

5.2 Post-medieval Blandford Forum (1540-1850)

5.2.1 Historical Summary

This period saw the transformation of Blandford into the Georgian town that is so familiar today. However for much of this period, there was little change in the size and layout of the town, which remained a small market town during the 16th and 17th centuries. The change in the physical appearance of the town was the result of serious fires in the in the early 18th century.

It seems clear from a number of maps and the little published information concerning the development of trade and industry within Blandford Forum that the town did not significantly expand economically or physically beyond its medieval limits until the mid 17th century. There was some limited early post-medieval period expansion on the north side of The Plocks as revealed on the 1605 Norden survey of Cranborne Chase (DHC Photocopy 311). A suburb also developed on the south side of the ford during the late medieval or early post-medieval period within the parish of Blandford St Mary. This suburb is depicted on the Hardinge survey of Cranborne Chase dated 1618. None of the 17th century maps are of sufficient resolution to depict the location of dispersed medieval farmsteads in the region.

In 1605 the manor was formally incorporated as a borough, with a charter. In the 1620s, Thomas Gerard described Blandford as a *"faire market towne"* (Penn 1980, 19). Whilst the medieval town was well enough positioned to succeed as a local market centre, economic growth was only possible within the sphere of wider national socio-economic developments associated with the agricultural revolution in the later 17th and 18th centuries. This might be partly explained by a change in tenurial arrangements from copyhold to leasehold in the region, allowing landowners to increase rents

on a regular basis and requiring tenants to exploit and amalgamate their smallholdings in order to pay the increased rents. This in turn stimulated the economy of local urban areas such as Wimborne Minster and Blandford Forum (Reeve, 2000).

Industry remained a relatively small component of Blandford's total economy in the 17th and 18th centuries. The weekly market and annual fairs were more important. Nevertheless, it was during the 17th century that industries such as the manufacture of band strings and bone lace were recorded for the town. In fact, by 1698 there were 500 lace makers recorded in Blandford (Sharpe 2007). This is a remarkable figure that must include the surrounding area, considering that Hutchins reckoned there were only 400 houses in the town as late as 1760. Blandford continued to be famous for the production of the finest lace or point in England into the early 18th century (Hutchins 1874, 215). Lace making was conducted on an individual basis, needing little equipment and was considered a worthy occupation for schoolchildren and residents of poor houses. Button making was also a feature of the Blandford economy during the 17th century and, along with the manufacture of articles of straw, into the 18th century. A large manufactory of shirt buttons continued at Blandford in to the early 19th century. In 1814 seven families were engaged in button making in Blandford (Warren 1937, 40; 45; Hutchins 1874, 216). Gloving became an significant industry in Blandford from at least the early 18th century (Cox 1992, 11-13). Brewing was an important cottage industry during the 17th century. During the 18th century public houses brewed their own ales. Hector's Brewery was established by 1789 on the south bank of the river Stour in Blandford St Mary (Blandford Town Council 2001). A further insight into the burgeoning economy of the late 17th century may be gained through the fact that in 1660-66



Figure 12: The Old House



Figure 13: Dale House

local Blandford tradesmen resorted to issuing their own token coinage of farthings and half-pence in brass and copper. In 1669 the borough issued its own farthing tokens in order to meet the demand for small change generated through trade (Cox 2003, 11).

A second factor in the growth of the 17th and early 18th century economy was the wealth contained within the surrounding countryside, where there were a number of large estates and country houses. Hutchins also noted that the chief support of the town was the resort of travellers and the neighbouring gentry, as well as the market and fairs. He also mentioned the races which had been held during July or August on Monkton Down (now the site of Blandford Camp) since at least 1603 up until 1843. The borough put on entertainments during race week and the races themselves were widely attended by Dorset gentry during the 18th century. An offshoot of the wealth exhibited in the surrounding country may have been the development of plant nurseries as successful businesses around the fringes of the town from the late 18th century. John Galpine ran a particularly extensive garden nursery on the north side of the town. His 1782 catalogue listed a variety of ornamental trees, shrubs and plants serving the growing needs of country houses and formal gardens (Blandford Forum Town Council 2001, 33-4).

