

5.2 Medieval Wimborne Minster (AD1066-1540)

5.2.1 Historical Summary

Little is known of Norman Wimborne Minster; the college of secular Canons was a free chapel of the king, with a college attached and as such was immune from all episcopal jurisdictions, this means that there are no entries in diocesan registers which might give information about the college (Page 1908, 107-113). Neither is it clear whether Wimborne Minster had a Norman Castle imposed upon it. An earthwork on the bank of the River Stour (west of the Leaze, just outside the study area), is likely to be the remains of a motte and bailey castle (RCHME V 1975, 92). The mention of a castle built by the Earl of Gloucester at Wimborne in 1137 probably refers to Castle Hill in Cranborne (Penn 1980, 124).

At some point following the Norman Conquest, the manor held by the Dean and church at Wimborne Minster seems to have considerably increased in extent and during the medieval period the town was divided between two major manors; that of the Dean and that of the Lord of Kingston Lacy. The extent of the town also expanded during the medieval period. Suburbs appear to have been established in both of the major manors. Earthworks in the Leaze (Figure 11) to the south of the town have been shown through excavation to represent a planned suburb within the Dean's manor; created circa AD 1200 (Field 1973, 59). The suburb took the form of a single street running south from King Street and was lined on both sides with houses. Plots behind these houses backed onto two parallel back Lanes. An open area at the north end may have been a green or market square. The suburb continued to develop until the mid 14th century at which time it was abandoned. This suburb may

represent a speculative development by the Dean of Wimborne Minster in order to maximise his rental income. This may have encouraged a similar development in the manor of Kingston Lacy during the 13th century, resulting in the creation of The Borough to the north of the Saxon town. The borough took a similar form to that of the Leaze with a central street and two parallel back lanes. The central Street became known as West or 'straight' Borough (Figure 12) and the eastern back lane as East or 'crooked' Borough. The crooked nature of East Borough was a result of the pre-existing road north from The Square. A further suburb may have developed along West Street (Figure 13), which is recorded by 1220.

Both manors held separate markets during the medieval period. The Dean's market was first mentioned in Close Rolls dating from the early 13th century. In the second year of Henry II (1217-18) the market day was changed from Sunday to Monday. The Sunday market was still being held however, in the 4th year of Edward II (1311-12). In 1224 the sheriff of Dorset proclaimed that *the market and fair formerly held within the cemetery of Wimborne should in future be held outside under the walls, on land belonging to the dean on the same days and with the same liberties and customs as formerly*. The market may have moved to the Corn Market at this time, or even the Leaze, although by 1413-14 it was recorded that the church of Wimborne Minster held a market in the churchyard. The Lord of the Borough also held a market by 1236 when he complained that his market was being damaged by that of the Dean. It is likely that the Borough market was held in the street of West Borough. Two annual fairs were held in the town on Good Friday and in September, the profits from



Figure 11: Earthworks in The Leaze, the site of a deserted medieval suburb of Wimborne Minster.



Figure 12: View north along West Borough.

which were held by the Dean (Page 1908, 107-13; Hutchins 1874, 180; Penn 1980, 124).

The Lay Subsidy of 1332 recorded that there were 73 taxpayers in Wimborne Minster, a sizeable number in comparison to the 27 recorded for the neighbouring borough of Wareham. However, none of the taxpayers appear to have been wealthy, all paid between 8d and 3s. Names recorded in the 1327 and 1332 subsidies (le Tannere, le Whelere, le Chalynere, le Coppere, Cuterel and Le Tailler) indicate a variety of common trades were conducted within the town. The existence of a preacher, auctioneer, carpenter, spicer, skinner, school-teacher and draper are also suggested by occupational names within the text. The neighbouring tithing of Leigh contained 81 taxpayers in 1327 and 97 in 1332. It might be considered surprising that a rural tithing contained more taxpayers than a neighbouring market town, however, many of those counted for Leigh lived within the urban area in the suburb of Eastbrook. Occupational names within this area are more rural in nature and include herdsmen, mulewards, huntsmen, a cowherd and a tithingman. (Rumble 1980, 122-4; Mills 1971, 100). The abandonment of The Leaze suburb might suggest a decline in the town's fortunes during the 14th century. It has been suggested that this decline followed on from the Black Death in 1348. This pestilence certainly did have an effect on the town; two Deans died in quick succession during that year (Fletcher 1922, 8).

