

INTRODUCTION

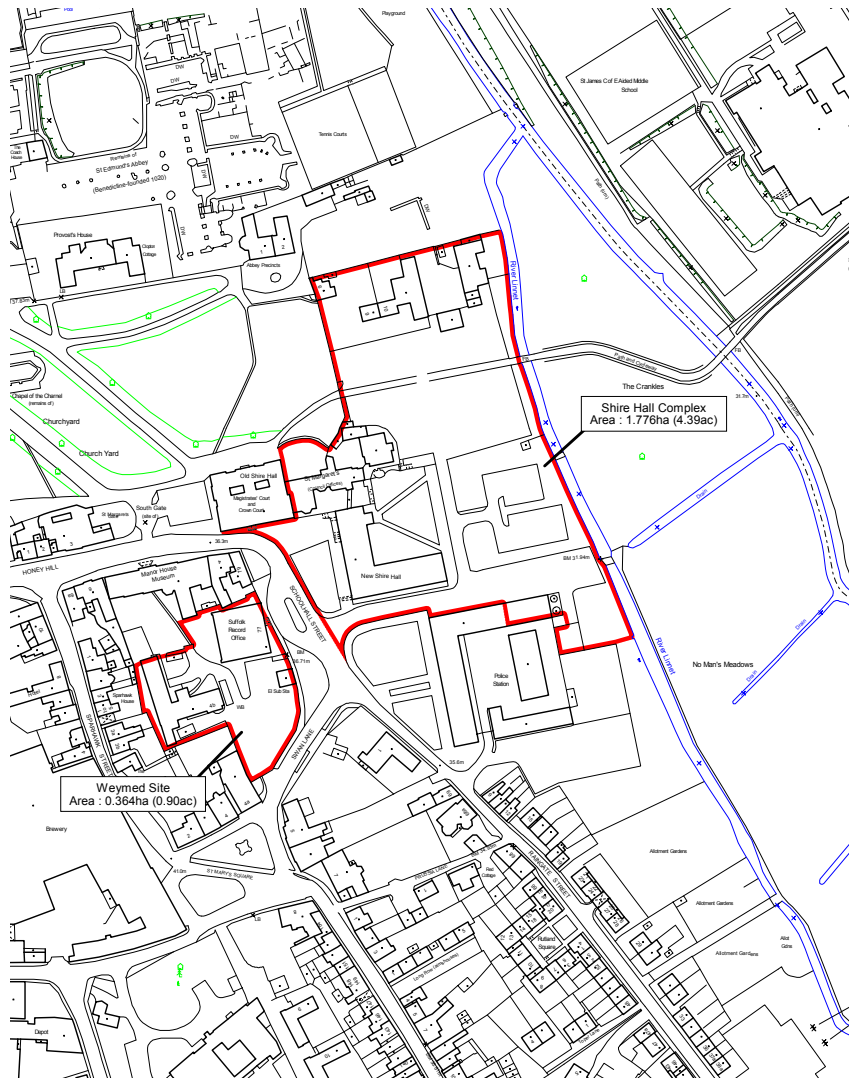


Figure 1 The Site

INTRODUCTION

Bidwells has been commissioned by Suffolk County Council to undertake a Character Appraisal for the Shire Hall Complex, Bury St Edmunds. The purpose is to describe the context and character of the site and surroundings to help inform emerging design proposals.

The term 'character' attempts to bring together as many aspects of a place as possible in order to appreciate and understand it better, and to understand the experience of being in it. It tries to capture the overall feeling about the place and is not just about collecting facts.

There are two areas which make up the overall site outlined in red (Figure 1). A larger area will be assessed for the context and character of the local area in which the site sits.

The Bury St Edmunds Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan 2007 illustrates that the New Shire Hall Complex is generally outside the

five identified character areas, but the area to the north of the Precinct wall is within the Abbey Precinct character area (Figure 2). The early medieval wall completed during the 12th century divides the site with the northern part lying within the Abbey Precinct character area.

The area immediately west of the current Shire Hall is within the South of the Town Centre character area.

