

English Heritage Extensive Urban Survey

An archaeological assessment of

# Ilminster

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# SOMERSET EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY

## ILMINSTER

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

by Clare Gathercole

#### CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION .....	3
II. MAJOR SOURCES .....	3
1. <i>Primary documents</i> .....	3
2. <i>Local histories</i> .....	3
3. <i>Maps</i> .....	3
III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF ILMINSTER .....	3
IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ILMINSTER .....	5
GENERAL COMMENTS .....	5
1. <i>PREHISTORIC</i> .....	5
2. <i>ROMAN</i> .....	5
3. <i>SAXON</i> .....	6
4. <i>MEDIEVAL</i> .....	8
5. <i>POST-MEDIEVAL</i> .....	12
6. <i>INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY)</i> .....	15
7. <i>20TH CENTURY</i> .....	18
V. THE POTENTIAL OF ILMINSTER .....	19
1. <i>Research interests</i> .....	19
2. <i>Areas of potentially exceptional preservation</i> .....	19
3. <i>Limitations</i> .....	19
4. <i>Extent of current protection</i> .....	19
5. <i>Management Proposals</i> .....	19
VI. SOURCES .....	19
1. <i>General documentary (Somerset/ Wessex)</i> .....	19
2. <i>Ilminster</i> .....	21
3. <i>Maps</i> .....	21
VII. COMPONENT INDEXES .....	21
1. <i>Component to map</i> .....	21
2. <i>Component to page</i> .....	22

Appendix:      Maps



## SOMERSET EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY

### ILMINSTER

#### 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 2003.

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

##### *1. Primary documents*

Because of Ilminster's association with the Dean and Chapter of Wells, some periods of its history are quite well documented. However, there are gaps, notably in the later medieval, and the abbots' records are somewhat scanty. No primary documents have been consulted for this report.

##### *2. Local histories*

The Victoria County History has not yet covered Ilminster, but there is a history of the town by Street (1904). Little else has been written about the archaeology of Ilminster.

##### *3. Maps*

A series of mid-18th century maps (drawn up between 1750 and 1768) covers Ilminster and its hinterland in some detail.

#### III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF ILMINSTER

Ilminster sits along a ridge which drops down to the fertile Isle Valley. The town's growth pattern has been dominated by the topography, and its economy by the availability of both fast flowing streams and level meadowland. The area is geologically complex, with marl, limestones, sandstones and chalk strata available for quarrying.

There is some evidence of both prehistoric and Roman activity in the area, in the shape of isolated artefact finds. Unfortunately, these are not well provenanced and it is difficult to be certain whether the site of Ilminster itself was occupied in these periods. As it lies astride a ridgeway and, in the Roman period, was only a few miles from the Fosse Way, occupation cannot be ruled out.

There is documentary evidence of a Saxon minster and settlement at Ilminster (Ile Mynister = the minster on the River Isle). The earliest certain reference to the site is King Ethelred's Confirmation of 995, which *returned* the estates to the Benedictine Muchelney Abbey after a time of disturbance. The wording of this document implies an earlier origin for Ilminster, and a charter of 693 may record the original estate grant. However, the 725 "Charter of King Ine" is now thought to be a later forgery, perhaps medieval, or perhaps 10th century and part of the dispute which led to the issue of Ethelred's Confirmation (Bond, c1990). The early estate centred on Ilminster was extensive: the parish of Ilminster was the most important in the Hundred of Abdick and Bulstone in the late Saxon period. The place names of the surrounding area - Ilton, Dillington, Whitelackington, Dinnington, for example - suggest that a network of estates and estate settlements existed: of these, Dillington was certainly part of the abbey's estates and allied to Ilminster.

After the Conquest, attempted rebellion brought serious consequences for some of Ilminster's neighbours, including Donyatt, Dowlish and Whitelackington. But the town itself, being a church possession, was largely spared. Domesday records an affluent estate, with a good deal of woodland (some of which may have been attached to Neroche Forest to the west), and the beginnings of a town in the shape of a market rated at twenty shillings a year. Muchelney remained in possession of the manorial rights, rents, the tithes and the church itself until the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and presided over the growth of the medieval town. In 1201, a deal struck between Muchelney and Wells inaugurated the "golden age" of Ilminster (Street, 1904): the abbots of Muchelney gained status as prebends, Wells gained the rectory and much of the revenues, and both institutions protected and encouraged the town - though they never allowed a free borough to be established.

Ilminster was extremely prosperous by the later medieval period, and the 15th century parish church and Grammar School bear witness to this. The town's prosperity was largely based on the textile industry, but it was also an important local market centre.

Between the late 15th and the late 17th centuries Ilminster suffered a series of setbacks. The first of these was a major fire in 1491, which seems to have damaged the town's economy. According to Collinson (1791), Ilminster was never completely rebuilt after this catastrophe. Only a few decades later, the Dissolution of the Monasteries disrupted the running of the town. The abbots' rights were split up into the Lordship of the Manor, the rectorial tithes and the advowson of the vicarage, and the 16th and 17th centuries saw a series of absentee Lords of the Manor. As well as the disruption of the Civil War, in 1661 there was another major fire, this one being followed by appeals read up and down the country.

Despite all this, Ilminster was still the fourth largest town in Somerset in 1670 (as shown by the hearth tax returns). Prosperity continued into the 18th century and Collinson described two irregular streets with about 300 houses, many of which were "decent stone and brick". The town was both a market centre (noted for leather in the post-medieval period) and a centre of the cloth industry, ropemaking and gloving (though many of the actual sites of activity were in the outlying areas along the rivers). It was also surrounded by orchards. Ilminster benefited from the increasing traffic on the turnpiked London to Exeter route which passed through the town.

Ilminster's population was declining at the beginning of the 19th century, but it took off in the 1820s and 1830s. The town then thrived throughout the 19th century, aided by the arrival of the Chard Canal (briefly) and then the Railway. Brags Directory described a town "much improved by many new houses" by the 1840s, and Hunts 1848 Directory mentions improvements to the market. There were then two weekly markets and quarterly and annual livestock fairs, but the Directory says that the woollen trade was almost gone, and that the silk factory and maltings were the town's staple industry at the time. Population growth continued up to the 1870s. Though the failure of the canal adversely affected some of the ventures that had been set up around the town, notably at Dowlish Ford and Moolham, population remained steady, and a brewery and the artificial stone works took the place of failed industries.

Ilminster remains a small market town. It now lies within commuting distance of larger towns such as Taunton and Yeovil and since the 1950s, its population has again been steadily increasing.

## **IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ILMINSTER**

Ilminster lies in a densely settled area, and has many close neighbours of historical and archaeological interest. For example, the great estates of Dillington (originally part of the Ilminster estate), Whitelackington and Jordans all lay on the fringe of Ilminster, whilst to the west were the Donyatt potteries. These surrounding features are of importance in understanding the context of Ilminster, but are largely beyond the scope of this report.

### **GENERAL COMMENTS**

#### **0.1 Archaeological work in the town**

There has been little archaeological work in Ilminster, and many questions remain to be addressed. There have, however, been some small, unproductive evaluation trenches on the southern fringe of the town.

#### **0.2 Standing structures and visible remains**

Ilminster has few visible remains predating the late post-medieval, for at least two major fires have probably destroyed most of the medieval buildings (though concealed structural elements may survive). The town layout is probably Saxon in part, though the relationship of that early plan to today's evolved plan is not completely clear.

### **1. PREHISTORIC**

*(No map)*

#### **1.1 Archaeological knowledge**

There have been isolated finds of prehistoric material around Ilminster, but none of these can be very precisely located. Flint implements have been found near the foot of Herne Hill (SMR 53451), and a number of bronze age artefacts, including palstaves, a bracelet and a torque, were found at Winterhay Green (SMR 53461). The SMR should be consulted for further details. Also, a number of post-mesolithic flint implements were found in a field north of Knot Oak, during pipeline work in 1978 (Minnitt & Murless, 1978).

