

5.3 Post-medieval Wimborne Minster (1540-1847)

5.3.1 Historical Summary

The College of Secular Canons was dissolved during the first year of Edward VI's reign, in 1547. At this time the possessions of the Chantries were appropriated and the chaplains removed from office. The immediate effect on the town was the loss of the free school. That this was the major concern is revealed through complaints made by the townspeople for its restoration or suitable alternative provision. No provision was made for the school until the reign of Elizabeth I, in her 5th year as Queen she made a grant of part of the property of the former college to the governors of the free grammar school of Queen Elizabeth (Page 1908, 107-13). The grant included the old school house and four priest's houses, presumably on the site of the present school.

Following the dissolution of the Deanery, the town was governed by 12 governors of the Grammar School chosen from the substantial inhabitants of the parish. Replacements were chosen by the governors themselves creating, in effect, a 'closed borough'. They had an annual income from the tithes of the parish of approximately £90. This increased to over £200 by 1631 and continued to increase during the 17th century. The churchwardens provided the second tier of administration in the parish and were responsible for running the church court. The Wimborne Minster church hierarchy was Laudian in its outlook, this meant that it approved of some decoration and paid for an organist and a choir. Such things were frowned upon by many extreme puritans who refused to attend services at the Minster. This is revealed through the number of people presented to the church courts between 1620 and 1638. From the 1570's onwards recusants were also presented at the church courts. Wim-

borne Minster had a relatively high number of prominent Catholic recusants centred in the Leigh and Eastbrook areas. The east wing of Lewen's House, built in 1654, contained a chapel, possibly for the use of local Catholics (Reeve 2000, 139-141; 232-250).

In economic terms Wimborne Minster appears to have been in reasonable shape during the 16th century. Leland observed that '...the town is yet meatly good and reasonably well inhabited...' (Hutchins 1874, 102). The appeal for the restoration of the free school described Wimborne as '...a great market town...' (Page 1908, 107-13). However, a serious outbreak of plague seems to have afflicted the town during 1638, when 400 townspeople were buried in the Square (Hutchins 1874, 228). Wimborne Minster declared for the king at the outbreak of civil war in 1642 but within three years the whole of Dorset, except Corfe Castle and Portland, was under Parliamentary control. There is thought to have been little damage to the town or minster caused by the war. Troops may have been billeted in The George Inn where graffiti etched into the timbers there date from the civil war period (Figure 19). These events seem to have had no discernible detri-



Figure 20: Wimborne Minster United Reformed Church, Chapel Lane



Figure 21: Former Baptist Chapel behind 88 West Borough.



