

Thanet Archaeological Landscape Mapping Project



Issue four of the Thanet Archaeological Landscape Mapping project newsletter

Welcome to the fourth Thanet Archaeological Landscape Mapping Project newsletter. In this issue, we provide details and an update on the progress made, information from some of the interesting archaeological excavations in the district and how to get involved in the project.

The first issue of the newsletter also provided general background on the project, including the reasons for undertaking this work and a summary of our main aims and objectives. If you missed it, all previous editions of the newsletter are available on the project page of the Kent County Council website.

<https://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure-and-community/history-and-heritage/thanet-archaeological-landscape-mapping-project>

The data enhancement work

The data work has continued, and we have made significant progress in enhancing and adding information to the Kent Historic Environment Record (HER). All available unpublished archaeological reports detailing the excavations carried out in Thanet have been processed and are now represented in the database as Event records. Monument records have been created for the features, finds, and deposits detailed in those reports. Moving forward, we will focus on enhancing the existing data in the database, prioritizing investigations that provide the most valuable information.

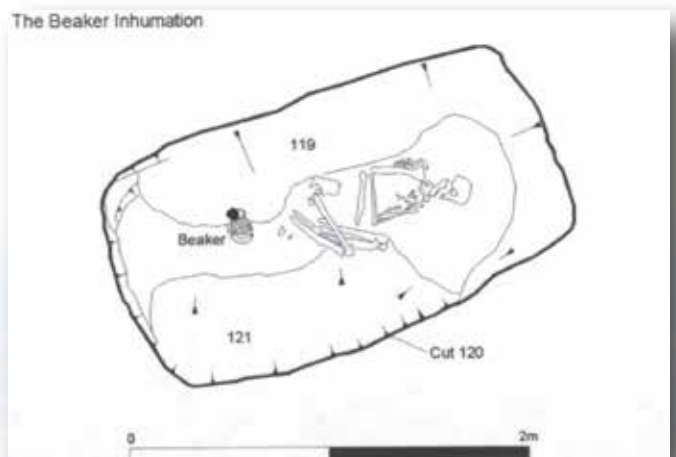
Previous issues of the newsletter have primarily focused on large-scale excavations conducted ahead of development and infrastructure projects. This emphasis is due to the substantial amount of information these sites typically contribute to the HER database.

However, this does not imply that information from small-scale excavations is insignificant. On the contrary, such excavations are crucial for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the district's archaeology and providing local context.

Bronze Age discoveries at North Foreland

A notable example is the archaeological discoveries made by The Trust For Thanet Archaeology during the construction of an underground garage off North Foreland Avenue in 2004. Despite the small size of the site, which was limited to the front garden of a single property, the findings were both impressive and significant.

The excavation revealed part of a ring ditch, likely the enclosure ditch of a round barrow, alongside a large pit containing a crouched inhumation burial of an adult female. Both the ring ditch and the burial were dated to the Early Bronze Age (circa 1900-1700 BC) and were cut into the natural chalk approximately 25cm beneath the modern ground level. The form of the grave cut/pit suggests it may have once contained an inner timber structure into which the inhumation was placed.



Bronze Age burial discovered at North Foreland Avenue in 2004 by the Trust for Thanet Archaeology



The grave also contained a long-necked beaker placed at her feet. Other finds, mostly from the fills of the ring ditch, included earlier flintwork, such as a Neolithic polished axe-head, possibly indicating earlier activity in the vicinity. In addition to enhancing our understanding of the distribution of Bronze Age activity and burials, the 2004 discoveries at North Foreland Avenue contribute to the study of the Beaker period as a whole. The potential presence of a timber grave structure adds an extra layer of interest to these discoveries.

The information gathered from this small-scale investigation contributes to our understanding of the distribution of prehistoric activity and burials in the area, especially when considered alongside other nearby excavations. These include the investigation at Fairacre Lodge, less than 50 m to the west, which also produced evidence of a Bronze Age barrow and inhumation, and the excavations at St Stephen's College off North Foreland Road, less than 200 m to the south, which provided evidence of Bronze Age activity in the form of ring ditches, though these are likely slightly later in date.



The Beaker discovered alongside the burial at North Foreland Avenue



Two of the ring ditches excavated by the Trust for Thanet Archaeology at St Stephen's College



Roman buildings in Broadstairs

Further examples of useful small-scale investigations can be found in Broadstairs where there have been a number of Roman buildings revealed. In March 2004, a single evaluation trench excavated on a development site at the rear of 103 Stone Road uncovered the remains of two Roman structures beneath deep deposits of garden soil and colluvium. These remains included flint cobble walls, beaten chalk floors, and flint cobble wall foundations. They were associated with a series of small kilns, possibly used for grain processing or as kitchen stoves. Analysis of the grain found within the kilns provided evidence of the crops grown in the surrounding landscape during that period. The analysis of the finds and pottery discovered here is also illuminating, suggesting possible late 3rd-century military activity at the site.

Roman buildings were also identified on land adjacent to Bleak House in Broadstairs during excavations in 2007 and 2009. Three buildings were uncovered, and although the superstructure was lost, the remains suggest buildings of considerable size and sophistication. They bore similarities to those discovered off Stone Street, and the assemblage of pottery was also comparable. As with the Bronze Age evidence discussed earlier, these small-scale investigations provide evidence for what is happening in a wider landscape. They offer clues to the purpose and character of Roman settlement in this part of the district and point to the strategic significance of the east coast of Thanet and the North Foreland peninsula in the later Roman period.



