Winchester The Square and Great Minster Street - Introduction



Aerial photo of Winchester and Jewry Street

The cover photograph shows a view of the city looking West, where Winchester Cathedral and Peninsular Barracks (top centre) are prominent.

This is a description of the architecture of buildings in The Square and Great Minster Street in Winchester produced by the Trust in 1985. You can read the individual sections on the Web, see below.

Publications

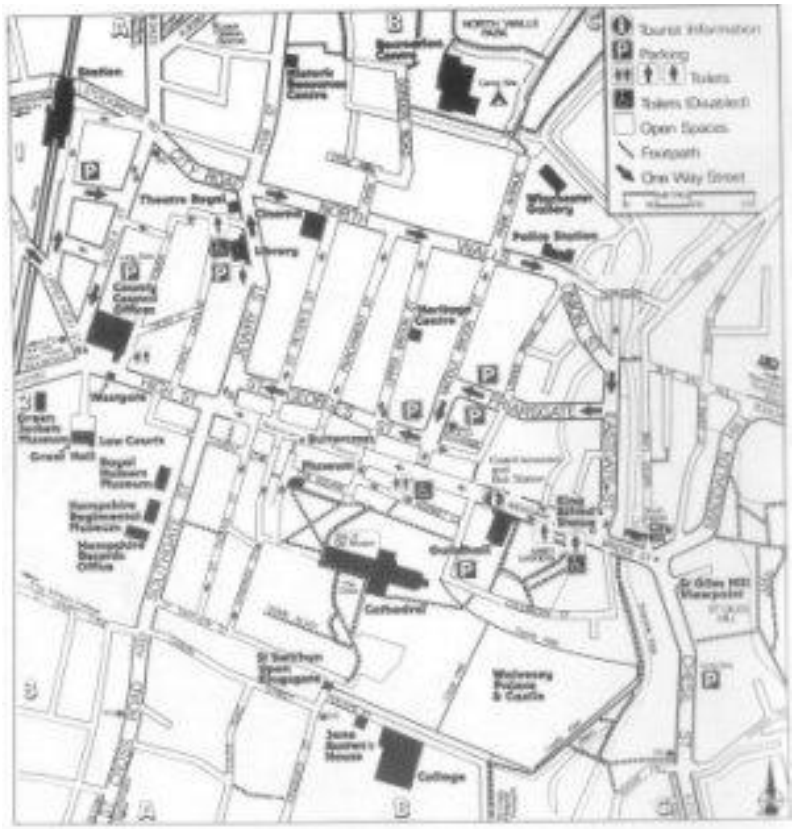
This is the fifth in our ‘Street’ series printed in 1988 by Sarsen Press, Winchester. Previous publications from Winchester bookshops and the Heritage Centre include:

1976 The High Street by Keith Walker RIBA and Mrs B. Carpenter Turner BA JP

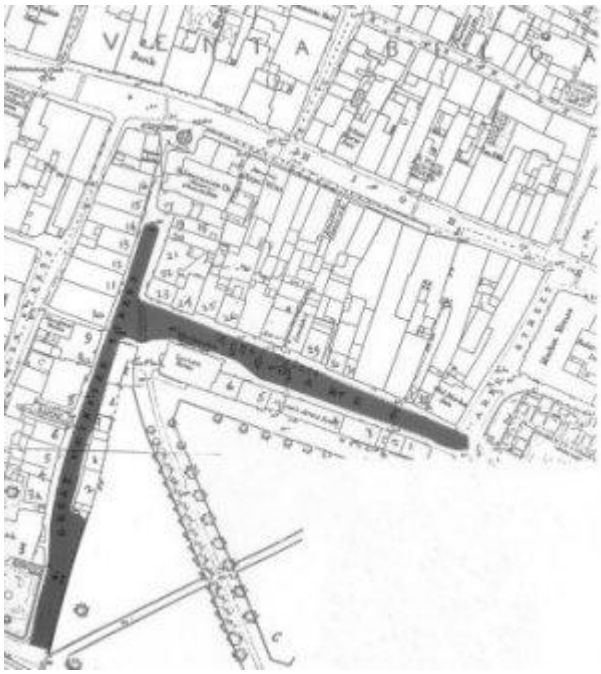
1984 Jewry Street by F. Chippindale RIBA

1985 The Square and Great Minster Street by F. Chippindale RIBA

1986 From Cathedral to Castle by F. Chippindale RIBA and Keith Leaman RIBA



The Square & Great Minster Street



Winchester Town Map

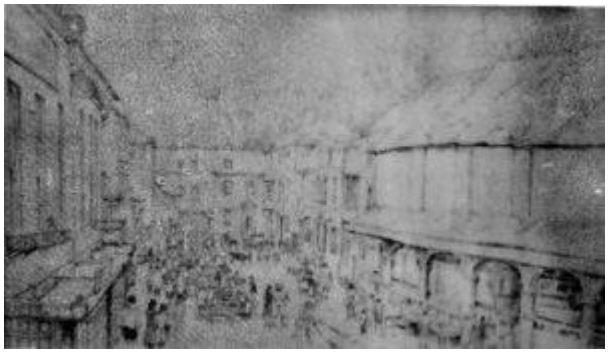
Winchester The Square and Great Minster Street - Description Part 1



This was the original location of a palace for Charles II designed by Sir Christopher Wren to occupy the site of Winchester Castle demolished after the Civil War on the orders of Oliver Cromwell.

