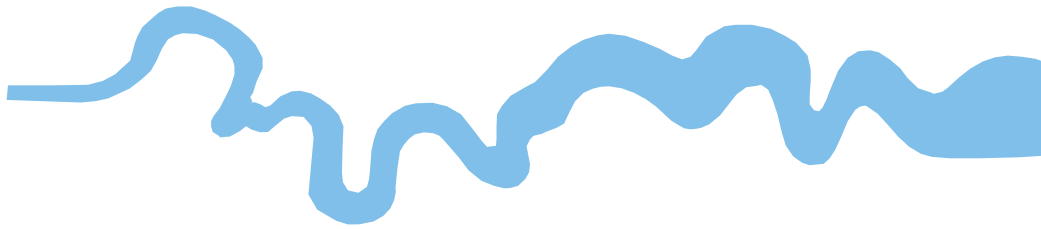


T V A S



SOUTH

**Late Iron Age/Early Roman and Medieval boundaries at
Rockington Nursery, Blackness Road,
Crowborough, East Sussex**

Archaeological Excavation

by Sean Wallis

Site Code: RNC20/53

(TQ 5274 2971)

**Late Iron Age/Early Roman and Medieval boundaries at
Rockington Nursery, Blackness Road,
Crowborough, East Sussex**

An Archaeological Excavation

for Whitehall Homes LLP

Planning Reference: WD/2016/1677/MAO

by Sean Wallis

TVAS South

Site Code RNC 20/53

Summary

Site name: Rockington Nursery, Blackness Road, Crowborough, East Sussex

Grid reference: TQ 5274 2971

Planning reference: WD/2016/1677/MAO

Site activity: Excavation

Date and Duration of fieldwork: 1st–5th June 2020

Project manager: Sean Wallis

Site supervisor: Sean Wallis

Site code: RNC 20/53

Area of site: *c.* 725 sq m

Summary of results: The archaeological excavation at Rockington Nursery successfully investigated the north-east corner of the site, where a number of features had been revealed during the evaluation. Although the features recorded during the excavation produced very little in the way of finds, they were clearly associated with ditches found on the adjacent site in 2017. It seems that the ditch which crossed the excavation area represented a boundary for the Late Iron Age or Early Roman occupation which was recorded in 2017, although it might just be that the focus of this activity was further to the north of the area covered in both phases of archaeological work. The combined results will be published as a short note.

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Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford ✓ 12.10.20
	Steve Preston ✓ 08.10.20

**Late Iron Age/Early Roman and Medieval boundaries at Rockington Nursery,
Blackness Road, Crowborough, East Sussex
An Archaeological Excavation**

by Sean Wallis

with contributions by David Dungworth, Steve Ford, Alice Lyons and Jo Pine

Report 20/53b

Introduction

An archaeological excavation was carried out by Thames Valley Archaeological Services at Rockington Nursery, Crowborough, East Sussex (TQ 5274 2971). The work was commissioned by Mr Matthew Jounides of Whitehall Homes LLP, Dorset House, 64 High Street, East Grinstead, RH19 3DE.

Planning permission (WD/2016/1677/MAO) had been granted by Wealden District Council for the re-development of a former nursery site to the south-east of the historic core of Crowborough, East Sussex. The consent was subject to two conditions (21 and 22) relating to archaeology and the historic environment, which required the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in advance of groundworks. This was in accordance with the Ministry for Communities and Local Government's *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF 2012), and the District Council's policies on archaeology. The site was the subject of an archaeological evaluation in April 2020 (Rouard 2020) which demonstrated the site's potential and showed it to contain some linear features which appeared to be continuations of Late Iron Age or Early Roman features recorded immediately to the east in 2017 (Rouard 2017). As these features would be damaged or destroyed by the planned construction work, excavation was required to mitigate these effects and to enhance understanding of the nature of these features. This report is concerned with that follow-up excavation, carried out in June 2020, which targeted features revealed in the evaluation.

