

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATION AND RECORDING OF
GEOTECHNICAL TRIAL PITS AT DORCHESTER MARKET,
FAIRFIELD ROAD, DORCHESTER, DORSET (NGR SY69059020)**

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1. SUMMARY

Archaeological observation and recording of geotechnical trial pits took place at the site of Dorchester Market, Fairfield Road, Dorchester during February 2000. The site lies some 150m from the southern entrance to the Roman town of Durnovaria and adjacent to the course of a known Roman road. Previously recorded finds from the site include evidence for a Roman building with mortar and tessellated floors, and Romano-British burials along the east side of the site, adjacent to the Roman road.

The current work comprised seven trial pits of varying size located across the site, and revealed areas where probable truncation had removed pre-existing deposits, areas where an apparently undisturbed deposit sequence of soil horizons lay above weathered chalk, and two locations within which significant archaeological deposits were recorded. Trial Pit 2, sited alongside Weymouth Avenue to the east, contained one definite and two probable graves of the Romano-British period. It was only possible to investigate one of these, which contained a poorly-preserved adult skeleton, aligned ENE-WSW lying on its left side and facing approximately south in a flexed posture. A plain round-wire ankle bracelet of copper alloy was recorded in situ around the lower right tibia and fibula. The burial was left in situ following recording. The possible cemetery indicated by the current work and previous observations may be defined by the largely negative results from Trial Pits 5 & 6 located, respectively, to the northeast and southwest of Trial Pit 2, and which contained apparently undisturbed simple deposit sequences.

Within Trial Pit 3, a large SW-NE aligned ditch cutting a further possible grave were recorded lying beneath a substantial soil accumulation. Roman pottery and box flue tile were recovered from the ditch, although insufficient of the possible grave was exposed to enable full investigation. Finds of box flue tile, limestone and ceramic roof tile from horizons across the site may indicate the presence of a Romano-British building somewhere in the vicinity, although no direct evidence was found for the Roman structure previously observed beneath the site. Given the small area of the site exposed within the trial pits it is possible that further archaeological remains lie in situ beneath the market site.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 This report presents the results of archaeological observation and recording of geotechnical pits at Dorchester Market, Fairfield Road, Dorchester, Dorset (NGR SY69059020). The work was commissioned by Malcolm Wright Partnership on behalf of clients, in support of a planning application (No. 1/E/2000/0005) to extend the covered area of the market. The work was carried out by AC *archaeology* during February 2000.

2.2 The aim of the work was to record, in conjunction with groundworks, any evidence for sub-surface archaeological remains, and to establish the date, nature, extent and character of any such remains.

2.3 The site is currently used a tarmac-covered car park and market site, the ground sloping gently down to the northeast. It lies at around 70mAOD, the underlying geology is Upper Chalk.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 The site lies approximately 150m southwest of the southern entrance to the Roman town of Durnovaria, adjacent to the course of a known Roman road along the current Weymouth Avenue.

3.2 Previous archaeological finds are recorded from within the site. These are presented in the following table:

Table 1: previous recorded archaeological sites and finds

RCHM(E) Reference No.	Date Recorded	NGR	Description
211	c.1878	c. 69129024	'A well-made Roman mortar floor' was seen by E. Cunningham and an enamelled bronze military belt plate and pottery were found 'at the corner of the fairground, now Cattle Market adjoining 'The Elms', Weymouth Avenue
211	c.1935	c. 69129024	A small portion of 'a coloured tessellated pavement' was seen in a trench dug in the market, nearby
220(a)	c.1930	69,099,021	Inhumation found in trenching for water mains in the Cattle Market. The remains, with a pot, were found at the E. edge of the concrete apron between the old butter shed and the N.E. exit to Weymouth Avenue

3.3 The possible presence, noted from earlier records, of both a building and burials of Romano-British date indicates a high probability that further archaeological remains may be present on the site.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 The work comprised the excavation and recording of seven trial pits, at locations determined by the structural engineer (Fig. 2). Excavation of

demonstrably modern and post-medieval overburden took place using a New Holland mechanical excavator equipped with a 0.5m wide toothless bucket, acting under constant archaeological supervision.

