

## Part 5: Historical Analysis





## 5.1 Saxon Wareham (AD 700-1066)

### 5.1.1 Historical Summary

The rectilinear form of the historic town centre of Wareham and its grid of streets appears to be associated with the fortified burh founded by King Alfred in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. However, the origins of settlement at Wareham seem to be much earlier and are rather obscure. Nevertheless, there are a number of strands of evidence that can be interpreted to put forward a model of its origins and early development.

There is evidence for extensive settlement and other activity, including pottery production, in the area during the Iron Age and Roman periods, as revealed by archaeological investigations on the Bestwall peninsula (Ladle forthcoming), at Worgret (Hearne and Smith 1991) and at Redcliffe (Lyne 2002). A track ran along the line of the present Cow Lane and Bell's Orchard to the tip of the Bestwall peninsula and to the Roman pottery kilns. Within Wareham itself, there have been extensive discoveries and finds of Iron Age and Roman material (Farrar 1954a; RCHME 1970, 614), which can be seen to group into two separate areas, around the church of Lady St Mary and in the northwest corner of the town (Hinton and Hodges 1977, 81). However, the nature of this evidence does not indicate there was a significant settlement focus in the area of the town during the Roman period.

The site of Wareham seems to have been of significance to early Christian communities and a Late or post-Roman 'Celtic' or 'British' Christian church was established, probably on or near the site of the present church of Lady St Mary. The evidence for this is a group of five inscribed memorial stones, made from Romano-British architectural fragments (perhaps from a local villa or shipped downriver from Dorchester) and dating to the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>

centuries, which were found in the fabric of Lady St Mary church during its rebuilding in 1841-2 (Hinton 1992). The veneration of the dead was important in early Christian liturgy; particularly the tombs of martyrs, and it may be that the earliest church was founded on the site of an important burial. The 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century inscribed stones show that important burials continued to be made here.

A late Roman and/or post-Roman cemetery may have existed in the adjacent area of St John's Hill (Figure 6). A number of burials have been recorded from this area, mainly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century or earlier, but unfortunately none have been excavated archaeologically. These burials have been interpreted previously as burials associated with St John's Church (Penn 1980). However, Hutchins (1774) describes the burials as lying east-west, often in a prone position (with the body buried face down) and with flat stones set edgewise around the grave. The occurrence of stone 'cists' in the graves is more reminiscent of very late Roman or post-Roman cemeteries, such as the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD cemetery at Shepherd's Farm, Ulwell (Cox 1988) and the 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century cemetery at Tolpuddle Ball (Hearne and Birbeck 1999). Prone burials were not present in either of these cemeteries, but do occur in late Roman cemetery contexts elsewhere.

This early Christian site may have attracted more substantial and permanent settlement, probably between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. It has been suggested that Wareham was the site of a British Christian monastery prior to the Saxon conquest in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century AD (RCHME 1970, xliii). Following the conquest of Purbeck by the Saxons, Wareham became the site of a Minster church with a large *parochia* associated with a large royal estate (Keen 1984, Hinton and Webster 1987, Hall 2000).



Figure 6: St John's Hill looking SW with the tower of Holy Trinity church in the background.



Figure 7: View south along the West Walls showing the rampart and external ditch.

The precise boundaries of this territory are difficult to reconstruct, but may have included a very large area of southeast Dorset south of the river Piddle (Hinton and Webster 1987). The mid-Saxon importance of Wareham is underlined by the place-name evidence – the ‘*ham*’ element is an early one, often used for places of special significance (Mills 1977, 152-3). The burial of King Brihtric at Wareham in 802 also underscores its importance and highlights its function as a royal centre, perhaps with a royal residence in Wareham or nearby (Hinton and Webster 1987). Later, in 978, King Edward was buried here, following his murder at Corfe Castle. His body was later removed to Shaftesbury Abbey.

