

5.3 Eighteenth – Nineteenth Century Stalbridge (1700-1899)

5.3.1 Historical Summary

The fortunes of Stalbridge as a market town continued to fluctuate during the 18th century. The market seems to have closed for a while but in 1787 a successful Monday cattle market was opened. This market thrived in the late 18th-early 19th centuries, accommodating up to 500 cattle and attracting buyers from the Army and Navy. The nearest contemporary cattle markets were at Salisbury and Yeovil. The cattle were tied up for sale along the lengths of High Street and Ring Street, creating a great deal of noise and filth. It appears that physical injury to the Rector's wife (who lived next to the 15th century market cross) caused by the cattle, led the Rector to threaten sellers with prosecution. These threats seem to have encouraged the establishment of a rival market at nearby Sturminster Newton during the early 19th century. However, by 1817, the Stalbridge fortnightly Monday market was described as the best for cattle in the county with 120 cattle sold in one day. Stalbridge also retained its weekly Tuesday market as well as two fairs held on land near to The Ring on May 6th and September 4th. Stalbridge was well known, not only for its cattle market, but also for the manufacture of stockings and its stone quarries. Silk was also manufactured at two sites: Willmotts of Sherborne had operated out of a chamber at the workhouse on Ringtree Green (Figure 17) prior to 1770, and a second poor house operated as a silk works at Silk House Barton. In 1793 150 women and children were employed spinning silk in the town (Crick 1908, 362). Both Cornbrash and Forest Marble were quarried for building stone.

A significant part of Stalbridge parish lies within a clay vale which produces copious quantities of grass in the summer but is frequently

flooded in winter. This has led to dairy produce forming the most important component of the area's economy. Large quantities of butter and other dairy produce were exported to Poole from the region in the 18th and 19th centuries. This dairy economy was facilitated by a large number of smallholders in the late 18th century. However, in the early 19th century the agricultural revolution came to Stalbridge. The commons were enclosed by act of parliament in 1811. Larger holdings and greater use of machinery led to unemployment and a general depression in the 1820s. Rents remained high whilst agricultural wages fell. Concerns came to a head on 1 December 1830 when a riot at Stalbridge led to the destruction of a number of threshing machines.

Fortunately Stalbridge did not witness many devastating fires. The largest occurred in 1843 when four cottages burnt down in High Street. Nevertheless thatched roofs were progressively replaced with imported Welsh slate during the 19th century, a material first used in Stalbridge in 1831 (Jones 1993, 15-113).

Religious non-conformity came relatively early to Stalbridge. Hutchins mentions a Presbyterian meeting house in 1774. Wesley preached at the market cross in 1766. He recorded that Methodists had been abused and pelted with eggs and stones by Stalbridge residents in previous years but that he personally experienced only attentive audiences. The Methodist and Independent Chapels (Figure 18) on Ring Street and Station Road date from the later 19th century (Swayne 1889, 20-21).

A charity school was established in Stalbridge in 1708. The Old Schoolhouse at the junction of Church Hill and Drew's Lane was built in 1832 (Figure 19), although the school had moved to its present site on Duck Lane by the late 19th century.



Figure 17: Ringtree House; the old Workhouse.



Figure 18: The Independent Chapel, Station Road.

The Vale of Blackmore Turnpike Trust was established in 1764-5, as the western division of the Blandford and Poole Trust. It did not operate under the Vale of Blackmore name, however, until sixty years later. This later act of 1824-5 effected the turnpiking of the main road through Stalbridge, including Lower Road, Ring Street, High Street and Church Hill. A few years later in 1830 another act created a new road from Lydlinch Common, over Warr Bridge and to Stalbridge via the newly-built Thornhill Road. This later became the route of the A357, reducing the importance of the old Lower Road to Sturminster (Good 1966, 135-6).

Stalbridge railway station opened in 1863. The line had been opposed by Lord Anglesey, making the section of the Somerset and Dorset Joint Railway between Templecombe and Blandford the last to be constructed. The station enabled a direct link between Stalbridge market and Poole, but this could not halt a decline in the fortunes of the town in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Census returns indicate that the population of Stalbridge rose steadily from approximately 1250 during 1801, reaching a peak of approximately 2,100 inhabitants in 1871. From this point the population fell sharply to approximately 1,500 in 1901 and reached a minimum of just over 1200 in 1921.

