



# South Street, Dorchester, Dorset

Archaeological Observations and Recording during Installation of New Refill Water Point



Report No. 53556/3/1

November 2020

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November 2020

**Client:** Dorchester Town Council

**Agent:**

**Scheduled Monument:** 1002449 Dorchester Roman Walls

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**Illustrations:** Peter Bellamy BSc (Hons) MCIfA

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## Project Report Summary Page

Project Details			
<b>OASIS Reference</b>	terraina1-409389		
<b>Project Title</b>	New Refill Water Point, South Street, Dorchester		
<b>Short Description of Project</b>	Terrain Archaeology carried out archaeological observations and recording during the installation of a new refill water point at the south end of South Street, Dorchester. Most of the area exposed was heavily disturbed by modern services and activity, but a deep layer of soil exposed at the base of the trench may be part of the upper fill of the inner ditch of the Roman town defences.		
<b>Project Dates</b>	Start: 25-11-2020	End: 27-11-2020	
<b>Previous/Future Work</b>	No/No		
<b>Project Code</b>	53556		
<b>Monument Type and Period</b>	Town Defences (Roman); Town Ditch (Roman)		
<b>Significant Finds</b>	None		
Project Location			
<b>County/District/Parish</b>	Dorset/ West Dorset/ Dorchester		
<b>Site Address</b>	Adjacent 31 South Street, Dorchester, DT1 1DD		
<b>Site Coordinates</b>	SY 6919 9034		
<b>Site Area</b>	6.3 m <sup>2</sup>		
<b>Height OD</b>	c. 64 m		
Project Creators			
<b>Organisation</b>	Terrain Archaeology		
<b>Project Brief Originator</b>	None		
<b>Project Design Originator</b>	Terrain Archaeology		
<b>Project Supervisor</b>	Peter Bellamy		
<b>Project Manager</b>	Peter Bellamy		
<b>Sponsor or Funding Body</b>	Dorchester Town Council		
Project Archive			
<b>Archive Type</b>	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Digital</b>	<b>Paper</b>
<b>Location/Accession No</b>	No physical archive	No digital archive	No paper archive
<b>Contents</b>			

# South Street, Dorchester, Dorset

## Archaeological Observations and Recording during Installation of New Refill Water Point, November 2020

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Project introduction

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by Dorchester Town Council to carry out archaeological observations and recording during works by Wessex Water to install a new refill water point at the south end of South Street, Dorchester.

The fieldwork was carried out between the 25th – 27th November 2020 by Peter Bellamy.

#### 1.2 Brief

No written brief for the works was produced by or on behalf of the Client, but the requirement for archaeological observations was discussed with Historic England.

#### 1.3 Site Location

The site is located on the southern edge of the historic centre of Dorchester, near the junction of South Street, Weymouth Avenue, Prince of Wales Road, Great Western Road and South Walks Road (centred on SY 6919 9034) (Figure 1; Plates 1–3). The trench lay partly in the pavement and partly in the road at the south end of South Street to the south of No. 31 (Figure 2). The topography is generally flat, lying at a height of about 64 m above OD, but rising up towards the south west.

#### 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 close to postulated location of the South Gate 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. 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 also appears to be a possibly 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 where it was first noted at the Lee Motors site (RCHME 1970, 547) and

subsequently also found at South Grove House, Bowling Alley Walk and in the South Walks Tunnel Sewer (Startin 1981, Putnam *et al.* 1970, Davies & Farwell 1990) and on the west side of the town beneath 1 West Walks (Trevarthen 2012). This wall footing lay behind the primary rampart (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 with the construction of a stone wall and the enlargement of the earthen rampart behind it (RCHME 1970). The ditch system may have been elaborated from a postulated single ditch to a triple ditch system with counterscarp bank, at least along the south and west sides of the town. The most complete section through the ditch system was made in 1896 across the southern line of the defences, close to the southwest corner, just to the south east of the site (RCHME 1970). The ditches were about 15 m wide and up to 4 m deep with V-shaped profiles. The inner edge of the middle ditch of this system was observed in the garden of Appian House, 22 Great Western Road in 2006 (Tatler and Bellamy 2006). The bank was investigated near the western end of Bowling Alley Walk in 1969–70, which revealed a primary bank about 15 m wide, later enlarged to a width of twenty-seven metres (Putnam *et al.* 1969 and 1970). The counterscarp bank lies under the houses on the south side of Great Western Road and south of South Walks Road beneath Southfield House (Davies and Thompson 1987).

