

**An Archaeological Watching Brief Report  
Mill House, High Street, Staplehurst, Kent**

**NGR 578660 143057  
(TQ 78660 43057)**

**ASE Project No: 4813  
Site Code: MHS12**

**ASE Report No: 2012131  
OASIS id: archaeol6-129951**



**By Nick Garland MA**

**July 2012**

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**Abstract**

*Archaeology South-East was commissioned by commissioned by Richard Gill Architects to undertake an archaeological watching brief during excavations associated with the construction of a house and garage at Mill House, Staplehurst, Kent. The work was undertaken between the 31<sup>st</sup> May and 7<sup>th</sup> June 2012.*

*No archaeological deposits, features or finds were uncovered during the works. The monitoring revealed that the site had been heavily truncated, removing any trace of subsoil layers. This may have been the result of the bombing and subsequent levelling of the site during World War II.*

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site Background**

1.1.1 Archaeology South-East (ASE), the contracting division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology (CAA) at the University College London (UCL) Institute for Archaeology (IoA), was commissioned by Richard Gill Architects on behalf of their client, Revd. James Dowswell, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during excavations associated with development at Mill House, Staplehurst, Kent (NGR 578660 143057; Figure 1).

### **1.2 Geology and Topography**

1.2.1 The site is located between Mill House to the south and further properties to the north, set back from the High Street, down a small lane. The site is flanked by green fields to the east, including the site of a now demolished windmill.

1.2.2 According to the British Geological Survey (BGS 2012) the site lies over Weald Clay.

### **1.3 Planning Background**

1.3.1 The archaeological work related to a post-determination condition attached to a planning application for the construction of a three-bedroom house and attached garage at land at Mill House, High Street (ref MA/10/0064). The condition stated:

*No development shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a watching brief to be undertaken by an archaeologist approved by the Local Planning Authority so that the excavation is observed and items of interest and finds area recorded. The watching brief shall be in accordance with a written programme and specification, which has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority.*

*Reason: To ensure that features of archaeological interest are properly examined and recorded*

1.3.2 Accordingly, a specification (HCGKCC 2011) for an archaeological watching brief was prepared by the Kent Country Council Heritage Conservation Group.

### **1.4 Scope of Report**

1.4.1 This report details the findings of the watching brief which was undertaken by Nick Garland (Archaeologist) and Gary Webster between the 31<sup>st</sup> May and 7<sup>th</sup> June 2012. The project was managed by Andy Leonard (Project Manager) and Jim Stevenson (Post-Excavation).

## **2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

2.1 The following background forms a summary of the archaeological potential of Staplehurst derived from the specification for the works (HCGKCC 2011) and from the investigation of a site further to the north (ASE 2012).

### **2.2 Prehistoric**

2.2.1 Prehistoric settlement is generally concentrated on the fertile soils of the Greensand and the Chalk uplands. The Weald was covered in dense forest throughout this period, and much of the known settlement pattern concentrates around the rim of the Weald, where better soils are located.

2.2.2 Initially, Mesolithic communities resettled the area as the climate began to improve at the end of the Ice Age, however, early farming communities began in the Neolithic when a major phase of woodland clearance took place.

2.2.3 The Bronze Age is characterised by the introduction of metals and, initially, the construction of a distinctive burial tradition under round earthen barrows.

2.2.4 Finally, the Iron Age saw a general continuation of trends from the preceding period, with increasing numbers of open settlements and defended enclosures evident. Later Iron Age settlement is much more evident across the county, with many sites along the Greensand, and a concentration of activity on the Weald Clay itself around Ashford.

2.2.5 Little evidence of prehistoric activity is known in the area immediately surrounding the site.

### **2.3 Romano-British**

2.3.1 As the nearest part of Britain to the Continent, Kent experienced contact with Rome from an early date. Following the Roman invasion of AD43, the region became heavily settled, particularly along the principal route, Watling Street, which linked Richborough with the major urban centres of Canterbury, Rochester and London. Stone Street was subsequently constructed southwards from Rochester, to access the iron resources of the Weald. Staplehurst lies along the road between the iron-working district around Hastings and the major town and port at Rochester and survives as the High Street that runs through the village.

### **2.4 Anglo-Saxon**

2.4.1 Although Kent was one of the first areas to be heavily settled by Germanic peoples, they tended to prefer the more tractable soils of the coastal plain and the river valleys.

