

Old Road East, Gravesend, Kent, DA12 1NQ

National Grid Reference TQ 6495 7296 (approx site centre)

Report on an Archaeological Evaluation

Gravesham Borough Council planning reference 20211092



Figure 1: The front area of the evaluation site, with Old Road East to the left and the modern hall to the right. Note the artificially raised flat area immediately behind the wall along the street frontage modern. This was more than 1m above the ground to the south (in front of the hall), precluding any excavation here.

Graham Keevill
Keevill Heritage Ltd
For Wakes Construction Ltd
12 April 2023

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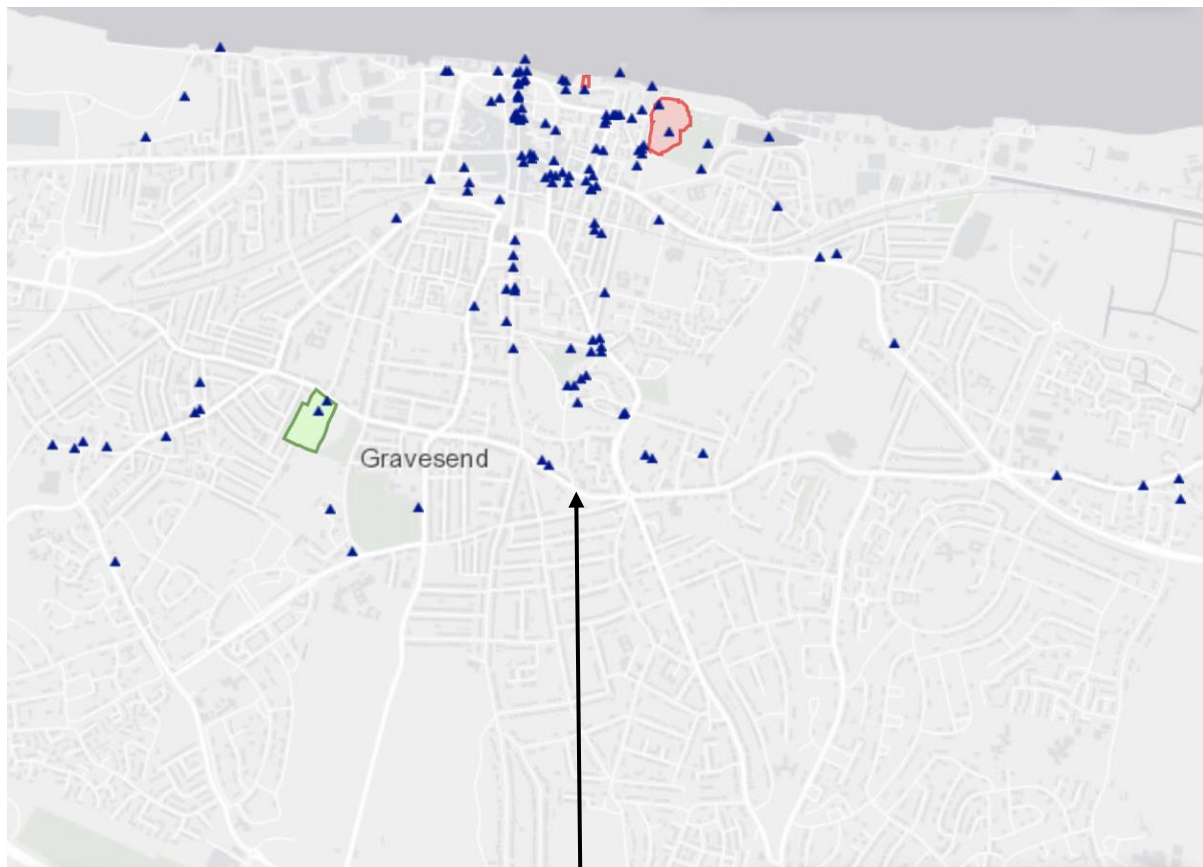


Figure 2: Site location plan (arrowed) showing listed buildings (small blue triangles), registered park (shaded light green) and Scheduled Monument (shaded light red). Ordnance Survey data Crown Copyright 2023. All rights reserved. Licence number 100051221.