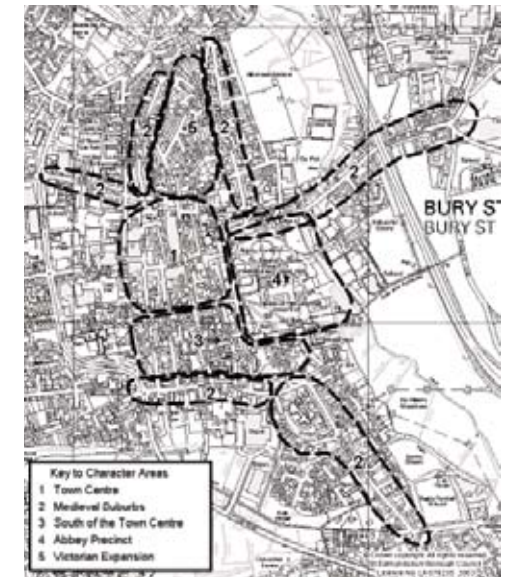


Figure 2 Conservation Area Appraisal Character Areas

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Historic context

The Shire Hall Complex lies entirely within the area of Archaeological Importance as defined in the Local Plan. The current Shire Hall building and the Record Office are situated within the medieval urban core and in the area of the Saxon settlement from which the town originated. The car park and the outlying offices to the north of the main building are within the precinct of the medieval Abbey of St Edmund, adjacent to both the ruins of the Abbey Church and its Great Churchyard and separated from the main building by the early 12th century precinct wall.

An engraving of the town, Ryland's 'East View of the Town' published in 1791 (Figure 3), shows the historic context of the Shire Hall Complex. The Archaeological Assessment Report Shire Hall Complex 2007 summarises the principal findings, in that:

- The site of the former Shire Hall was formerly an Abbey School, possibly a song or music school and from which the name Schoolhall Lane, now called Honey Hill/ Raingate Street,

was derived.

- The area behind the former Shire Hall and to the south of the Precinct wall was formerly the Sacrist's Yard. The Sacrist was an eminent Abbey official at the head of a large staff who administered the Abbey buildings and construction works and who had extensive property and influence within the town.
- The yard was an enclosed space and the only access to the yard was via a driftway, now the area between the former Shire Hall and Registrar's, from Honey Hill/Raingate Street.
- The entire area within the Precinct to the south of the Abbey Church is referred to as the Great Churchyard in 16th and 17th century documents. The northern half of the car park is described as the Monk's Cemetery on the Ordnance Survey Plan of 1880.
- From 1820 the area of the car park was the site of a Botanic Garden, the forerunner of the Abbey Gardens. It so impressed the Marquis of

Bristol that it was moved under his patronage to its present site in 1831.

