

# Town Centre Heritage

## Part 1: Background & History



Planning & Regeneration Services inc Building Consultancy, 2011

*Striving for Excellence*

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This document is the first report of the Town Centre Conservation Areas Appraisals. Further details on the aims, objectives and methods used are in Part 2 of the Town Centre Heritage Character Statement along with the source of information consulted.

# Background & Historical Development

## 1.1 Introduction

This background report provides evidence to support the Town Centre Heritage Character Statement which is part of the appraisal of the three Conservation Areas. A brief summary of key events in the history of the oldest part of the town, that is within the level crossings, is necessary to inform an understanding of the forces that have shaped and re-shaped the form and buildings of the town that has survived centuries of change to the present day.

To plan for the future it is essential to understand the town's morphology (the way it has changed over time) as the layout of the town has changed dramatically from its early origins around the Great Quay and St. James church. The old parish of St. James, within the level crossing, is located in the original pre-1835 part of the town, before its extension of that year, on what was mainly an island surrounded by mud flats, reached by sea or by land through the medieval towngate that joined it to the mainland. By the time the peninsula was fully developed by the late 19th century the ditch that had cut through its top end had been filled and laid out for the railway and industries and businesses competed for space with a complex layout of narrow streets of shops and houses. Damage inflicted by World War II bombings was dispersed on small sites across the peninsula though many buildings and the west end of the quay were never quite the same as they were before the war. By the 1960s advocates for modernising the densely populated peninsula were set against shopkeepers and those in favour of more gradual changes. The government Minister over rode the objections and approved the 1963 Plan for the new shopping centre, road network and Baiter park reclamation area.

Whole Streets such as Towngate Street and Fish Street were re-developed for new road bridges and, the latter, for offices. Little lanes lined with terraced houses were cleared to provide modern housing terraces and blocks of flats, east of Lagland Street and on the back plots south of New Orchard between the High Street and Market/Church Street. Industrial sites were re-developed for housing, offices and a hotel, in the case of the gasworks on the quay.



Ledger panel from Poole Pottery

## 1.□ The Great Quay

By the 15th century Poole had become one of the largest towns on the south coast, defended from the land by a large tidal ditch, which guarded crossings and from the sea by manpower. As no town walls had been constructed it relied on a dyke, gate and mudflats for its defense and the Great Quay was fortified with cannon. The Towngate stood strategically on a narrow neck of land at Hunger Hill, near the demolished Railway Hotel, under the Towngate Bridge.

Defensible land on the peninsula was much narrower than it is today. The line from Thames Street along Strand Street and its continuation along Paradise Street forms the approximate line where the southern medieval shoreline may have been (see Map 3) West Street forms the approximate line of the western shoreline. The town's surviving medieval architecture reflects its important port status from this period. The core of medieval buildings constructed on the oldest part of the Quay at the Great Quay, as it was known, date from circa 1300 and extended around the church at the south-west end of the High Street. The Town Cellars, also known as the Woolhouse or the King's Hall, were erected around that time to store "commodities of the staple" and large stocks of wool for shipping. Originally the longest such building known in northern Europe of that date, Thames Street was constructed through its western end in the late 18th century. With foundations dating from 1300 the Woolhouse is the centrepiece of a special group of buildings that together with the Custom House, King Charles Inn and Scaplens Court form the medieval core of the Quay Conservation Area.



Thames Street, 1907 (T. Snook, Poole Museum)