Executive summary

Keevill Heritage Ltd excavated two evaluation trenches on land at Milton Mount, Old Road East, Gravesend, in late March 2023. This was in response to Condition 7, planning permission 20211092, issued by Gravesham Borough Council. The site part of the large garden of a substantial detached house a little further west along Old Road East (the house still survives) but now contains a large single-storey building set near the centre of the curtilage, and a large timber shed towards the rear. Both were built in the later 20th century, and their construction involved extensive terracing into existing ground levels as well as general disturbance. This and the difficult sloping terrain affected the evaluation strategy – one trench had to be abandoned entirely, while a second had to be moved slightly to the west from its intended location. This trench was extended into an L-shape to partly compensate for the missing trench. The excavations revealed some areas of obviously modern made ground incorporating much building rubble, as well as a modern soakaway and salt-glazed ceramic drain pipe. These overlay or cut through silty clay subsoil, perhaps representing several hundred years of agricultural or other low-grade activity. The subsoil directly overlay the natural geology of sand and gravel. No artefacts were present other than the modern building rubble. None of this was retained. The evaluation therefore produced negative results (except for establishing the top level of the natural sand/gravel in both trenches) and did not add to evidence for prehistoric and Roman archaeology found in a dene hole c 140m to the north-west of the site in 1907.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Gravesham Borough Council (GBC) granted full planning permission to Wakes Construction Ltd for “demolition of existing hall and outbuildings, erection of a 3-storey building containing 9 x 2 bed flats towards the front of the site, a terrace of 4 no. 3 bedroom houses over 2 full floors and within the roofspace towards the rear of the site, and with parking for 19 cars”. The permission (GBC reference 20211092) stipulated a number of requirements. One of these, Condition 7, stated that

No development shall take place until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of

- i. Archaeological field evaluation works in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation and timetable which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority; and
- ii. Following on from the evaluation, any safeguarding measures to ensure preservation in situ of important archaeological remains and/or further archaeological investigation and recording in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation and timetable which has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure appropriate assessment of the archaeological implications of any development proposals and the subsequent mitigation of adverse impacts through preservation in situ or by record.

Wakes Construction Ltd commissioned Keevill Heritage Ltd to carry out the evaluation on their behalf. Our written scheme of investigation (WSI) describing the archaeological aims and methods for the evaluation was approved by Kent County Council’s senior archaeological officer (advising the borough council) on 15 March 2023. The WSI includes a brief summary of the site’s archaeological and historical potential, based on the National Heritage List, Kent Historic Environment Record, and aerial photographs taken in the 1920s. Only information directly relevant to this report is repeated here.

1.2 The site

The development site is located at National Grid Reference (NGR) TQ 6495 7296 (centre point), postcode DA12 1NQ. The ground slopes strongly from c 33.5m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) at the Old Road East frontage to c 28.75m aOD towards the rear. Some area, especially at the front, have been built up by a metre and more in recent times, while the areas around the existing buildings have been cut into the natural ground slope to provide level construction platforms. These factors were a partial constraint on the evaluation strategy.

A site investigation by Ground and Environmental Services Ltd found the site to be underlain by Thanet Formation Sands with varying quantities of sands, silts, clays and gravels. Lewes Chalk was encountered in borehole 1 at a depth of 15.1m below ground level.

The only entries of note on the Kent Historic Environment Record are two Palaeolithic hand axes from Windmill Hill, and finds (two flint implements and a piece of Roman tile) from a dene hole 140m to the north-west of the Old Road East site.¹ The dene hole finds were the main reason for the archaeological condition on this planning consent. The hole is marked on the early 20th-century Ordnance Survey map for the area, which also shows the current property as open space, part of a very large garden belonging to the detached house immediately to the west (20 Old Road East). The site is also covered by a few aerial photographs in the Historic England Archive collection that are available on their web site.² The earliest of these dates from 1920, and the latest from 1948. The 1920 image is included here, and confirms the open garden nature of the site at that time.



