

## **Part 5: Historical Analysis**





## 5.1 Medieval Blandford Forum (AD 1066-1540)

### 5.1.1 Historical Summary

The early history of Blandford is not clear. The Domesday survey lists nine separate estates called *Bleneford* or *Blaneford*, which are thought to lie in the later parishes of Langton Long Blandford, Blandford St Mary and Bryanston and it is not certain whether any of these refers to the present site of the town. It is possible that any settlement here may have been included as part of Pimperne (Thorn & Thorn 1983). If there was a pre-existing settlement on the site of the later Blandford Forum, it only comprised a small village or hamlet at the time of the Domesday survey. The earliest secure evidence for occupation within the study area comes from archaeological finds of Late Saxon pottery in association with a shrunken medieval settlement found at the Stour Park retail site in Blandford St Mary (Graham & Cox, 1993).

It has been suggested that the first church was founded at Blandford in 1110 by Robert de Beaumont, 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Leicester and lord of the manor (Cox 2003, 3). However, it is not clear if this refers to the church at Blandford Forum, or one of the other Blandfords. Rectors are only recorded for Blandford Forum church from 1295 onwards (Hutchins 1774). The medieval church burnt down in the great fire of 1731 but was rebuilt on the same site.

The first record of urban development at Blandford Forum comes from Close Rolls dated 1217-18. This document is a mandate to the Sheriff of Dorset that the market day at Blandford shall be changed from Sunday to Saturday. In 1219 the Countess of Leicester received £10 rent from the borough of Blandford and in 1244 Blandford was represented as a borough at the Eyre. From 1288 onwards the town is referred to as *Cheping Blandford* or

*Blandford Forum* (Penn 1980, 19; Letters 2007). These documents suggest a very rapid rise for Blandford as a borough and market town and may suggest the implantation of a planned market and Borough in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. By 1307 the borough had passed to the Kingston Lacy estate. At this time Henry de Lacy was granted a charter for an annual fair to be held over three days centred on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul (29 June) to be held at the manor of Blandford. A second annual fair was in existence at the town by 1415 when Henry V granted that the fair held on All Saints Day should be moved to the feast of Simon and Jude on 28 October (Letters 2007).

In 1304-5 Blandford sent a member to parliament and by 1307 the town was taxed at the urban rate. The burgesses paid 40s a year in rent collectively to their lord in 1312. The Lay Subsidy of 1332 records that there were 21 tax payers in the town paying a total of 41s. This suggests that Blandford remained a modest country town following its initial foundation. The surnames of the taxpayers recorded in the 14<sup>th</sup> century Lay Subsidies suggest that a typical range of urban trades were carried out in the town. These include le Tannere, le Smyth, le Goldsmyth, le Chalener (blanket seller), le Skynnere (leather worker), le Webbe (weaver), le Clerk, Boucher (butcher) and Tavener (Penn 1980, 19; Mills 1971, 105; Rumble 1980).

There are other clues to the scale and nature of the medieval urban economy in Blandford; in 1390 12 men and one woman were taken to court for brewing and selling ale contrary to regulations (Cox 2003, 7); and John Aubrey recalled that the town had a glass painter who died in 1643 (Hutchins 1874, 216).

Hutchins mentions a hospital for lepers at Langton Long Blandford recorded in a deed



Figure 6: St Leonard's Chapel



Figure 7: Medieval burgage plot with post-medieval outbuildings on the south.

dated 1281-2 (Hutchins 1774, 98). At the time of the Black Death a chantry priest is recorded as being replaced in Langton Long Blandford (Fletcher 1922, 8-9). This chantry at Langton may be part of the leper hospital of St Leonard, close to the east side of the town. Nothing more is known of it other than it is traditionally held to have been at the site of St Leonard's Chapel (Page 1908, 100).

It is unclear whether Blandford Forum was severely affected by the Black Death of 1348. If the town did suffer a slight decline during the late 14<sup>th</sup> century because of the Black Death or other reasons, it had recovered by the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. At this time it is thought to have contained a population of around 500, maintained through an economy based on a small cloth industry. Sixteenth century developments in the town included a free school north of the church, an almshouse immediately west of the church and a guildhall.