There had been a number of destructive fires prior to 1731. In 1713 for example, the lower part of East Street was destroyed by a fire suspected as arson. Subsequently this part of town, rebuilt in brick and tile, avoided the worst ravages of the Great Fire of 1731. The Great Fire began around 2pm on 4 June 1731 at a soap boiler's or tallow chandler's house at the junction of White Cliff Mill and Bryanston Streets. The town's three fire engines were quickly burnt or rendered unusable and brisk NW winds spread the fire throughout the town within less than an hour. The fire also spread to Blandford St Mary and Bryanston where it



Figure 14: The Georgian Town Hall, Market Place

destroyed all but three houses. Tiled houses lasted longer than thatched but even so, by 7pm few houses were left standing. Apart from the eastern end of East Street, only the Old House (Figure 12), Ryves almshouses, Dale House (Figure 13) and a few other buildings in the upper parts of Salisbury and White Cliff Mill Streets survived. Few people died in the fire but 400 families lost their homes. Temporary barracks were built to house the poor at the NE corner of the town and a wooden tabernacle was built on the north side of the sheep market as a temporary parish church. In 1732 George II passed an act for the reconstruction of the town and charitable donations were made to help the process (Hutchins 1874, 216-7).

John and William Bastard were in business in Blandford as architects, builders and joiners at the time of the fire. They had considerable experience and had built many country houses in the area. It was John and William who undertook the planning and supervision, as well as most of the rebuilding of the town following the fire. The fact that John subsequently held the office of town bailiff five times and William twice, is a mark of how well their efforts were received (Cox 1987, 4). The work was largely completed within a period of thirty years. The Bastards initially drew up an accurate map showing the extent of the destruction. They retained the original street plan and plot boundaries, although some of the streets and the market place were widened and the work was regulated by act of parliament, resulting in the present brick Georgian town (RCHME 1970, 16-18).

The rapid and charity-aided reconstruction meant that the economy of the town was not adversely affected in a disproportionate manner. Nevertheless, there was a certain amount of disorder and poverty during the mid 18th century. In 1738 only 20 innkeepers were licensed because of a large number of disorderly events. The situation soon normalised and in 1757 Archbishop Wakes Bluecoat School was



Figure 15: The Fire Monument, Market Place

established and in 1785 Milton Abbas Grammar School relocated to East Street. The Blandford Bank was founded in 1787 by John Bastard, William Sillers and John Damory. The success of Blandford Forum is also reflected in the fact that it was created a municipal borough under the Municipal Corporations act of 1835, although there was no boundary extension until 1889 (Cox 1986b, 63).

The Free School at Blandford had been established on the NW side of the parish church during the 16th century or earlier. It was rebuilt by the corporation following the fire, but appears to have closed in the early 19th century. It may have suffered due to competition from the Milton Abbey Grammar School which had relocated to Blandford in 1785. Archbishop Wakes' Charity Blue Coat School was established by 1757 through a charitable endowment for the payment of a master. This arrangement continued until the establishment of the National School in Park Road in 1831 at which time the Blue Coat boys were admitted there. A girls National and infants school was built on Damory Street in 1821 (Hutchins 1874, 220; 241). Blandford St Mary School was built in 1846 by the Down House Estate and served the children of the parish of Blandford St Mary.

The origins of religious non-conformity in Blandford seem to lie with a licence granted to Congregationalists to hold a service in the house of John Paige in 1672. In 1711 the first Congregational church was built on a site off Salisbury Street. It was rebuilt after the fire and again in 1867. A large workhouse was built on East Street in 1815 for 250 paupers (Cox 2003, 12-13; 23).

Blandford Bridge was repaired by the County in 1664, although not fully taken over as a designated County Bridge until the 18th century. The current arrangement of three bridges was newly built in 1783, with the two smaller bridges designed to accommodate flood water (Hutchins 1874, 220; Good 1966, 39). A number of turnpike trusts were established in and around Blandford. The earliest was the Harnham, Blandford and Dorchester Trust which was set up in 1753-4. This was the second earliest trust in Dorset. The Blandford trust created a single major road between Axminster and Salisbury, leaving the county at Harnham Hill. This later became known as The Great Western Turnpike and greatly increased traffic through Blandford, to and from London. The section of the road through the study area entirely utilised pre-existing routes between Blandford and Pimperne (Salisbury Road), although a more direct route cut directly south of Blandford Bridge and

along Dorchester Hill south of Blandford St Mary. The Blandford and Poole Trust and the Vale of Blackmore Trust represent eastern and western subdivisions respectively of an earlier trust established in 1764-5 between Poole and Sherborne via Blandford St Mary. This act turnpiked the Bournemouth Road, east of Blandford Bridge, on the south side of the river. The Blandford and Wimborne Trust was established in 1765-6 to control the road between Blandford and Wimborne. This originally left Blandford on the Langton Road, although at some time between 1765 and 1795 the Wimborne Road was created along the line of the modern B3082. The lower road between Blandford and Shaftesbury was created by a later act relating to the Shaftesbury and Sherborne Trust dated 1778-9 (Good 1966, 125-138).

