemorated by Old Town Lane in a part of Formby which is now intensively developed. It lay a short distance to the west of Formby's extensive open-fields which survived at least until after 1845 (Lancs RO DRL 1/27; Ordnance Survey six inch sheet 90, 1848). By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the Old Town consisted of a few scattered farms with small enclosures sometimes called Old Town Yards (see, for example, Lancs RO DDFo 12/2, 14/10, 14/12; DDIn 49/26). All the same, such documents demonstrate that in the area of Old Town, as elsewhere in Formby, the property of the principal landlords was not consolidated.

Unlike Formby, the earliest plans of Ravenmeols preserve no hint of open fields. If these had not already disappeared by the 16<sup>th</sup> century they certainly had done so by the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lancs RO DRL 1/27). By 1667 Robert Molyneux's *hawse* or warren in Ravenmeols was known as the Park (Lancs RO DDFo 34/1) and Park House<sup>26</sup>, together with a small group of other houses, survived until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These, perhaps, were the seven messuages and tenements together with nine other parcels of land, a rabbit warren and waste

<sup>25</sup> A study of the map, in so far as it relates to establishing the bounds of the area under dispute, has been published (Turner, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> In this context, the meaning is probably of enclosed ground for pasture or tillage (Ekwall, 1922, 15) rather than formal emparkment of an estate.

which belonged to the Molyneux of Mossborough estate in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (France, ed., 1960, 106-7). The artificially straight line of the boundaries which divide Ravenmeols from Formby and Altcar (to the south and east) (Ordnance Survey six inch sheet 90, 1848) suggests that these had been redefined.

### *Settlements south and west of the Alt*

South and west of the Alt the topography changes and small areas of the sandstone ridge covered with drift rise as low mounds above the mosslands. The villages of Little Crosby and Ince Blundell, which are predominantly linear, contrast with clustered settlement in villages and hamlets in Thornton, Great Crosby and Litherland. All have evidence for open fields. Both types of village differ, however, from the arrangement in Sefton township where clear evidence for medieval settlement and open fields has been more difficult to identify.

#### *Little Crosby and Morehouses*

The village at Little Crosby occupies a low sandstone ridge which continues northwards from the village to Woodholm Knoll. With a single street lined with buildings, a stepped cross and well lay at the north of the street, the well being approached down a flight of large steps (Taylor, 1906, 165). North of this, in 1702, was the pound which may have lain on a green (Lancs RO DDBI 48/41; fig. 1.15<sup>27</sup>). Along part of the street the houses and farm buildings are close together but, towards the north, the farmsteads become more widely separated. There is nothing to show that this is a consequence of abandonment of house plots.

After 1702, and probably in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Crosby Hall, together with the site of the windmill, the *Harkirk* and a wayside cross, was enclosed within its own park east of the village. The park walls are built of stone, perhaps from the village quarry. As in Ince Blundell, some of the medieval open fields were lost to the enclosure and there was some realignment of the road leading to Great Crosby.

A series of cuts into bedrock at the north-east end of the village street, seem to relate to a slight change in the road alignment and suggest that some tofts could have been destroyed when the

<sup>27</sup> A version of the 1702 map is given in Tyrer, 1970, fig. 1.

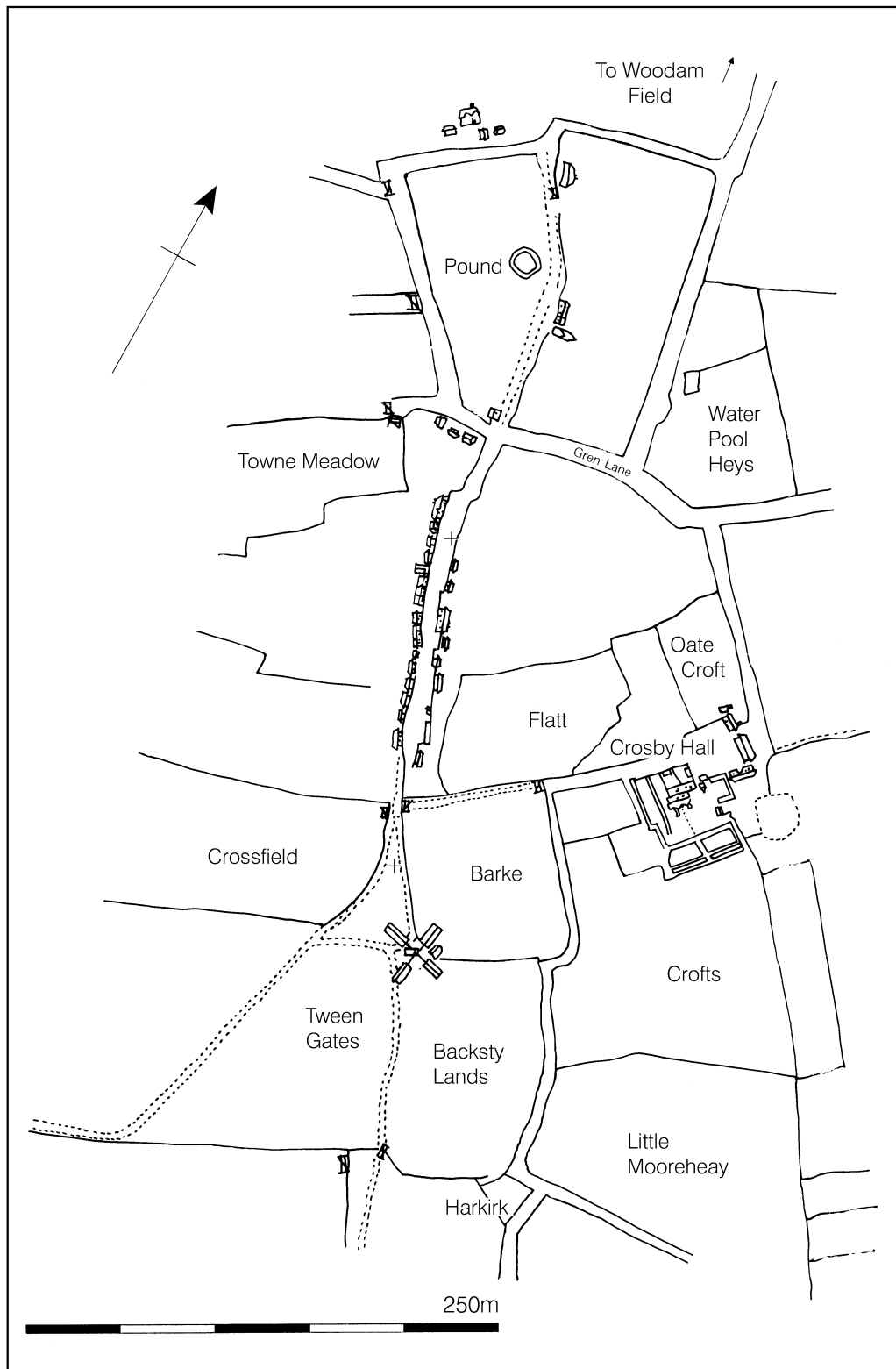


Fig. 1.15 Demesne lands in Little Crosby, 1702 (Lancs RO DDBI 48/41)

park wall was introduced. The land immediately behind the park wall, now under plantation, is considerably higher than road level. Further south, it seems that the park wall was modified in about 1870-80 (Taylor, 1906, 166) and, presumably, a low bank now inside the park, represents former toft boundaries. The site of the medieval windmill at the south end of the village may be represented in a low mound now within the park. From the village, the road southwards ran past a cross, also now within the park. The shaft was reconstructed from loose stones in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but probably the base is on the original site (Taylor, 1906, 167). It may have both marked the southern limit of the medieval village and been a medieval resting place for funeral processions on the route to Sefton church.

The relationship between the *Harkirk* and the village, separated as they were by the 'Towne Fields' (Backsty Lands, Tween Gates, Barke and Crossfield), seems somewhat awkward. This may indicate that the settlement pattern, as shown in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, is a consequence either of migration northwards or that the *Harkirk* was always isolated (perhaps in a manner similar to the chapel at Ravenmeols) and served both Ince Blundell and Little Crosby.

Little Crosby appears to have lost a carucate of land between 1212 and 1346 (Farrer, 1903, 42; Farrer, 1915, 94). The reason for this is not clear, though creation of the sub-manor of Morehouses, perhaps in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, may have resulted in severance of a carucate from Little Crosby lordship. Alternatively, the township may have been affected by coastal instability experienced elsewhere along the coast and certainly it did so during stormy episodes in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (Tyrer, 1968, 1970, 1972 *passim*).

The so-called 'manor' of Morehouses (probably centred on the modern village of Hightown) (fig. 1.16), and the extent of the estate, can be assessed through map and documentary evidence. An entry in manor court rolls for Little Crosby in 1628 stated that the 'ffarmers of the Grange in the Northend Lane heirtofore made the ffence betwixt the Grange hoase and the Morehouse' (Watts, 1893, 118). This seems to fix the north boundary of Morehouses along North End Lane as it still survives. The southern boundary was perhaps defined by Gorsey Lane, alongside Short Field, in Little Crosby and ran east and then north along Moss Lane to Orrell Hill Lane<sup>28</sup> and Lady Green in Ince Blundell.

<sup>28</sup> *ora* = O.E. margin, bank (Ekwall, 1922, 1117). Such a meaning would be topographically sound in this location

The first references to Morehouses appear in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century there was a common green; a document dated to 1310 noted houses and curtilages in the Morehouses next to the bounds of Ince, and within four ditches (Lancs RO DDBI 51/5). Fields called 'Green' are close to mossland on the boundary with Ince Blundell (Lancs RO DDBI 51/33) so indicating that the Green probably occupied fields opposite Hamgate Farm. Crosby meadow, which perhaps lay between Morehouses and Little Crosby, was divided into *lands*. A 16<sup>th</sup>-century document tells of an 'old hall of the Morehouses' of which closes in Highfield had been demesne (Lancs RO DDBI 51/47). The location of the old hall has not been ascertained, but Highfield was west of Sandy Lane and its eastern boundary is marked by a low, wide embankment which may in fact be a warren wall. Several fields can be identified on plans of Little Crosby dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Lancs RO DDBI 48/42). By this time the settlement consisted of a small group of houses occupied by named individuals and grouped around the Hightown Cross (Lancs RO DDBI 48/41). By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the settlement had shrunk to two groups of buildings (Lancs RO DRL 1/27); sand dunes had encroached to the edge of Hightown and there are now no early buildings in the area.

It has sometimes been assumed that 'Altmouth' was the site of a lost settlement at Hightown. There is, however, nothing to suggest that it was ever a place and this misconception seems to derive from misinterpretation of Christopher Saxton's map of 1577 when the name was engraved against the estuary of the River Alt. Importantly, this map shows that the Alt opened to the Irish Sea in an almost westerly direction - as indeed it appears on the map of Formby's disputed mosslands in 1557-58 (PRO MR2). The southerly orientation of the present estuary had started to appear by the time of William Yates' survey between 1775-80 (Harley, 1968, 9-10) but was markedly more pronounced in 1848 by which time rabbit warrens at Balling's Wharf had been established (Ordnance Survey six inch Sheet 90). Consequently, the Altmouth of Christopher Saxton's survey, which may well have indicated a safe landfall (see above) should more properly be placed between the southern boundary

though Gelling prefers 'shore', 'hill slope' or, possibly, 'foot of a slope' (1993, 179-182).

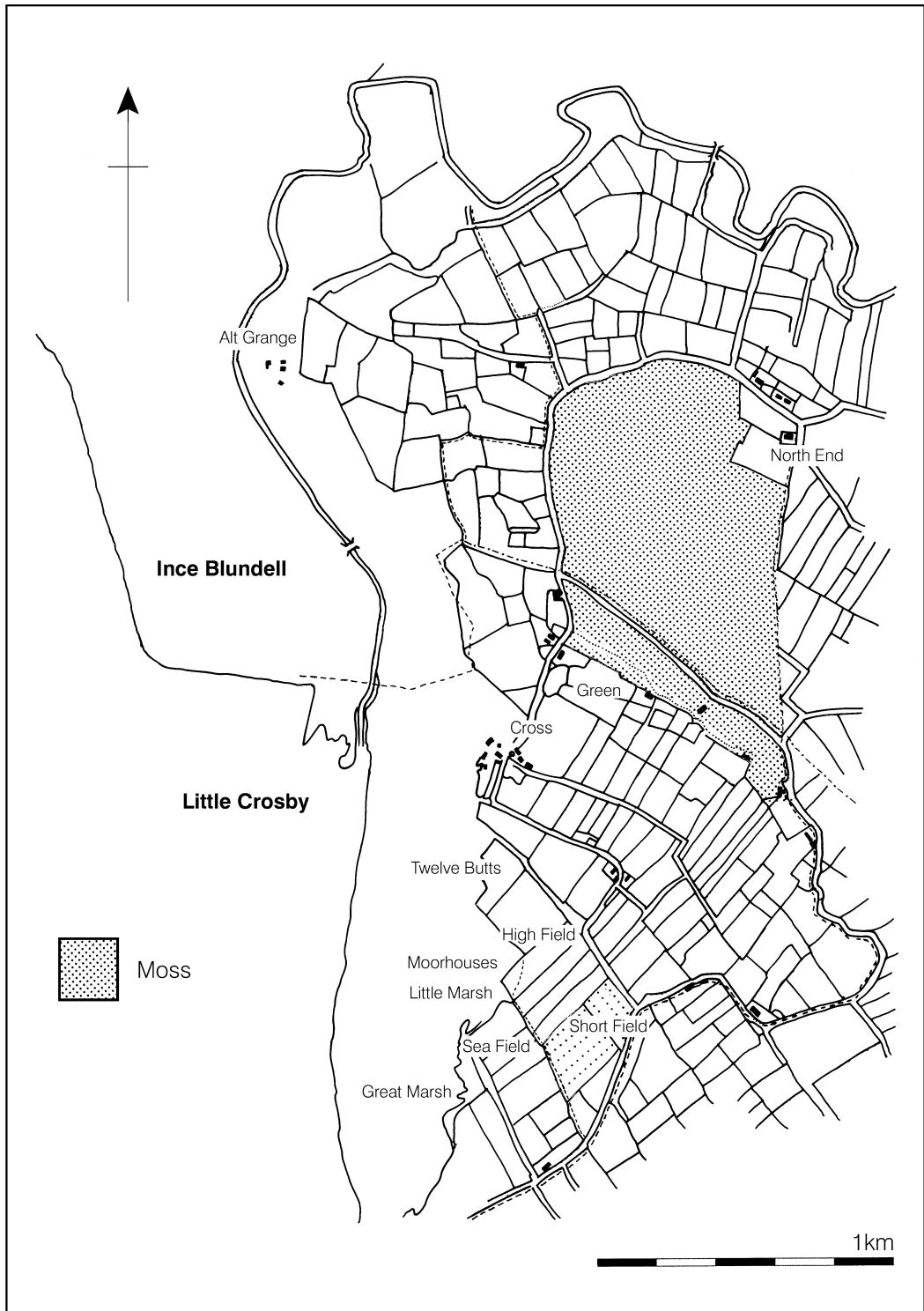


Fig. 1.16 Morehouses (based on Lancs RO DDBI 48/42 (1741) and First Edition Six Inch Ordnance Survey sheet 90 (1848))

of Ravenmeols and Grange Farm, formerly the property of Whalley Abbey, in Ince Blundell.

### *Ince Blundell*

Though a township attached to the barony of Warrington and with notionally a single manorial lord, Ince Blundell was not dominated by a monolithic demesne and there was a strong tradition of free tenants (Bakewell, 1982, 6). The tenorial complexity may be reflected in the settlement pattern which comprises a linear village and outlying hamlets at Carr Houses and Lady Green and, more distantly, at North End an estate held by Whalley Abbey, at Alt Grange (figs. 1.16, 1.17). The Town fields, which survived as strips in multiple ownership in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Bakewell, 1982, 13-14, figs 3-4), lay between Carr Houses and the present village. Map evidence supported by aerial photography shows that other open fields lay towards the south of the township, on the east side of a low sandstone ridge (Jones, 1988; Sheppard, 1981, 87, fig. 3). These fields seem to have been lost as a consequence of two phases of post-medieval emparkment.

Like Little Crosby, the village has a linear plan but its small farmsteads and their outbuildings are set alongside a pair of parallel roads. These merge and the road, lined with farmsteads, continues westwards towards Lady Green. The supposed centre of the village, marked by the village cross, is almost exactly 0.5km equidistant east and west respectively from hamlets at Carr Houses and Lady Green and from Cross Barn, to the south-east. The cross, near the junction with Carr House Lane, was said to be within a garden on what was formerly the village green (Taylor, 1906, 161). The shaft was replaced in c.1876 and there must be some doubt that the cross stands in its original location. Such doubts may be confirmed by the failure, in 1979, of Liverpool University's Rescue Archaeology Unit to recover from the site of a farmhouse next to the cross any archaeological material which could with confidence be dated to the medieval period. Although a considerable amount of good-quality 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century material was recovered, structural evidence for early buildings was lacking and medieval artefacts were few in number.

Carr Houses was noted in 1402 when land belonging to the property was distributed throughout the open fields (Lancs RO DDIn 53/55). However, its extent at that time has not been ascertained. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were considerably more buildings than now (Lancs RO DDM 14/31) and the hamlet probably comprised a row of buildings along a lane running eastwards towards the moss. Lady Green is represented in a

cluster of farms at the north-west end of a pair of parallel lanes which run from the village.

South-east of the village, and separated from it by cultivated land and woodland etched with deep, wide ditches, is the park surrounding Ince Blundell Hall. A rounded park enclosure, which may date from the late medieval or early post-medieval period, was extended to the south and east in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This resulted in the incorporation of some of the medieval fields into the new enclosure (Sheppard, 1981, 87 fig. 3). Clay dug from inside the park was used to make bricks for the new wall. At the same time the medieval road from Ince Blundell to Sefton church was moved eastwards and re-aligned outside the perimeter; a wayside cross within the park marks a point on the earlier road.

South of the Hall, and within the later park a low sandstone ridge (15m OD), known as Millhouse Clump in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lancs RO DRL 1/40), contains a small quarry. The medieval windmill may have occupied a mound near the south end of the ridge and the mound was, perhaps, reused when a sandstone and brick folly was built (Hussey, 1958, 876). Loose bricks and blocks of architectural sandstone masonry of 18<sup>th</sup>-century style lie scattered in a shallow depression around the base. Small-scale archaeological investigation in 1981, however, failed to produce any evidence to date construction of the mound.

### *Thornton and Homer Green*

The village of Thornton occupies a low sandstone outcrop covered with drift at the south end of the township and is separated from the hamlet of Homer Green by common fields (fig.1.19). Together with the adjacent township of Great Crosby (fig. 1.18) these are the only settlements in the district for which there is recognisable evidence for nucleation. The village plan is defined by three parallel lanes, one of which still retains the name Holgate, at the south end of which was a small green and cross. The remains of a second cross, Brooms Cross, lie at the northern end of Back Lane (a continuation of Holgate) and may define the limits of the village; in this part of Thornton traces of the pattern of tofts and crofts can still be discerned. The medieval windmill probably lay a little east of the village near the boundary with Sefton township; perhaps due to changes in estate boundaries it may be at Tan House Farm in Sefton township.



