

Maumbury Rings

The Roman Amphitheatre

When the Romans built their new town of Durnovaria (Dorchester) in around 60 AD, rather than build an entirely new amphitheatre, they re-modelled the prehistoric henge.

They dug out and flattened the inside of the ring to create an arena, which was floored with rammed chalk and sand. The arena is one of the largest in Britain – but among the smallest in the Roman empire.

The extra chalk and soil was used to raise the banks to about the height they are today. There may have been wooden seating built into the sides and there is evidence of a wooden safety fence around the arena. Behind the safety fence was a service corridor.

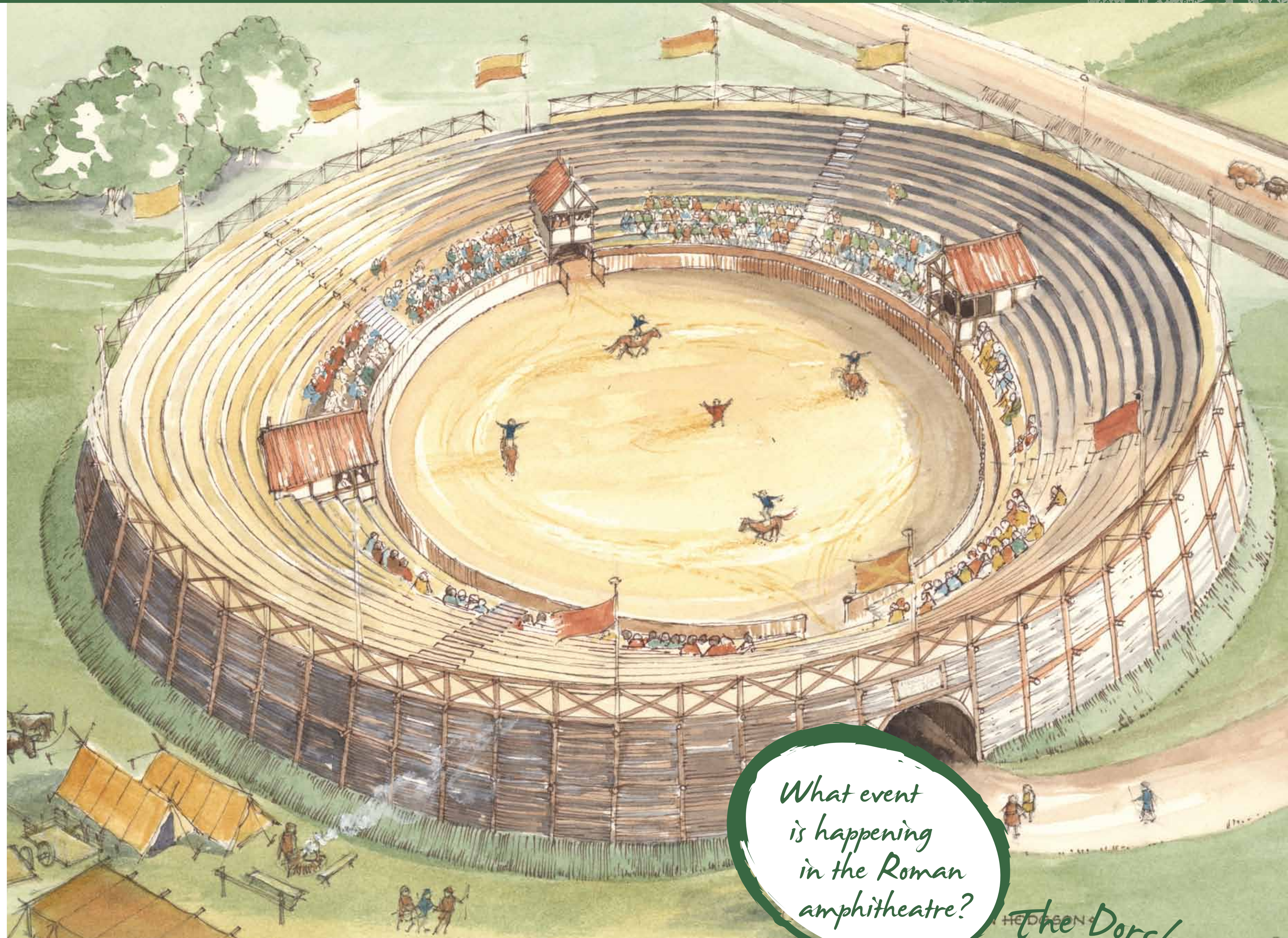
The Romans also built new entrances and, on the east, west and southern sides, they built small recesses into the banks. It is not known what these were for – perhaps pens or cages, or small rooms with shrines or religious statues. It is possible that stands – like theatre boxes – were constructed above these small rooms.

