

**Archaeological Watching Brief Report
Great Dixter, Northiam, East Sussex**

NGR 581960 125110

Rother District Council Planning Ref: RR/2009/434/L

**ASE Project No: 4601
Site Code: GDN 10**

**ASE Report No: 2012178
OASIS ID: archaeol6-133125**

Simon Stevens BA MIFA

**With contributions by
Luke Barber, Karine Le Hégarat
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Abstract

Archaeology South-East (ASE), a division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology, UCL, was commissioned by Thomas Ford and Partners on behalf of the Great Dixter Trust to undertake archaeological monitoring during groundworks within the complex of building at Great Dixter. The work was undertaken between the 7th December 2010 and the 29th August 2012.

The excavation of c.250m of pipe trenches and ground reduction associated with the installation of a new biomass boiler were monitored. No significant archaeological deposits or features were encountered.

However a significant discovery was that of an undated timber threshing floor within the Great Barn encountered during pipe trenching, which necessitated the rerouting of the trench allowed the recorded of this comparatively rare feature.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Background

1.1.1 Archaeology South-East (ASE), a division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology (CAA), Institute of Archaeology (IoA), University College London (UCL) was commissioned by Thomas Ford and Partners on behalf of the Great Dixter Trust to undertake an archaeological watching brief on groundworks at Great Dixter House, Northiam, East Sussex (NGR 581960 125110; Fig 1).

1.2 Topography and Geology

1.2.1 Great Dixter House and the associated complex of historic buildings are located approximately one mile to the north-west of the centre of the village of Northiam in an elevated position above the valley of the River Rother, at a height of c.50m AOD.

1.2.2 According to current data from the British Geological Survey Great Dixter lies close to the junction of the Wadhurst Clay and Upper Tunbridge Wells Sand formations. There is no recorded superficial geology (BGS 2012).

1.3 Planning Background

1.3.1 Planning permission was granted by Rother District Council for infrastructure improvements within the complex buildings at the site (planning ref. RR/2009/434/L). Following consultation between Rother District Council and East Sussex County Council (Rother District Council's advisers on archaeological issues), a condition was attached to that permission, requiring a programme of archaeological work at the site. The condition stated that:

'No development shall take place until the applicant or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation, including a timetable for the investigation, which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority and the works shall be undertaken in accordance with the approved details.'

1.4 Aims and Objectives

1.4.1 The monitoring was undertaken as part of a wider programme of archaeological works at the site. A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) for this element of the works was prepared by Casper Johnson, County Archaeologist, East Sussex County Council in 2010 (ESCC 2010). The stated objective of the monitoring was to:

'contribute to our understanding of the site through the recording of any archaeological remains exposed as a result of excavations in connection with the groundworks..... Particular attention will be made to the character, depth below ground level, condition, date and significance of any deposits'

1.5 Scope of Report

- 1.5.1 This current report provides the results of the archaeological monitoring of various groundworks at the site undertaken by a team comprised of Andrew Margetts, Simon Stevens and Alice Thorne (Senior Archaeologists), Dylan Hopkinson and Gary Webster (Archaeologists), Rob Cole and John Cook (Archaeological Surveyors) and Sam Whitehead (Assistant Archaeologist) between the 7th December 2010 and the 29th August 2012. The project was managed by Jon Sygrave and Andy Leonard (Project Manager) and by Jim Stevenson (Post-Excavation Manager).

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Medieval and Post-Medieval

2.1.1 The site comprises the medieval and post-medieval manorial centre of Great Dixter. A large hall house was constructed here in the mid-late 15th century probably by Sir Thomas Etchingam who inherited Dixter in 1464 (ESCC 2010). The building was purchased in 1910 by Nathaniel Lloyd, who with the help of his architect, Sir Edward Lutyens, restored the house and built a new extension on the site of the original service range. To the rear of the extension they re-erected a 15th century hall house originally from Benenden, Kent. The main house has been the subject of a recent architectural survey (ASE 2010).

2.1.2 The house has associated barns and other structures and an internationally important garden, developed by Nathaniel Lloyd, working from a pre-existing setting for the main house and associated buildings. Historic mapping of the site, shows that before 1910 there were numerous buildings, ponds, boundaries and tracks distributed across the site (ESCC *op. cit*).

