

Part 5: Historical Analysis



5.1 Medieval Corfe Castle (AD1066-1539)

5.1.1 Historical Summary

The town of Corfe Castle developed subsequent to the construction of the castle, which provided the impetus for its development. The town itself probably developed in the 12th century and was certainly in existence by the first quarter of the 13th century. Activity on the site of the castle, on the other hand, is potentially much older, but does not relate directly to the development of the town itself.

The earliest history of the site of Corfe Castle is uncertain. The intrinsic strategic importance of the castle site has led to suggestions that it may have been occupied from the late prehistoric period (PDC 2009, 8), but evidence for this is lacking. The earliest evidence for activity on Castle Hill comprises a few sherds of Roman pottery recovered from residual contexts and rabbit burrows close to the south curtain wall of the middle ward (Drury 1943; Farrar 1950). This probably relates to the extensive Roman industrial and settlement area to the north of the town at Norden.

In the Saxon period the large parish of Corfe Castle probably formed the core of a royal estate with its centre at Kingston, 2.5km south of the Castle. It is not clear whether there was any defensive structure or settlement at Corfe Castle during this period. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records for the year AD 978 that King Edward the Martyr was murdered by his step-mother at *Corfgeat* (Penn 1980, 44). This is one of the earliest mentions of the name *Corfe*, which means a cutting, gap or pass (Mills 1991, 90). The use of the suffix *geat* suggests that there was already an important route here by the 10th century. This passage from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle has led to suggestions that there was a royal residence at Corfe, but this is unlikely as it was part of the lands of

Shaftesbury Abbey in 1066 and may have been so as early as AD 948. A section of herring-bone masonry incorporated within the south curtain wall of the middle ward at the castle may represent late Saxon structures associated with Shaftesbury Abbey (Penn 1980, 44). The Domesday survey records that the Abbess of Shaftesbury gave one hide of land to William the Conqueror for his castle in return for the church at Gillingham (Thorn and Thorn 1983). Penn has noted that this was a high price to pay for a small tract of grazing land and suggests the presence of pre-conquest buildings on the site (Penn 1980, 44-5).

The original royal castle, known as Wareham Castle, was built in 1080 and was gradually enlarged in the 12th and 13th centuries. The stone keep was built in the early 12th century, and it withstood a siege by Stephen in 1139. The domestic range to the east of the Keep, within the inner ward and including the Gloriette, dates from the early 13th century and was built under the auspices of King John (Figure 6). The current circuit of the outer curtain wall was established about 1285 (RCHME 1970, 57-63). During King John's reign the castle gained significant regional importance as the treasury for the south of England (Penn 1980, 45).

The grant of a hide for William's castle probably included the area later occupied by the town, although there is no evidence for a town on the site until King John granted a weekly Saturday market to his men of Corfe in 1215 (Legg 2004, 64). Nevertheless, the initial construction of the castle and its 12th century remodelling in stone is likely to have brought many artisans to the area. The town may have originated as a construction camp, which later gained economic independence through the development of quarrying and stone-working industries. The trade in Purbeck marble was



Figure 6: View of Corfe Castle Keep and Gloriette.



Figure 7: View of St Edward's Parish Church.

particularly important for the economic success of Corfe. Purbeck marble was available only from Purbeck and the trade was controlled by the marblers of Corfe and London. There was significant demand for Purbeck Marble in the period from about 1170-1550, but the peak period for the use of Purbeck Marble was between about 1250 and 1350 (Blair 1991). The marble was used for effigies, decorative columns, fonts and monuments. The marble was taken from the quarries and workshops and shipped to London and further afield from Ower and Wareham.

A further Thursday market and fair was granted in 1247-8 and the town was recognised as a borough in the late 13th century. Tenants and burgesses of Corfe are mentioned in 1299. The town may have been governed by a marblers' guild comprising eight barons in the 14th century. A church is recorded at Corfe by 1291 and fragments of 13th century masonry have been re-used in the current fabric of St Edward's church, which was rebuilt (apart from the 15th century tower) in 1860 (Figure 7).

