

HHC Hungerford Historic Core

Historic Character

An historic market town with a substantial stock of historic buildings, Hungerford is situated close to the confluence of the rivers Kennet and Dun and the junction of roads from Oxford to Salisbury (A338) and London to Bath (A4). The main element of the historic core is the planned market town along the High Street, and most of the layout of this zone (in narrow burgage plots) is medieval in origin. There are three other significant elements within the HECZ: the church, which lies in an area to the west of the burgage plots; Charnham Street to the north, between the Dun and the Kennet and possibly representing a separate pre-Conquest settlement focus; and an area of post-medieval expansion around Park Street and the railway station. Hungerford developed into a significant market town in the medieval period and continued to prosper with the rise in coaching traffic between London and Bath and Salisbury and Oxford in the 18th century. Many inns and other trades developed to service travellers. The largest concentration of inns was in Charnham Street and many survive today as Public Houses. The prosperity brought by coaching is reflected in the large number of buildings along the High Street that were either constructed or re-façaded in the 18th and early 19th century. Hungerford has been a focus of growth, with housing constructed south of the town in the 1960s and 1990s (*HSAS*), and an industrial area to the north (*HSAM*); however, only limited redevelopment and infilling has occurred in the town's core, and this has not had a significant effect on its historic character.

Historic Environment

HER records are very dense in this zone and include documentary references, sub-surface deposits and many standing buildings. There has been some archaeological work in the zone but mostly consisting of small scale evaluations prior to development, or watching briefs during construction.

There is very limited evidence of prehistoric activity; a single gully, excavated on the Somerfield site, is the only feature of this period that has been located within the town. No Roman archaeology is recorded; however, Hungerford lies within an area of prehistoric and Romano-British activity and it is possible that sub-surface deposits from these periods exist in the zone.

Charnham Street is documented from the 14th century but has been linked to the lost place name of Charlton recorded in the Wiltshire Domesday folios; this part of Hungerford was not brought into Berkshire until 1895. Little is known of the origin and nature of this early medieval settlement and no deposits relating to it have yet been discovered. It is possible that there was a settlement at Hungerford in the early medieval period but it is not recorded in Domesday, perhaps because it lay within the manor of Kintbury. The earliest reference to a church and settlement at Hungerford was in 1103, and it is thought that this early occupation would have been around the church site. An early medieval feature was located at a site near the church, but meaningful remains of activity of this date have not yet been found.

In the late 12th or early 13th century Hungerford was replanned and relaunched as a market town. This entailed the creation of a new settlement comprising a wide market street lined with burgage plots which were serviced by back lanes on the east and west side of the town. This medieval layout still forms the street pattern of modern Hungerford; most of the boundaries separating properties remain evident and this is a significant element of the town's historic feel. Deposits relating to late medieval occupation have not yet been located. The late medieval church of St. Lawrence was demolished and rebuilt in 1816; however sections of 12th century church foundations and some burials were located during groundwork monitoring at the church.

Historic Environment Character Zone

Two medieval hospitals were located in the town but their precise location is unknown. The Hospital of St. Lawrence, for female lepers, is thought to have been located near the church on the basis of its name only. The Hospital of St. John is referred to in a 1573 document as lying on the island in the Dun crossed by Bridge Street. It has been suggested that construction of Bridge Street may have destroyed the remains of this hospital but this has not been confirmed.

There is a significant stock of historic buildings in Hungerford and most of the *HHC* HECZ is designated as a Conservation Area. There are nearly a hundred listed buildings and the majority of these are on the High Street and Charnham Street. Some medieval buildings, including a 15th century hall-house on the High Street, are amongst the listed buildings. Most listed structures are 18th or early 19th century domestic structures, and reflect the prosperity brought by coaching. The hotels and inns in Charnham Street are listed and form an important group that also reflect this phase of the town's history. Several buildings along the High Street have been found to have 18th/19th century façades that conceal earlier 16th and 17th century structures. It is possible that further medieval structural elements could be identified within the town's historic building stock. The church, several tombs, the Old Vicarage and the former Parsonage Farmhouse are also listed.

Historic Environment Potential

There has been no major archaeological or historic character study of the town since the Astill survey of 1978. This remains the most comprehensive review of the archaeological potential. The HER record is understandably biased towards buildings and features known from documentary sources. Work carried out in recent years has shown that buried deposits are present and the archaeological potential could therefore be high across much of the zone. Deposits are likely to survive as islands within undeveloped back-plots but have probably been removed by cellaring in places along the street frontages. Deposits are most likely to be medieval or post-medieval in date, but prehistoric and Romano-British material is also possible. Further deposits relating to early medieval occupation and burial are likely in the area around St. Lawrence's Church. Such deposits will be crucial in understanding the origin of the early medieval settlement, and its decline following the establishment of the planned market town; similarly opportunities should be taken to examine the evolution of the separate Charnham Street settlement. Sub-surface deposits relating to the two medieval hospitals may survive around the church and the Dun bridge. The historic building stock has been well-studied, but there remains a possibility that further medieval structural elements will be discovered.

Historic Environment Action Plan

Conservation Issues

- There is continual development pressure in the town centre and protecting the definition and character of the burgage plots remains a high priority. Pressure on these is raised by the current definition of 'brownfield' sites and the priority placed on building on these.
- The town currently retains its character of a small market town based on the medieval street/property patterns. Development in the zone should only be allowed where it does not compromise this character.
- Conservation Area appraisal and management plan is overdue.
- There has been no major archaeological or historic character study of the town since the Astill survey of 1978. This remains the most comprehensive review of the archaeological potential.

Historic Environment Character Zone

Research Priorities

- Where was the pre-Conquest settlement of Hungerford? How extensive was it and what status did it have?
- Can the post-Conquest expansion of the settlement be seen in the archaeological record?
- When was the new town laid out? How successful in the medieval period was the new town? What evidence for trade, crafts and industries survive in the burgage plots?
- What was the status and origin of settlement activity in Charnham Street, and can it be definitely linked to the Domesday place of Charlton?
- Where were the medieval hospitals? How large/successful were these institutions?
- Do any medieval buildings survive in the town centre?
- What is the significance of the historic building stock in the town?