

## 5.3 Norman Christchurch (AD1066-1149)

### 5.3.1 Historical Summary

William Rufus gave the Church and town to Ranulf Flambard, who became Bishop of Durham prior to 1095. However, Flambard was exiled after the murder of William Rufus, and the manor, town and church passed to Richard de Redvers. The town became a mesne borough at this time (literally a middling borough; one that was no longer held directly from the king but sublet to a lower ranked Lord) and the church became a separate manor. Baldwin De Redvers began the construction of the castle c. 1100 and it became the seat of the manor (Penn, 1980, 39). Archaeological evidence for Norman occupation within the town is sparse. At Domesday the town had only 39 recorded messuages, by far the poorest of the Dorset burhs (Penn, 1980, 38). In fact Christchurch was no longer listed as a borough in 1086 (Keen, 1984, 243). Norman settlement within the walled town of Christchurch then would have been fairly sparse, probably concentrated around the castle area and at the southern end of High Street.

Baldwin de Redvers granted the town a charter in 1149 in which the burgesses were granted exemptions to several customs and duties (Page, 1912, 83-101). This charter refers to *all the land in the two streets of the town, with messuages as far as the Stour*. Christchurch certainly functioned as the market for the lord's estates, although the tallage of 12 marks paid by the borough in 1176 suggests that the market was small. (Penn, 1980, 39).

There is little evidence for the town's economy at this time; although fishing is likely to have played a significant part (Jarvis 1983, 15-16). A fishery is recorded at Knapp in 1086. Knapp Mill is close to the site of the renowned Royalty Fishery, suggesting that this part of the Avon

has been important for fishing for approximately 1000 years.

Ranulf Flambard demolished the Saxon minister church and commenced building c AD 1095. The college of 24 secular canons was replaced by Baldwin de Redvers c.1150 with regular Augustinian canons. De Redvers also granted the priory land in the borough and a market (Jarvis 1983, 11; Penn, 1980, 39).

Christchurch minted coins during the reigns of William I and Henry I (1066-1135). No coins are known from the reign of William II but it is likely that the mint continued through the aforementioned period. During the reign of William I (1066-1087) a single moneyer, Coleman, is recorded. During the reign of Henry I (1100-1135) three moneyers; Aeldred, Henric and Tovi are recorded (North, 1994, 187-199).

### 5.3.2 Town Layout

Significant developments in town layout occurred during the Norman period; the main ones being the establishment of the Castle, the creation of the Augustinian Priory, and the probable alteration of the town defences to include a wall and ditch, as well as the certain establishment of the 'playing card' shape.

### 5.3.3 Norman Urban plan components

The main plan components of the early medieval town are shown on figure 13 and are listed below.

1. *The Priory*. Ranulf Flambard began the construction of a new church in about 1095, and around 1150 Baldwin de Redvers replaced the college of secular canons with regular Augustinian canons. The priory continued in this form until its dissolution in 1539 (Penn, 1980, 38-9).



