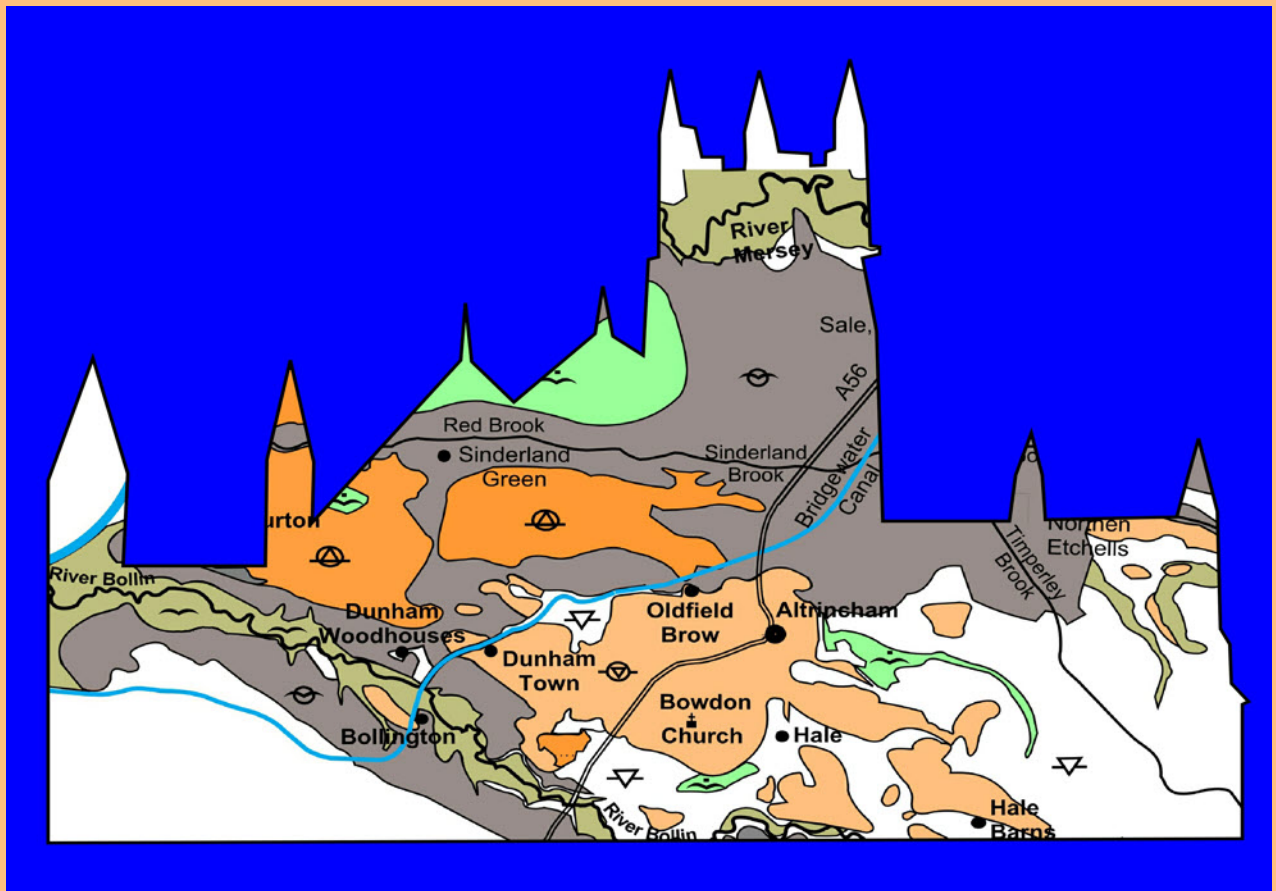


The Changing Landscape of Bowdon, Cheshire



Don Bayliss and David Miller

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A study of Bowdon through land use, its unusual multiple open field system, and the importance of the church in the area's history and development

Don Bayliss and David Miller

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Frontispiece: Bowdon Church inset with superficial geology

Back Cover: Bowdon Hall, Cheshire (with thanks to John Lee)

The Changing Landscape of Bowdon, Cheshire

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Preface

As Bowdon is my place of birth and of my early education through Altrincham Grammar School, it is a delight to see this multi-disciplinary volume on its landscape, archaeological and historical development. Such detailed local historical papers are one of the foundations of both archaeological and historical studies in Britain. As is the case here, such studies are an opportunity to bring together both volunteers and professionals steeped in an appreciation of the local area. Indeed this volume falls within the landscape research approach formulated by the great mid-20th century historian W.G. Hoskins.

I know from my own career and professional experience that the Bowdon landscape is an intriguing and teasing one, at least archaeologically. As a post-graduate student in archaeology at Manchester University in the mid- to late-1980s, I spent several years studying the late prehistoric and Romano-British landscape of the Mersey basin. At the time, the low ridge that runs along the northern side of the River Bollin and which ends in the hill at Bowdon seemed like a good landscape for early settlement. As it was mostly covered in Victorian and 20th century housing, it seemed unlikely we would find out much more about its earlier past. Yet just a few years later the medieval moat at Timperley Old Hall at the northern foot of the hill, produced evidence for later prehistoric and Saxon activity.

Later, in the 1990s, as a project officer for the University of Manchester Archaeological Unit, I was lucky enough to be involved in two projects that encompassed Bowdon. Firstly through the research for a book on the archaeology of Trafford which highlighted Bowdon's role as an early estate centre. Secondly through the Tameside Archaeology Survey, an upland area to the east of Manchester, which used the lowland areas of Bowdon parish as a landscape comparator for studying the evolution of the region over the last 2,000 years. In the subsequent 20 years, firstly as Director of the University of Manchester Archaeological Unit and since 2009, as Head of Archaeology at Salford University, my work across more than 30 books and dozens of academic articles has focused on the impact of industrialisation and how this can be recovered archaeologically. Here, too, the Bowdon landscape has much to contribute to our understanding of this huge process, especially in terms of how the farming landscape was changed by improvement, population growth and finally urban expansion. Much of this mature landscape can be seen around Bowdon Church and enjoyed from the lofty vantage of its attractive, leafy and still graveyard.

Dr Michael Nevell, BA Hons, MPhil, DPhil, FSA, MCIfA

Introduction

The aim of the book

The aim of this book is to examine the unusual multiple field farming system which existed in Bowdon; the important part that owners and tenants played in Bowdon's development, its growth and history. This is an account of a village in north Cheshire, the variation in its size and importance at different times, and the changes which have occurred in the landscape since Roman times.

Bowdon started life as a small planned settlement based around a 'minster' church. This term was generally given to large churches associated with monastic settlements, but there is no evidence of such a situation at Bowdon if it ever existed. However, a village developed around what was from early times an important religious site. This church served more than a dozen townships which made it an important place. Its position at the highest point of the region indicates a carefully selected site. To the north, the low Manchester basin could be seen; to the east the start of the Pennine range; to the south there was a view over the Cheshire plain; and to the north-west a view along a ridgeway which had been in use probably since Mesolithic times with some evidence of the deposition of prehistoric finds. However, in this book the earliest time referred to is the Romano-British period.

The account shows the development of its farming methods in 'open field' cultivation with its associated personal structures of ownership and tenancy, eventually expanding this type of agriculture into several large fields. Bowdon was unusual in having nine open fields as opposed to adjacent Altrincham and Dunham, each with one open field, and Hale with two. In this system, most farmers lived in the village. Eventually this was followed by enclosure of the open fields and the creation of single farms, usually leased by one farmer. A final phase of development became associated with modern transport systems: the Bridgewater Canal, turnpiked roads, and railways.

The book is in six parts:

Part 1 (chapters 1-7) considers Bowdon's position, boundaries, and natural features. It describes the geology on which the village lies, i.e. areas of hard rock and features of the superficial geology of sand and gravels etc. It describes over time the climate experienced, the soils of the area, and streams.

