

'The Butts'

Sandwich

Watching brief report

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CONTENTS

Frontispiece
List of figures
List of tables

1. Summary
2. Introduction
3. Historical background
4. Methodology
5. The recorded stratification
6. Finds
7. Environmental evidence *by Enid Allison and Alex Vokes*
8. Conclusions
9. Bibliography

List of figures

Frontispiece General view of the trench under excavation, looking south-east

Fig. 1 Map showing general location of the excavated trench, with inset location map (*Based on the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, ©Crown Copyright Licence No. AL100021009*)

Fig. 2 West facing section showing the recorded deposits

List of tables

Table 1 Distribution of finds from trenching at The Butts, Sandwich

Table 2 Pottery spot-dating for contexts recorded at The Butts, Sandwich

Watching brief at The Butts, Sandwich, 2013

1. Summary

1.1 In the north-west corner of the medieval walled town of Sandwich, just inside the town rampart, the excavation of a narrow trench was observed during April 2013. This was cut south–north for 18m along an unadopted roadway known as ‘The Butts’ (NGR 632680 158492, centred). The trench was taken to a depth of about 2m and revealed a significant sequence of post-medieval deposits.

1.2 At the base was natural alluvial clay. This was overlain by a succession of early post-medieval dump layers, up to 1.65m thick, containing much building debris, domestic waste and pottery dated *c* AD 1500–1550. Above these dumps, layers of rubble and hardcore supported the modern roadway. The tail of the medieval town rampart was not identified and must have lain just outside (i.e. west of) the excavated trench.

2. Introduction

2.1 Ongoing investigations into the cause of subsidence to an inhabited dwelling known as ‘The Barn’ within the historic town of Sandwich, required the excavation of a deep trench immediately to the west of the structure. This was to be filled with concrete to act as a barrier to tree roots, associated with large trees growing nearby, which were suspected of causing the structural problems to the house.

2.2 The trench was cut south–north almost down the middle of an unadopted roadway known as ‘The Butts’ (NGR 632680 158492, centred). This thoroughfare runs across low-lying ground in the north-west corner of the medieval walled town, just inside the town rampart, south of the site of the Canterbury Gate (Fig. 1). A short distance to the east lies the Delf Stream – a man-made watercourse dating back to at least the mid-twelfth century (Clarke *et al* 2010, 36).

2.3 The southern half of the trenched area fell within the boundaries of the Scheduled Ancient Monument protecting this section of the medieval town rampart (also here known as ‘The Butts’; Monument No. 1005175).

2.4 The building known as ‘The Barn’ is an early nineteenth-century brick-built industrial structure of three storeys, now converted into dwelling. The gardens of this building run down to the banks of the Delf, but lie at a significantly lower level than the roadway. The surface of the roadway stands between 3.00 and 3.05m above OD, with the ground floor of ‘The Barn’ and its garden to the east some 1.20–1.50m lower.

2.5 Given the archaeological importance of the medieval town and Cinque Port of Sandwich generally and the proximity of a Scheduled Ancient Monument specifically, an archaeological presence was required throughout the period of the trench excavation. Accordingly, Canterbury Archaeological Trust (CAT) was commissioned by Darran Solley of Dover District Council to maintain a watching brief during the course of the work and record anything of interest that might be exposed. The work was conducted by the writer during six half-day visits undertaken between 2 and 10 April 2013, with some significant results.

2.6 The observation and recording work was undertaken in generally cold but dry weather conditions, with light to moderate cloud-cover. The workmen on site afforded every assistance during the course of the excavation.

3. Historical background

3.1 Although contained within the walled town, the site investigated falls outside the main focus of medieval settlement, in a low-lying, wet area that was not generally inhabited much before the nineteenth century. During the sixteenth century, a watermill had stood on the Delf in this area, but in 1538 the Royal authorities ordered that it be demolished because it was obstructing the flow of water from the Delf into the Haven (Clarke *et al* 2010, 128).

