

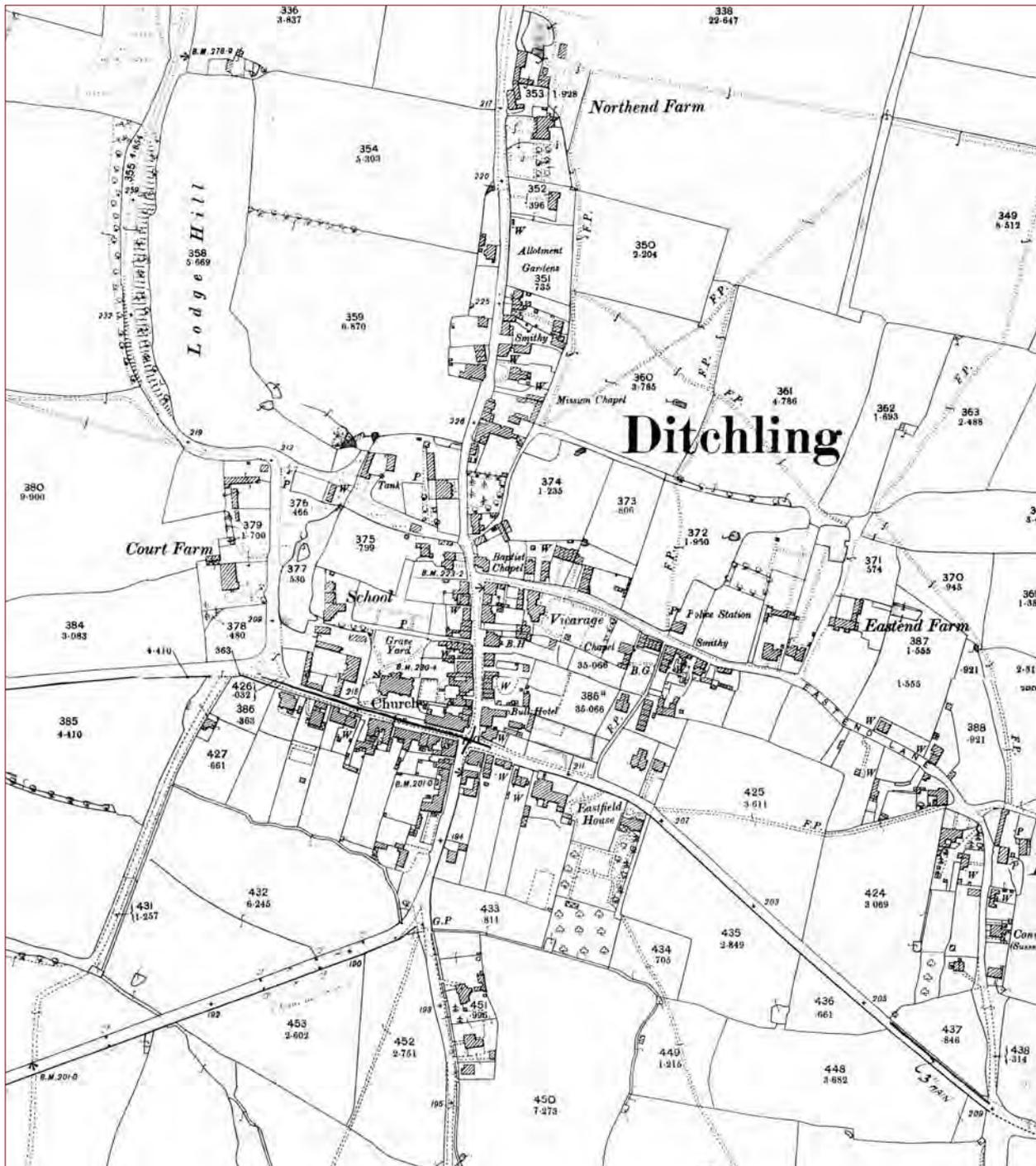
3 THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The Parish of Ditchling is a fine example of an ancient Sussex strip parish extending from the Downs to the Weald. Sheep farming was common in the south, swine and cattle on the Lower Wealden clay to the north, and arable and pasture in between. The settlement of Ditchling grew up on the well drained greensand in the centre. It has been suggested that the village's name

derives from *Dicul*, a local Saxon chief. *Diccelenge*, an old form of Ditchling, may mean 'Dicul's people'. Legend has it that Lodge Hill is Dicul's burial place.