Part 2 (chapters 8-13) looks at the possibility of Iron Age and Roman presence and other signs of archaeological and early historical interest. It discusses suggestions that curvilinear structures can be seen in the region, leading to a possibility that Celtic people may have settled here after the Romans left in the third century. Following the Celtic people, other settlers came: the Anglo-Saxons, Scandinavians and Normans. At this point, use is made of the Domesday Book and features of the later medieval period are described.

Part 3 (chapters 14-17) covers Bowdon Church and Bowdon Hall and their importance over time.

Part 4 (chapters 18-19) is devoted to the particular 'open field' field type of arable culture practised in Bowdon and explains the collapse of the open field system in favour of enclosure.

Part 5 (chapters 20-24) describes the modern period with unit farms, how this gave way to suburbanisation, and how today virtually the whole township is covered with houses.

Part 6 (chapter 25) includes the Conclusions and Appendices.

Acknowledgement of Illustrations and other material

Most of the maps in this book were drawn by David Miller and cover from the Ice Age to the present in the context of the history of Bowdon. He also provided additional information on many topics and most of the photographs of modern ground views of features such as those of Bow Green Farm, and we thank the farmer, Nigel Kennerley, for his indulgence and details of his farming practices.

We are grateful to Jill Groves who provided data on several topics such as populations and households of the Restoration period.

We thank Prof. Graeme White, Emeritus Professor of Local History at the University of Chester, having retired after 33 years there in 2010. He has been extremely generous with information and a list of relevant books (Appendix 3). A medievalist, he has published a number of papers and books, among them *Restoration and Reform: Recovery from Civil War in England, 1153-1165*, *The Medieval English Landscape, 1000-1540* and *The Magna Carta of Cheshire*.

We are grateful to Dr. John Hodgson, Collections and Research Support Manager, the University of Manchester John Rylands Library, for access to several documents covering topics relating to the land use of Bowdon and for answering queries.

Thanks to Prof. John Morrill for advice on the Bucklow Hundred, and the Civil War in Cheshire.

We record our thanks to a wide range of contributors to the Bowdon Sheaf, whose articles we have referenced in many sections of our study. We have used significant pieces of information from this journal, now in its 56th edition, which contain a wealth of information on topics not only about Bowdon but wider afield.

Thanks are due to the inhabitants of several properties used to illustrate types of buildings at different periods.

Thanks also to Judith Miller for proof reading.

We thank Altrincham History Society for agreeing to support the publication of the book.

The colour printed version of this book has been supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Authors

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Don Bayliss, B.A. (Hons, Manchester), M.A. (Leeds) and Ph.D. (Manchester) is a retired Principal Lecturer and Head of Geography at Manchester Polytechnic, where he created a first degree in Geography and lectured on many courses. Now President of Altrincham History Society, Vice-President and former Chairman of Altrincham & Bowdon Civic Society, and member of South Trafford Archaeological Group, he formerly lectured at the Manchester Metropolitan University on local history and geology in the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Manchester areas and has published a dozen books and shorter articles on topics related to these areas. Present area of research interest is concerned with the historical geography of settlements.

David Miller

David has lived in the area most his life and has a physics degree from Liverpool University. From 1961 he worked for William Timpson as a computer programmer on the first generation of integrated-circuit machines. He moved to Manchester City Council in 1963, retiring in 1997 having become Development Manager. He has published a book on IT management and several articles and occasional papers for Altrincham History Society and Bowdon History Society.

The Contributors

The authors wish to thank the following persons for help with advice or material:

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We have consulted some of Charles' publications on farming and the history of rural life in central Cheshire and he has answered several questions at length. His books include: *Capital and Innovation – How Britain became the First Industrial Nation*, and *Cheshire Cheese and Farming in the North West in the 17th and 18th Centuries*.

Jill Groves

Jill has an arts degree from the Open University and a background in local history. She is working on a long-term project transcribing and analysing local wills and inventories. Jill is generous with information and has helped the two authors with their studies. She has published many books and is the publications officer/editor for the Open University History Society, Altrincham History Society and Ashton & Sale History Society and is a committee member for all three.

Bob Hayes

Bob has spent over 40 years working in the computer industry and, as a keen landscape archaeologist, in recent years actively participating in excavations and professional land survey work. He is at the cutting edge of computer and satellite landscape archaeology, utilising state-of-the-art technology and satellite imagery to distance-survey ground targets all over the UK. Using this technique he has discovered many previously unknown archaeological sites of all periods and expanded our knowledge of past activities both regionally and nationally.

Sue Nichols

After studying History and Fine Arts at Sydney University, Sue moved to London to obtain a BA and MA in the History of European Art and worked as a photo-librarian and researcher in the record and publishing industries. After contributions to art publications, Sue was responsible for forming the Vimto Advertising Collection and book. She has published *St Anne's Home: A History of the Bowdon Branch of Manchester Hospital for Consumption*. Sue is currently the project coordinator for Altrincham and Bowdon Civic Society's £50,000 Heritage Lottery Fund grant covering the Altrincham area. The work includes the digital archiving of local photograph and map collections, the formation of an Altrincham Heritage website and a heritage trail booklet for Altrincham town centre. Photographic and map acknowledgements to Altrincham Area Image Archive (AAIA) refer to the Heritage collection she has developed.

Mark Olly

Mark began his archaeological career under Peter Davey of the University Of Liverpool. He joined the team excavating Norton Priory under Patrick Greene, excavated at Wilderspool Roman settlement, Warrington under John Hinchliffe, and Warrington Friary under Barry Johnson and Pauline Bearpark, returning again in 2000 to assist Richard Heawood of Lancaster Archaeology Unit (Oxford Archaeology North). Since 1997 Mark has specialized in Celtic history and pre-history and his books have been distributed by several publishers. He has undertaken archaeological work in many parts of the world and is a visiting lecturer in Archaeology to Chester University, West Cheshire College, Chester, Wigan and Warrington Education Authorities, and the Wilmslow Guild.

Derek Pierce

Derek began his archaeological career under Professor Barri Jones in 1975 in digs on Roman campaign forts in Wales and on the Castlefield site in Manchester, followed by work on other Roman sites in England, Wales and Scotland. He was a founder member of South Trafford Archaeological Group in 1979 and chaired the Group for many years.

Frank Prest

Frank Prest, M.A. (Oxon), is a retired Principal Lecturer from Manchester Metropolitan University who organised the first multi-subject degree courses and lectured in economic geography. He has loaned many books and has advised on the geography and land use of the study area and on the structure of the book.

Ronald Trenbath

An artist and local historian, Ronald died in 2014 but had helped with advice on land use in Bowdon and gave permission to use several of his drawings produced for Bowdon History Society.

Emeritus Prof. Graeme White

Prof. White of the Local History Department of the University of Chester has been extremely helpful sharing his knowledge of land use and providing sources of information. After 30 years at the University of Chester, he retired in 2010. He is a Medieval Historian and has published many papers.

A mental map of an area of interest

The geographer is interested in mental as well as material maps, and in the way people may view the same feature quite differently. This applies, for instance, to the people who live in what was North Cheshire. In 1974, at the time of the redrawing of administrative boundaries, Bowdon was moved from Cheshire into Trafford Metropolitan Borough. However, the location of Bowdon is probably still in historic north Cheshire rather than Trafford in the minds of those of those inhabitants interested in its history. This mental attitude may be reinforced by two features: the proximity of Chester, the capital city of Cheshire, and because the plateau of Bowdon is tilted to the south away from Manchester and leans south-west towards Chester, rather than north-eastwards towards the 'cottonopolis' (cotton city) of Manchester with its manufacturing only eight miles distant.

Changes in measurement

The Imperial system of measurement has been used throughout this book.

Imperial (historic) measurement

miles, yards, feet (ft.), inches (ins.)
chain (22 yards)
furlong (220 yards)
rod, pole or perch ($\frac{1}{4}$ chain)
quarter or rood ($\frac{1}{4}$ acre)
perch ($\frac{1}{40}$ rood)
Cheshire acre (10,240 square yards)
pounds (£), shillings (s), pence (d)

Modern measurement

metre
square metres
hectare (about 2.5 acres)

statute acre (4,840 square yards)
pounds (£), pence (p)

Table 1. Useful measurements

A comparison of historic Imperial measurements and their modern replacements.

