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**BRENZETT ROUNDABOUT,
BRENZETT, KENT.**

Archaeological Site Investigations

Report No. W615

36627

For

**Department of Transport,
South East Network, Management Division,
Senet House, Station Road, Dorking,
Surrey RH4 1HJ.**

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The project was managed for Wessex Archaeology by Michael Heaton, with the fieldwork carried out by M.N.Rawlings and H.F.Beamish, who also prepared this report. The artefact assemblage was assessed by Dr Elaine Morris and the illustrations were drawn by S.E.James.

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SUMMARY

An archaeological investigation of the site of a proposed junction improvement to the A259/A2070 at Brenzett, Kent, was commissioned by the Management Division, South East Network, Department of Transport via Kent County Council Planning Department and carried out by Wessex Archaeology in July 1993.

The aim of the investigation was to provide archaeological information concerning the raised bank along which the current A259/A270 runs, postulated to be a structural remnant of a thirteenth century canal or sea wall known as the Rhee Wall. A single machine-excavated trench revealed a series of deposits forming the north-east edge of the raised bank. Although essentially undated, their nature and lack of modern components suggests them to be components of the medieval Rhee Wall. A medieval or post-medieval drainage ditch was also revealed, apparently a relict extension of extant surface field drains.

The archive and small artefact assemblage will be deposited with the relevant local museum following submission of this report.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project background

- 1.1.1 The project was commissioned by the Management Division, South East Network of the Department of Transport to fulfil a requirement by the County Archaeological Officer that archaeological investigations be carried out prior to the commencement of a road improvement scheme likely to involve substantial ground disturbance in the immediate vicinity of topographic feature known as the Rhee Wall, postulated to be the remnant of a canal or sea wall, of possible thirteenth century origin, which runs from Appledore to New Romney.
- 1.1.2 A specification for the work was prepared by the County Archaeological Officer and circulated to tendering organisations. This specified the scope and methodology of the archaeological work, and that the investigation should seek to establish and record the presence, extent, nature and date of any archaeological deposits but particularly the Rhee Wall.
- 1.1.3 Wessex Archaeology submitted a tender in response to the Kent County Council specification and, after clarification of certain details of the specification, were commissioned in June 1993 to undertake the work. Fieldwork commenced 19th July 1993, this report was submitted in August 1993.

1.2 The site, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The site of the proposed roundabout is situated at the south-eastern edge of the village of Brenzett (NGR TR 003273), approximately 6.5km north-west of New Romney in Kent. The carriageway of the A259 and its continuation as the A2070 currently runs along a raised bank known as the Rhee Wall, the road surface being c. 1.30m above the surrounding field level, approximately 3.30mOD immediately to the north-east of the road. A major field drain which runs intermittently along the north-eastern edge of the road and around adjacent fields is also referred to, erroneously, as the 'Rhee Wall' on current OS coverage, though there is no known structural relationship between the two features other than that of immediate adjacency.
- 1.2.2 The proposed improvements will re-site and enhance the junction with Ivychurch Road by way of a roundabout positioned approximately 20m north-east of the present junction. The work will involve the construction of a broad ramp down from the A259 carriageway. To prevent slippage, the interface between the ramp material and the raised bank (Rhee Wall) upon which the A259 currently runs will have to be stepped. This will involve considerable ground disturbance to the fabric of the Rhee Wall and to the natural ground levels in the immediate vicinity of it.