2.2 Previous Archaeological Work

2.2.1 Test pits excavated at Dixter Farm (roughly 100m north of the main house) were observed during a site visit by Casper Johnson on 16th July 2009. No archaeological features or deposits were observed in the seven test pits monitored. Three further test pits were monitored during the same visit, in the area of the new car park/ground source heat pump; once again no archaeological finds or features were recorded (*ibid*).

2.2.2 Following a visit to the site by David Martin, Senior Buildings Consultant, ASE in August 2009, an impact assessment of the proposed infrastructure work was produced which highlighted the historic significance of the rare 15th century Great Barn (ASE 2009).

2.2.2 Archaeological monitoring was undertaken at the site during pipe trench excavation in 2010 and 2011 (ASE 2011). The results of this work, a phase of the current infrastructure improvements are included in the current report, along with the monitoring work on groundworks (including further pipe trenches) undertaken since then.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

- 3.1. Mechanical and manual excavations at the site were monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist. Sections were examined for the presence of archaeological features or deposits, and all available spoil was scanned for the presence of archaeological artefacts.
- 3.2 All encountered archaeological deposits, features and finds 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.
- 3.3 A full 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, but has been accepted Rother District Council (based at Bexhill museum) for deposition in due course. Rother District Council does not issue accession numbers. It consists of the following material:

Number of Contexts	13 contexts
No. of files/paper record	1 folder
Photographs	114 digital
Registered finds	1 bag

Table 1: Quantification of Site Archive

4.0 RESULTS

(Figures 2 and 3)

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Groundworks associated with the improvements in the infrastructure of the site were monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist during visits to the site between December 2010 and August 2012. Most of the monitored work consisted of the mechanical and manual excavation of pipe trenches, as well as ground reduction for the installation of a new biomass boiler system.

4.2 The Pipe Trench

4.2.1 The works comprised the archaeological monitoring of the mechanical and manual excavation of c.250m of pipe trenches, which mostly followed the alignment of surfaced tracks to the north and east of the existing buildings at the site. The trenches were usually 600mm in width and a maximum of 800mm in depth. Monitoring of the excavations for the pipe trenches was undertaken during visits to the site between 7th December 2010 and the 29th August 2012.

Context Number	Type	Description	Maximum Thickness
001	Deposit	Topsoil	200mm
002	Deposit	'Natural'	-
003	Deposit	Road Surface	250mm
004	Deposit	Made Ground	250mm
005	Deposit	'Natural'	-

Table 2: List of recorded contexts in pipe trenches

4.2.2 The stratigraphic sequence recorded in the pipe trenches was for-the-most-part uniform and usually comprised a dark greyish brown gravel-made ground/road surface, context [002], which overlay a mottled, orangey grey, silty clay made ground/levelling, context [004]. A single fragment of clay pipe was recovered from this deposit

4.2.3 The majority of the pipe trench followed the gravel track, but in several places it deviated slightly into the surrounding area, where the uppermost layer was a dark greyish brown, humic topsoil, context [001], which also overlay the made ground/levelling, context [004], which in turn overlay the 'natural', context [002] (also recorded as context [005]).

4.2.4 No archaeological features or deposits were encountered during the watching brief. Around 0.20m of topsoil and around 0.25m of made ground survived through most of the pipe trench; however, in places, there was considerable truncation of the encountered deposits from services adjacent to some of the buildings.

4.3 The Biomass Boiler System

4.3.1 Mechanical excavations associated with the installation of the new boiler system were monitored on a visit to the site on 13th October 2011. An area of ground reduction adjacent to an existing building was observed and recorded.

Context Number	Type	Description	Maximum Thickness
006	Deposit	Made Ground	150mm
007	Deposit	Disturbed 'Natural'	150mm
008	Deposit	Concrete	150mm

Table 3: List of recorded contexts in area of ground reduction

4.3.2 The stratigraphic sequence was straightforward and reflected the level of disturbance/previous groundworks adjacent to the buildings, as seen during monitoring of the pipe trenches. The uppermost layer was context [008], a deposit of concrete, which directly overlay brick rubble, context [006], which in turn overlay a deposit of disturbed/redeposited yellowish brown 'natural', context [007].