The distribution of medieval buildings suggests that the town did not achieve any great size at this time. The Lay Subsidy of 1332 records only 23 taxpayers, comparable with Poole or Blandford (Penn 1980, 45). In fact the names of the taxpayers suggest that normal rural trades such as weaving and animal husbandry were important in the town. The lack of names relating to stone masonry is remarkable (Mills 1971, 106). The town may have entered a decline as early as the 14th century; the market was described as decayed in 1325, possibly due to a decline in use of Purbeck marble at that time. Purbeck Marble statues were still being sent to Westminster in 1385 but by the 15th century the stone was surpassed by alabaster from Nottingham and Derby, a cheaper and more easily carved alternative (Legg 2000, 134). Nevertheless, the decline in the town's fortunes may have been gradual. In 1525 58 taxpayers were recorded in

the liberty of Corfe Castle and Malham and 65 able-bodied men between the ages of 18 and 45 were recorded in the Muster Roll of 1569 (Stoate 1987, 164-5; 1982, 35).

5.1.2 Town Layout

The town of Corfe Castle has a very regular layout centred on the market square, which is located outside the Castle gates. The church of St Edward sits on the south side of the square with two almost parallel streets, East Street and West Street on either side of it. This arrangement is depicted on the 16th century map of the town by Ralph Treswell and very likely reflects the original medieval planned layout. Buildings fronted onto both sides of East and West Streets in the 16th century, as they do today. However, the roads may have fronted on to a central green or extended churchyard in the earlier medieval period, with burgage plots running from the far sides of the streets down to the East and West Corfe Rivers. It must be noted that burgage plots are depicted on the west side of West Street on Treswell's map of 1585, but not clearly shown on the east side of East Street. The East Street burgages are certainly shown on the 1844 Tithe map and it is possible that they are post-medieval rather than medieval in origin. The survival of a medieval hall house at 38 East Street suggests that any central green had been encroached upon by the 15th century. Some late medieval expansion along West Street is similarly attested by surviving medieval hall houses at Furzeman's and 35-7 West Street.

There were areas of medieval strip fields to the south and west of the town shown on Treswell's map, West Hawes and Middle Hawes have some strip boundaries preserved as hedges or slight earthworks (Penn 1980; RCHME 1970).



Figure 8: View of the castle looking east showing the Keep (centre left), West or Middle Bailey (left foreground) and Outer Bailey (right background).



Figure 9: View of The Square looking west.