The borough was administered by a common council and an elected bailiff who acted under the overall control of the manorial lord, prior to being incorporated in 1605 (Cox 2001, 6). The manor was owned by the Earl's of Leicester following the Norman Conquest, although Robert Earl of Leicester granted part of it to the nuns of the order of Ste Marie in Amesbury in 1200-1201. Hutchins was able to demonstrate that this property eventually passed to the Ryve family and equated to Damory Court just beyond the eastern end of East Street (Cox 1984, 31; Hutchins 1874, 222).

### 5.1.2 Town Layout

Our understanding of the layout of the medieval town of Blandford Forum is aided by good survival of medieval burgage plot boundaries in the centre of the town and the existence of a survey of the borough made for the Duchy of Lancaster (holders of the Lacy estate) in 1590-91. This survey records The Plocks and The Close as marking the bounds of the borough to the north and the south bank of the River Stour marking the south side. The borough included burgage plots fronting on to both sides of East Street and the Market Place and also included the Marsh, the Ham, the river and the ford on the south side of the town, which seem to represent the borough's common. The evidence suggests that a simple double row settlement and market was planted on the north side of an important crossing of the River Stour. The area around the ford lies at the boundary of two hundreds and may have always been open ground and potentially a traditional place of exchange prior to the foundation of the borough. Blandford Bridge was

first recorded as *pons de Blaneford* in 1268 (Cox 2003, 5) and was repaired in 1631.

The town was laid out perpendicular to the river crossing along the present East Street with burgage plots laid out on both sides. This simple double row layout is typical of planned settlements in Somerset and Dorset, with examples at Abbotsbury, Sturminster Newton and Charlton Horethorne in Somerset (Davey 2010). The market place lay at the west end close to the junction with the river crossing and the church lay at the east end of the market. At the east end of East Street lay the manor house (Damory Court), which was built during the early 14th century.

There is another block of burgage plots on the west side of Salisbury Street, lying outside the bounds of the medieval borough. These are also likely to be medieval in date, though post-dating the original foundation of the borough.

The medieval road pattern differed from the modern one in a few important aspects. Firstly, the road from London to Weymouth entered Blandford along Black Lane and East Street rather than Salisbury Street. This is clear from the layout of the medieval borough with its central axis along the important major route. It should be noted however, that the medieval chapel of St Leonard actually fronts on to a path which runs parallel to Black Lane, slightly to the north. This path is more directly aligned with East Street and may represent the original course of the major eastern medieval route (Figure 8). The second important difference is that West Street is likely to have originally continued directly south from Salisbury Street, crossing the Stour at the old ford 50m east of Blandford Bridge. Only after the construction of the bridge would West Street have been extended westwards along its current route. Bryanston Street marks the last vestige of a medieval road linking Blandford directly with Bryanston via a ford across the Stour between Bryanston Church and the modern Blandford School. The main road from Blandford to Shaftesbury is likely to have followed the Higher Shaftesbury Road during the medieval period (Good 1966, 54-5; 62; 105). Evidence from the changes in the course of Park Road and Milldown Road also suggest that Damory Street and White Cliff Mill Street formerly opened out into a broad unenclosed way, later enclosed as Milldown Road. An alternative route from Blandford to Kite's Corner is likely to have followed Salisbury Road and Shaftesbury Lane (as shown on the 1618 survey of Cranborne Chase). Finally, the road between Blandford Bridge and Blandford St Mary Church followed

