

Sherborne Historic Urban Character Area 1

Historic Core

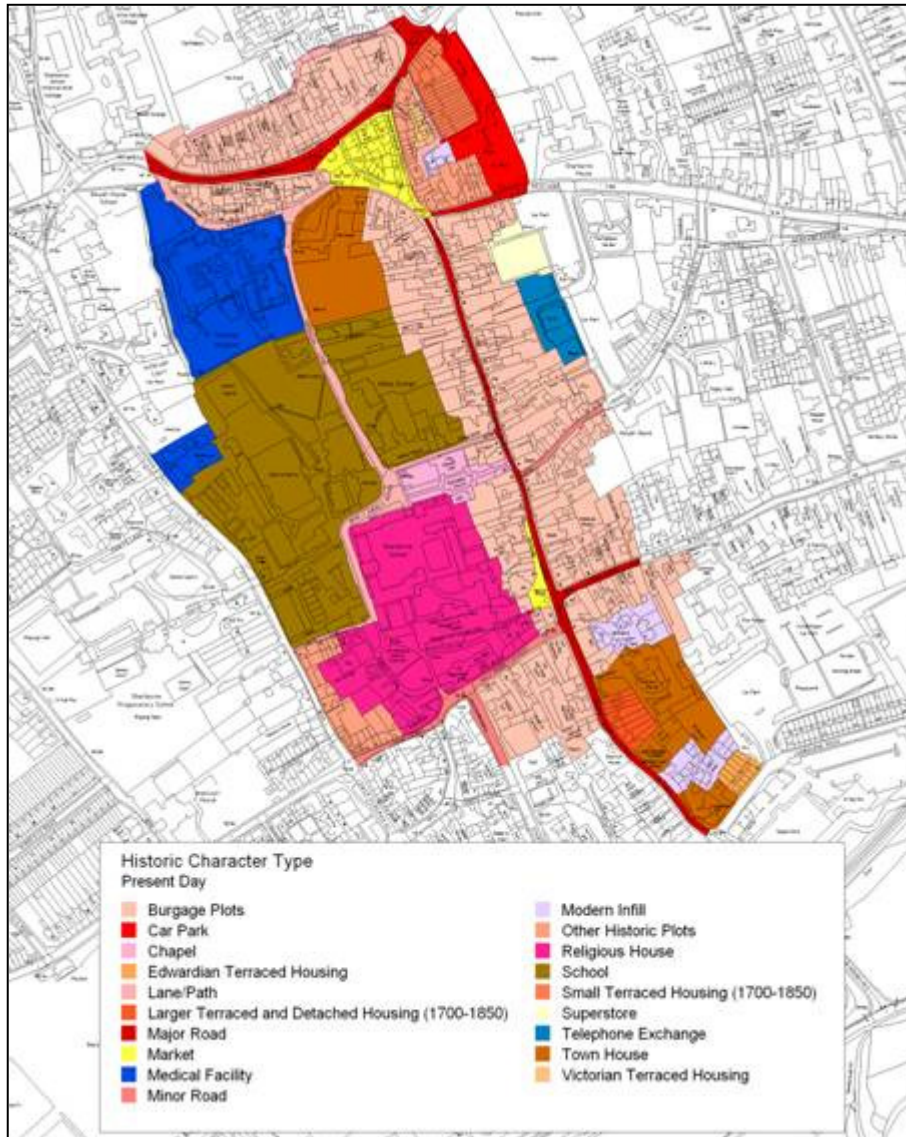


Figure 89 Historic Urban Character Area 1, showing current historic urban character type



Figure 90: The Market Place



Figure 91: The Abbey Church of St Mary

Sherborne Historic Urban Character Area 1

Structure of Character Area

Overview

This area centres on the monastic precinct of Sherborne Abbey, now largely occupied by the King's School. It is defined primarily by its historic dimension, Cheap Street and the monastic precinct being the earliest plan components identifiable in the town. 13th century burgages next to Greenhill and the 12th century Half Moon Street are included.

