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THE TRUST FOR THANET ARCHAEOLOGY;
EVALUATION WORK CARRIED OUT IN 1995,
HARTSDOWN COMMUNITY WOODLAND SCHEME,
MARGATE

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INTRODUCTION

This archaeological evaluation survey on farmland at Hartsdown/Shottendane, Margate, was made necessary by plans to develop the land as a Community Woodland. Extensive tree-planting is intended, and since a number of crop-marks representing ancient activity and settlement appear on the fields, their evaluation was essential. The evaluation survey demonstrated that a number of archaeological sites visible as crop-marks in aerial photographs taken some thirty years ago were present in a good state of preservation, and were of such interest as to form an important factor in planning a community woodland project for the Hartsdown site.

The concept of a project to establish a Community Woodland on Thanet Council owned land at Hartsdown/Shottendane, Margate, was first mooted in 1991. The Planning Department of Thanet District Council then asked the Thanet Archaeological Trust for advice as a matter of routine, and the Trust was able to state that there were important archaeological implications attendant on the proposed development. Aerial photographs taken in the 1960s demonstrated the presence of a number of enclosures that could be interpreted as the ring ditches of prehistoric round barrows, and prehistoric and/or Romano-British settlements.

The Trust began a study of the crop-marks using the 1960s photos with some more recent colour slides in conjunction with a computer-aided photogrammetry programme to plot the crop-marks on Ordnance Survey maps. An evaluation strategy consisting of a pattern of random and 'educated' trenches was designed, and this was submitted for approval to the County Archaeologist, Dr John Williams. The evaluation was carried out in August 1995, and record, photographic, and material archives of the work have been created.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Trust for Thanet Archaeology wish to thank Thanet District Council for funding this important evaluation, and Mr Jonathan Tapp who farms the land, both for his kind co-operation, and careful attitude to cultivating the land so that the ancient sites have been largely preserved from plough damage.

THE SITE TOPOGRAPHY AND KNOWN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Site Topography and Geology

The site is situated at Hartsdown/Shottendane, Margate, on farmland part of Twenties Farm at an O.S. ref. centred at TR 345 695. It is 20.62 ha. (50.9 acres) in area. The fields constituting the site form the northern rise and escarpment ridge of the Shottendane Valley, and vary in elevation between 10.50 and 25.00 m. O.D. There can be little doubt that the valley held a stream until modern times, its last remnant being the 'Tivoli Dike' which last century drained into the marsh where Margate's 'Dreamland' Amusement Park is now situated, and from which Margate (Marshgate) is said to have been named. In 1808, during a storm and on-shore gale, the valley for a few hours became a tidal creek as far up as Shottendane Farm.

The geology of the site is that of the Head and Drift Brickearth over the Upper Chalk. Since this stratum drains well the Shottendane stream may only have run in winter, reverting to a series of ponds and marshy spots in high summer. In this it would have been similar to a number of Kent's 'woe waters' as for example the upper reaches of the Nailbourne.

Three of the evaluation trenches, Trenches 37, 38, and 47, were cut near the valley bottom where they encountered colluvium so deep that they could not safely be excavated down to chalk. Elsewhere on the site trenching revealed the chalk to be capped by an overburden of loam varying between 0.30 and 0.60 m. in depth, of which the upper 0.25 m. is modern plough soil with that beneath it constituting an ancient horizon often exhibiting cultural material. The level of the Roman metalled trackway surface (Site 1) and ditch section evidence from Site 7 seem to indicate that ground level today is little different from what it was in the Iron Age and Roman periods. Over much of the site the surface of the Upper Chalk was hard and even. In the northern angle near Hartsdown Road it was, however, much affected by periglacial activity, the brick-earth filled ice-wedge pits being easily confused with man-made features.

That ancient horizons survive at Hartsdown when they have been

denuded elsewhere in Thanet is due to the care of the farmer, Mr Jonathan Tapp, who after attending an N.F.U. branch meeting some years ago at which the writer demonstrated the consequences of deep ploughing over archaeological sites, has eschewed the use of the 'sub-soiler'.

Known Archaeology

No archaeological investigations even at the level of field-walking have previously taken place at Hartsdown. There has been a certain amount of metal detector prospecting around the margins of the field, albeit with little of interest found (pers. comm. Thanet and Wantsum Association). The nearest excavations were Dr Rowe's work in the Half Mile Ride Anglo-Saxon cemetery (1923) which is 700 m. south of the site, the Thanet Trust's evaluations at Westfield Road about 300 m. to the west, and Dr Rowe's 'Tivoli Villa' about 300 m. north-east. A crop-mark soil-mark that may well be significant has been recorded from the south-western rise of the Shottendane valley as it ascends towards St. John's cemetery. It seems to indicate the presence of double parallel ditches passing along the face of the hill and turning east towards the Lydden valley. They may constitute the defences of a prehistoric hill-fort similar to the great enclosure recently discovered at North Foreland Hill, Kingsgate.

Historical Background

The origin of the name Hartsdown is as a hill frequented by harts or stags (OE herotes dun) and the hill was known as 'Hertesdowne' in 1451. This apart, the tract of land is seldom mentioned during the medieval period, when it would have formed part of the Manor of Dent-de-Lion. From the 1750s the land was in use as arable and pasture, and was the site of the 'Margate Races' from 1765 to 1838.