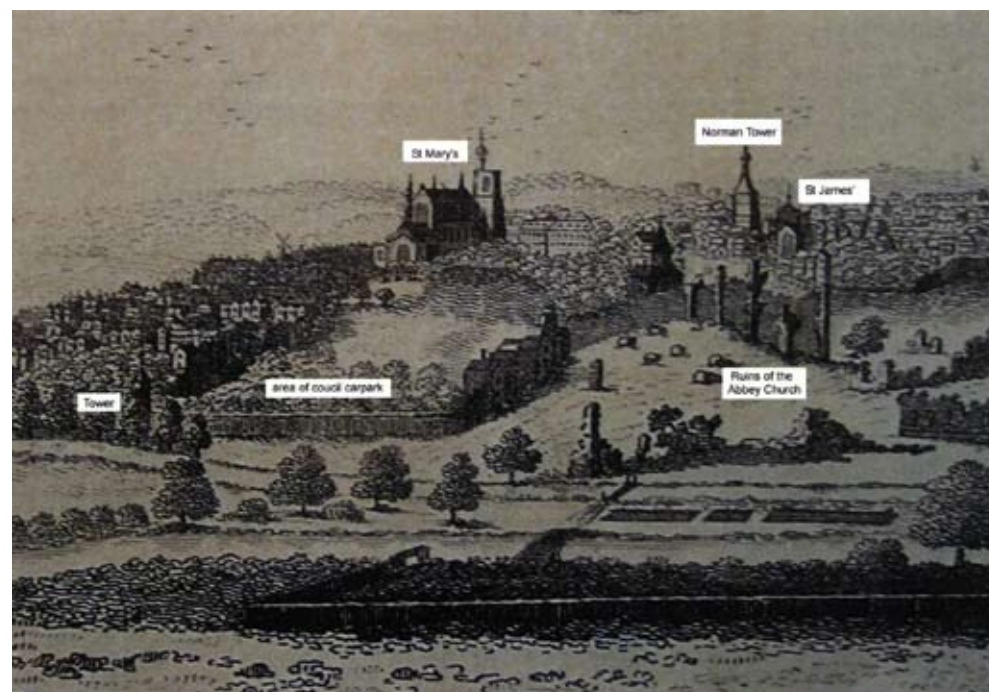


Figure 3 Ryland's 'East View of the Town' published in 1791

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The series of plans Figure 4 illustrate how the area has changed, and the approximate age of the buildings can be extrapolated from these plans. Buildings built during each plan period are coloured red.



1776



1791



1823



1886



1960



Present

LOCAL CHARACTERISATION

LOCAL CHARACTERISATION

This characterisation appraisal is undertaken at a local scale and encompasses the immediate area around the site. Eight distinct character areas have been identified and are shown on Figure 5 and described below.

- 1 St. Mary's Square, Sparhawk Street, and Honey Hill/Swan Lane. This is part of the 'Streets to the south of the town centre' described in the Conservation Area Appraisal.
- 2 The Weymed Site.
- 3 Existing Shire Hall and Police Station.
- 4 Former Shire Hall Buildings.
- 5 Area to the north of the site.
- 6 Car park.
- 7 Abbey Precinct. This is part of the 'Abbey Precinct' described in the Conservation Area Appraisal.
- 8 No Man's Meadow.



Figure 5 Character areas

1. ST MARY'S SQUARE, SPARHAWK STREET, AND HONEY HILL / SWAN LANE

ST. MARY'S SQUARE, SPARHAWK STREET, AND HONEY HILL/SWAN LANE.



Architectural Interest - Built Form

There is considerable variation in the built form, but despite this there is an overall impression of homogeneity. Many of the buildings are two and a half to three storey, with the exception being the striking Greene King warehouse on Sparhawk Street at five lofty storeys. A variety of materials are used with red brick and render finishes. The roof profiles vary with a mix of dormers, eaves and gables. Some of the buildings on Sparhawk Street are jettied. Honey Hill is wider but still retains a strong building line. The variety is shown in Figure 6.

History (Prevailing and former uses)

This is a primarily residential area with a great variety of building types generally built up to the back of the footpath with no front gardens. Some properties were previously in retail use and historic shopfronts have been kept when buildings became houses. The Greene King Brewery warehouse sits in a prominent position at the end of Sparhawk Street.



Figure 6 Illustrates variety of built form

1. ST MARY'S SQUARE, SPARHAWK STREET, AND HONEY HILL / SWAN LANE

Open Space

St Mary's Square, now bifurcated by a road, is a small green space. The space is illustrated in Figure 7. The space opens up the built form allowing some significant views.

Significant Trees

There are significant trees on St Mary's Square which add considerably to the local amenity.

Views

There is considerable visual interest created by the layout of buildings. The view to the west from Swan Lane illustrated by the series of photographs (Figure 8) shows the progression of vistas travelling west where the built form forces the street around creating new views and vistas beyond. The Greene King warehouse forms a significant 'stop' to the view from St Mary's Square (Figure 9). Views to the existing Shire Hall are foreshortened by the curve of the street. Figure 10 shows the glimpsed view of the existing Shire Hall from St Mary's Square.



Figure 8 Progression along Swan Lane



Figure 7 St Mary's Square



Figure 10 View to existing Shire Hall



Figure 9 Greene King warehouse

2. THE WEYMED SITE

THE WEYMED SITE



Schoolhall Street to the north. One of the properties adjoined an entrance leading to a barn probably within the car park area.

