

**SECTION 8**

**Conservation**



## 8.0. CONSERVATION

### 8.1. INTRODUCTION

8.1.1. Ross-on-Wye is a town of considerable architectural and historical importance and for this reason, the town centre and its environs were designated as an Outstanding Conservation Area in 1976. The purpose of this report is to identify the character of the town and its surroundings and to examine the need for improvement of the town's fabric and general environment.

### 8.2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND TOWN DEVELOPMENT

- 8.2.1. Ross derived its name from the Gaelic "Ros" (pronounced rose) which meant it was a "Rose Town" whose settlement gradually rose up the hill from the river at Wilton. The original settlement at Wilton can be traced to Saxon times.
- 8.2.2. As a town, it most likely dates from after the fall of Rome. Three miles or so on the Gloucester side of the town, where Bolitree Farm now is, the Romans built their Ariconium. It was an industrial town which smelted and forged iron from the nearby Forest of Dean.
- 8.2.3. When the Domesday Book was compiled the population of Ross was 130 people and the settlement formed around the Market Place. Ross became a market town in the days of Stephen and its privileges were gained when it was made a borough in the reign of Henry III.
- 8.2.4. In the early 17th Century, Ross suffered a severe epidemic of the plague with 315 inhabitants dying and this severely halted the town's growth. It was a few years after the plague that John Kyrle, the 'Man of Ross' settled in the town. Kyrle was a pioneer in town planning and in addition to designing and laying out the Prospect where he lived, he was greatly involved with the development of the town.
- 8.2.5. Ross has enjoyed from an early period, the reputation of affording good inn accommodation to travellers, and the town's first major development from its original medieval form was due to the Turnpike Trust. One such Turnpike was set up on the Gloucester/Mid-Wales route which ran through the existing settlement. The location of the town on this route led to the building of numerous inns, coach houses and beer houses for passing traders.
- 8.2.6. Development was still, however, relatively small scale and centred around the existing town centre and remained that way until the late 1800's when the town was connected by railways with Hereford, Gloucester, Monmouth and the Forest of Dean. The railways led to a spread of development northwards and increased the town's importance.
- 8.2.7. Post-war development has occurred further north of the railway and also south and east along the main radial traffic routes.

### 8.3. TOWN SETTING AND PHYSICAL FEATURES

8.3.1. Ross-on-Wye is set amidst fine countryside with the old town perched on a terrace above the meandering River Wye - forming part of the designated Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Furthermore, the attractiveness of the town's setting is increased by the extensive

Forest of Dean, a short distance to the south east of the town and by the Black Mountains rising starkly above the western area of South Herefordshire, some twenty miles to the west.

- 8.3.2. Thus from inside the town, extensive panoramic views are afforded of Herefordshire set against the Welsh mountains whilst from the east, outside the town, Ross is seen against a background of wooded hills and distant mountains.
- 8.3.4. In the local context, the physical features are of great importance in considering the town's setting and character and the principal components can be summarised as follows (also see Plan 9):-

a) The flood plain of the River Wye - Primarily consisting of riverside meadows this feature forms an important foreground to the town when viewed from the north-west. Although the major part of this area is open in character, some portions are relieved by hedgerow and riverside tree groups.

b) The escarpment - South and east of the 'horseshoe' bend of the River Wye, a steep escarpment or cliff rises above the floodplain with exposures of the local red brown sandstone along its length. The medieval town was established on this prominence and this together with the more notable buildings including the Church of St. Mary is a unique feature of the town's character. The trees along the escarpment and in the Prospect and Churchyard enhance the dramatic scene. Curving northwards around the Wye horseshoe, the highland of Springfield and Greytrees complete the semi-circular range of hills on which the town has developed.