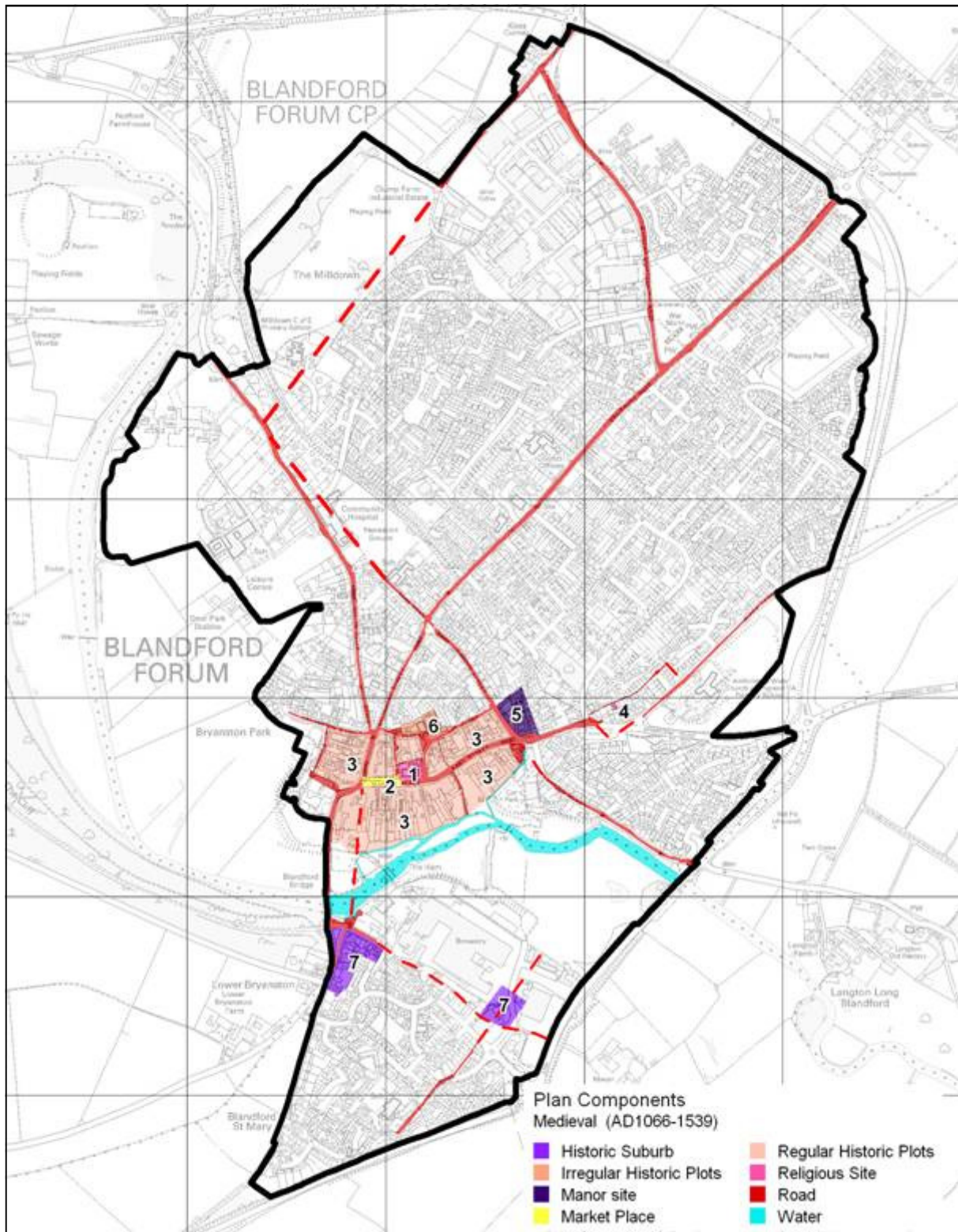


Figure 8: Medieval and Early Post Medieval Plan Components

an alternative route along Poole Road, slightly further to the north of the current Bournemouth Road.

### 5.1.3 Medieval Urban plan components

The main plan components of the medieval town are shown on Figure 8 and are listed below.

1. The Church of Ss Peter and Paul. The me-

dieval church of Ss Peter and Paul was destroyed in the great fire of 1731, although the current church was re-built on the original site (Figure 9). A survey of the town drawn up by the Bastard brothers prior to reconstruction shows the plan of the original which comprised a chancel, nave, two aisles, a north chancel and an embattled tower on which was erected a 100ft high wooden spire covered with lead (Hutchins 1874, 224).