METHODS

Trenching

Evaluation was by machine-cut trench. In all, 59 trenches were cut under archaeological supervision, in total 2450 m. of trenching with an area of 3675 square metres, this representing a 2 per cent sampling of the site. As originally planned, twenty-three of the trenches were so positioned as to coincide with crop-marks, whose location had been established by photogrammetry during preliminary work by the Thanet Trust in 1991. The rest of the trenches was positioned so as to sample 'bare' areas where no crop-marks had been observed so as to act as a control. For

safety reasons, trenches were backfilled at the end of each working session. Important features which could not be excavated or recorded in a day were left covered and taped off. All trenches were cut under archaeological supervision, and were taken down either to an ancient horizon or the natural chalk. Any isolated features were excavated, and where the trenches ran through settlement enclosures about 25 per cent of the features observed were, according to size, either sampled or fully excavated.

It had been intended that rather more than double the amount of trenching would be carried out so as to sample at about the 4 per cent level. In the event, although an additional 650 square metres of unscheduled trenches were cut so as to exactly locate sites and define the boundaries of the settlement enclosures, the final total (about 2.4 per cent) is thought adequate, see below.

Confidence Rating

This can be considered high. In the case of those trenches whose location coincided with the crop-mark evidence, the features were found. In all others, the 'random trenches' where no crop-marks were visible in the air photos, nothing was observed. Additionally, the shallow overburden covering most of the site promotes the formation of crop-marks, even over small and shallow features such as post-holes. The assembled crop-mark picture can therefore be considered explicit.

RESULTS: SITE DESCRIPTIONS

The following is a list of 'Sites' where a group of features is either confined within a boundary ditch, or are in such close association as to be considered a single archaeological entity. Fig. 1 shows the location of all trenches and sites. Ceramic spot dates are as given by Nigel Macpherson-Grant, who has examined the Hartsdown pottery and will be commenting on it in due course as part of a synthesis of Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age ceramics in east Kent.

Site 1

This is clearly identifiable as a length of Roman metalled trackway. It consists of a layer of metalling composed of small water-worn flint cobbles about 4 m. wide and 0.20 m. deep where best preserved, this laid in a shallow chalk-cut slot. This is flanked on both sides by parallel chalk-cut ditches about 4 m. wide and 1 m. deep. In the only complete section cut (Trench 21) these have been re-cut at some stage so as to create double ditches on either side (see Fig. 2, plan and section). The

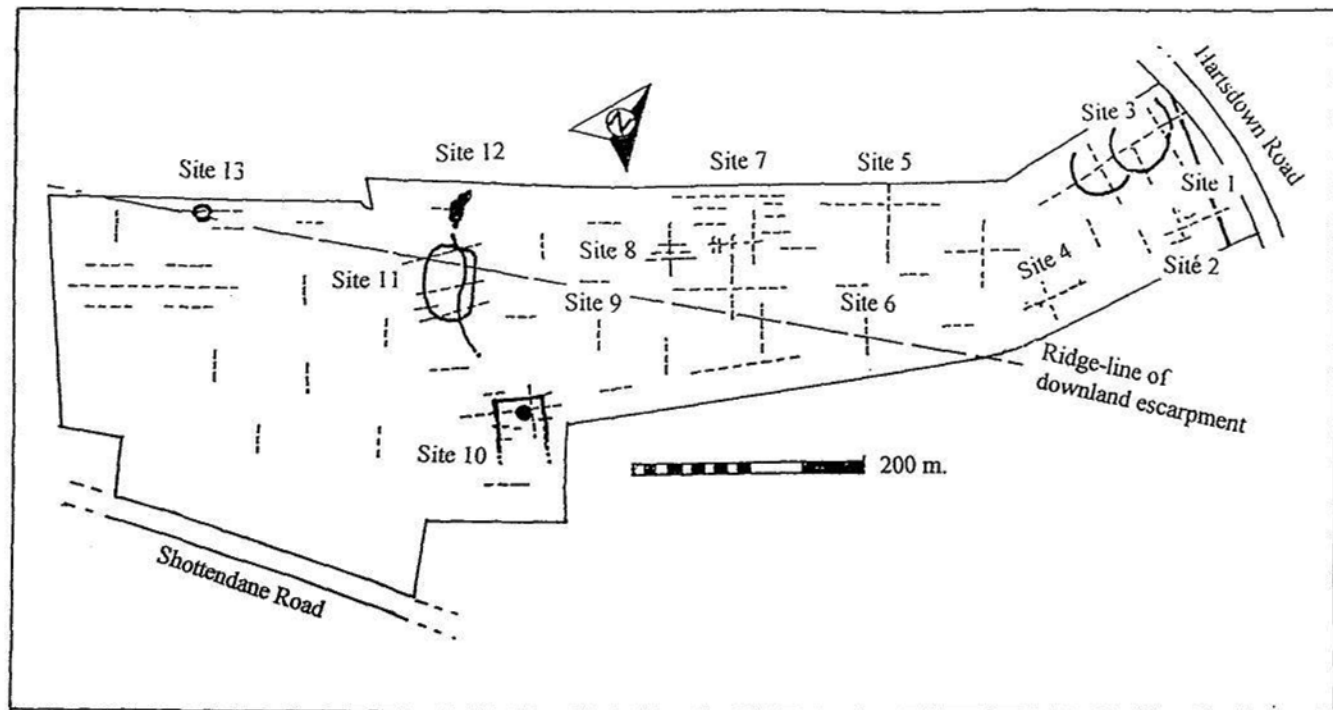


Fig. 1. Hartsdown Evaluation 1995, Plan of Trenches and Sites. Trenches are marked in broken line, and crop marks are shown in heavy line for the Roman trackway and sites not illustrated in Figs. 2-5.