5.2.2 Town Layout

It has been noted that the 17th and 18th centuries were periods of economic expansion for Blandford Forum. This is reflected in the town layout. The town survey drawn up by the Bastards following the Great Fire in 1731 clearly shows that a significant number of large suburban villas and town houses had been established prior to the fire along the upper reaches of White Cliff Mill and Bryanston Streets as well as along Salisbury Street north of the Plocks. Dale House was built in 1689, Ryves Almshouse was built in 1682 and The Old House was built by a German Doctor also during the mid-late 17th century (Cox 2003, 12). The fact that almost the entire town was destroyed by fire in 1731, did not affect the layout of the town, which was re-built within the former street plan and using the former plot boundaries. The market place was cleared of stalls, shambles and the market cross to create a more open space, perhaps to provide a more effective fire break. Some important changes to the town plan followed on from the reconstruction of the town. Initially 60 wooden barracks were built between The Close and Salisbury Street. These were replaced during the early 19th century by an estate of terraced houses lining Dorset and Orchard Streets. Further large detached houses were established following the fire on the north side of the town. One of the largest, Park House at the west end of Bryanston Street, was built during the early 19th century following the creation of Bryanston Park and the closure of the road linking Blandford to the old medieval village at Bryanston.

Other important changes to the road layout include the creation of the Great Western Turnpike between Salisbury and Axminster in the

