

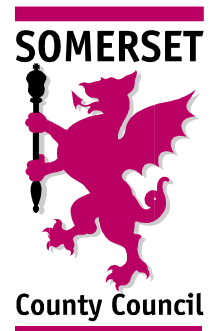
English Heritage Extensive Urban Survey

An archaeological assessment of

Down End

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SOMERSET EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY

DOWN END

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

by Clare Gathercole

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SOMERSET EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY
DOWN END
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

Somerset County Council would like to thank all the people who assisted in the compiling or editing of this report.

I. INTRODUCTION

This report forms one of a series commissioned by English Heritage and prepared by Somerset County Council with the aim of assessing urban archaeology as part of the Monuments Protection Programme. The work was carried out from 1994 to 1998 by Clare Gathercole and Miranda Richardson (from 1996), managed by Chris Webster. The reports are essentially as completed during that period but have been updated by Chris Webster with new archaeological information in early 2001.

English Heritage has funded two programmes assess the urban archaeological resource - intensive and extensive. The former is restricted to the major historic cities, characterised by a great depth of archaeological remains, a wealth of historical documentation and in many cases, by a great deal of archaeological investigation. The extensive urban surveys cover the smaller towns and are based on information in the local Sites and Monuments Record with limited amounts of new information collected during the project. Once the information has been collected and mapped, attention is focused on the analysis of the town plan and defining topographic units within the town. This will lead to the preparation of guidance for planners, developers and others involved in the management of the town.

II. MAJOR SOURCES

There is little documentary material, primary or secondary, available on Down End, though manorial records for the post-medieval and later periods survive in the Northumberland MSS at Alnwick . The Puriton enclosure map of 1798 is the earliest showing the area around Down End in any detail. The situation is well shown on the OS surveyors' drawings of 1802, though Down End itself is obscured by hachuring, and the Puriton Tithe Map of 1842 shows the details of plot enclosures.

III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF DOWN END

Down End is included in this survey because of its short-lived medieval urban status, and the possible associated urban archaeology. No real urban activity is known before this time. However, it is likely that the same factors which encouraged the attempt to set up a port in the middle ages were relevant in earlier times. The site of Down End at the western end of the Poldens offers a strategic viewpoint, natural defences and good communications. Until 1677, when its course was deliberately altered, the Parrett flowed along the south side of the Poldens between Crandon Bridge and Down End, where the King's Sedgemoor Drain now runs. Along this stretch of the river, traffic could pass directly from the Poldens to deep water river transport. There is evidence of some iron age activity here, and of significant Roman activity. A Roman road is reputed to have run along the ridge, completing the land connection between Ilchester and the possible Roman port of Comwich, but there was also a significant port at Crandon Bridge. Archaeological investigations have shown a large Roman settlement only just east of the site of Down End.

Nevertheless, there is no evidence that Down End was anything other than part of a rural estate in Saxon times. In 1086, Puriton parish was a possession of St Peter's, Rome. By 1159, however, Philip de Columbers held the land. There is documentary evidence that he was paying for borough rights - somewhere - but the location of that borough is uncertain: it *may* have been Down End, but is perhaps more likely to have been Nether Stowey (Dunning, pers. comm.). Certainly by 1226 Down End (called *Capite Montis or Dunende*) was a borough, having its own jury at the eyre; and it is referred to as a borough in the 1242/3 Assize Rolls.

The borough of Down End was probably set up in order to take advantage of the estate's position on a junction of north-south and east-west routes and on the tidal stretch of the River Parrett, closer to the sea than Bridgwater. Very little is known about the town, except that it had a grid street plan (still visible), a probable motte and bailey, a chapel and a suspected port. It seems never to have taken off, perhaps because of Bridgwater's commercial success: there are no certain references to the borough after the 13th century, though there are 16th century references to unidentified "burgages" in Puriton parish (Dunning, pers. comm.). How long settlement continued on the site is uncertain, but no post-medieval urban activity is known, and the late 18th century map shows a site returned to agricultural use. During the 19th century, the conveniently delimited plots were in use for orchards and farm buildings, whilst industrial and infrastructure developments (road, rail, cement) hemmed the site in. This process has continued in the present century, leading to Down End's redevelopment as an annex to the village of Puriton, and the industrial estate at Dunball.

IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF DOWN END

GENERAL COMMENTS

0.1 Archaeological knowledge

There has been no archaeological work on the medieval urban area of Down End, although the castle mound has been trenched (Chater & Major, 1909). More recently (in the 1970s), work in advance of the M5 to the east of Down End has produced important evidence of iron age and Roman activity. The other major road development in the area, the A38/9, does not appear to have been monitored (Bond, c1990). South of the castle mound, a 1957 sewer trench watching brief and a 1993 evaluation (SMR 90000) produced minimal evidence of any activity. Similarly, examination of a building plot to the north of the castle in 1996 found no evidence of activity (SMR 90013).

0.2 Standing structures

There are no standing remains of the early periods, although fragments of industrial archaeology survive.

1. PREHISTORIC

(Map A)

1.1 Archaeological knowledge and context

Down End is one of 37 of the 45 historic towns covered by this project at which there is as yet no strong evidence of prehistoric settlement on the site of the later town itself - though it is also one of three at which the suggestion has been made that the medieval castle directly overlies a prehistoric earthwork, with the resultant implication of continuity. This may be unlikely, but it should be remembered that it is notoriously difficult for archaeologists to demonstrate a prehistoric presence in areas subsequently built up or reengineered, and that, whilst 'towns' were not, generally speaking, a feature of prehistoric landscapes, many of the same factors which made the site desirable in later periods would already have been operative. This is born out by the situation at Down End, where nearby iron age and Roman settlement indicates the importance of the Parrett and Polden communication lines.

1.2 Archaeological features, shown on Map A

1.2.a Settlement

The early topography of the site is unknown in detail, as is the extent of pre-Roman settlement. It may be that the low promontory overlooking the river and tidal flats was in use, and that the mound at its western end was occupied prior to the medieval scarping, but there is no evidence that this was so. The suggestion of a hillfort by the 1908 excavators (Chater & Major, 1909) has been recently described as a misinterpretation of the archaeology (Bond, c1990).

The iron age/ Roman sites are shown on Map A as Roman sites (DOW/201, DOW/202).

2. ROMAN *(Map A)*

2.1 Archaeological knowledge

The M5 sites, shown on Map A, have added considerably to knowledge of Roman activity in the immediate vicinity of Down End. Roman remains were recorded east of Down End at SMR 10702 and 10705.

2.2 Archaeological context

The Roman period was one of deliberate, strategic urbanisation. The area which is now Somerset appears to have been less affected than some other areas by this, in that few really urban sites are known, and this probably reflects its marginal position. However, the widespread distribution of Roman or Romanised settlements shows that the county - particularly east of the Parrett - was heavily populated and exploited in this period.

Down End is one of 12 of the 45 historic towns covered by this project at which there is evidence of local settlement, though not exactly on the site of the later town. The location was an important one, on the Roman road which ran from the Fosse Way along the Poldens towards the nearby port of Crandon Bridge and on to Combwich, and there is evidence of a considerable agricultural landscape surrounding it.

2.3 Archaeological features, shown on Map A

2.3.a Settlement

DOW/201 Roman settlement
One site (SMR 10705) was a large settlement - this was observed in the area of construction for the present motorway junction. It contained paving and wall structures, as well as potsherds, including Samian, and mortaria.

DOW/202 Roman occupation
The other site (SMR 10702) produced pot, a knife, and possible hearths.

Within the area adjacent to the M5, most of the archaeological deposits will have been destroyed during road construction.

The suggested settlement areas are taken from the SMR, and represent the areas seen during investigations. The limits of settlement were not, however, defined by the watching briefs: settlement may have extended along the ridge. Roman pot, coins and foundations (the latter possibly a dubious claim) were reported by the 1908 excavators to have been found previously on the mound (Chater & Major, 1909).

