

5.7 Early 20th Century Christchurch (1900 - 1945)

5.7.1 Historical Summary

The developmental history of Christchurch in the early 20th century is dominated by three themes: the further expansion of the area as a seaside and holiday resort; the large number of military sites, airfield and coastal defences dating from the Second World War; and the proliferation of suburban housing estates. The historic core of Christchurch remained relatively undisturbed by these developments. The population of Christchurch continued to expand steadily from 11,155 in 1901 to approximately 22,500 in 1945. There is very good cartographic evidence for the development of Christchurch during this time.

During the First World War Christchurch was active in providing many hospitals for wounded troops and training sites for trench warfare. St Catherine's Hill was one such site, used again in the Second World War. During the Second World War the defences of Christchurch reached a new level. The region had a large number of airfields including Hurn (later the site of Bournemouth International Airport), Winkton, Holmesley South and Christchurch. RAF Christchurch also had a multitude of anti-invasion defences, some of which were specifically associated with the airfield and the SRDE and MVEE sites. However, Christchurch was also designated as a 'centre of resistance' and the defences were developed as an 'anti-tank island'. This was achieved through the usual coastal defences of pillboxes and anti-tank cubes etc, but the rear of the area was also defended by utilising the line of the railway embankment and cuttings. This provided a ready-made anti-tank defence, reinforced where necessary by pillboxes and anti-tank cubes. The line of the railway from the River Avon to the Stour was reinforced by a considerable number

of anti-tank cubes, with pillboxes at either end where the railway crossed the rivers. At the Old Railway Goods Yard, to the north of the railway and east of Fairmile Road, 48 of these anti-tank cubes and a pillbox survive and have been scheduled. Pillboxes also survive at Convent Meadows, Ringwood Road and the A35 Road bridge over the railway at Roeshott Hill. Here the pillbox was disguised by building it into the road bridge. These railway defences were designed to face north, protecting the Christchurch 'centre of resistance' from inland attack (Hodges 1999).

For some the defining Character of Christchurch is its location on the eastern edge of the Poole-Bournemouth conurbation. This is, in terms of historic character, a very recent development. By the 1930s the maps indicate that the suburban area on the north of the historic town had expanded as far as Grove Farm with the plots at Portfield and Jumpers Common nearly completely occupied. The area had been divided into a regular grid of Streets with regular subdivisions of long thin rectangular plots with a street frontage and long garden to the rear. Housing tended to be detached or semi-detached. The first stage of this process of subdivision can be seen at Mudeford where streets had been mapped but no houses built in the 1930s. The only other areas to be developed by this time were Highcliffe and Walkford at the extreme eastern end of the study area where former common heath land at Chewton and Walkford Commons had been enclosed, subdivided into grids and plots and a number of houses built.

5.7.2 Town Layout

The twentieth century was a period of most dramatic change to the urban layout of Christ-



Figure 42: The Military Vehicle Engineering Establishment (MVEE) on the former Christchurch barracks site.