#### **1.2 Context**

Ilminster 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 - though there was certainly activity in the area and it should be remembered that it is notoriously difficult for archaeologists to demonstrate a prehistoric presence in modern urban areas. 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.

#### **1.3 Archaeological features**

*(No Map)*

There is as yet no evidence of prehistoric settlement on the site of Ilminster itself.

No map has been produced for this period.

### **2. ROMAN**

*(No map)*

#### **2.1 Archaeological knowledge**

There have been isolated finds of Roman material to the south-west of Ilminster, including coins at Herne Hill (SMR 53465), Cross (SMR 53466) and Dunpole (SMR 53467) (none of which can be precisely located). The SMR should be consulted for further details of these. No other occupation material has been recovered.

#### **2.2 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.

Ilminster is one of 26 of the 45 historic towns covered by this project at which there is no evidence of Roman settlement on the site of the later town, though there was certainly activity in the area. The site lies only a few miles from the Fosse Way, the major Roman artery into the south-west, and occupation cannot therefore be ruled out.

### **2.3 Archaeological features**

*(No map)*

There is as yet no evidence of Roman occupation at Ilminster.

No map has been produced for this period.

## **3. SAXON**

*(Maps A & C)*

### **3.1 Archaeological work in the town/ Archaeological knowledge**

There has been no archaeological investigation of the Saxon settlement of Ilminster and important questions remain regarding the original layout of the town, the extent of the minster and abbots' grange and the location of the main settlement focus.

### **3.2 Context**

Though the Post-Roman and early Saxon periods were characterised by a return to non-urban lifestyles, the later Saxon period (from the 9th century onwards) saw the beginnings of a resurgence of trading places and towns. This was controlled, in England, by the Saxon royal families (though it was part of a wider trend), and took place in the context of a network of royal estate administration centres which was already established (in some cases long-established). The reasons for the changes were many and complex, combining defensive, administrative and ecclesiastical considerations with, increasingly, purely commercial aspirations. As one of the heartlands of the kings of Wessex, Somerset played an important part in the early re-urbanisation of the south, and there are a number of places amongst those studied for this project which can claim to have been towns before the Norman Conquest.

Ilminster is one of fifteen out of the 45 historic towns covered by this project which already had some urban functions or features before the Conquest. In fact, it is one of the seven towns at which the probable or possible existence of a pre-Conquest market has been noted (though this figure may be misleadingly low), as well as being one of nine in which possible signs of pre-Conquest planning have been noted in the Assessments. Ilminster is also one of 22 out of the 45 towns associated with a known or probable pre-Conquest minster.

### **3.3 Standing structures and visible remains**

There are no surviving standing structures, though it is possible that the street plan is partly Saxon.

### **3.4 Archaeological components (centre), shown on Map A**

#### **3.4.a Communications**

##### **(a) Roads**

ILM/307

##### Early roads

The street pattern of the early town has been somewhat obscured by later developments. However, the focus of routes at the market and what was presumably the minster gates appears to be early. The roads shown on Map A represent a skeleton plan for the Saxon settlement, based on post-medieval road lines and on conjecture. One of the main fields of interest in Ilminster is the establishment of the early street lines.

*The road lines shown are from the 1768 map, and their Saxon origin is conjectural.*

##### **(b) Burial sites, religious houses and places of worship**

ILM/301

##### The Saxon minster

Very little is known about the minster. The topography and street plan suggest the southern, south-eastern and south-western limits, but the northern extent of the precinct is not clear. The limit shown is based on the theory that the Triangle represents the vestigial remains of a very early

open area which was built up in the medieval and later periods (R.A. Croft, pers. comm.). However, it is also possible that the minster precinct extended as far as High Street. The minster precinct boundary may be archaeologically detectable and its establishment is important to the understanding of the early development of the town.

Within the minster precinct, there may be remains of the early church, burials and buildings associated with the abbey's administration of the town. The suggestion that the medieval church's cruciform plan reflects the original minster plan (Bond, c1990) may imply that the older church directly underlies the present building. The original extent of the churchyard is not known: it is possible that burials underlie areas later encroached upon and developed commercially. The character and extent of associated buildings is also unclear: they may, however, have included high status timber or stone buildings.

With the exception of the existing churchyard (SMR 53450), the minster area was redeveloped in the medieval and post-medieval periods and its later components are described on p9.

*The marked area is based on the 1768 map in conjunction with the suggestions of R.A. Croft.*

### 3.4.b Settlement

ILM/302

#### The Saxon settlement

The precise location and extent of the Saxon settlement at Ilminster has not been established. The area shown is conjectural, based on the theory that the minster was flanked by two large open market areas (R.A. Croft, pers. comm.). It may be that the main focus of activity was around the lower market area at the crossroads, but this remains to be archaeologically established.

Any surviving archaeology of this period is likely to be ephemeral in character, consisting principally of the remains of timber buildings. Since the suggested settlement areas underlie the centre of the medieval and later town, much may already have been lost.

*The area shown is conjectural.*

ILM/305

#### The market

The market is probably of Saxon origin, though its original extent is unclear. By its nature, the early market would have been largely open. However, there are likely to have been small structures associated with commercial activity. Certainly, in the post-medieval period, the market was bisected by shambles stretching nearly 100m eastward up the centre. These are shown on the 18th century map and were still in existence when Collinson described the town in 1791. They were demolished in the 19th century, during refurbishment of the market place: the present market house also dates from the early 19th century, but probably incorporates an earlier structure.

*The market is defined from the 1768 and 1995 maps.*

ILM/304

#### A possible northern market area

The area now occupied by the Triangle and part of Court Barton may originally have been an open area to the north of the minster, perhaps functioning as a livestock market. This suggestion is based in part on the oddities of Ilminster's street plan in this area. Archaeological evaluation is necessary in this area to test the theory that it was originally open.

This area has subsequently been built up, probably in the medieval period but certainly by the 18th century. Later components are described on p10.

*The area is defined from the suggestions of R.A. Croft (pers. comm.) and from the 1768 map.*



### 3.5 Archaeological features (outlying area), shown on Map C

There are a number of ‘tun’ settlements around Ilminster, including Horton and Dillington, but the relationship of these settlements, which have survived to the present day, to the Ilminster estate is beyond the scope of this report.

#### 3.5.a Settlement

ILM/306

##### “Ditton”

This area shows on the 18th century map as a peculiar semicircular field formation, the field names all containing “Ditton”. The area was respected by roads which have now vanished, and the name of the modern street leading from the centre of Ilminster to this spot is Ditton Street. Further research might clarify the significance of this field formation, but for this report Ditton has been identified as a site of possibly early archaeology, the character of which remains uncertain.

Part of this area has been built up: the Crescent has fossilised part of its northern boundary. It was also bisected by the Chard Canal in the 19th century. However, other parts of the area have remained undeveloped and are likely to be of more archaeological potential.

*The area has been defined from the 1768 map.*

ILM/303

##### “Hewish”

A triangular field named “Hewish” and surrounded by lanes on the 1798 map, lies between Ilminster’s North Field and Dillington House. It is possible that this represents a site of earlier Saxon occupation, west of Dillington House. This site may have been protected to some extent by its position in parkland, though some landscaping has been carried out.

*From the 1798 map.*

#### 3.5.b Industrial sites

Not mapped

Three mills in the parish were mentioned at Domesday. These may have been near the later mills of Sea Mills, Hortbridge and Eames' Mill (see below, p14), but their exact sites are not known.

## 4. MEDIEVAL

(Maps B & D)

### 4.1 Archaeological work in the town/ Archaeological knowledge

There has been very little work in the medieval town of Ilminster. Recent evaluations (1995) south of Frog Lane have confirmed the limits of the medieval town in this area.

### 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.

Iminster is one of the fifteen places out of the 45 historic towns covered by this project which either were boroughs or at least had some urban functions before the Conquest; but it is one of four in the latter category which appears not to have achieved borough status in the medieval period. However, Iminster was one of nine of the towns at which signs of planning may date to the pre-Conquest period.

