

The Archaeology of Wiltshire's Towns
An Extensive Urban Survey

GREAT BEDWYN

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The Archaeology and History of Great Bedwyn

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Towns are an important component of the historic environment which have developed over many hundreds of years and are under constant development pressures. The archaeological resource within our historic towns is an invaluable and irreplaceable source of data about past societies and the evolution of our culture. Despite these factors the archaeology of many towns, especially the smaller market towns, is poorly understood.
- 1.2. In 1976 the D.O.E. sponsored a study of the archaeology of Wiltshire's historic towns, aiming to assess the relative importance of the towns at different points in time as a basis for future archaeological research. This resulted in the publication of "*Wiltshire Towns: the archaeological potential*" (Haslam 1976). Since then, the book has been one of the key references for archaeologists monitoring urban development and its impact in the county.
- 1.3. An increase in the amount of archaeological and historical data available and changes in legislation such as the introduction of Planning Policy Guidance note No.16, have meant that a reappraisal of the situation is now due. The Extensive Urban Survey of Wiltshire has been commissioned by English Heritage, as part of a National programme, to address the need for a new assessment of urban archaeology in the county. The current structure of the historic county of Wiltshire is two-tier, with the County Council working in conjunction with the four District Councils (Kennet, North Wiltshire, Salisbury and West Wiltshire) and the new unitary authority of Swindon – historically part of the county. The survey aims to map the development of all of Wiltshire's and Swindon's historic towns (Fig. 1) and to assess the extent of the surviving archaeology and built heritage. It is also proposed that the threat of development on the historic environment within the county's towns will be examined.
- 1.4. As far as is known the first towns in Wiltshire appeared during the Romano-British period but all the known examples are now greenfield sites, although some may have given rise to nearby settlements. Most modern towns in the county have their roots as Saxon villages or defended settlements such as Cricklade and Wilton. Many of the villages grew into small towns after the Norman invasion, often focussed around a castle or market and in the early thirteenth century 'planted boroughs', in which individual plots of land were sold by the major landowner.
- 1.5. The definition of a town for inclusion in the survey follows the criteria laid out in Heighway (1972), by which the settlement must possess certain characteristics such as defences, a mint, a market, a street plan, or a judicial centre, and demonstrate such urban attributes as high population, a diversified economic base or a central or key location. For the purposes of the survey, however, the towns should meet these criteria historically, even if they no longer do so. This allows, for example, the inclusion of the five Roman towns in the county, and settlements such as the village of Heytesbury, which was developed as a planned town in the 13th century, but which did not succeed as an urban centre.

The full list of 34 towns included in the survey and the criteria for inclusion are included as Appendix 1. Great Bedwyn satisfies four criteria: it has a documented Medieval market (*criteria iii*); it was the site of a Saxon mint (*criteria iv*); it has very early guild statutes (*criteria v*); there is some evidence for the presence of burgage plots (*criteria ix*).

- 1.6. The area of study in each town is defined by the size of the town as it stood in 1945, encompassing both the historic core of the town and the older industrial and suburban development. There is an emphasis on the earlier material, and the later Victorian and 20th century development are covered here only very briefly. Although more detailed than Haslam's report, in most cases each study remains no more than a brief summary of the data, and a guide to the location of more detail for other researchers. The extent of the study area for Great Bedwyn is depicted in Fig. 2.
- 1.7. The research into each town will be encapsulated into two reports: a summary and assessment of the data gathered and an outline strategy for future management of specified sections of the urban area. This first report is intended to provide a clear and up-to-date synthesis of the available archaeological and historical data for Great Bedwyn, with an assessment of the main areas of historic settlement in the town and of the potential and sensitivity of the archaeologically important areas. The assessment reports are compiled from four main data streams: geographical and geological sources for the location and topographical summary; secondary historical sources for the historical outline; recorded archaeological data for the sites and finds information; the archive of the Wiltshire Buildings Record (WBR) for architectural data. The architectural summary is not subject to the same level of research as the other three data streams, and the information presented in the reports is based upon evidence compiled from the existing WBR archive, updated in places by field visits to note non-listed buildings of historic interest, combined with the Department Of The Environment schedule of listed buildings.
- 1.8. This Assessment was prepared originally in 2001, with amendments from consultations added in 2003.

2. LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 2.1. Modern Great Bedwyn is a village situated near the eastern border of the county, within the District of Kennet, standing some 10km from Marlborough to the north-west and 7km south-west of Hungerford (Berkshire).
- 2.2. The village lies on the west side of a minor river valley cutting through Upper Chalk, and is built on a slight spur which dips sharply towards the valley bottom near the stream (Haslam 1976). High ground lies to the north-west and south-east, where the chalk is overlain by Eocene deposits – chiefly Reading Beds and London Clay (Ordnance Survey 1971). Great Bedwyn lies at a mean elevation of c.120m AOD (Ordnance Survey 1984).

3. PAST WORK AND THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

3.1. Historic Sources

3.1.1. This is a desk-based study, using material available within the County Council Heritage Services facilities in Trowbridge: the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR); The Wiltshire Reference Library; the Wiltshire & Swindon Record Office; and the Wiltshire Buildings Record. Historical data are generally drawn from secondary sources, normally the Victoria County History and histories of the individual towns, based on recommendations or specific requirements. Data on archaeological investigations and their results are drawn directly from the original reports or publications wherever these are available, but for some poorly recorded finds we have had to rely on passing references or the existing entries in the county SMR.

