

4

Vestiges of the pre-urban landscape in the suburban geography of South Manchester

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Introduction

One can see the suburban sprawl around cities as a largely featureless and homogeneous landscape with street after street of similar houses. In a conurbation such as Greater Manchester, suburbs coalesce into an apparent sea of houses punctuated by occasional shopping centres or out-of-town industrial/commercial estates. This notion of faceless anonymous suburbia was challenged by David Ward (1962) in his study of the relationship between the pre-urban cadastre and the contemporary urban patterns of Leeds' suburbs. The pre-urban land ownership patterns, revealed by the Tithe Surveys of the 1840s, together with the pre-urban settlement and road network, influenced the emerging urban landscape in terms of street alignments and the micro-morphology of the built-up area. The degree of fragmentation of the suburban morphology in some parts of Leeds contrasted with the more standardised large estates where the internal urban layout was more independent of earlier landscape features. A similar relationship between urban patterns and the pre-urban cadastre can be found across South Manchester with Chorlton-cum-Hardy serving as a case study.

Anglo-Saxon origins can be postulated for the place-names Chorlton (Ceorlatun) and Hardy (Ard-Eea). The township's most noteworthy building, Hough End Hall, was built for the Mosley Family in 1596, probably on the site of an earlier house. Barlow Hall may date back earlier, being rebuilt in 1584. The associated estate was bought by the Egertons of Tatton in the 1770s. The

first chapel was erected about 1512, probably by the Barlows, and was replaced by a brick church in 1779-80, to be enlarged in 1837.

By the time of Chorlton's Tithe Survey in 1847 the village was a rural backwater set in its fields, orchards and woodland copses. Its population had risen to only 619 in 1811 and to 761 by the 1851 census. What is now South Manchester was then a scatter of villages, hamlets and farms. Other 1840s settlement centres included Stretford, Withington, Didsbury, Burnage and Northenden, plus several halls. To Hough End Hall and Barlow Hall can be added Longford Hall, Wythenshawe Hall and Baguley Hall, revealing the mid-nineteenth century social hierarchy. Transport links to the emerging industrial centre of Manchester were poor and slow, mainly using rural lanes through what became Whalley Range and Moss Side to Stretford and Chester Roads. Less direct but probably quicker was the lane to Stretford with its Bridgewater Canal transport link and, from 1849, its new railway station link to central Manchester. Some early lanes were later to evolve into major roads like Barlow Moor Lane and Moss Lane. To the south the River Mersey was a barrier and a flood threat rather than a transport link.

The focus of Chorlton in 1847 was Beech Lane and Chorlton Green with the parish church and one or two inns. Figure 1 shows the pre-1870 housing development around the Green, along Beech Road and northwards along High Lane. This early 'Old Chorlton' development was supplemented after the 1880 arrival of Chorlton's rail connection to Manchester Central

