# 5.3 Post-medieval Cerne Abbas (1540-1799)

### 5.3.1 Historical Summary

After the dissolution of the Abbey, its properties and market rights were sold into private hands, and the town appears to have suffered a decline following the disappearance of its major source of patronage. The Abbey buildings were demolished relatively quickly. The church was gone by 1585 and the claustral buildings were also lost at an early date leaving no record of their layout. Some of the stone was plundered for buildings in the town. A mansion house was recorded in the town by 1612, probably Abbey Farm (Figure 16). A survey of 1617 recorded that the town had a corn market, a shambles and a guildhall, but that the guildhall was on the verge of collapse and the town was poorly governed. Also the town was damaged by fire in 1644 and a further fire in 1740 damaged the remaining Abbey buildings. The Cerne Abbas Protestation Returns list 204 men in the town in 1642 (Dorset OPC 2009) and the Hearth Tax Returns of 1662-4 record 89 householders (Meekings 1951). This suggests that Cerne Abbas was approximately the same size as Sturminster Newton or Corfe in the mid-17th century.

Cerne Abbas became a small agricultural market town. Cloth-making was probably its major industry in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Penn 1980), but Cerne Abbas was never one of the major centres of Dorset cloth-making. Hutchins maintains its only trade arose from the weekly Wednesday market and its three fairs held yearly on Midlent Monday, Holy Thursday and St Mathew's Day. The market was chiefly for corn, as well as butchers' meat, poultry and vegetables and was well frequented. Bullocks, pigs and a few horses were sold at the fairs (Hutchins 1874, 15). At the time of the Civil War, Cerne Abbas estate was owned by Denzil Holles, MP for Dorchester and leading antagonist for parliament in the instigation of the war. However, he despised Cromwell and later tried to mediate between the King and parliament. It has been suggested that his disregard for Cromwell led to the creation of the Cerne Giant as a caricature lampooning the military leader (Morril 2004; Bettey 1981).

The 18<sup>th</sup> century appears to have been a period of relative prosperity in Cerne Abbas. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, malting and brewing were the main trades of the town. Cerne Abbas, according to Pococke writing in 1754, was "more famous for beer than in any other place in this county" (quoted in Crick 1908, 368). The beer was shipped to London and was also sent in quantity to America and the West Indies (Universal Directory c. 1753, 544). The 1798 Admeasurement Survey indicates that malthouses are the single most common commercial use of property, with inns and brewhouses also mentioned. Other industries of greater or lesser importance in Cerne during the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were gloving, shoe-making, silk-winding, and tanning. John Shearer, who established the silk throwing mill at Westbury in Sherborne during the mid 18th century, had opened up subsidiary establishments at Cerne Abbas and Stalbridge by 1765 (Warren 1937, 36; 40-41). At one time 80-100 women were employed by Wilmott in winding silk at Cerne (Hutchins 1874, 15). The silk industry lasted in Cerne from 1764-1871 (Coffin 1987, 50-51). The Universal British Directory of 1793-8 also lists two apothecaries, a bookseller, a grocer and a watchmaker in the town.



Figure 14: Earthwork remains of the monastic precinct boundary, with enigmatic earthwork enclosures showing in the left middle distance.

The old school house at the junction of Duck Street and Mill Lane dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A Mr Stickland was master of a school in



Figure 15: The Porch to the former abbots hall, built under Abbot Thomas Sam (1497-1509).

Cerne in 1609. In 1752 Thomas Pitt, the lord of the manor, set up a charity school in the town (Coffin 1987, 48).

Nonconformity appears to have come early to Cerne Abbas. Denzil Holles had been a Puritan and a meeting of Dorset Quakers was broken up by a riot in Cerne during 1659. The Congregationalists had established themselves by the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The Maiden Newton Turnpike Trust was established in 1777-8. It included provision for a road from Up Sydling to Cerne Abbas, entering Cerne Abbas Town along Sydling Road and stopping at Pudding Knapp; the junction of Acreman Street, The Folly, Dorchester Road and Sydling Road. The road struggled to make any money and was revoked in 1797-8 (Good 1966, 142-3).

## 5.3.2 Town Layout

The basic street layout of the post-medieval town remained largely as it had been in the medieval period with the market place at the junction of Long Street and Abbey Street, and the focus of settlement was along these two streets. Following the dissolution of the Abbey most of the conventual buildings were demolished and robbed. Abbey Farm was established as the manor house, adjacent to the former abbey precinct and the medieval settlement in this area appears to have contracted. Instead, the town expanded beyond the river into the west side of the valley. Acreman Street was fully developed on both sides, as was Duck Street beyond Wills Lane. Folly Lane was developed on the north side and the market place was filled in with buildings. Abbey Street, Long Street were fully developed and Piddle Lane also had houses along it (now lost). Back Lane and Mill Lane were also partially developed with housing. The Mill on Mill Lane appears to be of  $18^{th}$  century origin (Figure 17).