Nevertheless, despite this apparent decline the town continued to prosper into the late medieval period. Shops and tenements are recorded in Cook Row, one individual held nine shops and a shamble in the Borough in 1476. The town also had a guild of Shearmen, tuckers and cappers, indicating that the town had a modest cloth production industry in the 15th century (Penn 1980, 124).



Figure 13: View East along West Street from Pye Corner.

Wimborne Minster had three chapels beside the Minster Church during the medieval period. St Mary's was held by Horton Abbey and was in existence by Domesday. It was repaired in about 1500 and sold following the dissolution. It is thought to have stood in the Corn Market. St Catherine's chapel lay on the east side of the River Allen and may have served the settlement of Leigh which was a Deanery manor. St Peter's chapel stood in the Square and was in existence by 1409. It remained a chapel until 1543. A fourth chapel dedicated to St Margaret existed outside the town on the site of a leper hospital (Figure 14). It existed by 1256, possibly founded by the Lord of Kingston Lacy (Penn 1980, 124). Redcoddes Chantry was founded within St Margaret's Hospital during 1438-9, for a priest to pray for the soul of John Redcoddes (Popham 1983, 51). The 'Great Chantry' was founded in 1354 by Dean Thomas de Brembre containing four chaplains. Wimborne Minster also seems to have had a chantry school, founded in 1509 by Margaret Countess of Richmond. She endowed a perpetual chantry of one chaplain who resided continually in the college in a house set apart to teach grammar to all who came for instruction (Hutchins 1874, 191).

5.2.2 Town Layout

The medieval period saw significant changes to the layout of Wimborne Minster. Chief amongst these were the creation of two new suburbs at The Leaze and The Borough, on to the south and north sides of the town. Both seem to have been planned expansions and took the form of a central straight street lined on both sides with houses and two parallel back lanes to the rear. The Leaze suburb was abandoned during the 14th century and now survives only as earthworks. The Borough has a wide central street (West Borough) which also served as a market. The plots seem to have been divided into and held as burgages.



Figure 14: St Margaret's Chapel.

