

Corfe Castle Historic Urban Character Area 1

The Castle and Medieval Town

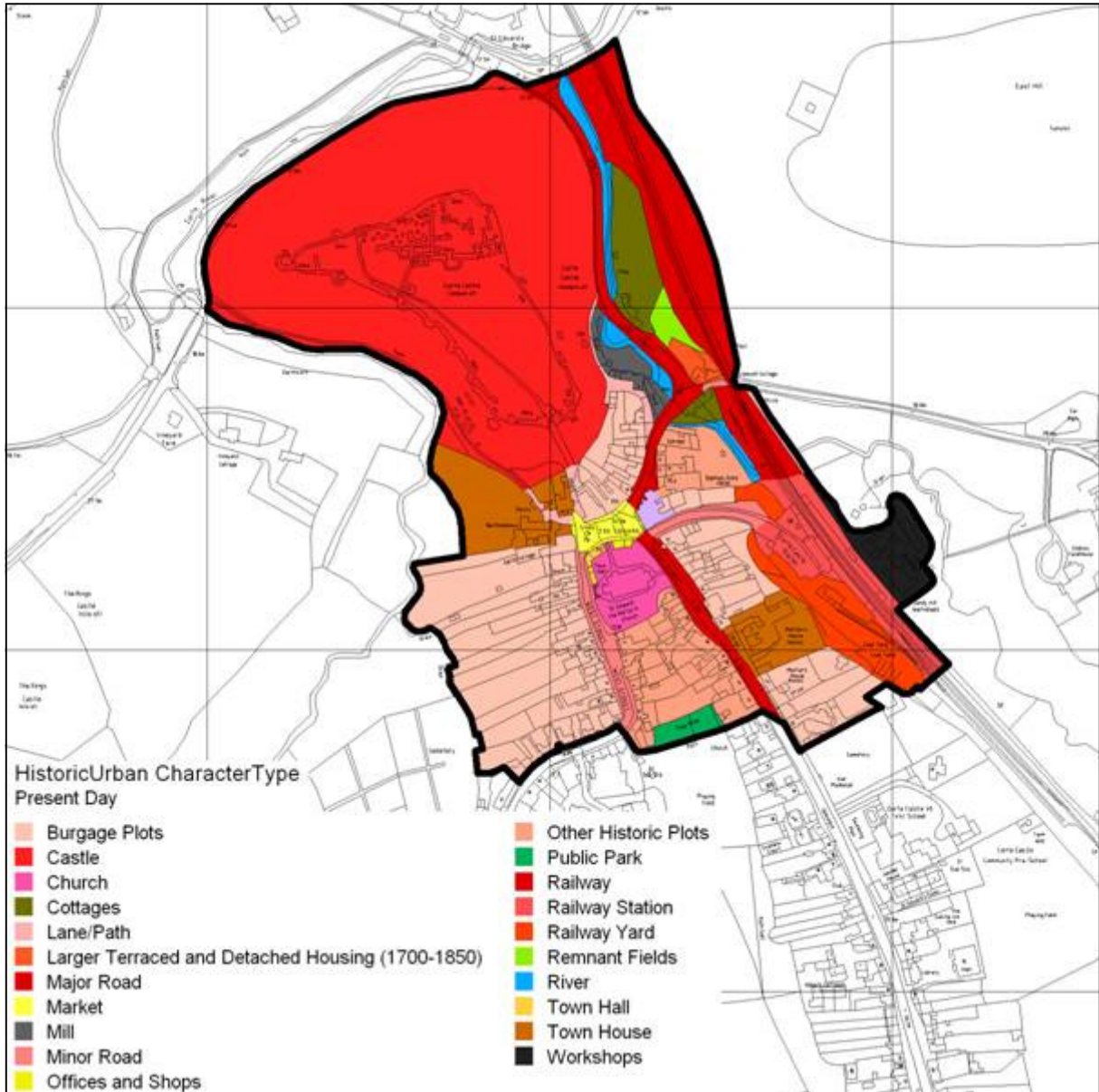


Figure 37: Map of Historic Urban Character Area 1, showing current historic urban character type.



Figure 38: View of The Square with castle behind.



Figure 39: View north along West Street.

Corfe Castle Historic Urban Character Area 1 Structure of Character Area

Overview

This area represents the earliest historic component of Corfe Castle and comprises primarily the castle and the medieval town. It is primarily defined by its historic component but includes a small geographically adjacent area to the east.

