



**NEW WALL, VICTORY COURT, NORTH SQUARE,
DORCHESTER, DORSET
Archaeological Watching Brief**



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March 2004

New Wall, Victory Court, North Square, Dorchester, Dorset

Archaeological Watching Brief, March 2004

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SUMMARY

Archaeological observations and recording were carried out by Terrain Archaeology during the construction of a new wall between Victory Court and the Dorchester Town Council car park behind the Corn Exchange off North Square, Dorchester (SY69299079). A small part of the floor of the 19th century Market House was revealed. Beneath the North Square frontage, two brick vaulted cellars were discovered, containing a series of vats possibly for curing bacon.

INTRODUCTION

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Magna Housing Association to undertake archaeological observations and recording during the construction of a new boundary wall along the south side of Victory Court, off North Square, Dorchester (Figure 1).

The new wall was constructed in a continuous footings trench about 0.4 m wide and 0.3 m deep, excavated between the existing walls along the boundary (Figure 2).

The site lies between Victory Court to the north and the Dorchester Town Council car park behind the Town Hall and Corn Exchange in the south, on the east side of North Square in the centre of Dorchester, at Ordnance Survey NGR SY69299079. The site is flat but there is a large drop down to the east into the King's Arms car park, indicating that the area has been terraced. The underlying geology is Upper Chalk.

The fieldwork was carried out between 8th and 9th March 2004 by Peter Bellamy.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge the following for their help and cooperation during this project: Jonathan Cooksley and Harry Denton (Magna Housing Association), Steve Wallis (Dorset County Council), David Wareham and the groundworkers, and Valerie Dicker (Dorset County Museum).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

There have been number of previous archaeological interventions in the immediately surrounding area of the site. No significant prehistoric archaeology has been found in this area. The only prehistoric remains have been traces of the pre-Roman soil and a scattering of prehistoric flintwork.

The site lies within the Roman town of *Durnovaria* and it is not surprising that Roman archaeology has been found during nearly all the previous archaeological works in this area. Just to the north of the site, an east-west ditch, of probable late 1st century date, was found behind 21 North Square in 1977. It was about one metre deep and is thought to have been an early property boundary (Keen 1977, 120–1). Further to the north, a few 1st and 2nd century Roman features have been recorded behind No. 19 North Square (Terrain Archaeology 2003). To the northwest, evidence for a late 2nd century Roman building, ditch and pit was found during the building of an extension to 6 North

Square (Keen 1977, 121). Also in this area, the remains of a mosaic were found in 1854 (RCHME 1970,568–9, monument 209b). To the northeast of the site, the remains of a 3rd–4th century Roman building were found along the eastern side of Friary Lane on the site of the former St John Ambulance hall (Bellamy 2000). Also in this area, apparent Roman building rubble was found under the road between 8 and 12 Friary Lane by Christopher Sparey Green in 1981.

There is no evidence for Saxon occupation of this part of Dorchester. In the medieval period, it lay just outside the defences of the medieval castle (Draper and Chaplin 1982). A small number of 12th–13th century features were found behind No. 19 North Square; otherwise there has been no *in situ* evidence of medieval occupation found in the immediately surrounding area of the site.

North Square was a wide street to accommodate the market which spread out from the central crossroads in the town, with butchers' shops or stalls recorded from the medieval period onwards. In the 18th century, North Square was known as Bull Stake.

It is likely that the street frontage was developed from the medieval period. The 17th and 18th century maps of Dorchester suggest that the east side of North Square was lined with buildings, and the first detailed map of Dorchester (1810 DRO: OE1) shows the whole of this east side filled with houses. The area which is now the Dorchester Town Council car park has in 1810 a large house occupied by George Squibb with a large outbuilding behind. The next detailed map (of 1848 DRO: D40E/7) shows the area of that house taken over by the Borough, and that same year a large Market House was built on the site, at the back of the new Town Hall. The 1888 Ordnance Survey 1:500 map shows the large Market House on the site (Figure 2).

The 1893 Ling's Dorchester Almanack (DCL) has a map of North Square, and this shows that the southernmost house on this side of North Square was occupied by J. H. Groves, butcher. There were two more butcher's shops in North Square, and others traded in the Market House.

