5.4 Post-Medieval Sherborne (1540-1750)

5.4.1 Historical Summary

The start of this period was marked by the dissolution of Sherborne Abbey on March 18 1539. There was little protest from the townspeople and the economy was only partially affected. Most of the Abbey's estates were obtained by Sir John Horsey of Clifton Maybank, who quickly sought to recoup his outlay of nearly £2,800. He stripped the lead from the monastic buildings, many of which then deteriorated rapidly. He took the lead from the roof of Sherborne Old Castle in 1553-5 and sold wood, lead, glass and stone to the value of £1,500. The Castle was taken from him but was left in a ruinous state. By 1569 it was being used as a convenient source of stone for repairs to the Abbey church, which had been sold to the parishioners of Sherborne (Bettey, 2005, 188-195). The Castle and manor of Sherborne came into the hands of Sir Walter Raleigh in 1591-2. He held the manor until 1599, although he paid rent to the bishop of Salisbury. John Digby became Lord of the Manor in 1619-20, and it is held by the same family today (Fowler, 1951, 369).

Nothing remarkable happened to the Castle until the civil war, when it was one of the first to be besieged by Parliament and one of the last to hold out for the King. The Castle was finally defeated by Fairfax in 1645. He had pounded the Castle with cannon and used miners from Mendip to undermine the walls. Less than a week after the end of the siege the demolition of the Castle was ordered. The town came under attack by Parliamentary forces during 1643; 300 townsmen mustered to repel the first wave but were eventually defeated. Many houses were destroyed and property stolen (Hutchins, 1873, 266-273).

Hutchins mentions three crosses in Sherborne. The Higher Cross at the junction of Newland and Cheap Street was removed in the early 17th century with permission of the first Lord Digby. The lower cross stood at the junction of Half Moon Street and South Street and the square base of a cross remained at Newland at the time of Hutchins (ibid. 283-7)

Lenthay was common pasture in 1549, although the parish register of that year seems to suggest that there were demonstrations against its enclosure (Fowler, 1951, 339).

Plague broke out in Sherborne in 1594 and this episode seems to have had more effect on the town than the Great Plague of 1665. The economy of Sherborne seems to have developed steadily during the early post-medieval period despite the dissolution of the Abbey and outbreaks of plague. Leland described Sherborne as '… the best town…in Dorsetshire' on the eve of the dissolution, supported by cloth making and a variety of other crafts. This industry continued into the 17th century. By the 17th century Sherborne was an important market town and centre for rural crafts (Pitman, 1983, 6-7). A further economic rise in the mid 18th century was linked to the introduction of silk manufacture to the town.

The town was situated on the main route from London and continued to have regular markets as well as three annual fairs. This can be contrasted with the fate of Cerne Abbas, which was devastated by the dissolution (Bettey, 2005, 192). In the 17th century Sherborne markets were well attended and were especially important for sheep, cattle and hides. There were wooden stalls with stone tiled roofs fixed at the lower part of Cheap Street, and moveable animal pens on Greenhill. Other traders had stalls erected in the streets and large amounts of corn were traded (Pitman, 1983, 6-7). During the 18th century Castleton had its own weekly market on Thursdays and a fair held annually on August 5th. The three fairs of St Thomas, St Swithin and Pack Monday continued during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Hutchins records that woollen cloths and all sorts of commodities were sold at the Pack Monday fair, as well as cattle, horses and sheep (Hutchins, 1873, 204-9).