3. SAXON *(No map)*

Though the Post-Roman and early Saxon periods were characterised by a return to non-urban lifestyles, the later Saxon period (from the 8th or 9th century onwards) saw the beginnings of a resurgence of first trading places and then towns, under the control of the Saxon royal families, in the context of a network of royal estate administration centres and subordinate settlements which was already established (in some cases long-established). Though only a relatively small number of places with any claim to be towns existed by the time of the Domesday Survey, many of the subordinate settlements recorded at that point were to become towns in the medieval period.

4. MEDIEVAL *(Map A)*

The medieval town is SMR 10703.

4.1 Archaeological knowledge

There have been few excavations in the area of the medieval settlement. There were excavations at the motte and bailey in 1908 (Chater & Major, 1909) - photographs of this excavation in progress are in the SANHS library in

Taunton. Additionally, the construction of a sewer trench close to the Castle was subject to archaeological monitoring in 1957 (SMR 10716) and a further evaluation (SMR 90000) has been carried out in the same field more recently (1993).

4.2 Context

Both in Britain and on the continent, the medieval period saw the growth of town foundation and, to an extent, urban living (though the bulk of the population continued to live in villages). The reasons for this growth were many and complex. In England they included both general factors - such as the growth of mercantile trade (especially the cloth trade) - and more specific ones - such as the post-Conquest establishment of a network of (theoretically) loyal magnates and prelates with large estates and commercial privileges. The latter led to the increasing relaxation of the royal stranglehold on the profits of towns and chartered boroughs (where tenants paid cash rents and were free of feudal ties), which in turn enabled the establishment of new purpose-built commercial areas (the majority of places classed as towns in the medieval period have at least some planned elements). Of course, some boroughs were already in existence by the Conquest, and the existing pattern of Saxon urban or semi-urban centres was an important influence on the medieval one. This is evident in Somerset which, like many parts of the south and west (where the majority of the Saxon *burhs* and boroughs had been established), was peppered with small boroughs in the medieval period.

In archaeological terms, the medieval towns are characterised by evidence of partially planned, intensive occupation of restricted areas. Typical features which may occur include: regular, or semi-regular, street layouts; large market places (usually obscured by later encroachments); blocks of regular, long, narrow, plots end on to the commercial frontage; churchyards, either within the medieval layout or outside it - the latter often indicative of a deliberate shift of activity; regular or irregular suburbs or marginal areas occupied by quays, or industrial sites such as mills; and high status sites such as castles, manor sites and large religious precincts.

Down End is one of six of the 45 historic towns identified by this project which were set up in the 12th and 13th centuries as completely new towns on greenfield sites, from an existing settlement or borough (this does not include planned extensions *within* existing boroughs, of which there were also a number). All of these new towns were given borough status by their founders - in this case one of the Norman lords - and were subsequently abandoned, or semi-abandoned, with consequently good archaeological preservation. Down End was one of eight of the 45 towns, but the only one of the greenfield sites, to be associated with a castle. It was also one of eleven of the towns (and four of the castle towns) which had a harbour or quays in the medieval period.

4.3 Standing structures

There are no buildings from this period, although the motte and bailey remain.

4.4 Archaeological components, shown on Map A

4.4.a Communications

(a) Roads, streets and routeways

Not mapped Down End's simple ladder grid plan is quite characteristic of medieval planted towns and is still visible today. There are two east-west streets along the ridge, with cross streets. The more northerly of these streets probably represents the main routeway, and its eastward extension beyond the borough centre is marked Greenway on the 1798 map. Down End's street plan is one of its greater points of interest and more archaeological knowledge of its history would be welcome (Aston & Leech, 1977).

(b) Quays

DOW/404

The quays

The location of the town's quays is unknown. The possible port area suggested by Aston & Leech, which would have been on the main channel of the Parrett, lies close to what is now the King's Sedgemoor Drain, more or less underneath the railway. If there is any medieval archaeology surviving in this area it will have potential for environmental preservation, with possible wooden quay structures and cargo traces.

