

Dorset Historic Towns Project

# Cranborne



Historic Urban Characterisation





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# Summary

This report considers the historical, archaeological, architectural and map evidence relating to the development of Cranborne. It focuses on the overall development of the town from its origins to the present day, with a view to defining its influence on the modern townscape, identifying surviving historical features and structures, and understanding how these contributed to the character of Cranborne today. This will enable an informed approach to the management of change and conservation of the urban environment.

## **Historical Background**

Cranborne appears to have originated as the major settlement of a Saxon manor, located at the point where the River Crane was crossed by an important ancient route from Poole Harbour to Old Sarum. A Benedictine monastery was founded here in 980 AD, probably on the site of the present parish church, but the recovery of a 9<sup>th</sup> century carved stone fragment from the manor fish pond suggests the presence of an earlier church. The manor passed into royal hands following the Norman Conquest and then to Robert Fitzhamon, cousin of William I. Robert removed the abbot of Cranborne to Tewkesbury, making it an abbey and Cranborne a subordinate priory. The nearby motte and bailey at Castle Hill is likely to have been constructed in the late 11<sup>th</sup>- early 12<sup>th</sup> century, forming the manorial seat for a short while. Cranborne became a popular haunt of King John who built a hunting lodge here in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. This house was altered by the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Salisbury in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, but remains substantially intact and is an important example of 13<sup>th</sup> century architecture. Richard de Clare was granted a fair in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century whilst Edward IV made a grant of a Thursday market here in 1384. This confirmed a market that had been held at Cranborne from *time out of mind*. The town was described as a borough in 1314. The town may have entered a slight decline following the cessation of royal patronage and the dissolution of the priory in 1540. However, in the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries Cranborne experienced an economic renaissance; a new market house was built and a significant ribbon-weaving industry was established. Nevertheless, the town was to enter a decline following the construction of the Salisbury to Blandford turnpike in 1755-6, which by-passed Cranborne, thus rendering it a quiet backwater. The market and fairs ceased altogether in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and today Cranborne is a rural village nes-

ted in the upper Crane valley.

## **Town morphology**

Cranborne has a tightly packed town centre arranged around the medieval market place. The town straddles the River Crane which flowed along the entire length of the axial High Street prior to the central part being culverted in 1841. The manor house and priory sit on a flat area above the town to the south west. The medieval market place lay to the north of the church. The axial street runs eastwards from Swan Street, through the market place to The Square, Crane Street and then Water Street, following exactly the course of the River Crane. Two parallel back lanes flank this road on the north and south sides with a series of interconnecting lanes and paths between them. Running across the grain of the town is the altered course of the ancient N-S through route, now represented by Salisbury and Wimborne Streets. Modern housing developments and amenity sites dominate the eastern and northern fringes of the town.

## **Built character**

Cranborne has a large number of historic buildings within the area of the medieval and post-medieval town. The majority date from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, although there are four standing medieval structures: the 13<sup>th</sup> century Cranborne manor; the 14<sup>th</sup> century parish church of St Mary and St Bartholomew; the partially timber framed late medieval Fleur-de-lys Inn and 1-2 Church Street. The historic buildings make an important contribution to the character of Cranborne and are typified by their use of local orange brick and tile. Other materials include cob boundary walls, flint and heath stone rubble walls (notably in the 15<sup>th</sup> century church tower) and thatch. The latter is the traditional roofing material, although only a few examples survive in the town following a devastating fire in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Landscape Setting**

Cranborne lies on the eastern fringes of Cranborne Chase, a designated *chase* in the medieval period and historically comprising open chalk downland with large tracts of woodland. The town is hidden from view within the sheltered upper valley of the River Crane which flows in a southeasterly direction, joining the River Stour near Christchurch. The eastern fringes of the parish lie adjacent to the clays and gravels of the Hampshire Basin.



Figure 1: Vertical aerial photographic view of Cranborne, 2005 (© Getmapping.com, 2005).

### **Historic Urban Character**

The Historic Urban character of Cranborne is closely bound up with its landscape setting and the quality of its historic fabric. The medieval town plan survives virtually complete. The location of the church and market are significant in terms of the medieval character. The manor house and gardens are of national historic and architectural significance. The built character of the central part of the former town reflects its urban history, whilst the northern and eastern fringes have a rural feel, reinforced by the passage of the chalk stream through Water Street.

