

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE  
EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY

# HIGHAM FERRERS

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Funded by English Heritage

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2000

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## **BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT**

This is one of a series of reports compiled by Northamptonshire Heritage as part of the English Heritage funded Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) of Northamptonshire, which is intended to provide an effective information base and research framework to guide the management of the county's urban archaeological resource. The survey encompasses all urban settlements and others that may have had some urban attributes, from the Roman period to the 1930s. The only exception is Northampton, which is the subject of an Intensive Urban Survey in its own right.

Each report comprises three distinct sections: a detailed description of the town in each major period; an assessment of potential and definition of a research agenda; and a strategy for future management. A consistent approach has been taken in the presentation of the description in each report with detail being presented under each standard category even where this has no direct obvious relevance to the urban aspects. This section has however been presented in the form of a gazetteer with standard headings so enabling the reader to identify those sections of particular interest. The Higham Ferrers report is presented in two parts: the first covering the medieval and post medieval town prepared by Glenn Foard; the second covering the industrial period, from 1750 to the 1930s, by Jennifer Ballinger. The report draws upon research previously conducted by Glenn Foard on the medieval and post medieval towns of the county; from the survey of historic buildings and land use in selected towns conducted by the Archaeology Unit in the late 1970s, and has benefited from the specialist advice of Dr Barrie Trinder on industrial period. Other contributions to the EUS on digital mapping, database input and related work have been made by various individuals including Christine Addison, Chris Jones, Paul Thompson, Rob Atkins, Phil Markham and especially Tracey Britnell and Abi Kennedy.

The first objective of the report is to determine layout, character and chronology of development of Higham Ferrers from its rural Saxon origins up to the 1930s. An attempt has been made to identify the various components of the town which are likely to have left identifiable archaeological remains and, as far as practicable, to define the exact location and extent of these buried or upstanding 'monuments'. They have also all been assessed for likely current survival and their potential to contribute to research objectives. The relationship of the town to its hinterland has also been considered and the potential for study of that interaction has been assessed. In this way the report aims to provide a well founded research framework, establishing the current state of knowledge of Higham Ferrers' history and defining a research agenda which can guide future archaeological investigation within the town. Conservation objectives have also been defined. This report should be viewed as a starting point rather than a definitive study, which it certainly is not. If this report serves its purpose then it will need to be regularly reviewed and substantially revised in future years as archaeological investigations, and hopefully also further documentary research, is undertaken.

Given the limitations of time, which inevitably must guide the conduct of a countywide project, it has been necessary to limit the depth of investigation. No original archaeological earthwork or other such field survey has been conducted, but all available existing archaeological data has been consulted. Mapping from aerial photographic sources in the Northamptonshire SMR, CUCAP and the NMR has been completed. Although each town has been visited to examine the topography of the town and an assessment attempted as to the

general state of archaeological survival, no attempt has been made to conduct cellar survey comparable to that undertaken for Northampton as part of the Intensive Urban Survey of that town. This is due to the absence of detailed mapped evidence comparable to that which exists for Northampton and the very poor results achieved in 1979 when a cellar survey was attempted in Thrapston, Higham Ferrers and Towcester. Nor has it been possible to examine all documentary sources, even for the medieval period. However, an attempt has been made to assess the overall potential of this crucial part of the record of the urban past and to examine in detail the most documentary important sources. An index has been compiled from various lists and indexes in the Public Record Office, Northamptonshire Record Office, National Register of Archives and British Library. Given the vast quantity of documentation, particularly for the last 200 years the limitations in the documentary assessment, especially regarding the industrial period must be acknowledged. Attention has focussed on those sources that might contribute significantly to the reconstruction of the historical topography of the town and to the broader characterisation of the various monuments within the town.

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## SUMMARY

Higham was probably one component of the polyfocal centre of the middle Saxon royal estate of Irthlingborough. In the late Saxon period Higham was one of two hundredal manors in the area, probably created out of that estate in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. By 1086 it was one of only four places in the county with a recorded market, reflecting its early tenurial and administrative importance. The early and middle Saxon focus of the settlement seems to have lain just beyond the northern edge of the medieval settlement, although another focus may have lain in the area of the later castle and church. Probably in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, in association with the creation of the hundredal manor, the primary focus may have shifted to create the manor, church and market place, which was to form the core of the medieval settlement.

What was probably a market village in the 11<sup>th</sup> century grew to true urban status in the 12<sup>th</sup> and earlier 13<sup>th</sup> century. In 1250-1 the lord raised 92 tenants to the status of burgesses within a newly created self-governing borough. This was not an act of urban foundation but rather the recognition of an earlier process of urbanisation and an attempt to further promote urban prosperity and the profits that this generated. In addition to a market, burgage tenure and self governing borough status, the town also had a number of other urban attributes: a medieval hospital, school, college and almshouse, all in the shadow of a major castle. Although little evidence has been identified as to the range of craft production in the town before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when in severe decline, it may be expected that there were a range of industries present in the medieval and early post medieval town. There is no evidence as yet of a high level of specialist industrial or commercial activity in the town and its prosperity may prove to have been primarily dependent on its provision of general commercial services to a local hinterland.

As with all the small towns in the county Higham will have suffered significant economic decline in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the case of Higham this was however compounded as the town began to suffer from competition from nearby Wellingborough. The decline may have been exacerbated in circa 1408 when Higham was devastated by a fire, which destroyed all the shops and the moot hall in the market place and many of the houses in the town. It is perhaps significant that Leland in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century took so little notice of Higham in his Itinerary compared to some other towns in the county. Despite various new grants of privilege, including representation in parliament, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Higham was eclipsed by Wellingborough. By 1712 Morton describes Higham as '*small and not very populous*' and attributes what was to prove terminal decline to the loss of the corn market to Wellingborough.<sup>1</sup>

Higham retained its status as a borough throughout the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, receiving its latest 'Charter of Incorporation' in the 1880's. The borough was however disenfranchised by the Reform Act of 1832. The population of the town by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was very low and similar to many of the villages in the area. The market function of the town was lost during the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> Morton, J., 1712, The Natural History of Northamptonshire.

**When the full force of the Industrial Revolution finally impacted on Northamptonshire, following the mechanisation of the boot and shoe industry in the 1850s, it was the large adjacent 'open' village of Rushden that took off. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the boot and shoe industry did develop in Higham, but no more than in several nearby villages like Raunds and Wollaston. Such development was concentrated in back lanes or new areas of development mainly on the periphery of the historic settlement core. This provided a regeneration of the settlement, with a corresponding expansion in the population, but from this time onwards Higham was overshadowed by the phenomenal development of its neighbour, Rushden.**

**As one of the major medieval small towns in the county and an important late Saxon estate centre with substantial and possibly high status early-middle Saxon activity, Higham is of high historical importance in county terms. Thanks to its decline in the post medieval period and, as a result, the diversion of industrialisation into Wellingborough and Rushden, the archaeology of the medieval and earlier settlement is likely to be far better preserved than in some other towns. The Saxon and Roman settlements at the north of the town have been evaluated and have been or will be subject to extensive investigation prior to development. In contrast the actual quality and extent of survival of much of the rest of the archaeology of the town has not been confirmed by evaluation. There is therefore the need for detailed extensive assessment of the archaeological resource before the medieval and post medieval potential can be fully confirmed. Similarly there is a good survival of historic buildings, though in the absence of systematic survey it is unclear how many have medieval fabric. Higham also has exceptional survival of documentary material from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The hinterland of the town has an unusually high archaeological potential for the Saxon and medieval period due to the good survival of some medieval settlements and especially the investigations of the Raunds Area Project.**

**For these reasons it would appear to represent a good example of an important small town with major Saxon origins. Detailed study of Higham is likely to cast important light on the origins, development and demise of small town urbanism from the late Saxon to the post medieval period. The historical topography of the town is also relatively well preserved from the post medieval and medieval period and is worthy of conservation, especially in the light of survival of a number of major standing structures of the medieval period which together have a high amenity value.**

**There is also a very good range of documents for Higham Ferrers for the Industrial period. In addition the early settlement core has one of the best survival rates of any town in the survey in respect of its 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century character. However, the majority of buildings in the town originate from the pre Industrial period and there are few purpose-built structures from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as earlier buildings were being re-used. The town is broadly divided into two with the historic central core and the remains of industrialisation around the extremities.**

# I DESCRIPTION

## TOPOGRAPHY & GEOLOGY

Higham Ferrers lies on the eastern side of the middle Nene valley within 500 m. of the river on relatively level ground set well above the floodplain. The nucleated Roman settlement and the known early-middle Saxon occupation lies on ironstone geology on the higher ground but close to the valley slope. The Saxon settlement is associated with a small valley or slade which cuts back into the ironstone. In contrast the medieval town stretches southward from the known Saxon area onto mainly limestone geology on relatively level ground but extending away from the valley edge. Very small valleys or slades cut back for a short distance into this higher ground in several locations but whereas most other settlements in the area lie on permeable geologies in subsidiary valleys, Higham is related directly to the main valley of the Nene. The town lies close to the boundary between the limestone and a thin band of clay and this may have provided a significant number of springs in close proximity in the northern half of the settlement.

The township extends from the alluvial floodplain of the Nene up onto the boulder clay plateau. However, unlike many other townships, it does not extend to the watershed with the Ouse valley, though if the townships of its subsidiary hamlets of Chelveston & Caldecot and of Buscot are taken into account then the territory does extend to the watershed. The majority of the Higham township is however on permeable geology, mainly limestone and ironstone. It is bounded on the north by a substantial subsidiary valley and on the south by a yet smaller valley, cutting back into the plateau.



## **A PRE MEDIEVAL**

### **1.0 Early History**

#### **1.1 PREHISTORIC AND ROMAN**

This part of the Nene valley was intensively occupied in the prehistoric and Roman periods. The permeable geology, especially the river gravel, show extensive evidence of ritual activity in the Neolithic and Bronze Age with two main complexes, one including a long barrow and the other a long enclosure and long mound. There are also round barrows in a widely dispersed group over more than a square kilometre on both sides of the river. Other barrows are recorded in several locations on other geologies. There are antiquarian excavations and records of large upstanding barrow mounds as well as large scale modern excavation of barrow groups. There is also extensive palaeoenvironmental evidence. It is to be expected that settlement evidence of these periods will also have existed extensively on the higher ground though little remains of such sites apart from flint scatters and occasional pits, as found adjacent to the Saxon settlement area immediately to the north Higham.

There was intensive occupation of the permeable geology in the Iron Age and Roman periods, but by this time settlement also extended across the boulder clay areas up to the watershed. Most of the settlement is in the form of single farms but at Stanwick the Iron Age occupation appears to have been more nucleated in character and was succeeded by a nucleated villa settlement. The most intensive occupation in both periods is found on the permeable geologies, particularly the river gravel and on the ironstone. A pattern of dispersed Iron Age settlement is known from crop-marks, fieldwalking and excavated evidence throughout the area, most clearly defined within the Raunds Project which abuts Higham Ferrers on its north eastern side. Several Iron Age settlements lie in close proximity to the medieval town and others may be expected beneath or close to the town. However the major Iron Age settlement in the area is the Irthlingborough hillfort which lies 2.5 km to the north on the other side of the river. It has been suggested that the main enclosure of the Iron Age settlement north of Higham is a Wootton Hill type defensive enclosure, but its form is not as substantial as the certain examples of this type some of which lie in association with hillforts, and at present there is no reason to consider this a high status site which had an influence on the siting of the adjacent Roman settlement.

Roman dispersed settlement similar in distribution to that of the Iron Age extends across the area. There are also villas distributed along the valley, the two in Stanwick parish lie within 1.5 and 2 km to the north east of Higham. There is also evidence for roadside occupation along the Roman road running along the valley.

Immediately to the north west of the medieval town is the site of a large nucleated Roman settlement of perhaps 5-10 hectares. At least half of this site was built over in the 1960s while part of the northern end of the settlement was probably lost beneath the sewage works. There was small scale excavation in 1961 of circa 400 m<sup>2</sup> while other trenches and observation of development revealed wall footings, a burial and scatters of Roman material. The occupation dates from the late 1<sup>st</sup> to at least the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Crop-marks and trial excavation in the northern part of the settlement suggest a rectilinear layout with metalled roads and ditched

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<sup>2</sup> Meadows, I, 1992, 'Excavations by E Greenfield at Bozeat, Higham Ferrers and Great Oakley', *Northamptonshire Archaeology*, 24, 82-91.

enclosures while fieldwalking has also revealed further early-middle Saxon pottery in association with the Roman. It is possible that the main road is part of a Roman road running along the eastern side of the valley between the Roman small towns at Titchmarsh and Irchester.<sup>3</sup> The settlement would appear to contain a major Roman stone building, from the discovery of a single architectural fragment.<sup>4</sup> Although this might represent a Roman temple, it is perhaps more likely to indicate a domestic building indicating that this is a villa based nucleated settlement similar to that extensively excavated at Stanwick, 2 km to the north east. There is no reason at present to consider that the site is a Roman small town, especially given its close proximity to the walled small town at Irchester, 4 km to the south west.

## 1.2 Saxon

### 1.2.1 SAXON ORIGINS

Several early-middle Saxon sherds were recovered from the upper fill of a Roman quarry pit and other early-middle Saxon pottery has been recovered from fieldwalking on the northern part of the Roman nucleated settlement. This lies within 300 metres of a substantial early-middle Saxon settlement immediately north of Higham and this proximity may indicate a degree of settlement continuity. The apparent high status or specialist function of the middle Saxon settlement might also suggest some element of continuity of central place function between the nucleated Roman settlement and the early-middle Saxon settlement of Higham. However this relationship may be mediated in a much wider context incorporating components of a wider multiple estate and not be direct between the two settlements, their proximity simply resulting from the restricted extent of permeable geology in the area. While the two villa sites in Stanwick both have evidence of limited early Saxon occupation, only on the hillfort at Irthlingborough is there good evidence of extensive early-middle Saxon activity in association with Iron Age and Roman settlement.

Early-middle Saxon pottery from fieldwalking extends across a wide area on either side of the small slade cutting back into the ironstone immediately to the north of Higham. The settlement appears however to be centred to the east of the stream and quite separate from the Roman settlement to the west. A large oval ditched enclosure lay on limestone and clay on the east side of the settlement and contained no evidence of occupation within it. Immediately to the west of the enclosure there was extensive evidence of early Saxon occupation including four sunken floored buildings and several pits and post holes, although no clear timber halls were recognised. To the south west of the enclosure there were post and ditched boundaries and associated timber structures, one comprising very substantial post holes. Ceramics from the middle Saxon phase of the settlement appear to be of high status or specialist function. The settlement was then replanned in the late Saxon period, with activity apparently fronting south onto a small back lane or perhaps more likely on a small green which was later infilled leaving just a lane.

There is very little association between the layout of the early-middle Saxon settlement and the pattern of open field furlongs that replaced it. The exceptions are the parallel alignment of the Townsend Furlong strips with the alignment of the middle(?) Saxon ditch closing the

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<sup>3</sup> Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit, 1991, *Archaeological Evaluation on Duchy of Lancaster Land at Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire*, unpublished report in SMR.

<sup>4</sup> Woodfield, P, 1978, 'Roman Architectural Masonry from Northamptonshire', *Northamptonshire Archaeology*, 13, 76-9.

open, southern end of the original oval enclosure, while the eastern most extent of the oval enclosure defines the boundary between the road and the furlong.

Given the very limited relationship between the Saxon and medieval patterns it is not surprising therefore to find that there is also no evidence of continuity of layout between the Roman settlement, as seen from crop-mark evidence, and the medieval furlong pattern as recorded by Hall.<sup>5</sup> This suggests fundamental reorganisation in the late Saxon period when the furlong pattern was laid out, taking account only of a few existing elements of the early-middle Saxon settlement. However these elements may be very significant. The north-south road, which may originally have been very wide, appears to run north through the medieval settlement as though heading for the southern entrance of the oval enclosure, but then at the green it swings eastward around the enclosure. This road may possibly have been in existence at the same time as the enclosure with the late Saxon furlong being laid out to respect the road.

### **1.2.2 LATE SAXON HUNDREDAL MANOR AND SOKE CENTRE**

There is strong evidence that would suggest that the Higham Ferrers, the Finedon royal soke and the properties held by Burgred, as recorded in 1086, were originally a single administrative unit. There are two main alternative hypotheses as to the origins and evolution of the central place functions of Higham Ferrers. It may have acquired these functions as a result of the late Saxon fragmentation of a soke centred on Finedon and originally, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century based on Irthlingborough. This is believed to have occurred here and elsewhere in the county as a result of the administrative reorganisation, which accompanied the hidation of the county in the 9th century, following the reconquest. Alternatively it may have been one of a number of distinct centres with complementary functions within the middle Saxon royal estate. Place-name and archaeological evidence would suggest that Irthlingborough was the royal residence of the estate in the middle Saxon period. However the village and township of Irthlingborough almost certainly take their name from the Iron Age hillfort to the north east of the medieval settlement which was apparently refortified in the early Saxon period.<sup>6</sup> Although in 1086 Finedon was the caput of the royal estate, it is possible that the 'demesne' function was originally based in Higham and that Finedon was merely the centre of judicial activity, as indicated by the 'thing' element of the place-name. The case for Higham having a significant function may be supported by the 'ham' place-name element, for there are several 'ham' place-names linked to other major Saxon central places, notably Northampton and Passenham.<sup>7</sup>

This major early-middle Saxon settlement will have been just one of a dispersed pattern of settlement across the township except for the boulder clay areas, as seen in the Raunds area and elsewhere across the county, although these settlements have yet been identified within the township. It is possible, given the very limited scale of fieldwork yet undertaken within the medieval town that one or more such settlements may lie beneath the town itself, as suggested by a single residual early-middle Saxon sherd recovered from evaluation of the castle site.

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<sup>5</sup> Unpublished plan of open field furlongs by D Hall, in SMR.

<sup>6</sup> Parry, S., forthcoming, *The Raunds Area Survey*.

<sup>7</sup> Foard, G., 1985, The Administrative Organisation of Northamptonshire in the Saxon Period, *Anglo Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 4, 185-222; Cadman, G., and Foard, G., 1984, 'Raunds: Manorial and Village Origins', Faul, M. L., (ed.), *Studies in Late Anglo Saxon Settlement*, 81-100.

### **1.2.3 LATE SAXON AND MEDIEVAL VILLAGE**

Nucleation of settlement will have been completed before the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century, all late Saxon settlements, with only one or two very special exceptions, so far identified in Northamptonshire lying beneath or on the edge of the medieval settlement areas. A single hamlet may have remained, its fields divided between the townships of Higham and Newton, and known in the 13<sup>th</sup> century as Britwinescote, later Buscot. However this land all lay on boulder clay and was wholly demesne of Higham manor and so it is possible that this farm or hamlet was a new creation of the late Saxon or early medieval period as the boulder clay land was brought into full cultivation. Hall has also suggested it may have been the precursor of Newton.<sup>8</sup>

The township of Higham Ferrers extends from the alluvial flood plain of the Nene but does not reach up onto the boulder clay to the south east as far as the watershed with the Ouse valley, unlike adjacent townships such as Rushden and Stanwick. However if the dependent hamlets of Chelveston, Caldecott and Buscot are taken together with Higham then the more typical pattern is revealed. In contrast Newton Bromswold with Higham Park lies almost wholly within the Ouse watershed.

It is likely that the townships of Chelveston and Caldecot, hamlets and chapelry of Higham in the medieval period, were created as townships in the late Saxon period out of an earlier land unit attached to Higham. Topographical evidence, the sharing of the land of Buscot with Higham and payments by the lord of Newton to the lord of Higham in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, may also indicate that Newton Bromswold, which has a rectilinear plan form suggesting a planned settlement, was a new 'tun' created out of the territory of Higham, probably in the late Saxon replanning.<sup>9</sup> The final phase in this expansion onto the boulder clay was probably the creation of Higham Park, which was within medieval Rushden township but was probably formed by taking land from Newton and from Bedfordshire. The complexity of the relationship between Higham and its dependencies and of the boundary between Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire is seen in the fact that small holdings in both Newton and Rushden in 1086 lay in Bedfordshire.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the area's importance as a royal estate centre, Higham may have lain at an important road junction in the late Saxon period on routes between four of the region's burhs, with routes possible from Bedford to Leicester and from Cambridge to Leicester and Northampton. Indeed the routes may have passed through Higham because of the place's apparent importance in the middle Saxon period. The presence of the settlement on such a road network would then have had a major influence on the later development of the town. The early importance of the settlement and its position on a major road network may have both been factors in ensuring Higham was chosen as a major estate centre in the late Saxon period.

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<sup>8</sup> Gover, J E B, Mawer, A and Stenton, F M, 1975, *The Place-names of Northamptonshire*, 191.

<sup>9</sup> Id rent from a John Druel for the fourth part of a knights fee in Newton in 1313-14 Similarly there is rent from tenants in Chelveston cum Caldecot and from the lord there, and also from Raunds. Account roll translated in Kerr, W J B, 1925, *Higham Ferrers and its Ducal and Royal Castle and Park*.50-62.

<sup>10</sup> Hall, 1995, *The Open Fields of Northamptonshire*, NRS vol.38, 295.

Whereas the excavated evidence immediately north of the town suggests that high status occupation or specialist estate functions were focussed in that area in the middle Saxon period, by the late 11<sup>th</sup> century the focus of status occupation had almost certainly shifted to the site of the medieval church, castle and market place. Kerr suggested, followed later by Beresford and Steane, that the origins of this focus lay in the establishment of a late Saxon burh at Higham, in the late 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> This hypothesis is based on the presence of a rectangular pattern of closes immediately east of the castle and church called Bury Closes. The interpretation should probably be dismissed because the size of the enclosure defined would be of the order of 35 hectares. This lies dramatically beyond the size of the county's two known late Saxon burhs of Towcester and Northampton, at 10 and 24 hectares respectively. It is extremely unlikely that a burh larger than Northampton would have existed within the county or that such a substantial defended late Saxon site would have left no documentary record other than field names. A far more likely interpretation for the Bury Close field names (see below 3.2.1) is that they represent demesne land partly or wholly enclosed after 1591, when Norden depicted open field abutting the castle on the east side.<sup>12</sup>

There are two more plausible hypotheses for the shift in the focus of the settlement. It may represent an early example of new town foundation at the periphery of an existing settlement. However, given the presence of a priest and a market at Domesday it seems likely that both church and market place, undoubtedly accompanied by the manor, already existed in its medieval location by 1086. It would be unusual for a new town foundation to occur in the late Saxon period, the other examples generally being of post conquest date.

The most likely explanation is however that the shift was associated with the late Saxon replanning recognised in adjacent villages in the Raunds area, accompanied or perhaps even driven by the fragmentation of the Irthlingborough royal estate and the creation of a separate hundredal manor of Higham. The demise of the high status middle Saxon focus at the northern end of the settlement and its reorganisation apparently as tenements in the late Saxon period is a critical component of the chronology of the shift. There is however as yet no evidence from the medieval core of the town to complement this evidence while the existence of an early-middle Saxon settlement beneath the castle site has already been suggested and if this was a high status settlement the a shift in focus may never have occurred.

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<sup>11</sup> Beresford, M W, 1957, *History on the Ground*, 166; Steane, J., 1974, *The Northamptonshire Landscape*, 155.

<sup>12</sup> A Northbury close is recorded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The closes are mapped in 1737. VCH, 3, 266.

