



Forton and Meretown Conservation Area Appraisal



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1. Introduction

1.1 Definition

- A Conservation Area is defined in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Section 69 (1) of the Act imposes a duty on the local planning authority to identify areas of special architectural or historic interest, and to designate those places as conservation areas. Designation helps to ensure that an area identified for its architectural and historic significance is managed and protected appropriately.

1.2 Purpose of Appraisal

- Conservation area appraisal is a means of identifying and assessing the special architectural or historic character of a place. Forton and Meretown Conservation Area was designated in 1978 by Staffordshire County Council after an appraisal of the special architectural and historic interest of the area. Under section 69 (2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, it is a requirement of the local planning authority to update conservation area appraisals regularly, and designate further areas as necessary. The purpose of this appraisal is to assess and define the special character and appearance of Forton and Meretown as it stands today, and identify any threats or future threats to the area's character and integrity.
- Appraisal ensures that the local authority, developers, property owners and the local community are aware of the area's special character when drawing up and assessing proposals for change.

1.3 Effects of Conservation Area Designation

- The conservation area appraisal will be adopted as a “material consideration” in the planning process and will be used by the local planning authority when considering the effects of any proposed development affecting the conservation area, including its setting.

1.4 Certain Works in a Conservation area require Consent:

- Planning Permission is required for the demolition or substantial demolition of an unlisted building within a conservation area.
- Works to trees: Anyone proposing to cut down, top or lop a tree in a conservation area, even if the tree is not protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), must notify the local planning authority and allow six weeks before commencing work. This gives the local planning authority the opportunity to make a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) if the tree is considered to be important.
- Permitted Development Rights, i.e. those works of alteration or extension that can be carried out without planning permission, are slightly different in conservation areas. Some conservation areas are covered by Article 4 Directions, which restrict certain Permitted Development Rights, for example the installation of uPVC windows or satellite dishes. These are specific to each conservation area, and are in place to ensure the special historic and architectural character is protected.

1.5 Community Involvement

- Stafford Borough Council’s Statement of Community Involvement sets out to ensure that all sections of the community and interested parties have a reasonable opportunity to engage with plan-making and planning application processes. A public consultation will take place.

1.6 Planning Policy Context

1.6.1 National Planning Policy Framework policy relevant to Forton and Meretown Conservation Area

- National planning policy is contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Section 12 relates to conserving and enhancing the historic environment and paragraphs 127-141 are relevant to Forton and Meretown Conservation Area.
- Historic England's *Good Practice Advice (GPA) notes 1,2,3 (2015)* is the national conservation guidance to support the NPPF policies and supersedes PPS5.

1.6.2 Local Planning Policy relevant to Forton and Meretown Conservation Area

- Local planning policy is contained within The Plan for Stafford Borough (adopted 2014). Section 12 *Environment* contains policies relevant to Forton and Meretown Conservation Area: Policies N8: *Landscape Character*, N9: *Historic Environment* and paragraphs 12.45-12.56.

2. Summary of Special Interest, Forton and Meretown Conservation Area

2.1 The Forton and Meretown Conservation Area was designated by Staffordshire County Council on 9th October 1978, as a means of preserving and enhancing the special architectural and historic interest that has been retained and enriched through the development of the villages over the centuries.

2.2 The key elements of the special character and appearance of Forton and Meretown are summarised as follows:

- Three listed buildings, one at grade II and two at grade II *, and a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM). A number of other buildings that make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance
- A well-preserved linear estate village pertaining to the nearby Aqualate Estate and retaining much of its 18th and 19th century historical form and character
- A wealth of surviving architectural features including the distinctive neo-Tudor style of gabled half-dormers and diamond lattice windows reflecting early 19th century development in the village by Thomas Boughey.
- The Church of All Saints with its medieval origins stands in an elevated position alongside Forton Hall lending an architectural grandeur to the centre of the village
- A distinct rural character reflected through good examples of surviving farm houses and a number of outbuildings retained in their original courtyard plan form

- Survival of historic canal bridges including the nationally important Skew Bridge a SAM
- Well-preserved stone walls and tall native hedgerows create strong boundaries along main thoroughfares
- A well-preserved historic street pattern enhanced by the course of the River Meese and former Newport Branch Canal
- Historic green spaces and open pools providing a strong visual relationship between buildings and landscape
- A winding village lane that presents a series of views with progression through the village including glimpses of historic buildings along enclosed lanes and long reaching views in and around the village

2.1 Location and Topography

2.1.1 Forton is a small village which lies 2 miles northeast of Newport and 13 miles west of Stafford, adjoining the A519 Newport to Eccleshall Road. Immediately south of the village lies the small hamlet of Meretown which is topographically divided from Forton by the winding course of the River Meese. The two settlements are joined by the lane across the skew bridge.

2.1.2 To the southeast of the settlements is the Aqualate Estate which consists of a hall, associated deer park, woodland, and a large mere, a nature reserve and the largest natural lake in the West Midlands being approximately one mile in length by ½ mile wide.

2.1.3 Forton and Meretown developed as linear settlement in relation to the Aqualate Estate. Forton village itself stands as a cluster of historic buildings on an elevated sandstone ridge standing above the valley of the Meese, All Saint's Church and Forton Hall overlook the open slope down to the river. The construction of the now dis-used Newport Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal in the 1830s necessitated the diversion of the road to Meretown from Forton road known as Fleet Lane, which formerly ran past the rectory and crossed the River Meese by a ford. A combined road bridge and aqueduct, known as Skew Bridge, carries the road over both the river and the former canal.

2.1.4 The land surrounding the village is mostly drained wetlands and floodplain fields with some pre 1880s paddocks and closes. The area is wholly agricultural with much of the land used for grazing. The large tree-lined Moss Pool lies to the far south of the conservation area adjoining the site of the disused Newport Branch Canal.

2.2 Historical development and relationship to current layout

2.2.1 At the time of the Norman Conquest, Forton was part of the Manor of Mere, which was held at the time of the Domesday survey in 1086 by the King. A mill was included in the Manor of Mere in the Domesday Book with 4000 eels and a fishery recorded in 1272. By 1487 Meretown mill was recorded with a weir and eel trap, tenanted by Richard Orme who also held the mill house. In the 1550s the name of the manor was changed from Mere to Mere and Forton.

2.2.2 The Manor of the Mere was purchased by the Skymshers in the mid-16th century, passing to the Baldwyns through marriage and then to the Fletchers of Betley in 1797 whose heirs took the name Boughey.

2.2.3 The name Forton is thought to come from 'settlement or town of the ford'; Probably the *tun* by the ford. The name 'Mere' comes from the OE *mere* meaning 'a pool, a lake', the place adjoining Aqualate Mere.



Figure 1 Yate's Map of 1798 shows the linear settlement of Forton and Meretown

2.2.4 Forton and Meretown have their roots in agriculture, developing further as an estate village for the nearby Aqualate Estate from the 17th century. In contrast to the scattered houses which survive, Meretown was once a substantial linear settlement and many of the extant dwellings are historic farmsteads evidenced through the high survival of courtyard outbuildings. A further linear development pattern occurred in Forton during the 18th and 19th centuries along the Roman road, now the A519 which runs between Newport and Newcastle under Lyme.

2.2.5 The basic historic road layout and early settlement pattern of Forton and Meretown can still be identified, the only change being the re-routing of the lane during construction of the Newport Branch Canal in the early 19th century. Built through the village in the 1830s, the canal required the diversion of the Meretown-Forton Road known as Fleet Lane, which formerly ran past the rectory and crossed the River Meese by a ford, this lane is now a dead end and private road. Skew Bridge, a combined road bridge and aqueduct, was constructed to carry the re-routed road over the river east of the mill.

2.2.6 Many of the houses and cottages in Forton and Meretown were built or rebuilt in the early 19th century by Sir Thomas Boughey, the owner and heir to the Aqualate Estate in the 1830s. Boughey carried out works of estate improvements and re-building throughout his inheritance using capital accumulated during his minority before 1830. Early mapping from the mid-to-late 18th century identifies several buildings which by the Tithe Map of 1843 have been either demolished or replaced. The majority of the houses are built in the distinctive neo-Tudor architectural style in red brick with gabled half-dormers and diamond-shaped window panes set in stone mullion frames. By the first edition OS map of 1891 the layout of the village buildings are much as they are today.

