



Listening Learning Leading

Thame Conservation Area Character Appraisal

April 2006

Introduction

This conservation area character appraisal has been undertaken to assist in defining the special character of the Thame Conservation Area. An appreciation of this special character is essential in order to manage change within the conservation area. This appraisal is part of the duty placed on the local authority by the 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act to determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. The Act also states that the local planning authority should, from time to time, formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of these Conservation Areas. These are the subject of a separate management plan.

As part of this exercise a plan of the conservation area had been produced which aims to identify the elements which contribute to the character. The plan includes the conservation area boundary, listed buildings (buildings identified by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport as being of special architectural or historic interest), former Grade III listed buildings (a now obsolete category but where the buildings may still be of architectural or historic interest) and other buildings of local note. This latter group consists of buildings that play a part in establishing the character of the street scene but have not yet been considered to be of sufficient importance to meet the current criteria for listing. Recent government guidance contained in PPG.15 - *Planning and the Historic Environment* indicates, however, that there is a presumption against the demolition of such buildings. Important

trees are also identified. These are usually highly visible from public places and/or they contribute to the setting of a listed building. Important open spaces are identified, as these are a vital element in the character of an area. Character is defined not just by buildings, walls and trees, but also by the spaces between them. These contribute to the setting of buildings. They allow views around the area and they are often an important element in the historical development of a settlement.

Important unlisted walls are identified. These are usually built of local materials and help to define spaces and frame views. Lastly, important views into, out of and around the Conservation Area are identified. It should be appreciated that a Conservation Area's character does not end with a line drawn on a map. Often the character is closely associated with attractive views out to surrounding countryside, sometimes via gaps between buildings. Views within an area such as that to a church or particularly attractive group of buildings are also important.

1 Thame - Historical context

Anglo Saxon Period (400 AD - 1066)

The story of modern day Thame really begins in the Anglo Saxon period. In the four hundred years from the dawn of English Christianity to the Norman Conquest, Thame and nearly all of the towns and villages around it were established.

Thame was on the southern fringes of the Anglo Saxon kingdom of Mercia, Wulfhere, son of Penda, and related to the later King Offa, was King of Mercia in the late seventh century. He was the first of the royal line of Mercia to be converted to Christianity, and in a charter dated 675 King Wulfhere of Mercia bestowed an abbey at Chertsey whilst himself at Thame.

Historians have speculated that Thame was at this time one of a number of royal minster settlements, under Mercian overlordship. St. Mary's Church at Thame dates from after the Norman Conquest, but it is known to have been built on the site of an earlier Anglo Saxon church. This may have been the original site of the royal minster building, perhaps with a surrounding enclosure.

There is reference in the Anglo Saxon Chronicles to Thame only once. This is in the year 970 or 971 (depending on the interpretation chosen), when a man called Oskytel, Bishop of Dorchester and Archbishop of York, died whilst at Thame.

In the centuries before Domesday, the Anglo Saxons developed a system of land tenure based on the hundred and the hide. Thame appears to have been a regional administrative centre during these times.

There is speculation that Thame suffered a Danish raid in the tenth century, but there is scant evidence for this.

Along with Banbury, Cropredy, Great Milton and Dorchester itself, Thame was part of the demesne lands of the Bishop of Dorchester in the late Anglo Saxon Period.

Domesday Period (1066 - 1099)

The Domesday Book, compiled in 1086, records the manor of Thame as belonging to the Bishop of Lincoln, a man named Remigius. The entry for the manor of Thame included the settlements at Moreton, North Weston, Tetsworth, Attington and possibly Waterstock.

Before the Norman Conquest, Thame belonged to the Bishop of Dorchester, who in 1066 was a man named Wulfig, appointed by Edward the Confessor.

A Benedictine monk, Remigius from Fecamp on the coast of Normandy had provided ships and men to William the Conqueror's cause and had been promised the first available Bishopric in England in return. When Wulfwig died in 1067 Remigius duly became Bishop of Dorchester, and when in or around 1072 the seat of this huge diocese was moved from Dorchester to Lincoln, Remigius became the first ever Bishop of Lincoln, and Thame entered into a long period of being one of the demesne lands of the Bishopric of Lincoln.

12th Century Period (1100 - 1199)

Alexander de Blois, known as Alexander the Magnificent, was Bishop of Lincoln from 1123 to 1147. During this time he was lord of the manor of Thame. Originally planning to turn a

large tract of uncultivated land bordering on his manor at Thame into a deer park, in 1138 this land, known to us today as Thame Park, was given to the Cistercian monks of Otmoor by Bishop Alexander. The monks moved in, and presumably an abbey was constructed, between 1139 and 1142 becoming named as *Sancta Maria de Parco Thame*.

During the time of Bishop Alexander, Thame church became a prebend of the Cathedral of Lincoln, increasing its importance within the diocese. The establishment of a prebendal community based around the new Prebendal House followed, giving Priestend its name.

A new town was built at Thame in the twelfth century, with its characteristic burgage plots and wide market place, typical of many new towns of the time. It is thought this new town, known as New Thame, was laid out during the time of Alexander the Magnificent of Lincoln, between 1123 and 1147. The manors of Old Thame and Priestend, together with New Thame, were for several centuries administered as separate manors.

The see of Lincoln fell vacant for a period in the late twelfth century, and the manors reverted to the King, Henry II. However, Walter de Coutances, Bishop of Lincoln from 1183 to 1186, restored Thame to at least partial Episcopal control. He secured market charters for the town from Henry II and held regular Tuesday markets and a fair at Michaelmas.

13th Century Period (1200 - 1299)

Bishop Hugh de Welles, also known as Hugh Trotman, regained full possession of the manors of New Thame and Old Thame in 1213 from

King John. In 1215, the year of Magna Carta, King John granted a market charter for Thame to Bishop Hugh de Welles. This was confirmed in 1227 by Henry III (1216 - 1272).

King Henry III also granted Hugh de Welles a licence to divert the King's Highway through Thame in 1219. This is a crucial event in the development of Thame as a town. In the same year, 1219, Bishop Hugh de Welles granted timber for the construction of a Court House, near what is now Church Row, to replace an earlier administrative hall.

At Thame Park, the Cistercian monks also received favour from Henry III. In 1224 the Abbot of Thame received the right to export wool free of royal customs duty and in 1232 new choir stalls were paid for at Thame Abbey by the King

In 1235 Robert Grosseteste, the then Bishop of Lincoln, instructed a new church to be built at Thame. The new construction of St. Mary's began in 1240 destroying most of what would have almost certainly been a timber building, possibly remnants of the former Anglo Saxon church

In 1241 the chapel within the grounds of the Prebendal House was built, and in this same year Bishop Grosseteste entered into a bitter dispute with King Henry III over the prebend at Thame. This was finally resolved when John Mansel, who as Royal Chancellor and one of the most wealthy ecclesiastics of the time declined the office of the prebend offered to him by the King, allowing Bishop Grosseteste's nominee, a man called Simon of London, to take up office.

Royal inquests into the affairs of the realm, known as Hundredal Inquests and recorded for us today in well preserved manuscripts called Hundred

Rolls, reveal that the Bishops of Lincoln expanded the town of New Thame by erecting permanent shops and stalls in the middle of the market place. In 1255 the Hundred Rolls of King Henry III tell us that a certain Geoffrey Taylor and five others were paying rent to the Bishop of Lincoln for their shops in the middle of Thame market place.

Although Thame's wide high street is one of many such well preserved examples in England, it is very rare for the road still to pass either side of this thirteenth century infill as we see at Thame today.

Thame's Cistercian Abbey, which had originally been founded as a daughter house of Waverley Abbey, the first Cistercian house in Britain, itself founded its own daughter house, Rewley Abbey in Oxford in 1281.

In 1293 and 1294 there was another dispute over the prebend of Thame, this time involving a prolonged and violent occupation of Thame church by the supporters of the Pope's nominee Edward son of St. John de St. John, against the wishes of Oliver Sutton, then Bishop of Lincoln, who had appointed his nephew Thomas de Sutton, Archdeacon of Northampton. The bailiffs of Thame and Banbury, and various other men of the Bishop eventually blockaded the town, digging dykes across five roads into the town and breaking down the Crendon Bridge.

14th Century Period (1300 - 1399)

The first half of the fourteenth century saw Thame build upon the prosperity its market charter, religious houses and new town had brought in the previous century. In 1302 Bishop John d'Alderby, Bishop of Lincoln, succeeded in

persuading King Edward I to withdraw the market charter from nearby Haddenham, on competition grounds.

In 1309 the Bishop granted money to repair the Crendon Bridge, which had been broken down in 1294. In 1335 however the bridge collapsed and there was for many years thereafter a dispute over who should maintain it. In 1317, the year following two bad harvests throughout England, the road from Thame to Sydenham was enclosed within Thame Park. This extension to the park may have been to accommodate more sheep.

An early act of the new King Edward III was to confirm Thame's market charter, which he did in 1329. The fourteenth century also brought a new style of house construction to Thame, and houses built using a 'cruck' frame began to appear. Prosperous merchant families were developing in Thame.

The Elys family were wool merchants, and the wool of Robert Elys of Thame was on board a ship captured by the Admiral of Calais in 1316. In 1340 Richard Elys became one of the few local men to be appointed Vicar of Thame. In 1345 a certain Edward le Spicer, a mercer of Thame, used his money to begin constructing a causeway between Thame and Rycote, which was then still a village community.

The middle years of the 14th century saw the plague known as the Black Death introduced into England, and fully one third of the country's population is thought to have perished. Enclosure of land for sheep, together with the Black Death, may have contributed towards the eventual demise of local villages such as Rycote and Albury. Thame however, was without doubt a prosperous and growing town, and it survived the

ravages of the plague, playing host to King Edward III in 1365 and Edmund of York, Guardian of England, in 1399.

15th Century Period (1400 - 1499)

Richard Quartermain was a significant fifteenth century benefactor of Thame. His family had held the manor of North Weston since the twelfth century. North Weston was not mentioned in the Domesday Book, being a part of the manor of Thame, but it later became a 'subinfeudated' manor of Old Thame. That is to say, a subsidiary manor whose lord was vested with feudal rights such as the ability to hold manorial courts.

The Domesday manor of Rycote had passed by marriage to the steward of Richard II's household, Nicholas Englefield, in the fourteenth century. In 1415 Nicholas Englefield died and the manor of Rycote passed to Richard Quartermain of North Weston through his marriage to Richard Englefield's daughter Sybil.

Richard had been trained in the Customs in London, and was throughout his life a patron of trade and commerce and a benefactor of the poor and needy. At Thame he endowed the original Alms House near the Church, and created the Chantry or Guild of St. Christopher. The south transept of St. Mary's Church became known as St. Christopher's Chapel.

At Rycote, close to his own manor house, Richard Quartermain built a chapel and chantry, consecrated in 1449. Richard Quartermain died childless and left the bulk of his estate to his protégé Richard Fowler, who had risen to become Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and lived at North Weston manor house whilst the Quartermains lived at Rycote manor

house. North Weston manor house was known as Hall Place and little or nothing of it remains today. Richard and Sybil Quartermain are buried in Thame Church, where their tomb is decorated with fine brasses depicting them and, it is thought, Richard Fowler.

