

Report 2738



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## **Historic Building Record and Archaeological Watching Brief at Chislet CEP School, Chislet, Canterbury, Kent**



**Prepared for**  
NPS South East Ltd.



NPS Archaeology

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## Contents

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<i>Summary</i> .....	1
1.0 Introduction .....	1
2.0 Geology and Topography .....	1
3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background.....	3
4.0 Methodology .....	3
5.0 Results .....	3
5.1 Historic Building Record .....	3
5.2 Watching Brief .....	9
6.0 Conclusions .....	10
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	11
<i>Bibliography</i> .....	11
Appendix 1: Locations and directions of record photographs .....	12

## **Figures**

- Figure 1 Site location
- Figure 2 Air raid shelter as surveyed
- Figure 3 Air raid shelter original layout
- Figure 4 Locations and directions of photographs (Appendix 1)

## **Plates**

- Plate 1 General view south-west of the air raid shelter
- Plate 2 General view south-east of the air raid shelter
- Plate 3 The north-west wall showing the later door and blocked original door occupied by the later window
- Plate 4 The north-west wall showing the original door at the top and the later door knocked through the brick wall line
- Plate 5 Interior of Room 2 showing later window and the impressions of the timber shuttering in the poured concrete roof
- Plate 6 Blocked doorway between Rooms 2 and 4 and the remains of a Bakelite light switch
- Plate 7 View north across the excavations for the foundations of the new hall

Location:	Chislet CEP School, Chislet, Kent
District:	Canterbury
Planning Ref.:	CA/10/00489
Grid Ref.:	TR 2236 6424
OASIS Ref.:	112196
Client:	NPS South East Ltd.
Dates of Fieldwork:	3-4 and 8 August 2011

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## **Summary**

*An historic building recording and archaeological watching brief were undertaken for NPS South East Ltd ahead of the demolition of a redundant World War II air raid shelter and during excavations required for the construction of a new community hall at Chislet CEP School, Chislet, Kent.*

*The air raid shelter was constructed as part of a widespread programme of air raid shelter construction in schools and other public places and was subsequently adapted to school use by the insertion of a new entrance and windows.*

*Monitoring of the excavation of the foundations for the new hall revealed no features or deposits of archaeological interest.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Proposals to construct a new community hall in the grounds of Chislet CEP School, Chislet, Kent, involved the demolition of an existing air raid shelter and the excavation of new foundation and service trenches. Therefore, a programme of archaeological works was required to mitigate the loss of the air raid shelter and the potential loss of other archaeological information.

This work was undertaken to fulfil a planning condition set by the Planning Applications Group at Kent County Council (Planning Application CA/10/00489) and two briefs issued by the Heritage Conservation Unit of Kent County Council (CA 10 00489 SP01 HBR and CA 10 00489 SP02 WB). The work was conducted in accordance with a Project Design and Method Statement prepared by NPS Archaeology Unit (NAU/BAU2738/NP). This work was commissioned by NPS South East Ltd.

The site archive is currently held by NPS Archaeology and on completion of the project will be deposited with a suitable record office, following relevant national and local policies on archiving standards.

## **2.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

The school lies close to St Mary's Church on Church Lane, Chislet, north-east of Canterbury and is bounded by Church Lane on its east and south sides. An extension of the St Mary's Church cemetery forms the western boundary and an access track to the cemetery lies along the north boundary.



Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:5000

The school sits at an elevation of c.17 m above Ordnance Datum on an underlying geology of a Head deposit of undifferentiated sand, silt, clay and gravel overlying Harwich Formation sand, with the Thanet Sands group to the east and north and the Lambeth Sands to the south-west (mapping of the British Geological Survey).

### **3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The school lies in an area that has been identified as having some archaeological potential. Remains of Roman and Anglo Saxon date were recovered during the cutting of graves in the neighbouring graveyard extension. A burial of Romano-British date was recorded in 1949 close to the present road and a collection of finds of Anglo-Saxon date including a spearhead, two knives and a pin, were recorded in the north-east corner of the graveyard.

The air raid shelter itself was a typical example of a public shelter built during the later 1930s as part of the Air Raid Precautions Act and even though they are still fairly common shelters such as this are frequently being lost through redevelopment.

### **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

The objective of this project was to mitigate the effects of the construction of the new hall by creating a record of the structure of the air raid shelter before it was demolished and recording any below ground remains during the groundworks for the new building. Therefore, a two-phased programme of fieldwork was undertaken, which included the production of an historic building record of the air raid shelter and a watching brief on the groundworks for the new hall building.