### 1.3 Tudor Period-16th Century

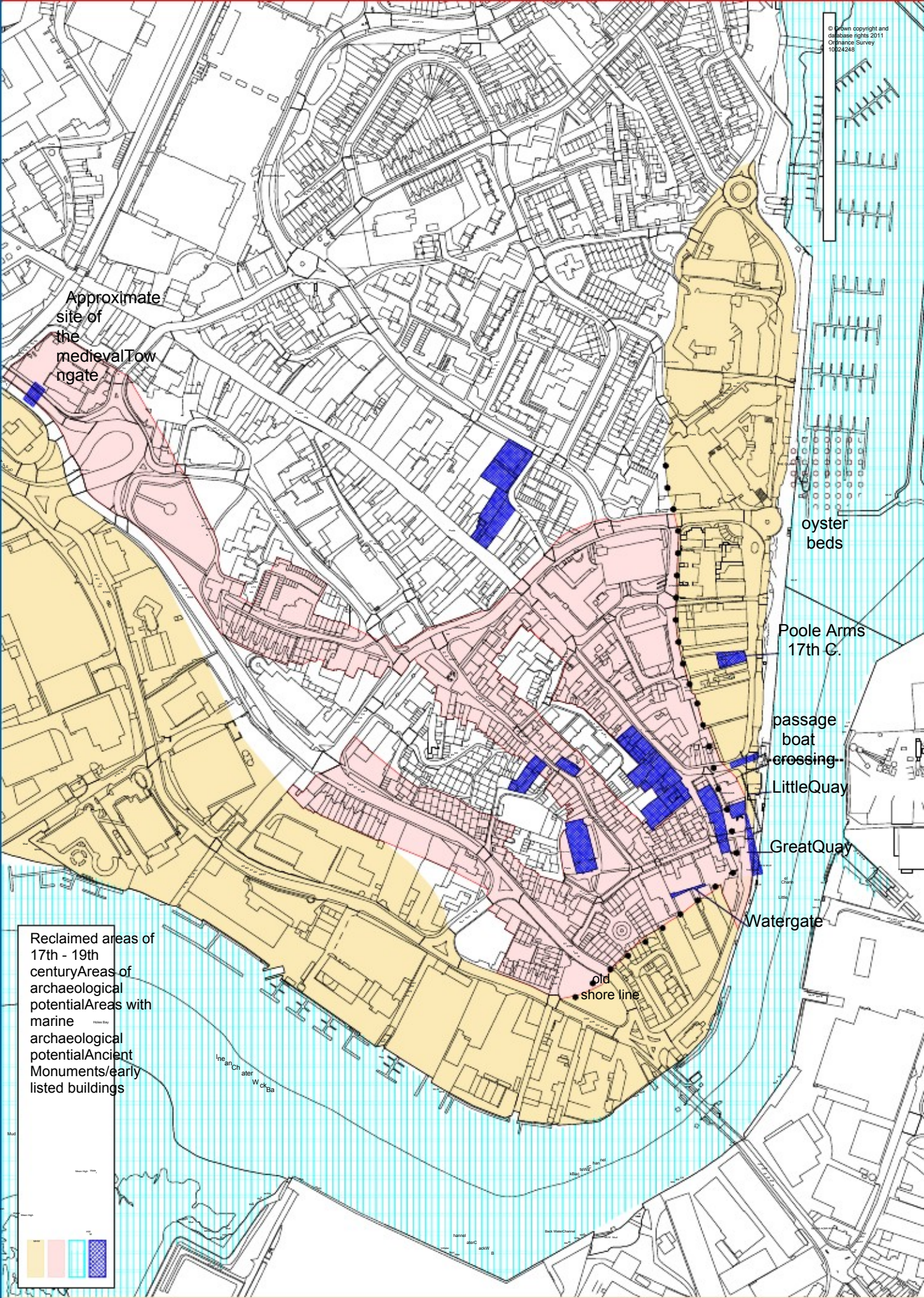
The stability of the Tudor period brought prosperity and more permanent houses designed for comfort and entertaining. Poole men began crossing the Atlantic to fish for cod off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, after it was discovered by John Cabot in 1497. Merchant families such as the Havillands who served as town mayors and officials began securing and providing facilities for the community in the early 16th century. A windmill was built on waste ground at 'Bayter' and a conduit head was set at Tatnam to provide the town's fresh water supply. In 1544 major repairs were carried out on the town gate. In the 16th century the peninsula remained an island, entered by a Towngate, across the narrow neck of land that linked it to the mainland, roughly where the Hunger Hill roundabout is today. By the mid-16th century the Great Quay had been constructed in the area where Thames Street meets Paradise Street. In 1544 Quay stairs were being repaired and a wooden platform was constructed for mounting guns on the quayside, ornamented with posts carved with the Royal Tudor griffins and lions. By the late 16th century the area south of Strand Street had been reclaimed from the waters of the channel.

