

English Heritage Extensive Urban Survey

An archaeological assessment of

# Wells

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# SOMERSET EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY

## WELLS

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

by Clare Gathercole

#### CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION .....	3
II. MAJOR SOURCES .....	3
1. <i>Primary documentation and local histories</i> .....	3
2. <i>Maps</i> .....	3
III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF WELLS .....	3
IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WELLS .....	5
<i>GENERAL COMMENTS</i> .....	5
2. <i>ROMAN</i> .....	7
3. <i>EARLY SAXON</i> .....	8
4. <i>LATE SAXON AND MEDIEVAL</i> .....	11
5. <i>MEDIEVAL/ POST-MEDIEVAL</i> .....	17
6. <i>INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY)</i> .....	22
7. <i>20TH CENTURY</i> .....	24
V. THE POTENTIAL OF WELLS .....	25
1. <i>Research interests</i> .....	25
2. <i>Areas of potentially exceptional preservation</i> .....	26
3. <i>Limitations</i> .....	26
4. <i>Extent of current protection</i> .....	26
5. <i>Management Proposals</i> .....	26
VI. SOURCES .....	26
1. <i>General documentary (Somerset/ Wessex)</i> .....	26
2. <i>Wells</i> .....	28
3. <i>Maps</i> .....	29
VII. COMPONENT INDEXES .....	29
1. <i>Component to map</i> .....	29
2. <i>Component to page</i> .....	30

*Appendix: Maps*



## SOMERSET EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY

### WELLS

#### 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 documentation and local histories*

There is abundant primary documentary material relating to the development of central Wells, which has to an extent been assimilated and analysed by A J Scrase (1989a). The present report relies to a large extent on his work, which should be consulted for full details of the supporting evidence. His work, however, concentrates on certain areas of the city and there is little else available for other areas.

##### *2. Maps*

Simes' 1735 map is a stylised version of the centre of Wells, but there are several late 18th and early 19th century maps which show the extent of the city (though not in much detail). The Tithe Map is of little help.

#### III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF WELLS

Wells lies near the end of the Mendip-foot bench, a narrow shelf of fertile land between the upland environment of the Mendips and the wetland environment of the Levels. The site is at a confluence of major routes from all directions. It is also the focus of drainage of three Mendip valleys, and a place of springs. The vigorous issue of water from the springs has produced the Wells Gravels, a well drained island, across which the Axe-Brue watershed runs, and on which the city is now centred. The site is naturally favoured, relatively protected and poised to exploit three environmental zones.

It is perhaps not entirely surprising then that the antiquarian view that settlement at Wells began with the foundation of the Saxon minster by the springs c700 has been challenged by recent excavations. It is now clear that activity at the site goes back much further and it is possible that the Saxon centre at Wells was successor to not only Roman but also prehistoric centres in the locality.

The hills to the north and east of Wells are peppered with well known prehistoric sites, such as the bone caves round Wookey Hole, the Bronze Age barrows round Horrington, or the iron age hillfort at King's Castle. In contrast, comparatively little is known of activity on the fertile shelf between these sites and the sporadically exploited wetlands. Recent excavations, however, have produced evidence of Mesolithic and Neolithic activity and possible occupation at the Wells springs overlooked by the iron age centre of King's Castle.

The same excavations have produced evidence of Roman occupation of the site. There may have been a villa close to the springs, probably at the centre of an affluent estate with mining interests. Certainly by the late- or sub-Roman period there was a religious centre of some kind at the springs, evidenced by the mausoleum found there, the site of which retained its importance until the Reformation.

Wells' first Saxon role was as an ecclesiastical centre, built on a royal estate and linked to the burh at Axbridge and the palace at Cheddar by the road running along the foot of the Mendips. The minster was founded c700 by Ine of Wessex, and attained Cathedral status in 909 under Edward the Elder, its diocese covering most of Somerset. The minster and the springs probably formed an early focus of settlement. But the acquisition of Cathedral status may have been accompanied by a deliberate expansion of the city, with a planned road system, a parish church to the west (St Cuthbert's) and a chapel in Southover (St Etheldreda's).

One of the tantalising things about the history of Wells is that, although the presence of a Cathedral, a parish church *and* a chapel point to a settlement of some importance, Domesday records neither a town nor a market there, only a markedly large estate (60 hides) belonging to the Cathedral. The size of these estates, however, reflected the comparatively recent activities of the last Anglo-Saxon Bishop, Giso (1061-88): banished by Harold, he returned under the Conqueror, inspired by continental practices, and reorganised and expanded the ecclesiastical properties. So at Domesday, the population was relatively large, certainly larger than that of Bath, the city to which the See was moved in 1088, by Giso's Norman successor, John (1088-1136). Wells was reduced to the status of one of the manors of the See, and John's manor house was built close to the church. There could have been several reasons for this move, including the lack of a formalised market, but some historians put it down to John's personal interests.

Medieval Wells continued to be very much in the power of the Bishops, but from the mid 12th century onwards, their influence was more positive. Whilst the See was still in Bath, charters of Robert of Lewes (1136-66) granted Wells three markets, to be held in the main streets. He also restored canons' property to them, and repaired and modified the Saxon church to produce the first Norman one. In the time of his successor, Reginald (1174-1191) free burgage tenure was granted, though still subject to the Bishops' jurisdiction. He also began the massive realignment and construction project which produced the modern Cathedral: it has been argued that this can only have been undertaken in the expectation of the return of the See to Wells (Rodwell, 1982a).

Bishop Savaric's charter of 1201 outlined the boundaries of the city, but much of his energy was directed into disputes with Glastonbury Abbey. It was the return of the See to Wells with the election of Joscelin (1206-42), a canon and townsman, which really marked the beginning of Wells' prosperity. Two burgesses represented the city in Edward I's Parliament of 1298. In the 1327 lay subsidy 64 inhabitants are recorded as being taxed. By the 14th century Wells was the largest town in Somerset. It has been described as a "parasitic" town, riding on the back of the Bishops, who had estates and projects all over Somerset in the medieval period (Scrase, 1978). Indeed, although Wells is a natural market centre at a focus of routes and zones, the market must have been boosted by the numbers of visitors who came to the city on church business. Much of the textile industry, which was the mainstay of Wells' economy, was in the Bishops' hands, but it was based on the Mendip grazing, abundant water and local fullers earth deposits.

The Bishops certainly had an extensive influence over the physical shape of the city. Scrase has shown how changes to the Saxon layout took place very early in the medieval period, with the realignment of the Cathedral begun by Reginald (Scrase, 1989a). This was completed by Joscelin, who also created the Bishop's Park, which subsequently restricted the city's growth to the south. Subsequent 14th century diversions related to the walling of the precinct seem to have been less significant, with the framework of the city largely solidified by the middle of the 13th century. Scrase has also shown that this influence probably did *not* include the laying out of regular burgage plots across the blocks of the Saxon street layout.

Unsurprisingly, this amount of influence led to friction between town and Bishop. This was reflected in the walling off of the precinct in the 1340s, which was directly followed by an application by the townsmen to be allowed to wall off the town! (Although the grant was made, the wall was never built).

Not being monastic, the establishment of Wells was not dissolved at the Reformation. However, its power and wealth was much diminished. The city suffered from this, as its importance was reduced accordingly. In 1589 the borough acquired full independence (though the Bishop retained a financial interest in its fairs and markets until 1779), but with the fall in visitors and a slump in the cloth trade, the city struggled for a while. By the end of the 16th century, however, trade was recovering and the Mendip lead mines were thriving. For the rest of the post-medieval period Wells had a quiet but prosperous existence, based on modest trade and attracting (would-be) gentry rather than the great merchants of the high medieval period.

In the 19th century, the cheese market was the largest in the west of England, but in other respects Wells was hit badly by the impact of the Industrial Revolution elsewhere. Its textile industry was virtually destroyed by the northern mills, the mines declined and the remaining church estates were transferred to central control. Moreover, although the railways did come to Wells, it was only on a branch line, and this proved insufficient to counteract the coming of the main line to other market centres (which were in Somerset too numerous to sustain). The city became little more than a picturesque local service centre.

Wells remains essentially a market town, dominated by the cathedral, but recently there has been a marked growth of modern housing around its historic core.

#### **IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WELLS**

##### ***GENERAL COMMENTS***

###### ***0.1 Archaeological knowledge***

Although there have been several architectural surveys of Wells, there have been surprisingly few large archaeological surveys or excavations. There has perhaps been an over-emphasis on the Cathedral precincts to the detriment of other aspects of Wells' archaeology: the pattern was described in 1978 as "dangerously incomplete", the unexplored potential of the area underlined by the rich yield of a 1941 anti-tank trench near the city (Scrase, 1978). Until the 1970s, the only excavation of note had been in 1894 (Buckle, 1894), which located an earlier church or chapel under the site of Bishop Stillington's late medieval Lady Chapel. There had also been observations during the construction of the Central Schools in the 19th century and some more recent observations of developments. Since then, development-led watching briefs, often surprisingly negative, have taken place in other areas, but it is still true that the major excavations have been either within the precinct or just outside it. The Camery site (Rodwell, 1981a, 1987 etc) and the Clares Carlton site (Leach, 1987) have produced important information about, respectively, the Saxon Cathedral and the old watercourses.

Since this report was compiled there have been numerous small excavations and watching briefs in the city which have continued to add to our knowledge. The Camery excavation has been published (Rodwell 2001).

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

There are more than 300 Listed Buildings in Wells, many of which could not be mentioned individually in this study. Map H shows the overall pattern of Listed Buildings.

##### ***1. PREHISTORIC***

***(Map A)***

###### ***1.1 Archaeological knowledge***

The archaeology of the hilly surroundings of Wells is comparatively well-preserved and well-recorded. The SMR contains information on sites ranging from the earliest Palaeolithic to the iron age, pointing to prolonged and extensive activity in the upland area.

## 1.2 Context

Wells is one of eight out of the 45 historic towns covered by this project at which there is evidence of occupation on the site of the later town. It is also one of five at which a nearby prehistoric hillfort may represent some form of predecessor to the later town. In this case, the earthwork (King's Castle) would have controlled both a confluence of routes and a series of springs, hinting at the complex nature of the Mendip and Mendip foot landscape, of which many upland sites, including nationally important occupation and burial sites dating from the Palaeolithic period onwards, survive to provide evidence of the area's connections with dominant Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures to the east.

## 1.3 Archaeological features, shown on Map A

### 1.3.a Communications: routeways

Not mapped      There may have been an iron age route between King's Castle and Maesbury, later perhaps reused by the Romans (Reid, 1927), but there is no evidence as yet for this.

### 1.3.b Water

The most important local topographic features were the springs, with the stream flowing away in its natural course, and the gravels. In combination these resulted in areas of comparatively well drained land and areas of marsh.

WEL/102

#### The stream

The course of the stream before it was altered during the middle ages is not certain in all its details, but ran more directly south-west from the springs in a marshy valley.

*The course suggested here is based on the sketch maps by Scrase (1989a) and Rodwell (1982a), on the textual description of Balch (1925) and on the results of the Clare's Carlton excavations (Leach, 1987). The line is approximate.*

### 1.3.c Settlement

Not mapped      The picture of the extent and character of prehistoric activity in the vicinity of Wells is incomplete, though the SMR contains details of a number of sites. Several Neolithic axes (SMR 24317, 23378, 25168) and other flint scatters (eg SMR 24314, 25070) have been found to the north of the city, around Walcombe, and to the east, around Dinder. Iron age activity is evidenced chiefly by the defended settlement of King's Castle, with its associated field system (see below).

WEL/101

#### The Wells Gravels

The Camery excavation produced evidence of Neolithic occupation close to the springs, in the form of two pits and a scatter of flints, including arrowheads (and including some older Mesolithic material). Exploitation of the well drained gravel is implied, which means that there is a likelihood of further Mesolithic or Neolithic material, and/or remains of Neolithic farming virtually anywhere in the locality of Wells. There may be a focus at the springs, but there is insufficient evidence to be sure.

The Wells Gravels have archaeological potential both as a receptacle of water borne artefacts and as an island of well-drained ground. The approximate area, spreading south-west from the springs, is shown. The zone defines the area in which water borne fossils are likely to occur; although it does not necessarily define the area of later prehistoric activity, it may be that the area has attracted occupation.