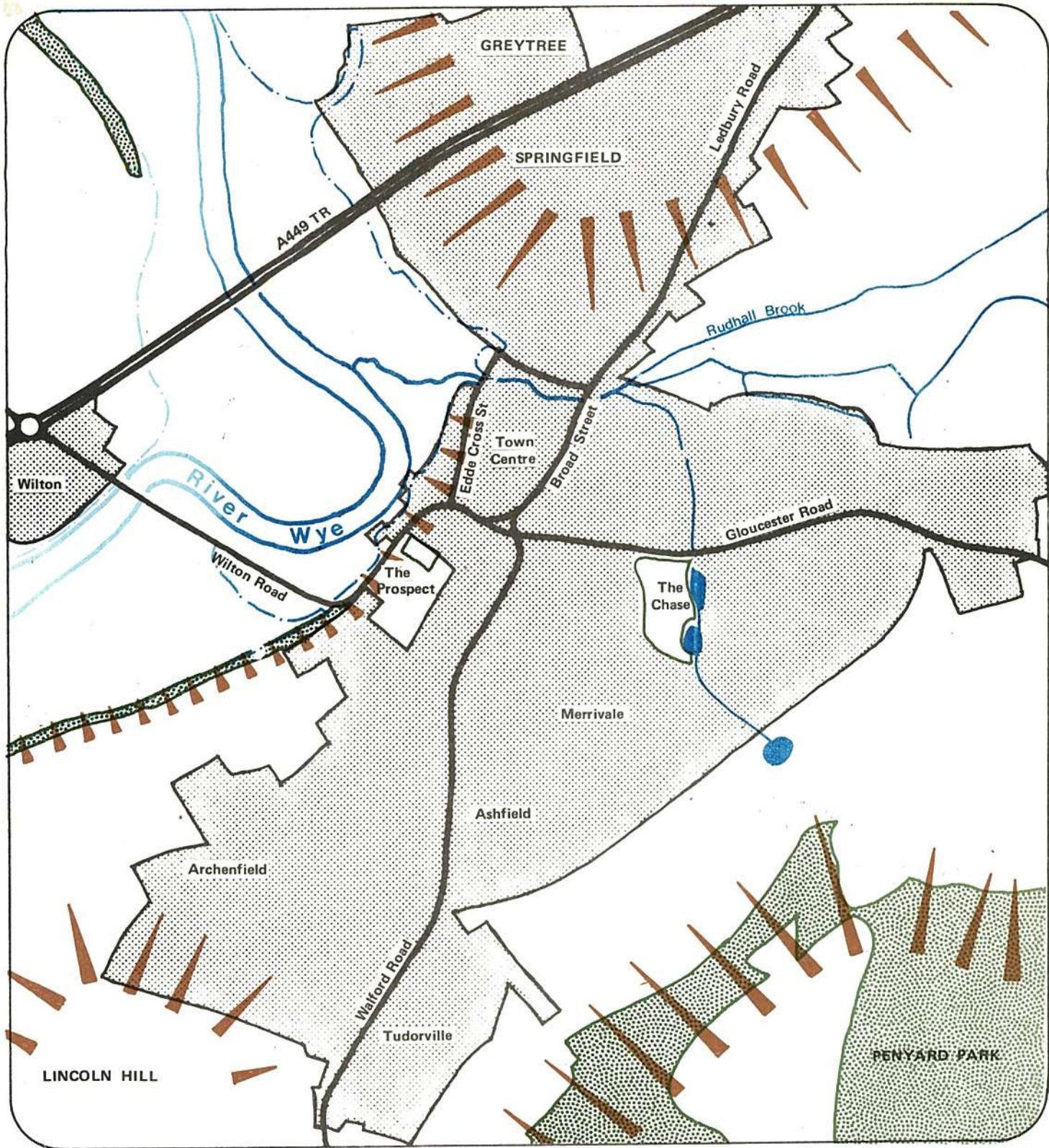
c) Chase Wood and Penyard Park - The twin wooded hills of Chase Wood and Penyard Park rise to some 600 feet above ordnance datum forming a distinctive backcloth to the town and are also particularly dominant from within parts of the town.

d) Minor drainage pattern - The highland features referred to in paragraph b) are bisected by the Rudhall Brook which flows in a south westerly direction to join the River Wye north of Ropewalk Meadow. Along this valley feature, the early industrial uses of the town were established including Ore Mill off Trenchard Street and the Corn Mill at the bottom end of Brookend Street. From Ropewalk Meadow, a 'finger' of open space extends into the town centre along the Rudhall Brook. A secondary drainage system originating on the lower slopes of Chase Wood flows northwards through the ponds in the grounds of the Chase to join the Rudhall in the vicinity of Millpond Street and Overcross Street junction. The grounds of the Chase and its ponds form a pleasant but privately owned 'green lung' within the older part of the town.

#### CONSERVATION WITHIN THE BUILT UP AREA

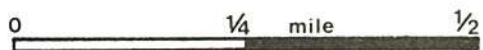
#### 8.4. THE CONSERVATION AREA

- 8.4.1. Originally designated in 1968 by the former Herefordshire County Council, it was extended by the District Council in 1975 and was granted 'Outstanding' status in 1976 by the Department of the Environment.
- 8.4.2. The principal effect of designation ensures that new development and extensions will be compatible with existing development, buildings are protected from demolition unless consent has been granted and also trees are protected from indiscriminate felling and lopping.



Plan 9.