## **B MEDIEVAL & POST-MEDIEVAL**

### **1.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

It is unclear when the market was first established at Higham. Though it could be argued that a marketing function accompanied a middle Saxon estate centre but there is no evidence at present to support such a hypothesis. Foundation of a regular weekly market is perhaps more likely to have happened during the important phase of commercial development in the late Saxon period, which saw the transformation of Northampton into a true town. It is possible that it was associated with the establishment of the manor on the site of the later castle or with the presumed phase of late Saxon planning of the settlement. Certainly by 1086 Higham was one of only four places in the county with a documented market, reflecting its early tenurial and administrative importance. The promotion of a market here, as with its success during the medieval period, must owe much to the patronage of a series of major lords from the late Saxon period onwards.

The growth of Higham like its acquisition of major castle is likely to have resulted from a combination of its importance as an estate centre and its position on the road network. What was probably a market village in the 11<sup>th</sup> century grew into a true urban settlement in the 12<sup>th</sup> and earlier 13<sup>th</sup> century. Higham's commercial success must have owed much, at least initially, to promotion by resident lords of national importance that chose to develop a castle here as a major residence. This is most clearly demonstrated in 1250-1 when the lord raised 92 villein tenants to the status of burgesses within a self-governing borough. This was not an act of urban foundation but an important recognition of an earlier process of urbanisation and an attempt to further promote the process. The initial and continued prosperity will have been supported by its position on the major road network. The growth also clearly depended on the fact of Higham's very early acquisition of a market, placing it on the ladder far earlier than most other small towns in the county. But underlying all these factors and underpinning the whole success of the town was the fact that its hinterland encompassed some of the most productive areas of agricultural land in the county with many wealthy villages focussed along the valley of the Nene.

Although Higham was not a large settlement, being smaller than several of the villages in its hinterland, it had a small township and hence a limited agricultural base compared to those villages. A very high proportion of its tenants by the 13<sup>th</sup> century were cottagers and after 1250 burgesses, who were probably dependent primarily upon work in craft industry and commerce rather than agriculture. Although little evidence has been identified as to the range of craft production in the town before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when it had gone into severe decline, it may be expected that there were a range of industries present in the medieval and early post medieval town. The town probably functioned primarily as a centre for marketing for its hinterland, with grain probably the major product. In the medieval period the wool trade and associated cloth production may have been significant, as it certainly was in some other Northamptonshire towns. Commercial success can in part be judged by both the number of shops and market stalls and by the income of the market and is reflected in the presence of a substantial Moot Hall. In addition to a market and two annual fairs, burgage tenure and self governing borough status, the town also shows a number of other urban attributes having. Like a number of other successful small towns, its church acquired or retained the function of a Deanery centre. It also had a medieval hospital, a subsidiary chapel, a school, a college, an

almshouse and two bakehouses. Perhaps even clearer as a guide to the town's wealth in the medieval period is the size and elaboration, both internal and external, of its parish church. Indeed the degree of investment in the church helps in part to explain why, until the late medieval foundation of Chichele College and of the Bede House, the number of other foundations were relatively few and the endowments of the medieval hospital relatively modest.

As with all the small towns in the county Higham will have suffered significant economic decline in the later 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. However in this case the decline was compounded in the later medieval period as the town began to suffer from competition from nearby Wellingborough. In part this may result from the loss of a resident lord, reflected in the decay and demolition of the castle. At the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Higham had come into the hands of the crown that thereafter leased out the Borough and also the manor. In contrast the Abbot of Crowland probably remained far more actively involved in the effective management of his estate and town at Wellingborough, which remained one of its most important manors. Possibly more important may have been a lack of restrictions in Wellingborough, which was not a borough and did not have burgage tenure in contrast to the self governing borough of Higham Ferrers. The relative decline may have been hastened in circa 1408 when Higham was devastated by a fire, destroying the shops and moot hall in the market place and many of the houses in the town.

Despite competition from Wellingborough, Higham had continued to prosper and growth significantly in both population and wealth relative to other Northamptonshire settlements at least until the earlier 16<sup>th</sup> century. It acquired more fairs and had its privileges confirmed and extended and there were still in the later 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries a number of wealthy merchants living in the town, several of whom are commemorated with elaborate brasses and monuments in the church. However already by the time of the major upturn in the fortunes of urban centres in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the seeds of decline had probably already been sown. By the later 17<sup>th</sup> century the population had declined dramatically relative to other settlements and especially compared to the more dynamic Northamptonshire towns. Wellingborough prospered in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by exploiting the leather trade, especially through its developing boot and shoe industry. In contrast Higham apparently did not benefit from what may have been a significant shift from medieval wool to post medieval leather production as the main agricultural support to grain production in the agricultural economy. The key to post medieval urban success in the county may be linked intimately to specialisation. It was the towns, notably Wellingborough, Kettering and of course Northampton, that had specialised in one or two major industrial product during the 17<sup>th</sup> century that came to dominate the county in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It is interesting to see how little note Leland took of Higham in his Itinerary compared to some other towns in the county. Despite various new grants of privilege, including representation in parliament, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Higham had been completely eclipsed by Wellingborough in a commercial and industrial context. By 1712 Morton describes Higham as '*small and not very populous*' but although he attributes its decline to the loss of the corn market to Wellingborough it is clearly a far more complex picture.<sup>13</sup> By the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Higham was decaying into little more than a market village. But the influence of Higham's earlier privileges continued.

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<sup>13</sup> Morton, J., 1712, *The Natural History of Northamptonshire*.

## **2.0 TOPOGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENT (FIGURE 2)**

The town of Higham developed from an early-middle Saxon settlement, probably of high status, immediately north of and possibly extending beneath the Bond End at the northern periphery of the later town. However there is also likely to be early-middle Saxon occupation in the area of the church and castle, where small scale evaluation has produced a single residual early-middle Saxon sherd in addition to occupation evidence of late Saxon date. This would suggest a polyfocal plan form origin for Higham.

Because of the small scale of previous excavation in the area there is no evidence yet as to the extent or plan form of any early-middle Saxon occupation in the castle area. In contrast the Saxon occupation beyond Bond End begins in the early Saxon with typically scattered occupation outside a large oval ditched enclosure of uncertain function but with a wide entrance facing south towards the later green and on the projected line of the High Street. It was then replaced by a rectilinear plan form of ditched enclosures representing a re-planning of the settlement. This probably created a row of tenements fronting south either onto a back lane or possibly initially onto a green. If the latter, then these tenements came to front onto a lane as a resulting of later infill on the green, creating an island of development surrounded by roads. Fragmented areas of unenclosed 'waste' remained in this area in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, only being finally lost at enclosure. The absence of any occupation deposits from test pits in the northernmost of these fragments may reflect the absence of occupation here rather than, as suggested in the report, later destruction of archaeology.<sup>14</sup> The tenements on this island of development fronting east onto the main road were occupied in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when a potter was working here, but appear topographically to be medieval encroachments on the road. Evaluation to the north of the back lane has shown a single tenement which possibly fronted onto the main road in the medieval period, though the presence of late Saxon occupation beneath it indicates that this might not be a case of medieval encroachment and that instead it may have been the easternmost tenement of the row believed to have existed to the west.<sup>15</sup>

The medieval, and presumably late Saxon, road pattern appears to respect the early-middle Saxon enclosure and occupation area, one road curving around it on the east and the other turning down to the west of it. The eastern road was probably the main medieval road on the east side of the valley, only later probably being extended to cross the river via a bridge built by the lord of Irthlingborough manor. In the early medieval period the road running north west from Bond End was probably the main road crossing the river, running to the ford in the All Saints end of Irthlingborough.

Whereas the northern part of the Saxon settlement was transformed into open field in the late Saxon or early medieval period, occupation continued around the green and this end of the settlement became known as the Bond End and then later, by 1543, as 'le North Ende'.<sup>16</sup> This End may have been the main focus of occupation for the agricultural tenants in the medieval

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<sup>14</sup> OAU, 1997.

<sup>15</sup> OAU, 1997.

<sup>16</sup> Gover, et al, 1975, 191.



settlement. However the 18<sup>th</sup> century burgage rental does show that a number of the tenements on the putative green and two on its south west side were burgages at that time.

The presumed infilling between the manorial centre, with its associated church and market place, and the Bond End comprised tenement rows on either side of the main road, later known as College Street after medieval college. On the east the presence of a back lane and the layout in relation to the road to the north may indicate encroachment onto a formerly wide road or linear green similar to that seen immediately to the north. On the west side a back lane defines similarly short tenements. To the south of what was the major road to Cambridge, now known as the Kimbolton Road, the tenements are very short and might prove to be infill between the rabbit warren and the road. Further south they are even more likely to be medieval infill between the castle and the road, later expanding over the castle ditch in places after it fell out of use. On the west side of the road more typical, longer tenements form a row with a back lane behind.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were ancient enclosures to the west of the back lane. Although Hall suggests that they are all late enclosures of open field strips, with Norden showing open field immediately north of Saffron Close in 1591, it needs to be determined archaeologically whether any of the closes contained medieval occupation.<sup>17</sup> The northernmost closes, next to Bond End, are perhaps the most likely to have contained medieval occupation but unpublished ongoing evaluation has failed to reveal any trace of occupation here. To the south the enclosures are more likely to be late and post medieval encroachments on to the open field. This is most clearly seen in Saffron Closes. Even in 1591 Saffron Close is described as a new enclosure, and what appears to be ridge and furrow was faintly traceable in the area in 1979, while the adjacent closes appear from their shape as depicted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century maps also to be enclosed strips. However, even here there were already several buildings on the close adjacent to Saffron Close in 1591 and some may prove to have medieval origins. On the east side of Bond End other closes are also suggested by Hall as being late enclosure of open field, though there is still a slight possibility here also for some medieval occupation where they abut the main roads.

Whereas the northern end of the town is first depicted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the centre and south of the village was mapped by Norden in 1591. The problems of interpretation of the 1591 map of Higham town are enormous. Where features can be accurately related to the 18<sup>th</sup> century maps it is clear that a vast degree of distortion exists in the map. This is not only in the shape and size of closes and tenement but major distortion in the layout of the town. In particular one finds no correlation between features on one side of the main street to those on the other, with displacements of many tens of metres. Major scale changes are visible with some frontages having been shortened, particularly to the north and south ends of the town while others have been lengthened and enlarged, especially around the market place, where Norden is attempting to depict more detail. If treated with extreme care the map does however reveal several important changes in the layout of the town when compared to later maps.

Between 1591 and 1737 there was apparently the creation of a new road around the south and east sides of the churchyard and parsonage. This has significantly altered and thus confused the form of what is likely to be the core of the late Saxon and early medieval settlement and

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<sup>17</sup> Unpublished survey of open field furlongs by D Hall in SMR.

of the medieval town, focussed around the manor/castle, church and market place. The manor is likely to have been the primary component to which the others were appended in the late Saxon period. The topography has however probably been transformed as a result of the construction of the castle, presumably on the site of the manor. The castle is likely to have fronted directly onto what was later known as College Street with the main gate possibly represented by the gap in the tenement row at the north west corner of the outer bailey. The location of the castle gate may have had a significant influence on the character of tenements in its immediate environs. The castle and its associated warren seems to have restricted the expansion of the town on the east side. This may have forcing what has been described above as possible encroachment onto an originally much wider road, similar to that which survived undeveloped in the 18<sup>th</sup> century on both the Cambridge and the north road immediately outside the town.

It might be argued that the position of the church, tight to the northern part of the churchyard, argues for an origin within a wider defensive enclosure encompassing manor and church, but this seems unlikely. It is more likely that the churchyard is part of a major piece of late Saxon planning. To the east of the core in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the parsonage, Tithing Yard and other features lay in Bury Closes. Hall interprets these areas as open field furlongs and Norden shows open field abutting the town on part of the east side. However the enclosed land was already partly extant in 1591 when the parsonage lay here. But all the closes in that area, even those of 1591, appear topographically to represent medieval encroachment onto open field furlongs. It is however just possible that in the late Saxon period a large rectangular market area was laid out immediately south of the manor and that tenements fronted it on the south and west, with the parsonage on the east and with the church being placed on the northern part. Whatever the exact form of the original market place, it is likely that the tenements between church and market place represent infilling on the original market place by shops later converted to tenements. Similarly the 'Behind Stye' has a more certain origin as encroachment. The other encroachments have all been lost as a result of early modern clearance. Beresford argues that the rectilinear plan of the market place shown by Norden is wrong and that there was a triangular market place, based on the evidence of the 1789 map.<sup>18</sup> However all the other maps clearly show a rectilinear form and this is supported by the wider plan form evidence discussed above.

The market place was the commercial focus of the settlement and has the highest concentration of burgages surviving in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The shops and stalls were also all apparently located in the market place in the medieval and post medieval period, as in other towns. Some were converted to tenements, as in the case of 'Behind the Stye' while others were cleared from the market place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Norden indicates a more complex pattern of roads and tenements on the west side of the market place than survived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The identification of the exact location of these roads is difficult because of the extreme distortion of the 1591 map, but in 1789 a narrow plot runs east to west in this area and a gap exists in the frontage that may indicate the position of the earlier lane. Whether the north-south lane actually existed as a separate feature is less certain, for it is conceivable that Norden distorted one of the blocks on the market place and that the north south lane is in fact part of 'Behind Stye'. More likely however, judging from both the shorter plots and the other narrow plot seen here in the 18<sup>th</sup> century,

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<sup>18</sup> Beresford, 1971, 166.

that there was indeed a lane that is now lost. Both lanes have been mapped but the potential inaccuracies must be noted.

St Botolph End and St Botolph Street are frequently recorded in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries in court rolls and survived until at least circa 1720 when Bridges records Old Botolph Lane, but neither the chapel itself nor the lane has been located.<sup>19</sup> Although it is possible that the lanes lost on the west of the market place could have been St Botolph's Lane this is unlikely as it would not represent a discrete 'end'.

The expansion of the town in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries will have occurred to some degree through subdivision of tenements and by the encroachments already discussed, but there is also good evidence of expansion. The clearest example is the development along the road running south from the market place in an area known as Newland in 1720.<sup>20</sup> This almost certainly represents encroachment in four separate blocks, defined by the side roads which relate to adjacent furlong boundaries, over parts of four furlongs running parallel to the main road. The greatest concentration of burgage tenements in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, after the market place, is in the Newlands and it seems likely that this area will have been laid out primarily for artisans and other non agricultural tenants as the town grew. As there was only minor increase in the number of burgages after 1251 it is likely that most if not all of the Newlands had been laid out by that time. Detailed analysis of the size of the burgage or other tenements has not been attempted, but there is reference in 1313 to a burgage tenement 14ft wide at the highway, 16ft wide at the field and 110 ft long.<sup>21</sup> Behind the back lane on the east side of Newlands another long close appears to represent enclosure of open field strips but it is uncertain whether occupation ever extended into this area in the medieval period.

The town did not have any substantial monastic or other major urban monuments within it until the late medieval foundation of College and Bede House, which were inserted into areas of pre-existing tenements. However the expansion of the town along Newlands brought the settlement to the edge of the township and thus effectively integrated the hospital, which then lay in Rushden township immediately to the south of Newlands, as part of the town. It is likely to originally have been established on the main road as early as the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century, at a distance and probably before the Newlands were laid out.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century maps show numerous vacant plots, with desertion of tenements having progressed much further in the northern third of the settlement than elsewhere. Although most small towns in the county in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century showed evidence of earlier decline, the more successful ones also had evidence either of post medieval expansion in other areas or of significant subdivision or more often infilling in the backs of tenements. The absence of such evidence at Higham is a clear reflection of not just the relative but also absolute decline compared to the newer towns of Wellingborough and Kettering.

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<sup>19</sup> VCH, 3, 266, quoting Historic Manuscripts Commission Report xii, app 9, 531, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Bridges, 1791, 2, 170.

<sup>21</sup> Beresford, 1971, 164.

## **3.0 THEMATIC ANALYSIS (FIGURE 3 & 4)**

### **3.1 Manorial**

#### **3.1.1 MANORS**

##### **3.1.1.1 DUCHY OF LANCASTER MANOR**

In 1066 the manor of Higham was held by Gytha, countess of Hereford but in 1086 William Peverell held 6 hides in Higham Ferrers. In addition there were members of the manor in Rushden, Chelveston cum Caldecot, Knuston, and soke land in Irchester, Farndish, Poddington, Easton Maudit, Bozeat, Hargrave and Raunds. At Higham there were then 2 hides in demesne, a market, mill and woodland and a priest. Higham was an hundredal manor and the hundred court met at Higham throughout the medieval and post medieval period. In 1155 the lordship was forfeit to the crown then granted for life to Robert de Ferrers, Earl of Derby, but returned to crown until 1199 when purchased from the crown by William de Ferrers. In 1266 the Earl of Derby's estates were seized by the crown and granted to Edmund, Earl of Lancaster. In 1322 it passed to Aylmer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, but returned to Duchy of Lancaster in 1327 and in 1399 the Duchy was merged with the lands of the crown.

##### **3.1.1.2 LESSER HOLDINGS**

A manor called the Borough Hold existed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century which was the property belonging to the Borough of Higham, extending from the Stump Cross to the Spittle Cross.<sup>22</sup> Its bounds were redefined by Act of Parliament in 1838.<sup>23</sup> The Lands of Lord Lovell in Higham were granted in 1485 to Earl of Worcester and in 1553 alienated to Gilbert Pickering.<sup>24</sup> In the medieval period Ascelin & Andrew of Higham held three virgates of land in serjeanty for the service of carrying writs of the Honour of Higham. They are identified as 'Serjeants peeces' in the open field in 1691.<sup>25</sup>

##### **3.1.1.3 RECTORY MANOR**

The rectory passed with the advowson until the dissolution, first with the main manor and then from 1354 with Leicester Hospital when converted to the College of the Newark in Leicester. It was leased by the College in the 1530s and then following the dissolution from the crown by various tenants in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was owned by the Freeman family in the 17<sup>th</sup> century but leased out, at least for part of the time, although it would appear that in 1649 it may have been occupied by the Freemans.<sup>26</sup> By 1731 it was owned by the Dacres and thence descended with the advowson. In 1737 the rectory and parsonage property was held by Earl Malton and Mr Mascall. Earl Malton was later the Marquis of Rockingham, and from him the rectory descended to Earl Fitzwilliam, who held the advowson of the church.<sup>27</sup> The rectory is depicted on Norden's map of 1591 and can be equated with the property lying to the south east of the church and known as the manor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see 3.2.1).

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<sup>22</sup> Bridges, J., 1791, *The History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire*, 2, 170.

<sup>23</sup> VCH, 3, 271.

<sup>24</sup> VCH, 3, 268.

<sup>25</sup> VCH, 3, 269.

<sup>26</sup> Survey, PRO E317 Northants 32. It is possible that some documentary material exists for the rectory in the records of Newark College, Leicester.

<sup>27</sup> Bridges, 1791.

Given this interpretation it seems likely that the building described by Kerr as standing on what he thought of as the manor and described as the great grange was no more than the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century tithe barn, the walls of which in the 1920s ‘incorporating substantial portions of the medieval structure, are still standing and a few years back it was stripped of its thatched roof and turned into a factory’.<sup>28</sup> It is unlikely that any medieval remains will have existed in this area.

### **3.1.2 MANORIAL APPURTENANCES**

#### **3.1.2.1 MANOR HOUSE**

Excavation immediately to the north of the church has shown that the castle site was occupied prior to the construction of the defences. This late Saxon and early medieval activity, which includes structural evidence, may represent the site of the late Saxon and early medieval manor prior to the construction of the castle.<sup>29</sup>

In 1298 the manor included a capital messuage with garden, dovehouse and fishpond worth 6/8d.<sup>30</sup> This was clearly associated with the castle, for in 1313-14 there are references to the gate of the manor and to the field gate outside the manor, implying that it was a discrete part of the outer ward of the castle.<sup>31</sup> In 1591 the manor, of which Robert Redale was then the tenant, was specifically described as having been within the castle itself, ‘*standing in a place called the Castell yard nere the church which hath bene of long time decaied*’.<sup>32</sup> In 1617 Thomas Rudd held the capital messuage with 100 acres of land, the great barn, a croft called ‘*byhynsty*’ and other land,<sup>33</sup> and in 1649 he or another Thomas Rudd was still tenant.<sup>34</sup> In 1591 Norden shows that Mr Rudd lived in the major house on the east side of the market place between it and the vicarage, not in a house on the Castle Yard. It is stated in the 1649 survey that the capital messuage or ‘*Manor place called the Castle Yard*’ occupied by Thomas Rudd, lay immediately north of the churchyard between it and the Connygarth and bounded by the lane to Mr Freeman’s house on the east. The manor then comprised a malting house of 8 bays, a hay barn of 3 bays and a large dovehouse well stored.<sup>35</sup> These buildings are not apparently depicted on Norden’s map of 1591, except possibly for the building at the south west corner of the Castle Yard.

Cole believed that the manor house, which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century lay to the east of the market place and had been rebuilt before 1838, had been the dwelling of the Rudd family. This was repeated by Kerr who suggested that this had been the site of the medieval manor in the outer court of the castle.<sup>36</sup> However in 1649 to the east of the Castle Yard lay the North Bury Close also held by Thomas Rudd. This was of 21 acres and abutted north onto the Chelveston Road and west onto the Castle Yard and equates with the 21 acres depicted in 1789. South Berry Close was also held by Thomas Rudd comprising 12a 26 pole and butting Handcross Field

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<sup>28</sup> Kerr, 1925, p.119.

<sup>29</sup> Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit, 1992, *Archaeological Evaluation at Higham Ferrers Castle*, unpublished report in SMR.

<sup>30</sup> IPM, translation in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>31</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>32</sup> Survey, PRO SC/12/13/33.

<sup>33</sup> Rental, NRO PDC Ar Box V 15.

<sup>34</sup> PRO, Parliamentary Survey, Northants, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Survey, PRO E317 Northants 32.

<sup>36</sup> Cole, J., 1838, *History of Higham Ferrers*, 92-3.

east, North Bury Close north and, significantly, Mr Freeman's garden west.<sup>37</sup> This must be South Bury Close of 1789, then of 12 acres 1 rood. Both were held as parcel of the manor and this undoubtedly explains the 'Bury' name, simply meaning belonging to the manor. The fact that the area is depicted by Norden in 1591 as common field, might indicate that it represents the enclosure of an open field furlong in the late 16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> century, but the inaccuracies of Norden's map mean one can not be certain of this dating and there is reason to believe it may have been enclosed with the parsonage site, earlier in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (see below). The rectilinear form of the enclosures, which led to the suggestion that it was the site of a burh, resulted from the rectilinear layout of the furlongs in this part of the open field system.

Eayre's prospect of Higham of circa 1720 does show both the 'manor house' and a barn to the south east of the churchyard, set within hedged closes with standard trees, but significantly he describes it as the Parsonage House. The property can be equated with the Tythe Yard and associated buildings and closes to the east of the back lane, all described as 'tythe', on the map of 1737.<sup>38</sup> The parsonage depicted by Norden must be the same property shown by Eayre and on the 1737 map but shown too far to the west, reflecting the high degree of inaccuracy in the Norden map, a problem further discussed below (10.0). The Freeman family had held the Rectory in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Henry Freeman being the rector in 1681.<sup>39</sup> Mr Freeman's house mentioned in 1649 on the west of the South Berry Close is therefore clearly the parsonage with a lane leading to it from the Chelveston road running on the east side of the castle. As the rectory had been leased out in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century to the College, it is possible that the parsonage with its farm buildings were not erected until after the dissolution. It may have been built by the rector on land enclosed from the open field together with the Bury closes and being the tithe portion of that inclosure at some time between 1535 and 1591. The road on the east side of the castle may thus have existed in 1591 but was not accurately shown by Norden, but if it existed in the medieval period it may have been no more than a back lane giving access to the field gate of the castle. The parsonage became known as the manor at some time in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century, presumably as a result of integration of the rectory with the former manorial property.