The avenue of lime trees, seen as a diagonal line across the Cathedral Green, was planted in the second half of the eighteenth century. This photograph shows these trees being felled in 1985, as they were considered to be a danger to the public. The new avenue consists of 28 limes. All this space in mediaeval times was a graveyard much in use during the plague of 1349 when three quarters of the population of Winchester died.

The drawing of the Square in 1825 is a reminder that this area was part of the old Roman Forum, later included within the Conqueror's palace after 1066. The market hall, the site of the present museum, had a frontage of stone pillars and arches with massive oak supports inside. In 1760 the ten years' lease for the butchers' market was forty shillings a year plus one shilling chicken money (the Mayor's delicacy). Two years later the surrounding area was paved and a pump fixed to cleanse the shambles twice a week.



The meat market hall had cattle stalls and slaughtering facilities on the ground floor whilst a large room for hire on the first floor was used by touring theatre companies. A wide variety of entertainment was provided, so much so that it was considered Winchester College boys might be corrupted. Gallery tickets cost one shilling and pit tickets two shillings, whilst the local nobility paid two guineas for a box for the season. This theatre closed in 1784 and a new one in Jewry Street built at a cost of £1,000 opened in 1785.



The Mechanics Institute was established in 1835 after the theatre had closed, through it was still above the butchers' market until 1855. The Corporation granted a lease for the whole building and the ground floor was then used as a reading room. By 1898 the end of the lease was near, still at the original figure of £8 per year, the lessees being the Winchester Technical Institute which had spent £700-£800 to improve the property.

The above photograph is of the present museum built in 1902 on the site of the Mechanics Institute and Reading Room, a Tudoresque design fashionable in the late nineteenth century but not in keeping with other buildings in the street. The immediate space in front had, in earlier days, a town `cayge' and a pillory where 'the Beadle could wield his scourge'. The kerb was re-aligned in 1976 and the present inelegant plant-holders and the popular wooden seat were added in 1980.



The buildings in the background show the site of the parsonage of St Lawrence, now the Eclipse Inn. It probably ceased being used by the Church early in the 1850s and there were beer retailers here from at least 1875. In 1925, a year after the name Eclipse Inn was used (in competition with the Sun Inn at No. 10), the cement covering was removed to expose much of the sixteenth century timber framing seen today both internally and externally. The electric reproduction gas lamps were adopted when the street lighting was re-organised in 1980.



The 15th century framed interior of the bookshop at No. 19 is shown here, used by the Gilbert family since 1904. It was threatened with demolition in 1972 but careful and expensive restoration has renewed both inside and outside.

The photograph of the Square looks north into the cul-de-sac, resurfaced with concrete block paving in 1980. The term 'dumb street' is sometimes used and a part of the Cathedral Close is referred to as Dumb or Dome Alley.

The tower of the church of St Lawrence in the Square can be seen above the shops. It was built on the site of the Savoy Chapel of the Palace of William the Conqueror which was demolished circa 1150. The church was rebuilt in 1449-50 during the time when Henry VI held Parliament in the Great Hall of Winchester Castle, and in Cromwell's time was used as a school. All the tower bells, except one dated 1621, have been removed. The interior is unusual with a double king post roof truss dated 1674. The church was re-dedicated in June 1980 after considerable fire damage in 1978.

Winchester The Square and Great Minster Street - Description Part 2



This photograph is of David Frost's premises at No. 15, in business from 1864 as jeweller, optician and watchmaker. In addition to making 'jewellery' to order, gilding, electro-plating and engraving was available as were 'clocks wound by the year'. F.D. Frost was a nationally famous cyclist in the 1890s. His Penny Farthing cycle and several silver cups were given to the.city by Mrs F.D. Frost. The house above the shop and also No. 16 (John Davy), shows an example of mathematical tiling. These tiles were nailed to timber framing so that the raised band at the bottom represented brick sizes. In addition to being a fire deterrent, the tiles would evade the brick tax (at one time 2/6d per 1000 bricks).



