English Heritage Extensive Urban Survey

An archaeological assessment of

Crowcombe

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SOMERSET EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY

CROWCOMBE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

by Clare Gathercole

CONTENTS

II. MAJOR SOURCES 3 1. Primary documents 3 2. Local histories 3 3. Maps 3 III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF CROWCOMBE 3 IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CROWCOMBE 4 GENERAL COMMENTS 4 1. PREHISTORIC 4 2. ROMAN 4 3. SAXON AND MEDIEVAL 5 4. POST-MEDIEVAL 8 5. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH & 19TH CENTURY) 9 V. THE POTENTIAL OF CROWCOMBE 10 1. Research interests 10 2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13 2. Component to page 13	I. INTRODUCTION	 	 	 3
1. Primary documents 3 2. Local histories 3 3. Maps 3 III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF CROWCOMBE 3 IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CROWCOMBE 4 GENERAL COMMENTS 4 1. PREHISTORIC 4 2. ROMAN 4 3. SAXON AND MEDIEVAL 5 4. POST-MEDIEVAL 8 5. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH & 19TH CENTURY) 9 V. THE POTENTIAL OF CROWCOMBE 10 1. Research interests 10 2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13	II. MAJOR SOURCES	 	 	 3
2. Local histories 3 3. Maps 3 3. Maps 3 III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF CROWCOMBE 3 IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CROWCOMBE 4 GENERAL COMMENTS 4 1. PREHISTORIC 4 2. ROMAN 4 3. SAXON AND MEDIEVAL 5 4. POST-MEDIEVAL 8 5. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH & 19TH CENTURY) 9 V. THE POTENTIAL OF CROWCOMBE 10 1. Research interests 10 2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13				
3. Maps 3 III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF CROWCOMBE 3 IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CROWCOMBE 4 GENERAL COMMENTS 4 1. PREHISTORIC 4 2. ROMAN 4 3. SAXON AND MEDIEVAL 5 4. POST-MEDIEVAL 8 5. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH & 19TH CENTURY) 9 V. THE POTENTIAL OF CROWCOMBE 10 1. Research interests 10 2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13				
IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CROWCOMBE 4 GENERAL COMMENTS 4 1. PREHISTORIC 4 2. ROMAN 4 3. SAXON AND MEDIEVAL 5 4. POST-MEDIEVAL 8 5. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH & 19TH CENTURY) 9 V. THE POTENTIAL OF CROWCOMBE 10 1. Research interests 10 2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13				
GENERAL COMMENTS 4 1. PREHISTORIC 4 2. ROMAN 4 3. SAXON AND MEDIEVAL 5 4. POST-MEDIEVAL 8 5. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH & 19TH CENTURY) 9 V. THE POTENTIAL OF CROWCOMBE 10 1. Research interests 10 2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13	III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF CROWCOMBE	 	 	 3
1. PREHISTORIC 4 2. ROMAN 4 3. SAXON AND MEDIEVAL 5 4. POST-MEDIEVAL 8 5. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH & 19TH CENTURY) 9 V. THE POTENTIAL OF CROWCOMBE 10 1. Research interests 10 2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13	IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CROWCOMBE	 	 	 4
2. ROMAN 4 3. SAXON AND MEDIEVAL 5 4. POST-MEDIEVAL 8 5. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH & 19TH CENTURY) 9 V. THE POTENTIAL OF CROWCOMBE 10 1. Research interests 10 2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13	GENERAL COMMENTS	 	 	 4
3. SAXON AND MEDIEVAL 5 4. POST-MEDIEVAL 8 5. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH & 19TH CENTURY) 9 V. THE POTENTIAL OF CROWCOMBE 10 1. Research interests 10 2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13	1. PREHISTORIC	 	 	 4
4. POST-MEDIEVAL 8 5. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH & 19TH CENTURY) 9 V. THE POTENTIAL OF CROWCOMBE 10 1. Research interests 10 2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13	2. ROMAN	 	 	 4
5. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH & 19TH CENTURY) 9 V. THE POTENTIAL OF CROWCOMBE 10 1. Research interests 10 2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13	3. SAXON AND MEDIEVAL	 	 	 5
V. THE POTENTIAL OF CROWCOMBE 10 1. Research interests 10 2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13	4. POST-MEDIEVAL	 	 	 8
1. Research interests 10 2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13	5. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH & 19TH CENTURY)	 	 	 9
2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13	V. THE POTENTIAL OF CROWCOMBE	 	 	 . 10
2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation 10 3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13	1. Research interests	 	 	 . 10
3. Limitations 10 4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13				
4. Extent of current protection 10 5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13				
5. Management Proposals 11 VI. SOURCES 11 1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13				
1. General (Somerset/ Wessex) 11 2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13	•			
2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13	VI. SOURCES	 	 	 . 11
2. Crowcombe 12 3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13	1. General (Somerset/ Wessex)	 	 	 . 11
3. Maps 13 VII. COMPONENT INDEXES 13 1. Component to map 13				
1. Component to map				
1. Component to map	VII. COMPONENT INDEXES	 	 	 . 13
• •				
	•			

