

Part 5: Historical Analysis



5.1 Medieval Middleton (AD1150-1539)

5.1.1 Historical Summary

The origins of the town of Middleton (contracted to Milton) are linked to the existence of the abbey of St Mary, St Samson and St Branwallader. The abbey was founded by King Athelstan (925-939), for the soul of his brother Edwin, possibly in 934 (Traskey 1978). He gave the abbey relics of St Sampson of Dol and St Branwallader, hence the dedication of the abbey. This is recorded in a later (doubtful) charter (Sawyer No, 391). There have been suggestions that there was an earlier church here, but the arguments for this rest solely on an assumed Breton or Cornish connection suggested by the Saints Samson and Branwallader (Penn 1980).

In 964, King Edgar reformed the house by replacing the priests with monks and appointing Cyneweard, later bishop of Wells, as abbot (RCHME 1970).

Milton Abbey was a wealthy foundation with possessions assessed at over £90 in the Domesday survey (Thorn and Thorn 1983). Domesday records Milton as the chief manor of the abbey and that in 1086 there were 15 ploughs, 27 villagers, 20 smallholders and a mill, which suggests a populous manor, but not necessarily a population nucleus (Thorn and Thorn 1983; Penn 1980).

A settlement grew up around the gate of the abbey. The date of its origin is not known, but it was probably well-established by the mid-13th century. A market and a yearly fair were granted to the abbot in 1252 and confirmed in 1280, but there is a slight suggestion that these existed earlier (Letters 2007; Hutchins 1873, 382). The town was never granted borough status and remained dependent on the abbey.

In 1309, a serious fire totally destroyed the ab-

bey church, its relics and records. Following the fire the number of monks was much reduced and there was a strain on the resources of the abbey (Calthrop 1908, 60). Nevertheless, the church was rebuilt on a much larger scale from the 14th century onwards, but was not completed by the time of dissolution in 1539 (RCHME 1970).

By the mid 14th century, the town appears to have grown fairly large. The Lay Subsidy of 1332 records 105 taxpayers, but very few wealthy individuals, suggesting it was a relatively modest agricultural market town (Mills 1971). The surnames recorded in the Lay Subsidy of 1332 (which at this date are likely to be derived from the occupation or place of origin of the individual) suggest mainly rural occupations, with only a few names, such as Tanner, Webbe (weaver) and le Taillur (tailor), indicating any other industry (Penn 1980). The Lay Subsidy of 1525 records 141 taxpayers, which suggests a very populous town and manor (Stoate 1982). Little else is known about the development and economy of the medieval town. The Grammar School was possibly founded in 1521 by Abbot Middleton (Pentin 1904a; Nelmes 1983).

Middleton was connected by a network of roads to Cerne Abbas, Sherborne and Blandford (Good 1966). The major route from the town ran south along the Milborne valley, roughly along the line of the present road to Milborne St Andrew to join the road from Dorchester to Blandford. There were also other minor routes to the north, east, west and south.

5.1.2 Town Layout

The layout of the medieval town can be deduced from two mid-18th century plans – the 1758 copy of a 1659 plan by Philip Byles (DHC



Figure 6: Milton Abbey Church from west.



Figure 7: Site of the medieval market cross (hidden in bush in centre of photo).