5.3.2 Town Layout

The layout of Stalbridge in the 18th and early 19th centuries remained remarkably unchanged from that of the 17th century. The upturn in the fortunes of the town in the early 19th century led to the beginnings of suburban development manifested in the construction of Anglesey Cottages on Ring Street in 1831 (Figure 20). The completion of Westminster Cottages and Westminster Buildings in the 1860s coincided with the peak of population growth recorded in the 1871 census. The success of the town was



Figure 19: The Old Schoolhouse, Church Hill.

also manifest in the development of a large villa at Grove House. The centre of The Ring was also developed as an island of houses between two branches of Ring Street (Figure 22). The construction of the new turnpike road, Thornhill Road, resulted in the formation of Ringtree Green, a triangle of land formed at the junction of the turnpike and Lower Road.

5.3.3 Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Town Plan Components

The main plan components of eighteenth and nineteenth century town are shown on Figure 21 and are listed below.

1. *St Mary's Parish Church*. The 19th century saw the complete renovation of the church during Stalbridge's period of eminence as a market town.

2. *The Old Rectory*. There were no significant changes to this site during the 18th-19th centuries.

3. *Site of Medieval Manor*. Church Hill Cottages, on the Church Hill frontage, were constructed during the 19th century.

4. *Gold Street*. There appears to have been very little change to the Gold Street plots since the medieval period. However, most of the current houses date from the 18th and 19th centuries.

5. *High Street*. There appears to have been very little change to the High Street plots since the 17th century.

6. *Church Hill*. The Church Hill burgage plots seem to have been partially enclosed during the mid 19th century, with only one of furlong length remaining to the rear of Stalbridge School by the end of the period.

7. *Drew's Lane*. The south frontage of Drew's Lane was fully developed with cottages by 1782.



Figure 20: Numbers 5-6 Anglesey Cottages, Lower Road.