Figure 3: The 6-inch (1:10560) Ordnance Survey ap of 1869 shows the site as part of an orchard, with a building to the east. The approximate site area is indicated here.

¹ [https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=MWX20815&resourceID=1005](https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=MWX20815&resourceID=1005;);
https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=MKE1638&resourceID=1005.

² [Aerial Photo Explorer – Over 400,000 aerial photos in Historic England's digitised collections | Historic England](#);



Figure 4: The 1897 (top) and 1909 (middle) 25-inch (1:2500) OS maps, with the site outline shown on the latter, and the 1920 aerial photograph with the site arrowed. It remained as open ground well into the 20th century, still being shown as open ground on the 1966 OS map. The hall was built later than that.

1.4 Evaluation aims, methods and timing

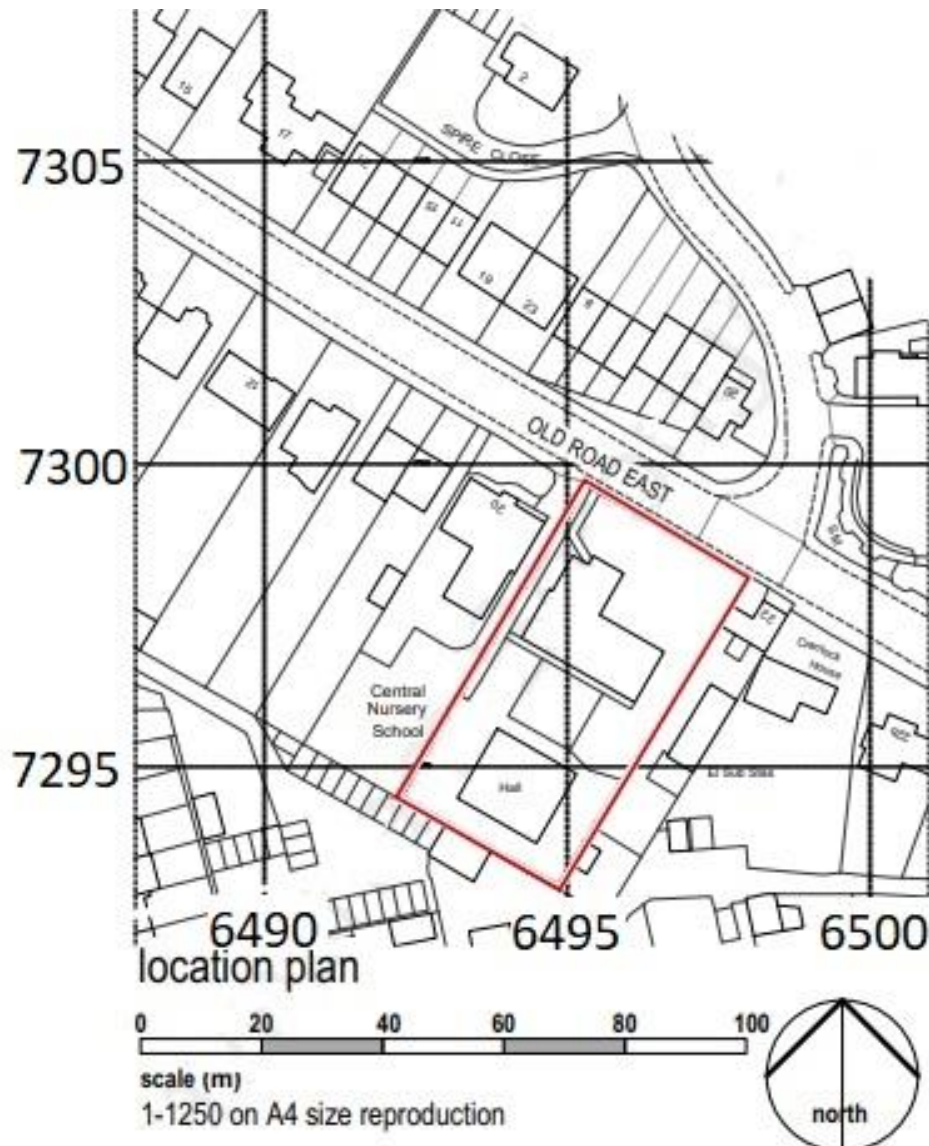


Figure 5: Detailed site location plan with OS grid line coordinates identified.

