

Part 3: Town Context



3.1 The Setting of the Town

No town exists in isolation. All towns are shaped and influenced by their surrounding landscape. Topography and geology have a profound influence on the way a town develops; constraining development, shaping communication routes, and providing raw materials for building and other economic activity, amongst other things. In order to understand the character of a town, its surrounding landscape and natural context need to be understood. This section of the report briefly sets out the wider context of the town and the landscape character of its hinterland.

3.2 Topography

The historic core of Wimborne Minster lies near to the south eastern tip of a low ridge of clay between the rivers Stour and Allen (Figure 3). During the nineteenth century however, with the coming of the railway, a new suburb rapidly developed on the eastern side of the river Allen. Topographically, this suburb is dominated by the gravel terrace of Colehill which rises to over 60m in the north east corner of the study area. The southern part of the study area comprises the flood plain of the River Stour. The meaning of the name Wimborne Minster is thought to derive from an early name for the River Allen. The earliest recorded form of the name; *Winburnan* (early 9th century) comprises

the Old English elements *Winn + burna* meaning *meadow or bright stream* (Mills 1991, 362; Hutchins 1874, 178).

The topography of the region has influenced the layout of the town, albeit through the pre-urban rural landscape. NW-SE aligned roads and field boundaries, represent the last vestiges of a potentially late prehistoric co-axial field system, which formerly existed along the Allen Valley. The major routes of the B3073 (Poole Road) and the B3082 (St Margaret's Hill and Victoria Road) are the most obvious examples, although Cowgrove Road, Blind Lane, Knobcrook Road and parts of Wimborne Road, Lewens Lane, Park Lane, Rowlands Hill and Leigh Common are also representative. The Saxon town of Wimborne Minster was built on a regular grid plan aligned approximately north-south and superimposed upon the pre-existing rural landscape.

3.3 Geology

The Geology of the Wimborne Minster study area has London Clay as its foundation. This represents the earliest surviving Tertiary deposits within Dorset, laid down in a coastal environment approximately 60 million years ago. The clay also contains deposits of iron rich sandstone known as Heath Stone (Ensom 1998, 70-71). London Clay has traditionally been important in the region for the manufacture of earthenware pottery. The Verwood pot-