Figure 11: The Priory Church dominating the town



Figure 12: Christchurch Castle Keep

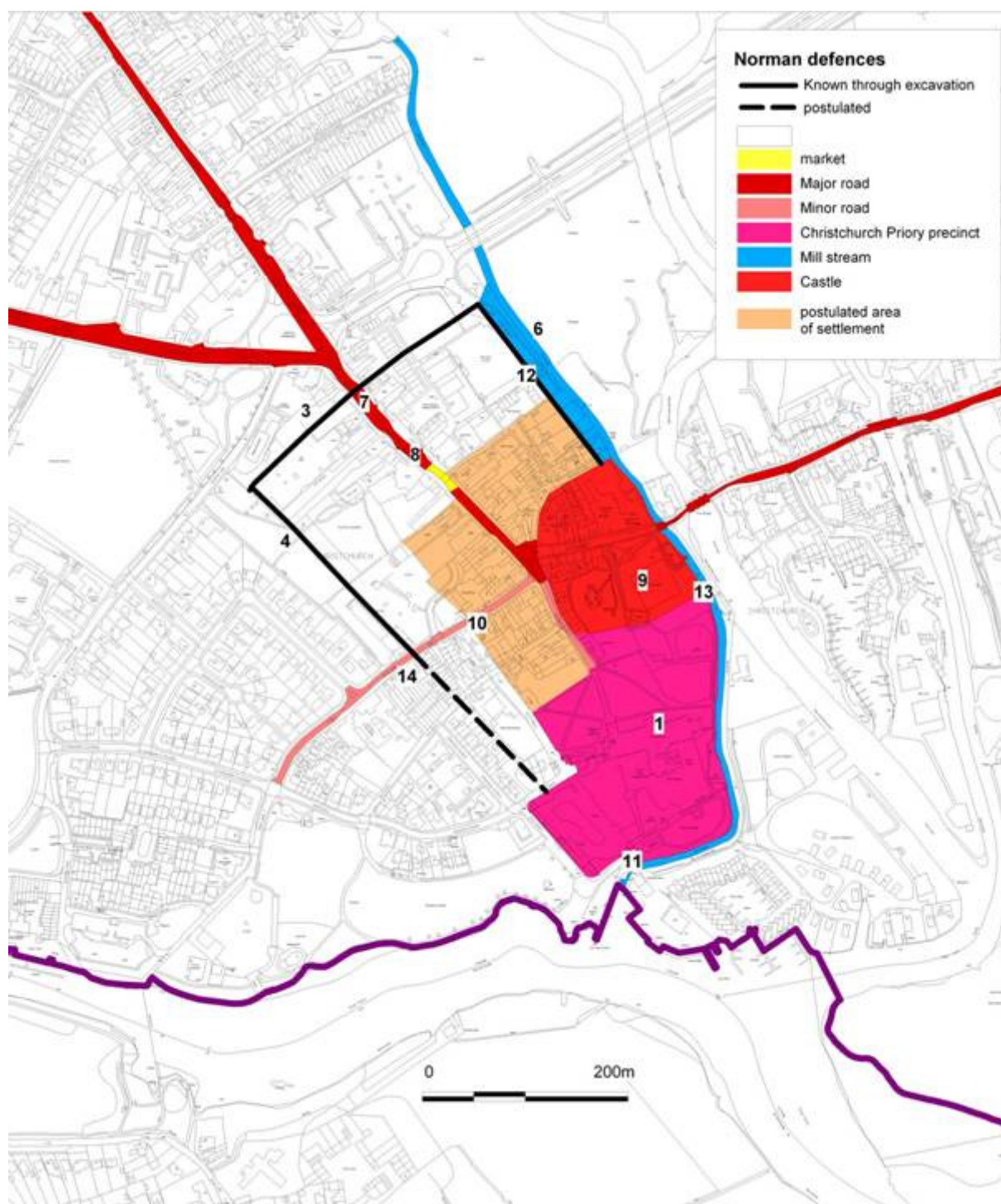


Figure 13: Christchurch Norman plan components

2. *Secular Settlement.* Archaeological evidence suggests that the northern part of the burh was still sparsely populated during the Norman period. There is documentary evidence to suggest that the medieval market lay at the junction of High Street and Millhams Street (Jarvis 1983, 14). It is possible that this was also the location of the Norman market place, indicating that settlement had progressed at least this far.

3. *Northern town defences.* The northern defences were modified during the Saxo-Norman

period. In the 10th or 11th century a stone revetment was added to the inner face of the bank, the late Saxon ditch was re-cut with a 'V'-profile and a second ditch was placed 10m north of the bank. There were at least six ditch phases, but all had been filled by the 12th/13<sup>th</sup> century (Jarvis 1983, 25-7).

4. *Western town defences.* The evidence from site X5 (Druitt Gardens 1972-3) comprised a spread of large Ironstone and Heathstone rubble deriving from the town wall, which partly

overlies an external partly-silted ditch. The full width and depth of the ditch could not be ascertained during excavation due to encroachment of the water table, but it is apparently of defensive proportions. The evidence suggests that the ditch was silted up by the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century and that the wall collapsed prior to the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries (Jarvis 1983, 31-2).

6. *Eastern town defences.* It is possible that an eastern line had been added to the Christchurch defences by the Saxo-Norman period, completing a playing card-shaped defensive circuit. Excavations directed by Wessex Archaeology behind Millhams Street (site W10) during 1981, suggested that a defensive bank and ditch were constructed parallel to the Millstream later in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The date of this refurbishment is not clear but the eastern defences seem to have gone out of use by the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Davies 1983, 29).

7. *Bargate.* It is thought that the stone structure of the Bargate was built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Jarvis 1983, 18-20), although there was likely to have been an earlier, possibly wooden, precursor to it.