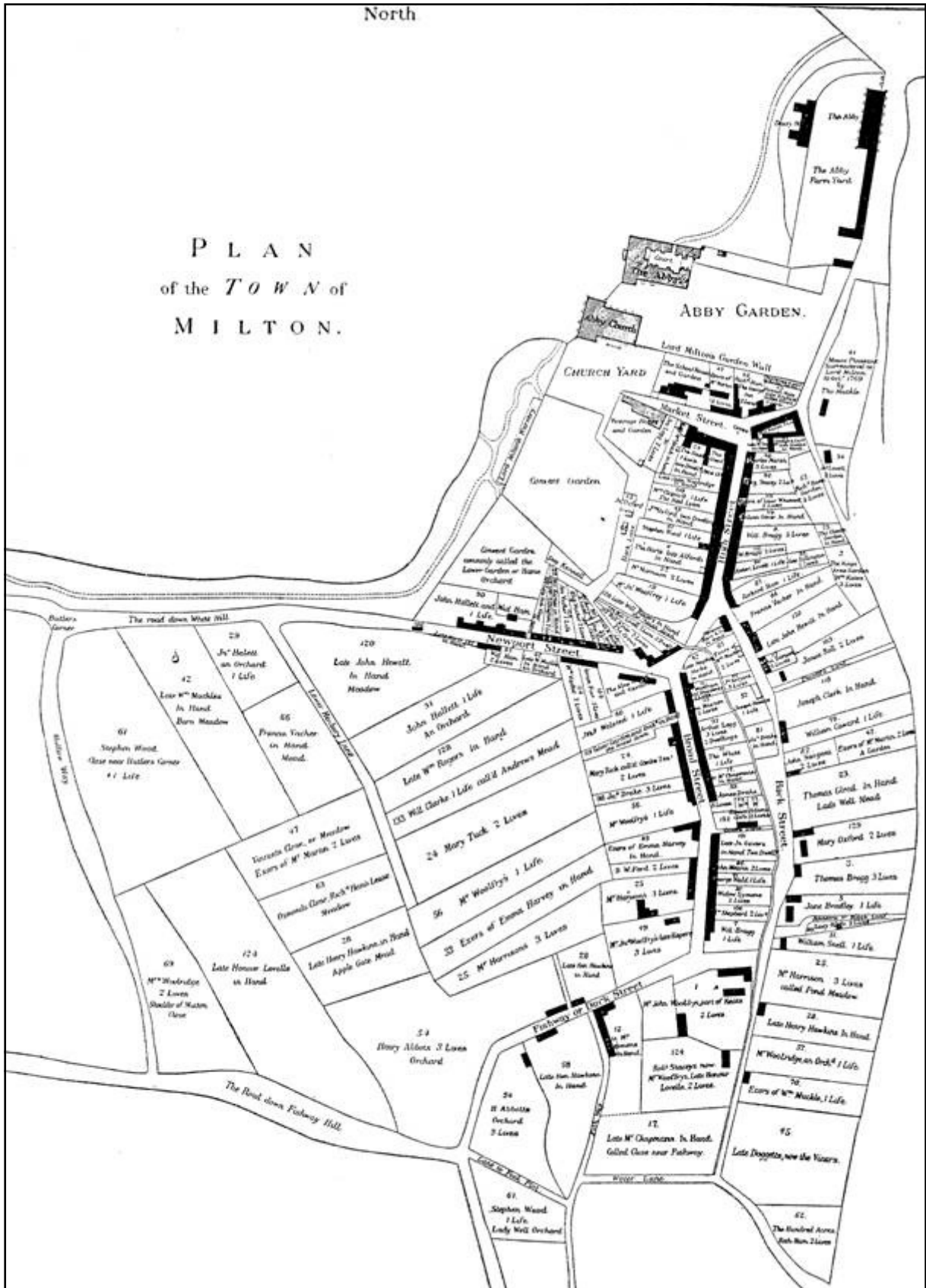


Figure 8: Map of the old town based on Woodward's 1769-70 survey, published by Pentin (1904a).