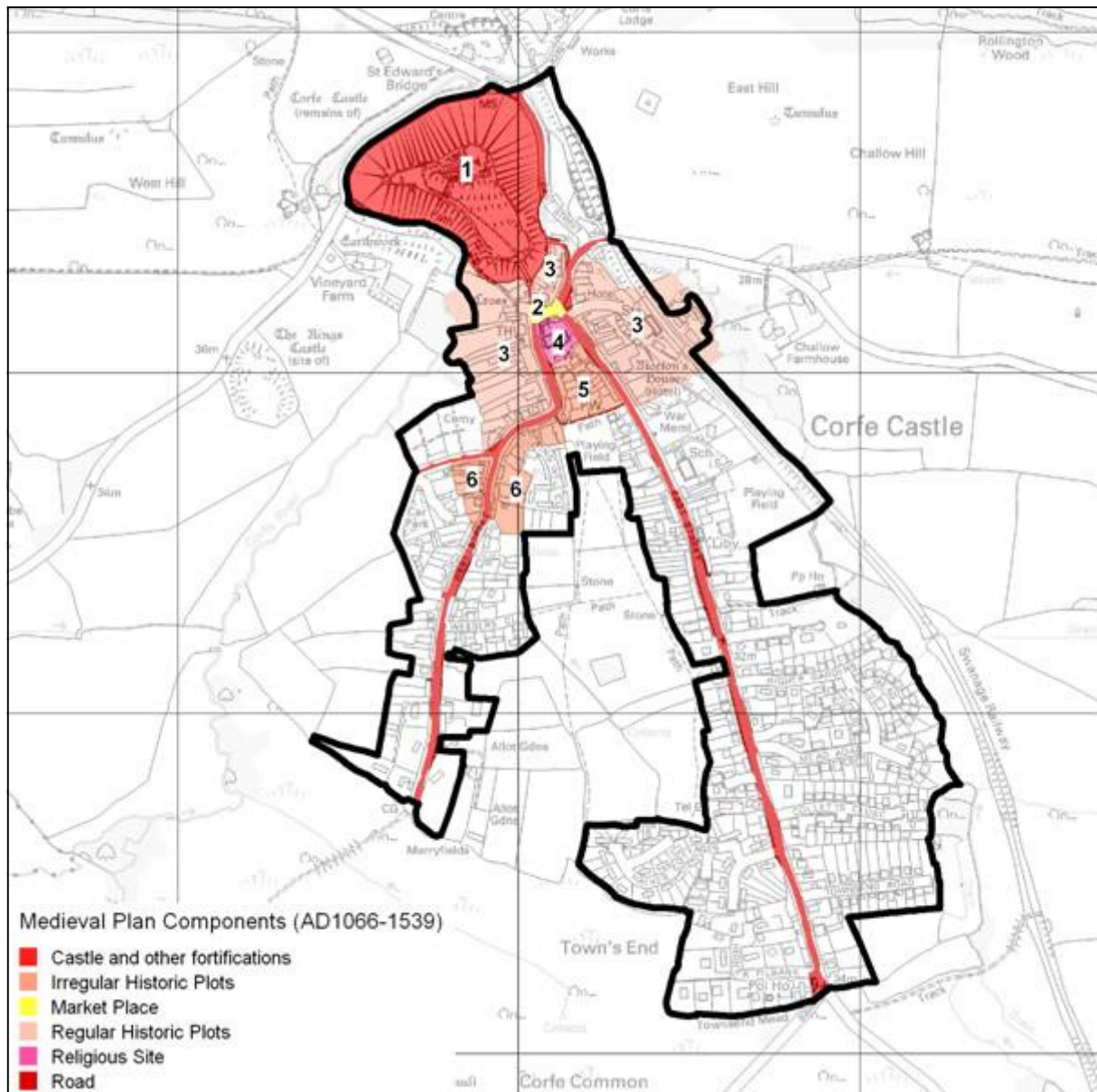


Figure 10: Corfe Castle Medieval Town Plan Components

5.1.3 Medieval town plan components

The main plan components of the medieval town are shown on Figure 10 and are listed below.

1. *The Castle*. The castle was initially constructed for William I in AD 1080 and was constantly improved under royal patronage until its sale in the late 16th century (Penn 1980, 45). The primary components of the structure include the impressive stone Keep constructed in the early 12th century. The Keep sits in a commanding position at the southwest corner of the inner ward. Late 12th and early 13th century domestic halls, service buildings and gardens occupy the eastern part of the Inner Ward. These include the *Gloriette*, a term used to describe a decorative building situated in an elevated posi-

tion in respect to its surroundings. The Inner Ward is entered via a small West Bailey or Middle Ward which also contained a late 11th century hall. The West Bailey is entered via the late 13th century southwest Gatehouse from the Outer Bailey, which occupied the entire southern part of the castle. The whole is enclosed by a 13th century curtain wall entered from the town via the Outer Gatehouse and bridge (Figure 8). These structures sit upon a natural chalk knoll carved out of the Purbeck Ridge through the action of the East and West Corfe Rivers. The slightly lower southern part of the castle occupied by the Outer Bailey sits on Upper Greensand and the moat between town and castle is an enhanced natural gully at the junction of the Upper Greensand and Wealden Beds (RCHME 1970, 57-63).

2. *The Square (Figure 9)*. Hutchins mentions a market grant to the men of Corfe by King John in the early 13th century. A further grant of a market and fair was made in 1247-8. The market square is depicted in its current form on Treswell's map of 1585 and this is likely to represent the site of the medieval market. There was a market cross at the west end at the highest point of the market square. The cross is mentioned in 1381, but appears to have been taken down by 1586 (Bartelot 1912).