3.2 The construction date of the medieval town wall of Sandwich is somewhat obscure, but a fourteenth-century date for the earthen ramparts that protect the western landward approaches to the town (i.e. 'The Butts' rampart) seems most likely (Clarke *et al* 2010, 69). The stone-built Canterbury Gate was erected sometime before 1468 and demolished in 1795. A small part of it was exposed during roadworks in 1929, some 40m north of the present trench (Clarke *et al* 2010, 151).

3.3 The origins of the unadopted roadway today known as 'The Butts' is uncertain. Boys' map of the town dated 1792 is unclear on the issue (Clarke *et al* 2010, fig. 8.1). A gap between the buildings of the town and the medieval ramparts certainly existed here then, but whether this was serving as a thoroughfare is not apparent. Either way, Ordnance Survey maps confirm that the route had developed into a formally metalled roadway by the nineteenth century and this remains in regular use today.

4. Methodology

4.1 The root barrier trench was dug under close archaeological observation using a 5 tonne tracked excavator with a 360 degree slew, equipped with a 0.45m wide toothed bucket (Frontispiece). Details of the exposed deposits were recorded following the general conventions set out in the Canterbury Archaeological Trust's *Site Recording Manual*.

4.2 The deep narrow trench, dug in three metre sections, was not well-suited for archaeological purposes. Nevertheless, significant stratified deposits were revealed and some useful information was obtained. Each length of trench was carefully inspected during its excavation, with the exposed stratification being recorded as accurately as possible from the top of the trench.

4.3 With the aid of the workmen on site, useful samples of material were recovered from most layers exposed. Limited hand-excavation of the upper stratified deposits was possible on occasion but safety considerations prevented any detailed examination of the lower levels *in situ*. Nevertheless, it was possible to collect material from the deeper levels from the machine bucket as it was brought out of the trench and tipped into the dumper. Some further finds were collected after the material had been dumped into the adjacent skip. Use of a metal-detector to search for additional finds was largely precluded by the confined working area available and the steel construction of all the site equipment.

4.4 In order to produce a continuous overall section of the deposits revealed, a 1:20 scale measured drawing was prepared for each length of trench, with these being joined together as the work proceeded to produce a composite section drawing of the entire trench (Fig. 2). Inevitably, this was somewhat generalised as it was impossible to accurately note all the individual sub-divisions within the main deposits observed.

4.5 The fieldwork generated a moderate archive, including, twelve recorded contexts, a composite measured section (Fig. 2), three OD levels, thirty-one digital photographs (Frontispiece) and one environmental sample. All the field records have been checked and indexed. The field records are currently held by CAT (Dover Office).

5. The recorded stratification (Fig. 2)

5.1 The trench was cut along the roadway about 1.25m west of the standing building known as *The Barn*. It had an overall length of 18m (N–S) and was just 0.45m wide (Fig. 1). It was excavated to a depth of 2m, which generally reached the top of the natural alluvial clay, just above the level of the water-table. The trench remained mostly dry throughout with just occasional minor seepage at a few points in the base. The natural clay was overlain by between 0.50m and 1.65m of stratified archaeological deposits, sealed by the make-up of the modern roadway (Fig. 2).

5.2 The exposed soil sequence in the trench was fairly complex and could not be dissected in full detail. Nevertheless, the general sequence exposed was broadly similar for the full length of the trench. At the base was the natural alluvial clay (Context 6). This was overlain by a succession of early post-medieval dump deposits, up to 1.65m thick, containing much building debris and domestic waste (Fig. 2, Contexts 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12). Above these, layers of rubble and hardcore (Contexts 2 & 7) supported the modern roadway (Context 1). No masonry walling was revealed and the tail of the medieval town rampart appeared to lie outside (i.e. west of) the trench.

5.3 At the base of the excavated sequence the natural alluvial clay (Context 6) was revealed at a depth of between 1 and 2m below modern road level (at +0.82 to +1.96m OD). In detail, the deposit consisted of a stiff cream-grey silty clay with iron mottling/staining and containing occasional small flint pebbles and natural marine shells. This must represent the oxidised, upper zone of the local marsh clay. A few carbon flecks noted in the highest levels of this clay would seem to indicate some casual human activity in the area, as does a single piece of animal bone recovered from the top of this deposit.