3.1.2. The use of primary sources in the Record Office is restricted to maps and sometimes other pictorial material, which are consulted to accurately locate individual sites or buildings and to trace the growth of the settlement.

3.2. Archaeological Work In The Town (Fig.3)

3.2.1. A search through the Heritage Services archives has determined that only two archaeological investigations have occurred within the Study Area. These are detailed below:

Event	Year	Site Name/Location	Event Type	Excavator	Reference
001	1948-1952	Tor Mead	Excavation	O. Meyrick	Marlborough College Natural History Society 1956
002	1974	Farm Lane	Excavation	J. Haslam	Department of the Environment 1974

Table 1: Archaeological Investigations in Great Bedwyn.

4. HISTORICAL OUTLINE

4.1. This report is not intended to provide a major historical review of the history of Great Bedwyn and the material included here relates mainly to events which might have had some impact on the archaeology of the town, or its survival. The chief source of historical information for the town is Volume 16 of the Victoria County History (Currie (ed) 1999), upon which, unless otherwise stated, the majority of the Historical Outline is based.

4.2. The earliest reference to a settlement at Great Bedwyn is from 778, in a land grant from King Cynewulf of Wessex. At this time the place-name was 'Bedewinde' which Gover (1939) thought to be derived from the Old English

word for bindweed or wild clematis, indicating this to be a place where the plant flourished, although Haslam (1976) has pointed out that Bedwyn is found as a stream name in Old English times, and may therefore be an earlier, British name.

- 4.3. Bedwyn is thereafter referred to in Saxon grants of 801, 873 and 899. The most significant reference, though, is that in a 10th century manuscript which records the earliest surviving mention of tithes and of guild statutes, and includes two manumissions of female slaves. The manuscript details the collection of tithes for 'God's servants at Bedwyn', indicating a probable minster church, and the guild statutes indicate a sizeable settlement, probably of town status (Eagles 1997), an indication strengthened by the presence of an official mint in the settlement from the reign of King Athelstan (924-39), who decreed that coins should only be struck in a 'port' (town) (Pugh 1955).
- 4.4. The Domesday listing for Great Bedwyn includes twenty-fives burgesses, a church and 8 mills, although these latter buildings may have been spread throughout the estate rather than in the core settlement itself (Currie 1999). The town at this time was subject to the 'farm of one night', whereby an obligation existed to accommodate and entertain the king and his retinue for one night a year – an obligation which could only be sustained by a sizeable settlement.
- 4.5. A market is first known in the town in the later 13th century, and market grants survive from 1468 and 1641 (*ibid.*). However, Great Bedwyn evidently failed to grow in the period between 1086 and the Poll Tax of 1377, when it was recorded as the smallest urban fiscal unit in the county (Haslam 1976).
- 4.6. The town continued to decline in importance through the later Medieval and Post-medieval periods, probably stunted by its proximity to the much larger market centres at Marlborough and Hungerford. In 1545 Leland described Bedwyn as 'a poor thing to sight' and in 1754 a traveller described it as a 'poor town of farmers, maltsters and publicans'.
- 4.7. Although Great Bedwyn was a centre for cloth production in the Middle Ages, there is no later evidence for anything but the usual rural trades to be in existence. A small-scale malting industry serviced the many inns of the 17th and 18th centuries, and an industrial-scale maltings was built in 1868. Neither the arrival of the Kennet & Avon Canal in 1801, nor the railway in 1862, stimulated expansion. Modern Great Bedwyn is accurately described as a village rather than a town, which with the exception of a handful of 20th century developments has escaped the suburban sprawl associated with many other historic Wiltshire towns.

5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SUMMARY

5.1. Introduction

5.1.1. The following is a resume of the archaeological record of the town, drawn from the county SMR and the various excavation reports. Data on surviving buildings come from the Wiltshire Buildings Record unless otherwise stated. The bold print numbers in this section refer to entries in the Urban Survey database, and appear on the sites and findspots location maps in Figs. 4 - 6, which were created from the database and the SMR.

5.2. Prehistory (Fig. 4)

5.2.1. A ring ditch (**GB011**, Meyrick 1957) was excavated in Tor Mead, and found to be of probable Bronze Age date, based upon the earliest finds from the ditch, which comprised pottery of that period and beads (**GB001**). Iron Age finds were also recovered (**GB002**), including bone tools and a perforated chalk plaque.

5.2.2. Excavations off Farm Lane (**GB003**, Department of the Environment 1975) may have encountered Iron Age deposits, but these were only reported in local newspaper articles, and are not mentioned in the published note for the site.

5.3. Roman (Fig. 4)

5.3.1. The only Romano-British find from within the Study Area is a 1st or 2nd century dragonesque brooch (**GB003**) from the vicinity of the ring ditch at Tor Mead (see **GB011**). However, a substantial villa site has been identified and excavated c.1km to the south of the Study Area (SMR Ref. SU26SE304), although beyond the scope of this report.

5.4. Medieval (Fig. 5)

5.4.1. The only archaeological excavation to take place within the village – off Farm Lane – recorded a single small pit yielding 13th century pottery (**GB006**, Department of the Environment 1975), although this was located away from the nucleus of historic settlement. It is however the location of one of the mills, known as Cop Mill in 1590 (Bedwyn History Society 2003).

