Salisbury Walk, Dorchester, Dorset
Archaeological Recording, January 2002

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SUMMARY

New steps were constructed from Salisbury Field onto Salisbury Walk (SY69629056). These cut through part of the Roman defensive rampart along the east side of the Roman town. The bank appeared to be constructed from layers of chalk rubble, gravel and grey silty soil. No dating evidence was recovered.

INTRODUCTION

This project was commissioned by Dorchester Town Council. Terrain Archaeology was asked to record the exposed archaeology following the insertion of a set of steps into the earthwork bank along Salisbury Walks, Dorchester (Plate 1). The bank forms part of the defences along the eastern side of the Roman town of *Durnovaria* (RCHME 1970). This bank has statutory protection as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Dorset 648). At the time of the recording, Scheduled Ancient Monument Consent had not been obtained.

A *c.* 2.3 m wide cut, about 7.5 m long, was made through the bank for the insertion of the steps. The steps are made from a stout timber frame with a gravel infill (Plate 2). As the steps had already been constructed, it was only possible to record a partial section of the upper part of the bank still exposed above the finished level of the steps. It was not possible to record the section to the full depth of the disturbance.

The site lies on the eastern edge of Salisbury Walk, just south of the path through to All Saints' Road, at Ordnance Survey NGR SY69629056 (Figure 1). The steps rise from the surface of Salisbury Field, through the earthwork bank to meet the metalled path of Salisbury Walks.

The underlying geology is mapped as Upper Chalk (Geological Survey of Great Britain1: 50,000 Sheet 328 *Dorchester* 1981).

The fieldwork was carried out 23rd January 2002.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge Denis Holmes (Dorchester Town Council), Steve Wallis (Dorset County Council) and Jo Draper for their input into this project. The fieldwork was undertaken by Peter Bellamy.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The line of the defences of the Roman town of *Durnovaria* are marked by The Grove and West Walks to the west, South Walks and Bowling Alley Walk to the south, and by Salisbury Walk to the west. Earthwork remains of the bank are visible on the west and east sides of this circuit.

There have been numerous small-scale investigations of these defences, particularly to the east and to the south. These have shown that the defences consisted of an earthen bank and ditch system probably constructed in the later 2nd century AD, with a stone wall added to the front at a later date (RCHME 1970, 542–51). On the eastern side, excavations in Colliton Park showed that the bank was about 24 m wide and constructed from alternate layers of

chalk rubble and soil ('clay') (RCHME 1970, 545–8). On the southern side the investigations have been more numerous but more piecemeal (RCHME 1970; Woodward and Pearce 1985; Smith 1989; Davies and Farwell 1990). Here too the bank appears to consist of layers of chalk rubble and grey silty clay.

No previous archaeological investigation of the defences on the eastern side of the town has been undertaken.

Subsequent to the Roman period the defences fell into decay. They formed the border between the town of Dorchester and the Manor of Fordington. Salisbury Field was part of the open fields of Fordington in the medieval period. A complex of boundary ditches of Saxon or medieval date were excavated at the Old Vicarage site on the east side of Salisbury Field (Startin 1981). By the 18th century, Salisbury Field had been enclosed and was known as 'Great Walls Close' (Fordington Tithe Map 1841). It was under arable in the early 18th century (Pope 1918).

The East Walks (or Salisbury Walk), together with South Walks, were created in 1743–4 (Pope 1918). The banks were levelled for gravel paths and planted with trees.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of the archaeological recording is to record all the exposed *in situ* archaeological deposits and features to an appropriate professional standard.

METHODOLOGY

The observations were carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct*.

The location of the works and any archaeological features exposed were located using taped measurements from existing landscape features. The profile and section were surveyed using taped measurements from a datum line tied in to Ordnance Datum.

All archaeological deposits were recorded using components of the Terrain Archaeology recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records.

The records have been compiled in a stable, cross-referenced and fully indexed archive in accordance with current UKIC guidelines.

RESULTS

The earthwork bank had an eroded profile and was over 7.5 m wide and 1.5 m high (Figure 3). It is likely to continue beneath the tarmac path of Salisbury Walk.

The lowest layer of bank make-up exposed was a layer of dark orange sand and gravel (5), over 0.05 m thick, visible at the base on the eastern side of the rampart. This was overlain by a similar, 0.06 m thick layer of gravel (4), distinguished by a greater soil content. Overlying these gravel layers was a layer of hard-packed clean chalk rubble (3), over 0.18 m thick. This chalk rubble was capped by a layer of grey silty clay soil (2) about 0.25 m thick. Some tree root disturbance (6) was noted within this layer. These layers were sealed by a 0.1 m thick layer of dark greyish brown topsoil (1).

The chalk bedrock was not exposed.

A rapid search was made of the spoil heap. No finds other than modern rubbish were found. These were not retained.

