5.3 Medieval Sherborne (1150-1539)

5.3.1 Historical Summary

Expansion of the urban area continued in Sherborne during the 13th century. The most significant development of this period was the creation of the planned borough of Newland by Bishop Richard Le Poure. This act is recorded in a charter dated 1227-8, and appears to have been a speculative attempt by the bishop to develop a piece of real estate in Sherborne.

The new borough was progressive in that the burgesses held their land by a fixed money rent rather than in lieu of service, and were able to sell or mortgage their plots. Furthermore, the borough held its own court at which the burgesses were their own jurors. A court roll of 1383-4 mentions a cross at the centre of Newland where the borough court was held in the open air.

The Lay Subsidy rolls of 1327 & 1332, show Sherborne divided into four tithings (Abbots Fee, Hound Street, Eastbury and Westbury) with two boroughs at Newland and Castleton. Another tithing at Nethercoombe also falls within the study area (Rumble, 1980, 29-36; Mills, 1971, 32-4). Fowler suggests that the four central tithings were arranged relative to the central axial road of Cheap Street, with Hound Street and Eastbury to the east and Abbots Fee and Westbury to the west. It is not clear when the borough of Castleton was created but the settlement may have originated for the retainers of Bishop Roger in the 12th century. It was a small borough in 1332, with only 13 taxpayers, though it may have had its own court, rights and liberties (Fowler, 1951, 2, 107, 146-7).

The Black Death may not have affected Sherborne as badly as coastal Dorset towns such as Melcombe Regis and Bridport. The plague arrived in Melcombe Regis in July 1348 but

Sherborne did not lose its Abbot until 18th January 1349. St Thomas' had lost its incumbent six days earlier, and Castleton its vicar on December 21st 1348. Bishop Wyvil was spared as his episcopate lasted from 1330-1375 (Fletcher, 1923, 10).

Sherborne had held a weekly Thursday market since at least 1280. A Tuesday market was also granted in 1300. Three fairs were claimed by the bishop: at the Feast of Relics, St Thomas the Martyr and the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Mary. A fourth; St Swithin's was held by the vicar of Sherborne. All fairs have been discontinued except Pack Monday, held on the 1st Monday after Michaelmas. This may have been the traditional time when agricultural labour was engaged (Fowler, 1951, 168-70). St Thomas' fair was also known as Green fair or Gooseberry fair and was held on The Green at the top of Cheap Street. It was abolished in 1888 (Barker, 1990, no.56).

The site of the medieval St Swithin's fair is thought to have been at Newland Gardens; the west end of Newland used to be known as St Swithin's Street. A stone on this site (now lost) is thought to have been the remains of a market cross for the market of the Newland borough. The position of this stone is now marked by a plaque (Figure 19). It is possible that the cross existed before the creation of the borough, on the site of a pre-existing St Swithin's fair. A large number of burials have been recorded as coming from this area and a font was found during demolition of a house nearby. This had led some to suggest that there was a church dedicated to St Swithin here in the medieval period (Bean, 1955, 145), but this remains unproven. St Swithin's fair was held over 5 days at St Swithin's day (July 15th) until at least 1887 (Fowler, 1951, 109).

Perhaps the best source of information regard-

Figure 17: The Green .

Figure 18: Bridewell Court.

ing medieval industry in Sherborne is the Lay Subsidy tax returns for Dorset. These record that a prior and a clerk lived in the tithing of Nethercoombe during the 14th century, and that there was a mill there. Throughout the town there is a preponderance of trades associated with the cloth industry; this is in common with many towns in South Somerset at the time (Richardson, 2003, 3). Listed trades include tailors, dyers, weavers, shepherds, drapers, grangers, chaleners (blanket sellers), skinners, tuckers, and tanners. A broad range of other trades associated with a thriving market town are also represented, with butchers, cooks, lime burners, roofers (*Helyer*), barbers, bakers, smiths, iron mongers, coopers (*houpere*) and cutlers. Some trades listed can be linked with an ecclesiastical aspect to the Sherborne economy: scribes, clerks, priors and book binders (*parchemenir*). A single goldsmith is also listed as residing in Hound Street tithing during 1332 (Rumble, 1980, 29-36; Mills, 1971, 32-4).