8. *Market (High Street).* Several 15<sup>th</sup> century documents suggest that the medieval market hall was originally located at the junction of High Street and Millhams Street (Jarvis 1983, 14). However, given the lack of evidence for Norman occupation at this point, it seems likely that the Norman market was located outside the castle at the junction of High Street and Castle Street.

9. *The Castle.* The castle was built by Richard de Redvers c. 1100. It was attacked in 1147, but saw little other action until the civil war. A hall was built c. 1160 (the 'Constable's House') and the stone keep may not have been constructed until after 1300. The early form of the castle is not clear but the course of the bailey circuit may be fossilised in the line of a later alley; *The Drum and Ducking Stool Lane*. If this was the case then access to the town from the east would only have been possible through the castle bailey. The line of Castle Street certainly appears to have been diverted by the construction of the castle. A charter, dated 1150, mentions a castle ditch, which may have been fed by the millstream (Penn, 1980, 39; Jarvis 1983, 11).

10. *Wick Lane.* The town charter of 1150 refers to all the land in the two streets of the town, with messuages as far as the Stour. It is suggested that these two streets are High Street and Castle Street (Jarvis 1983, 12). However, if Castle Street had been blocked by the con-

struction of an early keep, then the second street might rather equate to Wick Lane. This would help explain the reference to messuages as far as the Stour.

11. *Place Mill.* Domesday also records two mills at Christchurch, one belonging to the Priory and the other to the King. The Priory mill may have been in the vicinity of Place Mill

12. *Millhams Mill.* The royal mill, mentioned in Domesday, may have been in the vicinity of Millhams, east of High Street. The Staggs site excavation (X12) was located approximately 25m from the proposed site of Millhams Mill and some post-built structures revealed there may be associated directly with it (grain or equipment storage etc) (Jarvis 1983, 42-9).

13. *The Harbour.* The Christchurch Cartulary indicates that the *Havene* lay between the castle and the cemetery (Penn, 1980, 42). This cemetery is presumably one attached to the Priory and probably lay largely to the north of the Priory Church, perhaps closer to the millstream than today. Jarvis suggests that the town quay may have been located near the town bridge and that the Priory had its own jetty close to Place Mill (Jarvis 1983, 21).

14. *West Gate.* No evidence is known for the date of the West gate, but its position on Wick Lane is suggested by a constriction in the Lane corresponding to the point at which the Saxo-Norman town wall is projected to have crossed (Penn, 1980, 42).

*Highcliffe.* The manor of *Highcliff* was originally counted within New Forest hundred at the time of Domesday (Page, 1912, 81-2). An '...estate called Sclive (Cliff) was held by... [the] Bishop of Wincheste. This estate probably equates to the modern Highcliff, which belonged to the priory during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, being part of the manor of Somerford' (Page, 1912, 83-101).



Figure 14: Christchurch Castle, The Constables Hall

## 5.4 Medieval Christchurch (AD1150-1539)

### 5.4.1 Historical Summary

The evidence suggests that Christchurch developed only slowly as a medieval market town. The small Domesday town of 39 messuages developed into a late medieval town of timber framed houses with burgage plots containing simple post-built structures to the rear. Some High Street frontages remained unoccupied throughout the period, although there were also the development of burgage plots on street frontages in suburbs to the north and east of the town. In 1538 the Prior described the Priory as:

*'situate and set in a desolate place, in a very barren country out and far from all highways, in an angle or a corner, having no woods nor commodious country about it, nor nigh no good town, but only the said poor town of Christchurch which is a very poor town and slenderly inhabited.'* (Page, 1912, 86)

Evidence for industry in the medieval period is limited to the Salmon fisheries, for which the town was famous (Page, 1912, 86), milling and gravel extraction, with some of the gravel perhaps being used as hard standing in the market place. The castle was of little military significance and acted more as a manorial and administrative centre for the town. The Priory was probably at the spiritual and economic heart of the town's activities throughout the medieval period.