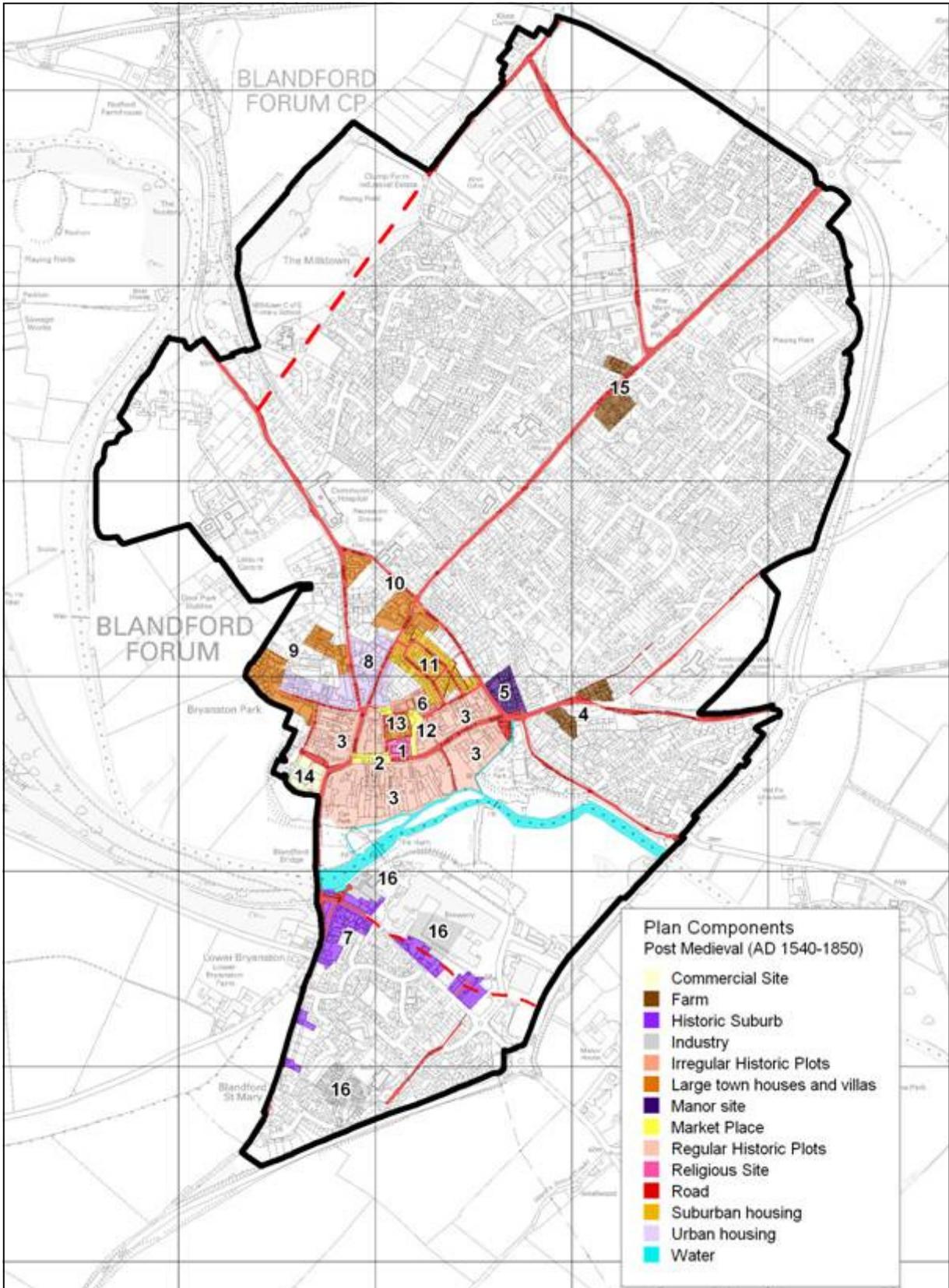


Figure 16: Later Post- Medieval Plan Components

mid 18th century. This road entered Blandford from the east along Salisbury Road. This marked a change from the medieval route to London which had entered Blandford along East Street. Further changes south of Blandford Bridge led to the creation of a more direct southerly route from the Bridge and along Dorchester Hill. Finally, the modern Wimborne Road was created during the late 18th century as a turnpike route between Blandford and Wimborne.

5.2.3 Post-medieval Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the post-medieval town are shown on Figure 16 and are listed below.

1. *The Church of Ss Peter and Paul.* The current parish church was re-built on the original medieval site following the fire of 1731. It was completed by John and William Bastard in 1739, built from Greensand with Portland stone dressings.

2. *The Market.* By the early 18th century, permanent stalls had been established at the east end of the market. These were removed, together with the medieval market cross, after the Great fire of 1731. The old Town Hall was cleared from the centre of the market and a new one built on the north side of the newly cleared square by 1734 (Figure 14). On completion of the town's reconstruction in about 1760, John Bastard erected a commemorative water pump on the east side of the square, adjacent to the church (Figure 15).

3. *Burgages.* The plan of the town drawn up by the Bastards following the fire of 1731 clearly shows the extent of burgages before the fire. The fact that the majority remain intact today demonstrates that the town was rebuilt within the original medieval plots.

4. *St Leonard's Chapel.* At some point during

the post-medieval period the chapel became incorporated into the out buildings of St Leonard's Farm.

5. *Damory Court.* Damory Court was held by the Ryves family during the 16th and 17th centuries; a wealthy and prominent Blandford family. Penn suggests that the house had disappeared by the 1838 Tithe Map (Penn 1980, 19) although it is named quite clearly in the tithe apportionment as plot 118: *Damory House, yards and buildings* (DHC T/BLF). The editor of Hutchins 3rd edition claimed that Damory Court had become a farm by the late 19th century, although this may be a simple confusion with the recently constructed Damory Court Farm on Salisbury Road. The original Damory Court seems to have been demolished to make way for the railway during the mid 19th century.

6. *Plots north of the Plocks.* Buildings in these plots were destroyed during the fire of 1731, although a formal garden was already in existence on the site of the current Woodhouse garden by that time. A temporary wooden tabernacle was built within the square at the top of sheep market hill immediately following the fire and the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel (Figure 17) now retains the name 'The Tabernacle'.

7. *Blandford St Mary suburb.* Blandford St Mary was also devastated by the 1731 fire and thirteen houses were destroyed (Cox 1987, 10). Information concerning the sequence of reconstruction here is limited, although the creation of the Great Western Turnpike from 1753-4, 20 years after the fire, seems to have taken the opportunity to realign the road between the bridge and Dorchester Hill on a more direct southerly route over the site of former tenements. Thus it may have been that only houses on the east side of Dorchester Hill and the south side of Bournemouth Road were reconstructed during the 18th century. The medieval settlement at Stour Park seems to have shrunk significantly during the 14th century (Graham & Cox 1993b).