2.4.2 A line of estates can be traced down the Greensand ridge, forming the nucleus of the later parochial structure, with estate centres corresponding with later village centres, although archaeological evidence (apart from cemeteries) is sparse. These estate centres spawned a system of outlying

subsidiary settlements exploiting the Wealden woodlands for stock pasture, known as 'dens'.

- 2.4.3 Staplehurst originated as a group of dens belonging to estates within the Hundred of Eyhorne. The place-name is of Anglo-Saxon origin, meaning a wooded hill marked by a post.

## **2.5 Medieval**

- 2.5.1 Staplehurst is not mentioned in Domesday – this does not necessarily mean that no settlement existed here in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, merely that it was subsumed into an entry relating to a parent manor.
- 2.5.2 Two pieces of evidence do indicate some settlement here – the existence of a moated site of 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century date at Castle Banks and 12<sup>th</sup> century fabric within the Church of All Saints. The church itself was extensively enlarged in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and again in the 15<sup>th</sup> century when the tower was added.
- 2.5.3 A nucleated settlement at Staplehurst appears to be of late medieval development as an industrial centre, presumably associated with the wool trade and clustered around the parish church.

## **2.6 Post-Medieval**

- 2.6.1 Staplehurst developed modestly through the post-medieval period as a small cloth-making centre, declining by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and turning into an agricultural centre.
- 2.6.2 The main road between Ashford and Maidstone was not turnpiked until 1760 and the railway was not constructed here until 1842.
- 2.6.3 To the east of the site there is located the remains of a Smock Mill, originally constructed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but quickly going out of used during the decline of the cloth-making industry. The mill was burnt down by the villagers to celebrate the coronation of George V in 1911.
- 2.6.4 A Grade II listed building, Winborne Cottage, possibly dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, lies to the south of the site.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Objectives**

- 3.1.1 The objectives of the investigation were detailed in the specification (HCGKCC 2011) and are reproduced below:

*The objectives of the archaeological watching brief are to contribute to heritage knowledge of the area through the recording of any archaeological remains exposed as a result of excavations in connection with the groundworks.*

#### **3.2 Methodology**

(Figures 2 and 3)

- 3.2.1 The monitored groundworks comprised excavations for footings of the garage as well as some general ground reduction on the northern part of the site.
- 3.2.2 All monitored excavations were undertaken by 360° tracked excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket under archaeological supervision until it became clear that certain areas had been disturbed by existing modern services. Only undifferentiated topsoil, subsoil and overburden of recent origin was removed by machine and kept separately. Excavations were reduced in spits of no more than 0.1m for the topsoil and subsoil, down to the maximum depth of construction levels.
- 3.2.3 All spoil from the excavations was scanned visually and also with a metal detector for the presence of any stray, unstratified artefacts.
- 3.2.4 All deposits were recorded according to accepted professional standards and in accordance with the specification (HCGKCC 2011) using *pro-forma* ASE recording sheets. Sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10. Deposit colours were verified by visual inspection.
- 3.2.5 A photographic record of the excavations was kept, including monochrome prints, colour slides and digital.
- 3.2.5 The archive is presently held at the ASE offices at Portslade, East Sussex. We are currently exploring options for the deposition of the archive.

Number of Contexts	3 contexts
No. of files/paper record	1 folder
Photographs	76 Digital

Table 1: Quantification of site archive



## 4.0 RESULTS

(Figures 2 and 3)

4.1 As discussed above, the monitored works included the excavation of the foundation trench for the garage structure and a general area of reduction on the northern part of the site.

### 4.2 Summary

4.2.1 The ground reduction over the northern part of the site measured c. 16m long x 1.7m wide x 0.6m deep. The foundation trenches measured c. 25m long x 0.6m wide x 0.8m deep.

4.2.2 The same basic sequence was observed in all monitored areas. The lowest deposit viewed was Weald Clay [003]. This was overlain in all monitored areas by made ground [001] a mid brown silty clay containing post-medieval and Victorian pottery and ceramic building material (CBM).

4.2.3 A second deposit of made ground [002], a dark brownish grey sandy silt deposit containing glass, shell, animal bone and CBM was observed to the west of the area and overlay [001].