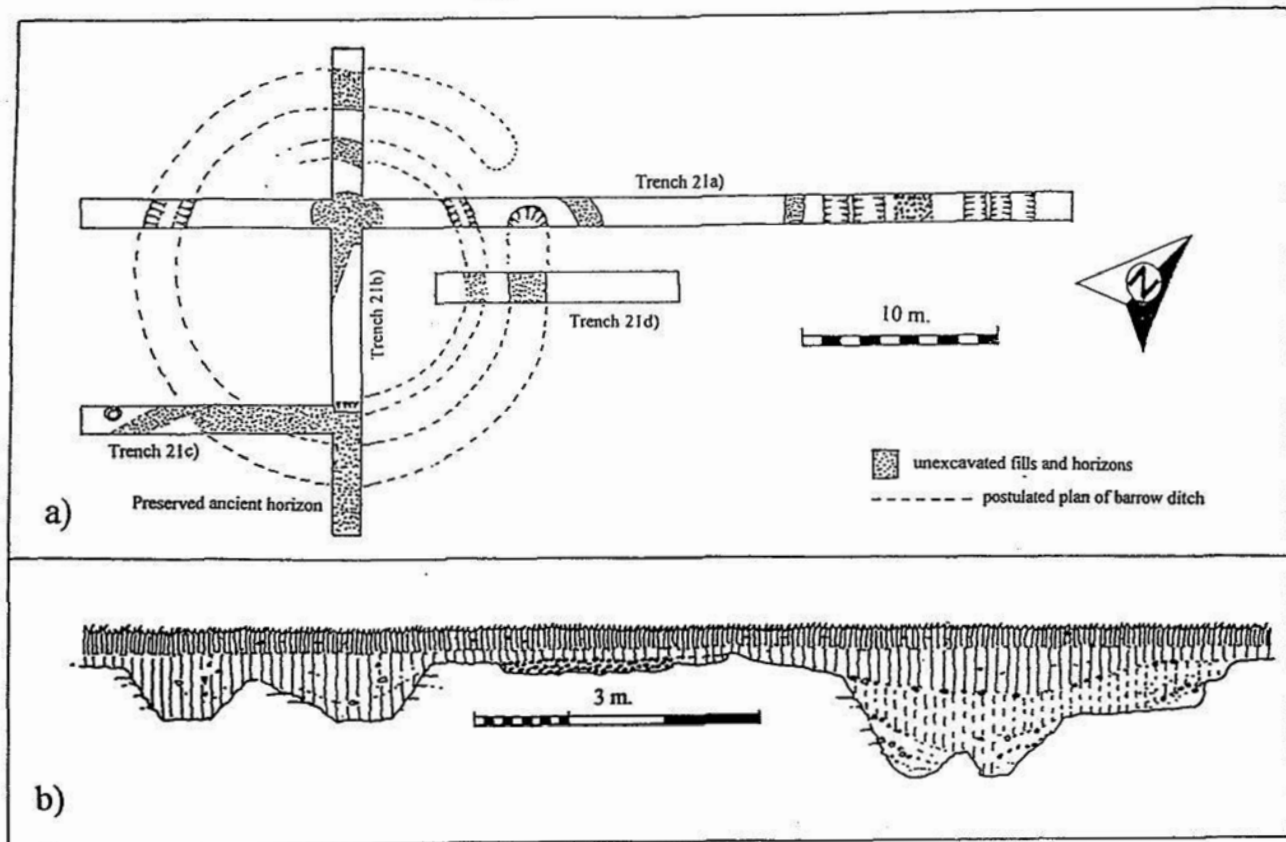


Fig. 2. (a) Plan of the Trench 21 system showing the round barrow (Site 2) and sections across the Roman trackway. (b) Section through the Roman trackway and parallel ditches.

feature extends for about 150 m. through the north-eastern end of Area 1, but has presumably been destroyed by modern roads and buildings to the north-west. To the south-east it may well survive while descending under farmland to the bottom of the Shottendane valley. Finds from the site consisted of Belgic and Romano-British pot-sherds from the ditch fills, and fragments of a bow-brooch and dress pin, (both of iron) from the metalling. Ceramic spot-dating indicates early Roman *c.* A.D. 75–100.

Site 2

As it appears in crop-mark photos, this is an oval ditched enclosure having an off-set minor ring ditch within it. Prior to evaluation it was tentatively identified as a Late Neolithic–Early Bronze Age round barrow. Evaluation revealed that the major outer ditch had a causeway entrance, and that the minor inner ditch is only a half circle, (see Fig. 2, plan and reconstruction). These findings do not however clash with original identification, as barrows with similar forms and features have been examined elsewhere in Thanet. The site is rendered complex by superimposed Iron Age occupation evidence consisting of pits, ditches, post-holes, and areas of a preserved ancient horizon. Ceramic evidence from the barrow ditches indicates that they were nearly filled level by the time of the Iron Age presence. Curving lengths of ditch running south and south-west from the barrow may well represent one or two additional ring ditches. Sections were cut through both the inner and outer ditches of the barrow. Finds from the ditch fills consisted of prehistoric sherds from the upper layers of fill, with animal bones, flint debitage, and calcined flint nodules below. Ceramic spot-dating for the upper ditch fills indicates an Early–Middle Iron Age presence, *c.* 550–350 B.C.