An Act of Parliament dated 1554 concerned the construction of a 12 mile stretch of paved road between Shaftesbury and Sherborne, known as the Sherborne Causeway. This was part of the main road from London to Plymouth and probably ran along Pinford Lane to Castleton and from there along Newland to The Green, then west along Bradford Road to Bradford Abbas and Stoford. Coldharbour was not an important road until the advent of the Turnpike trusts in 1752-3. The main road west of Sherborne did not pass through Yeovil until the 1670s. Sherborne continued as a mail post in the 16th and 17th centuries and, by the late 17th century, also provided by-posts to Sturminster Newton, Cranborne, Bruton, Wincanton, Wiveliscombe, Evershot, Somerton, Yeovil and Martock. Prior to the Turnpike Trusts the north-south route to Dorchester crossed the Yeo at the bottom of South Street and passed up Gas House Hill and Gainsborough Hill via a hollow-
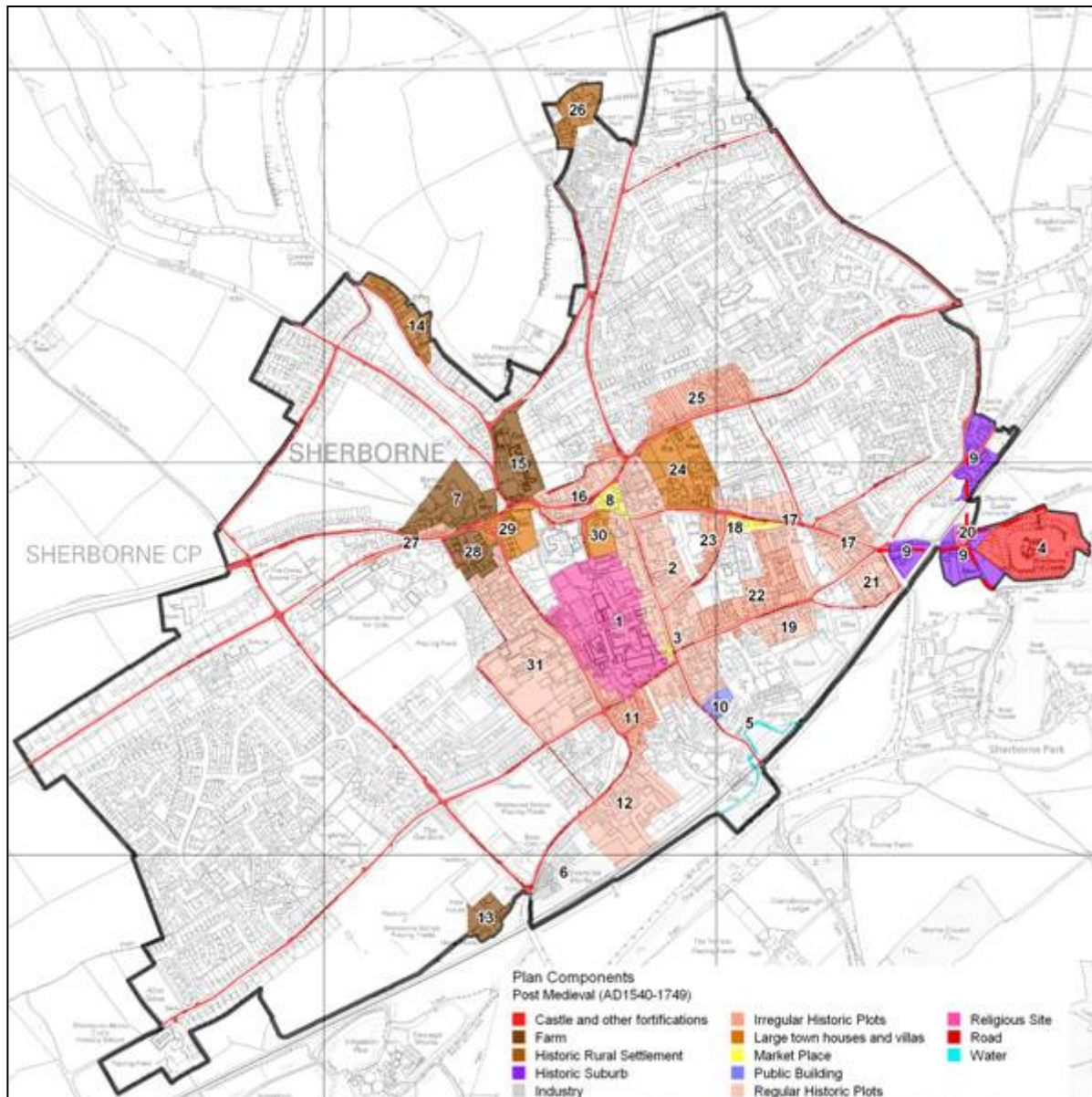
Figure 25: Post Medieval Plan Components.

way still used as a footpath today (Andrews, 1987, 1-19).

A map of the Sherborne area dating from 1564-78 in the British Library (BL Add MS 52522) shows that the majority of the small lanes around Sherborne at that time can still be traced as roads, lanes or tracks today.