# 5.3.3 Post-medieval Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the late sixteenth-eighteenth century town are shown on Figure 18 and are listed below.

1. The Abbey. The church and claustral buildings had completely disappeared by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Their complete destruction may be partly due to deliberate slighting at the time of the Dissolution and by later robbing of the site for masonry. Abbey Farmhouse incorporates part of the former Abbey gatehouse and was established as a manor house by the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The south-west quarter of the Abbey precinct, including St Augustine's Well, became the parish churchyard by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when an entrance gateway was built. The 15<sup>th</sup> century Ham Stone preaching cross may have been moved to the churchyard in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

2. *Medieval Burgages.* There was little discernible change to the layout of the Abbey Street and Long Street burgages in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, except that the south-east corner of the former precinct, between the town and the 17<sup>th</sup> century churchyard, became incorporated into the plots of Abbey Street. This area is now known as Abbey Gardens. The Cerne Abbas brewery on Long Street (now the site of Abbey Court) was established within a burgage plot by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

3. Abbey Farm. Abbey Farm was established shortly after the Dissolution as the manorial or home farm of Cerne Abbas. The main domestic buildings were developed from the former entrance range of the Abbey and are included within the Abbey. The area to the west of the former Abbey, probably an area of former medieval settlement, was now incorporated as the farmyard and outbuildings of Abbey Farm (Figure 19). This area also included the town pound.



Figure 16: South front of Abbey Farm House.



Figure 17: The 18<sup>th</sup> century Mill House, Mill Lane.



Figure 18: Cerne Abbas Post-medieval Town Plan Components.

4. The Market Place. Documentary evidence informs us that the market comprised a market house, shambles and possibly a guildhall in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A weekly market and three annual fairs may have been held here. The triangular market place began to be filled with buildings during the late medieval period, a process that was complete by the 1768 as depicted on an estate map of that time.

5. Barton Farm. The area of the monastic tithe barn became Barton Farm by the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The southern part of the barn was converted into a dwelling at that time and associated outbuildings date from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 20). In the Admeasurement of 1798 the area is described as a house, garden, barton, stables, dairy house, pasture and green barton. The five northernmost bays of the tithe barn had collapsed by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, possibly suggesting a period of disuse following the Dissolution.

6. St Mary's Parish Church. The east wall of the chancel was rebuilt in 1639 and the west wall and gable of the south porch were rebuilt in 1696 (Pitfield 1981).

7. Duck Lane. It is not clear when Duck Lane was developed, although the 18<sup>th</sup> century estate maps clearly show that it was extensively inhabited by the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. A school house was built at the junction of Duck Street and Mill Lane in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 21), although

the other houses on the street seem to date from the  $18^{th}$  century or later.

8. Acreman Street Planned Suburb. Plot boundaries for properties fronting on to Acreman Street north of Wills Lane are arranged into a regular block suggestive of a planned suburb. This block is most clearly visible on 19<sup>th</sup> century maps but the eastern part is also clearly visible on the 1798 Admeasurement Survey. The regular furlongs on the western side may reflect the establishment of smallholdings within a former medieval strip field. And it may have been this process of smallholding creation which led to the name Acreman Street i.e. the street occupied by men holding an acre. This development may have been established in the late medieval or early post-medieval period in an attempt to extract more cash rent rather than tithes from Abbey or estate lands. Similar developments have been observed at former abbey towns at Abbotsbury (The Furlongs) and Sherborne (Acreman Street).

9.Acreman Street Ribbon Settlement. A less regular ribbon settlement developed along Acreman Street and The Folly at some point before the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This may mark the expansion of medieval settlement associated with the tithe barn or indeed an earlier secondary settlement focus on the west side of the River Cerne.

10. The Mill. The watermill in Mill Lane was a corn mill, thought to have been established in

the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The earlier medieval abbey and later manorial mill were located to the west of Abbey Farm. The position of the mill is recorded on the Admeasurement Survey and belonged to Charles Davis, miller.

11. The Tannery. A tanhouse is recorded on the Admeasurement Survey of 1798, slightly further downstream from the mill at the junction of Folly Lane and Back Lane. The tanhouse belonged to John Hodges at that time. There are two entries for John Hodges in the Universal British Directory: a currier (leather worker) and a tanner. The tanhouse (Figure 22) was partly demolished in 1909-10 leaving the current cottage (Cerne Abbas Historical Society 2007).