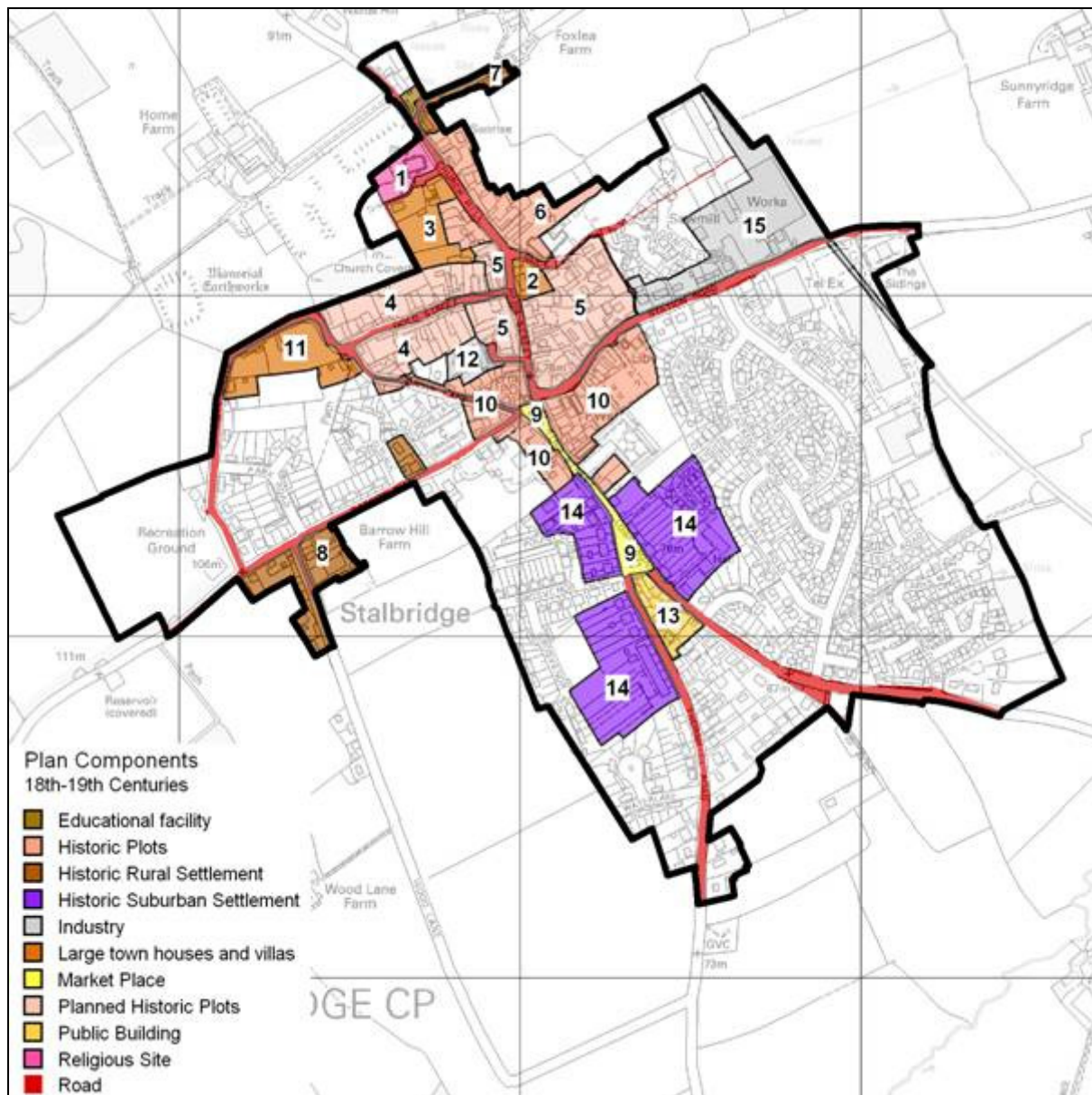


Figure 21: Stalbridge Eighteenth–Nineteenth Century Town Plan Components.

8. *Barrow Hill*. Barrow Hill House was built in the Georgian style and probably dates from the 18th century (Figure 23). A number of cottages on the west side of Wood Lane were developed during the 18th and 19th centuries.

9. *The Ring*. The Ring had developed as an ‘island’ of houses within two ‘channels’ of Ring Street by 1782. Nevertheless Stalbridge’s two fairs were recorded as being held on land near The Ring in the early 19th century. In the late 19th century The Ring became enclosed so that only the ‘channel’ on the east side (Ring Street) remained.

10. *The Ring Historic Plots* (Figure 24). These plots became fully developed in the 18th and 19th centuries.

11. *Glebe Court and Grove House*. Glebe

Court dates from the 17th century and represents the first colonisation of the area west of Gold Street. In the late 19th century this area became characterised by large detached houses and ornamental villas, notably Grove House (Figure 25).

12. *Silk Barton Silk Works*. Stalbridge was well known for the manufacture of stockings during the 18th and 19th centuries. The tithe map (1839) shows the location of one of the silk works, at the rear of Silk Barton. Jones (1993, 22) suggests that this was also the site of a poor house. The site was later occupied by a glove factory, demolished and replaced by modern apartments (Knightstone Court) in the later 20th century.

13. *The Old Workhouse*. Ringtree House dates

from c. 1760 and was originally part of the old Workhouse. One of the chambers in the workhouse had been used for silk manufacture by Wilmotts of Sherborne prior to 1770. The yard at the back of the house was surrounded by hovels occupied by the poor. The pound and the town house stood on the west side of The Ring (Jones 1993, 22-3).

14. *The Ring Suburban Villas*. Suburban housing began in Stalbridge with the construction of Anglesey Cottages on the east side of Lower Road in 1831-2. This was a block of ten semi-detached houses with hipped roofs of imported Welsh slate; the first time this material was used in Stalbridge (Figure 20). Each house came with a long narrow rectangular plot at the back. In the 1860s further semi-detached suburban villas, Westminster Cottages, and large terraced houses, Westminster Buildings (Figure 26), were built on the west side of the new Thornhill Road.

15. *Station Road Industrial Area*. The opening of Stalbridge Railway Station in 1863 led to the establishment of a new industrial area to the east of the town in the clay vale. This process began with the construction of a gas works in the late 19th century (Figure 27). The town also began to spread eastwards along Station Road towards the station.



Figure 24: Eighteenth century cottages, Ring Street.



Figure 25: Grove House, Park Grove.



Figure 22: The Ring, Ring Street.



Figure 26: View of Westminster Buildings, Thornhill Road



Figure 23: Barrow Hill House.



Figure 27: The old Gas Works, Station Road.

5.4 Twentieth Century Stalbridge (1900-present day)

5.4.1 Historical Summary

Like many Dorset towns, the later 19th and early 20th century was a period of decline for Stalbridge, with the dwindling of its industries and the general agricultural depression in the later 19th century. Census returns indicate that there was a dramatic fall in population from a high of nearly 2,100 in 1871 to approximately 1,200 in 1921. The population steadied in the 1930s and 40s, rising dramatically again only in the post-war era to a current high of approximately 2,680.

Stalbridge's fortnightly cattle market and weekly Tuesday market ceased in the 20th century, replaced by nearby Sturminster Newton as the local market town. The parish council purchased the market cross in 1918 for 1 shilling (Dike 1977, 25).

