

## 5.3 Post-medieval Shaftesbury (1540-1799)

### 5.3.1 Historical Summary

This period starts with the dissolution of Shaftesbury Abbey. This had a detrimental effect on the economy of the town, which was reduced to a local market town and a staging post on the Great West Road. However, the success of the market meant that Shaftesbury became an important agricultural market town and a minor industrial town in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, but by the end of this period, the industry had stagnated and had largely disappeared. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the town had about 3500 inhabitants and five hundred and forty houses (Universal British Directory 1793-8).

Shaftesbury Abbey was dissolved on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1539. The abbey together with all of the lands owned by the abbey in the town and the manor of Barton were purchased by Sir Thomas Arundell, who became the first major private landowner in Shaftesbury. He very quickly demolished the abbey buildings. Upon Sir Thomas' execution in 1552, the estate was bought by the Earl of Pembroke. He appears to have leased it back to the Arundells. Sir Mathew Arundell built a large house for himself on Bimport, using materials salvaged from the abbey (Innes 1992, 34).

The demise of the abbey, having been the largest house of Benedictine nuns in England, would have had a significant effect on the economy of the town. The loss of employment for estate workers, trade from the nuns and from pilgrims all would have contributed to a lull in the fortunes of the town. Shaftesbury was listed as too poor to pay taxes in 1541 (Innes 1992, 34) and the town plan of 1615 depicts a number of vacant burgage plots.

Although Shaftesbury lost its pilgrim travellers

(which, in any case, were declining in numbers during the late medieval period), its position on the Great West Road equidistant between Salisbury and Sherborne meant that it remained a staging post for travellers. A number of inns flourished and were able to accept travellers who might otherwise have lodged at the abbey.

The weekly market appears to have continued to flourish after Dissolution. The town plan of 1615 shows that the market comprised a corn market, a fish market and a cattle market. Sheep were penned for sale in Bleke Street and Gold Hill, which also held a pig market. Cattle from as far afield as Wales were sold on Bimport and fish may have come from Poole. A covered market was erected in the centre of The Commons for the sale of perishable goods such as butter and milk, as well as poultry. A new guild hall was built at the top of Gold Hill in 1578. Shaftesbury held two annual fairs during the post-medieval period, although they were probably of medieval origin. One, St Martin's Fair, was held in November when salt traders from the Dorset coast would supply salt for the preservation of winter meat (Innes 1992, 31-9). The town formerly had many market crosses; one on St Mary's Green was removed in about 1800; The Fish Cross was sited at the top of Gold Hill to the west of the then town hall and stood till 1780; another existed in Trinity churchyard; and the butter or cheese cross (formerly the poultry cross) was built in 1562 in the butter market and was removed in 1727 (Hutchins 1868, 43).

The Hearth Tax returns of 1662-4 suggest the town remained relatively large during the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Meeking 1951). However, Daniel Defoe described the town in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century as '...now a sorry town, upon the top of a high



Figure 20: Abbey House, built on the site of the former abbey.



Figure 21: Large villas on the north side of Bimport.

hill', perhaps partly because it was a 'Pocket Borough' where the two parliamentary seats returned by the town could be bought or obtained through bribery (Innes 1993, 56). The existence of a large property (known as the 'Property of Shaftesbury') that included much of the town made it easy for MPs to control the relatively small number of voters in the town, either by bribery or by the threat of eviction from their home. The town itself was administered by a 'close' corporation in which members were chosen by the existing ruling 'capital burgesses' rather than through elections and which afforded many opportunities for corruption.

A number of charitable foundations were made during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps a reflection of its economic success. In about 1611, Mathew Chubb established an almshouse for poor women on Salisbury Street. Sir Henry Spiller founded an almshouse for men on the opposite side of Salisbury Street in 1663. A Free School was started in the late 1620s, initially in Magdalen Lane, then later in Bimport in a house given by William Whitaker.

Shaftesbury did not see any significant action during the Civil War, although the Dorset Clubmen, a local association of war-weary countrymen, 'dug themselves in' at Castle Hill in 1645 (Bayley 1914, 276).