The street plan of the town probably developed gradually and organically from the simple two-street cross of the burh to the more complex medieval layout. Additional side streets are recorded in 14<sup>th</sup> century documents and included *mulestrete* (probably the northern section of Milhams leading directly from the High

Street to the Millstream) and *Nywest Street* (probably the modern Church Lane). Back lanes probably also developed piecemeal. The earliest documentary evidence for buildings occurs in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and refers to settlement in the Priory Gate area, although the north side of Castle Street was also probably occupied at this time. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century houses were recorded on the south side of Castle Street, High Street and Wick Lane, with tenements in the Milhams area (Jarvis 1983, 12). Nevertheless, despite this scant specific evidence for occupation prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a survey made in 1300 shows that there were 228 places recorded in the borough, 46 of which were counted as *terra forinseca* (foreign land, possibly land outside the town walls) (Page, 1912, 86). Evidence from excavation, standing buildings and documents, suggests that by the late medieval period timber framed buildings lined Castle and High Streets, which were probably both much narrower than today. The earliest documentary references to a bridge occur in the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the land between the two bridges is mentioned in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Repairs to the bridge over the Avon are also recorded from this time. Three gates are also recorded in medieval Christchurch: Canon's Gate, Castle Gate and Egheiete Gate or Bargate. The Canon's gate may equate to a Priory Gate on Quay Road, though the present gateway there is modern. The Castle Gate is recorded on the south side of Castle Street in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Jarvis 1983, 12-13). Bargates also developed as an extra-mural suburb during the medieval period, as did the Bridge Street area.

The town defences appear to have gone out of use by the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The final silting of the defensive ditches occurred at this time and the



Figure 15: The East front of the Priory Church



Figure 16: Place Mill, medieval masonry can be found in the stone plinth.

rubble collapse from the town wall seals 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century deposits. The town defences seem to have undergone significant alterations prior to their abandonment. An archaeological watching brief at the Keith Motors site High Street, Christchurch, during 1979-80, revealed evidence for the terminal of a medieval ditch [A]. This ditch had a V-profile and was aligned parallel to and approximately 85m west of High Street (Jarvis 1983, 52).

The town had an annual fair by the 12<sup>th</sup> century belonging to the lord of the manor, held on Trinity Thursday. A further fair was granted in 1257 to be held over three days centred on the feast of St Faith in October. A weekly Monday market was granted in 1150 and was described as a *poor one* in 1620 (Page, 1912, 83-101). In the 15<sup>th</sup> century the market house is recorded on High Street, south of the junction with Millhams Street. By 1572 the market house had moved to the corner of High Street and Castle Street, possibly as a result of the dissolution of the priory.

By 1317 the leper hospital of St Mary Magdalene had been established outside the town, on Barrack Road on the edge of the Bargates suburb. It survived until the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Page, 1912, 83-101).

A school was recorded as belonging to the priory in about 1140 and there may always have been a school associated with it. When the priory was dissolved in 1539 a master was kept on to continue teaching the boys (Page, 1912, 83-101).

### 5.4.2 Town Layout

The medieval period appears to be the time at which most developments took place within the historic core of Christchurch. So much so that the layout of the medieval town centre seems largely indistinguishable from that of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Much of the evidence for the development of the town derives from medieval



Figure 17: Bargates looking south

documents, which are prolific for the period. Many plan elements are first alluded to in 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century documents, although this does not necessarily mean that these features were not already in existence, or that they took the same form as those that we recognise by the same name today.

### 5.4.3 Medieval Urban plan components

The main plan components of the later medieval town are shown on figure 19 and are listed below.

1. *The Priory*. Little is known about the layout of the priory precinct save that the cloister block was on the south side of the priory church, its position clearly marked by structural features in the south wall of the church. The main monastic buildings would have been arranged around the cloister, although at either end of the southern precinct wall were a garderobe and turret (east) and a gatehouse (west). Service buildings were located adjacent to the west precinct wall. Much of the priory church appears to date architecturally to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, whilst the tower and eastern part of the church are 15<sup>th</sup> century (Jarvis 1983, 15-16).

6. *The Mill Stream*. An excavation was conducted adjacent to the west bank of the mill stream during 1981 (site W10). By the 13<sup>th</sup> century the west bank of the mill stream had moved eastwards by 3 or 4 metres and had been strengthened with a revetment of timber posts (Davies 1983, 27-33). This is consistent with the mill stream being used for transport, and the strengthened bank for the unloading and loading of grain and flour.