The historic building record conformed to a Level 2 survey as defined by English Heritage (English Heritage 2006, *Understanding Historic Buildings: a guide to good practice*) and the watching brief was carried out in accordance with *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (Institute for Archaeologists 2008).

## **5.0 RESULTS**

### **5.1 Historic Building Record**

#### **5.1.1 General**

The air raid shelter sat in the north-west corner of the playground and consisted of a rectangular yellow brick built structure c.8.1m x c.4.7m, aligned north-west – south-east (Fig. 1, Plates 1 and 2). It had a 0.15m thick concrete roof that oversailed the walls by c.0.1m. The shelter stood c.2.15m high, although the playground had been built up, which made the building's original external height c.2.25m high. Internally the rooms were all approximately 2.1m high.

The brickwork was laid in English bond and the walls sat on a low concrete plinth, c.0.1m high, with a slate damp proof course.

At the time of this survey the shelter contained four rooms, but this seems to have been a consequence of alterations made after the war, presumably, to make it a more useful building for the school.



Plate 1. General view south-west of the air raid shelter



Plate 2. General view south-east of the air raid shelter

All the interiors were bare plain brick walls and concrete ceilings with no traces of paint or any other form of internal finishes. The ceilings showed the shutter marks from its poured concrete construction.

There was no graffiti or signage inside the building, but there were various signs and targets from ball games either painted or screwed onto the long north-east wall that faced the playground.