The borough of Newland appears to have contained a number of brewers in the late 14th century. A court roll dated 1383-4 records a dispute between the bishop and the burgesses over the payment of tallage on ale called *croukpenny* (Fowler, 1951, 146-159).

The 15th century saw the rise of Sherborne as an important cloth making town. Leland states that the town was supported, not only by cloth making, but also by all manner of crafts during the early 16th century (Pitman, 1983, 6).

Medieval royal itineraries suggest that an east-west route existed between London and Exeter via Sherborne and Shaftesbury, by the 13th century (Hindle, 1982). Paid messengers were recorded carrying letters to and from Sherborne as early as 1501 and 1506, the latter between the Abbot of Sherborne and the Bishop of Exeter. The first relay of posts was also established on the western road between the royal court in London and Exeter in 1506. There were nine posts, each covering about 20

miles. By 1516 the western road was extended to Plymouth and became important for communication between the monarch and the fleet. The route of the western road through Sherborne is not certain at this date, but seems to have approached Castleton along Pinford Lane, skirted around the Castle and thence along Newland to The Green. From The Green it headed west down Greenhill and out of Sherborne along Bradford Road to Bradford Abbas and Stoford. The main road west of Sherborne did not pass through Yeovil until the 1670s (Andrews, 1987, 1).

Substantial building works during the 15th century transformed St Mary's into a perpendicular style church. There was bad feeling between the monastic and secular sections of the community in Sherborne, probably originating in the fact that the Abbey held the rectory of the parish but was perceived to provide little towards the spiritual needs of the parishioners. All Hallows church was built in the early 14th century, adjoining the west end of the Abbey church, but the parishioners still had to be baptised in the Abbey Church next door. When a font was erected in All Hallows, the resulting dispute culminated in the burning of the Abbey Church, which the townspeople were subsequently made to repair. This may explain why there was little or no protest from the townspeople when Sherborne Abbey was dissolved on the 18th March 1539 (Bettey, 2005, 190).

A chapel dedicated to St Emerenciana was built in a close adjoining the Marston Road on the N side of Newell, apparently during the 14th century, but was disused by 1540. St Emerenciana is mentioned in the Sherborne Missal.

Sherborne was not a borough in the medieval period, but administered as two manors, one belonging to the bishop and the other to the monks of Sherborne Abbey. Newland was a free borough administered through the borough court (Fowler, 1951, 150-4).

The Almshouse of SS John was licensed in

Figure 19: The site of the former Newland Cross.

