

English Heritage Extensive Urban Survey

An archaeological assessment of

Watchet

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SOMERSET EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY

WATCHET

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

by Clare Gathercole

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	3
II. MAJOR SOURCES	3
1. <i>Local histories</i>	3
2. <i>Maps</i>	3
III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF WATCHET	3
IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WATCHET	4
GENERAL COMMENTS	4
1. <i>PREHISTORIC</i>	4
2. <i>ROMAN</i>	5
3. <i>SAXON</i>	5
4. <i>MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL</i>	7
5. <i>INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH & 19TH CENTURY)</i>	12
6. <i>20TH CENTURY</i>	14
V. THE POTENTIAL OF WATCHET	14
1. <i>Research interests</i>	14
2. <i>Areas of potentially exceptional preservation</i>	15
3. <i>Limitations</i>	15
4. <i>Extent of current protection</i>	15
5. <i>Management Proposals</i>	15
VI. SOURCES	15
1. <i>General documentary (Somerset/ Wessex)</i>	15
2. <i>Watchet</i>	17
3. <i>Maps</i>	17
VII. COMPONENT INDEXES	17
1. <i>Component to Map</i>	17
2. <i>Component to Page</i>	18

Appendix: *Maps*

SOMERSET EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY

WATCHET

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. *Local histories*

The history of Watchet has been covered in detail in the Victoria County History (Dunning, 1985) and in "A History of Watchet" (Wedlake, 1973).

2. *Maps*

The most useful early maps are the 1801 survey of the Earl of Egremont's manors and the 1841 Tithe Map.

III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF WATCHET

Pre-Saxon activity in the vicinity of Watchet is suggested by the British origin of the name (*gwo coed* -under the wood), by the dedication of the church of St Decuman, and by scattered finds of Prehistoric and Roman material (the latter on Cleeve Hill). However, it is not until Saxon times that there is any indication of a semi-urban settlement. The parish of St Decuman, in which Watchet lay until 1974, descended from the royal hundred of Williton; and Watchet would have been the port and trading area associated with the royal estate at Williton itself. There must have been a fort by at least the tenth century, since Watchet is mentioned in the Burghal Hidage, and an associated trading centre referred to as *Wecedport* in the tenth century may have been in existence by the time of Alfred (871-90) (Dunning, 1985). Watchet had a mint from c980, which remained in production into medieval times (except for a hiatus around the time of the Conquest). Coins from this mint are found in Scandinavia: this is probably best understood as Danegeld payments. Watchet suffered repeated Viking raids in the tenth century, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle implies it may have been at least partially destroyed in 997 (Garmonsway ed., 1972).

At Domesday, a mill and an agricultural estate are recorded at Watchet: the town, fort and mint are not referred to though these must have been in existence. It has been suggested that the gap in the production of Watchet mint (between 1056 and 1080) may reflect a period of transition between an interdependent fort & port and a single settlement (McAvoy, 1986). The area was part of the estates of the William de Mohun who built Dunster castle. The manor was subdivided several times in the medieval period, one major reorganisation being in 1388, when the borough itself was split.

The period from the early thirteenth century to the first half of the fifteenth century seems on the whole to have been one of modest growth in Watchet. No charter is known, but it is referred to as a borough by 1225, and in 1222-3 there is a record of Dunster - apparently unsuccessfully - resisting rival Watchet's attempt to set up a market: there is documentary evidence of the presence of Flemish merchants slightly earlier, in 1210. A fair is known by 1244. In c1383 there were 49 burgesses in Watchet, and the appearance of new street names in the documents of this time implies expansion of the town. Although Minehead and not Watchet was the Staple port, the St Decuman's area of Watchet was important in the cloth industry: fulling mills were established by 1318. Most of the other evidence for traded commodities comes from the post-medieval period, but local resources included limestone and seaweed (kelp). Fisheries were also important in the medieval period.

Catastrophic storms in the 1450s virtually destroyed Watchet's harbour and swept part of the town away. Customable trade seems to have ceased for a while after this. But the port recovered somewhat in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The harbour was cleaned out and a new pier built in Queen Elizabeth I's time at the expense of the lords of the manor, Luttrells and Wyndhams. Trade, mainly with Bristol and Wales, grew in salt, coal, wine and livestock; smuggling was also important in the seventeenth century. However, despite further repairs to the harbour in the early eighteenth century, silting became a problem and Watchet declined as Minehead grew. By 1791 it was being described as "formerly a place of considerable trade having now few vessels" (Collinson, 1791).

Collinson's description was copied for Pigot's Directory of 1830, but by 1842 it had been altered to "*is a place of considerable trade*". Between 1794 and 1840, the directories show a business expansion: new businesses included the foundry and, briefly, shipbuilding. In the mid nineteenth century, the iron ore mines opened on the Brendon Hills. The coming of the railways (West Somerset Mineral Railway, 1858-9; West Somerset Railway to Taunton, 1862, extended to Minehead 1874) and the rebuilding of the harbour (after another storm) and seafront were associated with the growth of the ironstone trade. Although the harbour redevelopment destroyed the old beach, Watchet was nevertheless a minor resort in the 1870s, with hotels and a bathing place for ladies. This was the last marked expansion of Watchet. The harbour was badly damaged again in 1901 and it was in part to enable the repair of this that Watchet Urban District Council was formed in 1902.

IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WATCHET

GENERAL COMMENTS

0.1 Archaeological knowledge

There has been little examination of the archaeological deposits at Watchet, the sole recent excavations being at Daw's Castle in 1982 (McAvoy, 1986). Stray finds have been sporadically recorded, but there has been no organised monitoring of developments in the town.

0.2 Standing structures

A small number of Listed Buildings exist in Watchet. In addition, the remains of the Saxon burh survive in part to the west of the town.

1. PREHISTORIC

(Map A)

1.1 Archaeological knowledge

There have been few prehistoric finds at Watchet, though flint finds are recorded from Nine Elms Nursery (SMR 34161). However, an area to the east of the town lies on the Doniford Gravels, which formed part of a recent study of river gravels (Wessex Archaeology, 1994).

1.2 Context

Watchet 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 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; at Watchet these would have included access to coastal resources. Whether or not there was settlement at Watchet itself in the later Prehistoric periods, there is certainly evidence of Prehistoric activity in the area, and it is worth noting that one of the county's more important assemblages of earlier Prehistoric (Palaeolithic) artefacts, associated with a semi-nomadic existence, comes from the nearby Doniford Gravels.

1.3 Archaeological features, shown on Map A

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

WAT/101 The Doniford Gravels

Part of the Doniford Gravels area, which potentially contains isolated flint artefacts.

The western limits of the area have been defined from the maps in the Wessex Archaeology report (1994). However, the eastern and southern limits of the marked area are defined by the parish boundary and the edge of the grid square and do not represent the full extent of the gravels.

2. ROMAN

(No map)

2.1 Archaeological knowledge

Occasional Roman finds have been made in the vicinity of Watchet, including on Cleeve Hill (Wedlake, 1973; McAvoy, 1986). Whilst these are not considered indicative of a settlement there, the adjacent Old Minster Field (see below, p6) may contain archaeology associated with the British foundation of St Decuman's.

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.

