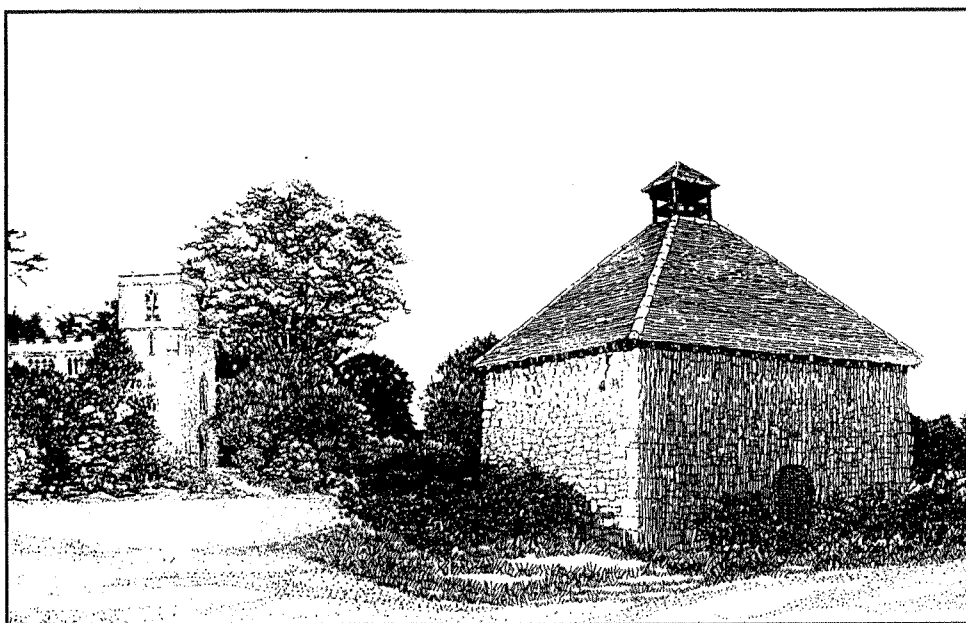

Conservation Area Character Survey

Monks Risborough



What is a Conservation Area?

Conservation Areas are areas of special architectural or historic interest which are considered worthy of preservation or enhancement. They are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Monks Risborough Conservation Area was designated in 1977 by Wycombe District Council.

Within conservation areas there are special controls on some alterations, the demolition of buildings or parts of buildings and on the felling, uprooting, lopping and topping of trees. The Council's Heritage Guidance Note on Conservation Areas gives further details of the special controls that apply.

Designation of a conservation area does not preclude the possibility of new development. However such development must be designed to preserve or enhance the special character of the area.

What is the purpose of this Survey?

This conservation area character survey describes the main features of special architectural or historic interest that justify the designation of Monks Risborough as a conservation area.

The survey is intended to complement the approved policies for conservation areas in the Council's Wycombe District Local Plan and these are the primary means of protecting the special interest of conservation areas.

The survey is also intended to be used as an aid to making decisions on planning and related issues. Proposals for schemes to enhance the character and appearance of Monks Risborough Conservation Area will be produced in the future in consultation with local residents and the Parish Council.



HISTORY

The name 'Risborough' derives from the Anglo-Saxon 'hrisenan beorgas', the brushwood covered hills. The name is first found in the famous land charter copied in 903 AD in which it is described as Eastern Risborough, the eastern brushwood covered hills. In 1237 it was called Parva [little] Risenburgh, but by 1346 it was known as 'Monkenrisborough'.

Although now within the civil parish of its much larger neighbour Princes Risborough, the ecclesiastical parish retains most of its ancient boundaries. Like many along the Chiltern scarp, it was a long, narrow linear parish with the village roughly in its centre. These long parishes gave each village a good admixture of land, from rich arable in the Vale of Aylesbury to woodland and hill pasture in the Chilterns themselves. The boundaries were established well before 903 AD when a land charter destroyed in a fire was written out from memory. This included a description of the boundaries of the parish and the charter conveyed land from ealdorman Æthelfrith to his daughter Ethelgyth. It provides one of the earliest surviving such parish bounds and is thus of very great interest.

