

Thanet Archaeological Landscapes Mapping Project



Project Newsletter No.3 - August 2024

Issue three of the Thanet Archaeological Landscape Mapping project newsletter

Welcome to the third Thanet Archaeological Landscape Mapping Project Newsletter, where we provide details about the key stages of the work, updates on the progress that's been made and information about ways to get involved. The first issue of the newsletter also provided some general background to the project including the reasons why we are undertaking the work and a summary of our main aims and objectives. If you missed it, all earlier versions of the newsletter are available on the project page of the Kent County Council website:

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/history-and-heritage/thanet-archaeological-landscape-mapping-project>

The data enhancement work

The first major stage is the data work. During this phase of the project our aim is to add to and enhance the information held by the Kent Historic Environment Record (HER) and its associated geographical information system (GIS). This is so that the data can be more effectively used to underpin the later stages of the project – principally the archaeological characterisation and archaeological strategy.

We have made steady progress across the district and have so far enhanced all the archaeological data in a band across the southern portion of the district (the priority area). Alongside the very largescale projects such as the East Kent Access road, which were discussed in the previous newsletter, this work has also improved the depiction and added extra detail to the HER records for some very interesting and, if not nationally, certainly regionally important sites. These include the important prehistoric sites at Cliffsend Farm and Chalk Hill.

Cliffsend Farm

Cliffsend Farm, which is located in an area overlooking Pegwell Bay at the southern edge of the Isle of Thanet, was investigated in 2004-2005 by Wessex Archaeology ahead of the redevelopment of the site for housing. Prior to this investigation, no archaeological features, finds or deposits had been revealed at this location but the Heritage Conservation team at Kent County Council knew features were apparent in high densities in the fields surrounding the site so put an archaeological planning condition on the proposed development. The resulting excavation revealed nearly 500 features spanning the Early Bronze Age through to the Anglo Saxon period



Cliffsend Farm - example of one of the many interesting Inhumation burials that were uncovered

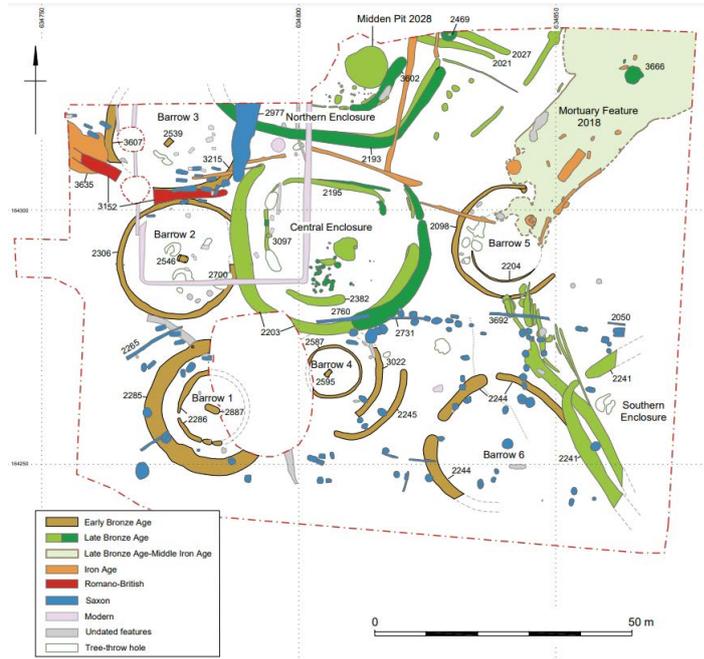
The early Bronze Age features included six closely clustered barrows which are interesting in their own right, but following a hiatus of activity in the middle Bronze Age, the site was used for a more complex series of mortuary and ceremonial purposes.



