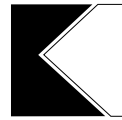


# 2005

## CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL



Knowsl@y Council

# Prescot

## Introduction

Prescot is an old market town which follows the traditional medieval grid pattern. The Conservation Area has an old world feel with cobbled streets, mature trees and fine views and vistas, yet at the towns core is a thriving retail centre. Prescot has a wealth of historic architecture including Georgian and Victorian buildings. The towns watchmaking past is evident in the streets and buildings.

## History

Prescot is one of the oldest towns in Merseyside. It is believed that an early Christian Church was established here in the 7th Century, although the earliest documentary evidence for the settlement dates from 1178. In medieval times Prescot was a thriving market town and the ecclesiastical centre of a large parish covering much of south west Lancashire.

Prescot is believed to be Anglo-Saxon in origin, with the name 'Prescota-cot' meaning a 'priest cottage'. In 1333 the Lord of the Manor, William D'Acre, was granted the right to hold a weekly market and the town's importance is reflected in its inclusion on the Bodleian Map of Britain drawn by Gough in 1350.



Date of Photograph: 1809. Prescot Market Place.



Date of Photograph: 1893.

The small watchmaker's shops were a common sight in the Prescot district. Watchmaker's premises could easily be identified by the long windows on either side of the building which supplied the maximum light possible for the watchmaker to work by.

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Much of the plot layout and street pattern of medieval Prescot survives virtually intact and the topography of medieval Prescot is the best known of any similar town in Northern England. Eccleston Street in particular has several medieval building survivals including numbers 9 and 30.



Date of Photographs: 1900's and 1998  
Old half-timbered house in Eccleston Street, Prescot used as shop premises.

In the prosperous Georgian and early Victorian periods many buildings were rebuilt within medieval plot layouts and there are a number of fine Georgian houses surviving, particularly in Vicarage Place, Derby Street and the High Street.

The eighteenth century brought considerable changes to Prescot and the continued growth in a number of craft industries created one of the earliest centres of the industrial revolution. These craft industries were concentrated on watchmaking, tool making and the potteries resulting in Prescot's increased prosperity and a rapid rise in population from an estimated 700 in the 1690's to 3,645 in 1801. The town also had close links with Liverpool's expanding overseas trade and as a result became an early important coaching centre on the Lancashire turnpike system.

## **Conservation Area**

Areas of special historic or architectural character. New development within these areas must preserve or enhance the special characteristics of the area.

## **Listed Building**

Buildings or other structures which are on a statutory list because of their special architectural or historic character, and which are protected from demolition or inappropriate alterations. Listed Building Consent is required for works affecting these buildings.

## **Permitted Development Rights**

Under government legislation, certain forms of minor development (such as small extensions to houses, small fences and walls, small extensions to factories) are automatically granted planning permission. This means that you do not always need to apply to the Council for planning permission for these forms of development. However, the rules governing these 'Permitted Development' rights are complex and you are always advised to contact the Council for advice. In some areas (eg. some Conservation Areas, converted barns and in some housing estates) Permitted Development rights have been removed by the Council meaning that planning permission is required even for the smallest extensions to houses, boundary walls, etc.

## **Trees**

Tree coverage provides a vital aspect of the character and appearance of a Conservation Area, therefore they too are protected through legislation. Any work affecting trees within the Conservation Area requires six weeks notice to be given to the Council.

Prescot has traditional paving materials of cobbles, setts and stone slabs which have also been reinstated in Vicarage Place. Eccleston Street/Chapel Street has been pedestrianised and the road surface varies with a mixture of small grey cobbles, concrete slabs and bricks. Around St. Mary's Church attractive Victorian cast iron street lamps are used to enhance the historic nature of the area.

The street furniture in Eccleston Street is minimal comprising of a small seating area and some landscaping. Vicarage place has a series of cast iron street bollards which are sensitively used to restrict traffic flow.

## Potential Improvements

The area on Market Place between St. Mary's church and Greenall Court has scope for improvement. This public space unfortunately facilitates antisocial behaviour and is particularly destructive to St. Mary's church.

