



**WEST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL CAR PARK,  
COLLITON STREET, DORCHESTER, DORSET  
Archaeological Observations**

Prepared on behalf of:

**West Dorset District Council  
Stratton House  
High West Street  
DORCHESTER  
Dorset  
DT1 1UZ**

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**West Dorset District Council Car Park, Colliton Street, Dorchester, Dorset**

**Archaeological Observations, February 2000**

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## Summary

*Archaeological observations during the replacement of the retaining wall of the WDDC car park in Colliton Street, Dorchester revealed c.0.6 m of Roman stratigraphy. A number of small pits, probably dating to the 1st – 2nd century AD, were sealed below a rammed chalk floor of probable 2nd century date. The northern part of this surface was cut by several post-holes. At the northern end of the site were three small hearths. A number of later Roman pits were also revealed.*

*No evidence of medieval activity was discovered. Post-medieval features included an outhouse and a stone-lined well.*



# **West Dorset District Council Car Park, Colliton Street, Dorchester, Dorset**

## **Archaeological Observations, February 2000**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1** This project was commissioned by West Dorset District Council through their agents Aspley Associates, 5 Nappers Court, Charles Street, Dorchester. In accordance with Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning (1991), the planning consent for the replacement of the retaining wall along the west side of the West Dorset District Council Car Park in Colliton Street, Dorchester (Application No: 1/E/1999/0476) requested an archaeological watching brief to be undertaken during the course of the works.
- 1.2** The existing west retaining wall of the car park was demolished then a roughly two metre wide trench was excavated by machine down to the natural chalk, in order to construct the footings for a new wall.
- 1.3** The Site (centred on NGR SY 6917 9079) is situated on the historic core of Dorchester, on the south side of Colliton Street to the north of Trinity Cottages (Figure 1). The general trend of the topography slopes down to the east. The car park itself is almost level and the wall along the southwest part acts as a revetment against the garden of 1 Grey School Passage, which is about 1.8 m higher than the car park. The underlying geology is mapped as Upper Chalk (Geological Survey of England and Wales Sheet 328 *Dorchester* 1:50000 Drift 1981).
- 1.4** The fieldwork was carried out between 31st January – 2nd February 2000.
- 1.5** Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge the help and cooperation of Moore And Cousins Ltd on site. Thanks are also due to Andrew Maynard of Aspley Associates and Steve Wallis of the Dorset County Council Archaeology Service. The fieldwork was undertaken by Peter Bellamy who also compiled this report. Pottery identification was by Jo Draper, FSA.

### **2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** The site lies within the northwest quarter of the Roman town of Durnovaria to the north of the presumed line of the main east-west street, which is thought to be roughly along High East Street/ High West Street. The remains of another street running at right angles (roughly N-S) have been found immediately east of the site in the back gardens of 64 High West Street at SY 6919 9078 (RCHME 1970, 552, no. 179b).
- 2.2** There have been a number of archaeological investigations in the vicinity of Colliton Street (see references for details. Evidence for substantial building remains have been found at the western end of Colliton Street behind 36 and 37 Glyde Path Road where part of a building with a mosaic floor was discovered at SY 6909 9076 (RCHME 1970, 567, no. 207a), together with pits containing building debris, including substantial quantities of painted wall plaster (RCHME 1970, 567, no. 207b; Davies 1989). At the eastern end of Colliton Street, behind 6 North Square, the remains of two buildings dated to the 2nd century and later have been discovered (Keen 1977). These buildings were cut into earlier Roman deposits. Only one other archaeological investigation in the area has revealed Roman stratigraphy: a trench to the



south of Colliton Street, at c. SY 6917 9081, revealed a 0.5 m depth of Roman deposits (Smith 1997). The other investigations have only revealed very slight evidence for Roman activity.

- 2.3** Colliton Street, formerly Pease Lane, was a back street in medieval Dorchester, bordering the medieval castle to the north. The street frontage on both sides of the street was well-filled by the 15th century (Draper and King 1995).

### **3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

- 3.1** The objective of the archaeological work was to record all archaeological deposits and features encountered during the groundworks on site.

