

5.3 Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century Corfe Castle (1800-1913)

5.3.1 Historical Summary

This period charts the fortunes of the town following the decay of the Purbeck Marble trade and before the rise of the tourist industry in the 20th century. The first half of the nineteenth century saw a dramatic 46% increase in the population of Corfe Castle parish from 1,344 in 1801 to 1,966 in 1851. This is as likely to reflect trends in rural poverty during the early 19th century and a drift to urban centres as it is an increase in economic activity in Corfe Castle town itself. Indeed, there are a number of eyewitness accounts that describe abject poverty in the town at that time (The Farmer Magazine, 1850). In the second half of the 19th century, the population of Corfe Castle parish fell fairly rapidly from the high of 1,966 in 1851 to just over 1,400 in 1901.

The earlier mainstay of the Corfe economy, the Purbeck Marble industry, had all but ceased by the 18th century, but there was increased demand for Purbeck stone for road building and construction from the late 18th century and continuing throughout the 19th century. However, the Purbeck stone quarries were located on the south coast to the west of Swanage and the trade was conducted via the port of Swanage or directly by sea from the quarries themselves. Thus, Corfe became less central to the Purbeck stone trade, though many quarrymen lived in the town. This period also saw the expansion of the Ball Clay extraction industries in the area around Norden to the north of the town. The clay was not transported via Corfe, but was taken by tramway to Poole Harbour, so Corfe was not directly involved in the trade, but many clay workers were resident in the town. The 1881 census records that 44 men resident in Corfe Castle town were employed

as clay workers at that time. A brickworks was recorded at Lynch to the south of the town in 1888 (Young 1971).

Other industries and crafts formed only a minor part of the economy of the town. Worsteds stockings continued to be knitted in Corfe during the 19th century (Stevenson 1815; Hutchins 1861). The 1844 Tithe Map lists a number of smaller industries including two smithies on East Street; one close to the church and the other close to Boar Mill. There was a carpenter's shop to the south of the Congregational chapel, East Street. A tan house existed on the east side of East Street, south of Byle Brook Bridge on the site of the former garage. A brew house was situated just north of the square on the west side of East Street. There was a small timber yard behind Batholomew's. West Street had three bakeries, a slaughterhouse and a malthouse. However, despite this activity, and the success of the nearby ball clay industry, Corfe Castle's Thursday market had long ceased by 1848 (Lewis 1848, 685-93).

The Swanage Branch Line railway from Wareham to Swanage with a single intermediate station at Corfe was opened in 1885. It was operated by the London & South Western Railway Company and was used for conveying visitors to the seaside resort at Swanage and also for the transport of Purbeck stone via a stone yard at Swanage and ball clay via sidings at Furzebrook and Eldon.

Corfe Castle had both a British School and a National School for boys and girls in the early 19th century. The British School was founded in about 1829 and moved into the former Independent chapel in West Street in 1834. The National School was built on the west side of East Street in 1834 (Figure 20). A south wing



Figure 20: Former National School, now Royal British Legion Hall, East Street.



Figure 21: View of Corfe Castle Station looking north.

was added and the schoolmaster's house extended before 1850. In 1895 a new school was built on the opposite side of the road.

In 1815, an Independent chapel was built in West Street, possibly on the site of the earlier Presbyterian meeting-house. It was used until 1834, when the building was converted for use as a British School. A new Congregational chapel was constructed in 1835 on the site of the earlier Friends Meeting House in East Street (Stell 1991). A Wesleyan Methodist Chapel was built at 106 East Street some time before 1870 (Wilson, 1872; Dorset County Archives Service 2002, 28).

Corfe Castle had sent two members to parliament since the 17th century, but had become the archetypal 'rotten borough' following the demise of the marbling industry. The town was disenfranchised following the 1832 Reform Act (Wilson 1872).

