

## Part 3: Town Context





### 3.1 The Setting of the Town

No town exists in isolation. All towns are shaped and influenced by their surrounding landscape. Topography and geology have a profound influence on the way a town develops; constraining development, shaping communication routes, and providing raw materials for building and other economic activity, amongst other things. In order to understand the character of a town, its surrounding landscape and natural context need to be understood. This section of the report briefly sets out the wider context of the town and the landscape character of its hinterland.

### 3.2 Topography

Swanage lies at the end of the wide central Purbeck Vale where it meets the sea (Figure 3). The topography of the area trends E-W and to the north of the town is the prominent chalk ridge which ends in Ballard Down and Old

Harry Rocks to the east with flat sandy heathland beyond to the north. To the south lies the broad limestone uplands of the Purbeck plateau, which end in the promontories of Durlston Head and Peveril Point.

The central part of the town lies in the clay vale which is fairly flat and low-lying to the south along the line of the stream or brook that drains it, but rises up in a series of irregular ridges and hummocks to the north towards Ballard Down and which form a number of locally prominent high points. To the south, the ground rises up regularly to the south, forming a steep north-facing slope to the southern part of the town, Swanage Bay is a wide curving bay with a sandy beach between prominent headlands of Ballard Point and Peveril Point to the north and south.

The topography has had a major influence on

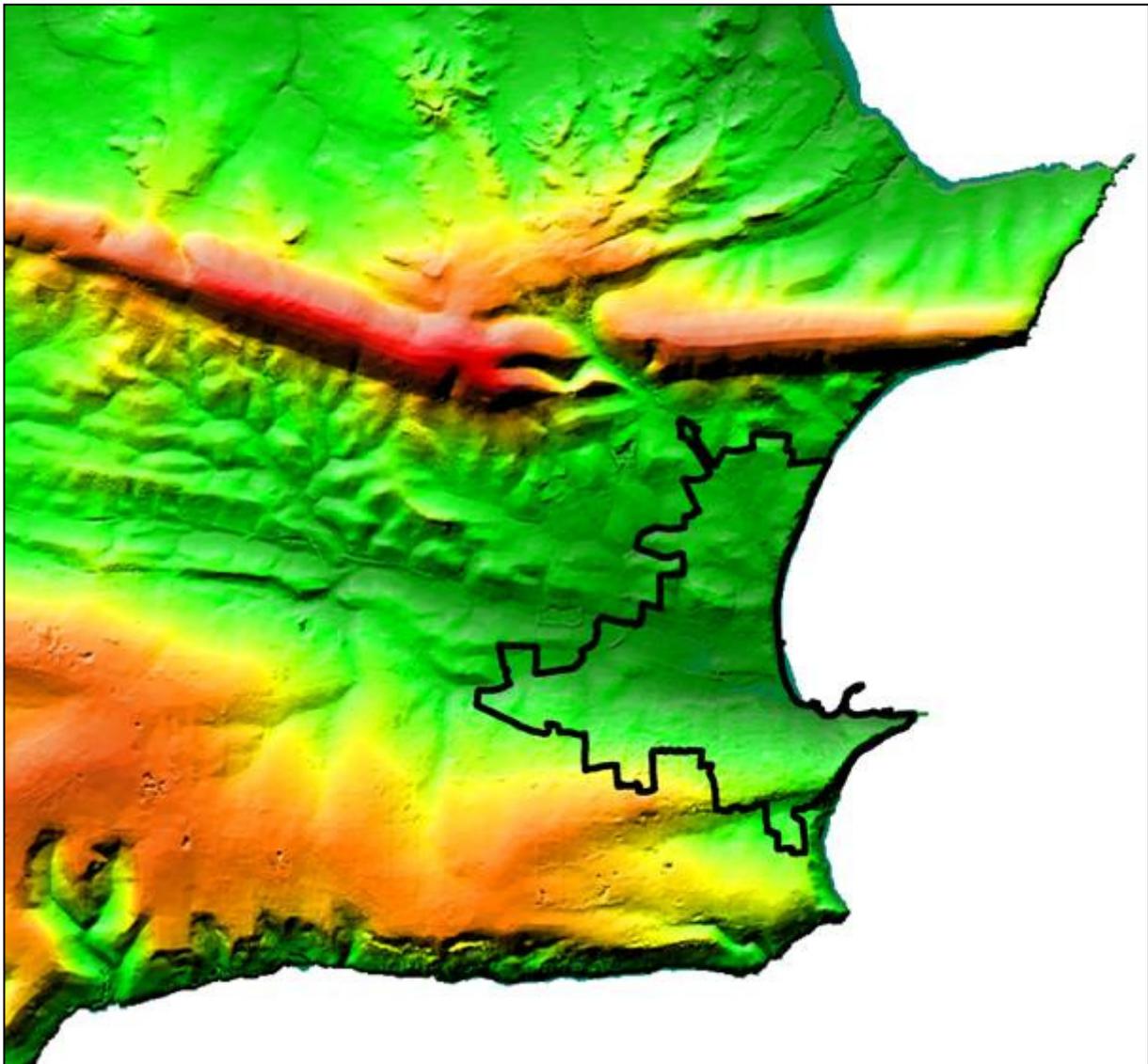


Figure 3: Swanage's topographic setting

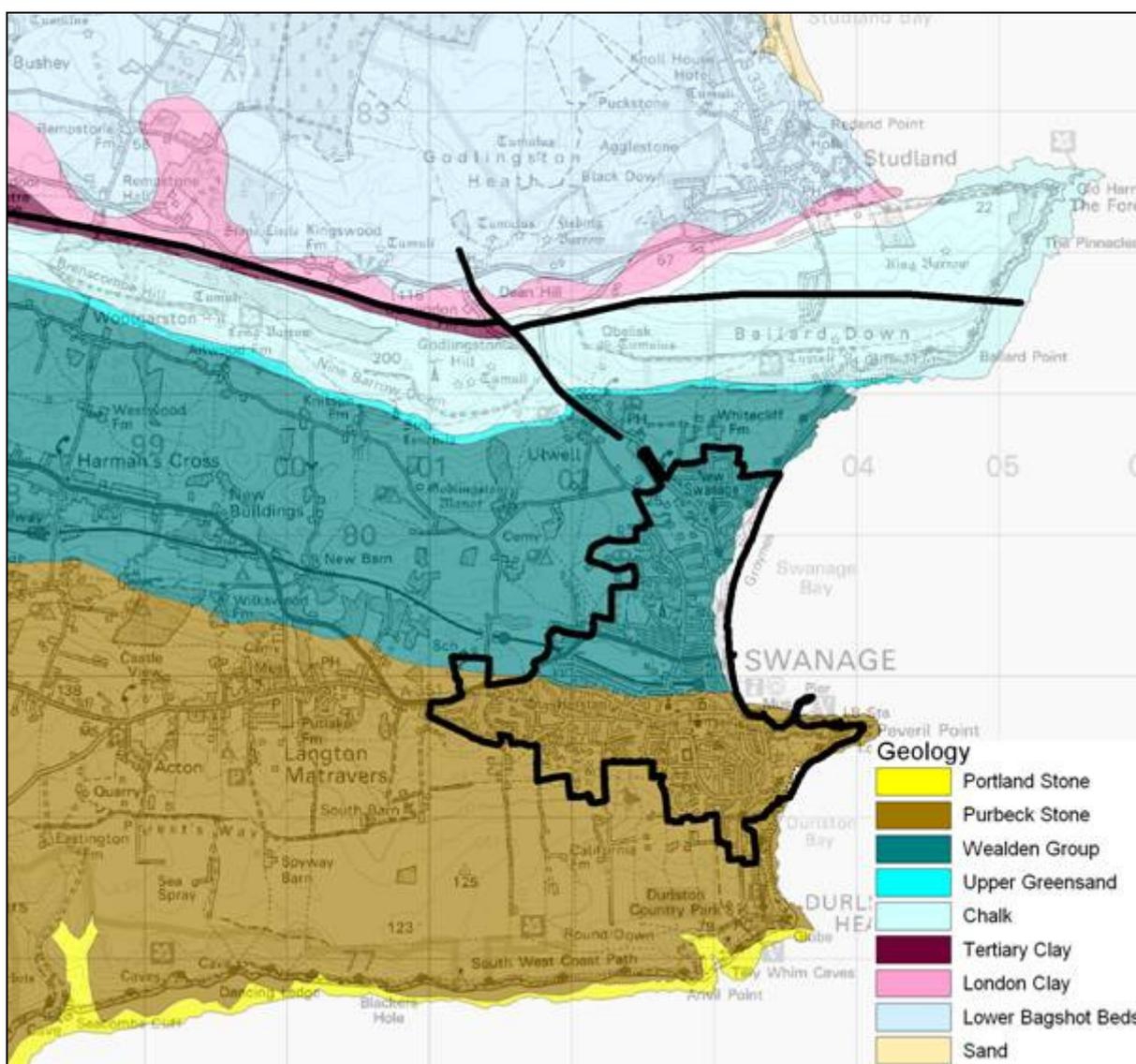


Figure 4: Geology of the Swanage Area.

the communication links of the town, with the main historical routes running E-W along the limestone plateau avoiding the poorly drained clay vale and the oldest parts of the town situated on the edge of the limestone slopes just above the clay land. The wide bay provides a sheltered anchorage from the prevailing winds, but the seas around Peveril Point and Durlston Head can be treacherous.

### 3.3 Geology

The geology of this area trends E-W. The southern part of Swanage lies on Middle Purbeck limestones with a narrow band of the Upper Purbeck formation along its northern edge and the northern part of the town lies on the sands and clays of Lower Cretaceous Wealden Group (Figure 4). There is an area of alluvium at the base of the Purbeck vale on the southern end of the Wealden Group geology. To the north of the town is a narrow band of Green-

sand and the Chalk ridge of Ballard Down.

### 3.4 Landscape Character

Swanage lies within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), recognised as a nationally important landscape. This area has been the subject of several landscape character assessments, which help place the town into its wider surroundings.

In the national assessment of countryside character, Swanage lies within National Character Area 136 *South Purbeck* (Countryside Agency 1999).

The key characteristics of National Character Area 136 are listed as:

- An exceptionally diverse landscape with sharp contrasts within a small area; strongly influenced by its underlying chalk, limestone, shale and clay rocks.