4.2.3 No archaeological features, finds or deposit were observed during any of these excavations.

Number	Type	Description	Max. Length	Max. Width	Deposit Thickness	Height m.AOD
001	Deposit	Made Ground	As Ex.	As Ex.	0.2 m	40.75
002	Deposit	Made Ground	As Ex.	As Ex.	0.6 m	40.55
003	Deposit	Weald Clay	As Ex.	As Ex.	N/A	39.95

Table 2: Site stratigraphy

## **5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 To conclude, no archaeological deposits, features or finds that could contribute to the heritage knowledge of the wider area were exposed during the watching brief.
- 5.2 In discussion with the owner of the property it appears that the location of the garage and the surrounding areas was the subject of a 'doodlebug' attack during World War II, destroying any standing buildings across the site (James Dowswell pers comm). The clearance of the site after the attack most likely resulted in the destruction of any surviving topsoil or subsoil deposits and/or surviving archaeological remains on the site had any been present.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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HCGKCC, 2011. Specification for an archaeological watching brief on Land at Mill House, High Street in Staplehurst

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Archaeology South-East would like to thank Jessica Farmer of Richard Gill Architects for commissioning the work and Wendy Rogers of Kent County Council for her guidance throughout the project. Illustrations were by Justin Russell.

## HER Summary Form

<b>Site Name:</b> Mill House, Staplehurst	
<b>Site Address:</b> Mill House, Staplehurst, Kent	
<b>Summary:</b>  <i>Archaeology South-East was commissioned by commissioned by Richard Gill Architects to undertake an archaeological watching brief during excavations associated with the construction of a house and garage at Mill House, Staplehurst, Kent. The work was undertaken between the 31<sup>st</sup> May and 7<sup>th</sup> June 2012.</i>  <i>No archaeological deposits, features or finds were uncovered during these works. The monitoring revealed that the site had been heavily truncated removing any trace of subsoil layers. This may have been the result of the bombing of the site and subsequent levelling of the site during World War II.</i>	
<b>District/Unitary:</b> Kent	<b>Parish:</b> Maidstone
<b>Period(s):</b> None	
<b>NGR (centre of site : 8 figures):</b> 578660 143057	
<b>Type of archaeological work (delete)</b> <b>Watching Brief</b>	
<b>Date of Recording:</b> 31 <sup>st</sup> May to 7 <sup>th</sup> June 2012	
<b>Unit undertaking recording:</b> Archaeology South East	
<b>Geology:</b> Weald Clay	
<b>Title and author of accompanying report:</b> An Archaeological Watching Brief at Mill House, Staplehurst, Kent by N. Garland	
<b>Summary of fieldwork results (begin with earliest period first, add NGRs where appropriate)</b>  None	
<b>Location of archive/finds:</b> Portslade, East Sussex	
<b>Contact at Unit:</b> Andy Leonard	<b>Date:</b> June 2012

**OASIS ID: archaeo16-129951**

**Project details**

Project name	Mill House, Staplehurst
Short description of the project	Archaeology South-East was commissioned by commissioned by Richard Gill Architects to undertake an archaeological watching brief during excavations associated with the construction of a house and garage at Mill House, Staplehurst, Kent. The work was undertaken between the 31 <sup>st</sup> May and 7 <sup>th</sup> June 2012.No archaeological deposits, features or finds were uncovered during these works. The monitoring revealed that the site had been heavily truncated removing any trace of subsoil layers. This may have been the result of the bombing of the site and subsequent levelling of the site during World War II.
Project dates	Start: 31-05-2012 End: 07-06-2012
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	MHS12 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	None
Current Land use	Residential 1 - General Residential
Monument type	NONE None
Significant Finds	NONE None
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Planning condition

**Project location**

Country	England
Site location	KENT MAIDSTONE STAPLEHURST Mill House, High Street, Staplehurst, Kent
Postcode	TN12 0AU
Study area	200.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	TQ 78660 43057 51 0 51 09 29 N 000 33 18 E Point
Height OD / Depth	Min: 40.00m Max: 40.00m

**Project creators**

Name of Organisation	Archaeology South-East
Project brief originator	Kent County Council
Project design	Kent County Council Heritage Conservation Group

originator  
Project director/manager Neil Griffin  
Project supervisor Nick Garland  
Type of sponsor/funding body Dean and Chapter

