

# Stalbridge Historic Urban Character Area 1

## Stalbridge Historic Core

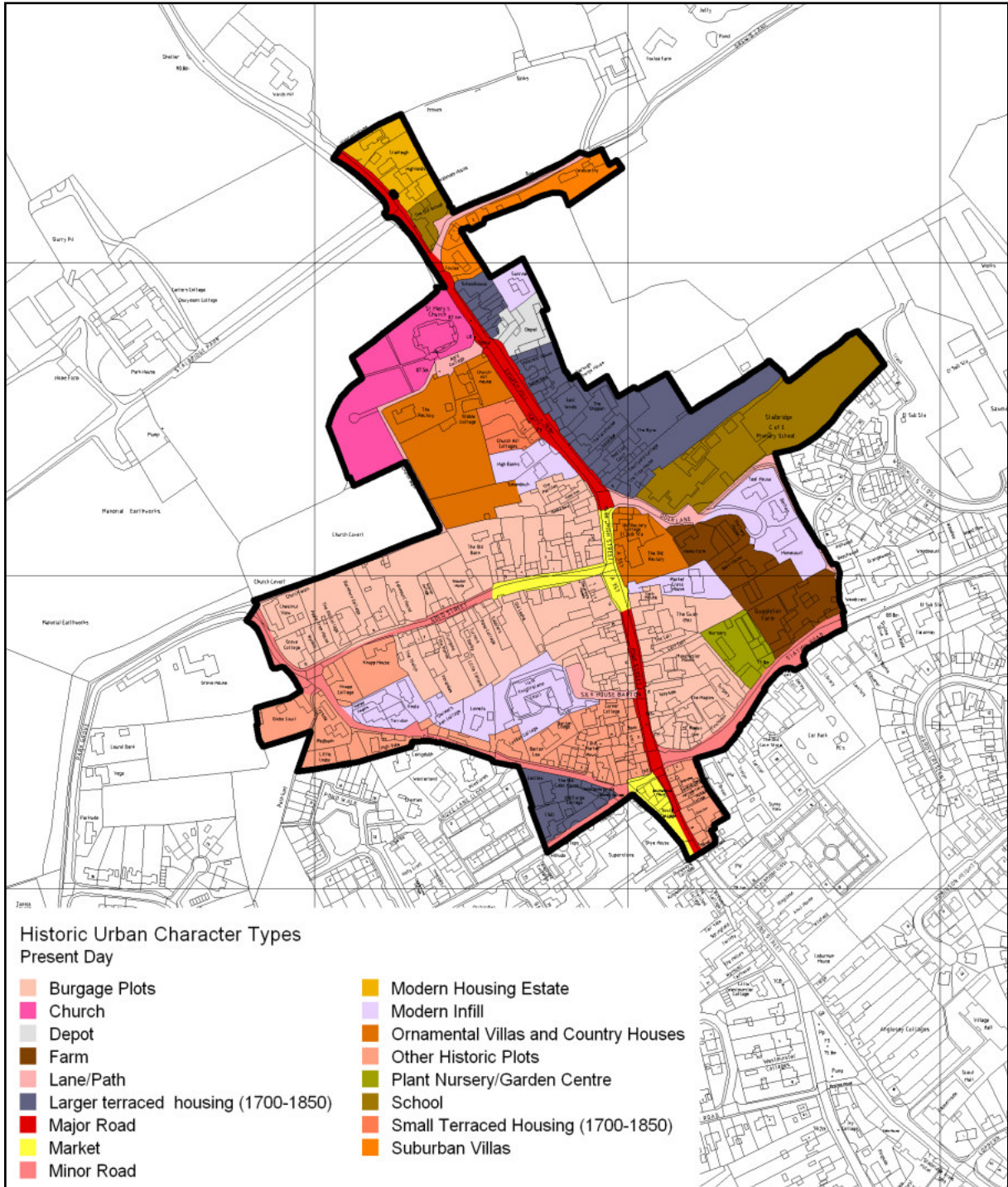


Figure 39: Map of Historic Urban Character Area 1, showing current historic urban character type.

## Stalbridge Historic Urban Character Area 1 Structure of Character Area

### **Overview**

This area represents the medieval town of Stalbridge and is defined primarily by its historic dimension. Important elements include the church and manor site, the medieval market site and surviving medieval plot boundaries. The former medieval market place sits centrally at the junction of High Street and Gold Street. The possible site of the 17<sup>th</sup> century market lies at the southern end of the area, which is also the present commercial hub of the town (Figure 40). Grove Lane represents a former Back Lane and Drew's Lane may be the site of an historic rural settlement.