The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr Neil Griffin, the East Sussex County Council Archaeological Officer, who advises Wealden District Council. The fieldwork was undertaken by Elisabet Diaz, Virginia Fuentes and the author, between 1st and 5th June 2020, and the site code is RNC 20/53. The archive is presently held at TVAS South, Brighton and will be deposited with a suitable depository in due course. Lewes Museum would be the most obviously suitable, but it is not currently accepting new archives.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located to the south of Blackness Road, approximately 1.2km south-east of the historic core of Crowborough, East Sussex (Figs 1 and 2). The former nursery generally slopes down towards the south-east, but the area where the excavation took place is relatively flat and lies at a height of approximately 162m above Ordnance

Datum. According to the British Geological Survey the underlying geology consists of the Ashdown Formation (sandstone and siltstone) (BGS 1999), and this was confirmed in the excavation as a mid yellow brown sandy clay.

Archaeological background

The archaeological potential of the site had been highlighted in a desk-based assessment (Shapland 2016). In summary the site lies within the High Weald, which until relatively recently has been regarded as being sparsely occupied in the prehistoric period. Whilst a small amount of material dating from the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods had been recorded in the past, the area is thought to have been largely exploited on a seasonal basis due to its being heavily wooded, with most of the activity being situated close to the river courses. However, recent archaeological projects in the region have revealed traces of prehistoric settlement (eg. Wallis 2012; Taylor 2016), and numerous archaeological features have been recorded by LIDAR surveys. The Weald was utilized for the production of Iron during the Iron Age, Roman, Saxon, medieval and post-medieval periods. Although settlement evidence is still rare for the earlier periods, many iron working sites and roads have been identified. The East Sussex HER contains an entry relating to a probable prehistoric or Roman trackway, the Newenden-Wadhurst Ridgeway, approximately 500m north-east of the present site.

An archaeological excavation was carried out immediately east of the site in 2017 (Rouard 2017), following an earlier evaluation (Webster 2017). Four linear features were recorded, along with a number of pits and post-holes. The features in the northern part of the excavation area largely dated from the Late Iron Age or early Roman periods, whilst a ditch in the southern part of the area was post-medieval (Rouard 2017). Slightly further afield, features dating from the Bronze Age, Iron Age and post-medieval periods were revealed during a recent evaluation at Walsh Manor Farm, about 600m south-west of the present site (Le Hagarat 2019).

The Evaluation

An evaluation of the present site was carried out in April 2020. Nineteen trenches were excavated across the site (Fig. 2) and these seemed to indicate that the area had been significantly disturbed in the past, probably when the nursery was built (Rouard 2020). However, a number of linear features were recorded in the north-east corner of the site (trenches 10 and 19) and, whilst they contained no dating evidence, it seemed likely that they would relate to the Late Iron Age or Roman features which were recorded immediately to the east in 2017 (Rouard 2017). As a result, the East Sussex County Council Archaeological Officer (Mr Neil Griffin) requested that this small area be stripped to further investigate these features.

Objectives and methodology

The aim of the project was to excavate and record any archaeological deposits and features within an area of the site where features had been discovered during the evaluation, around Trenches 10 and 19 located in the north-eastern part of the site.

The general objectives of the project were to:

- excavate and record all archaeological deposits and features within the excavation area;
- produce relative and absolute dating and phasing for deposits and features recorded on the site;
- establish the character of the deposits in an attempt to define functional areas on the site such as industrial, domestic, etc; and to
- produce information on the economy and local environment and compare and contrast this with the results of other excavations in the region

The project would also address the following research questions:

- What is the nature and extent of and Late Iron Age or Roman activity on site?
- What use was made of floral and faunal resources and can these be identified and assessed from a programme of environmental sampling ?

All features were hand excavated and recorded in accordance with the relevant sections of *Sussex Archaeological Standards* (ESCC 2015). Any pits and postholes were to be dug 100% (though in the event, there were none), as well as a 10–20% sample of any ditches and gullies. Bulk soil samples were to be taken from appropriate contexts to environmental evidence and to enhance finds recovery.