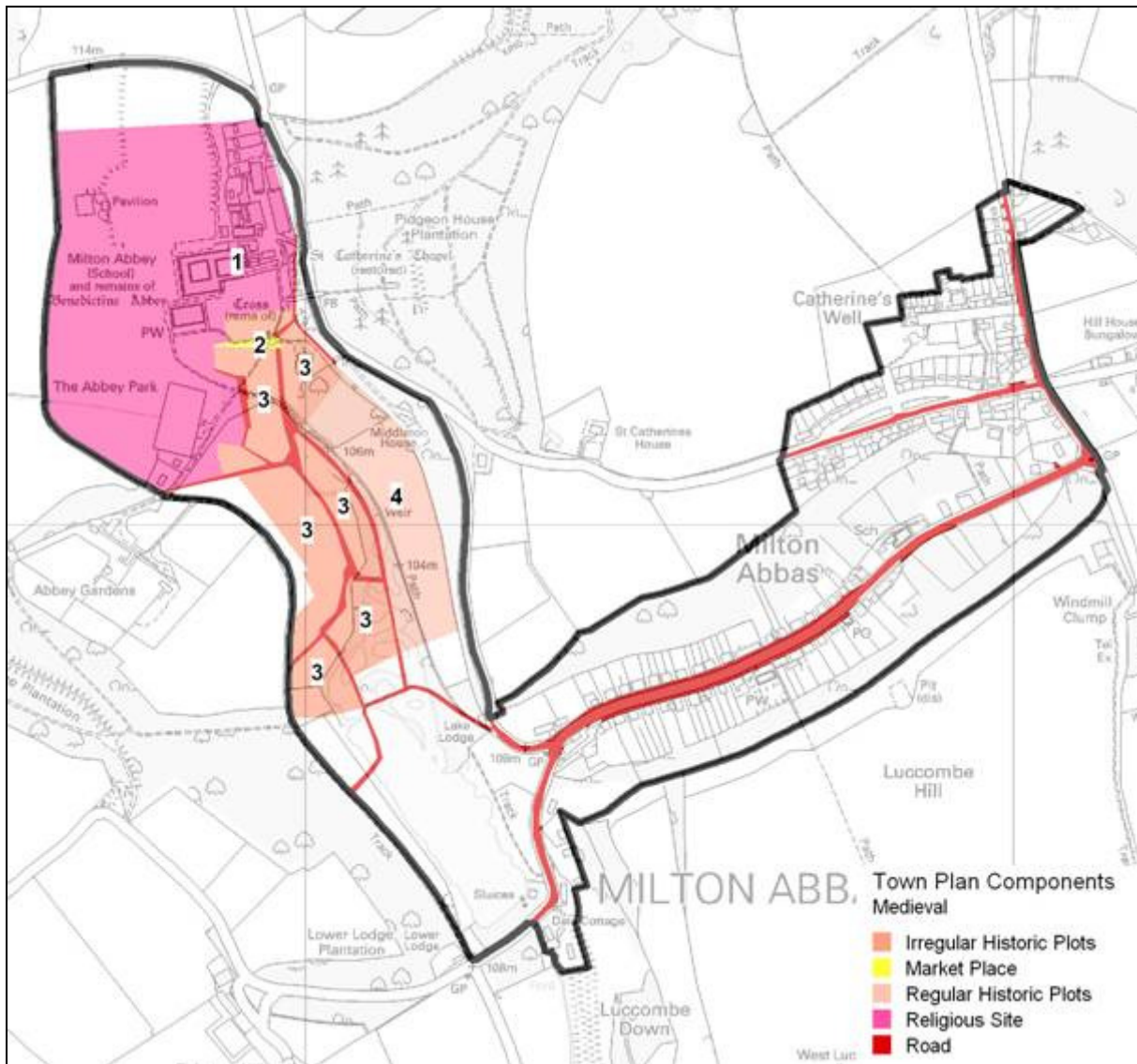


Figure 9: Milton Abbas Medieval Town Plan Components

D919/1) and the survey and map of the manor of Milton by William Woodward dated 1769-70 (DHC D919/5). A transcribed extract of Woodward's map was published by Pentin in 1904 (Figure 8). The earthwork remains in the later park indicate that the size and shape of the plots in these maps are somewhat stylised and in reality, they were more irregular (RCHME 1970).

The town lay immediately to the south of the Abbey with the triangular Market Street to the north. The market cross was at the broad east end of Market Street. High Street, with a back lane to the west, ran south from the east end of the market. To the south was Broad Street, with Back Street on its east side (Figure 8). The exact extent of the medieval town is not known, but it is likely to have occupied much of the same extent as the post-medieval town.

The plan of the town perhaps hints at several

phases of development. The earliest phase may be represented by the market place and High Street. Broad Street with its back lane (Back Street) may represent a second phase of development (Penn 1980). The settlement along the east side of Back Street may be later in date, either late medieval or early post-medieval. The plots are larger and more regular and hint at some element of a planned layout.

5.1.3 Medieval town plan components

The main plan components of the medieval town are shown on Figure 9 and are listed below.

1. Milton Abbey. The abbey comprised the church, with cloisters and associated claustral buildings to the north (west of the transept of the present church), the abbot's lodgings and other buildings set around a courtyard to the north. Beyond this were a series of service

buildings, stables and barn (Hutchins 1873; RCHME 1970). A chapel dedicated to St Catherine was built in the late 12th century on the hill to the east of the abbey, outside the study area.

No standing remains of the earlier church survive *in situ*. The new abbey church was built gradually over several centuries and was never completed. The work was initiated by Abbot Walter de Sydeling and early in the 14th century two eastern chapels (now destroyed), the aisled presbytery and the crossing were built. The south transept was built later in the 14th century. The central tower was built in the 15th century. In the late 15th and early 16th century, the north transept and much other building work was carried out under the auspices of Abbot William Middleton. Other than the church, the only standing monastic building is the late 15th-century great hall built by Abbot Middleton in 1498 and now incorporated into Milton Abbey House to the north of the church.

2. *Market-place*. To the south of the abbey was the triangular market place of the town of Middleton, which ran roughly E-W, widening out to the east. There was a stone market cross, the base of which still survives, at the broad east end of the market place.

3. *High Street and Broad Street*. The extent of the medieval town is not known for certain, but there is likely to have been development along all the major streets in the area shown on Figure 9. As mentioned above, High Street may represent an early phase of development of the town, with Broad Street being later in date. It is unclear whether there was development along Newport Street in the medieval period. In the post-medieval period there was almost continuous development along the frontages of High Street, Broad Street and Newport Street. The property boundaries as mapped by Woodward (Pentin 1904a) exhibit a range of widths and lengths, suggesting the core of the medieval town was not the result of planned development.

4. *Back Street*. The block of properties along the east side of Back Street, have fairly regular plots with a common rear boundary, which may indicate some degree of planned layout. This area may be a later medieval expansion, but dating evidence is lacking. In the post-medieval period, the street frontage was not completely built up, which may also have been the case in the later medieval period.

5.2 Post-medieval Middleton(1540-1750)

5.2.1 Historical Summary

The monastery was dissolved in 1539, when it was surrendered to the Crown by the abbot and twelve monks. The abbey was purchased in 1540 by Sir John Tregonwell. He converted the Abbot's lodgings into a house for himself and made the abbey church into the parish church (RCHME 1970). It is likely that the dissolution of the abbey had very little impact on the town. The Milton estate remained with Tregonwell's heirs until it was bought by Joseph Damer (later Lord Milton) in 1752. The town was divided from the Tregonwell's (later Damer's) estate by a garden wall.