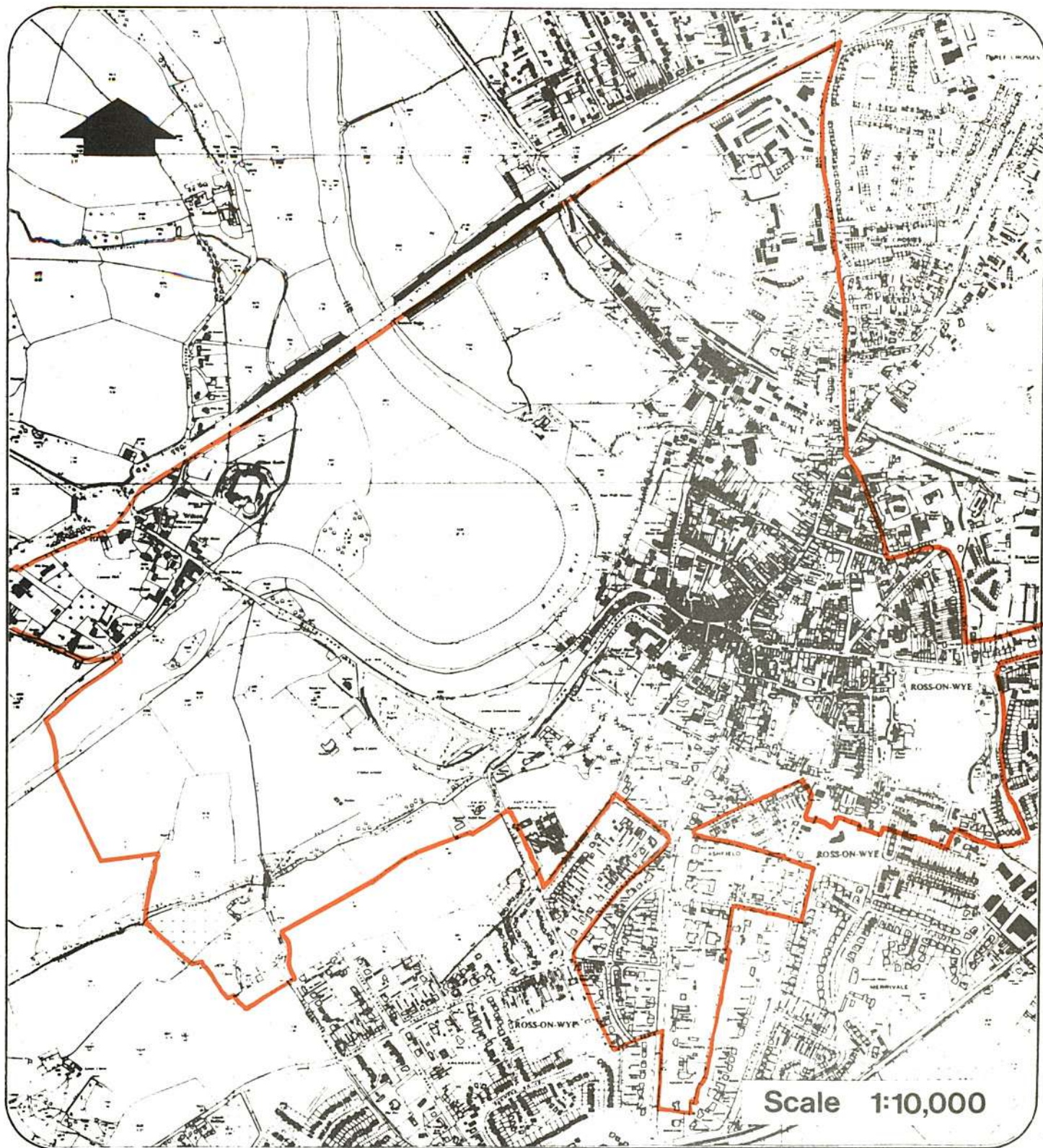
Physical features



NOTATION

|   |                                |                       |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
|  | Dual Carriageway               | } Main Traffic Routes |
|  | Single Carriageway             |                       |
|  | Steep slopes and highland      |                       |
|  | Built up areas                 |                       |
|  | Main woodland areas            |                       |
|  | Limit of flood plain (approx.) |                       |





**Plan 10a.**

**Conservation Area**



**Boundary of Conservation Area**





- 8.4.3. The boundary of the designated area embraces the town centre, the riverside meadows, the settlement of Wilton and the early Victorian development in the Ashfield Park area (see Plan 10a).
- 8.4.4. Aside from the additional protection afforded in the Conservation Area, the promotion of positive conservation schemes is of paramount importance and to this end, there are various schemes of grant aid for the repair and improvement of property and these are discussed in a following section.

8.5. LISTED BUILDINGS AND TOWNSCAPE

8.5.1. There are numerous Grade II Listed Buildings or groups of buildings on the statutory list and most are contained within the historic town centre. In the main, the buildings on the statutory list contribute most to the character of the built environment.

8.5.2. In and around the historic town centre, there are a number of distinct areas which collectively contribute to the overall historic and townscape character. A brief description of each of these areas is included below:-

a) The Ecclesiastical Complex - This area is centred on the Church of St. Mary and the site of the former Bishop's Palace (now the Royal Hotel) with its Chase and Park beyond. Situated south of the Wilton Road and High Street, the area was essentially detached from the town and formed a green and undeveloped area. Although recent development now surrounds the area, the Prospect and Graveyard with a proliferation of mature trees still forms a pleasant 'open lung' on the edge of the town centre. North of the fine Church with its graceful spire, an enclosed space is formed around the Churchyard by the 18th and 19th Century buildings lining Church Row, the Rudhall Almshouses and other buildings in Church Street and by the three storey corner buildings in St. Mary's Street together with the outbuildings of the Royal Hotel. The walls, gates, piers, steps and mature trees add to the interest of this space dominated by St. Mary's Church.

b) The Medieval Centre - With the arcaded sandstone Market House as a focal point of the town centre, the medieval street pattern radiates from the Market Square. For the most part, the buildings along the principal thoroughfares of High Street, Broad Street and Edde Cross Street are narrow-fronted derived from the medieval burgage plots as are many of the buildings in the side streets of New Street and Kyrle Street. Though some of the buildings date from the 17th Century, most are 18th and 19th Century; the predominant building materials are red brick, painted brick and stucco whilst most roofs are slated. The sense of verticality to building facades brought about by the narrow frontages, is heightened by the predominance of traditional Georgian sash windows. Despite the physical and environmental damage of heavy traffic, the narrow streets are of considerable interest and character. New Street deserves special mention, particularly the eastern section in view of its elegant Georgian buildings.