4.3.3 No archaeological deposits or features were encountered and no artefacts were recovered from the spoil.

4.4 The Great Barn

4.4.1 The Historic Buildings report and terminology

Intrusive groundworks during the archaeological watching brief also took place inside the Great Barn. This building is discussed in detail in the separate historic buildings interpretative survey report (Martin and Martin 2012). The terminology used in that report is followed here for consistency with each bay of the structure being assigned a letter (A-H) (Fig. 3)

The exposure of a threshing floor in a pipe trench (Bay B-C) is of more relevance to the Historic Buildings investigation and this element is therefore discussed in detail in that report, although it is briefly detailed in the text below and shown on Figure 3 for clarity (Williamson in Martin and Martin 2012).

4.4.2 The threshing floor (Bay B-C)

A threshing floor has also been previously exposed in the building in Bays E-F (Fig 3) (Martin and Martin 2012).

A further threshing floor was found in Bays B-C during a monitoring visit to the site on 14th December 2011, to observe the excavation of a 600mm wide pipe trench (Fig 3). During this visit, timbers forming a threshing floor were noted and work ceased to allow full recording of the feature. The pipe trench was subsequently rerouted to avoid the timbers.

Context Number	Type	Description	Maximum Thickness
009	Deposit	Current Floor	160mm
010	Deposit	Timber Floor	c.35mm
011	Deposit	Overburden	150mm
012	Masonry	Brick Supports	-
013	Deposit	Clay Floor	-

Table 4: List of recorded contexts in The Great Barn

Two hand excavated test pits were dug to investigate the threshing floor (TP1 and TP2)

Initial recording showed that the floor was buried beneath the current 'earth floor' of the barn, which consisted of a compacted mid-greyish brown silty clay, context [009], which directly overly the timbers, context [010]. Detailed recording was hampered by the presence of extensive scaffolding within the building.

4.4.3 Investigations in Bay F-H

Further observation of groundworks were made in the Bay F-H in May 2012. Only c.150mm of the modern 'clay floor' surface was removed and recorded as context [011]. The surface of another clay floor. Context [012] was

revealed. A line of possible post-holes were noted but were not recorded in detail as they were immediately covered, and hence have been left *in situ*.

5.0 THE FINDS

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 A small collection of finds was recovered during the archaeological work at Great Dixter. The assemblage is quantified in Table 5.

Context	Pottery	Weight (g)	Flint	Weight (g)	Clay Pipe	Weight (g)
004					1	78
011	1	10	2	28		

Table 5: Overview of the finds assemblage

5.2 The Pottery by Luke Barber

5.2.1 The watching brief recovered a single sherd of pottery from the site (context [011]). This consists of a slightly abraded bodysherd from a 19th- century Sunderland-type slipware bowl.

5.3 The Flintwork by Karine Le Hégarat

5.3.1 Archaeological work at Great Dixter, Northiam produced two pieces of flint weighing 28g. The artefacts, recovered from context [011], display extensive edge damage, implying the possibility of successive re-depositions. The artefacts are made from light grey flint. They comprised a flake fragment and an unclassifiable fragmentary core. The latter exhibits signs of having been used as a hammer percussor. This small isolated and poorly preserved assemblage isn't diagnostic of a particular period.

5.4 The Clay Pipe by Elke Raemen

5.4.1 A single clay tobacco pipe bowl fragment (RF <1>, wt 8g) was recovered from deposit [004]. The bowl, a type OS12 (Oswald 1975), dates between ca. 1730 and 1780. Maker's marks "IM" survive moulded in relief on the sides of the heel; however, there is no known local maker with these initials.

6.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 No significant archaeological deposits or features were encountered during the monitoring of the excavation of the pipe trench. The majority of the excavation followed the line of the track running along the north-western side of the complex of buildings. Similarly no archaeological deposits were encountered during monitoring of the groundworks associated with the installation of the new biomass boiler system. Truncation was noted close to all of the buildings. The discovery of post-medieval artefacts is not in itself significant, given the location. The struck flint is not, on its own, indicative of prehistoric settlement.
- 6.2 The discovery of, and opportunity to record the threshing floor in the Great Barn was however significant, given the scarcity of the survival of such features (Amy Williamson *pers. comm.*). However this rarity is a handicap in dating the structure, as is the common practice of reusing timbers in such an agricultural setting. In addition, the barn itself has been substantially altered in its long history and is the subject of a recent detailed survey (ASE 2012).
- 6.3 It was unfortunate that the circumstances of the watching brief (not least the presence of scaffolding) did not allow more detailed recording of the relationships between the threshing floor and some of the more firmly dated elements of the barn's structure. Even where the determination of a relationship of the threshing floor between datable walls or floors was initially thought possible, firm conclusions were impossible and therefore the date of the floor must remain uncertain.
- 6.4 The threshing floor is discussed in detail in the Historic Buildings Report (Williamson, in ASE 2012).