The alternative site for the port suggested by Chater & Major (1909, not mapped) lies at the west

end of the promontory, but this depends on a re-interpretation of the baileys which is not generally accepted.

The marked area is based on that suggested by Aston & Leech (1977).

4.4.b Water

The medieval town was situated on a westward facing promontory, with a natural scarp to the river (which has changed course several times) to the south and a stream to the north. The banks defining the old river course are still visible on aerial photographs (Leech & Leach, 1982). The 1908 excavators of the motte claimed to have revealed evidence of not only flooding but also a silted inlet on its north-western flank (Chater & Major, 1909). Aston & Leech's later work does not mention their interpretation, which may be insufficiently supported by their data. But further information on the details of the river at this time would be of use in determining the position of the port, which, though thought to lie a little south of the town, has not been found.

DOW/405 The approximate old river course (from Williams, 1970).

4.4.c Military sites

DOW/402 The Castle

The mound at the west end of Down End, formerly known as Chidley or Chisley Mount, is probably a motte and bailey (SMR 11447, SM 33714), although some doubts have been expressed about the nature of the site (Chater & Major, 1909; R. Dunning and R.A. Croft, pers. comm.). The unimpressive standing earthworks may represent the artificially defended sides of two baileys to the north of the mound, the remaining sides of which would presumably have been enclosed by marsh. The motte itself appears to have been deliberately scarped on its western side, enhancing the natural shape; the eastern side does not stand high and is poorly defined. There is a central depression, but excavations failed to show any signs of structural remains.

There has been no major disturbance of the site, although the eastern side is somewhat pitted and lies under private gardens.

The outline follows the Scheduled area.

DOW/403 The town defences

Whilst the town had natural defences to the north (the stream) and south (the scarp), and the castle to the west, its open eastern side may also have been defended or at least delimited by a bank and ditch. Contour maps show such a feature to the east of the town, unfortunately in the area affected by the motorway link development.

The marked area is based on that suggested in Aston & Leech, 1977.

4.4.d Burial sites and places of worship

Not mapped There are references, in 15th and 16th century documents, and in Collinson (1791) to a chapel, the location of which remains unknown.

4.4.e Settlement (Urban)

DOW/401 The medieval Borough

Map A shows the probable area of medieval settlement, almost certainly defined by the streets, the natural topography and a possible artificial embankment to the west. However, there is no archaeological confirmation of its exact limits. Unfortunately, the opportunity was not taken to define the borough limits before modern road and housing redevelopment took place, and it is likely that the archaeological deposits have been damaged. The exact locations of the plots are not known, nor the extent to which they were built up in medieval times: in view of the evident lack of success of the borough, the intensity of activity may be expected to be less than normal.

Nevertheless, any of the plots fronting the medieval streets have the potential to contain remains of medieval buildings, with outhouses, workshops, yards and pits behind.

The marked area is based on the remaining street plan and the limits suggested in Aston & Leech, 1977.

4.4.f Artefact scatters

DOW/406

Pottery

medieval and post-medieval pottery (SMR 10716) was recovered from the field below the Castle during the construction of a sewer trench in 1957. However, a subsequent evaluation (SMR 90000) in this field has revealed only ridge and furrow of probable 18th century date.

5. POST-MEDIEVAL

(Map A)

5.1 Archaeological knowledge and context

The two evaluations south-west of the mound (SMR 10716 and SMR 90000) have produced a little post-medieval archaeology in the shape of potsherds and 18th century ridge and furrow. M5 work produced evidence of post-medieval settlement closer to the turnpike route to the south-east, close to the drain (SMR 10715).

5.2 Context

The basic pattern of towns had been established by the end of the middle ages, and there were very few major changes in the post-medieval period, though the economic fortunes of particular towns rose and fell. Down End, however, is one of nine of the 45 historic towns covered by this project which, though in some way urban in the medieval period, were not really so in the post-medieval period.

5.3 Standing structures

There are no Listed Buildings of this period in Down End.