*The Gravels area has been defined from information in Donovan, 1988.*

WEL/103

#### King's Castle

Although the iron age defended settlement at King's Castle (SMR 24336, SM 24024) lies outside the present city of Wells, it may have been the precursor of the later centres. The site is considered somewhat unusual, consisting of two or three linked sub-enclosures, with a field system extending to the east. Little iron age material has been found west of the site, and so its relationship with the Wells focus is unclear.

*The outline of King's Castle is based on the Scheduled area.*

## **2. ROMAN (Map B)**

### **2.1 Archaeological knowledge**

Until the 1970s, it was thought that Ine's minster was founded on a virgin site. Excavations in 1978-9, however, revealed dramatic evidence (Rodwell, 1982 etc; Leach, 1987) that this was not so, and that there was continuous non-urban Roman occupation from the 1st century AD onwards. The SMR contains details of other Roman sites and finds in the vicinity of Wells, but there is as yet no further information on the extent of the Roman remains under the city.

### **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.

Wells is one of seven of the 45 historic towns covered by this project at which there is evidence of a Roman site at the core of the later town. Four of these towns, including Wells (and Cheddar, Glastonbury and - perhaps - Street) have probable or possible villa sites at their heart, and in each case there is also an apparent association with a (pre-existing?) religious site: each was later reused as a religious precinct. The evidence suggests that Wells was the centre of an affluent and well-settled area, perhaps with wealth coming in from the Charterhouse mines up on the Mendips.

### **2.3 Archaeological features, shown on Map B**

#### **2.3.a Communications: Roads**

The relative importance of the various early routes into Wells, is a subject of debate. Amongst recent theories, two major ones are those of Rodwell (1982a) and Scrase (1989a, which also discusses other theories), who differ in matters of detail but also of more substance. Their work is further discussed below (see p8). Map B shows two alternative scenarios for the Roman routes down the valley at Wells.

WEL/204	<p><u>Roman roads</u> These roads are thought by both Rodwell and Scrase to be of Roman origin.</p>
WEL/205	<p><u>Roman roads</u> These roads are thought by Rodwell to be of Roman origin. They include two alignments, through the centre of modern Wells, and to the south within the Bishop's Park, which have since disappeared.</p>
WEL/203	<p><u>Roman roads</u> These roads are thought by Scrase to be of Roman origin. They include a conjectural early alignment across the centre of modern Wells which has since disappeared.</p>

*The suggested road lines, where not following modern roads, are based on sketch maps by Rodwell (1982a) and Scrase (1989a). The lines are therefore somewhat approximate.*

#### **2.3.b Burial sites and places of worship**

WEL/202	<p><u>The mausoleum</u> By the late- or sub-Roman period there was a mausoleum west of St Andrew's Well, the sacred spring. This may have been in origin a private mausoleum attached to the villa. The building itself was of a common late Roman type, a square building with a central burial vault. However, its position and history suggests that it was of some religious importance, probably of Celtic origin: it may have contained a shrine to a Christian martyr (Rodwell, 1981b). The building was replaced by a mortuary chapel, presumably at the minster's foundation: the vault was cleared out</p>
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and used as an ossuary, and the site formed a focus for the 8th century burials. The chapel, St Mary's Chapel, was then incorporated into the 10th century Cathedral. This sequence of events has parallels at other Roman estate centres, most notably at Lullingstone, Kent (Rodwell, 1982c).

*The position of the mausoleum was established during the Camery excavations (Rodwell 2001).*

### 2.3.c Settlement

WEL/201

#### The Roman settlement focus

The Camery Site confirmed the picture of an affluent area, yielding abundant pottery and building materials of Roman date. Nothing structural from the early Roman occupation was revealed, but the extent of the recovered material was such that the excavator suggested a villa nearby, possibly under the eastern end of the medieval Cathedral (Rodwell, 2001). Further Roman material and a possible ditch was found in the 1987-88 Clares Carlton excavations, the excavator suggesting widespread exploitation of the gravels (Leach, 1987). The character of occupation may have altered somewhat in the late- to sub-Roman period, with a religious focus at the springs attaining importance: it is possible that a community survived here until Ine's minster foundation around AD 700.

The area shown represents the probable centre of Roman settlement around the springs. Without saying that other areas of the city will *not* contain Roman remains, it is now clear that a major building is likely to exist close to the springs, possibly within the precinct. The theory that it underlies the Cathedral is yet to be tested, and every opportunity to do so should be taken.

*This zone is conjectural and there is no direct evidence for its limits.*

## 3. EARLY SAXON

(Map C)

Present knowledge suggests two major phases in the Saxon archaeology of Wells. The earlier of these (9th century) is associated with the minster foundation, with the expansion of a (possibly pre-existing) settlement around it.

### 3.1 Archaeological knowledge

Archaeological knowledge of the early-Saxon period is limited to the 8th century burials and mortuary chapel found during the Camery excavations. All else is inference.

### 3.2 Context

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. However, there are also a number which can claim to have been 'central places' performing more limited, and non-commercial, functions: not all such places developed into towns, but many towns originated in such specialised settlements. The early-Saxon foundation at Wells formed part of a network of royal centres with different main functions along the Mendip-foot bench. Wells' focus was ecclesiastical, whilst there was a burh at Axbridge and the palace at Cheddar. The minster was apparently one of a series set up in a comparatively short time within the diocese of Sherborne under Aldhelm.

### 3.3 Archaeological components, shown on Map C

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

The Camery excavations have shown the continuity between the Roman religious focus at the mausoleum and the sequence of Saxon and medieval religious buildings. However, continuity of enclosure boundaries and/or settlement plan has not been established: early Saxon elements have therefore been redefined across the Roman layers.

#### 3.3.b Communications: Routes and streets

As with the Roman roads (see above, p7), the relative importance of the various early Saxon routes into Wells, and the manner in which the possible 10th century and later streets related to them, is a subject of debate. Whilst Rodwell and Scrase agree that most major streets of Wells are Saxon in origin, they disagree on the early street

alignments as well as the extent to which the side streets were established before the medieval borough developments. There is not space to go into detail here, but the question of early street alignments and the dates of their establishment is obviously of some importance. Almost any area within the city core may provide archaeological evidence relevant either to the street alignment itself or to the antiquity of plot development upon it.

WEL/306 Early Saxon roads

Rodwell and Scrase agree that Southover (the main incoming route from Glastonbury and the Levels) was in existence in the early Saxon period. It is also agreed that certain of the roads of probable Roman origin (see above, WEL/204) remained in use: these include the routes from the royal centres at Axbridge and Cheddar (Portway), and from Bath and Frome (College Road and St Thomas Street).

WEL/307 Early Saxon roads

These roads are those proposed by Rodwell as existing in the early Saxon period. He suggests an informal village development (Tideston) associated with a pre-10th century establishment of St Cuthbert's. Associated roads of probable Roman origin (see above, WEL/205) include (according to Rodwell) an extra route from the west (Burcott Road), a continuation of which is proposed as an earlier axial street on the line of neither Chamberlain Street nor St Cuthbert Street. Scrase, on the other hand, sees the area around St Cuthbert's as part of an "ambitious" bifocal street plan associated with the grant of Cathedral status in the 10th century, which essentially established the central blocks of plots in the city (see below, p12).

WEL/308 Early Saxon roads

These roads are those proposed by Scrase as existing in the early Saxon period. They include Milton Lane, the old alignment of Tor Street, and a lane linking Southover to a central street (of probable Roman origin, WEL/203) closer to the modern line of Chamberlain Street.

*The suggested roadlines, where not following modern roads, are based on sketch maps by Rodwell (1982a) and Scrase (1989a). The lines are therefore somewhat approximate.*

### 3.3.c Manors and estates

WEL/304 The royal manor

There was probably an early royal manor house at Wells. Whilst the location of this is not documented, a sensible guess would be in the area across the stream from the minster and west of the earlier road, which was occupied by later manors. John de Villula's early medieval manor house, constructed whilst the See was in Bath, may also lie in this area. Both may have been damaged in the 13th century by the Bishop's Palace construction work.

*The area is defined to the north by the stream and to the east by the old road. The southern and western limits are conjectural.*

### 3.3.d Burial sites, religious houses and places of worship

WEL/302 The Saxon minster

The exact limits of the area first attached to the minster are not known, but it is at least possible that it was bounded to the south by the stream. To the north and east, the major north-south and east-west routes (the lines of which are not known for certain) may have defined it. The western limit is obscure because this is the area which altered most with the establishment of the Cathedral and apparent subsequent reorientation of the settlement. It is, however, possible that it included at least part of the area which later became the main market place, since this was originally included in the Liberty of St Andrew. The establishment of the possible early minster area, especially as it relates to the possible settlement at the St Thomas Street crossroads, is a matter of great archaeological interest: the archaeology of areas at the edge of the defined zone is therefore potentially as significant as that in its heart.

Within the minster area the archaeology is obviously of great importance. A little is known of the site from the Camery excavations. The remains of the early-Saxon minster itself were not found, but it is thought to lie under the present cloisters, on the same alignment as the major streets of the city (which the later medieval Cathedral is not). The first minster is unlikely to have been as substantial a structure as its successors and may survive in poor condition, if at all. It was also aligned with the mortuary chapel immediately to the east, revealed in the Camery excavations, and the holy well. The chapel had replaced the late-Roman mausoleum, and was surrounded by 8th-century burials. Close by were wells, at least one of which was cut by the later Cathedral construction. Apart from structural evidence, the excavators found important early high class continental artefacts (glass and coins). Much remains to be discovered about the early minster complex: the limits of the precincts and the cemetery, the details of the church and the sites of any associated buildings.

*This area has been defined by the approximate lines of late-Saxon/ early-medieval streets to the north and east (Scrase, 1989a) and by the old stream course to the south (from textual descriptions in Balch, 1925, and Leach, 1987). The western limit follows that suggested in Scrase, 1989a. The boundary between minster and possible eastern settlement must be regarded as highly conjectural.*

*Note that the defined area of the early minster differs from those of the later Saxon and medieval establishments, reflecting the lack of archaeological knowledge. The later complexes are discussed below (see p12 and p19).*

WEL/305

St Cuthbert's

St Cuthbert's may perhaps have been founded to serve "Tideston" before Wells' acquisition of Cathedral status, although there is as yet no strong evidence that this was so. It is largely the dedication, a favoured one of Alfred, and an extremely unlikely choice for a Norman Bishop, which suggests its Saxon origin. Rodwell's sequence (Rodwell, 1982a) requires that the earlier church was slightly north of the medieval one (see also below, p13).

*The area has been based on the modern city plan together with suggestions in Aston and Leech (1977), Rodwell (1982a) and Scrase (1989a).*

*3.3.e Settlement*

There are two possible foci of early Saxon settlement at Wells. The major one of these centres around the springs and the minster, but there *may* also have been a pre-10th century development around St Cuthbert's (if it was established this early). In both of these areas, the remains of early timber buildings may perhaps survive. *Both of these suggested areas are conjectural and require archaeological confirmation.*

WEL/301

St Thomas Street early Saxon focus

A possible focus of early-Saxon settlement around the west end of modern St Thomas Street, suggested by Scrase (1989a). There could be the remains of a very early, possibly pre-Saxon settlement and market in this area close to the springs, outside the minster and on the major crossroads at the end of the Mendip-foot bench.

*Defined from the sketch map in Scrase (1989a).*

WEL/303

"Tideston" early Saxon focus

A second possible focus of middle-Saxon settlement around St Cuthbert's Church (see above).

*The existence of this focus is suggested by Rodwell (1982a). The outline shown is conjectural, based on his sketch map.*

#### 4. LATE SAXON AND MEDIEVAL

##### (SMR 24810) (Map D)

The development of the city centre of Wells through the late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval periods is complex and incompletely understood. The structure of this document reflects the complexity and occasional ambiguity of Wells in its division of the later Saxon/ medieval town from the medieval/ post-medieval city. This division also enables greater clarity on the maps.

##### 4.1 Archaeological knowledge

The SMR contains more than twenty references to the remains of medieval field systems and trackways in the vicinity of Wells. There are also several settlement sites, including a deserted village near Upper Milton (SMR 24328).