From Roman villas to modern villas

One of the interesting points arising in this study has been the uniqueness of the character of the Bowdon area. Bowdon, formerly a village and about seventeen farms in 800 acres, completely changed in less than a century to be almost totally submerged under modern domestic buildings, with its agricultural character and components gone. While this is also the story for many other places whose destiny was changed by outside influences, here the factors for change were the turnpiking of the roads, the building of the Bridgewater Canal and the Manchester South Junction & Altrincham Railway. From the early 19th century, these changes brought a particular type of resident, the wealthy business commuter, altering the panorama of farms into one of superb suburban houses known locally as 'villas', providing houses for wealthy people in a ten-mile radius of Greater Manchester. The following pages tell the story of the changing forms of the landscape through the centuries, from the elegant Roman villas of Mamucium (Manchester) to the elegant modern villas of Bowdon.

PART 1

Chapter 1. Aims of the work and Bowdon's location

Bowdon used to be a small village eight miles south of Manchester but, following the administrative reorganisation in 1974, is now located in the Metropolitan Borough of Trafford.

Aims

This study aims to illustrate the history of Bowdon in a different, geographical way from a conventional narrative description by using many maps. Bowdon was chosen because of material about its 18th century open field character, lending itself to illustration by maps, came to the notice of the authors. The first idea was to put the information in an atlas followed the genre of such a method first exemplified in Cheshire in Sylvester's and McNulty's *The Historical Atlas of Cheshire* of 1958. The idea of a historical atlas also prompted the production of a *Historical Atlas of Trafford* in 1996 (Bayliss) and the approach was revived on a regional scale in the excellent *A New Historical Atlas of Cheshire* by A.D.M. Phillips and C.B. Phillips in 2002. This book has too much text for an atlas but it is hoped the reader will enjoy the attempt to unravel the landscape history of Bowdon through the vehicle of interesting maps.

We first look at the development of the basic character of the physical landscape and the processes creating the natural scene such as the physical geography, the geology and land, the historical ecology, and the social and economic changes at Bowdon. This is followed by the supposition that the Romans were once present in the area. It is well known that Mamucium (Manchester) was a Roman settlement and the use of aerial maps suggests that Bowdon had a similar origin. As one proceeds through the Bowdon time-scale, it seems clear that there was a great deal of continuity in the use of a relatively few settlement sites used by the different groups of people who occupied parts of Bowdon in Roman and post-Roman times, e.g. the Romans, the Welsh, the Anglo-Saxons, the Vikings and the Normans.

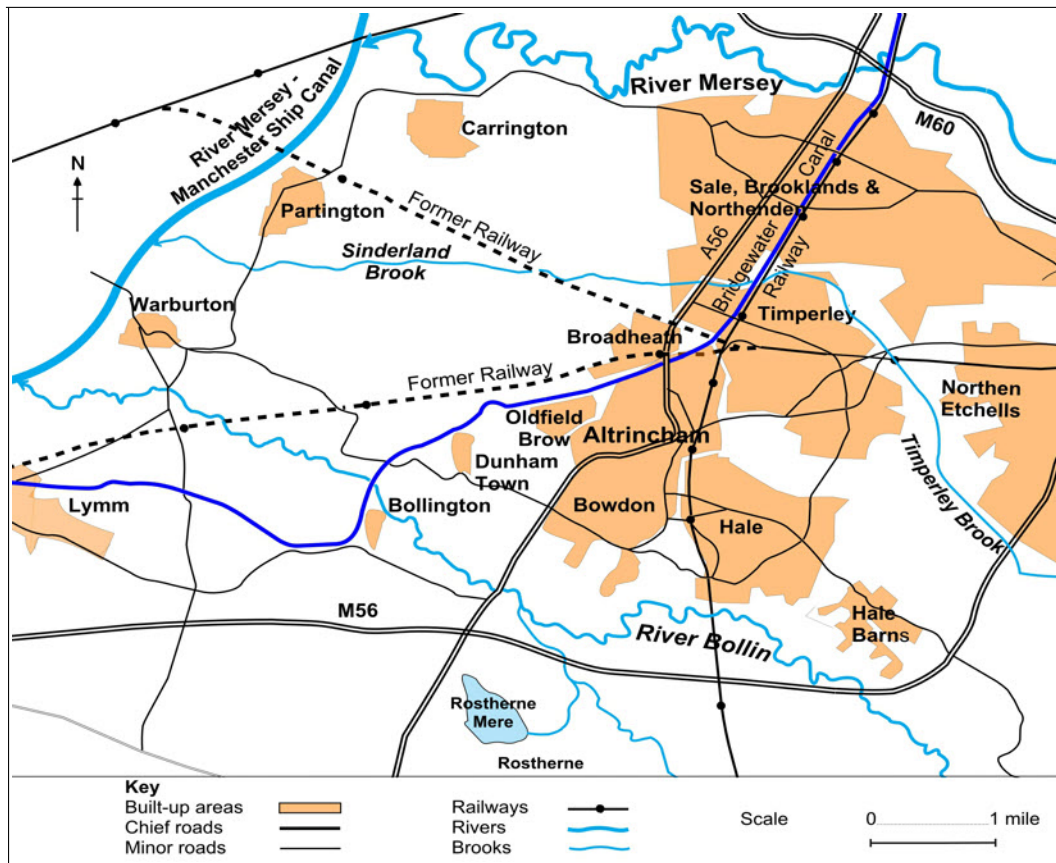
Plates 1 and 2 show Bowdon as a small village centring on a large church. Its population is currently about 9,000.



Plate 1. Bowdon Village looking east. The village and church lie in dominant high positions with views in all directions.



Plate 2. Bowdon Village looking south over the Cheshire plain from the church tower (Altrincham Area Image Archive).



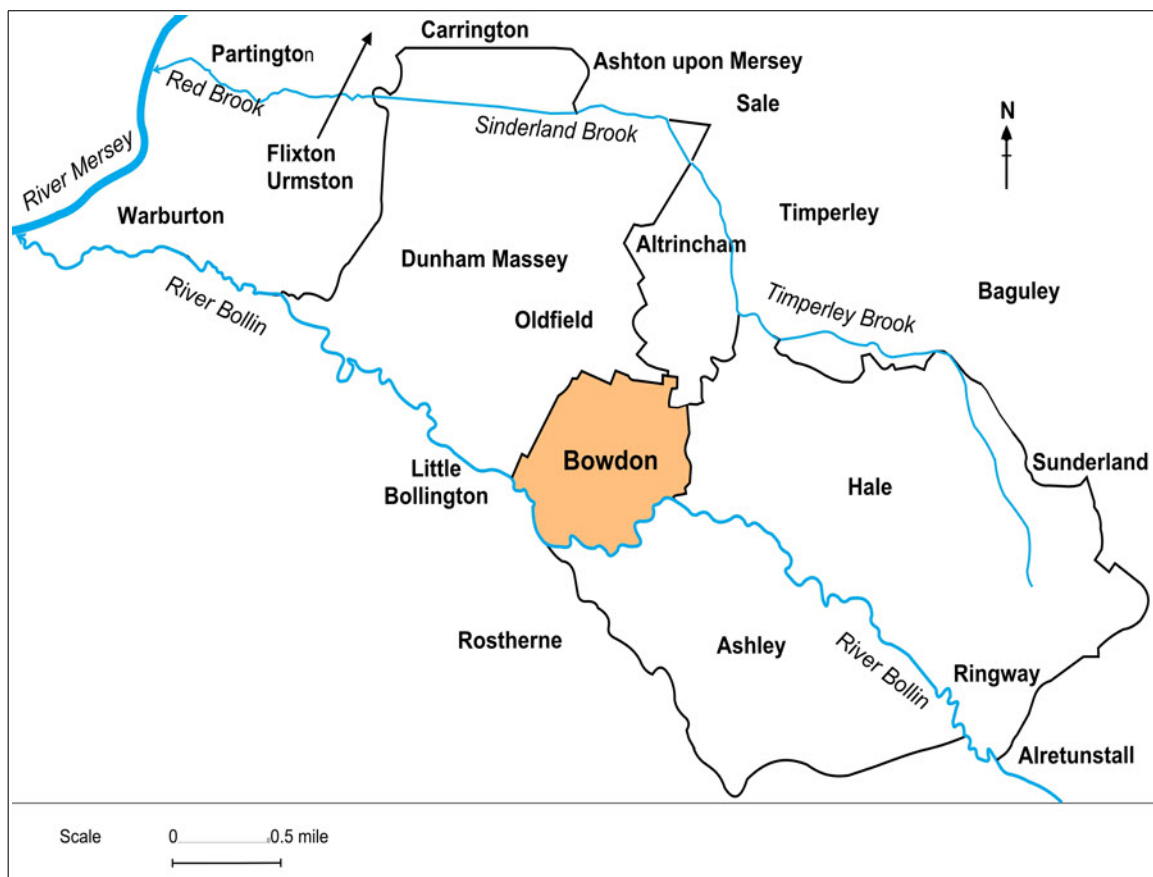
Map 1. The modern urban landscape of Bowdon and district.

