

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
On Land at Corsica Hall, College Road, Seaford, East Sussex**

(NGR TV 4865 9855)

By

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**ASE Report No. 2008158
OASIS ID: archaeol6-31225**

Project No. 2209

Sept 2008

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Abstract

An archaeological watching brief was maintained during groundwork associated with the refurbishment and renovation of Corsica Hall, College road, Seaford. Corsica Hall has undergone various structural changes and alterations, and has fulfilled a variety of different functions during its period of use. No archaeological finds or features were identified during the watching brief, suggesting that the top of the knoll may have undergone landscaping or disturbance associated with the construction of, or renovation to, the building itself.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Archaeology South-East (ASE), a division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology, University College London, was commissioned by Coastal Management Ltd to undertake an archaeological watching brief during groundworks associated with the refurbishment and renovation of Corsica Hall and a late post medieval building (The Lodge), College road, Seaford (NGR TV 4865 9855) (Fig. 1).
- 1.2** The proposed groundwork included the demolition of the entirety of The Lodge, part of the existing structure, the excavation of footings for a new extension and a new build property on the former site of The Lodge, and the excavation of a light well. Service trenching around the property was also monitored.
- 1.3** Due to the archaeological potential of the site, East Sussex County Council advised the local planning authority that a condition should be attached to the planning consent requiring a programme of archaeological work. The recommended programme was in the form of an enhanced watching brief.
- 1.4** A Method Statement outlining the requirements was prepared by Sam Worrall of Archaeology South-East and fully complies with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Fieldwork, Recording, and Post Excavation (Development Control) in East Sussex* Version 3 (dated 17-09-03) including Annex B, otherwise known as the “Standard Conditions”.
- 1.5** The fieldwork was undertaken by Alice Thorne from September 2005 - July 2006, Simon Stevens on the 28/10/05, Justin Russell on the 6/12/05, Paul Riccoboni on the 5/04/06, Samantha Worrall on the 6/04/06 and Deon Whittaker on the 22/05/07. The project was managed by Neil Griffin (Project Manager) and Louise Rayner (Post-excavation Manager).
- 1.6** The British Geological Survey map Sheet 334 (Area Eastbourne) Solid and Drift Edition (1:50,000 scale) indicates that the site lies on Woolwich Beds, and is surrounded by alluvium.

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The site is located on a low knoll on the southern edge of Seaford in an area originally forming part of the medieval harbour. The marshland around, now occupied by a school, open grassland and housing, underwent drainage work in 1881, and is now a flat dry valley floor, protected from inundation from the sea by coastal defence work (Fig. 1).
- 2.2** A desk based assessment of the site was undertaken by Archaeology South East (James 2004). A review of the available data for the area indicated that the site had some archaeological potential for a number of periods. The topographical nature of the site is likely to have been favoured by early post-glacial hunters. The nearby chalk downlands are rich in Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age sites, a good example being located on Seaford Head, about 1.5km to the south-east of the site. Iron Age middens have been found nearby at Hawks Brow, and another example was found c. 300m from the

site.

- 2.3** Roman evidence near the site includes a cemetery and various find spots, indicating that a settlement may have existed within the vicinity. During the Roman period the knoll is likely to have been surrounded by marshland, which during the Anglo- Saxon period became inundated, as the Ouse migrated eastwards. The place name Seaford is first attested in 788 (*Saforda*), although the nature of the Anglo-Saxon settlement at Seaford is poorly understood. It is likely however, that the harbour was utilised at this time.
- 2.4** The appraisal site lies to the south east of the historic core of Seaford, a minor medieval cinque port. The knoll occupied by the site formed a prominent feature at this time, jutting out into the harbour, and was known as Millburgh. A mill known to have occupied the site in the post-medieval period may have had a medieval origin.
- 2.5** The present building of Corsica Hall dates from 1783, and was remodelled in 1823. In later years the house was used as a convalescent hospital, a public school, Home Economics College and most recently, an Education Centre.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