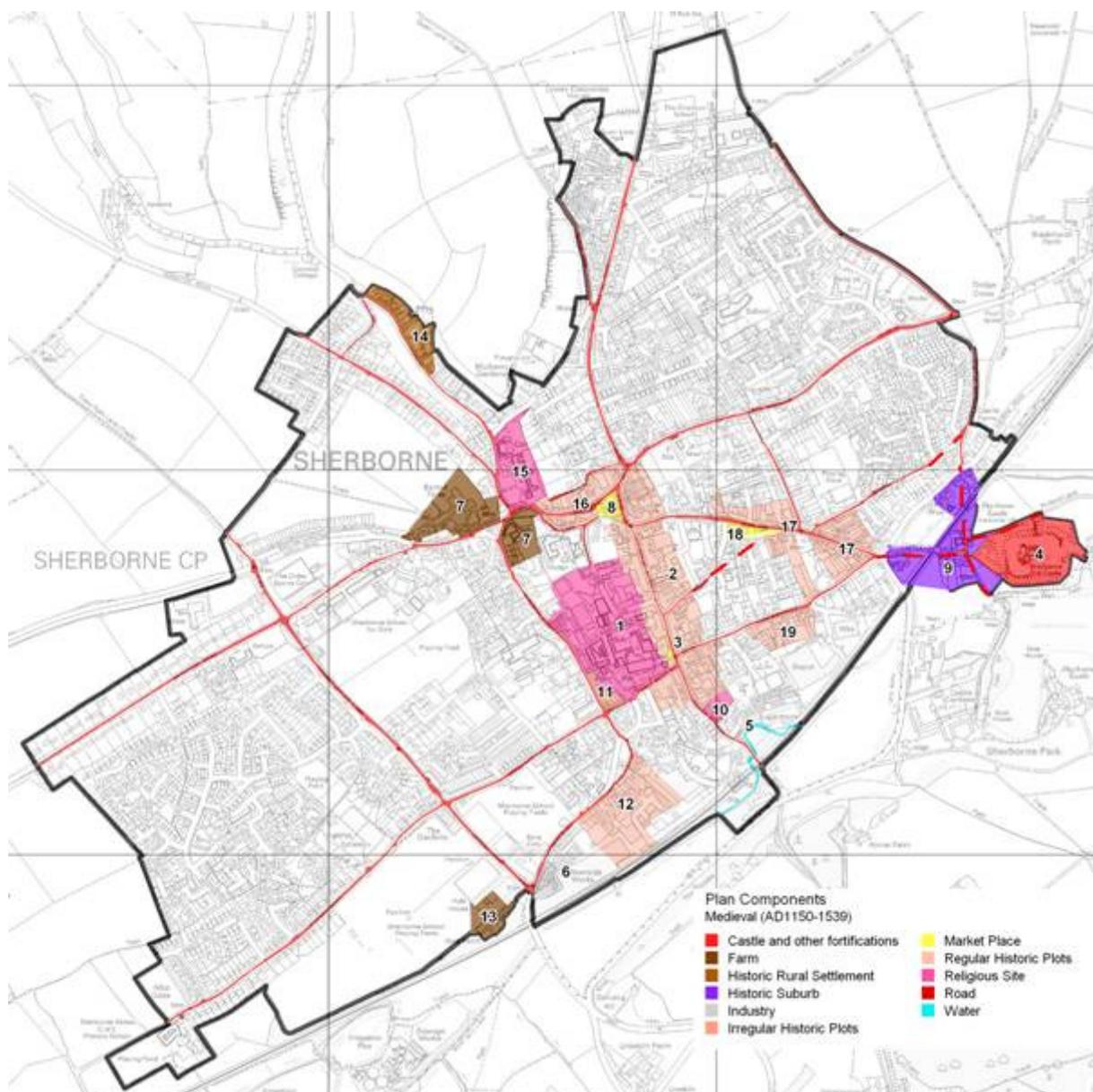*Figure 20: SS Johns' Almshouse, Half Moon Street .*

Figure 21: Medieval Town Plan Components

1437 and built between 1439 and 1444 (Figure 20). Earlier almshouses include Brother John's almshouse (1223) and William Dodil's almshouse (1406). The latter was situated in Hound Street tithing (Fowler, 1951, 232).

There may have been a grammar school in Sherborne by the 12th century. There is evidence to suggest that the Abbey paid an annual sum for the maintenance of one from that time. The master of the schools is mentioned in 1437-8 as a benefactor of the almshouse. He lived in Cheap Street, which may also have been the location of the school (*ibid.* 341).

5.3.2 Town Layout

Expansion of the town continued in the medieval period, so that by the early 14th century the present layout of the historic core of Sherborne could be recognised. This medieval layout seemed to remain intact, apart from post-medieval infill, until a further episode of expansion during the 19th and 20th centuries. The medieval road layout was a central rectangle around the monastic precinct formed by Cheap Street, Greenhill, Acreman Street and Half Moon Street, and a triangular section on the east side of the town comprising Newland and Long Street. Long Street may have lain 20m to the south of its present course until the 12th century (Bellamy, 2000). It may have originated as a much earlier track associated with the prevailing ENE-WSW field alignments, modified in the 12th century to connect Castleton with the east gate of the Abbey precinct. Castleton lay slightly further east, just beyond the apex of the

triangle; and Westbury slightly apart on the south west of the town centre.