4.2 Machine-excavation paused upon reaching archaeological levels, while the archaeologist in attendance assessed the significance of the deposit exposed. Deposits considered to be of moderate archaeological value were subject to hand excavation only to elucidate their character, origin and date. These were subsequently removed by machine. Within the context of the current work, such deposits comprised lenses of soil and other horizontal spreads within which no stratigraphy or structure was evident.

4.3 Where significant archaeological deposits were encountered, machine excavation ceased completely, and the trial pit was cleaned by hand and planned. All discrete archaeological features were 50% sampled, except in the case of burials, where excavation was limited to determining the nature and orientation of any such features.

4.4 Recording took place using the AC *archaeology* pro-forma recording system, supplemented by scaled graphic and photographic records. The archive has been prepared using the site code AC588.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Of the seven trial pits excavated, only two - TP2 and TP3 - contained significant archaeological remains, with TP2 revealing one definite and two possible burials, and TP3 containing a large Romano-British ditch cutting another possible burial. Of the remainder a further two - TP5 and TP7 - revealed a probable undisturbed deposit sequence, with soil horizons lying above weathered natural chalk displaying periglacial or ancient tree root disturbance. The three remaining trial pits - TP 1, TP4 and TP6 showed evidence for probable truncation, with dark soils lying directly above unweathered bedrock chalk. Individual trial pit results follow in numerical order:

5.2 Trial Pit 1 -1.6 x 1.5m [Location plan Fig. 2]

This trial pit revealed a simple deposit sequence overlying possible evidence for truncation in that a dark soil horizon directly overlay unweathered bedrock chalk. No evidence for a weathered horizon was present. No finds were recovered, and c.20% of the pit was not fully excavated due to the presence of a large drainage pipe. The soil descriptions are as follows:

Table 2: Deposit sequence within Trial Pit 1

Context	Depth below ground surface	Description	Interpretation	Remarks
100	260mm	Tarmac and hardcore sub-base	Modern	-
101	260-430mm	Re-deposited compacted chalk rubble	Modern	-
102	430-690mm	Greyish-brown compacted silty clay with sparse sub-rounded flint gravels, sparse small sub-angular chalk fragments and occasional charcoal flecks	Layer	No finds
103	690mm+	Unweathered bedrock chalk	Natural	Probably truncated

5.3 Trial Pit 2 - 2 x 2m [Location plan Fig. 2, plan Fig. 3a, section Fig. 3c]

This trial pit was located adjacent to Weymouth Avenue on the east side of the site. Removal of 520mm of modern overburden exposed a soil horizon of probable Roman date, which sealed one definite and two possible burials. Of these three, two (F208 and F210) were only partially exposed and made investigation impractical. The third, F204, was approximately half exposed within the trial pit with some bone already visible, and appeared to lie roughly parallel with F208 and F210. Grave F204 was therefore partially excavated to establish its nature, orientation and date.

Grave F204 had two edges exposed within Trial Pit 2. Sub-rectangular in plan, and aligned approximately ENE-WSW, F204 measured 1.9m+ x 0.62m+ and extended beyond the pit to the east. It was filled with (203), a dark greyish-brown plastic silty clay with moderate medium to large flint nodules, sparse small chalk fragments and sparse chalk flecks. Fill (203) also contained frequent inclusions of decayed pale buff mortar - both lumps and flecks - and skeleton (205).

Skeleton (205) was aligned approximately ENE-WSW with the (unexposed) skull to ENE and was in a flexed posture on its left side, facing SSE. The bone colour was pale yellowish-brown and bone preservation was fair to poor, with the exposed long bones cracked and broken, and smaller bones such as ribs and digits absent, although these may lie within the unexcavated portion of the fill. A plain round-wire copper alloy ankle bracelet was recorded in situ around the lower right tibia and fibula. This appeared to be in good condition, although the fastening was not exposed, precluding a more detailed description.

Upon completion of recording, the burial was covered over with sieved soil and then sample sacks, prior to the pit being backfilled. The two possible graves - F208 and F210 - although unexcavated and only partially exposed share characteristics similar to grave F204; all three features appeared to lie parallel, and the fills of all three were notable for the presence of medium to large flint nodules and inclusions of pale buff mortar. No finds were recovered from these fills.