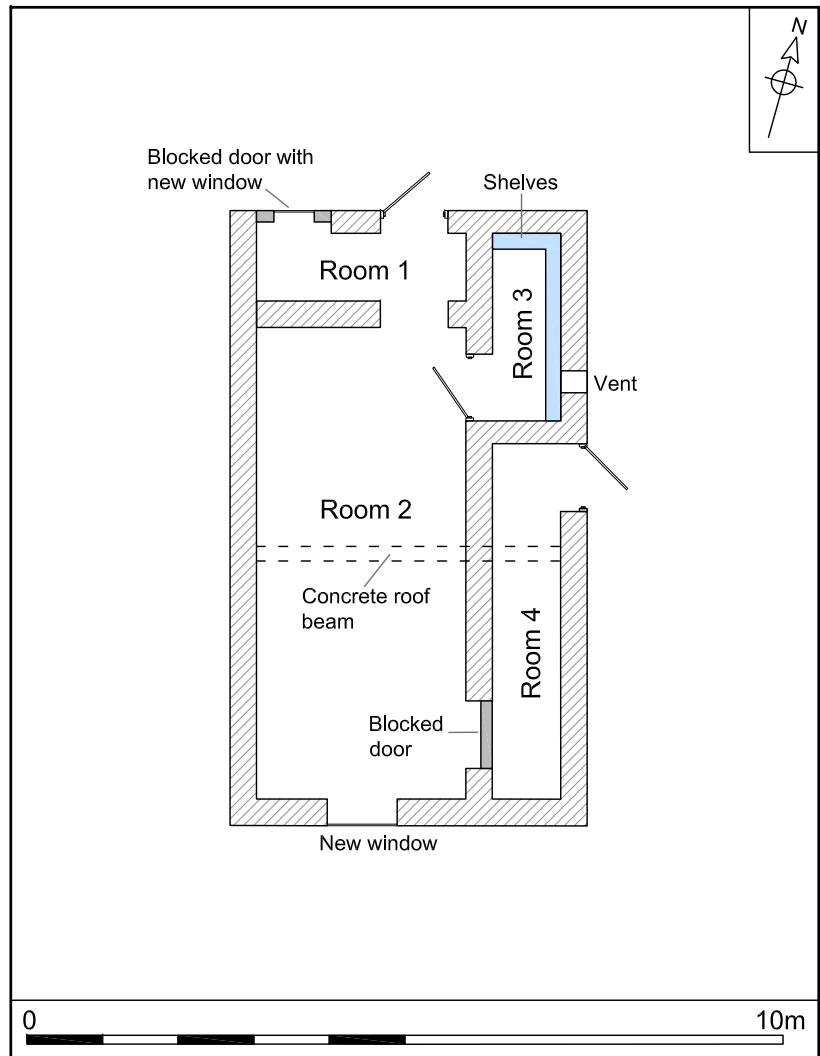


Figure 2. Air raid shelter as surveyed. Scale 1:100

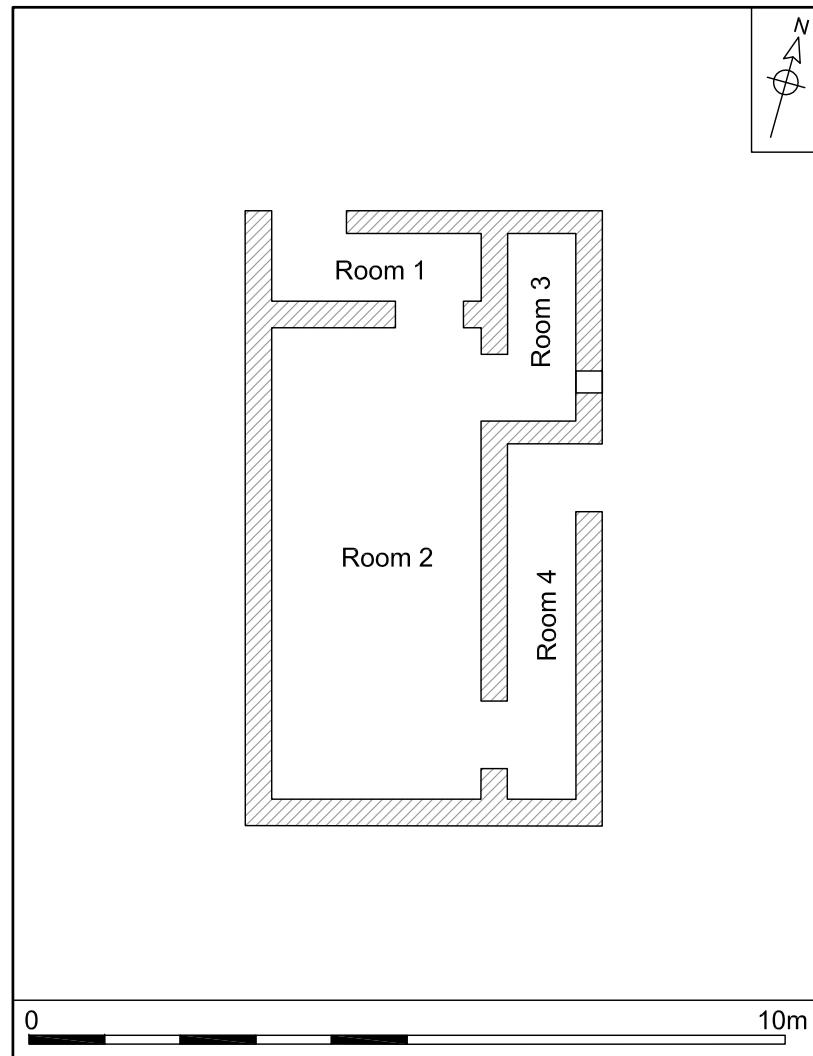


Figure 3. Air raid shelter original layout. Scale 1:100

### **5.1.2 Room 1**

The building was entered through a wooden door that was located towards the north-eastern end of Room 1, but was centrally placed in the end wall of the building. Room 1 measured 2.75m x 0.9m at the north-east end, but the north-west end was stepped back to 1.13m wide, where the north-west (end) wall contained a window (Fig. 2). The window was a six-light metal framed window, with a rendered surround.

The external door was opposite the entrance into Room 2, effectively making Room 1 a small room, or storage area, to the side of the entrance.

There was good evidence to suggest that the door was a later insertion, with the original entrance being through the section containing the window (Fig. 3). The brickwork of the external wall line continues across the base of the doorway, but not across the base of the window recess and there are vertical scars in the external wall to suggest that the window recess is later blocking (Plates 3 and 4). This arrangement gives a more logical layout, in which Room 1 originally formed a short, narrow baffle entrance into the main body of the shelter, which would have afforded some blast protection (Fig. 3).



Plate 3. The north-west wall showing the later door and blocked original door occupied by the later window



Plate 4. The north-west wall showing the original door at the top and the later door knocked through the brick wall line

### 5.1.3 Room 2

This was the main chamber of the shelter and consisted of a rectangular room, c.6.1m x c.2.75m, entered from Room 1 through a plain opening in the north-east end of its north-west wall, with a central window in the opposing south-east wall (Fig. 2: Plate 5). There was a blocked doorway at the south-east end of the north-east wall, which originally opened into Room 4 (see below). A door in the north-east wall led to Room 3 (see below).