- 2.2.7** There was a church at Forton by 1199 and parts of the church building dates to the early 13th century including the lower walling of the tower and much of the east chancel wall. A top storey was added to the tower in c.1500 and extensive alterations were carried out in 1723 by Acton Baldwyn, the then heir to the manor. The church of All Saints was originally approached from the west which became the farmyard to Forton Hall and is now converted agricultural dwellings. When the new road was built past the church in the 19th century the entrance was moved to the south side of the churchyard.
- 2.2.8** The National school was built in Forton in 1843 by Sir Thomas Boughey; the single storey building built in the same style as the houses and cottages of red brick in the Tudor style. The school was replaced in 1898 by the present school in Shaw Lane.
- 2.2.9** There has been little modern development within the Forton and Meretown Conservation Area and 20th and 21st century development has been limited to the residential conversion of agricultural buildings and a small group of modern housing on Swan Court.

2.3 Map Regression



Figure 2 Estate Map of Forton 1767



Figure 3 Tithe Map of Forton and Meretwon 1843

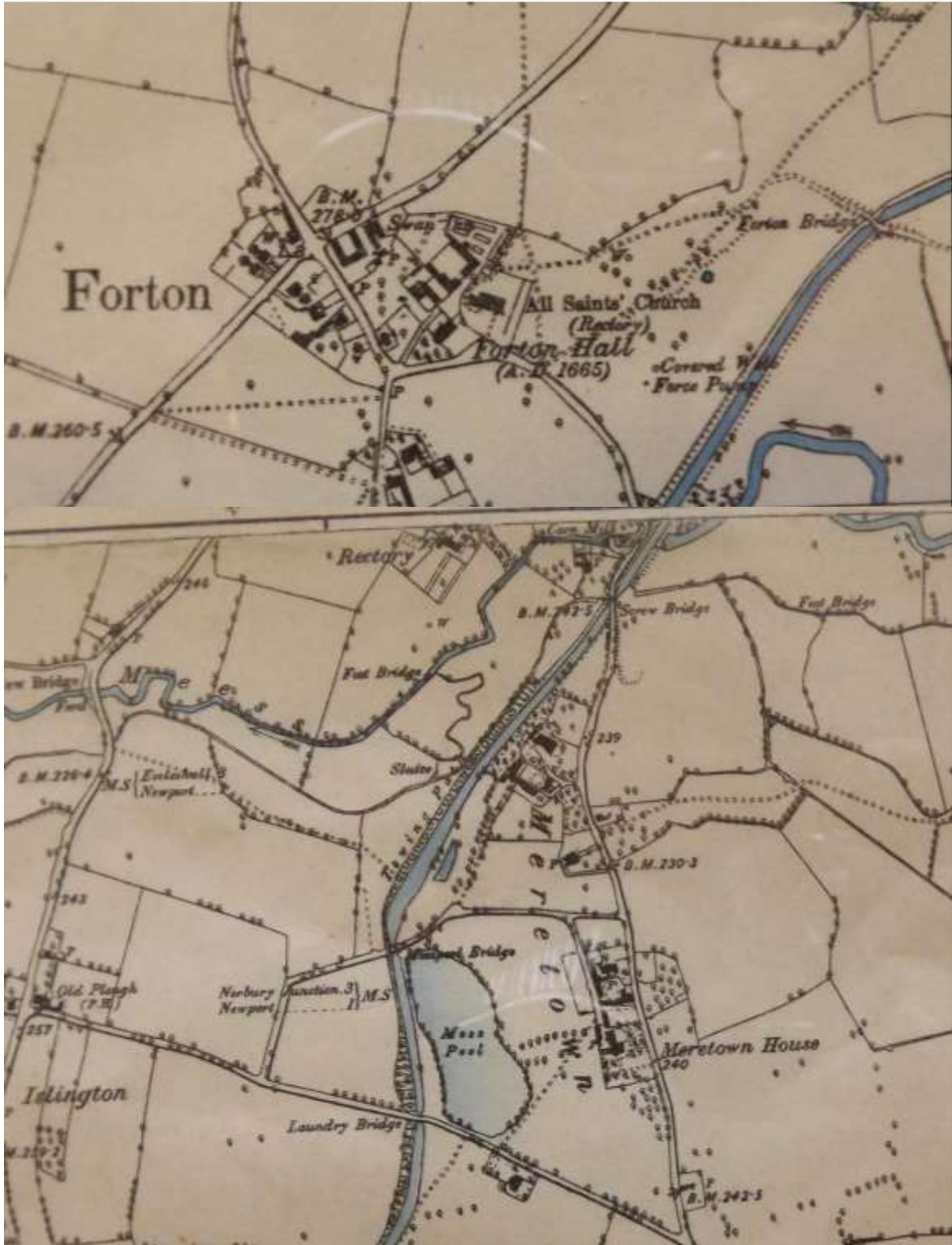


Figure 4 1st edition OS Map 1891



Figure 5 2nd edition OS Map 1903



Figure 6 3rd Edition OS Map 1925

3. Built Character

3.1 Building types

3.1.1 The buildings within the Forton and Meretown Conservation Area are architecturally distinct, many with neo-Tudor features which give the communities the mark of an estate village. The buildings are predominantly of brick with stone dressings and features, and roofs are of tile. There is a large number of surviving agricultural outbuildings to former historic farmhouses, almost all of which have now been converted to residential use.

3.1.2 The buildings are mostly domestic dwellings and former farmsteads ranging in date from at least the 17th century to the 21st century. All Saint's Church is an 18th century stone church with a medieval stone tower and sits on raised ground in an elevated position. There is one pub, The Swan and the former National school, now a nursery school, which dates to the 19th century.

3.1.3 The course of the Newport Branch Canal through Forton and Meretown has determined that the built environment of this rural village encompasses a group of stone canal bridges, including Skew Bridge, a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

3.2 Plan form and layout

3.2.1 The historic buildings of Forton range from modest two-storey, three bay detached or semi-detached dwellings to three-to-four storey large scale dwellings. The buildings mostly follow a rectangular or T-shaped plan and are aligned to the road. In both Forton and Meretown the majority of buildings are set back from the road edge behind front gardens, paths and gates, the larger houses having substantial front plots enclosed behind tree fronted grounds.

- 3.2.2** Former agricultural buildings are modest one-to-two-storey, rectilinear buildings, located in the grounds of farms or former farms in either U-shaped or loose courtyard arrangements.
- 3.2.3** All the buildings within the conservation area are oriented with their front façade facing the road, the exception being Netherfield House (the former Rectory) which faces away from the main route from Forton to Meretown. The larger scale dwellings, such as Forton Hall and Meretown Grange, are set within their own grounds in slightly elevated positions, and Meretown House is set back from the road in a farmyard setting surrounded by open paddocks.
- 3.2.4** Forton House and Netherfield House are sited along the former village road which was re-routed in the 19th century. Now a private road the buildings form a cluster of historic buildings along with former agricultural buildings, now residential conversions, which can be glimpsed from the village.
- 3.2.5** The Swan Pub is a grand looking, two storey building which faces the south side of the main Eccleshall Road as it passes through the conservation area, and forms part of the 18th and 19th century linear development of buildings along the road. The former agricultural outbuildings to the west of the Swan form a U-shaped plan form and Hi Vue and Swan Farm Cottages continue the linear building line along the north side of the road.

3.3 Architectural style and features

3.3.1 The neo-Tudor features are a predominant characteristic of many of the cottages and farm houses in Forton and Meretown, and give the communities the mark of an estate village. They owe their development to Sir Thomas Boughy, the owner and heir to the Aqualate Estate in the 1830s, who carried out works of improvement and re-building throughout his inheritance using capital accumulated during his minority before 1830.

