
Conservation Area Character Survey

Medmenham



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.

Within conservation areas there are special controls on some alterations to buildings, their demolition or partial demolition and on works to trees. The Council's Heritage Guidance Note on conservation areas gives further details of the specific controls that apply.

Designation of a conservation area does not preclude the possibility of new development, but such development must be designed positively to enhance the special character of the area.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS SURVEY

The designation of a Conservation Area imposes specific duties on local authorities to formulate and publish proposals to ensure that the special character of the areas are preserved and enhanced.

This conservation area character survey describes the main features of special architectural and historic interest, which justify the designation of Medmenham as a conservation area.

This survey is in accordance with Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and PPG15, complies with the requirements of PPG12, , and contributes to the Council's strategic Aim 4 The Environment. As supplementary planning guidance, it is intended to complement the approved policies for conservation areas in the Council's Wycombe District Local Plan and is consistent with paragraphs 11.36 – 11.39 of the Emerging Wycombe District Local Plan.

This survey was the subject of public consultation prior to adoption as supplementary planning guidance. The views of the consultees were taken into account and in some cases changes were made. A copy of all representations made to the Council during public consultation and Councils response to those representations is available from the District Council Offices.

Planning and Major Projects - 2002



The tower of St. Peter and St. Paul, added in the 15th century

Context

Medmenham lies three miles west of Marlow along the River Thames, just below a sharp break in the Chiltern Hills, in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The village focus is The Church of St. Peter and St. Paul and The Dog and Badger public house along Henley Road, with further buildings stretching to the River Thames to the south, and scattered irregularly to the north.

Cresting the western embankment behind The Dog and Badger is Lodge Farmhouse, easily seen from many viewpoints within the village and beyond, while the eastern embankment is the site of an iron age hill fort, commonly referred to as Bolebec's Castle.

Medmenham was first designated as a conservation area in 1971 and was subject to two boundary revisions, the first in 1988 when it was extended south to include the land adjacent to The River Thames west of Ferry Lane, and a further revision in 1994 which resulted in modern housing at the west side of Ferry Lane being removed from the Conservation Area.

History

The village of Medmenham has a rich and varied history, the extent of which is impossible to cover in this brief document. A history of the village stretching back to

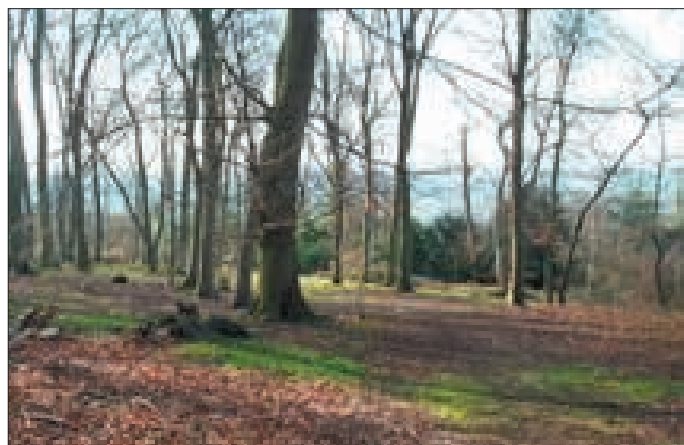
5000 BC can be found in *The Romance of a Chiltern Village*, by Arthur H. Plaisted (1958). Additionally, a number of books have been written on the subject of "The Order of St. Francis", more commonly referred to as the "Hell-Fire Club", which met in Medmenham Abbey from around 1755 to 1763.

The name of the village may be derived from the Anglo-Saxon word 'maed' meaning meadow, and 'ham' meaning dwelling or village, others suggest that the name originates from "medeme" meaning moderate or small. A. Plaisted suggests that Medmenham is so named from the Saxon leader Meda.

The earliest evidence of settlement is the Iron Age hill fort, covering 17 acres at the top of the eastern escarpment behind the village. By 600 AD, Medmenham was the site of an Anglo-Saxon settlement and in 640, the first church was built by Birinus, bishop of Dorchester.