Topography and Geology

The town of Sherborne was established near the confluence of the Coombe Brook and the River Yeo, and lies on the north bank of the Yeo, on the edge of the well drained inferior Oolite. The Coombe Brook, now largely culverted, flows through the western side of the character area in a slight valley.

Urban Structure

The modern town plan comprises a rectangular grid of streets around the medieval monastery. The main shopping area, Cheap Street, runs parallel to the eastern boundary of the monastic precinct. Properties here took the form of burgages, although many of these were truncated in the 20th century. Half Moon Street, along the southern edge of the precinct, was created in the 12th century. The northern side of the rectangle is Greenhill; land parcels on either side of this road are burgage plots associated with the 13th-century borough of Newland.

Present Character

Figure 89 shows the present day historic urban character types. The former Abbey precinct is focal and retains a significant amount of its character, though it is now almost entirely part of Sherborne School. The commercial heart of the town comprises Cheap Street, as it has done since at least the Norman period. The remains of original burgage plots can be recognised in modern property boundaries. The greatest disruption occurs at the Somerfield supermarket and the adjacent telephone



Figure 92: View north along Cheap Street.

exchange. The market place (Figure 90) and The Green lie at either end of Cheap Street. Former burgages on the upper east side of Cheap Street have been infilled with Victorian terraced housing, and modern infill on the site of a Quaker burial ground. Medieval burgages survive on either side of Greenhill, and Greenhill House itself is a large 17th century town house. South Street continues the line of Cheap Street to the south. Plots here include former town houses and 19th and 20th century terraces.

Time Depth

This area represents the historic core of the town. The middle Saxon cathedral was founded on the west side of the Abbey church (Figure 91), elements of which date from the late Saxon period. The rectangular Abbey precinct is late Saxon in origin. It is likely that Cheap Street, which follows the alignment of the precinct, is late Saxon in date. Half Moon Street, The Green and South Street date from the Norman period if not earlier and burgages on Greenhill date from the 13th century. A significant number of medieval buildings survive.

Settlement Pattern and Streetscape

The settlement pattern of the town centre is essentially a grid of four streets around a rectangular core of the former monastic precinct. Here the school buildings are arranged into courts with open areas between. The northern part of the school contains modern school buildings and the Yeatman Hospital but still with significant open spaces and walled lanes. Cheap Street (Figure 92) and Greenhill have compact frontages with former burgage plots behind. The only open spaces are at Greenhill and the market place. Back lanes are also compact with small terraces fronting directly on to the streets. Only Hound Street has an open feel, with the former cemetery and Abbey Close (Figure 93) providing an important open public space framed by the Abbey Church, SS Johns' almshouses and the Church Hall.



Figure 93: View SW across Abbey Close to SS Johns' Almshouse

Sherborne Historic Urban Character Area 1 Built Character

Building types

The central area is dominated historically, architecturally and physically by the Abbey Church of St Mary. The church retains a few late Saxon structural elements but was largely reconstructed in the 12th century. 15th century remodelling is associated with the magnificent high span fan vaulting, the first of its kind in England. Little remains of the medieval claustral buildings. Those that survive have been incorporated into the courtyards of Sherborne School, founded in 1550. One exception is the Conduit Head which was removed from the monk's cloisters to the market place c. 1553.

Of 375 listed buildings and structures in the study area, 183 lie in this character area. These form a near continuous historic built environment of exceptional quality and character along the lengths of Green Hill, Cheap Street, Half Moon Street, Trendle and the southern part of Acreman Street. As well as the above mentioned Abbey and School, key groups of buildings include those arranged around The Green (Figure 94), including St Julian's Hospice (c. 1437). Another key group, around the market place, includes the Conduit Head, the 19th century Abbey Gatehouse and the 15th century cemetery gate. Half Moon Street provides the main southern aspect of the Abbey Church, framed on the west by the Almshouses of SS John, Abbey Close and Finger Lane and on the east by the 16th century former church hall. There are also a few large modern buildings such as the telephone exchange in Hound Street car park, the new wing to the Yeatman Hospital and the Somerfield supermarket.

