

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT DOCUMENT

WEST COWES

1. INTRODUCTION

English Heritage has initiated a national series of Extensive Urban Surveys. Several counties have commenced such projects including Hampshire County Council who are undertaking the survey of the small towns of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. The survey is intended to provide an up-to-date view of the archaeological resource in each of the towns building on earlier surveys (e.g. Hughes, 1976; Basford, 1980) and consists of three phases: Data Collection, Data Assessment and Strategy. The first stage, Data Collection, draws together the accessible history of the town, the archaeological knowledge and historic buildings data. The Data Assessment phase of the survey leads to the production of a report which presents a brief history of the town, (this document is not intended as a definitive history) an analysis of the plan of the town, an assessment of the archaeological and buildings data and the state of modern development resulting in the identification of areas of archaeological importance. Information about the development of the town through the ages, including plan-form analysis and the identified areas of archaeological importance, is also presented in cartographic form at the end of the report. The Strategy phase of the survey, uses the information presented in the Data Assessment combined with current statutory and non-statutory constraints, and present and future planning policy to make recommendations for policies regarding the historic environment. The policies may be incorporated into Local and Unitary Development Plans, non-statutory policies, supplementary guidance and for use within development control.

2. LOCATION

West Cowes (NGR SZ496963) lies on the western bank of the mouth of the River Medina where it flows into the Solent at the most northerly point of the Isle of Wight. The town climbs from sea level to around 50m OD. West Cowes is approximately 7km to the north of Newport, the principal town of the Island.

3. BACKGROUND

ARCHAEOLOGY

Prehistoric

There are only four recorded sites and find spots of prehistoric date in the area of West Cowes in the County Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). Flint arrowheads have been recovered from two locations in the town, one near Westhill Road and the other from a garden of a property on Street Faith's Road.

Two Bronze Age ring ditches have been identified from aerial photographs on the recreation ground on the western edge of the town.

Roman

A single Roman coin has been found in the town

Anglo-Saxon

No sites or finds of Anglo-Saxon date in the vicinity of the town are recorded in the SMR.

Medieval

No sites or finds of medieval date from the immediate area of Cowes are recorded in the SMR.

Post-medieval

There are the sites of several post-medieval salterns recorded along the coast to the south of the centre of West Cowes.

HISTORY

Anglo-Saxon

The land upon which West Cowes now stands formed part of the manor of Bowcombe (Page 1912, 269) which was the principal manor of the Island and which included Carisbrooke, the central refuge of the Island. Carisbrooke church has been identified as a minster church that had a *parochia*, or area of jurisdiction, that stretched from the north coast to the south coast of the Island (Hase 1984, 47).

Medieval

The principal settlement in the northern part of the *parochia* of Carisbrooke in the medieval period was Northwood, a little over 2km to the south-west of West Cowes. Northwood is not mentioned in the Domesday Survey of the late eleventh century. There was a chapel at Northwood, which was dependent upon the mother church of Carisbrooke until the sixteenth century when it gained parochial rights and exemption from contributions towards repairs of Carisbrooke church (Page 1912, 270-1). Although Northwood does not appear to have been a major settlement, it was the most heavily taxed settlement in the West Medina in the 1334 Lay Subsidy when it was assessed at £7. 5. 0 compared to Carisbrooke, which was assessed at only £1. 2. 2 and Bowcombe that was charged £5. 9. 6 (Glasscock 1975, 119-120).

In the fourteenth century King Edward III decreed that there should only be three ports in the Island, namely Ryde, Shamblers and Yarmouth (Page 1912, 197). To the south of West Cowes a copse called Shamblers Copse is marked on the Ordnance Survey (OS) 1st Edition 6" map of 1866. There was also a Shamblers name on the east side of the River Medina, and it is thought that the name is derived from *Shamlord*, an estate identified as a land holding of the Abbot of Beaulieu on the east side of the Medina recorded from the late thirteenth century (Page 1912, 198). It appears that there was an East Shamlord and a West Shamlord and that the latter place was located where White's foundry stood just above the (1912) ferry to East Cowes (Page 1912, 269). There appears to be little other information about the medieval port. The list of the three ports is interesting in that only Yarmouth is generally recognised as an important medieval port and borough, but other ports on the Island included Newtown, Newport, Brading and St Helens.

