RPS Planning, Transport and Environment

INDEX DATA	RPS INFORMATION
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Contractor South Eastern Archaeological Services	
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An Archaeological Watching Brief

on the A249 M2 to Iwade Improvement, Kent

Project No. 1994/65

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SEAS

South Eastern Archaeological Services

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South Eastern Archaeological Services (SEAS) is a division of the Field Archaeology Unit, University College London, one of the largest groupings of academic archaeologists in the country. Consequently, SEAS has access to the conservation, computing and environmental backup of the college, as well as a range of other archaeological services.

The Field Archaeology Unit and SEAS were established in 1974 and 1991 respectively. Although field projects have been conducted world-wide, FAU/SEAS retain a special interest in south-east England with the majority of our contract and consultancy work concentrated in Sussex, Kent, Greater London and Essex.

Based in the local community, the Field Archaeology Unit sees an important part of its work as explaining the results to the broader public. Public lectures, open days, training courses and liaison with local archaeological societies are aspects of its community-based approach.

Drawing on experience of the countryside and towns of the south east of England the Unit can give advice and carry out surveys at an early stage in the planning process. By working closely with developers and planning authorities it is possible to incorporate archaeological work into developments with little inconvenience.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In August and September 1995 South Eastern Archaeological Services (a division of University College London) undertook a watching brief commissioned by David Huskisson Associates on behalf of the Highways Agency on the Iwade section of the A249 road improvement.

1.2 The area examined lay south-east of the present Iwade to Kingsferry Bridge stretch of the A249 known as Sheppey Way (TQ909679 to 910690) where the new road runs parallel with the Sittingbourne to Sheerness railway line (Fig. 1).

1.3 The purpose of the watching brief was to oversee the excavation of drainage ditches each side of the carriageway. These excavations were carried out by a tracked mechanical digger operating under strict control as the site bordered upon a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Any archaeological features or deposits discovered were to be recorded in plan and section with a photographic record, if appropriate.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Iwade to Kingsferry Bridge stretch of the road scheme traverses Coldharbour and Ridham Marshes. Recent archaeological work has revealed remnant landscapes of prehistoric, Roman and Saxon date on the upland to the south. On the lowlands there are a number of surface features, notably salt-working mounds, sheepfolds and linear boundary banks of medieval and post-medieval date.

2.2 An earlier watching brief carried out in 1994 on the stretch of carriageway south and immediately adjacent to the current area located two scatters of Iron Age and Romano-British pottery, tile fragments and burnt flint. The stone footings of a possible structure associated with 13th- to 14th-century pottery were discovered a short distance further south.

3.0 WATCHING BRIEF: METHODOLOGY

3.1 As the road corridor avoided any obvious surface features other than two boundary banks, the aim of the watching brief was to examine any buried features or deposits that might be uncovered.

3.2 The site consisted of two separate ditches located to the west and east of the carriageway. The west ditch bordered the SSSI. English Nature had laid down guidelines regarding the shape of the west ditch which was to appear as natural and unobtrusive as possible. The ditch was machine-cut and was relatively shallow with a stepped profile (fig. 2).

3.3 This complex profile caused the contractors some difficulty. The slow rate of progress obviated the need for a constant archaeological presence on site. Instead only one or two visits a week were considered necessary. These visits were undertaken on 14th, 16th, 21st, 23rd and 30th August, a total of 3½ days.

3.4 The east ditch was begun immediately after completion of the west ditch. A short stretch had been stripped of topsoil, when the work was halted, due to the vibrations of the machinery adversely affecting the recently-laid concrete carriageway. Work was subsequently recommenced on this ditch without archaeological supervision, due to a failure on the part of the contractors to notify SEAS. A visit was made to view this completed section on 24th October.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 The west ditch was dug for a distance of about 800m. It was 7m wide and approximately 1m deep. Two areas were left undug to be dealt with at a later date.