- 3.1** The objectives of the archaeological watching brief were to contribute to the knowledge of the area through the recording and interpretation of any archaeological remains exposed and affected as a result of excavations in connection with the groundworks. Particular attention was to be made to the character, height below ground level, condition, date and significance of the deposits.
- 3.2** All encountered archaeological deposits, features and finds were recorded according to accepted professional standards in accordance with the Specification using standard Archaeology South-East context record sheets. Deposit colours were verified by visual inspection and not by reference to a Munsell Colour chart.
- 3.3** The groundwork comprised the ground reduction to the rear of the Annex building, ground reduction within the rear south east wing of the main house, substantial service trenching, and the excavation of pits and soakaways within the grounds of the property (Fig 2).
- 3.4** Where possible, archaeological monitoring took place during the actual process of ground excavation or reduction. However, on the occasion that work had progressed on site in the absence of archaeological supervision the exposed trench and pit sections were inspected for features and finds during walk over visits to the site.
- 3.5** The spoil from the excavations was inspected to recover any artefacts or ecofacts of archaeological interest.
- 3.6** A full photographic record of the work was kept (black and white prints and colour slides) and will form part of the site archive. The archive is presently

held at the Archaeology South-East offices at Ditchling and will be offered to Seaford Museum of Local History in due course.

4.0 RESULTS (See Fig.2)

4.1 Pit 1

4.1.1 A pit measuring 2m x 3m by 1.25m deep associated with the drainage works was machine excavated to the south of the Annex building (Fig 2). No archaeological finds or features were recovered and the stratigraphic sequence revealed was as follows:

- A friable dark brown sandy clay with flints formed the topsoil deposit (Context **1**), to a depth of 0.29m.
- Below this a 0.30m thick subsoil deposit of mid orangish- brown sandy clay with angular and sub angular flints nodules was encountered (Context **2**).
- Below this a 0.50m thick compact mid orangish- brown sandy silty clay was encountered. (Context **3**) It contained very frequent weathered angular flint nodules and pebbles forming up to 80% of the deposit. Small ironstone fragments were also noted. This may possibly represent a storm thrown beach deposit.
- Below this a compact mid orangish – brown sandy clay containing frequent flints was noted (Context **4**). This deposit may represent the primary geological form comprising the knoll, the marine clay Woolwich Beds.

4.2 Pit 2

4.2.1 A small pit was excavated adjoining the south east wall of the Annex (Fig 2). It measured 0.50m x 1.50m by 1.10m deep. The deposits noted were as follows:

- Below the topsoil (Context **1**) a possible modern footing trench or drainage cut was noted to a depth of 0.90m running alongside the annex wall. This was filled with a friable mid brownish silty clay containing rusted iron objects, tile and plaster (Context **5**). This had been cut through a modern deposit of made ground containing slate, glass, flint nodules and brick, which was visible throughout the rest of the pit (Context **6**).

4.3 Pit 3

4.3.1 A large stretch of trenching had been machine excavated and backfilled to the southeast of the annex (Fig 2). However a section measuring 3m x 0.80m by 1.40m deep was left open and could be inspected at the far south eastern extent of the trench. No finds or features were identified, and the geological sequence was as follows:

- Below 0.30m of topsoil (Context **1**) a compact mid orangish- brown sandy clay containing flints and some ironstone and manganese fragments was encountered (Context **7**). The deposit contained fewer flints and became slightly sandier towards the base of the trench. This may represent an alluvial deposit located in far south eastern area of the site.

4.4 Pit 4

4.4.1 A rectangular pit was machine excavated to the north – east of the annex (Fig 2). It measured 4m x 2.5m by 0.70m deep. The stratigraphic sequence was as follows:

- Below 0.07m of turf (Context **8**) a mid brown silty clay containing c50% chalk blocks and fragments and c30% flint nodules was encountered. This was an even and compact deposit, containing oyster shell and small fragments of tile (Context **9**). It had a thickness of 0.15m, and appears to represent an external ground surface associated with one of the occupation phases of the main building, perhaps a platform for an external prefab classroom. Below this a slightly clayey sand containing a few weathered flint nodules was noted (Context **10**).