12. Back Lane. Back Lane originated as an access to the rear of medieval burgages fronting on to the south side of Long Street. Houses fronting on to Back Lane are visible on the 1768 survey, particularly at the western end. Some of these were larger houses belonging to members of Cerne's merchant class such as Thomas Cockeram, a maltster (Cerne Abbas Historical Society 2007). Smaller properties fronted on to Piddle Lane close to the junction with Back Lane. These were cut into a hollow way and have since been demolished.



Figure 19: Abbey Farm outbuildings looking south.



Figure 20: Mid-18th century Barton Farmhouse and attached barn.



Figure 21: View of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Old Forge and attached schoolhouse, with 18<sup>th</sup> century re-fenestration.



Figure 22: View of the former tan house, The Folly.

## 5.4 Nineteenth Century Cerne Abbas (1800-1899)

#### 5.4.1 Historical Summary

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a significant period in the history of Cerne Abbas. It reached its peak of recorded settlement, numbering over 1300 persons in the 1840s and 1850s. From that point, however, the town entered a serious decline, the population falling to approximately 650 by the turn of the century. The decline in the town's fortunes reflects the wider decline in the rural economy in Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Cerne Abbas, as a small town, may have fared better than some surrounding villages at first but then entered terminal decline in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The market was still in existence in 1813 but by 1874 had long been disused.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, brewing and malting are still the major trades, but they decline in importance, from about 1810, when the export of beer to London ceases, as it was superseded by the establishment of London Porter and the beer was brewed largely for local consumption (Hutchins 1813, 305; 1874, 15). By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were two small malthouses and one small brewery. The brewery on Long Street (now Chescombe Farm buildings) closed down in 1883. The silk industry also declined and silk throwing ceased in Cerne in 1871 (Coffin 1987, 48).

Leather working became more important for the town and by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century it was the most important industry. Tanning had been carried out in Cerne from the medieval period onwards and there was at least one tannery in the town during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A great many shoemakers were recorded in the town in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Stevenson 1815). Glove manufacture was undertaken in the town by Messrs Frampton and Co in 1830 (Piggott's Directory 1830) and in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a coarse kind of leather glove and gaiters were still being manufactured here. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a cottage industry in parchment making.

Other minor industries in the town in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century are the manufacture of dowlas, a coarse linen cloth, (Stevenson 1815, 450) and watch and clock-making.

The Police Station was established in Long Street by 1860 which included a sergeant's house and court house (Figure 23). The station still held six constables and a sergeant by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A new National School opened in Duck Street in 1844 (Figure 24) and continues in use to this day as the Cerne Abbas CE VC First School (Cerne Abbas Historical Society 2007). There was also a British School in the town by 1875

A Wesleyan Chapel had formerly been situated opposite the Royal Oak pub. It was built during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, possibly before 1840 but certainly by 1873. It had gone out of use by 1919 when Pitt Rivers gifted the building to the parish as a reading room. The site is now a public toilet (Coffin 1987, 101). The Congregational Chapel in Abbey Street was re-built in 1878 (Cerne Abbas Historical Society 2007).

The Cerne Abbas Turnpike Trust was established in 1824-5. The roads provided for in the act within the Cerne Abbas urban area were: from Pudding Knapp to Charminster via Nether Cerne and Godmanstone, essentially the route of the modern A352 Dorchester Road, south of the junction with The Folly; from Pudding Knapp northwards (along Acreman Street); and from Pudding Knapp along The Folly and Duck Street to the junction with Acreman Street and thence north to meet the Sherborne to Dorchester Turnpike. In 1840 the trust had only 13.5miles of road with four toll gates, two toll



Figure 23: View of the Old Police Station, 8-12 Long Street .



Figure 24: Cerne Abbas CE VC First School, Duck Street .



Figure 25: Cerne Abbas Nineteenth Century Town Plan Components.

houses and one side bar. One of the toll houses was at Pudding Knapp. The Trust was impoverished and expired on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1874 (Good, 1966, 145).

It is the terminal decline in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that sets Cerne apart from other similar-sized Dorset towns such as Stalbridge and Sturminster Newton. It is probably too simplistic to put the decline down to the lack of a railway station, as Cerne had reasonably good road links with Dorchester and Sherborne. A town needs an industrial or market base to its economy and Yeovil and Sherborne's industries seem to have thrived at Cerne's expense in terms of gloving and linen manufacture. As a result, the market and fairs would have also entered a decline, until Cerne remained nothing more than a large rural village.