5.4 As seen in the excavated trench, the surface of the natural clay showed a broad central depression about 17m across and up to 1m deep, with shallow sloping sides and an undulating base (Fig. 2). Whether this was a man-made feature or some natural hollow was not entirely clear from what was exposed. However, the fact that the overlying rubbish deposits (see below) rested directly on the surface of this clay, without any evidence of intervening sediments, topsoil or a turf line, tends to suggest that this hollow had been deliberately cut, rather than being a natural, wetland feature.

5.5 Filling the hollow were various early post-medieval dump deposits (Contexts 5, 10, 11 & 12), which in turn were overlain by more general deposits of similar material (Contexts 3, 4 & 8).

5.6 The earliest of the post-medieval deposits occupying the hollow was a thin, discontinuous layer of black ash and charcoal with frequent oyster shells (Context 12). This rested directly on the surface of the natural clay in the northern half of the excavated trench. No datable finds were recovered from this deposit.

5.7 Also within the hollow, partially sealing Context 12, was a 0.25m thick deposit of dark grey sandy clay loam, with frequent carbon flecks, moderate numbers of small flint pebble, occasional peg-tile fragments and chalk flecks (Context 11). Small amounts of roof tile, early brick, floor tile, animal bone and oyster shell, were recovered from this layer but there was no datable pottery. An environmental sample taken from this layer proved to be quite rich in material (see below).

5.8 Context 11 was sealed by a more extensive deposit of mid–light grey, slightly organic, sandy clay loam (Context 10) which also filled the hollow. This layer was up to 0.75m thick and contained moderate amounts of broken peg-tile, oyster shell and carbon flecks, with occasional chalk specks and small flint pebbles. Finds recovered from this layer included eleven sherds of pottery dated *c.* AD 1500–1575, a complete ‘Sandwich Haven’ brick, roof tile, animal bone and oyster shell.

5.9 Overlapping the southern end of Context 10 and filling the deepest part of the hollow in the southern half of the trench was Context 5. This was between 0.30 and 0.80m thick and consisted of a dark grey, slightly organic, sandy loam containing frequent oyster shells and carbon flecks with occasional small chalk lumps. Finds recovered included eight sherds of pottery dated *c.* AD 1500–1550, roof tile, occasional early brick fragments, two pieces of floor tile, animal bone and marine shell.

5.10 Sealing Context 5 and overlapping the edge of Context 10 was Context 4. This was between 0.20 and 0.40m thick and extended across the southern half of the trench. It consisted of a light grey sandy, slightly organic, loam with carbon flecking, containing frequent oyster shells and moderate amounts of broken peg-tile. Finds recovered included fourteen sherds of pottery datable to the period *c.* AD 1475–1550, roof tile, fragments of early brick, floor tile, a piece of medieval roofing slate, a fragment of coal, animal bone and marine shell.

5.11 Contexts 4 and 10 were sealed by a more extensive layer (Context 8) which sealed the infilled hollow and occupied all the excavated trench apart from its south end. Context 8 was up to 0.65m thick and consisted of a dark grey brown, slightly organic, sandy loam containing frequent small and medium flint pebbles, occasional large flint cobbles, frequent carbon flecks and moderate amounts of animal bone. Finds recovered included sixty-three sherds of pottery datable to the period *c.* AD 1500–1550, fragments of early brick and roof tile, together with three more pieces of medieval roofing slate, a large iron nail, animal bone and marine shell.

5.12 The southern margin of Context 8 was overlapped by Context 3 which represented stratigraphically the latest deposit of the post-medieval dump layers. It was between 0.40 and 0.50m thick and consisted of a dark grey clayey sand with chalk specks, containing moderate quantities of broken roof tile, oyster shell and occasional early brick fragments. Five sherds of pottery datable to *c.* AD 1500–1575 were recovered from this deposit, along with a few fragments of pan-tile, animal bone and oyster shell.