Site 3

A group of inter-connected sub-circular enclosures could just be made out in some aerial photos of the site. Their boundary ditches were located by Trenches 22 and 23. When sectioned they were found to contain small quantities of Late Bronze–Early Iron Age sherds. A problem was presented at this site in distinguishing between man-made and natural features as hereabouts the surface of the Upper Chalk had been subject to intense periglacial activity. Ditches apart, only two pits and one post-hole were observed in 260 m. (390 m. sq.) of trenching. This and the lack of a visible scatter of archaeological material across the site other than in the surfaces of ditch fills would seem to indicate that the enclosures may have served as cattle pounds or the like rather than as settlement areas. Ceramic spot-dating indicates a Late Bronze–Early Iron Age occupation *c.* 800–600 B.C.

Site 4

This appears in some aerial photos as a well-defined rectangular enclosure. As observed in Trenches 25 and 26 and some additional cuts, it seems, however, to be more nearly sub-circular, see Fig. 3. Dimensions are roughly 20×22 m. One return of the ditch curves inward across the enclosure and presumably creates a causeway entrance. Internal features consist of post-holes and the damaged remains of a wall constructed from large flints. While the few sherds from the ditch sections were prehistoric, others were early medieval (twelfth century). One of the post-holes yielded a late medieval glazed sherd, and a fragment of ?Roman glass. A complex history with several phases of occupation seems indicated. Ceramic spot-dating indicates occupation c. A.D. 1100.

Site 5

This rectangular enclosure is so faintly visible that it needs almost the 'eye of faith' to see it in aerial photos as extending obliquely east-north-

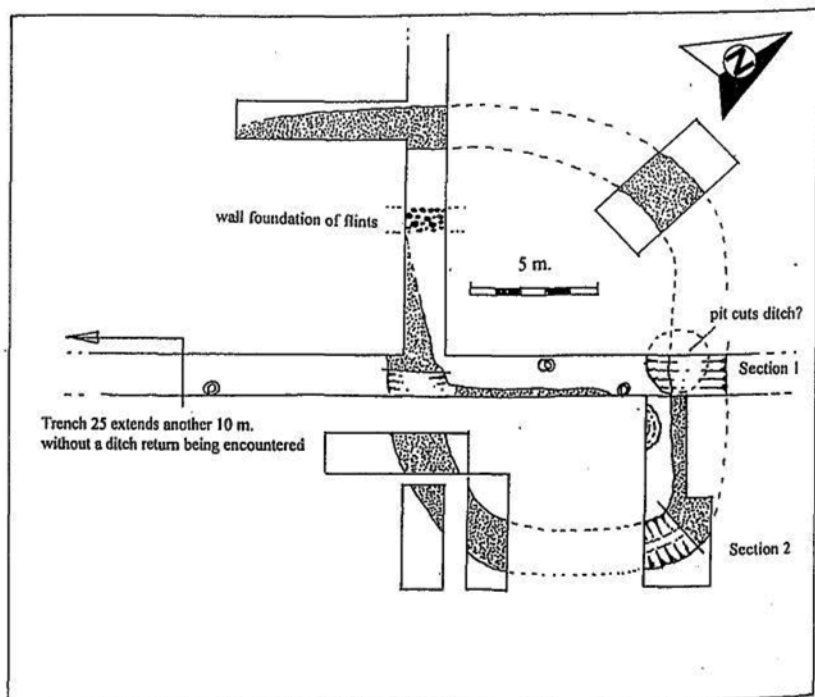


Fig. 3. Site 4 shown in Trenches 25 and 26 and additional cuts.

east from the northern boundary of the field. More easily seen are two internal rectangular shapes formed by post-holes, presumably buildings. Trenches 19 and 49 revealed pits and post-holes, and narrow shallow ditches on a line with the apparent axis of the enclosure, see Fig. 4. These are tentatively identified as palisade trenches. As interpreted from the alignment of the ?palisade trenches and spread of features, the dimensions of the enclosure would seem to be about 50 × 60 m. Finds: Three features, *F.* 119, 121, and 123 appeared to be storage pits back-filled with midden material. They held large quantities of pot-sherds in forms and fabrics of the Early–Middle Iron Age *c.* 550–350 B.C. Other finds included a bone comb and a cowrie shell from tropic waters.

Site 6

Trenches 50 and 51 were cut to sample what appears to be a down-hill spread of features from the boundary of Site 5. Trench 50 exposed a group of large post-holes, three of them re-cut, and presumably belonging to a single structure. A narrow ?palisade trench was sectioned passing north–south through Trench 51. Ceramic spot-dating indicates occupation during the Early–Middle Iron Age, *c.* 550–359 B.C.

Site 7

As indicated by crop-mark photography, this proved to be a rectangular ditched enclosure extending south-east from the north-western boundary of the field, see Fig. 5. That part of the site that could be investigated formed a square of 55 m. on each side. The south-eastern angle of the enclosure ditch was cut by a wide causeway entrance. Within the enclosure, Trench 12 held fifteen features, of which seven were post-holes, six were ditches (two outer and four internal), and two were large storage pits. These last had been back-filled as middens and held many pot-sherds in forms and fabrics of the Early–Middle Iron Age period, *c.* 550–350 B.C., although some Late Bronze–Early Iron Age material was present.