Building Materials

The majority of buildings in Sherborne are constructed from Sherborne Building Stone, an oolitic limestone which weathers to a warm light fawn colour. Roofs tend to be in local stone slate, imported slate or plain tile, although the Abbey church roof is leaded (Figure 95). Wooden sash and casement windows and 19th century shop fronts characterise Cheap Street. A relatively high number of medieval timber framed buildings also survive along Cheap Street. Numbers 36, 38 and 46 are good examples of late medieval timber framed buildings with jetties, posts and brackets. Red brick tends to be restricted to an early 20th century terrace and a former municipal fire station on Ludbourne Road. Modern buildings use a range of modern materials but are often faced with local stone.

Key Buildings

Ecclesiastical: Abbey Church of St Mary, Sherborne United Reformed Church, Cheap Street, SS John's Almshouse, Half Moon Street, Former Abbey Claustral buildings (Abbots Hall and Kitchens, The Slype, Sherborne School Library, The Conduit Cross, the cemetery gate and gatehouse).

Sherborne School Buildings: The Old School, The Great Court, Medlycott Building.

Medieval buildings: St Julian's Hospice, The Church Hall, numbers 36, 38 and 46 Cheap Street.

17th to 19th century town houses: Greenhill House, Ludbourne House, The Vicarage.



Figure 94: View of The Green looking towards St Julian's Hospice



Figure 95: View south along Hound Street

**Sherborne Historic Urban Character Area 1
Archaeology**

Archaeological Investigations

Forty three archaeological investigations have been undertaken in this character area (Figure 96; Appendix 3, nos 1-43).

The earliest discoveries and investigations date from the beginning of the 19th century and are associated with the Abbey. Workmen found burials beneath the Abbey church [1- 3] and Slype [4-6], but little is known about this find. A Romano-British or possibly Saxon, mosaic was found under the floor [7], and remains of the west tower of the late Saxon Abbey church were recorded during renovation work [8]. This work on the Saxon west tower was followed by excavations in 1949 [9] and by Sherborne School Archaeological Society from 1964 to 1973 [10-13]. These investigations revealed

evidence for the plan of the medieval parish church of All Hallows. Excavations at the library [14] and the Slype [15] produced evidence for the east and west claustral ranges of Sherborne Abbey. A series of excavations was directed by Gem, Keen and Thackray from 1972-6 to the north of the Slype [16], at the school library [17], the Courts [18], new sports hall [19] and at the west end of the north aisle of the Abbey church [20 (Keen and Ellis 2005)]. A radar survey was undertaken in the former cemetery south of the Abbey church during 1992 [21].