Leland records that this prosperity came quickly to Poole. In his itinerary c.1538 he notes that Poole "is no town of ancient occupying in merchandise; but rather of old time a poor fisher village... [that] men alive remembered almost all the town covered with sedge and rushes and that "it is in hominum memoria much increased with fair building and use of merchandise". (Cullingford, p.10). Leland's comments appear well founded as the RCHM recorded over twenty surviving buildings of the 16th century in its 1970 landmark publication. The King Charles public house with its timber front to Thames Street is one of the best survivors of this period. By this period a substantial stone church had taken the place of what was likely a small wooden chapel (from the mid 14th century) on the site of the present Parish Church of St James. Some Market Street buildings date from the 16th century, though they have been restored.

Despite the relatively small size of Poole, with less than 1,400 inhabitants, Elizabeth 1 granted a Charter in 1568 to the Town which made it a county corporate separate from the County of Dorset and naming it the 'County of the Town of Poole'. The Charter enabled the Mayor and Bailiffs to "purchase and possess all manner of goods, lands, tenements, liberties and hereditaments whatsoever". A Sheriff was appointed and made responsible for the town gaol and executing punishments.



Lower Thames Street looking towards the channel (Poole Museum).



## 1.4 17th- Century Development

By 1688 the Town had an unfinished character. The Quays stretched from where Hamworthy Bridge is today to the Museum. The town was still reached through the old stone Towngate which was positioned on a narrow neck of land between thirty and fifty yards wide at high water tide. Beyond the quays were the mudlands reaching to Baiter with the saltworkings further along the shore. In Hamworthy the Corporation's new ballast quay was in operation near some small shipyards dotted along the (now Backwater) channel edge. The Passage House public house was a landmark on Hamworthy Quay for many years serving as the terminus for the only ferry that carried passengers to Poole (Hillier, *Pride of Poole*, 1974).

The second boom in Poole's development occurred in the late 17th century spurred by the North Atlantic trade in fish and associated products. No substantial buildings survive intact in the historic town core from this period. The most important building work of this period was the construction of the Little Quay in the early part of the century and the New Quay in the later decades.



Town Quay from Hamworthy 1840

## 1.5 Georgian Pride: 18th Century



Skinner Street, Chapel, circa 1821 (Grade II \* listed)

The wealth from the fisheries trade created extensive building in the town in the 18th century. Many of the best surviving buildings clustered around St. James churchyard date from this period. With this rise in trade from 1688 and the regaining of the Borough's ancient liberties and rights, new families and merchants rose to prominence to dominate the power and political structure over the next two centuries. In 1750 Dr Pocock observed "There are several quays at the end of the town and on each side of the merchants yard go to the water and some have quays to

them. They have some Newfoundland trade and a considerable business in building ships and bringing the materials; they are also employed in fishing, having beside the common seafish plenty of soles and John Dory and very large oysters...”.

The merchants built their estates and large houses in the Town and on the north shore of Holes Bay at Upton. A series of about a dozen important merchants houses with the earliest being 87 High Street (dated 1704) surviving as good examples of this prosperous century. Sir Peter Thompson House (1746-49), West End House and 10 Market Street are the best period examples. A number of good smaller Georgian Houses survive from the 18th century with 60 examples noted in the 1970 RCHM publication. The single fronted houses tend to date from the later 18th century. The Skinner Street Congregational Chapel of 1777 is another noteworthy Georgian period building and remarkable survivor which forms the essential historic core of the south Lagland Street area.

The construction of the Guildhall in 1761 on Market Street reflected the affluence of the day. The rebuilding of St James Church that was begun in 1819 was the other major public building constructed in the late Georgian period though not all building was of such a high quality. By 1801 Poole's Newfoundland trade was at the peak of its prosperity and the town's population increased substantially between 1811 and 1831. As a result many poorly built cottages were constructed after the Napoleonic wars as piecemeal, speculative developments that would not be durable enough to survive into the later 19th century.

Other improvements such as the opening up of road access onto the still lengthening quays were made to accommodate the all important port activities. The New Quay was built south of Strand Street between 1751-74. Later in the 18th century the Great Quay and Little Quay were extended southward with the construction of a new quay wall and jetties. Generally the town met the needs and the architecture expressed the aspirations of Georgian society with a Guildhall, market-house, prison, large parish church and non-conformist chapels, free-schools, almshouses, merchant houses with views of the bay and a London coach with daily postal deliveries. The Directory of 1830 described Poole as the town with the most considerable port and most populous town in the country ... with many handsome buildings.