## 5.4.2 Town Layout

A comparison of the Admeasurement survey (1798) and the 1<sup>st</sup> edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey maps (late 19<sup>th</sup> century) shows that there was negligible change in the layout of Cerne Abbas between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is in itself a good indicator of the stagnation of the town during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

# 5.4.3 Nineteenth Century Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the nineteenth century town are shown on Figure 25 and are listed below.

1. The Abbey. There appears to have been very little physical change to the former Abbey precinct during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The north barn had a north east wing added and another outbuilding constructed to the south, the monastic earthworks were surveyed for the first time, which is indicative of an increasing awareness of and interest in antiquities.

2. *Medieval Burgages.* There was little discernible change to the layout of the Abbey Street and Long Street burgages in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However a significant number of the buildings fronting on to Long Street were either rebuilt or refaced during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The distinctive brick and flint banding of buildings in this area dates from this time.

3. Abbey Farm. The only discernable change was the addition of an L shaped barn (now lost) to the farm buildings. The town pound remained here throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*4. The Market Place.* The Old Market House was built during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is thought to occupy the former site of the Guildhall (Figure 26).

5. Barton Farm. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the addi-

tion of a number of outbuildings to the Barton Farm complex. This includes an early 19<sup>th</sup> century granary with weather-boarded and brick walls standing on staddle stones with a hipped tiled roof as well as a late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> century stables.

6. St Mary's Parish Church. There was a comparatively minor restoration of the church in 1870.

7. Duck Street. Although the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Admeasurement Survey shows that Duck Street had been completely developed by that time, it is also one of the two main streets in Cerne Abbas that exhibits significant 19<sup>th</sup> century alteration (Figure 27). In 1844 the National School was built at the north end of the Street.

8. Acreman Street Planned Suburb. There was little change to these plots during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, except that a maltings was established in the central part of the western side of the block.

9.Acreman Street Ribbon Settlement. There was little discernable change to this area during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The extent of the settlement may have extended slightly north beyond the 18<sup>th</sup> century and modern limits. The Cerne Union Workhouse was built outside the study area to the north between 1836 and 1841.

*10. The Mill.* The corn mill appears to have continued in use throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*11. The Tannery.* The tannery continued in use through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but was partly demolished in 1909-10.

*12. Back Lane.* The number of buildings fronting on to both sides of Back Lane increased significantly during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some of these were houses built at the back of former burgage plots for properties on Long Street.

*13. The Lodge*. The Lodge is a 19<sup>th</sup> century villa set centrally within a relatively small area of landscape gardens (Figure 28). In the western part of the area, at the junction of Piddle Lane and Alton Lane, a surgery had existed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This had been replaced by a smithy by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

14. Mill Mead Quarry and water meadows. This meadow, now the site of the village hall has surviving earthworks of an 18<sup>th</sup> century water meadow. However, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Ordnance Survey map indicates that there was an old quarry here at that time. The quarry is likely to have been in a raised area in the NW corner of the field and has since been filled in. It may have been a quarry for Upper Greensand.

*15. Barton Lodge.* An early-19<sup>th</sup> century stuccoed villa set centrally within landscape grounds (Figure 29). The Lodge remains, although the associated outbuildings have been lost to modern development



Figure 26: View of The 19<sup>th</sup> century Market House.



Figure 27: View NW along Duck Street.



Figure 28: The south front of The Lodge, Alton Lane.



Figure 29: The south front of Barton Lodge, The Folly.

## 5.5 Twentieth Century Cerne Abbas (1900- Present Day)

### 5.5.1 Historical Summary

The twentieth century was a period of continued decline for Cerne Abbas. In 1919, the Pitt Rivers estate sold all their property in Cerne Abbas. The majority of the houses were sold to the tenants. Despite this many of the local craft industries continued to go out of business during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the forge, the saddlery (Figure 30), the tannery and the corn mill. The population dropped to a low of approximately 450 during the 1920s and had only risen to around 500 by 1971. This represents a nearly two-thirds decline in population from the high of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the post-war period, the population has risen again, reaching 732 in 2001, largely a result of inward migration as Cerne became a dormitory town for Dorchester and further afield. Today the economy of the village is largely dependent on tourism. This trade is engendered by the fame of the Cerne Giant but sustained by the charm of a village which has remained remarkably unchanged since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The increased populace during the post war period has been housed to a great extent within small modern suburban housing estates around the edge of town as well as modern infill within the limit of the medieval and postmedieval urban plots. The main housing estates are at Chescombe, Abbots Walk, Acreman Close and Springfields. The largest, at Chescombe and Abbots Walk (Figure 31) on the south side of the village, comprises approximately 90 dwellings.