Within the city, there is some archaeological evidence for the superseded religious buildings of Wells. 19th and 20th century archaeological excavations in the Camery (Buckle, 1894; Rodwell, 2001) revealed evidence of the late-Saxon and first Norman Cathedrals, with some of their associated buildings. Observations were made, during the building of the Central School in the 19th century, of remains probably connected with the priory of St John. Archaeological knowledge of the city is limited, however. Although there have been several small interventions, many of these have been in the vicinity of the Cathedral and revealed little but post-medieval remains or barren made ground. Most recently, work near the Museum has shown that structural remains exist within areas shown as garden or paddock on Simes' 18th century map (R A Croft, pers. comm.).

##### 4.2 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.

Wells 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. Though Wells is not known to have developed any commercial functions by the end of the Saxon period, its importance as an Episcopal 'town' is reflected in the fact that it is one of nine of the historic towns in which pre-Conquest planning has been noted in the Assessments. Functionally, it was one of seven of the 45 historic towns covered by this project which had both ecclesiastical and administrative functions. It is one of 22 towns associated with a known or probable pre-Conquest minster, which in this case had become a Cathedral by the late Saxon period, and one of 22 associated with a royal manor centre (though the estate was transferred to the church before the Conquest).

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.

Wells is one of five of the places with some pre-Conquest urban functions which acquired borough status during the medieval period. Indeed, by the 14th century it had the largest population of any of the towns in the survey. Wells is one of eight of the towns which had at least one large or important religious establishment in the medieval period. In this case, of course, this was the Cathedral complex, which differed considerably in character from the monastic houses. Indeed, though there were three of the eight at which the religious establishment was probably the major influence on the development of the town in the medieval period, Wells was unlike the other two (Glastonbury and Bruton) in that it acquired its borough.

### 4.3 *Standing structures*

A high proportion of Listed Buildings of medieval origin in Wells are of late (15th century) date. All Listed Buildings of medieval origin are therefore shown on Map E (see below, p17).

## 4.4 *Archaeological components, shown on Map D*

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

By the later Saxon period, with the consolidation of the town plan of Wells, earlier possible foci - at the St Thomas Street crossroads and around St Cuthbert's - had been swallowed by the urban area. The religious precincts and the manor area, on the other hand, probably retained their integrity. Of these, the former may have been affected by the establishment of a regular street plan: both St Cuthbert's and the minster area have been redefined for this period to take account of this.

### 4.4.b *Communications: Roads and streets*

WEL/319, WEL/408

#### Late Saxon and early medieval streets

It is possible that many of the major streets in the city centre date from the 10th century. The framework as envisaged by Scrase consists of two major south-west to north-east streets (Chamberlain Street and St Cuthbert/ High Street (the former representing the old through route, and the latter the new road to the Cathedral gate), joined by cross streets and with parallel back lanes (squeezed to the south because of the stream valley). This represents a considerable adaptation of the earlier informal layout. The southern routes into the city did not wholly fit into this semi-regular pattern, but to the east the routes were more regular than in the medieval period with at least one major crossroads.

*The streets in existence are taken from the sketch maps of Scrase (1989a) and Rodwell (1982a). Those not following modern street lines (such as the back lanes) are somewhat approximate*

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

WEL/318

#### The late Saxon and Norman cathedrals

The Diocese of Somerset, with Wells at its heart, was created in 909. The area of the first Cathedral, which belonged to the late Saxon period, extended as far as the old stream course until the creation of the moated Palace in the 13th century. The Camery excavations identified the site of the late-Saxon Cathedral, which is thought to directly overlie the earlier minster. Only the eastern end was uncovered, and not enough is known yet to reconstruct the plan: the remains of the main structure lie under the cloisters. East of the Cathedral, the mortuary chapel was rebuilt as St Mary's Chapel, which partially obscured the early-Saxon burials.

The first Norman Cathedral, consecrated in 1148 by Robert of Lewes, appears to have been largely an extensive refurbishment of the Saxon one and incorporated the first Lady Chapel (St Mary's Chapel). This Cathedral probably remained in service until the completion of the new

Cathedral. Its remains were partially uncovered in the Camery excavations, but not enough to reconstruct the plan.

Excavations have shown that a considerable depth of deposits - more than 3m - survives in some places on the south side of the Cathedral. Other archaeological remains associated with the Saxo-Norman complexes which may therefore still survive in the open areas around the present day standing buildings include ranges of earlier buildings: to the north (where it is thought Giso's Saxo-Norman cloisters were); south (domestic ranges, including a dormitory and refectory); and west (in the atrium or open area outside the west door, which became a market overspill area in the medieval period). The remains of buildings on the old Saxon alignment can be seen in the modern Cathedral precinct. There are also conduits running from the springs through the area, which have been picked up in the excavations (Rodwell, 1981a).

*The area has been defined according to the street plan proposed by Scrase (1989a).*

WEL/305

St Cuthbert's

St Cuthbert's parish church (SMR 24793, SMR LB 20454) may have been founded in the 10th century, after Cathedral status was granted (but see above, p9). The earliest fabric is 12th century (a pillar piscina) and most of the standing fabric is 13th to 15th century. There is therefore very likely to be an earlier church, with its associated churchyard, on the same site. The churchyard is thought to have originally occupied the whole late-Saxon block (Aston & Leech, 1977; Scrase, 1989a), and so there may be widespread early burials. The site marked the western limit of the medieval commercial centre and by the 13th century was largely built over by properties in which the Bishop had an interest (see below, p20).

*The area has been defined from the modern street plan and from the suggestions of Aston & Leech (1977) and Scrase (1989a).*

WEL/317

St Etheldreda's chapel

St Etheldreda's may have been founded in the 10th century (or earlier). Referred to by various names throughout the medieval period (including St Thomas the Martyr, and St Andrew - probably a misreading of St Audrey, itself a corruption of St Etheldreda), it is placed by the documentary evidence somewhere in Southover. There is also documentary evidence that it had its own cemetery, and that it was a significant landlord in the medieval city. Tradition places it on the site of the Methodist Chapel, which Scrase suggests is supported by much circumstantial evidence, including the discovery of human bones during vestry construction at the Chapel (Scrase, 1982a). There is potential for further documentary research since the manor of St Etheldreda survived until the 18th century.

*The site of St Etheldreda's is suggested by tradition and Scrase (1982a, 1993).*

4.4.d Settlement (Urban) (SMR 24810)

(a) Commercial core

(i) Markets

WEL/311

Broad Street market

The early medieval market grants refer to three markets. Modern Broad Street, Queen Street and St Cuthbert Street/ High Street form a triangle, typical of market areas. Scrase suggests that this was in fact the intended 10th century market place, although Rodwell sees it as a later insertion. Whichever is true, there is documentary evidence that it was built up very quickly in the early medieval period, whilst markets in the High Street and outside the Cathedral gates flourished.

The built up island in this area was affected by the 19th century widening of Wet Lane into Broad Street in order to carry the turnpike traffic. Medieval properties may still underlie the western edge of Broad Street.

*This area has been defined from the modern city plan and Scrase's suggested Saxon street framework (1989a).*

WEL/312

High Street/ Market Place markets

It is not certain that the High Street/ Market Place market area functioned as such in the Saxon period. However, after the building of the Cathedral, it was directly outside the west door. There are references in a charter dated earlier than 1160 to a well established market spilling over into the atrium and disturbing the Norman ecclesiastics (Rodwell 1982a). It would therefore seem reasonable to suppose a late-Saxon market focus here too.

The Market Place flourished in the medieval period. The walling off of the precinct appears to have reinforced the commercial character of the area, leading to the establishment of new late medieval burgages by Beckington in 1451. The medieval markets, however, are documented as stretching as far as St Cuthbert's. It was only by the 16th century that market activity was concentrated in the east. Simes' 1735 map shows a shambles and a central block of encroaching properties just west of the Market Place, as well as a Market Cross (SMR 24794, a 16th century structure replacing the medieval High Cross) and conduit and a 17th century Market Hall (SMR 24795). Most of these features were demolished in the mid- to late-18th century, partly because they were dilapidated and partly in connection with the establishment of the turnpikes and the enlargement of the market. A 1992 watching brief in the Market Place showed that post-medieval building foundations survive.

*This area has been defined from Simes' 1735 map.*

(ii) *Town plots*

The pattern of development is far from clear and the rate at which the late-Saxon street pattern was infilled is not yet known. It is unlikely that such development was evenly spread and one might anticipate foci around the Cathedral and St Cuthbert's. Recent work tracing burgage rents has indeed suggested that the early medieval urban nucleus included properties in Chamberlain Street, High Street, Mill Street, Sadler Street, and St Cuthbert Street, as well as in Southover (Scrase, 1993).

The blocks in the city centre described below are therefore likely to contain archaeology of varying character and intensity. It is likely that some of the areas included in the town plots in fact remained paddock until the 19th century. However, recent excavations in Wells have shown that it is not safe to assume that land marked as paddock, garden or orchard on the 18th century maps is empty of earlier archaeology: it must be instead assumed that all these areas have potential.

WEL/316

Burgages (High Street north)

This central block contains the most characteristic town or burgage plots, long and narrow. Scrase has shown that they are unlikely to have been laid out as extensive blocks of controlled plots, but probably developed from initially somewhat more spacious plots - consistent with the idea that the supply of space in town at first exceeded demand. Although some larger plots have survived in this block (notably the Convent plot), it has been subjected to intense modern development, which has affected the backs more than the frontages. At least two old lanes have disappeared.

*This area has been defined from the modern town plan and Scrase's suggested Saxon street framework (1989a).*

WEL/315

Town plots (High Street south)

These are urban plots of uncertain status, backing onto the mill stream and the old stream valley. They too have been extensively developed. The backs of these plots have archaeological potential

because of their proximity to water, particularly where they abut the old stream course: this was only infilled during the later medieval period and has been shown to contain deep and quite well-preserved deposits.

*This area has been defined according to modern/ Saxon street lines to the north and west (Scrase, 1989a). To the south it is defined by the old stream course and the limits of the Bishop's lands and mill, and to the east by the limits of the Cathedral area.*

WEL/309 Town plots (St Cuthbert Street south)

These plots are potentially early, forming part of a nucleus around St Cuthbert's which may pre- or post-date the establishment of the town plan.

*This area is defined from the modern/ Saxon street plan (Scrase, 1989a) together with suggestions in Rodwell, 1982a.*

WEL/314 Town plots (Chamberlain Street north)

Much of this area, particularly the western end, shows as open ground on the 18th century maps. In this period, Chamberlain Street was a fashionable residential area (Scrase, 1993), and its openness may be a result of this, the implication being that properties may have been more cramped in the medieval period. However, the pace and extent of medieval urban development is not well understood in this area. Archaeological observations during the laying of foundations to the rear of one of the plots in 1994 were consistent with the presence of open land.

*This area is defined from the suggested Saxon street plan (Scrase, 1989a), Simes' 1735 map and the 1788 map.*

(b) *The Liberty*

WEL/313 The Liberty

These areas are somewhat different from the other areas of city. Close to the possible original settlement focus at the crossroads, and within the 10th century framework, they may contain early urban plots. However, with the establishment of a commercial centre to the west, the role of these areas may have changed. The small rectangle east of the postulated original Dulcote road became part of the precinct in the 13th century. The other blocks lay largely within the part of the Liberty of St Andrew devoted to the housing of the ecclesiastics, and partly within the late medieval precinct. They therefore enclose larger plots which can be expected to contain the remains of (comparatively well documented) earlier versions of the many fine buildings which have survived. Surviving buildings include the Old Deanery (SMR LB 20318), the Vicars' Close and Hall (SMR LB 20510, 20511, 20512), and several other houses or collegiate properties; earlier buildings which may survive include the late medieval College of Montroy, which was replaced by the Cedars in the 18th century.

The western edge of the largest of these blocks includes the new medieval road, New Street (see also p21), which existed by the 13th century. Along this major route, the character of the archaeology is likely to be somewhat different, especially to the west of the road (since this area was eventually excluded from the Liberty). Documentary evidence also suggests that it was one of the areas of Wells that suffered most from the late medieval recession, with some properties falling into disuse (Scrase, 1993).

The most recent excavations in Wells have taken place within the Liberty, and have shown that there are extensive archaeological remains even in the garden areas. Limited archaeological observations made during the restoration of Vicars' Close in the 1970s and 1980s also suggest that some terracing has occurred on certain sites. Whilst disturbing some earlier deposits, this process may also have protected others.

