



Maumbury Rings, Dorchester

Observations and Recording during new fencing and retaining wall construction



Report No. 53331/3/1

March 2013

Maumbury Rings, Dorchester, Dorset

Archaeological Observations and Recording during new fencing and retaining wall construction, June–September 2012

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Scheduled Monument No: DO 41

Scheduled Monument Consent Ref: S00006485

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Project Report Summary Page

Project Details			
OASIS Reference	terrains1-139964		
Project Title	Maumbury Rings Fencing, Dorchester, Dorset		
Short Description of Project	Between June and September 2012, Terrain Archaeology carried out a programme of archaeological observations and recording at Maumbury Rings during the renewal of the retaining wall along Weymouth Avenue and the erection of a new fence along Weymouth Avenue and Maumbury Road. The groundworks did not disturb any archaeologically significant deposits, only post-medieval and modern agricultural soils and landscaping deposits. The only feature observed was a ditch, probably of post-medieval or modern date.		
Project Dates	Start: 06-06-2012	End: 06-09-2012	
Previous/Future Work	Yes/Not Known		
Project Code	53331		
Monument Type and Period	None		
Significant Finds	None		
Project Location			
County/District/Parish	Dorset/ West Dorset/Dorchester		
Site Address	Maumbury Rings, Weymouth Avenue, Dorchester Dorset, DT1 1PW		
Site Coordinates	SY 6902 8992		
Site Area	30 m ²		
Height OD			
Project Creators			
Organisation	Terrain Archaeology		
Project Brief Originator	English Heritage		
Project Design Originator	Terrain Archaeology		
Project Supervisor	Mike Trevarthen		
Project Manager	Peter Bellamy		
Sponsor or Funding Body	Dorchester Town Council		
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.
Contents	None	Digital photography	context sheets, photographs, plans, report

Maumbury Rings, Dorchester, Dorset

Archaeological Observations and Recording during new fencing and retaining wall construction, June–September 2012

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Introduction

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Dorchester Town Council, through their agents Beauchamps Chartered Surveyors, to carry out a programme of archaeological observations and recording at Maumbury Rings during the replacement of the retaining wall along Weymouth Avenue and the replacement of the fencing along Weymouth Avenue and Maumbury Road, Dorchester.

'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."

Fieldwork was carried out intermittently between 6th June 2012 and 6th September 2012 by Mike Trevarthen (AlfA) and Peter Bellamy (MifA). The project was managed for Terrain Archaeology by Peter Bellamy.

Terrain Archaeology gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Steven Sherlock (Beauchamps Chartered Surveyors), the site contractors, N.R.G. Associates (Yeovil) Ltd, in particular Russell Crocker, Danny and Pete, Veryan Heal (English Heritage) and Steve Wallis, Dorset County Council Senior Archaeologist (Advice and Management).

1.2 Brief

No written brief was issued, but the scope of the works was discussed between Beauchamps Chartered Surveyors and English Heritage. Archaeological Observations and Recording was a condition of the granting of Scheduled Monument Consent for the works (Scheduled Monument No: DO 41, SMC Ref No: S00006485).

1.3 Site Location and Topography

Maumbury Rings survives as a significant earthwork on the east side of Weymouth Avenue in the southern part of Dorchester (NGR SY 690 899). It is bounded by Weymouth Avenue to the west, Maumbury Road to the south, Dorchester Police Station to the north and the railway line to the east (Figure 1). The site is under grass with some mature trees along the northern edge of the site. Five mature London Plane trees are in the pavement along the Weymouth Avenue boundary, divided from the site by a retaining wall. A number of smaller Lime trees grow on the southern boundary along Maumbury Road.

The site is designated as a Scheduled Monument DO 41 (Henge, Romano-British amphitheatre and Civil War fieldworks known collectively as Maumbury Rings) and lies within the Dorchester Conservation Area.

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

Maumbury Rings is a multi-period monument comprising a Neolithic henge monument, reworked into a Roman amphitheatre and later adapted as a 'fort' during the English Civil War. It is not proposed to provide full details of the complex archaeology and history of this remarkable monument, but to outline the major events that have implications for the survival of archaeological stratigraphy. Most of our knowledge of this monument comes from the excavations carried out by H. St. George Gray between 1908 and 1913 (Bradley 1976).