Woollen cloth-making remained one of the major industries in Shaftesbury in the post-medieval period, though the industry does not appear to have been large. It is unclear what range of cloths were produced in the early part of this period, but it probably was largely medley or mixed cloths (Page 1908, 360). The cloth industry was flourishing in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, but declined in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century. A particular specialisation of Shaftesbury (and Sturminster) was swanskin, a coarse white cloth largely used for soldiers' and fishermen's clothing (Page 1908, 361). This declined by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the main manufacture was 'linsey wolsley', a mixture of wool and linen used for bed ticking and work clothes. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the manufacture of shirt buttons had become the chief industry, employing about 1200 women and children (Universal British Directory 1793-8). Other significant industries in the town were tanning, knitting woollen stockings, glove-making and shoemaking (Rutter 1827a). All these industries appeared to be declining by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Overall, Shaftesbury did not develop a strong manufacturing base and was known primarily as a market town. However, the decline of industry particularly affected the poorer element

of the town and the gap between rich and poor gradually widened. A workhouse to provide work for the able-bodied poor and the correction of the idle and disorderly was established through donation at Parson's Pool in 1626. The poor were set to work in the cloth industry, carding and spinning. However, this early workhouse does not seem to have remained in use beyond 1660. A poorhouse called Maudlin's or Dolhouse also existed in Trinity parish on the west side of Magdalen Lane (Hutchins 1868, 43).

There was a significant nonconformist population in Shaftesbury, a number of whom were active in attempting to alleviate the lot of the poor and to provide for education. The first surviving written evidence for nonconformism in the town dates from 1662 when a Presbyterian congregation met in a room in Crown Alley (Hutchins 1868, 39). A Presbyterian church was built near Muston's Lane as soon as meetings were legalised in 1672. This was re-founded as a Congregational chapel in 1732. A meeting of the Society of Friends was formed in about 1699 and a meeting house was built in St James in 1746. Wesleyan Methodist meetings were established at Angel Square in 1748. John Wesley paid the first of many visits to the town in 1750 by which time the congregation numbered five hundred (Innes 1992, 48, 61-2).

A small school had been established within former abbey buildings on Magdalen Lane prior to 1630. This only lasted a few years until it lost its lease. The free school was established shortly after in 1633 on Bimport, nearly opposite the graveyard of Holy Trinity church. The school soon accepted fee-paying boys and lasted on the site for 120 years. Following its demise the premises were unoccupied until they were pulled down shortly before 1868 (Hutchins 1868, 43). William Lush also set up a charity school (the 'Blue Coat School') in Bell Street, through his will in 1718. This provided for 20 poor boys or girls for whom the free school on Bimport no longer catered (Rutter 1970, 4).

Shaftesbury did not witness many serious fires. This is perhaps surprising considering the difficulty of obtaining plentiful water in the town centre. This led to the town initiating a number of precautionary measures, including stripping thatch from roofs when a fire broke out. A fire engine was purchased by the St Peter's parishioners in 1744 but this was still fed by bucketed water, either from Parsons Pool on Bell Street or from Enmore Green, transported by horses. Payments were made to water carriers whenever the fire engine was deployed (Innes 1992,

