

**EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY
FOR
BEDFORDSHIRE**

**LEIGHTON BUZZARD ARCHAEOLOGICAL
ASSESSMENT**

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Bedfordshire County Council and English Heritage

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Preface

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Background to the Project*

English Heritage has initiated a national series of Extensive Urban Surveys. This report is an archaeological assessment of Leighton Buzzard and forms part of the Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) for Bedfordshire. The survey of the 12 historic towns of Bedfordshire is funded by English Heritage (EH) and managed by the County Archaeological Officer (CAO) of Bedfordshire County Council (BCC). It is a joint project undertaken by staff of Albion Archaeology and the Heritage and Environment Group of BCC.

The EUS comprises three stages: Data Compilation, Assessment and Strategy. The first stage, Data Compilation, draws together the accessible history of the town, known archaeological sites and historic buildings data. The Assessment presents this evidence in the form of a report which provides a history of the town, an account of its buried and standing archaeology, together with an assessment of archaeological potential. The Strategy stage will draw on the Assessment to develop a strategic framework for the management of the archaeological resource for each town.

The chronological framework used in the Assessment reports to describe each town's development (normally section 5) reflects the periodisation used in the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER). Any broad dating system of this kind has limitations in the face of the mass of detailed evidence that exists for each town. It has, therefore, occasionally (*e.g.* Bedford in the Saxon and Saxo-Norman periods, or Luton in the early industrial period) been necessary to use slightly different chronological divisions. In addition, the town of Sandy is exceptional in its own right because only the Roman town has been included in the Bedfordshire EUS.

1.2 *Structure of this Document*

This report has been compiled using a number of sources including the Bedfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER), the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service (BLARS) and the Albion Archaeology (formerly BCAS) project database.

The location and topography of Leighton Buzzard is described in Section 2. The nature of the evidence is discussed in Section 3 and a historical summary of the town is presented in Section 4. The archaeological and historical development of the town is described by chronological period in Section 5. Section 6 comprises an assessment of Leighton Buzzard's character, importance and potential. The historical development of the town and areas of archaeological potential are presented in plan form at the end of this report.



2 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

Leighton Buzzard is a medium-sized town in south-west Bedfordshire (Fig 1), within the hundred of Manshead. Its historic core is centred at about SP 920 250 on the OS grid. The town is 39 miles north-west of London and 10 miles south-east of the new town of Milton Keynes. Bedford is 20 miles to the north-north-east. Aylesbury is 11 miles to the south-west. Dunstable is 6 miles and Luton 12 miles to the east-south-east.

Since 1965 Leighton Buzzard has been part of the combined borough of Leighton-Linslade, consisting of the larger town of Leighton Buzzard to the east and the smaller more recent town of Linslade to the west. Now nearly adjoining each other, these two areas of the present borough are still separated topographically by the course of the River Ousel (sometimes spelt as Ouzel). The county boundary, formerly marked by the river, was shifted westwards to accommodate the change – bringing Linslade into Bedfordshire for the first time. (Note that Linslade was once situated 1 mile to the north of its present position; only in the post-medieval period did the settlement shift south towards the river crossing).

The geology of the town consists of river gravels overlying Lower Greensand. Ground is fairly level but with a gentle slope down to the river and the brook. Average height is about 85m AOD. The River Ousel (a tributary of the Great Ouse) runs from south to north just to the west of Leighton Buzzard and to the east of Linslade. It acts as a natural boundary and, as already mentioned, served until recently as the county boundary between Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Running into the Ousel from the north-east is the Clipstone Brook, which effectively forms a southern boundary to the old town (Fig 1).

More or less parallel to and west of the river between Leighton Buzzard and Linslade is the Grand Union Canal - one of the great waterways of the Industrial Age. When it was constructed it was situated entirely in the county of Buckinghamshire, but due to the boundary changes a short stretch of it now runs within Bedfordshire.

Leighton Buzzard is located just 4 miles to the south-west of the A5 (Watling Street), which has been a major route between London, the Midlands and the North-West since Roman times. It is at the junction of a number of lesser routes which converge on the bridges over the River Ousel and the canal. Roads from Milton Keynes, Buckingham and Aylesbury/Wing converge on the Linslade side. Roads from Woburn/Heath and Reach, Hockliffe, and Hemel Hempstead/Billington all converge on the western side of Leighton Buzzard to be funnelled into the town along the High Street (though nowadays traffic is directed away again by the bypass and one-way systems). See Fig 9 for modern street names.

The Agricultural Land Classification of England and Wales, Sheet 147, shows the area of the town to be predominantly in urban use. The agricultural land surrounding the town is classed as Grade III and is primarily used for mixed



arable farming. Sand and gravel quarrying has impacted upon this landscape, in some cases converting the land to recreational use.



3 NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE

3.1 *Previous Archaeological Investigations*

3.1.1 Excavations in the Historic Core

There have been very few excavations in Leighton Buzzard, making it one of the least investigated of the market towns of Bedfordshire. Locations of all excavations are marked on Fig 2.

From the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service (BCAS) carried out a number of small watching briefs in the town centre – at Church Farm (WB 4), Lake Street (WB 47, WB 63), All Saints' Church (WB 100), 12 High Street (WB119), 23-25 High Street (LB94/248), and Water Lane (WB 204). However, very little archaeological evidence dating to before the post-medieval period has been reported.

Another archaeological investigation (LB 428) took place at 4 Market Square in 1996. Initial documentary research suggested that the area was occupied by light industry in the 17th century. A programme of trial trenching seemed to confirm this, revealing archaeological and structural evidence - in the form of a boundary ditch, stone drain and walls - dating from the post-medieval period. Also found were a few unstratified medieval pottery sherds, indicating that earlier evidence may have been disturbed. This may be the case for much of the old part of Leighton Buzzard.

In 1999 a small evaluation was carried out by BCAS in the graveyard of All Saints' Church (ASC 563). The most significant finding was a great depth of rubble in the west part of the graveyard, thought to be the infill of cellars of the prebendal mansion, demolished in 1810 (Wilson 1999).

In 2000, the Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological evaluation at 33 Lake Street. A single large pit, probably for quarrying, was reported (Murray 2000).

In 2001, ASC conducted an evaluation of 52-54 Lake Street. A total of 14 trial trenches were opened up. A series of boundary ditches were discovered running parallel to Lake Street in a NW-SE direction - dated by pottery to the 11th-13th centuries - but very few other archaeological features were found (Fell and King 2001).

3.1.2 Excavations Outside the Historic Core

During the early 20th century three Anglo-Saxon cemeteries were excavated by the gifted amateur archaeologist Fred Gurney. Locations are marked on Figs 2 and 3. Two of the cemeteries (HER 3, Morris 1962) were located on the northern edge of the town near to Chamberlains Barn sandpit. The first cemetery to be discovered here was dated to the 6th and 7th centuries, the second was found to be slightly later. To the west of these, near to the Brickhill Road sandpit (Deadman's Slade) a further cemetery was excavated, dated to the 6th



century (HER 1, Morris 1962). For a more detailed account of the cemetery evidence, see Gurney (1956) or Hislop (1963). A recent consideration of their date and possible sequence of use can be found in Boddington (1990).

In 2000, Network Archaeology carried out an evaluation at St Ives, Plantation Road, in the north of Leighton Buzzard, very close to the site of Deadman's Slade cemetery. It located the edge of the 19th century quarry, but no Anglo-Saxon remains were uncovered (Network Archaeology 2000).

One of the longest running excavations in Britain was carried out by Bedfordshire County Archaeology Service at Grove Priory quarry, 2km to the south of Leighton Buzzard town centre, between 1973 and 1985 (Figs 2 and 3). The site was investigated by means of an extensive programme of excavation and other fieldwork, together with documentary research, over a period of 12 years (GP 333). The priory served as the Royal Manor of Leighton as well as an ecclesiastical centre. A large number of buildings, ranging in date from the early medieval up until the early post-medieval period, were excavated. These included priory buildings, specialised domestic and industrial structures, agricultural barns, *etc.* There were also extensive earthworks, including fishponds (Baker 1997: 227-236, Baker *in prep*). Further trial trenching was carried out in 1991 (WB 192); a number of features were identified, but the precise date of these were undetermined. A further area was subject to a watching brief in 1995 (WB 206). Most of the area has now been quarried away.

In 1985 a programme of archaeological fieldwork (WB 40) was undertaken in conjunction with the development of the Leighton-Linslade bypass to the south of the town near Grove Priory. This produced some archaeological features dating from prehistoric to post-medieval. Further work, in the form of a watching brief (LLB 90) was undertaken on the bypass route in 1990.

In 1984 a watching brief (WB10) was carried out at the point where the bypass crosses the River Ousel, 1.5km south-west of Leighton Buzzard town centre. This was the spot identified by Gurney (1920) as the ford known as Yttingaford (HER 18), where the Ousel was crossed by the Anglo-Saxon route called the Thiodweg or saltway. No trace of the ford was found, but excavation revealed a large stone or monolith and some possible masonry. It was speculated that a bridge might have existed here at some time during the medieval period.

3.2 Historical Evidence

Volume III of the Victorian County History (VCH) gives a history of the Manshead Hundred, which includes Leighton Buzzard and its hamlets (Page 1912, 399-417).

A Bedfordshire Town Survey of Leighton Buzzard (undated) was produced by Annette Edwards in 1974.

Steve Coleman wrote a detailed Parish Survey for Bedfordshire County Council in 1981, covering the modern parishes of Billington, Eggington, Heath and Reach, Leighton-Linslade and Stanbridge.



The Bedfordshire and Luton Archive and Record Service (BLARS) holds a vast amount of material about Leighton Buzzard, including manorial documents, which date from the late medieval to the early 19th century. There is an extensive series of parish registers, dating from the early 17th century. Census returns from 1801-1991 are also held there.

A very important resource held by BLARS consists of the field notes of amateur archaeologist Frederick Gurney of Eggington (X325), who carried out much useful fieldwork in the countryside around Leighton Buzzard in the first half of the 20th century.

The map evidence for the parish of Leighton Buzzard is reasonably good although there is no surviving early map from before the late 18th century. The earliest map showing the basic street plan is Jeffrey's map of Bedfordshire surveyed in 1765, but detail is lacking. Bevan's map of 1819 is the first properly surveyed town map, with positions of buildings clearly shown. The first edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map was surveyed in 1886, with subsequent editions in 1901 and 1926.

The Historic Environment Record, maintained by Bedfordshire County Council, lists over 300 historic buildings ranging in date from the 13th century parish church of All Saints (HER 862) to the late 19th century Methodist Chapel located on North Street (HER 7315). It also maps and records archaeological sites and findspots and is a crucial resource for anyone researching into the history or archaeology of the town. Copies of most of the unpublished archaeological reports cited here are available for consultation in the HER.

Bedford, Leighton Buzzard and Luton Libraries all hold some material on Leighton Buzzard, including parish surveys, newspaper cuttings and magazine articles.

For a good general background on the history of Bedfordshire, see Godber (1969).



4 HISTORICAL SUMMARY

The settlement now known as Leighton Buzzard originated in the Saxon period, though there is no definite mention of it prior to the Domesday Book of 1086. At that time the manor (of which the ‘town’ was a part) was known simply as Lestone. It was described as a household manor of the King, with 47 hides and land for 52 ploughs – making it the largest and one of the most important of the royal manors in the county. Listed in the survey are 82 villagers, 30 smallholders and 2 slaves. This implies a sizeable settlement of several hundred inhabitants, but how many of these actually lived in the settlement later known as Leighton Buzzard is unclear. Mention of market tolls confirms that it was a thriving community at that time (there are only three markets listed for Bedfordshire in the survey). There were two mills working within the manor and large areas of meadow and woodland. The church, together with the 4 hides of land attached to it, was held by Remigius, Bishop of Lincoln (Morris 1977).

The first and earliest part of the placename of Leighton Buzzard is generally thought to derive from the Old English *lei* meaning clearing or cultivated area and *tun* or *ton*, which denotes a village. Alternatively it may come from the Old English word *leactun* meaning ‘kitchen garden’ (Mawer and Staughton 1926). The second part is thought to have been added by clerics at Lincoln Cathedral in the early 13th century. It may derive from the name of Theobald de Busar, a Canon of Lincoln and prebendary of Leighton at that time. From the early 17th century it was sometimes rendered as Beau Dessert or Beau Assart (a good clearing). There have been many different spellings of both parts of the name – over sixty versions of Leighton and over forty versions of Buzzard (Hart 1986).

The growth of the town may be closely connected with the re-routing of an important Saxon route known as the Theed Way or Thiodweg away from the crossing of the River Ousel at Yttingaford towards the crossing (bridge) at Leighton (Fig 3). This re-routing is thought by some to have taken place in about the 12th century. The Theed Way continued in use as a salt road in the medieval period but roads now diverted much of the traffic into and through the town, leading to a major re-planning of the town’s layout in the 12th century or thereabouts (Coleman 1981).

In 1164, the manor was granted by Henry II to the abbey of Fontévrault in France. By the reign of Richard I the abbey had founded a cell within the manor to the south of the town. This came to be known as La Grove, Grove Priory or Grovebury, to which Leighton manor was henceforth attached (Page 1912).

While it had been William the Conqueror who had given the church of the royal manor of Lestone to Lincoln Cathedral some time between 1066 and 1086, it was not until a century or so later that it was made into a prebend by Bishop Hugh (whose dates in office are 1186-1200). The Bishop’s estate, which included the church, became known as Leighton Prebendal or Rectorial Manor.



The suffix 'Busar' or 'Busard' was probably added to the town's name shortly after this, to distinguish it from Lincoln's other prebendary at Leighton Bromeswold (see discussion of placename above).

Leighton Buzzard developed into a thriving market town with several annual fairs. The surviving market cross is thought to be early 15th century in date, though it may have replaced an earlier cross. There was also a 'Nether Cross' which no longer survives at the other end of the High Street. The first mention of a Moot Hall or Market Toll House is in the 16th century.

In 1645 Cromwell's Parliamentarian troops were billeted in the town. There was a fire on the south side of the High Street, causing £14,000 worth of damage – a huge amount for those days.