St Aldhelm visited Wareham in the later 7<sup>th</sup> century on his way to Rome. While waiting for favourable weather, he built a church near to Wareham (according to William of Malmesbury, writing in the 12<sup>th</sup> century). This has often been taken to refer to Lady St Mary Church, despite the description ‘near to’ Wareham. Keen suggests Kingston as a more likely site for this church (Keen 1984, 213). Nevertheless, there was a large stone church in Wareham, probably of early 8<sup>th</sup> century date. This church survived until Lady St Mary was rebuilt in 1841-2 (Pitfield 1985). A nunnery founded here some time before the ninth century. It was destroyed during the Viking raid of 876 (Page 1908, 121). The nunnery may have been refounded in 915, but was abandoned some time after 982, when its Abbess Wulfwyn is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, but before 1086, as it is not mentioned in the Domesday survey (Penn 1980).

William of Malmesbury’s account of St Aldhelm staying near Wareham and waiting for favourable weather to cross the channel has been taken to mean that Wareham was a recognised cross-channel port in the late 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries (RCHME 1970, 304). At the same time, there is evidence for an important industrial centre located just to the east of Wareham on the Bestwall peninsula, where hundreds of charcoal-making pits and large quantities of iron-working slag and smelting and smithing structures have been dated to the middle Saxon period. (Ladle, forthcoming).

In 876, Wareham was overrun by a Viking Army. Shortly after the Danish attack, probably in 878-9, Alfred made Wareham one of his burhs, a strategic defended town in his war against the Danes. The burh was defended by substantial earthen bank and ditch defences around the north, east and west sides, large parts of which still survive as earthworks today

(RCHME 1970) (Figure 7). No trace of the defences on the south side of the town survives. It is possible that this side was defended by a wooden palisade or similar. The defences were reinforced with a stone wall, possibly during the 890s in response to renewed Viking raids (RCHME 1959, Haslam 2009, 103).

The internal grid street plan is assumed to date to the same period as the construction of the burh defences, though how many of the streets were laid out in the Saxon period is unclear. The more irregular arrangement around St John’s Hill may hint at an earlier layout in this area. Four parish churches are known in medieval Wareham, together with three chapels of ease. Lady St Mary and St Martin’s Churches were both certainly in existence pre-Conquest and St Andrew’s is likely to have been in existence (Pitfield 1985; Hinton and Webster 1987; Hall 2000). However, the other medieval churches and chapels may have been founded during the Saxon period also, although documentary evidence is lacking, as it has been noted that towns founded in the Saxon period generally have a large number of churches within small parishes. This is in contrast to towns founded after the Norman Conquest, which tend to have only one or two parish churches (Morris 1989 168-226; Schofield and Vince 1994, 147). The foundation of several churches suggests that the town of Wareham flourished both in size of population and economy. This is confirmed by the presence of two moneyers in the town in the early 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. By 1066, according to the Domesday survey, Wareham grew to become the largest town in Dorset with 285 houses.

### 5.1.2 Town Layout

It is thought that the late Saxon town plan has been fossilised within that of the modern town. The line of the 9<sup>th</sup> century burh defences is largely marked by surviving earthworks. The southern side of the town in this period is probably marked by the edge of the river terrace (Figure 8). The grid pattern of streets is also thought to date to this period, though precisely which streets were in existence within the Saxon burh is uncertain and the pattern may have developed piecemeal. It is assumed that North/South Street and East/West Street were the two main streets upon which burgages were established during the Saxon period, though the status of the ancient trackway along the line of Bells Orchard and Cow Lane at this time is unclear. North Street may have linked with a Roman road to Woodbury Hill near Bere Regis, and South Street with a possible south road on