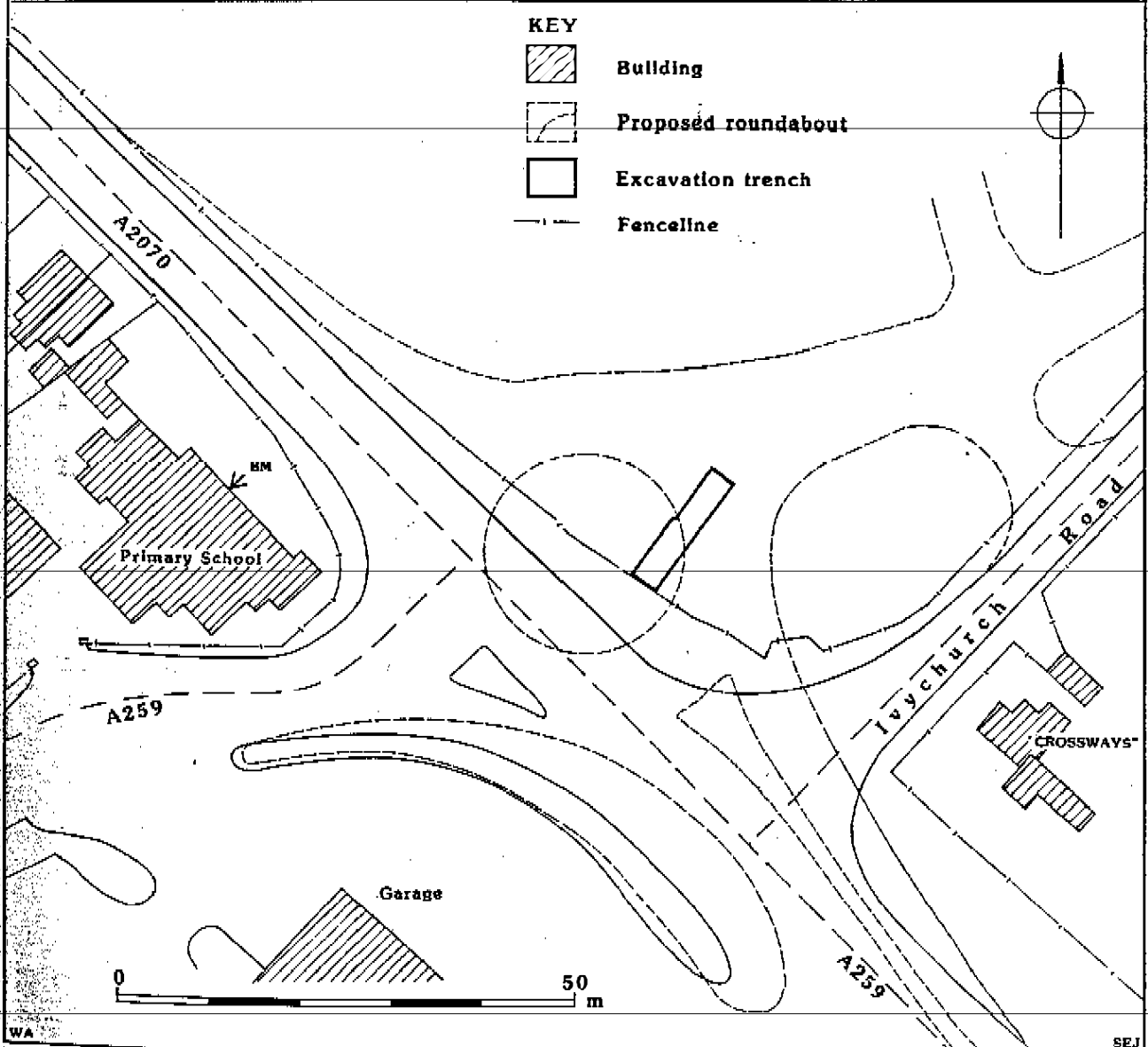
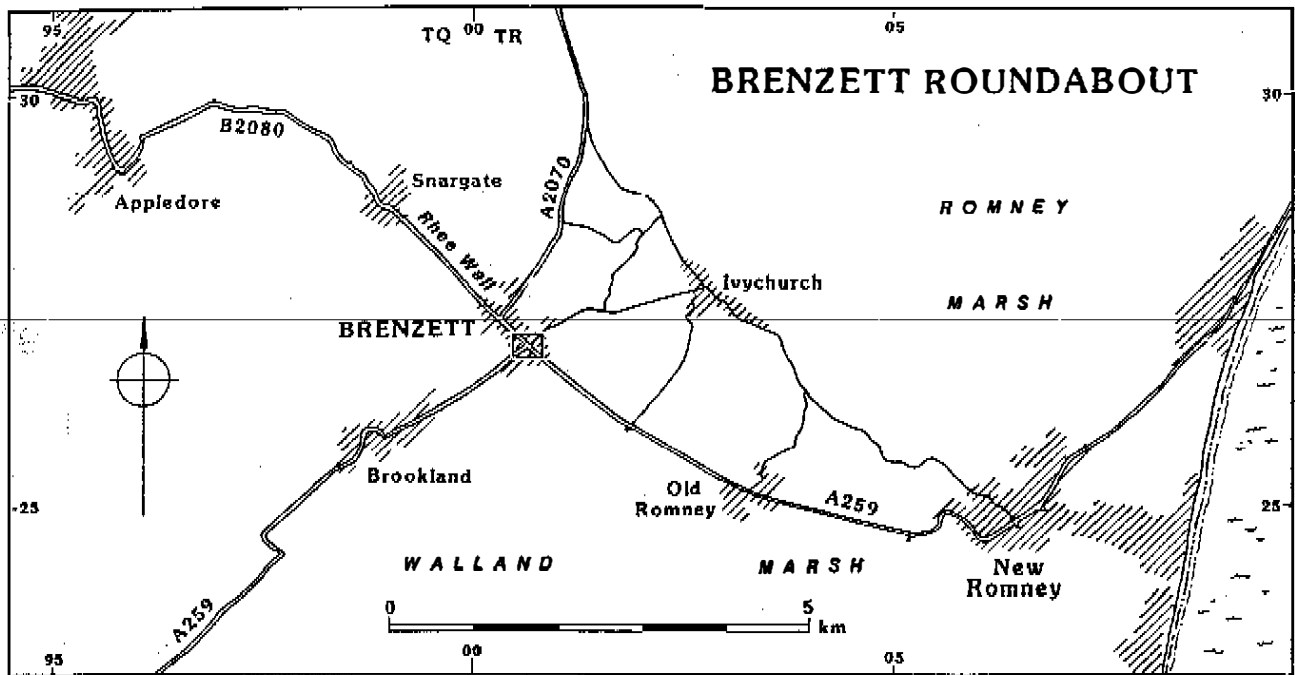