Straw-plaiting and basket-making were significant cottage industries from the mid 18th century on. Agriculture was also an important part of town life.

Thomas Jeffery's map of 1765 shows Leighton Buzzard to be quite separate from Linslade, which at that time was one mile north of its present position. Linslade had its own market and was a place of pilgrimage in medieval times but declined in importance relative to Leighton Buzzard. The opening of the Grand Junction Canal in 1800 and the construction of three wharfs brought about a significant shift of settlement with people moving to a place called Chelsea on the west bank of the Ousel (Fig 12). This became known as Linslade, distinguished from the older settlement to the north which was now called Old Linslade. There was further expansion of Linslade when the London and North Western Railway line opened, running between Euston and Manchester. Leighton Buzzard has always been a small market town surrounded by farmland. However, the railway encouraged industrial growth. Tile manufacture and the quarrying of sand were important industries throughout the 20th century.

The population of the new town of Linslade was only 200 in the early 19th century, growing to about 2000 in the early 20th century. The two towns joined to form one town of 17,000 inhabitants in 1965. The population of Leighton-Linslade in 1991 was over 30,000.



5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

5.1 *The Prehistoric Period (c10,000BC - AD43)*

Palaeolithic flints have been found in several of the clay pits and gravel pits around Leighton Buzzard (HER 10722-4, 1037-8, 10965).

A Mesolithic flint working area was found during excavation of Grove Priory, 2km south of the town. Investigation of the raised, sandy part of the site revealed concentrations of flints associated with a number of possible pits. This part of the site was interpreted as a temporary flint working area, perhaps on an island. There are no other similar Mesolithic sites within Bedfordshire, thus these finds are potentially extremely important both on a local and regional scale (Baker forthcoming).

In close proximity to the Mesolithic flint working area were a number of post holes and shallow pits containing Neolithic flint tools and debitage. A near complete vessel and possible cremations were also found, suggesting small-scale, localised settlement activity (Baker forthcoming).

Flint artefacts of Neolithic date were also recovered during the watching brief (WB 40) on the Leighton-Linslade bypass undertaken in 1985. Further isolated Neolithic finds (HER 19, 10711, 10716, 10718) have been found within or close to the town of Leighton Buzzard itself, suggesting there was activity within the area during this period, but not necessarily a permanent settlement.

Leighton Buzzard is situated close to the Thiodweg, Thede or Theed Way (HER 10843), an ancient track branching off from the Icknield Way and heading north-eastwards towards Toddington (Fig 3). Although best known as a medieval salt route, the road (together with the crossing of the River Ousel known as Yttingaford) is likely to be prehistoric in origin.

Located near to Leighton Buzzard on the southern edge of Leighton Heath are two Bronze Age barrows (HER 2) (Fig 3). These are now in poor condition due to modern farming practices and the advent of recent development. There was a further barrow located at the site of Grove Priory (HER 3289); this seems to have been re-used as a windmill mound in the medieval period, but quarrying has recently destroyed the site. Also found at Grove Priory were near complete beaker-type vessels and associated flint assemblages. Associated with these were a group of features and a possible structure.

A number of Iron Age coins, including gold stater, have been found in or close to the town (HER 17, 10712, 10713).

5.2 *The Roman Period (AD43 - AD410)*

Work by Fred Gurney at the beginning of the 20th century (field notes, BLARS X325, Simco 1984, 10) highlighted the interesting distribution of Roman pottery in the general area of Leighton Buzzard. He noted that Roman pottery was easy to find on the boulder clay ridges but virtually impossible to find in



the valleys where gault clay predominated. From this he concluded that most settlement in Roman times was on the higher ground, avoiding the poorly drained land in the valley bottoms.

Notwithstanding this, Simco (1984, 29) identified the Leighton Buzzard area, close to the River Ousel, as a likely location for a Roman villa – though no evidence of one has yet emerged. Leighton Buzzard is situated about 5km from Watling Street; that is, unlike Dunstable, it is situated away from the main routes in use in Roman times.

Few finds of Roman date have come from Leighton Buzzard. In Page's Park to the south-east of the High Street, a Roman well lined with sandstone was discovered (HER 20, Simco 1984, 109). In 1961 sherds of Romano-British pottery (HER 819) were found opposite the church, near to the canal (Simco 1984, 109).

Further Roman finds such as pottery (HER 10729, 10965), coins (HER 9659, 10712, 10714-5) and a burial (10728) were found within and near to the town. Overall, there is nothing to suggest that anything more than sporadic settlement existed here in Roman times.

5.3 The Anglo-Saxon Period (AD410 - AD1066)

5.3.1 Early Saxon Cemeteries

Two Anglo-Saxon cemeteries (HER 3) were excavated at Chamberlains Barn sandpit, Leighton Buzzard, between 1931 and 1936. The potential of the site was first realised in 1931 when the owner of the sandpit discovered 15 polychrome beads. These were identified by Mr Gurney who subsequently made a number of visits to where the beads had been found. About 70 inhumations and a number of cremations were recorded and excavated. In October 1935 further burial evidence, consisting of 22 inhumations, was found to the south-east. It was quickly realised that this formed part of a separate cemetery. The precise location of the graves within both cemeteries cannot be determined, as at the time of the excavation only scant notes were made. The second cemetery consisted of 22 inhumations (Morris 1962: 68).

Grave goods from the first cemetery suggest that it was in use in the 6th and early 7th centuries. The second cemetery was identified as similar to those excavated in Kent; its date is uncertain (Hislop 1964, 189-200).

A further cemetery (HER 1) had been excavated at Brickhill Road sandpit (Deadman's Slade) in the 1880s. A number of the cremation urns were decorated with chevrons, dots and rings; several inhumations were also found. Grave goods date the cemetery to the 6th century (Morris 1962, 68).

The existence of the cemeteries indicates there was a settlement nearby, as the number and organised arrangement of the burials must have come from one or more structured community. A general characteristic of the distribution of cemeteries of this date is that they are often located on boundaries. These are



no exception, situated as they are just outside of and to the north of the later medieval town, on the edge of heath or common land.

An Anglo-Saxon spear (HER 2820) was found during the construction of a new road near Sandy Lane, close to the Chamberlains Barn cemeteries.

5.3.2 Theed Way and Yttingaford

An important Saxon and medieval road known as the Thiodweg or Theed Way passed to the south of the town, crossing the River Ousel at Yttingaford. This is where King Edward the Elder met the Danish leaders in 903, a significant event mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Savage 1983). The Theed Way continued in use as a salt road in the medieval period but by then most traffic is thought to have been diverted into and through the town (Coleman 1996).

5.3.3 Royal Manor

The Royal Manor of Leighton was assessed in the Domesday Book at 47 hides, of which 4 were held by the church of the manor. There was arable land for 55 ploughs, meadowland for 47 plough teams, woodland for 100 swine, and two mills (Morris 1977). The whereabouts of the headquarters or focus of the manor is not known. It has been suggested that it could have been at the later site of Grove Priory, in the town of Leighton itself, or in Heath and Reach. Or there could have been a number of manorial centres.

In the late Saxon period at Grove there was a timber hall surrounded by a large enclosure ditch and bank, and these earthworks provided the frame for the location of later monastic buildings. It is possible that these represent an early manorial centre (especially as Grove Priory was subsequently the site of the Royal Manor, from the late 12th to the early 16th century)

But wherever the headquarters were, the sheer size of the manorial lands made it one of the largest in Bedfordshire. It covered Heath and Reach, Eggington, Billington, Stanbridge, as well as the town itself.

5.3.4 Church

The site of the original Saxon church is not known with certainty but is thought to have been on the site of the present church, built in the late 13th century. In 1066 the church and 4 hides of land were held by Bishop Wulfwig of Dorchester. It was passed to the Bishop of Lincoln in 1079 (Coleman 1981). It seems likely that the church, though much smaller than the present structure, could have been an important minster during the middle to late Saxon period, with daughter churches at Billington, Eggington, Heath and Reach, and Stanbridge.

5.3.5 Town Layout and Streets

The layout of the town in the late Anglo-Saxon and early Norman periods (prior to its supposed re-planning in the 12th century) is not known with any certainty. It seems likely that it would have occupied land close to the river, on its eastern bank, to the north and south of a ford or bridge. Assuming that the



river crossing at that time was on the site of the present bridge, a good case could be made out for Bridge Street being the central east-west axis of this early town (the High Street part of town being added later). It could have occupied a roughly rectangular area beside the river, the streets and property boundaries of which seem to be orientated differently from those associated with the High Street (see Fig 14, Component 2).

However, a drawback of this model is that it leaves the church in an oddly peripheral position on the edge of town away from the main street. Other possible models of the early origin and layout of the town should perhaps be considered. The assumption that the High Street is a later addition to the town is challenged by the fact that it is on the same alignment as the road through Wing to Aylesbury on the other side of the river. Could they once have been one and the same road, crossing the river at a point to the south of the present bridge? Such an alternative model might suggest that the High Street could be an original feature of town layout, and that Bridge Street is part of a later modification which involved the blocking of an existing route and the diversion of traffic to a new river crossing. A remodelling of the High Street and the setting out of burgage plots at this time may have built upon an already existing pattern of development.

The first model is the established one and will for the most part be followed in this report. But it is worth leaving open the possibility that other models could be employed to reach very different conclusions about the origin and development of the town.

5.4 The Medieval Period (AD1066 - AD1550)

5.4.1 All Saints' Church

The church was demolished and completely re-built in the late 13th century, and most of the fabric dates from that time, though a bell dating to 1150 and an early 13th century font survive from the earlier building (Pickford 1998, 420). Documents of 1220 and 1242 refer to disputes between the church and Foutevrault Abbey, the latter being a complaint by the Rector that the Abbess of Fontévrault had built a chapel. The rector stated that this chapel was prejudicial to his parochial interests and to those of All Saints' Church.

This large cruciform church with its impressive central tower and spire is situated on the south side of Church Square, set back from the High Street. The broach spire is 190 feet high and can be easily seen from all approaches to the town. The position of the church raises interesting questions about town development, which are discussed below. A major fire in 1985 severely damaged the tower and chancel with its 15th century roof, and there has been much subsequent restoration work, including some archaeological recording on the tower by Network Archaeology (2003).

Inside the church there is much ancient woodwork. An eagle lectern of oak is believed to be 13th or 14th century in date. In the chancel are 14th century stalls with carved misericords which survived the fire unharmed. The west door has



ornate 13th century ironwork by the local ironsmith Thomas of Leighton, whose work can also be seen in Westminster Abbey. There is some notable medieval graffiti in the church.

New drainage works at the church prompted a programme of archaeological investigation (Wilson 1999). Two trenches were excavated for new soakaways. A considerable depth of brick and tile rubble was found in the graveyard to the west of the church. This probably derives from the demolition of the prebendal mansion. The trench was probably positioned over the rubble-filled cellars of the mansion, over which the graveyard had later expanded.

5.4.2 Prebendal Manor

In 1189 Leighton was converted into a Prebendal Stall (referring to a stall in Lincoln Cathedral). From then on right up to the 19th century the parish was a 'Peculiar' in that, though part of an archdeaconry, it was also outside its jurisdiction and had its own 'Peculiar' court. An officer of Lincoln Cathedral called the Prebendary was appointed, and it was probably at this time that the prebendal or rectorial manor house was built on the west side of the church, in a large plot of land with river frontage. The first documentary reference to it is in 1344, when a document lists the items stolen in a burglary (Willis 1984, 22-3). The manor house was probably rebuilt several times, and its latest post-medieval form is depicted on a painting currently held by the church. It was demolished in the early 19th century. Its exact location was uncertain, partly because the painting showed it and its surroundings in mirror image. However, an evaluation trench in the churchyard seems to have located the cellars of the later mansion, and its exact position can in fact be reconstructed from old plans (Wilson 1999). See Fig 10 for the layout of the mansion and gardens marked up onto the modern Ordnance Survey map. It can perhaps be assumed that the earlier prebendal manor house lies within or close to the footprint of the post-medieval mansion.

5.4.3 Royal Manor and Grove Priory

In 1164 Henry II granted the Royal Manor of Leighton to the Benedictine Order of Fontévrault in Anjou. A priory was founded upon an important site right on the boundary of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire about 2km to the south of the town of Leighton (Fig 3). This had been a focus of settlement in preceding periods: for example, it was the site of an Anglo-Saxon hall within a ditched enclosure which may have been one of the manorial centres for the Royal Manor of Leighton long before the manor was granted to the Fontévrault Order. Grove Priory is first mentioned in a document of 1194. From the late 12th century up to the early 15th century, priory and manor seem to be almost synonymous with each other. The Priory was dissolved in 1414, but the manor continued. In 1415 it passed to William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, and his wife Alice. In 1444, they granted Leighton manor to Eton College but in 1472 the manor was granted back to Alice and her heirs. In 1480, Leighton manor was alienated to the dean and canons of St George's, Windsor (Baker 1982).

Between 1973 and 1985 the excavation of the priory and royal manor was undertaken prior to the site being quarried away. A total of 87 buildings were



investigated with several dating from the 11th century up until the mid 16th century. Buildings identified within the medieval phase were interpreted as belonging to administrative and royal quarters, which were defended by palisades. These were later replaced by walled roadways, external buildings and watercourses. The site encompassed a wide range of buildings, which had social, domestic, royal, agricultural and ecclesiastical functions (Baker 1982, Baker *in prep*).

5.4.4 Mill

Two mills in the Royal Manor of Leighton are referred to in the Domesday Book (one of these may have been at Grove, or on the prebendal estate – or it could be that two mills were housed in the same building at Leighton). The Leighton (town) mill was situated at SP 9183 2560 at the north end of an artificial leat. Both mill and leat could be of Saxon origin, or may date to the re-planning of the town layout in the 12th century. The mill was mentioned in 1155 when the owner was forced to pay a fine of 32 shillings to Woburn Abbey (Willis 1984, 16). In a lease of 1525 the mill is referred to as Leighton Mill.