The historic northern county boundary of Cheshire was the river Mersey at the top. Land north of the Mersey was in Lancashire. The A556/A56 is approximately on the line of a Roman road from Chester to York, climbing past Bowdon from the south-west. Note the bend in the road as it turned downhill through the word 'Altrincham'. Altrincham was a medieval planted borough and the diversion might have been to improve trade. Before the local government changes of 1974, the named places were all in north Cheshire. Those north of the Bollin are now in Trafford Metropolitan District Council in Greater Manchester and those south of the Bollin are in Macclesfield District. Manchester Ship Canal was created from the Mersey to assist the shipping export of cotton and engineered products, and the import of grain. The canal extends thirty miles to Liverpool to the west. The straightened course of the Mersey is shown as 'River Mersey - Manchester Ship Canal'. The Bollin flows westwards past Bowdon and serves as the township's southern boundary.

Location

Manchester lies in the basin of several rivers, some rising in the Pennines. However, the most notable, the River Mersey, is formed from rivers coalescing a few miles before reaching south Manchester, and then the single river keeps the name 'Mersey' for thirty miles until it reaches Liverpool. The Mersey from Manchester to its estuary at Liverpool was canalized as the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894 to allow sea-going ships into Manchester. In the Pennine hills in the south-east, a much smaller river called the Bollin rises and flows thirty miles westwards, starting roughly parallel to the Mersey (Warrender, 14). It joins the Mersey as one of its tributaries at the small village of Warburton four miles west of Bowdon (*Map 1*). The Bollin is not navigable. The township of Bowdon is about three miles from west to east and two miles from north to south. In earlier times it was part of north Cheshire called the Bucklow Hundred, administered from Bucklow Hill, a grassy hill about three miles south of Bowdon (Higham, 1993,163). Prof. John Morrill says that administration was from Knutsford after 1543.

The boundaries of other townships are shown on *Map 2*. A busy commuter rail link joins Central Cheshire through Hale and Altrincham with Manchester.



Map 2. Bowdon in relation to some neighbouring townships.

These places had some early contact with Bowdon. Apart from Warburton, those along the Bollin were contained in a Saxon and later a Norman manor and then a medieval estate. Warburton was the end of a ridgeway route along the watershed between the Mersey and the Bollin, and had a distinctly separate history from the places to the east and is not covered here. Though Ashley village lies south of the river Bollin, some of its inhabitants worked land in Bowdon. Altrincham was a planned town built in 1290AD. It was a major engineering town until the 1980s since when it has developed its supply base as a centre for surrounding towns. It is the largest town with a population of over 40,000. Ringway is now the site of Manchester International Airport.

The small village of Bollington (now Little Bollington) on this map should not be confused with a town called Bollington, also on the river Bollin, a dozen miles to the south east in the foothills of the Pennines. The attractive small village of Rostherne lies to the south of Bowdon and Higham thinks that the two settlements had possibly trading interests in medieval times. Rostherne has a large mere (lake), perhaps from the dissolution of the salt-rich rocks on which it lies, or from a hollow left by a huge mass of ice in the last Ice Age.

Bowdon township land is quite hilly, rising from the valley of the river Bollin at 70 feet above sea level (asl) to a long sinuous ridge at about 200 feet asl, the watershed between the Bollin valley and the former Mersey. Bowdon's high southerly aspect below the long ridge and an atmosphere free from the industrial smoke of the manufacturing areas, made it a desirable place to live. In the Manchester area, Bowdon became a fashionable domicile and over the last two centuries people prepared to commute eight miles to the city, famous for its cotton, engineering and manufacturing, moved to Bowdon. The township is now almost completely built-over with attractive houses. For local services, Bowdon is really a suburb of Altrincham, the large neighbouring town, and these two places with adjacent suburbs such as Hale, Timperley and Sale, form a large dormitory area for

Manchester to which they have easy access by a fast tram, the 'Metrolink', from Altrincham, and a rail link to Stockport.

Ormerod (Vol1 p513), the late-19th century Cheshire historian, gave this appropriate outline of Bowdon's site in 1882: "*Bowdon occupies a high ridge of land on the bank of the Bollin about eight miles south of Manchester. The church and village are situated on the highest part of the eminence which commands a delightful view towards the Lancashire hills over the vale of the Mersey in a northerly direction and an equally extensive and more diversified prospect to the south.*" Reason enough for a later spread of homes over Bowdon.

Historic Bowdon in the 19th century was quite small, only 762 acres in the first census in 1801 when the population was 340. However, by 1991 it had reached over 5,000. In 1974 a modern 'administrative' Bowdon Ward was created incorporating several villages and stretching more than four miles from Hale, through Bowdon and Dunham Massey to Warburton. This much larger area had a total population of over 11,000. It is now no longer possible to get figures for the number of people living in the former township of Bowdon.

Bowdon offers much in the way of past evidence of its landscapes including a fine old church, the key to Bowdon's ecclesiastical and political importance in earlier times and some interesting field systems from a thousand years of agriculture. There are several signs of British Iron Age settlements in the wider area which must have existed in a symbiotic relationship with the advanced Roman culture.

According to Canon Maurice Ridgway, the name of Bowdon has been spelled many different ways, including:

- Bogedone in the Domesday Book, 1086
- Boudun and Bothedun in 1189-99
- Bodeon in the 13th century
- Bowedon in 1345
- Bowden in 1438, 1488, 1535, 1695
- Botheden, Baw(e)don, Baudon in 1455
- Bow(e)den(e) in 1537
- Boodon in 1549 (Patent Rolls)
- Bowdon in 1611
- Bodon in 1617
- Bowdon in 1656 (Kings Vale Royal)
- Bowdon in 1673 (Peter Leicester)

In some 19th century wills and other documents in John Rylands Library, Manchester, it is also spelled both Bowden and the modern way. In this book, the name Bowdon will generally be used throughout.

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Chapter 2. Bowdon boundaries

Boundaries

Bowdon township has clear east, south and west boundaries. Motley Brook rises in Spring Bank at the most easterly end of Bowdon to form the Hale boundary. The westerly boundary is the Roman road for some of its part. The River Bollin borders the south for three miles. It passes from east to west across the south of Bowdon at about 90 feet asl in the east to 70 feet in the west as a single stream, but subject to many local course vagaries. It is typical of a small active mature river which meanders and there are numerous oxbow lakes. The river changed course frequently even in the recent past, and sometimes flowed at higher levels, leaving three terraces to show evidence of former levels and activity.