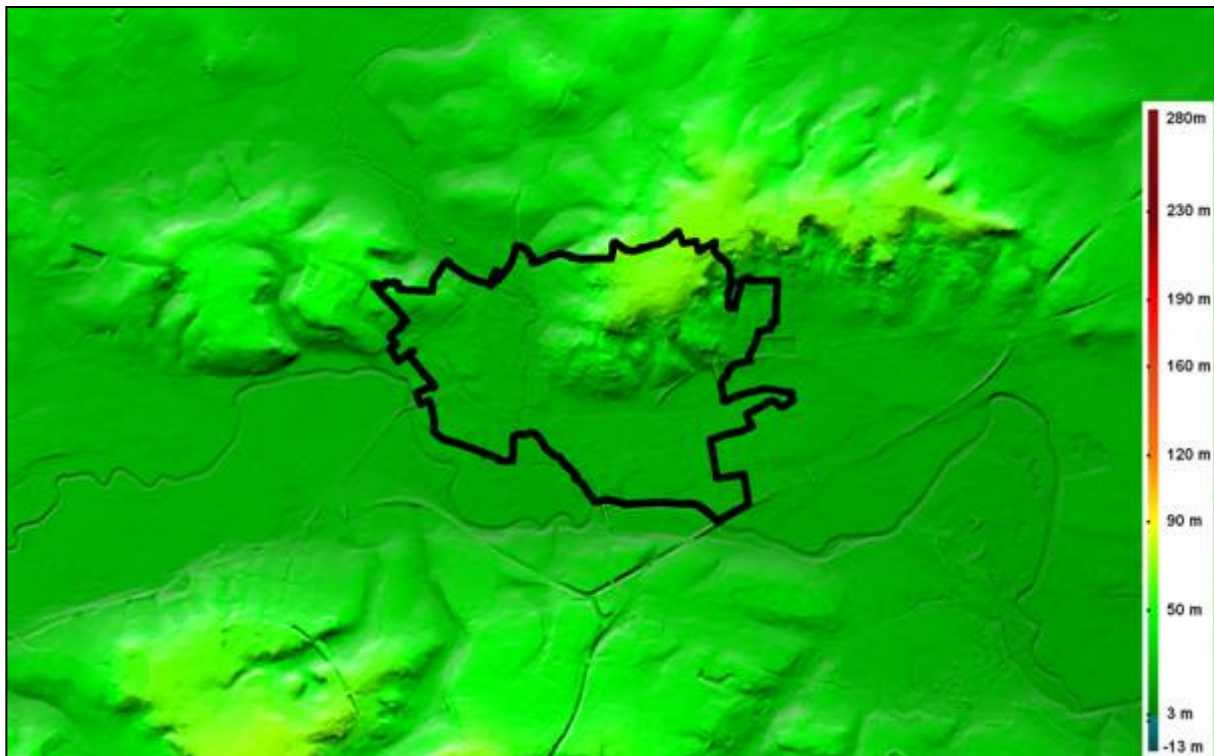


Figure 3: Topographical setting of Wimborne Minster

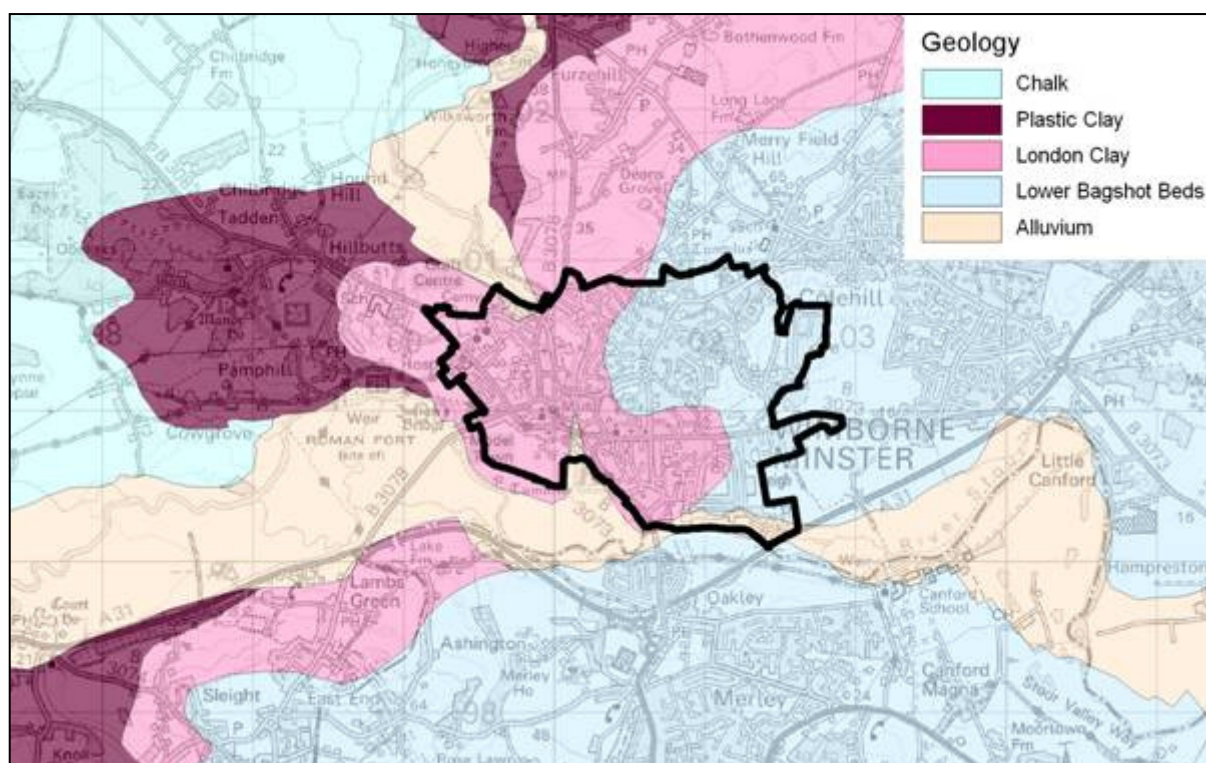


Figure 4: Solid Geology of the Wimborne Minster region

teries 5 miles north east of Wimborne Minster manufactured large quantities of earthenware until the middle of the 20th century, which were distributed across Dorset. London Clay is also excellent material for the manufacture of bricks. Colehill has contained a significant brick making industry since at least the 17th century (Reeve 2000, 35) and large brickworks existed close to Walford at the north end of historic Wimborne Minster during the 19th and 20th centuries (now the site of the Stone Lane Industrial Estate). The eastern part of the study area comprises sands and gravels of the Lower Bagshot beds, which overly the London Clay. These date from the Eocene Epoch (55-34 million years ago) and cover an extensive area of East Dorset and the Poole and Bournemouth conurbation (Figure 4). They are thought to have been laid down as alluvial deposits by the River Solent. Sand and gravel extraction have been important industries in the region with large extraction pits existing along the River Stour at Merley and Longham.

