

Thanet Archaeological Landscapes Mapping Project



Project Newsletter No.1 - October 2023

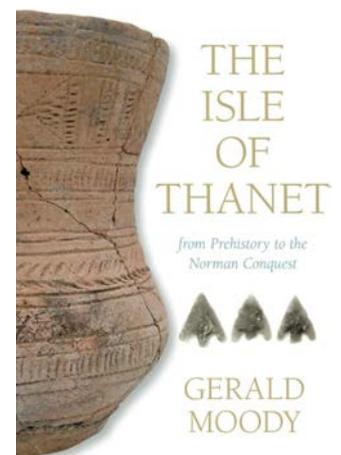
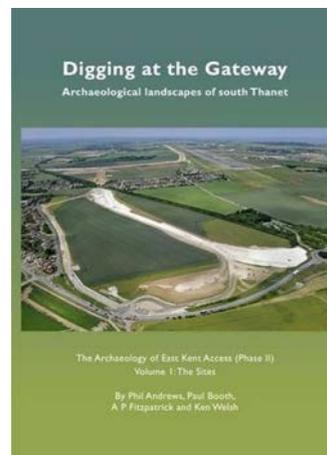
Welcome to Newsletter 1 of the Thanet Archaeological Landscapes Mapping Project

Every 3 months we will issue a new Newsletter that will provide updates on the project's progress, details about the key steps and information about how you can get involved. In this initial newsletter we have included a bit of extra information about the background to the project - the reasons why we are carrying out the work, as well as a general summary of our aims and objectives.

Introduction - background and reasons for the project

Thanet has long been recognised as an area of outstanding archaeological potential, with nationally and internationally important sites, particularly for the later prehistoric to Medieval period. The archaeology of Thanet has a distinct character and, due to the district's role as a gateway region, it is central to our understanding of the links between England and continental Europe through time. Some of the earliest stories in the nation's history played out in or close to the Isle of Thanet, e.g., the arrival of the Romans, Anglo-Saxons and Christianity. The information that we have about Thanet's rich heritage comes from a long history of archaeological investigation in the district. Examples of early investigations include the excavation of an Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Ozengell between 1845 and 1850 and the barrows at Hackendown Banks which were investigated in 1743 and then again in 1865. This district has also been the scene of some very large-scale developer led archaeological investigations. Some examples include, Thanet Way 7A, East Kent Access Road, Thanet Earth,