#### **4.3 Standing structures and visible remains**

There are only two listed medieval buildings, the Chantry (SMR LB 58023), and the Church (SMR LB 58106). Medieval structural elements *may* survive in other town buildings, but fire destroyed much in the 15th century and again in the 17th century. The Listed Buildings of medieval origin are shown on Map B.

#### **4.4 Archaeological components (centre), shown on Map B**

The map of the medieval town is somewhat conjectural in parts. Collinson (1791) states that medieval Iminster was bigger than its 18th century counterpart, and this has been a factor in the interpretation of the 1768 map. Collinson's assertion has not yet been archaeologically confirmed, however.

##### *4.4.a Redevelopment in earlier settlement components*

The development of post-Conquest Iminster appears to have involved some plan alterations and specialisations in the area of the minster. Here, only the modern churchyard area (shown more lightly shaded) has not been redefined for this period. The other settlement component dating from the Saxon period is the lower market, also shown more lightly shaded.

##### *4.4.b Communications*

###### *(a) Roads, streets and routeways*

###### ILM/413 The medieval street plan

The medieval street plan largely survives in Iminster, though its development is not fully understood. Map B shows the roads as they may have existed in the medieval period: the main axis runs east-west along the contours; the Old Road heads north between the West and Middle Fields, the High Street has been established along the northern edge of the area north of the minster, and the route along the south side curtailed by the expansion of the Abbots' buildings; the Butts "bypass" is not yet in existence; and Silver Street runs along the south side of the minster. The development of Silver Street at least remains to be clarified. The dog leg connecting it to West Street appears from the maps and the existing building styles and levels to be late, but it has been suggested that Silver Street was actually part of the main east-west route (Bond, c1990) even before the turnpikes.

*The lines of the roads are from the 18th century maps.*

##### *4.4.c Burial sites, religious houses and places of worship*

The three elements of the area around the surviving churchyard are separated by a network of narrow paths. These have been accepted for the definition of medieval elements in the absence of other evidence, but may in fact reflect post-Dissolution developments. The development of this area is not fully understood and is a question of particular interest in Iminster.

###### ILM/404 Court Barton

The Court Barton was the medieval abbots' grange, in which tithes were collected, the Abbots' Court held and general administration centred; it was also the source of the town's water, conduited from a spring there. Little is known about the details of the medieval layout, though the open courtyard giving access perhaps to tithe barns or farm buildings can still be seen; no building earlier than the 16th century survives in this area. If the proposed interpretation of the Saxon layout is correct (see above, p6), the northern part of the Court Barton must represent an extension beyond the old minster area: but this needs to be tested archaeologically.

After the Dissolution, part of the land was redeveloped privately. This included the site of the Grammar School (SMR LB 58009-58010), built and endowed (or perhaps re-endowed) in the 16th century. References to the “roar of wild beasts there” in the post-medieval period (Street, 1904) imply that some open ground was then available for such amusements. A number of 17th century Listed Buildings survive, particularly along North Street, and further frontage development has taken place along North Street, High Street and Berrymans Lane since then. Nevertheless, open areas still exist within the complex, and some of these may protect early burials (see above, p6).

The character and quality of the archaeology in this area has yet to be assessed, but the history of Court Barton suggests considerable potential.

*The area has been defined from the 1768 map.*

ILM/405

The Chantry

This area, which may have been part of the old minster precinct, backed onto the abbots' courtyard in the medieval period, and still contains a 15th century chantry house (SMR LB 58023). Little else is known of its medieval character, which has been obscured by extensive street frontage development from the 17th century onwards (including the 17th century Dolphin Inn, SMR LB 58108, 58117). The character and quality of the archaeology has yet to be assessed.

*The area has been defined from the 1768 map.*

ILM/408

The area west of the market

The area between the church and the main market was certainly active commercially during the post-medieval period (and the Listed 17th century George Hotel, SMR LB 58078, still survives), but it is less clear what was happening in the medieval period. The establishment of the first date of commercial activity in what may have been part of the old minster precinct (see above, p6) is of importance in understanding the development of the town. If medieval, it implies an active intervention in the encouragement of the town centre.

*The area has been defined from the 1768 map.*

#### 4.4.d Settlement (Urban)

##### (a) Commercial core

Map B shows the possible shape of medieval Iminster, with a central focus at Court Barton and extensive commercial development strung out along the downslope side of the east-west route. Iminster was not a borough, but it was nevertheless a commercial venture by Muchelney and Wells: at least some of this area, therefore, may represent deliberately laid out blocks of properties. There is evidence that Iminster was a relatively large medieval settlement. All of the marked areas are enclosed by the apparently partly diverted course of the Shudrick Stream.

In none of the following areas has the archaeology been investigated. In most of them it is likely to have been complicated by factors connected with Iminster's topography, including restriction of available space, and repeated terracing of the hillside.

ILM/407

Medieval occupation around the market

This comparatively level area, around the market place, is likely to have seen the most intensive medieval activity. Even in the post-medieval period it was occupied by a large number of very narrow plots, particularly to the south of the market. It has remained the focus of the town in succeeding centuries and there has been continuous redevelopment in this area.

ILM/402

The Triangle

The 1768 map shows frontage development north and south of the Triangle, and the triangular encroaching block already established. Strawberry Bank appears as a block of regular plots: this may be a post-medieval development, but some of the properties are said to be medieval in origin

(R. Dunning, pers. comm.). Dating of development in this area is important to the understanding of the evolution of the town.

ILM/410

Silver St

This small area must be seen in the context of the development of Silver Street, which is not well understood (see above, p9). The 1768 map is badly worn at this spot, but there does not appear to be anything but open ground at this date.

ILM/403, ILM/411

Other medieval urban plots

On the 1768 map, the Shudrick stream and the east-west roads enclose a long rectangle which *may* represent the limit (actual or intended) of the medieval town. The two “wings” of the medieval town may have been equally developed, both consisting of short building plots backing onto long orchards or meadows (see ILM/406). However, their actual extents and the relative intensity of occupation have not been archaeologically established. It is clear from the 1768 map that in the post-medieval period, the western reach of the town, extending towards the fertile valley of the Isle and to the common pastures, was more successful, and this may also have been the case in the medieval period.

ILM/403 may represent the more likely area of the medieval town. On the 1768 map its western extent is still occupied by regular plots: these are quite broad compared to the central area and may represent reaggregation of properties under reduced commercial pressure. The eastern extent shows more irregular and sporadic occupation at this date: Townsend Farm marks its eastern limit. Since both the canal and railway passed to the west of Ilminster, 19th century development was heavier there and this has largely been true also of 20th century development.

ILM/411 represents other areas which *may* have been within the medieval town, though there was clearly only slight occupation in the post-medieval. Further documentary research might clarify this matter, but archaeological evaluation of these areas is also desirable. Since modern development in parts of these areas has also been limited, it is possible that medieval deposits may survive well.

*All the above areas are defined from the 1768 map.*

*(b) Suburbs*

ILM/409, ILM/412

Ditton Street and Cross

There was certainly development southwards along Ditton Street towards Cross in the post-medieval period. But if the medieval town itself was bigger, then the possibility that development extended further to the south than in 1768 has also to be considered. ILM/409 represents the 1768 extent of occupation on Ditton Street and at Cross (supposedly the site of a cross of which the location is unknown); ILM/412 represents a conjectural area of medieval occupation between the two, based on the pattern of field boundaries in 1768 and the above arguments. This area has been extensively redeveloped in the 19th and 20th centuries.

*The areas are defined, directly or indirectly, from the 1768 map.*

*4.4.e Agricultural sites*

ILM/406

The town fields

There were extensive orchards and meadows between the medieval built up area and Shudrick stream. Recent evaluations south of Frog Lane have confirmed the absence of medieval urban deposits in part of this area at least.

