



Land at the Rear of Dorchester Police Station

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



LAND AT THE REAR OF DORCHESTER POLICE STATION

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Figure 1: Location plan of area of watching brief

Figure 2: Location of archaeological features seen during Watching Brief

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Summary

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Taylor Woodrow Developments Limited to carry out an archaeological watching brief during groundworks for a new housing development, centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 369070 90000, on land at the rear of Dorchester Police Station, Dorchester, Dorset (the Site). Prior to the development there had been various ancillary buildings on the Site. The main period of watching brief was undertaken between 30th August and the 5th September 2005, with an additional site visit for the examination of a service trench on 24th October 2005.

The Site adjoins the monument of Maumbury Rings, originally a Neolithic henge, later utilised as a Roman amphitheatre from the 1st Century AD, an artillery fort for parliament supporters during the Civil War, and during the mid- to late-18th Century as an arena for public executions. The area of the watching brief is also only about 250m south of the city walls of Roman Dorchester (Durnovaria). Weymouth Avenue, to the immediate west of the Site, follows the alignment of a Roman road.

Extensive truncation during the modern era, as a result of the construction of the (now former) ancillary buildings associated with the police station was observed across the Site. However, the watching brief recorded a number of surviving archaeological features, potentially associated with the adjacent Maumbury Rings. A total of five substantial pits, some intercutting, contained prehistoric struck flint, Romano-British pottery and animal as well as some human bone. Their exact date is uncertain, but their presence suggests a long-term site use during the prehistoric and Romano-British periods. The Late Neolithic occupation within the monument itself features deep conical shafts cut through the henge's enclosure ditch, and it is possible that the pits identified on this Site served a related purpose. Human bone recovered from one pit may indicate that this may have been of a ritual or funerary nature.

A single coffin inhumation of a Romano-British date was recovered from the Site. The interred individual was most likely a middle-aged female which had suffered from osteoarthritis prior to her death and who had incurred an infected fracture of the right leg during her life-time. No further graves were identified during the groundworks, suggesting that the interment does not form part of a cemetery, but represents an isolated roadside inhumation.

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The work was commissioned and financed by Taylor Woodrow Developments Limited, and Wessex Archaeology would like to acknowledge the assistance of Roger Evans and Malcolm Teague. Wessex Archaeology are also grateful for the co-operation of the building contractors, Moors, during our monitoring of the works. Steve Wallis, Senior Archaeologist for Dorset County Council is also thanked for his helpful advice.

The fieldwork was managed and undertaken by David Parry, who also compiled this report. The illustrations were prepared by Linda Coleman. Finds were assessed by Lorraine Meopham. The human bone has been reported on by Jacqueline McKinley.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Taylor Woodrow Developments Limited to undertake a watching brief during groundworks for a new housing development on land formerly Dorchester Police Station, hereafter referred to as 'the Site' (Figure 1).
- 1.1.2 The requirement for archaeological investigations on the Site was set down by Dorset County Council as a condition of outline planning permission. This condition required that no development should take place until the implementation of an agreed programme of archaeological work had been secured. A specification for archaeological work comprising a watching brief and the preparation of a report on the results of the fieldwork was subsequently submitted and approved by Steve Wallis, Senior Archaeologist for Dorset County Council.
- 1.1.3 The main period of watching brief was undertaken between 30th August and the 5th September 2005, with an additional site visit for the examination of a service trench on 24th October 2005. During the latter, no archaeological evidence was encountered.

1.2 Site Location and Description

- 1.2.1 The Site comprises a sub-rectangular parcel of land of some 0.37ha extent and is located on former police station land south of Dorchester town centre. The Site is bounded by Dorchester Police Station to the north-west, Pulman Court council offices to the north-east, the Weymouth-Bournemouth railway line to the south-east, and Maumbury Rings (a site of 1.5ha centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 369015 89919 to the south-west.
- 1.2.2 The service trench subject to an additional watching brief in October extended from the north-western limit of the Site to Weymouth Avenue. The location of both watching brief areas is shown on Figure 1.
- 1.2.3 Following the recent demolition of various former police buildings the Site featured rough, heavily disturbed ground consisting of levelled demolition rubble. A small plot of grassed-over land adjoined the south-east side of the Site.

1.2.4 The Site lies on Upper Chalk, on gently sloping ground at c. 73m above Ordnance Datum (aOD).

1.3 General Historical and Archaeological Background

1.3.1 The Site is located on land adjoining the Scheduled Monument of Maumbury Rings. Excavated in the early 20th Century, the current extant earthworks were found to overlie an unusual Late Neolithic henge. Featuring an entrance to the north east, the henge comprised a large sub-circular bank and ditch. Cut through the base of the ditch was a series of deep conical shaped pits, with an average depth of some 10m.