### **4 METHODOLOGY**

- 4.1** The observations were carried out in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeology's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (1994, rev. 1999).
- 4.2** There was no written project design or specification.
- 4.3** The footings trench was excavated by machine fitted with a toothed bucket. The location of all archaeological features and deposits was planned using taped measurements from the existing property boundaries. All depths were recorded from the existing ground surface.
- 4.4** The archaeological features and deposits were recorded using Terrain Archaeology's standard recording system of written, drawn and photographic records.

### **5 RESULTS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

- 5.1.1** There is a difference of some 1.85 m in the ground levels on either side of the car park wall. To the east, in the car park, the stratigraphic sequence is truncated and comprises mainly of post-medieval disturbance (Figure 2). To the west, in the garden of 1 Grey School Passage there is well-preserved Roman stratigraphy sealed by a considerable depth of garden soils. The archaeology was only observed in section, except where there were deeper features cut into the natural chalk in the base of the trench. The following description concentrates on the stratigraphic sequence exposed in the western section. Descriptions of all contexts can be found in Appendix 1.

#### **5.2 Natural deposits**

- 5.2.1** The natural chalk bedrock (106 )was exposed at about 69.80 m above Ordnance Datum, that is, at a depth of about 0.65 m below the present surface of the car park.

#### **5.3 Late Prehistoric/Early Roman soils**

- 5.3.1** Overlying the natural chalk in the southwest end of the trench was a thin layer of yellowish

brown silty clay (127). This layer was very similar to the ancient ground surface which has survived in beneath Roman levels in many parts of Dorchester. It had only survived where it had been protected by a chalk floor (Figure 2). No artefacts or other material was recovered from this layer.

- 5.3.2 Elsewhere on site, there were patches of chalky reddish brown silty clay (140, 151) lying immediately above the natural chalk). This may represent an early Roman soil. A small quantity of 1st/2nd century pottery was recovered from layer 140.
- 5.3.3 A thin brown clay layer (165) immediately above the natural chalk in the east section (Figure 2) may also be part of these ancient soil layers, though this was not proved with certainty. It would be a remarkable survival given the level of more recent disturbance in this area.

## 5.4 Roman activity

- 5.4.1 There were at least three pits cut into the chalk which appear to be part of the earliest Roman activity recognised on site. In the southwest part of the trench was a small square or rectangular pit (108) with almost vertical sides which cut through the ancient ground surface 127 (Figure 2). It was filled with yellowish brown silty clay loam and chalk (107) with some charcoal flecks. A small quantity of Roman coarseware pottery, unfortunately not closely datable, was recovered, together with some animal bone fragments. Further to the north was a fairly shallow feature (139) cut through the early Roman soil layer 140. This feature was only observed in section so its plan shape is not known. It was also partly destroyed by later Roman activity. It had a fairly irregular base and was filled with yellowish brown silty clay loam with frequent small chalk lumps and flecks (138). Occasional fragments of mussel shell, Roman tile and 1st/2nd century pottery were recovered from this feature. The third of these early pits was pit 117, a circular pit, largely cut away by later pits (Figure 1). It was filled with yellowish grey brown silty clay with fairly frequent chalk and sparse charcoal flecks (116). This pit also produced 1st/2nd century pottery.
- 5.4.2 The early pits were sealed by the remains of a structure represented by a rammed chalk floor. A 0.1 m thick rammed chalk surface (104), overlay a 0.07 m thick layer of grey brown clay loam (105) with chalk lumps and frequent charcoal flecks, which contained many small fragments of mussel shell, as well as some animal bone and 2nd century AD pottery. This surface had sunk into the top of pit 108 (Figure 2). A further small fragment of a rammed chalk surface (136) was exposed further to the north. This was largely destroyed by later activity. It too was built over a layer of soil (137). Abutting the north side of surface 104 was a thin layer of crushed chalk with frequent lenses of grey clay (129) overlying a layer of yellowish grey silty clay with mortar fragments (128). This may represent a repair to the surface. Neither the rammed chalk surface nor the repair is closely dated, but it has a *terminus post quem* of the 2nd century. From the available evidence it is not possible to say whether it was part of a building or was an external yard surface or similar. If it was part of a building, this was likely to have been a timber structure, given the absence of any evidence for stone walls.
- 5.4.3 At the northern end, the chalk floor was cut by a number of post-holes (135, 146 and 148). Not enough was exposed to determine the character of any structures. No dating evidence was recovered from these post-holes.