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**Project archives**

Physical Archive Exists? No  
Digital Archive recipient Local Museum  
Digital Contents "none"  
Digital Media available "GIS", "Images raster / digital photography", "Text"  
Paper Archive recipient Local Museum  
Paper Contents "none"  
Paper Media available "Context sheet", "Plan", "Report"

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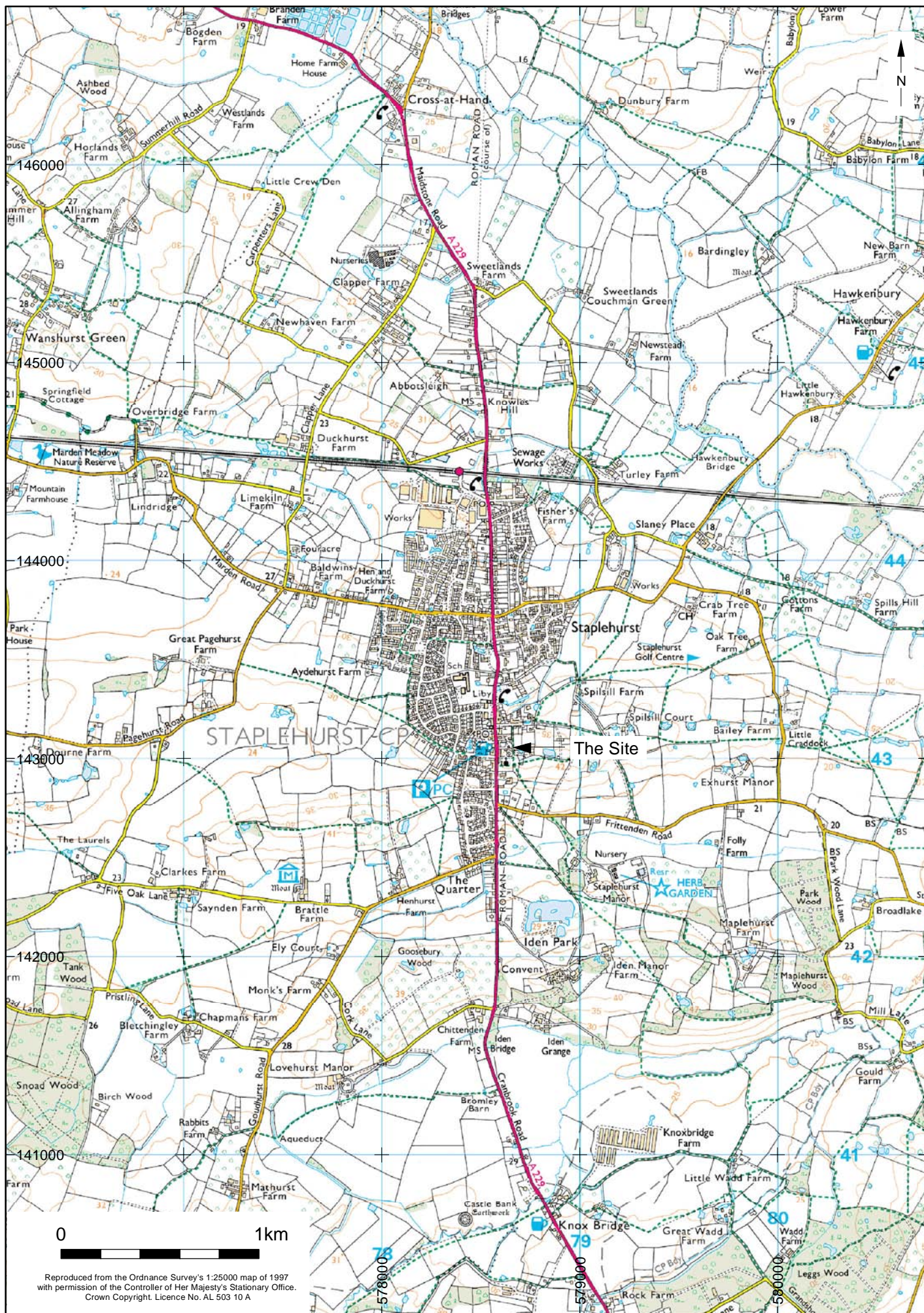
**Project bibliography**