It is suggested that the inhabitants of this part of Northwood parish were seafarers and traders (and probably smugglers) as there are records to at least one man being pardoned for selling wool without paying custom (Page 1912, 269).

Post-medieval

It is suggested that the place-name is derived from the name of some sand-banks close to the mouth of the River Medina. The Port Book of Southampton recorded *the Cowe* in 1469 and in 1512 the naval fleet victualled at *the Cowe* (Page 1912, 269; Harding, 1978) which indicates that the name was in use before the construction of the pair of castles at East and West Cowes began in 1539. The castles formed part of a chain of castles, including those at Yarmouth, Hurst, Calshot and Southsea which were built to protect the Solent and approaches to Southampton and Portsmouth at a time when there was a fear of a French invasion (Muir, 1990, 211-212). The construction of the castles probably led to the development of small settlements on either side of the Medina. The growth of Cowes was recorded by Sir John Ogländer in 1627 when he commented on the potential benefits to the Island of having a new market centre and so not having to use Newport's market. Ogländer stated that he could remember the time when there were only three or four houses at Cowes (Page 1912, 197; Harding, 1978).

The land upon which Cowes was built lay in two estates, one belonging to the Stephens family which was purchased from the manor of Alvington in 1547 and was previously known as Barnetts, and the second, which was in two parts, was part of the manor of Debourne and Wilmington (Harding, 1978).

It appears that the Stephens family were probably the people who most encouraged development in the town. In 1631 ten occupiers were listed in a document relating to a legal dispute and it is thought that this was the number of houses on the Stephens' part of the settlement at that date. By 1660 Richard Stephens made a settlement of his lands which included six ancient messuages in West Cowes and Northwood and 60 newly erected messuages in West Cowes. By 1691 there were 148 houses on the Stephens' land. Hearth Tax returns also indicate that the land belonging to the manor of Debourne and Wilmington as also being developed. In 1725 it was recorded that there was a population of 1,250 people in the town (Harding, 1978).

In the seventeenth century East Cowes was the more important of the two settlements and its growth coincided with the settlement of the American colonies and the strong trading links that were formed. In 1677 4,000 hogsheads of tobacco from Virginia came into East Cowes and 3-4,000 barrels of rice from Carolina were screened before being shipped to the continent (Page 1912, 197). The settlement also provided supplies for the fleets of merchant ships which would ride off Cowes for several weeks in times of war or whilst waiting for favourable winds (Albin 1795, 583). It is probable that West Cowes also benefited from the presence of such fleets. The American War of Independence broke the trading links in the late eighteenth century (Page 1912, 197).

In the mid-eighteenth century a bath-house was built in the town and by 1771 there were two bath-houses, one near the castle, and the second at Egypt. The baths were a major attraction that led to Cowes becoming a fashionable watering-place (Harding, 1978).

The Yacht Club (later the Royal Yacht Squadron), was founded in East Cowes in 1815, before moving to West Cowes, and then, in the 1850's the Squadron moved to their present home in the castle (Harding, 1978). Cowes is regarded as the hub of the yachting world. Many members of the Squadron and retired naval officers built elegant houses to the north of the town that had fine views across the mouth of the Medina and the Solent. Both West Cowes and East Cowes benefited from the purchase of Osborne House by Queen Victoria in 1845 which increased the popularity of the Island (Gale 1987, 38, 41).

West Cowes became an ecclesiastical parish in 1894 when it was taken out of the parish of Northwood (Page 1912, 268).

4. ANALYSIS

TOPOGRAPHY OF WEST COWES

Introduction

The plan of Cowes is irregular with most of the early settlement lying along the coast, probably due to the attraction of the waterfront for its quay facilities, and partly because of the relatively steep slope to the west that may have been a less attractive area for initial settlement. Apart from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century large houses and nineteenth-century terraced houses, it is difficult to see stages of development within the plan. Harding has identified the area of the Stephens' holding as stretching from Watch House Lane in the north to Carvel Lane in the south (Harding, 1978). At the heart of this area is the possible market area and the majority of the older properties of the town. However, if the land belonging to the manor of Debourne and Wilmington to the north and south of the Stephens' land was also being developed then it should be possible to identify other foci of early development and so resulting in West Cowes being a polyfocal settlement. It is, though, not possible to identify such foci within the plan.

