



**INSTALLATION OF RABBIT DROP-BOXES, OLD SARUM,
SALISBURY, WILTSHIRE
Archaeological Observations and Recording**



Report No. 53285/3/1

June 2008

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Archaeological Observations and Recording, May 2008

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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Terrain Archaeology in May 2008, during the excavation of fourteen trenches for the installation of Rabbit Drop-boxes at Old Sarum, Salisbury. The small trenches were dug along a fenceline to the south of Old Sarum, immediately outside of the area of the Scheduled Monument, centred on NGR SU13703236. No archaeological features were observed.

INTRODUCTION

Terrain Archaeology was commissioned by English Heritage to undertake a programme of archaeological observations and recording during the excavation of fourteen trenches for the installation of Rabbit Drop-boxes at Old Sarum, Salisbury, Wiltshire.

Archaeological Observations and Recording, also known as an archaeological watching brief, is defined by the Institute of Field Archaeologists as “a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons, within a specified area or site where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed.”

The rabbit drop-boxes were installed along the line of a new rabbit fence to the south of Old Sarum, centred on NGR SU13703236 (Figure 1). It lies just outside the area of the Scheduled Monument (SM No. 26715), on land owned by English Heritage. A total of fourteen rabbit drop-boxes were installed with each box requiring the excavation of a trench approximately 1m square and up to 0.65 m deep.

The fieldwork was carried out on the 9th May 2008 by Steven Tatler.

Terrain Archaeology would like to acknowledge the help and cooperation of the following during this project: Chris Bally (Regional Landscape Manager, English Heritage), Phil McMahon (Inspector of Ancient Monuments, English Heritage), James Bradley (Pest Control).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Old Sarum is a multivallate Iron Age hillfort, originally with entrances at both east and west ends, but the western entrance was later blocked. There is evidence for Early Iron Age settlement and also Late Iron Age and Roman settlement within the hillfort. There is an area of Iron Age activity close to the eastern entrance and another area of Iron Age activity to the west of the hillfort.

Old Sarum was the focus of a number of Roman roads and the Roman town of *Sorviodunum* lies close by.

Documentary sources attest to the establishment of a Saxon burh, *Seresberie*, at Old Sarum and there was a mint here by the early eleventh century.

After the Norman Conquest a royal motte and bailey castle was built within the hillfort and the Norman town established within the hillfort defences. A cathedral was built in the 11th century and later rebuilt and enlarged in the early 12th century. In the mid 12th century a bishop's palace was built. Outside the western limits of the defences, there may traces of a contemporary suburb,

revealed by aerial photography. Following the move of the bishopric to Salisbury in the early 13th century, Old Sarum was gradually abandoned and the castle demolished in the early 14th century. It had become totally abandoned by the early 16th century.

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 undertaken in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation produced by Terrain Archaeology (Document No. 3243/1/1), and the Institute of Field Archaeologists *Code of Conduct and Standard and guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (1994, as revised).

The trenchers for the Rabbit Drop-boxes were dug at intervals along approximately 480 m of fence line (Figure 2). They were excavated by a small mechanical excavator fitted with a 1m wide grading bucket.

All features and deposits, exposed during the works, were recorded using components of the Terrain Archaeology recording system of complementary written, drawn and photographic records. Each drop-box hole was given a unique number, with each context numbered as a suffix to the hole number (e.g. 10.1, 10.2, etc).

The records, and any materials recovered, 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.

RESULTS

A similar sequence of deposits was encountered across the whole of the site. This has been tabulated in Appendix 1 and shows relative depths of the deposits within all trenches.

Natural deposits

The underlying natural varied slightly across the site and was not encountered in all trenches. Solid chalk bedrock was found in Trenches 1, 2, 3, 6 and 14 (Plate 1). Degraded chalk bedrock was encountered in Trenches 9, 10, 12 and 13 (Plate 6). In Trench 7 a yellow calcareous silt containing chalk, flint and peagrit was observed and probably represents a natural deposit directly overlying the chalk bedrock (Plate 3).

Field clearance

In Trenches 7 and 8, at the west end of the E-W aligned length of fence, a layer containing large pieces of flint was observed (Plate 3). This colluvial deposit appeared to become thicker towards the field boundary and probably represents clearance of the fields during ploughing.

Colluvium

In most of the trenches a layer of colluvium was observed overlying either the natural or the field clearance deposits (Plates 2-6). This consisted of a very pale yellowish-brown calcareous silt containing pieces of chalk and flint. It was not present in Trenches 1, 2 and 3 at the west end of the site where the ground sloped down from the ramparts or in Trench 6 where the ground rose up slightly from the southwest corner of the site.

Topsoil

Overlying the whole of the site was a pale yellowish-brown calcareous silty loam topsoil, containing pieces of chalk, which varied in depth between 0.2 m and 0.3 m.

Finds

The finds recovered from the watching brief are presented in Table 1 below.