Watchet is one of 26 of the 45 historic towns covered by this project at which there is as yet no evidence of Roman settlement, though Roman material has been found in the area. This reflects the generally reduced penetration of Roman influence into the West Somerset uplands.

2.3 Archaeological features

There is as yet no evidence of Roman settlement at Watchet itself.

3. SAXON

(Map B)

3.1 Archaeological knowledge

There are important unanswered questions in the archaeology of Saxon Watchet (SMR 34162). Some progress has been made in locating the probable burh defences (SMR 34162) at Daw's Castle (McAvoy, 1986), but the settlement remains unlocated and the possible Minster unconfirmed.

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.

Watchet 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 three places which, though not recorded as boroughs in Domesday, may have paid the '3rd penny' (a form of taxation associated with borough status) at least by 1086. Whilst Watchet is one of the four *burhs* (fortified sites) recorded in the Burghal Hidage, it is probable that commercial development took place at a later stage on a site further east. But it still acted as an outlier to the royal estate centre at Williton (one of three such pairings, the others being Axbridge/ Cheddar and Langport/ Somerton), and is one of eleven places which may have had a mint in the 10th or 11th centuries, as well as being one of 22 out of the 45 towns associated with a known or probable pre-Conquest minster.

3.3 Archaeological components, shown on Map B

3.3.a Military sites

WAT/301 The probable Saxon burh

Excavations in 1982 revealed two phases of defences on Daw's Castle (SM 33712) dated to no earlier than the seventh century (McAvoy, 1986). In the absence of documentary evidence for a post-Conquest castle at Watchet, these are believed to represent the burh defences. The extrapolated perimeter dimensions are roughly in accord with the assessment in the Burghal Hidage, and the form/dimensions of the second phase of defences are comparable with other Wessex burhs (the earlier phase is not so clear). The site is being continually eroded from the north and some of the ramparts are already lost. The remaining ramparts and the interior have been damaged by limestone working, the construction of nineteenth century limekilns, and a golf course development. Moreover, the site was partially excavated in 1971 (location uncertain and no records) and ploughed to a depth of about 25cm in 1981. Although McAvoy believes that the site of Watchet mint (SMR 34209) was probably within the burh (McAvoy, 1986), no evidence of this has yet come to light: the 1982 trenches revealed only one post-medieval gully in the interior. The character of the occupation of the burh is not yet settled, therefore, and any remaining archaeology in the interior is potentially very important.

The burh has been defined according to the standing remains and the plan of features recorded in 1911 (in McAvoy, 1986). It extends further than the current cliff edge because of the possibility of eroded material being recovered from these areas.

3.3.b Burial sites, religious houses and places of worship

WAT/302 The Saxon minster (SMR 34175)

The Old Minster Field, lying just east of Daw's Castle and across the valley from the medieval church of St Decuman's, is thought to represent the site of a Saxon minster. The site is comparable with other churches of pre-Saxon origin in the West Country, so this area may contain both Saxon and earlier remains, possibly of buildings and/ or possibly burials. The burh ramparts encroach on the current field. Burials found in the ramparts during the construction of the limekilns may be fifth century (Pearce, 1978, 66, 184): the remains are said to have been reinterred "higher up the field". There is no concrete archaeological confirmation of the site and this must be a priority at Watchet. Most of the field appears to have remained undisturbed, but 19th century housing ("Saxon Villas") lies on its eastern flank and the north has probably been damaged by coastal erosion.

The area has been defined largely along present field boundaries, but it is possible that a wider area should be considered sensitive unless the Old Minster can be more precisely located.

3.3.c Settlement

WAT/303 The Saxon port and settlement

The early topography of Watchet is imperfectly understood, but it has been suggested that the settlement may have lain on a low promontory between the stream to the west and the marsh to the east with present day Swain St as its main axis. The old marsh area, east of Swain St and extending just beyond the railway, may have lain close to the lost port (Bond, c1990) and is potentially an area of good preservation (though much land has been lost to the sea since the Saxon period).

The site of the Saxon settlement and port has not been archaeologically located. The area marked is based on the suggested locations outlined above, but it should be born in mind that the area between the port and the burh to the west is potentially also a zone of activity. Therefore any development in these areas of Watchet should bear in mind the possibility of ephemeral building remains and, towards the marsh, possible traces of quays.

The area has been defined from the suggestions of Aston & Leech (1977).

3.3.d Industrial and agricultural sites

Not mapped As well as the mint, a mill is known to have existed and may have been in the same position as the medieval mill. There is a record of a grant of a vineyard and estate in 962 but the location is uncertain. It is known that there was a 10th century estate SW of Watchet between Washford and Kentsford; an agricultural estate is mentioned in Domesday.

4. MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL

(Map C)

The medieval and post-medieval archaeology is considered together since the archaeological information is insufficient to distinguish the two periods in many cases.

4.1 Archaeological knowledge

The extent and layout of the medieval town (SMR 34163) has not been defined archaeologically: there have been no controlled excavations and little monitoring of finds.

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.

Watchet 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. Though not described as a borough before the Conquest, it was one of five of the places with some pre-Conquest urban functions which acquired borough status during the medieval period. Watchet was also one of eleven of the 45 towns which had a harbour or quays in the Medieval period. It is one of a relatively small number - five - of the medieval towns which consisted of a largely irregular layout (though with some regular tenements) superimposed on an existing settlement.

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. Watchet 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.

4.3 Standing structures

There are few visible remains of the medieval town, except in the plan and layout at St Decuman's. There are more standing remains for the post-medieval period, including a small number of Listed Buildings. These are shown on Map C.

4.4 Archaeological components, shown on Map C

4.4.a Redevelopment in earlier settlement components.

New archaeological components have been defined for these periods because the extent of continuity between the Saxon and medieval occupation is unclear. Piecemeal redevelopment of the medieval centre took place throughout the medieval period, particularly in the harbour area, where the quay areas were reconstructed several times.

4.4.b Communications

(a) Roads

WAT/401, WAT/501

Roads, streets and routeways

The street plan of central Watchet is probably of medieval origin, though Watchet was not a planned town. It is said to have consisted of four streets in 1791 (Collinson), and the 1801 survey shows these as Swain (Swine) St, Market St (formerly Chipping St), Mill/ Anchor St (formerly Bridge St) and West St. However, it is known that there has been significant change along the seafront where at least one street, Culvercliffe St (which ran east from the market along the shore), has been lost to the sea; a parallel street, Culver St, may be partly preserved in Esplanade Lane. It is likely therefore that the focus, and possibly the port, of the medieval town was slightly more to the east and the north than that of the present town. The area to the west of the Market was an island between the East and West waters (Dunning, 1985) and this island still shows on nineteenth century maps; the limit of the Medieval town in this area is obscure. Expansion inland is known to have occurred in the 14th century. The name South St appears 1361-85. Glovers (Goviers) Lane is recorded 1438, and an area possibly to the south-east called Lourtegeale.

Some post-medieval expansion is recorded by the appearance of new street names in the eighteenth century. These represent the infilling of an area between Swain St and the river. Silver St appears by 1736, Back Lane (which became Anchor St) by c1725. The limits of settlement are not known archaeologically.

The main routes out of Watchet have also altered somewhat since the medieval period. There used to be two parallel routes to the south - Leechway and Liddymore lanes - a route west past the Old Minster (reported overgrown by 1472 and known as the Greenway by the sixteenth century), and the route to Snailholt which still exists. The lanes south were closed early in the nineteenth century, the main turnpike route having been running further to the west for some fifty years by this time.