Topography and Geology

This is the most topographically and geologically diverse part of Corfe Castle. The castle itself sits atop a chalk hill carved out of the Purbeck Ridge by the East and West Corfe rivers. The Outer Ward of the castle is slightly lower and sits on the Upper Greensand which forms the southern slopes of the Purbeck Ridge. The moat between the castle and town represents an enhanced natural gully formed at the junction of the Upper Greensand and Wealden Clay. The historic core of the town lies outside the Castle gates to the south and sits upon the Wealden Clay on a raised plateau formed between the two rivers.

Urban Structure

The market square forms the urban focus, lying outside the castle gates, with two roughly parallel roads running SSE from the southern corners, another road running around the east side of the castle from the northeast corner and a lane running around the west side of the castle from the northwest corner of The Square. Another road runs off the southwest corner of the Square to the railway station, otherwise there are no side roads or lanes running off the major routes. The east side of East Street and the west side of West Street have regular plots, with less regular plots to the north of the market place and south of the church.

Present Character

Figure 37 shows the present day historic urban character types. The castle dominates the northern section in terms of area and physical



Figure 40: Boar Mill with millpond and castle behind.

presence. The town lies to the south of the castle and comprises the market square with the church, town hall and shops on its south side. The whole is surrounded by burgage plots on the west side of West Street, the east side of East Street and the north side of The Square. Irregular historic plots occupy the space between East and West Streets south of the church. The burgage plots on the east side of East Street have been truncated by the construction of the railway, station and yard. The railway continues along the entire western edge of the character area, with cottages, remnant fields and a mill sandwiched between it and the castle.

Time Depth

This area represents the historic core of the town and has the greatest time depth of any part of Corfe Castle. The castle was built in 1080. The church was originally built in the 12th century and the market was established by the early 13th century. The property boundaries on West Street may be medieval in origin. Boar Mill may have originated in the late medieval period. The railway was opened in 1885 and the former milk factory is early 20th century.

Settlement Pattern and Streetscape

The settlement pattern is high density housing in a ribbon layout, with areas of both regular and irregular plots. The houses are set predominantly along the street frontage. The frontages are almost completely built up with relatively few openings to provide access to the rear. Away from the main streets, the pattern is more irregular, becoming semi-rural to the northeast.

There are few green spaces within this area other than the churchyard and a small play area to the south. However, the topography of the castle hill and the Purbeck ridge dominate the area providing dramatic views of the surrounding landscape.



Figure 41: Corfe Castle Station.

Corfe Castle Historic Urban Character Area 1

Built Character

Building types

The area has a wide variety of building forms, ranging from extensive medieval castle ruins, to medium and small vernacular stone built houses tightly packed around the town square. The majority of the buildings date from the 17th and 18th century and vary in height from 1.5 to 2.5 storeys. The irregularity of roof line is a feature of the town in general. Particular features of the medieval core include buildings with small dormer windows and two storey porches, either enclosed or open on the ground floor; The Greyhound Inn, The Bankes' Arms Hotel (Figure 42) and 25-7 East Street are good examples. Frequently small stone cottages of varying origin have been amalgamated to form a terrace with irregular roof line. There are also examples of larger symmetrically fronted Georgian town houses of up to three stories (Drury's, The Square; 5 West Street). Morton's House is a large late 16th-early 17th Jacobean house of irregular E-shaped plan set back from the road within a courtyard entered through an early 20th century arch.

The only certain medieval buildings are the castle and the parish church. 30 West Street, a small vernacular stone cottage of 1.5 storeys, may be a former medieval hall house with its long side fronted on to the road. The majority of the surviving buildings in the medieval core date from the 17th and 18th century.

There is a terrace of early 20th century houses in an Arts and Crafts style at 20-28 East Street (Figure 23).

Building Materials

The town centre of Corfe Castle is notable for its consistent use of Purbeck stone rubble for walling and stone slates for roofing. Local Wealden brick has also been employed on the upper storey of the Town Hall (Figure 43), 25 East Street and Bridge Cottage, Sandy Hill Lane. A few buildings have plain tile roofs; notably the Railway Station and Bridge Cottage, although many others have clay ridge tiles. Ashlar dressings are common on buildings around The Square.

Key Buildings

Public Buildings: Corfe Castle, St Edward's Church, Town Hall, Town House (Figure 44), Market Cross.

Medieval and post-medieval vernacular houses: 30 West Street, Greyhound Hotel, 25 East Street, The Sweet Shop, Bartholomew's, 9-15

West Street.

Large town houses: Morton's House, Drury's, 35 West Street, National Trust Tea Rooms, National Trust Shop, Uvedale's House.

