



**Two prehistoric and Roman sites in Whitfield, Dover, Kent**

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# **Two prehistoric and Roman sites in Whitfield, Dover, Kent**

**Simon Stevens, Gary Webster, Lucy Allott and Anna Doherty**

## **Abstract**

*Archaeology South-East carried out archaeological work on two development sites in Whitfield, Dover, Kent. The excavations revealed limited evidence of Mesolithic/Early Neolithic and Early Bronze Age activity, Late Bronze Age and Iron Age field systems and Roman remains, suggesting widespread human activity in the area across time.*

## **Introduction**

This report provides results of archaeological work at two sites in Whitfield, one on land at Honeywood Parkway, White Cliffs Business Park (hereafter *Site A*), and another which straddled the A256 to the east of the village (hereafter *Site B*; Figure 1). This article seeks to discuss the findings in the context of the archaeological development of the broader area and with reference to pertinent aspects of previous archaeological work.

Figure 1: Site locations

### ***Site A***

Site A consisted of a parcel of land to the south-east of White Cliffs Business Park, Whitfield (NGR 631204 144427; Figure 2). It was bounded to the north and east by Honeywood Parkway, and to the south by agricultural land. The northern part of the

site was formally occupied by a compound used during the construction of White Cliffs Business Park. The underlying bedrock geology at the site is the Margate Chalk Member overlain by superficial deposits of clay, silt, sand and gravel of the Clay-with-flints (BGS 2023).

Figure 2: Site A - all phases

Archaeology South-East (ASE) was commissioned to carry out a strip map and sample excavation of two areas at the site between February and March 2016. This followed on from an initial evaluation carried out by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust (CAT) in March 2007. The fieldwork took place in advance of the creation of trade units and warehouses to fulfil a planning condition, and was commissioned by Trade Marq Ltd. And managed by RPS Consulting. Full details of the site are included in unpublished reports (CAT 2007; ASE 2016).

### ***Site B***

The site consisted of three parcels of land on either side of the A256 to the east of Whitfield, and to the south of Pineham (NGR 631270 145582; Figure 1). The site was previously used for agriculture and was bounded on all sides by farmland. The bedrock was Seaford Chalk Formation, overlain by Head Deposits, formed of clay, silt, sand and gravel (BGS 2023).

ASE was commissioned to undertake a strip, map and sample excavation of two

areas on either side of the A256, (and an associated watching brief) undertaken between March and October 2016, following an evaluation carried out by ASE in November and December 2015, itself following the production of an archaeological desk-based assessment completed by CgMs Consulting in October 2009 (see below). The fieldwork took place in advance of, and during residential development to fulfil a planning condition, and was commissioned by CgMs Consulting. Full details of the site are included in an unpublished report (ASE 2017).

### **Archaeological Background**

The sites lie in an area rich in known archaeological remains dating as far back as the Palaeolithic. The Desk Based Assessment completed for Site B (CgMs 2009) highlighted the presence of prehistoric deposits across the local landscape, including flint finds and the location of a barrow to the north-west of Site B. There was a clear uptick in activity into the Iron Age, with more intensive activity into the Roman period. The Richborough to Dover Roman road runs on a north-south alignment c.200m to the east of Site B (Margary 1955) and there is clear evidence of Roman settlement and cemeteries in the Whitfield area. There is evidence of dispersed Romano-British settlement in the vicinity identified during an evaluation of the Old Park Barracks estate where Roman pits and a possible cremation were identified, as well as 260 sherds of pottery dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD (Corke and Parfitt 2005, 25). Further evidence of a 1<sup>st</sup> Century farmstead, including a possible beam slot, a hearth and several post-holes, was found to the north of the Old Park Barracks, during an evaluation of Honeywood Road (CAT 1998).

Clearly an attractive place to live, settlement continued into the Early Medieval period, and remains from the Anglo-Saxon era have also been encountered locally, with timber halls and Grubenhäuser encountered close to Site B. A later medieval building is also thought to have been excavated near the site, but the exact location remains unclear (CgMs 2009).

## **Archaeological Results**

### ***Site A***

#### ***Period 1 - Mesolithic/Early Neolithic***

A concentration of fresh Mesolithic or Early Neolithic material was recovered from pits (A-G1) identified in the northern excavation area. Two intercutting pits, were originally recorded as a ditch in the evaluation (CAT 2010) as they are elongated and steep-sided. Another pit, more circular and shallower than the other two lay to the west of these. All of these features produced modest assemblages of fresh Mesolithic or Neolithic flint flakes, blades and chips, indicating that these represent primary deposit, rather than residual material. Other features, undated by artefacts, but presumed to be contemporary were located in the vicinity (A-G2, A-G3 and A-G4).

