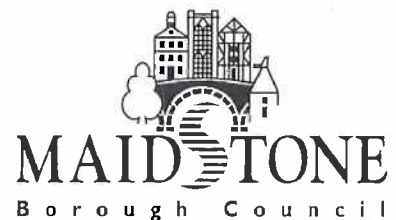


All Saints Conservation Area Appraisal

An assessment of the character and appearance of the area



Directorate of Development Services

Forward

This report is one of two documents produced by the All Saints Conservation Area Working Party. The group was convened by the Director of Development Services, Trevor Gasson, in June 2000 with the task of preparing a conservation area enhancement scheme for the All Saints Conservation Area. The brief for the group was:

To prepare a conservation area enhancement scheme for the All Saints Conservation Area to guide proposals for the improvement of the area as whole, enhancement of the All Saints Church Yard, and to provide a context for possible enhancement and grant aiding of the restoration of the individual buildings and structures within the area. The scheme should take into account the current status of the Maidstone Millennium River park proposals, the potential construction of the All Saints Link Road and the possibility of the Carriage Museum being relocated to Mote Park.

The Working Party was drawn mainly from staff in Maidstone Borough Council, but also included help from English Heritage. The members of the team were:

Nick Antram	English Heritage
Mark Collins	Property Services, MBC
Deanne Cunningham	Environmental Services, MBC
Michael Kiely (chair)	Development Control Planner, MBC
Mike Parkinson	Conservation Officer, MBC
Richard Powell	Tourism Development, MBC
Mark Praed	Landscape Officer, MBC
Geoff Russell	Highway Manager, MBC
Anthony Tomlin	Architect, MBC
Bruce Waldoock	Policy Planner, MBC

The group has produced two reports: an Appraisal and a Study of the Conservation Area. The appraisal is concerned with analysing the character and appearance of the area, whereas the study develops proposals for its preservation and enhancement. It is hoped that these two documents will provide an informed framework within which to consider any future proposals for this important area and act as a catalyst to bring about some of these changes.

FRONT PICTURE: View of the conservation area taken circa 1880

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	6
2	Location and Development of the All Saints Conservation Area	7
3	Historical Development	8
	General Background	8
	The Origins and Development of Maidstone as a Town	8
	The Development of All Saints Church	10
	The Development of the Archbishop's Palace Complex	12
	The Development of The College of All Saints	14
	The Development of Other Areas	15
	Knightrider Street	15
	Mill Street	15
	College Road	15
	The New Burial Ground	16
	Bridges	16
4	The Buildings within the Conservation Area	17
	Archbishops Palace	17
	Description	17
	Construction	17
	Present Usage	18
	Archbishops Stables	18
	Description	18
	Construction	18
	Condition of the Building	19
	Refurbishment	19
	Present Situation	19
	Archbishops Palace Gatehouse (Tourist Information Centre)	19
	Description	19
	Construction	20
	Present Situation	20
	Current Proposals	20
	The Archbishops Palace Undercroft	20
	Description	20
	Construction	21
	Current Situation	21
	The College Complex	21
	Description of the Complex	21
	Present Situation	22
	The College Gateway	22
	Description	22
	Construction	22
	Present Situation	22
	The Parish Room	23
	Description	23
	Present Situation	23
	College Tower	23
	Description	23
	Present Situation	23
	Master's House	23
	Present Situation	24
	Master's Tower	24
	Description	24
	Present Situation	24