All three features were cut through an earlier, although undated, soil horizon and the natural chalk bedrock was not reached.

Table 3: Deposit sequence within Trial Pit 2

Context	Depth below ground surface	Description	Interpretation	Remarks
200	0 - 100mm	Dark brown silty loam	Modern turf	-
201	100 - 520mm	Re-deposited chalk rubble and hardcore	Modern	-
202	520 - 800mm	Dark greyish-brown silty clay loam with rare chalk fragments, sparse flint fragments, moderate chalk flecks and sparse charcoal flecks	Layer	Finds include medieval and post-medieval pottery, shell, CBM
203	800mm+	Dark greyish-brown plastic silty clay with moderate medium to large flint nodules, sparse small chalk fragments and sparse chalk flecks - frequent mortar inclusions	Grave fill	Contains skeleton (205)
204	800mm+	Cut - sub-rectangular in plan, sides & base not excavated. Cut through layer (206)	Grave Cut	See text
205	800mm+	Skeleton - see text, above for full description	Burial	Cu. alloy ankle bracelet - left in situ
206	800mm+	Dark brown compacted silty clay with common small sub-angular chalk fragments and sparse flint fragments. Rare mortar inclusions	Layer	Unexcavated, no finds
207	800mm+	Dark brown pliable clayey silt with moderate small chalk fragments and sparse medium to large flint nodules	Probable grave fill	No finds
208	800mm+	Cut of unexcavated feature, linear in plan, partially exposed, parallel with F204	Probable grave cut	-
209	800mm+	Dark greyish-brown pliable silty clay loam with moderate chalk fragments, sparse flint fragments and small mortar inclusions	Probable grave fill	No finds
210	800mm+	Cut of unexcavated feature partially exposed, with rounded sub-rectangular end	Probable grave cut	-

5.4 Trial Pit 3 - 1.5 x 1.5m [Location plan Fig. 2, plan Fig. 3b, section Fig. 3d]

This trial pit was located to the northwest side of the site, and contained a substantial soil build-up overlying archaeological features of Romano-British date. A large, approximately east-west aligned ditch F304 filled the whole area of the trial pit, and was found upon excavation to cut an earlier feature F307, which, although only partially exposed it is considered may represent a grave. Both these features were cut into the natural chalk bedrock.

Deposits overlying the archaeological features were removed by machine to a depth of 1.02m. The deepest of these deposits - layer (302) - yielded fragments of limestone and ceramic roof tile and a fragment of box flue tile, and may be of Romano-British origin. Layer (302) sealed ditch F304, which proved to have two fills, the uppermost of which - fill (303) - produced limestone and ceramic roof tile, box flue tile and a single sherd of black-burnished ware pottery. Trial Pit 3 is located on the north side of the site, and these fragments of building materials may relate to the Roman building recorded in this area during earlier observations (para. 3.2, above).

Ditch F304 measured at least 1.5m wide and 0.70m deep, and slightly truncated an earlier feature F307, partially revealed in the southeast side of the trial pit. Excavation of the small exposed portion of this feature failed to fully define its function, although some observations are possible. F307 was apparently sub-rectangular in plan, with well-defined, very steep straight sides. The base lay beyond the trial pit section to the southeast. The single fill (306) was a loose pale yellowish-brown silty clay loam containing profuse small angular chalk fragments with frequent small air voids, which yielded no finds. The nature of this feature was strongly suggestive of a grave, although the small portion available to sample revealed no bones, which probably lie beyond the trial pit.