4.5 Pit 5

4.5.1 Pit 5 had been excavated and backfilled without archaeological monitoring.

4.6 Pit 6

4.6.1 A pit measuring 3m x 4.2m x 1.4m, located at the back of the library in the northern part of the site, revealed that here 0.35m of topsoil directly overlay the yellow sand Context **14**, confirming that the sandbank extends over most of the northern side of the knoll (Fig 2).

4.7 Ground reduction at the back of the annex

4.7.1 A large area of ground reduction was monitored at the rear of the annex (Fig 2). An area measuring approximately 13m by 7m by up to 3.7m deep was removed by machine, flattening the area to the east of the building. The sequence of deposits noted indicated that a bank had been built up against the rear of the annex. The stratigraphy noted was as follows:

- Located below the concrete pavement at the rear of the house a mid yellowish – orange deposit of loose redeposited sand was revealed, containing occasional lenses of a dark – grey silty clay containing flint grits and charcoal frags (Context **11**). This had a maximum thickness of 0.80m.
- Below this, a dark greyish – brown sandy silt containing frequent flint pebbles, gravels, grit, chalk smears, slate, tile, white china and brick was noted (Context **12**). This had a maximum depth of 0.40m and may represent an old ground surface deposit, or a deposit of made ground associated with building up the bank at the rear of the annex.
- Below this lay a mid brownish – orange slightly silty sand containing occasional flint grits (Context **13**). This had a maximum depth of 0.20m and represents a subsoil or interface layer between Context **12** and the sandbank Context **14** below.
- Context **14** comprises a mid orangish – yellow loose sand, indicating that part of the knoll is comprised of a sand bank to the north and east.
- A pipe trench was excavated through the reduced ground level in the southernmost extent of the strip, taking the maximum excavated depth in this area to 3.70m below the original ground surface. This demonstrated that in this area of the site a mid reddish- brown silty clay (Context **15**) lay below

deposit **13**. Context **15** contained occasional flint fragments, which became increasingly concentrated towards the base of the deposit, until it merged with Context **16** a reddish brown silty clay containing up to 70% angular – subangular flint nodules. Context **16** may equate to Context **3** in Test pit 1, interpreted as a storm thrown beach deposit. The combined depth of contexts **15** and **16** reached 1.10m, below which the sand bank Context **14** was encountered.

4.8 Ground reduction within the house

- 4.8.1** An area of ground reduction within the cellars in the south corner of the house was monitored (Fig 2). A small room at the front of the house corresponding with the Period A range and believed to date from the original phase of building (1783 – 1786) was inspected before work commenced. The room formed a small cellar measuring 4.6m by 1.90m accessed via the Period B range at the back of the house. A floor surface of squared brick – tiles measuring 16cm square by 0.05m thick were noted, set into a light- mid grey sandy loose mortar. Behind this another small cellar also located within the Period A range measured 4.6m by 3m, and had a tightly packed grey brick floor, with no mortar visible holding the bricks together. The rooms in the Period B range (c 1800) at the back of the house contained a concrete floor and a square brick lined pit containing part of an oil-fired boiler system.
- 4.8.2** As ground reduction took place, the sandy clay and shingle bank of the knoll was encountered beneath the floor surfacing (Context **4**)

4.9 Service Trenching

- 4.9.1** Approximately 158m of Gas and Water Mains service trenching was also monitored across the property. The monitoring of these trenches generally took the form of a walk over inspection of the trench sections following excavation (Fig 2). The trenches measured 0.50m in width by approximately 1 meter in depth. The stratigraphy revealed confirmed that a silty clay with flints deposit (Context **4**) comprised the majority of the knoll to the south, with a substantial bank of sand (Context **14**) located on the eastern and northern banks.

4.10 Car Park Strip

- 4.10.1** Below the topsoil (Context **1**) the surface of the clay with flints natural encountered in Test Pit 1 (Context **3**) was revealed (Fig 2).