5.4.2. Six sites of archaeological interest have been identified through historical and documentary sources. St. Mary's Church (**GB005**, Pevsner 1975) contains architectural details dating from the 12th century, although most of the structure is of later Medieval origin. A church is known in Great Bedwyn in 1066, although its site is uncertain. It is likely, however, that the 12th century church was constructed upon the same site as its predecessor, which was acquired by Salisbury Cathedral in 1091 and probably rebuilt soon after. Within the churchyard stands the steps, base and shaft of a Medieval cross (**GB007**).

- 5.4.3. Possession of the Medieval borough was divided into two manors. The Prebendal estate, established following the acquisition of the church by Salisbury in 1091, was based at a manor house immediately to the north-east of the church (**GB012**). Although the date of the first building is unknown, a manor house certainly stood in 1502-3 when there is a reference to repairs to its roof. The Prebendal manor was dissolved in 1547 and passed into secular hands, and the manor house is thought to have burned down in the 17th century. Its replacement was demolished in the 19th century when the present Manor Farm was built. The manor of West Bedwyn was granted away from the crown in 1130, and is thought to have been centred on a manor house in Farm Lane (**GB014**), where No. 12 incorporates early architectural features including an elaborate chimney which would have been part of a high status residence. Records survive of the manor's holders from c.1408, when the oratory within the manor house was licensed as a chapel.
- 5.4.4. Great Bedwyn's traditional market place (**GB013**) is the widened part of the High Street, originally known as Chipping or Cheap Street. The earliest market reference is from the late 13th century when the town was known as Chipping Bedwyn, although as an established township it is likely that Great Bedwyn had market functions from a much earlier date. Butcher's shambles are mentioned in the market in the mid 15th century, and a market house existed from at least the early 17th century (see **GB015**).
- 5.4.5. Frogmore Farm in Frog Lane (**GB008**) is of Medieval origin, first associated with William Frogmore in 1249.

5.5. Post Medieval (Fig. 6)

- 5.5.1. A market house existed in the High Street from at least the early 17th century (**GB015**). It is described as a two-storey building open on the ground floor with a timber-framed first floor room supported on turned columns. The building was demolished in 1870.

5.6. Industrial/Recent (Fig. 6)

- 5.6.1. The Kennet & Avon Canal (**GB016**) was opened from Hungerford to Great Bedwyn in 1799, from Great Bedwyn to Devizes in 1809, and completely in 1810. A wharf was built in the town, and four locks to the south-west of it. The railway (**GB017**) came to Great Bedwyn in 1862, as the Berks & Hants Extension of the GWR. Both these features survive today – the canal restored for pleasure use and the railway as part of the London to Exeter main line.
- 5.6.2. The only industrial site of note is the former maltings built in Farm Lane in 1868 (**GB018**). This was disused by 1945, but has recently been converted into flats.

5.7. Undated (Fig. 6)

5.7.1. Two undated sites have been identified, the most significant of which is the Bedwyn Dyke (**GB010**), a linear earthwork running to the north of the borough, which is thought variously to be an Iron Age monument or a sub-Roman or early Saxon work and which is a suitable candidate for a research project. South of Church Lock (**GB009**) are a group of undated lynchets.

5.8. Built Heritage

5.8.1. This section of the report is intended to provide an introduction to the surviving built heritage of Great Bedwyn, and is not designed to be a comprehensive account of the town's notable structures, but is a selection of the salient architectural features and buildings within the Study Area, including, if present, significant unlisted structures. This data has been compiled by Wiltshire Buildings Record.

5.8.2. Detailed lists of historic buildings and architectural detail are included as Appendices 3, 4 & 5. Although individual Grade II listed buildings may be (where relevant) discussed in this section, they are not included as a comprehensive list in the Appendices, due to the very large quantities of additional data this would involve. Researchers seeking information on Grade II structures are directed to the lists produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. It is possible that several buildings have been omitted from the official list in error (*pers comm*, Conservation Officer, Kennet District Council).

5.8.3. Great Bedwyn is now no more than a large village on the southern edge of Savernake Forest. It was a Saxon 'town' with its economy based on agriculture and later cloth making; prosperity allowing for extensive enrichment in the 13th century to the parish church, although the town itself was in decline. Early building survival from the 12th to 15th centuries is typically in stone for non-domestic structures. Early timber and brickwork is found appearing concurrently from the 16th century, with brick being the favoured material for prestigious and domestic building thereafter.

5.8.2. Twelfth Century

5.8.2.1. The church of St Mary the Virgin, Church Street (grade I) is a flint and limestone building with origins in the late 12th century seen in the Transitional four-bay nave. Further work dates from the 13th and 14th centuries. The church was heavily restored in 1853-5

5.8.3. Fourteenth Century

5.8.3.1. The churchyard Cross, Church Street (grade II*) is a complete limestone structure minus the head, with an 18th century sundial added.

5.8.4. Fifteenth Century

5.8.4.1. All that remains of an earlier build at Castle Cottage, 12 Farm Lane is a stone stack with a circular flue, which has a creasing for an earlier roof. The site may be that of the manor of West Bedwyn (Par. 5.4.3).

