

5.2 Post-medieval Gillingham (1540-1850)

5.2.1 Historical Summary

Gillingham was a relatively small town at the end of the medieval period and seems to have remained so throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, but the population increased significantly during the 18th and early 19th century. The hearth tax returns of 1662-4 record 122 householders and 367 hearths, similar to Christchurch and Wareham (Penn 1980, 68). Gillingham's returns were for the entire large parish rather than the urban area alone. The population of the parish was 2520 in 1831 but had risen to 3775 by 1851.

The town was not unduly affected by the dissolution of the monasteries. The advowson of the church, formerly held by Shaftesbury Abbey was initially granted to Lord Wriothesley, but reverted to the Crown a year later. Queen Elizabeth converted the Rectory and Prebend into two prebends styled Gillingham Major and Minor in 1582 (Hutchins 1868, 644). St Catherine's Chantry was extinguished in 1547 and its lands granted to Sherborne School. These changes amounted to little more than a change of landlord to the tenants of Gillingham and had little effect on the economy of the town.

Of far greater significance was the enclosure of the forest of Gillingham during the late 1620s. Originally, when the manor of Gillingham was granted to Lord Elgin in 1625, part of the forest lands were reserved by the Crown. These seem to have been granted to James Fullerton later in that year and he was given licence to enclose the forest five years later. This proved a difficult process which led to riots and resistance from the tenants of Gillingham. The tenants traditionally enjoyed rights of common in the forest and were granted small plots of land in lieu of these rights on enclosure. However, a number of problems concerning rights of way and quality of land led to a large and organised

group of tenants forcibly tearing down enclosure fences and filling in ditches, as well as preventing further enclosure work. The army was dispatched to quell the rioters but it was not until the winter of 1628 that they were finally arrested and fined. There is evidence to suggest that the enclosure and narrowing of the wide forest roads across the clay lands contributed to their becoming impassable during the winter months. This reduced the volume of traffic between Gillingham and Shaftesbury, detrimentally affecting the market there (Hutchins 1868, 623; Bettey 1976, 21-4). Despite these difficulties, there were frequent references to tenants enclosing pieces of wasteland and erecting buildings on them during the 18th century (Shaw 1973, 16). This process probably began with the establishment of the suburb of Newbury in the 13th century, continued in to the 17th century with the enclosure of the forest and then on in to the 18th century with the expansion of the settlements at Ham Common, Peacemarsh and Bay.

During the Civil War St Mary's Church was sacked by parliamentary forces and the Vicar's property was seized, only to be returned to him on the restoration of the monarchy. Gillingham was held by parliament.

In June 1694 a fire broke out which is said to have destroyed 40 houses in three hours, and another fire in May 1742 destroyed six houses (Hutchins 1868, 619). As a result of these and possibly further unrecorded fires, there are very few architectural features in the town which pre-date the 18th century (Penn 1980, 68).

Gillingham was reckoned as one of nine cloth-making towns of Dorset in the early 18th century, but the industry declined in the later 18th century (VCH). Linen weaving was carried on from 1800-1850 and by 1823 there were five



Figure 13: The former Wyke Brewery, Wyke Road.



Figure 14: The old Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Portland Cottages, Queen Street.

manufactories of bed-ticking and dowlas (a coarse linen cloth) (Pigot's Directory 1823). In 1838 a flax mill was mentioned and a jute and tow spinning factory was mentioned in 1850. This was two storeys in height and capable of working 800 heavy spindles, with a cording room and engine house adjoining. In 1769 the Gillingham Silk Company was established and began silk throwing in the town. The site was at Town Mill, adjoining the existing mill on the west side of the mill pond. The company was bought by Stephen Hannam in 1776, whose family worked the silk mill until 1875. During the early 19th century 160 people were employed there, as well as many other cottage workers. Many women in Gillingham were employed in the manufacture of leather gloves (Hunts Directory 1851). At some time before 1800 the brewery at Wyke was started by the Matthews family (Figure 13). By the early 19th century there were a number of small brickworks at Gillingham and its immediately surrounding area (Young 1971). By 1825, there was a brickworks at Kingscourt, Park House Farm (Ross 1991, 1992). Another undated (but probably 19th century) brickworks lay in Newbury (Bellamy 2003). The Gillingham Gas and Coke Company was formed in 1837 to provide gas lighting for the town.

