5.2 Early Nineteenth Century Swanage (1800-1850)

5.2.1 Historical Summary

The first half of the 19th century saw the beginnings of Swanage as a watering-place and the start of its transformation from a small quarrying and fishing village to a resort town. The vision for this transformation belonged to William Morton Pitt of Kingston Maurward and MP for Dorset. The impetus was the Chancery Sale in 1823 of the extensive estates formerly belonging to the Rev John Chapman, Rector of Silton, which included large parts of Swanage. The principal purchasers were Samuel Beaton a wealthy farmer who bought the Carrant's Court estate, Freeland Filliter a Wareham lawyer, who bought Sentry and William Morton Pitt, who acquired the Mansion and Peveril and later also acquired the Whitecliff estate.

Pitt's first operation was to convert the Mansion house into a first-class hotel, the Manor House Hotel, and to clear away the old White Hall farm buildings. He subsequently built the Rookery, which was used as a customs-house, shop and library and Marine Villas, which were originally built as baths, but soon became Pitt's own residence in Swanage. Other works he instigated included the construction of a private pier or quay next to the hotel, a Watch and Preventative Station near Peveril Point, a new road to Peveril Point, and a new shore road to Battle Mead. He also planted many trees on the hill south of the hotel. His plans for Swanage included the construction of a new road to Corfe Castle and a series of crescents on the slopes behind the hotel, but these were not realised. The last enterprise undertaken by Pitt in 1830 was to build a number of large houses for rent in Seymer Road, under the tontine principle where the finance was raised by the issuing of shares and by subscription. Unfortunately, Pitt was declared bankrupt in 1835 and he died in 1836. His estates were sold by Chancery in 1838.

Pitt's improvements to Swanage were successful in attracting some well-heeled visitors to the Manor House Hotel, the most prestigious being Princess Victoria who stayed in 1833 and prompted a change of name to the Royal Victoria Hotel. The pier attracted increasing numbers of steam-boats and a number of gentlemen's yachts.

Swanage still remained economically dependent on fishing, quarrying and the stone trade. This trade underwent a decline in the early 19th century following the cessation of the Napoleonic wars, wages were low and a number of quarries were closed. Nevertheless, the stone trade continued and there were a number of very prosperous stone merchants in the town during the early 19th century, but many of the inhabitants working in the quarries were very poor. Pitt had tried to establish a herring fishery with smokery and curing houses, but it was not a success and the buildings were converted to a brewery. Straw-plait manufacture was introduced in the early 19th century, largely through the encouragement of the rector of Swanage Dr Andrew Bell. It became a widespread employment for women in Swanage and lead to the extinction of the earlier knitting industry as it was more profitable. Some flax spinning was also undertaken in the town.

The population of Swanage increased from 1382 inhabitants in 1801 to 2104 in 1851. The market formerly held on Thursdays and Fridays was discontinued by the 19th century.

There were two nonconformist chapels in Swanage in the early 19th century, both on the High Street. The Wesleyan Methodist Chapel was built in 1805. The Independent Chapel, built in 1705 as a Presbyterian meeting-house, was replaced by a new Congregational chapel