5.8.5. Sixteenth Century

5.8.5.1. Harding Farmhouse (grade II) dates from the late 16th/early 17th centuries and is an early vernacular example of English bond brickwork. The other two buildings dating from this century are both timber-framed.

5.8.6. Seventeenth Century

5.8.6.1. No. 6 Brook Street is a 17th or early 18th century brick building with decorative diaper work, which became more popular in the 18th century. The roof is a queen-strut type with clasped purlins also seen in the five other buildings of this century.

5.8.6.2. WBR fieldwork has noted that the unlisted Cobblers Cottage, Farm Lane is a 17th century timber framed building altered in the 18th and 19th centuries.

5.8.7. Eighteenth Century

5.8.7.1. Only nine buildings are listed from the 18th century. The barn at Hardings farm (grade II) is timber-framed with a queen-post roof and clasped purlins typically seen in the east of the county. Many more buildings are in plain brick, such as 3 Back Lane (grade II), though some have a diaper pattern (4 Back Lane - grade II). No. 15 High Street (grade II) is in a blue header bond with red brick details including a dentilled eaves perhaps looking forward to the elaborate brickwork of the 19th century.

5.8.7.2. Fieldwork in Great Bedwyn by WBR has found reused crucks and a pre-existing cellar in 15 High Street, a grade II building dating from the 18th century.

5.8.8. Nineteenth Century

5.8.8.1. Standing out from the almost universal brick building in the town from this century is the School (grade II), Church Street, which is in limestone ashlar.

5.8.8.2. Cob buildings are unusual in north-east Wiltshire. The Stable and Cart House to 6 Brook Street is a rare example of 35cm thick cob on brick and flint sills of probably mid 19th century date.

6. PLAN FORM ANALYSIS

6.1. *Introduction*

6.1.1. The town has been divided into components, each representing blocks of activity, and sub-divided by period. Great Bedwyn in common with all existing Wiltshire towns, has no foundation in the prehistoric or Romano-British periods,

although archaeological remains belonging to both periods are present within and nearby to the study area. Historical and documentary archives have clearly identified the presence of a settlement from at least the 8th century, although the sparse archaeological evidence and lack of detailed historical records for the Saxon period has meant that a conjectural reconstruction has been necessary. Otherwise, the town has been divided into different plan components (settlement areas, church, market place, etc.) for each relevant period, and these are illustrated in the stated figures.

Table 2: Plan form components

COMPONENT	PERIOD OF ORIGIN	COMPONENT TYPE	FIGURE No.
COM1	Saxon	Possible Minster Church	7
COM2	Saxon	Possible Manor	7
COM3	Saxon	Settlement Area	7
COM4	Saxon	Roads	7
COM5	Medieval	Parish Church	8
COM6	Medieval	Prebendal Manor	8
COM7	Medieval	West Bedwyn Manor	8
COM8	Medieval	Market Place	8
COM9	Medieval	Settlement Area	8
COM10	Medieval	Frogmore Farm	8
COM11	Medieval	Roads	8

6.2. Saxon (Fig. 7)

6.2.1. **COM1 – Possible Minster Church.** There is evidence to suggest that a minster church was established at Great Bedwyn. It is known that in the 10th century Great Bedwyn belonged to the abbey at Abingdon, and there is a reference in a contemporary manuscript to tithes for ‘god’s servants at Bedwyn’, indicating the presence of a religious community of some form (Currie 1999). The Prebendal estate created in the 12th century following the acquisition of the church by Salisbury Cathedral collected tithes from virtually the entire parish, and included a manor assessed at 1.5 Hides (ibid.). It is possible that this estate was created from the holdings of a pre-existing minster.

6.2.2. Although the exact location of the church standing in 1066 is not known, it is considered likely that the present parish church stands on its site. Minster churches were often sited on prominent places or in proximity to watercourses (Blair 1988, Hase 1994) – as is the present St. Mary’s – and the Norman practice of building larger, more impressive churches directly upon the sites of their Saxon predecessors is well known (Rodwell 1989). It is noteworthy that the 12th century church was of large-scale construction – this may reflect the substantial nature of the structure it replaced.

6.2.3. **COM2 – Possible Pre-Conquest Manor.** It is probable that a manor stood within Great Bedwyn in the Saxon period, indeed Haslam (1984) postulates that the town was the site of a ‘villa regia’ or official residence – home of the king’s agent for the area and which would have served as accommodation for the

royal retinue for the 'farm of one night' (Par. 4.4). Successive researchers (Haslam 1984, Hinton 1990, Reynolds 1999) have pointed out the close physical relationship between church and manor within Saxon Wessex settlements. The Predendal manor house – of at least 12th century date - is known to have stood just to the north-east of the parish church in the Medieval period, and it is possible that this site was the long-established location of an important residence by the time the Prebendal estate was formed.