5.3.2 Town Layout

The late 19th century town layout is depicted on the 1st edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey maps. These indicate very little change over the period from the Tithe Map in 1844. Essentially the late medieval town plan remained stable into the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, there are a few changes worth noting. The changes to the roads in the late 18th century has been mentioned above. The most significant change in the layout in the 19th and early 20th century was the creation of the Swanage Branch Railway in 1885. This led to the severe truncation of burgage plots on the east side of East Street and the creation of a new access road and station (Figure 24). Other small changes include the construction of schools and a cemetery on East Street. This period also saw the beginnings of suburban housing along East and West Streets.



Figure 22: Site of the Former Tannery, Byle Bridge, East Street..

5.3.3 Nineteenth and early 20th century Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the nineteenth and early twentieth century town are shown on Figure 24 and are listed below.

1. *The Castle*. There was no significant change to the castle during the 19th century. It continued to be owned by the Bankes family, but remained a ruin, Antiquarian interest in the site grew during this time.

2. *The Square*. The Thursday market had been closed for some time by 1848, although the two annual fairs persisted until at least 1870. Commercial activity remained in the market square in the form of shops and hotels. A new market cross was erected on the site of the ancient market cross during 1897 as a memorial to Queen Victoria's 60th year on the throne (Figure 26).

3. *Burgage Plots*. The most significant change to the layout of the East Street burgage plots was their truncation through the creation of the Swanage Railway in 1885.

4. *The Parish Church of St Edward the Martyr*. By the 19th century the church was in poor condition and required major restoration. This was undertaken in 1859-60, the poor condition of the fabric requiring almost all of the church to be demolished except for the West Tower. The church was almost completely rebuilt in a 13th century style to the plans of T H Wyatt. The chancel was widened and lengthened (Pitfield 1985). Some fragments of 13th century masonry were reused in the new fabric. Several cottages which had encroached on the east end of the churchyard were demolished at this time.

5. *Central Historic Plots*. A terrace of houses was constructed on the west side of East Street (numbers 20-28) immediately south of the churchyard during the early 20th century (Figure 23).



Figure 23: 20-28 East Street..

