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ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT MAIDSTONE HOSPITAL, HERMITAGE LANE, BARMING

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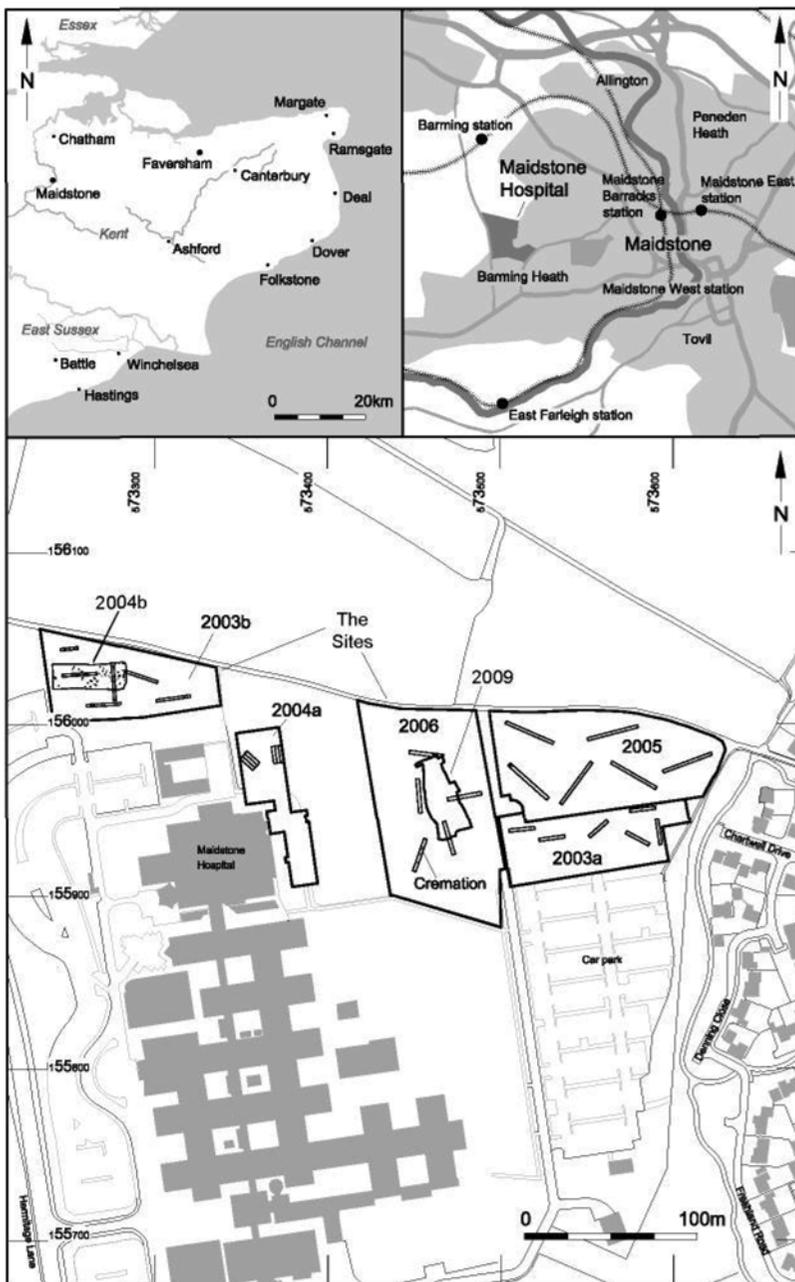
with contributions from Charlotte Thompson, Trista Clifford
and Lucy Sibun

Archaeology South-East (ASE), Institute of Archaeology UCL, was commissioned by Just Learning Ltd and East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust to conduct archaeological investigations at Maidstone Hospital in advance of development work at the site. The excavations revealed evidence of Neolithic, Late Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Late Iron Age and Roman occupation and funerary activity.

The hospital complex is located on the eastern side of Hermitage Lane at c.80m AOD, to the west of Maidstone (NGR 573300 156000; **Fig. 1**). The underlying geology is Folkestone Beds overlain by 5th Terrace River Gravels and the site is c.2.2km to the west of the River Medway. Previous archaeological work immediately to the north of the hospital has revealed evidence of Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Age and Romano-British activity (CAT 1998). Three archaeological investigations by ASE (**Fig. 1**; ASE 2003a; ASE 2004a; ASE 2005) were negative and did not reveal any significant archaeological remains whilst two other areas (**Fig. 1**; ASE 2003b; ASE 2006) have revealed further evidence of Iron Age and Romano-British activity. It is these last two areas that are the subject of this article.