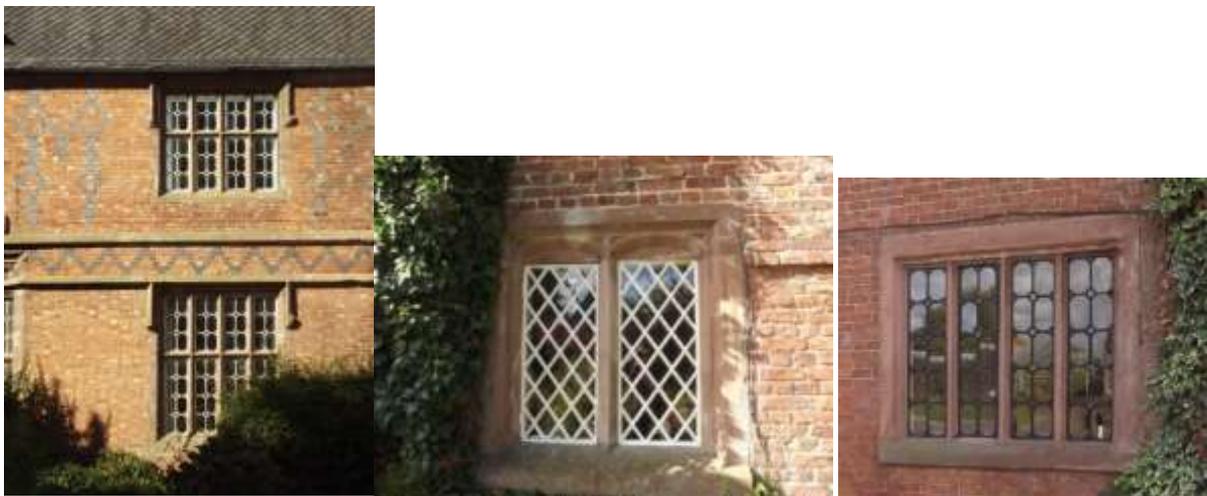


Figure 7 The distinctive windows of the conservation area seen at Meretown Grange, Brook House and the Swan

3.3.2. Iron casement windows with diamond lattice glazing bars set in a moulded, Tudor arch stone, mullioned frame are found throughout the conservation area. Particularly good examples are seen at Brook House and Meretown Cottage. This distinctive window style contributes significantly to the character and appearance of the Forton and Meretown Conservation Area. Other historic windows are found at Meretown Grange which has stone transomed windows with decorative iron lights, a feature mirrored at The Swan public house, and there are good examples of eight over eight sash windows at Meretown Farm.

3.3.3 Dormer windows are a characteristic feature within the conservation area and take the form of either full dormers, as seen at Forton House or, more frequently, half-dormers as at the Old School House. The dormers give a vertical emphasis to the buildings and many are finished with decorative stone finials. Chimney stacks and pots also feature strongly within the conservation area adding further to the verticality of the buildings; the exceptional chimney stacks of Forton Hall are worthy of note.



Figure 8 Roof dormers and finials at Forton House and chimney stacks to Forton Hall

3.3.4 There are a variety of bespoke decorative and architecturally attractive features in Forton and Meretown. The cast iron 'hand' window catches made in Coalbrookdale in Ironbridge are thought to be exclusive to Meretown, and the moulded hinge block quoins carved from ashlar stone form an integral part of the stable building at Brook House.



Figure 9 Cast iron 'hand' window catches and moulded stone door hinge holders

3.3.5 Doors within the Conservation Area are mostly traditional timber panelled doors or simple plank doors. Doorways are enhanced by distinguished porches which range from the highly ornate stone carved to the more simple brick and pitched tile roof porches. Some porches are recessed back beyond a projecting central gable as seen at the Swan Public House and Meretown Grange. Traditional stables doors at Brook House and Meretown House, and the surviving stone arched doorway of the mill create a pleasing contrast to the more formal doorways of the houses.

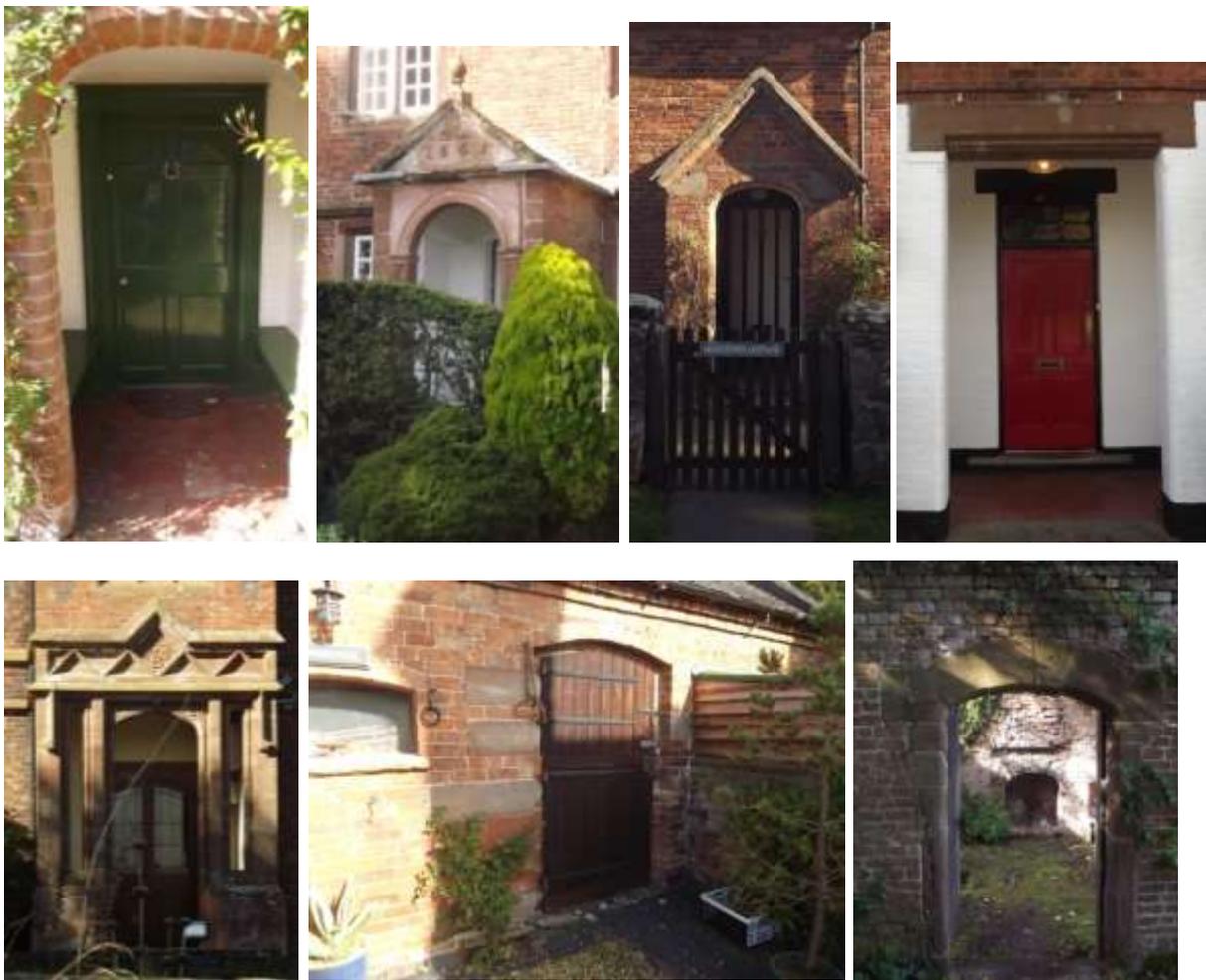


Figure 10 Doors and porches of the conservation area

3.3.6 Gates and gate posts feature throughout the conservation area and create a traditional, well-defined entrance at many of the houses and cottages. Stone gateposts and iron gates combine with simple picket gates to give an organised and clearly defined entrance to many of the houses and cottages.



Figure 11 Gates and gateposts of the conservation area

3.4 Building Materials

3.4.1 Building materials in the conservation area are predominantly red brick with roof material almost exclusively Staffordshire blue clay tiles. Ashlar stone is found at Forton House and stone is used both structurally and decoratively, for window surrounds and decorative features. The Skew Bridge and other canal bridges are also of ashlar stone and stone footings are still evident at the mill building.

3.4.2 Ironwork is present to the distinctive casement windows and there are examples of wrought iron gates throughout the conservation area. Timber is used for windows and some gates and fencing.

3.5 Listed Buildings

There are three listed buildings in the Forton and Meretown Conservation Area; one at grade II and two at grade II* and one Scheduled ancient Monument.