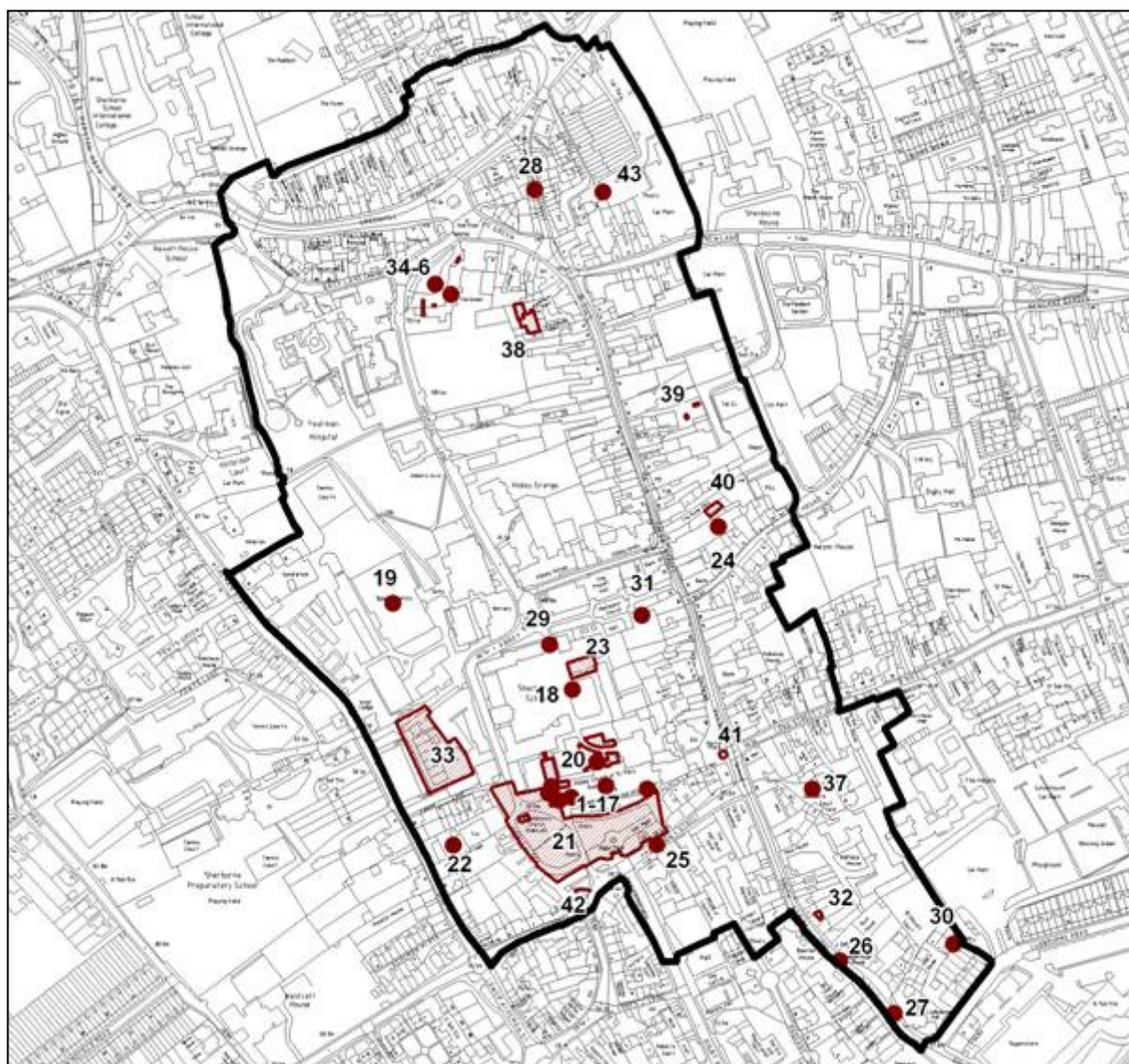
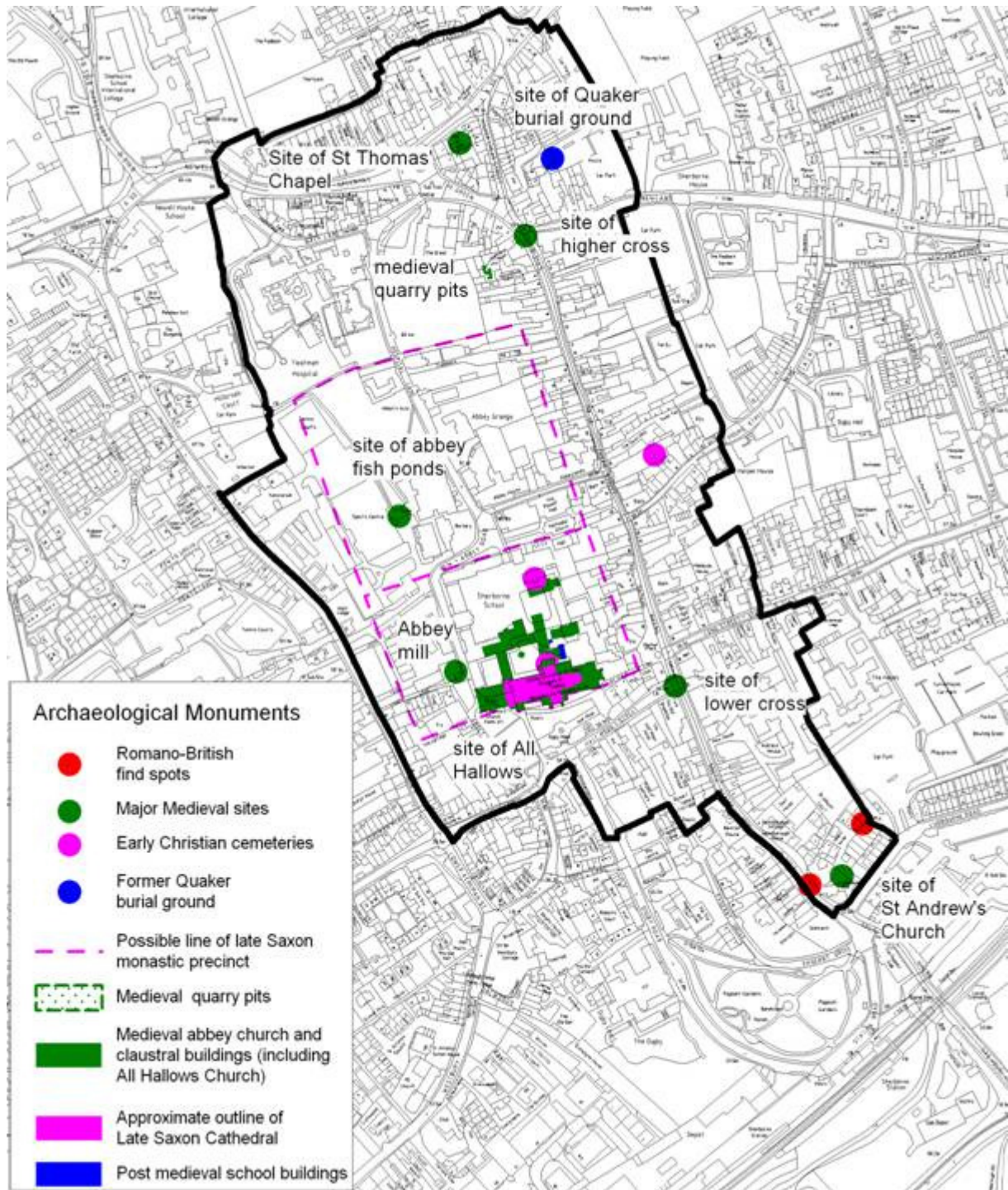