Market Street view to the Guildhall



The Custom House, nearest the Quayside and facing the Harbour Masters Office, about 1822

## 1.6 Victorian Growth

Decline progressed rapidly from the collapse of the Newfoundland fisheries and the obstacles presented by the compacted sandy "bar" in the harbour that prevented the development of the port for big ships. By the time of Queen Victoria's accession in 1837 distress had set into the town with 6,500 people crammed onto the peninsula of 160 acres along with shops, breweries and warehouses. The larger mansions had been converted to flats, new terraces were built along the back gardens of existing terraces. East of the towngate houses were thrown up on lands occupied by the Napoleonic soldiers on new roads like Trafalgar and Nile Row.



Despite the many economic setbacks of the period the major infrastructure of the town was largely put into place by the Victorians after the passing of the Municipal Corporation Act.

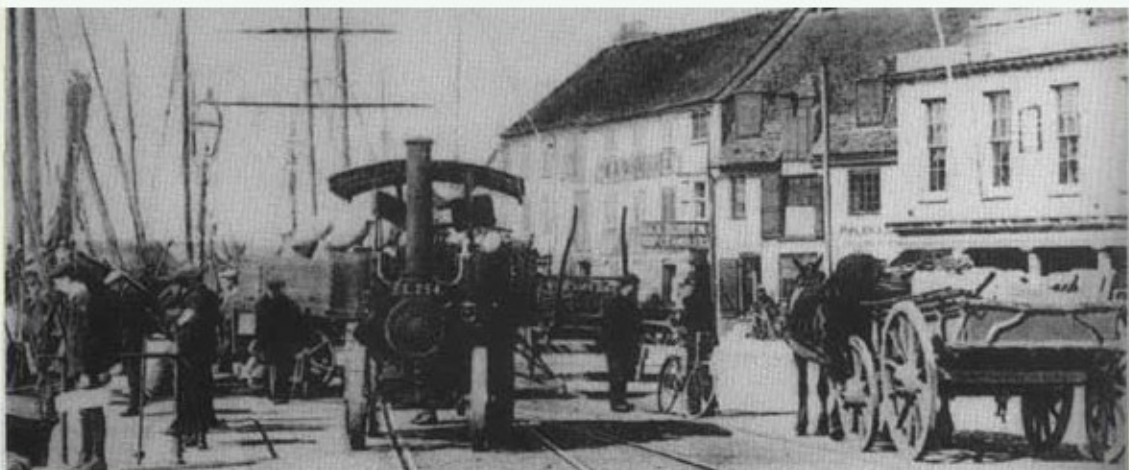
The land reclamation and quay developments which essentially 'Arrival from Waterloo', re-shaped the peninsula into the heart shape it has today were

(copyright Rodney Legg Collection)

constructed by 1900. The first wooden bridge from the west quay to Hamworthy was built by 1834 and its iron replacement was constructed by 1885. The Turnpike Trust was dissolved in 1880 after it had extended the High Street into Longfleet in 1837. By 1847 Hamworthy Quay Railway Station had been built by Castleman and a wharf was built above the bridge to take cargoes. When the railway line from Poole to Bournemouth was constructed Towngate Street and Poole High Street were cut across and the railway was constructed only slightly above sea level. By 1870 the main passenger railway station was built near the High Street with a two level crossings. A single footbridge is still in place dating from the period.

By 1850 Bournemouth was becoming the more fashionable location to develop and live in. The completion of the railway into Hamworthy Junction Station in 1847 contributed to the decline of the port as rail transport replaced coastal shipping as the most up to date mode of transporting goods.

