

Shapwick Village Design Statement



building on Shapwick's Heritage

Cover photograph: St Mary's Church and crossroads by R Brindley
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Shapwick

Village Design Statement

"We, Shapwick People, care passionately about our village"



Written by the Shapwick Village Design Group
on behalf of the Parish Council
and endorsed by the villagers

1999

Index

	Page
Figures in Text	1
Foreword by Prof. M A Aston	2
Introduction	3
Historic and Economic Perspective	4
Geographic and Landscape Setting	6
Settlement Pattern Character	8
Map of Shapwick Village 1999	10
Buildings	12
Highways, Traffic and Services	18
Acknowledgements	20
References	21
Map of Shapwick Village in the 17th Century	22

Figures in text

		Page
Fig. 1	<i>New House</i> , built in 1998 in School Lane, blends in with older dwellings	3
Fig. 2	<i>Manor Farm</i>	4
Fig. 3	<i>Shapwick House</i> from the south west	5
Fig. 4	<i>St Mary's Church</i>	6
Fig. 5	<i>Forsters</i>	7
Fig. 6	Pollarded willows	7
Fig. 7	Glastonbury Tor from Station Road	8
Fig. 8	High Lane looking east	9
Fig. 9	View north west from Station Road	9
Fig. 10	Station Road cottages with the flat top of the churchyard wall in the foreground	12
Fig. 11	<i>Gateway, Home Farm</i>	13
Fig. 12	Gable	13
Fig. 13	Stone chimney	13
Fig. 14	Stone boundary wall with stones designed to protect the wall from cart wheels	14
Fig. 15	Flat arch with wedge shaped stone voussoirs	15
Fig. 16	Wooden lintel	15
Fig. 17	Typical farmhouse doorway with segmental stone arch	15
Fig. 18	Wall cappings	15
Fig. 19	Dovecote at <i>Shapwick Manor</i>	16
Fig. 20	<i>Forsters</i>	17
Fig. 21	Station Road looking north	18
Fig. 22	High Lane looking west	19
Fig. 23	Cottages in Church Road	19
Fig. 24	Clock on the stable block, <i>Shapwick Manor</i>	20
Fig. 25	Cottages in Northbrook Road	21

Foreword

Recent research on medieval settlement development in Europe suggests that villages are late-comers to the landscape - probably 10th to 12th Century in origin and are associated with the arrival of large, open, common fields. I came to Shapwick ten years ago to test this idea for the village. Shapwick is now internationally known amongst archaeologists and historians and has probably been the subject of more intensive research than almost any other village in Europe.

It has a most unusual geometrical layout, possibly unique to this part of the country, with its two parallel roads running N-S, connected by a series of cross lanes to produce a ladder-like pattern of rectangular plots. It was partly this layout, together with the availability of its extensive documented sources, which attracted me to Shapwick to test the hypothesis that the present village and medieval field system was planned in the late Saxon period as a replacement for the earlier pattern of scattered farmsteads and their individual fields.

Over the last ten years this 'Shapwick Project' has resulted in the most extensive archaeological study of a whole village undertaken in the country. A wealth of evidence has been produced by documentary research, archaeological fieldwork and excavations, buildings recording, geophysical and geochemical surveys, and other methods.

Although work on the Project will end soon there is scope for much more to be done in the village, based on what has been learnt and the foundations laid already. The parts of the village at present designated as a Conservation Area, which seeks to protect areas of archaeological and historical importance are, in the light of our results, woefully inadequate and these boundaries need to be re-drawn to reflect the results of the Project and to protect areas and features of interest in the parish.

I commend the work of the Design Group in drawing attention to the history of the village and recognising the importance of conserving the evidence of the past during any expansion, whilst at the same time retaining Shapwick's unique character.

Professor MA Aston,
University of Bristol

1 Introduction

The Village Design Statement describes Shapwick as it is today, and highlights the qualities valued by its residents. Its aim is to ensure that further development and change will contribute positively to the future of Shapwick and protect and enhance its special nature.

Change is brought about not only by large developments but also by the smaller day-to-day adjustments to homes and gardens, open spaces, paths and hedges, which alter the look and feel of the whole village.

Villagers were stimulated by the Countryside Commission's pack and video (CCP 501), *Village Design, making local character count in new development*, to produce a Village Design Statement for Shapwick.

The Village Design Statement was officially adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by Sedgemoor District Council on 28 April 1999, for reference in connection with design matters in the Parish of Shapwick. The Parish and District Councils will use the Village Design Statement when planning applications are being assessed, but its most important function will be to provide an appreciation of local context and thereby influence the building design process from the outset.



Fig. 1 *New House*, built in 1998 in School Lane; blends in with older dwellings

2 Historic and Economic Perspective

An important village in feudal times, the parish has much deeper roots as is demonstrated by the Sweet Track (circa 3300 BC), Iron Age and Roman remains. The Shapwick Project is currently a ten year archaeological survey by Professor Mick Aston's Bristol University team to determine how and when this English village began. (see *Current Archaeology* no. 151).

Prior to World War II Shapwick was largely a self contained farming parish controlled by two manorial estates with tied cottages. It had a blacksmith, steam powered mill, wheelwright, cider orchards, abattoir and bakery. In the recent past it had a village school, a Post Office and shop, a joinery workshop with thirty eight employees, and was involved in peat extraction for fuel and no-soil compost.