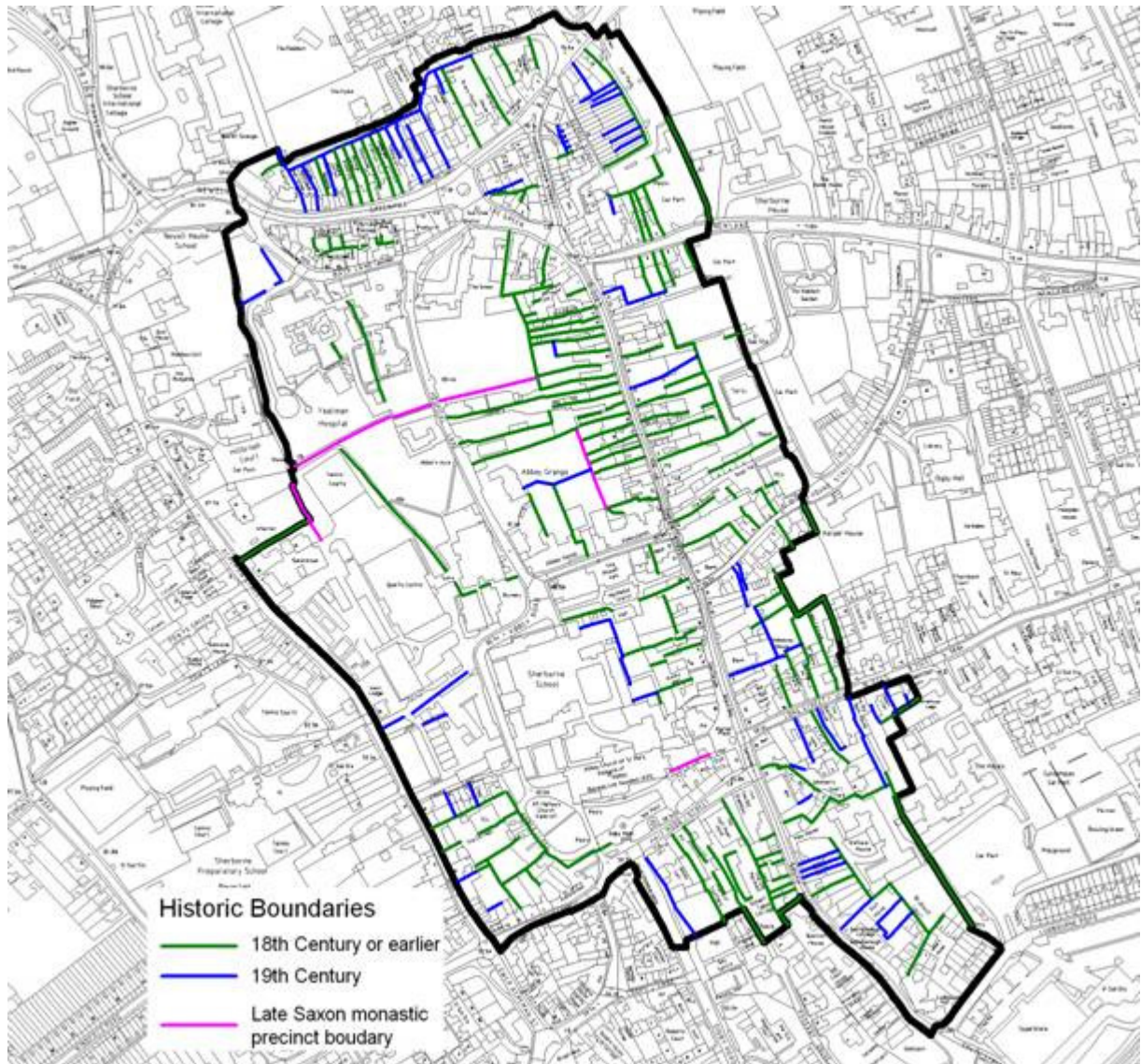
Figure 96: Archaeological Investigations in Historic Urban Character Area 1