### **3.1.2.2 CASTLE**

The castle was also the manor in the medieval period. It is likely that the location of the castle was determined by estate function rather than strategic considerations, although it did lie close to two major roads. The castle is described in great detail by Kerr, although there are significant problems with his interpretation of the evidence. He drew upon a wide range of medieval documentary sources with various detail of nature and chronology of construction and repair, in some cases on a major scale, during the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>40</sup> The exact date of origin for the castle is not known but the presence of a major residence here in the 13<sup>th</sup> century is clearly demonstrated by the signing of royal documents at Higham.<sup>41</sup> The castle may prove originally to have been of motte and bailey type but it is perhaps more likely that it was simply of two unequally sized baileys, the smaller towards the churchyard and the larger to the north. The area of the whole Castle Yard including the moats comprises about

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<sup>37</sup> Survey, PRO E317 Northants 32.

<sup>38</sup> Bailey, B, 1996, *Northamptonshire in the Early 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, NRS vol. 39, 90.

<sup>39</sup> Bridges, 1791.

<sup>40</sup> Kerr, 1925.

<sup>41</sup> Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit, 1992, *Archaeological Evaluation at Higham Ferrers Castle*, unpublished report in SMR. 'King John and the Court at Higham', *Archaeologia*, xxii, 148.

1.5 hectares. However the possibility that the warren on the north side originated as an outer bailey in the early medieval period, as suggested for example at Rockingham, though unlikely should still be considered.

Camden, speaking of the castle, is specific that '*the ruins whereof are yet to be seen near the church*'.<sup>42</sup> The ruins are depicted on Norden's map of 1591 in the paddock immediately to the north of the church. Though the castle had been demolished in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century there were substantial earthworks surviving for in 1646 it was ordered that '*no one shall put any nuisance into the castle ditch ... or at the little gate of the castle, or deposit rubbish near the bounds*..<sup>43</sup> In circa 1720 there were some walls still standing on west end of the area near the church, being vestiges of buildings and various hollows and heaps of ruins. Bridges however misinterpreted the remains of the warren, which lie to the north of the area of ruins shown by Norden, as the northern part of the castle, following perhaps Norden's naming in 1591 of these closes as part of the castle. This error is repeated by Kerr, the Victoria County History and by Beresford, but reinterpretation by Brown has shown that the northern half of the area was merely the rabbit warren which belonged to the manor.<sup>44</sup>

The earthworks of the castle still survived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and with a low mound with a deep wide ditch bounding it on the western side is depicted by Eayre in circa 1720 immediately to the north of the castle 1720.<sup>45</sup> The 1789 map shows very faintly three earthworks: the irregular mound in the warren which survives today, a bank which may be the outer bailey bank on the north side of the Castle Yard and a mound and curving ditch close to the church.<sup>46</sup> A photograph of the area prior to 1930 shows, despite 19<sup>th</sup> century levelling, a substantial rise in the area of the presumed motte.<sup>47</sup> Sketch plotting of slight earthworks on the site in 1979 corresponds in very general terms to this layout as does the depiction of ruined walls and uneven ground by Norden in 1591.<sup>48</sup> The outer, northern bank as depicted in 1789 was still visible in 1979 as a distinct scarp dropping north in part into the fishpond. There was also a slight indication of it possibly turning southward within the rear gardens of properties fronting onto the main street. Here in 1737 the tenements were half their present length and a long narrow plot ran north south, almost certainly representing the location of the moat of the bailey. The earthworks are also described by Cole.<sup>49</sup> Writing in 1838 he states that the two acre area of the castle adjacent to the churchyard was recently levelled, comprising earthworks including an elevated mound surrounded by a deep dry moat. The greater part of the mound appears to have been incorporated within a 19<sup>th</sup> century extension of the churchyard in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which remains a raised area immediately north of the church. The report of discovery of Roman remains including a bath house in the area of the castle yard contiguous with the churchyard is almost certainly a misinterpretation in the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century of medieval structures related to the castle.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Camden, W., 1607, *Britannia*.

<sup>43</sup> Court roll, quoted by Serjeantson, R.M., 1916, *The Court Rolls of Higham Ferrers*.

<sup>44</sup> Brown, A E, 1974, 'Higham Ferrers Castle or Otherwise', *Northamptonshire Past & Present*, 5, 79-84.

<sup>45</sup> Bailey, 1996.

<sup>46</sup> See digital data listed in archive summary.

<sup>47</sup> VCH, 3, plate opposite p.274.

<sup>48</sup> See digital data listed in archive summary.

<sup>49</sup> Bailey, 1996, 90.

<sup>50</sup> Cole, 1838.

The massive ditch and occupation evidence on an internal raised and embanked area probably representing the inner bailey or motte were revealed in evaluation trenching immediately north of the churchyard. There is evidence for pre castle structures probably of late Saxon date and other early medieval occupation which might pre date the defences. At some time during the 12<sup>th</sup> century the site was defended with a massive ditch.<sup>51</sup>

The castle comprised an inner and an outer ward, both encompassed by stone walls with, in 1313-14, a wooden gallery over the wall. There were two outer gates, the town or west gate and the east or field gate. The location of the town gate is identified by Kerr as lying in the area of the entrance to the present park. A tenement to the south is described in detail, created in 1469 from waste ground on the south side of the gate.<sup>52</sup> The town gate thus led into the main street, almost opposite where the College now stands. The field or east gate probably issued onto the back lane on this side of the town which may have existed in the medieval period. Both led out of the outer ward which clearly lay at the northern side of the castle. The great gate led west into the main street and had a drawbridge and chambers above the entrance. There is also reference to a Middle Gate, with the steward's residence in the upper storey, presumably leading from the inner to the outer court. This may have been the great gate, with the Lord's Chamber above. There was also a postern or little gate which must have led out of the inner bailey as it is said to have lain near the churchyard.

Within the castle a wide range of buildings are described but in few cases can their position within the castle be located. These include the chapel, Great Hall, Lord's Chamber and the Lady's Chamber all in the lower ward. Then there were the Friar's chamber, Treasury Chamber, Kitchen, Scullery, Saucery, Larder, Buttery, Pantry, Chaunderye, Ewery, Cellar, Wine Cellar, Storehouse and Bakehouse. The long stable lay beside the east gate and the grange also towards the field. Contrary to Kerr's interpretation most if not all of the buildings of the demesne farm must have lain within the outer ward. These buildings included the Great Barn, Granary, hayhouse, oxhouse, cattle sheds, sheepcote, kilnhouse, stable for cart and plough horses, or at least the majority of them, must have also lain within the outer bailey. Indeed in 1430-1 the receiver's accounts specifically refer to the repair of the '*Great Barn within the castle*' and in 1550-1 the accounts refer to the '*horreum in le Castleyarde*'

The castle suffered neglect in late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century and in 1523 was '*all rased and in great ruin and decay*' when the king granted Sir Richard Wingford the stone from the ruined castle to rebuild Kimbolton castle. According to Leland, writing in the 1540s it was '*now of late clene faullen and taken down*'<sup>53</sup> and in 1610 Norden describes it as '*altogether ruinate*', but he adds that '*the foundations and ruyns doe declare that it hath bin a place of some accompt*'.<sup>54</sup> It is clear from the 1649 survey and other sources discussed above that the demesne farm was maintained long after the rest of the castle was demolished. There were still payments of the 'Castle Guard' as late as 1694 but this does not imply the survival of any part of the castle. The last named constable of the castle was Sir Robert Tirwhit in 1546-1572, while the 1572 grant of the stewardship of Higham to Christopher Hatton makes no reference to the constable of the castle, it having been deleted from the draft.<sup>55</sup> The Castle

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<sup>51</sup> Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit, 1992, *Archaeological Evaluation at Higham Ferrers Castle*, unpublished report in SMR.

<sup>52</sup> Kerr, 1925.

<sup>53</sup> Leland, *Itinerary*, 7, f.98v.

<sup>54</sup> Norden J, 1610, *A Delineation of Northamptonshire*.

<sup>55</sup> Kerr, 1925.



Barn still stood, alongside the Dovehouse, on the very western edge of the Castle Yard in circa 1720.<sup>56</sup>

### **3.1.2.3 DOVECOTE**

A dovecote is recorded with the capital message in 1298,<sup>57</sup> while in 1313-14 the farm of two dovecotes within the courtyard was 6/8d.<sup>58</sup> In 1535 the dovecote below the manor was held by the warden of the College<sup>59</sup> and in 1649 it is described as lying in the Castle Yard and being well stored.<sup>60</sup> It is depicted by Eayre in circa 1720 as a roofed building,<sup>61</sup> and it is again identified on the 1789 map. A wall of this building is still standing in the garden of the Green Dragon.<sup>62</sup>

### **3.1.2.4 GARDEN**

A garden was attached to the manor in 1313-14 when the accounts record that there was no income that year from the plants and fruit of the large garden.<sup>63</sup>

### **3.1.2.5 FISHPONDS**

There were at least two separate groups of fishponds in the manor. One group lay in the bottom of the small valley of Kings Meadow Lane in the close called The Vines. The fishpond in The Vines is recorded in 1464 (see below) and in 1885 comprised a single pond created by a dam across the valley bottom.<sup>64</sup>

The other group of ponds lay in the rabbit warren and are depicted on Norden's map of 1591 and the various 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century maps of the town.<sup>65</sup> The 1591 survey shows that the fishponds in the warren were still managed and the ponds in the warren may prove to have been in origin the pond referred to in 1298 in the garden associated with the capital message.<sup>66</sup> In 1313-14 the grass around the fishponds worth 4/- and a fisherman employed, but it is not possible to determine which ponds are being described.<sup>67</sup>

### **3.1.2.6 PINFOLD**

A pinfold for the holding of stray animals is recorded in 1313-14, when repairs to the gate and income from the grass are recorded, but no evidence has been found as to its location.<sup>68</sup>

### **3.1.2.7 SHEEPCOTE**

The sheepecote recorded within the manor in the medieval period may have lain not within the outer bailey of the castle but rather in the Sheepecote Close, held in 1649 by Thomas Rudd,

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<sup>56</sup> Bailey, 1996, 90.

<sup>57</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>58</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>59</sup> Account roll, PRO SC6 Henry VIII 5404.

<sup>60</sup> Survey, PRO E317 Northants 32.

<sup>61</sup> Bailey, B, 1996, 90.

<sup>62</sup> Associated Architectural Society Reports, xxxiii, 369.

<sup>63</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>64</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> edition 6" Ordnance Survey Map, XI NW.

<sup>65</sup> VCH, 3, 267.

<sup>66</sup> Brown, 1974, 79-84.

<sup>67</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>68</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

which lay at the northern end of the town on the west side of the main street and abutting west onto the Gunnsex Field.<sup>69</sup>

### **3.1.2.8 WATERMILL**

A watermill is recorded in 1086 which rendered 20/-.<sup>70</sup> Later sources record two watermills, but one of these was Ditchford Mill, recorded in 1235-6 in Rushden parish. Within Higham township itself there was King's Mill or Higham Mill which in 1298 is described as three mills under one roof worth £8 with the fishery at the mill worth a further 6/8d.<sup>71</sup> King's Mill is securely located on a side channel of the Nene to the north west of the town in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However in 1789 an Old Mill Lane is shown leading westward from the town while on the parish boundary there was a furlong called Mill Hole in 1737. No record has been found of a second mill within the township of Higham. It is possible that this represents the original site of the medieval mill but Hall notes the presence of another Mill Hole furlong on the Rushden side of the stream and suggests this may in fact locate Rushden mill, which was not recorded after 1327.<sup>72</sup>

### **3.1.2.9 WINDMILL**

No reference has been identified to a medieval windmill within the township but one is depicted on Eayre's map at the north end of the town in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and it is shown again on the map of Higham in 1737. It had gone by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>73</sup> Another windmill existed to the eastern edge of the township, on Chelveston road which has been recognised from crop-marks adjacent to the windmill hill furlong recorded on the 1737 map.

### **3.1.2.10 BAKEHOUSE**

In 1298 there were 3 bakehouses in the town worth 70/-.<sup>74</sup> In the charter of 1251 the burgesses were required to bake their bread in the bakehouse on the market square.<sup>75</sup> In 1313-14 the farm of bakehouses was worth £4 but their location is not specified.<sup>76</sup> However in 1464 there were two bakehouses which were farmed for 40/-, while another bakehouse was separately held at farm in the Bond End.<sup>77</sup> The implication is that whereas the bakehouse on the market square served the burgesses that in the Bond End served the bond tenants. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century only one bakehouse remained, that within the market place, which then lay on the north side of and adjoining the Town Hall, where leaseholders of the manor were bound to bake bread.<sup>78</sup> In the medieval period the bakehouse also incorporated the living space of the baker although it is not certain that it stood on the same site as in 1649, when it is described as a two bay building held by Thomas Rudd who also held the manor.<sup>79</sup> The bakehouse on the market place was taken down when the new town hall was erected in 1808.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Kerr, 1925; Survey, PRO E317 Northants 32; NRO map 1000, 1789.

<sup>70</sup> Domesday Book, 225d.

<sup>71</sup> VCH, 3, 269; IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>72</sup> Hall, D., and Harding, R., 1985, *Rushden : A Duchy of Lancaster Village*, 136.

<sup>73</sup> Bryant's map of Northamptonshire.

<sup>74</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>75</sup> Groome, 1961.

<sup>76</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>77</sup> Account Roll, PRO DL29/735/12052.

<sup>78</sup> PRO, Parliamentary Survey, Northants 33, quoted in VCH 3, 263.

<sup>79</sup> Serjeantson, 1916. Survey, PRO E317 Northants 32.

<sup>80</sup> Cole, 1838, 184.

### **3.1.2.11 VINEYARD**

A 3 acre vineyard existed in Higham by 1298.<sup>81</sup> In 1313-14 the wages of a vine dresser and payment for 38 men gathering grapes and making must are recorded, while the grass in the vines was said to be worth nothing that year.<sup>82</sup> In 1464-6 the close called The Vines was held at farm with the fishpond there for 10/-.<sup>83</sup> This close was held at farm by the warden of the College in 1535<sup>84</sup> and is probably part or all of the anciently enclosed close called The Vines to the west of the town recorded in 1737. However the whole hillside to the west of the Bond End was known as Vine Hill in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but the majority of this lay in open field. The close called The Vines lay on fairly level ground overlooking the Nene on Northampton Sand, but with the northern end sloping northward into a small valley. The close contained the earthworks of a fishpond in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the north end of the close in the bottom of the small valley on Upper Lias Clay. However this close comprised 13 acres and so if the vineyard existed there in the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> century then it must have encompassed a much smaller part of the area.

### **3.1.2.12 DEER PARK**

Higham Park is first mentioned in 1167.<sup>85</sup> Although it was described in 1199 as lying in the same vill as Higham<sup>86</sup> and was attached to Higham Ferrers castle, it was extra-parochial and a liberty of Rushden. It lay on beyond the watershed with the Ouse on the highest part of the boulder clay plateau some 5 km to the south east of Higham and so is not dealt with in detail here.<sup>87</sup> The park is described in detail by Hall.<sup>88</sup>

### **3.1.2.13 RABBIT WARREN**

There is no reference to a warren in the extent of Higham in 1298, but a garden and fishpond were at that time associated with the capital messuage.<sup>89</sup> By 1313-14 the accounts do record the employment of a warrener.<sup>90</sup> There is record of repair to the gate of the warren in 1313-14 while in 1362-3 it is clear that it was enclosed by a stone wall, of which 88 perches were repaired in 1380-1. In 1463 there was complaint regarding the stream running out of the 'conyger pond'.<sup>91</sup>

It is possible therefore that the warren was created in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century out of an existing garden attached to the castle. However, a grant of free warren had been made to the Earl of Derby in 1248, for which warrant was proved in 1329, and so it is still possible that a warren existed by this date.<sup>92</sup> The warren was leased to the warden of the College in 1492 and was still held at farm by the warden in 1535.<sup>93</sup> After the dissolution it continued to be leased to tenants, well after the demolition of the castle, though whether still functioning as a warren is

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<sup>81</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>82</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>83</sup> Account Roll, PRO DL29/735/12052.

<sup>84</sup> Account roll, PRO SC6 Henry VIII 5404.

<sup>85</sup> Gover, J E B, Mawer, A and Stenton, F M, 1975, *The Place-names of Northamptonshire*, 191.

<sup>86</sup> Kerr, 1925.

<sup>87</sup> VCH, 3, 279-80.

<sup>88</sup> Hall, 1985, 97-109.

<sup>89</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>90</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>91</sup> Kerr, 1925.

<sup>92</sup> VCH, 3, 268&269.

<sup>93</sup> Account roll, PRO SC6 Henry VIII 5404. Brown, p.81.

unclear.<sup>94</sup> Certainly by 1649 it was described simply as a close of pasture containing 66 trees and called the Connygarth.<sup>95</sup> In 1789 the enclosure immediately north of castle yard is identified as the coneygarth, an identification confirmed by the 1649 survey. At that time it incorporated several ponds, also shown by Norden in 1591, although then enclosed by a hedge rather than a wall. The surviving earthworks in the warren include, in addition to the fishponds, a large irregular mound which has been interpreted as a mound for the rabbits to create burrows.<sup>96</sup>

By 1737 a new warren, the '*Tyth Warren*', had been laid out to the east of the church together with the Tyth Yard and Tythe House and Orchard.<sup>97</sup> This is believed to have been part of the rectory and established in the post medieval period over former open field land, rather than being of medieval origin (see above).

## **3.2 Church**

### **3.2.1 CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN**

There was priest recorded in Higham in 1086 implying the presence of the church, which may then or earlier have served part or all of the manor and its dependencies. However the absence of priests in the dependencies cannot be taken as confirmation of a continuing ecclesiastical dependency at that time, as Domesday provides a very inconsistent record of ecclesiastical provision. Later in the medieval period only Chelveston and Caldecott, two separate townships served by a single chapel, remained a chapelry of Higham.<sup>98</sup>

The early medieval church may have been a large one, given its likely old minster functions with regard to the wider estate, but almost nothing survives from before the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The present building, resulting from large scale rebuilding in the 13<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, is one of the major medieval churches of Northamptonshire. It has a double chancel and double nave as well as a north and south aisle each with a chapel, a west tower and a south porch. The wealth of the parish is also reflected in the various carvings, particularly in the west entrance and re-used in the upper tower. The impressive west door for example is the work of the Westminster school of masons, there are substantial 13<sup>th</sup> century sculptures reused in the tower, while the church contains one of the largest and most important collections of brasses in the diocese. However the scale, architectural elaboration, fittings and contents of the present church reflects two things. Firstly is the church's status as the head of a deanery, which may well be related to wide-scale Saxon ecclesiastical functions. Secondly and perhaps more importantly is the importance and wealth of the town and especially of its lord in the medieval period.<sup>99</sup>

The advowson of the church was granted by William Peverell before 1113 to his priory of Lenton, though the advowson had returned to the manor in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In 1354 the advowson was granted to the hospital of the Annunciation in Leicester, later the College of Newark in Leicester.

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<sup>94</sup> Serjeantson, 1916, 40-42.

<sup>95</sup> Survey, PRO E317 Northants 32.

<sup>96</sup> Brown, 1974. RCHM, 1, 55.

<sup>97</sup> Survey, NRO Fitzwilliam Misc. Vol. 48 and map 1004.

<sup>98</sup> Bridges notes, Bodleian Library, Top. Northants, e5. Kerr, 1925, 48.

<sup>99</sup> VCH 3, 272-8; RCHME Church Survey, copy of unpublished notes in SMR; Pevsner, 1973, 254-8.

In the early 15<sup>th</sup> century construction of the Bede House and Grammar School transformed the churchyard into a form of precinct. Bridges, writing in circa 1720, also suggests that 'Drews House' may have formerly been the house of a chantry priest, but this has not been located.<sup>100</sup>

### **3.2.1.1 CHURCHYARD CROSS**

Within the churchyard there is an 11 ft high medieval stone cross, erected about 1320.<sup>101</sup> It was known as the Wardeyn Cross in 1463 and was restored in 1919.<sup>102</sup>

### **3.2.2 ST BOTOLPH'S CHAPEL**

A chapel of St Botolph existed in the town in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, with a reference in 1374 to the brethren of St Botolph. This chapel presumably lay in the unlocated St Botolph Street and St Botolph End, which still existed in circa 1720 but has not been located.<sup>103</sup> A Chapel Hill Close is recorded in 1550 and then again on the Inclosure map, lying immediately north of The Vines, some distance from the town, but there is no reason at present to suggest that this was the site of a chapel rather than simply land belonging to a chapel in the town.

A chapel of Jesus was also mentioned in the grant of the rectory in 1535, but it is unclear where this chapel lay, if it was indeed separate from the church itself.<sup>104</sup>

### **3.2.3 VICARAGE**

A vicarage had been instituted at Higham by 1254.<sup>105</sup> From 1422 onwards the warden of the College was presented to the vicarage by the College of Leicester and in 1535 the profits arising from the vicarage belonged to the College of Higham.<sup>106</sup> This may indicate that a separate vicarage property was not in use during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, although the vicarage house which lay adjacent to the churchyard, attached to the Bede House is said possibly to have been of late medieval origin, though this work was heavily obscured by later addition and alteration.<sup>107</sup> The vicarage house was demolished in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century and now only a single fragment of walling survives, from the north west corner of the house, built into the churchyard wall. In circa 1720 it certainly lay immediately to the south west of the Bede House and according to Cole, in 1838, the vicarage house still retained a '*portion of its ancient woodwork*' which was the chamber window described by Bridges.<sup>108</sup>

### **3.2.4 CROSSES**

In addition to the market and churchyard crosses there were at least two other crosses on the main roads leading into the town. The Stump Cross, said to have stood near the Walnut Tree

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<sup>100</sup> Bridges notes, Bodleian Library, Top. Northants. e4.

<sup>101</sup> It is described and drawn in Markham, C.A., 1901, *The Stone Crosses of the County of Northampton*, 65; also in 1849, *Churches of the Archdeaconry of Northampton*, 1, 28.

<sup>102</sup> VCH, 3, 263.

<sup>103</sup> Bridges, 2, 170.

<sup>104</sup> VCH, 3, 278. Bridges, 1791, 2, 174.

<sup>105</sup> Bridges, 1791, 2, 174.

<sup>106</sup> Bridges, 1791, 2, 174.

<sup>107</sup> VCH, 3, 264.

<sup>108</sup> Cole, 1838, 93. Bridges, 1791.

at the north end of the town, marked the north boundary of the borough,<sup>109</sup> while the Spittle Cross lay next to the medieval hospital and marked the southern boundary of the borough.<sup>110</sup>

### **3.2.5 BAPTIST CHAPEL**

A nonconformist chapel in Higham, at which John Bunyan is said to have frequently preached, had been converted to a coal house to the house of Henry Elwick by 1838.<sup>111</sup> It has not been located.