#### ***Period 2 - Early Bronze Age***

A loose cluster of three post-holes (A-G11) were identified in the southern excavation area. The southernmost feature contained three pieces of worked flint, consisting of one flake, and two blades; one of which was serrated. These were all relatively fresh, and although they were initially dated to the Neolithic period based on this flintwork, charcoal and charred *Corylus avellana* shell, retrieved from the same sample that produced the flints, have been carbon-dated to 2475–2295 cal BC and 2575–2455 cal BC respectively, putting their date in the very Early Bronze Age (SUERC-69740, 3925 ± 30 BP; SUERC-69741, 3979 ± 30 BP; Table 1)

*Period 3 - Middle to Late Iron Age*

A c.2m wide, c.1.2m deep, north-east to south-west aligned ‘v’-shaped ditch (A-G5) was identified in the south-eastern part of the site. Twenty sherds of Middle to Late Iron Age pottery recovered from this feature, along with twenty-two pieces of residual worked flint. Another ditch (A-G7) which ran on a north-west to south-east alignment, broadly perpendicular to ditch (A-G5) was also identified. Though the perpendicular layout of the features might suggest that these features were part of an organised landscape, the profile of ditch (A-G7) was very different from that of (A-G5), being only c.0.3m deep and having shallow sloping sides and a concave base

The two intercutting Mesolithic/Early Neolithic pits (A-G1) were probably disturbed during the Middle and Late Iron Age, as pottery identified as probably from this period was also collected from the upper fills of the features. The Iron Age pottery

from these fills was significantly more abraded and worn than the Neolithic material, indicating that it was intrusive, interpreted by the excavators as the result of attempts to level the land.

#### *Period 4 - Roman*

A single piece of Roman pottery was recovered from one of three pits (A-G6) identified in the south-western part of the southern area. Two of these features were very shallow, perhaps just representing the base of truncated features, but one, from which the pottery was recovered, was c.0.5m deep.

#### ***Finds and Environmental Summary***

Finds from the excavation included 161 pieces of struck worked flint weighing 670g. The flintwork from Site A/Area B comprises 31 flakes, 35 bladelets, blades and blade-like flakes, two pieces of irregular waste and a modified blade. This material is directly related to the blade-based industry, and it is likely to be Mesolithic or Early Neolithic in date. The material from Site A/Area A is slightly more mixed. The assemblage consists of 24 flakes, a blade, a blade-like flake, 14 chips and three retouched pieces. This material was more crudely worked than the material from Area B. There was a further 1842g of burnt, unstruck flint.

Forty sherds of pottery, weighing 148g, dating from the prehistoric and Roman periods were recovered from Site A. Prehistoric fabrics are largely made up by a similar range of well-fired, fairly fine, well-sorted flint-tempered wares with silty to

fine sandy matrixes. Aside from a tiny undiagnostic rim fragment weighing 3g, this material was all made up by featureless bodysherds, though the fabric types encountered are fairly typical of the Middle and Late Iron Age (c.400 BC–AD 10) in south-east Kent. This broad date range is supported by the presence of a typically Middle Iron Age non-flint-tempered sandy fabric and large sherds in a Late Iron Age grog-tempered ware. A single partial rim sherd from a Roman everted rim jar or beaker in Canterbury oxidised ware was also recovered; this was unaccompanied by prehistoric pottery.

Suitable features were sampled for environmental remains. Most of these were dominated by uncharred vegetative material, such as rootlets, twigs and seeds of knotgrasses (*Polygonum* sp.). Charred plant remains consisted of a small amount of hazel (*Corylus avellana*) nutshell fragments. No crop remains were recorded. A tiny amount of bone from an unidentified species from a Mesolithic or Neolithic pit was identified. Further finds retrieved from the samples included flint, pottery, fire cracked flint, pebbles and magnetic material. The samples did not yield charred plant macrofossils other than fragments of hazelnut shells. There was not a wide array of identified taxa and although the assemblage is too small to draw any conclusions on fuel selection strategy, the presence of oak and cherry/blackthorn suggests that both deciduous woodland and hedgerows/shrubs were present in the local vegetation and were being exploited for fuel.

#### ***Site B***

### **Period 1- Residual Earlier Prehistoric Material**

Two small flint flakes, or either Mesolithic or Neolithic date were recovered as residual finds in the fill of a Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age ditch (B-G1; Figure 3).