List descriptions can found in appendix 1.

3.5.1 Church of All Saints

Built of dressed sandstone the medieval tower of the church rises to the west, the chancel east wall and the north aisle are also medieval. The nave is reputed to have been rebuilt in 1723 as part of extensive alterations inspired by Acton Baldwyn, then heir to the manor of Mere, who arms appear in the centre of the south wall. There was later restoration work in the very early 20th century when the 18th century box pews were removed.



Figure 12 Church of All Saints

3.5.2 Forton Hall

Located to the west of all Saint's Church, Forton Hall is a 17th century hall of four storeys including a basement and attics. Of red brick and tile over three bays with stone quoins and eaves, the building is symmetrical on a rectangular plan. Windows are stone mullioned and there are three half-dormers with gables and stone ball finials. Large external chimney stacks. A stone string course separates the ground and first floors and in the centre is a stone porch which has a round-headed opening and a date inscription of 1665. Its proximity to the church illustrates the importance of the Hall. Apart from a Georgian bay window and some additional chimneys, the house is little altered and stands as a good example of its period.



Figure 13 Forton Hall



Figure 14 Forton House

3.5.3 Forton House

A fine stone ashlar house with mullioned windows and gabled dormers, Forton House was built in 1638 by Jeffrey Pigot whose stone quarrying led him into conflict with the Lord of the Manor. The house was extended to the rear in the early in the early 19th century, and altered again in the 1860s. During part of the 19th century the house was occupied by a girl's 'boarding academy'.

3.5.4 The Skew Bridge and aqueduct

A Scheduled Ancient Monument, this skew arched bridge was built by Thomas Telford to carry the Newport Branch Canal across the River Meese. A novel feat of engineering the skew bridge combined the re-aligned road and an aqueduct for the canal together in a single structure built of ashlar stone. The bridge is unique in Staffordshire, an unusual structure in the country as a whole, and an important monument to the technology of the canal era.



Figure 15 The aqueduct



Figure 16 The canal bridge

3.6 Positive buildings and structures

Forton and Meretown are, for such small hamlets, particularly rich in historic buildings and there are a number of historic buildings and structures within the Conservation Area which make a positive contribution to the special character of the area.

3.6.1 The Swan

A former 18th century coaching inn, The Swan is a substantial building located on the main A519 road through Forton. Of red brick and tile, the building has the characteristic stone mullion windows and decorative panes. A projecting bay to the central gable houses a recessed porch and there are several large chimney stacks.



Figure 17 The Swan

3.6.2 Hi Vue

A traditional red brick and tile former farmhouse set over three storeys and three bays with half-dormers passing through the roof space and traditional style casement windows. The extant building appears to date from the early 19th century although there is evidence of an earlier building on this site. The building forms part of an historic linear group of buildings along with Swan Farm Cottages.



Figure 18 Hi Vue

3.6.3 Swan Farm and Swan Farm Cottages display the traditional, estate village architectural style built in the 19th century during the re-building of the village built by Sir Thomas in the style of some of the other larger buildings in the village, although they have regrettably lost their lattice windows.



Figure 19 Swan Farm and Swan Farm cottages

3.6.4 The Old School House and the former National school are also buildings of the early 19th century re-building period and retain many of the distinctive neo-Tudor features with half-dormers, front porch and mullion lattice windows. The projecting gable of the school displays the date stamp of 1843. The former National school is currently used as a nursery school.



Figure 20 The Old School House and the former National school

3.6.5 Netherfield House (the former Rectory)

A large red brick building well screened behind a thicket of trees adjoining Forton House, Netherfield House is the former rectory and dates largely from 1804, but possibly contains fragments of an earlier house dating from 1637. Now Netherfield House, the building sits in large grounds at the end of the former village lane which was re-routed in the 19th century.

3.6.6 Brook House

Located next to the skew bridge, Brook House was probably the original mill house. Thought to have 15th century origins, the house itself contains 17th century brickwork, but was extensively altered in the mid-19th century when it assumed its present neo-Tudor appearance, with gabled half dormers and diamond lattice windows. A picturesque house over three storeys, Brook House is set in immaculate gardens with the River Meese and a small tributary with a stone culvert passing through the grounds. To the rear of the house lies a brick and tile stable block and former piggery both of which retain original fenestration and architectural features.



Figure 21 Brook House

3.6.7 The Mill

The mill itself stood in a small red brick building on a stone base of 17th century date alongside the River Meese. Now derelict this former hemp mill is thought to stand on the site of a 13th century mill and retains its open hearth and chimney stack and stone entrance doorway. The waterwheel was an undershot type which along with its machinery was dismantled in the 18th century. The sluices and culverts are however, still in place and the iron sluice gate handle survives within the mill building.



Figure 22 The mill

3.6.8 Meretown Grange

Entering the hamlet of Meretown, the impressive Meretown Grange sits on a bank to the west. Formerly Bank House Farm, the building is gabled with black diaper patterns in the brickwork, distinctive ornate chimneys and stone finials, and stone mullion and transom lattice windows with hood moulds. The central projecting gabled bay incorporates a decorative stone porch. To the south of the house former outbuildings have been converted to three residential dwellings, now known as Meretown Court.



Figure 23 Meretown Grange

3.6.9 Meretown House

An 18th century brick building with later additions, Meretown House was bought by Sir Thomas Boughey in 1816 and used as a dower house for the Aqualate Estate during much of the 19th century. With its own school house and bakery, the building historically had numerous outbuildings, and whilst the original stables remain, many have now been converted to residential use.

3.6.10 Meretown Cottage

A building can be identified on this site from the late 18th century, however it is likely that Meretown Cottage was rebuilt or redesigned as part of the estate in the 1830s. Almost opposite the cottage stands Meredale house, a building on a larger scale than Meretown Cottage, but both sharing the same distinct estate village architectural features.



Figure 24 Meretown Cottage

3.6.11 Meretown Farm

A late 18th century farmhouse, Meretown Farm is a three storey farmhouse over three bays with gabled half-dormers and eight over eight sash windows with stone lintels and projecting keystones.



