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COLNBROOK CONSERVATION AREA

A character statement

JULY 1997



**SLOUGH BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

PRICE: £3.00

1. HISTORY

- 1.1 The first mention of Colnbrook (as "Colebroc") is in 1106 when an inn on the London Road was given to Abingdon Abbey. Whether this became the present Ostrich Inn (perhaps a corruption of "hospice") is a matter for speculation, but it is an important early 16th century building and there are older timber framed hall houses nearby.
- 1.2 Colnbrook grew up on the road from London to Windsor and the west, at its crossing over the Colne Brook which was once navigable. It was divided between the parishes of Horton, Langley Marish and Iver in Buckinghamshire and Stanwell in Middlesex. More recently the division was between Iver and Poyle (Surrey after 1964), but since 1995 the settlement has at last been united as a separate parish within the Borough of Slough, and it now entirely in Berkshire.
- 1.3 For a time in the 16th century Colnbrook was elevated to Borough status with a grant of markets and fairs. A new charter was granted in 1635 but due to the depredations of the civil war the corporation failed and was never revived. The Borough was dissolved under the 1832 Reform Act as it had fewer than 2000 inhabitants.
- 1.4 Colnbrook has many associations with royalty and events of history. The conspirators against the newly crowned Henry IV met here in 1400. It is mentioned in connection with the funeral of Lady Jane Grey, the "Nine Day Queen" in 1537. After the battle of Edgehill in 1642 the petition of peace from Parliament was offered to the King here, but hopes of a truce were dashed by the sacking of Brentford by Prince Rupert who is reported to have plundered Colnbrook itself later. There is constant mention of troops in the vicinity during the Civil War.
- 1.5 During the 18th and early 19th centuries the coaching trade made Colnbrook a busy and prosperous place, and there is evidence for this still in the remaining buildings. Nevertheless, it did not expand in the 19th century, no doubt because the coaching trade disappeared with the railways, which did not come to Colnbrook. When road traffic revived in the 20th century, the narrow street of Colnbrook was unsuited to it, and its ancient buildings and townscape were eroded, and despite a bypass and a motorway it suffered, and still does, from through traffic.
- 1.6 Meanwhile a new form of transport further reduced the amenities of Colnbrook with the expansion of nearby Heathrow Airport and the introduction of jet airliners, with their great noise in landing and take-off.
- 1.7 Ecclesiastically, Colnbrook was a part of Horton Parish with a chapel of ease built in 1342, replaced on a site opposite the George Inn in 1794, and demolished by 1862 by which time the present church of St Thomas had been built in 1847 to serve the new parish created in 1853. The church, with its vicarage, school and master's house, forms a Victorian group which was originally close to the entrance to Richings Park to the north, linked to Colnbrook by a lime avenue.

2. TOWNSCAPE QUALITY AND STREET PATTERN

- 2.1 Descriptions down to the early 20th century refer to the long narrow main street of Colnbrook. In 1862 the local historian Gyll, writes: "It consists of one principal street, continuous and sinuous but rather narrow." This is clearly shown in the Ordnance Survey map of 1890 (Map 1), and is still referred to in the Victoria County History entry of 1925. Not long after this date changes must have begun, eroding the continuous frontage development shown on the 1890 map and introducing gaps with buildings set back, presumably with a view to eventually widening the main road, with no regard for the destruction of ancient buildings such a scheme would necessitate. Now all that remains of the early character of Colnbrook is the narrow section of the street by the Ostrich and the continuous range of frontage buildings on the south of Bridge Street and on the north of Park Street east of the Colne Brook. Elsewhere the settings of the remaining older buildings have been changed by demolition and the resiting of new development. Despite this, the main road through the village remains the strongest feature of the townscape and dominates the street pattern. There are a few remaining side views between buildings and through archways, typical of old coaching towns. Contrasting with the urban quality of the main street is the offshoot of Mill Street and the nearby church/school group mentioned above now in Vicarage Way.

The Conservation Area

- 2.2 This has been restricted to the part of the village described above which retains sufficient elements of the historic settlement to merit designation as "an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance." (Town and Country Planning Act 1990).