Firstly, archaeological evaluation work prior to the construction of a new day nursery (ASE 2003b; hereafter '*The Nursery Site*'), which uncovered remains of Late Iron Age to early Romano-British date, led to open-area excavation within the footprint of the new building (**Fig. 2**; ASE 2004b).

Secondly, evaluation work carried out ahead of a new renal unit (ASE 2006; hereafter '*The Renal Unit Site*') revealed a single isolated Romano-British cremation whilst a subsequent open-area excavation and watching brief on the site revealed no further archaeological remains (ASE 2009).



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Fig. 1 Site location.

Neolithic/Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age

Some residual prehistoric worked flint was found within later features and from the overburden at the Nursery and Renal Unit sites. Although small in number, the artefacts are indicative of activity in the area. A small quantity of LBA/EIA pottery was recovered from a ditch in evaluation Trench 1 at the Renal Unit site (ASE 2006).

Late Iron Age/Romano-British (Fig. 2)

Evidence of this period was mostly found at the Nursery Site but some pottery of this date was also recovered from the overburden at the Renal Unit Site. Most features were shallow pits and/or post-holes with similar orangey brown, greyish brown or orangey grey silty sand fills. There was little in the way of surviving environmental evidence, although some features did contain unidentified charred cereal grains. The dating of the features was often based on one or a few sherds of pottery.

The largest and most informative feature was [111]. Only two other features had more than twenty sherds. Both were located at the western end of the open area: post-hole [91] and pit [102]. Many of the features were clustered in the centre of the site. This group included pits [21, 23, 25, 39, 51, 57, 59, 70 and 73] and post-holes [64] and [93]. To the south-east of this was another cluster, pits [66, 77, 79, 96 and 101]. The other features were located in two apparent clusters in the eastern half of the stripped area. The first consists of pits [105, 107, 112 and 124]; the other, pits [45, 47, 127, 134 and 155]. Two intercutting LIA pits [119] and [161] were also recorded. A number of other pits and/or post holes probably date this period but contained no finds.

Later Romano-British Cremation Deposit

Recorded in the Renal Unit Site evaluation, the deposit lay within pit [2/010] which contained two discernible fills and grave goods (**Fig. 3**). The primary fill [2/005] had a small assemblage of cremated bone; the secondary fill [2/0110] contained further cremated bone and grave goods: a miniature decorated pottery jar dated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, and small copper-alloy disc brooch. Other small quantities of residual Romano-British pottery were found at the Nursery Site and from the overburden at the Renal Unit Site.

Medieval and Post-Medieval

A single sherd of medieval pottery and a small quantity of post-medieval pottery was recovered from the overburden at the Nursery Site. This

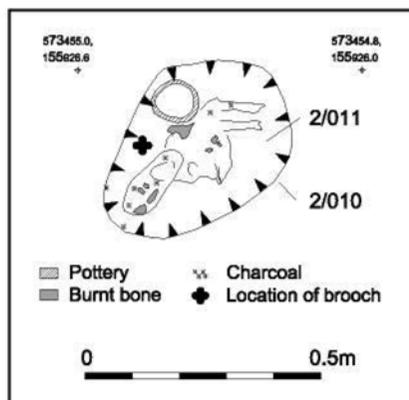


Fig. 3 Cremation found in the Renal Unit evaluation.

does not suggest occupation of the site pre-dating the foundation of the hospital in the 1980s but is most likely the result of night-soiling and/or manuring.

Discussion

The archaeological work has highlighted the potential of the area for the survival of a range of archaeological remains. Although the negative results from most of the evaluation work suggest that there is no great density of archaeology in the area, records of previous finds in the vicinity suggest that there may have been a focus of activity in the immediate environs of the current hospital location.

The Kent County Council Historic Environment Record lists finds of both Late Iron Age and Roman funerary deposits in the immediate area, including a record of a square glass bottle, associated samian dishes and coarse pottery (HER No. TQ 75 NW 15) found in a similar arrangement to the Renal Unit Site cremation. Evidence of possible Bronze Age urns found in 1905 (HER No. TQ 75 NW 14) and a so-called 'Late Celtic interment' found in 1923 (HER No. TQ 75 NW 13), both in the vicinity of the hospital grounds, suggest a local tradition of burial at or near the current hospital, which clearly continues into the second century AD.