Table 4: deposit sequence within Trial Pit 3

Context	Depth below ground surface	Description	Interpretation	Remarks
300	0 - 330mm	Tarmac and hardcore sub-base	Modern	-
301	330 - 700mm	Dark brown silty clay loam with sparse small flint fragments, rare small chalk fragments and chalk flecks	Layer - modern	Modern finds noted but not retained
302	700m - 1.02m	Dark yellowish-brown silty clay loam with rare flint fragments and sparse small chalk fragments	Layer - Roman	Finds - limestone and ceramic roof tile, box flue tile
303	1.02 - 1.35m	Firm yellowish-brown silty clay loam with moderate very small chalk fragments and flecks	Ditch fill - Roman	Finds - limestone and ceramic roof tile, box flue tile, black-burnished ware pottery
304	1.02 - 1.70m	Cut - linear ditch aligned approx. NE-SW with moderately steep, slightly concave sides merging with a gently concave base, cut through natural chalk and F307	Ditch - Roman	Continues beyond TP3 to NE and SW
305	1.35 - 1.70m	Friable yellowish-brown silty clay with profuse small sub-angular chalk fragments, silted/tipped in from west side	Primary ditch fill - Roman	Finds - worked flint and animal bone
306	0.94 - 1.51m+	Loose pale yellowish-brown silty clay loam containing profuse small angular chalk fragments with frequent small air voids	Fill of possible grave - Romano-British	No finds
307	0.94 - 1.51m+	Cut - apparently sub-rectangular in plan, with well-defined, very steep straight sides. The base lay beyond the trial pit section to the southeast	Possible grave - Romano-British	Approximately E-W aligned

5.5 Trial Pit 4 - 1.5 x 1.5m [Location plan Fig. 2]

This was the most southerly trial pit, and also the one with the shallowest deposit sequence, measuring 0.7m to the natural chalk beds. Nothing of archaeological interest was seen here, and the dark soil (402) containing modern finds and lying directly above unweathered natural chalk would suggest that truncation has occurred.

Table 5: deposit sequence, Trial Pit 4

Context	Depth below ground surface	Description	Interpretation	Remarks
400	0 - 300mm	Tarmac and hardcore sub-base	Modern	-
401	300 - 370mm	Re-deposited chalk rubble	Modern	-
402	370 - 700mm	Compacted greyish-brown silty clay with moderate small sub-angular chalk fragments, and sparse irregular flint fragments	Layer - modern	Modern finds noted but not retained
403	700m+	Unweathered natural chalk beds	Geology	Truncated

5.6 Trial Pit 5 - 1.5 x 1.5m [Location plan Fig. 2]

This trial pit was located at the northwest end of the grass verge adjoining Weymouth Avenue along the east side of the site, and was a similar distance to the road as TP2. On this basis it was expected that further burials might be exposed. No significant archaeology existed at this location, with a simple deposit sequence overlying extensively weathered and root-disturbed natural bedrock chalk. It is considered that the deposits within TP5 represent an undisturbed sequence of accumulation, with no evidence for truncation.

Table 6: deposit sequence, Trial Pit 5

Context	Depth below ground surface	Description	Interpretation	Remarks
500	0 - 100mm	Dark brown silty loam	Topsoil/turf	Modern
501	100 - 200mm	Re-deposited chalk rubble	Modern	-
502	200 - 800mm	Dark brown silty clay loam with moderate irregular flint fragments and rare chalk fragments	Layer	Finds - medieval and post-medieval pottery and a fragment of limestone quern
503	800mm - 1.18m	Probable tree bole - irregular profile, filled with very pale yellowish-brown degraded calcareous silts and inclusions of loose chalk rubble	Natural disturbance	-
504	800mm+	Weathered natural chalk beds	Geology	-

5.7 Trial Pit 6 - 1.2 x 1.2m [Location plan Fig. 2]

Trial Pit 6 was located 1m to the southwest of TP2, and was dug to ascertain the depth of natural chalk at this point (which had not been possible in TP2 due to the presence of burial/s). It was thought probable that further burials may lie in this area, although excavation revealed a simple deposit sequence above weathered natural chalk.

The layer above natural - (603) - yielded a single abraded sherd of Samian pottery. The presence of Roman pottery in this layer and the weathered nature of the chalk bedrock would suggest that these deposits represent an undisturbed sequence of accumulation. The absence of evidence for burials in this trial pit - just 1m from TP2 - may indicate the south-western extent of this activity.

