

5.3 Medieval Wareham (AD1150-1539)

5.3.1 Historical Summary

Following the destruction of property and other upheavals of the civil war of Stephen and Matilda, Wareham appears to have begun a slow recovery. The evidence for this is contradictory and the town may have developed more slowly during the late 12th and 13th centuries, which was a period of steep economic growth in other parts of the kingdom. By the late medieval period, the town appears to have stagnated, partly due to the rise of the port of Poole.

In 1189 King John (then Prince John) acquired through marriage the estates of the earls of Gloucester, which included the town and castle. In about 1207, he repaired the castle and subsequently stayed there on numerous occasions, often on the way to and from Corfe Castle (Davis 1984). King John granted Wareham its first charter in 1211, giving the town full control over salmon-fishing, grazing rights, mills, shops, customs duties, mooring fees, weekly markets, annual fairs and their own judicial courts (Davis 1984).

Evidence for economic activity during the later 12th and early 13th centuries includes entries in the Pipe Rolls which record that the burgesses were fined in 1179-80 for erecting a guild without a licence, indicating organised trade. The first documentary evidence for Wareham as a port belongs to the early 13th century. The documentary evidence indicates trade with Normandy and along the south coast and the main items of trade appear to have been, wine, corn, leather and salt (Davis 1984). The town was successful enough to enable it to maintain, enlarge or rebuild the seven or eight churches and chapels in the town. Wareham had the

second highest number of churches and chapels for any medieval town in Dorset (after Shaftesbury).

After the death of King John in 1216, the ownership of the town passed to the earls of Clare. Wareham was only a minor part of their holdings and held little interest other than the revenue it could provide and they regained the rights given to the burgesses of the town by King John.

By the end of the 13th century, the economy appears to have been in decline. The river channel was silting up, making the passage of larger ships up to Wareham more difficult. This led to a drop off in the volume of trade into the port. The rise of the port at Poole took away the foreign trade from Wareham, leaving only local trade coming in and out of the port. The last mention of Wareham as a major port is in 1347 when three ships and 94 men were sent to the siege of Calais (Hutchins 1861, 93).

The Lay Subsidy of 1322 suggests that there were only 27 taxpayers in the town. This was the same number as the newly established and rival port of Poole but considerably less than successful Dorset towns such as Shaftesbury and Sherborne (with over 100 taxpayers each), Weymouth and Melcombe Regis (with over 60 taxpayers) and Dorchester (with 53 taxpayers). Furthermore, most of the taxpayers in Wareham paid only a small amount of tax, suggesting a relatively poor town with no very wealthy inhabitants (Penn 1980, 110; Mills 1971). The Black Death appears to have hit Wareham hard, with seven priests recorded as dying in 1348 alone, and may have helped accelerate the decline of the town. Wareham seems to have become a small market town and minor port, dependent on local trade. The location of



Figure 14: View of the 16th century Priory House on the south side of Lady St Mary's Church.



Figure 15: Lady St Mary's Church looking south. The Chancel (left) dates from the 14th century and the tower (right) dates from the 15th century. The intervening fabric dates from 1841 or later.

Wareham with its large relatively unproductive heathland hinterland was not able to support a large market.

Wareham Priory (Figure 16) held the rectory of Lady St Mary's church as well as the presentation of the churches of St Martin, St Michael and St Peter within the town. The fact that the rectory was held by an alien priory may have restricted the development of Wareham. There were certainly complaints in the middle of the 14th century that the priory had been deliberately run down and profits expropriated to France. The fear of English property being in the hands of French Kings during the Hundred Years War led to the suppression of alien priories in 1414. The lands belonging to Wareham Priory were granted to the Carthusian monastery at Sheen (Page 1908, 121-2). The priory was dissolved in 1536.

An almshouse was founded by John Streche in 1418 at Wareham for the relief of six poor and impotent men and five poor women 'to have their continual living there' (Page 1908, 107).

5.3.2 Town Layout

The best clue to the medieval layout of Wareham lies in 18th century maps of the town. These indicate a road layout essentially the same as today and comprising the grid of late Saxon streets, but with some additions including Dollins Lane, which has been shown through archaeological investigation to date from the 13th century or later (Hinton and Hodges 1977). The name New Street suggests this is not part of the original street layout, but its date of origin is not known. Trinity and Pound Lanes preserve the outline of the inner and outer baileys of the castle.

