

English Heritage Extensive Urban Survey

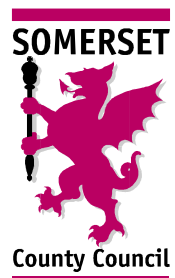
An archaeological assessment of

Williton

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2003



SOMERSET EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY

WILLITON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

by Clare Gathercole

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SOMERSET EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY

WILLITON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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

I. INTRODUCTION

This report forms one of a series commissioned by English Heritage and prepared by Somerset County Council with the aim of assessing urban archaeology as part of the Monuments Protection Programme. The work was carried out from 1994 to 1998 by Clare Gathercole and Miranda Richardson (from 1996), managed by Chris Webster. The reports are essentially as completed during that period but have been updated by Chris Webster with new archaeological information in 2003.

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

II. MAJOR SOURCES

1. Local histories

Williton has been covered as part of the parish of St Decumans by the Victoria County History (Dunning, 1985), and there are also useful works by Armstrong (1984a,b).

2. Maps

The earliest map giving any detail is attached to the Earl of Egremont's 1801 survey of his estates. This has been studied and annotated by Armstrong (unpub.)

III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF WILLITON

Williton lies towards the south of what was, until 1902, the parish of St Decumans. The area is rich in resources: Williton itself is situated on marls and gravels, with limestone to the north and sandstone to the south; north of the limestone ridge, the coastal area also provides alabaster, lias and kelp. Quarrying of the building materials has supplemented Williton's basically agrarian economy in historical times.

In the prehistoric period, there is ample evidence of activity in the area. The Doniford gravels, on which Williton lies, have produced many palaeolithic artefacts; and both mesolithic and neolithic material has also been found in the vicinity of Williton. There is definite evidence of a later prehistoric (neolithic/ bronze age) presence at, or near, the site of Williton itself, in the shape of the barrows (Graburrows) of Battlegore, just to the north-west of the modern settlement.

There is no clear sign as yet that there was any Roman settlement nearer to Williton than Doniford (though this cannot be ruled out). It is only from the Saxon period onwards that Williton emerges as a distinct settlement. The name is of Saxon origin (meaning the *tun* on the Willet) and the place was an administrative centre of a major royal estate, linked to Cannington and Carhampton and lying on the route between them. The fact that it was never hidated

suggests that it was part of the original royal demesne. St Decumans parish, served by the minster of St Decumans (sited on the coast, and probably a pre-Saxon foundation), was a relic of this estate. The tenth century *Charter of Priveleges* granted to the Monastery at Taunton makes it clear that there was also a royal hunting lodge at Williton (Armstrong, 1982). As a royal administrative centre and lodge, Williton must then have had a settlement of some status (if not necessarily of any great size). Whilst the location of the Saxon settlement is uncertain, most indicators point to the area around and to the north of the church (see below).

The establishment of the interdependent burh and port of Watchet, which in the later Saxon and early medieval periods assumed most of the specifically urban attributes in the parish, consolidated the differentiation of function already displayed by St Decumans and Williton. Williton's chapel appears to have remained a private chapel until the 12th century. Its close ties to St Decumans were amongst the consequences of the involvement of Reynold FitzUrse, then lord of the manor, in the murder of Becket in 1170. As part of his penance, the manor was divided, half going to the Knights Templar and half to his brother Robert. In further expiation, Robert gave property and rights to the chapel to St Decumans. There was a further division of the remaining manor in 1388, but most of the estates around Williton were eventually reunited in the hands of the Wyndhams.

Williton was an agricultural centre of no great prominence throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods. There is no sign of a formalised market such as Watchet had, but it had a fair by 1767: this survived until 1877. Collinson in 1791 gave the village short shrift, describing it as consisting of two long streets with a small and unremarkable chapel to the west. It was with the coming of the turnpikes in 1765 (with improvements in 1807 and 1829, bringing traffic direct from Taunton and Bridgwater on the route to the coast), and then the West Somerset Railway (in the 1860s) that Williton came to prosper as a small market town, a commercial as well as a governmental centre. The directories from 1840 onwards describe it as "a small, neat town". The town still operated in partnership with Watchet: some firms, including Gliddons (probably the most important 19th century industrial operation), maintained works in both. Markets were formally established and the town expanded to the south and east.

