1 West Walks, Dorchester, Dorset

Observations and Recording

Report No. 53378/3/1

December 2012

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3				

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Project Report Summary Page

Project Details			
OASIS Reference	terraina1-134301		
Project Title	1 West Walks, Dorchester, Dorset		
Short Description of Project	Terrain Archaeology undertook archaeological observations and recording during the lowering of the cellar floor at 1 West Walks, Dorchester. The site directly overlies the western part of the Roman town defences. A north-south linear foundation over 2.6 m wide was discovered at a depth of about 2.3 m below modern external ground level. This structure comprised three layers of packed flint nodules and other stone separated by layers of rammed chalk and capped with a thin skim of mortar within a flat-based trench 0.45m deep. Finds from the foundation make-up comprise ceramic roof tile and brick, a Dressel 20 amphora handle and a fragment of Niedermendig lava quern. Observations of an almost identical feature have been made previously along the southern part of the Roman town defences along Bowling Alley Walk and South Walks. This feature is difficult to interpret but appears to be the remains of a substantial wall footing for an early masonry town wall, possibly never completed, and subsequently buried beneath the ?3rd/4th century rampart.		
Project Dates	Start: 12-07-2012	End: 13-07-2012	
Previous/Future Work	No/No		
Project Code	53378		
Monument Type and Period	Town Defences (Roman)		
Significant Finds	Amphora (Roman), roof tile (Roman), brick (Roman), rotary quern (Roman)		
Project Location			
County/District/ Parish	Dorset/ West Dorset/Dorchester		
Site Address	1 West Walks, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1RE		
Site Coordinates	SY 6891 9060		
Site Area	35 m^2		
Height OD			
Project Creators			
Organisation	Terrain Archaeology		
Project Brief Originator	None		
Project Design Originator	Terrain Archaeology		
Project Supervisor	Peter Bellamy		
Project Manager	Peter Bellamy		
Sponsor or Funding Body	Developer		
Project Archive			
Archive Type	**Physical**	**Digital**	**Paper**
Location/Accession No	Terrain Archaeology offices, pending deposition with Dorset County Museum.	Terrain Archaeology offices, pending deposition with Dorset County Museum.	Terrain Archaeology offices, pending deposition with Dorset County Museum.
Contents	Pottery, Ceramic Building Material, stone	Digital photography	context sheets, photographs, plans, report

1 West Walks, Dorchester, Dorset
Archaeological Observations and Recording, July 2012

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Introduction

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Christina Walker to undertake a programme of archaeological observations and recording at 1 West Walks, Dorchester, Dorset, during the lowering of an existing cellar floor to facilitate construction of a new basement kitchen for the property.

'Archaeological observations and recording', also more colloquially known as an archaeological watching brief, is defined by the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) as "*a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons. This will be within a specified area or site on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed. The programme will result in the preparation of a report and ordered archive*" (IfA 2008). Its purposes are: "*to allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works* " and "*to provide an opportunity, if needed, for the watching archaeologist to signal to all interested parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief itself are not sufficient to support treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard*."

The fieldwork was carried out between 12th–13th July 2012 by Peter Bellamy and Mike Trevarthen.

Terrain Archaeology wishes to acknowledge the assistance and cooperation of Christina Walker and family and their builder, and Stefan Pitman (John Stark & Crickmay Partnership).

1.2 Brief

No written brief was issued by, or on behalf of, West Dorset District Council.

1.3 Site Location and Topography

The site lies on the corner of West Walks and Princes Street, Dorchester, at Ordnance Survey NGR SY68919060 and at a height of about 75.5 m above OD.

1.4 Geology

The underlying bedrock geology is mapped as Portsdown Chalk Formation of the White Chalk Subgroup of Campanian Age. No superficial deposits are recorded (http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html).

1.5 Archaeological and Historical Background

The site lies on the inside edge of the western side of the Roman town defences of *Durnovaria*. The defences on the west side of the town comprise an earthen rampart, later surmounted by a stone wall with a series of three V-shaped ditches and a counterscarp bank outside. The bank survives in an altered form as the 'West Walks' and a small portion of the stone wall remains visible just to the north of the site on Albert Road (RCHME 1970). The three V-shaped ditches and the counterscarp bank survive beneath the adjacent Borough Gardens and beneath Dorford Church (Bellamy 2004). The site itself may lie on the tail of the rampart (Figure 1).