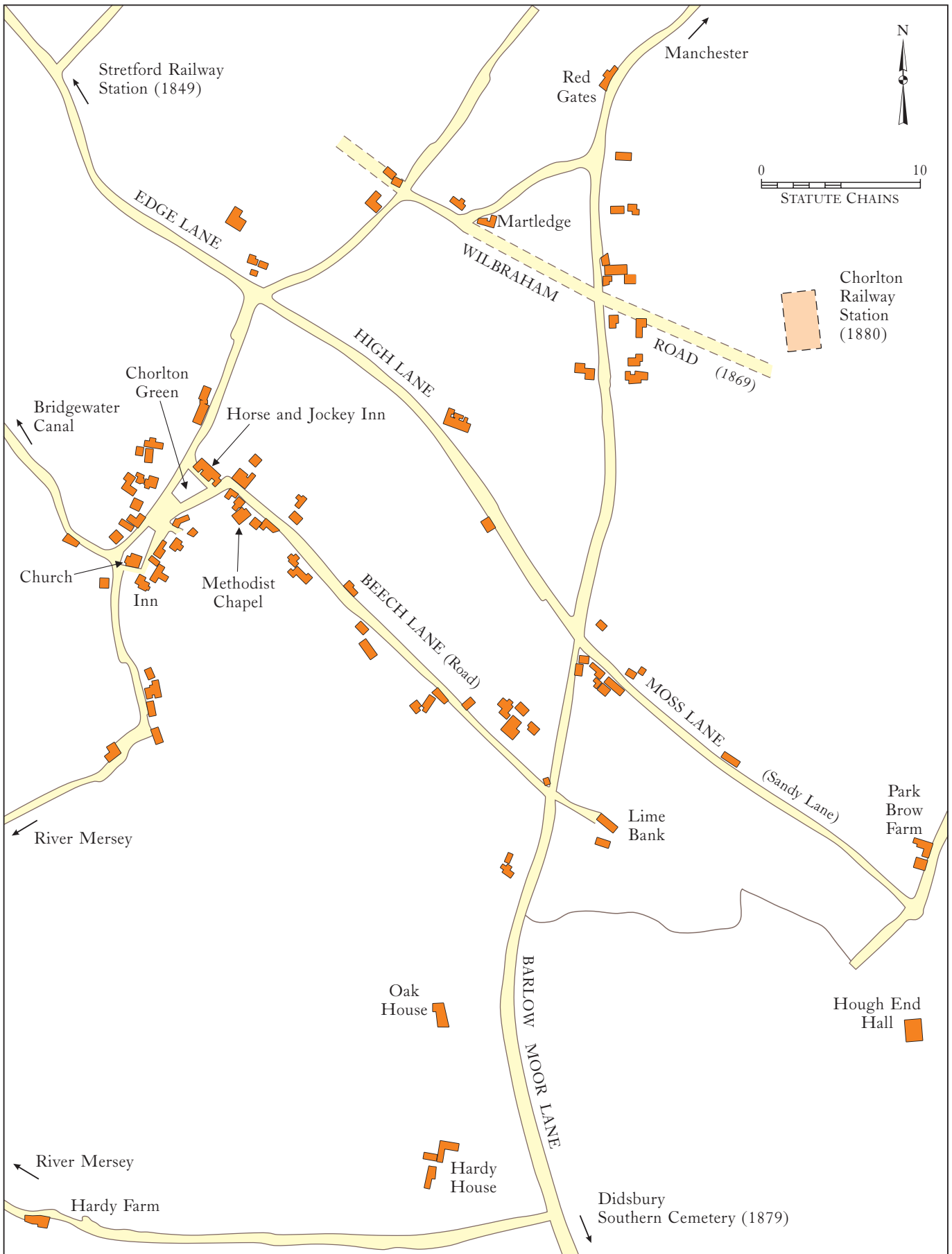


Figure 1: 1847 settlement features.

Station by 'New Chorlton' with commercial and residential development focused on the Wilbraham Road–Barlow Moor Road crossroads which became the main centre of the emerging suburb. Commuting links to Manchester by train were soon supplemented by horse omnibus routes, tramlines and bus services. Manchester's first horse omnibus service started in 1824 from Pendleton to Market Street. By 1850, 64 omnibuses were running in the city. Turnpike trust roads and later municipal road widening and straightening permitted large horse buses, carrying up to 40 passengers, and later, horse tramways to link Manchester's suburbs to the city centre. In 1880 two operating companies were amalgamated into the Manchester Carriage and Tramways Company. By 1895 the Manchester Corporation was resolved to take over the tramways and operate them as an electric system. However, lightly used routes in Southern Manchester, such as Hulme to Chorlton-cum-Hardy and Brooks Bar to Southern Cemetery, were still being operated by horse buses in 1905. From 1906 motor buses were first used and from 1929 they replaced the first abandoned tramway routes.

By now Chorlton was linked to the tram system. In 1903 the tram route from Belle Vue via Brooks Bar and Upper Chorlton Road was extended to West Point at Seymour Grove; in 1907 this was extended to Lane End, that is the junction of Barlow Moor Road and Sandy Lane. This tram line was further extended to Southern Cemetery in 1911 and then to Didsbury in 1913. Chorlton Tram Terminus, later the Bus Terminus, was opened in May 1915. From Whalley Range the tram service along Alexandra Road was extended to Egerton Road in 1913, though the railway bridge had to be strengthened to allow this line to link up with the Barlow Moor to Didsbury line.