Streets

The principal street of the town is High Street that takes a curving course approximately parallel to the shore line. It is believed that the line of a harbour wall, built by John Stephens in the mid-seventeenth century, lies along the line of High Street, and so High Street may

have been the earliest quay or landing stage of the town. Bath Road continues the line of High Street towards the castle. At the south end of the High Street is Shooters Hill that leads on to Birmingham Road and then Medina Road which leads to the ferry to East Cowes. Sun Hill and Market Hill climb to the south-east from the High Street and meet up resulting in a small triangular area at their junction.

The main road into the town is Newport Road which enters the town from the south but it does not follow a direct course into the town. Mid-nineteenth century maps show the road leading up to the southern edge of the grounds of Westhill House, and then the road skirts the edge of the grounds before turning to the north to lead into the town.

Many streets were newly laid out in the mid- and late nineteenth century, along which terraced houses were built.

Market B1

At the foot of Market Hill is an area, partly built on by the mid-nineteenth century, which may represent the site of the town's market. The market is first mentioned in 1816 when an Improvement Act was passed which allowed for the setting up of a market in the town (Page 1912, 269).

Property plots

Early properties B2

The historic core of the town is focused along High Street, and around the triangular area formed by Market Hill and Sun Hill. Within this area the property plots are small, frequently only slightly larger than the buildings within the plots, and overall do not exhibit evidence of strong regularity and planning.

Properties on reclaimed land B3

If the line of the first sea wall does lie along High Street, then all properties on the east side of High Street have been built on reclaimed land.

Nineteenth-century properties B4

To the south and south-west of the town centre there are rows of terraced houses, for example, Thetis Road, Pelham Road and Bernard Road, that were built in the nineteenth century for workers from White's Yard (Harding, 1978).

To the north of the historic core, near the castle are larger late eighteenth and nineteenth century properties (not marked on map).

Buildings

Northwood House and Park B5 and B6

A house called Bellevue formerly stood on the present site of Northwood House that was rebuilt in 1837 and extended in the 1840's. The park surrounding the house was created from 1801 after a farm adjacent to Bellevue, Debourne Farm, was purchased. The present-day Northwood Park consists of the pleasure grounds around the house. The outer landscape park has now been largely developed. The wall that surrounded the park survives in places, and three of lodges still stand including Round House and Church Lodge.

Westhill House B7

The OS 1st Edition 6" map of 1866 shows a house called Westhill House set in a small park. By 1898 part of the park had been developed and new streets, Gordon Street and Westhill Road had been laid out. Westhill House has been demolished and the area of the park completely developed.

Other buildings

There appear to be few survivals of the earliest buildings of the embryonic seventeenth-century Cowes. The Vectis Tavern, a timber-framed building, may be one of the oldest buildings of the town. There are a number of better quality eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses in the town.

Churches and Chapels

St Mary's B8

The chapel of St Mary was built in 1657 and consecrated in 1662. It is a rare example of a chapel established during the Commonwealth period (Page 1912, 271; Harding, 1978). The building was enlarged by Nash in 1811 and demolished and rebuilt in 1867 (Pevsner and Lloyd 1967, 740-1).

Other churches and chapels (Not marked on map)

St. Faith's in Newport Road built in 1909, Holy Trinity, Queen's Road of 1832, and the Roman Catholic church of St. Thomas of Canterbury, which was built in 1796 (Pevsner and Lloyd 1967, 740-1).

There was also a Congregational chapel constructed in 1804, a Wesleyan chapel of 1831, a Baptist chapel built in 1877, and a Primitive Methodist church dating from 1889 (Page 1912, 271).

Castle B9

Construction of the castle at West Cowes, began in 1539 and it is thought that stone from Quarr Abbey and the grange of Beaulieu Abbey on the east side of the River Medina was used for this castle and its partner at East Cowes (Harding, 1978).

Quay (Within B3)

A sea wall was built by John Stephens in the mid-seventeenth century but there was no quay until 1756. The line of the sea wall lies approximately along the centre of High Street, and was frequently hit by council workmen digging up the road (Harding, 1978). Some of the quays and jetties exhibit evidence for extensions in the form of vertical joints in the stonework and different building materials.