2.3 **Activities**

This small conservation area contains a variety of uses. It is predominantly residential but there are a number of shops and offices, three inns, industry at Tanhouse Farm and community uses in the church group.

3. ELEMENTS OF TOWNSCAPE

- 3.1 Entering Colnbrook from the south-east one of the strongest townscape features, the continuous two-storey frontage development on the north side of Park Street, is immediately encountered. Its position as an outlier to the centre of the town is still recognisable. Opposite is the ancient building known as King John's Palace, with the attached Star and Garter pub set back from the street with a narrow front garden or forecourt, which gives a more spacious and rural appearance than the main development in the town. This can be seen across the bridge over the Colne Brook, where the 18th century symmetrical facade of Ye Olde George and Park House close the vista very effectively, providing one of the best townscape views with further frontage buildings and Aberdeen House to the left. The road turns westwards here, where Bridge Street becomes High Street. The wider triangle at this point probably represents the market place referred to in 16th century documents. Mill Street joins the main road at this point, as does Vicarage Way, roughly on the line of the former drive to Richings Park, the Lodge to which survives, adjoining the east side of Ye Olde George.

- 3.2 The short section of old frontage buildings on the south side of Bridge Street, including Aberdeen House, has been mentioned, but the narrow quality of the street is not mentioned.

suburban development on the north side. Only the building immediately west of the bridge occupies the original frontage site. The bridge itself has been rebuilt with no camber but the parapets and inscribed coping have been retained. From the bridge there is an attractive view into the rural enclave of the Mill grounds to the north, and out to open meadows to the south.

- 3.3 In Mill Street this more rural edge survives at Tanhouse Farm with its listed barns, while on the west side recent redevelopment on the site of pre-war detached villas and bungalows has introduced a more continuous form of terraced housing which is perhaps closer to the urban traditions of Colnbrook and makes its own contribution to the townscape both in views towards High Street and towards the church group in Vicarage Way.
- 3.4 The building at the junction of Bridge Street with Mill Street is part of the redevelopment of the north side of Bridge Street which once had continuous frontage building. It is a substantial block, with flats and a shop, and it closes the vista from the west playing a similar role in the townscape to Ye Old George in views from the east. It is unfortunate therefore that it is not a building of better design, more worthy of the historic context. Furthermore, the telegraph pole and overhead wires on the traffic island to the north are inconsistent with a conservation area.
- 3.5 High Street continues westwards with the important remaining very short narrow section with ancient buildings on each side notably the 16th century and earlier Ostrich Inn, listed II* (star) and rightly one of the most celebrated examples of a traditional coaching inn. Unfortunately, its courtyard buildings have long ago been demolished to form a large rear car park. On the north side, the recently refurbished Old Lucas Shop is a 15th century timber-framed hall house. Set back between it and Park House is the Baptist Chapel, built on a former narrow burgage plot but, because of the thinning out of frontage development and the opening-up of Vicarage Way, this 19th century building is now more prominent than it would originally have been. When frontage development was more complete, the contrasting views up narrow alleys and through archways must have been more striking, but very few remain (e.g. Garden Cottages). Many coaching arches remain, but few provide satisfactory peeps of old rear development, the exception being at King John's Palace. The view from the rear of Ye Old George/Park House still provides an idea of the old coaching inn yard.
- 3.6 The Conservation Area boundary is immediately west of the Ostrich and Old Lucas Shop. Beyond this the remaining frontage buildings are so fragmentary that the historic form of the town has been lost. Views can be obtained which give some idea of the former appearance, but the gaps are very wide and the development within them of indifferent suburban quality. Because of the straight quality of the street, these views can be gained from some distance; for example near the Cedars, an attractive distant view of the Ostrich is seen with the two cedar trees in the foreground.

3.7 Listed Buildings

There are 23 entries in the statutory list for the Conservation Area. All are Grade II except King John's Palace, Park Street and The Ostrich, High Street, which are Grade II* (star). Ten of the listed buildings are east of the Colne Brook, seven forming the continuous range on the north side of Park Street and three on the south (King John's Palace, the barn to the rear and The Star and Garter).