- 5.4.4 At the northern end of the trench were three small hearths (143, 150 and 153) comprising shallow cuts filled primarily with ash and charcoal (Figure 2). Only one of these hearths was in use at a time and they were sealed by layers of soil (144, 142). These features are not well dated — a single 2nd century pot sherd was recovered from the earliest hearth (150) and soil layer 144 contained general Roman finds. Too little of this area was exposed to be certain of the nature and function of these hearths.
- 5.4.3 There are three pits (113, 115, 119) which may date to the later Roman period. These are distinguished from the earlier Roman pits by the very dark colour of their fills. A small rectangular pit (115) cut the edge of pit 117 (Figure 1). It was filled with very dark reddish brown silty clay loam with frequent charcoal flecks (114). This pit was in turn, cut by a larger rectangular pit with vertical sides, which also cut through the whole sequence of surviving Roman stratigraphy (Figures 1 and 2). It was filled with at least three layers of dark brown or dark reddish brown soil (112, 131 132). To the north of these two pits were the remains of a sub-circular pit (119), largely destroyed by later activity (Figure 1). It was filled with loose very dark brown silty clay (118). None of these pits was excavated, so consequently little material was recovered from them. Pit 113 produced some 3rd/4th century pot.
- 5.4.4 Overlying the Roman stratigraphy described above were several layers of soil containing fairly large quantities of mortar debris (103, 124, 125, 126, 141). These are assumed to represent deposits resulting from the demolition or decay of Roman structures in the vicinity.

## **5.5 Medieval activity**

- 5.5.1 No medieval finds were recovered and there are no features or deposits which could be ascribed to the medieval period. It would appear that the medieval deposits have been destroyed by later activity.

## **5.6 Post-medieval activity**

- 5.6.1 A small number of post-medieval features and deposits were recorded. The presence of post-medieval finds was noted from a number of contexts but these were not collected. At the northeast end of the trench a well (123) with a drystone lining was revealed (Figure 1). The upper part of the well shaft down to a depth of about two metres was void. It had been capped by concrete.
- 5.6.2 At the southern end of the trench, built against the wall of 1 Trinity Cottages, part of a rectangular structure was exposed (Figure 1). It consisted of a mortared stone wall (109) round the edge of a rectangular cut (111) into the natural chalk. The interior was filled with loose mixed dark grey brown soil with lenses of black ash, chalk lumps, etc.(110) with a layer of dark brown soil and stone rubble (167) above and finally a layer of orange sand (166). Finds from this feature included clay tobacco pipe and roofing slate fragments. This structure is likely to have been an outhouse and is not marked on the large scale Ordnance Survey maps of this area.
- 5.6.3 The existing boundary wall at the north end of the site was partially founded on a rammed chalk footing (155), 0.45 m wide and 0.27 m deep. This was slightly offset to the west of the present wall and may represent the footings of an earlier boundary wall. It is not clear whether the stone rubble wall core (130) visible in the north end of the west section (Figure 2) was part of this earlier boundary.

5.6.4 The area to the west of the boundary wall had garden soils (101, 102) up to 2 m deep over the Roman stratigraphy.

## 5.7 Modern disturbance

5.7.1 Along the east section of the trench, below the present car park surface, almost all the deposits appear to be the result of fairly recent activity. These are illustrated in Figure 2 and the contexts listed in Appendix 1. They will not be discussed in detail here.