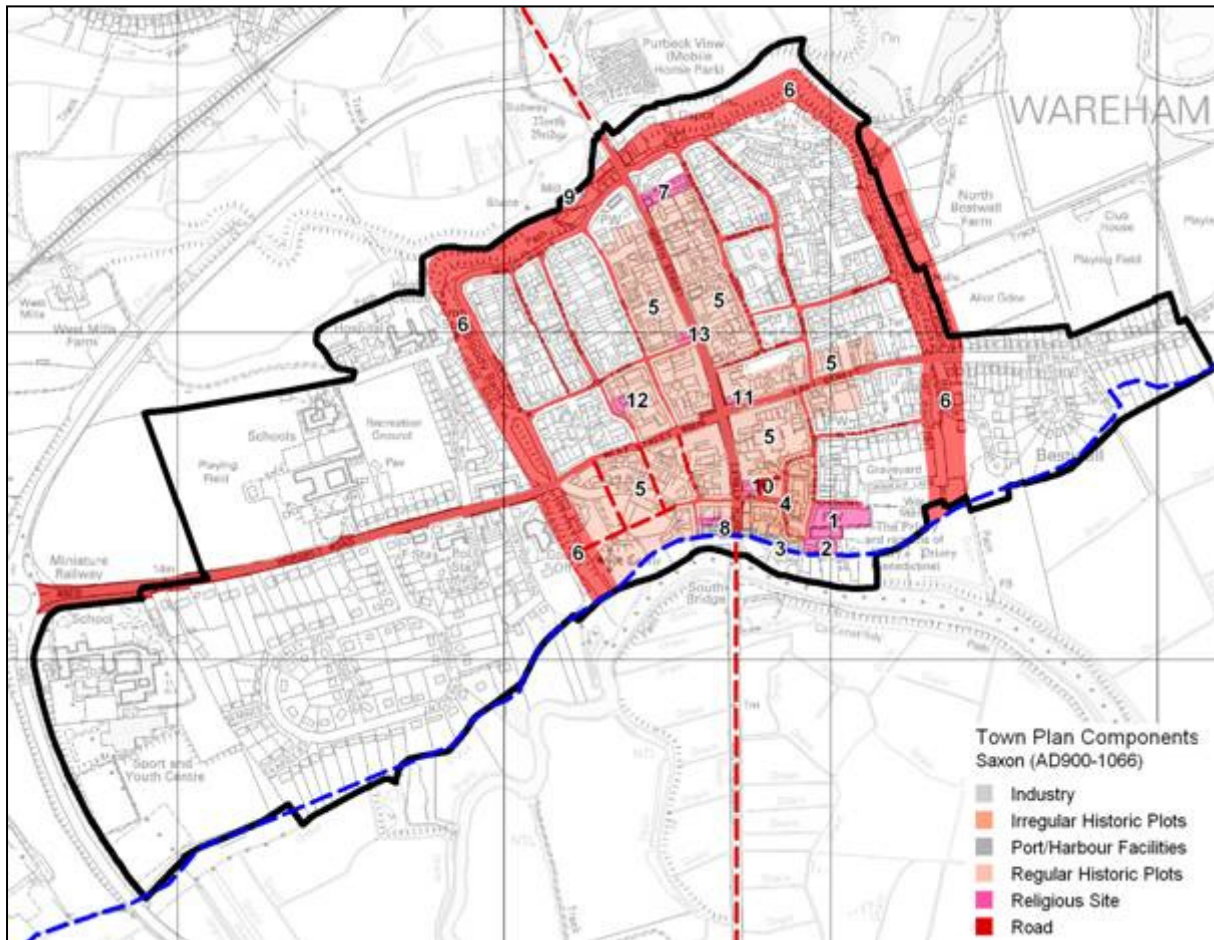


Figure 8: Wareham Saxon plan components

a causeway to Purbeck. The extent of Saxon settlement within the town is not certain, but the burgages may have filled the southern half of the town and extended along the full length of North Street as far as St Martin's church. It is assumed that Saxon markets were held either along the main streets of South and North Street, or on the site of St John's Hill, close to the quay. The quay probably ran along the line immediately in front of the buildings that form the northern limit of The Quay today.

The church of Lady St Mary is the site of the late 7<sup>th</sup> century Minster church. St Martin's church at the north end of North Street, close to the presumed site of the north gate, was built in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 9). St Andrew's Church lay close to the presumed site of the south gate, in an analogous position to St Martin's.

### 5.1.3 Saxon Urban plan components

The main plan components of the medieval town are shown on Figure 8 and are listed below.