South-west

The river leaves Bowdon at Newbridge Hollow at the south-western corner about 70 feet asl, and passes westwards to become the southern boundary of the next township downstream, Dunham Massey, known for its National Trust hall (Bayliss and Miller, 91). At Newbridge Hollow the river passes under a bridge carrying a Roman road, the A556, coming from Chester in the south-west and becoming the A56, locally called Watling Street, heading for Manchester and York. In this study the route described by the Roman road is the one indicated on Ordnance Survey (OS) maps. This road from Chester crosses the Bollin and strikes up the hill towards Altrincham (*Plate 3*).



Plate 3. Looking north-east up the A56. In the far distance the road climbs steeply up an escarpment towards the church which lies off the view to the right (east). The A56 is used as the western boundary of the township of Bowdon on many maps. The farm hamlet on the right is Streethead, a clear reference to its position on a Roman road.

West and north-west

The Roman road on the Ordnance Survey (OS) map forms the straight western boundary of Bowdon and gives that boundary a date, if only a broad one. It is shown to run along the line of the A56 but in fact the precise course of the road is contested by at least four people with different views. Three archaeologists, Mark Olly, Bob Hayes, and Derek Pierce, think it was further to the west, and historian Ronald Trenbath believed the road originally forded the Bollin to the east of its present route. For the purposes of this book the Ordnance Survey line of the A56 will be regarded as the line of the Roman road from Chester to Manchester.

North

The Chester Road and boundary pass in a straight line north-eastwards up the hill between Bowdon village and the village of Dunham Massey (*Maps 1 and 3*) until they reach 200 feet asl near the highest point of the hill. The course of the Roman road continues downhill on in its north-easterly direction as a track. The main road turns off the Roman line north-eastwards at the top of the hill and descends into the middle of Altrincham. It then turns northwards at about 75 feet asl picking up the straight line of the Roman road from west Bowdon as the Manchester Road from Altrincham towards Manchester at Broadheath (Nevell, Plate 1.1).

Broadheath

The name gives a clue to the original nature of the district (see *Plate 16*). It was formerly a wild heath and in the late nineteenth century became the site of an engineering complex of more than a score of huge firms employing 8,000 engineers. Several firms were known the world over, such as Linotype making newspaper set-up machinery. Another firm milled huge parts such as propellers for ships. However, after a century of world-renowned activity, the work disappeared in the 1970s after munition production finished at the end of the Second World War. Today few vestiges of engineering are left and most of the area is a retail shopping park and residential area (Bamford, 99, and Sparkes, 281). The area now mainly offers services and is another large suburb of Manchester.

East

To the east of Bowdon, a narrow road follows a small stream known as Motley Brook (*Plate 4*) flowing into the Bollin at the most south-easterly part of Bowdon. It is possible this eastern Bowdon road system was part of an ancient route from the Cheshire salt fields via Tatton to Manchester. Certainly part of it was the result of enclosure of a 200 acre common at the top of the hill shared by five townships for grazing, peat cutting, rabbit warrens and smallholdings. In 1702, at the time of its enclosure, these townships were: Bowdon; Dunham Massey to the west (the hall and park now in the care of the National Trust); Oldfield Brow, a former hamlet with a 1920's housing estate added; Hale and two commuter-residential villages; a few farms; and Altrincham. This is now all a large urban area of about 60,000 people. As to be expected, when the common was surveyed and allocated to three main landowners in 1702, the result created a boundary system of straight lines. Today, only street signs mark the passage from one place to another.

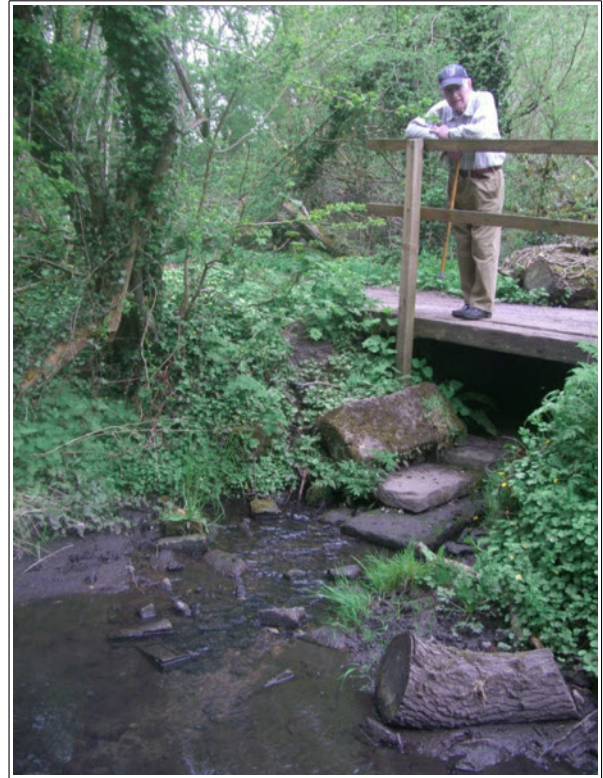


Plate 4. View of the south-flowing Motley Brook which marks the eastern boundary of Bowdon – now not such a clear feature as its west and south limits but probably a larger stream in former times. It shows how even small natural geographical features were used for important land definition in the past when nothing more striking was available for a boundary.

The church, its townships and their boundaries

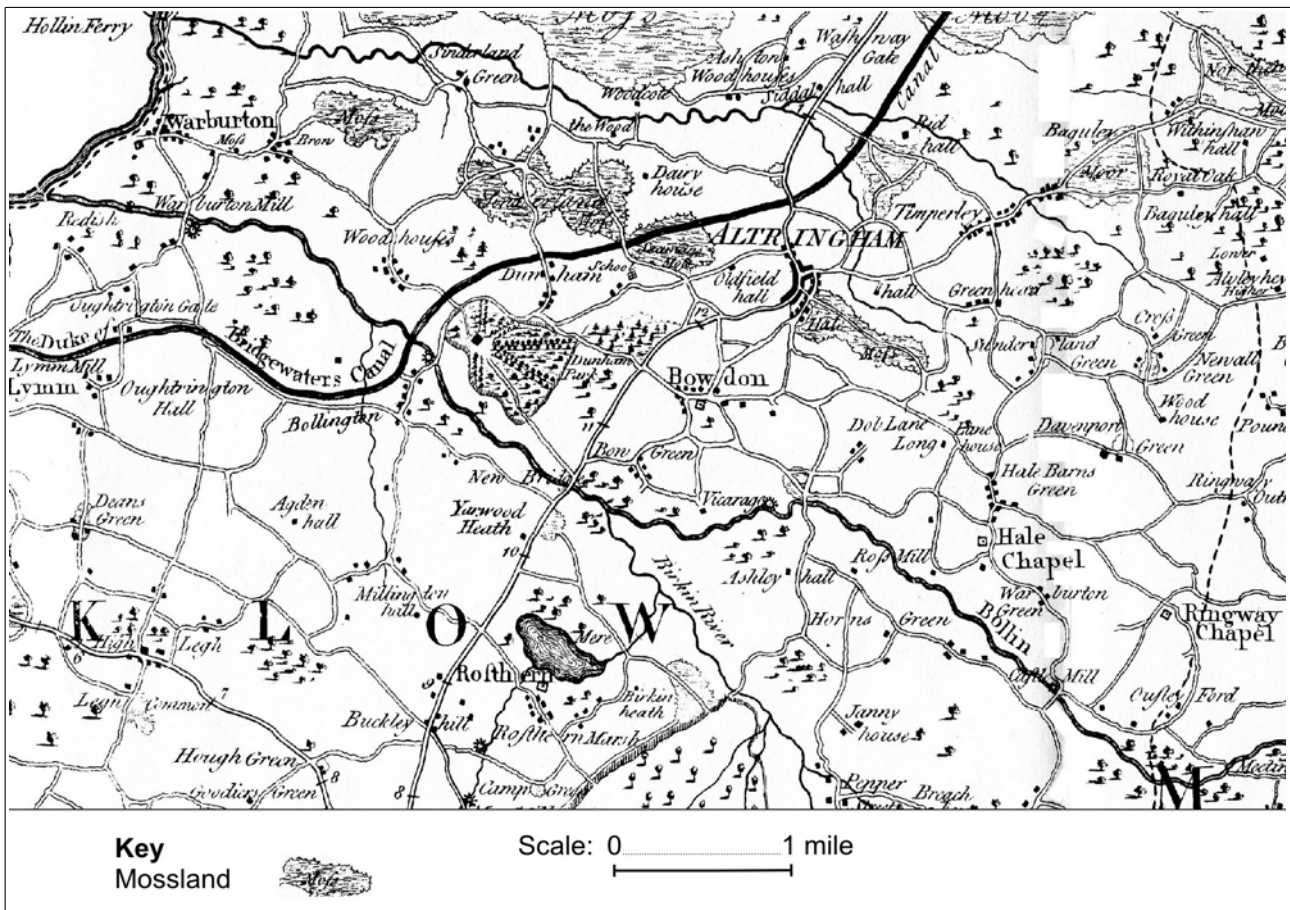
Bowdon lies 30 miles north-east of Chester, Cheshire's historic county town. Bowdon and its neighbours lie on a ridgeway of hilly ground, the watershed between the Mersey and the Bollin (*Map 2*). Bowdon had a church mentioned in Domesday Book of 1086AD, and a few pieces of early stone date from a medieval period. There have been several rebuilds of the church, the last in 1858-60. The presence of the church was the main contributor to the importance of Bowdon in the medieval period as the only church in twenty-five square miles. It had a large parish of more than a dozen townships. These included Ashley, Hale, Baguley, Timperley, Altrincham, Ashton-upon-Mersey,