c) Brookend - As previously mentioned, a number of early industrial uses were established in the area adjoining the Rudhall Brook or Brookend area. Close to this area tanning, leatherworking, railmaking and other metal workers could once have been found but all this has disappeared. It is important to mention the red sandstone Town Mill (now SHACS). This building is located near the corner of Brookend Street

and Greytrees Road, stands on the site of a mill mentioned in the Domesday Book and was once powered by water from the Millpond (now Millpond Street car park). At the corners of this junction, there are two fine Georgian buildings - the Railway Inn on the south side and Brook House on the north side. Just to the north of Brook House is the interesting Friends Meeting House reached from Brampton Street via an arched opening in the high stone wall fronting the street. Grouped around a heavily trafficked network of junctions, the character of this area is not fully realised however, with the construction of the Relief Road and some modest enhancement work, the area could once again realise its full potential.

d) Henry Street, Crofts Lane and Station Street - Whilst not of the same importance and scale as the buildings in the principal Streets of the town centre, the terraced cottages in this area have their own intrinsic character. Of particular interest is the group in Crofts Lane which has potential to form an important link between the shopping area and other facilities in the Cantilupe Road area. Nearby in Station Street, there are the massive buildings of the former Alton Court Brewery.

e) Ashfield Park Area - A little way to the south of the town centre is Ashfield Park consisting of early Victorian Villa development. The area is enhanced by the large number of mature trees in the grounds of the large houses and also many roadside trees.

f) The escarpment, Prospect and Gazebo Tower - Reference has previously been made to the escarpment with its red sandstone crags, and this is an important element of the town's character as are the Gothic embellishments. These include the Gazebo Tower, and its neighbouring medieval style walls, the Palace Pound, John Kyrle's Summer House and the walled and gated Prospect overlooking the Wye Valley.

g) Wilton - Detached from the town of Ross by the River and the meadows, the medieval settlement of Wilton forms the 'gateway' to the main town. The principal area of character is centred around the group of buildings at the corner of Wilton Lane and Wilton Road (A40 Trunk Road) on the approach to the fine stone bridge completed in about 1599. To the north of the settlement is Wilton Castle, dating from Norman times however, most of the standing ruins are Elizabethan. Although, the settlement is attractive from within, its face or frontage to the River Wye is neglected and there is considerable potential for improvement in this area. With appropriate treatment, the riverside frontage could become as attractive as the riverside meadows on the east bank.

h) Wye Street and adjoining Meadows - From the partially enclosed space formed at the junction of High Street, Wilton Road and Edde Cross Street, Wye Street descends steeply down a curving route to level out in the vicinity of Long Acres and Caroline Symonds Gardens. The 19th Century building facades on the south side contains an interesting mixture of styles; some displaying a Tudor or Gothic influence whilst the variety of materials and changing levels add to the interest of the street scene. On the north side of the curving street section, the streets enclosure is broken by the terraced Blakes Memorial Gardens affording a view of the open countryside beyond. Further down the street, the mature trees in the grounds of the Hope and Anchor Public House help to continue the enclosure of the street facade until the open spaces of Long Acres and Caroline Symonds Gardens are reached. From here the riverside meadows (mostly public open space) extend in either direction along the river bank.

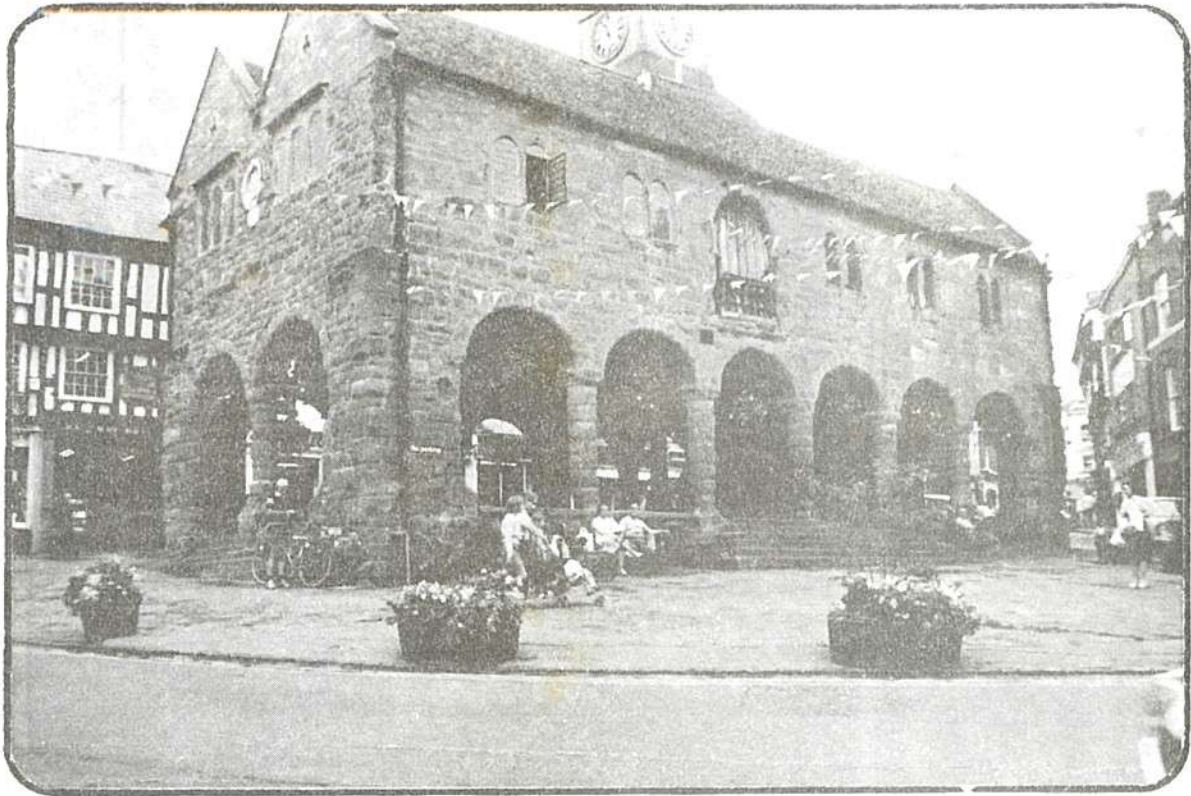


Plate 5 — The Market Hall — the focal point of the town is of great visitor attraction.