Teresa Hall has noted that there is some geographical grouping of the different types of street name in the town (Hall 2000, 56). The western half of the town contains occupational street names, such as Tanner's Land, Roper's



Figure 16: Priory House, the original 16th century wing lies to the rear in this photograph.

Lane, Mill Lane, Tinker's Lane, which could indicate the area of and nature of medieval craft industry in the town. The northeast part of the town contains street names incorporating personal names, including Dollins Lane, Bells Lane, Morton's Lane, Wyatt's Lane, etc. Street names related to churches are found over most parts of the town.

The 18th century maps also indicate the general layout of the medieval burgages and suggest that North, South and West Streets were fully occupied, while East Street and numerous side streets were less so. The larger part of the area enclosed within the town walls appears to have been given over to agricultural plots and gardens, particular on the north and east sides of the town.

5.3.3 Medieval Urban plan components

The main plan components of the medieval town are shown on Figure 18 and are listed below.

1. *The Church of Lady St Mary (Figure 15).* The late Saxon church of Lady St Mary continued to be modified and added to during the medieval period. St Edward's chapel was considerably altered in the 13th century. The original presbytery and apse were replaced by a new large chancel in the early 14th century. The West Tower was built during the late 15th century, with the vestry and west porch added on to it during the early 16th century (RCHME 1970; Pitfield 1985).
2. *The Priory.* Wareham Priory was an alien cell of Benedictine monks subordinate to the Abbey of Lire in Normandy. It was in existence from at least the early 12th century until the suppression of alien priories in 1414, after which it was held by the Carthusian monastery of Sheen until the dissolution. Part of the priory appears to have been rebuilt in the early 16th



Figure 17: View west along St John's Hill.