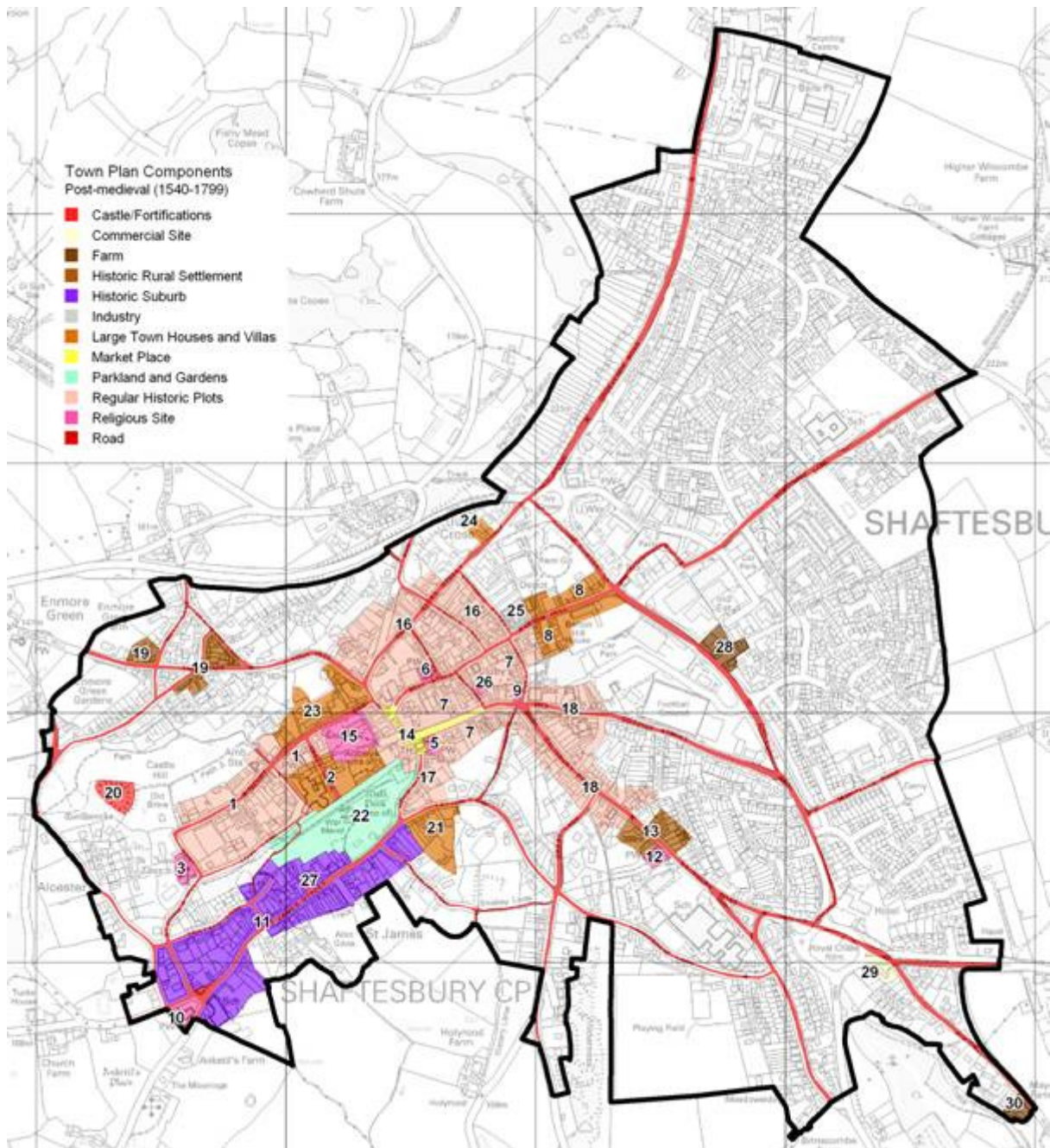


Figure 22: Shaftesbury Post-medieval Town Plan Components.

52-4). The early 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a number of abortive schemes for pumping water from springs up to reservoirs in the town and subsequent distribution through lead pipes. These either failed completely or supplied water unfit for regular consumption (Howarth and Young 1972, 12-13). Hutchins mentions the digging of ten or twelve wells in the town during the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Hutchins 1774).

The Shaftesbury and Sherborne Turnpike Trust was the subject of the first Turnpike Act relating to Dorset in 1752-3. This Act was essentially concerned with the Great Western Post Road from London to Exeter, but also included provision for

a number of side roads, two of which ran from Shaftesbury. The main route ran along High Street leaving Shaftesbury by Tout Hill and Enmore Green. The first side route ran from the Angel Inn in Shaftesbury, possibly along High Street and Tout Hill and thence to Gillingham. The second side route ran from the New Inn at Cann, probably the Half Moon at the junction of Salisbury Road, south along the Higher Blandford Road. A second Act only three years later included provision for three further roads in Shaftesbury. The first was the current A350 main road from Ivy Cross to East Knoyle, as well as Dark Lane running from Ivy Cross towards Motcombe. The second ran from Butts Knapp on Salisbury

Street to the village of Cann (the Lower Blandford Road). The third may have been along the line of Hawkesdene and Layton Lanes, connecting St James with routes running south and east from Shaftesbury without having to traverse Gold Hill and High Street. A third Act in 1778-9 divided the Trust into two separate Shaftesbury and Sherborne divisions (Good 1966, 124-5).

### 5.3.2 Town Layout

The understanding of the layout of Shaftesbury in this period benefits from the existence of detailed maps of the town dated 1615 and 1799. Overall, the street layout seems to have altered very little from the medieval period. The 18<sup>th</sup> century Turnpike Acts do not seem to have altered the line of roads or created new ones, but rather improved existing roads. There were minor changes to the arrangements around the market place and also the lanes and paths leading down through the park to St James.