1.3.2 With the development of the Roman town of Dorchester, the earthworks of Maumbury Rings were remodelled to create an amphitheatre approximately 200m to the south of the town walls.

1.3.3 At the time of the Civil War in the 17th Century, the Rings saw a further re-use as an artillery station between 1642 and 1643. During this period the monument featured a ramp from the interior up to the south-west part of the bank.

1.3.4 Cartographic evidence shows that Weymouth Avenue, to the immediate west of the Site, follows the alignment of a Roman road (**Figure 1**).

2 METHODS

2.1 Aims and Objectives

2.1.1 The aim of the watching brief was to provide a record of any archaeological features and deposits observed during groundworks associated with the proposed development (**Figure 1**).

2.1.2 The objectives were to ensure the monitoring of groundwork and the adequate investigation and recording of any archaeological features or deposits revealed. This included recording the location, extent, date, character and relationship of the archaeological evidence.

2.2 Groundworks

2.2.1 Work comprised two stages. Initially a demolition layer across the southern part of the Site was removed, and backfilling and stabilisation of lower ground across the northern part of the Site undertaken. To this purpose, a 360° excavator using both a toothed and a toothless bucket was deployed to remove deposits to the formation level. During this operation it became clear that the bedrock chalk had already been cut out to level the ground for the construction of previous buildings. Very little bedrock chalk was exposed at the finished foundation level.

2.2.2 Following the ground preparation, a 360° excavator with toothless buckets was used to excavate buildings footings trenches with widths of 0.45m and

0.6m. In accordance with the buildings inspector's requirements, these trenches were dug into 0.40m of solid chalk (either bedrock or redeposited).

2.3 Archaeological recording

2.3.1 The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (1994, revised 1999).

2.3.2 Wessex Archaeology's standard *pro forma* recording system was used, comprising written details and a full photographic record.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 All groundwork operations were monitored including areas for car parking facilities outside the footprint of the new building (**Figure 1**).

3.2 Soil profile

3.2.1 Topsoil survived only as sporadic remnants, having been heavily disturbed by the construction and recent demolition of mid- to late 20th century buildings, yards and associated structures. Where topsoil was present it was a mid/dark greyish brown silt loam, up to 0.25m thick. No surviving subsoil was observed.

3.2.2 The natural geological deposit is Upper Chalk, exposed at a varying depth of 0.15m to 0.60m below the present ground surface. The surface of the chalk was fractured, but relatively hard. The greatest depth down to chalk generally occurred in the northern part of the Site.

3.2.3 Modern disturbance was noted across the majority of the Site, but was generally superficial. Other more substantial modern disturbances included two pits in the north-east of the Site, measuring some 4m across, cut at least 1m into the natural chalk; various concrete and brick footings in all parts of the Site; a substantial cellar along the north-east edge of the Site and another cellar along the south-east edge of the Site. All deep cutting modern features had been backfilled with building debris during recent demolition and levelling activities.

3.3 Results by period

Undated

3.3.1 A total of four pits, some intercutting, were observed and could not be accurately dated. Pieces of struck prehistoric flint were recovered from their fills and the close proximity of the Late Neolithic monument of Maumbury Rings (also associated with pit-digging activities) suggests a possible prehistoric date for them. However, some Romano-British pottery was also recovered from their upper fills, and the identification of a Romano-British

burial during the works indicates site-use during this time also. Since some pits were intercutting they may represent therefore more than one period of site-use.

- 3.3.2 All pits were revealed only within the machine excavated footings trenches.
- 3.3.3 There was one small isolated pit [105], cut to a depth of 0.25m into the chalk near the north-west corner of the Site. It was seen in section only. Four further large pits were recorded in the south-east corner of the Site (Figure 2). The machined footings trenches allowed only rough estimation of the extent of these pits. Pit [107] was about 4m across, machine excavated to a depth of 1.90m and was cut by a modern test pit, which was machine excavated to a depth of 3.10m. It is possible that pit [107] was also at least this deep. Pits [110] and [114] were also approximately 4-5m in diameter, and were machine excavated to a depth of 0.50m. Pit [113] was fully revealed in section within a SW-NE footings trench and measured 1.65m in depth with a diameter of approximately 1.80m. The footings trenches were too narrow and unstable to allow hand-excavation, therefore only limited hand cleaning by trowel was carried out on sections.
- 3.3.4 Large fragments of human bone (lower limb and patella) were recovered from (117) in pit [113]. Health and safety considerations forbade hand excavation within the machine excavated trench, and a further perpendicular footings trench revealed no additional bone. The bones were recovered from the machine spoil, although more could be seen in section. It was not possible to observe if the bone lay *in situ* in the pit, or represented redeposited remains.
- 3.3.5 The pits located to the south-east of the Site were observed to be intercutting. Stratigraphic evidence demonstrated that pit [114] was evidently the latest, and that pit [110] post-dated pit [113], while the relationship between pits [107], [110] and [113] was unresolved (Figure 2).