*These areas follow Scrase's suggested sequence of development (1989a).*



*(c) Suburbs*

WEL/310

Southover

Southover's plots may have Saxon origins. The area which the early chapel (WEL/317) served lay beyond the main framework of the Saxon town, probably originally separated from it by meadowland. The occupied area is thought to have expanded in the early medieval period, when references to burgage rents occur (Scrase, 1993). However, the laying out of the Bishop's Park in the 13th century appears to have stifled further urbanisation in this area, forcing it north into Tucker Street (Scrase, 1993).

The marked area may contain remains both of Saxon occupation and of early medieval urban properties, possibly on a slightly different alignment from those of the later medieval suburb (see below, p20). Later developments are likely to have affected the archaeological deposits, though it is possible that the Park may have protected some to the south, and that preservation may be good adjacent to the streams.

*The marked area is somewhat conjectural, based on the chapel site and on the information in Scrase, 1989a and 1993.*

WEL/402

Tucker Street

See below, p21.

WEL/403

St Thomas Street

There are very early documentary references to properties in St Thomas Street (13th century onwards), consistent with an early origin for residence in the area. The suburb, which was known as Byestwalles, grew up on both sides of the road. Some of the properties towards the western end of the street were in the Bishop's hands. In the post-medieval period, however, the area seems to have declined somewhat in prestige if not in extent (Scrase, 1993).

*These areas have been defined from the 1788 map, supported by information in Scrase, 1989a.*

*4.4.e Settlement (Rural)*

Wells was unusually compact until the 20th century, with both the topography and the pattern of land ownership preventing the development of smaller settlements within the area under consideration (the modern urban area). However, the SMR contains information on extensive surviving medieval landscapes on the north side of the city. As well as field systems, a small number of possible house platforms (eg SMR 25994, 25996) are recorded. These are not shown in this report.

*4.4.f Industrial sites**(a) Mills*

WEL/404, WEL/405, WEL/406

The three town mills

The Palace Mill (SMR 24802), and the Bishop's in- and out-mills (SMR 24803, 24804) are marked. It is not known how ancient any of these are: one or more of them may correspond with the mills of Domesday. Fragments of the in-mill may remain in the structure of Mill House on Mill Street. The Clares Carlton excavation was close to the Palace Mill, but no early structural remains were found.

Not mapped

Other milling areas were to the south-west at Keward, and to the north, between Walpole and Wells). There was a fulling mill just to the north of the junction of College Road and North Road, which was lost when Stoberry Park was laid out (Scrase, 1982b). If there was a Priory mill in town too, it would have had to have been on St John Street, between the Bishop's mills.

*(b) Other sites*

The principal industrial area was Tucker Street (see p21).

## 5. MEDIEVAL/ POST-MEDIEVAL

### (Map E)

Included in this section are the 13th century and later developments associated with the establishment of the Medieval Cathedral, Bishop's Palace and Priory, together with medieval and post-medieval encroachment and expansion.

### 5.1 Archaeological knowledge

A series of small excavations around the Cathedral have revealed extensive post-medieval made land in this part of the City, but its significance is uncertain. The SMR contains references to many small sites in the surrounding area, including several mills, limekilns, and ponds.

### 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. Wells 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, although it was one of several towns which suffered badly as a result of the Dissolution.

### 5.3 Standing structures

Many medieval structures survive in Wells, and many of these are Listed, with an unusually high proportion being rated Grade I or II\*. High grade Listed Buildings cluster around the Cathedral (SMR LB 20308): these include Browne's Gate (SMR LB 20497), Penniless Porch (SMR LB 20419) and the Bishop's Eye (SMR LB 20416); the Old Deanery (SMR LB 20318), the Vicars' Close and Hall (SMR LB 20510, 20511, 20512); several other buildings in the Liberty (SMR LB 20403, 20407, 20321, 20452, 20460); the Bishop's Palace (SMR LB 20300); and several structures in the Market Place (SMR LB 20411, 20409). A second focus is St Cuthbert's Church (SMR LB 20454), which is close to the Bubwith Almshouses (SMR LB 20326), and the Priory (SMR LB 20456). Other medieval Listed Buildings, some Grade I or II\* and others (not mentioned individually in this report) rated Grade II, are scattered throughout the city centre and along St Thomas Street.

There are also many post-medieval Listed Buildings, including a number of Grade II\* buildings, scattered throughout the city. These are not mentioned individually in the text.

Map E shows Listed Buildings of Medieval and post-medieval origin in the centre of Wells.

### 5.4 Archaeological components, shown on Map E

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

Components described under earlier periods are shown lightly shaded on Map E. These include many parts of the late Saxon/ early medieval town and suburbs, and much of the street plan. Restricted by topography and the Bishop's estates, Wells hardly expanded at all during this period, with most redevelopment occurring within the medieval town. The centre of the town contained numerous inns by the end of this period (Scrase, 1987). There are several Listed Buildings dating from this period, scattered throughout the city. The maps also show a very few isolated buildings along the main roads just outside the city.

#### 5.4.b Communications: Roads and streets

Whilst streets in the western part in the city remained fairly static in the medieval period, the eastern half saw several major alterations. There is not space to go into the details here (see Scrase, 1989a), but the changes will be described briefly, and the main problem areas highlighted. Much of the work on changing street alignments has been theoretical, based on plot histories. The potential role of archaeology in testing the (sometimes controversial) theories is very great.

#### WEL/415 Tor Street

There were major redevelopments in the late 12th and early 13th century, connected with the realignment of the Cathedral, and the laying out of the Bishop's Palace and Park. These affected the roads on the east and (perhaps) the north sides of the precinct: Tor Lane was moved east, destroying the crossroads.

The licenced diversion connected with the walling of the precinct in 1340 probably had comparatively little affect, though it may have affected Sadler Street to the west. Whilst the alignment may have been unaffected, it may have been transformed from a Cathedral-oriented pedestrian way to a commercial street (recognised in the late medieval period by the creation of burgages on its eastern side).

*From Scrase, 1989a.*

WEL/416, WEL/505

New Street

New Street, created in order to improve the Bath and Bristol routes (which had been of less importance before the medieval period), was in existence by the mid 13th century. The diversion of Milton Lane was connected with the creation of this new road. The north end of New Street is also an area which has seen complex and continuing changes of layout (Scrase, 1989a).

*From Scrase, 1989a.*

WEL/420

Moniers Lane

Apart from the major redevelopments, there are known to have been a series of lanes and back entries in the town blocks, and many of these have since been obliterated. There were, for example, at least two (Swan Lane and Moniers Lane) between Sadler Street and Union Street. Moniers Lane has been the subject of research (Scrase, 1989b) and is shown on Map E.

*From Scrase, 1989b.*

5.4.c *Water*

Major alterations were made to the water flow through Wells in the medieval period. The construction of the moated Bishop's Palace required the rerouting of the stream, achieved through various conduits and drains which were elaborated throughout the period. The mill stream was probably also created in the medieval period (although it is conceivable that it is older). There are many other hidden conduits and watercourses in Wells, including the Lortebourne or Ludbourne which ran on the south side of Chamberlain Street (and the then Beggar Street). These have long been a source of interest but are still not fully understood. The work of H E Balch (1925) is still the most detailed treatment and should be consulted for further information. A little light has been shed on the subject, with details of the old stream course revealed in the Clares Carlton excavations, and of medieval conduits in the Camery. Other developments have encountered old drains. The subject is a most important one, not only because of the archaeological potential of infilled watercourses, but also because of the effect of the old watercourses on current drainage patterns.

WEL/417

St Andrew's Well

St Andrew's Well (SMR 23034, SM Som 240b) has apparently been a focus of veneration from at least the Roman period. The form of the pool around the spring has probably been altered during successive phases of building and landscaping, and would repay further study: the shape shown is that on Simes' 1735 map. The well house is of 15th century date.

*From the 1735 map.*

WEL/501

Post-medieval watercourses

Some of the streams and ponds appearing on Simes' map of 1735 are reproduced on Map E.

*From the 1735 map.*

5.4.d *Manors and estates*

WEL/413

The Bishop's Palace

The moated medieval Bishop's Palace (SMR 25370, SMR LB 20300, SM Som 240) was constructed in two major phases in the 13th century. Its construction necessitated the diversion

of the stream which had previously probably formed the boundary of the minster/ Cathedral area. The earlier Palace buildings, Joscelin's suite (1230-40) stand, whilst Burnell's hall and chapel (1275-92) are ruinous.

*This area is defined from the present day moat line.*

WEL/401

Bishop's land

Most of the land to the west of the Palace itself was orchard and paddock attached to the Bishop's home farm. The old stream course ran across the field and was gradually infilled during the medieval period, though a stream still shows on Simes' 1735 map. The area also contains the Bishop's Tithe Barn (SMR 24798, SMR LB 20498, SM Som 024), and, in the extreme north-west, the Bishop's in-mill. Part of the western field, which still lies open, is marked as Bell Close on Simes' 1735 map.

East of the Cathedral the springs formed part of a garden complex, known as the Camera by 1735.

*The area has been defined from the 1735 map and from the analysis of property ownership at that date in Scrase (1989a)*

WEL/409

The Bishop's Park

The Bishop's Park (SMR 24808) was laid out as a deer park by Joscelin in the early 13th century. The boundaries are as deduced by Scrase (1978, 1989a). This large area is mostly field, but probably contains the remains of several diverted roads, including the Dultingcote and Coxley roads. Part of the area is now a Registered Park (Grade II).

*The area has been defined from the map in Scrase, 1978.*

5.4.e Burial sites, religious houses and places of worship

WEL/412

The medieval cathedral

The medieval Cathedral (SMR LB 20308), begun by Reginald de Bohun (c1180) and consecrated in 1239 by the Joscelyn who returned the See to Wells, was realigned closer to the liturgically correct east-west axis. The Cathedral and the associated buildings, which include the cloisters, the extended Lady Chapel and Chapter House, as well as the Close gateways (Browne's Gate, SMR LB 20497, SM Som 233; Penniless Porch, SMR LB 20419; and the Bishop's Eye, SMR LB 20416) have been extensively described elsewhere. The late medieval Lady Chapel of Bishop Stillington, which was destroyed in the 16th century, was partially excavated in 1894 and 1978-9 (Rodwell, 1981a).

Burials can be expected in the areas established as cemeteries according to a document of 1243: to the east (the ancient cemetery, subsequently the Vicars' Cemetery), west (the Great Cemetery) and in the Cloisters (the Canons' Cemetery). The medieval buildings also overlie earlier burial areas. There is documentary evidence of a number of later medieval and post-medieval features - including tree rows, enclosing gates and walls, and encroaching buildings - in the Great Cemetery. Archaeological observations and works in the Cathedral Green area have, however, so far revealed only 18th and 19th century deposits.

The extreme east of the Cathedral area was redeveloped in the 15th century for commercial reasons (see below, p20), leading to the creation of a set of burgages across the wall line. This area, and that area around the town hall which may originally have been part of the precinct, has been affected by subsequent urban development, but the rest of the area has been and remains protected.

*The area has been defined from the 1735 map and from the analysis of property ownership at that date in Scrase (1989a). The property of the Bishops at that date has been excluded from the Cathedral area and included in that described under p18.*

WEL/410

St John's Priory

St John's Priory (SMR 24796) was endowed in the early 13th century, initially as a hospital, and dissolved in 1539. Scrase has shown that the precinct lands belonging to the Priory were not as extensive as was previously thought, though it was a major landlord in the city. The area marked here is said by him to represent the maximum extent of the Priory's holdings south of the millstream, achieved only a few decades before its dissolution (the Priory also held land in the "Tucker Street" area: see above, p21). Most of this land is paddock and orchard (the paddock probably formerly part of the Southover plots): the Priory itself lay close to St John's Street, south of the mill stream, and the building north of the mill stream traditionally associated with the Priory (SMR LB 20456) may in fact have been the Priors' House. However, the so-called Priory Mill was not in fact the mill belonging to the Priory (Scrase, 1982b).

The Priory became a wool factory in the post-medieval period, and then a school, which was rebuilt as the Central School in the 19th century. Foundations and flooring probably belonging to the Priory were observed during the construction of the Central School, but not properly recorded. Priory Road and Princes Road, constructed in the 19th century, cut across the Priory Lands. Much of the land along the road, particularly to the north, remained undeveloped until the 20th century. The archaeology to the south and east is likely to be of more importance, the former because of the land's previous attachment to the Southover plots, and the latter because of the Priory buildings. It is not known how much survives of the archaeology.