5.13 Also overlying Context 8, across most of the northern half of the trench, was substantial pebble layer about 0.30m thick (Context 9). In detail, this consisted of a dark grey sandy clay loam containing frequent small, medium and large flint pebbles with some larger flint cobbles and very occasional carbon flecks. The only find recovered was a single large animal bone.

5.14 Contexts 3, 8 and 9 were sealed by an extensive rubble layer (Context 7), representing the sub-base of the existing roadway. Context 7 was up to 0.50m thick and consisted of compact, red and yellow brick rubble, with chalk lumps, crushed white mortar and flint pebbles. Much of the material used would appear to represent rubble from demolished buildings. Finds were limited to three residual potsherds of sixteenth-century date, but a nineteenth-century date for this deposit seems fairly certain.

5.15 In the southern half of the trench Context 7 was sealed by another road make-up layer (Context 2). This was 0.34m thick and consisted of a dark grey gritty loam with frequent flint cobbles, flint pebbles and brick rubble. No datable finds were recovered from this deposit.

5.16 The present-day roadway surfacing (Context 1) was between 0.10 and 0.15m thick and generally consisted of a grey gritty loam with very frequent large, medium and small flint pebbles, with localised patches of tarmac, brick rubble and concrete, representing casual *ad hoc* repairs made to the surface over the years.

6. Finds

6.1 A significant quantity of finds was recovered during the course of the watching brief. The bulk of this material came from the early post-medieval soil dumps above the natural clay. Most of the material recovered was broken roof tile, animal bone and marine shell, with smaller amounts pottery, early brick, medieval roofing slate and a single small fragment of coal. Apart from a large iron nail, no metal objects were discovered.

6.2 The material has all been processed and catalogued according to standard Canterbury Archaeological Trust procedures. It currently remains in the possession of the Trust but, subject to agreement, will be transferred to Dover Museum in due course. Brief notes on various categories of find are set out below. The complete finds assemblage is listed in Table 1.

Context	Pottery	Roof tile	Brick	Floor tile	Slate	Iron	Coal	Bone	Shell
1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	5	5	1	-	-	-	-	12	10
4	14	19	6	2	1	-	-	50	28
5	8	32	1	2	-	-	-	11	27
6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
7	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8	63	54	5	-	3	1	-	180	65
9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
10	11	26	4	-	-	-	-	26	14
11	-	1	1	4	-	-	-	2	1
12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	104	137	18	8	4	1	1	283	145

Table 1. Distribution of finds from trenching at The Butts, Sandwich

6.3 Pottery

based on notes by Luke Barber

A total of 104 pot-sherds was recovered from six different contexts. More than half this material came from Context 8. The assemblage comprises mostly local red wares but with a few local Wealden buff ware sherds and (early) Surrey Whiteware. There are a notable number of imports – mainly Dutch redwares, with a few slipwares and German stoneware (Raeren and Cologne), together with probable Haffner Whitewares. Most of the sherds fit within a date bracket of *c.* AD1500 – 1550/75 and overall the assemblage represents a nice group of early Tudor pottery.

Context	No. of sherds	Spot Date
3	5	<i>c.</i> AD 1500 – 1575
4	14	<i>c.</i> AD 1475 – 1550
5	8	<i>c.</i> AD 1500 – 1550
7	3	<i>c.</i> AD 1500 – 1575
8	63	<i>c.</i> AD 1500 – 1550
10	11	<i>c.</i> AD 1500 – 1575
Total	104	

Table 2. Pottery spot-dating for contexts recorded at The Butts, Sandwich

6.4 Building material

6.4.1 Roof tile

Moderate quantities of broken roof tile were contained in all of the stratified deposits exposed. Most of this was locally produced peg-tile with a few pieces of pan-tile. Pan-tiles may be broadly dated to the seventeenth to nineteenth century and occur as roof coverings on a number of historic buildings in the town.