Roman Shows

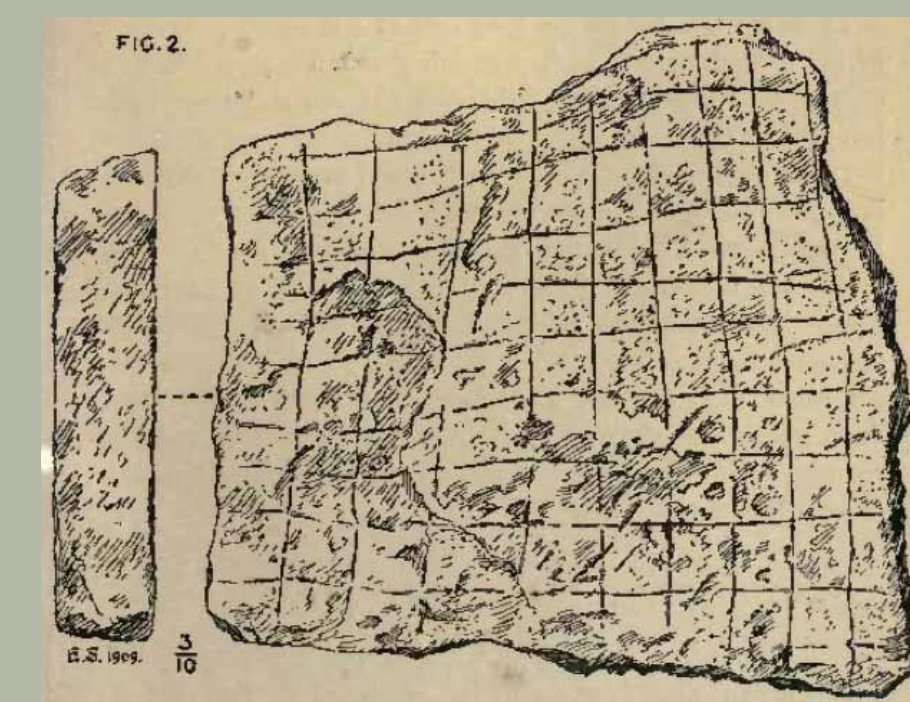
It is likely that the amphitheatre was built by the Second Legion Augusta of the Roman army, when they established a base here in Dorchester. One possible site for the Roman barracks is across the road at the Market site.

The amphitheatre would have been used for practice and demonstrations of army skills. No strong evidence of gladiators has been found, but there were probably circuses, bull fights and wild beast shows. Wolves, bears and wild boar were present in Britain at this time and may have been captured for shows.

The use of Maumbury Rings transferred from the army to the townspeople, but it gradually fell out of regular use.



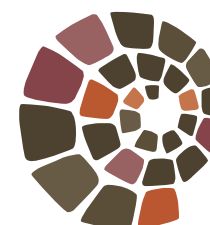
The Roman amphitheatre at Arles, France, where bullfighting still takes place. This was built of stone, unlike Maumbury Rings. The Roman Emperor Caligula is said to have been the first to introduce cushions to soften the stone seating in Rome!



A Roman draught-board found here.



DORCHESTER
HERITAGE
COMMITTEE



DORSET
COUNTY
MUSEUM

The Dorchester
Dormouse trail