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HER Summary Form

Site Code	GDN10					
Identification Name and Address	Great Dixter, Northiam					
County, District &/or Borough	Rother District, East Sussex					
OS Grid Refs.	NGR 581960 125110					
Geology	Wadhurst Clay/Upper Tunbridge Wells Sand+					
Arch. South-East Project Number	4601					
Type of Fieldwork	Eval.	Excav.	Watching Brief ✓	Standing Structure	Survey	Other
Type of Site	Green Field	Shallow Urban	Deep Urban	Other <i>Grounds of Historic House</i>		
Dates of Fieldwork	Eval.	Excav.	WB. 07.12.2010 - 29.08.2012	Other		
Sponsor/Client	Thomas Ford and Partners on behalf of the Great Dixter Trust					
Project Manager	Jon Sygrave/Andy Leonard/Jim Stevenson					
Project Supervisor	Sam Whitehead					
Period Summary	Palaeo.	Meso.	Neo. ?✓	BA ?✓	IA	RB
	AS	MED	PM ✓	Other		
<p>Summary</p> <p><i>Archaeology South-East (ASE), a division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology, UCL, was commissioned by Thomas Ford and Partners on behalf of the Great Dixter Trust to undertake archaeological monitoring during groundworks within the grounds of the historic house. The work was undertaken between the 7th December 2010 and the 29th August 2012.</i></p> <p><i>The excavation of c.250m of pipe trenches and ground reduction associated with the installation of a new biomass boiler were monitored. No significant archaeological deposits or features were encountered.</i></p> <p><i>However a significant discovery was that of an undated timber threshing floor within the Great Barn encountered during pipe trenching, which necessitated the rerouting of the trench allowed the recorded of this comparatively rare feature.</i></p>						

OASIS Form

OASIS ID: archaeol6-133125

Project details

Project name	An Archaeological Watching Brief at Great Dixter, Northiam, East Sussex
Short description of the project	Archaeology South-East (ASE), a division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology, UCL, was commissioned by Thomas Ford and Partners on behalf of the Great Dixter Trust to undertake archaeological monitoring during groundworks within the grounds of the historic house. The work was undertaken between the 7th December 2010 and the 29th August 2012. The excavation of c.250m of pipe trenches and ground reduction associated with the installation of a new biomass boiler were monitored. No significant archaeological deposits or features were encountered. However the most significant discovery was that of an undated timber threshing floor within the Great Barn encountered during pipe trenching, which necessitated the rerouting of the trench and allowed the recorded of this comparatively rare feature.
Project dates	Start: 07-12-2010 End: 29-08-2012
Previous/future work	Yes / Not known
Any associated project reference codes	4601 - Contracting Unit No.
Any associated project reference codes	GDN10 - Sitecode
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	Local Authority Designated Archaeological Area
Current Land use	Other 13 - Waste ground
Monument type	THRESHING FLOOR Post Medieval
Significant Finds	NONE None
Investigation type	""Watching Brief""
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS

Project location

Country	England
Site location	EAST SUSSEX ROTHER NORTHIAM Great Dixter
Postcode	TN31 6PH
Study area	2.00 Hectares

Site coordinates TQ 8196 2511 50 0 50 59 45 N 000 35 36 E Point

Height OD / Depth Min: 49.00m Max: 51.00m

Project creators

Name of Organisation	Archaeology South-East
Project brief originator	East Sussex County Council
Project design originator	Archaeology South-East
Project director/manager	Jon Sygrave/Andy Leonard/Jim Stevenson
Project supervisor	Simon Stevens
Type of sponsor/funding body	Client
Name of sponsor/funding body	Thomas Ford and Partners

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient	Bexhill Museum
Physical Contents	"Ceramics", "Worked stone/lithics"
Digital Archive recipient	Bexhill Museum
Digital Contents	"other"
Digital Media available	"Images raster / digital photography", "Survey", "Text"
Paper Archive recipient	Bexhill Museum
Paper Contents	"other"
Paper Media available	"Correspondence", "Drawing", "Miscellaneous Material", "Notebook - Excavation", " Research", " General Notes", "Plan", "Report", "Survey", "Unpublished Text"

