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THE TRUST FOR THANET ARCHAEOLOGY: EXCAVATIONS AND
EVALUATIONS, 1989-1990*The Thanet Way Improvement Scheme*

Mentioned briefly in last year's volume, the Romano-British site at St. Nicholas Court Farm, St. Nicholas-at-Wade (Thanet Site and Monument Register No. 304) produced further occupation evidence, which included a small round isolated section of flints on rammed chalk, measuring 1.50 m. in diameter and numerous pits and ditch sections. These contained large quantities of pot-sherds which are currently being studied. Preliminary indications suggest the site was occupied from A.D. 50/75 to A.D. 200/250, peaking at around A.D. 150/200.

A small number of medieval pottery sherds c. twelfth-fourteenth century were also recovered as were some Early to Late Iron Age sherds.

Road Improvements at the Lord of the Manor junction of the A253 (Canterbury Road) and the A256 (Haine Road)

The scheme involves bridging the valley sloping down from the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age enclosures and barrows that straddle the Haine Road at this point. This aspect of the scheme provided an opportunity to investigate the interesting prehistoric evidence which might be preserved in the downwashed soil horizons along the valley bottom. Four 'boxes' each measuring 3 × 3 m. were excavated to subsoil. Only boxes 1 and 2 were of archaeological interest. Just below modern topsoil a layer of chalk nodules was observed to cover the whole surface of the box. Finds indicated a nineteenth-century date and suggest that this may be a scatter from the railway cutting of 1846. A layer of flints with sherds of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery c. 600 B.C. was encountered 1.40 m. from the surface in box 2; this was surprising, but not disappointing, as it had been thought that much earlier horizons would be found. We may conclude that prior to 600 B.C. these slopes were perhaps wooded or pasture and not prone to soil erosion and downwash.

As the route of the new road would pass through unexcavated areas of an important archaeological site, it provided three opportunities: (1) to establish the western boundary of the famous 'Ozengell' Jutish cemetery, (first discovered in 1846). Jutish graves had been encountered during the 1977 excavation of the Late Neolithic enclosure, and it was not known whether any further graves existed to the west; (2) to return to the north-west quadrant of the

Late Neolithic enclosure ditch (Lord of the Manor site III) left unexcavated in 1977 because of lack of time and resources; and (3) to ascertain whether the ditch of a barrow (Lord of the Manor site IV) survived to the west of Haine Road.

As a result of these investigations the western extremity of the Jutish cemetery was established by the discovery of two further graves, one of which was in the ditch fill of the unexcavated quadrant of the Late Neolithic enclosure. Grave 229 was discovered when an area 18 × 8 m. was cleared down to subsoil chalk just west of the limit of the 1977 excavation. The grave had been robbed in antiquity. Only very fragmentary skeletal remains were present, and much of this in the form of 'bone dust' observable on the dark wood trace of the coffin board on the grave floor. Wood traces suggesting a coffin were also plotted in the undisturbed fill against the sides of the grave. Some slabs of local sandstone were found high in the back fill of the disturbed area; these may represent the remains of a ground level grave corner as described by Roach Smith in 1856, or alternatively they were meant to serve as protection against the probes of grave plunderers. The grave goods included a small iron spearhead of Swanton's Type F4 and a 1.50 m. long wooden trace of the shaft. Inside the ferrule of the spearhead about 4 cm. of the shaft wood had been preserved by the iron corrosion products. Two iron knives and fragments of another were present together with three iron shield studs and part of the rim of the boss. A number of small iron fragments (possible coffin nails?) and a bronze buckle loop of common type conclude the list of metal grave goods which by their nature point to a male burial, a conclusion impossible to reach by other means because of the paucity of skeletal remains. A cannon bone (*Ovis*) was recovered from the grave fill in the skull area.