3. *Burgage Plots*. Burgage plots can be identified behind properties on East Street and West Street from the Tithe Map. Those behind East Street have been truncated by the railway. However, those behind West Street survive largely intact and can be easily viewed in the garden of the Fox Public House (Figure 11). A third area of plots with burgage style boundaries, albeit on a much smaller scale, lie on the north side of The Square, between it and the castle moat.

4. *The Parish Church of St Edward the Martyr*. The development history of the church is made more difficult by the almost complete 19th century rebuilding, but has been elucidated by Pitfield (1985). The original 12th century church appears to have been a large structure with nave, chancel, north aisle and north porch. The church appears to have been enlarged in the 13th century with the addition of a south aisle to the nave and north and south aisles to the chancel. There was possibly a south tower also. At the end of the 14th or beginning of the 15th century the present west tower was added.

5. *Central Historic Plots*. To the south of the church, between East and West Streets, is a block of houses largely dating from the late 16th-18th centuries. However, one building at 38 East Street is probably a late medieval hall house, suggesting that this area was at least partially developed by the 15th century. The plots are less regular than those of the burgages possibly indicating a slightly more haphazard enclosure of an area that may have originated as a planned rectangular village green.

6. *West Street (Figure 12)*. The town of Corfe Castle expanded beyond its original planned limits in the later medieval period. This is attested by surviving late medieval hall houses at Furzeman's and 35-7 West Street. Hutchins notes that large quantities of marble debris were found in West Street to the south of the burgage plots (Hutchins 1861, 466). Similar debris was also found in West Street during the laying of a water main in 1924 (Drury 1948, 75). Previously this was taken to be the remains of marblers' 'bankers' and it was assumed that the marble was transported in an unworked state and was

largely worked in Corfe itself. However, more recent evidence suggests that most of the working and finishing of the marble was done at the quarries and the existence of marblers' 'bankers' in West Street remains unproven (Blair 1991).



Figure 11: View of the medieval burgage plot at the Fox Inn garden.



Figure 12: View east along West Street.

5.2 Post-medieval Corfe Castle (1540-1799)

5.2.1 Historical Summary

The post-medieval history of Corfe is again intrinsically linked with events at the castle. The castle was sold by Elizabeth I into private hands in 1572 for the sum of £4,761. The new owner, Christopher Hatton, employed Ralph Treswell as his steward and the detailed plans drawn up by him of town and castle in 1585-6 are invaluable for understanding the development of the town and castle. New defensive works were instigated by Hatton, although by 1635 the castle was in the hands of Sir John Bankes, Lord Chief Justice. The castle was held for the King by Lady Bankes during the Civil War and withstood sporadic sieges between 1643 and 1646. The castle was not defeated through force of arms but rather through treachery when an officer in the garrison, Lt. Col. Pitman, allowed 50 parliamentarian soldiers through the gates precipitating a negotiated surrender at the end of February 1645. Parliament ordered the slighting of the castle on March 4th 1645 (Hutchins 1774, 181-2). The strength of the defences meant that mining under the walls and the use of explosives was required to achieve this. Even so, substantial portions of the structure survived the demolition (RCHME 1970, 63-4).

In the face of these events, there is some evidence that the town of Corfe actually flourished during the 16th and 17th centuries. Hatton gained the incorporation of the town as a borough in 1576 as well as the grant of a market and two fairs. A number of large houses were built, including Uvedale's House, Morton's House and the Almshouse, all in East Street. The number of taxpayers in the town increased from 58 in 1525 to 68 in 1662, comparable with Beaminster or Blandford.

Penn suggests that the late 17th and early 18th

centuries may have been marked by a decline in individual wealth indicated by the construction of smaller houses and the subdivision of larger ones (Penn 1980, 45). Nevertheless, the greater portion of Corfe's surviving historic buildings were constructed or re-constructed during the 18th century suggesting continuing prosperity in the town as a whole. Indeed two of the town's civic buildings date from the 18th century; the Town Hall and the Town House. The town sustained two corn mills, a market and two fairs from at least the 16th century. Daniel Defoe described Corfe as a large market town in the early 18th century.