The good survival of the historic structure is complemented by the large quantity of historic buildings. The survival in the historic core of many unbroken groups of buildings, with little disruption from modern development, is a major factor which highlights the contribution made by historic elements to Cranborne's urban character. The consistent use of local brick is a uniting feature within the town.

The large number of large mature trees within the town are a significant component of its character and provide many of the prominent land-

marks. They provide a visual link with the surrounding woodlands and emphasise the sense of enclosure of the town.

### **Further Research**

This report has highlighted many aspects of the historical development of Cranborne and how this has shaped the modern town. It has also indicated gaps in our knowledge and areas which would repay further research.

The main areas of suggested further research include:

- Research into the origins and form of the Saxon settlement. No physical remains of the Saxon manor have been recorded, although a 9<sup>th</sup> century carved stone was recovered from the manor fishpond.
- Research into the medieval development of the town, its economy, industry and secular buildings.
- Research into the post-medieval economic development and decline.

## Part 1: Introduction





## 1.1 Background to the Project

The Dorset Historic Towns Survey forms part of a national programme of urban surveys of historic towns, launched by English Heritage in 1992 (English Heritage 1992) and subsequently modified in the light of approaches developed as part of English Heritage's Historic Landscape Characterisation programme (Thomas 2005).

The 23 places selected for inclusion in the Dorset Historic Towns Survey are shown on Figure 2. For the purposes of this project, Dorset is defined by its post-1974 boundary and includes the present administrative county of Dorset and the area of the Unitary Authorities of Bournemouth and Poole.

## 1.2 Rationale

Town centres have always been a focus for trade, industry and housing, consequently there have been many different pressures on their development. This has led to both the creation of a potentially rich, complex, deeply-stratified urban archaeological resource through past development of the town and, on the other hand, to serious threats to the survival of this archaeological resource and to other elements of the historical townscape through modern developmental pressure. Without knowledge and understanding of the historic urban environment it is too easy for significant elements to be damaged or removed through modern redevelopment.

The potential for the historic environment to play a complex and highly significant role in economic regeneration was outlined in *Power of Place* (English Heritage, 2000) and its value is highlighted in the government's response *The Historic Environment: A Force for the Future* (DCMS 2001). The potential of the historic environment is particularly significant in towns, where a high quality historic urban environment and the resulting distinctiveness and sense of place that this brings, has been shown to be a primary asset in promoting regeneration. The effect may be direct – through heritage tourism, for example – or more subtle, promoting a strong sense of identity and pride of place, thus creating new confidence and a positive climate for investment and growth.

Before we can build upon the potential positive effects of the historic urban environment, we must understand it. Characterisation provides a means of understanding the diverse range of

factors which create distinctiveness and a sense of place. In order to make the characterisation of the historic urban environment relevant and meaningful, it needs to be based on a thorough assessment of the nature, quality and quantity of the historic resource of each urban centre. It is to this end that the Dorset Historic Towns Survey has been undertaken.

## 1.3 Aims

The aim of the project is to present a review of the existing archaeological, historical and urban morphological evidence and set out the historic character and development of Dorset's Historic towns:

- to produce a useful and flexible tool to aid in the understanding and management of the town.
- to inform archaeological and historic environment research.
- to inform the management and interpretation of historic urban buildings and land use.
- to provide an evidence base to feed into the Local Development Framework.
- to encourage the integration of urban historic characterisation into the wider process of protecting and enhancing urban character.
- to address a number of research aims set out in the South West Archaeological Research Framework into developing understanding of urban settlement from the Roman to the post-medieval periods (Webster 2008).

## 1.4 Report Structure

The Historic Urban Characterisation Assessment reports all have a similar structure, divided into seven major sections. These are briefly described below to enable easy navigation to the various elements.

**Part 1: Introduction** is a general introduction to the Dorset Historic Towns Project and to this report.

**Part 2 : Overview of Approach** is a brief methodological section outlining the guiding principles and approach, together with an explanation of the main technical terms used in this report.