Fig. 1.17 Ince Blundell, 1844 (Lancs RO DRL 1/40)  
The cross lies near the junction of the roads which run into the village from Lady Green and Carr Houses

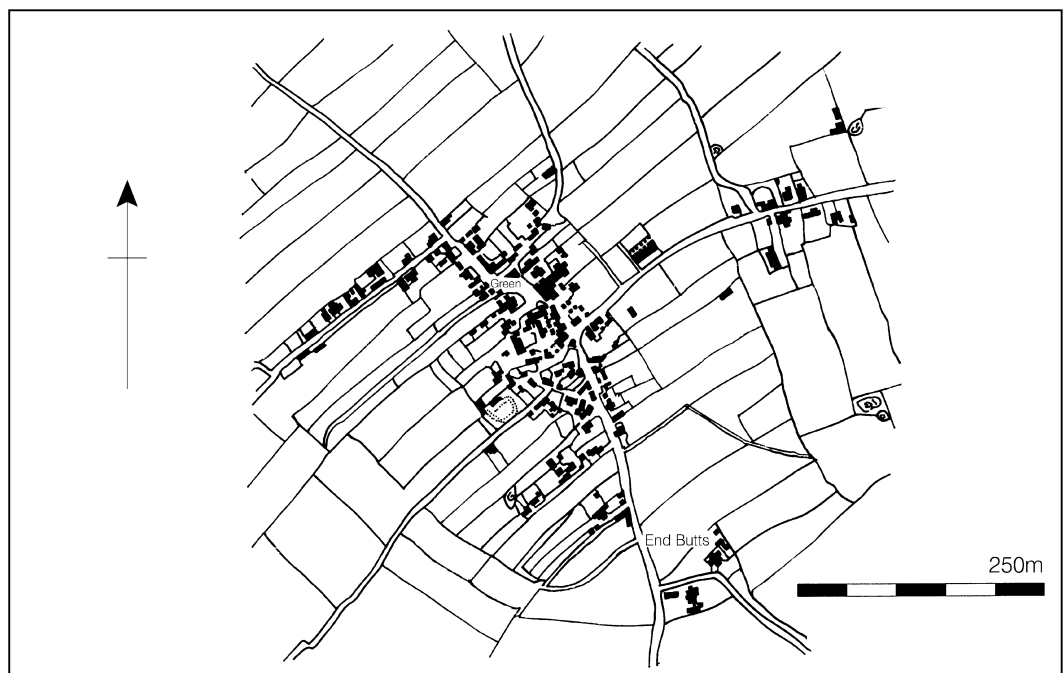


Fig. 1.18 Great Crosby, 1850 (Lancs RO DRL 1/17)

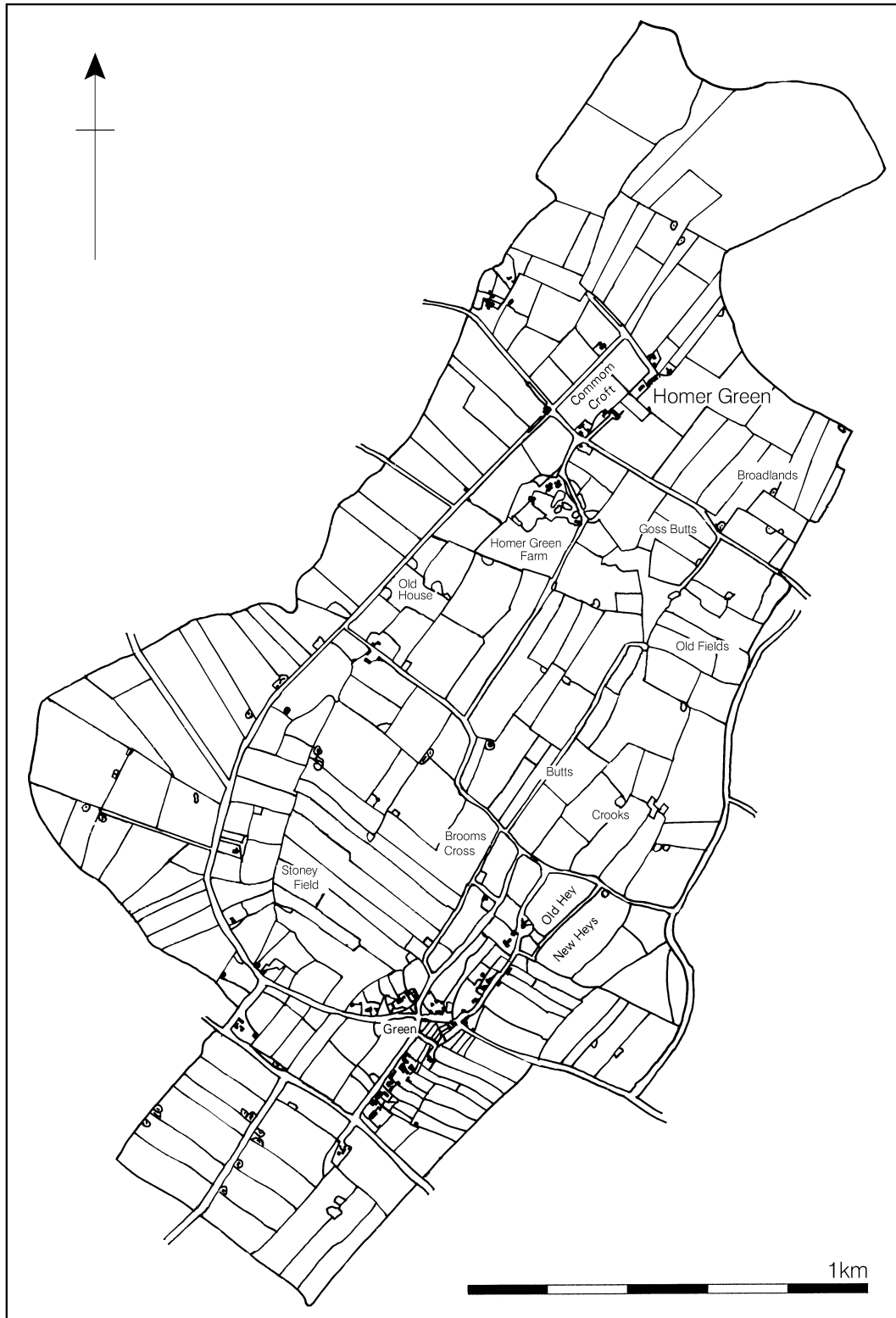


Fig. 1.19 Thornton (based on Lancs RO DDM 14/54 (1769) and First Edition Six Inch Ordnance Survey sheets 91 and 99 (1849))  
Holgate and Back Lane run between the Green and Brooms Cross.

From Brooms Cross, Gates Lane ran north through the open fields to Homer Green Farm and beyond to the hamlet of Homer Green. This lies on the route from Ince Blundell to the parish church at Sefton. The earliest specific documentary evidence for *Houlmore* dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Lancs RO DDM 49/50) and in 1476 reference was made to land and buildings thereon (Lancs RO DDM 49/51). The hamlet now comprises a small group of farmsteads set alongside a field called Common Croft. This is surrounded on two sides by a ditch and is bisected by a third ditch. The settlement pattern is almost identical to that in 1769 when several landowners held property there (Lancs RO DDM 14/54). Some buildings retain 18<sup>th</sup>-century features and almost certainly lie on or near the site of earlier structures. Homer Green Farm, which may have been moated, stands on a platform enclosed by narrow, water-filled ditches and adjacent ponds, and may represent the barony of Warrington's medieval estate in Thornton.

#### *Litherland, Orrell and Ford*

Litherland, with the hamlets of Orrell and Ford, came to the Molyneux family of Sefton by c.1100, half as an estate attached to their military fee and the other half, in exchange for Toxteth, as two portions held in thanage. Possibly these divisions represent Litherland and the two hamlets (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 95-6). The 18<sup>th</sup>-century settlement pattern has medieval characteristics (Lancs RO DDM 14/43; fig. 1.9). The village of Litherland, on the south west slope of a sandstone outcrop at the centre of the township, clustered around an open area with the pinfold and tithe barn a little to the east. The strips of open fields ran northwards from the village and to the east, south and west lay areas of moss, moor and marsh. Above the settlement focus, at the top of the slope, allotments lie on the site of the medieval 'Churchfield'. Ford Green lay at the north end of the open fields; Orrell Green lay to the south of the moss and moor. The 18<sup>th</sup>-century road pattern associated with each suggests that linear settlements may have extended out from a small nucleated core.

#### *Sefton, Netherton and Lunt*

The medieval settlement pattern in Sefton, Netherton and Lunt has been difficult to establish and, like Litherland, the earliest plan dates from 1769 (Lancs RO DDM 14/47; fig. 1.20). The relatively high carucal assessment of 1066 (fig. 1.6; table 1.6) does, however, suggest that arable cultivation was both well-established and productive by the middle years of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The holdings of the five pre-Conquest thanes recorded at Domesday cannot be identified and

whether they represented five distinct estates or a focused community is unknown.

Sefton Town, which lies at cross roads at the highest point in the township, may represent an example of shrunken settlement though it is impossible to relate this part of the township with 'decayed housing' listed in 1411 (Bakewell, 1982, 19; Lancs RO DDM 7/addl. acc. 3300). All the same, the 1769 plan provides some possible evidence for the distribution of early buildings and arrangement of the fields. Interlocked enclosures around Sefton Town and Netherton Green and, possibly, Buckley Hill, may represent evidence for primary occupation and land use at these *foci*. If so, the most westerly fields of Sefton Old Hall's demesne may be superimposed on Sefton Town's enclosure; the 18<sup>th</sup>-century field pattern provides a mere hint of a nucleated settlement of tofts, crofts and open fields and there was a small cluster of buildings around the crossroads. With open land to the north-west, along Lydiate Lane, there remains a reasonable chance that the truncated remains of early settlement survive beneath playing fields. Buckley Hill lies to the south west of Sefton Town at the junction of several roads. Its date is uncertain but it may be associated with the 13<sup>th</sup>-century holding at *Gorstihill* (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 68, n.1) which 18<sup>th</sup>-century field-name evidence suggests extended into the neighbouring township of Litherland.

Uniquely for the district, the church and watermill were adjacent to the Hall but, though their medieval origins are without question, there is little evidence for nucleated settlement in this part of the township. Moreover, isolation of the capital messuage and church from the rest of the community does not seem to result from settlement relocation at a distance from the manorial homestead. Rather, it may be supposed that, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, settlement and agriculture in Sefton township were well-established and there was little available land for the new church and manor house above the reaches of the Alt floodwaters.

Edge estate lay in the west of the township at the head of the Rimrose Valley, on the bounds with Litherland, and was focused on a single moated farmstead at Edge Farm. The earliest evidence for the estate appears in 1315 when it was granted by Richard Molyneux to one of his sons (Lancs RO DDM 46/43). The size of the estate at that time is unknown; documentary sources indicate that it may

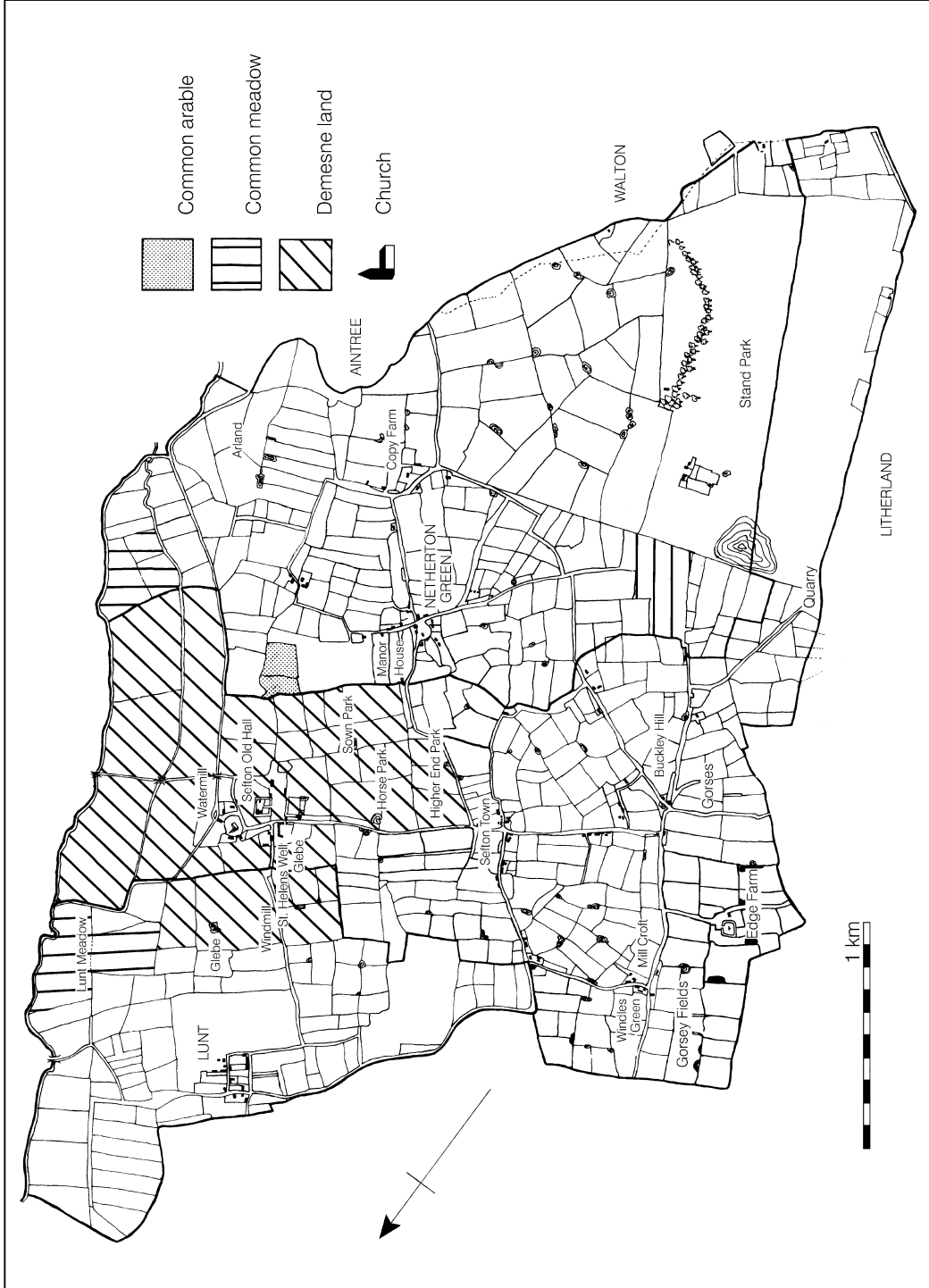


Fig. 1.20 Sefton, Nethererton and Lunt, 1769 (Lancs RO DDM 14/47)  
Lydiat Lane runs north-westwards from Sefton Old Hall, past the windmill towards Lunt.

have included the hamlet or farmstead at Windles Green and have extended into Thornton. Changes in the bounds, perhaps as marginal land used for intercommoning was brought into cultivation, may have obscured an earlier arrangement.

Netherton does not seem to have formed a distinct manor but was included in Sefton (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 75). Its bounds were defined in 1318 when *the Netherton* was granted by Richard de Molyneux to another of his sons (Lancs RO DDM 17/10-11; Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 75, n.3). This estate embraced the southern part of Sefton township from the watermill and River Alt in the east, to *Arland* and the bounds of Aintree, Walton and Litherland. From there it went along the moss and a ditch back to the watermill. However, it probably excluded the area which was to become Stand Park. Before 1615, when a grant of free warren<sup>29</sup> was obtained, a park had been created on the mossland but it had decayed by 1770 (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 75, nn. 7-8). The capital messuage may have been at Copy Farm which, in 1691, was sold by John Molyneux of Copy to William Molyneux of Croxteth (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 75, n. 5) so returning the estate to the main line of the family after nearly 400 years. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Netherton Green, south east of Sefton Town, comprised a small cluster of buildings (Lancs RO DDM 14/47) (fig. 1.20).

The medieval hamlet of Lunt, on the road from Ince Blundell to Sefton Church, may not have been recognised as a separate administrative entity until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 75). Land at Lunt Green was granted in 1260 and Lunt was referred to as a hamlet in 1344 (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 75, nn. 13, 15). The 18<sup>th</sup>-century plan provides the earliest map evidence (Lancs RO DDM 14/47; fig. 1.20) and shows a small concentration of buildings around a rectangular area divided into tofts, some of the boundaries of which can still be seen. To the east are a farm and four or five brick buildings apparently of 18<sup>th</sup>-century date with earlier elements, and a tithebarn with a date of 1693 (Caröe and Gordon, 1893, 56).

The settlement pattern in Sefton township is, therefore, one of small, centrally-placed *foci* at Sefton Town and Netherton Green with others, ranged around the township bounds, at Windles Green, Buckley Hill and Lunt. The estates at Edge and Copy Farms also lay on the margins. The reasons for the establishment of the church and

capital messuage close to the Alt, and therefore frequently subject to flooding, have not been explained. Possibly, on receiving Sefton from the Crown in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, the new lord acquired property where settlement and agricultural management were well-established as indicated by the large carucal assessment of 1066 (fig. 1.6; table 1.6). If in acquiring the manorial rights the Molyneux family arrived in a township where continuing use of the better-drained lands for arable cultivation was of higher priority than choice of a location for the church and manor house, they may have been forced to settle on the very margins of habitable land.

### *Townships east of the mosslands and the Alt valley*

The settlement pattern east of the Alt is one almost entirely of dispersal. Here, it is likely that large areas were still wooded in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century. Melling, perhaps, did have some arable but Lydiate and Maghull may have retained their woodland until considerably later. The dispersed pattern of small farm units, seen in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and later in all these villis, appears to have had its origins in assarting, a process which was probably still continuing in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A small settlement in Melling was probably focused on the church, or at the junction of lanes a little to the east, on a sandstone outcrop (fig. 1.21). It is, however, an unconvincing example of a nucleated village. In Maghull the chapel and Chapel House Farm may represent a focus of medieval settlement (fig. 1.22) but again the evidence is unconvincing.

Cunscough, with its dispersed farmsteads in the north of Melling, seems to have developed entirely as a result of monastic influence. Once again there is no evidence for settlement nucleation and the pattern of dispersed farmsteads is seen as a reflection of piecemeal clearance and exploitation. As in Lydiate and Maghull, it is likely that the surviving farmsteads continue to occupy the same, or adjacent, sites as those of their medieval predecessors.<sup>30</sup>

Thorp, a lost place with a Scandinavian place-name meaning 'village' or 'hamlet' (Ekwall, 1922,

<sup>29</sup> The right to hunt on one's own land.

<sup>30</sup> Much work is still needed to distinguish farmsteads which represent primary settlement from those which result from expansion on to the marginal lands. Archaeological work elsewhere in Merseyside and south Lancashire is beginning to hint at evidence for a slight, progressive migration of farmsteads within the landholdings they occupied (Cowell and Philpott, 2000, 214-215).