The village today is mainly residential with people of many backgrounds, professions and skills either working from home, commuting some distance to work or retired. Some people are still employed within the parish on the six remaining farms, or at Shapwick House Hotel and Shapwick School (a private school for dyslexic children which employs 15 villagers out of a total of 40 employees).

Tourism will offer interesting future prospects as the Somerset Levels and Moors continue to be increasingly ecologically important. The no. 3 National and other cycle routes will also have an impact.



Fig. 2 Manor Farm

2 Historic and Economic Perspective

Historic and Economic guidelines:

- 2.1 The special historic sites and buildings which have been highlighted by Professor Mick Aston's archaeological survey need to be protected. (*The Shapwick Project*, reports 1-8)
- 2.2 The appropriate economic development of new and existing businesses is welcomed e.g. Farming, Shapwick House Hotel, Shapwick School, Software & Information Technology
- 2.3 The re-establishment of a Village Shop would be encouraged.
- 2.4 The establishment of a Village Pub would be encouraged.
- 2.5 Ecological and associated economic development of the Somerset Levels & Moors will be encouraged in consultation with the Levels & Moors Partnership (LAMP).



Fig. 3 *Shapwick House* from the south west

3 Geographic and Landscape Setting

Shapwick is situated between Bridgwater and Glastonbury just to the north of the A39 road. One half of the parish containing the village lies on the gentle northern slope of the blue lias Polden Hills and the other half on the southern edge of the Somerset Levels.

Travel along the A39 from Glastonbury and turn off to Shapwick. Come up over the brow of the Polden Hills and feast your eyes on the panoramic vista spread out before you. From Burnham-on-Sea on the Bristol Channel, Brent Knoll and the Levels to Glastonbury Tor with the cave-ridden Mendip Hills as a backdrop. At the foot of the hill the imposing square stone tower of St Mary's Church is surrounded by its magnificent cedar trees and the lightly wooded village. Red tile and blue slate roofed grey stone buildings nestle and blend into the landscape. A tufa stream flows from the spring line through the village in a small valley and runs out to the peat moors.

Because of the compact nature of the village and its feudal history, there has been little fringe development. Homes retain a particularly close contact with the surrounding countryside making it almost unique amongst its neighbours, its compact N-S alignment contrasting with the E-W development of other Polden villages.

The Levels and Moors to the north are a wonderful haven for wildlife and form part of a Ramsar site (a site designated by the UK Government under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially for waterfowl, signed at Ramsar, Iran, in 1971) due to the alkaline sedge moor resulting from water leaching minerals out of the limestone hills. A large section of the Avalon Marshes Reserve is contained within the parish boundary. Since the impact of Dutch elm disease changed so radically the hedgerows of Somerset, the existence of woodland around the village and farms e.g. Loxley Wood, Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve, and the pines on the Nidons, becomes doubly important not only aesthetically but also for wildlife.



Fig. 4 *St Mary's Church*

3 Geographic and Landscape Setting

Landscape guidelines:

3.1 The compact nature of the village resulting in its close contact with the countryside should be retained.

3.2 Planting of indigenous trees in the village is encouraged to ensure a lightly wooded effect.



Fig. 5 Forsters

3.3 The internationally renowned wetland and Ramsar site of the Levels and Moors, together with woodland and hedgerow habitats, should be considered before any development is allowed in this ecologically important area.



Fig. 6 Pollarded willows

4 Settlement Pattern Character

Shapwick has a distinctive long narrow layout, being contained within two boundary roads running north and south, joined by cross lanes, to give a ladder-like pattern of inhabited rectangles. It is thought that, centuries ago, all the farmsteads scattered around the parish were deliberately brought together near the Church and Manor as a planned village, thus clearing all the land to the east and west to be shared out for strip farming. This geometrical layout is shown on the 17th Century map of the village (p.22), although the boundary roads were not all straight. Shapwick essentially retains this ladder pattern today, with some development to the east of the church cross-roads and a further development on the southern boundary of the parish near the A39.

Because it is only a few hundred metres wide the village retains a great feeling of space. Although there are now only five large farms outside the village, the former east and west fields are still recognisable from the boundary roads and provide incomparable views across the Moors to the Mendips, Brent Knoll and Glastonbury Tor.

Within the village itself there are three areas of open space of particular importance to its character:

- The centrally situated fields to the north of the church and bounded by the Village Hall, Shapwick School and the stream (the Parish Council hopes to secure these as the Village Green).
- The 'old parklands and gardens' of Shapwick House, which, before it was a hotel, enhanced the feeling of a country estate and allow unrivalled views to the west.
- The Ashcott & Shapwick Cricket Club ground and the School playing fields, with a vista of Glastonbury Tor.