Commercial growth led in 1837 to the opening of the first bank in the town, the Wilts and Dorset Banking Company, in premises close to the Phoenix Hotel in The Square. However, despite this industrial and commercial growth, Gillingham was not immune to the effects of the agricultural depression and the bank closed in 1847.

Agriculture remained of vital importance to the town's economy throughout the post-medieval period; the two annual fairs were for bullocks, horses and sheep. A bacon factory was established on the new Station Road in 1847 (Shaw 1973, 16-21). There was also a large trade in slaughtering cattle for the London markets (Hunts Directory 1851). In 1801 the Liberty of Gillingham contained 1873 persons of whom 973 were employed in agriculture and 796 in trade, manufacture and handicraft (Hutchins 1868, 649).

A workhouse was built in 1737, paid for by private donation. This was presumably the old workhouse at Bay, which was closed in 1835-40, converted into cottages and then into the house known as Spring Gardens (Shaw 1973, 16). A parliamentary report dated 1777 listed a parish poorhouse in operation in Gillingham for up to 70 inmates. The Shaftesbury Poor Law Union came into being in 1836, of which Gil-

lingham was part. A new building was constructed in Shaftesbury and opened in 1840 to replace the parish poor houses at Gillingham, Shaftesbury and Motcombe (Higginbotham 2008).

The history of non-conformism in Gillingham is not well known. The earliest Presbyterian meeting-house in Gillingham was licensed at the house of Robert Berren in 1672 (Davies 1976, 30). A Wesleyan Methodist chapel was built by Henry Broadway in Queen Street, near the Parish Church in 1792 (Biggs 1987). It was later enlarged and is now converted to housing and known as Portland Cottages (Figure 14). The first Primitive Methodist Chapel was built at the top of Turners Lane in 1838. In 1839 a Baptist chapel was built in Newbury, but had to be rebuilt in 1858-9 (Stell 1991).

The Free School continued in its premises in the Market Place. A National School was started in 1839 in a new school room near the Vicarage (Lloyd 1998, 87).

Gillingham's fire service was established in the late 18th century with the purchase by the Vestry Committee of the first manual pump for the town in 1790. It was housed in a room under the Free School (5 High Street). It was replaced in 1836 by a horse-drawn manual pump, although the original pump was restored after WWII and is now housed in Gillingham Museum (Anon 1992).

The Shaftesbury and Sherborne Turnpike Trust was established in 1752-3, the first turnpike act relating to Dorset. This primarily concerned the Great Western Post Road between Shaftesbury and Sherborne but also included a number of side roads. One of these was the road from Shaftesbury to Wincanton via Gillingham (the present B3081). The Vale of Blackmoor Turnpike Trust began in 1764-5 but a later act relating to it dated 1831 included provision for the turnpiking of the road between East Stour and Newbury via Madjeston, the present B3092. This superseded the medieval route across Chantry Ford (Good 1966, 124 & 136-7).

5.2.2 Town Layout

The post-medieval period did not see wholesale change in the layout of Gillingham, but rather expansion along already established lines. The most significant planned change was the enclosure of the forest, as well as the major roads through it. Thus, where the settlement of Ham had comprised a few houses on the edge of Ham Common in the medieval period, the post-medieval settlement comprised many