This tram network fed and supplemented the suburban railway service opened on 1st January 1880 between Central Station and Stockport, with stations at Chorlton, Withington and Didsbury. The South Junction Line, from Fairfield in East Manchester to Chorlton Junction, gave the

Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway a route in to Central Station via the 1880 Cheshire Lines Committee line. Intermediate stations were opened in 1892 at Alexandra Park (later renamed Wilbraham Road), Fallowfield and Levenshulme. These commuter stations functioned until the 1960s closures; Chorlton station closed in 1967.

Chorlton's road links were further enhanced in 1932 when Princess Parkway was opened, with a new bridge over the River Mersey. The development of Manchester's overspill and erstwhile garden suburb of Wythenshawe then commenced.

An interesting footnote to Chorlton's transport development was the brief existence of Hough End Aerodrome or Alexandra Park Aerodrome. Opened as a military aerodrome in May 1918 until May 1919, this then functioned as a civil airfield until September 1924 with flights to London's Croydon Airport, Southport, Blackpool and Amsterdam, though it was costly to hire aircraft for such flights. The adjacent railway line and Alexandra Park station allowed the rail transport of aircraft parts from Newton Heath and Stockport for assembly at the site (Worthington, 2014, p. 319).

This transformation of Chorlton from an 1840s village with a few poor rural lanes to Stretford and Manchester, to an early twentieth-century suburb with a choice of rail, tram and bus services to both the city centre and to other suburbs engendered the rapid spread of the built-up area.

Suburban housing development

The sequence of nineteenth-century and twentieth-century urban developments now finds expression in the 'Age of Buildings' cartography of Chorlton (Figure 2). The pre-1870 category reflects the pre-railway original village of Chorlton focused on the Green, on Beech Lane/Road and on Edge Lane plus a handful of isolated farms and cottages. Between 1870 and 1914 the village becomes a suburb focused on the railway station and the new commercial centre aligned along the Wilbraham Road and the Barlow Moor Road–Manchester Road axes. Late Victorian housing development along Corkland Road, Egerton Road,