## 5.8 Finds

5.8.1 The finds have been scanned to provide spot dates and any other information which may aid in interpretation of the excavated features and deposits. They have not been examined or described in detail. All finds are tabulated by context in Table 1. These are all Roman in date as no medieval material was discovered and no post-medieval finds were collected.

context	description	Roman Pottery	ceramic building material	fired clay	burnt stone	iron	animal bone	shell
100	unstratified	3/99			1/244			
102	levelling layer	1/29				1		
103	silting layer above chalk floor	3/50	2/133					
105	occupation	3/90	1/38				2/4	1/1
107	fill of pit 108	3/16					3/34	
112	uppermost fill of pit 113	18/146	5/289	1/2	1/2	1	15/150	
116	fill of pit 117	1/6						
118	fill of pit 119	1/9					1/0	
125	demolition and levelling layer		1/178					
126	demolition and levelling layer	3/3						
128	demolition debris?	3/9						
131	fill of pit 113	4/36	1/75					
138	fill of feature 139	1/8	2/223		3/549			
140	old ground surface?	1/15						
143	hearth						1/2	
144	soil layer	1/13						
149	hearth	1/8						
152	hearth	3/31	1/17			1	1/1	
	<i>total</i>	<i>50/568</i>	<i>13/953</i>	<i>1/2</i>	<i>3/795</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>23/191</i>	<i>1/1</i>

Table 1: All finds (no/wt (g)) by context

5.8.2 *Roman pottery.* A total of 50 sherds of Roman pottery were retained. The quantity of pottery is too small for detailed analysis and all the forms are commonly known from Dorchester. Several of those which can be identified date from the second century, but there is also later Roman material present. Most of the pottery was Black-Burnished Ware coarsewares with one greyware sherd (from context 126) also. The finewares comprise a 2nd century Rhenish beaker base (from context 103) and one sherd of red colour-coat, possibly Oxford ware (from context 131).

5.8.3 *Ceramic building material.* The ceramic building material recovered was all Roman in date. Two tegula and four imbrex fragments were recognised. The rest of the material was too small



to identify to type.

- 5.8.4 *Fired Clay*. A single small fragment of undiagnostic fired clay was recovered.
- 5.8.5 *Burnt Stone*. Four pieces of burnt Purbeck Marble (from contexts 100 and 114) and one piece of burnt flint (context 112) were recovered. No traces of working were observed on these pieces.
- 5.8.6 *Iron*. Three iron nail fragments were recovered. One from context 102 was corroded to a potsherd.
- 5.8.7 *Animal bone and shell*. Most of the animal bone was small unidentifiable fragments. The shell was mussel shell.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The observations have shown that there is surviving evidence for Roman activity from the 2nd century or late 1st century onwards, in this area. It survives principally in the garden to the north of the car park, while in the area of the car park itself, there is considerably more disturbance. On the basis of the present works it is difficult to interpret the archaeology revealed. There is some structural evidence but the character of the structures and the precise nature of the activities being carried out is less clear. The small quantity of artefacts suggests that these are 2nd century in date. Later Roman activity is represented by a small number of pits.
- 6.2 There was no evidence for medieval activity recognised on site.

## 7 PROJECT ARCHIVE

- 7.1 The archive will be deposited with the Dorset County Museum, who have agreed in principle to accept the archive, subject to fulfilment of the Museum's requirements of the preparation of archaeological archives.
- 7.2 The indexed and cross-referenced project archive consists of:–

- File 1:**
- 1.1 Specification
  - 1.2 The watching brief report 5059.1
  - 1.3 Context index
  - 1.4 Context record
  - 1.5 Context finds record
  - 1.6 Drawing register
  - 1.7 Photographic register and monochrome contact sheets
  - 1.8 Levels sheet

- File 2:**
- 2.1 Monochrome negatives
  - 2.2 Colour transparencies

- File 3:** Site Drawings

**Finds** — 1 box.

## **8 REFERENCES**

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- RCHME 1970 Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Dorset* **2** South-East.
- Smith, R. J. C., 1997 'Dorchester – Colliton Street' *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* **119**, 173.