The second Jutish grave (No. 230) was found intruding into the north-west quadrant of the ditch of the Late Neolithic hengiform enclosure. It was exposed by topsoil removal and subsequent excavation revealed the grave had been cut through the upper layer of the ditch fill and thereafter disturbed in antiquity. Evidence for the burial consisted of a concentration of sandstone slabs lying at all angles in the ditch fill in an area c. 1.50 m. across. Among the slabs were human long bone fragments. Other finds included an iron clench bolt of a type and size similar to those used in Saxon boat building and like those discovered nearby in 1982, in what was interpreted as a Saxon boat burial.¹ A small pot-*sherd* in a buff coloured sandy fabric and a number of small friable fragments of worked bone, perhaps part of a

¹ D.R.J. Perkins, 'The Monkton Gas Pipe Line', *Arch. Cant.*, cii (1985), 51-3.

comb, were also found. The scale of the disturbance to the grave rendered it impossible to arrive at its dimension, shape or orientation.

Further excavation of the ditch fill showed it to contain many more sandstone slabs and iron fragments, among them parts of two iron knives of Saxon type. Lower down in this layer were found Late Bronze/Early Iron Age flint tempered pot-sherds, c. 600 B.C. Other finds included two flint scrapers, waste flakes, shells, animal bones and teeth.

Soil processing for molluscan evidence also revealed carbonised cereal seed, notably those of barley. Continuing examination of the ditch revealed a long slot cut into the outer chalk wall; this was similar to features discovered elsewhere in the ditch during the 1977 excavation. The observed sequence of infill revealed by the ditch section confirmed a tentative opinion, formed in 1977, that an almost completely infilled ditch had been recut to provide material for a mound over a cremation burial in a Collared Urn.²

Cottington Hill, Ebbsfleet, Ramsgate

Cottington Hill is situated at Ebbsfleet, Ramsgate. The O.S. coordinates for the crown of the hill (which is some 15 m. above O.D.) are TR 336637. The hill measures 43.5 acres. The subsoil consists of the lower measures of the Thanet Beds, and is encountered as a yellow/brown sand with large sandstone boulders occurring at c. 50 cm. below the land surface at the crown of the hill.

Ebbsfleet is the legendary site of the arrival of Hengist and Horsa, and more recently said to be the landing place of St. Augustine. More verifiable, it is also the location of the famous Late Bronze Age 'Ebbsfleet Hoard', now in the care of the British Museum.

Credit and thanks must be given to Messrs. Thanet Golf Developments Ltd. for permitting and funding an archaeological evaluation prior to creating a nine-hole golf course on Cottington Hill.

The main discovery was that of the buried remains of a Romano-British building, at N.G.R. TR 33356337. No attempt was made to excavate but its location was recorded. Rubbish pits and ditches around the area were sampled and yielded pottery, which is currently being processed. A number of coins were recovered, the earliest being a *potin*, c. 70–50 B.C. Another early issue found was that of the dynastic ruler Tasciovanus who ruled from 20 B.C.–10 A.D. Later

² N. McPherson-Grant, D.R.J. Perkins, pending in 'Ozengell' and Lord of the Manor Sites, Ramsgate.

