

**Archaeological Watching Brief Report
Five Acre Wood School
Maidstone, Kent**

**NGR 576851 153086
(TQ 76851 53086)**

**Planning Reference: MA/14/504946
ASE Project No: 7931
Site Code: MFA15
ASE Report No: 2016090
OASIS id: archaeol6-244429**



Author Sarah Ritchie, MA, ACIfA



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Date of Issue:	March 2016		
Revision:			

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Abstract

Archaeology South-East was commissioned by Faithful+Gould on behalf of their clients Kent County Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of an extension to Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone, Kent.

This phase of the watching brief consisted of the stripping of a new access road and associated parking area within the northern area of the site. No archaeological deposits were encountered and no artefacts were recovered from the overburden.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Background

1.1.1 Archaeology South-East (ASE) was commissioned by Faithful+Gould on behalf of their clients Kent County Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of an extension to Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone, Kent (NGR: 576851 153086; Figure 1).

1.2 Geology and Topography

1.2.1 The solid geology of the site is shown by the British Geological Survey (BGS Map Viewer online, 2015) as Hythe Formation (sandstone and limestone). There is no recorded superficial geology.

1.2.2 The site lies at a height of c. 87m AOD, to the south of the modern commercial centre of Maidstone, to the east of Boughton Lane. The location of the monitored works lies immediately to the north of the existing school buildings in an area of open land currently associated with the farm.

1.3 Planning Background

1.3.1 Planning permission was granted by Maidstone Borough Council (Planning Ref: MA/14/504946) for the refurbishment and redevelopment work at the site, including an extension to the school. Owing to the archaeological potential of the site based on the findings of a desk-based assessment carried out in 2014 (ASE 2014a), archaeological fieldwork (ASE 2014b), and following consultation between Maidstone Borough Council and Kent County Council (the Borough Council's advisers on archaeological issues), a programme of archaeological works was required as a condition of planning consent. Condition 12 stated that:

'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 County Planning Authority so that the excavation is observed and items of interest and finds are 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 No site specific specification document for the work was issued by Kent County Council, so the archaeological work was undertaken in keeping with the generic requirements for fieldwork in Kent (KCC 2011) and accepted nationwide guidelines (ClfA 2014).

1.4 Scope of Report

- 1.4.1 This report details the results of the archaeological watching brief carried out on the site 13th and 14th January 2016. Previous phases of the archaeological work have already been reported on (ASE, 2014b, ASE 2015).
- 1.4.2 The site work was carried out by Sarah Ritchie, and was managed by Paul Mason (fieldwork) and Dan Swift (post-excavation).

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The archaeological background is set out in the Desk Based Assessment prepared for the site (ASE, 2014a) and summarised below.

2.2 Prehistoric

2.2.1 The site stands on the Lower Greensand ridge which encircles the Kentish Weald. Prehistoric communities appear to have settled this ridge as well as the Chalk uplands of the adjacent North Downs. The Weald to the south was covered in dense forest throughout this period, and much of the known settlement pattern concentrates around the rim of the Weald, where the Chalk and Greensand geology offers better soils. Mesolithic communities resettled the area as the climate began to improve at the end of the Ice Age. Expanding woodland provided a rich resource base for transient hunting groups, who also exploited the river valleys of the region such as the Len. A belt of Mesolithic settlement or activity sites are known along the Greensand ridge, but none occur within the vicinity of the site.

2.2.2 The Medway around Maidstone has been identified as an area likely to produce evidence for human activity during the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic, representing the earliest such activity in the British Isles, up to 700,000 years ago (Wenban-Smith et al. 2007). The focus of study is the sand/gravel aggregate deposits formed during the Middle and early Late Pleistocene, contemporary with these periods of human activity. Although these deposits are concentrated c.5km north of the site, the mapped distribution of fluvial sediments within the Medway Gap is now thought to under-represent their true extent.

