

**THE AIR RAID SHELTER AT MINSTER IN SHEPPEY PRIMARY SCHOOL,  
BRECON CLOSE, MINSTER**

**(NGR 595390 172934)**

**HISTORIC  
BUILDING RECORD**



**Commissioned by  
Neilcott Special Works**

**Report No. 2008110**

THE AIR RAID SHELTER AT MINSTER IN SHEPPEY PRIMARY SCHOOL,  
BRECON CLOSE, MINSTER

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HISTORIC  
BUILDING SURVEY

Commissioned by  
Neilcott Special Works

Project No. 3481  
Report No. 2008110

July 2008

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## ABSTRACT

*In June 2008 Archaeology South-East (a division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology, UCL) carried out a historic building survey of the air raid shelter at Minster in Sheppey Primary School, Minster. The work was carried out to satisfy a condition of planning consent relating to the proposed demolition of the structure to make way for a new children's centre.*

*The air raid shelter was built to serve the school under the Air Raid Precautions Act of 1936 (revised in 1938). The structure is of yellow brick in English bond incorporating several small ventilation openings just below the oversailing roof level. The shelter is rectangular in plan with a concrete roof and two traverse entry doorways in the western elevation. The interior of the structure has two separate chambers with access between them. The traverse entries have in situ doorways with traces of a further diagonally set doorway within the passage intended to offer extra protection against blast damage. A later set of double doors have been inserted into the north elevation of the building and the interior is currently utilised as a storage facility.*

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In May 2008 Archaeology South-East (a division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology, UCL) carried out a historic building survey of the air raid shelter at Minster in Sheppey Primary School, Minster (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Neilcott Special Works to satisfy a condition of planning consent (planning reference: SW/07/1360) relating to its proposed demolition to make way for a new children's centre at the school.

## **2.0 SCOPE & METHODOLOGY**

- 2.1 The aim of the historic building survey was to provide an overview of the date, sequence of construction, layout, materials and principal architectural features of the building. The main elements of the project involved the compilation of a written description and analysis of the building and the creation of a drawn and photographic record.
- 2.2 The site was visited by Maggie Henderson and Amy Williamson in June 2008 in order to compile the description of the building and undertake the drawing and photographic work. The drawing work involved the creation of a measured floor plan of the building (Fig. 2), in addition to the principal elevation (west). The photographic record was made using traditional 35mm black and white, and colour slide photography in addition to digital photography. A photographic location plan of the photography is included as Appendix 1 and a selection of the photographs are reproduced as plates to illustrate the report.

## **3.0 LOCATION**

- 3.1 The shelter is in the grounds of Minster in Sheppey Primary School which is in itself situated on the west side of Minster, between Brecon Close and Minster Road. The shelter opens onto the car park in the south of the school grounds. The topography rises gently to the east, more steeply to the northeast and is flat to the south and west with the adjacent car park occupying a slightly lower level than that over which the shelter is situated. An asphalt path extends from the school buildings to the street along the eastern side of the structure.

## **4.0 HISTORIC BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 A statutory obligation was placed upon Local government in the form of the Air Raid Precaution Act (ARP) of 1937, to provide shelter and anti-gas precautions for the civil population (CBA, 1996). The Munich Crises of 1938 led to the formation of an Air Raid Precautions Department within the Home Office and the creation of a new ARP Act which came into force in January 1938. Public shelters issues included trench type or single storey surface shelters of the type surviving at Minster in Sheppey Primary School as discussed in the following report.

4.2 Surface shelters formed the most numerous types of air raid shelters, the other types comprising trench and covered trench shelters (*ibid.*). The usual type of surface shelter was rectangular in plan, built of brick with a concrete roof, with doors protected by a traverse or blast wall.

## 5.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING AS EXISTING (JUNE 2008)

At the time of the survey, the air raid shelter was in use as a storage facility which obscured some interior detail.

### 5.1 Exterior

5.1.1 The air raid shelter is oriented on a north - south alignment and the overall external dimensions are 13.24 m in length by 4.85 m wide. The walls of the building stand to a height of 2.16 m; the roof is an additional 160 mm thick. The principal elevation faces west, now within a modern car park facility associated with the school (Plate 1)

5.1.2 The shelter is of yellow hued brick construction. The brickwork (avg. brick size 220 mm x 105 mm x 60mm/ $8\frac{5}{8}$ " x  $4\frac{3}{8}$ " x  $2\frac{1}{2}$ ") is laid in English bond (Plate 2) and is bonded with a cement based mortar, the joints at 15 mm thick. There is a concrete plinth at 130 mm in height by 55 mm wide at the base of the structure. The roof is of concrete at 160 mm thick, with an overhang of 40 mm east and west and 100 mm north and south (Figure 2). There are a series of openings built into the walls of the shelter just under the level of the roof to provide ventilation into the interior (Plate 3).