The Excavation

The excavation area was stripped down to the top of the underlying natural geology, which necessitated the removal of up to 0.40m of topsoil (50), made ground and subsoil deposits (51). The area was stripped by a mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, under constant archaeological supervision. Care was taken not to strip too close to the perimeter of the site, due to the presence of mature trees. It was subsequently agreed during a site meeting with the East Sussex County Council Archaeological Officer that it would not be necessary to strip the area to its full intended extent to the south and west, as this would restrict access to other parts of the site. As a result, the excavation covered an area of approximately 725 sq m (Fig. 3).

All of the archaeological features recorded in the excavation area corresponded with the linear features observed during the evaluation, and these were sampled by hand. Appendix 1 provides a summary of all of the excavated features, with dating evidence, including the features from the evaluation.

Phase 1: Late Iron Age - Early Roman (c. 0-70AD)

The features recorded in the north-east corner of the site during the evaluation and within the excavation area produced few finds, with just one sherd of Late Iron Age or Early Roman pottery being recovered from one of the excavated ditch slots. However, the two ditches observed in the excavation area (1000 and 1001) appear to be contemporary, and one of them (1000) is reasonably clearly the same ditch as that recorded in the north-west corner of the area excavated in 2017 (slot 9 in that numbering sequence). The latter contained a small amount of pottery (12 sherds) dating from the 1st century AD (Late Iron Age or Early Roman).

Ditch 1000 crossed the entire excavation area, aligned SW-NE, if not quite die-straight. Two slots (2 and 6) were excavated through the ditch by hand during the evaluation, and a further three slots (8, 10 and 13) were dug during the excavation, along with a relationship slot with ditch 1001 (11/12). One slot had (9) been excavated in the prior excavation and one more (01/004) in the evaluation that preceded it. The ditch was up to 1.60m wide and 0.47m deep, but became noticeably shallower towards the south-west, which may explain why it was not visible in evaluation trench 11, though it could also have terminated. Several deposits (62, 63, 64 and 65) were recorded in the deepest slot (10), but in slots 8 and 13 the ditch appeared to have just a single fill of mid greyish brown sandy clay. Just one small sherd of Late Iron Age or Early Roman pottery was recovered from the feature, along with a fragment of ironworking slag. The ditch also yielded two struck flints, including a scraper, which are clearly residual in a later deposit but do indicate activity in the area during the earlier prehistoric period. Some charcoal was recovered from a soil sample, but the fragments were too small to enable species identification.

Ditch 1001 had also been recorded during the evaluation, when two slots were excavated through it by hand (3 and 7). A further slot (9) was dug through the ditch during the excavation, along with a relationship slot with ditch 1000 (11/12). The relationship slot proved inconclusive, but it is highly likely that the two ditches are broadly contemporary as ditch 1001 did not extend beyond ditch 1000. The only find from this ditch was a fragment of burnt flint, which was recovered from a soil sample. The sample also contained fragments of charcoal, although again these were too small for species identification. Although ditch 1001 extended approximately east from ditch 1000, it was not recorded during the 2017 excavation in the adjacent site.

Phase 2: Late medieval / Early post-medieval

The only other feature revealed during the excavation was a small section of gully, in the far north-east corner of the area. This gully had been investigated during the evaluation in trench 10, where a slot (1) through it revealed that it was up to 0.40m wide, but only 0.04m deep. The gully produced no finds, but it seems likely that it is the same feature as one (1002) recorded in the adjacent site in 2017. Several slots had been excavated across the gully in

2017, and the small amount of pottery recovered indicated that it probably dated to the late medieval or early post-medieval period (c. AD 1450-1600) while tile and slag indicated a date at the post-medieval end of that range.