97: Archaeological Features in Historic Urban Character Area 1

C E Bean carried out observations and salvage exercises in the town between 1931 and 1955, several within the former Abbey precinct. Evidence of the precinct was recorded at The Vicarage in 1954-5 [22] and the Medlycott Building in 1954-5 [23]. This evaluation also revealed burials thought to be associated with an early Christian cemetery. Bean recorded another cemetery during the construction of Woolworths in 1937 [24]

and human remains beneath Half Moon Street in 1955 [25]. He undertook salvage recording at South Street [26-7], Higher Cheap Street [28] and Sherborne School main entrance [29]. Sherborne School Archaeological Society also excavated a disturbed Romano-British site at Elmdene, South Street [30] and Katherine Barker excavated in the back garden of 60 Cheap Street during 1977 [31].



98: Historic Boundaries in Historic Urban Character Area 1

Recently evaluations have been undertaken at 6 South Street [32], Devitt Court [33], Greenhill House [34-6], Johnson's Yard [37] and 4-6 and 39 Cheap Street [38 & 39]. Watching briefs were conducted at The Swan, Cheap Street [40], during conservation of the Conduit [41], and at SS Johns Almshouses [42]. These revealed evidence for medieval and post medieval pits and structures. A 1994 documentary survey of Quaker burial grounds includes Sherborne [43].

Archaeological Character

There is little evidence for prehistoric or Romano-British activity (Figure 97). A report of a Roman mosaic is unreliable (Carpenter 1877) and latest thinking suggests that this may represent the floor of the Saxon Cathedral, partly because of the paucity Roman finds. Roman material has been recorded behind South Street, and this may represent a dispersed settlement. Rectilinear alignments surviving within the modern town-

scape suggest intensive activity in the Sherborne region from at least the late Iron Age (Davey 2010).