There is little information known about the town in this period, but it is likely it remained largely a rural market town. In 1570-1 Milton Abbey estate (including the town of Middleton) had 52 messuages and 51 cottages (Traskey 1978, 188). A number of trade tokens were issued in Milton during the 17th century, including tokens from two grocers, a draper and a mercer (Pentin 1904a; Symonds 1908). In 1642 an epidemic struck the town killing a large number of inhabitants. In 1658, there was a serious fire that destroyed the northern part of the town from the middle of the High Street to the church. Twenty five houses were destroyed (perhaps a quarter of the town), as was the vicarage, school and market house (Hutchins 1873, 382-3; SDNQ 30 (1930-32), 17). The school was rebuilt in 1662, but it is not known how long it took to rebuild the rest of the town (Traskey 1978, 189). The Hearth Tax Assessment of 1662-4 records only 43 houses with taxable hearths, perhaps indicating that rebuilding hadn't been completed by this date (Meekings 1951; Traskey 1978). The Woodward survey of 1769-70 (DHC D919/5) shows 104 buildings in the town including three inns and an almshouse.



Figure 10: Tregonwell's Almshouses.

In 1674, John Tregonwell built and endowed an almshouse for six widows on the corner of Broad Street and Newport Street (Pentin 1904a). The Grammar School possibly founded by Abbot Middleton in 1521 remained in Milton until it was moved to Blandford Forum by Lord Milton in 1785 (Nelmes 1983). The school had up to 80 scholars in 1600 and in about 1630 a new school house was built on Market Street (Pentin 1904b). The school declined in the later 18th century. The historian John Hutchins was an assistant master and its pupils included Thomas Masterman Hardy, Nelson's flag-captain, and Thomas Beach, the painter.

5.2.2 Town Layout

The layout of the post-medieval town is depicted on two historic plans – Byles' 1659 survey (DHC D919/1) and Woodward's 1769-70 survey (DHC D919/5). A transcribed extract of Woodward's map was published by Pentin in 1904 (Figure 8). The earthwork remains in the later park indicate that the size and shape of the plots on these maps are somewhat stylised and in reality, they were more irregular (RCHME 1970).

The town lay immediately to the south of the Abbey with the triangular Market Street to the north, with its market cross at the east end. High Street ran south from the east end of the market, with a back lane to the west. To the south of the junction with an E-W street, Newport Street, was Broad Street, with Back Street on its east side (Figure 12). It is likely that the post-medieval town layout was largely the same as the medieval town. Perhaps there was more development along Newport Street and Back Street and the area to the south of the town during this period.



Figure 11: Green Walk, the only surviving house from the old town of Middleton.