## **3.3 Monastic & Other Establishments**

### **3.3.1 HOSPITAL OF ST JAMES**

A hospital appears to have existed at Higham by 1154-89 because then and in 1200-1201 reference is made to lands belonging to *'the sick'* in Higham.<sup>112</sup> The first specific reference to the Hospital of St James, which lay immediately beyond the southern bounds of the borough in the parish of Rushden, is in 1230 when 7/8d was received by the incumbent of Rushden from the hospital.<sup>113</sup> There are various other references to it in the 13<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>114</sup> while in 1298 the extent of the manor included an expense, in line with the requirements of a charter of lord Edmund, of 20/- in alms to Roger the chaplain.<sup>115</sup> It is clear from later evidence that this is a remission of rent to the master of the Hospital of St James. This continues until at least 1401-2 when the remission was of 40/-.<sup>116</sup> The Masters of the hospital are recorded in the reeve's accounts between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>117</sup>

By 1485 the hospital was merely a free chapel, for in that year the king made a grant of the *'free chapel of St James without our lordship of Higham Ferrers'*.<sup>118</sup> It would appear that the chapel had been demolished by the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century, as in 1548 it was described simply as the close called le Spittle in Higham when the property passed to the king. In 1588 it was again simply the Spital Close, described as lying against the southern boundary of the borough, while Norden does not depict it on his map of 1591 even though the area at the road junction is shown.<sup>119</sup>

The Hospital lay in the closes near the head of a small valley which cuts back from the Nene along the southern boundary of the township. It is bounded on the north by the road to Wellingborough and on the east by the road to Rushden. The buildings of the hospital are most likely to have been close to the road junction on the small area of limestone geology at the north east corner of the closes. It was at this point that a small bridge carried the main road to Rushden over the stream by the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>120</sup> A small rectangular pond lay in the close in 1789 but it is unclear how this related to the hospital. Although there is no reference

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<sup>109</sup> Anon, 1958, A Short Guide to the Church, 26.

<sup>110</sup> VCH, 3, 263.

<sup>111</sup> Cole, 1838, 94.

<sup>112</sup> Pipe Rolls, quoted by Kerr, 1925. See also Dugdale, 1817, *Monasticon*, vi, 2, 770.

<sup>113</sup> Register of Bishop Hugh Wells, quoted by Kerr, W J B, 1921, 'The Medieval Hospital of St James of Higham Ferrers', Association of Architectural Society Reports, xxxvi, pt 2. See also Dugdale, 1817, *Monasticon*, vi, 2, 770.

<sup>114</sup> Bridges, 1791, 2, 178.

<sup>115</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>116</sup> Account Roll, PRO DL29/727/11997.

<sup>117</sup> Kerr, 1921.

<sup>118</sup> Serjeantson, 1916.

<sup>119</sup> Kerr, 1921.

<sup>120</sup> Hall, D., and Harding, R., 1985, *Rushden : A Duchy of Lancaster Village*, 50.

to burial associated with the chapel it is likely that a burial ground will have existed in association with the hospital.

### **3.3.2 THE NEW HOSPITAL**

Serjeantson refers to the presence of a new hospital in the town in 1439, however the actual description is '*novo hospicio*'. It may be that this is simply the new inn established by the warden of the College. However there is a record in 1439 that John Attespittel was fined for occupying an oven in the new spital.<sup>121</sup>

### **3.3.3 COLLEGE**

Henry Chicheley, Archbishop of Canterbury, was son of Thomas Chicheley, a merchant and burgess of Higham. Thomas had been mayor in 1381-3 and held land, the Crofts and two houses in Higham, one in Newlands and the other in the market place. Henry was educated at Winchester and rose to become Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1422 he endowed and built the College in Higham, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, St Thomas of Canterbury and St Edward the Confessor. He endowed the College with income from the manor of West Mersea as well as with property in Higham itself.<sup>122</sup> The College was for 8 secular canons and chaplains, including one master, 4 clerks, one being a grammar master and another a music master, and six choristers.<sup>123</sup> The warden of the College was also vicar of the parish church and one of the clerks served as schoolmaster. There were various additional endowments made in 1430s and 1440s. Although there was income from Higham itself, in 1521-2 to the value of £20, the greater part of the endowment was in income from property in West Mersea, London and elsewhere outside the county. At the dissolution, the College lands, including the advowson, were granted to Robert Dacre, reserving only £10 per annum for the schoolmaster. However, the College buildings themselves remained in the crown manor until 1564 when the site, with the orchard called Saffron Yard of 2.5 acres, was granted to John Smith and Richard Duffield, except for the bells and lead which were retained by the crown.<sup>124</sup>

It is clear from the historical topography of the town that the College was created out of several tenements, and specific reference is made to 27/11d of burgage rent and 6/1.5d of free rent remitted when tenements were demolished to build the College.<sup>125</sup> The College took the form of a closed courtyard with the ranges of buildings around the courtyard including a chapel and kitchen. Reference is also made to a mill, presumably a horse malt mill, within the College.<sup>126</sup> The layout is clearly depicted by Norden in 1591 with buildings on all four sides and a formal garden to the rear. Immediately to the north of the garden lay a dovecote, presumably belonging to the College, which still stood in 1737. The College was described briefly in circa 1720 when largely ruined and in use as an inn called the Saracen's Head.<sup>127</sup> However the ranges of buildings still stood on the four sides of the courtyard in 1737, though most had been demolished by 1789. The eastern facade of the College is depicted by Tillemans in circa 1719, showing the ruined nature of the property<sup>128</sup> while a prospect also

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<sup>121</sup> Serjeantson, 1916, 6.

<sup>122</sup> VCH, 2, 177-179.

<sup>123</sup> Jacob, E F, 1967, *Henry Chicheley*. See also Dugdale, 1817, *Monasticon*, vi, part 3, 1424-6.

<sup>124</sup> VCH 3, 269.

<sup>125</sup> Serjeantson, 1916.

<sup>126</sup> Warden's Account of the College of Higham Ferrers, 13 Henry VIII, Beds Record Office D/EL n E19.

<sup>127</sup> Bridges, 1791, 2, 178. Bridges notes, Bodleian Library, Top. Northants., e4.

<sup>128</sup> Bailey, 1996, 92.

showing part of the interior was produced in 1729 by Buck.<sup>129</sup> Little more remains than the front of the gatehouse and part of the south range in which the chapel lay. Ruined walls of the other ranges survived in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>130</sup> In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the College was a butcher's shop.<sup>131</sup> There was restoration of some walls and roofing in 1914. Excavations were conducted on the College in 1966 by Thompson revealing various foundations.<sup>132</sup>

The Saffron Close, which had been granted to the College in 1427, when it comprised 4 acres of common pasture,<sup>133</sup> was by 1591 a park-like walled area containing a small moated enclosure. The whole area is now a public park with the moat surviving as an earthwork.<sup>134</sup>

### **3.3.4 BEDE HOUSE**

Archbishop Chicheley founded the Bede House in 1422.<sup>135</sup> It was for 12 men and one woman and lay on the south eastern edge of the churchyard. The endowment included a garden, which is shown in 1737 extending south to Wood Street.<sup>136</sup> The vicarage lay immediately adjacent and it seems likely that it and the vicarage were originally a single property, especially as both were associated with the Chicheley's College. Alternatively both were created, at different times, from a series of tenements fronting south onto Wood Street. The Bede House comprises a hall with a raised chapel at the east end, which has a vaulted chamber beneath entered from an external door. The west front of the Bede House is depicted by Tillemans in circa 1719,<sup>137</sup> and is described briefly at that time when adjoining the Bede house on the south side were offices with a barn and orchard and small garden. At that time the chapel had stained glass figures in its east.<sup>138</sup> The hall originally contained 13 cubicles. The bell-cote contains a bell of 1737 by Thomas Eayre.<sup>139</sup> By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century there were two cottages in the churchyard used as almshouses for two people,<sup>140</sup> because in 1849 the Bede house itself was roofless and remained largely ruined until heavy restoration in 1923.<sup>141</sup>

### **3.3.5 SCHOOLS**

A Grammar School existed in the town by 1372 when a master was appointed.<sup>142</sup> It was re-founded in 1422 when money was specifically allocated in Archbishop Chicheley's endowment of the College for one of the clerks to serve as Grammar School master. In 1535, at the dissolution, £10 per annum was reserved out of the former College estate for the maintenance of a schoolmaster and it continued to function unto the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>143</sup> The School House lies in the churchyard. It is a small but elaborate 15<sup>th</sup> century building depicted by Tillemans in circa 1719.<sup>144</sup> Though largely intact, it was restored in 1914-15.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> VCH, 3, plate opposite p262.

<sup>130</sup> The College is described in VCH 3, 265-6 with a plan.

<sup>131</sup> Cole, 1838, 73.

<sup>132</sup> Medieval Archaeology, 1967.

<sup>133</sup> Groome, N, 1964, The College of the Borough of Higham Ferrers.

<sup>134</sup> RCHM, 1975, 1, 56.

<sup>135</sup> VCH 3, 278.

<sup>136</sup> Map of 1737, NRO Map 1004; Survey of 1737, NRO Fitzwilliam Misc. Vol.48.

<sup>137</sup> Bailey, 1996, 94.

<sup>138</sup> Bridges, 1791, 2, 178.

<sup>139</sup> Anon, 1849, 26.

<sup>140</sup> Whellan, W., 1849, History Gazetteer and Directory of Northamptonshire, 874-5.

<sup>141</sup> The Bede House is described in detail in VCH, 3, 263-4.

<sup>142</sup> Serjeantson, 1916, 42. The medieval schools are discussed in detail in VCH ,2, 217-222.

<sup>143</sup> Jacob, E F, 1967, Henry Chicheley. See also Carlisle, 1818, English Grammar Schools, 2, 209.

<sup>144</sup> Bailey, 1996, 93.



### **3.3.6 TOWN HOUSES**

In 1737 there were five town houses, all located in the northern half of Higham.<sup>146</sup> The workhouse has also been identified from the 1795 burgage rental and 1789 map.

## **3.4 Tenements**

### **3.4.1 POPULATION AND WEALTH (FIGURE 5)**

Beresford suggests, on the basis of the 1377 poll tax, that *'more than a score of Northamptonshire country villages'* were as large as Higham, noting for example that there were 258 men recorded in Higham yet 555 in Raunds.<sup>147</sup> However Beresford does not take into account the size of the townships involved which, together with the land use potential, will have been the main determinant of population density of any agricultural village. Moreover it is likely that Raunds, which is referred to as *'cum membris'*, included Ringstead and part of Hargrave. Higham township comprised just 735 hectares compared to 2757 hectares for Raunds and Ringstead and 3334 if Hargrave is added. This places Higham in a very different light. Indeed when acreage of land is taken into account in a countywide analysis then Higham stands out as one of the largest of the small towns in the county by 1377 with the greatest differential between the expected agricultural population and the total recorded population.

The exact number of tenements in the town in the medieval period has not been established because the number of free tenants has not been determined. Excluding these, in 1251 the total was 119, comprising 25 villein, 2 cottage and 92 burgage tenants. Although the rents paid by each type of tenant are separately recorded in various sources this does not reflect the numbers of tenants because there are such major variations in the amounts of land held by the different tenures. Hence one cannot calculate the number of free tenants from the percentage of the total rents they contributed, though this may give a very crude indication, being some 20% of the total.<sup>148</sup> This might indicate 20 or 30 free tenants, but it is perhaps likely that the numbers were far lower and that the rents are made up largely of payment for land.

### **3.4.2 BOROUGH / BURGAGE (FIGURE 6)**

The Earl of Ferrers who held Higham between 1247-54 was a favourite of Henry III and this in part may explain his acquisition of a charter from the king for a second fair and for the creation of a free borough in 1250-1.<sup>149</sup> By 1377 a mayor is recorded in the town. In 1556 a new charter was granted confirming its liberties and bounds and with a mayor, seven aldermen and 13 chief burgesses. This charter granted to the borough the rights of the market and fairs with the profits and court of pie-powder, with a court of record for pleas in the borough in a common hall. The nomination of the chaplain, schoolmaster and beadsmen, which had been with the College, was also transferred to the borough. Then in 1558 the town was made a corporation and granted right of representation with two members of the House

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<sup>145</sup> VCH 3, 264.

<sup>146</sup> Survey, NRO, Fitzwilliam Misc. Vol.48.

<sup>147</sup> Beresford, M W, 1971, *'History on the Ground'*, 179.

<sup>148</sup> PRO DL29/325/5320. In 1298 and (1399-1400) respectively the burgesses with £28 (£28 represented 43%), the customary or 'bond' tenants with £33/9/6 (£22/11/0 were 35%), free tenants with £12/6/10.5d (£13/12/4d were 21%) and the cottars with 13/4d (13/4d just 1%).

<sup>149</sup> VCH, 3, 268. Cal Chart 1226-57, 332, 350.

of Commons, later returning one member until 1834.<sup>150</sup> The rights of the borough were further extended in 1604 and 1664. Through the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century Higham was held at farm by the town, in 1464-6 for £7/13/11d.<sup>151</sup> The yearly rent of the borough in 1558-1603 was £15/19/5.5d.<sup>152</sup> The presence of a mayor by the later 14<sup>th</sup> century shows that already by then Higham achieved a quite different level of freedom and self governing status compared to most other medieval towns in the county apart from Northampton and Brackley. Higham clearly had a far higher significance and level of urbanisation than Beresford believed.

In 1251 the Earl had granted burgage rights to 92 of his villein tenants, comprising 79 men and 13 women. The full list of tenants is named, with a further 30 families listed who were not being given their freedom<sup>153</sup> It is clear that existing cottagers with specialist commercial and industrial occupations were simply being granted freedoms, a recognition of existing urban character rather than the initiation of urbanisation. Indeed it is just possible that there were burgesses in Higham before its first surviving charter of 1251, as is seen in Oundle. The granting of the freedoms in 1251 may, to a degree, be a response to the competition from the increasing number of other market settlements. A number of towns which had grown up, especially in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century and probably in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and this was also just at the beginning of the rash of village market grants of the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. There was a small increase in the number of burgages from 92 to 101 between 1251 and 1313-14. However it is quite likely, although the documented number of burgages remained the same thereafter, that as at Oundle there was subdivision of some of those tenements which was not necessarily reflected in all documentation. Hence relative stability in the size of the commercial and craft component of the population cannot be assumed from the apparent stability in the number of burgages in Higham in the later 13<sup>th</sup> century.

There had undoubtedly been substantial subdivision and regrouping of burgages between 1251 and the burgage rental of 1730 which is linked to a map of 1737. In 1591 there were still 110 burgages<sup>154</sup> but by 1730 the number had reduced to only 69 and it seems likely therefore that some burgages had been converted to other tenure. For example in the 1420s the College was founded partly on burgage tenements yet the former College was not considered burgage property in 1730.

The location of the burgages as recorded in 1730 shows a very clear concentration in the southern half of the town, especially around the market place and in Newlands. The bakehouse to be used by the burgesses was also in the market place. Although in the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were a number of burgages in the northern part of the town, including 7 in the Bond End, this is clearly a discrete part of the settlement with its own bakehouse for the bond tenants. It maybe that all or at least the majority of the 30 agricultural tenements of 1251 lay in the northern end of the settlement. This may also in part explain the presence in that part of the town of the tenements held as leasehold of the manor. The bounds of the Borough are defined in detail on the map of 1789 and this appears to be the same as that of 1591 where the borough is said to have extended from Spittle Cross on the south to another cross near

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<sup>150</sup> VCH, 3, 269-271.

<sup>151</sup> VCH 3, 269-70. Account Roll, PRO DL29/735/12052.

<sup>152</sup> Survey, PRO SC12/13/33.

<sup>153</sup> VCH 3, 269.

<sup>154</sup> PRO DL42/117; also SC12/3/31 and SC12/13/33.

Mallards Close beyond the north end of the town.<sup>155</sup> The 1789 Inclosure map boundary crosses the main north south road just to the south of Mallards Close as recorded in 1737, at the junction of three roads. As such the borough thus included the whole settlement of Higham by 1591. However these bounds may have been newly defined by the charter of 1556 and may not have been of medieval in origin, when the distinction between the town and the Bond End was the significant one, although no formal boundary between the two has been identified.

There is a clear distinction between the non-agricultural occupation of the burgesses compared to the villein tenants. Whereas the villeins held 20.5 virgates, probably representing at least 540 acres and may in 1251 have held as much as 810 acres (see below), the 101 burgages in 1313-14 included only 30.5 acres of field land, not even the amount of a single virgate. How long this situation prevailed is as yet unclear, but by the earlier 15<sup>th</sup> century there was at least one tenement in the Newlands which was held with 70 acres of arable and meadow.<sup>156</sup> However the investment in agriculture by burgesses as they prospered during the medieval period is seen in various towns, whether through the purchase of land or the leasing of demesne land, and does not necessarily represent a change in the overall commercial base of the town.

### **3.4.3 VIRGATE**

In 1086 there were 16 villeins who, together with 9 bordars and a priest, had 8.5 ploughs. The villeins held 20.5 virgates, probably representing at least 540 acres. The 25 villeins of 1251 may have held as much as 810 acres. In 1399-40 the bondmen held 20.5 virgates and paid £22/11/0.<sup>157</sup> The apparent growth in the number of virgate tenants from 16 in 1086 to 25 in 1251 may have taken place through the subdivision of tenements, but if it involved the creation of new tenements then these may have been established by expansion southward from the Bond End towards the market place or by the encroachment on the green and the highway which is suggested by the topographical analysis (see below).

As discussed above, the Bond End name of the north end of the settlement and the presence there in 1298 of a third bakehouse, which is specifically described as a common oven of the bond men, makes very clear that the north end of Higham was the area where the virgate holders were concentrated. The presence of the Sheepcote Close in the Bond End in the 18<sup>th</sup> century might reflect the location of the medieval sheepcote and further reinforce the agricultural significance of this part of the town. It would certainly appear likely that the early focus of the virgate holdings was in the northern part of Higham. The close association of this with the only irregular plan component in the settlement and also, perhaps significantly, its close proximity to the major focus of early and middle Saxon activity would suggest that this may be the earliest surviving area of the settlement.

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<sup>155</sup> PRO DL42/117.

<sup>156</sup> Groome, 1961.

<sup>157</sup> PRO DL29/325/5320. Account roll translated in Kerr, 1925, 50-62. 540 acres is based on the post medieval average acreage per virgate, given in Hall, 1995, 296, however as there had by that date been enclosure of parts of the open field and conversion of other land to cow pasture it is possible that Groome's suggestion that the villein virgates comprised 810 acres is more accurate, although Hall's calculation of 830 acres excluding demesne in the rest of the field system would allow for 800 acres of villein land assuming no free or cottage land. Hall, 1995, 76. Groome, 1961.

### **3.4.4 COTTAGE**

In 1086 there were 9 bordars in Higham.<sup>158</sup> There were just two cottagers left in the town after the burgesses were created in 1251 and in 1399-40 the cottars paid in total just 13/4d rent.<sup>159</sup> Although the numbers of cottagers increased enormously between 1086 and 1251, from 9 to 94, 92 of these must have been employed primarily if not wholly in commercial or industrial activity and this is why they were given their freedom at the creation of the borough, leaving just 2 cottagers who were presumably the only ones involved solely in agricultural occupations.<sup>160</sup> Such a pattern is repeated in Oundle and may give some indication as to the significance of cottagers in other settlements in the 13<sup>th</sup> century as probably mainly representing artisans.

### **3.4.5 FREE TENANTS**

In addition to the burgesses there were also a number of free tenants in the town who in 1399-40 were paying in total an assize rent of £13/12/4d.<sup>161</sup> The exact number and distribution of these tenants through the town and their significance in the urban development of the town has not been established. In some other towns, such as Oundle and Kettering the number of free tenants has been relatively few and although the relative assize rent value could suggest as many as 20 or 30 this is very unlikely and is more likely to represent a small number of freeholders but with a substantial land holding (see above).

### **3.4.6 DECLINE AND RECOVERY**

The impact of the famines of the earlier 14<sup>th</sup> century and particularly of the plagues of the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century have not been established in Higham, although a significant percentage of the abandoned tenements seen in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, particularly at the northern end of the town are likely to have been largely a result of population decline at that time.<sup>162</sup> Just before 1410 there was also a major fire in the town, for there are various references in the subsequent account rolls to dues being relaxed to assist the tenants in the rebuilding of the town. In 1410-11 there was an allowance of £9/8/4 and in 1414-15 of £6/13/4 from the £11/13/4 toll of the market and fair and as late as 1427-9 the sum of 66/8d was granted to mayor and burgesses for repair of the burgages which had been burnt.<sup>163</sup>

Like a few other of the town in the county, Higham did however increase in both population and wealth relative to the rest of the county at least until the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. However by the later 17<sup>th</sup> century it had gone into rapid relative decline in countywide terms. In 1712 Morton says '*the town is small and not very populous*' and attributed its decline to the loss of the corn market to Wellingborough.<sup>164</sup> Clear evidence of decline can be seen in the number of vacant plots on the 1737 and 1789 maps. Cole also reports the presence of foundations of walls in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in the eastern and western directions of the town, though his suggestion that the town had extended as far on the west as the mill seems improbable given

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<sup>158</sup> Domesday Book, 225d.

<sup>159</sup> PRO DL29/325/5320.

<sup>160</sup> Groome, 1961.

<sup>161</sup> PRO DL29/325/5320.

<sup>162</sup> Groome has examined the evidence generally for the impact of the Black Death on Higham Hundred: Groome, N., 1982, 'The Black Death in the Hundred of Higham Ferrers', *Northamptonshire Past & Present*, 6, 309-311.

<sup>163</sup> Account Rolls, PRO DL29/728/11987, 729/11993, 11997, 11999, 731/12016, 12018, 12021, 12023, 732/12026, 12031, 12033, 734/12044, 735/12052, 12056. The total assize rent for Higham in the 15<sup>th</sup> century varied between £84/9/1 in 1399-1400, declining slightly in the 1410s to £84/0/2.2d and then rising again by 1464-6 (and continuing in 1535) to £82/17/8.5d. Fee farm and toll from Mayor and burgesses in 1535 £21/18/10d. Account roll, PRO SC6 Henry VIII 5404.

<sup>164</sup> Morton, 1712.

the existence of open field land in this area. It is probable that occupation did not extend beyond the back lane on the west side of the town.

### **3.5 Commerce**

Beresford suggests that Higham was too small to maintain full time specialists in trade and crafts, pointing out that the burgesses were also concerned with cultivation in the open fields, but as we have already seen this interpretation is in error.<sup>165</sup> Higham quite clearly did have a substantial population supported largely if not wholly through commercial activity (see above). Of the 92 burgesses recorded in 1251 there were 16 trades recorded. These comprised 6 people involved in the preparation and sale of food: 2 butchers, baker, fishmonger, confectioner, cook; two involved in leather working: cobbler, skinner; two in clothes production: yarn maker, tailor; together with the usual smith, miller and clerks. There were also three people apparently involved in agricultural activities: shepherd, horse keeper, swineherd.<sup>166</sup> If these are in any way representative of the overall occupations of the burgesses then the leather and the cloth industries may have been of similar overall importance to the economy of the town as the more general ‘service industries’. However, if the vast majority of the burgesses were involved primarily in commercial and industrial activities as opposed to agriculture then agriculture represented only about 32% of the households.

There are some indications as to the range of goods sold in the market, in addition to the evidence of the 1251 charter. In particular there are various references in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and later to the butchers’ stalls, reflecting the importance of such general trade to all the significant markets in the county. There is also reference to the shops of the linen merchants, implying that this particular component of the cloth industry was significant within the town and may even indicate the presence of linen production in Higham or nearby. The leather was a significant component of the commercial activity in the town from at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century. However it is possible that the first reference to the appointment of a ‘Leather Searcher’ in 1539,<sup>167</sup> may reflect a significant shift taking place in the nature of commercial activity in the Higham. This would accord well with a more general change in the Nene valley, clearly recognised by 1777, though by then Higham had only a very minor role in the industry.