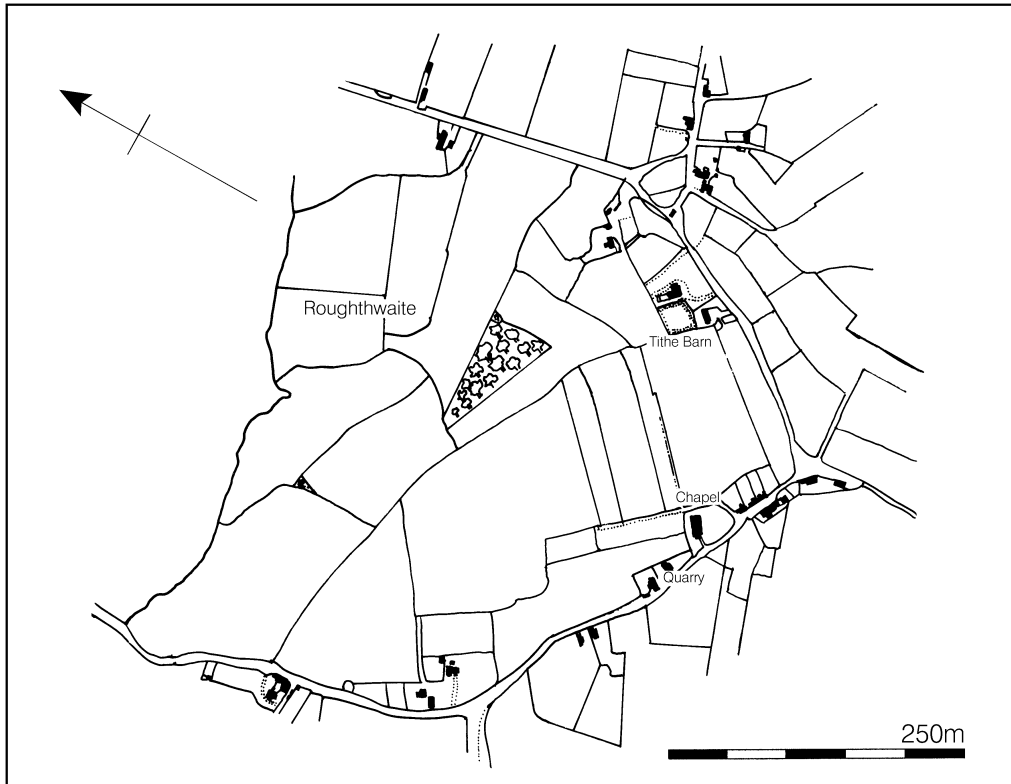


Fig. 1.21 Melling, 1840 (Lancs RO DRL 1/54)

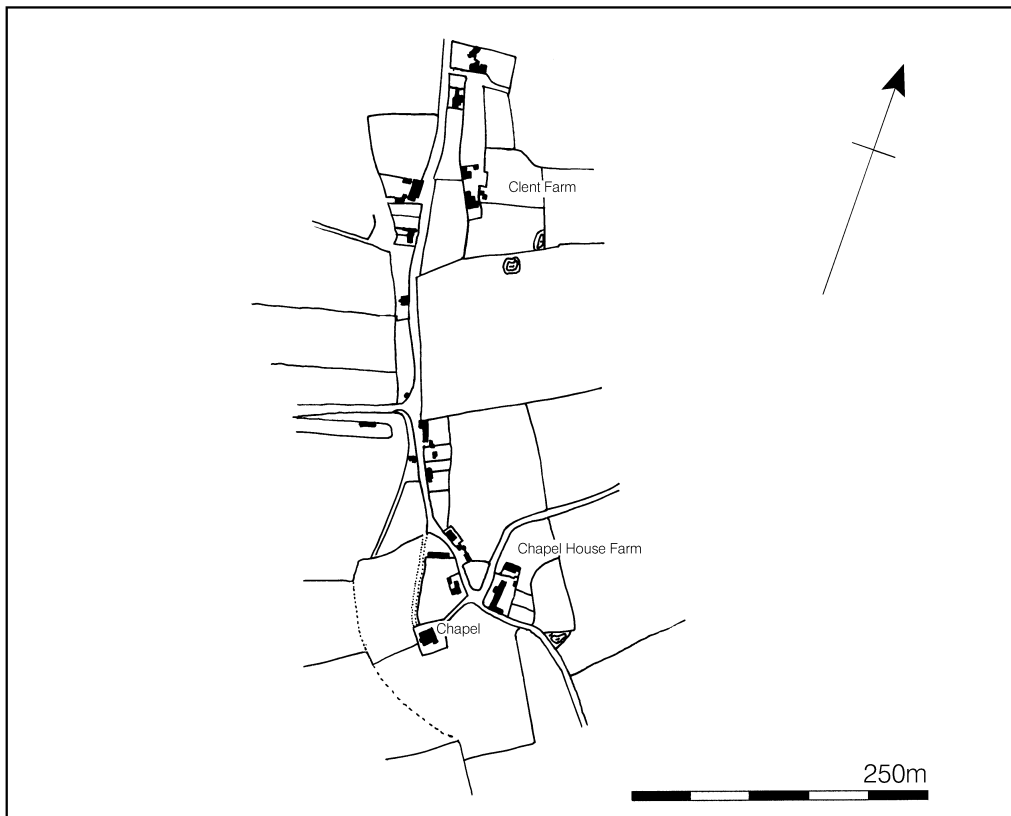


Fig. 1.22 Maghull, 1840 (Lancs RO DRL 1/53)

119), appears in 12<sup>th</sup>-century grants, to Cockersand Abbey and Burscough Priory, in which it was associated with land in Melling called *Hengarth* and *Hengarthleache* (*Hingardesslake*) (Farrer, 1900, 5 [fol.79] *passim*; Webb, 1970, 112). The modern derivation *anger* (from *Hengarth*) can perhaps be interpreted as 'grassland or pastureland' (Smith, 1956) or as *hangra* with an Old English meaning of 'hanging wood' (Gelling 1993, 194). Topographically either meaning would be acceptable.

Though Thorp itself may not have been granted to either monastic house, from a grant of 1184-90 it can be located generally to an area between the 'highway' and the Simonswood boundary, a road from Thorp to Melling, and from *Hengarthleache* to the Bickerstaffe boundary (Farrer, 1900, 5). Elsewhere we hear of land in *Hingardesslake* adjacent to Cockersand land at *Hangepul* and between *Mosdiche* and land formerly belonging to one William of Thorp (Webb, 1970, 112). There can be little doubt that Thorp lay towards the eastern bounds of Melling and probably occupied an area overlooking the boundary with Kirkby. Confirmation comes from 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century field names such as Thorp and Anger and a road still called Anger Lane (Lancs RO DDM 14/12, 14/44, DRL 1/54; fig. 1.23). These fields lie in a large sub-oval enclosure, divided internally into small rectangular fields amongst which are a couple called Old Meadow. Thorp, perhaps, was created out of woodland clearance but it is uncertain whether a single farmstead or small settlement is implied. Bank Farm, lies within the oval; Melling House was probably just outside, on the south. A scatter of other 19<sup>th</sup>-century farmsteads, around the western perimeter of the oval, may mark the junction of two zones of different land quality. That west of the enclosure is associated with fields named 'moor' which, in turn, may have abutted a redefined boundary at *Hengarthleache*. Elsewhere in medieval Lancashire, Mary Atkin has found areas of arable within oval enclosures. The farms around the perimeter shared the land within the oval but it was rare for other farms to have land within it (Atkin, 1985, 173). As yet, however, no good evidence has emerged for early management and farming practices at Thorp.

Field walking in the vicinity has produced a single flint blade, probably mesolithic, a few pieces of struck flint and a thin scatter of Roman material. Fields closer to the farmsteads have produced sherds of late-medieval and early post-medieval pottery. Though the evidence remains thin there is, perhaps, a hint of occupation of a core area over several millenia (*see* Philpott 1999, 200-202).

### *Greens and Peels*

Evidence for woodland clearance and mossland reclamation is seen both in minor place or field names and in the settlement pattern. The name 'green' occurs on township margins where it seems not to relate to an area of open land within a village. It appears, rather, in association with small hamlets and isolated farmsteads such as Windles Green and Homer Green respectively in Sefton township and Thornton. Similarly, Lady Green at Ince Blundell is a cluster of two or three farms on the edge of the moss. In such instances, places of common grazing at the interface between the better-drained lands and summer pastures might be implied. However, in the woodland townships east of the Alt, it seems more likely that the word results from clearance and assart at, for example, Kennessee Green in Maghull<sup>31</sup>. In the neighbouring township of Aughton (in Lancashire), there are five instances of 'green' names, each originally associated with an isolated farm.

It seems likely also that Peel<sup>32</sup> Hey, a field in Lydiat almost at the highest point of the township, and Peel Farm on the mossland fringes in Maghull, derive their names from clearance in the post-Conquest period, perhaps for stock grazing (Lewis, 2000, 7, fig. 4). At neither place is there any visible evidence for defensive structures though, on the evidence of aerial photography, a moated site at Peel Farm has been suggested (G.D.B. Jones, pers. comm.).

### *Post-medieval settlement*

The district experienced little or no redistribution of the main centres of settlement in the post-medieval period though, as has been noted, there may have been some reorganisation of house plots in Little Crosby when the park walls were raised in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. With the advent of more extensive drainage schemes, which began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century at Martin Mere, more land became available and the distribution of isolated farmsteads around the mossland peripheries in Lydiat, Maghull and Ince Blundell, can probably be related to this period. Carr Side Farm, for example, on the

<sup>31</sup> A cluster of 'green' names is also found at Pemberton, near Wigan.

<sup>32</sup> *Peel* = a palisade formed of stakes; a stockade (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 1987).

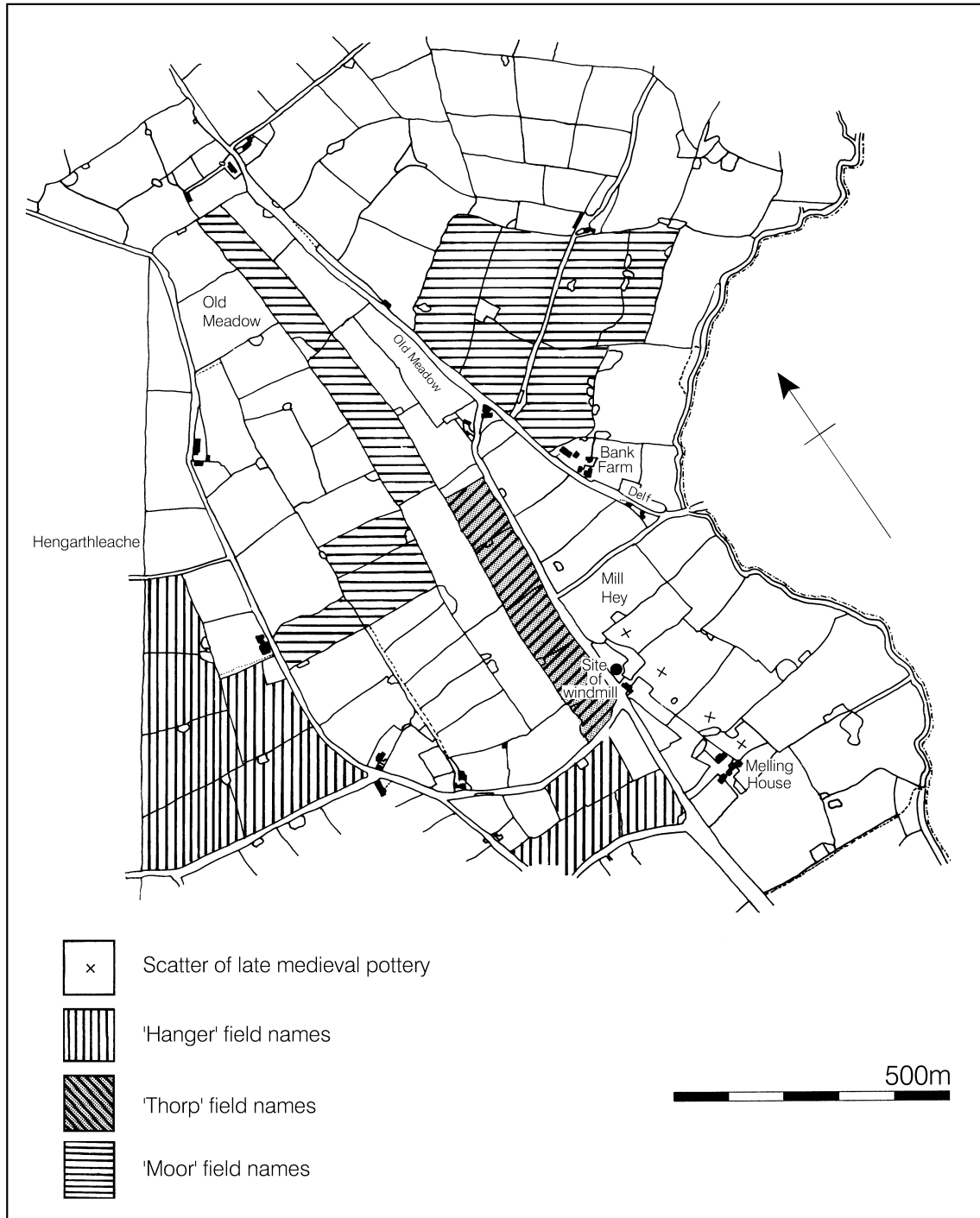


Fig. 1.23 Thorp, Melling (conjectural location based on Lancs RO DDM 14/44 (1769) and DRL 1/54 (1840))  
 Anger Lane runs west from the 'Site of windmill'

eastern boundary of Ince Blundell's open fields and close to the moss, appears to result from such expansion. The earliest elements of the farm complex probably date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and in 1717 Mr Richard Blundell held the property (Lancs RO DDIn 54/13). By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the farm consisted of a dwelling-house and a range of outbuildings, which were altered and extended in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The site location is typical of farmsteads which relate to this period of agricultural expansion.

The pattern of dispersed settlement seen in Lydiate, Maghull and Cunsough continued with little change. As at Carr Side Farm, however, there was an expansion of farming on to the edge of the mosslands. With the division of the mosslands between Melling and Maghull in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, isolated farmsteads which now occupy this area may have been established. Undoubtedly, isolated settlement around the mossland fringes is, in some instances, a consequence of post-medieval agricultural expansion which followed successful drainage of the wetlands but, until the process is fully understood in the context of the local landscape, we must exercise extreme caution before assigning all such settlements to such a late date.

In the latter decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the creation of the turnpike road between Liverpool and Preston, along with completion of the Leeds-Liverpool Canal, led to an expansion of settlement along these new routeways. This can be seen in Maghull and Lydiate and canal-side industry developed in Litherland. However, the arrival of the railway in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was to result in the development of new settlement *foci*. In townships such as Litherland, Great Crosby and Formby on the coast and Maghull east of the Alt, the pattern of small nucleated villages and scattered farmsteads was translated into one of close-knit urbanised communities.

### Village, Wayside and Boundary Crosses (table 1.10)

The area abounded with crosses many of which survived to some extent until the 19<sup>th</sup> century if not to the present day (Taylor, 1902, 136-238; Tyrer, 1965, 225-228; table 1.9). Several were village crosses apparently associated with, or near, centres of settlement. Others took the form of wayside crosses on the route between outlying communities and their parish church and are thought to represent resting places for coffins destined for burial in the churchyard. Yet another group, which seem to relate to estate boundaries, could date from as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> or early 13<sup>th</sup> century.

In St Luke's Churchyard in Formby is a small cross which does not fit into any of these categories. Known locally as the Godstone, it is a small carving of a cross around which it was formerly the custom to carry a corpse three times prior to burial (Taylor, 1902, 190). It is a curious and unique carving of a

<i>Location</i>	<i>Village cross</i>	<i>Wayside cross</i>	<i>Boundary cross</i>	<i>Other</i>
Formby	Cross Green	Cop cross	Headless cross	Godstone
Great Crosby	Village			
Ince Blundell	Village	Lady Green cross Park cross	Orrell Hill Lane	
Litherland		Orrell cross Sterrix Lane cross		
Little Crosby	Village	Harkirk cross Hightown cross Park cross Park Wall cross Virgin's Lane cross		
Lydiate		Lydiate cross Lydiate Hall cross School Brow cross	Eggargate cross	
Maghull		Woodlands cross Clent Farm cross Back Lane cross		
North Meols	Crossens Village	Birkdale Breeing Stone	Snotter Stone Shore cross	
Sefton		Brick Wall Lane cross Buckley Hill cross Old Hall cross Sefton churchyard cross Sefton Town cross		
Thornton	Village	Brooms cross		

**Table 1. 10:** Crosses (based on Taylor, 1906, 121-175 *passim*; First Edition Ordnance Survey six inch sheets 75, 90, 91, 99)

cross standing on three steps and surmounted by a circle. No parallels have been found but it has been reproduced, not always accurately, on some other 17<sup>th</sup>-century memorials in the burial ground. Detailed examination of loose masonry now seems to show that the Godstone cross is carved into a piece of masonry, now broken. A number of other small grave markers seem also to be carved on similar blocks of masonry. If so, these stones may

have come from the chapel after it was overwhelmed by sand in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Village crosses**

Village crosses have been identified in several townships (Taylor, 1906, 121-175, *passim*). Documents, however, have failed to produce clear evidence to show any relationship with market centres and their position is not always clearly associated with nucleated settlement. Those at Little Crosby, Ince Blundell and Formby stood on a series of steps and provided a significant focal point. Others were of more simple form, comprising a cross base set on one or two steps. Where they still exist, cross shafts and heads are 19<sup>th</sup> century or modern replacements.

At Little Crosby the cross, near the north end of the single street, stands on a high sandstone plinth above the village well. A second cross, now inside the 18<sup>th</sup>-century walls of Crosby park, formerly marked both the southern extent of the settlement and the route to Sefton church. A modern carving of a cross, set in the park wall, reflects the position of the earlier cross some 50m or so to the east. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century shaft of the village cross at Ince Blundell is also set on steps. Although these probably contain much of the original stone, the masonry has been reset on a modern plinth and it seems likely that refurbishment, if not relocation of the whole structure, was effected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, the cross was removed from Cross Green in Formby and reset in St Luke's churchyard at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The crosses at Thornton, Morehouses (now Hightown) and Great Crosby are probably close by, or on, their original sites. The pedestal of Great Crosby Cross stands on three steps and is inscribed 'St. Micheal's [!] Well'; from here proclamations of the manor court were made at the base (Taylor, 1902, 179). Thornton's Cross and stocks lay at the green, at the southern end of the medieval village. Brooms Cross stands at the northern limits of parallel lanes, which define the settlement focus at Thornton, on one of the pathways leading through the medieval open fields to the hamlet of Homer Green and on to Sefton church (fig. 1.19). Like the park cross in Little Crosby, it also may have defined the limits of the village.

Village crosses have not been identified in Lydiate, Maghull and Melling. The reason is unclear though it probably reflects the predominantly dispersed nature of settlement in these townships.

### **Wayside crosses**

Wayside crosses usually stand beside the principal route between the settlement or township and its parish church. Writing of the cross at Little Crosby Park, Josephine Blundell commented 'The steps I believe are just as they always were and much worn by people kneeling on them when passing along the high road or when a funeral passed the procession always stopped there and a *De profundis* was said' (Taylor, 1902, 182). The site of the crosses is sometimes informative about *former* routes to the church. For example in Little Crosby and Ince Blundell crosses on the route to Sefton Church mark the position of roads which were realigned when the parks were enclosed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps two in Lydiate indicate a route some 200m or so west of the present road to Halsall church. Many wayside crosses have been lost to road building or are re-sited in churchyards, as at Sefton and in St Thomas' churchyard at Lydiate.

### **Boundary crosses and markers**

Reference to crosses associated with both major and minor boundary divisions has been found in medieval and post-medieval documents. The Snotter Stone at North Meols defined the boundary between the hundreds of West Derby and Leyland and the Shore Cross appears to have been aligned with the Snotter Stone and another in Birkdale (Taylor, 1906, 147-148).

One at Eggargate (Eggargarth)<sup>33</sup>, and one on the ditch which separates Ince Blundell and Little Crosby, probably fell into this category. However, though they are known from the written sources and 19<sup>th</sup>-century or earlier plans, none has been located during fieldwork. The Eggargate cross may be one of a series which ran along the Mairscough Brook which separates Lydiate from Downholland (Ordnance Survey six inch Sheet 91, 1849) and, if so, could be one of those cited in grants of land at Mairscough to Cockersand Abbey in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Similar references to crosses as boundary markers appeared in monastic grants in Cuncough but, as at Eggargate, these have not been located. Almost certainly the two Formby crosses related to boundaries which were probably established, or redefined, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century though Cop Cross lay on the route between Cross Green and the churchyard. The 'Headless Cross' appeared on a plan made in 1769; it stood on the boundary between Ravenmeols and Altcar (Lancs RO DDM 14/21). The cross at the junction of Orrell Hill

<sup>33</sup> Eggargarth was attached to Lydiate but was placed in Lancashire as a consequence of the 1974 boundary reorganisation.