All Saints Church	24
Description	24
Current Situation	24
Maidstone Baptist Church	24
Description	24
All Saints C.E. Primary School	25
Description	25
Cutbush Almshouses	25
Description	25
Southern Gateway	25
Description	25
Present Situation	25
5 Statutory Listed Buildings and Ancient Monuments	26
6 Archaeological Significance	28
7 Character of the Conservation Area	29
Introduction	29
Townscape Analysis	29
Approaches	29
Streets and Spaces	31
Analysis of Spaces	31
The Old Palace Courtyard	31
All Saints Churchyard	32
The College Courtyard	33
The Cutbush Almshouses Courtyard	34
The Southern Gateway and Garden	34
The Riverside	34
The Palace Gardens	36
The New Burial Ground	37
Other Areas	37
Building Design and Styles	39
Relationship between Buildings and Spaces	39
Trees	39
8 Conclusion	40
List of Plans	41
Plan 1 Brown 1821	41
Plan 2 Ordnance Survey map 1876-95	41
Plan 3 Ordnance Survey map 1908	41
Plan 4 (Ordnance Survey map 1936-46	41
Plan 5 Heritage Features in the Archbishop's Precinct - Plan and Gazetteer, 1997 (Oxford Archaeological Unit)	41
Plan 6 Main Tree Groups within the Conservation Area	41
Appendix: Schedule of Listed Buildings and Ancient Monuments	52
i) Gateway and Wall to Palace Gardens, Mill Street. Grade II	52
ii) Wall to north west of Archbishop's Palace, Mill Street. Grade II	52
iii) The Archbishop's Palace, Mill Street. Grade I	52
iv) Wall to east of Archbishop's Palace, Mill Street. Grade II	52
v) The Dungeons at the Archbishop's Palace, Mill Street. Grade II*	52
vi) The Gate House at the Archbishop's Palace, Mill Street. Grade II	53
vii) The Len Bridge, Mill Street. Grade II	53
viii) The Archbishop's Stables, Mill Street. Grade I	53
ix) Parish Church of All Saints, Mill Street. Grade A	53
x) Wall to north and west of All Saints Church, Mill Street. Grade II	53
xi) The College Gateway/All Saints Parish Room/The College Tower, Mill Street. Grade I	54

xii) The College, Mill Street. Grade II*	54
xiii) The Master's Tower, Mill Street. Grade II	54
xiv) The Cutbush Almshouses, Mill Street. Grade II	54
xv) Ruined Gateway, Mill Street. Grade II	55
xvi) All Saints Church of England School, Priory Road. Grade II	55
i) North Boundary Wall formerly to Digons, Knightrider Street. Grade II	55
ii) East Boundary Wall formally to Digons, Knightrider Street. Grade II	55
iii) Knightrider House, 14 Knightrider Street. Grade II	55
Description of Scheduled Ancient Monument	56
Assessment of importance of Scheduled Ancient Monument	57

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Conservation Areas were first introduced under the provisions of the Civic Amenities Act of 1967 [now superseded by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990]. Section 69 of the 1990 Act requires local planning authorities to designate as conservation areas any “areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”.
- 1.2 Such designation brings control over the demolition of unlisted buildings and works to trees as well as some additional control over minor developments to single dwelling houses. The 1990 Act also places duties on local authorities:
1. to review the extent of designation from time to time;
 2. to designate further areas if appropriate;
 3. to formulate proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas (with public consultation); and
 4. to pay special attention to the character and appearance of conservation areas when exercising their planning powers.
- 1.3 The relevant development plan needs to include firm conservation area policies. These need to be based on a clear definition of the special architectural or historic interest of conservation area in order to provide an effective tool for planning decisions. The relevant development plans at the time of writing this report are the Kent Structure Plan 1996 and the approved Maidstone Borough-Wide Local Plan 2000.
- 1.4 There are over 40 conservation areas in the Borough, and given that they are all of varying character, it would be unwieldy to include specific policies for individual conservation areas within the bodies of the development plans. Central Government advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note No. 15 (PPG15) urges local planning authorities to assess the special interest, character and appearance of all conservation areas in their districts in the form of written appraisals which will provide a sound basis for the more general policies included in development plans, will inform development control decisions and provide additional assistance at planning appeals. They can also act as the first step towards a subsequent Conservation Area Study which would contain specific policies and proposals for the preservation or enhancement of the area which can be treated as supplementary planning guidance to the Local Plan.
- 1.5 This document seeks to address the appraisal of the special interest, character and appearance of this Conservation Area. It will look at the origins and historical development of the area. A detailed analysis of all the buildings is included as well as an appraisal of the character of the streets and spaces within the area. The document will not put forward any specific proposals for the area although it may identify problems and opportunities. Specific proposals, in any case, will to some extent depend on whether road schemes are implemented or not, and it is intended that a separate Conservation Area Study will be produced which will be subject to public consultation. This will set out proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the area.

