

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

**WATCHING BRIEF:  
ROMAN THEATRE  
GORHAMBURY ESTATE  
ST ALBANS  
HERTFORDSHIRE**

NGR: TL 1344 0741

*on behalf of the Gorhambury Estate*



Jonathan R Hunn BA PhD MIFA

May 2008

ASC: 1010/GRT/2

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## Site Data

<i>ASC project code:</i>	GRT	<i>ASC Project No:</i>	1010
<i>OASIS ref:</i>		<i>Event/Accession no:</i>	
<i>County:</i>	Hertfordshire		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	Kingsbury		
<i>Civil Parish:</i>	St Michaels		
<i>NGR (to 8 figs):</i>	TL 1344 0741		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	25m x 2m and 13m x 2m		
<i>Present use:</i>	Historic monument		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	Re-grading existing pathway and new viewing platform		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	HSD 9/2/9506		
<i>Local Planning Authority:</i>	St Albans District Council		
<i>Date of fieldwork:</i>	15/4/08		
<i>Commissioned by:</i>	Neil Fraser Strutt & Parker		
<i>Client:</i>	The Gorhambury Estate C/o Strutt & Parker 34 St Peters Street St Albans Hertfordshire AL1 3NA		
<i>Contact name:</i>	Neil Fraser		

## Internal Quality Check

<i>Primary Author:</i>	Jonathan R Hunn	<i>Date:</i>	30/5/08
<i>Revisions:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	
<i>Edited/Checked By:</i>		<i>Date:</i>	

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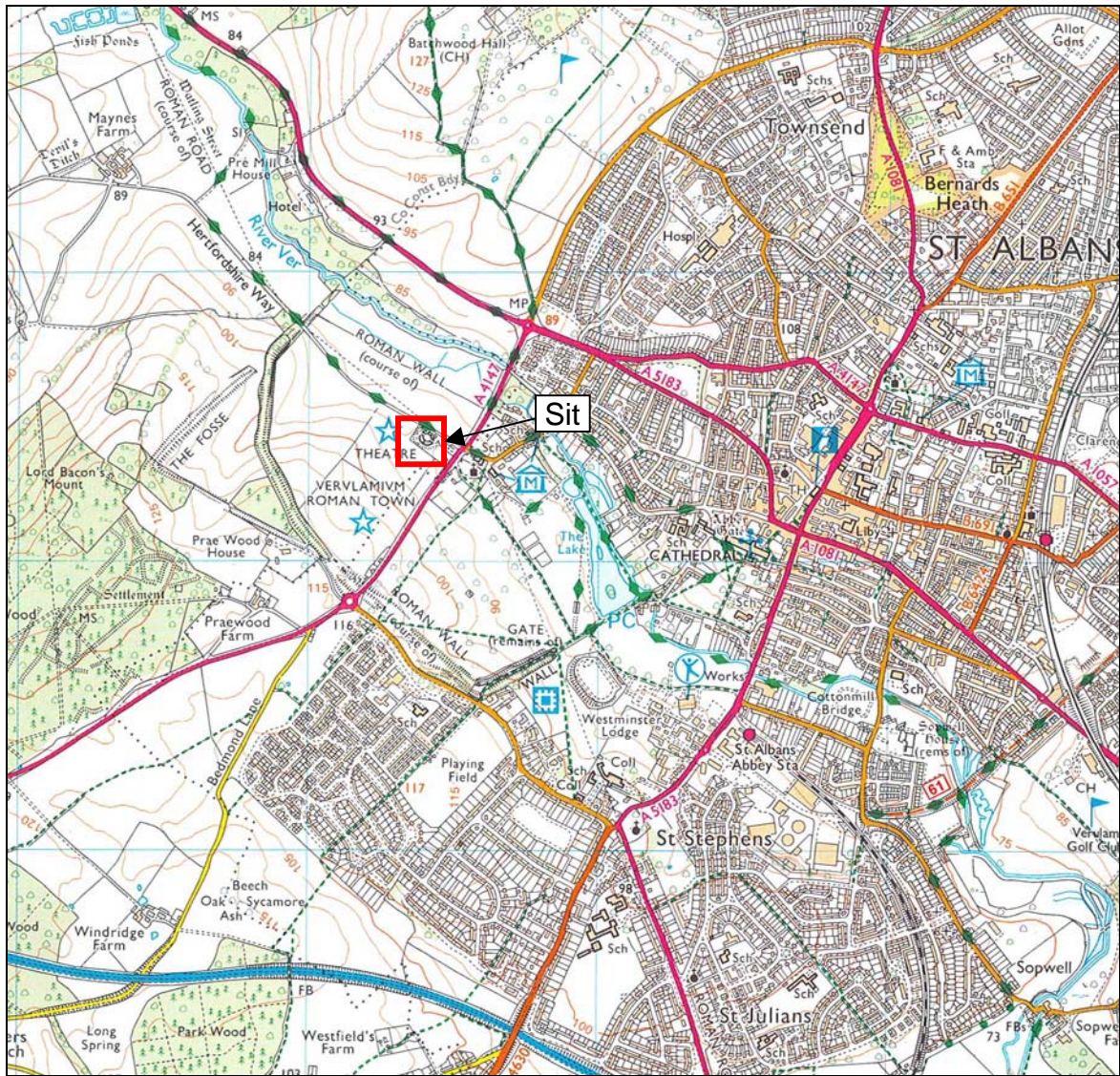
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*Cover: The Roman theatre looking east towards Kingsbury and St Michael's church*