It is suggested that the following actions are considered positively:

- Consider encouraging appropriate development on gap and advertisement hoarding sites that have not been identified for car parking or amenity proposals;
- Advise vacant property owners on action to stimulate building reuse;
- Advise occupiers of conservation and planning responsibilities;
- Investigate potential new funding opportunities;
- Rationalise use of signage in front of St. Mary's Church;
- Prepare a Conservation Plan for the area around St. Mary's Church;
- Submit application to Department of Culture, Media and Sport for the listing of the town walls;
- Consider new linkage between the old town centre through Sewell Street to connect to new redevelopment proposals to the South;
- Prepare Prescot Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document and introduction of Article 4 Directions to specific historic buildings; and
- Introduce an interpretation feature and signage to highlight the boundaries and places of interest in the Conservation Area.

## Glossary

### Article 4 Direction

A legal direction imposed by the Council which requires that development which would otherwise be 'Permitted Development' will require planning permission.



Date of Photograph: 1930's and Present Day.

Postcard view of High Street, Prescot. Many of the Georgian buildings along this street survive today.



Date of Photograph: 1998.

No. 3 High Street is a fine example of a Georgian House and is typical of the Georgian style. Note the careful layout of the windows with sliding sash windows and glazing bars, the porch with Doric columns and the fanlight over the door.

Prior to Prescot's designation as a Conservation Area, many of its buildings were demolished for road improvements and redevelopment proposals, which were later rescinded. This uncertainty fuelled a process of destroying the character of the historic town and there was a lack of long term commitment by businesses. As a result demolition sites became eyesores and property owners allowed their buildings to fall into a state of disrepair. This added to the vicious cycle of urban decline.

In 1978 Knowsley Council decided to take action to reverse this decline when much of the Town Centre was made a Conservation Area and an action plan was prepared to guide its regeneration. Prescot Town Centre Conservation Area combines and extends the previously designated Prescot Church and Prescot High Street Conservation Areas.

## Townscape and Key Buildings

Prescot's hilltop settlement is dominated by St. Mary's Church and consists of largely domestic scaled 2 to 3 storey properties in continuous terraces. At the junctions of Derby Street, High Street, Church Street and West Street there are some fine historic buildings, namely St. Mary's Church, Deane's House Hotel, 3 High Street and Prescot Museum. The churchyard and the vicarage garden are well treed and this continues into the residential areas on West Street and Derby Street.

High Street is the main transport route through the town centre and it contains many fine examples of Georgian and early Victorian buildings. However, the roads continuity is broken by a series of 'gap' sites. There are also a number of buildings that are vacant and have started to decay.

Since medieval times the market and the church formed the focal point of the town, and evidence of this can still be found by studying Prescot's road patterns. The routes have remained basically unchanged for centuries.

Despite the historic nature of Prescot and its extensive period of occupation there are surprisingly few Listed Buildings in the Conservation Area. St. Mary's Church is the only Grade I Listed Building in the Borough and this is linked to the Grade II Roman Catholic Church by one of the most attractive pieces of urban townscape in the Borough, that of Vicarage Place.

The list of rectors for St. Mary's Church goes back to 1179, with much of the present church dating from 1610. One of those making a large donation enabling the church to be rebuilt was John Ogle of Whiston, and when he died in 1614 his effigy was placed in the new church. The church also contains a number of items from earlier buildings including a fifteenth century vestry, intricate woodcarvings,



Date of Photograph: 1910.  
This busy street scene was taken looking west along Eccleston Street towards St. Mary's Church. Taken around 1910, when horse-drawn transport was still used for deliveries.



Date of Photograph: 1998.  
The Roman Catholic Church of 'Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception and St. Joseph', is located at the end of Vicarage Place, Prescot. It was built in 1856 by J. A. Hansom, the inventor of the Hansom 'cab.' Vicarage Place appears to have changed very little since the mid-nineteenth century and although restoration work has been carried out in this area, it has been completed sympathetically to its surroundings.



Above Left: Taken from an engraving of 1829, showing Prescott Parish Church with the sundial in the foreground.