4.2 The ditch was cut into a mid-grey, firm clay silt. It was very clean and contained only a few inclusions - rounded pebbles, flint nodules and sea shells. In places this deposit was cut by drainage ditches, probably fairly modern in date. Some of these ditches still contained water, others existed merely as dry linear depressions. These was no indication of earlier buried drainage channels, presumably due to the shallowness of the excavation. The fill of these was similar in nature to the main deposit, but was dark blue-grey in colour and was softer. Some organic elements, mainly consisting of roots, were evident, . The bank deposit, where the ditch cut through an upstanding boundary bank, were seen to be identical to the main deposit. No other features were seen. The only finds were some sherds of modern land drain, a broken clay pipe and a 1941 spent cartridge.

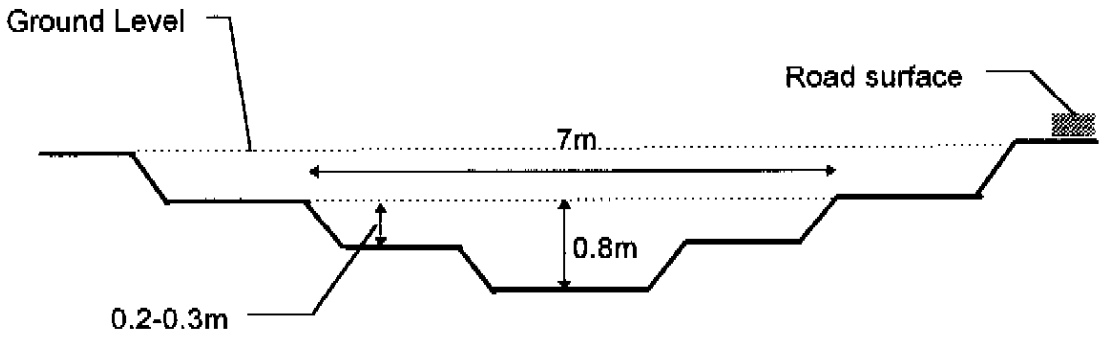
4.3 An examination of the stripped portion of the east ditch revealed a scatter of late Iron Age or Romano-British pottery sherds (see Appendix 1) on the surface, together with a broken modern brick. This area is close to a previous find spot of similar nature.[1] The ditch was subsequently dug to approximately the same depth as the west ditch, but had a simple V-shaped profile. Unfortunately, the ditch was full of water when visited, rendering an examination of the sides and base impossible.

[1] See A249, M2 to Iwade Improvement: An Archaeological Desk-Top Assessment and Walkover Survey (November 1994), Appendix 1, Sites nos. 39, 40, 41 and 70.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 Both ditches were cut into the upper layer of fairly recent sediment. No features or artefacts were found in the west ditch, although there could well be archaeological deposits buried at greater depth. Topsoil stripping has shown that deposits may be present in the area of the east ditch. Unfortunately any such deposits could not be examined as the ditch was excavated without archaeological supervision.