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 rampart around the town was flattened and spread to form a series of tree-lined walks in the early eighteenth century. Bowling Alley Walk was created in about 1712 and South Walks in 1743–4 (Pope 1918).

The historic maps show that in 1810 the site was approximately on the path forming the town walks (DHC D1/OE1). The 1848 map (DHC D/COO:E/7) shows a clump of trees just south of the site, which the 1888 Ordnance Survey Town Plan shows to be planted on a small mound. By 1929 an underground toilet with steps down to the east and west was built just south of the site where the mound was formerly (see the 1929 Ordnance survey 1:2500 map). This toilet appears to have been decommissioned and filled in by 1988.

## 1.6 Previous Archaeological fieldwork

A number of casual and other observations have been made in the area of the South Gate Junction from the early 20th century onwards. In 1912 during surface drainage water works along South Walks, the edge of a ditch was seen under the pavement at the west foot of South Street and was thought to be part of the inner ditch of the Roman town defences (RCHME 1970, 548). In about 1940 a trench dug between South Walks Road and Great Western Road revealed a W-shaped ditch (probably the inner and middle ditches) and in 1965 C. J. Sparey Green saw the apex of a ridge of chalk in a telephone cable trench at the north side of South Walks Road (RCHME 1970, 548).

The outer ditch was exposed during work at Southfield House, by Wessex Archaeology in 1987 (Davies and Thompson 1987). The ditch had a splayed V-shaped profile about 7 m wide and the base was at about 3.2 m below modern ground level. The lower 0.75 m of the ditch was filled with fine reddish-brown silty clay and chalk wash with occasional chalk rubble. The rest of the ditch above was filled with homogeneous fine brown loam (Davies and Thompson 1987, 126). The counterscarp bank was also investigated in this area and consisted of layers of dumped chalk and clay about 23 m wide which survived to height of about 1.25 m. A number of Roman burials and an earlier Roman ditch were also recorded.

Wessex Archaeology observed the construction of a new tunnel sewer along South Walks in 1990 (Davies and Farwell 1990). A manhole (MH1) dug at the southern end of South Street revealed a 0.6 m thick layer of flint gravel and clay loam above natural chalk below about one metre of modern made ground. This is likely to be the remains of

a Roman Road. A further exposure of this road was recorded by Terrain Archaeology in January 2002, during sewerage improvement works immediately east of the earlier manhole (Bellamy and Pearce 2002). The remains of probable Roman road gravels were identified at a depth of 0.75–1.05 m below the modern surface.

Terrain Archaeology recorded various elements of the Roman town defences, including the edge of the outer ditch and the upper fills of the outer and middle ditches during improvements to South Gate Junction in April–June 2017 (Bellamy 2017) and during the erection of a WWI centenary commemorative information board and new sculpture base (Bellamy 2018).

## 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 works included the removal of the existing paving slabs followed by the hand excavation of a trench between the new refill station base position out to the road in order to connect with the water main (Figure 2). The area of the new base measured 0.6 m by 0.6 m across and the trench was about 5.5 m long, 0.5 m wide and up to 0.45 m deep (Figure 2; Plate 4). The digging of the trench was complicated by the presence of a large number of services and thick areas of concrete. It proved impossible to insert the soakaway for the new refill station beneath the pavement and it was moved to beneath the road adjacent to the water main. The trench in the road was enlarged several times, firstly to locate and expose the water main and secondly to enable the construction of the soakaway. The trench in the road measured 2.2 m by 1.8 m across and up to 1.45 m deep at time of recording (Figure 2; Plate 6).

## 1.9 Methods

The archaeological works were undertaken in accordance with 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 the digging of the trench.

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 recovered from the site.

### 1.10.3 Report

A copy of this report will be lodged with Dorset 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](http://www.oasis.ac.uk)) under the reference code *terraina1-409389*. 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 Soil Layer (Ditch Fill?)

The lowest deposit revealed during the works was a soil layer (106) over 0.8 m thick that was exposed in the trench in the road (Plate 6). This mid brown silty clay loam soil had mottles of reddish-brown clay and dark brown clay loam, and contained moderate to frequent chalk flecks and pieces, moderate flint nodules, and occasional limestone fragments. The base of this soil layer was not exposed but it continued down to a depth of over 1.45 m below modern ground level. A similar soil (102) was exposed at the base of the trench in the pavement and may be part of the same deposit.