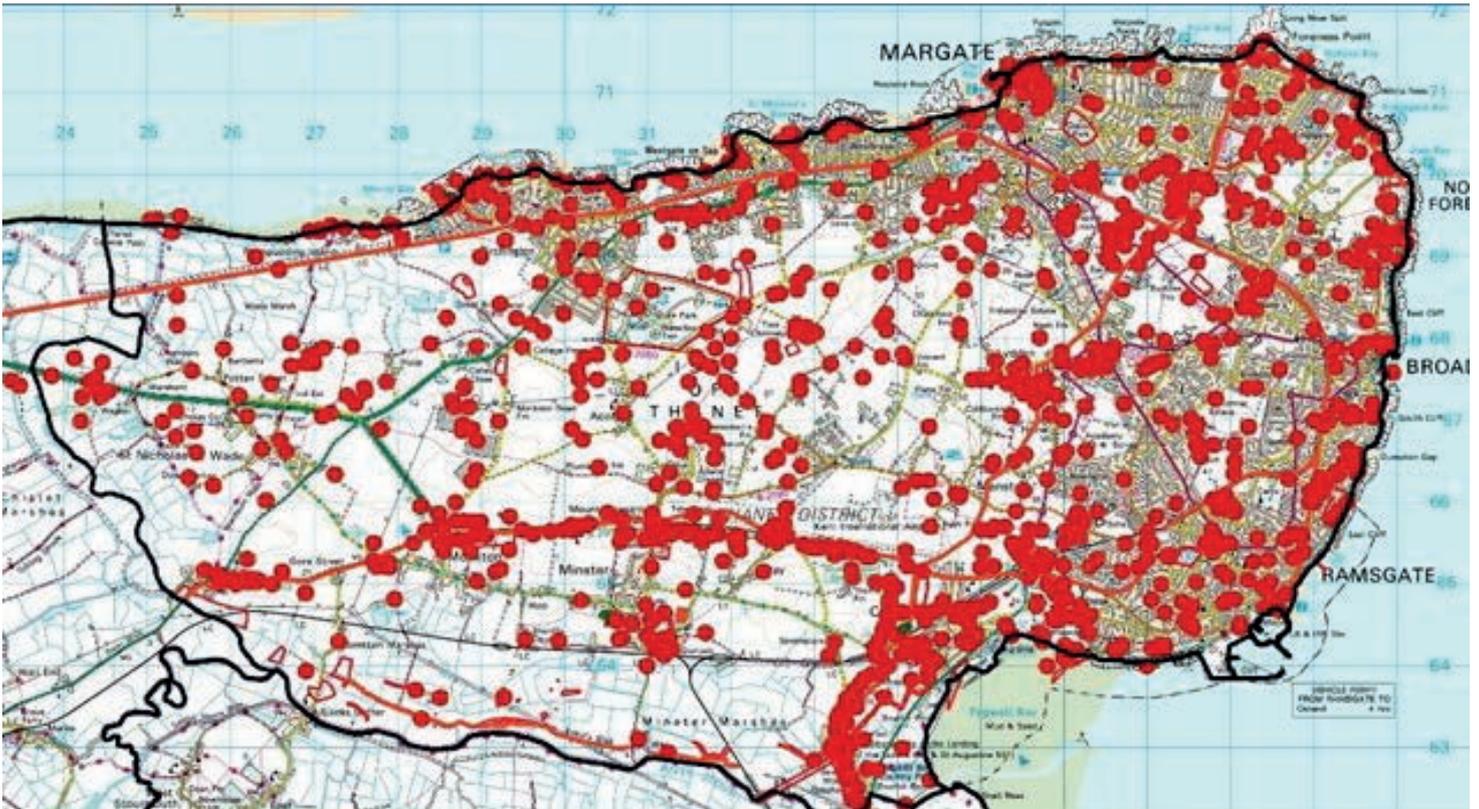
Harbour Approach Road and Westwood Cross. Each of these (alongside many others) has produced a huge amount of raw archaeological data. Some interesting and informative publications about the district's heritage have been produced (a good example is the *Isle of Thanet, from Prehistory to the Norman Conquest* by Gerald Moody) and results of many archaeological investigations are discussed in detailed monographs (examples include: *Digging at the Gateway, Archaeological Landscapes of South Thanet*, *The Archaeology of East Kent Access (Phase II)* produced in 2015 as a joint venture by Oxford Wessex Archaeology and Farming, Everyday Life and Ritual, 6000 years of *Archaeology at Thanet Earth* produced by Canterbury Archaeological Trust this year).



In addition to these excavated sites, there are lots of well-preserved features located in areas that have not been investigated. Our knowledge of these comes from the large volume of very clear cropmarks that are visible on the aerial photographs of the district. Often these provide evidence for large, complex and likely multi-period sites and in some cases the cropmark evidence has led sites being protected as scheduled monuments.



Kent HER Mapping for Thanet



Despite all this data, the area lacks recent detailed synthesis, and an understanding of the archaeological landscape is concentrated in too few people. There are few resources for developers, planners and archaeologists to draw on. The raw data is also not easily available to researchers/archaeologists. Because of this, baseline studies of the archaeology and heritage that are prepared ahead of development often fail to recognise the significance of the archaeology in Thanet and the potential of the development site.

This is a particular problem because Thanet is the scene of significant development growth, some of which is in open areas of the district in which so many well-preserved archaeological sites lie.

The Project aims

With the above in mind, in 2023 Historic England awarded Kent County Council a grant to carry out the Thanet Archaeological Landscapes Mapping Project, working in partnership with Thanet District Council and

the Trust for Thanet Archaeology. The project will have several outputs which will improve our understanding and management of the archaeology of Thanet.