The late 19th century agricultural depression ended the growth and was followed by a fall in population. This has been reversed since the Second World War. Williton has continued to be an administrative centre and the rise in holiday traffic has revived its commercial role and made it into a tourist attraction.

IV. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WILLITON

GENERAL COMMENTS

0.1 Archaeological knowledge

Archaeological knowledge of Williton is patchy. The prehistoric site at Battlegore has been the subject of 19th and early 20th century attention, whilst the possible site of the Saxon centre remains uninvestigated (and unprotected).

0.2 Standing structures

Whilst there are a number of listed buildings in Williton, very few of these are earlier than the 16th and 17th centuries.

1. PREHISTORIC

(Map A)

1.1 Archaeological knowledge

There is some knowledge of the prehistoric archaeology of Williton. Apart from survey and excavation in the barrow cemetery itself, scatters of earlier (mesolithic) flints have been recovered from fields to its north (SMR 34192), and to the north-east of the settlement (SMR 34193). Moreover, there have been other occasional finds, including a palaeolithic handaxe (SMR 34208), and a neolithic axe (SMR 35379).

1.2 Context

Williton is one of 37 of the 45 historic towns covered by this project at which, despite the presence of the barrow

cemetery, there is as yet no strong evidence of prehistoric settlement on the site of the later town - though it should be remembered that it is notoriously difficult for archaeologists to demonstrate a prehistoric presence in modern urban areas. Whilst 'towns' were not, generally speaking, a feature of prehistoric landscapes, many of the same factors which made the site desirable in later periods would already have been operative. Whether or not there was settlement at Williton itself in the later prehistoric periods, there is certainly evidence of prehistoric activity in the area, and it is worth noting that one of the county's more important assemblages of earlier prehistoric (palaeolithic) artefacts, associated with a semi-nomadic existence, comes from the nearby Doniford Gravels.

1.3 Standing structures

The barrows of Battlegore (SMR 34185-88, SM 33704) are still visible, though damaged. These have not been marked individually on the map.

1.4 Archaeological features, shown on Map A

1.4.a Burial sites and places of worship

WIL/101 Battlegore Barrow Cemetery (SMR 35378)

The Battlegore barrow cemetery (SMR 35378) has strong local traditions of Saxon origin and/ or use, but all the surviving archaeological evidence points to a neolithic/ bronze age date for the monuments on the site.

The original extent of the cemetery is unclear. Recent aerial photographic evidence has, however, added to our understanding of the present area. This contains five damaged round barrows (SMR 34185-7, SM 33704; and SMR 35440, 35441) and a supposed "long barrow" (SMR 34188 SM 33704), which in fact has a large round shadow to the north of it. Excavations in 1931 in the most northerly of the barrows failed to find the primary interment (already disturbed) but uncovered the remains of a ditch, and a secondary cremation, together with flints and neolithic pottery (Gray, 1931). The excavations also investigated the stone group to the south of this barrow: this may represent the remains of the burial chamber from a long barrow. The low earthworks near the round barrow proved to be part of relatively modern field drainage systems.

The name appears as Bytelgore as early as the 14th century, and the name of the barrows themselves, Graburrows, is similarly old. The modern appearance of the name as Battlegore reflects the traditional association of the site with the battle against raiding Danes in either 918 or 988. Another tradition places the battle nearby, with the dead being buried in the barrow cemetery. These associations were strengthened in folklore by the 19th century (and earlier) discovery of fragments of weapons - though all of these were of bronze age date - and by the reputed revelation of bones and stone cysts by farmers at work. Whilst there is no direct archaeological evidence for the truth of these traditions, Saxon re-use of bronze age cemeteries is well attested elsewhere in Britain.

The site has been damaged by past agricultural practices, which have resulted in much material being removed for use as topsoil (Gray, 1931), and in ploughing. Slight rises in the ground, together with the recent aerial photographs, suggest there are at least two other ploughed out barrows in the cemetery area but as yet unscheduled.

The defined area is based on the SMR, the scheduled areas and the modern field boundaries.

