

# Summary

This report contains the results of a consideration of the historical, archaeological, architectural and map evidence relating to the developmental history of Gillingham. It has focused on the understanding of the overall development of the town from its earliest beginnings to the present day. This work has been conducted in order to achieve a better understanding of how the historical dimension has influenced the modern townscape, identify what historical features and structures survive within the modern town, and understand the contribution this has made to the present character of Gillingham. This will enable an informed approach to the management of change and conservation of the urban environment.

## **Historical Background**

Gillingham originated as a late Saxon royal estate centre, first documented in AD 1016, and is also likely to have been the site of a Minster church. This church was gifted to Shaftesbury Abbey *circa* 1080 in exchange for land at Corfe Castle. The estate comprised several separate manors under the name of Gillingham at the time of Domesday. There are no documentary references to a medieval weekly market at Gillingham, although it is very likely to have held at least one. There were two annual fairs. Earthwork remains at Kings Court, just outside the town are thought to be the remains of a royal hunting lodge on the edge of Gillingham Forest and deer park. The manor remained under the Crown until 1632 when it was granted to the Earl of Elgin. There were serious uprisings and reprisals when James Fullerton enclosed the Forest in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Gillingham was a cloth-making town in the medieval and early post-medieval period. A silk mill was established in 1769 and Wyke Brewery in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. There were small brickworks around the town in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in 1865 the large brickworks of the Gillingham Pottery Brick and Tile Co was established. The coming of the railway in the 1850s stimulated the growth of the agricultural markets and associated agricultural industries. Recent developments have seen the expansion of suburban housing, the construction of a relief road close to the historic town centre and creation of a modern industrial and commercial zone along its route.

## **Town morphology**

The historic town centre of Gillingham is laid out on a grid plan arranged around the Parish

Church of St Mary. The church had historically been set in a rectangular enclosure thought to correspond to that of the late Saxon Minster. This suggests that the town plan is late Saxon in origin. A number of roads radiate out from the centre with ribbon development along them. The earliest was the medieval suburb of Newbury along the Shaftesbury Road, although a deserted suburb at Chantry Fields to the south of the town was also Saxon or medieval in origin. Lodbourne to the north and Cold Harbour to the west expanded during the post-medieval period to eventually join with the satellite rural settlements of Wyke, Peacemarsh, Bay and Ham. These hamlets also expanded from the 17<sup>th</sup> century through the piecemeal enclosure of former roadside commons. Nineteenth century industrial development was concentrated in the station area, south of Newbury. The later 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the growth of modern suburban housing estates around the former rural settlements of Wyke, Peacemarsh and Ham.

## **Built character**

Gillingham is typified by a large number of later 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings constructed from the local orange brick. There are also a significant number of late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century historic buildings within the area of the medieval and post-medieval town, as well as in the satellite settlements of Ham, Wyke, Bay and Peacemarsh. There are very few earlier buildings as a result of serious fires in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The earlier buildings are mainly built of local Corallian limestone with some Greensand. Very few thatched buildings survive. Only a few 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial buildings have survived modern redevelopment, notably at Wyke Brewery and Malthouse Farm. Significant modern commercial development cuts a swathe through the fringes of the historic town, along the route of the Gillingham relief road.

## **Landscape Setting**

Gillingham lies within a natural bowl in the Kimmeridge Clay surrounded by a ring of hills to the west, north, east and southeast. The upper Stour drains this bowl, fed by a dendritic pattern of tributaries with an outlet to the southwest. This bowl marks the northeastern extreme of the Blackmore Vale at the foot of the chalk and Greensand scarps. The tributaries to the Stour divide the clay floor into a series of low rounded ridges along which radial routes pass through the town and rural settlement has been established. The historic town centre lies at the



Figure 1: Vertical aerial photographic view of Gillingham, 2005 (© Getmapping.com, 2005).

southern tip one of these ridges between the Stour and Shreen Water, near their confluence.

### **Historic Urban Character**

The historic urban character of Gillingham is closely bound up with its landscape setting, historic fabric and its industrial heritage. The medieval town plan survives partially complete; truncated to the south and west by the modern relief road. A number of historic villages have become incorporated into the greater suburban area of the town, each with their own distinctive character and some with better preserved historic fabric than others. The survival in the historic core of a number of historic buildings helps underscore the historic elements of Gillingham's urban character. The widespread use of local brick in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century town emphasises the importance of the local brick industry and the period when Gillingham was a significant market and industrial centre.

The landscape setting of the town is fundamen-

tal to its character; in particular, the river meadows which run through the town.

### **Further Research**

This report has highlighted many aspects of the historical development of Gillingham and how this has shaped the modern town. It has also indicated gaps in our knowledge and areas which would repay further research.

The main areas of suggested further research include:

- Research into the pre-urban settlement pattern and its relationship to the origins and form of the Saxon town.
- Research into the medieval development of the town, its economy, industry and secular buildings.
- Research into, and conservation of, the post-medieval industrial heritage of the town.