Slightly further afield, near East Barming church to the south-west of the hospital, a walled cemetery and two masonry structures, one a possible villa, were located (Page 1932, 104, 145), and to the east in Barming Woods, a mid second-century AD cremation with four pottery vessels, was discovered (Detsicas 1980, 396). Demonstrating that the apparently

isolated cremation burials on the hospital site must be viewed within the broader context of Roman settlement of the Maidstone area.

The characteristics of Romano-British internments are as yet not fully understood in rural areas, but Cleary (2000, 132) has noted that burial sites range from small formally laid-out cemeteries close to the course of Roman roads to apparently isolated burials in the corners of fields or enclosures. The nature of the 'cemetery' at the current site is too poorly defined for classification, and the course of any local network of Roman roads is as yet unknown; the course of the main road from Rochester to Maidstone and into the iron-rich Weald is thought to have run some distance to the east (e.g. Andrews 2004, 20). Cremation deposits are associated with known roadside settlements in this part of Roman Kent, at sites such as Hersden (Barrett 2006) or at Westhawk Farm (Booth, Bingham and Lawrence 2008), both within 20 miles of the site.

The evidence from the Late Iron Age features at the Nursery Site, and from the CAT evaluation to the north; of Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British finds (CAT 1998), is clearly indicative of activity over a long period, and possibly continuity. However, the marked concentration of Late Iron Age features at the Nursery Site is more suggestive evidence of habitation, with the possible presence of post-built structures of some kind, alongside larger pit features.

The Pottery by Charlotte Thompson

A small quantity of unstratified, mostly late prehistoric pottery was recovered. The Nursery Site resulted in the recovery of 215 sherds weighing 1.32kg, which are mostly Late Iron Age to early Romano-British in date; the Renal Unit Site uncovered a Romano-British cremation urn. The pottery was examined under a x20 microscope and recorded by fabric, form and decoration, and quantified by sherd count and weight. Where possible, the fabrics have been related to published fabric definitions (Monaghan 1988; Tomber and Dore 1998). The prehistoric sherds have also been divided into eleven fabric categories.

Late Iron Age/Romano-British Pottery

The prehistoric assemblage contains few diagnostic sherds, rendering tight dating somewhat problematic. However, a later Iron Age date seems likely for most of the material as glauconite tempered pottery falls out of use in the early first century AD (Thompson 1982, 14; Pollard 1988, 33). A 'Belgic' grog-tempered sherd from pit [119] supports this date. Of the few diagnostic forms, a jar from pit [111] has an out-turned rim, polished exterior and a pedestal base. The profile is hard to reconstruct as it is fragmentary, but it is likely to fall into Thompson (1982) class

A1 – a plain pedestal urn with an ordinary foot. There are some Roman sherds in the assemblage, from pits [102], [105] and [111] and also in the unstratified assemblage, but all of these are only found with later Iron Age material. Most of the sherds are reduced and are likely to have been made at the Upchurch/Thameside kilns. A small piece of the diagnostic North Kent fine reduced ware (Tomber and Dore 1998, 168) further supports this as a source for much of the pottery.

Later Romano-British Cremation Vessel

The vessel associated with the cremation in [2/011] is a ‘miniature’ acutellate decorated jar with a small everted rim. It is wheelmade in a sand-tempered fabric that is not immediately traceable to the Cooling or Cliffe kilns in Kent that are known to be producing wheel-made black-burnished ware 2 (BB2) and dated *c.* AD 120-250. The vessel has been burnt and there is soot on the exterior, suggesting that it has been used prior to deposition. It is *c.* 85mm high and the base diameter is 43mm but the rim sherds are too fragmentary to [allow an] estimate of the rim diameter. Vessels on this small scale are known, but rare (Davies *et al.* 1994, fig. 97 no. 633). Two samian sherds recovered from the overburden are in poor condition, but the fabric is central Gaulish Samian, which is also dated *c.* AD 120-250.