1.4.b Artefact scatters

WIL/104 The Doniford Gravels

The Doniford Gravels have produced significant palaeolithic flint finds (Wessex Archaeology 1994). Part of the outline of the Gravels area, which potentially contains isolated flint artefacts, is shown.

The approximate outline of the Doniford Gravels is taken from the maps produced by Wessex Archaeology (1994).

WIL/102, WIL/103

Flint scatters

The SMR contains records of a scatter of mesolithic flints (SMR 34192) to the north of Battlegore and another (SMR 34193) to the north-east of the town.

The positions of the two flint scatters are marked from the SMR.

2. ROMAN

(No map)

2.1 Archaeological knowledge

A 4th century Romano-British site at Doniford is known and there have been occasional finds of Roman material in the surrounding area.

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.

Williton 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

(Map B)

3.1 Archaeological knowledge

Despite the strong traditions and early documentation regarding Saxon Williton, far too little is known archaeologically. The local tradition of a Saxon settlement in the virtually undisturbed meadow to the north of the church seems not to have been the subject of any investigation.

3.2 Context

Though the Post-Roman and early Saxon periods were characterised by a return to non-urban lifestyles, the later Saxon period (from the 9th century onwards) saw the beginnings of a resurgence of trading places and towns. This was controlled, in England, by the Saxon royal families (though it was part of a wider trend), and took place in the context of a network of royal estate administration centres which was already established (in some cases long-established). The reasons for the changes were many and complex, combining defensive, administrative and ecclesiastical considerations with, increasingly, purely commercial aspirations.

As one of the heartlands of the kings of Wessex, Somerset played an important part in the early re-urbanisation of the south, and there are a number of places amongst those studied for this project which can claim to have been towns before the Norman Conquest. 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.

Williton is one of five of the 45 historic towns covered by this project which, whilst it had not developed any really urban functions by the end of the Saxon period, was probably the administrative centre for a royal estate. There were eleven other administration centres in the survey which had developed urban functions by the Conquest (and another six which also had minsters).

3.3 Archaeological components, shown on Map B

3.3.a Communications: roads, streets and routeways

Not mapped The earliest street plan is unclear, though it must have been somewhat simpler than that of the medieval village. If the supposition is correct that the Saxon settlement was to the south-west of Williton, then it is in this area that one would expect routes to converge. The lines of Priest St, skirting the north of the Bury field, suggest an early origin, but it is possible that its line was slightly different, if Dunning's suggestion that the original crossroads was not staggered is correct (Dunning, 1985).

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

The major religious site serving Williton was the probable minster of St Decuman, for which see the report on *Watchet*. Whilst this is the most likely site of burials, there is a tradition that the men who fell in the battle against the Danes (in 918 or 988) were buried in the barrow cemetery of Battlegore (WIL/101).

Not mapped It is likely that the medieval church began in this period as a chapel attached to the manor centre (see below).

3.3.c Manors and estates

WIL/302 The Saxon royal manor site

Documentary sources give sufficient locational information regarding the Norman manor house (WIL/416) to locate it close to the medieval church (WIL/417), which probably began as a private chapel. Assuming continuity of site for the chapel (and though there are references to a rebuilding when it was given to St Decumans, there is no sign that it was moved), it is at least conceivable that the royal hunting lodge originally served by the chapel lay either on the same site as the early post-Conquest house, or nearby in this area enclosed by the (?artificial) meanders of the stream.

In this area, then, the remains of a Saxon hall and an early chapel may survive. However, as with the Bury fields, the archaeological expectations are at present conjectural. There has been somewhat more redevelopment in this area, with the establishment of several successive house complexes on the supposed manor house site, as well as ever more substantial churches, a churchyard (SMR 34184; WIL/417) and attached buildings (including the chapel house). The church as it now stands (SMR LB 30969) contains fabric of medieval date, but it was extensively restored in the 19th century.

The original boundaries of the area are unclear. For one thing, the lane from the town to its chapel of ease and then on to Orchard Wyndham has obscured the relationship of this area to that of the possible settlement; for another, the watercourses around Williton were extensively managed and diverted in the medieval period for the maintenance of the water meadows and the effect of this process on the ditches around the Saxon sites is not known.