Even though Bournemouth's suburban growth outstripped Poole at this time, Poole businesses like Sydenhams and Nortons contributed and benefitted by supplying timber shipped and imported from the Baltics and Quebec to and from their wharves along West Quay. Slates were brought into Poole from North Wales. An abundance of clay on both sides of the harbour provided raw material for bricks, floors, wall tiles and pipes. George Jennings's South-Western Pottery Co. was established in Parkstone to produce bricks, drainpipes, sanitary ware and later architectural terra cotta. By the mid-1880s Jesse Carter's pottery (later the internationally known Poole Pottery) had expanded to cover part of the East Quay, near the gasworks, up to the harbour's edge. G. and T. Belben in the central Quay (now demolished but where Dundees is today), milled grain for the hinterland taken off its own vessels. The



Quay Railway lines circa 1900

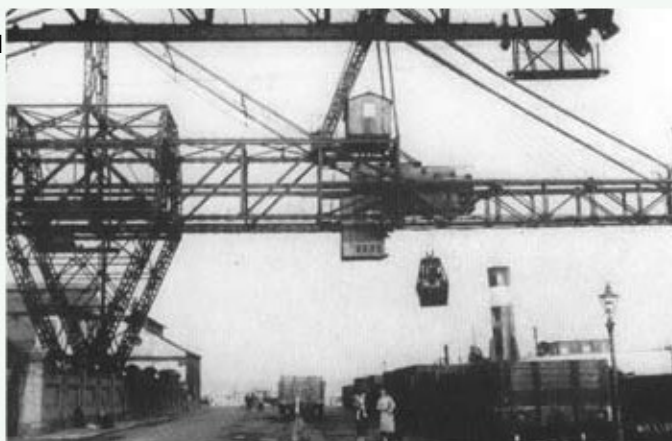
Poole foundry established at 1841 on Baiter Green, between Green Road and South Road, produced the threshing machines as well as steam launches and locomotives that served the industrial revolution in the countryside to the north and on the sea. The owner of the foundry later went on to establish the Dorset Foundry on West Quay Road.

Few large Victorian houses were built in Poole's town centre as the leafy green suburban locations were more desirable and the old town was densely built up with little scope for new development. The lower portions of several grand Georgian houses on the High Street were converted to meet the need for shops. Despite economic difficulties some good Victorian public buildings were built in styles exhibiting the last great burst of 19th century civic pride that inspired them. The Custom House, Harbour Masters Office, Old Library and non-conformist churches and chapels, survive to represent the values and architectural aspirations of the Victorian townspeople.

The century ended with the council establishing ownership over the reclaimed lands behind the new quays and the Harbour Commissioners retaining a lease over a 30 foot strip along the waters edge. The Corporation built a new Fisherman's Dock at the eastern end of the new quays and extended it outwards so that a much greater depth of water along the quay was secured.

## 1.7 □0th Century Transformation

In 1900 the Poole and District Electric Traction Co. laid tramlines and overhead wires linking the Old Town at Poole Station to the new suburbs and to Westbourne. The company was then taken over by the Corporation in 1905 and operated for the next 30 years as the main public transport system in the Borough.