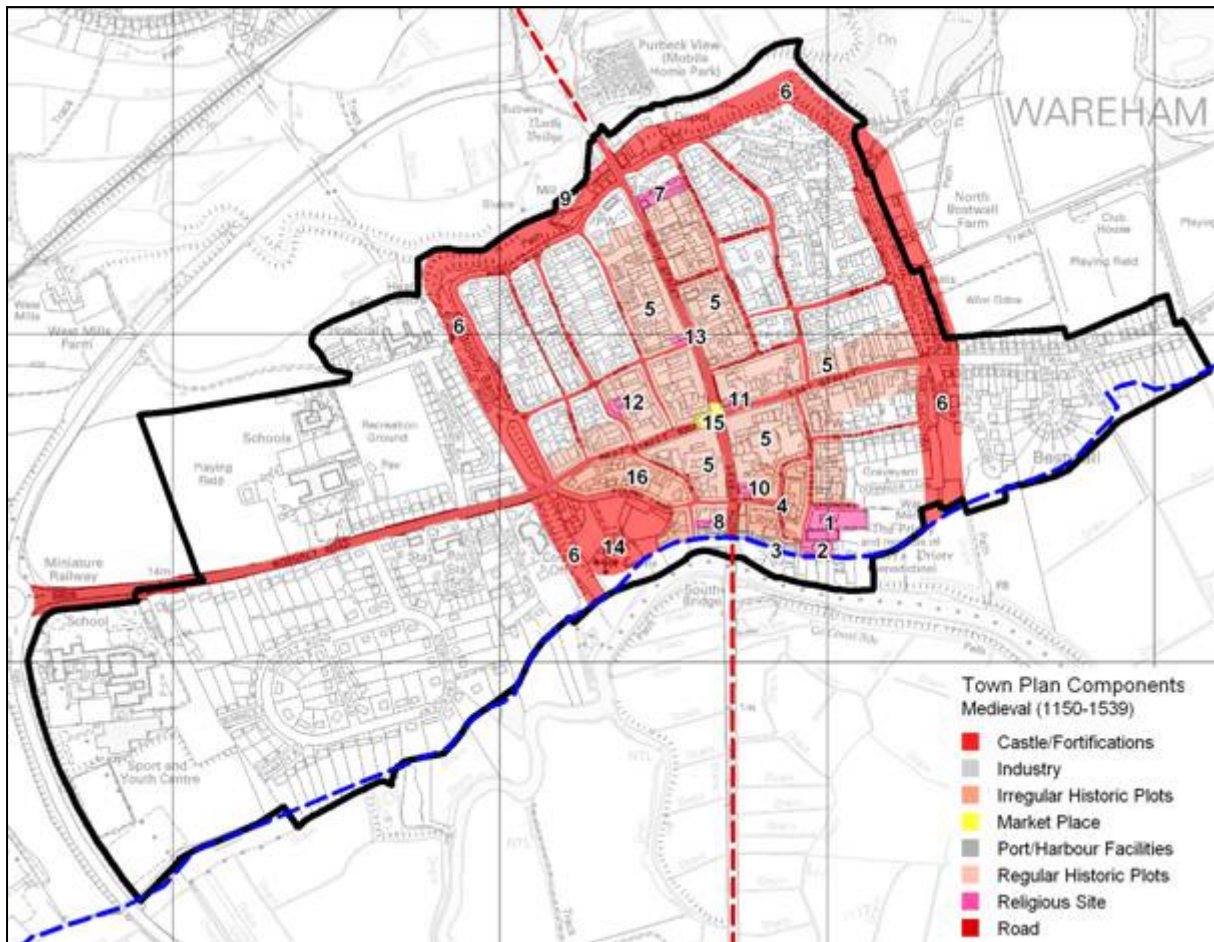


Figure 18: Wareham medieval plan components. The dotted blue line shows the postulated edge of the floodplain.

century and is now part of the present Priory Hotel (RCHME 1970, 317-8) (Figure 16).

3. *The Quay*. Nothing of the form and arrangement of the medieval quay is known, it probably remained largely as it was in late Saxon and Norman times.

4. *St John's Hill*. Documentary evidence for the use of this area immediately behind the quay is lacking for this period, but it is likely to have remained part of the commercial focus of the town. This area possibly represents the site of medieval fairs held on the feast of St John. As such it may also represent the site of medieval markets. It forms an open square behind the east side of South Street and is therefore close to the medieval hub of the town around Lady St Mary's Church and the quay (Figure 17). A large late medieval barn stood along the northern edge of St John's Hill, parts of which still survive (Figure 19).

5. *Burgages*. 18th century maps indicate that the medieval burgages were concentrated along the four main streets. Streche's Almshouses in East Street were founded in 1418, though the east end of the street was more sparsely occupied.

The northern and eastern parts of the town were largely undeveloped during the 18th century and are likely to have been so during the medieval period also.

6. *Town Defences*. The late Saxon or Norman stone wall running along the top of the defensive bank was later robbed down to its foundations, although it is not clear when (RCHME 1970, 325).

7. *St Martin's Church*. There were minor alterations and insertions of windows and doors in the 13th and 14th centuries. The west end of the church was entirely rebuilt in the 15th century. The south tower dates from the 16th century (RCHME 1970; Pitfield 1985).

8. *Holy Trinity Church*. Holy Trinity Church appears to have been completely rebuilt in the 14th century. It had a combined nave and chancel and a north aisle (Figure 20). There were some minor alterations in the 15th or early 16th century (Pitfield 1985).

9. *North Mill*. North Mill was known to have been owned by the Priory in 1150. Nothing is known of the form of the mills at this date.

10. *St John's Church*. The first documentary reference to the free chapel of St John was in 1415. It continued in use throughout this period.

11. *St Peter's Church*. St Peter's church was first documented in 1348, but undoubtedly existed earlier. Hutchins described it in the 18th century as a small church with a simple nave with no evidence for a chancel (Hutchins 1774, 32).

12. *St Michael's Church*. This church was first documented in 1340, but probably existed much earlier. It was still in use in 1540 (Hutchins 1864, 108).

13. *All Hallows Church*. This chapel stood on the west side of North Street and traces of its crypt remain in the cellar of 19 North Street. It was annexed to St Martin's during the post-medieval period, although it is not known when it was built (Hutchins 1774, 29; Penn 1980, 110).

14. *The Castle*. King John restored the ruined castle in about 1207. The ditch of the outer bailey was filled in during the early 13th century.

15. *The Market*. Wareham's weekly Saturday market charter was confirmed in 1272. Grants of fairs are recorded from 1200 onwards. One particular fair of John the Baptist is recorded for 1280 and may indicate that the site of St John's Hill was the site of medieval fairs (Penn 1980, 111). Eighteenth century maps indicate that the central cross roads were the site of post-medieval markets and a good candidate for a medieval market place (Figure 21).

16. *Pound Lane*. This area was formerly the outer bailey of the Norman castle. The outer bailey ditch appears to have been filled in during the early 13th century. Pound Lane and Trinity Lane developed along the edges of the former bailey. The area between may have been developed during the later part of this period, but evidence is lacking to confirm this.