The nature of the underlying geology has also influenced the appearance and built environment of the town. The Bagshot Beds and the London Clay both contain some reddish sandstone (heath stone) used locally for walling. The local clays have also been used in the manufacture of brick from at least the 17th century and cob walling before that.

3.4 Landscape Character

Several landscape character assessments help place the town into its wider landscape context.

In the national assessment of countryside character, Wimborne Minster lies within Joint Character Area 135; Dorset Heaths (Countryside Agency 1999).

The key characteristics of Joint Character Area 135 are listed as:

- An exposed, open, broad-scale landscape forming a strong contrast with the adjacent character areas
- Undulating lowland heath with tracts of heather, stunted pines and gorse scrub.
- Blocks of conifers forming locally-prominent landmarks.
- Mosaics of heathland, farmland, woodland and scrub.
- Much is sparsely populated with scattered settlements and a few small villages and towns but the extensive conurbation of Poole-Bournemouth forms a major influence in the south and east.
- Flat-bottomed, open valleys with floodplain pastures and willows.
- An outer edge of low, rolling hills with an irregular patchwork of pasture, woodland and dense hedges marking the transition to the chalk.

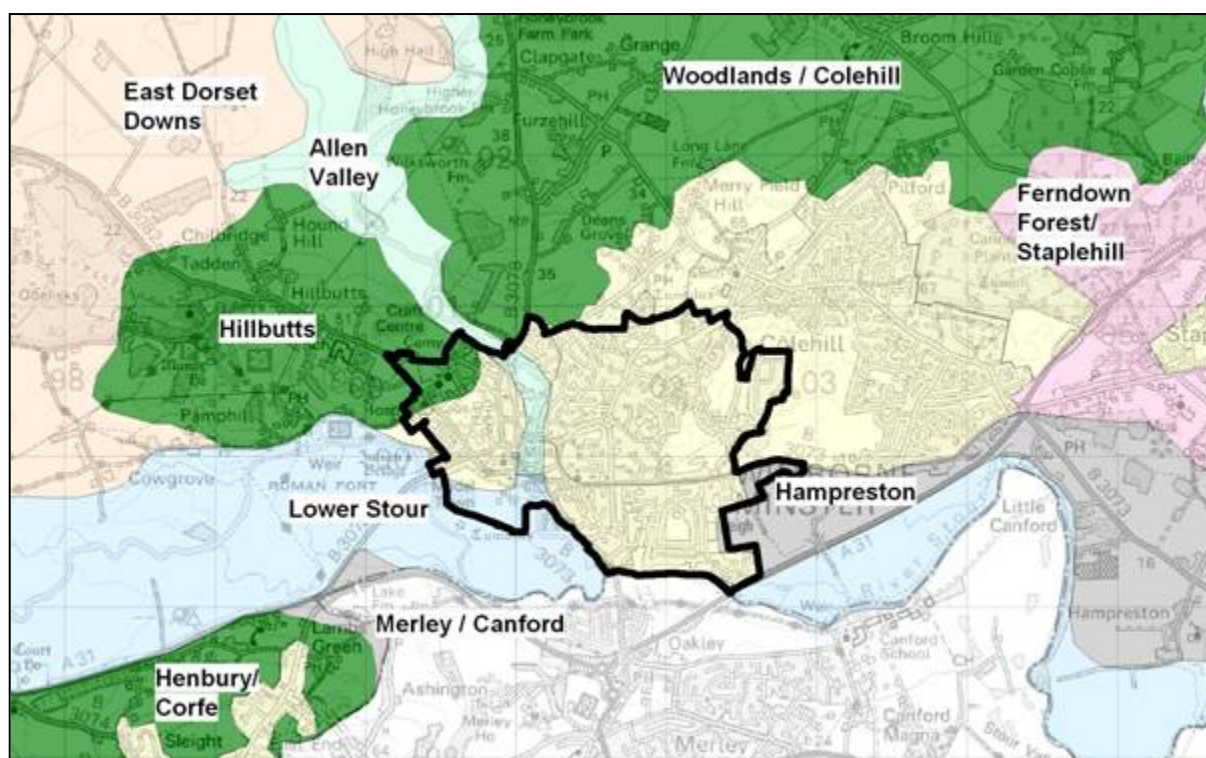


Figure 5: Wimborne Minster in its landscape character setting (East Dorset District Landscape Characterisation).