*These areas have been defined from maps in Scrase, 1989a.*

## 5.4.f Settlement (Urban)

## (a) Commercial Core

WEL/414

Encroachments

Areas of documented (relatively late) medieval encroachment in an otherwise stable town plan include the Broad Street market triangle and much of the land formerly associated with St Cuthbert's. The latter included St Saviour's Hospital (Bubwith Almshouses, SMR 24797, SMR LB 20326), which was founded in 1424 (but largely rebuilt in 1884).

*From the 1735 and 1788 maps.*

WEL/411

Beckington's New Works

These are mid 15th-century burgages, formalised as part of Beckington's New Works, but originating in commercial properties built up against the Precinct wall in the 14th century. A range of houses associated with the 15th-century rebuild survives (SMR LB 20409).

*The area has been defined from the standing remains and from Aston & Leech, 1977.*

## (b) The Liberty

WEL/418

The Canon's house

Between the Bishop's lands and the Market Place was the site of one of the Canons' houses, subdivided into tenements in the medieval period, and then demolished to make way for the 19th century market extensions and Town Hall.

*From Scrase 1989a.*

## (c) Suburbs

WEL/419

Southover

The laying out of the Bishop's Park involved the diversion of the Glastonbury road and, perhaps, the realignment of the strip of properties on its north side. It also appears to have stifled the urban development of Southover (Scrase, 1993). The plots there remained semi-rural for the rest of the medieval period (much of the land south of the mill stream which became part of the precinct of St John's Priory was originally attached to the Southover properties). It has been suggested that

it may at this time have formed a semi-agricultural settlement housing the Bishop's workers (Scrase, 1989a).

Southover may therefore contain archaeological deposits of great interest, including remains of Saxon occupation, more urban early urban medieval plots and realigned later medieval and post-medieval occupation. It is possible that the backs may contain remains of small scale industry, which may be well preserved near the stream.

*These areas have been defined from information in Scrase, 1989a, and Simes' 1735 map.*

WEL/402

#### Tucker Street

The Tucker Street suburb was primarily associated with the cloth industry. Accordingly, whilst it thrived in the medieval period, particularly after the urban development of Southover had been blocked, it declined somewhat in the post-medieval. It is therefore possible that the 18th century maps, which are the main source for the marked areas, may not represent the full extent of Medieval occupation.

The main built up area was probably to the north of the road (according to the 18th century maps), although documentary evidence for the medieval origin of the more westerly plots is uncertain. The land to the south of Tucker Street was much less developed, possibly being used for racks, though there are documentary references to some properties there, including some west of West Street (Scrase, 1993; 1996, in litt.). Much of the land along the stream (east of West Street) belonged to the Priory by the later medieval period, though it is not clear that it was anything other than the orchard and meadow depicted on Simes' 1735 map. A recent archaeological survey and evaluation off Ethel Street suggested that an old stream course, diverted to feed the medieval mill, may have crossed the area. The evaluation results were consistent with the use of the land for agricultural purposes until relatively recently, with little or no structural evidence being recovered, only isolated artefacts (including material of prehistoric date) in silt deposits.

The land behind the street frontage remained largely open until the 20th century, but has now been heavily developed.

*From the 1735 and 1788 maps, and information from A.J. Scrase (1996, in litt.).*

WEL/502

#### New Street

There was suburban expansion along New Street, apparently reaching its maximum extent in about 1350. Documents show that in the later medieval period plots which had been built up were being converted into gardens or closes (Scrase, 1993). However, New Street was a suburb of some quality, being adjacent to the Liberty and containing a number of properties owned by the Canons and Colleges (including Mountroy House, the site of which belonged first to the Bubwith Almshouse and, by the 16th century, to the College of Montroy). It became a fashionable area and is likely to contain the remains of properties of some status.

It is possible that the area shown, which represents the post-medieval extent of occupation, may not reflect the full extent of Medieval development.

*From the 1788 map.*

### 5.5 Settlement (Rural)

See comments on p16. The SMR also contains information on a number of Post-Medieval landscape features.

#### 5.5.a Mills

WEL/407

##### Keward Mill

Upper Keward Mill is of Medieval origin, and was probably the Priory Mill. It became a fulling mill in the Post-Medieval period. See also p16.

*The sites of the mills are described in Scrase, 1982b and 1989a.*

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

(Map F)

### 6.1 Context

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

Wells 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. Wells was one of only two of the Boroughs and Urban Districts which was principally a market town in this period.

### 6.2 Standing structures

The Listed Buildings of this period are shown on Map F.

### 6.3 Archaeological components, shown on Map F

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

Components described under earlier periods are shown lightly shaded on Map F. In the late 18th and the 19th centuries there was extensive piecemeal redevelopment of buildings in the centre of the city, reflected in the number of Listed Buildings within this area (see Map F). These were generally commercial and residential premises. There was also some light industrial development south of the Town Hall: the Clares Carlton site demonstrated the survival of archaeology in this area, but no assessment has been made of the extent to which the urban archaeology has survived the rash of 19th century adaptations.

In the south-west quarter, the building of new roads and the railways resulted in considerable alterations: in this area, therefore, new urban components have been defined.

*All components have been defined from the 1888 1:2500 and 1904 1:10560 OS maps, except where stated.*

#### 6.3.b Communications

##### (a) Roads

The major developments in 19th century Wells affected the western outskirts of the city more than the centre.

WEL/601

##### The turnpikes

The Wells Turnpike Trust was set up in 1753 (and not dissolved until 1883). The main routes to Bath, Bristol, Frome, Shepton Mallet and Glastonbury were all turnpiked under its aegis; the Highbridge turnpike was separately administered. Associated features include the Keward tollhouse (SMR LB 20349), the Stoberry Gate tollhouse (SMR LB 20301) and the Tor Hill tollhouse (SMR LB 20502).

*From Bentley & Murless 1985 & 1987.*

WEL/602 Priory Road and Broad Street  
The designation of the turnpike routes, together with the coming of the railways, led to the creation of Priory Road (which bisected the lands once belonging to the Priory), and to the widening of Wet Lane into Broad Street (which involved the cutting back of properties on the triangular island).

(b) *Railways*

WEL/603 The railways  
The railways also came in on the west side of the city, running through what had been the Bishop's Park and skirting the Tucker Street suburbs. The three railway projects, from Glastonbury (Somerset Central/ Somerset & Dorset), Shepton Mallet (East Somerset) and the main line via Cheddar (Bristol & Exeter), opened between 1859 and 1870. Two termini on Priory Road and a station at Tucker Street co-existed in the 19th century.

6.3.c *Water*

WEL/616 The reservoir  
A reservoir was built near the asylums.

6.3.d *Estates*

WEL/618 Stoberry Park  
Stoberry Park was laid out in the 19th century. The southern part was built over in the 20th century, but the northern part (SMR 24807) contains the remains of lynchets and field systems (SMR 25905); leats (feeding a water meadow), and stock ponds (SMR 25909); and possibly medieval house platforms (SMR 25994). To the north of the park itself was Stoberry Warren (SMR 24433), which contains a probable pillow mound.

*From the 19th century maps and the SMR.*

6.3.e *Burial sites and places of worship*

WEL/604 St Thomas's Church  
The construction of St Thomas's Church and vicarage consolidated the suburban development of eastern Wells.

WEL/605 Bath Road cemetery  
St Thomas's cemetery east along the Bath Road.

WEL/607 Wells Cemetery  
The combined Wells Cemetery on Wookey Road, extended in the 20th century.

6.3.f *Settlement (Urban)*

(a) *Commercial core*

WEL/606 Priory Road  
Urban developments around Priory Road included the new Princes Road market.

(b) *Suburbs*

WEL/608 19th century suburbs  
There was suburban expansion along the main roads, including some encroachment onto the old road verges - on the south side of Southover or Portway for example, where characteristically shallow plots survive in places (Scrase, 1993). Expansion to the east, along the Bath road, consolidated the St Thomas Street suburb, which had acquired its own church and cemetery. East of the church, the development was of typical Victorian large plots. To the west of the city, on the other hand, smaller terraces developed late in the 19th century close to the railway, mostly on greenfield sites, but also affecting the south side of Tucker Street. This development also included a recreation ground.



- WEL/609      The Workhouse  
The workhouse on Glastonbury Road subsequently became the Hospital. The main building is Listed (SMR LB 20347). The complex was extended this century.
- WEL/610      Wells Cottage Hospital.
- WEL/611      The isolation hospital.
- WEL/612      The lunatic asylum  
The lunatic asylum complex was constructed outside the city to the east. It contained the asylum buildings, hospital, gasworks and sewage works.
- 6.3.g *Settlement (Rural): Farms*
- WEL/619      19th century farms  
There were several farms close to the city centre, three of them on the former Park land.
- 6.3.h *Industrial sites*
- WEL/613      Sewage works  
These sewage works, to the south-west of the city, were extended in the 20th century.
- WEL/614      The gasworks, Southover.
- WEL/615      Railway yards etc  
Railway yards and buildings, the adjacent coalyard and other industrial developments, including mills.
- WEL/617      Quarries  
Quarries at Torhill (extended in the 20th century) and Stoberry.
- Not mapped      The major mills (paper mills) lay further out, between Wookey and Wookey Hole and at Dulcote.

## 7. 20TH CENTURY (Map G)

### 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.

Wells 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 Settlement components, shown on Map G

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

Many of the open areas and plot backs of Wells, including those in the most prestigious areas, have been gradually infilled by residential or commercial buildings. The extent to which this has damaged the archaeological deposits, particularly in the potentially rich backs, remains unknown. Wells has also expanded west and east across agricultural land, with most building being in the form of residential estates. The city is now connected to Wookey Hole and, less markedly, Wookey, by ribbon development which has not been mapped on the GIS.

*All components are defined from the 1938, 1972-5 and 1995 maps and digital maps, except where stated.*

*7.2.b Communications: Roads*

Wells saw no major road developments in the earlier part of this century, but the Wells relief road scheme will now affect the western side of the city. This road is designed to reuse the old railway lines.

*7.2.c Estates*WEL/702 Milton Lodge

The Milton Lodge parkland (a Registered Park) is an early 20th century establishment. The park preserves medieval and post-medieval landscape features (SMR 25827,25896, 25897, 25900).

*7.2.d Burial sites and places of worship*WEL/706 Portway cemetery extension.*7.2.e Settlement (Urban)**(a) Commercial*WEL/707 Keward Mill Trading Estate*(b) Suburbs*WEL/701 20th century suburbs

There have been extensive developments of housing estates around Wells this century, particularly, but not exclusively, in the last few decades. These have been largely on greenfield sites to the east and west of the city: the southern part of Stoberry Park has also been infilled.

In the early part of the century there were allotments on Southover, Wookey Hole Lane, Bath Road and Rowdens Road. Much of this land has been subsequently redeveloped.

Several schools, with associated fields and amenities, have been set up or move beyond the historic core. To the north on previously open land are the new Blue School buildings and the Secondary School; in Stoberry Park are the Stoberry schools. There is also a suburban school off Glastonbury Road, and there was a school on Southover in the early part of the century (since gone).

*7.2.f Settlement (Rural)*

In the 20th century, ribbon development has occurred between Wells and the neighbouring settlements. Where it lies beyond the 1995 civil parish boundary, this has not been mapped

WEL/705 20th century farms

New farms close to town on Beryl Lane and Ash Close.

*7.2.g Industrial sites*

Industrial areas are concentrated to the south-west and north-west of the city, the former partly in the old railway areas.

WEL/703 Glastonbury Road industrial areas

Various industrial developments off Glastonbury Road and Southover.

WEL/704 Quarries

Quarries at Torhill (extension) and Underwood, together with works near Underwood Quarry.

**V. THE POTENTIAL OF WELLS****1. Research interests**

As has already been suggested, the archaeological picture of Wells is extremely biased. It is very important to gain a clearer picture of the city development as a whole. Watching briefs on small developments give only limited insights at the best of times, and experience in Wells has been of particularly barren sites, where glimpses at least

of medieval archaeology were expected. The reasons for this are not properly understood and it is important that they should be in order that archaeological evaluation can proceed more accurately. Any chance of intervention within the centre of Wells should therefore be exploited fully.

The earlier sections of this report mentioned several differing theories of Wells' early development. Where these involve differing street alignments, they are clearly testable through archaeological investigation. The changing alignments of Wells' streets and watercourses are intrinsically interesting. Moreover, fuller understanding of them would lead to more accurate prediction of the character and quality of archaeological deposits. Recent documentary research has, too, raised the profile of plot development patterns within Wells and it would be valuable to be able to test these hypotheses too.