1. *The Church of Lady St Mary.* This church is thought to have existed on its present site from the late 7<sup>th</sup> or early 8<sup>th</sup> century and probably marks the site of the early 'British' church. The five 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century memorial stones were found on the site, built into the 8<sup>th</sup> century church. A stone church of basilican plan, very similar to the surviving 8<sup>th</sup> century church at Brixworth, Northamptonshire survived on this site until 1841 (Pitfield 1985).

2. *The Priory.* A nunnery existed in Wareham in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The location of this nunnery is not known, but it is assumed that it was in a similar location to the medieval priory, which lay on the south side of Lady St Mary church. No evidence for the form of this nunnery is known.

3. *The Quay.* The quay associated with the late Saxon town is likely to have been north of the present Quay, along the southern edge of the present Bridge House.

4. *St John's Hill.* The layout of the St John's Hill area does not conform to that of the regular town grid and may represent an earlier element in Wareham, pre-dating the layout of the burh. The discovery of human burials in this area re-

corded by Hutchins (1774) may indicate the presence of a late Roman or post-Roman cemetery. This area, behind the quay, is likely to have developed as an early commercial centre in the town, next to the church (Figure 6). St John's church lay in this area in the medieval period and possibly was founded during the Saxon period, though documentary evidence is lacking.

5. *Burgages*. The regular grid street pattern of modern Wareham is thought to have originated with the late 9<sup>th</sup> century foundation of the burh. The extent of settlement in the town is not known, but is likely to have been focussed along the two main streets. Excavations at St Martin's House during 1974 demonstrated that late Saxon occupation extended at least half way along North Street (Hinton & Hodges 1977, 42-76). At Domesday two Wareham burgesses tied to the Manor of Charminster held 12 acres between them in the town, suggesting that late Saxon burgage plots in Wareham were akin to smallholdings. Gardens are also mentioned at that time, suggesting that some plots were not attached to a house (Thorn & Thorn 1983).

6. *Town Defences*. Substantial bank and ditch defences enclosed the town on three sides and were an original part of the Alfredian burh dating to the period 878-9 (Figure 7). The form of the defences along the south side adjacent to the River Frome are uncertain, but may have been a timber palisade or similar. The defences were strengthened with the addition of a stone wall to the earthen rampart possibly at some time during the 890s in response to renewed Viking raids (RCHME 1959, Haslam 2009, 103).

7. *St Martin's Church* (Figure 9). The current church was built at the north end of North Street during the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, although potentially on the site of an earlier building (Hinton and Webster 1987). The chancel and nave date from the late 11<sup>th</sup> century and have rubble walls with long and short stonework on the quoins at their eastern end (RCHME 1970, 312; Pitfield

1985).

8. *St Andrew's Church*. St Andrew's church, possibly on the site of the current Holy Trinity Church, may be the church mentioned as a possession of Horton Abbey at Domesday. When Sherborne became an abbey in 1122 it was granted Horton abbey as a dependant cell along with its property in Wareham, including a chapel of St Andrew (Penn 1980, 110).

9. *North Mill*. No mills are mentioned for Wareham in Domesday, although it is inconceivable that such an important town and port did not possess several. One of them may have been on the site of the present North Mill, just outside the north gate of the town on the River Piddle.

10. *St John's Church*. The free chapel of St John is first recorded in 1415, although the mention of fairs of St John in the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries may indicate an earlier foundation (Penn 1980, 111). Its date of foundation is not known and it is possible that it was a late Saxon foundation.

11. *St Peter's Church*. St Peter's church was in existence by 1348 at the junction of North and East Streets. Its date of foundation is not known, but may be a late Saxon foundation.

12. *St Michael's Church*. This church is first recorded in 1340. Its date of foundation is not known and it is possible that it was a late Saxon foundation.

13. *All Hallow's Church*. This chapel of ease to St Martin's stood on the west side of North Street. Its date of foundation is not known and it is possible that it was founded in the late Saxon period.



Figure 9: The east end of St Martin's Church showing the long and short stone work in the Chancel quoins.