By the early 18th century the cloth trade had given way to button making and haberdashery (Pitman, 1983, 6-7). The haberdashery trade was augmented by the introduction of silk manufacture to the former west range of the Abbey c. 1740, possibly using power from the old Abbey mill. Manufacturing during the 16th and 17th centuries seems to have been on a cottage industry scale within the burgage plots of Newland, Long Street, Castleton and West-

bury. It was only from the mid 18th century that large-scale manufacture developed.

When Sherborne Abbey was dissolved on March 18 1539 the Abbey church of St Mary was purchased by the people of Sherborne to use as their parish church. The Abbey claustral buildings fell into disrepair and any surviving structures were in due course acquired by Sherborne School. The ecclesiastical parish of Sherborne became part of the see of Bristol in 1542 (Fowler, 1951, 298). St Thomas' chapel was dispossessed of its lands under the second chantries act of 1547-8. It was sold in the 17th century to John Dodyngton and William Warde, although it was already in a ruinous state by that time (ibid. 336).

The Norman chapel of St Mary Magdalene built

Figure 26: Church House, Half Moon Street .

Figure 27: St Julian's Hospice (foreground) and number 3 Cheap Street.

Figure 28: The Market Place with the Conduit Cross in the left foreground

Figure 29: Barton Farmhouse, Kitt Hill

by Roger de Caen outside the curtain wall of Sherborne Castle was still standing when Sir Walter Raleigh came to Sherborne in 1592. He obtained sanction to enclose the old church, and to build another, presumably on the site of the present church. Raleigh's church was finished by 1601 but was structurally very poor. The present church (figure 35) was built in 1714 by William 5th Lord Digby (Pitman, 1970).

The rise of non-conformity began during the 17th century in Sherborne. A Quaker burial ground was in use at George Street from about 1693 to 1835 (Stock, 1995) but non-conformist chapels were generally not constructed in Sherborne until the 19th century.

Sherborne School was founded by letters patent of Edward VI on May 13 1550. This almost certainly replaced a school either endowed or run by the monks of Sherborne before the dissolution. It is possible that the monks ran an almonry school on the site of Sherborne old school building, or that a grammar school had existed on Cheap Street. The almshouses survived the dissolution because they were run by laymen (Fowler, 1951, 341, 353-5).

The town hall lay in the Abbey church yard on Half Moon Street, opposite Digby Road. It housed the assizes and a covered market. It was built in 1681 and demolished in 1884, eventually being replaced by the Digby Memorial Hall in 1910 (Barker, 1990, nos 90 & 105).

Lord Digby's School started as a small charity school endowed in 1733 by the wife of the 5th Lord Digby, and located on Westbury on what is now the site of The Britannia Inn. Thirteen poor girls were to be clothed and given books, and educated there by a school mistress (Thomson, 1969, 7).

The first workhouse was opened in 1720 at the Prior's Lodgings, to the north of the NE corner of St Mary's Church. It was pulled down in 1749 and the workhouse moved to the site of the Digby Tap on Cook's Lane (figure 36). It was moved again to a purpose-built structure on Horsecastles in 1838-9 (Barker, 1990, no.31).

5.4.2 Town Layout

The early post-medieval town plan can be surmised from an estate map dating from 1564-78 (BL Add MS 52522). This indicates that the open spaces between the medieval town and the outlying planned boroughs and tithings of Newland, Eastbury and Westbury, had largely been filled by the 16th century. It is not clear as to whether this occurred in the late medieval period or the early post-medieval period. No

medieval buildings survive in these new areas of settlement, however, and for that reason it is assumed that the infilling occurred in the early post-medieval period. Other features of the early post-medieval town plan include the 17th-century or earlier town houses at Sherborne House, The Manor House (figure 36), Newell House, Greenhill House and the 18th century Kitt Hill House. The other major development of the time was establishment of Sherborne School on the site of the medieval Abbey claustral buildings.

5.4.3 Post Medieval Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the post medieval town are shown on Figure 36 and are listed below.