Figure 11: Former Royal Victoria Hotel.
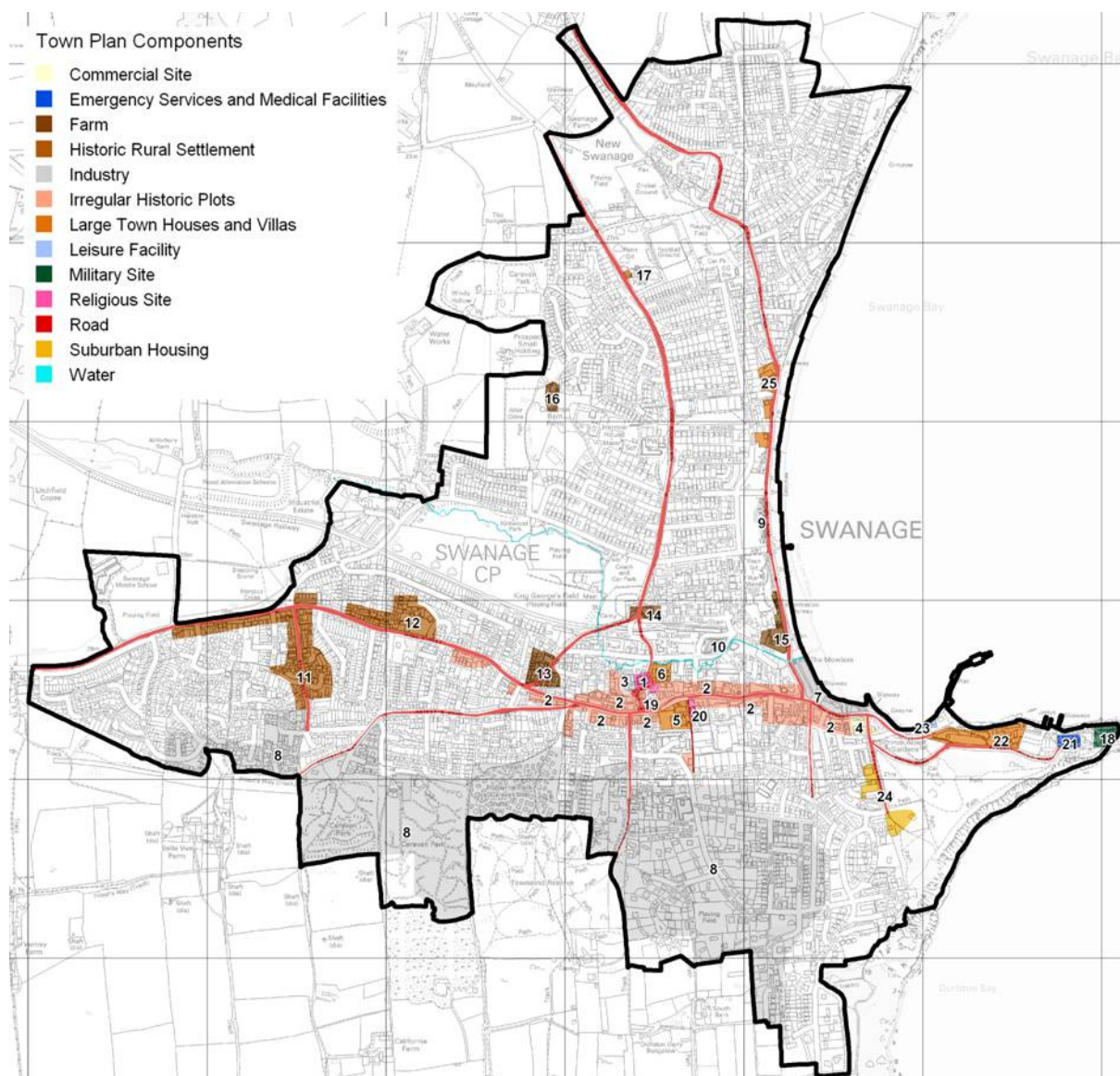

Figure 12: Marine Villas.

Figure 13: Early 19th century Plan components

on the same site in 1835.

The early 19th century saw the development of education in Swanage. In 1801, Dr Andrew Bell became Rector of Swanage and instigated his 'Madras System' of education in Swanage, where brighter pupils were used as 'monitors' to teach smaller groups of pupils. Bell reorganised the Sunday schools according to these principles. He also encouraged the setting up of an 'industrial school' where straw-plaiting skills were taught along with the rudiments of education. In 1807 there were three Sunday Schools and thirteen day schools in the parish (Emms 1991). A British School was founded in the town in 1832. Its location is not known but may have been held in the Congregational Chapel. A National School was built in the High Street near the junction with Queens Road in 1835 (Emms 1991).

5.2.2 Town Layout

The focus of the town was in the area between the church and the shore along the High Street. Development was concentrated along the line of High Street between the junction with Priest's Way and the coast, stimulated by the stone traffic from the quarries to the bankers along the shore. The 1844 Tithe Map shows almost continuous development along both sides of the High Street.

The street layout developed from that of the 18th century settlement with new roads along the shore to Battle Mead and to Peveril Point, reflecting the shift of focus of the town towards the sea. The main road to Studland remained along Court Road and Northbrook Road. The paths and lanes to the south of the town continued to provide access to the quarries, but they also saw the beginnings of housing development along them, most notably Seymer Road.

Herston comprised a fairly dispersed settlement of mainly small cottages along Bell Street and along the road to Langton Matravers.

5.2.3 Early 19th Century Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the early post-medieval town are shown on Figure 13 and are listed below.