6.2.4. **COM3 – Settlement Area.** Although the extent of the Saxon settlement is unknown, and there is as yet no archaeological evidence for Saxon occupation, a conjectural area of possible settlement can be defined. This possible area is centred upon the ancient NE-SW aligned road through the town (now Farm Lane and Church Street, and no longer a through route (Par. 6.2.5)), and is imagined as extending from the vicinity of the minster church (**COM1**) and possible manor (**COM2**) to the north of the junction with High Street. Within this area, and especially to the south of High Street, appear evenly-spaced plots reminiscent of burgages. Running to the west of Church Street, and parallel with it, is a road called Back Lane which delimits a discreet group of such plots. Given that Great Bedwyn was in apparent decline during the Medieval period (Par.s 4.5, 4.6), and that there is no record for the type of 12th/13th century speculative planned expansion seen in many Wiltshire towns (Wiltshire County Archaeology Service 1999), this raises the intriguing possibility that elements of Saxon planning survive within the modern village. The settlement area to the east of Church Street has been depicted as extending across to the Bedwyn Stream, it being thought reasonable that settlement in this vicinity would have access to fresh water.

6.2.5. **COM4 – Roads.** Two roads are depicted in Fig. 7, of which possibly the more significant is the historic NE-SW aligned route along Church Street and Farm Lane, postulated above to be the focus of early settlement. Farm Lane is now a cul-de-sac, but in past centuries extended north-east beyond its current terminus to the Bedwyn Dyke, where it met the road approaching Chisbury Camp hillfort and the road to Hungerford. This may have once been the main road into the settlement, and is shown on the first edition O.S. map as a farm track, although today it is downgraded to a public footpath. The second road runs at right-angles to the NE-SW route, and is the Marlborough road. This road became the main route through the town in the Middle Ages and is the modern High Street.

6.3. Medieval (Fig. 8)

6.3.1. **COM5 – Parish Church.** The architectural development and phasing of St. Mary's Church is well recorded (Par.s 5.4.2 & 5.8.2.1, above; Pevsner 1975). It is likely that the churchyard attained its present form towards the end of the Medieval period.

6.3.2. **COM6 – Prebendal Manor.** This component can be demonstrated to exist from at least the 12th century (Par. 5.4.3). It's development can be traced

through the period and beyond from documentary and historical records, although the extent of the area shown in Fig. 8 is conjectural. The site today is occupied by a variety of 19th century and modern farm buildings.

6.3.3. **COM7 – West Bedwyn Manor.** This manor, granted away from the crown in 1130, is thought to have occupied a site in Farm Lane (Par. 5.4.3), although the exact nature of the proposed site has yet to be determined. This manor included fields to the north of Farm Lane called ‘Spains’. It is possible that creation of this manor and its farm marked the disuse of Farm Lane as a major route into the settlement and the development of a new northern approach road along Brown’s lane. The manor site today is marked by the enigmatic and massive decorative chimney incorporated within a later cottage at No. 12 Farm Lane.

6.3.4. **COM8 – Market Place.** It is proposed by this survey that Great Bedwyn’s market place in the High Street is a 12th or 13th century development following the shift of the northern approach road from Farm Lane to Brown’s Lane during or shortly after the creation of West Bedwyn manor (**COM7**). The first known market grant dates from the 13th century, shambles are mentioned in the 15th century, and a market house from the early 17th century (par. 5.4.4), although all probably pre-date these surviving references. The present topography of the market place masks its former function, with only a widened pavement/verge and a war memorial in a small ‘island’ hinting at the former open space. Architecturally, this area is dominated by 18th century brick-built houses, many of which were formerly inns and shops, but which are now nearly all private dwellings.

6.3.5. **COM9 – Settlement Area.** The area depicted on Fig. 8 includes the area of postulated Saxon settlement plus a new area developed along High Street around the Medieval market place. This appears to be supported by the 1773 Andrews & Dury map. Given the likely slow growth of the town in the Post-medieval period and its poor status by the end of the Medieval era, this map may well represent to a large degree the extent of late Medieval settlement. The 1st Edition O.S. map also reflects this situation, and mirrors the 1773 map. The built environment of the settlement area is today overwhelmingly of 18th and 19th century date. Here, as in the market place, one can see evidence of former shops and inns, although almost all are now private residences.

6.3.6. **COM10 – Frogmore Farm.** This farmstead can be traced to 1249, when it is associated in documentary records with one William Frogmore, although nothing is known in detail of the site and the area depicted is conjectural.

6.3.7. **COM11 – Roads.** Those shown in Fig. 8 include the two main routes through the town to Marlborough and Hungerford, and minor roads serving the Medieval town, such as (the possibly Saxon) Back Lane, Farm Lane and Frogmore Lane.

7. ASSESSMENT

7.1. Summary of Research

7.1.1. There are frequent references to the town in Saxon documents, including the unique manuscript recording some aspects of life in 10th century Great Bedwyn (Par. 4.3). These are, however, the only records we have of everyday life in the Saxon town, and as with so many Wiltshire towns, the first reliable account of the settlement is from Domesday. Although certain elements of Norman rule are recorded, such as the establishment of manors, little is known of the late Saxon institutions these replaced, or of the nature of the town itself at this time. The recent Victoria County History survey of the town and parish has been of great use in tracing the development of the settlement through the late Medieval and Post-Medieval periods.

7.1.2. There has been negligible archaeological work in Great Bedwyn, with only one summarily-reported excavation known from the fringe of the historic core of the town, although a Bronze Age site has been investigated to the west of the settlement. With so much to learn of the Saxon & Medieval town there is a clear need for archaeological research to begin an exploration of the issues raised in this report.