CROWCOMBE

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 aimof assessing urban archaeology as part of the Monuments Protection Programme. The work was carried out from 1994 to 1998 by Clare Gathercole and Miranda Richardson (from 1996), managed by Chris Webster. The reports are essentially as completed during that period but have been updated by Chris Webster with new archaeological information in early 2001.

English Heritage has funded two programmes assess the urban archaeological resourse - 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 Recordwith limited amounts of new information collected during the project. Once the information has been collected and mapped, attention is focussed on the analysis of the town plan and defining topographic units within the town. This will lead to the preparation of guidance for planners, developers and others involved in the management of the town.

II. MAJOR SOURCES

1. Primary documents

There are a number of Carew manor documents, though these deal principally with the rural parish. These have not been consulted for the purposes of this survey.

2. Local histories

The parish of Crowcombe has been covered by the Victoria County History, although there is little specifically relating to the town.

3. Maps

The earliest map showing Crowcombe town in any detail is dated 1797.

III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF CROWCOMBE

The parish of Crowcombe straddles the south-west scarp of the Quantocks; the town lies at its centre, below the combe after which the parish is named. The area contains deposits of sandstone, marl and copper suitable for quarrying and mining, though these deposits have had limited impact on the history of the town.

Whilst there are clear signs of prehistoric activity on the Quantocks above Crowcombe, there is no sign of any significant settlement at the foot of the scarp. In fact, it is not until the Saxon period that there is any indication of settlement at Crowcombe. The estate of *Cerawicombe*, which belonged to Glastonbury Abbey, is mentioned in a charter of 854, and is probably to be identified with Crowcombe. *Crawancombe* is mentioned in 904, when land held by the Bishop of Winchester was exchanged. The estate was thenceforth part of the West Saxon royal demesne. It probably passed to Earl Godwin and subsequently to his widow, Gytha. She granted the estate to Winchester, supposedly as expiation for her husband's sins. The estate recorded at Domesday was of 10 hides, of which 6 had been exempted from Danegeld and may represent the old royal demesne.

Soon after the Conquest, the manor passed to Robert of Mortain, from whose 12th century successors the Crowcombe family came to hold the land. It was in the 13th century, however, that the pattern of Crowcombe's development was

set. In an attempt to increase cash profits from this rural manor, the Crowcombes acquired market rights (1227) and rights to a three day fair (1234), and set up the borough of Crowcombe (first mentioned in the early 13th century, though there is no surviving charter). Soon afterwards, the property and commercial rights were split, when one part of the jointly-held estate was willed to the Prioress of Studley (a relative). This part of the manor became known as Crowcombe-Studley, and was held by the Priory until the Dissolution. The remaining part became Crowcombe Biccombe and stayed in the family (in fact it has a remarkable history of continuity of family ownership, passing to the related Carews).