Fig. 1: Site location

- 1.2.3 The area of investigation lies entirely on Pleistocene Marine Alluvium Sand (O.S Geology Sheet 305).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 A brief summary of the archaeological and historical background of the Rhee Wall was included within the specification provided by Kent County Council Planning Department and the following information has been extracted from that summary.
- 1.3.2 The Rhee Wall proper runs for over seven and a half miles between Appledore to the north-west and New Romney to the south-east. Its construction is thought to date from the thirteenth century and the canal potentially served to divert waters from the River Rother to a marine inlet close by Romney, thus linking the productive hinterland with the medieval port of New Romney. The canal was probably constructed by raising two walls or banks which may still be discerned intermittently along the route. There are no archaeological records of the Rhee Wall; its precise form, use and infilling process remain conjectural.
- 1.3.3 Apart from providing dating and structural evidence for the construction, form and function of the Rhee Wall, archaeological excavation of the deposits integral to it could provide a range of palaeoenvironmental data pertaining to the origins and the history of economic exploitation of the Romney marshes. Its exact function is still the subject of academic debate, as yet unsupported by archaeological evidence.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Kent County Council Specification

- 2.1.1 The specified archaeological objective was to '... provide information relating to a section across the linear feature described.....as the Rhee Wall', to obviate the need for further detailed work during construction.
- 2.1.2 The Specification stipulated, *inter alia*, that the investigations be carried out by way of a single machine-excavated trench measuring 15m x 3m located adjacent to the centre of the proposed roundabout, normal to the line of the Rhee Wall, in a position agreed in advance by the CAO. Other than overburden removal, all excavation within the trench was to be by hand, followed by detailed recording of all deposits. Bulk soil samples from independently dated and sealed deposits relating to the construction, use or decline of the monument were to be taken for the purposes of recovering palaeoenvironmental materials.

