

5.2 Norman Sherborne (AD1066-1149)

5.2.1 Historical Summary

The description of Sherborne in Domesday suggests that it was a small town in the Late Saxon period. It seems to have developed into a thriving market town during the Norman period. This was stimulated largely by the efforts of Roger of Caen, Bishop of Salisbury, who constructed Sherborne Old Castle (Figure 12) as his residence and is partly responsible for improvements at the Abbey Church. He was a favourite of Henry I, Abbot of Sherborne from AD 1103-1122 and Bishop of Salisbury from AD 1102-1139. He built castles at Devizes and Malmesbury, as well as a defensive wall around the Royal castle at Old Sarum. Sherborne Castle was itself completed in or around 1137. Following the death of Henry in 1135, and the ensuing anarchy, Roger was dispossessed of his properties and imprisoned by Stephen. He died in 1139 at Salisbury. The Castle saw some action during the period of the anarchy, falling into the hands of the house of Anjou in 1143 as a consequence of the battle of Wilton (Fowler, 1951, 105-6, 116).

Half Moon Street was created during the Norman period. It is recorded that the site of the former Saxon bishops' residence was given to the monks by Bishop Roger in exchange for a strip of their churchyard on which he built Half Moon Street for better access to Cheap Street (Penn, 1980, 94). His other works included a deer park to the south of the Castle, from which the monks of Sherborne were entitled to a tithe of the hides for binding their books. He constructed fishponds in the Yeo valley between the Castle and the bottom of South Street, thereby depriving the monks of two mills, and gave them St Andrew's Mill in compensation.

Castleton may have developed initially as a

small settlement of Roger's retainers drawn up close to the Castle and only later became a borough (Fowler, 1951, 105-116). It is possible that a settlement existed on the Castle site prior to construction. Excavations here have revealed evidence for a ditch and E-W aligned burials (Bean, 1955a; Webster & Cherry, 1974).

St Swithin's Fair was granted to the monks of Sherborne in 1122 at the same time that Sherborne was made an independent Abbey. The suggestion is however, that the fair had already been in existence before then, but under the auspices of Roger, Bishop of Salisbury (Penn, 1980, 94). The medieval site of St Swithin's fair is thought to be at Newland Gardens, marked by the site of a cross or stone. However, Newland was not created as a borough until 1277 and the fair may have been moved here after that date. The Green at the top of Cheap Street was also the site of fairs in the medieval period and this appears to be a more logical place for an early fair in Sherborne.

The bishop also had a Thursday market at Sherborne, first recorded in 1147-8 (ibid. 95; Fowler, 1951, 146-7). Its site is not known, although it is likely to have been held at either the market place at the southern end of Cheap Street, or The Green at the top of Cheap Street.

Major building campaigns were instigated at Sherborne Castle and the Abbey (Figure 13) during the Norman period. The work was largely completed using local materials with some Ham Stone ashlar imported from Somerset. A substantial workforce would have been required and were probably resident in the town from at least 1122. This influx of workers would also have stimulated the agrarian and market economy in the town. It may have been at this time that Sherborne became recognisa-



Figure 11: The Old Cottage, South Street



Figure 12: Sherborne Old Castle, West Gate

bly urban. Some of the labourers may have been settled within a newly established extra mural settlement at Castleton.

The see of Sherborne was transferred to Old Sarum in 1075. The bishop of Sherborne had also acted as the abbot so when the see was transferred, the abbot was no longer resident at Sherborne. To resolve this situation the monastery was made an independent Abbey with Thurstan as Abbot in 1122, instituted by Bishop Roger (Penn, 1980, 94). New churches are also recorded, dedicated to St Andrews and St Thomas the Martyr, during the 12th century. Neither of these survives, although Hutchins recorded that the County Bridewell on South Street had been built on the site of St Andrew's church and that the remains of St Thomas' church were still visible at The Green at the top of Cheap Street during the 18th century (Hutchins, 1873, 282-4).

5.2.2 Town Layout

The essential and primary component of the Norman town plan remained the monastic precinct. Documentary evidence clearly suggests that Cheap Street was established by the Norman period and that Half Moon Street was constructed at this time by Bishop Roger. Penn has drawn key items from the papal bulls of 1145 and 1163 which indicate the character of Sherborne in the 12th century. The bulls mention the church of St Mary Magdalene next the Castle; the church of St Andrew with a mill beside it; a church dedicated to St Probus and associated with *Stocland* and two mills; a mill next to the monastery; a settlement or *vicum* which is before the monastery and extends as far as St Andrew's church; and a vineyard next the Castle. These observations suggest that the town of Sherborne essentially consisted of Cheap Street, South Street and Half Moon Street in the 12th century. The church of St Andrew may indicate expansion into South Street at this time. A church dedicated to St Thomas à Beckett was also constructed at *La Grene* at the top of Cheap Street in 1177 suggesting expansion to the north shortly afterwards (Penn, 1980, 94-5). The major construction projects at the Castle and the Abbey during the 12th century would certainly have stimulated growth. It is also possible that Long Street was established at this time, although it is not recorded in documents until 1425. It may have originated as a road from the Castle to the Abbey. Similarly, the road later to be known as Newland may also have originated as a lane from the Castle to The Green, cutting across arable fields, at this time.