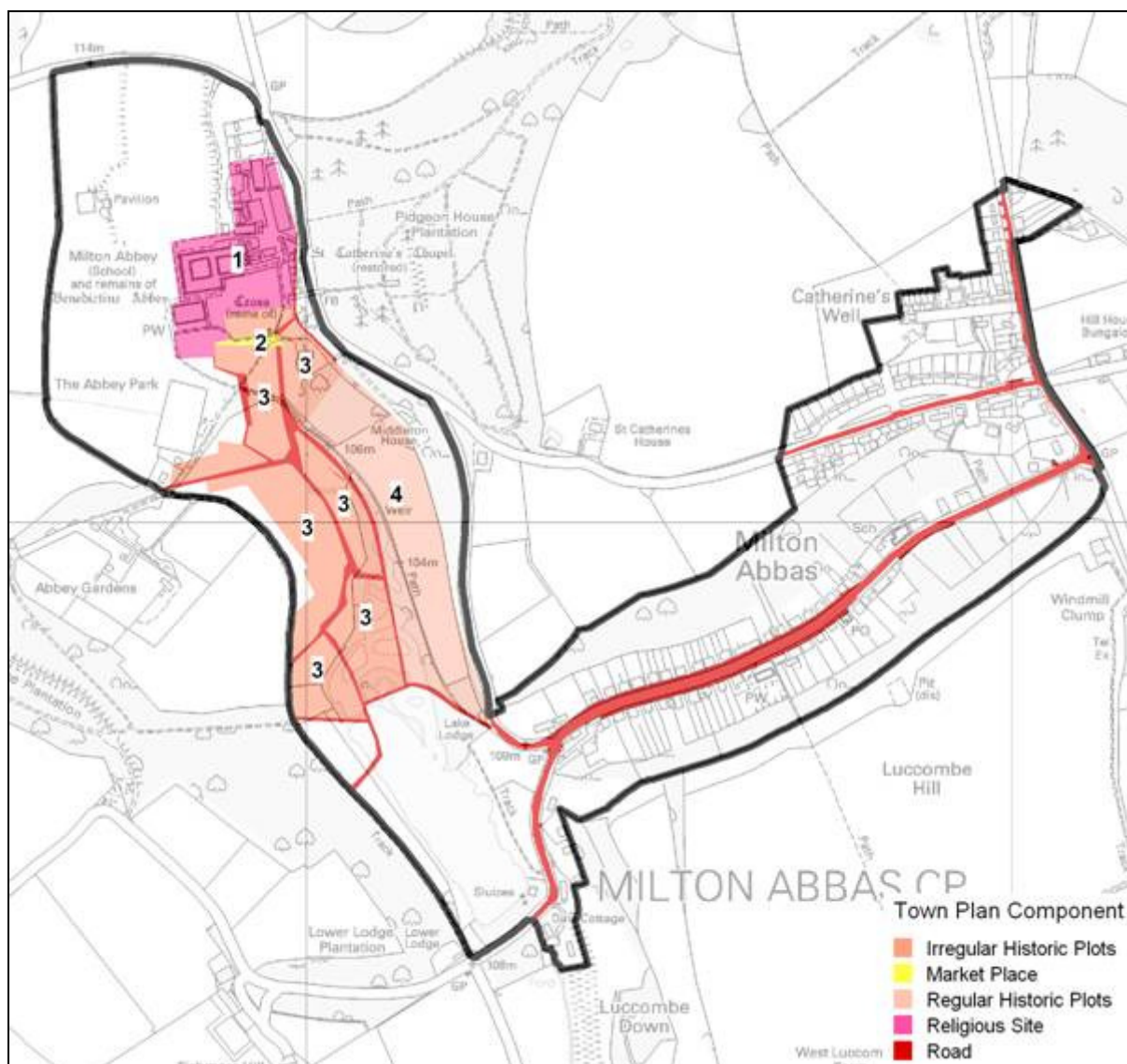


Figure 12: Milton Abbas Post-medieval Town Plan Components.

5.2.3 Post-medieval Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the post-medieval town are shown on Figure 12 and are listed below.

1. *Milton Abbey.* The former abbey church became the parish church with a churchyard to the south. The former abbot's lodgings were converted and extended to form Sir John Tregonwell's house. This house was oblong in plan with a low north range and a large gate which gave access to a small courtyard surrounded by irregular old buildings. The abbot's great hall was on the south side and to the east were the former abbey kitchens, which were demolished in 1737 (RCHME 1970). Philip Byles' Survey of 1659 (DHC D919/5) shows a series of enclosed gardens to the south and east of the abbey, an area of trees, perhaps an orchard to the north and ovoid pond to the

south-west. A series of buildings are shown along the east side, perhaps the abbey farm.

2. *Market-place.* The form of the market place remained much as it was in the medieval period, with the market cross at its east end. The parish churchyard and the vicarage house were at the west end of the market place. The grammar school lay on the north side.

3. *High Street and Broad Street.* There was almost continuous development along the street frontages of High Street and Broad Street and significant development along Newport Street (Figure 8). At the southern end of the town development was more sparse and a number of houses were set back from the street.

4. *Back Street.* There was relatively sparse development along the east side of Back Street. By the late 18th century a number of the plots are meadows, gardens or orchards.

5.3 Late Eighteenth – Early Twentieth Century Milton Abbas (1751-1945)

5.3.1 Historical Summary

This period sees a major transformation of Milton Abbas, with the decline of the town of Middleton and its eventual removal as part of the creation of a new landscape park for Lord Milton, to be replaced by a new 'model' village built further away from Milton Abbey House. This arrangement is broadly that which survives today, and it marks the end of the urban history of Milton.

Joseph Damers (created Lord Milton, 1753 and Earl of Dorchester, 1792) purchased Milton Abbey in 1752. He soon started to make significant changes to his estate. In 1763 he commissioned Lancelot 'Capability' Brown to make improvements to his grounds, which took place in two phases between 1763-70 and 1773-82. Between 1771 and 1776, he rebuilt Milton Abbey House to the designs of Sir William Chambers.

The first phase of Brown's landscape improvements (1763-70) were in the north park. Broadfield and Delcombe Bottom to the north of Milton Abbey House were laid out as parkland, with 'hanging' plantations created on the hillslopes to the north and west and a belt of trees planted to screen the house from the old town (Lovie 2006). Three roads were closed and diverted. The second phase (1773-82) concentrated on the south park, lake and model village. It was this second phase that required the removal of the old town of Middleton, with the inhabitants being rehoused in the new model village.

The town may have been in decline during the 18th century, as Woodward's survey of 1769-70 shows that a significant number of properties were 'in hand' (i.e. had reverted to Lord Milton)

at this date, although it might also reflect the early stages of Milton's plans to remove the town. One of the factors in the decline of the town may have been the turnpiking of the Dorchester to Blandford and Salisbury road by the Harnham, Blandford and Dorchester Trust in 1753-4, which by-passed Middleton, running further to the south through Milborne St Andrew (Good 1966).

Lord Milton appears to have started his policy of clearing the town in 1771, gradually acquiring properties as their leases expired, or by other means. The clearance of the town was a protracted affair, not without significant opposition from some of the inhabitants. Milton started legal proceedings to remove the Grammar School in 1775, but it required several attempts before he was successful in getting it moved to Blandford in 1785 (Nelmes 1983). He finally completed the clearance of the town in 1790.

Designs for the new model village were submitted by Sir William Chambers in 1773 and by 'Capability' Brown in 1774. Construction of the village probably began in the late 1770s, although the vicarage may have been built earlier. Tregonwell's almshouses were moved from the old town to the new village in 1779. The new parish church was completed in 1786.

Lord Milton died in 1798 and the estate passed through several branches of his family until it was sold to Baron Hambro, a Danish merchant banker, in 1852. In 1865, Hambro commissioned Sir George Gilbert Scott to restore the abbey church. The estate remained in the hands of the Hambros until 1932 when it was sold and the estate broken up. The Abbey church and house was bought by the Ecclesiastical Commission and handed over to the



Figure 13: Milton Abbey House and Church in its parkland setting, viewed from the Hilton valley.