Bowdon, Dunham Massey, Partington, Carrington, Agden, Rostherne and several detached areas which shared parts of parishes such as Bollington, Ashton-upon-Mersey, and Bowdon (see Phillips and Phillips, rear folder). The whole group stretched over the watershed north of the Bollin valley into the Mersey valley, the next river basin to the north. As the religious centre for a large Anglo-Saxon estate of eight manors, Bowdon subsequently held the chief church of the Norman estate and barony which took its place following the conquest in 1066. The extent of Bowdon parish can be seen on *Maps 1 and 21*, where it includes the whole district apart from Lymm, Warburton, and Etchells.

Following settlement by Romans and other groups, a barony came about when a Norman family from Macey in Normandy was ennobled in about 1069. There have been several forms of the spelling of the name of this family, such as Macey, Maci, Masci, Mascy and Massey. Mascy will be used here except in the modern place name Dunham Massey (Bayliss in Bayliss and Miller, 41). The estate grew through acquisitions by marriage and purchase, to more than thirty manors. In the eighteenth century, through a particularly felicitous marriage to the Booths, the estate became part of the earldom of the Grey family from Lincolnshire, owners of three large houses in three different counties and land elsewhere making thirty thousand acres and lasting two-and a half centuries (Eastwood in Bayliss and Miller, 76-79).

Burdett's map of the Bowdon area

Map 3 was a precursor of the modern Ordnance Survey 1 inch to 1 mile maps. It shows the crucial feature which began the modern history of Bowdon - the Bridgewater Canal. This ran from Worsley and Manchester to Runcorn, where it reached the outer Mersey and the sea. It put Bowdon in touch with the outside world from 1765 and enabled export of its agricultural products, especially cheese and grain, along with Manchester's metal tools and manufactured products. Residents of Bowdon could reach Manchester by fast horse-drawn 'fly boats' in two hours and wealthy people in the same time by a swift carriage on the turnpikes. Manufacturers began living in Bowdon and commuting to Manchester.



Map 3. Part of Peter Burdett's map of Cheshire, 1777. This extract of an early map extending from Warburton in the west to Hale Barns in the east helps to locate places. The river Mersey is top left, showing its winding course it became part of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894. Peat bogs, called 'mosses' like Carrington Moss (top middle) and others ran in a line from Warburton Moss (top left) through Sinderland Moss to Hale Moss east of Altrincham. Other shaded areas include parks with trees such as Dunham Park surrounding Dunham Hall (shown as a black spot) west of Bowdon. Rostherne, bottom centre has a lake or 'mere'.

Sadly, Bowdon was not included in *The Cheshire Historic Landscapes Characterisation Project*. The Bowdon area had some features which might have been characterised as 'Ancient Fieldscapes', 'Post-medieval Landscapes', 'Prehistoric and Romano-British Field Systems,' 'Medieval Open Field Systems' and 'Features from the Domesday Survey'. The limit of northern Cheshire along the River Bollin is a modern political and administrative boundary of convenience from 1974 and not the Mersey, the northern historic boundary of Cheshire further north than the Bollin.

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Chapter 3. The physical landscape and the 'Bow' of Bowdon

The natural landscape of Bowdon has determined its history. This chapter examines its relief, i.e. the distribution of high and low land, its shape. The nature of the solid rocks in the area will be dealt with in Chapter 4; the effects of, the Ice Age and its aftermath in Chapter 5; the drainage of the area in Chapter 6; and the features of the living environment in Chapter 7. *Plates 5 and 6* show the westerly and southerly boundaries of Bowdon.



Plate 5. View west down into the Devisdale looking in the distance into the beginning of the hollow made by the 'bow' of western Bowdon. Just beyond is the A56.



Plate 6. Bowdon's southern boundary below Watch Hill, the site of a motte-and-bailey castle, where the River Bollin meets the Dunham Massey boundary.

Bowdon Hill

Over time, there has been a close relationship in the area between natural and human features. The township is located on a sloping plateau with a base at about 75 feet asl and wide-spaced contours showing the ground rising northwards to the top of Bowdon Hill (*Maps 4 and 5*) to over 200 feet asl, with the church at the highest point in the landscape. After a steep drop and south of the River Bollin, the undulating Cheshire Plain begins.

The ridgeway

The contours show Bowdon Church on a long ridge linking Hale, Bowdon, Dunham Massey and Warburton to the west (Nevell, 10). The route extends eastwards to Alderley Edge through Styal and Wilmslow. The ridge running westwards follows the line of the river and is the fractured northern edge of the Permo-Triassic rocks of the Cheshire plain, here mainly sandstone and marl overlaid by a variable thickness of glacial and fluvioglacial deposits. Bronze Age barrows and flints are occasionally found along the ridge suggesting it formed part of a long-distance prehistoric route from Alderley Edge, north-westwards towards the Mersey estuary, exporting copper and lead from the mines (Edwards and Trotter, 80). It is possible there might have been some coastal and river trade, receiving tin in exchange for copper and lead to make bronze. Warburton might have been a small river port for the exchange of trade at the confluence of the Bollin with the Mersey, leading to the west coast for importing and exporting metals, ores, and other products, though there is no archaeological evidence.