CONCLUSIONS

Only a small section across the earthwork bank was exposed, too little to allow a definitive section to be recorded. Not enough was visible to clarify whether the recorded layers were part of the original rampart construction or were derived from later agricultural disturbance or landscaping activity.

During the medieval period, ploughing is likely to have eroded the rampart and disturbed the upper layers, particularly along its eastern side. However, the greatest disturbance was probably due to the creation of the walks. The rampart was levelled to form a path, and its base probably still survives beneath the present tarmac path (although this was not confirmed by the present works). What is less clear is whether the present shape of the bank to the east was also largely a product of 18th century landscaping.

The nature of the deposits exposed is similar to those recorded elsewhere from the rampart and it seems almost certain that all these deposits were derived from the Roman bank. What is less apparent is whether these layers were *in situ* parts of the rampart or disturbed or redeposited material. It is possible that all the exposed deposits were reworked during the 18th century landscaping. However, their character suggests they are of some antiquity. The chalk rubble in particular is very clean and unmixed, implying that it is, in fact, part of the original rampart construction. On the other hand, the grey silty soil layer above was more mixed and could be part of the 18th century landscaping. The tree root disturbance is a direct result of the planting of trees along the walks.

The gravel layers within the bank are interesting as gravel has not been recorded as part of the make-up of the rampart elsewhere. They appear to be stratified beneath the chalk rubble but too little was exposed to be able to be certain of their derivation and interpretation.

No dating evidence for the construction of the defences was obtained but this hardly surprising given the small scale of the archaeological recording.

PROJECT ARCHIVE

The archive (Terrain Archaeology Project No. TA5099) will be deposited with Dorset County Museum, which has agreed in principle to accept the archive, subject to fulfilment of the Museum's requirements of the preparation of archaeological archives. A copy of the microfilmed archive will be deposited with the National Monuments Record.

The indexed and cross-referenced project archive consists of: –

File 1:	1.1	Archive Index
	1.2	Report 5099.1
	1.3	Context Record
	1.4	Drawing Register
	1.5	Photographic Register
	1.6	Monochrome contact sheet
File 2:	2.1	Monochrome negatives
File 3:	2.1	Drawings

REFERENCES

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Appendix 1: List of all contexts

Context	Description	Interpretation	Depth below surface
1	Friable dark greyish brown silty clay loam with sparse chalk flecks and sparse small flint gravel.	Turf and Topsoil	0
2	Fairly compact mid grey silty clay loam with pale grey mottles, occasional chalk flecks and occasional small flint gravel.	Make-up of Roman rampart or 18th century landscaping?	0.1 m
3	Hard-packed chalk rubble.	Make-up of Roman rampart.	0.1–0.35 m
4	Loose dark orange brown sandy loam with frequent small flint gravel.	Part of make-up of rampart?	0.1 m
5	Loose dark orange sand and gravel, mainly rounded flint gravels up to 7 mm across.	Part of make-up of rampart?	0.15 m
6	Soft dark grey brown silty clay loam.	Tree root disturbance.	0.15 m