4.11 Wall Footing

- 4.11.1** A wall footing was encountered during a phase of work to the north-east of the knoll (Fig.3). The wall cut through a mixed brownish- orange builders sand (Context **17**), and 0.20m thick dark brown silty grey clay (Context **18**) into the mid brownish – grey silty clay with gravels natural (Context **19**). The cut (Context **22**) was 0.79m wide, and had a maximum exposed depth of 0.40m. It was filled by a 0.35m thick mixed brick and concrete rubble structure (Context **20**), overlying a loose, unmortared chalk rubble footing (Context **21**). A maximum depth of 0.07m was exposed of this chalk footing. No finds were recovered.

4.12 Footings for new build on the former site of the Lodge

4.12.1 Excavation of footings for a new development on the former site of The Lodge was carried out down to a height of 4.27 metres AOD. Using a 600mm ditching bucket approximately 56 metres of footing trench were excavated to an average depth of 1.2 metres.

4.12.2 In stratigraphical order from youngest to oldest the following Contexts were revealed:

- (Context **23**) – 40mm of greenish yellow sand, loose and course grained, (north of site only)
- (Context **24**) – 100 - 200mm of compact white – grey, indurated, pea grit – gravel (north of site only)
- (Context **25**) – between 100mm (in north of site) and 300mm of dark greyish brown, friable clayey silt, with occasional sub angular gravel, unsorted, less than 30mm in size
- (Context **26**) – 100mm of firm white compacted chalk rubble (north-east of site only)
- (Context **27**) – 900mm of medium reddish brown, clayey silt, firm, without inclusions *or* (Context **28**) – 900mm of dark reddish brown clayey silt, firm with occasional sub angular gravel, unsorted, less than 30mm in size.

4.12.3 A 600mm x 450mm foundation of late post-medieval cemented brick was exposed in the north east of the site. Below this lay an irregular 200mm thick deposit of concrete.

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 The knoll would have once been surrounded on almost all sides by water. The results of this watching brief largely confirm this, with clay – with flints (Contexts **3** and **4**) encountered in the Test Pits 1 and 3 and service trenching to the south and south west of the main building (Fig. 2). However, a sand deposit was also encountered in the service trenching to the south, ground reduction at the rear of the annex, and within Pits 4 and 6 to the east and north of the main building (Contexts **10** and **14**). This suggests that a substantial sand bank had built up behind the clay knoll. This may perhaps have accumulated when the area was in active use as a harbour, or may be a much earlier geological deposit resulting from a period when this area of the valley was inundated by the sea. In the area of Test Pit 3 an alluvial clay (Context **7**) perhaps associated with the silting up of the medieval harbour, confirmed the change in geology from the raised knoll into the lower alluvial valley floor to the east and south east.

5.2 No archaeological features or finds were encountered during the period of monitoring at the site. The wall footing was constructed of concrete rubble, and is believed to represent a modern garden or property wall. All finds recovered from the topsoil were 19th or 20th century domestic refuse, such as blue and white or white glazed china, associated with the occupation of the hall itself. The area at the top of the knoll may have been subject to considerable landscaping or disturbance associated with the construction of, or alteration to the main building and its associated structures.

Bibliography

James, R., 2004 An Archaeological Desk- Based Assessment and Historic Buildings Assessment at Corsica Hall, College Road, Seaford, East Sussex. *ASE Project no. 1822*.

SMR Summary Form

Site Code	CHS05					
Identification Name and Address	Corsica Hall, College road, Seaford					
County, District &/or Borough	East Sussex					
OS Grid Refs.	(NGR TV 4865 9855).					
Geology	Woolwich Beds					
Arch. South-East Project Number	2209					
Type of Fieldwork	Eval.	Excav.	Watching Brief ✓	Standing Structure	Survey	Other
Type of Site	Green Field	Shallow Urban ✓	Deep Urban	Other		
Dates of Fieldwork	Eval.	Excav.	WB. Sept 2005 - May 2007	Other		
Sponsor/Client	Coastal Management Ltd					
Project Manager	Neil Griffin					
Project Supervisor	Alice Thorne					
Period Summary	Palaeo.	Meso.	Neo.	BA	IA	RB
	AS	MED	PM	Other Modern ✓		
<p>100 Word Summary.</p> <p>An archaeological watching brief was maintained during groundwork associated with the refurbishment and renovation of Corsica Hall, College road, Seaford. Corsica Hall has undergone various structural changes and alterations, and has fulfilled a variety of different functions during its period of use. No archaeological finds or features were identified during the watching brief, suggesting that the top of the knoll may have undergone landscaping or disturbance associated with the construction of, or renovation to, the building itself.</p>						