The roads are taken from the 1802 OS surveyors' drawings, except for Culvercliffe Street, a conjectural position for which is suggested by the description of Dunning (1985).

Not mapped

At least two medieval *bridges* are known by name: Damejonebrugge, which probably carried the westward route out of the market place, though one source says there was only a ford here until the early 1800s (Norman, 1985); and Cackle Bridge, somewhere further to the south. Neither has been traced archaeologically.

(b) The harbour

WAT/405

The Medieval harbour

The exact location of the Medieval quays is not known, although it was suggested above that it may have lain slightly to the east and north of the post-medieval quays. The harbour was rebuilt

in post-medieval times, more than once. The history of harbour developments is covered in "Tales of Watchet Harbour" (Norman, 1985) and this work should be consulted for further information on the fate of the various rebuilds. The 1801 map shows an area north of Market St which may be plots set out as part of post-medieval reorganisation of the harbour area. This area contains the listed London Inn (SMR LB 30015)

The harbour redevelopments in the 1840s and 1861-2 involved the loss of some properties at the north end of Swain St, on the eastern side and redevelopment along the line of the Esplanade. They led to the destruction of the old Yard Beach (between Goviers Lane and Splash Point), which was replaced by the new pleasure grounds further east. The present layout of the harbour is essentially the same as in the mid 19th century, but there have been further storms and repairs to the quay.

Because of continual erosion and harbour works, it is considered unlikely that archaeological remains of the earliest medieval, or Saxon, quays will survive (Aston & Leech, 1977). The situation is complicated by the fact that parts of the medieval town once lay within the area now harbour: again, it is unlikely that much survives. However, these assumptions have not been tested. Moreover, remains of later structures may have survived.

The harbour area is defined to include all areas which are known to have contained quay structures (from the 1801 and later maps). The actual medieval harbour lay somewhere within this area. The area also includes the area north and east of the Market Place. This area may contain remains of medieval urban plots, and more certainly contains remains of post-medieval quayside building.

4.4.c Burial sites and places of worship

WAT/402

St Decuman's Church

The church precinct of St Decuman's (SMR 34169) contains several Listed Buildings, some medieval (SMR 34843, SM 16054, SMR LB 30002 - the cross) and some not (SMR LB 30003, 30005-6). There might conceivably be an earlier chapel here: a 6th century Byzantine coin was found in the churchyard (SMR 34205). The church (SMR 35057, SMR LB 30001) is first referred to on this site in the 12th century, but the fabric dates partly from the late 13th and mostly from the 15th/16th centuries. The Vicarage house stood just south of the churchyard: new houses were built on this site in 1833 and, slightly to the east, in 1977. The Church House is mentioned by 1519: this stood at the east end of the churchyard by the road. The fair was held here in Twyfayrecroftes field between the Church and the prebendal house. The Church House was used as a fair house in the 18th century, and a poorhouse in the 19th. Still standing in 1841, the site was later incorporated into the churchyard extension.

This area has been defined from the 1888 map, and also covers the old fair field, and the houses adjacent to St Decuman's.

WAT/403

St Decuman's Well

The immediate surrounds of the churchyard may also have points of archaeological interest. St Decuman's Well (SMR 34841, SMR LB 30004) may be an ancient site and may be one reason why the church moved to this particular position.

The extent has been defined from the modern map.

Not mapped

The Chapel of the Holy Cross (chapel with chantry mentioned in 1369, 1375 and 1539, which owned property in the town, including the Roodweir fishery) is thought to have been near the Market Place, possibly on the site subsequently occupied by the London Inn (Dunning, 1985) and marked on the map; an alternative site was proposed on the western side of Swain St in an unspecified area of irregular plot boundaries (Aston & Leech, 1977).

4.4.d Settlement (Urban)

(a) Commercial core

WAT/406

The market place

The market place lies immediately to the south of the *present* quay area, and is a broad, triangular area. It has been encroached on by the Market House, on which site used to stand the shambles (from the fourteenth to the early nineteenth century).

The area has been defined from the modern town plan and from the 1801 map.

Not mapped

There are also references from the 13th to the 15th centuries to a possible western inner market (or possibly harbour) area called Bynneport or Byngport: the location of this is not yet known.

WAT/407

Burgage plots

The area of known burgage plots is based on the 1801 map, which shows characteristic long, thin plots and front to back buildings in two areas of the town. One block fronts the south side of Market St, and one the east side of Swain St. The former is heavily built up on the 1801 map, the latter less so: it would be of interest to know whether these Swain St plots were ever developed in medieval times. In both areas there are potentially remains of medieval buildings at the street end, and outhouses and rubbish pits at the back. Since the Swain St plots run down to the marsh there could be rubbish pits with good organic preservation - or there may be areas beyond the plots into which rubbish was tipped. There were other burgage plots along the streets lost to the sea, but these could not be mapped: the area is included within the harbour area.

The area is defined from the 1801 town plan.

WAT/408

Other urban plots

The area between Swain St and the river shows on the 1801 map as an area of "urban farm" plots, fairly large plots with scattered outbuildings, and buildings facing Swain St and Bridge St broad side on. It is likely that part at least of this area was developed in medieval times. The remaining street frontages are sometimes extremely narrow, which suggests that there *might* be burgage plots in this area too, despite the map evidence. These frontages will have been most affected by later redevelopment, but archaeology may survive. The area of less intensive activity at the back may contain remains of slight buildings and lost plot boundaries.

The area is defined from the 1801 map.

(b) Suburbs

WAT/502

Post-medieval suburbs

Medieval Watchet was too small for suburbs. However, there are several areas marked on the 1801 map which appear to represent post-medieval suburban developments. The area between Swine St and the river was mentioned in connection with the medieval town, but was definitely part of the urban fabric by the end of this period (SMR LB 30016-17, 30023-24). There are also plots along Bridge St, at the south end of Swain St and just north east of the Swain St burgages (SMR LB 30010). An area to the west of the river is divided into regular strips of plots by 1801, but there is little evidence of buildings actually having been erected on them by this date. Study of the survey accompanying the maps would allow greater interpretation.

These areas are defined from the 1801 map.

4.4.e Settlement (Rural)

WAT/404

Parsonage Farm

The prebendal glebe lands (not mapped) lay beyond the open fields in the St Decuman's area. The present farm is 18th century, but the earlier house and glebe farm stood on the same site.

The area is defined from the 1888 map.

4.4.f Industrial sites

(a) Mills

Watchet had several mills in the medieval and post-medieval periods.

WAT/409 The Old Mill
The grist mill may have stood near the river mouth in the town (Dunning, 1985). This site continued in use for milling until 1911 and there has been repeated redevelopment of the site.

The area is centred on the site of "the Old Mill"; the leat (not marked) ran to the south.

WAT/410 Stoate's Mill
The site of the 19th century Stoate's flour mill (SMR 34167), which eventually replaced Little Silver Mill, may have been occupied by an earlier mill.

From the 1801 map and the SMR entry.

WAT/411 Little Silver Mill
There was a fulling mill at Little Silver (successor to the nearby Brutcotes Mill), the site of which lies at the easternmost extremity of the modern paper mill. Successive maps show that the mill runs on the Washford River have been repeatedly altered and the medieval mill runs are not yet known.

