

## WINCHELSEA

- The town as it is today

New Winchelsea is an evocative and atmospheric place but nowadays rather gentrified. Only less than half of the original area occupied by the Edwardian new town is now lived in and made up of houses and streets. The grid plan here, in the northern half of the town, is especially clear. In the southern, unoccupied part of the town the lines of former streets and the 'lost' quarters can still be traced as earthworks in field or as field boundaries and paths. These were carefully surveyed by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) in 1996.<sup>490</sup> The site of the Monday market is viewable from the public highway, though much of the decayed part of the town is not accessible without permission via the current landowners, The National Trust.

Winchelsea has good surviving remains of late thirteenth century buildings that were put up shortly after the town was moved to the new site, including the remains of three of the four original town gates (New Gate, Strand Gate and Pipewell Gate), the church of St Thomas (now reduced to half its former size), an end gable of St John's Hospital, the church of Grey Friars, as well as stone-built vaulted undercrofts (32 of which survive under houses in the northern part of the town, while others exist even though the building above has gone).<sup>491</sup> These standing remains and the town's archaeology in general, have been surveyed as part of an English Heritage and National Trust initiative, the details of which are in the volumes by David and Barbara Martin.<sup>492</sup> Archaeological excavations of the town's plots have revealed their internal structures with boundary ditches and fences, as well as the original road surfaces of stone paving and gravel.<sup>493</sup> There is a remarkable continuity in the townscape of New Winchelsea, not only in the survival of buildings contemporary with the founding of the town, such as the parish church and town gates, but also the layout of streets, the 'quarters', and in some cases the plots too. This makes it possible to visualise the town as it was even though it is now a shadow of its former self. Despite having few urban attributes, Winchelsea is nevertheless still regarded locally as a town, and rightly so. On a summer's day, with the sun shining, it even feels like a Gascon *bastide*.

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<sup>490</sup> Martin and Martin, *Extensive Urban Survey*, p.7, figure 16. The original plans are kept at the National Monuments Record, Swindon.

<sup>491</sup> Martin and Martin, *Extensive Urban Survey*, pp.37-43.

<sup>492</sup> Martin and Martin, *Extensive Urban Survey*; Martin and Martin, *Quarter-by-Quarter Analysis*; Martin and Martin, *New Winchelsea*.

<sup>493</sup> Martin and Rudling (eds.), *Excavations in Winchelsea*, passim; R. James, 'St Thomas' School site. Examining a medieval burgage plot in Winchelsea', *Sussex Past and Present*, December 2004, pp.9-10.