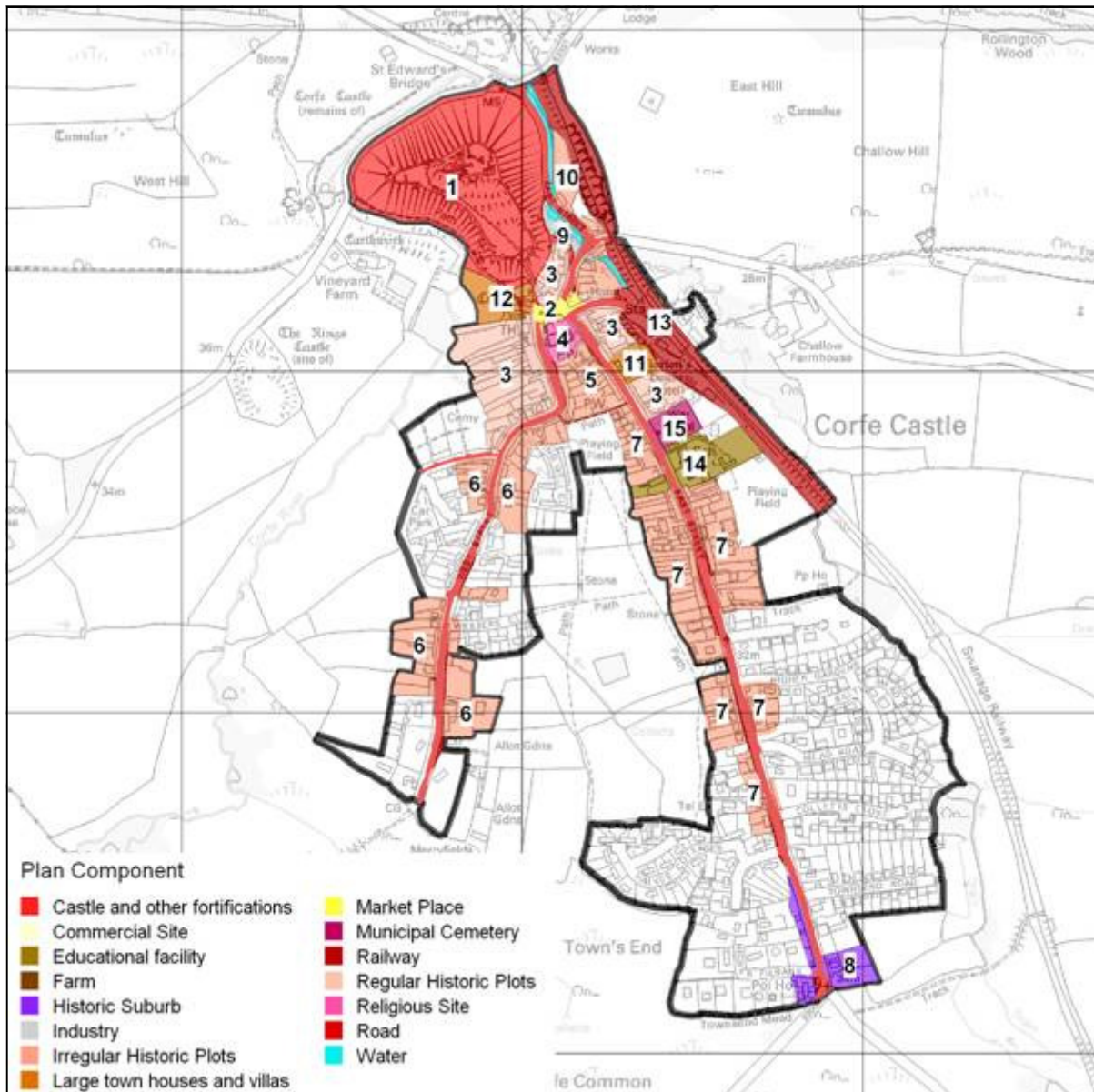


Figure 24: Corfe Castle Nineteenth and early 20th century Town Plan Components.

6. *West Street*. West Street took on more of the character of a quiet back street containing detached cottages irregularly spaced along the length of the street during the 19th century.

7. *East Street*. East Street was the main thoroughfare through Corfe Castle during the 19th century. Two schools, a cemetery, two chapels and new houses were added at this time to create an almost unbroken development along the street as far south as Town's End.

8. *Town's End*. It is not clear whether the 19th century Town's End Farmhouse (Figure 25) represents a new farm established at that time or whether it is a new building built on the site of an earlier farmhouse. A short terrace of three houses was added opposite in the early 20th century.

9. *Boar Mill*. Boar Mill remained in use throughout this period, although the main street through Corfe was diverted behind it in the late 18th century. It is sometimes known as Battrick's Mill or bakery after the Victorian owners.

10. *Sandy Hill Lane/East Street (north)*. The turnpiking of East Street east of Boar Mill meant that houses formerly on Sandy Hill Lane found themselves on East Street. A further small group of cottages was built round the back of Boar Mill by the late 19th century. A tan house existed at the junction of East Street and Sandy Hill Lane in 1844, on the south side of the Byle Brook (Figure 22).

11. *Morton's House*. 19th century developments at Morton's House include the construction of outbuildings to the north and at the rear of the

main house. In the late 19th century a large part of the grounds at the rear of the house were lost to the railway and station yard. An arched entranceway with side wing walls was built in the early 20th century.

12 *Bartholomew's*. There was little discernible change to the town houses in the northeastern quadrant of the Square during the 19th century. A timber yard existed in the southeast corner of Bartholomew's Mead in 1844.

13. *Swanage Railway*. The Swanage Railway was proposed as early as 1847 but not opened until 1885. It was operated by the London & South Western Railway Company. The station building was built in the Victorian Gothic style and had a large signal box on the down platform.