2.2.3 The early farming communities of the Neolithic saw a major phase of woodland clearance take place, opening up land for crops and the domestication of animals. Much of the evidence for this period in Kent is found in the north of the county, with high status 'monuments' such as the causewayed enclosures at Burham and Kingsborough Farm on the Isle of Sheppey, and complex burial monuments such as Kits Coty House and Julliberrie's Grave. Neolithic finds on the Greensand ridge tend to be axes and flint scatters – of which three are known within the vicinity – and may indicate a reliance on hunting in these less favourable locales.

2.2.4 The Bronze Age is characterised by the introduction of metals and, initially, the construction of a distinctive burial tradition under round earthen barrows. The later Bronze Age period saw a change in emphasis away from the ritual landscape towards a more utilitarian landscape of agricultural settlement, albeit with spirituality as an integral part of the fabric. Recent studies of Late Bronze Age settlement have identified a bias towards the better soils and improved trading links of the coastal plain and estuaries, but settlement elsewhere in Kent is becoming clearer. Settlement foci are known along the Greensand ridge: a large assemblage of pottery sherds and a nearby suggested field system and hut, both of provisional late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age date, are known within the vicinity.

2.2.5 The Iron Age saw a general continuation of trends from the preceding period, with increasing numbers of open settlements and defended enclosures evident. The known Early Iron Age settlement pattern is largely concentrated in the north-east of the county, although several small settlements are known along the Greensand belt, many of which can be associated with the ancient ridgeway known as the 'Pilgrim's Way' which runs along the North Downs. Later Iron Age settlement is much more evident across the county, with many sites along the Greensand belt, including within the area.

2.2.6 Also within the area, 700m south of the site but not recorded in the HER, a linear earthwork ran east/west between Loose Road and Boughton Lane, in the approximate location of the present Walnut Tree Avenue and Leonard Gould Way. It is undated, but thought to relate to a late Iron Age oppidum (proto-town) earthwork enclosure at Quarry Wood in Loose parish, 1600m south of the site (Kelly 1971). The Iron Age settlement at Queen Elizabeth Square would presumably have had close interactions with that site.

2.2.7 Six prehistoric sites are recorded within the vicinity of the site:

- Two Neolithic flint scrapers were found in 1952 when a rockery was constructed at the "Byeways", Lancet Lane, Loose;
- The end of narrow flint axe of Neolithic date found at 64 Broadoak Avenue;
- Archaeological work at Queen Elizabeth Square in 1998-9 produced evidence for a Neolithic activity site and a Middle Iron Age to Early Roman Settlement;
- A flint core and a large collection of pot sherds, provisionally dated to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, was found in association with a probable agricultural pond at the County Police Headquarters;
- Archaeological work at Boughton Lane in 1998 revealed a series of gullies, ditches and postholes which may represent a late Bronze Age or early Iron Age field system and accompanying hut.
- A linear earthwork, not recorded in the HER, has been identified running between Loose Road and Boughton Lane. It is undated, but is thought to relate to a late Iron Age oppidum at nearby Quarry Wood.

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 (Margary 1965, 208-228): it runs through Maidstone, and passes within 100m of the site. The former earthwork enclosure at Mangravet Wood lies adjacent to this important road and appears to respect it, indicating its contemporaneity.

2.3.2 Much of Kent was characterised by pre-Roman native type farmsteads, although the distribution of other Roman sites and finds are widespread, with all the main river valleys being well populated. Maidstone appears to have been a significant settlement with at least six cemeteries and a bath-house during this period (English Heritage 2004). The foundations of Roman buildings together with assorted tiles were found near Stone Street at Eight Acres Field in 1840, c.950m south-east of the site.

2.3.3 Three Romano-British sites have been recorded within the area:

- A kite-shaped univallate earthwork enclosure was excavated in 1927 at Mangravet Wood;
- An important Roman road, 'Stone Street', runs Rochester - Maidstone - Hastings;
- Roman foundations and tiles were found in 1840 by Taylor Smythe in Eight Acres Field, south of Sutton Road.