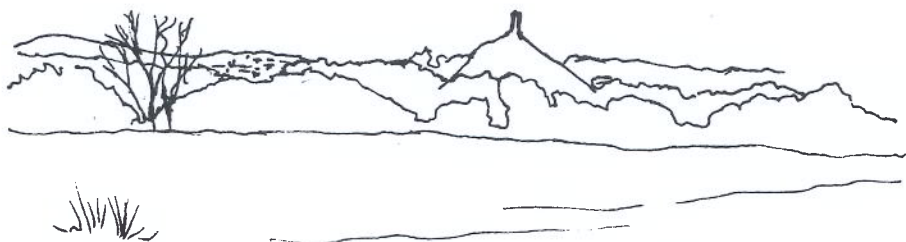


Fig. 7 Glastonbury Tor from Station Road

4 Settlement Pattern Character

Settlement guidelines:

- 4.1 The great feeling of space enhanced by distant views must be retained by leaving spaces between buildings and by continuing to position roads to enhance views out into the surrounding countryside.

- 4.2 The three major areas of open space and their specific character must be retained.



Fig. 8 High Lane looking east

- 4.3 The layout of the village 'ladder formation' is very important and should be maintained.

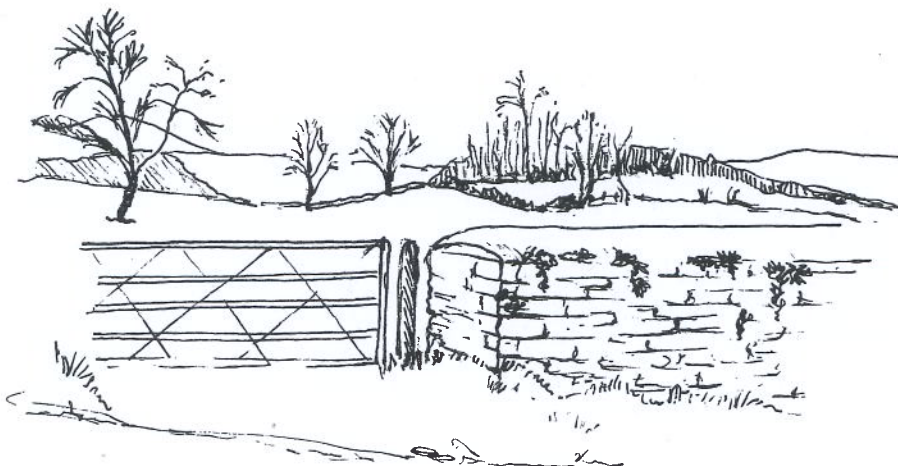
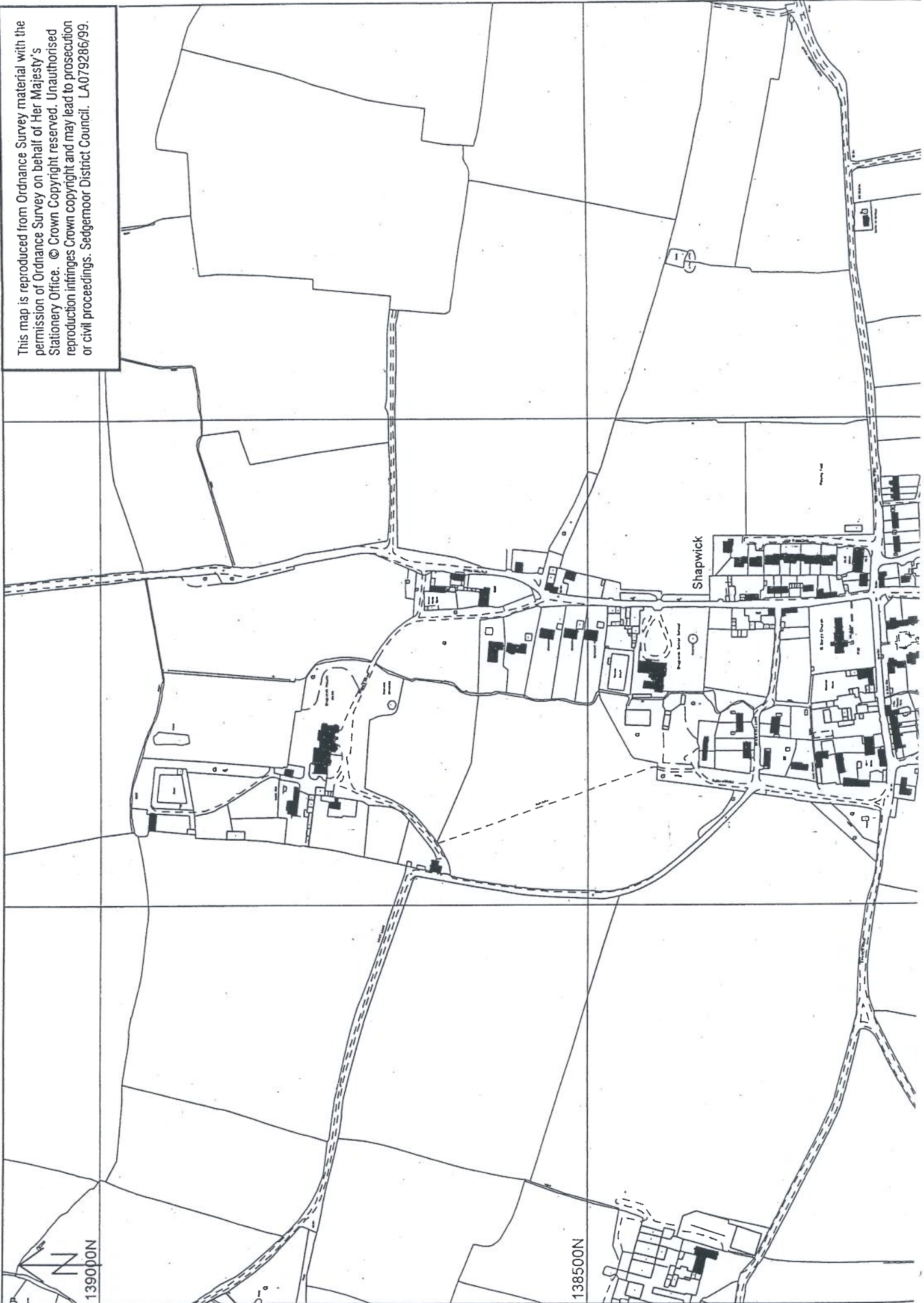
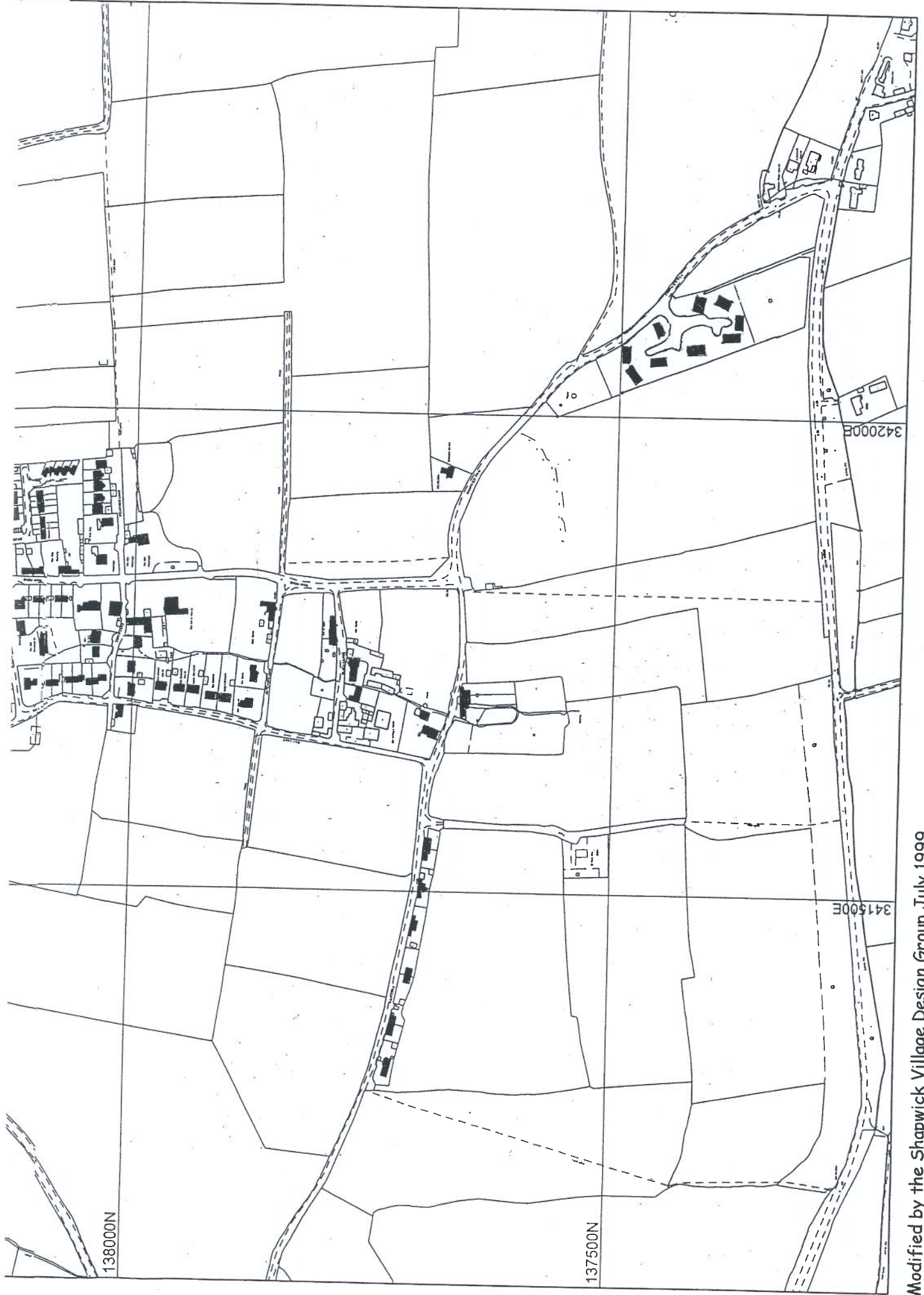


Fig. 9 View north west from Station Road

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Scale 1:5000

Modified by the Shapwick Village Design Group July 1999

5 Buildings

Most of the village is characterised by buildings constructed from local blue lias limestone or matching reconstituted stone with red tile or blue slate roofs in a pleasing mix of old and new arising from infill of former apple orchards. The grey stone walls and elm/mixed hedgerows are a particular feature of the village lanes.

Many of the older buildings in the village have been surveyed and their historical records examined by the Somerset Vernacular Buildings Research Group, in association with the Shapwick Project. Their results were published in 1996 as *The Vernacular Buildings of Shapwick* in the Group's series of reports on Somerset Villages.

