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# Wirral Rural Fringes Survey

**GILL CHITTY**

This paper has been abstracted from a report written for the Department of the Environment (Ancient Monuments) and the Merseyside County Council Planning Department as part of a commission to the Archaeological Survey of Merseyside 'to review the collected evidence for sites in Merseyside's rural fringes and carry out field survey and assessments for such sites'. Wirral Metropolitan District was selected for study in the first year of this project from May 1978.

## Introduction

The basic unit of landscape and settlement study chosen for the survey is the 19th century township (see Figure 1; boundaries taken from mid 19th century tithe maps) as this represents an historically meaningful, and often ancient, division of the land which precedes the changes in local government boundaries of the later 19th and 20th centuries. The early 19th century township is the final expression, in an area still totally rural, of the slowly evolved unit of agricultural territory surrounding each individual settlement. For each township information relating to landscape and settlement history up to about 1750 has been recorded.

Fieldwork combined with documentary research has increased the number of sites on record for Wirral to about 1300, of which about 1100 were visited and recorded during the survey. Approximately double this number of sites is known to have existed but many of them cannot be accurately plotted out as their precise location was not identified in the field. These unlocated sites form a 'dead file' which accompanies each township record and which will provide a fruitful source for future field and documentary work.

The general discussion which follows draws together the themes and characteristics of the area's archaeology within the limitations of our present knowledge. No attempt has been made to describe or list all known sites in detail and, apart from exceptional cases, references to specific sites are made only by way of example. Some key published sources have been referred to in the text, but detailed bibliographies for every site and find are too lengthy to include here. Full records for all sites exist in the Archaeological Survey of Merseyside with comprehensive indexes to all publications, maps and documentary sources. These can be consulted at Merseyside County Museums, by arrangement.

## The Prehistoric Period

The distribution of known prehistoric sites and finds on Wirral is shown in Figure 2. It represents a thin scatter of chance finds made largely during the 19th century. The distribution, particularly of the few sites which may indicate some type of occupation as opposed to casual losses, shows a marked coastal preference. The boulder clays have produced only a small number of stone axes and single flint finds in contrast to the sandstone ridges and littoral areas. These sites have one factor in common: almost without exception they are the subject of severe erosion, either coastal or hill top, suffering from loss of sand and soil cover. This suggests two possible explanations. First, that there was a preference for the thin soils and open aspect of the coastal and highland locations as opposed to the heavily wooded clay lands. Second, the identification of sites in these areas may be a function of the natural process of erosion which has not operated in other areas where prehistoric sites still remain covered by alluvium and drift. It has been suggested that apart from the well drained higher land Wirral would have presented a wet, heavily forested and inhospitable aspect over much of its area in the prehistoric period. Such statements, however, have hitherto been based on supposition rather than environmental evidence.

The forest peat beds of the north Wirral coast, although much eroded, are potentially an important source of environmental evidence for the exploitation of the extensive coastal woodlands, marshes and fresh water lagoons by Mesolithic and later populations. In other areas it has been well demonstrated that such situations on the edge of several ecosystems were most attractive in allowing the exploitation of several different sources of food and materials. At this stage the evidence for the effect of Mesolithic activity on the vegetational cover is not clear. Mr R Kenna's work on the environmental history of the north Wirral coastal area has shown some evidence for the activity of man there in the Neolithic period (c. 5000 BP). Also his work on the early drainage pattern of the coastal plain and the local effects of coastal change has contributed much to an understanding of the nature of the prehistoric landscape in this area (see p.27 for detailed discussion). Dr Tooley's work on the complex sequence of sea-level change in the north west (Tooley 1976) has provided a general picture for the area but, apart from Mr Kenna's research, the local effects of these changes, and the mechanisms of coastal erosion and deposition which have affected the Dee and Mersey estuaries, are still not fully appreciated. The present understanding of the undocumented early periods is unlikely to alter significantly until this kind of study in the post glacial environment has been followed further. It may then be possible to predict to some extent where prehistoric settlement is likely to have taken place.

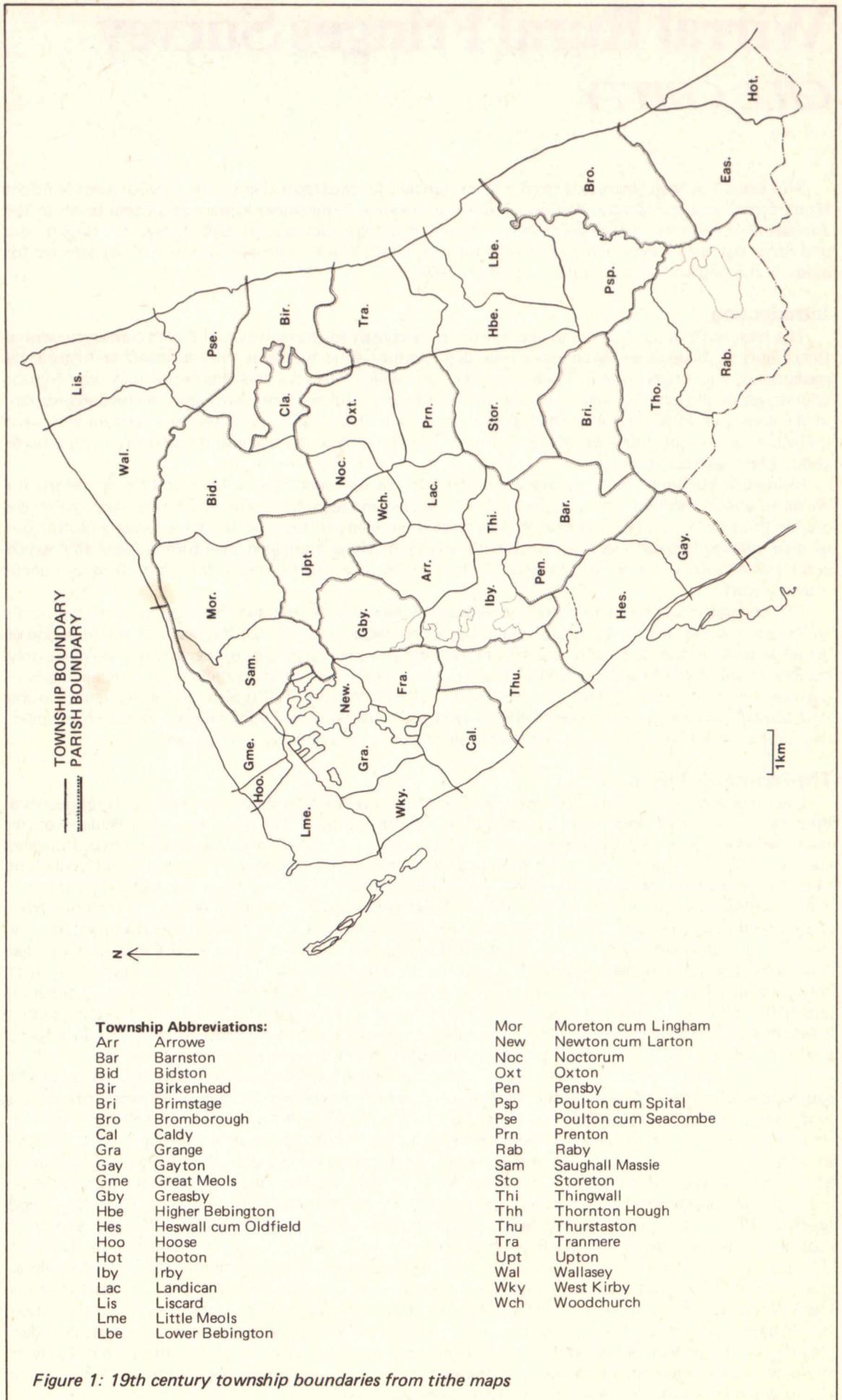
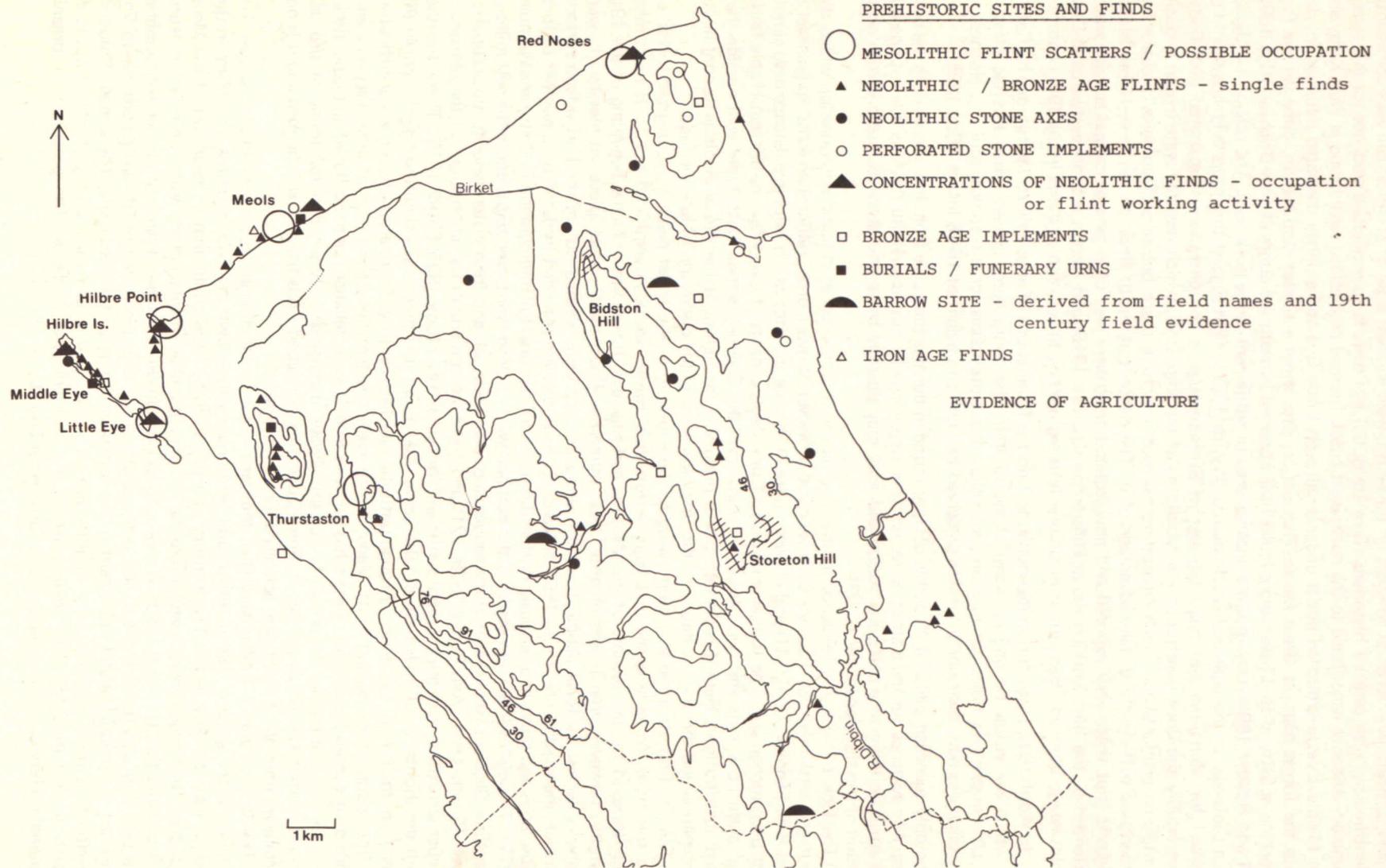


Figure 1: 19th century township boundaries from tithe maps

Figure 2: Distribution of Prehistoric sites and finds



Whilst there is environmental evidence for prehistoric agricultural activity, the archaeological evidence is slight, and this is not surprising in an area which has been subject to continuous and relatively intensive arable cultivation. A series of lynchets on the south, west and east sides of Storeton Hill were confidently identified by 19th century historians (Cox 1898, 52) but there is no conclusive evidence for this today. Funerary evidence is confined to the north west coast. Inurned cremations were found at West Kirby and on Middle Eye, a crouched burial under a cairn on Little Eye and a partly cremated inhumation, dug into the forest peat, at Great Meols. Occupation sites show a similar distribution, although the flint working activity at Red Noses and circular huts observed beneath the dunes at New Brighton (Cox 1895, 44 and Roeder 1898) may indicate another area of settlement in the north east. The role of the Mersey as a routeway in the later prehistoric period (Wynne 1959) might suggest that more evidence should be looked for along the east coast (eg east of Bromborough, a concentration of scattered flint finds). Regrettably the dock construction and building of the ship canal, which revealed waterlogged deposits containing artefacts and much environmental evidence, took place before archaeological practice had progressed sufficiently to take advantage of it. The concentrations of finds on the three Hilbre islands suggests that these very exposed and now isolated areas were part of a zone of coastal activity which extended to the flint working site at Hilbre Point (Glenn 1915) and along the shore eastwards to Dove Point where there are descriptions of circular huts exposed by the erosion of dunes in the 19th century:

'In April 1892 I was fortunate enough to find the foundations of another circular hut, one half of which was visible beyond the scarp of the sandhill. The stones were partially rough, but had a few pick marks and holes cut in them, in which to set the stakes for the conical roof . . . all these residences have their upright stakes preserved to a uniform height of 15-18 inches' (Cox 1895).

The only recorded piece of Neolithic pottery found in the area has come from this site, as does the only Iron Age evidence for the district. Since no finds were made in association with the huts it is not possible to attribute them to a particular period and they may possibly be as late as the Romano British occupation of the site (see below, p. ???).

The lack of Iron Age evidence in the area has been attributed to climatic deterioration which discouraged settlement. Dr Tooley's sea-level curve, however, shows a drop, rather than a rise, in sea-level at this time (Tooley 1976, 141) and it seems more likely that the sites which were in existence have simply not been recognised. The Iron Age evidence from Meols consists of a very few, rather remarkable finds: two swan neck pins and two base silver coins from the Channel Islands, both types well outside their usual distributions. Here it is perhaps worth discussing the nature of the site at Meols as its continuous occupation and the unusual nature of the finds will recur in the discussion of later periods.

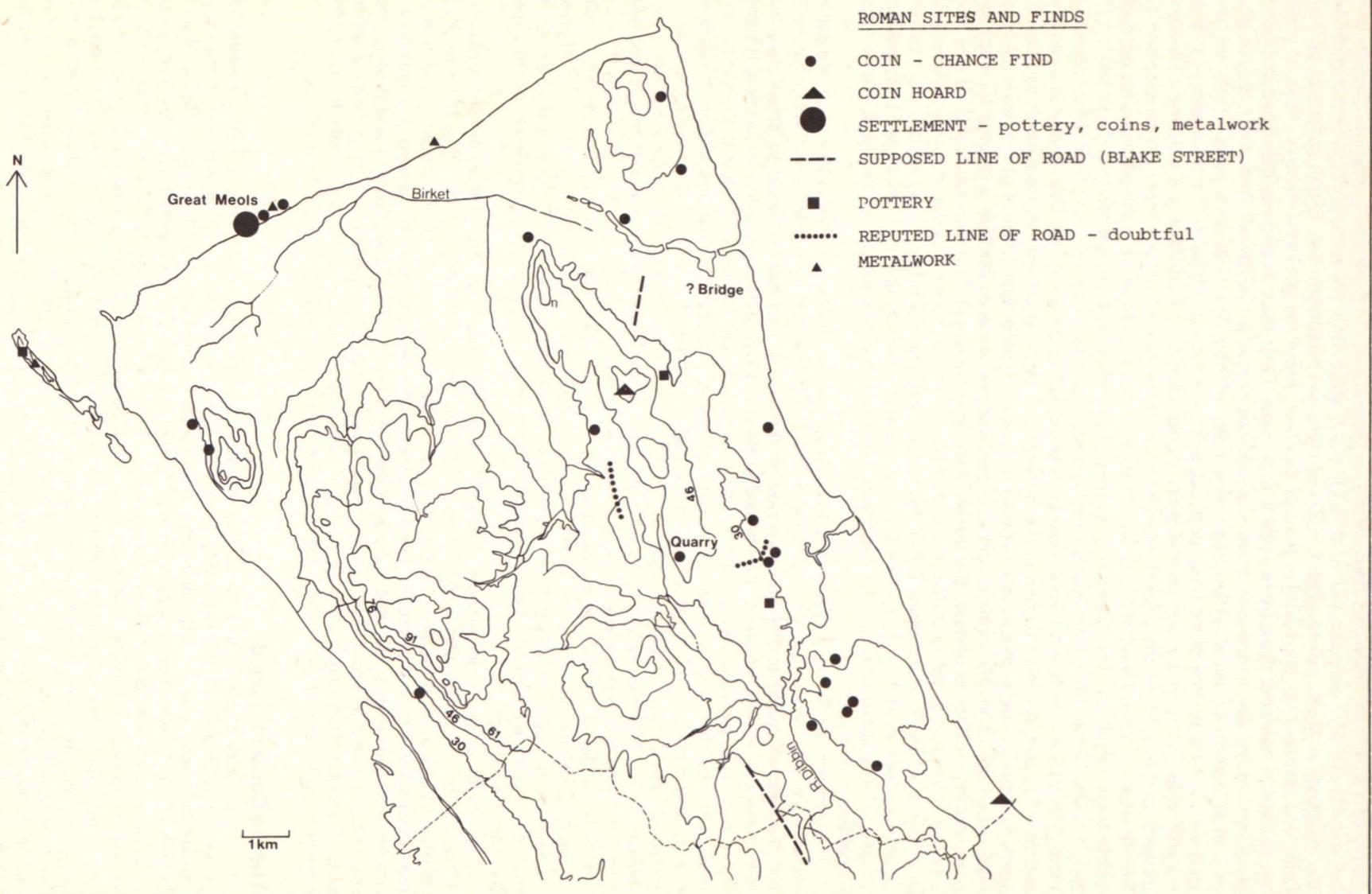
The site first attracted attention owing to the exposure of the forest peats or 'submerged forest' on the foreshore. As early as the mid 16th century this 'waste' was being exploited as a source of timber and firewood by the tenants of the Mostyns and Stanleys. It was not until the beginning of the 19th century, however, that it was recorded that numerous finds, mainly small pieces of metalwork, were being collected by local people from the shore as they were washed out of the buried land surfaces beneath the sand dunes. From 1850 onwards these finds were recorded in detail by a number of local antiquaries and published variously during the next half century (full bibliography in Chitty and Warhurst 1977). The discoveries were made to the east and west of Dove Point over about one and a half miles of coastline. Sections were drawn of the sequence of peat beds, salt and fresh water deposits and occupation levels (Smith 1864, 204; Potter 1876, 121) and there are contemporary descriptions of the remains of timber structures, cart tracks, rubbish pits and industrial waste (Cox 1895; Potter 1876). These, together with the thousands of finds from the site, leave little doubt that there was a significant settlement in this area from the prehistoric period through until the late 14th century. There are, however, some difficulties in interpreting the site and finds. Many objects were misidentified at the time of their discovery and, since only a small proportion of these has survived in museums, reliance has to be placed on the published illustrations. Contemporary accounts do not always distinguish between material found *in situ* and objects washed out on to the beach. Some collectors purchased finds from local fishermen and it is not certain whether all of these were actually found on the site.

The lack of a good understanding of the pattern of coastal change has been referred to above. The advance of the sea and loss of agricultural land under wind-blown sand was a source of concern in this area at least as early as the 17th century and there can be little doubt that a major part of the Meols settlement had been eroded away before the building of embankments and sea-walls in the 19th century. It is possible that part of the eroded area still lies beneath the redeposited sands of the present foreshore and probably also beneath the dunes to the south of the embankment. Here it may be possible to find traces of the gradual inland movement of the settlement to its post medieval site. The spread of modern development now occupies much of this land but some open areas remain undisturbed and would be worth investigating for both environmental and archaeological evidence. The potential for organic material preserved in the waterlogged deposits is very good.

### **The Roman Period**

Because of the proximity of Wirral to Chester, local historians and archaeologists have always tended to suppose that the area should have been subject to considerable Romanizing influence. The evidence for this is not apparent. In Figure 3 the distribution of Roman sites and finds is shown. This consists

Figure 3: Distribution of Roman sites and finds



mainly of a scatter of single coin finds, largely on the east side of the peninsula, where two hoards (mid 3rd and 4th century) were also found, at Oxton and Hooton. Only one settlement can be recognised on the mainland, at Meols, where large numbers of coins and metalwork were found to the east of Dove Point and scattered up the coastline towards Leasowe. From the published material, little of which has survived in museums, there are two points to be made. First, the coin evidence indicates a continuous occupation of the site, and second, there is an absence of military metalwork from which the presence of a small outpost or signal station might have been inferred. The finds were made largely on (and apparently in) the surface of the forest peat, exposed some distance offshore. The occurrence of Roman material redeposited so far out on the shore would seem to indicate that the settlement lay some distance to the north of the present coastline. Comparatively little pottery, normally so abundant on Roman sites, has been found at Meols, and its absence here and elsewhere in the peninsula has not been satisfactorily explained. The presence of pottery from Newstead's excavations (Newstead 1927, 137) and of other Roman finds from Hilbre Island suggest that there might also have been some occupation there. The sites at Meols and Hilbre could both be related to the use of the Dee estuary as a route to and from Chester. A similar pattern in the chronological distribution of coins from Meols and Chester seems to show a close economic link between the two. The deep water channel of the Hoyle Lake was made much use of in the medieval and post medieval periods as an offshore anchorage for ships and boats waiting on tides to navigate the Dee and Mersey estuaries and the coastal sand banks. It may have served this function in earlier periods but it is an assumption to imagine that the channel was necessarily in existence in the Roman period. Today, the Hoyle Lake is rapidly silting up and the continual shifting of offshore material at the mouth of the Dee (and Mersey) is well documented. Once again it is necessary to gain a fuller appreciation of the patterns of coastal change to understand how viable it is to make suggestions of this kind.

The evidence for Roman roads in Wirral is well summarised by Mr K Jermy (1960, 1-13). No dating evidence has been found associated with the sections of road which have been identified (see Figure 3) and they are attributed to the Roman period on the basis of medieval references to 'street' field and lane names and on the character of the cobbled surfaces and kerb stones revealed by excavation. It seems likely that some land route, as well as a coastal one, would have connected Meols with Chester but the route taken by the sections of road identified appears to indicate a different destination. It has been suggested that the object in view was a bridge crossing the Wallasey Pool. The remains of a substantial timber structure were uncovered there in the 19th century during excavations for a railway bridge (Massie 1857). No dating evidence was associated with it and it seems more probable that it should be connected with the medieval watermill of Birkenhead Priory which was located in this area. If it can be assumed that during the Roman period Wallasey Pool was a tidal inlet of similar proportions to that shown on post medieval maps, then there must have been good reason for the need to cross it. There is no evidence, however, to suggest Roman settlement or occupation on the other side of the Pool nor is there evidence on the opposite shore of the Mersey to suggest that the road may have led to a ford across the river this far north.

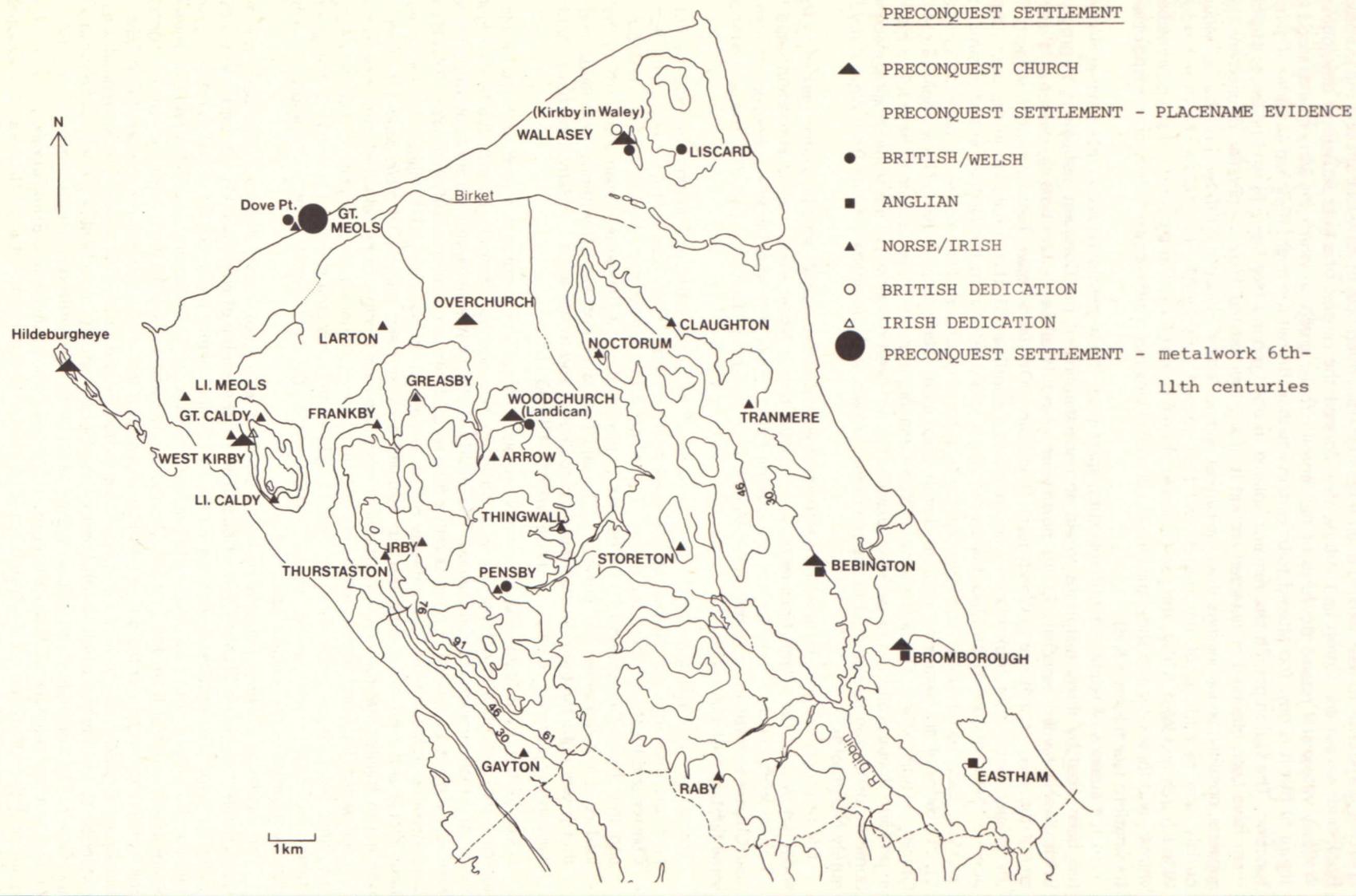
The possibility of a more westerly road to Meols was considered by 19th century historians (Watkin 1886, 57) but has been dismissed in later studies on the grounds of poor evidence. More recently research and excavation by Mr P France (1964-6) has led to the tentative identification of a section of road in Greasby as part of this route. The difficulty of dating roads of this type remains. The network of official, well constructed, metalled highways does not appear to extend over this area, and there is little reason to suppose that a rural lane of Roman date should be distinguishable from latter, or indeed earlier, ones. The assumption that a road with paving or kerb stones is necessarily Roman in date, has led to the misnaming of lanes, such as Roman Road in Storeton, which are almost certainly medieval.

### **The Pre Conquest Period**

From the very sparse picture for the prehistoric and Roman periods, a greatly contrasting pattern of settlement is evident at the Domesday Survey of 1086. At this period Wirral was one of the most densely populated areas of Cheshire. More than twenty manors occupied the area (see figure 5) and, excluding Earl Edwin's large coastal manor of Eastham, the pre Conquest pattern is predominantly one of small compact manors worked as single holdings of one thegn. Occasionally there are multiple holdings within one manor, eg Prenton, Barnston. Each one is based upon a small agricultural unit, or units, of one to five plough teams. Whether these represent small villages, hamlets or single farms is not clear, but the overall picture is one of a well-populated landscape with a relatively even spread of settlement. It is fair to assume that this pattern had its origins in some centuries of development before the 11th century and, by studying the late Mercian settlement of the area, it is possible to make tentative retrospective judgements about earlier pre Conquest occupation.

It is possible to demonstrate the pre Conquest origins of medieval settlement archaeologically in only a few cases, but all these appear to show a continuity of activity on the same site. In figure 4 the pre Conquest evidence, including place names, is shown. At Meols, once again, there is metalwork from the sub Roman period and the late Anglian settlement of the area in the 7th century (Bu'lock 1972, 20). On Hilbre Island the English settlement is represented by some finds of beads and the dedication of the isolated cell to St Hildeburga. An early foundation has also been attributed to Wallasey church on the basis of its dedication to St Hilary. For the 8th, 9th and 10th centuries, apart from the Meols site which

Figure 4: Distribution of Pre-Conquest sites and finds



has a wealth of metalwork and coins, evidence is restricted to fragments of sculptured crosses and grave monuments, notably the Aethelmund runic inscription from Upton, the 10th century hogback stone from West Kirby and fragments from Hilbre, Woodchurch, Bromborough and Wallasey. Pre Conquest churches are known to have existed at all these sites from references in early charters and the Domesday Book and, except for Upton and Hilbre, they formed the centres of a later settlement development. Wallasey village still retains the form of the central circular green on which the early church stood (see figure 5) but it is now too altered to be certain whether this hill top might have had an earlier defensive function. The Upton church site remains isolated in open ground (see figure 6), and no traces of settlement have been observed or detected around it, if any ever existed. Here the circular, ditched enclosure suggests, possibly, an earlier date than the earliest archaeological evidence (10th century), but subsequent burials, and rebuildings of the church will have caused considerable disturbance. At Bromborough, Woodchurch and West Kirby, the pre Conquest church sites still exist in the centre of the post medieval villages, and these sites also show the circular or oval enclosures which appear to be characteristic of early foundations (see figures 5 & 6).

In the absence of readily identifiable sites, apart from those mentioned above, place name evidence has been used by many historians to aid an understanding of pre Conquest settlement. A group of British/Welsh names, especially in the north east 'island' (Wallasey — OE *wala-eg*, Welshmen's island) and at the early church site in Woodchurch (Landican — OW *lann-Tegan*, Tegan's church), suggests that the Anglian settlement took place in an area with a significant British population in the post Roman period. There are no Anglian place names showing primary settlement but Bebington and Eastham are relatively early name forms. The large number of secondary English place names in the area (Barnston, Upton, Bidston) are frequently combined with place name elements of Hiberno-Norse origin (Storeton, Greasby, Thurstaston). The settlement of Norse immigrants from Ireland seems to have left a marked impression linguistically but as yet their presence has not been recognised in the archaeological evidence. Some influence can be detected in the sculptured crosses, and the hogback stone from West Kirby is a purely Norse form.

The historical evidence for the Norse settlement is confined to a single specific source, part of an Irish annal known as *The Three Fragments*, which states that a Norse leader named Hingamund and his followers were expelled from Ireland and, having failed to gain a foothold in Wales, were granted lands, near Chester to settle in by Aethelfled of Mercia. This implies a peaceful occupation of the area although some fighting took place later:

'Hingamund was asking lands of the queen in which he would settle, and on which he would build huts and dwellings, for he was at this time weary of war. Then Edelfrida gave him lands near Chester and he stayed there for a time. The result of this was when he saw the city full of wealth and the choice land around it, he desired to possess them. Afterwards Hingamund came to the leaders of the Norsemen and Danes; . . . he said they were not well off without good lands, and that it was right for them all to come to seize Chester and to possess it . . . Many great battles and wars arose on account of this . . .' (Wainwright 1975, 80-1).

A concentration of Norse and Hiberno-Norse place names in the north and west of Wirral seems to indicate that the planted colony was at its strongest here and this corresponds with the lack of 'good lands' of which Hingamund complained. The mixing of place name elements referred to above, however, probably indicates a mixing of peoples rather than an exclusive occupation of different areas. This is well demonstrated at Meols where an originally British settlement shows evidence of Anglian occupation with later Norse and Irish metalwork and has assumed a Norse place name (ON *melr*, sandhill). There is nothing to suggest that the existing settlement was taken over forcibly or exclusively for the newcomers. A much wider Norse and Irish influence is shown in minor place names, fields (eg breck, thwaite, car, gil) and lanes (eg rake), but the value of these to define the Norse area is debatable owing to the general currency of Scandinavian words eventually adopted into the local dialect. They are widespread in what may be regarded as the Anglian east coast areas.

The incidence of Norse personal names in the Domesday Book record shows a similar pattern to the place names (see figure 7), both in distribution and in the mixing of Norse and English lords even within a single manor. The notable exceptions are the two English named lords, Leofnoth and Earl Edwin, who together hold the entire coast line of the peninsula. This could be interpreted as a deliberate exclusion of Scandinavian control from the Dee and Mersey estuaries and a link with the Danish and Norse settlers in the north. In this context the position of Bromborough is important. It formed the head of Earl Edwin's manor of Eastham which, although rather fragmented by the time of Domesday, must originally have extended to include the whole south coast of the Mersey estuary from Wallasey Pool to the mouth of the Gowy. The north Mercian frontier, strengthened by the Aethelflaedan burghs of the 10th century, is known to have extended as far as Runcorn. The place name evidence (OE *Bruna-burgh*, Bruna's stronghold) and the identification of Bromborough with the 10th century battle of Brunanburgh (Dodgson 1972, 238) suggest that the manor of Eastham might have formed an extension of the Mercian frontier along the Mersey (OE *Moeres'ea*, boundary river). This offers an explanation for the siting and strong defensive position of the large ditched site of Bromborough Court House (see figure 1, p.49). Although later in the medieval period it was used for a monastic manor house and grange, it is isolated from the village to the south and suggests the use of a pre-existing site (see Chitty *et al* 1979).

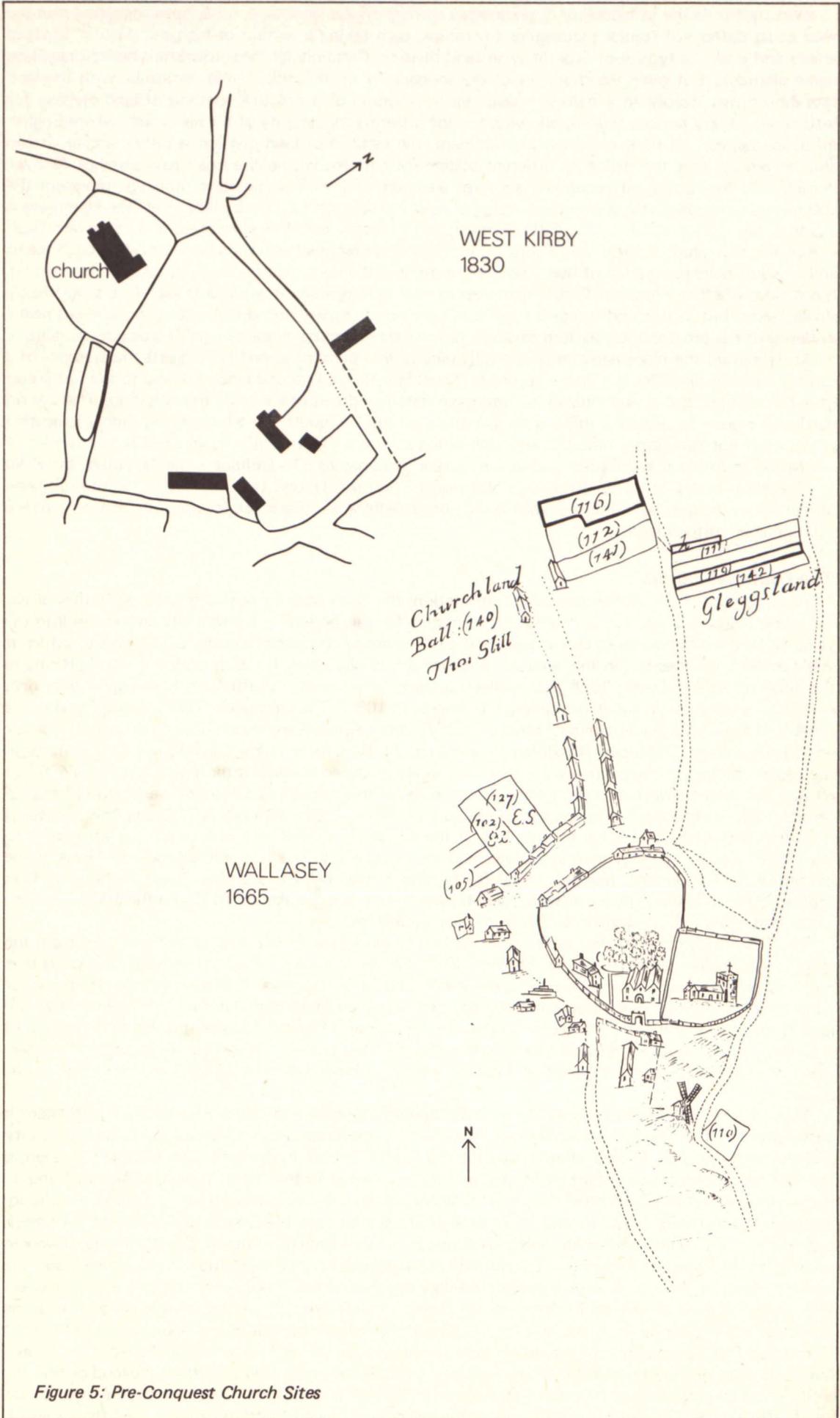


Figure 5: Pre-Conquest Church Sites

With regard to the influence of Scandinavian settlers on the landscape, it has been suggested that the west coast pattern of regular rectangular townships, each taking a section of highland pasture, lowland arable and coast, is typical of Scandinavian land division. Certainly all these townships bear Norse place name elements, but given the character of the topography on this side of the peninsula, with the land dropping down steeply to a narrow coastal strip, it would be a practical method of land division for settlement of any period. Indeed, allowing for the differing topography of the east coast, where English influence appears to have remained predominant, the method of land division is rather similar. It can also be argued that the strikingly different settlement patterns within the small townships of Arrowe, Pensby and Noctorum, all occupying spurs of elevated land with single farm holdings, represent the colonisation of previously unoccupied marginal land for pastoral farming by Norse settlers. Hargreave is a Domesday manor which by the 18th century, and probably earlier, was reduced to a single farmstead within the township of Raby (see figure 8). In 1086, it is described as having land for two plough teams and an adult male population of five. The pre Conquest lord, Osgot, bears a Norse name (ON *Asgautr*). It is not clear whether a nucleated settlement ever existed in Hargreave or whether it was always worked by single farms, but in this undeveloped rural area detailed air survey and documentary work might reveal evidence of the pre Conquest pattern of single farmsteads said to be characteristic of Norse settlement.

At Thingwall the place name evidence (ON *þing völr* – place of assembly) suggests the presence of a central meeting place for the Norse colonists. Cross Hill forms a natural landmark and to the south east of this, multiple banks and ditches of unknown date run down one side of the common. There is no particular reason to associate these with the supposed pre Conquest site which, being simply a meeting place, need not necessarily have left any archaeological trace. The tradition of an English counterpart of the Norse assembly may be preserved in the 'mutler' field names (OE *ge)mot* – meeting place and *lhaw* – (burial) mound) of South Brimstage and north Thornton Hough (see figure 10). No site has been identified on the ground in this area, but aerial photography may be a possible approach, as the fields are still open agricultural land.

### The Medieval Period

As a document for archaeological interpretation, the Domesday Survey is fraught with difficulties, but nonetheless it contains much unique information for this period. It is essentially an enquiry into the value of land for tax purposes and an assessment of the newly conquered kingdom. The basis on which it was carried out varies but in this area three values are usually given for each manor: a value TRE (ie in the time of King Edward, 1066 and earlier); a value 'afterwards' (ie after the harrying of the north c 1070); a value 'now' (ie at the time of the survey in 1086). The landowner TRE is usually given. It is notable that in 1086 the important manors of Edwin and Leofnoth are assumed by Earl Hugh of Chester and his lieutenant, Robert of Rhuddlan. The manors of the largely Norse named pre Conquest lords in the central section of the peninsula are those which are recorded as waste after the campaigns of 1070 to reduce the area to Norman rule. Eastham and many of the manors of Leofnoth were also reduced so severely that their value fell to less than three quarters of their estimated worth TRE and only recovered slowly to about half that value by the time of the survey. The harshness with which the area seems to have been treated suggests that there was a strong resistance to the Norman advance. In terms of the continuity of settlement, however, the effects cannot have been irreversible. Some manors, such as Storeton, had recovered in the fifteen years between their being waste in 1070 and the 1086 survey to the extent of having increased in worth from their value TRE.

The Domesday Book makes only one reference to woodland in the area, at Prenton, and from the absence of Anglian clearance names (Bu'lock 1972, 22 and Sylvester 1963) it has been concluded that much of the landscape was open heath and arable land by this period. If this is the case, it argues for considerable clearance in earlier periods by the prehistoric and later populations. The absence of woodland from the record is not, however, necessarily conclusive. Medieval documents refer to large areas of woodland (eg in Bidston and Wallasey) but the effect of the creation of a royal forest and the management of woodland during the medieval period may have been the cause of some regeneration of tree cover.