One Mesolithic or Neolithic flake, and one Mesolithic to Early Bronze flake were recovered residually within the remains of fires (B-G8) cut into the fills of the ditch.

### **Figure 3: Site B - all phases**

An Early to Middle Neolithic leaf-shaped arrowhead was recovered from the subsoil, alongside other Mesolithic and Neolithic flintwork.

### ***Period 2 - Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age***

A Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age ditch (B-G1) was identified, forming the north-eastern portion of an enclosure of unknown extent, with a c.1.20m wide entrance facing to the north-east. Five sections were excavated through the feature, and they all revealed a similar concave profile, a maximum width of 1.5m and depth of 0.50m.

An assemblage of 69 sherds of pottery all apparently from a single vessel, dated to c.1150 BC to 800 BC were recovered from fill [9/005] of ditch [9/004], interpreted as the result of deliberate deposition. A carbonised residue adhering to the inside of a sherd of the pottery returned a calibrated date of 1215–1005 cal BC (at 95% confidence) or 1190–1120 cal BC (at 68% confidence) (Beta-655847; 2910 ± 30 BP;

Table 1). Other finds from the enclosure ditch included pottery sherds in the same fabric type, as well as residual Mesolithic and Neolithic flintwork.

No archaeological features were encountered to the exterior of the ditch, and on the balance of probabilities, and in the absence of clear dating evidence the features recorded within the enclosure were presumed to be broadly contemporary with it in date. Features interpreted as evidence of tree clearance were recorded (e.g. [016]), as well as two groups of post-holes (e.g. [020]), which formed no obvious patterns representing structures or fence lines.

#### *Period 3 - Middle to Late Iron Age*

A small assemblage of pottery dating from the Middle Iron Age was encountered pressed into the surface of the natural within Trench 33 (Context [33/003]). A hearth/pit [35/004] (not illustrated) contained frequent fire-cracked flint, occasional charcoal, worked flint and a small quantity of Middle Iron Age/Late Iron Age pottery.

After the enclosure ditch had silted up, a series of fires left burnt deposits (B-G8) on the top of the feature. Charcoal was identified within the fills, as well as quantities of fire cracked flint (FCF) and earlier residual flint. This activity was presumed to be broadly contemporary with the deposits recorded in the evaluation trenches.

#### *Period 4 - Late Iron Age to Early Roman*

Substantial features [049] and [055] were identified during the archaeological watching brief, but could not be fully traced or recorded and were only visible in section (Figure 4). Both features appeared to lie on a broadly east-west alignment. They were irregular in profile and uncertain in extent, and with no clear relationship. The upper fill of feature [049], context [051], contained several sherds of a single storage jar, which could be dated to the Late Iron Age or Early Roman period, as well a handful of other grog-tempered bodysherds. Smaller hollows were located on the other side of Whitfield in excavations at Green Lane. These were interpreted as possible clay extraction of Late Iron Age date (Parfitt 2002), and it is plausible, although far from certain that the features at the current site were used for the extraction of chalk and clay.

Figure 4: Site B - Watching Brief Area

#### ***The Finds and Environmental Summary***

A total of 78 pieces of struck flint weighing 688g were recovered during the evaluation and the subsequent excavation. A moderate quantity of burnt unworked flint (just under 24kg) was also recovered.

Considering the presence of 23 chips (<1cm<sup>2</sup>), the flint assemblage is relatively small. It is thinly spread across the site with no contexts producing more than five pieces. Except for four modified tools, the assemblage consists entirely of unretouched débitage of which flakes are the dominant type (39 pieces). It is difficult to date the

flakes with confidence, but a large amount display thin flake scar removals on the dorsal face, platform preparation or winged platforms. Some of these flakes are likely to pre-date the Middle Bronze Age. True blades were uncommon, but thin blade scars were observed on several blade-like flakes. These pieces were also carefully worked. A single platform flake core (86g) was recovered from ditch [39], fill [40] (B-G1). It is minimally used.

The assemblage contained four modified pieces; a retouched flake, an end scraper, a possible unfinished arrowhead from the subsoil and a serrated piece from B-G1. The serrated piece is broken. It is made on a blade and displays serrations on both sides. The possible leaf arrowhead is crudely made and appears unfinished. Both these pieces are likely to be Neolithic. The end scraper is likely to pre-date the Middle Bronze Age, but the retouched flake is chronologically undiagnostic.