The report identified Shapwick House (p5) and the Forsters (p7, 17) as the oldest buildings extant in the village, both having their origins in the 15th Century. All quarters of the village contain cottages and former farm houses which have their origins in the late 16th to 18th Century with a few from the 19th Century. The situation then remained largely unchanged until after World War II, but from about 1947 to the present day the number of houses here has increased considerably; most of these are interspersed between older buildings in comparatively small parcels.

At the time of writing, 1998, a new development of nine bungalows is under construction on the former radio station on Shapwick Hill, near the A39, and several hundred metres from the existing village.

continued on p. 14



Fig. 10 Cottages in Station Road with the flat top of the churchyard wall in the foreground

5 Buildings

Building guidelines:

- 5.1 The distinctive character of grey lias limestone (preferably natural) buildings and red tile or blue slate roofs should be retained and be recommended for future buildings.
- 5.2 The use of local building/architectural features illustrated in the line drawings or complementary features should be strongly recommended in new developments.

- 5.3 Terracotta Roman pantiles require simple roof shapes; dormer windows are not appropriate. Eaves are usually shallow.

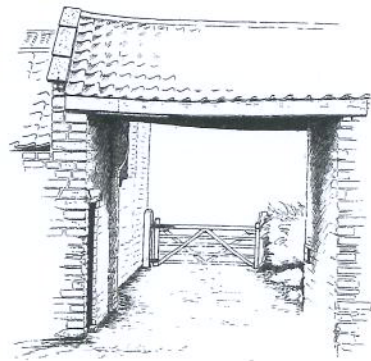


Fig. 11 Gateway, Home Farm

- 5.4

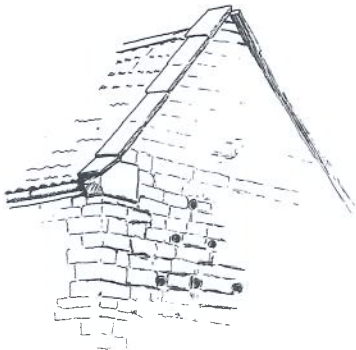


Fig. 12 Gable

A distinctive construction feature is gable walls capped with coping stones. In other instances the roof plane is continued over the top of the gable wall with end tiles simply bedded on mortar or finished with timber barge boards.

- 5.5 Chimney stacks, constructed in stone or brick, are a traditional feature usually positioned at the apex of the gable, the chimney being built internally and not projecting outside the gable wall. Highly visible metal flues should be avoided or cased in brick or stone.

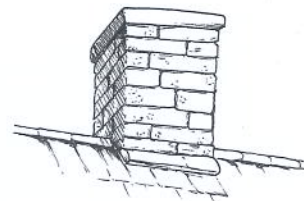


Fig. 13 Stone chimney

5 Buildings

Continued:

Distinctive village features and building details are illustrated in the line diagrams.

The characteristic appearance of the old buildings within the village should be maintained where appropriate in new developments. The varied greys of the lias limestone, mellowed and mottled with a range of lichens and with small plants growing in the old limestone mortar contribute to the recognition features of the Polden villages and this is what villagers want to keep.

Several farms within the village boundaries are now no longer working farms and new development has taken place, sometimes good, sometimes out of character.

Scale is especially important. Older buildings are low, simple in outline, with an absence of dormer windows, bay windows, picture windows, elaborate barge boards and overhanging eaves, external chimneys and metal flue pipes. These uncharacteristic features should be avoided.

Typical are stone or wooden lintels and sills to windows and doors, sash or casement windows often with small panes. Chimney stacks are of brick or stone, some with more elaborate coping, but mainly set at the apex of the roof with internal chimney breasts, efficient in energy saving and maintaining clean lines of external walls. Roman tiles are brittle and difficult to cut, so simple roof lines are preferred, with shallow eaves and with narrow or no barge boards on gables.

Boundary walls are especially important, these are either capped with vertical or horizontal stones and soon become inhabited by a range of lichens and other plants. Where stone is limited, boundary walls are particularly important, a sympathetically constructed stone wall compensating to some degree for rendered block buildings.

continued on p. 16

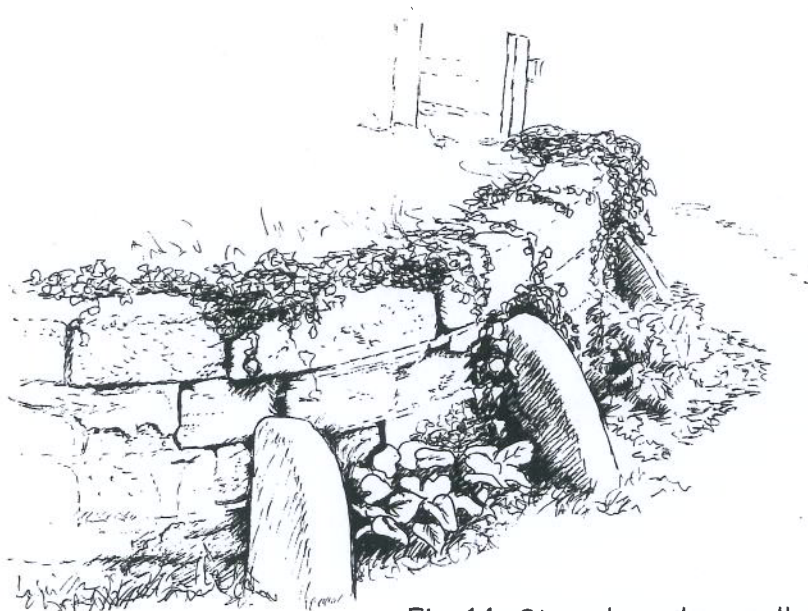


Fig. 14 Stone boundary wall with rounded stones designed to protect the wall from cart wheels