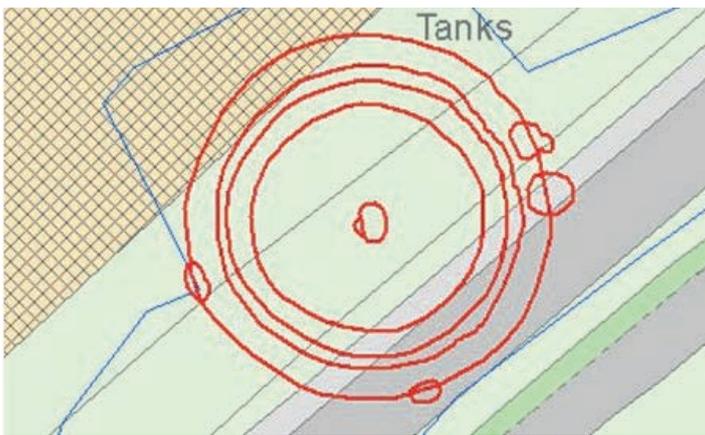
Improved Historic Environment Record information

The Kent Historic Environment Record (HER) is a large database of heritage sites linked to a Geographic Information System (GIS) or mapping system. It includes archaeological sites and finds, as well as information about historic buildings and historic landscape features. It has been maintained by Kent County Council since the late 1980s and has over 90,000 records, more than 6,000 of which are in Thanet. These records are accessed by a variety of users including those working in planning and development control and professional archaeologists. The HER is also a public resource that is used by private individuals carrying out research or members of the public who are interested in the heritage of their local area.

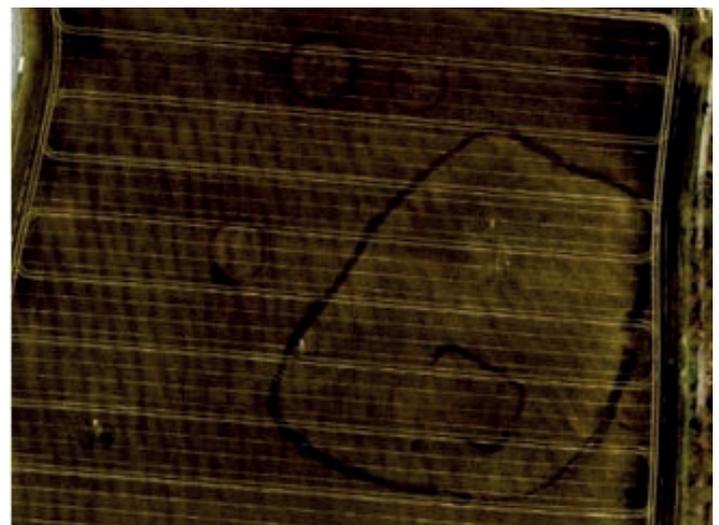
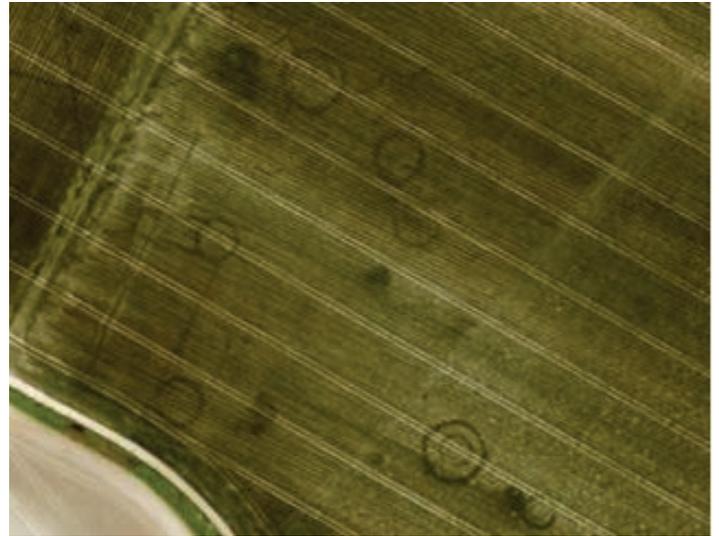