On a plan dated 4th May 1960 attached to one of the Council's conveyance deeds two Civil Defence buildings are shown in the car park to the rear of the Record Office.

Architectural Interest - Built Form

The site is dominated by the Record Office. Whilst the building is only two storey, these are high and the building has a substantial presence in the street

History (Prevailing and former uses)

The site of the Record Office was formerly the County Library. Map evidence suggests that most of the site had formerly been part of the gardens attached to the Manor House. The Manor House was built 1736-8 for the wife of the 1st Earl of Bristol, and stayed in the family for some time.

Three properties described in various rentals dated 1433, 1526 and 1542 appear to be part of the Record Office site as their frontages rested on



Figure 11 The Record Office creates a substantial presence on Schoolhall Street

scene as illustrated in Figure 11

Figure 12 illustrates the current use as a car park. The wall to the back of the footpath on Schoolhall Street and the

sub station can be seen in the distance. There is a significant view from the site to the south to Swan Lane / St Mary's Square.



Figure 12 The Weymed Site car park with the Record Office and the existing Shire Hall beyond

2. THE WEYMED SITE

Open Space

There is an area of open space immediately east of the Weymed Site. Whilst this is currently a grass area, it relates visually to the open space in front of the existing Shire Hall and the Police Station, and together these spaces are a considerable amenity in the local scene (Figure 13). Part of the wall backing the open space is flint and illustrated in Figure 14, the remainder is brick.

Significant Trees

There are significant trees on the corner of Raingate Street and Swan Lane, in front of the existing Shire Hall and in front of the Police Station. These can be seen in Figures 11 and 12.

Views

There are significant views to the existing Shire Hall as illustrated in Figure 12.



Figure 13 Open space on Schoolhall Street



Figure 14 The wall to the Weymed site - partly brick and partly flint



3. EXISTING SHIRE HALL AND POLICE STATION

EXISTING SHIRE HALL AND POLICE STATION

History (Prevailing and former uses)



The existing Shire Hall was built in the early 1960's and is approximately contemporary with the Police Station. Part of the area of the existing Shire Hall was the Sacrist's Yard. The 'Sextry Yard' is mentioned in 1663, and described as adjoining the yard were 'the mansion for the sacrist's household without the wall, namely the hall, solars, chambers, brewhouse, bakehouse, kitchen, granary, and hay loft with stables; carpenter's shop, the

subscrist's building with the mint, and with other offices there'.

The houses that formerly fronted the site of the Council Offices were in Honey Hill/Raingate Street and these were demolished in the 1960's. The buildings were immediately to the south of the gardens attached to St Margaret's House and linked to that building by a garden wall. From the buildings' external appearance some if not all of the buildings date from at least the 16th century. Another range of buildings was built in the early 19th century and behind this second range there was a small close consisting of seven

dwellings known as Providence Place. Now this area is open space.

Architectural Interest - Built Form

The existing Shire Hall is an imposing four storey building. It forms an effective focal point of views from Honey Hill and Swan Lane. The Police Station, whilst only two storeys is also an imposing building. The panorama in Figure 15 shows how these municipal buildings, along with the Weymed Site, dominate the character of Honey Hill/Raingate Street.

Open Space

The two separate open spaces in front

of the existing Shire Hall and Police Station are an important amenity. These read with the open space to the Weymed Site and form an important setting to the grand scale of the surrounding built form.

Significant Trees

There are significant trees on both the New Shire Hall open space and the open space relating to the Police Station.

Views

There are significant views to the Record Office.



Figure 15 The existing Shire Hall complex

4. FORMER SHIRE HALL BUILDINGS

FORMER SHIRE HALL BUILDINGS



History

The first three editions of the 1:2500 Ordnance Survey maps mark the site of the former Shire Hall as 'St Margaret's Church'. The link between the former church or chapel and former Shire Hall is shown on Payne's 1834 map of Bury (Figure 16). Modern writers have associated the site with a monastic

grammar school. Margaret Statham's 'The Book of Bury St Edmunds' states that, 'In 1579, Thomas Badby gave the former monastic grammar school building to the Guildhall Feoffees for a Shire House, and some of the older Shire Hall buildings, including the courts, still stand on the site'.