Project bibliography 1

Publication type	Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)
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Sussex

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

Other bibliographic details ASE Report No. 2012178

Date 2012

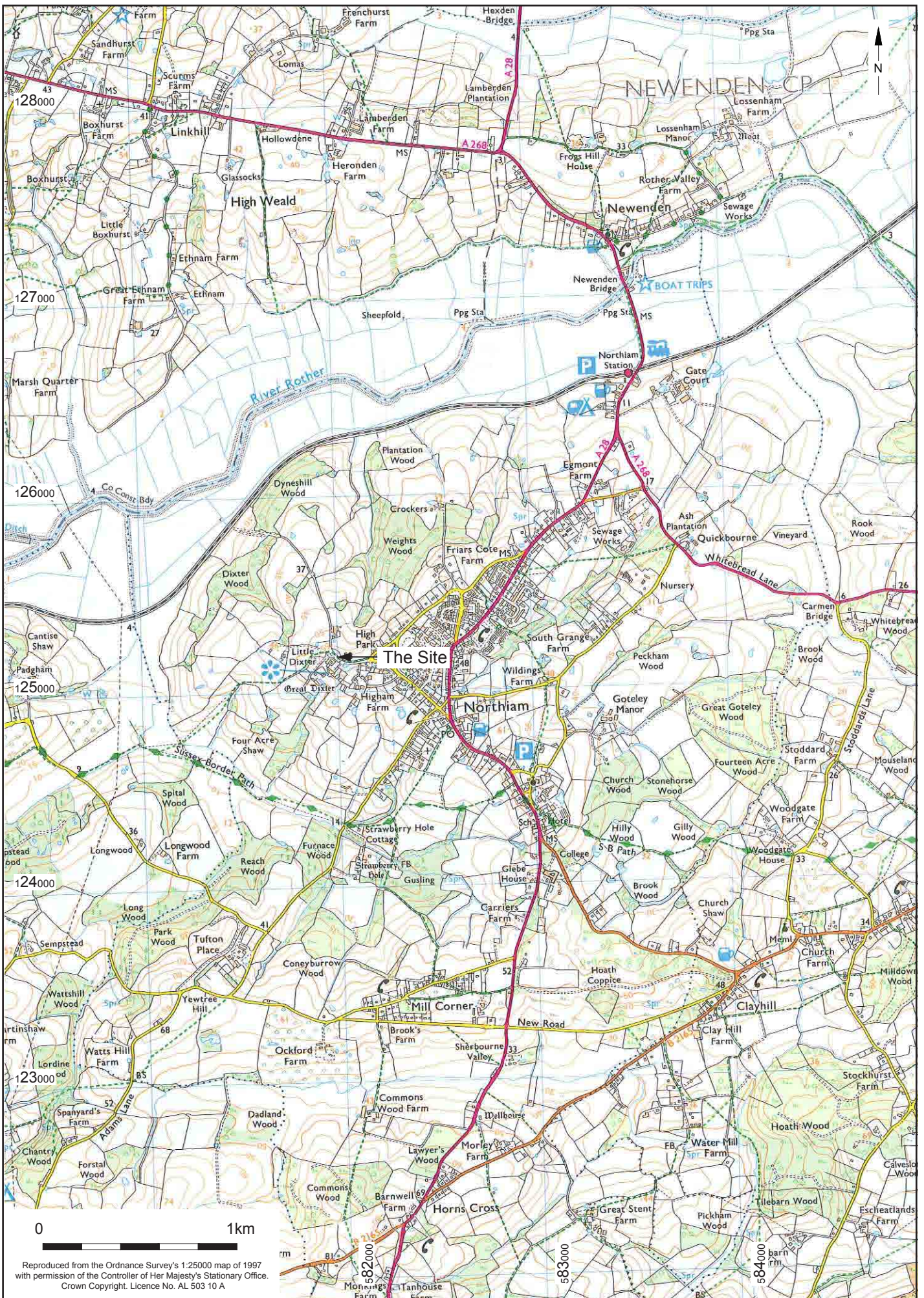
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© Archaeology South-East		Great Dixter House		Fig. 1
Project Ref: 4601	July 2012	Site location		
Report Ref: 2012178	Drawn by: JLR			