## Appendix 1: List of all contexts

context	description	interpretation	spot dates
100	number given to finds collected during machining	unstratified finds	2nd cent. AD
101	Loose very dark brown clay loam with stone rubble.	topsoil	post-medieval
102	Loose dark brown clay loam with fairly frequent chalk rubble	levelling layer	
103	Friable dark yellowish brown sandy clay loam with moderate gravel, occasional flint nodules and moderate charcoal flecks.	Silting layer above chalk floor	2nd cent. AD
104	Rammed chalk layer	chalk floor	
105	Friable grey brown clay loam with moderate chalk lumps and frequent charcoal flecks. It contains many mussel shell fragments.	occupation layer	2nd cent. AD
106	chalk	natural chalk bedrock	
107	Loose yellowish brown silty clay loam with frequent chalk lumps and moderate charcoal flecks.	fill of pit 108	Roman
108	Square or rectangular pit with near vertical sides.	pit of unknown function.	
109	Limestone bonded with orange brown lime mortar around sides of cut 111.	Stone lining of latrine pit	
110	Mixed loose dark grey brown clay loam with lenses of black ash, chalk lumps etc.	backfill of pit 111	post-medieval
111	Rectangular pit with mortared stone lining built in corner of property to north of 1 Trinity Cottages.	cut for outhouse/ latrine pit	
112	Loose very dark grey brown clay loam with occasional flint nodules, chalk lumps and limestone fragments.	fill of pit 113	2nd-4th cent. AD
113	?Subrectangular pit with vertical sides.	pit of unknown function	
114	Loose very dark reddish brown silty clay loam with frequent charcoal flecks and occasional flint nodules and chalk lumps.	fill of pit 115	2nd cent. AD
115	Rectangular pit. (not excavated)	pit of unknown function	
116	Fairly loose yellowish grey brown silty clay with fairly frequent chalk lumps, occasional flint nodules and sparse charcoal flecks.	fill of pit 117	1st-2nd cent. AD
117	Circular or oval pit (largely cut away by pits 113 and 115).	pit of unknown function	
118	loose very dark brown silty clay with occasional chalk lumps and sparse flint nodules.	fill of pit 119	Roman
119	?Subcircular or oval pit (largely cut away by pit 121).	pit of unknown function	
120	Hard pale grey soil and crushed chalk with concrete, bricks and stone rubble.	Fill of modern disturbance 121	
121	Irregular cut	modern disturbance	
122	Dry limestone lining of well 123	stone lining of well	
123	Vertically sided, circular cut.	well	
124	Loose dark brown clay loam with moderate charcoal flecks and sparse chalk flecks.	demolition and levelling layer	
125	Friable dark yellowish brown gritty loam with very frequent mortar flecks and occasional flint nodules.	demolition and levelling layer	
126	Fairly compact brown silty loam with moderate chalk flecks and sparse charcoal flecks.	demolition and levelling layer	Roman
127	Friable yellowish brown silty clay with moderate chalk flecks and occasional flint fragments.	Old ground surface	
128	Fairly hard-packed yellowish grey silty clay with many lenses of crushed chalk and soil and occasional mortar flecks and lumps.	demolition debris?	Roman