The trade in Purbeck marble was in decline from the mid 16th century and appeared to cease completely by about 1700. There was an increase in demand for Purbeck stone in the 18th century, but the stone was shipped out via Swanage, rather than being transported through Corfe to the quay at Ower. Nevertheless, there were many. The late 18th century Universal British Trade Directory states that the only trade is stone and knitted stockings. Most of the traders listed in Corfe were stone masons or clay merchants. The extraction of Ball Clay in the region around Norden, immediately to the north of the Purbeck Ridge was initially stimulated by the introduction of tobacco in the 16th century and the need to produce clay pipes. However it was the patronage of Josiah Wedgwood in the late 18th century that greatly accelerated the extraction of Ball Clay in the region. The clay was exported from Poole Harbour to Liverpool by sea and thence to the Staffordshire potteries in quantities of up to 1400 tons per year (PMMM 2009). A remarkable private census was carried out by William Pitt in 1796 which showed that 55 clay cutters, 16 stonemasons and 10 quarrymen lived in the parish of Corfe Castle during the late 18th century. This census is very informative with re-



Figure 13: Uvedale's House, 17-21 East Street (built circa 1575).



Figure 14: Morton's House, East Street (built circa 1600).

gard to other trades contributing to the Corfe Castle economy at that time. There were the usual agricultural workers, the full range of tradesmen, shopkeepers and servants, but perhaps rather surprisingly six ropemakers, three twine spinners and two flax dressers (Legg 2000, 41).

The Wareham Turnpike Trust was created in 1765-6 and led to the turnpiking of the road from Wareham to Swanage via Corfe Castle and Kingston. This had a considerable effect on the town of Corfe Castle by creating a new road from Town's End to Kingston (the modern B3069). The earlier route to Kingston had been along West Street and across Corfe Common to Lynch Farm. The effect of the new link was to make East Street the new main thoroughfare in the town (Good 1966, 138).

There was a small dissenting community in Corfe from the late 17th century onwards. The Society of Friends held meetings in Corfe from at least 1661 and in 1691 built a meeting house in East Street, but by 1789 it was only in occasional use and the burial ground disused (Dorset County Archives Service 2002, 31; Stell 1991). A small Presbyterian congregation was active in Corfe in the late 18th century with a meeting house on the west side of West Street. A small Methodist society was formed in Corfe in the 1770s and John Wesley came to preach to them in 1776 (Stell 1991).

One of the earliest Sunday schools was established in Corfe Castle in the late 18th century at the instigation of William Pitt of Kingston who was one of the prime proponents of the Sunday School Movement. An almshouse was established on East Street in about 1610 for the welfare of six elderly persons (Lewis 1848, 685-93).

5.2.2 Town Layout

The early post-medieval town layout is clearly and accurately depicted on the Treswell plan of 1585. This shows that there were few changes



Figure 15: View north along East Street.

between the 16th century and the late 19th century as depicted on the 1st edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey maps. The principal differences lie in the route of East Street. During the 16th century this ran along the west side of the Boar Mill and the Byle Brook, between it and the castle. By the late 19th century the route had changed to run along the east side of the brook for just under a kilometre before it re-joined the old road around the back of the mill. This is the current route of East Street and may have been diverted as part of the turnpiking of the Wareham to Swanage Road in 1766. The southern part of East Street was also turnpiked and became the main street through the town superseding West Street (Good 1966, 138). Previously, East Street had ended at a bog south of Town's End, which was filled in order to complete the road (Legg 2000, 59-60). It may have been from this time, the late 18th century that many of the houses on East Street were built.

5.2.3 Post-medieval Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the late sixteenth-eighteenth century town are shown on Figure 17 and are listed below.

1. *The Castle*. Queen Elizabeth sold the castle to Christopher Hatton in 1572 and it was Hatton who commissioned the Treswell surveys of the Castle and town in 1585-6. The features missing from this plan must have been constructed after this date and most likely in preparation for sieges during the Civil War. Prominent among these is the Bastion projecting from the southern wall of the inner ward seemingly built for cannon commanding the entire town and its approaches. The castle passed to the Bankes family in 1635 and was held for the king by Lady Bankes, enduring many sieges from 1643-1646. It was only captured through intrigue, rather than being defeated militarily. Its destruction was ordered soon after by Parliament. The damage was too



Figure 16: View of Town's End looking north.

