

TOP O'TH TOWN CONSERVATION AREA

HISTORY

The Top O'Th Town area of Burnley is where the original settlement of Brun Lea (named after The River Brun - brown clearing), developed in Saxon times in the area where St. Peter's Church now stands. The area embraces some of the oldest parts of the town, including the original market place, which was first established in 1295, the stocks, smithy, church, sites of ancient hostelries, Burnley's first day school and grammar school. These remaining structures contribute to the essential character of the Top O'Th Town representing the social and economic history of Burnley.

SPECIAL CHARACTER

This area is characterised by stone buildings in the vernacular tradition with pitched gabled slate roofs. Development is centred around St. Peter's Church and the junction of Ormerod Road and Church Street, which was Burnley's original market place and the site of the Market Cross (now located in the former Grammar School's grounds).

The buildings that developed around the Church are linear in form, expressing movement, particularly along Bank Parade and Ormerod Road, where the slope of the land suggests this. The houses in the Top O'Th Town are largely two and three-storey Georgian and Victorian terraced properties.

Ormerod Road has a formal, dignified character created by the large, sober merchants' dwellings and has predominantly short terraced rows of houses as does Bank Parade, indicating wealth.

Water is an important element in this area of town. The original settlement of Brun Lea developed in the Top O'Th Town area along the banks of the River Brun for protection purposes. There is also the Leeds and Liverpool Canal to the east of the Conservation Area, a vital contributor to the growth of Burnley. Both stretches of water contribute to the openness of the Top O'Th Town. The large grounds of properties, the trees and the fact that Thompson Park borders the north of the boundary all contribute to the open nature of the area.

The Top O'Th Town is the educational centre of Burnley with the former Grammar School, now Adult Education Centre, St. Peter's Church of England Primary School and Burnley College of Arts and Technology all within close proximity. These buildings are all dominant and impressive in the area due to their size and intrinsic design, particularly the front elevation of the College and the former Grammar School.

It is the open, uniform character of this area which Conservation Area status would hope to improve and enhance.

St. James's Street to the north of the Conservation Area boundary is one of the oldest streets in town. It was the main link road in medieval times from the Top O'Th Town to Bottom O'Th Town/The Meadows. The shape of a market place still remains with the street widening up to the junction with Manchester Road. Now that the street has been pedestrianised, a pleasant open space has been created, built at a human scale for all to enjoy. St. James's Street is enclosed at both ends by buildings - the logical boundary markers to the Conservation Area.

To the west of Hammerton Street is The Meadows area of town (or Bottom O'Th Town), so called because cows used to graze here before being taken to the cattle market which was on the forecourt between the Central Library and the Crown Court.

This area is important to the town centre although its character is quite different from grid pattern around Manchester Road. Early industries set up in this area, providing townsfolk with jobs. The stone buildings are somewhat larger in scale and proportion than the regularly sized ones on the grid street pattern, set around an irregular street pattern. The narrower cobbled streets, the old workshops and Newtown Mill and its 1864 Chimney - a landmark of the town - are all reminders of what conditions were like in Victorian times.

The properties fronting onto St. James's Street at the western end are similar in size to those at the eastern end, although they are different in style, not being as ornate, and are somewhat rundown. Despite this, they are still important to the character of the town centre area in that they enclose St. James's Street and indicate the edge of the town centre. Some of the properties on St. James's Street back onto the River Calder, some of which are built out on stilts. The view from the bridge on Cow Lane would be very picturesque if the buildings were improved.

The proposed Conservation Area contains all of the elements of a thriving town centre, including retail, commercial, service, industrial and residential properties found in an attractive, essentially Victorian, townscape.