

Thorne Conservation Area Appraisal



South Somerset District Council
2010

THORNE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Introduction

Conservation areas are areas of 'special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty on local authorities to identify appropriate parts of their areas, to designate them as conservation areas and to keep them under review. Historic areas are now extensively recognised for the contribution they make to our cultural inheritance, economic well-being and quality of life. Public support for the conservation and enhancement of areas of architectural and historic interest is well established. By suggesting continuity and stability, such areas provide points of reference in a rapidly changing world: they represent the familiar and cherished local scene. Over 9000 have been designated nationally since they were introduced in 1967 and there are over 80 in South Somerset

The Thorne Coffin Conservation Area was first designated in 1978. The District Council is required by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to define the special interest and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas. Conservation area appraisals contribute to the fulfilment of this requirement.

In order that designation is effective in conserving the special interest, planning decisions must be based on a thorough understanding of the Conservation Area's character. Appraisals are therefore essential tools for the planning process and to manage informed intervention. They will provide a sound basis, defensible on appeal, for the relevant development plan policies and development control decisions and will form the framework for effective management of change. The appraisal should provide the District Council and the local community with a clear idea

of what features and details contribute to the character of the conservation area.

The purpose of carrying out appraisals is to produce strategic documents, which can be used to assess the significance of places and become tools to manage informed intervention. The more clearly the character or special interest of a conservation area is defined, the easier it is to manage without damaging that interest. This will not only provide a sound basis, defensible on appeal, for the development plan policies and development control decisions, but will also form the framework for managing change.

The intention of the appraisals is to provide the Council and local community with a clear idea of what features and details contribute to the character of conservation areas.

The appraisal document follows the content recommended in advice from English Heritage, 'Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' published by English Heritage/ Planning Advisory Service/ DCMS 2006.

The planning policy context

The South Somerset Local Development Framework and the saved policies from the South Somerset Local Plan (Adopted 2006) form the context for the conservation area policies. Additional policy on the protection and management of conservation areas is contained in the national Planning Policy Statement 5 'Planning for the Historic Environment'.

Summary of special interest - the area's key characteristics

- A peaceful secluded hamlet close to the expanding urban area of Yeovil
- High quality hamstone buildings with C17 style predominant

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- Plan form relates to a single lane
- Significant individual trees and hamstone walls
- Dispersed built form in a dominant rural setting
- Pattern of manor house and farm groups still readable



A peaceful secluded hamlet

ASSESSMENT OF THE SPECIAL INTEREST

Location and context

The hamlet of Thorne Coffin is located in open countryside 3-4 miles distance north west of central Yeovil in Brympton Parish. One of several small, historic settlements that fringed the market town, it lies on the liassic dipslope that forms a vale between a low escarpment of the Pennard Sands/Junction Bed and a minor escarpment to the north at Chilthorne Domer. The village is situated at the head of the gentle west-facing valley of the Balls Water stream, and remains just separated from the urban area by the shielding escarpment.

General character and plan form

The village has a scattered linear form related to a single street running north south, a minor lane that dips through the valley that once connected Houndstone and Chilthorne Domer. There is only one other lane; this runs westwards a short distance from below the church to the Old Rectory entrance. The built form is loose with few buildings. Two groupings exist; one in the hollow below the church at the southern end and another north of the stream around Manor Farm on the

rising ground. Between lies only Thorne House set in its grounds.

Landscape setting

The core of the historic settlement lies south of the stream with the church situated elevated above the hollow way that leads down into the hamlet from the south. The setting is open with the land rising gently on three sides and is open to the west so that the village is contained in the hollow below the low escarpments to north and south. This gives it a distinctly private character now enhanced by the closure of the road to through traffic. The open scattered form means the rural surroundings intrude and form prominent parts of the settlement. Many of these fields appear to have been orchards that are now neglected with few surviving trees. Thorne House with its wider gardens extending up the eastward slope of the valley dominates the centre of the village. The adjacent pastureland reaches into the village from the west, the view closed by a line of trees that follow the streamline (The Wilderness Local Wildlife Site). Hedged boundaries and some significant trees contribute: several yews in churchyard, yews with dark conifers along lane frontage of Thorne House, strong mixed tree presence to east side and within Thorne House grounds, ashes, oaks etc along the lane adjacent to village hall and Thorne House gates, close to Thorne Lodge and outside Manor Farm.

Setting of the Conservation Area

The setting is identified in relation to the national and local planning policies in PPS5 'Planning for the Historic Environment' and the South Somerset Local Development Framework. Its extent has been refined by SSDC from the initial work contained in the Historic Environment Assessment of Yeovil Periphery. The setting is mapped at the end of this document.