2.2 Wessex Archaeology field methodology

2.2.1 The single trench was located (Figure 1) by taped measurement scaled from drawing no.7268/25 A, supplied by Kent County Council Highways and Transportation Department to accompany the Specification. The presence of roadside utilities, most notably a British Telecom fibre optic, required that the trench be re-located with its south-west end 5m from its specified position at the edge of the carriageway. The exact position of the trench is recorded in archive and illustrated on Figure 1. The ground conditions prior to, and following, excavation were photographed, also available in archive.

2.2.2 Overburden was removed using a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless bucket, operating under constant archaeological supervision. Machine excavation was halted at the first indication of significant interpretable archaeological deposits, all further investigation was by hand excavation.

2.2.3 All deposits were recorded in detail using Wessex Archaeology's standard recording system of written, drawn and photographic records. The sections revealed were photographed and then drawn at a scale of 1:20. The trench was planned at a scale of 1:100 and related to K.C.C. drawing 7268/25 A. A site TBM was traversed from an OS bench mark at Brenzett District Primary School, recorded on O.S sheet TR0027 as 3.55m OD.

2.2.4 All artefacts, other than those of obvious modern origin, were retained. A bulk soil sample was taken from one layer, context 112.

2.2.5 The trench was backfilled immediately upon completion of work, though not otherwise consolidated, and the resultant ground conditions photographed.

2.3 Wessex Archaeology post-field methodologies

2.3.1 Upon completion of field-work, all records were compiled into a fully indexed and cross-referenced archive in accordance with Appendix 6 of *The Management of Archaeological Projects* (MAP2: English Heritage). All records display the Wessex Archaeology site code **W615**.

2.3.2 Processing, cataloguing and curating of finds was undertaken off-site at Old Sarum in accordance with current U.K.I.C and Museum's Association guidelines, as encompassed in Wessex Archaeology finds processing guidelines (available on request). Individual artefacts were marked with Wessex Archaeology's site code **W615** and context number. All bags and boxes display this information. There were no materials requiring conservation. All artefacts were catalogued by material and context, and scanned by finds staff for the purposes of assessment and spot-dating. No materials were discarded.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Trench Description

The positions and relationships of all deposits are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, and a full listing of dimensions and detailed descriptions is presented in Appendix 1.

3.1.1 Summary The investigation revealed that the edge of the bank along which the A259 road currently runs is made up of a series of irregular deposits of clays and silts, often mixed together in a variety of textures. At the edge of the bank, and almost parallel to it, is a ditch *c.* 3.5m wide which has entirely silted up and which is cut by a much smaller modern ditch.

3.1.2 Modern overburden and disturbance A loose topsoil (101) sealed all deposits and was variable in depth, up to 0.4m deep at the base of the slope. A steep-sided 'V'-shaped machine-cut ditch (103) was revealed running parallel to the road across the centre of the trench, cut from directly below the base of the topsoil. The single homogenous fill (102) of this feature included much plastic waste and a ceramic field-drain.

