



Edward Road,
Dorchester, Dorset.

Archaeological Watching Brief Report





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Dorchester,
Dorset**

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Figure 1 Site location plan

Plate 1 East facing section through feature 103

Cover Projected line of Roman road looking south-west

Back Possible hollow way

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Bryant Homes Southern Counties to carry out archaeological recording on land at Edward Road, Dorchester, Dorset following groundworks for the redevelopment of the Site. The Site is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 368835 090070.

The archaeological work was required as a condition of planning consent, granted to Bryant Homes Southern Counties by West Dorset District Council for the proposed residential development of the Site.

Although groundworks on Site had commenced, there remained the opportunity to record a north-south aligned section positioned in the southern half of the Site. Possible archaeological features visible in the section were investigated and recorded; a photographic record was also made of the postulated line of a possible Roman road thought to cross the Site.

Three possible features were identified in the remaining east-facing section; excavation of two of these produced modern brick fragments and the remains of a tin can and no further recording was undertaken. A very large irregular feature was identified in the central part of the Site and the limited excavation possible, produced a small, abraded sherd of Romano-British pottery and a single flint waste flake.

Although the shape in plan, and therefore the form of the large feature is uncertain, its irregular profile, along with the scarcity of finds may suggest a natural origin, possibly a large natural hollow, pond or palaeochannel. Alternatively, it could represent a hollow way, similar to the medieval example recorded at Tolpuddle Ball, which was of similar dimensions with comparable silty clay loam fills and could then represent a Romano-British or later route from Dorchester to the south-west. Given this feature lies approximately 65m to the north of the projected line of the Roman road and its form is markedly different to that excavated within the town, it seems unlikely this feature relates to the Roman road recorded elsewhere in Dorchester.

The projected line of the Roman road was surveyed in using a GPS and the area carefully examined for any remains, as were the areas on either side. No traces of the road were found, however, the ground surface above the section appeared to have been truncated, probably during a previous development on the Site.

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Acknowledgements

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The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Sue Farr. The fieldwork was undertaken by Vaughan Birbeck who also compiled this report with help from Lorraine Mepham (pottery) and Dr. Matt Lievers (flint). The illustrations were prepared by Rob Goller.

Edward Road, Dorchester, Dorset

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Bryant Homes Southern Counties (the Client) to carry out archaeological recording on land at Edward Road, Dorchester, Dorset (hereafter 'the Site') following groundworks for the redevelopment of the Site. The Site is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 368835 090070 (**Figure 1**)
- 1.1.2 The archaeological work was required as a condition of planning consent, granted to Bryant Homes Southern Counties by West Dorset District Council for the proposed residential development on the Site.
- 1.1.3 Although groundworks on Site had commenced, there remained the opportunity to record a north-south aligned section positioned in the southern half of the Site. Possible archaeological features visible in the section were investigated and recorded and a photographic record was also made of the postulated line of the Roman road thought to cross the Site.

2 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Location, topography and geology.

- 2.1.1 The Site comprises an irregularly shaped area of c.1.05 hectares, situated between Edward Road to the west and the Dorchester West railway station to the east (**Figure 1**).
- 2.1.2 The Site had been significantly disturbed by the commencement of development works, which appeared to have reduced the ground level on the Site by up to 2.40m and by previous works associated with the railway, primarily comprising a deep cutting.
- 2.1.3 The underlying geology consists of Upper Chalk (BGS, Sheet 328, Dorchester). The original topography of the Site appears to have been fairly flat or a very gentle north-east facing slope, at an elevation of between 78.5m and 79.20m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1.1 The early importance of the Dorchester area is suggested by the concentration of prehistoric monuments and earthworks by which the modern town is surrounded. Maiden Castle, the largest and most visible of these, dominates the landscape to the south-west of Dorchester, but the smaller earthwork of Maumbury Rings is immediately to the east of the Site, and other lesser monuments such as barrows, still survive in the surrounding countryside.