Lane with Moss Lane, on the boundary of Ince Blundell with Little Crosby, almost certainly relates to the establishment of that boundary in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, ‘as we the said Roger and Thomas han merket hit and so fro that said mere streght forth to othir two stones and ther a mere to be mad.....’ (Lancs RO DDB1 56/53).

### Moated sites and ditched enclosures (Fig. 1.24; table 1.11)

A moated site is defined as an area of ground, often occupied by a dwelling or structure, bounded or partly bounded by a wide ditch (3-6m), which in most cases was intended to be filled with water (Taylor, 1978). Such sites may be considered in terms not only of form and size but also of status and function. As far as the general chronology of moats is concerned for work undertaken in Britain as a whole, both documentary evidence and archaeological findings indicate a small beginning in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. This was followed by a peak between the mid-13<sup>th</sup> and mid-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, with a diminishing tail running into the 16<sup>th</sup> century and beyond (Le Patourel, 1973, 16-19).

House platforms surrounded, or partly surrounded, by ditches are amongst the most prominent archaeological features in Sefton. However, in a topography where ditches have always played a vital role in the provision of good drainage and, together with banks, have been used as field boundaries from the medieval period onwards, there are some problems of identification. Whilst the

district contains moated enclosures which conform with the generally accepted morphology of such sites, there are a few instances where narrower ditches enclose one or more buildings. In addition, 19<sup>th</sup>-century antiquarianism tended to place a moat around important dwellings where now the evidence is elusive. For example, a moat at Meols Hall in North Meols has been claimed (Bulpit, 1908, 72); for this there is no clear indication on the ground though slight traces of the medieval watermill and fishery called Otterpool east of the Hall can still be seen. Nonetheless, detailed study of the moated sites in the region has indicated that some 13 moated or ditched sites lie

within eight of Sefton’s townships and that these can be considered under several different classifications (Lewis, 2000, 91-122). Six are considered to be certainly moated or ditched, five are probably so and moated homesteads are possible at the remaining two, Ince Blundell Hall and Peel Farm in Maghull.

Some townships contain more than one moated site and their occurrence is indifferent to the superior lordship or tenure of the medieval estates on which they have been identified. Whilst in Sefton township, according to generally-accepted classification, there seems to be a clear hierarchy of manorial and sub-manorial sites, and there was

<i>Site name</i>	<i>Identifi- cation</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Ditch width</i>	<i>Platform size</i>	<i>Platform shape</i>	<i>Estate Overlord</i>	<i>Date (M) (B)</i>
Cuncough Hall, Melling	***	P	2-10m	>1,000m <sup>2</sup>	A1.1	monastic	14thC (B)
Melling House	**	P	5-12m	n/k	Udf	thanage	16thC (B)
Wood Hall, Melling	***	P	n/k	n/k	Udf	thanage	pre 17thC (B)
Edge Farm, Sefton	***	P	12-20m	<2,000m <sup>2</sup>	A1.3	Sefton	18thC (M) 17thC (B)
Sefton Old Hall	***	P	18-25m	<5,000m <sup>2</sup>	A1.3	Sefton	?13thC (M) 16thC (B)
Sefton Rectory	**	P	?8m	<1,000m <sup>2</sup>	Udf	rectorial	18thC (B)
Manor House, Maghull	***	P	8-20m	<2,000m <sup>2</sup>	Udf	Widnes	17thC (B)
Peel Farm, Maghull	*	P	n/k	n/k	Udf	Widnes	16thC (B)
Crosby Hall, Little Crosby	***	C	n/k	n/k	n/k	Widnes	13thC (M)
Formby Hall	**	P	10m	<4,000m <sup>2</sup>	Udf	thanage	16thC (B)
Homer Green Farm, Thornton	**	P	3-10m	<4,000m <sup>2</sup>	Udf	Warrington	16thC (B)
Ince Blundell Hall	*	C	3-5m	n/k	ND	Warrington	17thC (B)
Lydiat Hall	**	P	2-4m	n/k	ND	Warrington	16thC (B)

**Table 1.11:** Summary of moated sites and ditched enclosures

*key:* \*\*\* = certain; \*\* = probable; \* = possible; C = central or P = peripheral in relation to township bounds; Platform shape: A1.# = classification according to Le Patourel (1973); Udf = undefined form; ND = narrow ditch; (M) = earliest known moat date; (B) = earliest known building date

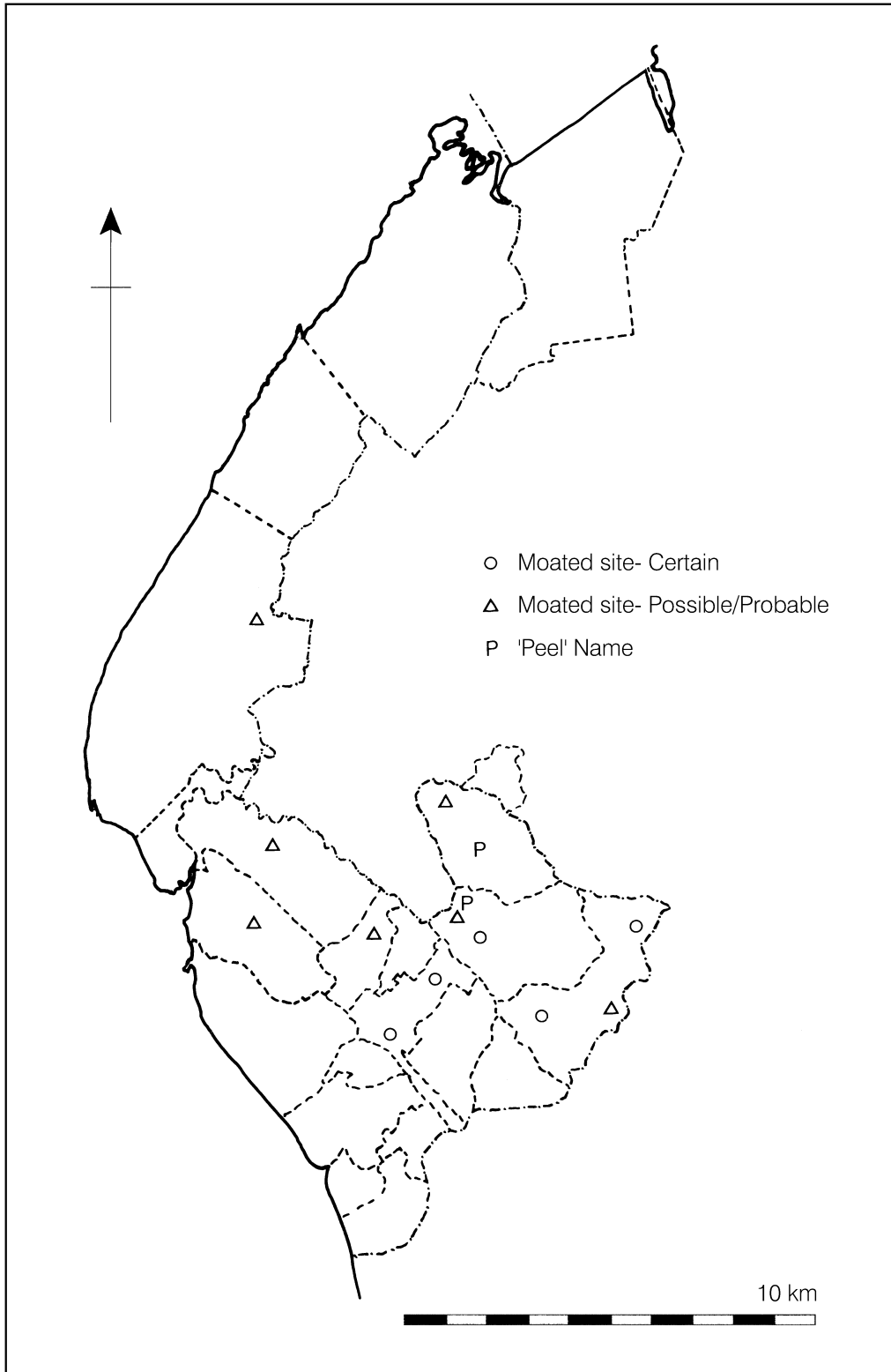


Fig. 1.24 Moated Sites

also a moated Rectory, the situation elsewhere is not so clear. Melling also contains three possible sites; two are on estates held in thanage tenure and the third was probably the grange held in lay tenure for Cockersand Abbey. Here, though three different estates are clearly indicated, there is no suggestion of a local manorial hierarchy; the two thanage estates seem to have been held from the Crown (Lewis, 2000, 305-09).

Nine of the region's sites are found on estates held from the military fees of Sefton, Warrington and Widnes. Only at Sefton, however, was there a resident lord in the medieval period. The estates attached to the Warrington and Widnes fees were detached outliers where, apart from feudal obligations by the tenant, there is almost nothing to show that the military lords took a direct interest in their management. Moreover, in Little Crosby, the Molyneuxes of Sefton intervened between Widnes and the mesne lords, the Blundells.

Most sites occur on estates adjacent to the bounds of their respective townships. Only two, at Little Crosby and the possible enclosure at Ince Blundell, can be considered as central. Sefton Old Hall is undoubtedly the most prestigious - and largest - moated enclosure but, on the bounds of the township close to the Alt, it seems to have suffered regularly from flooding. Only three sites, Sefton Old Hall, Lydiate Hall and Edge Farm, have been subject to any form of archaeological investigation. The house at Formby Hall has also been examined archaeologically.

The dates of earliest occupation and moat construction are unknown; only at Crosby Hall do we find documentary reference to an old ditch and courtyards in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (see below). Excavations at Lydiate Hall showed that the house had been built *de novo* in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, though earthworks in the adjacent Courts Field suggest slight migration westwards from an earlier house. The work at Sefton Old Hall also failed to produce satisfactory dating evidence for moat construction or primary occupation of the platform.

Whilst it seems that, at least between the Ribble and Mersey, the nature of tenure was no bar to creation of a moated or ditched enclosure, clearly the ability to do so remained with those who exercised local financial and administrative control. The difficulties in establishing the dates at which they were created are not confined to Sefton. In one or two instances, there is convincing evidence for moated homesteads in the 14<sup>th</sup> century but, from the region as a whole, good evidence is also emerging for the creation of ditched enclosures around the

homesteads of socially important individuals as late as the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (Lewis, 2000, 150-56).

### *Sefton Old Hall*

The moated enclosure at Sefton Old Hall, home of the Molyneux family from at least the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, was the largest in the district and, rarely for south west Lancashire, lies but a short distance from the parish church (Lewis, 2000, 105; fig. 1.20). Whether the moat was an early creation is unknown and aerial photography suggests that the ditch complex may have been more extensive than the single enclosure which survives. Part of the platform was excavated in the early 1960s but, apart from confirming the position of buildings shown on a plan of 1769 (Lancs RO DDM 14/47) and showing a possible structure on the west arm of the ditch, little archaeological interpretation was attempted and most of the finds were lost (Lewis, 1981a, 53-72). The 1769 plan shows at least two courts with the gatehouse at mid-point of the platform, opposite the bridge. Sandstone foundations for both the gatehouse and bridge were found but a building on the north-east corner of the platform produced evidence only for a brick structure. A stone and brick-built 'cellar' at the east end of the structure may represent the remains of a 'necessary house' set on the edge of the moat. At Lydiate Hall, two comparable structures have been identified, each set on the inner edge of a ditch a short distance from the house (Lewis, 2000, 297). In keeping with its status as the district's only home of a resident lord until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a pond with a series of small embayments is thought to represent Sefton's manorial fishpond.

### *Edge Farm*

Edge, on the western bounds of Sefton township, is the district's only known example of a sub-manorial estate (fig. 1.20). In 1315 'A place of land called the Egge' was granted to Thomas Molyneux of Cuerdale (Lancs RO DDM 46/45), son of Richard de Molyneux, lord of Sefton. It is not known if he resided at Edge or whether it was leased to a tenant. It was repurchased by the principal lord in 1589 (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 74) when it was leased to tenants.

As elsewhere, the date at which the moat was created is unknown but the house, which contains 17<sup>th</sup> -century features, still stands on the platform. One water-filled feature survives, probably as the south west corner of the moat. It has been revetted with a stone wall on its north side, perhaps when the platform was landscaped. The rest of the moat, which was fed either by ground water or a natural spring, had been largely filled in between 1769 and

1616 (Lancs RO WCW Robert Blundell, 1616)				1688 (Lancs RO WCW Henry Blundell, 1688)			
Order cited		Order cited: rooms with bedding		Order cited		Order cited: rooms with bedding	
1	common hall	14	chamber over the hall	19	Hall	5	Hall chamber
2	buttery	11	chamber over the buttery	20	Butterie	3	Butterie chamber
		12	middle chamber			4	Little inner room in the same chamber
3	parlour	13	great chamber over the parlour	26	Parlor	1	Malted (sic) chamber
4	kitchen	9	maids chamber	25	Kitchin	7	Chamber over the kitchen
5	brewhouse	17	servants chamber	21	Brewehouse	2	little Green chamber
6	deyhuse			15	Workeservante ould chamber		
7	larder			17	Servante ground chamber	6	Mayds chamber
8	storehouse			18	Deyrie	16	Chamber over the deary
10	little closet next to the maids chamber			23	Wet larder		
15	study			24	Stoorehouse	13	John Laithwaite's chamber over the coach house
16	gallery			22	Wash house	14	Butlers chamber
				12	Grunde roome in the same buildinge	8	Nearer chamber in the newe buildeings
						9	Furthest chamber in the same newe buildeings
						10	Mr Tasbrough chamber
						11	Highermost chamber in the same buildeings

**Table 1.12** Rooms at Ince Blundell Hall 1618 and 1688

1845 with rubbish perhaps brought by canal from Liverpool (Lancs RO DDM 14/47; DRL 1/72; Philpott, 1991, 15). In common with other moated sites in the district, the farm buildings lay outside the platform. Though mostly of brick, they included a small cruck-framed barn which was demolished in the late 1970s.

### *Ince Blundell Hall*

Fieldwork, in woodland north of Ince Blundell Hall, has revealed a series of deep (c.2m) steep-sided ditches, some 3-5m wide, which connect with a principal drainage ditch on the north side of the hall grounds (fig. 1.25). They do not relate to boundaries shown on the tithe map (Lancs RO DRL 1/4) and can be only partially identified on 18<sup>th</sup>-century estate maps (Lancs RO DDIn – uncalendared).

Some 150m south of the ditches is a brick building with sandstone dressings known popularly, but almost certainly erroneously, as the Old Hall. It probably dates from the latter years of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. There can be little doubt that this building originally comprised a pair of conjoined three-storeyed dwellings, one room deep, with a pair of doors on the east elevation. Probably in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Henry Blundell rebuilt his new hall and garden temple further east, the doors were blocked and an earthen embankment was raised

along the east elevation no doubt both to obscure the view from the Old Hall and to screen the old building from the new house. New doors, with ill-fitting stone surrounds, were opened in the west elevation.

Comparison of probate inventories for 1616 and 1688 (table 1.12) shows, quite clearly, that there had been some new building during that period, but there is no obvious relationship between the rooms described in the inventories and those in the supposed Old Hall. Nor does the Old Hall show any evidence for 'new building' such as that described in the 1688 inventory. It seems likely, therefore, that the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Hall lay on or close to the site of the surviving 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century house but whether it succeeded an earlier structure on a moated enclosure a little to the south remains to be established.

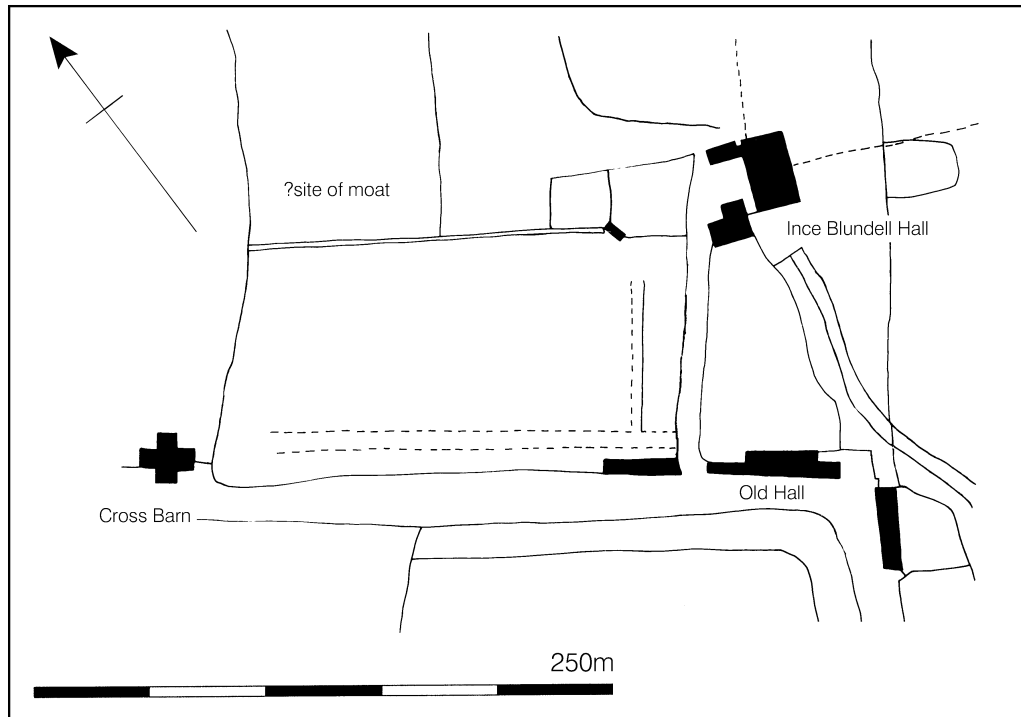


Fig. 1.25 Ince Blundell Hall, 1766 (Lancs RO DDIn, deposited 1962)  
The ditches, which have not been surveyed, lie in woodland in the area shown as  
'?site of moat'.

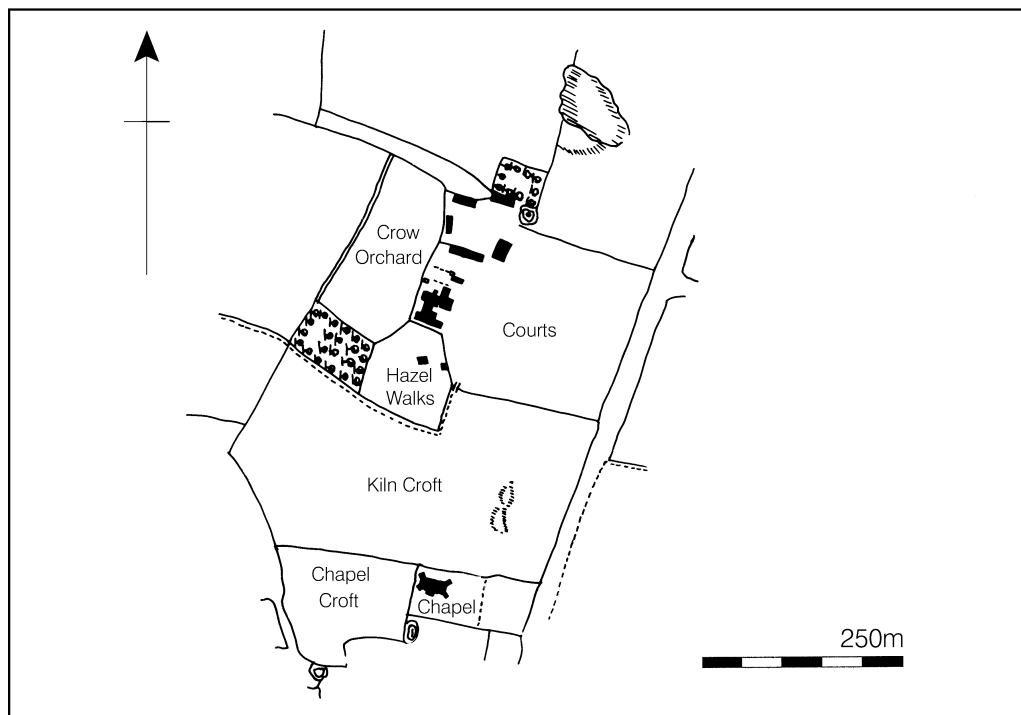


Fig. 1.26 Lydiat Hall, 1809 (Lancs RO DDIn 63/95a)

### *Lydiate Hall*

There is a tradition of a moat at Lydiate Hall (fig. 1.26) and in 1895 it was stated 'the building appears to have been surrounded by a moat .... and some indications of it are still visible at the front of the house' (Taylor and Cox, 1895, 5). Certainly, a shallow linear depression runs along the east side of the house and eastwards towards a rectangular earthwork in the field called 'Courts'<sup>34</sup>. On the west edge of the depression a small, rectangular structure is interpreted as a 'necessary house'. A more substantial rock-cut ditch runs northwards from the north-west corner of the house along the western perimeter of the farmyard. Part of the present house may lie over this ditch and there is a second 'necessary house' on the east bank (Lewis, 2000, 295-97).