Burnt unworked flint totalling 11.5kg was hand-collected during the evaluation and excavations and just over 12kg was retrieved from bulk soil samples. The fills of three pits/hearths (B-G8) dug into Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age enclosure ditch produced 45.1% of the total assemblage of FCF. The single fill [38] of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pit [37] (B-G8) produced 9366g (39.3% of the total FCF).

A small assemblage of prehistoric to early Roman pottery was recovered from evaluation and mitigation work at the site, totalling 120 sherds, weighing 966g. Most of the sherds originate from one fragmented vessel of probable Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age date. A small amount of material of possible Middle/Late Iron

Age date was recovered from evaluation trenches in areas which were not further mitigated. Finally, a very small quantity of Late Iron Age/early Roman material was recorded.

The majority of the assemblage (69 sherds, weighing 654g) comes from a single vessel found lying on its side in a partially-complete state in fill [9/005] of ditch [9/004] (enclosure ditch B-G1), a thin-walled shouldered jar with simple short, out-turning rim (Figure 5, P1) in a moderately coarse flint-tempered ware, with inclusions ranging up to 2–3mm, was found in a fragmented but partially complete state. Radiocarbon dating of an internal carbonised residue on the vessel returned a date spanning the 12<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (Beta-655848, 2910 ± 30 BP, 1215–1005 cal BC). Although this calibrated range includes the very end of the Middle Bronze Age period, the fabric, form and wall thickness of this vessel places it firmly in the Late Bronze Age plain ware post Deverel-Rimbury (PDR) tradition, and the form likely dates to around 1150–1000 BC. More fragmentary sherds from a very similar necked jar in the same fabric type were noted in fill [025] of ditch [024] from the same enclosure ditch.

Figure 5: Illustrated pottery

Some other flint-tempered wares, all from evaluation trenches beyond the main mitigation area, were relatively finer and better sorted. One of these contexts, [33/003], contained a small/moderate-sized group of pottery and some diagnostic feature sherds. It is dominated by the fairly fine flint-tempered fabrics, including a

small partial rim probably from an S-profile necked jar and a pedestal base fragment. Taken as a group most of these sherds would be in keeping with a Middle Iron Age date. The group also contained two sherds in non-flint-tempered sandy wares containing sparse grog-tempering. Evidence from the Highspeed 1 (CTRL) project suggests that grog-tempered fabrics tend to first appear in transitional Middle/Late Iron Age groups (Morris 2006, 67–77). Sherds in grog-tempered and flint-tempered wares also co-occurred in context [35/005], something which may also suggest a Middle/Late Iron Age date.

All of the Late Iron Age/Early Roman pottery was grog tempered. It comprised a large rimsherd from bead rim storage jar recovered from fill [057] of feature [055] (B-G9) and a few other grog-tempered bodysherds found in fill [42/004] of equivalent feature [42/003], recorded during the evaluation. This material is typical of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

Three bulk soil samples were taken to retrieve environmental remains such as charred plant macrofossils, wood charcoal, fauna and molluscs, and to assist finds recovery. The samples originated form the fills of two pits and a ditch. The two pit fills have been phased to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age. The present report summarises the contents of these samples, and assesses the significance and the potential of the environmental remains to contribute to discussions of diet, environment, economy and fuel acquisition strategies.

Flots were generally dominated by very small charcoal fragments. Evidence of rooting was minimal, indicating little to no disturbance. Charred plant macrofossils were limited to a small number of indeterminate buds. Charcoal was recovered from all the samples, but was not in the size range or amount that would have warranted identification work. No significant assemblages of finds were recovered from the residues.

### **Radiocarbon Dating and Statistical Analysis** by Lucy Allott and Anna Doherty

#### ***Introduction and Methods***

Samples of wood charcoal, a charred plant macrofossil and a carbonised residue adhering to pottery were submitted to SUERC and Beta Analytic Radiocarbon Dating Laboratories for AMS radiocarbon dating. The purpose of submitting the samples was:

- to establish a date for the infilling [047] <6> of one of a series of potholes [048] A-G11 in which flint which may be of Neolithic date was recovered at Site A
- provide a date on a charred residue located on the inside of vessel fragments within context [9/005] of ditch [9/004] (enclosure ditch B-G1) within Site B

Conventional radiocarbon ages (Stuiver & Polach 1977) are presented in Table 1 and are quoted in accordance with the international standard known as the Trondheim

convention (Stuiver and Kra 1986). Calibrated date ranges have been calculated for these using the program OxCal v4.4.4 (Bronk Ramsey 2009), and the IntCal20 data set for terrestrial samples from the northern hemisphere (Reimer *et al.* 2020) and presented in Table 1. Date ranges given in the table and text are those for 95% confidence and are quoted in the form recommended by Mook (1986), with the end points rounded outwards to 10 years and have been calculated using the maximum intercept method (Stuiver and Reimer 1986).