A number of Roman burials have been found close to the site. Part of a Roman cemetery has been found on the western edge of the counterscarp bank in the gardens of 8 Albert Road and 43 Cornwall Road (Stacey 1986 a-b) and which extended across the road and into the Borough Gardens (RCHME 1970, 582).

During the medieval period the site was within the open fields of West Walls (Draper 2001). West Walks was laid out as a tree-lined walk in about 1712 with a gravel path along the flattened out top of the remains of the Roman rampart (Pope 1918). By the late 18th century there were buildings on the plot on the corner of West Walks and Princes Street. The present house and the other villas on West Walks were probably built in the early 19th century, as they are first shown on a map of Dorchester dated 1810, so are clearly earlier than the *c.* 1830s date in the listed building description.

The property is Grade II Listed (National Heritage List entry Number: 1220831).

1.6 Previous Archaeological fieldwork

There has been no previous fieldwork undertaken on the site itself, but there have been a number of archaeological observations and investigations in the near vicinity. The defences on the west side of *Durnovaria* have been investigated piecemeal in a number of locations (RCHME 1970, Startin *et al.* 1972, Bellamy 2004) but nowhere has the full width of the defences investigated in detail.

Traces of a Roman building were recorded during the construction of a chapel of rest in Princes Street in 1999, about 40 m east of the site. There have been a number of excavations of the area of the town just within the western town defences to the south of the site in the area of the former hospital (Trevarthen 2008).

A number of finds have been recovered from the vicinity including a Roman medical instrument from West Walks (Sparey Green 1994), a Roman intaglio gem from Albert Road (Henig 1971) and a late Roman hoard of silver coins and spoons was found close to Princes Street (RCHME 1970, 562).

1.7 Aims and Objectives

The aim of the archaeological programme was to establish and make available information about the archaeological resource existing on the site.

Its objectives were:

- To observe and record the all the *in situ* archaeological deposits and features revealed during the groundworks to an appropriate archaeological standard.
- To present the results in a report to the appropriate standard.

1.8 Fieldwork

Groundworks in the cellar had begun prior to Terrain Archaeology being notified and shortly after the draft Written Scheme of Investigation was submitted to John Stark & Crickmay Partnership. Prior to the first site visit by Terrain Archaeology, the floor of the cellar had been removed, an inspection trench about 0.4 m wide and 0.3 m deep had been dug around the inside of the walls revealing the presence of a substantial nodular flint and rammed chalk structure. At the time of Terrain Archaeology's first visit ground reduction was in progress in the northern part of the cellar. Therefore, archaeological investigation was restricted to the relatively undisturbed southern part of the cellar, while ground reduction by the builder continued in the northern part.

An approximately two metre wide area across the southern end of the cellar was cleaned back by trowel to reveal the upper surface of the feature (Plates 1-2). A single slot was fully hand-excavated across the feature (Figure 2; Plate 3) to investigate the flint feature and to search for sealed dateable material. The upper surface of this feature was not examined over the rest of the area as it had been removed by the builder.

1.9 Methods

The methodology, scope, aims and objectives of the works was set out in a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) produced by Terrain Archaeology in July 2012 (Terrain Archaeology document no. 3364/0/1).

All archaeological works were carried out in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists *Code of Conduct* and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (IfA 2008).

All features and deposits, regardless of their perceived date and archaeological significance, were recorded using components of Terrain Archaeology's system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records. These have been compiled in a stable, cross-referenced and fully indexed archive in accordance with current guidelines (AAF 2007) and the requirements of the receiving museum. A photographic record of the works was maintained in digital format, and includes aspects of their setting, conduct and technical detail.

Upon recognition of the presence of a significant archaeological feature, Dorset County Council's Senior Archaeologist (Advice and Management) was notified by Terrain Archaeology to provide the opportunity for site monitoring.

1.10 Archive and Dissemination

The project archive, comprising written, graphic and photographic records, and appropriate background documentation, is currently stored by Terrain Archaeology under the project code 53378. In due course, and subject to the legal agreement of the landowner to full Transfer of Title, it is anticipated that those components of the archive not re-interred on-site, or selected for discard in accordance with appropriate policies will be accessioned for long-term curation and storage by the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, subject to fulfilment of the Museum's requirements of the preparation of archaeological archives. Deposition of the archive will place it in the public domain.