### **Topography and Geology**

The historic core of the town was established on the western slope of a ridge formed as a result of the faulting of a finger of harder Jurassic limestone south into a vale of softer Oxford Clay. The town lies on the gentle dip slope of the Jurassic strata just above the day vale. The steeper scarp slope lies about half a mile west of High Street. The medieval town lies on the fertile and well-drained Combrash close to the spring line. The only part of this character area to lie on Oxford day is the rear of plots fronting on to the east side of Church Hill and High Street.

### **Urban Structure**

The High Street, running roughly N-S forms the spine of this area, with a small number of minor roads leading off it to east and west. The T-junction with Gold Street with its medieval market cross forms a focus as does the Church in its dominant position at the northern end. It essentially comprises ribbon development along the frontages of High Street and Gold Street, with some back lanes along the rear of the properties, and infill of the areas behind the frontages. The properties along the main streets have relatively regular rectilinear plots, but those behind are less regular. The commercial centre lies at the junction of High Street and Ring Street at the southern end of the area.

### **Present Character**

Figure 39 shows the present day historic urban character types. The central part of the area at the junction of High Street and Gold Street has surviving regular historic 'burgage plots', with the old Rectory occupying a prime position at this junction. There are more irregular historic plots along Grove Lane. To the north, are the large house and grounds of Church Hill House

and the church itself on the west side and larger terraced houses on the east. The east side of the character area has a more rural aspect with farms and a plant nursery. To the north of the farms is Stalbridge primary school, with the former school at the north end of Church Hill. Small areas of modern housing occupy the old paddocks to the rear of the historic frontages throughout the character area.

### **Time Depth**

This area represents the primary historic component of the town. The site of the medieval Church and Manor is also likely to be the site of the late Saxon manorial centre. Plot boundaries associated with Gold Street suggest that it may be the primary settlement component of the medieval town. In fact, there is some archaeological evidence for Roman activity in the vicinity of Gold Street. The only two surviving medieval domestic buildings both lie on High Street and it is High Street upon which the 15<sup>th</sup> century market cross was built. A number of further buildings on High Street and Station Road date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The houses on Gold Street date from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and on the east side of Church Hill, the houses date from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **Settlement Pattern and Streetscape**

The settlement pattern is of high density housing in a mixture of regular planned and more irregular organic ribbon layout along the major streets, with the houses set along the street frontage. Where there are larger buildings set back from the street, such as the Old Vicarage and St Mary's Church, the street frontage is defined by fairly high stone walls. The frontages of the main streets are almost completely built up and give an enclosed feel, enhanced by the curves in the road inhibiting long views and the rise in the ground to the north and the high raised pavement in front of the church. Away from the main streets, the layout is more open and irregular with more buildings set back behind the frontage and with more gaps in the frontages.

There is a relatively small contribution played by green elements and open spaces in this area. The churchyard and the Old Vicarage have large trees which form significant visual elements within this part of the town. The open spaces around the church are hidden by high stone walls.

## Stalbridge Historic Urban Character Area 1 Built Character

### **Building types**

The area has a large number of traditional buildings characterised by their modest scale, use of local stone for walling and roofs and survival of historic detail. This detail includes windows, doors, roofs, chimneys and boundary walls. These features form a key part of the historic and architectural importance of buildings and their environs within the conservation area. The medieval buildings include the parish church of St Mary, built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century on the site of an earlier church and completely renovated in 1832. The 15<sup>th</sup> century market cross dates from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, although the cross head was reconstructed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both buildings are grade II\* listed and the market cross is a Scheduled Monument. The only two surviving medieval domestic buildings are the 15<sup>th</sup> century Old Bakehouse (Figure 44) and Silk Hay-Fernwood (Figure 45), both situated on the west side of High Street.

Early post-medieval buildings of significance include the early 17<sup>th</sup> century cross passage house, *Wayside*. The Old Rectory was built on the site of the medieval market in 1699. Home Farmhouse lies behind the Old Rectory and dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some of its out-buildings have been incorporated into a modern housing development. The 18<sup>th</sup> century Church Hill House is in a prominent position opposite the church on the site of the medieval manor. Gold Street has a large number of 18<sup>th</sup> century vernacular buildings of modest scale, constructed from local materials and retaining significant historic detail. These houses are set within medieval plot frontages. An important group of 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial warehouses survive on Church Hill. They are constructed in stone rubble with a small amount of brick detail and are used as a warehouse and retail outlet by C C Moores, a local food milling company.