Romano-British

- 3.3.6 A single coffin, adult, inhumation burial (104) was revealed in parallel alignment with a SW-NE footings trench. The mechanically excavated footings trench was 0.45m wide and was widened by approximately 0.10m on the north side in order to facilitate hand excavation of the skeleton. The excavator's bucket had removed some bone prior to the identification of the grave.
- 3.3.7 Skeletal evidence suggested the individual to be a woman aged between 40-55 years of age. The presence of 15 coffin nails indicated that the inhumation had originally been coffined. Pathological lesions indicated that the individual had suffered from osteoarthritis and had experienced an infected fracture of the right leg (well-healed at the time of death) sometime during her life-time.
- 3.3.8 A group of 17 iron hobnails was recovered in association with the bones of the right foot indicating a Romano-British date of the grave.

4 FINDS

- 4.1.1 Small quantities of Romano-British pottery, struck flint and animal as well as human bone were recovered from the pit features. The human bone assemblage from pit [113] is discussed in Section 5, below.
- 4.1.2 A total of three pieces of struck flint (two waste flakes and one core) were recovered from (106) in pit [105].
- 4.1.3 Two pieces of struck flint (flakes) were recovered from the upper fill (108) in pit [107].
- 4.1.4 One struck flint (flake) was recovered as well as one small abraded sherd of reduced Romano-British Black Burnished Ware (BB1) and one large shoulder sherd of oxidised BB1 from (111) within pit [110]. One struck flint (flake) and three small sherds of Romano-British BB1 pot (all from the same vessel) were recovered from deposit (112) in the same pit.
- 4.1.5 Five fragments of animal bone and 13 small sherds of Romano-British BB1 pot (all from the same vessel) were recovered from (115) in pit [114].

5 HUMAN BONE

Introduction

- 5.1.1 Human bone as recovered from two contexts including the *in situ* remains of a Romano-British coffined inhumation burial (104, grave [102]) and the lower fill of an undated pit (117, pit [113]).
- 5.1.2 The bone is in good condition, with only slight root erosion (Grade 0-2; McKinley (2004, fig. 6), but is heavily fragmented due to the nature of its discovery and removal (by machine), with many fresh breaks, often with no adjoining fragments.

Age and Sex

- 5.1.3 The c. 30% skeletal remains recovered from grave 102 represent those of an adult, c. 40-55 years old, most likely a female (Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994; Scheuer and Black 2000). The c. 5% of the skeleton (lower limb) recovered from pit [113] also represent those of an adult (>18 years), most likely female.
- 5.1.4 Incomplete skeletal recovery and the heavily fragmented nature of the bone made it impossible to take any measurements for indices or stature estimate calculations.

Grave [102]

- 5.1.5 Several pathological lesions were observed in the remains from grave 102. Lesions indicative of osteoarthritis were observed in the one fragmentary lumbar vertebra recovered and osteophytes (marginal new bone indicative of

age-related wear and tear) in the articular facets of the three recorded cervical vertebrae. The right fibula has a well-healed, slightly misaligned, transverse fracture in the proximal half of the shaft. The fracture is likely to have resulted from a direct blow to the side of the leg, and the broken bone would have been splinted during healing by the tibia. There was clearly some soft tissue infection associated with the trauma, indicated by the extensive lamellar new bone (healed) over much of the right fibula and right tibia shaft.

Pit [113]

- 5.1.6 It was not possible during the site works to observe if the bone from pit [113] lay *in situ* or represented redeposited remains, nor if more bone remained within the pit. Given that the bone fragments recovered represent anatomically adjacent bones, either could be the case.