The area has been defined from the modern stream and from the maps in Armstrong (1982) and Dunning (1985).

3.3.d Settlement

It is important to bear in mind that the tradition regarding the location of the Saxon settlement, on which the zones marked on Map B have largely been based, is archaeologically unproven. Should future research prove negative, the area to the east (that is, on the same site as the medieval village) would provide an alternative possible location.

WIL/301 The Saxon settlement (SMR 35383)

Traditionally, the fields to the north of the church are the site of a Saxon settlement (SMR 35383). This is reflected in the fieldnames recorded at the 1801 survey, which include Bury Meadow and Little Bury. Such names would seem to recall the presence of an enclosed area associated with the manor centre, and it is conceivable that most activity - whether commercial or administrative - would have been concentrated in such an enclave. After the Conquest, the Bury fields, referred to then as the enclosure, remained important enough to be mentioned specifically in deeds

associated with the break up of the Norman manor after Reynold FitzUrse's indiscretion (Armstrong, 1982). If the fields represented high status land retained for the private use of the Norman lord, this would be consistent with the eastward shift of settlement required by the local tradition.

If the local tradition is correct, then this area represents an area of high archaeological potential, since it is both wet and relatively undisturbed. Any archaeological remains are, however, unlikely to be substantial, being rather the remains of timber structures.

An archaeological assessment of this area is desirable, to confirm or refute the presence of the Saxon settlement on this site.

The defined area is based on the 1801 "Bury" field boundaries, together with the SMR entry and the comments in Armstrong (1982) and Dunning (1985). The southern limit contiguous with the suggested lodge and chapel site, is somewhat arbitrary.

3.3.e Industrial sites

Not mapped A manorial mill is recorded at Domesday, but this may have been an outlying mill, such as that at Egrove.

4. MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL

(Map B)

Between the Saxon period and the 19th century, Williton grew up as a village of only moderate local significance and with few clearly defined plan elements. Though there was, perhaps, a shift of site in the early medieval period, the manner in which this gave rise to the village as it appears on the earliest detailed map (of 1801) is not clear: therefore, the periods have been treated together. The pattern of development could almost certainly be clarified by the kind of detailed research which was not possible for this report.

4.1 Archaeological knowledge

There is little archaeological knowledge of the area of medieval and post-medieval settlement. Works in the road in 1980 uncovered the foundations of one of the crosses (Armstrong, 1982).

4.2 Context

Both in Britain and on the continent, the medieval period saw the growth of town foundation and, to an extent, urban living (though the bulk of the population continued to live in villages). The reasons for this growth were many and complex. In England they included both general factors - such as the growth of mercantile trade (especially the cloth trade) - and more specific ones - such as the post-Conquest establishment of a network of (theoretically) loyal magnates and prelates with large estates and commercial privileges. The latter led to the increasing relaxation of the royal stranglehold on the profits of towns and chartered boroughs (where tenants paid cash rents and were free of feudal ties), which in turn enabled the establishment of new purpose-built commercial areas (the majority of places classed as towns in the medieval period have at least some planned elements). Of course, some boroughs were already in existence by the Conquest, and the existing pattern of Saxon urban or semi-urban centres was an important influence on the medieval one. This is evident in Somerset which, like many parts of the south and west (where the majority of the Saxon *burhs* and boroughs had been established), was peppered with small boroughs in the medieval period. Williton, however, is one of two of the 45 historic towns which, though it had some central place functions in the pre-Conquest period, did not develop into a town in the medieval period, and was one of two of the 45 towns which, having lost status, continued non-urban in the post-medieval.

4.3 Standing structures and visible remains

There are very few surviving medieval buildings, with only a cottage on Long Street (SMR LB 30932) and the church (SMR LB 30969) certainly of this period. However, many more survive from the post-medieval period. The listed buildings of medieval origin are shown in *green*, and those of post-medieval in *red*, on **Map B**.

4.4 Archaeological components, shown on Map B

4.4.a Redevelopment in earlier settlement components

In the medieval and post-medieval periods, the old settlement (WIL/301, see above) appears to have been partially abandoned. Whilst the manor centre (WIL/302) remained occupied, a churchyard was defined within the area.

