

Ness Conservation Area



Character Appraisal and Management Plan

March 2007



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PART 1: STATEMENT OF CHARACTER

1. Introduction

National Statutory Framework

The national Civic Amenities Act of 1967 gave Local Planning Authorities the power to designate Conservation Areas. These were defined as 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Then, in the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 a duty was placed on Local Authorities to designate Conservation Areas and preserve and enhance them.

Local Planning Policy

This Statement relates directly to Policy ENV13 of the Borough Local Plan, which states that 'developments within or affecting the setting of Conservation Areas should preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the particular Conservation Area'. The statement describes the character and appearance of Ness Conservation Area and is a material consideration used by the Borough Planning Department in the determining of relevant planning applications. Householders, residents, planning officers and developers should therefore refer to this guide to ensure that any new development is appropriate to the character of the Conservation Area. The Council adopted this document at Planning Committee on March 13th 2007.

Public Consultation

Stakeholders, local businesses and residents affected by the conservation area were informed of the impending appraisal and asked for any comments they may wish to make. The draft document was then advertised in the local press, and consultees informed in writing of its availability online, at Neston Library or as a hard copy by request. Interested parties were invited to a public consultation evening on Thursday February 15th 2007, which was attended by about 50 local residents and the local Councillor for Burton and Ness. All comments received at the consultation evening and throughout the consultation process have been taken into account.

2. Designations

The table below sets out the key features of the conservation area:

Conservation Area	Designated 06 March 1984
Listed Buildings	- Laburnham Farmhouse, Mill Lane - Goldstraw Farmhouse, Neston Road - Lloyds Cottages, Neston Road
Locally Listed Buildings	- Mealors Mowers, Neston Road - Swan Cottage, Neston Road
Scheduled Ancient Monuments	None
Registered Parks and Gardens	- Ness Gardens borders the Conservation Area.
Archaeological Priority	
SSSI	None
Article 4 Directions	None
Regulation 7 Directions	None
Area of Special County Value (ASCV)	- Area from Ness properties to the marshes
Site of Biological Interest	None
Site of Nature Conservation Value	None
Area of Nature Conservation Value	None
Other	



Mealors Mowers on Neston Road – one of the Locally Listed buildings in Ness

Ness Conservation Area was designated on 6 March 1984 (fig. 1). As part of this appraisal the boundaries have been reviewed and the resulting alterations are shown in Figure 2.

The extension to the east takes in the fields between Snab Lane and the track to Ness Gardens. This is because the sunken lanes and their sandstone and

hedge boundaries around medium sized fields are indicative of an historic Wirral landscape. This setting is vital in Ness because the views to the estuary play such a prominent role in binding the Conservation Area character throughout. No extra controls exist over the undeveloped land and both the Green Belt and Area of Special County Value (ASCV) designations are unaffected. The extension is partly in response to the initial consultation exercise when support for the conservation of Ness's rural setting was widespread.

3. Local History

For such a small place Ness has an interesting and well-remembered history that is linked to the growth and character of the built environment. This, and some historic maps illustrating the village's growth since 1845 are included in appendix 1.

4. Summary of Special Interest

Despite the coalescent development between Ness village and Little Neston, Ness retains a character of its own. This independent character gives the impression of a 'small village scale conurbation centred around a very small village green area'. 'While buildings are of differing periods and scales they are united by boundary walls mainly of red sandstone, and by the use of red sandstone, old brick and some pebbledash as the main construction materials'.¹

The following points are considered important to retaining the village's special characteristics and any change should be in keeping with them:

Plan Development

- In general, the village has a nuclear plan with buildings becoming increasingly dispersed towards the edge of the village. The densest development is near the central junction.

¹ Ash, Malcolm, Local Resident, 09/12/2006.

- Just outside the centre, buildings tend to be small but planned less densely around open courtyard-like spaces.
- Later peripheral expansion has tended to be in the form of more spaciouly planned detached buildings.
- This model of increasingly dispersed development towards the village boundaries is a distinct visual reminder of Ness's organic growth, a crucial part of its character and needs to be preserved.

Topography, Landscape and Open Space

- Streets and building heights undulate as they follow the topography of the sandstone ridge.
- High ridge location means people benefit from stunning views of the River Dee throughout.
- The focus of the village is a small triangular green.

Architecture and Building Materials

- Mainly natural materials such as timber, sandstone, slate, brick and white painted render are prevalent in the Conservation Area and should be used in future.
- Historic fenestration designs to be in keeping with the age of the building.
- Some buildings are in hard, red brick they are the anomalies and the material should be avoided in future.
- Most buildings have only one or two storeys; low density is especially important towards the periphery of the village.
- The substantial red sandstone and lime mortar walls are an excellent vernacular feature that bound many of the properties in Ness.
- The applications of renewable energy sources such as solar panels and wind turbines are a real threat to character and they should not be visible from a public highway.



Cumbers Cottages – an example of typical construction materials used in Ness.

Village Character

- Ness was primarily a working village until the 20th century when many of the buildings were converted to housing.
- Its village like environment is still distinguishable from Little Neston despite the closeness of the two villages.
- The definable village character is important to residents and gives more strength to the Conservation Area designation.
- The village lacks an amenity near the centre that would enhance its independent village character.
- The century old association between Ness village and Ness Gardens is not as discernible as it should be and measures should be taken to re-establish the relationship between the two.

5. Special Interest Assessment Around Ness

Described below are five areas of distinctly different character in Ness (fig. 2). The different needs of these areas mean they will face different future threats from development. In each area changes should be dealt with differently, as outlined below:

North Conservation Area

The area just north of the main junction is more open than other areas near the village centre and provides a good visual buffer between the village and Little Neston. Several large and irregularly planned detached buildings with large gardens create an openness that enhances the areas rural character.