1. The former Abbey precinct. Major changes in the layout of the former monastic precinct followed swiftly from the dissolution in 1539. The former Abbey church of St Mary was sold by Sir John Horsey to the parishioners of Sherborne for 100 marks. The neighbouring All Hallows church was dismantled between 1542 and 1550 (Fowler, 1951, 298), although part of the north aisle wall remains as a boundary between Sherborne School and the Church yard (Figure 7). Many of the claustral buildings were stripped of saleable assets, including lead from the roofs, and quickly fell into disrepair. Nevertheless, part of the west range remained in use as a dwelling. The buildings were later used by a cobbler and then converted to a silk mill *c* 1740 and an extra storey was added. Part of the north range, the abbot's kitchen and lodgings and Sherborne School Chapel (figure 37) also survived (Keen & Ellis, 2005).

Sherborne School may have originated as the monks' almonry school, where charity boys were taught and trained to sing mass. It may have been housed in a building to the north east of the Abbey church. Such schools were situated near the eastern main gates of the Abbey precinct so that the comings and goings of the boys would not disturb the monks. A new school building was constructed in 1606-7 and this Jacobean school house still stands today (figure 38). The Lady Chapel and the Bow chapel at the east end of St Mary's church were described as void in an indenture of 1554-5. Their site became part of Sherborne School in 1559 and their remains converted into the headmaster's residence in 1600-01. They remained as such for 300 years and were restored to the church in 1921. Between 1670 and 1749 the school yard known as the ball court was enclosed. The box building was constructed in 1697 as an infirmary for the school and The Slype was incorporated as the school

laundry, also in the late 17th century. The Prior's Lodgings, to the north of headmaster's lodgings, remained largely intact as a private residence and workhouse until about 1748 when they were acquired by the school and demolished to make way for new school development. (Fowler, 1951, 326-53)

2. Cheap Street. About a third of the buildings on Cheap Street date from the early post-medieval period.

3. The Market. The cluster of late medieval and early post-medieval buildings around the market on Cheap Street has the Conduit House at its centre (Figure 27). This late-medieval structure stood opposite the monks' refectory within the cloister garth but was dismantled and moved to its present location after the dissolution.

4. The Old Castle. The Castle was stripped of valuable materials immediately after the dissolution and left in a ruinous state. The ruins were used as a source of stone for Sir Walter Raleigh's new lodge, Sherborne New Castle. Despite this, the Old Castle remained defensible and was held for the king during the Civil War. It was captured and demolished in 1645 and its stone quarried again for the houses and church of Castleton.

5. *St Andrew's Mill.* The Mill is recorded on the 16th-century estate map of Sherborne and marked on J Ladd's map of 1732 when it lay on the south side of the junction with Ludbourne Road and South Street.

6. West Mill. The position of the west mill is also marked on Ladd's map of 1735 and is named on J.Ayres 1802 copy as Hart's or Willmotts' Silk-work. However, the mill had been used for grinding corn until 1753 (Marsden, 1980, 3).

7. *Abbey Barton.* The Kitt Hill area of Sherborne appears to have been built up by the later 16th century, as depicted on the estate map of that time. The western part of Barton Farmhouse and Newell House Barn seem to date from this time. The western part of Newell House is 17th century in date and may have had two projecting wings enclosing a small court at the front. Kitt Hill House, Cornhill House and associated cottages date from the 18th century (figure 39) as do some of the cottages associated with Barton Farm.

8. The Green and St Thomas' Chapel. Leland recorded that the chapel was disused in 1540 and Hutchins recorded that some remains of it were still visible in 1770. A substantial building depicted on J Ladd's map of 1735 is recorded as destroyed by the 1802 reproduction by Ayres. This building lay on the north side of the courtyard now known as The Old Green, adjacent to the A30. It is possible that this courtyard marks

the site of the former chapel and churchyard. It was dispossessed of its lands under the second Chantries Act of 1547-8. The New Inn was constructed on Greenhill by Bishop Rampisham in 1483 in order to provide hospitality to travellers outside the monastic precinct. It was demolished c.1842 in order to make way for the 'Georgian Houses' (figure 40). Greenhill House was built in 1607 (Fowler, 1951, 129-134, 266; Thornton, 1974, 2-3). St Thomas' Fair continued to be held at The Green throughout the early medieval period. The higher Cross was removed with the permission of the first Earl Digby

9. Castleton. Hutchins recorded that Castleton comprised a street about 300 yards long to the west of the castle, with approximately 50 houses in the early 18th century. Ladd's map of 1735 however, shows that Hutchins' description was over simple. Buildings also stretched along Castletown Way towards the present Castle Farm (figure 41) and there were a couple of buildings on Pinford Lane. Castleton Mill is also marked on the map at the junction of Castleton and Newland. The mill race that fed the mill ran along the south side of the lower London Road. The site of the building probably lies partially under and to the south of Castleton Road which has been diverted slightly to the north, probably during the 19th century (figure 42).