Figure 19: Warehouse, St Johns Hill, converted from a barn built in about 1500.



Figure 20: Holy Trinity Church.



Figure 21: View north along North Street. Prior to the great fire in 1762 shambles ran along the centre of North Street.

5.4 Post-medieval Wareham (AD15400-1799)

5.4.1 Historical Summary

This period saw the continuing decline in the importance of Wareham, which continued as a small market town. The 16th century was a time when many towns in England expanded and grew in importance, but Wareham appears to have stagnated or declined. In about 1540 Leland described Wareham as "... now within the waulles faullen down, made into gardens for garlike." This suggests that much of the area within the walls was comprised of open plots and gardens and not built up.

The dissolution of the priory in 1536 probably did not have a great effect on the economic fortunes of the town, as it was small, containing only a few monks. The property of the priory was sold off. There is relatively little information on the fortunes of the town in the 16th century, though there are a number of alterations and extensions to the churches and a small number of stone houses surviving from this date. Contemporary deeds reveal trades, such as dyeing, joinery, building, shoemaking and gloving in the town (Squibb 1947). Wareham's weekly Saturday market continued during this period. The market place was located in the central square at the junction of the four main streets. North Street and South Street widened at this point to accommodate the shambles running along the central axis, as revealed on 18th century maps. By the early 18th century, Defoe described Wareham as a neat town; full of people, but within the ruins of a once larger town.

Wareham played an important role in the English Civil War, largely a result of its proximity to Corfe Castle. Wareham declared for Parliament, and formed the base for an attack on Corfe Castle in 1643. The town was subsequently captured by the Royalists and several

raids were made on the town, which was taken by the Parliamentarians after a fierce battle in 1644 and retained by them until the end of the war. The town walls were strengthened during the struggles. Circular platforms at strategic points along the walls noted by Hutchins may represent part of these modifications (Penn 1980, 111).

Wareham had little industry during the post-medieval period, other than the normal trades associated with a rural market town. Defoe mentioned Wareham as one of the Dorset cloth-making towns, but there is little evidence of this industry. The knitting of woollen stockings was a major occupation of the women of Wareham at the end of the 18th century and early 19th century (Davis 1984). Brewing developed as one of the major industries of the town in the second half of the 18th century, though this reached its peak in the 19th century. There are records of brewhouses in the town from the late 17th century and by the middle of the 18th century there were at least four breweries, including one at the south end of South Street and one in Pound Lane. A number of maltings are also recorded in the town at this date (Davis 1984). Wareham beer was being exported as far afield as Portsmouth and London. A clay pipe manufactory is known to have existed in North Street (Farrar 1974). An 18th century grain store survives alongside the quay at number 1 The Quay (Figure 22). This indicates that the quay was still important locally for the storage and transport of bulk agricultural produce by water. At the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, there was a significant ship-borne trade of vegetables to Poole.

Religious non-conformity came early to Wareham. In 1672 the house of Dorothy Chapman in Wareham was granted a licence to function



Figure 22: View of The Quay from across the River Frome.



Figure 23: The former Streche's Almshouse, East Street.

as a Presbyterian meeting house (Davies 1976, 30). In 1694 a site in Church Street, formerly a garden, was acquired and a new meeting-house erected. It was rebuilt in 1747, but was destroyed by fire in 1762 and subsequently rebuilt. In 1789, doctrinal differences lead to a split in the congregation and the more orthodox members built a new chapel on West Street, which opened on New Years Day 1790 (Stell 1991).

A Free School was endowed in Wareham in 1693 by the will of George Pitt. The endowment of £20, along with other liberties, was for the payment of a '...schoolmaster to instruct the children of Wareham and Stowborough to read, write, cast accounts, and other good learning...' (Hutchins 1861, 89).

Streche's almshouse was rebuilt on the south side of East Street in 1741 (Figure 23). The walls are brick with a pitched Purbeck slate roof and red brick chimney stacks.

In 1762 devastating fire destroyed two thirds of the town. The fire started in the back of the Bull's Head in South Street when some ashes were thrown on a dung heap parched by dry weather. The wind spread the fire from thatched roof to thatched roof. The affected properties are recorded on a map held at the Dorset History Centre (DHC D1/10,367) and show that nearly all the houses on East Street were burnt, together with the southern most part of North Street (including the shambles), the eastern half of West Street and the entire block comprising Trinity Lane and the western side of South Street.