Threats/Opportunities:

- The redevelopment of the large plots with smaller units would be very damaging to this area, as it would compromise the open character of the area.
- The field to the north and car park to the south of the Wheatsheaf are particularly vulnerable and development here would be highly inappropriate.

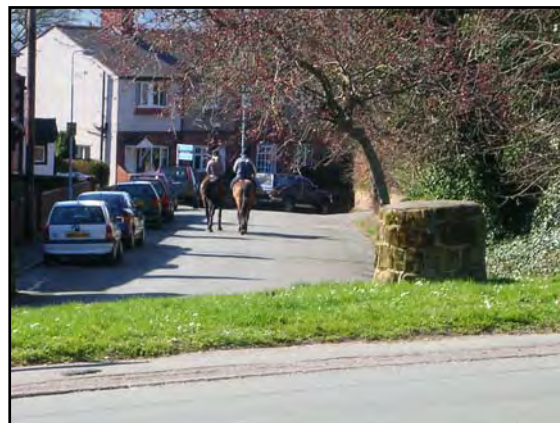
Well Lane

The long triangular green reaches down into Well Lane, which is one of the most densely developed areas of Ness. There are terraces on one side with tall sandstone walls on the other of this narrow, quiet road. The whole area takes on a more crowded feel as it descends closer to the Dee marshes.

Threats/Opportunities:

- Where properties are closely planned with a co-ordinated design, small changes to original details like window design and guttering, and even garden condition, can be greatly detrimental.
- The sandstone walls are wonderfully prevalent in this area and they need to be maintained by careful pointing with lime mortar.

Well Lane – one of the most densely developed areas of Ness



Peripheral Development and Rural Setting

The village's location high on the sandstone ridge means that historic pathways extending towards the Dee cut deeply into the ground. Low, often retaining sandstone walls topped with hedges bound these sunken roads. They are part of a wider pattern of medium sized fields, which are indicative of the wider west Wirral landscape and an important contributor to the agricultural character of the area. Development encroachment into this area has been slight, and buildings adjacent to the sunken roads are at a higher level, aiding the preservation of their special character and that of the overall conservation area.

Threats/Opportunities:

- The medium sized field pattern, sunken lanes like Snab Lane and low sandstone boundary walls should be preserved.
- The large plots of land around most of the properties in this area should not be developed with smaller dwellings.
- Increased traffic would be damaging because it would prevent horse riders from using the quieter roads such as Well Lane.

Neston Road

This part of Neston Road is where the core of the village developed in medieval times. Because it has seen cyclical redevelopment the linear route displays a pleasing range of traditional building types, ages and styles. Without much greenery or views into the countryside the area has a functional character than is unseen elsewhere, and the continued existence of business enhances this. Mealors Mowers and Goldstraw Farm continue as working agricultural businesses, which with their informal building planning and hotchpotch repair work suit this area's practical agricultural character.

Threats/Opportunities:

- Goldstraw Farm and Mealors Mowers both occupy large sites that could be converted into several residential dwellings. While any conversion would be detrimental to some extent, any scheme that involved replacing any of the older prominent buildings, the loss of courtyards, use of modern materials or increasing the predominant building height would be highly out of character and damaging to the area.
- Cumulative changes are a threat in this built up area. The Overmarsh barn conversion development, considered a successfully designed scheme, would suffer greatly if a number of insensitive extensions and alterations took place.

Mill Lane

Mill Lane has been almost entirely redeveloped in the past 50 years and most of the developments have taken place with regard to the existing character of the Conservation Area. Particularly impressive is the continuing trend of increasingly dispersed buildings towards the village boundaries: There are terraces nearest the junction with Neston Road and further away Laburnham Farm Close is planned around a courtyard. Dial Terrace, the 1900 redbrick buildings on the corner of Neston Road and Mill Lane are beautifully detailed. The corner one is a particularly prominent focus of the Conservation Area.

Threats/Opportunities:

- Cumulative change is a big threat here: Extensions and alterations to the comprehensive development of Laburnham Farm Close should be sensitive to the materials and height of the buildings and their courtyard setting.



Dial Terrace – a focal point of the centre of Ness

6. General Condition

Private Areas

Due to the inclusive nature of the designation, Conservation Areas often differ greatly in condition, and therefore character, throughout. One of the most pleasing and contributory factors of the Ness townscape is that most of the

buildings and gardens are looked after and kept tidy, clean and looking their best. Without this sort of care from residents the character of the Conservation Area would be damaged.