5.4.5 Market and Fairs

The first mention of Leighton Buzzard's market occurs in the Domesday Book of 1086, implying that a market was well established in late Saxon times. Edwards (1974) believes that the early market may have been on a site close to the church. The next mention of the market occurs in a document dating to 1230. This concerns a complaint made by the Prior of Leighton to the Prior of Snelshall that the new market at Mursley interfered with attendance at the market at Leighton. In the late 15th century a Moot Hall or market house was built on Market Hill, at the east end of the main street. Further encroachments occurred here in the late medieval period as Middle Row (which now forms 18-35 Market Square) was established.

5.4.6 Market Cross

The market cross was also built in the 15th century - first mentioned in a court roll entry of 1499 (BLARS: KK 944/4). It still remains one of the major landmarks of the town. Willis suggests that its construction was organised by Alice, Duchess of Suffolk, who was the owner of the manor in the mid 15th century (Willis 1984, 27). At about this time there was also another cross at the bottom or west end of the main street. This was known as the Nether Cross, mentioned in documents of 1537, 1582 and 1611 (Richmond 1928, Coleman 1996). This second cross was probably knocked down during the 17th century.

Located at the focal point of the three roads which funnel into the High Street at its eastern end, the surviving market cross is a key element in the layout of the town today, just as it was in medieval times. It is quite possible that when it was built in the 15th century it replaced an earlier cross, of which no record remains.

5.4.7 Iron Smelting (HER 10845)

Frederick Gurney describes in his notebooks the finding of over 200 pits close to the Chamberlains Barn Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. These were typically 9-16



feet deep and made to reach a bed of sandstone from which iron-bearing nodules had been removed. Scraps of medieval pottery dated to about the 13th century were found in small spreads of industrial residue nearby. These remains are thought to represent a medieval smelting site.

5.4.8 Row Riddy Stone (HER 11083)

Also called the Roweredy, Roughride, Rowe Rody or Rowley Stone, this monument was still in existence when the Bevan map of 1819 was surveyed. It marked the point at which the narrow road leading northwards out of Leighton Buzzard opened out into heathland. A stream which ran past the stone was also called Row-Riddy. The antiquity of this stone is unknown. It was probably removed during extensive modifications to the landscape at Enclosure in 1848.

5.4.9 Tannery (HER 1086)

A tannery was located between Water Lane and Bridge Street at Lovell End, adjacent to the mill race on the east bank of the River Ousel. The site is centred at SP 9178 2509. Coleman (1981, 123) traces its use back to at least the late 15th century and suggests it could have been a manorial tannery. It could be much older. There are records of tan-pits, lime-pits and vats at this location. The site seems to have been in use as a tannery right up to the 19th century.

5.4.10 Streets

The street pattern of Leighton Buzzard has been discussed in detail by Coleman (1996). He argues that the town was subject to a radical re-planning in the 12th century, with the basic 'Y'-shaped formation of streets probably being laid out at that time. There are alternative ways of looking at the evidence, however. It is interesting to consider that the High Street (which forms the stem of the 'Y') seems oddly disconnected from the roads coming into Leighton from the west, yet is actually on the same alignment as the old road which passes through Wing towards Aylesbury. Could it be that the two roads were once one and the same, but were disconnected during re-planning of the town in the 12th century? If so, this would mean that the basic 'Y' pattern of streets is much earlier in date than previously thought, possibly dating right back into Saxon times though no doubt modified in later planning events. It would also suggest that the present bridge does not mark the original crossing of the river, and that the narrow and curving Bridge Street is not an original feature of the town. Indeed this route could be interpreted as a diversion from a more direct pre-existing route. An expansion of prebendary lands, together with a need to control traffic through the town, might have prompted this radical re-arrangement of roads.

5.4.11 Bridges

The Yttingaford, a major crossing-point in the Anglo-Saxon period, continued to be used in the medieval period too. However due to a reorientation of routes in the medieval period the significance of the ford decreased. Traffic and roads increasingly headed for other river crossings instead. Of growing importance was the crossing over the River Ousel just to the east of the town, funnelling roads towards it from all directions. The development of Leighton Buzzard from a small rural settlement into a town was inextricably bound up with these changing patterns of communication. The bridge on Bridge Street (HER



11094) is first mentioned in 1311/12 – though it is likely to have replaced an earlier bridge or ford on the same site. Note that there were actually a series of three bridges here, crossing first of all the mill leat and then two channels of the Ousel. The main bridge was called the ‘Lovendbrigg’ in bailiff’s accounts of 1389 (Simco and McKeague 1997, 86), apparently because the Ousel at that time was called the Lovent. Responsibility for maintaining the bridge fell to the lord of the manor. The medieval bridge has long since been replaced; it has been re-built several times over the last 300 years.

A bridge known as Lake or Chain Bridge (HER 11087) is mentioned in the manor court rolls of 1491. It was located at the point where Lake Street (the road to Billington) crossed the Clipstone Brook.

5.4.12 Buildings (see Fig 11)

HER	Address	Comments
1088	All Saints’ Church, Church Square	Late 13 th century, probably on site of earlier church
4606	The Peacock, 1 Lake Street	15 th century converted into a shop in the 19 th century
4623	The Bell Public House, formerly the Market Tavern, 10 Market Sq.	Opened 1483, 19 th century façade added
16163	4-8 Market Place	15 th century

Table 1. Medieval buildings in Leighton Buzzard

5.4.13 Trades

Leighton Buzzard would have had the full range of traders. Taxation documents of the 13th/14th centuries list glovers, dyers, spicers, merchants, tailors, fullers and carpenters. A court roll entry of 1468 lists four butchers, two bakers, four tanners, two leather dressers, a Chandler and a Glover (Godber 1969, 161). Many of these trades were associated with shops. Records dating to the 15th century suggest that there were a number of shops on the High Street (BLARS: KK 944/4). There is also reference to a smith’s forge (HER 11156), located on Forge Street and in existence by 1500. Many of the town inhabitants were farmers, or worked in an occupation related to agriculture. Textile- and leather-working were important industries, with the tannery located close to the river, where a dye house is also recorded to have extended up to the artificial mill leat in the 15th and 16th century (Coleman 1996, 6). The mill was probably used for fulling and other industrial purposes, and it is likely that some of the small closes around the mill were for drying fulled cloth on tentering-racks.

5.5 The Post-Medieval Period (AD1550 - AD1850)

5.5.1 Market

During the post-medieval period the market and fairs, focused upon Market Square, extended right along the High Street. In the centre of the square was the Market House or Moot Hall (HER 4631), which dispensed the rights to set up stalls and pens. This was replaced by the Town Hall in 1851. Coleman (1981, 77) describes how the different types of animal stock (cattle, sheep, pigs,



horses) always occupied set positions along the High Street on market days.

There were at least six fairs held during the year. During the 19th century these included a horse fair held over three days, during which there was a turnover of over 4,000 horses. A wool fair, originating in 1840, sold over 70,000 fleeces in two days. The picture that emerges is of a flourishing commercial town, with numerous inns lining the main streets. Markets and fairs dealt mainly in animal and other agricultural products, with some straw plait.

The market cross served as an important focus for public meetings and proclamations. Preachers used the steps as a platform. In 1751 two local women were denounced as witches from the steps of the cross.

5.5.2 Inns

Connected with the market were the large number of inns, where much market business was carried out. The Peacock in Lake Street is one of the oldest. It had a smithy at the back and part of the market, called Peacock Market, held at the front. Other ancient inns in Lake Street were the George and the Plume of Feathers. In the High Street were the Bull, the Eagle and Child, the Saracen's Head and the Swan. All these were in existence in the 18th century. Some were important coaching inns. Many had their own malt-houses for brewing in yards to the rear. By the 19th century there were over ten inns in Lake Street alone, which at that time was one of the most prosperous areas of the town.

5.5.3 Leighton House

Leighton House was an 18th century large house and gardens situated half way along the south side of the High Street, though it is now demolished. A doorway adjoining the house was often said to be the remains of a Cistercian cell of Woburn Abbey situated within the town, though this is more legend than fact. In local folklore, an underground tunnel was supposed to link the cell with All Saints' Church and the prebendal manor.

5.5.4 Mill

The mill continued in use as a flour mill throughout the post-medieval period, and is mentioned in numerous documents as Leighton Mill or Town Mill.

5.5.5 Pest House

A pest house was located on the outskirts of town at the top of North Street, near Row Riddy Stone, during the late medieval and early post-medieval period.

5.5.6 Streets

The medieval street plan continued in use throughout the post-medieval period with little change or addition, though back streets like Friday Street may be later developments. Bevan's map of 1819 depicts an essentially medieval town (Fig 6). The market was no longer confined solely to the Market Square and extended instead right along the length of the High Street. Some infilling of the market square had taken place, probably in medieval times, creating small lanes between buildings where once there was an open space.



5.5.7 Bridge

The bridge was repaired in 1734 and again in 1824, then widened in the late 19th century (Simco and McKeague 1997, 86). The present bridge is of 20th century concrete construction.

5.5.8 Prebendal Mansion

The prebendal mansion was rebuilt in the 17th-18th century, and the form of this house is depicted in mirror image on a painting held by the church. It is also shown in plan together with its main outbuildings and garden areas on a map of 1804 (BLARS: CRT130 LB35), from which Fig 10 has been drawn. It was demolished by 1820.

5.5.9 St Andrew's Church

St Andrew's Church was built in 1867 but recently demolished, with only the churchyard wall and lych gate surviving.

5.5.10 Chapels

The first non-conformist church in Leighton Buzzard was the Baptist Chapel in Lake Street, built in 1776 and rebuilt in 1864 on the same site. Baptisms were conducted in the River Ousel. It was closed in the 1970s and demolished in 1983, with private houses now situated on the former chapel land and graveyard.

The Primary Methodist Church in North Street (HER 11099) was built in 1890, and still stands. The Wesleyan Chapel in Hockliffe Street (HER 11098), founded in 1804 but rebuilt in 1865, had houses either side for ministers. These have all now been demolished. The Friends Meeting Place in North Street, which was built about the same time, is still in use.

5.5.11 Workhouse (HER 8099)

For most of the post-medieval period the parish workhouse was in Baker Street, which used to be known as Workhouse Lane. This, together with workhouses in adjacent parishes, was sold off when the new Union workhouse was constructed in Grovebury Lane in 1836. Designed to hold up to 300 inhabitants, the workhouse functioned right up to the end of the 19th century. It was in many respects very much like a prison, with a central tower or master's house from which all the exercise yards (separate ones for men, women, girls and boys) could be viewed. It became the Civil Defence headquarters in 1938, and has recently been converted into industrial premises (HER 8099).

5.5.12 Canal and Wharfs

The Grand Junction Canal (later known as the Grand Union Canal) was completed in 1799 (Fig 12). Passing just to the west of Leighton Buzzard, it linked London with the large industrial cities of the Midlands and the North-West. For much of the 19th century there was thriving trade in coal, iron, brick, stone, timber, lime, sand, salt, pottery, glass, grain, seed, animal feed and the whole range of other agricultural products.

There were two wharfs on the canal at the time of Bevan's map in 1819.



Lawford's Wharf (later Grant's Wharf, then Brantom's Wharf) was situated on the south side of the road on the east bank of the canal in a roughly triangular piece of land. This wharf was in use right up to WWII.

The second wharf shown on the Bevan map is Whichello's Wharf, situated to the north of the road and on the west bank of the canal. Both Whichello's and Lawford's wharfs have rectangular basins perpendicular to the canal for loading and unloading, with various warehouses, offices and other buildings set around a yard.

A third wharf, known as Charity Wharf, is shown on the 1st Edition OS map. This was located to the south of the road on the west side of the canal.

The wharfs tended to also serve as coalyards, timberyards, agricultural machinery suppliers, brick and tile manufacturers, etc – attracting industry and commerce to this new part of town. Several lime kilns were set up during the 19th century to the north of Whichello's Wharf. A hotel and several administrative buildings were built on the road frontage. The building of the canal is generally thought to have stimulated the growth of the sand extraction industry around Leighton Buzzard, and this must in turn have had knock-on effects on the development of other industries.

For a building survey of one of the warehouse buildings at Brantom's Wharf, see Cook (2002).

5.5.13 Trades

Many trades and occupations have already been mentioned. As a thriving town, Leighton Buzzard had the full range of traders. (See for example trades directories of the early 19th century for extensive lists). Farming was an important trade throughout much of the post-medieval period. The markets and fairs which were the commercial life-blood of the town were based on the sale of agricultural produce from the surrounding countryside. Many tradesmen were also part-time farmers, with gardens, orchards and other land to the rear of premises being used for agriculture of one kind or another.

Use of buildings changed regularly. The following information, for example, is known about 8 Market Square in the late 17th to late 18th century. Between 1659 and 1702, it was owned by Richard Leach who was a grocer, and passed to his son Richard Leach in 1703. In 1743 the property changed hands with Thomas Whitney, a currier (dresser of tanned leather) taking it over. Whitney sold the property in 1746 to William Darling (a brazier). And so on.

An important industry from at least the late 17th century on was brick making. A terrier document of 1700 refers to clay pits near to the town (KK 724/5 Terrier, 1700). A clay pit and brick kiln were located close to the Row Riddy Stone House at the top of North Street (HER 3226). This activity developed into an important tile-making industry which is still a part of the town's economy today.



In the early 19th century there was a blacksmith's shop and cottage (HER 11153-4) on North End, other forges on Bedford Street (HER 11155) and Lovell Street (HER 11156). The Gilbert Iron Foundry was located on St Andrew's Street. Another foundry was the Victoria Iron Works (HER 11111). By 1835 the Gas and Coke Company, built on the eastern side of Lake Street was formed. Agricultural tools and machinery were manufactured in the early 19th century in premises next to the canal. Lime kilns were also situated here.

Lace-making and straw-plait were important cottage industries. Basket making was also undertaken, mainly in buildings and sheds to the rear of properties on North Street and the east side of Lake Street. Further research needs to be done on these activities and the possible archaeological imprint they may have left on the town.

5.5.14 Buildings

The Historic Environment Record lists surviving post-medieval buildings and gives indications of date. These have been tabulated below (Fig 11).