The Neolithic henge monument comprised a ring of deep chalk-cut shafts, probably cut into the bottom of a ditch with an external enclosing bank with an entrance to the north. There may have been a large standing stone in or near the entrance (Bradley 1975, 15). This phase has been dated by two radiocarbon dates of between 2880–2040 cal. BC (Bradley and Thomas 1984). A large deep pit with human remains found just outside the northeast corner of the site (Parry 2006) may be associated with this henge.

In the early Roman period, the earthwork was extensively modified to create an amphitheatre. The arena was created by lowering the level of the interior by about three metres with the spoil added to the bank. There were quite complex northern entrance arrangements. The edge of the arena was revetted by a timber palisade. The amphitheatre was later modified, by creating another entrance to the south, as well as other modifications. It lay on the eastern side of the Roman road to Radipole.

A number of Roman burials were discovered outside the northern entrance of the amphitheatre. These, and further burials discovered just to the north on the site of the police station (Chandler *et al.* 1999), probably belong to a cemetery, dated to the 2nd century AD, along the Roman road. A ditch flanked the east side of this road and although it has not been exposed on the Maumbury Rings site, it has been seen several times in the area just to the north of the site (Bellamy 1989, Pearce 1986, Whelan 2001). It is likely that this ditch continues along the western side of the Maumbury Rings site.

In the 17th century, during the Civil war, the earthworks were remodelled with a ramp and projecting promontory added over the southern entrance and two earthen ramps added on to the east and west sides of the interior. A small ditch was added around the outer edge of the bank and a larger ditch ran from the northern entrance towards the town.

The monument was incorporated within the open field system of the Manor of Fordington until the 1890s when it was enclosed and preserved for public access (Morris and Draper 1995). Both the interior and the area surrounding it were under arable agriculture.

In 1879, there was an unsuccessful excavation to try to find the large portal stone that had once stood to the west of the entrance (Pope 1885).

The county gallows stood outside the western side of the rings until 1766 (RCHME 1970, 592) and from the end of the 19th century the monument has played host to a myriad of different public events both large and small.

1.6 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.

1.7 Fieldwork

The fieldwork comprised the observation and recording of groundworks associated with the demolition and rebuilding of a retaining wall along Weymouth Avenue and the removal and replacement of the boundary fence along Weymouth Avenue and Maumbury Road carried out by the contractors under observation by a suitably experienced archaeologist.

The existing retaining wall was of concrete cast *in situ*. It had been damaged and moved by tree root action from the five mature plane trees along Weymouth Avenue. The existing wall and footings were removed using a mechanical breaker, but the parts of the wall adjacent and behind the five trees were left in position so as not to damage the tree roots. The existing fencing was cut down to ground level. The new metal post and rail fence had posts at 970 mm centres inserted into new hand-dug holes approximately 0.2 m across and 0.5-0.6 m deep. The spoil from the holes was placed on plastic sheeting (and generally the spoil from each hole was kept separate) before disposal off-site after post erection.

1.8 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 December 2010 (Terrain Archaeology document no. 3331/0/1).

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; IfA 2009) 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.

For the purposes of recording, each post hole was numbered in a sequence from 1-221 and the soil profile of each hole recorded on an abbreviated context sheet with depths recorded from present ground surface.

1.9 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 53331. 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 *terrains1-139964*. A digital copy of this report will be uploaded for inclusion in the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) online 'grey literature' library.

A brief summary of the fieldwork results will be published by Terrain Archaeology in the next edition of the *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society*. No further publication is proposed.

2. Results

2.1 Retaining Wall along Weymouth Avenue

The removal of the existing retaining wall exposed an almost continuous section along Weymouth Avenue, south of the access gate into the site, from the present ground surface down to a depth of about 0.2 m below pavement level (Figure 3).