Ditchling is first mentioned in a written record in a document of A.D. 765 in which Aldwulf, a Saxon overlord, transferred a large area of land to the Canons of South Malling, near Lewes. Later it is recorded that the lands were held by King Alfred



Ordnance Survey 1898

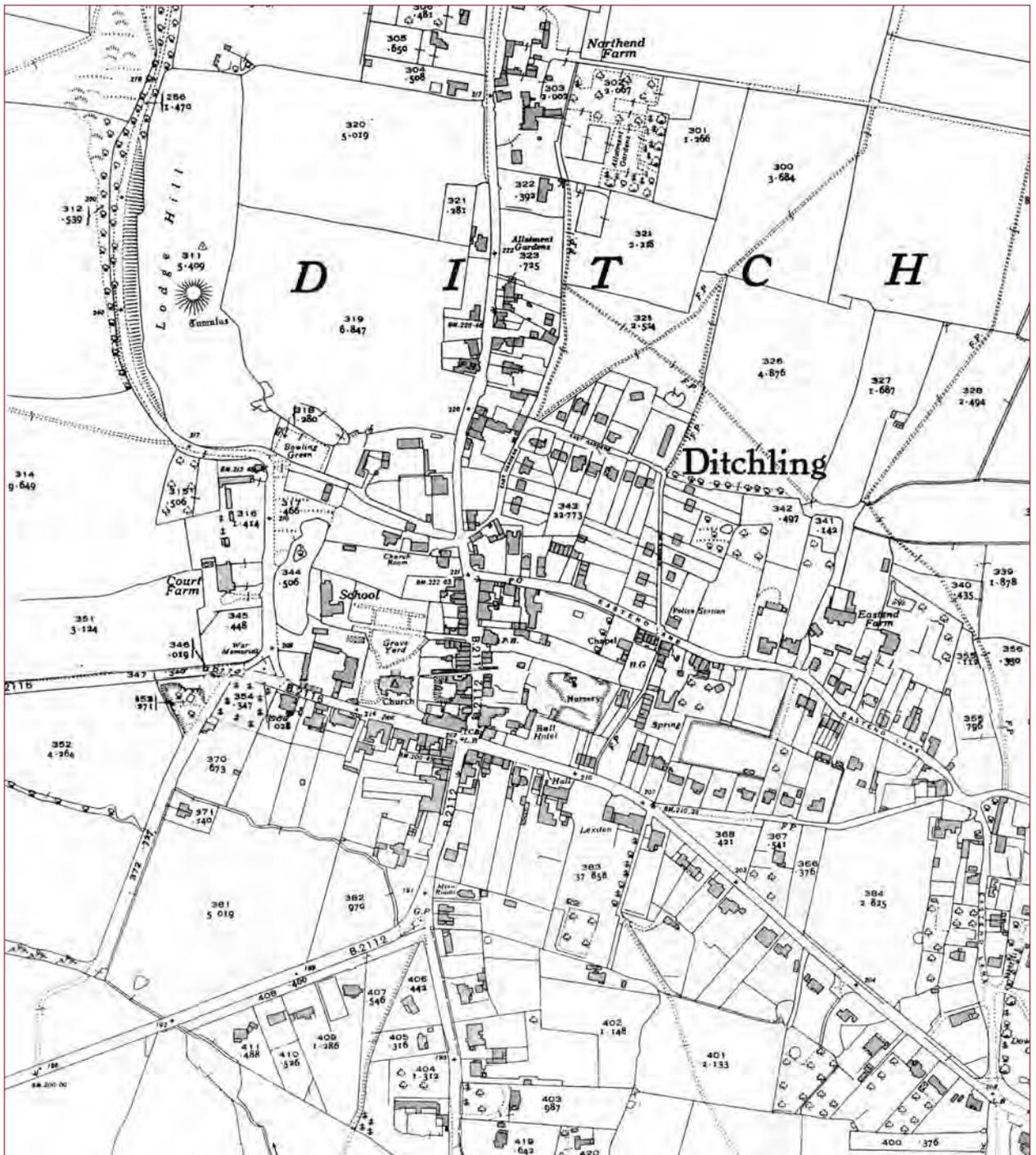
the Great. When Alfred died in the year A.D. 900, the lands passed to a kinsman, Osferth, and then reverted to the Crown under Edward the Confessor.

After the Norman conquest, the land was held by William de Warenne, possibly son-in-law of William the Conqueror. The land passed through several hands until it was owned by the Marquess of Abergavenny who held it until the 20th century.