Figure 22: Allendale House, East Borough

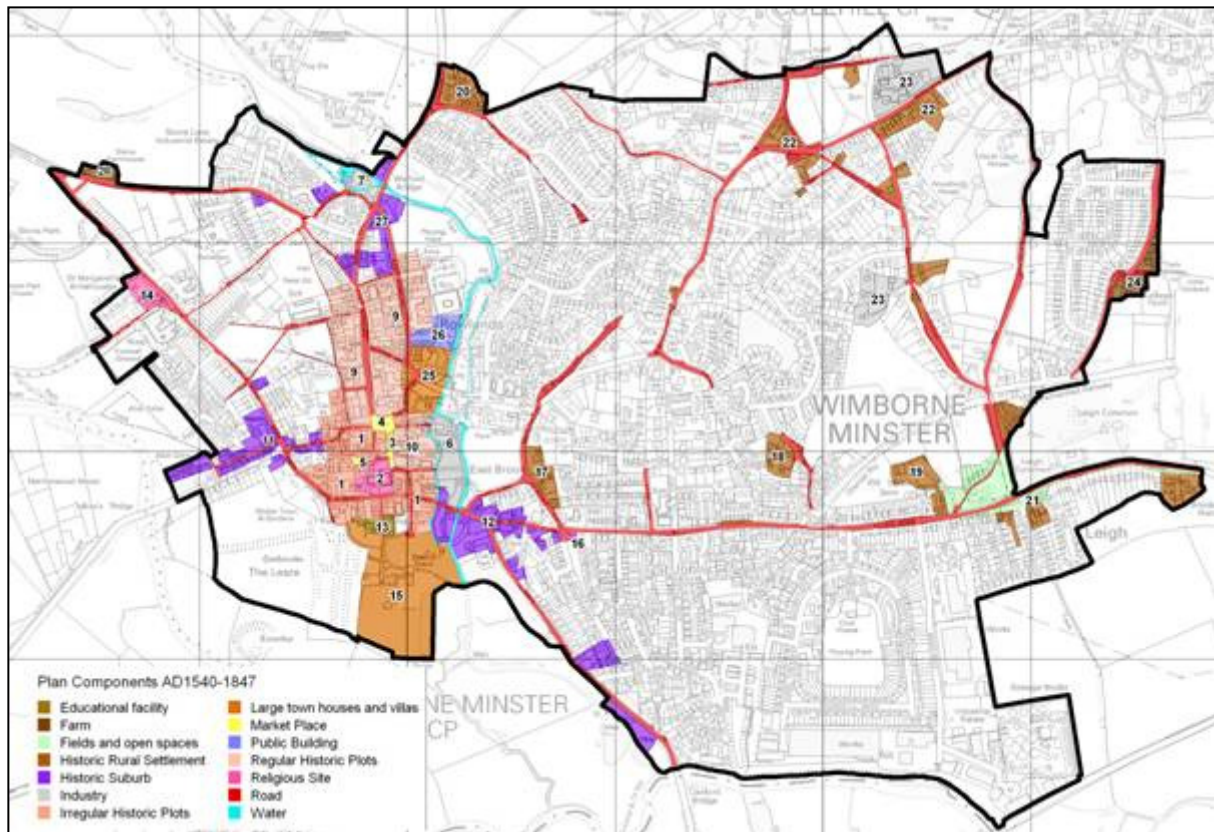


Figure 23: Post Medieval Plan Components

mental effect on the economy of the town; the 1662-4 Hearth Tax returns suggest that Wimborne Minster remained a sizeable town with a population similar to that of Lyme Regis or Bridport (Penn 1980, 125). Wimborne Minster was an important centre of the manufacture of cloth and tanning during the 17th century; the town had 11 tanners during the early 17th century. This cottage scale industry consolidated into fewer, larger tanneries by the end of the century. The brewing industry was also conducted on a cottage scale during the 17th century. These small brewers and innkeepers were often women or widows. Walford Mill was used for both corn and fulling in the 17th century (Reeve, 2000, 87-106). A number of large houses and farmhouses in the vicinity of Wimborne Minster either date from or were rebuilt during the 17th century and may reflect this period of prosperity. Wimborne Minster's occupational structure is comparable with that of many larger towns during the 17th century; 91 different occupations being identified in the parish for the period 1620-1690. During the late 17th century approximately 60 men were recorded as weavers and tailors at any one time; 48 as woodworkers/builders; 30 as dealers in livestock; 26 as leatherworkers; 24 as retailers of drink; 13 as metalworkers; 11 as retailers of textiles; 8 as legal professionals and 6 as deal-

ers in building materials. The recorded trades also indicate that the majority of buildings retained thatched rather than tiled roofs during the 17th century, although the number of bricklayers was increasing at that time. The town was developing economically and culturally during the 17th century. It had a grammar school, a Minster with an organist and a choir, a Town Hall and a chained library (Reeve 2000, 91; 105-6; 129-137).

By the late 18th century Hutchins recorded that little trade was carried out at Wimborne Minster. What there was comprised mainly the knitting of stockings by poor females within their own cottages. Nevertheless, Wimborne Minster market was still well supplied with corn, cattle, butcher's meat and other necessities of life during the later 18th century. The market was held weekly on Friday at that time. A fair had traditionally been held on Good Friday for cattle but was changed in 1765 to the preceding Friday. The town fair, held with the rights to the market, had traditionally been held on St Cuthburgh's day (31st August). By the 18th century this appears to have been chiefly for pedlary and was held on the 14th September. Fortnightly cattle markets were also held during the 18th century. The markets and fairs are likely to have been held on High Street and The

Square, although tradition had it that they had formerly been held in The Borough (Hutchins 1874, 180; 233; Reeve 2000, 117). The chapel of St Peter had decayed soon after the reformation, probably as a result of the Minster Church becoming the town's parish church following the dissolution of the college in 1547. The site of St Peter's was purchased and given to the corporation in 1588-9 for the construction of a Town Hall. Unfortunately the Town Hall fell down within 100 years of its construction and the whole area was opened up as The Square during the 19th century. A number of industrial premises are indicated on the Tithe map and include the Town Brewery adjacent to Town Mill and a further manufactory at Crown Mead. A Malthouse existed near the Corn Market, possibly associated with the George Inn and a Curry house lay on the north side of West Street. These were in addition to the usual blacksmiths, bakeries, slaughterhouses, pubs and offices.

Aside from the medieval St Margaret's Hospital, Wimborne Minster gained a further almshouse during the 16th century. Courtenay's almshouse was endowed by Gertrude Courtenay, Marchioness of Exeter in 1557 to provide for the maintenance and dwelling of six poor men and women (Hutchins 1874, 249). The almshouses stood on the east side of Dean's Court Lane until the mid 20th century.