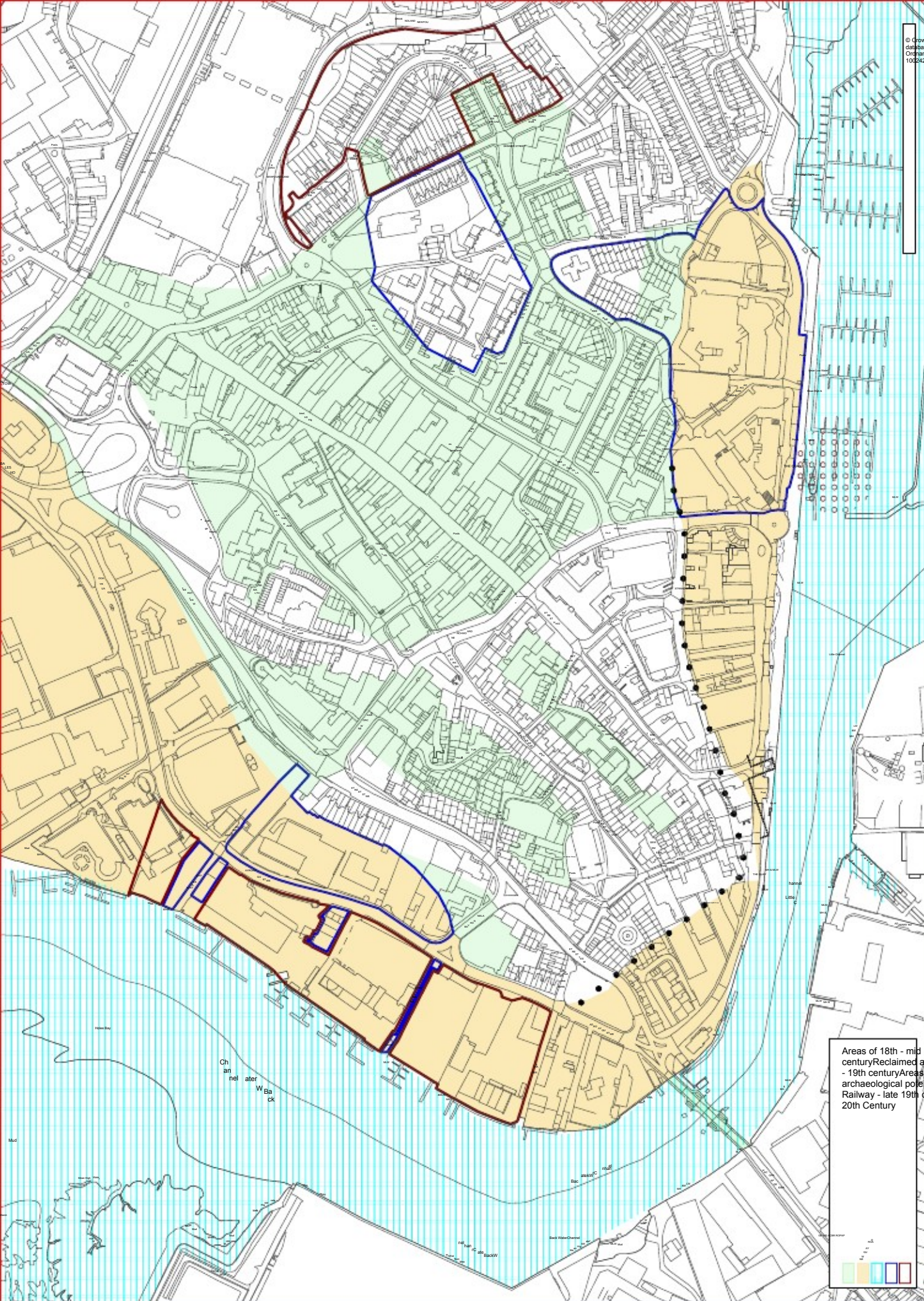
Other improvements in education led to the construction of the South Street School in 191□ to replace the British Schools on Lagland and Skinner Streets

East Quay Gasworks Coal Transporters (site of Quay Thistle Hotel)

and the Borough's first secondary school was built on Kingland Road and later renamed the Grammar School. The South Street School is the only one to survive to this day in the peninsula.

Building in the early □0th century was interrupted by WWI which ushered in a transitional period in architectural design and gradual breaking out from traditional built forms to the suburban styles favoured by speculative builders. New mass-produced, building materials offered a wider palette of cost-effective choices for architects and surveyors to select from. The suburbs of Poole developed rapidly but the town centre continued to suffer from poor investment and transport problems.

The opening of the third Hamworthy bridge in 19□7 freed up the flow of traffic through the Old Town. A revival of interest in Poole's past and heritage occurred in the 19□0s. The headmaster at South Road School, HP Smith, led the excavation of an Iron Age/ Romano-British site on the Carter tile site at Lower Hamworthy. A storm exposed the medieval origins of Scaplens Court. The introduction of motorbuses led to the closure of the electric trams in 1935. Between the wars the large gasholder became a landmark on East Quay where it was linked by a bridge transport to the reclaimed land at Pitwines (from the Quay Thistle site to Sainsburys). By 1935 135,000 tons of coal were being unloaded every year from the quay. Major employers such as the gas company and the internationally reknown Carter, Stabler and Adams Pottery were located on the east quay.



## 1.8 World War II and Early Planning

Poole played a major role during WWII as a key location within Churchill's plan to transform the south coast from a bastion of defence to a springboard of attack. The old town was already overcrowded with port installations, factories, petrol storage tanks and gasworks which made protecting and diverting attacks a priority. The town served as a base for the supplies to allied forces in Europe and the third largest embarkation point for the D-Day landings. The Quay became the busy centre of the Airways Marine Service and the Marine Department of



Soldiers marching past the Custom House (Poole Museum)

Securities and Customs which took over part of Carter's quayside pottery. Poole also became a hub for international air travellers using the Empire Services transferred from Hythe. Though Poole fared much better than some cities and towns the legacy of the war remains in evidence. Buildings such as the Sunday school opposite St. James Church, the High Street, Quayside buildings at Barbers Pile and Yeat's mill were also bombed.