5.4 Archaeological components, shown on Map A

5.4.a Communications: Roads

Not mapped The area of Down End lay a little way off the 18th century turnpike route which passed through Puriton.

5.4.b Settlement

DOW/501

Post-medieval settlement

The area of settlement, *based on information in the SMR (SMR 10715).*

5.4.c Industrial sites

DOW/502

The windmill and possible limekiln site

There are several post-medieval industrial and milling sites along the ridge, closer to Puriton than to Down End. Remains of the westernmost windmill of three (SMR 10706-8) could still be seen earlier this century; Windmill Cottage still exists.

There is a possible limekiln site (SMR 11828), in Rock Field, just north of the westernmost windmill: pot, clay pipe, glass, and burnt brick and limestone have all been found here.

These sites are mapped from information in the SMR.

6. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH/ 19TH CENTURY) **(Map B)**

6.1 Context

The late 18th and 19th centuries saw some changes to the urban pattern, with the beginning of the emergence of larger centres (often at the expense of smaller ones), linked by vastly improved communication lines (turnpikes, railways and canals). Somerset was not characterised by the kind of large scale industrialisation and urbanisation seen in other counties - indeed, the virtual collapse of its most important industry, which was cloth, affected nearly all of the medieval and post-medieval towns - but some did take place. The changes were reflected in a series of alterations to town governance, which left the county with a total of only fifteen Municipal Boroughs and Urban Districts by the end of the 19th century.

Down End is one of eight places which were not towns in the 19th century, though they had previously been so.

6.2 Standing structures

There are no Listed Buildings, though there are limekilns (adjacent to the railway) which are considered to be of interest.

6.3 Archaeological components, shown on Map B

6.3.a Redevelopment in earlier settlement components

Components described in previous sections are shown in lighter shading. 19th century activity was concentrated beside the road and railways, away from the medieval settlement.

6.3.b Communications: Roads, railways and quays

There was significant development of industry and infrastructure around Down End. The opening of the new turnpike road (1827) and the railway (early 1840s) enabled the growth of industrial complexes south and east of Down End. Within 30 years of the railway's advent, three cement & lime works, two brick & tile works and a manure works had sprung up (Murless, 1992). However, on the 1886 OS map, the town itself shows only scattered building, much of which is associated with Down End Farm.

DOW/608 The new turnpike, from the 1842 tithe map.

DOW/607 The railway
The railway to the east of Down End, the Bristol & Exeter, later the GWR, was constructed in the early 1840s, bypassing the town but providing branches to the growing industrial complexes by 1886.

Mapped from the 1886 map.

DOW/606 Dunball Wharf
Dunball Wharf was built in the 1850s at the junction of the Parrett and the King's Sedgemoor drain and linked to the railway by a tramline. The manure works were also located on the wharf.

From the 1886 map.

6.3.c Settlement

DOW/602 19th century development (general)

There were a few houses built around Down End in the nineteenth century, between the railway and the site of the medieval town, and down by the wharf. There was also a hotel by the wharf, and a few isolated buildings south of the river.

From the 1886 map.

DOW/603 Unclassified 19th century occupation

From the 19th century maps.

6.3.d Industrial sites

DOW/601 Dunball Cement Works

Dunball Cement Works (SMR 10048) was active by the 1840s and is of historical interest as it was an early element in John Board's empire (Murless, 1992).

Associated with the cement and lime works are several limekilns. Probably the most interesting of these are the surviving elements of the ranges just west of the railway (Murless, 1993): some of these were destroyed by the motorway link road but a bank still survives.

The cement works are mapped from the 1886 map.

DOW/604 The limekiln site

There were also limekilns north of Down End (SMR 10712). *These are mapped from the SMR.*

DOW/605 The brickworks

The brickworks were at Dunball Wharf (SMR 10718), as were the manure works, marked "disused" on the 1886 map.

These are mapped from the 1886 map.

Not mapped On the 1886 map, the fields to the east of Down End are peppered with quarries and abandoned quarries.