In 1419 another 'subinfeudated' manor is first recorded at Thame. Baldington manor was named after the Baldington family. The manor had lands in Old Thame, Moreton and North Weston and property in New Thame. Richard Quartermain was only one of two exceptionally wealthy fifteenth century merchants within the parish of Thame, the other was Geoffrey Dormer. The Dormer family had long been resident in Thame and Geoffrey Dormer became a merchant of the staple of Calais. In 1473 this wealthy wool merchant is said to have bought the Baldington Manor House, also known as Place House, which was situated off what is now North St., Thame.

The Dormers were noted for their acquisition of land throughout the manors of Thame, and had a reputation for enclosing land much to the inconvenience of other tenants. Geoffrey Dormer, for instance, was presented in 1481 for enclosing land at Moreton. The manor of Baldington was passed on by Geoffrey Dormer to his son, also Geoffrey Dormer, in 1498.

Early 16th Century Period (1500 - 1530)

In the first year of the reign of King Henry VIII, there is the first mention of the market hall or 'moot' hall at Thame. Prior to this market hall, which stood more or less where Thame Town Hall stands today, it is thought that the building used for conducting market business and for confining transgressors was the oldest part of

the building which is today the Birdcage pub.

In 1514 Thomas Wolsey, King Henry's Lord Chancellor, began building Hampton Court Palace. It is thought that Rycote Palace, a building of similar style and proportions, was built around 1520-25, on the site of Richard Quartermain's former manor house at Rycote Park.

It is not known for certain who built Rycote Palace and when, the accepted date of its construction coming from comparison with such building styles as those seen at Hampton Court. Richard Fowler the younger with a reputation as a spendthrift sold the Rycote estate to Sir John Heron, treasurer of the royal household, in 1521, after plunging it into ruin. The construction of the Tudor palace at Rycote was either the cause of Richard Fowler's ruin, or the work of the King's treasurer, Sir John Heron.

At Thame Park, the Cistercian Abbey was only a few decades away from final dissolution. The behaviour of the monks and the Abbot were giving cause for concern. In 1525 the Bishop of Lincoln, John Longlands, who was also confessor to King Henry VIII, wrote to the person responsible for order at Thame Abbey, the Abbot at Waverley, complaining about the state of affairs at the Abbey. The buildings were reported to be in ruin, although the Abbot of Thame Abbey, John Warren, was said to be furnishing himself with a grand lodging. The monks were said to hold great feasts at the local taverns, although the Abbey was in debt, owing money to the Vicar of Thame among others.

At John Warren's death in 1529 Bishop Longlands advised Cardinal Wolsey that none of the local monks should be

made Abbot and instead Robert King, whose brother William was a brother-in-law to Sir John Williams, was appointed as the last Abbot of Thame.

The following year, 1530, King Henry VIII is said to have visited Thame and been entertained at the Red Lion Inn with both his first wife Catherine of Aragon and his next wife, then a lady in waiting, Anne Boleyn.

The Reformation Period (1531 - 1559)

The Reformation of the English Church and Dissolution of the Monasteries were to have a profound effect on Thame Church and Thame Park. In 1537 John Stribblehill and his father Thomas, two leading church wardens and supporters of King Henry VIII's policy towards the Church, made a complaint to their fellow churchwardens about the remarks of one Robert Johns. Johns had been heard to suggest that the parish jewels be sold in order to repair the church, which was in a state of decay, before Henry confiscated them. Thame Abbey was dissolved in 1539, along with all other monastic foundations in England. The lands belonging to the Abbey were shortly afterwards given to Sir John Williams. The choir stalls and linenfold panelling, perhaps those provided by King Henry III in the thirteenth century, were removed to Thame Church in 1540.

In 1539, Sir John Williams also acquired Rycote Palace from Sir Giles Heron, the son of Sir John Heron who had bought it in 1521. King Henry VIII spent part of his honeymoon with his fifth wife, Catherine Howard, at Rycote Palace in 1540.

In 1541 Robert King, brother-in-law to Sir John Williams and last Abbot of

Thame Park, for whom Sir John Williams had secured the position of Abbot of Osney in 1537, became Bishop of Thame and Osney. In 1545 he was appointed first Bishop of Oxford, initially based at Osney, and the see of Thame and Osney lapsed.

In 1543 a clock is first recorded in Thame market hall, when the churchwardens paid 5 shillings to repair it. Thame's ancient wooden market cross was reportedly taken down in 1553.

Henry VIII died in 1547 and it was during the reign of his infant son, Edward VI (1547-1553), that the manor and prebend of Thame were relinquished by the Bishop of Lincoln, Henry Holbeach, and given to the King. The manor of Thame was passed on to Sir John Williams and the prebend to Sir John Thynne. Sir John Williams was seemingly an unpopular landlord, and in 1549 the people rose up and killed the deer in Rycote Park and Thame Park. In the same year two men were ordered to 'suffer at Thame' for their part in a revolt in Oxfordshire against the religious changes made by Henry VIII.

Sir John Williams was instrumental in facilitating the accession to the throne of Queen Mary, and was rewarded with a Baronetcy, becoming Baron Williams of Thame. He was also President of the Council of the Marches of Wales, being of Welsh origin himself, and it was whilst at Ludlow Castle in 1559 that Baron Williams of Thame died. John Williams' body was brought back to Thame and today lies in St. Mary's Church.

The Elizabethan Period (1560 - 1603)

The will of Lord Williams, former lord of the manor of Thame, contained several endowments to the benefit of the town, the most notable of these being the establishment of Thame Grammar School and the endowment of Thame's Alms Houses.

Lord Williams' elder daughter Marjorie inherited the manor of Thame and also her father's former home at Rycote Palace. She married Henry Norreys in 1546, whose father had been executed in 1536 as a suspected lover of Anne Boleyn, mother of Queen Elizabeth I. The Queen is believed to have sympathised with Henry Norreys over the wrongful execution of his father. She made him her ambassador to France. Marjorie Norreys initiated the building of Thame Grammar School in 1569 and it opened in the following year, 1570. Both the new Grammar School and the Alms Houses passed into the care of the warden of New College Oxford in 1575. There was a long and close friendship between Queen Elizabeth I and Henry and Marjorie Norreys. Elizabeth paid affectionate visits to Rycote Palace for over a quarter of a century whilst she was Queen of England. She had also spent much time there during her childhood. Henry Norreys, then Baron Norreys of Rycote, died in 1601, two years before his beloved Queen Elizabeth herself.

John Williams' younger daughter Isobel inherited Thame Park from her father. She had married Sir Richard Wenman, a wealthy wool merchant from Witney, who died in 1572. In 1596, the grandson of Sir Richard Wenman, also called Richard, and resident at Thame Park, received a knighthood whilst serving at Cadiz.

The Early Stuart Period (1604 - 1641)

Although Sir Richard Wenman of Thame Park was suspected of complicity in the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, nothing seems to have been proven as he became the first Viscount Wenman in 1628.

King James enforced a penalty for not attending Church, as an attempt to quell Roman Catholic opposition, and at Thame several Roman Catholics were fined for not attending St. Mary's Church in the years following the Gunpowder Plot. The Vicar of Thame at the start of the 17th century was John Trinder, who began keeping parish records, most of which have survived to this day.

Thomas Hennant, related by marriage to the family of Oliver Cromwell and John Hampden, who were themselves cousins, was appointed Vicar of Thame from 1631. The Grammar School at Thame was at this time prospering, educating amongst others the young John Hampden. Its Head Master from 1631 to 1647 was William Burt, who was also related by marriage to the Cromwells and Hampdens. With both the Vicar and Grammar School Principal possessing strong Puritan beliefs, we can perhaps conclude where the loyalties of the churchwardens lay, and they granted Thomas Hennant a house in Thame churchyard.

The grandson of Sir Henry Norreys had inherited Rycote, but he committed suicide in 1623. His daughter Elizabeth married Edward Wray, Groom of the Bedchamber to King James I, in 1622. In 1625 King Charles I moving his court to Oxford, to avoid plague in London, and broke his journey at Rycote Palace, to be entertained by

the Wrays. Although lords of the manor of Thame, the Wray's leased the manor house and lands of Old Thame to Vincent Barry, possibly in 1626.

The Civil War Period (1642 - 1646)

During the early years of the English Civil War between Parliament and Charles I, the land east of the Chiltern Hills, towards London, and to the north of the Vale of Aylesbury, was controlled by Parliament. The land to the west of Oxford, Oxford City itself and key towns in the Thames Valley, such as Wallingford, were controlled by the King. The King himself set up court at Oxford. Manor houses and market towns along the Oxfordshire border, such as Thame, were called upon to feed, house and tend the wounds of soldiers from both sides as the conflict progressed. In 1643 Thame was not openly Royalist or Parliamentarian, although the sentiment within the town was said to be generally Puritan and pro Parliament.

The Earl of Essex, commanding the Parliamentary army locally made a push in early 1643 to close in on Oxford, and set up his headquarters in Thame. This was to have a devastating effect on Thame. In the summer of 1643 an outbreak of what is thought to have been typhus hit Thame, and 141 people out of an estimated population of 1300 died in a single ten week period.

Prince Rupert mounted raids out of Oxford against the Parliamentarian army's positions. It was in returning to Oxford from one such raid that the Royalist party engaged at Chalgrove with a Parliamentarian contingent led by John Hampden. In the resulting battle John Hampden was mortally wounded. He managed to make his way to Thame, where six days later he

died, on 24th June 1643. The following month the Parliamentary army retreated from Thame and the Earl of Essex moved his headquarters to Aylesbury. Anthony Wood was a scholar at Thame Grammar School and was lodging at Thame vicarage during the conflict. His diaries give a good account of a Royalist party fleeing back to Wallingford from Long Crendon, through the west end of Thame, in January 1644.

There was a further skirmish at Thame in April 1645, and by September 1645 a substantial Parliamentary force was once again garrisoned at Thame. One Sunday morning a Royalist force from Oxford rode into Thame market place and attacked them. In December 1645 two regiments of horses from Sir Thomas Fairfax's army at High Wycombe were moved to Thame, and that was an end to Royalist attacks.

When the Royalist garrison at Oxford under Sir Thomas Glemham surrendered to Fairfax in June 1646 they were allowed to march out of Oxford with a Regiment on foot of some 3000 men, fully armed and with their colours flying. King Charles had ordered them to disband, and when they reached Thame they disbanded and were allowed to return home or to leave the country.

The surrender of Oxford and the dignified dispersal of Glemham's troops at Thame marked the end of what is known as the first English Civil War.

The Late 17th Century Period (1647 - 1699)

The Parliamentary army had been headquartered in Thame during the Civil War. As well as the human cost, with a plague in 1643, there was also much physical damage done to the

buildings taken over by the soldiers, including the Grammar School, the Vicarage and St. Mary's Church. The churchwardens of Thame were left to repair their community.

The prebend of Thame, which in normal times benefited from the church dues, had passed into the hands of the family of Sir John Thynne at the Reformation, over a century before. Thomas, first Viscount Weymouth, was descended from Sir Thomas Thynne and it was to him that the churchwardens turned. The Thynne family had long since abandoned the Prebendal House in Thame. In 1661 it stood in ruins.