The original parish was 9 kilometres in length but only about 1.5 kms wide. It included the hamlets of Owlswick and Meadle to the north, Askett to the east and Whiteleaf to the south of Monks Risborough village itself. Beyond the Whiteleaf Cross, cut into the Chiltern chalk scarp face, the parish continued south-east onto the plateau as far as the outskirts of Speen where Monkton Farm and Monkton Wood perpetuate its former extent.

Indeed the Black Hedge referred to in the 903 AD charter survives, defining the parish boundary from Kop Hill to Windsor Hill, and is still the ecclesiastical parish boundary, following a double boundary bank of probably 8th. century AD date. The Icknield Way, both Lower and Upper, passes through the parish and these Pre-Roman trade routes were improved by the Romans. The first surviving reference to the Icknield Way, incidentally, is in the 903 AD charter.

The manor had passed to the monks of Christchurch Priory, Canterbury, by 994 AD, the date of a further charter. There were various confirmations of the grant, one in 1006 and another by Edward the Confessor. The Priory held the manor continuously until the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII who granted it to secular owners. The Prior had extensive rights in this 'peculiar' of Canterbury, including his own gallows, tumbrel and pillory as well as the right to the chattels of criminals and outlaws and to receive the fines imposed on his own men in the king's courts.

The parish became known as Monks Risborough to distinguish it from Princes Risborough which was held by Edward the Black Prince, son of Edward III. There is

however no evidence of any religious house in the parish and the manor appears to have been farmed by tenants on behalf Christchurch Priory. It seems likely that the dovecote in the park north of the church survives from late in this period.

The last remnant of the parish open fields, that is the fields farmed in common by the villagers, were enclosed in 1839 following a private Act of Parliament of 1830. Originally separate from Princes Risborough, the village was linked by ribbon development along Aylesbury Road by the 1950s. During the early 1960s the fields west of Monks Risborough were developed and the fine demolished farmstead of Place Farm is now commemorated by the name Place Farm Way and its great oak trees by King's Oak Close. Fortunately fields around the dovecote were retained as a public park and act as an invaluable buffer that separates the historic village from the suburban tide.

The conservation area was first designated by Wycombe District Council in 1977 and the revised statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest for Princes Risborough parish was issued in 1985 by the Department of the Environment.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the Conservation area. Of archaeological significance is the park north of the church for this comprises the remains of the former home fields to Place Farm which was probably the site of the Christchurch Priory's monastic grange farm. At one time cress beds along the stream and traces of medieval fishponds were formerly visible within the park as depressions north of the churchyard. The dovecote, of course, survives above ground.

However in the event of archaeological deposits being found here or elsewhere in the conservation area the Council will require archaeological conditions attaching to planning permissions where appropriate, including watching briefs, excavation or similar recording procedures.

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS

The village is a most attractive and distinctive one and its special qualities need to be carefully safeguarded. It falls into two distinct areas, the village centre to the east and the more open west with the park, parish churchyard and grounds of The Old Rectory. Aylesbury Road is fronted by a fine group of historic buildings behind what has the appearance of a small village green. In fact this is the land between the old course of the main road and its diversion to a more southerly line in the 1920s. Leading north-west from Aylesbury Road is Green Lane, off which is Burton Lane. Burton Lane connects Green Lane with Mill Lane and is one of the most picturesque and beautiful village

streets in the County and much photographed. The fine parish church is set within a well treed churchyard and has a common boundary with the spacious grounds of The Old Rectory. The park is separated from these and Mill Lane by ditches and hedges with some tall trees at the north-west and a hedge at the south-west. In the angle with Aylesbury Road and Mill Lane St.Dunstans's House is the 1920s successor rectory with its further modern replacement beyond. A salient of the conservation Area takes in the Victorian school of 1855, founded as a National School.

Within the churchyard and along Burton Lane there is little or no awareness that the village is not entirely separate from the suburban spread of Princes Risborough. Elsewhere this is helped by the sports field on the south side of Aylesbury Road which preserves an open link with the countryside beyond.

The village is situated on the spring line to the north of the Chiltern Hills which are seen from many points in the village, sometimes glimpsed between buildings, sometimes more directly. The conservation area boundary clearly demarcates the area of historic interest as it survives and this character should be a pre-eminent consideration in any planning applications affecting it or its immediate surroundings.

ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER AND QUALITY OF BUILDINGS

Within the conservation area there are ten listed buildings. Eight are Grade II whereas St.Dunstan's Parish Church is of outstanding historic interest being listed Grade I and the Dovecote is particularly special being listed Grade II*. The main grouping of listed buildings is along Burton Lane and, along Aylesbury Road, the former farmyard of Chestnut Farm. The most important buildings architecturally form a loose focus to the north, the parish church, The Old Rectory and the dovecote. These special buildings are listed in the centre pages of this Survey beside the map.

Burton Lane is undoubtedly the centrepiece of the village with its mostly thatched cottages at the west and the old walls to the east overhung with trees. These cottages date from the late 16th. century to the 19th. but their predominant character is 17th. century with much exposed timber framing with brick or rendered infill. Monks Thacky was at one time divided into six cottages by the Parish to provide relief for the poor and the evidence of the former doorways is clearly visible and is mentioned in the 1842 Sanitary Enquiry for England as having "14 persons lodged; - a man with his wife, three old men and a girl with a bastard child; the girl is a notorious prostitute, and receives men there in the day and night". Churchways has a panel of original wattle and daub exposed behind glass to show the traditional method of infilling the panels in timber framed houses.

Green Lane has pavement edge cottages and leads to Aylesbury Road which has a more mixed architecture ranging from the mellow 18th. century brick and tile of Chestnut Farmhouse and Maytrees, refronted in 1798, the Victorian flint and brick of the tall The Haven, to the now rendered mid 19th. century Old Nag's Head and Forge Cottages. They front onto the grassed area left over by road diversion which gives them the fortuitous setting of a village green. Chestnut Farm is the only former farmyard in the village. Its west barn is now a dwelling while the thatched 18th. century barn to the west side of the farmyard has been carefully restored. Both barns are weatherboarded. Attached to Forge Cottages is the former smithy which has unfortunately had its old clay pantiles replaced by modern concrete ones.

To the east and on the opposite side of the Aylesbury Road the Church of England Combined School retains its flint and brick-dressed school and master's house buildings of 1855, the latter much extended and the school extended outside the conservation area boundary.

Green Lane continues north-west from the junction with Burton Lane as an unsurfaced track with wide grass verges and leads to the churchyard and the park. On its left is a cemetery extension. The pyramidal roofed dovecote stands in splendid isolation in the middle of the park while the church and The Old Rectory are largely hidden from view, the church tower seen through trees.

St.Dunstan's Parish Church is dedicated to the great reforming tenth century Archbishop of Canterbury and is a most attractive building in flint with stone dressings. Although its font is Norman of the 'Aylesbury' type with a fluted bowl, the fabric of the church is essentially 13th., 14th. and 15th. century. It is aisled and has an elegant clerestory with large three light Perpendicular windows and a battlemented parapet. The earlier tower has straight parapets and a tall stair turret. Inside are many fine features, including 15th. century chancel screen paintings. There is an excellent church guide by the Rev. A.A.Taylor which gives much more information on this outstandingly interesting church.

The Old Rectory was built in 1670 for Dr.Tomkins, the then rector, on a letter H plan in brick. It was greatly enlarged, altered and refaced in 1863. It has tiled roofs, some stone mullioned windows and is set in good landscaped grounds with the former ponds now an attractive water garden. Its outbuilding, mostly of 19th. century date, fronts Mill Lane and is now a separate dwelling. This has diapered brickwork. Flint boundary walls with brick integral piers and dressings front Mill Lane and Burton Lane, with brick walling along the path to the churchyard.

The Dovecote is in chalk stone and limestone rubble with a tiled pyramidal roof and entry turret. It was restored by the parish [now town] council in 1983. and is the centrepiece of the park, although its setting is a little marred by the children's playground nearby.

Monks Risborough Conservation Area

Character Survey Map

LISTED BUILDINGS

Grade I - Buildings of national importance and exceptional interest [less than 2% of all listed buildings]

8/150 **Parish Church of St.Dunstan.** 14th and 15th century. Norman font. Some medieval stained glass. 15th century chancel screen, bench ends and nave and aisle roofs.

Grade II* - Particularly special and important buildings [some 4% of all listed buildings]

8/198 **Dovecote** west of St.Dunstan's Church. 16th century chalk rubble dovecote with pyramidal tiled roof and entry turret. Inside are 216 nest boxes.