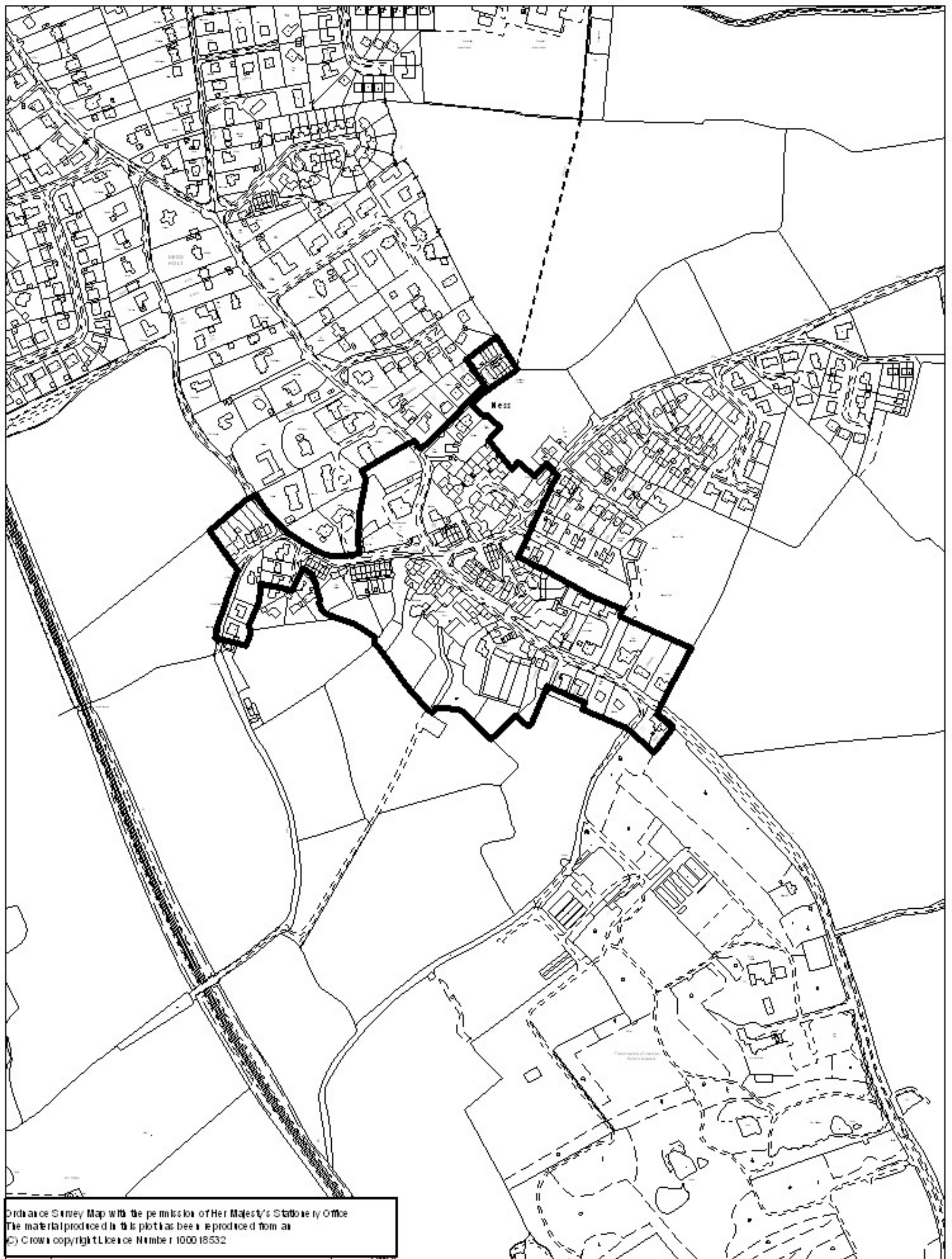
Public Realm

The triangular green and its street furniture and the network of pavements and roads are the only real public realm in Ness. While these seem to be well looked after, several of the roads in Ness are unadopted and as such are not maintained by the Local Highway Authority. Their condition causes concern to some local people who have responded to the initial character assessment consultation with letters of disappointment about the treatment of surfacing in the area.²

There is also some concern about the speed that traffic travels through the area and how it could be slowed. Many of the residents that responded felt that traffic calming was necessary to prevent the village being used as a rat run from Neston through to the A540. Any signage implemented should be tidily displayed so they are as in keeping as possible.

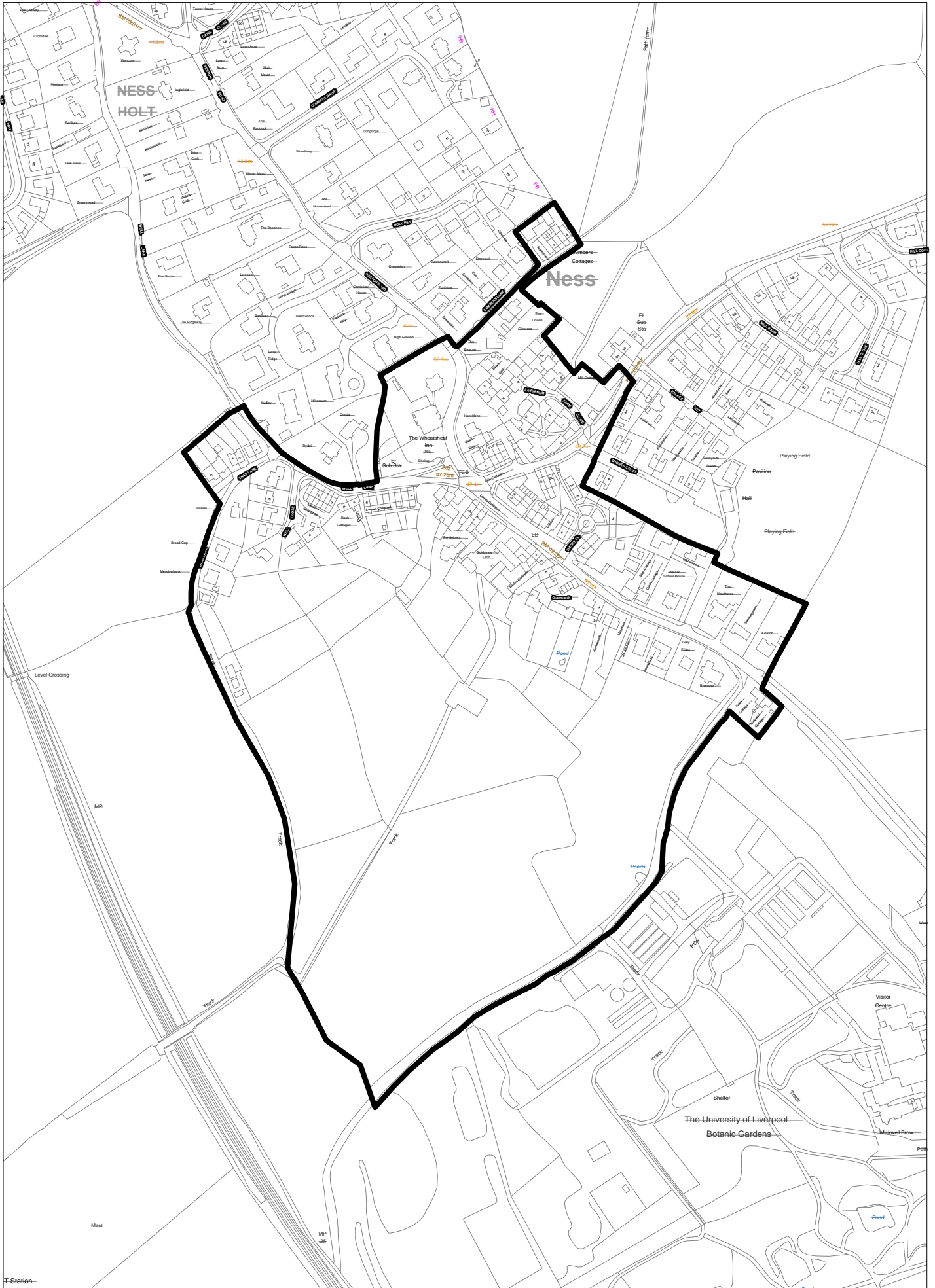
² Own research findings, 11/2006.