The area around the Cathedral which has in the past been the major focus of interest is indeed of great importance. It has already been proven to contain an outstanding sequence of religious buildings. It is possible that a comparable sequence of secular remains awaits discovery: a Roman villa may lie beneath the Cathedral and Saxon and medieval manor buildings may underlie the Bishop's Palace area.

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

The depth of deposits varies in Wells, with the greatest depth probably in the old stream valley, and away from the gravel platform on which the city centre rests. Waterlogged deposits are possible not only in the old stream valley near South Street and the recreation ground, but, in smaller pockets, in the various conduits and drains carrying water around Wells, the locations of not all of which are known.

## **3. Limitations**

In some areas of the City centre the deposits may be shallow, as they were in areas of the Clares Carlton excavations. Moreover, in the Cathedral area several small interventions revealed little but dumped soil at a depth at which earlier deposits, including burials, were expected. This may mean that such deposits have been damaged or destroyed in these areas, although the possibility exists that they may still exist at a greater depth (and therefore well protected).

There has been a lot of development and redevelopment in Wells City centre over the years. This has included modern development which until comparatively recently was not adequately monitored. Much may therefore have been lost but there is no accurate assessment of how much.

## **4. Extent of current protection**

The existing constraints are shown on Map H. The centre of Wells is covered by a Conservation Area, and the revised List of Buildings has over 300 entries. There are three Scheduled Monuments, the Bishop's Tithe Barn (SM Som 024), Browne's Gate (SM Som 233) and the Bishop's Palace (SM Som 240). The Scheduling is currently being revised but has been held up by an argument over ecclesiastical exemption. An AHAP has been defined to cover the medieval town. There are two registered parks and gardens - the Bishop's Park and the Milton Lodge and Combe parkland.

## **5. Management Proposals**

See the Archaeological Guidance Document.

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- 1971-3 OS 1:10000 + SMR

## VII. COMPONENT INDEXES

### 1. Component to map

Component	Map	Component	Map
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WEL/101	A	WEL/411	E
WEL/102	A	WEL/412	E
WEL/103	A	WEL/413	E
WEL/201	B	WEL/414	E
WEL/202	B	WEL/415	E
WEL/203	B	WEL/416	E
WEL/204	B	WEL/417	E
WEL/205	B	WEL/418	E
WEL/301	C	WEL/501	E
WEL/302	C	WEL/502	E
WEL/303	C	WEL/505	E
WEL/304	C	WEL/601	F
WEL/305	C,D	WEL/602	F
WEL/306	C	WEL/603	F
WEL/307	C	WEL/604	F
WEL/308	C	WEL/605	F
WEL/309	D	WEL/606	F
WEL/310	D	WEL/607	F
WEL/311	D	WEL/608	F
WEL/312	D	WEL/609	F
WEL/313	D	WEL/610	F
WEL/314	D	WEL/611	F
WEL/315	D	WEL/612	F
WEL/316	D	WEL/613	F
WEL/317	D	WEL/614	F
WEL/318	D	WEL/615	F
WEL/319	D	WEL/616	F
WEL/401	D,E	WEL/617	F
WEL/402	D	WEL/618	F
WEL/403	D	WEL/619	F
WEL/404	D	WEL/701	G
WEL/405	D	WEL/702	G
WEL/406	D	WEL/703	G
WEL/407	D	WEL/704	G
WEL/408	D	WEL/705	G
WEL/409	E	WEL/706	G
WEL/410	E	WEL/707	G

## 2. Component to page

WEL/101	6, 30
WEL/102	6, 30
WEL/103	6, 30
WEL/201	8, 30
WEL/202	7, 30
WEL/203	7, 9, 30
WEL/204	7, 9, 30
WEL/205	7, 9, 30
WEL/301	10, 30
WEL/302	9, 30
WEL/303	10, 30
WEL/304	9, 30
WEL/305	10, 13, 30
WEL/306	9, 30
WEL/307	9, 30

WEL/308	9, 30
WEL/309	15, 30
WEL/310	16, 30
WEL/311	13, 30
WEL/312	14, 30
WEL/313	15, 30
WEL/314	15, 30
WEL/315	14, 30
WEL/316	14, 30
WEL/317	13, 16, 30
WEL/318	12, 30
WEL/319	12, 30
WEL/401	19, 30
WEL/402	16, 21, 30
WEL/403	16, 30
WEL/404	16, 30
WEL/405	16, 30
WEL/406	16, 30
WEL/407	22, 30
WEL/408	12, 30
WEL/409	19, 30
WEL/410	20, 30
WEL/411	20, 30
WEL/412	19, 30
WEL/413	18, 30
WEL/414	20, 30
WEL/415	17, 30
WEL/416	18, 30
WEL/417	18, 30
WEL/418	20, 30
WEL/419	20
WEL/420	18
WEL/501	18, 30
WEL/502	21, 30
WEL/505	18, 30
WEL/601	22, 30
WEL/602	23, 30
WEL/603	23, 30
WEL/604	23, 30
WEL/605	23, 30
WEL/606	23, 30
WEL/607	23, 30
WEL/608	23, 30
WEL/609	24, 30
WEL/610	24, 30
WEL/611	24, 30
WEL/612	24, 30
WEL/613	24, 30
WEL/614	24, 30
WEL/615	24, 30
WEL/616	23, 30
WEL/617	24, 30
WEL/618	23, 30
WEL/619	24, 30
WEL/701	25, 30



WEL/702 .....	25, 30
WEL/703 .....	25, 30
WEL/704 .....	25, 30
WEL/705 .....	25, 30
WEL/706 .....	25, 30
WEL/707 .....	25, 30

## Maps

### **Map A – prehistoric**

### **Map B – Roman**

### **Map C – early Saxon**

Earlier components in yellow.

### **Map D – late Saxon/medieval**

Earlier components in yellow.

### **Map E – medieval and post-medieval**

Earlier components in yellow.

### **Map F – 19<sup>th</sup> century**

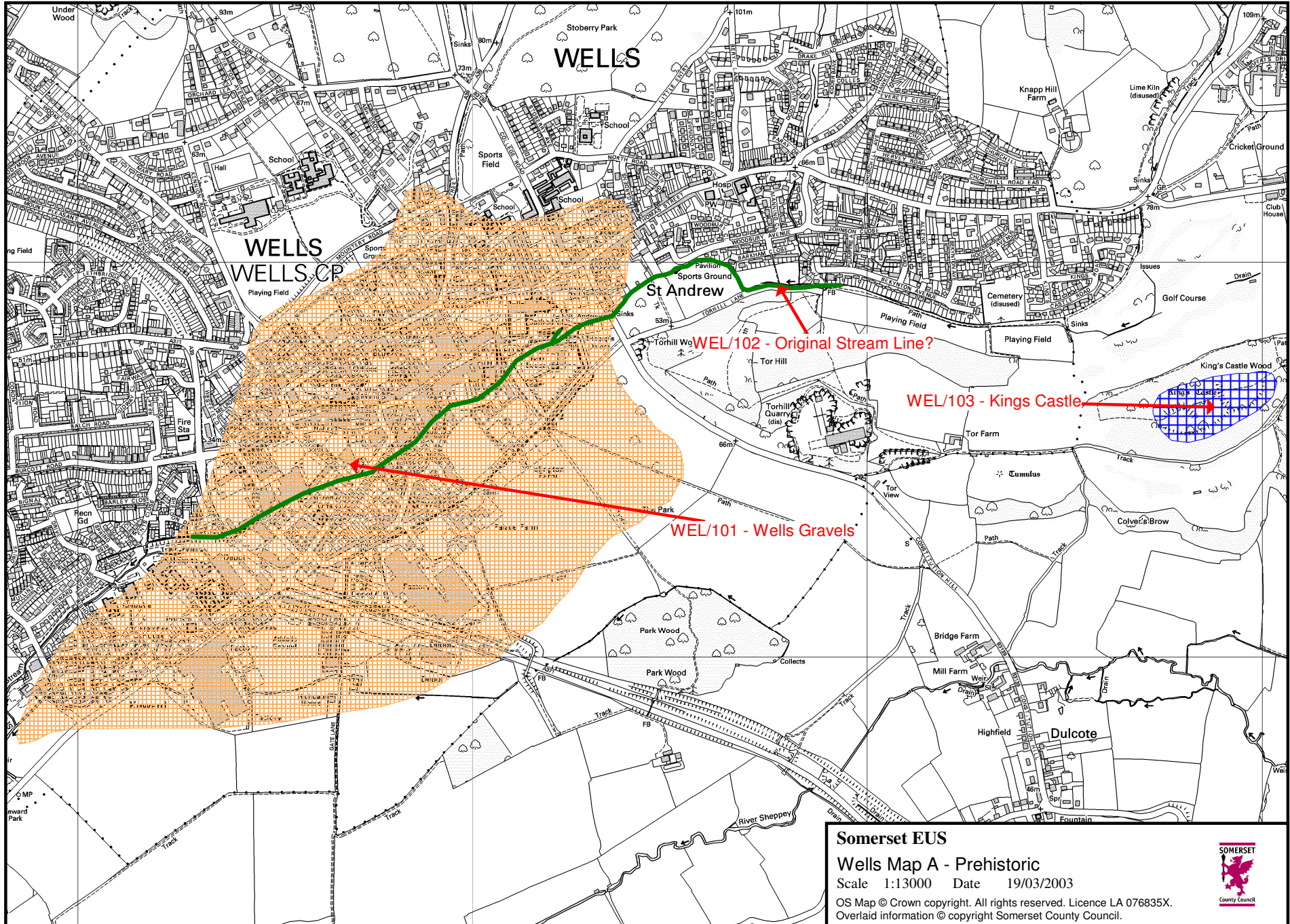
Earlier components in yellow.

### **Map G – 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Earlier components in yellow.

### **Map H - Existing designations**

Key: Scheduled Monuments (dark blue),  
Listed Buildings Grade I (light blue)  
Grade II\* (light green)  
Grade II (green)  
Registered Park (brown)  
Conservation Area (green)  
Area of High Archaeological Potential (pink)