By 1964, the Ordnance Survey map shows that the Market house had been demolished, and most of the shops had gone. The site was turned into a car park.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

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

The archaeological works aimed to observe and record all the *in situ* archaeological deposits and features revealed during the groundworks to an appropriate professional standard.

METHODS

The work was carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Code of Conduct and *Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs*, although there was no written brief produced for the archaeological works.

The groundworks comprised strip footings for the wall, excavated using a mechanical excavator. The depth of the footings trenches was determined by the contractors. The location of the footings trenches was taken from a plan provided by the client. All depths recorded were below existing ground surface.

The observations of the footings for the proposed new extension was intermittent, as defined by the Institute of Field Archaeologists, with a suitably qualified archaeologist viewing all footings trenches either during or immediately after machining. All deposits exposed in the trenches were

recorded using elements of Terrain Archaeology's 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 and the requirements of the receiving museum. The archive will be deposited with the Dorset County Museum.

RESULTS

Introduction

The footings trenches comprised three separate lengths: the western end between the North Square frontage and the existing wall; the central part between the two short lengths of existing wall; and the eastern part up to the eastern end of the site (Figure 3). The eastern and western parts were observed after excavation but the central part had been partially filled with concrete before observations could take place. The western part of the footings trench revealed traces of the former Market House and of earlier cellars beneath. The central section had been largely disturbed by services. The eastern part revealed a probable levelling layer of clay.

The Cellars

The excavation of the new wall footings just behind the street frontage, broke through into the cellars below. A rapid sketch survey of the two accessible cellars was undertaken. These cellars were aligned along the street frontage and comprised a large brick built barrel vault with a smaller vaulted cellar to the south, joined by a doorway in the southeast part (Figure 4). A further blocked doorway to the south presumably led into the next vault to the south.

The northern cellar measured approximately 4.0 m by 4.6 m across and 2.15 m high with the barrel vault running from east to west. The cellar was mainly constructed of brick, but with some stone in the upper courses, particularly at the west end. The walls and vaulting were covered in limewash. There was a rectangular cut-out 1.17 m by 1.25 m across in the vaulting in the northwest corner of the cellar, presumably the remains of an access hatch from ground level. This appears to have been an original feature of the cellar. The hatch itself has gone and the upper part has been reinforced in concrete and with a wooden pillar to support the pathway to Victory Court above. In the west wall, there is a rectangular opening 0.95 m by 0.9 m across, which has been blocked with concrete blockwork (Plate 4). There is a large tank or vat in the southwest part of the cellar, constructed of brick with a cement lining (Plate 5). It measured 1.15 m by 2.15 m across internally and 0.65 m deep. A row of seven similarly constructed vats 0.54 m by 0.77 m across and 0.65 m deep runs across the northern side of the cellar (Plates 6 and 7).

The southern cellar measures about 4.6 m by 2.8 m across and is similar in construction to the northern cellar. Much of the western wall has been rebuilt in modern brick and concrete blockwork (Plate 9). There is a large vat or tank 1.2 m by 2.8 m along the west wall (Plate 9).

The cellars are likely to pre-date the Market House and are probably related to the large house on the site depicted on the 1810 map. It is possible that they were part of a butchers and the vats were used for curing bacon (Jo Draper pers. comm.).

The Market House

A small part of what is probably the floor of the Market House was exposed in the western end of the trench. This comprised a line of bricks running east–west bordering a tiled floor of quarry tiles to the south (Figure 3; Plate 3). The eastern limit of this tiled floor was against a north-south wall, 0.35 m wide constructed of mortared pale sandy bricks or sandstone blocks. This wall was about

6.4 m to the east of the street frontage. This wall was probably part of an internal partition within the Market House.

Later Features and Deposits

The northern part of the trench at the west end had a tarmac surface immediately below the present car park surface (Plate 1). This may be later in date than the Market House. It seals the access hatch to the cellars described above.

The central part of the trench on either side of the existing wall was disturbed by modern concrete footings (for the existing wall) and by services. At the eastern end of the trench, a layer of mixed dark brown clay infill was found below the present tarmac surface at a depth of about 0.2 m below present ground level. No dating evidence was recovered from this layer.

CONCLUSIONS

The intrusive groundworks were on such a small scale that only a very limited part of the archaeological deposits was exposed. The groundworks did not penetrate to sufficient depth to determine whether there are any surviving prehistoric, Roman or Medieval deposits or features on the site.