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**Figure 1:** General location (Scale 1:25,000)

## Summary

*In April 2008 a footpath and new viewing platform were constructed on the site of the Roman theatre at Gorhambury, near St Albans, Hertfordshire. The new footpath replaced the existing access to the site and the new viewing platform was constructed over an existing hedgerow adjacent to Gorhambury lane. Due to the relative shallowness of the footpath foundations and the depth of dark soil beside the lane no obvious archaeological deposits were observed.*

### 1. Introduction

1.1 In April 2008 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out a watching brief at the Roman theatre, Gorhambury, near St Albans. The project was commissioned by Neil Fraser of Strutt & Parker, and was carried out according to a brief prepared by Deborah Priddy of *English Heritage* and a project design prepared by ASC (Barclay & Fell 2007). The relevant planning application reference is HSD 9/2/9506

#### 1.2 *Planning Background*

This watching brief was required under the terms of *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (PPG16), as a condition of planning permission for the development of the site.

#### 1.3 *Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd*

*Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) is an independent archaeological practice providing a full range of archaeological services including consultancy, field evaluation, mitigation and post-excavation studies, historic building recording and analysis. ASC is recognised as a *Registered Archaeological Organisation* by the Institute of Field Archaeologists, in recognition of its high standards and working practices.

#### 1.4 *Management*

The project was carried out under the overall direction of **Jonathan Hunn** BA PHD MIFA, an established archaeologist with extensive experience in managing archaeological projects in England. Jonathan holds a first degree in Archaeology and History from the University College of North Wales (Bangor), and a PhD from the University of Southampton (Dept of Geography). Jonathan has held managerial posts with *English Heritage*, *Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust*, *Oxford Archaeological Unit* and *Tempvs Reparatvm Ltd*, and has acted as archaeological consultant for *Hertfordshire County Council* and *English Heritage*.

