



Swanage Town context 02.4

Historic Background

2.4.1 Swanage's origins stretch far back into ancient times, and the town certainly grew up around its quarrying trade. The settlement's beginnings stemmed from more than a dozen manors, or farms, unlike some of the smaller settlements in the Isle of Purbeck and elsewhere, which developed with a single manor house as their nucleus. Herston was also mentioned in the Domesday records, and may have been a settlement of Saxon origin.

2.4.2 The derivation of the town's name is uncertain, with countless variants of the spelling over the centuries, some of the most common being Swanwic, Swanwich or Sandwich. Similarly, the nearby village of Herston, now having merged into a single conurbation with Swanage, was historically sometimes referred to as Easton. Peveril Point is thought to have been named after Ranulph Peverell, a relative of one of William the Conqueror's descendants. This surname was fairly prevalent in the early 1100s.

2.4.3 Purbeck marble began to be exported in earnest during the 12th century. The high demand for stone meant that it could be traded more expensively. This led to an influx of apprentices from neighbouring parishes who settled there and learned the trade, helping to produce paving slabs, kerbs and steps to be sent to London. During the 18th century, as London was being rebuilt and there remained a strong demand for Purbeck stone, it began to be primarily exported direct from Swanage instead of Poole Harbour, the major site of exportation in earlier centuries. The Brook is today barely visible in the town, having been canalised. It was once wider and remained uncovered as late as the turn of the 20th century. In medieval times, the stone that was exported direct from Swanage would have been taken on flat-bottomed boats from the Wealden valley, where there is evidence that a lake once existed⁽¹⁾, through to the shore and on to the ships farther out in the bay.

2.4.4 Aside from providing a means of transport for the quarried stone, in more ancient times The Brook was an important feature as it formed the dividing line between the different layout of fields and manor boundaries to its north and south. The land south of the Brook was divided into orderly parallel sections, and, perhaps later, marked out with the use of drystone walls, whereas land patterns to the north of the Brook were quite irregular (**fig. A**). To some extent this north-south difference can still be appreciated today, as it appears to have influenced the layout of some of the more historic roads, in particular those which would have been based on ancient tracks. Although much of this ancient pattern has now been

obscured by modern development, it can still be noticed in the layout of the fields to the south and north-west of the town, and is prominent in maps and aerial photographs.



fig. A. The different layout of fields to the north and south of the Brook can be clearly seen in this map from 1840s.

2.4.5 One of the most ancient routes still surviving is the Priest's Way, which joins Priest's Road when it enters the town. Today this route, once the main route into Swanage, can still be followed as a bridleway and was the route taken by the rector of Worth or his curate, when he rode to Swanage to celebrate mass in the chapel. This would have happened primarily between 1297 and 1500 when the chapel of Swanage was under the direction of the rector of Worth, before

Swanage gained its own priest.

2.4.6 By the latter part of the 1700s, the High Street was around a mile long, stretching back through the valley from the bay, and it contained most of the extents of Swanage. At this time, the predominant materials used to construct the cottages were rubble for the walls, stone tiles as a roofing material and some timber. The rest of the settlement was made up of scattered farms and mansion houses which were beginning to spring up on some of the estates purchased by wealthy men. The central section of the Royal Victoria Hotel was built as a Great House by John Chapman, a stone merchant, in 1721. The road from Swanage through Herston and Langton Matravers to Wareham was turnpiked in 1766, making travel in and out of Swanage much easier. By the late 1770s, Herston, which remained a village distinct from Swanage until the 1920s, contained more than 50 cottages but was a poorer settlement, comprising mainly quarry workers' families.

2.4.7 By the early 1800s, the stone that was to be exported by sea was brought by merchants from the quarries and stacked on the 'bankers', on shore, from where it was taken into the shallows by a horse and cart to a small barge off shore, which transferred it to the stone ship further out in the bay. The demand for Purbeck stone fell in the early 1800s, and the quarries at Tilly Whim were closed although others remained open for trade. It was around the same time that the resort potential of Swanage was first considered by a few individuals, but the transformation of Swanage into a seaside resort town was not to happen for several decades. The true beginnings of Swanage as a resort town were in the 1820s, when William Morton Pitt envisaged families visiting Swanage in summer. One of the three main purchasers of land at the Chancery Sale of 1823, he decided that the main flaw in the idea of Swanage as a watering-place was its lack of amenities and accommodation for prospective visitors. Consequently, he converted the mansion built by Chapman the previous century into the Manor House Hotel, clearing away some older buildings nearby to improve views to Peveril Point. He also created a road from the hotel to Peveril Point, built the Rookery and Marine Villa, planted rows of trees and marked out the land south of the hotel in preparation for the construction of crescents. When the future Queen Victoria stayed at the hotel in 1833, the hotel was renamed the Royal Victoria Hotel.