The site is marked from the position given in Dunning, 1985.

WAT/412 Snailholt Mill
The paper mill began in the post-medieval period, initially on a site on the medieval Snailholt Farm (SMR 34172). This early mill has not been disturbed by the later mill buildings.

The site is mapped from the 1995 map and the SMR entry.

(b) Other industrial sites

Not mapped Medieval Watchet is not known to have had areas of concentrated industrial activity, but the river and the foreshore contain potential remains associated with fishing. In the seafront area of the town were the medieval fishweirs and fishponds (SMR 33776). One was known at the mouth of the river by 1311. Three sea fishing ponds are referred to on the shore 1398-1456. Two manor sea weirs, one at "Le Putt" are referred to in 1476. There is said to be a surviving semicircular enclosure of large stones out on the fishing grounds, a few hundred yards west of the North Pier (Wedlake, 1973).

4.4.g Agricultural sites

WAT/413 Open fields
The open fields have been mapped from the named fields still in strips on the 1801 map (which is unlikely to represent their original extent). The map appears to indicate massive coastal erosion of parts of the medieval town. The fields do not directly abut the medieval town, but skirt the marsh to the south and east. The open fields began to be built on in the nineteenth century and now lie mostly beneath 20th century estates.

The site is marked from the 1801 map.

5. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH & 19TH CENTURY) (Map D)

5.1 Archaeological knowledge

The industrial archaeology of Watchet has been the subject of several small studies published by SIAS.

5.2 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.

Watchet 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. Watchet was one of a handful of tourist centres in the county by the end of the 19th century, a minor coastal resort, but is also one of the towns noted for its small-scale industrial remains.

5.3 Standing structures

There are several fine urban and suburban buildings surviving, notably the Market House (SMR LB 30014), and the civic buildings along Swain St (SMR LB 30020-22, 30025). Less remains of the industrial developments. **Map D** shows the Listed Buildings of the period.

5.4 Archaeological components, shown on Map D

5.4.a Redevelopment in earlier settlement components

There was some development in the centre of Watchet, The plan of the centre, however, remained largely unaltered, and settlement components already described under earlier periods are shown more lightly shaded. Nineteenth century redevelopment centred on the railways and the reconstruction of the harbour area. Both involved the partial destruction of the margins of the earlier town. There were also housing developments on greenfield sites to the south, east and west of the town.

5.4.b Communications

(a) Roads

WAT/601

The turnpikes

The turnpike roads were established in this period: designated routes ran west to Dunster, south-west to Bampton, south to Williton and east to Nether Stowey.

The turnpikes are taken from the work of Bentley & Murlless, 1985.

(b) Railways

WAT/602

The West Somerset Railway

The West Somerset line (SMR 33462) to Taunton and Minehead skirted the south-east margin of the established town, but curtailed some properties there. It branched to the new harbour's Eastern Pier. A branch to the paper mills was also built after 1880.

WAT/603

The Mineral Railway

The route of the West Somerset Mineral Railway (SMR 34374) down to the Western Quay can still be traced. It came into the town from the south-west and only at its northern end encountered already developed properties: a group of properties shown on the 1841 Tithe Map lies on the site of the harbour station (SMR 34375) and the track to the quay marked on the 1880 map. This and the Mineral Railway to the Western Pier have been taken up and the track partially built over.

The lines of both railways are taken from the 1888 map.

(c) The harbour

Most of the 19th century harbour lay within the area of the medieval and post-medieval harbour.

WAT/604 The 19th century slipway
The new slipway lay beyond the old harbour area.

5.4.c Burial sites and places of worship

Not mapped Several chapels were built to serve the increased suburban populace: the Baptist Chapel (SMR LB 30008), the Bible Christian Chapel (after which Temple Villas and Temple Terrace were named, and which became part of St Decuman's C of E School - site marked), St Saviour's Mission Church (first on Brendon Hill, later on West St - site marked - and then succeeded by the Holy Cross in Market House) and the Methodists' building (SMR LB 30012) in Harbour Rd (then Station Rd).

5.4.d Settlement (Urban)

WAT/605 19th century suburbs
New housing appeared amongst the fields to the south and east of the town, including Almyr and Wristland Terraces (named after the old open fields in which they were built), Sea View Terrace (SMR LB 30011), Causeway Cottages, and isolated housing (SMR LB 30018-19). There were also new suburbs to the West - the Green (SMR LB 30026), off West St, and villas on Cleeve Hill by the 1880s. Not all the 19th century suburbs have survived intact, as advantage has more recently been taken of the large plots associated with them.

An area of the old fields east of the harbour was enclosed as a pleasure ground and has continued in this use.

*5.4.e Industrial sites**(a) Mills*

WAT/608 Stoate's Mill
Stoate's Mill (SMR 34167) expanded in the 19th century.

WAT/609 The paper mill
The paper mill (SMR 34168) which had begun at Snailholt farm in the seventeenth century moved downstream and expanded considerably, although a new water wheel was fixed at Snailholt as late as 1886 (the wheel pit and sluice of this mill survive - SMR 34172). The 1880 map shows a series of mill races and weirs along the Washford River.

WAT/607 The saw mills
The saw mills.

(b) Other sites

WAT/606 The gasworks
To the south of the town, the gasworks were built. This site continues to be employed for similar purposes.

The above areas have all been defined from the 1841 and 1888 maps.

Not mapped There was a brewery (SMR 34166) east of the harbour, c200 yards beyond the present cliff face and now lost. Limekilns (SMR 34173-4, SMR LB 30009) were also built at Watchet, including the ones on Cleeve Hill. Chidgey's foundry (SMR 34171) was in operation in the latter half of the century at Mount Pleasant: much has been preserved from this, although the site has been reused.

6. 20TH CENTURY (Map E)

6.1 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. Watchet 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.

6.2 Settlement components, shown on Map E

6.2.a Redevelopment in earlier settlement components

Settlement components described under earlier periods are shown more lightly shaded. Watchet has gradually developed to the south and east, across the area of the old open fields and the reclaimed marsh. Most of the growth has been in the form of large residential estates.

6.2.b Water

WAT/703 The reservoir
The reservoir was built to the south of the town.

6.2.c Military sites

WAT/701 Liddymore Camp
Liddymore camp was built on fields south-east of Watchet and later considerably expanded. Some of this area has since been used for new housing.

Not mapped There are wartime harbour emplacements (SMR 35370, 35392-94).

6.2.d Settlement (Suburban)

WAT/702 20th century suburbs
Pre-1940 suburban development was principally to the south-east of the railway, focussing on South Rd. Post-War estates followed the same pattern, which can be seen on the map. Building has also taken place on large Victorian plots to the west and south-west of the town centre.

Areas to the south and to the west were set out in the early part of the century as a Memorial Ground (near the shore) and allotments. The Pleasure Ground was also extended further to the west. Some of the allotments have subsequently been built over.

6.2.e Industrial sites

WAT/704 The paper mill
The area of the paper mill continued to expand across meadowland on the valley floor.

The above areas are all defined from the 1939, 1962, 1975 and 1995 maps.