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 to those of the Greensand ridge. The densest occupation in the early Anglo-Saxon period seems to have been in the north-east of the county, the heartland of the kingdom of the Cantware, protected to the west by the Medway and to the south-west by the Weald. Penetration of the Greensand ridge seems to have taken place slightly later, in the 6th century, according to funerary evidence. Estates were set up, often with evidence for continuity with earlier land units, encompassing a range of resource areas: Weald, Greensand, river valley and downland – droving of animals between downland and Weald left a legacy of north-south aligned trackways. 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 such as Maidstone, although archaeological evidence (apart from cemeteries) is sparse.

2.4.2 Although there is little evidence for a significant population centre at Maidstone during the Anglo-Saxon period, it was nonetheless an important regional centre from an early date. The place-name Eccles, the location of a Roman villa site a short distance to the north-west of the town is rare evidence for the endurance of early Christianity in southern Britain during the 5th and 6th centuries AD (Blair 2005, 27-8). A minster church (a collegiate foundations servicing a large territories) was established at Maidstone in the mid-7th century (Everitt 1986; Riddler 2004). The place-name, first attested c. 975 as *de maeides stana*, may mean 'the maidens' stone' (Maegoastan) or 'the peoples' stone' (Maegoastan), the latter a probable reference to Maidstone's likely status as a political and judicial meeting-place for its hundred (English Heritage 2004). The exact location of this meeting-place is unknown, but it presumably was at a megalithic tomb on Stone Street and/or the crossing of the Medway.

2.4.3 During this period, the site appears to have been a liminal place, and was probably afforested with the predecessor of Mangravel Wood. The parish boundary between Maidstone and Loose ran across the site until 1887.

2.4.4 No Anglo-Saxon sites have been recorded within the area.

2.5 Medieval

2.5.1 The town of Maidstone grew up at the crossing of the Medway, around the Roman road. Sometime during the late eleventh or early twelfth century, a planned urban unit seems to have been laid out east/west along the present High Street. A number of churches were founded soon after, and by the mid-13th century Maidstone had become a significant commercial centre with three markets and an annual fair (English Heritage 2004).

2.5.2 As in the Anglo-Saxon period, the site was peripheral to Maidstone throughout the medieval period, during which time it was cleared for agricultural use.

2.5.3 No medieval sites are recorded within the vicinity of the site.

2.6 Post Medieval and Modern

2.6.1 Maidstone continued to prosper as an important regional centre throughout the post-medieval period, and grew rapidly in population during the 19th and 20th centuries. Despite this, the site remained in agricultural use until the construction of the existing school in the 1950s.

2.6.2 Four post-medieval sites are recorded within the area:

- A post-medieval drainage scheme was excavated at the County Police Headquarters in 1997 & 2001
- The Maidstone Corporation Tramway opened in 1904 and closed in 1930
- A 'pleasure ground' landscape was laid out during the 17th and 18th centuries at Mote Park
- South Park was devolved from meadowland and designed by Bunyards of Maidstone in 1929

2.7 Recent Archaeological Investigations

2.7.1 The Canterbury Archaeological Trust carried out an archaeological watching brief at the County Police Headquarters, 900m south-east of the site in July 1997. This produced nothing of significance. The features found related to a post medieval drainage scheme, although one undated circular feature was noted. A later excavation, undertaken by ASE in July 2001 uncovered a flint core and a large collection of pottery sherds, provisionally dated to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, in association with a probable agricultural pond.

2.7.2 The Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit carried out an archaeological evaluation at Queen Elizabeth Square, 750m east of the site in November 1998. This produced evidence for a Middle Iron Age to Early Roman Settlement. Further excavation the following year uncovered further evidence for this settlement as well as a Neolithic activity site.