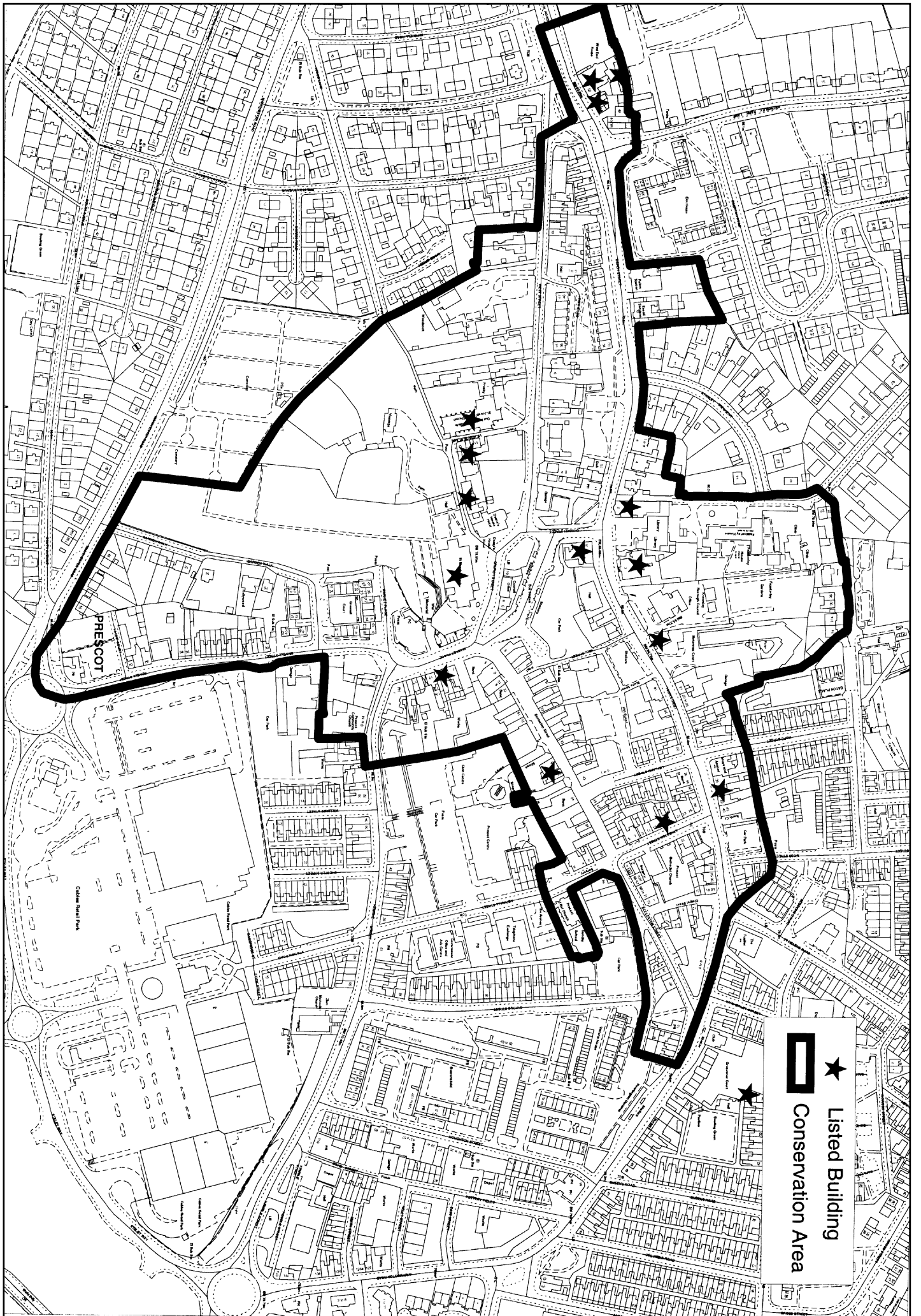
panelling and an Anglo-Saxon font. The tower and spire which were added in the late 1720's are thought to be the work of a pupil of Sir Christopher Wren. Unfortunately, the church has been subject to acts of vandalism and it has been necessary for the church to implement measures to protect the windows.

Within the Conservation Area are a number of old high sandstone walls, known as the 'Town Walls'. Little is known about their history or former use but there has been a local tradition of retaining them.

The United Reform Church and Sunday school on Aspinall Street are important features to be included in this Conservation Area as they are an outstanding historical aspect surrounded by the close modern development.



Date of Photograph 1930's.  
 Congregational Church, Aspinall Street, Prescott. It was built in 1878 in a newly constructed street that joined Eccleston and Kemble streets.



★ Listed Building  
Conservation Area