Queen Elizabeth's Grammar school made an annual charge of 3 guineas per head for education during the 19th century, increased to 5 guineas by 1865 (Harrod 1865). A National School was established on the north side of King Street during the early 19th century.

The origins of religious non-conformity in Wimborne Minster can be found with the erstwhile rector of Lytchet Matravers, Thomas Rowe. He was ejected from his rectory and began preaching from a house in Little Canford, and occasionally in Wimborne Minster from 1666. The non-conformist meetings in Wimborne Minster initially took place on a site later used as a warehouse and next to the 19th century Baptist meeting house at the north end of West Borough. A purpose built meeting house was constructed in 1672 and Rowe resided there until his death in 1680. In November 1695 the site of the present meeting house (Wimborne Minster United Reformed Church) on Chapel Lane was obtained. The building was enlarged in 1829 and rebuilt larger again, alongside a school in 1847 (Figure 20). At the time of Hutchins in the late 18th century there were two dissenting meeting houses; The Presbyterians on Chapel Lane and the Anabaptists at 88

West Borough. This latter building survives as a brick outbuilding with half hipped plain tile roof and a large round arched window in the north wall behind 88 West Borough (Figure 21). A Wesleyan Methodist Chapel was added on the west side of the Corn Market in 1820 and rebuilt and enlarged in 1844 (Hutchins 1874, 228-30). The enlargement of the chapels in the mid 19th century was symptomatic of wider changes in Wimborne Minster during the Victorian era which will be discussed in the following section.

A large workhouse was built on East Borough in 1759. A parliamentary report of 1777 recorded that it could cater for up to 200 inmates. The separate poor law unions of Wimborne Minster and Cranborne were created in 1835 and merged in 1836. At this point the Wimborne Minster workhouse was enlarged and converted to a Union Workhouse (Hutchins 1874, 230; Higginbotham 2006).

Wimborne Minster's high survival rate for 18th century and earlier buildings can be attributed to some extent to the fact that it was spared from the devastating fires which ravaged the neighbouring towns of Blandford and Wareham. There was a fire in 1762, the same year as that which destroyed half of Wareham, but on a much smaller scale. This prompted the Wimborne Minster Vestry to make new regulations for bakers and blacksmiths to cover their ovens with tile rather than thatch and to restrict the storage of fuel in the town (Popham 1983, 93-4).

Julian's Bridge was designated a County Bridge in 1633, although Julian's Road, was not constructed until 1840, when the Puddletown and Wimborne Turnpike Trust was established. This was the last of the ordinary Dorset Trusts. The earlier Poole, Wimborne and Cranborne Trust was established in 1755-6. The main route relating to this trust was that from Poole to Cranborne via Wimborne Minster, al-



Figure 24: The National School, King Street. The date stone on the front gable reads Built 1843 Enlarged 1871 and 1888.

though north of Canford Bridge it largely followed the old road. The act also provided for a tollhouse and gate at Walford Bridge. The Ringwood Longham and Leigh Turnpike Trust was set up in 1758-9 and included the Leigh Road. The modern B3082 between Wimborne Minster and Blandford was turnpiked in 1795 under the auspices of the Blandford and Wimborne Trust. There was a tollhouse at St Margaret's Hospital with a gate barring the Cowgrove Road (Good 1966, 128-147).

5.3.2 Town Layout

The existence of a number of 17th and 18th century maps means that for the first time there is incontrovertible evidence for the town layout during the post-medieval period. The street pattern was largely the same as that of today, with a few minor exceptions. Julian's Road from West Street to Julian's Bridge was not built until 1840. The Old Road still exists for part of its course, parallel to and slightly north of Julian's Road. Hanham Road and the eastern end of Stone Lane were built in the late 20th century. The road network around Rowlands, Colehill and Leigh has also been greatly altered during the 19th and 20th centuries.

East Borough is shown as almost fully developed on 17th century maps. This development is likely to date largely from the late medieval or early post medieval period. Eastbrook and Leigh Common were also fully developed by the early 17th century. Old Road had a row of terraced houses on its south side. Major 18th century developments on East Borough include the workhouse and its infirmary whilst The Dolphin Inn, on the site of Allendale House, was built in 1823 (Figure 22). Significant industrial activity developed on the island between the Allen and the Millstream in the vicinity of Town Mill and included the Town Brewery and another manufactory. The East Brook suburb included a gas works by the mid 19th century. Deans Court also saw significant developments during the 18th century with the reconstruction of the house and the laying out of formal gardens.