4.4.b Communications

(a) Roads

Not mapped The street plan of modern Williton is based on the network of roads that developed during the medieval and post-medieval periods, though the process of this development is unclear. There may have been lanes or courts in the western part of the village which have now vanished (Dunning, 1985).

WIL/415 An old route alignment (Station Rd)

The main road east ran on the more northerly of the two modern roads (Station Rd): part of the route is marked on Map B.

(b) Bridges

Not mapped Heybrugge (High Bridge) was mentioned in 1438-9, carrying the Egrove and Doniford road over the Doniford Stream. Fowl Bridge carried the Leechway over the stream at Battlegore (Dunning, 1985 for both bridges). The bridges are marked on the GIS though they do not appear on the map.

4.4.c Water

Not mapped The watercourses both to the south-west and to the north-east of Williton were diverted and controlled in the medieval period into waterleats, which fed artificial water meadows. The details of the changes are not clear.

4.4.d Burial sites and places of worship

WIL/417 The medieval churchyard (SMR 34184)

The medieval churchyard (SMR 34184) and attached buildings (including the chapel house) may have developed on the site of an earlier royal chapel (see above, p7). The church as it now stands (SMR LB 30969) contains fabric of medieval date, though it was extensively restored in the 19th century. It is possible that remains of earlier ecclesiastical or non-ecclesiastical buildings survive beneath or close to the church.

The churchyard outline is from the SMR.

WIL/402 The Priest's Acre

The priest's acre was part of the property donated to St Decumans in the 12th century. Both the priest's house and the almshouse were built within it, both lying towards the eastern end of the plot, east of the present vicarage.

The area is defined from the modern boundaries, together with the map in Armstrong (1982).

4.4.e Manors and estates

Whilst the early manorial focus was in the south-west part of the settlement, Williton's landholdings came to be dominated by Orchard Wyndham, which lies further to the south-west, beyond the scope of this report.

WIL/416 The medieval manor house

As stated above, documentary sources give sufficient locational information regarding the Norman manor house to locate it close to the medieval church. No further details have been ascertained for this report.

The possible site of the early medieval manor house is marked from the maps in Armstrong (1982) and Dunning (1985).

4.4.f Settlement

The various plan blocks in Williton are not well defined.

- Not mapped The market: there was no formal market until the 19th century, and there is no clearly defined market area in Williton. However, Fore St (which has been variously named over the years) was enclosed between the Lower and the Higher Cross.
- WIL/401 Early settlement: Bridge Street north
The shape of this block suggests a comparatively early origin, perhaps a nucleus of the early medieval (or possibly the Saxon) settlement. The 1801 map, which postdates the turnpikes, shows the western part of the block (defined by Back St, only later named Bridge St) lying semi-vacant. However, documentary sources suggest that there had been a shrinkage of settlement in the west as early as the 16th or 17th century (Dunning, 1985), for reasons which are not entirely clear. Armstrong (1982) suggests that there was a mill in the area in the medieval period. Whilst there has been some modern development, it is possible that archaeological survival may be sufficient to clarify the early history. This area should be treated with caution, due to its proximity to the unproven Saxon settlement site.
- WIL/403 Early settlement: Bank Street north
This block is likely to contain the remains of medieval buildings along the frontages. However, the 1801 map does not suggest that there was any pressure to develop back into the paddocks behind. Therefore, although the whole block formed part of the structure of the medieval and post-medieval settlement, the main archaeological interest is in the road frontages. The southern part of the frontage is among the areas in Williton more affected by later development.
- WIL/404 Early settlement: Bridge Street south
This area contains scattered development by 1801. Whilst it is likely that there was some earlier building, it may have been neither extensive nor urban in character. There is a possibility that the house belonging to the Knights Templar's half of the manor may have been located in this area (Dunning, 1985). Bridge Farm, adjacent to the areas thought to have been of Saxon origin, was part of Orchard Wyndham estates in the post-medieval period: its archaeology may be important.
- WIL/405 Early settlement: Long Street north
The western part of this area appears similar in development to area 7 on the 1801 map, with frontage development and strips of paddock behind. Along this part of the frontage a number of post-medieval buildings survive. To the east there is scattered development backing straight onto fields in 1801. This area has been affected by 19th century redevelopment and modern suburban growth to the rear.