For the most part, the HER provides a relatively short and simple summary of the available information, and the majority of sites are represented on the map as points. Some of the associated geographical Information was obtained by inaccurate and out of date methods. To remedy these issues and increase the usefulness of the information, this project will include an upgrade of the HER data for Thanet. This upgrade will add detail to the summarised records and improve their spatial accuracy. It will also add detail (polygonise) to many records that are currently represented in the HER's mapping system by points so they more accurately and clearly correspond to the known or presumed archaeological features. In addition, extra information from sources, including reports awaiting entry from recent archaeological investigations as well as periodicals, books, archive materials and old maps will be added.

This information will improve the interpretation of the cropmarks, and their spatial representation (greater location accuracy and turning points into polygons), as well as adding previously unrecorded sites.



Example of a polygonised Monument Record (above) and the same feature prior excavation (below)



Examples of features visible as cropmarks in thanet



Historic England's Aerial Investigation and Mapping team is also involved in this project and as part of the HER improvement work, they will add information to the HER from the wealth of available cropmark evidence.



An Archaeological Characterisation

The improved HER and GIS data for Thanet will be used alongside information from other sources to produce an archaeological characterisation of the district. This characterisation will aim to make sense of all the detail and try to understand the district as a whole rather than as a collection of individual sites or buildings. It will tell the story of the development of Thanet and allow an understanding of the part played in that story by the different areas and communities across the district. It will also identify gaps in our current knowledge and will, therefore, help us identify new research questions.

This type of work has been applied to a wide range of contexts and at different scales in the form of historic landscape characterisation, historic seascape characterisation, historic area assessments and in built environment and urban characterisations. This project will, however, be the first to produce an archaeological characterisation at this scale and the finer details of the methodology and the exact form of the characterisation will be worked out as the project progresses. It is hoped that it will set a precedent for future work on archaeological characterisations elsewhere in the country.

Tools for development management

A key goal of the project is to assist the management of the archaeological resource during development, so that it may be better protected and/or enjoyed in future. This will be achieved by developing an archaeological strategy that can underpin decision-making in the district, and which is intended to be adopted into policy by Thanet District Council.

As part of this, we will use the data from the enhanced HER, the GIS datasets and the archaeological characterisation, to define a series of archaeological character zones across the whole district. Each character zone will have a map and an associated document that will include a description of the archaeological character and an assessment of the likely potential of the area to reveal archaeological features.

These will provide developers, planners and the public with up-front information about the potential impact of development in the Zones.



**East Kent Access route
under investigation**

Work completed so far

Work on the initial stages of the project began in the spring and much of what has been completed so far has involved setting up methods and systems for working on the project. We have made contact with key stake-holders and advertised the project via a press release and web page.





Thanet Earth Monument data before (left) and after (right) processing in the GIS

We have also begun updating the HER data. We have used the recently published results of the archaeological investigation at Thanet Earth as a trial for our methods and the results are a very large improvement in the quality of the data in this area. Before this project, the data in the HER for this vast and complex site included just a few Monument records represented as points in the associated mapping. Our work has transformed the recorded features into a total of 60 new Monument records, each containing a much higher level of detail and with an accurately located polygon in the associated mapping. We are also defining project standards for capturing Event data (information about excavations and other research) and are gathering new sources of information.

How To get involved

As the project continues, we would very much like to talk to interested people and groups about what we are doing. We know that many people in Thanet will have information that we lack, and we want to find out what you know. Similarly, we want to tell as many people as we can about what we are doing. To help this, we will be writing to all those local groups of which we are aware, to offer them evening talks or meetings to talk to us.

As the project continues, we will make drafts of the documents that we produce available on the website so that people can offer their thoughts and advice. In the second half of the project, we will also prepare and conduct archaeological walks so that people can learn more about the fascinating archaeology of Thanet.

All events, talks and walks will be advertised on the web page where you will also see the project Newsletters.

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



Historic England

