

Dorset Historic Towns Project

Wareham



Historic Urban Characterisation



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February 2011

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Acknowledgements

This report was produced as part of the Dorset Historic Towns Survey, undertaken by Dorset County Council, in partnership with Purbeck District Council and funded by English Heritage.

The report was written by Peter Bellamy and John Davey and subsequently edited by Peter Bellamy with assistance from Gordon Le Pard and Claire Pinder. Lilian Ladle commented on an earlier draft of this report and has provided invaluable advice and information on Wareham.

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Summary

This report contains the results of a consideration of the historical, archaeological, architectural and map evidence relating to the developmental history of Wareham. It has focused on the understanding of the overall development of the town from its earliest beginnings to the present day. This work has been conducted in order to; achieve a better understanding of how the historical dimension has influenced the modern townscape; identify what historical features and structures survive within the modern town and; comprehend the contribution made by this historic dimension to the present character of Wareham. This will enable an informed approach to the management of change and conservation of the urban environment.

Historical Background

The origins of settlement at Wareham are obscure. There has been no convincing evidence for a significant Roman settlement on the site of Wareham town, but there appears to have been an important post-Roman British church on or close to the site of Lady St Mary Church. This church certainly existed by the early 8th century and there may have been a settlement that grew up adjacent. However, the history of Wareham as an urban centre begins with the foundation of the Alfredian burh in the late 9th century. Both the town defences and the origins of the street pattern derive from the creation of the burh and both have had a profound effect on the subsequent layout and development of the town. Wareham appears to have become a successful settlement, probably developing as a trading centre and port. By the time of the Norman Conquest, Wareham was the largest town in Dorset. A castle was built in the southwest corner of the town. This became the focus of much military activity during the civil war between Stephen and Matilda in the 12th century and this appeared to have a detrimental effect on the economy of the town, leading to a decline in its importance. By the end of the medieval period, Wareham's importance as a port had declined in favour of Poole and, from this period onwards, it became a relatively small market town. Wareham played an important part in the Civil War, due largely to its proximity to Corfe Castle. In 1762, there was a serious fire in the town, destroying much of centre. The town was rebuilt largely in brick in a Georgian style.

Town morphology

Wareham has a grid plan form laid out within the rectilinear Saxon town defences. The main

streets form a cruciform arrangement with the historic market place in the centre. Behind the main streets are a series of narrow streets and lanes. The grid layout is most evident in the northern part of the town. In the southeast part, the streets are more irregular and arranged around the open areas of St John's Hill, Lady St Mary Church and The Quay. In the southwest corner, the lanes have a distinct curvature, reflecting the line of the former Norman castle. Twentieth century suburban development has been largely focused on Northport, to the north of the historic core, together with limited development to the east and west of the town along Bestwall Road and Worgret Road.

Built character

Wareham has a large number of historic buildings within its historic core. The majority are late 18th century Georgian brick buildings, the result of rebuilding after the 1762 fire, which gives a coherent character to the main streetscapes. There are a small number of earlier buildings, including some architecturally important structures, the most notable being the 11th century St Martin's Church. Medieval structures include Holy Trinity Church, Priory House, a barn on St John's Hill and 14 North Street. There are a range of 19th century buildings, including small terraced houses along back lanes and suburban villas. Modern development has taken place largely behind the main street frontages.

Landscape Setting

Wareham lies on a narrow ridge of river gravels between the floodplains of the rivers Piddle and Frome. Beyond the floodplains lie extensive and expansive areas of open heathland mixed with a patchwork of enclosures, plantation and mixed woodland. Beyond the heath to the south is the Purbeck Ridge, affording pleasant vistas from the Quay southwards. The town has expanded east and west along the ridge, although the floodplains provide green buffers between Wareham and Northport to the north and Stoborough to the south.

Historic Urban Character

The historic urban character of Wareham is a reflection of both its origins as a Saxon burh and the changes wrought by the major fire of 1762. The street grid and rectilinear form of the town centre has its origins in the laying out of the burh. The survival of the Saxon town defences as significant earthworks has defined the shape and structure of the historic town and



Figure 1: Vertical aerial photographic view of Wareham, 2005 (© Getmapping.com, 2005).

constrained suburban development. The long narrow historic properties along the main streets have defined a characteristic rhythm to the streetscapes with their predominantly Georgian brick houses built after the 1762 fire. This unity of historic built environment is a major component of the historic character of the town. The survival of many unbroken groups of buildings, with little disruption from modern development, is a major factor that highlights the contribution made by historic elements to Wareham's urban character. The landscape setting of the town on a low ridge between two rivers has constrained suburban development to immediately east and west of the town and encouraged expansion further to the north at Northport. The extensive views from the Town Walls and the Quay across the floodplains and the surrounding landscape is another significant element in the character of the town.