Conservation Area Boundary 1984



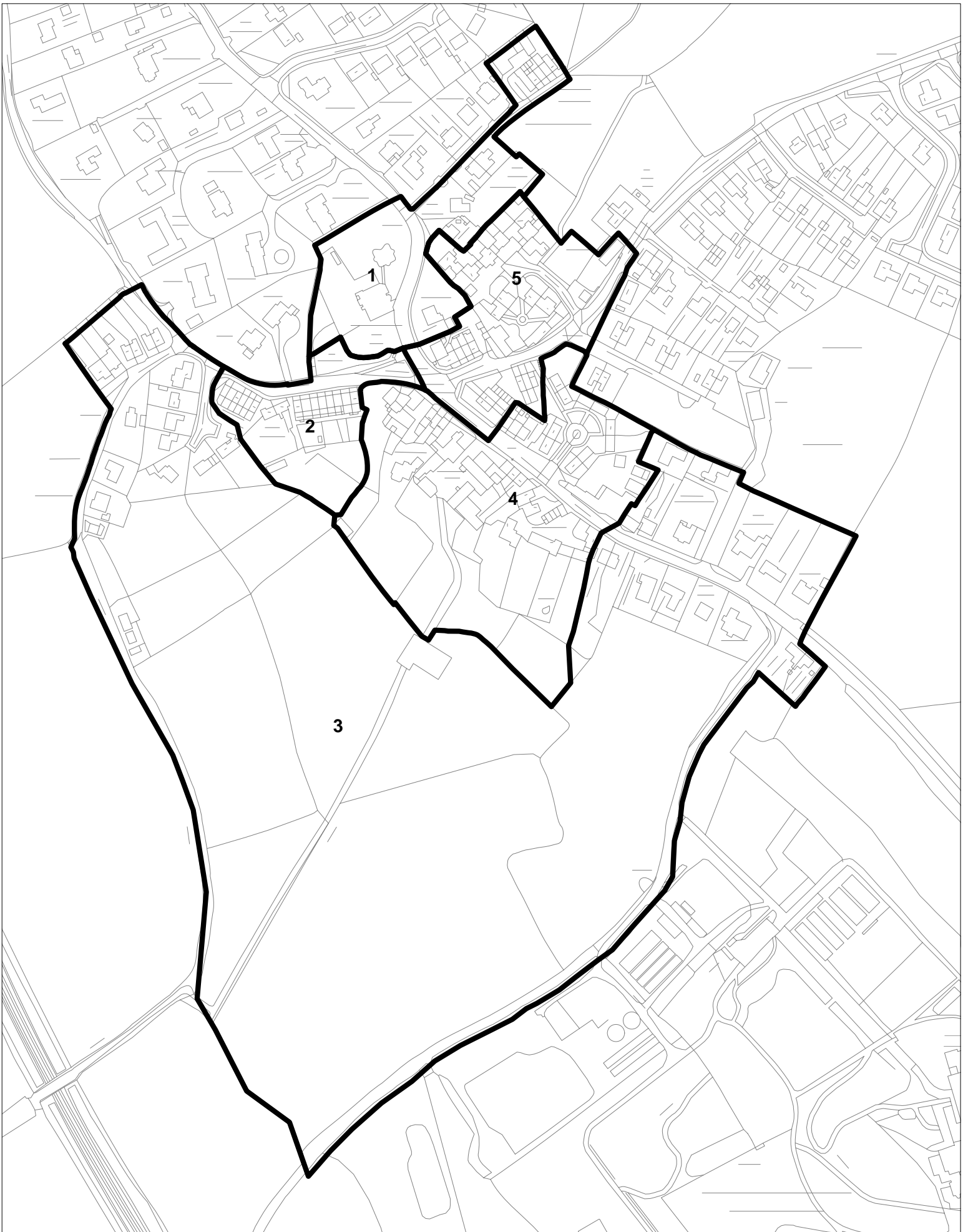
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Ness Conservation Area Boundary 2007.