The market at Thame had continued to operate throughout the Civil War, but the local economy suffered several side effects of the conflict. One problem was a shortage of coinage. The town traders at Thame issued tokens to be used in place of coins between 1653 and 1659.

Upon the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Charles II imposed a number of 'briefs' on Thame, so that there had to be collections at the church for specified charities. These were not popular with the struggling Thame churchwardens. Firstly, in 1660 he created the Order of the Royal Oak, one purpose of which was to raise money from rich landowners in return for membership. Local landowners who offered to contribute up to £2000 included Sir John Clerke of North Weston and Sir Francis Wenman later of Thame Park.

Then, in 1662 the King introduced a Hearth Tax, under which anyone who owned property was taxed according to the number of hearths, effectively rooms, in their house. This tax lasted until 1689, and the Hearth Tax Returns for Thame have survived.

At Thame Park the second Viscount

Wenman died in 1664, in a poor state of finances. He had suffered at the hands of the Cavaliers during the Civil War, having supported Parliament. His daughter Mary married her cousin Sir Francis Wenman in 1671 and thereby kept Thame Park in the Wenman family.

Bridget, daughter of Edward and Elizabeth Wray, had married Montagu Bertie, second Earl of Lindsey, and it was their son James Bertie who was created Earl of Abingdon by Charles II in 1682, and who inherited the manor of Thame, part of it leased to the Barry family. Perhaps to mark his new position as Earl of Abingdon, James Bertie built a new market hall for Thame in 1684.

The countryside around Thame had seen both Royalist and Parliamentary raiding parties during the war. Fifty years later the problem was 'freebooters', or highwaymen. In 1692 a party of fifteen butchers travelling to Thame market was ambushed outside Thame.

The Early 18th Century Period (1700 - 1759)

In the early years of the eighteenth century, particularly after the succession of George I, there was the whiff of rebellion in the air in both England and Scotland. There were several ill-fated Jacobite uprisings and consequent arrest and prosecution of suspected Jacobite sympathizers. Oxford was known as something of a centre of Jacobite sympathies, and evidently there were some in Thame. In 1714 a certain John Dorrell of Thame was hanged as a Jacobite rebel.

The 1720's were the hey-day of one of Thame's famous sons, James Figg the illustrious boxer, champion of England.

In the religious sphere, Nonconformists

were beginning to organize in Thame. In 1728 the first Presbyterian meeting house opened in the yard of the Sun Inn, in Thame High St. The minister was Rev Matthew Leeson. The Rev Matthew Leeson took as a pupil a young John Wilkes in 1739. Wilkes was to become a hugely important figure in the political life of eighteenth century Britain. Leeson and Wilkes subsequently moved from Thame to Aylesbury.

The year 1745 was a year of tragedy for Thame's lord of the manor and his family. The heir to the title of Earl of Abingdon was killed in a fire at Rycote Palace, a fire that destroyed the grand Tudor Palace patronized by King Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I.

The same year, 1745, saw happier times for the Wenman family at Thame Park. The 6th Viscount Wenman added a grand Palladian frontage to Thame Park House and so created the classic picture of an English country house we see today. Thame High St. displays to this day something of the grandeur of Georgian times, with several three storey frontages built onto earlier buildings.

The Parliamentary seat of Oxfordshire had been held uncontested by the Tory Party for many years, often with a member of the Wenman family being sent to Westminster. In 1754 the ruling Whig Party (the forerunner of the Liberal Party) contested the seat. Women had no vote, and nor did most of the men of Thame. Only 83 men, those holding property by freehold, had the vote. The votes for the town were declared and they were 71 for the Tory candidates and 12 for the Whig (Liberal) candidates, thereby helping to maintain the status quo in Oxfordshire.

The George III Period (1760 - 1820)

Turnpike trusts and the building of high quality toll roads proliferated throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century. Comfortable and safe travel by stagecoach from Oxford to London via Thame, and from Thame to many other places now became a reality. The Aylesbury to Shillingford turnpike opened in 1770. This road runs from Thame via Milton Common to Stadhampton and on to Shillingford.

The hunting of foxes with hounds in organised hunts in the Thame area began in the same year. The fourth Earl of Abingdon, Willoughby Bertie, who inherited the title in 1760, stabled not only horses but also hunting dogs at Rycote House, which he was renovating after the fire of 1745. The land between Thame and Tetsworth became the hunting ground for the Earl of Abingdon's hunt.

At Rycote Park Willoughby Bertie employed the renowned landscape gardener, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown to transform the gardens, paying him £2,500 in 1778. Willoughby Bertie, the fourth Earl of Abingdon, was a political radical, as well as huntsman, horse breeder and renovator of Rycote House. Rycote House had been refurbished since the fire, but in 1779 the entire contents of the house, such as paintings etc., were sold off.

Willoughby Bertie died in 1799, and the fifth Earl, Montagu Bertie, took the drastic step of dismantling Rycote House altogether. In 1807 the actual fabric of the building was sold off, such that today only the stables remain, converted into a house.

In the eighteenth century, providing relief for the poor was the responsibility of each parish. Parishes were allowed by law to house the poor in

workhouses, so as to defray the costs of their keep by the fruits of their labour. In 1763-4 the churchwardens of Thame, effectively the parish council, advertised for a suitable person to run a local workhouse. In 1790 a building used in the Middle Ages as a 'bridewell' or local prison in Wellington St., then called Pound Lane, was converted into such a workhouse. This venture apparently failed and the building has since burnt down.

Without the workhouse, the people of Thame had to support the poor through the Poor Rate. In 1811 the sum required was £3,686, a crippling burden for the town and its farming community.

Fleeing persecution in France, 18 Catholic clergy arrived in England and found their way via Reading to Thame. They were accommodated in Thame in 1792, in the mansion that stood in the High St. In 1806 the town accommodated more Frenchmen, this time Napoleonic prisoners awaiting repatriation after the end of the war with France.

The Early 19th Century Period (1821 - 1850)

Land enclosure and rural poverty were two great themes of early nineteenth century Thame life. Thame's open fields were enclosed in 1826, with the town's Enclosure Award. Enclosure brought new hedges to the landscape, and turned many smallholders into agricultural workers paid a wage.

There was already great poverty in rural communities and enclosure was often met with resistance from the local agricultural population. Otmoor saw resistance to enclosure in 1829-32 and in 1830-31 there was a rural revolt across southern England, known as

the 'Captain Swing' uprising. Machinery was smashed at Long Crendon, but Thame seems to have avoided trouble.

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 divided the country into Poor Law Unions, also known as Registration Districts, and each district was to have a workhouse. Poor relief became a national matter and no longer a local obligation. The Thame Poor Law Union comprised 35 local parishes and a substantial workhouse was built at Thame in 1836.

Another great theme of Thame life at this time was the growing influence of the Nonconformist population. In 1827 a Congregationalist Chapel opened at 14 High St., now the site of the Masonic Hall. A Primitive Methodist chapel began at Moreton in 1830.

The Nonconformist influenced 'British and Foreign Schools Society' opened a Royal British School in Park St., Thame in 1836, now the John Hampden County Primary School.

Following a local meeting, the 'National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Church of England' opened a National School on land donated by the Earl of Abingdon in the Hog Fair, just off the Lower High St., also in 1836.

East St. was built in the early 1830's. It was then called New Road, and was linked to a new turnpike road from Thame to Princes Risborough. Several new houses were built along East St. and Park St., one seemingly by a family of Quakers in 1833.

Thame broke onto the national stage in 1840. The first letter sent with a Penny Black stamp was sent in 1840 to a certain George Waterman in Thame.

Mr John Stone, a wealthy local man, purchased and began to renovate the

Prebendal House in 1835, as it had been in a state of disrepair for some time.

The Poor Law Unions or Registration Districts were the basis for the nineteenth century population censuses. The first detailed census was in 1841. The 1841 census returns for Thame give us a view of Thame's population make-up following the upheavals of enclosure, dire local poverty and the beginnings of new building in the eastern part of the town.

In 1844 Montagu Bertie, 5th Earl of Abingdon, offered his lands in Thame for sale. He succeeded in selling Priestend, but not Old Thame, New Thame and North Weston, which remained in the Bertie family.

The Mid 19th Century Period (1851 - 1870)

The years between 1851 and around 1865 are known by historians as a Golden Age of High Farming in England. This was also a time when Britain was known as 'The Workshop of the World'. Rural towns like Thame supplied food to a growing industrial population. In turn, local agriculture and town life in general began to benefit from increased mechanisation and innovation.

Gaslight, an evocative symbol of the Victorian age, began to illuminate Thame's streets at night from around 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, with the opening of Thame Gas Works (now demolished). By compulsory Act of Parliament, Thame acquired its own County Police Station in 1854 and its own County Court in 1861. Thame Agricultural Society began in 1855, organising an annual ploughing match. This developed to become the Thame Show. To report on these and other

events, the Thame Gazette started in 1856.

A number of local trade directories date from this period, giving us a view of the trades being carried out in Thame. Combined with the population census returns for 1851 and 1861, these directories provide an insight into prosperous mid-nineteenth century town life at Thame. The crowning glory of these years of progress and prosperity was without doubt the coming of the railway to Thame in 1858, and its extension to Oxford in 1864.

The Late Victorian Period (1871 - 1901)

Despite the town's many new advantages, there were still open ditches to carry away waste from the High St., including from the town centre slaughter houses. A local Board of Health was formed in 1871 to address the sanitary conditions within the town. The first priority was the drainage and sewerage situation.

There had been several attempts to run a local fire service, but it was not until 1878 that Thame acquired a permanent fire station with its own fire engines. Thame's Fire Engine House opened in Park St. in 1878.

New building during this period included the current Lord Williams Grammar School on the Oxford Road built in 1879 to replace the original Grammar School in Church Row. During the 1880's many new terraced houses were built along Chinnor Road, Park St. and East St. The Market Hall in the middle of Thame High St. dated from 1684, and although it had been adorned with an external spiral staircase, was not considered fit for the purpose. In 1887 the old Market Hall

was pulled down and the present Town Hall built, on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. The town roads were greatly improved in 1894 and in 1897 the Victoria Cottage Hospital was opened in East St., on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

This brief history has been edited by Allan Hickman from information contained on the website www.thamehistory.net constructed by Phil Williams of Thame Historical Society Research Group.

2 The Established Character

Introduction

The previous section explains how the historic centre of Thame, covered by the conservation area, has developed over many centuries. Evidence of this is to be seen everywhere in both the fine collection of historic buildings and the layout of streets, buildings, private gardens and public open areas. This history of development has also invested the town with areas of subtly differing character. The following consideration of the established character of the conservation area will look at these areas in turn, partly to render the descriptions of the conservation area into manageable portions but also to respect the different characters to be found within it and establish the attributes of each. Chief among these areas are those around the Prebendal and St. Mary's Church and on the High St. The former is based on the earliest settlement at Thame and the latter is essentially a product of the 13th century planned town. The High St. itself has been subdivided for this study as there are other, subtle changes in character between the formally planned central area and the more organically developed area between the High St. proper and the church. Two of the principal approaches to the town (Oxford Road and Aylesbury Road/North St.) owe much of their character to historic 'ribbon' development into countryside and the inclusion of buildings and spaces formerly in a rural location. They are therefore considered separately as are the predominantly 19th century areas such as Park St. and East St.