Further Research

This report has highlighted many aspects of the historical development of Wareham and how this has shaped the modern town. It has also indicated gaps in our knowledge and areas which would repay further research.

The main areas of suggested further research include:

- Research into the pre-Saxon origins of the Lady St Mary site
- Research into the potential pre-burh settlement and activity.
- Research into the extent of Saxon and medieval occupation within the walled town.

Part 1: Introduction



1.1 Background to the Project

The Dorset Historic Towns Survey forms part of a national programme of urban surveys of historic towns, launched by English Heritage in 1992 (English Heritage 1992) and subsequently modified in the light of approaches developed as part of English Heritage's Historic Landscape Characterisation programme (Thomas 2005).

The 23 places selected for inclusion in the Dorset Historic Towns Survey are shown on Figure 2. For the purposes of this project, Dorset is defined by its post-1974 boundary and includes the present administrative county of Dorset and the area of the Unitary Authorities of Bournemouth and Poole.

1.2 Rationale

Town centres have always been a focus for trade, industry and housing, consequently there have been many different pressures on their development. This has led to both the creation of a potentially rich, complex, deeply-stratified urban archaeological resource through past development of the town and, on the other hand, to serious threats to the survival of this archaeological resource and to other elements of the historical townscape through modern developmental pressure. Without knowledge and understanding of the historic urban environment it is too easy for significant elements to be damaged or removed through modern redevelopment.

The potential for the historic environment to play a complex and highly significant role in economic regeneration was outlined in *Power of Place* (English Heritage, 2000) and its value is highlighted in the government's response *The Historic Environment: A Force for our Future* (DCMS 2001). The potential of the historic environment is particularly significant in towns, where a high quality historic urban environment and the resulting distinctiveness and sense of place that this brings, has been shown to be a primary asset in promoting regeneration. The effect may be direct – through heritage tourism, for example – or more subtle, promoting a strong sense of identity and pride of place, thus creating new confidence and a positive climate for investment and growth.

Before we can build upon the potential positive effects of the historic urban environment, we must understand it. Characterisation provides a means of understanding the diverse range of

factors which create distinctiveness and a sense of place. In order to make the characterisation of the historic urban environment relevant and meaningful, it needs to be based on a thorough assessment of the nature, quality and quantity of the historic resource of each urban centre. It is to this end that the Dorset Historic Towns Survey has been undertaken.

1.3 Aims

The aim of the project is to present a review of the existing archaeological, historical and urban morphological evidence and set out the historic character and development of Dorset's Historic towns:

- to produce a useful and flexible tool to aid in the understanding and management of the town
- to inform archaeological and historic environment research
- to inform the management and interpretation of historic urban buildings and land use.
- to provide an evidence base to feed into the Local Development Framework
- to encourage the integration of urban historic characterisation into the wider process of protecting and enhancing urban character.
- to address a number of research aims set out in the South West Archaeological Research Framework into developing understanding of urban settlement from the Roman to the post-medieval periods (Webster 2008).

1.4 Report Structure

The Historic Urban Characterisation Assessment reports all have a similar structure, divided into seven major sections. These are briefly described below to enable easy navigation to the various elements.

Part 1: Introduction is a general introduction to the Dorset Historic Towns Project and to this report.

Part 2 : Overview of Approach is a brief methodological section outlining the guiding principles and approach, together with an explanation of the main technical terms used in this report.