7.2. The Growth of the Town (Fig. 9)

7.2.1. Saxon

7.2.1.1. Great Bedwyn emerged as the centre of a large Anglo-Saxon estate in the 8th century, although its genesis may lie in the landscape around and beyond the Study Area. Circa 1km to the south of the modern village, beyond the scope of detailed examination in this survey, lies the large villa complex of Castle Copse, where extensive excavations (Hostetter & Howe 1997) have demonstrated continuous occupation from the 1st to 5th centuries AD. It is believed that the villa acted as the focal point of a large agricultural estate, and it is in this role, although probably not in direct succession, that the settlement is thought to have begun (Eagles 1997) – possibly by the later 6th century. Haslam (1976) advances the theory that following the decline of centralised Roman authority, the old Iron Age hillfort of Chisbury (c.2.2km to the north of Great Bedwyn) was reoccupied and effectively became the centre of a new estate based largely upon the bounds of the former Romano-British one. Chisbury is thought to be the stronghold of ‘Cissanbyrig’, listed in the 10th century *Burghal Hideage*, and Haslam suggests that if this were so it would only have been a temporary refuge in times of strife, with ordinary ‘civilian’ life based within the fertile river valley below the fort.

7.2.1.2. It is Haslam’s belief that the settlement at Great Bedwyn grew up into a local market centre in the period after the late 9th century following the ‘official’ fortification of Chisbury by King Alfred, the adjacent stronghold providing the security necessary for successful urban or proto-urban living. By the mid 10th century Great Bedwyn displayed some of the urban attributes of the period: it

had a mint, guild statutes, a religious community or (more likely) a minster church, and may have been the site of a 'villa regia'. The Domesday listing shows the town to have had twenty-five burgesses in 1086, and it is likely that the mid to later 11th century was the period of greatest vitality and importance for the town.

7.2.2. Late Medieval

7.2.2.1. The 12th century saw the construction of a bold new church in the town and the creation of two new manors. However, it is apparent that the town failed to grow significantly in this period, and there is evidence for decline by the later 14th century, when it gave the lowest Poll Tax return of any urban fiscal unit in the county (*ibid.*). The root of this stasis and decline may be found in the rising fortunes of the two larger, nearby market centres at Marlborough and Hungerford – both sited on major communication routes and both with evidence of planned expansion from this time. Great Bedwyn, relatively isolated, fell into increasing obscurity. Fig. 9 shows that some minor growth occurred during this time along High Street and in the area of the new West Bedwyn manor, but this is insignificant in comparison to the great expansion many Wiltshire towns experienced through the later Medieval era (Wiltshire County Archaeology Service 1999).

7.2.3. Post Medieval & Recent

7.2.3.1. The town saw little growth in the Post-medieval period, and only started to creep beyond the area of Saxon and Medieval settlement in the mid to late 19th century, possibly stimulated by the canal and later the railway, but even these developments failed to boost the town's fortunes. A number of small housing developments on the periphery of the core settlement can be traced to the 19th and early 20th centuries, but the historic town is now more accurately described as a village in a quiet backwater location.

7.3. The Archaeological Potential

7.3.1. One of the principal aims of this phase of the Extensive Urban Survey is to examine the archaeological potential of the town to assist with the development of a management strategy in the later phase of the project. Whilst all of the core town may be considered important archaeologically, it is necessary to try to highlight those areas of greater interest, either because of the importance of the remains or because better than average preservation is expected there.

7.3.2. Very little is known of the development of the Saxon and Medieval town, and therefore any opportunity should be taken to investigate the likely area of occupation during these periods. Of particular interest are the group of possible early burgages surviving between Church Street and Back Lane. Archaeological investigation here, even to the rear of properties, may help to determine a chronology for the urban development of the settlement. Archaeological evaluation of sites on the edge of the postulated Saxon and Medieval settlement areas will assist in a more accurate definition of the boundaries of historic settlement.

- 7.3.3. Archaeological work could be useful in defining the earliest ecclesiastical use of the parish church site, and whether St. Mary's lies on the site of its Saxon predecessor. Although it is recognised that a significant development-generated archaeological project here is unlikely, churches and churchyards are occasionally subject to minor interventions such as underpinning, damp-proofing, and the cutting of drainage and service trenches, all of which offer the opportunity for archaeological observation on this site of local importance. The opportunity to observe any excavation within the church itself would be of particular interest, given the common Medieval practice of rebuilding a church directly upon the site of its predecessor (Rodwell 1989).
- 7.3.4. Great Bedwyn's two manors – Prebendal and West Bedwyn – can be traced to the late 11th and early 12th centuries, respectively. Archaeological research at these two sites would be useful in determining any possible pre-Conquest occupation. The West Bedwyn manor site in Farm Lane may benefit from geophysical survey, as the present cottage stands within a large garden.
- 7.3.5. Within the historic market place the apparent surviving built heritage is virtually all of 18th century date. A programme of buildings survey could identify the presence of earlier structures obscured by later frontages.
- 7.3.6. The north-western corner of the Study Area is traversed by the Bedwyn Dyke, a linear earthwork of uncertain date. Although the well-preserved sections of this feature are protected as a Scheduled Monument, the badly plough-damaged areas are not, and these may provide an opportunity for archaeological research to explore the date and character of this enigmatic feature.