Appendix: Oasis Summary Form

OASIS ID: archaeol6-31225

Project details

Project name	Corsica Hall
Short description of the project	An archaeological watching brief was maintained during groundwork associated with the refurbishment and renovation of Corsica Hall, College road, Seaford. Corsica Hall has undergone various structural changes and alterations, and has fulfilled a variety of different functions during its period of use. No archaeological finds or features were identified during the watching brief, suggesting that the top of the knoll may have undergone landscaping or disturbance associated with the construction of, or renovation to, the building itself. To the east of the site, deposits of made ground and hardcore have extended a level terrace for the building of a late post-medieval property now being redeveloped.
Project dates	Start: 01-09-2005 End: 22-05-2007
Previous/future work	Not known / Not known
Type of project	Recording project
Site status	None
Current Land use	Residential 2 - Institutional and communal accommodation
Investigation type	'Watching Brief'
Prompt	Planning condition

Project location

Country	England
Site location	EAST SUSSEX BRIGHTON AND HOVE ROTTINGDEAN Corsica Hall
Postcode	BN25
Study area	2500.00 Square metres

Site coordinates TV 4865 9855 50.7668773668 0.108192081585 50 46 00 N 000 06
29 E Point

Height OD Min: 0m Max: 0m

Project creators

Name of Organisation Archaeology South East

Project brief originator Archaeology South East

Project design originator Archaeology South-East

Project director/manager Neil Griffin

Project supervisor Alice Thorne

Type of sponsor/funding body Landowner

Name of sponsor/funding body Coastal Management Ltd

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists? No

Digital Archive recipient Local Museum

Digital Contents 'other'

Digital Media available 'Images raster / digital photography'

Paper Archive recipient Local Museum

Paper Contents 'Stratigraphic'

Paper Media available 'Context sheet', 'Notebook - Excavation', ' Research', ' General Notes'

**Project
bibliography 1**

Publication type Grey literature (unpublished document/manuscript)

Title An Archaeological Watching Brief On Land at Corsica Hall, College Road, Seaford, East Sussex

Author(s)/Editor(s) Thorne, A. Whittaker, D.