## Appendix 1: List of all contexts (continued)

context	description	interpretation	spot dates
129	Fairly hard-packed crushed chalk with lenses of grey silty clay.	disturbed chalk surface?	
130	Loose flint, limestone and chalk rubble in dark brown clay loam.	core of earlier boundary wall	
131	Soft dark brown clay loam with moderate chalk lumps and flecks.	Upper fill of pit 113	Roman
132	Dark reddish brown silty clay loam with occasional chalk flecks and gravel.	fill in pit 113	
133	Yellowish grey silty clay with frequent chalk flecks and lumps in S part of pit 113.	Part of context 128 collapsed into pit 113	
134	Grey brown silty clay loam with sparse chalk and mortar flecks.	fill of post-hole 135	
135	Small steep-sided flat bottomed cut.	?post-hole	
136	Rammed chalk.	chalk surface	
137	Grey brown silty clay with frequent small chalk lumps and flecks at the base of the layer. Sparse charcoal flecks.	soil layer	
138	Yellowish brown silty clay loam with frequent small chalk lumps and flecks and occasional flint fragments.	fill of feature 139	1st-2nd cent. AD
139	Cut with steeply sloping sides and fairly irregular base.	feature of unknown function	
140	Reddish brown silty clay with frequent chalk lumps and flecks.	Old ground surface?	1st-2nd cent. AD
141	Reddish brown silty clay loam with fairly frequent mortar flecks, moderate chalk flecks and occasional charcoal flecks.	demolition layer	
142	loose brown silty clay loam with frequent chalk flecks and occasional charcoal flecks.	soil layer	
143	Dark brown ash with many lenses of dark grey ash overlying a thin layer of chalk.	hearth or hearth rakeout	
144	Brown clay loam with frequent chalk flecks and moderate charcoal flecks.	soil layer	Roman
145	Loose greyish brown clay loam with frequent chalk lumps and limestone packing.	fill of post-hole 146	
146	Steep-sided flat-bottomed cut	post-hole	
147	loose yellowish brown silty clay with very frequent small chalk lumps.	fill of post-hole 148	
148	Steep-sided flat-bottomed cut	?post-hole	
149	Dark brown silty clay loam with many thin lenses of reddish brown, orangey brown and black ash and charcoal.	hearth	2nd cent. AD
150	shallow cut with slightly bowl-shaped base.	cut for hearth 149	
151	Reddish brown clay with very frequent chalk lumps.	old ground surface/decayed chalk bedrock?	
152	Grey brown silty clay loam with moderate chalk and charcoal flecks above a lens of dark grey ash.	hearth	Roman
153	Shallow flat-bottomed cut.	cut for hearth 152	
154	Mortared stone and brick wall.	west retaining wall of car park	
155	Rammed chalk.	footings of earlier boundary wall	
156	Dark brown soil with brick rubble, drain pipes.	modern disturbance	
157	Mortared brick wall.	modern brick wall	

## Appendix 1: List of all contexts (continued)



context	description	interpretation	spot dates
158	Stone flags	Stone flag surface	
159	Tarmac and orange gravel hoggin	Car park surface	
160	Dark brown clay loam.	Topsoil layer below car park	
161	Rammed chalk	rammed chalk levelling layer	
162	Dark brown clay loam	Topsoil layer within chalk 161	
163	Mixed grey silty clay and chalk rubble.	fill of feature 164	
164	Cut containing context 163	modern disturbance	
165	Brown clay	Old ground surface?	
166	Orange sand	upper fill of cut 111	
167	Dark brown clay loam with frequent stone rubble.	fill in cut 111	