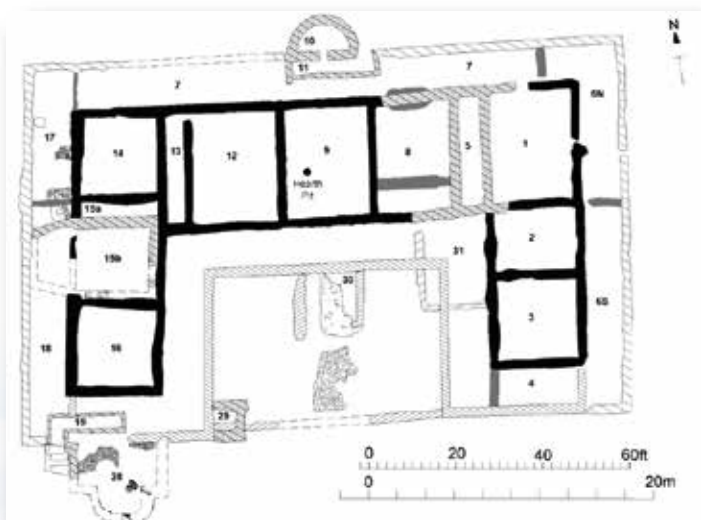
Roman cellar at Bleak House in Broadstairs excavated by The Trust for Thanet Archaeology



Minster Roman villa

Commercial excavations are not the only type of archaeological investigation carried out in the district. Community archaeological digs also make valuable contributions to the record, with some fascinating sites explored by groups of volunteers or amateur archaeologists. One such site is Minster Roman villa, located in the fields north-east of Minster Abbey. The presence of a Roman villa in this location had been known for many years, with above-ground remains noted in antiquarian sources. Although these standing remains were lost many years ago, the villa complex is clearly visible as a negative cropmark on aerial photographs.

The first archaeological investigations at the site were conducted in 1991 by members of the Kent Archaeological Society, who dug a series of hand-cut trenches. Results from four trenches indicated that substantial building remains survived, but they were very close to the surface and subject to regular plough attrition. Consequently, a more extensive programme of archaeological investigation was deemed necessary to preserve the villa by record. Members of the Kent Archaeological Society and the Dover Archaeological Group excavated the site over several seasons between 1996 and 2004, revealing large parts of the villa estate.



Plan of the main villa building at Minster Roman villa



Polychrome mosaic glass discovered during excavations at Minster Roman villa

Six separate buildings were identified along with a vast array of finds. The buildings included a bathhouse, a possible corn dryer, large sections of the boundary walls, and various ancillary structures. It seems likely that other structures remain to be discovered. The main villa building, revealed over several seasons, consisted of a 'winged-corridor' house of a well-known Romano-British type. A large quantity of finds were gathered and analysed, including pottery, tile, glass, animal bone, painted plaster, mosaic fragments, coins, and other artefacts. The excavated evidence suggests that the villa was established towards the end of the 1st century AD and continued into the early 3rd century being abandoned by the late 3rd century. Overall, the results gathered by the volunteer archaeologists at this site significantly enhances our understanding of the Roman period in Thanet and contributes to villa studies at a regional level.



Minster Roman villa and associated buildings plotted in the HER GIS mapping



Work of the Historic England AIM team

In conjunction with the work being carried out on the HER data at Kent County Council, Historic England's Aerial Investigation and Mapping team have continued their work on the project. They have completed mapping all identified features from aerial photographs and Lidar onto their system and are now in the process of adding this information to the Kent HER. The work is in progress but the improvements made by the AIM team are already evident. They have enhanced the geographical locations and interpretations of many features previously mapped from aerial photographs and have added numerous previously unrecorded sites. An area where these improvements are especially apparent is in the open areas between Acol, Brooksend Farm, and Birchington. Here, extensive cropmark traces reveal a complex, multi-phase landscape of later prehistoric, Roman, and medieval settlements with field systems linked by linear ditches and trackways. Several trackways converge at the head of the Brooksend Stream inlet. Among the settlement remains are numerous Bronze Age round barrows and three Early Medieval cemeteries. The project has also revealed and mapped the Medieval landscape at Westgate-on-Sea, including a string of Medieval rectangular enclosures north of the road, demonstrating the longevity of the routeways in Thanet.

So far, the team has added or enhanced over 2,000 records, significantly improving the HER data in Thanet, which will be extremely useful for the characterisation stage of the project, and for HER users more generally. The team has also conducted field visits to examine the areas they have been mapping, allowing them to see the features in their landscape context. These visits were helpful in identifying whether any of the mapped features could still be recognized as upstanding earthworks. Fortunately, some features were still visible; one of the mounds associated with a Bronze Age ring ditch was discernible as a very slight hump, and salterns were clearly visible as earthworks or mounds.

All HE's digital aerial photographs are available on Aerial Photo Explorer – <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/collections/aerial-photos/>



Top: AIM work in remaining open areas between Acol, Brooksend Farm and Birchington

Bottom: Bronze Age barrows and WW2 trenches around Brooksend Farm

Outreach

Our outreach program for the project has been continuing. We have held talks introducing the project, discussing its main aims and outputs, and providing details about the work completed so far at several local historical groups and archaeological societies. Most recently, these talks were held with the Isle of Thanet Archaeological Society at Crampton Tower in Broadstairs and with the Seaside History Club in Margate. If you and/or your organisation or society would like to host a public talk about the project, or if you would like more information, please get in touch via email:

Victoria.hosegood@kent.gov.uk or
heritage.conservation@kent.gov.uk