West Suffolk County Council purchased St Margaret's House in 1932 and the only substantial changes to the structure had been the demolition of various outbuildings at the eastern end to accommodate the original site of the County Library. The site of the building, now used for weddings, was once used as a 'music room' and may have been added to the building for that purpose. A small semi circle of land used as a garden and formerly part of the churchyard was added to the north of the site before 1866. The garden is now enclosed with a small iron fence.

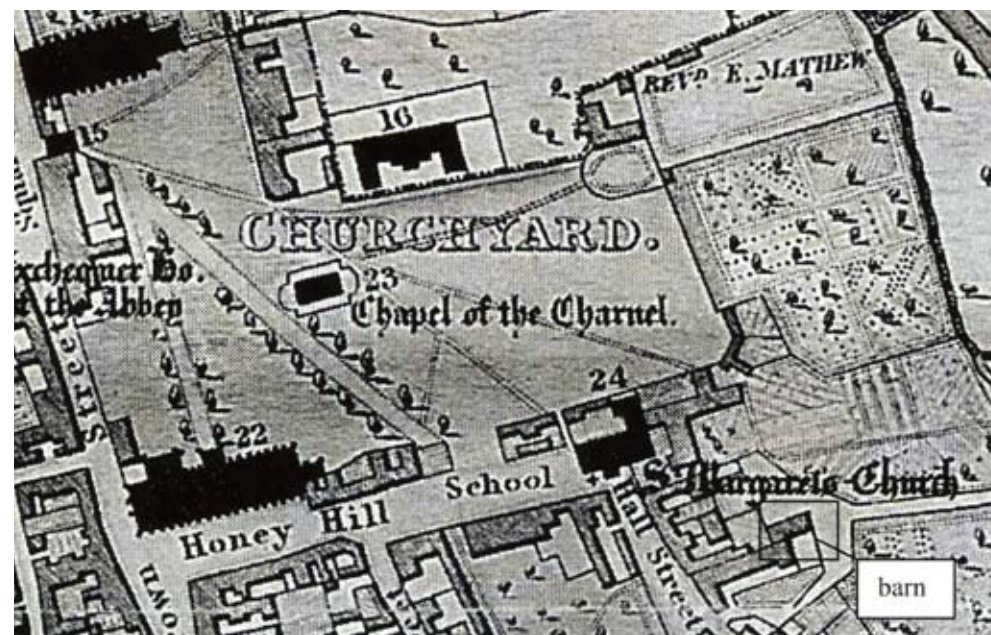


Figure 16 Extract from Payne's map of Bury 1834 showing the area of the former Shire Hall complex

4. FORMER SHIRE HALL BUILDINGS

Architectural Interest - Built Form

St Margaret's House is listed and described as early 18th century but incorporating 13th century Abbey remains. On the south side of the east range of this building there are a 'series of ornately gabled Edwardian extensions including a turret with conical roof' and 'an old wine cellar below the western half of the main range'.

The Guildhall, where the borough-courts are held, is a handsome structure, built mostly of brick. Figure 17 illustrates part of the south facing elevation of this group viewed from the existing Shire Hall.

Figure 18 shows the rear elevation of this building group fronting onto the Abbey Precinct.

Figure 19 shows the west elevation of this building group.

The other buildings which comprise this group are the Coach House and Cottage (Figure 20).



Figure 17 South side of Shire Hall



Figure 19 West elevation



Figure 18 Rear elevation



Figure 20 The cottage

4. FORMER SHIRE HALL BUILDINGS

Open Space

The former Shire Hall and St Margaret's House share the open space directly adjacent with the existing Shire Hall. Part of this space is grassed, and the rest is paved with Yorkstone flags. This space along with the other open spaces on Honey Hill/Raingate Street are of significant amenity value (Figure 21).

Significant Trees

There are a number of significant trees in the area which add appreciably to the amenity of the built environment. Figure 21 illustrates the magnificent Horse Chestnut which sits in this space.