#### 1.5 *The Site*

##### 1.5.1 *Location & Description*

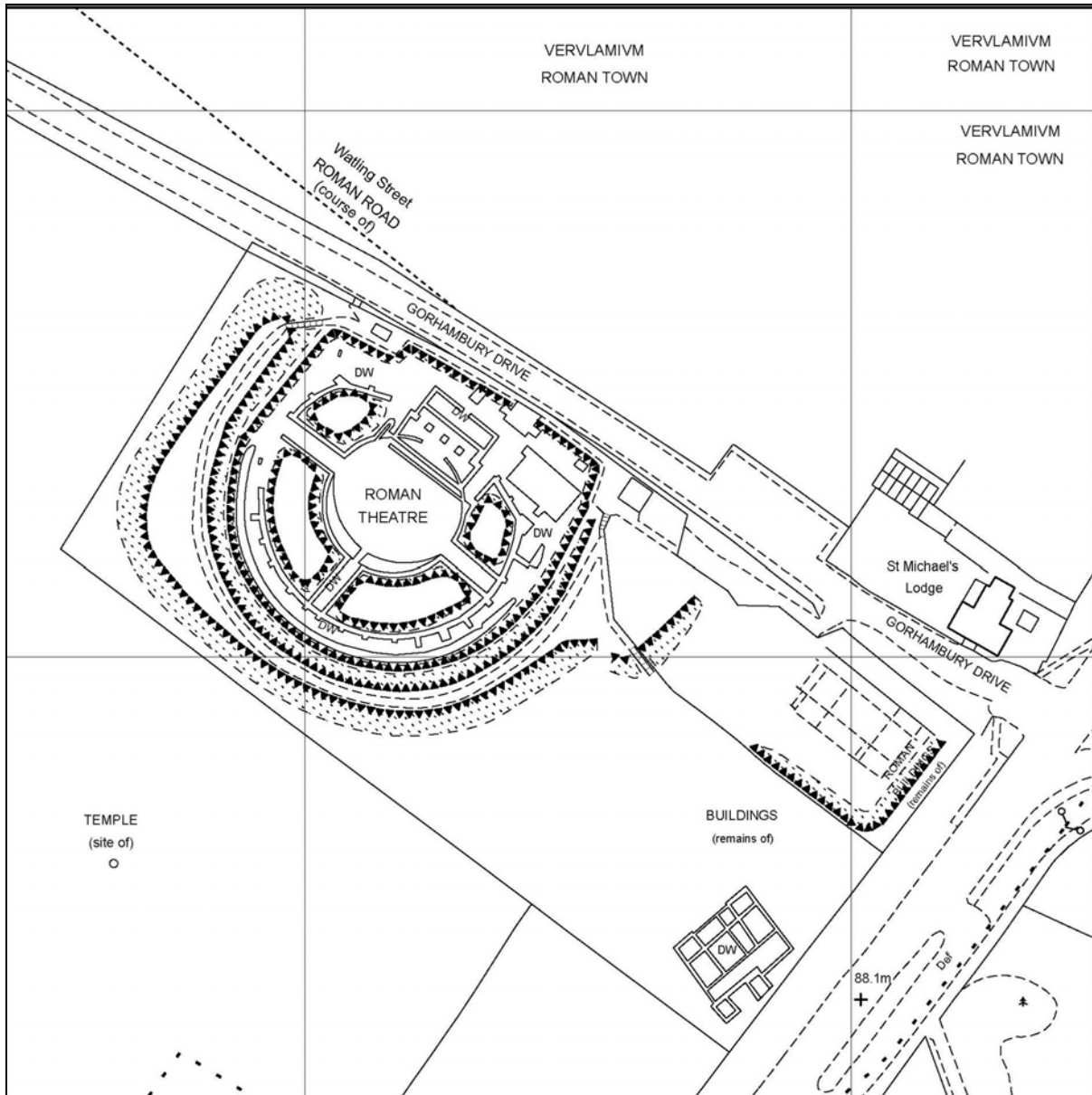
The site is situated within the former Roman town Verulamium at St Albans, Hertfordshire (Figure 1). It lies to the southwest of the city centre, within the Gorhambury Estate and is centred on Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference TL 1344 0741 (Figure 2). Access will be from the east, off the A 4147 St Albans to Hemel Hempstead road.

### 1.5.2 *Geology & Topography*

The soils of the area are of the *Marlow Association*, and are characterised as *well drained fine loamy over clayey and clayey soils. Some coarse and fine loamy over clayey soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal waterlogging.* The underlying geology comprises *plateau and river terrace drift* (Soil Survey, 1983, 581e). The site lies at an elevation of *c.95m OD*.

### 1.5.3 *Proposed Development*

The proposal is for the construction of a disabled access ramp into the theatre and a viewing platform for wheelchair users (Figure 3).



**Figure 2:** Site plan (scale 1:1250)

## 2. Aims & Methods

### 2.1 *Aims*

As described in the brief (Section 2), the aims of the watching brief were:

- To preserve, by record, any archaeological deposits revealed by the proposed works.

### 2.2 *Standards*

The work conformed to the project design, to the relevant sections of the Institute of Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000) and *Standard & Guidance Notes* (IFA 2001), to the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers East of England Region *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (ALGAO 2003), and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual*.