A paper copy of this report will be lodged with Dorset County Council's Historic Environment Record (HER). The HER is a publicly funded and accessible resource, and deposition of the report will place it, and the project results, in the public domain.

A digital summary of the archive will be placed with the OASIS project (www.oasis.ac.uk) under the reference code *terraina1-124780*. A digital copy of this report will be uploaded for inclusion in the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) online 'grey literature' library.

A brief report of the project will be published by Terrain Archaeology in the *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society*.

2. Results

2.1 Natural Deposits

Natural deposits were observed at about 2.3 m below external ground level and comprised clean jointed chalk bedrock. It was not possible within the cellar to ascertain whether, and to what extent, this chalk may have been truncated by past activity.

2.2 Roman Structure 103

Also at about 2.3 m below external ground level, Feature 103 was observed on a north-south alignment along the whole length of the exposed cellar floor (Figure 2). Its eastern edge was approximately straight and cut into clean natural chalk, but the western edge lay outside the investigation area: It may lie outside the building or have been destroyed in the early 19th century by the excavation of its foundations. Unfortunately, the base of the cellar walls had been underpinned with concrete prior to Terrain Archaeology's presence on site, so it was not possible to confirm whether the feature continued beneath and beyond the cellar wall.

Feature 103 comprised a steep-sided and flat-based cut over 2.6m wide and some 0.40–0.45 m deep. This cut was filled with three layers of tightly packed flint nodules and a small amount of limestone, firmly set in a very variable matrix of redeposited chalk, grey-brown loamy silt and some reddish brown clay-silt (106, 108, 110), interleaved with layers of compact rammed chalk (105, 107,109). In all three stone layers it was noticeable that much of the stone was pitched, suggesting it was carefully laid from west to east (Figure 3).

The upper rammed chalk layer (105) was capped with a thin skim (up to *c.* 10 mm) of firm light yellow-brown clay-lime mortar containing moderate small chalk fragments. This layer was not continuous, but had been eroded away in places (Figure 2; Plates 1-2). The association of this layer was not established beyond doubt as the necessary physical evidence had been lost, but it was confined to the area of the footing, and seems more likely to belong to structure 103 than to form part of the early 19th century cellar construction.

No finds were recovered from the hand-dug section, but Roman material was retrieved by the builders during bulk-reduction of the foundation: this undifferentiated material was assigned to a separate context 100 (see Table 1).

2.3 Nineteenth Century Deposits

1 West Walks is known to have stood in its present location since at least 1810 on historic map evidence. It is assumed that original excavation of the cellar was integral with its construction. The base of early 19th century cellar cut seems, in the main, to have coincided broadly with the upper surface of Structure 103 – possibly indicating that this level marks the wider transition from natural chalk bedrock to dumped rampart deposits.

The limestone flags and patchy bedding mortar of the modern cellar overlay a levelling deposit (101) comprising up to 0.15 m of mixed redeposited soil, of very variable character, sometimes containing chalk and brick fragments.

3. Finds

3.1 Finds Assemblage

During the builder's bulk excavation of the cellar floor, a small assemblage of finds was recovered from the makeup layers forming foundation structure 103 (see Table 1). All were of Roman date.

Context	Amphora	Ceramic Building Material	Stone Building Material	Stone Objects
100	1/585g	4/1624g	1/962g	4/215g

Table 1: Quantification of finds by context

3.2 Amphora

A single amphora handle sherd, probably from a Dressel 20 Spanish olive oil jar was found in the make-up of feature 103. Dressel 20 are the most common amphora type in Roman Britain and date from the first to the mid-third centuries AD.

3.3 Ceramic Building Material

Three fragments of Roman roof tile (1202 g) and one piece of Roman brick (422 g) were recovered from the make-up of feature 103. The roof tiles were all tegulae fragments, from three separate tiles. One tegula fragment had a cut chamfered corner, presumably part of a (lost) cutaway and part of an incised mark on the underside.

The brick fragment (436g) was made in hard, well-fired pinkish orange fabric with a reduced grey core of variable thickness. One flat edge survived showing the brick to be 42 mm thick, although its other dimensions (and therefore its type) cannot be established. Traces of smooth pale buff lime mortar remained on one flat surface, the flat edge and one broken surface, suggesting the fragment had already been used at least once in a broken form prior to its deposition in structure 103.