Figure 25 Meretown Farm

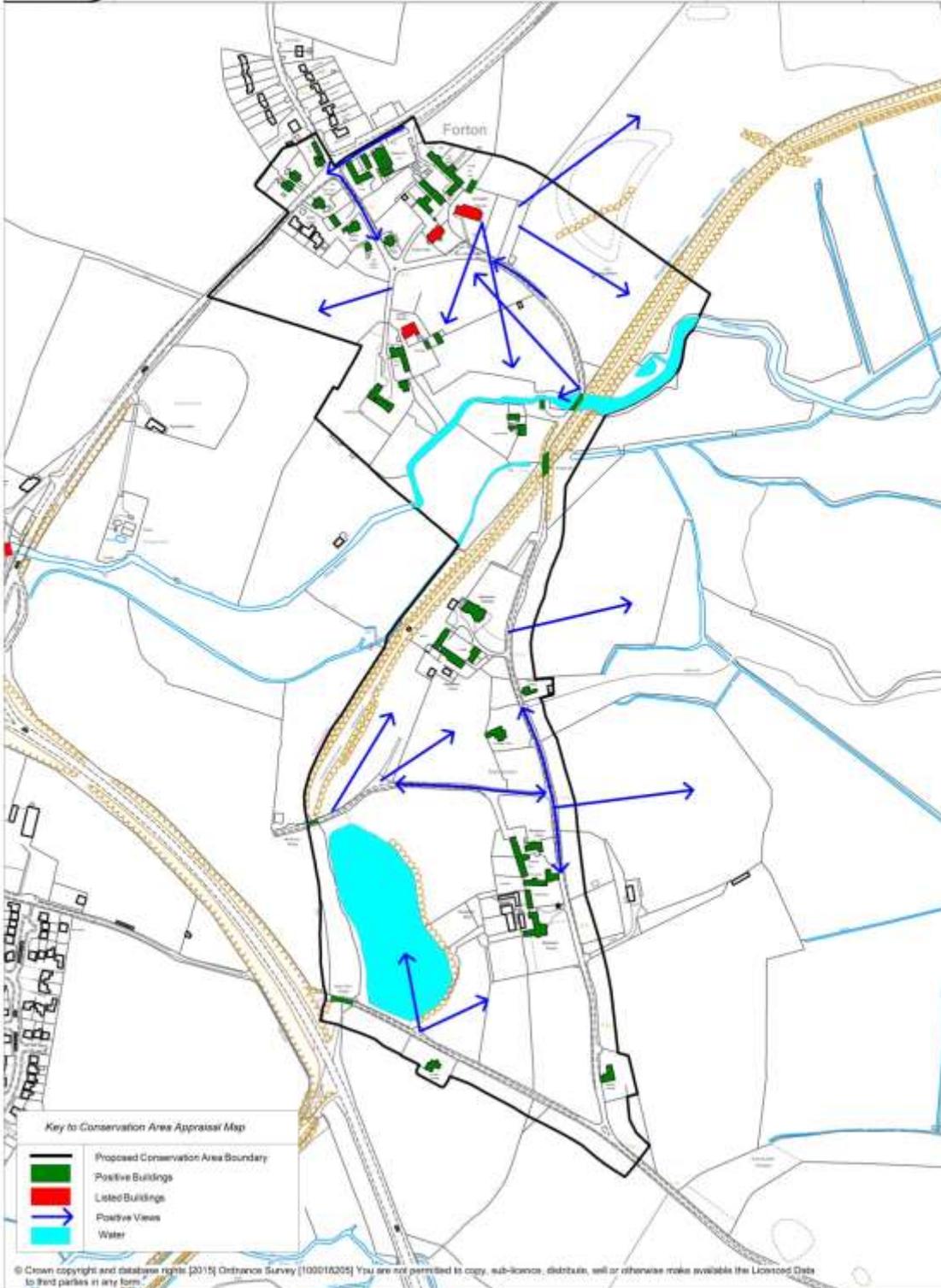
3.6.12 Warwick Cottage and Laundry Cottage lie to the south of the conservation area, slightly more dispersed from the other buildings. Warwick Cottage shows evidence of the neo-Tudor features found elsewhere in the village although it has been much extended and altered and Laundry Cottage is an 18th century cottage which has been extended to the side elevation. This two storey cottage is built in the local vernacular of red brick and tile, and has eight-over-eight sash windows although these appear to be 20th century replacements.



Figure 26 Laundry Cottage and Warwick Cottage

3.6.13 The survival of two further canal bridges in addition to the Skew Bridge is testament to the industrial transportation history which touched this quietly remote settlement for over a century. Meretown Bridge and Moss Pool Bridge, situated to the northwest and southwest of Moss Pool, remain intact over the back filled canal channel.

3.6.14 A large number of agricultural outbuildings survive within the conservation area, most of which have now been converted to domestic dwellings. In most cases the plan form and courtyard layout of the buildings has been retained giving these buildings a strong historical context in which to sit. Some conversions have successfully managed to respect historic fenestration although the creation of new openings and insertion of roof lights has created a heavily domesticated appearance to others



4. Spatial analysis

4.1 Plan form and layout

- 4.1.1** The street pattern of Forton and Meretown is determined by its ancient origins, its development as an estate village for the nearby Aqualate Estate, and the coming of the Newport Branch Canal through the village in the 19th century, with few modifications or alterations since. The A519 runs southwest to northeast through Forton, and the lane travelling from Forton to Meretown, known as Walkley Bank, runs north to south and an untreated single track lane leads off Walkley Bank down to the former branch canal. The River Meese winds through Forton from the west and the dis-used branch canal traverses the conservation area northeast to southwest.
- 4.1.2** The village follows a linear development pattern both along the main A519 and along Walkley Bank. The historic buildings are mostly sited adjacent to the roads, and some form small groups or clusters such as All Saints Church and Forton Hall, and Forton House and Netherfield House. All buildings face the road, although former farm buildings form U-shaped or loose courtyard arrangements oriented around their yards; Netherfield House alone turns its back to the village.
- 4.1.3** There is a consistency in the plan form and layout of the buildings in Forton and Meretown representing the gradual development of the village, from its agricultural roots through to a more 'designed' estate village.

4.2 Landmarks, focal points and views

4.2.1 Forton and Meretown are mainly experienced through a series of sequential and linear views with landmarks and focal points adding interest and intrigue. Looking west along the Eccleshall Road, the building line of Hi Vue and Swan Farm Cottages create a focal point in the street scene, and approaching Meretown Lane from the north, the strong visual boundaries of stone walling and hedging draw the eye down further into the village.



Figure 27 The building line created by Hi Vue and Swan Farm cottages looking west

4.2.2 The main landmarks in Forton are All Saints Church and Forton Hall. Set next to each other in an elevated position, the dominance of these buildings in the landscape creates a strong visual focus and highlights the importance of these grade II * buildings to the village.



Figure 28 All Saints Church and Forton Hall create a strong visual focus

4.2.3 From the churchyard open views in all directions take advantage of its elevated position, and the feeling of space and open countryside penetrates into this central core of Forton. Long views across fields to the southeast take in groups of trees, extending beyond the site of the branch canal to the countryside beyond, and to the south views are open across pasture land, sealed by the enclosed group of the grade II listed Forton House and outbuildings. The long reaching and unspoilt views from the churchyard across the historic landscape to the northeast enhances the open character felt from this commanding position.



Figure 29 Views from the churchyard to the southeast and south

4.2.4 The Skew Bridge is a key focal point of the conservation area. This Scheduled Ancient Monument combines a road bridge, aqueduct and canal bridge, and carries the road from Forton into Meretown. Views from the canal bridge are of the former Newport Branch Canal and the River Meese to the northeast, and from the road bridge above the aqueduct, glimpse views of the mill provide a focal point to the west.



Figure 30 Glimpse views of the mill from Skew Bridge

4.2.5 Travelling into Meretown the character immediately becomes more enclosed as stone boundary walls are heightened by high hedgerows and tall trees creating a sense of intimacy. As the lane winds through Meretown occasional gaps in hedgerows and sections of low stone walling create opportunities to experience open rural views. Notable views are where the space opens out to the east across open farmland and to the west where the enclosure of hedges opens out to paddocks and Moss Pool beyond.



Figure 31 Views through Meretown contrast between enclosed lanes and open farmland

4.2.6 The landscape setting of Meretown is considerably enhanced by the tree-lined Moss Pool, adjoining the now disused Newport Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal at the southwest corner of the conservation area. A break in the trees along Meretown Lane allows for open water views of the heavily enclosed Pool, this landmark water feature further emphasising the sense of space within the conservation area.



Figure 32 View of Moss Pool from the south

4.3 Open space and gardens

4.3.1 The special and unspoilt character of Forton and Meretown lies in the combination of its important and well-preserved historic buildings and the attractive open spaces between them which complement their picturesque setting. This character is apparent throughout the conservation area where the settings of the historic buildings are considerably enhanced by farm and pastureland, private gardens and public space. Moss Pool and the site of the former branch canal also contribute positively to open space within the conservation area.

4.3.2 The majority of open space within Forton and Meretown is made up of pre 1880s paddocks and closes, much of which is now used for grazing. This pastoral landscape quality is embodied by an area of pastureland which offers attractive green space at the heart of Forton and large areas of paddock create significant open space intertwined with the buildings of Meretown.



Figure 33 Open pastureland in Forton and Meretown

4.3.3 Most of the buildings of Forton and Meretown are situated within their own grounds and many of the larger dwellings have substantial gardens which creates a sense of space around and between the buildings.

4.3.4 The coming of the Newport Branch Canal through Forton and Meretown in the 19th century made a significant contribution not only to the built character of the area but also to the landscape character. The canal channel is now back-filled and has been assimilated into the landscape creating a corridor of open space through parts of the conservation area. Despite this, evidence of the canal cut is still well-defined in many parts and serves as a tangible visual reminder of what once was a busy branch canal.