### 2.3 *Methods*

The work was carried out according to the brief (Section 3), which required:

- Any machine stripping will be undertaken with a toothless bucket under archaeological supervision
- Any features or deposits will be hand-cleaned and planned
- A metal detector will to be used to locate any artefacts

### 2.4 *Constraints*

There were no particular constraints on this project.



### 3. Archaeological & Historical Background

3.1 The following section provides a summary of the readily available archaeological and historical background to the development site and its environs. The site lies within an area of archaeological and historical interest, and has the potential to reveal evidence of a range of periods.

St Albans is an area of considerable archaeological and historical interest and this has recently been defined in the St Albans Archaeological Assessment (Niblett and Thompson 2005). The site has the potential to reveal evidence of a variety of periods, but the focus of interest lies in the presence of the Roman theatre HER508-9).

3.2 **Prehistoric** (before AD 43)

A variety of flint artefacts have been found in the valley of the river Ver in the St Albans area. The area was of considerable importance during the late Iron Age and a number of major sites of this period are located in the area. Late Iron Age settlement was dominated by a settlement at Prae Wood, c.1.5km southwest of the site (Wheeler & Wheeler 1936; Hunn 1980). Further settlement of this period has been found at a variety of locations, for example at Gorhambury (Neal *et al* 1990; HER 504). Further evidence has been found north of the river, notably at Folly Lane, where an important Late Iron Age high-status burial has been recorded (Niblett 1999).

3.3 **Roman** (AD43-c.450)

Following the Roman conquest there was a shift in settlement and an important Roman town, known as *Verulamium*, was laid out on the south side of the river Ver. It developed into the third largest town in Roman Britain and is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Niblett 2001; Wheeler & Wheeler 1936). Communications in the area were dominated by a major Roman road, now known as *Watling Street*, which linked *Londinium* (London) and *Verulamium* with *Durocbrivae* (Dunstable).

The earliest buildings in the town were constructed of timber, and many were destroyed during Boudiccan Revolt in AD60-61 (Frere 1972). The town was subsequently rebuilt and expanded and was later encircled by gated walls (Niblett 2001). St Alban, the first British Christian martyr, was executed in AD 209 within the town walls (Niblett 2001, 137-139).

The theatre on the site was identified by R Grove Lowe in 1847 (Niblett & Thompson, 2005, 100), who undertook sporadic excavation during the following years. The site was fully excavated by Kathleen Kenyon in 1934, who identified five main phases, between c.AD140 and the late 4<sup>th</sup> century (Kenyon 1934; Kenyon 1935).

A number of cemeteries are recorded outside the town walls, notably on King Harry Lane to the south west of the town (Stead & Rigby 1989). Further burials are recorded on the east side of the town, 500m southeast of the site (Anthony 1968).

3.5 **Saxon** (c.450-1066)

The Roman city declined after the departure of the army. Many of its buildings fell into disuse, and by the 5<sup>th</sup> century much of the population had relocated (Niblett 2001, 127-146).

The focus of settlement shifted to the north side of the river, where a new site known as *Kingsbury* developed (Niblett 2001, fig. 75). King Offa of Mercia founded an abbey dedicated to the martyred Christian St Alban and the present cathedral occupies the site of the Saxon abbey. A market was established during the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3.6 **Medieval** (1066-1500)

St Albans is mentioned in the Domesday Survey (1086) when the abbot was the principal landholder (Williams & Martin 2002). The town developed considerably during the medieval period, when settlement became focused around the abbey and the surrounding area.

### 3.7 **Post-Medieval** (1500-1900)

This period saw the demise of the abbey and the rise of a new elite to run the newly founded Corporation of St Albans. New mansions were built in the vicinity of the town at Sopwell and Gorhambury. The town continued to develop as new coaching inns sprang up to meet the needs of the growing transport trade. Benjamin Hare's map of 1634 is the first large scale plan to show the layout of the town in some detail. Although the town was never part of the canal system and its railway connections relatively late, it remained the premier settlement in the county. The last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the population double.

### 3.8 **Modern** (1900-present)

The town of St Albans grew dramatically in this century as it moved away from its agrarian dominated past to a manufacturing and service based economy. The population more than quadrupled during this century with the town expanding on its northern and eastern sides. The estates to the west of the town such as Gorhambury, Childwickbury and Batchworth helped preserve these areas from the impact of urbanisation. Kingsbury is now a suburb of St Albans with the Roman theatre lying within an important historic landscape.