### 2.2 Post-medieval / Modern Features

The remains of a vertical circular cast iron structure (103) with yellowish mortar/concrete benching was found beneath the pavement (Figure 2; Plate 5). This was set into soil layer 102 and was only partially within the trench and is thought to be the broken-off remains of a former lamp post.

On the south and east sides of the area of the new water point base was a vertical concrete surface and the area between was filled with a thick deposit of hard concrete. This was not investigated properly, but may be related to the former toilets that lay just outside the area of the trench.

### 2.3 Modern Services and Deposits

The upper part of the trench under the footpath (100) consisted of a mixed series of deposits of concrete, sand, gravel, stone scalplings, etc (101), which was up to 0.45 m deep. A large number of services, both live and dead were found cut through or within these deposits. Further services were noted at greater depths within the base of the trench, but were not recorded. Under the road (104) was a 0.4 m thick layer of flint gravel and cobbles (105). This was cut through by modern services that penetrated down to about 1.2–1.3m depth. These were not individually recorded.

## 3. Finds

### 3.1 Finds Assemblage

No finds were identified during the fieldwork.

## 4. Discussion and Conclusions

### 4.1 Discussion

The only deposit that is not clearly modern in origin is the soil layer 106 (and possibly 102). This soil was over 1.45 m depth below the road surface and no trace of the natural chalk was observed. Natural chalk was found at a depth of 1.05 m below the road about 5.4 m to the south and at 1.75 m depth about 2.8 m to the south during observations in 2002 (Bellamy and Pearce 2002) and in both of these exposures the top of the natural chalk appears truncated. These depths of natural chalk, taken together with the 1912 observations of a 35° angle slope in the natural chalk at the south end of South Street, just to the north of the site, (RCHME 1970) and the observation of the northern edge of the ditch in a gas main in South Street (Keen 1979), suggest that the site lies over the inner ditch of the Roman town defences (Figure 3) and that the soil deposit 106 was part of the upper fill. It is broadly similar in character to the upper fills of the outer ditch recorded at South Gate Junction in 2017 (Bellamy 2017). If this is the case, then the inner ditch appears to continue across the southern end of the present South Street. The position of the South Gate is uncertain, but projecting the lines of the Roman approach road from Radipole, the NE-SW street running across

Charles Street and Wollaston Field (Davies and Farwell 1990; RCHME 1970, 552) and the N-S street exposed during excavations at Applegates, 34 Trinity Street (O'Connor and Startin 1971) could suggest a location just east of South Street (Figure 3). The possible Roman road metalling found at the south end of South Street in 1990 and 2002 (Davies and Farwell 1990; Bellamy and Pearce 2002) is difficult to fit into the arrangement of the defences at the south gate. They also appear to overlie the inner ditch deposits. It is possible that this metalling is part of a later road, or that it is part of the edge of the road, which had spread across the edge of the ditch or is part of a later remetalling of the road. The road alignment projected in Figure 3 is a rather awkward arrangement consisting part of the approach road, and the NE-SW street joining just outside the gate. Further works are clearly needed to clarify the arrangement of the road approaching the South Gate.

## 4.2 Conclusions

The archaeological observations and recording during the installation of the new refill water point exposed what may be part of the upper fill of the inner ditch of the Roman town.