Oxford Road

At the western boundary of the conservation area is Town Farm, once situated beyond the edge of the town. This side of the town still has a green and fairly rural feel, mainly due to the valley of the Cuttle Brook, which provides an important open space and views into fields on either side of Oxford Road. To the north west can be seen the Thame valley, whilst on the south east the meadows stretch off to the east around the back of Southern Road, the historic southern boundary of the medieval town. Although there is a good deal of modern building along the road between the brook and Town Farm much of it consists of bungalows set back from the road behind their gardens which limits the impact on the south-eastern side. Town Farmhouse is an early 17th century building with an earlier core and a timber-framed cross-wing at the rear. It faces the road and is an important building in the street scene on the approach to Thame. Behind the house the former farmyard contains two 18th century barns, both clad in weatherboarding, which make an attractive group with the house. Whilst the contribution to the landscape made by the historic Town Farm complex is an important one it has been adversely affected by the modern housing development adjacent to it. A little closer to the town are a pair of buildings that also make a contribution to the scene, Waterloo Cottage and Jemmetts Cottage. The former is built of cob, known locally as wychert (which means 'white mud'); and the latter features some attractive old stonework in the gable end facing the road and mature yew trees in the front garden. The road climbs a low hill as it approaches the edge of the town. Stone walls line the south-eastern side

and the tower of St. Mary's church draws the eye to the brow of the hill. The thatched roof of 2 Priestend is both an attractive feature and a visual reminder of the once rural nature of this part of the conservation area. Opposite 2 Priestend is Rycotewood College, the former Thame Union workhouse. The lodges are distinctive but relatively modest and the main building is contained wholly within its own grounds. This, together with some attractive trees helps the college contribute to, rather than dominant, the street scene. In this sense it is interesting to compare the college with the adjacent office building (Oxford House), also a large institutional building on the edge of the historic town. Even though the building is set back from the roadside (and so does not wholly impose itself on views of the distant church) it is a visually intrusive modern presence which an attractive tile roof and less successful stone boundary wall do little to enliven.

and 56 High St.) which display the principal traditional building materials found in the town: stone, brick, thatch, tile and timber framing (see Fig. 1). The buildings stand quite close together where the road narrows as it turns into Lower High St. making an almost gateway-like feeling around the western entrance to the town centre. This is both an appropriate entrance to the town and one that serves to emphasise the broad character of the High St. by contrasting with it.



Fig. 1. Stribblehills

At the junction of Oxford Road with Priestend and the western end of the Lower High St. are a fine group of buildings (the Old Crown, Stribblehills



Fig. 2. The approach to St. Mary's Church

St. Mary's Church and The Prebendal

The area around St. Mary's Church is the ancient heart of the town. Priestend is a broad open road with the churchyard and allotments to one side and the walls of the Prebendal, with mature trees behind on the other. Although an open area this space feels remarkably isolated from the town, almost like a village in its own right. This is emphasised by the open space separating it from the town on all but the High St. side. The two key components to this area are the church and the Prebendal but it is the spaces between these two, as much as the buildings themselves, which give Priestend its character. The Prebendal's grounds and St. Mary's

face each other across the road and churchyard. Trees and walls in local stone frame the scene and the Prebendal's 1930s gatehouse built in stone blends into the established scene. When entering Priestend low walls contribute to the open feel and the trees are important in giving the space a definite, but soft boundary. The allotments beside the churchyard not only complement the open green space character of the churchyard but also represent a visual reminder of the traditional use of plots behind this part of the High St. as smallholdings (see Fig. 3). Looking back out of Priestend the multiple extensions behind 56 High St. present a rhythm of descending rooflines whilst the Old Crown terminates the view with an attractive jumble of roofs and walls in contrasting materials.



Fig. 3. Allotments on Priestend

The churchyard is a very important open space. Avenues of pollarded limes planted for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee cross the churchyard on its north, south and east sides, dividing it into a series of smaller spaces, especially in summer when the trees' dense foliage forms a solid mass. In this way the churchyard maintains an open aspect. The church

is the obvious dominant feature in the churchyard and there are intriguing views of it through the lime avenues as well as a fuller view from the western edge of the churchyard. The earliest parts of the present building are early 13th century in date, the tower, nave and transepts being of this period. The church was substantially altered in the 14th century and the aisles, south porch, the clerestory windows in the nave and the upper part of the tower all date from then. The magnificent windows of the transepts were installed around 1442 when the transepts were remodelled and extended. The churchyard has been extended to the south and the headstones and monuments reflect this. The earliest headstones, characterised by their random distribution (including one of 1630 and another of 1668) are near the church and along the main paths. Further into the churchyard extension the memorials are more uniform and regularly placed and on the south side of the church there are mostly simple headstones in rows. This makes for a very open feeling in the area between the lime avenue and Church Farm. In this space sits the 'Sexton's Hut', a former dovecote originally belonging to the neighbouring Church Farm (see Fig. 4). It is far enough away from the church to be a prominent feature in its own right, especially when seen from the east.



Fig. 4. Former dovecote in St Mary's Churchyard

Although Priestend narrows as it turns into the old Long Crendon Road the grass verges on either side maintain an open feel until the tall trees in the Prebendal's grounds and the front of the Old Vicarage frame a view out into the low flood plain of the River Thame. This is an important view into and out of the conservation area. Looking across the river the willows and rough pasture are crucial to the setting of the conservation area and unspoiled by the distant main road. Looking back from Thame Bridge in the midst of the meadows, the Old Vicarage and the tower of St. Mary's are prominently displayed amongst the trees. Although a defining part of this scene, the Prebendal is hidden within its grounds, mainly contributing to the wider scene by maintaining an open green space which balances that around the church. The Old Vicarage is an attractive house of 1842 with several mature specimen trees in its gardens, which are bounded by important stone walls on the town side.

pitch on its raised mound. The view eastwards from the church is of Aylesbury Road, where, in the distance the thatched roofs of Gable Cottage and Godbegot make an attractive group with Regency Cottage. To the south is the rear of properties on the lower part of High St. In essence these rear elevations contribute well to the scene, presenting a generally attractive jumble of roof forms and materials rising behind hedges and trees. The bulk of the Waitrose building in the distance detracts from this. The eastern edge of the churchyard is bounded by a stone retaining wall with purplish triangular coping bricks and a stone-on-edge path, which leads out onto the cricket pitch through a wrought iron kissing gate.

Running between the stone walls of the Old Vicarage and St. Mary's churchyard is a footpath that links Priestend with Aylesbury Road. At the church end there are broad grass verges beside the path and the view towards the Aylesbury Road end is partly closed by a 5-bar gate and the overhanging branches of trees in the Old Vicarage's garden, all of which produces a scene quite rural in character that contributes to the area's village feel. The footpath leads to the drive of Lashlake House and Jasmine Cottage, a pair of fine 18th century houses that form an attractive backdrop to the north side of the cricket pitch. Brick garden walls flank these houses and the pavement in front has stone kerbs. The northern edge of the cricket pitch is bordered by a 19th century wrought iron estate fence instead of a wall, giving the drive to the houses a very open aspect and visually bringing the houses almost onto the cricket pitch. This helps impart the feel of a village green to the area.

Fig. 5. View across cricket pitch



On the eastern side of the church and Prebendal area is Church Meadow. This separates the town from the church, seen to good advantage across the broad, open expanse of the cricket

The entrance to the drive on Aylesbury Road is screened with trees giving a secluded and rural look.

Aylesbury Road

Aylesbury Road runs from the roundabout at the western end of North St. northwards out of the conservation area. It is a very important component of the conservation area as a whole because it is a major historic route into the town, established when the Bishop of Lincoln diverted the road from Old Thame to run through his newly established market place. The road curves along the edge of the cricket pitch, expressing the ancient boundary of the Saxon enclosure around the church.

Coming into the town from the north and approaching the cricket pitch, the northern end of the conservation area in Aylesbury Road still has a strong sense of the former rural fringe of the town. The road is flanked by brick walls on both sides giving a narrow and enclosed feel but with views into and out of the conservation area. At this point the works of H&C Pearce are a major feature. This woolstapler and rural supplies company is an important part of this corner of the conservation area and their yard contains a mixture of late 19th and early 20th century buildings that are built of a uniform red brick and share a plain, industrial character. Whilst views out of the conservation area along Aylesbury Road are of an uninspiring mixture of modern housing (with the exception of no. 41), street lamps and road signs, the edge of the area is marked by an attractive group of houses: Ash Tree Cottage, (a 17th century timber-framed house extended in the 18th century), its neighbour no. 21 and the adjoining building in Pearce's yard. Opposite the

latter is a pair of well-preserved Victorian semi-detached houses (nos. 42 and 44). All these buildings are set back behind walls, opening the view slightly on the way out of town. Looking back in towards Thame the walls of Pearce's yard and no. 40 close the view as the road curves and trees on the edge of the cricket pitch partly obscure the view.

Beside 32 Aylesbury Road ('Dolphins') is a path leading to an area of open ground. This forms a gap between the housing on Yeates Close and the neighbouring modern development on Brookside. More importantly for the setting of the conservation area, it is a remaining piece of open ground on what was once the rural fringe of the town. The entrance from Aylesbury Road is a wide grass track closed by a five-bar gate and flanked by trees giving the impression of a field entrance. This small feature, along with the trees around it, makes a significant contribution to the setting of the conservation area.

A good deal of the eastern side of Aylesbury Road as it approaches the town centre is dominated by modern housing of non-traditional form. Further up the road to the south a series of bungalows (nos. 2-10), the Waitrose building and the police station dominate the scene. Although small, the bungalows stand out because of their non-traditional materials and form. Despite efforts to lessen the impact of the Waitrose building by cladding it in red brick and tile the sheer scale of the structure overwhelms its setting and sadly dominates the view into town. The roundabout with its hard landscaping and plethora of signs and lights also detracts from the appearance of this part of the conservation area.

High St.: Lower (Western) Area

Historically the lower part of High St. was the original settlement of Old Thame prior to the addition of the planned extension of 12th century to the west. The variety of size and shape of building plots contrasts sharply with the uniformity of the long narrow burgage plots of New Thame. Its historic character is compromised in places by some inappropriate modern development.

Looking out of town the view is closed by Striblehills, a 17th century house of medieval origins much remodelled in the 1840s. Looking into Thame from this point the High St. slowly opens out with the Victorian Town Hall visible in the distance. The dominant historic character of the lower part of High St. is of two storey houses, singly or in small groups, built right onto the pavement with no front gardens, although there are several notable historic exceptions to this. This is much more prevalent at the western end where the road is narrow. A number of early buildings follow this pattern, including the Six Bells and The Cruke, but this form of building directly onto the pavement was respected late into the 19th century, as seen in properties such as no. 59 which dates from this period. The prevalence of this form at the western end of the High St. makes the incursion of modern buildings that go against this grain all the more noticeable.