The documentary evidence available as an aid to understanding and identifying medieval settlement is very extensive but largely uninvestigated. Two factors, the creation of Cheshire as a palatine county and the afforestation of Wirral Hundred by the 4th Earl of Chester in the early 12th century, have led to the accumulation of a large part of the records for the period in the Public Record Office in London. Parts of these archives have been searched by historians for specific purposes but the bulk remains unassessed. More readily available, and more thoroughly studied, are the County Records held in Chester, but again, many family and estate collections remain to be searched in depth. Some manors, however, granted to ecclesiastical houses at an early date, have generated very few historical documents and the loss of many of these at the Dissolution (notably for Birkenhead Priory) has led to a very imperfect knowledge of these townships in the medieval period. The creation of a royal forest will have had some effect on the development of the area, but it should be understood that in the medieval sense, the term 'forest' is a legal one applying to an area outside common law, under direct control of special royal legislation. It does not imply that the entire area was forested, that the king owned all the land or that the entire area was given over to hunting. The petition to Edward III in 1376/7 (which finally brought about the disafforestation of the hundred) refers to the 'great harm, damage and destruction that the beasts of

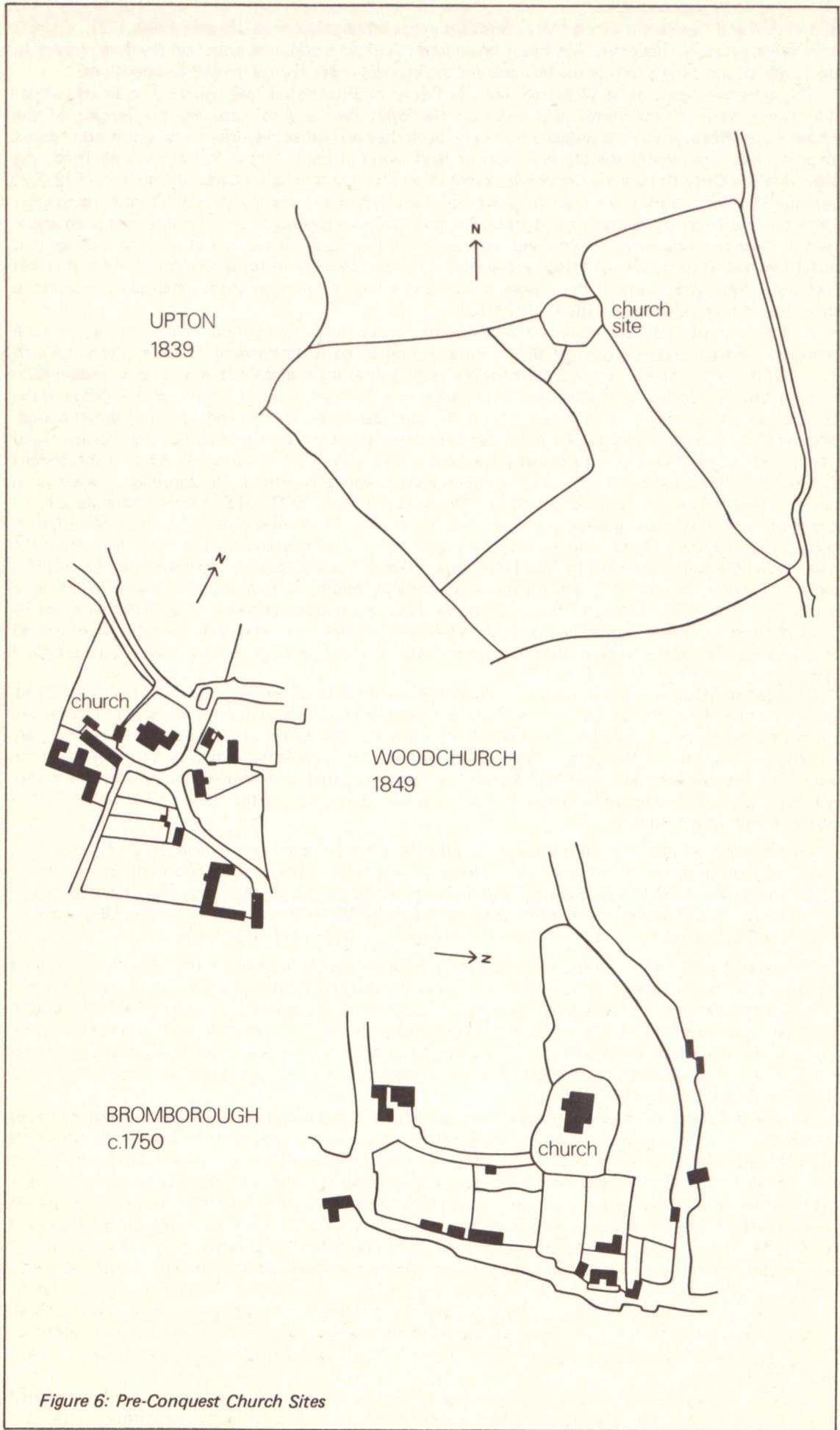


Figure 6: Pre-Conquest Church Sites

the Forest of Wyrall had done from time to time to his Commonalty people there, and particularly the destruction and desolation of the Holy Parish Churches in the said Forest' (Brown 1908, 172). There is little other evidence, however, that forest law might have had a crippling effect on the development of the hundred, and allowances should be made for the overstatement typical in medieval petitions.

The extensive lands of St Werburgh and the Priory of Birkenhead (see figure 12) claimed exemption from many of the restrictions enforced by forest law, and to judge by the records of the Forest Court Rolls, which are available for study, both they and other manorial lords continued to assart areas of land. Frequently the ploughing up of land 'without harm to the forest' was permitted, and following the *Carta Communis Cestrisirie*, sometimes known as the *Magna Carta* of Cheshire, in 1215-6, baronial liberties included 'the right to assart their lands within the arable area of the forest and to grow crops on land formerly cultivated and free from wood without payment . . .'. The extent of open arable field in most townships by the 13th and 14th centuries (see figure 9) would not seem to indicate that forest law had as restrictive an effect as has been supposed by some historians; 'most of the farms must have been destroyed, many of the villages wasted and a large proportion of the inhabitants confined to the coast or driven elsewhere' (Husain 1973, 62).

A large amount of documentary and field work remains to be carried out on the medieval agricultural economy, and an understanding of this is fundamental to an understanding of the settlement which accompanied it. No medieval maps exist for the area, and in their absence it would be an assumption, without other evidence, to imagine that a reference to a Domesday manor implies that a village of the same name was in existence in 1086, even if one had developed by the end of the medieval period. Accurate plotting of medieval open fields can help to pinpoint the centre of settlement, however, and may imply the existence of a nucleated settlement where none is documented. In figure 9 the present evidence for the existence of open field arable in each township is plotted. The approach to identifying this has been based on Orwin's definition (Orwin and Orwin 1939, 64-5) of the characteristics of common field arable and grazing practice. This has been supplemented, in the absence of sufficient detailed documentary study, with a preliminary study of field names and field patterns from the tithe maps, using the names accepted by Miss D Sylvester (1957, 5) as indicative of enclosure from open strips (eg loons, butts, shoots etc.), and references to *campus*, *selion*, *cultura* and *territorium* in medieval deeds. The incomplete nature of this attempt to show the pattern of medieval agriculture cannot be overemphasised. Studies of individual townships have shown that many areas, now tentatively recognised as having some evidence of open field, can be shown with detailed work to have operated a multi-field system.

The general picture which is beginning to emerge seems to show an intensively worked arable landscape in which the multi-field system was fully developed by the 13th century, if not earlier. Most townships were based on a small nucleated village or hamlet at the centre of its fields, although there are exceptions. The land of Newbold in Grange was worked as a single farm holding by a free tenant of the Abbey of Basingwerk, and does not appear to have supported a nucleated settlement. The rather complex field system described below in 1310 suggests that some of the fields at least were held in common with other tenants:

'In Newbold, all the field called Strangys-Strathfield, the field called Prestysfield, all the Broofield, all the field in length from the court of Newbold that comes to Holmedale and south west to the Smytheshoke, with Middle Furlong, and so from Smytheshoke all that shoots on the court of Newbold, 17 butts next the meadow with the headland that shoot the ends to Holmesdale, all the field called Dorton Knoll, the field called Bake Butts . . .' (Brownbill 1928, 100).

By the end of the 13th century there appears to have been some pressure on the available agricultural land. In Bebington in about 1300 an interesting charter describes the ploughing up of the reams or balks between ploughlands to bring more land under cultivation: 'I, William Lancelyn, lord of Poulton Lancelyn, have given to Robert le Heyre of Lower Bebington all my waste everywhere on the land lying between the ditches of the open fields of the vill of Lower Bebington and the ends of all Robert's strips . . . and also all the middles of the land of the reams between his strips and those of his neighbours . . .' (*Cheshire Sheaf* 3rd ser. XLVIII, 2).

In a large number of cases where the present settlement is still nucleated around a medieval church or manor house in the centre of the enclosed open fields, it is possible to be fairly certain that it represents the site, and possibly also the disposition, of the medieval village. Brimstage is a good example, where part of the 14th century manor house and its fortified tower still stand adjoined to the post medieval hall. The pattern of enclosed strips is still recognisable around the village, some of the open field names survive, and the houses, arranged around an open green, retain the form of the rectangular crofts of each house plot. This is shown well on the tithe map of 1841 (see figure 10) although only a few buildings of even post medieval date survive in the village today. Storeton village is another excellent example. Today a small hamlet lies to the south of the medieval hall and contains an unusually high proportion of good post medieval cottages and farm buildings. Frankby is similarly well preserved, with post medieval buildings occupying the plots of the medieval buildings around a triangular green, and surrounded by one of the best preserved open field enclosure patterns that remain in the district (see figure 11, tithe map, 1844).

The true medieval village, in the technical sense of its size and parish church status, is well represented at Bidston and at Eastham, where later development has not markedly affected the form of settlement

since the 17th century. Eastham is a classic green village with the church of St Mary (12th century and later) on the central triangular green, and compact groups of cottages on three sides (see figure 13 from tithe map 1843). On the north side of the green, many of the stone built 18th century cottages are constructed on much older weathered sandstone bases, which suggest they have replaced timber framed buildings of an earlier date. The growth of Bidston has been affected by the presence of the large 16th century hall and the medieval deer park and hunting lodge which lay to the west of the village. Here a fairly compact group of buildings is centred around the church and an open green with the hall to the south (see figure 13, Kingston Estate Map 1665). It is not certain whether this stands on the site of an earlier medieval hall.

Moreton was apparently a large and prosperous medieval village, paying the largest contributions of any village in Wirral to the fines of the Disafforestation Roll in the late 14th century and to the Mize in the 15th century. 'Morton Towne', on the 17th century Kingston estate map, is a comparatively small linear settlement along two parallel lanes running north from a central square green, and by this date must have shrunk considerably in size. On its western edge lies the medieval chapel, which had decayed and been demolished by the end of the 17th century. This pattern of development along two parallel lanes leading from the village to the fields can be seen in other places. The post medieval plans of Bromborough and Wallasey are similar, and in both cases the village is clustered around an open green on which the church and village cross stood at the bottom of the lanes (see figure 14, Bromborough c 1750 and figure 5, Wallasey 1665). In all three examples modern development has almost totally replaced earlier buildings, but the skeleton of the early layout has determined the modern street plan. The lane from the village to the fields is frequently named 'rake' (eg Mark Rake, The Rake, Bromborough; Hoole Rake Lane, Bidston; Rake Lane, Upton, Liscard, Heswall etc), derived from ON *rák*, a path especially for cattle, although they do appear to lead generally to the arable fields rather than to the common pasture.

Although nationally it has been estimated that there was on average a 25% loss of village settlement with the economic changes and drop in population of the later medieval period, there is little evidence to suggest such a profound change in this area. In other parts of the country the deserted village site and considerably shrunken settlement are characteristic features of the medieval landscape. At Bebington, West Kirby and Upton (all with pre Conquest churches), the churches are marginal to, and in the latter's case, isolated from, the site of the post medieval village, which would seem to indicate a shrinkage or shift of settlement in the medieval or later periods. In the case of Upton, there is no conclusive evidence that the settlement ever surrounded the church site. Similarly Hargreave, a reasonably populated manor at Domesday (see p.10), may never have supported a nucleated settlement. It is not named in the Disafforestation Roll of 1384, and presumably came under the account for Neston, as in 1399 there is one carucate of land there worth 40 shillings. It may have operated as a single farm as it does today. Poulton Lancelyn and Woodchurch appear to be considerably shrunken village settlements by the late post medieval period. The former is reduced still further today, and only two farms and the manor hall remain of the small linear hamlet shown on the 1665 estate map. Barnston hamlet shows evidence of having formerly extended to the west of the present settlement, from the field pattern and the existence of earthworks to the rear of the 19th century church.

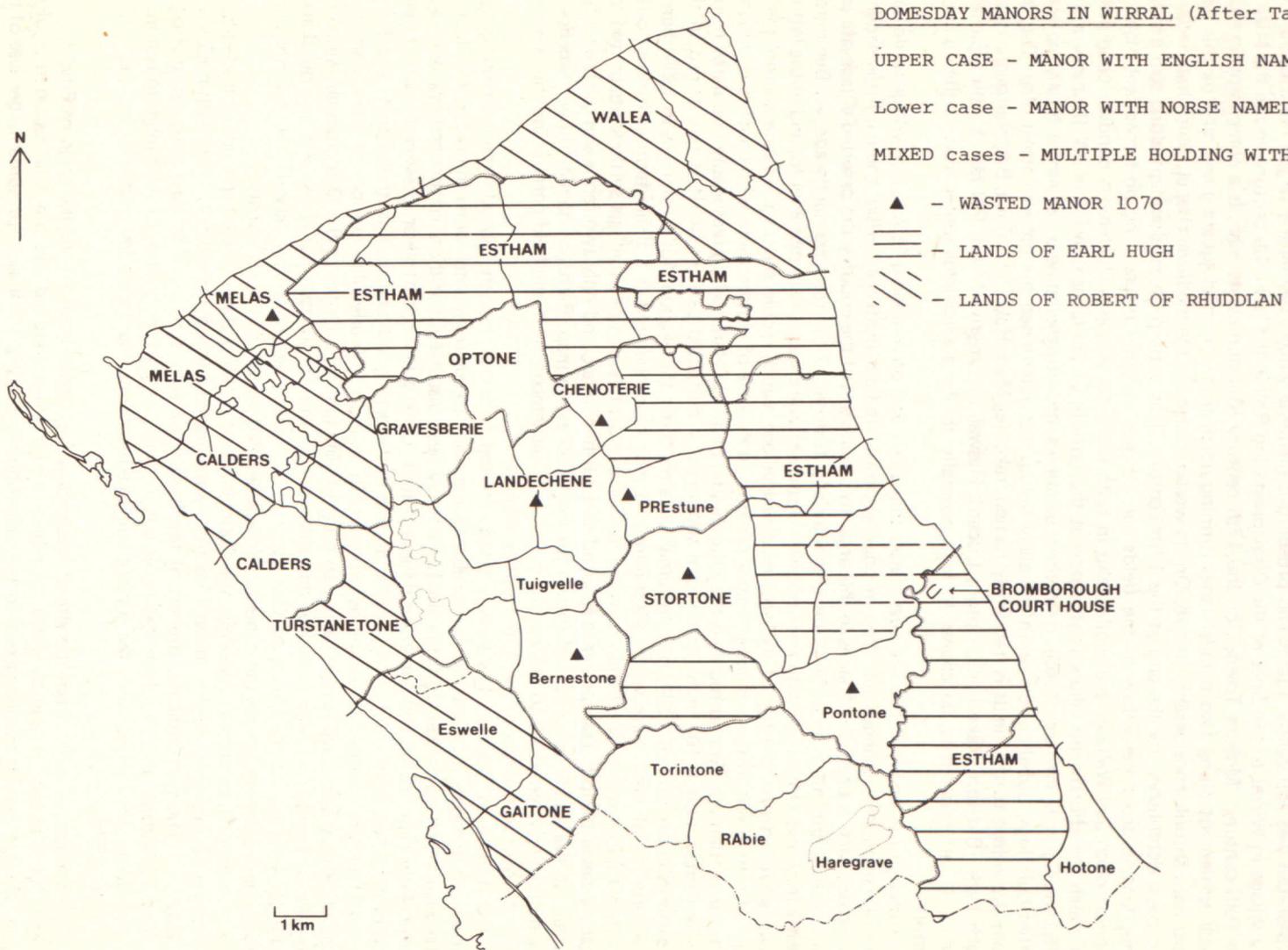
The decline of Moreton has already been referred to above, but the abandonment of the coastal settlement at Meols for a site inland is probably the result of environmental rather than economic factors. The wealth of finds made from the site has already been discussed, but those of the medieval period are particularly rich, varied and numerous (Hume, 1863). Large quantities of silver, brass and pewter objects and evidence of smithing, bronze, pewter and leather working indicate an industrial activity which may account for the wealth of the site as expressed in an extraordinarily high number of coins. Part of its prosperity may also have lain in having an outpost function for Chester as the Dee gradually silted up. An unusual number of pilgrim badges and tokens from the site suggest that it was also an embarkation point for pilgrims to the shrine of Our Lady of Hildeburgheye on Hilbre Island. The description of structures preserved beneath the dunes provides a detailed picture of the settlement:

'... three or four ancient dwellings, the floors made of puddled clay ... what remains of the walls, from 9-15 inches in height, shows that they were made of wood framework, filled with puddled clay ... The perpendicular timbers of the framework were supported on long irregular squared blocks of stone, two of which had holes cut in their surface for the foot of the timber to rest in. The floors were raised from the surface soil to a height varying from a few inches to two feet ...'  
(Potter 1876).

The number of coins from the site at Meols drops suddenly from 70 for the reign of Edward II to only 6 for Edward III, and by 1350 the manor house was abandoned and the 'site' reported as of no value. The De Meoles family moved to the neighbouring parish of Wallasey, presumably because of the encroachment of the sea and sand over the fields and the settlement itself. Since the Black Death was at its height during the same period, however, this may also have been a contributory factor to the decline of the village. Settlement was by no means wiped out but the post medieval pattern shows it to be of a rather scattered nature inland.

Although the typical medieval settlement pattern appears to be the small nucleated hamlet and village, some townships show a contrasting dispersed pattern of scattered and isolated farmsteads. Hoose and Pensby do not appear to have supported hamlets in the medieval or post medieval periods. Hoose was

Figure 7: Domesday Manors in Wirral



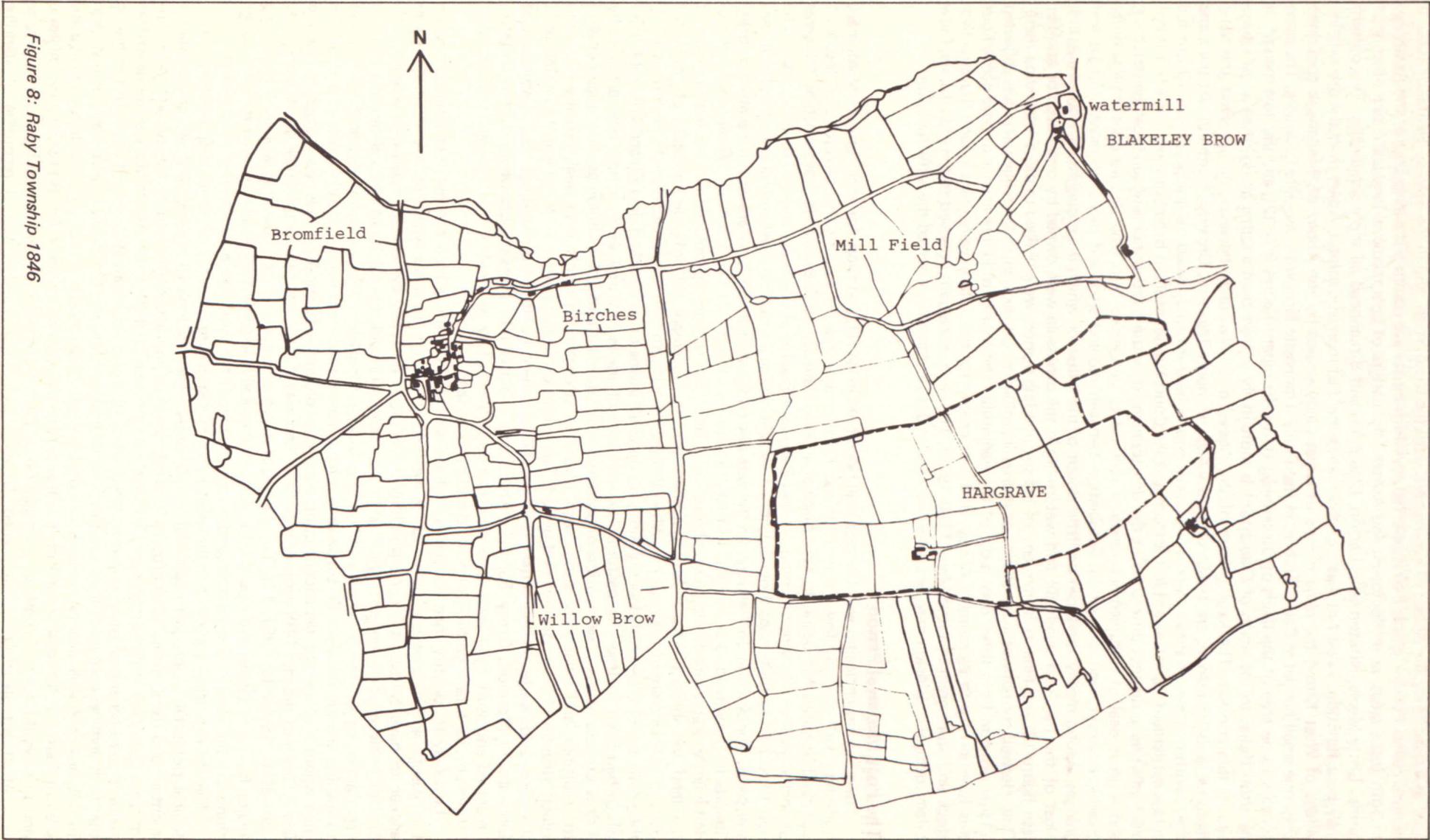


Figure 8: Raby Township 1846

used as a pasture by the Abbey of Basingwerk until the Dissolution, and in the Stanley Rental of 1592 'a pasture called Pensby' worth £40 is referred to, which must have comprised a large part of the township. In both these areas, as in Noctorum and Arrowe, the pattern of post medieval land use is one of isolated farms. Little Meols, Newton cum Larton, Claughton and Birkenhead all show similarities. This pattern may be a function, in part at least, of the management of monastic estates. Apart from the pre existing village of West Kirby, the large manor of Great Caldy owned by the Abbey of Basingwerk contained only one small hamlet at Caldy Grange, in itself only a monastic farm with associated cottages. The same appears to be true of the lands of Birkenhead Priory (compare figures 9 & 12), and the 'lost manor' of Woolton (lying to the north of Claughton) is more likely to have been another grange than a lost village site in this context. The large estates of the Abbey of St Werburgh, however, do not show the same features, and its manors are based upon a village economy (eg Irby, Greasby, Eastham). At the same time, within some of these manors, separate estates have evolved, based on granges isolated from the village settlement (eg Plymyard in Eastham and the Court House estate in Bromborough). As yet it is not clear whether a distinct difference in the development of settlement in monastic lands can be detected, and a great deal of documentary research remains to be carried out. One feature does emerge quite clearly, however, and this is the association between moated sites and monastic manor houses and granges. Economically there can be little doubt of the influence which the ecclesiastical houses exerted. Most of the medieval windmills and watermills in the peninsula were owned by one house or another (see figure 12) and tenants from many of the surrounding manors were obliged to pay for grinding there. Only Heswall church was independent of monastic influence. Consequently the religious houses collected a large revenue from tithes over most of the peninsula. The monks of Hilbre appear to have carried out this function for St Werburgh's Abbey, and presumably for this reason were granted land to house livestock and store grain in Little Meols (Tait 1920). The large stone barn attached to the old vicarage (now Lilac Cottage) in Bidston may be partly medieval in date and probably served the same function.

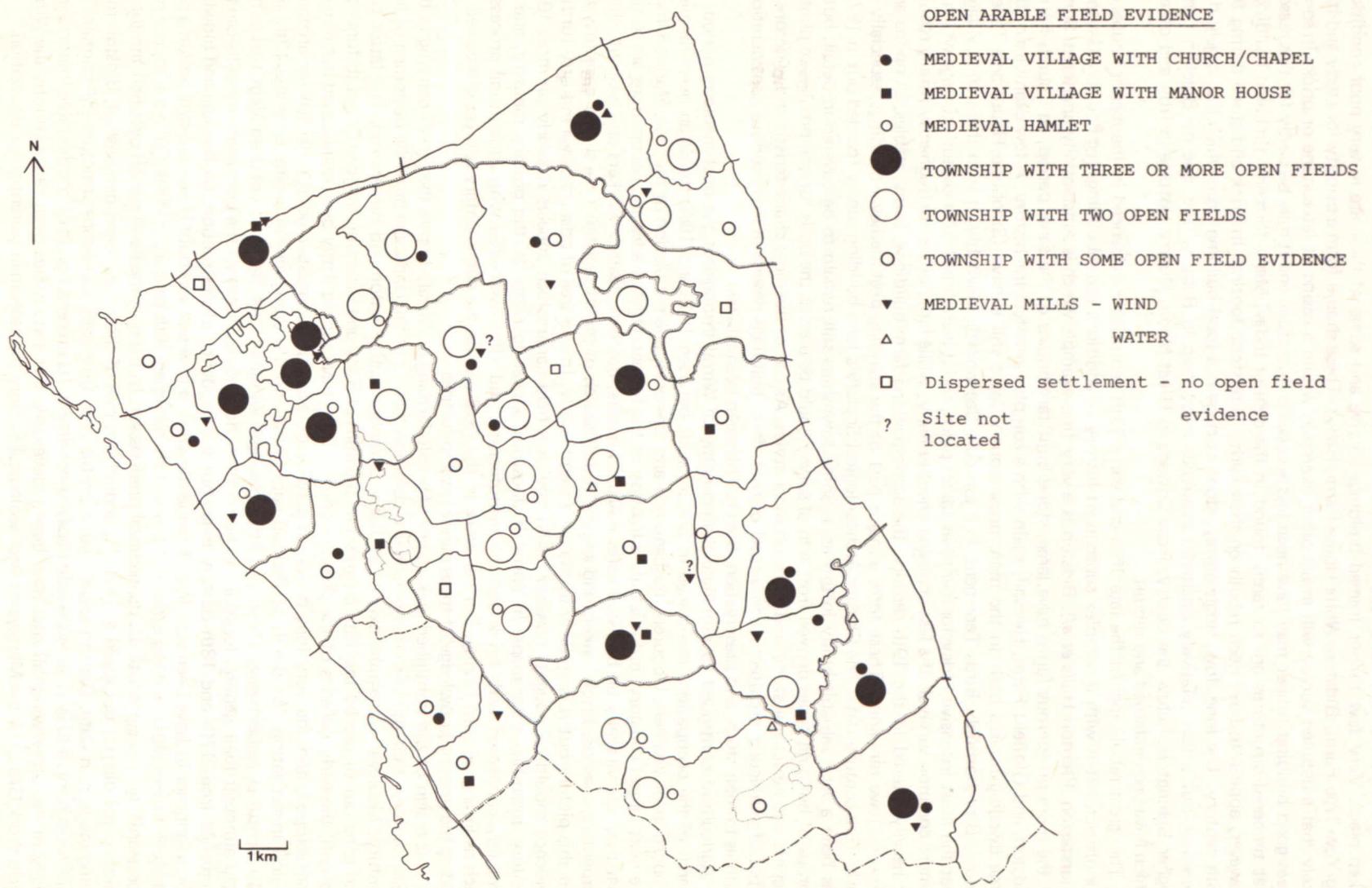
### **The Post Medieval Period**

There are no enclosure acts for medieval open field in Wirral, and those for enclosure of common are quite late and relatively few. From 17th and 18th century maps it appears that piecemeal enclosure of scattered holdings had begun to take place at an early date. By 1638 Brimstage is described as 793 acres of enclosure and 120 acres of common, and Raby as 805 acres of enclosure and 410 acres common. The mid 19th century tithe maps show only one township where a much decayed common arable system was still partly functioning. In Wallasey, on the east side of the village, tenants were working scattered strips: 'lounds in Townfield' and 'quilllets in Field behind the church'. The economy of Wirral remained predominantly arable (*viz* the large number of 17th and 18th century cornmills), and the unsuitability of the land for sheep grazing meant that there was no movement towards the enclosure of arable for pasture as elsewhere in the country. When Wolsey's Enclosure Commissioners visited Cheshire in 1517, they found no evidence of depopulation, no decayed towns or houses, and only 65 acres of arable land which had been enclosed for pasture. The enclosure of arable in Wirral seems to have been achieved by a slow process of the consolidation of scattered strips into scattered block holdings. This, together with the multiple land ownership within each township, strengthened rather than weakened the nucleated village structure in the post medieval period. The exception to this pattern in Wirral was the enclosure of the carrs and waste on the outskirts of townships where isolated land holdings have developed, eg Lingham in Moreton, Benty Farm in Thurstaston, Oldfield in Heswall. Elsewhere in the country, organised enclosure by a single land owner or by parliamentary act tended to encourage the dispersal of settlement, each farm within its consolidated block of land.

Less easy to identify than the pattern which resulted from the gradual process of early enclosure are the reasons and mechanisms by which it was brought about. In areas where nucleated villages never appear to have existed it is correspondingly difficult to trace any evidence of open field arable in the present enclosed field systems, although the documentary evidence for its former existence is in some cases good, eg Arrowe, Newton cum Larton, Grange, Claughton. The movement towards enclosure in townships already managed by single or scattered farms must have been relatively easier to accomplish than where a village was dependent upon communal ploughing to subsist. It has been suggested that the Black Death of the mid 14th century may have 'hastened if it did not initiate the break up of community cultivation' (Sylvester 1957, 12). The degree of manorial control in each township will also have been a major factor. Whatever the reasons, the post medieval village of Wirral appears to have evolved in something like the same nucleated form and on approximately the same site as its medieval counterpart.

The documentary sources for the post medieval period are extremely numerous and their archaeological potential is only just beginning to be realised. They include all types of official records, parliamentary and fiscal, manorial records, private estate papers and title deeds, rentals, surveys and maps. The origins of modern state bureaucracy lie in the Tudor period, and from the 16th century onwards written records were generated on an unprecedented scale. It is only in recent years that it has been recognised that such archives have more than a purely historical value. Until more of these sources have been studied in full, any archaeological examination of post medieval sites would be out of place. In many cases the present fabric of the settlement forms a large part of the physical evidence for its post medieval history, and one would not anticipate an investigation of the underground archaeology taking place so long as the settlement structure is maintained. Detailed architectural and structural recording of standing

Figure 9: Distribution of open field arable evidence



buildings, which it has not been possible to carry out on this survey, should form a necessary part of future work on the post medieval archaeology of the area. Mr A. Shatwell's study of the cruck barn at Vineyard Farm, Poulton Lancelyn, is an excellent example of one of the few such surveys which has taken place. Very few timber framed buildings survive and some of these are in very poor condition (eg Yew Tree Farm, Bidston; White House Farm, Raby). These should form a priority for study and it is likely that a detailed survey will reveal other examples within a casing of later stone or brick. In some areas good building timber may have been less accessible than stone and it may be partly for this reason that timbered structures are so rarely found in the district today. Many formerly timbered buildings, however, appear to have been rebuilt on their earlier sandstone footings in brick and stone during the 18th century. The long, low, single storey, stone cottage is a local building type which has largely disappeared, but a few relatively unaltered examples exist: two in Raby village, one on Bracken Lane, Higher Bebington, below the quarry, Rose Cottage in Great Meols, Quarry Cottage in Irby and others which have been enlarged and rebuilt.

The 'great rebuilding' of the late 16th and early 17th centuries is evidenced in the manor houses of the district, often with a complex subsequent history of additions and rebuildings (eg Poulton, Gayton, Thurstaston, Prenton Halls *et al*). Bidston is a very fine example which is substantially unaltered. Some of the more prosperous farms have large, stone built farmhouses of the same period, eg Church Farm, Bidston, and Oldfield Farm, Heswall, again with a complex architectural history. A few examples of the large dwelling houses built in the more prosperous villages still survive (Stanhope House and Tellets House, Bromborough; Birds Tenement, Poulton cum Seacombe). Inevitably, it is in these large villages that the most intensive redevelopment has taken place, and it is the small 17th century cottage which is a more common survival, if a less imposing one. Similarly, while farmhouses are frequently totally rebuilt or heavily altered in the 19th century, the accompanying farm buildings, barns, stables, shippens and pig-sties, have remained. These form a major part of the standing post medieval buildings, especially of early 18th century date. The Chester Archaeological Society's farm building survey (carried out in 1973) has been a very valuable study in this area. Some townships still remain to be covered in detail, but a corpus of building types derived from a total survey could be used as the basis for comprehensive photographic and structural study and work on local styles. As one of the most characteristic and widespread types of vernacular architecture in a rural district, farm buildings deserve a more serious consideration, both as to their study and preservation, than has hitherto been allowed.

Agriculture continued to dominate the economy of Wirral throughout the post medieval period. A search of the occupations mentioned in Chester wills between 1545 and 1800 shows an overwhelming proportion of yeomen, labourers, husbandmen and farmers in the population of the area. Mariners form the next largest category, but it is only a fraction of the former. Other trades and occupations are so few that they can virtually all be listed here: millers, brewers, butchers, leather workers and weavers, ships carpenters, masons, brick makers and smiths. A full search of parish registers on a similar basis may fill out this picture but it is unlikely to change it significantly. In one area of post medieval industry further evidence should be sought, however. 'Kiln hey' is a field name which appears regularly on most 19th century township tithe maps. In Wirral it does not appear to relate to the pottery industry, and is probably connected with brick and tile manufacture, and kilns associated with agricultural processes such as liming or corn drying. Further work in the field and on the documentary sources is required to add to the present knowledge of these minor rural industries.

It is a sign of the continued importance of arable farming in Wirral, despite the rise of dairying in the 18th century, that the corn mill remained a common feature of the landscape until the beginning of this century. Medieval watermills existed at Raby, Bromborough, Prenton and Birkenhead. The latter two had gone out of use by the 18th century but the mills at Raby and Bromborough continued to function up until the early decades of the present century. Both have subsequently been demolished but remain undeveloped, and the very long period of activity on both sites suggests a good potential for archaeological investigation. Windmills at Poulton cum Spital and Storeton were in existence in the 13th and 14th centuries respectively. These, and other medieval windmill sites, have not yet been identified in the field although their general location is known from field names. Many of the post medieval mills can be identified from 17th and 18th century maps but the incidence of destruction, by burning and blowing down, appears to have been very high. Frequently when a new mill was built it was constructed on a site adjacent to the older one (eg Bidston, Irby) and therefore an 18th century mill may be close to, but not necessarily on the same site as, its medieval predecessor. In the post medieval period over half the townships in the district possessed a windmill, and all but one of these have been demolished, Bidston mill being modern in date. Gayton tower mill, a particularly fine, early sandstone structure still contains its mill machinery, and is in an extremely decayed condition. Its preservation is of considerable importance. Many of the other windmill sites have been redeveloped but a study has been carried out by the Wirral Field Work Group of the Merseyside Archaeological Society to assess their potential for excavation.

On Bidston Moss a corn mill, with grain drying ovens, and a large complex of iron slitting mills with furnaces, worked on tidal power from the Wallasey Pool in the 18th century (Cuthbert Woods 1927, 113). A small community of houses and offices grew up around the industry but had a short lived existence. By the 19th century only a small cottage remained, which was demolished before 1905. The area is now occupied by railway sidings and refuse tipping. Apart from this limited industrial development, and a very short lived attempt to start, a salt works on Hilbre Island in the 17th century

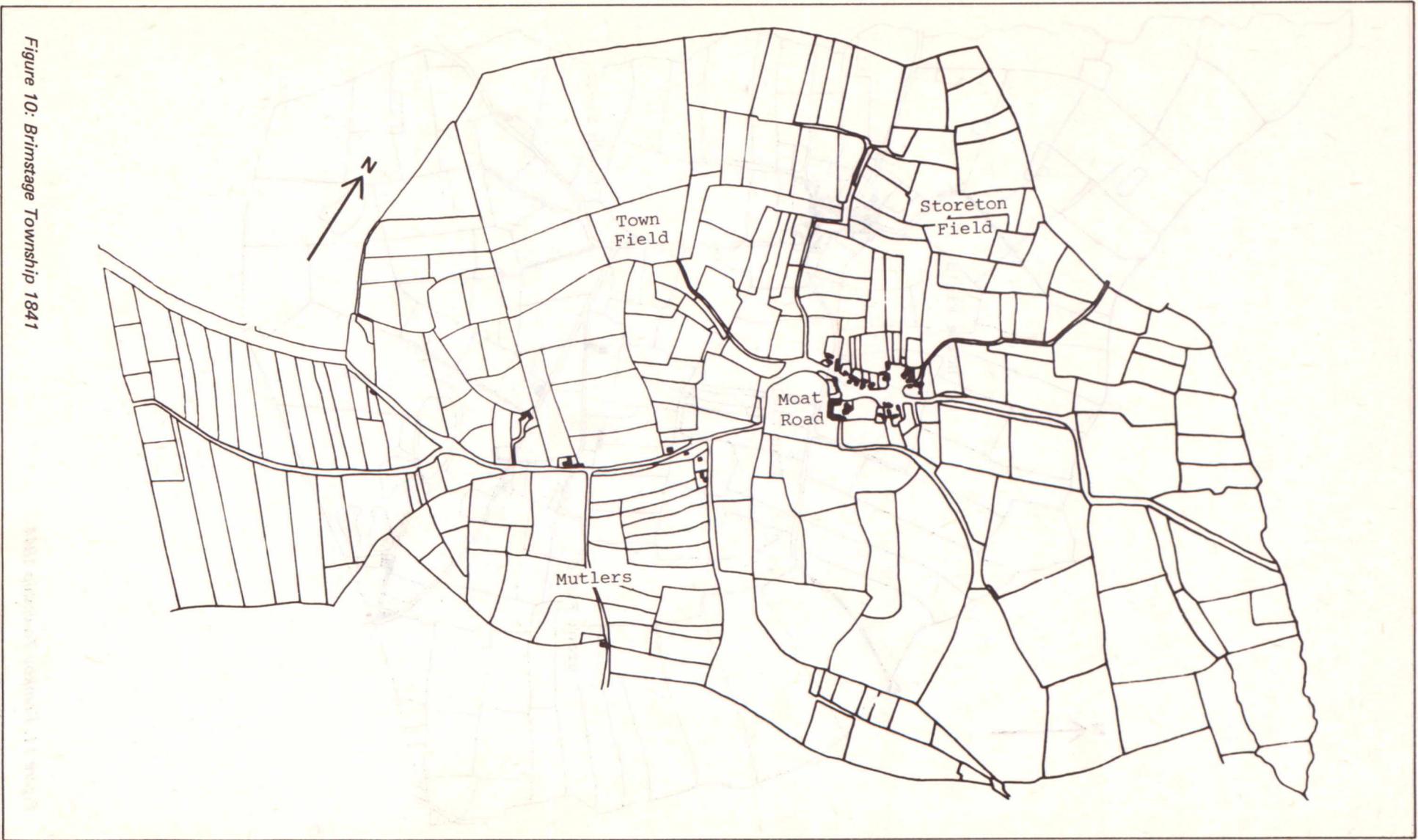


Figure 10: Brimstage Township 1841

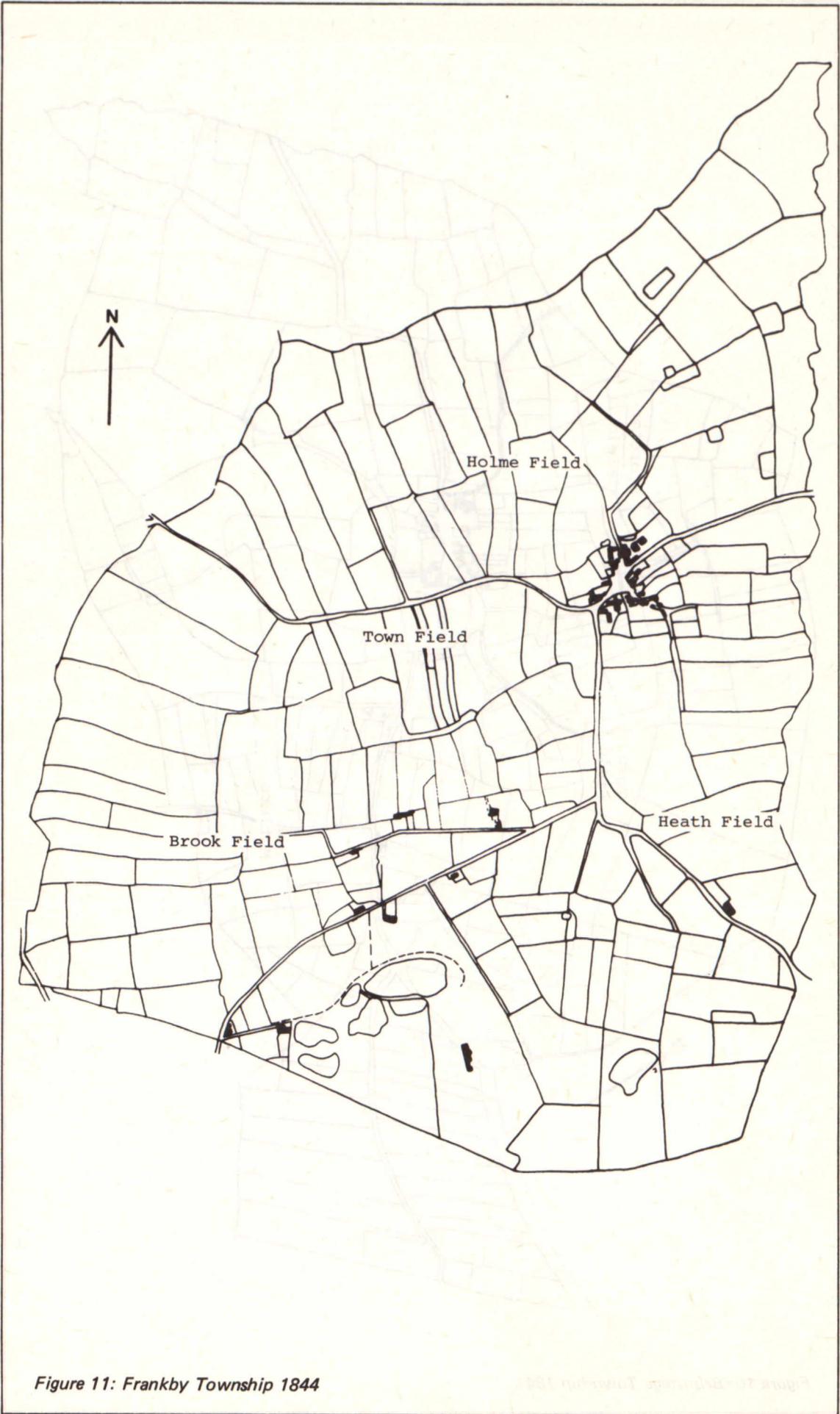
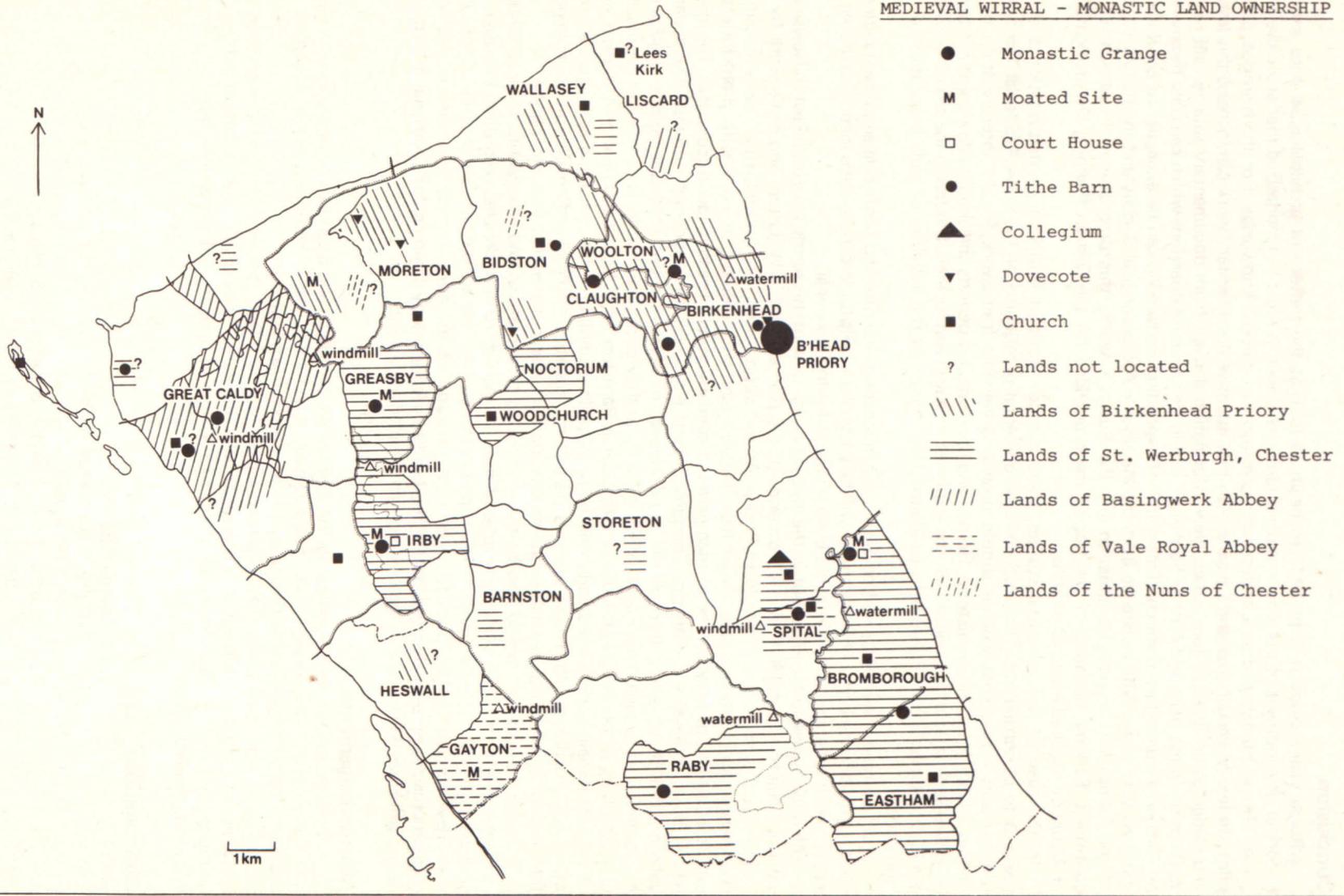


Figure 11: Frankby Township 1844

Figure 12: Monastic Land Ownership

MEDIEVAL WIRRAL - MONASTIC LAND OWNERSHIP



(Brownbill 1928, 46), there is little other evidence for post medieval industry. Another hundred years was to elapse before the building of the railways, the Wallasey and Birkenhead docks and the beginning of the growth of the east coast industrial belt.