The church was rebuilt in 1140 in stone and flint, the remaining north and south walls dating from this period. Extensive alterations in the 15th century resulted in the addition of the tower and a new vicarage in Ferry Lane. The former vicarage facing the churchyard was then converted for use first by aged people and later into two tenements to which were subsequently added 3 more cottages, two of which have recently been combined. Token rents were paid by the poor to live in these overcrowded cottages resulting in them being referred to as "the barracks". These are now Numbers 3-6 Church Cottages.

The Abbey of St. Mary was founded in the 13th century by Hugh de Bolebec, cousin to William the Conqueror, who came to inherit large portions of Buckinghamshire, including Medmenham. At the Dissolution (1535) it was granted to the Abbey at Bisham and later acquired by various people eventually coming to the family of Duffield, who had possession until 1779. By 1895 The Abbey



The site of the iron age hill fort above the village of Medmenham

had been purchased by Robert Hudson, the soap manufacturer.

The Knights of St. Francis of Wycombe, commonly referred to as “The Hell Fire Club”, used Medmenham Abbey as its meeting place during its heyday from 1755 to 1763. The founder of the order was Sir Francis Dashwood of West Wycombe, and the membership was made up of friends drawn from various other clubs, the House of Commons, and neighbouring landowners. The meetings originally took place in London and at various members homes, but as the club grew, Sir Francis began the search for a more suitable secluded location, settling on Medmenham Abbey which was then owned by his friend Francis Duffield V.

The abbey at that time consisted of a few columns, walls, and statues, and a large house which had been added by the Duffield family. To make the abbey a more suitable meeting place, improvements were carried out by the architect Nicholas Revett and completed in such a way so as to appear a part of the original abbey. An arcaded cloister, chapter house, and ruined tower were added, with frescos by Giuseppe Borgnis from Italy. Inscribed over doors and on fireplace mantels throughout the Abbey is the motto of the Hell Fire Club ‘fay ce que voudras’ or “do as you wish”. The garden was similarly improved with statues and grottos, and in a small inlet off the River Thames was a mooring and where a boat was kept for outings. The club met here until political disagreements precipitated its decline.

While not located within the Conservation Area, nearby Danesfield has had a tremendous impact on the development of the village. It was constructed in 1750 by Dr. John Morton, who also provided financial assistance to the Duffield family allowing them to retain properties in Medmenham. After his death, the property was sold to Robert Scott, who rebuilt Danesfield and purchased the nearby Hambleton Manor. The estate eventually passed to Charles Robert Scott Murray who also purchased Medmenham House and the manorial rights. He reconstructed



Sir Francis Dashwood, founder of the Hell-fire Club, as ‘Il Faquir Dashwood Pasha’, c1745.

States House, built a row of cottages, numbers 1-4 Ferry Lane, and repaired the parish church.

His son eventually sold the estate in the late 1800s; States House, Lodge Farmhouse, Medmenham House and various other houses and land in the village were purchased by Mr Hudson Kearley, later to become Lord Devonport, while Danesfield, Medmenham Abbey, Westfield, Bockmer and Wood End Farms were purchased by Mr. Robert Hudson. During World War II, Danesfield was first used by Colet Court School, evacuated from London in World War II, and was later requisitioned by the Royal Air Force. It is now the Danesfield Hotel and Spa. The cast iron bridge over the A4155 approximately 1 mile to the east of Medmenham and serving as a gateway to the village was built in the mid 19th century to connect Danesfield with the kitchen gardens.

Robert Hudson was responsible for a number of buildings in the area to the designs of Romaine Walker. Those within the conservation area include: Old School Cottage, The Old School, The Old School West, Little States, Hillside, Olmeda and The Gate Cottage, and Ferry Nab

Hudson Kearley restored the Manor House and also built Southlands, Lindum, Charlmead, and Weybrooks, all of which are commonly attributed to Sir Reginald Blomfield. Also at Kearlys bequest, Duffields was built as the village institute adjoining an old caretakers cottage. It was furnished with a snooker table, games room and reading room and was managed by a committee of gardeners



Part of the school complex provided by Robert Hudson



Duffields, the village institute provided by Hudson Kearley, now a residence

until the end of World War I when interest waned and it became a private dwelling.