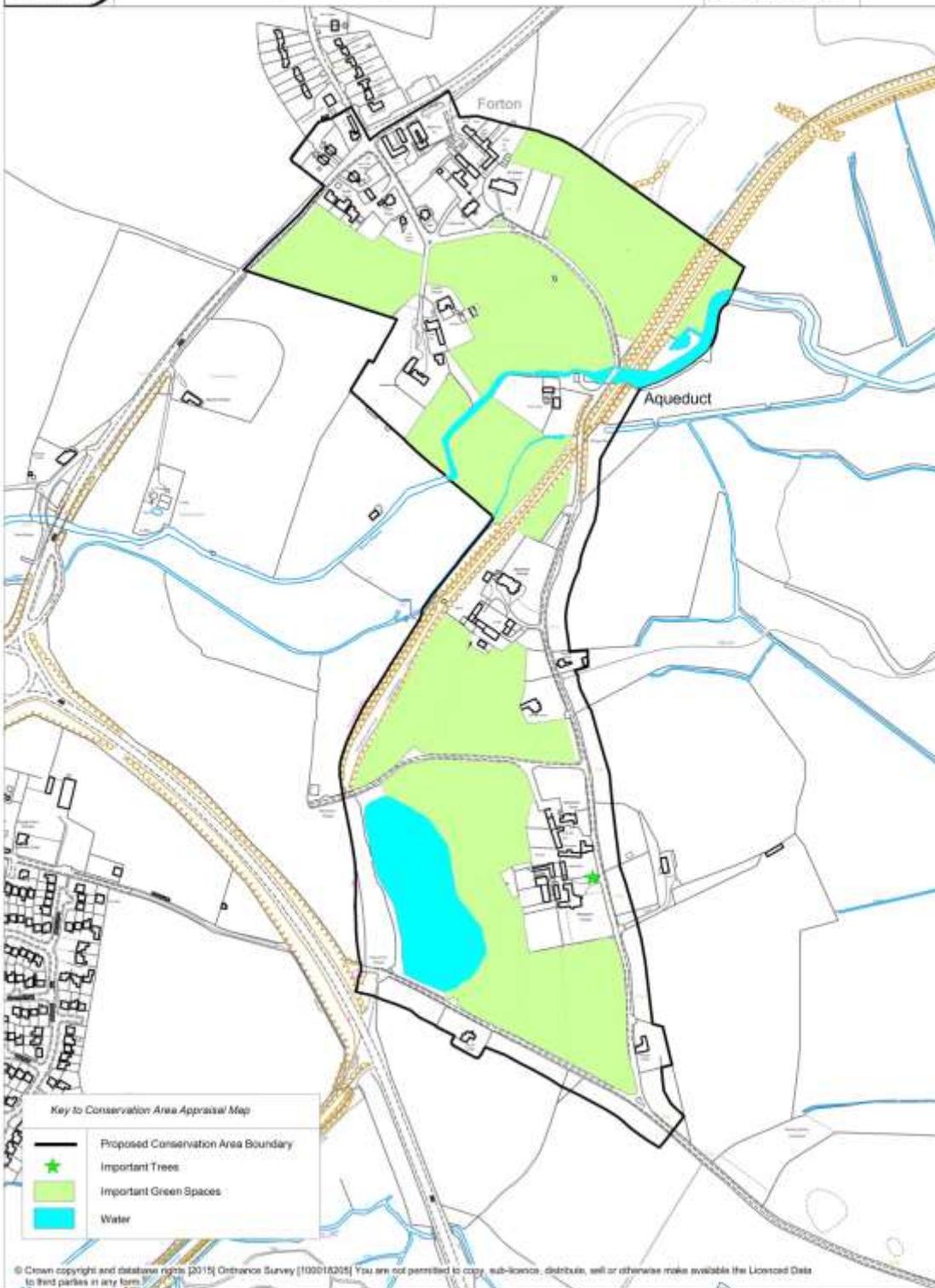


Figure 34 Site of the former branch canal to the north of the Skew Bridge

4.3.5 Public space is provided by the churchyard at All Saints Church which surrounds the church on three sides. A number of historic headstones, including that of canal engineer Alexander Easton, combine with a peaceful and tranquil setting which is amplified by the open space of neighbouring fields. A small triangular green in front of the Church and Forton Hall forms a well-defined green space and enhances the setting of these two important historic buildings.



Figure 35 Public space is found at the churchyard



4.4 Public Realm

4.4.1 The main roads within the conservation area are of tarmac and there are some pavements with concrete kerbs along the main A519 Eccleshall Road which continue into the north section of Meretown Lane. Road markings are quite heavy along the A519 but are limited to junctions along Meretown Lane. Elsewhere in the conservation area informal grass verges line the roadside, most are without kerbs although some traditional kerb stones line the grass verge in front of the church and the pavement in front of Forton Nursery School.

4.4.2 There is no street lighting in the conservation area, although there is a traditional lamp at the churchyard gates and the Swan public house has illuminated signage. Street furniture consists of a bench in the churchyard and there are some modern plastic rubbish bins located along Meretown Lane.

4.4.3 There are a number of historic public footpaths in Forton, running to the north and east of All Saints Church and to the west of the lane leading to Forton House. In Meretown a footpath runs from the lane north of Meretown Farm down past Moss Pool.

4.5 Important Trees and hedges

4.5.1 Both trees and hedges are an integral part of the character of Forton and Meretown. Hedging was the traditional means of field enclosure during the 18th and 19th centuries and well-established hedges of native species contribute to the rural character, particularly along the enclosed lanes throughout Meretown and around Moss Pool.

4.5.2 A number of fine mature trees can be found throughout the conservation area, lining the lanes and forming important focal points, both as clusters and individually. Mature trees enclose gardens and form key groups which define historic buildings and areas. Notable groups of trees can be found to the south and west of Forton House, to the grounds of Brook House and the mill and between Meretown Grange and the former branch canal.



Figure 36 Trees line the lanes and enclose gardens

4.5.3 Individually significant trees can be found lining the edges of lanes or as focal points within the landscape. A group of Silver Birch trees covered by Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) define the entrance to Meretown Lane from the A519, and an impressive Plane tree frames the entrance to Meretown House.



Figure 37 A mature Plane tree at Meretown House and a group of Silver Birch trees at the corner of Walkley Bank and the A519

4.5.4 Hedging is also used to create domestic boundaries. Although some species may not be native and their appearance of less historic character, they soften views and create senses of intimacy and enclosure. At Meretown Grange and Meredale House hedging interspersed with mature trees creates a particular sense of withdrawal and privacy.

4.6 Boundary Treatment

4.6.1 Boundary treatments through the conservation area line the main thoroughfares and quiet lanes and play an important part in defining the character of the area. Treatments vary considerably with a mixture of stone and brick walling of varying heights, some combined with hedging and others with simple post and rail fencing. Some boundaries are defined by high hedgerows which follow historic field boundaries, and metal railings, gates and stone gateposts are a regular feature throughout the conservation area.

4.6.2 The boundary wall to the church is of red brick built in Flemish Bond with saddleback stone copings and stone footings. Iron gates and stone steps create a distinctive entrance to the churchyard, whilst the low ashlar sandstone wall with fine joints, chamfered copings and neat hedging creates a well-defined and formal boundary to Forton Hall next door. Metal railings on low stone walling continue round the grounds of the hall to line the boundary of the nurse school, and iron fencing bounds the graveyard on the north and east side.

4.6.3 The stone and brick walls that bound the houses of the conservation area tend to create a planned and formal feel, contrasting with the more informal hedges and timber fences which convey a rustic, agricultural character. This is, particularly noticeable through Meretown where the sturdy line of ashlar stone walls regularly gives way to hedgerows and fencing. Breaks in boundaries occur as walls curve up driveways, and entrances to courtyards and driveway surfaces are either of tarmac, brick paving or untreated or gravelled, with some historic cobbles found at Meretown House,

4.6.4 Natural boundaries are also a key feature of the conservation area and the native hawthorn and holly hedgerows that line Meretown Lane create a sense of enclosure and emphasise the narrow winding nature of the lane.



Figure 38 Varying boundary treatments throughout the conservation area

5. Key Positive Characteristics to be considered during any Proposal for Change

Layout of the Conservation Area

- An historic, linear village and hamlet settlement, with surviving historic street pattern.
- Identifiable historic field boundaries, mature trees and hedgerows.
- Surviving historic farmhouses and estate houses related to the Aqualate Estate.
- Areas of open and watered space

Building types

- An 18th century church with medieval origins and grade II* listed
- A 17th century hall which still retains its historic plan form and many original features listed grade II*
- Examples of domestic farmhouses and agricultural buildings.
- Modest cottages and larger houses dating from at least the 17th century
- An 18th century coaching inn and 19th century former National school
- An important canal aqueduct and bridge, a Scheduled Ancient Monument

Plot size and plan form

- One to four storey cottages and houses set behind modest to large front gardens
- Large scale farmhouses and dwellings set back from the roadside in large grounds.
- One to two storey rectilinear agricultural buildings in U-shaped or loose courtyard arrangements.