Investigations around the Abbey have produced evidence for the plan of the late Saxon cathedral church and Abbey precinct, and a significant number of 7th-11th century burials. There is well preserved evidence for the medieval Abbey church, claustral ranges, precinct boundaries, burials and parish church of All Hallows. The surrounding streets hold evidence of the medieval and post medieval economy, including pits, quarries, wells and ditches, and the pin making and pottery industries.

Figure 98 shows historic boundaries visible on 18th and 19th century maps. The surviving putative late Saxon Abbey precinct boundaries are also shown. Burgage style plots visible on 18th and early 19th century maps are presumed to be of medieval origin.

Sherborne Historic Urban Character Area 1 Designations

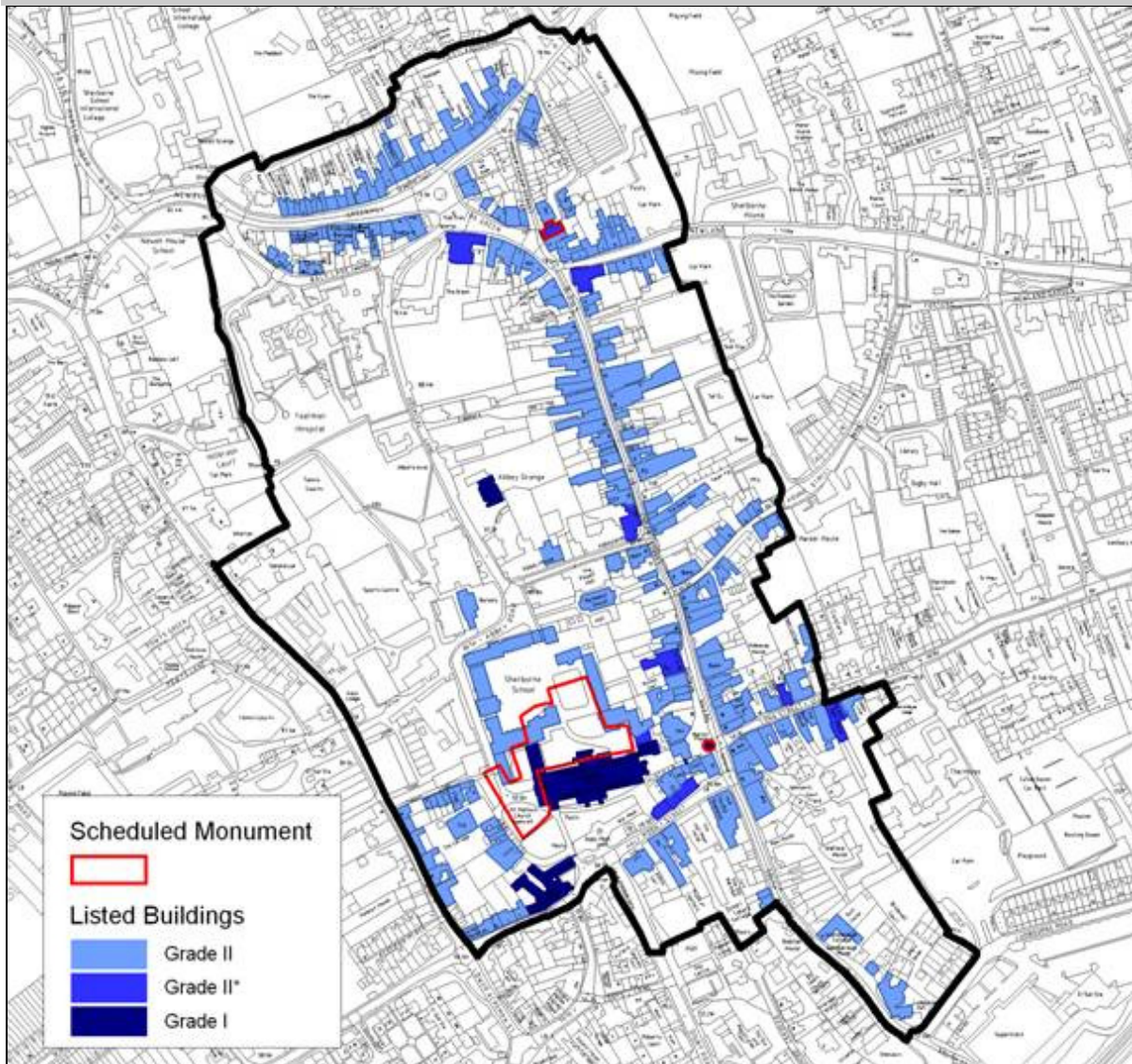


Figure 99: Historic Buildings and Scheduled Monuments in Historic Urban Character Area 1

Listed Buildings

There are 184 Listed Building designations in the Character Area, ten of which are Grade I (The Conduit, The Hospital of SS John, Library at Sherborne School, Abbey Grange, Sherborne Old School house, The School House Studies at Sherborne School, The Chapel at Sherborne School, The Slype, The Cemetery Gate and the Abbey Church of St Mary). Ten are grade II* and the remainder are Grade II (Figure 99).

Conservation Areas

Almost all of this Character Area lies within the Sherborne Conservation Area. Only Bridewell Court and Ludbourne Terrace at the extreme southern tip of the character area lie outside the Conservation Area (Figure 88).

Registered Historic Parks and Gardens

There are no Registered Parks and Gardens within the Character Area.

Scheduled Monuments

Three Scheduled Monuments lie within the character area; The Abbey church and buildings (SM Dorset No 797); St Julian's Hospice (SM Dorset No 139); and The Conduit Cross (SM Dorset No 7).

Sherborne Historic Urban Character Area 1 Evaluation

Strength of Historic Character

The strength of character of this area is judged to be **strong**, being a combination of the significant historical background and time depth, the positive contribution made by a very high number of historic buildings and scheduled monuments and the rich archaeological record. Approximately 90% of the buildings within the character area date from the late 19th century or earlier. The area also contains several upstanding medieval structures, including one (the Abbey church) which retains elements from before the Norman Conquest. The consistent use of Sherborne stone for both walling and roofing forms a significant aspect of the historic character. Furthermore, the area displays good survival of the Saxon and Norman town plan, as well as medieval burgage plot boundaries.