Plate 6 — New Street — boasts a number of fine Georgian buildings.



Plate 7 — The Churchyard of St. Mary's Church is enclosed by an attractive variety of buildings.



Plate 8 — The Gazebo Tower as viewed from the Churchyard.



Plate 9 — The Prospect offers panoramic views over the River Wye and its meadows.

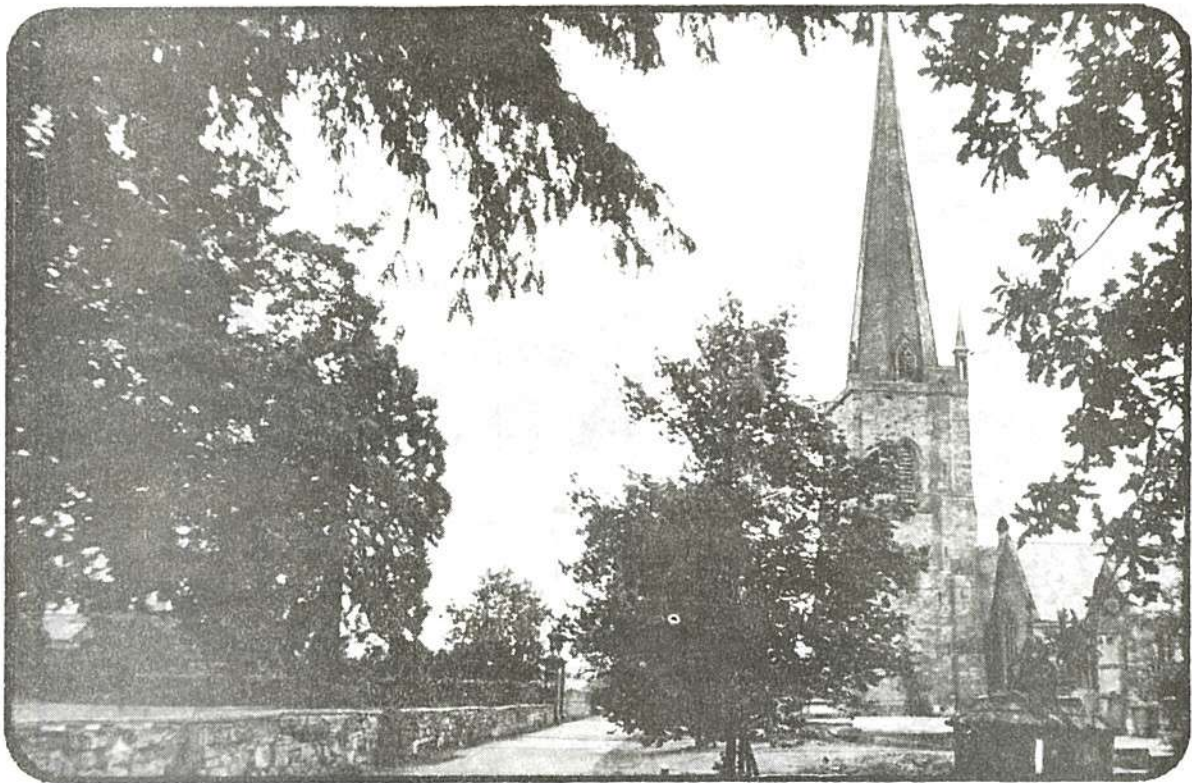


Plate 10 — The fine Church of St. Mary's with its graceful spire.



Plate 11 — Alton Street, affords a fine vista to Penyard Wood.



Plate 12 — Wilton — although detached from the town is an area of pleasant character.

Viewed from the Bypass (A449 Trunk Road), the buildings at the upper end of Wye Street and Edde Cross Street are a conspicuous feature above the meadows below.

1) Alton Street - On the edge of the historic centre, Alton Street falls gently eastwards from Copse Cross Street to afford a fine vista to Penyard Park. Along its length, are interesting groups of 18th and 19th Century houses whilst on the northern side, there is a long high stone wall. In the area surrounding the New House, there are many mature trees, some of which overhang the roadside wall to enhance the street scene.

8.5.3. Having drawn attention to the town's principal attributes it is fair to state that there are many areas and building groups where there is a real need for improvement if the full potential of the town's character and environmental quality is to be realised.

8.6. GRANTS FOR CONSERVATION

8.6.1. In order to encourage positive schemes of improvement, there are various grant aid schemes currently available. The total monies for these schemes is limited at the present time in view of the restrictions on public expenditure nevertheless there is sufficient to assist quite a number of projects annually. It must be stressed that eligibility for grant aid does not automatically entitle an applicant to such aid as the grants are discretionary and subject to an annual budget.