HER	Address	Comments
4586	34 and 36 High Street	Late 16 th century/early 17 th century (Grade II)
4598	17 Hockliffe Street	16 th century (Grade II)
4591	The Swan Hotel, 50 High Street	Late 16 th /early 17 th century. Early 18 th century alterations
4599	19 and 21 Hockliffe Street	16 th century (Grade II)
4600	21a Hockliffe Street	16 th century (Grade II)
4624	12 Market Square	16 th /17 th century, altered 19 th century, 20 th century shop front
4626	18 and 18a Market Square	16 th century (Grade II)
10888	The Kings Arms PH, North Street	16 th /17 th century ceased trading in the early 20 th century, subsequently converted to a private house

Table 2. 16th century buildings in Leighton Buzzard



HER	Address	Comments
2190	The George PH/Corn Exchange, Lake Street	Late 17 th century
3252	7 Market Square	17 th century
3258	3 and 5 North Street	17 th / 18 th century
4563	1 High Street	Early 17 th century, alterations in the 18 th and 19 th century
4567	17 High Street	17 th century (Grade II) /refronted 18 th century, altered 19 th century
4568	19 High Street	17 th century (Grade II) /refronted 18 th century, altered 19 th century
4577	45 and 47 High Street	Early 17 th century (Grade II) Divided into two properties the late 17 th century
4592 / 10892	2 Hockliffe Street (the Roebuck, formerly the White Horse)	Early to mid 17 th century
4614	1-5 Market Square, formerly the Eagle and Child	Early 17 th century, rebuilt 1750 and converted to a shop in 1812
4646	18 North Street	17 th century with 18 th century alterations
4656	1-5 Pulford Road	Late 17 th or Early 18 th century (Grade II)
10888	Formerly the Kings Arms, North Street	16 th /17 th century ceased trading in the early 20 th century, subsequently it was converted to a private house

Table 3. 17th century buildings in Leighton Buzzard (from HER)

HER	Address	Comments
2012	Bridge Hotel, 1 Bridge Street	1736
3254	13 and 15 Market Square	18 th century
3257	17 and 17A Market Square	1786
3258	3 and 5 North Street	17 th /18 th century
3264	Depot, North Street	18 th century/19 th century
4559	Shenley House, Church Street	18 th century, altered 19 th century (Grade II)
4563	1 High Street	Early 17 th century, alterations in the 18 th and 19 th century
4568	19 High Street	17 th century (Grade II) /refronted 18 th century, altered 19 th century
4569	21 High Street	18 th century
4574	39 High Street	18 th century
4576	43 High Street	18 th century (Grade II), Modern alterations
4579	51 High Street	18 th century (Grade II)
4581	57 and 59 High Street	18 th century (Grade II)
4585 / 10884	Former Black Lion PH, High Street	Early to mid 17 th century. Changed to the Raven after 1645. Closed in the mid 19 th century, converted into a dwelling and shop between 1865 and 1881
4587	38 High Street	18 th century (Grade II)
4588	40 High Street	Early 18 th century (Grade II)
4589	44 High Street, formerly known as the Bull	Early 18 th century, name changed to the Black Boy in mid to late 18 th



4614	1-5 Market Square, formerly The Eagle and Child	century Early 17 th century, rebuilt 1750 and converted to a shop in 1812
4624	12 Market Square	16 th /17 th century, altered 19 th century, 20 th century shop front
4596	18 Hockliffe Street	Late 18 th /early 19 th century
4608	2 and 4 Lake Street	18 th century, modern shop front
4615	23 Market Square	Late 18 th century
4617	29 Market Square	18 th century, 19 th century alterations
4618	31 Market Square, former Currier's Arms	1780, converted into a shop in early 20 th century
4619	35 Market Square, formerly the Cross Keys	1746, closed in early 20 th century and converted into a shop
4621	4 Market Square	18 th century Grade II
4622	6 Market Square	18 th century, 19 th century shop front
4624	12 Market Square	16 th /17 th century, altered 19 th century, 20 th century shop front
4629	24 Market Square	Late 18 th /early 19 th century (Grade II)
4630	26 Market Square	Late 18 th /early 19 th century (Grade II)
4642	4 North Street	Late 17 th century/early 18 th century
4642	4 North Street	Late 17 th century/early 18 th century
4646	18 North Street	17 th century with 18 th century alterations
4643	6 and North Street	Early 18 th century (Grade II)
4647	52 and 54 North Street	18 th century/ early 19 th century
4648	Black Horse PH, 21 North Street	1784
4649	Outbuildings associated with the Black Horse PH	1784
4651	Quaker House/Friends meeting house	Late 18 th century
4653	Wilkes' Almshouses, 37-51 North Street	Rebuilt mid 18 th century (originally built 1630)
4654	The Wheatsheaf PH, 57 North Street	Late 18 th century
4656	1-5 Pulford Road	Late 17 th or early 18 th century (Grade II)
4669	4-6 Bedford Street	Late 18 th / early 19 th century
4712	8 Market Square	18 th century
4717	Grove House, Grove Place	Late 18 th century
6538	The Ewe and Lamb PH	1746
10883	The Boot Inn, Market Square	1746, converted to a shop in the early 20 th century
10887	31 and 33 Lake Street (The Coach and Horses, formerly The Catherine Wheel)	18 th century
10894	The Falcon, Stanbridge Road	Early to mid 18 th century
11103	The Three Tuns, North End	Mid 18 th century
11110	Crown and Thistle, (Queens Head)	18 th century
11165	White Lion, Lake Street	18 th century

Table 4. 18th century buildings in Leighton Buzzard (from HER)



HER	Address	Comments
3253	9 Market Square	19 th century, modern shop front
3255	7 North Street	19 th century, late 19 th century alterations
3256	11 and 11a Market Square	Early to mid 19 th century
3259	9 North Street	19 th century
3260	11 North Street	Early to mid 19 th century
3261	13 and 15 North Street	Mid 19 th century
3262	17 North Street	Mid 19 th century
3264	Depot, North Street	18 th /19 th century
3934	6 and 6a Lake Street	Early 19 th century
3942	28 and 30 Lake Street	Early to mid 19 th century
3943	34,36 and 38 Lake Street	Early to mid 19 th century
3944	40 Lake Street	Early 19 th century
3945	Baptist Chapel, Lake Street	1864 (Grade II)
4555	25 and 27 Bridge Street	Early 19 th century
4556	19-23 Bridge Street	Early 19 th century
4557	Bridge House, 13 Bridge Street	Mid 19 th century
4559	Shenley House, Church Street	18 th century, altered 19 th century (Grade II)
4562	27 and 29 Church Street	Early to mid 19 th century
4563	1 High Street	Early 17 th century, alterations in the 18 th and 19 th century
4565	3 and 3a High Street	19 th century
4566	13 High Street	Early 19 th century (Grade II), 20 th century shop front
4568	19 High Street	17 th century (Grade II) /refronted 18 th century, altered 19 th century
4573	37 High Street	19 th century (Grade II)
4605	87 Hockliffe Street (Dolphin PH)	1856
4580	55 High Street	19 th century (Grade II) later alterations
4582	10 and 12 High Street	Early 19 th century (Grade II)
4583	14 High Street	19 th century (Grade II)
4590	46 High Street	Early to mid 19 th century
4594	12 Hockliffe Street	Early 19 th century, later alterations
4595	14 Hockliffe Street	Early 19 th century
4596	18 Hockliffe Street	Late 18 th century/early 19 th century
4597	64-72 Hockliffe Street	Mid 19 th century
4601	23 and 25 Hockliffe Street	Early to mid 19 th century
4602	Delta House, 33 Hockliffe Street	Early 19 th century, altered in the late 19 th century/ early 20 th century
4603	The White House, 37 Hockliffe St.	1865, late 20 th century alterations
4604	73 and 75 Hockliffe Street	Early to mid 19 th century
4609	12 and 12a Lake Street	Early 19 th century (Grade II)
4610	26 Lake Street	Early 19 th century (Grade II)
4611	32 Lake Street	Early 19 th century
4612	10-14 Lammas Walk	Early 19 th century
4613	Grand Union House, Leighton Road	Early 19 th century
4614	1-5 Market Square, formerly The Eagle and Child	Early 17 th century, rebuilt 1750 and converted to a shop in 1812



4616	25 Market Square	Mid 19 th century
4617	29 Market Square	18 th century, 19 th century alterations
4620	Barclays Bank (formerly Bassetts Bank), 2 Market Square	1866
4623	The Bell PH formerly the Market Tavern, 10 Market Square	19 th century façade
4625	16 Market Square	Early 19 th century
4627	20 Market Square	Mid 19 th century, later 19 th century alterations (Grade II)
4628	22 Market Square	Early 19 th century, later 19 th century alterations (Grade II)
4630	26 Market Square	Late 18 th /early 19 th century (Grade II)
4631	Former Town Hall and fire station)	Built on site of old Market Hall, 1851
4633	25-31 Mill Road	Mid 19 th century
4644	10 North Street	Early to mid 19 th century (Grade II)
4645	12 North Street	Early 19 th century
4647	52 and 54 North Street	18 th century/early 19 th century
4650	27-31 North Street	19 th century
4652	33 and 35 North Street	1873 (Grade II)
4657	All Saints' Vicarage, Pulford Road	Mid to late 19 th century
4658	2 and 4 St Andrew Street	Early 19 th century
4659	38 St Andrew Street	Early 19 th century
4666	62-66 St Andrew Street	Mid 19 th century
4669	The Round House, 14 Bassett Road	Early 19 th century (Grade II)
4689	10-18 Plantation Road	Mid to late 19 th century, 20 th century alterations
4690	The Knolls, Plantation Road	1865 (Grade II)
4691	Oxendon House, Plantation Road	Mid 19 th century
4692	Oxendon Lodge, Plantation Road	Mid 19 th century
4697	32 High Street	19 th century
4698	30 High Street	19 th century
4699	28 High Street	19 th century
4700	26 High Street	Early 19 th century
4701	22 and 24 High Street	Early 19 th century
4704	9 High Street	Early 19 th century
4705	11 High Street	Early 19 th century
4714	5 Hockliffe Street, formerly the Prince of Wales and New Inn	Mid 19 th century
4716	The Crown, 72 North Street	1830
7315	Primitive Methodist Chapel, North Street	1890
7997	Former parish workhouse, Baker Street	1834, converted into a private house in late 19 th century
10885	15 High Street, Corporation Yard former brewery	Early 19 th century (brewing ceased in 1910)
10889	38 Bassett Road, formerly the Carpenter's Arms	Built 1851
10890	17 Lake Street, The Nags' Head	Mid 19 th century, converted to nightclub in late 20 th century
11058	Post Office, Church Square, formerly Pulford School Site	Late 19 th century



11159	1 Mill Road, Nags Head	Mid 19 th century
11160	Royal Oak, Friday Street (or Back Lane)	Mid 19 th century
11161	The Agricultural Inn, Lake Street	Late 19 th century
11162	8 St Andrews Street, Ram Inn	Mid 19 th century
11163	Eagle Inn, Billington Road	Mid 19 th century
11164	87 North Street, White Lion Inn	Late 19 th century
11166	Ashwell Arms, Ashwell Street	Late 19 th century
11167	1 Heath Road	1854
12941	7-17 Friday Street and West Street	1890
14036	Police Station, Hockliffe Road	Late 19 th century
15584	134-138 Plantation Road	Mid 19 th century
15669	Oakbank, Heath Road	19 th century
16149	Cemetery Chapel, Van Dyke Road	1882
16389	16-18 Lammas Walk	19 th century

Table 5. 19th century buildings in Leighton Buzzard (from HER)

5.6 The Industrial and Modern Period (AD1850 - present)

5.6.1 Railway

The London-Birmingham Railway was opened in 1838 (Fig 12). The line did not pass through the town of Leighton Buzzard itself, but to the west (over the border in Buckinghamshire, encouraging further the growth of Linslade). The branch to Dunstable was opened in 1848 and ten years later extended to Luton. The opening of the railways led to the decline of the canal and coaching trades.

5.6.2 The Narrow Gauge Railway (HER 11090)

Initial proposals for a narrow gauge railway were made in 1892, but construction was only completed in 1919. The railway was built for the transport of sand, from sandpits on the north side of town to screening and washing plants near Billington Road, and from there to the Marley Tile Works or railway sidings on the Leighton-Dunstable branch line. The Leighton Buzzard Light Railway was at its busiest in the 1930s. Due to a decline in the use of the light railway the line closed in 1969 (Leleux 1969, 22-26). It now runs as a leisure attraction.

5.6.3 Industries

Sand extraction greatly increased during the 19th century and became a major industry in the 20th century, with Leighton Buzzard sand exported all over the world, even to Saudi Arabia (where the rounded sand is unsuitable for building purposes). Other important industries were tile-making and asbestos-processing, which took place mainly just outside the town on its southern side.

A carriage works called Morgan & Co was the biggest factory in Leighton Buzzard for many years. Built on the east side of the canal in 1886, it progressed to the manufacture of cars and then (during WWI) aeroplanes. During the 20th century, firms setting up factories in the town included Lipton Tea, Gossard (clothing) and Lancer Boss (forklift trucks).



5.7 Summary of Town Development

The first settlement in Leighton was connected with the 5th-7th century Anglo-Saxon cemeteries on the northern edge of town. Whether such early settlement (perhaps in the form of scattered hamlets or a small village) formed the basis for the later development of the market town is not known, but some continuity is possible. At any rate, the town seems to have originated on land near to the river, close to the bridge and the church. It is generally held that the origin of the 'Y'-shaped configuration of streets, funnelling traffic through the High Street, lies in a major town planning event of about the 12th century. Leighton Buzzard has the look of a medieval planned town, with the High Street and associated burgage plots added on to an existing settlement, the central axis of which was Bridge Street. However, this accepted model for the development of the town is challenged by the fact that the High Street is on the same alignment as the road through Wing towards Aylesbury: could they once have been the same road, crossing the river to the south of the bridge? Could the High Street and Market Square have been the focus of Saxon settlement? Were the medieval burgage plots flanking the High Street laid out on either side of an already existing routeway, of which Hockliffe Street is perhaps a remnant? The story of the early development of Leighton Buzzard may be more complex than previously thought. Further light might be shed by further archaeological investigation.

