



Gallows Hill, Dorchester, Dorset

Archaeological Observations and Recording during Path Improvements



Report No. 53519/3/1

February 2019

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Client: Dorset Highways, Dorset County Council

Agent:

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Project Report Summary Page

Project Details			
OASIS Reference	terraina1-343184		
Project Title	Gallows Hill Path Improvements, Dorchester		
Short Description of Project	Terrain Archaeology carried out archaeological observations and recording during footpath improvement works at Gallows Hill, Dorchester, close to the south east corner of the Roman town defences. Natural chalk was revealed over the whole area of groundworks. No trace of the defences was found, but the site lay on the outer edge of the projected course of the bank. All traces of the bank material may have been removed from this area as part of the eighteenth century landscaping works to form the town walks.		
Project Dates	Start: 11-02-2019	End: 12-02-2019	
Previous/Future Work	No/No		
Project Code	53519		
Monument Type and Period	Town Defences (Roman)		
Significant Finds	None		
Project Location			
County/District/Parish	Dorset/ West Dorset/ Dorchester		
Site Address	Gallows Hill, Dorchester, DT1 1ET		
Site Coordinates	SY 6963 9045		
Site Area	45 m ²		
Height OD	c. 64 m		
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	Dorset County Council		
Project Archive			
Archive Type	Physical	Digital	Paper
Location/Accession No	No physical archive	No digital archive	No paper archive
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Gallows Hill, Dorchester, Dorset

Archaeological Observations and Recording during Path Improvements, February 2019

1. Introduction

1.1 Project introduction

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Dorset Highways, Dorset County Council to carry out archaeological observations and recording during path improvement works at Gallows Hill, Dorchester. The area of the path improvements lies within the *Dorchester Roman Walls* Scheduled Ancient Monument (National Heritage List Entry No: 1002449). The works were carried out under Scheduled Monument Consent S00152042 issued January 2017 for management and maintenance works, including path and road surface maintenance, tree re-planting and minor service trench works, and other routine management and maintenance works on the Dorchester Roman Walls, over a five-year period.

The fieldwork was carried out on the 11th and 12th February 2019 by Peter Bellamy.

1.2 Brief

No written brief for the works was produced by or on behalf of the Client, but the scope of the works required are set out in the Scheduled Monument Consent S00152042.

1.3 Site Location

The site is located at the south east corner of the historic centre of Dorchester at the junction of South Walks Road and Icen Way, close to the junction of South Walks and Salisbury Walks (centred on SY 6963 9045) (Figure 1). The ground rises up eastwards from Icen Way to form an area of higher ground in the angle between Icen Way and South Walks Road, lying at a height of about 65 m above OD (Figure 2, Plate 1).

1.4 Geology

The solid geology is mapped as chalk of the Portsdown Chalk Formation (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>). No Superficial Deposits are recorded.

1.5 Archaeological and Historical Background

The Site lies in the south east corner of the Roman town of *Durnovaria*, founded about AD65. The earliest element of the town appears to be the street pattern, which was laid out on top of the pre-Roman agricultural soil. The full street pattern is not known, but the alignment of a number of streets can be determined, though the street arrangement in the south east corner of the town is not clear. The nearest observation of probable Roman street gravels to the site was at the junction of Wollaston Road and Icen Way (Tatler and Bellamy 2009). In the early Roman period, the town appears to have had a relatively low density of buildings and the street frontages were developed with small timber buildings set within relatively large enclosures with further enclosures behind the street frontages (Woodward *et al.* 1993; Trevarthen 2008). Towards the end of the second century AD many of the timber buildings were replaced by buildings with stone footings that are extended and developed by the late 3rd and into the 4th century and include large courtyard town houses and aisled buildings including possible urban farms, which continued to be built up until the end of the 4th century.