Part 3: Town Context is a consideration of the wider natural setting of the town. It includes a summary account of the geology and

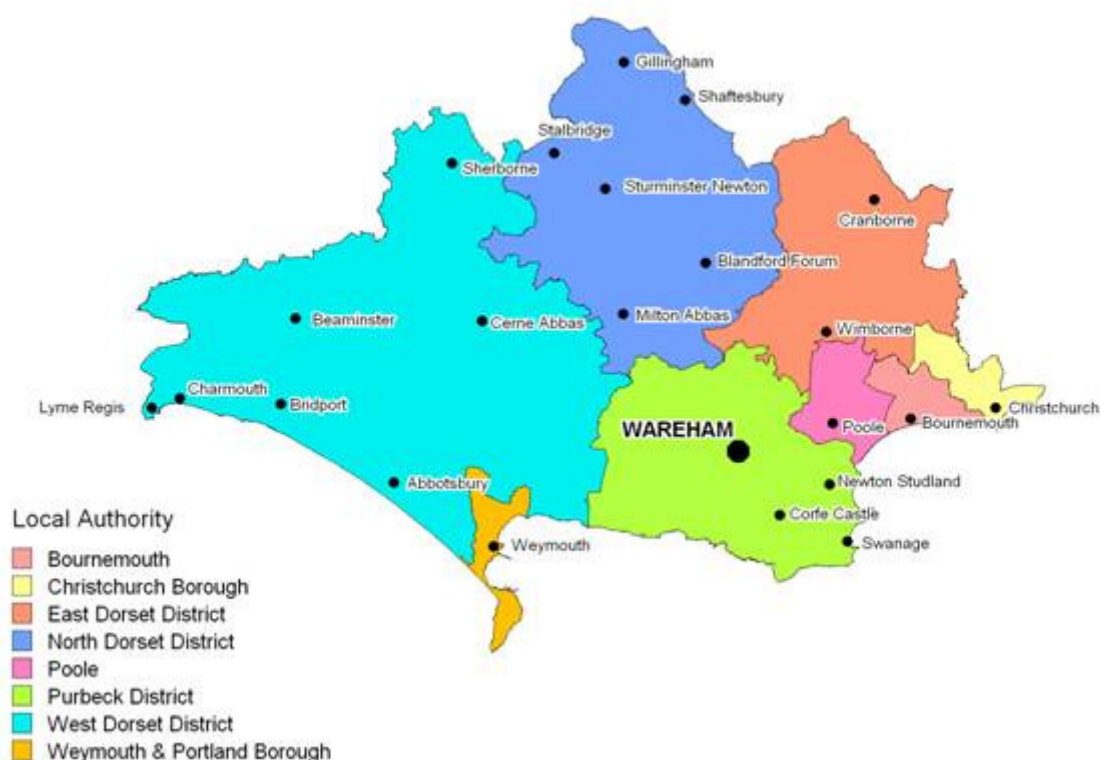


Figure 2: Map of Dorset showing the location of Wareham and the other towns in the Dorset Historic Towns Survey.

topography and makes reference to any Landscape Character Assessments undertaken in the area. It includes a summary of the present town, its population, economic base, etc.

Part 4: Sources is an outline of the main sources of historic, cartographic, archaeological and other information used in the report, together with a summary of previous research in the town.

Part 5: Historical Analysis provides a summary account of the chronological development of the town from its origins to the present day, and is a synthesis of the available documentary, archaeological, topographic and morphological information, based largely on a review of published sources. This provides the context for the consideration of Historic Urban Character.

Part 6: Historic Urban Character Appraisal presents the details of the historic urban characterisation work, identifying the physical remains of the past in the present day townscape. It includes a summary of the overall historic urban character of the town and a description of the Historic Urban Character Areas defined as part of this work.

Part 7: Historic Environment Research Framework

outlines the major research questions which could be used to guide and inform future research into the town and how these fit into the South West Archaeological Research Framework.

1.5 Who is this Document for?

The information in this report is aimed at the public bodies, organisations and groups that play a role in the planning and management of the urban and historic environments. Additionally anyone who has an interest in the historic urban environment, including community groups, developers, architects and academics, may find aspects of this work of interest and relevance.

Part 2: Overview of Approach



2.1 Guiding Principles

Historic Urban Characterisation is a method of defining and mapping the historic dimension of modern townscapes. The approach used by this project has been developed and adapted from Historic Landscape Characterisation studies. The guiding principles of historic urban characterisation are as follows (adapted from Clark *et al.* 2004, 6):

- Present not past: it is the present-day townscape that is the main object of study.
- Townscape as history not geography: the most important characteristic of the townscape is its time-depth; change and earlier townscapes exist in the present town.
- All aspects of the townscape, no matter how modern, are treated as part of the urban character, not just 'special' areas.
- Characterisation of the urban landscape is a matter of interpretation not record.
- Urban landscape is and always has been dynamic: management of change, not preservation is the aim.
- The process of characterisation should be transparent, with clearly articulated records of data sources and methods used.