Throughout the medieval period, Leighton Buzzard flourished as a bustling market town, with its triangular market place, and broad High Street with its many inns and crosses at either end. It became a centre for the straw plait industry in the early post-medieval period. The building of the canal at the end of the 18th century led to a shift in settlement from the village of Old Linslade to new Linslade, with three wharves and much industry growing up on the canalside. Leighton Buzzard changed from a town situated almost solely on the east side of the river to a much larger town, now known as Leighton-Linslade, on both sides. As Figs 4-8 show, the town has expanded exponentially during the last 200 years.



6 ASSESSMENT OF LEIGHTON BUZZARD'S CHARACTER, IMPORTANCE AND POTENTIAL

6.1 *Character of the Present Town*

The present town is the result of hundreds of years of development, but has changed more in the last fifty years than in any of the preceding periods. Expansion of the town since the Victorian period has left a legacy of a variety of suburban residential areas, as well as parks such as Page's Park and Parson's Close and other recreational open spaces. But it is still the historic core of the town that provides its central focus. (See Fig 13 for extent of Conservation Area). Its most defining historic features are the broad High Street (with its many Georgian buildings and Victorian facades), the large All Saints' Church with its tall spire and the elegant Church Square in front, and the 15th century market cross. The market itself still flourishes on Tuesdays and Saturdays and this economic activity, spreading out along the entire length of the High Street, itself gives material form to the vibrancy of the place. The broadness of the street and the many large inns give Leighton Buzzard the atmosphere of a Georgian coaching town. Different parts of the town are linked together by the Y-shaped street plan, which still survives more or less intact despite some dislocation as a result of the building of an internal relief road in the form of West Street and Leston Road. The ancient roads of North Street and Lake Street still 'funnel' in to the High Street as they have done for centuries, even if traffic is re-routed by the bypass. Small alleyways leading back from the main streets give an idea of the intimacy of town spaces prior to the construction of large traffic-bearing roads through town. The modern bypass has done much to preserve the character of the High Street while destroying the historic character of the area around. Other large modern developments such as the Bossard Shopping Centre and car parks have taken out large parts of the historic core of the town to the north of the High Street and away from the street frontage.

In the 1960s Leighton Buzzard and Linslade were combined for administration purposes, but the two towns – separated by the river and the canal - are actually completely different in character. Linslade has the railway station and canal and most evidence of modern industry, while Leighton Buzzard town centre with its broad, ancient streets retains the more historic air and charm.

6.2 *Archaeological Potential*

Very little archaeological investigation has been carried out in Leighton Buzzard but it does have great potential for further research. As the market centre of the Royal Manor of Leighton at Domesday, its origins go right back into the Saxon period, and indeed it has evidence of early-middle Saxon activity in the form of cemeteries on the northern outskirts of town. There are several different possible models of town origin and development but whichever is accepted, it seems clear that there was major re-planning of the town's layout in about the 12th–13th centuries, probably connected with the re-organization of the manorial lands and the making of Leighton into a prebendary stall. This redevelopment may have entailed the laying out of the Y-shaped street plan, or the laying out of new burgage plots around existing streets. Archaeological work could shed further



light on the origins and early development of the town, with relevance not only to Leighton Buzzard itself but also comparable towns in Bedfordshire (such as Biggleswade) or Buckinghamshire (such as Olney) and studies of small towns in general.

Although not industrial in the sense that Luton is, Leighton Buzzard has been a thriving small town right through the post-medieval and industrial periods, and the archaeology from these times should not be neglected.

Potential for further archaeological research exists not only in relation to buried archaeological remains but also to upstanding structures. More buildings in the town, like the old Peacock Inn (which preserves the basic structure of a 15th century hall), are likely to hide earlier structures behind later facades. Archaeological building survey is likely to lead to radical re-dating of some buildings. There is a considerable amount of cellarge within the town; cellar surveys could well yield evidence of earlier foundations.

6.3 Archaeological Components

The locations of most of the archaeological components identified in this study are shown in Fig 14. The area of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries comprising Component 1 is some way to the north of the historic core and is shown in Fig 3. The canal and its wharfs are best understood in relation to Linslade as well as to Leighton Buzzard; they are also depicted on the 1900 2nd edition OS map (Fig 12).

- **Component 1** *Saxon Cemeteries*

The area to the north of the town, on the edge of former heathland, has proved to be rich in early-middle Saxon funerary remains, with three cemeteries identified during mineral extraction. The existence of these cemeteries implies settlement(s) nearby, probably in the area of the present town, though no trace of these has been found. Their location may or may not be relevant to an understanding of the early origins of Leighton Buzzard. See Figs 2 and 3 for the locations of the cemeteries.

- **Component 2** *Probable Late Saxon Settlement Core*

While the origin of the town is likely to lie in the middle-late Saxon period, the form and size of the settlement at that time is not known with any certainty. The area around the church and the river crossing is usually taken to be the earliest part of the town. But it has been pointed out in this study that alternative models of town development could conceivably change our understanding of this issue. There is some indication for example that the High Street is on the course of an old route which once joined up with the road through Wing to Aylesbury. If so, this would turn established ideas about the development of the town upside down. The route represented by the High Street would then be one of the central elements of the old part of town, though it may have been subject to redevelopment at a later date.



- **Component 3 *River Ousel***

The River Ousel forms the historic boundary between Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire (only changed in 1965), and this boundary may fossilise the division between earlier territories. Nowadays, its main course is channelled down the mill leat; its original, highly sinuous form is best seen on Fig 12. The town of Leighton Buzzard probably originated and developed in relation to (*i.e.* on one side of) this boundary. This is important to bear in mind when considering, for example, the configuration of roads into and out of the town and over the river crossing. In the sense of the orientation of the town in relation to the river, Leighton Buzzard and the River Ousel can be usefully compared with the town of Biggleswade and the River Ivel (in Bedfordshire), or possibly Olney and the River Great Ouse (in Buckinghamshire).
- **Component 4 *Bridge***

There must have been a ford over the River Ousel at Leighton Buzzard before the bridge was built. This could have been on the site of the present bridge, or further to the south. The first documentary evidence for the bridge dates to the early 14th century, though there was probably a bridge here before then. It was rebuilt several times in the 18th and 19th centuries. The present concrete bridge is 20th century in date.
- **Component 5 *Church***

The church was in existence at the time of Domesday and perhaps for several centuries before this. It seems likely that it served as a minster, and that it may have been associated with a bishop's residence long before it was converted into a prebendal stall in the late 12th century. Note that the western churchyard has been extended over the former site of the post-medieval prebendal mansion.
- **Component 6 *Prebendal Manor***

The Prebendal or Rectorial Manor (not to be confused with the Royal Manor of Leighton) was an important element in the town from at least the late 12th century, when Leighton was made into a prebendal stall, right up to the 19th century, when the latest manor house was demolished. However, it is clear that the church held lands here even before the Norman Conquest. (Note that this component has a considerable overlap with Component 2, the probable late Saxon town core). The prebendal manor house was no doubt rebuilt several times before being demolished in the early 19th century. A surviving painting depicts the position of the post-medieval mansion and associated buildings and gardens in relation to the church. Structural remains, in the form of filled-in cellars, have been encountered by excavation within the western part of the churchyard. The more or less complete layout of the latest mansion and gardens is known and has been mapped in Fig 10.
- **Component 7 *Mill and Leat***

Leighton Mill is mentioned in the Domesday Book. Its former site is to the north of the historic core of the town at the end of an artificial channel or leat, which now forms the main course of the River Ousel. Other mills are likely to have been situated in Leighton Buzzard during the medieval period, especially on the prebendal estate with its extensive river frontage. An important consideration in



any discussion of town origins and development is when the long mill leat was created. It could have been as long ago as middle-late Saxon times, or might have been associated with re-planning of the town in the 12th century.

- **Component 8** *The 'Y'-Shaped Street Formation*

The High Street with its associated burgage plots and its triangular market place, funnelling roads into the town, appears to be a distinct element of town development. It is generally argued that this was set out as an addition to or modification of a pre-existing but smaller settlement to the west (Component 2). There is, however, some evidence to suggest that the High Street is on the line of an older route which may have once crossed the river to the south of the present bridge.

- **Component 9** *Market Square*

The first mention of the market occurs in the Domesday Book of 1086, implying that a market was well established in late Saxon times. It is possible that in the early days this was located near to the church. The Market Square itself is a triangular area in the eastern part of the historic core, formed by the junction of three roads as they funnel into the High Street. This was also known as Market Hill. Here a Moot Hall and market cross were built during the medieval period. In the post-medieval period the whole of the broad High Street seems to have been used for markets. As well as the weekly market, several annual fairs added to the prosperity of the town.

- **Component 10** *Canal and Wharfs*

Completed in 1799, the Grand Junction Canal gave an important stimulus to the development of the town, turning the area around the canal into a small industrialised area. It had several wharfs, warehouses, limekilns, etc. The sand industry around Leighton Buzzard could not have grown as it did without the means of transport provided first by the canal and later the railways. The new settlement of Linslade (not to be confused with Old Linslade further to the north) also originated in the early 19th century with the construction of the canal. Many of the original inhabitants of Linslade were employed in industries that depended upon the canal for transport of goods and materials. These industries continued to flourish long after canals were overtaken by the railways as the main form of transport.



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Maps

1. 1765 Jeffrey's map of Bedfordshire
2. 1819 Bevan's map of Leighton Buzzard (BLARS: X 1/34)
3. 1840 Tithe map (BLARS: MAT 29/1/1)
4. 1848 Enclosure map (BLARS: MA 79/1)
5. 1886 Ordnance Survey map 1st Edition
6. 1900 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map 2nd Edition
7. 1926 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map 3rd Edition

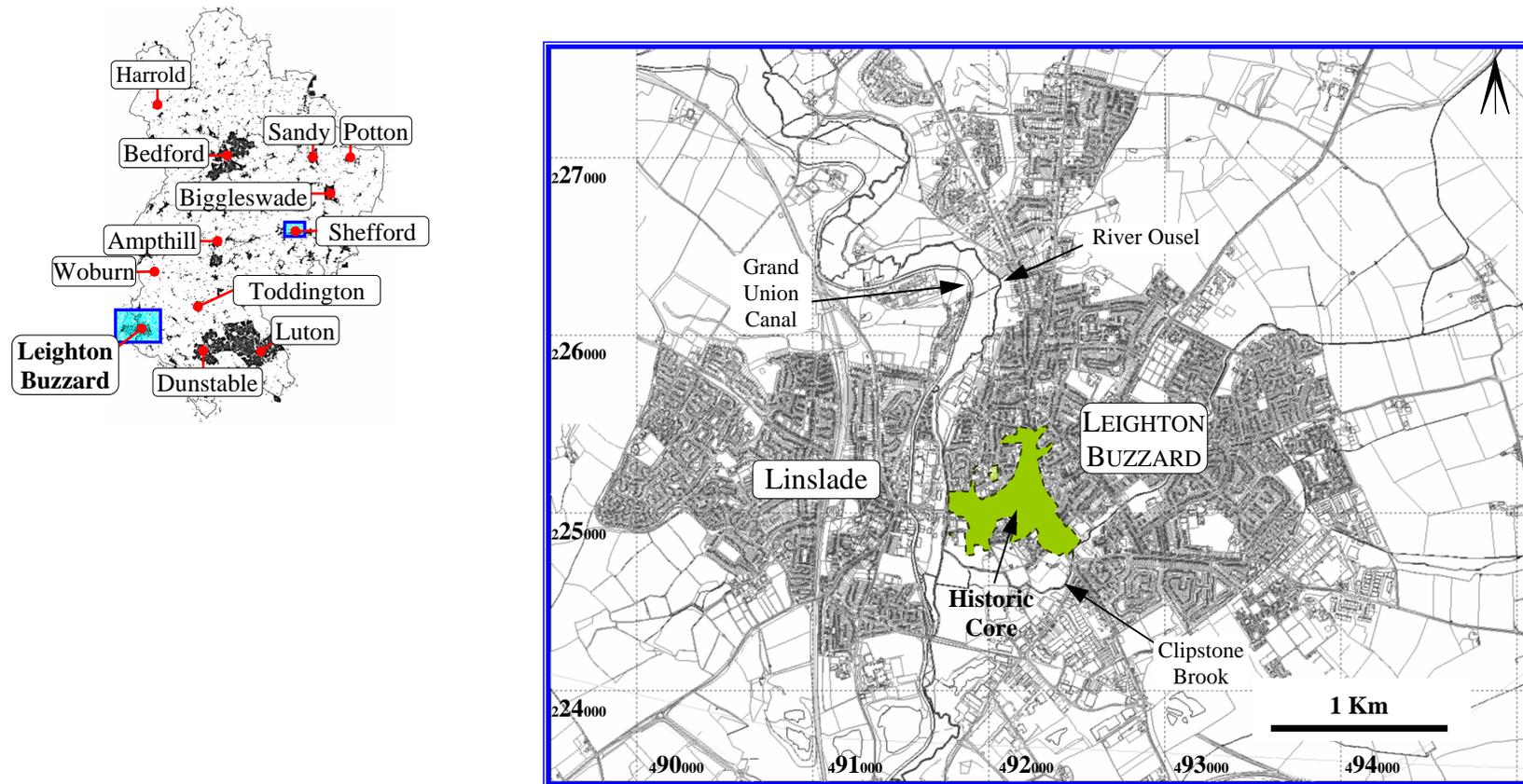


Figure 1: Location map.