**Part 3: Town Context** is a consideration of the wider natural setting of the town. It includes a summary account of the geology and



## **Part 2: Overview of Approach**





## 2.1 Guiding Principles

Historic Urban Characterisation is a method of defining and mapping the historic dimension of modern townscapes. The approach used by this project has been developed and adapted from Historic Landscape Characterisation studies. The guiding principles of historic urban characterisation are as follows (adapted from Clark *et al.* 2004, 6):

- Present not past: it is the present-day townscape that is the main object of study.
- Townscape as history not geography: the most important characteristic of the townscape is its time-depth; change and earlier townscapes exist in the present town.
- All aspects of the townscape, no matter how modern, are treated as part of the urban character, not just 'special' areas.
- Characterisation of the urban landscape is a matter of interpretation not record.
- Urban landscape is and always has been dynamic: management of change, not preservation is the aim.
- The process of characterisation should be transparent, with clearly articulated records of data sources and methods used.

## 2.2 General Approach

In order to characterise the distinctive historic dimension of the present day urban landscape, the systematic identification of the historic attributes of the contemporary townscape is undertaken using a number of cartographic, historic, archaeological and standing building sources. These sources are used to identify 'Historic Urban Character Types' which are mapped onto the modern Ordnance Survey MasterMap base. These character types are used to inform the identification of a series of town plan components for the major periods of development for each town from its origins to the present day. The character types are also used to define a series of 'Historic Urban Character Areas' within each town. The character areas form the basis of a more detailed assessment of historic urban character.

## 2.3 Historic Urban Character Types

The identification of the historic urban character is based on the collation and analysis of a large quantity of information, including town

plan form, building form, historic map evidence, aerial photographic evidence and archaeological data. This information has been used to define specific areas of single character type within the modern town plan, based on the current settlement character, but taking into account previous uses and settlement history. These Historic Urban Character Types form the basic building blocks for analysing the historic urban character.

The methodology and terminology of these Historic Urban Character Types has been developed from that of Historic Landscape Characterisation and comprise a series of ten Broad Types each sub-divided into a number of more specific Historic Urban Character Types. The list and description of the character types is set out in **Appendix 4**. The Historic Urban Character Types used are a standardised classification across all the Dorset Historic Towns. This enables direct comparisons to be made between towns across the county and allows consistency in analysis of the historic environment of the different towns.

The Historic Urban Character Types are mapped onto the digital map base using a Geographical Information System (GIS), linked to a table containing data on the settlement attributes of the current Historic Urban Character Type, the period from which it derives, and data on all previous Historic Urban Character Types. This enables the character of the town to be displayed for all periods and allows a comprehensive picture of the development of the town through time and the time depth of the current urban character to be presented.

## 2.4 Town Plan Components

Town Plan Components are a series of recognisable morphological units with a definable time depth within an individual townscape. These plan components have been identified through the analysis of the town plan and building fabric, together with their historic urban character types, to form a series of larger units (on a street or block scale rather than on a plot scale) that illustrate the composition of the town within a specific chronological period. These town plan components have been used to identify and illustrate the historic development of each town, as set out in Part 5 of this report. A series of twenty seven standard types of town plan component have been identified.

## 2.5 Historic Urban Character Areas

The historic urban characterisation of the Dorset towns produces a large quantity of detailed data recorded within individual Historic Urban Character Types. This information is at a too fine-grained scale to enable easy understanding of the character of the town. Therefore, the information has been used to define a smaller number of larger areas of distinctive character within the town known as Historic Urban Character Areas. These can be used as a means of understanding the past and the present character of the town, simplifying the large quantity of data presented by the Historic Urban Character Types and enabling a more detailed appraisal of the historic urban character to be undertaken.

The Historic Urban Character Areas are recognisable distinctive areas which have meaningful coherence within the modern townscape. They are defined by one or more of the following attributes

- consistent historic urban character
- common historical development
- similar topographic location
- similar degree of archaeological and/or historic building preservation.

Each character area will have its own individual 'biography' that has defined its present character. Consequently, the Historic Urban Character Areas can be used as a tool to help maintain and reinforce the historic character and individuality of these areas and the town as a whole.

## 2.6 Extent of the Study Area

The Dorset Historic Towns Project Study Area for Cranborne is taken as the present-day urban extent as shown on the 2009 Ordnance Survey MasterMap digital mapping and comprises only part of Cranborne parish. The urban extent includes areas of recreational open space, school playing fields, etc. around the fringes of the settlement. Where practicable, the boundary to the Study Area is along boundary lines marked on the MasterMap base.

## 2.7 Definition of Terms

### 2.7.1 Characterisation Terms

#### *Historic Urban Character Area*

See section 2.5 above.

#### *Historic Urban Character Type*

See section 2.3 above.