Railway B10

In 1862 the first of the Island's railways, the Isle of Wight Central Railway, was opened between Cowes and Newport. The railway terminus and station stood near the junction of Terminus Road, Railway Street and Carvel Lane. The site of the station has now been developed.

Trades and Industries

Ship-building

There is no evidence of ship-building in West Cowes until the mid-eighteenth century. East Cowes was the shipbuilding centre where war ships were built. A Trinity House and Admiralty report of 1698 pronounced that West Cowes was not a suitable place for ship-building but East Cowes did have suitable facilities. From the mid- to late eighteenth century there are records of tradesmen working in, or connected to, ship-building in West Cowes, including chandlers, blockmakers, rope-makers, sail-makers, blacksmiths and coopers (Harding, 1978). A ropeworks on the south side of Mill Hill Road was established about 1820 (Insole and Parker 1979, 19) and was shown on the OS 1st Edition 6" map of 1866.

John White, from the Kent ship-building family, moved to Cowes in the early years of the nineteenth century, taking over Nye's ship-building yard which lay on the eastern side of the Medina. A new shipyard, the Thetis Yard, was opened in West Cowes in 1815. The Thetis

Yard was built on reclaimed marsh land as was the later Medina or West Cowes Shipyard. The modern-day extent of White's Shipbuilding Yard incorporates both the Thetis and Medina Docks. The Medina drydock was back-filled in 1889 and the ship-building yard cleared for the construction of an engineering works to be built which produced engines for the ships. White's was a progressive company that developed many new features of ship design and engine technology (Williams, 1993).

Brick-making (Not on map extent)

Brickmakers were recorded in the town from 1630 (Harding, 1978). There was a brickyard on Mill Hill, indicated by a field-name shown on a map of c.1815, and a brickworks in Shamblers Copse to the south of the town (Gale 1987, 41).

Salterns (Not on map extent)

A saltern was started in the marsh to the south of the road to the ferry in 1729. The salterns were in disuse possibly by the late eighteenth century and were later used as a timber pond (Harding, 1978).

Mill (Not on map extent)

A windmill, West Cowes Mill, was located between the southern end of Mill Hill Road and Love Lane to the south-west of the town centre.

5. RECENT DEVELOPMENT

Within the historic core of the town there has not been a high level of modern development with a few medium sized developments in the Market Hill/Sun Hill area of the town. Part of Northwood Park has been developed since the mid-twentieth century, particularly the area to the south-west of Northwood House.

6. IMPORTANCE AND POTENTIAL

CRITERIA FOR THE AREAS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE AND POTENTIAL

Introduction

The primary aim of the Data Collection and Data Assessment phases of the project is to enable the identification of areas of archaeological importance and potential within each town to inform the Strategy phase of the project. Four such areas of importance and potential have been defined, and the criteria for these are briefly described below. Although they are all described in this introduction, not all towns will have areas within each of these categories.

Levels of Archaeological Importance and Potential

The levels of importance and potential are Areas Comprising Nationally Important Remains; Areas of High Archaeological Potential; Areas of Archaeologically Potential; and Areas of Limited Archaeological Potential.

As additional archaeological information becomes available, and a greater understanding of the archaeological resource of the town is achieved, it is possible that some areas will be re-assigned to different levels of potential.

Areas Comprising Nationally Important Remains

Areas of identified nationally important archaeological remains, whose location, character and importance have been demonstrably established. These remains merit physical preservation *in situ*. The criteria used to assess national importance is set out in Annex 4 of the Secretary of State's non-statutory guidance note PPG16, and are briefly noted below.

- Period
- Rarity

- Documentation
- Group Value
- Survival/Condition
- Fragility/Vulnerability
- Diversity
- Potential

This category will include Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Areas of High Archaeological Potential

Areas considered to include other important archaeological remains, whose location, character and importance are inferred from observation, research and interpretation. Those remains are likely to merit preservation *in situ*. Where preservation is not justified appropriate archaeological recording will be required.