Despite the economic downturn in the early 20th century new businesses were established in the area, including a saw mill on Station Road. When the railway closed in 1966 the station was demolished and new industrial works set up on the site (Figure 28).

The late 20th century also saw the development of suburban housing estates, most notably at Jarvis Way, filling in the gap between the historic town and the station (Figure 29). Other estates were built on Barrow Hill and to the west of The Ring. Further expansion of the town to the west has been restricted through the establishment of a conservation area in May 1978.

5.4.2 Town Layout

The historic core of the town remained largely as it had done in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The major change has been the con-

struction of modern housing on the fringes of the historic town. This has had little impact on the character of the historic core, although there has also been some infilling of vacant plots along Ring Street, Back Street and Barrow Hill.

5.4.3 Twentieth century Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the twentieth century town are shown on Figure 30 and are listed below.

1. *St Mary's Parish Church*. The Graveyard was extended to the west during the 20th century.
2. *The Old Rectory*. There were no significant changes to this site during the 20th century.
3. *Site of Medieval Manor*. Two detached houses set back from the Church Hill frontage were added during the later 20th century.
4. *Gold Street*. There appears to have been very little change to the Gold Street plots since the 18th-19th centuries. However, a number of new houses have recently been built at the eastern end in a style sympathetic to the character of the street.
5. *High Street*. A small cul-de-sac of modern detached houses has been constructed on Duck Lane at the rear of Home Farm and there has been a little infilling of vacant plots along the north frontage of Station Road.
6. *Church Hill*. The Church Hill plots are essentially unchanged since the 19th century.
7. *Drew's Lane*. A few modern detached houses have been built to the north of the old schoolhouse on Church Hill, on the site of an early 20th century farmhouse. Modern cottages



Figure 28: Late View of Stalbridge Timber Supplies on the site of the old Station.



Figure 29: View of Jarvis Way bungalows.