Excavations in 1981-82 located part of the Hall's east wing, and three associated post holes, but showed that the house had been built *de novo*. Dendrochronological analysis of structural timbers indicated that it could not have been built before the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and that its three surviving wings were raised in a single phase (Leggett, 1990b; Lewis and Samuels, 1990). In this it differs from Speke Hall, near Liverpool (with which it bears a close resemblance in design) where it has been shown that the courtyard house was raised in several phases between 1530 and 1598 (Howard *et al.*, 1992)<sup>35</sup>. A survey of surviving elements of Lydiate Hall's north range has shown that the timber-frame was encapsulated within a brick facing in successive phases of rebuilding in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Swogger and Lewis, 1996).

Immediately east of the Hall is a pasture called 'Courts' in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Lancs RO DDIn 56/99; DDIn 63/95a; DRL 1/52; ). A survey in 1982, supported by more recent work, has shown a square enclosure in the north-west of the field together with a series of three parallel 'platforms', each c.5m x 15m and separated by linear depressions, in the south east corner (Lewis, 2000, 297, fig. 91.33i). Across the west side of the field a wide depression runs in a north-south direction and

<sup>34</sup> Earthwork surveys of these features have been undertaken by R.W. Cowell (1982) and by J.I. Speakman and J-G Swogger (1994) in advance of works to consolidate the standing remains of the Hall.

<sup>35</sup> The evidence for a single phase has recently been questioned (Alcock, 2001, 89-90) and a re-evaluation of the structural sequence is now needed.

holds water from time to time. There must be a strong suspicion that some of these earthworks relate to one or more buildings which pre-date the 16<sup>th</sup>-century house. It has already been noted that two crosses near the Hall could mark the line of a former road; a shallow depression which runs eastwards from the demolished east wing of the Hall marks the line of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century driveway (Lancs RO DRL 1/52).

### *Manor House, Maghull*

Maghull Manor (fig. 1.27) was shown as a moated site in 1848 (First Edition six inch Ordnance Survey Sheet 91). The moat survives as two arms of unequal width of a water-filled ditch around the north and east sides of a platform on which there are no early buildings. However, a stone-built structure, interpreted as a folly, stands at the north-east corner. A length of sandstone walling, perhaps the site of an earlier building, was located during ploughing to bring the site into use as a vegetable garden or orchard. Perhaps the house was replaced in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the present house which stands a little to the south-west of the moated area.

### *Peel Farm, Maghull*

On the basis of aerial photography and the suggestion that the name 'peel' may be associated with a moated site, a claim has been made for a moated site at Peel Farm in Maghull. This isolated farmstead lies on the edge of mosslands and a large modern drain has been inserted in the field in which the aerial feature was observed. The Peel Fields (which can be traced back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century) have produced no archaeological evidence for structures, ditches or artefacts to support any claim for a moat. Furthermore, unlike the other moated or ditched enclosures in south west Lancashire, no documentary evidence has been found to show that the grantees or tenants of Peel Farm ever achieved sufficient independence to create a moated site. Woodland survival at least until the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and probably much later, leads us to suppose that the 'peel' represents clearance and construction of a palisade or ditch to enclose the cleared area, build a house and protect the place from marauding animals (Lewis, 2000, 300).

### *Formby Hall*

On the basis of its owners' status, a moated or ditched enclosure at Formby Hall (fig. 1.28) might be expected. It was the capital messuage of the Formby family in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, associated with one of the four Domesday ploughlands in the township which passed to the Crown and were subsequently held under three different kinds of lordship. The Crown retained and then granted out

two ploughlands, one ploughland was held by serjeanty and the fourth, held in thanage, seems to be that attached to Formby Hall (Lewis, 2000, 218). The only resident lord held the Formby Hall estate and, in 1446, William Formby was described as one of the *four* lords (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 47, n. 17). Even following sale of the demesne and serjeanty holdings to a single owner in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the new lord preferred to continue to live at his estate in Halsall (in Lancashire). Though there is no documentary evidence for a moated site at the Hall, a wide fishpond east of the garden area is connected to drainage ditches; the arrangement of boundaries around the garden suggests a former moat. The present house is believed to date from the 16<sup>th</sup> century but extensive alterations have obscured many of its original features (Lewis, 1987).

### *Crosby Hall*

A moat at Crosby Hall in Little Crosby (fig. 1.15) is known only from written sources. The estate was held from the barony of Widnes by the Molyneux family of Sefton and, in turn, was granted to the family of Blundell of Crosby. This family's history can be traced from the 13<sup>th</sup> century at which time Robert Blundell was described as a free tenant (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 86). A document of c.1275 refers to 'an old messuage, with a great grange, and an orchard, beginning at the old ditch on the north side of the old hall right up to the entrance of the courtyard of each' (Lancs RO DDBI 50/16). A second document of 1332 noted 'an old courtyard with its orchard enclosed by a ditch' (Blundell, n.d., 66b).

A plan of the Little Crosby estate in 1741 (Lancs RO DDBI 48/42) and a drawing of about the same date (Tyrer, 1972, 64) show a water-filled feature west of Crosby Hall. However, in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century Nicholas Blundell, like his forebears, took great interest in his property and concerned himself not only with improvements to his buildings but with extensive gardening activities (Blundell, 1933, 99, 135; Tyrer, 1968, 1). These included the creation of his 'Canall' (Tyrer, 1972, 220). In 1711, gardeners working in the Stone Garden encountered 'the clay floorer of some old roome and part of a foundation wall'. Since a two-storeyed hall of 'Tudor' date still stood at this time and was abutted by a larger three-storeyed house, which may also have been standing before 1702, these remains presumably related to a building of considerably earlier date. Perhaps the name of the Stone Garden evokes an area within the curtilage where the earth was more markedly stony due to the remains of earlier structures. The 'Tudor' house and detached gatehouse were demolished in the late

18<sup>th</sup> century (Tyrer, 1968, 304; 1970, fig. 1; 1972, 64).

### *Wood Hall, Melling*

'Moat Croft' in an 18<sup>th</sup>-century document (Lancs RO DDK 1770/18) suggests a moated site at Wood Hall and an adjacent field called Salter's Sough in 1840 perhaps indicates water-logged ground (fig. 1.29). The early history of the site is not known but the name may represent medieval woodland clearance and assart. It was the property of a junior branch of the Molyneux family of Sefton who held one-third of Thornton and made Wood Hall their principal residence in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 211).

It has been claimed that the moated enclosure was visible from the air in 1977 (M58 survey, 1977, 4-6, fig. 2). A linear ditch in a field east of the farm and a pond at the farm yard have not been positively associated with any medieval features but could represent the fragmentary remains of moat ditches. Recent field walking south of the linear ditch has produced a small amount of late medieval and early post-medieval pottery and building material. The assemblage is masked by extensive spreads of 18<sup>th</sup>-century and later artefacts which are considered to represent the results of night-soiling. Though inconclusive, it is just possible that the earlier material relates to an area of occupation abandoned when the present house was built a little to the west in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### *Melling House*

Evidence for a moated site at Melling House is not secure though origins in the medieval period are indicated by recovery of pottery sherds during field walking. The site, at the top of a slope overlooking the boundary with Kirkby township, is probably just outside the oval enclosure associated with Thorp (see above, fig. 1.23). A broad ditch, partly filled with vegetation, runs at right-angles in a southerly direction from the farm outbuildings. It can be traced for a few metres but is obscured by a hedge and is not visible in the adjacent field. North of the farm house a second broad ditch runs eastwards but it also cannot be traced beyond the field boundary. It, too, is partly infilled, but with modern farm debris. Both ditches are c.6m wide and c.1.5m deep and, like the moat at Cunsough Hall (see below), are more massive than the usual

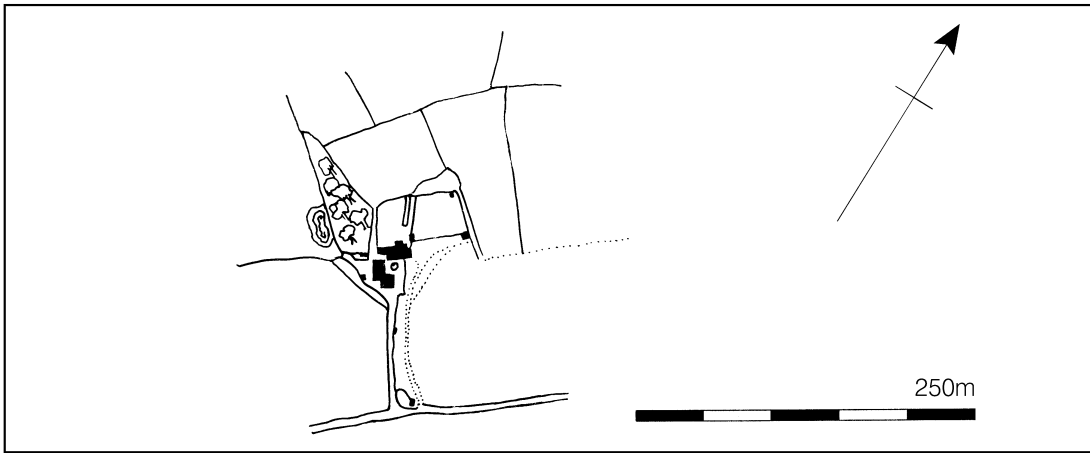


Fig. 1.27 Maghull Manor, 1840 (Lancs RO DRL 1/53)  
The ditches surround three sides of the trapezoidal area north-east of the buildings

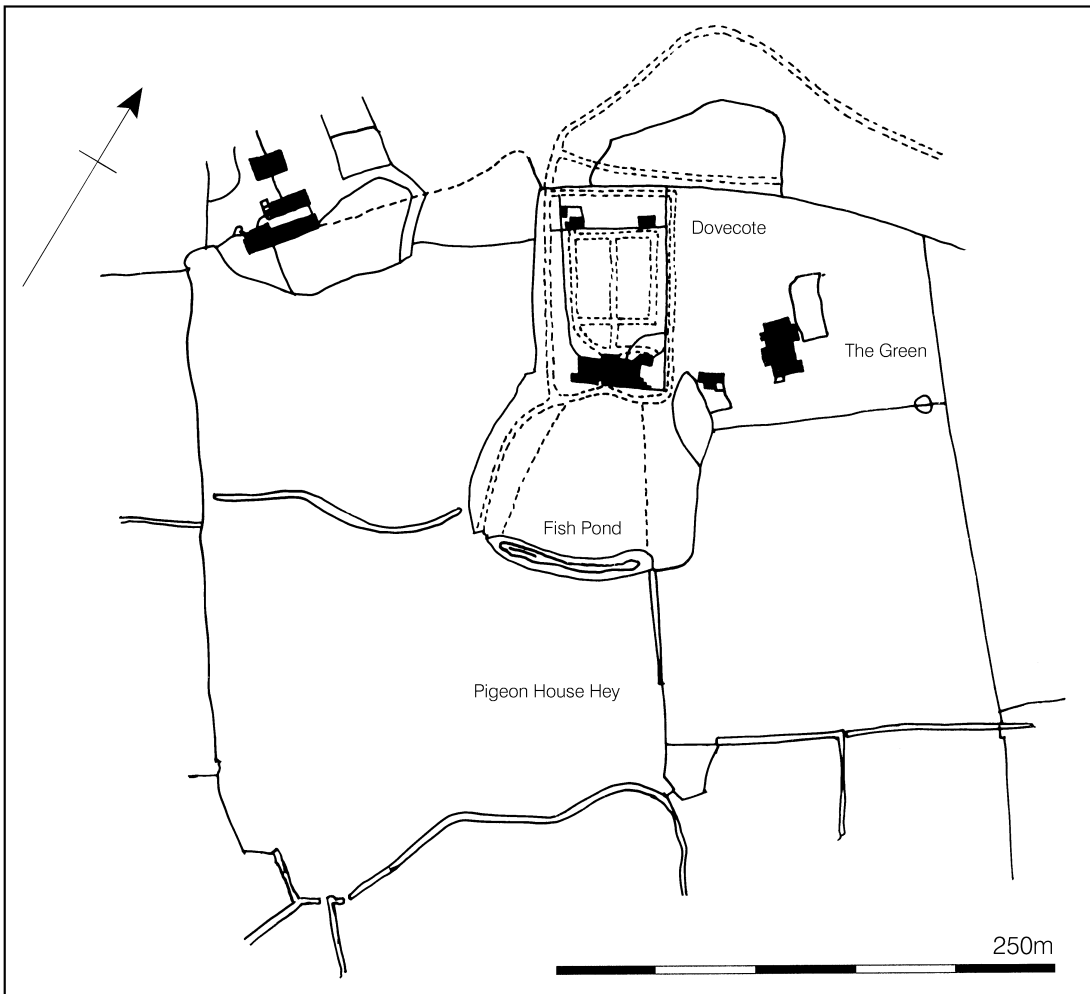


Fig. 1.28 Formby Hall, 1845 (Lancs RO DRL 1/27)

field ditches found in Melling.

The estate was owned by Thomas Bootle at his death in 1693, and family links with the township can be traced back to the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. In 1324-25 Adam, son of Richard de Bootle, granted all his land in Melling lying between *Thorpsbrook* and the moor (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 212-213); in 1332 either *Robto* or *Nicho de Bothull* probably held this property (Rylands, 1896, 24). Some 300 years later, in 1600, Robert Bootle was recorded as a freeholder (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 183). The buildings demonstrate a chronological use and reconstruction since at least the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. The former dwelling-house is a two-storeyed, stone-built house, possibly of two phases, and includes earlier timber-framing. There are stone-mullioned windows on all elevations and, almost certainly, this was the house where five hearths were recorded in 1666 (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 183). A range of sandstone outbuildings carries datestones from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century.

### *Cunscough Hall, Melling*

Like the other Melling estates upon which the moated sites were created, Cunscough was held in thanage tenure and, probably, derived from partible inheritance by Thomas and Henry de Melling, sons of Siward, lord of Melling and Upholland. They certainly granted Cunscough to Cockersand Abbey but there is no evidence that there was ever any resident monastic presence. Possibly the grange raided during the civil unrest of the early 14<sup>th</sup> century (Tupling, 1949, 77) was at Cunscough Hall. Amongst the smallest moated enclosures in south west Lancashire (fig. 1.30), the moat may have been created around the grange as Cunscough's woodland was cleared.

### **Emparkment**

Documentary sources contain no evidence for medieval emparkment in the district and none was identified during fieldwork. With the exception of the Molyneux family, none of Sefton's superior lords appears to have established any permanent residence in the district, leaving tenancy and occupation of their dispersed estates to lesser people. These, though locally important, appear either to have lacked sufficient influence to acquire rights to empark or to have had little inclination so to do.

Field names Sown Park, Horse Park and Higher End Park on Sefton's demesne may refer to emparkment. Clearly Lord Burghley's map of 1590 (Gillow, 1907) does show a palisade around Sefton

church and the field pattern hints at the possibility that some 'park' fields were superimposed on lands which had focused on Sefton Town (fig. 1.20). But since there is no evidence for any embankment or pale it seems more likely that, as in Ravenmeols and Eggargate where fields called 'Park' have also been found, the term refers to land enclosed for grazing. If so, it may perhaps be supposed that grazing on Sefton Old Hall's demesne was adjacent to the moated house.

A grant of free warren in 1615 mentioned the park (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 75, n.7) and an area reserved for hunting may be supposed. This, however, was probably some distance from Sefton church, at Stand Park at Nethererton and its bounds are shown in 1767 (Lancs RO DDM 14/47). It lay on mossland which, in the medieval period, may have been part of the township's common pasture. Its northern limit probably abutted the cultivated land and was marked by a long, straight boundary which runs from Copy Farm westwards to the township boundary with Litherland. The eastern half had been enclosed by 1767; it had decayed by 1770, though it was shown on Teesdale's map of 1830 (Farrer and Brownbill (eds.) 3, 1907, 75, n. 8). All the same, early in May 1709 Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby sent two bulls and '3 other beas[ts] to be scored'<sup>36</sup> at Sefton Park. One bull was to stay there until Michaelmas but the other was brought back to Little Crosby two weeks later and turned out with the heifers (Tyrer, 1968, 213, 215).

Lands south of Ince Blundell Hall had probably been emparked at least as early as the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the bounds were extended after c.1770. The park at Little Crosby Hall was also a late 18<sup>th</sup>-century creation and, as at Ince Blundell, the bounds extended over the former open fields (see above).

### **Buildings**

Historic buildings survive, at least in part, from all levels of the district's post-medieval society. Medieval structures are, however, extremely rare and only parts of Sefton parish church and Maghull chapel, and possibly the chapel dedicated to St Catherine at Lydiate, survive from earlier than the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A useful overview of the region's principal buildings and materials is given

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<sup>36</sup> Branded?

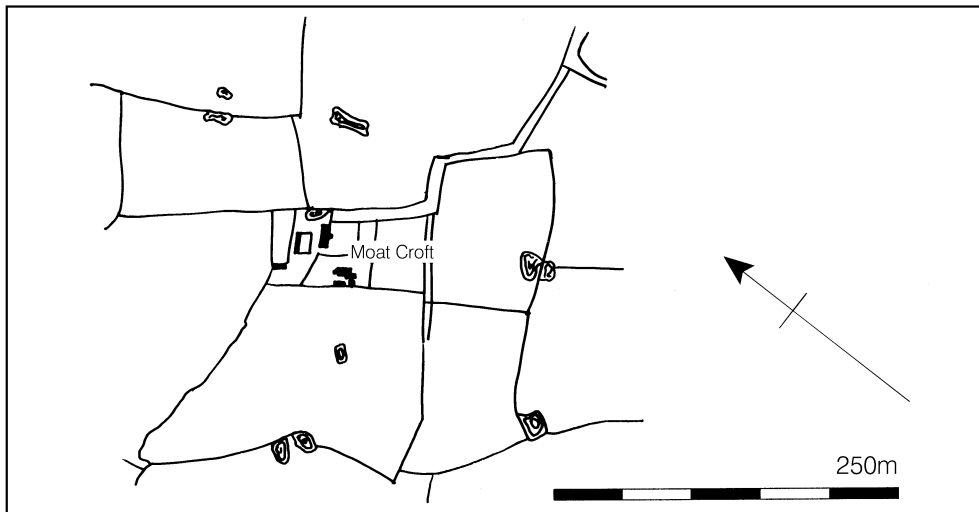


Fig. 1.29 Wood Hall, Melling, 1840 (Lancs RO DRL 1/54)  
Salter's Sough is the field immediately north of the buildings.