The lower part of High St. contains a fine collection of historic buildings, diverse in form and type. Several thatch and timber framed buildings can be seen including no. 69, The Six Bells, The Old Trout and The Cruke, whilst the street frontage of no. 78 (The Brewer's House) is distinguished by the fine chequered brickwork (see Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. The Cruke, High Street

Although most buildings are two storeys high there are several of one-and-a-half and three storeys, making the roofscape more varied and interesting. No. 69 has a jettied gable to the street, breaking with the overall pattern of building, and there are several spaces between the buildings. This gives a character quite distinct from the parade of contiguous facades seen on the main part of High St. in the medieval planned town and also allows views of some interesting features on the side elevations of buildings. The 16th century cruck frame of The Cruke is revealed in its small garden. The spectacular chimneys of The Old Trout are also prominent. More variation comes from the fine entrance gates to the Old Grammar School through which the relocated Victorian bandstand can be seen. No. 79, a well-preserved Victorian house, is set back from the street behind a low wall. Also Victorian are the former Magistrates' Court (see Fig. 7) which has its own space defined by a small frontage and a pair of flanking driveways which lead to no. 78a and the Old Maltings. These buildings illustrate how the more gradual and less formally planned development of the lower part of High St. has resulted in building behind the street. The 19th century Old Maltings

retains a good degree of its character despite conversion to residential use and the forecourt to the houses makes a quiet space off the main road.



Fig. 7. The former Magistrates Court

The garden plots behind the lower part of High St. have been much affected by modern development. Several of the older buildings have land to the rear reminiscent of the burgage plots seen in the town centre (for example no. 50, a small late 17th century house squeezed into a narrow plot). Others had larger pieces of ground to go with the larger street frontages, like The Old Trout (itself the product of several phases of 16th and 17th century building). In many cases, however, these grounds have long been taken by other properties, including the large Victorian house, Elm Trees.

Towards the western end of Lower High St. is the entrance to Church Road. In the same way that Priestend connects the Prebendal area to High St. so Church Road provides a link to St. Mary's Church. This street contains a remarkable variety of buildings and spaces in its short length. The view from High St. reveals an extremely attractive street with St. Mary's tower rising above the trees of the churchyard. The road appears quite

broad, partly due to the wide pavement on its eastern side. Despite some modern tarmac its predominant materials are Victorian brick and stone setts with stone kerbs which overall give an appearance of interestingly mixed textures. The western side of the street has a narrower pavement surfaced in tarmac. The buildings are either quite low or set back from the road, adding to this broad, open feel. The first half of the road, coming from High St., has two dramatically contrasting sides. The timber-framed side elevation of no. 69 High St. (the 16th century almshouses - see Fig. 8) turns the corner into Church Road but the Old Grammar School (now offices) occupies most of the eastern side of the street. Behind low stone walls, this 16th century building is set back behind a small lawn with mature trees making an important contribution to the scene. The modern office extension is set back behind and to the side of the old school. The western side of Church Road is in strong contrast. The almost perfectly preserved façade of a 19th century terrace (nos. 1-6) is set straight onto the pavement. In some ways these buildings seem at odds with the rest of the area and are perhaps more akin to those seen on Victorian East St. The warm orange-red brick and



Fig. 8. The Almshouses

uniform fenestration make a significant contribution to this most attractive street and demonstrate well how the slow growth of Thame's historic centre has produced a mixed, yet perfectly integrated character.

Between the churchyard and the terrace, the character of Church Road is distinctly different. The former agricultural buildings of Church Farm are the dominant historic features. Their arrangement around the former farmyard opens out the scene effectively to make it blend pleasingly with the churchyard. On the western side of the road stands the Tithe Barn. This is one of the major historic buildings in the town. It has a well-preserved timber frame and herringbone brickwork infill and dates from the 16th century. The current business use has not compromised its contribution to the streetscape. Church Farm is on the eastern side where the tiled roofs rise above the patchwork stone boundary wall. The only alien element in Church Lane is the pair of 1930s semi-detached houses, nos. 7 and 8, which, despite the large amount of herringbone brickwork inspired by the Tithe Barn, do not fit well with either terrace or barns.

Brook Lane leaves the High St. beside The Six Bells and forms part of the boundary of the conservation area before becoming a path to the Cuttle Brook. Looking into the lane from the High St. the trees at the rear of The Six Bells car park close the view and the lane turns out of sight. The road is narrow and winding as it follows the rear boundaries of houses on High St. Two sections of old wall survive behind the houses as well as the stone and timber outbuilding in the garden of no.41. Brook Lane provides a fascinating view of the jumble of tile, slate and thatch roofs behind the houses of High St.

The junction of High St. with Southern Road and Bell Lane is one of the busiest parts of the town in terms of road traffic. However, the width of the High St. and its junction with Bell Lane accommodate the roundabout and the area is therefore not wholly blighted by traffic. A fine group of buildings addresses this broad, open space. In the foreground of the view into High St. is no.85. The building stands at the head of the closely packed and rigidly ordered row of facades that front one side of High St. and Buttermarket and, despite its relatively small scale, it is a major landmark in the street scene. On the north side of Bell Lane are nos. 80-83, a fine group of buildings with dates that span from the 16th to 19th centuries. No. 83 (Croft Cottage) is a timber and brick house of the 17th century and whilst no. 80 presents an early 18th century façade to the street it has a rear section that is probably earlier. The more ordered facades of nos. 81 and 82 complete the group. The entrance to Southern Road is the narrowest of the four exits from the roundabout and is flanked by two, suitably modest, one-and-a-half storey

Fig. 9. Church Road



buildings, The Malthouse and The Rising Sun. The Malthouse, dating from the 18th century, may indeed have started life as a maltings and turns the corner with its roughly textured rubble stone walls. The Rising Sun has a jettied rear wing onto Southern Road and a 19th century former off licence shopfront to the left on the High St. side. As well as marking the entrance to Southern Road, the Rising Sun also forms, with nos. 23-25, an attractive and interesting group of buildings on the southern side of High St.

Bell Lane curves gently downhill from High St. to join Aylesbury Road and the north end of North St. Its historic character is that of unplanned building between the rear of garden plots behind the houses of High St. and the edge of the countryside surrounding Thame prior to the 20th century. Reflecting this, the lower part of Bell Lane is still notable for relatively low-density development and significant numbers of trees. Development is irregular and spaces between the buildings are vital to its character. At the top of the lane building is denser, typified by the rear elevations of nos. 85-90 High St. which form quite a prominent feature at the top of Bell Lane. Lower down the lane is no.12 Bell Lane, an early 17th century, timber-framed, thatched house with a cross-wing partly built in rubblestone. Not only is this an extremely attractive property but the gardens (although much reduced by the construction of car parking space in the Waitrose complex) are important in maintaining the green feel and low-density of building on the lane. On the west side of the lane stands no. 7; a substantial house with origins in the early 17th century, or possibly earlier. The house

has been altered and extended on more than one occasion. Corner Close Cottage sits in an extremely important position, being visible across the Aylesbury Road roundabout and marking the entrance to Bell Lane. This is another fine survival of timber-framed building, still with a thatched roof, on the fringe of the historic town centre. In this case it is a modest house originating in the early 17th century and extended later in that century. With a stone wall in front and the trees bounding the cricket pitch behind, it is an important landmark on the way into and out of the town centre. Bell Close is populated by modern detached houses of various styles. These are mostly set in fairly generous gardens which help the edge of the town blend softly with the openness of the cricket pitch. The properties on the north side of the Close are particularly important in establishing the character of the boundary between these two areas.

High St. (Main Area)

The dominant character of High St. is its broad, open aspect with the facades of buildings forming an unbroken front uniformly on both sides. The buildings are built right onto the pavement without front gardens, boundary walls, porches or steps and are tightly packed together, reflecting the narrow medieval burgage plots on which they stand. The only spaces between the buildings are the occasional passageways which give access to the land behind but as these are mostly covered by the upper storeys of the buildings and closed by solid gates they do not significantly break the continuous line of building. This character continues along Cornmarket and Upper High St. and is especially prevalent on the southern

side where views from either end of the town centre reveal a continuous sweep of closely packed buildings only broken by the entrances to Rooks Lane and Nelson St. Although there is a variety of building types on High St., a common form is the classically inspired façade, often applied to earlier buildings, such as no. 93, The Book House, and mainly dating from the 18th and early 19th centuries. These often have parapets to hide their roofs. These buildings present a formal face to the street, imparting even more regularity to the streetscape. Most of High St.'s 18th and 19th century houses have been converted to commercial use on the ground floor although some, such as nos. 91 and 92, remain relatively unaltered externally. Even with the variations in shop design there is still a strong continuity among groups of such buildings. A good example of this can be seen in nos. 104-109, where all date from the early 19th century except no. 107, mid 18th century and no. 106 with its striking Venetian windows, which is early 18th century. There are many other buildings, such as the numerous smaller houses of 17th and 18th century date, that are less imposing than the Georgian houses and display attractive sweeps of red tile roof. Others, both early vernacular buildings and later Victorian ones, have prominent gables to the street, giving a more varied rhythm to the roofscape. Although there is almost as much variety of building type in this part of High St. as at its lower end, the formality of planning imposed by the burgage plots makes the overall appearance much more regular. This is not to say the area is bland and uninteresting. Rather, views along High St. from any direction show a fascinating mixture of roofs and

parapets, gables and dormers, rendered façades and decorative brickwork. The dominant material seen in these facades is the local red brick, commonly combined with the grey flared headers to make a pattern (as at no. 109) or to contrast decoratively with red brick, as at no. 91. Render is also used as a surface finish, usually painted white or a light pastel shade.

At its western end the main part of High St. starts with a group of buildings less ordered than those seen elsewhere in the street. No. 22, Lancastrian Cottage, is a 16th century timber framed house with a partially surviving cruck frame visible in the gable end. It has a small garden on High St. bounded by a brick wall. As a result of this the building is in some ways at odds with the regularity of the rest of the street but makes a delightful visual link with the more relaxed planning of the lower part of High St., as well as helping to open out gradually views into main High St. area. Starbank House is a 19th century re-fronted Georgian town house which also deviates slightly from High St.'s other frontages, playing a similar role to Lancastrian Cottage in allowing the opening out of views along the street. It is significant too in views to the west because, as it is set forward of the principal building line, it presents a large portion of its end wall to the street, whilst the buildings beyond close this view. Of particular interest at this point is no. 24 High St., an attractive roughcast timber-framed building containing a passage with an arched timber entrance. This leads to a row of stone cottages built on the burgage plot in the 19th century. Today this is a quiet space away from the busy High St.

On the south side of High St. are nos. 16, 17 and 18 which date from the 19th century and 15a which has a fine mid-18th century façade. Together this group of three-storey structures forms quite an imposing group. They are given an added sense of group cohesion by the space in front of the Masonic Hall visually separating them from the rest of the High St. buildings. To the rear of 15a three burgage plots have been combined and a part given to the modern Garden House. Access through some Victorian gates leads to a car park with mature trees and the house's garden beyond which make this quiet, leafy spot. From here the rear of the Masonic Hall can be seen with its blocked chapel-like windows. Some rubble stone walling in the side of 16a is also visible, perhaps suggesting the rear may be older than the front of the building, and the stone setts beneath the drive from the street can also be seen. Nos. 9 -13 High St. are of a very different character but form a similarly coherent group. These are smaller buildings all converted to shops on the ground floor and separated from the modern shops to the east by the alleyway which leads to the car parks behind. The side elevation of 9 shows its early timber-frame. The group identity of these buildings is underlined by similarities in exterior colour scheme and shop front detailing that appear in more than one property and combine to form a pleasing effect.