14. *Corfe Castle School*. A new school building was constructed on the west side of East Street in 1834 and extended by 1850. This was replaced by a new building opposite it on the east side of East Street in 1895. The original early 19th century school building is now the British Legion Hall.

15. *East Street Cemetery*. This cemetery was established by 1844 but was extended by the late 19th century. It appears to have been consecrated as a replacement to the churchyard.



Figure 25: Town's End Farm, 127 East Street.



Figure 26: View of the Market Cross and Village Pump, The Square.

5.4 Later Twentieth Century Corfe Castle (1914- Present Day)

5.4.1 Historical Summary

This period saw the final decline of industry in the area. Corfe Castle is now a major tourist destination.

The population of Corfe Castle parish remained relatively stable throughout the 20th century. The population was just over 1,400 in 1901 and remained around 1,300 inhabitants until recently and now stands at just over 1,400 again. This demographic stability is possibly a reflection of the fact that despite a decline in the extraction of Ball Clay during the late 20th century, the economy of the town switched at that time to focus more on tourism. The lowest point in the population of the town was in the 1970s and marks the hiatus between the closure of many clay pits as well as the Swanage Railway in 1972, and the rise of tourism during the 1980s. Tourism may have been partly stimulated by the reconstruction of the Swanage Railway by enthusiasts and its resurrection as a heritage steam railway, although the extension from Harman's Cross to Corfe Castle was not re-opened until 1995. Today the railway, castle and town perfectly complement each other to provide a stunning attraction to the visitor. A milk factory was established for a time on the east side of the railway line, next to the station. This also closed at about the same time as the railway, upon which it depended for transport links. The buildings are now used as craft studios, galleries and workshops (Figure 27).

Ralph Bankes left the Corfe Castle estate to the National Trust in 1981. This included the castle, the commons and various properties in the town. Other former public and commercial buildings have been converted to tourist attractions; the Old Town Hall is now a museum and the National Trust Tea Rooms occupy a former



Figure 27: View of Sandy Hill Workshops – the former milk factory.

shop on the Square. Cleall's general store on East Street was established in 1881 and is still open today (Legg 2004).

However, stable demographics do not mean zero growth in terms of the built up area of Corfe Castle. The very cramped conditions described for Corfe in the middle of the 19th century have been alleviated through the gradual and largely piecemeal construction of new houses of, inter-war and post-war style, as well as modern suburban housing estates arranged around curvilinear culs-de-sac. These developments began around Town's End and separately on East Street and West Street during the inter-war period and have expanded during the last 20 years, particularly in the region of Town's End at the south end of East Street (Figure 28).

5.4.2 Town Layout

The town layout has changed remarkably little from Treswell's map of 1585 in terms of the plan of the principal streets. Nevertheless, there have been significant additions in terms of suburban housing developments along culs-de-sac which branch off the main East and West Streets, notably around Town's End.

The town has also expanded in the area of the former Milk Factory, a new cemetery and car park at Hollands Close, and new playing fields next to the Corfe Castle First School and Springwell Close.

5.4.3 Later Twentieth century Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the twentieth century town are shown on Figure 29 and are listed below.



Figure 28: View of Halves Cottages, later 20th century suburban houses at Town's End