Commercial and Industrial Buildings: Boar Mill, Corfe Castle Railway Station, Bankes' Arms Hotel.



Figure 42: Bankes' Arms Hotel, East Street.



Figure 43: The Town Hall, West Street.



Figure 44: The Town House, The Square.

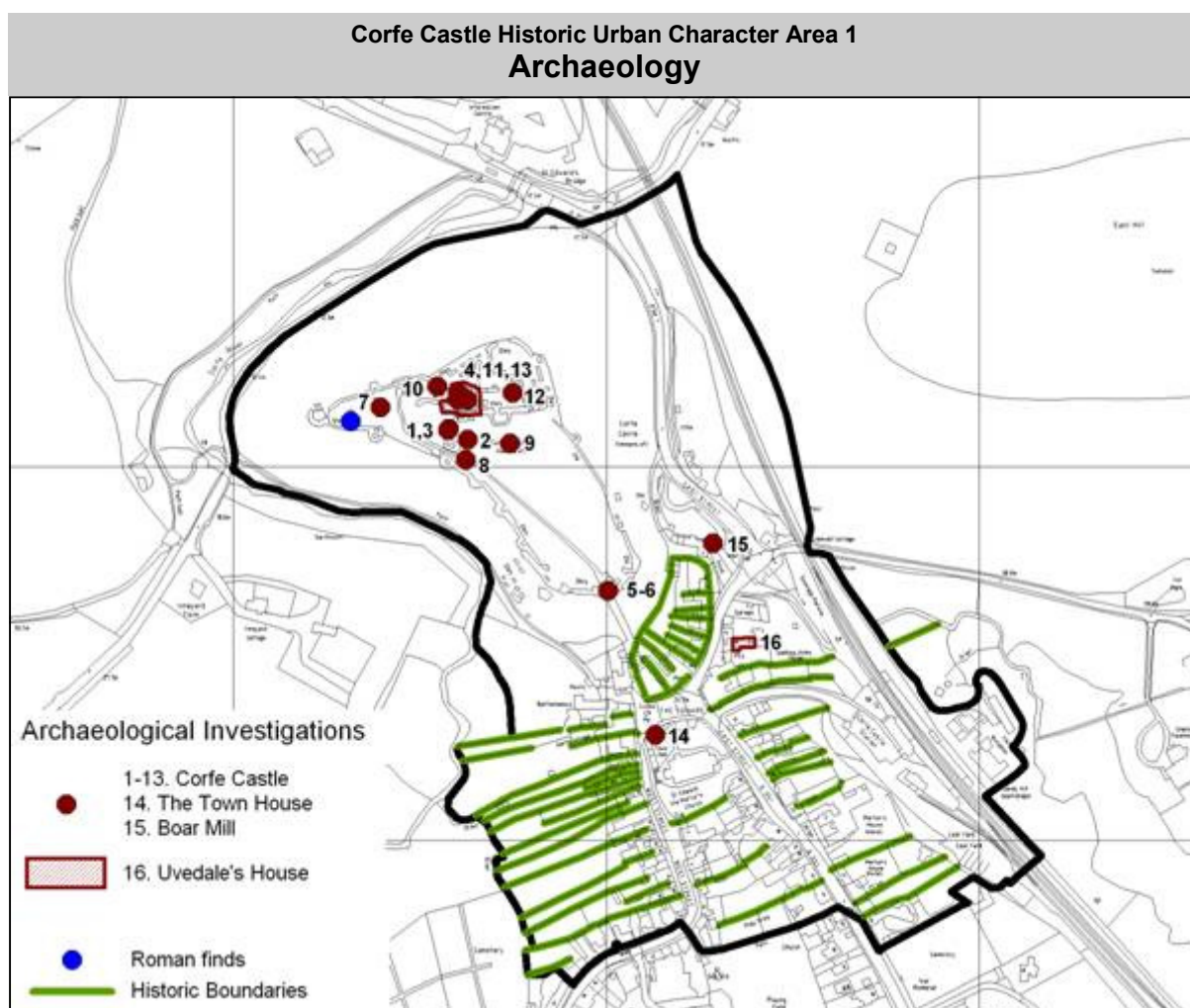


Figure 45: Archaeological Investigations and features in Historic Urban Character Area 1.

