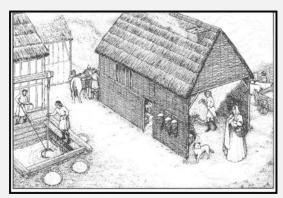
Medieval

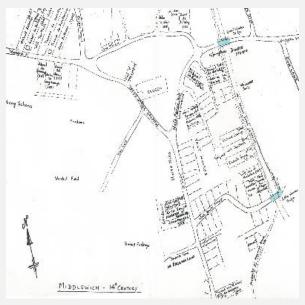
Throughout the Prehistoric, Roman and Dark Ages, Middlewich was an important producer of salt. In the 7th century, Cheshire had fallen to the emerging English Kingdom of Mercia. The newcomers developed their own settlements away from the heart of the onetime Roman town, in Kinderton to the east, and in Newton on the other side of the river Croco, equally blessed by the presence of brine-springs.

Domesday survey of 1086 shows Middlewich salt production divided one-third to the Earl of Chester and two-thirds to King William I.



Reconstruction of a Medieval Wych House. © Cheshire County Council

13th Century Middlewich had around 100 6-lead pan wych houses on both sides of river Croco. The "walling" land existed as an enclave between settlements of Newton & Kinderton.



Map of the east side of the river Croco in the 14th Century, put together from documents by Allan Earl ©. The salt-making areas were confined as industrial estates, with workers probably coming in from the adjacent manors.

There were six named brine pits, including the longest running the 'Great Seath'. Salt working was controlled by local regulations, production had limited seasons to maintain value.

Salt makers made 16 boiling's of brine each week between the feasts of St Martin (Nov 11th) and the ascension (40th day after Easter). Brine pits could only supply enough brine for 36 salt houses at a time over several weeks, due to the replenishment rate of saturated brine. Sources tells us about a brisk sale of salt in autumn at slaughter time for animals. An extraordinary week's boiling is the right of 82 hours 'the walling of the whole town' sales could be 50 shillings; proceeds went to the upkeep of the town.

This medieval system collapsed for a few reasons: the rise of unlimited salt working in the late 17th century, the changes in fuel sources and materials paving the way for bigger 'Town Works' and the limitation of Middlewich being an inland salt industry.