5.3.3 Post-medieval Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the post medieval town are shown on Figure 23 and are listed below.

1. Town Plots. The post medieval plot pattern of the Saxon core may have become slightly more compacted; subdivided into smaller plots during the post-medieval period. A number of important buildings were constructed during this time nota-

bly the George Inn (Figure 19) and the Methodist Chapel on Corn Market (now the site of the late 19th century Masonic Hall), The National School on King Street (built in 1843) and Courtenay's almshouses on Deans Court Lane (demolished during the 1960's).

2. The College and Minster. The college of secular canons was dissolved in 1547 and its possessions seized by King Edward VI. The church of St Cuthburga remained as the parish church for the town but a large part of the former college precinct may have been lost.

3. High Street. High Street was also known as Market Street and was likely to have functioned as a market place and fair site during the post medieval period.

4. St Peter's Chapel. This chapel decayed soon after the reformation, probably as a result of the former royal free chapel of St Cuthburga becoming the town's parish church. The site was purchased in 1558-9 and given to the corporation in order to build a Town Hall. The Town Hall collapsed within 99 years of its construction, although the east wall of St Peter's Chapel remained standing until the beginning of the 19th century when the whole area was opened up as a square and market place. In 1638 400 inhabitants of the town were buried at St Peter's following a severe outbreak of the plague (Hutchins 1874, 228).

5. The Corn Market. St Mary's Chapel was sold in the 16th century following the dissolution of Sherborne Abbey. Its exact site is unknown, although the rear courtyard of the George Inn, on the south side of Corn Market is recorded as a churchyard on an 18th century map of Wimborne Minster (DHC Ph 676). An Ebenezer Methodist Chapel was added on the west side of the Corn Market in 1820 and rebuilt and enlarged in 1847 (Hutchins 1874, 228-30).

6. Town Mill. Industrial activity expanded in the region of Town Mill during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The Town Brewery was established at the east end of Mill Lane between the River Allen and the millstream.

7. Walford Mill. The site of Walford Mill also expanded during the early 19th century. A new brick corn mill was built in about 1800 (Figure 25) and a large mill owner's house was constructed along with assorted outbuildings and industrial buildings during the early 19th century.

9. The Borough. The Borough expanded during the early post medieval period through the settlement of East Borough, a former back lane, and the subdivision of former burgage plots. The market belonging to the Lord of Kingston Lacy seems

to have been abandoned by agreement with the town on payment of an annual fee to the Lord of the Borough.

10. *High Street Burgages*. The burgage plots on the west side of High Street remained largely intact during the post medieval period. A number of Inns are recorded fronting on to the street in the tithe apportionment (The New Inn, The Greyhound Inn and The New Bell Inn).

11. *The Western Suburb*. The suburb on the west side of the town centre expanded beyond the confines of West Street during the post medieval period. The suburb was centred on *Pye Corner* at the junction of West Street, King Street and the roads to Blandford and Julian's Bridge. The Green Man and Three Lions pubs fronted on to the junction by the early 19th century and terraces of small houses lined the Old Road to Julian's Bridge by the late 18th century.

12. *Eastbrook Suburb*. Early 17th century maps show that a substantial suburb had been established on both sides of Eastbrook bridge by that time. The bridge itself dates from the 18th, although an earlier bridge at Eastbrook is mentioned in documents dating to 1567 (Hutchins 1874, 182). By the early 19th century the area contained a mixture of industrial and residential premises. A gas works lay close to the site of St Catherine's Chapel. A tanyard lay adjacent to the east bank of the river, south of the bridge and offices lay behind the Rising Sun pub, which fronted on to the south side of East Street.

13. *Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School*. The grammar school opened in 1563 following a petition from the townspeople for the reinstatement of the free chantry school, which had been closed on the dissolution in 1547. The 18th century map of the town indicates that the school lay on the site of the former chantry and continued to be run by three chaplains. The current school building dates from 1851.

14. *St Margaret's Hospital*. The site of the Leper hospital was converted to almshouses at some time prior to the reformation when it provided for the relief of 8 poor townspeople. Following the reformation the almshouse was run by two elected wardens, and after 1683, by the stewards of the Lord of Kingston Lacy (Page 1908, 106-7). The site comprises a number of cottages, one of which dates from the 16th-17th centuries and is timber framed, with a surviving panel of wattle and daub (Figure 26). Two others are built in cob and date from the 18th century.