## 4. Results

- 4.1 The new footpath consisted of a re-grading of the existing access route and new retaining walls. This resulted in a path with a slope of no more than 1:20. the foundations for the wall were between 0.4 and 0.5m deep below existing ground level. The path was approximately 24m in length with a width of 1.95m overall. The path itself was 1.5m wide with 0.15m thick foundation of compacted gravel blinded with clinker and with two courses of 20mm thick coated macadam finish (Plates 1 & 2).
- 4.2 During the construction of the new path it became apparent that the old path had been built to a more robust specification than anticipated. Over much of its length it was necessary to break up a substantial layer of concrete (H. Webb pers. comm.). Although the author was unable to see this in person he was assured by several witnesses that there was relatively little new intrusion into the ground immediately below the foundations for the old path. The ground beneath the concrete appeared to consist of a flinty, chalky clay. One presumes this was re-deposited material but this remains uncertain. No obvious features were identified nor any artefacts recovered. Due to a mistiming, no metal detector was used during the demolition of the old path.
- 4.3 The location of the reinforced concrete rafts for the foundations of the old kiosks are shown on Fig. 3. The most westerly one was 2100 x 1750 x 150mm and the most easterly one, nearest the entrance, was 4000 x 3900 x 200mm both 100mm below the original path surface (A.Tight pers comm.).
- 4.4 The new viewing area for wheelchair use was located on an old hedgerow boundary which lay to the north east of the Roman theatre. This boundary once lay adjacent to the old London to Holyhead road. About 13m of hedgerow was removed and a new retaining wall built (Plates 3 & 4). Very little of the ground was disturbed here as it was a question of infilling the area immediately over the actual hedge boundary. However, the foundation for the retaining wall went down some 0.5m onto a flinty clay, presumably the make up for an old Roman road. No obvious features were noted but the restrictive nature of these foundations and observation makes this assertion only probable rather than certain.