### **Building Materials**

The two local stone types are both Jurassic limestones; the first is grey Forest Marble; and the second is the buff coloured Combrash. Both types of stone are used as rubble building stone, although the Forest Marble is the preferred material and also produces good stone roof tiles. Ham Hill stone has also been imported from Somerset for use in the market cross. A remarkable number of buildings in Stalbridge retain their original stone slate roofs with only a small number of thatched buildings. Welsh slate was introduced in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century as a roofing material and was commonly used as a replacement material throughout the

late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Some windows retain cast iron casements and leaded lights. Original doors also survive in places.

### **Key Buildings**

Public Buildings: St Mary's Church, Market Cross, and the Old Schoolhouse.

Medieval Domestic Buildings: The Old Bakehouse, Fernwood/Silk Hay.

Post-medieval Domestic Buildings: The Old Rectory, Home Farm House, Church Hill House/ April Cottage, 1-2 Station Road and Wayside.



Figure 40: View of Home Farm, Duck Street.



Figure 41: The Old Bakehouse, High Street.



Figure 42: Silk Hay and Fernwood, High Street.

**Stalbridge Historic Urban Character Area 1  
Archaeology**

**Archaeological Investigations**

Two archaeological investigations have been undertaken in this character area (Appendix 3, Nos. 1-2) comprising observations during groundworks at Devonshire House and at St Mary's Church. The stone footings of an earlier church, were found beneath the vestry floor of St. Mary's Church in 1978. A Roman burial with a Roman coin in the mouth, was found during the extension of a butter works at Devonshire House in 1918.

**Archaeological Character**

Although limited in number, the observations impart important information on the origins of Stalbridge. The Roman burial is suggestive of settlement in the near vicinity, although the nature and extent of this settlement cannot yet be understood. Other Roman material from the town includes two coins from a garden in Gold Street and occupation debris from Barrow Lea about 200 m to the southwest.

The evidence for an earlier church is also important in understanding the origins of the town layout. It is suggested that the site of the church and manor is the earliest town plan component, although there is little in the way of absolute dating evidence to confirm this theory.

Figure 46 also depicts burgage plot boundaries visible on 19<sup>th</sup> century maps and potentially originally dating from the medieval period. The maps suggest remarkable survival of plot boundaries within the medieval core, possibly the result of the commercial centre of the town migrating southwards during the post-medieval period and relieving developmental pressure on the medieval town.

The location within the historic core of the town would suggest that a series of medieval and post-medieval pits may exist in the rear of the historic plots, together with evidence for earlier property boundaries and structures.