Durnovaria was provided with town defences, probably some time in the late 2nd century AD. The precise form and dating of the defences is uncertain, nevertheless a summary of the likely sequence can be suggested. The main source for our understanding of the defences remains the work done by R.A.H. Farrar for the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments Inventory published in 1970 (RCHME 1970), together with a number of later observations and

relatively small-scale excavations. The first phase of defences appears to consist of a relatively small earthen bank and perhaps a single external ditch and is 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). However, there may have also been an earlier abandoned phase to the defences, as the remains of a massive unfinished wall footing about three metres wide has been traced along the south side of the town, first noted at the Lee Motors site (RCHME 1970, 547) and subsequently at South Grove House, Bowling Alley Walk and in the South Walks Tunnel Sewer (Startin 1981, Putnam *et al.* 1970, Davies & Farwell 1990). It has also been discovered on the west side of the town beneath 1 West Walks (Trevarthen 2012a). This wall footing lay behind the primary bank (suggesting it pre-dates it) and was sealed by the later enlargement of the bank. This abandoned phase of the defences remains poorly understood and not securely dated.

At some time after the late second century AD, but perhaps more likely in the late third or early fourth century AD, the defences were enlarged and elaborated. The earthen bank was heightened and widened and a stone wall constructed along it (RCHME 1970). A triple ditch system with counterscarp bank was built in front of the bank. Along the south side of the town to the west of Acland Road, the line of the bank has been shown to lay to the north of South Walks in the area west of Acland Road (Batchelor *et al.* 1985; Davies and Farwell 1990; Woodward and Pearce 1985). The present scarp along the northern edge of South Walks is the result of 18th century landscaping (Pope 1918). The line of the bank east of Acland Road has not been determined but probably lies under the properties north of South Walks. The inner ditch probably lies mostly beneath South Walks and its southern edge was observed in a manhole in South Walks Road (Davies and Farwell 1990, 53). Part of the middle ditch, the outer ditch and the counterscarp bank were recorded in the grounds of St Genevieve's Convent (now Sunninghill Preparatory School) (Davies 1995).

The layout of the Roman defences in the area of Gallows Hill and the junction with Icen Way is uncertain. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments notes that the "*behaviour of the defences at the S.E. or Gallows Hill corner is obscure. Although the ditch was traced ... as far as the stables of South Court in Culliford Road, the foundations and associated drain trenches of the house 'Robin's Garth' less than 30 yds to the E. showed undisturbed Chalk at 1½ ft. below surface in 1955 (RCHM records). Unless the ditch was interrupted, perhaps for a gate, the inference must be that it had already begun to turn, in which case a straight traverse between two obtuse angles may be proposed for the defences instead of the acute S.E. angle suggested by the modern topography*" (RCHME 1970, 548-9).

The installation of bollards across the end of South Walks on the west side of Icen Way exposed natural chalk at a depth of between 0.7–0.85 m below modern ground level (Trevarthen 2012b). No ditch fills were exposed suggesting that the line of the inner ditch does not swing round to the northeast at this point as has been suggested by the Royal Commission (RCHME 1970, 548-9). It is possible that the inner ditch continued straight on and turned further east, or there was a break in the defences at this point, perhaps for a hypothesised southeast town gate (see RCHME 1970, 549).

During the medieval period, the Roman bank survived as an earthwork and was part of the borough of Dorchester and the ditches (which also appeared to survive as visible earthworks, at least on the west side of the town) were within the manor of Fordington, part of the lands of the Duchy of Cornwall. During the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there were frequent disputes over the boundaries of the borough and the respective rights of the townspeople of Dorchester and the tenants of Fordington over the 'ditches', as recorded in the borough records and the Court Rolls of the Manor of Fordington. The line of the former Roman bank around the town was flattened and spread to form a series of tree-lined walks in the early eighteenth century. South Walks and East Walks (Salisbury Walk) were created in 1743–4 (Pope 1918).

The gallows that give Gallows Hill its name lay at the junction of Icen Way and South Walks and are shown on Speed's 1610 map of Dorchester. They are depicted on the west side of the junction and not in the area of the present observations. The gallows were moved to Maumbury Rings in about 1700 (Filleul 1911).

1.6 Previous Archaeological fieldwork

The closest previous archaeological investigation to the site was a watching brief undertaken by Terrain Archaeology during the installation of new bollards on South Walks in 2012 (Trevarthen 2012b). The works included the observation of four new bollards at the end of South Walks at Icen Way. In the centre of the Walks, chalk bedrock was exposed at a depth of 0.7 m below modern ground level. On the northern side of the Walks a layer of chalk rubble was found at 0.25 m below ground level, possibly a part of the eighteenth century landscaping or possibly a remnant of the Roman bank.