Fig. 1 Sketch plan of typical profile through west ditch



APPENDIX I

THE POTTERY FROM THE EAST DITCH

(1) *Tile*

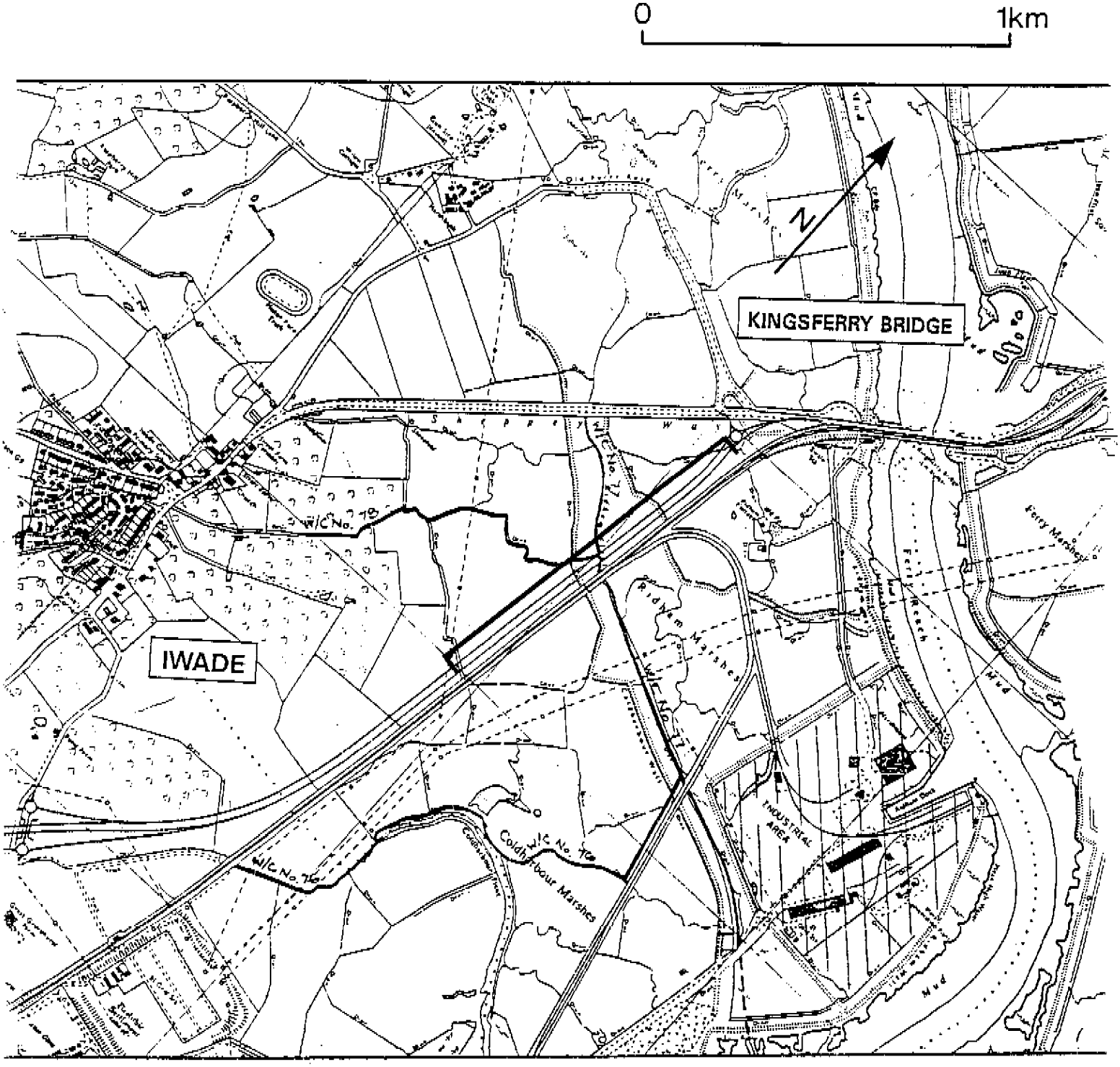
1 Fragment from a 'flat' tile, and one possibly from an Imbrex (an upturned half-cylinder-shaped tile covering the join between two conjoining roof tiles.) Both Romano-British.

(2) *Pottery*

(a) 3 conjoining body sherds of moderate coarse sand tempered fabric. Brick red core with grey brown surfaces.

(b) 1 sherd, tempered with very fine sand and some organic inclusions (burnt out). Hand-made, slightly micaceous. Late Iron-Age - 1st century AD.

(c) 4 sherds of very fine silty ware. Black-brown core, with oxidised margins and surfaces. Some grog (crushed pot) inclusions. From beaker/flagon. 1st century-early 2nd centuries AD



SEAS	Site: A249 M2 to Iwade Improvement		
Turner Dumbrell Workshops North End Ditchling East Sussex BN6 8TG	Title: Location Map		
	Date: April 1996	Ref: 65	Drawing No: 1