It is not clear whether the decline in the town relative to its competitors is to be first traced to the recession of second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century the town was still home to merchants. Several of these are commemorated in the church as with William Thorpe, to whom there is a brass of 1504 in the Lady Chapel of the church.<sup>168</sup> The number of shops and stalls occupied in the market place had declined from an early 14<sup>th</sup> century high of 38 (8 shops and 30 stalls) to 26 stalls by the end of the century. If this represents a comprehensive record then Higham is comparable to Kettering in this respect. There is insufficient evidence available to be able to compare the town with Wellingborough, its primary competitor for trade. The market still survived and a number of tradesmen’s tokens were issued at Higham in the 17<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>169</sup> while in the later 16<sup>th</sup> and earlier 17<sup>th</sup> century a

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<sup>165</sup> Beresford, 1971, 164.

<sup>166</sup> Full list of names in *Calendar of Charter Rolls*, i, 372-3.

<sup>167</sup> Serjeantson, 1916.

<sup>168</sup> VCH, 3, 277.

<sup>169</sup> Cole, 1838, 106.

meadow was leased to the poor craftsmen of Higham, known as the tradesmen's and craftsmen's meadow.<sup>170</sup>

At present it would appear that it was in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that the major shift in fortunes took place between the two towns of Higham and Wellingborough. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, before it lost out to Wellingborough, Higham market was clearly important as a corn market.<sup>171</sup> In 1664 when the main market was transferred to a Thursday the Saturday market was appropriated to the sale of cattle and horses, possibly representing the shift of the corn market to Wellingborough, although it does suggest that horses and cattle represented a significant component of commercial exchange in Higham.

By 1777 the settlement had declined to a place of very limited significance with only a very small range of people involved in commerce and industry. However only between 20 - 40% of the adult males recorded in that year were involved in agriculture (depending on the number of recorded labourers involved in agriculture). There were still a range of people involved in 'service industries': apothecary, poulterer, 2 drapers, 2 grocers, 1 baker, 2 butchers. There was no longer any significant cloth related activity but the leather industry was represented: glover, 3 cordwainers, fellmonger, collar maker, as was the building industry: mason, glazier, 2 carpenters. The other trades comprised a miller, 2 smiths, cooper and a mat maker, in addition to 5 farmers, 1 husbandman, 12 labourers, 1 gentleman and 9 servants. Higham had thus not declined to a purely agricultural settlement and retained a limited range of services and industrial production, but this component of the population was minute compared to the successful small towns of the 18<sup>th</sup> century such as Wellingborough and Kettering.<sup>172</sup>

### **3.5.1 MARKET**

Higham is one of only three markets recorded in the county in 1086, in addition to the Borough of Northampton for which, as with other Domesday boroughs, specific mention of the market is not made. In 1086 the market at Higham was valued at 20 shillings per year.<sup>173</sup> The rights to the market were confirmed at various times during the medieval and post medieval period.<sup>174</sup> Although most early markets seem originally to have been held on a Sunday there is no record of the Higham market having been transferred from the Sunday but in 1298 it was certainly being held on a Saturday.<sup>175</sup> The new charter of 1556 had granted two markets, on Saturday and Monday,<sup>176</sup> but the Monday market appears to have had fallen into disuse before 1649. Then in 1664 the market was transferred to a Thursday and the Saturday market appropriated to the sale of cattle and horses.<sup>177</sup> According to Morton the loss of the corn market to Wellingborough in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which Higham unsuccessfully tried to win back, was critical to the decline of the town.<sup>178</sup> In circa 1720 of the three markets which had at one time existed the Monday and Thursday markets were disused and the Saturday market

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<sup>170</sup> PRO, Parliamentary Survey, Duchy Lancaster, 55; PRO, Parliamentary Survey, Northants 33.

<sup>171</sup> Morton, 1712.

<sup>172</sup> Hatley, V, 1973, *Northamptonshire Militia Lists 1777*, NRS vol.25.

<sup>173</sup> Domesday Book, 225d.

<sup>174</sup> E.g.: Inquisition Post Mortem, 13 May 26 Ed. I; The right to hold a market and the use of gallows, pillory, tumbrel and to hold the assize of bread and ale was proven in 1329. VCH, 3, 269.

<sup>175</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>176</sup> VCH 3, 272.

<sup>177</sup> VCH, 3, 272.

<sup>178</sup> Morton 1712.

was said to be '*much decayed*'.<sup>179</sup> By 1849 all the markets had fallen into disuse<sup>180</sup> and although in October 1888 a weekly Monday market was re-established but by 1901 this had also failed.<sup>181</sup>

The profit of the market and fair in 1298 was £9.<sup>182</sup> In 1313-14 the toll of market and fairs excluding the Michaelmas fair was worth £17,<sup>183</sup> while in 1399-40 the market, fair, stalls and shops were worth £25/5/5d with the toll of market and fair again being £17.<sup>184</sup> In the 15<sup>th</sup> century the value of the toll, including income from the shops and stalls varied from £11 in 1401, when the toll alone was worth 54/- to £3/6/8 in 1439 when the whole of the tolls, rents etc had been farmed out. Overall this may in part be an indication of the declining fortunes of the market and fairs but it could equally reflect changes in the farming out of the market and exactly what was included and excluded. The nature and significance of the changes may be clarified by further detailed documentary analysis.

In 1426 the manor still maintained some control of the market, for in that year the king's chief steward of the Duchy of Lancaster fined certain offenders for irregularities of weights and measures through '*the abuse of their bushels*'.<sup>185</sup> However in 1485 the tolls of the market and fairs with all shops and stalls in the market place were leased for 20 years to the Borough by the crown<sup>186</sup> and in 1535 and 1649 the mayor and corporation of Higham still paid 66/8d for the four fairs and a weekly market. It is possible that the burgesses actually already held the market and fair at farm by 1420 because then and in 1427-8 the toll of the market and fair that was released to the burgesses for the repair of burgages was also 66/8d.

### **3.5.1.1 MARKET PLACE**

The market place lay at the centre of the town and is traversed by the main road. It was, contrary to Beresford's interpretation, a roughly rectangular area which presumably had originally extended from the boundary of the churchyard to the tenements on the west side of Behind the Stye. It had however suffered significant encroachment on the eastern side, if this interpretation is correct, with rows of tenements fronting the east side of the market place between it and the churchyard. Elsewhere permanent shops and stalls had appears in several locations. Encroachment seems to have remained a problem for in 1451 fines were imposed for the erection of wooden hovels '*byhyndethesty*'. Also on the market square were a market cross and two bakehouses which served the Borough. The bailiff of the Borough, at least from the point in the late medieval period when the Borough held the market tolls at farm, was responsible for keeping the market place '*clean and fair*'.<sup>187</sup>

### **3.5.1.2 SHOPS & STALLS**

In 1298 the farm of stalls in market place was worth £4.<sup>188</sup> The first details of the numbers of shops and stalls is given in 1313-14 when 25 butchers' stalls were worth 100/-, 5 butchers

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<sup>179</sup> Bridges, 1791, 2,170.

<sup>180</sup> Whellan, 1849, 872.

<sup>181</sup> Markham, 1901, 68.

<sup>182</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>183</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>184</sup> PRO DL29/325/5320.

<sup>185</sup> VCH, 3, 271.

<sup>186</sup> VCH, 3, 271.

<sup>187</sup> Serjeantson, 1916.

<sup>188</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33. The later history in particular of the shops and stalls is well documented but the sources have not been examined in detail for this report. NRO HF index Misc. Documents 1-45 includes details of shops in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

stalls in the *'foro carnificium'* 18/-, although for one stall there was nothing that year, and 8 shops farmed to the linen dealers at 47/-.<sup>189</sup> The number of butchers' stalls may have increased from 25 to 26 in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century because in 1399-40 there were 26 not 25 butchers stalls in the group in the Shambles at a rent of 106/-. However there had clearly been significant decay in the market in the second half of the century because in 1399-1400 the other group of 5 butchers stalls outside the Shambles, in the Butchers' market, provided no income and were in decay, while the 8 linen stalls were all in hand.<sup>190</sup> However this may have been a temporary decline because, although the total rents had declined significantly, in 1416 it would appear that there were still 26 butchers' stalls in the shambles worth 72/4d, 5 butchers' stalls outside the shambles worth 20d and 8 linen shops worth 21/-.<sup>191</sup> Le Shoprowe is mentioned in 1488<sup>192</sup> and in 1591 Norden shows four rows of shops and stalls on the market place. One of these was largely the Moot Hall and bakehouse but appears to include one or more other buildings at the north end. There is then a second row to the west of the Moot Hall adjacent to Behind Stye. Then on the eastern side of the market place there were two more rows. In 1737 the two rows adjacent to Behind the Stye remained, appearing to be back to back rows fronting east and west. The shops on the south eastern part of the market place were two short rows running east-west and linked on the east side by another building. The alignment of these is different to those shown by Norden and they may have been rebuilt. More detail is provided in 1789 when the western rows are seen to be in three parts, a single building at the southern end, then a narrow alley, another longer row then another alley and then a final longer row. By this time however the properties seem only to have fronted eastward, with single properties extending from the main road to Behind Stye. The extent of the Town Hall row and the eastern rows are also more accurately depicted in 1789, but apparently with little or no change in extent. If the pattern seen in the post medieval period reflects the medieval pattern, as detailed documentary research suggests was the case in Oundle, then the western two rows may perhaps be equated with the butchers row of some 25 stalls while the eastern group might represent the 8 linen merchants' shops. The Moot Hall row was removed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as were the eastern group of shops which were replaced by the new town hall. The western rows of shops next to Behind Stye have also been converted to houses but the two alleyways still remain dividing the row into three parts.

There is limited evidence as to the size and construction of the shops and stalls. In 1399-40 there was 2d new rent from one vacant plot *'Behynsty'* measuring 15 ft by 7 ft.<sup>193</sup> This is the order of scale of the shops and stalls seen in some other towns and may be one of the vacant plots in the shop row, which appears from Norden's map of 1591 to have fronted west onto Behind Stye. It is unclear whether the shops and stalls were constructed of timber, like many of those in Oundle, but in 1485, when the shops and stalls in the market place were leased to the mayor, the king agreed to provide flags or sedges for their roofing from le Middell Wroo meadow.<sup>194</sup>

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The 15<sup>th</sup> century as well as 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century shop numbers will be available from Duchy account rolls in the PRO.

<sup>189</sup> Account roll, 1313 in Kerr, 1925.

<sup>190</sup> PRO DL29/325/5320.

<sup>191</sup> PRO Misc. Books, Duchy Lancaster, xx, f.100d.

<sup>192</sup> Bridges, 1791.

<sup>193</sup> PRO DL29/325/5320.

<sup>194</sup> Kerr, 1925.



### **3.5.1.3 MARKET CROSS**

A late 13<sup>th</sup> century market cross, suggested as being erected circa 1280, still stands on the north eastern part of the market place. It is 14 ft high and consists of a stone shaft with foliated capital, the shaft on a conical base which probably encases earlier steps.<sup>195</sup> In circa 1720 the shaft was surmounted by a small stone cube carved with the crucifixion,<sup>196</sup> but by 1901 this had been replaced by a weather vane which in turn was lost in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>197</sup>

### **3.5.1.4 MOOT HALL**

The Moot Hall or Hall of the Burgesses presumably lay on the market place in the medieval period. Details of its repair are recorded in 1381, 1382 and 1394-5. The Hall was burnt down in the fire of circa 1410 but it is likely that it was rebuilt on the same site. In 1444 it is clear that there was at least one shop beneath the '*Motehall*',<sup>198</sup> showing that, as in other towns, it was a first floor hall. By 1537 it was known as the Guildhall and is described in 1615 as the place where '*common council*' of the Borough customarily took place. In 1591 Norden shows a large hall in the market place with smaller buildings to its north, with the first floor hall approached from a flight of step on the east side. In 1737 it is shown immediately to the east of the main road and in 1789 with the bakehouse adjoining it on the north side. Cole describes it as having had two prisons on the ground floor.<sup>199</sup> The old hall was demolished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and replaced by a new town hall, erected in 1808 on the eastern part of the market place. The earlier building was presumably demolished, as in other market places, to open up the market place and especially to provide a wide carriageway for the main road which had been severely restricted by the Moot Hall and the various shop rows.

## **3.5.2 FAIR**

In 1250 William de Ferrers obtained a grant of a fair on the vigil, day and morrow of the feast of St. Botolph (17<sup>th</sup> June).<sup>200</sup> St Botolph's fair continued and in 1300 a second fair was added, on the eve of St. Michael and two days thereafter, granted to Thomas, Earl of Lancaster.<sup>201</sup> In 1556 the borough charter granted four fairs, adding feasts of St Katherine and of St Matthias to the existing fairs and four fairs continued to be held by the corporation in 1649.<sup>202</sup> In the 1660s the number was reduced to two fairs and in 1684 just one remained, for the sale of cattle and merchandise on the Thursday before the conversion of St Paul.<sup>203</sup> However in circa 1720 Bridges records 7 fairs<sup>204</sup> and these remained in 1800, being held on the Tuesday before 5<sup>th</sup> February, the 7<sup>th</sup> March, 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 28<sup>th</sup> June, the Thursday before 5<sup>th</sup> August, 10<sup>th</sup> October and 17<sup>th</sup> December. In 1849 fairs were still held on Wednesday before February 5<sup>th</sup>, March 7<sup>th</sup>, Thursday before 5<sup>th</sup> August, 11<sup>th</sup> October and 6<sup>th</sup> December.<sup>205</sup> However by 1901 all these fairs had fallen into disuse, replaced only by a pleasure fair in the week after 15<sup>th</sup> August.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> VCH, 3, 263.

<sup>196</sup> Bridges, 1791, 2, 170.

<sup>197</sup> It is drawn and described in Markham, 1901, 66-7.

<sup>198</sup> Serjeantson, 1916, 7.

<sup>199</sup> Cole, 1838, 178.

<sup>200</sup> VCH, 3, 268&9.

<sup>201</sup> Pat no.30., quoted by VCH, 3.

<sup>202</sup> VCH, 3, 272. PRO E317, Northants 32.

<sup>203</sup> VCH 3, 269-70 & 272.

<sup>204</sup> Bridges 1791.

<sup>205</sup> Whellan, 1849, 872.

<sup>206</sup> Markham, 1901, 68

In 1298 the profit of annual fair was 20/-,<sup>207</sup> but with the addition of a second fair the value increased and in 1413-22 the farm of the fair was worth 54/-.<sup>208</sup>

While the fairs will have been held in the market place and streets of the town in the medieval and much of the post medieval period, by 1737 a close on the south west side of Bond End, behind the Back Lane was known as Hog Fair Piece.

### **3.5.3 INNS & ALEHOUSES**

It may be expected that there were several inns at Higham in the later medieval period. The Swan and Hope Inn, with 60 acres of arable land and 10 acres of meadow, was granted in 1435 to the College by Chicheley.<sup>209</sup> This must be the new inn ('hospicium') called 'le Swan' that lay in the Newland in 1441 adjacent to a burgage of the College.<sup>210</sup>

Higham Ferrers is omitted from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century alehouse recognisances records of the quarter sessions because, like Northampton, Brackley and Daventry, it was a self governing borough. However it is included in the War Office statistics, listing the number of guest beds and the quantity of stabling for horses. It is therefore possible to establish Higham's relative status countywide, which will give an indication of the quantity of through traffic using the town and of other overnight visitors coming to the town for commercial and other purposes. In each case it is already at the bottom of the hierarchy of significant urban settlements. In 1686 there were 29 guest beds (12<sup>th</sup>) and 55 places for horses (14<sup>th</sup>); in 1756 30 guest beds (8<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup>) and 20 stabling places (15<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup>) and in 1800 23 (11<sup>th</sup>) and 55 (11<sup>th</sup>) respectively.<sup>211</sup>

As yet the distribution of most of the inns and alehouses has not been established although several have been located. In circa 1720 for example the former College incorporated an inn, the Saracen's Head.<sup>212</sup> It is clear from the survey of 1737 that some at least of the inns and alehouses were distributed through the town from North End to the southern end of Newlands.

### **3.5.4 HINTERLAND (FIGURE 7)**

The definition of hinterlands for this study has necessarily been conducted in a relatively simplistic fashion. Firstly using Bracton's theoretical measurement of  $6\frac{2}{3}$  miles as the distance within which a new market could be considered to provide direct competition to an existing market.<sup>213</sup> An alternative has been calculated using Thiessen polygons. The latter have just taken into account the markets towns which were clearly successful and which survived into the post medieval period. The Thiessen polygons are likely to give a closer definition of the area in which the town had the dominant impact but the former should provide a guide as to the widest hinterland from which the town will have derived the most of its trade. These theoretical constructs will of course have been substantially influenced by the

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<sup>207</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>208</sup> Serjeantson, 1916.

<sup>209</sup> Groome, 1961.

<sup>210</sup> Serjeantson, 1916, 46.

<sup>211</sup> PRO, WO 30/48, 48 & 50.

<sup>212</sup> Bridges, 1791, 2, 178.

<sup>213</sup> The issue is discussed briefly in the Northamptonshire context by Goodfellow, P, 1987, 'Medieval Markets in Northamptonshire', *Northamptonshire Past & Present*, VII, 305.

road pattern. They will also have been affected by physical topography and land use, though in Northamptonshire, unlike upland counties, these are likely to have been relatively limited in their impact.

The hinterland thus defined encompasses many large villages and some of the wealthiest agricultural land in the county, set along the Nene Valley. These will have generated a major trade in corn, as their most important product, and the area remained largely champion land well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Significantly it was the loss of the corn market to Wellingborough in the later 17<sup>th</sup> century that was seen as the factor which sealed Higham's fate as a market town. Although there may have been some areas of woodland on the boulder clay of the hinterland in the late Saxon period this had largely gone by the 11<sup>th</sup> century and so there were no major products of a woodland economy within the hinterland to provide extra diversity to its economy.

At least two market villages lay within the hinterland, Wollaston and Finedon, but neither provided significant competition to Higham and their markets failed in the recession of the later 14<sup>th</sup> century. Thrapston lay on the very edge of Higham's hinterland and hence, although it achieved modest urbanisation, it did not represent a significant threat to Higham. In contrast the other medieval market foundation of the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, at Wellingborough, was closer and did develop into a large and successful small town in the medieval period. It represented a significant challenge to Higham's dominance. In the post medieval period Wellingborough rapidly supplanted Higham as the main market town in the area.

### **3.6 Industry**

The evidence for craft production in Higham Ferrers is very limited, though this is probably mainly due to the lack of detailed documentary and archaeological investigation rather than the lack of evidence or of substantial production in the town. The leather industry had been present in Higham in the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century, with at least two burgesses involved in shoemaking and leather preparation. It is however uncertain how important the industry was at this time. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the court rolls have various references to tanners and from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards there are various records of shoemakers in the town.<sup>214</sup> A Skinners Well Close is also recorded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, though might prove to be a personal name.<sup>215</sup> In 1777 there were 6 persons involved in leather related trades, including a 3 shoemakers, a glover, a fellmonger and a collar maker. However by this date the town was in severe decline and it was not until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century that boot and shoe manufacture became the principal occupation of the inhabitants.<sup>216</sup>

It is likely that a cloth industry existed in Higham in the medieval and early post medieval period, although as yet there is only very limited documentary evidence, which may indicate both woollen cloth and linen production. In 1737 a furlong at the south east end of the town was called Tenters, implying the use of the land at some point for the tenting or stretching of cloth on frames after fulling. Towards the eastern side of the township another furlong lay on Full Mill Hill, on the west side of a small valley. It is possible that earlier terrier will reveal a quite different derivation for the name, but it is possible that this represents the site

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<sup>214</sup> Serjeantson, 1916.

<sup>215</sup> VCH, 3, 266.

<sup>216</sup> Whellan, 1849, 872.

of a fulling mill as mills have been recorded on similar minor streams elsewhere, as for example with a fulling mill in 1705 at Ecton.<sup>217</sup> This would suggest cloth production in the town at some point in the medieval or post medieval period, the only other reference related to a cloth industry being the presence of a yarn maker in the town in 1251. The presence of a Flaxland furlong on the 1737 map may indicate the growing of flax. It is possible that this relates to a local medieval linen industry which might have supplied the linen merchants who held shops in the town in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

A malt mill is recorded in a tenement in the High Street in 1730. However such horse driven mills are seen in a number of settlements in the post medieval period and although clearly related to the brewing industry they do not seem to indicate a special importance to that industry in the town.<sup>218</sup> Similarly the presence of mortar pits recorded on the 1789 map to the west of the town in an area of Upper Estuarine Clay is typical of villages and towns in this period, being quarries from which clay was dug to provide 'mortar' for the construction of stone buildings.

The only industry that has as yet produced clear archaeological evidence is the pottery industry which was thought to have been established in the town in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In 1436 William Potter *'took a messuage not built, together with a selion of land in an adjacent croft, in which croft there is a kiln for making pots and other earthen vessels'*. It is again recorded in 1467.<sup>219</sup> This kiln, which lay in the Bond End has been excavated and would appear to represent an isolated late medieval potter, presumably serving a fairly local market, not a more substantial industry.<sup>220</sup> Adjacent evaluation has failed to yield any evidence of production on other tenements.<sup>221</sup> Recent analysis of the pottery from excavations at West Cotton suggest that by the late 13<sup>th</sup> century reduced wares of similar type to those off the 15<sup>th</sup> century from Higham were producing somewhere in the region, but they may not have been in Higham.<sup>222</sup> In the absence of publication of the excavation of the Higham kiln it is unclear whether the dating of the excavated kiln itself needs revision or whether before the 15<sup>th</sup> century there were kilns located in tenement elsewhere in the town or in another nearby village.

### **3.7 Communications**

Beresford has suggested that the main north south route from London to Leicester in this area originally ran via Ditchford bridge heading straight to Finedon, the royal estate centre of 1086.<sup>223</sup> The road where it runs south into Bedfordshire is confirmed by Hall,<sup>224</sup> but to the north the route suggested by Beresford is inaccurate and requires further investigation. It may represent a route on the east side of the Ise valley but it is unclear whether such a major long distance route existed here. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the major route from London to Leicester ran

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<sup>217</sup> NRO Map 2115.

<sup>218</sup> NRO, burgage rental H29/15.

<sup>219</sup> Serjeantson, 1916, 37

<sup>220</sup> Hall, D, 1974, Medieval Pottery from the Higham Ferrers Hundred, Northamptonshire, *Journal of the Northampton Museum and Art Gallery*, 10, 38-57.

<sup>221</sup> Oxford Archaeological Unit, 1996, Land off Station Road / North End, Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire; 1997, Walnut Tree Station, Higham Ferrers, Northants, unpublished reports in SMR.

<sup>222</sup> Blinkhorn, P 'The Saxon and medieval pottery' in Chapman, A ,forthcoming, Raunds, West Cotton, a study of medieval dynamics: Excavation at West Cotton, Northamptonshire 1985-89.

<sup>223</sup> Beresford, 1971, 161-2.