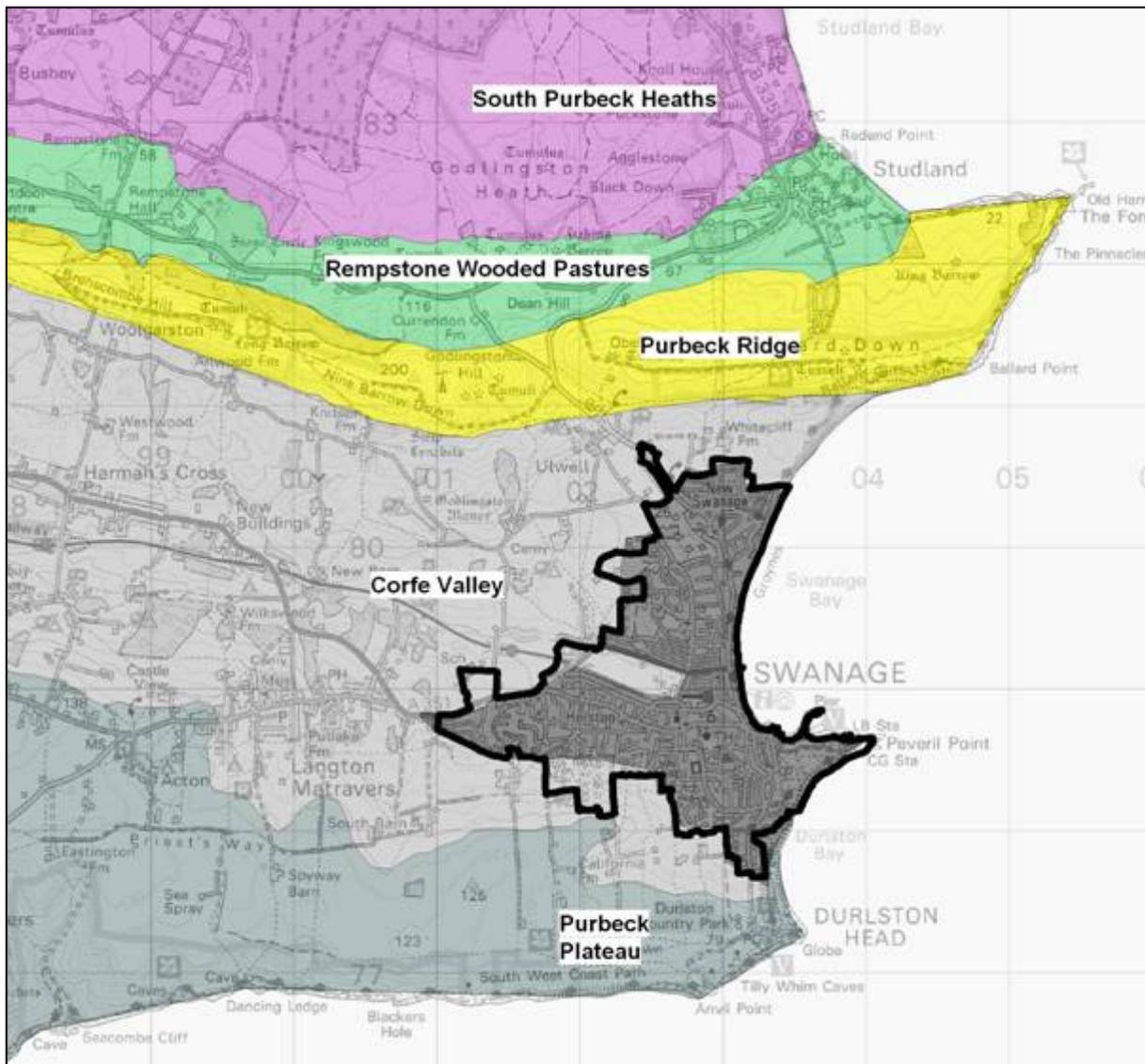


Figure 5: Swanage in its landscape character setting (Dorset AONB Landscape Characterisation).

- High historical interest, including early settlements, medieval industrial sites and dramatically-sited Corfe Castle.
- Outstanding and diverse coastline encompassing Chalk, limestone and shale cliffs and sheltered bays.
- Open, windswept Chalk ridge and limestone plateau.
- Sheltered central valley and steep-sided minor valleys.
- Abrupt transition to heathland to the north.

Swanage is included in the Landscape Character Assessment of the Dorset AONB (Dorset AONB 2008). Swanage lies at the east end of the Corfe Valley Character Area, part of the Clay Valley Landscape Type. To the north is the Purbeck Ridge Character area and to the south the Purbeck Plateau Character Area (Figure 5).

The key characteristics of the Corfe Valley area are:

- Sweeping and secluded clay valley enclosed by the dramatic chalk escarpment to the north and undulating limestone ridge to the south.
- Continuous patchwork of small regular intimate pastures with dense hedgerows and small broadleaved woodlands of oak and hazel.
- Small scattered nucleated villages and farmsteads of limestone on the valley floor with adjacent paddocks and piecemeal enclosures and dense small broadleaved woodlands.
- Occasional springs, flushes and wet woodlands on the valley floor with damp rush pasture and meadows.
- Dramatic views of the coast towards the

west and east.