Figure 1: Location Map

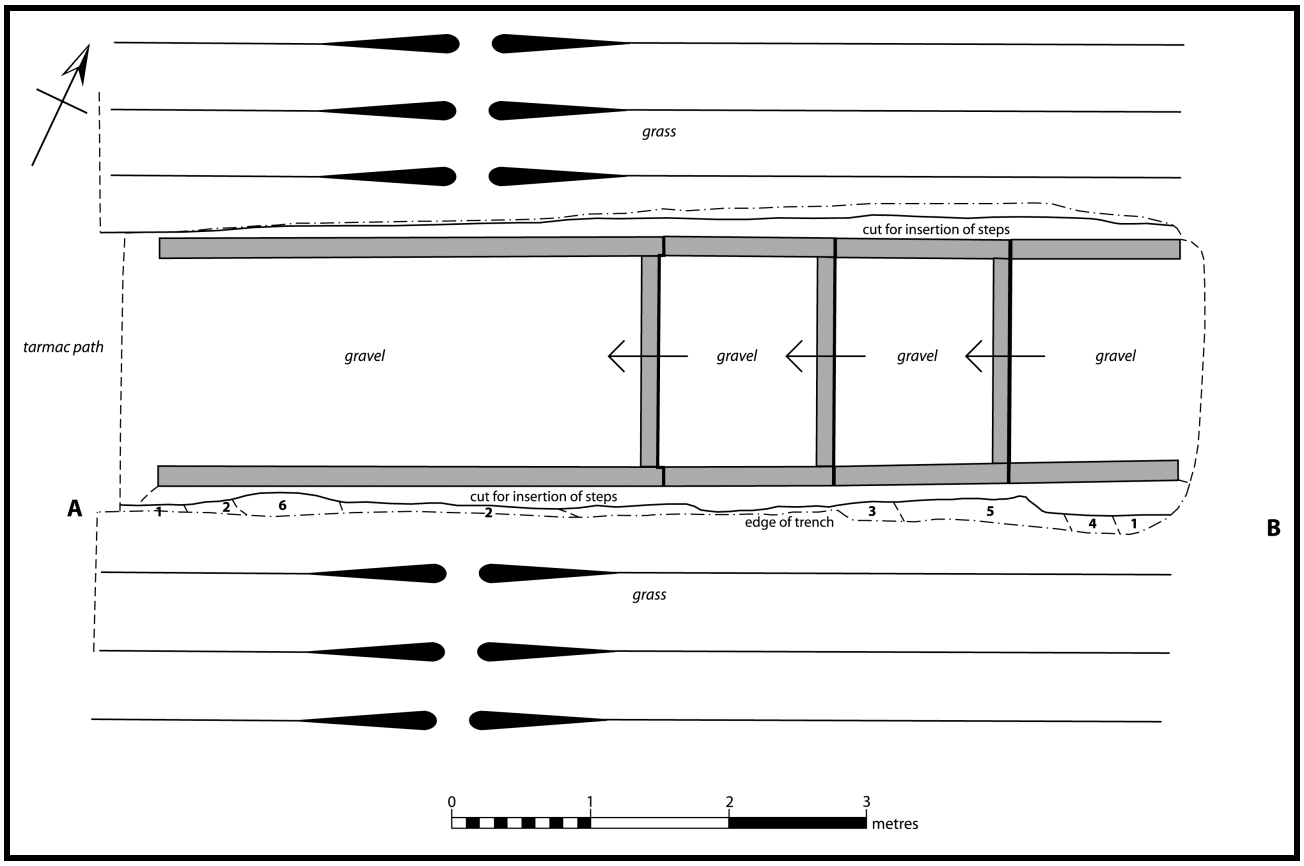

Figure 2: Plan of steps inserted into bank

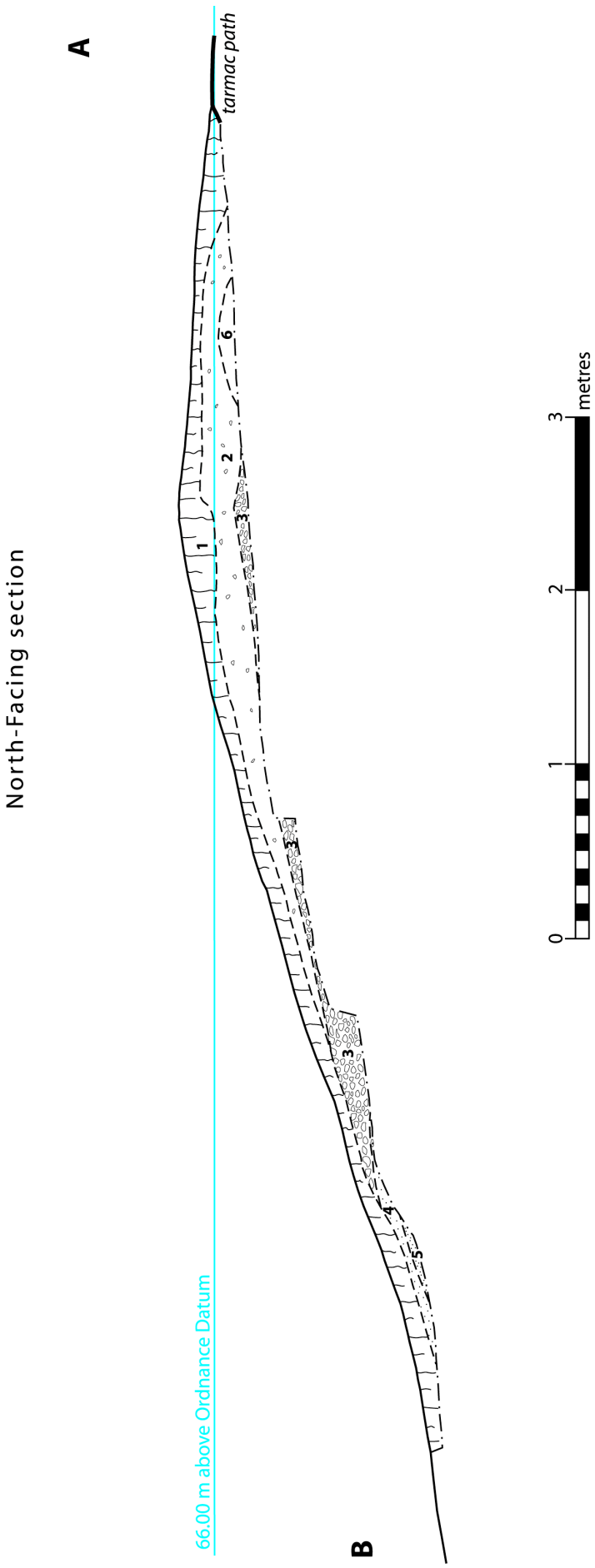

Figure 3: North-facing section across bank