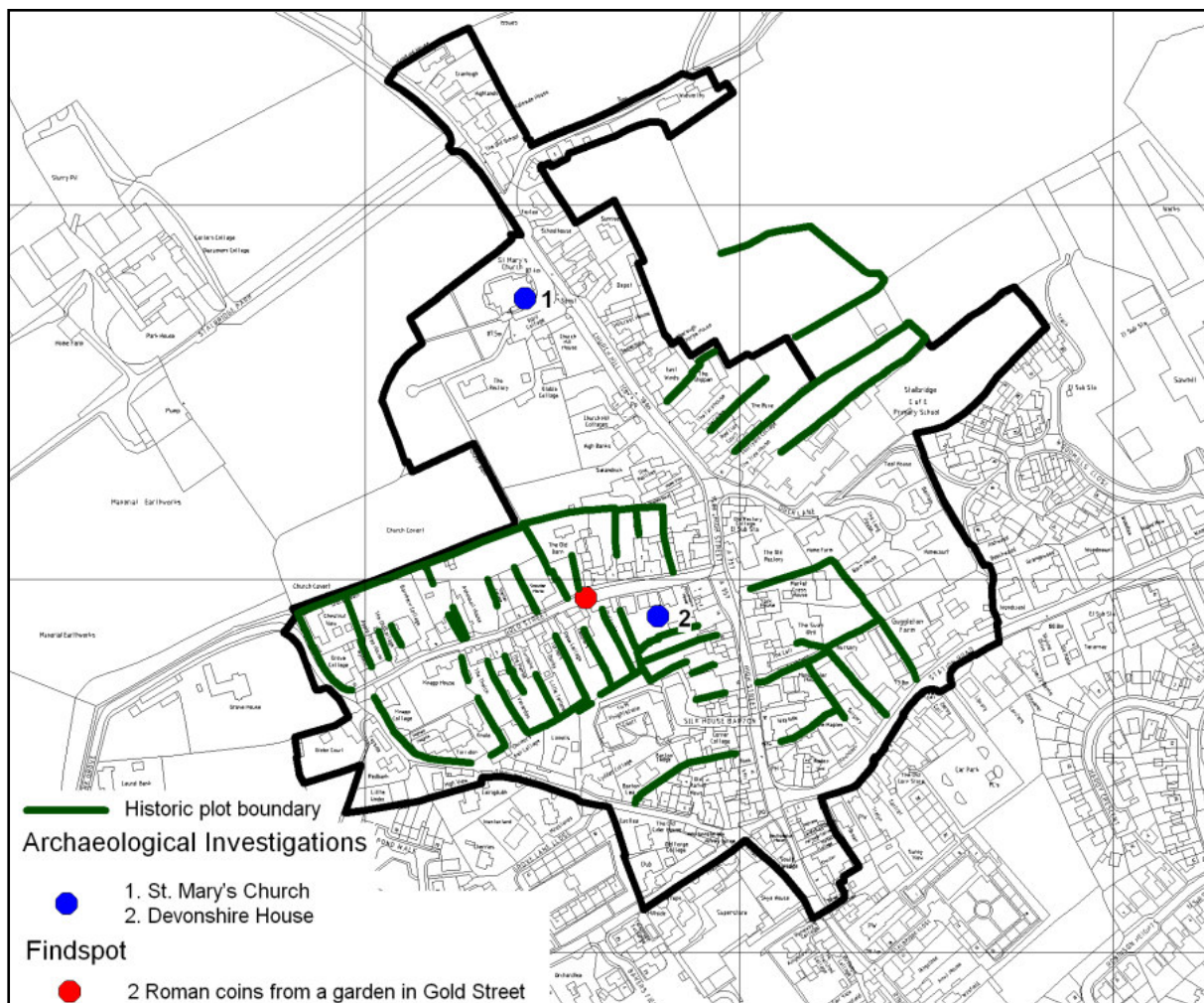


Figure 43: Archaeological Investigations and findspots in Historic Urban Character Area 1.