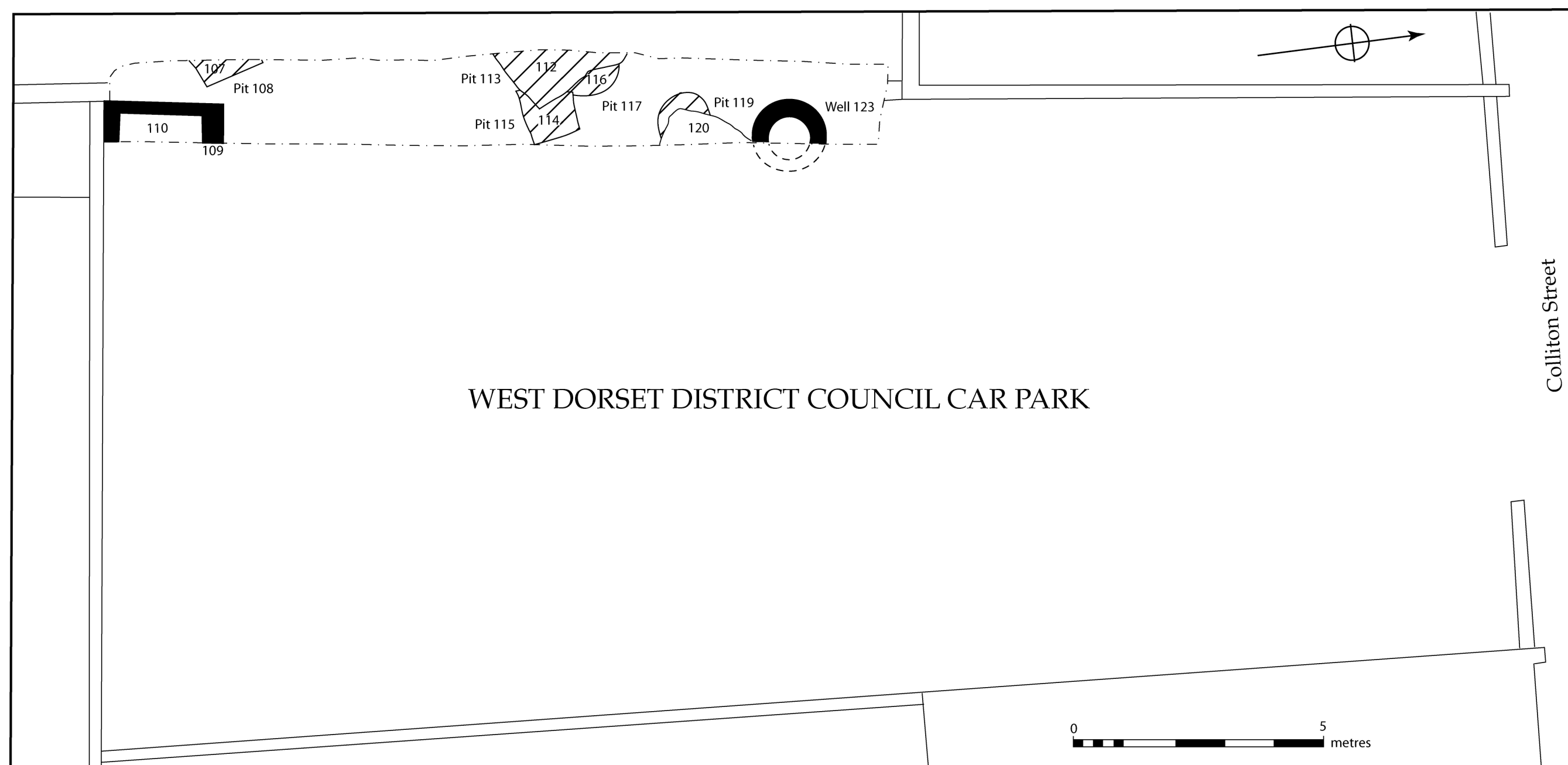
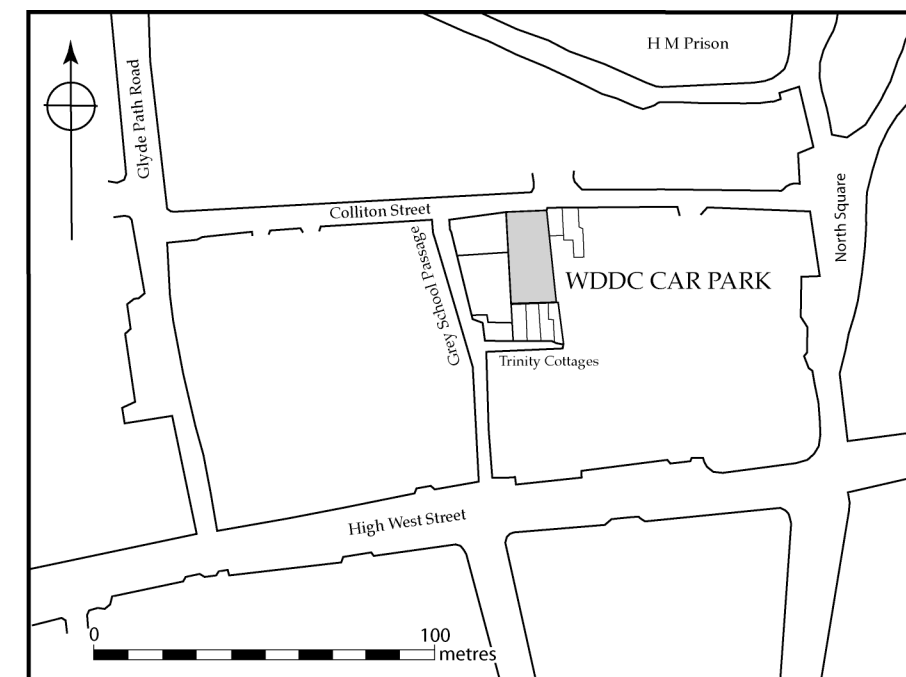