Medmenham is today much less affected by the activities of the nearby estates and abbey. Modern infilling has taken place along Ferry Lane, and these dwellings, outside of the conservation area, lend a somewhat more suburban feel to the village. The Water Research Centre at the end of Ferry Lane, while screened by trees and shrubs, makes its presence known especially at lunch when employees make their way up Ferry Lane to The Dog and Badger.

Crossing Henley Road to The Dog and Badger however proves to be somewhat perilous as traffic thunders through. Damage to the surrounding buildings from the heavy traffic is evident in the broken roof tiles of The Dog and Badger. Such damage and noise makes the erection of wooden fencing and tall brick walls along the south side of Henley Road understandable, though they detract from the appearance of the village.

Archaeological Interest

Within the conservation area is an iron age hill fort, a scheduled ancient monument in private ownership. The fort encloses 17 acres and consists of a single rampart and



The dog and Badger at the crossroads of the village

ditch, with the original entrance to the north west. There is a path to the south west, leading to the village and the original water source. Also in the area are a number of disused chalk and flint quarries.

As the history of settlement in the area stretches back at least as far as Iron Age, it is likely that there may be archaeological features and deposits not yet discovered in and around the conservation area. Accordingly, where appropriate the Council will attach archaeological conditions to planning permissions, requiring excavation, watching briefs or similar recording procedures.

Essential Characteristics

Medmenham is a small Thames-side village at the base of the Chiltern escarpment. The banks of the escarpment and the generous tree cover provides a sense of enclosure and disguises the true extent of the village from Henley Road.

Much of the earliest remaining development in the village took place intermittently between the 15th and 16th centuries. This development is focused mainly around the Church and The Dog and Badger, both of which are on the crossroads of Henley Road, which runs along the base of the escarpment, and Ferry Lane, the main street of the village leading to the River Thames. The river, to which the Abbey and Lodge Farmhouse is oriented, is largely hidden from the village by the wooded landscape. Other village buildings are oriented along Ferry Lane and Henley Road, with a small group tucked behind the pub in the old quarry. While farms are often located at the bottom or sides of a valley, Lodge Farmhouse is unusually located in a prominent position at the top of the hill, making it a local landmark visible near and wide.

The second major phase of development took place in the late 19th to early 20th centuries, under the direction of Mr. Hudson Kearley and Mr. Robert Hudson. Most of this development took place along Ferry Lane, although



Lodge Farmhouse occupies a prominent position overlooking the village

conflict between Mr. Kearley and Mr. Hudson resulted in the school complex being built in a location somewhat remote from the rest of the village to the north east.

Recent development in the village has closed many of the gaps which previously existed along the north end of Ferry Lane and has subsequently changed the nature of the village from that of a loose knit rural community to more of a suburban enclave. A large gap remains between the North and South conservation areas, providing the only significant remaining views of the Thames Valley and distinguishing the two areas.

Architectural Character and Quality of Buildings

The phases of development of the village are evident in the materials and construction methods used. Earlier vernacular buildings are typically 1½-2 storeys tall with low gabled or half-hipped tile roofs, some having small dormers. They are constructed simply of local materials such as flint, chalk block, timber framing, and red bricks.

Development which took place in the late 19th and early 20th century is characterised by the use of Vernacular Revival, and Tudor, Jacobean or Queen Anne detailing. Those built to the designs of Romaine Walker are distinctive and can easily be identified by their use of local chalk block and brick chimneys with 'v' pilasters and corbeled heads. In general, the buildings have greater massing, are built of chalk, red brick or render with projecting upper storeys, decorative bargeboards and finials, hanging tile, tall decorative chimneys, gabled roofs, and dormers.