Figure 43: The Rialto Cinema

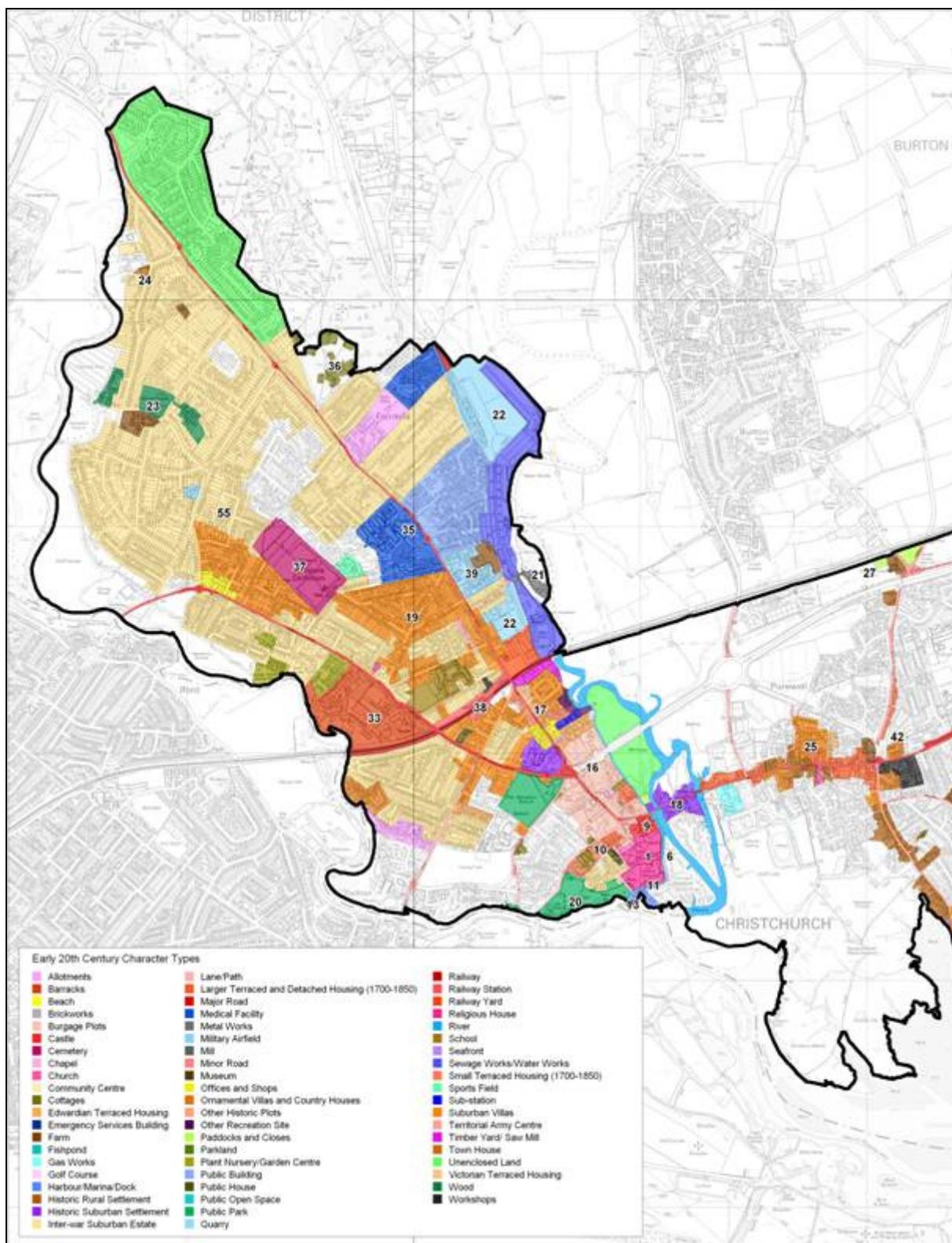


Figure 44: Christchurch early twentieth century plan components (west)

church. It was in the first half of the century that many of the suburban housing estates were established, mainly on the enclosed former arable fields of Christchurch, Stanpit and Bure. The period was dominated politically by military conflict, which is reflected in the establishment

and expansion of military sites at Christchurch Airfield and the Barracks, and at sites such as Steamer Point.