The rebuilding after the fire dramatically transformed the appearance of the town. The buildings were built in brick in a Georgian style, thus providing much of the familiar streetscape of the modern town and defining much of its perceived historic character. Thatched roofs were banned from the reconstructed buildings and where they

exist in the town today they mark the limits reached by the fire. The Town Hall had been housed within the walls of the former St Peter's Church prior to the fire, and although the structure was saved it was ultimately demolished and a new town hall built on the site in 1768.

The Rev. John Hutchins was Rector of Wareham from 1744 to his death in 1773. At the time of the fire he was away preaching but the rectory was seriously damaged. His wife was able to save numerous priceless manuscripts enabling Hutchins to continue his life's work of documenting the history of Dorset. He was buried in the church of Lady St Mary.

Both North and South Bridges were designated County Bridges during the 18th century (Good 1966, 39-41). The Wareham Turnpike Trust was established in 1765-6. This act made provision for ten roads, many of which connected Wareham with towns and villages in Purbeck including Corfe, Swanage and Langton Matravers. West Street from the Market cross was turnpiked as part of the new road to Weymouth (only completed as far as Wool). Roads north of Wareham were also turnpiked including the road to Bere Regis and that to Lychett Minster. Toll gates were set up at the north end of Stowborough village as well as at Westport and Northport, Wareham (Good 1966, 138-40).

At the end of this period, war had been declared on France in 1783. A cavalry barracks was built just outside the West Walls (on the site of Westport House), to accommodate 120 cavalry officers (Davis 1984).

5.4.2 Town Layout

The existence of a number of 18th century maps and plans means that for the first time there is a clear depiction of the town layout. In the 18th century, the street pattern was similar to today, but with the addition of two further lanes in the



Figure 24: The Old Maltings, Abbot's Quay.



Figure 25: North Mill viewed from the North Walls.