5.3.3 Medieval Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the medieval town are shown on Figure 21 and are listed below.

1. The Abbey Precinct. Much more is known about the internal organisation of the precinct in the medieval period, although the exact line of the precinct boundary itself is still poorly understood. The only certainty seems to be the position of the cemetery gate, close to the market place (Figure 22). This gate dates from the 15th century, although the precinct boundary may be late Saxon in origin. The Abbey church underwent substantial reconstruction in the 15th century when fan vaults were built, together with a new choir and the façade of the church altered to the perpendicular style.

Leland tells us that the cloisters were built by Abbot Frith (1348-73), but were completely removed by 1569-70. Only the slender pilasters of the south and west walls of the cloisters, on the outer walls of St Mary's and the old school library (Figure 23), remain. Leland also records that the monks' water supply came from the New Well at the bottom of Greenhill. This well originally fed the Coombe Brook but was diverted by the monks to the conduit head in the cloister garth, just outside the refectory. After the dissolution the conduit head was removed and rebuilt in the market place at the foot of Cheap Street. An Elizabethan court roll dated 1593-4 shows that the monks' privies, along with those of several houses nearby, were flushed weekly on Saturdays and Sundays by diverting the waters of the Coombe Stream. The Coombe Stream also separately fed the Abbey fishponds (Fowler, 1951, 11-12). A number of late medieval buildings survived the dissolution. These include the Slype; Sherborne School library, formerly part of the west claustral range; the abbot's lodgings and kitchen, now the school chapel and studies; the gatehouse; the Abbey grange; and the conduit head, now in the market place but formerly attached to the north cloister walk. Excavation has revealed evidence of the chapter house, cloisters, infirmary, fishponds, and precinct boundaries (Keen & Ellis, 2005).

The 15th-century monks' barn was located in the NE quadrant and partially survives as the Abbey Grange on Hospital Lane (Figure 24). A recent archaeological evaluation suggests that there was less intense activity elsewhere in the northern part of the precinct.

The parish church of All Hallows was completed at some time between 1298 and 1301. It seems to represent a compromise between the townspeople, who wanted their own parish church, and the monks who held the rectory of the parish. An open door was left between the Abbey church and All Hallows, and the parishioners were obliged to carry children through the doorway to be baptised. This led to a dispute with the monks and fire in St Mary's church described above. The townspeople were forced to repair the Abbey Church, although All Hallows was made independent of St Mary's soon after. The church was dismantled between 1542 and 1550, following the dissolution, when the town purchased the Abbey church and the congregation moved to St Mary's (Fowler, 1951, 166-7, 274, 298). Only the north wall of the north aisle of All Hallows remains in situ, as a boundary between Sherborne School and Abbey Close (Figure 7).

Two important late medieval stone buildings flank the Abbey Close on the north side of Half Moon Street. These are the Almshouse of SS John (Figure 20) and Church House (Figure 26), which today provide an important visual frame for the south front of the Abbey. However, the whole of the north front of Half Moon Street may have been built up during the medieval period. The town Hall was located here during the post-medieval period.

2. Cheap Street. There is a significant number of surviving late medieval timber framed buildings on Cheap Street, and it is likely that the entire street was lined with similar buildings at that time. Numbers 3, 36, 38 and 46 are good examples of late medieval timber framed buildings with jetties, posts and brackets. There are also important medieval stone buildings, notably St Julian's Hospice (Figure 27) and The George Hotel. Cheap Street clearly remained the commercial hub of the town. The market lay at the southern end, next to the Abbey gate, and the fair field (The Green) lay at the northern end. The street was so densely occupied that it was divided into two separate tithings by the 14th century (Abbots Fee and Hound Street). The Higher Cross stood at the top of Cheap Street, at the junction with Newland. The lower Cross stood at the bottom of Cheap Street, at the junction with South Street and Half Moon Street.