V. THE POTENTIAL OF WATCHET

1. Research interests

Watchet's Saxon (and possible post-Roman British) archaeology is probably its outstanding point of interest. Confirmation and investigation of the minster, in particular, could be of value in the study of the Saxon Church in Somerset and its relationship with the pre-Saxon establishment. If the burh is not too badly damaged, it may retain enough archaeology for the character of its occupation to be ascertained. The location of the Saxon settlement and the clarification of its connections with the defensive enclosure and the estates at Williton would be of great interest.

Watchet's flint scatters are also directly relevant to current research into the earlier prehistoric periods.

The town's medieval core has been defined as an area of interest, although the town plan is no longer complete. The sequence of medieval and later mills along the Washford river is of interest.

2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation

The main area of potentially good preservation in Watchet is on the western fringes of the marsh. The marsh was a constraint to earlier development, but was gradually reclaimed. The effect of the reclamation on any deposits is not known. The narrow Watermeadows form an additional area of wetland, but activity in this area has probably been limited, with the exception of mill sites and associated waterworks. Additionally, there has been a process of silting in the harbour and at low tide structural remains are visible. However, the effects of erosion and repeated redevelopment and scouring mean that the likelihood of these being very early is small.

3. Limitations

There has been extensive coastal erosion affecting the Saxon and medieval settlements. This is shown by the extent of the fields on the 1801 map and supported by the knowledge of the lost hamlet of Easenton (SMR 34165) which lay quarter of a mile beyond the present coastline. Parts of the inner town have been completely destroyed by the sea (probably). The point of transition from destroyed archaeology to extant archaeology of consequently greater importance is not known exactly and may be abrupt. Erosion continues where not contained by modern breakwaters and is threatening Daw's Castle and the Old Minster Field. Damage to Watchet's archaeology from previous development has not been reliably assessed. The extent of nineteenth century cellaring is not known. There has been post-war demolition in the centre, but few major modern developments.

4. Extent of current protection

(shown on Map F)

The Area of High Archaeological Potential covers most of Watchet town centre and large areas to the east and west.. There are two Scheduled Monuments: Daw's Castle (SM 33712) and the cross at St Decuman's church (SM 16054). The Conservation Area was revised and considerably enlarged in 2003 based partly on this report. The Listed Buildings are described in the main text. The extent of these current designation is shown on Map F.

5. Management Proposals

See the Archaeological Guidance Document.

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3. Maps

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- 1802 3" OS surveyors' drawings: fiche in SSL
- 1841 Tithe Map of St Decumans: SRO D/D/Rt 435
- 1880 1:2500 OS map: fiche in SSL
- 1894 Watchet and Williton Ward plans: SRO D/R/WIL 9/10/2
- 1939 1:10560 OS map
- 1962 1:10560 OS map + SMR data
- 1975 1:10000 OS map + SMR data
- 1995 OS digital data

VII. COMPONENT INDEXES

1. Component to Map

<i>Component</i>	<i>Map</i>	<i>Component</i>	<i>Map</i>
WAT/101	A	WAT/411	C
WAT/301	B	WAT/412	C
WAT/302	B	WAT/413	C
WAT/303	B	WAT/501	C
WAT/401	C	WAT/502	C
WAT/402	C	WAT/601	D
WAT/403	C	WAT/602	D
WAT/404	C	WAT/603	D
WAT/405	C	WAT/604	D
WAT/406	C	WAT/605	D
WAT/407	C	WAT/606	D
WAT/408	C	WAT/607	D
WAT/409	C	WAT/608	D
WAT/410	C	WAT/609	D

WAT/701	E	WAT/703	E
WAT/702	E	WAT/704	E

2. Component to Page

WAT/101	5, 17
WAT/301	6, 17
WAT/302	6, 17
WAT/303	6, 17
WAT/401	8, 17
WAT/402	9, 17
WAT/403	9, 17
WAT/404	10, 17
WAT/405	8, 17
WAT/406	10, 17
WAT/407	10, 17
WAT/408	10, 17
WAT/409	11, 17
WAT/410	11, 17
WAT/411	11, 17
WAT/412	11, 17
WAT/413	11, 17
WAT/501	8, 17
WAT/502	10, 17
WAT/601	12, 17
WAT/602	12, 17
WAT/603	12, 17
WAT/604	13, 17
WAT/605	13, 17
WAT/606	13, 17
WAT/607	13, 17
WAT/608	13, 17
WAT/609	13, 17
WAT/701	14, 18
WAT/702	14, 18
WAT/703	14, 18
WAT/704	14, 18

Maps

Map A - prehistoric

Map B - Saxon

Map C - medieval and post-medieval

Map D - 19th century

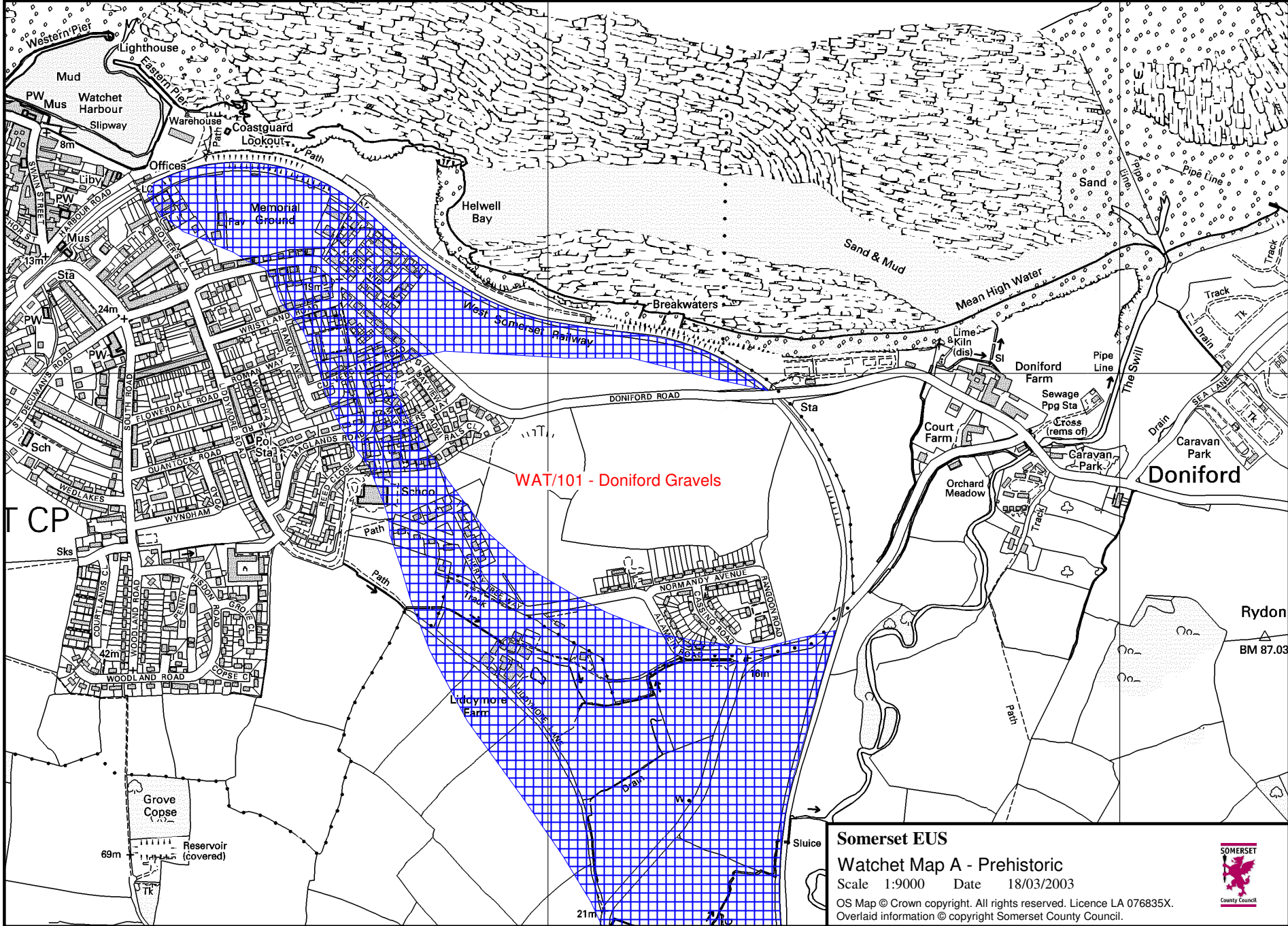
Earlier components shown in yellow.