Figure 13: The north front of Sherborne Abbey showing The Slype and successive gable scars from the Abbey cloisters on the external wall of the north transept

5.2.3 Norman Urban plan components

The main plan components of the medieval town are shown on Figure 14 and are listed below.

1. *Abbey Church of St Mary and Monastic Precinct*. Thurstan became abbot of the newly independent monastery in AD 1122. He and Bishop Roger are credited with instigating a phase of building at Sherborne in which part of the Abbey church and the entire claustral range was rebuilt (Pitman, 1983, 10). A stone-built cloister was erected against the existing Late-Saxon Cathedral. Major alterations were made to the NE transept including the construction of the chapter house and Slype (Figure 13). The chapter house was modified again in the late 12th century. It may also have been during the 12th century rebuilt that the west tower of the Saxon Cathedral was demolished, along with its adjoining portacus, and the nave remodelled (Keen & Ellis, 2005, 137-141). The central tower has a Saxo-Norman base and walls of the Norman church are included in the north transept and the Wykeham Chapel. The south front of the Abbey (Figure 15) dates from the Norman rebuilding in the 12th century, as does the porch and parts of the north aisle, the south aisle, the south transept and St Katharine's Chapel (RCHME, 1952, 200-206). Later, under the abbacy of Clement (c.1150-c.1180) the stone cloister walk was built as well as the chapter house and Wykeham chapel (Keen & Ellis, 2005, 138). The north choir aisle of the Abbey church retains an important fragment of the monument to abbot Clement and represents one of the earliest portraits on an English tomb (Pitman, 1983, 15).

Bishop Roger appears to have created Half Moon Street (Figure 16) between 1122 and 1139 to allow easier access to Cheap Street south of the Abbey precinct. A small strip of the monk's cemetery was taken in the creation of the road. This