At the eastern extremity of this area stood White Cross, marking the end of the settlement. Nothing now remains of this cross.
- WIL/406 Early settlement: Long Street south
Very few buildings are marked in this area on the 1801 map, despite the fact that it lies adjacent to two of the main routes. It would be of some interest to know whether this is a true reflection of the area's history. Therefore, opportunities to assess the archaeology of the Fore St and Long St frontages should be taken where possible.
- WIL/407 Early settlement: High Street east
These areas, straddling the stream show development along the eastern frontage of High Street and the southern frontage of Half Acre in 1801, with meadow behind.
- WIL/409 Early settlement: Long Street south
To the south of Long St the 1801 map indicates further scattered occupation constrained by the watermeadows.

- WIL/411 Early settlement: North Road/ Doniford Road
Some development is shown in the fork of the roads on the 1801 map.
- WIL/413 Early settlement: Tower Hill
The property marked at Tower Hill on the 1801 map was adjacent to the old Rack Close (Armstrong, 1984).

All of the above areas are marked from the 1801 survey map without detailed reference to the accompanying survey.

4.4.g Settlement (Rural)

WIL/410, WIL/412, WIL/414

Medieval farms (various)

These farms were certainly in existence by 1801, possibly earlier. Armstrong suggests that the main Catwell property is of medieval origin.

The boundaries have been defined from the 1801 and the 1995 map. NB WIL/414 lies beyond the extent of Map B.

- Not mapped There were hamlets and farms recorded by the late 13th century at Egrove (north-east of Williton), and Curlinch (immediately west of Williton church). For more details of the surrounding settlements in the parish, the Victoria County History should be consulted.

4.4.h Industrial sites

(a) Mills

- Not mapped The manorial mill (not mapped) was in existence by Domesday. This was probably out at Egrove. It was superseded by Orchard Mills in the post-medieval period, but was converted then into a fulling mill (it may already have had this function). It became a grist mill in the late 19th century.

- WIL/501 White Cross Mill
White Cross mill was a fulling mill established by 1735. By the early 19th century the complex included dye houses, workshops, napping, fulling and rowing mills. The building was converted into a workhouse c1825 (Dunning, 1985), which was presumably the predecessor of the Union Workhouse (SMR LB 30927) to the west.

The marked site is based on the 1801 map.

- WIL/502 Orchard Mills
Orchard Mills are thought to have been new in the early 17th century as the lord of the manor, Sir John Wyndham, was criticised for taking the stones from the old mill and allowing it to decay. These were grist mills and continued in operation until 1967, though largely rebuilt in the 19th century. The mill is now a craft shop and museum (1988).

The marked areas are based on the 1801 map.

(b) Other sites

- WIL/408 Smithy
This single establishment existed by 1801 and was marked as a smithy by the end of the 19th century.

The areas are defined from the 1801 map.

- Not mapped There are references to racks close to Tower Hill.

5. INDUSTRIAL (LATE 18TH/ 19TH CENTURY)

(Map C)

5.1 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.

Williton is one of the 22 or so places which though they did not merit Borough or Urban District status at the end of the 19th century, remained market centres and can probably still be regarded as towns (though several of them had sunk towards village status during the course of the century). Williton, in fact, recovered its status to become one of five of these towns which was the centre of its own Rural District.

5.2 Standing structures

There are a number of late 18th and 19th century listed buildings in Williton. These include the Workhouse (Williton Hospital, SMR LB 30927-8) and a complex of buildings at the station (SMR LB 30951-6), as well as several buildings connected with Orchard Wyndham on the south-west fringes of the town (SMR LB 30935-8).

5.3 Archaeological components, shown on Map C

5.3.a Redevelopment in earlier settlement components

There was much redevelopment in the centre of the settlement at the height of Williton's 19th century boom, though Map C shows how little the town expanded in this period. The workhouse/ hospital was established on the eastern fringes of the town in the late 1830s, but this area subsequently became a minor focus for redevelopment with the coming of the railway, with the Railway Hotel being set up opposite.