### **Results**

Two samples submitted for dating from posthole [048] have been subjected to chi-square test for consistency (Ward and Wilson 1978). Measurements on *Prunus* sp. (cherry/blackthorn) charcoal (SUERC-69740) and charred *Corylus avellana* (hazel) nut shell fragment (SUERC-69741) from [049] are statistically consistent at the 5% level ( $T'=1.6$ ;  $v=1$ ;  $T'(5\%)=3.8$ ; Ward and Wilson 1978) and the charred remains could be of the same actual date. The youngest calibrated date of 2475–2295 cal BC obtained on *Prunus* sp. charcoal (SUERC-69740) provides the best estimate for the infilling of the feature.

A carbonised residue adhering to the inside of a fragment of partially complete vessel from the fill [9/005] of ditch [9/004] (B-G1) returned a calibrated date of 1215–1005 cal BC (at 95% confidence) or 1190–1120 cal BC (at 68% confidence) (Beta-655847).

Lab Code	Context & Sample Reference	Sample material	Radiocarbon age (BP)	$\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{IRMS}}$ (‰)	Calibrated range ( $2\sigma$ )
SUERC- 69740	Posthole [048] A-G11 [047] sample <6> ASE_DS_416	Charcoal: <i>Prunus</i> sp.	3925±30	-26.0	2475 – 2295 cal BC
SUERC- 69741	Posthole [048] A-G11 [047] sample <6> ASE_DS_417	Charred Plant Remain: <i>Corylus</i> <i>avallana</i> nutshell fragment	3979±30	-25.2	2575 – 2455 cal BC
Beta- 655847	ditch [9/004] fill [9/005] ASE_DS_1011	Charred Residue on Pot	2910±30	-26.9	1215 – 1005 cal BC

Table 1: Summary of radiocarbon dates from both sites

## Conclusions

Clearly the high, dry chalklands of the Whitfield area have proved attractive for millennia, with the so-called ‘400 foot plateau,’ (CAT 2010) and the surrounding area offering past societies a range of resources to exploit.

Both sites offered up remains of hunter/gatherer activity in the distant past, with Site A producing more concrete evidence of Mesolithic/Early Neolithic pit digging, perhaps hinting at a shift in the early Neolithic to towards some level of seasonal

occupation, although this is speculative at best. What is more certain is that moving into the Bronze Age, activity seemed to intensify in the area, with Early Bronze Age activity at Site A, followed by the establishment of a ditched enclosure in the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age at Site B.

It was unfortunate that there was so little evidence for the nature of activity within the enclosure, either in terms of features representing structures or indicative of function, or in terms of environmental material, which was scant at best across both areas and in all represented periods. However, the ditch alone arguably provided evidence for another location of a long-recognised style of enclosed Late Bronze Age farmstead found in elevated positions in Kent (e.g. Mill Hill and Highstead; Champion 1980).

By the Middle to the Late Iron Age, there appeared to have attempts at organised land division at Site A, and limited activity at Site B. possibly in connection with land clearance and preparation for agriculture. Unfortunately, the deposits dated to the Roman period were equally enigmatic, suggesting the focus of local activity may have shifted (cf. CAT 1998; Corke and Parfitt 2005).