<sup>224</sup> Hall, 1985, 74.

via Northampton, with the nearest major road being that from London through Wellingborough to Oakham. It is possible that traffic was diverted from a Ditchford route to one through Higham Ferrers with the construction of the bridge over the Nene to the north of the town by the Abbots of Peterborough as early as 1227.<sup>225</sup>

However an alternative interpretation is possible. The most important route in the Saxon period may have been that along Kings Meadow Lane to Irthlingborough via Bertletsforth.<sup>226</sup> Prior to the construction of the bridge over the Nene by the Abbot of Peterborough this may have been the main route connecting the Higham and Irthlingborough in the Saxon and early medieval period. It may also be significant that as late as 1591 the road to Bedford as well as to Cambridge ran out of the town to the north of the warren. The route to Bedford probably ran south east through or near Buscots and Newton Bromswold, whereas the Cambridge road went via Yilden, where the presence of a major motte and bailey castle might indicate this was a major route by the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century. The route might originally have continued via the later Kings Mill Lane to the royal centre at Irthlingborough and then on to the late Saxon royal estate centre at Finedon. This may have been the major late Saxon and early medieval route from Cambridge and from Bedford to Leicester. A course through Higham would reflect the Saxon importance of Higham. It might also in part explain the early medieval urban development of Higham and its choice for the construction of a major castle. By the post medieval period the Bedford route passed through Wellingborough. This might have resulted from the impact of medieval replacement of fords with bridges but may also reflect the attraction of the Wellingborough following its rapid 13<sup>th</sup> century urbanisation. The medieval construction of the bridges certainly did change the road network in Higham. By the post medieval period Irthlingborough was reached from the south west corner of the market place along Stolpe Lane with Stolpe bridge leading over the Nene.<sup>227</sup> Irthlingborough was also reached across a major new bridge to the north which diverted the road pattern a little. This may have served as a major route from Cambridge to Leicester.

By the 17<sup>th</sup> century the major route was along the road through Higham from Cambridge to Northampton and Coventry. The Coventry to Cambridge road may once have passed by the town, on the south side, running along the road on the southern township boundary and past the hospital, which may have been constructed here for that very reason. If so it is likely to have been diverted, in the medieval period, to bring the traffic through the town, where it certainly ran in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The other locally significant route will have been that leading along the valley to Thrapston and Oundle. By the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century the road to Rushden, later the route to Bedford, had been improved by the construction of a small bridge and associated causeway, called 'spetel bridge', first recorded in 1410, crossing the small stream adjacent to the hospital.<sup>228</sup> Certainly Higham exploited the traffic through the town and more widely through the Hundred, the Borough having toll of passengers through the town and other places in the Hundred in 1591.<sup>229</sup>

The road system through Higham was turnpiked in the 1750s, the present A6 from Knotting to Barton Seagrave in 1753 and the Cambridge to Coventry route, on a different course to the

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<sup>225</sup> Steane, 1974, 156.

<sup>226</sup> Survey of Irthlingborough, 1404-5, BL Cotton MS Nero C. vii f112-119.

<sup>227</sup> BL, Norden's map of Higham Ferrers, 1591; NRO map 1000 of 1789.

<sup>228</sup> Hall, 1985, 50.

<sup>229</sup> VCH 3, 271.

east of the town, from Great Staughton to Wellingborough in 1754. The toll bar on the Wellingborough road as it entered the town has been located from the 1789 map.

### **3.8 Land Use**

#### **3.8.1 WOODLAND**

Whereas Higham township contained little boulder clay land on the higher ground, the land of Newton, Buscot and Higham Park were almost wholly boulder clay. It seems likely that part at least of the boulder clay area will in the Saxon period have been attached to Higham. The 'New tun' was perhaps created, in the late Saxon period, from land taken out of the Higham estate in an area which may have been extensively wooded at an earlier date. In 1086 there was one woodland 1 furlong by 1 furlong. If this was within the township then it will almost certainly have lain at the eastern edge of the on clay land, but it may have been in the area later known as Higham Park, which later lay within Rushden township where no woodland was recorded in 1086.

#### **3.8.2 OPEN FIELDS & INCLOSURE**

A high proportion of Higham township comprises permeable geology compared to that in some other townships in the area. This to a limited degree explains the high level of population and wealth in the settlement in the medieval and post medieval period, the agricultural land use capability being higher as a result of the geology. The agricultural land was largely in the form of open field which by 1567 were in four great fields: Middle Field, Brook Field, Handcross Field and West Field or Gunnsex Field.<sup>230</sup>

The manor had a substantial demesne. In 1086 there had been 2 hides in demesne out of a total 6 hides, while 4 of the 12.5 ploughs were in demesne together with four slaves.<sup>231</sup> Later in the medieval period there were in demesne 400 acres arable and 90 acres meadow.<sup>232</sup> In 1298 the demesne comprised 400 acres 3 roods arable worth 4d per acre, 68 acres 3 roods meadow the mowing of which was worth 2/- per acre, with other unquantified parcels of meadow.<sup>233</sup> In 1314 & 1327 was 470 acres approximately and all other field land 830 acres, the demesne being about 33% of the total, as in 1086.

The demesne was held largely in a consolidated area including early enclosed land to the west of the town.<sup>234</sup> Inclosure of the open field land to the west of the town began in the medieval period, for the vineyard is likely to have lain there, while the closes immediately west of the town began to be enclosed from the open field before 1427 when the Saffron Close was described as a close of 4 acres of common pasture.<sup>235</sup> Prior to parliamentary enclosure there were extensive areas of hedged enclosures, particularly in this area to the west of the town. Some of these were old inclosures but a substantial number were field closes, while various other hedges bounded furlongs. The 1591 map suggests open field extending closer to the town on both east and west, though the inaccuracies of this map must be remembered. The implication is however that the inclosure process was largely post medieval, and mainly of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. These late enclosures probably include the

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<sup>230</sup> Hall, 1995, 295.

<sup>231</sup> Domesday Book, 225d.

<sup>232</sup> Groome, H, 1961, Charters and Insignia of the Borough of Higham Ferrers.

<sup>233</sup> IPM, translated in Kerr, 1925, 33.

<sup>234</sup> Hall, 1995, 76.

<sup>235</sup> Groome, N, 1964, The College of the Borough of Higham Ferrers.

Hop Yard. Hall has shown that some of the closes on the west side of the town can be equated with demesne pasture leased out in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>236</sup> The other substantial change by the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the creation of a large cow pasture out of former furlongs to the north of the town, presumably in lieu of common rights lost when land was enclosed. The extensive areas of open fields which remained were finally enclosed by parliamentary Act in 1800 with other waste lands enclosed in 1838.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Hall, 1995, 296.

<sup>237</sup> VCH 3, 263.

## **C INDUSTRIAL (FIGURE 8)**

### **1.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT (FIGURE 9)**

Higham Ferrers was clearly regarded as an important town throughout the medieval and post medieval periods with several renewals of the town charter. The latest renewal was on 16 July 1886 under the Municipal Corporations Act 1882, which created Higham Ferrers a municipal borough with a mayor, 4 aldermen and 12 councillors. In many other respects however Higham Ferrers lost a certain amount of status in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The town, which had been a 'borough by prescription' was disenfranchised by the Reform Act of 1832, on the basis of population. In addition the town which had been the central point for the Hundred of Higham Ferrers was by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century administratively located in 'the petty sessional division, hundred, union and county court district of Wellingborough'.<sup>1</sup>

The population of the town in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was very sparse in comparison to other small market towns in the county such as Brackley, Oundle, Towcester, Daventry and Rothwell. The recorded population in 1801 was 726, which was comparable to many large villages in Northamptonshire including Burton Latimer, Desborough, Finedon, Irthlingborough, Raunds, Earls Barton and Wollaston. This appears to be a trend that had continued from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Militia lists of 1777 indicate that Higham Ferrers had just 52 men between the ages of 18 and 45 - with several settlements within the Hundred of Higham Ferrers having larger populations - Bozeat (61), Wollaston (73), Rushden (109) and Raunds (120).<sup>2</sup> Analysis of population graphs for the 19<sup>th</sup> century indicates that the pattern for Higham Ferrers was more akin to the development of the industrialised villages than any of the other market towns in the county - with a gradual increase in population throughout the early 19<sup>th</sup> century followed by a more dramatic rise in the decades following 1871.

The relationship between the adjoining settlements of Higham Ferrers and Rushden is an interesting one - there was clearly a certain amount of inter-dependence between the two throughout the period. In 1849 Whellan's Trade Directory described Rushden as a 'subsidiary' of Higham Ferrers, despite the fact that throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century the population of Rushden was always larger than that of the older town. By the end of the century Rushden was by far the larger settlement having undergone a massive expansion. It would appear likely that the re-development of Higham Ferrers in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was primarily linked to the fortunes of its neighbour. The town clearly benefited from its close links with Rushden, this was recognised by the Official Guide to Higham Ferrers '*We have to emphasise that Higham Ferrers and the much large town of Rushden have fused together - even to the point of developing a joint housing estate. Their interests overlap in industry, trade, recreation, education and many other things*'

The traditional market function of the town declined throughout the period 1750 - 1939. The primary function of the settlement had clearly been as a commercial centre; traditionally there were three weekly markets on Monday, Thursday and Saturday and seven annual fairs spread

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<sup>1</sup> Kelly's Trade Directory 1894

<sup>2</sup> This was the smallest number of men recorded for that date for any of the settlements in the Small Towns survey - the nearest examples are Burton Latimer with 61 and Thrapston with 71. The small market towns in the county had Daventry (379), Brackley (134), Oundle (153), Rothwell (156) and Towcester (186).



throughout the year.<sup>3</sup> By 1830 this had been reduced to one weekly market on a Saturday and the fairs, but less than 20 years later Whellan's Trade Directory indicated that all three markets had fallen into disuse and that the annual fairs were reduced to five. The town clearly did have a retail centre in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but this would appear to have been of a limited nature. In 1777 there were a number of butchers, bakers, drapers and grocers etc, but no more than would be expected in any self-sufficient community. By 1831 46% of the population were employed in retail and trade, compared to 31% in agriculture indicating that the settlement was still primarily urban. Trade directories in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries indicate that there was a retail trade in Higham Ferrers, but that this tended to fluctuate much more than in other towns and was less wide ranging. Although the number of shopkeepers recorded in trade directories grew from 3 in 1849 to 6 in 1894 and 14 in 1924 certain services such as linen and woollen drapers, an ironmonger, greengrocer, bookseller, stationers and provisions dealer disappeared over time - perhaps to become amalgamated into the more general stores. Some specialised services such as a book binders, confectioners, fancy goods dealer, furniture dealer, newsagent and fishmonger did develop, but the picture is not one of continued expansion and diversification of services in the town. The decline may have been linked to the growing prosperity and fortunes of Rushden. The town was clearly in a state of decline and yet this is not the impression given by 19<sup>th</sup> century writers. John Cole in his 'History and Antiquities of Higham Ferrers' claimed '*The town consists principally of one long spacious street, extending nearly a mile: its general appearance being that of a large village, excepting about the market place, which forms a sort of square, and is surrounded by shops and genteel well-built houses, affording an air of cheerfulness to the place, which is much enriched in effect by the handsome spire of the church, and by a market cross of considerable elevation, raised in its centre*'.<sup>4</sup> Similarly Whellan's Trade Directory of 1849 claims '*The town is plain, and consists of a market place and one line of spacious street, nearly a mile in length. Its general appearance is healthy, cheerful and respectable*'.<sup>5</sup> This contrasts sharply to contemporary impressions of Brackley, which had also declined from its former high status, but was in a far stronger position than the town of Higham Ferrers. The perceptions of contemporaries about the town in the 19<sup>th</sup> century appear to be based largely on the physical appearance of the settlement as opposed to any analysis of social or economic trends in the town. Indeed John Cole goes on to acknowledge '*But when we enter upon an examination of the different buildings in the town, we are irresistibly led to contemplate the grandeur of former days, and involuntarily induced to consider that we are viewing relics of by-gone years, which stand as memorials of the importance of this place in 'the olden tyme'*'. The town did manage to retain its essential character and appearance throughout the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with the majority of new elements to the town being located away from the central street. '*The town has succeeded remarkably well in separating its industrial and non-industrial aspects. The main street presents little sign of the workaday world, yet Midland Road is almost entirely industrial, its impressive row of factories and offices looking across to the old stone wall which is the boundary of the historical quarter*'.<sup>6</sup> This will be discussed in greater depth in the section on urban topography. The reason for this may lie in the fact that despite being an urban area the town was to a considerable extent a closed settlement. Whellan's Trade Directory indicates that 'Earl Fitzwilliam is lord of the manor and owner of

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<sup>3</sup> Piggot's Trade Directory of 1830; Whellan's Trade Directory of 1849.

<sup>4</sup> Cole J, The History and Antiquities of Higham Ferrers with historical notices of Rushden and Irthlingborough in the county of Northampton, 1838.

<sup>5</sup> Whellan's Trade Directory 1849.

<sup>6</sup> Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire. The Official Guide published with the Authority of the Borough Council. Ed J Burrow and Co Ltd Publishers.

the whole of the parish of Higham Ferrers' and it is clear that the Duchy of Lancaster had a large controlling interest in the town, by 1924 they were regarded as the chief landowners.<sup>7</sup> Therefore there must have been a greater element of control in the planning of the town than in other settlements in the county. The Militia list of 1777 does not provide any indication of industry in the town- three cordwainers are listed, but these would probably have been merely to service the population as opposed to manufacturing on a larger scale. Similarly the number of fell mongers, glaziers, carpenters, masons, smiths, mat makers and coopers listed would presumably have serviced the needs of the town. Trade directories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century indicate that 'the chief trade is in shoe and lace making'. Piggott's directory of 1830 records a single lace manufacturer (who was also an auctioneer and appraiser and agent to the Norwich Union fire office) and four boot and shoe makers. The boot and shoe industry clearly provided the main focus for employment in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A single boot and shoe manufacturer was noted in Whellan's Trade Directory of 1849; this had risen to five boot and shoe wholesalers and a boot and shoe agent by 1893. By 1920 there were nine boot and shoe wholesalers, four makers and/or warehouses, a boot and shoe factors, a heel manufacturer and a boot upper manufacturer. The boot and shoe trade in Higham Ferrers was closely linked to the industry in the neighbouring town of Rushden - John White, WW Chamberlain and Ashford and Campion all had factories in both Rushden and Higham Ferrers. There was also a substantial leather industry - 4 curriers, 2 grindery dealers, 2 leather cutters and sellers, 3 leather dressers and 3 leather merchants listed in 1893 and 7 curriers, 9 leather dressers, 2 leather factors, 4 leather merchants and 1 leather dressers and tanners machinery manufacturers in 1920. The boot and shoe and leather industries were clearly responsible for the regeneration of the town of Higham Ferrers in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As noted above the population graph for the town mirrored that of a number of villages that were industrialised as a result of the predominance of the boot and shoe industry in the area.

## **2.0 TOPOGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENT (FIGURES 10 & 11)**

The study of the development of the urban topography of Higham Ferrers is facilitated by the large numbers of early maps available for the settlement. Surviving maps of the town include John Norden's street map of 1591<sup>8</sup>, maps of the open fields for 1737<sup>9</sup> and 1789<sup>10</sup>, the enclosure map of 1839<sup>11</sup> and a map drawn by Henry Sanderson in 1842<sup>12</sup>. The town actually develops very little between 1591 and the first edition map which is produced in the 1880's.

The settlement is clearly focussed around one long main street - by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century this is divided into High Street, College Street and North End or Station Road. The market place is situated approximately in the centre of this street. The map of 1591 shows a number of houses in areas that do not later develop into streets (particularly between High Street and Back Lane), but by the 18<sup>th</sup> century the core area of settlement is largely defined. Wood Street to the east of the town and Back Lane to the west begin to become in filled with houses and outbuildings and a number of lanes leading off the High Street become fully utilised.

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<sup>7</sup> Kelly's Trade Directory 1924.

<sup>8</sup> NRO, MAP 4661

<sup>9</sup> NRO, Map 1004

<sup>10</sup> NRO, Map 1000

<sup>11</sup> NRO, Map 2850

<sup>12</sup> NRO, Map 1654

Other than the gradual shifting of houses and properties within this core area, the only developments to occur between 1737 and 1884 are the northward expansion of the town, which is shown on the enclosure map of 1839; the south western leg comprising Thrift Street, Commercial Street and Westfield Terrace, which developed between 1839 and 1884 and Corporation Terrace to the extreme west of the town.

The main expansion of the town occurred in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and was primarily based on the boot and shoe trade<sup>13</sup>. The main focus for industry was Midland Road, which lay to the east of the churchyard. By 1926 there was a large boot and shoe factory and two large leather works on this road and the area continued to develop after this period with a number of additional industrial structures being erected. Factories were also located throughout the town, but none were positioned on the frontages of either High Street or College Street. Typical 19<sup>th</sup> century mixed developments were located to the south west of the town around Westfields Terrace, Milton Street, Wharf Street, Commercial Street and Thrift Street and to the north east around Lancaster Street, Grove Street, Chichele Street and York Street.

The central area of Higham Ferrers has been remarkably well preserved, the majority of buildings in the area are of stone with many dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and a substantial number originating in 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. There are very few intrusions of brick buildings onto High Street and College Street and 19<sup>th</sup> century terraces erected at the southern end of High Street have been constructed of cream rather than red brick.

### **3.0 THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

#### **3.1 Industry**

There is little evidence for any early industry in the town other than references to lace making in 19<sup>th</sup> century trade directories. This would have been conducted largely on a domestic basis and no physical remains were discovered as part of the map analysis and field visit.

##### **3.1.1 BOOT AND SHOE**

There was a fairly substantial boot and shoe industry in the town of Higham Ferrers. Nine individual boot and shoe factories were identified as part of mapping and the field visit. Of these, three have been demolished (one of these had been burnt down by 1905, another has part of one wall surviving in The Swan car park to the south of the town.) and the remaining six are still in existence. Of the surviving buildings, Ashford and Champion's factory in Westfield Terrace has either been altered substantially on the frontage or a new building may have been erected on the same plot; Walker and Gunn's shoe factory in North End has been rendered over and may have been substantially altered. All but one of the remaining buildings are still in some form of industrial usage. There are a number of garden workshops located around the town - there are two main forms. Small detached shoemakers workshops at the end of plots of terraced houses are found to the rear of structures on Westfield Terrace these appear to be purpose-built at the time of construction of the houses. The main alternative, which appears to be a feature of Higham Ferrers, are single storey workshops attached to the rear of the terraced houses with a small chimney, more than one entrance and several windows; examples are found on Grove Street and to the south of High Street. In addition

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<sup>13</sup> The second edition Ordnance Survey map of 1900 was not available during the survey.

there are a number of workshops that have been erected at different times behind many of the older houses in the settlement - a two-storey example exists on Thrift Street.

### **3.1.2 LEATHER INDUSTRIES**

The town also had a large leather industry operating in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As part of the mapping and field visit three tanneries and five leather dressing works have been identified - and it is likely that many of the small industrial buildings and factories which have been located were also associated with the leather industry. Of the eight tanneries and leather works which have been identified four have been demolished, four are still in existence and it was not possible to positively ascertain whether two of the tanneries were still extant. All the remaining buildings have a very functional appearance with little attempt at architectural embellishment. There is still a substantial leather industry operating in Higham Ferrers.

### **3.2 Agriculture**

The town clearly did have an agricultural element in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but this was of a limited nature with only six farmers being recorded in 1777 and a total of 31% of the population employed in agriculture in 1831. The only farm to be identified within the core of the settlement is located in North End and is now called Walnut Tree Farm - part of the range of buildings have been demolished and some of the remaining structures have been converted for domestic use. Farms in the surrounding area have not been considered as part of the survey. The one mill that has been identified for the town was located to the north on the River Nene, but has now been demolished.

### **3.3 Housing**

There is a wide variety of housing in Higham Ferrers and differing house types appear to fit fairly neatly into zones within the town. The central area of the town around High Street, College Street, Market Square and Wood Street is comprised primarily of stone town houses and cottages of varying dates. The earliest is of 15<sup>th</sup> century date, but many originate in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a large number of these buildings are listed.<sup>14</sup> There are a very small number of brick built houses in this area; the most prominent examples are located to the south of High Street and are late 19<sup>th</sup> century terraces with attached rear workshops and are constructed of cream / white brick - this ensures that they blend into the street far better than if they were of red brick.

There are a number of very typical 19<sup>th</sup> century red brick terraces located outside the central area of the town - with Grove Street, York Street and Lancaster Street to the north east and Milton Street, Thrift Street, Commercial Street and Westfield Street to the south west being particular examples. A large number of these houses have garden workshops either attached to the back of the house or at the end of the garden or plot of land on which they stand. Larger terraces and 19<sup>th</sup> early 20<sup>th</sup> century houses are found on Lancaster Street, Kimbolton Road, Station Road and Wharf Road and much larger villa style houses of this date are found on the road between Higham Ferrers and Rushden.

There are very few 1920's - 1930's houses in the town - although there are a number of examples in North End and Chichele Street. There are however two later developments which are worthy of mentioning. The first is a complex of 9 bungalows in White Close off Midland

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<sup>14</sup> See Green back for individual list descriptions.

Road, which were designed by the architect Sir Albert Richardson and erected in 1951. The second is a number of houses on Upper George Street that won an award from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, although these were not seen as part of the field visit as they lie outside the 1926 boundary of the town.

A number of houses in the town have been demolished since the Ordnance Survey of the 1920's. Some of these structures appear to have been typical 19<sup>th</sup> century terraces (on Thrift Street, Rogue Terrace and Corporation Terrace), but many appear from mapped evidence to have been very small structures and were probably demolished as a result of slum clearances - particular examples are buildings in North End / Station Road, off Hind Style and Town Yard and on Spring Gardens.

### **3.4 Commerce**

The primary commercial centre of Higham Ferrers was the market place, although the markets in the town were falling out of use in the period following 1750 the area of the market itself has remained largely intact. The only change in the area between 1789 and today is that some of the encroachment that had occurred on the market square has been demolished, the present town hall was erected on the site of a previous structure. The market square area is now used as a car park for the town.

#### **3.4.1 SHOPS**

There were very few purpose built shops in Higham Ferrers identified during the field visit - the two main exceptions being two Co-operative Society stores - located on Lancaster Street and Westfields Road / Wharf Road. Both structures are still standing, but are no longer in use by the Co-operative Society and the former is now utilised as a printing works. Shops currently in the town centre are located in previous town houses and cottages. The town is very unusual in having no surviving corner shops in the 19<sup>th</sup> century areas of the settlement. A small, purpose built, single storey classical building on Wood Street has the appearance of a small, local bank and is now in use as veterinary clinic. The Post Office and Coffee Tavern, which operated in Wood Street, were closed during the 1930's was originally located on this plot of land.

#### **3.4.2 PUBLIC HOUSES / INNS**

Nine public houses and inns were identified in trade directories of 1830, 1849, 1894 and 1924. Four survive as public houses, four further examples survive as buildings, but have been converted to alternative uses and the Anchor Inn at Higham Wharf has been demolished. Three public houses are listed buildings including the Green Dragon Hotel (the main coaching inn for the town), the Griffin Public House and a building shown as a public house on the map of 1884, but later converted to use as a house / shop.

### **3.5 Transport and Communications (FIGURE 12)**

Higham Ferrers was centrally located on a number of communication routes during the period following 1750.

Higham Ferrers was well located to take advantage of the coaching era. John Cole claimed '*The roads in the vicinity are kept in excellent repair, this place being a great thoroughfare to the northern parts of the kingdom*'. Piggot's Directory of 1830 indicates that there were daily coaches to London, Leeds and Manchester (stopping off at a number of differing locations on the way). The Green Dragon was clearly the central point for coaching stops in

the town. A toll house was located to the south of the town in close proximity to Bedford Row.