Activity associated with a group of three enclosures and a complex mortuary feature spans the end of the 11th century (Late Bronze Age) right through to the 3rd/4th centuries BC (Middle Iron Age). The mortuary feature is of particular interest as the soil conditions had led to the preservations of an extraordinary series of human remains including both complete in situ burials, placed groups of articulated bones, as well as disarticulated remains and bone fragments. These were in some examples accompanied by complete or near-complete carcasses of animals (lambs, horse, cattle), and placed artefacts. The long period of use of this location for burial is very interesting as is the fact that a number of different mortuary rites appear to have been observed. These included the use of communal and individual graves, human and probably animal sacrifice, exhumation with redeposition of partially articulated body parts, and curation of individual skeletal elements. Further interesting discoveries were made during the post excavation analysis of the human remains. Isotope analysis, which studies the ratio of different isotopes of a particular element to determine things like the date, diet, and country of origin/migration patterns of people and artefacts, was conducted on the teeth from 26 individuals discovered at the Cliffsend site. This revealed that alongside the Kentish locals, the remains included two groups of immigrants from 'Scandinavia' and the west Mediterranean/Iberian area respectively. This distance highlights the importance of the site and the longevity of its use shows its significance endures over many centuries.

Following the Early to Middle Iron Age, there is only a small amount of activity evidenced by the archaeology until the Anglo Saxon period, where, yet again, the site is used for mortuary and possibly ceremonial purposes. An Anglo-Saxon cemetery was established on the site, with an assemblage of grave goods that included brooches, beads, a pin and weapons. An area of intensive pitting was also uncovered and dated to this period, some of these pits contained very large assemblages of marine shells. It is possible that these are the remains of a processing site but one potential alternative interpretation is that this may represent an area that was used for ceremonial

feasting. Overall it is clear that this part of the district held great significance to many people over a very long period of time.



Plan of all features discovered at the Cliffsend Farm site



Photograph of the Cliffsend Farm mortuary feature under excavation



Chalk Hill

Less than a kilometre to the east of Cliffsend Farm, at Chalk Hill, was another important and interesting site. The area was investigated ahead of road construction (the A253 – Ramsgate Harbour Approach Road), with the first phase of archaeological excavation beginning in 1997. A wide range of archaeological features were recorded including Early Bronze Age inhumations that were associated with very nice Beaker vessels, as well as evidence for Anglo Saxon settlement in the form of sunken featured buildings. The earliest and most significant features recorded on the site were however, dated to the early Neolithic period (roughly 3700-3600 cal BC). They took the form of three concentric arcs of intercutting pit clusters which produced very rich assemblages of pottery, flintwork, animal bone and other material. The overall morphology is reminiscent of a ‘causewayed enclosure’ which are some of the earliest known examples of the enclosure of open space, contemporary with the construction of longhouses and ceremonial or ritual monuments including cursus monuments and long barrows.



Bottom left:
Chalk Hill site
post HER
Processing

Top right:
Chalk Hill
Neolithic
features
during
excavation

Overall, this site is of interest for many reasons; the feature itself is of interest as Causewayed enclosures are a relatively rare and this is only one of a few known examples from Kent, its early date is also worthy of note. It is its form that is particularly interesting however, the pit clusters which each formed a segment of the enclosure, appeared to have resulted from repeated pit digging in the same location over an extended period. This differs from the usual form of planned ‘causeways’ between ditch segments at other causewayed enclosure sites. The finds are also interesting as much of the material appeared to have been deliberately placed in the pits rather than representing casual disposal of refuse, perhaps therefore giving us some hint as to what was going on within the enclosed area. The site therefore contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the diverse character of monumental architecture in the early Neolithic of the British Isles.

Both of these fascinating sites are explored in high quality and detailed monographs. If you would like to find out more about the features and finds which were uncovered the books are available to download for free via these links:

<https://wessexarchaeologylibrary.org/plugins/-books/4/>

<https://www.sidestone.com/books/chalk-hill>



Outreach events

Alongside our work on the data, we have also been invited to talk about the project at a few public events. These talks have introduced the project and included our reasons why its is needed as well as a discussion of our main aims and objectives. So far we have presented at Birchington Heritage Trust and Westgate Historical Society events as well a brief introduction to the project at the Ramsgate Tunnels Local History Event. We hope to be able to visit more interested people and groups as the project continues, not only because we would like to share what we are doing but also because we know that many people in Thanet will have information that we lack, and we want to find out what you know. If you and/or your organisation or society would like to host a public talk about the project, or if you would like more information, please get in touch via email:

Victoria.hosegood@kent.gov.uk or
heritage.conservation@kent.gov.uk



Aerial Photographs and Lidar data processing

Over the last few months Historic England's Aerial Survey Team has also continued their work to identify, map and record archaeological features from aerial photographs and visualisations of lidar data across Thanet. They have been progressing westwards beyond the end of the Isle of Thanet into the Wade and Chislet Marshes. This work has allowed them to record the cropmarks of settlements and burial sites from all periods from later prehistory through to the medieval period, often layered one on top of the other in the same field.

These cropmarks are confined within the coastal extents of the former Isle of Thanet before the silting up of the Wantsum Channel in the medieval period. This relationship is particularly clear between Birchington and St Nicholas at Wade where the relic coastline of the former inlet of the Brooksend Stream is clearly picked out by the cropmark traces of probable medieval settlement enclosures.



Extract from the AIM team mapping showing the large number of cropmarks recorded in the area around Great Brooksend Farm



Top right: Presentation at Westgate Heritage Centre Event (at Christ Church United Reformed Church, Westgate Bay Avenue)

Bottom Right: Ramsgate Tunnels open day



Also visible are the cropmark traces of numerous Bronze Age round barrows which when extant would have been clearly visible when approaching Thanet by boat from the mainland. This protected inlet was also the siting of a Roman villa west of Little Brooksend Farm. To the north of this area some more modern features have also been revealed. These include traces of WW2 anti-invasion defences including barbed wire entanglements (in the purple on the image below) and anti-glider ditches which were recorded on the coast at Plumbpudding Island.



Extract from the AIM team mapping showing WW2 anti invasion defences at Plumbpudding Island

Recent archaeological work carried out in the district

Archaeologists have been out and about in many parts of Thanet in the first part of the year, undertaking geophysical surveys, trial trenching and investigating new sites. The large-scale investigations at Manston Green, Ramsgate continued on new phases of the housing and easements for pipes and electrical cable diversions. Significant discoveries by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust to the west of Haine Road found a cluster of medieval sunken buildings with well preserved oven bases. In Hartsdown Road, Margate work in advance of housing development found an unanticipated area of Saxon settlement with a number of sunken buildings. Other remains on the site included large Iron Age granary pits that had been repurposed as burial pits. Sunken buildings continued to crop up elsewhere on Thanet with a number of well preserved Iron Age and Roman examples excavated by Kent Archaeological projects at New Haine Road and a Saxon example at Reading Street, Broadstairs by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust.

Remains of Thanet's wartime past have also been recorded on recent sites. At Manston Road, Manston, the Kent Archaeological Projects team are investigating the remains of Second World War practice trenches. The site lies immediately adjacent to a sunken hangar that was constructed at RAF Manston in 1918. During the Second World War the abandoned hangar and its surroundings were used for training of troops stationed at the airfield. This is clearly shown on an aerial photograph taken in 1946.



Extract from 1946 aerial photograph above RAF Manston



The crenelated trenches shown on the aerial photograph (overleaf) have been picked up as cropmarks and on geophysical surveys. Stripping of part of the site has revealed the trenches in more detail. allowing the Recent investigations have examined these in more detail revealing information on the training exercises that took place there. Remains of barbed wire entanglements, cartridge cases and fragments of mills grenades suggest that part of the trenches were used as a grenade range. At Manston Green the remains of a demolished pillbox has been uncovered the second found on the site. These were positioned to defend approaches to RAF Manston. The photograph shows traces of the original concrete structure which was probably encased in a brick skin. The entrance and other internal features can also be seen in the surviving slab.



Conjoined WWII trenches exposed in excavations



View of the Excavation at Manston from above



WWII trench section



WWII Brass Cartridge rim (images courtesy of Kent Archaeological Projects)



Concrete remains of a demolished WWII pillbox