Finds

Pottery by Alice Lyons

A single (3g) handmade, possibly wheel finished, low-fired jar/bowl pottery sherd was recovered from ditch 1000 (slot 8; fill 60). The fabric of the sherd is a naturally occurring shelly clay with additional grog (previously fired crushed pottery) added as a temper or mixing agent. It has a reduced (grey) body with an oxidized (orange) external surface. It is an abraded fragment with no surviving evidence of use or function (residues). It dates to the latest Iron Age or Early Roman period (AD1–75). The nature of the clay body of this pottery is consistent with relatively local production in East Sussex, utilizing the Purbeck clays which can be shelly in composition (Howitt 1964). In an area where both Late Iron Age and Early Roman pottery is sparsely reported, possibly due to few archaeological investigations (Garland 2008, 3), this single sherd provides a valuable hint of Late Iron Age or Early Roman pottery manufacture for domestic use within the vicinity of recent excavations. It is consistent with the similarly-dated pottery from the adjacent site.

Metalworking Slag by David Dungworth

A single fragment of ironworking slag was recovered from ditch 1000 (slot 13; fill 70). This weighs 134g and displays a surface texture suggesting some degree of flow while at least partially molten. The surface morphology lacks the criteria usually associated with tap slag (Historic England 2015) but this lump is still best interpreted as a smelting slag. It represents less than 10% of all of the slag that might be expected from a single smelt and any smelting was probably a minor activity and/or took place outside the area excavated.

Struck Flint by Steve Ford

Just two struck flints were recovered from the excavation phase of the fieldwork. These consisted of a flake and a scraper, both from ditch 1000 (slot 10; fill 62). The flake is made from a black flint with rough cortex suggesting a source direct from the chalk. The scraper is made from flint obtained from the interface between Reading Beds and Upper Chalk with a thin cortex with greenish tinge and iron stained band just beneath. The material is undiagnostic and could belong to several periods but is probably of later Neolithic or Bronze Age date.

Burnt Flint by Sean Wallis

One small fragment of burnt flint, weighing 23g, was recovered from a soil sample taken from ditch 1001 (slot 9; fill 61). The fragment had not been worked.

Macrobotanical plant material and charcoal by Jo Pine

Two bulk soil samples were processed from deposits 61 and 63. The samples were wet sieved to .25mm and air dried. The flots were examined under a low-power binocular microscope at magnifications between x10 and x40. Charcoal was present in very small quantities and very small pieces, none of which is likely to permit the fracturing necessary for species identification.

Conclusion

The archaeological excavation at Rockington Nursery successfully investigated the north-east corner of the site, where a number of features had been revealed during the evaluation. Although the features recorded during the excavation produced few finds, it is reasonably certain that they can be associated with features found on the adjacent site in 2017. Ditch 1000 may represent a boundary for the Late Iron Age or Early Roman occupation which was recorded in 2017, although it might just be that the focus of this activity was further to the north of the archaeological work on both sites.

Whilst the findings from this fieldwork and that previously on the adjacent site to the east are small scale, they have a relative importance in assisting in the characterisation of the settlement pattern of the High Weald during Late Iron Age and Early Roman times. As summarised above, recent fieldwork has begun to demonstrate that the region was settled, perhaps at a smaller scale and lower density than adjacent regions such as the chalklands to the north or coastal plain to the south in addition to better known iron production sites.

Acknowledgements

The excavation was funded by Whitehall Homes LLP, with the fieldwork being monitored by Neil Griffin, the East Sussex County Council Archaeological Officer. The excavation team consisted of Virginia Fuentes-Mateos, Elisabet Diaz-Pila, and the author. Illustrations were produced by Virginia Fuentes-Mateos and the author.