The features encountered in the footings trench probably all relate to the mid 19th century Market House. The cellars below are earlier and may have been used by one of the numerous butchers on North Square, with the vats used for curing bacon etc.

PROJECT ARCHIVE

The archive (Terrain Archaeology Project No. 53149) 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.

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Figure 1: Location map

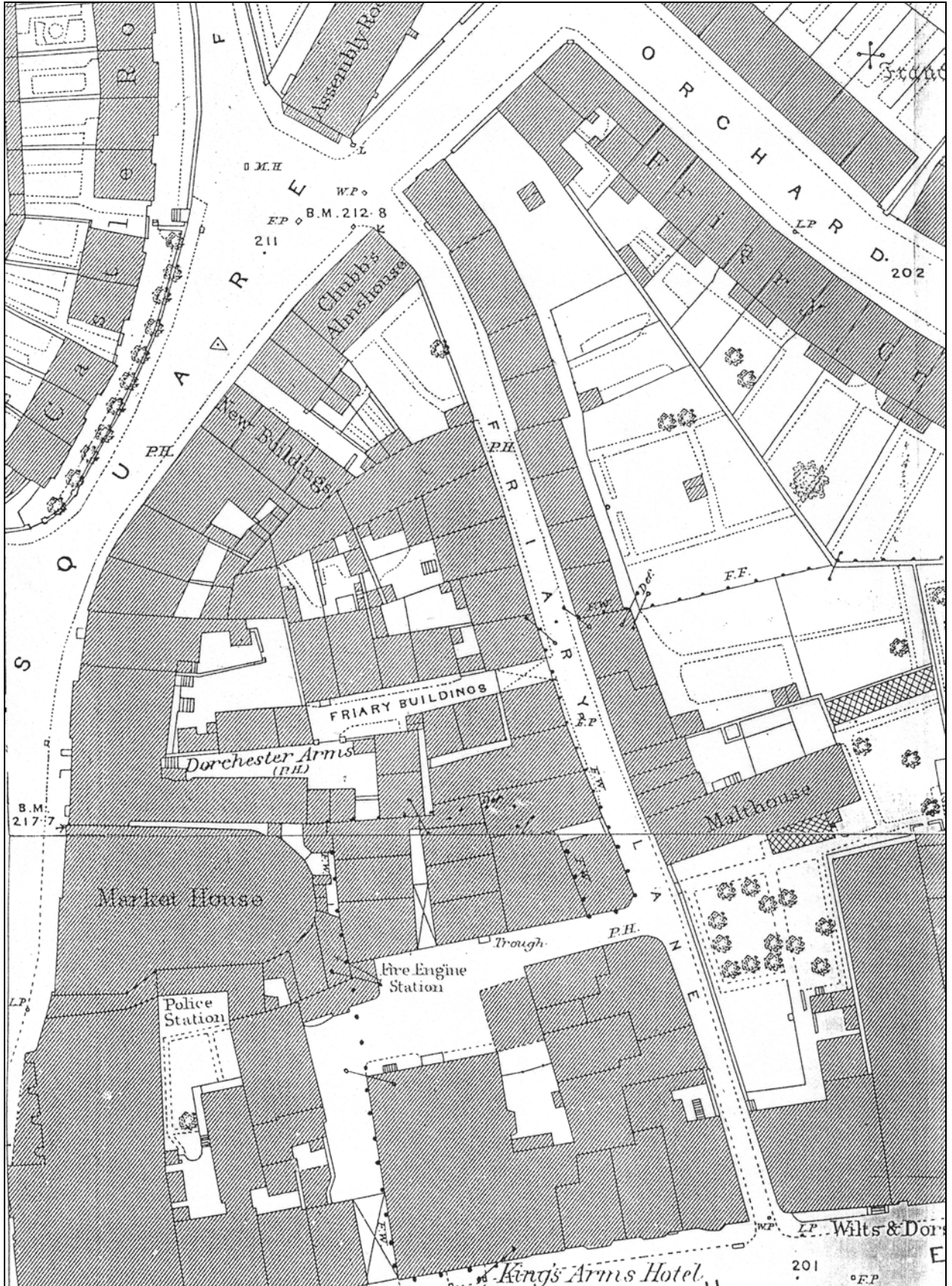


Figure 2: The 1888 Ordnance Survey map, showing the Market House of 1867, just north of the Corn Exchange.