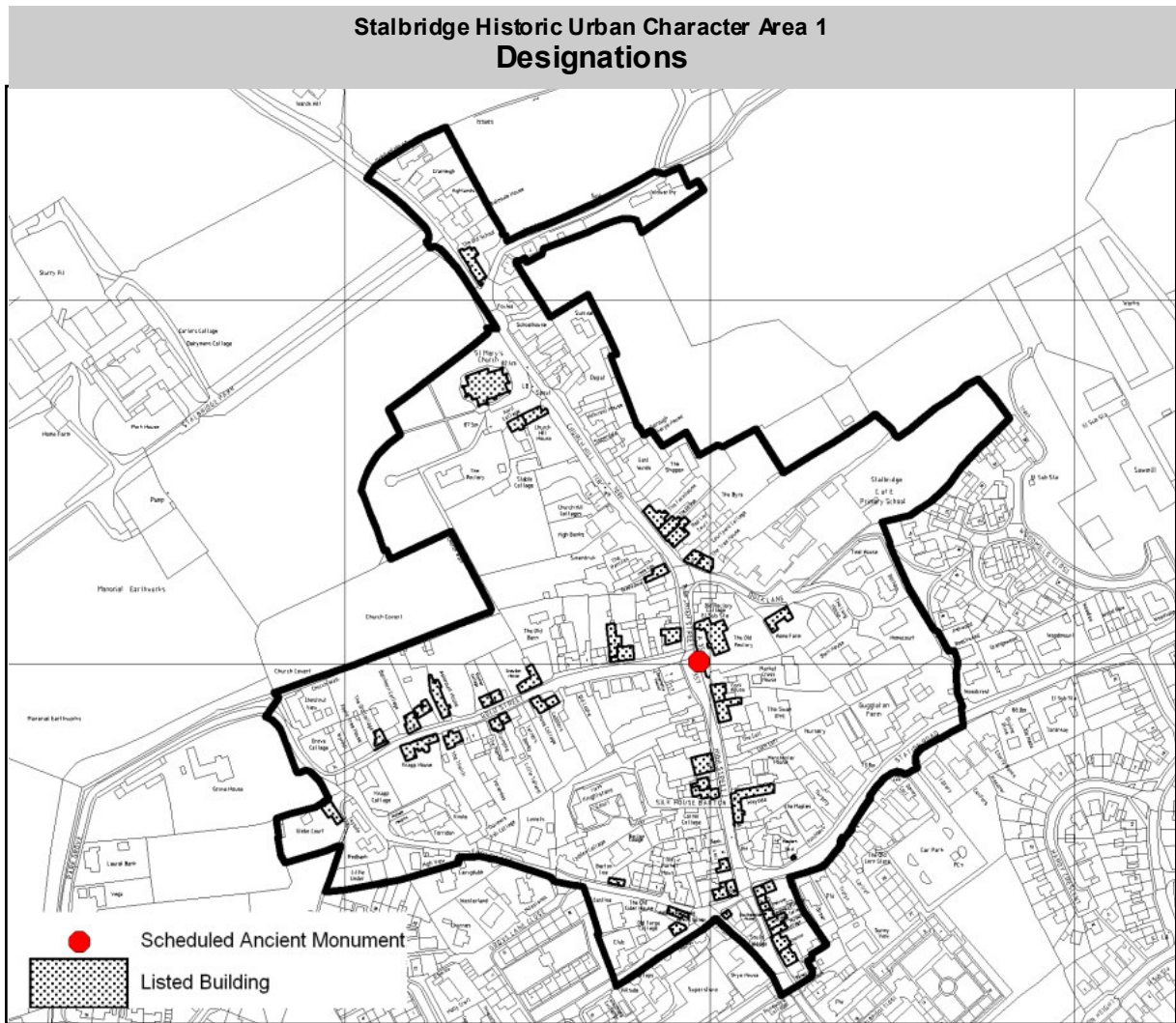


Figure 44: Listed Buildings and other designations in Historic Urban Character Area 1.

### Listed Buildings

There are 42 Listed Buildings in the Character Area, two of which are Grade II\* (St Mary's Church and The Market Cross). The remainder are Grade II (Figure 47).

### Conservation Areas

Almost the whole of this Character Area lies within the Stalbridge Conservation Area. Only the back 15-20m of plots fronting on to Church Hill, north of the junction with Drew's Lane, lie outside the Conservation Area.

### Registered Historic Parks and Gardens

There are no Registered Parks and Gardens within the Character Area.

### Scheduled Monuments

There is one Scheduled Monument within the character area; the Market Cross (SM No. 27391).



Figure 45: View of the 15<sup>th</sup> century market cross.

## Beaminster Historic Urban Character Area 1 Evaluation

### ***Strength of Historic Character***

The strength of character of this area is judged to be **strong**. The character of the medieval core is a combination of the positive contribution made by a very high number of historic buildings and the tight urban grain of a traditional market town. Approximately 80% of the buildings within the character area date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or earlier. This is the only part of the town to contain upstanding medieval structures. The widespread use of local materials is a unifying feature of the character area. Furthermore, there is good survival of potentially medieval plot boundaries.

### ***Sensitivity to Large Scale Development***

The area has a **high** sensitivity to major change. Development in the area has been restricted to the infill or redevelopment of back plots during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The largest developments have been the construction of Knightstone Court on the site of the former silk factory, the development of housing at Old Market Mews and at the rear of Home Farm. The street frontages and the historic plots are the most sensitive to redevelopment.

### ***Archaeological Potential***

The archaeological potential of this area is

judged to be **high**. It forms the primary settlement component of Stalbridge. The lack of modern development means that there is very high potential for important and informative remains of the medieval town remaining intact. These have the potential to reveal details on the organisation, crafts, industries, economy and diet of the inhabitants. Furthermore, little is known of the origins of Stalbridge. The potential for evidence of a Roman settlement beneath the medieval town is of paramount importance in this respect. An outline for the development of the town plan has been suggested in this report, and yet there is very little dateable evidence to support or refute the scheme. The medieval core of the town provides the greatest archaeological potential to remedy the situation.

Many of the late medieval buildings and outbuildings have been modified in the post-medieval period and remain in use today. There is a high potential for detailed information on the survival of earlier structures hidden within later buildings.

This area has the potential to provide information which would contribute to Research Questions 1- 19 and 21-24 (Part 7).

### **Key Characteristics**

- Former Saxon manor
- Primary settlement component of historic Stalbridge
- Medieval market site
- Post-Medieval market site
- Parish church located to the north of the town
- Upstanding medieval buildings
- High proportion of quality historic buildings with contemporary detail
- High proportion of surviving medieval plot boundaries