5 Buildings

- 5.6 Windows should have either stone or wooden lintels, sash or casement with wood or stone sills. Large picture windows, bay windows and dormers should be avoided.



Fig. 15 Flat arch with wedge shaped stone voussoirs



Fig. 16 Wooden lintel

- 5.7 Door openings should also have stone arches or wooden lintels.



Fig. 17 Typical farmhouse doorway with segmental stone arch

- 5.8 Existing stone barns/buildings which are structurally sound and give character to the village should be retained by incorporating them into any new developments.
- 5.9 Grey stone walls and mixed hedges should be retained and encouraged in any new developments.
- 5.10 Boundary walls should be of lias limestone and capped in a traditional way with either vertical or flat capping stones. Paling fences or low walls topped with paling should not be allowed.

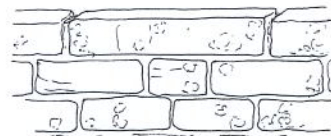
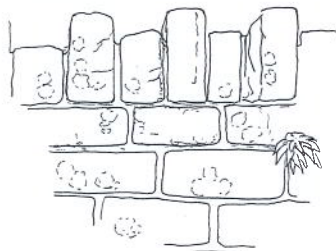


Fig. 18 Wall cappings

- 5.11 Where hedges exist as boundaries, they should not be removed.

5 Buildings

Continued:

Significant buildings of great character exist within the village:

The Parish Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary (probably a Minster church built in 1331 to replace St Andrew's Church near Beerway Farm) at the centre of the village is an imposing but simple building with a massive central tower, unusual for this period. The interior is beautiful and intimate due to its long narrow design and stained glass windows.

Shapwick House, presently a hotel, is superficially a 17th century building with a 19th century facade but closer internal examination has revealed roof timbers of probably a late medieval hall. It has an octagonal dovecote in its grounds. Its associated buildings have been converted into private homes.

The 16th century Rectorial Manor and its 17th century stable block at present house Shapwick School. The site has a wonderful ambience being enclosed with its circular dovecote and cedar trees in a walled garden (below).

It is not only the larger buildings which merit recognition. Forsters, the only thatched house remaining in the village, has changed remarkably little since the 15th Century. Built to a traditional 3-roomed plan, probably for a prosperous yeoman farmer, it originally had an open hall and central hearth, as witnessed by the remaining smoke-blackened roof timbers and inner thatch.

Only one farm, Bowerings, remains active within the village, others are now private houses and the farm buildings converted or demolished. Kent farm is the oldest of the outlying farms, although the present buildings are not the originals. The Northbrook farmhouse, built in 18th Century, is unique locally, with its classical style and south front faced with brick. It is to be hoped that scale and style of any new farm buildings added to these and the other working farms are kept in proportion and sympathetic with the older buildings.

Other buildings of note include the former village school, bakery and butchers, a carpenter's workroom and steam mill. It is desirable that these retain evidence of their earlier use in the economy of the village.



Fig. 19 Dovecote at *Shapwick Manor*

5 Buildings

Continued:

- 5.12 Views of the 'significant buildings' and open spaces of the village should be considered in any new development by leaving gaps between buildings and by careful positioning of new roads.
- 5.13 Any building developments should be 'infill' but without losing the open nature of the village.
- 5.14 A variety of house sizes will be encouraged to cater for individual and family needs.
- 5.15 Greater expansion of the village could be considered by 'lengthening' the 'ladder' pattern.
- 5.16 The character of outlying farms should be retained.
- 5.17 The design of new farm buildings should complement the colour and shape of the existing farm houses or be screened by sensitive tree planting.



Fig. 20 Forsters

6 Highways, Traffic and Services

The majority of streets and roads in the village are narrow country lanes with grass verges and without footpaths giving a delightful rural feel. Even the wider main village road running N-S from Westhay to the A39 is largely of a similar character and is unsuitable for the spasmodic but increasing number of large heavy lorries passing through. Simple road painted 30 mph traffic calming has been applied to this road in an attempt to slow vehicles down. There is a dull drone of noise from the A39 which runs along the southern boundary of the parish. Some of the newer developments do have pavements alongside the roads e.g. Northbrook Drive, Orchard Way, Church Close and Loxley Batch. Street lighting, for which there is no widespread demand, is minimal.

There are 11 cross-country footpaths now used for leisure purposes. There are designated cycle paths along the South Drain, and the line of the old railway, part of the Sustrans route, follows some of the village lanes. There are no car parks. Most houses have space for off-road parking but there are some dwellings where vehicles are parked on the street. Many of the older cottages front directly on to the road with no verge or footpath. This includes the main road through the village, Main Road and Station Road, and the other roads at right angles to this. Multi-axled large and heavy lorries passing through the village are a hazard to safety and villagers would like a weight restriction introduced.