The most significant change was the dismantling of the abbey and its replacement with Abbey House and gardens, a private residence (Figure 20). Further large villas were constructed for wealthy landowners along the north side of Bimport (Figure 21). The area of the former Saxon burh at the west end of Bimport became largely deserted and turned over to gardens. Similarly the abbey manor or grange at Barton went out of use by the 18<sup>th</sup> century and was replaced by a private residence at Barton Hill House. Barton Hill Farm may also have been established at about the same time. There may have been some expansion of the urban area to the east by the end of this period and the extent of the suburb of St James also appears to have expanded. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century there were the beginnings of villa development outside the town at Belle Vue.

### 5.3.3 Post-medieval Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the post-medieval town are shown on Figure 22 and are listed below.

1. *Bimport (The Burh)*. The western part of the area of the Late Saxon burh became largely deserted during the early post-medieval period. The 1799 Upjohn map of Shaftesbury shows this area as a series of gardens. Further east, in the area immediately west of the junction with Magdalen Street, there were still fairly unbroken lines of houses along both sides of Bimport. A large timber yard stood in the corner of Bimport and Abbey Walk.
2. *The Abbey (Abbey House)*. The abbey church was destroyed promptly after the dissolution of Shaftesbury abbey in 1539. However, many of the subsidiary buildings survived until at least 1565 when a survey of the abbey revealed over 40 major chambers and ancillary buildings on the site. Very few of these survive today, although there are fragments of 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> century walls and windows surviving in the fabric of the School House on the east side of Abbey Walk (Figure 23). Abbey House was constructed during the late 16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> century and was much altered in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Its gardens partly overlie the west end of the abbey church and its walls contain some carved stones re-used from the abbey church (RCHME 1972, 73). The park wall on the west side of Gold Hill represents the only surviving section of the original abbey precinct wall.
3. *St John's Church*. This church had gone out of use by the end of the medieval period, although Hutchins mentions that its foundations were still visible in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Hutchins 1774, 32). Its churchyard remained in use until the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Penn 1980, 85).
4. *St Mary's Church*. St Mary's church had disappeared by the end of the medieval period, although Hutchins mentions that a pointed arched doorway was still visible in a dwelling house in Bimport, close to Magdalen Lane in 1868 (Hutchins 1868, 61).
5. *St Peter's Church*. St Peter's became the town's main parish church after Dissolution. The south aisle was enlarged and a crypt added during the 16<sup>th</sup> century (RCHME 1972, 61-2).
6. *St Laurence's Church*. St Laurence parish was still extant c. 1600. The date of demolition of the church is not known. A preaching-house was built on the site in 1766 (Stell 1991, 127).
7. *High Street*. The plan and number of the plots in the High Street area changed very little in the post-medieval period. Some outbuildings and yards were constructed in the rear of burgage plots by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The nature of the street frontage during this period is uncertain.
8. *Barton Hill*. Barton manor passed to the first Earl of Pembroke after Dissolution and seems to have been initially managed much as before. However, the manor house went out of use during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, probably at the same time that Barton Hill House was constructed (Jervoise 1954). The manor house appears to have been demolished before 1745 (Cox and Chandler 1996). The 1799 Upjohn map shows a large area of parkland and pond to the south of Barton Hill House. The gardens of Barton Hill House were laid out in about 1770 by W T

Bowles (Cox and Chandler 1996). Another large house and garden was built to the north of Barton Hill House, probably in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

9. *St Martin's Church*. St Martin's parish was still in existence in about 1600. The building survived until about 1800 as a barn (Penn 1980, 85).

10. *St James Church*. There was no significant change in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

11. *St James Suburb*. The tannery and Abbey Laundry at St James survived the Dissolution, although the suburb did not expand significantly into the former area of the abbey precinct which remained as a park. A large house and gardens is shown on the 1799 map at the junction of St James Street and Kingmer Lane, but is gone by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

12. *St Rumbold's Church*. There does not appear to have been any significant change to the fabric of St Rumbold's Church during this period.

13. *Cann*. The extent of the settlement around the church and around Butts Knap during the post-medieval period is not known. The Rectory was rebuilt in 1736. The turnpiking of the Great West Road and the roads to Blandford in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century may have stimulated development in this area.