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Ness Conservation Area Character Zones



PART 2: MANAGEMENT PLAN

1. Introduction

Part 1 of this document, the Statement of Character, outlines some of the development issues that may threaten or give opportunities to improve the character of the Conservation Area. While managing those issues appropriately through the planning system is the most reliable way of preserving and enhancing the area's special character, there are additional measures that can be taken to encourage the overall enhancement of the area. Although these measures would be difficult to undertake through the day-to-day implementation of planning controls in the area and need to be addressed independently, they are important and realistic and are therefore described concisely in this management plan.

2. Awareness Strategies

Public Awareness

In most Conservation Areas householders and residents are relied upon to make sensitive alterations when planning permission and the guidance of the Local Authority is not a legislative necessity.

- ✓ Informed householders are better placed to make alterations that are sensitive to and in keeping with the character of an area.
- ✓ Therefore they must be kept notified about any alterations to or new documentation about the designation
- ✓ Public meetings, advertisements in the local press and written correspondence are good ways of keeping residents informed.

Authority Awareness

Different Local Authority departments implement small changes in areas that cumulatively can be damaging to any sensitive character.

- ✓ Inform the Highway Authority of the Conservation Area designation and the need to make any changes within the boundaries in keeping.
- ✓ Ask them to consult the Conservation Officer before making significant changes in the area.

3. Monitoring

Regular photographic surveys help monitor change in the built environment. Through assessing which changes have been positive and which detrimental, sound decisions regarding future changes can be made.

- ✓ Photographic surveys of the area should be undertaken every six years by the Planning Department.

4. Ongoing Management

Ensuring that cumulative changes in the built environment are in keeping with the character of Ness is an essential part of character conservation. In Ness there are several things that new development should refer to in order to be in keeping.

- ✓ The sandstone and lime stone mortar walls are a hugely important contributor to character in the village and should bound new properties as well as old.
- ✓ Trees and other planting contribute throughout the Conservation Area. At a minimum these should be retained and further tree planting would enhance the rural character of the area.
- ✓ Soft natural materials such as handmade bricks, slate, lime mortar and timber are more in keeping with the rural character of the area and should be used rather than modern alternatives like engineering bricks, concrete tiles, cement and uPVC.
- ✓ Fenestration designs in new windows should be as original or altered to complement the age of the building.
- ✓ The views seen from Snab Lane and Neston Road contribute enormously to the character of the area and should be opened up where possible and not diminished or lost by insensitive infill building.

5. Improvement Opportunities

Although there is no funding available for the improvement of the appearance of Ness, some small changes would make a significant difference to the character of the Conservation Area.

Public Access

- ✓ Linking the pavement around to the gardens would provide for people without access to a vehicle a safe way of walking there from the village centre and bus stop.
- ✓ Sensitive sign posting to Ness gardens from centre of village would help reinstate the village's historic link to the Gardens, which Arthur Bulley always intended to be partially open to local residents.¹
- ✓ The Dee Estuary can be reached via Newhouses Lane and this well-used walk should be sensitively signposted so that visitors are made aware of the opportunity.

Areas in Need of Attention

- ✓ One of the weakest points of the entire Conservation Area is the entrance to the garages of nos. 2 – 12 Mill Lane, which has a cold and functional air. Planting along the entrance to these would soften and tidy the area, to the benefit of the centre of the Conservation Area.
- ✓ The tarmac car park in front of the pub is a focal point of the entire village and appears functional and utilitarian. A hard or soft landscaping scheme here would benefit the immediate locality and the Conservation Area as a whole.
- ✓ Clearing and tidying the land around electricity substation would be an ideal way to provide some openness around the green.

¹ <http://www.liv.ac.uk/nessgardens/about/history.html>, 09/01/2007

APPENDICES

Local History

Like many Wirral villages Ness lies on the rocky outcrops of the sandstone ridge that passes through the peninsular projecting through the clay. The Triassic red sandstone makes strong foundations and is a good building material that can still be seen throughout the townscape of the village today. From its beginning until the 1750's little is known, but the creation of Neston's New Quay in the mid-16th century probably meant that Ness saw some increased prosperity¹.

Other than gentry landownership, nothing about Ness is documented until 'commercial mining activity began in c.1757', at Ness (or Denna) Colliery². 'Coal was mined extensively by the Stanley's' of Denna Hall, which may have provided jobs for Ness's population³. Although the mine shut in 1855 its importance to the region has been researched and documented by a local historian. It seems that 'the colliery is of considerable importance in an historical context within our region: it was a major industrial site and employer from the mid to late 18th century; very significantly it was the site of the first steam engine in the region and, later, was visited by George Stephenson who had men working there. It can reasonably lay claim to being the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution in west Cheshire (and Wirral)'⁴. Since miners would have almost certainly occupied Ness, this prosperous activity would have led to the growth of the village.

Shortly after the opening of the colliery came an event for which Ness will be forever remembered. The village is best known as the birthplace of 'Emy, Daughter of Henry Lyon, Smith of Nesse by Mary' who was baptised on 12th of May 1765⁵. Emy was later to become Lady Emma Hamilton, wife of Sir

¹ Place, G., *Neston 1840 – 1940*, (The Burton and South Wirral Local History Society, 1996), p. 2

² Hilditch, E., *Neston 1840 – 1940*, (The Burton and South Wirral Local History Society, 1996), p. 98

³ Sulley, P., *The Hundred of Wirral*, (CB Harem and Co., 1889), p. 189

⁴ Annakin-Smith, A.,

⁵ Budden, C. W., *The Beauty and Interest of Wirral*, (Turnbull and Spears, Edinburgh, 1921), p. 50

William Hamilton, renowned mistress of Nelson and mother of his daughter Horatia⁶.