In 1990 Wessex Archaeology carried out a watching brief during the construction of a new tunnel sewer along South Walks (Davies and Farwell 1990). A borehole in the road junction between Icen Way and South Walks Road revealed 1.35 m of modern deposits above natural chalk and the construction of a nearby manhole chamber revealed natural chalk at 1.0 m depth beneath modern made ground (Davies and Farwell 1990,51-2) (Figure 2).

Wessex Archaeology undertook an archaeological evaluation in the ground of Sunninghill Preparatory School (formerly St Genevieve's Convent) in 1995. Part of the middle ditch, the outer ditch and the counterscarp bank were recorded (Davies 1995).

1.7 Aims and Objectives

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

Its objectives were:

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

1.8 Groundworks

The groundworks consisted of the regrading of the slope of the footpath on Gallows Hill on the east side of Icen Way. The tarmac was removed by machine fitted with a toothed bucket over a distance of approximately 14.5 m, then the slope was reprofiled to form a shallower gradient by machine fitted with a toothless grading bucket. Up to about 0.6 m of material was removed. At the east end of the north side of the path a deeper trench 0.4 m wide was dug to a depth of 1.15 m below ground level to seat a new stone slab revetment. The concrete base of a former bench was removed and the grassy areas to north and south of the path were reprofiled by machine to fit the new gradient of the footpath.

1.9 Methods

The methodology of the works is set out in the Method Statement(s) in the *Dorchester Town Walls / The Town Walks, Dorchester Management Plan* produced for Dorchester Town Council by Arrowhead Archaeology in June 2016 (Clarke 2016).

The observation and recording of the groundworks was undertaken to the standards of the Chartered Institute of Archaeologists (CIfA 2014), with an archaeologist in attendance during works that possibly may expose pre-modern deposits.

All deposits revealed, irrespective of their apparent archaeological significance, were recorded using components of the Terrain Archaeology recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records. The photographic record of the work was maintained in digital format, and included aspects of its setting, conduct and technical detail.

1.10 Archive and Dissemination

1.10.1 Paper Archive

No paper archive will be retained beyond the end of the project.

1.10.2 Artefacts

No artefacts or other materials were retained from the site.

1.10.3 Report

A 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 *terrains1-343184*. A digital copy of this report will be uploaded for inclusion in the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) online 'grey literature' library.

2. Results

2.1 Introduction

The area of groundworks monitored archaeologically is shown on Figure 2. The removal of the existing path and the reduction of the ground levels of the path were observed and most of the reprofiling of the adjacent areas of ground to meet the new path levels (Plates 1–6). The deposits revealed are described in Appendix 1.

2.2 Natural Deposits

Natural chalk bedrock (103) was encountered at a depth of 0.28 m below modern ground level (Plates 4-6). The upper surface was weathered but quickly gave way to solid unweathered chalk below.

2.3 Archaeological Features

No archaeological features were observed.

2.4 Post-Medieval and Modern Deposits

Overlying the natural chalk was a thin layer of grey silt (102) with sparse chalk flecks and occasional flint (Plate 3). This was found across most of the area of the footpath and also extended beneath the topsoil in the areas to the north and south of the path (Plates 3–6). A single sherd of eighteenth/nineteenth century pottery was recovered from this layer. The character of this deposit suggests it is a product of erosion of a chalk bank and may be associated with the construction of the walks in the eighteenth century.

The flint gravel sub-base (101) for the tarmac path (100) was set directly on top of the silty layer 102 (Plate 3). A layer of topsoil and grass (104) overlay silty layer 102 to the north and south of the path (Plates 5–6). A single sherd of Roman Black Burnished Ware pottery was noted in the topsoil south of the path.

3. Finds

3.1 Finds Assemblage

Two sherds of pottery were noted during the observations, but have not been retained. They consisted of one sherd (3g) of Roman Black Burnished Ware from topsoil 104 and one sherd (25g) of eighteenth or nineteenth century local (Verwood) earthenware from silty layer 102.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

4.1 Discussion

Although no direct evidence for the Roman town defences was exposed during the works, the observations have added some valuable information to our understanding of the Roman town defences in the south east corner of the town of *Durnovaria*.