Site 8

Trenches 28 and 29 and additional cuts confirmed this as being a small rectangular enclosure aligned with the down-hill ‘front’ of Site 7, see Fig. 5. In the eastern corner of the enclosure was a large storage pit. A small section was taken across one side of this without bottoming out, and the ceramics obtained were similar to those from Site 7, Early–Middle Iron Age.

Site 9

Trench 43 was located so as to sample a scatter of marks visible in aerial photos. It exposed five large post-holes with ‘post ghosts’ in place, and

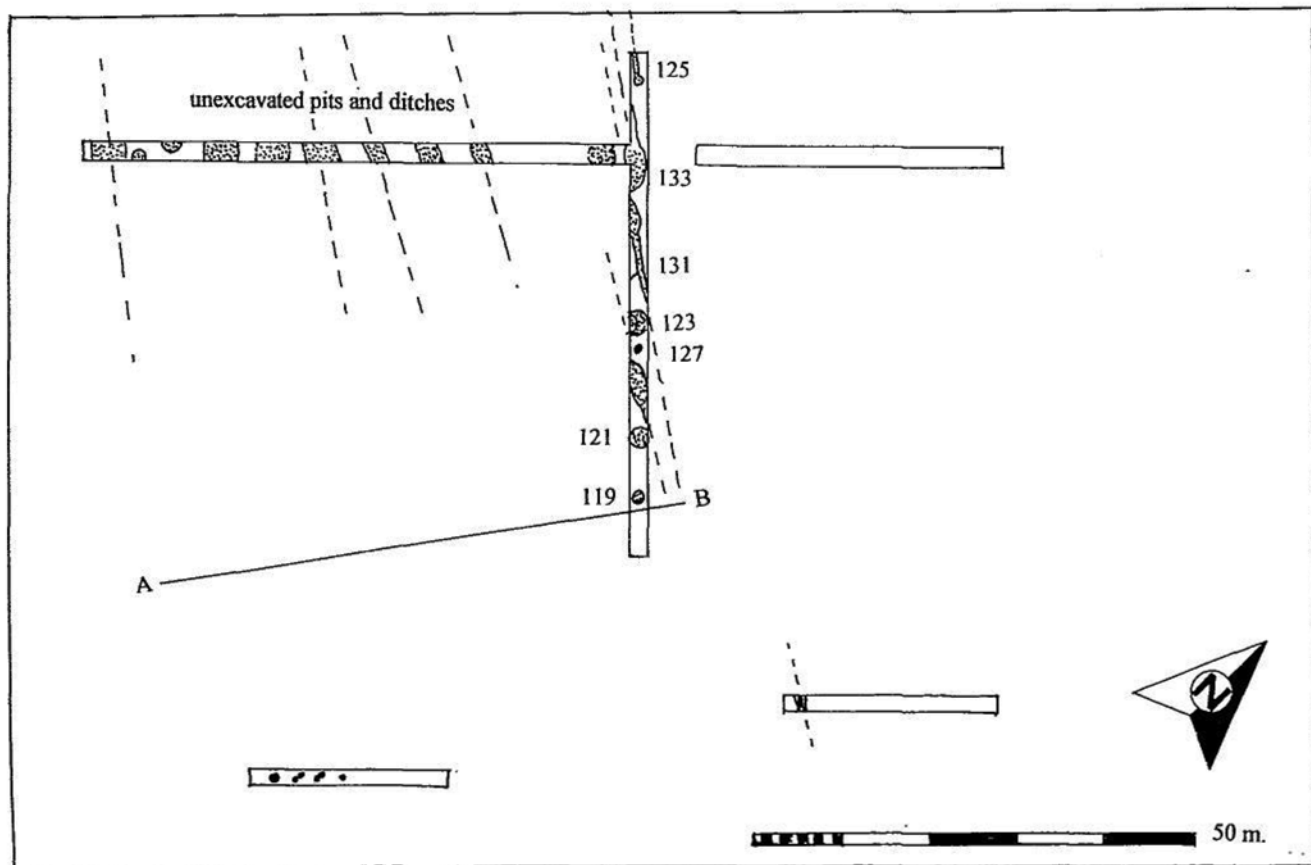


Fig. 4. Plan of Site 5. A ?rectangular enclosure possibly contained within palisades. Line A-B indicates a postulated north-east-south-west boundary line based on a close examination of aerial photographs.