Map E - 20th century

Earlier components shown in yellow.

Map F - Existing designations

Key: Scheduled Monuments (dark blue),
Listed Buildings Grade I (light blue)
Grade II* (light green)
Grade II (green)
Registered Park (brown, none)
Conservation Area (green)
Area of High Archaeological Potential (pink)

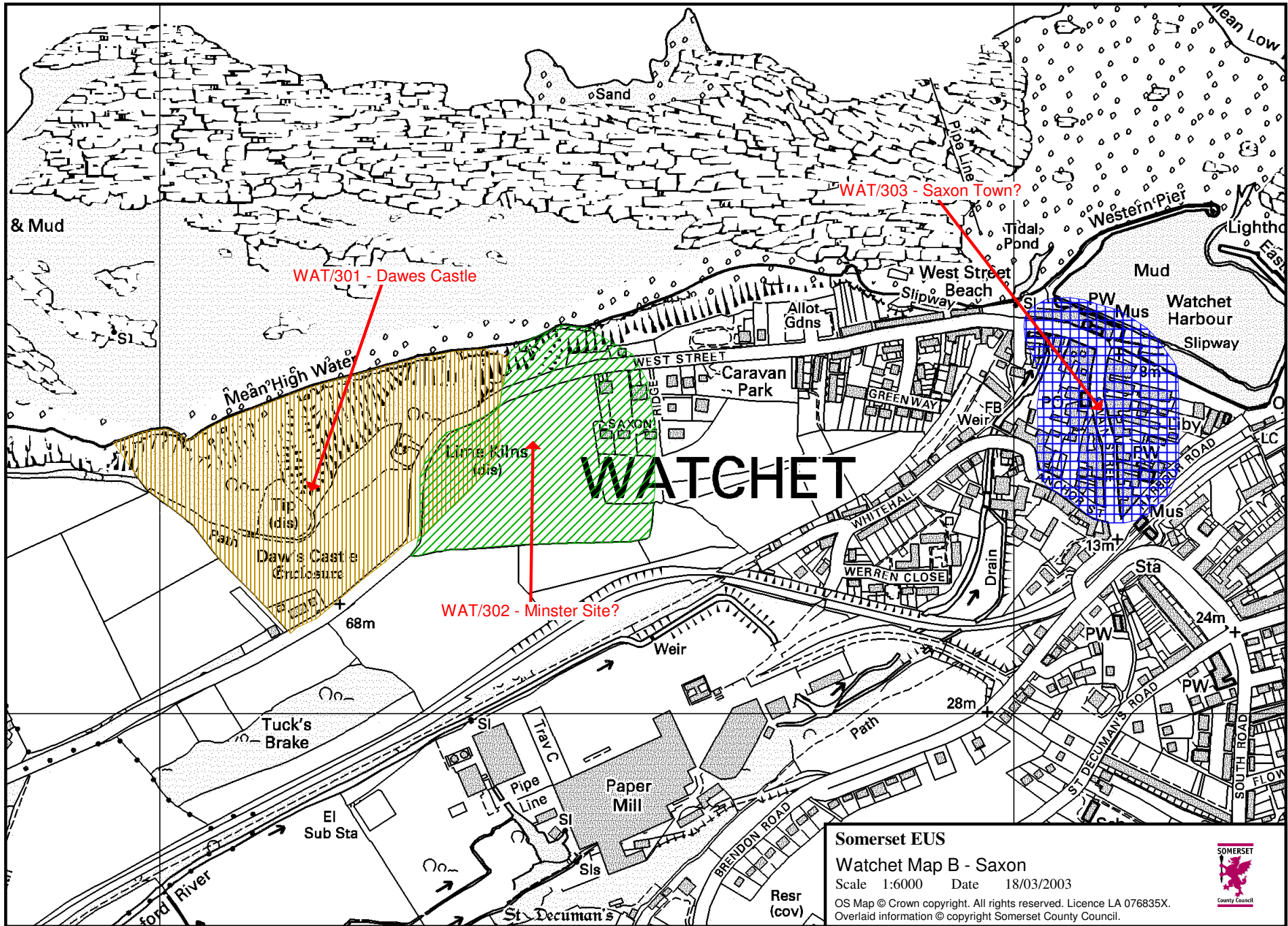


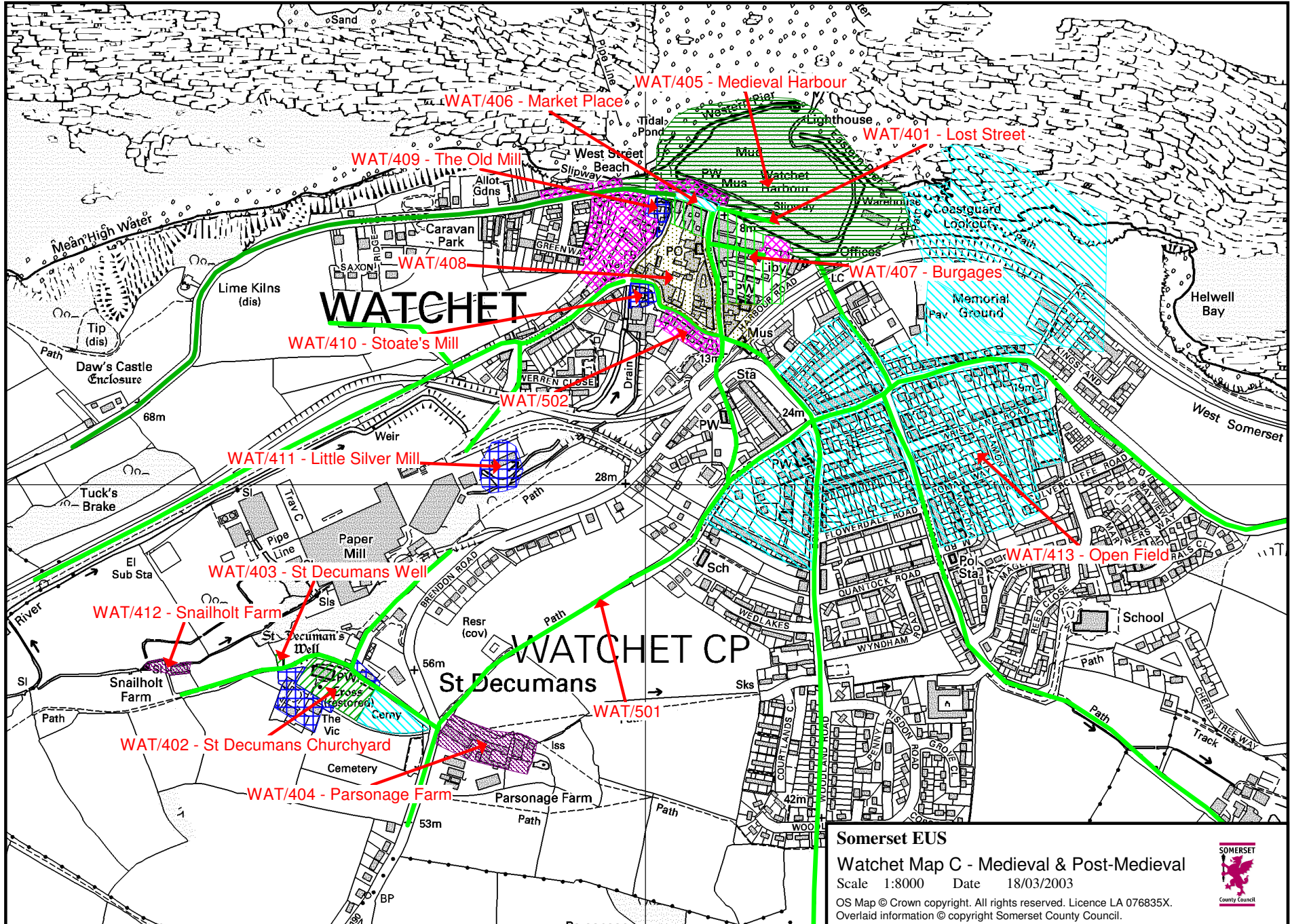
WAT/101 - Doniford Gravels

Somerset EUS
Watchet Map A - Prehistoric

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WATCHET