The specific aims of this archaeological evaluation were

- to determine whether archaeological structures, features or layers exist within the proposal site, and if so how they may be affected by the development;
- to assess the significance of any archaeological deposits, structures and features that may be encountered, to inform any proposals for appropriate mitigation measures that may seek to limit the damage to significant archaeological deposits, and to define any research priorities that may be relevant should further investigation be required;
- to collect artefacts (where present and of archaeological significance) from the excavations, and soil samples if there was apparent potential for environmental studies;

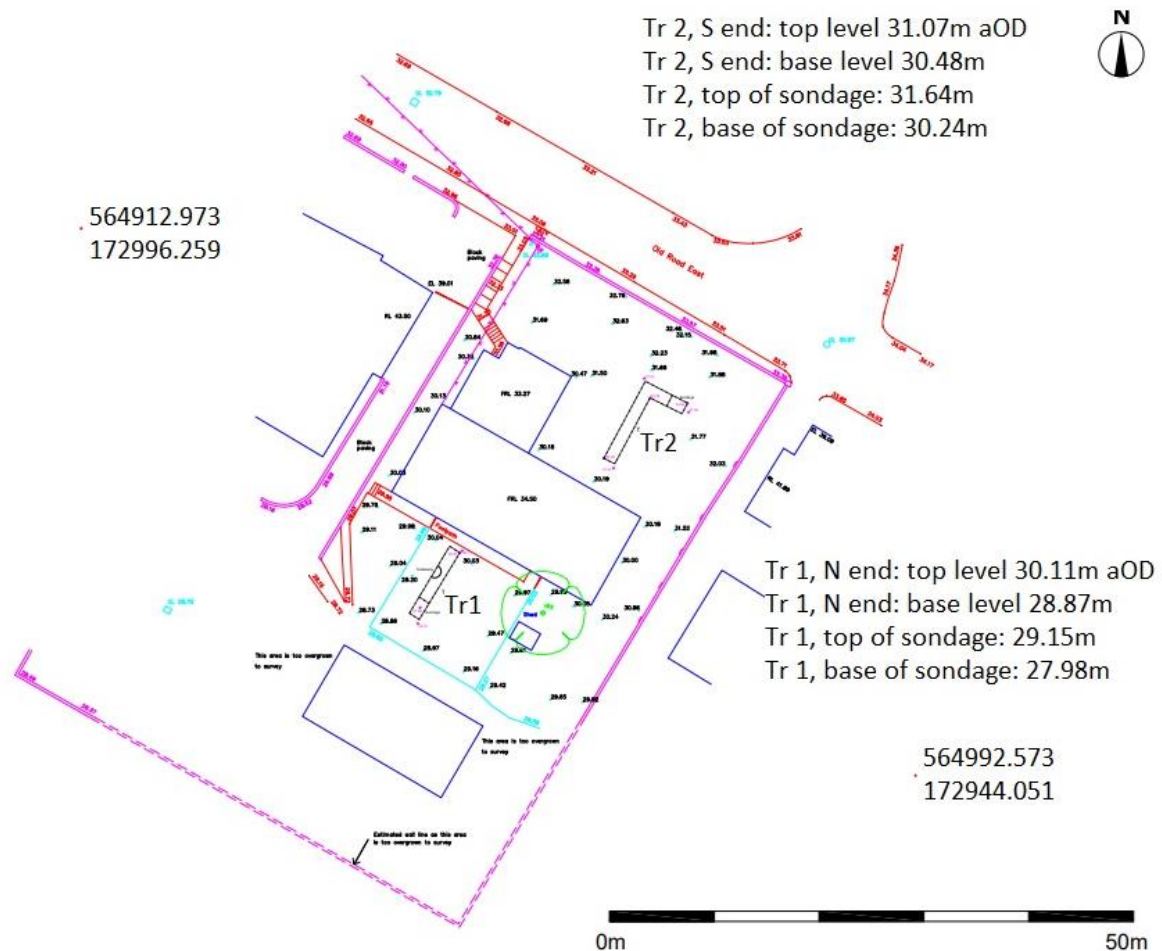


Figure 6: Detailed trench location plan as excavated. Surveyed by Jonny Madden. Not to scale (1:500 at A4 landscape format).

The evaluation was carried out by Graham Keevill of Keevill Heritage Ltd on 29 March 2023. A 360° tracked excavator and operative were kindly provided by Wakes Construction Ltd. The initial trench layout provided in the WSI envisaged excavating two 10m-long trenches at the front (north end) of the site, and a third in the central area of the site, between the hall and a large shed behind it. The latter trench was excavated largely as planned, but slightly shorter than anticipated because of the limited space and sloping ground between the buildings. The trenches at the front were far more constrained than expected, with one having to be abandoned entirely because the ground level has been raised by at least 1m in recent times. The second trench in this area also had to be moved a little to the west because of tree stumps, an active fox burrow, and other modern disturbance. This trench, however, was extended into an L-shape to partly compensate for the loss of the other trench – these changes were agreed with Kent County Council’s senior archaeological officer before the trench was excavated. The trenches were surveyed using GPS equipment, accurate to c 20mm in this open terrain with minimal tree cover.

2 Description of the stratigraphy

Both trenches had very simple stratigraphy. Trench 1 was c 8.5m long and 1.35m wide, with a depth of 1.3m in a sondage at the south end, 0.9m generally, and 1.3m again at the north end where the ground level had been built up in modern times. The topsoil (1) was a clean, dark grey-brown silty clay-loam, typically 0.2m thick, present along the full length of the trench. There were no finds, with

