



High Street, looking north

- 36 South of here lies a third large space, the broad triangular green that sits in the fork between the Old and New Roads, which is given a certain stateliness by the fine avenue of trees along the latter. More intimate is the steep climb out of the High Street to the west up Cullings Hill, where the houses are tiered one above the other, culminating in the venerable pile of the Manor House. This leads to the Row, which although it was once part of the main road has very much the character of a back street, dotted rather than built up with houses. The slope here is much steeper, so that the Row is effectively set on a terrace overlooking the High Street; the two roads run gradually downhill and uphill respectively to join at the War Memorial. Here there is a tiny green, once the site of the parish well, which continues downhill as a grassy bank called the Butts, giving this upper part of the High Street a relaxed, 'rural' character that contrasts with its more urbane lower reaches.



War memorial and the Butts

Key views & vistas

37 Elham is set within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, in the midst of a winding valley especially noted for its scenic quality. Views of the surrounding countryside are therefore of particular importance. The best are to be had from the high points towards the northern and western fringes of the village. From the top of the High Street there is a panoramic vista: northwards over the outlying houses and along the valley towards Park Gate and North Elham; westwards up the combe towards Exted and Mount; and southwards down the High Street, which falls away in a long curve with the stocky spire of St Mary's poking up above the rooftops.



Left: view north towards Park Gate. Right: looking down High Street from the Old

38 Proceeding down the High Street, side roads and gaps between houses offer a series of glimpses of the opposite escarpment to the east. Cullings Hill and St Mary's Road provide dramatic views in both directions: uphill towards the Manor House with its great bank of chimneys, and downhill over the rooftops to the green hillside beyond. Other important views are those into and out of the Square and those around the churchyard. The avenue of tall trees along New Road provides a fine formal prospect across the green and out of the village to the south.



Left: looking down St Mary's Road. Right: view south-east from churchyard

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Activity, uses & influence on layout & building types

- 39 The way Elham's former standing as a market town has affected the layout of its principal spaces has been discussed in the previous section. The effect on building types, while no less marked, is harder to discern, as very few of the principal buildings in the village are in their original use, and many have been re-fronted or altered in ways that largely obscure their origins. The most tangible reminder of Elham's civic past, the old market booths on the Square, were demolished during the 1940s, while the outbuildings at Water Farm, the last direct link with agriculture, have disappeared even more recently. Nevertheless, a number of buildings survive to testify to former patterns of activity.
- 40 The most prominent are the two oldest, St Mary's Church (with its associated priest's house, now Church Cottage) and the Manor House: the twin poles of spiritual and feudal authority between which, appropriately enough, lies in the mercantile heart of the settlement. Here, along the St Mary's Road/Cullings Hill axis, are to be found a series of timber-framed houses of medieval origins, including the Wealden hall-house known as King Post, which presumably housed the wealthier burghers of the little town.
- 41 All were given more or less convincing classical frontages in the C18th, a testament to continuing prosperity and the pervasiveness of architectural fashion. (An interesting example of the same phenomenon in reverse is offered by the old Vicarage. Originally perhaps a farmhouse, it had become the priest's lodgings by the time of the first tithe maps, by which point the C17th building had been extensively 'Georgianised'. In 1900-1, the architect FC Eden was employed to remodel the front of the house, giving it its present appearance of a small country mansion of the mid-1600s.)



Early houses along St Mary's Road, with King Post second from left

- 42 The proliferation of old inns, extant and defunct, around the High Street and the Square likewise testifies to the former importance of these areas as the town's commercial hub. The Abbot's Fireside, once the Smithies' Arms, is the most prominent; the Rose and Crown, which retains its stable yard and first-floor hall which it is believed once served as the district court house, the oldest and most important. Other civic institutions, now long extinct, have left their mark on Elham. The western range of the Square was from 1723 until 1844 occupied by Sir John Williams' School. (Part of its 1871 successor still stands, empty, on Vicarage Lane.) Poor's House on High Street was purpose built as the parish workhouse in the late 1700s. The division between the Master's lodgings on the left and the inmates' wing on the right with the carriage entrance between remains clearly visible from without. The house directly behind it, which fronts the Row, may once have been the hospital wing, carefully separated from the accommodation by the full depth of the plot. Just outside the CA, on the Old Road, stands a sturdy little house that was once the village police station.



Poor's House, with former Master's lodgings on left

- 43 One or two former industrial buildings survive. Manor House Cottage, which replaced the right hand wing of the Manor House in the C17th, contains a row of 'frieze' windows on its first floor, which suggest that the room behind may once have been a workshop. The Old Carpenters at the top of the High Street, which shares this feature, certainly was, although its top floor was only added in the early 1900s. The old garage building is later still, but hides its modernity behind a reassuring half-timbered and tile-hung frontage. Several houses in the former market area, including the Old Bakery, Brogdale and Verneys, were once shops and retain evidence of their old shop-fronts.

Architectural & historic qualities & contribution to special interest

- 44 Any architectural survey of Elham would have to begin with its oldest, largest and most highly listed building, the Church of St Mary the Virgin (grade I). A typical conglomeration of medieval styles of the C12th-C15th plus various later additions, its dominant external features are the squat, massive west tower with its stubby octagonal spire, and the tall two-storied porch topped with an elegant Dutch gable. (This last looks C17th, but may have been partly rebuilt when the church was restored in 1908-11 by FC Eden.)
- 45 The rest of the building is long and low, as if clinging to the steeply sloping ground it sits on, and displays windows in various Gothic modes: C13th lancets in the chancel (those in the east wall are Victorian restorations in place of a big Perpendicular window), C14th curvilinear tracery in the north aisle, C15th paired cinquefoil-headed lights under square hood-moulds in the clerestory.



St Mary's Church from the south-east

- 46 Two domestic buildings give some idea of the vernacular styles prevalent in medieval Elham. These are the Manor House on the Row and King Post on St Mary's Road (grade II*). Both are, or were, C15th timber framed houses of the Wealden type, i.e. with a central double-height hall set between jettied end bays containing domestic and service rooms on two floors, under a hipped roof. King Post is largely intact, but being set end-on to the street with its visible bay refaced in brick it gives little outward impression of its antiquity. The Manor House is only a fragment, its right half having been demolished in the C17th to make way for the adjoining cottage, but the left-hand jettied bay with its tension-braced framing can still be seen, set above the close-studded lower floor. The Rose and Crown (grade II) also contains the remnants of a C15th hall house, but these are wholly concealed behind a C19th front.



The Manor House, with Wealden bay to left and Manor Cottage in foreground

- 47 The most impressive timber-framed building in the village, however, is the somewhat later – probably early C17th– inn now known as the Abbot's Fireside (grade II*). This has a lobby-entry plan, with a jetty carried across the full five-bay width of the front on a series of carved brackets in the form of grotesque squatting figures. The lower storey is rendered but the first floor displays exposed close-studding, and would once have had an impressive continuous string of fenestration consisting of five oriels with (now blocked) frieze windows in between. The roof is hipped on the right hand side, but on the left ends in a gabled end-wall of finely-moulded brick.



The Abbot's Fireside; the right-hand wing is a later addition