Figure 14: View of model village with brewery buildings on right hand side.

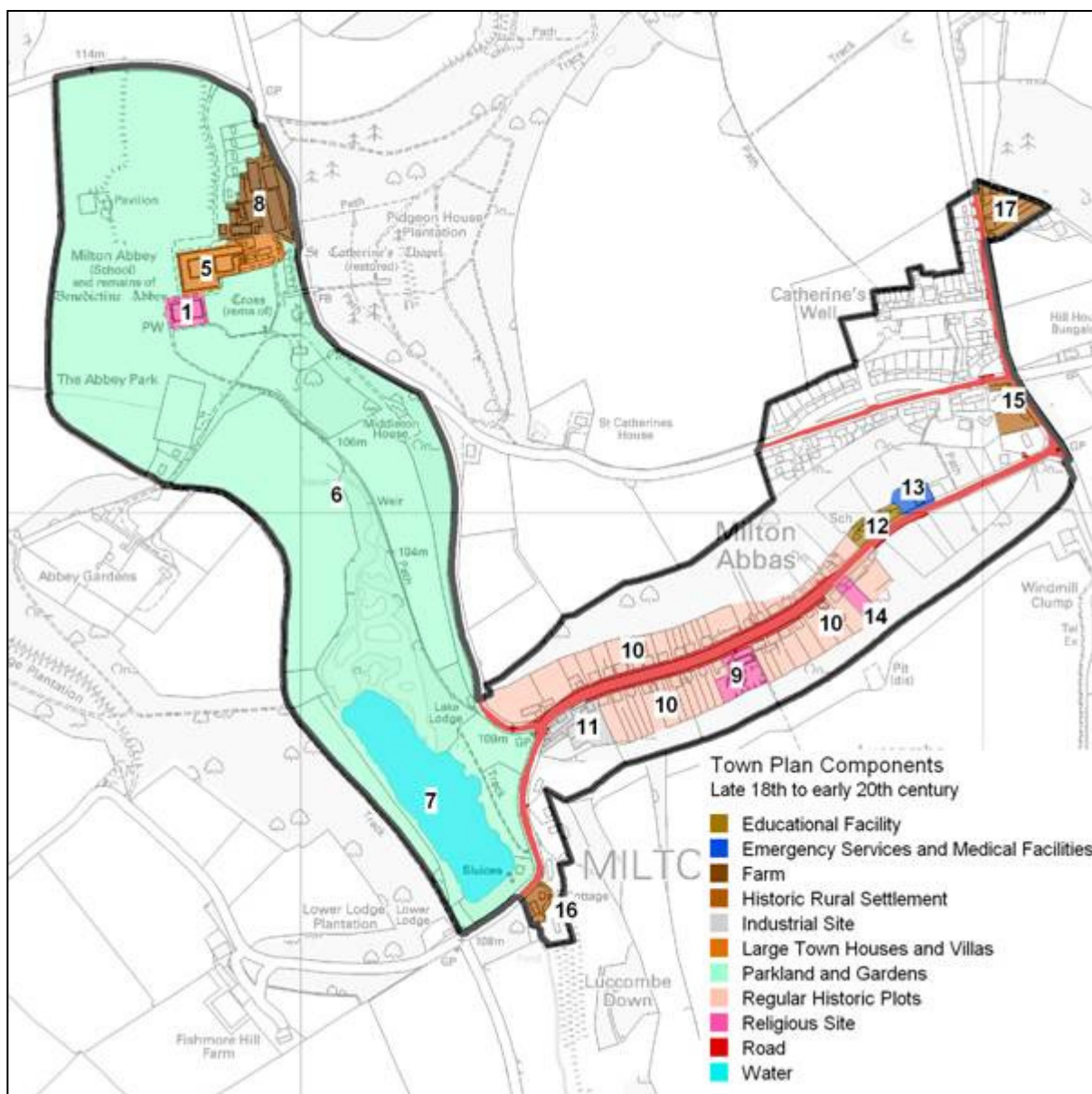


Figure 15: Milton Abbas Late 18th to early 20th century Town Plan Components.

Diocese of Salisbury. It was used as a centre for faith healing until about 1950.

The economic base of the village was largely dependent on the Milton Abbey estate and was mainly involved in agriculture and other rural crafts. There was a brewery at the west end of the village, originally founded in the old town and established on the new site when the village was moved. There is also mention of a factory for window-glass in the late 18th-early 19th century (RCHME 1970, 197).

5.3.2 Town Layout

The layout of the old town was completely swept away, to be replaced by parkland with a lake to the south. The roads and plots in the

town were not preserved and it is only the eastern boundary of the plots on the east side of the former Back Street, which survives within the new landscape layout.

The model village comprised two rows of cottages and other buildings regularly set either side of the gently winding road along the bottom of the valley and separated from the road by a wide grass verge.

5.3.3 Late 18th – early 20th century Town Plan Components

The main plan components of late eighteenth-early 20th century Milton Abbas are shown on Figure 15 and are listed below.