- 2.7.3 RPS Clouston carried out an archaeological excavation at Boughton Lane, 700m south of the site in June 1998. This revealed a series of gullies, ditches and postholes which may represent a Late Bronze Age or early Iron Age field system and accompanying hut. A large piece of slag was also found suggesting the potential for iron smelting although no furnaces were found.
- 2.7.4 ASE carried out an archaeological watching brief during sewer upgrade at Broadoak Avenue and Postley Road, 850m north-west of the site in January 2009. No archaeological deposits were uncovered.
- 2.7.5 Wessex Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at Pickering Street, 600m south of the site in February 2010. No archaeological deposits were uncovered.
- 2.7.6 ASE carried out a geophysical survey at the New Line Learning Academy, which bounds the site to the south in January 2012. Despite the level of modern disturbance, several linear anomalies were identified, one of which survives as a visible earthwork. These anomalies potentially relate to buried archaeology such as buried pits and ditches, although a geological origin for these features should not be ruled out.
- 2.7.7 ASE undertook an archaeological evaluation at the current site in August 2014 (ASE 2014b). An undated post-hole was identified in one of the trenches and was the only archaeological feature encountered during the evaluation. An archaeological watching brief was maintained during groundworks at the site consisting of the mechanical and manual excavation of service trenches and strip footings (ASE 2015). No archaeological features were observed during this phase of works.

2.8 Project Aims and Objectives

- 2.8.1 The general aim of the fieldwork given in the specification document (KCC 2011) was:

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

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

3.1 Fieldwork Methodology

- 3.1.1 Mechanical excavation of the stripping of an area to create a new access road and parking lot were monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist. All sections were examined for the presence of archaeological features, and all spoil was scanned for archaeological artefacts.
- 3.1.2 All machine excavation was undertaken using a suitable back-acting mechanical excavator provided by the client or their contractor and fitted with a wide flat-bladed ditching bucket. The machine excavation was excavated through undifferentiated topsoil and modern made ground in spits of no more than 0.25m until archaeological deposits or the top of the underlying natural sediments were reached.
- 3.1.3 While a watching brief is designed to cause minimal disruption to a development, sufficient time was granted to the archaeologist on site to properly excavate and record the site sequence.
- 3.1.4 All encountered deposits were recorded to accepted professional standards using standard Archaeology South-East context record forms. Deposit colours were recorded by visual inspection and not by reference to a Munsell Colour chart.

3.2 Archive

3.2.1 A digital photographic record of the work was kept and will form part of the site archive. The site archive is currently held by Archaeology South-East at the offices in Portslade, and has been offered to Maidstone Museum. The archive consists of the following material:

Context sheets	4
Section sheets	0
Plans sheets	0
Colour photographs	0
B&W photos	0
Digital photos	39
Context register	0
Drawing register	0
Watching brief forms	2
Trench Record forms	0

Table 1: Quantification of site paper archive

Bulk finds (quantity e.g. 1 bag, 1 box, 0.5 box 0.5 of a box)	0
Registered finds (number of)	0
Flots and environmental remains from bulk samples	0
Palaeoenvironmental specialists sample samples (e.g. columns, prepared slides)	0
Waterlogged wood	0
Wet sieved environmental remains from bulk samples	0

Table 2: Quantification of artefact and environmental samples

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 New road and parking

Context	Type	Description	Deposit Thickness m
010	Layer	Topsoil	0.15m
011	Layer	Made Ground	0.30m
012	Layer	Subsoil	0.40m
013	Layer	Natural	NFE