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9. MAPS

- 1773.** Wiltshire map series, No12: Andrews & Dury.
- 1820.** Map of the county of Wiltshire. Greenwood (Chandler 1998).
- 1839.** Tithe Map
- 1880.** Ordnance Survey, 1st Edition, 1:500 series.
- 1900.** Ordnance Survey, 2nd Edition, 1:2500 Series.
- 1923.** Ordnance Survey, 3rd Edition, 1:2500 Series.
- 1938.** Ordnance Survey, 4th Edition (with revisions), 1:2500 Series.
- 1971.** Ordnance Survey, Geological Survey of Great Britain (England & Wales), Sheet 267 -Hungerford, 1" to 1 mile.
- 1984.** Ordnance Survey, Pathfinder Sheet SU26/36, 1:25000 Series.

10. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Towns included in the Extensive Urban Survey of Wiltshire, with reference to urban criteria defined by Heighway (1972).

	Town	Criteria
1	Amesbury	iii, xi
2	Bradford-on-Avon	iii,vi viii, xi
3	Calne	ii, iii, ix
4	Chippenham	i, iii, iv, viii, ix, x, xii i, ii, v, xii
5	Cricklade	i, ii, vi
6	CUNETIO	i, ii, iii,. v
7	Devizes	ii, iii, v, ix, xi
8	Downton	i,, ii vi
9	DUROCORNOVIUM	i, vi
10	EASTON GREY	iii, iv, v, ix
11	Great Bedwyn	ii, iii
12	Heytesbury	ii, iv
13	Highworth	ii, vi, ix
14	Hindon	ii, iii, xi
15	Lacock	v
16	Ludgershall	i, iii, iv, xi
17	Malmesbury	iii, v
18	Market Lavington	ii, iii, iv, xi
19	Marlborough	iii, vi
20	Melksham	ii, iii, xii
21	Mere	viii, xi
22	Ramsbury	i, ii, iii, v, vi, vii, viii,
23	Salisbury	ix, x, xi, ii, iii
24	Sherston	i, vi
25	SORVIODUNUM	iii, viii
26	Swindon	iii, v
27	Tilshead	vii, xi
28	Tisbury	ii, iii, viii
29	Trowbridge	ii, iii, iv, vii
30	Warminster	iii, viii
31	Westbury	i, iv, v, vi, vii,
32	Wilton	ii, iii, v, viii
33	Wootton Bassett	ii, vi
34	VERLUCIO	

Appendix 2: Urban Criteria set out in Heighway (1972)

- i) *Urban Defences*: A town, at some time in its history, might have a wall, or bank and ditch with wooden defences.
- ii) *Internal Street plan*: A town may be planned at any moment in its history; part of its street pattern may display evidence of deliberate planning, such as a grid lay-out. A street plan with provision for a market place will also distinguish a town.
- iii) *Market*: Perhaps the only indispensable criterion, although a market alone does not distinguish a town. The date of a market charter is usually taken in this study as indicating the date by which the place had become a town.
- iv) *Mint*: The existence of a mint often denotes a town.
- v) *Legal existence*: This aspect of the town was one of the first to be studied and formed the basis of most of the early studies of towns. It has long been evident that legal history, once a favoured method of study, does not provide the only clue to urban origins, in which economic causes play an important part. However, the date of a borough charter or the dates of taxation at borough rates or of the town's parliamentary franchise may provide a date from which the place may be called a town.
- vi) *Position*: A town may have a central position in a network of communications and this can be a clue to its importance. This can be a difficult criterion to assess as it involves knowledge of the age of the road system in relation to the town itself, the past navigability of rivers, and other related problems.
- vii) *Population*: A town will often have or have had a high density and size of population compared with surrounding places.
- viii) *Diversified economic base*: Archaeological or documentary evidence might suggest a diversified economic base, particularly a concentration of various crafts in one area, and evidence of long distance trade. For earlier periods, only archaeological evidence can determine this; it is a reflection on the state of urban archaeology that so little is known of this aspect.
- ix) *House plot and house type*: The town-plan may show long, narrow 'burgage-type' plots; surviving houses will be urban rather than rural in form.
- x) *Social differentiation*: A town should contain a wide range of social classes and especially possess a middle class. House types, demonstrated in the earlier periods by archaeology, again form part of the evidence.
- xi) The presence of a *complex religious organisation* may also denote a town; i.e. the possession of more than one parish church or the existence of other institutions, especially monastic.
- xii) *Judicial centre*: A town may be a centre for courts of national or local status.

Appendix 3: Listed Buildings by Schedule Category (Refer to Dept. of National Heritage schedule for Grade II buildings)

Grade I

Church of St Mary the Virgin, Church Street (late 12C, 13C, 14C & 1530-5)

Grade II*

Churchyard Cross, Church Street (14C)

Appendix 4: Buildings Survival by Century

12th Century

Church of St Mary the Virgin, Church Street (late 12C, 13C, 14C & 153-5)

14th Century

Churchyard Cross, Church Street (14C)

16th Century

Harding Farmhouse (late 16C/early 17C)

Castle Cottage, 12 Farm Lane (16C/17C)

17th Century

13 & 14 Brook Street

6 Brook Street (late 17C/early 18C)

Moonrakers, 53 Church Street (late 17C/early 18C)

18th Century

Barn at Harding Farm, s.w. of farmhouse

7 & 8 Walnut Cottages, Brook Street

The Wharf, Frog Lane (& early 19C)