PUBLIC BUILDINGS

The Grade II* listed parish **Church of St. Peter and St. Paul** is of flint and chalk block with a tiled roof. It was built in the mid



The Church of St. Peter and St. Paul

12th century but extensively altered in the 15th century when the three stage tower was added. The tower, part roughcast and recently resurfaced, has a embattled parapet. The nave is mid 12th century with late 15th century fenestration, roof, and chancel. All was restored in 19th century when the hammerbeam screen was added to the chancel. The north transept was rebuilt and north vestry added in 1925, although the arched entry dates from the 13th century. A semi-circular chalk arch in the north wall indicates the location of the priest's entrance, filled in the 14th century with brick when the new vicarage was built in Ferry Lane. This arch is now the site of a war memorial. At the south door is a late 19th or early 20th century gabled timber porch. The chancel glass, by Willement, pictures Kynegils, first Christian monarch of Wessex, and Bishop Birinus.

LARGE HOUSES

Grade II* listed **Medmenham Abbey** may incorporate remnants of the 13th century Cistercian Abbey of St. Mary, to which was added in 1595 a large east range and north transept for Sir Francis Duffield. In 1755 Nicholas Revett added a ruined folly tower to the south east corner and a chapter house and arcaded cloister on the east elevation for Sir Francis Dashwood of the Hell Fire Club, who

rented the property from Francis Duffield V. In 1898 a west wing was added by Romaine Walker for Mr. Robert Hudson of Danesfield, during which time the remainder was greatly restored.

The building is of dressed chalk block, with the tower and North wing partly of flint, and upper storeys of part half-timbered with herringbone brick nogging. The roof is of plain tile and chimneys are of brick with “v” pilasters and corbeled heads. In a panel above the door of the two storey gabled porch is inscribed ‘Fay ce que voudras’ the motto of the Hell Fire Club. The windows are irregular, moulded mullion and transom, of chalk or wood. Much of the Abbey is hidden from view by surrounding walls and hedges. Only the roofscape is visible from Ferry Lane and the best view of the abbey is obtained from the banks of the Thames.

The **Lodge Farmhouse** is a grade II* listed 17th century house possibly built as a hunting lodge. It is in an L-plan, with a two storey main range and a small one storey rear wing. It is constructed of flint with narrow brick dressings, wooden casements, a plain tile roof and corbeled chimneys. There are gables on the front and matching blind gables on the rear, all with moulded brick copings and kneelers. Also associated with the Lodge Farmhouse are two listed barns and a stable, mentioned below.

The Grade II listed **Manor House** dating from the mid 15th century, was altered in 17th century. Restoration work carried in 1903 for Hudson Ewbanke Kearley is attributed to Sir Reginald Blomfield. It is a brick building with a jettied upper storey of whitewashed roughcast plaster, some half-timbering and a plain tile roof. It has five bays, the outer two having larger gables and gabled oriel windows to first floor. The four-centred arch door dating from 1903, is located in the second bay. The leaded casements also date from this time.



The Manor House



Picketts Cottage

SMALL COTTAGES
Grade II Listed

Yew Tree Cottage, Picketts Cottage, and Weybrook Cottage is a row of 3 two-storey cottages built in the 16th and 17th centuries. They are timber framed with brick nogging, wood and leaded casements and a plain tile roof.

Abbots Place and Herons Cottage are a former circa 1900 stable block which has been converted to dwellings. It is a brick building in u-plan building of 1½ storeys with single-storey wings.

Olmeda and The Gate Cottage are a pair of estate cottages, formerly the lodge to Medmenham Abbey, built around 1900 by Romaine Walker for Mr. Robert Hudson. In addition to the design characteristics mentioned as common to Hudson’s work, details include a wooden bressumer, ornamental wooden bargeboards, and remains of twisted wooden finials.

1-6 Abbey Cottages are a row of six estate cottages built around 1898 by Romaine Walker for Mr. Robert Hudson. Details are as before, but here the decorative wooden bargeboards and finials remain intact.