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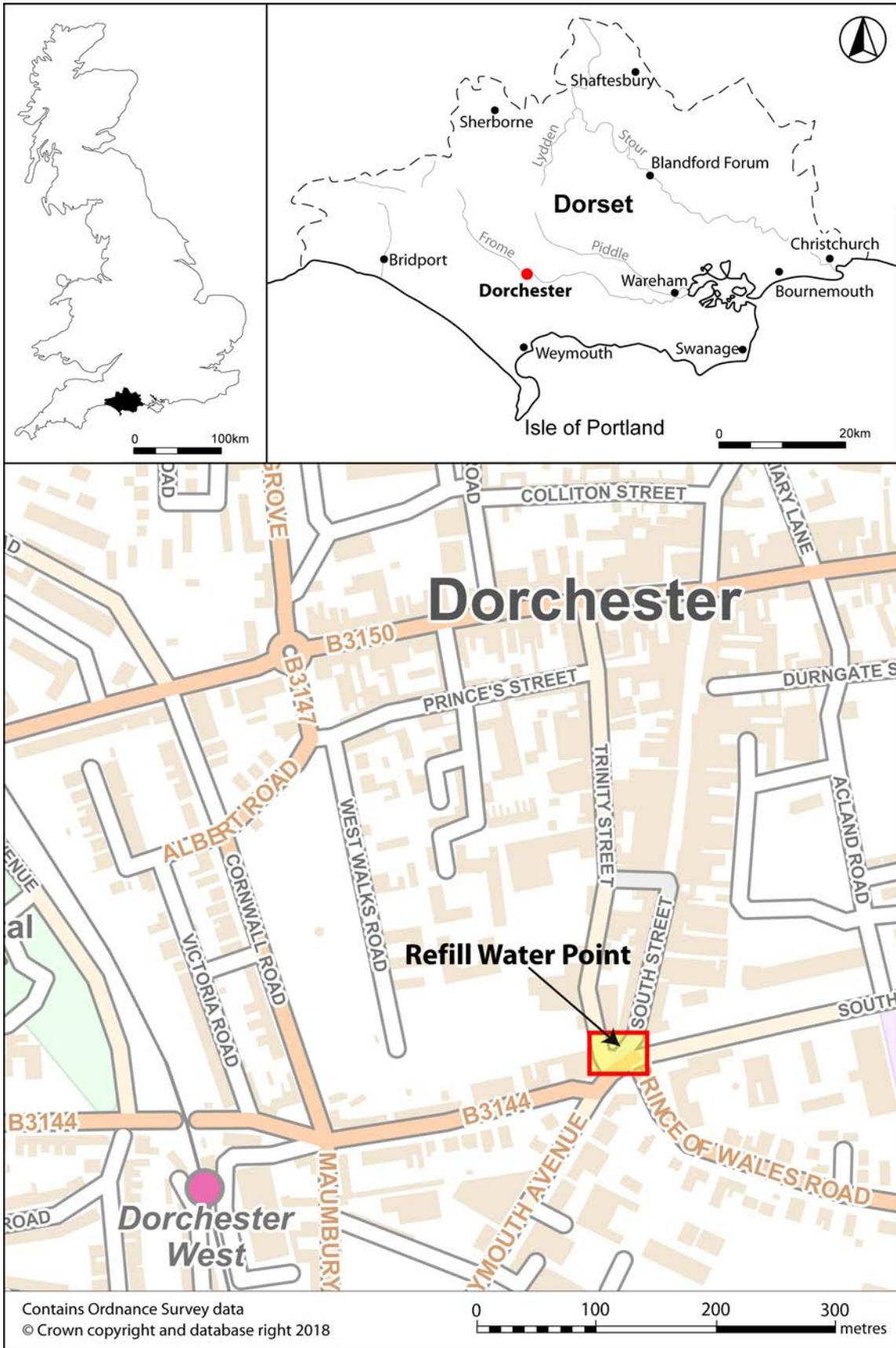


Figure 1: Site Location.