Areas of High Archaeological Potential may:

- Contain well preserved, archaeological deposits which may not be of national importance, but which are of importance to the understanding of the origins and development of the town;
- Be areas where the destruction, without archaeological record, of well preserved archaeological deposits means that the last surviving elements have an increased value for the understanding of the origins and development of the town;
- Have been identified as having significant water-logged deposits;
- Have a high number of existing medieval buildings. The survival of medieval buildings may also indicate that there is well preserved stratigraphy beneath the building;
- Be areas that are thought to have High Archaeological Potential due to their proximity to other, recognised, plan elements even though there is little direct evidence to indicate high importance. For example, the area around an isolated church that may have been the focus for earlier settlement may be defined as an Area of High Archaeological Potential.

It is possible that areas of High Archaeological Potential may, through further archaeological or documentary work, be shown to include Nationally Important Remains.

Areas of Archaeological Potential

Areas considered to contain archaeological remains of some importance. Where these remains cannot be preserved *in situ*, they are likely to require appropriate archaeological recording.

Such areas:

- Are significant elements in the plan but where there has been a moderate level of modern development or cellaring;
- Have had little archaeological work undertaken within them but cartographic or documentary sources suggest that they may have been within the historic core of the town or areas of important suburban development.

Surviving archaeological deposits in Areas of Archaeological Potential will probably have a relatively high density but, due to pressures of development over many centuries, there may be a high level of fragmentation.

Areas of Limited Archaeological Potential

Areas considered to include archaeological remains of a character unlikely to provide significant information, or archaeological remains whose integrity has been severely compromised by development. These remains may require appropriate archaeological recording if threatened by development.

Areas of Limited Archaeological Potential may:

- Have a good survival of archaeological deposits, but where there is likely to be a low density of archaeological features;
- Be areas with significant modern development resulting in limited archaeological potential, either due to the scale of development or due to the limited nature of the archaeological resource before development;
- Be areas where the current hypothesis supports only a limited possibility of encountering archaeological remains.

THE POTENTIAL OF COWES

Areas of Archaeological Importance and Potential

Areas Comprising Nationally Important Archaeological Remains

West Cowes Castle, one of Henry VIII's artillery castles, is one of only twenty-one surviving examples in England and is, therefore, a nationally important monument although it is not a Scheduled Ancient Monument as the building is in use by the Royal Yacht Squadron.

Areas of High Archaeological Potential

The church of St Mary and surrounding churchyard form an Area of High Archaeological Potential. Within the churchyard there are many eighteenth century monuments, the study of which could be used in social history studies of the town, particularly from a time when the town was rapidly developing. The burials themselves would also provide important demographic information, and judging from the number of earlier monuments, there should not be a high level of later disturbance to the burials.

Areas of Archaeological Potential

The property plots in the core of the town form an Area of Archaeological Potential that extends from the top of Shooters Hill in the south to Bath Road in the north. The area also includes the properties around the triangular area formed by Market Hill and Sun Hill, and the properties on the east side of the High Street which lie upon suggested reclaimed land as the quay was extended out into the river. Within this area archaeological intervention may reveal evidence for the development of the town and for the earliest buildings of the settlement. Evidence for trades and industries undertaken in Cowes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries may also be recovered. Within the area to the east of the High Street, evidence for phases of the quay may survive together with possible water-logged remains. Artefacts recovered from the town could be used as indicators for trading links within the Island, with the mainland, and with foreign countries.

Issues to be resolved

- The development of the quays and jetties

Survey of the jetties and quays may reveal further evidence for stages of development in the reclamation of the shoreline. Opportunities to examine the build-up behind the present quay-line may reveal artefacts, including organic materials, that may shed further light on the trades and industries undertaken in the town during its early, formative, history.

7. SOURCES

DOCUMENTARY

Few original documentary sources have been used directly in this survey although the work of Harding would indicate the existence of documents that could be used to inform further, in-depth, studies of the town.

MAPS AND PLANS

- 1769 Andrews' map of the Isle of Wight
 1866 OS 1st Edition 6" map Sheet 90
 1898 OS 2nd Edition 25" map Sheet 90.2

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8. ABBREVIATIONS

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| NGR | National Grid Reference |
| OD | Ordnance Datum |
| OS | Ordnance Survey |
| PPG | Planning Policy Guidance |
| SMR | Sites and Monuments Record |