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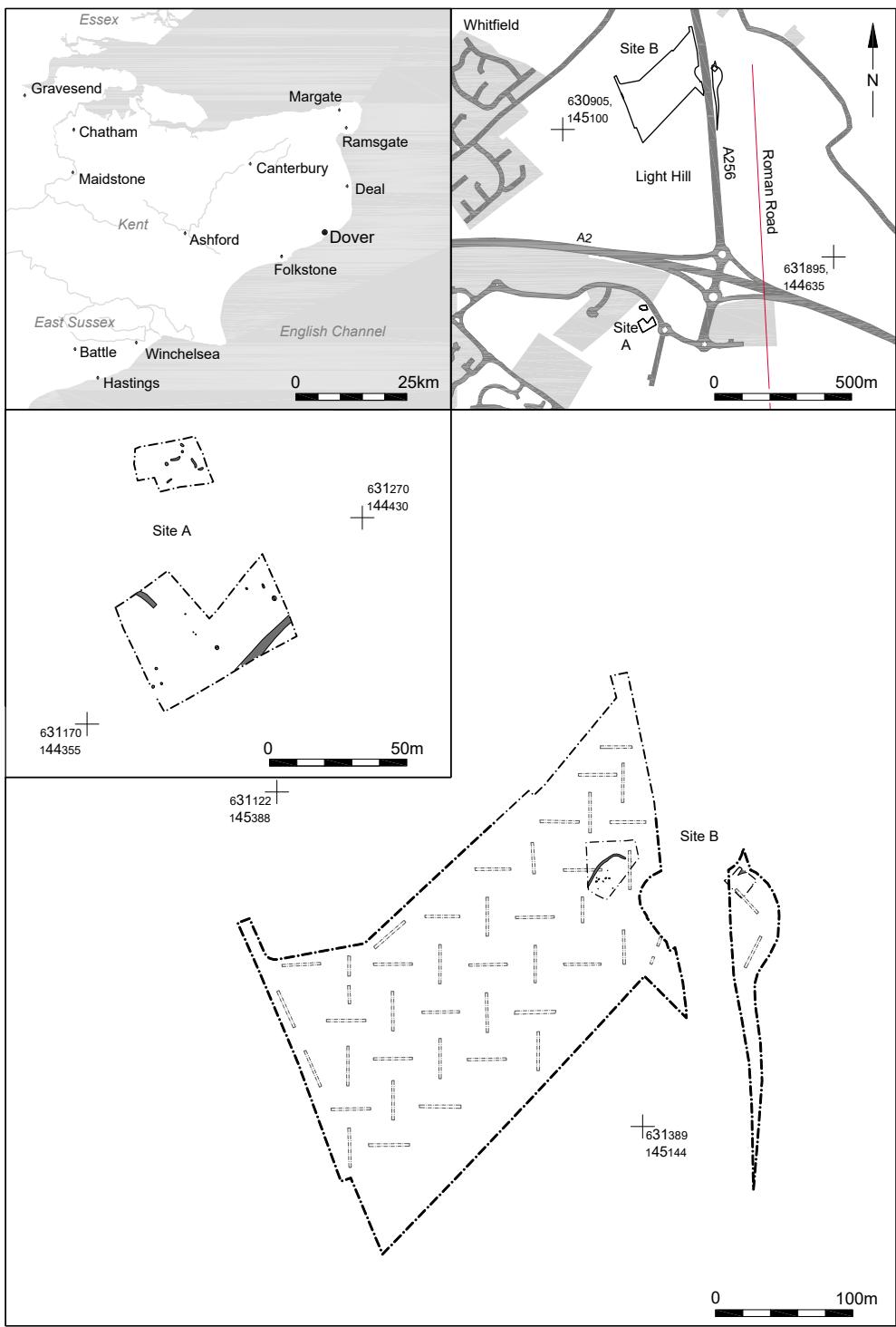
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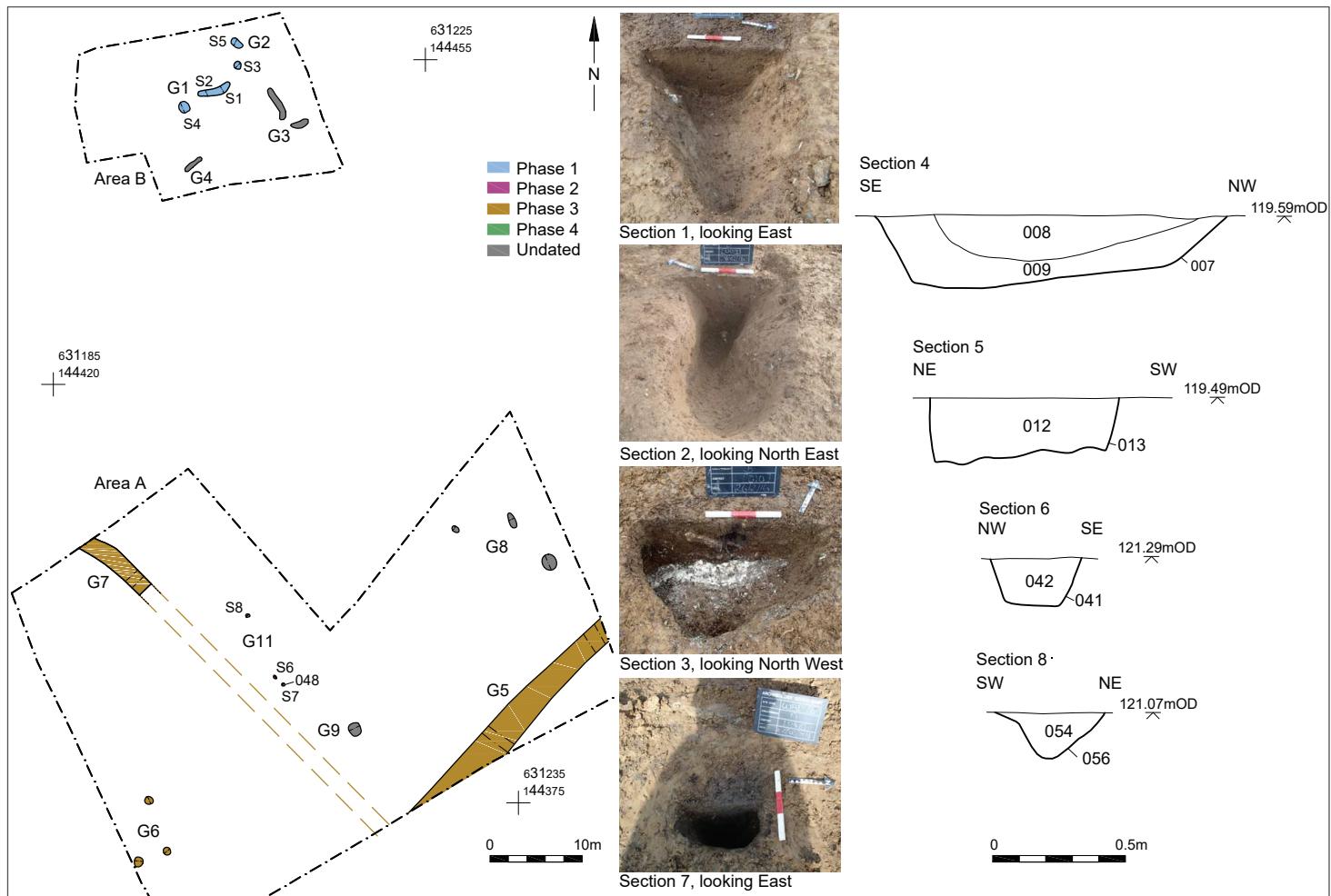
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