The view from the cul-de-sac along Great Minster Street shows the traditional features which make up the charm of this Winchester street. In addition to a slight deviation of line, there is on the west side an unbroken continuity of buildings of considerable variety terminated by a formal eighteenth century house. Although in mediaeval times there were also buildings on the east side, only two remain, so that the Cathedral Green is seen as a welcome open space and is freely used by the public.

No. 10 (Laura Ashley) was probably a timber framed inn with hand made roof tiles and tile hung side wall. The earliest reference to the inn is a city lease dated 1738. It seems to have ceased business in 1859 and is not shown in the 1871 map (inside back cover). The frontage to the Square adds a note of fashionable quality as well as being a fire protection measure. The rear view below shows the old timber framing to the upper floors, whilst at street level a traffic warden fixes a notice of a £10 fine for wrongful parking.

Houses with gables fronting the King's highway were liable for rent, nominally paid to the King. Some were quite plain, cement rendered as No. 7 or covered with decorative tiling as No. 9, and this gable has a typical Victorian barge board finish to the tile edging. The Vine Inn, altered internally in 1984, has a good console type fanlight door to the house. The gothic motif of the window design, contrasting with this door, seems in accord with the old vine creeping casually over the facade. The brick walling underneath has bricks only 6 ins x 2 ins, surely the smallest in the street. In 1899 this property at No. 8 was known as Welch's Wine Stores, holding a six days full licence, and was auctioned when John A. Welch retired. It was

withdrawn as the highest bid of £4,400 was insufficient. There had been only one change of owner in the previous 62 years and the sale included stabling in Little Minster Street, together with coach house and domestic accommodation.



The Church of England Young Men's Christian Association moved into No. 7 in 1859. It was used as a Reading Room and library, also for meetings, and in 1985 was converted from a private dwelling into three shops, at a selling price of about £150,000. The door and window details of Nos. 5 and 6 illustrate how easily the quality of design can be eroded.

Great Minster Street dates from the mid eighteenth century and the view from the south is more formal than from the Square. This part of the street was made one way for traffic in 1976. No. 3, dated 1787, was at one time a bank. The garden wall is typical, comprising local flint with bonding stones, brick courses for additional stiffness and brick protective capping. This house shows another familiar Winchester detail of blue brick headers in walling of Flemish bond with a modillion cornice. The classical doorcase has Tuscan columns and open moulded pediment, following textbook rules, as does the remainder of the frontage. The overall frontage, based on this classic formula, has its length twice the height of the front wall, though uncontrolled growth of the creeping plants upsets the subtle proportions of this attractive house.



In this photograph, taken from near the original mediaeval entrance to the cathedral churchyard, can also be seen Nos. 1 and 2 (across from No. 3) dated 1725 and leased then from the corporation for one shilling a year. These houses, one room deep, are known as Constabulary buildings, being a reminder that the thirteenth century rents were paid to the Constable of the Castle. Near the gable end of No. 2 is a street lamp which is probably unique. Whilst using North Sea gas it also incorporates a natural air supply from the town's sewers so providing a continuous light.

All these properties have two traditional features which contribute greatly to the special character of these old streets, in addition to the variety of dormer windows in the roof. Chimney stacks are retained, even when not essential, and their vertical emphasis provides a broken silhouette in keeping with the varied eaves line.

The second feature is the oriel window, a projecting window clear of the pavement underneath. The cantilever type, seen at No. 4 is recent (1937) though the smaller one at No. 22 is older. The bow fronted one at No. 9 is typical with sliding sashes and decorative lead flashing.

Winchester The Square and Great Minster Street - Listed Buildings

Under the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 the Secretary of State for the environment has a duty to compile lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. Buildings are classified in grades according to their relative importance:

Grade I Buildings of Outstanding Interest

Grade II Buildings of Special Interest of which particularly important ones are graded II*



This view of the Square in 1969 shows the north side of the Museum with what was the dispensary adjoining. The plaque near the rear corner of the Museum refers to the execution in 1685 of Lady Alice Lisle, age 68, from Ringwood. She had sheltered dispossessed religious ministers and the Government, after Monmouth's rebellion of 1685 considered such non-conformists as political traitors. Lady Lisle had a public trial in the Great Hall, under Judge Jeffries, and was sentenced to be burnt at the stake. An appeal to the new King James resulted in a remittal to being hanged in the roadway. Her last few days would probably have been in an upper room of the parsonage opposite.



Nos. 5 and 6 on the site of the old corn Market combined with two houses to form the Winchester Provident Dispensary in 1875 as the outcome of a public meeting in the Guildhall. It was financed by charitable donations and monthly subscriptions from members. A married couple paid two shillings monthly plus two pence a child, those earning less than 25 shillings a week paid one shilling (this in 1939) anthe upper wage limit was £3.10/- a week. The 1984 equivalent of 25 shillings weekly wage is about £25. Today's prescription charges are £2.00, with exemptions for pensioners and other categories, compared with 2/6d in 1968 - 20 years after the inauguration of a free health service. Membership in 1876 was 131, in 1901 it was 1,823 (when the population was 21,000) and at the close there were 615 members. Because of reduced membership and rumours of the new health bill in 1948, all the drugs were sold to the hospital for £35 in 1947 and dispensing was done by Boots the chemist starting in 1946. The building was restored in 1983 and is typical of the period when cement was used to imitate stone quoins and voussoirs over windows.