Romano-British Brooch by Trista Clifford (Fig. 4)

A single copper-alloy plate brooch of unusual form was associated with the cremation deposit in [2/011]. The brooch is small with a circular central field with four equidistant moulded lugs forming a cruciform

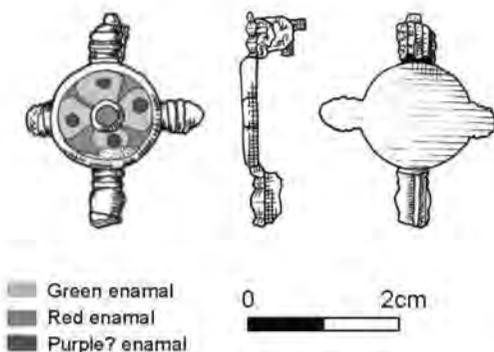


Fig. 4 Romano-British brooch.

shape; the largest of these houses the hinged pin mechanism with iron axial bar and corresponding catchplate. The remaining two are shorter and slightly pointed with a moulded collar. The circular field is enamelled with a red background and four pale green 'petals' surrounding a red enamelled circular central cell within a metal division. In the centre of each petal is a small spot of translucent purple enamel.

The brooch appears to belong to the symmetrical class of plate brooch, since the lugs holding the pin are recessed slightly from the central disc, while the other two lugs are cast in the same plane, and perhaps has the greatest affinities with Hull's Type 230 (Bayley and Butcher 2004, 238). However, an exact parallel for the brooch could not be found: none of the Richborough examples has a round central plate although the brooch has similarities with Richborough Cat 359-60 and with Cat 366. The latter exhibits similarities in both enameling method and colour of decoration, with several colours used within the same field, although in this case there are no metal divisions within the field. A comparable brooch without metal cell divisions was found at Nor-Nour on the Isles of Scilly (Hull 1968, 51 cat. 180). Perhaps the closest parallel in form is cited by Hattat (1989, 152 cat. 1609) as a rare type from Cambridgeshire with a parallel from Pannonia.

Given the lack of British and continental parallels, it is not possible to establish where the brooch was produced, but it is likely to be a continental import broadly dated to the late first/second century AD (Bayley and Butcher 2004, 171 and 176).

The Human Bone *by Lucy Sibun*

Cremated human bone was recovered from [2/005] and [2/011] within a single feature [2/010]. The resulting fractions had been divided into 2-4mm and >4mm. For the purposes of analysis, each context was considered separately. The assessment was undertaken according to standard guidelines (McKinley 2004). The total of weight of cremated bone from each context was established. Each assemblage was then examined to record the degree of fragmentation and fragment colour. The presence and weight of fragments from all skeletal areas (skull, axial skeleton, upper limb, lower limb) was noted. Fragments were also examined for demographic or pathological information. The results of this analysis are summarised in **Table 1**.

A small quantity of cremated bone was recovered, the majority from [2/005]. The combined results of the assemblages seem to represent the remains of a single individual with no repeated elements present. Whilst fragments from all areas of the skeleton were recognisable in both contexts, neither contained fragments which enabled age or sex to be established with confidence. However, based upon size alone, the

TABLE 1: SUMMARY RESULTS OF CREMATED HUMAN BONE ANALYSIS

	Context	2/005	2/011
		Weight (g)	
Fragment size (mm)	0-4	49.9	22.9
	5-10	117.2	11.1
	11-20	39.1	1.9
	21-30	2.0	-
	Total	208.2	35.9
Identifiable bones	Skull	Yes	Yes
	Axial	Yes	Yes
	Upper limb	Yes	Yes
	Lower limb	Yes	Yes
	Age	Prob. adult?	?
	Sex	?	?

individual represented by [2/005] is probably adult. No pathological lesions were noted on any fragments.

The assemblage was completely calcined with all fragments an off-white colour. The assemblage was also highly fragmented, with 90% of fragments less than 10mm across. **Table 2** shows the calculated degree of fragmentation for each context.

TABLE 2: THE DEGREE OF FRAGMENTATION

	Percentage of fragments in each size range.			
	0-4mm	6-10mm	11-20mm	21-30mm
2/005	24	56	19	1
2/011	64	36	-	-
Total	44	46	9.5	0.5

It appears that [2/010] represents a single deposition event; the burial of an adult individual. The context details and analysis results suggest that the burial involved gathering and placing a concentration of fragments at the base of the cut, which was then filled in with another deposit, perhaps including some re-deposited pyre debris.

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