2 Location and Development of the All Saints Conservation Area

- 2.1 The All Saints Conservation Area lies to the south of the present-day town centre of Maidstone, but represents, as far as can be deduced, the original early-Medieval nucleus of settlement. The Conservation Area is focused around the magnificent group of medieval buildings comprising the Archbishops Palace and Stables, All Saints Church and the College of All Saints.
- 2.2 The Conservation Area was first designated on November 14th 1969 by Kent County Council. Extensions to the original Conservation Area were designated on 25th January 1974, again by Kent County Council, to include All Saints Primary School and the eastern range of the Monckton Drill Hall.
- 2.3 The boundary of the Conservation Area to the west is formed by the River Medway, which has a major effect on the character of the area. To the north the boundary is formed by the modern line of Bishops' Way and to the north-east the boundary does not follow any topographical feature but is artificially drawn to follow the line of the long-proposed "Southern Approach Road"; it then returns westwards along Knightrider Street before turning south along Priory Road which forms the eastern boundary to the conservation area. The southern boundary coincides to some extent with the original precinct boundary of the College of All Saints except that modern buildings in College Avenue are omitted.
- 2.4 No supporting statements or character assessment survive from the time of the original designation of the Conservation Area, but its *raison d'être* is obviously the concentration of listed buildings, the national importance of a number of which is reflected in their high gradings. Since designation the Conservation Area has not been subject to substantial pressures for development or redevelopment largely because of the nature of the buildings and uses and the significant land holdings of the Borough Council. The only significant new development post-designation is Carriage House, an office block on the site of late 19th/early 20th century workshop buildings, which themselves detracted from the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

3 Historical Development

General Background

- 3.1 The All Saints Conservation Area is the site of the ecclesiastical complex which was the core of the original medieval town. The site is on higher ground bounded by the Medway to the west and the boggy ground of the Len valley to the north. The Roman road, Stone Street, crosses the Len just to the east. Knightrider Street, the old road to Ashford, crosses the Medway to the south of the Palace. The site is therefore defensible, had good communications by road and water and a supply of fresh water. The development of the area is therefore inseparable from the development of Maidstone as a whole.

The Origins and Development of Maidstone as a Town

- 3.2 The origins of settlement in Maidstone are not fully understood and there has been little systematic archaeological investigation carried out in the town. The area was obviously attractive to early settlers as evidenced by the surviving Neolithic ritual monuments such as Kits Coty House, collectively known as the Medway Megaliths, and the recent discovery during the Channel Tunnel Rail Link works of a Neolithic house at Bluebell Hill. A late Neolithic/Bronze Age beaker was found at Tovil, not too far away from the Conservation Area, and post holes discovered during archaeological investigations on the Palace site have tentatively been ascribed to the Bronze Age.
- 3.3 Late Iron Age activity in the general area is evidenced by large cremation cemeteries at Aylesford and Allington, and cremation urns, coins and pottery of similar date have been discovered as chance finds in numerous locations in central Maidstone. In the years immediately preceding the Roman Invasion the oppidum (or proto-town) at Quarry Wood, Boughton Monchelsea, was established, and it is possible that some settlement focus may have occurred within its territory at the future site of Maidstone.
- 3.4 The Maidstone area is rich in remains of the Roman period, but there is no concrete evidence of there having been a town here. There are two known Roman villas in the immediate vicinity of the town centre – one at The Mount less than 1 kilometre north of the Conservation Area, just beyond the Maidstone East railway line, and another to the south-east on the far side of Upper Stone Street, and many others are known along this stretch of the Medway Valley. Two large cremation cemeteries of Roman date were discovered during building operations during the 18th and 19th centuries, one in the area of Pudding Lane/Earl Street and the other across the river from the Conservation Area near Maidstone West Station. Their existence suggests some form of reasonably substantial settlement – if such a settlement did exist, the cemeteries, in accordance with Roman law, would have been outside it.