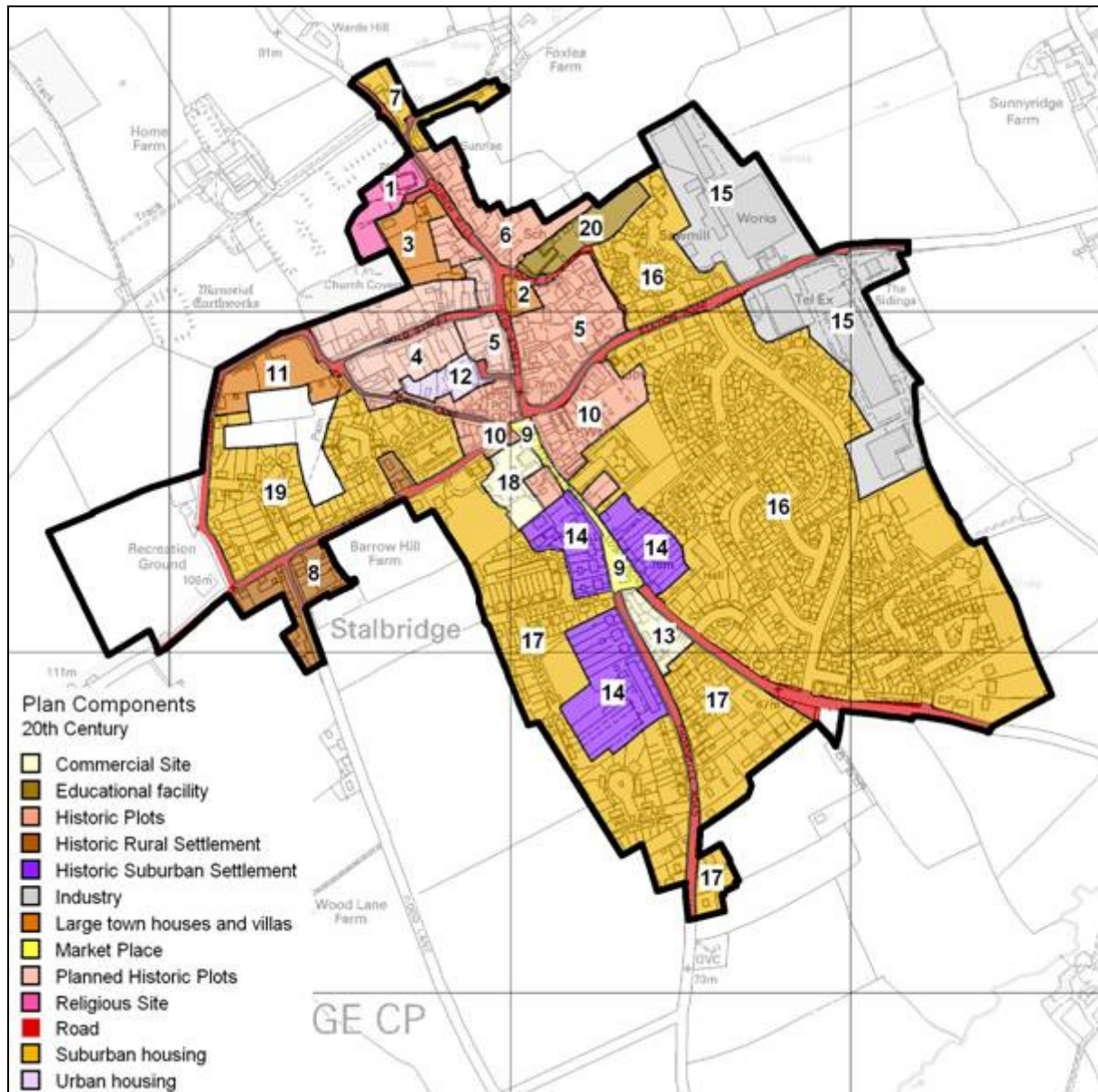


Figure 30: Stalbridge Twentieth Century Town Plan Components.

have also replaced some earlier buildings along Drew's Lane.

8. *Barrow Hill*. A few modern cottages have filled in vacant plots on Wood Lane and Barrow Hill.

9. *The Ring*. The Ring was enclosed in the late 19th century and the old buildings here acquired garden plots to the west during the 20th century.

10. *The Ring Historic Plots*. These plots are typified by modern development in their former back plots. Such developments include Old Market Mews, Grove Lane and Vale Cottages, Ring Street.

11. *Glebe Court and Grove House*. There has been no significant change to this area during

the 20th century.

12. *Silk Barton Silk Works*. The former industrial buildings were flattened during the 1970s and developed in the 1980s as modern apartments, Knightstone Court (Figure 31).

13. *The Old Workhouse*. The southern end of this plot was redeveloped during the later 20th century as detached houses and the short terrace West End Mews.

14. *The Ring Suburban Villas*. The only change during the later 20th century has been the partial truncation of back plots for the development of modern housing estates.

15. *Station Road Industrial Area*. This area expanded through the construction of a saw mill in the early 20th century and the establishment

of further commercial premises following the demise of Stalbridge Station. These include Station Road Business Park, The sidings and Fudges-Dorset Village Bakery.

16. *East Stalbridge Housing Estates*. The major part of this estate was developed during the post-war period, in the 1960s and 70s in the region of Jarvis Way. It comprises curvilinear culs-de-sac of bungalows and semi-detached houses. Late additions include Springfields to the south and Woodmills Close to the north of Station Road. These estates have connected the Station Road industrial area to the main body of the town.

17. *South West Stalbridge Housing Estates*. This plan component comprises two elements: a post-war housing estate to the rear of the 19th century suburban villas on the west side of Thornhill Road, and an estate of detached houses on the east side of Thornhill Road. The former comprises Grosvenor Road (Figure 32), Pound Close and Waterlake, with the addition of Baker's Field in the early 21st century. The latter initially comprised detached houses fronting on to Thornhill Road in the inter-war period with the filling in of back plots in the later 20th century.

18. *Dike's Superstore*. Dike's have kept a shop on Ring Street since 1851 and have recently constructed an independent superstore at the rear of the old premises (Figure 33).

19. *Barrow Hill Housing Estate*. This estate occupies the land between Barrow Hill and Grove Lane. It had comprised enclosed fields and allotment gardens in the early 20th century. By the 1950s semi-detached houses had been established along the Barrow Hill street frontage and the Park Road cul-de-sac. Grove Lane Close was built in the 1960s with Pond Walk added during the 1990s.

20. *Stalbridge Primary School*. The school was established on its current site in the late 19th century and the core of the building dates from that time. The plot was initially small but extended during the later 20th century to include a large field at the rear. The building has also been extended in a piecemeal fashion (Figure 34).



Figure 31: Knightstone Court, Silk House Barton; on the site of the former silk works.



Figure 32: View west along Grosvenor Road.



Figure 33: Dike's Superstore



Figure 34: Stalbridge Primary School, Duck Lane.