

SNATCHFIELD, CHURCH STRETTON

An overview of the historic landscape



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SNATCHFIELD IN THE LANDSCAPE OF MEDIEVAL CHURCH STRETTON

Setting

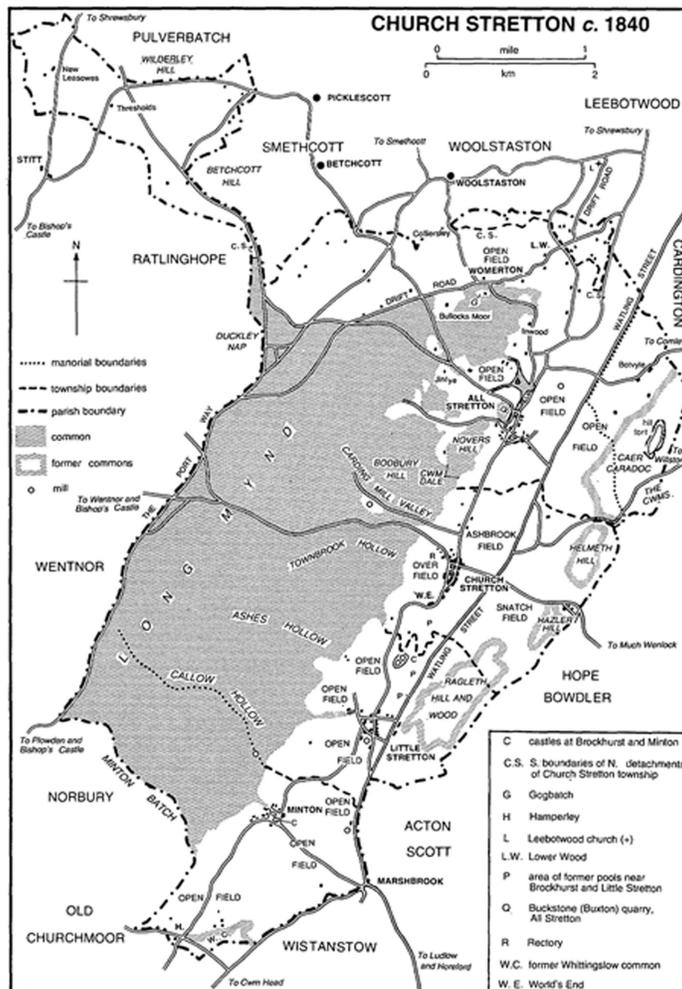
In the Middle Ages Church Stretton comprised a small, predominantly agricultural settlement.

Church Stretton was surrounded by its three large open fields (Ashbrook, **Snatchfield** and the Overfield). These were divided up into strips which were cultivated by the local people for growing crops. The strips were rotated to maintain soil fertility.

There were also hay meadows around the settlement and extensive common hill grazing pastures on the Long Mynd and the unwooded slopes of the Stretton Hills.

Woodland was managed by coppicing to ensure a continuous supply of small fuelwood and raw materials.

Around Brockhurst lay an expanse of wetland and marsh, some of which was incorporated into the fishponds for Brockhurst castle. There were watermills located on the brooks that run through the valley.

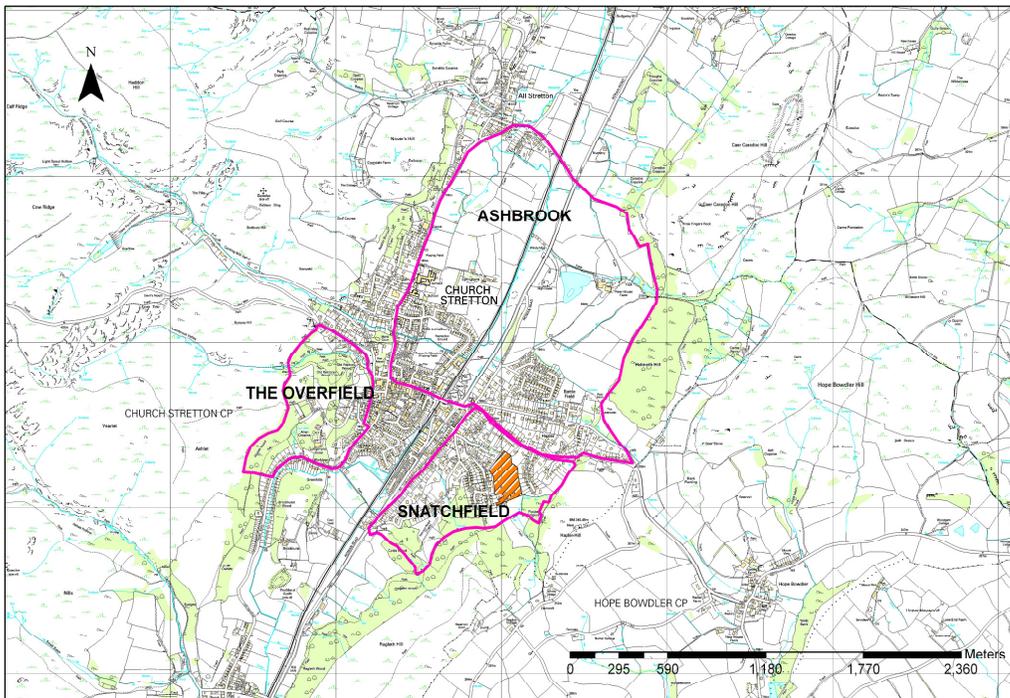


Historical value

The open fields were probably disappearing in the early 17th century through piecemeal enclosure. Of the three former open fields, **Snatchfield** (albeit a fragment of its former extent) is **the only one of the former open fields that still possesses historical integrity as a relict open field**. Despite some recent development on three sides of the proposed development site CST021, Snatchfield is still the most complete of Church Stretton's open fields.