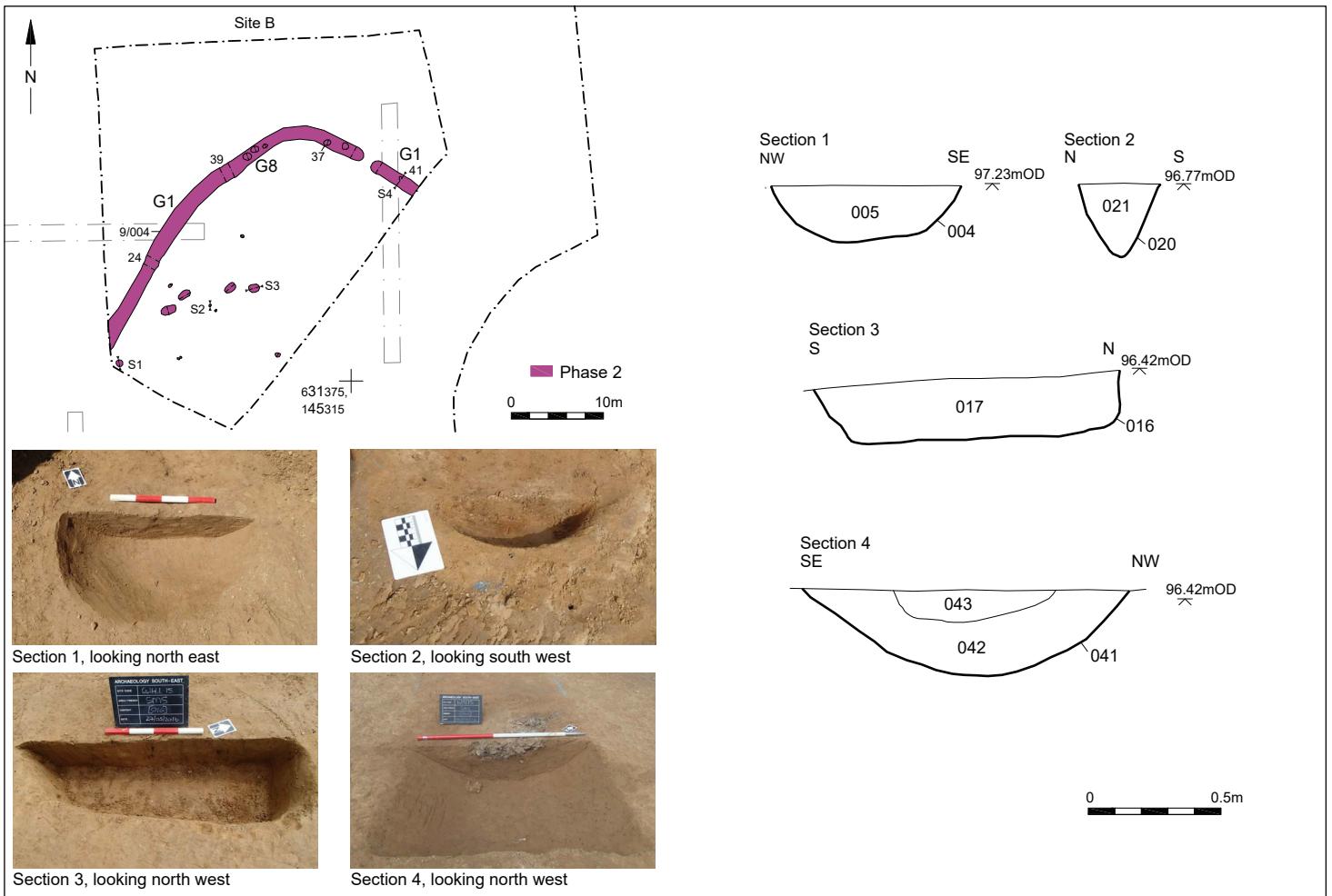
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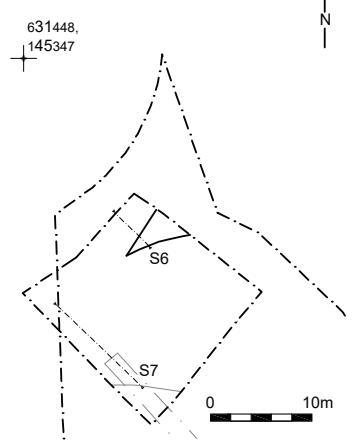
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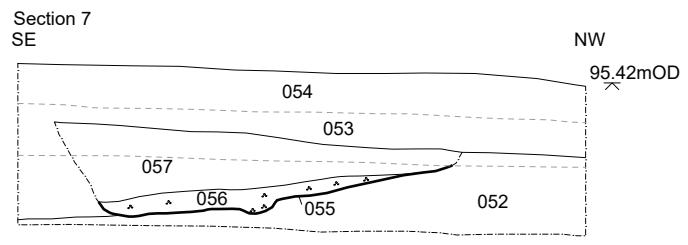