## Conclusion

After a year's study it is possible to begin to look at the pattern of archaeological sites and the historical development of the area in general terms. However, it must be emphasized that at all levels this survey should be regarded as a preliminary assessment of current knowledge. For the historical period, pilot studies on certain townships have shown that intensive documentary work can increase this level of knowledge some three or four times. New information derived from documentary sources will require verification in the field, and further field work will in its turn raise questions which can only be answered by further documentary research. This spiral of expanding knowledge can be expected to continue for some years to come. With assistance from the Merseyside Archaeological Society and the further support of the Manpower Services Commission for the Survey's work, this programme of research will be continued. Periodic updating of the hazard maps provided for the District Planning Departments will probably be required every 18 months.

In the field of environmental studies, there is much work of synthesis, reinterpretation and new research to be carried out. The proposed environmental programme on the Survey's Special Temporary Employment Programme scheme should provide a valuable framework for the interpretation of the slender evidence for the prehistoric, Roman and pre Conquest periods and should allow some prediction of where such sites might realistically be expected to have been located. Studies in the sequence of post glacial vegetational change will help to identify the impact of the activities of early populations on the landscape.

A programme of air survey will be productive in locating new sites and furthering an understanding of the known existing ones. This approach will be particularly helpful in certain areas identified during the survey and a programme for flying has been prepared for the next year.

The only excavations carried out in the area up to the time of this survey have been Prof R Newstead's work on Hilbre Island, Mr K Jermy's sections of the Roman road in Willaston, and some work by the University of Liverpool at Birkenhead Priory. An excavation policy is required which takes account of both rescue and research needs. Apart from Hilbre Island and Middle Eye, no specific prehistoric sites can be identified at present. The Roman period is similarly scant of readily identifiable sites. The examination of a medieval site with pre Conquest origins would be of considerable interest. The apparent conservatism of settlement through the pre Conquest, medieval and post medieval periods suggests that the sampling of suitable post medieval village sites, as they become available, is one way to approach an understanding of the earlier periods. At sites such as Barnston, Irby, Upton and Poulton Lancelyn, areas of interest remain undeveloped and potentially valuable. Sampling of the remaining open areas south of the Meols coastline could suggest whether part of the deserted medieval settlement still exists beneath the sand dunes, and the potential for the preservation of organic material on this site is good.

A major contribution would also be the monitoring of alterations and renovations to post medieval buildings, many of which stand on medieval sites, and which require detailed recording. However, the greatest potential for archaeological investigation lies in the rural areas which are protected from large scale development by the present green belt. In many of the areas outside this, the archaeological contexts have been severely eroded over the last hundred years by building and industrial growth, and rescue priorities will remain in these areas in the immediate future.

## Acknowledgements

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## Abbreviations

Chet Soc	Chetham Society
EPNS	English Place Names Society
Geol J	Geological Journal
JCAS	Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society
JMAS	Journal of the Merseyside Archaeological Society
LCAS	Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society
THSLC	Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire
TRE	<i>Tempore regis Edwardi</i> (in the time of King Edward)
OE	Old English
ON	Old Norse
OW	Old Welsh

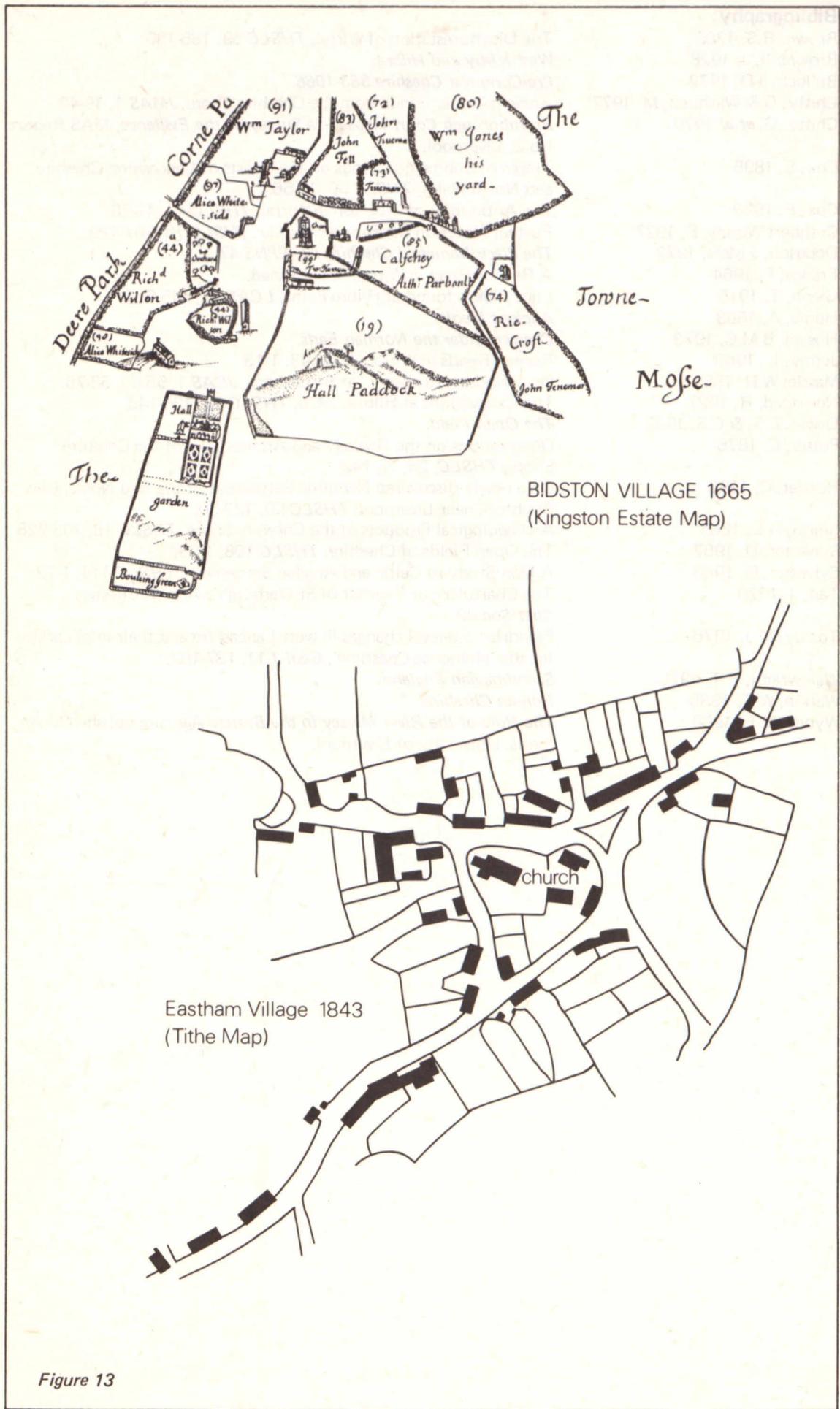


Figure 13

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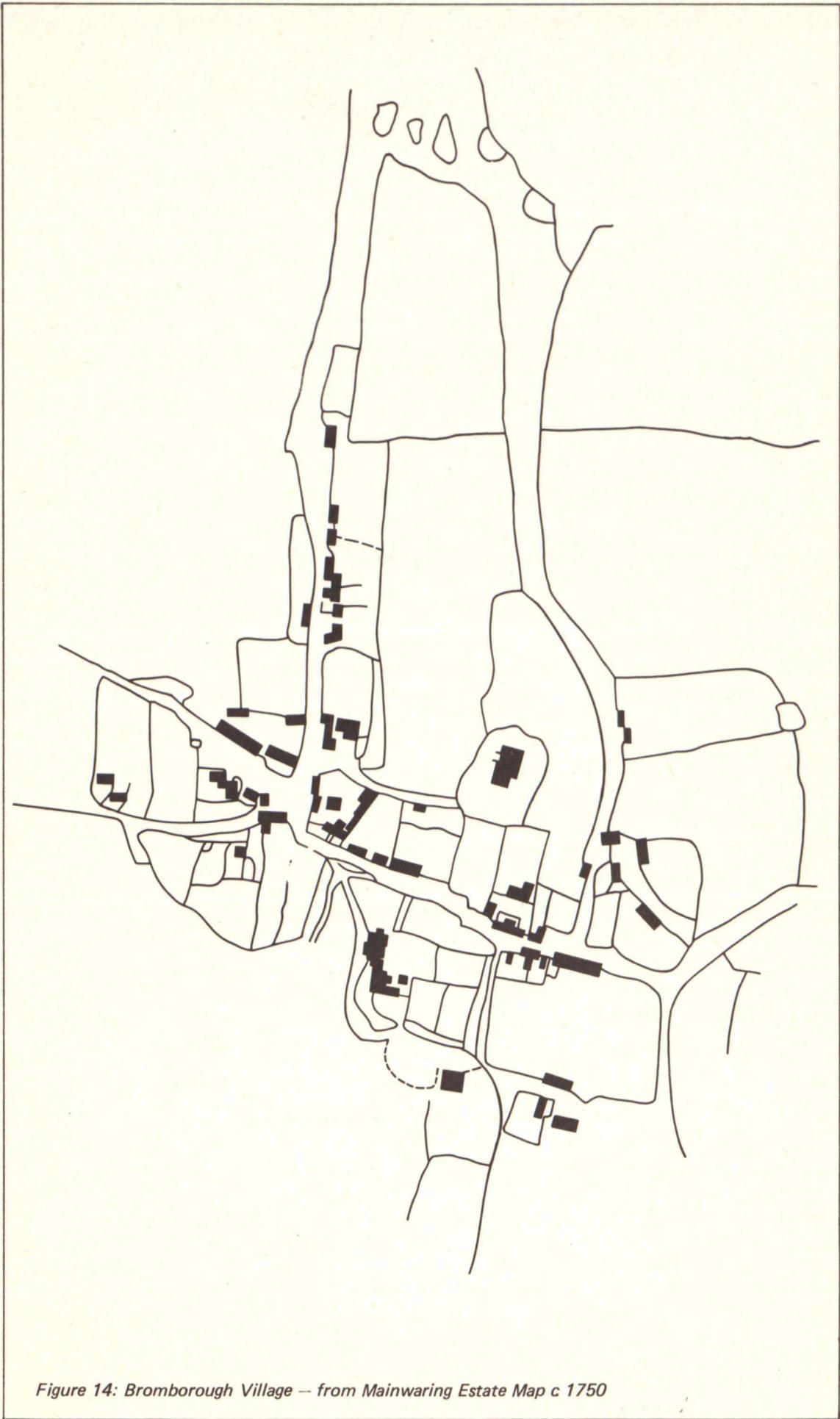


Figure 14: Bromborough Village -- from Mainwaring Estate Map c 1750



# Early Settlement on the North Wirral Coastal Area

**RAY KENNA**

## Introduction

During the last two years there has been a renewed interest in prehistoric and early settlement in Cheshire and the north Wirral coast. Chitty and Warhurst (1977) discuss the history of the site of 'Ancient Meols' and, like Hume (1863) and Smith (1865), suggest that the artefacts indicate an almost continuous occupation of the site from prehistoric times to the 14th century. Alexander (1977) refers to the few prehistoric sites and finds in Cheshire and the lack of new evidence for prehistoric settlement. He mentions the need for pollen analysis, the study of old land surfaces, ecology and soils.

The writer is currently researching the geological, geomorphological and environmental history of the north Wirral coast during the Flandrian Stage, covering approximately the last 10,000 years. Two of the difficulties confronting the geologist and archaeologist on this low-lying coastal plain are the lack of natural exposures of Flandrian (ie post glacial) strata and the presence of high water tables, making trenching and augering difficult. However the data obtained from over 700 borehole logs and from additional boreholes sunk by the writer have proved invaluable in interpreting the major stratigraphical and lithological changes. From these data, stratum contours for the boulder clay and other surfaces can be plotted, as can the thicknesses of the various strata. Open sections have been logged in civil engineering excavations (usually dewatered) and geological and feature mapping carried out. Palaeontological studies have also been necessary, with pollen and microfossil analyses, and radiocarbon dating on peat samples, *in situ* tree stump heartwood and bone from a midden. Further information has been gathered from a study of early maps and charts, and aerial photographs.

The radiocarbon dates (half life = 5,570 years) for assays on the writer's samples are here given without their standard deviations (which are generally insignificant), and are suffixed in lower case, ie bp, as they have not yet been published in *Radiocarbon*. At this stage it is hoped that the observations, alternative interpretations, suggestions and tentative conclusions may be of use to the archaeologist, who will frequently need to apply a multi-disciplinary approach to archaeological investigations. Most of the comments relate to the area shown on the map. It is not intended to make detailed comments as to whether or not all marine incursions and regressions are related to actual rises or falls in sea level (Tooley 1978a, 1978b). Earlier references relating to Tooley's very detailed research are found in the bibliographies of his latest publications (Tooley 1978 a and b). Some of the events recorded by Tooley (1978a, 141-148) for the Lancashire coast can be correlated with events recorded by the writer for the north Wirral coast, but these will be the subject of a later discourse.

## Evidence of Coastal Change from Peat and Other Deposits

At the beginning of the Flandrian Period, about 10,000 years BP, there were times when the land mass extended many kilometres to the north of the present Wirral coastline, and there were probably land connections joining Wirral and Lancashire to the Isle of Man. Although the sea level was generally rising during the Flandrian Period, there were times when the north Wirral landmass extended at least 10 km to the north of the present coastline. There have also been marine incursions extending several kilometres to the south. This is evidenced in the sections by the alternating sequences of marine/estuarine silts and clays with peat/forest beds, culminating in the formation of sand dunes. The 'Lower Peat/Forest Bed' (LPFB) is equivalent to the 'Inferior Peat and Forest Bed', and the 'Upper Peat/Forest Bed' (UPFB) to the 'Superior Peat and Forest Bed', of Reade (1871). The boulder clay (till) surfaces D and E appear to be sea-washed as the overlying thin, sandier detritus is shelly in places and includes *Cardium sp*, *Mya sp* and *Mytilus sp*. The mapped sections (B, C, D and E) are examples of the stratigraphical sequences. Lensing and thinning of strata is however very much in evidence, and non-sequences of strata have been recorded.

The base level of the early post boulder clay buried valley of the river Fender shown on the map from Ford Bridge to A, is in excess of -10.0 m OD at C, 162 m north east of Leasowe Station, whereas under the old Fender Lane bridge the bed level of the present artificial Fender cut is +1.7 m OD. These differences in base levels indicate a period of low sea level when the land mass would have extended to the north of the present coastline. From the borehole data early river or drainage profiles can be plotted. The earlier deposits of silts and clays in the buried post boulder clay valleys are not shown in section. They reflect the silting up process of the valleys during the post glacial rise of sea level, and the intercalated peats reflect pauses or regressions suitable for terrestrial biogenetic sedimentation.

The buried valleys shown on the map have been plotted from borehole data, surface features, and data from seismic and resistivity surveys. The contour on the junction of earlier channel deposits resting

on boulder clay (till) at Ordnance Datum is shown for the sides of the channels. Less data is available for the north western part of the coastal plain, but over much of this area the boulder clay surface is below Ordnance Datum. A marine seismic survey shows that the boulder clay surface dips very gradually to the north and west; 3.5 km north north west of Dove Point its surface is -12.0 m, and there is evidence of a buried channel with a base of -13.0 m some 2.8 km north north west of Dove Point. Evidence for a marine incursion to the south of the present coastline is indicated where, for example, the UPFB is overlain by grey clay with *Scrobicularia*, 46 m north of section C. An earlier sequence of estuarine clays and silts has been recorded at Stanlow (Morton 1888) and at Helsby (Tooley 1978a, 134-135), where radiocarbon dates on peats subjacent to and above estuarine clays and silts date a marine incursion at  $5,470 \pm 155$  years BP with a regression at  $5,250 \pm 385$  years BP (Tooley 1978a, 134-135).

During the period of silting up of the post boulder clay Fender, drainage must have been sluggish, as there is little evidence of later scouring. In places, the LPFB is absent, eg in the northern part of the early Fender and the tributary entering it from the north west (a tributary previously flowing from this direction indicates the later loss of land seawards). The sluggish northerly outlet into Liverpool Bay could have been blocked by encroaching sand banks and vegetation. (Tooley (1978a, 148) recognises a dune building period for the Lancashire coast between 4,000 and 2,400 years BP). From mapped sections, eg C, and borehole data, the UPFB can be traced across the early Fender valley, but there are variations in its thickness, partial washouts are evident, and channelling has occurred in the upper part of the brown peat near C. East of the course of the Fender and south of the course of the Birket shown on the 1840 edition of the Ordnance Survey map, the LPFB is found recorded in borehole logs, but washouts appear to be present in the UPFB, and there is evidence of puckering and feathering, particularly in the black lower sequence of the UPFB. It will be shown that the easterly diversion of the early Fender, causing it to flow sluggishly into Wallasey Pool, could have occurred 4,000 years BP or a short time later.

The alignment of the present Birket system before 1845, when it was diverted during the construction of the Birkenhead Docks, seems to be unrelated to earlier drainage patterns, except, perhaps, in the case of a north west-south east tributary flowing into the early Fender valley.

The major terrestrial and estuarine/marine sequences are evident from the sections (the lower channel sequence at C is not shown), but pollen analyses and microfossil assemblages indicate environmental and ecological changes in more detail. The UPFB and LPFB reflect a more complicated series of events, not necessarily continuous, over a longer period of time than Erdtman (1928) and, particularly, Travis (1929) infer. Pollen analyses on the LPFB D with high frequencies of *Chenopodiaceae* pollen, and low frequencies of *Artemisia* and *Armeria*, point to the proximity of salt marshes at the sampling level. The pollen assemblage is pre elm decline (within the Atlantic climatic zone, ie pre 5000 BP). This is confirmed by a radiocarbon date of 6420 years BP on the peat, which correlates with the radiocarbon date on the oak stump in B – which is Flandrian II (ie 7,200 to 5,000 bp).

Pollen analysis of the black *Phragmites* peat, D, just above the junction between the silty clay and the base of the UPFB shows an arboreal assemblage dominated by *Quercus*, *Alnus* and *Ulmus*, with some *Pinus*. The non-arboreal pollen of grasses, sedges, *Taraxacum*-types, *Malva*, Rosaceae and Umbelliferae indicate lightly wooded or open conditions. The presence of *Taraxacum*-type pollen may be associated with prehistoric clearance episodes, even though the assemblage is again pre elm decline.

The pollen assemblage of the black *Phragmites* peat at the base of the UPFB C in the channel area shows similar arboreal pollen frequencies to that of D. Evidence for nearby marine conditions is recorded by peaks in the value of Halophyte pollen such as *Chenopodiaceae* with other plants having possible coastal affinities: *Artemisia*, *Ranunculus*, *Taraxacum* and Umbelliferae. The weed pollen may again reflect the nearby presence of man. The regional vegetation seems to have been that of damp fen areas within mixed deciduous woodland. Relatively high *Pinus* values suggest the possible local occurrence of this tree, perhaps in sandy coastal locations. The pollen assemblage is again pre elm decline – and this horizon is possibly related to that of Helsby referred to above. A sample from the base of the black peat at C has been submitted for radiocarbon dating to confirm the conclusions based on the pollen assemblage, ie that this peat is a Flandrian II deposit.

The brown amorphous peat immediately above the black *Phragmites* peat C is post elm decline (ie post 5,000 BP, which is Flandrian III) within the sub Boreal climatic zone. Local vegetation appears still to be that of an alder fen community, while the regional picture is still one of forest clearance, with higher weed values. At the top of the brown peat pollen is present from many plants of disturbed ground, but pollen associated with marine conditions is lacking. Marine *Scrobicularia* are, however, present in the overlying clay, especially where channelling is evident in the upper surface of the brown peat; pollen associated with marine type taxa is absent in the peat below the channelling, and this may be indicative of rapid channelling, perhaps during a tidal surge. Further seaward (885 m north west), brackish water and marine to brackish water diatoms are present in the clayey silt overlying the UPFB, ie *Diploneis interrupta* and *Diploneis incurvata* respectively, and other estuarine/marine microfossils occur in this stratum. The main interfaces of strata seen in the section 46 m north of C, where channelling is evidenced, are grey clay with *Scrobicularia* to 2.62 m OD, brown laminated peat to 2.58 m OD, black *Phragmites* peat to 2.42 m OD (lower sequence not seen, due to water).

The frequencies of the main pollen and spore types for the laminated brown peat and the black *Phragmites* peat are shown below, and the results obtained from pollen analysis so far indicate that peat formation was not continuous in the case of the UPFB: pauses in deposition seem to have occurred.

Pollen Analyses 46 m North of C

SAMPLE LEVEL	TREE POLLEN %				SHRUB POLLEN (as % of total tree pollen)								HERB POLLEN (as % of total tree pollen)				SPORES (as % of total tree pollen)				CHRON- OLOGY		
	<i>Betula</i> (birch)	<i>Pinus</i> (pine)	<i>Ulmus</i> (elm)	<i>Quercus</i> (oak)	<i>Tilia</i> (lime)	<i>Alnus</i> (alder)	<i>Fraxinus</i> (ash)	<i>Corylus</i> (hazel)	<i>Salix</i> (willow)	<i>Calluna</i> (heather)	<i>Gramineae</i> (grasses)	<i>Cyperaceae</i> (sedges)	<i>Chenopodiaceae</i>	<i>Rosaceae</i>	<i>Rumex</i> (dock)	<i>Urtica</i> (nettle)	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i> (nibwort)	<i>Plantago maritima</i> (sea plantain)	<i>Pteridium</i> (bracken)	<i>Polypodium</i> (polypody)	<i>Filicales</i> (ferns)	<i>Thyopteris</i> (ferns)	FLANDRIAN
2.62 m	6	3	2	19	10	60	<1	84	0	2	18	12	0	0	1	2	1	0	4	12	24	6	III
2.53 m	13	3	11	36	2	35	<1	56	14	0	9	14	22	3	2	0	0	49	5	2	8	0	II

The radiocarbon dates on heartwood from *Pinus* and *Quercus* of 3,800 and 3,910 years bp E indicate that the seedlings germinated on the earlier black peat. The stumps appear to be embedded in the earlier lower peat, but this is probably due to the later weight of overlying high sand dunes causing compression and compaction; this is further evidenced by the flattened appearance of woody material in the peat. In places tree stumps are preserved *in situ*, but trunks are usually found in the horizontal position. A radiocarbon date on a tree trunk found lying horizontally on top of the UPFB at 3.05 m OD approximately and 305 m west north west of Section C (written communication from Dr G Tresise) is 3,965 ± 110 years BP (Godwin & Willis 1964, 116). The radiocarbon dates suggest a period of afforestation between about 3,910 years bp and about 3,600 bp. The wood debris recorded at the junction of the brown and black peat at C may be similar in age to *in situ* stumps or the horizontal trunk referred to above. Impeded drainage could have caused rotting at the base of trunks and breakage could have been caused by gales; the stumps exposed under the embankment seem to have been relatively young when they died and there was no evidence to indicate felling by axes, although this possibility should not be ruled out. This period of impeded drainage could have been caused by sand dunes encroaching from the north about 4,000 years BP or a short time later, and after this drainage may have been diverted to the east.

The radiocarbon date on the tree trunk of 3,695 years BP (Godwin & Willis 1964, 116) is used by Tooley (1978a, 26 and 136) to date the beginning of a marine transgression about 3,700 years BP. Sections examined by the writer, together with pollen and other data, indicate that this tree trunk may have been lying on later brown peat. However, if there was a marine transgression in the area at this time, then a rising water table could have caused rotting near the base of the trees. Furthermore, diversion of the drainage to the east may not have occurred until the subsequent marine regression recorded for the Lancashire coast about 3,160 years BP (Tooley 1978a, 136) or later. The sequence of events after 3,800 years BP to the beginning of sand dune conditions is unclear.

The succession of strata above the UPFB differs between sections. A radiocarbon date on the upper part of the peaty *Soil Bed* (Morton 1891, 238 plxvi) of 550 years BP at E correlates with the radiocarbon date of 540 years BP for the lens of later freshwater sandy peat with seeds of *Menyanthes trifoliata* and charcoal at D. However, these dates may err on the late side. The *Soil Bed* or compact black sand (of varying thicknesses up to 0.75 m) with the overlying laminated beds of sand alternating with sandy peat was traced east to west over 250 m under the old embankment. The peaty *Soil Bed*, where visible, appears to have been the basal organic bed of a large east to west dune slack, and the laminated sands between the sandy peats have the appearance of having been deposited in water as the slack was infilled. The time taken from the initial blow out giving rise to dune slack conditions to the time when sand covered the basal organic horizon (the *Soil Bed*) could have been 150 years or more. This chronology is thus compatible with that based on the medieval artefacts found in the *Soil Bed* (Smith 1865, 214 plii). Assuming that the radiocarbon dates for the *Soil Bed* and sandy peat err on the late side, then the sand dunes existing before and during the formation of the dune slack could be assigned to the second phase of the Younger Dunes of the 12th and 13th centuries (Tooley 1978a, 145). Pollen is rarely present in the *Soil Bed* (due to subsequent oxidation) except where it is more peaty. Where conditions are suitable, however, seeds and pollen of wet and dry dune slack taxa are present. An alternative mode of origin for the *Soil Bed* and overlying laminated sands could be that they were formed in a sheltered lagoon.

The normal sequence of dune alignment seen on the Ainsdale and Formby coastal region, ie ranging from outer young dunes to an inner belt, has not been established in the area under consideration. However, on this coast, the amount of sand erosion in historical times has been high, and Tooley (1978a, 145) refers to documentary proof of dune instability on the Lancashire coast in the latter half of the 15th century. Hume (1863, opp 1), the original of which has been examined by the writer, shows a section of the coast illustrating the amount of land lost to the sea between 1771 and 1813, and his accompanying map of the Wirral shows the coastline of 1736/7. Further loss is obvious when comparison of the 1840 OS map is made with more recent maps. Since 1736, between Leasowe Lighthouse and Dove Point, the evidence suggests the loss of a strip of land, probably sand dunes and dune heath, about 400 m wide.

This great seaward loss of land complicates the interpretation of the upper sequence. Comparison of successive charts of the coastal area, from that of Captain G Collins (1689) to the present charts, gives some idea of the relatively recent coastal changes. Climatic changes have obviously affected sand movement, accretion and erosion, and there are periods on record when winds were stronger and more continuous from the east (Brooks 1949, 312-314), and more east and north winds between 1799 and 1820 are referred to by Goudie (1977, 133). Smith (1865, 203) mentions the 'rare conjunction of strong north or north east winds with higher Spring tides' when he refers to the decreasing number of artefacts being found on the Cheshire shore.

The actions of man in historic times have affected the Dee Estuary; the construction of the weir at Chester in the 11th century and, particularly, the construction of the New Cut in 1737, increased the natural silting up rate of the Dee. In the case of the Mersey, the scouring effects would have been increased by the construction of the docks; however, controls up river will have reduced the outward flow of sediment. Erosion at Formby Point may have been accelerated by dredging, not only by the removing of sand, but also by the channel so formed acting as a submarine sand barrier. These interferences, together with the construction of Wallasey Embankment, begun in 1829, and the construction of the training walls of the Mersey Channel have masked natural coastal processes.

### **Opportunities and evidence for Prehistoric Settlement**

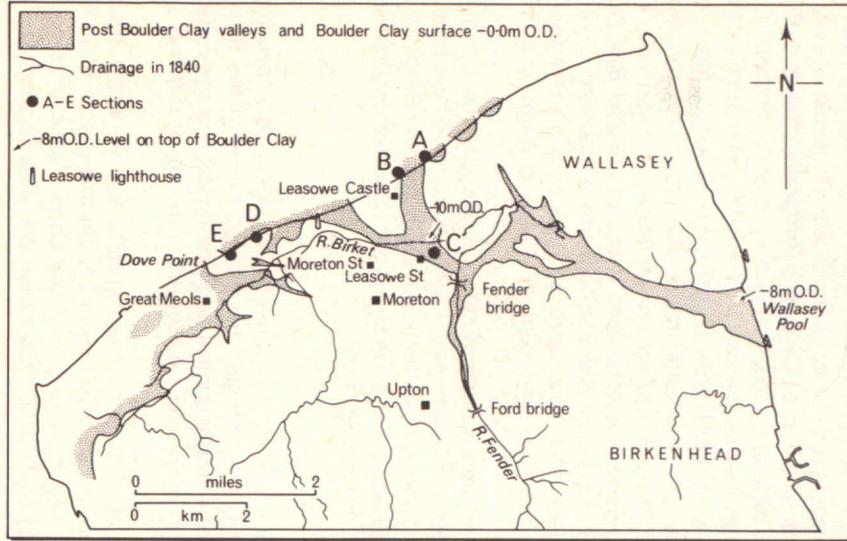
During the last 10,000 years the landmass has extended to the north of the present coastline, although, at times, marine incursions have submerged parts of it, and these incursions have submerged land south of the present coastline. Some of the marine incursions may have been sudden, due to surge tides and, at times, blocked inland waters may have ruptured peat deposits and sand dunes. At times, Wallasey's rocky promontory and knolls of boulder clay may have appeared as islands, at least at high tide. Over the same area, environmental conditions have fluctuated with marine incursions and regressions. Remapping of the Wallasey Embankment, together with evidence and illustrations of previous writers (Reade 1871 & Morton 1891, pl 1, frontis) and old photographs suggest that afforestation was more prolific to the north. The tree stumps previously exposed on the Formby shore (Travis 1926) may be similar in age to those of the Wirral coast.

Conditions for settlement varied on this coastal plain; they were unfavourable when saltmarsh and mud flats existed, but more favourable during periods of afforestation and sand dune stability when shelter was provided. The presence of man in the area may be inferred tentatively from the pollen data, ie about 5,000 years bp (and later).

An abundance of animal bones at A, almost certainly a bone midden found in grey silt below the UPFB in a gully exposed on the shore during storm tides in 1967, included a skull and other bones of an ox (*Bos sp*) with bones and antlers of red deer (*Cervus elaphus*). The contents of the midden have been examined by the writer. From the difference in the size and shape of the antlers, it included the remains of at least two deer, and bones of at least two oxen were present. A radiocarbon date of 3,980 years bp has been obtained from an assay on an ox rib bone from the midden. (The finder claims to have seen a more or less circular floor on peat, showing evidence of burning, a short distance inland of the midden). The correlation between tree and bone radiocarbon dates suggests the presence of man and settlement in the wooded coastal area about 4,000 to 3,600 years bp. There is insufficient data to determine whether or not the settlers were semi-nomadic hunters and fishermen, or early farmers supplementing their diet with meat and probably fish, and living in natural or man made clearings. Tillage would have been possible where the boulder clay was sandier or overlain by sands, silts and peat with good drainage. Settlement after this time is clearly evident from pollen data of the later peats.

The writer has been informed that two canoes were found at the base of the UPFB 400 m north west of Section C during building work in 1961. In the absence of accurate stratigraphical provenance or other substantiating data, there are two periods when the canoes could have been in use, about 5,000 years bp, or by the settlers in the wooded coastal area between 4,000 and 3,600 years bp. The canoe and midden sites are close to the buried channel of the early Fender and communication over shallow water between these sites would have been possible by canoe. Evidence for more recent freshwater lakes and reed swamps on the plain, particularly east of Moreton, is indicated by the presence of grey silts and clays with freshwater shells above the UPFB and below the topsoil.

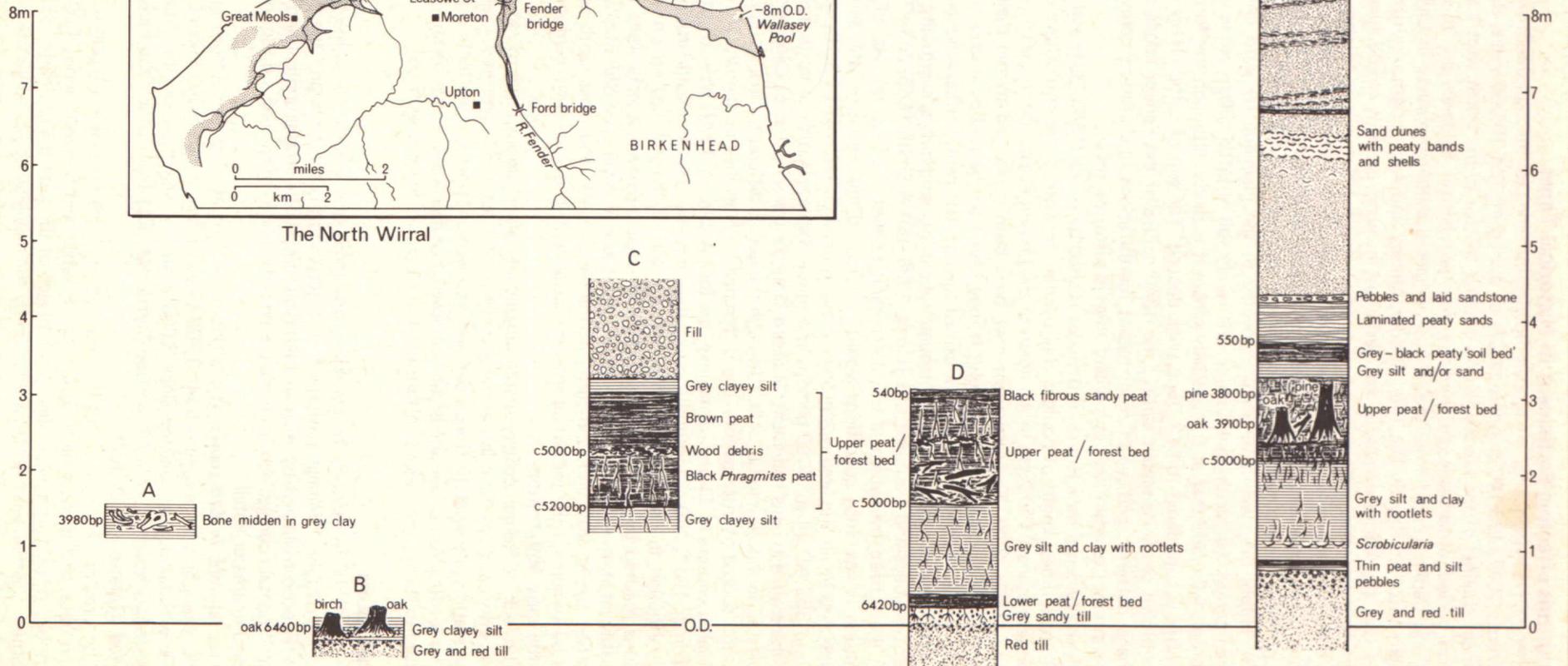
Figure 1



The North Wirral

Representative stratigraphical sections showing radiocarbon dates

c = dates bp based on pollen analyses and other data



J. Lynch

## Conditions affecting Settlement in Historical Times

There is no evidence for the Mersey flowing into the Dee through the Broxton valley in historic times (Mortimer 1847, 193-140 & Appx 21-27) or during the last 10,000 years; neither is there evidence for the main channel of the Mersey having entered the sea to the north west via Wallasey Pool. During the Roman period, a navigable entrance may not have been in evidence due to the existence of sand bars, spits and banks formed from glacial and periglacial sediment already in Liverpool Bay, and from that brought into the Bay by the Dee, Fender, Mersey and Alt. Longshore drift along the coasts of north Wales and the Wirral peninsula and variations in wind patterns would have further complicated the marine and sub-aerial sedimentary processes. During the Roman period and at earlier times the Mersey may have been more deltaic in appearance, backed by uninviting saltmarsh. The Dee channel during the Roman period and before could have been further to the west (it is of interest to note that *forest beds* are still shown to the east of Dawpool Bank on the Geological Survey's Drift Map of Liverpool 1:50000, 1975). Hilbre may well have been connected to the mainland by sand dunes prior to or during the Roman period. Under the microscope, the sandy soil of Little Hilbre shows many characteristics similar to those of the *Soil Bed* at E, especially where it is sandy, although the former is at a higher level, and the latter is considered to be a dune slack deposit. The soil of Little Hilbre seems to have been derived from blown sand. As stated earlier, the 1840 course of the Fender appears to be unrelated to earlier drainage patterns, and, apart from recent modifications, the present course could, therefore, reflect man's attempt to drain the wet lowland areas in historical times.

Strong evidence for a Roman settlement is cited by Hume (1863, 391) and Chitty & Warhurst (1977). In Roman times, knolls of boulder clay overlain by sand dunes could have afforded areas of sheltered settlement at least 1 to 2 km to the north of the present coast, and this is compatible with Smith's observations (1865, 203). The settlement may have been connected to the mainland by a spit backed by shallow water, or, more speculatively, it may have been backed by a lagoon. Wind and marine erosion could have led to the later abandonment of such a settlement, perhaps sudden abandonment, leaving the remains of the occupation to sink through the eroding sand dunes, eventually to settle on already eroded forest/peat beds and clays and silts (Hume 1866, 391 & Smith 1865, 203). The seaward fertile *Soil Bed* could have been overwhelmed by blown sand or destroyed by the sea and, with the erosion of the sheltering dunes, such conditions would have caused the retreat of later settlers. The earliest recorded marine disaster in the area was probably the inundation referred to by Benjamin (1868, 391) as taking place in 353 AD when '5000 persons and innumerable quantity of cattle perished'. Benjamin does not give the source for his statement. Richard Gough's transcription of *Camden's Britannia* (Gough 1789) reports an inundation in 563 AD. Although the date is different, the accompanying description implies a common source of information. The difference in dates may have arisen from a different reading of the original manuscript. Storms damaging Stanlow Abbey in 1279, also affecting the shores of the Dee (Mortimer 1847, 260 & footnote), could have hastened severe coastal erosion along the northern coastline. Although the radiocarbon date near the top of the soil may err on the late side, it verifies conclusions reached by Smith (1865, 214, pl II) that medieval objects were found in the *Soil Bed*, but probably at a lower level than the radiocarbon sample level. The *Soil Bed* is below a sequence of well stratified sandy peats and sands infilling the earlier slack, and these sands and later blown sands could have overwhelmed the remaining seaward settlement in the late 14th century (Chitty & Warhurst 1977) and the early 15th century.

The lack of Roman pottery is still inexplicable, since various types of red, blue and grey clay occur in the vicinity, and the function of the settlement, at least in Roman times, is unclear. It could have been a signal station or a small fortified post, and a convenient port and shelter between Chester and Ribchester. The exact location of the site is still unknown, but it is possible that certain geophysical techniques may be used to locate any major concentration of stone (eg hearths) or metal.

## Conclusions

From 10,000 years BP, the coastal environment of the north Wirral has been continuously changing, at times rapidly. Drainage patterns have altered during this time and the present course of the Birket may have been shaped by man in historical times. The stratigraphical and lithological changes reflect environmental changes, and from the pollen assemblages of the peats these environmental changes can be defined in greater detail.

Tree stumps *in situ* represent periods of ancient afforestation (more prolific to the north) about 6,460 years bp and between about 3,900 years bp and about 3,600 years bp. On this coastal plain no major woodlands have existed since 3,600 years bp except perhaps for Alder Carrs. Pollen from dune slacks does, however, contain the Bog Myrtle (*Myrica*) from which the name 'Wirral' is supposed to be derived (Dodgson 1970, 167).

The presence of man in this low lying coastal area from about 5,000 years bp is inferred from the pollen data, and there is firmer evidence for settlement between about 4,000 years bp and about 3,600 years bp. After this time, pollen assemblages of the later peats clearly indicate man's presence. Areas suitable for settlement have been affected by the changing coastal environment.

During the writer's mapping of the area, no artefacts have been found *in situ*. Local farmers and market gardeners have found no artefacts of importance but during ploughing and ditching operations in fields near the Birket tree stumps and trunks are dug out from time to time. If a settlement existed

during and after the Roman occupation, there can be no doubt that it was north of the present coastline; however, major coastal changes in historical and recent times have obliterated all visible evidence.

Further and more detailed evidence of changing environments, ecology and prehistoric settlement requires pollen analysis of complete sections of the coastal peats, and subsequent radiocarbon dating. The shore should be monitored regularly as, under certain tidal and storm conditions, Flandrian strata and the surface of the boulder clay may be revealed beneath the later covering of sand and silts.

Radiocarbon assays on samples from the black peat and the top of the brown peat at C are currently under way. The radiocarbon date on the brown peat may help to clarify the sequence of events after 3,800 years BP.

### Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to the Local Authorities, North West Water Authority, the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, and many other organisations for granting me access to borehole records, and to those contractors who have allowed me the use of machines for excavation and who have helped in levelling. Mr P Barber has provided valuable data relating to his current research into coastal changes and tidal action along the north Wirral coast. Dr H A McAllister (Ness Gardens) has identified plant material. Pollen analysis and Diatom identification have been carried out by Dr M J Tooley (University of Durham) and his colleagues. Pollen analyses have also been carried out by J Innes and P Tomlinson (Archaeological Survey of Merseyside), including those shown in the text, and Miss A O'Gara carried out the pollen analyses on the *Soil Bed* and sandy peats. Comments on the pollen analyses are based on written communications received from those mentioned above, their specialised knowledge has been invaluable, and Dr Tooley has been both encouraging and patient.