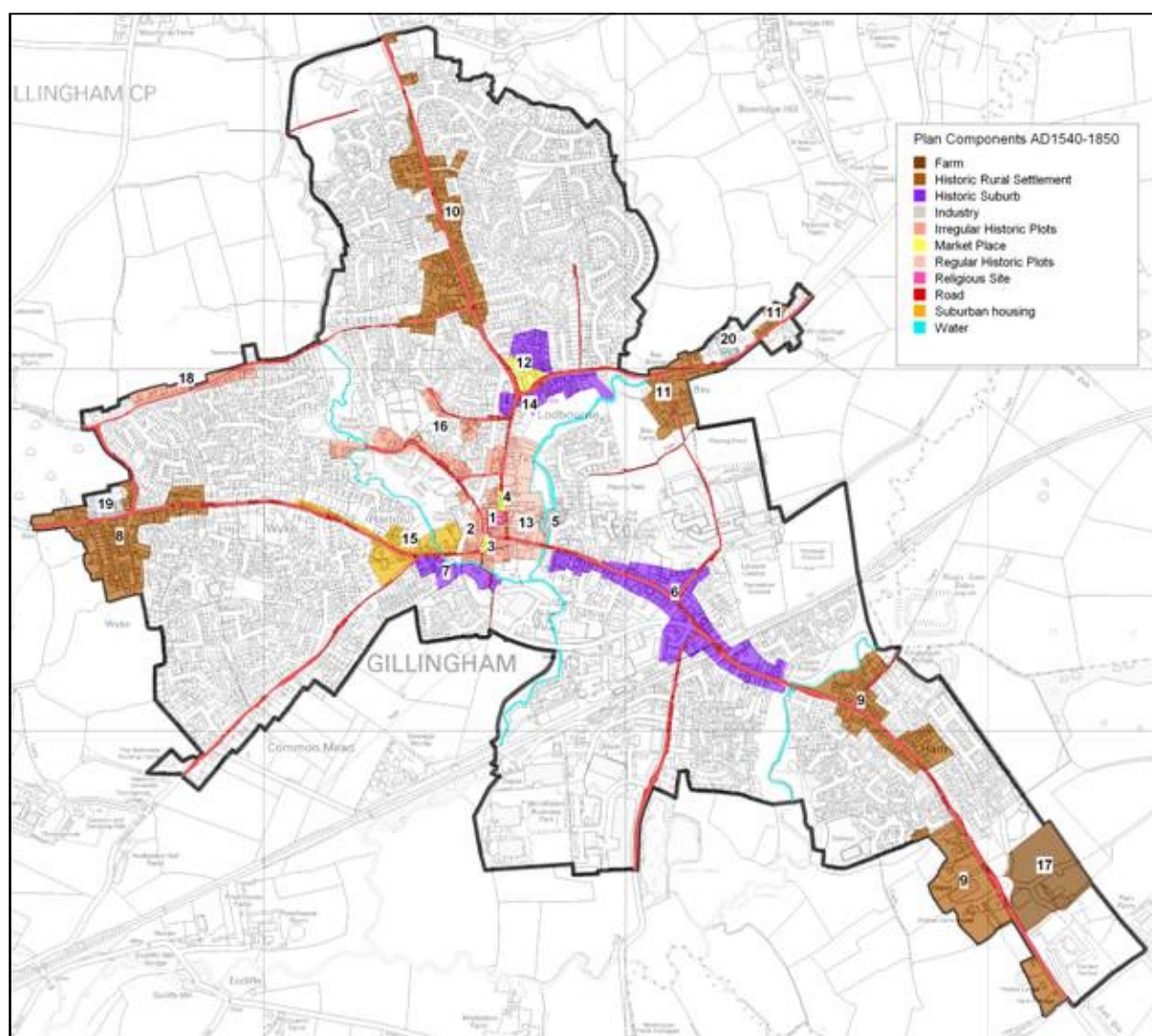


Figure 15: Gillingham Post-medieval Town Plan Components.

more houses within plots subdivided from the common and fronting on to the significantly narrowed Shaftesbury and Kingscourt Roads. Similarly the settlement of Bay developed as plots enclosed from the formerly open Bay Road and Bay Lane. These details are revealed through comparison of the Forest Map dated 1624 and the Tithe Map dated 1841. However, documents reveal that these enclosures of waste do not all date from the early 17th century disafforestation, but continued in a piecemeal fashion throughout the 18th century. Although outside the bounds of Gillingham Forest, the shape of historic plots in Peacemarsch are also suggestive of enclosure from formerly wide open roads at Peacemarsch Road and Wavering Lane. By the end of the period suburban villas had been developed at the eastern end of Wyke Road, although piecemeal enclosure of waste alongside the road had also occurred further west in the Cold Harbour region. This process might also explain the shape of plots containing cottages in the Rolls