- 3.5 Week Street/Gabriels Hill/Stone Street mark the line of the known Roman road linking Rochester with the iron-rich Weald and the coast near Hastings (and by another road diverging from it at Chart Sutton to the Roman port at Lympne (Portus Lemanis). It has been suggested that the name of Week Street is derived from the Latin word “vicus”, a term often applied to small Roman towns. It has also been put forward that the “ston” element in various Kentish place names (i.e. the “stone” in Maidstone) – such as, for example, Folkestone, Lullingstone, Cuxton, Keston, and Teston – is often indicative of Roman buildings in the vicinity, although as in many of these examples this may relate to substantial villas rather than towns or villages. In another example, however, at Stone-by Faversham, there is conclusive archaeological evidence of a Roman religious building being incorporated into a Christian Church by the 8th century. The possibility of such a building influencing the siting of the parish church of Maidstone is not to be discounted – a Roman coin was found in the churchyard in 1844, and Beale Post, writing in 1847, reports that some fragments of a tessellated pavement were exhibited in Maidstone “a few years before 1845” and said to have been found on the College site, but he was unable to authenticate the claim. Just outside the Conservation Area, on the site of Rootes Garage in Mill Street, a 2nd century pot was discovered in 1937.
- 3.6 If a small town did exist at Maidstone in Roman times there are two possible reasons for its existence. The ragstone deposits in the area are known to have been exploited in Roman times and the product was used extensively in London to which it could have been easily shipped from Maidstone via the Medway and Thames. It is possible that one or both the villas in the vicinity were associated with the quarrying industry rather than agriculture, and the villa off Stone Street is not that far away from the later Coombe Quarry. A small town could well have grown up to house workers and provide services for them, and also to act as a port for shipping the stone, perhaps based around the confluence of the River Len with the Medway (which would have been tidal at the time).
- 3.7 The other possible impetus for the development of a small town may have been to do with facilities provided for the benefit of the *cursus publicus* or Imperial Post – the official Imperial messenger service. These included inns for overnight accommodation (“*mansiones*”) and posting stations where horses could be changed (“*mutationes*”) and known examples of both types of establishment have given rise to town development elsewhere. Written evidence from the Roman period exists to show that the development of an inn was considered to be a profitable sideline for a villa estate lying near a main road, so it is possible that one of the Maidstone villas may have been tempted to set one up. Perhaps, however, a posting-station is more likely, given the proximity of the major town at Rochester which is more than likely to have possessed at least one inn. Research on Stane Street, the London-Chichester Roman road has found that posting stations were spaced approximately 11-13 miles apart – a spacing which tallies quite well with the distance between Rochester and Maidstone.
- 3.8 Evidence of Anglo-Saxon activity in the area is rather more sparse, but this is likely to be the result of the more fugitive nature of any archaeological remains. An Anglo-Saxon cemetery was located in the area around the junction of Wheeler Street and Brewer Street on the far side of the later medieval town from the Conservation Area in the 19th century, but there have been no finds of this period within the vicinity of All Saints Church.

The Development of All Saints Church

- 3.9 It is likely that the Anglo-Saxon period is the period during which development occurred within the Conservation Area which first established the character which is still reflected today. It all revolves around the founding of the original minster church of St. Mary, which occupied the same site as All Saints Church.
- 3.10 The date of this foundation is not known, but the existence of the pre-Conquest minster is certain. In the Domesday Monachorum (which is roughly contemporary with Domesday Book but reflects pre-Conquest arrangements) Maidstone St. Mary's is recorded as being "mother church" to 17 "daughter churches" – interestingly enough, the plotting of these reveals, with minor exceptions, a remarkably similar "territory" to the present Maidstone Borough. Of the 15 recorded pre-Conquest minsters in Kent all were associated with ancient royal estates or estates granted by the crown to the church at a very early period. From the time of St. Augustine onwards, the spread and promotion of Christianity relied heavily on initiatives from individual kings, who would provide land for religious communities to establish themselves – this is definitely attested, for example, at Reculver, where St. Mary's Church was founded on royal land within the old Roman fort in AD633. St. Mary's at Maidstone may have been founded at a similar date as it has been noted that the original "mother churches" in Kent were often founded in the 7th century. The dedication to St. Mary may also provide a clue, being one of the three most popular dedications amongst early Saxon churches in Kent. Examples other than Reculver already noted include Folkestone, where a 7th century nunnery was founded, Lyminge founded as an abbey in AD633 and St. Mary in Castro at Dover. At Maidstone, too, the site was typical of an early monastic one – these have been noted to often be close to Roman roads but also to be attracted to semi-secluded sites like peninsulas on the coast or triangular areas of ground formed where rivers meet – the original confluence of the Len and the Medway had just this pattern.
- 3.11 Consideration of the dedication to St. Mary may even cast some light on previous religious practices at the site. Dedications to St. Mary often seem to be connected to holy wells, and one may have existed on the Maidstone site – another holy well is attested later in the Middle Ages at St. Ann's Well, where a chapel was built – this was situated near Springfield. Early 19th century maps show the lane leading south from the southern gateway of the College named as Gorewell Lane, which must relate to some form of spring. Holy wells were often appropriated to the church from pagan religious practices, often involving female watersprites.
- 3.12 Much debate has taken place over the meaning of the place name of Maidstone – the earliest written evidence is c. AD975 to "de maides stana". The most popular interpretation seems to be "the maiden's stone", and it has been postulated that this might relate to a megalith connected with just such a female watersprite. The Pope's early missionaries were certainly encouraged to convert pagan religious sites to Christian use.