The exposed section revealed three basic stratigraphic layers. The lowest layer exposed was only visible in the southern part of the section, south of Tree 5. This layer (104) was a loose mid-light yellowish-brown silty clay loam with fragmented chalk pieces and flecks and sparse small stone, over 0.35 m thick. This layer was sealed by a 0.45-0.55 m thick layer (101) of mid yellowish-brown silty loam with sparse small stone. This was sealed beneath the topsoil (100), a 3 m thick friable mid greyish-brown clay loam with a well-defined modern turfline. In the section between Trees 4 and 5, a band of chalk up to 0.2 m thick and 2.2 m wide was exposed beneath layer 101 and probably lying on the surface of layer 104.

A single feature was observed, a sloping-sided ditch (102), probably oriented roughly WNW-ESE and cut through layer 104. The relationship with the overlying layer 101 was not clearly determined because of the amount of disturbance by tree roots. It measured about 2.2 m wide, but its full depth and profile were not exposed. It was filled with dark greyish-brown silty loam (103) with occasional chalk flecks and small limestone fragments. This feature coincided with the presence of a slight linear earthwork embankment running up to the edge of the rampart (Figure 2).

2.2 New Fencing along Weymouth Avenue and Maumbury Road

Ninety nine postholes for the new fencing and kissing gate (1-86, 209-221) were dug along the Weymouth Avenue frontage. Fourteen (1-14) of these were excavated and the posts concreted in position, before Terrain Archaeology was informed that the work was taking place, so were not recorded. The remainder of the holes revealed a similar sequence to that recorded along the retaining wall. A small quantity of post-medieval pottery was recovered from the holes, but none could be confidently ascribed to a particular context.

One hundred and twenty seven postholes (87-208) were dug along Maumbury Road for the new fencing and kissing gate. The sequence revealed was different to that on Weymouth Avenue and was almost completely composed of modern disturbance. It was clear that the ground level had been built up significantly next to Maumbury Road as there is a bank about 2-3 m wide and between about 0.6-0.8m high ramping up to pavement level inside the scheduled area, suggesting that the original ground level lay at or below the base of the post holes. A layer of concrete up to 0.5 m deep was recorded in the upper part of many of the postholes. It appears to be associated with the pavement and services beneath the pavement along Maumbury Road. Beneath this concrete a disturbed layer of chalk rubble and soil containing fragments of tarmac was observed, particularly in the area up to about 46 m from the junction. Further to the southeast, the lower part of the sequence comprised a silty loam similar to context 101 recorded along Weymouth Avenue. This layer contained post-medieval pottery, clay tobacco pipe, bottle glass and brick.

Between 39 m and 46 m from the junction, hard chalk was observed at the base of the postholes at a depth of 0.55 m below ground level. It was unclear if this represented hard-packed redeposited chalk or natural chalk bedrock: if the latter, it is the only place where natural chalk was exposed.

3. Finds

3.1 Finds Assemblage

The finds collected from the observations are shown in Table 1. None of the artefacts were observed *in situ* and all came from examining the spoil derived from the digging of the postholes. Only one find, a fragment of Roman roof

tile, appears to date to the periods of construction, use and reuse of the monument itself: all other finds relate to later activity, either agricultural or to landscaping associated with the modern roads. None of the finds have been retained.

Post hole	Iron	Pottery	Clay Tobacco Pipe	Ceramic Building Material	Slate	Glass
9		1/3g		1/168g		
32		1/3g			1/6g	
33		1/3g				
38						1/6g
39		1/3g				
96						2/163g
97						1/20g
98						3/74g
99						2/4g
100		1/1g				
106						1/124g
112		1/1g				
124		1/6g				
136				1/36g		
137				2/66g		1/7g
143						3/17g
144		1/10g				
145			1/2g			2/16g
146		1/3g			1/16g	1/36g
148		2/26g		1/20g	1/4g	
160		2/16g		1/8g		1/4g
161					1/16g	1/12g
162						1/3g
163		1/13g				1/19g
164				2/63g		
168					2/33g	
169						1/10g
162		2/12g		1/43g		
166		3/21g				
168		1/1g				
174	1/34g					
192		1/2g				
196		1/17g				
197						2/23g
198						2/26g
Total	1/34g	22/138g	1/2g	9/374g	6/72g	26/547g

Table 1: Quantification of finds assemblage

3.2 Pottery

Twenty two sherds of pottery of nineteenth and twentieth century date were recovered. The majority were small sherds of industrial whitewares. Two stoneware blacking bottle sherds were found in postholes 160 and 162. A fragment of marmalade jar came from posthole 195. Verwood earthenware sherds were found in postholes 9, 32, 33, 38 148, 153 and 165.