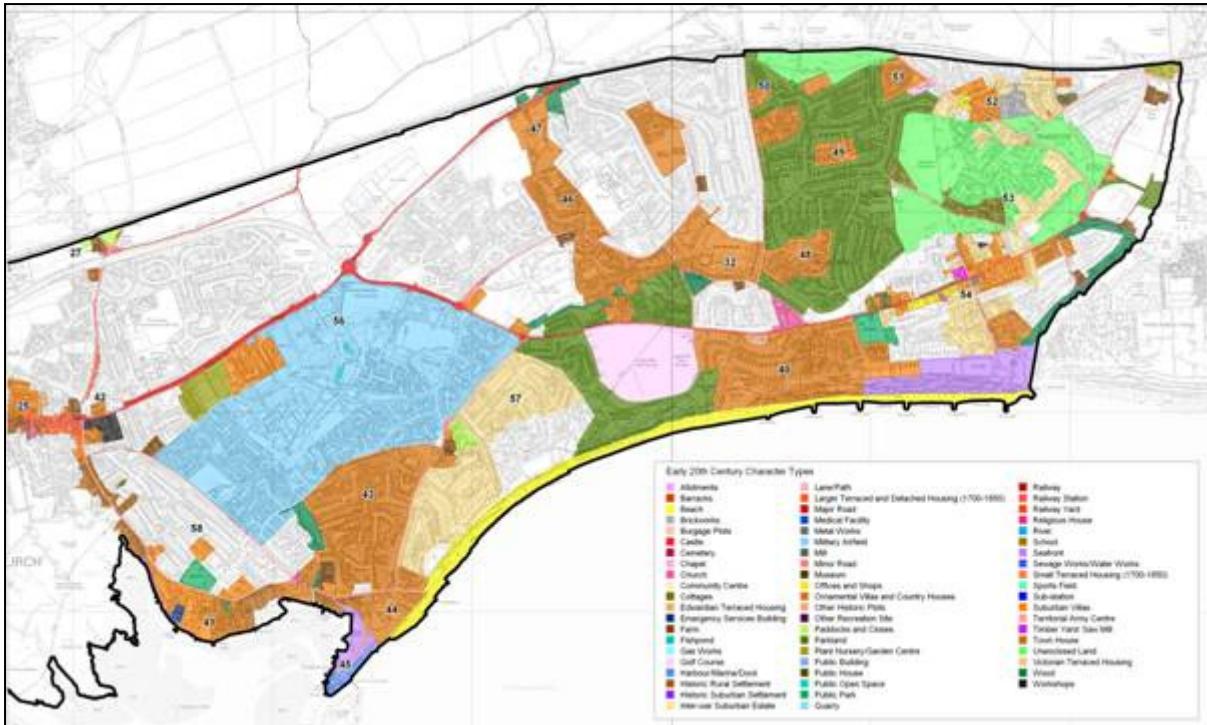


Figure 45: Christchurch early twentieth century plan components (east)

5.7.3 Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the inter-war town are shown on Figures 44 & 45 and are listed below.

1. *Parish Church of the Holy Trinity and Priory House.* There were no significant developments during this period
6. *The Mill Stream.* There were no significant developments during this period
9. *The Castle.* There were no significant developments during this period
10. *Wick Lane.* The only development in this area during the early 20th century was the construction of a new road; Princess Avenue, off of Whitehall Lane, with associated suburban housing.



Figure 46: Knapp Mill pumping and water treatment station, 1921

11. *Place Mill.* Place Mill continued working until 1908 when damage caused by constant vibration made its repair uneconomic. It became a boat house.

13. *The Harbour & Quays.* There were no significant developments during this period. There was some dredging in the 1930s.

16. *Burgage Plots.* The areas of Pound Lane, Millhams Street and Beaconsfield Road in Bargates had already been developed by the end of the 19th century. However, elsewhere along High Street and on the east side of Bargates burgage Plots remained intact. The only development during the earlier 20th century was the construction of the electricity generating station immediately north of Beaconsfield Road in



Figure 47: The surviving buildings of the Airspeed factory

1903. This utilised and remained wholly within an earlier burgage plot.

17. Bargates suburb. The major developments in Bargates during the early 20th century were predominately in the area of the former Portfield between the historic suburb and the Railway Station. A number of roads had already been planned at the end of the 19th century, although few houses had been built. In the early 20th century a number of suburban villas were developed along Fairfield, Station Road, Twynham Avenue, Stour Road and Barrack Road. In the historic part of the suburb the Rialto Cinema was built in the art deco style and became the headquarters for the Christchurch Royal British Legion in 1946.