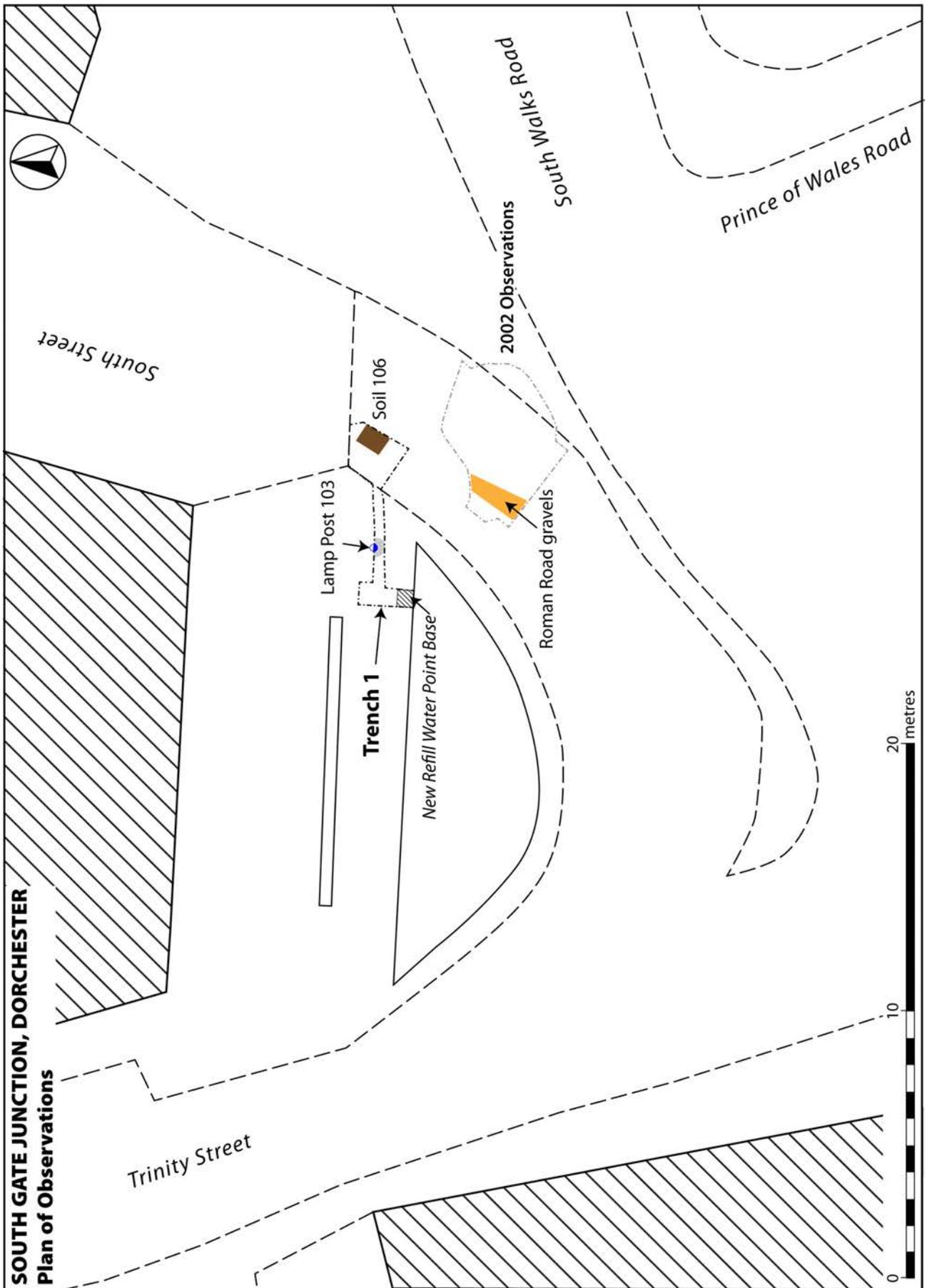


Figure 2: Location of Observations.