## 5.2 Norman Wareham (AD1066-1149)

### 5.2.1 Historical Summary

This period was one of upheaval and destruction, which appears to have had a serious detrimental effect on the economy of the town. The major new development in the town was the construction of a castle in the southwest quarter of Wareham, probably shortly after the Conquest.

The Domesday survey records that over half the houses in Wareham were destroyed or made derelict, between 1066 and 1086. The reasons for this destruction are unclear. One possible explanation for the destruction is the insertion of the castle in the southwest quarter of the town. This may have been one of the most densely populated sectors of the late Saxon town, adjacent to the river and quay in the southern part of the town, however the construction of the castle is unlikely to account for all of the recorded destruction. In fact it is possible that this southwest corner of the town was the site of a pre-existing royal residence.

The castle was probably originally an earth and timber motte and bailey and the remains of the motte still survive as an earthwork (Figure 10). The bailey lay on the northeast side and its shape is fossilised in the shape of Pound Lane and Trinity Lane (Figure 11). Archaeological excavation on the site revealed the remains of a stone keep, which may be a secondary construction, perhaps of the early 12<sup>th</sup> century (Renn 1960; Penn 1980). The first recorded Lord of the castle was Robert Beaumont who died in AD1118 and the estate passed to Robert, later Earl of Gloucester who strengthened the castle in 1137. During the civil war between Stephen and Matilda, the town and castle were captured by Stephen, but were soon retaken by the Earl Robert. In 1142, Stephen plundered the town and recaptured the castle, while Robert was in France. Robert

returned, seized the town and besieged the castle, which remained in his hands until his death in 1145-6. At this time the Wareham mint was located in the castle and the last coins were issued in 1147-9. The castle may not have survived after the end of Stephen's reign and could have been one of the castles demolished under the terms of the peace treaty (Renn 1960). Certainly, after this date, Corfe became the dominant castle in the area with its much more defensible position.

The Domesday survey records that the borough of Wareham was divided into three main holdings, with the king's part being the largest and probably located in the area of the castle and the western part of the town, the part belonging to the Abbey of St Wandrille focussed in the area of Lady St Mary in the southeast quarter and the various baron's holdings were probably in the northeast part of the town (Hall 2000).

Lady St Mary church was owned by the Abbey of St Wandrille's in Normandy and a group of canons is recorded here in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. In about 1150, the church passed from St Wandrille's abbey to the abbey of Lire. The canons were soon replaced by a cell of Benedictine monks (Page 1908, 121-2).

The turmoil of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century must have had a serious effect on the economy of the town. In 1137, Stephen is thought to have burnt the town in punishment for supporting Matilda. St Andrew's Church, just outside the castle precinct, is thought to have been so severely damaged that it had to be completely rebuilt, with a new dedication to the Holy Trinity (Ladle 1994). The town seems to have never fully recovered, certainly in relative terms, from the damage wrought by this period of turmoil (Penn 1980, 110).



Figure 10: View of Castle Close atop the earthwork motte of the Norman castle.



Figure 11: View southeast along Trinity Lane showing the curving line of the outer castle bailey.

