

**NEW WATER MAIN, DURNGATE STREET,  
DORCHESTER, DORSET**  
**Archaeological Observations and Recording**



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# **New Water Main, Durngate Street, Dorchester, Dorset Archaeological Observations and Recording, January 2002**

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## **SUMMARY**

*A watching brief was carried out during the construction of a new water main along Durngate Street, east of the junction with Icen Way in Dorchester (SY 6969 9034). A small area of probable Roman road gravels was observed 13 m east of the junction. The orientation of the road could not be determined but the observed remains were just to the southeast of a site where Roman road gravels, thought to be part of a north-south street, were seen in 1976. These are likely to be part of the same road.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This project, comprising an archaeological watching brief during the construction of a new water main, was commissioned by Wessex Water following advice from Steven Wallis, Senior Archaeologist, Dorset County Council.

The site is located in the eastern part of Dorchester, on Durngate Street, immediately east of the junction with Icen Way, at Ordnance Survey NGR SY 6919 9034 (Figure 1). The topography slopes gently down to the east and lies at a height of about 57.6 m OD. The underlying geology is mapped as Upper Chalk (Geological Survey of Great Britain 1: 50,000 Sheet 328 *Dorchester* 1981).

The groundworks comprised the machine excavation of a 0.5 m wide trench approximately 46 m long and 0.9 m deep, along Durngate Street. The trench was started in the middle of Durngate Street at the junction with Icen Way and continued down the middle of the road for c. 10 m before turning and running along the northern edge of the street to join the new services from the development on the former Channon's Garage site (Figure 1).

The fieldwork was carried out between 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> May 2002 by Peter Bellamy.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge the following for their help and cooperation during this project: Ron Davey (Wessex Water), and the groundworkers (Docwra).

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The site lies within the Roman town of *Durnovaria* (Figure 2). The course of the defences is known and fragments of the street pattern have been recovered but much of the detail of the layout of the Roman town is not known (RCHME 1970). The Roman street layout is different to the medieval and modern street pattern (Figure 2).

A substantial fragment of a Roman street was uncovered at the western end of Durngate Street at the junction with South Street during excavations at the Old Methodist Chapel site (Woodward *et al.* 1993). The remains of this road consisted of a thin spread of chalk rubble about 0.02 m thick with a layer of coarse flint gravel about 0.3 m thick above, forming the base of the 5.5 m wide road. The road surface comprising two layers of fine gravel only survived in very small patches (Woodward *et al.* 1993, 34). Assuming a straight line, the projected course of this road would be about 15 m to the north of Durngate Street, in the area of the present watching brief.



During the construction of the house on the northeast corner of the junction of Durngate Street and Icen Way in 1976, traces of Roman occupation were observed at a depth of about 1.12 m below the surface (Keen 1976). On the east side of this development, a substantial gravel surface was discovered. This has been interpreted as the remains of a previously unknown Roman street running North-South (Keen 1976).

## **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 observations were carried out in compliance with the specification prepared by Terrain Archaeology (Document 3090, May 2002) and in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (1994, rev. 1999).

The location of the groundworks was surveyed by taped measurements from the existing buildings. All depths have been recorded as below present ground levels.

All archaeological deposits and features exposed during the works 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 and the requirements of the receiving museum, Dorset County Museum.

## **RESULTS**

### *Natural deposits*

The groundworks did not penetrate to sufficient depth to reveal any natural deposits.

### *Roman*

At about 12 m from the western end of the trench, hard-packed flint gravels were exposed in the bottom of the trench at a depth of about 0.55 m (Figure 3: Plate 3). This deposit was truncated both to the east and west by modern services, leaving a 2.6 m length surviving intact. This gravel deposit was over 0.35 m thick and comprised a number of different layers (Figure 4; Plate 2). The lowest exposed layer was only partially revealed in the bottom of the trench. It was over 0.06 m thick and consisted of mid greyish brown coarse sand with frequent fairly hard-packed flint gravels (8). This was overlain by a 0.09 m thick layer of orange brown coarse sand and gravel (7), 0.09 m thick, which, in turn, was sealed by a dark grey brown clayey sand and gravel (6), 0.08 m thick, with a layer of mid grey coarse clayey sand and gravel (5), 0.09 m thick. The uppermost surviving layer was a 0.1 m thick mid orangey grey coarse clayey sand with frequent flint gravel (4). On the western edge of these gravel layers was a layer of very tightly packed flint nodules in an orangey brown sandy clay matrix (9).

These gravels are thought to be the remnants of a Roman road, based on the nature of the deposits and their location.

### *Post-medieval and modern*

For most of its length, the trench only cut through fairly recent deposits, which, except in the area of the Roman road gravels, continued below the depth of the trench. These deposits were very mixed and contained numerous drainpipes and other services. This material was not recorded in detail and the whole deposit was given a single context number (3). This was sealed by the tarmac (1) and flint gravel sub-base (2) for the present street.

### *Finds*

No finds were recovered from the watching brief.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The new water main trench revealed the remnants of a Roman street, on the northern edge of Durngate Street, about 13 m east of the junction with Icen Way. Not enough of these gravels were exposed to enable the alignment of the Roman road to be determined. It lies immediately southeast of the area where possible Roman road gravels were observed in 1976 by C. J. Sparey Green and L. J. Keen and which were suggested to belong to a previously unknown street running north-south (Keen 1976). The road gravels observed during this project are likely to be part of this same street.

## **PROJECT ARCHIVE**

The archive (Terrain Archaeology Project No. 53090) 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.

## **REFERENCES**

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