3. The Market. The Tuesday and Thursday markets are likely to have continued on Cheap Street, although fairs were established on The Green and in the newly-created Borough of Newland. The late medieval Abbey cemetery

gate and Conduit house are important foci for the market area, although the latter structure was not moved here until the post medieval period (Figure 28).

4. The Old Castle. The Castle fell into the hands of the Crown in 1139 and remained so until 1355 when Bishop Wyvil made a claim for its return to the see of Salisbury, costing him 2,500 marks. Henry III had made many alterations and repairs, including the making good of the barbicans or outer defences and the four angle turrets. Other medieval alterations include the addition of a tower to the north gate, a courtyard on the western side and a chamber block on the southern side of the central keep. Archaeological excavations revealed evidence for a large kitchen block in the eastern part of the bailey and other buildings against the curtain wall. Leland records that Bishop Langton (1493-1501) made additions to Sherborne Castle, at the west end of the Hall, but these appear to have been completely destroyed by the 18th century (Hutchins, 1873, 265-6).

The Sherborne hoard was discovered in 1970 at Sherborne Old Castle, during work above and between the crowns of the two barrel vaults forming the first floor of the ruined keep (Cook, B, The British Museum, pers. comm). The hoard comprised 10 Spanish and Portuguese gold coins and 124 English silver coins of Henry VIII's second coinage. It is an unusual collection deposited in the 1530s, possibly in an attempt to hide wealth before the dissolution (Doyle, 2006, 36).

5. St Andrew's Mill. There is no specific evidence for the character of the mill during this period.

6. West Mill. There is no specific information relating to this mill for this period.

7. Abbey Barton. An archaeological evaluation in the grounds of Newell House revealed a complex of pits, post-holes and linear features, thought to represent a 14th-century settlement or farm. There is also a 16th-century barn on the site and it

has been suggested that this is the site of the Abbey barton or demesne farm. The current Barton Farm lies slightly to the west on the opposite side of the road (Figure 29). The junction of Cornhill and the Marston Road had previously been known as Barton Cross (Valentin, 2003).

8. The Green and St Thomas' Chapel. Leland recorded that St Thomas' Chapel had become disused by 1540. Markets and fairs were held on The Green throughout the medieval period. In particular St Thomas' Fair, also known as Green Fair or Gooseberry Fair was known to be held on The Green. Green hill, to the west of The Green seems to have been developed with burgage plots during the 13th century as part of the creation of Newland borough. The Higher Cross stood at the SE corner of The Green, where Cheap Street meets Newland (Figure 30).

9. Castleton. Castleton was a separate borough during the medieval period. It had 51 taxpayers recorded in the lay subsidy returns of 1327, but only 13 in the returns of 1332. This seems an overly dramatic decline to be explained by economic forces and may rather have an explanation in discrepancies over the way the two documents were compiled. William Montacute, Earl of Sarum, held the Castle of the King from 1330. Trades recorded in personal names listed in the Lay Subsidy for Castleton include a Tailor, a Shepherd (*Bercario*) and a dyer (*Deygher*). In the post-medieval period it had a weekly Thursday market and a fair on August 5th. It is likely that these events originated in the medieval period. The borough probably centred on a cross roads formed by the junction of Pinford Lane and an earlier course of Castletown Way (Figure 30). Pinford Lane represented the main road from London to Sherborne during the medieval period.

10. St Andrews Church. It is not recorded at what time St Andrew's Church fell into disuse, but it may have been connected with the construction of the new parish church of All Hallows at the start of the 14th century.

Figure 22: The Abbey Cemetery Gate looking west from the market place.

Figure 23: Sherborne School Library showing the remains of pilasters and vaulting from the lost west cloister walk

11. Trendle Street. The 16th-century estate map is not detailed enough to be certain, but it appears that there were houses along Trendle Street by that time. Nevertheless, a significant number of the buildings in this area date from the 17th century and it may equally have been at that time that the area was first colonised.