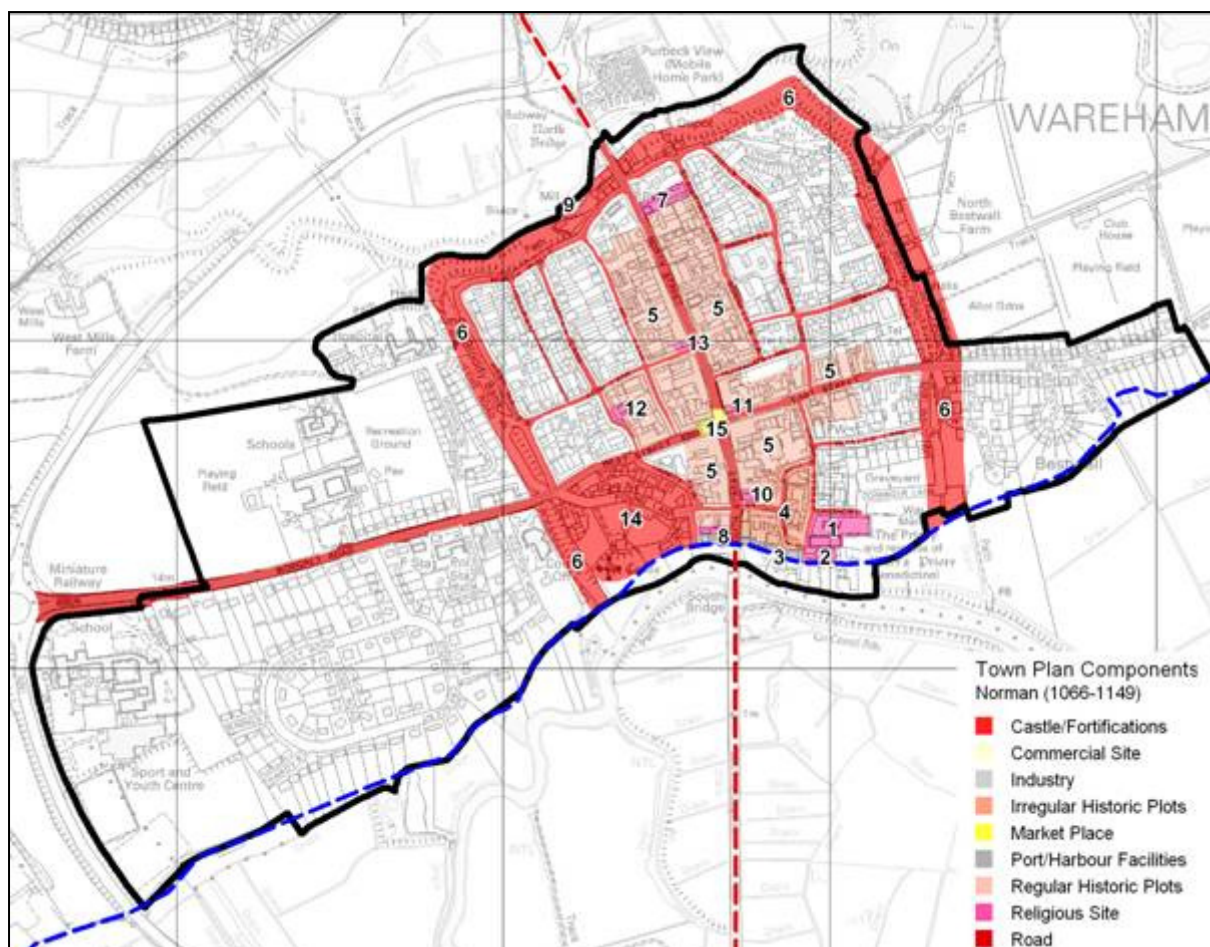


Figure 12: Wareham Norman plan components

### 5.2.2 Town Layout

The imposition of the Norman castle significantly affected the layout of the southwest quarter (Figure 12). It is assumed that there had previously been a grid pattern of roads here as in the remainder of the town (although the extent of the grid of streets during the Saxon and Norman period is uncertain). Vestiges of a grid pattern in the area of the castle survive in the line of Tanners Lane, the eastern end of Pound Lane and the southern extremity of Trinity Lane. The remainder of Pound and Trinity Lanes run parallel in a curving line which mark the limits of the castle's inner and outer bailey (Figure 11). The earthwork motte of the castle survives to the south of Pound Lane, with the modern house Castle Close standing on top of it (Figure 10).

It is likely that the main area of settlement within the town during the Norman period was to the south, adjacent to the quay and next to the main church and the castle. However, there is no surviving evidence for the extent of the settlement in the town and how much it contracted and recovered after Domesday. The

town remained an important port at this time. There is also likely to have been some settlement along North Street. The Benedictine priory was probably in the area immediately south of Lady St Mary church.

Part of a Norman bridge was incorporated in the 1788 South Bridge and traces of it were uncovered when the bridge was replaced in 1927 (Good 1966, 40, Davis 1984).

### 5.2.3 Norman Urban plan components

The main plan components of the medieval town are shown on Figure 12 and are listed below.