The East Dorset District Draft Landscape Character Assessment provides a detailed record of the features and landscape elements present in the wider Wimborne Area (Figure 5). The town itself is considered an urban area and not characterised within the assessment. However, small parts of the Woodlands-Colehill & Hillbutts farmland/woodland mosaic, Allen Valley, Lower Stour and Hampreston character areas extend into the study area (EDDC 2007).

The key characteristics of the Woodlands-Colehill & Hillbutts farmland/woodland mosaic Character Area are:

- Undulating landform, punctuated by hilltops
- Heavily influenced by woods, copses and hedgerow trees creating an irregular patchwork
- Absence of major roads
- Irregular road pattern, having an east-west emphasis with short north-south links
- Narrow, winding lanes throughout the area, with high, dense hedgerows
- Extensive network of public footpaths and woodland and other tracks
- Farmhouses and other modest rural dwellings, few major historic buildings or churches
- General absence of archaeological remains, except for tumuli on hilltops
- Heavy concentration of Ancient Woodlands
- Quiet, peaceful countryside largely unaf-

ected by modern development

The key characteristics of the Allen Valley Character Area are:

- Shallow sided valley
- Important chalk stream habitat
- Sparsely developed with secluded intimate character
- Distinctive, traditional building materials, flint, red brick and thatch
- Simple bridges

The key characteristics of the Lower Stour Valley Character Area are:

- Flat wide flood plain
- Meandering river
- Riverside trees and copses
- Long distance views along the valley
- Views of the church towers at Shapwick, Sturminster Marshall and Wimborne Minster
- Views of Canford school
- Views of A31 Wimborne By Pass
- Longham Lakes water treatment complex
- Historic water mill sites e.g. White Mill
- Overhead power lines (adverse impact)

The key characteristics of the Hampreston

River Terrace Character Area are:

- Flat landform
- Mosaic of large fields used for arable and pasture
- Few trees in fields, most trees near river and village

The draft Historic Landscape Character mapping shows Wimborne Minster sitting on a ridge between tracts of water meadows associated with the rivers Stour and Allen. The surrounding land comprises a variety of enclosed fields including planned, other regular, piecemeal and amorphous enclosures as well as a variety of settlements including historic villages, housing estates and country houses. There is also a patchwork of coppice, deciduous woodland and plantations.

3.5 The Present Town

The town of Wimborne Minster lies at the confluence of the rivers Stour and Allen, approximately 11 miles upstream from the point where the Stour empties into Christchurch harbour. The town, together with its modern suburban estates, sits 5 miles north of Poole and just beyond the north eastern tip of the wider Poole/ Bournemouth conurbation. The modern urban area covers approximately 320 ha. It lies on the A31 trunk road between Ringwood and Bere Regis, although this road has bypassed the town centre to the south since 1981. Wimborne Minster also sits at the south eastern end of the B3082, 9 miles from Blandford; the western end of the B3073, 11 miles from Christchurch; and at the southern end of the B3078, 9 miles from Cranborne. Wimborne Minster lies at the southern edge of East Dorset District. Its train station closed in 1977 and the site has now been developed as a cattle market and industrial estate. The nearest station is currently five miles away at Poole. The town has grown steadily from the 1960's onwards, the population increasing by approximately 56% from 4,160 in 1961 to 6,500 in 2001. This only tells part of the story however. The town has expanded most rapidly since the 1980's in the neighbouring parish of Colehill, which itself had a population of 6,710 in 2001 (Dorset County Council 2008, 88). Approximately one third of the Colehill population is included within the Wimborne Minster study area suggesting that the true population of the urban area lay at around 9,000 in 2001. Wimborne Minster is important as a service and shopping centre for the surrounding villages and the administrative offices of East Dorset District Council lie less than 1.5 miles north of

the town centre at Furzehill.

The Wimborne Minster pyramid area has one secondary school; Queen Elizabeth's School, fourteen first schools, one primary school, four middle schools and one special school (the Beacroft Foundation School). The retail sector comprises 118 shops, mainly local shops, but including national chains such as Boots, Somerfield, Superdrug, WH Smith and Waitrose. Wimborne Minster also has three industrial estates at Brook Road (8.24ha), Stone Lane (1.87ha) and Riverside Park (1.2ha).