7. 20TH CENTURY***(Map B)*****7.1 Context**

The 20th century has seen a vast physical expansion of some existing towns, and some expansion in most of the 45 historic towns covered by the project. However, there have only been limited alterations to the overall pattern of urban settlement. The County Structure Plan still contains fifteen settlements defined as Towns: this is almost identical to the late 19th century list of Municipal Boroughs and Urban Districts.

Down End is one of 30 of the 45 historic towns covered by this project which is not classed as a town in the County Structure Plan.

7.2 Settlement components, shown on Map B

All components have been mapped from the 1931, 1961 and 1995 maps.

7.2.a Communications: RoadsDOW/703 20th century roads

There have been further industrial and infrastructure (M5 and A38/9 link) developments this century, leading to a reoccupation of the medieval site, and its partial destruction.

7.2.b Military sites

Not mapped There are several surviving pillboxes protecting the approaches to the Royal Ordnance Factory and Port at Puriton) around Down End (SMR 11951, 11975, 11979); a further one (SMR 10720) has now been destroyed.

7.2.c Settlement (Suburban)DOW/701 20th century suburbs

Suburban development has occurred piecemeal within the area of the medieval town. There has also been some expansion to the north and south, and these areas are mapped.

7.2.d Industrial sites

DOW/702 20th century industry

Industry has continued to grow to the south of Down End, on the Dunball Industrial Estate, and to the north-west along the main road. There are remains of a salt works (SMR 10050) and bore holes dating from 1909-14 to the south-east of the cement works.

V. THE POTENTIAL OF DOWN END

1. Research interests

Down End is of interest because of its historic street pattern, its status as a medieval town and its unclear relationship with Bridgwater. The character of the mound, and the locations of the port and chapel are also of interest.

2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation

Most of the urban area of Down End is dry, but below the promontory - where any port would be expected to be - there are likely to be waterlogged deposits.

3. Limitations

It is unfortunate that whilst Down End lay virtually abandoned for many years, it is now at a hub of 19th & 20th century road, rail and industry developments. The south-eastern areas of the medieval settlement, including the possible town defences, have been badly damaged by the motorway link road. If Aston & Leech's suggested location for the port is correct then it lies under the railway. Modern housing developments may have damaged much of the archaeology of the central area in the town, though in the gardens some may survive. Moreover, there has been much quarrying in the area, which may have damaged the mound (Chater suggests that the mound may be partly a quarry tip), and the fringes of the town/ port. Since the locations of many elements of Down End are so uncertain, it is difficult to assess how much remains.

4. Extent of current protection

(Shown on Map C)

An AHAP has been defined covering the probable area of medieval settlement. The motte and bailey is Scheduled (SM 33714). There are no Listed Buildings, nor any Conservation Area.

5. Management Proposals

See the Archaeological Guidance Document.

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3. Maps

- 1798 Puriton Enclosures Map: SRO Q/RDe 1
 1802 OS surveyors' drawings at 3": fiche in SSL
 1842 Puriton Tithe Map: fiche in SSL
 1886 OS map at 1:2500: fiche in SSL
 1931 OS map at 1:10560
 1961 OS map at 1:10560 + SMR data
 1979 OS map at 1:10000 + SMR data
 1995 OS digital data

VII. COMPONENT INDEXES

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DOW/401	A	DOW/603	B
DOW/402	A	DOW/604	B
DOW/403	A	DOW/605	B
DOW/404	A	DOW/606	B
DOW/405	A	DOW/607	B
DOW/406	A	DOW/608	B
DOW/501	A	DOW/701	B
DOW/502	A	DOW/702	B