There are references to "villa burgi de Crowcombe" in 1297, and both borough and burgesses are mentioned in the lay subsidy of 1327. The borough was not taxed separately from the rest of the parish, however, and was never self-governing. The extent of the town's commercial success is unclear. No borough is mentioned in 1497, though contemporary references to the election of portreeves occur in the manor court records. Similar references, and others to the liabilities of burgage holders continue into the 18th century. After the difficulties of the later Middle Ages, there may indeed have been a modest recovery in the post-medieval period. But when Collinson described Crowcombe in 1791, he noted that there used to be many more houses in the town. By this time, the market had failed, despite an attempt by the Carews in the 1760s to revive it, and the fair was a shadow its former self. The parish had remained predominantly rural and from the 17th century onwards the "urban" experiment was supplemented by gradual processes of combination of tenures, inclosures and improvements to the surrounding farms to try to increase revenues.

Crowcombe was described as a former borough and market town in Braggs' Directory of 1840 and the two manors were united in 1894 to form Crowcombe Court Estate. From the 19th century onwards there has been a change from arable to dairying, but no urban development.

IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CROWCOMBE

GENERAL COMMENTS

0.1 Archaeological work

There is no recorded archaeological work in the settlement of Crowcombe.

0.2 Standing structures

There are some important medieval and post-medieval buildings in the town, which have been more studied than the archaeology.

1. PREHISTORIC

(No map)

1.1 Archaeological knowledge and context

Crowcombe 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 areas subsequently built up. 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. In this case, whilst there is no sign so far of significant prehistoric archaeology at Crowcombe itself, the Quantock uplands north-east of the town were heavily exploited in prehistoric times; the ancient Quantock ridgeway forms the spine of an important landscape. The most obvious remains at Crowcombe are those of the many barrows and cairns, mostly Bronze Age, which overlook the town. These include several scheduled monuments. Amongst the closer monuments are SMR 33225/ SM 33701 (on Fire Beacon Hill) and SMR 33226-9 / SM 32184 (all on Hurley Beacon). The SMR gives details of the prehistoric landscape above Crowcombe.

No map has been produced for this period.

2. ROMAN (No map)

2.1 Archaeological knowledge and 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.

Crowcombe is one of 26 of the 45 historic towns covered by this project at which there is as yet no evidence of Roman settlement, reflecting the generally reduced penetration of Roman influence into the West Somerset uplands.

No map has been produced for this period.

3. SAXON AND MEDIEVAL

(Map A)

The Saxon and medieval periods have been considered together because, although the settlement is known to have had Saxon origins, little specific can be said about its archaeology. The medieval burgages, however, can be clearly distinguished from the unplanned settlement around the church.

3.1 Archaeological knowledge and context

Though the Post-Roman and early Saxon periods were characterised by a return to non-urban lifestyles, the later Saxon period (from the 8th or 9th century onwards) saw the beginnings of a resurgence of first trading places and then towns, under the control of the Saxon royal families, in the context of a network of royal estate administration centres and subordinate settlements which was already established (in some cases long-established). Though only a relatively small number of places with any claim to be towns existed by the time of the Domesday Survey, many of the subordinate settlements recorded at that point were to become towns in the medieval period. Crowcombe is one of ten of the 45 historic towns covered by this project which had no urban pretensions before the Conquest but were nevertheless in existence as agricultural settlements.

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 priveleges. 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.

Crowcombe is one of 20 of the 45 historic towns covered by this project which first acquired urban status in the medieval period, and one of the ten which acquired full borough status. It was one of 19 at which a planned area was laid out in the medieval period partially across or - more commonly - immediately adjacent to an established settlement.

3.2 Standing structures

There are few buildings dating from the medieval period, with only three listed - the church (SMR LB 30477), the Old Rectory (SMR LB 30481) and a cottage (SMR LB 30482). In addition, there are two medieval crosses (SMR LB 30476, 30478). The listed buildings of medieval origin are shown on **Map A**.

3.3 Archaeological components, shown on Map A

3.3.a Communciations

(a) Roads

Not mapped

Crowcombe lay on or close to several important communication lines in the Saxon and medieval periods. The Saxon herepath may have run along the south-eastern estate boundary. There was also a meeting point of several hill routes, including the Ridgeway, just above Crowcombe, and the settlement itself lay at the foot of one of the main descents. Apart from the cross-Quantock routes, the main route in the parish was the route parallel to the Ridgeway, at the foot of the scarp: Crowcombe lay on this main route. There was another route, further west, through Lawford.