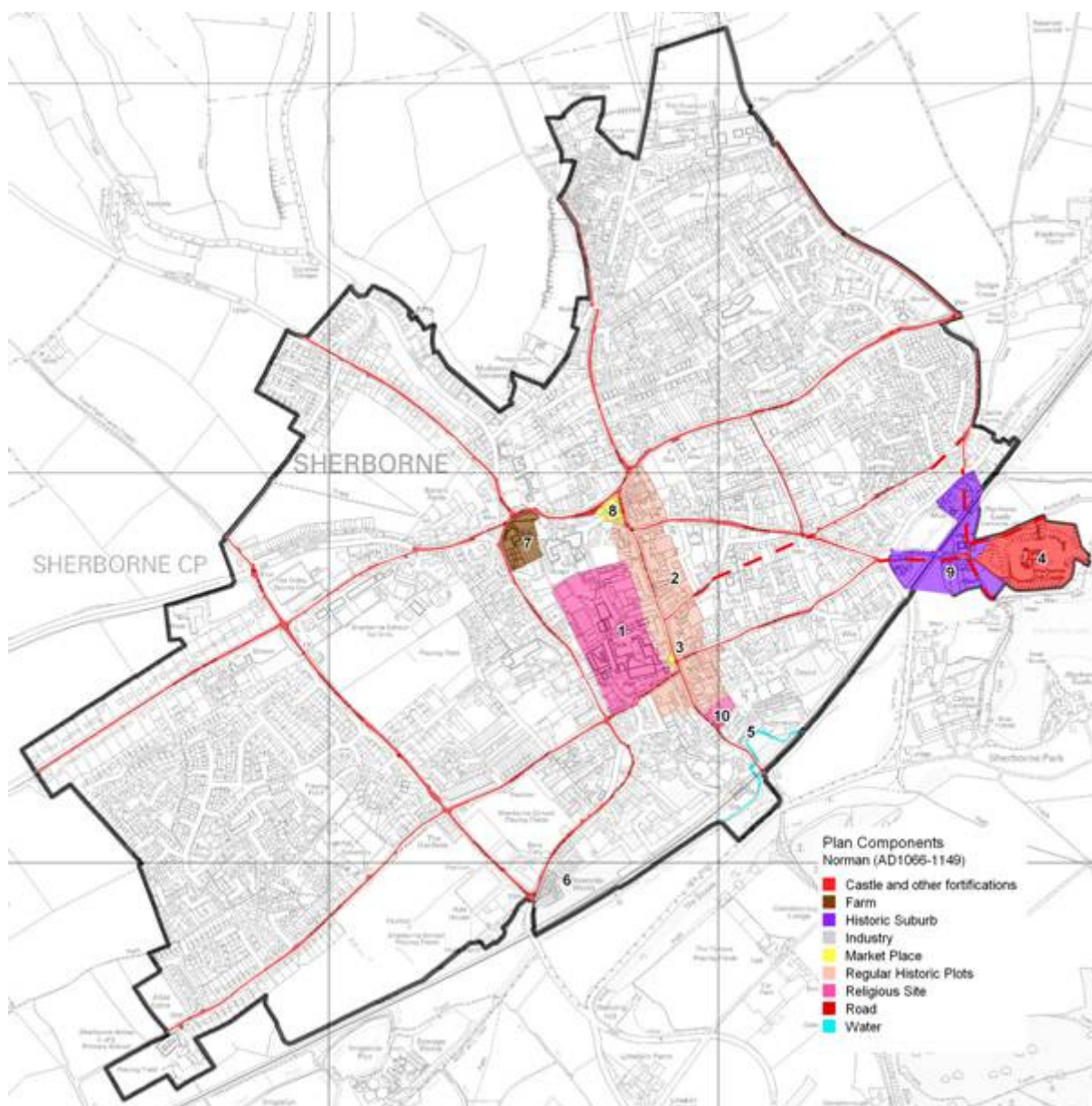


Figure 14: Norman Town Plan Components

was replaced by the derelict site of the former Saxon bishop's palace to the west of the Abbey Church (Fowler, 1951, 101-110; Penn, 1980, 94).

2. *Cheap Street*. Two papal bulls dated 1145 and 1163 record the presence of a *vicum* lying before the monastery and extending as far as St Andrews Church. This suggests that the extent of Sherborne at that time comprised the lengths of Cheap Street and South Street

3. *The Market*. The location of Sherborne's Thursday market is unknown, although it is likely to have been held at either the market place at the southern end of Cheap Street, or The Green at the top of Cheap Street. It is possible that both sites were used.

4. *Sherborne Old Castle*. The Castle was built c. 1137 and may be the earliest English example of

a concentrically planned Castle, with an outer bailey surrounding domestic apartments and a keep at the centre. It is situated on a rocky hill-ock between the two head waters of the Yeo. The site was certainly defensible and commanded the main route from London into Sherborne. The Dynney Bridge may also have been partly the work of Roger. It crosses the Bradley head stream on the south side of the Castle and carried the London Road, possibly diverted from an earlier route which was blocked by the construction of the Castle. Roger also built the chapel of St Mary Magdalene at the north east corner of the Castle. This was the first parish church of Castleton. Roger also built his own domestic chapel within the Castle walls, dedicated to St Michael. Excavations between 1932 and 1954, between 1968 and 1978, and in 1998, have identified

structural foundations and buried deposits, mostly of 12th century date with some 13th century deposits (Bean, 1950, 1951, 1955; White, 1983, Brown & Mathews, 2001).

5. *St Andrew's Mill*. Bishop Roger constructed fishponds along the Yeo valley between the Castle and South Street in the 12th century. This destroyed two of the monk's mills and he gave them St Andrew's Mill in return (Fowler, 1951, 108).

6. *West Mill*. There is no information pertaining specifically to this mill other than it may have been the site of one of the Domesday Mills.

7. *Abbey Barton*. An archaeological evaluation at Newell House has demonstrated that there was activity on this site during the Norman period (Valentin, 2003). The junction at which Newell is situated was also known as Barton Cross. It is not clear if this represents the demesne farm of the monks of Sherborne or the Bishop. The monks also had a barn on Hospital Lane during the later medieval period.

8. *The Green and St Thomas's Chapel*. The Green (figure 17) is situated at the top of Cheap Street, at the junction of the main E-W and N-S roads through Sherborne. Markets and fairs were held here throughout the medieval period. The chapel was consecrated in 1177 only seven years after the martyrdom of Thomas Becket. Leland recorded that it was disused by about 1540 and Hutchins records that some remains were still visible in about 1770. It lay within the triangle of buildings at the top of Cheap Street, within The Green (Fowler, 1951, 91 & 129-34).

9. *Castleton*. The borough may have originated during the Norman period as a settlement for Bishop Roger's retainers and those employed on the construction of the Castle. The chapel of St Mary Magdalene was first mentioned in the papal bulls of 1145 and 1163 and was recorded as being next to the Castle. It is possible that a vault excavated during 1951 just to the NE of the Castle walls may represent the remains of this chapel (Bean, 1951). Leland recorded a chapel here c.

1540.

10. *St Andrew's Church*. St Andrew's church was first recorded in 12th century Papal bulls. Hutchins recorded that the County bridewell was built on the site of St Andrew's Church. The gate piers for the Bridewell remain at Bridewell Court (figure 18) although there does not appear to be any trace of the church.



Figure 15: Sherborne Abbey south front.



Figure 16: View west along Half Moon Street.