Figure 1: Location map and plan of observed features

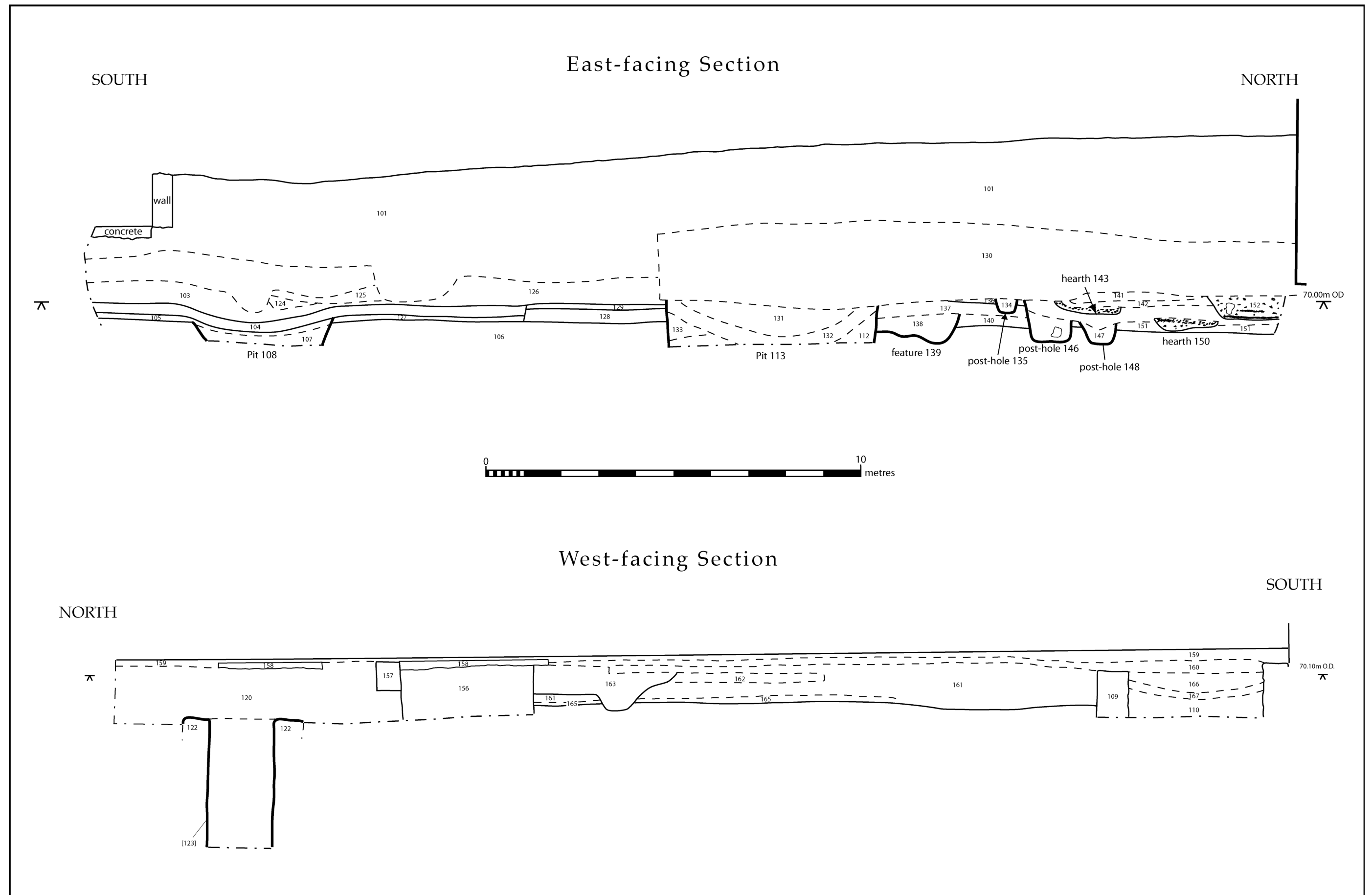


Figure 2: Sections