3.8 There are two listed buildings in Bridge Street, Aberdeen House and a (converted) barn; and two in Mill Street, Mill House with Tanhouse Farm, and the linked barns at Tanhouse Farm. In Vicarage Way there are four Victorian listed buildings: the church, former vicarage, school and schoolhouse. The remaining five listed buildings in the Conservation Area are in the High Street: Ye Olde George and Park House, a milestone and Old Lucas Shop on the north side; The Ostrich and adjoining properties (now part of the inn) on the south.

3.9 A number of unlisted buildings are of local interest or townscape value. These are:

- Bridge over the Colne Brook - parapets
- Houses on south side of Bridge Street (White Cottage, Tarrant Cottage, Black Boys Cottage, Old Village Hall)
- The Lodge, High Street/Vicarage Way
- The Lychgate to St Thomas's Church
- Stable block at Old Vicarage
- Baptist Chapel, High Street
- Sanbrook House, High Street
- Garden Cottages, High Street

3.10 There are a number of important walls which also merit consideration:

- Colne Cottage, Park Street/Bath Road
- The Lodge, Vicarage Way (with Richings Park plaque), plus lower wall
- Adjoining the Baptist Chapel, High Street

3.11 These will be fed into the Boroughwide assessment of buildings of local importance which is currently being undertaken.

3.12 Style and Materials

The listed buildings range from the early medieval to the mid-Victorian period. The early buildings retain substantial timber-framed structures, most clearly evident in the front elevation of the Ostrich, where the timber framing has been exposed internally. However, it is unlikely to have been the original treatment, since such structures were protected with coats of limewash, building up to a layer of rendering, a form of treatment which appears to survive at King John's Palace. The fashion for refronting timber buildings in stucco and brick, found in most old towns in England, occurs here: for example at Aberdeen House (rendering) and Old Lucas Shop (brick). The most spectacular is the symmetrical classical brick facade (now painted) complete with central pediment at Ye Old George/Park House, providing the town with its most notable townscape feature, but preserving behind it the ancient building with fine Tudor-arched fireplaces. The Park Street properties appear also to be largely refrontings of older buildings in more fashionable stucco, with classical forms. Tanhouse Farm is also faced in painted brick. A few later 19th century buildings survive but are not listed, the best example for this period being the church group (which are listed). The church itself is by Benjamin Ferrey, an exponent of the early religious phase of the gothic revival inspired by Pugin, and exceptionally it is faced in flint with stone dressings, while the (former) Vicarage, School and Schoolhouse are by G.E. Street, one of the great High Victorian architects most famous as designer of the Strand Law Courts, but also an important link with the following generation of the Arts and Crafts movement. The Colnbrook Vicarage is an early example of Street's work in polychrome brick, and the school and house are

humbler but characteristic designs, also using yellow and red brick in decorative forms.

3.13 Materials

In the older buildings, painted external plaster or stucco is most commonly found, with brick which has often been painted in some refacing work; plain brick, mostly London stocks, some multi-coloured in the Victorian buildings mentioned. For roofs, older buildings have plain clay tiled roofs (some replaced in machine made clay or concrete copies) and 19th century ones generally Welsh slate, although again there has been some replacement in modern materials such as concrete tiles. Recent development is mainly in brick, and the terraces in Mill Street and Vicarage Way have made use of bi-coloured brickwork and half-hipped roofs to echo the Victorian school and schoolhouse nearby.

3.14 Highway Materials

Highway and footpaths are generally tarmac with some setts in front of Ye Olde George, including an interesting short stretch of old footpath paved in grey sandstone setts, probably from the Chilterns. Kerbs and gutters are mostly granite as are some of the crossovers, but there is also concrete paving and kerbs, notably in front of Ye Olde George. Mention should be made of the modern traditional fluted iron bollards here which are considered appropriate for the conservation area.

Street lights along the main road are of trunk road scale, very tall and of a standard modern pattern.