5.3.b Communications

(a) Roads, streets and routeways

WIL/605

The turnpikes

All the major roads in Williton (except Doniford Road) were taken into the turnpike network from the second half of the 18th century onwards, with the central crossroads eventually connecting routes from Minehead, Bridgwater, Taunton and Watchet. The advent of the railway resulted in the diversion of the eastward route over a new bridge.

From Bentley & Murless (1985) and the 19th century maps.

(b) Railways

WIL/601

The West Somerset Railway

The West Somerset Railway (SMR 33462), opened in 1862, linked Williton to the coast and the main Taunton-Exeter line. It was extended from Watchet to Minehead in 1874. It ran to the east of the town, but close enough to affect the fabric of the town. The West Somerset Railway was closed in 1971 but is now run privately. The station area contains a complex of listed buildings dating from around 1862. These include the old engine shed, booking office, newspaper kiosk, signal box, plate layers' hut, waiting room and the eastern platform (SMR LB 30951-6).

From the 1888 OS map.

5.3.c Settlement (Urban)

(a) Commercial core

Not mapped

The 19th century market was formalised on a site at the junction of Bridge St and Priest St, next to the school.

(b) Suburbs

WIL/602 19th century suburbs (various)
The pattern of 19th century expansion, which was not extensive, is shown on **Map C**. There was cottage development at Catwell and Half-Acre to the south and south-east of the centre. The coming of the railway to the east of Williton led to some expansion.

WIL/603 The Workhouse (the Old Hospital)
The old Williton Hospital, which began as the Union Workhouse (SMR LB 30927-8), was built on the fringes of the post-medieval settlement.

The marked areas are from the 1841, 1888 and 1904 maps.

5.3.d Industrial sites

WIL/604 19th century quarries
Small quarries operated on the fringes of Williton, marked on the 19th century maps but possibly of earlier origins.

From the 1888 map.

6. 20TH CENTURY*(Map C)***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. Williton is one of 30 of the 45 historic towns covered by this project which is not classed as a town in the County Structure Plan.

6.2 Settlement components, shown on Map C*6.2.a Redevelopment in earlier settlement components*

There has been considerable modern infill of the open backs of areas east of Fore Street and High Street, and between High St and Bridge St. However, this has been less the case to the south and west of the town. No earlier settlement components have been redefined for this period.

6.2.b Settlement (Urban)

WIL/701 20th century suburbs (various)
There has been considerable suburban expansion this century. In the first half of the century sizeable allotments were designated to the north of the town, but these have largely been swallowed by Post-War estates. The area closest to the railway has comparatively recently been developed, for industrial and business use as well as suburbs.

6.2.c Industrial areas

WIL/702 20th century industrial sites (various)
Industrial area by the station.

The marked areas are based on the 1995 OS data.

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

Williton lies within a known area of prehistoric activity and archaeological potential: a greater understanding of the local context of the Battlegore barrow cemetery is therefore one focus of interest. In historic times, the town's chief

feature is its continuity as an administrative centre, despite fluctuations in its commercial importance. Research into the origins of this function in Williton requires archaeological input, since so little is known of the Saxon centre, or of any possible earlier origins. Even the archaeological confirmation (or refutation) of the traditional location of the settlement would be an advance on current understanding.

2. Areas of potentially exceptional preservation

Williton is well watered. Whilst few of the streams and leats touch areas of archaeological importance, those running through the centre and around the south-western corner of the town may, though small, have archaeological implications. Moreover, if the apparent settlement shift to the north-east is real, there is a possibility that the areas of greatest archaeological interest may be well-preserved, having been protected from later development.

3. Limitations

None.

4. Extent of current protection

(shown on Map D)

As well as a number of listed buildings, there are six scheduled monuments at Williton. Four of these are the barrows and burial chamber at Battle Gore (SM 33704); the other two are the crosses: SM 32189 and 32190. Most of Williton lies within the AHAP defined around the Doniford Gravels. There is No Conservation Area.

5. Management proposals

See the Archaeological Guidance Document.

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Maps

Map A – prehistoric

Map B – Saxon to post-medieval

Map C – 19th and 20th century

Map D - Existing designations

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