On the northern side of High St. there is perhaps less of the continuity, both in style and date. No. 98 is a 17th century building with an 18th century front and features a low opening on the left of the front elevation that leads to the office's car park. From the car park, the timber framing in the rear wing of the

building and a leaded casement window can be seen, as well as the brick boundary walls of the burgage plots flanking it. The centre of the car park is occupied by a majestic willow tree and behind this can be glimpsed the thatched roof of no.12 Bell Lane.

No. 98 is flanked on one side by a Victorian property bristling with gabled bay windows and on the other by a severely altered house, no. 100. The latter stands next to no. 100a, a modern building which, whilst not wholly out of keeping with the area in terms of scale, it is let down by its ill-matching brick laid in dull stretcher bond and poorly proportioned aluminium framed windows. Modern buildings also appear on the south side of the High St. where the Co-op store occupies several units between nos. 5 and 9. The central part (the right hand part of the supermarket) is fairly well designed in terms of scale and form with correctly proportioned windows. The façade as a whole has references to buildings in the rest of the street but the tall window and panel arrangement and the jettied bay are perhaps a little too prominent and draw unnecessary attention to the building.

The former Post Office, on the northern side of High St., is quite a substantial building, dating from the 17th century but with an 18th century façade that is almost forbidding in appearance with its simple decoration and heavy window surrounds. Many extensions have been added to the rear; most relating to the post office phase of the building's life, but those immediately behind the frontage building are also of some interest. The yard behind the post office is fronted by some attractive iron gates and in the yard itself boundary walls of the flanking burgage plots can be seen.



Fig. 10. The Town Hall

The Town Hall is a major feature in the centre of High St (see Fig. 10). Not only is it prominent in views from the west but it largely obscures the buildings between Cornmarket and Buttermarket when seen from this end of the town. Built in 1888 to replace an earlier town hall it commands views of the entrance to the centre of the town and all the activity in this area. The setting is ideal for such a grand and ornate structure, with other buildings being lower than the hall and set well away from it. The town hall benefits from an attractive paving which, through its use of York stone and granite setts enhances this part of the town. Granite setts also survive in some of the access roads to burgage plots through passages in High St. properties (such as at no. 10 High St., where cast iron drainage grates also survive).

The Victorian era contributed several other buildings to the High St. scene. They are often dramatically different from the dominant pattern of earlier vernacular buildings and 18th and early 19th century facades. No. 2 High St.

and the distinctive purpose built Lloyd's Bank on Cornmarket are both typical of this period (see Fig. 11). Relatively dense ornamentation is crammed onto the small frontages in a fashion quite distinct from the more restrained decoration of Georgian cornices and patterned brickwork seen elsewhere. However, these Victorian buildings commonly use traditional materials and are neither too numerous nor out of scale with the rest of the street to detract from it and in fact make a valuable contribution to the scene.



Fig. 11. Lloyds Bank

Buttermarket and Cornmarket

Cornmarket and Buttermarket, as areas distinct from the rest of High St., owe their existence to the encroachment of building into the medieval planned market place that separates them. The group of buildings between the two streets is a fascinating one and the area has a character very much its own. The view from the Town Hall is dominated by the impressive four-storey no. 20a Buttermarket. A handsome shop front wraps around the ground floor and a large bay window and heavy cornice capped with tile dominate the upper floors. The alleyway separating the building from no. 1 Cornmarket is too narrow for use by the public, and is indicative of the

way the middle area of Buttermarket and Cornmarket developed by encroaching onto High St. The original buildings here were temporary structures, some of which later developed into permanent buildings. This alley, The Shambles and Pump Lane illustrate this development and show these sites as distinct entities, unlike the contiguous building of the burgage plots. No. 1 Cornmarket presents an attractive shop front to the Town Hall but behind this the jettied side of an earlier and smaller building can be seen whilst on the other side a single storey extension has encroached into the alley. The divisions between some of these encroachment plots are very narrow and that between nos. 1 and 2 Cornmarket has been closed by infill, making it almost impossible to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. This mix of chaotic development and independent building plots gives the area between Cornmarket and Buttermarket much of its charm and character and distinguishes it from High St. There are several important views into the cluttered interior of this area.

The Shambles is in fact a much more interesting area than the view in from Buttermarket might at first suggest. It is formed by a dramatically contrasting mixture of buildings. The rear of 19 Buttermarket presents the front façade of a pleasant early 19th century town house (although one covered by pebble-dashing). Facing this is the rear of the National Westminster Bank which, although plainer than its fanciful front, has a plentiful amount of warm red brick. The other sides of The Shambles are formed by the far more rugged buildings at the rear of 20 and 20a Buttermarket, 3 Pump Lane and 1A Cornmarket. From the southern end

of The Shambles there is also a view of The Spread Eagle Hotel and the Georgian facades of houses on the south side of Cornmarket.

Views along Buttermarket show a narrow street that has an intimate and busy feel. The slight curve of the road in such a narrow space makes the buildings seem more crowded and the shop fronts pressed together, even though those on the north side still adhere to the planned layout of the medieval town. This side of the street has a pleasantly 'jumbled' feel in which projecting shop fronts, jettied upper storeys and hanging shop signs jostle for space in the narrow street. The western end of Buttermarket is marked by no.1 which has a pair of jettied gables above a rather plain, modern shop front. Although the whole façade is a little austere it has a strong presence in the street. The side of no. 20a, opposite, is also quite plain and marred by the small ground floor windows. More interesting are nos. 3-11 Buttermarket, the group which forms most of the northern side of the street. These are mainly quite low 2 storey buildings with 18th or 19th century fronts on older houses and present a string of consistently pleasing traditional shop fronts with sash or casement windows at first floor level and tiled roofs above. Prominent among this group is the former Saracen's Head, now offices, that has its origins in the late medieval period and saw some alteration in the 17th, 19th and 20th centuries. The tall gabled roof is a significant part of the street scene but perhaps the most interesting aspect of the building is the timber framing visible in the side wall. This can be seen from the side passage to the rear of the property and once formed the screens passage of

the medieval building. This is also one of the few places from which the burgage plots on the north side of Buttermarket can be seen.

The south side of Buttermarket very much complements the north side with many fine buildings lining the street, although the alleyways through to Cornmarket perforate the line of facades and subtly alter the feel of this side of the street. Nos. 14 and 15, near the eastern end, have their origins in the 17th century but the first floor bay windows and ornamental bargeboards that are prominent features of the twin gables are Victorian. This building is flanked by Victorian mock timber framed buildings which, whilst not unattractive in themselves alter the mood of this end of Buttermarket. The middle of the south side of the street is occupied by an interesting group of buildings, nos. 17-19. The front of no. 19 displays early 19th century windows and brickwork which are quite a contrast to the rear elevation facing into The Shambles. Nos. 17 and 18 are both of 17th century date but present later facades to Buttermarket.

Cornmarket has similar origins to Buttermarket in that one side (the south) is formed by the facades of buildings on the regular plots of the medieval planned town whilst opposite is the more irregular development of the infilled middle row of buildings. Perhaps the real landmark buildings of Cornmarket are the two public houses opposite each other. The Spread Eagle, once the home of the celebrated landlord and diarist John Fothergill (1876-1957), originated as a private house in 1765 (on medieval burgage plots) and became an inn only in 1852 (see Fig. 12). The regularity of its domestic Georgian façade is in tune with the formality of the High St. but in striking contrast to the Birdcage Public House across the road (see Fig. 13). Dating from the 15th century this is one of the most interesting buildings in the conservation area. There was a building on this plot in the 13th century and fabric from this date can be found in the cellar which was used as a gaol. The present Birdcage Public House also housed prisoners during the



Fig. 12. The Spread Eagle Hotel



Fig. 13. The Birdcage Public House

Napoleonic Wars. Standing on the corner of Cornmarket and the entrance to the Shambles the building displays some excellent jettied timber framing and a massive corner post is visible by the side entrance. The other buildings on this side of Cornmarket are not of such great antiquity but all occupy plots that originated from gradual infill and consequently form an irregular and characterful group. Whilst nos. 2 and 2a Cornmarket are of 17th century original, they display many Victorian details externally.

Most of the buildings on the southern side of Cornmarket present 18th century facades to the street, including the Black Horse Hotel, another inn that is a major feature of the street and nos. 18 and 19. No. 12 also has an 18th century façade and a passageway to the side. Behind the gates is a view of the series of extensions stretching back from the main building and a small outbuilding (perhaps a former stable) situated in the burgage plot, the stone and brick walls of which flank the garden. Quite at odds with the rest of Cornmarket, but a major feature of it, is the Lloyds TSB Bank.

Upper High St. and Market Place

Upper High St. shares the broad open character of the main High St. area to the west, narrowing only at its eastern end at the junction with Park St. and East St. The western part of Upper High St. is dominated by the market place, an open area subtly separated from the main road on its southern side by a visually low-key area of pavement planted with a row of plane trees. At the western end of the market place the Market House is a major feature. It is a modest building that is said to have originated as a chapel in the mid 18th century but has undergone many

changes and now houses the tourist information centre among other uses. It is highly prominent in views of Upper High St. from the Park St. end where the buildings at the end of Cornmarket and Buttermarket form a backdrop to the Market Hall (see Fig. 14). Chief among this group is the 'mock-Tudor' pub, a striking building executed with some attention to detail. When looking along Upper High St. from the market place the influence of the town's medieval planning is again evident in the orderly facades of buildings flanking the open space. Whilst regular and classically designed brick facades of the 18th and early 19th centuries dominate the streetscape (especially on the north side) there are also occasional breaks formed by older or later properties.



Fig. 14. The Market Hall

The north side of Upper High St. is marked at its western end by a series of buildings (nos. 2-7) that are relatively low, 2-storey structures of predominantly 18th century date, together presenting an attractive sweep of tiled roof to the market place. No. 1 Upper High St. marks the turning into North St. in an understated way. This three-storied, 18th-century building forms one half of an attractive pair with

the grander Victorian building opposite (12 Buttermarket). Being taller than their neighbouring buildings both are landmarks. Whilst not being overbearing they lead the viewer's eye around the corner into North St. Nos. 2-7 Upper High St. form an attractive group with their traditional shop fronts. An interesting detail is to be seen in the side entrance to no. 4 where heavy timber beams supporting the building above are exposed.



Fig. 15. The Swan Hotel

Although quite different in character to nos. 2-7, nos. 8-13 share many features in common that make them a coherent group. Their tall brick facades and tiled roof, whilst varied, are broadly similar. The Swan Hotel and no.13 are perhaps the most prominent buildings in this group (see Fig. 15). The 18th century front of the Swan features a tall and relatively narrow central part that is balanced by the flanking buildings whilst at the centre the passageway allows access into the bar. The timber framing in the side walls of the Swan, which suggests its earlier origins, can be seen from inside the passageway with sash windows giving views into

the bar. The passageway also provides access to the modern shopping area of Swan Walk and a small residential cul-de-sac behind. This housing is built upon part of the burgage plots behind Upper High St. Other areas of burgage plot survive behind nos. 7 and 8 Upper High St. as well as no. 11, which can be seen from Swan Walk. The full length of the rear burgage plot boundary wall can also be seen at this point.