31% of the economically active population are employed within the service sector; 26% in manufacturing; 20% in banking, finance and insurance; 17% in public administration, education and health; less than 5% in transport and communications and 3% in construction. Major employers include Anixter Components, Dorset County Council, Dorset Healthcare NHS Trust, East Dorset District Council, Flight Refuelling Ltd, Farrow and Ball, Easton Aerospace, Matrod Frampton Ltd, WM Morrison PLC, Savills Ltd, Travis Perkins Trading Co Ltd and Victoria Hospital (Dorset County Council, 2008, 88-9).

Part 4: Sources



4.1 Previous research

Wimborne Minster has attracted interest from antiquarians since the 16th century. John Leland visited at that time and described his route from Canford Bridge to Walford Bridge, Hutchins was disparaging in his description of the town during the late 18th century, possibly because he was rector of nearby Wareham. He nevertheless meticulously recorded details of the town's history. Hutchins maintained the antiquarian view that Wimborne Minster could be equated with the Roman Vindocladia, although the editors of the 3rd edition refuted the claim (Hutchins 1874, 178-9; 182). J M J Fletcher was a vicar at Wimborne Minster and conducted extensive and detailed research into the archives and history of the church during the early 20th century (Fletcher 1912; 1935a; 1935b; 1938).

A small number of local histories have been published during the later 20th century concerning specific aspects of Wimborne Minster's past. Joynes et al (198?) and Sadler (1992; 1996) have written on the history of Colehill. Gutheridge (2004) and Willis and Willis (1990) have both written photographic histories of Wimborne Minster. More general histories of the town have been written by Clegg (1960), James (1982) and Popham (1983). More recently Reeve has produced a socio-economic study of Wimborne Minster during the 17th century for his PhD thesis based on an exhaustive study of Wimborne Minster archives (Reeve 2000).

4.2 Historic Maps

Wimborne Minster is well represented with 17th and 18th century maps of the town. The earliest dated maps depicting the town were drawn by Richard Harding in 1613 (Map of the Hanham Estate; DHC D/1505/1) and in 1624 (Map of Holt Forest; DHC D/BKL). Hutchins drew a plan of the town for his *History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset* (DHC M78/10). This probably dates from 1774-1803 and is partially idealised and stylised in its depiction of the town. A more realistic 18th century map of the town is held at the Dorset History Centre as a photocopy (DHC Ph 676). This map is thought to date from 1775 and has been used extensively in the historic characterisation of the town.

The tithe map of Wimborne Minster dates from 1847 (DHC T/WM) and has also been used extensively during the characterisation of the

town. The later 19th and 20th century characterisation was largely based on the 1:2500 scale Ordnance Survey maps dating from 1887 onwards.

4.3 Documentary Evidence

Primary documentary sources used in this report include the Domesday Survey of 1086 (Thorn & Thorn 1983) and taxation records including the Lay Subsidy (Rumble 1980; Mills 1971) as well as Tudor subsidies and Muster Rolls (Stoate 1978; 1982). 19th century and early 20th century trade directories published in the Dorset On Line Parish Clerk website (Dorset OPC 2009) have also proved a valuable source of information. The Wimborne Minster parish archive is one of the largest collections of parish records in Dorset (DRO PE/WM). The Churchwarden's accounts begin in 1403 and are almost complete (Fletcher, 1938). Wimborne Minster also had its own church court with numerous records. There are a records relating to the town's ten charities, as well as hundredal and manorial court records. There are also a large number of probate records for the parish, including wills and inventories. Reeve has collated information from these and other sources to create a social and economic history of the town during the 17th century (Reeve 2000).

4.4 Archaeological Evidence

Forty archaeological events have been recorded for Wimborne Minster, the vast majority (34) occurring within the narrow confines of the medieval town. This work has proved invaluable to our understanding of the development of Saxon and medieval Wimborne Minster. Antiquarian interest in Wimborne Minster was initially based on the belief that it corresponded to the Roman town of Vindocladia, now believed to be the Roman settlement discovered at the foot of Badbury Rings. In fact there is little archaeological evidence for prehistoric or Roman activity in the Wimborne Minster area. A scatter of worked flint has been recovered from various excavations along the ridge between the rivers Allen and Stour, as well as along the southern slopes of Colehill. The discovery of cinerary urns has been reported from Wimborne Minster Cemetery (James 1982, 9) although no further corroboration has yet been found. There is some evidence for a late prehistoric system of land division in the lower Allen valley, fossilised in modern co-axial field and road alignments. Evidence for a late Iron Age and early Romano-British settlement has

been excavated at The Leaze (Whelan 2004) and a Roman Road between Lake Farm and Winchester runs through the study area south of Leigh Road.