2.4.8 The railway from London came to Southampton by 1840, and by 1847 it had extended to Dorchester, with the nearest stop at Wareham. Between 1859 and

1861 the first working pier was built, enabling goods for export to be put directly onto the vessels from the land, making the process of importing and exporting more time- and cost-effective. Purbeck stone could be brought from the quarries in wagons where it was stacked and stored on the shoreline ready for transport. These were known as Bankers. A tram line extended from the Bankers to the pier and a tram would be used to ferry the stone. It was hoped that the tram line would eventually connect with the railway, when built, but this did not happen. The second pier was also used for embarking and disembarking passenger ships and its posts can still be clearly seen today in the water alongside the surviving promenade pier (**fig. B**).



fig. B. View from Peveril Point: The posts of the original pier (built 1859-61) are visible next to the surviving pier (1897).

2.4.9 Another prominent figure in the development of Swanage was John Mowlem, most likely a descendant of the de Moulhams, who, after a successful career as a foreman and stone importer in London, returned to Swanage and began making improvements to roads such as Church Hill. In 1862 he put up the monument to King Alfred on the bay which was moved to make way for the new Mowlem Theatre development in 1966, a replacement of the original Mowlem Institute, built by John Mowlem in 1864 as a centre for general intellectual improvement.

2.4.10 The railway did not reach Swanage until 1885, and it was only after its arrival that the town really began to extend beyond the confines of the High



Street and the population started to increase. The railway enabled large numbers of visitors to make trips to Swanage. Residents who owned properties often offered accommodation to the 'genteel' visitors as there were not yet many hotels.

2.4.11 By the early 1880s, George Burt decided that Swanage was large enough to warrant a Town Hall. At the time, Cheapside in London was being widened, and it was decided that the original 17th century facade of Mercer's Hall would be brought to Swanage and incorporated in the Town Hall (**fig. C**). This was one of a series of items brought from London to be incorporated in Swanage over the years - others included the previous gas lampposts, street bollards, railings and a weather vane from the old Billingsgate fish market, a pair of Ionic columns now incorporated in Prince Albert Gardens and the Duke of Wellington memorial clock tower which formerly stood at the south end of London Bridge. Many of these quirky artefacts can still be seen today (**fig. D/E**).



fig. C. The facade of Swanage Town Hall, built in the 1880s, was transported by George Burt from London, and is the original 17th century facade of Mercer's Hall on Cheapside.

2.4.12 George Burt purchased land at Durlston in 1862 and planned to build villas and large expanses of terraces on the headland, as well as a park. He planned out wide roads, with Grosvenor Road, Park Road, Durlston Road and Peveril Road being built over abandoned quarry works. In the end, only a few of the



fig. D. The Ionic columns, today incorporated in the Prince Albert Gardens amphitheatre, formerly stood outside the Grosvenor Hotel and were originally from London.



fig. E. The clock tower was originally a memorial to the Duke of Wellington, situated at the southern end of London Bridge.

villas including Sentryfields, Steepways, Peveril and St. Aldhelm's were built. Gas lighting was arranged by the late 1860s but the provision of piped water to the town and draining of sewerage proved tricky. This perhaps slowed down the development of the area as no one wanted to risk spoiling the bathing potential of the bay

by draining directly into the sea there. The Old Water Tower, today converted into a residential property, was built at the top of Taunton Road in 1886. Sir Charles Robinson owned the estate next to Burt's from the 1870s, and the two men had frequent disagreements. Bon Accord Road, joining Burt and Robinson's estates, was so named to pledge better relations, although not entirely successfully. Purbeck House, which dates from 1875, now a hotel, was built as a retirement residence by Burt, and Durlston Castle followed in 1887.

2.4.13 By the late 19th century the railway was used to export Purbeck stone, which was stored in a depot by the bridge and so the use of bankers was no longer necessary, fading out entirely over the next two decades. Swanage swiftly developed as a holiday destination, with the surviving parade pier built for steam ships in 1897. When Queen Victoria died in 1901, the previous de Moulham Road was renamed Victoria Avenue. The Edwardian period saw a dramatic expansion of the town with new churches, shops, hotels and housing development. Swanage began to expand both north and south of the High Street and the Brook was covered over with development (**fig. F**).