Grade II - Buildings of special interest

8/143 **Chestnut Farmhouse,** Aylesbury Road. Brick house with tiled roof. Mid 18th century to the right, early 19th century to left.

8/144 **Chestnut Farm Barn** [west of house], Aylesbury Road. 18th century. Timber-framed and weatherboarded. Thatched roof.

8/145 **Chestnut Barn,** Aylesbury Road. Early 19th century barn. Now converted to a huose. Weatherboarded and tiled.

8/151 **Flint Cottage,** Moss Rose and Churchways, Burton Lane. Terrace of three cottages. Moss Rose 17th century timber-framed, others 18th and 19th century in brick and flint. All under continuous thatched roof.

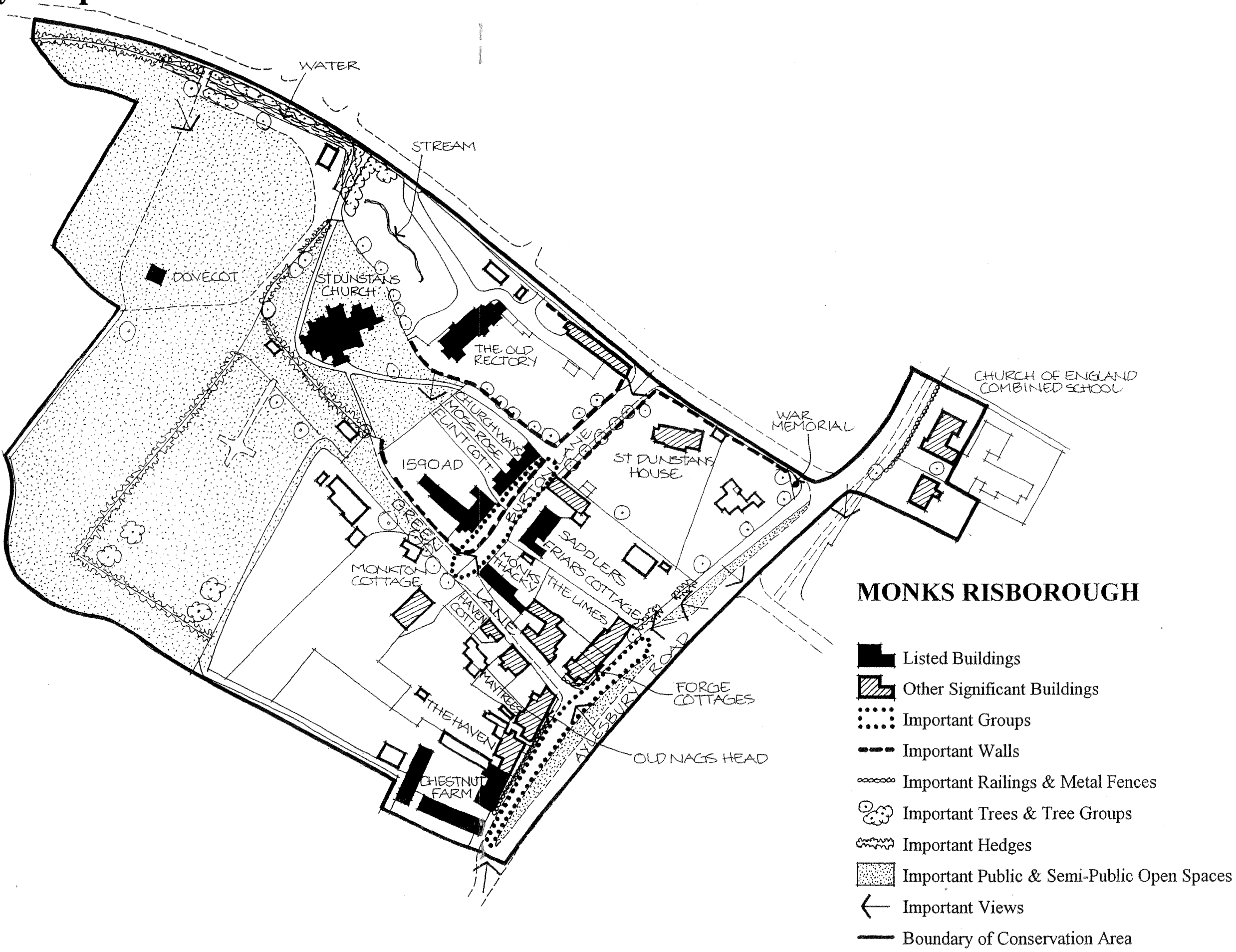
8/152 **1590 AD, Burton Lane.** Circa 1600 timber-framed house. Tiled roof, rear wing pantile roof.