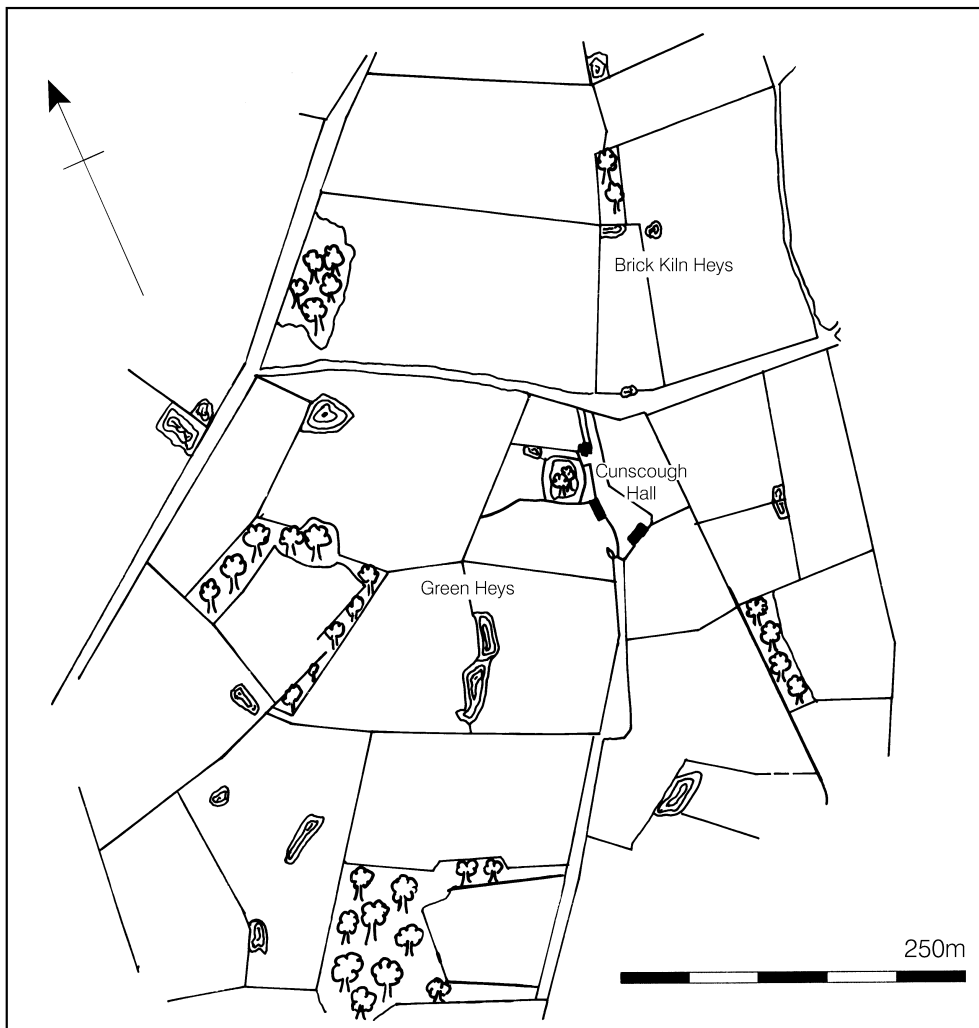


Fig. 1.30 Cunsough Hall, Melling, 1840 (Lancs RO DRL 1/54)

in Nikolaus Pevsner's introductions to Lancashire's buildings (Pevsner, 1969, 1969a)<sup>37</sup> and, for some aspects of local building construction in the early 18th century, Nicholas Blundell's diaries are invaluable (Tyrer, ed., 1968, 1970, 1972 *passim*).

Buildings provide important signals regarding the availability of materials, the nature of land use and aspects of social hierarchy. The range of farm buildings which survives today reflects a mixed agricultural economy. It includes threshing barns and granaries, stables, pigsties and cowhouses which provide important references to farming practices of their time. Structural changes, both external and internal, can also produce evidence for expansion or decline in the fortunes of a family or estate or changes in farming practices. They can also show a chronological sequence – and fashion – in the availability and use of materials. At Lydiate Hall, for example, brick additions were made to the 16<sup>th</sup>-century timber-framed house, probably in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. At about the same time a sandstone outbuilding was raised in the farmyard and, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a brick building was raised on the north side of the yard. In Little Crosby the reverse seems to have occurred with a brick farmhouse at Moor Farm, perhaps of 18<sup>th</sup> century date, and a sandstone barn built after 1848.

### ***Timber-framed buildings***

At least until the 17<sup>th</sup> century the majority of Sefton's buildings were probably timber-framed, and both cruck and box-framed structures have been identified. Timber was used at all levels of society. Crucks, however, seem to have been used more frequently in small houses, cottages and farm buildings. Since timber was brought from Ditton in 1707 to repair two cottages which had burnt down in Little Crosby (Tyrer, ed., 1968, 141) it seems that, at least on that estate, there was no longer any suitable building material. Though charcoal was still supplied from Lydiate and Maghull in 1717 (France, ed., 1945, 137-42;160-62) it is unclear whether these townships still retained any timber suitable for building.

Cruck-framed structures were formerly prolific along the coastal strip between North Meols probably at least as far south as Litherland, and along the Alt valley in Ince Blundell, Sefton and Lydiate. The greatest surviving concentration is probably in Formby where at least five or six such

structures still contain some original elements. During renovations to the three-bayed cottage at 62 Gores Lane it became clear that it had originally been a farm outbuilding; this had been converted to a house with a chimney and probably an upper sleeping area (Lewis, 1982). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it formed part of the farm complex attached to 53 Gores Lane (Lancs RO DRL 1/27) so the conversion may have been late. Renovations at Dean's Cottage in Formby in 1980 showed evidence for a sleeping area above the west bay but the east bay, also with an upper floor, may not have been part of the original structure. At the three-bayed Church View Cottage in Lydiate there seems to have been an upper floor over each end bay; in the south bay it was approached by a stair adjacent to the gable chimney. Timber panelled walls with vertical staves packed with daub survived at Gores Lane but in other cottages the walls had been replaced with brick. Samples taken for dendrochronological analysis from the blades at Gores Lane produced an inconclusive 17<sup>th</sup>-century date. This was based on statistical and visual comparison with an undated chronology constructed from other Lancastrian buildings known to contain 17<sup>th</sup>-century elements (Leggett, 1982). Tree-ring dating for the Scotch Piper at Lydiate was more successful (Leggett, 1990a; Lewis, 1990). However, it showed that the two pairs of crucks *could* have come from two different building phases (if not buildings) and, perhaps, had only been brought together into a single structure in c.1561. The date compares with that of timbers from the nearby Lydiate Hall (see below) and the likelihood of a *floruit* of new building in Lydiate, as Laurence Ireland strove to demonstrate his new-found status shortly after the Dissolution, cannot be ignored.

The Cross Barn at Ince Blundell retains two cruck-frames though its walls have been rebuilt in brick. A construction date in c.1540 has been claimed (DoE 1986, no. 6/58) though the evidence is not given. Its cruciform shape is achieved by brick wings with sandstone detail and tie-beam truss roof, perhaps of 18<sup>th</sup>-century date. It is popularly believed that the Barn was used by Catholics as a place of worship during the religious suppression. It was, perhaps, the 'Chapell' measured by Nicholas Blundell in 1710 and visited by him in 1726 (Tyrer, 1968, 261; 1972, 182).

By contrast, box-framed buildings are associated with the upper echelons of local society. Of such buildings, however, the ruined house at Lydiate Hall is the only survivor. Clearly, this was a two-storeyed courtyard house with a great hall on the ground floor and, unlike Merseyside's other comparable 16<sup>th</sup>-century house at Speke Hall, there

<sup>37</sup> Provisional lists of buildings of architectural or historical interest produced for the Ministry of Housing and Local Government in the 1950s and 1960s are a useful source of information.

were fenestrated rooms above the hall<sup>38</sup>. With a massive stone fireplace backing on to the screens passage at the north end of the hall, the canopied dais was at the south and heated private apartments lay beyond. The north range contained the domestic quarters. The two-storeyed gatehouse was probably in the east range which was demolished in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Lewis and Samuels, 1990). Dendrochronological sampling of 78 timbers from the south, west and north ranges showed that the majority had been felled after 1530. A construction date for the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, and probably between 1535-66, is thought likely (Leggett, 1990b, 53-54)<sup>39</sup> and if so Laurence Ireland (d 1566) would have been responsible for the work. As an opportunistic landowner, who after 1536, was to buy up the former Cockersand Abbey property in Lydiate and adjacent townships, his grand new house (which predates the design finally completed at Speke Hall in 1598) was a visible statement of his new-found status.

### **Stone buildings**

Though some townships have quarries these seem to have been exploited on a fairly small scale with, perhaps, that in Melling being most worked. The quality of the sandstone is variable. Fairly thin flags from Lydiate were probably suitable only as a roofing material but stone from Melling is supposed to have been used for the portico at Ince Blundell Hall in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lancs RO DDIn 53/114). The quarry in Little Crosby may have produced rubble for use at a strictly vernacular level and for the walls around the park. Very small-scale exploitation, possibly little more than an evaluation to establish the quality of the stone, can be seen on the low sandstone ridge in Ince Blundell.

With the exception of stone-built churches and chapels, the earliest and most substantial examples of stone buildings are found almost exclusively east of the Alt in Maghull, Melling and Lydiate. The early house at Melling House, entirely of red sandstone with internal timber-framed partition walls, may be of late 16<sup>th</sup>-century date with outbuildings of similar stone and dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Bank Farm, Melling was probably also built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. With thick walls and 'gothic' beams, it probably contains at least two phases of building and many of its windows and doors have been altered or blocked in. A plan of

<sup>38</sup> At Speke Hall the roof space over the Great Hall was modified by altering the angle of the struts between the principal rafters and tie-beams, probably to make servants' rooms or storage space.

<sup>39</sup> But see footnote 30 above.

the tenement in 1766 (Lancs RO DDIn 58/13) shows an additional portion attached to the end of the north gable. Two large outbuildings also stood at this time, one of which was a stone and brick barn still on the east side of the farmyard. With a datestone of 1654 Barnes Farmhouse, also in Melling, is of comparable date. It seems that, in Melling, if not elsewhere, the 17<sup>th</sup> century was a period of not inconsiderable reconstruction of the isolated farmhouses and their outbuildings which was to include the large brick house at Wood Hall (see below). The grey sandstone barn at Lydiate Hall is also thought to be of 17<sup>th</sup>-century date. Narrow stone courses with dressed angles on the west face contrast with ashlar used on the other elevations suggesting, perhaps, an intention to impress visitors to the Hall and presenting the less-pleasing elevation to the farmyard.

West of the Alt, the earliest surviving stone house may date from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Orchard House in Sefton township has thick stone walls and stone doorways at both floor levels. In Little Crosby many farm outbuildings are also of stone, but, with the exception of the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup>-century barns at Crosby Hall, they are probably of 19<sup>th</sup>-century date.

Buildings with a high (0.75m or more) sandstone plinth surmounted by brick walls are occasionally found. The brick walls of such a two-storeyed house at Homer Green Farm may replace a timber frame similar to that at Rainhill Hall Farm (see Chitty, this volume) and are an unusual example for the region. The Mill House in Sefton township is also of brick on a stone plinth and this three-storeyed building was raised in 1753 as accommodation for the miller.

### **Brick**

Not surprisingly, brick is the most common building material in the district. Buildings range from the most important houses in their respective townships such as Ince Blundell Hall, Formby Hall and Meols Hall, to estate cottages and both large and small farm buildings. The date of the earliest brick buildings has not been established but the fashion for building in brick seems to have developed from the first known local use of this material in Prescot in the period 1579-86 (Bailey, 1953, 82, 99-100). The majority of brick buildings, however, are probably of 18<sup>th</sup> century date and later though in some instances, such as at Lydiate Hall, early elements may be masked by later alterations and extensions.

It is generally believed that the Old Hall at Ince Blundell (see above) and the barn at Alt Grange are the earliest and claims for a 16<sup>th</sup>-century date have been frequently repeated, though without justification. An inventory of Alt Grange in 1634 shows that the house was probably on two floors. The rooms were identified as a chamber over the 'butterye', a chamber over the parlour, larder, little larder, kitchen and hall. Also listed were a brewhouse, storehouse, garnett house and 'goore house' (Lancs RO WCW, Richard Molyneux, 1634). By 1696, the Grange was 'an old house of six beays and nine or tenn beays of outbuilding' (Lancs RO DDM 14/9). The present house probably retains some 17<sup>th</sup>-century elements and Edge Farm in Sefton may be similar.

In Little Crosby William Blundell, who inherited the estate in 1638 on the death of his grandfather, noted an estimate for brickmaking in his grandfather's time at a cost of 2s.9d. per thousand; coal, slack, wood and turf were used as fuel (Blundell, 1933, 61). It seems that the house was neglected for some years for, in 1662, William cited expenses for a window in his new building and for wainscotting in his dining room (Blundell, 1933, 99). Shortly before his death in 1698 he made

<i>Order cited</i>		<i>Order cited: rooms with bedding</i>	
5	Gallery	1	Arches
10	Store room	2	Yellow Room
13	Passage	3	Old Room
15	Dining room	4	Blew Room
16	Hall	6	Garden chamber
17	Front parlour	14	Parlour chamber
18	Pantry	9	Maids room
19	Back parlour	12	Green room
20	Closet	8	Dressing room
21	NB's closet		
22	Kitchen	7	Kitchen chamber
23	Larders		
24	Pastry ( <i>sic</i> )		
25	Wash house		
26	Brewhouse	11	Brewhouse room
27	Milkhouse	30	Gatehouse
28	Cellar	31	Room over the stables
29	Upper Gallery	32	Old room over the shippins

**Table 1. 13:** Rooms at Little Crosby Hall, 1737 (Tyrer, 1972, 241-243)

further reference to rooms within his house – his own chamber over the hall, staircase, the higher and lower Galleries, the Arches, Buttery and Buttery Chamber, kitchen and well court all suffered damage to their window glass and leading during a severe hailstorm (Blundell, 1933, 291-292; see table 1.13 for comparison).

The earliest documentary evidence for the use of brick has been found in inventories of 17<sup>th</sup>-century

date for Thornton and Lydiate. It seems that some of the brick work at Lydiate Hall's buildings (see above), such as the 'necessary houses', with sandstone foundations and brick floors, may date from this period. In 1609 the probate inventory compiled after the death of Lawrence Ireland of Lydiate recorded *clm*<sup>40</sup> unburnt bricks, valued at £4.10s. (Lancs RO WCW Lawrence Ireland, 1609). A field adjacent to the 'Courts' at Lydiate Hall was called Kiln Croft in 1809 (fig. 1.26), and was perhaps the place where bricks were fired in clamps. With such evidence, perhaps, we can postulate the date for the brick extensions to the timber-framed north range. In 1618 the inventory of William Abraham of Thornton included 'bricke' to the value of 3s.4d. (Lancs RO WCW) but Abraham's house has not been identified. Meols Hall also contains some 17<sup>th</sup>-century brick elements. Its two-celled dovecote<sup>41</sup> is thought to have been amongst the earliest brick buildings in the area and to date from the late 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century (Cheetham 1925, 11). Using crudely-made bricks, the intricate pattern of nesting boxes was created using a thick packing of lime mortar to establish both evenness in the coursing and thickness within the walls (Lewis, 1991).

Reuse of materials from earlier timber-framed buildings occurred in Formby in 1712. A bricklayer, Robert Vose of Ormskirk, was charged with making 60,000 bricks to build a house measuring 10¾ yards on the front, with a porch, by 9 yards 2 feet 'backwards'<sup>42</sup> (Lancs RO DDFo 13/31). The mortar, however, was to be taken from clay in the walls of the 'ould haws' and lime, if needed, was to be bought. The total cost came to £90.18s.11d. of which carpentry for roof timber, floors and doors cost £27.16s.11d. The remaining materials were brick, limestone, slate, flags, plastering and whiting (Lancs RO DDFo 13/32, 33).

## Household Goods

Fieldwalking and excavation have occasionally produced glazed or unglazed ceramics identifiable as roofing materials - and possibly cooking or table wares - on or near sites of supposed medieval occupation but these, more often, have been places occupied by those of highest status in the district. Even in the latter decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century there

<sup>40</sup> The quantity implied is unclear. Possibly it represents 170,000 bricks using the so-called 'long' or 'great' hundred where *c* = 120 (Hector, 1980, 41) though this seems a very large amount.

<sup>41</sup> In a dangerous condition, the dovecote was demolished in 1991.

<sup>42</sup> 32.25ft x 29ft (9.83m x 8.84m).

is little archaeological evidence for the use of ceramics except in the more wealthy households.

There is no doubt that many of the principal landowners occupied substantial houses such as Meols Hall, Lydiate Hall, Crosby Hall and Ince Blundell Hall, and 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century inventories provide evidence, not only of the number of rooms in the building (see tables 1.12-1.13), but also of the household goods belonging to the deceased (see, for example, Gibson, 1876, 39-43; Lewis and Samuels, 1990, 47-52; Tyrer, 1972, 239-44). Brass and pewter objects were of significant value, usually according to their weight, and treenware seems to have been in more general use at least in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In Sefton, the absence of known local places of pottery manufacture, at any period, implies that ceramic wares were acquired from centres outside the district. It seems, also, that the use of pottery was confined to the relatively small number of more wealthy or privileged members of the community. Evidence from post-medieval inventories suggests

that this might be the case.

The inventory of Richard Molyneux of Alt Grange in 1634 included brass and pewter vessels to a total

John Molyneux of Alt Grange included a ‘Tea pott and cheanie’ worth 5s.0d., but pewter and treenware were worth £4.1s.0d. and £1.10s.0d. respectively (Lancs RO WCW John Molyneux, 1726). In 1737, the inventory taken following the death of Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby included a large amount of pottery which appears to be represented in ‘collour’d’ earthenwares, presumably slipwares, as well as firewares, which were listed as ‘Delph’, ‘Dutch’, ‘Liverpool Delph’ and ‘Cornish China’ (Tyrer, 1972, 244). Blundell’s diaries suggest his fascination with ceramics. He bought ‘Fine Muggs’ in 1702 and ‘coffy pots’ in 1709, both from Prescot. In Liverpool, on different occasions in 1710, he observed the manufacture of ‘Whit-Mettle Muggs’ and bought a ‘fanciful Ring of Mugg Mettle to drink out of’ and ‘Many Muggs’. He seems also to have bought two china dishes and bowls from a travelling salesman. ‘Pan-Muggs and other Muggs’ were bought in Ormskirk, presumably from the market and a load of ‘Muggs for the Hous use’ came from Liverpool. In August 1712 he bought more ‘Coffy Cups’, from the ‘Whit-Mettle Mugg hous’ in Liverpool. In 1719, he sent clay from Little Crosby to the ‘Mugg House and Pip-Makers’, presumably in Liverpool, ‘to be tried there’. In the same year he went again to Liverpool and stocked up with ‘some Chinae’<sup>43</sup>. At the same time he bought a wooden

	<i>Arable</i>	<i>Oxen &amp; cows</i>	<i>Sheep</i>	<i>Goats</i>	<i>Horses</i>	<i>Pasture</i>	<i>Meadow</i>	<i>Pigs</i>	<i>Wood</i>	<i>Moss &amp; Marsh</i>	<i>Fishery</i>
North Meols	*	*	*		*	*	*			*	*
Birkdale										*	
Ainsdale	*		*			*	*			*	*
Formby	*	*								*	*
Ravenmeols		*y	*y		*y	*		*y		*	*
Ince Blundell	*	*	*			*				*	
Little Crosby	*									*	
Great Crosby	*									*	
Thornton	*						*				
Sefton, Netherton and Lunt	*						*			*	
Litherland	*									*	
Bootle	*					*	*			*	
Aintree	*										
Melling	*							*	*	*	
Maghull								*	*	*	
Lydiate	*	*y	*	*	*y			*	*	*	

**Table 1.14:** Summary of land use (y = livestock with young)

(based on Farrer, 1900; Hulton, 1853; McNulty, 1933; Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907; Webb, 1970)

value of £8.16s.9d., including pewter dishes weighing a total of 117 pounds and valued at £4.7s.9d. Fifty-four trenchers, presumably wooden, were valued at 2s.3d. No earthenware vessels can be identified in this inventory (Lancs RO WCW Richard Molyneux, 1634). In 1726, the goods of

pail, sieve and wooden bowls, some glass bottles and a mat made of starr grass. For the garden, in

<sup>43</sup> ‘Muggs for Butter and Milk, andc., Punsh Bowl’ and half a dozen each of china coffee cups and dishes.