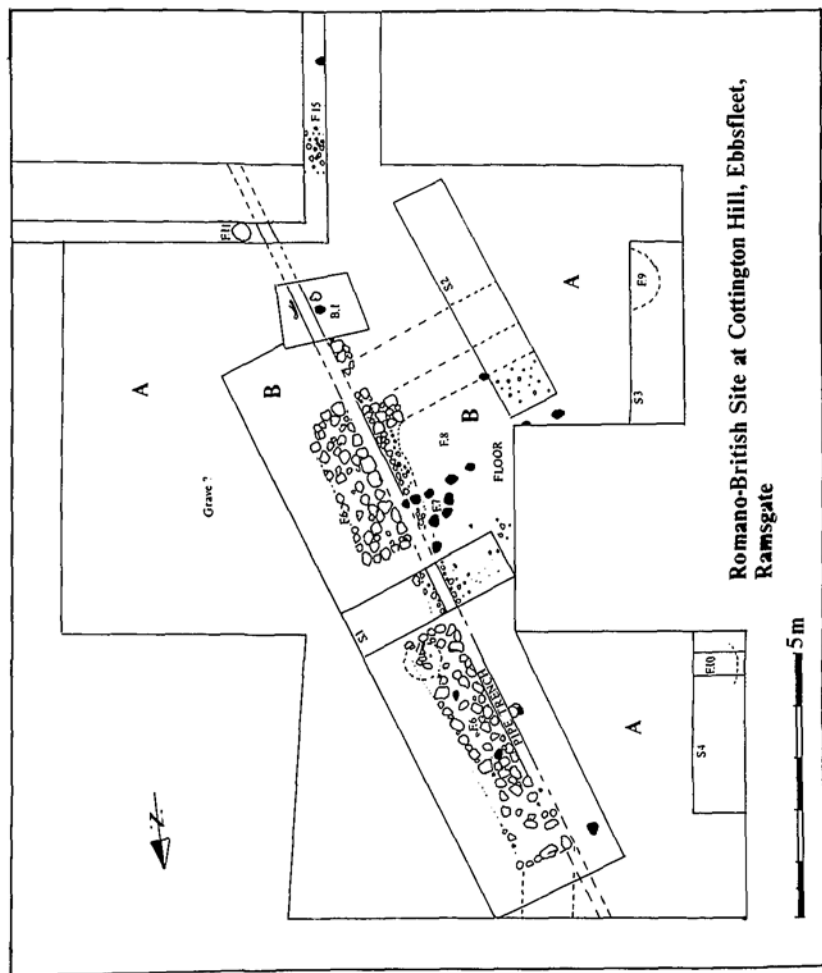


Fig. 1. Plan of Romano-British Site at Cottington Hill, Ebbsfleet, Ramsgate.

Roman coins included two silver *denarii* of Commodus of A.D. 183 and Septimius Severus of A.D. 193. A confirmatory date for this phase of occupation is provided by some sherds of samian ware. A number of Roman bronze coins of various emperors, covering a date range from late third to late fourth century, were also recovered.

After study, this material should greatly advance our knowledge of the Roman presence in Thanet, until recently thought to be negligible. The observed building remains consist of a phase 1 length of wall foundation composed of nodules of hard white limestone, see F.6 in Fig.1. The foundation turns west at its southern end, and peters out in a robber trench discernible in S.2, Fig. 1. No return was detected at the northern end, where a robber trench appears to angle north. Within the area so framed are preserved patches of floor consisting of traces of decayed mortar set with smooth flat pebbles, F.8, Fig. 1. Above these remains, but only within the line formed by the foundations and the robber trench is a layer of black sandy loam containing charcoal, calcined chalk and pot-sherds, some of the latter appear to have been broken *in situ*. The upper 10 cm. of this layer is characterised by masses of oyster shells, bones and pot-sherds. Among this material was found a coin of early fourth-century date. It is possible that this layer represents fire damage to the building, topped off with midden material after abandonment. A phase 2 wall foundation of large water rolled flints was laid on and into this layer, see F.7, Fig. 1. This feature had suffered attrition from modern ploughing and subsoiling.

A beaker burial was discovered during the work to confirm the southern return of the Roman building foundation. The beaker had been damaged by the Romano-British builders when digging their foundation trench. The crouched burial lying on its left side facing north, with skull aligned to the west had suffered further damage when a modern drainage trench removed the rib cage. See B.1, Fig. 1. The skeletal material was very friable, most bones being present as colour traces. However, about 600 gr. of skull and femora fragments were dispatched to the British Museum for C¹⁴ dating. The beaker has been identified as belonging to the East Anglian series and is decorated all over with horizontal incised lines. The typical barrel-shaped East Anglian beakers were rare before step 3 of Lanting and van der Waals' scheme, around 2200 B.C. (1850 bc). (Burgess 1974).³ It will be of interest to see if the C¹⁴ date being obtained for the skeletal material is in general agreement with this chronology.

³ C. Burgess in (Ed.) C. Renfrew, 'British Prehistory', 1974, 172-5.