Archaeological Investigations

There have been 15 archaeological investigations in this character area, overwhelmingly focused on the castle (Figure 45; Appendix 3, Nos 1-15). The 1883 and 1950s investigations of the castle were small in scale and directed at identifying potential pre-conquest features associated with a surviving section of herring bone masonry on the south curtain wall of the middle ward (Chambers 1949; Farrar 1951). A later series of excavations by The National Trust were undertaken between 1986 and 1996 in advance of various works associated with the consolidation and display of the castle (Thackray and Papworth 1987; 1990; 1991; 1992; 1993; 1994; 1995; Grace & Papworth, 1997).

The paucity of archaeological investigation within the medieval town is probably a reflection of the minimal development that has taken place within this historic area. The chance discovery of an 18th century brick barrel vault during renovation at the Town House in 1992 led to the recovery of a large quantity of pottery

(Draper 1996). The National Trust also conducted a watching brief during repairs to the mill leat at Boar Mill in 2000 and buildings survey of Uvedale's House in advance of renovation (Papworth, 2004).

Archaeological Character

The lack of archaeological investigation in most of this area hampers a full consideration of its archaeological character. The castle has been largely undisturbed since the 17th century and is likely to retain a wealth of stratigraphic information. In particular, the possibility of pre-conquest and Norman structures surviving as sub-surface deposits is very important for a period of the castle's history that is poorly recorded and little understood. The discovery of Romano-British pottery at various locations around the castle site (notably around the south wall of the west ward and the area of the Old Hall also in the west ward) suggests that there may have been occupation here on a small scale. It is most likely that this relates to the extensive Roman industrial and settlement site at Norden to the north of the town.

The archaeological character in the historic core of the town is likely to include medieval and post-medieval deposits and features such as pits, property boundaries and structures in the rear of the plots. It may also contain evidence for craft and industrial activity in this area. There may also be remains of earlier phases of buildings incorporated into the later buildings.

fossilised on 19th century maps that are likely to represent medieval burgages and other early plots. These medieval boundaries potentially overlie an earlier system of land division. This earlier system is likely to be aligned perpendicular to the prevailing topographical grain and is visible in other parts of south east Purbeck.