7. *Bargate*. A possible sketch of the structure held in the Red House Museum shows architectural features dating from the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century, suggesting that the structure was rela-



Figure 18: Castle Street looking across the Town Bridge

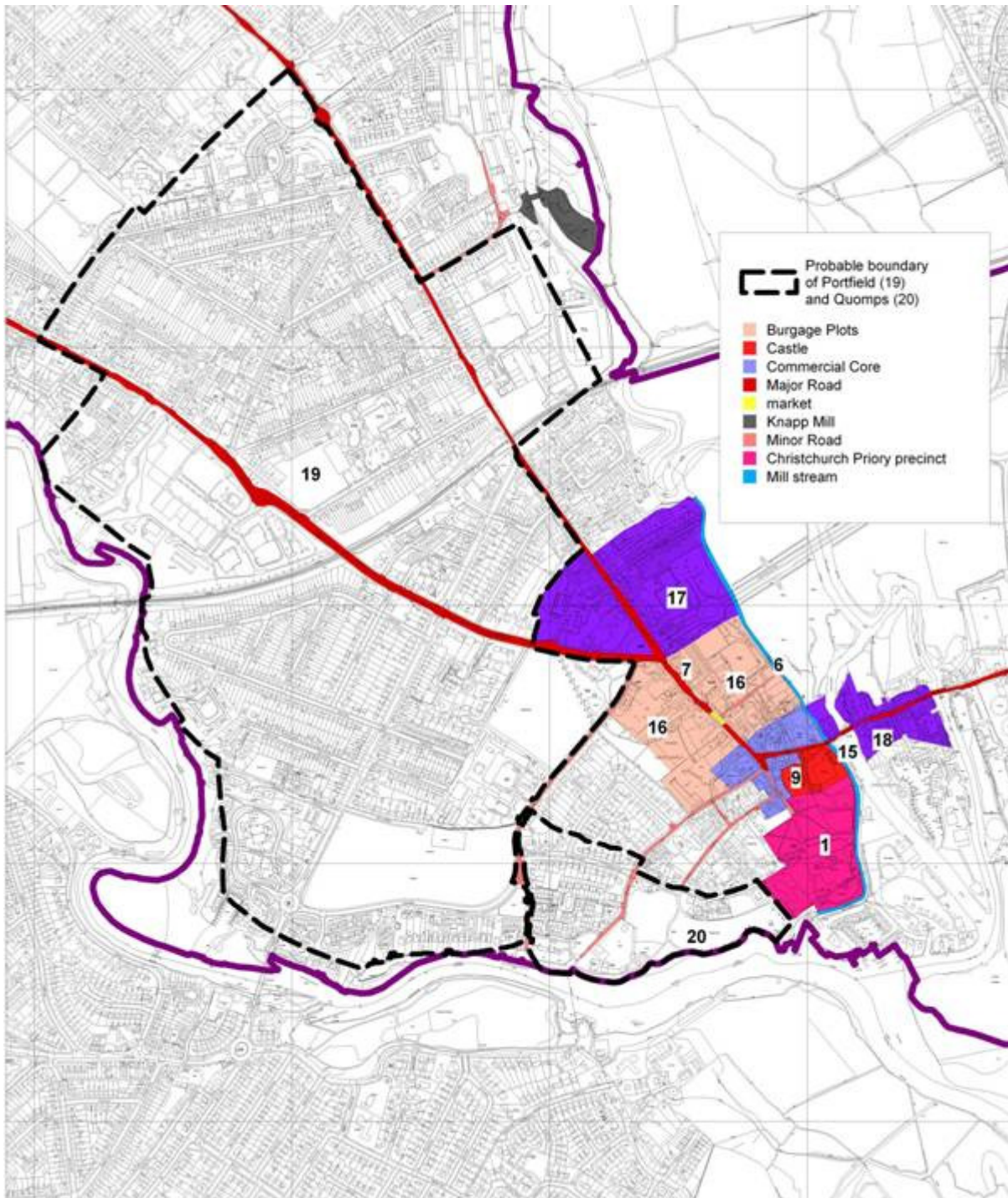


Figure 19: Christchurch medieval plan components.

tively new when the town walls were demolished in the 13th century (Jarvis 1983, 18-20).

8. *The Market (High Street)*. Several 15<sup>th</sup> century documents suggest that the medieval market was originally along High Street, with a town hall recorded in the market place at the junction of High Street and Millhams Street (Jarvis 1983, 14).

9. *The Castle*. The history of the castle is obscure; the stone keep may have been added as late as 1300. The keep was rectangular,

15.25m by 13.9m, with walls over 2.75m thick. Archaeological observations during topsoil stripping for a new bowls pavilion at Christchurch Castle in 1987, revealed evidence for medieval activity within the bailey comprising a pit, clay floor layers and sloping layers suggestive of the edge of the castle ditch. By the later 14<sup>th</sup> century Houses on the south side of Castle Street had curtilages running down into the castle ditch. There is no evidence for a wall or bank around the bailey, except for a wall along the

mill stream, possibly incorporated into the fabric of the Constable's Hall (Penn, 1980, 39, 42).