Table 3: List of recorded contexts

- 4.1.1 An area to the north of the existing school buildings was stripped to create a new access road and parking area.
- 4.1.2 This revealed natural orange-brown silty-clay [013] at c.0.85m bgl within the south of the site and c.0.40m bgl within the east. The natural was overlain by a mid-brown silty-clay subsoil [012] ranging in thickness from c.0.40m to the south to c.0.25m to the east. The subsoil contained sandstone, tarmac fragments and CBM inclusions.
- 4.1.3 Overlying [012], within the southernmost 3m of the strip, was a layer of terram overlain with c.0.40m of hardcore and redeposited orange clay (Figure 3). This has been interpreted as a layer of made ground [011] associated perhaps with the building of the school.
- 4.1.4 The strip was sealed by 0.15m of dark brown silt topsoil and turf [010]. No archaeological features were observed within the strip.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The stripping of an area to the north of the existing school for a new road and parking area revealed a sequence of natural orange silty-clay sealed by subsoil and topsoil. Within the southern area of the strip, closest to the existing school, the subsoil was overlain by terram and modern made ground before being sealed by topsoil and turf. No archaeological features were observed.
- 5.2 The results of this phase of the archaeological watching brief, taken in conjunction with the outcome of the previous phase and evaluation of the site (ASE 2014b; ASE 2015), suggest that no significant archaeological remains have survived in the area affected by the groundworks associated with the extension to the school.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ASE would like to thank Faithful+Gould for commissioning the work on behalf of Kent County Council and for their assistance throughout the project; Wendy Rogers Senior Archaeological Officer at Kent County Council for her guidance and monitoring. Thanks are also due to John Manning, the site manager and to the groundworks contractors for their co-operation and hospitality. The watching brief was carried out by Sarah Ritchie. The author would like to thank Justin Russell who produced the figures for this report; Paul Mason who project managed the excavations and Dan Swift who project managed the post-excavation process.

HER Summary

Site Code	MFA15					
Identification Name and Address	Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone					
County, District &/or Borough	Maidstone District, Kent					
OS Grid Refs.	576851 153086					
Geology	Hythe Formation (sandstone and limestone)					
Arch. South-East Project Number	7931					
Type of Fieldwork			Watching Brief			
Type of Site		Shallow Urban				
Dates of Fieldwork			13 th – 14 th Jan 2016			
Sponsor/Client	Faithful+Gould on behalf of Kent County Council					
Project Manager	Paul Mason					
Project Supervisor	Sarah Ritchie					
Period Summary						
						Modern
<p>Summary</p> <p>Archaeology South-East was commissioned by Faithful+Gould on behalf of their clients Kent County Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of an extension to Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone, Kent.</p> <p>This phase of the watching brief consisted of the stripping of a new access road and associated parking area within the northern area of the site. No archaeological deposits were encountered and no artefacts were recovered from the overburden.</p>						

OASIS Form

OASIS ID: archaeol6-244429

Project details

Project name	An Archaeological Watching Brief Report Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone, Kent
Short description of the project	Archaeology South-East was commissioned by Faithful+Gould on behalf of their clients Kent County Council to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the construction of an extension to Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone, Kent. This phase of the watching brief consisted of the stripping of a new access road and associated parking area within the northern area of the site. No archaeological deposits were encountered and no artefacts were recovered from the overburden.
Project dates	Start: 13-01-2016 End: 14-01-2016
Previous/future work	Yes / Yes
Any associated project reference codes	MFA15 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	None
Current Land use	Community Service 1 - Community Buildings
Investigation type	"Watching Brief"
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - Direction 4

Project location

Country	England
Site location	KENT MAIDSTONE MAIDSTONE Five Acre Wood School
Postcode	ME15 9QF
Study area	1 Hectares
Site coordinates	TQ 76851 53086 51.248922328881 0.534344331428 51 14 56 N 000 32 03 E Point

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Archaeology South-East
Project brief originator	Kent County Council
Project design originator	Archaeology South-East
Project director/manager	Paul Mason
Project supervisor	Sarah Ritchie
Type of	Client

sponsor/funding
body

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient MAIDSTONE MUSEUM

Digital Archive recipient MAIDSTONE MUSEUM

Paper Archive recipient MAIDSTONE MUSEUM

Project bibliography 1

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)

Title An Archaeological Watching Brief Report Five Acre Wood School, Maidstone, Kent

Author(s)/Editor(s) Ritchie, S.