common relatively modern material such as transfer-printed ware, red earthenware and ceramic drain pipe being conspicuously absent. The topsoil overlay a rubble-rich area of sandy made ground (2) at the north end of the trench – this had clearly been built up during construction of the hall. The rubble comprised brick, concrete, stone and one lump of unknapped flint. Most of this material was presumably surplus/debris from construction of the hall. The made ground was c 0.3m thick at the north end of the trench, gradually lessening to nothing a few metres along the excavation. Removal of this layer exposed a mid-brown silty clay (5) along the full length of the trench except in the centre of its west side, where a modern rubble-filled soakaway (3, fill 4 with many breeze blocks and bricks) had been cut into its top. The depth of the soakaway could not be established, but the many voids in its loose fill suggested that it continued down for a considerable distance. It was approached by a salt-glazed ceramic drain pipe (6) from the south – it presumably emanated from the large shed there, and discharged into the pit (this could not be proved but the fall of the drain was clearly in this south to north direction). Layer 5 was 0.65m thick at the north end of the excavation, lessening to 0.5m at the south end. The final context was yellow-brown slightly clayey sand (7), found just above the bottom of the trench along its full length. A 0.5m-deep sondage was excavated at the south end to confirm that this was natural, and 7 continued without any change of character for the full depth of this. No artefacts of any sort were present in this layer or the overlying silty clay (5).



Figure 7: Trench 1 looking north-east, with the natural slightly clayey sand exposed at the base. The soakaway is clearly visible in plan and section, cutting the subsoil, with the broken-out ceramic drain pipe running towards it from the south in the section. Note the rubble/made ground at the north end of the excavation.



Figure 8: The sondage at the south end of Trench 1 looking east. The drainpipe is visible again, cutting just into the top of the yellow-brown clayey sand natural. The scale are 1m each.