The town had only one main street. The earliest settlement focus of church, church house, market cross and old manor house, lies on the bend where several lanes join the street.

3.3.b Manors and estates

CRO/408

The medieval manor house

The Crowcombe-Biccombe manor house (SMR 33223), first mentioned in 1295, is thought to have lain just to the north (or west - Dunning, pers. comm.) of the church. There are no surface indications remaining, the park having been landscaped on the construction of the later house. There is mention of fishponds and a dovecot in the 14th century. A court and garden was laid out in 1676, but these too were demolished in the 18th century.

The marked area is meant to represent the approximate area of the house and entranceway only, and is based on information in the SMR. No attempt has been made to estimate the extent of the gardens attached to the early house.

CRO/410

The medieval deer park

The medieval deer park had been superseded by Crowcombe Park (SMR 34602) by the time of the first detailed maps and its extent and layout are uncertain. There is, however, a park pale apparently of medieval date up on the hill above the court (SMR 33224, not shown on Map A), which implies that the eastern boundary was in approximately the same position.

It is unclear whether anything remains of earlier garden works or outbuildings in the southern part of the park, which was transformed in the 18th century.

The marked boundary is approximate and based on the post-medieval boundary as recorded in the SMR.

3.3.c Burial sites and places of worship

CRO/401

The church

The church (SMR 33222, SMR LB 30477) stands on a slight rise. The earliest fabric of the present church dates from the 14th century. The remainder is 16th century and later. The church is remarkable for its 16th century bench end carvings, and for the fact that the spire was struck by lightning in 1725, crashing through the roof. The building was "restored" in the 19th century. In the churchyard, which has been in use since at least medieval times, stands a 14th century cross (SMR 34616, SMR LB 30478, SM 32188). There too are the remains of the spire (SMR LB 30480) and a listed 18th century tomb (SMR LB 30479).

It is possible that the archaeology of this site is amongst the earliest in Crowcombe, with the possibility of Saxon burials, as well as an earlier church.

The probable medieval extent of the churchyard is taken from the 1797 and 1842 maps.

CRO/402

The Old Rectory

The Old Rectory and Glebe House (SMR LB 30481) has been the site of the parsons' house since at least 1385. The building itself has a medieval hall, but is otherwise Elizabethan and later.

The modern plot is similar to, though somewhat more regular than, the plot marked on the 1797

map, from which this zone is mapped.

CRO/403 The church house

This plot originally housed the Prioress of Studley's pound (Young, 1908). The church house (SMR 34801, SMR LB 30491), was probably endowed in the 15th century as a joint venture between the Prioress of Studley and Hugh Biccombe. However, the present church house was built in the 16th century. From the 17th to the 19th centuries it was used variously as a school, courthouse and poorhouse, as well as for its intended parish hall function, and the interior has been substantially altered to accomodate these activities. The church house fell into disrepair on the opening of new schools in the 1870s, but has now been restored. The remains of the adjacent post-medieval pound and gate (SMR 34811) can still be seen. The rear of this plot is shown as orchard on the 18th and early 19th century maps, and may have lain open in the medieval period.

The marked area is that of Pound Orchard, marked on the 1797 and 1828 maps.

3.3.d Settlement (pre-Urban)

CRO/404, CRO/405

The Saxon and early medieval settlement

These areas are those likeliest to contain remnants of pre-borough settlement. The various post-medieval maps show that areas now lying open once contained buildings. Whilst it is difficult to be sure how much of the area was built up in the earlier periods, it must be regarded as of significant archaeological potential, especially at the northern end closest to the church.

The limits of these areas are conjectural. They follow the modern boundaries, but respect areas shown as containing buildings on the 1797, 1802 and 1828 maps.

3.3.e Settlement (Urban)

(a) Commercial core

CRO/409 The market

The market was licensed in 1227, but did not flourish beyond the medieval period. It was revived in the 18th century when stalls were provided, but had been defunct "for many years" in 1791 (Collinson). There was a market house (of uncertain date) which was converted to a stable of the Carew Arms in 1799. The 14th century cross (SMR 34617, SMR LB 30476, SM 32187) *may* mark the market site, or the entrance to the borough, in which medieval market activity may have been concentrated. The post-medieval maps show a slight widening of the road at the entrance to the borough, but no obvious market area. It is possible that parts of the area to the north, which has been included in the possible burgage area, may have lain open and formed part of a market area.