Although Higham Ferrers was not on the canal network it benefited from the canal age after the River Nene was made navigable in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Higham Ferrers Wharf was in heavy usage from this period until the arrival of the railways in the 1840's. The Anchor Inn was located on the wharf and remained trading until the 1920's; the building has since been demolished.

Higham Ferrers was serviced by two railway branch lines in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries - the Northampton and Peterborough line of the London and North Western Railway opened in 1845 with a station 1 mile to the north of the town. The Wellingborough and Higham Ferrers branch line of the Midland Railway opened in 1893 and came virtually to the centre of the settlement. Both lines closed in the 1950's and 1960's; the alignment survives in both cases, but both the track and the associated buildings have been demolished.

Later developments on the road network included a road viaduct opened to the north of the town on 23rd October 1936, which is still in operation today. There are two remaining early garages in Higham Ferrers; one was established in 1845 by Frederick Parker and is still in operation and the other is a corrugated iron example on Kimbolton Road and is in use as a car repair shop, although it is in a very poor state of repair.

### **3.6 Utilities**

The major public utilities in the parish of Higham Ferrers are fairly limited as many appear to be shared with the neighbouring town of Rushden. The town had a gasworks from 1855 to 1892, in the North End of the town, after which a new and much larger site was established at the north end of Rushden. The Higham Ferrers and Rushden water board established by an Act of Parliament in 1902 based their primary works at Sywell. There is no indication of sewage works or electricity works on early Ordnance Survey maps and it is likely that these two were shared with the town of Rushden. There was a fire station in the town - located on Wood Street, but this has since been demolished and modern houses erected on the site.

### **3.7 Health and welfare**

There were a number of public buildings erected in the town. The town hall was erected on the market square in 1808 on the site of the previous town hall, it is a two storey structure based on a very simple classical design. St Mary's Parish Rooms were designed by architects Talbot, Brown and Fisher and erected in 1904, the building was utilised as a VAD hospital during the 1st world war and is now used as the public library. The corporation cemetery was formed in 1898 with a lodge house with elaborate use of decorative stone and mock timber framing.

### **3.8 Religion**

The parish Church of St Mary's has remained in continual usage throughout the period following 1750. The associated chapel has become part of the main building and the Bede House is used for functions. The other major religious establishment in the town - Chichele College - was disbanded at the dissolution. The buildings were utilised by a number of functions in this period including the 'Saracen's Head' Inn, a bakery and a farm, the remaining structures are now Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

The Baptist Church was reputed to have a chapel in the town. The original building was reported to have been later converted into a coal house, but it was not possible to identify either this or its later replacement during the survey. The Methodist Church was originally located to the rear of a plot leading from High Street - this was later used as a hall, but has since been demolished and modern flats stand on the site. The new Wesleyan Methodist Church was constructed between 1902-3 and was designed by the architect Mr Tom Dyer. The front section of the chapel is designed in a very elaborate Gothic style with a mixture of red brick and stone - behind this is the main body of the church which has been constructed in a completely different brick. It is possible that the church was constructed and that the frontage was added later to provide a more elaborate appearance. The frontage is in a similar design to many of the non-conformist chapels in Rushden.

### **3.9 Education**

The grammar school, which was established by Archbishop Chichele in the 15th century, continued in use until 1907. The building was a small perpendicular structure to the west end of the church and is still standing today (as a listed grade 1 structure) and is in use as a chantry chapel. A board school and infant school were erected on Wharf Road in 1873 and 1897 respectively, these buildings are still in use as schools today, and provided the only educational provision in the town in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

An institute to the rear of the Methodist Church on High Street (which has since been demolished) and the Adult School Hall on Westfield Terrace, which was constructed after 1926, presumably provided adult educational opportunities in the settlement.

### **3.10 Recreation**

Three clubs and two halls were identified for recreational purposes within Higham Ferrers. Both halls have been demolished and Westfields Terrace Working Mens Club and Institute has been replaced with a modern building. The Higham Ferrers Town Band Club, a very plain, functional building, is still standing and in use as a social club and the building shown as 'club' towards the north of the town has been converted into a domestic residence. The recreational facilities for the town appear to be very limited and it would seem likely that the residents may have used facilities at the neighbouring town of Rushden.

### **3.11 Uncertain**

There are a number of monuments within the town including two stone crosses (in the market and churchyard) both of which are listed buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments, a war memorial designed by Messrs Talbot Brown and Fisher is also located on the market square. The Bede House in the churchyard is a listed building, although it is no longer in use. The almshouses erected in 1866 by money left in the will of a local resident are still in use as domestic residences.

## **II Assessment**

### **A PRE MEDIEVAL**

#### **1.0 Assessment of importance and survival**

The two major monuments of Roman and Saxon date were largely deserted as the medieval town expanded southward and were also largely unaffected by development until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are or were therefore relatively well preserved and suitable for large scale investigation. The large nucleated Roman settlement is not apparently urban in character and on present evidence this is a relatively rare monument class. There is an extensive area that has not been developed and is subject to a recording action requirement, while some excavation was conducted on the previously developed area. The archaeology of this settlement is of national importance. Its significance is reinforced by the association with the adjacent early-middle Saxon site which is apparently high status, part of major middle Saxon royal multiple estate centre, which is itself a rare monument class and of national importance. Most the latter monument has been developed with substantial rescue excavation. The remaining areas require detailed investigation if threatened. The late Saxon estate centre and associated settlement provides a crucial link between the middle Saxon high status site and the important medieval small town. As such its remains are likely to be of at least county importance and worthy of detailed investigation.

#### **1.1 ROMAN**

The condition and survival of the Roman settlement, and the relatively low quality and spatial incompleteness of the excavated data from that part of the Roman settlement which has been built over, mean that this is not one of the ideal examples for detailed investigation. More comprehensive evidence is likely to come from sites like Stanwick and Ashton which are far more complete. The site is not therefore considered of national importance. However the rarity of such nucleated settlements in Northamptonshire means that extensive investigation is warranted on any example which comes under threat. It also has a high potential to contribute to the understanding of the Roman settlement pattern of that part of the Nene valley investigated by the Raunds Area Project.

Investigation of the settlement should attempt to determine the place of the settlement within the Roman settlement hierarchy. Work should focus on determination as to whether the activities being carried on in the settlement were primarily related to agriculture and the processing of agricultural products, as at Stanwick, or if the economy of the settlement had a major element of industrial or commercial activity, as seen in the unwallled small town at Ashton.

Moreover the site does have a high potential to contribute to the understanding of the origins of the nationally important Saxon and Medieval settlement of Higham Ferrers. The close proximity of the nucleated Roman settlement to a late Saxon hundredal manor and soke centre, with demonstrated settlement origins in the early/middle Saxon period, renders the Roman settlement of high importance for the light it may shed on the origins of that Saxon settlement. Questions of both settlement continuity and administrative continuity arise,



especially as small quantities of Saxon material have been found within the Roman settlement.

## **1.2 SAXON**

The possible association of the Saxon settlement at the north end of the town with a green combined with the apparent agricultural function of the Bond End in the medieval period, has previously been taken to suggest that this may have been a primary element of the settlement. This would make the area of particular importance in the investigation of the origins of Higham Ferrers. This importance has been confirmed by the discoveries of evidence of intensive early-middle Saxon occupation immediately north of the Bond End.

Previous work on rural settlement in Northamptonshire has concentrated upon settlements or areas of settlements which had a very regular, rectilinear plan form. Even the settlement at West Cotton, originally considered to have an irregular form proved to have a regular origin. Only at Warmington has work begun on the investigation of a Northamptonshire settlement with a green component to the plan form. The function of the greens and their typically irregular plan form in Northamptonshire raises important questions with regard to settlement evolution and planning. They may represent earlier plan form elements which pre-date the phase of replanning and tenement creation, now well documented for the late Saxon period in eastern Northamptonshire. Alternatively they may not represent original settlement foci but instead, as has been suggested in Norfolk by Wade-Martins, they may represent the expansion of settlement around areas of common pasture during the medieval period. The information from Northamptonshire would suggest that some at least of these green based settlement elements have early or middle Saxon origins.

If many of these green based settlement elements do have early origins then they are likely to yield significant evidence as to the nature of the settlements which pre-date the 10th century replanning. The presence of areas of pasture as the focus of these early settlements may enable hypotheses to be built up as to the economic components of the settlement in relationship to the wider landscape and to contrast this with the succeeding phase of landscape development involving regular tenements held severally with all the rest of the land being held in common.

Where such irregular forms exist with a good archaeological potential it is essential that there is a detailed examination of the tenement layout and a determination of the date of laying out of the tenements and the spatial relationship to any earlier layout. This may enable us to determine whether the irregular forms were determined by earlier plan forms or were in some way a result of the replanning process. Comparison of the evolution of these irregular plan forms to regular plan forms already studied at Raunds and elsewhere, in terms of their origins, could prove of great significance in understanding the nature of the process of replanning and village development.

At Higham the presence of a relatively high density of early/middle Saxon occupation with relatively large quantities of early/middle Saxon pottery, partially underlying late Saxon or medieval tenements, provides a site of high potential for the investigation of these issues of replanning. Such sites with a long life, extending from the early/middle Saxon through into the medieval are probably not unusual. They differ markedly from the smaller, more dispersed and short lived sites scattered across the permeable geologies of Northamptonshire.

These dispersed sites were almost all deserted during the early or middle Saxon period. However, the Higham site would appear to fall into a very different category. This is one that is typically found in direct association with medieval settlement, either immediately beneath or extending slightly beyond the medieval area. These sites, as seen at Raunds and suspected on the basis of poor quality evidence at Irthlingborough and a number of other villages in Northamptonshire, may represent the typical foci of villages in the period during and immediately following nucleation. It is on and around these sites that village planning then took place in the late Saxon period. The Higham site can therefore be seen to fall into a particular grouping of settlements of the early/middle Saxon period.

The Higham site however exceptional because it has an early/middle Saxon oval enclosure attached to the settlement which is apparently respected by the contemporary occupation. The presence of undated oval enclosures at the core of some villages has been noted in a number of cases in Northamptonshire. It is particularly noticeable in Northamptonshire due to the relatively high level of regular planning seen in its villages. These oval forms have been recognised for example in Brackley and Daventry. There is no evidence on date or function from the latter to be able to determine whether they were a typical plan component associated with early settlement or with estate and ecclesiastical central places. At Higham the unique situation is that the enclosure lies wholly outside the medieval and later settlement and was wholly available for investigation, not having been disturbed by later activity. The proximity of this enclosure to the green at Higham may be coincidental. Alternatively there may be a functional relationship, for in the medieval period stock were typically brought back to the village overnight and held on pasture land within the village.

For these reasons the Saxon remains at Higham Ferrers are considered to be of national importance, because of the rarity of certain elements and their relative completeness, and because of their potential to address key issues related to village origins which can be explored within a coherent research framework.

## **B      MEDIEVAL & POST MEDIEVAL (FIGURE 13)**

### **1.0      Town**

#### **1.1      Assessment of Importance & Survival**

**The decline of Higham in the post medieval period resulted in the diversion of later industrialisation into Wellingborough and Rushden. As a result the archaeology of the medieval settlement is likely to be far better preserved than in some other towns. Similarly there is a good survival of historic buildings, though in the absence of systematic survey it is unclear how many have early fabric. Higham also has an exceptionally extensive survival of documentary material from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Although its archaeological, historic building and documentary resource requires more detailed assessment and investigation if the potential is to be confirmed, Higham would appear to represent a good example of a substantial small town which gained the status of a self governing borough. Evidence from Higham should be able to cast important light on the study of the origins, development and demise of small town urbanism from the late Saxon through to the post medieval period. The historical topography of the town is also relatively well preserved from the post medieval and**

**medieval period, with a number of well preserved standing medieval monuments that have a high amenity value.**

## **1.2 DOCUMENTARY**

### **1.2.1 SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS INVESTIGATION**

Extensive research on the wide range of detailed documentary sources for medieval and post medieval Higham were examined Kerr but unfortunately only part of his study, concentrating largely on the castle and park and on the hospital, was ever published and the rest of his work has been lost. Serjeantson published extensive information from the long run of court rolls for Higham. A VCH chapter is available for Higham and extensive notes from this research are also available on the 'slips' in the NRO. Study by Groome of the Borough records resulted in the preparation of a few minor publications. Other specific research on documentary sources related to the topography of the castle and rabbit warren has been published by Brown and on the open fields by Hall. A more general and fairly cursory review of the history of the medieval settlement has been published by Beresford. Despite this work there is a vast potential still to be realised through detailed documentary study.

### **1.2.2 RESEARCH FOR THIS REPORT**

The indexes and catalogues to the major relevant collections in the Public Record Office, Northamptonshire Record Office and British Library have been searched as have those in the National Register of Archives. Work has been concentrated on reconstruction of historical topography from documentary sources of the post medieval period. This provides a firm basis for the carrying of the reconstruction back to the medieval period. However the sheer volume of sources precluded such detailed study in connection with this report. Historic map transcription has been conducted to re-scale data from the 1737 and 1789 maps to an Ordnance Survey 1:2500 2<sup>nd</sup> edition base. The inaccuracies of the original mapping together with the limitations of working with xerox copies of the 1<sup>st</sup> edition mapping has led to an error of some 3-4 m in the positioning of some features, as identified by reference to surviving buildings on the modern digital mapping, though in exceptional cases a higher error may be found. A limited amount of work has been conducted on the primary sources for the medieval history of the town, but they are so extensive that very little was achieved in the available time.

### **1.2.3 SURVIVAL**

Higham Ferrers is exceptionally well documented from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, mainly through the Duchy of Lancaster and the Borough records, comprising the most extensive runs of detailed account rolls and court rolls for any of the small towns in the county. The mapped evidence for both the settlement and its open and enclosed fields is also more comprehensive and continuous than for any other town, especially as it also has associated written surveys and terriers. The open fields of Higham are well documented with field books of 1567, 1707 and 1737, and a field map of 1737. The 1591 map of Higham is supported by a complete terrier of the same date. The origins and value of the latter map is assessed by Beresford.<sup>1</sup> There are a range of maps from the 1730s onwards.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Beresford, 1971, 154-158.

<sup>2</sup> Map of 1591 is Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, Mss 706 Anglais, Acq. Nouv. No.58. A photographic copy is in the British Library. The survey of 1591 is PRO DL42/117. The town and field maps are: 1737: NRO Map 1004 with associated survey NRO Fitzwilliam Misc. Vol.48. Map of 1789, NRO Map 1000. Inclosure map of 1839, NRO Map 2850. Map of Buscott in 1793, NRO Map 1662.

#### **1.2.4 POTENTIAL**

A detailed documentary study of Higham is urgently required which draws fully upon the vast range of medieval and post medieval sources. It has one of the highest potentials for detailed study of the history of any small town in the county from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has a high potential for the reconstruction of historical topography from documentary sources and may be able to match and even surpass much of what has been achieved in Daventry, Oundle and Brackley. The sheer scale of the documentary record is however such that it requires detailed long term research in its own right and is ideally suited for a major study. The presence of a sound 18<sup>th</sup> century topographical framework closely integrated with contemporary written surveys provides the essential base for such analysis, allowing detailed earlier sources to be accurately placed. However it is not clear whether sufficient comprehensive surveys and rentals exist which will enable the tenurial pattern of burgages and other tenements to be carried back into the medieval period. Such reconstruction should be a high priority of future work.

It is likely that some indication of the impact of the famines of the early 14<sup>th</sup> century and certainly that of the Black Death and subsequent plagues could be established through further detailed documentary research. The fortunes of the market are also likely to be far more clearly revealed from systematic study of the account rolls which reveal detail of changing numbers, functions and even some locational information for shops and stalls. At present the two most important records of the range of trades in Higham are from the 1251 burgage charter and the 1777 Militia Lists, but detailed documentary study may also enable a wide range of evidence of occupations to be recovered for the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, as for example the reference to tallow chandlers in the town in 1440.<sup>3</sup>

### **1.3 HISTORIC BUILDINGS**

#### **1.3.1 SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS INVESTIGATION**

A brief note on the main surviving stone houses is given in the VCH chapter for the town, with more detailed description of the Bede House, Vicarage, School House, College and church. The church is dealt with in the unpublished RCHME survey of the churches of the county. Several other vernacular buildings within the town have been examined but there has been no systematic detailed survey of the lesser historic buildings of the town or detailed modern recording of any individual buildings.

#### **1.3.2 RESEARCH FOR THIS REPORT**

A rapid survey was conducted in 1979 to establish what stone buildings then surviving also existed on the 18<sup>th</sup> century mapping.

#### **1.3.3 SURVIVAL**

The rapid survey of 1979 indicates the maximum resource which is likely to include survival of historic fabric from the post medieval and medieval period. Of these about 70% are now listed. These buildings are concentrated around the market place and adjacent areas of Newlands and College Street. The northern half of the settlement is very poorly represented, having only 2 buildings surviving. One building on the Wood Street frontage, distinctive for

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<sup>3</sup> Serjeantson, 1916.

its decorated plaster work, was claimed in 1951, when converted to Council offices, to be of 14<sup>th</sup> century date with various later alterations and additions.<sup>4</sup>

Of the 44 listed buildings in the town, in addition to the medieval church, 5 are of 15<sup>th</sup> century date (including the College, Bede House and Grammar School), while two are said to be 16<sup>th</sup> century, 9 are 17<sup>th</sup> century, 23 of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and 4 of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **1.3.4 POTENTIAL**

There is unusual potential for the survival of evidence of shops in a shop row - the *Behind Stye* row - though no such evidence has yet been forthcoming.<sup>5</sup> Particular attention should be paid to even the most limited of alteration to these buildings to enable the presence of shop structures to be identified. Other shops may be revealed in tenements fronting onto the market place. Recognition of what may be very limited evidence for shops may need specialist expertise.

All buildings which come under threat of alteration or demolition which are within the group identified here as potentially of value should be subject to field assessment. Detailed study of these historic buildings is particularly important given the high potential for detailed medieval and post medieval evidence from documentary sources to be tied directly to specific tenements. Any such investigations should also consider the potential for below ground archaeological investigation, even on a fairly small scale.

### **1.4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

#### **1.4.1 SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS INVESTIGATION (FIGURE 14)**

The open fields of Higham have been surveyed by Hall but not published. The earthworks of the warren have been surveyed by RCHME and by Brown. Excavations were conducted on the College in 1966 which have resulted in the exposure of the plan of the college, but no detailed excavation report was published from this investigation. Rescue excavation was conducted in the early 1970s by Hall on a late medieval pottery kiln in North End but this has not been published in full.<sup>6</sup> Evaluation trenching has taken place in the 1990s on the castle site, confirming the scale and state of preservation of the remains of what is probably the inner bailey. Small scale evaluation has taken place in four other locations within the town. One within tenements in the Newlands at the south end of the town has shown extensive destruction by 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century development. The second, conducted within former closes on the north eastern edge of the town demonstrated that the area had not been occupied in the Saxon or medieval period. Thirdly there has been observation of trial pitting adjacent to Walnut Tree Green in the north of the town showing limited survival. Nearby on the northern periphery of the town extensive evaluation took place between 1989 and 1998 on the northern edge of the medieval and late Saxon occupation and adjacent and underlying early –middle Saxon activity and then to the west and north Roman and Iron Age occupation. The greater part of the early-middle Saxon and the periphery of the late Saxon together with all the Iron Age occupation has been subject to significant but insufficiently extensive recording action later during the 1990s, prior to development, as a result of inadequate funding due to a pre

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<sup>4</sup> Anon, undated, *Ancient Tenement, Wood Street, Higham Ferrers*, 36-9, publication in NRL.

<sup>5</sup> There is a small carving of a figure on the rear elevation of no 5 Behind the Stye. - noted in 1979.

<sup>6</sup> Hall, 1974, 38-57.

PPG16 planning permission. Further evaluation and recording action is now underway on adjacent areas and further work is intended for the Roman settlement.

#### **1.4.2 RESEARCH FOR THIS REPORT**

No specific archaeological survey work was conducted for this report, apart from the sketch plan of slight earthwork remains on the castle site compiled in circa 1980 by G Foard.

#### **1.4.3 SURVIVAL**

There were substantial areas of the town which were not built up in the post medieval period especially in the northern half of the town. However, as a result of industrialisation in the later 19<sup>th</sup> and earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century there was extensive infilling with factories and housing, followed by further redevelopment and further infilling in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result some 25% of the probable area of medieval tenements, castle etc which cover some 237000 m<sup>2</sup>, 58500 m<sup>2</sup> have been built up in the 1890s or at present. If the extensive open areas of the castle and warren are excluded, giving a settlement area of 192000 m<sup>2</sup> the built up area then is 30%. But of the built up area 10000 m<sup>2</sup> represents historic buildings most of which are probably of pre 18<sup>th</sup> century date. Hence only 48000 m<sup>2</sup> are modern built up area, giving 25%. However, almost the whole of the medieval frontage areas are built up or have been encompassed within the highway boundary by road widening with the likely associated destruction from services etc. However the number of factories within the medieval area over the last 120 years has been far less than in some other towns, notably Wellingborough, Kettering and Rothwell.

The survival of medieval, late Saxon and early-middle Saxon stratigraphy in areas where there was not later occupation, even though ploughed, has been shown to be very good at the northern periphery of the town. Within the core of the town there is still high potential between areas of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century structures but particularly where there has been industrial or commercial development then the survival is poor though fragmentary remains can survive, as by Walnut Tree Green.

#### **1.4.4 POTENTIAL**

Given the relatively high density, especially of the frontages, which have been built up in the last 120 years there is probably a more limited potential for archaeological survival than is seen in several other towns, such as Oundle, but still considerably higher than that in Kettering and Wellingborough, which both saw far more intensive infilling with factories and terraced housing. It is therefore possible that survival of deposits does occur beneath some late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century developments. Although the one area fronting to a major road that has been subject to evaluation in the 1990s showed extensive destruction of archaeological deposits, this was on one of the relatively few sites where there had been extensive 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century redevelopment for construction of a factory. Far better preservation may occur elsewhere. A cellars survey conducted in 1979 produced very limited data but did demonstrate that a number of the buildings on the market place frontage in particular are cellared. It does not however suggest an extensive cellaring problem.

A high priority should be given to testing a wide range of sites within the medieval area of the town, even where there has been 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century redevelopment. Given the relatively small areas of frontage, particularly in the central and southern part of the historic core, which has not been built up there is a high priority for detailed evaluation of any of

those area which come under threat as they may yield the best evidence for sequences of occupation.

Because some 70% of the surface area of the historic core has not been built up there is the potential for good survival of pit groups and other stratified deposits even if good sequences of buildings on the frontages prove to be rarely recoverable. This may enable issues such as chronology of occupation, tenement laying out and possibly occupation to be addressed.

## **1.5 HISTORICAL TOPOGRAPHY**

### **1.5.1 SURVIVAL**

With the exception of the minor lanes shown in 1591 to the west of the market place there road pattern of the medieval town has survived largely intact. Within the general areas of the tenement rows there has however been substantial loss of tenement layout with the insertion of a number of factories and the insertion of terraced rows and especially later 20<sup>th</sup> century irregular estate infill. Significant areas of medieval tenement layout do survive along Newlands and adjacent to the west of the church and castle sites, although a substantial proportion of these show infill down the tenements and others have infilling on the back crofts fronting towards the back lane. Such infilling of tenements is typical of the early modern development of the small towns in the county and thus rarely will examples without such change be found.

Within the market place the appearance is largely maintained of the medieval tenement frontage but not on the west side of *Behind the Styie*. The tenement row of *Behind the Styie* is however relatively rare survival of a probable shop/stall row conversion but all the other market place shop rows, moot hall and other medieval and post medieval developments on the market place have been cleared.