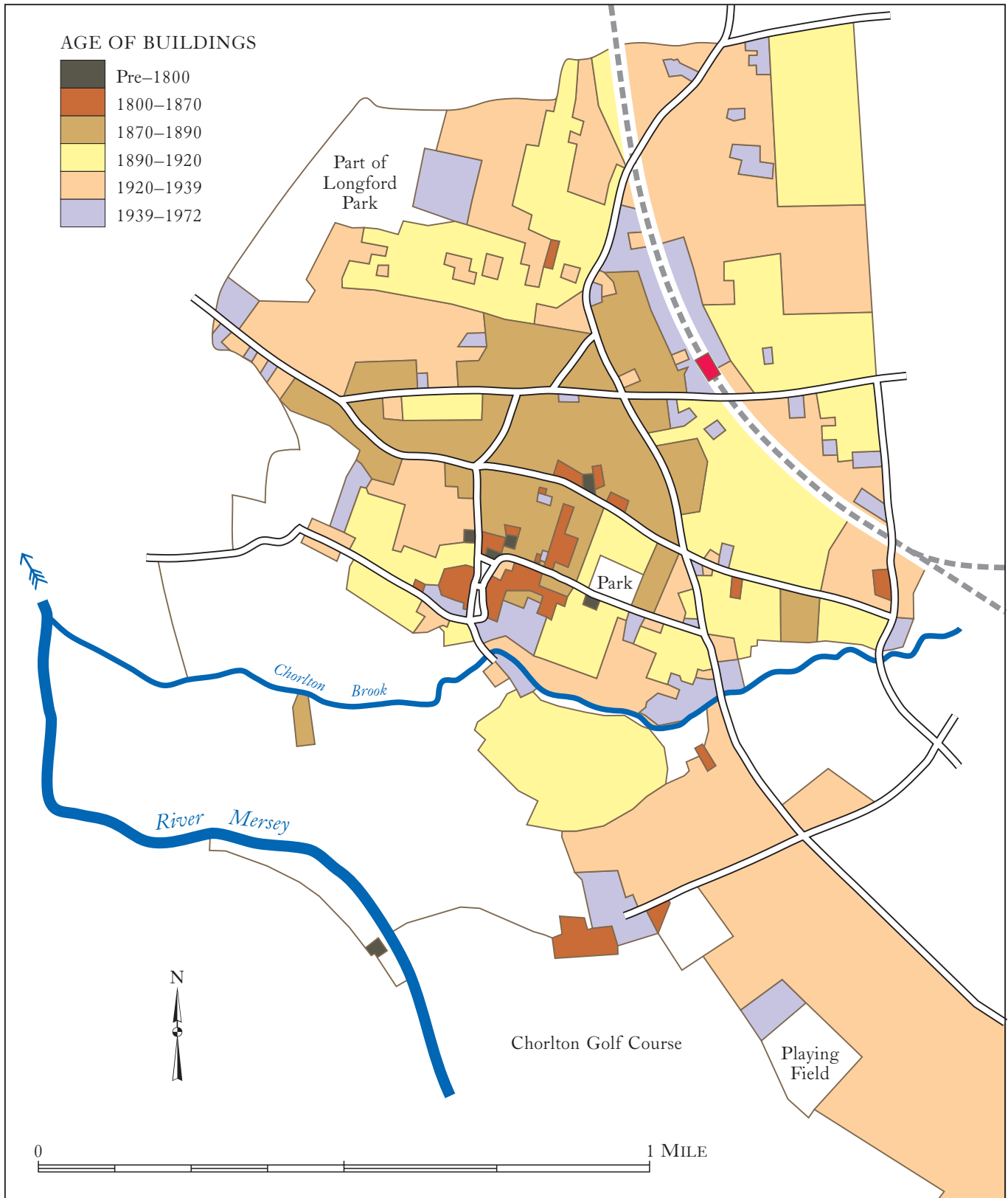


Figure 2: Age of buildings map.

Oswald Road and Ivygreen Road contrasts with the 1914-1939 houses along Buckingham Road, Manley Road and King's Road on the Egerton Estate and focused on Kensington Road, Ryebank Road and Beaumont Road. Chorltonville, as an early garden city style development represents further early twentieth-century urban development, opening in 1911. 1930s and later council house building southwest of Barlow Moor Road filled in the main remaining area of undeveloped land and served to link Chorlton to West Didsbury. Population census figures reflect the age of buildings map. In the decade following 1861 the population doubled for the first time and then continued to double for most succeeding decades until 1921. The largest increase of 177%, from 9,026 in 1901 to 24,977 in 1911, ties in with a change in emphasis from building larger semi-detached houses to the development of terraces of working-class housing.

By the 1890s significant settlement growth was linked to commuting to Manchester as Chorlton station, omnibus and tram services developed. Sprawl occurred around the Chorlton Green focus and northwards along the Wilbraham Road/Barlow Moor Road/Manchester Road axes, often in the form of terraced housing plus villa developments along High Lane and Edge Lane. Suburban Whalley Range is expanding between Princess Road and Withington Road. To the east Didsbury/Withington is fast developing in the form of Albert Park plus the buildings of the Chorlton Union Workhouse, later to become Withington Hospital. Near Stretford station the rectangular fields west of Longford Hall were being built on, organised along Cromwell Street and two other straight streets.

An interesting new development was the allocation of an area of small fields between Barlow Lane and Nell Lane to the new municipal Southern Cemetery with several chapels and an early crematorium. The cemetery, when opened in October 1879, was then quite distant from built-up Manchester.

A noteworthy feature was the absence so far of the major north-south axis of Princess Parkway, though Alexandra Road had already been extended to the new railway line from Manchester Central Station.

By the 1950s Chorlton is solidly enmeshed in Manchester's urban sprawl, separated from the further outward expansion of Wythenshawe, Sale and Northenden/Gatley by the flood-plain 'Green Belt' of the River Mersey. Whalley Range and Stretford have extended the continuous urban area southwards into the former Chorlton township and to the east the Withington-Burnage-Didsbury suburbs have expanded towards the Mersey bridging points. A few pockets of open un-built land survive in Whalley Range and especially between Princess Road and Mauldeth Road, where Hough End fields on the former first aerodrome of Manchester still remained undeveloped. In the late-1940s/early-1950s an estate of post-war pre-fab houses was built on part of this open area, later to be cleared in the 1960s and restored to open land. Other undeveloped plots on the map are mostly parks and university and school sports fields. Within Chorlton township private house development south of Manley Park, east of Longford Park and along Kings Road and in Chorltonville have filled in the suburb, as have council housing estates in the south along Hardy Lane and south of Barlow Moor Road. From now on infilling and densification of villas with large gardens would be the only form of further house development.