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Appendix 1: Feature details

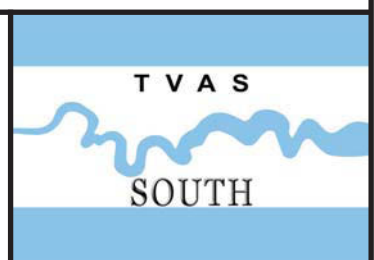
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1	53		Gully	Post-medieval ?	Association - evaluation
2	54	1000	Ditch	Late Iron Age / Roman	Association - evaluation
3	55	1001	Ditch	Late Iron Age / Roman	Association - evaluation
4	56		Treebole	Undated	
5	57		Treebole	Undated	
6	58	1000	Ditch	Late Iron Age / Roman	Association - evaluation
7	59	1001	Post hole	Late Iron Age / Roman	Association - evaluation
8	60	1000	Ditch	Late Iron Age / Roman	Pottery and association
9	61	1001	Ditch	Late Iron Age / Roman	Association
10	62, 63, 64, 65	1000	Ditch	Late Iron Age / Roman	Association
11	66, 67, 68	1000	Ditch	Late Iron Age / Roman	Association
12	69	1001	Ditch	Late Iron Age / Roman	Association
13	70	1000	Ditch	Late Iron Age / Roman	Association