3.1.3 Archaeological deposits To the north-east of 103 and below topsoil 101, was a sequence of deposits filling a ditch (113) aligned west-north-west/east-south-east. This fill sequence comprised an upper fill of clay (109), sealing a silt fill (110), which overlay another clay fill (111). The lowest observed ditch fill was a layer of silt (112), from which was recovered a small fragment of ceramic building material. All contained fragments of mollusc shell. The southern edge of ditch 113 appeared to have been removed by the later ditch 103 but projections based on both the section and the plan view of ditch 113 indicated that it was likely to have been approximately 3.5m wide with a broad 'U'-shaped profile. South of 113, and below topsoil 101, was a thick (>0.65m) layer of sandy silt (104), interpreted as slope-wash, which sealed a mottled deposit of sand (105). Beneath 105 was a deposit (106) primarily of clay but also including occasional lenses of sand. Two fragments of ceramic building material were recovered from this context. Sealed by 106 was a deposit of silt (108) including patches of clay and lenses of sand similar to 106. These layers are interpreted as the lower part of an earthen bank, possibly now denuded, constructed from deposits of locally available material. It is possible that deposit 104 may once also have been part of this bank and has subsequently tumbled down the slope.

3.1.4 Natural deposits Ditch 113 cut into a sequence of artefactually sterile sandy marsh silts (114, 115, 116) with upper surfaces resting at approximately 1.7mOD, all horizontally bedded and interpreted as being of natural deposition. At the southern end of the trench, below 108, was a layer of mixed silts (107) also interpreted as natural.