Views

Part of this character area lies within the site. There are views to the existing Shire Hall and to the Weymed Site.



Figure 21 Open space in front of Shire Hall and New Shire Hall

5. AREA TO THE NORTH OF THE SITE

AREA TO THE NORTH OF THE SITE



In 1887 human remains were uncovered during building work at the houses now known as 1 and 2 Abbey Precinct. The references of land to the 'Cemetery for the Monks' show that it was an area of orchards, gardens and the former Botanic Gardens. In Ryland's 'East View of the Town' published in 1791 (Figure 3) there is no wall separating the churchyard from the present site of the council office's car park and the Archaeological Unit's offices.

History (Prevailing and former uses)

The area to the north of the site comprises the buildings now used for Road Safety, Children and Young People, Archaeology, the Records Office Store and Property Maintenance. They lie to the north of the existing Shire Hall car park.

This area is marked as the site of the 'Cemetery for the Monks' on Ordnance Survey maps.



Figure 22 View across to the north of the site. The area has a well tree'd backdrop. This panorama also shows the significant tree belt to the west of the river

5. AREA TO THE NORTH OF THE SITE

Architectural Interest - Built Form

This building group is situated to the north of the car park. The buildings to the west are set in well tree'd areas. The main architectural interest is No 6 Abbey Precinct, a Grade II Listed Building. This building has interesting details as illustrated in Figure 23.

Open Space

The building group in the north east corner forms a small courtyard, part of which is designated as Scheduled Ancient Monument (Figure 24).

Significant Trees

There are a number of significant trees in the area which add considerably to the amenity.

Views

There are views from this area towards the existing Shire Hall.



Figure 23 No 6 Abbey Precinct and details



Figure 24 View of building group from car park

6. CAR PARK

CAR PARK



History (Prevailing and former uses)

The car park to the south of the Abbey Wall

Horse Radish Pieces and part of No Man's Meadow are shown on the earliest plan attached to the property deeds for St Margaret's House dated 2 July 1802 (Figure 25). The Meadow measured one acre and six perches. These lands can be traced back to 7 May 1663 a deed now within the Vernon Wentworth Collection held at the Suffolk

Record Office. The area was also the site of the Sacrist's Yard.

The Car Park to the North of the Abbey Wall

This area is marked as the site of the 'Cemetery for the Monks' on Ordnance Survey maps.

In 1887 human remains were uncovered during building work at the houses now known as 1 and 2 Abbey Precinct.

The references of land to the 'Cemetery for the Monks' show that it was an area of orchards, gardens and the former Botanic Gardens.

The Abbey wall is a Scheduled Ancient Monument described as 'an interrupted stretch of Precinct wall to the east of Shire Hall and at the southern end of the Precinct. The wall was built in the 12th century in flint, part coursed, part random. At the west end approximately nine metres of the wall are at a higher level and partly form the rear wall of St Margaret's being a continuation of the section of wall which runs through that building. Its lower stages are in good coursed flint. The remainder of

the wall, approximately 78 metres in total length is in three sections, partly coursed flint, all approximately three metres high, later archway and a narrow roadway (Figure 26). Parts have been extensively restored'. The description fails to mention a change in the alignment of this wall at the eastern end. This change of alignment is evident on

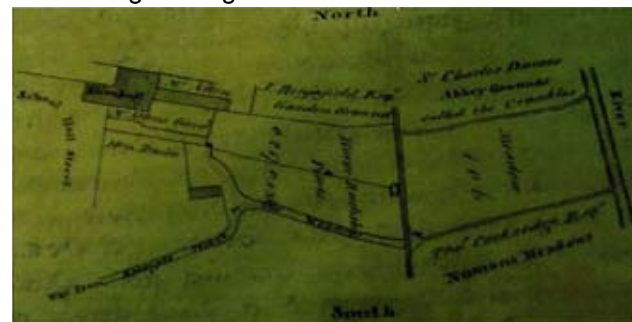


Figure 25 Plan of St Margaret's House and its lands 1802 showing Horse Radish Pieces and part of No Man's Meadow the location of the current car park



Figure 26 Archway and narrow roadway in Precinct wall

the property deeds on 1802 plans. The main section of the wall is considered to date between 1120 and 1148 with later 13th century additions.