- Network of stone walls towards the Purbeck Plateau.
- Winding rural lanes with dense hedgerows and hedge banks.

The draft Historic Landscape Character mapping shows the landscape to the south of Swanage dominated by planned enclosures and the area to the north is mainly piecemeal enclosures with some areas of planned enclosure and other regular enclosures.

### 3.5 The Present Town

The modern built-up area of Swanage lies completely within the parish of Swanage and covers an area of about 333 ha. It lies at the end of the A351, at the east end of the Isle of Purbeck. The Swanage steam railway has recently been connected to the national rail network at Wareham. There is access to Poole via the Sandbanks ferry. The population is 10,180 (2005 mid-year estimate), making it the largest town in Purbeck and the eighth largest historic town in Dorset. The population grew by about 10% in the 1980s and by about 6% in the 1990s, largely the result of net inward migration. The population contains a higher proportion of older people compared to the county average – almost 34% are aged 60 or over. The 2001 Census records 5304 dwellings in Swanage and a further 224 have been built since 2001, giving a total of 5528. There are three first schools and one middle school.

The retail sector comprises 119 shops/107,000 sq ft (2005). These are mainly local shops, with some national chains and the catchment area for shopping extends about a five miles to the northwest and towards Wareham.

There is one industrial estate in the town, the Old Gas works Industrial Estate (2.52ha). The most significant employers are in the Distribution, Hotels and Restaurants sector, employing about 35% of the workforce and the Public Administration, Education and Health sector employing about 33%. The major employers are Dorset County Council, Dorset Healthcare NHS Trust, Ibstock Bricks Ltd and Wire Fittings Ltd.

The data used in this section have been obtained from Dorset County Council's *The Dorset Data Book 2008* (April 2008).

## Part 4: Sources





## 4.1 Previous research

The earliest written account of the history of Swanage is that by John Hutchins in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Hutchins 1774) and considerably expanded in the subsequent editions (Hutchins 1796 and 1861). It provided the first attempt to unravel the evidence for the location and development of the Saxon and medieval manors in Swanage. It also provides some interesting information on the social history and on the industry and craft activities in the town.

William Masters Hardy was a local builder and worthy of the town, who played a significant part in the life of the town in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. He produced an anecdotal history of the town and the surrounding area (Hardy 1908), which contains myriad snippets of information about the archaeology and history of Swanage, many of which would probably otherwise now be lost.

Another source of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier history of Swanage are the later 19<sup>th</sup> century tourist guides to the town, in particular, Brannon (1858), Panton (1885) and Braye's remarkable treatise of 1890.

The best and most comprehensive history of Swanage is that by David Lewer and Denis Smale (1994). This well researched and profusely illustrated history is the major source used for the historical background of this report. David Lewer has also written on other specific aspects of Swanage, particularly on the architectural pieces salvaged from London by John Mowlem and George Burt (Lewer and Calkin 1971). He has also edited John Mowlem's Swanage Diary, which contains many incidental details of Swanage (Lewer 1990). Two well-researched studies by Margaret Emms on education in Swanage and on the Local Board of Health have also been very useful in collating this report. (Emms 1985; 1991).

There have been other local histories and research on specific aspects of Swanage produced in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These include some general books on Swanage (Legg 1983, 1995, 2001), books on specific aspects of the town, such as the piers (Popplewell 1988) or the Second World War (Chackfield 1993) and books of historic photographs (Haysom and Bragg 1991; Legg 2004). There have been few more scholarly studies of Swanage and Purbeck, but among them are a study of the medieval economy of Purbeck (Hinton 2002) and the place-name evidence (Mills 1977).