3.4 Stone Building Material

One broken piece of fine-grained light grey limestone (*c.* 140mm by 80mm by 55mm: 962g), with the remains one dressed surface was recovered. It had been heated to a mid grey colour on one edge, which was also slightly abraded. Heat affected stones of this sort are commonly found locally in furnaces or ovens (e.g. Trevarthen 2008, 18).

3.5 Stone Object

A single piece of dark grey vesicular Niedermendig lava (215g), recently broken into four fragments was recovered. This is likely to be part of a quern, but the form could not be determined. Niedermendig lava querns were widely used throughout Roman Britain and were imported from the Middle Rhineland.

3.6 Discussion of Finds

Whilst not closely dateable, all of the finds recovered fit comfortably within the 1st-mid 3rd century AD, but it is clear that all been incorporated into the foundation as 'rubble'. Pottery (other than the large fragment of amphora) was absent. The lack of re-used Purbeck stone roof-tile (commonly found in later Roman structures and deposits within the town) could suggest an earlier Roman date for structure 103.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

4.1 Discussion

A definitive interpretation of Feature 103 is rendered difficult, party by the relatively small scale of its exposure and the *ad hoc* nature of its discovery, but more significantly because construction of the cellar of 1 West Walks (probably in the early 19th century) has largely divorced it from its original stratigraphic context. However, its location and orientation strongly suggest that Feature 103 forms part of the complex of defences that surrounded *Durnovaria* in the Roman period. Insofar as they are presently understood, these defences comprised a small primary earthen rampart, perhaps of later second century date, sealed below a much larger secondary rampart, which was itself later surmounted by a stone wall, perhaps in the 4th century. Outside the rampart was a wide triple ditch system with a broad counterscarp bank beyond (RCHME 1970 and see Figure 1). On the west side of the town the line of the rampart is now marked by West Walks and Colliton Walk. 1 West Walks probably lies just inside the first phase rampart but within the footprint of the second phase rampart.

The character of Feature 103, constructed of interbedded hard-packed flint nodules and chalk rubble, suggests it may be the foundation for a large wall, though no evidence for the existence of any superstructure was revealed in the excavation. Its width (in excess of 2.6 m) compares well with the known late Roman town wall footings elsewhere along the western side of the defences, which are all about three metres wide (RCHME 1970), and is also broadly comparable in scale with the defensive walls of other Romano-British towns e.g. St Albans at 3–3.5 m wide (Niblett 2005), Silchester at up to 3.7 m wide (Wacher 1978, 266), Cirencester at *c.* 3 m wide and Exeter at 3.4 m wide (*ibid*. 302, 332).

Feature 103 is located only about 35 m south of the surviving portion of the Roman town wall in Albert Road (Figure 1), but its axis is offset some 10 m to the east. Thus, unless there is a dog-leg, or other major change of alignment in the wall, it seems unlikely that both belong to the same structure. Feature 103 is instead closely paralleled by a similar feature previously found in several locations beneath the rampart on the southern town defences. Excavation in the 1950s at the former Lee Motors garage off Trinity Street exposed an 85 ft (25.9 m) length of a steep-sided and flat-based foundation 9½ ft (2.9 m) wide, cut into natural chalk and consisting of "three layers of flints capped and interleaved with chalk" (RCHME 1970, 547). This lay on an east-west alignment which diverged slightly from that of the overlying earthen rampart, and was tentatively interpreted as an early street (Street 176), buried when the rampart was raised (RCHME 1970, 546-7). This interpretation now seems unlikely following further investigation of this feature at South Grove Cottage and Bowling Alley Walk. Excavations at South Grove Cottage (situated adjacent to the Lee Motors site) exposed more of the feature, which measured some three metres wide and 0.5 m deep, cut into the natural chalk. The lowest 0.3 m of the structure comprised three successive layers of flint nodules separated by layers of "dirty chalk, well trodden", with an upper surface which was "almost absolutely flat, with only one or two flints protruding", and which showed no signs of wear or use. As previously, it was clear that the upper surface of the structure was immediately physically overlain by the dumps of soil forming the upper rampart without any intervening soil development or other stratigraphy (Startin 1981, 24-5). A trench cut through the rampart in Bowling Alley Walk, about 100 m to the west of South Grove Cottage, revealed a "foundation cut into the natural Chalk about 3 m. wide and 40 cm. thick, consisting of 3 layers each of flints and puddled chalk, virtually identical with that seen at the Lee