The land history to the north has been described as '1.3 acres, land for office and other accommodation for Shire Hall, part of 6 The Churchyard'.

6. CAR PARK

Architectural Interest - Built Form

The main feature of architectural interest is the Precinct wall which effectively divides the car park. Figure 26 illustrates the views over the southern part of the car park. The Precinct wall lies to the left.

Open Space

Whilst this area is a car park it is an important open space and a significant local amenity in that it gives access to the river.

Significant Trees

There are significant trees within the car park and on the eastern boundary with the River Linnet, which are clearly seen in Figure 27.

Views

There are views from the car park through to the Abbey Precinct (Figure 28). Figure 29 illustrates the views from No Man's Meadows to the car park.



Figure 28 View from car park to Abbey Precinct



Figure 29 View from No Man's Meadows to car park



Figure 27 Views across the southern car park

7. ABBEY PRECINCT

ABBNEY PRECINCT. THIS IS PART OF THE 'ABBNEY PRECINCT' DESCRIBED IN THE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL.



History (Prevailing and former uses)

The Abbey Ruins and Botanical Gardens are all that remain of the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds, which fell during Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. There are explanatory plaques amid the ruins, which are now the site of the Abbey Botanical Gardens, with roses, elegant hedges, and rare

trees, including a Chinese Tree of Heaven planted in the 1830s

A public park opened at the end of the 19th century originally developed as a botanic garden in 1831 on the site of the medieval St Edmund's Abbey.

The Great Churchyard was purchased by the town Corporation in 1798. In 1806 Abbey House and its garden were inherited by the Marquis of Bristol. Between 1863 and 1885 two further avenues were planted in the Great Churchyard to enhance its public appeal. In 1953 the Borough bought the Gardens from the Marquis of Bristol and began to manage the area around the Abbey ruins thus reuniting the two main parts of the Abbey Precinct, the Abbey Gardens and the Great Churchyard into a single ownership.

The Abbey Gardens, Great Churchyard and Abbey Precinct are enclosed by the remains of the medieval Precinct wall, bounded to the north by Mustow Street, to the west by Angel Hill, to the south by Honey Hill and to the east by the River Lark.

The Abbey Gardens have been

developed as a series of enclosed spaces which occupy elements of the Abbey ruins.

The Churchyard was closed as a burial site by the mid 19th century when two further lime avenues were planted at the eastern end of the site.



Figure 30 Aerial view showing the Abbey Precinct and avenues of trees

7. ABBEY PRECINCT

Architectural Interest - Built Form

The site is an Area of Archaeological Importance. There are a number of buildings and ruins in the area. Figure 31 illustrates the area.

Open Space

The Abbey Precinct is essentially one open space containing buildings and ruins and with differing character. It has a well tree'd boundary and trees around the garden area and with attractive tree-lined paths in the Great Churchyard. These can be seen in the aerial photograph Figure 30.

Significant Trees

The town Corporation planted two lime avenues in 1732 to line main walks both radiating from the Norman Tower. One focused on Nottingham Porch and the other on the Shire Hall.

Views

There are a number of views into the Great Churchyard and Abbey Precinct.



Figure 31 The environs of the Abbey Precinct

8. THE CRANKLES AND NO MAN'S MEADOWS

THE CRANKLES AND NO MAN'S MEADOWS



History (Prevailing and former uses)

The Crankles is the area to the north of the piece of meadow as shown on a plan attached to an 1802 deed. The Crankles have been leased to St Edmundsbury Council and are no longer part of the Council offices' site.

The Walnut Tree Yard was the low lying meadow adjoining the River Linnet.

The Crankles continues on into No Man's Meadows. The Crankles was the name of the fishpond near the River

Lark and the vineyard was first laid out in the 1200s.