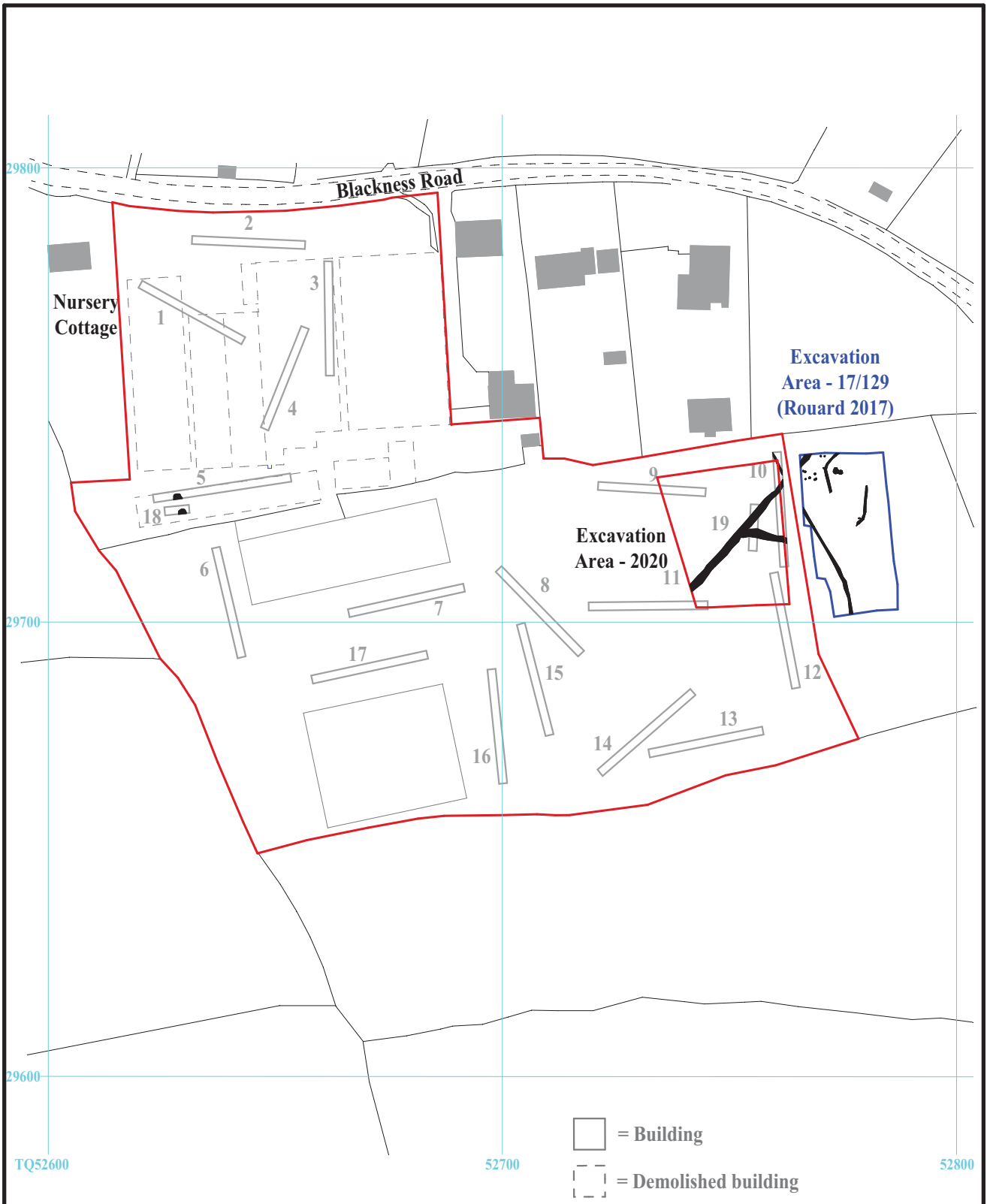


**Rockington Nursery, Blackness Road,
Crowborough, East Sussex, 2020
Archaeological Excavation**

Figure 1. Location of site within Crowborough and East Sussex.

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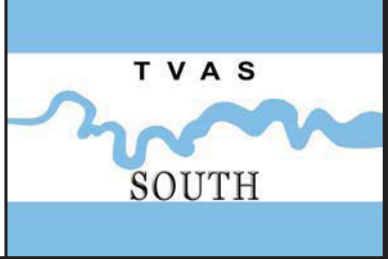