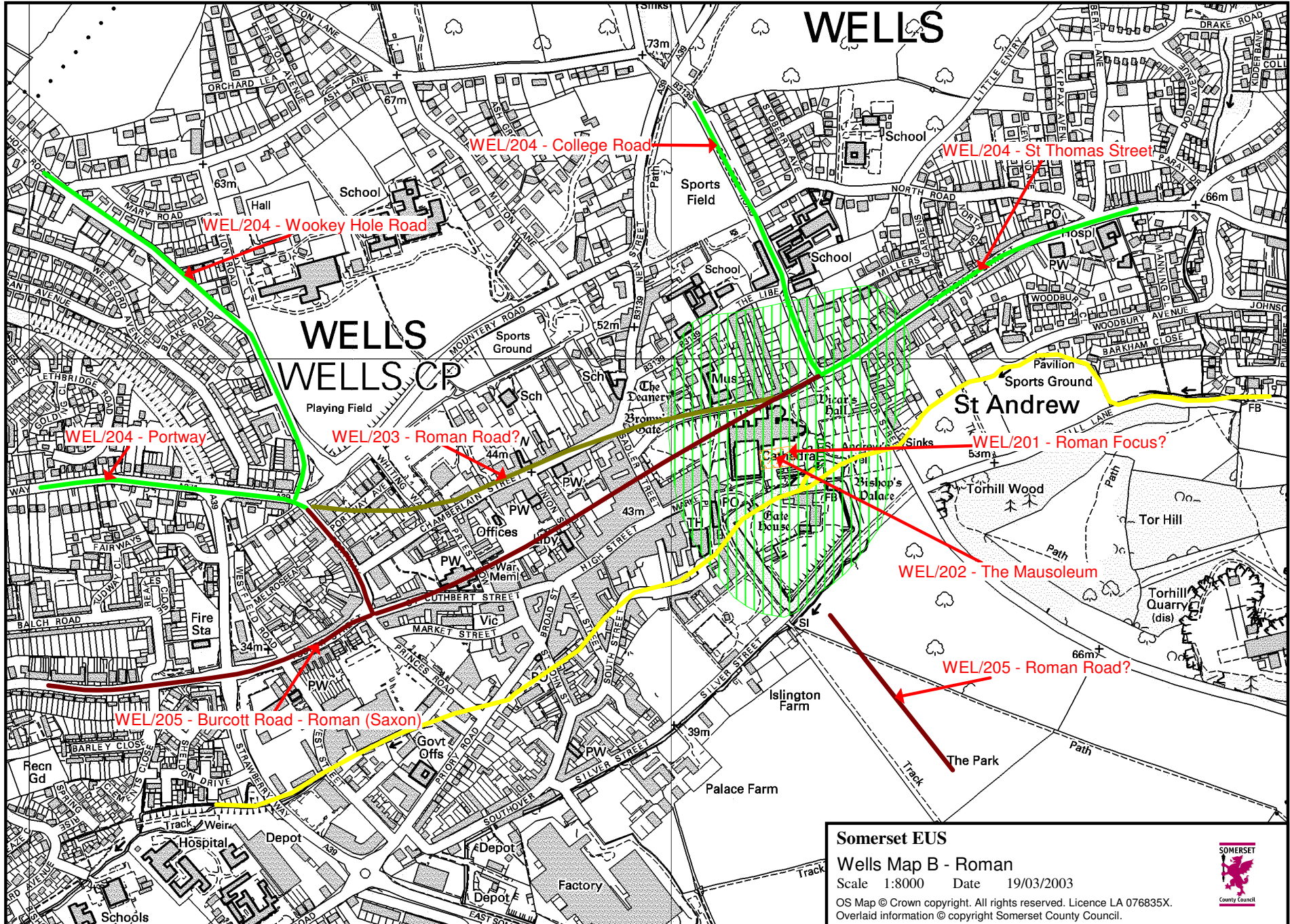
**Somerset EUS**

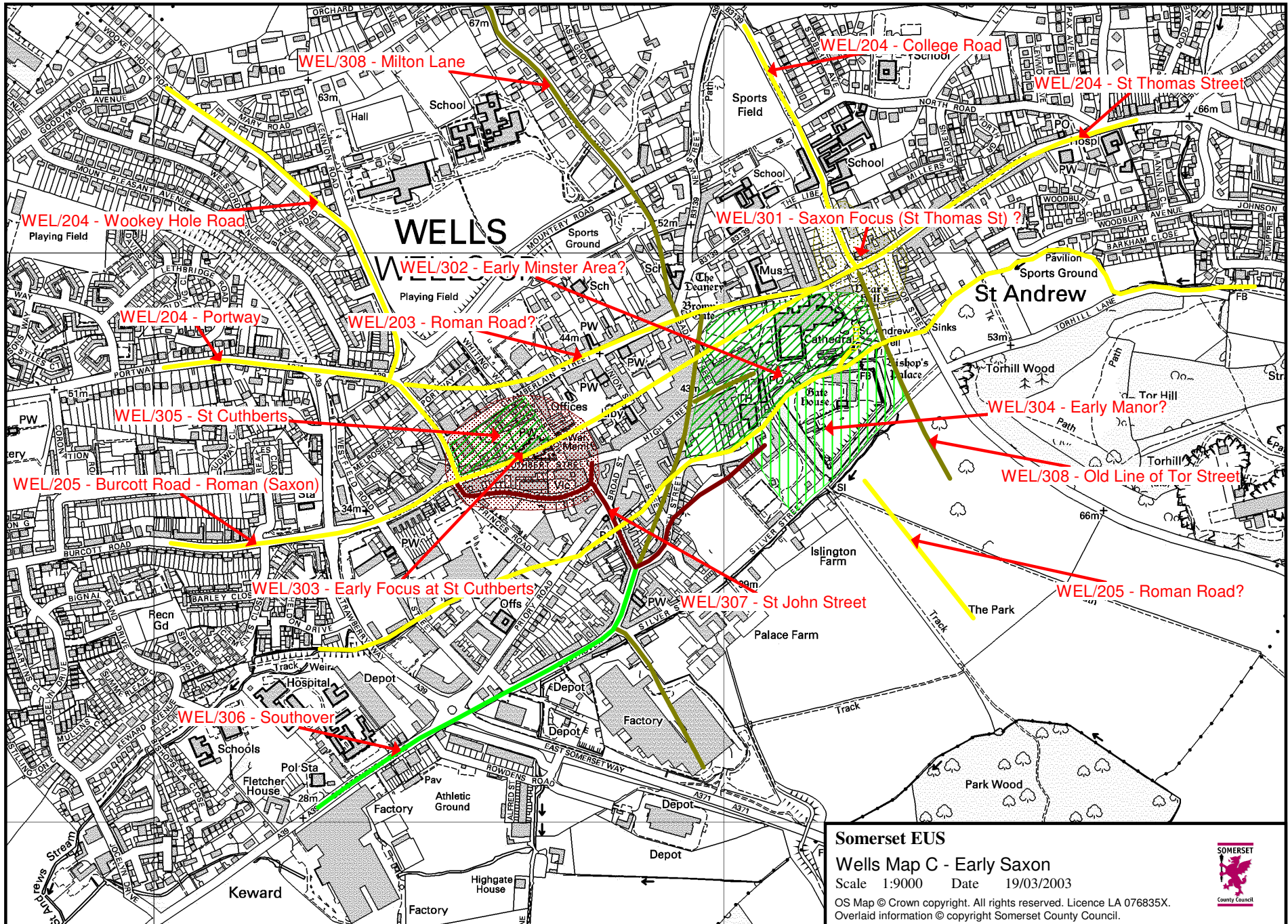
**Wells Map A - Prehistoric**

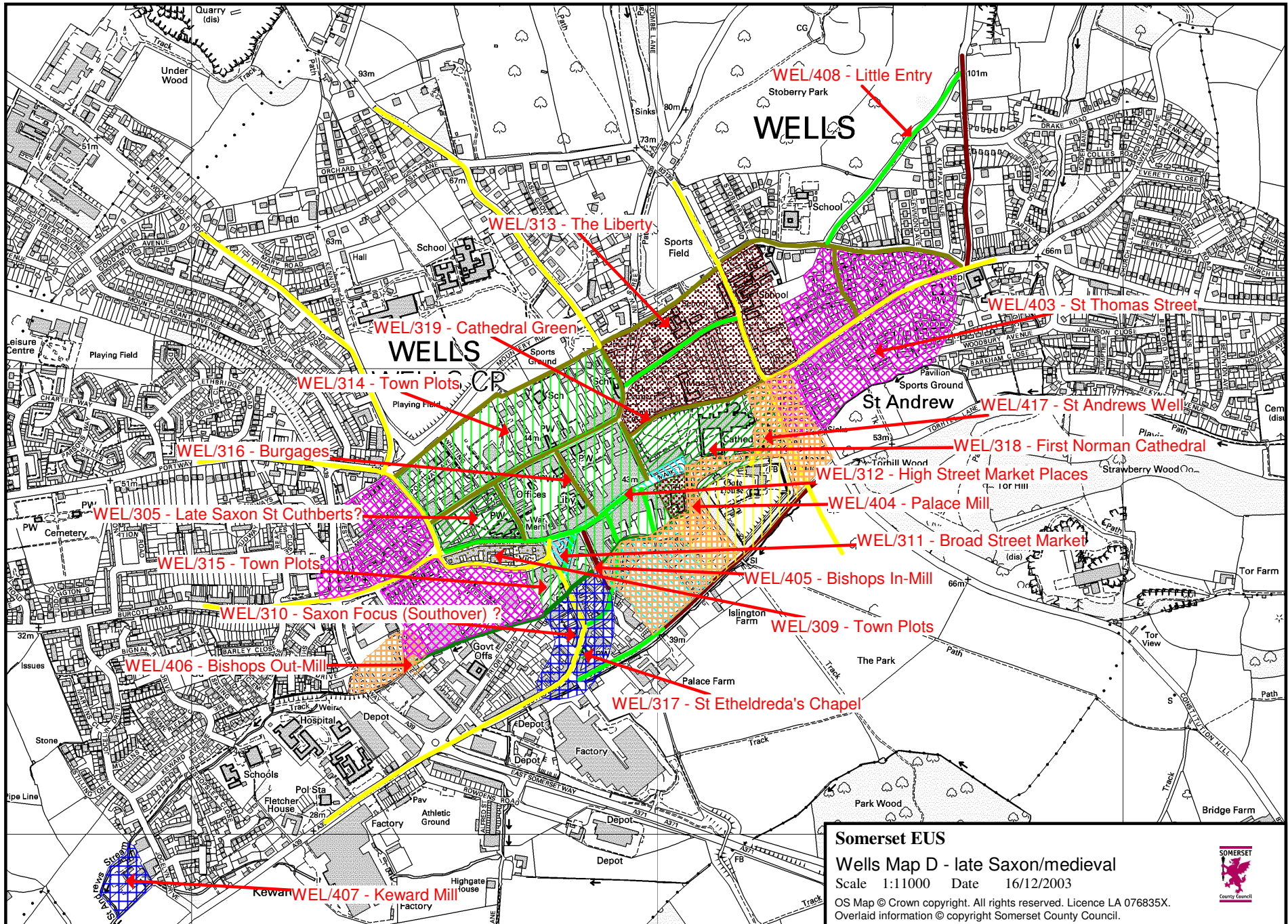
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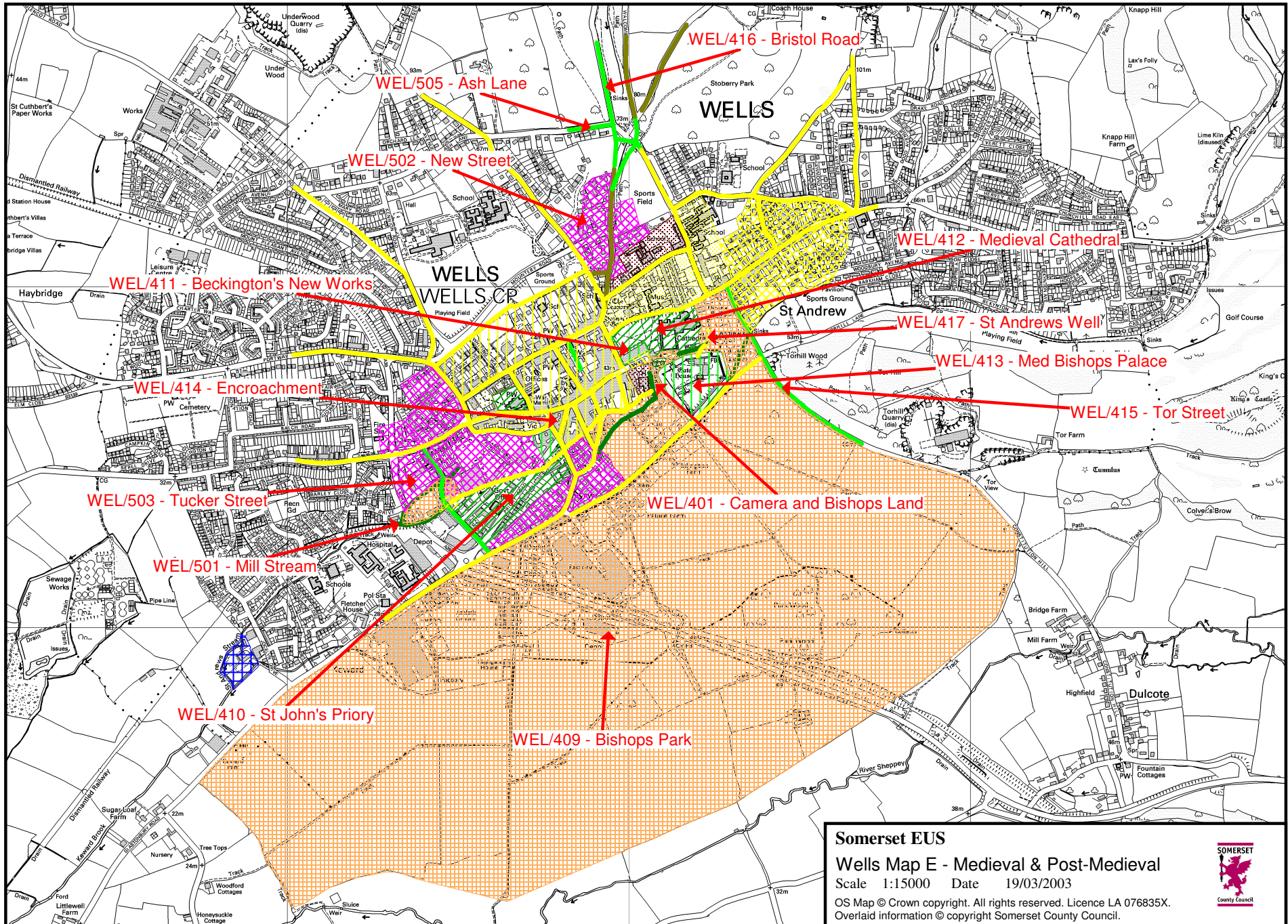
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**Wells Map D - late Saxon/medieval**

