



# A Brief History of the Town

## **The earliest known settlement of Dunmow, which means “meadow on the hill” dates from the roman period.**

The site was at the junction of Stane Street and the roads running from London to Sudbury and from Chelmsford to Cambridge and it may have extended to the present day High Street. It seems that there was a separate settlement at Church End. Both of these sites were reoccupied in the Saxon period and the name first appears in the year 951. By 1086 there were 674 families recorded in the locality. Church End may have been the first Saxon settlement but the market charter dated 1227 may mean that the 'higher' town around the present day market place was becoming more significant. The market place then was thought to be the whole of the land between High Street and what was Back Lane; now White Street. A chapel, St George the Martyr, occupied part of this market area and its remains can be found behind the White Horse Public house. No. 34 High Street is thought to be the priest house that accompanied it. The Guildhall which dates from the 15th Century thus stands at the north end of the former market place and now overlooks the more recent market place, in fact simply a widening of the Saffron Walden Road until recently know as Star Hill The Chequers and Boars Head are both locations of other public buildings where remains can still be found.

Cloth and tanning were key reasons for the growth and prosperity of Dunmow in the 16th and 17th centuries when the population grew by 40% and New Street and North Street but

the town then fell into relative decline and little growth occurred until the beginning of the 20th century. The population rose only from 1800 to 2400 over the 100 years to 1901. The railway came in 1862 and stimulated some later growth but was closed in 1952.

Whilst there are no roman features above ground and few if any medieval remains the town has almost 170 listed buildings. The Church of St Mary's and the Clock House in Causeway are grade 1 and there are 7 grade II\* which are also very special. Remains of late mediaeval buildings are embedded in more modern structures. No. 37 High Street is thought to be priest's house and No. 20-24 is a very fine late 14th century hall. But the town is also important as an example of a roman and medieval market town. The road pattern and the plots within the structure of the town is the most obvious modern survival of this unique history.

The whole of the early modern town is now a conservation area and alongside the number of individual listed buildings this can be said to give a high level of protection. However, a deep understanding of the historic morphology and structure of the town and the significance of spaces and boundaries as well of individual buildings and architectural features needs to inform the control of development.

The District Council has recently published its Conservation Area Appraisal. This provides a useful description of some of the key features of the town and of some of the listed buildings. However, it fails to provide the understanding that is necessary to provide a foundation for more effective protection and enhancement of the conservation area.