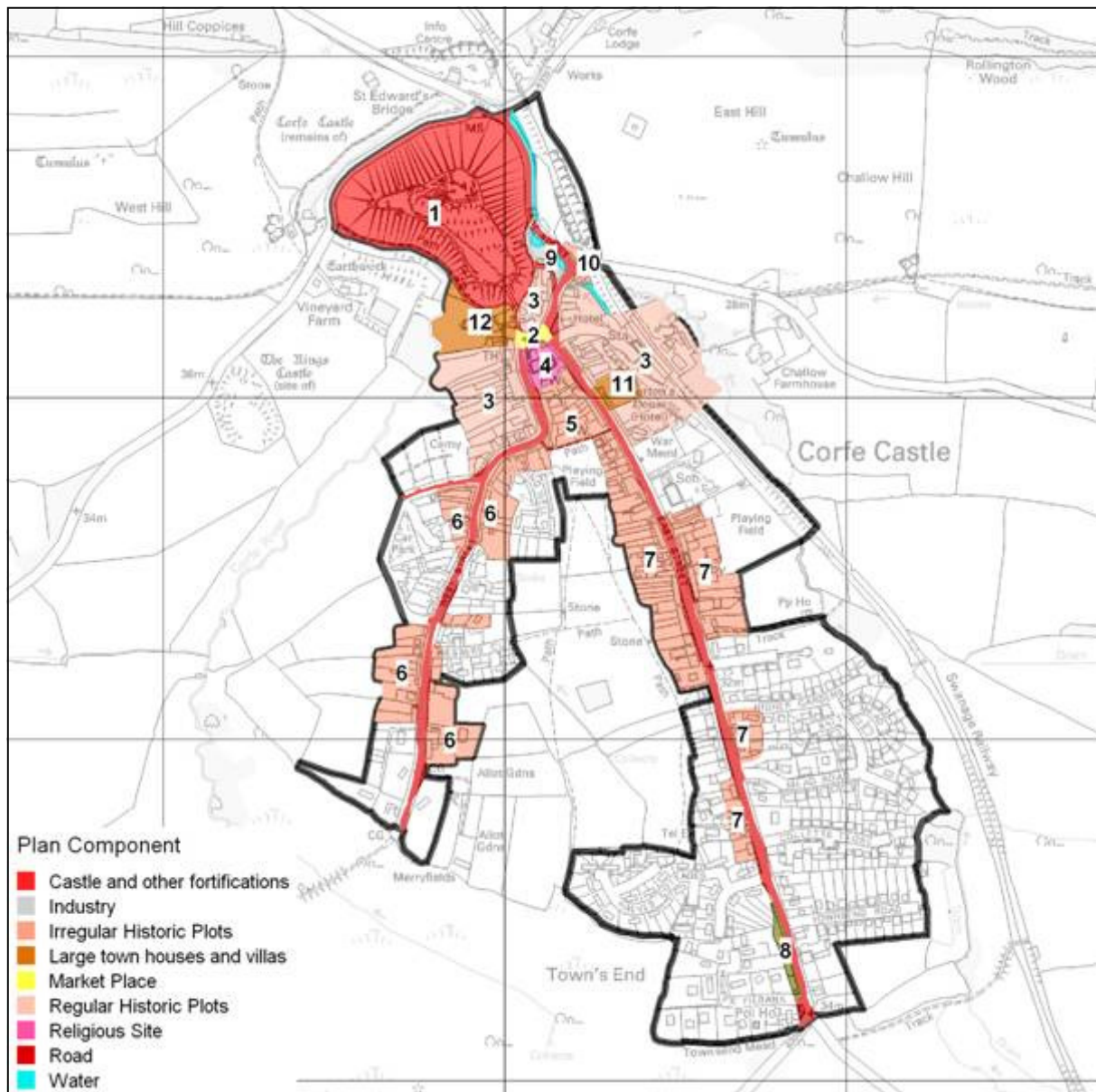


Figure 17: Corfe Castle Post-medieval Town Plan Components.

severe for the castle to be repaired, so the Bankes family built a new house at Kingston Lacy. The castle still maintains the ruinous but majestic appearance derived from that time.