Sensitivity to Large Scale Development

The area has a **high** sensitivity to major change. The historic town centre has a settlement pattern which reflects its Saxon origins. At the core of this is the former monastic precinct which now comprises the tranquil spaces and historic buildings of Sherborne School. Modern development has taken place here, particularly in the north of the precinct and at Yeatman Hospital, but this development has retained significant open spaces and walled gardens of Sherborne stone lining quiet back lanes. Stone walled plot boundaries are a significant feature of

Sherborne, many of them defining medieval burgages. These are at risk from large scale development. Some have already been lost behind Cheap Street and the character of this area has been undermined as a result.

Archaeological Potential

The debate concerning the origins of Sherborne remains controversial and of national significance. Consequently this area has a very **high** archaeological potential. There may be deposits relating to middle Saxon Sherborne, and evidence as to whether there are Roman structures beneath the Abbey church or any archaeological evidence for a post-Roman settlement, ecclesiastical or otherwise, in the vicinity of the Abbey. The lost chapels of St Andrew and St Thomas are thought to have been in this area. There is considerable potential for archaeology relating to commercial and domestic activity in the town in the medieval period in particular

A number of historic buildings have potential to provide detailed information on the survival of earlier phases of building and to contribute to the understanding both of individual properties and of stages of development in medieval and post-medieval Sherborne.

This area has the potential to provide information which would contribute to Research Questions 1-3, 5-6, 8-14, 16, 18 and 20-24 (Part 7).

Key Characteristics

- **Saxon Cathedral, Abbey and precinct**
- **Sherborne School**
- **Medieval planned burgages**
- **The site of medieval markets and fairs**
- **High proportion of medieval historic buildings and scheduled monuments**
- **Consistent use of local stone for buildings and plot boundaries**
- **Well preserved 19th century shop fronts**
- **Significant sub-surface archaeological potential**