The pre-urban cadastre in the 1840s and its impact on settlement development

The map of landownership in the 1840s (Figure 3) based on the Tithe Map and the accompanying Tithe Files reflects the dominance of two individuals, Wilbraham Egerton and George Lloyd. Egerton owned practically all the land in the southern and north-eastern sections of the township. George Lloyd's land was concentrated

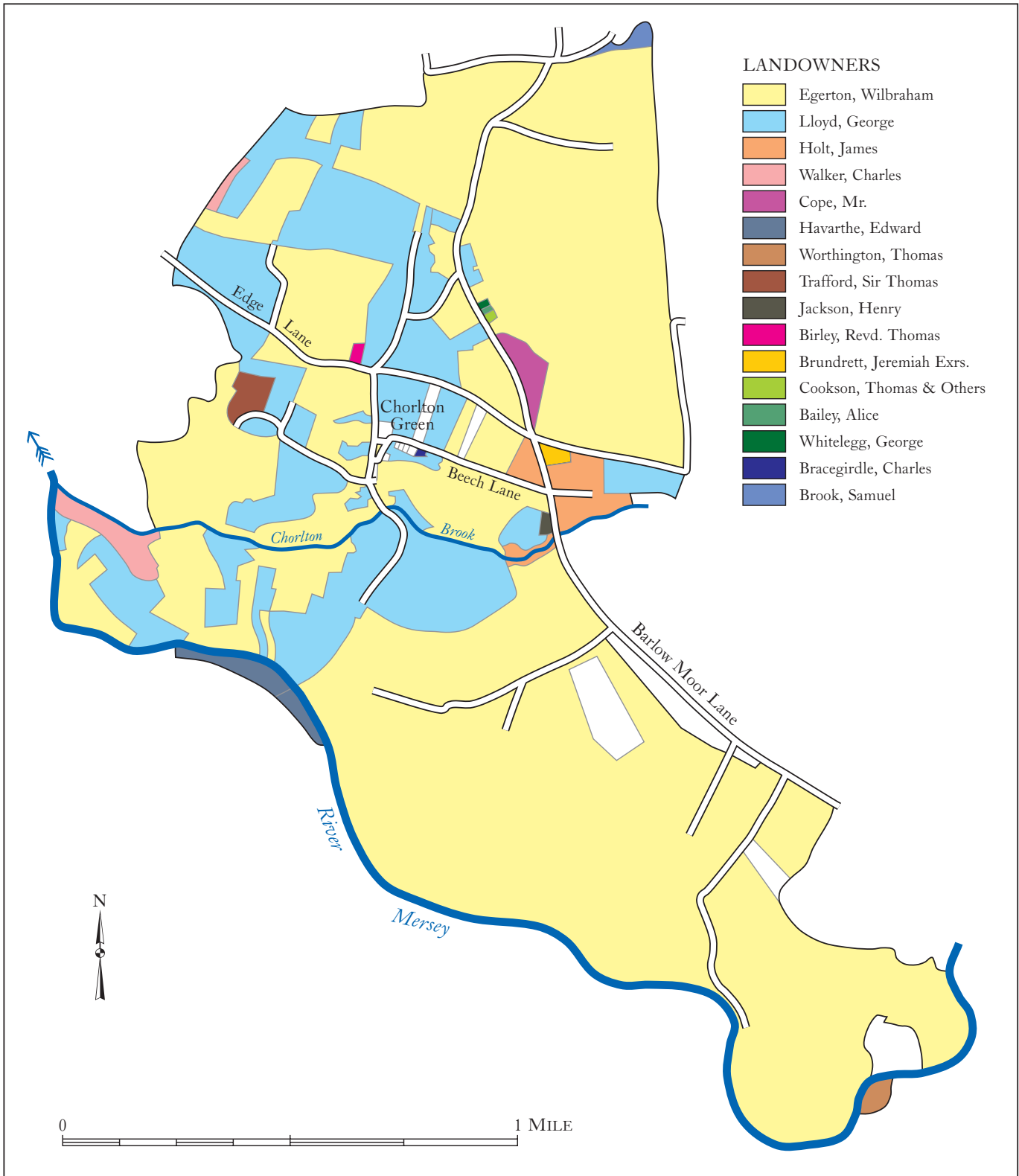


Figure 3: Landownership 1847.