## 1.9 Housing and Commercial Renewal

The housing renewal projects, construction of the Arndale shopping centre (now the Dolphin Centre) at the north end of the High Street and road and transport improvements were the most significant historic events to affect the peninsula in the second half of the 20th century. Anxious to move the Borough into the post-war era the official 1950 Town Map and accompanying Written Statement did not refer to any proposals for the Old Town. Planners were aware that land use conflicts were arising from the horseshoe of industrial warehouses, factories, and expanded gasworks surrounding a precinct of medieval and Georgian houses. The street pattern and widths were largely medieval and the population of the 177 acres of the Old Town development area was about the same as it was in 1801, at 4,665 residents. The two level crossings in the High Street and Towngate Street, lack of car parks and narrow roads disrupted the passage of vehicles and people through the Lower Town. The operations at the Generating Station, which began in 1951 at Hamworthy, meant that colliers carrying coal from Humberside had to pass through the town so frequently that the lifting bridge had to close to traffic 10 to 20 times a day making "Poole about as impregnable for road traffic as an ancient walled town"

The same year as the Town Plan was presented The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments reported on its year long survey of the Lower Town and recommended the Minister schedule 153 buildings as sites of architectural or historical interest. By 1960 the idea of designating the Old Town of Poole as a special garden precinct roughly between Thames Street, High Street and Market Street seemed to resolve some debates over the extent of the clearances. The area would become the precursor of the Old Town Conservation Area.



Second Ed. O.S. Map, 1902 shows the built up character of the peninsula

The Guildhall, Harbour Office, Town Cellars, Scaplens Court and Parish Hall of St. James formed the core of the garden precinct along with adjacent sub standard houses in need of restoration, a scrap yard, an iron foundry and various engineering works. In addition the area contained 30 shops, 6 public houses and three restaurants. In 1964 a condition assessment of the historic properties was carried out and a conservation policy was published. The Council took a lead role in purchasing properties and leasing them to tenants on the basis that the tenants would restore the buildings, using grants wherever necessary. New developments on industrial plots on Thames Street were considered high quality contemporary designs. Flat developments on New Orchard Street were designed by the Borough Architects and won Department of the Environment housing awards. Extensive restoration work was also carried out on Scaplens Court in 1960 and on the Town Cellars in the 1970s and 1980s.

By 1960 the Council's policy of providing as many new homes as possible in or near the Old Town, as high density blocks of flats, was well under way. The intention was to re-house the residents moved from the demolition sites. The council's Works Departments completed Lagland Court (50 flats) in 1960 and a private firm completed 14 flats on Skinner Street in 1961. In 1961 Nelson Court was completed (63 flats), and agreements for constructing Rodney and Drake Courts of 11 storeys (6 flats each). These tower block developments transformed the scale and physical environment of the east side of the peninsula in a dramatic way.

At the same time as the town centre renewal was being considered other plans were being made for addressing retail shortages in a town with a rapidly growing population. A shopping precinct north of the railway was envisioned as the two railway level crossings made it difficult to enter the Lower Town. The retail development was progressed with an offer to reclaim the mudflats of Baiter to compensate for the loss of the Ladies Walking Field.

After much debate the Council's resolution to re-house displaced residents with new housing in the historic core and on Hamworthy was largely achieved by 1968 when Grenville Court, the last multi-storey block, was completed. Poor access through railway level crossings and the narrow medieval streets and alleyways necessitated the design of a whole new road network to link the east and west sides of the peninsula.



Rear Thames Street & St Clements Lane 15thc, Boundary Wall, originally on shoreline

The construction of the road network and related multi-storey car parks were achieved by demolishing old buildings mainly on Castle Street (now Fish Street), King Street (now Old Orchard), Lagland Street and West Street. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments noted that of the 38 monuments standing in the central area over half were demolished by 1970. The work of retaining and renovating the Georgian Precinct which had been identified in the Poole Plan proved more problematic for officers who faced opposition from some members who considered the renovation option to be “impracticable”. The debates that ensued around demolition and conservation are recorded by Hillier and Blythe in *Poole’s Pride Regained*.