Throughout Ness's long history, agriculture would always have been a principal source of income and this pursuit has had a significant impact on the built environment there today: Most of the fields outside the village were and still are farmed, some of the oldest buildings are clearly farmhouses and the pub's current name Wheatsheaf, one with clear arable farming connotations, was licenced as such in 1801⁷. The hedge and sandstone field boundaries in the west of the Conservation Area may be ancient hedges, originating from the early Cheshire enclosures act.

The 1896 arrival of the railway in Neston seems to have encouraged a flurry of development, as there are many buildings from c.1900 throughout the village⁸. Shortly after, in 1898, Arthur Kilpin Bulley founded nearby Ness Botanic Gardens⁹. It took Mr. Bulley a year to find Ness, which with its 'rock, sand, clay, water and south facing slope' was ideal for his garden¹⁰. This coincidentally reiterates how strong a tie Ness village enjoys with the undeveloped land around it.

The earliest of the 19th century buildings are in local sandstone but after transportation of building materials became easier local entrepreneurs would build workers' terraces out of brick. One such set is Mealors New Cottages, which are named after the local Mealor family who successfully made ploughs in Ness from 1851 until 1956, when competition from producers of tractor drawn ploughs finally became too much¹¹. However, the company that took it over specialised in the supply and maintenance of grass cutting machinery and today's Mealors Mowers, still on the same site that was in use in the early

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emma_Lady_Hamilton, 11/01/2007

⁷ Sulley, P., *The Hundred of Wirral*, (CB Harem and Co., 1889), p. 188

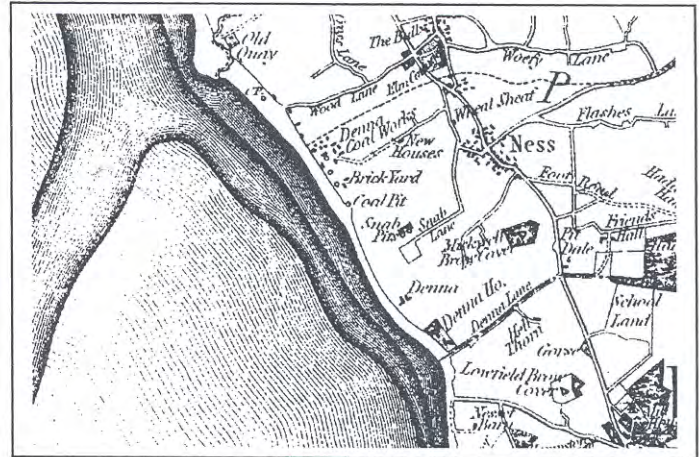
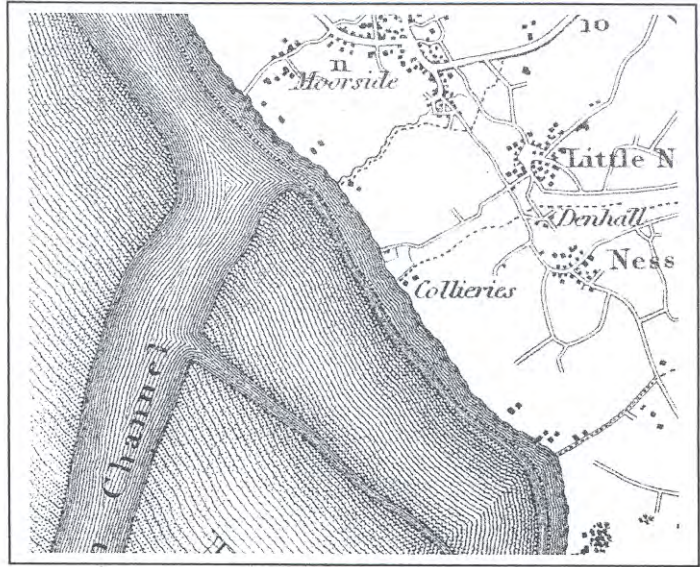
⁸ <http://www.penmorfa.com/Wrexham/history.html>, 23/01/2007

⁹ <http://www.liv.ac.uk/nessgardens/about/history.htm>, 15/01/2007

¹⁰ Hilditch, E., *Neston 1840 – 1940*, (The Burton and South Wirral Local History Society, 1996), p. 85