Radiocarbon dating on wood and peat has been undertaken by the National Environment Research Council's Radiocarbon Laboratory under the direction of Dr D D Harkness, and bone dating has been carried out by Mr R E G Williams at the University of Birmingham's Radiocarbon Laboratory. Geophysical surveys have been undertaken with the cooperation of Professor R L Wilson and Dr C D V Wilson (University of Liverpool). Other members of the staff of the University of Liverpool have been most helpful, and I am grateful to Professor W S Pitcher and Professor D Flinn for allowing me the use of facilities within the Geology Department, also to Mr J Lynch for producing the diagrams. Land owners, Leasowe Golf Club and, particularly, Messrs E R Squibb and Sons Ltd, together with many other people not referred to by name, have been most cooperative, and Mr W Henderson provided the ox rib bone for radiocarbon dating. Finally, this multi-disciplinary approach has been greatly facilitated by Mr B Sheppard and his colleagues of the Archaeological Survey of Merseyside.

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### Abbreviations

BP	Before present
OD	Ordnance Datum
OS	Ordnance Survey
UPFB	Lower Peat Forest Bed
UPFB	Upper Peat Forest Bed

# Bromborough Manor Houses

*K. JONES*

In April 1936 a report of a talk given by Mrs Anderson, a well known and respected Bromborough historian, appeared in a local newspaper — '... a hall existed in Bromborough since 1100 AD. It probably stood in the park forming part of the grounds near what was known locally as the "Horse Wash", a pond in the second field on the left of the path to Eastham Ferry. There were clear indications there of a moated grange ...'

The footpath, field and pond referred to are shown in the 1947 edition of the Wirral Footpaths Society's map of North Wirral, in an area now covered by oil storage tanks. The pond would have been situated at SJ 355820, along the southern side of the present Old Hall Road, the field stretching in a southerly direction towards Green Lane, Bromborough. It is readily recalled by older residents as being used to wash the legs of farm hoses and known also as 'Fetlock Wash'. Enquiries to date have not, however, revealed a further description of the moated site.

The field in question was shown as part of the Manor Hall park in the 1840 Tithe Map, but in an 18th century estate map as one of several fields called the Seeches which were part of the medieval arable field system of Bromborough, being a subject of a grant to the Abbot of St Werburgh's Monastery, Chester, between 1265 and 1291 (Tait 1920, 388-89), and mentioned in various title deeds of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. The name is Old English for a 'watercourse field'.

There are known to have been at least three manor houses in Bromborough at different periods:—

1. Bromborough Court House (SJ 345842) the ancient manor house of Bromborough, demolished in 1969, and subject of this society's Report no 2 (Chitty *et al* 1979).

2. Bromborough Manor, New or Upper Hall (SJ 351823) which was situated in Bromborough Village Road opposite the existing lane leading to the parish churchyard. It was demolished in 1930 and its site is now occupied by a petrol filling station. The hall is described by Mortimer (1847, 209), Sulley (1889, 206), Gamlin (1897, 64) and Young (1915, 44), who all state that it was built by Dr John Bridgeman, Bishop of Chester, between 1619 and 1645, the source being a travelogue description of Bromborough in the Gentleman's Magazine of 1762.

3. Bromborough Old, Lower or Little Hall. In 1594, Sir Hugh Cholmondeley and others sold Bromborough Court, 'that Mansion House or Manor House of Bromborough', and its demesne to Henry Hardware so that it became detached from the manor which was sold to Richard Bavand in the same year. In the relevant deed, apart from specifically excepting Bromborough Court, there is no reference to a capital message. The next sale of the manor occurred in 1638 when Richard Bavand sold the manor to Orlando Bridgeman. Again no capital message or manor house is mentioned in the deed, the relevant clause reading 'All and singular the Manor of Bromborough with the rights members and appurtenances thereof within the County of Chester and all the messuages, cottages, lands, tenements and herditaments ...'

There is a break in the succession of title deeds at this juncture as the next known deed relating to a sale of the manor is by Arthur and Anthony Samuel to James Green in 1661, and it mentions two halls, 'That Capitall Messuage or Manor House of Bromborough and that Capitall Messuage or Manor House called the Lower Hall of Bromborough'. Neither of these halls could be Bromborough Court because, as previously mentioned, it had become detached from the manor by its sale to the Hardwares in 1594, and remained so until 1748 when, following its sale to the Mainwaring family it became reunited.

It is not known for certain how the manor came into the possession of the Samuels but it may have been the subject of Parliamentary sequestration, because in 1646 a George Pressick, a Parliamentary sympathizer, complained to the Committee for Compounding that since being granted a lease of 'the Hall' by the Sequestrators for Wirral to the year ending 2nd February 1647 he had been disturbed in his possession of the Hall by John Bridgeman, sometime Bishop of Chester, to whom it lately belonged, and whose son Orlando had previously compounded his delinquency (Irvine & Bennett 1912, 43).

In 1662, James Green sold the Lower Hall with another message and tenement to William Pimlowe, the wording of the deed being 'one certain house . . . the Lower Hall' and 'another house or message . . . Mistress Alice House with appurtenances' together with the associated fields of the latter tenement. An endorsement of 1663 states 'Memorandum. that quiet possession seisin and Liverie were given by the within named James Green to the within named Will. Pimlowe in the Mansion or Dwelling House of the within ment'oned Message called Mistress Alice house or Message. And liverie in a Certain Roome in the House or Messuage called the Little Hall . . .'

In 1663, Green sold the manor to Edward Bradshaw and the deed states 'All that capital message or manor house called the New Hall of Bromborough . . .', and there is a clause specifically excepting 'all that message or tenement called the old hall and the backside . . . and all that message and tenement called Mrs Alice tenement with the backside thereto belonging' and specified fields.

By a fortunate coincidence the Hearth Tax Returns for 1663 have survived (Irvine & Bennett 1910, 69). Premises with more than one hearth are as follows:—

1.	Sir Thomas Povell	3
2.	James Green and Edward Bradshaw	13
3.	Frances Gille	2
4.	Will Daine	2
5.	Eallion Tellett	3
6.	Margaret Bagnall	2
7.	Will Pimlowe	5

Of these (1) was probably Bromborough Court, (2) would be Bromborough New Hall. From subsequent deeds (6) would appear to be the Mistress Alice House mentioned in the deeds of 1662 and 1663 and (7) the Old Hall. It would appear, therefore, that the Old Hall was a moderately sized building perhaps larger than the original Bromborough Court which it is thought was replaced about 1690 (Chitty *et al* 1979, 8).

The location of the Old Hall cannot be determined, and on present evidence cannot be equated with the site described by Mrs Anderson. However, the adjectives 'lower' and 'upper' when related to the slope of the land down to the river from the village encourages speculation that they are the same. The site was in the centre of the medieval field complex and it is interesting to note that if the southerly direction of the former Court Lane is continued, instead of diverting to the village as on the Tithe Map, it would meet the site and form a direct route between it and the Court House.

A further speculation is the possible relationship of the Old Hall with Bromborough Manor Farm, formerly located at SJ 350822. This building is described by most local writers in some detail, and some fine 16th century wood panelling is shown in a photograph in Young (1915). The present whereabouts of this panelling is not known but it does seem to have been slightly incongruous in a farm house. The Old Hall cannot be identified in any known documentary sources after 1663 and the Manor Farm is said to have been substantially restored in 1676 so that the panelling may have come from the Old Hall, possibly on demolition.

#### Unpublished sources

All the deeds are part of the Mainwaring collection of papers in the Cheshire County Record Office (ACC 53 DPB, ACC 103 DMB, ACC 124 DPB and ACC 231 DMB) with the exception of the deed Cholmondeley and others to Bavand (Bromborough Manor) 1594 which is in the Liverpool Central Library (Cheshire Deeds 195).

The Bromborough 1840 Tithe Map (EDT 70/2) and a photograph of an 18th Century survey map of Bromborough (ACC 107) are also in the Cheshire County Record Office.

The author acknowledges the assistance of the Merseyside Archaeological Survey — Miss G Chitty and Miss S Nicholson, the Cheshire County Record Office and the Liverpool Central Library.

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# Irby Mill Excavations 1979

**GILL CHITTY**

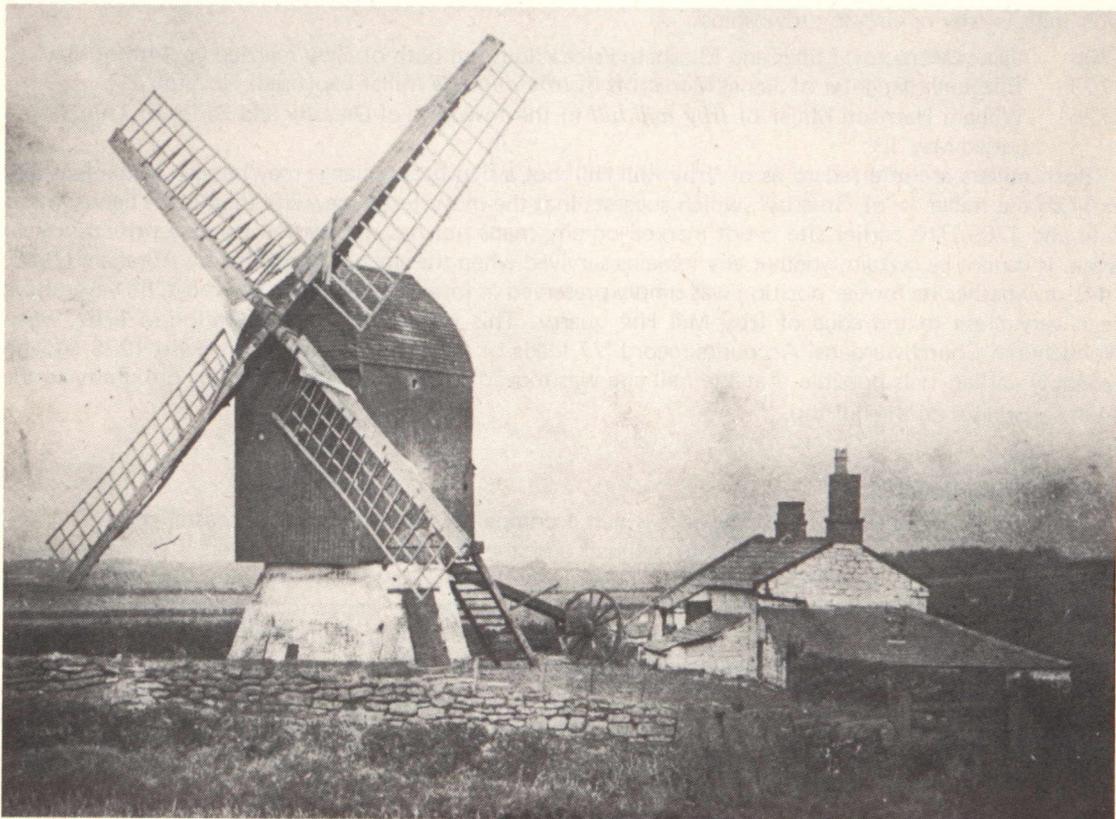
Early in 1979 the society's attention was drawn by Mr J T O'Neil to the proposed development of a post mill site at Irby Mill Hill in Greasby. The mill itself had been demolished, but the mill cottage remained and permission was being sought to convert this into a public house. Planning permission was finally granted to Higsons Brewery in March and a site meeting was arranged for the Wirral Field Work Group with the architect, Mr W Hardman. It was explained that the development of the site would involve the demolition of the derelict south-wing of the cottage, built in the 1920s, and the landscaping of the area west and north of the cottage to provide space for car parking. The latter would destroy any evidence which remained of the mill site. As the Wirral Field Work Group was engaged on a survey of mill sites in Wirral during the summer, this seemed an appropriate opportunity to examine a mill site by excavation. The proposal received every cooperation from the architect and contractors, and the site was excavated during three weeks at the end of July. The documentary work summarised below was drawn together in the interim period.

## **Irby Mill: the historical evidence**

The windmill appears to have occupied two sites at different periods in its history: the earlier one is said to have been 'well up the hill to the south of the now ruined one about 100 yards away' (Abraham 1905, 144). The first site from this description would have lain in Irby township, the boundary between Irby and Greasby townships lying along Hillbark Road (see figure 1). The later site, which was that excavated, lies in Greasby township, but both sites are within Thurstaston parish.

## **The medieval site**

The Taxation of Pope Nicholas IV c 1291 (Hist Mss Comm 1802, 258) contains the first known reference to a mill in Irby: '*Taxacio bonor' temporalm Abbis Cestr' in Decanat' de Wyrhale . . . Item het apud Yrby . . . Et het ibm unu' molin' ad ventu' & val p annu' 0-10-0'*'. It is evident that it formed part of the possessions of the Abbey of St Werburgh in Chester to which Irby and Greasby had been given in 1093 by Hugh Lupus (Ormerod 1882, II, 510). A rental of St Werburghs for 1431/2 states that 'The tenants of Irby, Greasby, Woodchurch and Noctorum with those of the monks of Frankby, must grind



*Figure 3: Irby Mill*

at Irby Mill to the 16th measure (ie they must give a sixteenth of the flour to the miller as toll) and convey millstones from Little Christleton to the said mill, and must repair the earthwork (*opus terrenum*) of the mill as may be needful' (Brownbill 1928, 284, quoting PRO Rentals and Surveys Roll 901). The Chartulary of St Werburgh's records that land in Little Christleton was given to the Abbey by Leticia de Malpas at some time between 1121 and 1129 (Tait 1920, 33) and a local variety of the ferruginous sandstone may have provided a more suitable material for millstones than any readily available from Wirral.

St Werburgh's Abbey was surrendered on 20 January 1540. For some years before this the Abbot had been granting unusually long leases on various monastic properties, and by an indenture of 10 September 1538, Abbot Thomas Clarke granted a 61 year lease to 'Thomas Birkheved' for, among other places, Hilbre Island and 'one Wyndemyne called Ireby Mylne, with the appurtenances to the same belonging paying . . . yearly to the Abbot and Convent . . . for the said mill, forty shillings'. The provisions placed upon the St Werburgh's community the obligation for 'all necessary reparacons that herafter shall happe in and upon the said mylne upon their own proper costes, that is to say mylne-stones, tymber werke and tymber for the same, ironwerke and iron for the same, cogges and ronges only of the same and seyll clothes' (*Sheaf* 3 ser, vol 32, June 1937 (7133), 52-3).

After the Dissolution, Irby was granted to the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral Church of Chester in the endowment of the latter on 4 August 1541 (*Sheaf* 3 ser, vol 2, Jan 1898 (137), 7). General references to Irby occur in leases, rentals and associated documents (ChRO refs EEC and ACC 1205 DPD) but references to the mill itself are rare and not all the Dean and Chapter records have survived in their original form. An extract from a 97 year lease granted on 13 March 1552 by the Dean and Chapter to Rowland Stanley, in consideration for the surrender of the Thomas Birkenhead lease, granted in 1538, was published in *Sheaf* (3 ser, vol 4 April 1902 (624), 44, quoting B M Harleian Mss No 1994, f.409b). The 1552 lease included 'their Windy Milne called Irby Milne'. A later reference to the same leases of 1538 and 1552 was made in a Court of Exchequer document of 28 October 1634/44 (*Sheaf* 3 ser, vol 6, Oct 17 1906 (1143), 84, quoting B M Harleian Mss No 2009, f.337) which repeated the list of Boardland tithes and ' . . . one wynde-mill in Irby . . . cald Irby Mill'.

During the Commonwealth period Deans and Chapters of Cathedrals were abolished. The Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 meant a similar restoration of Deans and Chapters and a fresh granting of leases. On 29 November 1660 a 21 year lease of Hilbre Island, various Boardland tithes and 'also all that Milne in Irby . . . called Irby milne with all the tolls and mulctures thereunto belonging' was granted to William Stanley (*Sheaf* 3 ser, vol 5 June 3 1903 (841), 52). The next specific reference to the mill is to be found in the will of Edward Glegge of Grange, 10 November 1684, ' . . . all my purchased lands in and about Irby with the windmill there' (ChRO WS; Beazley 1926, 49).

The extant registers for Thurstaston parish begin in 1706 (ChRO ref P48/1/1). The Bishop's Transcripts date from 1581 (ChRO ref EDB BTs Thurstaston). Townships and occupations are occasionally entered but not consistently. The following transcript entries note occupation and are linked with mills in Irby or Greasby townships:

- 1706 'James Morecroft Miller and Elizabeth Price Widd(ow) both of *Erby* married ye 14th of May'  
1709 'Elizabeth daughter of James Morecroft of *Irby-mill-Hill* Miller bap(tised) Novemb 1'  
1725 'William Harrison Miller of *Irby mill hill* in the township of *Greasby* and Parish of Thurstaston buried May 13'

Both millers are referred to as of 'Irby Mill Hill' but a significant change may be seen in the fact that in 1725 the miller is 'of Greasby', which suggests that the move to the new site took place between this date and 1709. The earlier site is not marked on any maps nor has its position been identified in field work. It cannot be certain whether any remains survived when the site was described by Abraham (1905, 144) or whether its former position was simply preserved in local memory. The site must, however, have been very close to the edge of Irby Mill Hill quarry. This was certainly in operation in 1767, when Woodchurch Churchwardens' Accounts record '77 loads of stone from Irby Hill' (Hewitt 1925, 9), and probably earlier. It is possible that the mill site was moved to the north because of its proximity to the quarry workings on the hill top.

### The post medieval site

Irby Mill is not mentioned in the text which accompanies Fearon and Eyes coastal chart of 1738, although other mills in the vicinity are included and the position of the mill itself is shown approximately on the 1755 edition of the chart. A possible explanation is that by this time the mill had been moved to its new site and no longer constituted a useful landmark, appearing against the hill instead of on the skyline as before. The site was less favourable for the prevailing winds for this reason, as Abraham (1905, 144) and Marriott (*Sheaf* 5 ser Jan 1977 (42)) have remarked.

By 1777 the mill was certainly in its later position as it is marked clearly in the north west corner of the cross roads on Burdett's map of Cheshire. A further piece of evidence regarding the date of the new mill was recovered from the ruin of the mill itself. Abraham (1905, 144) records 'Among the confused heap of ruins on the later site are several pieces of timber, one between two and three feet square, formerly the shaft, bears the date 1773 and the initials R<sup>M</sup>H'. This date provides a *terminus ante quem* but is not likely to be that of the building of the structure.

For the 19th century the site is documented in detail both on maps and in written records. Bryant's

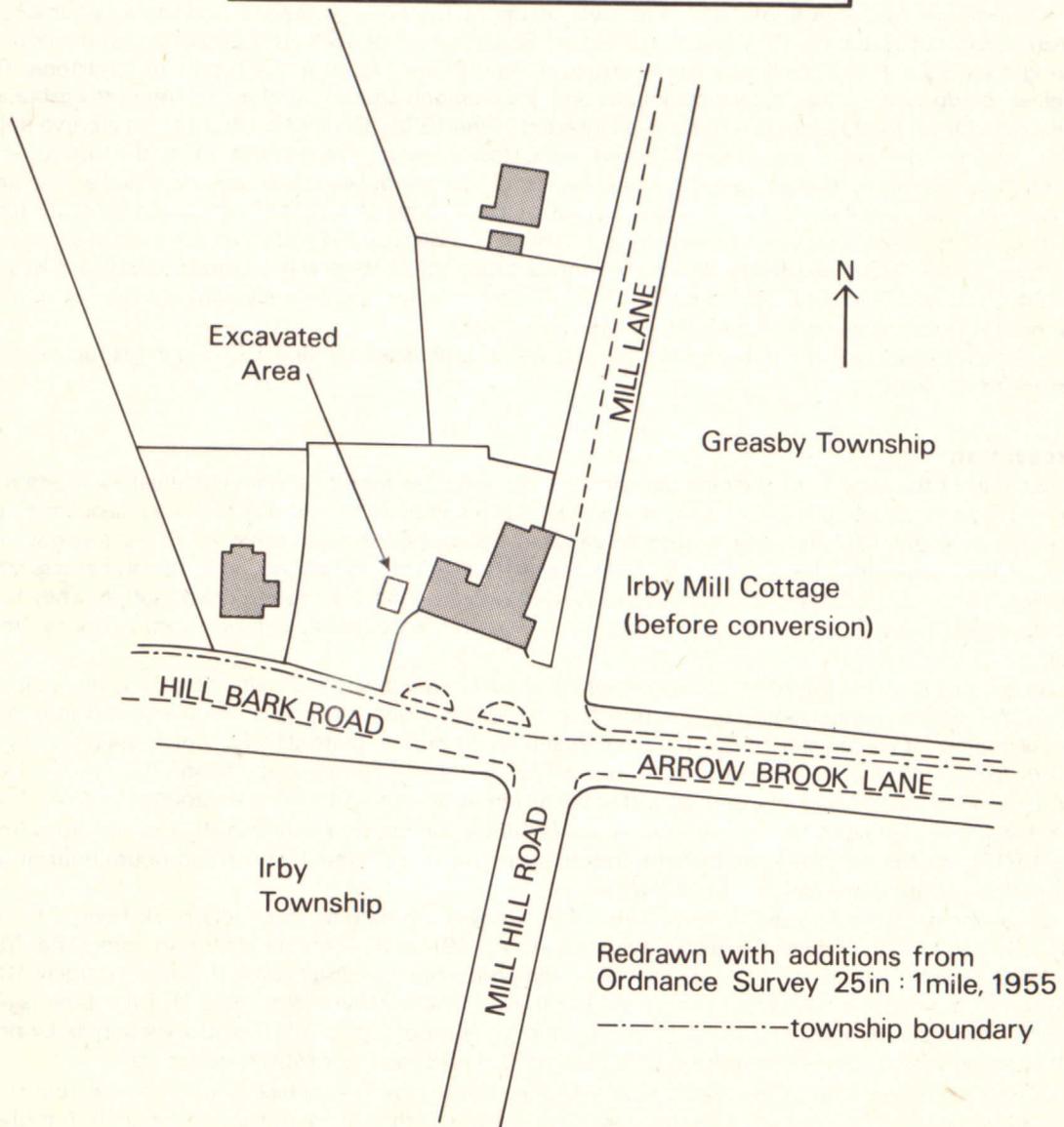
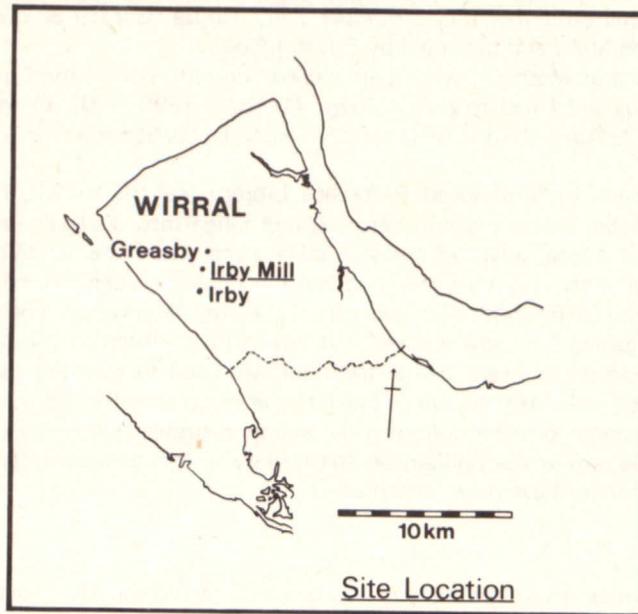


Figure 1: The Site of Irby Mill

map of 1829 shows the mill in its later position, and the tithe maps for Thurstaston, 1847 (ChRO ref EDT 394/2), and Greasby, 1849 (ChRO EDT 171/2) give considerable detail (see figure 2). In the tithe apportionment for Thurstaston the mill is number 214, 'House, Garden & Windmill' and was in the possession of John Ralph Shaw and occupied by Edward Realey.

By 1898 Colonel Arthur Mesham, who then owned the mill, commented that it was 'in a ruinous condition and dangerous and I had to pull it down' (Mesham 1899, 109). In the sale catalogue of the Greasby Hall Estate of 29 April 1913 (ChRO ref DRO/8/2/1), it is described as 'lot 18 . . . the site of the Old Wooden Windmill'.

An undated photograph in Birkenhead Reference Library (ref BC VII 42, 171/2), taken by James White and Theodore Green, shows the mill before it had fallen into disrepair (see figure 3a). The other view shown here is from a local postcard and was taken some years later when it was dilapidated. Both show a wooden post mill with a brick roundhouse, built in English garden 3 bond, on a sandstone plinth. There is a door into this, facing south east, away from the prevailing winds. The upper storey is weather boarded with an ogee gabled roof and was reached through a doorway at the rear. Wooden steps gave access to this. The wooden tail beam below the door was used to turn the superstructure around its central pivot, turning the sails into the wind. The latter are of simple framed form and would have been rigged with canvas. An undated water colour of the mill with similar detail by Peter Ghent, and a Hopps watercolour, dated 1898, are in the Williamson Art Gallery in Birkenhead. Regrettably no descriptions or photographs of the interior have been identified.

### **Irby Mill Cottage**

The earliest written reference to the mill cottage as distinct from the mill is in the tithe apportionment for Thurstaston (see above) of 1847. The style of the cottage would possibly indicate a rather earlier construction but as the building is not marked on Bryant's map of 1829, it is probable that it was built during the 1830s. It is a small two storey structure built of well faced ashlar blocks of sandstone. The original windows are small square casements and the diamond shaped windows in the north gable are understood from local residents to have been inserted in the 1930s. On the east front there are two doorways, one on the north side being blocked with stone. During the renovation of the cottage, the architect noted other, internal, features which suggested that the building had been occupied at one time as two separate dwellings; approximately a third of the cottage at the north end being separate from the rest. At the rear, a series of brick lean-to buildings had been added and an annexe on the south side was built in the 1920s (see figure 2). As mentioned above the cottage was occupied by Edward Realey in 1847, and the Census of 1851 describes him as 'Master Miller and Journeyman'. Before the cottage was built it is not certain where the miller would have lived.

A detailed history of the mill site and cottage will be published by Mr J T O'Neil in his forthcoming *History of Greasby*.

### **Excavation**

A study of the early maps showing the windmill site indicates that it had lain immediately adjacent to the south west corner of the mill cottage, an area which had been the cottage garden subsequent to the demolition of the mill. This area formed an elevated flat topped mound, some 2 to 3 metres above the level of the surrounding land. Steps had been constructed in the side of the mound to give access from the north side of the cottage and these were revealed when the site was cleared of vegetation. They were constructed of reused sandstone and brick of 18th century date, possibly taken from the demolished mill.

An area of 8 metres by 6 metres was stripped of turf in the position shown in figure 1. Immediately below the turf an unmortared stone foundation of reused stone blocks (1) was uncovered in a loose rubbly matrix of garden soil containing large quantities of broken plate glass (2) which can probably be accounted for by the greenhouse shown on the 1938 Ordnance Survey map (figure 2). A shallow slot (7/8) cut into the lower levels, and on a slightly different alignment to the stone foundation, was filled with loose soil containing recent material. Together with a number of articulated chicken skeletons (in 2 and 16/17), on the north side of the site, the slot is probably associated with a hen house built at the rear of the cottage in the earlier part of the century.

Below the garden soil, a sequence of layers was removed, containing stone and brick fragments and gradually becoming sandier. All these layers (3, 4, 13, 19) were contaminated with some late 19th century pottery although they contained a very high proportion of earlier residual material, largely 18th century in date with a few earlier sherds of brown glazed earthenware (see Table 1). Into these layers were cut two animal burials (16/17 and 14/15, chicken and dog, see Table 2) and several irregular post holes packed with brick and stone fragments (5/6, 9/10, 11/12) and of relatively recent date.

On the north east side of the area a relatively pure sandy layer (4) appeared to have been tipped on the site in the late 19th century and large quantities of early 18th century pottery and a small flint blade were found in this. A discontinuous layer of compacted red and grey clay (18 and 20) sealed the only level which was found to contain purely early 18th century material (21). This lay immediately over the sandstone bedrock, which rose steeply towards the south end of the site, and showed no traces of the mill foundations.

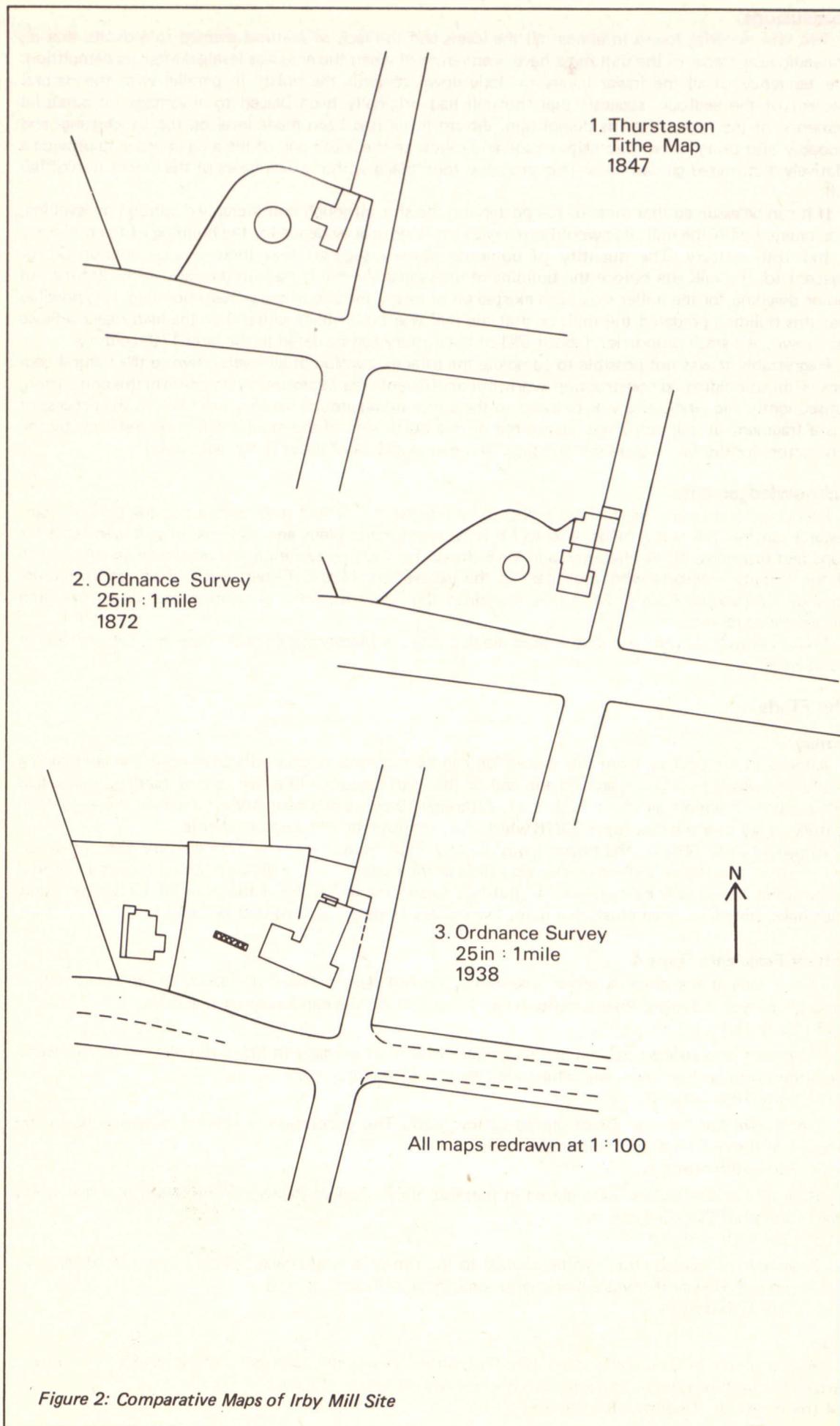


Figure 2: Comparative Maps of Irby Mill Site

## Conclusions

The late material found in almost all the levels and the lack of features seemed to indicate that all archaeological traces of the mill must have been removed when the area was levelled after its demolition. The tendency of all the lower layers to slope down towards the north, in parallel with the natural gradient of the bedrock, suggests that the mill had originally been placed to advantage on a natural eminence of the rock. After its demolition, the small hill had been made level on top by shifting, and probably also bringing in, quantities of soil and rubble to the south end of the area in order to provide a relatively flat, raised garden area. This probably took place within a few years of the demolition of the mill.

If it can be assumed that most of the pottery on the site, although considerably disturbed by levelling, is associated with the mill, this would agree with the historical evidence for the building of the mill early in the 18th century. The quantity of domestic pottery suggests that there was occupation on, or adjacent to, the mill site before the building of the sandstone mill cottage in the early 19th century. An earlier dwelling for the miller may have existed on or nearby the site of the present building. It is possible that this building predated the mill, or that the mill was built rather earlier than the historical evidence has shown, as a small proportion (about 5%) of the pottery can be dated to the later 17th century.

Regrettably it was not possible to complete the total excavation of all levels down to the natural bedrock without holding up construction work, but a sufficient area was examined to confirm this conclusion. Subsequently the whole site was reduced to the surrounding ground level by machine. In the process of this a fragment of mill stone was uncovered on the north side of the mound which was retained by the contractors for display outside the building. No other evidence of the mill was uncovered.

## Acknowledgements

Particular thanks are due to Miss S Nicholson and Mr J T O'Neil who carried out the documentary research on the mill and cottage; also to Mr M Brown for the plans and sections; Miss K Lancaster for maps and drawings; Mr W Hardman and Mr F Brown for their cooperation and assistance on site; and to all the Society members who took part in the excavation. Miss C Fisher, Department of Vertebrate Zoology, Merseyside County Museums, examined the bones from the excavation and kindly prepared the appended report.

The excavation records and all the finds are deposited in Merseyside County Museums, Department of Antiquities.

## The Finds

### Pottery

Almost all the pottery from the excavation can be regarded as unstratified owing to the landscaping of the site which took place around the end of the 19th century and which caused the disturbance and redeposition of almost all levels except 21. Although 19 contained no material later than the early 18th century, it lay over the clay layer 20/18 which did produce late 19th century sherds.

Approximately 65% of the pottery was of early 18th century or later 17th century date, however, and most of this has very close or exact parallels in the material from the South Castle Street, Liverpool excavations, which will be published in full in a forthcoming volume of this Journal. Only a very few finds have, therefore, been illustrated here. The pottery finds are summarised in Table 1.

### Pottery Fragments, figure 4

1. Four joining sherds of a brown stoneware handled cup in fine buff fabric. Ornamented with a band of grooves and raised lines around the girth, over which the handle has been applied.  
3.13 Early 18th century.
2. Fragment of a straight sided, handled tankard with splashed glaze in fine buff coloured earthenware. Decorated with girth grooves over which the handle has been applied.  
3.13 Early 18th century.
3. Decorative lug from a splash glazed hollow ware. The decoration is applied in two coils to the exterior of the rim. Fine buff coloured earthenware.  
3.13 Early 18th century.
4. Base of a coarse hollow ware glazed in purplish black. Red earthenware fabric with rounded white quartz and small black inclusions.  
3.18 Late 17th century.
5. Fragment of faceted strap handle applied to the rim of a large coarse hollow ware, with black glaze inside and out. Red earthenware fabric with some large inclusions of grog.  
3.19 Late 17th century.

### Flint

6. Broken blade of semi translucent grey flint, struck as a single flake and slightly convex. The convex surface has been worked by the removal of secondary longitudinal flakes.  
3.4 (redeposited) Neolithic/Bronze Age.

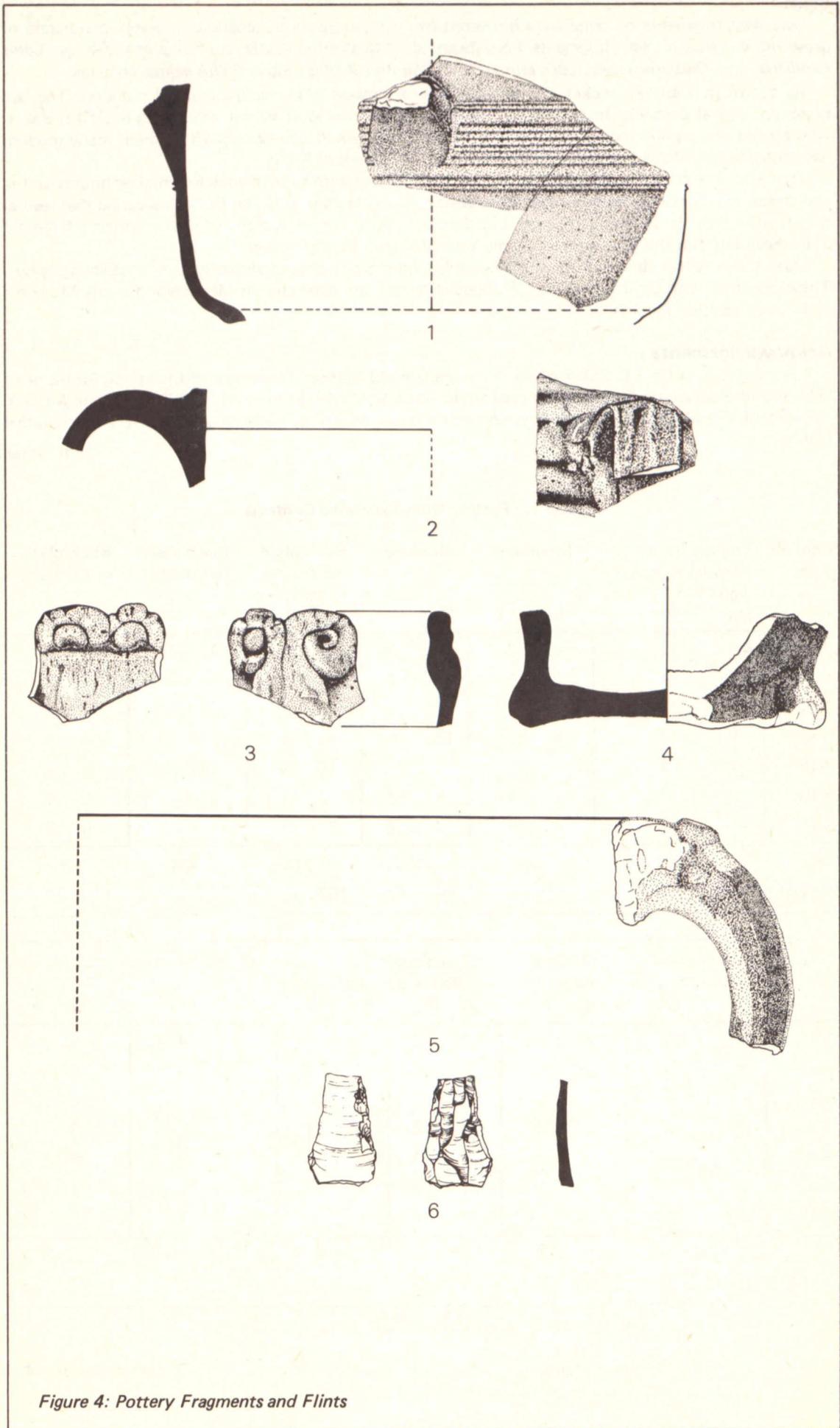


Figure 4: Pottery Fragments and Flints

## Bones

Over 400 fragments of bone were recovered from the excavation, generally in a very good state of preservation. About 380 fragments have been identified and include the following species: *Canis familiaris*, dog; *Ovis aries*, sheep; *Bos taurus*, cow; *Equus caballus*, horse; *Gallus gallus*, chicken.

As shown in Table 2, chicken and dog bones were present in by far the greatest numbers. The dog bones are almost certainly from one skeleton and are from an adult animal. According to Dr J R Baker, who carried out a pathological study of the bones, these would correspond with a great many modern day mongrels and closely resemble the bones of various breeds of Collie.

The great number of chicken bones present is consistent with the evidence for chicken houses on the site. There is a considerable size range in evidence, from Bantam to Game Cock, indicating that several breeds were kept. From the pathological evidence it would seem that many of the bones came from old individuals and that the birds were probably kept primarily for egg laying.

Measurements have been taken where possible under the von den Driesch system (see Bibliography). These, together with Dr J R Baker's pathological report, are deposited in Merseyside County Museums with the excavation records.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Dr J R Baker of the Veterinary Field Station, University of Liverpool, for his most helpful pathological report and additional advice on identification. I would also like to thank Mr G Y McInnes of the Museums Conservation Department for obtaining some of the necessary comparative material.

Clem Fisher

**Table 1: Pottery from Excavated Contexts**

Context Nos.	English china, porcelain, enamel wares etc.		Stoneware		Slipware		Black glaze-red/purple body		Black glaze buff body		Black glaze-mixed body	
	No	MV	No	MV	No	MV	No	MV	No	MV	No	MV
3-3	42	12	6	3	9	2	11	2	4	2	19	3
3-4	11	4	3	2	15	4	37	5	5	2	21	2
3-8	—	—	—	—	1	1	4	1	—	—	2	1
3-13	4	2	6	2	15	6	21	3	12	5	59	5
3-18	4	3	—	—	1	1	5	1	1	1	—	—
3-19	—	—	1	1	1	1	2	1	—	—	5	1
3-21	—	—	—	—	4	2	22	2	—	—	5	3
%	12%		3%		9%		21%		4%		23%	
TOTALS	61	21	16	8	46	17	102	15	22	10	111	15

Context Nos.	Brown glaze-purple body		Splashed glaze		Lead glaze yellow ware		Tin glaze ware		Gravel Tempered		Clay pipes	
	No	MV	No	MV	No	MV	No	MV	No	MV	No	MV
3-3	5	2	6	1	4	2	—	—	1	1	6	2
3-4	4	1	22	2	5	1	1	1	1	1	—	—
3-8	—	—	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
3-13	5	1	33	9	8	2	1	1	—	—	3	2
3-18	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	3	3
3-19	—	—	1	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	6	3
3-21	1	1	5	3	—	—	—	—	1	1	5	3
%	3%		14%		4%		0.5%		0.5%		5%	
TOTALS	16	6	68	17	21	9	2	2	3	3	23	13

NB Context 2, topsoil, is omitted here as very disturbed

No = Number of sherds  
MV = Minimum number of vessels

Total No Sherds = 491

**Table 2: Excavated Bone**

Context	Canis familiaris	Ovaries	Bos taurus	?Equus caballus	Gallus gallus	Total of identifiable fragments
2	6	3	—	?2	200	205
3	6	—	—	—	5	11
4	—	—	1	—	—	1
8	—	—	—	—	2	2
13	unidentifiable fragment					
15	64	—	—	—	—	64
17	—	—	—	—	101	101
TOTAL	70	3	1	?2	308	384
% of total	18	1	.5	.5	80	100

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**Abbreviations**

- BM Harl Ms      British Museum Harleian Manuscripts
- Chet Soc*      Chetham Society
- ChRO      Cheshire Record Office, The Castle, Chester
- Hist Mss Comm      Historical Manuscripts Commission
- Sheaf*      *Cheshire Sheaf*, Irvine, W F & Bennett, H E, eds.
- Trans Hist Soc Lancashire Cheshire*      Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire



# Bromborough Court House Moated Site Excavations 1979

*DAVID FREKE*

## Introduction

Following the work carried out in 1977-78 by a joint WEA and Institute of Extension Studies evening class (Chitty *et al* 1979) the Liverpool University Rescue Archaeology Unit excavated a small trial trench in advance of redevelopment adjacent to the moat at Bromborough (figure 1). The work was carried out by a Manpower Services Commission team with grants from the DoE and UML Ltd in October and November 1979. The excavation was designed to check the possibility of medieval occupation or use of the area, and also to determine the profile and date of the south west corner of the moat. This report follows the recommendations of the Frere report on archaeological publication. The Level II and Level III archives on which it is based are lodged with the finds in the Merseyside County Museums.