*From the 1768 map.*

#### **4.5 Archaeological components (outlying area), shown on Map C**

The outlying area has not been studied in any detail for this report.

##### *4.5.a Manors and estates*

###### ILM/401 Donyatt Deer Park

Donyatt Deer Park (SMR 53331) was a very early deer park, in existence by Domesday. The boundary is shown as a line of field boundaries "called Park Bounds" on the 1768 map, and the SMR contains details of other documentary and cartographic evidence for the park. No trace of a pale has been found for this deer park.

*From the SMR and the 1768 map.*

##### *4.5.b Settlement (Rural)*

Not shown There were numerous small settlements around Ilminster in the medieval and post-medieval periods. These included Sea, Horton, and Ashwell. Though some details for these settlements have been entered on the GIS, they have been excluded from this report.

###### ILM/516 Dunpole

There are medieval references to Dunpole ("Dunna's Pool"), which used to be more closely linked to Ilminster town by a network of now vanished lanes. The farm lay just west of a complex of marl pits in the post-medieval period.

*From the 1768 map and the 1802-7 OS surveyors' drawings.*

##### *4.5.c Agricultural sites*

###### ILM/414 The open fields

The open fields, on the high ground to the north of the town, remained partly in strips in 1768.

*From the 1768 map.*

###### ILM/415 Winterhay Green

Winterhay Green was the winter pasture, part of the manor waste. Hort Mead (not mapped) was an area of common pasture just to the west. The enclosure of both was completed in the 19th century.

*The marked extent of Winterhay Green is that shown on the 1768 map.*

## **5. POST-MEDIEVAL**

*(Map C)*

### **5.1 Archaeological work in the town/ Archaeological knowledge**

There has been very little archaeological work relating to post-medieval Ilminster.

### **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. Nearly all the Somerset towns depended on either cloth manufacture or cloth trade to some extent. Ilminster was no exception, and was one of many of the 45 historic towns covered by this project which held its own economically for much of this period. It was one of a group of important cloth towns in the south and east of the county, and, although it was one of several towns which suffered as a result of the Dissolution, it was still the fourth largest town in Somerset in 1670.

### 5.3 Standing structures and visible remains

There are many fine late 17th and 18th century houses, though the fire of 1661 destroyed many earlier post-medieval structures. The Listed Buildings of post-medieval origin are shown on Map C. The map shows a concentration in the Court Barton area: these include Abbots Court (SMR LB 58007), the old Grammar School buildings (SMR LB 58009), Barton Cottage (SMR LB 58019), the North Street cottages (SMR LB 58075, 58076, 58077, 58082, 58112 and 58113), and the Dolphin (SMR LB 58117, 58108) and George (SMR LB 58073) Inns. Other areas of the town, including East Street, Silver Street and West Street, have a few Listed and post-medieval structures: other unlisted structures survive, but have been subject to 19th and 20th century alterations.

### 5.4 Archaeological components, shown on Map C

#### 5.4.a Redevelopment in earlier settlement components

Areas shown more lightly shaded represent components of the medieval town which continued into the post-medieval. These include most of the central focus and many of the plots along West Street and Ditton Street. The pattern of development probably differed in these areas: as land became available for private development after the Dissolution, the centre appears to have become more built up; on the other hand, pressure on the fringes of the town may have eased.

#### 5.4.b Communications

##### (a) Roads, streets and routeways

###### ILM/517 Post-medieval streets and roads

The post-medieval street pattern was essentially the same as the medieval. The principal addition is thought to have been the Butts (Bond, c1990). In existence by 1768, this became a turnpike bypass in the later 18th century.

The roads shown beyond the centre are those in existence in the 18th century: the available maps mostly postdate both the turnpikes (which were set up from 1759 onwards around Ilminster) and the changes associated with improvements at Dillington.

*The roads are defined from the 18th century maps and the 1802-7 OS Surveyors' Drawings.*

##### (b) Other

###### ILM/504 The beacon

The beacon (SMR 53462) was in part of one of the open fields. No sign of a beacon has yet been found on the site.

*From the SMR.*

#### 5.4.c Water

###### ILM/515 Hazel Well

Hazel well (SMR 53354) is a chalybeate well, now with a concrete housing.

*From the SMR.*

#### 5.4.d Manors and estates

###### ILM/510 Dillington House

The extent of Dillington House at the beginning of the 19th century has been marked for the sake of completeness. However, the house has not been studied for this report.

*From the 1802-7 OS surveyors' drawings*

#### 5.4.e Burial sites and places of worship

###### ILM/502 The Quaker burial ground, Old Road

There was a Quaker burial ground (SMR 53456) on the Old Road.

*From the 1798 map.*

ILM/503 The Quaker burial ground, Dunpole  
Another Quaker burial ground (SMR 53459) was located between Dunpole and Ditton.

*From the SMR.*

#### 5.4.f Settlement (Urban)

##### (a) Commercial core

ILM/509 Urban occupation: post-medieval extent  
In this area, there was no change of function from the medieval period (see p10). However, Map C shows the actual extent of intensive development around the market in 1768.

*From the 1768 map.*

##### (b) Suburbs

ILM/505 Suburban occupation: post-medieval extent  
Map C shows the actual extent of built up plots along West Street, East Street and Ditton Street in 1768. Many of these have been redefined across areas of possibly more extensive medieval occupation, particularly on East Street. On the other hand, plots on the north side of West Street may have been newly established as enclosure on the nearby low land of Winterhay and Hort Mead proceeded.

*From the 1768 map.*

#### 5.4.g Settlement (Rural)

Not shown There were numerous small settlements around Ilminster in the late 18th century. These included Sea, Horton, and Ashwell. Though some details for these settlements have been entered on the GIS, they have been excluded from this report.

ILM/501 Enclosures on Winterhay Green  
Enclosures on Winterhay Green probably date mainly from the post-medieval period, and consist of both houses and farms. Manor Farm, however, is medieval in origin (Winterhay was one of the medieval manors around Ilminster) and is thought to contain the site of an early chapel (SMR 53463). These enclosures were added to in the 19th century, but have not been swallowed by urban development.

*From the 1768 map.*

ILM/512 Butts Farm

*From the 1768 map.*

ILM/513 Prittwood Farm

*From the 1767 map.*

#### 5.4.h Industrial areas and sites

##### (a) Mills

Three mills existed in the parish at Domesday. Though the sites of these are not known for certain, they may have been close to the sites Sea Mills, Hort Bridge Mill (or Rippe's Mill) and Eames' Mill, which were the major post-medieval mills for Ilminster. These mills have been variously employed both in the textile industry and for grinding corn during their histories (which have not been studied in detail for this report).

ILM/511 Hort Bridge Mills  
Hort Bridge Mill (SMR 53457) is not shown clearly on the 1768 map, though it does appear, as part of Rose Mill (a lace mill in the 19th century), on the OS surveyors' drawings of forty years

later. Further research would be necessary to clarify history of these mills, as it is possible that the mill site has shifted more than once. Papers relating to the auction of Hort Bridge Mills in 1876 describe a site adjoining the road and close to the then railway station, with a dwelling house and a five storey mill building which had formerly been a cloth factory but was at that point a grist and saw mill and corn store (T. Goverd, pers. comm.). On the other hand, Street (1904) refers to the remains of Rippe's Mill (not mapped) being visible in the river at the beginning of the 20th century, but only locates the site roughly (a little way downstream of Rose Mill, and upstream of Eames' Mill).

*From the 1802-7 Surveyors' drawings.*

ILM/514

Dowlish Ford

Silk was thrown at Dowlish Ford, possibly in the later 18th century, and was eventually replaced by flax and hemp spinning (T. Goverd, in litt., 1998). The earlier history of the site is obscure.

*From the 1802-7 OS surveyors' drawings.*

*5.4.i Other industrial sites*

There were close connections between the Donyatt pottery dynasties and Ilminster, though there is no sign that kilns were located here. But the principal industry in both the medieval and post-medieval period was the textile industry which continued to flourish in the late 18th century.