Motors site in 1955" (Putnam 1970, 135). It lay at the tail of the primary rampart and was sealed by a turf line that also developed over the rampart. It was sealed by the secondary rampart. Further to the east, and to the east of the Roman south gate, a near-identical structure was found below the end of Charles Street during the excavation of the South Walks Tunnel Sewer, just west of the new West Dorset District Council offices. This feature was 3.5 m wide and 0.3 m thick comprising two layers of flint nodules interleaved with rammed chalk rubble within a linear cut through an early Roman soil level and sealed by material from the rampart (Davies & Farwell 1990). It was about ten metres from the lip of the inner town ditch. The most easterly exposure comes from the recent excavations for the new WDDC offices, where a partial section of the rampart included a coursed flint and chalk structure cutting the natural chalk (R. Greatorex, pers. comm.).

Feature 103 marks the first recognition of this structure on the western arm of the defences. However, It is possible to speculate that it originally continued even further north, beyond the town's west gate. Re-examination of two published schematic sections of the western and northern defences at Colliton Park excavated in the 1930s may show an unfinished foundation trench. Both sections contained an otherwise unremarked steep-sided flat-based cut into natural chalk, in the order of 3–3.5 m wide and sealed directly beneath rampart makeup (RCHME 1970, 546). Whilst there is no evidence that these were ever filled with flint and chalk footings, their form, dimensions and stratigraphic setting all hint at an unfinished wall foundation. The Colliton Park excavations have yet to be fully published and the plan form of these cuts cannot be confirmed without recourse to archival research.

The descriptions of the 'flint and chalk' feature at the South Grove Cottage and Bowling Alley Walks stress that the footing appears to be unused. The exposure in the cellar of 1 West Walks is different in that it has a thin slick of clayey mortar overlying the footings but there was no visible evidence for mortar scars or masonry impressions, neither was there any building material surviving elsewhere in the cellar (though that this could have been removed when the cellar was constructed).

The 1 West Walks structure appears to confirm Startin's tentative interpretation of the 'flint and chalk' feature at South Grove Cottage as the foundation of a defensive structure (presumably a masonry wall) abandoned before its completion (Startin 1981). In respect of this, the West Walks observations are particularly significant as they suggest the preparations for this structure were very much more advanced than might otherwise have been suspected, and certainly extended as far north as the west gate. The observation at the South Walks Tunnel Sewer (Davies & Farwell 1990) indicates they extended east of the south gate, and (rather less conclusively) the west and north rampart sections at Colliton park (RCHME 1970, 546) may show that an unfilled foundation trench was dug north of the west gate and around the northwest corner of the town. There has been no evidence recovered for a masonry superstructure, or for the demolition or robbing-out of such a wall prior to construction of the earthen defences. Such evidence might particularly be expected to survive at South Grove Cottage, where the top of the chalk and flint footing lay about 0.2 m below the top of its chalk bedrock construction cut.

4.2 Conclusions

The survival of Structure 103 beneath the deep basement cellar of an early 19th century urban villa was unexpected, and its preservation at such depth carries significant implications for the ongoing conservation and management of heritage assets along West Walks Road, by no means all of which are protected as part of the Scheduled Monument. It can no longer be assumed that building cellars or foundations along West Walks will necessarily have destroyed all archaeologically significant remains within their footprint, or that wider investigation of the non-scheduled rampart remains will offers little by way of new information on the development of the Roman defences.

Feature 103 itself appears to be a westerly extension of a structure previously recorded in several locations along the southern Roman town defences beneath South Walks and Bowling Alley Walk. This feature as a whole is now tentatively interpreted as a footing for masonry wall, potentially unfinished or abandoned, of uncertain relationship to the primary phase rampart, but clearly pre-dating the ?3rd/4th century second phase enlarged rampart.