18. Bridge Street suburb. There were no significant developments during this period

19. Avon Park Housing Estate. By 1901 there were 25 houses in the Avon Park estate. There was a period of rapid growth between 1901 and 1909, with another burst of development in the early 1920s following the new Housing Act of 1922. This boom was only partly curtailed by the depression in the late 1920s, with construction continuing into the late 1930s. Electricity did not arrive until 1939 and a third burst in construction during the 1960s saw the plots finally fully developed (Donachie, 2005, 14-33). The early 20th century also saw the expansion of housing to other areas of the former Portfield. The homelands housing estate was built on the site of the early 20th century, Portfield House, also known as *Homelands*.

20. Quomps

The 1920-30s were an important period in the development of the Quomps. Common rights ceased in 1923, the ground level was raised and a recreation ground built on the site of the rubbish tip.

21. Knapp Mill

The site of Knapp Mill was purchased by West Hampshire Water Company in 1921 and the old mill building demolished. In 1937 the present pumping and water treatment station was built on the site.

22. Latch Farm

During the early 20th century the size of the pits and rate of extraction increased. Pits are recorded at Furzy or Furzy Hatch and Newman's Pit to the north of Latch Farm and east of Marsh Lane; and at Higher and Lower Close in the immediate vicinity of Latch Farmhouse. Some of the area of the former gravel working has been incorporated into the waterworks alongside the River Avon. The Mill Plain gravel pits

lay to the south of Lower Close and were bounded by Mill Road, Fairmile Road and the railway to the north of Bargates. Gravel was worked here intermittently between 1909 and 1934.

23. Grove Farm. There was little change at Grove Farm until the 1930s when an inter-war suburban housing estate encroached on the farm and woodland.

24. Bosley. Suburban housing developments did not reach Bosley until the later 20th century. Nevertheless, there was some development in the area during the inter-war period. This comprised a number of cottages and outbuildings developed around the irregular village green. None of these later buildings survived redevelopment in the modern era.

25. Street or Purewell. The only significant developments during the early 20th century was the continued infilling of vacant plots along these Roads and Scotts Hill Lane.

A large villa was built at Purewell Hill, but demolished in the later 20th century. The site is now represented by the modern development of Purewell Court. During the 1930s.

27. Staple Cross. There were no significant developments during this period. The cross itself was damaged by a tank in 1944.

32. Nea. Nea House was demolished in 1940, although its landscaped park survives as Nea Meadow; a Local Nature Reserve.

33. Barracks. The barracks were expanded during the Second World War. It was here that the EBE became MEXE and later MVEE, and the Bailey Bridge was developed and tested. One is used to span Mother Siller's Channel on Stanpit Marsh and remains there to this day. The MVEE site was finally closed in the 1994 and has since been redeveloped as a modern light industrial and retail centre. Some of the original buildings may survive at the southern end of Bailey Drive.

35. Christchurch Union Workhouse and hospital. In 1913 a new infirmary block was added to the north side of the Fairmile Road workhouse. During both wars the buildings were used as military hospitals and several wards were added. The site became Christchurch hospital in 1948 . The original infirmary block survives as the entrance block to Christchurch.

36. St Catherine's Hill estate. This small estate was fully developed by the 1930's with early 20th century addition including Willowmarsh and Sunny Bank on Marsh Lane as well as Grove View.

37. Jumpers cemetery. There were no signifi-

cant developments during this period

38. Christchurch Station and railway. The Ringwood to Christchurch line closed to passengers in 1935 and for commercial use in 1938. During WWII a series of anti-tank cubes were constructed in the railway yard to the east of Fairmile Road, close to the site of the early station building.

39. Cottage Homes. Two further homes were added in 1926. There was also a school building and a house for a superintendent and matron. The homes were demolished in the 1960s and have been replaced by a modern housing estate.

40. Highcliffe Castle. The castle was sold in 1950 and it became a children's convalescent home and Catholic Seminary.

41. Fisherman's Bank. There was little development in the historic cores of Stanpit and Mudeford during the early 20th century. Fisherman's bank on the other hand was enclosed and partially developed later in the 19th century and continued into the 20th century.

42. Purewell Cross. A large villa was built at Purewell Hill. During the 1930's a small gravel pit was temporarily opened on the present site of Grovely Road.