5.1.3 The access into the interior of the shelter is through two original openings under concrete lintels (340 mm wide by 160 mm thick) on the western elevation. The openings create a protected, baffle type entry to the structure that is known as a traverse (Figure 2). The timber boarded and ledged doors with diagonal bracing are situated to the north of the opening at the northern end of the structure, and to the south of the southern opening (Figure 2). Behind these outer doors at each entry point, within the traverse passage there is a sloping door frame (Plate 4) built into the wall construction. The frame is of timber at 95mm by 45 mm section housed within concrete that stands proud of the brickwork (Plate 4). The concrete and timber framework is set diagonally to the passage with the upper part of the frame further towards the north and south ends of the structure than the base of the frame. Although no doorway was *in situ* at the date the survey was carried out it is suggested that the sloping nature of the inner doorways was to create increased protection from any blast.

### 5.2 Interior

- 5.2.1 The interior of the structure comprises two chambers of roughly equal proportions, separated by an east - west orientated partition wall of brickwork. The chambers are accessed independently through the traverse entries discussed above but can also be accessed one from the other by the area between the two traverses (Figure 2).
- 5.2.2 Both chambers have concrete floors and the reinforced concrete roof is bare on the interior showing the shutter marks of the construction (Plate 5). The walls of the north chamber are unpainted, the southern chamber had been whitewashed and there are a series of L-shaped hooks (Plate 5) in the east and west elevations. It is uncertain if the hooks and painted wall finish are part of a later phase within the construction.
- 5.2.3 A pair of double doors (Plate 6), of boarded and ledged construction has been inserted into the northern end wall of the building. This is shown by the truncated nature of the brickwork to either side of the doorway and the concrete render used to finish the breach.

## **6.0 INTERPRETATION AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The air raid shelter was constructed as part of a broader programme of precautions instigated by the government under the Air Raid Precautions Act of 1936, revised in 1938. The act saw the construction of many shelters of this type, known as a surface shelter, in association with school buildings. In each case the buildings were built of brick with thick concrete roofs to offer additional protection against blasts. It is usual for the structures to contain some provision for toilet facilities but there are no indications surviving within the Minster in Sheppey Primary School example.

## **7.0 SOURCES CONSULTED**

Heritage Conservation Group, February 2008 *Specification for Historic Building Survey at Minster in Sheppey Primary School, Brecon Close in Minster*. Kent County Council

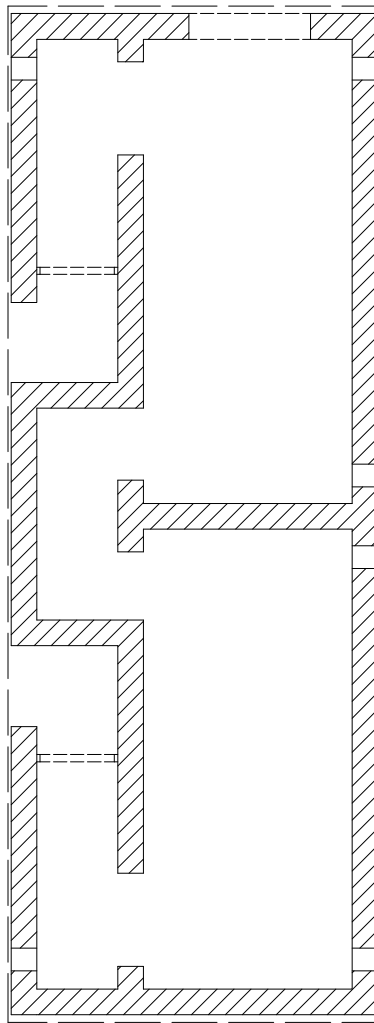
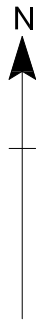
Council for British Archaeology (CBA) 1996, *20th Century Defences in Britain An Introductory Guide*. Practical Handbooks in Archaeology No. 12 (Revised edition).



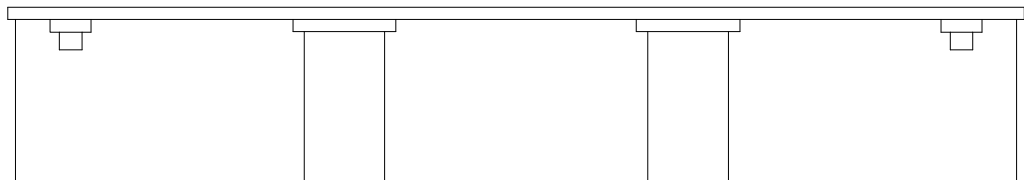


© Archaeology South-East		Minster in Sheppey Primary School, Minster		Fig. 1
Project Ref: 3481	July 2008	Site Location Plan		
Report Ref: 2008110	Drawn by: SM			

