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INVESTIGATIONS AND EXCAVATIONS DURING THE YEAR

REPORTS FROM LOCAL SECRETARIES AND GROUPS

The Trust for Thanet Archaeology: Activities during 1988-89. Mr L. Jay reports:

In its first year, the newly formed Trust for Thanet Archaeology, has been engaged in a number of evaluations and excavations in advance of development. The following is a summary of Trust activities.

A Barrow and Beaker Burial at Manston, Ramsgate

Archaeological survey in advance of a possible re-routing of part of the A253 revealed a small ploughed-off barrow of oval plan. An offset burial pit contained a crouched burial, accompanied by a long-necked beaker, a jet button and a plano-convex flint knife. Publication of this interesting site awaits the result of a radio-carbon dating experiment with a sample of the skeletal material.

Land adjacent to Bradstowe School, Dumpton Park Drive, Broadstairs

An evaluation was carried out at the behest of the owners and developers, Messrs. G.E. Bowra Group Ltd., on land once part of the grounds of Bradstowe School. The evaluation was necessary because of the known proximity of important archaeological sites. A barrow group had been discovered during the building of a driveway in the grounds of Valetta House (later Bradstowe School) in 1910. Among the barrows were Anglo-Saxon (Jutish) graves dating from c. A.D. 650, which on excavation produced a variety of rich grave goods.¹ Later work carried out in 1970-71 indicated that the cemetery might well encroach on the northern boundary of the

¹ H. Hurd, *Note on archaeological Discoveries at Broadstairs*. Pamphlet published by the Broadstairs and St. Peter's Archaeological Society, 1911.

present development. The area in question is situated on the northern rise of a shallow valley running in a westerly direction from the sea at Dumpton Gap. Both the northern and southern slopes of this valley abound in archaeological remains ranging in date from the Neolithic to Saxon times.

As past excavations had indicated the possible presence of Jutish graves near the northern boundary of the development and taking account of the east-west alignment of these cemeteries, the evaluation strategy took the form of laying out a number of 20 m. long 'investigatory boxes' aligned on a north-south axis, in a distribution which favoured the northern end of the development site, so as to have the maximum chance of intercepting any graves. Once topsoil was removed, the remaining strata were trowelled and sieved down to the chalk bedrock.

No Saxon graves were encountered, but instead, numerous pits and post-holes cut into the chalk appeared in all the investigation trenches. Early to mid Iron Age potsherds, (c. 400 B.C.), were recovered from the fill of these features. This date ties in well with the extensive remains of Iron Age settlement in the locality first discovered by the Broadstairs archaeologist Howard Hurd in 1907-1909.²

The present results are to some extent inconclusive and consist primarily of chalk-cut features. The original soil horizons have been damaged or destroyed by, (probably medieval), ploughing. It is hoped that the builder will strip off the thin soil cover prior to building, and give the Trust team the opportunity to plot and excavate the post-holes and pits of what is presumably a substantial Iron Age occupation site.

This is yet a further instance of intensive land-use and settlement over several centuries from 400 to 100 B.C. in this part of Broadstairs.

Another school playing field site at Northdown Primary School, Cliftonville, Margate

The site is on the crest of rising downland at N.G.R. TR 37257005, and is recorded as Site 11 in the Thanet Sites and Monuments Record. Ancient remains first came to light here in 1965, and again during work in the school grounds in 1971-73.³

² H. Hurd, 'On a late Celtic village near Dumpton Gap, Broadstairs', *Archaeologia*, lxi (1909), 427-38.

³ Unpublished notes of the defunct Thanet Excavation Group, preserved in the archives of the Thanet Archaeological Society.

During the building of an extension to Northdown Primary School, the cutting of footing trenches afforded another opportunity to search for features of archaeological interest. Several pits and sections of ditch were discovered, together with pottery ranging in date from the Iron Age to the medieval period.

The pottery came mainly from the contractors' spoil-heaps as they cleared a rectangular area of topsoil prior to digging the footing trenches. When these were cut, ditches of U- and V-section and the remains of a number of circular pits were exposed. Only one pit, which had served as a midden and was of a truncated cone shape, contained dateable evidence. This was in the form of a number of sherds of a large medieval cooking-pot in sandy 'Tyler Hill' fabric found in the bottom 30 cm. of the chalky fill of the pit. A very similar vessel has a date of 1325-75 attributed to it.⁴ It would seem from the evidence so far encountered from this and previous excavations that we are dealing with a site with phases of settlement spanning perhaps 2,000 years, from the Late Bronze Age c. 500. B.C. through the Romano-British period, and finally to mid-fourteenth century.

What made the site so attractive to so many generations of farmers can only be conjectured, but its elevated situation overlooking Dane Valley would have presented possibilities for defence in times of stress for the innumerable farming communities who tilled the well-drained soils of this downland ridge for so many centuries.