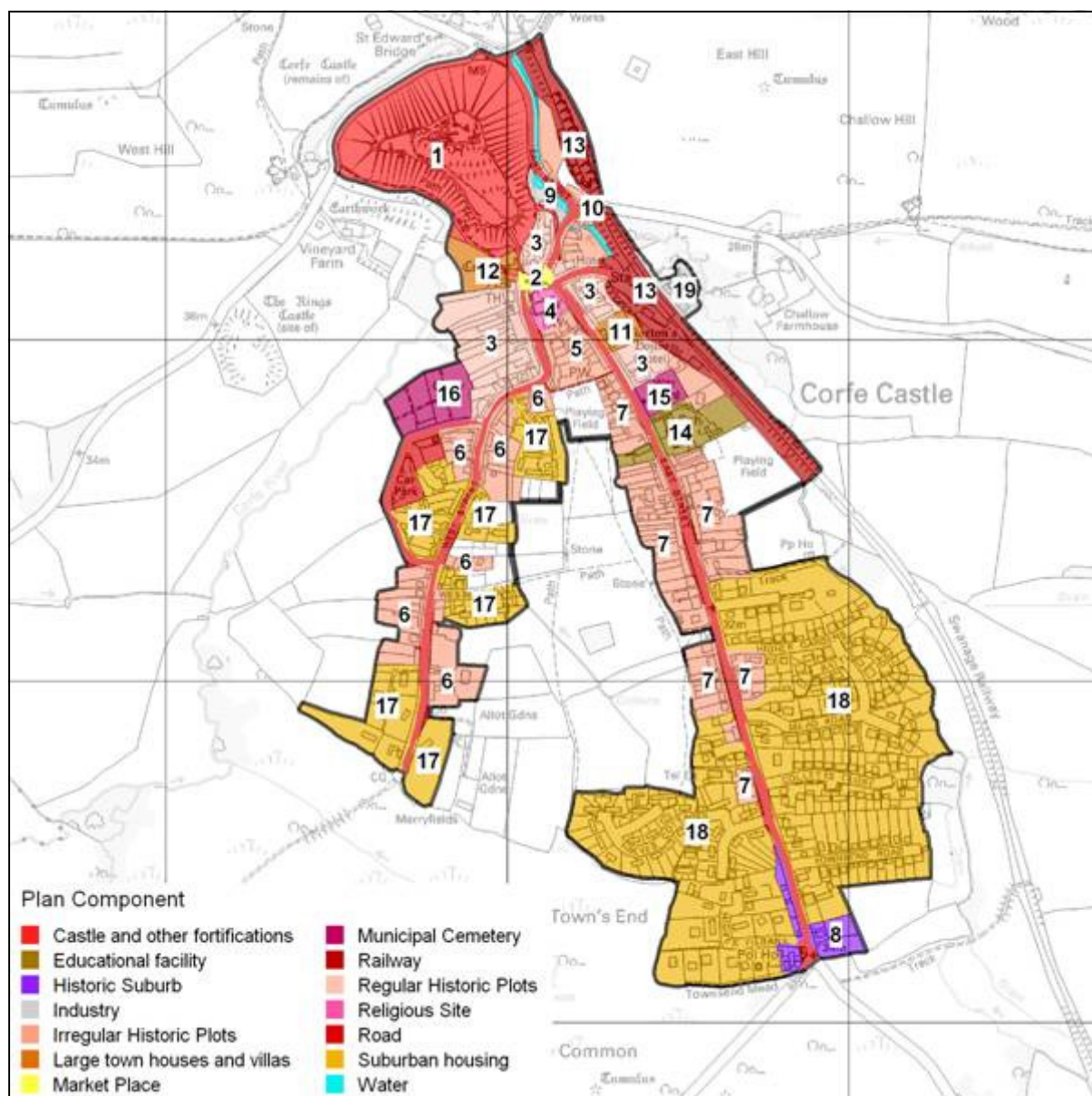


Figure 29: Corfe Castle Later Twentieth Century Town Plan Components.

1. *The Castle.* The 20th century has seen a number of piecemeal excavations at the site of the Castle, most recently in association with a programme of consolidation and access improvements conducted by the National Trust from 1986-1999.

2. *The Square.* There appears to have been little significant change to the Square during the 20th century. In 1927 the village sign was erected here, depicting St Edward the Martyr, painted by Fra Newbery.

3. *Burgage Plots.* There has been little significant change to the town burgage plots after the construction of the railway.

4. *The Parish Church of St Edward the Martyr..* In 1946-7 the floor at the east end of the chancel was lowered, the north aisle was slightly

altered and several windows were replaced or inserted (Pitfield 1985).