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Plan of the air raid shelter



West elevation of the air raid shelter





Plate 1: The principal western entrance elevation to the shelter



Plate 2: Detail of the brickwork



Plate 3: Detail of the interior of one of the vents



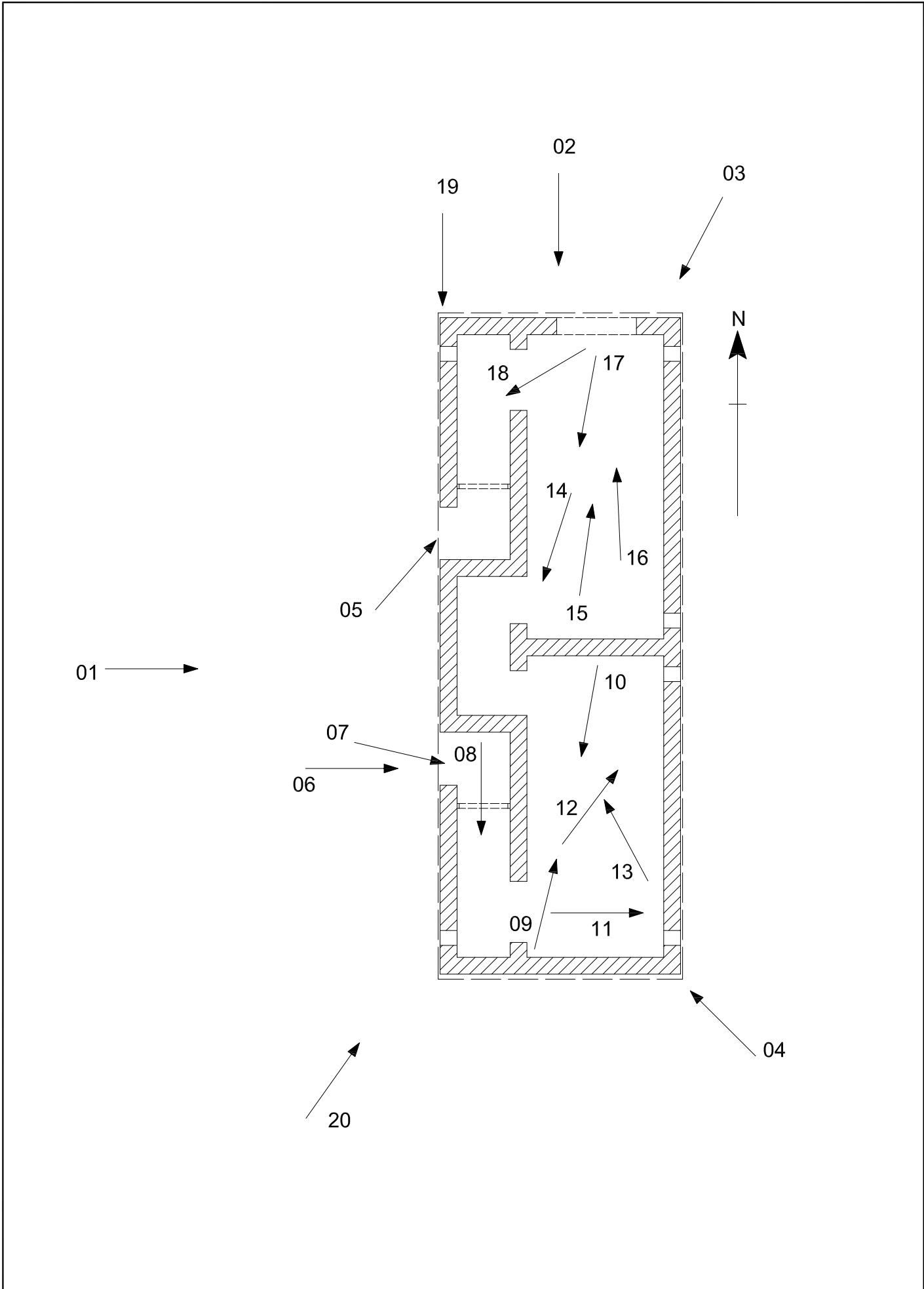
Plate 4: The south traverse passage with diagonal housing for additional blast-protection doorway



Plate 5: Detail of the shuttered concrete roof in the interior of the south room, shows whitewashed walls and hooks



Plate 6: Interior of the north room with later inserted double doors in the north end wall, shows the un-painted brickwork