10. Bridewell. Hutchins recorded that the 18th century County Bridewell was built on the site of St Andrew's Church. The gate jambs of the old Bridwell survive at the entrance to Bridewell Court (figure 18).

11. Trendle Street and the east end of Westbury. This compact block of houses appears to represent 17th century infill between the town centre and the medieval tithing of Westbury. The 16th century estate map is not detailed enough to be certain; it appears that houses existed along Trendle Street (figure 43) but a gap remained between Westbury and the town at that time. A significant number of the buildings in this area date from the 17th century and it may have been at this time that the area was first colonised.

12. Westbury. Westbury is depicted on Ladd's map of 1735 as a single row of cottages on the south side of the street with long burgage plots running behind as far as the Yeo River. Only the eastern most of these burgage plots survives today, to the rear of Stonedyke House, the remainder being absorbed into the Riverside Works during the 20th century.

13. Hyle Farm. Hyle Farm remained as a possession of SS Johns' Almshouse throughout this period.

14. Nethercoombe. The extent to which the char-

Figure 30: The site of the medieval higher cross; Cheap Street/Newland junction

Figure 31: Raleigh Lodge, Middle House and Lattice House, Castleton.

Figure 32: Emerenciana, Nethercoombe.

Figure 33: View west along Newland with Newland Green in the centre

acter of Nethercoombe changed during this period remains uncertain.

15. *Emerenciana.* The chapel of Emerenciana had fallen down prior to the dissolution, although stone from this chapel is possibly incorporated into the 17th-century farmhouse and barn called Emerenciana. Newell Grange (figure 44), originally a farmhouse but now part of Sherborne International College, also dates from the late 17th-early 18th century.

16. *Newland; Greenhill.* There was little discernible change to the burgage plots lining Greenhill during the post-medieval period. A small collection of houses within irregular plots were appended to the west end of the burgages on the south side of Greenhill, partly along the Back Lane. Numbers 1 and 2 Priestands Lane are also 18th century in style, although not depicted on Ayres' map of 1802.

17. *Newland.* There was little discernible change to the burgages at Newland during this period. The origins of the Manor House (figure 36) are obscure; it is said to have a 15th or 16th-century origin, although the front, as it exists, appears to be largely early or mid 19th-century Gothic Revival work. The central oriel may be partly original. The building was certainly never a manor house as such. In 1735 it was described as 'late Durnfords'. The Durnford family were prominent in Sherborne during the 16th century (Barker, 1990, no.145).

18. *Newland Green.* Hutchins records that the square base of a cross remained at Newland in the 18th century. St Swithin's Fair continued at this time and is thought to have been held at Newland. There was a pond at the site of Newland Gardens in 1570 (Barker, 1990).

19. *Eastbury.* The site of Eastbury is recorded on J Ladd's map of 1735 and named on the later copy by J.Ayres (1802). It comprised a row of terraced houses with eight regular burgage plots to the rear. The majority of the current buildings, including Eastbury Cottages and the Eastbury Hotel, date from the 17th and 18th centuries.

20. *St Mary Magdalene Church, Castleton.* Raleigh built a church here that was finished in 1601 but needed replacing by 1714. The present church was built then by William 5th Lord Digby (Pitman, 1970). It is a rectangular stone building with two aisles. The windows and nave arcade are in the Gothic style. The graveyard has iron gates and stone gate-piers with balls.

21. *Eastfield.* On the south side of the eastern end of Long Street is a block of land delineated by East Mill Lane. This area is associated with the place name *Eastfield*, and probably repre-

Figure 34: View west along Long Street showing the block known as Eastbury on the left

Figure 35: The Church of St Mary Magdalene, Castleton

Figure 36: The Manor House, Newland

sents a medieval arable field, colonised by the early post-medieval period. The position of the east Mill is marked on J Ladd's map of 1735 and the 1802 copy by J Ayres. On the later map the Mill is named as Scott's Mill, formerly Castle Mill. A large building may be depicted at the same site on the 16th century estate map. This mill is likely to have been one of two mills acquired by Bishop Roger in the 12th century and which continued to be associated with the Castle after the dissolution.

