

# 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.