- 3.1.2 Maiden Castle represents the earliest archaeological site in the area, since, although in its present form it appears as an Iron Age hillfort, evidence of a Neolithic causewayed enclosure, constructed c. 3800 BC, has also been found at the eastern end of the hilltop. A second, smaller causewayed enclosure, dating to between 3250-2750 BC, has recently been excavated at Flagstones on the eastern outskirts of the modern town (Woodward and Smith 1988; Woodward, Smith and Healy 1997). Nearby and also dating from the third millennium BC, were other large monuments: a henge and enclosure at Mount Pleasant, a henge at Maumbury Rings and a large post alignment beneath the present centre of Dorchester.
- 3.1.3 The Romano-British town of *Durnovaria* at Dorchester, on the evidence of finds recovered, thrived from the 1st until the 5th century AD when Roman administration ceased. Thereafter, as elsewhere, the picture becomes obscure, with little archaeological or historical evidence surviving to clarify developments. Scarcely any conclusive record of closely dated post-Roman activity has been found within the walls of the Roman town, but structures dating to the 5th and 6th centuries AD were recorded at Poundbury (Green 1987) and several slightly later burials have been excavated south-east of the town (Green 1984).
- 3.1.4 The Roman town was approached by roads from the west, south and east which entered the town through gates; the exact positions of the gates are not known, but they are probably located south of High West and High East Street, near the line of Durngate Street and Princes Street. The layout of a number of roads within the town is well known and forms a fairly regular grid with one exception, a road running from the south gate diagonally across the grid to the east gate (**Figure 1**). The projected line of this road to the south-west of the south gate crosses the Site, which is approximately 450m to the south-west of the probable location of the south gate. This road has been located by two excavations within the Roman town (Davies and Farwell 1989, 107; Davies and Farwell 1990, 53) where the road was "5.75m wide and comprised 0.5m thick layers of compacted gravel bands over a crushed chalk consolidation level." It was also suggested (*ibid*) that the road had fallen out of use by the 4th century.

4 AIMS

- 4.1.1 The principal aim of the work was to provide further information concerning the presence/absence, date, nature and extent of any buried archaeological remains and to investigate and record these within the exposed section on Site.

5 METHOD

- 5.1.1 The fieldwork comprised the recording of a section running roughly north south through the southern half of the Site. Although ground clearance and the excavation of foundations had already commenced and significantly compromised any archaeology on Site, the exposed section appeared to contain some evidence of previous activity in the area.
- 5.1.2 A suitably experienced archaeologist investigated all potential archaeological remains by excavation and recorded all archaeological remains commensurate with the scale of work and using Wessex Archaeology's *pro forma* recording system. Due to the height of the section and the presence of a thick made-ground deposit overlying the

archaeological remains, excavation was limited to small-scale cutting-back of the section in order to clarify the form of the features and recover dating evidence and to determine stratigraphic relationships. Recording included written, drawn, and photographic elements.

- 5.1.3 Areas under archaeological observation were surveyed using GPS and tied in to the Ordnance Survey. The assumed line of the Roman road (see 3.1.4 above) was also marked out using GPS in order to identify any features or deposits that may relate to this feature.
- 5.1.4 The work was carried out in accordance with the relevant guidance given in the Institute For Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (revised 2008).

6 RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 The Site was monitored on Thursday 6th August 2009 and all fieldwork was completed the same day. Three possible features were identified in the remaining east-facing section; excavation of two of these produced modern brick fragments and the remains of a tin can and no further recording was undertaken. A very large irregular feature was identified in the central part of the Site and from the limited excavation possible, a tiny, abraded sherd of Romano-British pottery and a single flint waste flake was recovered.
- 6.1.2 The assumed line of the Roman Road was carefully marked-out using GPS and this area of the section was carefully examined for any remains, as were the areas on either side. No traces of the road were found, however, the ground surface above the section appeared to have been truncated, probably during a previous development on the Site.

6.2 Archaeological Features and Deposits

- 6.2.1 The only feature of possible archaeological significance was the very large irregular feature (103) (Plate 1) approximately 65m north of the suggested line of the Roman Road. This was approximately 14m wide and up to 1.50m deep with moderately steep, irregular sides and an irregular base. The basal fill (102) comprised very pale grey silty clay with small chalk inclusions and the upper fill (101) was a mid greyish brown silty clay loam with common flint and chalk inclusions, both appeared to be well-sorted and were probably the product of gradual silting. Due to the presence of a substantial layer of recent made ground (100; a c. 0.40m thick layer of re-deposited chalk and topsoil with occasional brick and concrete inclusions) no excavation was possible and the form of the feature is uncertain.
- 6.2.2 A very small assemblage of finds, comprising a single flint waste flake and a single, tiny, abraded sherd of sandy tempered pottery was recovered from the upper fill (101) during hand cleaning of the section. The pottery, a heavily abraded body sherd, can only be broadly dated to the Romano-British period (AD 43-410); the flint waste flake is undiagnostic and can only be dated broadly to the prehistoric period and the heavily abraded state of both the pottery and the flint suggest that both are probably residual within the fills of this feature.