ILM/507

Racks

Though the main mills were along the river to the north and west, there is evidence that land close to Ilminster was being used for cloth-drying. The 1768 map shows two "Rack close" field names.

*From the 1768 map.*

ILM/506

Quarries

Quarrying was another important industry and marl pits are known at Ilminster and Dunpole.

*From the 1767 and 1768 maps.*

ILM/508

"Bell Close"

"Bell Close", named on the 1768 map, *may* imply a bell casting pit in this field, now built up.

*From the 1768 map.*

**6. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY)**

*(Map D)*

**6.1 Archaeological work in the town/ Archaeological knowledge**

Much of the 19th century town centre is still in use.

**6.2 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.



Ilminster was one of the thirteen existing boroughs and towns which were either Municipal Boroughs or Urban Districts at the end of the 19th century. These varied in character. Ilminster was one of eight of the 45 towns (all eight of which were either Municipal Boroughs or Urban Districts) which were connected to both rail and canal networks during the 19th century. In all these cases, industrial activity was encouraged, and Ilminster is one of the towns noted for its small-scale industrial remains.

### 6.3 Standing structures and visible remains

There are numerous Listed Buildings of late 18th century and 19th century origin. These are spread along East Street and West Street as well as in the centre. These are not shown on Map E, because of the scale at which it has been produced, but they have been entered onto the GIS: details of the buildings are to be found in the SMR. The lines of the Canal and Railway are also visible in places, and something remains of the inclined plane and tunnel on the Canal.

### 6.4 Archaeological components, shown on Map D

#### 6.4.a Redevelopment in earlier settlement components

Those features which were described under previous periods are shown more lightly shaded on Map D. 19th century development around Ilminster generally took the form of expansion and infill around these features.

#### 6.4.b Communications

##### (a) Roads

ILM/604

##### 19th century roads and turnpikes

There were several alterations to the road pattern on the outskirts of Ilminster in the 19th century. The local roads were turnpiked from 1759 onwards, and the town became a crossroads of turnpike routes (shown in *dark blue* on Map E). Whilst the Butts bypassed the worst gradients for some of the traffic, New Road was a 19th century development easing the north-south gradient. North-west of the centre, a regular system of private roads was laid out across the newly enclosed Winterhay Green. At Dowlish Ford, the Canal forced a reorientation of the road from Moolham.

*The roads are defined from the 1838, 1887-8, and 1904 maps.*

##### (b) Railways

ILM/605

##### The Railway

The Bristol and Exeter Railway's branch line from Chard opened in 1866 and passed just to the west of Ilminster. The line converges with the Canal, which it replaced, just north of the main road crossing and station/ hotel complex there. The line finally closed in 1966, and has been partly built over, though much of the route is still visible.

*The railway is from the 1887-8 map.*

##### (c) Canals

ILM/601

##### Chard Canal

The Chard Canal (SMR 53321), which ran for 13.5 miles between Chard and the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal at Creech St Michael, passed just to the west of Ilminster. It was the last of the major English canals, and technically advanced. However, it was not a financial success. The Bristol and Exeter Railway bought the canal for a tiny fraction of its construction cost, largely to forestall the ambitions of the LSWR. The canal was closed in 1866; isolated plots were sold off and the rest was allowed to decay. Parts of the canal have been built over since then, though remains of its course can still be seen in places.

*The line of the Canal is defined from the SMR.*

ILM/602

##### Ilminster inclined plane, Chard Canal

The Chard Canal was on five main levels, and mostly used inclined planes rather than locks. West of Cross, there was an inclined plane (SMR 53454) with a tunnel (SMR 53453) at the top. The incline had a fall of 82 feet and probably used an overshot wheel: though this has gone, part of the

walling survives. The tunnel was 300 yards long, and part of the northern entrance has been preserved.

*The incline is defined from the SMR.*

ILM/603

Canal wharves

Two wharves were established, one (SMR 53329) at the end of Wharf Lane, and one (SMR 53594) where the canal crossed West Street.

*The wharves are defined from the SMR and the Tithe Map.*

6.4.c Burial sites and places of worship

ILM/607

New Road Cemetery

A new cemetery was laid out on New Road.

*From the 1887-8 and 1904 maps.*

6.4.d Settlement (Urban)

ILM/608

19th century suburbs (various)

Relatively small-scale suburban expansion occurred along New Road, Ditton Street, and East Street (the latter possibly a reoccupation of areas of the medieval town).

*From the 1887-8 and 1904 maps.*

6.4.e Settlement (Rural)

ILM/606

Unclassified 19th century occupation (various)

Map D shows a scatter of very small scale development on the roads out of Ilminster, which has not been examined in detail for this report.

*From the 1838, 1887-8 and 1904 maps.*

6.4.f Industrial sites

ILM/609

Dowlish Ford Mills

The mill sites described above (p14) remained in use, but most expanded, particularly at Dowlish Ford, where the mill (SMR 53460) had replaced an earlier silk throwing enterprise. Though hit by the failure of the Canal, to which it was adjacent, the mill survived, becoming a rope and twine works and then a shoe factory. Parts of the present building date from around 1800.

*From the 1887-8 and 1904 maps.*

ILM/610

Cross brick and tile works (SMR 53458).

*From the 1887-8 map.*

ILM/611

Limekiln on Old Rd (SMR 53452)

*From the SMR.*

ILM/613

The gasworks.

*From the 1887-8 map.*

ILM/612

Other industrial areas

These included a coalyard and smithy.

*From the 1887-8 map.*

6.4.g Agricultural sites

ILM/614            Farm extensions  
Several farms expanded in the 19th century.

*From the 1887-8 and 1904 maps.*

## **7. 20TH CENTURY**

*(Map E)*

### **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.

Ilminster is one of 15 of the 45 historic towns covered by this project which is classed as a Town in the County Structure Plan.

### **7.2 Standing structures and visible remains**

Listed 20th century elements include two K6 phone boxes (SMR LB 58065, 58141) and the old shirt factory in East St (SMR LB 58012).

### **7.3 Settlement components, shown on Map E**

#### **7.3.a Redevelopment in earlier settlement components**

Earlier settlement components are shown more lightly shaded on Map F. There has been little major modern development in these areas, and none has been redefined.

*All defined elements are from the 1995 OS digital maps unless otherwise stated.*

#### **7.3.b Communications**

ILM/701            20th century roads

The major new road development of the 20th century has been the A 303/ A358 bypasses and roundabout.

#### **7.3.c Military sites**

Not mapped      Lines of pillboxes and anti-tank defences run along the line of the railway and the hillside, forming part of the Taunton Stop Line. Details of these are contained in the SMR.

#### **7.3.d Settlement (Suburban)**

ILM/702            20th century suburbs

Residential estates have been established both north and south of the town centre.

#### **7.3.e Settlement (Rural)**

ILM/705            Farms.

#### **7.3.f Industrial sites**

ILM/703            Dowlish Ford Mill expansion.

ILM/704            Industry (various)

Industrial developments have been concentrated to the west of the town on the lower ground. They include the stone works.

## V. THE POTENTIAL OF ILMINSTER

### 1. *Research interests*

Ilminster has an odd street plan, which is not fully understood. Therefore, any work showing how the modern plan relates to that of the Saxon and medieval settlements will be of interest. The central eye, in which the Saxon minster and medieval abbots' grange were located, is of particular importance in this regard: few details are known of either of these features. On the other hand, evidence from the fringes of the town is needed in order to establish the maximum medieval settlement extent.

### 2. *Areas of potentially exceptional preservation*

There may be waterlogged deposits to the south of the town on the valley floor, though the town centre itself is largely dry. It is also possible that the serious fires which affected Ilminster in the 15th and 17th centuries may have resulted in layers, or pockets, of burnt debris sealing earlier deposits beneath them.