## 4.2 Historic Maps

There are a number of early maps for the Swanage area. The earliest map showing any useful detail is the 1596 Treswell map. The 1772 map and survey by Samuel Donne (DHC RWR: E16-E17) shows only part of the survey area, but contains some interesting details, particularly of the fort at Peveril Point. The first map which shows some detail of the whole survey area at Swanage is the 1765 map by Isaac Taylor, which together with the 1st Edition one-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1811 is very useful for seeing the settlement prior to the first attempts to develop Swanage as a resort. The 1840 Swanage Tithe Map (DHC T/SW) contains invaluable detail of the settlement, ownership and land use at the beginning of the development of the town of Swanage. The later 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century town is shown in some detail on the series of 1:2500 scale Ordnance Survey maps dating from 1889 onwards. The historic characterisation was largely based on the Tithe Map and these OS maps.

A number of other maps and plans of parts of Swanage, in particular the lands that were formerly part of the lands of the Ilminster Free School and the De Moulham Estate, dating from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries survive within the Mowlem archives at the Dorset History Centre (DHC D/MOW).

## 4.3 Documentary Evidence

A range of documentary evidence survives for Swanage. There is some patchy survival of manorial documents for Carrant's Court manor (1556-1665), De Moleham manor (1448 onwards) and Eight Holes manor (1721-1841) collected by John Mowlem. A number of other documents also survive from the John Mowlem Estate dating from 1806-1898 (DHC D/MOW). The Encombe Estate archives (DHC D/SEN) contain a number of deeds and sale catalogues from Swanage. The Swanage Parish records date from 1563 onwards and include the Swanage Poor Book (1752-80) and extensive Vestry minutes and local Board of Health minutes.

## 4.4 Archaeological Evidence

There has been a relatively small amount of archaeological investigation in Swanage, which has produced a small body of archaeological evidence (Appendix 3). The majority of archaeological discoveries date to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and most were not accurately located or systematically recorded and none were properly published. Evidence from these earlier sites and findspots is frustratingly limited, giving hints of earlier activity, but lack-

ing much detail which would enable the results to be interpreted in a meaningful fashion.

There was no active local antiquarian undertaking fieldwork or recording discoveries, though W M Hardy reports a number of archaeological discoveries in his history of Swanage (Hardy 1908). J B Calkin excavated part of a Late Iron Age and Roman settlement discovered in the Herston quarries in the 1930s and also recorded a number of discoveries in the area (Calkin 1948).

There has been relatively little modern archaeological fieldwork in the town. This has been mainly fairly small watching briefs, with only one larger evaluation and excavation. The four watching briefs (Appendix 3, nos 2-3, 7-8) recorded no significant archaeological finds or features. The evaluation and excavation of land adjacent to Bell Street in advance of housing development revealed elements of Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age and Roman activity and the remains of medieval fields (Smith 1996; SAS 1997).

## 4.5 Historic Buildings

Swanage has a diverse range of historic buildings reflecting its evolution from village to seaside resort. There are very few pre-18<sup>th</sup> century buildings. Newton Manor is the most significant, including work from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, though the main block is 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Old Vicarage is mid 17<sup>th</sup> century enlarged in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Only the 14<sup>th</sup> century tower survives from the 19<sup>th</sup> century rebuilding of St Mary's Church.

There is a good group of 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century Purbeck stone cottages in Herston and next to the church, survivals from the earlier quarrying and farming settlements. A small, but significant, group of early 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgian buildings including the Royal Victoria Hotel, Marine Villas, Seymer Place and Belvedere, representing the various elements of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century watering place.

The most distinctive buildings in Swanage date to the later 19<sup>th</sup> century and are associated with George Burt and are distinguished by their reuse of architectural fragments salvaged from buildings in London. The most important are the Town Hall and Purbeck House. There are also a large number of Victorian and Edwardian houses, many of which were probably built as guest houses, often distinguished by their large stacked bay windows, particularly on the slopes to the south of the High Street and in New Swanage to the north of the town.

Swanage has a large number of inter-war sub-

urban houses, many of which may have been used as guest houses. There are also a relatively large number of post-war and modern housing estates.

A small number of industrial buildings survive in the town, including George Burt's water works and water tower, the station buildings and fragments of the gas works.