10. *Wick Lane*. An archaeological evaluation at 14 Wick Lane, Christchurch, during 1991, revealed evidence for medieval activity. This comprised angular pits post-holes and layers containing medieval pottery, close to the Wick Lane and Silver Street frontages (Poole Museum, 1991). Unfortunately the evidence is such that we cannot be certain that there were medieval houses here, the evidence could be explained by activity at the rear of properties fronting on to Church Street.

11. *Place Mill*. Remains of the medieval Place Mill building can be seen in the stone base of the present red brick structure. The nearby Place Mill Bridge is also thought to be a surviving medieval structure. It has two round headed arches in stone rubble with a grotesque corbel head at each side of the bridge pier.

12. *Millhams Mill*. Of the two Domesday Mills, Millhams Mill appears to have been owned by the King. About 1140 Baldwin de Redvers granted it to the Abbot and brethren of Savigny and in 1272 Isabel de Fortibus granted it to Quarr Abbey. It burnt down in 1562 (Page, 1912, 83-101; Penn, 1980, 43).

13. *The Harbour and Quays*. The Christchurch Cartulary indicates that the *Havene* lay between the castle and the cemetery (Penn, 1980, 42). Jarvis suggests that the town quay may have been located near the town bridge (Jarvis 1983, 21). The positions of Millhams Mill, Bridge Street suburb, the Castle and the Harbour suggest that the section of the Mill Stream, either side of the Town Bridge and the corresponding stretch of the Avon was a bustling centre of transport, commerce and industry during the medieval period.

14. *West Gate*. There is no information regarding the structure or date of construction for a West Gate. However, the archaeological evidence suggests that the town wall had been demolished by the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the best stone robbed, possibly for the construction of the castle keep. West Gate may have been demolished or left in a state of disrepair at this time

15. *Castle Gate*. A 13<sup>th</sup> century reference speaks of the moat and gate of the castle (Penn, 1980, 39). A castle gate is also recorded on the south side of Castle Street in 1483 (Jarvis 1983, 13).

16. *Burgage Plots*. Burgage plots depicted on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century maps with buildings front-



Figure 20: The Quomps.



Figure 21: The 16<sup>th</sup> century Prior's lodgings

ing on to both sides of High Street seem to have originated during the medieval period. This has been corroborated by excavation at the Staggs site (X12) which revealed a pair of curving linear trenches, interpreted as foundation trenches for a strong timber fence. It is likely that this fence formed a boundary between two parallel plots, similar in position and orientation to plot boundaries visible on the Tithe map.

17. *Bargates suburb*. Extra mural settlement is first mentioned in 14<sup>th</sup> century documents when 46 places are referred to as *terra forinseca*. These suburbs included tenements outside the Bargate (Jarvis 1983, 21). The settlement seems to have comprised a triangle between Bargates and Barrack Road. In particular properties on the east side of Bargates took the form of burgage plots, visible on the tithe map and continuing those on the east side of High Street. Archaeological evidence for medieval plot boundaries in the Bargates area has been recovered at site W9 (Davies 1983, 23-27).

18. *Bridge Street suburb*. This area represents a medieval suburb of Christchurch. A grant of AD 1278 mentions extra-mural settlement at Bargates and 'between the two bridges'. The suburb probably lay on the island formed between the two channels of the River Avon. Many of the plots fronting on to Bridge Street

are defined at the rear by either natural channels or man-made drainage channels which demarcate the settlement from the floodable meadows to the north. These channels survive in the modern townscape.

*19. Portfield.* The fields of Christchurch are referred to in the 14<sup>th</sup> century; Portfield and *Les Compis* (Jarvis 1983, 11-13). Although not strictly an urban plan component at this time, the Portfield has been included by virtue of the fact that in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century it was enclosed and the area developed as the earliest suburban housing estate in Christchurch.

*20. Quomps.* *Les Compis* are mentioned as a field of Christchurch during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The name is believed by Jarvis to refer to Quomps (Jarvis 1983, 11-13) although it might conceivably refer to any of Christchurch's fields. Again Quomps does not strictly form an urban plan component at this time, although its character during the medieval period, as a town common, could be said to be similar to that of today; public open space adjacent to the medieval town.