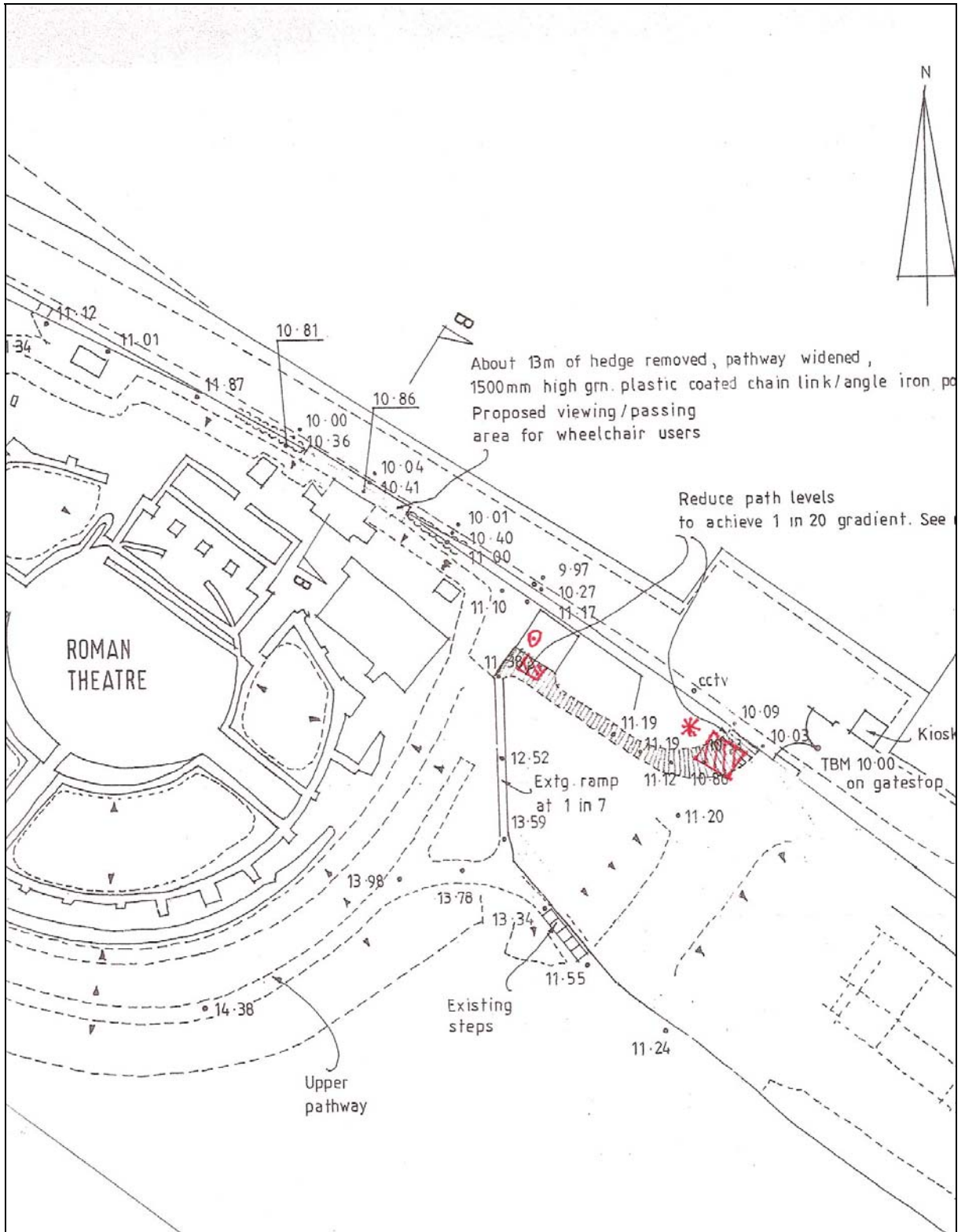


Figure 4: Architects annotated plan



**Plate 1:** View east from entrance up the slope of new footpath



**Plate 2:** View west looking down slope of new footpath



**Plate 3:** Location of new viewing terrace to north of the theatre



**Plate 4:** Looking north east to the retaining wall for the new viewing platform

## 5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Based on the author's visit to the site and discussion with several witnesses he is reasonably confident that very little evidence of any substance was exposed during this project. This was principally due to the depth of the original foundations of the old footpath. There was some slight intrusion into the old land surface to create the slope but this was relatively minor. The same also holds true for the new viewing platform which was more a question of building up the existing ground level rather than excavation. The only area that was disturbed was along the base of the new retaining wall. Again, its restrictive width and relative depth would have made it difficult to observe the ground very clearly. However, this is only probable for the ultimate responsibility for this conclusion must rest with the author.

## **6. Acknowledgements**

The evaluation was commissioned by Neil Fraser of Strutt & Parker on behalf of the Gorhambury estate for which both are thanked. The writer is grateful to Anthony Tight ( A.T. Surveys ltd) for his assistance. The project was monitored by Simon West on behalf of the local planning authority. The author wishes to thank Simon West for discussing the setting of the theatre in the wider Roman landscape. Finally, my thanks to Bob Zeepvat for editing this report.

## **7. Archive**

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Brief
2. Project Design
3. Clients site plans
4. Site Monitoring Sheets
5. List of photographs
6. B/W prints & negatives
7. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with St Albans Museum

## 8. References

### *Standards & Specifications*

- ALGAO 2003 *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England*. East Anglian Archaeology Occasional Paper 14.
- EH 1991 *The Management of Archaeological Projects*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. English Heritage (London).
- IFA 2000a Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct*.
- IFA 2000b Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual Arrangements in Field Archaeology*.
- IFA 2001 Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance documents (Desk-Based Assessments, Watching Briefs, Evaluations, Excavations, Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings, Finds)*.

### *Secondary Sources*

- Anthony I E 1968 'Excavations in Verulam Hills Field, St Albans 1963-4'. *Hertfordshire Archaeology*. **1**, 9-50
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- Kenyon K M, 1935 'The Roman Theatre at Verulamium, St Albans' *Archaeologia* **84**, 213-62
- Neal D S, Wardle A and Hunn J 1990 *Excavation of the Iron Age, Roman and Medieval Settlement at Gorhambury, St Albans*. English Heritage Archaeological Report **14**.
- Niblett R. 1999 *The Excavation of a ceremonial Site at Folly Lane, Verulamium*. Britannia Monograph Series No: **14**.
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- Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* (Harpenden).
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- Wheeler R E M & Wheeler T V 1936 *Verulamium A Belgic and Two Roman Cities*. Reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquities London.
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- Soil Survey 1983 *1:250,000 Soil Map of England and Wales, and accompanying legend* (Harpenden).