It is probable that there was a church here in

Saxon times, a small rectangular building on the site of the current church's nave. The Domesday Book, completed in 1086, tells us that there was a church and a mill in Ditchling and the population was around 150 households. In 1090 William's son put the church and lands in Ditchling into the hands of the Cluniac Priory of St Pancras in Lewes.

In 1312 King Edward II granted Ditchling a weekly market to be held on Tuesdays and a fair on St Margaret's Day – July 20th. At the Dissolution of



Ordnance Survey 1937

the Monasteries, St Margaret's Church was surrendered to Henry VIII because of the connection with Lewes Priory. In 1540 Henry VIII gave part of Ditchling Garden Manor (now Court Gardens) to his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves.

There was a congregation of religious dissenters in the village in the 17th century and the building today known as The Old Meeting House, built in 1740, was the original meeting place of the General Baptists. Unitarians built a school for boys in 1815 and a National School was opened in 1836. Ditchling, like many other Sussex villages, was a focus for smuggling activities in the 17th and 18th centuries and beneath West Street there are apparently large inter-connected cellars once used by smugglers.

The rise of Brighton as a fashionable resort for the new craze for sea-bathing towards the end of the 18th century brought changes and increased prosperity to Ditchling life. In 1794 regular London to Brighton coaches stopped at The Bull to change horses before making their way up the steep hill over the Downs at Ditchling Beacon.

The London to Brighton railway line was given Royal Assent in 1837. Bricks from Ditchling Potteries on the Common and sand quarried from land east of the High Street were needed for the construction of the railway tunnel at Clayton and the narrow lane to Keymer was diverted and widened to take the loaded carts, today's Clayton Road. There were five sand quarries in the village quarried at different times.

The railway line to Brighton was completed in 1841 putting an end to Brighton-bound horse drawn coaches. Hassocks, to the west, gained a railway station and rapidly expanded whilst Ditchling remained a small rural village.

In the 18th and early 19th century there was a busy small scale pottery and brickyard at Ditchling Common, a few kilometres to the north of the village. Production was at first for local demand but later, in the late 19th century, the potteries began to produce terracotta that was exported throughout the country along the newly created railways.



Cotterlings, West Street



The Old Meeting House, The Twitten

In the early 20th century several artists and craftsmen moved to Ditchling, notably Eric Gill, artist and calligrapher, the painter Sir Frank Brangwyn and Edward Johnston, a calligrapher best known for designing the typeface that is used throughout the London Underground system.

Like many English villages, changes in agriculture mean that Ditchling is no longer a self-sufficient farming community and offers few opportunities for local employment. The influence of the artists and craftspeople who arrived in the early 20th century is still felt in the village's craft workshops and galleries but a change in national shopping patterns has resulted in the incremental closure of shops and pubs.

3.2 ARCHAEOLOGY

Evidence of early settlement or activity in the vicinity of Ditchling has been found in the form of flint tools and implements. Ditchling Beacon is the

site of an Early Iron Age hillfort. Lodge Hill is topped by a Bronze Age barrow. Finds on the site include flint blades, microliths, scrapers, awls and some Neolithic pottery. The name Lodge Hill may stem from the area being used as a hunting lodge for King Alfred, who used to hunt in the area.

The remains of the main east-west Roman road in Sussex following the South Downs along the greensand passes through the village just north of Boddingtons Lane. This road links two north-south Roman roads, one from Shoreham Harbour to the west of London and the other from Lewes to the east of London. The road passes through Streat to the east of Ditchling, crosses the main road just north of Rowlescroft and passes below Lodge Hill. Some Romano-British Pottery has been found north of the Roman road just north-east of the village and several Roman coins have been found but there is no direct evidence of Romano-British settlement in the area.

4 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

4.1 GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

The village of Ditchling is situated in the west of East Sussex about 12 km north of Brighton and 12 km north-west of Lewes. The village lies around the intersection of two minor roads: the B2116 and the B2112. The B2116 is an east-west route between Hassocks and Lewes; the B2112 is a north-south route between Brighton and Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill. A network of public footpaths links the village to surrounding countryside, to Keymer and to the small hamlets of Streat and Westmeston.

4.2 TOPOGRAPHY AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

Ditchling lies in a picturesque setting in open countryside. The village sits on a small spur of land, on which St Margaret's Church is prominent, between the foot of the South Downs and Lodge Hill, a small hill north-west of the village.

From the sandstone knoll on which the church stands, the land falls slightly to east and south. Southward views of the Downs are a particular feature of the village which help to define its distinctive rural character. Conversely, the church

spire and village is easily visible from Ditchling Beacon, a high point on the South Downs, 2 km to the south of the village.