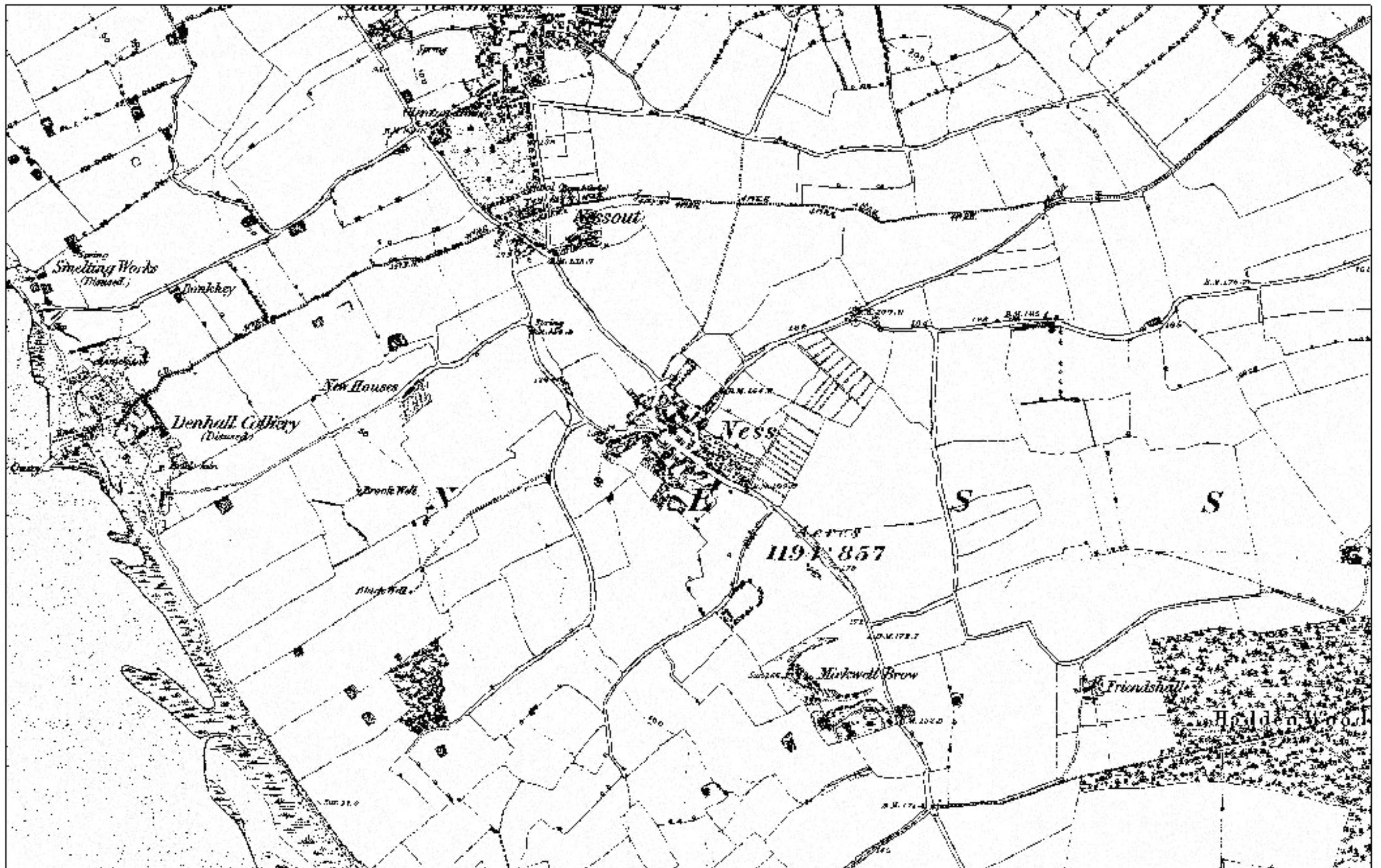
¹¹ Hilditch, E., *Neston 1840 – 1940*, (The Burton and South Wirral Local History Society, 1996), p. 82-85

20th century, is one of the last surviving industries in Ness. Peripheral expansion, central redevelopment and conversion schemes have all supplied residential dwellings, which has led to the historic village becoming a dormitory commuter typical of the 20th century.



Three depictions of the colliery area: (a) Greenwood (1819); (b) Swire and Hutchings (1829); and (c) Bryant (1831). Sources: CRO, 13/10a, 13/8a and PM 5.2

Cheshire 1881-1882



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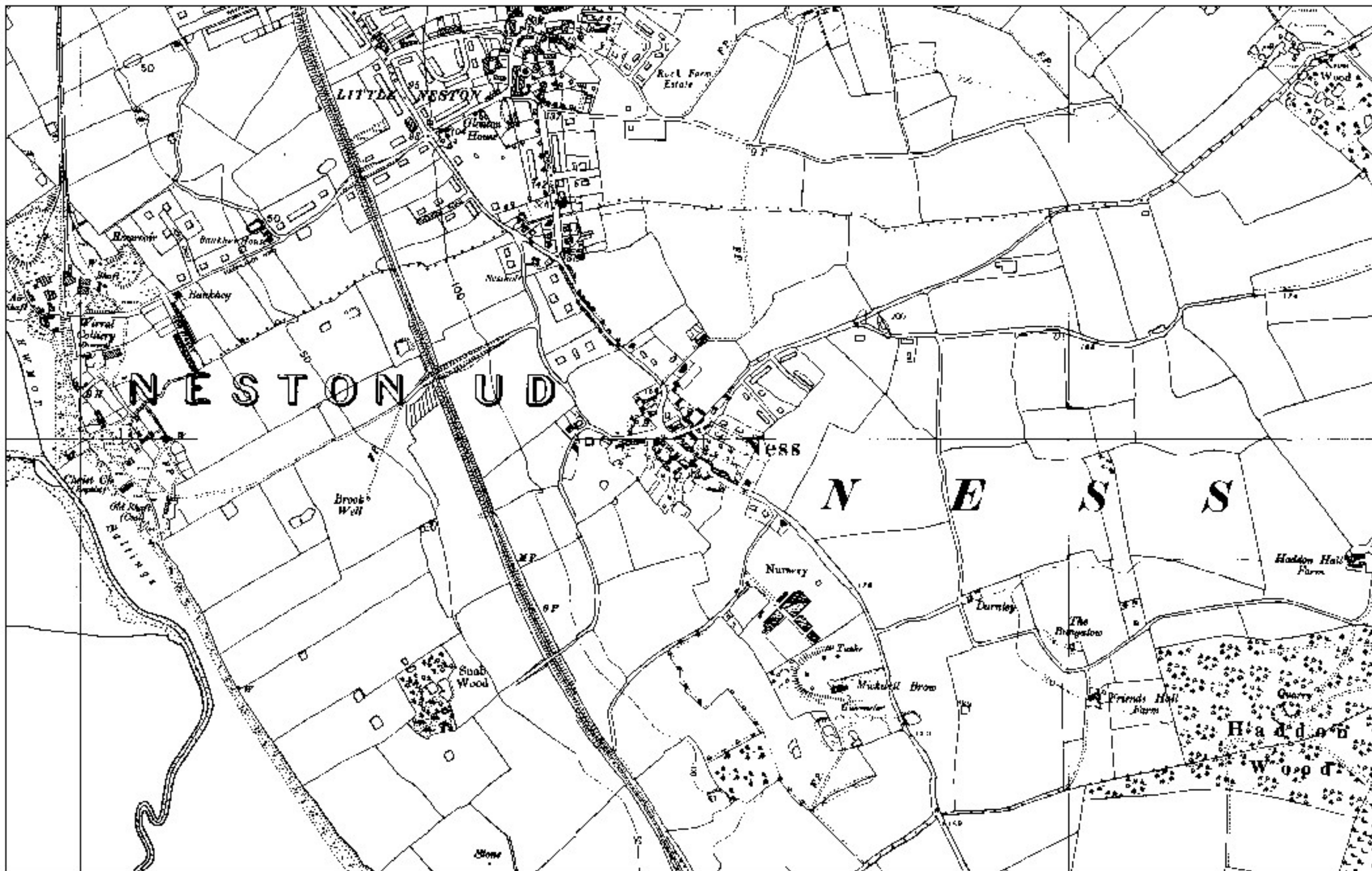
Cheshire 1911-1914