3.15 Trees and Open Spaces

These are found mostly on the edges of the Conservation Area, notably at the far east end where large gardens and a former cricket ground have been included within the boundary. The five pollarded limes in Vicarage Walk are a vestige of the former approach to Richings Park, while further trees including some in the churchyard and Old Vicarage garden, form a background to views of the church group.

The 1890 map shows no room for trees on the historic continuous development, and they make little contribution to the present townscape qualities though there may be scope for some limited tree planting on fringe sites to enhance views or screen buildings. There are more pollarded limes in Bridge Street (south side near the bridge) and two in front of King John's Palace. One tree, important to the townscape, is the beech at the entrance to Mill Street. The large yew immediately adjoining Mill House is also prominent and a number of trees along the river from here to the bridge contribute to this rural enclave. The garden of Mill House is an important open space, as is the churchyard, Old Vicarage garden and the paddock to the east.

3.16 Relationship with Countryside

The 1890 map shows Colnbrook having a series of long back gardens and orchards on all sides. The lime avenue led north to the wide acres of Richings Park, while Tanhouse Farm adjoined its fields. But owing to 20th century development and change, the countryside setting is now hardly recognisable. Mill Street (which itself retains a fragment of rural character - see paragraph 3.3) still leads out of the centre into an open area but industrial uses at Tanhouse Farm have eroded it.

to the north-west has altered the character of the Church/Vicarage area, and the former gardens and orchards are now built over. On the east side, housing development (Albany Park) has also taken place on the former cricket ground within the conservation area, cutting off the remaining open area from the old part of the village. To the west of the Colne Brook, new houses have been built in Rudsworth Close, but permitting a view from Park Street and the bridge southwards over meadowland. The northern part of this meadowland is included in the Conservation Area. To the north is a surprisingly rural stretch of the river towards Mill House and its garden, making an attractive contrast with the urban street in the heart of the village.

3.17 Patterns of Movement/Impact of Traffic.

Many attempts have been made over the years to discourage through traffic though, at the time when this assessment was made, the impact of traffic does not appear to have abated. The narrowness of the main street, especially High Street, combined with parked vehicles west of the Conservation Area, interrupts traffic flow and reduces speeds. This is less true of the wider section of Park Street, but vehicles going west are slowed by the bend in Bridge Street. Narrowings and 'bumps' have been incorporated into Mill Street and Vicarage Way, and they fit in quite unobtrusively without unsightly signs or bollards. Any further measures for traffic calming should take into account the character and appearance of the Conservation Area avoiding narrowings which interrupt the straight kerbline and necessitate unsightly warning signs and bollards. Such features should preferably be kept outside the Conservation Area, perhaps as gateway features east of Park Street and west of High Street.

4. ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT/OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

- 4.1 It is ironic that the demolition of much of the old narrow street of Colnbrook which gave it its character of an historic coaching town was probably done in the name of improvement and good planning. No doubt the narrow fronted properties crowded along the street had long, insanitary back yards, and, especially by the 20th century, restricted the passage of through traffic on what was still the main road from London to the west. Nevertheless, what is striking is the unfortunate weakness introduced by the demolition, for example, of the north side of Bridge Street and its replacement with suburban bungalows in big gardens. Such properties have nothing to do with the truly historic character or interest of Colnbrook.
- 4.2 Therefore any opportunity presented by development proposals to regain missing frontage development within the Conservation Area should be taken and encouraged, so that the older pattern can, as far as possible, be regained. This might be achieved, for example, by providing front boundary walls in preference to fences, hedges or open front plots. Where development is proposed in an obvious gap, consideration should be given to a new building on the original frontage line, whilst maintaining visual interest in the streetscene via archways and other side views.
- 4.3 On the north side of Mill Street, east of the new houses, the derelict buildings have recently been demolished prior to redevelopment; this site will be developed to form six terraced houses, thus continuing the form of redevelopment elsewhere on Mill Street. Attention has been given to the design and use of appropriate materials in the scheme.