## The excavation

The drift geology of the area is generally boulder clay and in the excavation this deposit was represented by clay and sand. A pocket of clay had been cut by the moat, a fortunate occurrence because it facilitated the identification of material dug from the moat and spread outside. The upper surface of the sand was disturbed by small gullies and hollows, most of which were filled with iron-rich concretions. These features could not be investigated more fully because of the narrowness of the trench. The sand above these disturbances was black, virtually stone free and may represent a well developed pasture soil. Above this, over much of the trench, was a more or less clayey layer, very patchy towards the west, but quite thick and clean, nearer the moat. This is interpreted as material derived from the moat, either during recutting, or at the time of its original excavation. The capacity of the excavated section of the moat is approximately 40 m<sup>3</sup>, whereas the buildup of ground in the trench outside the moat represents only 9 m<sup>3</sup>, this being determined by calculating the greater depth of soil nearer the moat. Even allowing for much material being dispersed or eroded further to the west, this indicates that some of the material from the moat must have been disposed of elsewhere than in the area of the trench. The clay layer cannot be merely the result of superficial cleaning operations because of its thickness and cleanness which suggest that it was dug freshly. It is more likely to represent the spoil from a very massive recut or from the original excavation. This episode cannot be dated except by inference from the fact that no pottery above the clay in the ploughsoil is earlier than the 18th century. There were no artefacts at all in the layers below, except a possible struck flint. This may only mean that manuring (and therefore perhaps ploughing) in the area commenced in the 18th century. There were ploughmarks visible in the 24-26 m zone.

Above the ploughsoil was a thin, stony layer, the bottom of a worm-sorted soil. It contained 19th century pottery, coal and domestic ash. The topsoil was a well developed pasture soil. The ditch contained a wet humus rich fill, which covered fragments of late 19th century pottery. The profile suggests that the recut which they represent only affected the lower part of the ditch (3.5 m-8.5 m). This conclusion is supported by the presence of mature trees and stumps on the sides of the ditch and their absence in the bottom. The east side of the ditch was much disturbed by rabbits and roots, but the west side cut through a band of clay about 1.5m thick, overlying sand. The junction of the natural sand in the trench outside the moat and the natural clay at the top of the ditch (14 m) was obscured by tree root or rabbit disturbance and a modern pit.

## Observations in a contractor's trench

While the Unit excavation was being carried out at the south west corner, contractors erecting an overhead steam pipeline bulldozed a ramp through the ditch and into the interior at the north west corner (figure 2). The opportunity was taken to clean and record the section thus revealed (figure 3). The concrete base of a stanchion, the incomplete excavation and the obliquity of the trench all conspired to confuse the interpretation, but it could be seen that the internal pond may have originally extended at least as far as the trench where it was much shallower. Mrs McMillan observed only 8" (0.20 m) of silt in the bottom of the present (dry) pond in 1957 (Chitty *et al* 1979, 6). This is at least a metre lower than the natural sand in the contractor's trench, where it is overlain by at least 0.60 m of silt. This argues for a considerable recent deepening, or at least cleaning, of the present internal pond, a process which did not encompass the western end. In fact the top metre of the section in the contractor's trench had all the appearance of a dump of soil, with tip lines of various sands and earth, which might be attributable to the deepening of the remainder of the inner pond. Another possibility is that the inner and outer ponds were once one, and the western arm of the present moat was driven through it, the spoil being

used to backfill the adjacent portions of the pond. This could easily be checked by a small excavation.

No dating evidence was recovered from any of the layers in the contractor's trench, but the peaty organic deposit at the bottom although dry was not completely decayed. Small twigs and roots could still be discerned.

### The finds

The pottery was all 18th, 19th and early 20th century in date, and very fragmented. This is consistent with the night soil manuring known to have been used extensively in the region. Very few finds were of interest in their own right, but among the earthenwares was an applied slipware 'chicken' decoration, probably from a Buckley moneybox.

Other finds included nails, a modern horseshoe and bottle glass.

### Stratigraphy and Pollen Analysis at Bromborough Court House, Wirral

Samples were recovered from the contractor's trench at Bromborough Court House, (fig. 2), to shed light on the stratigraphy and environmental history of the site. Dimpleby (1975) has discussed fully the interpretation of pollen assemblages from buried soils on archaeological sites, and they appear to be essentially local in nature, reflecting conditions on the site and its immediate vicinity. The interpretations and conclusions which follow reflect this contention.

### Stratigraphy

Field and laboratory examination of the sampled profile revealed a complex stratigraphic succession, within which three discrete units were recognised. These are represented in the stratigraphic column displayed in fig. 3, according to the system proposed by Troels-Smith (1955). Of the 50 cms sampled, the top 10 cms was disturbed. Stratum 3, between 10 and 38 cms, is an organic clay soil. Stratum 2, from 38 to 46 cms, is a black organic peaty layer with tiny fragments of birch bark and charcoal at the top. The lowest deposit, stratum 1, is a sandy clay soil, with some organic and rootlet material.

### Interpretation of the Pollen record

#### Pollen Zone 'a' 48-46 cms

Pollen zone 'a' is coincident with Stratum 1 and is characterised by high percentages of *Betula* (birch), *Pinus* (pine) and *Corylus* (hazel) pollen. Values for the thermophilous trees, *Alnus* (alder) and *Quercus* (oak) are low, and those for *Ulmus* (elm) are negligible. Tree and shrub pollen values are high during this phase, uniformly above 90% of total pollen. Other shrubs are represented by *Salix* (willow), and *Calluna* (heather), while the spores of *Pteridium* (bracken) are recorded, reflecting its role as an understory fern in birch woodland. Herbaceous pollen frequencies, including *Gramineae* (grasses), are very low.

#### Pollen Zone 'b' 46-30 cms

This pollen zone is coincident with Stratum 2 and the basal part of Stratum 3. Tree pollen frequencies are dominated by *Quercus* and *Alnus*, and *Corylus* is still well represented. *Ulmus* and *Tilia* (lime) are present, and *Fraxinus* (ash) is recorded for the first time. *Betula* and *Pinus* have declined sharply relative to zone 'a', although tree and shrub pollen still dominate the pollen assemblage. The representation of herbaceous taxa has increased, and includes some which may be indicative of human activity. Although grass pollen frequencies are still low, the presence of pollen of *Plantago lanceolata* (ribwort plantain), *Rumex* (sorrel), *Cirsium* (thistle) and other weeds, indicates the opening of the woodland through pastoral land-use. High *Pteridium* values are probably associated with this limited woodland clearance.

#### Pollen Zone 'c' 30-18 cms

Describing the middle part of Stratum 3, this zone is characterised by a sharp fall in frequency of *Quercus* and *Tilia* pollen and their replacement in the pollen spectra by *Betula*. Herbaceous pollen frequencies rise to over 20% of total pollen, mainly due to a marked increase in the representation of grass pollen. Cereal pollen is identified throughout this zone and the occurrence of weeds associated with arable cultivation is noted, including the *Caryophyllaceae* (stichwort), *Artemisia* (mugwort), *Matricaria* (mayweed), the *Chenopodiaceae* (goosefoot and fat hen), *Taraxacum* (dandelion) and *Centaurea cyanus* (cornflower). At the end of the zone, pollen of *Cannabis* – type (hemp) is recorded. Herbs indicative of disturbed habitats, especially *Plantago lanceolata* and *Rumex*, are present in consistently high frequency. *Pteridium* and *Calluna* values exhibit sharp peaks in what is apparently more open woodland and *Fraxinus* is recorded sporadically.

#### Pollen Zone 'd' 18-10 cms

During this pollen zone, which represents the upper part of Stratum 3, tree pollen values are much reduced, and *Betula* is the main contributor to the tree pollen sum. *Quercus* and *Alnus* have dropped to very low levels and *Tilia* is no longer recorded. This would appear to reflect major woodland clearance in the vicinity of the site. Disturbed ecological conditions are attested by the increased representation of *Fraxinus*, indicative of disturbed, yet still nutrient – sufficient soils. Other shrubs which are encouraged by woodland clearance are present, including *Calluna* and *Salix*, while the secondary nature of the woodland is confirmed by isolated records of *Acer* (maple) and *Fagus* (beech).

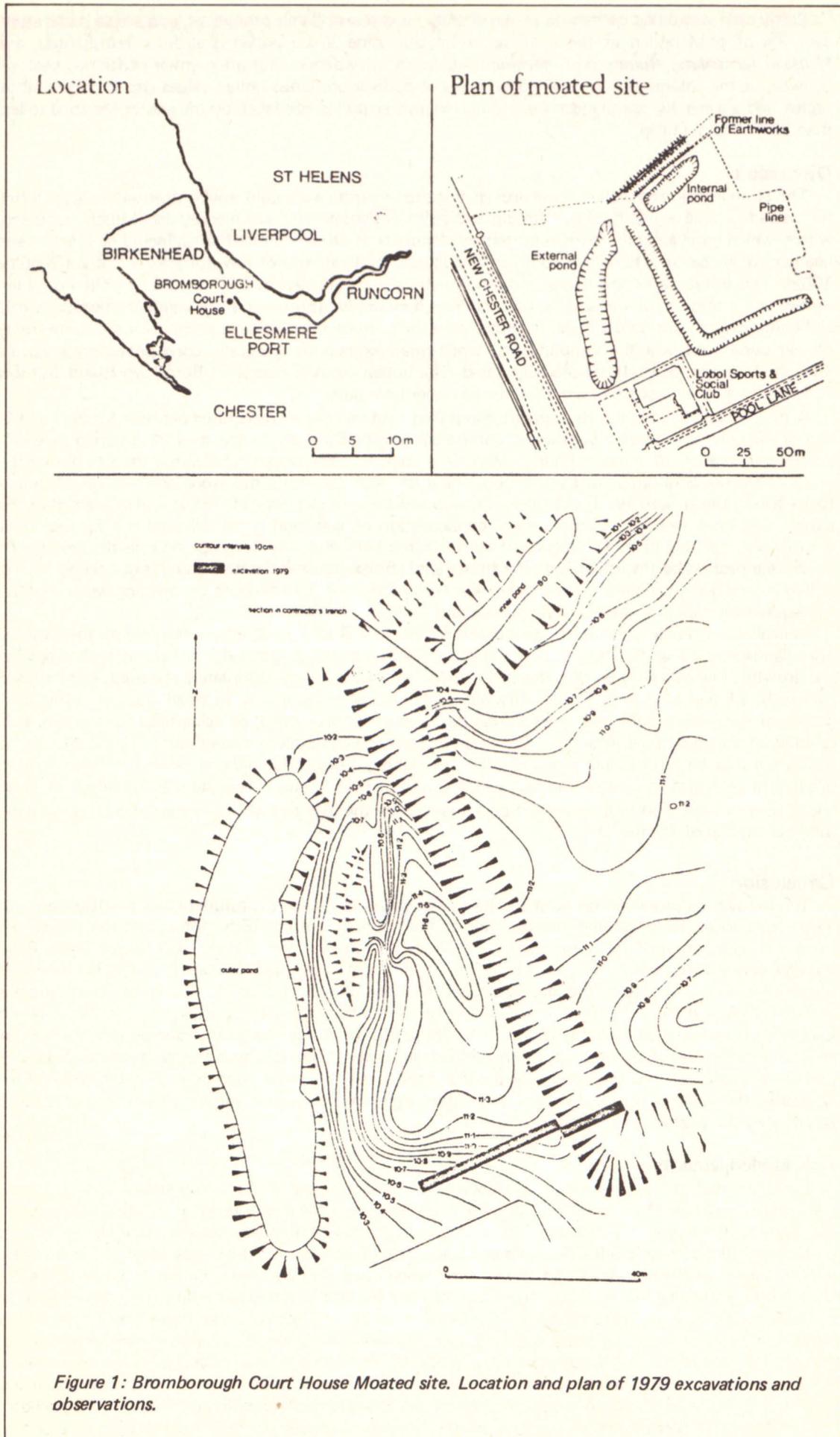


Figure 1: Bromborough Court House Moated site. Location and plan of 1979 excavations and observations.

Cultivation was being carried on in the vicinity, as cereal pollen is prominent, and arable herbs attain over 3% of total pollen at the culmination of this zone. Weed pollen is strongly represented, and *Plantago lanceolata*, *Rumex* and *Pteridium* are much in evidence, indicating either continued pastoral activity, or the colonisation of abandoned areas of cultivation. Grass pollen values rise to 25% of total pollen and a generally open landscape is indicated, as tree pollen has fallen by the end of the zone to less than 30% of total pollen.

## Discussion

The stratigraphic and pollen sequences at this site illustrate a complex environmental history. During the period of time represented by Stratum 1, the site was apparently occupied by dense birch woodland, within which hazel and pine were important constituents. A ground flora of ferns, including bracken and heather, is indicated. This plant community suggests an acidic soil of low nutrient – status (Dimbley 1962). The influence of the nearby Bromborough Pool is reflected in the presence of pollen of alder, willow and a number of wetland herbs, including *Ranunculus* (buttercup), *Filipendula* (meadowsweet) and *Caltha* (marsh marigold). These records persist throughout the diagram and argue for the continuance of wet conditions near the sampling site, which may explain the generally good pollen preservation. Stratum 1 cannot, of itself, be securely dated. The pollen content resembles Boreal woodland, but low elm values and the presence of alder point to a rather later date.

A sharp break, both in the stratigraphy and pollen content may be recognised between Strata 1 and 2, and apparently represents a substantial chronological gap. Stratum 1 may thus be a buried paleosol, possibly truncated, of some antiquity. More open oak – alder woodland covered the site during the accumulation of Stratum 2, and the establishment of clearings within this woodland may be attributed to pastoral human activity. This organic layer could be a limnic deposit, and it would seem that the damp conditions evinced by the strong representation of wet land herbs, allowed the formation of shallow pools at this time. The record of detrital birch bark and charcoal may indicate the creation of open areas nearby, by the use of fire. The stratigraphic break between Strata 2 and 3 is not echoed in the pollen record and thus conformity is assumed. A retraction of the influence of standing water and the subsequent formation of mineral soil may account for this.

Indicators of arable cultivation are present in Stratum 3 to a depth of 30 cms and an increasingly open landscape is manifest by the pollen spectra. Clearance of oak and alder woodland took place for the growth of cereals and, briefly, hemp. Lime and elm were almost completely removed, and replaced by beech, ash and sycamore. The locality had probably become a mosaic of small areas of cultivation, stands of open woodland, and cleared areas regenerating to woodland, or being used for pasture. It is considered that the upper mineral soil of Stratum 3 may be of relatively recent date. The disturbance of Stratum 4 may be attributable to the effects of ploughing, since continued cultivation on the site would produce a complete mixing of the top soil and loss of stratification. The site may latterly have been under active tillage therefore, a contention supported by the high pollen frequencies of cultivation indicators at the top of Stratum 3.

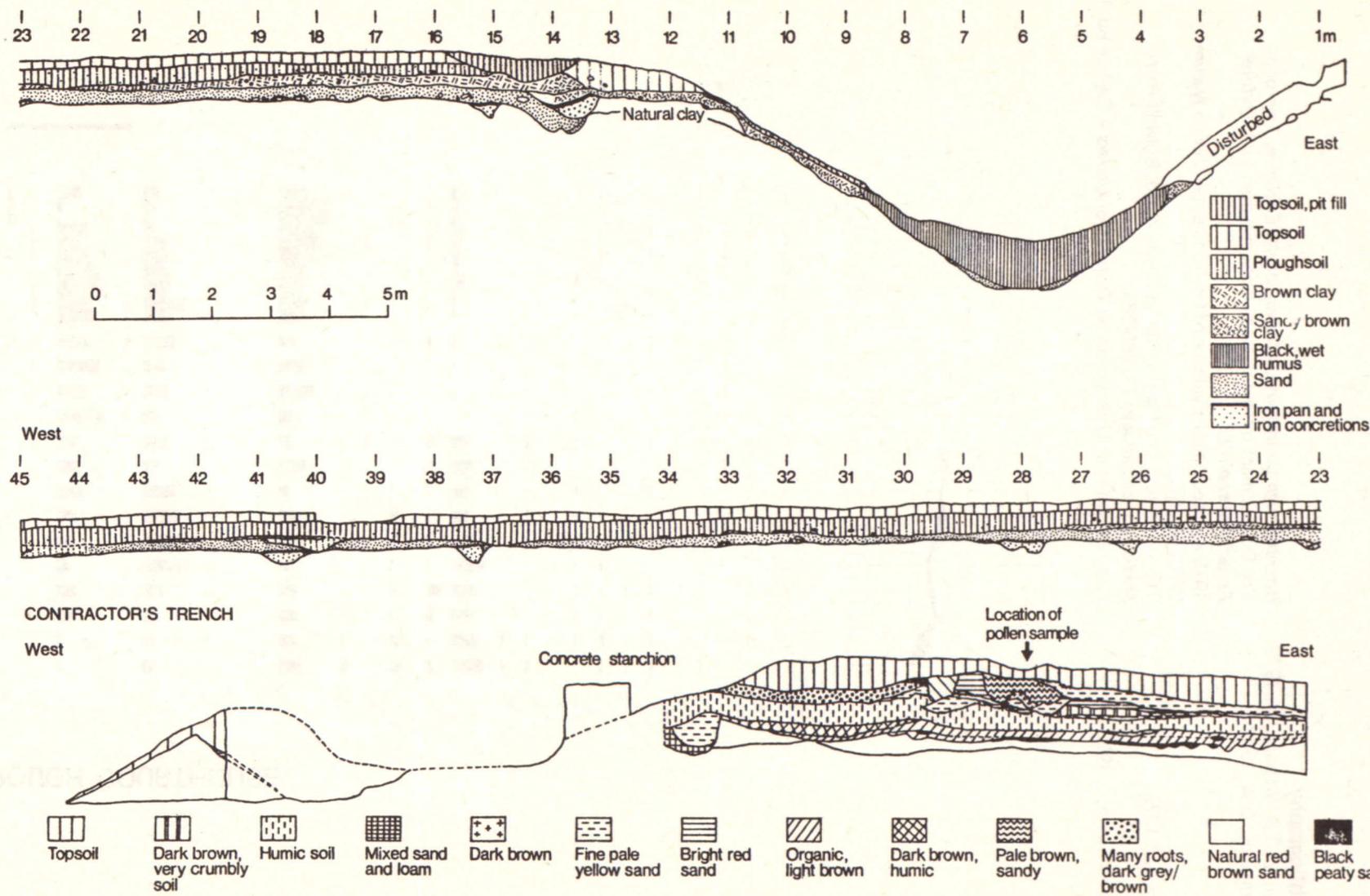
## Conclusion

The excavation produced no evidence for use of the area except as pasture before the 18th century. There was no evidence for the construction of the moat before the 18th century. At this period the moat probably attained its present profile even if this was not the original excavation. There is no *a priori* reason to suppose that the present line of the moat is medieval. A map of c 1750 is the earliest known reference to a moat, although the earliest reference to buildings which may be the Court House is in 1284 (Chitty *et al* 1979, 7-8). There is increasing evidence that moat digging was a tradition which continued into the 19th century (Drage 1979, 285-288). The large size of the moated area, the lack of any medieval evidence and its use as an orchard all suggest that it may be of post-medieval date. A careful excavation at the junction of the moat and the line of the outer pond might provide evidence for or against the suggestion that the inner and outer ponds were once one and have been separated fairly recently by the western arm of the moat.

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the members of the Merseyside Archaeological Society, Workers' Educational Association and Institute of Extension Studies evening classes and the Archaeological Survey of Merseyside, for bringing the site to my attention and contributing to the preliminary documentary work. I would particularly like to thank Gill Chitty, Peter Davey, Brian Sheppard and the survey team of the Archaeological Survey of Merseyside: Colin Milne, Steve Hogan and Kay Lancaster, on whose work figure ??? is based. I should also like to thank UML Ltd for permission to investigate the site and a generous grant towards the excavation, in particular Mr P Hodson; also the manager and members of the Lobol Sports and Social Club who gave us every help and encouragement and allowed us across their land to the site. Finally the excavation could not have taken place without the Manpower Services Commission team: Rebecca Smart, Linda Hartley, Donna Gray, Tom Branch, Mike Kinealy, Dave Knott, Dan Brennan and Val Santos. My thanks also to those members of the Merseyside Archaeological Society, the Archaeological Survey of Merseyside and various evening classes who gave up their weekends to help and to

Figure 2: Bromborough Court House Moated Site. Sections in 1979 excavations and contractor's trench.



Penny Brown for typing the report. Figure 1 is based on the survey carried out by the Archaeological Survey of Merseyside published in Chitty *et al* 1979.

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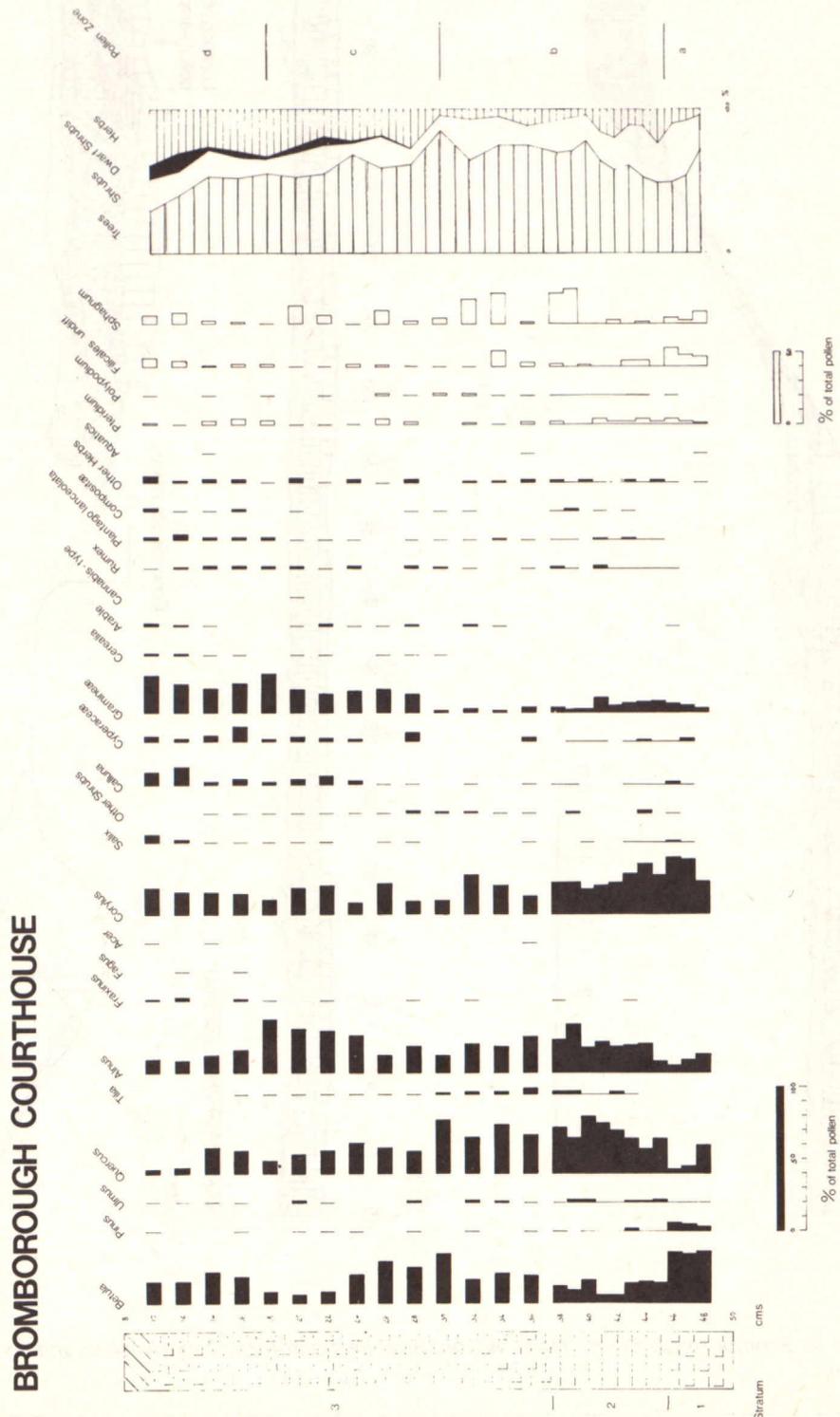


Figure 3: Stratigraphy and Pollen Analysis

# Sefton Old Hall, Merseyside, Excavations 1956-61

*JENNIFER LEWIS*

## **Introduction**

The moated site of Sefton Old Hall, Merseyside (SD 35660115) has aroused considerable interest during this century. Since the First World War there have been various attempts to investigate the site through excavation but none of the results has been published and over the years the records and finds that resulted have been dispersed. This report is of a programme of work undertaken as part of the Archaeological Survey of Merseyside with the intention of assembling and, where possible, interpreting the range of evidence that could be located.

The most significant excavations that have been examined are those of 1956-61 carried out firstly under the direction of Mr Frank Tyrer and then continued by the Merchant Taylors' School Archaeological Society under the supervision initially of Mr J F Elton and latterly Mr R H Gambles. During that five year period a series of trenches was examined, site plans were drawn, and a detailed note kept of the finds. Copies of those notes and plans were deposited by Mr Gambles at the then Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, at Lord Sefton's Estate Office, and at the Lancashire Record Office. Few of the artefacts, however, or descriptions of them and their provenances, have survived. It appears that most of the finds were thrown out as builders' rubbish during alterations at the school. Of the finds that have been recovered, some were apparently given as souvenirs to boys of the school, and there is some suspicion that a proportion of these may have come from other sites. As it was found impossible to relate these surviving finds to their contexts in the excavations little account has been taken of the significance of artefactual evidence. A short list of small finds is, however, included, and it is hoped that a more thorough appraisal of these and other artefacts from the site may be possible at a later date.

When this report is read, it should be appreciated that the records consulted were produced by a number of people who had not necessarily the benefit of recent guidelines for recording excavations and that, after such a long period, the supplementary detail that remained in their minds was often somewhat dulled. Inconsistencies that have become apparent in this analysis can thus only be reported. Site measurements are for the same reason reported in their original imperial units. Dates quoted are those deduced by the excavators, unless otherwise stated. In general, they should be regarded as guiding opinions.

Other moated sites in south Lancashire that might be considered in conjunction with this report are those at Scarisbrick (Steane 1960, 147-153), New Park, Lathom (Steane and Kelsall 1962, 73-98) and Yew Tree House, Halewood, Merseyside (Warhurst 1977, 5-10). Another moated site exists at Edge Farm in the township of Sefton but no survey or documentary research has yet been carried out into it and its possible relationship with Sefton Old Hall.

## **Topography**

Sefton Old Hall lies approximately 470 feet due south of St Helen's Church, Sefton, and a little above the 25 foot contour (figure 1). The geology of the locality is keuper sandstone overlain by a thick boulder clay, with soil of mixed sand and clay of the Astley Hall series. The township of Sefton is low lying and, until the advent of modern drainage schemes, the whole area was subject to flooding from the river Alt. The Alt drains a wide, shallow valley to the north of the site, and the former water mill adjacent to Sefton Church was fed by a mill stream (now filled in) branching from the river. It seems likely that fishponds and the moat associated with Sefton Old Hall were supplied through an extension of the system of mill streams.

## **History of the site**

The manor of Sefton is recorded in the Domesday Book as being held by five thanes. It contained one hide and the value was 16 shillings. Around 1100, Roger of Poitou granted the manor to the family of William de Molines and in 1912 it was recorded as the chief place of a fee consisting in total of ten and a half ploughlands, six of which lay in Sefton, by the service of half a knight (VCH, 67).

Throughout its history, the manor remained in the hands of the Molyneux family, though it was not always the chief residence. There is no clear evidence of the existence of an early building on the site but 19th century historians considered that a house stood there in 1372 (Mannix 1854, 654; Baines 1893, 229; Caroe & Gordon 1893, 50). The date has been repeated constantly but has not yet been substantiated by contemporary documents.

In 1535 Camden noted that Croxteth was the principal residence of the Molyneux family: 'Mr Molyneux, a knight of great lands, two miles from Prescot, dwelleth at a place called Croxtath'. This

would seem to be confirmed by Lord Burghley's Map of 1590 where Sefton Church is shown surrounded by a paling, with a small building adjacent ascribed to Ric. Molyneux de Sefton. The same map shows that Ric. Molyneux also resided at Croxstath; a more substantial building altogether, if the draughtsmanship is to be taken literally. Gillow (1907, 201) records that, throughout the days of religious persecution, Mass was regularly said in the private chapels at Croxteth and Sefton, as well as at other mansions belonging to the family. Caroe and Gordon (1893, 51) state that the chapel was in use until 1780 (VCH, 74, states 1792) when it was replaced by Netherton Roman Catholic Chapel. They also recorded (51) a comment by an elderly woman who claimed that above the chapel were two rooms used for living and sleeping by the cowman's family, but that it was in a dilapidated state at this time (about 1813). It is uncertain, however, whether the chapel did stand inside the moat (Chapel Garden was the name of a field a little to the south west of the site; its position is noted both on the Molyneux Estate Map of 1769 and on the Tithe Map of 1845).

At the inquisition at the death of Sir Richard Molyneux, 1568/69, it was stated that five unmarried daughters were living at Croxteth (VCH 70, n9). Ashmore (1958, 59-105) notes that, on his death in 1623, Sir Richard Molyneux of Sefton's possessions were valued at £3,800. His will, drawn up in 1618, refers to his house at Sefton, but the inventory of 1623 does not specify what proportion of his possessions related to Sefton itself. One interesting item refers to the value of timber for building. Richard, Viscount Molyneux of Mossborough, died at Croxteth on 8 May 1636 possessed of the manors of Sefton, Netherton and Lunt, in addition to many other manors and lands (VCH 70). It is clear that further examination of wills and inventories is necessary.

Leases relating to Sefton were apparently lost in the 17th century (Royalist Composition Papers 1898, 149, fol 781). An affidavit sworn about 1650/51 states that, in the time of the wars, the houses of Lord Molyneux of Croxteth and Sephton were plundered 'and the closets where the evidences lay broken open and some scattered about the houses, some cancelled and torn, other some carried away'. The witnesses had searched for the counterparts of the leases, but had not found them. It is not known whether any destruction of the houses had occurred as a result of this plundering; the Hearth Tax returns of 1666 show that Sefton Hall had 33 hearths, suggesting that little damage had been sustained.

At the Lancashire Record Office there is a petition (QSP 3/10) which, though not directly referring to Sefton Hall, throws some light on the problems encountered through living in such a low lying area close to the river. In 1648 the rector, Joseph Tomson, petitioned his brother, who was apparently clerk at Quarter Sessions, regarding action to be taken to prevent the continual flooding of the river Alt. Flooding had caused the inhabitants of the township to abandon their land, having neither meadow nor pasture for their cattle. It seems possible that Sefton Hall, being closely associated with river and mill stream and its own moat, would also have suffered from flooding at this time, especially if maintenance was in the hands of tenants and not under the direct control of the lord of the manor.

An indenture of 26 October 1694 records the leasing of Sefton Hall and Tarbock Hall to Sir George and Hugh Strode for 500 years at a peppercorn rent (LRO DDM 17/166), but by the middle of the 18th century the leasing of the Hall and demesne seems to have been once more in the hands of the Molyneux family (see Appendix 2).

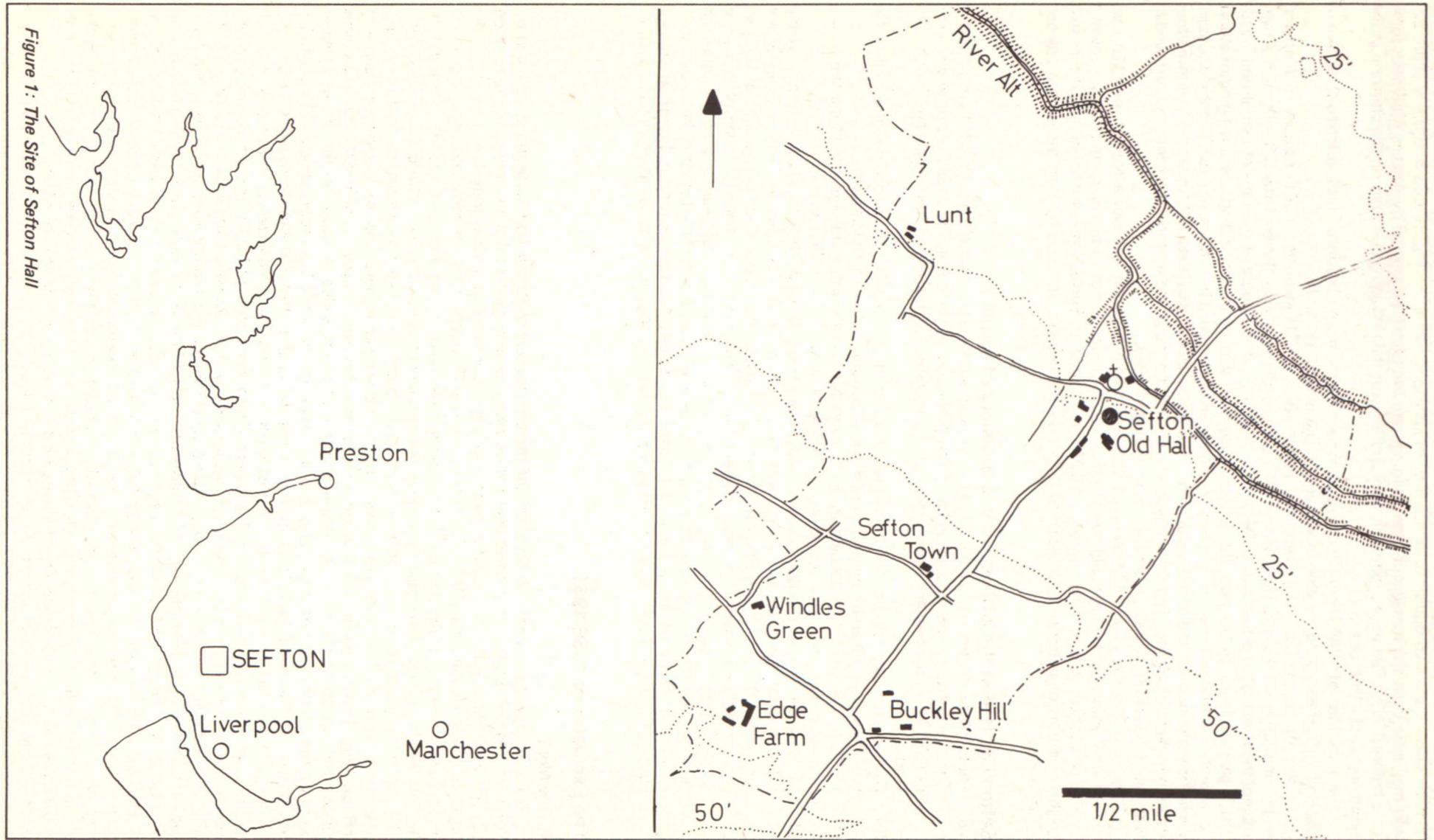
The diaries of Nicholas Blundell (Tyrrer 1968, 1970 & 1972) provide useful information regarding the site. Nicholas never referred to the Molyneux family as resident at Sefton. '2 November, 1702: I went to Croxtath with Pat. Gelibrond. We met Lord and Mr. Molineux going a seting. We suped there'. And again on 28 July 1703: 'I went to Croxtath to wate of Lord Molineux . . . but he was not come home'. On his marriage in 1705 Mr Richard Molyneux went to live at Woolton and appears never to have lived at Sefton. The Molyneux family paid frequent visits to Crosby Hall at this time but Nicholas Blundell never visited them at Sefton, only at Croxteth.

However, Nicholas Blundell did pay a number of visits to Sefton. '30 January, 1707: My wife, Mrs. Mills and I went to see the seller at Sefton', and on '6 May, 1724: They (Thomas Brownbill and Mr Topping) went with me to Sephton; I showed them the seller at the Hall and the Church'.

Mr Blundell also made some purchases of building material from Sefton. '15 May, 1719: I met Mr. Shepperd at the Hall of Sefton and bought some old Wainscoting of him, when we had mesured it we went to Thomas Tickleys and took a Glass of Aile'. And on '22 May, 1710: Pat Gelibrond went with me to the Hall of Sefton; I helped to lode the wainscoting as I have bought there'. (A footnote to this entry notes Nicholas' household accounts 'Old wainscot and old glass windus . . . £4.0s.0d.'). On 9 June, 1719: 'I fetched home from the Hall of Sefton the old glass as I had brought of Mr. Shepperd'. From the foregoing, it would seem that some demolition was taking place on the site at this time and that Mr Shepperd was entitled to negotiate the deal and accept payment. His relationship with the Molyneux family is not clear, but members of the Shepperd family were leasing land and buildings on the site of the Old Hall by the middle of the 18th century (see Appendix 2). It is not certain which buildings were being demolished at this time, but Nicholas Blundell's visit to the 'seller' again in 1724 would suggest that it had escaped destruction.

An estate map of 1769 (figure 2) shows buildings standing on a rectangular platform surrounded by a moat. One complex lies in the north angle, with a separate building to the south east, on the edge of the moat bank. The platform is divided across the centre, two 'courts' being formed on the west and south, separated by an access road which crosses the moat. Outside the moat a small square building is shown at the southern corner and a larger, rectangular building lies to the south of that. It is possible

Figure 1: The Site of Sefton Hall



that these were the two buildings reported as foundations visible in 1893 (Caroe & Gordon 1893, 52) and may have been the remains of farm buildings and the tithe barn erected by Antony Molyneux some time before 1553; these were supposedly demolished with the remaining buildings on the platform at the beginning of the 19th century.

The Tithe Map of 1845 (figure 3) shows open land on the moat platform. This is referred to as 'site of old Hall, offices and garden within moat', and its use is 'pasture (old)'.

At the site of the Old Hall, Caroe & Gordon (1893, 50-51) identified a 14th century mullion and large jamb stone of 16th century style workmanship, identical with those of the old mill on the river (demolished following a fire about 1940). A recollection of the house at the time of demolition, about 1817, gleaned from an 80 year old former inhabitant, was of the remaining portion being of stone, completely covered with ivy. It consisted of one gable approached by a flight of steps, supposed to have been formerly part of the internal staircase. The lower storey was already 'dismantled', with neither doors nor glass remaining. The same report states that the moat was as wide as a canal and surrounded with fine trees and fruit trees, few of which remained in 1893.

Caroe and Gordon (1893, 55) reported that the well at the Old Hall was a natural spring. It rose immediately above, and perpetually overflowed into, the moat. It was large and square, but was covered over to prevent cattle from falling into it. In 1951, the Ordnance Survey inspector found that it consisted of three courses of masonry to a depth of 0.7 m on the western side, but by then the eastern side had disappeared.

### **Sefton Old Hall in the 20th century: a summary of events**

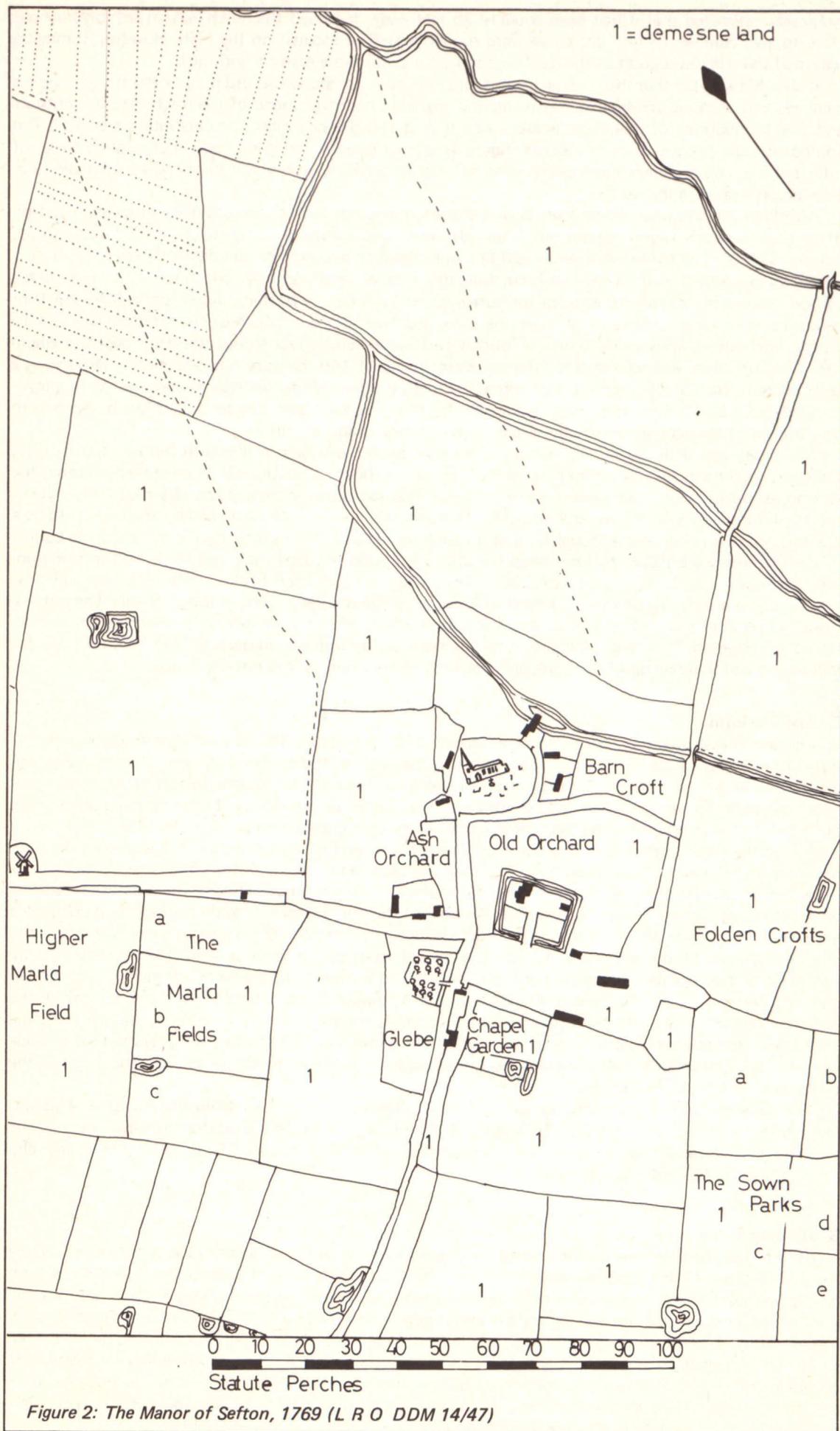
- (a) Photographs of the site of the Old Hall with an accompanying note loaned to the survey by Mr Tyrer, suggest that an excavation had taken place during World War I by a Mr Gregson and a party of soldiers. A preliminary examination of the literature of the period has revealed nothing of the work.
- (b) During the years 1956 to 1961 there was a series of excavations, first under the direction of Mr Frank Tyrer and then by the Merchant Taylors' School Archaeological Society.
- (c) In 1961 the site was scheduled as an Ancient Monument under the Ancient Monuments Act. After that date excavation ceased and the School exercised a 'watching brief'.
- (d) In 1964 a roadway (B5422) was rerouted through the centre of the site. During removal of the soft filling of the moat for replacement by hardcore, Mr B J N Edwards, Archaeologist of the Lancashire Record Office, Preston, recovered artefacts which have since been stored at Preston. His unpublished notes have been studied but an analysis of the finds has been deferred. Mr Edwards notes that none of the finds could be attributed to a date earlier than the late 16th century, with the exception of four fragments of green-glazed roof tiles which may be medieval.
- (e) In 1978 a survey of the site was undertaken by students of the Institute of Extension Studies, University of Liverpool, under the direction of Miss D O'Hanlon and Mrs R MacNeil-Sale (see page 68).