There is no uniformity of style of finger post and name signs within the parish due to vandalism, which has also been a problem with our only bus shelter and the public seat formerly at the crossroads.

Electricity and the telephone service are distributed by unattractive overhead wires on wooden poles. There is a modern public telephone box next to the Post Box in the centre of the village which we would like replaced by an old red one. There is mains water and sewerage in the village.



Fig. 21 Station Road looking north

6 Highways, Traffic and Services

Highways guidelines:

- 6.1 The 'country lanes with grass verges' character should be retained and applied to any 'infill' developments.



- 6.2 Attractive 'street furniture' in keeping with the historic and special nature of the village will be encouraged.

Fig. 22
High Lane looking west

- 6.3 Electricity and telephone services should be laid underground.

- 6.4 The roads are unsuitable for large, heavy lorries; many of the houses fronting directly on to the roads. (Figs 21, 22)

- 6.5 Future development of the A39 should not impinge on the village, and screening from noise should be considered.



Fig. 23 Cottages in Church Road

Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge participation and help from the following Shapwick residents:

The Village Design Group: Pamela Coney, Pat and Dennis Hill-Cottingham, John Motum, Stephanie and Farouk Qadir, Ken Wade (Chairman) and Dora Watkins.

Other residents:

Anthea Beale, Mike Beale, Ron Brindley, Kim Bucket, Julian Chubb, Joan Cole, Mike Cole, Sheila Coles, Belinda Coney, David Coombes, Mavis Cox, Andy Cox, Jane Danger, Jennifer Dennes, Stuart Dennes, Ruth Gale, John Gale, Rosemary Hargreaves, Chris Hargreaves, Janet Hart, Joan Hayward, Bob Hayward, Bernard Hillburn, Amanda Hollingshead, Janet Jones, Edwin King, Agnes Larkins, Peter Larkins, Peggy Long, Don Long, Phillippe Luckins, Julia Marshall, Margaret Motum, Amelia Murray, Pauline Richardson, Joan Rowe, Lynda Scott, Bobbie Sharp, Roy Strong, Julie Taylor, Tony Taylor, Pauline Taylor, Mary Thomas, Reg Thomas, Dominic Thyer, Peter Tucker, Helen Wade and June Warden.

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We would also like to thank Shapwick Village Hall Committee and other village groups, Shapwick WI, The Gardening Club, Men's Group and St Mary's Parish Church and all individuals who contributed so successfully to displays for the two exhibitions and helped to stimulate interest in the project. Thanks are also due to all the individuals who took the trouble to return their answers to the Village Questionnaire.

We would especially like to thank David Smith of the Community Council for Somerset, who guided us through the difficult early stages. He has been an inspiration throughout and facilitated our acquisition of a Rural Action Project grant for costs of meetings and production of this statement. Thanks also go to members of Sedgemoor District Council for the help they have given us in the final stages of this document.