3.3 Building Material

One broken piece of probable Roman roof tile, a fragment of imbrex, was recovered from posthole 9.

Eight other small fragments of ceramic building material were recovered, all of probable nineteenth century date. These comprised one brick fragment (from posthole 136), two fragments of ceramic pipe (from posthole 137) and six roof tile fragments (from postholes 32, 148, 150, 154 and 162).

Six fragments of Welsh slate roofing tile were recovered.

3.4 Glass

Twenty two glass bottle sherds and four window fragments were recovered. The bottle sherds are primarily from dark green or brown cylindrical wine bottles. Part of a push up with pontil mark was recovered from posthole 106, probably from a bottle dating to the first half of the nineteenth century. Two finishes are present (from postholes 96 and 97: one is of Jones group 2 of probable late eighteenth century date and the other is of group 3b dating to post-1820 (Jones 1986). Two milk bottle sherds were found in posthole 197.

The clear window glass sherds were found in postholes 99 and 143

3.5 Other Finds

A single broken iron knife with part of a bone handle was recovered from posthole 174. The knife had a scale tang and integral bolster. The blade was missing. One bone scale of the handle remained, fixed in place by two copper alloy rivets. This is probably a cutlery knife of post-medieval date.

A single clay tobacco pipe stem fragment was found in posthole 145.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

4.1 Discussion

The observations revealed either agricultural soils, post-medieval or modern landscaping deposits or modern disturbance for much of the course of the fence line. A short stretch of possible natural chalk was observed at a depth of about 0.6 m below ground level in Maumbury Road, but chalk was not exposed elsewhere (Figure 2). This is either a higher ridge of natural chalk or a layer of rammed chalk indicating the presence of an archaeological feature in this position. Without further investigation it is unclear what the true nature of this chalk is.

The removal of the retaining wall along Weymouth Avenue exposed a series of extensive soil layers of similar character (Figure 3). The lowest layer (104) has a very homogenous composition and is either a subsoil or more probably an agricultural soil. It is sealed by another probable agricultural soil (101), which most likely represents the nineteenth century ploughsoil. It is noticeable that the top of this layer is at a similar level to the present ground surface closer to the monument. Layer 100 above probably represents landscaping activity following the construction of the retaining wall sometime in the twentieth century, as there is a noticeable ramp up to the top of the retaining wall starting level several metres within the site. Similar agricultural soils were found along the eastern part of the fence line along Maumbury Road and again, there was a clear earthwork ramp up to the pavement indicating post-medieval or modern landscaping.

Only one archaeological feature, a ditch (102) was found along the Weymouth Avenue frontage (Figure 3). This ditch is undated and its full extent is unknown. However, it appears to coincide with an earthwork feature running WNW-ESE towards the monument, which appears to be of relatively recent origin. The stratigraphic position of the ditch within the sequence of soil layers is uncertain, but the overall character of its fill does not suggest it is an ancient feature. Its function remains unknown.

No trace was found of the Roman roadside ditch found further to the north at the Police Station and the Stationmaster's House (Bellamy 1989, Pearce 1986, Whelan 2001). Projection of the line of this ditch suggests it is likely to lie just to the east of the line of the fence along Weymouth Avenue. The course of this ditch was not picked up in the area where it is projected to cross Maumbury Road as this area was disturbed to a depth below the base of the postholes by modern activity probably associated with services under the pavement.

Only a single find dates to the period of the monument, a fragment of Roman roof tile. However, this is unlikely to be associated with the monument and may have derived from the soils removed from within the Roman town of Dorchester and dumped in the monument in 1895 (RCHME 1970, 592).

4.2 Conclusions

The observations of the works to renew the retaining wall along Weymouth Avenue and the fencing around Maumbury Rings along Weymouth Avenue and Maumbury Road revealed no significant archaeological finds and features. The works only disturbed soil layers related to the agricultural use of the monument in the post-medieval period and subsequent landscaping associated with the display of the monument in the late nineteenth century, together with areas of modern disturbance associated with services along Maumbury Road.