2. *The Market.* Blandford market was already in existence by 1217-18 when it is recorded that the market day was changed from Sunday to Saturday. Its location seems to have always been at the west end of East Street, west of the church. Shambles were recorded there as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century and by the 16<sup>th</sup> century 21 people had stalls there (Penn 1980, 19). The Bastard survey of 1731 shows that the medieval market cross lay at the junction of West Street and Salisbury Street, at the west end of the market place (Figure 10). The cross had a square plinth and circular shaft. Butter and cheese were sold and cheese weighed at the market cross (Hutchins 1874, 220). The shambles lay immediately east of the cross and the 16<sup>th</sup> century town or guildhall east of that, in the centre of the market place (RCHME 1970, plate 104).

3. *Burgages.* Two rows of burgage plots lay on the north and south sides of East Street and the market place. The earliest clear depiction of them is on the 1731 Bastard survey, although this is likely to depict a medieval arrangement. The original borough boundary included only these burgages and the common meadows and ford to their south. The burgages on the north were bounded by a back lane comprising the Close and the Plocks. The southern burgages were backed by the river and commons. The line of Salisbury Street marked the western limit and Damory Street/Langton Road the eastern limit. The church and market held central posi-

tions within this arrangement. The later medieval expansion of the town is represented by the addition of West Street, leading to the medieval bridge and the addition of a further block of burgages on the west side of Salisbury Street, although this remained outside the borough bounds.

4. *St Leonard's Chapel.* This building (Figure 6) is probably not a chapel at all, but rather the 15<sup>th</sup> century infirmary of a leper hospital (Gale 1991). Nevertheless, a chapel is first mentioned here in 1282 and Hutchins noted that there was a hospital for lepers in that parish by 1381-2, traditionally held to be on the site of St Leonard's Chapel (Cox 2003, 5; Page 1908, 100). It is notable as the only surviving medieval building within Blandford Forum, although it originally lay outside the borough in Langton Long Blandford parish.

5. *Damory Court.* Penn suggests that Damory Court was built at the east end of the borough circa 1300 (Penn 1980, 19). Hutchins was able to demonstrate that it originally formed the manor house for a small portion of the Earl of Leicester's manorial borough of Blandford. This small manor was granted to the nuns of the order of Ste Marie at Amesbury and was hence known as Dame Marie Court (Hutchins 1874, 222). The house was purchased by the Ryves family by the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

6. *Plots north of the Plocks.* The Norden survey of Cranborne Chase (1605) clearly shows that the town had expanded slightly to the north of The Plocks by that time. The Tithe map apportionment states that this land was rectorial glebe by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

7. *Blandford St Mary suburb.* The modern parish of Blandford St Mary comprises at least five separate Domesday manors which appear to have been strung out along the south side of the River Stour, just above the floodplain. Each manor was associated with a strip of land run-



Figure 9: The 18<sup>th</sup> century church of Ss Peter and Paul built on the site of the medieval parish church.



Figure 10: View west across the Market Place. The site of the medieval market cross was at the far end of this photograph.

ning up the valley slopes from the river to Little Down. The settlements were linked by a road running parallel to the river (Figure 11), although on a slightly different course than the modern Bournemouth Road (AOC 2001, 5). Each settlement had a further road running perpendicular to the river, providing access to its fields and meadow. At least one, possibly two, of these Domesday manors lay within the study area. A late Saxon and medieval settlement, together with its perpendicular hollow way, was excavated in advance of development of the Stour Park retail site in 1993 (Graham & Cox 1993a; 1993b; Hennessy 2004).

Furthermore, the medieval suburb on the south side of Blandford Bridge is depicted on the Hardinge Survey of Cranborne Chase dated 1618. The map shows that the suburb probably originally lay on either side of the northern end of Dorchester Hill, where it approached the ford. The first bridge was constructed at an unknown date prior to 1268, 50 yards to the west of the ford. The suburb subsequently extended along the new approach to the bridge. It is not known if this suburb represents the site of one of the Domesday manors.



*Figure 11: Lyndon Cottage, Blandford St Mary, fronting on to a short surviving section of the original E-W road linking medieval manors on the south side of the River Stour.*