Date 2007

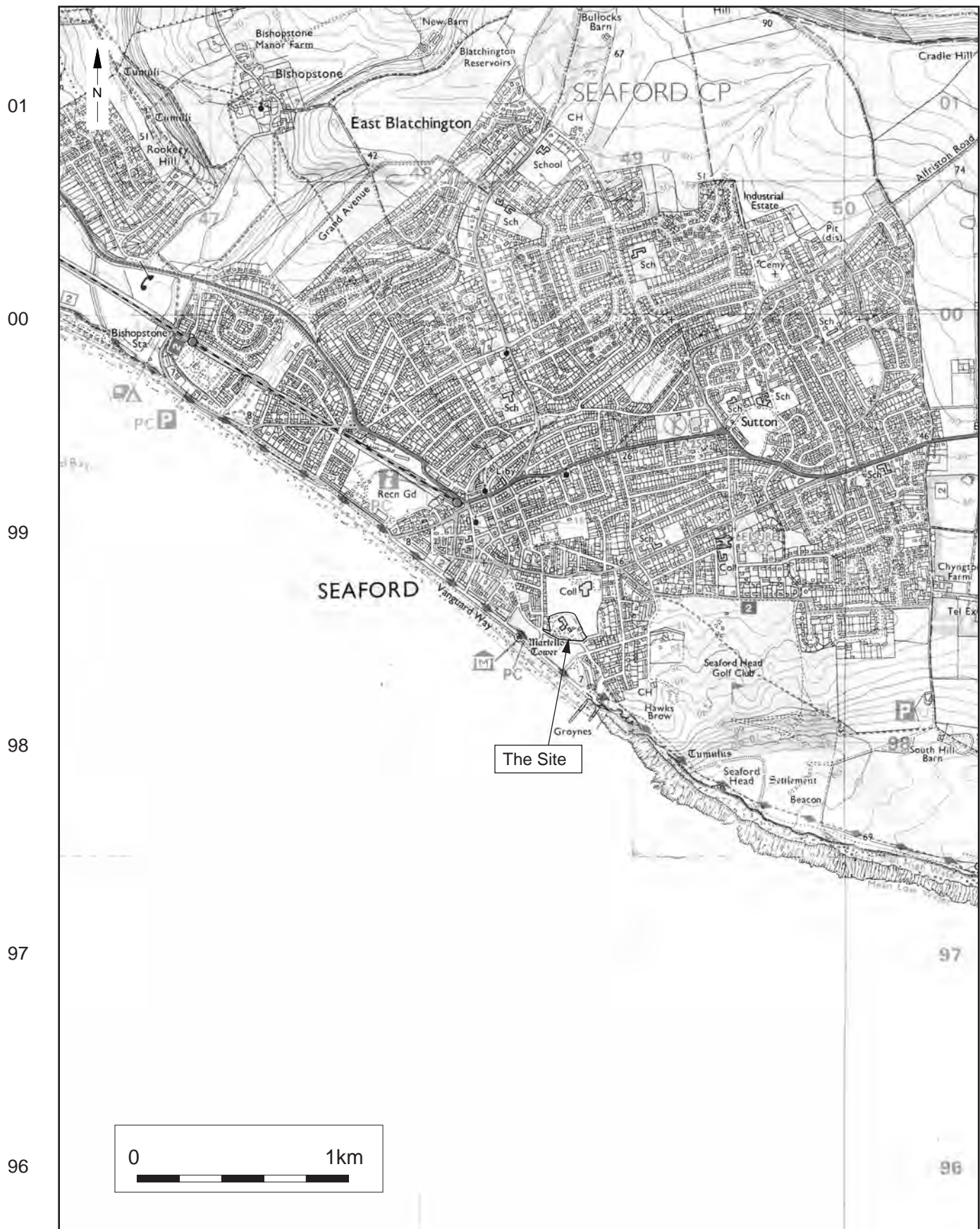
Issuer or publisher Archaeology South East