The marked area represents the widening of the street between the sites of the cross and the market house, which shows best on the 1842 map.

CRO/406 Burgage plots

The 13th century borough lay north-west of the dog-leg, between the market and Townsend (Bush, 1985). Traces of the burgages remain on the 18th and 19th century maps. The 1797 map shows characteristic long, narrow plots extending back from the road, and the 1828 map shows a field named Burgage. The 1842 tithe map shows a plot named "Zydicksborough" and also shows the field called Burgages. However, these are only fragmentary plot remnants, and the area of potential medieval buildings and yards must extend further. The exact limit and character of medieval development will only be ascertained by archaeological investigation. It is possible that the borough was quite intensively developed over a short period, in which case there may still be sgnificant surviving archaeological deposits in the grounds of subsequent houses.

The marked areas north and south of the street are conjectural. They are based on the approximate maximum lengths of the plots shown on the 1797 and 1828 maps, and include areas which may have been rear paddock rather than urban development. The western extent of the area is also conjectural, based on the plot pattern of the post-medieval maps.

CRO/407 Other urban plots

This area, which included the market house, has the appearance on the post-medieval maps of never having been laid out in long plots, but of backing onto open meadow. The character of the occupation has not been established, and any interventions in this area should be used to test for evidence of more extensive development than has been indicated here: the post-medieval maps may be misleading.

The area is marked from the 1797 map.

4. POST-MEDIEVAL (Map B)

4.1 Archaeological knowledge and 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. Crowcombe, however, is one of nine of the 45 historic towns covered by this project which, though in some way urban in themedieval period, were not really so in the post-medieval period.

4.2 Standing structures

There are several important post-medieval buildings, including the 16th century church house (SMR LB 30491) and the 18th century Crowcombe Court (SMR LB 30494). Cottages include SMR LB 30474, 30483-4, 30488-9, 30493. Buildings in Crowcombe Park include the icehouse (SMR LB 30495) and folly (SMR LB 30496).

4.3 Archaeological components, shown on Map B

4.3.a Redevelopment in earlier settlement components

Areas described under earlier periods are shown in yellow. Apart from the redevelopment of Crowcombe Court in the 18th century, the processes in Crowcombe were of gradual replacement or demolition of Medieaval buildings. Several cottages remain in the old borough area.

4.3.b Communications

(a) Roads

CRO/504, CRO/505

Pre-1800 roads

Roads from the 1797 map.

4.3.c Manors and estates

CRO/502

Crowcombe Court

Crowcombe Court was built in the 18th century on the orders of Thomas Carew, on a new site c250m from the old house. The house has recently been restored. It was flanked by ornamental and kitchen gardens, and there was an icehouse to the north (SMR LB 30495). The gardens were relandscaped from 1766 onward, in the rustic style. Part of this was an artificial "ruin" (SMR LB 30496), which may have used fittings from the original manor house (though tradition states they were from Halsway manor in Stogumber) (Bush, 1985). There were also fishponds (SMR 34603). Garden earthworks remain close to the house (SMR 34705).

The area marked includes the new house and ancillary buildings, including the Home Farm. The full extent of the Park, as recorded in the Parks and Gardens Register, can be seen on Map C.

4.3.d Settlement (Urban)

CRO/503

Post-medieval occupation (various)

These plots are taken from the 1802 map, which shows small buildings in approximately these positions (not marked on 1797 map).

4.3.e Industrial sites

Not mapped

The Brickfield at the southern edge of town was probably where the bricks for the 18th century Court were made.

4.3.f Settlement (Rural)

(a) Farms

CRO/501

Town Farm

The date of Town Farm is unclear, though buildings in its position appear on maps at the end of the post-medieval period (Bush, 1985). It may contain archaeology of medieval date.

The mapped extent is from the 1828 map.

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

5.1 Standing structures

There are a few listed 19th century buildings, including Crowcombe House and its stables (SMR LB 30485-7) and the Carew Arms (SMR LB 30490).

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.