8/153 **Saddlers and Friars Cottage,** Burton Lane. 17th century, left part rebuilt c1800. Brick and flint front, rear exposed timber frame. Friars thatched, Saddlers tiled.

8/154 **Monks Thacky,** Burton Lane. 17th century. Part timber-framed, part brick and flint. Part tiled, part thatched roof.

8/197 **The Old Rectory,** Mill Lane. Built 1670 for Dr.Tomkins, the rector. Enlarged 1863. North-east wing of circa 1930. Brick and tile.

493831 **The War Memorial** 1921 by J W Killer. Celtic cross style in granite



MONKS RISBOROUGH

- Listed Buildings
- Other Significant Buildings
- Important Groups
- Important Walls
- Important Railings & Metal Fences
- Important Trees & Tree Groups
- Important Hedges
- Important Public & Semi-Public Open Spaces
- Important Views
- Boundary of Conservation Area

The replacement rectory, now St.Dunstan's House, behind the 19th. century brick wall on the east side of Burton Lane is in brick with hipped tiled roofs and is dated 1924. It is a thoughtful exercise in modified William and Mary style and adds to the architectural quality of the conservation area. The current rectory was built within its garden and dates from 1985. Behind is the War Memorial at the junction of Mill Lane and Aylesbury Road in the form of a Celtic cross in granite.

There are a few stretches of iron fencing that add to the character of the conservation area. These are of various types from the ornate Victorian ones in front of The Haven and Maytrees, simpler post and rail in front of Chestnut Farmhouse, hairpin type in front of the school to the plain spiked type around the old smithy. Besides the high walls around the Old Rectory grounds and St.Dunstan's House, low brick and flint and brick walls front the lanes. These should be retained and safeguarded and the more visually significant are marked on the conservation area map.

Surfacing for paths and driveways should be informal and in keeping with the village nature of the conservation area, predominantly shingle. Brick pathways also have a traditional appearance, but impressed concrete, tarmac and brick pavours would introduce an alien suburban character.

MATERIALS

There is the usual range of materials found in Chiltern and Buckinghamshire villages. As is normal the parish church is in superior materials with local flints for the body of the walls and chalk stone and fine quality limestones imported for the dressings. Similarly the prior's dovecote is in chalk and limestone rubble. These are the oldest buildings in the village and are as a consequence atypical.

Within the village timber-framing sets much of the character in Burton Lane, although there is concealed 17th. century timber-framing elsewhere, as in the brick fronted Maytrees. Monks Thacky has much of its timbers rendered over. Both it and '1590 AD' have brick infill to the framing, while Moss Rose, Churchways and Friars Cottage having colourwashed infill, mostly over brick, but Churchways has wattle and daub exposed behind a glazed panel. Friars Cottage is refronted in brick and the framing is seen in long views across the back garden.

Brick and flint are the other predominant materials. Flint always has brick dressings. These usually form quoins, window jambs and arches, plinth and eaves bands, although Flint Cottage, Burton Lane, has a series of inset brick piers and band courses dividing the elevations into narrow rectangular panels. The Haven uses the flints unknapped and coursed as cobbles. The school and schoolmaster's house make skilled use of flint and brick in their elevations. There are numerous flint and flint and brick walls.

Brick fronted or brick built houses and cottages are common, ranging from The Old Rectory at the top of the scale which also has some stone dressings and the two phases of 18th. century brick to Chestnut Farmhouse to Friars Cottage and the late Victorian Monkton Cottage with its distinctive dormer windows. An example of decorative brick is found in the diapering on the old rectory outbuilding. The brick is almost exclusively locally produced and is of red multi brick type, that is with colours produced from the kiln process ranging from oranges and reds to grey and purple with a sprinkling of glazed or vitrified headers. The brick is mostly mellowed with age and adds immeasurably to the character of the village. There are a number of rendered buildings, mostly concealing the original brick elevations, such as Forge Cottages, the Old Nag's Head, The Granary and Bakehouse Cottage. The Limes may have been rendered from the start, although part of it was in flint.