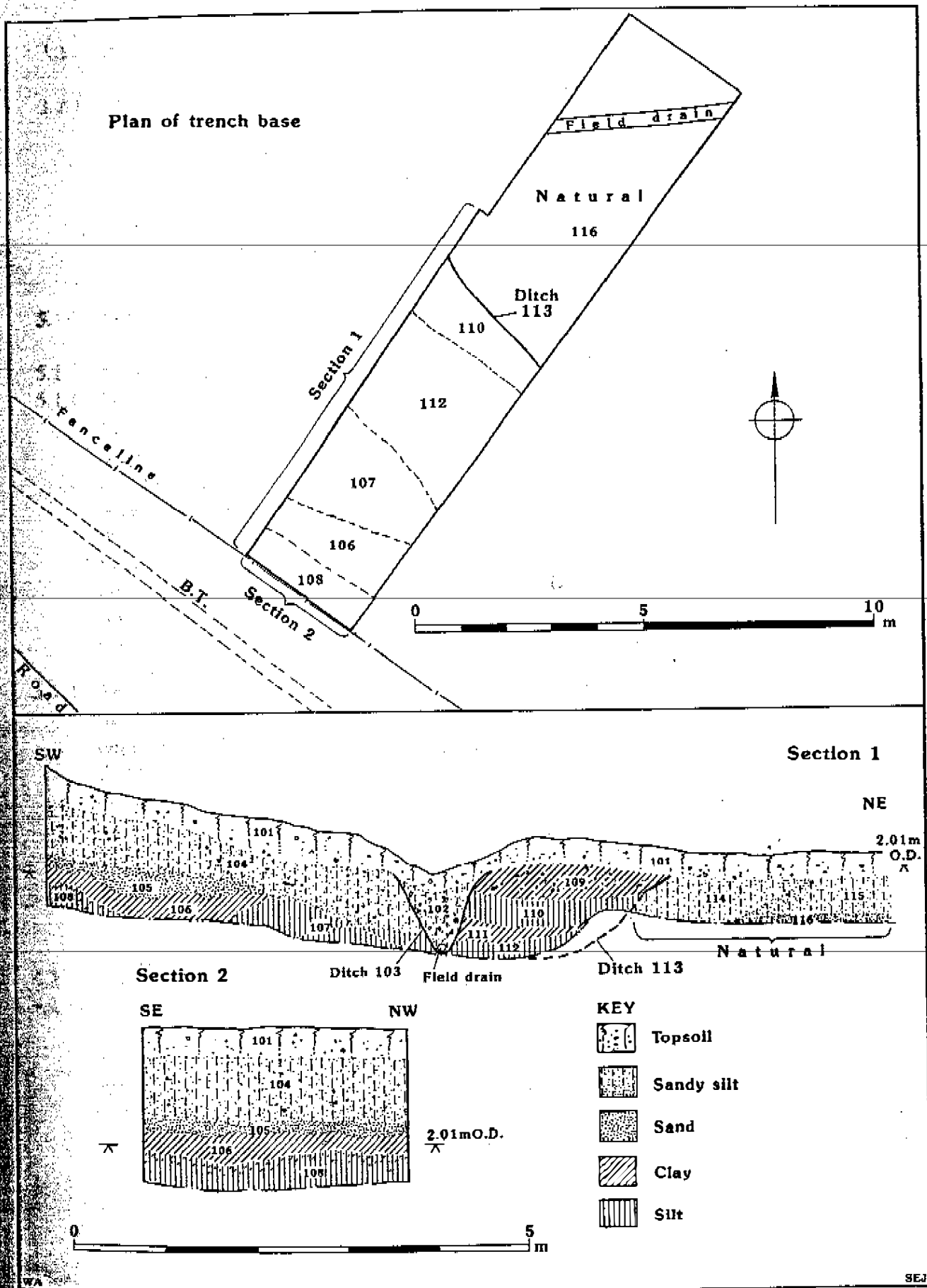


Fig. 2: Trench plan and sections

3.2 Artefacts

- 3.2.1 Ceramic building material (C.B.M) was the only category of finds recovered. Two fragments, weighing 35g and 2g, were recovered from layer 106 (part of the earthen bank). A third fragment, of 5g, was recovered from ditch fill 112. Although all three fragments are well-abraded and have no diagnostic features their fabric is compatible with a mediaeval or post-medieval date.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Demonstrated archaeological survival

- 5.1.1 Ditch 103 may safely be considered as a recent drainage feature and currently functions as such. Ditch 113 very probably fulfilled the same function as ditch 103 at an earlier date, apparently being cut from the top of layers 114 and 115. In plan this feature was seen to run not quite parallel to the existing road but to have a west-north-west to east-south-east alignment. No definitive dating evidence can be offered other than the small amount of medieval/post-mediaeval material recovered from fill 112. Its position size and alignment correspond with the extant drainage ditch known erroneously as the Rhee Wall to the north of the trench, so it is reasonable to conclude that this feature is a relict extension of the existing field drainage system.

- 5.1.2 The mottled appearance, textural irregularities and horizontally uneven nature of layers 105, 106 and 108 strongly suggest that these deposits represent re-deposited natural clays and silts placed to form a bank. It seems unlikely that this feature represents modern road construction, as it is neither consolidated or revetted. Although there were no obvious clear divisions between the layers in the bank, it is possible that the build-up of material could have taken place in several stages rather than as a single event. If the overlying deposit 104 is accepted as part of the bank make-up, the structure survives to height of 1.5m, approximately 3.0mOD.

5.2 Likely extent of archaeological deposits

- 5.2.1 It may be postulated that layers 104, 105, 106 and 108 represent the north-east bank of the substantial linear feature known as the Rhee Wall, and thus there exists the potential for further deposits associated with this canal to be extant beneath the current road. It is unfortunate that the presence of the modern services and utilities noted above precluded locating the trench closer to the carriageway.

- 5.2.2 Information recovered from the current investigation indicates that the north-east bank survives to a level of at least 3.0m OD and possibly to 3.40 OD. As the investigation revealed only part of the bank, the actual survival height may be slightly higher than this figure.

5.3 Local and regional significance

5.3.1 Archaeological research in the Romney Marsh area has inevitably been linked with the work of geologists, hydrologists and palaeogeographers, all aiming to further the understanding of the evolution of the coastline in this area. Building on work carried out by the Soil Survey of Great Britain (Green 1968), more recent publications have attempted to outline the evolution of the marsh (Cunliffe 1980; Eddison and Green 1988) using a variety of complementary approaches and methodologies.