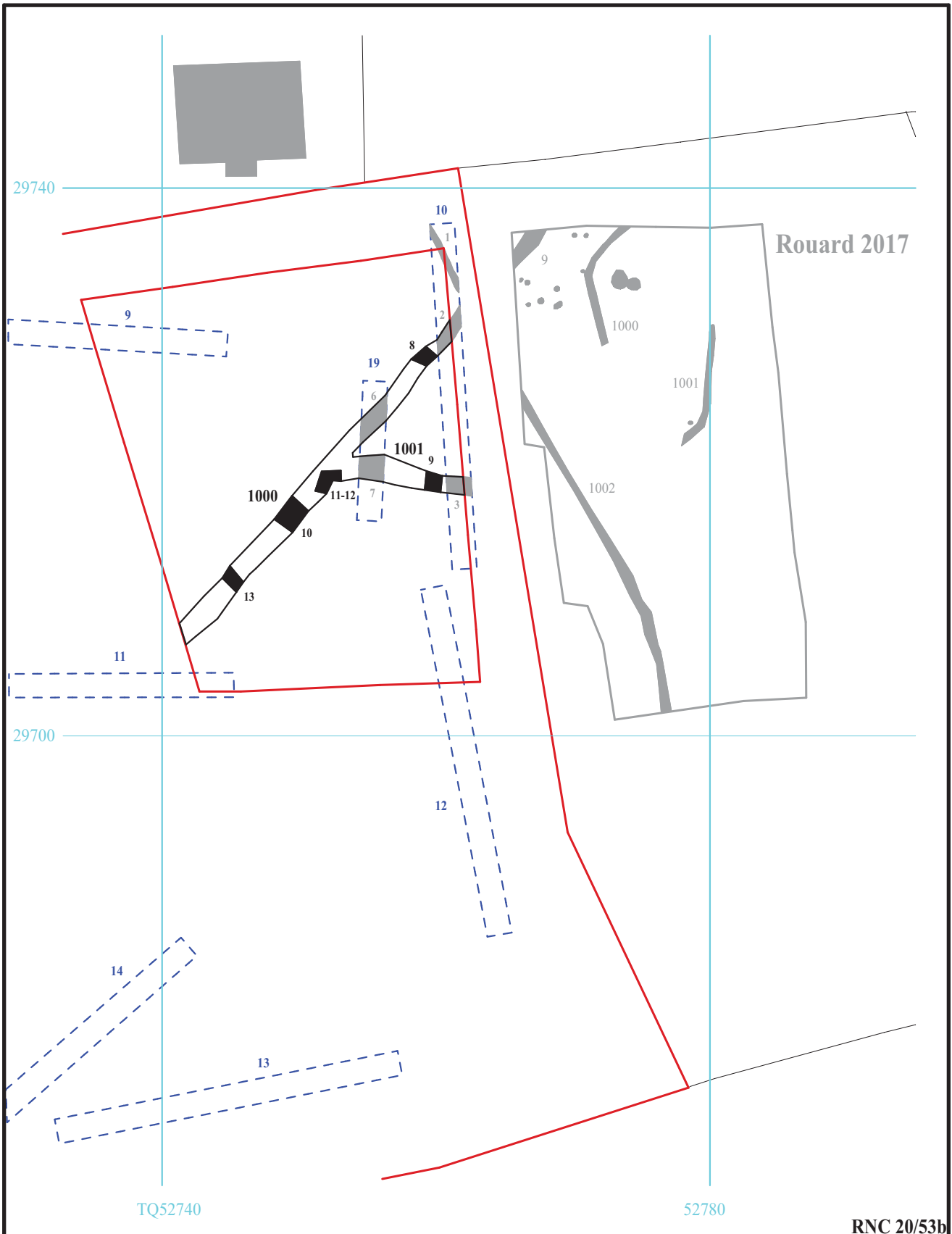
RNC 20/53b



**Rockington Nursery, Blackness Road,
Crowborough, East Sussex, 2020
Archaeological Excavation**

Figure 2. Detailed location of site showing evaluation trenches, excavation areas and archaeological features recorded.

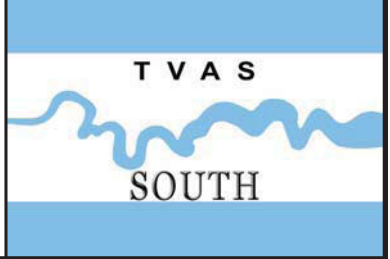




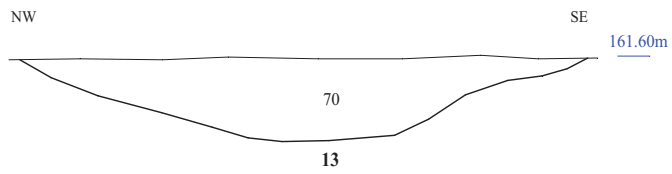
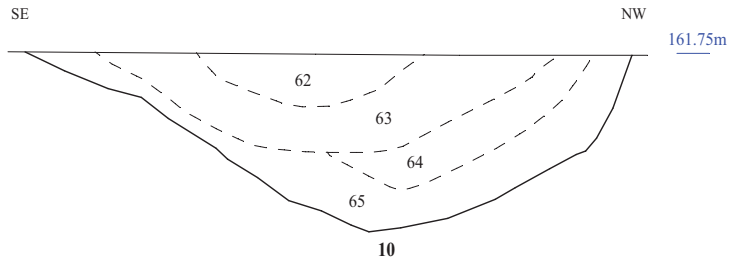
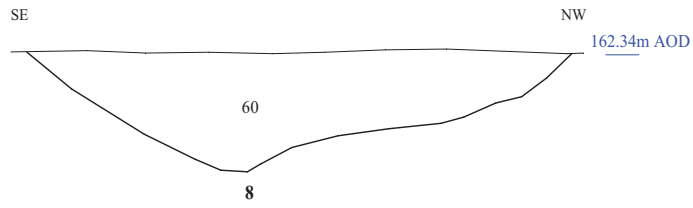
RNC 20/53b

**Rockington Nursery, Blackness Road,
Crowborough, East Sussex, 2020
Archaeological Excavation**

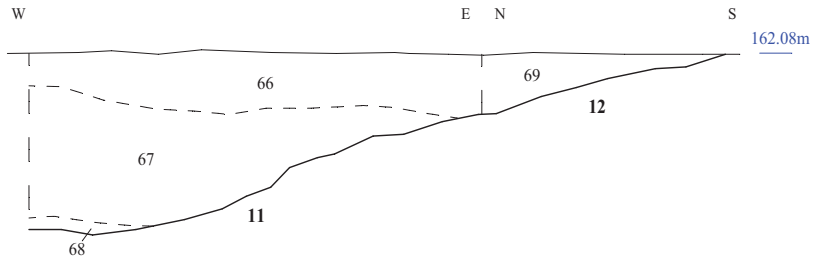
Figure 3. Detailed location of site showing excavation area and archaeological features.