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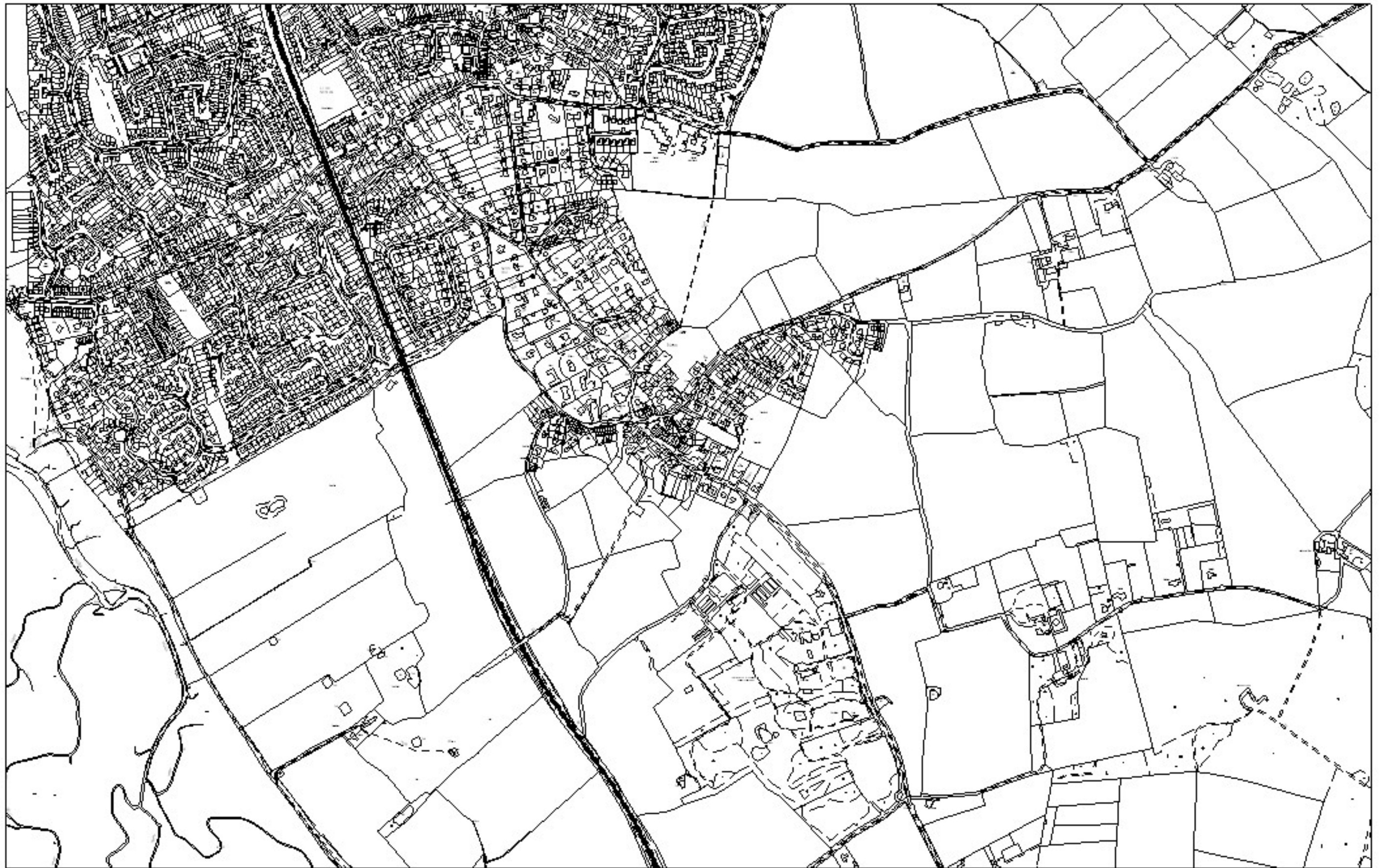
Cheshire 1954



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Ordnance Survey c.1990



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Aerial Photograph, 2000



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