Bridge and Tomlins Lane area, although some of these cottages seem to have been built within pre-existing paddocks and closes. Suburban development also expanded in the Lodbourne area, although there appears to have been contraction in the Chantry Fields area by the post-medieval period. Within the urban area of the town itself there may have been relatively few changes to the layout. Devastating fires during the 17th and 18th centuries mean that little of the built environment pre-dates the 18th century. It may have been during the post-medieval period that the infilling of The Square and St Martin's Square took place.

Minor alterations to the road layout may have taken place as a result of the late 18th and early 19th century turnpike acts. The only roads affected were the through route from Shaftesbury to Wincanton (the modern B3081) passing through Newbury, High Street and Queen Street; and the modern B3092 (New Road) prior

to its diversion by the railway. The name suggests that this road was newly built or improved in the early 19th century and that it probably superseded the medieval southern route into the town via Chantry Ford.

5.2.3 Post-medieval Town Plan Components

The main plan components of the late sixteenth-seventeenth century town are shown on Figure 15 and are listed below.

1. *St Mary's Parish Church*. It may have been during the later post-medieval expansion of the town that the former large rectangular church yard was enclosed by plots fronting on to High Street and Cemetery Road. The church itself, with the exception of the chancel and north chapel (14th century) and the west tower, south aisle and vestry (early 20th century), was rebuilt during 1838 (RCHME 1972, 27).

2. *Town Plots*. It is difficult to know exactly how the town plots developed during the post-medieval period. The earliest map depicting them dates from 1841, by which time their form is similar to that of today. The earliest buildings date from 18th century rebuilding following town centre fires.

3. *The Square*. The Square probably existed in its present form before the end of the medieval period. Although the current buildings date from the 18th century, documentary evidence suggests that there was a school house on the site of 5 High Street in by 1516.

4. *St Martin's Square*. The present buildings on the south side of St Martins Square date from the 19th century and buildings on these plots are clearly shown on the Tithe Map of 1841. There is every possibility, however, that they were rebuilt on the site of earlier buildings infilling the square in the early post-medieval or late medieval period.



Figure 16 : Mill House with Mill Cottage in the background. The apartments to the left have been built on the site of the Town Mills.

5. *Town Mill*. Town Mill is recorded in the 1662-4 hearth tax assessment and continued in use as a corn mill until 1966. In 1769 the Gillingham Silk Mill was set up adjacent to it and continued throwing silk until 1875. Pevsner claimed that Town Mill was Gillingham's archaeologically most remarkable building and one of the oldest surviving textile mill buildings (Newman & Pevsner 1972, 216). Unfortunately it was damaged by fire in 1982 and was demolished during the early 21st century. Mill House and Mill Cottage are the only surviving historic buildings on the site (Figure 16).

6. *Newbury*. Newbury is likely to have expanded during the later post-medieval period, although the earliest map of the suburb dates from 1841. Harwood House was built in the early 17th century, although its north gable was partly rebuilt in brick in 1694. Blackmore Vale House, The Laurels and Lodden Bridge Farmhouse all date from the early 19th century.

7. *Chantry Fields and Farm*. Excavations have demonstrated that the medieval settlement on Chantry Fields was abandoned before the post-medieval period. Chantry Farm and the cottages at Chantry Ford are all that remain. Chantry Cottage appears to be 17th century in origin with coursed rubble walls and thatched roof (Figure 17). Chantry Ford cottage dates from the 18th century and has whitewashed rubble walls.

8. *Wyke*. It is difficult to be certain exactly to what extent Wyke expanded during the post-medieval period. Wyke House and Brewery House certainly date from the Georgian era however. The brewery itself was started some time prior to 1800 and may have led to an increase in the number of Wyke residents. The town pound was located next to the Brewery at the junction of Pound Lane and Wyke Road.

