

Graveney Church, Graveney Bridge and Goodnestone conservation areas: character appraisal

(Extract from report to Development Committee 24 November 1999 – Agenda item 6C Annex A)

Location

1. Graveney is situated on the eastern edge of the Borough of Swale, some six kilometres from Faversham to the west and a similar distance from Whitstable to the north east. It lies on the edge of the Graveney marshes, which stretch away some distance to the north west as far as The Swale. Goodnestone, a separate settlement, lies immediately to the south of Graveney

Geography

2. Both settlements stand on slightly raised ground, just above the surrounding low lying land. Graveney has a distinctly linear form, with development stretching along Seasalter Road over a distance of some 800 metres. New development/redevelopment has taken place in recent times both north and south of the railway line.

3. At Goodnestone the buildings are grouped along the west side of Head Hill Road and round into Goodnestone Lane. Whilst the development form here is in some ways more compact than at Graveney, the church is set apart at the end of Goodnestone Lane, some 200 metres to the west. This location was a few hundred metres distant from an arm of Thorne Creek, which was navigable until the early 1800s.

Historical notes

4. The name 'Graveney' is said to derive from the Old English 'at the graven river'; it was originally the name given to the stream at Graveney which ran through a broad ditch (or trench or graven ditch). The best preserved Viking vessel found in England (the Graveney Boat), was discovered in 1970 a short distance to the north east of Graveney village during maintenance work on the Hammond Drain and dated to AD 927.

5. Goodnestone, originally a Saxon settlement, derived its name from Godwin, Earl of Wessex, and was for long known as Godwinstone (or Godwynstone), meaning the farmstead or manor belonging to Earl Godwin. This name continued in use until the 16th century.

Buildings

6. All Saints church, together with Graveney Court, marks the northern western edge of Graveney village. The church is of special interest dating from the 12th century. Newman (in Buildings of England) comments that 'this church is a rarity in Kent and would be a rarity in any county except perhaps Norfolk; for it is not only delightfully unrestored but it is worthwhile also as architecture and contains objects beautiful in their own right'. The church is modest in size, and built from flint and stone rubble with a peg tiled roof. A lych gate, much more recent in date, is sited on the edge of the carriageway and gives access to the small churchyard. A small paddock adjoins to the east which is enclosed by low brick walls and a rather battered estate railing along the road frontage.

7. Graveney Court adjoins the church to the north. Set back from road and partly hidden from view by trees from some angles, this house is situated on the very edge of Graveney marshes. It is timber framed, dates from around 1420, and is finished

with plaster and weatherboarding. The adjoining farmyard to the north now consists mainly of modern buildings, although two older brick buildings do survive.

8. Murtons Farm lies a short distance to the south of the church on the eastern side of Seasalter Road. A part of this small, now painted, brick building dates from the sixteenth century. Alongside is a rather larger seventeenth century, timber framed barn, recently converted into two dwellings, which now has a fairly modern appearance by virtue of the extensive refurbishment and conversion work.

9. This small group of buildings has now been joined by later development to the once separate cluster of old buildings some distance to the south, grouped around the junction of Seasalter Road with Sandbanks Lane. The original gap between these two groups of buildings has been infilled with housing development, particularly at Murton Place where the original small estate of Airey houses was redeveloped in the late 1980s to a higher density. It now comprises some 26 dwellings and although set around a cul-de-sac layout the development has a significant frontage to Seasalter Road.

10. Graveney School, and the former head teacher's house, is an attractive Victorian red brick building. Its steep, slate covered roofs, gothic shaped windows, and meticulous brickwork detailing are characteristic of school buildings of the period. This building, completed in 1876, has all the familiar characteristics of a small village school and it therefore makes a crucial contribution to the street scene.

11. The nearby Bridge House and The Post Office both pre-date the school, and define the shape of the road junction. Bridge House is built of red stock brick and has a clay tiled roof; the adjoining stables have been converted to a dwelling. The Post Office/ Graveney Bridge is built of brick, now painted, and has a prominent, steeply pitched, peg tiled roof. The shop comprises a single-storey weatherboarded extension built in front of the original building, and there is a simplicity about this arrangement which accords perfectly with the character of the place.

12. The North Kent Coast railway line now forms a physical edge to these buildings. Seasalter Road doglegs rather pleasantly to cross over the line, which form nicely emphasises the sense of place here. The railway bridge is a substantial and impressive structure, although it is not immediately apparent in the street scene as much of the yellow brick skewed arch is set within the railway cutting. A modern steel footbridge, lacking the character and finesse of the main bridge, has been placed alongside.

13. Culmers and Wheelwrights Cottages lie to the south of the railway line, and although both are of some age they have been heavily refurbished. To the south again is a line of unremarkable housing development. Opposite is The Four Horse Shoes public house dating from about 1800 which effectively marks the southern limit of this group, and which is of particular interest for the mathematical tiling on the front elevation. Land to the north of the public house has been recently developed for housing, and the site to the rear is occupied by a mobile home park.