Place of issue or publication Portslade

Description A4 Wp Card Back spiral bound

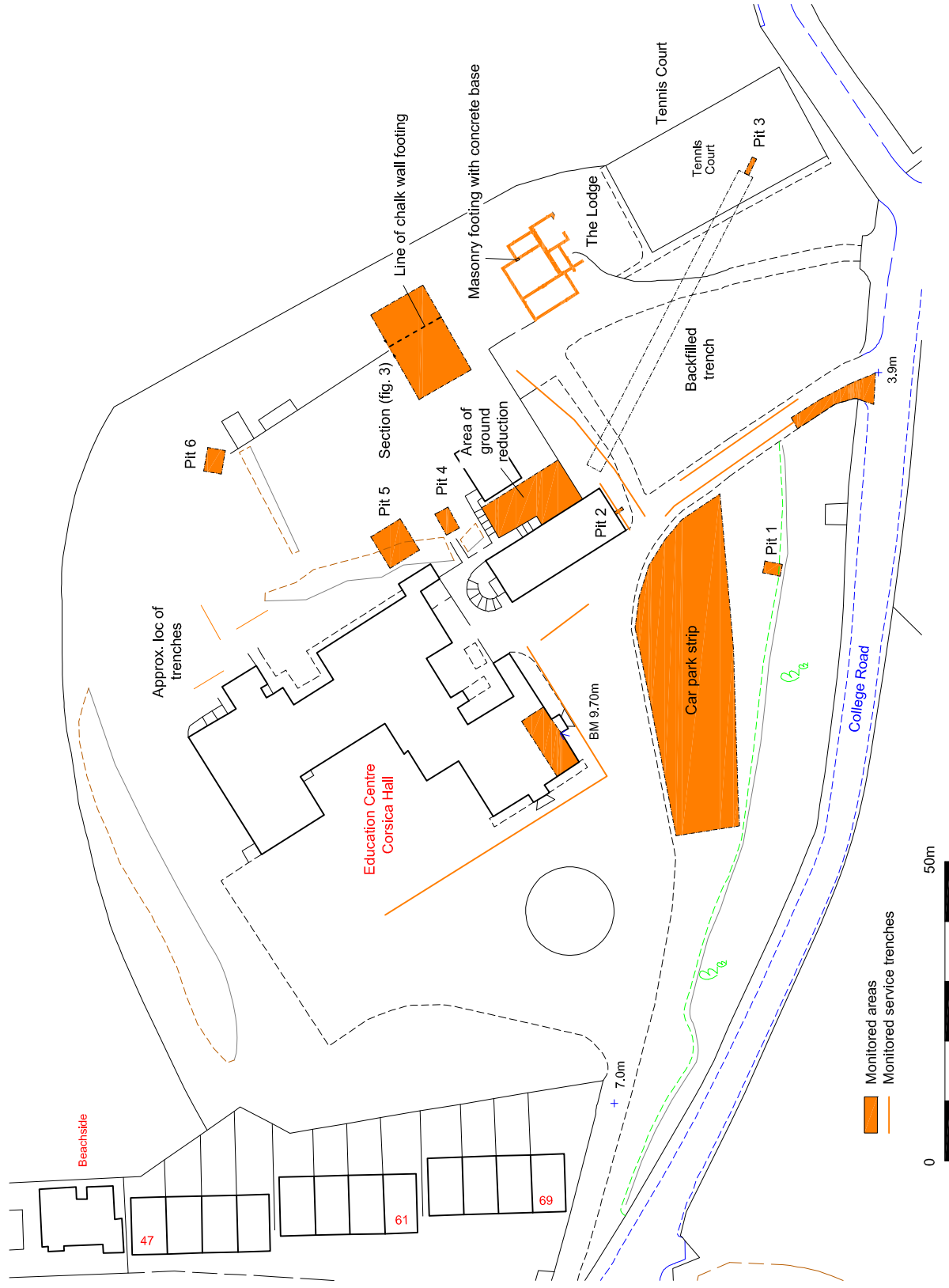
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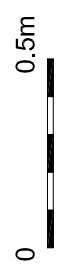
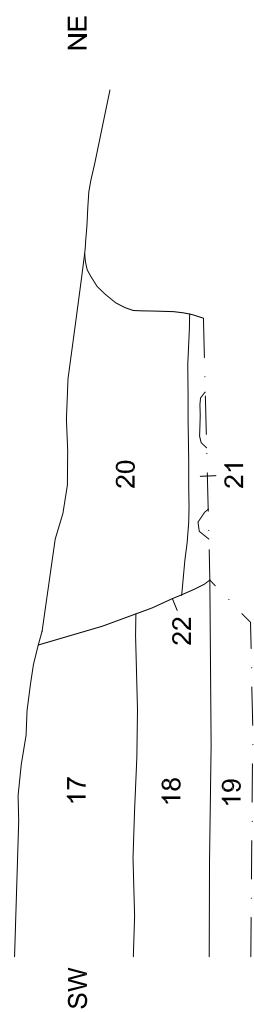
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© Archaeology South-East		Corsica Hall, Seaford	Fig. 1
Project Ref: 2209	Oct 2008	Site Location Plan	
Report Ref: 2008158	Drawn by: JLR		

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© Archaeology South-East		Corsica Hall, Seaforth		Fig. 3
Project Ref: 2209	Oct 2008	Section		
Report Ref: 2008158	Drawn by: JLR			