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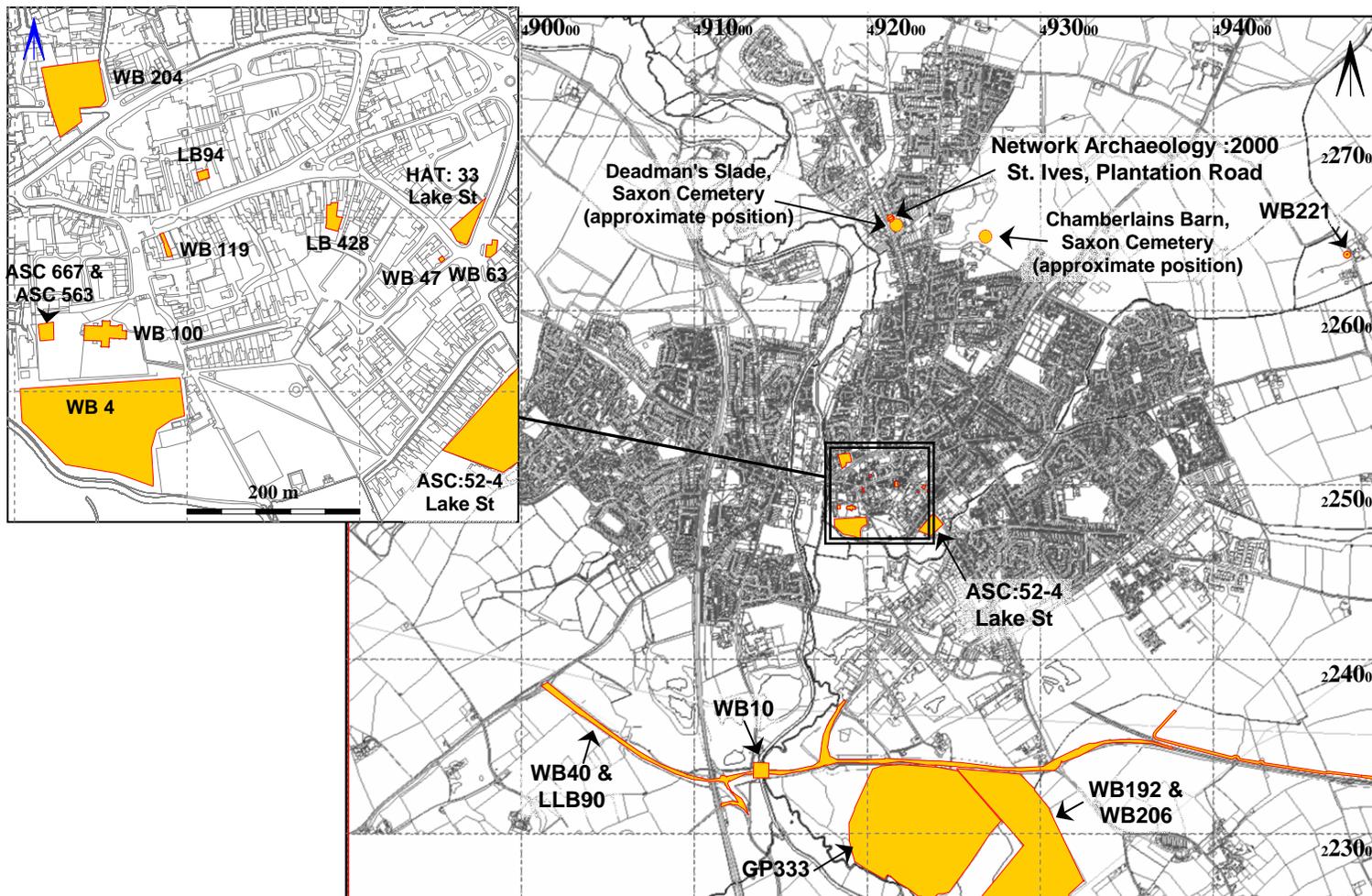


Figure 2: Archaeological excavations

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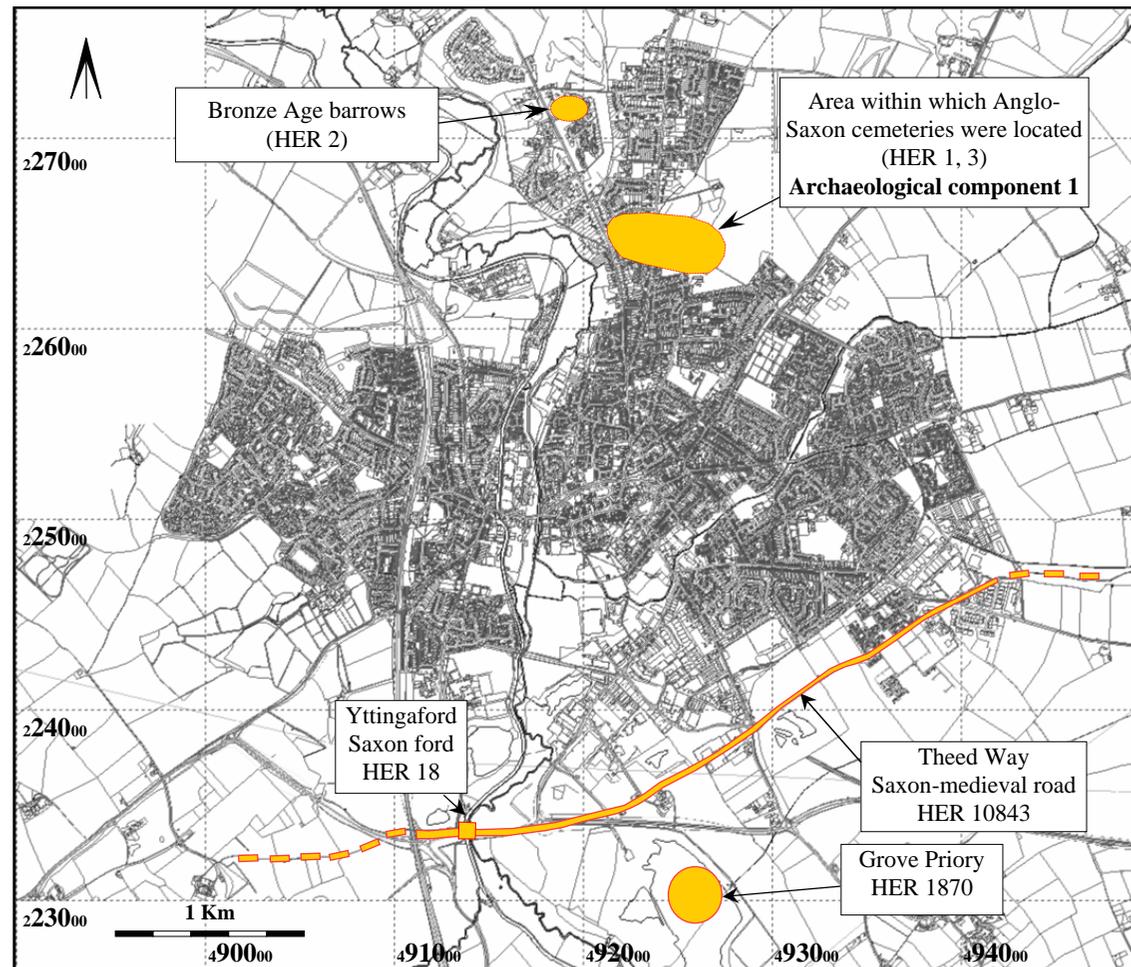


Figure 3: Major archaeological sites and features in the vicinity of the town (including archaeological component 1)

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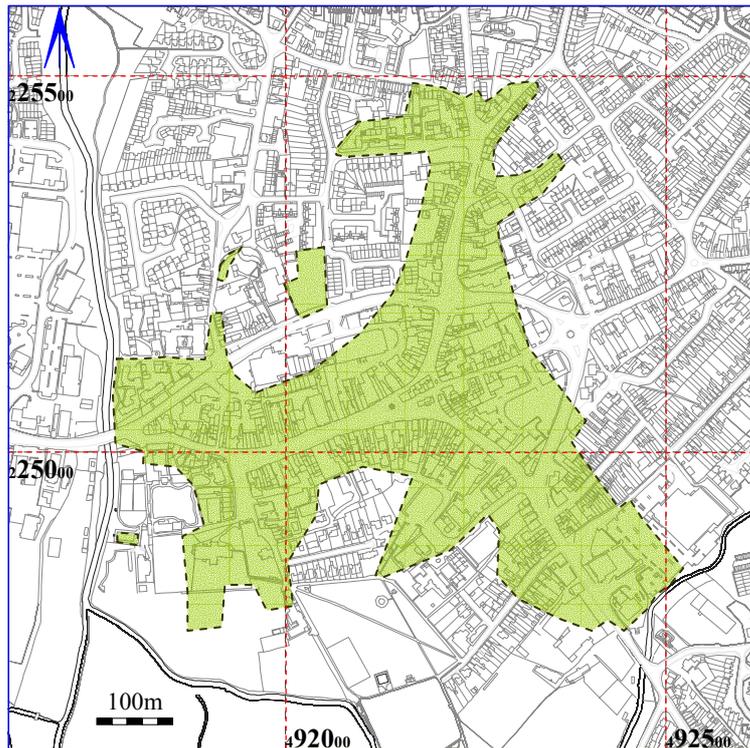


Figure 4: Extent of town in late 18th century

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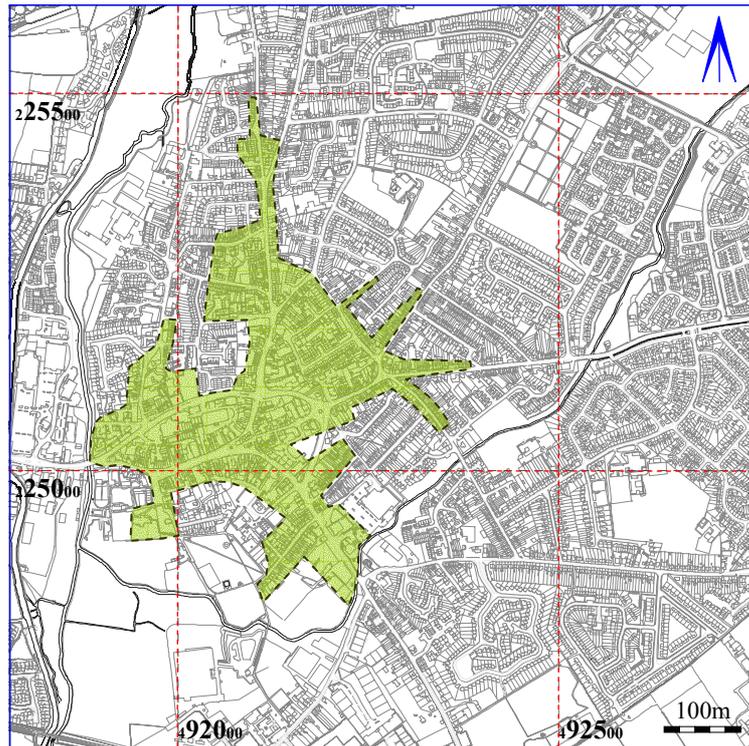
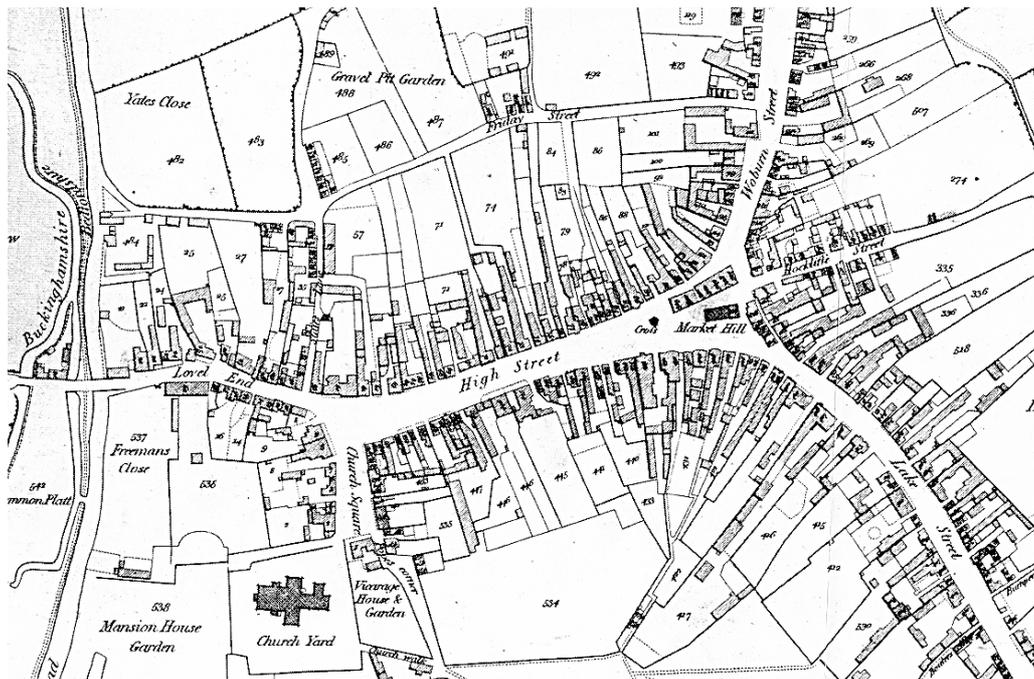


Figure 5: Extent of town in late 19th century.