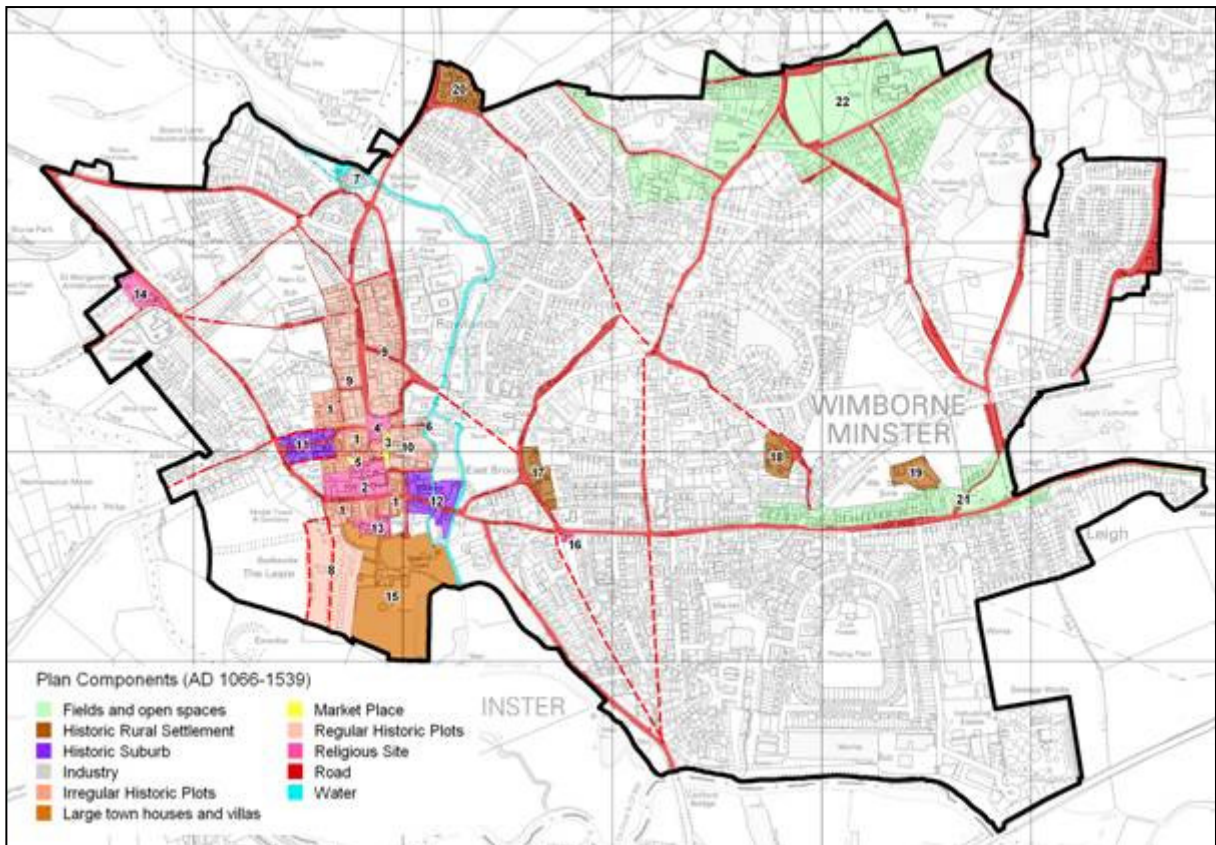


Figure 15: Medieval Plan Components

One of the back lanes (East Borough) was subsequently developed, although the other (Redcott Lane) remains a back lane. West Street is mentioned in documents dating from 1220, Cook Row in 1365, Chantry Street (Grammar School Lane) in 1410 and Mill Street in 1483 (Penn 1980, 125). The latter also implies the existence of Town Mill by the 15th century.

Settlement on the east side of the Allen Bridge is indicated by the presence of St Catherine's Chapel. A number of dispersed farmsteads existed by the 16th century at Green Close, Lewens, Walford Farm and Leigh Manor. These

may represent the site of earlier medieval dispersed settlements.

The wider road pattern is also likely to have altered during the medieval period, most notably with the major route across Canford Bridge linking Wimborne Minster with the new medieval port at Poole. Bridges were also constructed at Julian's Bridge, Allen Bridge and Walford Bridge. The latter were mentioned by Leland who crossed them on his journey from Poole to Cranborne (Hutchins 1874, 102)



Figure 16: Old Manor Farm, Leigh Common with medieval moat and original entrance in foreground.



Figure 17: Walford Farmhouse with modern housing estate behind.

5.2.3 Medieval Urban plan components

The main plan components of the medieval town are shown on Figure 15 and are listed below.

1. *Town Plots.* The old Saxon town seems to have developed during the medieval period as a series of irregular plots fitted around the medieval road pattern.

2. *The College and Minster.* The college of secular canons was founded by King Edward the Confessor as a royal free chapel. The initial endowment comprised the great tithes of Wimborne Minster, Kingston and Shapwick, although later endowments increased the annual income of the college and Minster to £71 as recorded in 1291.

3. *High Street.* Long parallel burgage plots may have been created on the east side of High Street during the medieval period (Hall 2000, 50-53). High Street was also known as Market Street and was likely to have functioned as a market place during the medieval period.

4. *St Peter's and St Mary's Chapels.* St Peter's chapel existed by 1409 and churchwardens accounts of 1530 mention elms in the churchyard. It ceased to be a chapel in 1543. The discovery of burials on the south side of The Square suggests that its churchyard extended southwards to include plots on the west side of High Street. St Mary's Chapel is recorded in Church Warden's accounts as being on Pillory Street (West Borough) on the north side of The Square. It belonged to Horton Abbey until 1122 when it came into the possession of Sherborne Abbey. It was much repaired in about 1500 and sold in the later 16th century (Penn 1980, 124).

5. *The Corn Market.* The Corn Market is thought to have been the site of the Dean's medieval markets.

6. *Town Mill.* Mill Street is first recorded in documents dating to 1483.

7. *Walford Mill.* There is a 16th century reference to a mill at *Wimburn town centre end*, thought to

refer to the mill at Walford (Popham 1983).

8. *The Leaze.* Earthworks to the south of the town were surveyed and excavated during 1961-4 and shown to be the remains of a medieval planned suburb within the Dean's manor. The earliest phase of occupation dated from circa 1200 and occupation continued into the middle of the 14th century when the site appears to have been abandoned, possibly as a result of a decline in population following the Plague (Field 1973).

9. *The Borough.* The initial success of the new suburb at the Leaze may have inspired the creation of a new borough appended to the north side of the town within the manor of Kingston Lacy. This borough took the form of regular burgage plots arranged on either side of a new central road; West Borough. East Borough and Redcotts Lane formed back lanes and the central street served as a market. The Borough seems to have been created during the early 13th century because by 1236 the Lord of the manor complained that the Dean's market was damaging his own (Penn 1980, 124).