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Historic development and archaeology

The hamlet has remained largely unchanged for over 150 years; the tithe map of c1840 shows few major differences to the map of today. The road alignment is reputed to have been altered to run further away to the east of the manor' east front in the C18. Very few buildings appear to have been lost or added since that time. Thorne House was rebuilt or substantially altered on the same site, its outbuildings extended in the 1880s, the Rectory was new built on a plot west of the church in the later C19 but the overall form of the village has remained consistent save change to the setting though demise of the orchards that feature prominently in the 1886 map. This shows Manor Farm, Dairy House Farm, Higher



St Andrew's Church

Farm, St Andrew's Church and the Manor as the key constituents and these remain clearly identifiable. The farms have been significant enterprises and display economic success in their C17 characteristics. The population, never large (94 in 1801) has however declined steadily through the last 100 years.

Origins and historic development

The manor was mentioned in 1066 indicating at least Saxon origins for the settlement. In 1087 it was held for the Count of Mortain and became associated with the de Montagues (or Montacutes). It acquired the Coffin suffix from the Coffin family who held

the manor in the 13th and 14th centuries. A second manor known as Thorn Prior existed in the parish, mentioned in 1086, which became part of the endowment of Montacute priory and seems to have remained associated until the Dissolution. The estates seem to have had a complex history of changing ownerships, leases and fragmentation until 1785 when the whole was known as Thorn Prior and formed part of the Napper estate of Tintinhull.

The manor-house of Thorne Prior is mentioned in 1635 as being divided and in 1740 when alterations or rebuilding took place and it was in single occupancy. In 1785 it is described as 'a good dwelling house' with pleasure grounds 'in the modern taste'. The present house, particularly the frontages to south and west, date from the major rebuild of 1882 by Sir T G Jackson, an leading architect of the day, for Judge Hooper, lord of the manor (died 1895)

Three significant farmsteads and the manor made up the settlement in the 1880s. The farmhouses still exist but have ceased their original function in the cases of Higher Farm (now Brook House) and Dairy House Farm (now Brambley and Dairy House Cottages). There has been a loss of subsidiary farm buildings and the survivors at Manor Farm are falling into neglect.



Bramley Cottage

Archaeology and monuments

There are no scheduled monuments within the designated area although a scheduled Roman villa site exists on the southern side of the Balls Water valley half a mile west (Lufton Roman Villa Scheduled Site 348 HER ref.

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53643), a possible length of roman road (53635) and an early medieval clapper bridge crosses the stream north west of the village (55458). A short distance away from the village at Thorne Cross a (listed) guide stone (17183) and early C20 Somerset cast iron direction signpost and east of this, a listed parish boundary marker stone, The Houndstone, partly absorbed by the adjacent tree (56148). St Andrew's Church, probably founded c1300 by Ellis Coffin, is grade II* listed. The churchyard contains two listed table tombs.

SPATIAL ANALYSIS

Character and interrelationship of spaces

Low density, rural in character, the key to the spatial arrangement of the settlement is the linear form with the three building groups, the Church group, the Manor and the Manor Farm group strung along the gentle curve of the N-S lane. Openings into green space and rising ground either side are also important to the setting.



View southwards to the church

Key views and vistas in and out

Views onto the hamlet from the surroundings are limited and only on the escarpment crests north and south is the settlement visible. Key views include

- View of the church from the lane to the west of Thorne House facing south

- On the approach from the south past the church the view onto the Brambley Cottage group.

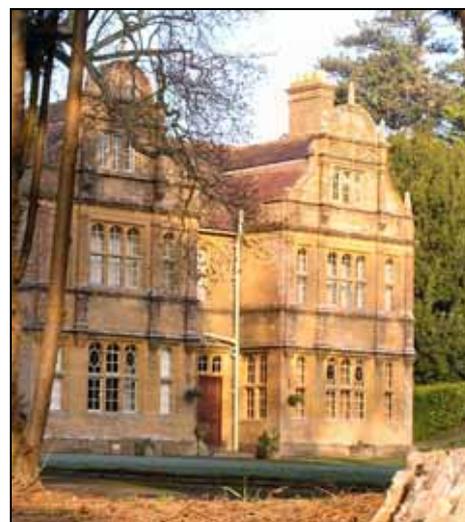


Dairy House Cottage

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Definition of character

Secluded and peaceful, the built form is sporadic and organic in character comprising mainly standalone building groups of good quality and vernacular character, arranged sequentially north of the church. The Church group forms the first with the churchyard wall, Brambley Cottage, Dairy House Cottage, Yeomans and Thorne Lodge, on the western side of the lane, the only built frontage in the village, defining the edge of the street. Brook House and Manley House complete the group on the east side of the lane.



Thorne House

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The second key group, the Manor Farm group rise up the north slope with gables to the lane facing south over the centre of the settlement which takes the form of two spaces: Thorne House and its gardens enclosed by trees and the open low-lying pasture west of the lane. Closure of the road north to traffic has imposed a quietness and a sense of some isolation on the hamlet.

Activity, uses, influences on form

Agriculture is the primary historic activity and its prosperity has had a strong influence on built form and character. Current activities/uses are residential and agricultural. Thorne House is now in conference/training use.