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Bevan's map 1819



Ordnance Survey map 1926

Figure 6: Bevan's map of 1819 and the Ordnance Survey 3rd ed 1926

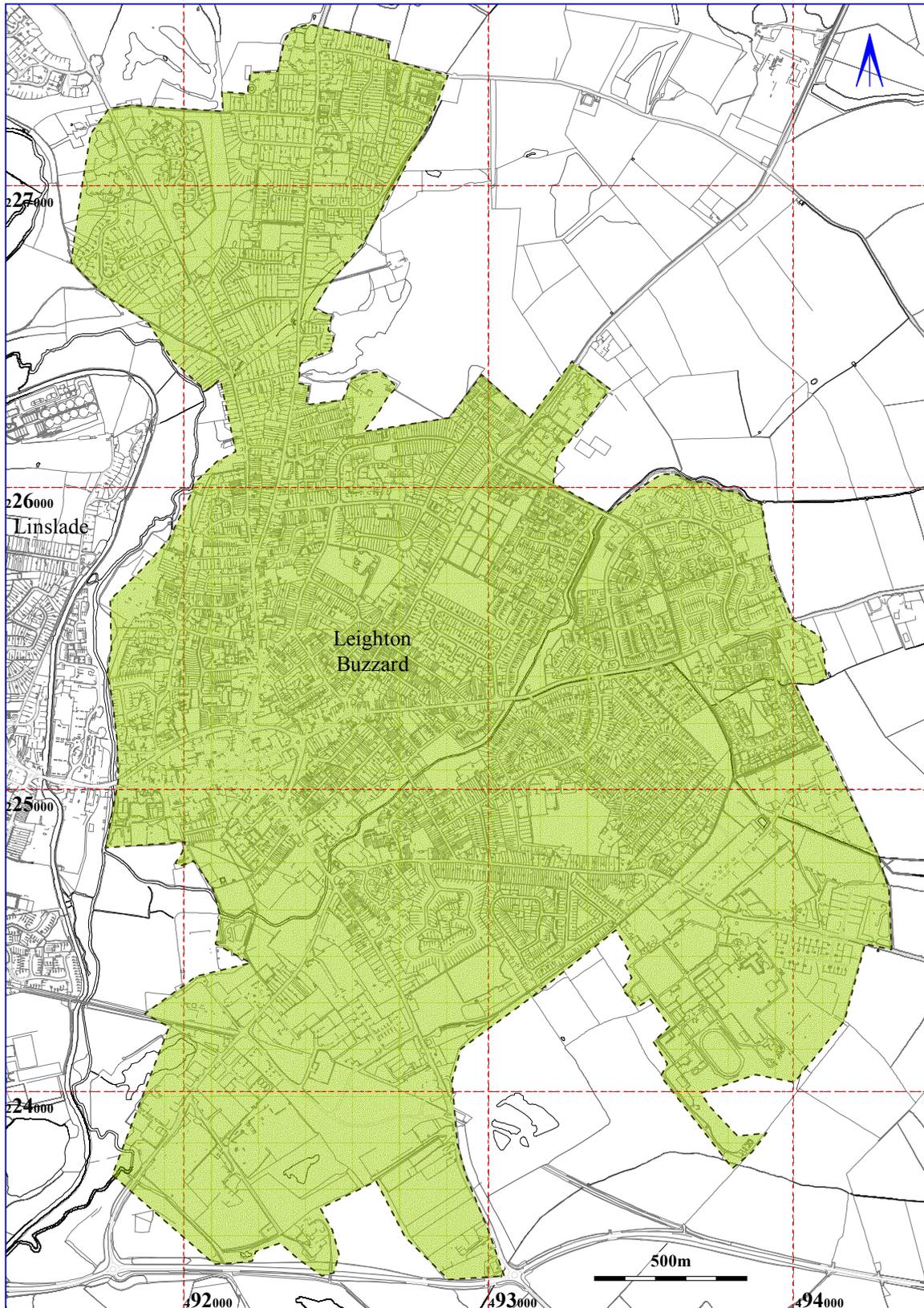


Figure 7: Extent of town in late 20th century

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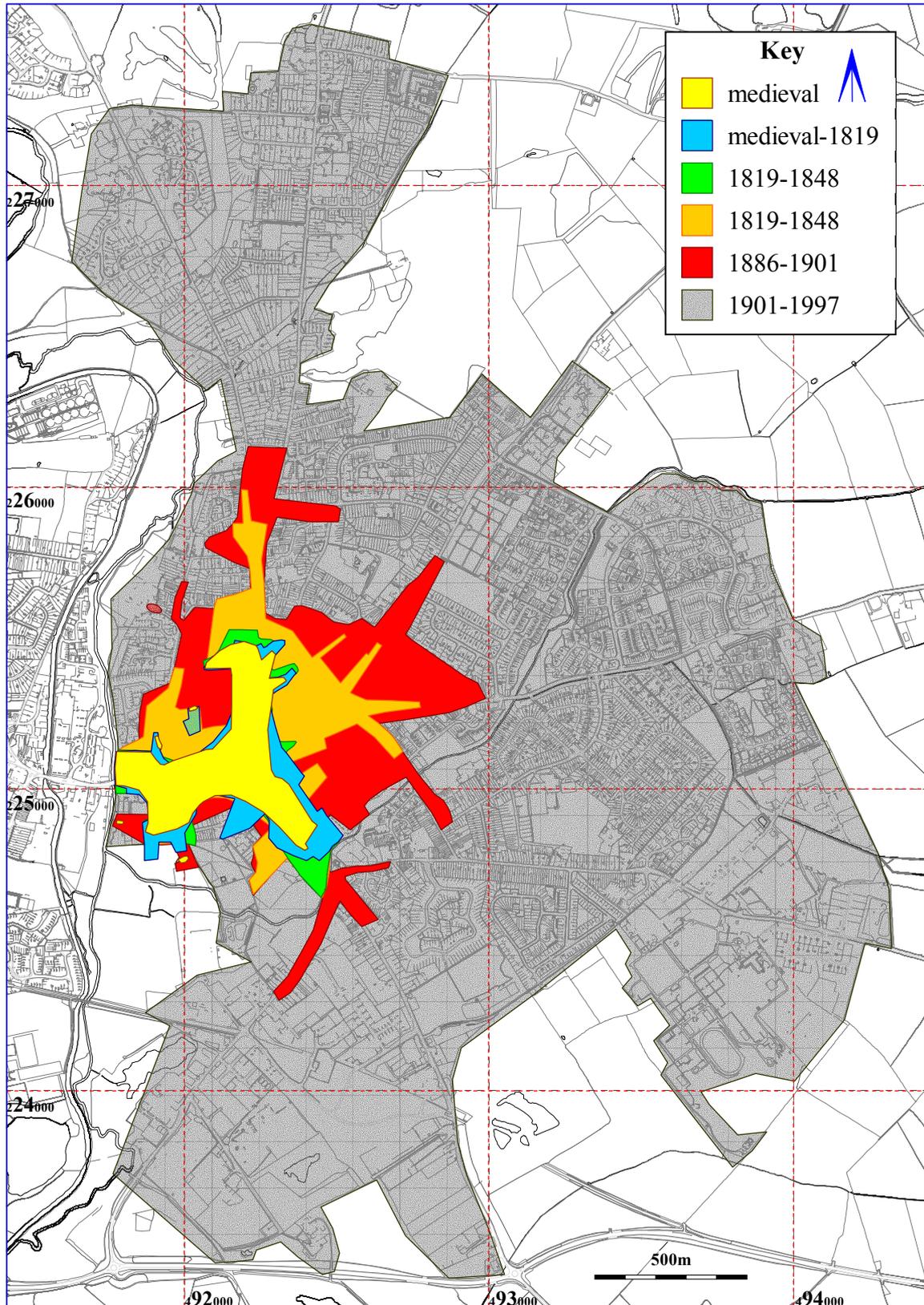


Figure 8: Schematic map of town development

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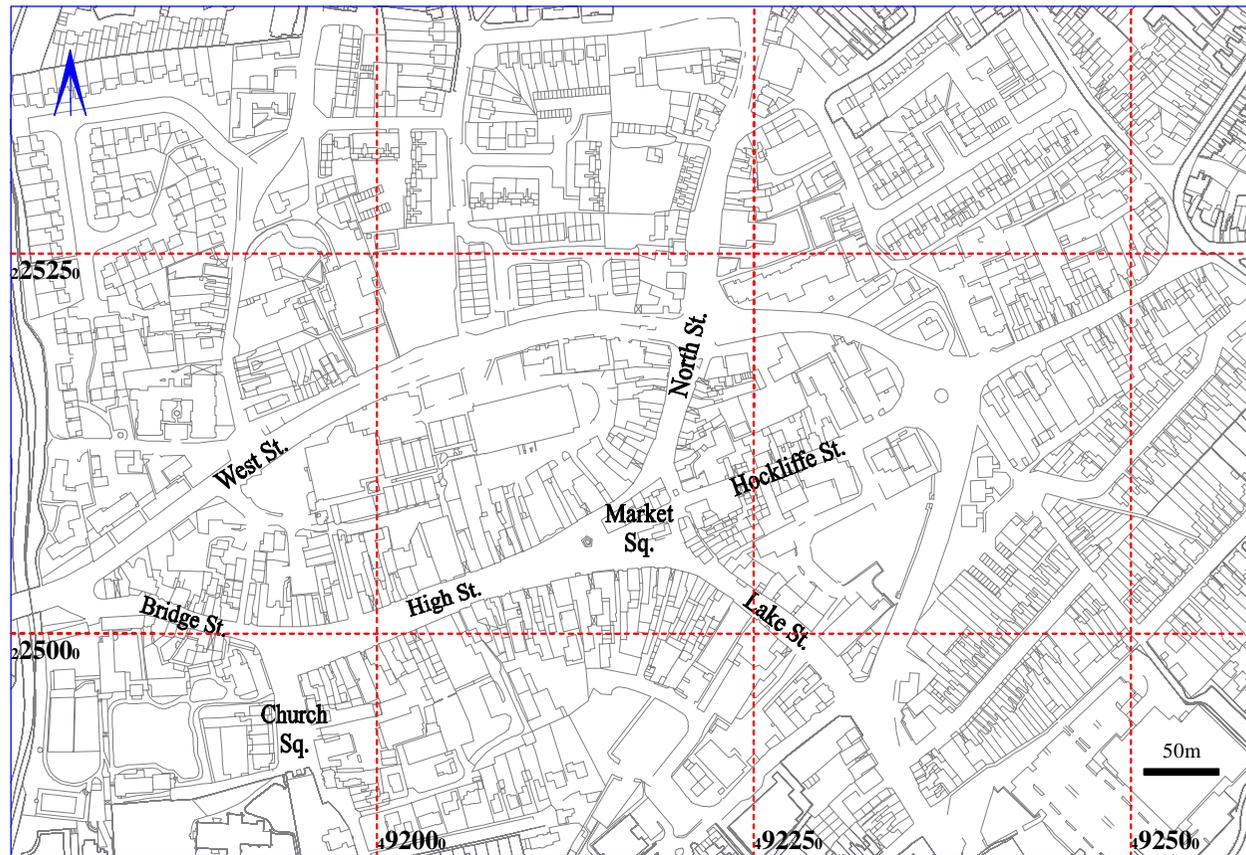


Figure 9: Leighton Buzzard's main streets.

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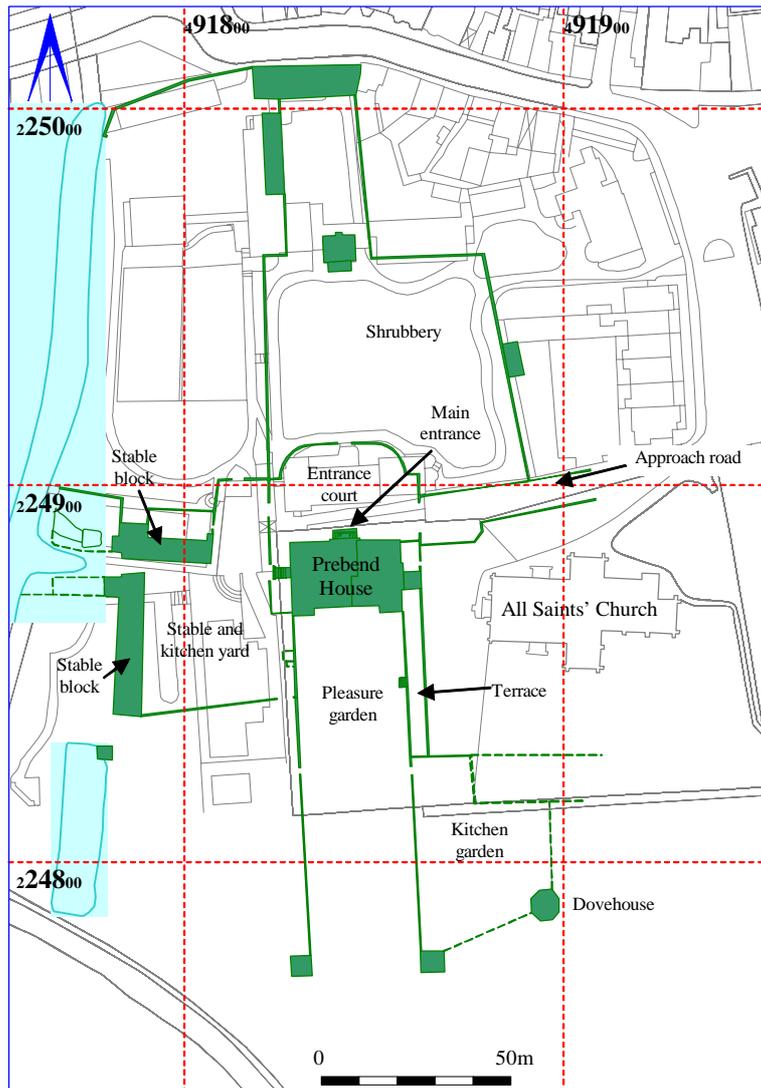
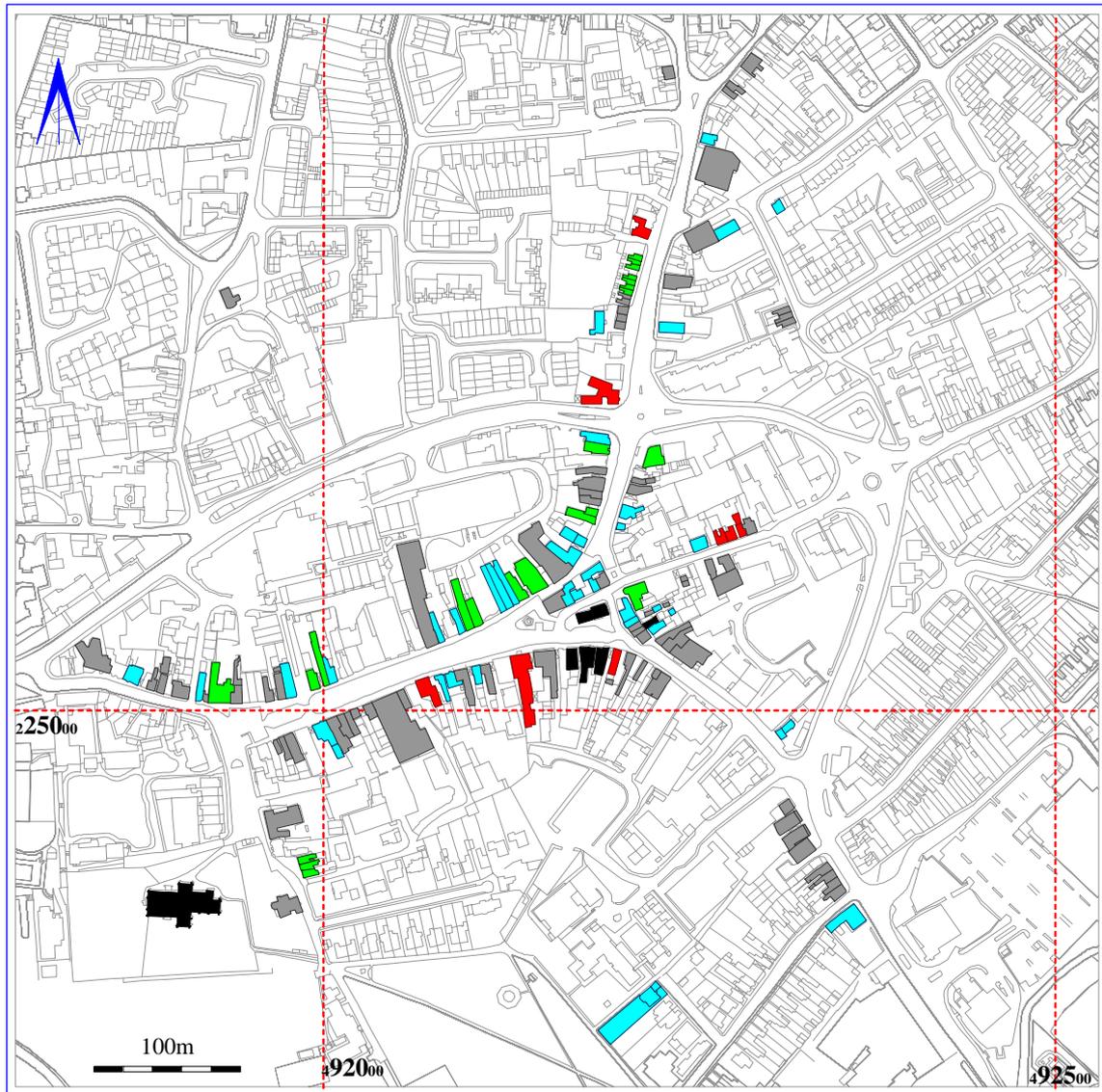