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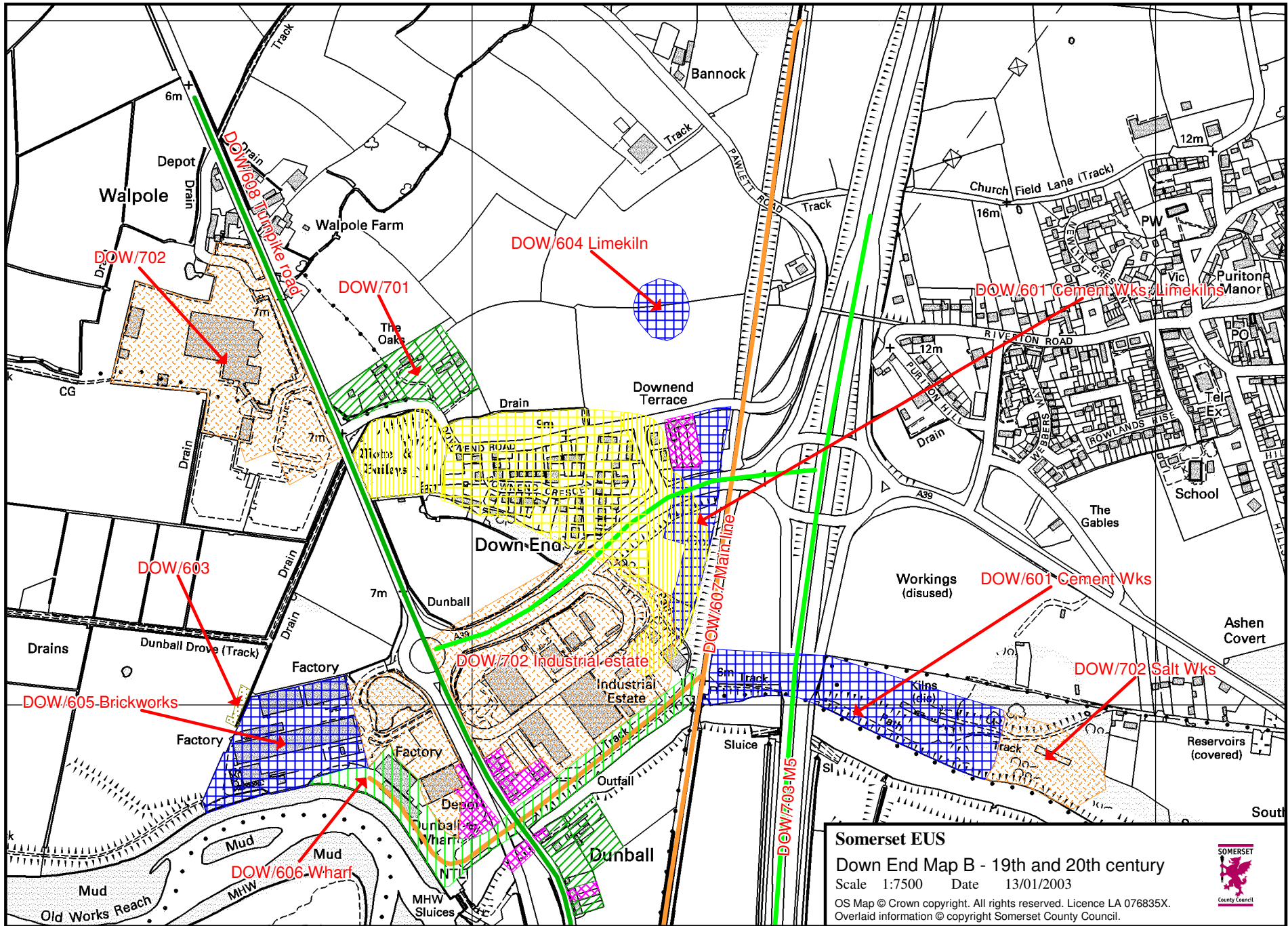
Maps

Map A - Pre-1800 settlement

Map B - 19th and 20th century. Surviving earlier components in yellow.

Map C - Existing constraints

Key: Scheduled Monuments (blue),
Listed Buildings Grade I (none)
 Grade II* (none)
 Grade II (none)
Conservation Area (none)
Area of High Archaeological Potential (pink)



Somerset EUS
 Down End Map B - 19th and 20th century
 Scale 1:7500 Date 13/01/2003
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