Documentary evidence suggests that Wimborne Minster was an important place during the Saxon period. It had a large double monastery, at least one other chapel, a royal residence and town walls. However, little is known about the layout of the Saxon town. A small fragment of tessellated pavement was revealed beneath the nave of the Minster church on two separate occasions in 1857 and 1961. This may be evidence for an earlier high status Roman building on site of the later Minster, although recent thought suggests that it actually represent the floor of the original Saxon monastery (Woodward 1983, 57). More recently two further tesserae have been found in association with remains of the medieval chapel of St Peter in the Square, potentially indicating a Saxon origin for this chapel (Ladle 2010). The study of property boundaries on historic maps has led various people to suggest potential circuits for the Saxon town walls and monastic precinct. Evidence for the course of the monastic, or at least the later medieval Minster precinct, had been unearthed to the south of the Corn Market where a large E-W aligned ditch was filled in during the 17th century. These excavations formed part of a wider programme of archaeological investigation under the auspices of the Dorset Archaeological Committee during the late 1970's (Woodward 1983). Further evidence for the layout of the Saxon town is elusive, although apparently limited to the immediate vicinity of the Minster church.

Archaeological evidence for the medieval town can be divided in to three main areas. Firstly earthworks in the Leaze have been shown through excavation to be the site of a failed medieval suburb (Field 1973). Secondly evidence for the medieval extent of the Minster precinct has been revealed through the excavation of burials and boundary ditches in the vicinity (Woodward 1983; Jenkins 1991). Evidence for the medieval chapel and graveyard of St Peter has also been discovered in The Square (Ladle 2010). Thirdly evidence for more general medieval activity has been recovered in the form of pits, plot boundaries and industrial sites in back plots around the town. Evidence for post-medieval economic activity has also been revealed around the fringes of the medieval town including a kiln on the north side of The Square (Woodward 1983, 62-3), quarries behind West Street and clay pipe manufacture on Blind Lane (Day 1997).

Historic Buildings

Wimborne Minster is particularly notable for retaining a relatively high proportion of 16th-18th century buildings. Nevertheless; it is the Minster Church of St Cuthberga that has dominated the architecture of the town since the 11th century and continues to do so today. Pevsner has described the church as *imposing but not beautiful* (Newman & Pevsner 1972, 461). His reasoning is that the spotty brown and grey stone detracts from its beauty and that the two towers compete for attention. The brown stone is local heath stone and is found in another of the town's medieval buildings; St Margaret's chapel, built for St Margaret's hospice early in the 13th century. The majority of secular medieval buildings in Wimborne Minster would have been constructed in cob and thatch, with brick becoming increasingly important from the 17th century onwards. Buildings retaining an element of cob include number 1 Lewens Lane, 2 Cobb's Road and 47-9 Wimborne Road, Colehill. Important medieval secular buildings include The Priests House on High Street and St Joseph's on King Street, both with surviving timber framed sections. The 17th century has been shown by Reeve to be a period in which there was an increasing financial gap between the wealthy and peasant elements of the parish. A number of large farmhouses and townhouses date from the 17th century including Greenclose and Walford Farms and Lewens House. There are a significant number of 17th century houses along West Borough, Cook Row and West Street; all originally timber framed but refaced in the 18th century in a brick Georgian style. Furthermore, a total of 79 listed buildings within the historic town centre date from the 18th century, giving West Borough, The Square, High Street and parts of King Street and West Street, a distinctive Georgian feel.

The 19th century was a period of rapid suburban expansion, particularly to the east of the town centre where a new town grew up alongside the railway station. Brick built Victorian suburban villas characterise Rowlands Hill, St John's Hill and The Avenue. Large country houses were also established in Colehill at this time.

Wimborne has been an important regional industrial centre since the 17th century; although the surviving purpose built industrial buildings generally date from the 19th century. These include the former Town Mill brewery and industrial buildings at Walford Mill and New Borough. Unfortunately nothing now survives of Julian's Brewery or of the Railway Station and associated buildings.