Cottington Hill is rich in archaeological evidence, spanning the centuries from Neolithic to Late Medieval. Proportionally more archaeological material was observed on the surface of the topsoil here than has been encountered elsewhere in Thanet during 14 years of survey. Of ceramic remains, by far the most common were sherds of Late Bronze–Early Iron Age pottery, these were most heavily distributed over the northern half of the hill, suggesting a more or less continuous occupation.

Thanet's inter-tidal zone sites

A survey of a number of locations measuring coastal wave attrition from Margate to Reculver was undertaken for English Heritage. An interesting but almost inaccessible site was discovered at Coldharbour (Thanet Site and Monument Register No. 262). Halfway between Reculver and Minnis Bay, it would have formed a small island in the mouth of the old Wantsum Channel. The interest lies in the fact that members of the public have been known to carry off bronze artefacts from this spot, including a spearhead and two socketed axes. Unfortunately, they have not responded to our request for an opportunity to examine them.

During this work it was possible to re-examine the general area of the most interesting site at St. Mildred's Bay, Westgate. (Thanet Site and Monument Register No. 301). Fragments of a dug-out canoe, of an estimated 4 m. length, were recovered from the beach at low water mark. The maximum moulded depth of a fragment was 25 cm., while the widest beam section measured 50 cm. This material has been sent to English Heritage for dendrochronological and specialist reports.

Other discoveries at this beach site include two more circular post settings, in addition to a complex setting of post-holes previously recorded. It was also possible on this occasion to trace further the sub-rectangular enclosure ditch in its progress shorewards. At its western extremity it appears to fork and carry on into a dead end. There is no easy answer to such a problem because the site is very rarely the same after each tide; sometimes brickearth is visible in the area of the enclosure ditch, at other times the site is covered by a blanket of sand of considerable depth.

Another year of continuing co-operation with local metal detector users

The Wantsum Relic Association has a long history of co-operation with Thanet archaeologists which has been of great benefit to the cause of Thanet archaeology. A recent example being the discovery

of an Iron Age-Belgic site being brought to our notice by a metal detector club member. The site is situated south-west of Thorne Cottages, Minster, just south of Grinsell Hill (Thanet Sites and Monuments Register no. 310). Archaeological evidence consisted of *tegulae*, flints, Roman and Belgic coins. Three *potin* coins being discovered in one hour.

L. JAY

THE SPIRES ON THE PARISH CHURCHES OF ST. MARY AT
MINSTER-IN-THANET AND WINGHAM

~~Medieval timber spires were once ubiquitous on the parish churches of England, but over the centuries very many of these have disappeared. In east Kent there are still a handful of fine surviving examples at places like Elham, Ash (near Sandwich), Wingham, Ickham and Fordwich (the spire on the neighbouring Sturry church came down in the last century), and it was, therefore, a great tragedy when the medieval spire of St. Mary at Minster-in-Thanet was blown down at about 5 a.m. on the morning of the great storm on 16th October, 1987. I managed to visit the church a few days later to find that the spire had fallen over the north-east corner of the tower and had crashed down, partly on the west end of the north aisle (breaking the roof there), and partly into the neighbouring churchyard. Unfortunately, all the spire timbers had already been cleared up into two neat piles, so that it was not immediately possible to work out the form of the timber-frame within the spire from the broken fragments. An inspection of the top of the tower, however, revealed that the base of the spire was about 12 ft. across, and that it had been supported by four main posts which had been tenoned into two crossing pairs of horizontal tie-beams. Among the principal timbers in the stack were several which suggested that the frame of the spire had been similar to, but slightly smaller than, that at Wingham (see below). Subsequently, David Perkins and members of the Thanet Archaeological Trust worked very hard to sort out and record all the broken timbers from the piles of debris (much of it broken fragments of the outer cladding and shingles),¹ and it is to be hoped that a full report on the timbers can be produced in due course.~~

~~¹ Sadly the original lead covering had been replaced with shingles, and this and the rottenness of the tenon and mortice joints at the base of the four main posts no doubt helped the wind to remove the spire from the tower in the great storm.~~