Whilst Feature 103 cannot contribute greatly to discussion of the overall dating and purpose of this footing, or of how it fits into to the developmental sequence of the town defences sequence, It remains of key importance as it demonstrates for the first time that the footing is much more extensive than previously thought, surrounding at least the south west quarter of the Roman town. The limited finds from the feature broadly indicate an earlier, rather than later, Roman date, but it is not possible to be more precise: the dating of the earthwork defences that seal the foundation elsewhere, is, in itself, vague, relying on comparatively slight pottery dating evidence. The first earthwork defences are unlikely to be earlier than *c.* AD130 and may be as late as the end of the second century or early third century (RCHME 1970, 535). The secondary enlargement of the rampart, has a *terminus post quem* of the late second century (Putnam 1970; Startin 1981), but may be associated with the construction of the later town wall, which has been tentatively dated to the late third or early fourth century AD (RCHME 1970, 535). Therefore, this feature has a tentative *terminus ante quem* of the late third or early fourth century, but is not more closely dated than that. Many Romano-British towns gained earthwork defences probably in the second half of the second century AD, and many of these were modified with stone walls in the third century (Jones & Mattingly 2002, 161). The potential presence of a pre-rampart wall (albeit potentially unfinished) at Dorchester is therefore curious, requiring far more detailed understanding of the town's defences than currently exists to fully explain, particularly since its position places it behind the primary earthen rampart. The motivations for its apparent abandonment in favour of earthen ramparts and ditches cannot be recovered archaeologically.

The results of the observations and recording programme at 1 West Walks, and the questions raised by the discovery of Feature 103 beneath the cellar floor of the property, provide a timely reminder that, despite the synthesis presented by the RCHME (1970) and information gained by archaeological works in the forty-two years since its publication, Dorchester's Roman defences remain particularly poorly understood in terms of their origins, layout, development, dating and phasing.

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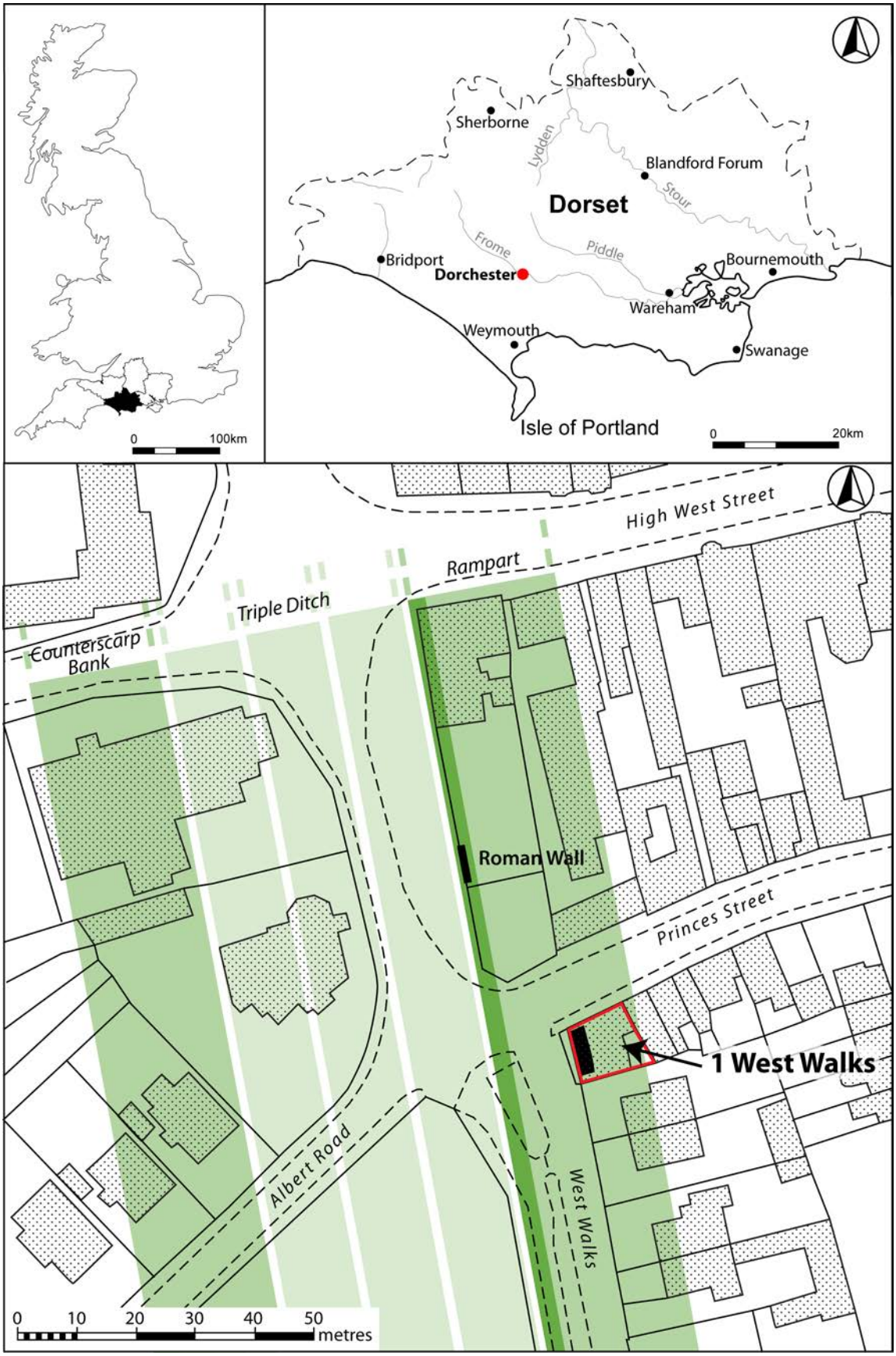