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

5.3 Archaeological components, shown on Map B

5.3.a Redevelopment in earlier settlement components

Components described under earlier periods are shown in yellow. There was minimal expansion in the 19th century, but some plots in the old borough area were redeveloped as spacious residential plots.

5.3.b Communications

(a) Roads

CRO/505

The turnpike

The main route through the town was turnpiked in 1807 as the main Taunton-Watchet route.

From Bentley & Murless 1985.

(b) Railways

Not mapped

The railway, which opened in 1862, ran well west of the town. Crowcombe's stations were Crowcombe Heathfield or Stogumber (not mapped). The line was closed in 1971, but has been reopened. The line is supposed to have passed through the site of the old Carew dower house.

5.3.c Burial sites and places of worship

CRO/603

The churchyard extension

The church was restored in the 19th century and the churchyard was extended to the north.

From the 1888 map.

5.3.d Settlement (Urban)

CRO/602

19th century development (various)

These plots are shown with small buildings on them on the 1842 map.

5.3.e Settlement (Rural)

(a) Farms

CRO/601 Town Farm

Town Farm was extended, as shown on the 1842 map.

6. 20TH CENTURY

(Map B)

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. Crowcombe 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 Listed Buildings

There is one modern listed building, the war memorial (SMR LB 30492).

6.3 Settlement Components, shown on Map B

6.3.a Redevelopment in earlier settlement components

Components described under earlier periods are shown in yellow. Again, there has been minimal expansion, though there have been small residential developments, some of which have probably damaged the medieval archaeology.

6.3.b Communications

(a) Roads

CRO/704 The bypass

Crowcombe was bypassed in the early part of the century. The creation of the bypass involved the demolition of one 19th-century property, but has probably not impinged on earlier archaeology. The road reuses part of the old alternative western route through the parish.

6.3.c Burial sites and places of worship

CRO/703 The churchyard extension

Another expansion of the cemetery, from the 1995 OS data.

6.3.d Settlement (Urban)

CRO/701 20th century developments (various)

Modern expansion, from the 1995 OS data.

6.3.e Industrial sites

CRO/702 The sewage works

From the 1995 OS map.

V. THE POTENTIAL OF CROWCOMBE

1. Research interests

Very little is known archaeologically of the two distinct early elements of Crowcombe - the settlement around the church and the medieval borough - and the relationship between them. The charting of the expansion and contraction of these settlements, on which some progress has been made through documentary study, requires archaeological input.

2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation

Whilst Crowcombe has no areas of particularly high environmental potential, the overall survival of archaeological deposits is likely to be quite good since many subsequent developments have been non-intensive.

3. Limitations

No serious limitations are known.

4. Extent of current protection

Crowcombe contains a number of listed buildings. There are two scheduled crosses SM 32187 and 32188. An AHAP has been defined, and the Post-medieval Crowcombe Park has been included on the Parks and Gardens Register, grade II. The existing constraints are shown on Map C.

5. Management Proposals

See the Archaeological Guidance Document.

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3. Maps	
1797	Chilcott's survey of Crowcombe-Biccombe manor: SRO DD/TB
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1828	Crowcombe Parish: SRO DD/TB 51/3
1842	Tithe map: fiche in SSL
1888	OS 1:2500: fiche in SSL
1904	OS 1:10560
1932	OS 1:10560
1995	OS digital data

VII. COMPONENT INDEXES

1. Component	t to map		
Component	Мар	Component	Мар
CRO/401	A	CRO/502	В
CRO/402	A	CRO/503	В
CRO/403	A	CRO/504	В
CRO/404	A	CRO/505	В
CRO/405	A	CRO/601	В
CRO/406	A	CRO/602	В
CRO/407	A	CRO/603	В
CRO/408	A	CRO/701	В
CRO/409	A	CRO/702	В
CRO/410	A	CRO/703	В
CRO/501	В	CRO/704	В

Maps

Map A - Saxon to Medieval

Map B – Post medieval to Modern

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

Map C – Existing constraints

Key: Scheduled Monuments (dark blue),

Listed Buildings Grade I (light blue)

Grade II* (light green)
Grade II (dark green)

Registered Park (brown)

Area of High Archaeological Potential (pink)