2.2 General Approach

In order to characterise the distinctive historic dimension of the present day urban landscape, the systematic identification of the historic attributes of the contemporary townscape is undertaken using a number of cartographic, historic, archaeological and standing building sources. These sources are used to identify 'Historic Urban Character Types' which are mapped onto the modern Ordnance Survey MasterMap base. These character types are used to inform the identification of a series of town plan components for the major periods of development for each town from its origins to the present day. The character types are also used to define a series of 'Historic Urban Character Areas' within each town. The character areas form the basis of a more detailed assessment of historic urban character.

2.3 Historic Urban Character Types

The identification of the historic urban character is based on the collation and analysis of a large quantity of information, including town

plan form, building form, historic map evidence, aerial photographic evidence and archaeological data. This information has been used to define specific areas of single character type within the modern town plan, based on the current settlement character, but taking into account previous uses and settlement history. These Historic Urban Character Types form the basic building blocks for analysing the historic urban character.

The methodology and terminology of these Historic Urban Character Types has been developed from that of Historic Landscape Characterisation and comprise a series of ten Broad Types each sub-divided into a number of more specific Historic Urban Character Types. The list and description of the character types is set out in **Appendix 4**. The Historic Urban Character Types used are a standardised classification across all the Dorset Historic Towns. This enables direct comparisons to be made between towns across the county and allows consistency in analysis of the historic environment of the different towns.

The Historic Urban Character Types are mapped onto the digital map base using a Geographical Information System (GIS), linked to a table containing data on the settlement attributes of the current Historic Urban Character Type, the period from which it derives, and data on all previous Historic Urban Character Types. This enables the character of the town to be displayed for all periods and allows a comprehensive picture of the development of the town through time and the time depth of the current urban character to be presented.

2.4 Town Plan Components

Town Plan Components are a series of recognisable morphological units with a definable time depth within an individual townscape. These plan components have been identified through the analysis of the town plan and building fabric, together with their historic urban character types, to form a series of larger units (on a street or block scale rather than on a plot scale) that illustrate the composition of the town within a specific chronological period. These town plan components have been used to identify and illustrate the historic development of each town, as set out in Part 5 of this report. A series of twenty seven standard types of town plan component have been identified.

2.5 Historic Urban Character Areas

The historic urban characterisation of the Dorset towns produces a large quantity of detailed data recorded within individual Historic Urban Character Types. This information is at a too fine-grained scale to enable easy understanding of the character of the town. Therefore, the information has been used to define a smaller number of larger areas of distinctive character within the town known as Historic Urban Character Areas. These can be used as a means of understanding the past and the present character of the town, simplifying the large quantity of data presented by the Historic Urban Character Types and enabling a more detailed appraisal of the historic urban character to be undertaken.

The Historic Urban Character Areas are recognisable distinctive areas which have meaningful coherence within the modern townscape. They are defined by one or more of the following attributes

- consistent historic urban character
- common historical development
- similar topographic location
- similar degree of archaeological and/or historic building preservation.

Each character area will have its own individual 'biography' that has defined its present character. Consequently, the Historic Urban Character Areas can be used as a tool to help maintain and reinforce the historic character and individuality of these areas and the town as a whole.

2.6 Extent of the Study Area

The Dorset Historic Towns Project Study Area for Wareham is taken as the present-day urban extent of the town of Wareham between the rivers Piddle and Frome, as shown on the 2009 Ordnance Survey MasterMap digital mapping. It does not include the suburb of Northport, which is separated from the town by the floodplain of the River Piddle. The study area includes part of Wareham parish and a small part of Arne parish along the western fringe of the area. The urban extent includes areas of recreational open space, school playing fields, etc. around the fringes of the settlement. Where practicable, the boundary to the Study Area is along boundary lines marked on the MasterMap base.

2.7 Definition of Terms

2.7.1 Characterisation Terms

Historic Urban Character Area

See section 2.5 above.

Historic Urban Character Type

See section 2.3 above.