A wooden dado rail ran around all the walls at 0.82m above the floor. The dado had been stained or painted brown and had chamfered top and bottom edges. Electric cables had been fixed to the underside of the dado along the south-west and south-east wall. These appeared to have been original, but they had been cut and did not lead to any fittings. There were parts of two surviving electrical fittings, which may have been original. These were a square wall switch on the north-east wall and a circular light fitting on the ceiling. Both fittings had wooden bases and the wall switch had the broken remains of a Bakelite switch.

The room was lit by a twelve light metal framed window in the south-east (end) wall. The window had rendered reveals and it appears to have been added later, presumably at the same time as the alterations to Room 1.

A large concrete roof beam crossed the room.

This room was the main part of the shelter and is where the pupils and staff would have congregated during air raids. It is likely that during the war there would have been facilities to teach or at least materials to keep the pupils occupied, although there was no surviving evidence for this.



Plate 5. Interior of Room 2 showing later window and the impressions of the timber shuttering in the poured concrete roof

#### **5.1.4 Room 3**

This is a small store room, 2.45m x 0.95m, opening off the north-east corner of Room 2 (Fig. 2). It was lined with shelves on its north-east and north-west walls and had a small vent at ceiling height in the north-east wall. The shelves were probably added after the end of the war as the shelter was adapted for school use. There was no evidence for any original fixtures or fittings.

#### **5.1.5 Room 4**

Room 4 was separated from the rest of the shelter and entered via a door in the external north-east wall. It measured 4.45m long x 1.15m wide and was full of old school documents, equipment and furniture at the time of the survey.

This room was originally connected to Room 2 by the blocked opening (Plate 6) in its south-west wall (the north-east wall of Room 2). The brickwork in the blocked opening had not been pointed in Room 4 suggesting that it had been built from within Room 2 and indicating that Room 2 was the main focus of the building and where appearances mattered.

Originally Room 4 appears to have formed a baffle entry to the main body of the shelter (Room 2), with a later use as a store.



Plate 6. Blocked doorway between rooms 2 and 4 and the remains of a Bakelite switch

#### **5.1.6 Discussion**

The building was a surface shelter of a type constructed in schools and other public areas as part of the Air Raid Precautions Act of 1936, revised in 1938. These shelters were generally constructed from yellow brick with a concrete roof and the Chislet shelter is a typical and unremarkable example, which had been modified post-war in order to make it a more useful school building.

These shelters usually had provision for toilet facilities, but there was no evidence surviving within the structure for any such facilities. It is possible that the facilities were not permanent and consisted of a portable toilet, perhaps located in Room 3, which was the only area able to afford any privacy.

A site visit during the watching brief to record the demolished air raid shelter confirmed that the original layout had two baffle entrances to the main chamber (Room 2), a central one (Room 4) on the long north-east wall and a smaller one (Room 1) on the narrow north-west wall (Fig. 3).

#### **5.2 Watching Brief**

The watching brief consisted of site visits to record the air raid shelter after it had been demolished to damp proof course level and to monitor the groundworks associated with piling and ring beam foundations.

The ground levels were reduced by 0.2m across the footprint of the new building, which involved removal of the concrete base of the air raid shelter and a small

section of tarmac playground. This reduction did not remove the make up layer for the concrete base of the air raid shelter, so the surface of the underlying clay natural was not exposed across the footprint.

The construction of the ring beam foundations required the excavation of trenches, c.0.5m deep, to link the piles. These were monitored and all, unsurprisingly, had the same sequence of natural deposits present (Plate 7). The base of the trenches was stiff clay and flint gravel, which was below a layer of stiff orange clay.

There were no archaeological features or deposits present.



Plate 7. View north across the excavations for the foundations of the new hall

## 6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The air raid shelter at Chislet CEP School was a fairly typical example of a public shelter and was probably built as part of the Air Raid Precautions Act of 1936 (revised in 1938) in which hundreds of shelters were built across the country. The shelter was built to a standard plan and consisted of a main chamber accessed by two offset, or baffle, entrances. The standard layout enabled the shelter to be doubled in size to provide a larger shelter if required as at Minster in Sheppey Primary School, Minster, Kent (Henderson 2008), for example

As is typical of such structures the Chislet shelter was adapted to school use after the war by the addition of windows and a new central door in the north-west wall. The windows would have let in light and the central door would have allowed bulky items to be carried straight into the main chamber rather than having to negotiate the original narrow baffle entrance. It is not certain if the shelter was ever used for anything other than storage after the war.

Monitoring of the excavation of the foundations for the new hall revealed no features or deposits of archaeological interest.

