

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
At the George Inn, Robertsbridge, East Sussex.**

(TQ 7379 2344)

Planning Reference: RR/2005/1397/P

Site Code GIR 06

Project No. 2331



**By
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Abstract

Archaeology South East (ASE), a division of University College London Field Archaeology Unit (UCLFAU), was commissioned by Roi Projects Limited to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the construction of new dwellings on land adjacent to the George Inn, Robertsbridge, East Sussex (NGR 564085 104538). The site lies within the historic core of the medieval town of Robertsbridge. Features of 18th -20th century date were identified during the investigation, including, pits, postholes and brick structures including foundations, paving and drains. Some, earlier residual finds of 16th – 17th date were also present.

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Archaeology South East (ASE), a division of University College London Field Archaeology Unit (UCLFAU), was commissioned by Roi Projects Limited to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the construction of new dwellings on land adjacent to the George Inn, Robertsbridge, East Sussex (NGR 573795 : 123446) (Fig.1).
- 1.2** The archaeological potential of the site was such that East Sussex County Council (ESCC) advised the local planning authority that an archaeological condition (Condition 10) should be attached to the planning consent (Reference RR/2005/1397/P) requiring a programme of archaeological work. This programme was in the form of an *enhanced archaeological watching brief*, referred to in the *Standards and Guidance* of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, as a watching brief.
- 1.3** A Method Statement outlining the requirements was prepared by Archaeology South-East and submitted to East Sussex County Council for approval. This document outlined a strategy for the archaeological watching brief.
- 1.4** The site consists of land immediately south of the George Inn (Fig. 2). The eastern part of the site comprised a car park associated with the George Inn, whereas the remainder of the site was occupied by gardens, also associated with the George Inn. The site slopes down steeply from approximately 22.50m AOD in the southeast to c. 18.70m AOD to the northwest. Some evidence of previous terracing up to 1.30m deep was apparent in the southeast of the site, presumably carried out during the construction of the car park.
- 1.5** The British and Geological Survey Sheet 304 (1: 50 000 map) shows the site to lie on Ashdown beds.
- 1.6** The fieldwork was undertaken by Diccon Hart and Paul Riccoboni (Senior Archaeologists) and Deon Whittaker (Asst. Archaeologist) between 4th-29th September 2006. The project was managed by Neil Griffin (Project Manager) and Louise Rayner (Post-excavation Manager).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The site of the development lies within the historic core of the medieval town of Robertsbridge which has good potential for medieval archaeological remains. There was also the possibility that the site comprised the original location of the Robertsbridge Abbey, around which, the town developed prior to the relocation of the abbey to nearby Salehurst (Hart 2006).
- 2.2** The development site lies immediately to the south of the George Hotel (also known as the George Inn), a Grade II listed building (LBS no. 413184). This was an important coaching inn on the Hastings Road.
- 2.3** Archaeology South-East undertook an Archaeological Interpretative Survey of this building (Martin & Martin 2004). Limited documentary evidence indicates that there was, on the site of the present George Inn, a house, barn and garden owned by Thomas Pook in 1567. (Martin & Martin 2004 citing Sussex Record Society Vol.47 (Lewes 1944), Tenements 64 -67). This was replaced in 1713 by owner William Hicks. By 1774 the site had become the home of the George Inn (ibid.)

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

3.1 The objective of the watching brief were outlined in a *Written Scheme of Investigation* prepared by ASE (ASE 2006) and are reproduced below in full:

'The general objective of the archaeological work is to monitor the excavation of the new groundworks in order to ensure that any features, artefacts or ecofacts of archaeological interest exposed and affected by the groundworks are recorded and interpreted to appropriate standards.'

3.2 The elements of the work that required archaeological monitoring included all intrusive groundworks and comprised:

- Soil stripping.
- Ground reduction for house plots and an access road.
- Excavation of rainwater storage tanks and services

3.2 All machines used for removal of material above undisturbed natural subsoil were fitted with a toothless bucket. All ground works were monitored at all times by an archaeologist until excavation reached undisturbed natural subsoils or the formation level was reached.

3.3 Where excavations revealed archaeological features, machine excavation by the contractor's staff ceased. The features were then hand excavated and recorded by the archaeologist in attendance. Exposed deposits were hand cleaned as necessary to clarify the presence, absence and nature of any features. Adequate time was made available by the contractor for appropriate archaeological excavation by hand to identify and record any such features.