9. *Ham Common*. The settlement at Ham Common developed substantially during the post-medieval period. This was initially through the



Figure 17 Chantry Cottage.

enclosure of the forest which resulted in the creation of many house plots from former common land on either side of the road. However, documents suggest that piecemeal enclosure from waste may have continued into and throughout the 18th century (Shaw 1973, 16).

10. *Peacemarsh*. Some of the documentary references to enclosures from waste are likely to have referred to Peacemarsh and this area almost certainly expanded along Peacemarsh Road and Wavering Lane during the post-medieval period.

11. *Bay*. This settlement is clearly depicted on the Forest Map of 1624 and comparison with the Tithe Map of 1841 clearly documents the development of Bay during the post-medieval period. It is clear that Bay Road was enclosed, probably during the process of disafforestation in the early 17th century, and houses built fronting on to the new narrow road.

12. *Lodbourne Green*. The two annual fairs continued throughout the post-medieval period and are likely to have been located at Lodbourne Green, called allotment fair ground in the tithe apportionment of 1841. The fairs were for bullocks, horses and sheep. The site is well situated for the droving of livestock, at the junction of two major routes just outside the town centre.

13. *Town Burgages*. If there had ever been a complete block of burgages on the east side of Queen Street, then some boundaries were lost during the post-medieval period as plots were amalgamated and/or abandoned. This process might be associated with the devastating fire of 1694. By the 18th century a number of larger town houses such as Lime Tree House (Figure 18) had been built within the enlarged plots.

14. *Lodbourne*. This suburb seems to have expanded significantly during the post-medieval period. It is not entirely clear which processes led to this expansion. It may be connected with increased commercial activity in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Alternatively it may be

connected with a move away from the town centre following fires in the 17th and 18th centuries. It may even represent the piecemeal enclosure of a once larger fair field, on both sides of Bay Lane. It is most likely that all three factors influenced the development to some degree.

15. *Cold Harbour*. The name Cold Harbour is often taken to reflect the site of a building that was partly derelict during the medieval period and often seems to correspond with the site of a Roman settlement. This could certainly be a valid explanation in the case of Gillingham's Cold Harbour which lies approximately 250 yards from a known Roman settlement. The name also suggests that there was no extant medieval settlement here. By the late post-medieval period there was certainly a suburban settlement here comprised partly of suburban villas and the large 18th century ornamental villa Knap House at the eastern end of Wyke Road, and piecemeal development of cottages from waste further west.

16. *Rolls Bridge and Tomlins Lane*. Rolls Bridge Farm may be the earliest settlement element in this area. The Tithe Map depicts a number of cottages along Rolls Bridge and Tomlins Lanes, seemingly enclosed from waste alongside the roads in a piecemeal fashion.

17. *Park Farm*. Park Farm is unlikely to date to before the disparking of Gillingham Park in 1630. The farm building itself dates from the early 19th century. The original farm buildings lie within the former area of Gillingham Park, close to a surviving section of the park pale.

18. *Wavering Lane*. A group of cottages are depicted on the tithe map at the western end of Wavering Lane on the edge of the modern urban area. These have long narrow plots adjacent to the lane and clearly represent the enclosure of waste along the side of the road (Figure 19). These enclosures are most likely to have been formed during the 18th century, when documents refer to many such acts.



Figure 18: Lime Tree House, Queen Street.



Figure 19: Thistledown Cottage, Wavering Lane West.

19. *Wyke Brewery*. Wyke Brewery was established at some time prior to 1800 by the Matthews family. Brewery House is Georgian in style and dates from the late 18th century. The main brewery building was built in the mid 19th century.

20. *Malthouse Farm, Bay*. Malthouse Farm is listed as a malt house in the Tithe Apportionment of 1841. It is not clear when it was established as such, although the development of the brewery at Wyke may well have stimulated the opening of a malt house at Bay.