No. 4 is the site of the Nelson Arms Inn (circa 1840). It had an innkeeper, Andrew Holdaway, who had a lease on the tolls of fish, meat and poultry. This was the site in the 1920s of a clinic for child welfare including 'maternity, ear nose throat and skin diseases, teeth and visual defects'.

The photograph above is the rear of No. 3 the Square, a well proportioned frontage to the Cathedral Green with a painted mark of 1772 and other later dates. This is an early example of sash windows showing thick glazing bars, the continuous vertical being wide enough to take an unmitred horizontal bar each side.



The old Market Inn of the 1870s was probably the same as an earlier one known as the Three Horse Shoes. The inn was substantially altered in 1930 by the architects Chancellor and Sawyer, the 1905 photograph above showing a simple eaves finish and a splendid sign. The cut off corner at pavement level with a squared off upper floor is a typical Winchester feature in older buildings.

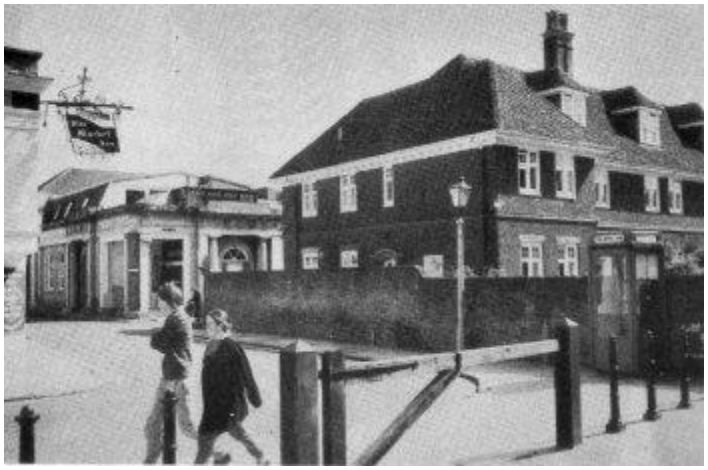
The photograph below, taken in 1985, shows the decorative tiled gable at No. 32A, the owner specialising in clocks and not following the example of Mr D. Frost and Son at No. 15 as clock maker, optician and jeweller from 1864-1939.



This dominant gable building shows a noticeable change in scale between adjacent buildings and is another common element in Winchester streets. In the foreground the early 1970s light alloy collapsible Maclaren 'buggy' is now a popular alternative to the more cumbersome ‘pram’.

The five inns at one time in the Square suggest how busy the Market area must have been. The Lamb Inn at No. 28 existed in 1762 and probably remained until about

1870. In those days there would have been a wide range of specialised shops including umbrella repairer, fishmonger, saddler, fishing tackle, butcher and coffee shop, each probably with its individually designed sign, as at Chalkley's No. 23 on p.2. The Vine and the Market Inn still have attractive hanging signs. (Shop owners should use this positive asset to the street scene, more attractive than the standard shop fascia too often with strident colours.)



The rear elevations of premises fronting the High Street are mundane by comparison with the remainder of the street. The symmetrical frontage built in 1933 seems ill at ease, the large span opening with a concrete lintel being out of keeping with the local brick idiom. Nos. 40 and 31 are due for changes as the lease has expired.

The view of part of Morley College, designed by John Colson in 1880, is on the site of a 1673 college intended for ten poor clergy widows. This nineteenth century replacement should have complied with fire regulations requiring dividing party walls to rise clear of the roof, similar to the St John's Hospital almshouses on the north side of the Broadway. The Square would have been improved if part of this building had occupied the fourth side.

The building in the background is the former Market Hall built in 1857 when the street was widened. In the nineteenth century the earlier architectural styles of classic Greek, Roman and of the mediaeval period were revived to suit the fashion of the time. In this building the features are recognisable as Greek Doric but considerable licence has been taken by introducing round arch arcades, later filled in with glazing.

The drawing below shows the proposed rebuilding of Nos. 4-8 Market Street alongside the Market Inn. The centre of Winchester is a conservation area and many buildings are officially listed, being of special architectural or historic interest. In this location the developers (United Biscuits Pension Trustees Ltd) have to meet the current planning, safety and health requirements as well as the aesthetic issues identified with this sensitive area of the town. The architects are Plincke, Leaman and Browning.



panoramic view