Context	Pottery		Ceramic Building Material		Flint	
	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)	No.	Wt (g)
9.2	1	2				
10.2			5	242	1	5
12.2			3	16		
13.2	1	2				
<i>Total</i>	2	4	8	258	1	5

Table 1: Finds assemblage by context

Pottery

Two small body sherds of Roman coarseware pottery were recovered from the colluvium in Trenches 9 and 13. An oxidised sandy fabric of probable Poole Harbour origin was found in Trench 9 and a greyware sherd in Trench 13.

Ceramic Building Material

A total of eight fragments of tile were recovered from the colluvium in Trenches 10 and 12. Four different fabrics are present, two coarse poorly wedged fabrics and two finer fabrics. All appear to be from flat tiles between 12-15 mm thick.

Flint

A single undiagnostic flint flake was recovered from the colluvium in Trench 10.

DISCUSSION

The character and small scale of the groundworks mean the scope for undertaking more than a simple description of the findings is extremely limited. As none of the trenches produced any recognisable evidence for *in situ* archaeological features and the number and range of finds recovered is small, it can be concluded that the insertion of the rabbit drop-boxes did not destroy any significant archaeological features or deposits.

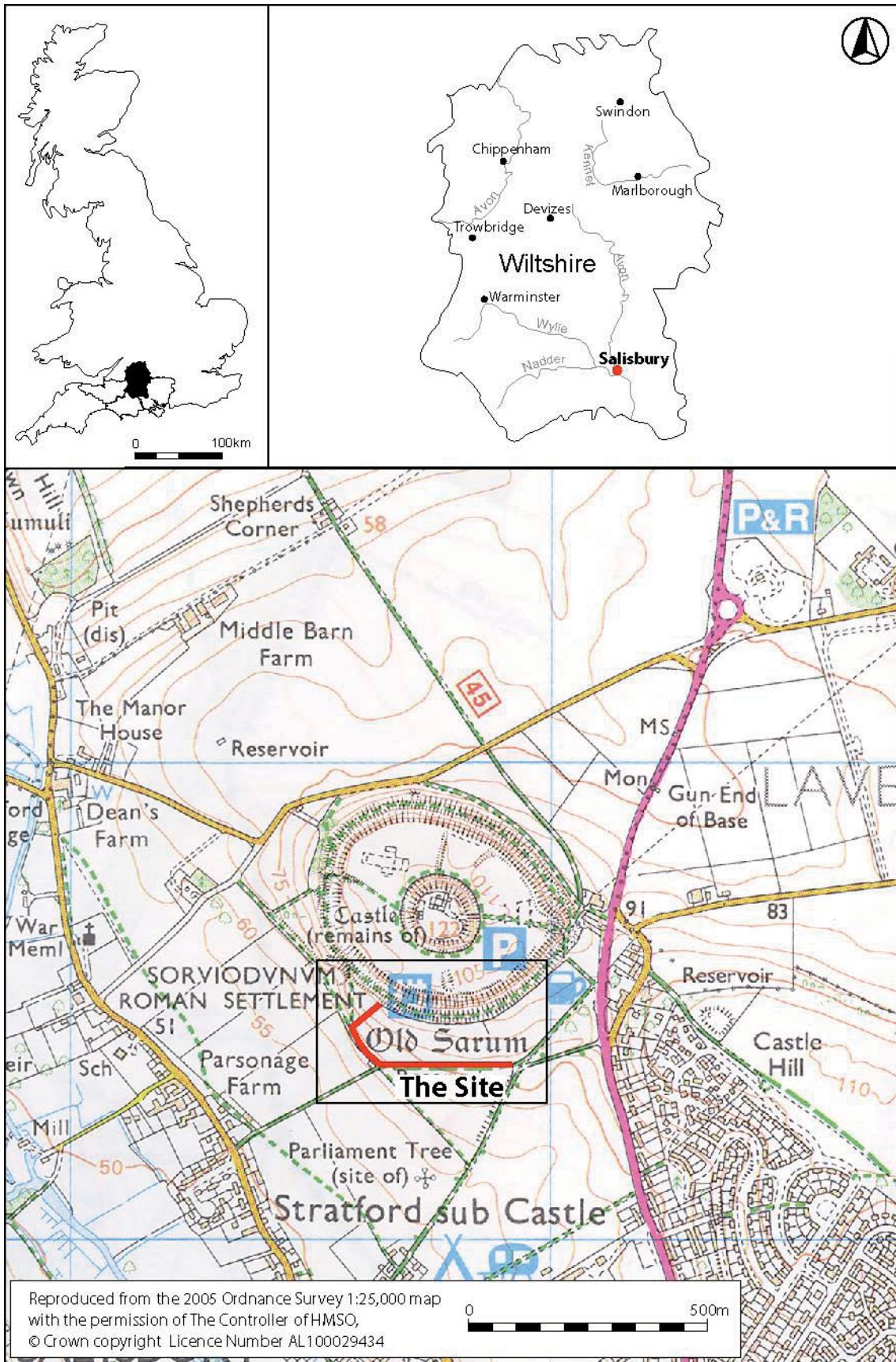


Figure 1: Site Location map

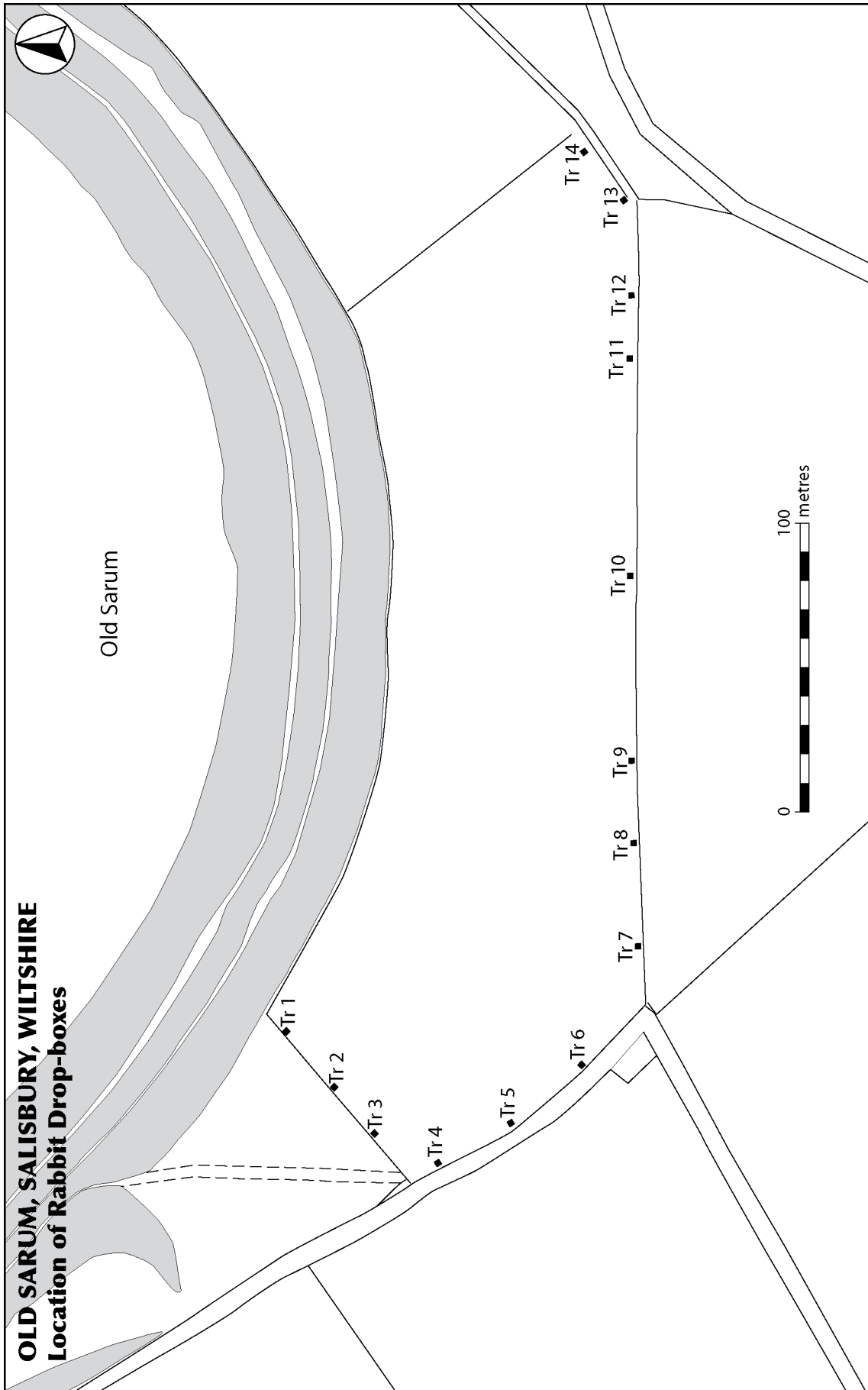


Figure 2: Plan showing location of drop-boxes (from a plan provided by English Heritage)



Plate 1: Trench 1 – southwest-facing section.



Plate 2: Trench 4 – northwest-facing section.



Plate 3: Trench 7 – west-facing section.



Plate 4: Trench 9 – west-facing section.



Plate 5: Trench 11 – west-facing section.



Plate 6: Trench 13 – west-facing section.

APPENDIX 1: Drop-box Trenches Stratigraphic Summary

(Depth below ground level in metres)

Trench	Topsoil	Colluvium	Field Clearance	Natural	Depth of trench	Finds Noted
1	0	-	-	0.2	0.4	-
2	0	-	-	0.2	0.45	-
3	0	-	-	0.2	0.45	-
4	0	0.4	-	-	0.45	-
5	0	0.4	-	-	0.55	-
6	0	-	-	0.45	0.45	-
7	0	0.25	0.35	0.45	0.45	-
8	0	0.2	0.35	-	0.5	-
9	0	0.2	-	0.5	0.5	pottery
10	0	0.25	-	0.55	0.65	tile, flint
11	0	0.3	-	-	0.45	-
12	0	0.2	-	0.6	0.6	tile
13	0	0.25	-	0.5	0.5	pottery
14	0	0.3	-	0.45	0.6	-