## Appendix 2 HER Summary Sheet

<b>Site Code</b>						
<b>Identification Name and Address</b>	Air Raid Shelter, Minster in Sheppey Primary School, Minster, Kent					
<b>County, District &amp;/or Borough</b>	Kent					
<b>OS Grid Refs.</b>	595390 172934					
<b>Geology</b>						
<b>Arch. South-East Project Number</b>	3481					
<b>Type of Fieldwork</b>	<b>Eval.</b>	<b>Excav.</b>	<b>Watching Brief</b>	<b>Standing Structure</b> ✓	<b>Survey</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Type of Site</b>	<b>Green Field</b>	<b>Shallow Urban</b>	<b>Deep Urban</b>	<b>Other</b>		
<b>Dates of Fieldwork</b>	<b>Eval.</b>	<b>Excav.</b>	<b>WB.</b>	<b>Other</b> 6 <sup>th</sup> June 2008		
<b>Sponsor/Client</b>	Neilcott Special Works					
<b>Project Manager</b>	Ron Humphrey					
<b>Project Supervisor</b>	Maggie Henderson/Amy Williamson					
<b>Period Summary</b>	<b>Palaeo.</b>	<b>Meso.</b>	<b>Neo.</b>	<b>BA</b>	<b>IA</b>	<b>RB</b>
	<b>AS</b>	<b>MED</b>	<b>PM</b>	<b>Other</b> <b>Modern</b> ✓ WWII		
<b>100 Word Summary.</b>						
<p>In June 2008 Archaeology South-East carried out a historic building survey of the air raid shelter at Minster in Sheppey Primary School. The building, built to serve the school under the Air Raid Precautions act of 1936 (revised in 1938) is of yellow brick in English bond incorporating several small ventilation openings just below the oversailing roof level. The shelter is rectangular in plan with a concrete roof and two traverse entry doorways in the western elevation. The interior of the structure has two separate chambers with access between them. The traverse entries have an <i>in situ</i> doorway with traces of a further diagonally set doorway within the passage. It is believed that the diagonal doorway would offer extra protection against blast damage.</p>						

## Appendix 3 – OASIS Form

OASIS ID: archaeol6-46700

### Project details

Project name	The Air Raid Shelter at Minster in Sheppey Primary School, Brecon Chase, Minster on Sea, Sheerness
Short description of the project	Historic building recording of a WWII air raid shelter in the grounds of Minster in Sheppey Primary School, Minster on Sea
Project dates	Start: 06-06-2008 End: 07-08-2008
Previous/future work	No / No
Type of project	Building Recording
Site status	None
Current Land use	Community Service 1 - Community Buildings
Monument type	AIR RAID SHELTER Modern
Significant Finds	NONE None
Methods & techniques	'Measured Survey','Photographic Survey','Survey/Recording Of Fabric/Structure'
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG15

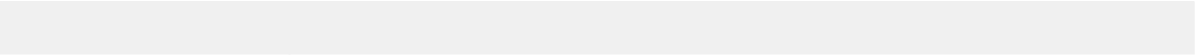
### Project location

Site location	KENT SWALE SHEERNESS Air Raid Shelter at Minster in Sheppey Primary School, Brecon Chase, Minster on Sea, Sheerness
Postcode	ME12 2HX
Study area	100.00 Square metres
Site coordinates	NGR - TR 95390 72934 LL - 51.3775569235 2.245502484190 (decimal) LL - 51 22 39 N 002 14 43 E (degrees) Point

### Project creators

Name of Organisation	Archaeology South-East
Project brief originator	Kent County Council
Project design originator	Archaeology South-East
Project director/manager	Ron Humphrey
Project supervisor	Maggie Henderson
Type of sponsor/funding body	Client

Name of sponsor/funding body      Neilcott Special Works



**? Project archives**

Physical Archive Exists?      No

Digital Archive recipient      Local Museum

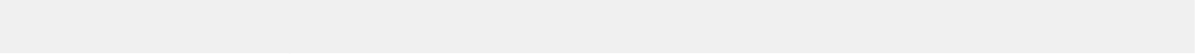
Digital Contents      'none'

Digital Media available      'Images raster / digital photography','Survey','Text'

Paper Archive recipient      Local Museum

Paper Contents      'none'

Paper Media available      'Drawing','Photograph','Survey '



**? Project bibliography 1**

Title      THE AIR RAID SHELTER AT MINSTER IN SHEPPEY PRIMARY SCHOOL, BRECON CHASE, MINSTER ON SEA, SHEERNESS

Author(s)/Editor(s)      Maggie Henderson

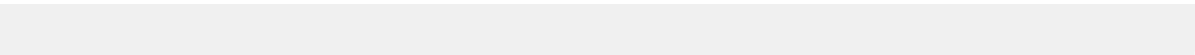
Other bibliographic details      2008110

Date      2008

Issuer or publisher      Archaeology South-East

Place of issue or publication      Archaeology South-East

Description      Bound report with text, images and plates





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