6.4.2 Brick

A number of early brick fragments were recovered. Most of these are of the pale yellow, 'Sandwich Haven' type, broadly datable from the fifteenth to seventeenth century. A complete specimen was recovered from Context 11, towards the northern end of the trench. This measured 226mm x 110mm x 54mm. There are records of a municipal brickworks being established at Sandwich in 1467. This seems to be the earliest documentary reference to brick-making in Kent (Clarke *et al* 2010, 135).

6.4.3 Floor tile

Eight fragments of floor tile were recovered, including an example of a medieval plain glazed tile that clearly derived from some medieval building of relatively high status.

6.4.4 Roofing slate

Four fragments of roofing slate were recovered from Contexts 4 and 8. Such slates became widely available from the middle of the twelfth century onwards and have been discovered at a number of medieval coastal towns in Kent. Most are likely to have originated from Cornwall and Devon, although a Belgian source is not impossible.

6.5 Animal bone and marine shell

Substantial amounts of animal bone and marine shell were recovered from the excavated trench (Table 1). The bone relates to a range of domestic animals, whilst most of the shell is oyster with a few whelks. No detailed analysis of this hand collected material has been undertaken (but see below).

7. Environmental evidence

by Enid Allison and Alex Vokes

7.1 A single bulk sediment sample (bulk (BS)/general biological analysis (GBA) sample *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) was collected from the basal fill of the probably man-made hollow revealed during the trenching (Context 11).

7.2 Methods

The sample had a volume of 4 litres. It was processed by standard methods of flotation after overnight soaking in water containing washing soda (sodium carbonate). A flot was collected onto 0.5mm mesh and the residue was washed onto nested 2mm and 1mm meshes for ease of examination. All three fractions were air-dried. The heavy residues >2mm were sorted (by Bob Robson) for animal and plant remains and artefacts. The residue fraction >1mm and the flot were scanned briefly using a low-power binocular microscope (x10) and the contents recorded. A magnet was used to check the >1mm fraction for the presence of hammerscale.

7.3 Results

7.3.1 The residue had a weight of 0.78kg. Fragments of peg-tile (total weight 150g), bone (35g) and marine mollusc shells (198g) were common. Other material recovered consisted of three pot sherds (11g), traces of slag and hammerscale (3g), two copper/bronze pin fragments, a small fragment of thin glass with an incised line decoration, avian eggshell fragments and a few terrestrial

snails. Fish, bird and large mammals were represented in the bone assemblage. Some of the large mammal fragments were charred or calcined which is typical of material that has been burnt on domestic fires. All categories of bone were uneroded but fragmentary and most fragments were therefore indeterminate. The few identifiable fish bones indicated that several species were represented including common eel (*Anguilla angilla*). Oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) shell was common and well-preserved, and fragments (1g or less) of five other marine mollusc species were represented: mussel (*Mytilus edulis*), whelk (cf *Buccinum undatum*), cockle (*Cerastoderma*), variegated scallop (*Chlamys varia*), and a small top shell (Trochidae). The mineral component of the residue included a dark/black piece of slate or shale.

7.3.2 The sample flot had a volume of 200ml and consisted chiefly of small pieces of coal, clinker and charcoal. Oyster shell fragments were common, including some that had been burnt. Small numbers of charred seeds, terrestrial snails and laver spire snails (*Hydrobia ulvae*) were also noted. The last of these are found in brackish to fully marine conditions (Davies 2008, 167) and may have arrived in the feature with waste water from domestic use other than for consumption, or from sea water transported with shellfish.

7.4 Note on the oyster shell

7.4.1 Oyster was represented by nine left valves, and three right valves. Five of the left valves had either V-shaped notches or other damage to the ventral edges caused during opening the shells. One large thick-shelled individual and a very small first year oyster were represented but most were estimated to be in the order of 3–4 years old. By this age, most oysters will have reached marketable size. Although age determination based on shell morphology is not necessarily straightforward and is rather subjective, the flat right valves on which annual growth is easier to discern are more reliable as indicators than the cupped lower valve. Left valves of oyster spat (the earliest stage of development after settling) were present on two of the mature left valves. It is possible that the first year individual had also originally been attached to one of the larger valves.