1. *The Church of Lady St Mary.* The Saxon church remained intact and St Edward's Chapel was added on the south side of the church in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century (Pitfield 1985).
2. *The Priory.* An alien cell of Benedictine monks was established following the granting of Lady St Mary's church and its appurtenances in Wareham to the Abbey of Lire in Normandy, during the late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup>



century. Nothing of the priory buildings survives, but part of the south wall of the early 12<sup>th</sup> century St Edward's Chapel on the south side of Lady St Mary Church appears to have been originally constructed as an internal wall, suggesting the former existence of the priory building to the south of the church (RCHME 1970, 306-7; Pitfield 1985).

3. *The Quay*. There is no documentary evidence for the existence of the quay and port of Wareham during this period, but Wareham is likely to have been the main port in this area before the rise of Poole in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The quay probably remained the commercial focus of the town during the Norman period.

4. *St John's Hill*. Documentary evidence for the use of this area immediately behind the quay is lacking for this period, but it is likely to have remained part of the commercial focus of the town.

5. *Burgages*. Over half of the houses in Wareham were destroyed during or shortly after the Norman Conquest (Thorn & Thorn 1983). A significant number of these probably lay within the SW quarter and were destroyed by the imposition of a Norman Castle. However, it is likely that the southern half of the town remained the most fully occupied, together with partial occupation of the North Street burgages, but evidence for the extent of the settlement is lacking.

6. *Town Defences*. The town defences remained in use during this period. The defences at the southern end of the west side may have been altered to accommodate the construction of the castle (RCHME 1970, 325).

7. *St Martin's Church* (Figure 13). A north aisle was added to the 11<sup>th</sup> century church in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century. The interior of the church contains a series of medieval wall paintings, of which the earliest dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century (RCHME 1970, 312-3)

8. *St Andrew's Church*. St Andrew's Church may be the church mentioned as a possession of Horton Abbey at Domesday. When Sherborne became an abbey in 1122 it was granted Horton abbey as a dependant cell along with its property in Wareham, including a chapel of St Andrew. It is mentioned in a Papal Bull dated 1163 (Penn 1980, 110). The church lay next to the south gate of the town, just outside the castle precinct and was probably badly damaged during the civil war of Stephen and Matilda and may have been rebuilt and rededicated to the Holy Trinity in the mid-12<sup>th</sup>

century. No fabric of this building survives in the present Holy Trinity Church.

9. *North Mill*. No mills are mentioned for Wareham in Domesday, although it is inconceivable that such an important town and port did not possess several. One of them may have been on the site of the present North Mill, outside the north gate of the town on the River Piddle.

10. *St John's Church*. The free chapel of St John is first recorded in 1415, although the mention of fairs of St John in the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries may indicate an earlier foundation (Penn 1980, 111). Its date of foundation is not known and it is possible that it was a late Saxon foundation.

11. *St Peter's Church*. St Peter's church was in existence by 1348 at the junction of North and East Streets. Its date of foundation is not known and it is possible that it was a late Saxon foundation.

12. *St Michael's Church*. This church is first recorded in 1340 and its former position is marked on 18<sup>th</sup> century maps, halfway along St Michaels Lane (Penn 1980).

13. *All Hallow's Church*. This chapel of ease to St Martin's stood on the west side of North Street and traces of its crypt remain in the cellar of 19 North Street (Hutchins 1774, 29; Penn 1980, 110).

14. *Wareham Castle*. The castle was built in the southwest corner of the town, probably soon after the Conquest, although it is not certainly referred to in documents until 1118. It was a motte and bailey castle, with a stone keep added probably during the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. The site of the motte is still visible as an earthwork and the position of the inner bailey is marked by the line of Pound Lane and that of the outer bailey by Trinity Lane (RCHME 1970, 324-5; Hinton and Hodges 1977).

15. *The Market*. There are no documentary



Figure 13: St Martin's Church looking north.

references to a market or fairs in Wareham until 1200. The markets are likely to have been held along the four main streets, focussed on the crossroads, in the same position as the post-medieval market.