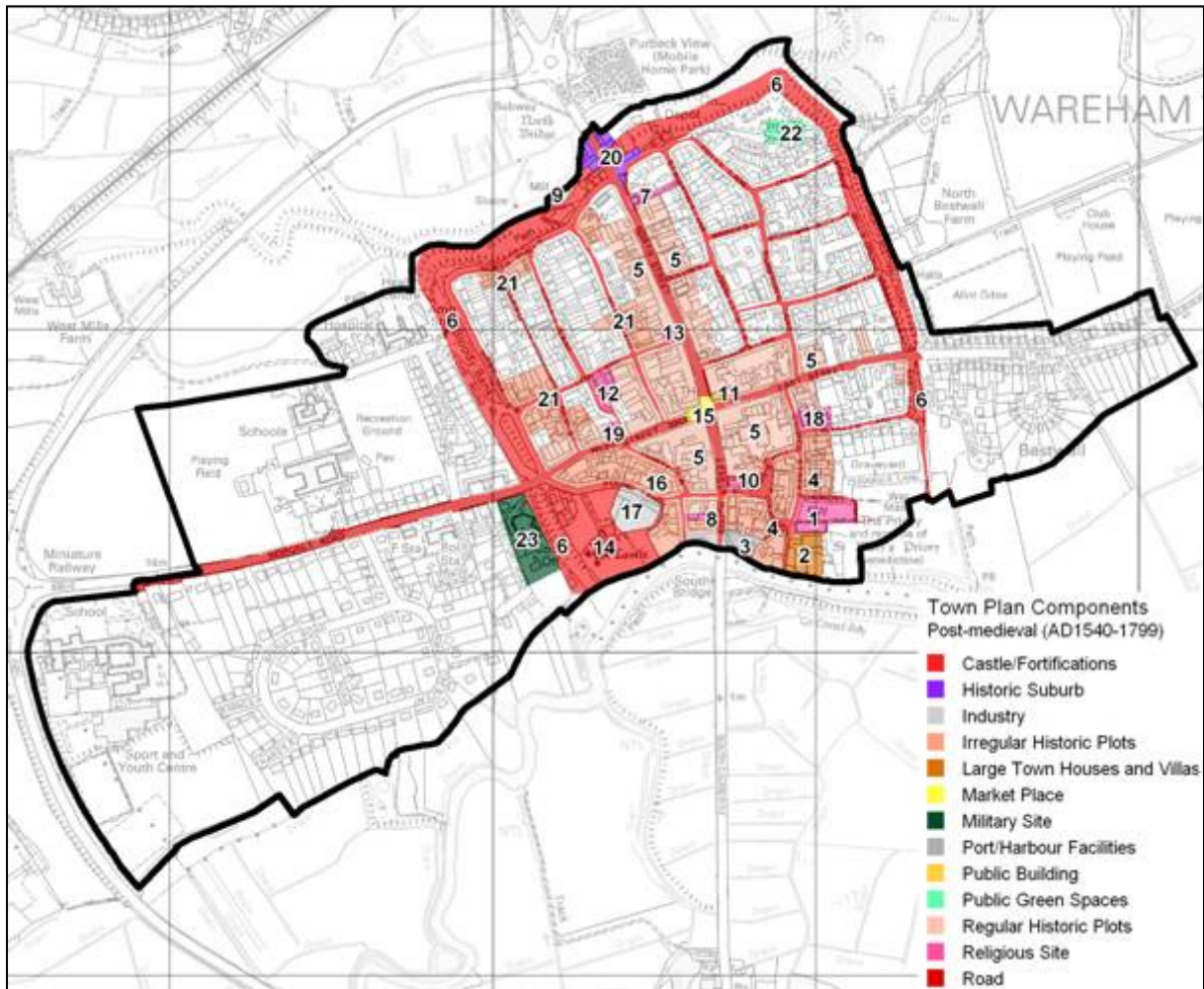


Figure 26: Wareham post-medieval plan components

northeast corner. The castle was now an open area called Castle Green. The two southern quarters were almost fully occupied, apart from the easternmost part and Pound Lane, which just contained two brewery buildings. The 18th century quay is shown in the same place as the modern quay. The northwest quarter had become more fully occupied; New Street and Mill Lane were fully divided into plots at their southern ends whilst a number of isolated larger houses and cottages had been built in the northern part. The northeast quarter, apart from the North Street and part of East Street, was agricultural plots and gardens. The extreme northeast corner of the town, within the angle of the town walls, contained a bowling green in the late 18th century. The maps also provide clear evidence for the existence of North Mill and of an extra-mural suburb between the town walls and North Bridge.

5.4.3 Post-medieval Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the post-medieval

town are shown on Figure 26 and are listed below.

1. *The Church of Lady St Mary.* There were no significant alterations to Lady St Mary Church during this period, although there was some refitting and refurnishing of the interior (Pitfield 1985).
2. *The Priory.* The present house was built on the site of the former Priory. The eastern part of the south range dates from the early 16th century. It is unknown whether this range was standing at the same time as any surviving Priory buildings, or was built as a private residence following the dissolution. The house was extended significantly during the 17th and 18th centuries to almost its full modern extent (RCHME 1970, 317-8).
3. *The Quay.* A new Quay seems to have been established during the post-medieval period, following a long period of silting up of the harbour. Archaeological observations have shown that the modern quay comprises post-medieval made ground above waterlogged medieval silts (Hinton & Hodges 1977, 45). Eighteenth century

maps show that there were large grain stores and maltings (Figure 24), as well as houses and commercial premises, arranged around the quay.

4. *St John's Hill*. The local name of this area was 'Sawpits', which may indicate the existence of carpentry trades or timber merchants in this area. A number of warehouses and offices were built along the northern side of St John's Hill and next to the Quay in the 18th century. One of these warehouses was converted from a 16th century barn. A number of 18th century town houses were built along the east side of the Quay on Church Green and may represent houses of merchants on land formerly occupied by the Priory. The open square in St John's Hill was used as a market for cattle and may have been the site of one of the town's annual fairs. The 18th century maps also show an open green, Church Green, in front of Lady St Mary Church.

5. *Burgages*. An 18th century map specifically subtitled 'Survey of the burgage tenements in Wareham, June 23rd-March 1st 1746' (DHC D/RWR/E53) indicates that settlement had spread from the four main streets. The southern ends of Mill Lane and New Street, as well as Church Lane and Trinity Lane, were fully built up by the 18th century. The northern and eastern parts of the town were much less developed. Many of the buildings were destroyed in the 1762 fire. A large town house, known as the 'Manor House' was built in South Street in 1712 for George Gould. It had extensive gardens to the rear and survived the fire.