1. Milton Abbey Church. The former abbey

church became the family chapel of Lord Milton. The former churchyard was removed, and the grave markers and an old stone cross destroyed. It was restored in 1789 by James Wyatt. A further restoration was undertaken by Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1865. The former medieval chapels at the east end were demolished.

5. *Milton Abbey House*. The house, designed by Sir William Chambers and completed by James Wyatt, was built between 1771 and 1776. The house has four symmetrical ranges surrounding a courtyard, the south range incorporating the 15th century great hall of the abbots lodgings. A service wing was added to the southeast in the 19th century. A three-storey extension was built to the northeast in 1936.

6 and 7. *Milton Abbey Park and Pond*. The former town of Middleton was swept away and the area incorporated into the pleasure grounds and extensive landscaped park surrounding Milton Abbey created by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown between 1763 and 1782. Only a small part of the landscaped park lies within the study area. The pond was part of the original design by Brown, but was smaller than originally envisaged.

8. *Abbey Farm*. The abbey farm comprised a dairy house to the west and barn and a long range of stables and other buildings along the east side of the farm yard, as illustrated on Figure 8.

9. *St James' Church*. The new parish church was built to the designs of James Wyatt in 1786. In 1886 the chancel was enlarged, the chancel and tower arches rebuilt, and the south aisle added (RCHME 1970). The church is said to have been built from material from the demolished abbey barn.

10. *Milton Abbas Model Village*. This comprised two rows of semi-detached cottages on either side of the road, built c. 1780. On the north side opposite, St James' Church is the



Figure 16: Former Milton Brewery.

17th century almshouses moved from the old town of Middleton. The vicarage cottage at the west end of the village was formerly the dairy house of Luccombe Farm and was converted in 1771 (Kelly's Directory 1895).

11. *Milton Brewery*. Founded by John Ham in the old town c. 1775 and moved to the new village in the late 18th century. Subsequently the lease was held by Charles Warne and in 1848 the lease was acquired by Henry Fookes and the brewery remained in the Fookes family until the mid 20th century. In 1851, Robert Fookes employed seven men at the brewery.

12. *Milton Abbas School*. The mixed parish school and adjacent master's house was built in 1840 for 150 children (Kelly's Directory 1895).

13. *Cottage Hospital*. A cottage hospital, built and endowed by Baron Hambro, was opened in 1873 (Kelly's Directory 1895). It closed in 1937, but remained the doctor's house.

14. *Wesleyan Methodist Chapel*. The chapel was built in 1895. Formerly the services were held in a private house.

15. *New Lodge*. A picturesque detached cottage, a lodge to the park, constructed in the mid 19th century.

16. *Dale Cottage*. A late 18th century cottage with cob walls and thatched roofs at the south end of Milton Abbey Park.

17. *New Close Cottages*. These cottages were built in the mid-19th century, with additional houses to the south built in the inter-war years.



Figure 17: Former Cottage Hospital.

5.3 Later Twentieth Century Milton Abbas (1946-Present day)

5.4.1 Historical Summary

From 1932 onwards, Milton Abbas was no longer in the hands of a single landowner and estate and many of the houses in the village passed into private ownership.

In 1953 Milton Abbey was bought by a trust to establish a school, Milton Abbey School, which continues to the present day. The school buildings are clustered in the area of the former abbey farm to the northeast of Milton Abbey House.

At the beginning of this period Milton Abbas was still a largely rural village with most inhabitants engaged in agricultural trades. However, during the second half of the 20th century, the village has become largely a dormitory settlement with most inhabitants working elsewhere. The brewery closed in 1951. Milton Abbas has become a favourite tourist destination, but there has been little development to accommodate visitors.

A council house estate was built in Catherine's Well in the 1950s, with some further houses added in the 1960s and 1990s.

5.4.2 Town Layout

There is little change to the layout of the park and the model village. A small estate at Catherine's well was built along existing minor roads with a crescent and short culs-de-sac providing local access.

5.4.3 Later Twentieth Century Town Plan Components

The main plan components of later 20th century Milton Abbas are shown on Figure 20 and are listed below.



Figure 18: 1950s Council House estate, Catherine's Well.

1. *Milton Abbey Church*. There has been little change to the former abbey church during this period. It forms part of the property of Milton Abbey School.

5. *Milton Abbey House*. The house now forms part of Milton Abbey School. There is a 20th century wing to the northeast. The east range was damaged by fire in 1956.

6 and 7. *Milton Abbey Park and Pond*. The park is now part of the school grounds of Milton Abbey School. The northern part of the park has games pitches, a pavilion and golf course. An all-weather pitch was constructed to the south of the former Abbey Church in 2001. Two staff houses were built in the area just south of this pitch in the 1950s. The headmaster's house was built to the southeast of the abbey. In addition to the school developments, Middleton House, a substantial dwelling, was probably constructed in the 1950s on the east side of the park. The pond has been enlarged during this period.

8. *Milton Abbey School*. The site of the former abbey farm has been comprehensively developed as part of Milton Abbey School since 1953. The area contains a range of school buildings, including a swimming pool and several houses for the staff. Parts of the former stables and some other buildings still survive among the modern school buildings. The stables were largely destroyed by a fire in 1980, but the façade has been preserved. This fire also destroyed the former barn.