No Man's Meadows and the Crankles have an interesting history, dating back to the Abbey of St Edmundsbury. It appears that the area was created artificially in the medieval period as a result of diverting the course of the River Linnet in order to provide a millstream for the Abbey. The meadows would have been used for grazing livestock, whilst it is thought that the Crankles was where the Abbey fishponds were situated, and where fish such as bream, tench and pike might have been bred. The unusual names of 'No Man's Meadows' and 'The Crankles' are quite old: both are used in Thomas Warren's map of 1747. The Crankles was also used as pastureland until relatively recently when it was planted with cricket bat willows. The reserve contains both meadow and wetland wildlife.

Architectural Interest - Built Form

There are no buildings on this land.

Open Space

The two adjoining areas of low lying land between the Rivers Lark and Linnet have very different characters.

The Crankles is a willow plantation whilst No Man's Meadows is four low-lying water meadows separated by ditches. The two areas are leased to St Edmundsbury Borough Council who manage the land as a local nature reserve open for walking and informal recreation.



Figure 32 View to the east

Significant Trees

There are a number of significant trees in the car park and lining the west bank of the River Linnet. These have considerable amenity.

Views

There are significant views from the Crankles and No Man's Meadows to the east (Figure 32). The view from the east to the nature reserve is illustrated in Figure 33. The view from the reserve to the car park is illustrated in Figure 29.



Figure 33 View from the east

ABBEY STRUCTURES WITHIN THE SHIRE HALL COMPLEX

ABBEY STRUCTURES WITHIN THE SHIRE HALL COMPLEX

The site is divided by the early medieval wall. This wall formed the south boundary to the Precinct and is part of the great curtain wall that enclosed the monastery grounds. The wall was completed during the 12th century and is constructed of mortared flint using large rounded flint sorted for size. The wall is 0.2m wide and is a general height of c2m. The wall is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

On the north side of the Precinct wall is a small turret with an upper storey window looking out from the Precinct. The window is an original feature and dates to the 12th century. The turret is situated just below the step in ground level and forms the link in the height change of the wall.

It is considered that the Precinct wall ran across the car park completing the circuit of the monastery grounds.

The wall separating the car park from the graveyard is a later addition and probably dates to the 18th or early 19th century. At the north end of this wall is

a section of early medieval or Norman wall characterised by coursing in the flintwork. This section of the wall is now partly exposed and it is likely that this is part of an Abbey building.

The curving wall that bounds the change in level between the car park and the offices is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument. This is completely overgrown and unseen; only a short section of medieval wall is apparent in the north wall of the Coach House.

Property records show the dissolution of the Abbey in 1539.

The area behind Shire Hall and to the south of the Precinct wall was formerly a Sacrist's Yard. The Sacrist was an Abbey official, the head of many staff who administered the Abbey buildings and construction works and had extreme property power and influence within the town.

The entire area within the Precinct to the south of the Abbey church is referred to as the Great Churchyard in 16th and 17th century documents. The northern half of the car park is described as a monk's cemetery on the

Ordnance survey plan of 1880.

From the 1820's the area of the car park was the site of a Botanic Garden, the forerunner of the Abbey Gardens.

Results of archaeological investigations suggest that there are extensive buried archaeological deposits within the area of the site.

The street name Honey Hill came into use in the early 19th century; before that date all the street from St Mary's Church to the junction of Raingate Street was known as Schoolhall Street.

The former site of Shire Hall was an Abbey school, possibly a song or music school and from which the name Schoolhall Lane is derived. On the first three editions of the Ordnance Survey maps (1:2500) the site of the Shire Hall is marked as 'St Margaret's Church'. Modern writers have associated the site with the former monastic grammar school. The monastic grammar school was given to the Guildhall Feoffees to be used as a Shire House and some of the older Shire Hall buildings, including the courts, still stand on the site.

The building was remodelled in 1842 according to the designs of the architect William McIntosh Brookes. The construction of the present building was complete in 1906.

The site of the Shire Hall is in a fixed position and the property ownership can be traced back to 1572.

Bricks for the Old Shire Hall were made at Brick Kiln Cottage at Bilson's Gate.