6. *Town Defences*. Circular mounds at the northwest and northeast angles of the town walls are thought to represent Civil War modifications, possibly artillery emplacements. The northern part of the western bank is known as the Bloody Bank and is reputed to refer to the execution of seven Dorset men who took part in the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685. The town walls were included as part of the town com-

mons during the post-medieval period. The southern end of the east walls was probably levelled sometime before the end of the 18th century.

7. *St Martin's Church*. The roof of the nave and north aisle appears to have been renewed in the 16th century. The high south porch was added in 1712 and an opening in the north wall of the north aisle was blocked during the 18th century (RCHME 1970, 312; Pitfield 1985). In 1736 the church became disused, and after the great fire of 1762 it was altered to accommodate some of the poorer people whose homes had been destroyed (Pitfield 1985).

8. *Holy Trinity Church*. The west tower was added during the late 16th or early 17th century. The east wall and the north aisle appear to have been rebuilt during the 18th century (Pitfield 1985). John Hutchins was its last rector. The church became disused after the 1762 fire.

9. *North Mill*. The present Mill House dates from the 17th or 18th century (Figure 25). There is also an 18th century sluice and bridge attached (RCHME 1970, 322).

10. *Chapel of St John's the Baptist*. It is not known at what date St John's went out of use, or when it was demolished, but it had gone some time before the 18th century.

11. *St Peter's Church*. A brick tower was added to the west end of the church in about 1700. It may have been damaged during the great fire of 1762 and was demolished and replaced by a purpose-built town hall and corn exchange in 1768 (Penn 1980).

12. *St Michael's Church*. St Michael's Church remained in use until at least 1755, but was converted into a barn shortly afterwards and was demolished during the later 18th century (Pitfield 1985).

13. *All Hallows' Chapel*. All Hallows remained in use until at least 1631. It was converted into stables in 1774 and was later used as a ware-



Figure 27: The Market Place looking west.



Figure 28: The Rectory, former residence of John Hutchins.

house.

14. *The Castle*. 18th century maps indicate that the area of the castle was an open green during the 18th century.

15. *The Market*. Wareham's weekly Saturday market remained throughout the post-medieval period. Eighteenth century maps show that the market place lay at the junction of the four main streets where there was an open square (Figure 27). North Street and South Street were slightly wider at this point, with the Shambles running axially along the middle. The shambles were destroyed in the fire of 1762 and not replaced.

16. *Pound Lane*. There was some encroachment on the land formerly part of the castle bailey from at least the early 18th century. The Holy Trinity rectory on Trinity Lane dates from the early 18th century (Figure 28). Some of the buildings in this area were damaged by fire in 1762. Those on the south side of Pound Lane were not rebuilt until the 19th century.

17. *Pound Lane Brewery*. A brewery existed in Pound Lane by the mid 18th century. By 1790, it was run by Thomas Hyde and Stephen White (Davis 1984). Brewers are not recorded in documents in Pound Lane until the 19th century. However, the late 18th century maps of the town clearly depict buildings in place there by 1762.

18. *Wareham Old Meeting-house*. A Presbyterian meeting-house (later a Congregational Chapel) was built in Church Lane in 1694. This was rebuilt in 1747, but was destroyed during the fire of 1762 and a new building was erected on the site (Stell 1991) (Figure 29).

19. *Wareham Congregational Chapel*. Following a split from the Old Meeting in 1789, a Congregational Chapel was opened in West Street in 1790 (Figure 30). The chapel was built by George Gollop and John Swetland (Stell 1991).

20. *North Bridge*. Eighteenth century maps show a number of houses built adjacent to the north causeway or just inside the town walls.



Figure 29: Old Meeting House, Church Lane.

These include two 18th century houses at the north end of North Street.

21. *Northwest Quarter*. The 18th century marked a period of expansion on a limited scale into formerly uninhabited parts of the town. A number of isolated cottages were built within the walls in the northwest part of the town. Surviving 18th century buildings include 34 Cow Lane, 37-43 Roper's Lane, and 46 & 48 Mill Lane.

22. *Bowling Green*. A bowling green is depicted within the angle of the northeast town defences on late 18th century maps. This survived as an earthwork until recent times and prompted an archaeological investigation prior to its conversion to a public playing field in 1972. The excavation produced 18th century pottery, confirming the documented history of the site (Parrington 1974).

23. *Barracks*. A cavalry barracks was built at Westport between 1795 and 1800. It was closed and demolished in about 1816.



Figure 30: Churchwood Court, façade of former Congregational Chapel, West Street. Built 1789.