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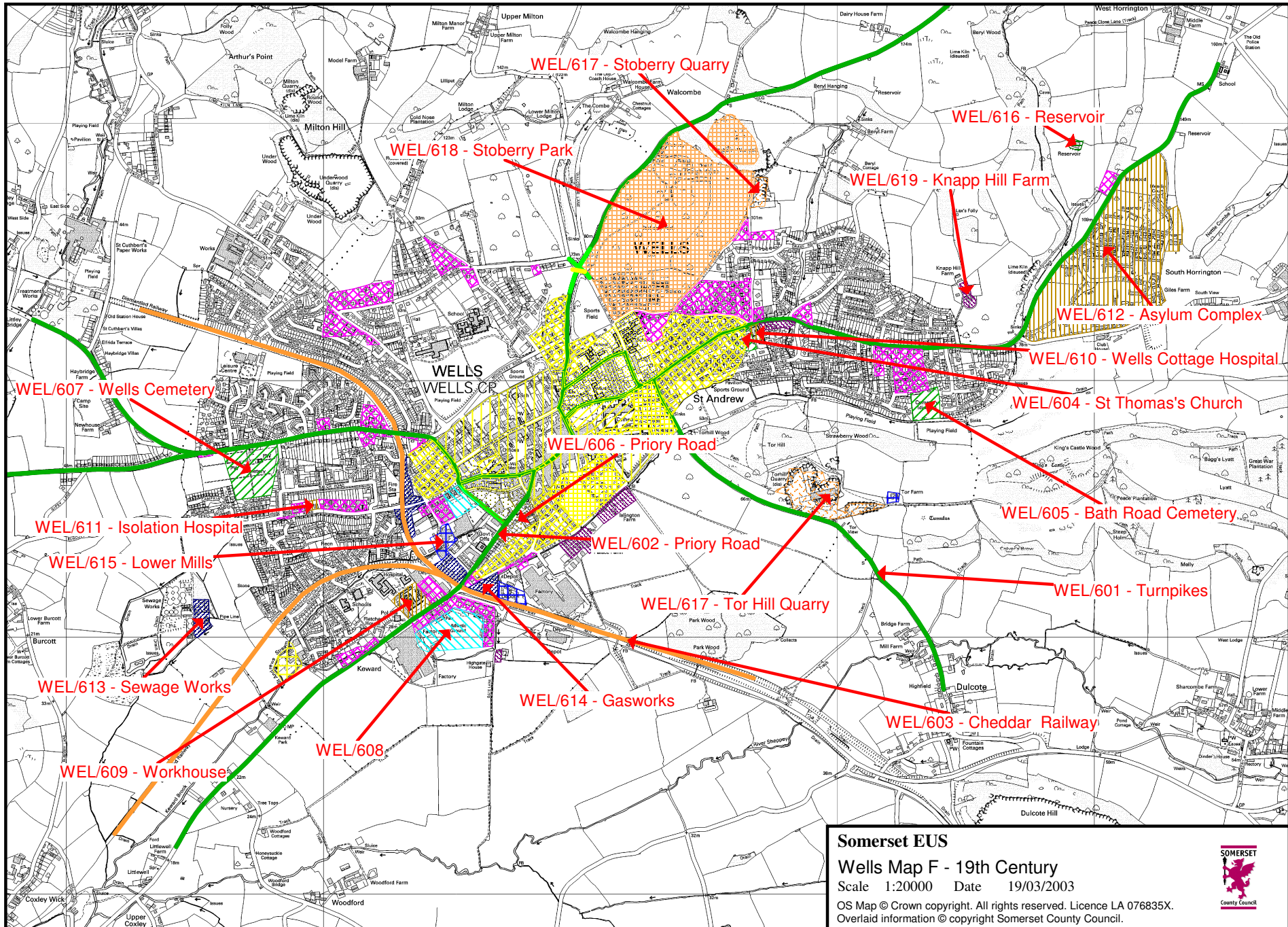
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Wells Map E - Medieval & Post-Medieval

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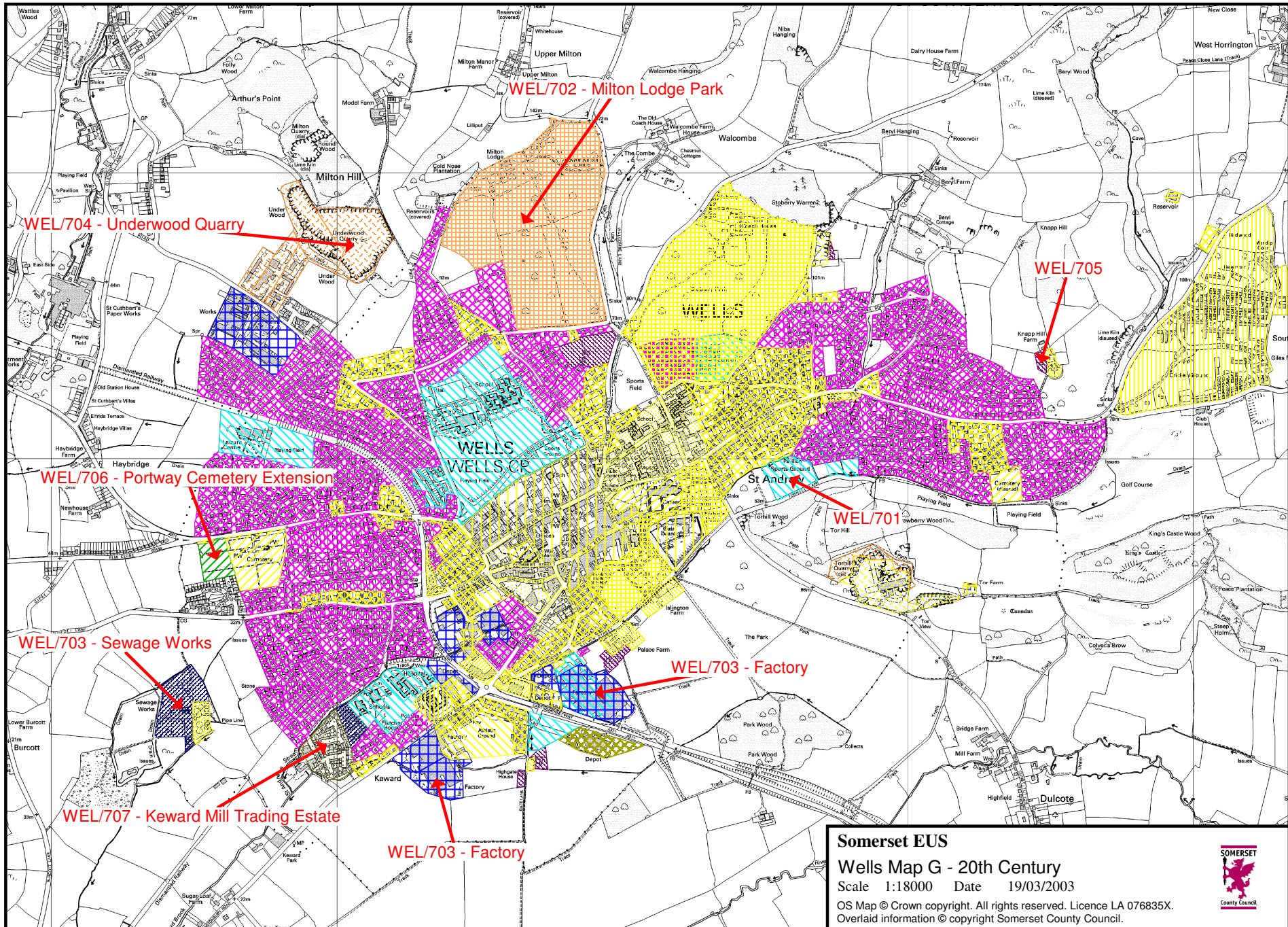
Wells Map F - 19th Century

Scale 1:20000 Date 19/03/2003

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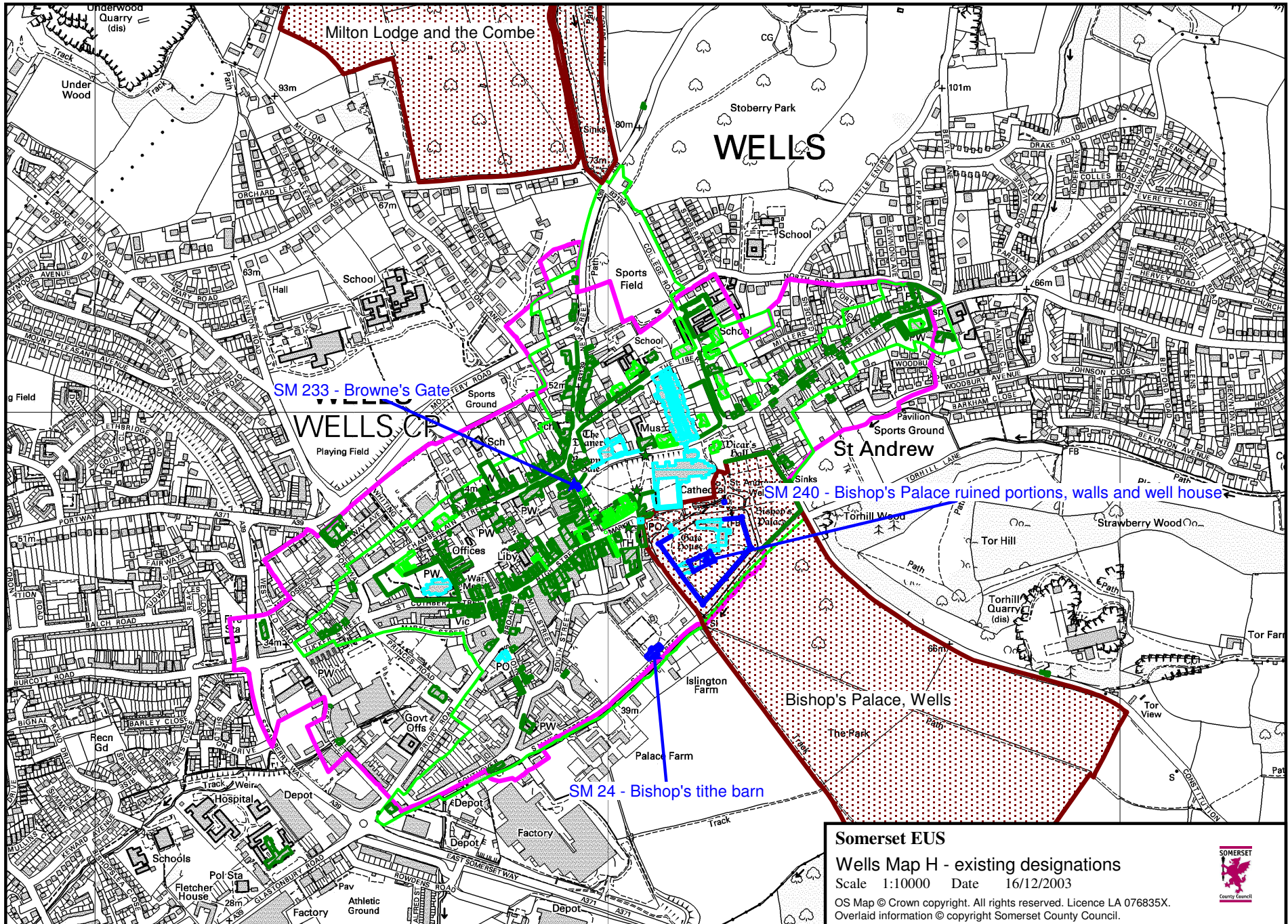






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**Wells Map G - 20th Century**  
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SM 233 - Browne's Gate

SM 240 - Bishop's Palace ruined portions, walls and well house

SM 24 - Bishop's title barn

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 Wells Map H - existing designations  
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