Figure 4a: The influence of the 1847 landownership and field patterns on the urban morphology between Beech Road and High Lane.

in the central and western parts of Chorlton. A lot of smaller landowners had scattered holdings in the central part of Chorlton, especially around the Green and along Beech Road, noteworthy among them being James Holt and the Brundrett family.

Pre-urban property boundaries and field boundaries and the orientation and nature of the fields, whether narrow strips or rectangular blocks, can all have an influence on the later micro-morphology of the suburban townscape. A particularly clear example is the area between Beech Road and High Lane (Figure 4a) where long, narrow strip-like fields, together with a more

fragmentary landownership pattern is replicated in the roughly parallel streets such as Stockton, Wilton Road and Cross Road. The grain of this block of streets and houses seem strongly influenced by the pre-existing cadastral situation and fits Ward's analysis of Leeds's townscapes.

The northwestern area of Chorlton (Figure 4b) differs from the area of Figure 4a in that it consisted of larger, squarer fields and that it almost wholly belonged in 1847 to two landowners, Egerton and Lloyd. North of the more recently inserted Wilbraham Road and its villa developments, the suburban landscape reflects large-scale



Figure 4b: The influence of the 1847 landownership and field patterns on the urban morphology of north west Chorlton.

development in estates, especially in the years 1905 to 1914. A large central block of land, fields 99-103 on the 1847 Tithe Map, which belonged to Wilbraham Egerton, was all developed as an estate of terrace houses. A similar development occurred on Egerton's land (fields 78-81 and 91-92) to the north adjacent to Manchester Road, either side of Oswald Road. Property boundaries remain detectable in the edges of specific house types or age of buildings units in the present townscapes. Within these larger-scale developments, builders could organise the street patterns within the ownership blocks with a greater degree of freedom.

Even larger scale housing developments were permitted by the landownership cadastral situation in the southern part of Chorlton where Egerton owned all the land except for a block of fields alongside Chorlton Brook belonging to Lloyd. This latter area, eight to nine fields owned by Lloyd was developed in its entirety as the Chorltonville Estate, a garden suburb, built 1911-1915 (Figure 4c). In contrast, the fields to the south along and to the south of Hardy Lane were owned by Egerton and were developed by the City Council as a large council estate in the 1920s. Consequently the curving property boundary