7.4.2 The general appearance of the oysters was suggestive of most of them having been harvested from a similar, probably sunny estuarine location on a hard substrate. All were of a fairly regular shape ('teardrop' to slightly triangular). One left valve had an obvious attachment facet at the umbone, the rest of the left valves being regularly rounded in profile. Seven of the nine left valves had extensive chalky deposits within the shell, and chambers could be seen between shell layers of the largest individual. Most of the left valves had greyish-pink streaks and patches on their external surfaces. Most of the more complete left valves showed evidence of having been encrusted externally or bored by other marine animals during their lives: six showed burrows of the bristle worm *Polydora ciliata*, four had sand tubes of sabellid worms, and two were encrusted by bryozoans. The larger older left valve showed evidence of four encrusting/boring organisms, including a sponge *Cliona celata*, and a larger species of bristle worm *Polydora hoplura*. The sponge would be visible as small yellow pustules protruding through holes in the outer layer of shell. *P. hoplura* bores into the edge of the shell and can penetrate the mantle cavity, affecting the ability of the oyster to close its shell. As a consequence of this the oyster seals off the worm and its burrow with a layer of shell. The resulting 'blister' often becomes filled with mud which affects eating properties and saleability. Such a mud blister was noted on this shell. *Polydora hoplura* tends to occur on soft substrates in relatively still, warm waters, while *P. ciliata* prefers to infest oysters on hard, sandy or clayey grounds in shallow waters which are typical of the Thames estuary and North Kent coast.

8. Conclusions

8.1 Despite the limitations imposed by the nature of the trench and its method of excavation, the watching brief has allowed the recording of some important (and unexpected) new archaeological information.

8.2 It is now apparent that there had been quite extensive sixteenth-century rubbish dumping, on ground that would have originally lain just inside the medieval town rampart, sometime prior to the laying down of the present roadway. Thick layers of dumped domestic rubbish and building debris were revealed above the natural alluvial clay, the earliest deposits occupying a broad hollow which seems to represent a man-made excavation rather than a natural feature. Possibly, this feature represents a broad shallow pit cut into the tail of the medieval rampart designed to take domestic rubbish from several properties on the western side of town.

8.3 The date-range of the pottery recovered suggests that this dumping was occurring over a fairly short period of time, between *c.* AD 1500 and 1575, with a quantity of demolition material also included. No doubt derived from the pulling-down of earlier buildings within the old town, this demolition material includes medieval glazed floor tile, roofing slate and early, locally made bricks.

8.4 Whether the close proximity of the Canterbury Gate, spanning one of the principal access roads into the town, was of particular significance in relation to the extensive dumping of rubbish that occurred in this area remains unclear. Although a watermill had stood nearby during the early sixteenth century (see above) there were no finds, such as millstone fragments, that might be derived from such a structure.

8.5 The unexpected discovery of extensive dumps of early post-medieval rubbish in the area investigated clearly indicates a significant archaeological potential for this part of Sandwich. The environmental sample has demonstrated the potential of archaeological deposits in this area to produce significant data. Any future excavations here should be carefully monitored or, if possible, undertaken by archaeologists implementing a detailed environmental sampling program.

8.6 No further analysis is presently required on the material recovered in 2013. The pottery, nevertheless, provides a useful assemblage from the historic town and should be carefully retained for inclusion in any future local ceramics studies.