The approximate line of the bank and ditches at the east end of the southern part of the circuit of the Roman town defences can be projected from previous observations further west between Charles Street and Acland Road (Batchelor *et al.* 1985; Davies and Farwell 1990; Woodward and Pearce 1985) and from the recorded position of the outer ditches and counterscarp bank in the grounds of Sunninghill Preparatory School (Davies 1995). The projected position of the defences is shown on Figure 2. The precise line of the bank and ditches on the eastern side of the town has not been determined by archaeological investigation and the assumed line is taken from the earthworks of Salisbury Walk. The arrangement of the defences in the south east corner of the town is still poorly understood and little additional information has been obtained since the description published by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments in 1970 (RCHME 1970, 548-9), where it was proposed that the corner was not the sharp angle suggested by the present topography, but may have been a straight traverse cutting off the corner, or perhaps there was a break in the defences for a gate at the south east corner for the postulated approach road from Purbeck (RCHME 1970, 548-9). These suggestions were a result of the discovery of undisturbed chalk at Robins Garth, in a position where the ditches of the defences were projected to be (Figure 2).

Subsequent small observations in the road junction between Icen Way and South Walks Road during the construction of a new tunnel sewer in 1990 have not clarified the position. These observations revealed natural chalk at depths of between 1.0 – 1.35 m below modern deposits (Davies and Farwell 1990, 51-2), suggesting that either the ditches do not exist in this area or that the area observed was between or on the edge of the ditches (Figure 2). Evidence from the former Bowling Green, Borough Gardens in the south west corner of the defences has indicated that the middle ditch, in particular, was small and shallow with a gap several metres wide between it and the inner ditch (Bellamy 2017). Also it showed that the upper ditch fills, to a depth of well over a metre, were post-medieval in date (Bellamy 2017). If the character of the middle ditch is similar in this part of the circuit and the ditch fills also contain a significant proportion of post-medieval material, then it is possible that the ditch was not encountered or recognised in 1990, particularly given the small scale of the manhole works. Also, it should be noted that the level of the road where the manhole was built was over a metre lower than the level of the chalk in the present observations, suggesting a significant degree of erosion.

The exposure of natural chalk bedrock on Gallows Hill during the present project indicates that the ditches did not cross this area. This is perhaps not surprising as the site is projected to lie beneath the bank (Figure 2). No bank material was recognised during the work, but this is likely to have been removed by erosion, or by the creation of the Walks, or the later construction of the footpath. No evidence for a ditch was observed, but the projected edge of the inner ditch lies just beyond the site.

No evidence for or against the presence of a gate in the south east corner of the defences for an approach road from Purbeck was obtained during the present observations.

4.2 Conclusions

The archaeological observations and recording during the footpath improvement works at Gallows Hill, Dorchester, revealed natural chalk beneath the topsoil and the footpath surface. This chalk lay close to the south east corner of the defences of the Roman town of Durnovaria. No trace of the defences was found, but the site lay near the outer edge of the projected course of the bank. All traces of the bank material may have been removed from this area as part of the eighteenth century landscaping works to form the town walks.

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Figure 1: Site Location.



Figure 2: Plan of Observations



Plate 1: General view of site looking across Icen Way from the west.



Plate 2: View of trench during reprofiling of the path, looking west.



Plate 3: Base of trench during groundworks showing path gravel sub-base 101, over grey silt 102 over natural chalk 103.



Plate 4: Surface of the natural chalk bedrock 103 in west part of trench. 1m scale.



Plate 5: Detail of stratigraphy on south edge of trench showing topsoil 104 and silt 102 over chalk bedrock. 1m scale.



Plate 6: Detail of stratigraphy on northern edge of trench with topsoil 104 and silt 102 over natural chalk 103.

Appendix 1: Context Summary

Trench 1

Length: 14.5 m; Maximum width 5.0 m; Maximum depth 1.15 m.

Context	Description and Interpretation	Depth (m) below ground level
100	Footpath Surface: Tarmac	0.00 – 0.07m
101	Path sub-base: Orange sand and flint gravel beneath tarmac 100.	0.07 – 0.20m
102	Silty Soil: Mid-light brownish-grey clayey silt with sparse chalk flecks and occasional small flint.	0.20 – 0.28m
103	Chalk Bedrock: Solid chalk bedrock beneath a 0.1m thick weathered chalk layer.	0.28m +
104	Topsoil: Turf and dark greyish-brown silty clay loam topsoil on both sides of footpath.	0.00 – 0.20m