No.13 Upper High St. is an extremely well preserved early 18th century townhouse with original windows and door, which is one of the few not having had a shop inserted on the ground floor. No.16, a few doors along, also has an immaculately preserved 18th century frontage (placed on an earlier building) and is notable for a fine Doric pilaster door case. The style of door at 16 is echoed in the large entrance gate set in no.16a. A more modest doorway can be seen at 11 where the simple rusticated stucco is an attractive part of the shop front. No.15 is another 18th century building with a striking oriel window on the first floor.



Fig. 16. 14 Upper High Street

A remarkable survival in this part of the High St. is no.14 (see Fig. 16). A

small highly attractive building with interesting historic details, it is actually quite at odds with the surrounding buildings as it is both in the vernacular style of the area (rather than the classically-inspired formality of the Georgian and later town house) and is set back from the street. The gable end of this 17th century house, prominent in views along the street, displays a queen post roof truss whilst there is 18th century brickwork facing the street. It stands out from the general pattern of building in the street and this is emphasised by the open area at its western side. This is the entrance to Belmont Mews, a modern development on the burgage plots of nos. 12-14 Upper High St., which is flanked by old boundary walls and incorporates some 19th century buildings.

From Rooks Lane to the War Memorial Gardens the southern side of Upper High St. contains a varied collection of buildings. The two Victorian churches have their frontages set back from the pavement and do not follow the formal arrangement of buildings elsewhere in the street. The former Methodist Chapel of 1876 (no.43) has a plain gabled façade with three lancet windows dominated by the large entrance porch with elaborate wrought iron hinges on the heavy timber door. The church is now in commercial use but retains its historic character. A more ornate facade is presented to the street by United Reformed Church (formerly a Congregational chapel built in 1871 to designs by WF Poulton of Reading). Its roughly dressed stone façade is set back from the street and raised above it at the top of a flight of stone steps. Two large windows with cusped tracery are surmounted by a rose window and the whole topped with a large finial. Other Victorian buildings on the south

side of the street (nos. 36, 37 and 38) are also pleasant examples of the typical architecture of the period but their projecting bay windows intrude into the street and are somewhat at odds with its overall character.



Fig. 17. The Old Nag's Head

Chief among the early buildings on the south side of Upper High St. are The Old Nag's Head, no. 42 and nos. 34 and 35. The Old Nags Head, dating from the 16th century, has a three jettied gable announcing its high status (see Fig. 17). These are a prominent feature of the street scene and the fine example of close-studded timber framing displayed on the western side contrasts with the solid Victorian stonework of the chapel adjacent. No.42 is a substantial building with its origins in the 17th century. The front is adorned with an ornate five-pointed arched doorway at the entrance to a passageway, which was added in the Victorian era. In this passageway

carved corbels in the shape of lions can be seen along with a timber pointed arch. To the rear of no. 42 a courtyard has been created by new offices built on the burgage plot. The stone side wall of the rear wing of the adjacent pub forms one side of this yard against which an old water pump stands. Several phases of building are immediately evident in the front of nos. 34 and 35. Originating as a 16th century house and extended in the 17th century, the most eye-catching features today are the closely-framed timberwork of the gable of no.34 and the large passage entrance to its left. Above the latter is an element of jettying and through the passage, from the car park behind, the roof of the coach house, stables and barn of The Elms can be glimpsed.

The eastern end of Upper High St. has a distinctly different character from the rest of the street. The southern side of the road is dominated by the well-tended and quietly dignified War Memorial gardens. Behind the stone wall at the back of the gardens trees growing in the grounds of The Elms form a soft green backdrop and a suitably peaceful setting for the memorial. The gardens are fronted by a low stone wall facing the street with understated but elegant iron gates.

Whilst the steady narrowing of the road towards the junction with Park St. is softened by the trees setback across the road, the buildings on the north side follow the same form as elsewhere on High St. (they are straight onto the pavement without gardens). There is a mixture of buildings on this side. Nos. 18-20 have 18th century facades though no. 18 has earlier origins which are clearly visible in the large ornate chimney rising from the roof above the late 19th

century shop front. After a series of Victorian buildings (a group which makes a positive contribution to the scene) is no. 26, a late 18th century house with several phases of extension to the rear. The access to St. Andrew's Court business area allows views of the quite spectacular boundary wall, curving and dropping in height with a series of ramps before continuing as a complete burgage plot boundary wall ending on Wellington St. The view from St. Andrew's Court shows a series of well-preserved burgage plots behind nos. 15-26 Upper High St., many of which are still in use as private gardens. The view across them is, in summer, a green and leafy one benefiting from a variety of mature trees. A series of descending roof lines at the rear of no. 27 Upper High St. can also be seen from St. Andrew's Court. These terminate in a large oriel window that no doubt once gave views over the burgage plot gardens but now looks mainly on to car parks and offices.

The very eastern end of Upper High St. is mainly occupied by Victorian buildings (nos. 27 and 27a making an imposing pair amongst them) but is most notable for 30, an elegantly proportioned, early 19th century house that probably once stood among gardens on the fringe of the town. Other examples of this type of development can be seen on Park St. and East St., suggesting that this end of Upper High St., whilst abutting the planned medieval town, developed in the same piecemeal way as the fringes. Behind no. 30 is a weatherboarded granary on 10 staddle stones and a rubble stone outbuilding. Nelson St. joins Upper High St. beside no.34 on the south side and links it to Southern Road. Nelson St. is an

Edwardian street developed to fill the gaps between the old planned town and the grounds of The Elms and is a good example of its kind. The southern half of the street is lined with mid and late 19th century houses with well-preserved and well-maintained frontages. Towards the Upper High St. end the street is more varied with some modern building and a 1937 fire station which are a little at odds with the overall Victorian feel. The view into Upper High St. is closed by no. 13 and the trees in the market place car park.

Southern Road

The present Southern Road follows the line of a service road or back lane originally laid out as part of the medieval planned town to provide rear access to the burgage plots on the southern side of the High St., Cornmarket and Upper High St. It bordered open fields and defined the extent of the town and continued to do so for many centuries. Today it marks the extent of the conservation area on the southern side of the town centre and continues to provide access to the land behind High St. There is, however, little historic building on the road, only an occasional outbuilding built at the rear of the burgage plots. The exception to this is a row of cottages at the western end of the road. These are on the eastern side of Southern Road and probably exploited small pockets of land on the fringe of the town. These continue from the rear of the Rising Sun, at the corner of High St. and Southern Road, and include no.5, a timber framed building, and a series of 18th century houses all of which present well-preserved facades to the street and continue the style of building seen in the lower part of High St. Opposite these houses the land to the

rear of High St. has been developed for modern housing including the Mitchell Close development. As Southern Road continues eastwards, however, its 'outer' side, (the land away from the town centre) is still open. The recreation ground and school playing fields, running from Spring Path to Moreton Lane, are hugely important in preserving the essence of a rural fringe to the town bounded by Southern Road. The playing fields stretch to the Cuttle Brook and form a continuous green area with the fields flanking the brook beside the Oxford Road.



Fig. 18. Southern Road

The burgage plots between Southern Road and High St. have, inevitably seen a great deal of change but the degree to which such an ancient landscape has survived is remarkable. Southern Road has provided modern developers with a ready access route to the rear of the burgage plots and the inside of the road is now lined with houses from opposite Mitchell Close to Dorchester Place. In many instances, however, this development merely rings a core of surviving burgage plots. An investigation of the modern

development at the aptly named Burgage Place reveals several historic walls still marking the plots behind nos. 18-21 High St. Whilst the Lincoln Place and Dorchester Place developments and the Co-op supermarket car park have encroached significantly into the historic landscape behind High St., other areas are remarkably intact. The Woolworth's car park, although an amalgamation of more than one plot, retains some old walls but most impressive is the plot behind the western part of the Spread Eagle. This has long been used as a vehicular drive flanked by trees and an attractive stone and brick wall running the full length of one side. This plot is very narrow and this may be what has saved it from development. The view down the plot reveals a jumble of roofs behind the High St., that of the Spread Eagle itself being particularly interesting. The Spread Eagle's car park also retains a good length of wall as well as the attractive Victorian Eagle Cottage built on the end of the combined burgage plots facing onto Southern Road.

Rooks Lane marks the return of Southern Road to High St. and some

modern low-density development is found on land behind buildings on High St. but there are substantial portions of burgage plot surviving behind the bungalow to the rear of the Black Horse's car park which can be seen from Rooks Lane. Rooks Lane itself does not have a strong historic character due to the amount of new development. Some of the buildings are Victorian (nos. 51 and 53) but the street's main contribution to the conservation area is to offer views on to the rear of the High St.

North St.

North St. runs on the north side of the town centre between Buttermarket and Aylesbury Road. Although it connects with Bell Lane and so forms a loop around the whole High St. area it does not possess the same intimate connection with the burgage plots as Southern Road. The plots to the north side of High St. were much shorter when they were originally laid out and, unusually, had no back lane. It has been suggested that this is because the land adjoining to the north was carved out of a possible Anglo-Saxon oval religious enclosure and its religious association inhibited total destruction of the site. It is also important to note that both North St. and Bell Lane are major routes to and from Thame because they connect with Aylesbury Road. The kind of heavy traffic seen on both roads is unknown on Southern Road and has also brought pressures to bear on the historic character of the streets.

Between the cattle market and the roundabout at the end of Aylesbury Road, North St. follows a sharply curving course as it skirts the outer edge of the enclosure which predates the medieval town. Although the area



Fig. 19. The burgage plot to the rear of the Spreadeagle

between the road and the town centre has been dramatically affected by the Waitrose and police station developments and there is a good deal of modern housing on the other side (the Lashlake Road area) the character of the road is quite well preserved. Despite the constant traffic on this relatively narrow road the impression of low-density development, predominantly characterised by small cottages on the margin between town and country, survives. A hedge and stone wall screens the Waitrose car park quite effectively for much of its length. The hedge fronting no. 39 and the trees opposite play an important role where the road bends. A pair of modern garages with a large area of hard standing do little to contribute to the street scene at this point and the entrance to Lashlake Road is very wide with broad expanses of tarmac pavement flanking it. Unfortunately this emphasises the intrusive nature of the Lashlake Road development. Looking towards Aylesbury Road, Corner Close Cottage and the cricket pitch form a soft and attractive termination to the view but the modern development and roundabout are a little too overbearing and harsh.