An archaeological watching brief on the Sparrow Castle to Manston water pipeline

During February to April 1989 a main water supply pipe-line was laid, connecting Manston Aerodrome with the pumping station at Sparrow Castle Farm. The total length of the pipeline was 1.7 km. While the Thanet Sites and Monuments Record (TSMR) lists over 300 sites, it is thought that many more exist undetected. Because of the possibility of the pipeline trench encountering other ancient sites, the Trust for Thanet Archaeology decided to approach the Southern Water Authority for permission to monitor the work. This was granted and the Trust wishes to thank the Southern Water Authority, the contractors Messrs R.E. Docwra Ltd. and the keen-eyed and interested pipe-line construction team for their help and co-operation.

At its commencement near the B2190, the pipe-line trench

⁴ P. Bennett, 'Four minor sites excavated by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust', *Arch. Cant.*, xcvi (1980), 296, figs. 13, 15.

revealed ditch and pit sections and two shallow ditches of irregular plan about 5 m. across with a maximum depth of 0.40 m. The fill of both was of dark soil rich in burnt daub and midden material, in particular many oyster shells. The few pot-sherds were of a coarse flint-tempered fabric of early to mid Iron Age date. Although the evidence was meagre, it does suggest the possibility of a settlement similar to those discovered at Sarre and Cleve Court during pipe laying in 1987.⁵

Other features encountered during the progress of the pipe-laying included two large pits, c. 20 m. across and of unknown depth, which may well have medieval chalk workings connected with Allend Grange. Evidence for occupation during the sixteenth to early eighteenth century came from an area near Cheeseman's Farm containing coins, pot-sherds in glazed stone- and earthenware and many fragments of bricks and tiles. Further along the route a scatter of aluminium fragments and the remains of machine-gun and cannon ammunition adds support to the local stories of a Messerschmidt fighter being downed in this area during an air battle over Manston airfield in August 1940.

In addition to the overall aim of the watching brief, the pipe-laying gave us the opportunity to evaluate a most interesting site (TSMR no. 115) previously seen and photographed as a crop-mark by aerial reconnaissance. It is a nearly square, ditched enclosure, enclosing an area of about 1 acre, its south-west side being cut by the Manston Road. Within, parallel ditches can be seen running north-east, a ring ditch with an internal feature lies in the north-east corner and there are several smaller features.

Investigation of this enclosure was one of the priorities of this watching brief, and was reached as the pipe-line approached its termination at the Sparrow Castle pumping station. The high expectations of the pipe trench revealing important evidence were in the event not realised and not much was found in the way of datable material. What there was came from the ditches and suggested their construction during the Belgic or Romano-British period. The shallow overburden suggests that ancient soil horizons have been lost through centuries of ploughing.

The enclosure layout is not obviously functional as a habitation or industrial site. The exciting thought comes to mind that this was a Romano-British temple enclosure. A possibility perhaps augmented by the presence of two presumed Roman building sites, one 300 m.

⁵ D.R.J. Perkins, 'The Selling to Thanet trunk water-main, Phase II, 1987: An interim Report', *Arch. Cant.*, cvii (1989), 267-79.

north-west, the other 500 m. north-east; see TSMR site nos. 113 and 116.

Though without spectacular results, this watching brief has revealed the presence of one prehistoric site and confirmed the antiquity of another, while hinting at possible remains in a further three locations. It was, therefore, an extremely useful operation, which will be repeated whenever a similar opportunity arises.

The prehistoric site at St. Mildred's Bay, Birchington

This most interesting and important site was first discovered in December 1987, and initially surveyed in 1988, when a bronze hoard was found.⁶ Further survey in December 1988 revealed that the site was suffering from wave attrition. A rescue excavation was mounted, this being funded jointly by English Heritage and Thanet District Council. Over two tons of environmental samples were extracted from the more vulnerable parts of the site, and these are currently being examined in the laboratories of English Heritage. Among the finds were the fragmentary remains of a dug-out canoe.

Continuing work

At the time of writing, the Trust's excavation team is involved in survey and rescue work along the route of the Thanet Way (A299), between the Wantsum and St. Nicholas-at-Wade. Discoveries include medieval salt-workings, a small barrow, and a Romano-British settlement site. The latter came to light during construction of new access roads, and a large packhouse at St. Nicholas Court Farm. Among the features and remains discovered are small foundations, rubbish pits, a ditch, a well shaft and both inhumation and cremation burials. The quantity and variety of the ceramics and building materials suggest the nearby presence of a building site.

⁶ D.R.J. Perkins, 'A Middle Bronze Age Hoard from a pre-historic Settlement Site at St. Mildred's Bay, Westgate-on-Sea', *Arch. Cant.*, cv (1988), 243-9.