22. *Long Street irregular plots.* Earlier post-medieval maps suggest that the street was com-

pletely occupied by the late 16th century and re-mained so into the 18th century (BL Add MS 52522; J Ladd, 1733). Around a fifth of the buildings on Long Street retain fabric from the late 16th to early 18th centuries. These are concentrated at the western end near the junction with Cheap Street and in the Eastbury area.

23. Hound Street. Hound Street followed its present course by 1735. Before then it seems to have taken a straighter, more easterly course towards Tinney's Lane or the putative hundred stone at Newland Green. Ladd's map of 1735 shows that only the north west frontage of the new curving street was developed by that time. The area to the east was known as Fairfield in the 19th century and may have been the site of St Swithin's fair in the post-medieval period. Only numbers 9 and 45 Hound Street (figure 45) appear to retain 17th-century fabric.

24. *Sherborne House.* The House is grade I listed and was designed by Benjamin Bastard for Henry Seymour Portman who bequeathed it in about 1720 to his nephew Francis Seymour. The main block is rectangular in plan with a central hall flanked by parlours. The staircase, to the rear on the right, has a mural painted by Sir James Thornhill. The rear north west wing dates from the 16th century.

25 *Coldharbour*. This road certainly existed by the late 16th century and appears to follow the line of the pre-urban rectilinear field system. It was not the major eastern route out of Sherborne during the medieval period and does not appear to have been built up with housing until the 17th or early 18th century.

26. *Clatcombe.* It is not clear when the dispersed settlement of Clatcombe was first established. It is not shown on the late 16th century estate map of Sherborne and lies outside the limit of Ladd's 18th century map. Nevertheless, the barn at Lower Clatcombe Farm (Clatcombe Grange) dates from the 18th century.

27. *Kitt Hill Cottages.* The Kitt Hill area of Sherborne appears to have been built up by the later 16th century, as depicted on the estate map of that time. The cottages associated with Barton Farm date from the 18th century.

28. *Horsecastles Farm.* The farm house at Horsecastles Farm is depicted on J Ladd's map of 1735. It takes its name from pre-existing stable buildings somewhere in the vicinity.

29. *Newell House* (Figure 39). This building lies at a prominent position at the junction of Acreman Street and Newell. Earlier activity on this site is attested by medieval deposits and pottery dating from the 10th to the 14th centuries excavated in

Figure 37: Sherborne School Library (left), Chapel and School House Studies (right); formerly the abbot's kitchen

Figure 38: Bell Buildings (left), Oak Room and Sherborne old school house (right)

Figure 39: Newell House (left foreground) and Kitt Hill House (right background)

the grounds of the house (Valentin, 2003). The west end of the house is of 17th century origin. It originally appears to have had two projecting wings at the front, forming a small court. The easternmost of the wings has been incorporated into a newer 19th-century block.

30. *Greenhill House* (Figure 46). Greenhill House is now part of Sherborne School. It dates from the 16th century, with later additions. The house faces The Green, which is medieval in origin, suggesting that Greenhill House may be on the

site of an earlier building. No evidence for any medieval structures was found during an archaeological evaluation in 1998, although a 14th century ditch and another medieval subsurface feature were recorded (Robinson, 1998; Cox & Chandler, 1997).

31. Acreman Street. Acreman Street may have existed as a road, along its present course, by the late Saxon period. However, no medieval structures survive and it may not have been colonised until the early post-medieval period. The earliest evidence for buildings here is the 16th century estate map (BL Add MS 52522). The plots on the west side of the road were regularly spaced and of approximately one acre during the 18th century. Thus the road name seems to reflect a late medieval or early post-medieval planned tenurial arrangement of regular one acre holdings. Similar arrangements of this period can be seen at Acreman Street in Cerne Abbas and The Furlongs in Abbotsbury. It may be no coincidence that all three were Abbey towns. However, the surname Acreman dates back to before the Norman Conquest and is thought to refer to a special bonded status in which the Acreman held a tenement in exchange for services to the Lord of the manor as a ploughman.