Figure 1: Site Location in relation to the projected line of Roman defences.

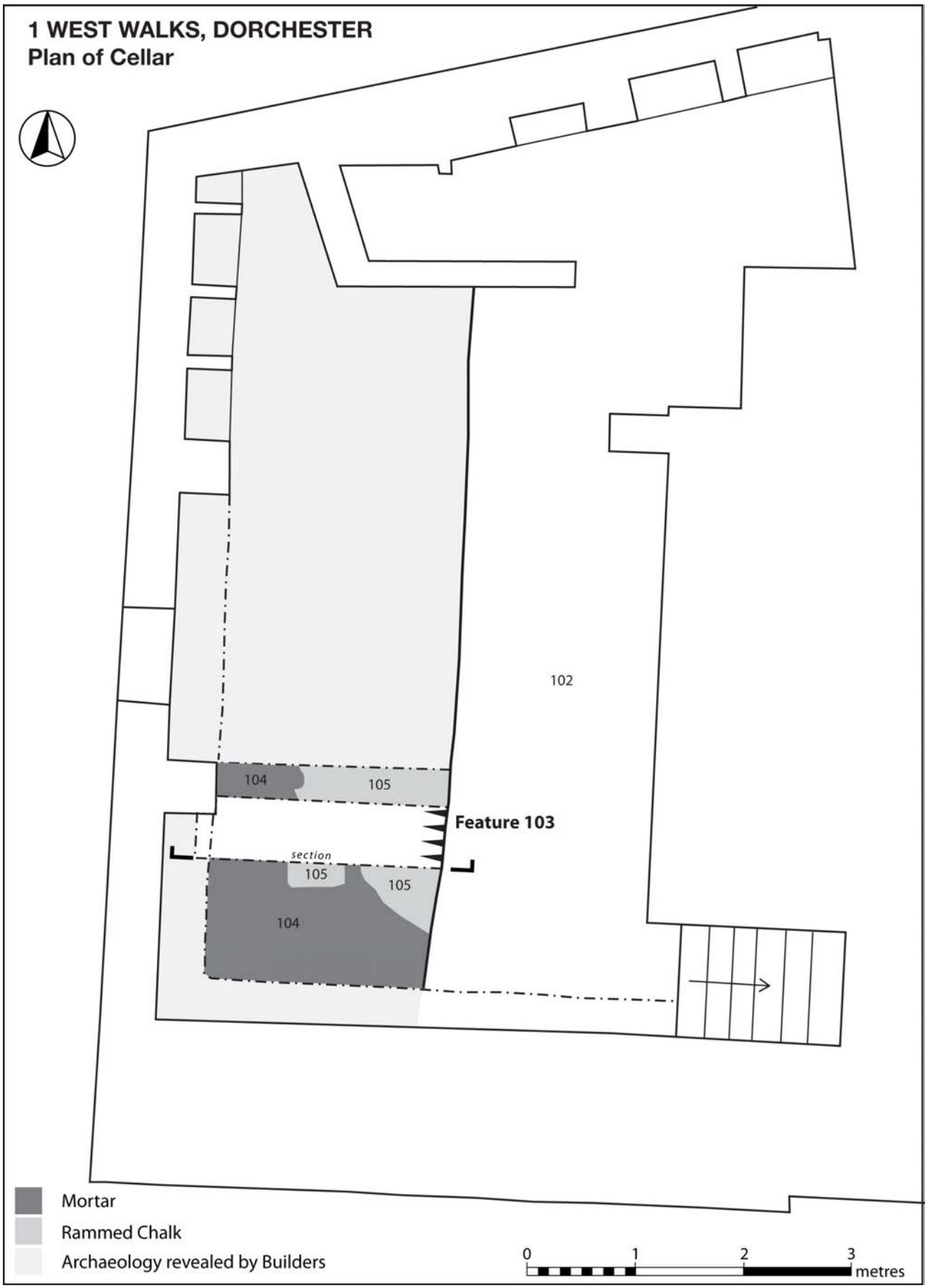

Figure 2: Plan of archaeology revealed in the cellar of 1 West Walks.