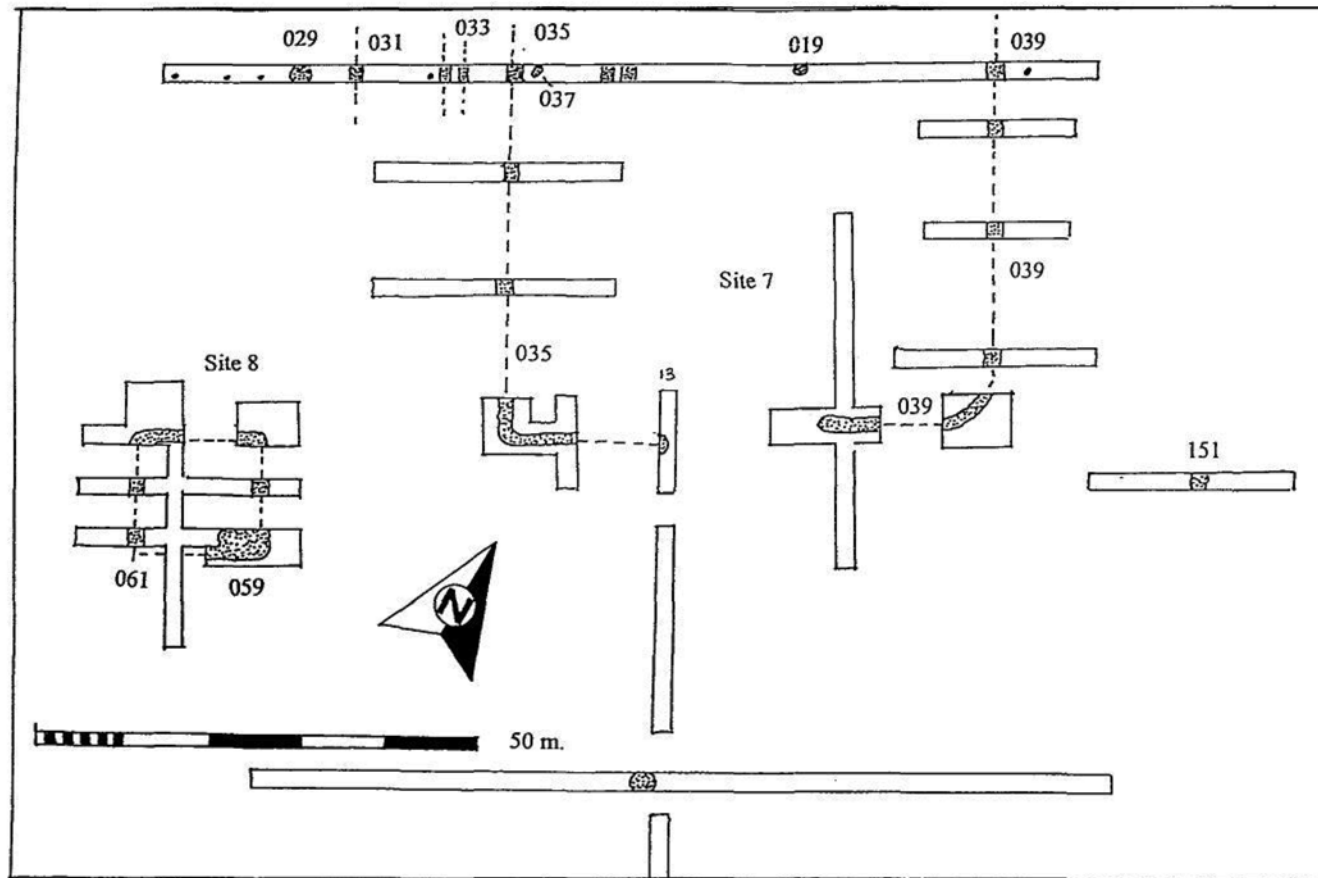


Fig. 5. Plan of two rectangular enclosures, Sites 7 and 8. The trenches are drawn 1/3 wider than true scale for clarity.

four ditches (three of palisade trench dimensions) running north-west-south-east. The post-holes suggest a rectangular structure. Spot-dating gives Early-Middle Iron Age.

Site 10

This shows by crop-mark as a rectangular enclosure. It is situated near the valley bottom with its ditches on the long north-west-south-east axis running deep under colluvial deposits. So far as it could be traced by trenching, the enclosure measures 35 × 45 m. Internally it holds at least two large pits (over 5 m. dia.) the surfaces of which yielded Late Iron Age-Belgic sherds. Ceramic spot-dating suggests a Belgic pre-Conquest occupation, first half of the first century A.D.

Site 11

This shows by crop-mark as a sub-rectangular ditched enclosure with a (perhaps unrelated) ditch passing through its long (north-south) axis. It was located by Trenches 7, 8, 58, and 59. These gave rough dimensions of 50 × 70 m. Only one internal feature was found, a post-hole, and the ditch sections investigated yielded only small quantities of prehistoric pot-sherds. As in the case of Site 3, the paucity of finds, environmental material and internal features indicate a low level of occupation. Ceramic spot-dating gives the period of use as Late Bronze-Early Iron Age, c. 800-600 B.C.

Site 12

In aerial photos this shows as an irregular 'coat-hanger' shaped mark built up from inter-cutting circular patches. It had previously been thought of as a modern feature, perhaps an anti-aircraft gun emplacement from WW II. Trench 9 located the feature and an attempt was made to section it, see Fig. 6. This had to be abandoned when excavated to the limits of safe working with no sign of bottoming out. So far as excavation went, it revealed a chalk-cut feature with steeply sloping sides, and a complex fill stratum of loam, chalk silt, with thin layers of dark humic soil. Flint debitage was encountered at all depths, and there were a few small sherds of prehistoric pottery in the upper fills, which were of Late Bronze-Early Iron Age fabrics, c. 800-600 B.C.

Site 13

This can be clearly seen in aerial photos as a ring ditch, presumably that of a Bronze Age round barrow. Trench 1 crossed the ring ditch slightly off-centre, giving sections of the ditch about 8 m. apart. This suggests a diameter of about 10 m. which put it into the two smallest groupings of Kentish barrows, indicating either an Early Bronze Age (Beaker) monu-

ment, or a barrow late in the series belonging in the Late Middle Bronze Age. A pit cut into the ditch fill at a late stage in the in-filling process held sherds from a Late Middle Bronze Age (Deverel-Rimbury) bucket urn, c. 1250 B.C.