5.3.2 Within the historical context of the development of New Romney as an important trading settlement (Tatton-Brown 1984) and the subsequent threat posed by the silting up of the Rother estuary, the nature of the Rhee Wall has become an issue of reasonable importance. The thirteenth century date of the Rhee Wall seems well-established but the function of this linear double wall has been the cause of some dispute (Ward 1952; Parkin 1973; Green 1968).

5.3.3 Recent thought places the Rhee Wall as a canal allowing water-borne trade and contact between New Romney and Appledore. Physical constraints on the positioning of the trench have prevented the current investigation from throwing new light upon this argument. However, it has established the probable preservation of the Rhee Wall as a medieval structure beneath the A259/A2070 and indicated that there would be potential for further archaeological work as part of the forthcoming road improvement works. However, the apparent lack of independent dating evidence within the deposits examined, compromises the value of any palaeoenvironmental materials that might be recovered from them.

5.3.4 The presence of a drainage ditch adjacent to the canal is not a surprise and is probably later than the main structure, relating to drainage of the adjacent fields. Analysis of the single soil sample taken from the fill of this ditch may reveal whether marine water or fresh water was present at the time of silting, information that may be of use to those studying the history of the drainage of the marsh. However, as this feature exists or continues as an extant watercourse immediately adjacent to the present site, the potential for ground water contamination of any palaeoenvironmental materials is high.

ARCHIVE

The project archive (Wessex Archaeology Reference W615) comprises the written, graphic and photographic records and also the finds from the fieldwork. It is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology at Old Sarum and in due course will be deposited with the relevant local museum.

The archive comprises the following :

File 1 :

- 1.1 The archive contents
- 1.2 Copy of client report
- 1.3 Background material
- 1.4 Context index
- 1.5 Context records
- 1.6 Graphics register
- 1.7 Levels register
- 1.8 Photographic register
- 1.9 The day book
- 1.10 Context finds records
- 1.11 Finds list by category index

File 2 :

The field drawings (1 x A1, 1 x A3)

File 3 :

The monochrome negatives
The colour transparencies

Box 1 :

The finds

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Ward, G. 1952 'The Saxon history of the town and port of Romney', *Arch. Cant.* 65, 12-25.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Detailed catalogue of context descriptions

Context	Description	Dimensions	Finds
101	Dark greyish brown sandy silt with roots, gravel and charcoal flecking. Topsoil.	0.40m deep	
102	Greyish brown sandy silt with roots, plastic waste and field-drain. Ditch fill.	0.60m deep	
103	'V' profile linear feature. Drainage ditch. Filled with 102.	0.85m deep 0.80m wide	
104	Light brownish grey sandy silt. Slope-wash or bank make-up.	0.65m deep	
105	Very pale brown sand, mottled appearance. Bank make-up.	0.35m deep	
106	Greyish brown clay with manganese staining and mollusc shell fragments. Bank make-up.	0.30m deep	x
107	Light grey to pale brown silt. Natural silt.	0.40m deep	
108	Light greyish brown silt. Bank make-up.	0.30m deep	
109	Light grey to brownish grey clay with mollusc shell fragments. Ditch fill.	0.40m deep 2.30m+ wide	
110	Pale brown silt with mollusc shell fragments. Ditch fill.	0.40m deep 1.60m+ wide	
111	Light brownish grey clay with mollusc shell fragments. Ditch fill.	0.30m deep 1.40m+ wide	
112	Light brownish grey to greyish brown silt with mollusc shell fragments. Ditch fill.	0.50m+deep 1.40m+ wide	x
113	Broad 'U' profile linear feature. Drainage ditch. Filled with 109, 110, 111 and 112.	c 3.50m wide 1.00m+ deep	
114	Light yellowish brown sandy silt with mollusc shell fragments. Natural silt.	0.45m deep	
115	Very pale brown sandy silt with mollusc shell fragments. Natural silt.	0.40m deep	
116	Light grey silty sand. Natural sand.	0.10+m deep	