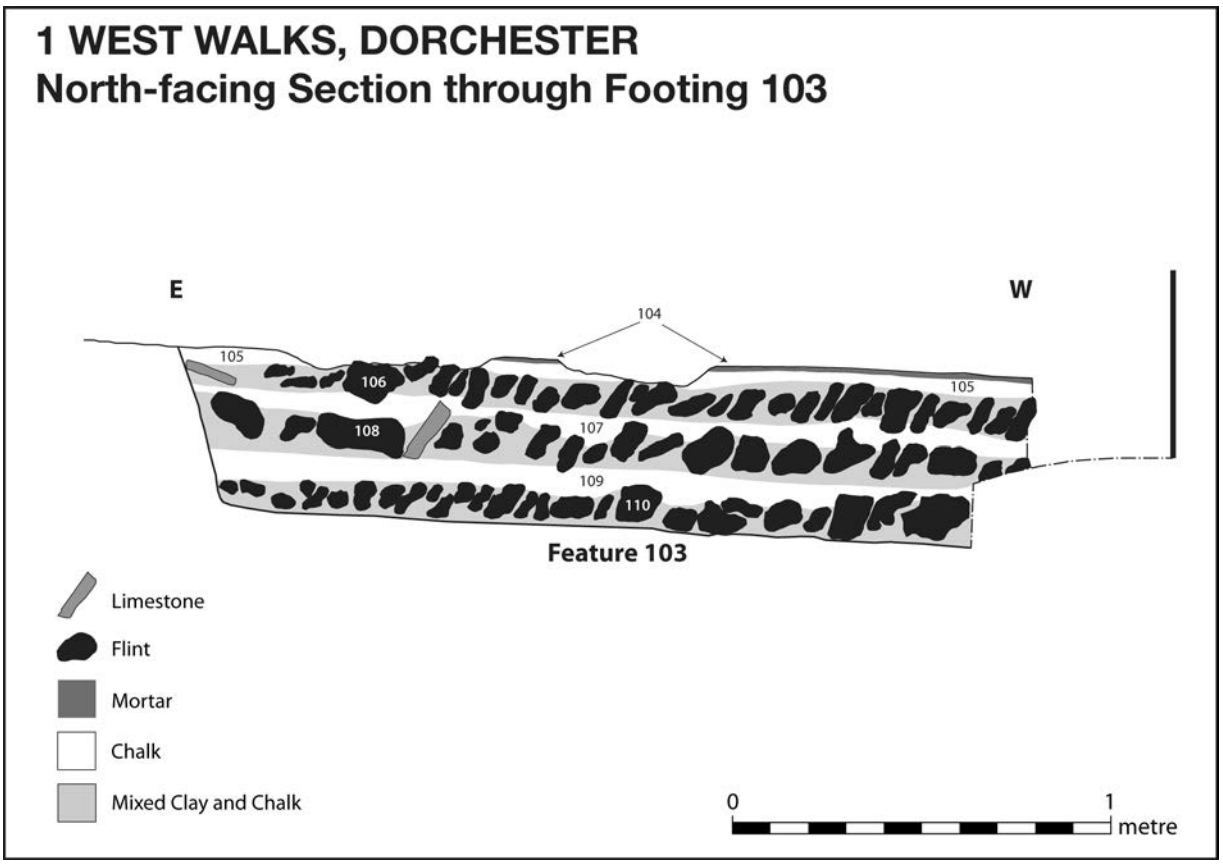

Figure 3: North-facing section through Feature 103.

Plate 1: View of cleaned area of Feature 103, looking South. 1m scale.

Plate 2: View of cleaned area of Feature 103, looking West. 1m scale.

Plate 2: Section through Feature 103 looking South. 1m scale.