

## Summary

This report contains the results of a consideration of the historical, archaeological, architectural and map evidence relating to the development of Wimborne Minster. 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 Wimborne Minster. This will enable an informed approach to the management of change and conservation of the urban environment.

### *Historical Background*

There is no evidence that a town or any large settlement existed at Wimborne Minster during the Roman period. Iron Age and Roman occupation centred at Badbury Rings 5km to the NW. However Wimborne Minster was an important place during the Saxon period, King Ine founded a monastery here by AD705, with his sister Cuthburgh as abbess. The original monastery seems to have been destroyed by Viking raiders during the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, and was re-founded by King Edward the Confessor as a house of secular canons during the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Wimborne Minster is not listed in the burghal hideage, or as one of the Dorset Boroughs in Domesday. It does however, have a reference to Burgesses and complex tenurial arrangements reminiscent of Borough status. The medieval town appears to have expanded into suburbs in The Leaze and West Borough, although Lay Subsidy returns suggest that it was not particularly wealthy. The town had five churches and chapels at this time; the Minster, St Mary's, St Peter's, St Margaret's and St Catherine's.

The town expanded economically during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The coming of the railway in 1847 led to rapid suburban expansion to the east of the River Allen, although the railway itself closed in 1977.

### *Town morphology*

Wimborne Minster has a complex and varied urban morphology reflecting its complex and prolonged development. The historic town centre is located on a low, flat ridge between the flood plains of the rivers Stour and Allen. The site of the Minster lies just above the floodable

land and is surrounded by a complex arrangement of narrow streets. These streets are aligned N-S and E-W and reflect the alignments of the original Saxon planned grid. Medieval suburbs were attached to this Saxon core along four radial streets aligned on the four main compass points. The southern suburb is now only represented by earthworks in the Leaze. The northern suburb, along West Borough comprises a regular arrangement of burgage plots with parallel back lanes on either side of West Borough. West Street may have originally been arranged along similar lines, although the eastern suburb of East Brook seems to have arisen through a less regular amalgamation of historic plots along the Leigh and Poole Roads. Industrial activity tended to be focussed along the river Allen and further south at East Brook. Further significant suburban expansion did not take place until the Victorian era. Wimborne Station was established on the east side of the River Allen accompanied by suburbs of brick built villas and terraces. This area expanded further during the later 20<sup>th</sup> century, through the construction of modern housing estates.

### *Built character*

Wimborne Minster is notable for the good survival of 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century buildings. This is particularly noticeable in comparison to its neighbours at Wareham and Blandford where large swathes of the towns were destroyed by fire during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Fragments of Saxon masonry survive within the central crossing at the Minster Church of St Cuthburga. The remainder of the church was largely complete in its present form by the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is distinctive with its paired towers and use of a mixture of limestone and local heathstone. A large number of late medieval or early post medieval timber framed buildings survive at The Priests House, St Josephs on King Street, almshouses on St Margaret's Hill and within houses along West Street, High Street and West Borough. Many of the latter were refaced during the 18<sup>th</sup> century to give the northern part of the town centre a distinctly Georgian feel. There are also good examples of 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century town houses as well as 17<sup>th</sup> century farmhouses. The 19<sup>th</sup> century is best represented by extensive brick built Victorian suburbs at St John's Hill and Rowland's Hill as well as large ornamental villas at Colehill.

### *Landscape Setting*

Wimborne Minster lies in an advantageous posi-



Figure 1 Vertical aerial photographic view of Wimborne Minster, 2005

tion upon a narrow clay ridge between the flood plains of the Rivers Allen and Stour. It has been suggested that the town grew up close to a pre-existing prehistoric route between Christchurch harbour and Badbury Rings. The ground rises steeply to the north west beyond the historic town centre towards the Kingston Lacy estate. The east side of the river Allen is dominated by the rounded mass of Colehill, here the southern aspect and views over the Stour valley led its being colonised by the independently wealthy and professional classes during the Victorian period. It is now a leafy suburb with a mixture of modern housing estates and Victorian suburban villas.

#### *Historic Urban Character*

The Historic Urban character of Wimborne Minster is closely bound up with its distinctive landscape setting and the quality of its historic fabric, as well as the quality of its documented history. The late Saxon town plan has been modified over the centuries to leave a tightly packed streetscape furnished with a range of historic buildings spanning the last millennium. This historic core is complemented by medieval suburbs, notably West Borough with its wider more open streetscape lined with Georgian style frontages. The Minster, The Corn Market and The Square are also significant in terms of open spaces within the tightly packed streetscape.

The good survival of the historic town structure is complemented by the large quantity of historic buildings. The survival in the historic core of many unbroken groups of 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century buildings, with little disruption from modern development, is a major factor. Medieval and post medieval bridges set the scene on the town approaches, as well as well preserved 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial buildings. Victorian suburbs and municipal parks and cemeteries around the fringes of the medieval town, underscore its local setting and emphasises the linkage with the surrounding landscape.

#### *Further Research*

This report has highlighted many aspects of the historical development of Wimborne Minster 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 layout of the Saxon and medieval monastic precincts.
- Research into the layout and economy of the Saxon and medieval secular town.
- Research into the sites and origins of the lost medieval chapels of St Mary, St Peter and St Catherine.