## **The Excavations: 1956-1961**

### **1. The Moat**

In the unpublished report, *A Summary of the Excavations at Sefton Hall, Lancashire*, prepared by Merchant Taylors' School, it is noted that before excavations began in 1956 the only visible remains on the site were three sides of a quadrangular moat, two pontoons of a 'drawbridge', and a well. In the opposite corner of the field, 'Castle Field', the 'manorial fishponds' could be seen. Photographs supplied by Mr Tyrer show that at the time of excavation the moat was wet, and that some masonry was visible in the turf, but it has not been possible to relate this with any certainty to the structures found on the site. The report describes the ditches that surrounded the platform as being an almost complete rectangle, with the exception of the southern corner. This corner appears to have been subjected to collapse and infilling since 1848 when the site was surveyed for the Ordnance Survey in the production of its maps scaled at six inches to the mile. The entrance to the platform is clearly shown on the school's plan as being on the south west side, detectable as a narrowing of the ditch from approximately 30 feet to 7½ feet (figure 4). The moat varies in width from a maximum of 40 feet in the southern corner to approximately 27 feet near the north corner. At the northern corner the ditch extends into an arm about 30 feet in length; it is not clear whether this is part of a former system of feeder-streams, an annexe to the moat ditch, or represents more recent agricultural activity. Two courses of streams were recognised, one entering the ditch at the eastern corner, and a second running northwards from the centre of the north east arm of the ditch. (The choice, by the present writer, of the words 'enter' and 'running northwards' is deliberate and intends to indicate the suggested flow of water through the moat, based on the direction of the course of the river Alt and its associated mill streams. This assumption has not yet been proved by field work, but the position of the 'fish ponds', if that is what they are, suggests a flow of clean water through them prior to entry into the moat ditches before being discharged into the mill stream in the vicinity of the mill.) The report suggests that construction of the moat involved the use of natural pools and ditches, but it is unclear whether this statement is based on archaeological evidence.

The excavation revealed another ditch, calculated from the plan (figure 4) to be parallel to, and a little inside, the north western edge of the platform, and three feet deep at its south west end. The



excavator estimated that it had been roughly 25 feet wide. It joined the north eastern arm of the moat close to two 'similar ditches' but these were not excavated or located on the plan. However, it may be reasoned that they were part of the discharge stream and annexe already mentioned.

It should be noted that the original general site plan does not show this ditch, but only the excavation trenches and sections in which it was located. A separate plan was made of the ditch, and its contours and the foundations of buildings located over it, but this did not mark the excavation trenches. The composite plan produced for this report (figure 4) is an attempt to combine these inter-relating pieces of information. The evidence it represents is sometimes in conflict, and where this occurs a discussion has been incorporated in the text.

Although the site plan shows a series of excavation trenches within the subsidiary ditch and location of sections across it (figure 5, sections A and B) there is no record of complete excavation down to the natural surface. The banks were excavated but only the western one received detailed examination. It is shown in Section B to be steep sided, cut into the 'natural sand and clay' and filled with 'dark, black topsoil' suggested to have come from the surrounding field. Coarse pottery, dated to the 14th and 15th centuries, was noted to have come from the bank and two adjacent trenches. The ditch fill was seen to merge, without obvious change, into a 'buried turf layer' which was spread unevenly over the whole site. The turf layer was suggested by the excavator to be of 14th century date. Section B also shows a layer of slate (*sic*) debris over the turf spread, falling into the residual depression and, over that, a layer of sand and clay, 3 feet deep, which covered the site. The sand and clay layer was attributed a 16th century date elsewhere on the site by virtue of the pottery found within it.

The moat was deduced by the excavator to have been redredged in the 14th century and its sides built up, sometimes behind a retaining wall of sandstone (figure 5, section D). It must be noted that the section as drawn would have to be a mirror image of that examined in order to be observed in the side of the trench indicated on the general site plan. This anomaly can only be explained by assuming it to be a draughtsman's error or, more probably, that it had appeared in a different section ie the adjoining baulk.

Revetments were noted to have been constructed around most of the moat bank, and in some unspecified places the bank was strengthened with sandstone slates (*sic*), broken pottery, bones and clay, resulting in a steepening of the moat bank and the consequent enlargement of the platform. The pottery from the bank was described as lead and salt glazed wares, of fairly good quality, with numerous fragments of Rhenish ware and slipware. The discrepancy between a suggested 14th century date for redredging and building up of the bank and the 17th century date of the pottery is obvious.

## 2. The Platform

The site plan shows the platform to be approximately 190 feet by 180 feet, and the excavation report notes that it was overlain by a 'turf level spread unevenly over the whole of the site'. The turf level was attributed to the 14th century by reason of decorated earthenware and coarse pottery found in trenches approximately 75 feet and 120 feet south east of the silted up subsidiary ditch described above. The buried turf layer is noted to have been 'washed away' at some unspecified parts of the site.

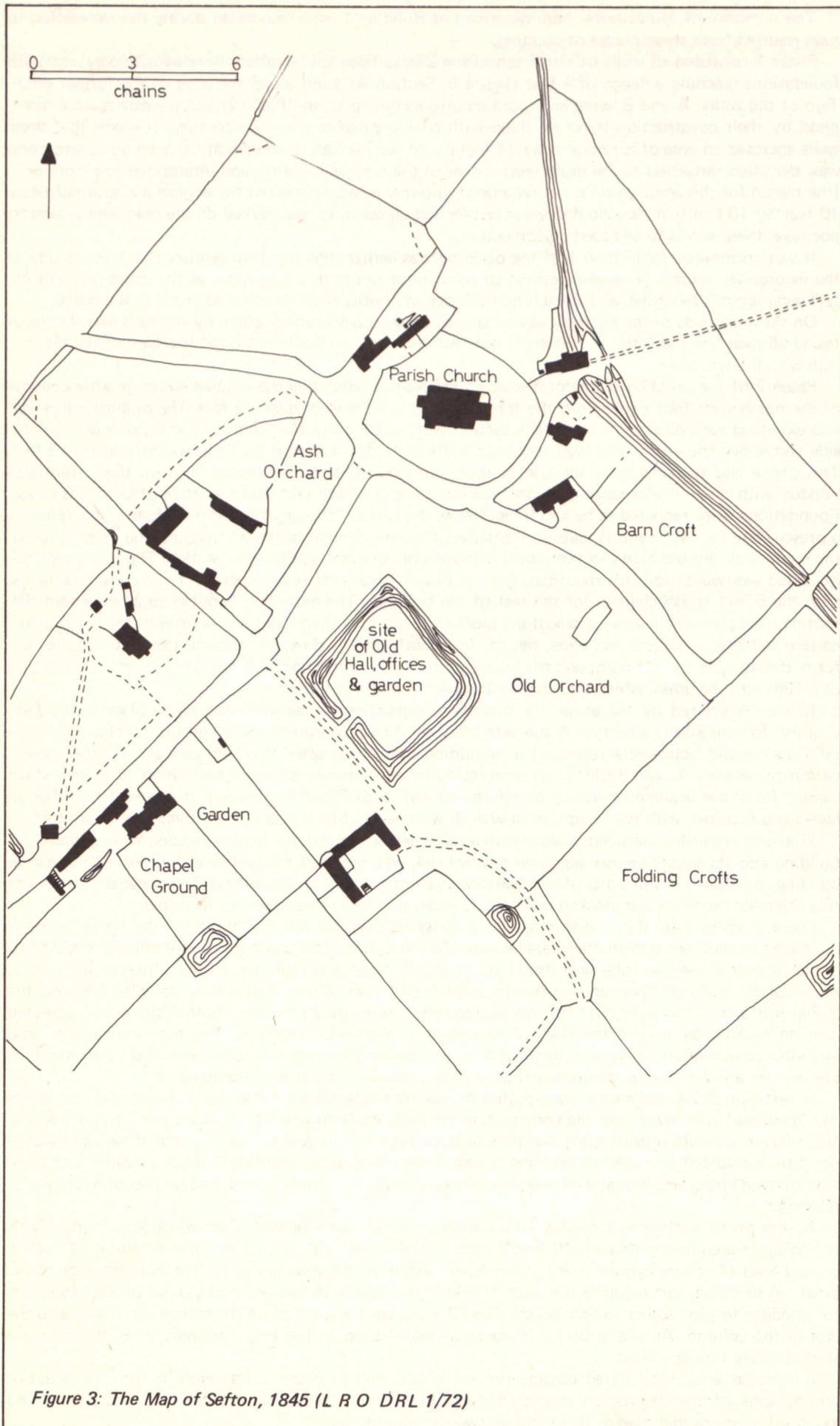
Above the 14th century turf layer was another of sand and clay to a depth of 3 feet, considered to have 'blown in' during the 16th century. The date was assumed from the pottery the layer contained.

Access to the platform was gained from the south west, across a narrowing of the moat, the resulting entrance being approximately 14 feet wide. An area on the north west side of the entrance was uncovered and foundations, identified as those of a 'drawbridge' were noted. No drawings were made and the precise location of the structures within the excavated trenches is unknown. The foundations are described as two pontoons constructed of yellow sandstone blocks, 12 inches by 30 inches, well dressed and laid without mortar. Reference is made to a similar, though smaller, pontoon lying to the east of the 'inner pontoon', in the moat itself, and joined to the larger structure by a retaining wall of the same materials. The wall was built on sandstone slates (*sic*) consisting, at the time of excavation, of a single course. The purpose of the wall was not recognised, but it was conjectured that it might form part of the wall revetment of the moat bank.

A cobbled road with cambered surface is noted to have run north east from the entrance. This was laid on the 16th century sand and clay layer and ran into the centre of the platform where it overlay the remains of Building 2. The width of the road and depth of its foundations, if any, are not recorded, and its portrayal on figure 4 is conjectural.

## 3. Building 1 (figure 6)

Before discussing the excavator's notes on this part of the site, the point made in discussion of the subsidiary ditch of the moat needs some expansion. Site records show the location within the platform of the excavation trenches and sections on one plan, and the excavated foundations and contours on another. Anomalies are revealed when the two plans, redrawn to a common scale, are superimposed. There are insufficient common points of reference to enable a precise superimposition to be made and, in any arrangement, a number of anomalies remain to make its absolute acceptability doubtful. The arrangement shown in figure 4 is considered by the present writer to be the best fit, but the resulting extension of the building into the moat, the position of the drawn sections, and the evidence within the trenches for the foundations that are described, are all subject to a degree of doubt.



The complex of foundations, here described as Building 1, was recognised during the excavation to have resulted from three phases of building.

Phase 1 consisted of walls of rough sandstone blocks (size not recorded) bonded with clay, and with foundations reaching a depth of 4 feet (figure 5, Section A), built along the edge of the former ditch. Two of the walls, A and B, were incorporated into a later structure (Phase 2) and the others were recognised by their construction trenches, filled with rubble dated to the 16th century. It seems that these walls enclosed an area of approximately 14 feet by 28 feet. A lean to annexe of more crude construction was identified, attached to the south west corner of the original building, and interpreted as a storeroom (the reason for this assumption is not recorded). Internal measurements of the annexe are approximately 10 feet by 10 feet 6 inches. No doorways or blocked up openings are marked on the plan, and indeed its portrayal there seems to be based on conjecture.

It was considered that Phase 1 of the building was earlier than the 14th century turf layer. Study of the incomplete section A reveals nothing to confirm or refute this suggestion as the lower limits of the turf layer are not recorded, and there is no evidence of construction trenches adjacent to the walls.

On the north side of the building was an area of crushed sandstone overlain by the sand and clay layer found all over the platform. Its extent is not recorded, and no comment is made regarding its relationship with the structure.

Phase 2 of the building is interpreted as an attempt at rebuilding the original structure after collapse of the north west (*sic*) corner into the former ditch, to a depth of nearly 2 feet. The original north wall was extended eastwards by 5 feet and a second wall, cutting the 14th century turf layer, was built outside and above the earlier east wall (figure 5, Section A). The width of the walls was increased to 5 feet. This phase was recognised by the use of more substantial sandstone blocks, though these were also bonded with clay. An expansion of the building at its southern end was also attributed to this phase. Foundations were reported to be laid 6 feet below the surface, though it is unclear whether this refers to a present day or 14th century datum. Remains of a semi circular buttress strengthening each corner of the south wall are described in the report, though only one is suggested on the plan. The south wall was extended westwards towards the ditch. On the plan this extended wall is shown to be considerably less than the 5 feet width claimed for the rest of the building. The extension is noted to be on a hard clay footing with only one course of sandstone blocks beneath the 'then turf line'. A little to the north of the eastern buttress, a wall, 3 feet wide, ran off in a south easterly direction towards the centre of the platform. Between its run off point and the buttress, the building wall had been breached for the construction of a 19th century drain, which also crossed the west wall of the building.

It was considered by the excavator that these repairs and extensions had taken place in the 14th century. Examination of section A suggests that wall B had cut into the 14th century turf layer or ditch infill and would apparently represent a rebuilding some time after the 14th century. Further examination of section A adds little to an understanding as it merely shows a succession of layers which cannot from the available evidence be related to wall A of Phase 1. However, it can be noted that all layers and features, with the exception of wall B, were sealed first by rubble and then by modern turf.

Problems regarding subsidence apparently continued to necessitate further repairs. Where the earlier building and its square annexe adjoined a new brick wall replaced the last surviving wall of the earlier building, possibly to infill a gap which developed due to collapse of the annexe. The statement was made that the main entrance was blocked up, but the location of the entrance is not recorded.

Phase 3 comprised the construction of a series of walls to the north east of the Phase 1 and 2 buildings. A wall was constructed parallel with the moat ditch. Its foundations were of brick rubble to a depth of over 2 feet, and the wall itself was of stone. Where the wall crossed the silted up ditch it was more solidly built of brick and mortar to a depth of 6 feet. A gap is shown on the plan between the stone wall and brick wall, but with no explanation. From the brick wall another stone wall adjoined running south west to join the Phase 2 extension of the earlier building. The plan indicates a most unhappy combination of walls at this point, but no explanation was suggested regarding replacement of one wall by another, and interpretation has not been possible on the evidence to hand.

In addition brick walls were constructed on poorly made rubble foundations, which did not pierce the 'medieval' turf layer, and the construction of these walls completed the enclosure of two 'rooms'. No mention is made regarding the position of door openings. It was considered that these walls would not have supported an upper storey, and it seems that they must have been merely partitions within a load bearing structure. Remains of neither stairwell nor chimney were found, and no mention is made of flooring.

At the north eastern end of this group another 'room' was located. This consisted of stone walls enclosing an area approximately 10 feet 3 inches by 14 feet, with a brick and stone floor, 4 feet below ground level (?modern ground level). The south western of these walls was 13 feet from the edge of the moat. A brick support adjoined the internal side of this wall, and was assumed to have provided support for a ladder to give access to the 'cellar'. Considerable wear was noted on the stones immediately to the east of the column. At a later period it was reasoned that repairs had been necessary when the structure started to slip into the moat.

A cobbled area was located outside the south east wall of Phase 3. Its extent is not recorded, but photographs of the excavation suggest that at the time of excavation the cobbling was patchy and extended no more than two or three feet eastwards from the wall.

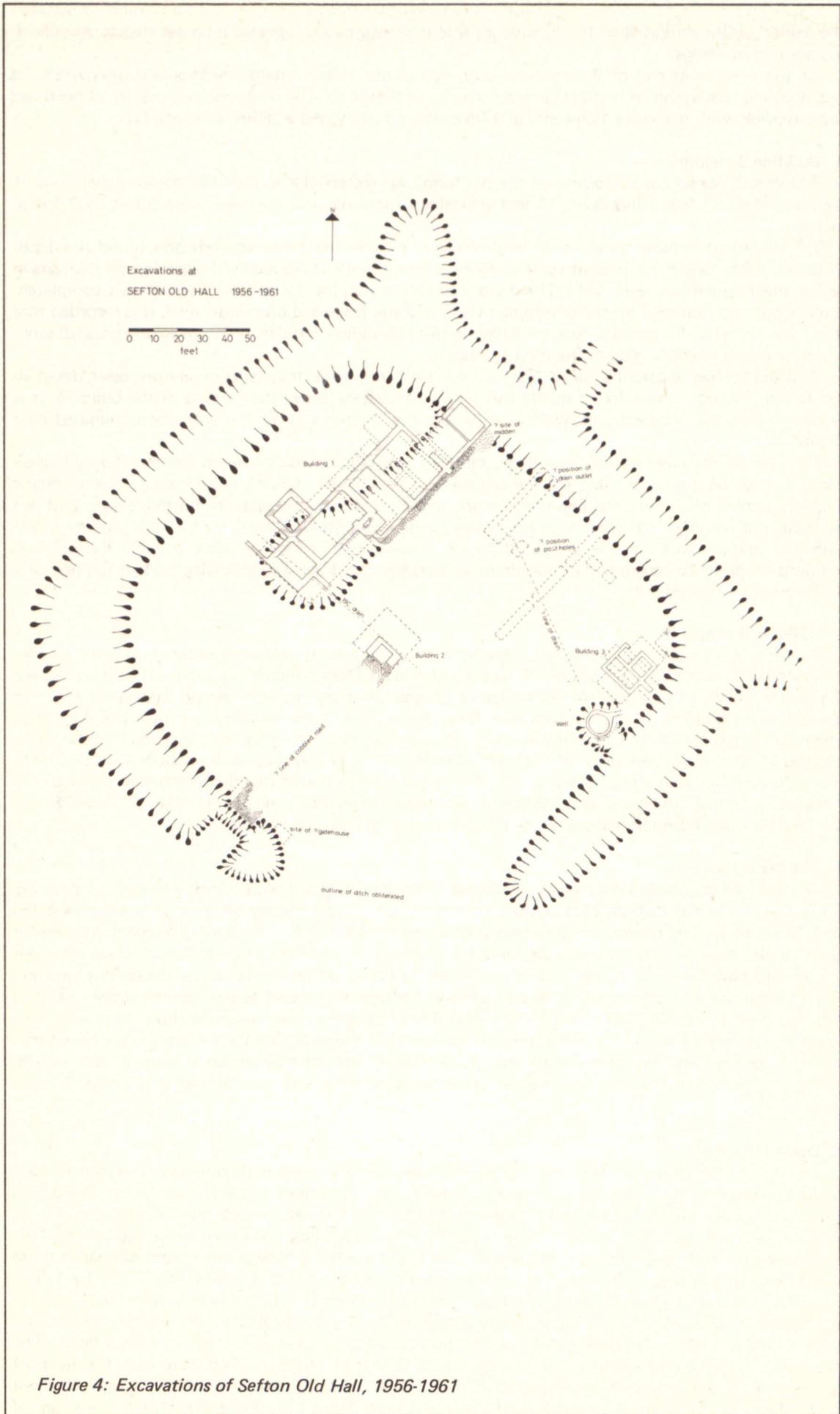


Figure 4: Excavations of Sefton Old Hall, 1956-1961

Foundations of rubble containing broken brick and two smashed pots were found running between the 'cellar' and main building. It was thought that they may have supported a timber structure connecting the two buildings.

At the north east end of the cobbled area, east of the cellar, a large midden was discovered. Its position and size as shown on the plan are conjectured (figure 4). The contents were mainly of bone and broken brick, with numerous fragments of 17th century pottery and a yellow slipware dish.

#### 4. Building 2 (figure 7)

Building 2, located at the centre of the platform, was rectangular in plan the overall dimensions of approximately 12 feet 9 inches by 10 feet enclosing an internal area approximately 6 feet by 7 feet 6 inches.

The excavated remains consisted of large blocks of roughly faced keuper sandstone, found at a depth of about 3 feet below the present surface. (No sections or notes have survived regarding the deposits in which the foundations were laid.) Three walls remained but the fourth had been almost completely robbed out and 'replaced by the enveloping clay', and the floor had been destroyed. It is recorded that there was an area of crushed sandstone adjacent to the building, similar in nature to the crushed sandstone found on the north side of Building 1, Phase 1.

Destruction had apparently taken place by the 14th century as fragments of an iron vessel, dated by the British Museum, were found in the turf level immediately above the remains of the building. It is recorded that the cobbled road which ran across the platform from the entrance terminated over Building 2.

The plan of the building also recorded a series of dotted lines which marked the line of a wall considered to have been a continuation of the eastward projecting wall of Building 1, Phase 2, thus forming a masonry barrier effectively dividing the platform in half. However, the evidence for the existence of this wall was not recorded. The detailed plan of the building records the location of a 19th century drain, with the caption 'wall removed for drain trench'. However, it is far from clear whether the wall was removed in order to accommodate the drain, or whether the drain was following part of the line of a wall previously robbed out.

#### 5. Building 3 (figure 8)

Building 3 is located in the eastern corner of the platform. It was apparently rectangular in construction, with overall dimensions of 15 feet 9 inches by 16 feet 6 inches. An internal partition crossed the centre on its longest axis. A second partition wall of stone was assumed to have been added to strengthen the building. It was reasoned that the north east part of the building had collapsed. A buttress (the plan suggests of stone) was added on the south east side. Section C (figure 5) suggests that the building was erected at a time later than the 14th century turf layer and that the foundations were dug into the 16th century sand and clay layer. A halfpenny of George II was found beneath the rubble of the collapsed building, implying that collapse could have taken place no earlier than 1727/1728. No comment is made regarding the use of the building except to call it an 'outhouse'.

#### 6. The Well (figure 8)

The well lies approximately 20 feet south west of building 3. It is slightly elliptical in shape, apparently due to repairs in the 15th or 16th century (the excavator records the earlier date on the plan and the later in his text). The original construction was of small crude blocks of stone, and repairs were recognised by the large, crudely fitting slabs, bricks and mortar. A cobbled surface around the perimeter was deduced to have been laid at the time of the repairs, but this opinion is not substantiated. The sand and clay inundations had apparently caused problems of silting of the well as a horseshoe shaped bank of clay had been erected around it, leaving the east side open, supposedly as an overflow. A second overflow was recognised and led into the moat to the south of the well, but the excavator considered that this had been ignored when the repairs were carried out. (The brick wall shown in figure 8, section A-B, to the south of the well is not recorded in the excavation notes, and its relationship to the well is not known.)

#### 7. Drain (figure 4)

The line of the drain has been drawn, by the present writer, on the main site plan in an approximate position deduced from the summary report, which notes, 'Its outlet is thirty feet to the east of the cellar and it goes twenty-three feet into the centre before turning east ten feet and following from there a course to a low spot near the well'. The excavator considered that it had been constructed to take off surface water which was running into the well. The outlet was built on large stone slabs, similar to those in the floor of Building 1, Phase 3, but of different dimensions. The drain slabs were 3 feet by 1 foot 6 inches. The base slabs were well dressed, but the stones above (? capping stones) were hardly shaped and varied in size and shape. The supporting walls were of poor quality stones and bricks with no mortar. Stone robbing had taken place at this point, and the outlet was filled in with a large stone 'evidently from the roof of the house or a gatepost'. Sherds of Liverpool delft ware tiles, fragments of glass and lead, and early 19th century kitchen ware were recovered in the vicinity of the outlet. The rest of the drain was constructed of sand, and brick and plaster. Along the 10 feet length there were signs of

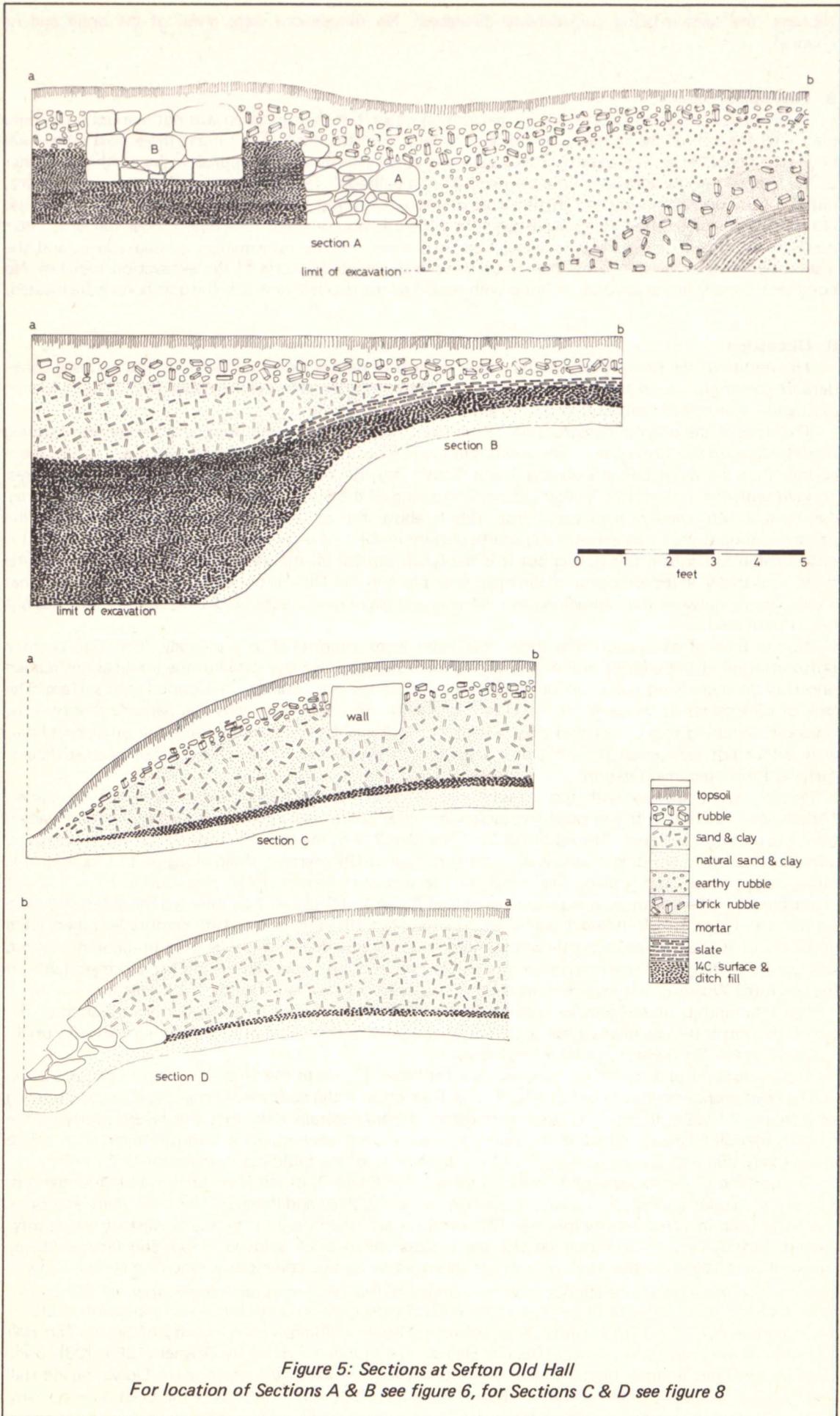


Figure 5: Sections at Sefton Old Hall  
 For location of Sections A & B see figure 6, for Sections C & D see figure 8

robbing 'the surface being considerably disturbed'. No dimensions were given of the drain and its channel.

### 8. Post holes (figure 4)

Three post holes were recorded in the excavation notes, but their location was not marked on the site plan. 'To the east of the outlet of the drain, six feet from the edge of the moat three post holes have been uncovered. These are about six feet apart and curve slightly as they approach the north east corner of the site, and would appear to have formed part of a palisade'. Two fragments of 12th century pottery, dated a little uncertainly by the British Museum, were recovered from the base of one of the post holes. No dimensions of the post holes were given, and there is no comment regarding timber remains. Their position as shown on figure 4 is conjectural and based on the information quoted above, and the assumption that at least one of them must have been located in one of the excavation trenches. No comment is made in the excavation notes with regard to the deposit in which the post holes were located.

### 9. Discussion

The nature of the excavations, coupled with the loss of details regarding the finds, has imposed considerable constraints upon the type of analysis and interpretation that can be undertaken. The following discussion is attempted within these constraints.

The date of the original construction of the moat has not been established and comments regarding its redredging in the 14th century are dubious in the absence of material evidence. However, it does seem certain that the ditch below Building 1 was filled in by the 14th century, and that its surface corresponded with the turf surface at that period. The dating of the buried turf layer is based on finds of fragments of a 14th century iron vessel from rubble above the remains of Building 2, together with the presence of decorated earthenware and coarse pottery in the turf layer uncovered east of Building 1. It is not possible to confirm this dating but it is the lynch pin for all the other dating on the site. From the finds, it is likely that redredging of the moat took place in the 16th/17th centuries. It is regrettable that a relationship between this redredging and the sand and clay layer of supposed 16th century date has not been established.

At the time of excavation, the three post holes were interpreted as a palisade. The 12th century pottery found at the base of one of the post holes, suggests a tentative date but the implications remain uncertain as there is no comment on the relationship of the post holes to the buried land surface. The lack of dimensions of the post holes makes it impossible to confirm or deny the palisade theory. It is, however, tempting to consider that they belonged to a timber framed building, and that other post holes were either not recognised for what they were or that the system of trenches did not open sufficient surfaces for proper investigation.

Possibly contemporary with the 'palisade' was Building 2, which apparently lay below the buried 14th century surface, and was overlain partly with 'enveloping clay' and by a later cobbled road leading from the platform entrance. The relationship of Building 2 with the 'curtain' wall, which was reported to have run from it to Building 1 (and was found to contain a 19th century drain along part of its length) is by no means certain, but it seems likely that the wall was of more recent date than Building 2.

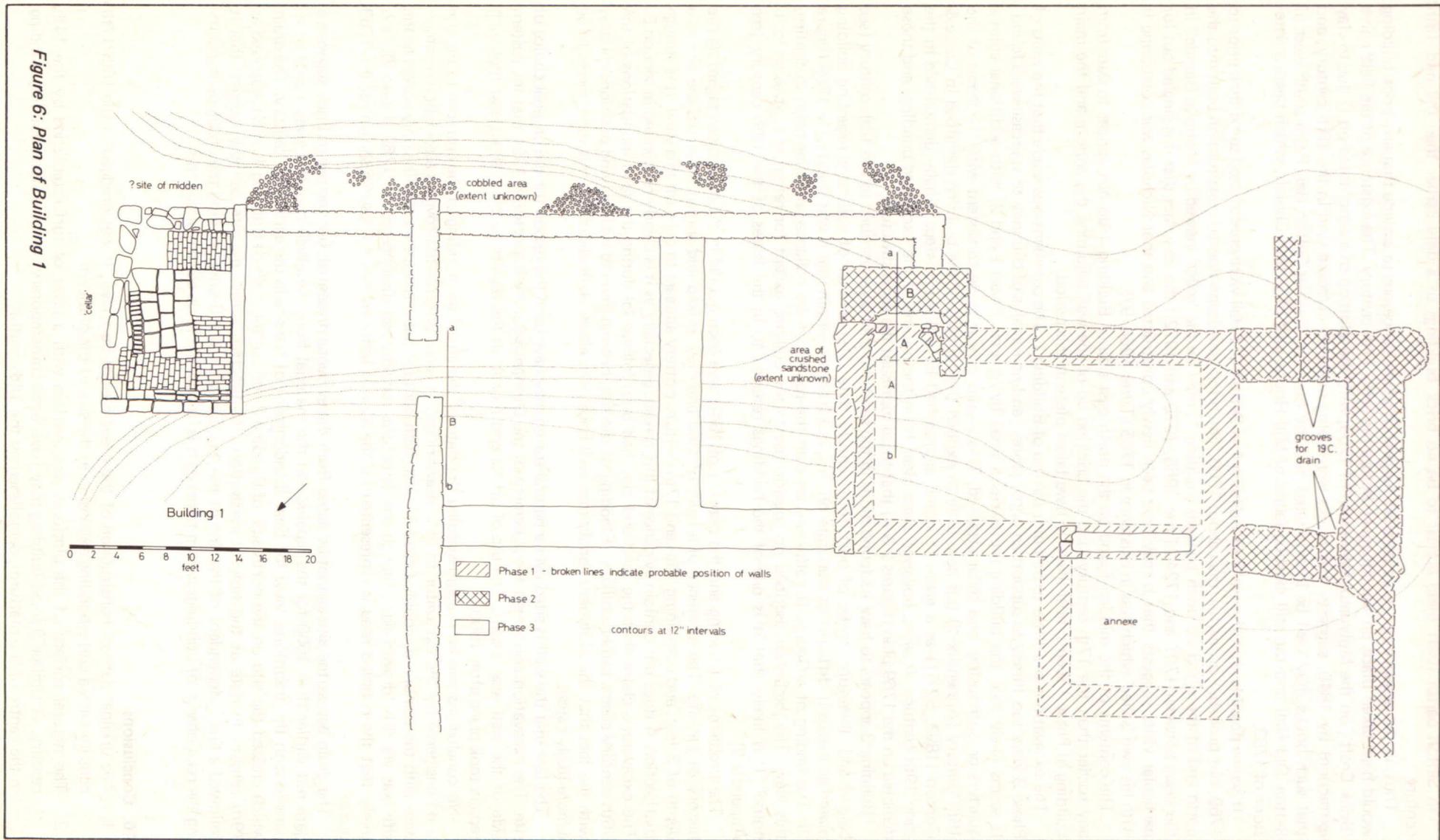
At the time of excavation, it was considered that Phase 1 of Building 1 represented the oldest structure on the site. Phase 1 of Building 1 was built over the ditch silted up by the 14th century and there were problems of subsidence at its north west corner. It seems possible that it was sited in ignorance of the soft nature of the subsoil or that, at the time of its construction, there was little other space available on the platform. Whatever the reason, it appears to have been constructed after the 14th century.

The relationship of the annexe with Phase 1 of Building 1 cannot be verified from the plan of the building, though it may finally have gone out of use with the blocking of the adjoining wall with brick, probably in the 17th century or later (see below).

The acceptance of a post 14th century date for Phase 1 leads to the problems of dating Phases 2 and 3. The relationship of Phase 1 with Phase 2 is far from clear in the absence of notes regarding the butting or bonding of walls. Dating is, thus, impossible; it being certain only that the layers overlying the remains of wall B (figure 5, section A) consist of a demolition layer and a modern turf layer. It therefore seems likely that wall B was standing until final demolition of the buildings in the early 19th century.

At the time of the excavation it was considered that Phase 3, of stone on brick rubble foundations, was of the 'Tudor period'. However, Clifton-Taylor (1972, 219) and Pevsner (1969, 57) state that brick was little used in Lancashire before the 17th century, and then only in the south west of the county. Indeed, Clifton-Taylor states that despite the success which brick enjoyed, it was still far from being universal in England in the 16th century, it being an expensive commodity requiring certain skills in manufacture. As a result, its adoption at the vernacular level was correspondingly slow. In the light of this, it would seem to be unlikely that stone walls constructed on a brick rubble foundation could be much earlier than the 17th century. Few remaining brick buildings in the vicinity of Sefton Old Hall seem to fall into the Tudor period. The Old Hall at Ince Blundell is dated by Pevsner (1969, 128) to the 16th century, but internal timber details seem to suggest an early 17th century date. Downholland Hall and Formby Hall are thought to be of 16th century date, but insufficient work has been done on early brick buildings in the area to confirm this claim.

Figure 6: Plan of Building 1



In Sefton parish itself there appear to be no brick buildings of a date earlier than the mid 18th century.

Thus, in the absence of more detailed research it seems dangerous to assume that any brick building would have taken place on the site much before the early 17th century. The existence of the field name 'Brick Croft', on the Molyneux estate map of 1769, with the addition of a water filled pit (? due to clay extraction) by 1845, suggests that bricks were being made on demesne land in the 18th century, and that such bricks may well be incorporated into the farm and barn at Sefton Hall Farm south west of Sefton Old Hall and the still existing fabric of Mill House, east of Sefton Church, which bears a date-stone of 1753.

It seems possible that the walls of Building 1 at Sefton Old Hall were constructed some time prior to 1769, but probably no earlier than about 1600. The brick- and stone floored construction built into the north end of the silted up ditch beneath Building 1, may be the 'seller' viewed by Nicholas Blundell in the years between 1707 and 1724 (Tyrer 1968, 1970 and 1972); the very fact that it is singled out for particular visits suggests that it may have been newly constructed and that Nicholas was comparing it with his own 'seller' which was in existence in 1705 (Tyrer 1968, 97).

The contents of the midden found on the north east side of Building 1 do not appear to date from any earlier than the 17th century, and the bricking up of the wall adjoining the annexe and the main building of Phase 1 seems most likely to have taken place at this period.

The excavations did little to pinpoint the use of Building 1. The comment was made that the walls of Phase 3 were too flimsy to support an upper storey, and no remains of chimney or staircase were found. It seems likely that the building represents a small living area (Phase 1 and 2) with additional animal quarters or outhousing, and cellar attached. This would appear to be consistent with the leases of the 18th century (Appendix 2) but does little to explain the remains of the building described in Caroe & Gordon (1893, 50-51) as a gable of stone, approached by a flight of steps, finally demolished in the early 19th century. It does, however, seem clear from the outline of the excavated buildings and those depicted on the 1769 plan (figures 2 & 4) that these represent the same structure.

Building 3 appears to have its foundations in the sand and clay layer ascribed to the 16th century (see below) and, therefore, to be of post 16th century date. The absence of comment regarding building materials makes it difficult to elaborate on this, but it seems certain that it was standing in 1769 (figure 2). The finding of a George II halfpenny beneath the rubble of the collapsed building helps to confirm this view. The excavator ascribed no specific use to the building except for referring to it as an 'out-house'. It is likely that it is one of the buildings referred to in the leases of the 18th century (see Appendix 2).

The problems of flooding and the petition of 1648 have been quoted in the paragraphs regarding the history of the site. The existence of a layer of sand and clay, mixed and spread all across the site to a depth of 3 feet, and containing 16th and 17th century pottery appears to confirm this view. It is strange that section A does not contain evidence of this spread, especially as it is clearly recognised in section B. The excavator's claim that the sand and clay had been 'blown in' during the sand inundations of the 16th century seems rather unlikely. Flooding of the site, bearing in mind its low lying position, coupled with the fact that the Molyneux family may well have been absentee landlords by this time, seems to be a more likely cause.

The fact that the well is sited over a natural spring may have been the reason for the original choice of site. The excavation confirmed the statement of the Ordnance Survey inspector in 1951 that the eastern side of the well was absent. The use of bricks and mortar in the repairs to the well suggest that such repairs took place after 1600.

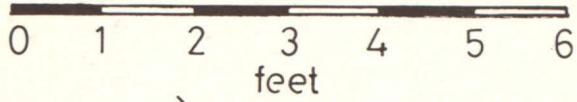
No conclusions can be drawn regarding the date of the structure standing at the entrance to the site and considered by the excavator to be a 'drawbridge'. It is not possible to prove its association or otherwise with the cambered, cobbled road of post 16th century date. It appears that the only access to the site was via this 'drawbridge', though any structural remains had disappeared by 1769 (figure 2). It is likely that the cobbled road is represented by the avenue between two enclosures shown on the 1769 plan.

The drain across the site cannot be dated from the evidence presented, but the use of brick suggests a date not earlier than 1600 for the repairs, and the material from the blocked outlet gives a date comparable with the traditional view for final abandonment of the site in the early 19th century. The drain which crossed the site on the north side of Building 2 and cut the walls of Building 1, was recognised as 19th century in date at the time of excavation. Its direction across the site seems to suggest that it followed a line independent of the line of the 'curtain' wall, but bearing in mind the problems concerning the relationship of buildings within trenches it is impossible to be certain about this.

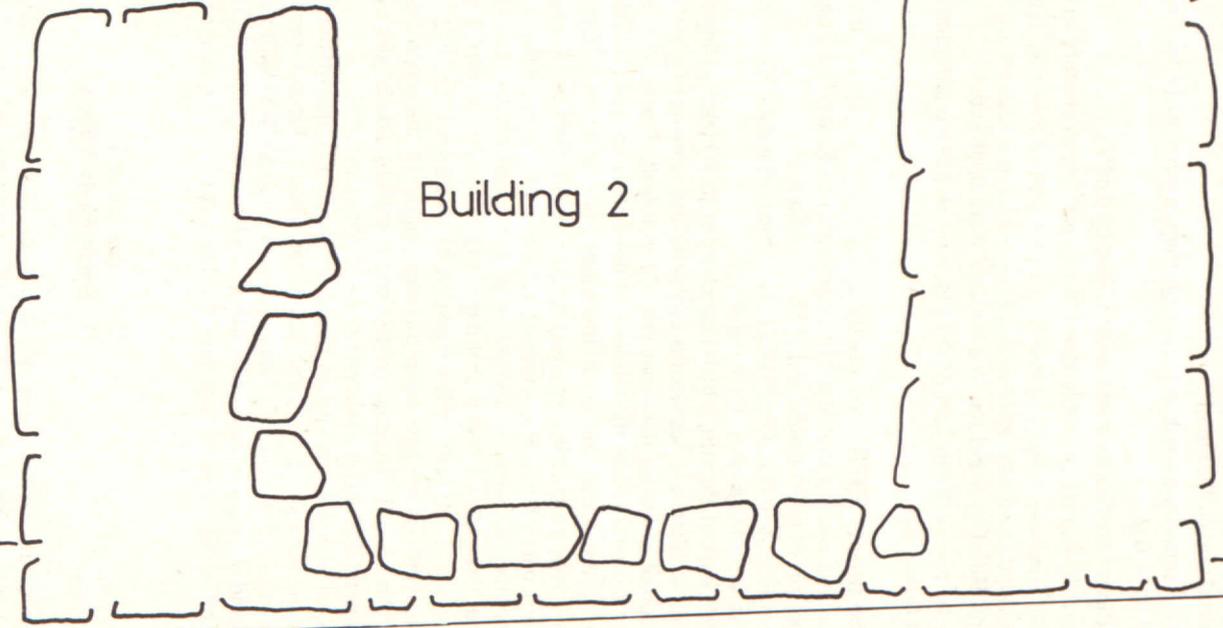
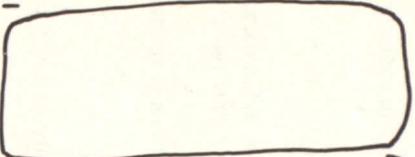
## 10. Conclusions

1. The original date of construction of the moat cannot be stated. It was dredged in the 16th/17th century with a corresponding expansion in the size of the platform.
2. The natural surface of the platform was overlain with a layer of turf established by the 14th century. A timber framed building may have been contemporary with the stone building standing in the centre of the platform, demolished by the 14th century.