Figure 17: Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, The Tabernacle



Figure 18: Eagle House, White Cliff Mill Street

8. *Bryanston, White Cliff Mill and Salisbury Street urban plots.* Map evidence suggests that the town of Blandford initially expanded north along these three streets during the late 17th and early 18th centuries. This took the form of tightly packed and irregular urban plots as well as larger houses around the fringes. Only the northern parts of White Cliff Mill and Salisbury Streets survived the fire of 1731, although the urban plots were reconstructed within their former tenement boundaries.

9. *Eagle House and Park House.* A number of large town houses and villas were constructed on the NW fringes of the town during the early-mid 18th century, either side of the fire. Parts of Eagle House (Figure 18) and the north wing of Park House may have survived the fire, although both have been substantially altered since. Park House itself was demolished during the later 20th century and only the stable block remains. Bryanston Cottage and Bethune, on the south side of Bryanston Street were constructed during the mid-late 18th century on the site of a former terrace destroyed by the fire (RCHME 1970, 27-8).

10. *Dale House/ Salisbury House.* A second area of large town houses was built on the northern fringe of the town, at the junction of Salisbury and Damory Streets. The Bastard town survey shows that there had been a cluster of buildings at this junction since before the fire of 1731 and that they survived the fire. However, all were rebuilt during the late 18th century, except Salisbury House. Dale House was built in 1689, although the original building was almost doubled in size during the early 19th century (RCHME 1970, 27; 35-7). A further group of buildings had been constructed at the north end of Park Road by the early 19th century.

11. *Dorset/ Orchard Street Housing Estate* (Figure 19). A compact estate of brick and stuccoed terraces was built during the early-mid 19th century on the site of former gardens between the west ends of The Close and Salisbury



Figure 19: View south along Dorset Street towards The Old House

Street. The estate was planned around a central square with the two principal streets running NNW-SSE along either side.

12. *The Plocks and the Sheep Market.* During the 17th and 18th centuries Blandford's growing economy and regional influence may have led to the expansion of the available market area. Map evidence is not conclusive, but suggests that The Plocks and Sheep Market Hill were established as market places prior to 1731. Blandford certainly held regular sheep fairs and sheep markets by the 19th century. In fact, the annual sheep fair was so well attended that by 1822 it was removed from the town centre to a new Fair Field on Salisbury Road (Cox 1995, 19).

13. *Church Lane Townhouses.* Prior to the fire of 1731, the block of land north of the church had held the free school and almshouses. Following the fire the site was redeveloped for private wealthy town houses. Coupar House is probably the largest and most splendidly decorated of the post-fire town houses (Figure 20). Old Bank House incorporates part of a surviving wall from the former school house. The rectory and the new almshouses complete the development, although Lime Tree House on the west side of Church Lane could also be considered among this group (RCHME 1970, 23-6).

14. *The Crown Hotel.* This hotel was originally constructed before the fire of 1731 and was rebuilt on the same site afterwards. Only the stables (now converted to garages) and part of the back of the current building survive from that time.

15. *Damory Court and Cowards Farms.* The date at which these farms were established is unknown, although they were certainly in existence by the late 19th century. Damory Court Farm may have been built following the destruction of Damory Court to make way for the new railway in the mid 19th century. Cowards Farm, on the other hand, may represent an earlier establishment.



Figure 20: Coupar House, Church Lane

16. *Hector's Brewery*. The original brewery at Blandford St Mary was built on the east side of the old ford on the south bank of the river Stour shortly before 1789 by William Clapcott. Subsequently brewers Snell, Storey and Hector took over the site (Stanier 2006, 3). Other 18th and early 19th century industry in Blandford St Mary includes a brick works on the site of the modern Hall and Woodhouse brewery. Pits for the extraction of clay, backfilled with brick making waste, have been excavated on the Stour Park retail site (Graham & Cox 1993a). A chalk extraction pit has also been identified from cartographic and documentary evidence adjacent to the modern Blandford St Mary Primary School on Birch Avenue (Dodd 1994; Cox 1994).