2. *The Square.* Corfe Castle held a market on Thursdays and two fairs on May 12th and October 29th during the post-medieval period (Lewis, 1848). The medieval market cross appears to have been taken down before 1586 and replaced by a pillory, using the cross base as a stand. However, the market place is described as having an ancient stone cross in 1848 (Lewis 1848). Many of the buildings surrounding the square were constructed in the 17th and 18th centuries; notably the 'Castle Tea Rooms', Greyhound Inn and Town House.

3. *Burgage Plots.* There was no discernable change to the burgage plots during the post-

medieval period. Although, it is possible that the plots on East Street were not constructed until this time.

4. *The Parish Church of St Edward the Martyr.* The church was heavily damaged during the Civil War when it was used as a vantage point by the Parliamentary forces. The Parliamentary Committee gave a grant towards the cost of repairing the damage in 1646. The church was repaired, but there were no other significant changes during this period (Pitfield 1985). The churchyard appears to have been encroached upon by buildings fronting on to the square. The Tithe map shows that the entire east, west and north sides of the churchyard were completely built up by 1844.

5. *Central Historic Plots.* The majority of houses in this block were constructed during

the 18th century and are relatively small in scale compared to those on The Square. Some are 17th century, but altered in the 18th century.

6. *West Street*. West Street had functioned as the main thoroughfare through Corfe to Kingston and the Purbeck Marble quarries during the medieval period and continued into the 17th and early 18th centuries. During this time a number of detached cottages and small terraced houses were added at the southern end of the street. With the advent of the Wareham Turnpike Trust in the late 18th century, West Street was superseded by East Street and development slowed.

7. *East Street (Figure 15)*. East Street to the south of the Square is depicted on Treswell's map of 1585, but remained a relatively undeveloped minor road until its incorporation into the Turnpike from Wareham to Swanage in the late 18th century. Many of the 18th century houses along East Street may actually date from the late 18th century following the increased importance of the street.

8. *Town's End (Figure 16)*. Town's End originated as an isolated dispersed settlement, although it is not clear if this origin dates from the medieval or post-medieval period. The earliest surviving buildings at Town's End date from the 18th century and occupy a thin ribbon of land alongside the road. The form of these plots is suggestive of squatter settlements on the edge of Corfe Common and may indicate a post-medieval date for the origin of Town's End.

9. *Boar Mill (Figure 18)*. Boar Mill is depicted on Treswell's map of 1585, although it is not named. A mill mentioned in 1290 is likely to have been West Mill (just outside the study area). There is some evidence that Boar Mill existed during the 15th century and two mills were certainly in existence by the 17th century, probably West Mill and Boar Mill (Penn 1980, 48; Eldred and Papworth 1998, 63).

10. *Sandy Hill Lane*. This lane leaves Corfe

Castle, branching off from East Street close to Boar Mill, and follows the foot of the Purbeck Ridge on the south side towards Ulwell. A small group of detached and semi-detached cottages were built here during the 18th century (Figure 19).

11. *Morton's House*. This large detached manor house (Figure 14) was built around 1600 on the site of former burgage plots on the east side of East Street. The house was enlarged to the rear later in the 17th century. The walls are of rough ashlar with ashlar dressings. The slate roofs are unlikely to be original.

12 *Bartholomew's*. The north west corner of The Square was redeveloped during the 17th century with a number of larger houses set within large plots. These include the 'Castle Tea Rooms', Bartholomew's and Garth Cottage. The development of large town houses during the 17th century has been taken as evidence of increasing prosperity in Corfe at that time (Penn 1980, 45).



Figure 18: Boar Mill



Figure 19: Bridge Cottage (right) and Cromwell Cottage (left) Sandy Hill Lane .