Fig. 2.1: Pipe trench looking north-east

Fig. 2.2: Pipe trench looking south-west

125200

125100

581900



Monitored areas

- Pipe trench
- The Great Barn
- Biomass boiler

0 20m

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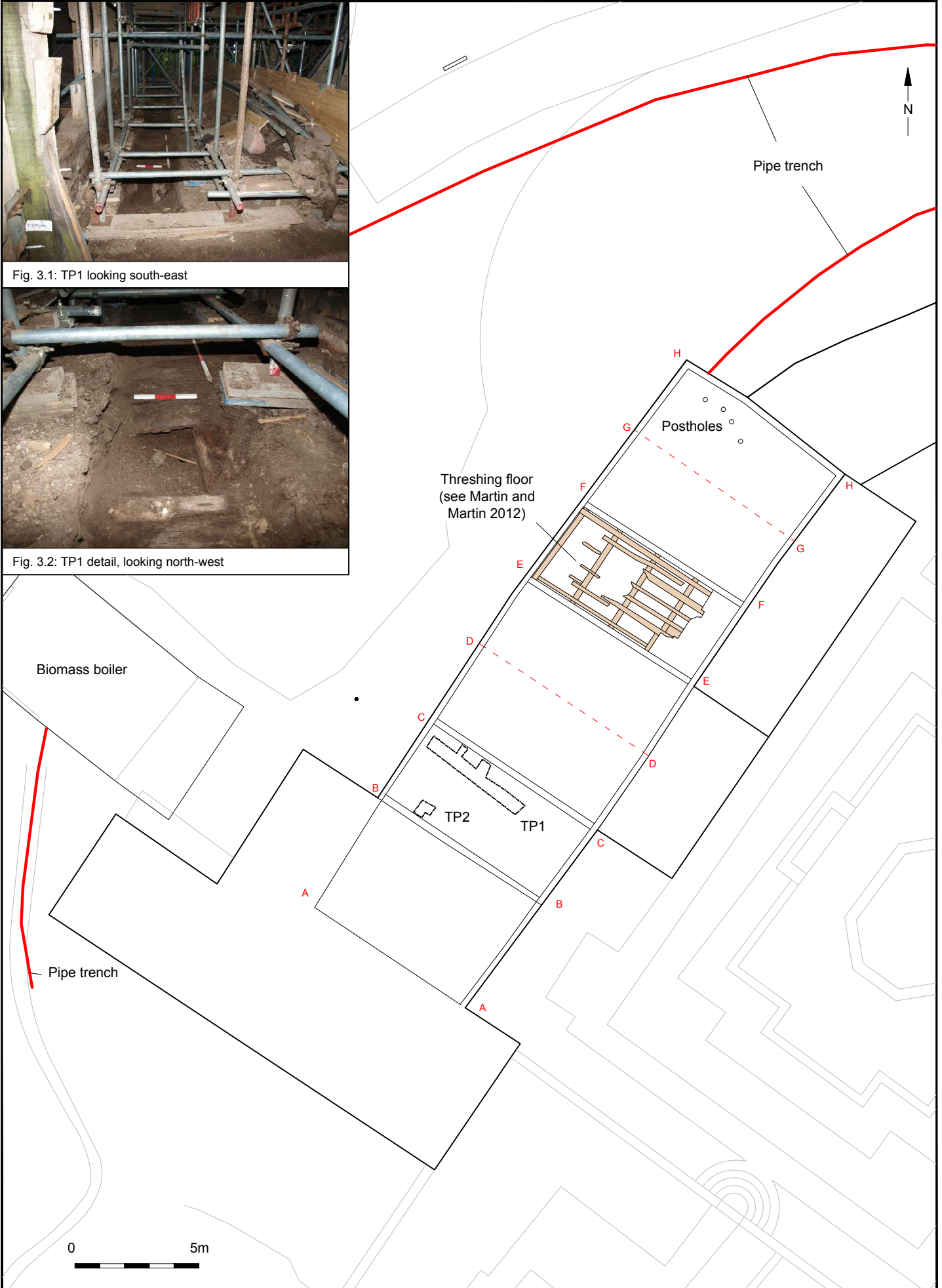
© Archaeology South-East		Great Dixter House WB - Groundworks	Fig. 2
Project Ref: 4601	July 2012	Site plan showing monitored areas	
Report Ref: 2012178	Drawn by: JLR		



Fig. 3.1: TP1 looking south-east



Fig. 3.2: TP1 detail, looking north-west



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