Building materials

- Red, orangey-red brick, stone and Staffordshire blue clay tile .
- The use of stone to footings, boundary walls and window frames, lintels and cills.
- Historic ironwork found to casement windows and metal railings to boundaries
- Timber sash windows

Public realm

- Positive public space is found at the churchyard of All Saints Church.

Boundaries

- Positive boundaries are created through historic hedgerows and mature trees combined with coursed and ashlar stone walling. There are examples of red brick boundary walls, post and rail fencing and moulded stone gate posts.

Architectural features

- Distinctive neo-Tudor 'estate' style with diamond lattice iron windows in stone mullion frames and roof dormers
- A variety of surviving historic windows including sash, casement and mullion.
- Projecting central bays with recessed porches, and brick and tile pitched roof porches
- Stone lintels and cills, finials and quoins.
- Decorative chimney stacks and pots.
- Bespoke iron 'hand' window handles and moulded stone door hinge blocks

Open space

- The open countryside which surrounds Forton and Meretown, contributes significantly to its rural setting. Open space within the conservation area is provided by public space, private land and gardens.

- Areas of open space can be found at Moss Pool, the site of the former Newport Branch Canal, at the churchyard and throughout both Forton and Meretown in the form of paddocks and pastureland

Important views

- It is important that significant and positive views are protected both into and out of the Conservation Area.
- Key views, landmarks and focal points, identified within this appraisal, positively contribute to the character of the Forton and Meretown Conservation Area and are to be protected.

Important trees and hedgerows

- Groups of important trees and hedges form an integral part of the character of the conservation area and provide aesthetically pleasing and picturesque aspects.
- Individually significant trees and groups of important trees can be found throughout the conservation area. A group of Silver Birch in the grounds of Swan Farm Cottages are protected by a TPO.

6. Negative aspects that impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area

6.1 In order to manage the conservation area's special architectural and historic character and appearance, it is essential to identify and address any problems that dilute this character. As a small rural settlement even slight changes can have a substantial impact on character and affect the significance of what makes Forton and Meretown special. The following issues have been identified as having a negative impact on the Conservation Area.

6.2 Some of the distinctive stone boundary walls have been made unstable through flooding, resulting in collapse in some parts. This loss of boundary wall interrupts the well-defined, linear character and reinstatement is desirable.

6.3 In the public realm street signage, telegraph wires and columns, and traffic bollards have a tendency to create visual clutter. Any new structures need to be carefully designed and sited in order to minimise the impact on the conservation area. The siting of telegraph posts and wire across an area of significant open green space creates a visual intrusion into the conservation area.



Figure 39 Traffic bollards and telegraph poles and wires create a visual intrusion

6.4 The buildings of Forton and Meretown are generally well-maintained and in good condition. However, the use of hard cementitious mortar is noted in some areas and is causing erosion of masonry. If the mortar used is harder than the brick or stone, then water will become trapped within the masonry, and cause erosion, particularly by 'spalling' in cold weather, when the moisture freezes, expands and blows the face off the masonry. If a damp proof course has been installed, this will then exacerbate the problem. The life of historic masonry can be protected by the use of softer, lime-based mortars which is permeable and thus sacrificial to the decay of the masonry.

6.5 Some cementitious mortars have been applied across the surface of historic masonry which, not only masks the historic material, but when mortar is flush with the masonry there is no channel to allow the water to run off. The over-zealous use of mortar to some buildings has also occurred which creates an unnatural appearance to historic stonework.



Figure 40 The use of cementitious mortar can both mask and detract from historic masonry

6.6 There has been little development within the Forton and Meretown Conservation Area since designation in 1978 and as such the conservation area has retained much of its historic, unspoilt character. Late 20th and early 21st century development has mostly been kept to the conversion of agricultural buildings to residential dwellings. Whilst some care has been taken with the conversions to retain features, the domestication of agricultural buildings almost always results in a loss or weakening of agricultural character for the following reasons:

- Loss of or alteration of original fenestration, including insertion of new openings and the use of 'timber-effect' uPVC windows
- The addition of raised roof lights raised
- The addition of chimneys to agricultural buildings
- The domestication of boundaries and creation of gardens breaks up the historic courtyard plan form
- The severing of the relationship between the buildings and the farmhouse by creating courtyard style developments with new names.



Figure 41 The domestication of agricultural buildings can cause loss or weakening of character

6.7 Modern development at Swan Farm Court has made some reference to style and materials although the cul-de-sac layout of these buildings creates a more suburban than rural character and interrupts the linear development pattern.

6.8 The use of modern building materials can have an adverse effect on historic character. This is particularly noticeable in Forton and Meretown where there is a distinctive architectural style and high retention of historic materials. Whilst many of the buildings retain their historic windows, some have been replaced in non-historic materials or styles such as uPVC or stained hardwood and in non-traditional top-opening styles. Where this has occurred, the variance with the established historic character is clear. In some cases there has been an attempt to mimic the neo-Tudor lattice iron windows with modern replicas, the result being one of an historic pastiche



Figure 42 Modern windows and doors can have an adverse effect on historic character

6.9 Some historic buildings have had modern conservatories or garage doors introduced which are visible from the roadside. The design and style of these conservatories are at odds with historic building materials and create a non-traditional character.

6.10 The isolated, rural nature of parts of the conservation area has attracted some littering and dumping of items. This has a negative impact on these areas which are otherwise unspoilt.

7. Enhancement opportunities

Some areas within conservation areas offer opportunities for enhancement, particularly where an area or building has been neglected or lost its historic use.

7.1 A section of the Newport Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal travelled through Forton and Meretown from the 1830s until being back-filled in 1960s. The canal contributed to the development of Forton and Meretown both historically and architecturally in the 19th century, and significantly contributed to the character and setting of the area. The loss of the canal through Forton and Meretown has resulted in the erosion of this particular aspect of character and reinstatement is desirable.

7.2 Along this small stretch of the former branch canal there remains intact two canal bridges. Meretown Bridge and Moss Pool Bridge are fine examples of traditional Thomas Telford engineered canal bridges and form a distinctive character group along with the nationally significant Skew Bridge. Currently defunct as canal bridges, and subsequently neglected significantly, the reinstatement of these bridges would be considered to be a positive enhancement to the conservation area.



Figure 43 Meretown Bridge and Moss Pool Bridge

7.3 A project to restore the Newport branch canal, from Norbury Junction in Staffordshire to Wappenshall in Shropshire, by the Shrewbury and Newport Canals Trust began in 2000. As part of the restoration the Trust identified a potential initial phase of restoration which includes the section of canal which travels from Forton to Newport, and includes the complete section which travels through the Forton and Meretown Conservation Area. Round one Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) funding has been secured by the Trust and in 2015 excavation work began.



Figure 44 Recent excavation of the Newport Branch Canal looking towards Skew Bridge



Figure 45 View of branch canal excavation from Skew Bridge

8. Protecting the character and appearance of the Conservation Area

Any new development should reinforce the character outlined in the summary of special interest and be sympathetic to the historical evolution and character of Forton and Meretown. Consideration should be given to the historic buildings and their setting, the historic layout and street pattern, significant spaces, massing, volume and scale of the existing and proposed buildings and the employment of vernacular materials and details.

Policies for the protection and management of the historic environment are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraphs 127 through to 141 and in the Plan for Stafford through policies N8 and N9, paragraphs 12.45 to 12.56.

These should be used in conjunction with this appraisal to guide or assess any future development within the Forton and Meretown Conservation Area.

Other organisations such as the County Council Highways Authority, and statutory undertakers also have their own commitment to protect the character and appearance of the Conservation Area in the exercise of their duties.