Figure 3: Plan of observations

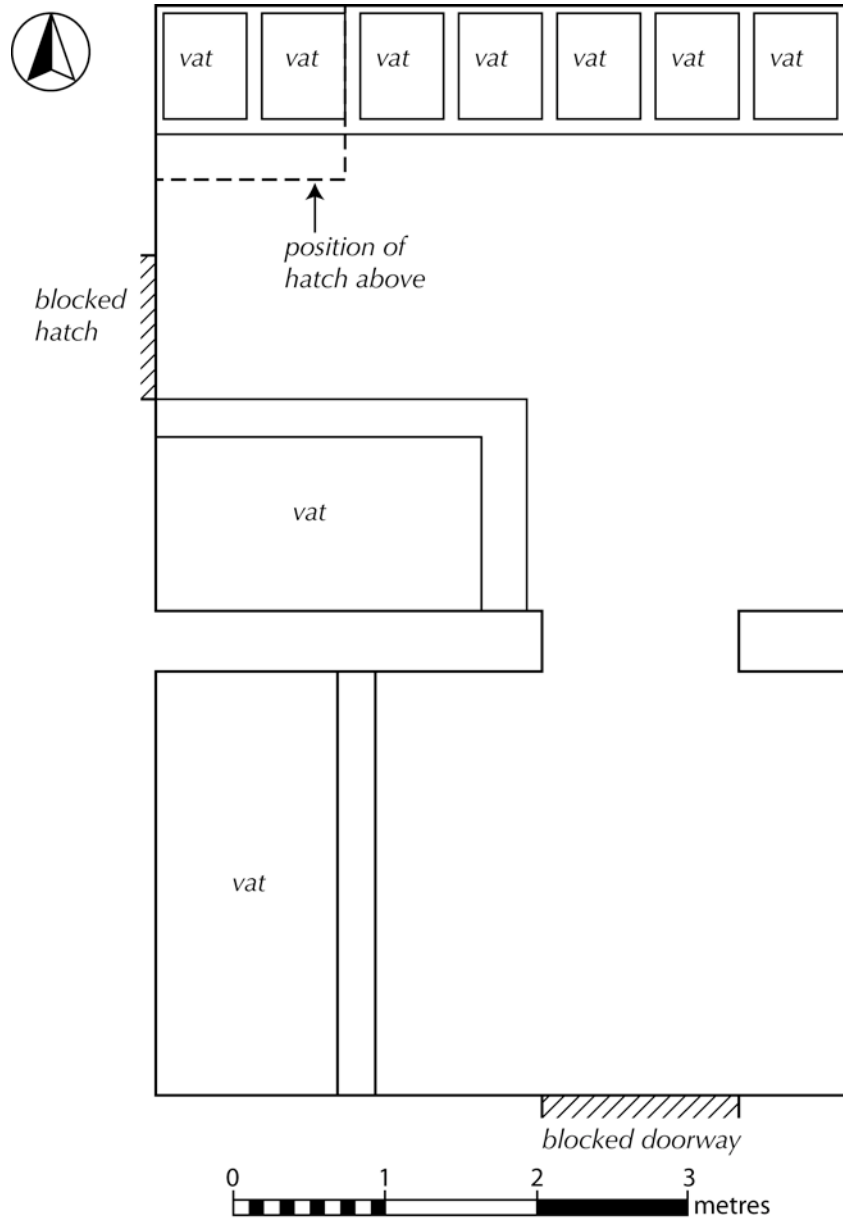


Figure 4: Sketch plan of cellars



Plate 1: Western part of wall footings trench, looking west towards the road.



Plate 2: East end of the footings trench, looking east.



Plate 3: Detail of the tiled floor of the Market House with internal wall remains at the top of the photo.



Plate 4: West end of northern cellar.



Plate 5: Tank or vat in southwest part of northern cellar.



Plate 6: Vats along northern side of northern cellar, looking west.



Plate 7: Vats along northern side of northern cellar, looking east.



Plate 8: Doorway between cellars, looking south.



Plate 9: Southern cellar, looking west.