The most interesting buildings on the lower part of North St. are the two early ones, Tripps Cottage and the Bishops Palace and the group of 19th century cottages around them (see Fig.20). This group, centred on Moorend Lane, represents both early building beyond the edge of the town and later development along a major route into it. Moorend Lane probably originated as a route out into the country with the mainly 17th century Bishop's Palace built in what were then open fields. This is a beautifully preserved timber framed building that was originally built



Fig. 20. The Bishops Palace

by the Bishop of Lincoln who used it as a temporary residence when touring his diocese. It incorporates a 16th century wing with a cruck frame. The house closes the view into Moorend Lane, its weathered and textured tile roof catching the eye. It also retains some sense of separation from the buildings around it due to its gardens and the drive to Tripps Cottage. This cottage, also originating in the 16th century, can be seen from Moorend Lane behind the later houses, and presents its rear elevation to Lashlake Road. The 19th century cottages that cluster around the junction of Moorend Lane and Lashlake Road are an interesting group, mixing brick and stone construction. No. 45 North St. has an unusual road sign on a stone panel to the front that is indicative of the development of the road into a major route. The blocked door and window also visible at the front result from the building's conversion from a public house. Nos. 41-45 North St. are stone and rendered brick cottages and nos. 9-10 and 3-6 Moorend Lane are 19th century terraced houses similar to those seen elsewhere on the fringes of Thame (for example in East St. and Nelson St.). Slate predominates on the roofs of this group but some traditional

clay tile can be seen on nos. 9-10 Moorend Lane.

When seen from the junction with Buttermarket, North St. rapidly assumes a distinctly different character from that of High St. The raised pavement on either side of the road leaves the buildings set above the street and this is particularly noticeable on the western side giving the mostly small buildings a greater prominence. The road is quite wide and becomes broader as it approaches the junction with Wellington St. Looking up the road, the Market Square pub is a prominent feature with the buildings at the corners of Upper High St. and Buttermarket flanking it. Looking away from High St., the road widens and curves away to the left with the trees on the grass verge in front of the cattle market softening the view. Two unremarkable buildings made prominent by distinctive colour schemes draw attention away from the more subtle tones of the stone cottage at the corner of Moorend Lane that closes the view in the distance.

The two sides of the southern part of North St. are subtly different. Building on the sides and ends of burgage plots on the Upper High St. side has mostly occurred at an early date and many of the small houses from Upper High St. to Wellington St. have 17th or early 18th century origins. Particularly notable among these is the central group, nos. 53-60, most of which date from the 17th century. Patterned brickwork and rendered facades dominate, whilst an attractive rhythm formed by the falling slope of roofs, windows and shopfronts as the terrace follows the slope gives an interesting and pleasingly coherent look to the group.

The western side of North St. is notable for an almost unbroken line of

small 19th century houses. The houses comprising this terrace range from small 1½-storey buildings (reminiscent of earlier houses on High St.) to more decorative late Victorian houses with polychromatic brickwork and bargeboards (nos. 21-23). Overall these houses are well preserved and make a strong contribution to the streetscape. The top of North St. is notable for The Beeches (no.5a) set behind a high stone wall capped in tile. This 18th century house is set back from the road and marks an important visual break between the properties on Buttermarket and the later terraced houses on North St. On the western side of the street is a narrow road between nos. 21 and 23. This leads to an area at the rear of Buttermarket where The Old Candle Factory (a Victorian building constructed on the burgage plot) stands. From here several boundary walls can be seen defining substantial areas of surviving burgage plots.

Whilst the cattle market features large utilitarian modern sheds it is also a large open area that does not dominate the edge of the conservation area as it is set back behind a grass verge and low wall. This provides something of a softening effect on the roadside. In the view up North St. from Moorend Lane 39 (The Blue Man) is prominent. Although this has been altered it is an interesting house that may have originated in the late 17th or early 18th centuries. It has two large chimneys prominent in views both on the street and from the supermarket car park behind. Between 39 and Friday Court are a series of Victorian terraced houses. In form, scale and position they are in keeping with the street and contribute to its appearance. Most of them have been substantially altered

and nos. 34 - 37 with their stone mullioned windows are perhaps the most characterful.

Park St. and East St.

In contrast to High St., the Park St. and East St. portions of the conservation area are predominantly 19th century in date and distinctly different in character. The visual character of Park St. is very different from that of Upper High St. At its eastern end Upper High St. is still very much an open, expansive space, despite the road narrowing as it moves away from the market place. This is due to the war memorial gardens and The Poplars, an early 18th century house with two splendid blue cedars in its large front garden. Not only do these spaces open out the street visually but their lawns and trees set against a background of mature trees in the grounds of The Elms make an important visual 'pause' between the dense building of Upper High St. and Park St.

Red brick is the dominant building material to be seen on Park St. and there is an attractive mixture of slate and tile roofs. There is some stone building evident, mostly on larger or earlier buildings such as the John Hampden School, the Police Station and 33 Park St. In addition some terraced houses use rubble stone in their front or side walls (15 and 16 Park St.). Whilst most boundary walls are also in red brick some stone is used, such as beside St. Mary's Cottage. The Cross Keys pub, situated on the corner of East St. and Park St. and commanding a view back into Upper High St. is an understated building for such a prominent position. It is an early 19th century building and has an attractively textured tile roof and presents quite a plain facade to Upper

High St. Beyond the Cross Keys, Park St. is narrow in comparison to Upper High St., with many of its houses built right on to the pavement and although they are quite low, principally two storeys, the feeling is a close and contained one.

Before the mid-19th century Park St. was very much at the rural fringe of the town and some of the early buildings seen today were built in formerly open ground. Perhaps the most notable of these are nos. 34 and 35 Park St., a pair of 18th century townhouses probably constructed in the expectation of other genteel architecture being built to accompany them in their prominent site on the main road into town. In the early and mid-19th century other houses followed and by the middle of the 19th century the gaps between these houses were becoming filled in and the densely built character of Park St. established. The terrace of houses adjoining the Cross Keys (nos. 2-8) was built in the early 19th century but it cannot have been long afterwards that the terrace nos. 36-40 was erected along with other small houses.

The mixture of large and small houses gives Park St. a diverse but ultimately enclosing feeling. The dominant building types are 2 storey, terraced houses and 2 storey, semi-detached houses with large gabled dormers in the roof facing the road. The houses are either built right on to the pavement edge or set behind small front gardens some with original low brick walls (nos. 17 and 18) and cast iron railings (nos. 88a-93). These gardens do not provide enough space for trees but some greenery is provided by the front gardens.

Further along the street are more terraced houses, like nos. 36-40, and larger houses, such as 33. The street

also features the non-residential buildings that fill spaces between the houses. The John Hampden School was built in 1837 as the Royal British School when much of the street would still have been undeveloped. It takes the form of a handsome stone house with flanking wings and is still topped with its original belfry. Unlike any other building in the street it is set back a considerable distance from the pavement behind two mature copper beech trees. The low front wall is topped with large and unusual shaped bricks (also seen on a wall in Priestend) that were originally crowned by iron railings. Replacement metal railings are now set just inside the wall. Despite the expansion of school grounds and the addition of ancillary school buildings the original school is still the principal building on the site. The school maintains an important place in the street scene and is a centre of activity for the local community. The Baptist Chapel (built in 1836) is also a building important to the community as well as being of some historic interest. To the rear of the south side of Park St. is The Elms Park. This has played an important role in restricting development behind the rear boundaries of the properties on Park St. and today allow views of the

rear of the houses. There is also a view into and out of the street via the entrance to the fields. For these reasons it is proposed to bring the Elms Park and playing fields into the conservation area (see Fig. 21).

The area of Park St. around the petrol station has a negative impact on the historic character of the area. Opposite Victoria Mead is a series of modern commercial premises which form an unsightly group not helped by the plethora of signs attached to their frontages. However, commercial premises have long been a part of Park St.'s character, both as purpose-built premises and adapted houses. A surviving late Victorian workshop and several shops with attractive shop fronts testify to this tradition.

The eastern end of Park St. is marked by the junction with Chinnor Road where the former Police Station dominates the scene. It is situated at the fork in the road and so is both an eye-catcher when looking from the town and has a commanding view back down Park St. to the High St. It is not a large building but its stonework and unadorned front façade give it an imposing and severe look. The large area of open ground around it further marks out the Police Station, from the surrounding area. Flanking the Police Station is a pair of interesting buildings. On the northern side is 1 Chinnor Road, an attractive and well-preserved Victorian gothic house and on the south is The Falcon pub, a fanciful and eclectic piece of Edwardian design that is in strong contrast to the other two buildings. Between these buildings and the petrol station are some typical 19th century terraced houses that form a link with those on Park St. and the view out along Chinnor Road.

Fig. 21. The Elms Park



East St., in contrast to Park St., is almost wholly dominated by small terraced and detached houses. The north side is taken up by a terrace of ten Victorian houses with a later pair added at the east end. Although few original windows and doors can be seen, the terrace is substantially intact. Where the south side of East St. meets Park St. earlier and more varied buildings can be seen. Here stone is mixed with brick and the cluster of small white-painted cottages, nos. 67-70 together with the outbuilding of the Cross Keys, are more representative of the vernacular building of the area than the urban terrace opposite. However, all these buildings are no more than two storeys high and built straight onto the pavement, giving the street a narrow feeling. The Primitive Methodist Chapel, built in 1864, is also of note here. Views in and out of the conservation area along East St. are quite constrained. The orientation of the street does not allow a view into the open vista of High St., as on Park St., and the curve of the road reduces views along East St. itself.

Whilst the conservation area in East St. finishes on the south side of the street with the start of inter-war semi-detached housing, on the north side Gas Alley marks a short break before a pair of larger detached houses. These are mid-19th century in date and as in Park St. are probably the result of the movement towards building large houses in the open countryside on the edge of the town prior to the construction of terraced housing. Interestingly, the inclusion of commercial premises in the area later in the 19th century, also seen on Park St., is displayed by the large workshop in the garden of No 16. These houses still have a sense of separation from

the rest of 19th century East St. due to Gas Alley and the front garden of no 15a which breaks the terrace's line of facades. Gas Alley itself is an interesting area. The attractively weathered brick walls and the white-painted walls of nos. 3 and 4 frame the view back into East St.

Proposed extensions to the conservation area

The plot behind the Six Bells in High St. is an area of former garden that has not so far been developed as has so often happened elsewhere on the southern side of the town. Although presently used as the pub's car park, it is still an open space that keeps the modern building beyond at a distance from the rear of the High St. and allows interesting views of the rear of these houses with their fascinating mixture of roofs and chimneys. The car park itself is also very visible from Brook Lane. Including this small but valuable area in the conservation area will recognise this unusual survival as a component of the historic town and consequently focus interest on the best way it can be managed and enhanced in the future.

The extensive grounds of The Elms and the adjoining recreation ground/playing field form a very important green space within the town. The grounds of The Elms, whilst not publicly accessible, make a strong contribution to the conservation area in views from the playing fields behind John Hampden School and from Elms Road. They also form a vital part of the setting of The Elms itself. Together these two green spaces frame the south-eastern side of the conservation area. They also separate Park St. and Nelson St. from the modern housing on Elms Road and Broadwater Avenue and so not only create an important

part of the character of this part of the conservation area but also maintain its historic integrity as a one-time fringe of the town.

Bringing these two areas into the conservation area will formally acknowledge the role they play and help focus attention on the historic character of the area should development around or on them ever be proposed.

Management proposals

Proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area are included in a separate document Thame Conservation Area; Management Plan. This includes proposals for the maintenance of historic buildings, trees and open spaces, design guidance for new development and public realm works and relevant conservation policies. This document is available from South Oxfordshire District Council, Conservation and Design Team; tel 01491 823771 or email: conservation@southoxon.gov.uk

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