4 Back Lane (early)

Church Lock and accommodation bridge (1799)

15 High Street (late)

3 Back Lane (late 18C/early 19C)

19th Century

Stable & Cart House to 6 Brook Street (?19C)

72 High Street (?19C)

Beech Grove Lock, accommodation bridge, and apron weir, Crofton Lane (c1800)

7 Church Street (early)

School, Church Street (1835)

82 Pear Tree House & 83 Church Street (1850-70)

84 & 85, 86 & 87 Church Street (c1870)

Glebe House, Church Street (1878-9)

1-3 (cons) Bedwyn Common (1880)

Lamp Standard, High Street (1887)

20th Century

K6 Telephone Kiosk, High Street (after 1935)

Appendix 5: Individual Architectural Details

15th Century

Stone stack with circular flue: Castle Cottage, 12 Farm Lane (16C/17C)

16th Century

English bond brick: Harding Farmhouse (late 16C/early 17C)

Timber framing: Castle Cottage, 12 Farm Lane (16C/17C)

Thatch roof: Castle Cottage, 12 Farm Lane (16C/17C)

Stone fireplace: Harding Farmhouse (late 16C/early 17C)

Butt purlin roof: Harding Farmhouse (late 16C/early 17C)

Clasped purlin roof: Castle Cottage, 12 Farm Lane (16C/17C)

17th Century

Brick:

Diaper: 6 Brook Street (late 17C/early 18C)

Brick/flint: 6 Brook Street (late 17C/early 18C)

Timber framing: Moonrakers, 53 Church Street (late 17C/early 18C)

Roof:

Thatch: 6 Brook Street (late 17C/early 18C)

Tiled: Moonrakers, 53 Church Street (late 17C/early 18C)

Dormers: Moonrakers, 53 Church Street (late 17C/early 18C)

Casements:

Leaded: Moonrakers, 53 Church Street (late 17C/early 18C)

Beams:

Chamfered & stopped: 6 Brook Street (late 17C/early 18C)

Queen strut roof: 6 Brook Street (late 17C/early 18C); Moonrakers, 53 Church Street (late 17C/early 18C)

18th Century

Timber framing: Barn at Harding Farm

Brick:

Diapered: 4 Back Lane (early)

Polychrome: 15 High Street (late)

Dentilled eaves: 15 High Street (late)

Roof:

Thatch: 4 Back Lane (early)

Roman tile: 15 High Street (late)

Doorway:

Hood on brackets: 15 High Street (late)

Door:

Panelled: 15 High Street (late)

Boarded: 4 Back Lane (early)
Window:
With cambered arch: 15 High Street (late)
Sash: 15 High Street (late)
Casement:
Leaded: 4 Back Lane (early)
Queen strut roof: Barn at Harding Farm

19th Century

Ashlar: School, Church Street (1835)

Brick: 3 Back Lane (late 18C/early 19C); 1-3 (cons) Bedwyn Common (1880); 7 & 8 Walnut Cottages, Brook Street;

with stone dressings: Church Lock and accommodation bridge (1799)

Diaper brickwork: 7 & 8 Walnut Cottages, Brook Street; 7 Church Street (early); 82 Pear Tree House & 83 Church Street (1850-70); 86 & 87 Church Street (c1870)

Polychrome: Glebe House, Church Street (1878-9)

Cob: 6 Brook Street (late 17C/early 18C)

Dentilled eaves: 7 Church Street (early); Glebe House, Church Street (1878-9)

Queen Anne revival style: Glebe House, Church Street (1878-9)

Roof:

Tile: 1-3 (cons) Bedwyn Common (1880); 7 Church Street (early); Glebe House, Church Street (1878-9)

Thatch: 3 Back Lane (late 18C/early 19C); 7 & 8 Walnut Cottages, Brook Street

Welsh slate: 82 Pear Tree House & 83 Church Street (1850-70)

Dormers: 3 Back Lane (late 18C/early 19C); 7 & 8 Walnut Cottages, Brook Street; Glebe House, Church Street (1878-9)

Brick stacks: Glebe House, Church Street (1878-9)

Windows:

Margin glazed: 82 Pear Tree House & 83 Church Street (1850-70); 86 & 87 Church Street (c1870)

With cambered heads: 3 Back Lane (late 18C/early 19C); 7 & 8 Walnut Cottages, Brook Street; Glebe House, Church Street (1878-9); 82 Pear Tree House & 83 Church Street (1850-70)

Canted bay: Glebe House, Church Street (1878-9)

With pediments: Glebe House, Church Street (1878-9)

Casement: 3 Back Lane (late 18C/early 19C); 1-3 (cons) Bedwyn Common (1880); 7 Church Street (early)

Doorway:

Hood on brackets: 3 Back Lane (late 18C/early 19C)

With fan/overlight: Glebe House, Church Street (1878-9); School, Church Street (1835)

In porch: Glebe House, Church Street (1878-9); 86 & 87 Church Street (c1870); School, Church Street (1835)

Door:

Panelled: 7 Church Street (early); Glebe House, Church Street (1878-9); 82 Pear Tree House & 83 Church Street (1850-70)

Boarded: 3 Back Lane (late 18C/early 19C); 1-3 (cons) Bedwyn Common (1880); School, Church Street (1835)

Notes

Churchyard monuments not included.