Figure 45 shows possible medieval boundaries

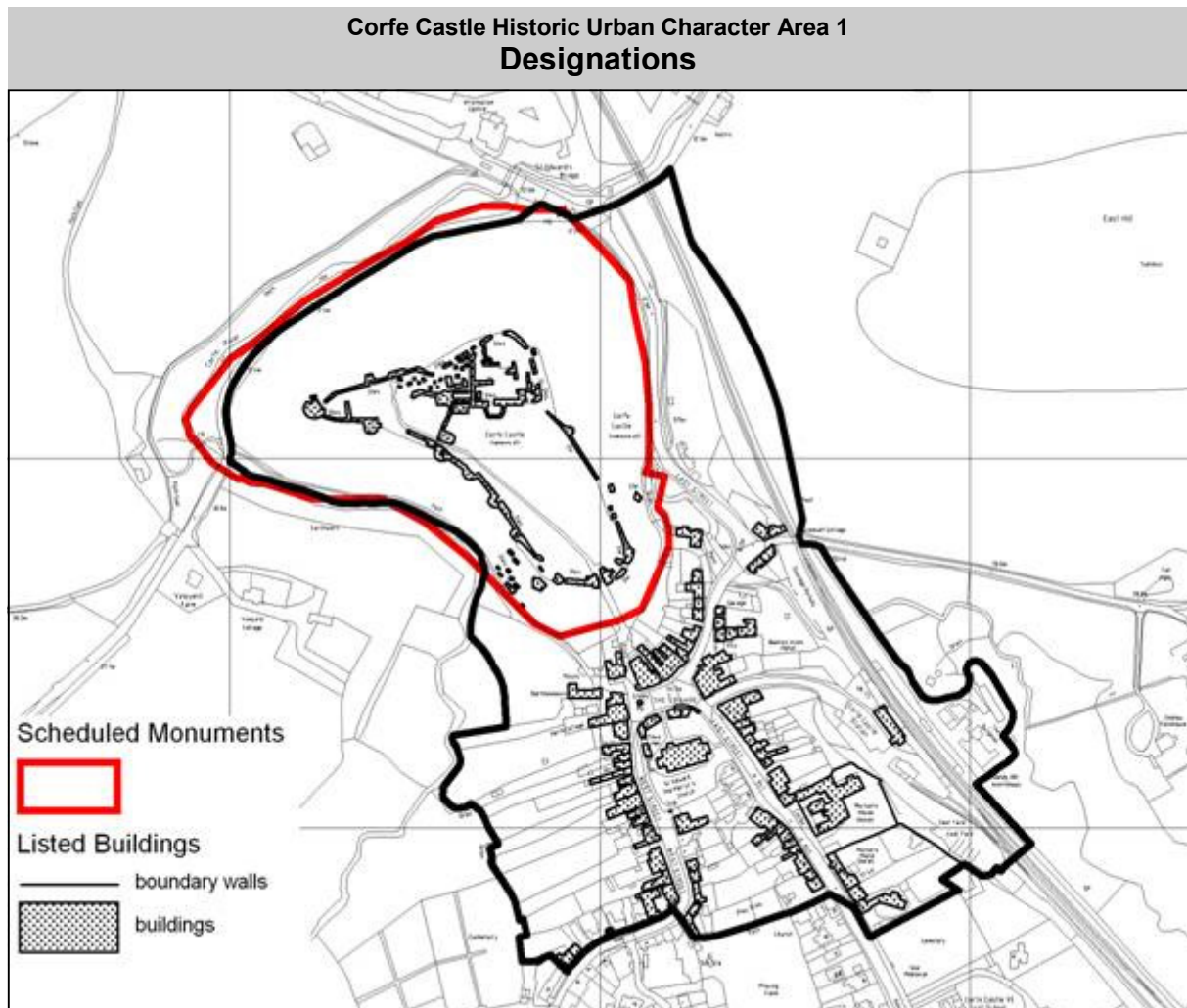


Figure 46: Listed Buildings and other designations in Historic Urban Character Area 1.

Listed Buildings

There are 69 Listed Buildings in the Character Area, one of which is Grade I (Corfe Castle), four are Grade II* (St Edward's parish church, The Old Town Hall, Morton's House and outbuildings, and The Town House). The remaining 64 are Grade II (Figure 46).

Conservation Areas

Almost the whole of this Character Area lies within the Corfe Castle Conservation Area (Figure 36). Only part of the railway embankment and the eastern half of the former

milk factory site lie outside the Conservation Area.

Registered Historic Parks and Gardens

There are no Registered Parks and Gardens within the Character Area.

Scheduled Monuments

Corfe Castle is the only Scheduled Monument within the character area (SM No. 21960).

Corfe Castle Historic Urban Character Area 1 Evaluation

Strength of Historic Character

The strength of character of this area is judged to be **strong**. It represents the oldest part of Corfe Castle. The castle was built in AD1080 but has evidence of earlier activity on the site. The castle was of national importance and its partial destruction following its capture during the civil war has left evocative and imposing ruins. The character of the medieval town results from a combination of the positive contribution made by a high number of historic 17th and 18th century buildings together with the survival of the medieval town plan and plot boundaries.

Sensitivity to Large Scale Development

The area has a **high** sensitivity to major change. The planned settlement layout has survived for over seven hundred years. The buildings themselves are relatively small in scale and together form an almost unbroken historic street frontage throughout the historic urban area. Any major development would be out of scale with the town. Furthermore, any development behind the street frontage is likely to impact upon historic burgage plot boundaries.

Archaeological Potential

The archaeological potential of this area is judged to be **high**. It forms the primary settlement component of Corfe Castle. The castle itself may have been the site of a pre-conquest settlement and any surviving deposits here have the potential to significantly increase our knowledge of a poorly documented period.

Furthermore, there is the potential for recovering evidence of putative Romano-British occupation on the site. The town itself dates from at least the 12th century and the current layout may have been planned at that time. However, it has been suggested that the earliest settlement on the site may have been a construction camp for the castle builders. This character area has the potential to reveal evidence for the origin of the town about which there has only been speculation to date. There is also potential for recovering evidence of an earlier system of land division thought to underlie the medieval planned town. Any sub-surface deposits relating to plot boundaries within the town have the potential for dating the origins of the burgages in Corfe town.

Many of the surviving historic buildings and outbuildings appear to have been built in the 17th and 18th centuries, some re-using masonry from the demolished castle. However, the economy of the medieval town was based on the trade of Purbeck marble and it seems likely that well-built stone structures were erected during the medieval period. Thus, there is a high potential for detailed information on the survival of earlier medieval structures hidden within the later post-medieval buildings. There is also potential for the recovery of information on industrial and craft activities in the town, particularly along West Street.

This area has the potential to provide information which would contribute to Research Questions 1-20 (Part 7).

Key Characteristics

- Norman and medieval castle
- Castle ruins and grounds
- Primary settlement component of historic Corfe Castle.
- Parish church located within raised churchyard enclosure
- Planned town layout centred on Market Square
- High proportion of quality 17th and 18th century buildings with contemporary detail
- High proportion of surviving medieval plot boundaries