### 3. *Limitations*

There has not been a huge amount of modern development in the centre. The effect of the town's topography on the build up of archaeological deposits has not been established, but there may have been terraces cut into them.

### 4. *Extent of current protection*

(shown on Map F)

There are a number of Listed Buildings in Ilminster, together with a Conservation Area and an AHAP. There are no Scheduled Monuments.

### 5. *Management Proposals*

See the Archaeological Guidance Document.

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## VII. COMPONENT INDEXES

### 1. Component to map

<i>Component</i>	<i>Map</i>	<i>Component</i>	<i>Map</i>
ILM/301	A	ILM/505	C
ILM/302	A	ILM/506	C
ILM/303	C	ILM/507	C
ILM/304	A	ILM/508	C
ILM/305	A	ILM/509	C
ILM/306	C	ILM/510	C
ILM/401	C	ILM/511	C
ILM/402	B	ILM/512	C
ILM/403	B	ILM/513	C
ILM/404	B	ILM/514	C
ILM/405	B	ILM/515	C
ILM/406	B	ILM/516	C
ILM/407	B	ILM/517	C
ILM/408	B	ILM/601	D
ILM/409	B	ILM/602	D
ILM/410	B	ILM/603	D
ILM/411	B	ILM/604	D
ILM/412	B	ILM/605	D
ILM/413	B,C	ILM/606	D
ILM/414	C	ILM/607	D
ILM/415	C	ILM/608	D
ILM/501	C	ILM/609	D
ILM/502	C	ILM/610	D
ILM/503	C	ILM/611	D
ILM/504	C	ILM/612	D

ILM/613	D	ILM/703	E
ILM/614	D	ILM/704	E
ILM/701	E	ILM/705	E
ILM/702	E		

## 2. Component to page

ILM/301	6, 21
ILM/302	7, 21
ILM/303	8, 21
ILM/304	7, 21
ILM/305	7, 21
ILM/306	8, 21
ILM/401	12, 21
ILM/402	10, 21
ILM/403	11, 21
ILM/404	9, 21
ILM/405	10, 21
ILM/406	11, 21
ILM/407	10, 21
ILM/408	10, 21
ILM/409	11, 21
ILM/410	11, 21
ILM/411	11, 21
ILM/412	11, 21
ILM/413	9, 21
ILM/414	12, 21
ILM/415	12, 21
ILM/501	14, 21
ILM/502	13, 21
ILM/503	14, 21
ILM/504	13, 21
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ILM/603	17, 21
ILM/604	16, 21
ILM/605	16, 21
ILM/606	17, 21
ILM/607	17, 21
ILM/608	17, 21
ILM/609	17, 21
ILM/610	17, 21
ILM/611	17, 21

ILM/612 .....	17, 21
ILM/613 .....	17, 22
ILM/614 .....	18, 22
ILM/701 .....	18, 22
ILM/702 .....	18, 22
ILM/703 .....	18, 22
ILM/704 .....	18, 22
ILM/705 .....	18, 22



## Maps

### **Map A -Saxon**

### **Map B - Medieval**

Key: Components shown on earlier maps are shown in yellow.

### **Map C - Pre 1800 settlement**

Key: Components shown on earlier maps are shown in yellow.

### **Map D - 19<sup>th</sup>-century**

Key: Components shown on earlier maps are shown in yellow.

### **Map E - 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Key: Components shown on earlier maps are shown in yellow.

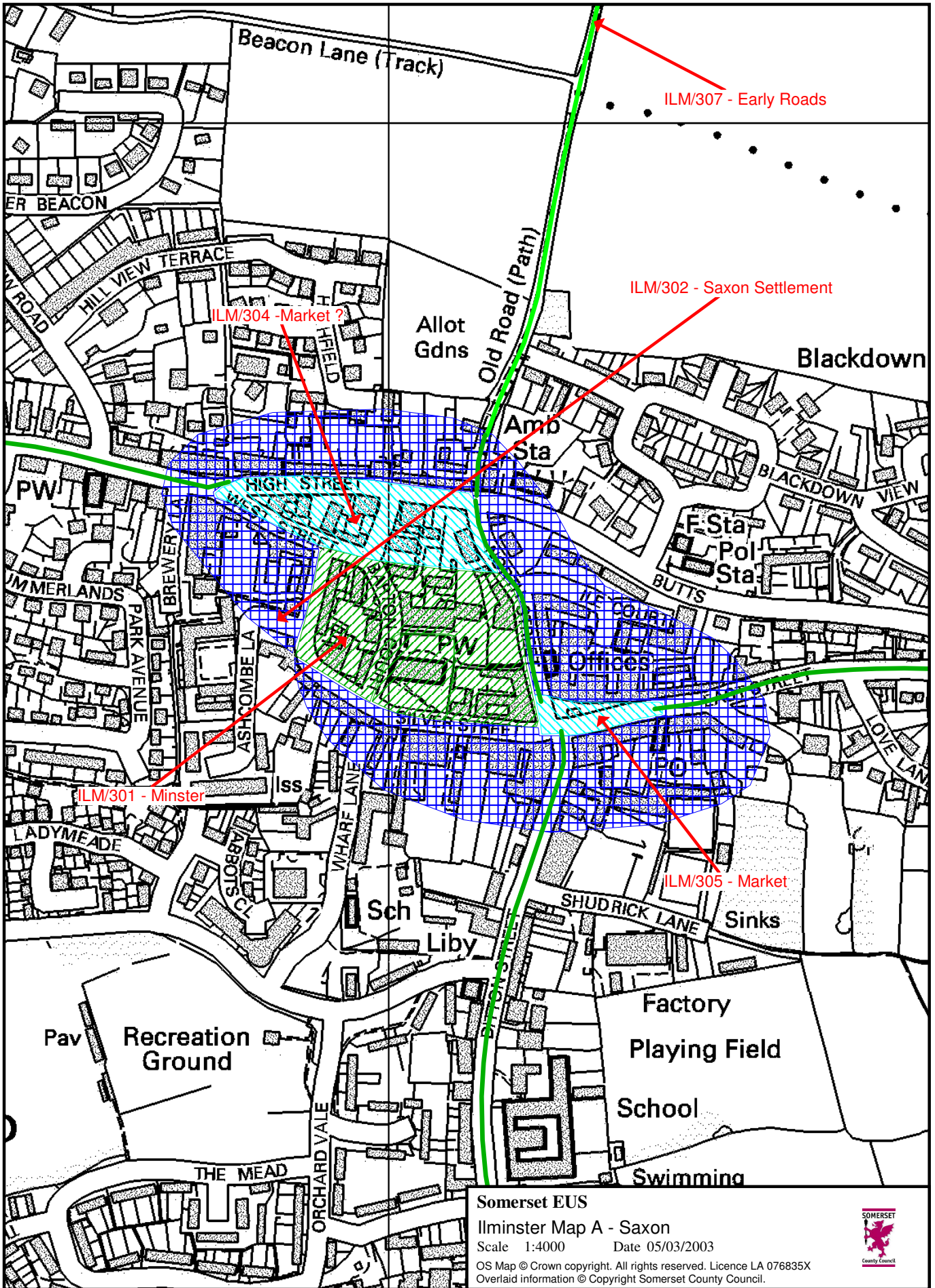
### **Map F - Existing designations**

Key: Scheduled Monuments (none)

Listed Buildings                      Grade I (light blue)  
    Grade II\* (light green)  
    Grade II (dark green)

Conservation Area (light green)

Area of High Archaeological Potential (pink)



