

Whitsbury Conservation Area



This attractive linear village forms part of the group of villages on the edge of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The village street with its hedges and low walls winds its way up to the wooded slopes of the Iron Age hill fort, a scheduled ancient monument. Perched above the straggling village of thatched timber-framed cottages and farms is the ancient stone and brick church of St Leonard with the old rectory alongside. Glebe House is a fine gentleman's residence dating from the 18th century in its small park. Carpenter's and Nippard's are good examples of 18th century brick farmhouses almost certainly encasing much earlier buildings while the turn of the century is represented by the typical red brick chapel and village hall. In spite of some modern development which has taken place just outside the conservation area the streetscene has changed little in the last hundred years or so.

The surrounding chalklands have been settled since earliest times. Flint implements dating from the Mesolithic period have been found indicating that the area was a focus for activity. Roman pottery and iron objects have also been found and some of these are now in Salisbury Museum. The hill fort dominates the top end of the village and it is easy to understand why its builders chose this site when you stand up on the footpaths and look at the views which extend for miles in all directions. The manor belonged to the kings of England until the time of Henry I who granted it to the monastery of Reading. After the dissolution of the monasteries it moved into private hands and in 1623 it was bought by Sir John Cooper of Rockbourne. The old manor house has disappeared although its name lives on in the buildings of the racing stables situated on the fringe of the western hill fort ramparts. A Church of England elementary school for 60 scholars was built by Edward Edwards in 1871. A memorial in the church commemorates his death in 1903. No trace remains of the school which has long since been demolished.

These are key features in the conservation area:

- **Whitsbury Castle Ditches** is a multivallate hill fort and would have been a very impressive sight when first constructed. It has three banks and two ditches which enclose an area of about 6.5 hectares (16 acres). The banks and ditches are now overgrown with woodland while the interior is pasture. Flint finds from the Mesolithic period include a scraper and a blade. Roman pottery from the 1st to the 4th centuries AD has been found in gravel overlying the Iron Age occupation suggesting Roman and post-Roman occupation of

this Iron Age fort. There are impressive views to the north and west from the public footpath around the outside of the banks.

- The exact date of the foundation of **St Leonards Church** - Grade II - is not known. However it formed part of the endowment of the monastery at Reading founded by Henry I and he died in 1119. The 18th century tower was rebuilt in 1878. In the chancel there are 19th century memorials to the Templeman and Purvis families. The south side of the churchyard is dominated by a very fine yew tree which is probably at least 200 years old and may be up to about 300 years.
- The **village street scene** has changed remarkably little over the last hundred years. Whitsbury is not on a through route and so only attracts local traffic and visitors. The narrow lane wends its way up the hill past cottages parallel and at right angles to it. The remaining agricultural buildings now have corrugated iron roofs, a cheap and easily fixed replacement introduced in the 19th century; they were probably once thatched.
- Like all the villages around here **the footpath system links the street with the fields behind the dwellings**. The narrow steep path winds up from Carpenter's Farm past the parkland grounds of Glebe House and suddenly comes out of the woodland into the brightness of the churchyard.

These are some of the things that make Whitsbury special - they need to be looked after:

- **History**
The relationship between the church and the settlement with its system of footpaths.
- **Buildings**
The church and the old rectory form an important group.
The brick houses of Carpenter's Farm and Nippard's Farm.
The Manor House group of house and farm buildings of brick and timber frames with weather-boarding.
Small cottages in English bond brickwork fronting or replacing timber frames with simple thatched roofs.
Weather-boarded and corrugated iron agricultural buildings.
- **Archaeology**
Whitsbury Castle Ditches is a Scheduled Ancient Monument.
Evidence of occupation from the Mesolithic and Roman periods have been found.
- **Landscape/Townscape**
The winding narrow village street with hedges.
The cast iron railings in front of Nippards.
The cottages north of Carpenter's Farm form an important tight-knit group.
Cottages to the west are placed at right angles and those to the east parallel to the street.
- **Setting**
Views down onto the village from the churchyard.
Views north and west from Castle Ditches.