Bowdon Common

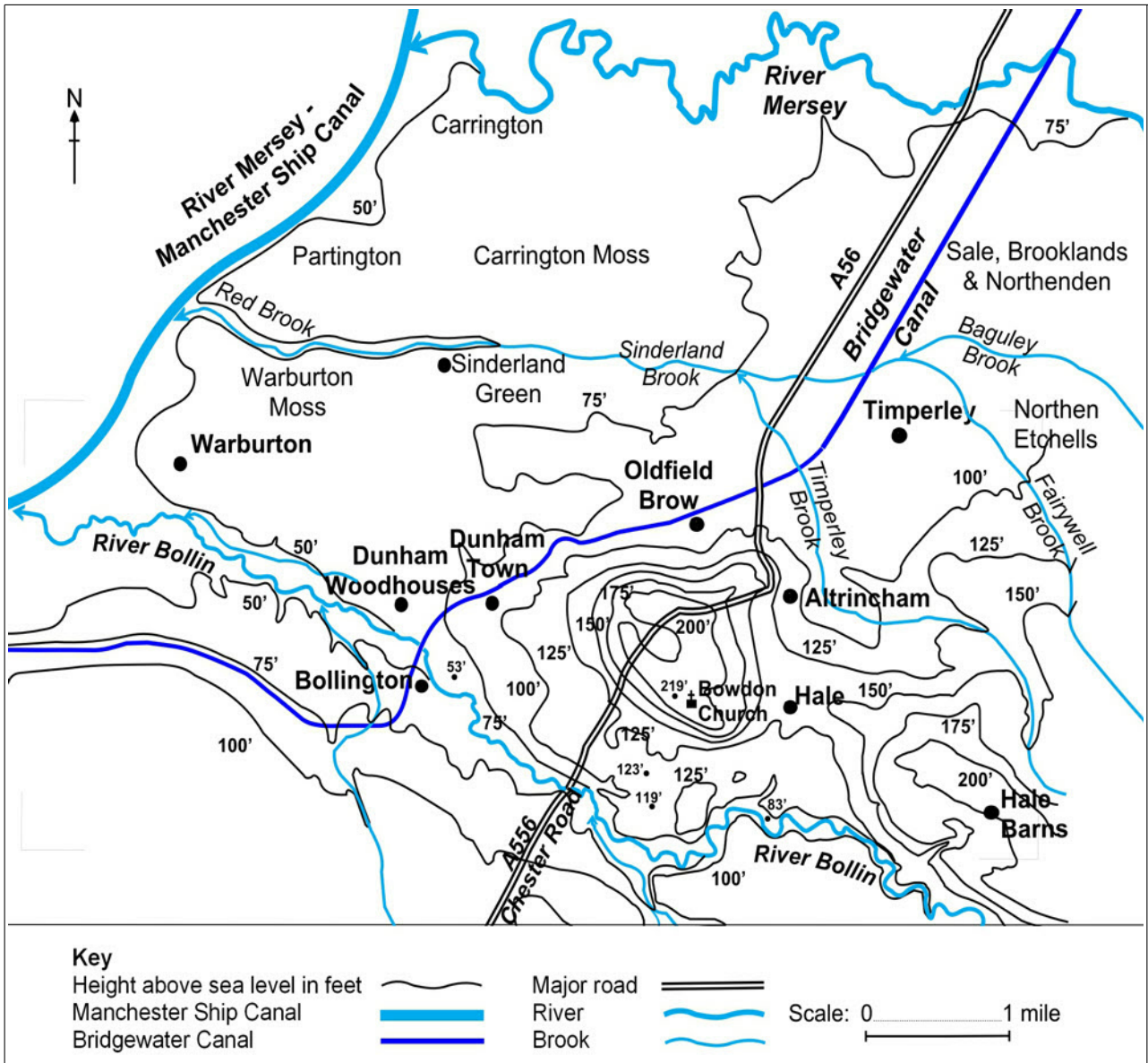
Further north across the top of Bowdon hill, there was once a large common of 200 acres shared by several communities from surrounding places including Bowdon, Altrincham, Dunham Massey, Hale and Oldfield Brow. Altrincham is now a town. Hale, Dunham Massey and Bowdon are villages and Oldfield Brow is a large inter-war housing estate. Part of the hill faced south and was very steep and more suitable for small cultivation and grazing than the north side which was likely to be in shade and not so productive. The hill was basically a massif of sand and gravel, used for the construction of buildings or roads. Other uses in former times involved digging out marl, peat, and turves, or keeping rabbits with a licence, an important occupation for the early landowners. There was clay for brick making and sand from pits. Fauna and flora included small fowl, reeds and other grasses. The high common was to be enclosed in an estate (see the plan of 1702 *Map 24*), and its land was divided between the three biggest landowners. One or two road names are indicators of early use on the north side of the plateau and refer, for example, to Park Field, The Downs, Higher Downs and Spring Bank. Further south the names are more redolent of later landowners who sold land for building in the 19th and 20th century or indicate pleasant sites such as 'Rosehill' and memorials such as 'Albert Square' named after Queen Victoria's husband.

The northern view from the edge of the sand and gravel hill includes the river Mersey basin which lies at about 70 feet asl. Looking eastwards to the Hale area, the deposit of sand and gravel is present as a long ridge through that township at about the same 200 feet height, shown in *Map 4*. The same ridge can be seen continuing to the west towards Dunham Massey. Bowdon Church is therefore at a crucial position on a ridgeway running along the watershed between the Mersey and the Bollin, of great importance in prehistoric times (Nevell, 10).

Ashley Heath

A small high area called Ashley Heath lies in the south-east, close to the Bollin. The heath is in Bowdon and Hale, not Ashley. The name indicates the original natural vegetation in the area, a cover of plants including dwarf shrubs of the heath family, grasses, bracken, sedges and a part-woodland cover (Innes, Tooley, and Lageards, 39). *Map 5* shows the heath standing at 125 feet asl, well above the 75 feet river level. Over time it was reclaimed and brought into full cereal production. There may be a relationship with the tithe barn at Ashley. Tithe barns were found in many districts including one in Hale Barns demolished in 1848 and one on Bowdon Moss which was 100 feet by 20 feet with six crucks, converted to a home in 1959 (Kemp, 2 and see Moss Farm in Chapter 17). A tithe barn was used to store one tenth of a farm's produce which was given to support the church each year.

The relief of the area north of the Bollin



Map 4. Relief of the landscape around Bowdon from Warburton to Hale.

The landscape was created by recent geomorphological processes such as post-glacial water erosion of fairly soft deposits, followed by deposits of glacial sands and shales. This was followed by post-glacial processes such as frost and river erosion. Where the road from Chester makes a bend north-eastwards at the 200 feet contour north-west of Bowdon Church, it crosses a semicircular 'bow'-shaped hollow. This is called 'The Devisdale' (Davis' or Devis' dole or share of land) facing north-west, prompting Anglo-Saxon settlers to give Bowdon its name, 'curved hill'. Note the 'abandoned meander' on which Hale is perched showing a former level of a river, which can still be traced to Dunham Town. The Bridgewater Canal closely follows the 83-foot contour.

The 'bow' in Bowdon

The narrow two-pronged ridge runs for a short distance from the church on the north-west side towards the next township of Dunham Massey. Leycester (p224) in 1673 wrote that: "This Town of Bowdon takes its Name from our two old Saxon Words which are yet in use with us for a Dwelling or Habitation, and Don or Dun, which is as much as a Plain upon a rising Hill, for which we now use the word Down. So that Bowdon signifies (sic) as much as a Town or Dwelling on the Downs; Unless perhaps we write it Boge-don (for so we find it anciently written in Domesday Book) and then it may denote a Down or Hill by a Bog; at the side whereof, towards Ashley lieth a great deep Bog."

Alternatively according to Dodgson, the interpretation might be 'curved hill' (Dodgson, 15) and is named from the elevation known as Bowdon Downs, which curves sharply to enclose a depression opening towards the north-west now known as The Devisdale. The same element of 'down' or hill is also found in 'Dunham' the township to the west, probably meaning 'the homestead (ham) by the hill or down'.

The land forms a bow-shaped ridge feature when seen along the 200 feet contour (*Map 4*) and when devoid of modern trees and buildings, early inhabitants would have been able to see a curved ridge or 'bow-shaped hill'.

The bow-shape probably resulted from erosion of the top of Bowdon Hill, a mass of sand and gravel of glacial origin which probably filled a large glacial cavity. On the melting and disappearance of ice, this deposit left a large steep-sided hill, subsequently eroded in the west by rainfall or ice into a shallow smooth-sided cwm at about 185 feet, now The Devisdale. The two valley-sides which resulted would give the impression of a bow-shaped feature. Devisdale was important in the past for the development of rabbit warrens and now as open space, and the site of school buildings, sports areas, and some houses (*Plate 5*).