14. Goodnestone lies to the south of Graveney, separated by a short stretch of countryside. Buildings here are grouped along the west side of Head Hill Road and round into Goodnestone Lane. Those fronting Head Hill Road include Poplar Hall farm, several groups of cottages and an oast house complex now converted to dwellings. The converted oast comprises five prominent roundels linked to a central two storey store. This traditional Kentish building, with its warm red brick and white painted weatherboarded loading bays, plays a key role in defining the character of

the street scene in Goodnestone. The conversion has respected the overall building form but detrimental features include rooflights in the roundels, plastic windows and tall evergreens along the front boundary.

15. Poplar Hall, built at the very beginning of the twentieth century, is a substantial, brick built house set back from the road in a mature garden and nicely marks the southern edge of the village. By contrast, the northern limit of the settlement is marked by groups of modest red and yellow brick cottages set around the junction of Goodnestone Lane with Head Hill Road which together create a pleasant space.

16. The tiny St Bartholomew church is set apart from the rest of Goodnestone to the west, and is approached along a narrow lane. This diminutive building dates from the early 12th century, possibly earlier, and still retains most of its Norman character. Built of flint and stone rubble, and set in a small churchyard it is a good example of a simple, almost primitive, country church. The building, redundant since 1984, is now cared for by the Churches Conservation Trust. Goodnestone Court, to the north, is a half timbered building dating from the 15th century. The large space between the church and the house is filled with an array of farm buildings, some brick built, which are set in and around a bowl shaped hollow.

17. Langdon Court, which lies a short distance to the north of the main group of Goodnestone buildings, is a substantial brick house set back from the road and largely hidden from view by large mature trees set around it. The adjoining complex of farm buildings, a separate commercial operation, has the appearance of being mainly comprised of modern buildings, but within the group there are a number of more traditional farm structures.

Landscape

18. The flat, expansive nature of the Graveney marshes continues to exert an influence on the character of development at Graveney, despite the land having been converted almost entirely to arable use. Whilst the marshes no longer have a truly wild appearance, the presence of these wide and open spaces extending up to the very edge of the church graveyard is a strong reminder of just how remote the place has been. This feeling tends to be absent from Goodnestone, where the surrounding landscape for the most part has more trees and hedgerows and consequently a rather softer character. However, the amalgamation of fields to the south-west is now creating a new and open landscape.

19. Orchards were, until recent times, a significant feature around both settlements, but their numbers have declined in recent years, as has the visual impact of the remaining orchards as standard trees have been replaced with smaller varieties. Hopfields too have disappeared. Arable crops are now the main feature in the landscape, together with intensive horticulture and fruit growing which, at certain times of the year, results in large areas of polythene being prominent in the landscape.

20. Head Hill and Seasalter Roads are country roads which are both still fairly well defined with hedgerows and trees, although the hedgerows are now very thin in places at the northern end. Footways and kerbing are generally absent in Goodnestone, so that the rural character of the road remains largely intact. At Graveney, however, stretches of footway are present both north and south of the bridge, as are a small number of street lighting columns; materials and detailing here tend to be suburban in character and make few concessions to the rural location.

Conclusion

21. Graveney and Goodnestone, although physically close, have separate origins which continue to be reflected in differences in character between them. Graveney's relatively isolated position on the very edge of the marshes continues to influence the character of the place, even though land drainage and changes in agricultural practice have altered the appearance of the surrounding landscape. Goodnestone, by contrast is surrounded by a more typically Kentish landscape where orchards are still a significant feature, although modern fruit and horticultural practices - and arable farming - have brought changes in appearance also.

22. Goodnestone is a modest place, comprised largely of cottages and farm buildings but with the rather exceptional presence of a tiny Norman church set in fields to the west with the characteristic Kentish yeoman farmer's house alongside. For the most part the environment has a pleasant cohesive quality, with buildings built from locally made red and yellow bricks (here predominantly reds) linked along the country road by hedgerows, trees, walls and fences. The salvage yard and the adjoining industrial building interrupt the visual flow of the frontage although the activities do bring some diversity into the street scene. The countryside remains a major influence on the character of the place.

23. Buildings at Graveney are more scattered, and their rather more ordinary appearance perhaps reflects the harsher environment close to the marshes. The straggle of buildings along the road may, therefore, be seen to be a proper reflection of times past and the somewhat bleak surroundings. There is, perhaps, less cohesion in the built environment and less consistency in the range of building materials. Nevertheless, the area around the railway bridge is quite nicely defined and undoubtedly has a clear sense of place. Recent new building has been on a significant scale for a small rural settlement, and has generally been rather ordinary in character.