6 CONCLUSIONS

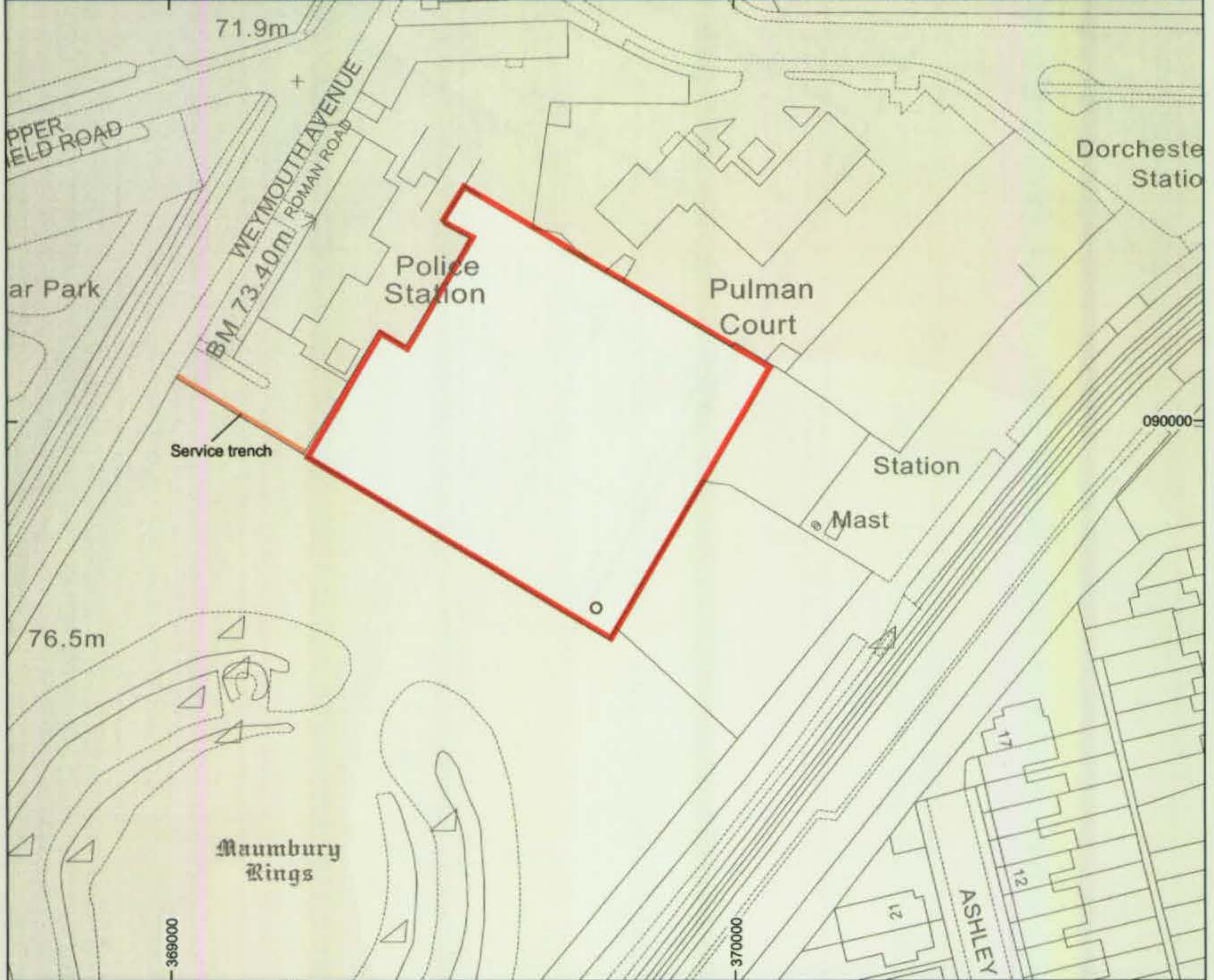
- 6.1.1 The watching brief has identified a small number of archaeological features of probable prehistoric and Romano-British date, most likely related to a site-use associated with the nearby Maumbury Rings during these periods.
- 6.1.2 The discovery of human remains in prehistoric pit [113] is inconclusive in itself, but could indicate the presence of pit burials in the area of the boundary between the Site and Maumbury Rings.
- 6.1.3 The absence of further contemporary graves suggests Romano-British burial (104) to have been an isolated interment rather than part of a cemetery. Its association with Weymouth Avenue, which follows the line of a Roman road, suggests it to be a roadside burial, a common feature of the period.

7 ARCHIVE

- 7.1.1 The project archive is stable and currently stored at the offices of Wessex Archaeology under the project code 61010. It is proposed that the archive will be deposited with Dorchester County Museum.

REFERENCES

- Buikstra, J.E. and Ubelaker, D.H., 1994, *Standards for data collection from human skeletal remains*, Arkansas Archaeological Survey Research Series 44
- McKinley, J.I., 2004, 'Compiling a skeletal inventory: disarticulated and co-mingled remains', in M. Brickley and J.I. McKinley (eds.), *Guidelines to the Standards for Recording Human Remains*, British Association for Biological Anthropology and Osteoarchaeology & Institute for Field Archaeology, 13-16
- Scheuer, L. and Black, S., 2000, *Developmental Juvenile Osteology*, Academic Press, London



- Watching Brief area
- Additional Watching Brief

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Location of area of Watching Brief

Figure 1



Watching Brief area
 Proposed Development



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Location of archaeological features seen during Watching Brief

Figure 2



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