1. Church. There was little change to the church during this period. A new detached cemetery immediately across the road was consecrated in 1826.

2. Historic Plots, High Street. High Street was lined on both sides by cottages and houses and a few shops. It included a number of late medieval houses and shops, together with some 18th and early 19th century houses. There was probably a significant amount of building along the frontages during this period, though precise details are not known, but the settlement pattern is clearly shown on the 1844 Tithe Map. There does not appear to be any deliberate planning of the properties, but the housing plots are fitted within earlier linear field boundaries and lanes.

3. Mill. There is little change in the mill and mill pond in this period.

4. Manor House Hotel. The Great House or Mansion House was purchased by William Morton Pitt in 1823 and converted into a hotel, the Manor House Hotel. It was renamed the Royal Victoria Hotel after Princess Victoria stayed there in 1833. The hotel was closed in 1835 following Pitt's bankruptcy but was re-opened in 1838 and was purchased by the architect Daniel Alexander in 1842.

5. Magnolia House. There appears to have been little change to the house during this period. It was sold as Lot III in the Chancery sale of 1823.

6. Vicarage. The house was enlarged in the early 19th century.

7. Bankers. The area along the foreshore south of the mouth of the brook was still used in this period to store stone in 'bankers' prior to being shipped out. A stone pier was built by William Morton Pitt at the east end of the 'bankers' as a private quay, not for use by the stone trade.

8. Quarries. The area of quarries in the study area was reduced and the area of quarrying moved away from the town as development started to expand southwards.

9. Sandpit. The sandpit immediately behind Swanage beach may still have been in use at this period. It is marked on the 1844 Tithe Map.

10. Brewery. At the beginning of the 19th century the old herring house was converted into a brewery by Mr Storey (Hardy 1910, 248). The brewery was purchased by Henry Gillingham in 1804 and subsequently was sold to Lord Eldon in 1849.

11. Herston. Herston was largely occupied by quarry workers and was a fairly poor community. It consisted of a relatively dispersed settlement of cottages along Bell Street and along the road to Langton Matravers.

12. Newton. The Cockram family of Newton Manor died out in 1830. It is unclear whether there were any changes to the buildings during this period. Herston House was bought by John Mowlem in 1849.

13. Carrant's Court. There does not appear to have been any significant change to Carrant's Court during this period.

14. Northbrook Farm. It comprised the farmhouse and farm buildings east of Northbrook Road and cottages and outbuildings on the east side of the road. There does not appear to have been any significant change to Northbrook Farm during this period.

15. Eastbrook Farm. There does not appear to have been any significant change to Eastbrook Farm during this period.

Figure 14: Tontine Houses on Seymer Road .

Figure 15: Congregational Chapel, built 1837.

16. *Cauldron Barn Farm.* The barn was a favourite hiding-place of smugglers. It is unclear whether there were any major changes during this period.

17. *New House*. The house is marked on the 1844 Tithe Map.

18. *Peveril Point Battery.* A report by William Morton Pitt on the coast of Dorset in 1798 described Peveril Point as "a regular Battery of seven Nine-Pounders […] with a Watch-House and Magazine, but there is no Gunner there, nor ammunition" (quoted by Lewer and Smale 1994, 60). A timber semi-circular battery was built in about 1840 to replace the earlier battery (Hardy 1908, 35).

19. *Congregational Chapel.* The early 18th century Presbyterian meeting house was replaced by a new Congregational chapel designed by George Gollop in 1837 (Stell 1991).

20. *Methodist Chapel.* A chapel was built on the south side of the High Street in 1807. It was enlarged in 1842.

21. *Watch and Preventative Station.* William Morton Pitt built a series of buildings for the Preventative or Coastguard Service at Peveril Point in 1826.

22. *The Grove.* This house was built in 1838 by Mr Coventry, after purchasing the land from the Pitt estate in the Chancery sale of 1838.

23. *Marine Villa.* This was constructed by William Morton Pitt in 1825. It was initially intended to be a Baths, with billiard and coffee rooms, but was soon taken over by Pitt as his own seaside residence.

24. *Tontine Houses.* From 1830 a number of large houses were built for rent on Seymer Road by William Morton Pitt using a tontine scheme for raising the capital. These include Belvedere and Seymer Place.

25. *Shore Villa.* Three houses, Shore Villa, Beach Cottage and Cliff Cottage were built on the shore road at Battle Mead. This is the first housing in this area.