5. References

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Figure 1: Location Map

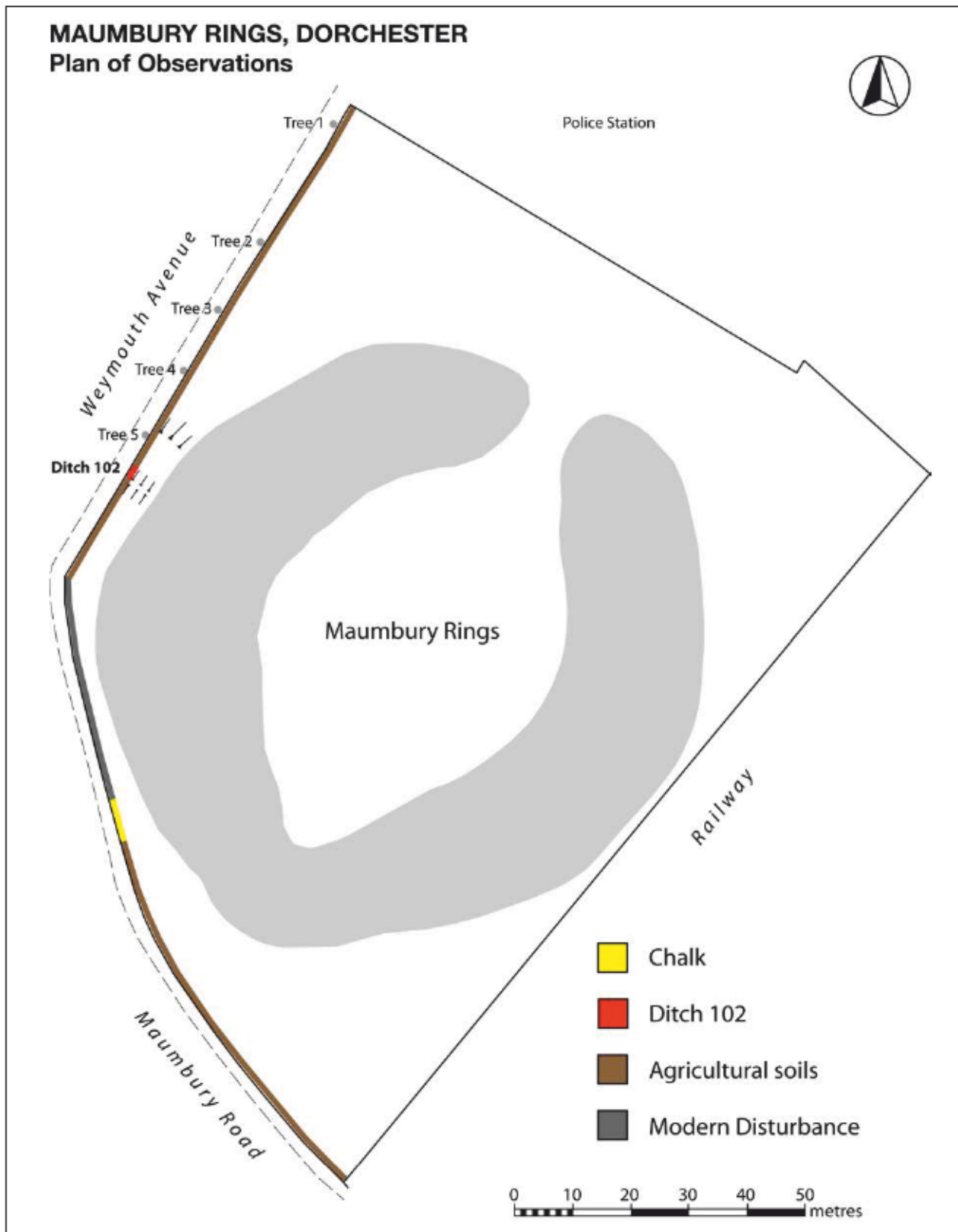


Figure 2: Plan of Observations

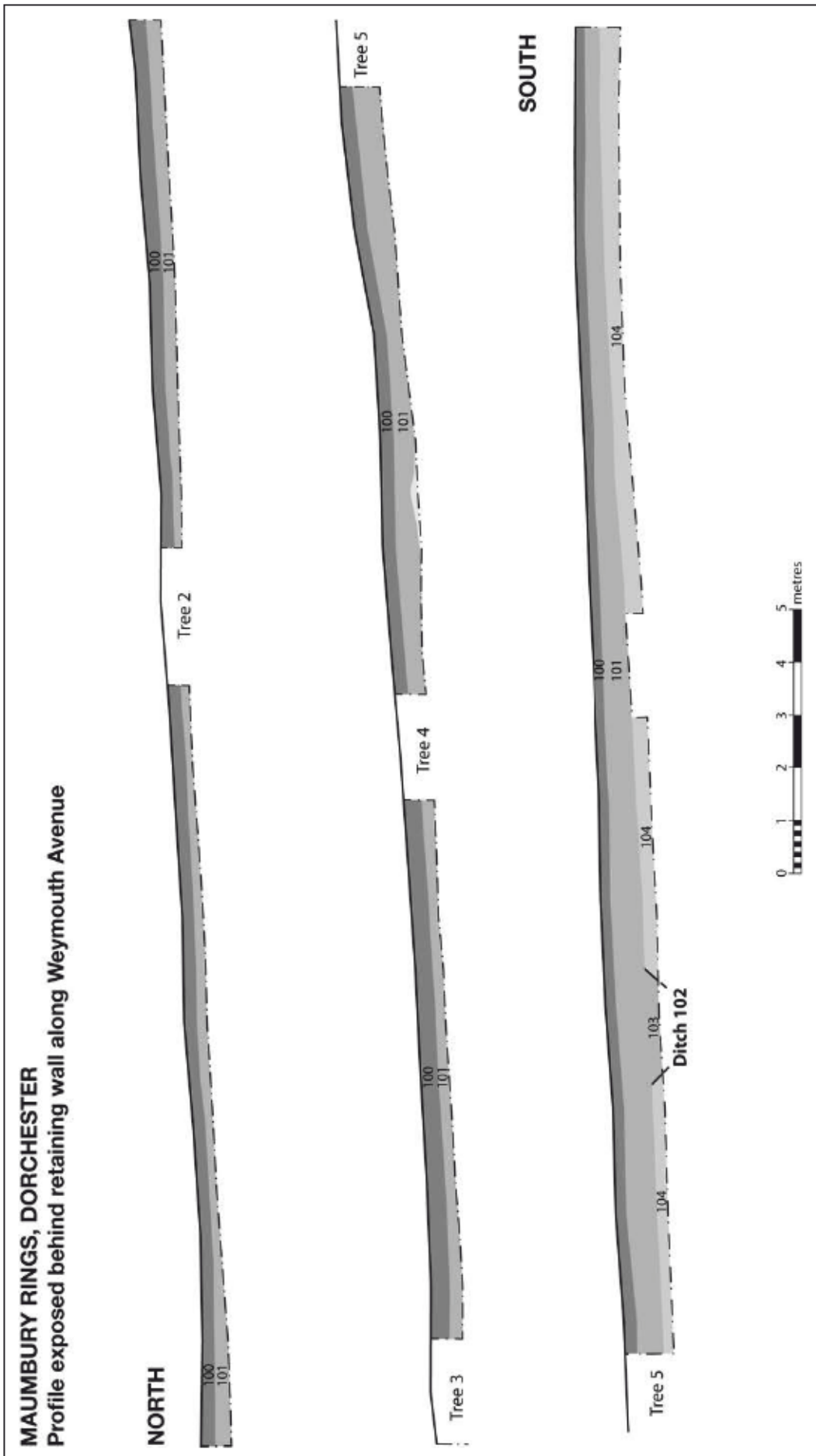


Figure 3: Section through deposits revealed behind retaining wall along Weymouth Avenue.



Plate 1: View of soil profile after removal of retaining wall along Weymouth Avenue.



Plate 2: Ditch 102 after removal of retaining wall along Weymouth Avenue.



Plate 2: General view of new fence along Maumbury Road, showing postholes and retained spoil behind.