Sensitivity to Large Scale Development

The assessment of sensitivity to large scale development has been developed from that included in the landscape character assessment undertaken by West Dorset District Council (WDDC 2008). Large scale development is taken to mean any form of development that is on a scale much larger than the existing plot pattern and building size.

Strength of Historic Character

The strength of character in each area is determined by judging the survival of historic urban elements in the modern townscape, together with its distinctiveness and recognisability. The strength of character is assessed as Strong, Medium or Weak.

Strong character is where there is widespread survival of historic boundaries and buildings reflecting considerable time depth, where modern development remains unobtrusive.

Medium character is where there is survival of historic boundaries and buildings, but modern development is more evident.

Weak character is where there may be some historic elements present, but there is little time depth evident in the visible structures, which comprise mainly modern buildings and street and boundary layouts.

Town Plan Component

See section 2.4 above.

Urban Structure

This is the framework of routes, plots and spaces and the way they relate to one another, which forms the basic plan on which all other aspects of the built environment and historic development and use are based (DETR 2000).

Housing Density

Low Density = < 30 dwellings per hectare (dph)

Medium Density = 30-50 dph

High Density = >50 dph

2.7.2 Archaeological Terms

Archaeological Intervention

A general term for any type of formal archaeo-

logical recording.

Archaeological Potential

Archaeological potential is an assessment of the probability of discovering archaeological finds and features, the likely amount and complexity of the archaeology, and the level of survival. See **Appendix 5** for more detail.

Building Recording

Building recording refers to any survey and recording of the structure of a building.

Evaluation

An archaeological evaluation is a limited programme of fieldwork to determine the presence or absence of archaeological deposits or remains within a specified area or site. It can include trial trenching, test pitting, geophysical survey, etc.

Excavation

An archaeological excavation is a programme of controlled fieldwork exposing, investigating and recording an area of below-ground archaeology.

Watching Brief

A watching brief is a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons.

2.7.3 Historical Terms

Hundred

A hundred was an administrative subdivision of a shire based notionally on a grouping of 100 hides. They originated in the Saxon period and had their own courts usually held at a meeting place close to the geographical centre of the administrative area, or at a point easily accessible from any part of the hundred.

Hide

A hide was an area of land defined for tax assessment purposes and was based on the amount of land required to support a family. The size of land unit covered by a hide varied according to its productivity but is generally thought to equal approximately 120 acres. Hides originated in the Saxon period but may be based on an earlier system of land holding.

Tithing

A tithing was a small administrative subdivision of a hundred notionally containing ten land owning families.

Manor

A manor was a parcel of land, often assessed at 5 hides, over which a lord held domain and could exercise certain rights and privileges, such as the right to have the populace of the manor work the lord's lands. The lord of manor could be a secular noble, the church, or the King himself; more important nobles held several manors. The manorial system was established in the late Saxon period, around the 10th century AD and became increasingly feudal following the Norman Conquest.

Borough

A borough was a town or part of a town upon which a degree of self governance had been conferred through the granting of a charter. Boroughs held their own courts, markets and were often subdivided into burgage plots held by burgesses (freemen of the borough) for cash rent rather than by feudal service.

Lay Subsidy

The Lay subsidy is a term given to a tax levied on the general populace (as opposed to the clergy or military) and was calculated as a proportion of their moveable wealth. The poor were exempt. The tax was levied occasionally as the king demanded in order to raise money for military campaigns from the late 13th to the 16th century. The lay subsidy rolls are documents recording the names of each person in a village or tithing within a specific hundred and the amount of tax payable by them. The rolls are particularly useful in the context of the Historic Towns Project because during the 13th and 14th centuries, surnames tended to reflect either occupation or place of habitation. The documents thus provide information on the size of the taxable population within a town, the range of crafts within a particular town or tithing, the names of the individual tithings and boroughs within a hundred and the names of other dispersed settlements within them.

Hearth Tax Returns

The Hearth Tax was a tax introduced in 1662 and abolished in 1689. It was payable by householders on the number of hearths or fireplaces in a household. The tax amounted to 1 shilling per hearth or stove payable twice a year. The Hearth Tax Returns generally date from 1662-6 and 1669-74; when the tax was administered by royal bailiffs. They include a list of householders eligible for the tax per parish and the number of hearths in each household. The documents are used in this report to give an estimate of the population of the town during the late 17th century.