Environmental materials and small finds

The limited objectives of this evaluation confined the excavation of features to sample sectioning intended to determine the nature of the feature and obtain representative pot-sherds for spot dating. Inevitably, however, fair quantities of environmental materials in the form of animal bones and marine shells were extracted. These have been recorded and placed in archive, since their detailed analysis would be subjective.

Of the small finds, seven objects are described below and illustrated in Fig. 6:

- (1) A spindle whorl from Site 7, Context 39 (a ditch section). This is heavily gritted with calcined flint and decorated with four incised lines running round the sides and others forming a 'wheel-spoke' pattern on the base.
- (2) A spindle whorl from Trench 46, Context 151 (pit close to Site 7). This has a burnished finish with a few flint grits visible in the surface.
- (3) A bracelet fragment from Site 5, Context 121 (storage pit back-filled as midden).

This has been roughly carved from Kimmeridge shale with unpolished inner and outer surfaces and ground faces front and back. Although less massive in section, it is similar in diameter and workmanship to one from the Early Iron Age levels at Maiden Castle (Wheeler 1943).

- (4) A long-handled 'weaving comb' from Site 5, Context 121 (storage pit back-filled as midden). This is carved from bone, length 100 mm., dentated at one end only, the other spatulate. It has nine teeth, the two outer on the left side being broken and worn. These objects are often found in association with spindle whorls and loom-weights. They first appear in the Mid-Late Bronze Age, but are mainly associated with the Iron Age and are almost exclusively a British phenomenon. A few examples from the Netherlands and Scandinavia are thought to have a British origin and to be evidence of North Sea trade (Tuohy 1992).

- (5) A fragment of an iron bow brooch from Trench 46, Context 151 (pit close to Site 7).

A very simple Early Iron Age type.

- (6) An iron bow brooch fragment from the road metal surface of the Roman road, and (7) an iron pin from the same spot. The brooch is of a common early Roman type.

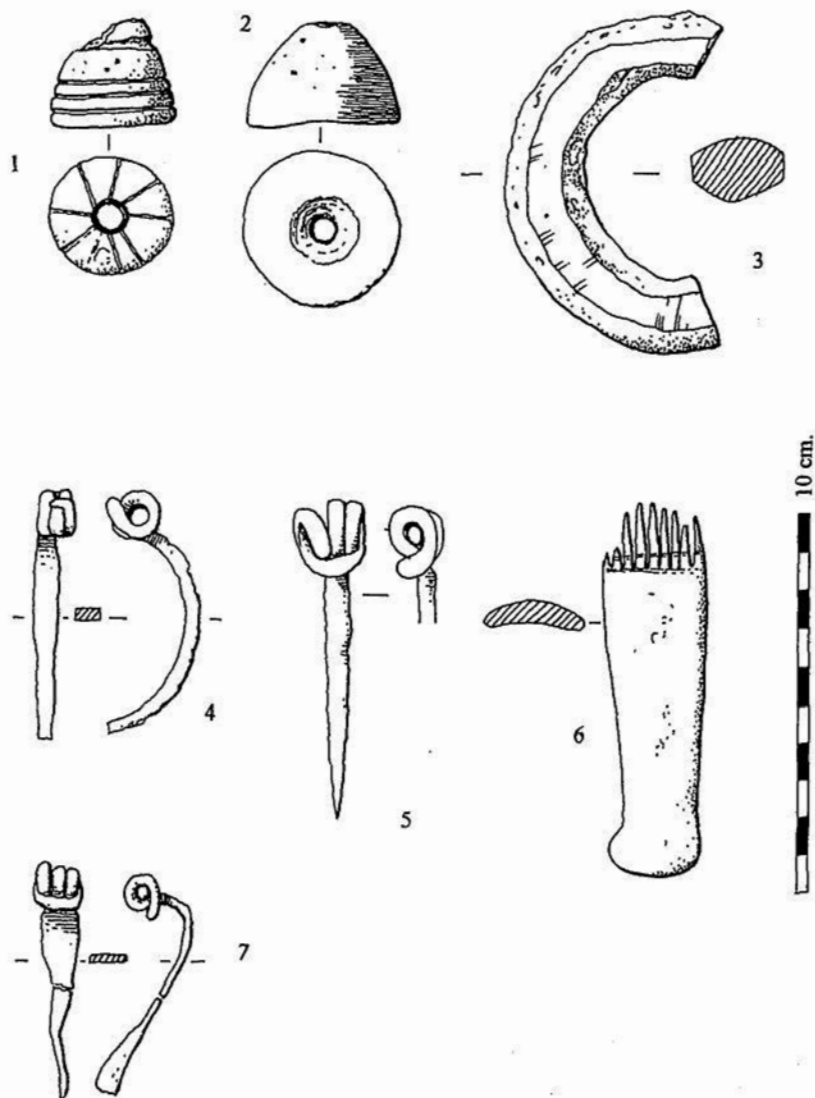


Fig. 6. Small finds all at scale as shown. (1) Spindle whorl of gritted ceramic, Site 7, F, 039. (2) spindle whorl of burnished ceramic, Trench 46, F. 151. (3) Bracelet fragment of carved shale, Site 5, F. 121. (4) Iron bow brooch, Trench 46, F. 151. (5) Iron pin, Site 1, metallated surface. (6) Bone comb, Site 5, F. 121. (7) Iron bow brooch, Site 1, metallated surface.