43. Bure Homage. Bure Homage was requisitioned by the American Air Force during the Second World War and then used as barracks for the SRDE from 1945. It fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1957.

44. Sandhills. There were no significant developments during this period

45. Mudeford Quay. There were no significant developments during this period.

45. Hoburne House. There were no significant developments during this period apart form the construction of Saulfland, to the south of Hoburne Farm, in the first quarter of the 20th century.

47. Verno House. There were no significant developments during this period.

48. Wolhayes. Wolhayes became the Marydale Convent School and was demolished in 1970 to be replaced by the Wolhayes housing development. In the late 19th and 20th centuries Belvedere became known as Holmhurst. The site was demolished and redeveloped in the later 20th century as part of the North Highcliffe housing estate.

50. Cranemoor House. There were no significant developments during this period.

51. Amberwood. There were no significant developments during this period.

52. Walkford. Glenville Road was laid out and a couple of semi-detached buildings constructed at the end of the 19th century. Suburban villas were added gradually throughout the first half of the 20th century with a growth spurt during the 1930s.

53. Bramble Lane and Chewton Common. Elphinstone Road was laid out in the first two decades of the 20th century, although only isolated housing was developed along it. During the 1930s there was an increase in development resulting in a large portion of Chewton Common between Elphinstone Road and Ringwood Road being enclosed and given over to suburban housing.

54. Highcliffe. The late 19th century had seen development in Highcliffe limited to the frontage of Lymington Road. During the early 20th century a number of side roads were developed for suburban housing in a grid pattern within former enclosed fields. Initially Stuart and Gordon Roads were developed. A little later large houses and hotels were added along Waterford Road, including Greystones and lodge in 1911-2. By the 1930s the grid pattern of streets had been extended to include Seaton Road, Holme Road, Montagu Road and Wortley Road.

55. Jumpers Common housing estate. The Jumpers Common estate was begun in the late 19th century with suburban villas constructed along



Figure 48: Friars Cliff



Figure 49: Walkford

Barrack Road, Fitzmaurice Road and Gardiner Road. Jumpers Avenue and Lodge Road were added during the Edwardian period. These streets essentially filled the area of the former Jumpers Common.

56. Christchurch Airfield. The old Somerford grange was pulled down by Gustavus Brander in 1781 and a new house built on the site. This, together with the tithe barn and prior's lodging, seems to have survived into the early 20th century when they were all demolished to make way for Christchurch Airfield. Two outbuildings at the southern end of the Somerford Farm may have survived the war but were demolished in the later 20th century. Some airfield buildings have now been incorporated into the Christchurch Business Centre on Grange Road.

Christchurch Airfield began c. 1926 as a small civilian airfield in the angle formed by Stroud Lane and Mudeford Lane. It gradually expanded during the 1930s to encompass the entire northern part of the later military airfield. In 1933 it was known as Christchurch Airfield and in 1934 as Bournemouth Aerodrome and ran scheduled flights. The Airspeed factory began the production of Horsa gliders, Oxfords and Mosquitos at the NE corner of the site during 1940. Following the war it became De Havillands and continued production of military and civilian aircraft. The factory closed in 1962, although the buildings are still in use. The southern part of the airfield, including Bure Homage, was used by the USAF in 1944, initially with a steel mesh runway, later converted to tarmac in 1954.

57. Friars Cliff housing estate. Friars Cliff housing estate was constructed to the south and east of the original settlement at Bure during the 1930s. The earliest part of the estate probably includes the area around Seafield Road which is arranged in a regular grid pattern. Later extensions to the estate tended to have a geometric street pattern. The name 'Friars Cliff' is an invention.

58. Mudeford Lane housing estate. The major development in the early 20th century involved the laying out of the Mudeford Lane housing estate during the 1930s. This occupies the area of the former Stanpit Field, common land lying between Mudeford Lane and Stanpit. Pauntley Road, Victoria Road, Queen's Road and Ledbury Road were laid out by the 1930s, Lingwood, Foxwood and Caroline Avenues were added before 1947.



Figure 50: 105 Bargates of 1902