The Table below sets out the principal schemes which are currently available:-

| TYPE OF AID   | LIMIT OF GRANT                                | ELIGIBLE BUILDINGS   | CONTRIBUTING AUTHORITIES  |
|---|---|--|---|
| 1. Town Scheme  | Up to 50% - variable upper limit              | Approved buildings shown on Townscape and Town Scheme Plan 10b | Department of the Environment<br>District Council<br>County Council |
| 2. Section 10 (Town and Country Planning (Amendment) Act, 1972)     | Varies between 25% and 50%                    | All buildings in Conservation Area                             | Department of the Environment                                       |
| 3. 1962 Act Grants (Local Authorities Historic Buildings Act, 1962) | Limit in accordance with an approved Schedule | All Listed Buildings   | County Council<br>District Council                                  |

TABLE 18

CONSERVATION GRANTS

Source:- SOUTH HEREFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

- 8.6.2. Over the past five years or so, since the inception of the Ross Town Scheme, a reasonable number of grants have been approved however, the rate of applications annually has varied greatly.
- 8.6.3. The District Council have already undertaken some conservation projects, some of which have had the benefit of Section 10 grant aid. These projects include the ongoing restoration of the Market Hall and the recent renovation of the Gazebo Tower.

8.7. OTHER AIDS TO CONSERVATION PROJECTS

8.7.1. There are two countywide schemes for promoting positive conservation projects.

8.7.2. Firstly, the Hereford and Worcester County Council operate the Revolving Restoration Scheme whereby the County Council purchases neglected buildings of architectural and/or historic interest, prepares a scheme of restoration and then sells the renovated building on the open market. The proceeds from the sale are then reinvested in other property requiring similar treatment. Secondly, a comparable scheme is operated by the Hereford and Worcester Building Preservation Trust and though the Trust have been seeking suitable premises in Ross-on-Wye, there has been no success to-date. Indirectly though, their efforts have resulted in many buildings being restored or improved by their owners.

8.7.3. Additionally, house renovation grants are available under the provisions of the Housing Act, 1974 (as amended by the Housing Act, 1980). Four types of grant aid are available depending on the level of improvement required.

8.8. PRESENT CONSERVATION POLICIES FOR ROSS-ON-WYE

8.8.1. The appropriate policy and principles proposed for the conservation of the built environment is currently Policy 12.1 of the Herefordshire Structure Plan. However, in the Written Statement of the new Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan, now awaiting approval, the following policies under relative sub-sections will need to be considered:-

Siting of new development in the landscape

POLICY BE.1.

Layout of development and design standards

POLICY BE.2.

POLICY BE.3.

The use of vacant land and buildings in urban areas

POLICY BE.4.

Extensions to existing dwellings

POLICY BE.7.

Conservation of Listed Buildings, historic settlements and other features

POLICIES BE.8-17.



## Sites of Archaeological Importance

POLICIES BE.18-24.

- 8.8.2. In the absence of an approved Statutory Local Plan and therefore any approved conservation policies, the District Council's Development Committee on 3rd November, 1976 approved Planning Policy No. 4 'Design Criteria in the Ross-on-Wye Conservation Area' as an interim measure (See Appendix IV).
- 8.8.3. This Policy provides guidance for intending applicants and forms a background for the consideration of planning applications in the Conservation Area.

### 8.9. FUTURE CONSERVATION POLICIES AND PROPOSALS

- 8.9.1. In addition to incorporating in the Local Plan, policies as contained within the new County Structure Plan and the District Council's Planning Policy No. 4, there is a need to consider new policies for promoting active conservation projects. Such measures would be in addition to the role played by the Local Planning Authority through its development control functions and grant aid schemes.
- 8.9.2. In this context a list of possible improvement and enhancement schemes in the Conservation Area has been identified in the following sections. In preparing any proposals, it will be necessary to consider which of these schemes can be realistically put forward as a positive step towards the further enhancement of the town and its environs. Some of the schemes may be achieved by merely drawing an owners attention to a particular problem or need whilst others may require action by the District Council or other public body and the consequent expenditure of public funds to achieve the objective.

#### A) Possible Development and Improvement Schemes

Generally, these schemes would involve the improvement of buildings and structures and in some cases, the partial redevelopment of an area.

- i) Former Alton Court Brewery, Station Street - This site is now surplus to the requirements of the present owners and would benefit from some redevelopment and improvement. Some of the buildings fronting to Station Street should be retained in view of their importance in the street scene.
- ii) Land to the rear of Brookend Street/Kyrle Street - Much of this area has been assembled into a single ownership but is currently an eyesore in this part of the town centre. There is an urgent need to improve the appearance of the area as well as ensuring that the half timbered buildings at the rear of 32 Brookend Street are satisfactorily restored.
- iii) Crofts Lane - There is considerable scope for an environmental improvement scheme for the area around the Crofts with an opportunity to provide a more attractive pedestrian link between Broad Street and facilities in Cantilupe Road. An opportunity exists for the terrace of Victorian Houses which are centrally located in this area to be retained, refurbished and incorporated into a redevelopment scheme.

iv) Repair of miscellaneous structures in the Conservation Area - A list of individual structures and items requiring repair was prepared some three to four years ago and although some matters have been attended to, there are still some items outstanding as follows:-

a) Steps and gate piers at the entrances to the Churchyard off St. Mary's Street and Church Street.

b) Boundary wall to south of the Prospect.

c) Medieval style wall adjoining the Gazebo Tower.

d) Retaining wall to Wilton Road and Royal Parade.

v) Cantilupe Road/Henry Street - Although the site of the former Primary School provides useful parking facilities, there is an urgent need to redevelop this site. A scheme is currently under discussion.