To manage and protect the special historic character and appearance of the Forton and Meretown Conservation Area in the exercise of these policies and duties:

- The existing special historic character and appearance of the Conservation Area as set out in this appraisal and all features identified as positive on the Conservation Area Appraisal Map should be retained and reinforced.
- Further works that harm the significance of the area, as set out in this appraisal, should be avoided.
- ‘*Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment*’ in the *Planning Practice Guidance* (2014) and *Good Practice Advice (GPA) notes 1,2,3* (Historic England, 2015).

- Existing and emerging design or conservation guidance published by Stafford Borough Council and English Heritage guidance should be consulted where relevant, such as *The Conversion of Traditional Farm Buildings: A guide to good practice* (English Heritage, 2006), *Living Buildings in a Living Landscape* (English Heritage, 2006), *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance* (English Heritage, 2008), *Streets for All* (English Heritage, 2004), *Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management* (English Heritage, 2011), *Setting and Views* (Historic England, 2015).
- Some works that could harm the character or appearance of the conservation area can be carried out under “permitted development rights”, which means that home owners do not need to apply for planning permission. Owners are nevertheless encouraged to take heed of the special historic character and appearance of the area when carrying out these works.

References

English Heritage: *Guidance on conservation area appraisals* (2006)

English Heritage: *Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management* (2011)

Horowitz, D. (2005). *The Place Names of Staffordshire*: Brewood

Midgley, M. (Ed.) (1958) *A History of the County of Stafford Volume IV*: London

Staffordshire County Council, Stafford Borough Council: *Forton and Meretown Conservation Area* (1978)

Websites

<http://www.search.staffspastrack.org.uk/Search.aspx?PageIndex=1&SortOrder=2&Keyword=forton>

Further information

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/9/section/69>

The Plan for Stafford Borough 2014

<http://www.staffordbc.gov.uk/live/Documents/Planning%20Policy/Plan%20for%20Stafford%20Borough/PFSB-Adoption.pdf>

The National Planning Policy Framework 2012

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

Staffordshire County Council, Historic Environment Record

http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Application.aspx?resourceID=1010

APPENDIX 1

Canal aqueduct

List Entry Summary

This monument is scheduled under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as amended as it appears to the Secretary of State to be of national importance. This entry is a copy, the original is held by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Name: Canal aqueduct

List entry Number: 1006078

Location

The monument may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: Staffordshire

District: Stafford

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Forton

Summary of Monument

Multi span canal aqueduct and skew bridge 90m ENE of Brook House.

Reasons for Designation

The principal age of canal building began in England in 1759 and played an important part in the growth and expansion of trade in many parts of the country, linking the river network and major ports. Canals also facilitated the relatively rapid movement of bulk agricultural produce from the countryside to the rapidly expanding industrial towns of the north and the midlands. Canal construction brought with it a whole range of associated structures. Many of these, such as bridges, canal workers' houses, warehouses, wet docks, dry docks, locks and water management systems involved the modification and development of the existing designs of such structures to meet the new requirements of the Canal Age, which also introduced the need for major technological innovation. The earlier canal bridges tended to be of brick or stone, depending on the local sources available and provided access for horse-drawn boats. They are usually single span due to the narrowness of the canals. During the later period cast iron bridges became more prominent. Normally a local builder was appointed by the engineer to construct a number of bridges creating local

distinctiveness in bridge designs. The great age of canal construction lasted until about the 1840s, when their utility was eroded by the huge expansion of railways with their quick and cheap transportation of people and goods. During their relatively brief period of use, however, canals became the most important method of industrial transportation, making a major contribution to England's Industrial Revolution. Surviving remains of the early industrial waterways transport network and associated structures are particularly important both by virtue of their rarity and representivity.

The multi span canal aqueduct and skew bridge 90m ENE of Brook House survives in good condition. It is representative of Thomas Telford's engineering achievements and an important period in the development of the network of waterway transportation and associated structures.

History

See Details.

Details

This record was the subject of a minor enhancement on 10 June 2015. This record has been generated from an "old county number" (OCN) scheduling record. These are monuments that were not reviewed under the Monuments Protection Programme and are some of our oldest designation records.

The monument includes a multi span canal aqueduct and bridge spanning the River Meese. It is built of coursed squared stone and includes three arches spanning the river. It was built in 1833 by the engineer Thomas Telford to carry the Newport branch of the Shropshire Union Canal and a public road over the River Meese.

Selected Sources

Other

Pastscape: 877041

National Grid Reference: SJ 75665 20972

CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS

List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS

List entry Number: 1242640

Location

CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: Staffordshire

District: Stafford

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Forton

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II*

Date first listed: 15-Jan-1968

List entry Description

Details

FORTON

603/7/1A CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS 15-JAN-68

II* Church built of dressed sandstone. An unusual mixture of dates being of possible C12 origins with a C18 remodelling to south wall and interior.

EXTERIOR: West tower with early C13 base, angled buttresses and late medieval upper part with a decorated frieze and eight pinnacles. The chancel is of early C13 date, possibly earlier, with a small window to the north. The east window is a Victorian replacement in Perpendicular style. The east window of the aisle is of C15 date with quatrefoil detail. The north wall (aisle) is of C14 with Decorated style windows. The south wall of the nave was rebuilt in 1723 and consists of 1:4:1 bays; four tall keyed round-arched windows flanked by round arched doors surmounted by keyed oculi. INTERIOR: To the north of the nave is an arcade of 1723 comprising six Tuscan columns on high plinths with round arches. The nave and chancel have a continuous flat plaster ceiling with moulded cornice. The northern aisle has a C19 close boarded roof with arched braces and pendants. The organ and alabaster monument (see below) are situated at the east end of the aisle. Much old clear glass survives. FITTINGS: Stylish C18 marble baluster font with waterleaf decoration presumably contemporary with the early C18 remodelling of the church. There is also a plain wooden C18 pulpit. Good modern screens of Classical Character. MONUMENTS: C17 Alabaster table tomb with effigies to Sir Thomas Skrymsher (1633) and his wife Anne (1656) by Garrat Hollemans. The two effigies lie beneath a flat canopy on four columns; the couple's children are represented along the side of

the chest.

HISTORY: Garrat Hollemans was one of a number of alabasterers working out of Burton upon Trent in the C17. The Skrymshers built the original Aqualate Hall (to the south east of Forton) in the early C17.

Summary of Importance: When assessing churches for listing, high quality work of any period after the Reformation combined with medieval work would normally result in a high grade, but the survival of C16 - C18 work, partly because of the age and partly because of the paucity of church building in this period, is even more likely to result in a high grade. All Saints Church not only possesses substantial early medieval fabric with its C13 chancel and tower but also was remodelled in 1723. The high quality of this C18 work, externally to the southern wall and internally with the restrained plastered ceiling and fine Tuscan arcading greatly contribute to the church's overall significance. It certainly merits listing at Grade II*.

SOURCES: Pevsner, N. 1968. The Buildings of England, Staffordshire.

Selected Sources

Legacy Record - This information may be included in the List Entry Details

National Grid Reference: SJ 75521 21188

FORTON HALL

List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: FORTON HALL

List entry Number: 1242679

Location

FORTON HALL

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: Staffordshire

District: Stafford

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Forton

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II*

Date first listed: 15-Jan-1968

List entry Description

Details

FORTON 1. 2385 Forton Hall SJ 72 SE 7/2A 15.1.68. II*

2. Brick lath stone dressings and tiled roof. Large brick stacks; 2 storeys and attic; moulded string course; stone mullioned windows; 3 gables in front; 4 window front; gabled porch with classical doorway and ball finial on gable; forestair; coped gables; dated on porch 1665, with initials S G A. Still in the Jacobean manner. Basement of stone.

FORTON HOUSE

List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

Name: FORTON HOUSE

List entry Number: 1242641

Location

FORTON HOUSE

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County: Staffordshire

District: Stafford

District Type: District Authority

Parish: Forton

National Park: Not applicable to this List entry.

Grade: II

Date first listed: 15-Jan-1968

List entry Description

Summary of Building

Details

FORTON 1. 2385 Forton House SJ 72 SE 7/3A 15.1.68. II

2. C17. Stone and brick with tiled roofs and formerly with-stone and brick stacks; 2 storeys; stone mullioned windows end sashes; 3 window front; square framed stone doorway; 3 gables in front with stone copin and finials. Rendered brick extension recently added at rear.

Listing NGR: SJ7545221051