1721, two dozen flower pots were bought in Liverpool (Tyrrer, 1968, 19, 238, 261, 263-64, 268, 289, 304; 1970, 30, 255, 260; 1972, 55).

Lower down the social scale the inventory of Robert Fleetwood, house carpenter of Ince Blundell, taken in 1692, recorded metal goods of pewter and brass valued at £5.8.0. He also had some 'Whyte mettell' worth 2s.0d., and mugs and earthenware worth 2s.0d. Treenware vessels were valued at £1.8.0. (Lancs RO WCW Robert Fleetwood, 1692). Elsewhere in the district the value of treenware has been seen to exceed that of earthenware vessels in the households of the yeoman class and below.

### Rural economy

The evidence for assessment of cultivable lands in the 11<sup>th</sup> century has been noted above (fig. 1.6; table 1.6). Characteristically, however, Sefton's rural economy derives from an agricultural regime which included both arable cultivation and pastoral farming (table 1.14). Certainly there are townships in which the arable appears to be more highly developed during the medieval period whilst others, though not without some evidence for cultivation, seem to have placed greater emphasis on animal husbandry. Reclamation of the marshes and mosses in Ince Blundell and Altcar in the 13<sup>th</sup> century produced *land* and meadow but agreement that Ince Marsh should be uncultivated for use as common pasture has been interpreted as an intention to preserve this fenland economy (Hallam, 1981, 180). Audrey Coney's description of 17<sup>th</sup> century exploitation of the mosslands around Martin Mere (1992) may well reflect a situation which prevailed for centuries over most of the district. Indeed, the absence of both historical and archaeological evidence for settlement desertion (Beresford, 1998, 359) seems likely to result from an economy which placed no reliance on a single agricultural resource. Though Sefton's occupants may not have accumulated great riches they were, perhaps, able to survive economic downturns which elsewhere forced those whose livelihood depended on a monocultural regime to desert the countryside. Notes accumulated towards an agricultural history of Formby, Ainsdale and Ravenmeols are a useful reminder of the variability of the region's resource in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and later (Morton, 1981, unpublished).

### Fields

Arguably the earliest surviving field system is found between North Meols and Crossens and is unique in the district. In c.1250 an acre of meadow called *Frere medu* in the townfields was granted to Sawley Abbey with the proviso that 'it shall be lawful for

the monks to inclose, hedge and ditch the said acre if they wish' (Farrer, 1903, 11). Today, fragments of fields identified in the 13<sup>th</sup>- century grant, and located on the 1683 plan (fig. 1.13), survive under pasture east of the urban area. Running for a considerable distance between the settlement and mosslands, they are small, irregular in shape and bounded by narrow, shallow ditches with the occasional hawthorn hedge. The 1683 plan hints at piecemeal development in a sinuous band which, perhaps, indicates constraints influenced by both the underlying drift and the drainage on the very edge of the mosslands. It has been said that such field systems would have developed in localities with a relatively low population (Taylor, 1975, 94). They are most frequently found in areas of scattered settlement, but this does not appear to be the case at North Meols where nucleation is indicated. Such fields were also associated with woodland and waste but, although *Frere medu* was said to be in the townfields, no good evidence for open fields has been identified. All the same, in 1683 ownership and occupation of the enclosed fields was intermixed between the two manorial estates and their tenants.

### Common fields

The problems of distinguishing between open field arable, meadow or pasture, and the dating of such fields, have been outlined by Taylor (1981, 13-21). By the 13<sup>th</sup> century it is clear that there was not one type of open field system but many, adapted to complex geographical, social, tenurial and economic circumstances, often differing from township to township. Indeed, the evidence from physical remains of common fields indicates that ridge and furrow associated with arable cultivation is itself the result of complex changes over the centuries. In his largely documentary study of Lancashire's common fields Youd located areas of common arable and meadow (1962, 1-41). He commented that the incidence of common fields in the county was highest on the coastal plain 'a low-lying area formerly covered by extensive tracts of mossland and marshland which have now been drained and improved'.

Sefton, and indeed much of south-Lancashire, is a region predominantly of dispersed estates and settlement. Marginal lands were widely used for intercommoning until at least as late as the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries when township bounds became firmly established. Where nucleated settlement, with an accompanying pattern of open fields, does punctuate the landscape, it seems to be a consequence of a Norman-style overlordship based on feudalism and superimposed on an earlier landscape of consolidated holdings. However,

although there is good evidence for common pasture and meadow throughout Sefton, evidence for common arable has been identified only in some townships. For the immediate post-Conquest period, the evidence is too flimsy to allow an understanding of how the region's common arable developed or expanded. From the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards documentary reference to selions is found in coastal townships and, particularly in Litherland, Great and Little Crosby, Thornton, Ince Blundell and Formby, the arrangement of the open fields is shown on post-medieval plans. In 1346 land in the quasi-royal demesne manor of Great Crosby was described as '21 bovates each containing 5 acres' (Farrer, 1915, 86) - some 105 acres of *customary* measure<sup>44</sup> in a township, which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had, a little over 2,000 statute acres. Particularly at Formby, even in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century ownership of the strips seems to reflect the situation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Lancs RO DRL 1/27). The 'town filds of Formbie' were shown on a plan of 1557-58 (PRO MR2) and field names cited in documents show that the south-east of Formby was managed for open field cultivation at least as early as the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century (Lancs RO DDFo 13/6, 13/12; DDIn 51/1). Sixteenth-century documents tell us that the strips were held in severalty by the superior lords (Sir Edward Warren, the earl of Derby and Sir William Molyneux who in the 1560s sold their estates to Henry Halsall, and William Formby) and their tenants.

In townships such as Ince Blundell and Little Crosby (Tyrer, 1963, 37-48; Youd, 1962, 1-41), there is documentary evidence for a gradual consolidation of holdings though aerial photography suggests that 18<sup>th</sup>-century survivals in Ince Blundell (Bakewell, 1982; Sheppard, 1981) represent but a fragment of more extensive common fields. Clearly the park has been superimposed over some of the early fields. A little to the north and east of the park, there had been some amalgamation of strips in the Townfield by c.1770 (Bakewell, 1982, fig. 4; Sheppard, 1981, 87, fig. 4). Although part of the ditch bounding one of these open fields still survives the land surface itself is extremely flat and is regularly ploughed. It betrays no visible evidence whatsoever for earlier strip divisions. In Little Crosby, as at Formby, the windmill lay in the open fields but in Little Crosby these seem to have been

<sup>44</sup> The variability of long measure in Lancashire has been considered (Smith, 1959). Measurements of the pole or perch in Altcar were 24ft and 20ft in West Derby they were 24ft and 24ft 6in. Smith suggests that the incidence of different units of measurement within a single township relates to quality of the land (10-11). In 1741, in Little Crosby and Burtonwood, a chain measured 32 (*sic*) yards (Lancs RO DDBI 48/42a; DDLi, uncalendared) and perches of 20ft were used in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 223).

of limited extent and, by 1702, certainly much of the north and east of the township was enclosed (Lancs RO DDBI 48/1). Litherland and Bootle may also have had well-developed arable by the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Litherland's open field system, which lay on the slopes east of the Rimrose Brook, could still be seen in 1769 (Lancs RO DDM 14/43; figs 1.2, 1.9).

In Thornton reference to Newfield appears in the latter decades of the 13<sup>th</sup> century; Oldfield was so-named as early as 1302 and selions in the Crooks were granted in 1489 (Williams, 1947, 44-50). Many of the field names can be identified from 18<sup>th</sup>-century and later plans (Lancs RO DDM 14/54; DRL 1/79). Newfield lay just east of the village; the Crooks were to the north and beyond them, east of Homer Green Farm, was Oldfield. A hedged field boundary and a low field bank are probably the only visible landscape evidence of the former open fields. All the same, they can still be seen as soil marks on aerial photographs and have been plotted on to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century map (Sheppard, 1981, 86-88).

The best evidence for common field cultivation comes from Ainsdale where, in the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> century, there were strips described as *selions*, *ridges* and *lands*, *townfields*, a field called *Goldcornisland* and at least one barn. There was also some meadow and grazing for sheep (Farrer, 1900, 579-80; Cunliffe Shaw, 1956, 341-343). The township also seems to have been divided into specific areas and a well-developed and organised agricultural community can be assumed. West Ainsdale contained its own named fields and the town of Ainsdale also included *lands* distributed in named fields (Farrer, 1900, 576-8, 580-1). The *dales* perhaps were hollows in the dunes where it seems that the sheep pastures would have been located, though *Romsdale* was also called a meadow, and was perhaps divided into *lands*. Unsurprisingly, ditches played a significant role in the definition of land boundaries. Of these medieval features, however, there is no trace.

Whereas traces of an extensive, structured open-field system can be seen in Ince Blundell and Thornton, at least until the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Bakewell, 1982, 26-27; fig. 4), the evidence for Sefton township is less clear. Although the medieval documentation hints at common field cultivation, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century pattern of enclosed fields fails to indicate where these might have been. Indeed, Bakewell suggests that the township's particular topographical conditions may have resulted in early measures to protect the land from flooding with the creation of ditches. This, in itself, would have

resulted in a pattern of enclosed fields (Bakewell, 1982, 19).

### *Enclosure*

It seems likely that, where they existed, enclosure of open fields occurred in Lancashire as a whole from at least as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, though recorded instances are rare. Piecemeal enclosure took two main forms - enclosure of individual strips (for which there is not evidence in Sefton), and enclosure following consolidation of strips by exchange. The documentary evidence for this has been considered for a number of townships in the district (Youd, 1962; Tyrer, 1963, 37-48). In addition, a study of land holdings in Ince Blundell has provided information for exchange and sale of land in that township (Bakewell, 1982). During the medieval period there is evidence of land ownership by several families but, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there were only two principal landowners, each having acquired property through exchange and sale during the medieval period. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century the owners still held strips in the town-field though the all surrounding land had been enclosed. During that century there was a gradual consolidation of strips, though even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century elements of former strip holdings could still be seen. This field has now been incorporated into a single cultivated area, divided by a roadway, but the medieval boundary ditch is still recognisable.

Enclosure of Great Field meadow in Thornton took place in 1742. Situated on the edge of the township, east of Homer Green, the field consisted of 'diverse butts of small parcels.... scattered in the said field'. Enclosure was by agreement and resulted in a regular pattern of allotments (Youd, 1962, 37) which may have echoes in the arrangement of doles in Ince Blundell, Moorhouses, Northend and Altcar in 1604 (Lancs RO DDBI 54/3).

East of the Alt, however, it seems either that open fields were either poorly-developed or that the rural economy was always based on discrete enclosed land holdings and individual fields. In the late 12<sup>th</sup> century grants in Lydiate frequently referred to areas of land which seem to have been entire units; for example, 'the whole of *Tunsnap*, both wood and plain' (Farrer, 1900, 635) suggests that this was an area of common pasture rather than one of cultivation. In Melling and Cunsough there is little evidence for common field cultivation and, as in Lydiate and Maghull, an emphasis on woodland assart and enclosure linked to a dispersed settlement pattern seems likely.

Further north at North Meols around the western perimeter of Martin Mere, enclosure of meadow land from at least as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century was probably a consequence of gradual development of the mosses. And, in many other townships, reference to 'closes', 'garths', 'crofts' and 'yards' throughout the medieval period is testimony to enclosure though the size of these enclosures, and the farming practices with which they were associated, remains unclear.

A gradual improvement and reclamation of marginal land seems to have been effected from at least as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the creation of mossland boundaries areas was probably initiated by a demand for grazing by the lords of the manors bordering these areas. Often the cultivated wastes and commons proved more fertile and productive than the old lands and, taking into account the extensive areas of mossland associated with nearly every township in Sefton, it would seem that great profits were to be achieved by improvement of the wastes. This extended to the coastal marshes and Bootle marsh was improved by marling (Holt, 1795, 119). By the middle years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century enclosed fields were predominant and only in a few places such as Formby, Ince Blundell, Little Crosby, and Litherland did open field agriculture survive to any great extent. Writing in 1795, John Holt commented on enclosures and described some of the boundaries (Holt, 1795, 43-47). Hedgerows were frequently neglected and branches spread over the land. Ditches were commonly found on flat, wet areas; most were 'nearly navigable' but no attention being paid to the outfall, they were full of putrid water.

### **Mills**

Watermills and windmills have been noted in both medieval and post-medieval documents; those still standing at the time of William Yates' survey are shown on his map (1786). Where they have eluded identification during fieldwork, a number of other mill sites can be inferred from the documentary sources (fig. 1.31; table 1.15). A horsemill was attached to the 17<sup>th</sup>-century farmbuildings at Crosby Hall and, from Birkdale, comes a single reference to a walkmill (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 238, n.1), a term which might imply part of the process of linen manufacture (Higham, 1989, 38).

Mills were the property of the lord of the manor though it is not uncommon in south west Lancashire to find that partible inheritance resulted in subdivided rights to ownership, sometimes to as little as one-sixth (table 1.15). In most instances the owners came from the laity, but an exception was the medieval watermill at Ravenmeols. This was

held by Stanlaw (subsequently Whalley) Abbey though title of the multure had also been granted to Cockersand (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 49, n. 10). The large number of mills in Formby, all of which are shown in different locations, can perhaps be best explained by the nature of lordship in which the four estates were held by individuals of apparently similar status. A watermill on Downholland Brook had been replaced by 1557-58 and, at this date, there were two post mills (PRO MR2). One called the Olde Milne stood within Formby lordship; the Newe Milne had been set up in 1539 on William Formby's land at the Short Dales in Town Field, between Formby lordship and Downholland Brook (Lancs RO DDFo 13/22; fig. 1.14). William Yates showed two windmills on his map published in 1786. Almost certainly one of these stood on the north side of Old Mill Lane but the other was to the south-west and may have been north of Ravenmeols Lane where a millstone was recovered in the late 1970s<sup>45</sup>. Yet another mill, a steam mill, had been set up on the south side of Cable Street before 1848 (Ordnance Survey six inch Sheet 90).

### Watermills

Although there were several watermills in the region in this low-lying landscape, there is clear evidence neither for artificial deepening of the watercourses nor for raised embanked 'canals' to provide a head of water. Occasionally, however, watercourses have been straightened or additional channels cut, presumably to increase and control the flow, and there is some documentary notice of mill pools. It seems likely, however, that power was obtained from undershot or, just possibly breast shot, wheels. Undershot wheels can be used where falls of up to 4ft (1.2m) occur, but they need an abundant water supply. They work by kinetic energy and a close-fitting wheel in a narrow housing would improve the power output. Such mills were simple to construct, easy to repair and unhindered by floods (Davies-Shiel, 1978, 29-30). In Sefton, power was probably achieved by long mill streams, such as the mill-dam in Sefton township, or by mill ponds, as at Eggargate.

The Eggargate mill lies on the boundary stream with Lydiate. It is first noticed in 1276 when half the mill was claimed as dower (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 201, n.15) and, in 1298, an agreement was drawn up concerning diversion of the course of the Alt. Permission was given to dam the 'water on the lands and woods' so as to turn the water back to its old course. Lands near the river were to be 'free

from harm and from flood' (Lancs RO DDIn 56/10). An undated grant (probably 13<sup>th</sup>-century) granted a quarter of the mill with the custom of all men in *Liddate*, and a fish pond with associated grassland following the dam to the mill, and lying between *Gildhusehul* and the land of Cockersand Abbey. The miller was to pay homage, service and the *silocus*<sup>46</sup> of the mill; he was granted a quarter of the timber from wood due to the mill. He had to undertake all customary repairs but the landlord would carry wood and stones. He was granted common of pasture, but pannage was reserved to the landlord (Lancs RO DDIn 56/5). The mill was rebuilt or altered in the post-medieval period and was still used for churning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 206, n.11).

The watermill in Sefton township lay close to the church and moated house on the western edge of Sefton meadows. Upstream at Dunning's Bridge the Alt was canalised into three courses before 1769 and the most westerly of these, known as the Mill Dam, provided power (Ordnance Survey six inch Sheet 99, 1848; Yates, 1786; fig. 1.20). A short distance north of the mill, they were reunited into a single stream. It is believed that the mill was rebuilt in 1595; a drawing has been published (Carøe and Gordon, 1893, 53) and a painting executed in 1876<sup>47</sup> has recently come to light. The mill may have replaced one or two watermills in Sefton manor in 1568 (Lancs RO DDM 12/30). The site of the wheelhousing and a leet survive as substantial finely-dressed and well-coursed masonry structures beneath the floor of the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century granary which replaced the old watermill after its destruction by fire. The mill may be the same as that which lay on the bounds of Netherton which, in 1318, was given to Peter, younger son of Richard de Molyneux together with the watermill (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 75, n.3). The boundary began at the watermill, ran out towards the Alt and then eastwards up the Alt as far as Arland ditch to the boundary with Aintree from where it followed the boundaries of Walton and Litherland, the moss and Sefton field back to the mill pool and mill.

Nearer the Alt outfall to the sea, between 1205-1211 William Blundell of Ince Blundell received a licence to make a mill on the Ravenmeols (north) side of the river and take eels from the sluice (Farrer and Brownbill 1907, 49). Between 1212-42 he gave the mill to the monks of Stanlaw

<sup>45</sup> The millstone was removed to the front of Formby Library.

<sup>46</sup> Possibly the term relates to 'wheaten flour' (Cassell's Latin Dictionary) or to 'rye' (Latham, 1965).

<sup>47</sup> By M. Langton Knowles.

(subsequently Whalley Abbey) and, at the same time, forbade his heirs to make pools or fish traps which might affect the monks' rights. They, however, were given the right to remove the mill to a more convenient place and take land for a mill pool. Whether they did so is uncertain and the site of the mill is not known, but since they were also given land called Scholes on which Alt Grange was established, it seems likely that the site lay close to the mouth of the Alt. That this was so seems to be shown in 1441 when the abbot refused to take responsibility for flooding caused by water flowing from and back into the Alt. However, since in 1329 the monks were answerable to the lord of Ravenmeols for rent of the mill, it seems that it stood on the north bank of the river (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 49, 79, nn. 10-11; 83, n.9).

The site of the watermill at North Meols is inferred from a plan of 1683 on which a small island called Milln Holm is depicted (Lancs RO DDSc 151/23; fig. 1.12). The stream, known as Otterpool, had an eel fishery at least as early as 1213-22 (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 230 n.14 ). The mill had perhaps disappeared by the time of Yates's survey in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century but a slight straightening in the course of the stream may represent part of the workings and suggest its approximate location.