#### B) Possible Enhancement Schemes

These are possible schemes for the enhancement of important areas in and around the town centre and in the main do not involve the improvement of existing buildings or construction of new buildings.

i) The Market Square - This scheme is limited to the proposed pedestrianisation of the west side of the Market Square and envisages the further enhancement of this area including possible repaving and permanent planting.

ii) Footpath between Trenchard Street and Greytree Road - A 'green finger' extends from Ropewalk Meadow via Metcalfe Close and the site of One Mill into Brookend Street Car Park (Redmeadow). There is an opportunity to improve and extend this feature, principally with planting.

iii) Area adjoining the Town Mill, Brookend Street and Millpond Street Car Park - This area adjoins one of the principal routes by which visitors reach the centre of Ross. In particular, the triangular area of land on the eastern side of the Mill and the peripheral area of the Millpond Street Car Park would benefit from improvement, mostly in the form of tidying and planting. There may also be an opportunity to provide a landscaped open space link from this area into the possible industrial area to the north. This would provide an ideal link from the Overross area to the possible new employment centre.

iv) Further improvement of the riverside meadows - Much has been done to improve the appearance of this area in recent years however there is potential for further planting and improvement. It would also be desirable to encourage improvement of the riverside on the west bank of the River in the Wilton area.

### THE RURAL LANDSCAPE

#### 8.10. LANDSCAPE VALUE

8.10.1. As previously mentioned much of the Plan area lies within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The length of the River Wye, its immediate river meadows, the Penyard Wood area and its slopes to the south eastern edge of the town are designated Areas of Special

Landscape (see Plan 3). Such special landscape character has therefore made Ross-on-Wye and the surrounding Wye Valley a playground for visitors. To safeguard this high quality landscape for the benefit of visitors and local people alike, conservation policies have been included in the present Herefordshire County Structure Plan and in the Written Statement of the new Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan which will supersede the former plan. To protect the landscape and to seek to harmonise the interests of all who use the valley is also the objective of the Wye Valley Management Plan.

#### 8.11. NATURE CONSERVATION

- 8.11.1. The 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, the 1968 Countryside Act and the recent Wildlife and Countryside Act have placed upon Planning Authorities the responsibility to pay due regard to the needs of Nature Conservation.
- 8.11.2. The Plan Area contains woodlands which support a great variety of plants and animals with many nationally rare or uncommon species. Woodlands are also interspersed with pockets of grassland which contributes to the characteristic landscape whilst also providing wildlife interest. In addition grassland habitats like orchards and hay meadows contain many of the rarest plants in the district and should wherever possible be protected.
- 8.11.3. Probably the most important nature reserve is the River Wye and its banks. The river is one of only eight rivers in Britain of national or international nature conservation importance and was the first major river in Britain to become designated a site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Nature Conservancy Council has notified individual owners - occupiers and Local Planning Authorities about designation which applies to the river and its immediate banks. The Conservancy Council are concerned with any development proposals which either immediately affect the scientific quality of the river or its immediate bank vegetation.

#### 8.12. TREES AND WOODLANDS

- 8.12.1. As described in the Section on Constraints upon Development (4.5.1), a number of trees are protected either because they are within the Conservation Area or because they are the subject of Tree Preservation Orders.
- 8.12.2. In addition to the above trees there are many other individual or groups of trees which are important in their local context.
- 8.12.3. As far as woodlands are concerned Penyard Wood and Chase Wood to the south are prominent hillside woodlands. Both these woodlands form important features to the landscape and under the ownership of the Forestry Commission can be expected to be effectively managed.

#### 8.13. PRESENT COUNTRYSIDE/CONSERVATION POLICIES

- 8.13.1. Whilst the Herefordshire County Structure Plan contains the relevant policies for the protection and preservation of landscape and natural resources as presently affecting the countryside viz, POLICIES 10.15 - 10.20 inclusive, it is probably more appropriate to refer to the policies contained in the new Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan which is presently with the Secretary of State for approval.

Protection and Enhancement of the Landscape

POLICY L.1.                      POLICY L.2.

Trees and Forestry

POLICIES L.3 - L.8.

Ecology

POLICY EC.1.                      POLICY EC.2.

- 8.13.2. Such policies, if and when approved by the Secretary of State, will need to be considered in conjunction with this Local Plan.



Plate 13 — Development of this site at the rear of Brookend Street and Kyrle Street would be desirable.