2.4.14 After World War I, groyne were constructed on the beach, to lessen erosion. The population of Swanage rose after the opening of the railway, and again sharply between 1951 and 1961, when it rose



fig. F. The Brook largely disappeared underneath 20th century development in Swanage, but it can still be seen in places, such as here beside St. Mary's Church.

by 1250, accounting for the large estates of post-war housing. Around 75 buildings were also demolished after being badly damaged in the war, causing further loss of some of the more historic buildings. Once petrol rationing ended, exports from Swanage were often transported on the roads rather than by rail, and with the increase of personal cars by the 1960s, the railway fell into decline and shut in 1972. During the 1960s to 1980s, the pier became dilapidated to the extent where it was considered too dangerous to remain open by 1982. The Haven marina development in the mid-1980s was to include the renovation of the pier, but the project came to a premature end in 1989 after completion of only one phase, due to the recession. The pier was finally renovated in the 1990s. Some recent buildings such as the Sailing Club and the Co-Op are built using Purbeck stone. The population of Swanage now numbers more than 10,000.

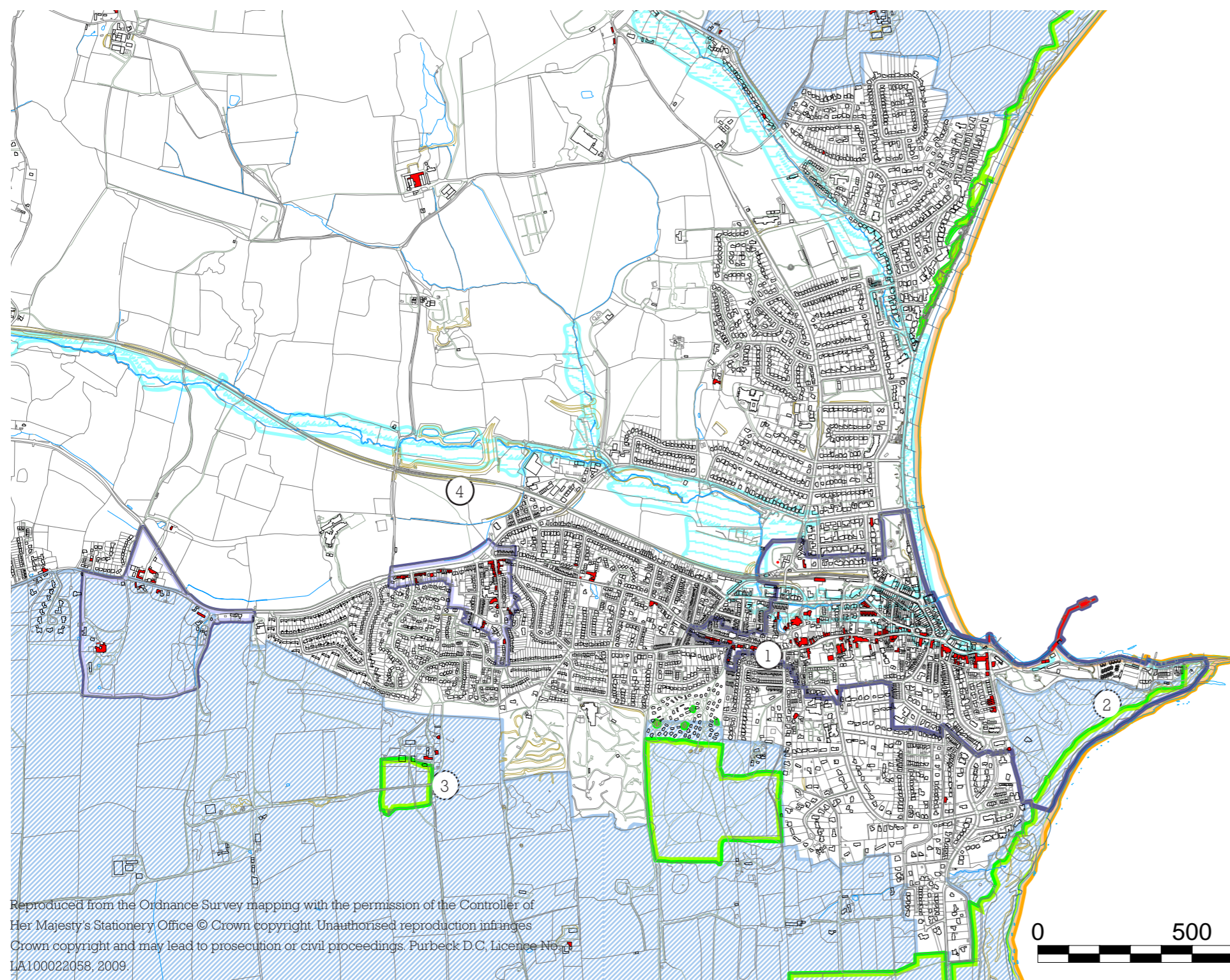
KEY POINTS

- Swanage has its origins in the quarrying of local Purbeck stone.
- The development of the town has been influenced by the unusual regular plot divisions of land to the south of the Brook.
- Priests Way, once the main Wareham to Swanage route, was superseded when the Wareham Road (B3069) was Turnpiked in 1776, this was in turn superseded by the road from Corfe built in the 1860s (A351).
- Herston remained separate to Swanage until the 1920s when it was joined by development.
- Local patron, William Pitt attempted to establish Swanage as a resort in the 1820s, but it was not until the arrival of the railway (1885) that visitors were able to reach the town with relative ease.
- Piers were built to transport stone and visitors by ship, but only the 1897 pier survives.
- Local patron George Burt brought many architectural artefacts from London including the facade of the Town Hall,

⁽¹⁾ SMALE, D., *Roads to the Isle*, No. 351, Dorset Life magazine, p. 59.
Main source: LEWER, D. & SMALE, D., *Swanage Past*, Phillimore & Co. Ltd, Chichester, Second edition 2004.



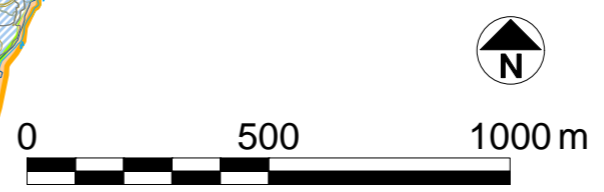
Swanage Town context 02.5 Planning Designations



-  Listed building
-  SAM
-  Conservation area
-  AONB
-  SSSI
-  Floodplain
-  Purbeck heritage coast

NB Listed Buildings plotted may not reflect the true extent of historic buildings and structures. Enquiries regarding listed buildings should be directed to Purbeck District Council who retain full records.

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1. Church Hill within the Swanage Conservation Area contains a number listed buildings and buildings of character.