Shapwick Parish Council
February 1999

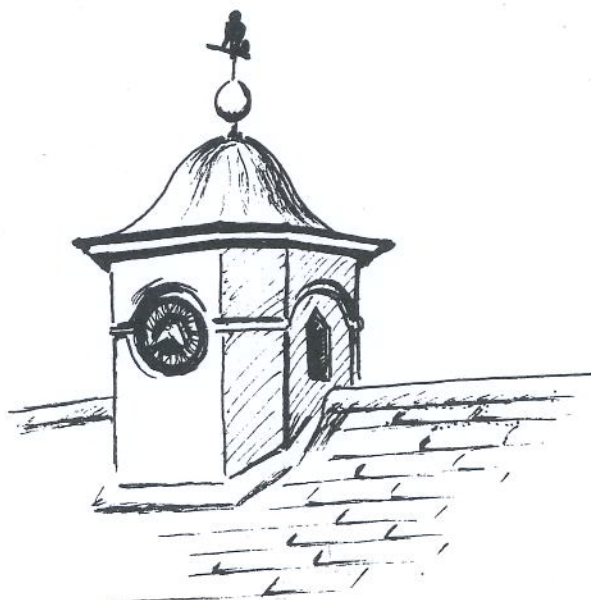


Fig. 24 Clock cupola on the stable block, *Shapwick Manor*

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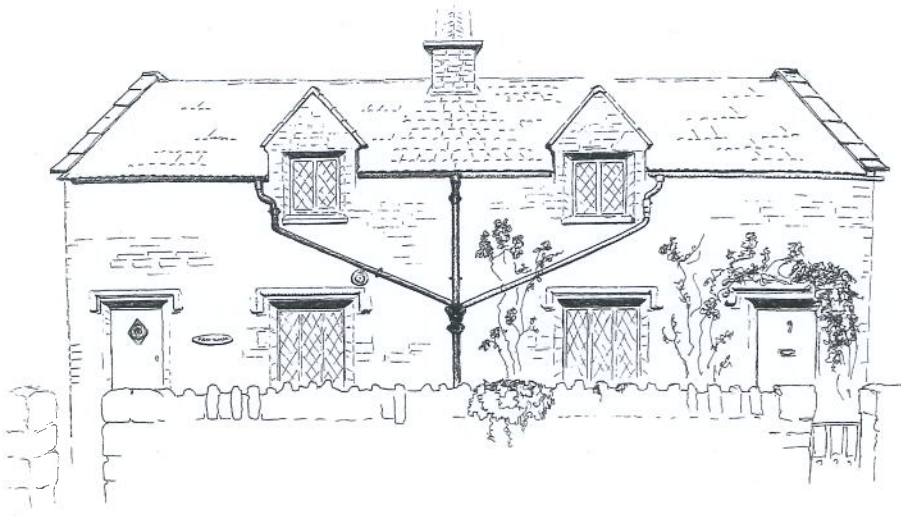
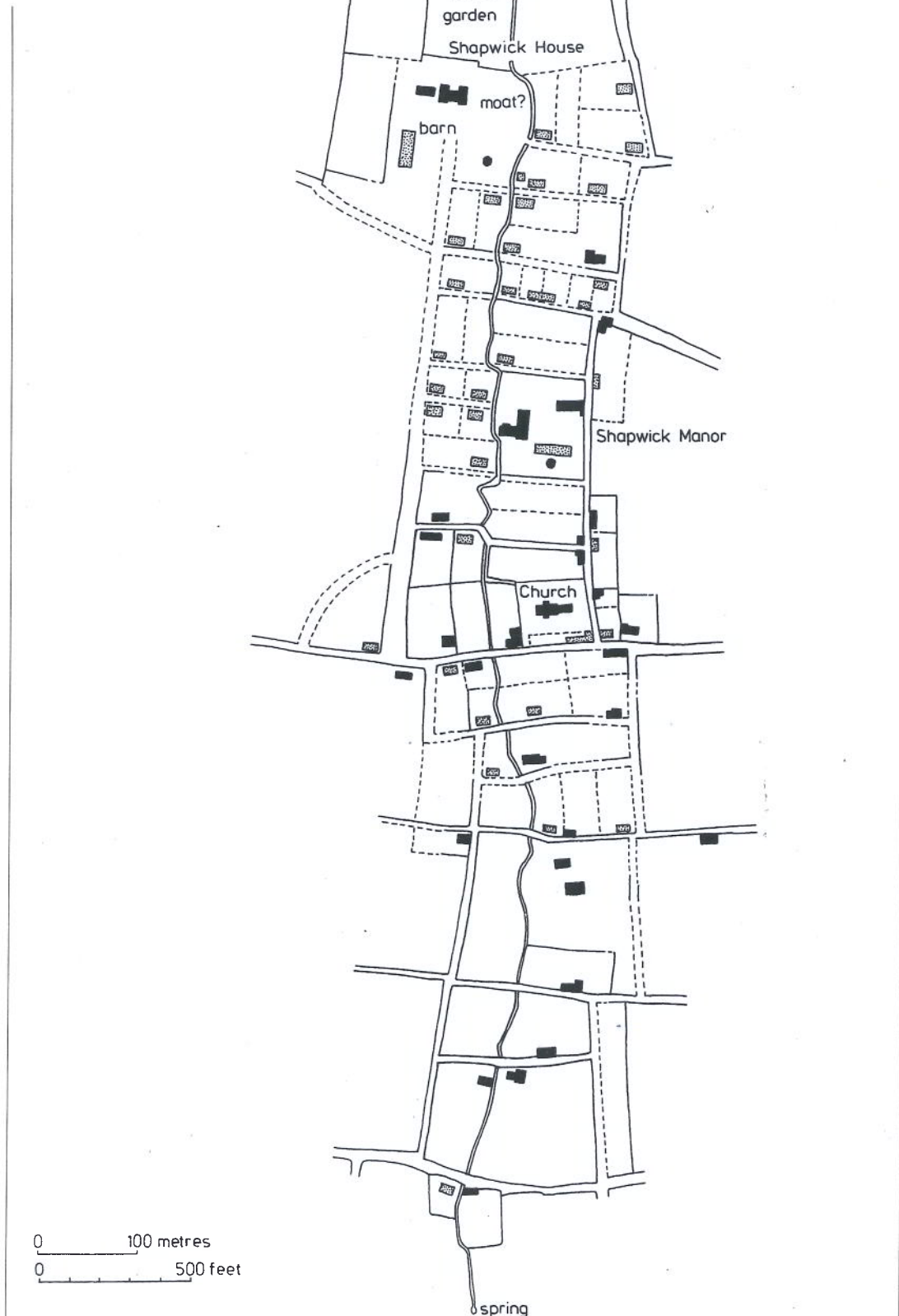


Fig. 25 Cottages in Northbrook Road

Shapwick Village
in the
17th Century



from *The Shapwick Project, the Fifth Report*, eds MA Aston & MD Costen, 1994.

Back cover photographs



1 Shapwick village from the south, Brent Knoll in the left background, Mendip Hills in the right background. (R Brindley)



2 Sycamore trees in the field at the south end of the village (D Hill-Cottingham)



3 Aerial view of Shapwick: High Lane in the foreground, Shapwick National Nature Reserve in the background (R Brindley)



4 Sheep grazing at the south end of the village (R Brindley)

5 View from Church Close towards St Mary's Parish Church (P Hill-Cottingham)