10. *High Street Burgages.* Long parallel property boundaries visible on 19th century maps on the east side of High Street, and still partially surviving today, suggest the presence of former burgages in this area. Hall has suggested that these burgages were created later than the initial layout of the Saxon walled town because they seem to have effected a diversion of the original course of High Street (Hall 2000, 50-53). This may represent the encroachment upon High Street of commercial premises.

11. *West Street.* West Street is first mentioned in documents dating from 1220. This road also has a deviation in its route, to the south of an earlier line which had formerly linked with Old Road. It is possible that this modification to West Street occurred following the creation of a new suburb in the 13th century, fronting on to the modern West Street and utilising the old street as a back lane.

12. *Eastbrook Suburb.* No archaeological or



Figure 18: Leigh Common



Figure 19: Number 2 Corn Market, formerly the site of the George Inn

documentary evidence relating to a putative medieval suburb in the vicinity of Allen Bridge. However it is likely that one developed at this important entry route in to the town. Allen Bridge itself is certainly medieval in origin. The current structure dates from the 18th century but Leland mentioned it by name circa. East Street itself was on floodable land however. It is possible then that the Eastbrook suburb, as the name suggests, was originally located on the east side of the Allen where there was a medieval chapel dedicated to St Catherine, and only later spread along East Street.

13. *The Chantry*. The Great or Brembre's chantry was founded in 1354 by the Dean Thomas de Brembre. The foundation provided for four chaplains to celebrate divine offices in the chantry chapel. A second chantry was endowed by Margaret Countess of Richmond and Derby on her death in 1511 for the sustenance of a single chaplain whose duties included providing free education to the children of the town.

14. *St Margaret's Hospital*. The Hospital of St Margaret and St Anthony, Wimborne Minster appears to have been founded as a Leper hospital, 0.5km outside the urban area on the Blandford Road. Deeds found in a chest held within the chapel on the site suggest that it existed in the reign of King John. It was entirely dependant on donations from the townspeople for its maintenance (Page 1908, 106-7). The chapel dates from the 13th century.

15. *Deans Court*. Elements of the original medieval Dean's Hall are thought to have survived until 1868 when the central hall was rebuilt, any surviving medieval fabric must now be very fragmentary and hidden (RCHME V 1975, 86). The cellars are reported to contain architectural features from an earlier building (D Reeve, pers comm).

16. *St Catherine's Chapel*. The position of the former St Catherine's Chapel is recorded on 19th century maps and also indicated by 19th century field names in the vicinity. It is not known when it was built but it was sold in 1550-51. Penn suggests that it served the rural settlement of Leigh (Penn 1980, 124), although it is described as a hermitage in some documents (D Reeve, pers comm).

17. *Lewens*. Lewens House is said to date from 1654, although elements of a 16th century structure survive and a building is depicted on the site on maps dating to 1613 and 1624. It is possible that this represents the location of a medieval dispersed settlement, or a part of the Eastbrook suburb. Number 1 Lewens Lane retains part of an earlier cob-walled building within its structure.

18. *Green Close Farm*. Green Close Farmhouse

is a 17th century cross passage house. However, it may also represent a 17th century rebuild on the site of a medieval dispersed settlement on the edge of Leigh Common.

19. *Old Manor Farm*. Old Manor Farmhouse retains elements of the original 16th century building. The house is surrounded by a moat on three sides. The tithe map shows that the moat originally surrounded the house on four sides. There is a strong possibility that the moat dates from an earlier medieval phase of occupation on the site and that this was the site of the medieval manor of Leigh (Figure 16).

20. *Walford Farm*. A one hide manor is recorded at Walford at the time of Domesday. The southern block of Walford Farmhouse dates from the 17th century, although it is possibly on the site of the earlier medieval manor (Figure 17).

21. *Leigh Common*. Leigh is mentioned in Domesday as a one hide manor. It was held by the Dean during the medieval period. The bulk of the current extent of Leigh Common lies outside the study area to the west. However, 19th century maps and the study of plot boundaries suggests that it was originally more extensive and may have included a large area of roadside common (Figure 18) reaching as far north as the *Old Manor* and *Green Close Farm*. Further post-medieval farms front on to the common on the south side of the road at Brookside Road and Brookside Manor.

22. *Colehill*. A large part of Colehill was unenclosed heath land as late as the 17th century. The name *Colhulle* is first mentioned in documents dated 1341 and a deed dated 1584-5 mentions a *house at Collehill in the tenure of Cyrile Hardinge* and *an acre of land at Collehill in the tenure of Thomas Willis* (Sadler 1992, 24-5). This heath was enclosed in a piecemeal fashion through the establishment of cottages and country houses largely during the 19th century.