**1**

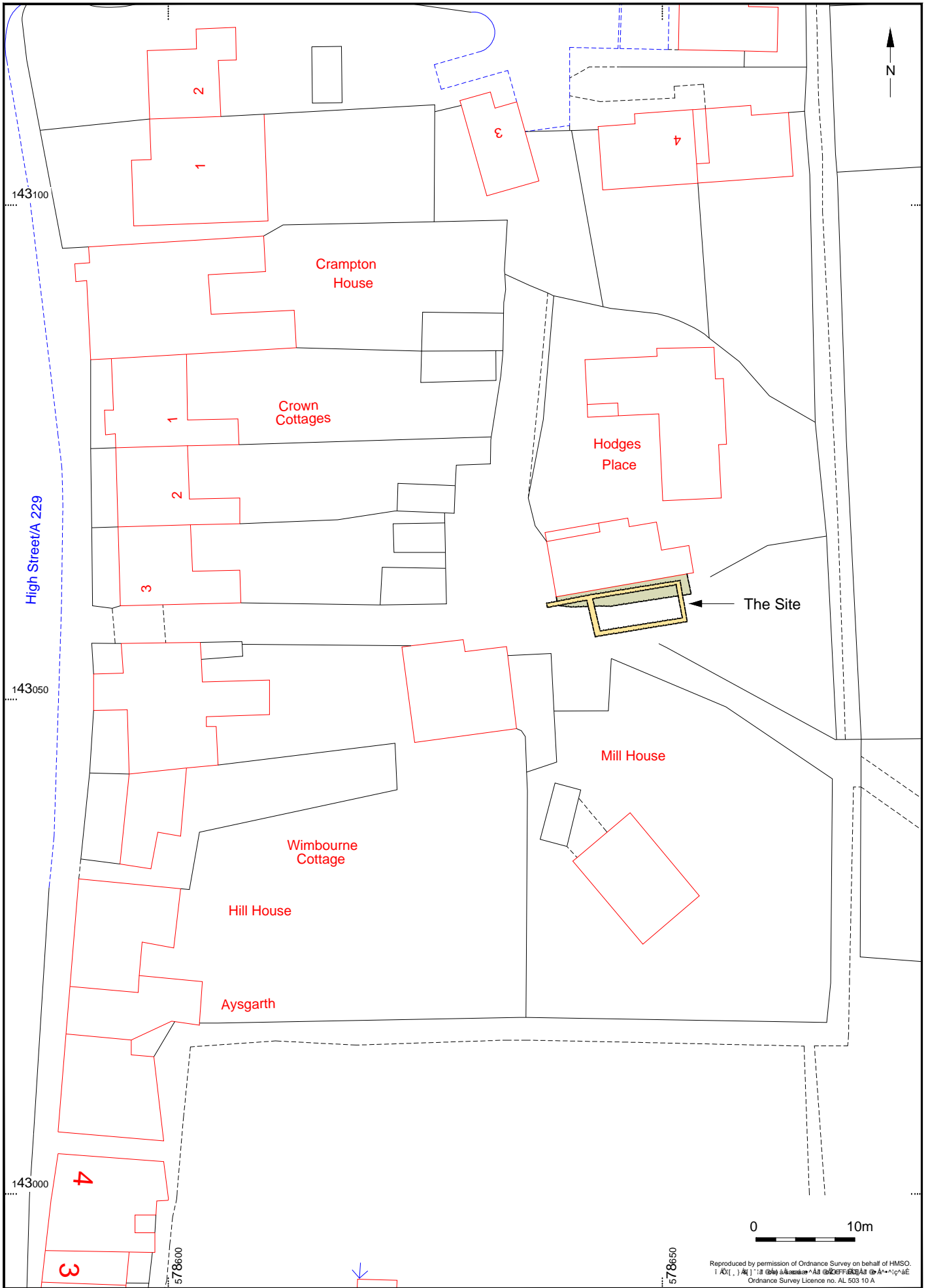
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© Archaeology South-East		Mill House, Staplehurst	Fig. 1
Project Ref: 4813	July 2012	Site location	
Report Ref: 2012131	Drawn by: JLR		



Archaeology South-East		Mill House, Staplehurst		Fig. 2
Project Ref: 4813	July 2012	Site plan		
Report Ref: 2012131	Drawn by: JLR			





		Mill House, Staplehurst	Fig. 3
Project Ref: 4813	July 2012	Monitored areas	
Report Ref: 2012131	Drawn by: JLR		

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