The stratigraphy was very largely the same in Trench 2, on the north side of the hall. The topsoil (**11**) was much the same as **1**, again with no finds, but it was thicker at 0.4m. This suggests a degree of deliberate soil dumping here (or surface stripping to the south), because one would usually expect the soil to be thicker down the slope rather than at its upper end. The subsoil (**12**) was likewise much the same as **5**, but here it was thinner at 0.3m. This also suggests that the site had been subject to a considerable amount of disturbance during construction of the hall, although it does not seem that this penetrated as far as the natural geology except where the buildings themselves were situated. The geology here showed a degree of lamination: at first exposure, c 0.8m below ground in the main trench, the sand (**13**) only appeared to have a relatively small amount of gravel in it (as was the case with **7**). Immediately round the corner into the extension, however, this proved to be a thin lens over a more mixed sand and gravel (**14**) – if anything the gravel was dominant. This was found at 0.9m below ground level – 30.74m aOD (above Ordnance Datum) and continued to the base of the sondage (eg 0.5m thick, to 30.24m aOD) where pure clean sand (**15**) was found. No flint artefacts or other possible indicators of early human activity (eg charcoal) were present. No drains or soakaways were found in trench 2, and no artefacts were recovered. There was no potential for environmental archaeology in either trench, so no soil samples were taken.



Figure 9: General view of Trench 2 looking south-east, with the hall to the right.



Figure 10: The sondage in Trench 2 looking north, with clean sand **15** at the very base, mixed sand and gravel **14** above it, and the cleaner sand (**13**) to the left.

3 Conclusions

The evaluation did not reveal any potential for archaeology. Trench 1 contained an area of obviously modern made ground incorporating much building rubble, as well as a modern soakaway and a salt-glazed ceramic pipe seemingly draining to it. They overlay or cut through a silty clay subsoil, perhaps representing several hundred years of agricultural or other low-grade activity – as suggested by the historic maps of this area. The subsoil directly overlay the natural geology of sand and gravel. No artefacts were present other than the modern building rubble – even Victorian pottery was absent, despite the site was within a garden known to be of this period. This suggests that some soil may have been removed during construction work in the later 20th century – the site's topography also hints at this. The evaluation therefore produced negative results (except for establishing the top level of the natural sand/gravel in both trenches) and did not add to evidence for prehistoric and Roman archaeology found in a dene hole c 140m to the north-west of the site in 1907. Accordingly no further mitigation is proposed for this site during the construction phase.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Wakes Construction Ltd for commissioning this work and for providing the plant for the evaluation. Casper Johnson, Senior Archaeological Officer with Kent County Council's Heritage Conservation Team and advisor to Gravesham Borough Council, gave valuable assistance, advice and support throughout, which was greatly appreciated. We are also very grateful to Jonny Madden for carrying out the GPS survey of the trenches.

The records from this watching brief are predominantly digital, including scanned copies of the few written records that were needed. The project archive will therefore be deposited digitally with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS). No artefacts were recovered, or soil samples taken.

Appendix 1: OASIS project summary for Old Road East, Gravesend

OASIS ID (UID) keevillh1-514754

Project Name	Evaluation at Old Road East, Gravesend
Sitename	Old Road East, Gravesend
Activity type	Evaluation
Project Identifier(s)	GORE23 EV
Planning Id	20211092
Reason	Planning: Post determination
Organisation	Keevill Heritage Consultancy
Project Dates	29-Mar-2023 - 19-Apr-2023
Location	Old Road East, Gravesend
NGR :	TQ 64950 72960
Administrative Area:	Kent, Gravesham
Project Methodology	Two small trial trenches were excavated on a site previously developed in the late 20th century, to assess its potential for archaeological remains.
Project Results	No archaeology was found other than a soakaway and salt-glazed ceramic drain pipe in the southern of the two trenches. These were obviously modern. The natural (drift) geology of sand and gravel was exposed in both trenches.