9. *St James' Church*. There are no major changes to the church during this period.

10. *Milton Abbas Model Village*. There has been little change to the village layout during this period. Some of the pairs of cottages have been amalgamated to form a single dwelling.



Figure 19: Modern school buildings, Milton Abbey School.

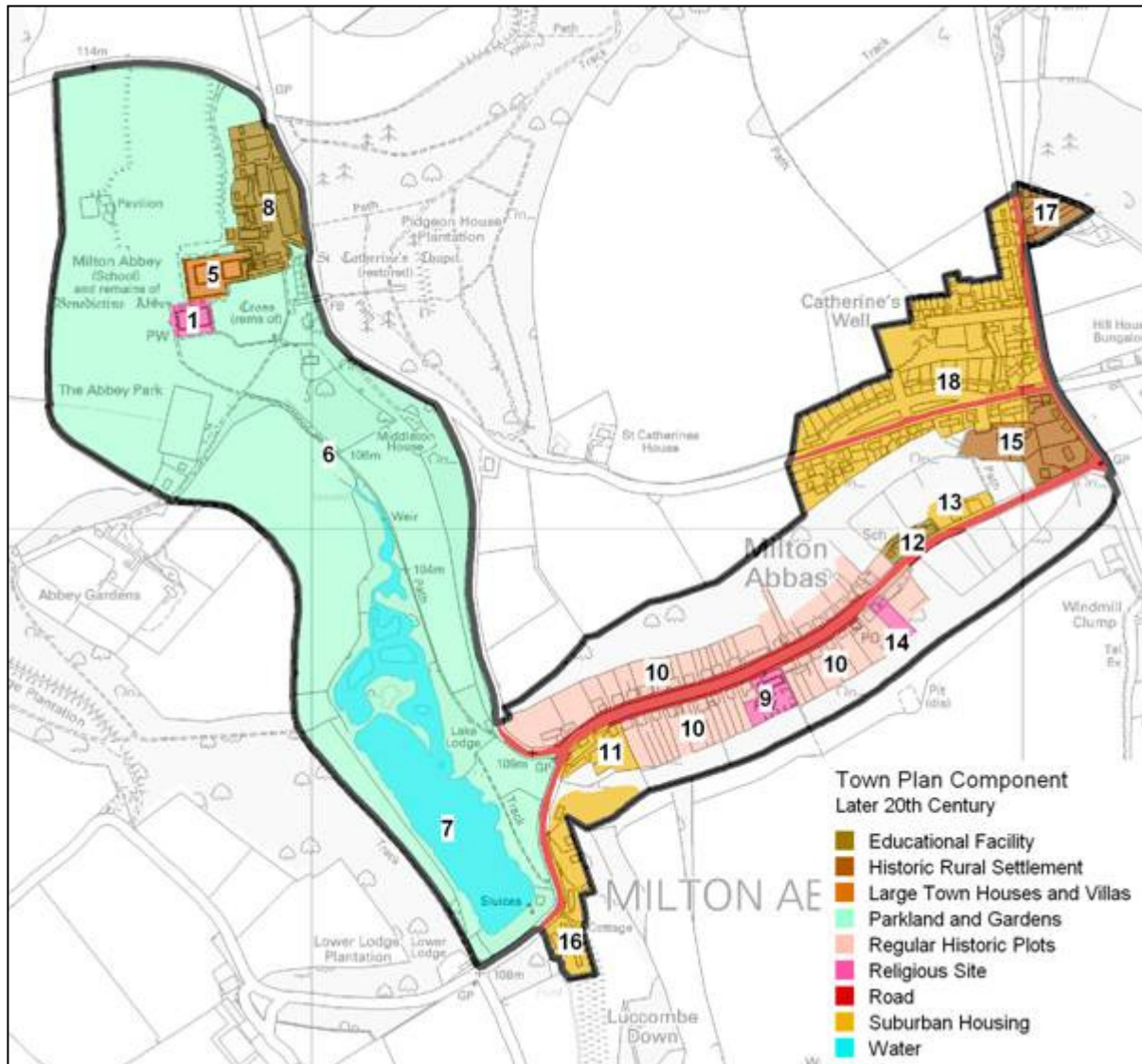


Figure 20: Milton Abbas Later Twentieth Century Town Plan Components.

11. *Milton Brewery*. The brewery was taken over by John Groves in 1950 and closed soon after. The site has now been converted into housing.

12. *Milton Abbas School*. The school closed in 2002.

13. *Cottage Hospital*. The hospital is now a private residence.

14. *Wesleyan Methodist Chapel*. The chapel was closed in 1977 and sold in 1981. It is now a private house.

15. *New Lodge*. A number of detached houses in relatively large grounds have been built in the area adjacent to New Lodge.

16. *Dale Cottage*. Several additional houses were built adjacent to Dale Cottage in the inter-war or immediately post-war period.

17. *New Close Cottages*. There was no signifi-

cant change during this period.

18. *Catherine's Well*. A council housing estate was built in the 1950s. Additional houses were built in the 1990s.