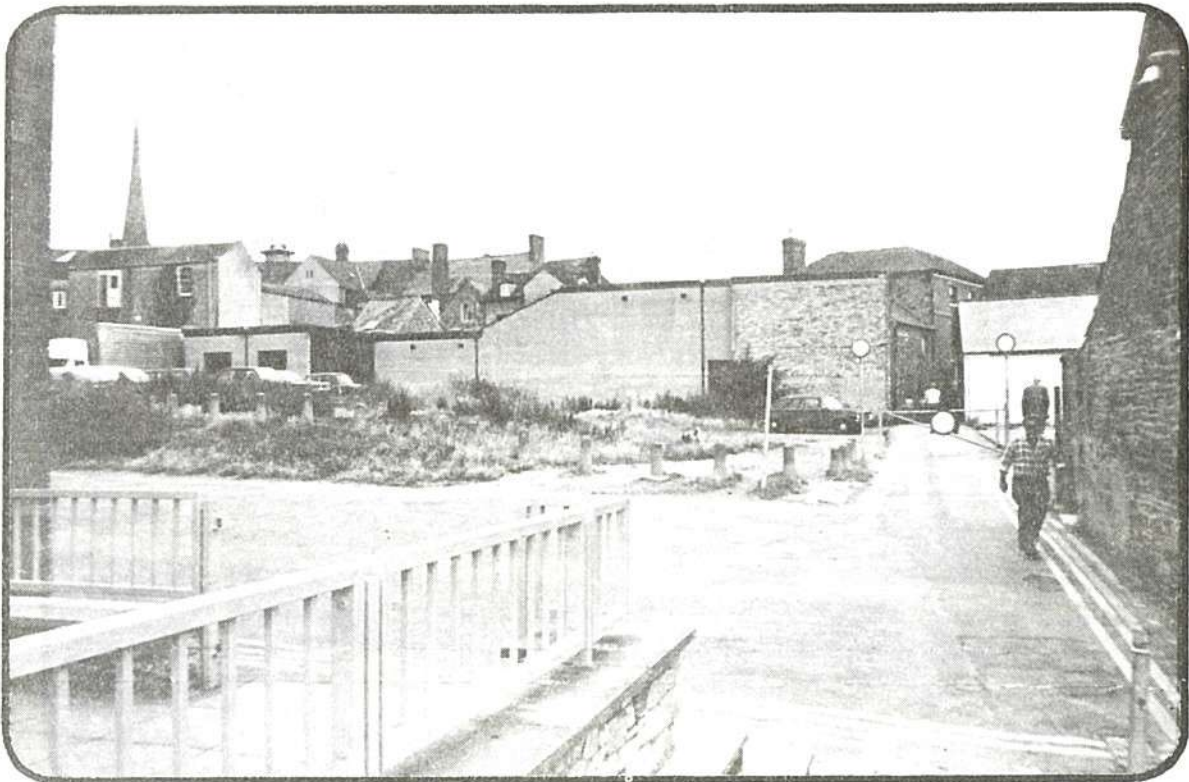


Plate 14 — Improvement / development of this Crofts Lane area would also benefit the town centre.



Plate 15 — The old Brewery site in Station Street (left foreground) offers opportunity for facade enhancement with possible redevelopment in the forecourt.

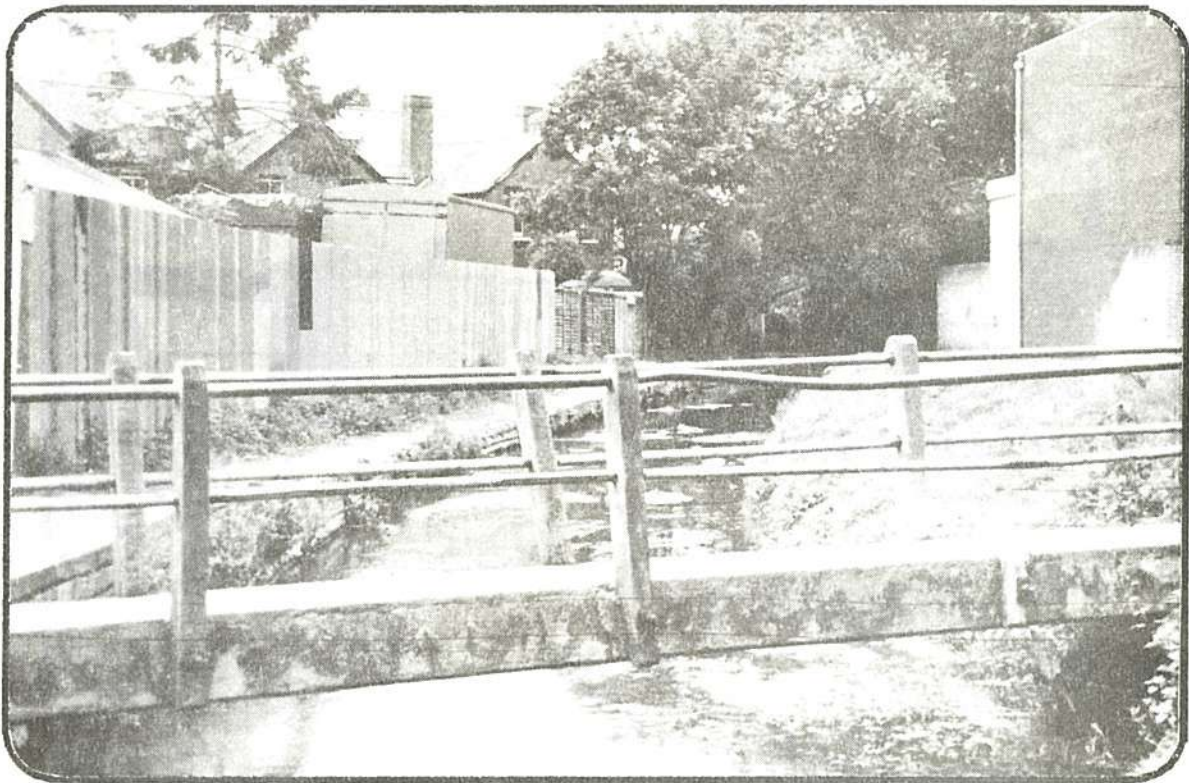


Plate 16 — Opportunity exists to improve the footpath area straddling the Rudhall Brook between Trenchard Street and Greytree Road.