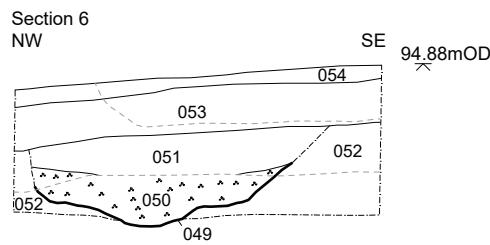
Site B: Watching Brief Area



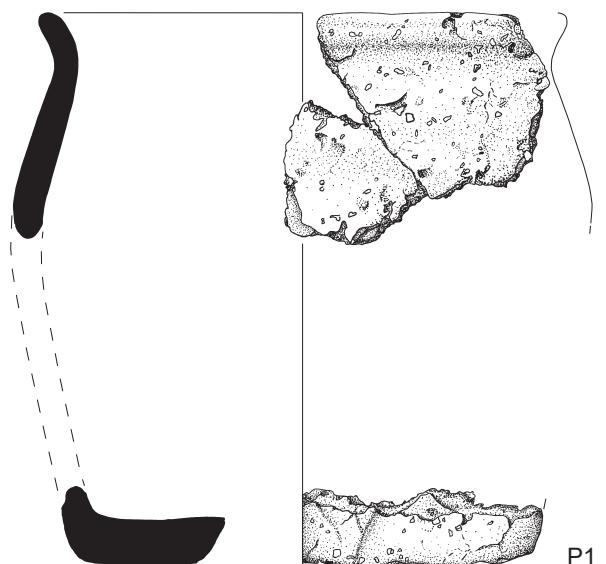
Section 6, looking north east



Section 7, looking south west



▲ Chalk 0 1m



0 5cm

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