WATCHET CP

St Decumans

WAT/406 - Market Place

WAT/405 - Medieval Harbour

WAT/401 - Lost Street

WAT/409 - The Old Mill

WAT/408

WAT/407 - Burgages

WAT/410 - Stote's Mill

WAT/502

WAT/411 - Little Silver Mill

WAT/403 - St Decumans Well

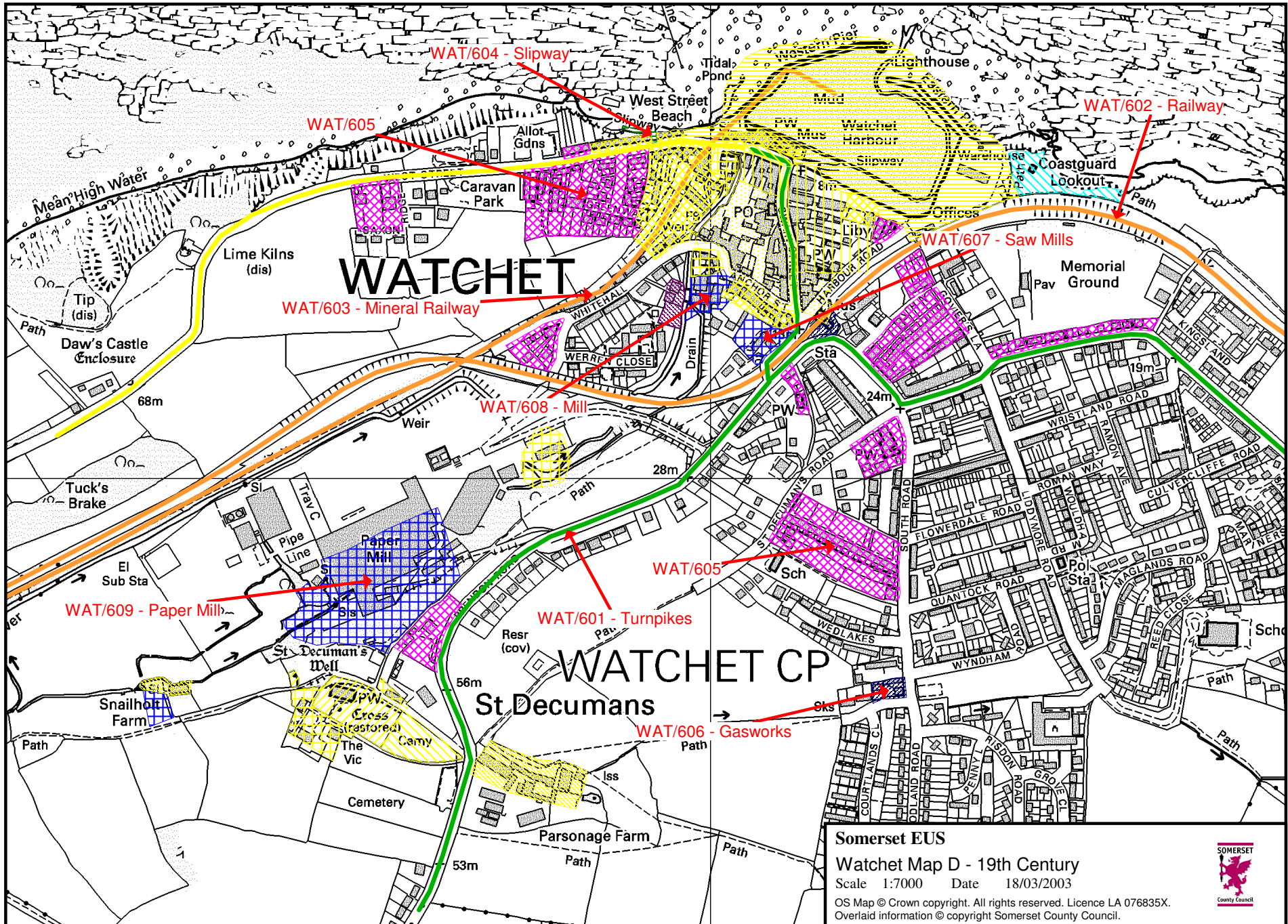
WAT/413 - Open Field

WAT/412 - Snailholt Farm

WAT/501

WAT/402 - St Decumans Churchyard

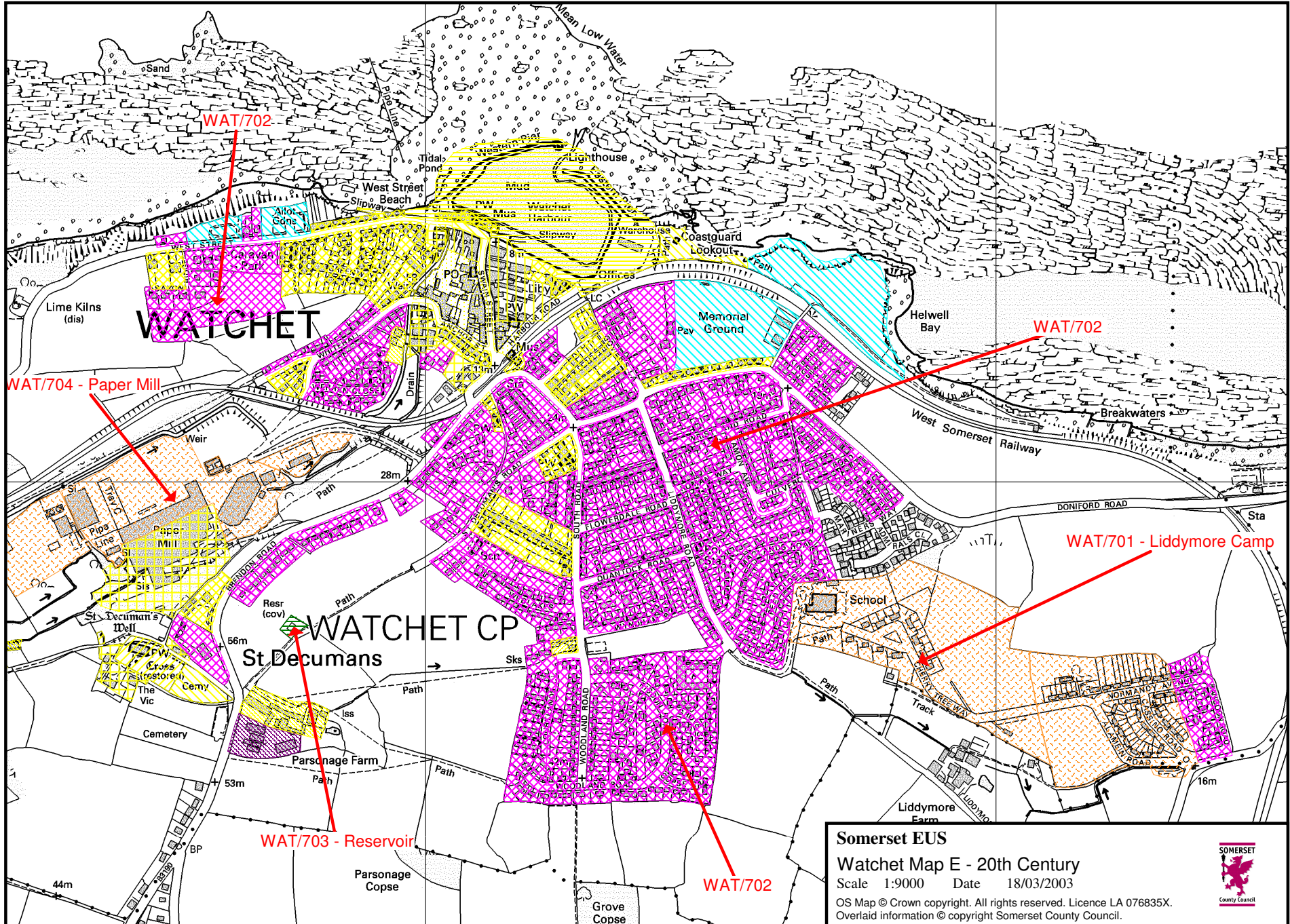
WAT/404 - Parsonage Farm



Somerset EUS
 Watchet Map D - 19th Century