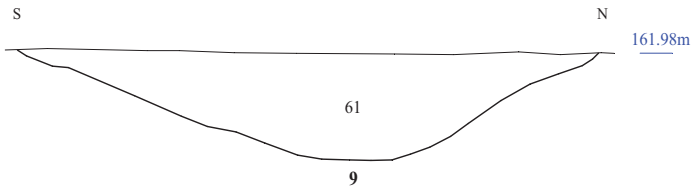
Ditch 1000



Ditches 1000 and 1001



Ditch 1001



RNC 20/53b

**Rockington Nursery, Blackness Road,
Crowborough, East Sussex, 2020
Archaeological Excavation**

Figure 4. Sections.

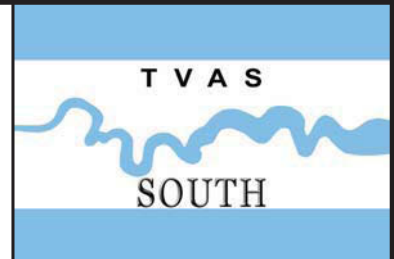




Plate 1. Ditch 1000, cut 8, looking South-west.
Scales: 1m and 0.30m.



Plate 2. Ditch 1001, cut 9, looking West.
Scales: 1m and 0.30m.



Plate 3. Ditch 1000, cut 10, looking South-west.
Scales: 1m and 0.30m.



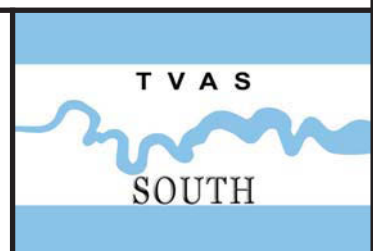
Plate 4. Ditches 1000 and 1001 (cuts 11-12),
looking North.
Scales: 1m, 0.50m, 0.30 and 0.10m.



Plate 5. General view of site, looking North-east,
showing ditch 1000.

RNC 20/53b

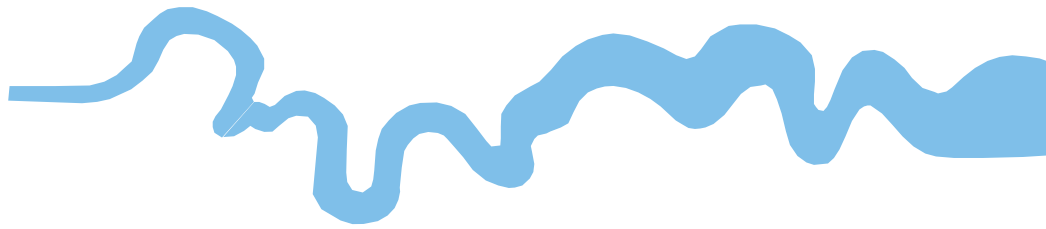
**Rockington Nursery, Blackness Road,
Crowborough, East Sussex, 2020
Archaeological Excavation
Plates 1 to 5.**



TIME CHART

	Calendar Years
Modern _____	AD 1901
Victorian _____	AD 1837
Post Medieval _____	AD 1500
Medieval _____	AD 1066
Saxon _____	AD 410
Roman _____	AD 43 AD 0 BC
Iron Age _____	750 BC
Bronze Age: Late _____	1300 BC
Bronze Age: Middle _____	1700 BC
Bronze Age: Early _____	2100 BC
Neolithic: Late	3300 BC
Neolithic: Early	4300 BC
Mesolithic: Late	6000 BC
Mesolithic: Early	10000 BC
Palaeolithic: Upper	30000 BC
Palaeolithic: Middle	70000 BC
Palaeolithic: Lower	2,000,000 BC





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