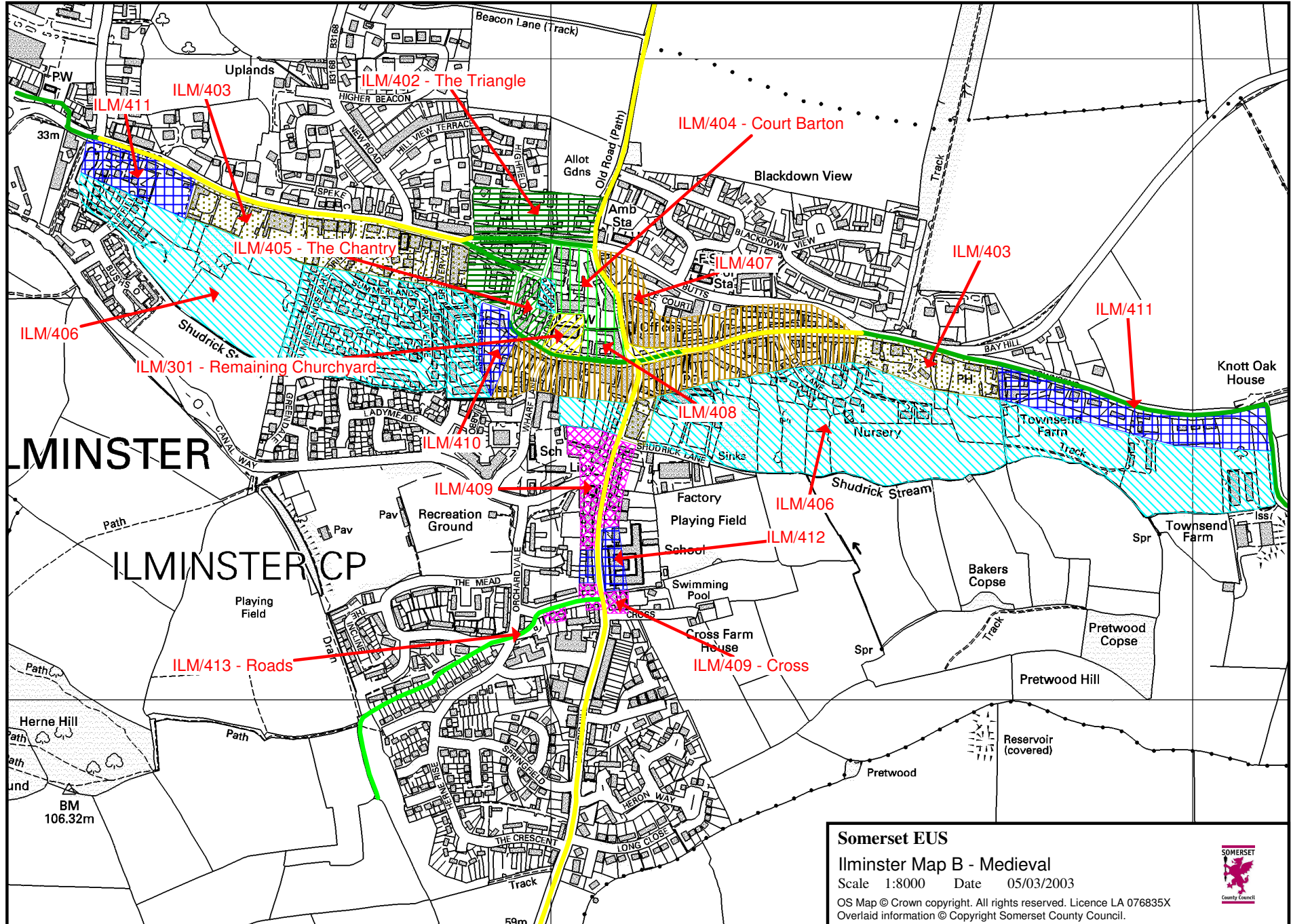
Somerset EUS

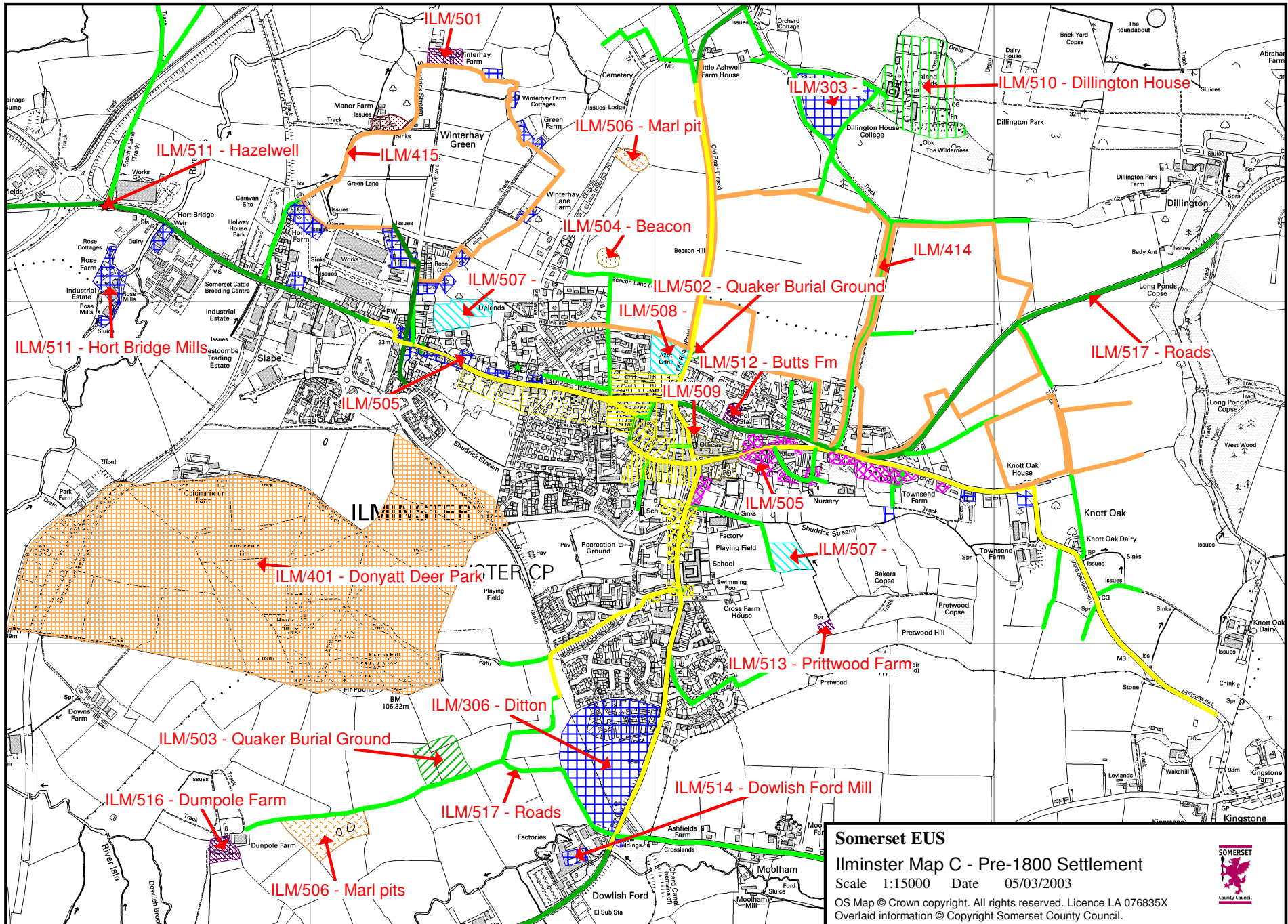
Ilminster Map A - Saxon

Scale 1:4000 Date 05/03/2003

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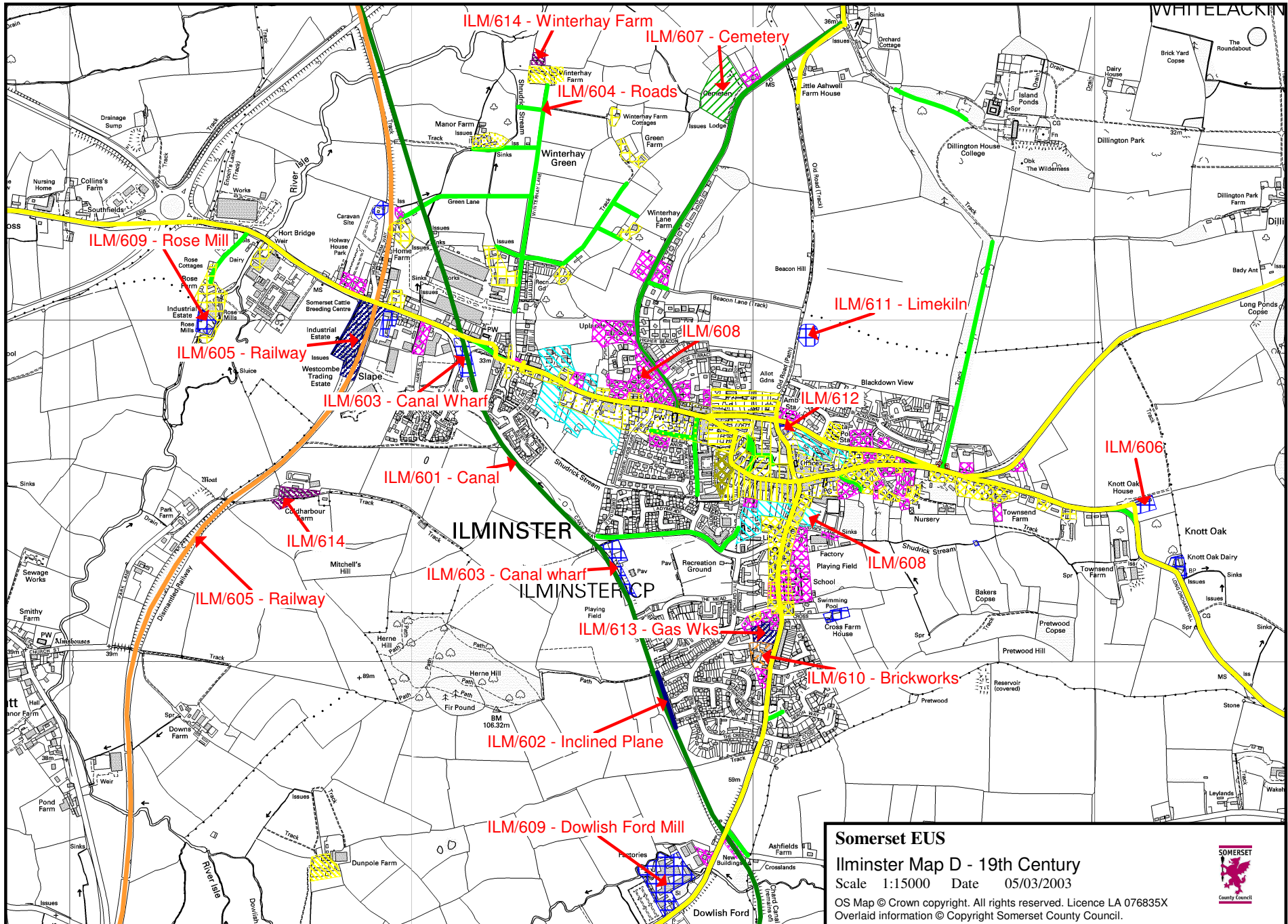


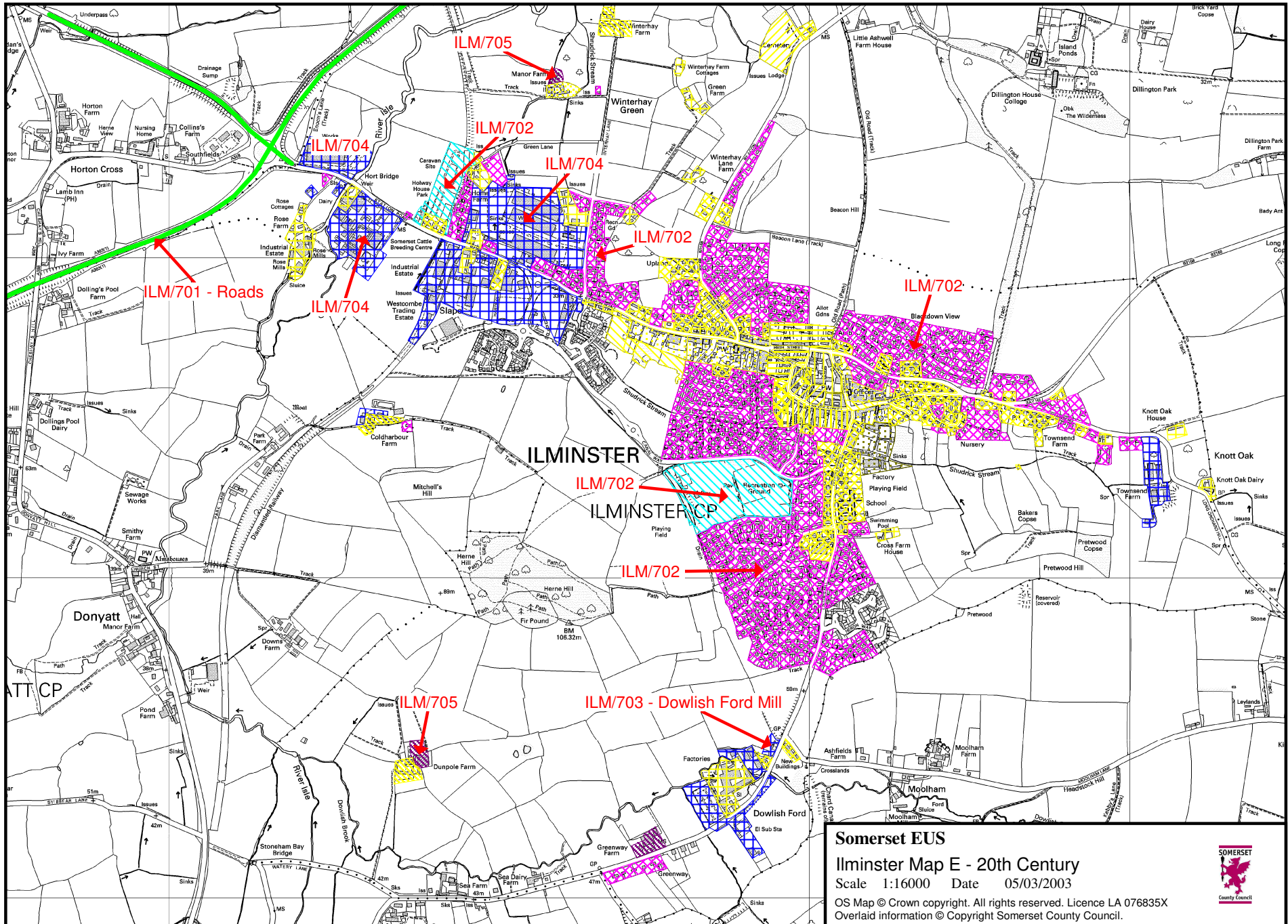




ILM/501 - Winterhay Farm  
 ILM/511 - Hazelwell  
 ILM/415  
 ILM/506 - Marl pit  
 ILM/303 -  
 ILM/510 - Dillington House  
 ILM/504 - Beacon  
 ILM/414  
 ILM/507 -  
 ILM/502 - Quaker Burial Ground  
 ILM/511 - Hort Bridge Mills  
 ILM/505  
 ILM/512 - Butts Fm  
 ILM/509  
 ILM/517 - Roads  
 ILM/401 - Donyatt Deer Park  
 ILM/505  
 ILM/507 -  
 ILM/513 - Prittwood Farm  
 ILM/503 - Quaker Burial Ground  
 ILM/306 - Ditton  
 ILM/516 - Dumpole Farm  
 ILM/517 - Roads  
 ILM/506 - Marl pits  
 ILM/514 - Dowlish Ford Mill







**Somerset EUS**  
**Ilminster Map E - 20th Century**  
 Scale 1:16000 Date 05/03/2003

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