 Scale 1:7000 Date 18/03/2003

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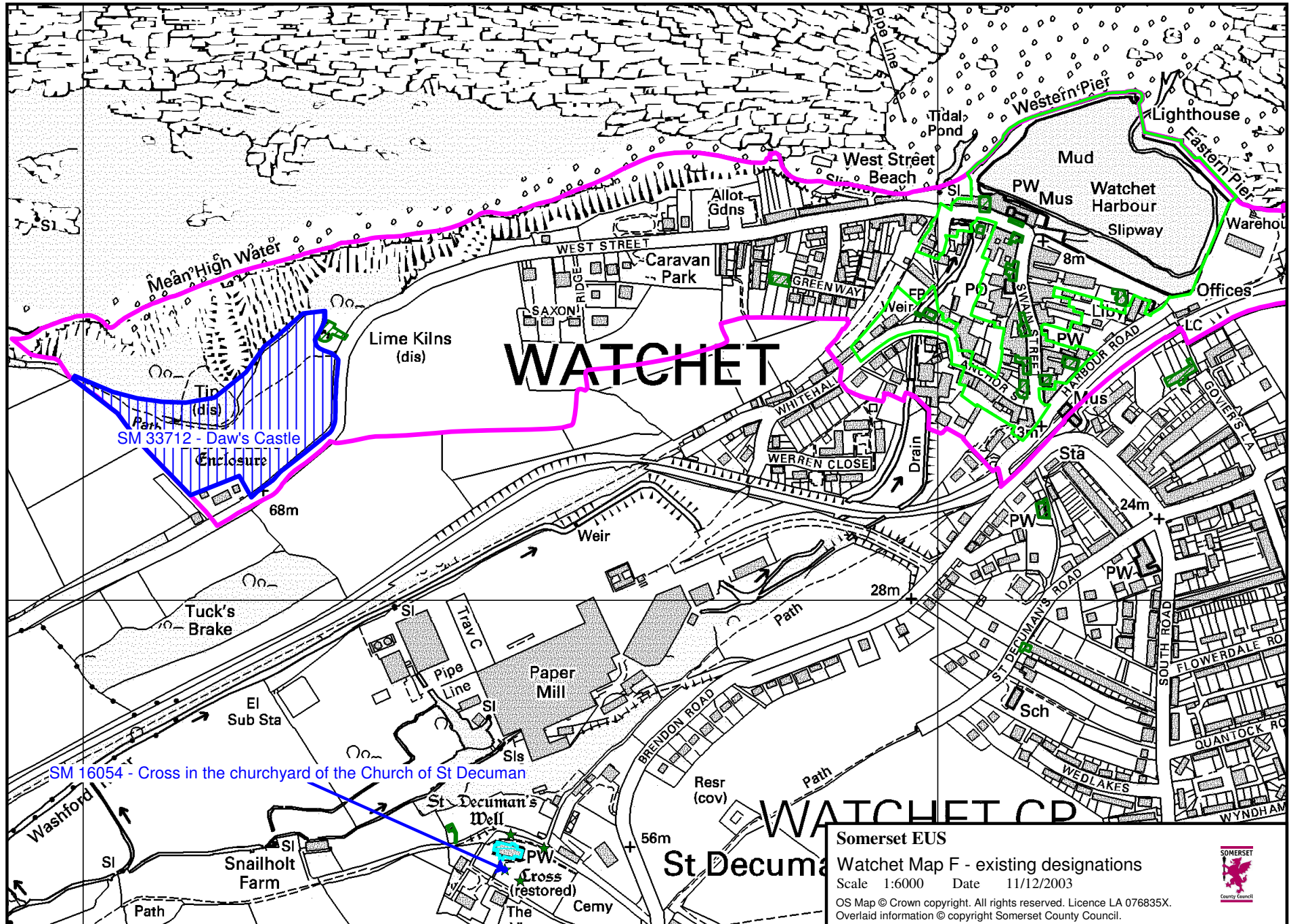




Somerset EUS
 Watchet Map E - 20th Century
 Scale 1:9000 Date 18/03/2003

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SM 33712 - Daw's Castle Enclosure

SM 16054 - Cross in the churchyard of the Church of St Decuman

WATCHET

WATCHET CP

St Decuman

Somerset EUS
 Watchet Map F - existing designations
 Scale 1:6000 Date 11/12/2003
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