15. *Deans Court*. The earliest part of the current building was erected by Sir William Hanham in 1725. It comprised north and east ranges enclosing, as its central hall, the original medieval

Dean's hall. However, the hall and the room adjoining it to the south were rebuilt in 1868 and nothing visible of the medieval hall remains today. The stable range on the west side of the house also dates from 1725. Landscaped and formal gardens were also laid out at the same time and include a brick garden wall of serpentine plan (RCHME V1975, 86).

16. *St Catherine's Chapel*. The chapel was sold in 1550-51 and appears to have been removed by the late 18th century. It is not shown on the tithe map although a field adjoining the site was known as Catherine's at that time (Penn 1980, 124).

17. *Lewens*. Lewens House is said to date from 1654, although it was greatly altered during the middle of the 18th century. These alterations resulted in an almost symmetrical brick front of two storeys with hipped attic dormers, tiled roof and a central doorway. The neighbouring 1 and 2 Lewens Lane are early 19th century houses, rendered with brick chimney stacks.

18. *Green Close Farm*. Green Close Farmhouse is a mid to late 17th century cross passage house. It has brick walls on a rubble stone base, although the original rear timber framed wall survives as an internal wall. Some timber framed partitions also survive internally on the first floor.

19. *Old Manor Farm*. Old Manor Farmhouse retains elements of the original 16th century building and is surrounded by a moat on three sides. A kitchen wing was added on the west side during the 18th century (RCHME V 1975, 86-7).

20. *Walford Farm*. This house is of two builds; the southern block dates from the 17th century and the northern block from the 18th century. It is on two storeys with brick walls, tiled roof and brick chimney stacks.

21. *Leigh Common*. The tithe map shows that by the early 19th century the settlement had taken the form of cottages and farms arranged around a central unenclosed green. Some cottages along-



Figure 25: Walford Mill

side the road further west are within long narrow plots suggestive of enclosure from former roadside waste. These latter cottages were demolished and replaced in the late 20th century by numbers 97-109 Leigh Road.

22. *Colehill*. The tithe map also shows that the part of Colehill common lying within the study area had been largely enclosed by the early 19th century. A number of cottages had been built in a piecemeal process and sometimes by enclosure of roadside waste. Numbers 47 and 49 Colehill Road are cob built with a thatched roof and described as dating from the early 18th century however they do not appear on the tithe map and may be mid to late 19th century in date.

23. *Colehill Clay and Gravel Pits*. Clay and gravel extraction seems to have started on an industrial scale around Colehill common during the early 19th century. A brick kiln and clay pit are recorded immediately outside the study area on the tithe map and old gravel and clay pits are recorded on late 19th century Ordnance Survey maps. Small scale extraction for cob walling and brickmaking had been taking place at an earlier date, and recorded from the 17th century. The expansion of the industry in the early to mid 19th century may be related to the development of the railway and Victorian suburbs.

24. *Cottage Farm*. Two cottages are shown adjacent to Leigh Lane on the tithe map, one on the site of *Cottage Farm* and now called *The Old Cottage* (Figure 27), the other at *Drovers*. They may represent the enclosure of roadside waste during the post medieval period.

25 *Allendale and East Borough Town Houses*. A group of Town Houses were built fronting on to both sides of East Borough, close to the town centre during the late 18th century. They are built in the Georgian style with classical moulded porches. Allendale House was built slightly later in 1823, although it may have been on the site of the 18th century Dolphin Inn. It is on three storeys with attics and cellars with rendered walls and a



Figure 26: Numbers 9 and 11 St Margaret's Hill, late 16th-late 18th century almshouses

slate roof. (RCHME V 1975, 90).

26. *The Workhouse*. This large workhouse was first built in 1759 on the east side of East Borough. It was enlarged and converted into a Union Workhouse over three years from 1836-8. It was a two storey brick building with tiled roofs. The central section had a 'T' shaped plan of two storeys with a bell turret. The stem of the 'T' had the master's parlour with his bedroom above (Higginbotham 2006).

27. *Walford Suburb*. The late 18th century map of Wimborne Minster shows that a substantial suburb of cottages, town houses and industrial buildings had been established between The Borough and Walford Mill. These lay within irregular plots and are unlikely to have derived from medieval burgages extending from the Borough. Development in this area began at least in the 17th century. Numbers 83-5 East Borough date from the 17th century. A toll house was established on West Borough in the late 18th century as was the Crown and Anchor Pub on the north side of Walford Bridge.

28. *Stone Farm*. Stone Farmhouse was in existence by the early 19th century, although the adjacent Angel cottage appears to be 18th century in date (Figure 28).



Figure 27: *The Old Cottage*, Leigh Lane, early 19th century or earlier.



Figure 28: *Angel Cottage*, Stone Lane; 18th century house with contemporary cob boundary wall