### **Windmills**

Windmills were probably introduced to Britain in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Post-mills were so-called due to support of the wooden-framed body by a vertical post which was held in position by quarter bars resting upon horizontal cross-trees. These were set either on short masonry pillars or were inserted directly into the ground. Power was obtained by adjusting the position of the mill so that the sails faced the wind. Evidence for a post-mill can sometimes be seen in trenches cut to take the cross-trees. A later development was the timber-built smock-mill which may have been introduced from Holland in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A tower mill has the same basic shape as a smock-mill, but is constructed of brick or stone. They were introduced to England at about the same time as smock-mills but are generally of larger proportions. Smock and tower mills do not leave many visible traces when they are dismantled. All three types of mill have been found on man-made mounds created to add effective height to a mill structure (Vince, 1977). Of those identified in Sefton, some certainly stood on mounds though for others there is now no evidence for either earthworks or structures.

The earliest known references to windmills come from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, in Little Crosby and Ince Blundell. The Little Crosby windmill is known

from as early as 1311; plans of early 18<sup>th</sup>-century date show its location and clearly it was still standing in 1786 (Lancs RO DDB1 48/41, 48/42; Yates, 1786; fig. 1.15). It stood in the Towne Fields (represented in Backsty Lands, Tween Gates, Barke and Crossfield) at the south end of the village and, within the walls of the present park, a small mound and deep well are thought to mark the site. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, millstones were supplied from Whittle-le-Woods, near Chorley (Tyler, 1970, 101) and, as with other aspects of his estate management, between 1702 and 1728 Nicholas Blundell's diaries have frequent entries relating to his mill, damage and repairs to the sails and purchase of millstones.

A mound at the south end of a low ridge in Ince Blundell park may mark the site of the medieval windmill. This mill stood in the townfield (Lancs RO DDM 14/9) and aerial photography has shown that strip fields ran eastwards from the ridge. This ridge, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was tree-covered and known as Millhouse Clump (Ordnance Survey six

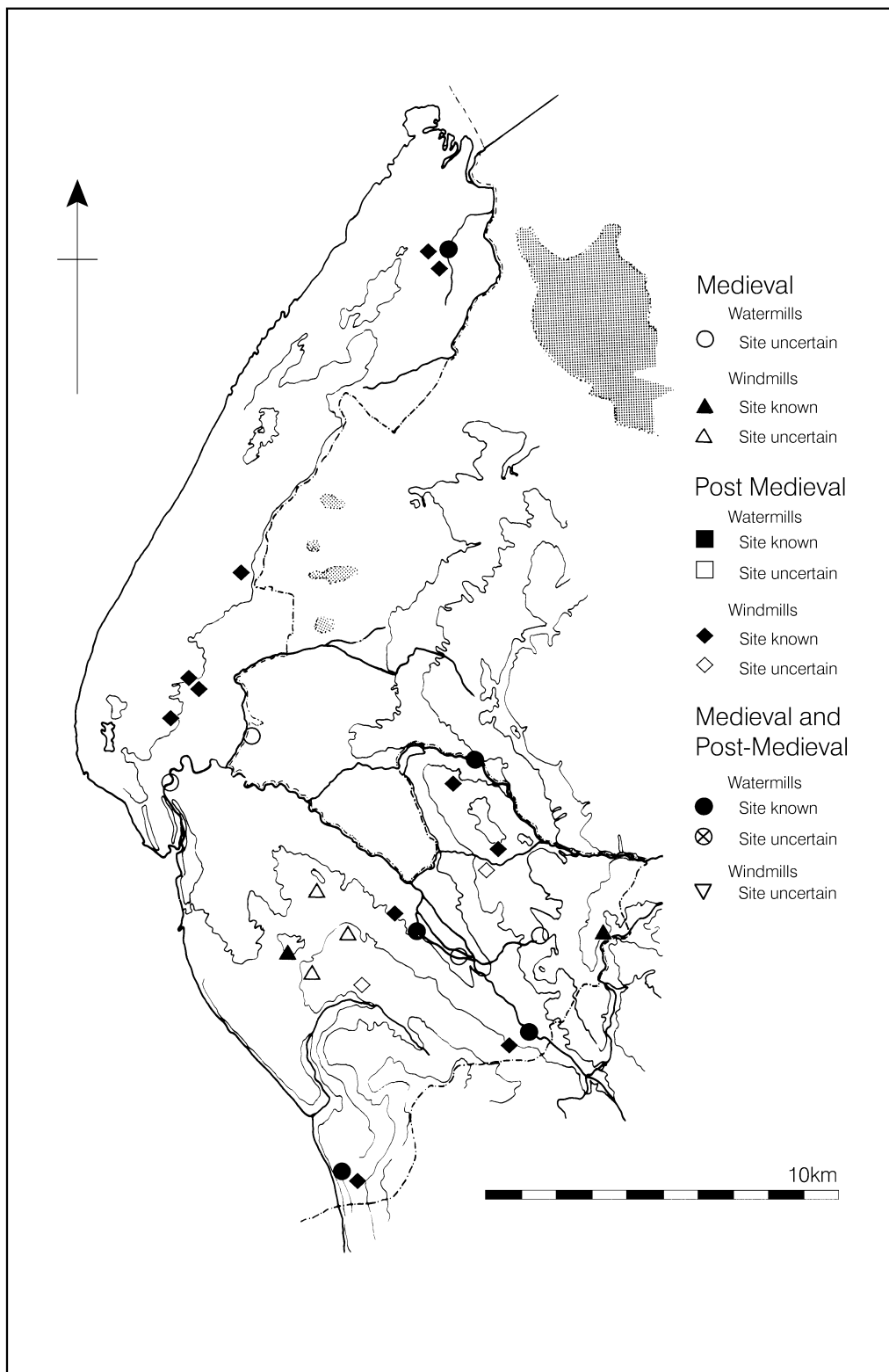


Fig. 1.31 Watermills and Windmills  
Shading indicates areas of standing water in the 18th and 19th centuries

inch Sheet 91, 1849). From c.1270 we have a description of 'all that plot of land upon which the said Windmill is situated, and also with the liberty of digging and taking each around the site of the said Mill for elevating or raising it just as may be necessary ..... And also one plot of land upon which is situated a very large Outbuilding where the said William and his men have been wont to sift (corn) in the Wind' (Morton, 1928, 9, unpub.). Field-walking on the western slope of the ridge produced a concentration of late 16<sup>th</sup>- to the 18<sup>th</sup> -

raised on the mound, probably towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Hussey 1958, 876).

Two windmill sites are assumed in Sefton township. One stood on the north side of the road between Sefton church and Lunt (Lancs RO DDM 14/47; Yates, 1786; fig. 1.20). The second is inferred from field name evidence for Millfield at Tan House Farm at Windles Green (Lancs RO DDM 14/47). The reason for the name 'Tan House' has not been established and there is no obvious evidence for

tanning in this part of the township (or indeed elsewhere in the district until the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Litherland tannery was set up on the Leeds to Liverpool canal). No firm documentary evidence for a mill at this site has been found though, in 1338, reference was made to land in Thornton 'in exchange for three acres on the *Egge* lying by the grantors Windmill' (Williams, 1947, 103). There is a strong suspicion that Edge estate included a larger area than the immediate vicinity of Edge Farm. It seems likely that the boundary was blurred between the estate and Thornton where the Molyneux family held two-thirds of the township under different tenures. Perhaps evidence for the mill is, in fact, captured within the name Windles Green<sup>48</sup>.

East of the Alt, at about the highest elevation in Melling, Mill Hey appears on a plan in 1769 (Lancs RO DDM 14/44). In 1524 Robert Tatlock and his son John sold a mill in Melling to Sir William Molyneux of Sefton (Farrer and Brownbill 3,

1907, 213, n. 17) and it was later leased back to the Tatlocks. The site of a building has been identified at Holmes' Tenement occupied by John Holme until his death in 1612. His will included 'one ould Mylne stone' and 'ymplemts belonginge to the Mylne' (Lancs RO WCW John Holme, 1612). Though field walking has produced a single sherd

	<i>water mills</i>	<i>windmills</i>	<i>other mills</i>	<i>earliest known date</i>	<i>medieval ownership</i>
North Meols	*			1549-50	
		*		1549-50	
		*		1683	
Birkdale			walkmill	1644	
		post mill		c. 1750	
Ainsdale		tower mill		1786	
Formby	*			pre 1557-1558	
		post mill		pre 1557-1558	
		post mill		pre 1557-1558	
		*		1786	
		tower mill		1786	
			steam mill	pre 1848	
Ravenmeols	*			1205-1211	thirds
Ince Blundell		*		c. 1270	
Little Crosby		*		1311	
			horsemill	17C	
Great Crosby		tower mill		c. 1290	moiety
Bootle	*			1254	sixths
Thornton		*		1296	
Sefton and Netherton	*			1318	
Sefton		*		1338	
Lunt		*		1786	
Aintree	*			1296	quarters
		*		1786	
Lydiate		*		1637	
		tower mill		1786	
Lydiate/ Eggargate	*			1276	half
Melling		*		1541	

**Table 1.15: Summary of mills**

(for dates see the relevant manorial histories in *Farrer and Brownbill* 3, 1907; Harrop, 1985; Kelly, 1973; Molyneux MSS at Lancs RO DDM 14 *passim*; Tyrer, 1968, 1970, 1972; Williams, 1947; Yates, 1786)

century pottery and bottle glass. There can be little doubt that such material represents good evidence for a building though none is shown on contemporary estate plans. There were two 'myllnestones on the hill' in 1688 (Lancs RO WCW Henry Blundell 1688) but the site was probably abandoned in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the park was expanded. The tithe barn, which may have been the building referred to in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, probably stood east of the mound; it also was removed and by 1769 had been rebuilt north of Lady Green (Lancs RO DDM 14/31). A brick and sandstone folly was

<sup>48</sup> A meaning of 'windy hill' is given to Windle in St Helens district (Ekwall, 1922, 109). Though exposed at the head of the Rimrose Valley, the site at Windles Green is flat.

of medieval pottery, and a more extensive spread of early 16<sup>th</sup>-century and later pottery, there are no other visible remains. Between Lydiate Hall and Eggargate is a mound on which the mill stood in 1786; a second mill is a brick-built tower at the toll bar on the Turnpike Road as it ran through Lydiate from Liverpool to Ormskirk (Yates, 1786).

### Rural produce

The emphasis of local agriculture on a mixed farming economy is hinted at in the late 12-14<sup>th</sup> centuries (table 1.14) and seen more clearly in post-medieval documents where inventories tell of livestock, crops and farm implements. With references to 'goorhouses', salting of meat, cheese-presses and butter-making equipment it seems that both beef and dairy farming were important. In addition to cattle, there were sheep, pigs and poultry 'of all sorts'. Implements were sometimes listed in great detail and included carts and wheels in addition to spades, forks and implements for tilling the land.

The importance of the mossland and mere resource to the local economy in the 17<sup>th</sup> century has been considered (Coney 1992). Eels, roach, pike, bream and perch came from Martin Mere and, no doubt, from the other smaller meres; wildfowl produced meat, eggs and, probably, feathers. Reeds were harvested for thatch; rushes and willows were used for making baskets and mats. And, of course, fuel was provided by the peat.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century sheep farming seems to have been an important aspect of the economy of North Meols (Lumby, 1936, 234). There would have been plenty of opportunities for grazing on the fringes of the mosslands and in the dune areas. In the other coastal townships there is evidence for both arable and pastoral farming in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. In addition to oxen and cows, the monastic grants included the right to graze mares, sheep and pigs at Ainsdale and Ravenmeols (Cunliffe Shaw, 1956, 402). This suggests that the agricultural economy was involved in all aspects of farming at this time and, particularly in Ravenmeols, included breeding. At Ince Blundell an undated medieval deed included common of pasture for 60 sheep in addition to six oxen, eight cows and two horses (Lancs RO DDIn 53/2). An exchange of land in 1240-41 between Richard Blundell and the monks of Whalley stipulated that the residue of the marsh between Ince and Scholes (perhaps located near Alt Grange) was to remain untilled for ever as common pasture (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 79).

Evidence for pastoral farming in the medieval period has been less forthcoming for other

townships south of the Alt. In Sefton township, for example, preliminary examination of the written sources has failed to produce any reference to rights of pasture. By contrast, east of the Alt we find associated with a 12<sup>th</sup>-century grant of land in the Lydiate's Townfield the right to common of pasture for 20 cows and their offspring of two years, and oxen for tilling the land, as well as pannage for 20 pigs. Grants of land elsewhere in Lydiate permitted sheep and goats *ad lib*, and mares with their offspring (Cunliffe Shaw, 1956, 402-403). In Melling, frequent reference was made to pannage (Farrer, ed., 1900, 531-540) indicating woodland survival at least until the latter years of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Arable crops included wheat, barley and oats, and flax and hemp were also grown. Hay was grown in the common meadows which often lay on the banks of streams and rivers where, no doubt, the land was regularly improved by water-borne mineral deposits at times of flooding. The meadows were divided into doles and closed in early spring (Youd, 1962, 28). In 1687, 36 acres of Sefton manor's demesne was put down to hay and, in the same year, 24 acres of hay was cut by Sefton tenants in Lunt, Netherton, Thornton, Litherland, Orrell and Ford (Lancs RO DDM 11/25). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, most of Altcar's c.300 acres were common meadow and Showrick, a 97-acre field in Altcar, was farmed by tenants of Sefton manor (Lancs RO DDM 14/21).

Some indication of the rural economy in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century can also be glimpsed from records of Papists' Estates (France, 1960, 68, 103-6; table 1.16). In Melling, the tenants of Robert Molyneux of Mossborough in Rainford, performed boons which included shearing corn, haymaking, manuring with marl or dung and keeping a beagle. Also from Melling, Sir William Molyneux required his tenants to provide turf whereas those in Lydiate and Maghull produced charcoal (France, 1945, 153-5, 160-162) indicating the survival of woodland and its management.

Flax appears occasionally in the documentary sources. Formby's Flaxfields lay on the edge of the moss and, possibly, the crop was retted at a place called Scotch Lake (Lancs RO DDFo 34/6). More extensive flax growing is, perhaps, suggested at Linacre (Bootle) where the name applied to one

ploughland granted to the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Farrer and Brownbill (eds.) 1907, 33). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century flax was grown on Nicholas Blundell's marled land in the Little More-Hey, a field south-east of Crosby Hall (Tyrer, 1968, 1970, 1972, *passim*). It was 'layed to Reet' in the Cross Field Pit, dried at the Oat 'kill'<sup>49</sup> and also processed and woven in Little Crosby (Tyrer, 1968, 63, 145; 1970, 105, 125). With standing water on the mosslands and in worked-out marl pits, it seems that there was little need for the more formal mechanics of retting pools such as those found elsewhere in Lancashire (Higham, 1989).

going for several days but it seems the yarn may have been bought after it had been processed and a distinction was made between flax for sheets and hemp yarn for servants' sheets (Tyrer, 1970, 11, 222, 227). Many probate inventories included a spinning-wheel or 'sitting-wheel' together with quantities of wool and linen yarn (e.g. Lancs RO WCW Edward Ireland of Lidyate, 1637); other documents hint at the processes of textile production (Tyrer, 1970, 7, 39). However, since evidence for looms is elusive, perhaps the yarn was spun in many households throughout the district and sent to Liverpool (if not elsewhere) for dyeing and

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
ploughing	M/S	M/S	M/S T	M/S	M/S	M/S	M/S				M/S	M/S	M/S	M/S
harrowing/weeding											M/S			
hay making					M/S		M/S		M/R	M/R	M/S		M/S	M/S
mowing													M/S	
shearing corn			S T G						M/R	M/R				
carrying dung/marl			T						M/R	M/R				
carrying slates							M/S							M/S
charcoal								M/S	M/S					
'mosse'									M/S					
carrying/'casting' turf	M/S						M/S		M/R	M/S	M/S	M/S	M/S	M/S
rent hen and/or capons	M/S	M/S	M/S	M/S G	M/S	M/S	M/S		M/R	M/S	M/S		M/S	M/S
keeping a dog				B					M/R	M/R		T		

**Table 1.16:** Summary of boons and services, 1717 (France, ed., 1945, 136-142, 151-152, 160-162; 1960) due to M/S: Molyneux of Sefton; M/R: Molyneux of Rainford; B: Browne; G: Gore; S: Syers; T: Tristram

**Key:** 1: Aintree; 2: Ford; 3: Great Crosby; 4: Ince Blundell; 5: Litherland; 6: Little Crosby; 7: Lunt; 8: Lydiate; 9: Maghull; 10: Mellington; 11: Netherton; 12: Orrell; 13: Sefton; 14: Thornton

With the exception of Linacre in Bootle, field names are disappointingly silent about places for tentering or fulling - but could Birkdale's 17<sup>th</sup>-century walkmill (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 238, n.1) have been associated with the process?

Occasional references are made to hemp. A hempyard appears in documents for Formby in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century (Lancs RO DDFo 14/7). Reference to a hempyard is also found in Litherland in 1662 when sale of a property involved not only the written legal process but also the formal act of delivery of seisin. The vendor 'in his own proper person did go into the hempyard and did there cast up a sod of earth, and then did likewise take some thatch with some of the dust or clay which was part of the wall of the house, and did all the same deliver as seisin' (Farrer and Brownbill 3, 1907, 97, n.8). Other references to hemp come from Little Crosby where Nicholas Blundell paid for spinning, twisting and knitting an eel net. His wife had five wheels

weaving into cloth and then returned to be made up (Tyrer, 1968, 171, 182, 192, 213, 305).

### Conclusions

This study of Sefton's rural fringes has considered the archaeological potential for the district against a background of the local topography. It has also attempted to consolidate the historical sources insofar as they may inform on the district's archaeology of the post-Roman period.

The tantalising likelihood that archaeological material survives in buried soils beneath the coastal dunes is tempered by the fact that, since the arrival of the railway from Waterloo (Litherland) to Southport in 1848, urban development has spilled out both towards the sea and inland to the very edges of the mosslands. All the same, careful and sustained investigations of the mosslands at Little Crosby and Ince Blundell - and fortuitous recognition of early human activity on the shore itself - has shown the potential for the prehistoric period, not only of archaeological material but also

<sup>49</sup> Perhaps the Oat Croft just north of Crosby Hall.

for understanding the early environment (Cowell and Innes, 1994, 71-110). There are occasional suggestions of settlement *foci* in the post-Roman period but merely a hint of medieval survival in the fabric of isolated farmsteads.

By comparison with other parts of England the district probably never achieved great prosperity but neither, perhaps, did it endure great poverty. Life may have been simple and, for the majority, may not have risen above subsistence level but the local community could draw on a varied resource. Though we hear of a market at North Meols in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century and are aware of fisheries that, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, attracted buyers from as far afield as Gawthorpe in the Ribble Valley or Smithills, near Bolton (Harland, 1856, 105), the nearest markets were at Ormskirk and Liverpool. The former, across the mosses, would have been almost inaccessible especially in winter, except to those living east of the Alt. Liverpool, was within reasonable travelling distance for those who lived south and east of the Alt<sup>50</sup>. With the growth of Liverpool and arrival of the Leeds and Liverpool canal there developed the means of transporting goods over greater distances and a system of two-way traffic developed (Coney, 1995). Nightsoil was brought out to improve the fields and local produce was carried from the rural areas to the markets. Until such improvements, however, it seems likely that, to a very considerable extent, the community relied upon its own resources as a response to the district's topographical isolation.

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<sup>50</sup> It is usually considered that the catchment area of a market is likely to be 3-7 km - about 10 km between markets. A radius of about 6.5 km around each market is about the optimum (Hodder and Orton, 1979, 57-58).

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**Abbreviations**

Chet Soc	Chetham Society
DoE	Department of the Environment Schedule of Listed Buildings
Lancs RO	Lancashire Record Office, Preston
Liv RO	Liverpool Record Office
PRO	Public Record Office, London
Rec Soc Lancs Ches	Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire
THSLC	Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire
TLCAS	Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society
VCH	Victoria History of the Counties of England