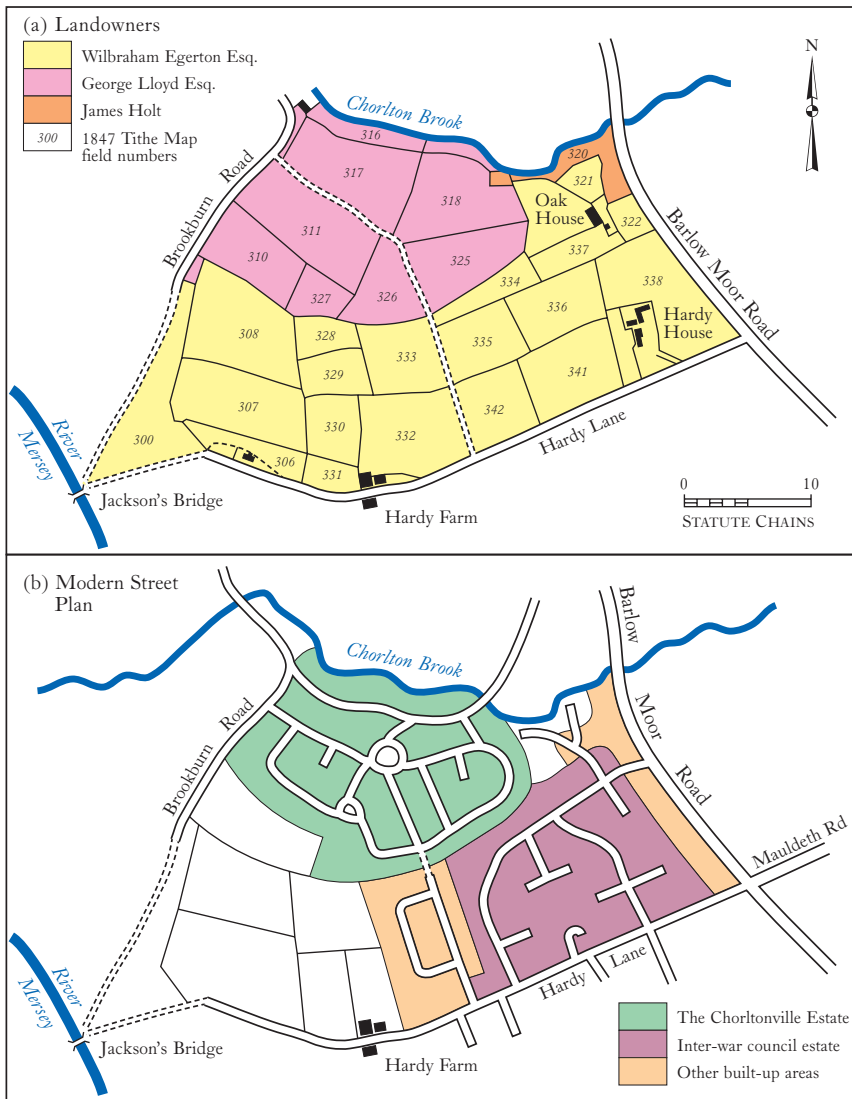


Figure 4c: The influence of the 1847 landownership and field patterns on the urban morphology of the Chorltonville Estate.

has been perpetuated as a morphological, and as a major social boundary between decidedly up-market Chorltonville and a major working-class council estate. Inside each contrasting estate the street layout reflects the requirements of the developer-builder rather than the earlier field pattern.

Recent changes in Chorlton and conclusions

By the early Twenty-First Century, the largely Nineteenth-Century and (pre-1950s) Twentieth-Century houses and commercial buildings of Chorlton have matured and been modified into a distinctive and much appreciated suburb of Manchester. The relative tranquillity of 'Old Chorlton' around the Green and the now

up-market cafes and shops of Beech Road contrasts with the bustling shops and businesses of 'New Chorlton' focused on the 'Four Banks' crossroad junction. Conservation Area and listed buildings measures protect landscape features such as Chorlton Green and the old churchyard, Beech Road, old halls, and old cinema and billiard hall facades. Pre-urban farms can just be distinguished bordering the Green, at the gentrified Bailey's Farm on St. Werburghs Road, and in the pavilion of South West Manchester Cricket Club. The former fields and meadows of the Mersey flood plain, formerly subject to periodic inundations, have been transformed into golf courses and the recreational assets of Chorlton and Sale Water Parks. The recent extension of Manchester's Metrolink Tram System has resurrected Chorlton

and Withington railway stations closed in the 1960s Beeching Cuts. With other new tram stations Chorlton's commuting function has been greatly enhanced and, furthermore, a direct tram link to Manchester International Airport now adds to Chorlton's locational attractiveness.

While this study has focused on Chorlton, it can be suggested that the pre-urban cadastre will have affected the suburban townscapes of other parts of Manchester such as Withington, Didsbury, Northenden, Heaton Moor/Mersey, parts of Stockport, and Prestwich, Whitefield and other districts of North Manchester. Tithe Maps

and Surveys exist for all these parishes (Kain and Prince 1986, Kain 1995). Obviously, the greater the time lapse between the Tithe Survey and the late-Nineteenth or early-Twentieth Century urban development the less strong will be the influence of landownership boundaries and other pre-urban landscape features. Studies are further hampered by the lack of subsequent land ownership maps and data. However, the idiosyncratic diversity and topographical personality of superficially homogeneous suburban 'sprawl' adds much character to the suburban setting of the daily lives of thousands of Mancunians.

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