## **2.0 Specific Monuments**

Little information is available as to the detailed survival of archaeological deposits on the major monuments within the town. Only in the case of the inner bailey or motte of the castle have reasonably well preserved, though truncated, deposits been demonstrated by evaluation trenching. The remained of the castle may have an equal state of preservation as it is affected by a very low density of development. Records have not been located from the College excavation which would enable the quality of survival of archaeological deposits to be determined. Only two well preserved earthworks remain within the town. The moated pond in the former College park called Saffron Close is of minor significance. The medieval rabbit warren, containing a large warren mound and several fishponds, immediately north of the castle site, has well preserved earthwork remains. Indeed this would appear to be one of the best preserved as well as most substantial of all medieval rabbit warrens in the county. The archaeological deposits of the early to late Saxon occupation at the north end of the town, where not yet built over or excavated also survives in a good state of preservation. No archaeological work has been undertaken in the church or within the market place or its associated frontages and so no information is available as to the state of preservation of buried deposits, while even the exact location of the leper hospital has not been established.

## **2.1 CASTLE**

The Inner Bailey appears to lie partly within the car park to the north of the churchyard and partly within the churchyard. The area immediately to the west of the car park has been deeply terraced in for the construction of post medieval buildings now demolished. The churchyard extension stands well over a metre higher than this and also stands higher than the car park. It may well survive near to the height of survival as it was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but this area has been subject to disturbance by an uncertain degree of burial. The car park area thus appears to have been levelled, although a very limited rise is visible. Evaluation trenching has shown good survival across the area including late Saxon and early medieval pre castle deposits as well as medieval castle related activity.

## **2.2 FISHPOND AND VINEYARD**

The fishpond at the north end of The Vines, in the valley of Kings Meadow Lane, though now levelled may contain environmental deposits relating to the existence of the vineyard, while the close itself may contain archaeological evidence of the vineyard.

## **2.3 MARKET PLACE**

The site of some of the shops in the market place lies beneath the centre of the main road. Others lay in the area of Behind the Sty and yet others in the area of the car park. The quality of survival of any archaeology related to these shops is not known. Some may have had cellars in the medieval period, as some properties did in Brackley and Northampton, and so there is the potential for significant deep archaeological deposits within the market place. These may in some cases be filled with 19<sup>th</sup> century deposits as most of the properties were not demolished until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus care needs to be taken in assessing the significance of late deposits as they may prove to be filling medieval or post medieval cellars which remained in use.

## **3.0 Urban Hinterland (FIGURE 15)**

For the purposes of assessment of the hinterlands of the medieval and post medieval towns in the county a rapid grading of the archaeological potential of the medieval settlements of the county has been conducted on the basis of professional judgement.

The consideration of the hinterland of Higham is far more complex than some other urban settlements because of its potential role in the major middle Saxon royal estate. The Irthlingborough meadows may offer high palaeo-environmental potentials for the study of the landscape context of the early and middle Saxon settlement excavated at Higham and that expected in Irthlingborough and on the adjacent hillfort, which may represent the original early Saxon focus of the estate.

Whereas the general historic landscape survival is poor in the hinterland, as a result of extensive urban development and mineral extraction, the individual medieval settlements show an above average survival. There are a number medieval settlements with significant archaeological potential, such as Newton Bromswold and Chester in Irchester, in the immediate hinterland of the town. By far the greatest potential is however concentrated in the Raunds Area where, in addition to several well preserved medieval settlements earthworks such as Mallows Cotton, there is a large body of excavated evidence from a number of Saxon and medieval settlements. As a result there is an unusually high potential to study the relationship between town and countryside.



## C      INDUSTRIAL

### **Assessment of Importance and Survival**

**The town of Higham Ferrers was one of the few small market towns in the county to be substantially revived as a result of the boot and shoe industry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The town was, however, substantially overshadowed by the neighbouring settlement of Rushden in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The physical development of Higham Ferrers was unremarkable in a county context.**

**The urban topography of the core area of the settlement, as it existed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, has one of the best survival rates of the towns in the survey. However, the majority of buildings in the town originate from an early period and there are few purpose-built structures from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as earlier buildings were being re-utilised. The buildings that were erected during this time were factories, terraced houses, a school and the Methodist Church; these tended to be erected to the extremities of the town and had little impact on the central plan of the town. The town is almost divided into two with the historic central core and the remains of industrialisation around the extremities. There are a very good range of documents for Higham Ferrers including a large number of early maps, official borough records and documents relating to parliamentary affairs, public utilities such as sewage and water board documents, the renewal of the corporation and various valuations / surveys.**

### 1.0      DOCUMENTARY

#### 1.1      MAPS

There are a large number of maps available for the town and immediately surrounding area of Higham Ferrers - John Norden's street map of 1591<sup>7</sup>, maps of the open fields for 1737<sup>8</sup> and 1789<sup>9</sup>, the enclosure map of 1839<sup>10</sup> and a map drawn by Henry Sanderson in 1842<sup>11</sup>. All of which show the town in a considerable amount of detail and would allow for a detailed reconstruction of the development of the settlement. Unfortunately at the time of the survey the Ordnance Survey map sheet for the main area of the town was not available for the period 1900 and therefore developments within the forty year period 1884-1924 could not be more closely determined.

#### 1.2      PHOTOGRAPHS

There are a large number of photographs for the settlement of Higham Ferrers at Northamptonshire Heritage, Northamptonshire Local Studies Library and Northamptonshire Record Office. These tend to focus on the older buildings in the town including the houses, church, college, Bede House etc, but there are also depictions of factories, shops, streets and events from later periods in the development of the town. In addition there are a number of architectural plans and drawings for specific buildings in the town including the manor house, free school, council school and factories / warehouses.

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<sup>7</sup> NRO, MAP 4661

<sup>8</sup> NRO, Map 1004

<sup>9</sup> NRO, Map 1000

<sup>10</sup> NRO, Map 2850

<sup>11</sup> NRO, Map 1654

### **1.3 DOCUMENTS**

There are a large number of documents relating to Higham Ferrers in the period 1750-1939, as well as in the preceding period. Many of these documents are official borough sources including accounts, miscellaneous papers, correspondence etc and relate to the development of the town as a whole. Documents relate to the borough, parliamentary affairs, public utilities such as sewage and water board documents, the renewal of the corporation and various valuations / surveys. The detailed study of the documentary evidence is likely to provide a much fuller picture of the social and economic status (including stagnation and development) of Higham Ferrers in the period following 1750. It is also likely that these sources would provide information relating to the physical development of the town.

### **2.0 STANDING BUILDINGS**

There are 51 listed buildings for the town of Higham Ferrers with the vast majority of these buildings being constructed of stone. A total of 28 of the listed structures are houses – 24 of these originate in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The only other buildings for the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are three 18<sup>th</sup> century public houses or inns, an 18<sup>th</sup> century outbuilding, the early 19<sup>th</sup> century town hall, the war memorial and a telephone box.

There was a very limited number and range of buildings constructed during the classic period of industrialisation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> / early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The substantially built structures of earlier periods were still being utilised. A board school and infant school were erected in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the large Methodist Church and Parish Rooms were built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a number of social clubs were erected throughout this period and the Queen's Head Public House was re-built in 1905. However the main building types for the period were the workers terraced houses, many of which have good surviving workshops, and the boot and shoe and leather works factories. The Charles Parker Boot and Shoe Factory on Midland Road is a very elaborate example of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial building with a half rotunda supported by columns projecting from the front of the building and landscaping to the frontage of the structure. The Methodist Church would be worthy of further research / survey in order to determine whether the main building was erected and the elaborate frontage added at a later date or whether the building was designed in this way. The other 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings are of little interest as individual structures, but all contribute to an understanding of the development of the town as a whole.

### **3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

There is a limited potential for below ground investigation of archaeological sites specifically for the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Higham Ferrers, although there are one or two sites to the extremities of the town. These include the two brickworks and tannery sites, which may be worthy of further investigation in connection with specific research agendas for these industries.

There may be the potential for archaeological investigations in the historic core of the town in line with work carried out for earlier periods.

### **4.0 TOPOGRAPHY**

The urban topography of Higham Ferrers survives remarkably well intact. There are areas in the town which have been subject to demolition in the period following 1926, but these are fewer than in other settlements and are concentrated to the northern and southern extremities

of the town. There have also been very limited modern intrusions into the core area of the town - a number of modern buildings including the architect designed bungalows on White Close and some houses/ flats to the rear of High Street have been very sensitively designed to fit in with the scale and appearance of the town as a whole.

The central area of the town particularly around High Street, College Street and Market Square comprises primarily of stone built town houses and cottages. The historic core of this area has been remarkably well preserved; the majority of buildings pre-date the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. A large number of the buildings are listed and the area was designated as a conservation area in 1970.

19<sup>th</sup> century urban developments have survived well to the north east of the town with the retention of both industrial buildings and housing developments. The area to the south west of the town has suffered demolitions of both houses and factories, but to a large extent retains its industrialised late 19<sup>th</sup> century character - particularly around Commercial Street and Thrift Street.

### **III Research Agenda**

#### **1.0 ROMAN**

Given the remarkable character of the early-middle Saxon settlement north of Bond End, it is essential to determine the character and latest chronology of the adjacent nucleated Roman settlement. Understanding of both the wider function of the lower status activity and the character of the suspected higher status activity are essential. They must however also be seen in the context of the wider Saxon royal estate of Irthlingborough, which is suspected as encompassing the Higham Area, hence the relationship with the major Roman sites of Stanwick and the Irthlingborough Hill Fort.

In order to determine whether there is any link between high status activity on the Higham nucleated Roman settlement and the early-middle Saxon status settlement it will be necessary to conduct detailed investigation of the Roman settlement to identify any focus of late Roman and/or early Saxon activity within that settlement. It will also be important, if the villa, temple or other substantial building within the settlement can be identified, to determine when that element of the settlement was deserted.

#### **2.0 SAXON**

Major research issues surround the Saxon royal estate of Irthlingborough and its origins. The early-middle Saxon activity at Higham, apparently of high status, must be interpreted in the context of the Irthlingborough estate of which it is likely to be a part. Surviving parts of the Saxon settlement should be fully excavated to recover as complete a plan form, function and chronology as possible. The presence of early, middle and late Saxon activity superimposed is as yet a relatively rare occurrence and offer the potential to explore in detail the chronology of the 'great re-planning'. Comparison of the chronology with the evidence from the nearby Raunds settlements will be important. In this context the interrelationship of the Saxon plan forms with that of the north end of the medieval settlement at Higham should be a high priority, with detailed examination of any area in the Bond End where survival of medieval or earlier deposits are demonstrated.

Examination of the character, layout and chronology of occupation on and around the suspected green will be an important research objective. This area has a high potential both because of the good survival of stratigraphy to the north of the lane and the presence of a relatively rare example of continuous occupation showing development of early through to late Saxon occupation including the phase of re-planning. It will also be important to establish the maximum extent of early-middle Saxon occupation and how its plan form relates to the green, tenements and road pattern of Bond End.

The investigation of the development of late Saxon settlement, with presumably at its core the castle, church, market place should be given a high priority. The relationship of this to the chronology of the demise of high status or specialist function in the early-middle Saxon focus at the north end of the town is a major research issue.

The origins of the castle and the expected manorial precursor, of the church and the market place will be central to the understanding of the origins of urbanism in Northamptonshire. This is because Higham is one of only three small towns confirmed as having markets in

1086. Given this early date for the market it will be important to see whether the market place was laid out prior to 1086 and how its early form and chronology compares to that of settlements whose markets are first documented in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Any artefactual, environmental or structural evidence which can cast light on the functions of tenements in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and before will be particularly important.

In order to characterise the settlement which replaced the Saxon settlement at the north end of the town it will be essential that all areas within and immediately adjacent to the medieval settled area are evaluated to identify any other foci of early-middle Saxon activity as well as the extent of such activity in the Bond End. Similarly the extent of late Saxon planning and whether it was on a wholly new location may cast light on the process of urbanisation although it could prove to be largely a matter of re-planning of a rural settlement similar to that seen in the Raunds settlements.

Specific investigation is required in the Bury Closes to test the improbable hypothesis of a late Saxon burh. In particular the outer boundary of the group of closes be tested for any defensive feature to demonstrate that the concept of a burh is wrong.

### **3.0 MEDIEVAL & POST MEDIEVAL**

The later expansion of the town has been conjectured from both plan form and street names, but this needs testing archaeologically to determine the true chronology of urban expansion. There are some areas of potential frontage that need testing to determine if these areas were actually occupied in the medieval period.

Any evidence as to the varying wealth and nature of activities taking place in individual tenements will be important. This may cast light on the dichotomy between agricultural and commercial / craft tenements and highlight the variability between burgages. This is especially important as it is likely to prove possible at Higham to establish the character of the tenure of individual medieval tenements from documentary sources.

The exceptional quality of documentation also means that the scale and chronology of subdivision of tenements is likely to be a significant research theme, if sufficient archaeological evidence survives, contributing to the understand of the relative importance of infilling versus expansion in the urban development in the medieval period. Similarly the chronology of the decay of urbanism should be explored through the chronology of abandonment and engrossing of tenements and its spatial patterning through the town.

The origins and development of the market will be a high priority as Higham is one of only four documented markets in the county by 1086. This may be best explored through the chronology of the laying out of the tenements around the market place, but the methodology for such investigation should be developed with reference to other market settlements as well.

It will be important to recover evidence of the exact location and state of preservation of the shops and other features, including bakehouse and town hall, lying within the market place. This is especially important as there appears to be such a good sequence of documentary evidence for these structures from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Their original laying-out may

not contribute to the understanding of the origins of the market as they are likely to be a later replacement for original stalls.

The origins and chronology of expansion of the church in relationship to the expansion of the size and wealth of the settlement and in relation to the origins and development of the manor / castle will also contribute to the understanding of the process of urbanisation. The related process of establishment of the rectory and vicarage may assist.

The exact form of and the chronology of the development of the castle will be a major research theme.

Study of the evolution of the road pattern both within and outside the settlement in the medieval period may assist in the understanding of the process of urbanisation. It can probably be best achieved through documentary research on the field system and examination of the fords and bridging points of the major roads, particularly Ditchford, Irthlingborough bridge and the medieval ford adjacent to Irthlingborough.

Individual issues exist concerning the identification or accurate location of significant monuments including the vineyard and the unlocated chapel of St Botolph. Other investigations should address the chronology of the establishment of other located monuments such as the Hospital and also the warren associated with the rectory, although in some cases such as the latter this may be resolved from purely documentary sources.

The castle ditches and the fishponds, may yield valuable waterlogged deposits, which are unlikely to exist elsewhere in Higham given its topographical location. The castle ditch in particular, because it abuts the town on the west side, is likely to have urban related deposits, although no waterlogging has yet been demonstrated in the ditch.

#### **4.0 INDUSTRIAL**

##### **What is the significance of the division between the historic core of the town and industrial zones surrounding this?**

Archaeological investigations in the core area of the town need to record land use in the post-medieval and industrial periods in order to determine whether the perceived division between the historic core of the town and the industrialised extremities was real or whether this reflects 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century ‘improvements’ to the town centre. If the division is real a combination of documentary and topographical research is required to determine the level of planning required to achieve this division.

##### **To what extent were the fortunes of Higham Ferrers and Rushden inter-linked in the period following 1750?**

Further detailed research is required on the relationship between Higham Ferrers and Rushden. To what extent did Rushden take over from Higham Ferrers as the regional centre for the area? Was the decline in the commercial significance of Higham Ferrers linked to the development of Rushden as a centre for services? How were the economic, social and physical development of the two settlements interlinked? To what extent was the re-development of Higham Ferrers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century based on the large-scale expansion of

Rushden? To what extent was the boot and shoe industry in Higham Ferrers dominated by Rushden?

A methodology needs to be established for assessing the precise relationship between the two towns in archaeological terms. One approach would be to use a combination of documentary research and standing building analysis to determine whether periods of development and stagnation in Rushden and Higham Ferrers coincided.

**To what extent did Higham Ferrers develop from a small market town into an industrialised village?**

In the period immediately following 1750 Higham Ferrers was clearly operating as a small market town, however by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century both the population growth and the topographical development of the settlement was more closely aligned to that of the industrialised villages in the county. Detailed analysis of individual buildings and areas is required in order to determine whether development in this period reflected the growth of the settlement as a village or a town.

## **IV Strategy**

The assessment of the management and conservation priorities within the Extensive Urban Survey have been based around an assessment of levels of importance previously applied elsewhere in the county for management purposes. The grading falls into six categories:

**Scheduled:** nationally important remains that have statutory protection.

**Unscheduled national importance:** in some cases statutory protection is suggested while in others recording action may prove to be the appropriate response to threats.

**County importance:** Where significant archaeology is known or where it is likely but confirmation is required. Normally recording rather than preservation would be the appropriate mitigation strategy.

**Historic buildings:** Buildings known or which have the potential to contain significant pre 19<sup>th</sup> century structural remains.

**Local importance:** where archaeology may survive but where, on present evidence investigation does not appear appropriate.

**Destroyed:** where the archaeology has been wholly destroyed.

**White Land:** Archaeology not assessed for this report.

In addition in some cases recommendations have been made for the designation of new or the extension of existing Conservation Areas and for the listing of specific buildings.

**This approach has not been possible for the industrial period, as further work on the period is needed at a county, regional and national level before a definitive assessment can be made. The town has been divided up into zones and priorities for additional research, recording and conservation measures have been assigned to each individual area.**

### **1.0 EXISTING DESIGNATIONS (FIGURE 16)**

#### **1.1 SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENTS**

There are three scheduled monuments in Higham: the castle, rabbit warren and associated fishponds; the College; and the Saffron Moat, which lay in the park of the College.

#### **1.2 LISTED BUILDINGS**

There are 51 listed buildings for Higham Ferrers.

#### **1.3 CONSERVATION AREA**

The Conservation Area encompasses most of the central and southern part of the historic core of the town. It covers most of the well preserved areas of the early plan form.





## **2.0 MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES**

### **2.1 PRE MEDIEVAL**

#### **2.1.1 Roman**

A significant part of the archaeological remains of the nucleated Roman settlement at the north of the town have been severely damaged by previous development with only limited excavation. The remaining undeveloped area already has an outstanding planning permission with large scale archaeological recording requirements. Threats in that part developed in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century may also require evaluation outside the excavation areas in order to establish if any significant evidence is still recoverable on the areas between the excavations. There is no potential for long term conservation of any part of the settlement.

#### **2.1.2 Saxon**

Except where already subject to substantial excavation and recently developed, the major Saxon settlement should be evaluated where threats exist. Large-scale recording is likely to be appropriate where survival is demonstrated.

The environs of the settlement should also be subject to evaluation where significant development proposals arise, as the full extent of occupation and associated activity is not known to the south and south east. The evaluation and recording action specified below for the medieval historic settlement core will allow the extent of the Saxon settlement to be defined and only a small additional area immediately east of the settlement requires evaluation purely for the Saxon settlement. The remaining undeveloped area of this settlement is likely to be subject to development proposals and although preservation is desirable, given the extent of the area already lost, a recording strategy is the most appropriate.

The evaluation and recording action specified below for the medieval historic settlement core should also allow the identification of the location and extent of the suspected Saxon settlement in the area of the church and castle.

## **2.2 Late Saxon, Medieval & Post Medieval (FIGURE 17)**

### **2.2.1 EVALUATION & RECORDING**

Throughout the whole area of the historic settlement core there should be evaluation of development threats of the scale of a single house or more. Recording action involving at least funded watching briefs will normally be appropriate on lesser developments. However where the latter affect frontages where good survival may be expected or other major monuments then evaluation may be considered appropriate. Within the market place small scale disturbance, such as deep resurfacing, pipe trenching (including in very sensitive areas the re-opening of existing trenches), may also need to be examined. This should enable determination of the state of preservation and exact location of structures including shops and stalls and any associated artefactual and environmental deposits.

There are a number of areas immediately adjacent to the historic core where medieval occupation may have existed and these should be evaluated according to the same criteria as the known settlement core. Particular attention needs to be given to the boundary of the Bury Closes, although here only large-scale redevelopment would normally warrant an

investigation, to confirm that no defensive circuit exists. Attention also needs to be given to the area to the west of the back lane between Vine Hill Drive and Wharf Road to identify if any medieval tenements lay to the west of the Back Lane.

Outside the historic settlement core in areas already developed archaeological investigation should normally only be required where potentially significant monuments are known or suspected.

All standing buildings, whether listed or not, identified in the report as potentially containing pre 19<sup>th</sup> century evidence should be assessed when affected by proposals for alteration or demolition. Where medieval or post medieval structural remains are demonstrated or suspected then detailed recording would normally be appropriate.

### **2.2.2 CONSERVATION**

All significant earthwork remains are already scheduled. There is no case at present for further scheduling, although the failure of the scheduled area to encompass the whole of the castle site, both in the gardens on its west side and of the churchyard on the south side is regrettable.

Given the rarity and well preserved state of the medieval warren it is desirable that the local authority should define management proposals for the site that will ensure that the earthworks are effectively conserved.

It is possible that evaluation of some of the unlisted buildings that may contain early fabric will indicate further requirements for listing but at present no such recommendations can be made.

No grounds have been identified to propose any significant extension of the Conservation Area. It is however suggested that particular attention is given to the design of development proposals within the historic core of the town to maintain the medieval and post medieval plan form where it is still well preserved. Both the long, narrow tenement layout and the areas of good survival of the historic street frontages, even if containing 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings, should be conserved and, where appropriate, enhanced by sympathetic design of new development. The area of the castle, both the scheduled and the unscheduled parts, should ideally be retained without further development to facilitate future archaeological investigation and interpretation of one of the most important archaeological monuments in the town.

## **2.3 Industrial (FIGURE 18)**

The major conservation aspects of Higham Ferrers have been dealt with by existing designations for listed buildings and conservation areas.

The recording criteria for the town are based around developing an understanding of the nature and development of the town in the period following 1750.

### **2.3.1 ZONE 1 - HISTORIC SETTLEMENT CORE**

The core area of the town mainly comprises stone buildings of 15<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century date. There are a large number of listed buildings in the core of the town and a large section of this

area is a Conservation Area. The topography and the standing buildings in the area is adequately protected by these designations.

Investigations for the pre-Industrial periods should also take account of the Industrial period research criteria outlined above.

### **2.3.2 ZONE 2 AND 3 - 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY MIXED DEVELOPMENTS**

The Charles Parker Boot and Shoe Factory on Midland Road should be recommended for listing as one of the few 20<sup>th</sup> century showpiece factories remaining in the county. There are a number of other specific buildings in the town that would be worthy of detailed recording; these have been identified in the assessment section.

Other recording should aim to expand our understanding of the nature of the development of the town and the links between the two settlements of Higham Ferrers and Rushden.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AASR	Association of Architectural Society Reports
BL	British Library
BNFAS	Bulletin of the Northamptonshire Federation of Archaeological Societies
Bridges Notes	John Bridges original notes for his History, from circa 1720, in Bodleian Library.
NN&Q	Northamptonshire Notes & Queries
NP&P	Northamptonshire Past & Present
NRL	Northampton Reference Library, Local Studies Collection.
NRO	Northamptonshire Record Office
NRS	Northamptonshire Record Society
PRO	Public Record Office
RCHME	Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England
SMR	Sites & Monuments Record
VCH	Victoria County History, Page, W., 1970.
VCH Notes	Notes compiled by the VCH in the early 20 <sup>th</sup> century, now in NRO.

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