Weatherboarding occurs on the barns to Chestnut Farm, the old smithy, the barn beside Saddlers, Burton Lane, and, painted, over the waggon way beside The Limes, once giving access to the slaughterhouse of Lacey, the village butcher.

Roofing materials are predominantly thatch and old clay plain tiles. There is a limited amount of slate, including the roofs of Forge Cottages and Haven Cottage. Buildings that have survived with thatched roofs should be safeguarded and recapped when necessary, but there is no compelling case to introduce thatch in new buildings. Complete stripping of thatch should always be avoided, for often the lowest layer of thatch is of considerable antiquity and sometimes as old as the building. Thatched buildings should be recapped in long straw or combed wheat reed, water reed being an alien material in Buckinghamshire and one whose use requires complete stripping down to the rafters, thus risking the loss of the historic thatch base coat which can be of Tudor date.

Sand faced plain clay tiles would be the normal material for extensions or new work, with natural slate where appropriate.

Plain clay tiles are used for all classes of building in the conservation area from the parish church's chancel, the dovecote and The Old Rectory down to the humblest cottage. The nave, aisles and tower have sheet copper roofs, which replaced the original sheet lead ones relatively recently.

Boundary walls, both high as surrounding The Old Rectory and low as fronting the cottage gardens along Burton Lane, are characteristic of the conservation area and there are a number of significant iron railings which need to be safeguarded.

Several houses and cottages have the remains of wells in their gardens, such as May Trees, or old pumps, such as Bakehouse Cottage, and these are interesting historical reminders.

TREES AND VEGETATION

Trees form a very important element in establishing the character of the conservation area. Some of the individual trees of visual importance are marked on the map. In the park there is one ancient pollarded willow which survives from the former hedges of Place Farm. Sycamores and maples occur in the hedges bordering the park and there is a large horse chestnut in the north-west corner of the churchyard. Two large sycamores are significant along the north part of Green Lane with four very large horse chestnut trees in front of Monkton Cottage. Within the grounds of St.Dunstan's House are three fine copper beeches, presumably planted in the 1920s when such a species was very popular.

Yew trees of varying sizes are visually highly significant in the churchyard and within the grounds of The Old Rectory, while box trees occur in front of the Burton Lane wall to St.Dunstan's House. Further sycamores are important in the setting of the school.

Traditional Hedges are also of importance in shaping the character of Monks Risborough. Significant ones are marked on the map. Although the hedging along the south-east and north-east boundaries of the park is mostly somewhat thin and unkempt it plays a vital rôle in establishing the verdent edge of the village. There are also trim stretches of hedge in the far west corner of the park fronting Mill Lane. These hedges evoke the former rural character of the village and are important visually. Where new hedges are planted these should use traditional native hedge species such as thorn, hazel and holly.

Coniferous hedging, mostly planted for its fast growing nature for screening purposes is visually out of place in this type of environment and should be firmly discouraged.

OPEN SPACE

Open space is critical in the Monks Risborough Conservation Area, both public and private. The importance of the park cannot be over emphasised. It is a vital barrier between the historic village and the suburbs of Princes Risborough. It is a relatively featureless expanse with little character intrinsically. However thus it makes a splendid foil for the dovecote set in its midst. The children's playground does few favours aesthetically and the park is capable of visual improvement. But that does not undermine its value to the structure of the conservation area. The spring that feeds the water gardens in the grounds of The Old Rectory passes under the path and emerges in the park to follow Mill Lane in a deep ditch.

The cemetery extension provides a further buffer with its hedge. The churchyard is a very significant semi-public open space with its gravestones and yew trees. The Old Rectory grounds are private but their presence with their well treed nature are valuable to the conservation area.

Green Lane's wide grassy and track between the park and Burton Lane is a significant 'green finger' linking the village core to the church and the park beyond. The grassy area between the old Aylesbury Road and its post 1920s course is valuable open space and, as written above, forms a kind of village green. It certainly acts as a visual buffer between the village and the very busy A4010.

The public footpath between the park and Aylesbury Road, running alongside the grounds of the modern Monks Mede and Chestnut Farmhouse is an effective but narrow buffer between the village and the modern housing.