## **Acknowledgements**

The project was initiated through NPS South East Ltd. The report was edited by Jayne Bown and the illustrations prepared by David Dobson.

## **Bibliography**

- British Geological Survey <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/> Accessed 14.01.11
- Henderson M 2008 *The Air Raid Shelter at Minster in Sheppey Primary School, Minster: Historic Building Survey*. Unpublished Archaeology South-East report 3481.

## **Appendix 1: Locations and directions of record photographs**

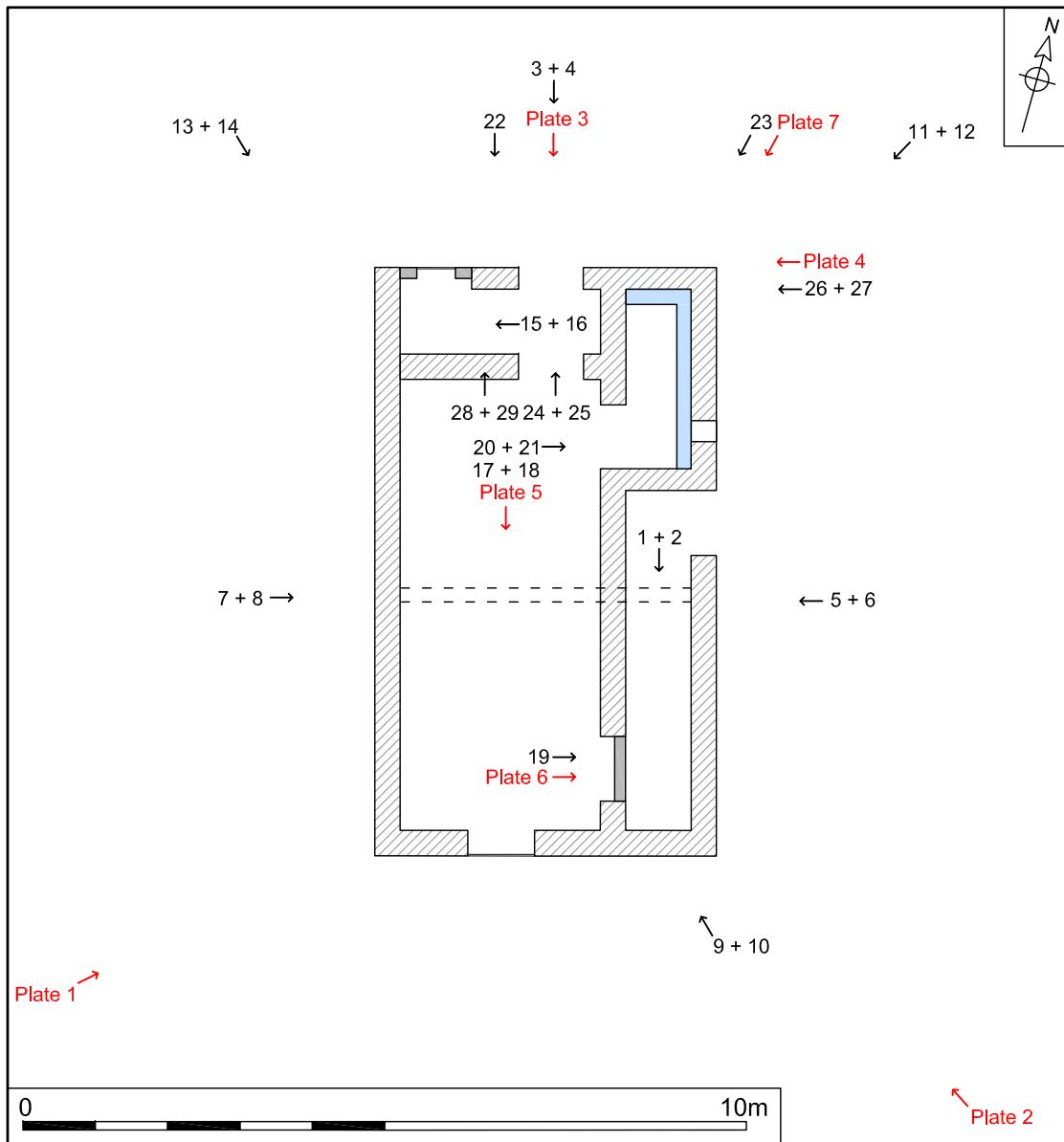


Figure 4. Locations and directions of photographs. Scale 1:100