14. *The Market*. There were a series of alterations and developments to the layout of the market place during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The town plan of 1615 is ambiguous as to whether the market place was infilled with buildings or market stalls or both. The Market Cross and Fish Cross were in the vicinity of St Peter's Church at the top of Gold Hill and the Butter Cross was at The Commons. To the west of the current town hall there was an open market square (where the corn market and shambles were held). By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century there had been significant encroachment on

the west side of the market place. A row of Tudor buildings were constructed in the middle of High Street, north of the market cross, and remained there throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and probably into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when the current Town Hall was built. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there were also buildings in the centre of the street in the area of The Commons and the Butter Cross, although these had been cleared by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

15. *Holy Trinity Church*. A sketch of the abbey ruins made in about 1553 depicts the medieval Holy Trinity Church in the background. There may have been little change to the fabric during this period (RCHME 1972, 64, plate 58).

16. *Bell Street and Bleke Street*. A significant number of the buildings at the east end of Bleke Street and Bell Street date from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Lush's Blue Coat School occupied the site of 47 Bell Street during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The 18<sup>th</sup> century Grosvenor House on Bleke Street also became a school (Figure 24).

17. *Gold Hill*. Many of the existing houses along Gold Hill were built or refronted in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, but there was probably not a great deal of change to the earlier property boundaries at this time. It is these cottages and the associated cobbled street that give Gold Hill its distinctive historic character (Figure 25).

18. *Salisbury Street and Coppice Street*. The 1615 town plan shows houses along the southwest side of the street down to the parish boundary with Cann. The plots along the northeast side are depicted but no houses are shown perhaps indicating they had become deserted by that time. Two almshouses were built on Salisbury Street during the 17<sup>th</sup> century; Mathew Chubb founded an almshouse for women in 1611 and a men's almshouse founded by Sir Henry Spiller in 1655 was built on the other side of the road (Innes 1992, 41-



Figure 23: The Old School House and Abbey House, Abbey Walk.



Figure 24: View along Parson's Pool from Bleke Street.

2). By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, there was almost continuous development along both sides of Salisbury Street.

19. *Enmore Green*. The tradition of carrying water from Enmore Green and its associated Bezan procession was first documented in 1655. The earliest surviving buildings in the village date from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. It may have been at this time that infilling of the triangular common began.

20. *Castle Hill*. There was a building constructed on a rough paved platform built here probably in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (Rigold 1949).

21. *Layton*. The 17<sup>th</sup> century Layton House and associated garden is shown on the 1799 Upjohn map of Shaftesbury. There are also a series of other buildings marked along the frontage, including a tanyard.

22. *The Park*. The former Abbey park was sold into private hands and was laid out with some ornamental paths and walkways. Park Walk was laid out in 1767 as a promenade.

23. *North Bimport*. Several large houses were built along the north side of Bimport to the north of the former abbey precinct. Sir Mathew Arundell built a large house on the corner of Bimport and Tout Hill not long after the Dissolution, using material salvaged from the abbey. It was the largest and grandest house in Shaftesbury and is illustrated on the 1615 map of the town. The other large house depicted is Mr Grove's House, a predecessor to the present Castle Hill House, which was built in 1743.

24. *Belle Vue*. A large house is shown at the end of Bleke Street on Upjohn's 1799 map. This is in the same location as the house now known as Bleke House (formerly Belle Vue) which is dated to the early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, suggesting that the current house may be a reconstruction of an earlier building.

25. *Malthouse*. A brewhouse and malthouse lay at the junction of Malthouse Lane and Barton Hill. These are marked on a map and survey of the borough of Shaftesbury dated 1817 (DHC Photocopy 485; D/SHS 3). The same buildings are shown on the Upjohn map of 1799 and it may be that the malthouse had an 18<sup>th</sup> century origin.

26. *Congregational Chapel*. The site was acquired in 1706 by a Presbyterian church of late 17<sup>th</sup> century origins. A meeting house was registered in 1707 (Stell 1991).

27. *Friends Meeting-House*. The Friends meeting-house in St James Street was built in 1746, set back from the street with burial ground in

front. There was a stable on the street frontage.

28. *Barton Hill Farm*. This farm appears to have been in existence by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, as buildings are shown in this position on the 1799 Upjohn map.

29. *Half Moon Inn*. The Half Moon Inn dates to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and may have been built following the turnpiking of the Great West Road (Figure 27).

30. *Mayo Farm*. The date at which this farm was established is unknown, although it may coincide with the turnpiking of the Higher Blandford Road in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The farm buildings are probably early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the barn has a reset date stone of 1736 (RCHME 1972, 9).



Figure 25: View down Gold Hill with Abbey precinct wall on the right.



Figure 26: View of Enmore Green from Castle Hill.



Figure 27: The Half Moon, Royal Chase Roundabout, Cann.