Figure 7: Plan of Building 2



remains of wall



19C. drain

wall removed for drain trench

3. Further building of a structure with stone foundations took place on the site after the 14th century (Building 1, Phases 1 and 2).
4. The site had been covered by sand and clay layers in the 16th century, probably due to flooding.
5. Additional building with brick (Building 1, Phase 3, and Building 3) took place after the 16th century.
6. Repairs to the well were probably contemporary with the construction of 16th century buildings.
7. Some demolition took place in the first quarter of the 18th century (perhaps of buildings which had suffered due to flooding).
8. Buildings 1 and 3 were still standing on the platform in 1769. The access road and two enclosures were still in evidence.
9. All buildings had disappeared from the site by 1845.
10. Drains on the site are probably late 18th or early 19th century in date.
11. The 1964 roadway destroyed the south east part of Building 1, and it is likely that the remains of the excavated postholes were also destroyed by the roadworks. Part of Building 2 may have survived, and Building 3 and the 'drawbridge' were unaffected.
12. An area in the southern part of the platform remains unaffected by either excavations or roadway construction.

### Survey of the moat: 1978 (figure 9)

This was carried out by students of the Institute of Extension Studies, the University of Liverpool, under the direction of D O'Hanlon and R MacNeil-Sale.

All that remains of Sefton Old Hall today is the rectangular moat. It is bisected by the B 5422 which runs south west from Maghull to Litherland.

The northern part of the site, which lies adjacent to St Helen's Church, is perhaps the better preserved. The moat is water filled and has what is probably the remains of a leet or channel to the north which, at one time, presumably linked the moat with Sefton Mill. Traces of stone footings on the north east side of the platforms may indicate the remains of the cellar described by Nicholas Blundell (Tyrer 1970, 30). An extension of the north corner of the moat may be of later date than the original moat, and it is suggested that it may have served as a watering place for cattle, or for soaking the wheels of carts.

The southern part of the site, adjacent to Old Hall Farm, seems to show a greater degree of disturbance. A wide marshy break in the moat at the south corner may represent infill at some time after 1845, since the Tithe Map shows that the moat is continuous except for the causeway on the south west arm. The causeway itself still shows some of its stone footings, but is marshy and much disturbed. A channel or leet running due east from the east corner of the moat probably represents yet another link with the river Alt. A well, situated on the south eastern side of the platform is still clearly discernible. The moat is water filled but is shallower than on the north side.

A complex of marshy, overgrown depressions lying approximately 35 metres east of the south site may represent the remains of fish ponds, but these require further investigation.

Despite the mutilation which it has undergone, Sefton Old Hall moat remains as a good example of a moated site, and compares well with other similar sites in Merseyside, such as that at Maghull (SD 36660216). This survey merely indicates the need for a closer study of the site, both from documents and fieldwork.

### Appendix 1 The Small Finds: 1956-61

The following summary is based on excavation notes where contexts for the finds are recorded. The notes included the comment that in general the pottery was of poor quality, unwedged clay, with poor, badly applied glazes.

Century	Description	Provenance
?12	Two sherds of 'exceptional crudity' with flint chip inclusions	base of one of the post holes
medieval	roof tiles, two of which were restored fragments of kitchen vessels	not known not known
14	fragments of iron vessel decorated earthenware and coarse pottery rough pottery wardrobe counter	turf layer above the remains of Building 2 trenches in the vicinity of post holes and Building 3 turf layer in trenches of Building 1 bank of ditch below Building 1 not known

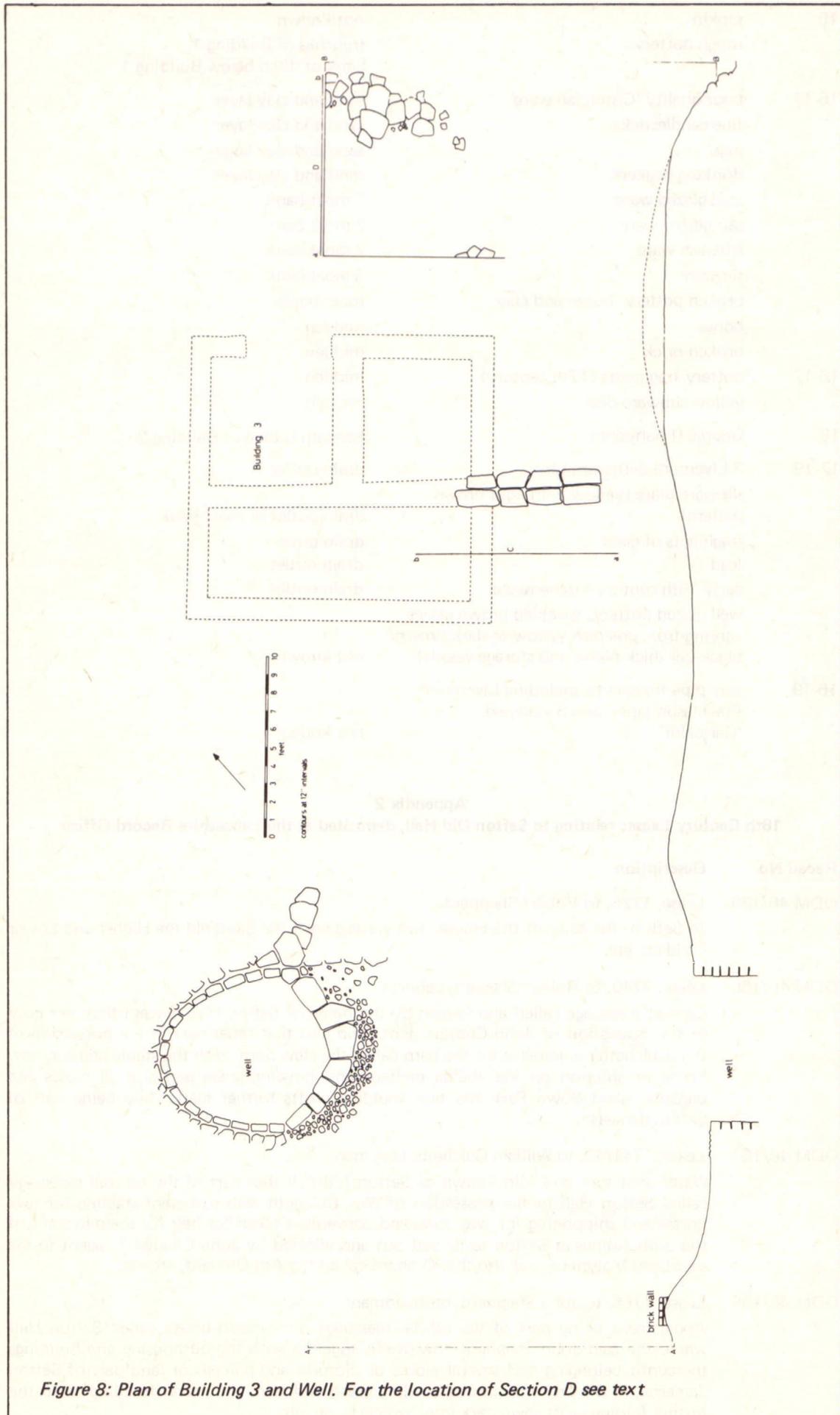


Figure 8: Plan of Building 3 and Well. For the location of Section D see text

15	pipkin rough pottery	not known trenches of Building 1 bank of ditch below Building 1
16-17	poor quality 'Cistercian ware' fine candlesticks jugs drinking beakers lead glazed ware salt glazed ware Rhenish ware slipware broken pottery, bones and clay bones broken brick	sand and clay layer sand and clay layer sand and clay layer sand and clay layer ? moat bank ? moat bank ? moat bank ? moat bank moat bank midden midden
16-17	pottery fragments (17th century) yellow slipware dish	midden midden
18	George II halfpenny	beneath rubble of Building 3
17-19	3 Liverpool delftware tiles slipware plate (yellow with light brown pattern) fragments of glass lead early 19th century kitchenware well glazed pottery, speckled brown glazes varying from greenish yellow to dark brown/black (all thick plates and storage vessels)	drain outlet  drain outlet or moat bank drain outlet drain outlet drain outlet not known
16-19	clay pipe fragments, including Liverpool Freemason pipes, and 3 stamped 'Garibaldi'	not known

## Appendix 2

### 18th Century Leases relating to Sefton Old Hall, deposited at the Lancashire Record Office

Recall No.	Description
DDM 46/139	Lease, 1725, to Robert Shepherd: In Sefton, the scite of the House, two yards a croft the Stanfield the Higher and Lower Field etc etc.
DDM 46/165	Lease, 1740, to Robert Shepard, yeoman: Capital message called and known by the name of Sefton Hall (except that part now in the possession of John Curdon, gent., and also that other part in the possession of Wm. Culcheth) together with the barn called the New Barn, with the stable and one cow house or shippon on the foulds orchard and bowling green and also all closes and parcells called Sown Park the two foulding crofts further marl'd hey being part of Sefton demesn.
DDM 46/167	Lease, 1741/42, to William Culcheth, chapman: Water grist mill and kiln known as Sefton Mills all that part of the capital message called Sefton Hall in the possession of Wm. Culcheth with sufficient stabling for two horses and shipponing for two cows and convenient room for hey for them in some of the outbuildings at Sefton to be sett out and allotted by John Chadwick, agent to the said Lord Molyneux and also that Orchard called the Ash Orchard, etc etc.
DDM 46/183	Lease, 1756, to John Shepherd, husbandman: Appartment being part of the capital message or mansion house called Sefton Hall where the said John Shepherd now dwells together with the outhousing and buildings thereunto belonging and several closes or closures and parcells or land part of Sefton demesne, ie the orchards garden bowling green and folds the nearer foulding crofts the further folding croft sown park into two parts, etc etc.

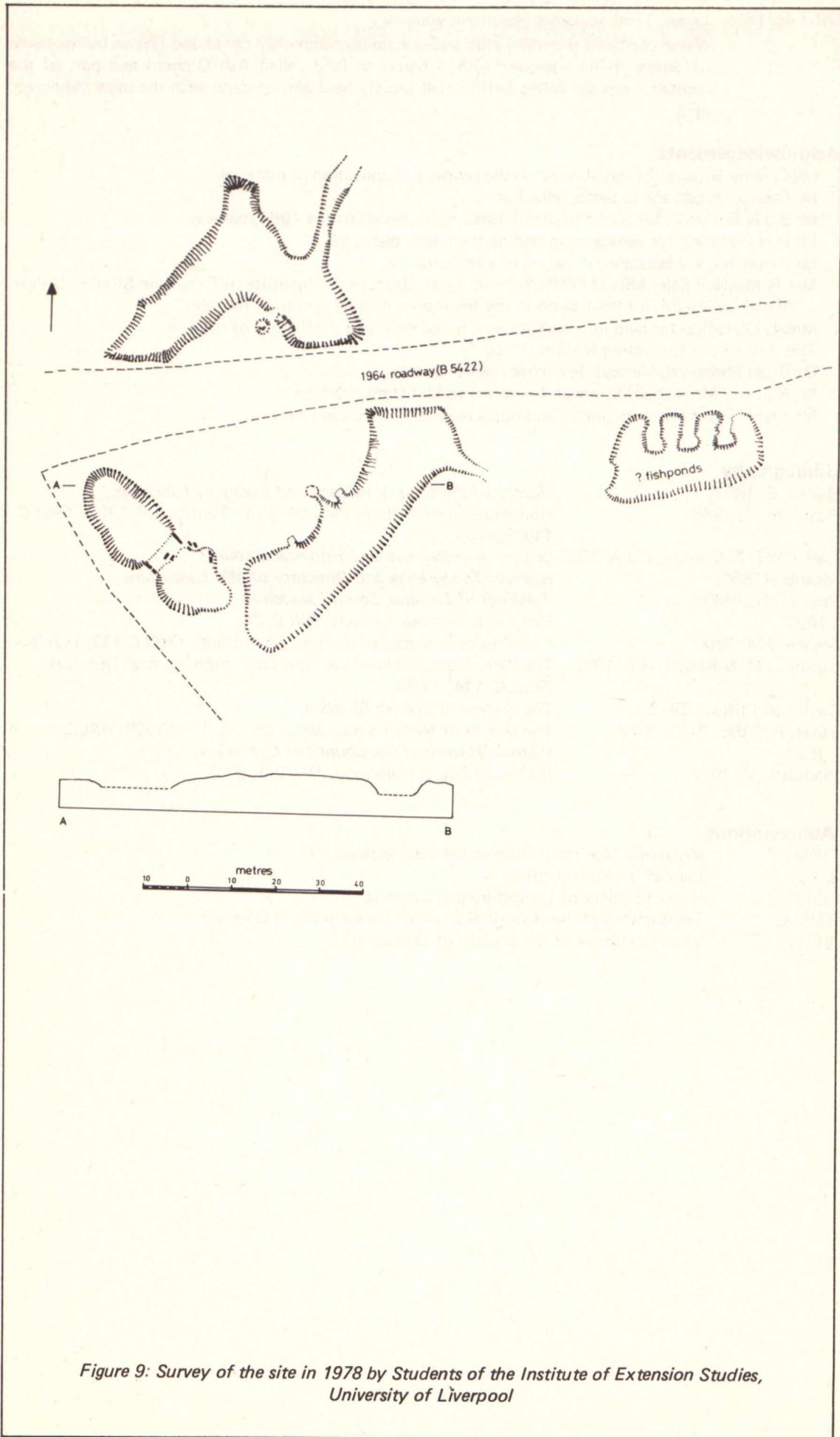


Figure 9: Survey of the site in 1978 by Students of the Institute of Extension Studies, University of Liverpool

DDM 46/182 Lease, 1756, to James Shepherd, yeoman:

Water corn mill and milln killn and windmilln commonly called and known by the name of Sefton milln together with a parcel of land called Ash Orchard and part of the capital messuage called Sefton Hall usually held and enjoyed with the same millns, etc etc.

### Acknowledgements

Miss Penny Brown, for initial work on the report and collection of material.  
Mr Caunce, for access to Sefton Hall Farm.  
Mr B J N Edwards, for access to unpublished notes regarding the 1964 roadway.  
Mr R H Gambles, for assistance in tracing the notes, plans, etc.  
Mr J Holland, for assistance in dating related buildings.  
Mrs R MacNeil-Sale, Miss D O'Hanlon and the students of the Institute of Extension Studies, University of Liverpool, for permission to use the results of their survey of the site.  
Miss D O'Hanlon for help in compilation of notes regarding the history of the site.  
The staff of the Lancashire Record Office.  
Mr Brian Sheppard, Merseyside Archaeological Survey.  
Mr Neil and Mr Richard Sturgeon for access to Mill House, Sefton.  
Mr Frank Tyrer for photographs and notes regarding the excavations.

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### Abbreviations

DDM	Molyneux Muniments (deposited deed Molyneux)
LRO	Lancashire Record Office
RS! C	Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire
THSLC	Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire
VCH	Victoria History of the County of Lancashire

# An Abandoned Church at Formby

**JENNIFER LEWIS**

The present church of St Luke stands on a site slightly to the north of an area of land known as 'Old Burying Ground'. The modern church was built in 1855 and replaced an earlier building supposedly abandoned in the first half of the 18th century due to persistent inundation of the site by sand.

The six inch Ordnance Survey map of 1848 records 'site of church' which it depicts as a rectangular building standing in the centre of a square enclosure named 'Old Church Yard'. The modern (1974) Ordnance Survey 1:10 000 sheet, SD 20 NE, makes no such comment regarding an earlier church, though the 1:25 000 sheet marks 'site of church' at SD 28090668, a little to the south east of the modern edifice.

Anciently, Formby, with Ravenmeols and Ainsdale, formed a detached portion of the parish of Walton-on-the-Hill. No church is recorded in the locality in the Domesday Book, but it seems that a church must have been established shortly afterwards. Grants made to Cockersand Abbey in the late 12th century record the following information: 'Grant in frankalmoign from Henry son of Warin of Lancaster . . . of two "lands" in Ravenmeols, to wit, one between the churchyard and the highway at the western plot and the other on the north next the church ditch in length' (Chet Soc 1900, 565). A second grant from Henry de Lea to the canons of Cockersand refers to a messuage extending from the threshold of Hugh the pounour to the toft of Robert, son of the priest (Chet Soc 1900, 566).

Deeds of the 13th century appear to confirm the existence of the church. A grant of land in Formby was made by Hugh, son of Master Roger of Derby, to Robert, son of Richard de Formby, son of Albinus the priest (DDFo 13/3). In a document dated 1240/1247, Hugh Honimouth quitclaimed to Sir John de Lee, Knight, the lands which Robert the chaplain held of the grantee in Ravenmeols (Rec Soc 1936, no 743). The Victoria County History (3, 1907, 48, n3) suggests that 'The Priests' seems to have been a holding which gave a surname to the tenant; land in Riccunifeld was granted by Stephen dil Prestes de forneby to John le Norreys in the period 1280 to 1284 (Rec Soc 1939, 183, no 1007).

Will. de Adbaston was parochial chaplain of Ravenmeols in 1340 (Rec Soc 1913, 107, no 665). Gilbert Blevyn was chaplain in 1442 (DDFo 13/5) and in 1485 a grant of land in Formby was made to John Dey and Hugh Lathum, chaplains (DDFo 13/8-11). By 1516 Roger Dobbe was chaplain; a ditch in Formby, known as Dobb's Gutter, still exists and may have formed the boundary of land held by Roger or his family.

Although it seems apparent that a chapel had existed at Formby throughout the medieval period, it is strange that no mention is made of such a building in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of Henry VIII (Caley & Hunter, 1834, V 221). The Valor recorded Edward Molyneux as rector of Walton, and Thomas Norres as vicar, with a chantry priest at Walton chantry. However, the VCH lists the curates and vicars who supposedly served Formby chapel from 1558, though it seems possible that their ministry was not always on a regular basis.

Local tradition believes that the church was finally abandoned in 1739, but it seems likely that the church was already in some state of decay before that date, although the chapel wardens' accounts, which date from 1705, suggest that the church was kept in reasonably good repair (Appendix). The storms of autumn 1720, recorded in the diaries of Nicholas Blundell (Tyrer, 1972), caused havoc in the township of Little Crosby, and large tracts of land along the coast were destroyed by the action of sea or sand (Beck, 1953).

With regard to the actual church building again little is known. A plan of 1557/58 (PRO, MR2) shows the church in Formby to be of a size comparable with that of Halsall Church, and to have had a spire. In addition, it is recorded that there had been at least one bell in the early church. It bore the date 1661 and was transferred to the new church, dedicated to St Peter, on its consecration in 1747 (Barsley, 1955, 12). The earlier church was given a grant of money from Queen Anne's Bounty in 1710, but it seems possible that part of this was used to establish the registers for the chapel, which commenced in that year. A gap of nine years in the chapel wardens' accounts, 1734 to 1743, may well relate to the period when the church was finally abandoned.

Of the actual construction and plan of the church there is no evidence outside that of the chapel wardens' accounts. It has already been noted that the church had a steeple, and in 1711 2s 1d was spent on 'glasing the bellhouse window'. Other entries regarding pointing of the church, suggest that it was built of brick or stone, and it seems likely that 'slate from the Delfe for the Chapel' was used for flooring or roofing. Stone, with adhering mortar, and some blocks with signs of having been dressed, can still be seen in the churchyard to the south of the modern church. The most spectacular of these is known locally as the 'Godstone'. It consists of a broken building stone on one face of which is a deeply incised

cross, surmounted by a perfect circle. The cross stands on a base of three steps. Local tradition states that prior to interment the corpse was carried three times around the Godstone. The stone is not in its original position: that it appears to have been originally a building stone suggests it may have come from the early church building.

In addition to the church, it is believed that there was a skull house in the churchyard, but its exact position is not now known.

Little is known as to the precise location of the early church. A newspaper report of 8 September 1894, refers to the funeral of Mr Richard Formby, junior. It was stated that 'in digging the new grave the workmen came across a coffin of red sandstone at a distance of 7 feet from the surface, as well as a portion of the old church wall'. Mr Formby's grave is just inside the present church gate, on the south side of the path. In the 19th century a font was rescued from a ditch where it had been used by local farmers for sharpening their scythes. It is of sandstone and circular, with the exterior surface cut into twenty three facets, all of which are absolutely plain and bear no trace of decoration. The font now stands inside the modern church and bears a plaque which states that it came from the old church which stood a little to the south east of the present building.

It appears that during the period following abandonment of the church burials continued to take place in the old churchyard. For the last 12 months, members of the Merseyside Archaeological Society, in conjunction with the Formby Society, have been undertaking a survey of the memorials in the old burying ground. The work is still in progress and it is hoped that a full analysis of the results will soon be completed.

#### Appendix

##### Extracts from Chapel wardens' accounts for the church at Formby (dedication not known)

	£	s	d
1705 Pointing ye church		18	0
1705 Drawing ye commandments		16	0
1705 Turf for ye church use		4	8
1705 Straw when ye church was plaistered		1	0
1706 An hour-glass for ye pulpit		1	2
1706 Whitelimeing ye church	2	9	0
1708 Stone from ye delf		5	4
1711 Lime and hair for mortar and 18 days pointing the chapel	1	7	6
1711 Glasing ye bellhouse window		2	1
1711 Rails for the communion table	1	17	10
1712 A sounding board for ye chapel	3	3	3
1716 Spent for drink at hanging the bells		1	0
1716 Slate from the delfe for the chapel		13	4
1716 18 days tearing the gallery and chapel		18	0
1716 Whitewashing the chapel	2	6	0
1716 Joiners' work in the gallery	6	10	0
1719 A dyale plate for chapel yard*		10	6

The above extracts are taken from notes contributed by Mr William Marshallsay to the Centenary Brochure of the Parish Church of St Luke, Formby, 1955, 23.

\* The sun-dial was removed to St Peter's Church, and stands on the west side of the porch.

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#### Abbreviations

DDFo Formby family muniments deposited at the Lancashire Record Office, Preston

PRO Public Record Office, London

RSLC Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire

THSLC Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.

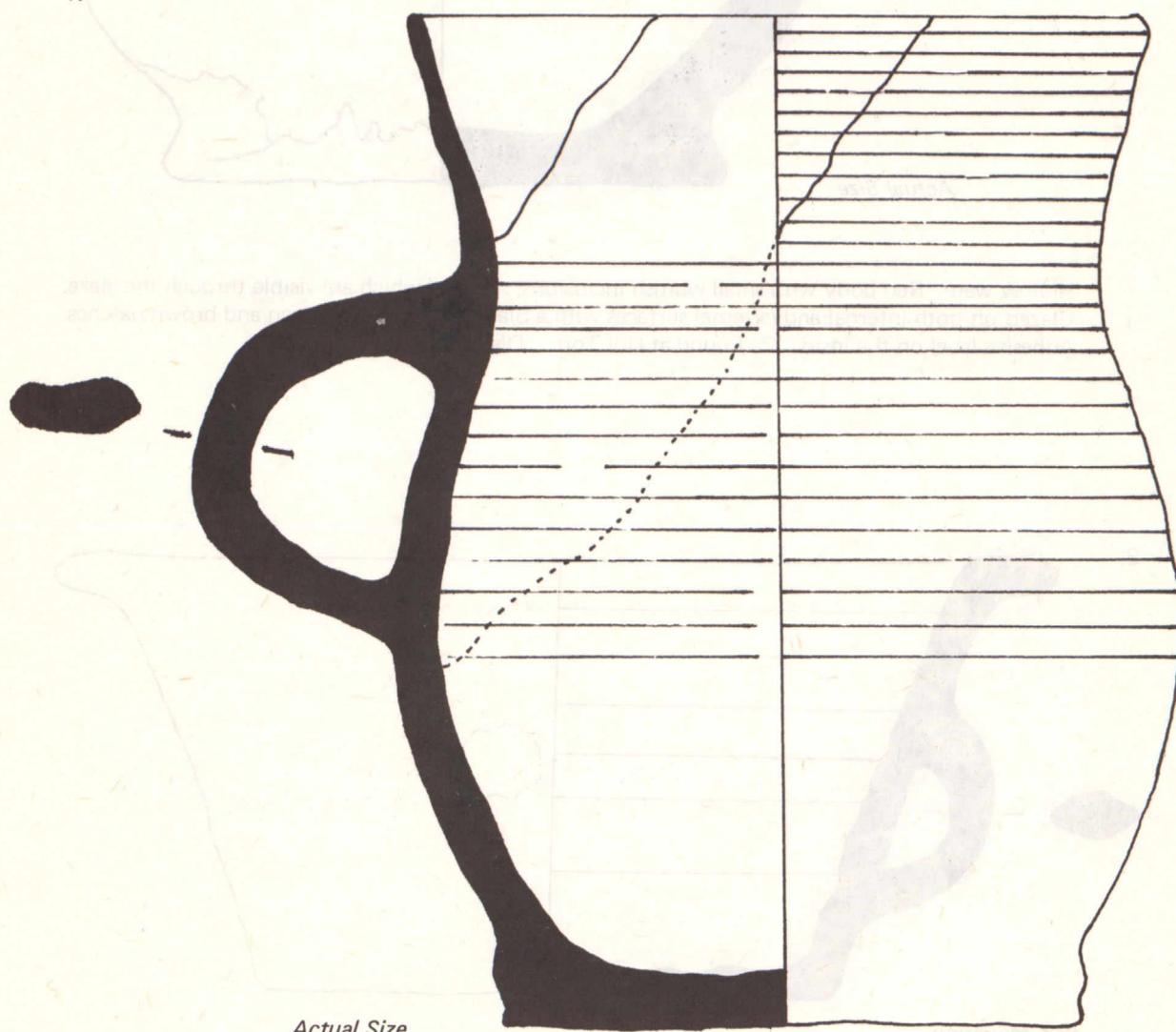
# Some Examples of Coarse Earthenware from Rainford

*P.J. DAVEY & D.E.M. MORGAN*

The writers examined a group of six complete, or almost complete, pots in St Helens Museum in the autumn of 1977. At the time all but one (No 3 below) seemed to be unprovenanced. Earlier this year, however, Miss E Lloyd, Curator of the Museum, discovered a note in the files marked '1922' which allowed her to identify five of the pots as having been found in Rainford before that date. A further complete example was recovered c 1975, on Red House Farm, Rainford, and remains in private possession. The following note is intended to record these finds and discuss their implications.

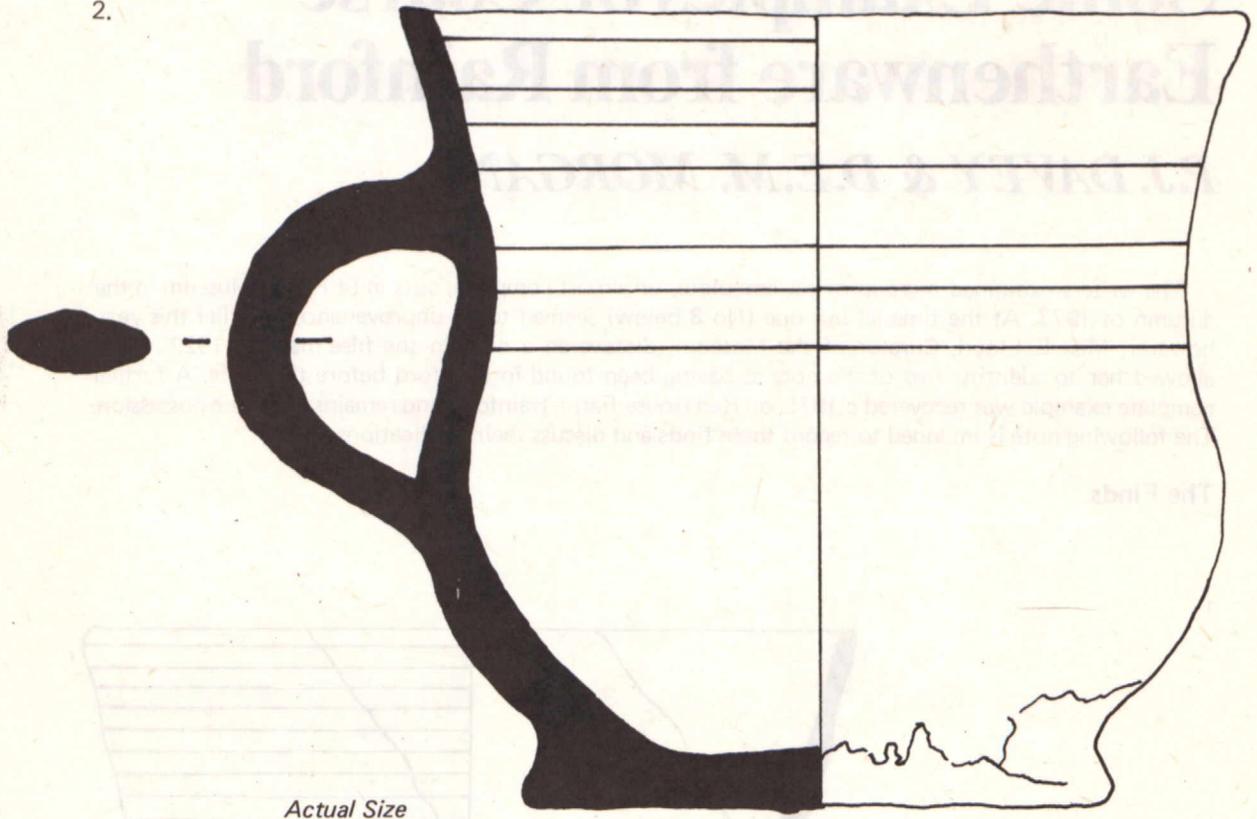
## The Finds

1.



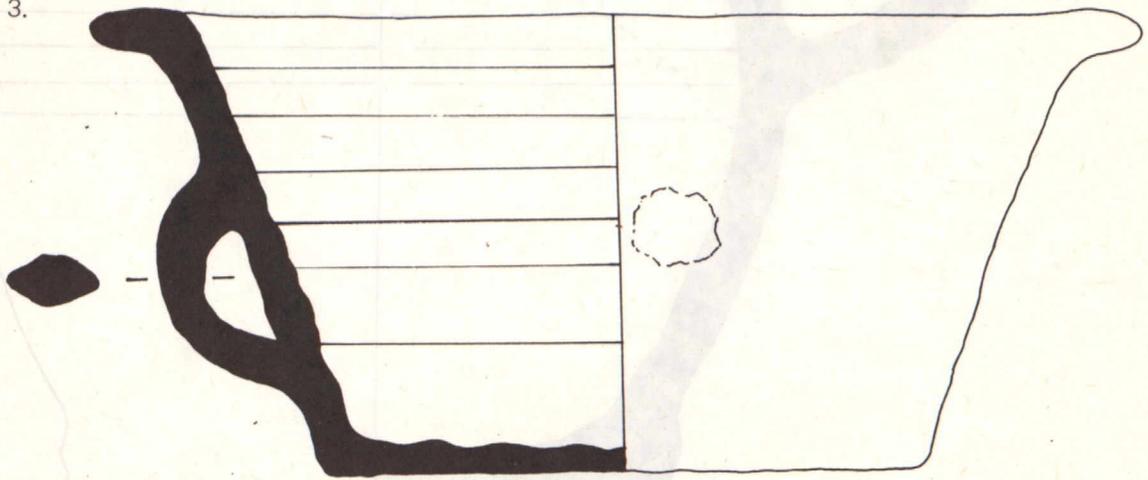
Hollow ware. Over-fired purplish orange body. Streaky yellow brown glaze around handle, and up to and over the rim. Main portion of both internal and external surfaces unglazed. Interior heavily wheel-marked. Adhesive label on inside '1'. Found at Hill Top, close to the Bottle and Glass Public House. DM/SH/1/1.

2.



Hollow ware. Red body with small whitish inclusions, some of which are visible through the glaze. Glazed on both internal and external surfaces with a blackish glaze, with green and brown patches. Adhesive label on the inside '2'. Found at Hill Top. DM/SH/2/2

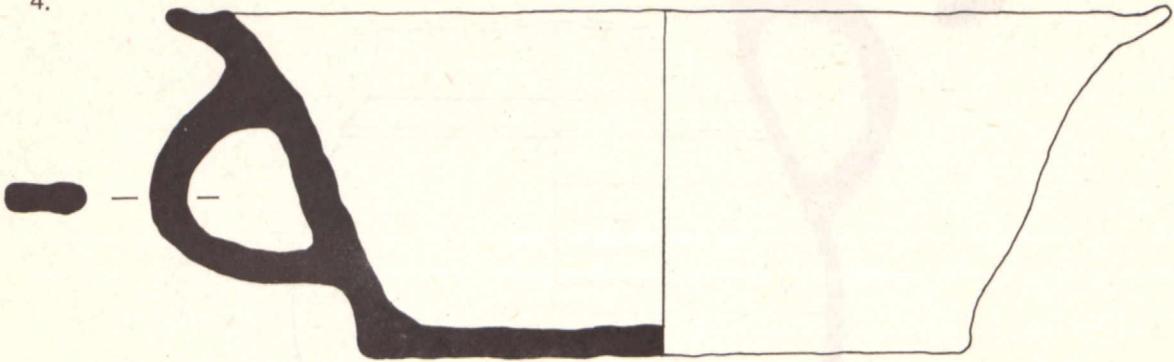
3.



64% reduction

Hollow ware. Orangy body with small buff inclusions, exterior surface sooted. Three splashes of yellowy brown glaze on the exterior. Interior chestnut brown glaze, crazed. Rim only patchily glazed. The rim has also been smoothed over with either a leather or cloth. Label reads 'Found underground at Rainford c 1920. Dated 1000-1500'. Found at Hill Top. DM/SH/3

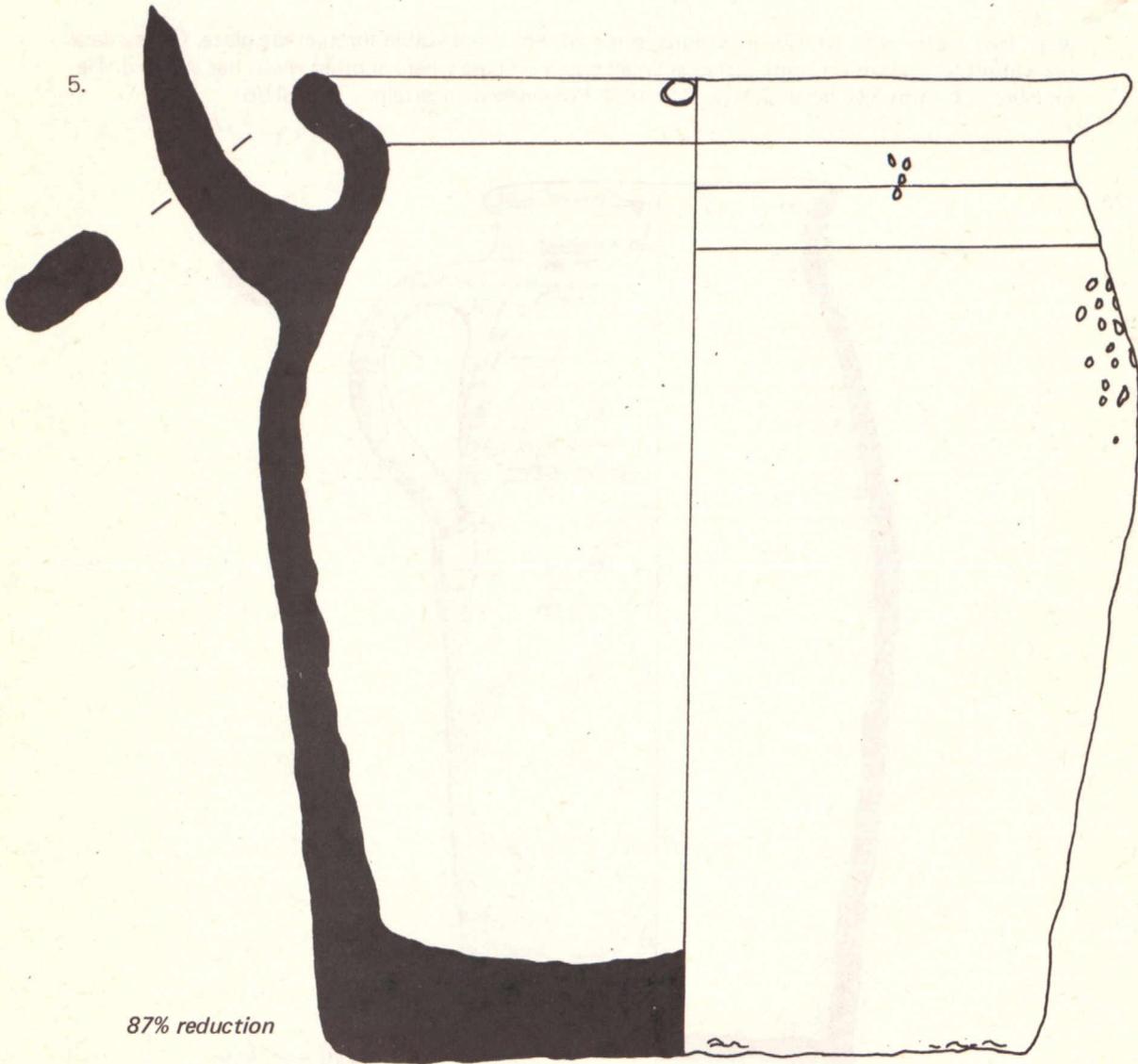
4.



*55% reduction*

Hollow ware. Red body. Interior purplish black glaze, pooled in base opposite the handle. A few splashes of glaze on the exterior surface. Small piece of another vessel adhered below the rim. The glaze on the underside of the base is marked with either the rim or base of another vessel. The vessel is cracked to just below the handle. Found at Hill Top. DM/SH/4

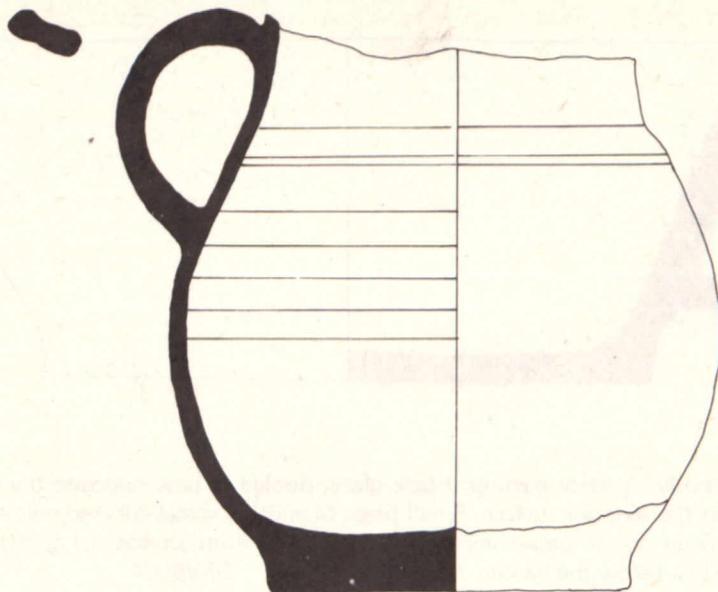
5.



*87% reduction*

Hollow ware. Over-fired purplish red fabric, coarse with large inclusions. The overfired glaze is both black and brown, also purple on both surfaces. Exterior and rim badly blistered in places. Internal lid-seating. Interior heavily wheel-marked. Small skillet-type handle below rim. Lump of clay attached on the outer base. Adhesive label on the rim '5'. Found when excavating the field behind the Golden Lion Inn, Rainford, about 4 feet below the surface, Friday July 29 1898. DM/SH/5/5

6.



48% reduction

Jug. Red fabric with whitish inclusions, some of which are visible through the glaze. Glossy dark brownish black glaze on both surfaces. Small patch on base where another vessel has adhered. Tie-on label '53'. Adhesive label on base 'AW 163'. Provenance uncertain. DM/SH/6

7.



44% reduction

Jug. Well fired dark red body. Patchy black/brown glaze inside and overflowing from rim on outside. Warped and fire cracked. Weight: 1.76 kg, volume: 3 litres, though will not and would not hold water. Possibly a kiln waster. Found by Mr W E Grayson on Red House Farm, Rainford c 1975 when laying a drain. He retains ownership.

## Discussion

Documentary evidence indicates that pottery was an important part of the economic life of the Rainford area from at least the 17th century onwards (Davey & Morgan 1977, 126-128). A number of potters' wills and inventories survive from the period and seem to suggest a 'cottage' industry complemented by agriculture. During the middle of the century, possibly due to interruption of supplies from the south caused by the Civil War, many of the potters seem to have adapted their techniques in order to produce clay tobacco pipes as well.

Fieldwalking in 1977/78 by Liverpool University Extra-Mural students, on land west of Rainford church, recovered kiln wasters and other evidence for both a 17th century pottery and pipe shop on the same field. The pipe site was excavated early in 1979, and pottery associated with it had as 'grog', crushed, waster pipe-stems included in the bodies.

It is against this sort of background that the seven whole, or almost whole, pots should be seen. In addition the 19th century publication of three tygs found in 1877 (fragments similar to which were also found as wasters in fieldwalking), gives a broader picture of what the production range might have been like (Gibson, 1878).

At present it is impossible to give any precise chronology for either form or fabric in the Rainford potteries. A number of the pots described here should belong to the middle of the 17th century or not much later (eg **4** and **7**), while others almost certainly derive from 18th century production (eg no **6**). Their poor quality and condition, together with parallels in the fieldwalking material, suggests that they are all Rainford products.

## Acknowledgements

The writers wish to thank Mr Senior and Miss Lloyd of St Helens Museum for permission to study the collection, Mr W E Grayson for his cooperation and Arthur Amery for producing the drawing of **7** at short notice.

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# Medieval Pottery from St. Anne's Well

*P.J. DAVEY*

In January 1978 the field surrounding St Anne's Well, Sutton (SD 49979143), was walked by an extra mural class after recent ploughing. Although very small quantities of 18th and 19th century material were recovered from most parts of the field, two sherds of medieval pottery were found within 5 m of the site of the well.

## Sherd 1

Thumbed, sagging base fragment (diameter 117 mm). Quartz rich vesicular fabric with small numbers of angular red inclusions, dark grey reduced core, bright orange exterior and dull, ? wiped interior surface. One small drop (c 1 mm in diameter) of green glaze on the underside of the base.

## Sherd 2

Body sherd of similar fabric, but almost certainly different vessel. Some mica inclusions.