Other unmarked private spaces, such as the gardens of Friars Cottage, are considered very important to the character of the conservation area.

GROUPINGS

There are two major groupings or foci within Monks Risborough Conservation Area. The first is the group of listed buildings along Burton Lane which is a group of consistently high and coherent architectural character and indeed one of the best known groupings in the county. The second is the built up frontage to Aylesbury Road in which the only unfelicitous note is the use of concrete interlocking pantiles on the old smithy.

The architectural qualities and integrity of these two major groupings should be carefully safeguarded as they are integral to the special interest of the conservation area.

VIEWS

There are important views within the conservation area and some of these are indicated on the survey map. The views indicated are by no means exclusive and there are very many other lesser ones that deserve safeguarding. Notable views include looking south past the dovecote towards the church whose tower peers through the trees; from opposite The Old Rectory across the picturesque backs of the cottages along Burton Lane; along Burton Lane from both ends; up Green Lane from the green beside Aylesbury Road; across the rear garden of Friars Cottage; and along the Aylesbury Road frontages.

There are also important views out of the conservation area, particularly towards the Whiteleaf Cross and the Chiltern Hills and some of these are also indicated on the map.

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL ADVICE

The policies of the Wycombe District Local Plan are the primary source of reference for development control advice. In addition the Council's approved Heritage Strategy is seen as a supporting document to the Plan. This character survey is also intended to provide broad guidance of an informal nature in considering development within the conservation area. Below is a brief check list taking account of the above text.

To safeguard, preserve and enhance the appearance and special character of Monks Risborough Conservation Area:-

- any new building works such as extensions, must be designed not as a separate entity, but should be sympathetic in form and scale with the existing buildings and the conservation area as a whole.
- materials for any new building works or surfacing must be sympathetic to those prevailing in the area.
- surfacing within domestic curtilages for driveways and the like should be in keeping with the nature of the village and of an informal type, predominantly shingle. Tarmac and concrete are out of place in this village setting. Regular paving, pavements and setts can also look discordant and may not always be appropriate. Paths to front doors historically were surfaced with clay tiles or brick and this is a tradition that could be encouraged.
- all trees in conservation areas are protected but special consideration should be given to those trees indicated on the conservation area survey map to ensure that they are not harmed. New development should recognise this and not present a risk to their continued future growth and habit.
- although hedges cannot be specially protected through legislation those hedgerows indicated on the survey map should be retained and where possible enhanced. As a boundary treatment traditional hedges, brick or brick and flint walls and even wrought iron park-style railings will generally be preferred to timber fencing.
- areas of open space and gaps between buildings throughout the village will be carefully considered
- for protection from development or enclosure in order to safeguard the character of Monks Risborough and any important views.
- listed and other significant buildings are identified on the survey map and their specific qualities are described in the text above. Any new development must not harm their integrity or visual quality and it should be recognised that new development may not be acceptable.
- applications for development adjoining but beyond the conservation area boundary will be assessed for their effect upon it and may be refused if this is considered adverse.
- special care must be taken to ensure that views looking into and out from the village are not spoilt. Those of particular importance are marked on the survey map.
- inappropriate replacement windows and doors can damage the character of the conservation area. Traditional natural materials should be used in order to safeguard the special character of the conservation area. Generally speaking painted timber windows and doors are appropriate and modern substitute materials such as UPVC and aluminium are not.
- in the conservation area higher standards of design are required in planning applications for it is the function of the planning authority in considering all applications to assess whether they preserve or enhance the special character identified in this appraisal.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE

Wycombe District Council's Planning, Transport and Development Service has a number of publications which offer further guidance. Ask the Conservation Officer for information on which Heritage Guidance Notes are currently available and appropriate.

The **Conservation Officer** is always pleased to give advice on all heritage matters and can be contacted on 01494 421578 or be seen by appointment in the Council offices or on site. The Council also has a small discretionary historic buildings specialist repair grant scheme, again with details available from the Conservation Officer.

Listed Building consent is required for works to the listed buildings in the conservation area, while planning permission is needed for all changes to their fences, gates and other means of enclosure.

Development Control matters are the responsibility of the **West Team** who can be contacted on 01494 421517.

Planning Policy matters are the responsibility of the **Policy and Environment Unit** who can be contacted on 01494 421545.