Kingland Road demolition, 1960's

## 1.10 Town Centre North

Plans for the development of a new shopping area linked to a transport scheme for the north town above the railway tracks were delayed by appeals to the government as matters could not be resolved locally. The Minister’s 1963 decision to allow a 43 acre reclamation of the mudlands between Baiter and Whitecliff would go some way in providing the green open space lost by building shops, a bus station and car park on the Ladies Walking field though many strongly objected to its loss. At the same appeal plans and approval for the area south of the railway, including the new roads, Hunger Hill roundabout and bridge

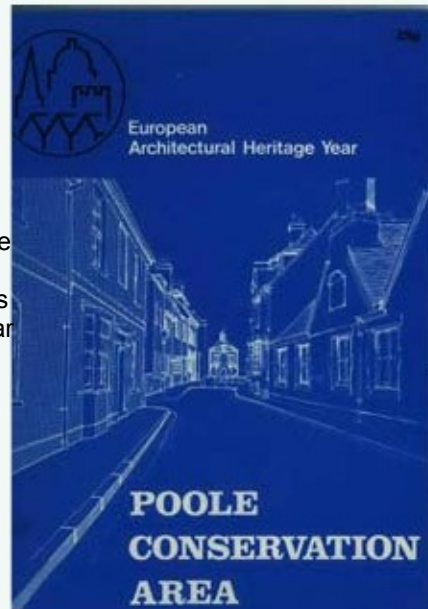


Towngate Street prior to demolition (Poole Museum) over the railway, and the special historic precinct, were debated and approved. The Borough Engineer’s landmark map of 1951 indicates the location of the new roads prior to the demolition work that cleared the way for them.

Some impacts from the 1960s plans that were implemented remain to this day affecting movement patterns between the old and “new” parts of the town. Tall buildings set back from the quayside punctuate the skyline and dominate views above the 18th and 19th century roofscapes. The demolition of Towngate Street with the old Poole railway station, which survived the Beeching cuts, and the Station Hotel left a blank slate for the new shopping precinct. The construction of Towngate Bridge in 1971-73 separated the railway from the pedestrian areas except where a road link was maintained under the raised bridge and the second level crossing met the High Street. The north portion of the High Street is now a pedestrian precinct called Falkland Square and forms a rear courtyard entrance

to the Arndale Shopping Centre (now the Dolphin Centre). The Arndale Centre incorporated the functions of a library and sports centre, with the adjacent Dolphin Swimming Pool and Arts Centre (now the Lighthouse) completing the civic developments.

The restoration work in the Old Town was celebrated in 1974 with the opening of the refurbished Guildhall as a Museum. The Old Town Conservation Area was the first historic area to be designated in the Borough of Poole in 1974. In 1975 Poole was chosen by the Council of Europe for Architectural Heritage Year as one of four pilots in the UK demonstrating the development of a comprehensive approach to area conservation. The Town Quay and High Streets were designated in 1981 and 1986 respectively.



A considerable amount of engineering work to improve the quayside sea defences, promenade and yacht harbour was completed in the late 1990s. The aspiration to remove the last

UK Pilot Project for 1975

major industrial complex from East Quay led to the demolition of Poole Potteries late 19th century warehouses and kilns and to the development of Dolphin Quays. Dolphin Quays is the first tall building built in the Conservation Area that was not designed in the traditional warehouse style common to other quayside buildings.

The tower blocks of flats and multi-storey car parks east of the High Street, and smaller blocks of flats and terraced housing which integrated more comfortably within the Old Town, all represent a specific response to address derelict housing and conditions that grew up in the 20th century. The salvage and restoration of the core of the Old Town in the 1960s and 1970s was a major achievement given the cultural values of that time. Quayside Conservation Area developments in the 1990s that have transformed a working port to a residential and leisure area were driven by the economic climate and international trends in port renewal.

As challenges remain to shape new buildings, landscapes and infrastructure and integrate the present needs of the 21st century with the existing historic environment, it is important to look to the past to avoid repeating mistakes to pass onto future generations.



St James' School Hall, Church Street, 1942 (Poole Historical Trust)



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