General Remarks

Other than the single round barrow (Site 13), Area 3 appears to hold no archaeology. Areas 1 and 2 contain 12 sites with all but one (Site 10) being situated on or just back from the north-western escarpment ridge which runs roughly from Site 13 to Site 4, see Fig. 2. In the case of Sites 5, 7, and 8, archaeological features are not confined within the boundary ditches of the sites, but can be seen in crop-mark photos to spread down hill towards the ridge. Lines can be drawn to roughly define the areas of concentrated archaeology. By rough calculation, these archaeologically sensitive zones represent 31 per cent of the total Community Woodland proposed area, and 54 per cent of Areas 1 and 2.

DISCUSSION

The Archaeology and its Implications.

Evaluation of the Hartsdown ridge has provided evidence for five main phases of land use and occupation:

(1) Late Neolithic–Early to Middle Bronze Age.

Only two round barrows, Sites 2 and 13 were found. This is surprising in that on similar escarpments elsewhere in Thanet such monuments are thickly clustered. Site 13 seems to be a fairly typical example of the small Middle Bronze Age barrows of east Kent. Site 2 presents some problems of interpretation, however. If as trenching evidence and the crop-mark indicate, it is of oval plan, penannular, and containing a semi-circular concentric inner ditch, it could well belong in Thanet's Late Neolithic–Early Bronze Age barrow tradition. As a departure from such sites, though, the fill of both inner and outer ditches (see Fig. 7, Site 2) held very little chalk rubble. This is in contrast with Site 13, where in common with all other barrow ditches excavated locally, rubble from an eroded inner mound is the principal component of the ditch fill (see Fig. 7, Site 13). This leads to two possible explanations:

- (a) That Site 2 never had a significant central mound, so that it was of a most unusual design, or may not have been a barrow at all, or
- (b) That after construction it was preserved from erosion in some way, e.g. quickly overgrown by nearby woodland, so that the mound survived intact until its surroundings ditches were totally infilled.

Site 12 is enigmatic, but may well belong to the same period as the barrows. A similar Thanet site in the writer's experience was a large infilled pit in the playing field of Drapers Mills School, Margate. This was investigated by trenching in 1980. Excavations were abandoned

when, at a depth of 4 m. from ground surface a flat chalk floor was found, pierced by vertical shafts to an unknown depth. A tanged and barbed flint arrowhead, unworn and unpatinated, was found laying on the chalk floor, dating the feature to the Early Bronze Age. The site was interpreted as the head of a flint mine, and Site 12 may also have had such a function.

(2) *The Late Bronze Age*

Sites 3 and 11 can be dated by the sparse ceramic materials in their ditch fills to the period 800–600 B.C. The paucity of occupation evidence in terms of finds and features suggests that at most they were single hut farmsteads, and they may even have been cattle pounds. It is interesting that the two sites are situated about 400 m. apart, as this is emerging as the optimum spatial distribution among groups of such enclosures in our area (pers. comm. N. Macpherson-Grant).

(3) *The Early to Middle Iron Age.*

Sites 5 and 7 are well preserved rectangular enclosures. Whatever their function (if not simply that of settlements) they provide ample evidence of occupation. Finds indicate a fairly well-to-do community, with northern French pottery, hones and whetstones from Scandinavia, and a cowry shell from tropic seas demonstrating extensive trade connections. The two enclosures are on different alignments. They also differ in that Site 7 is 'closed', enclosed that is within a defensive ditch, while Site 5 is much more unusual in being an 'open' enclosure framed by palisade trenches. This finds a parallel in one of the phases of the settlement investigated at Highstead, near Chislet (N. Macpherson-Grant forthcoming) and makes Site 5 extremely important in terms of regional study. Site 7 is in close association with Site 8, a small attendant enclosure, possibly a shrine?

Unless Sites 5, 7, and 8 are in time established as rare exceptions to the rule, their rectangular plans have important implications for our understanding of prehistoric settlement in Kent, since square and rectangular enclosures observed as crop-marks have hitherto been regarded and listed as being Late Iron Age (Belgic) and Romano-British sites.

(4) *The Belgic Late Iron Age*

While Belgic enclosures are ubiquitous, Site 10 merits attention as being, so far as could be established by this evaluation, an entirely pre-Conquest site. Very few such sites have been examined in Kent.

(5) *The Early Roman period*

Site 1 is a fairly well preserved stretch of Roman trackway, with metalting and parallel ditches intact. Such survival is rare in Kent, and this is

the first clearly identified piece to be discovered in Thanet. The feature extends through the evaluation area for about 150 m. If the course of the trackway is assumed to be straight, then it passes north-west towards the Sunken Garden area of the Westbrook cliffs, where extensive Belgic and Roman remains are known to exist, including (from ceramic evidence) a possible temple site (pers. comm. N. Macpherson-Grant).

(6) The Early Medieval period

Site 4 appears to date from around A.D. 1100, although some length of ditch may be prehistoric, with a Medieval enclosure (perhaps containing a flint-built structure) superimposed.

The implications

The writer does not pretend to any knowledge as to the effects of tree planting and subsequent afforestation on archaeological sites. Common sense dictates however that it must be deleterious. This brings us to the always vexed question of which sites, according to their relative archaeological importance, should be preserved, and which, albeit with some further investigation, could be sacrificed. While all the sites described above are of archaeological interest, Sites 1 and 10 are unique in our area, and Sites 5, 7, and 8 with their peripheral features and structures form a settlement/landscape of certainly regional if not national importance. The only options in the future treatment of these sites are preservation or full excavation, the latter being extremely costly.

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