The presence of trees, both within and around the village, is notable. From the vantage point of Lodge Hill, a few minutes walk from the Village Green, there are good views to the east and a fine view of the pyramidal church spire and the warm-coloured red roofs of the village against the backdrop of the Downs. The view of the village from Lodge Hill across the Downs is at least as important as that of the reverse direction.

Ditchling lies just outside the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty whose boundary sweeps right up the built environment of the village, a pointer to the high quality surrounding landscape.

The village settlement and the land north of it, including the Common, has been recommended for inclusion in the South Downs National Park.

4.3 GEOLOGY

Ditchling lies on well drained greensand between Weald clay to the north and chalk to the south.



Rooftops of Ditchling from Lodge Hill

5 SPATIAL ANALYSIS



Village Green viewed from the churchyard

5.1 OPEN SPACES, LANDSCAPE AND TREES

The most attractive and well used public open space in the conservation area is the area composed of St Margaret's churchyard, the Village Green, pond and War Memorial green. This area is well used in summer, provides a picturesque open setting for the church and is one of the distinctive features of the village.

Elsewhere there is little public open space. The graveyard in front of The Old Meeting House in The Twitten is a characterful spot that provides a fine setting for the 250-year old buildings. Large private gardens contribute to the generally spacious character of the area. Of particular note is the large garden of 4 High Street, north-east of The Bull. This was the site of a large sandpit from where sand was extracted to build the Clayton Tunnel, opened in 1841.

The front gardens of Pardons and East End House, bounded by open railings and fence, create an open space with a distinctly rural ambience in East End Lane. The large walled garden of Pardons and other private gardens are significant open spaces but, being enclosed and often out of sight of the public, do not impinge on the public realm. Two other areas are noteworthy: an area of allotment gardens in North End and a small open green of mown grass at Barfield Gardens.

The most distinctive landscape feature in the conservation area is the pond which helps complete the typical English ensemble of pond, village green and parish church – although the Village Green was, until 1965, part of the farmyard of Court Farm.

Ditchling benefits from a well-tree'd character where both groups and individual trees are important. Trees add significantly to the interest of the area and there are several specimen trees, or groups of trees, which make a positive contribution to the setting of the conservation area's buildings and focal points.

Those trees, and groups of trees, which are particularly prominent and make a contribution to the conservation area are identified on the Villagescape Appraisal map. In such a well tree'd area, it has not been possible to identify every notable tree and lack of a specific reference does not imply that it must not be of value.

Gardens to the front and rear of many of the properties are well kept, befitting a village with the oldest established Village Horticultural Society in England. The village won the county's 'best kept large village' competition in 1978, 1987, 1992, 1994 and 1997. The area's gardens, often stocked with traditional English 'cottage garden' plants, make a significant contribution to the attractive appearance of the conservation area.



Trees are a feature of the conservation area



Looking south west from beside Drove Cottages

5.2 FOCAL POINTS, VIEWS AND VISTAS.

There are many fine outlooks southward through the village towards the Downs which form a looming backdrop to the village's trees and buildings. The most notable southward views of the Downs are along the High Street, from the Village Green beside the church and from the lower end of East End Lane.

Over a field gate beside no. 17 North End there are open views of pasture and trees at the foot of Lodge Hill and from Boddingtons Lane one glimpses open country where a footpath ascends the hill.

Such views from within the conservation area to the wider landscape of pasture and Downs testify to the conservation area's setting in the landscape and make a significant contribution to overall character.

Within the conservation area itself the spire of St Margaret's Church, which is the most pre-eminent landmark from afar, is seen only from the west or from Lewes Road, being otherwise concealed by adjacent buildings and trees. The best views therefore are eastward from beside the pond and,

westward, from Lewes Road and, of course, in the immediate approach from West Street and Church Lane.

The crossroads at the centre of the village is another important focus within the conservation area. Buildings on the south-west and north-east corner are listed but the buildings at the other corners, though not architecturally distinguished, are nevertheless an important element in the streetscene and are identified as being 'positive buildings'.

The village has an attractive and lively roofscape composed of red clay tiled roofs, hips and gables, ornate chimney stacks and clay chimney pots. Because of the elevated position of St Margaret's Church, there are a number of points around the church from where this roofscape can be appreciated. From the elevated churchyard there is also a fine view of Wing's Place.

The stone War Memorial in a triangular green marks the entrance to the village from the west. This is the most attractive approach to the conservation area, offering a good view of the church, its flint boundary wall and the small green about the War Memorial.