- 4.4 The Old Vicarage in Vicarage Way is a grade II listed building of importance, only partially occupied; the well-treed grounds derelict. Every effort should be made to find a suitable new use for this building which would secure its proper repair and the restoration and improvement of the garden.
- 4.5 The Old Smithy is a single storey hall in Park Street between the bridge and the Star and Garter. It is an undistinguished building, untypically parallel to the street, but it has the virtue of defining the street. It is currently vacant, derelict and for sale. A suitable use should be found and its sale and repair encouraged or the site redeveloped, provided that any new building serves to define the street in the same manner as the Old Smithy.

Minor Defects

- 4.6 There is an ugly concrete bus stop standard in front of Park House, and an even more ugly modern street light fixed to the central pediment of this key building.
- 4.7 The traditional standard inn sign at the Star and Garter is cluttered by additional small illuminated advertising signs, which detract from the appearance of the listed building setting and the Conservation Area.
- 4.8 Overhead telephone wires from a distribution post attached to the east end of the single storey hall building next to the Star and Garter disfigure Park Street, and should be replaced by underground services. The same applies to the telegraph pole and overhead wires at the junction of Mill Street and Vicarage Way.
- 4.9 There are large down-lighting floodlights on the gables at The Ostrich which detract from the appearance of this important building. The need for numbers of flags along the frontage might also be questioned.
- 4.10 The stone plaque in the wall adjacent to the Lodge has been worn; means of retarding the erosion should be sought. Repair of the lower wall should also be sought if it is deemed appropriate to include it in the list of buildings of local importance.

4.11 Street lights

Consideration should be given to replacing the present street lights with a more traditional design. Some might be fixed by brackets to buildings, but care is needed to avoid detracting from the appearance of listed buildings 0 e.g. Ye Olde George.

5. BOUNDARY OF CONSERVATION AREA - AMENDMENTS

- 5.1 Since designation of the eastern part by Spelthorne and the western part by South Bucks in 1987, the most significant changes have been the various new housing developments. The large Vicarage Way estate is outside the Conservation Area. Rudsworth Close is within the boundary and was approved at appeal. The houses do not have a major visual impact, and the layout has preserved important countryside views. New houses in Mill Street have re-introduced an urban quality here and have added to the townscape. But at the far east end of the area, Albany Park has been built between the backs of the Park Street properties and the cricket ground. It is thus within the Conservation Area, but makes no positive contribution to the townscape and separates the remaining open space from the historic part of the village.

- 5.2 It is therefore recommended that the Conservation Area boundary should be amended to omit Albany Park and the remaining open space behind it, and should run instead along the northern boundary of the Park Street properties as far west as the Post Office. However, the open space adjoining Bath Road (Cox apple garden) should remain within the Conservation Area as it formerly formed part of the garden of Colne House.
- 5.3 Mention has been made of the recently demolished buildings on Mill Street; this site falls within the Conservation Area and should remain included as it is considered that the approved scheme for the redevelopment of the site will contribute to the townscape. Further north, the grounds of the Old Rectory are included, and the boundary then goes south to Vicarage Way and the rear of Ye Olde George. It also includes the southeastern corner of the car park where the recycling centre is located; this area makes no contribution to the townscape. Therefore, it is recommended that the boundary should be amended to exclude this area.
- 5.4 West of the Old Lucas Shop and The Ostrich in High Street, there are fragments of the old frontage development, a few of them being listed buildings (Town House, Excelsior House, Royal Standard on south; No.34 on north). Any further extension to the Conservation Area westwards (for example, as far as The Cedars) would mean including a number of gaps, some containing buildings badly out of keeping with the Conservation Area. For this reason it is not recommended that the Conservation Area should be extended in this direction, but should the policy suggested in paragraph 4.2 above be successful, there may be a case for reviewing the position in the future.
6. EXISTING POLICY FRAMEWORK (LOCAL PLAN POLICIES)

The policies set out in the consultation draft review of the Local Plan for Slough cover all aspects of Conservation Area and listed building control (EN13, 14, 15 and 16). The buildings mentioned in para 17 are worthy of inclusion in any list of buildings of local interest prepared under Policy E17.