Table 7: deposit sequence, Trial Pit 6

Context	Depth below ground surface	Description	Interpretation	Remarks
600	0 - 100mm	Dark brown silty loam	Topsoll/turf	Modern
601	1000 - 330mm	Re-deposited mid brown silty clay loam with common chalk and flint fragments	Layer - modern	Modern finds noted but not retained
602	330mm - 530mm	Re-deposited chalk rubble and hardcore	Modern	-
603	530mm - 1.02m	very dark brown compacted silty clay loam with rare chalk and sparse flint fragments	Layer - Romano-British	Finds - abraded Samian sherd and single flint flake
604	1.02m+	Weathered chalk bedrock	Geology	-

5.8 Trial Pit 7 - 1.5 x 1.5m [Location plan, Fig. 2]

This pit was excavated in the northeast corner of the site, within the vicinity of the Roman building recorded in the 19th-century. No evidence for structural remains was found, although the soil layer directly above natural - (702) - yielded one sherd of Samian pottery and fragments of roof tile. The deposit sequence here would appear undisturbed, and the surface of the natural chalk is extensively weathered, with tree root disturbance apparent.

Table 8: deposit sequence, Trial Pit 7

Context	Depth below ground surface	Description	Interpretation	Remarks
700	0 - 480mm	Tarmac and hardcore sub-base	Modern	-
701	480m -710mm	Very dark brown silty clay loam with rare chalk fragments, sparse flint fragments, and occasional charcoal flecks	Layer	Undated
702	710mm - 1.01m	Reddish-brown compacted silty clay with common small chalk fragments, moderate flint fragments and sparse charcoal flecks	Layer - Romano-British	One sherd of Samian pottery and roof tile fragments
703	1.01 - 1.48m	Tree bole - very irregular profile with 'jumbled' fill of dark yellowish-brown silty clay loam with profuse small degraded chalk fragments, moderate irregular flint fragments and inclusions of compacted reddish-brown clay	Natural feature	-
704	1.01m+	Extensively weathered chalk bedrock	Geology	-

5.9 Finds

A very small assemblage of finds was recovered during the work. This is summarised in Table 9 (overleaf):

Table 9: all finds quantified by number and by weight in grams

Context	Roman pottery	Post-medieval pottery	Ceramic building material	Animal bone/shell	Worked flint	Burnt Flint	Slag	Foreign Stone	Remarks
202		2/76g	7/428g	3/112g	1/22g				CBM = roof and floor tile
302			2/186g					1/406g	CBM = box flue tile
303	1/4g		5/226g	1/12g	1/4g	1/44g	2/120g	1/100g	1 sherd black burnished ware, 2 frags box flue tile
305				1/12g	4/132g				
502		2/28g						1/244g	poss. quern frag.
603	1/8g				1/12g				1 sherd Samian
702	1/2g		3/86g						1 sherd Samian
Totals	3/14g	4/106g	17/926g	5/136g	7/170g	1/44g	2/120g	3/750g	

6. COMMENT

6.1 The work has demonstrated the existence of significant archaeological remains at two locations within the site, but has also identified areas where probably undisturbed deposit sequences overlie weathered natural chalk and other areas where truncation may have occurred.

6.2 The burials within TP2 and the probable burial within TP3 may delimit the extent of a possible cemetery, which may be further defined by the undisturbed and largely negative results from TP5 and TP6. The single burial recorded - F204 - is probably of early Romano-British date; the orientation of the burial is ambiguous, although the posture (flexed, lying on its side) and the copper alloy ankle bracelet suggest an earlier rather than later date.

6.3 The features within TP3 denote at least two phases of Romano-British activity on the site, although further comment is difficult given the small sample available for excavation. Five trial pits contained soil horizons of possible Romano-British date, although finds were sparsely distributed. Of note is the fragments of ceramic and limestone roof tile and the fragments of box flue tile, indicating the possible presence of a building somewhere in the vicinity, which may relate to the Roman building noted during past observations (c.1878 and c.1935).

6.4 The trial pits represent a very small sample, and it is possible that further archaeological remains exist elsewhere beneath the site.

6.5 The proposed development will comprise the construction of a new covered market-area, built using 'pad' foundations. Although small in area, the foundations are considered likely to impact upon underlying archaeological remains.