2. The dramatic coastal cliffs around Swanage form part of the UNESCO World Heritage Coast (Jurassic Coast).



3. The countryside around Swanage is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



4. Swanage Brook flood alleviation works just west of Swanage (centre left).

2.5.1 Swanage is covered by a range of planning designations that cover parts of the town and large parts of the surrounding countryside.

2.5.2 The town contains two conservation areas, one around the former village of Herston and a larger area covering the historic town centre and Peveril Point. These areas reflect the locations of greatest architectural and historic interest and also contain the majority of the towns listed buildings, principally along the High Street and Kings Road East. Several flood areas extend along two discrete corridors from the east and northwest of Swanage and enter the central and northern parts of the town, including some parts of the old town, and converge on different locations on the sea front. These areas will restrict their suitability for future development.

2.5.3 The wider countryside around Swanage, from the coastline eastwards, is protected by a number of overlapping landscape designations. The whole area is contained within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which extends across the southern part of the County as far west as Lyme Regis.

2.5.4 In addition, the coastline around Swanage is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Coast for its geological formations, exceptional fossil sites, coastal features, such as Old Harry Rocks (visible from parts of Swanage), contribution to the history of geological sciences and outstanding natural beauty. Known as the Jurassic Coast, it covers 95 miles of cliffs and foreshore between Studland Bay (Dorset) and Exmouth (Devon). The site does not include the frontages of the main towns, including Swanage, although these are considered as gateways to the site. This coastal designation provides a beautiful setting to the town and is visible in many views to and from Swanage. Contained within the landscape around Swanage are a number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). These sites are located along the dramatic coastal cliffs and the upper southern reaches of the town. They contain nationally rare or important species and add to the richness, quality and interest of the environment around Swanage.

2.5.5 All these designations impose certain restrictions on the location and nature of development that can take place in and around the town.

KEY POINTS

- Swanage is protected by a range of heritage, landscape and ecological designations.
- Conservation Areas provide additional controls within central Swanage and Herston, which contain areas of architectural and historic interest.
- Parts of the town and surrounding river corridors are known to be liable to flooding.
- The high quality and beauty of the surrounding landscape and countryside are recognised through their designation as AONB and World Heritage Coastline.