Qualities of buildings and contribution to area

Around half of the buildings within the Conservation Area are listed. The buildings are characterised by the consistent high quality Hamstone vernacular of the (former) farmhouses. Their scale is typically low and form long fronted with narrow roof span. Typical details include mullioned windows, some string-courses, water tabling, brick chimney stacks for example **Brambley and Dairy House Cottages**. In contrast to this are **Thorne House**, in a grand neo-Jacobean style that was pioneered by Jackson and Norman Shaw in the 1880s as a specifically English style for large buildings and **The Rectory**; tall, upright, Victorian and, unique to the village, in blue-grey Lias stone.

The buildings of the village, being few, define its character as individuals rather than a groups and street frontages.

St Andrew's Church is a key building in terms of dominant location and level of land – with high retaining walls, it stands over buildings around it.



St Andrew's Church elevated above the road



Manor Farmhouse



Thorne Lodge

Prominent too is **Manor Farmhouse** with the good group of farm buildings around their yard below.

Unlisted buildings

The significant unlisted buildings include **Thorne Lodge** and **Thorne Cottage** on the northern ridge. Listed by association with Thorne House is

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the stables court with its fine clock turret.



Stables clock turret

Local prevalent building materials

Although the immediately local stone is from the Junction Bed, a pale earthy and shelly Upper Lias limestone only suitable for rubble walling, this is only evident here and there in less prominent locations (eg rear of Manor Farm house). The predominant building material is high quality Ham Hill stone seen in the buildings and boundary walls almost universally throughout the hamlet both as near ashlar faced rubble at Brambley and



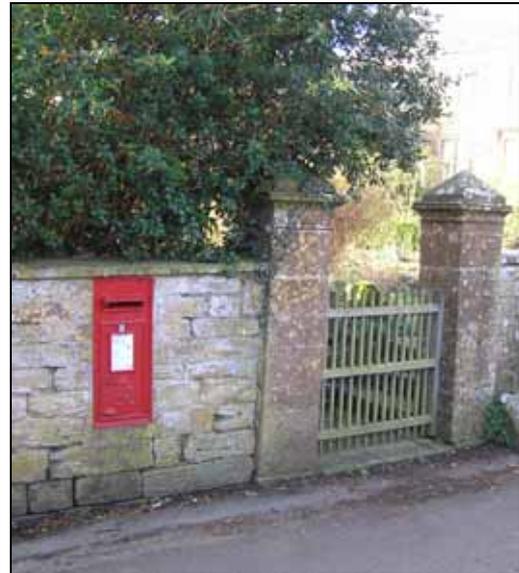
Ham stone ashlar

Dairy House Cottages and Thorne Lodge or rougher rubble (The Cottage).

Hamstone water tabling is prevalently featured. Only the Old Rectory is out of context in the use of Lias and this with Hamstone dressings. Thorne House stables and kitchen garden walls introduce red brick, but soft enough to tone with the hamstone. Roofs are slate and clay tile, double roman and plain.

Local details

The general use of hamstone throughout for buildings and walls creates visual consistency and cohesion. High quality stone boundary walls and gate piers are characteristic of the lane frontage, and give good enclosure. A long length of herringbone walling, unfortunately poorly repaired in contrasting coursed masonry in places, defines the open ground west of Thorne House while



the latter's grounds are enclosed with a good low wall with cock and hen coping. Manor Farm yard is bounded with a distinct and unusual fence of massive lias slabs while the setting of the church is characterised by substantial 3m stone retaining walls and accessed via a flight of hamstone steps.

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Wall mounted GR post box outside Manor Farmhouse Thorne House.

Green spaces

The churchyard is the only publicly accessible green space and this is small, enclosed and intimate. The proximity of pastureland and former orchard dividing up the settlement however provides a green and rural atmosphere.



Brook House



Somerset direction signpost

Negative factors

Few and minor, confined to some modern building alterations, two intrusive garage buildings near the church and the utilitarian gate across the lane at the north end.

Problems, pressures, capacity for change

The urban area of Yeovil is close to encroaching upon the setting of the village. Thorne Lane on the ridge to the south defines this extant but future development will run north of this line and although woodland will be

established as a buffer, the eastern slopes of the village are vulnerable to the intrusive proximity of development. There is little capacity for change without adverse impact upon the secluded character



Herringbone pattern wall

General condition

The condition of the area is good but the farm buildings at Manor Farm (listed GII) are not in full use and are falling into decay. The interesting cider house opposite Manor Cottages is similarly disused.

References and further reading

Victoria County History of the County of Somerset Volume III – UCL Institute of Historical Research, ed. R Dunning 1978

Somerset: The complete guide - Robin Bush 1994

86th List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest 1987

The Buildings of England -South and West Somerset – N. Pevsner 1958

Somerset Historic Environment Record

Guidance on conservation area appraisals – English Heritage 2006

Planning Policy Statement 5 Planning for the Historic Environment 2010

Historic Environment Assessment of Yeovil Periphery – Chris Blandford Associates 2010

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Thorne c.1840

Thorne Coffin Conservation Area

Showing the setting of Conservation Area and the boundary of Conservation Area