Ashbrook is now completely built over; **the Overfield** became a rabbit warren and deer park under Bonham Norton (who acquired the manor in the 17th century) and was subsequently incorporated into the Rev John Mainwaring's designed landscape attached to his Rectory and latterly became plantation woodland whilst in the ownership of the Rev. Robert Norgrave Pemberton in the 19th century. **The Overfield** survives today in Rectory Field, an amenity enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. Only **Snatchfield** still possesses some of the characteristics of historic agricultural land.

In its medieval form, Snatchfield covered 55.47ha (134.6 acres), extending westwards from the wooded slopes below Hazler Hill to the line of Watling Street in the Church Stretton valley below.



Recent agricultural operations have removed visible features such as relict ridge and furrow from the area proposed for development but these are clearly visible elsewhere, particularly upslope towards the woodland edge where lynchet banks and terraces can be seen. Aerial photographs do not reveal any notable archaeological features but the 1m digital terrain (DTM) LiDAR imagery shown below shows a linear feature which may be an old track way following an east-west trajectory. In the field situation this takes the form of a wet ditch. The age of this feature is unknown but it is likely to be post medieval or earlier and as such

appears to be an old route from the town into the Stretton hills and towards Hope Bowdler. The present day Snatchfields Lane which joins the Bridleways at the foot of the slope, has appearance of being a hollow way of great antiquity, whose original role was to provide access to Snatchfield open field when it was farmed by the community.

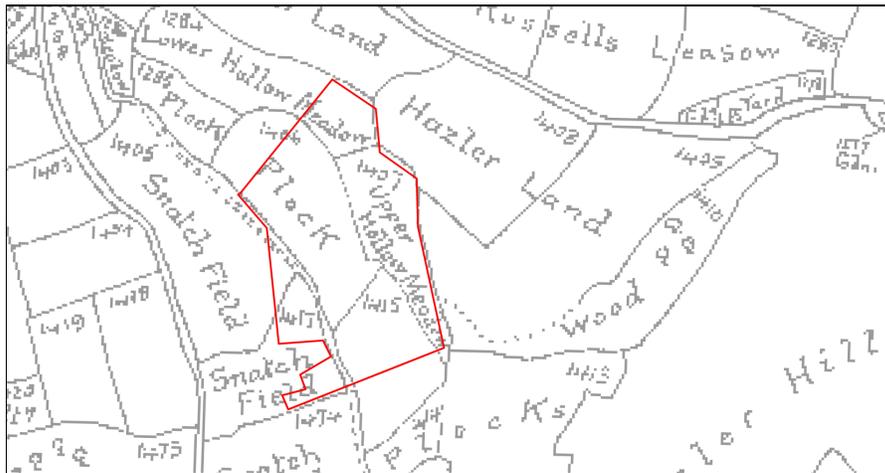


The LiDAR DTM image shows a linear depression that may be of some antiquity



In the field this takes the form of a wet ditch

The 1838/1840 Field Name map



This map reveals the names of a number of parcels that formed Snatchfield in the 19th century. It can be seen on the map bearing an overlay of the CST 021 image that the main portion of the area proposed for development was named Plock (1406). The area to the south of Snatchfields Lane which includes Snatchfields Farm of which some is the site of Chelmick Drive bore the name Snatchfield.

The place-names are interesting in that the toponym 'Plock' is here describing small fields rather than a person's name, and 'Snatchfield' is intriguing in that it suggests some sort of illegal land acquisition which occurred in antiquity.

An extract from the Church Stretton Field Name map with the proposed development site overlaid in red is provided in the map above.

The Tithe Apportionment of 1838 indicates that Snatchfield was comprised of three compartments, each having different tenants, although there were two principal owners.

The apportionment data is given thus:

No/Name	Acres-Rods-perches	Acres (ha)	Owner	Tenant
1405 Snatchfield	6-0-11	6.07 (2.46)	Mrs Coleman	John Phillips
1406 Plock	4-1-11	4.32 (1.75)	Rev Pemberton	John Belton
1417 Snatchfield	2-3-32	2.95 (1.2)	Mrs Coleman	John Phillips

Sources consulted

As a primary background to this study the writer has consulted the *Victoria County History Volume X: Wenlock, Upper Corvedale and the Stretton Hills* (1998).

Use has also been made of the Field Name Map for Church Stretton (taken from the 1838 Tithe Map and Apportionment), the Ordnance Survey First Edition 6 inch and 25 inch maps, aerial photographs, LiDAR imagery and the Shropshire Historic Environment Record (HER). Apart from the HER which did not reveal any archaeological finds from the location, the maps, aerial imagery and particularly the 1m LiDAR imagery usefully show the landscape

evolution of Snatchfield over two or more centuries. The writer has used map regression facilitated by ArcGIS software to inform the conclusions presented here.

Interestingly the linear depression revealed by the LiDAR imagery is in alignment with (and can be seen to extend from) the present day residential road The Bridleways. That this feature may have been a hollow way in antiquity is perhaps indicated by the names of two fields that abut it on its northern margin called Lower and Upper Hollow Meadow respectively which might indicate that this feature was an extant hollow way in 1838 when the Church Stretton Tithe Map was drawn.

Conclusion

On landscape history grounds there is a good case for opposing this development proposal for Snatchfield represents the last relatively intact area of Church Stretton's three open fields. As thus Snatchfield provides a direct link with the historic development of the early medieval settlement of Church Stretton and is an educational resource in its own right. This link could usefully be explained by some discreet interpretation for people walking on the Jack Mytton Way and local residents alike.