In view of the comparative rarity of medieval pottery from Merseyside and the south Lancashire area in general, the recovery of these two sherds is of interest. They both probably represent jugs dating from the 14th or 15th century. The sherds have been deposited at Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool.

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# Bromborough Court House - A Further Note

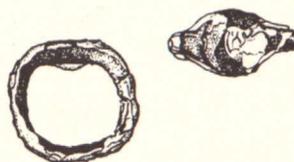
*Gill Chitty*

Following the publication of the Society's work on Bromborough Court House (MAS Report No 2, Liverpool), Mr H Edwards, who had lived in the house from 1921 until 1963, contacted the Archaeological Survey with further information about the finds made in the garden of the 17th century building. He kindly loaned the two objects illustrated to the Survey, for drawing and photography. Both were found in the front garden of the house.

1. Brown flint. The broken tip of a pointed tool or weapon of oval section, and worked on both convex surfaces. Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age.
2. An iron ring of small diameter with flat, pierced bezel. A similar example in bronze was found at Meols in the 19th century (MAS Journal 1, figure 2, 30). Probably medieval.



*Fig. 1*



*Fig. 2*



# Aerial Photography Aiding Landscape Studies on Merseyside

**BRIAN SHEPPARD**

Aerial photography has played a key role in the initial stages of an archaeological survey of Merseyside, even though few of the photographs studied had been taken for archaeological purposes. Most were from a collection, held by the Merseyside County Planning Department, of vertical monochrome prints and false-colour infra-red transparencies printed at a common scale of 1:10 000 and forming a series of surveys that began in 1945. The other significant collection was a set of vertical monochrome prints at 1:5 000 taken for and held by the St Helens Planning Department. Study of the material was made possible by a commissioning grant from the County Planning Department and was intended to provide a basic understanding of the potential for field research.

The detail that emerged was variable, depending on the weather conditions that prevailed during the weeks before and at the time of the flights. Earthworks were rarely recorded because, taken with the sun high in the sky, little shadow was thrown from them. One set, however, was exceptional in the quality and quantity of information revealed: the series taken with infra-red film. The survey, a joint venture between the Merseyside County Council and the Department of the Environment, had been undertaken in clear air at the beginning of the 1975 drought and was found to hold so much information that the other surveys were studied only to determine what additional or modifying information they might contain.

The number and scale of the photographs indicated that, with limited resources, a systematic search for individual small features would be impracticable, but groups of features or single, larger, ones could be assessed very effectively. The pattern of information that emerged separates Wirral from the rest of the County, (see p.88) and the reason for this may be surmised from an examination of the land involved and its varying potential for different types of human subsistence. To do that it is first necessary to consider the results and effects of the last glaciation.

The last glacial retreat, about 10,000 years ago, left behind a trail of devastation that is clearly discernible today. The vast gouges ripped out by the main ice routes can be seen on a contour map as the parallel valleys of the Dee and Mersey, along the central axis of Wirral as the Fender and, further east as the Alt and Sankey (figure 1). The areas of sandstone bedrock that endured this onslaught survive as today's high ground, surrounded by clays, sands and gravels that were dumped by the glaciers. That early mineral jungle gradually drained of excess water and was slowly colonised by types of vegetation suited to the changed environment.

The land that emerged was then further shaped by two opposing effects. The water that had been locked up in glaciers was now released, submerging large areas of coastal lowland (*eustatic rise*) and, in so doing, separating Britain from Europe. This inundation was offset in the north of Britain, however, by a rise in the landmass itself (*isostatic recovery*).

Today's familiar coastline is an intermediate result of that process and greatly different from that known by earlier generations. The model of its progress is not yet fully understood, but research by Creswell (1953) and, more recently, by Tooley (1978) and Kenna (1980) is rapidly contributing to an understanding. The relative height of land above sea level will have affected the drainage of the land and, hence, the character of the landscape that developed upon it. Changing coastal winds and currents will also have deposited and, at times, removed sand from the coastline, thereby changing the ease with which land water could drain into the sea.

Several distinct landscapes resulted from these processes but, for the purpose of this discussion, they will be considered as only three with local variations. The first division is that observable in the surface geology along an east-west line between the northern extremity of Wirral, through Bootle (north Liverpool) to the southern edge of urban St Helens. The land to the north of this line is predominantly covered with sands of the Shirdley Hill series overlain with large areas of peat bog. To the south of the line the main drift deposits are of boulder clay, conveniently subdivided by the Mersey. The difference between these subdivisions will be discussed later. The resultant sectors, illustrated in figure 1, may be considered as north, south west and south east Merseyside.

## 1. North Merseyside

The low, flat lands of the western half of this quadrant and the damming effect of the drifting coastal sand dunes have combined to make poor drainage its predominant characteristic. Persistently excessive

rainfall has accentuated this characteristic so that peat bog (known locally as *moss land*) has developed over much of the area. In the recent stages of development, the lowland moss and that on the higher ground around St Helens were both raised bog, but in the earlier stages it is reasonable to assume a fundamental difference between them. The lowland moss would have formed in water rich in minerals washed down from the higher ground, whereas the moss on the higher ground would have derived its supply of water only from the rain. In these conditions, different species of vegetation would have made up the bogs and each would have a different associated range of fauna, though with obvious overlap. As the bogs developed, the character of the lowland one appears to have changed. As the depth of vegetation increased, mineral downwash seems to have been out of reach of the new vegetation. With only direct rainfall to supply it, raised bog grew here too. Distribution of the surface deposits, including the bogs, may be examined in greater detail by studying the Ordnance Survey's maps of drift geology. They were surveyed in the last century when the mosslands, although significantly diminished by drainage schemes, were more extensive than the remnants of today.

The most significant implication of this landscape to an aerial study is that the peat resulting from the growth of a bog, even when drained, is a good buffer to dehydration. It tends, because of the slow rate of release, to distribute moisture evenly throughout its network. Buried features in soils where water drains and evaporates freely are often detected as *cropmarks* and differences of structure below the surface, caused by the presence of disused pits, ditches or foundations may then be indicated by differences in plant growth over them. This often occurs at the onset of a drought when the availability of a little extra moisture determines whether a plant thrives or dies. The pattern of affected plants then produces the cropmarks.

The mossland however, being peat, does not therefore readily reveal its history to the aerial observer. In its present drained state, it is highly prized for arable agriculture. In its natural form it would have offered peat as fuel, and a rich flora and fauna that would have provided valuable winter fodder for domestic animals as well as a variety of opportunities for hunting and gathering subsistence. The uses to which it was actually put, however, remain to be deduced from other techniques.

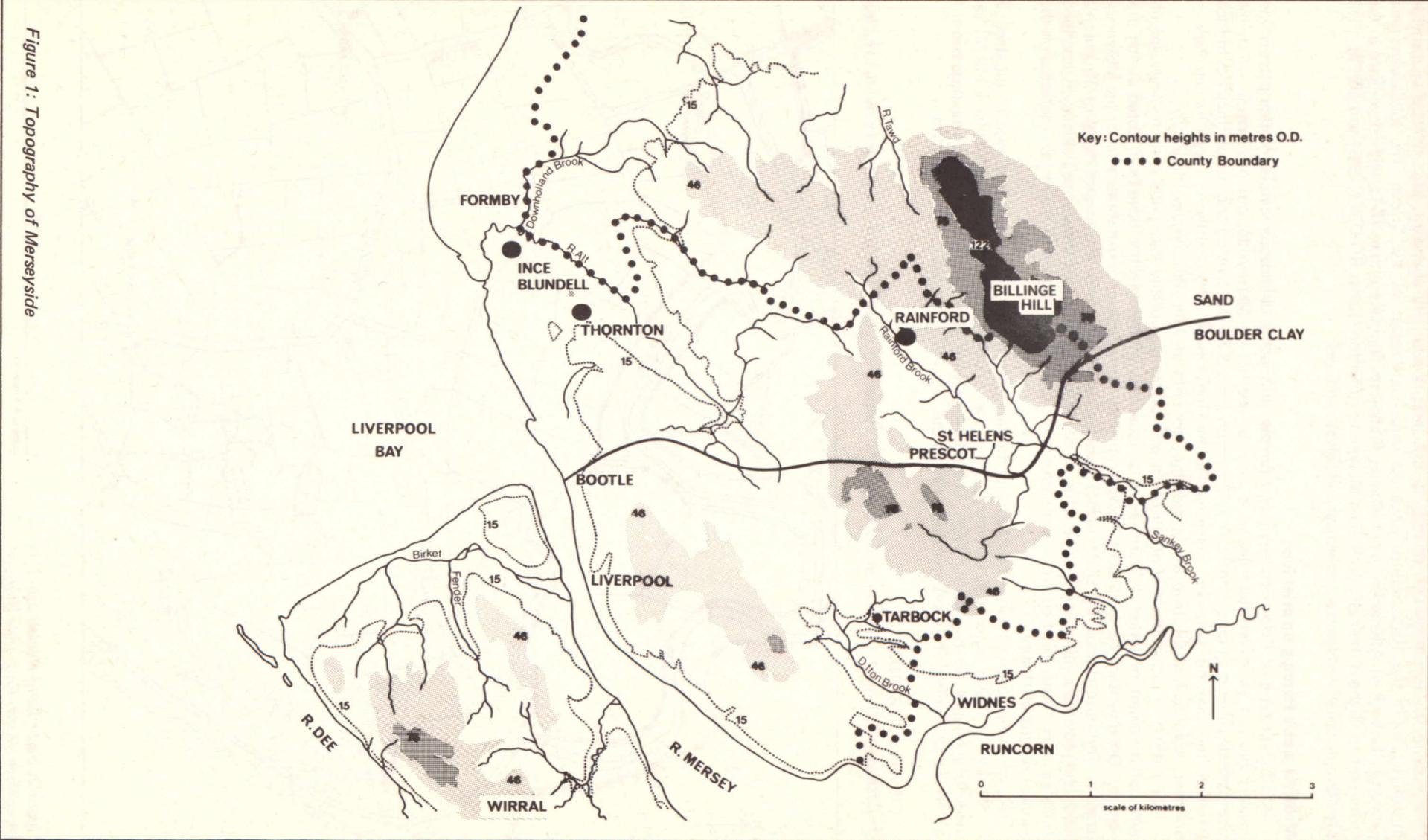
The mineral based soils in the remaining parts of this sector, especially those of the Shirdley Hill sands, may be expected under the appropriate conditions to produce cropmarks and, indeed, many have been observed. Although the large particle size of the sand means that the soils have an inferior ability to retain water and, hence, nutrients for the vegetation, they are light and easy to till with an ard or primitive plough. A natural admixture with peat, alluvium or boulder clay does, however, modify the characteristics to provide possibilities for successful agriculture. Such combinations are a common surface form in Merseyside. The cropmarks that have so far been studied on this type of soil are extremely prolific. There is a multitude of pits that require individual study before their functions can be established and a complex network of ploughed out field boundaries, most of which are recorded on 19th century tithe and Ordnance Survey maps. Some have an earlier, usually more complex or even unrelated form and it is examples of these that are described in the following pages. In this northern area, markedly different patterns of fields have been recorded from the air, some indicative of early wetland reclamation for agriculture and others of medieval arable agriculture on the drier land.

### **Wetland Reclamation**

The course of the lower reaches of the river Alt appears to have been altered in recent centuries by movements of the coastal sand, shifting from an east west alignment along today's southern urban limits of Formby (Saxton 1577 and Speed 1610), southwards to its present estuary at Hightown. In the northern bend of the modern river, at North End, Ince Blundell, field boundaries indicated on the infrared photographs are of an unusual form within the local landscape. Most of the fields in the area have linear boundaries that denote their function in land drainage and reclamation schemes implemented over the past two centuries. The small, irregular boundaries would have served the same function, but on a smaller and less regimented scale. Their form suggests drainage of a more easily reclaimable piece of land and thus of an early date. Their location, on freshwater alluvium of the river Alt, suggests that the river had already provided the basic mechanism for drainage, and that before reclamation the area may have been covered with light fen-woodland vegetation, surrounded on the north and south by peat bog.

In the absence of basic documentary research, the date of these fields can be attributed only to some time between the 12th and 18th centuries AD, with a suggestion that a period in the earlier part of those six centuries seems likely. The later date bracket is inferred from examination of an estate plan (Lancs RO DDIn 53/113) of the north part of Ince Blundell, surveyed when the fields were owned by William Blundell of Crosby Hall and Henry Blundell of Ince. The field boundaries shown on the survey are little different from those of the 19th century and later Ordnance Survey maps, depicting only a portion of the pattern seen on the photographs. The earlier date is that of a grant of land from the Lord of the Manor, Henry Blundell, to the Cistercian Abbey at Stanlow, Wirral, for the provision of a monastic grange. The monks cleared and drained the land in order to use it for farming, so it is in this programme that an explanation of the field ditches might be sought. There was widescale land reclamation for farming throughout England from the early 12th century onwards. Monastic houses were responsible for much of the work, especially those of the Cistercian order (Hoskins 1955, 101). Future research will therefore necessitate a study of the original land grant and monastic records (Transcription in Latin in Hulton 1847) to verify whether the land was part of the monastic estate and, if so, to search for further

Figure 1: Topography of Merseyside



references to it. Documentation relating to this land is relatively abundant. Monastic papers provide information until the 16th century when the lands were seized by the Crown. The subsequent land exchange 'Licence of Alienation' from Whalley Abbey to Thomas Holte in 1543, and conveyance in the same year to Richard, heir of Sir William Molyneux of Sefton (Lancs RO DDM 46/64 and 46/65), then provides the bridge between ecclesiastical and private archives.

#### Medieval arable farming on drier land

A different type of field pattern, *rig and furrow*, although a ubiquitous feature in other parts of the country has not yet been identified as a common feature on Merseyside, but one area in which the photographs show it in great profusion is Thornton (figure 3). Another rig and furrow field lies in Ince Blundell, the township boundary being marked by Hunt's Brook. Its position in Ince Blundell Park is, however, accidental, as this land was outside the Park until the late 18th century (figure 3).

The pattern of ploughing that produces rig and furrow is normally associated with medieval agriculture but it cannot be dated by form alone as examples of this practice have been noted during this century. Documentary research does, however, provide some assistance. An estate plan of the Molyneux lands in Thornton (Lancs RO DDM 14/54), surveyed in 1769, names and locates many of Thornton's fields and provides a valuable key to establishing the location of some of those same fields when described in earlier documents. 18th century field names can then also be applied to the remains detected on the aerial photographs (figure 3).

A systematic study of early documents for this area has only recently begun but, even at this stage, it is possible to make superficial comment, from transcriptions made by Thomas Williams (1974) on medieval references to two of the fields. The reference given after the field name is of the page and the quoted recall number of the original document in the Lancashire Record Office at Preston.

CROOKS (108, 61M).

*Exchange:* Richard Tarleton of Thorneton, to Robert Ince of the same – 2 selions in the field called

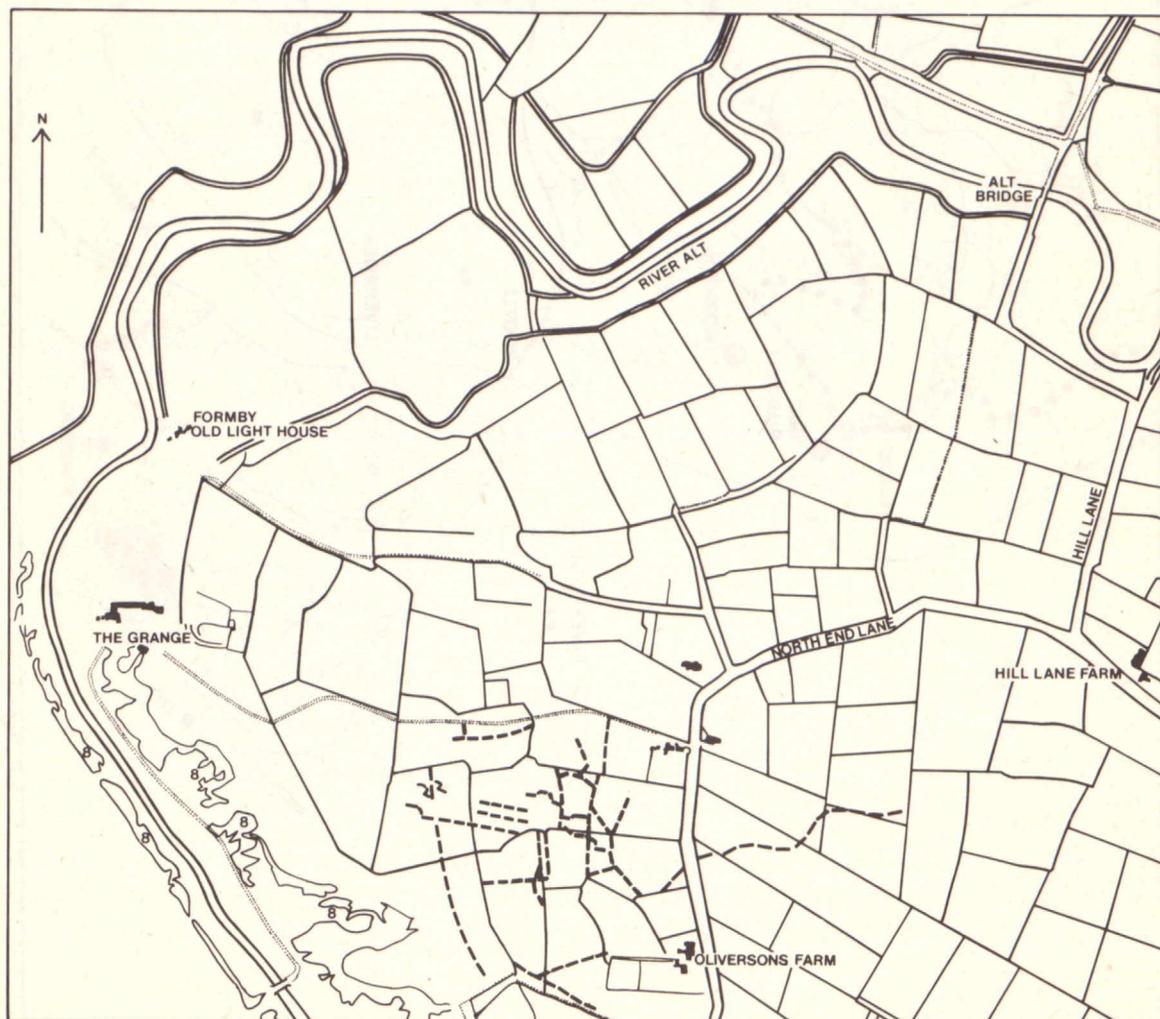
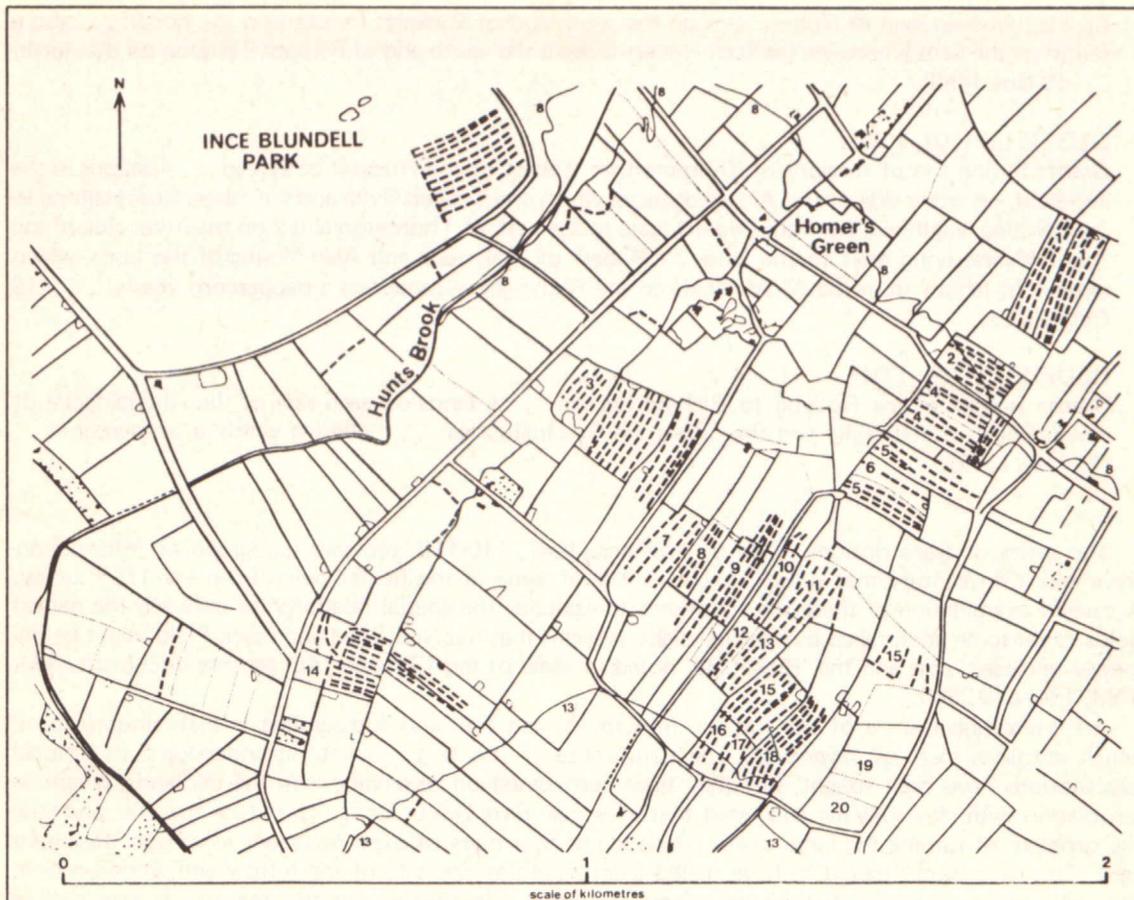


Figure 2: Early Land Reclamation for agriculture, North End, Ince Blundell



*Field names taken from the Molyneux estate plan of 1769*

- |                           |                         |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Broad Lands            | 11. Higher Tush Pit Hey |
| 2. Wm. Ecclestone's       | 12. Wall Butts          |
| 3. Mr. Bootles            | 13. Lower Tush Pit Hey  |
| 4. Lunt Heys              | 14. Pit Field           |
| 5. Old Field              | 15. Crooks              |
| 6. Thos. Stockforth's     | 16. Little Kiln Hey     |
| 7. Mr. Plumb's land       | 17. Mr. Abraham's       |
| 8. Field Hey              | 18. Horse Pasture       |
| 9. Wm. Cuthbertson's land | 19. Higher Black Field  |
| 10. Mr. Abraham's         | 20. Black Field         |

Notes:

- (A) Base map redrawn from 19th century O.S. map. Fine dotted lines are additional fields shown in 1769 survey.
- (B) Rig and furrow shown here is confined to the better drained soils of the Astley Hall series. The belt of soil straddling Hunts Brook is of the Sollom complex.
- (C) The Ordnance Survey's Soil Survey of 1967 describes the Astley Hall series as having imperfect natural drainage. It has a loamy sand to sandy loam surface with loamy sand to sand below. The Sollom complex has poor natural drainage, a peaty or humose loamy sand to sandy loam surface with sand below.

**Figure 3: Rig and Furrow at Thornton and Ince Blundell**

Crokis, between land of Robert Ince on the south and of Richard Tarleton on the north; . . . also a selion in the Crokis between lands of Robert Ince on the south and of Richard Tarleton on the north; . . . (8 Nov 1489).

OLDFIELD (101, 10M).

**Grant:** Simon son of Amaury of Thorneton, to Robert of the Rudyng of Sefton . . . 4 selions in the Aldefeld, on either side of the Aldefeldgate, of which one is called Gylle and the others Gose Hallondes, 2 extending lengthwise from the Aldefeldgate to the park of Thorneton and 2 on the other side of the Aldefeldgate, lying next to the lands of Robert of Molyneus and Alan Young of the Lont, which extend in length from the Aldefeldgate to the Rudynges — rendering a peppercorn yearly. . . . (19 Oct. 1302).

OLDFIELD (103, 17M).

**Grant:** Robert of the Rudyng to Richard his son . . . 4 lands on each side of the Aldefeldgate, of which one is called Gylle and the others the Gosehallondes . . . rendering yearly a peppercorn . . . (16 May 1312).

The series of transcriptions made by Williams (1947, 110-110) provides topographical information from the 13th century that suggests medieval use of some of the fields known from the 1769 survey. A careful examination of these transcriptions, to establish the spatial relationships between the named fields is yet to be undertaken but, at first sight, it seems that the New Field and Black Field might be the 'newly enclosed' acre and the 'Blakefield' noted in some of the 13th and 14th century documents (6M, 15M, 16M and 23M).

An interesting feature of the furrows in 'Crooks' and the land surrounding is their sinuous form, which classifies them as *'reverse S'*. The significance of this shape is not yet understood. Functional explanations have been sought, but they have been based on observations in the midlands, where an association with clay soils has suggested that they may have been planned to reduce trample, and ease the problem of turning the large teams consisting of four pairs of oxen necessary to plough this heavy land. The oxen were thought to have pulled from a path at one side of the furrow and, at mid-course, changed side to continue the original general direction. Whether or not this hypothesis stands close examination in that context, long plough teams would not be necessary in Thornton.

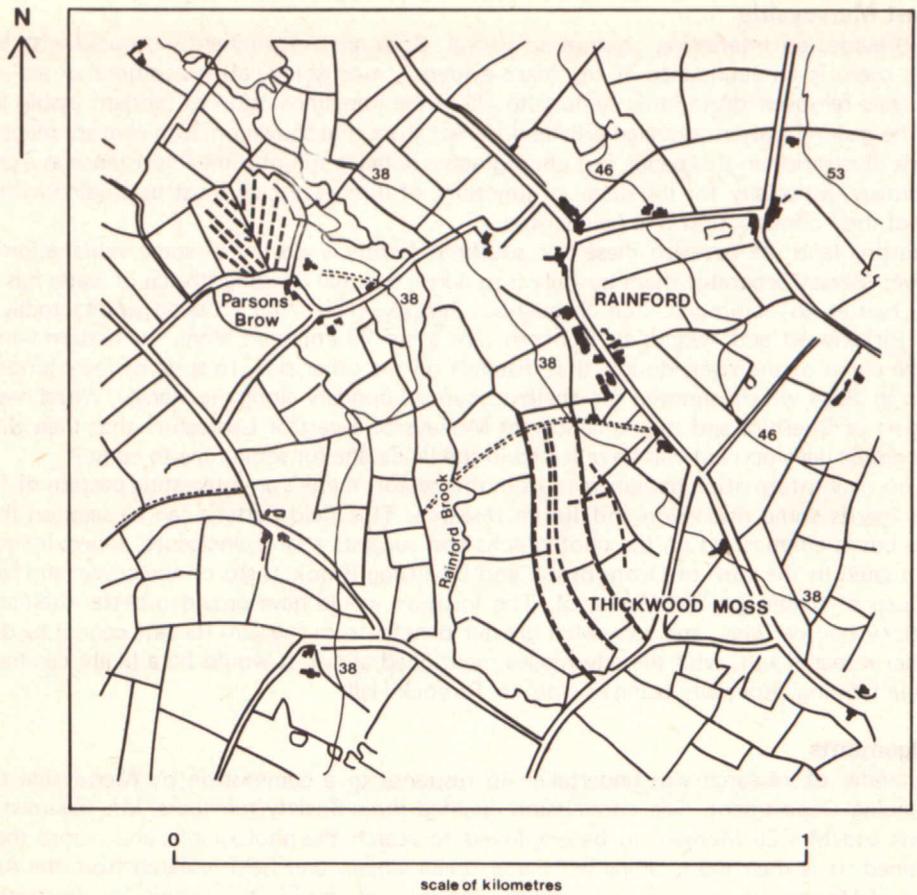
There is another example of this type of field at 'Thickwood Moss', 300 metres south of Rainford (figure 4). The photographs do not provide evidence of internal strips but do show small fields within those recorded on 19th century maps which conform to the reverse S shape. Without further evidence it would be unwise to attempt a positive attribution of these fields to the medieval period, though it remains a reasonable possibility. The soils have similar characteristics to those at Thornton, also being based on Shirdley Hill sands, and so would likewise appear to have offered reasonable scope for medieval arable agriculture.

Reverse S fields on light soils are not peculiar to Merseyside as Rhys Williams has also noted this combination in Cheshire (Williams 1978). There is, therefore, clearly a need for further observation and thought, before their true significance can be established.

## 2. South West Merseyside (Wirral)

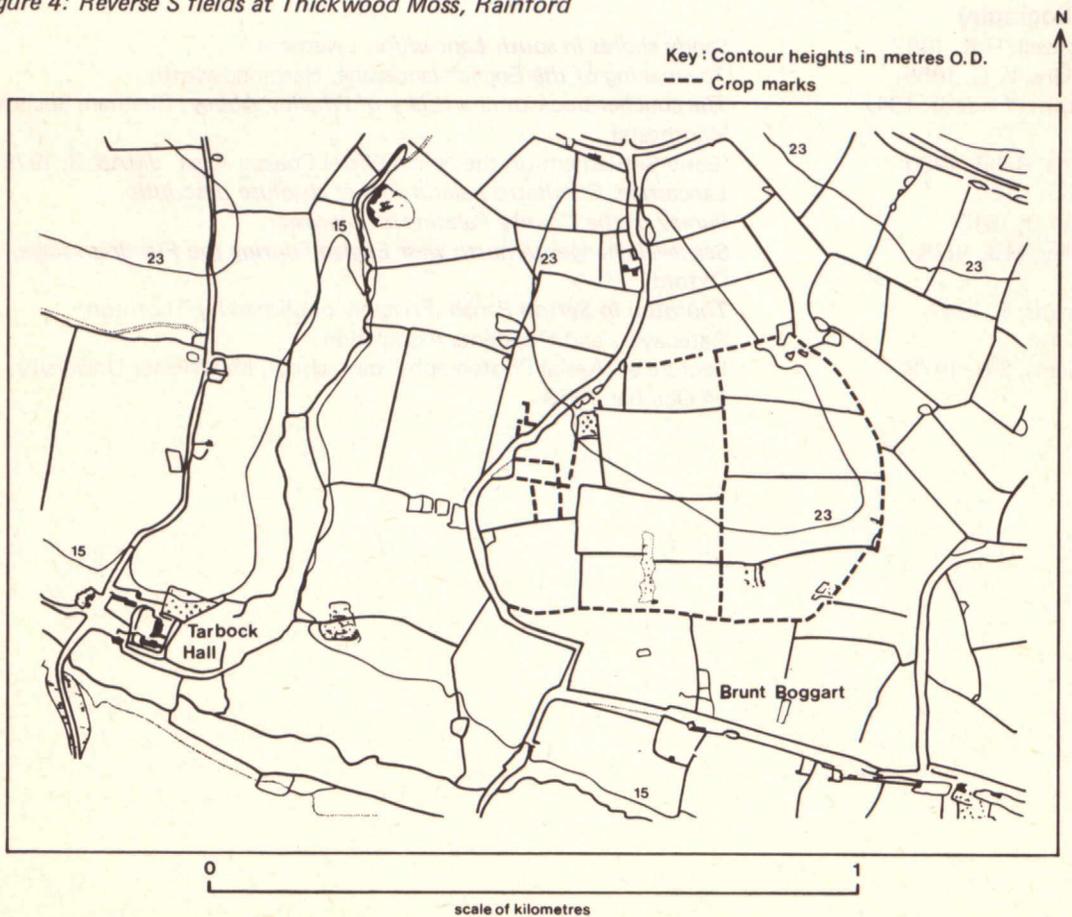
The blanket of boulder clay that covers so much of Wirral might in itself suggest that a study of cropmarks would be unprofitable. This proved to be the case, but not entirely for the reason suggested by the drift geology. Boulder clay, having extremely small particles, is more efficient than sand at retaining water and is thus a more resistant medium to drought. Because water and nutrients are efficiently retained and the large surface area offered by the constituent particles offers an effective supply of minerals for solution in the moist soil, it tends to be a good, if not too damp, medium for plant growth. The heavy and sticky characteristics that accompany small particle size are irrelevant to a growing plant, provided it is not waterlogged, but make tilling a difficult and usually impractical exercise with primitive agricultural technology. These soils have thus lent themselves to the natural formation of dense woodland which when cleared would provide lush pasture for sheep and cattle. A closer examination of the photographs shows that the paucity of cropmarks, whilst influenced by the nature of the soil, cannot entirely be attributed to it. The use to which the land has recently been put provides greater clues. Whereas many cropmarks have been observed on similar geological deposits in south east Merseyside most of these were of ploughed out field boundaries, on Wirral, these boundaries have tended to be preserved in their original form. With no break in this century from predominantly pastoral agriculture, the early fields continue to be economically acceptable and are thus retained. Smaller features are less easily detected under these conditions because grass, having shallower roots than cereals, is less sensitive to minor variations below the surface.

Aerial photography has still a role to play on Wirral but its important application must now be to study early field systems and earthworks that are still detectable in contour. These have not been revealed in this programme of vertical prints but would be in photographs taken under conditions that produce long shadows to emphasise their form.



Key: Contour heights in metres O.D.  
 --- Crop marks

Figure 4: Reverse S fields at Thickwood Moss, Rainford



Key: Contour heights in metres O.D.  
 --- Crop marks

Figure 5: Enclosure at Tarbock

### 3. South East Merseyside

This area provides an interesting contrast to Wirral. Both are predominantly covered with boulder clay but here there is an abundance of cropmark evidence, mostly indicating positions of earlier field boundary ditches removed during this century to allow the implementation of modern arable farming techniques. The general pattern revealed is little different from that shown on 19th century maps and so does not merit illustration in this paper, but photographic detail is still of some importance as a check to surveying accuracy, especially for the detail of junctions of ditches, which must be studied with care if the sequence of their construction is to be deduced.

The contrasting land use between these two southern sectors is worthy of some explanation at this point. The river Mersey separates them by only 3 to 4 km, but that dividing stretch of water has proved a significant barrier to communication throughout history. The main crossing points today, from Liverpool to Birkenhead and Widnes to Runcorn, are some 20 km apart along the eastern bank and, because of the curve of the river, double that distance on the other side. In spite of local government reorganisation in 1974 which removed the ancient county boundary along the Mersey, Wirral has for so long been a part of Cheshire and the remainder of Merseyside a part of Lancashire that their different social and economic development will be reflected in the landscape for some time to come.

Although no new information has emerged from this sector, there is an interesting pattern of fields at Tarbock that merits some discussion and future research. This field pattern can be seen on the 19th century maps but is emphasized on the photographs and suggests a large enclosure, approximately 600 by 400 m. Situated in the fork of Ochre Brook and Dog Clog Brook, it sits on the crown and southern slope of an area of higher ground (figure 5). The location would have provided better drained fields amidst the sticky boulder clay, and somewhat greater benefit from the sun. Its date cannot be deduced without further research but, with the advantages mentioned above, it would be a likely candidate for medieval arable farming, especially being so close to Tarbock Hall.

### Acknowledgements

This programme of research was undertaken in response to a commission by Merseyside County Council's Planning Department. The commission enabled three Society members, Mrs Maureen Hollis, Mrs Jen Lewis and Mrs Di Morgan, to be employed to search the photographs and record the information contained. It is their work, along with later documentary and field research from the Archaeological Survey of Merseyside that has produced the information used in this paper. The illustrations are based on 19th century Ordnance Survey maps and were drawn by Miss Kay Lancaster.

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# Towards an Understanding of the Environmental History of Merseyside

**BRIAN SHEPPARD, PHILIPPA TOMLINSON  
& JIM INNES**

The changes that have occurred in the landscape and environment of Merseyside since the last glaciation have provided a wide range of opportunities for, and constraints to, its successive generations of inhabitants. This paper describes a programme of research being undertaken within the Archaeological Survey of Merseyside to investigate those changes, and so attempt to understand where and how past communities may have lived.

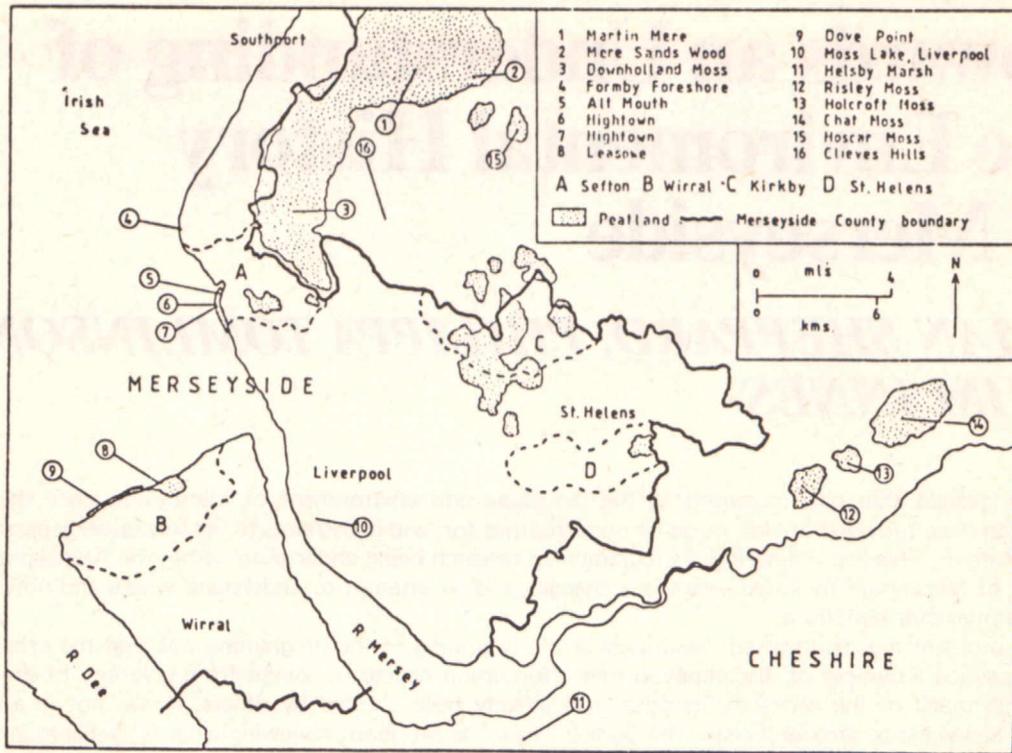
The problem that confronted the Survey at the beginning of the programme was that the proposed work spanned a number of disciplines so that information had to be sought from a variety of sources. Although much of the necessary evidence had already been studied by others, it was not in a form readily accessible to archaeologists. The Survey Team has set about reviewing what is available in both published and unpublished sources, and has contacted and consulted those who are, or have been, engaged in research into the subjects involved.

Much information has come from deductive archival research, especially of maps and plans from the local record offices, and this is of particular use for the later periods. From detailed work on a number of townships, selected from different topographical and geological regions in the county, evidence collected on agriculture, woodland management, and field and drainage systems, will indicate land use patterns in the different areas.

Merseyside had until recently many poorly drained areas of mossland and carr, which were of little use for arable agriculture but would have provided an abundant source of food for hunter gatherers and, in later times, as winter pasture for cattle. Reclamation of these wetlands was mostly done in an *ad hoc* manner, so there was little contemporary documentation to accompany it. The best documented reclamation is probably that of the wetlands of the river Alt, carried out under the terms of a George III Act of Parliament (1779). A comprehensive survey of the 'damaged lands' and proposals for their drainage has survived and provides a wealth of information on the previous landscape of that area (Lancs RO DB 1424/26). On Wirral, another drainage scheme with surviving records is that of Newton Carr, Grange. The only indication today of its earlier form is the road name Carr Lane in Hoylake, but an estate map of 1742 (Ches RO DDX 470/1) shows the undrained carr, and an enclosure map of 1823 (Ches RO QDE 1/26) shows the layout of fields on the reclaimed land. The carr had probably resulted from insufficient natural drainage to release the sea water that flooded it at high tides. Today's field pattern is almost identical to that shown on the enclosure map, and its hedges are mostly of a single species — an indicator that would be expected of hedges planted only 100 years ago. Field techniques such as hedgerow survey can help to complement the archival research, and it is useful to be able to relate the work to present day landscapes. The method of dating hedges by counting the number of species in a 30 metre length, which was developed in the south of England (Pollard *et al* 1974), has been used with success in south west Lancashire (Withersby and Coney, unpublished) and should therefore merit consideration.

Much useful information can be obtained from the drift geological maps, which show the areas of boulder clay, blown sand, alluvial and organic deposits. From these, and from contour and more detailed soil maps, the natural patterns of vegetation can be deduced. Also of value are early references to features of the landscape, which may provide useful insights into environmental changes in historical times. One of the earliest descriptions of the local soils (Holt 1795) indicates a knowledge of the buried surfaces around Formby: '... near the shore there is soil about two feet below the sand. There are the strongest reasons for believing this soil originally formed the ground surface and was gradually buried by sand from the neighbouring (sand) hills'. Such buried land surfaces may be a potential source of archaeological material.

The land beneath the modern surface is most effectively studied from boreholes, and many thousands sunk for construction engineering projects, are known to exist. They provide valuable stratigraphical information which can help with the interpretation of development of coastline, drainage patterns, and the extent of various organic deposits. A recent investigation at the site of an extension to the Head Post Office in Whitechapel, Liverpool provided an opportunity to find more evidence on the extent of the old 'Pool' of Liverpool. The boreholes contained no organic layers suitable for palaeobotanical analysis but



Map of Merseyside showing sites of previous work 1-16 and areas of proposed survey work A-D. (Reproduced from *Amateur Geologist*, Vol. 8, pt. ii, 1979).

did, nevertheless, indicate that the site was probably just outside the edge of the Pool. The sheer abundance of evidence so contained will be impossible to study exhaustively during this programme, but it is hoped that by selective study a valuable contribution to a better understanding will be achieved.

Palaeobotanical evidence, especially from ancient pollens in peat, has been extensively studied both for dating the formations of peat and, in conjunction with other techniques, for deducing changes in sea level and coastline. These techniques have been used on the Lancashire/Merseyside coast (Tooley 1978) and on the north coast of Wirral (Kenna, in this journal). The contribution to the understanding of patterns of past vegetation communities is of particular interest, and varies with the type of deposit examined. Buried soils from archaeological sites may contain evidence of quite local vegetation whilst peat bogs can contain a more regional representation of vegetation change. The decline in numbers of certain species, and the appearance of others within the pollen record indicate changing methods of land use. Thus, by examining the proportions of pollens contained within the deposit, it is possible to identify both the long term natural changes and the activities of man, such as forest clearance for timber, animal husbandry, or crop cultivation. The extensive peat formations that have made up the 'mosslands' of Merseyside have, therefore, been a central part of this study. Locations for sampling peat for laboratory analysis (see map) have been restricted by the availability of peat formations that have not oxidised after land drainage and reclamation, and that have not already been analysed.

It is believed that this short programme will begin to provide an environmental context for archaeological research in the County, whilst also providing a foundation for future research in the fields of study from which evidence has been taken. The Survey Team would welcome contact and discussion with anyone having an interest in, or information on the environmental history of this region. Enquiries should be addressed to:

The Archaeological Survey of Merseyside,  
c/o Merseyside County Museums,  
William Brown Street,  
Liverpool L3 8EN.

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