Figure 10: Location of Prebend House

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Key

-  Medieval
-  16th century
-  17th century
-  18th century
-  19th century

Figure 11: Historic buildings

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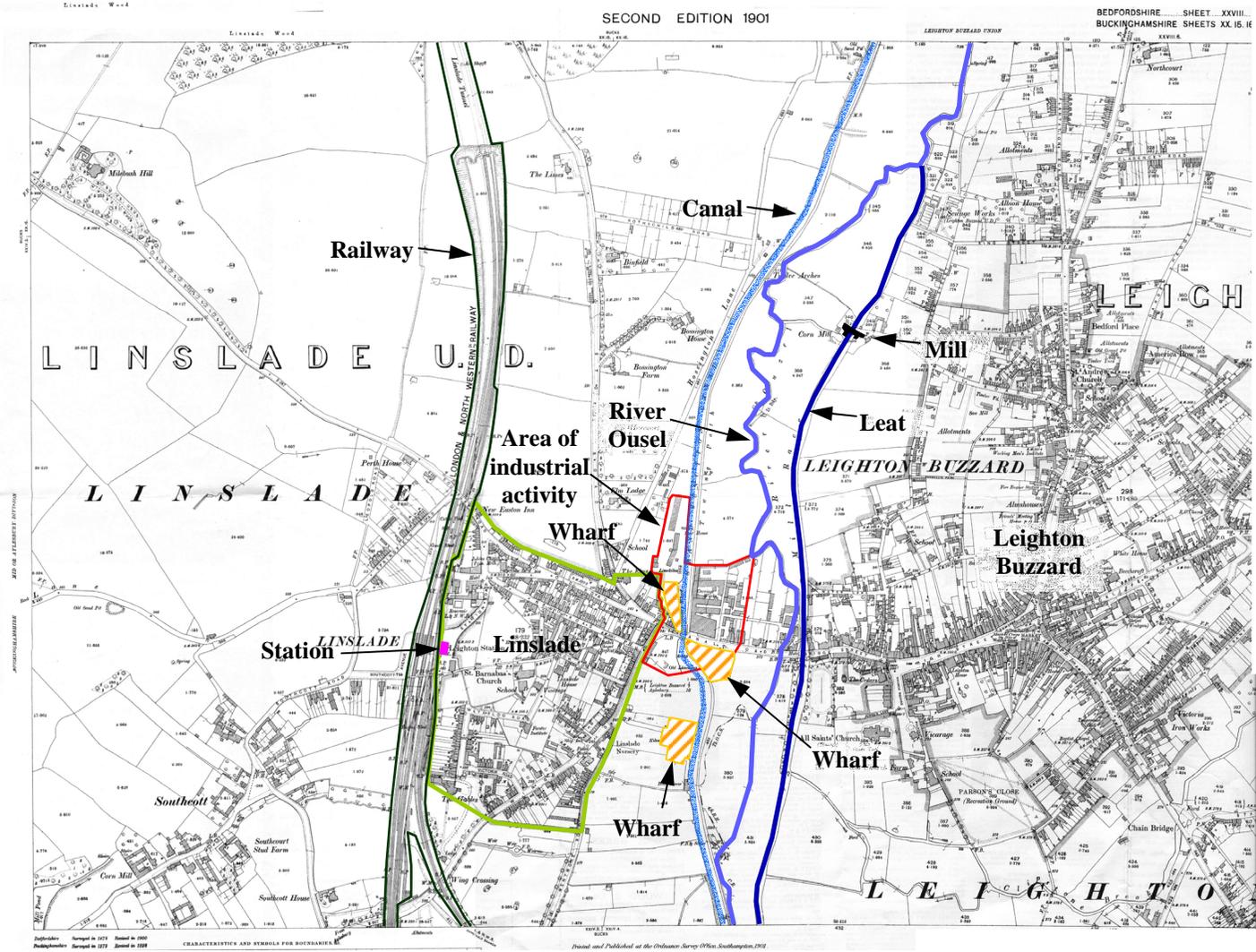


Figure 12: Linslade, railway, canal, and wharfs, shown on Ordnance Survey 2nd edition map (1900)

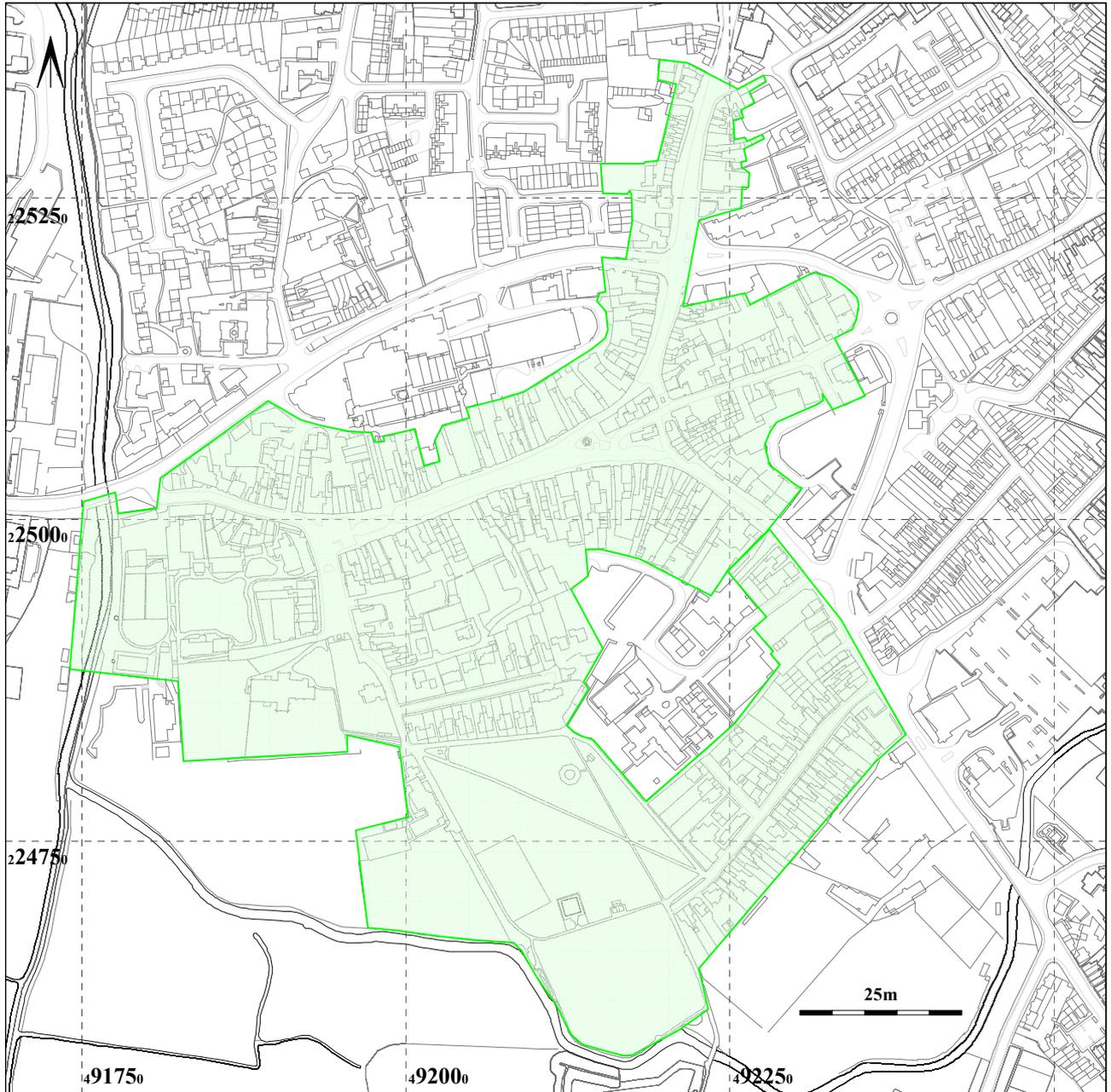


Figure 13: Conservation Area.

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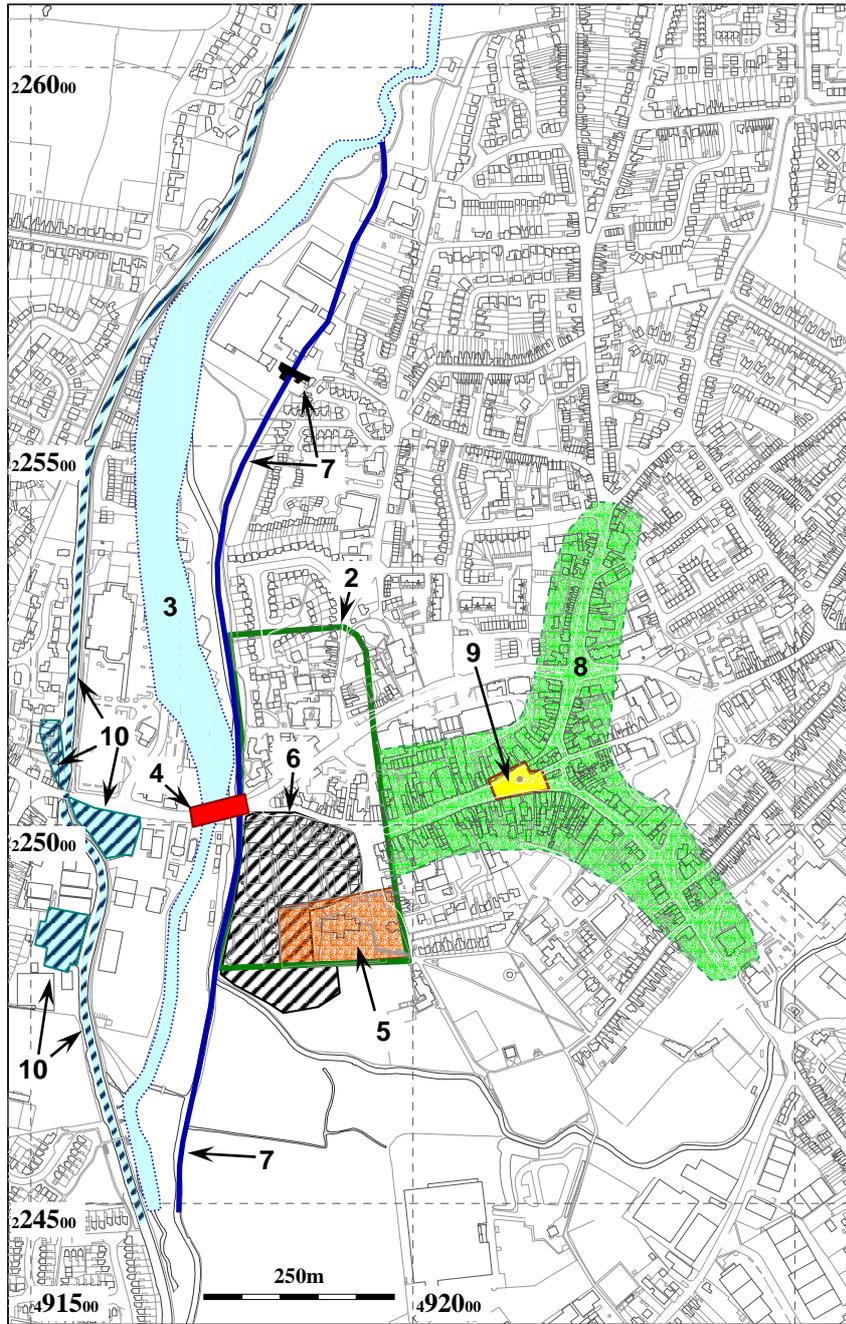


Figure 14: Archaeological components 2-10
(Note archaeological component 1 is shown on Fig 3)

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