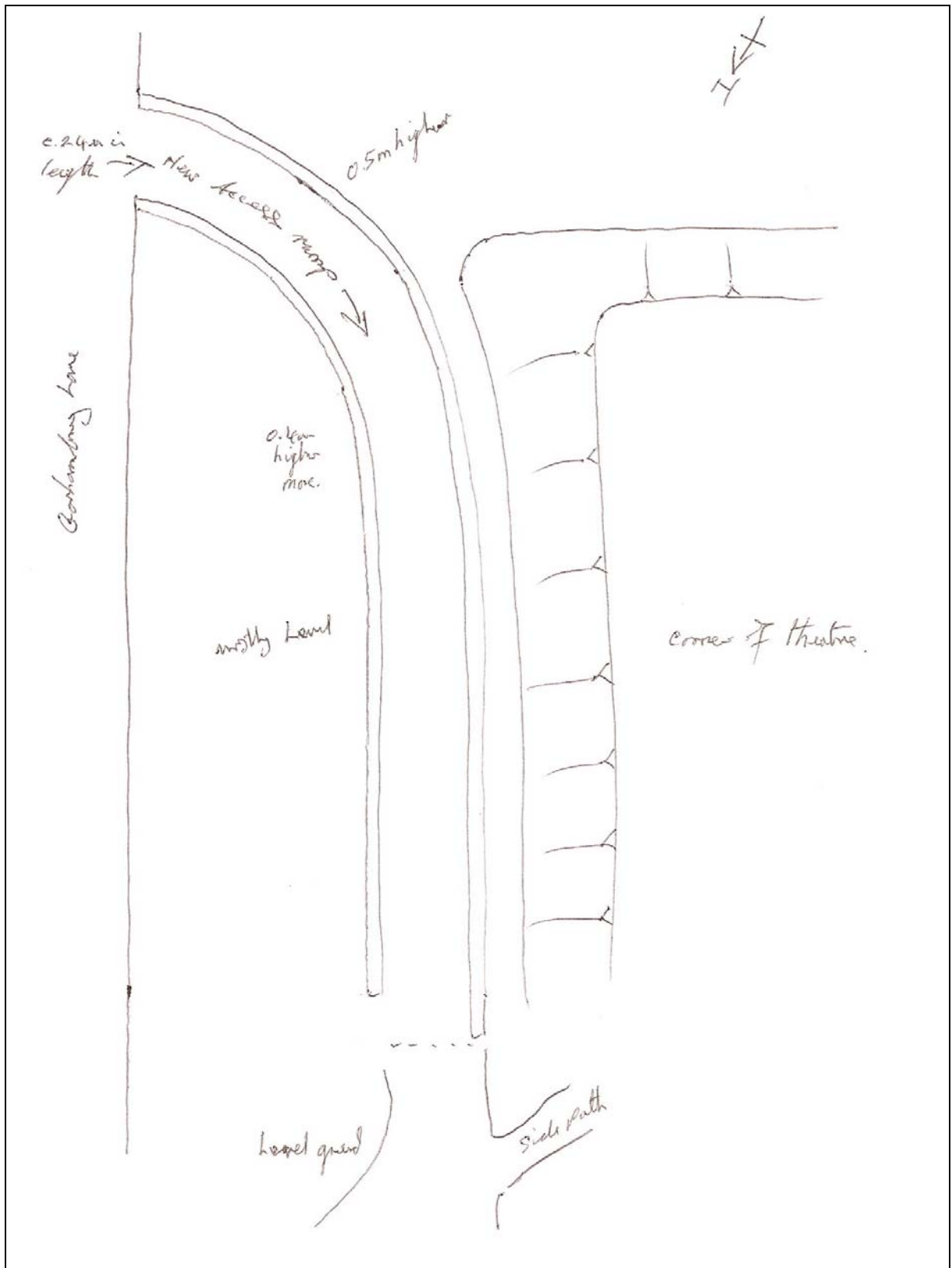


## Appendix 1: Monitoring Sheets

A.S.C. LTD		ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD MONITORING RECORD			
Project: <i>Roman Theatre, Gorhambury</i>		Project No/Code: <i>1010 1SRT</i>		Sheet: <i>1 of 1</i>	
<i>K.S. Tate</i>		Date of visit: <i>15/4/08</i>			
Client/Developer <i>Gorhambury Estate</i>					
Contact: <i>A. T.ight</i>			Phone:		
Duration of Visit (inc. travel):		Start: <i>3.00pm</i>		Finish: <i>5.35pm</i>	
Completed by:					
Development Type:					
Footings	Services	Roads	Levelling	Quarrying	Pipelines
					Other (specify): <i>Footpath</i>
Site & weather conditions: <i>Dry and Sunny.</i>					
Observations: <i>New access from Gorhambury Lane (c.15m long x 1.95m wide) edged with bricks. At a distance of 6m from entrance the wall is a recess of 0.5m deep on its South side (to level with the terrace surface of the new footpath. The ground had been re-instated so no valid observation possible. However intrusion likely since. Verbal confirmation of this (cavity probe). The make up of the previous path was much deeper than the builder's thought - had to break up the concrete) H. Webb pers.com.</i>					
<p><i>N.B. Semi-circular down coping-stone (0.7m wide x 0.26m thick) at NE corner of 'Dressing room' - possibly the same as that found near 'Haynes Farm'?</i></p>					
Comments: <i>Impact of rabbits noted on the theatre walls, particularly on the western side.</i>					

For sketch plan, use separate sheet

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## Appendix 2: List of Photographs

SITE NAME:			SITE NO/CODE:
Shot	B&W	Digital	Subject
1	√	4374	View east of new footpath
2		4375	View west of new footpath
3		4376	View west showing location of new viewing platform
4		4377	View east of theatre
5		4378	Detail of rabbit damage
6		4379	View North of theatre with viewing platform beyond
7		4380	View north showing sloping entrance
8		4383	View east of footpath in relation to adjacent bank