## 5.5.2 Town Layout

The historic core of the town remained largely as it had done in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The A352 was straightened and widened during the 1960s. This resulted in the demolition of a number of cottages at the junction of Folly Lane and Dorchester Road, known as Pudding Knap in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, the major change has been the construction of modern housing on the fringes of the historic town. This has had little impact on the character of the historic core, although there has also been some infilling of vacant plots along Duck Street, Back Lane and Alton Lane.

### 5.5.3 Twentieth century Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the twentieth century town are shown on Figure 32 and are listed below.

1. The Abbey. There appears to have been very little physical change to the former Abbey precinct during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A fishpond has been in filled at the north western part of the site. It is not clear whether this was a monastic fishpond. The North Barn has been converted into a dwelling; *Beauvoir Court* (Figure 33).

2. *Medieval Burgages.* The site of the old brewery on Long Street was redeveloped for housing in the 1990s. This cul-de-sac, Abbey Court, occupies two or three former burgage plots.

3. Abbey Farm. The 19<sup>th</sup> century L-shaped barn and the village pound have been lost. The northern part of the area now contains a large modern barn.

4. The Market Place. There has been little significant change to the former market place during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, except for the construction of a modern flint-and-brick-banded bus shelter.

*5. Barton Farm.* The majority of the farm buildings remain, although the area to the north, Barton Green, has been developed for modern housing arranged in courtyards set back from



*Figure 30: The Old Saddlery at the junction of Long St and Duck St, with its 19<sup>th</sup> century shop frontage.* 



Figure 31: View east of Chescombe Close with houses on Abbots Walk in the background .

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Figure 32: Cerne Abbas Twentieth Century Town Plan Components.

The Folly.

6. St Mary's Parish Church. There was a major church restoration in 1960-67, which included the re-roofing of the nave, chancel and north aisle, the rebuilding of the porch, opening of a blocked window in the south chancel wall, and many other works (Pitfield 1981).

7. Duck Street. There has been negligible change to the historic plots on Duck Street during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although modern housing has been added at the northern end at Riverside Close.

8. Acreman Street Planned Suburb. Acreman Street was straightened during the 1960s resulting in the destruction of a number of houses. They have been replaced with modern semis along the east side of the new street frontage. Two large detached modern houses have also been built in back plots at Park View and Rowden View. The old Maltings has been converted into flats (Figure 34).

9.Acreman Street Ribbon settlement. The widening and straightening of the A352 during the 1960s has led to the destruction of a number of historic plots, most notably at the junction of The Folly and Dorchester Road.

*10. The Mill.* The corn mill went out of use during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The mill house survives as

a dwelling and the mill race also still exists, although the wheel house has been demolished. Some remnant mill structures survive within the shell of the wheel house, now used for parking.

*11. The Tannery.* The tannery was partially demolished in 1909-10. The remaining part of the building is now a dwelling, *Cerne River Cottage.* 

*12. Back Lane.* The houses on Piddle Lane were demolished at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*13. The Lodge.* A large part of the former surgery and later smithy was demolished during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and No 1 Piddle Lane added. Three further large detached houses were built in the grounds of The Lodge during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

14. Mill Mead Quarry and watermeadows. A new village hall was built at the north part of Mill Mead and opened in 2006 (Figure 35). The remainder of the former water meadows has been left as a nature reserve.

*15. Barton Lodge.* A large part of the grounds of Barton Lodge were developed for modern housing during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, although the area to the south of the Lodge has been retained as communal gardens.

16. Chescombe and Abbots Walk Housing Estate. The first part of this estate to be developed was a geometrically-designed cul-de-sac of semi-detached houses at Chescombe in the post war period (Figure 36). Abbots Walk to the east comprises short terraces of smaller houses set in smaller plots only completed in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

17. Acreman Close. This cul-de-sac of semidetached houses was developed in the immediate post-war period. The large detached houses immediately south of Francombe Farm are late 20<sup>th</sup> century in date.

18. Springfield Housing Estate. This represents a late 20<sup>th</sup> century development of detached bungalows with hipped tiled roofs set centrally within medium-sized plots arranged around a cul-de-sac. Some dwellings within the development front on to Duck Street.

19. Simsay Housing Development. This development was completed at the turn of the new millennium. It began with the construction of a new doctor's surgery on Alton Lane, followed by a small cul-de-sac of houses at Simsay Fields.



Figure 33: Beauvoir Court, the former north barn of Cerne Abbey.



Figure 34: View of The Maltings, Acreman Street.



Figure 35: View of the new Village Hall, Kettle Lane.



Figure 36: View of the post-war housing estate at Chescombe .