5. *Central Historic Plots.* There was little discernible change to the form of this area during the 20th century.

6. *West Street.* Although there has been little change to the historic plots on West Street south of the burgages, there has been significant modern suburban development in the area around them. Despite this, the street frontage of West Street retains enough historic character to preserve the feel of a rural lane lined with cottages.

7. *East Street.* The historic street frontage of East Street has changed little since the late 18th century, despite being surrounded by modern housing developments.

8. *Town's End*. This historic settlement has changed little since the construction of a row of Edwardian houses in the early 20th century, although it is now surrounded by modern housing estates.

9. *Boar Mill*. The last record of Boar Mill in operation dates from 1920, although bread was still baked on the site as late as 1952. The site was purchased by the National Trust in 1992 and the machinery restored to working order. In 1997 the mill ground flour again for the first time in over 70 years (Eldred and Papworth 1998, 63). The mill pond remains empty and choked with weeds.

10. *Sandy Hill Lane/East Street (north)*. There has been little discernible change to the character of Sandy Hill Lane during the 20th century.

11. *Morton's House*. This house has been converted into a hotel.

12. *Bartholomew's*. A former barn was raised to two storeys and incorporated into the main house at Bartholomew's in about 1920. A projecting, gabled, two-storied wing was added in to the house in 1975.

13. *Swanage Railway*. The Swanage Branch Line became part of British Rail in 1948. A new signal box was built on the up platform of Corfe Castle Station in 1956. The line was closed in 1972 and the track lifted. However, it was not long until its resurrection as a heritage line. In 1975 The Swanage Railway Society were granted a licence to occupy Swanage Station. The line was originally re-laid as far as Herston on the outskirts of Swanage. The line was later extended to Harman's Cross and in 1995 to Corfe Castle. In 2009 the first passenger trains from London travelled direct to Swanage for the first time since 1972.

14. *Corfe Castle School*. Two new classrooms were added in 1964. To mark the centenary of the new school building in 1996, a gallery was built at one end of the large hall for a library, as well as a complete rebuild of the school swimming pool. In 2008 new playgrounds, including a fenced Early Years outdoor classroom were added.

15. *East Street Cemetery*. A rubble stone boundary wall and entrance gateway with ashlar dressings and slate roof were designed by Fra Newbery and built in 1922 (Figure 30).

16. *Tom's Mead Cemetery (Figure 31)*. This third cemetery in the town was added in the early 20th century at the rear of the West Street burgages. It was extended to the west during 1996-7. The construction of a car park south of the cemetery during 2005 revealed evidence for



Figure 30: Arched entrance to East Street Cemetery, designed by Fra Newbery, erected 1922.



Figure 31: Modern View of Corfe Castle Cemetery, behind West Street.



Figure 32: Inter-war semi-detached houses, 70-80 West Street

medieval field boundaries and significant Mesolithic activity.

17. *West Street Modern Housing Estates*. Inter-war housing was built on the west side of West Street (numbers 58-80) in the form of semi-detached houses (Figure 32) and a short terrace. Further semi-detached houses were built on the south side of Webber's Close. During the last 20 years small sections of modern infill have added to the housing stock at Holland's Close, Tom's Mead and Penny's Cottages.

18. *Town's End Housing Estates*. Inter-war housing at Townsend Road, Higher Filbank,

Jubilee Gardens (Figure 33) and Calcraft Road and Higher Gardens are generally arranged in linear culs-de-sac set perpendicular to the main East Street. Later housing estates at Halves Cottages and Mead Road from the 1960s onwards are arranged in curvilinear culs-de-sac. Taken together, this area forms the largest block of 20th century housing in the town.

19. *Sandy Hill Workshops*. These buildings originated as a Milk Factory adjacent to the railway but were closed at a similar time. It is now occupied by craft workshops and galleries.



Figure 33: *Inter-war bungalow at 3 Jubilee Gardens .*



Figure 34: *Modern suburban housing, Battlemead.*