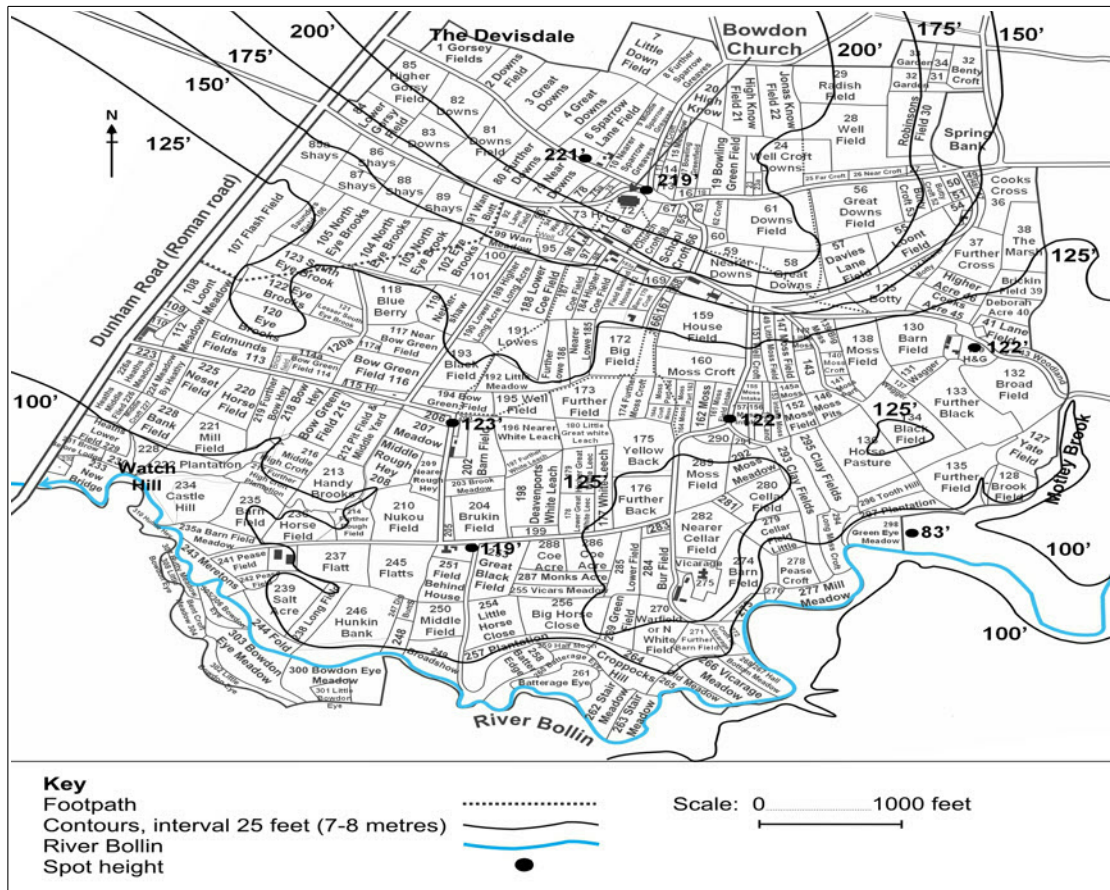
Gullies

From Bowdon Church, two small gullies run down, one from each side of the church southwards towards the river Bollin. One is now known as Church Brow and the other Richmond Road. This type of gully which probably carried large quantities of water in immediate post-glacial times appears in other places along higher parts of the Bollin valley. Other rivers in the past were short but strong streams cut into the soft sands and gravels of the ridge and tilted plateau sides. They created gullies and river terraces as the river began to erode the landscape in three stages down to the present level. The southern part of the tilted plateau has a steep drop at its top and descends in a series of narrow platforms to the Bollin, each ledge characterised by narrow grazing fields or meadows. This stepped slope is an 'adret' or sun-facing feature, named from southerly aspects in the Alps. It makes very important potential growing, grazing and flat terraces down to the lowest terrace at its base about 15 feet above the course of the river. Across the Bollin, the slopes climbing southwards away from the river in Ashley, form a more gradual, shaded-side feature, or 'ubac' as it is named in the Alps.

The location of the church

Higham points out (p164) that Bowdon Church, the focus of the village, was one of many churches occupying ridge-top sites in Cheshire, a focus for penitents with a spire or tower aimed upwards for spiritual contact. It was early enough to be recognised as a minster with a huge parish of twelve townships. Around the church, the fields are much smaller than elsewhere, accommodating small-scale activity in the village area. From the church the land slopes southwards in a series of lower levels from about 220 feet asl down to 70 feet asl until the plateau overlooks the river Bollin by a terrace and a series of low cliffs (see *Map 5*).

The relief of Bowdon



Map 5. Relief of Bowdon township.

The flat surface at 125 feet asl (above sea level) is Terrace 3, once at river level, a former high flat land area on which the church and village stand. Downhill there is a steep drop from the church southwards, shown by the cluster of contours. The land is then fairly level at about 100 feet asl, i.e. Terrace 2, another former flat river level or terrace. Parts of this terrace are creeping away from the higher part, the western lobe resembling a stream of detritus flowing downhill. Terrace 1 is at 75 feet, once river level but now approximately 15 feet above the river. The present river level is at about 60 feet asl. Vicarage Meadow (bottom right) is where a meander of the present river course is eroding Terrace 1 and leaving a steep edge to the terrace at Cellar Field.

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Donald Gordon Bayliss (1924-2017)

Don was born in Fallowfield, Manchester. He gained a BA and an MA at Manchester University, and a PhD at Leeds University. His teaching career started at Bedstone College, Shropshire, after which he became a lecturer in Geography at Carnegie College (now Leeds Beckett University). He moved to Hale, Altrincham and became Head of Geography at John Dalton College (now Manchester Metropolitan University).

Don served with the Royal Navy on a mine sweeper during World War II, ending up in the Far East. He was very proud of his medals and always attended Remembrance Day services.



On retiring, Don and his wife, Hilda, took a keen interest in the town's history and development. He founded Altrincham History Society in 1989 and was the society's first chairman, holding that office for 27 years, later becoming president. His greatest legacies are his books on local history. He published a dozen books including *Altrincham a History*, *Altrincham in 1841*, *Buildings of Central Altrincham in the Year 2000*, *Historical Atlas of Trafford*, *A Town in Crisis: Altrincham in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, *Dunham Massey Cheshire a History*, and *The Changing Landscape of Bowdon, Cheshire*. He also wrote many articles for the Altrincham History Society journal.

Don was also Vice-President and former Chairman of Altrincham & Bowdon Civic Society, and a member of the South Trafford Archaeological Group. He was involved in the development of the town making an outstanding contribution to the well being and advancement of Altrincham in his work for the Civic Society and other organisations.

Don and Hilda were keen sailors and over the years had two canal boats. Later their wooden 18-ton Plymouth Hooker was moored at Port Penrhyn, Bangor and had taken over 10 years to restore by Don, a talented carpenter. At one time they also had a fibreglass yacht which they kept for a few years in southern France. He was also a skilled model maker and railway enthusiast.

A talented musician, Don was a violinist and played in two quartets, originally with Hilda playing the piano. He also played in local orchestras, was an occasional painter in oils and enjoyed poetry.

Don and Hilda were awarded a joint Honour by the British Association for Local History for their work in Local History at their annual Local History Day in London in June 2007 (photo above). Don Bayliss died on 26 April 2017 aged 92. *The Changing Landscape of Bowdon, Cheshire* was his last book.

David Miller June 2017

The Changing Landscape of Bowdon, Cheshire

This is the story of a north Cheshire village near Manchester from earliest times, its position in the landscape, invaders who changed it, and national influences in its growth. Romans, Welsh, Anglo-Saxons and Normans all played a part in its development.

Bowdon, now a small corner of Trafford and part of the Greater Manchester conurbation, had a multiple open field system, an unusual landscape feature. How this came about is a major theme of the book, of interest to local people and to students of geography, geology, archaeology and history.

The book is well-illustrated by maps, photographs, reconstructed former landscapes, and historical records, and will be of interest to professionals and general readers of the Bowdon landscape.



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