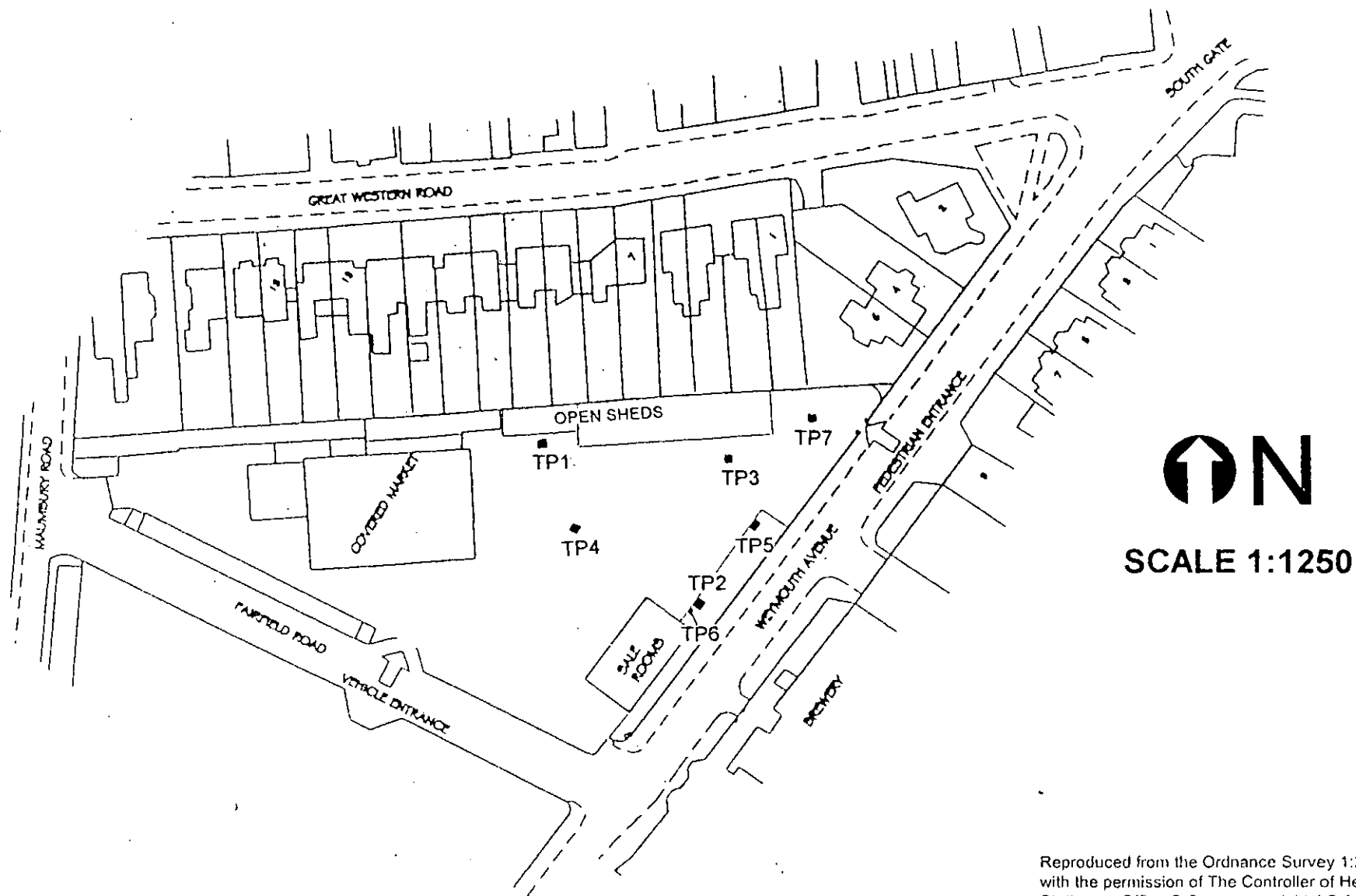
7. REFERENCE

RCHME, 1970, *An Inventory of Historical Monuments in the County of Dorset, Volume 2 South-East, Part 3*



Fig. 1: Site location plan

Fig. 2: Trial Pit location plan



SCALE 1:1250

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Fig. 3: Plans and sections, TP2 (a, c) and TP3 (b, d)