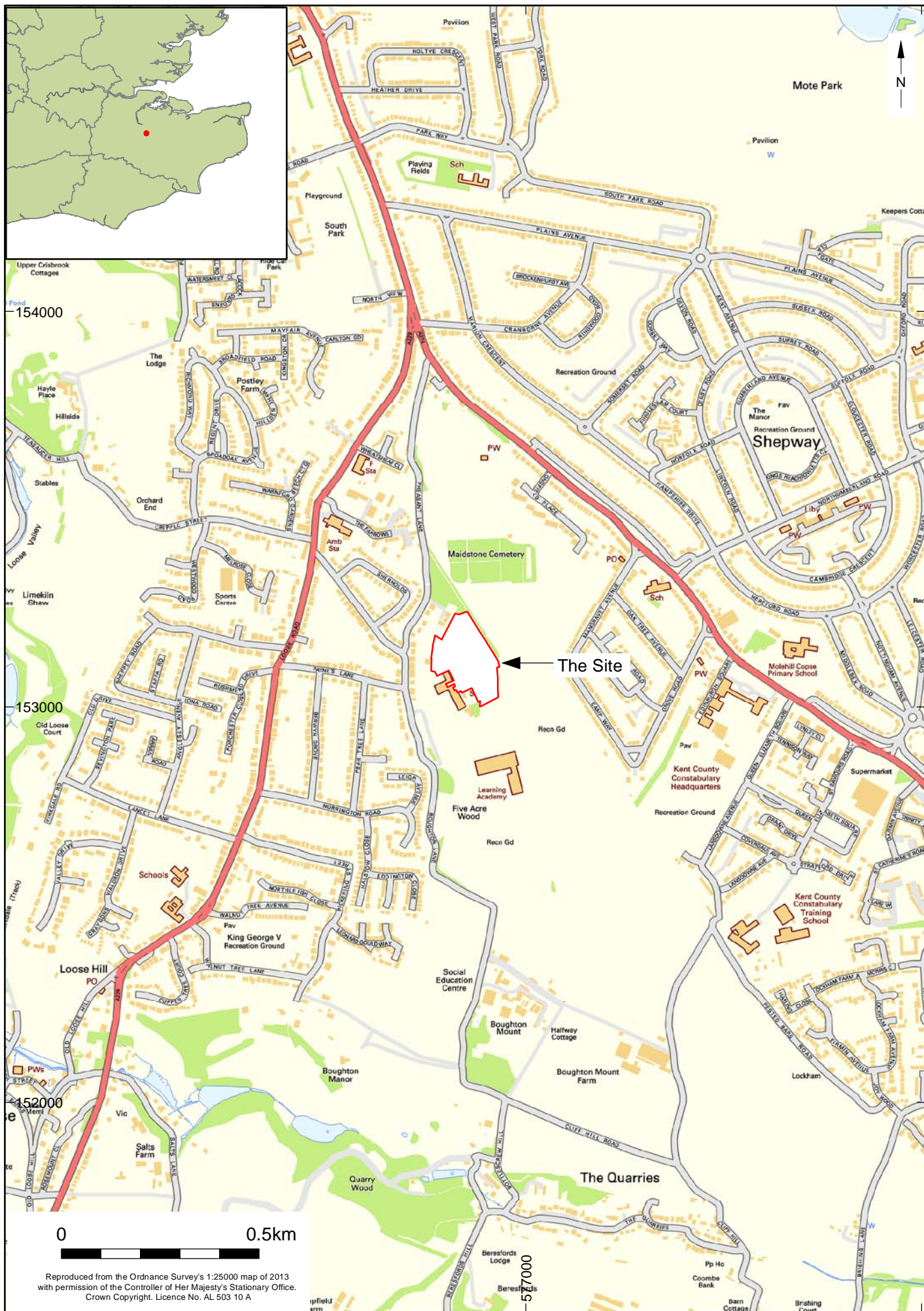
Date 2016

Issuer or publisher Archaeology South-East

Place of issue or publication London

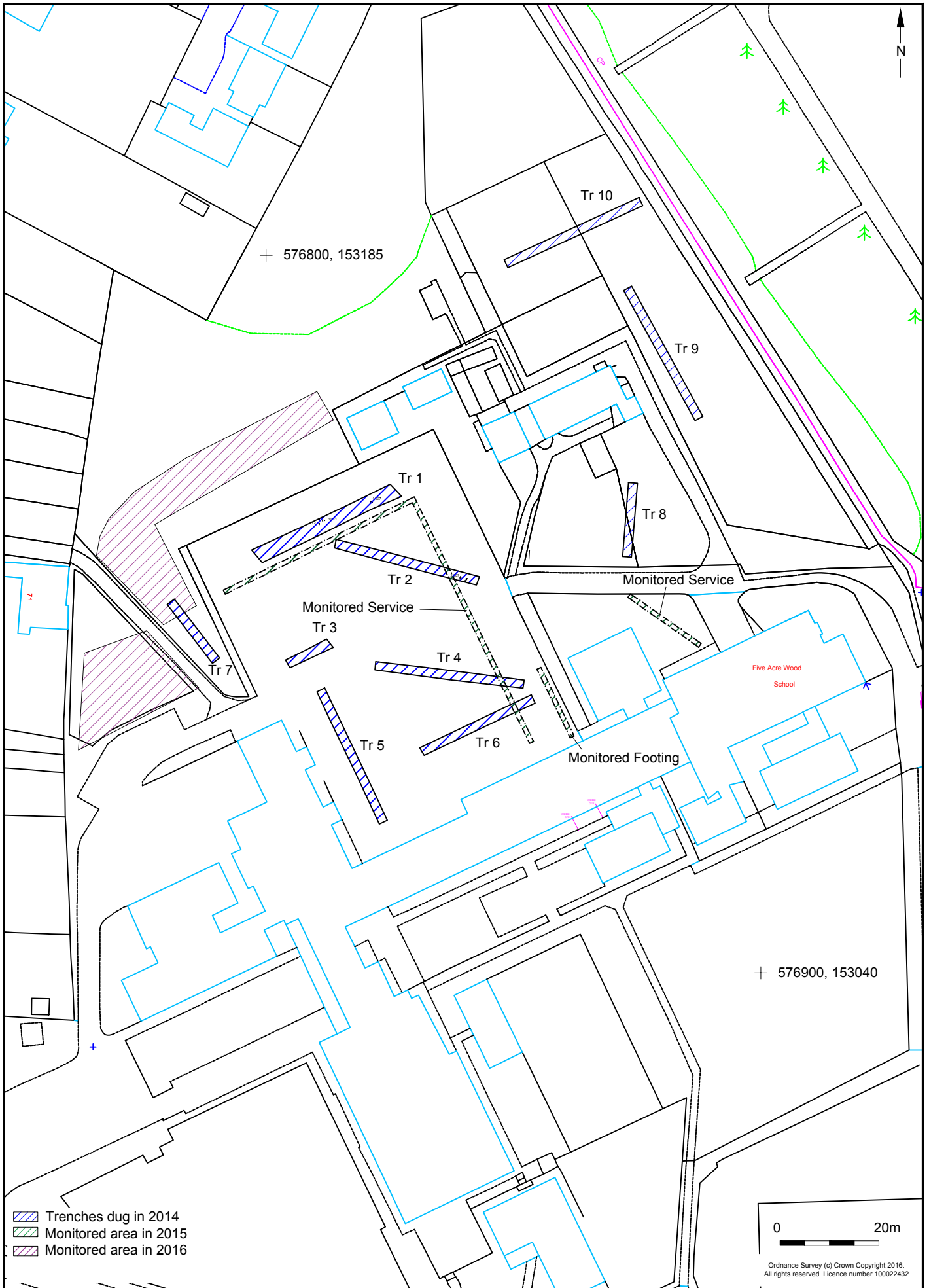
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Entered on 2 March 2016



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© Archaeology South-East		Maidstone: Five Acre Wood School	Fig. 1
Project Ref: 7931	03 - 2016	Site location	
Report Ref: 2016090	Drawn by: NG		



© Archaeology South-East		Maidstone: Five Acre Wood School	Fig. 2
Project Ref: 7931	03 - 2016	Watching brief area	
Report Ref: 2016090	Drawn by: NG		



North facing section of the Watching brief area



Stripped Watching Brief area, facing north



Stripped Watching Brief area, facing east



Stripped Watching Brief area, facing south

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