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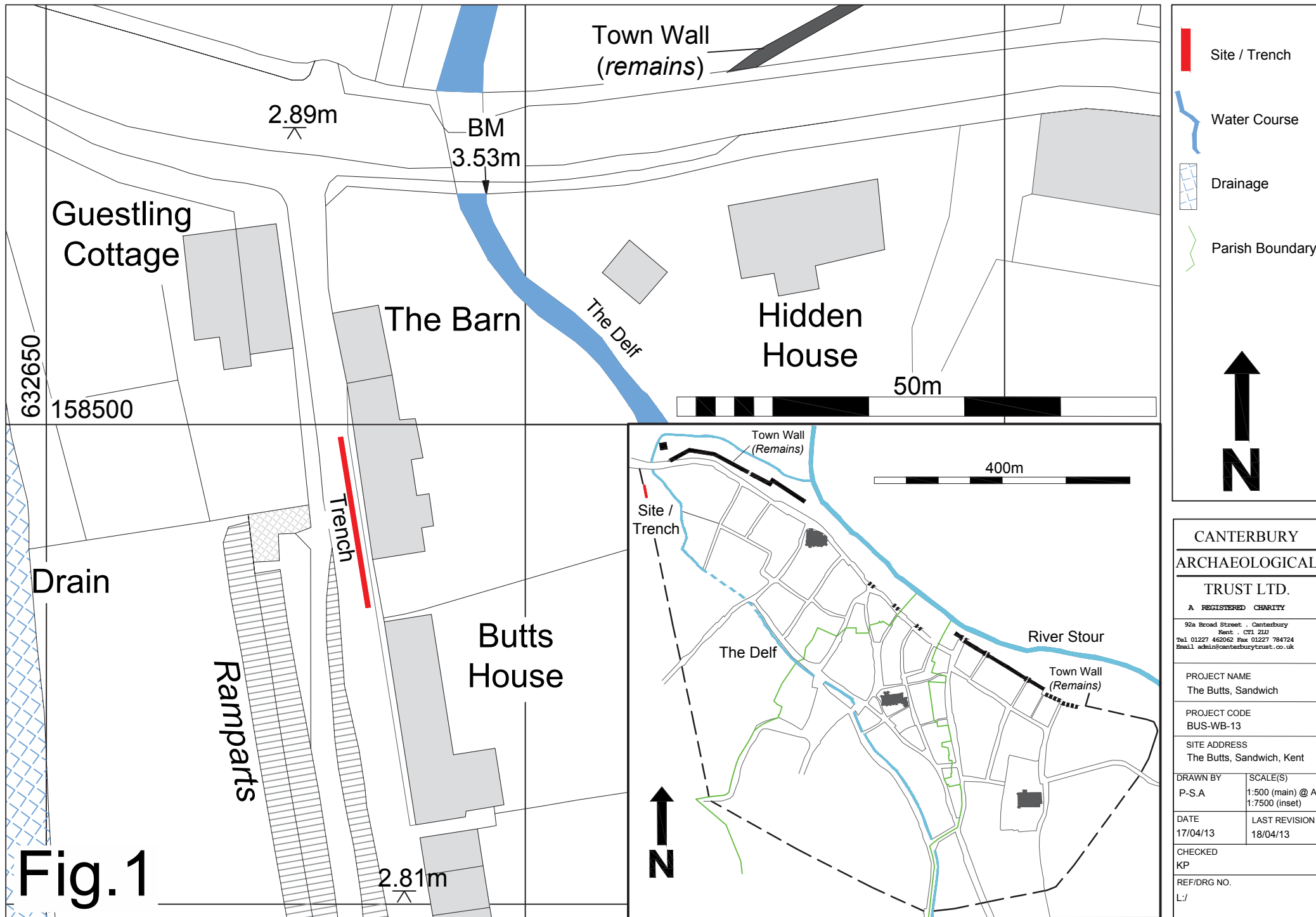
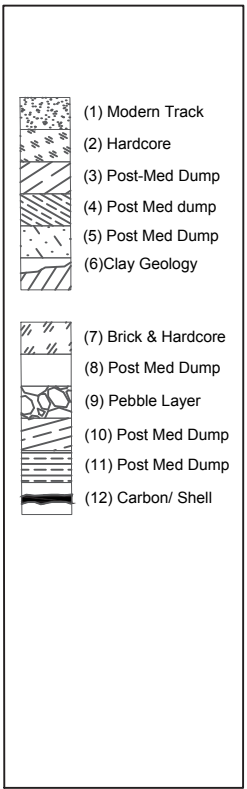
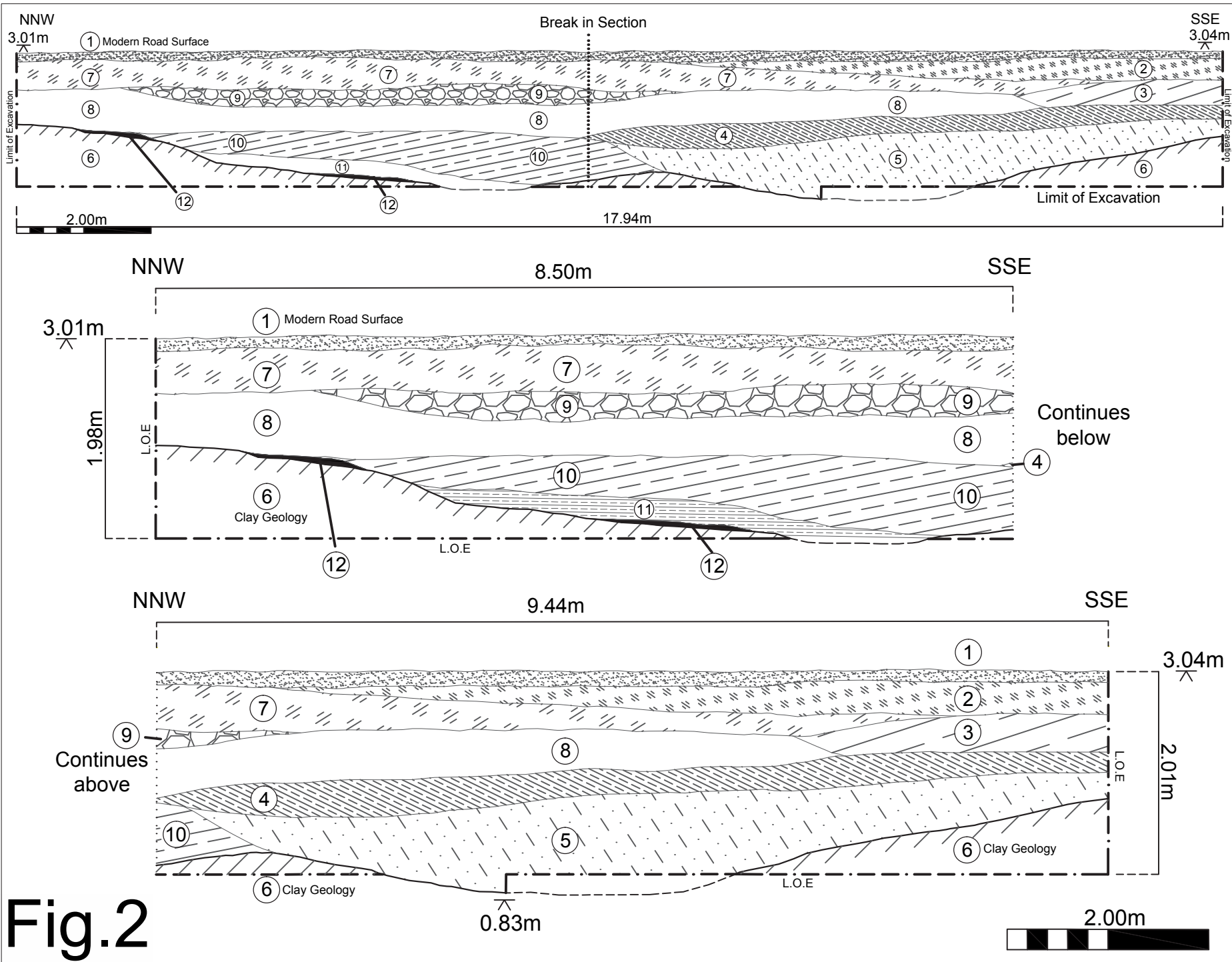


Fig. 1

Figure. 1 Trench Location map and inset map of Sandwich

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The Butts, Sandwich	
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P-SA	Main 1:20 Inset 1:50
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Fig.2

Fig.2 West facing section showing recorded deposits