#### *Sensitivity to Large Scale Development*

The assessment of sensitivity to large scale development has been developed from that included in the landscape character assessment undertaken by West Dorset District Council (WDDC 2008). Large scale development is taken to mean any form of development that is on a scale much larger than the existing plot pattern and building size.

#### *Strength of Historic Character*

The strength of character in each area is determined by judging the survival of historic urban elements in the modern townscape, together with its distinctiveness and recognisability. The strength of character is assessed as Strong, Medium or Weak.

**Strong** character is where there is widespread survival of historic boundaries and buildings reflecting considerable time depth, where modern development remains unobtrusive.

**Medium** character is where there is survival of historic boundaries and buildings, but modern development is more evident.

**Weak** character is where there may be some historic elements present, but there is little time depth evident in the visible structures, which comprise mainly modern buildings and street and boundary layouts.

#### *Town Plan Component*

See section 2.4 above.

#### *Urban Structure*

This is the framework of routes, plots and spaces and the way they relate to one another, which forms the basic plan on which all other aspects of the built environment and historic development and use are based.

#### *Housing Density*

Low Density = < 30 dwellings per hectare (dph)

Medium Density = 30-50 dph

High Density = >50 dph

### 2.7.2 Archaeological Terms

#### *Archaeological Intervention*

A general term for any type of formal archaeological recording.

#### *Archaeological Potential*

Archaeological potential is an assessment of the probability of discovering archaeological finds and features, the likely amount and complexity of the archaeology, and the level of survival. See Appendix 5 for more detail.

*Building Recording*

Building recording refers to any survey and recording of the structure of a building.

*Evaluation*

An archaeological evaluation is a limited programme of fieldwork to determine the presence or absence of archaeological deposits or remains within a specified area or site. It can include trial trenching, test pitting, geophysical survey, etc.

*Excavation*

An archaeological excavation is a programme of controlled fieldwork exposing, investigating and recording an area of below-ground archaeology.

*Watching Brief*

A watching brief is a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons.

**2.7.3 Historical Terms***Hundred*

A hundred was an administrative subdivision of a shire based notionally on a grouping of 100 hides. They originated in the Saxon period and had their own courts and jurisdiction usually held at a meeting place close to the geographical centre of the administrative area, or at a point easily accessible from any part of the hundred.

*Hide*

A hide was an area of land defined for tax assessment purposes and was based on the amount of land required to support a family. The size of land unit covered by a hide varied according to its productivity but is generally thought to equal approximately 120 acres. Hides originated in the Saxon period but may be based on earlier land units.

*Tithing*

A tithing was a small administrative subdivision of a hundred notionally containing ten land owning families.

*Manor*

A manor was a parcel of land, often assessed at 5 hides, over which a lord held domain and could exercise certain rights and privileges, such as the right to have the populace of the manor work the Lord's lands. The lord of manor could be a secular noble, the church, or the King himself; more important nobles held several manors. The manorial system was established in the late Saxon period, around the 10th

century AD and became increasingly feudal following the Norman Conquest.

*Borough*

A borough was a town or part of a town upon which a degree of self governance had been conferred through the granting of a charter. Boroughs held their own courts, markets and were often subdivided into burgage plots held by burgesses (freemen of the borough) for cash rent rather than by feudal service.

*Lay Subsidy*

The Lay subsidy is a term given to a tax levied on the general populace (as opposed to the clergy or military) and was calculated as a proportion of their moveable wealth. The poor were exempt. The tax was levied occasionally as the king demanded in order to raise money for military campaigns from the late 13th to the 16th century. The lay subsidy rolls are documents recording the names of each person in a village or tithing within a specific hundred and the amount of tax payable by them. The rolls are particularly useful in the context of the Historic Towns Project because during the 13th and 14th centuries, surnames tended to reflect either occupation or place of habitation. The documents thus provide information on the size of the taxable population within a town, the range of crafts within a particular town or tithing, the names of the individual tithings and boroughs within a hundred and the names of other dispersed settlements within them.

*Hearth Tax Returns*

The Hearth Tax was a tax introduced in 1662 and abolished in 1689. It was payable by householders on the number of hearths or fireplaces within a household. The tax amounted to 1 shilling per hearth or stove payable twice a year. The Hearth Tax Returns generally date from 1662-6 and 1669-74; periods when the tax was administered by royal bailiffs rather than private firms. They include a list of householders eligible for the tax per parish and the number of hearths in each household. The documents are used in this report to give an estimate of the population of the town during the late 17th century.