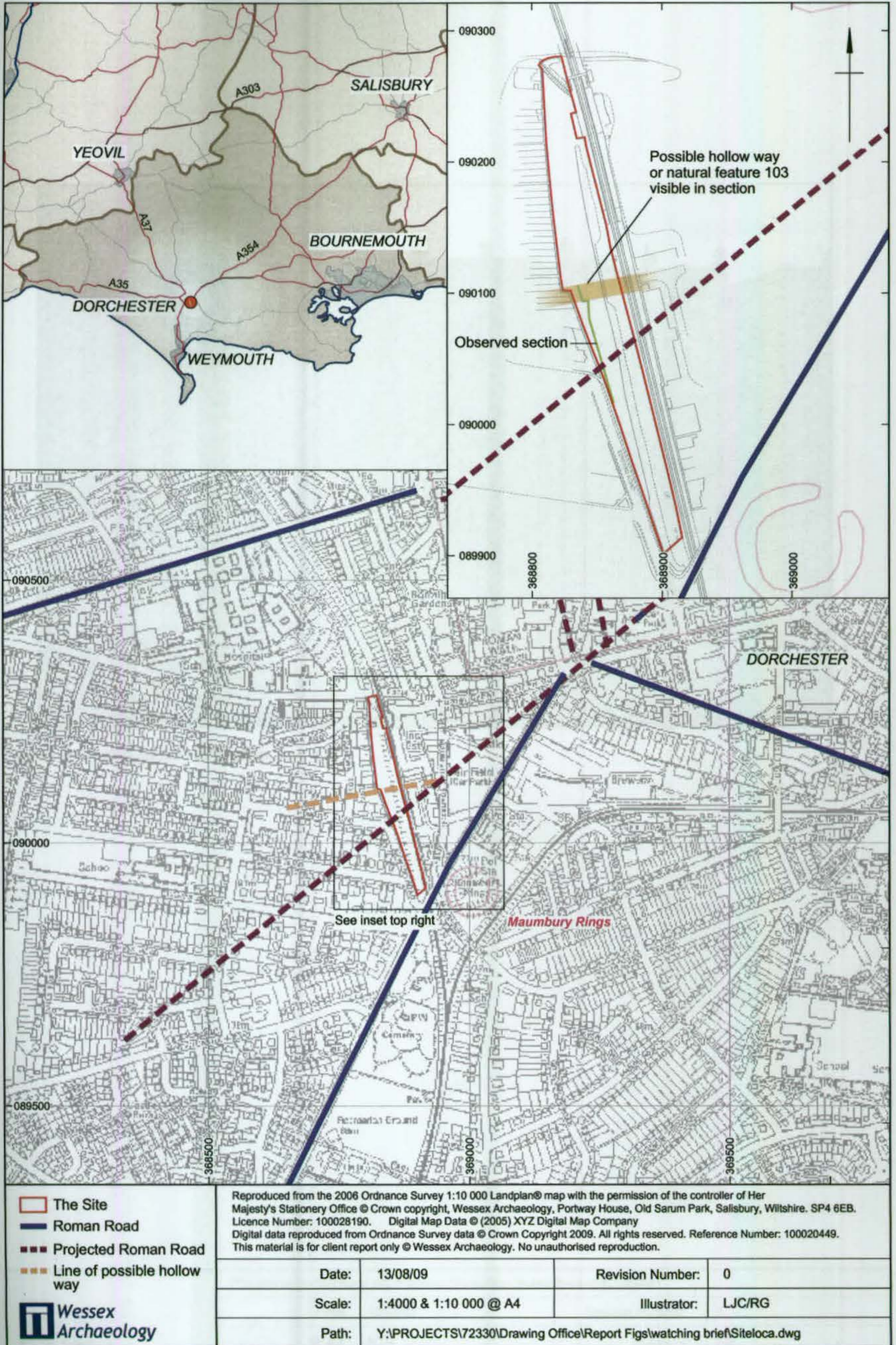
7 CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1.1 Although the shape in plan, and therefore the form of the large feature is uncertain, its irregular profile, along with the scarcity of finds within the two fills suggest a natural origin, possibly a large natural hollow, pond, or some form of erosion feature or palaeochannel. Alternatively, it could represent a hollow way, similar to the medieval example recorded at Tolpuddle Ball, which was of similar dimensions with similar silty clay loam fills (Hearne and Birbeck 1999, 53-54). If this is so, it could be that this represents a Romano-British or later route from Dorchester to the south-west.
- 7.1.2 Given this feature lies approximately 65m to the north of the projected line of the Roman road (**Figure 1**) and its form is markedly different to that excavated within the town, it seems unlikely this feature relates to the Roman road recorded elsewhere in Dorchester. Although it could have potentially represented a continuation of the road running diagonally across the Roman street grid, a fairly substantial deviation to the projected alignment would have been needed for this to be possible. Moreover, despite careful examination of the section, no traces of metalling or wheel ruts, which might be expected in a hollow way, were observed, perhaps reinforcing the interpretation of this as a natural feature, although, given the section was only marginally cut back, such features may not have been apparent in the area examined.

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Site location plan

Figure 1



East facing section through feature 103

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