12. Westbury. Westbury was recorded a separate tithing in 1327. The 33 taxpayers at that time included a weaver, a *honyman* and a cook. The number of taxpayers had fallen to 17 in 1332. It was also depicted on J Ladd's map of 1735 when it comprised a single row of cottages on the south side of the street with long burgage plots running behind as far as the Yeo River. It is likely that these 18th century burgages reflect the original medieval layout of the borough.

13. Hyle Farm. Hyle Farm was a holding of The Almshouse of SS John. The Sherborne Almshouse archive holds details of tenants, repairs and payment of rent as far back as 1440 (DRO D/SHA). It may be that the farm existed before then but not as a possession of the Almshouse.

14. Nethercoombe. Nethercoombe was a separate tithing of Sherborne recorded in the lay subsidy returns of 1327. One of the taxpayers was known as *Willelmo atte Mulle* , suggesting the presence of a mill here (Rumble, 1980, 29). It seems to have had a medieval chapel dedicated to St Emerenciana.

15. The Chapel of St Emerenciana. Leland recorded that a parish church had existed on the site of Nethercombe Farm (Now Sherborne International School), but had fallen down by 1540. An L-shaped block incorporating medieval masonry probably from this church is located on Coombe Road (Figure 32).

16. *Newland; Greenhill.* The most significant development of this period was the creation of the planned borough of Newland by Bishop Richard Le Poure. This act is recorded in a charter dated 1227-8 which lays out details of the plots and the

Figure 24: Abbey Grange; the former monks' barn in the NE quadrant of the Abbey precinct.

nature of the tenancies. Most of the new borough lay along the road called Newland, but a smaller part of the borough extended from the chapel of St Thomas, situated on The Green, and the Bishop's barn (Greenhill). Plots in this area were much smaller than those along Newland, measuring only 2 perches by 2 perches, approximately one fortieth of an acre (Fowler, 1951, 146-154).

17. Newland (Figure 33). The larger part of the new borough of Newland lay along the road Newland. The borough charter of 1227-8 recorded that it was created on an area of former arable fields (Fowler, 1951, 157-9). A series of property boundaries to the east of Cheap Street, on either side of Newland probably represent these fields, aligned on the Abbey Precinct.

Burgage plots of approximately half an acre were available on the north and south sides of the road running between the top of Cheap Street and Castleton (Fowler, 1951, 146-154).

18. *Newland Green.* It has been suggested that there was a chapel dedicated to St Swithin in Newland and that a market cross here marked the site of St Swithin's fair. The only evidence to support the existence of the chapel is the discovery of a font and numerous human burials in the area (Hutchins, 1873). There are no documentary references to a chapel of St Swithin. The borough court was held in the open air at the site of the cross during the 14th century. It has been suggested that this cross may have actually been a stone located on Newland Green and that it was already in existence prior to the creation of the borough. This stone may have marked the site of the hundredal moot and a pre-existing fair (Fowler, 1951, 158-9).

19. Eastbury (Figure 34). Eastbury was first recorded as a tithing of Sherborne in 1327, when 17 taxpayers lived there (Rumble, 1980, 30-31). 22 taxpayers were recorded in 1332 (Mills, 1971, 33). The trades associated with the tithing included a weaver, a tucker and possible a brass worker (*brasgheter).* The name *Eastbury* suggests a deliberate urban or suburban development east of the main town, and is probably to be identified with the block of planned burgage style tenements along Long Street. The area may have remained slightly apart from the centre of Sherborne as late as the 16th century, as suggested by a map of 1570 which depicts a break in housing on the southern side of Long Street. An early land boundary, possibly the boundary of the Eastbury tithing runs along the back of tenement plots fronting on to the south side of Long Street and possibly continues along the diagonal boundary followed by the western wall of the Dorsetshire Brewery buildings.