9		4384	Looking east of new retaining wall beside Gorhambury lane
10			

### Appendix 3: ASC OASIS Form

PROJECT DETAILS			
Project Name:	Roman theatre, Gorhambury		
Short Description:	<i>In April 2008 a footpath and new viewing platform were constructed on the site of the Roman theatre at Gorhambury, near St Albans, Hertfordshire. The new footpath replaced the existing access to the site and the new viewing platform was constructed over an existing hedgerow adjacent to Gorhambury lane. Due to the relative shallowness of the footpath foundations and the depth of dark soil beside the lane no obvious archaeological deposits were observed.</i>		
Project Type: (indicate all that apply)	Watching Brief		
Site status: (eg. none, SAM, Listed)	SAM	Previous work: (eg. SMR refs)	HER 508-9
Current land use:	Archaeological monument	Future work: (yes / no / unknown)	unknown
Monument type:	Theatre	Monument period:	Roman
Significant finds: (artefact type & period)	none		
PROJECT LOCATION			
County:	Hertfordshire	OS reference: (8 figs min)	TL 1344 0741
District:	St Albans	Parish:	St Michaels
Site address: (with postcode if known)	Same as title		
Study area: (sq. m. or ha)	80 sq. m	Height OD: (metres)	95m
PROJECT CREATORS			
Organisation:	Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd		
Project brief originator:	English Heritage	Project design originator:	ASC Ltd
Project Manager:	Hunn, J.R	Director/Supervisor:	Hunn J.R
Sponsor / funding body:	Gorhambury Estate		
PROJECT DATE			
Start date:	April 10th	End date:	April 15th
PROJECT ARCHIVES			
	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg. pottery, animal bone, files/sheets)	
Physical:	St Albans Museum	None	
Paper:	yes	none	
Digital:	yes	none	
BIBLIOGRAPHY (Journal/monograph, published or forthcoming, or unpublished client report)			
Title:	<b>WATCHING BRIEF:ROMAN THEATRE,GORHAMBURY ESTATE, ST ALBANS, HERTS</b>		
Serial title & volume:	ASC Ltd Report ref. 1010/GRT		
Author(s):	Jonathan R. Hunn		

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