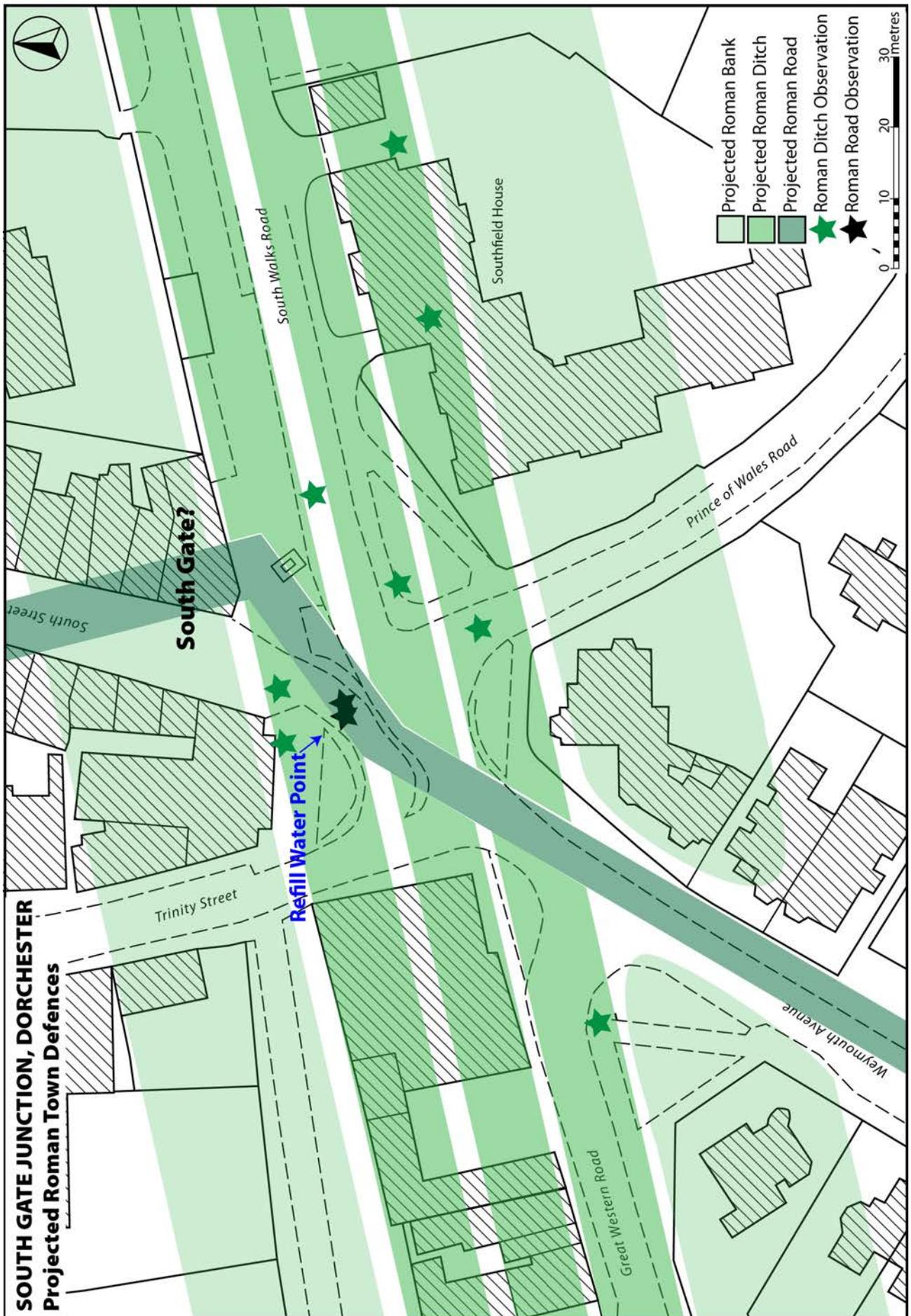


Figure 3: Projected Archaeological Context of Observations.



Plate 1: General view of Site, looking west.



Plate 2: General view of Site, looking east towards South Walks Road.



Plate 3: General view of Site, looking north up South Street.



Plate 4: Trench in pavement after excavation, looking east. 1m scale.



Plate 5: Cast iron lamp post remains, looking north.



Plate 6: Trench in road showing soil layer 106. 1m scale.

## Appendix 1: Context Summary

### Trench 1

Maximum Length: 6.75 m; Maximum Width 2.5 m; maximum depth 1.45 m.

Context	Description and Interpretation	Depth (m) below ground level
100	<b>Paving Slabs and base in Pavement</b>	0.00 – 0.15m
101	<b>Mixed Levelling and Service Trench Backfill under Pavement:</b> Mixed deposit including areas of stone scalpings, sand and concrete.	0.15 – 0.45m
102	<b>Mixed Soil Layer below Pavement:</b> Mixed mid brown clay loam with moderate chalk flecks and lumps, flint and patches of sand, and with occasional small roots.	0.45m +
103	<b>Cast Iron Lamp post:</b> Broken remains of cast iron base of probable former lamp post, with concrete benching. Set within 102.	0.25 – 0.45m +
104	<b>Road Tarmac and Base</b>	0.00 – 0.25m
105	<b>Mixed Levelling and Service Trench Backfill:</b> Mid greyish-brown clay loam with frequent flint gravel and occasional chalk flecks and small lumps. Recorded in NE part of trench in road overlying 105.	0.25 – 0.65m
106	<b>Mixed Soil Layer Below Road:</b> Mid brown silty clay loam with mottles of reddish-brown clay and dark brown clay loam, with moderate to frequent chalk flecks and pieces, moderate flint nodules, occasional limestone fragments, and occasional roots. Exposed in NE part of trench in road. Below 105 and cut by all services. Same as 102?	0.65 – 1.45m +