3.4 Work was carried out in accordance with the *Written Scheme of Investigation* (ASE 2007) as well as with the *Recommended Standard Conditions for Archaeological Fieldwork, Recording and Post-Excavation Work (Development Control) in East Sussex V3* (September 2003), and also with the *Standards and Guidance: watching brief* of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

3.5 All archaeological features were recorded using standard Archaeology South-East context record sheets. Deposit colours were verified by visual inspection and not by reference to a Munsell Colour chart.

3.6 The County Archaeologist of East Sussex County Council was kept informed of progress so that he could monitor the archaeological work as required.

4. RESULTS (Figs 2 and 3)

4.1 Natural Geology

The natural geology of the site comprised light yellowish grey slightly silty sand (40). This was encountered at a maximum height of 21.00m AOD in the south of the site, sloping down gradually to 20.01m to the north and 19.96m AOD to the east.

4.2 Pits

A total of five pits were recorded during the investigation. Finds recovered from all five features showed them to be of 19th-20th century date. It should be noted that four of these features were not excavated as they lay below the intended formation depth of the development and have thus been preserved *in situ*. These features are described below.

- Pit [23] measured 0.40m in diameter and was filled with dark greyish brown silty sandy clay (24) from which fragments of 19th century clay pipes were recovered. Unexcavated.
- Pit [25] measured 0.40m in diameter and was filled with dark greyish brown silty sandy clay (26). A, iron band was noted around the circumference of this feature, presumably from a barrel, and the feature was interpreted by the excavator as the remains of a modern planter associated with the George Inn. Unexcavated.
- Pit [27] also measured 0.40m in diameter with a fill of dark greyish brown silty sandy clay from which several fragments of 19th century stoneware were recovered. Unexcavated.
- Pit [29] measured up to 1.40m across, with a fill of dark greyish brown silty sandy clay (30) containing 19 - 20th century glass fragments. Unexcavated.
- Pit [16] measured 0.65m in diameter and up to 0.16m deep. A single fill of mid grey silty clay was recorded (15), from which a single fragment of 19th century peg tile was recovered.

4.3 Postholes

Some 12 postholes were recorded during the investigation. With the exception of a single isolated example situated towards the southwest of the area, these features formed two distinct groups and are described below.

- Posthole Group 1: Northwest-southeast alignment to east of site
 - Posthole [02] measured 0.20m in diameter, with a fill of mid greenish brown silty clay (01), A fragment of 19th century CBM was noted but not collected. Unexcavated.
 - Posthole [04] measured 0.40m in diameter and was also filled with mid greenish brown silty clay (03). Unexcavated.
 - Posthole [06] measured 0.40m in diameter with a fill of mid greenish brown silty clay (05). Unexcavated.
 - Posthole [08] measured 0.40m in diameter and 0.20m deep, with a fill of mid greenish brown silty clay (09) that contained several fragments of 19th century CBM. (Fig. 3)
 - Posthole [10] measured 0.40m in diameter and 0.12m deep, with a fill of mid greenish brown silty clay (09). (Fig.3)
 - Posthole [12] measured 0.40m in diameter with a fill of mid greenish brown silty clay (11). Unexcavated.
- Posthole Group 2: Rectilinear arrangement in centre of site.
 - Postholes [33]. A group of four rectangular postholes measuring approximately 0.30m by 0.15m across, with fills of dark greyish brown silty sandy clay (34) containing quantities of 20th century demolition material (not collected). Unexcavated.
 - Posthole [35] single rectangular posthole measuring 0.30m by 0.15m across, with a fill of dark greyish brown silty sandy clay (36) containing quantities of modern demolition material. Probably related to postholes [33]. Unexcavated.
- Isolated posthole to west of site.
 - Posthole [19]. Measured 0.40m in diameter and up to 0.40m deep, with a fill of mid grey silty clay (18) containing a fragment of 18th-19th century CBM and some residual 16-17th

century pottery. The top of this feature was seen to be heavily disturbed by rooting. (fig.3)

4.4 Timber

A single timber post was recorded during the evaluation. This lay towards the eastern side of the site and is described below.

- Driven timber post (39) comprised a box quartered post that measured 0.20m by 0.20m and 0.30m long. Of modern date.

4.5 Brick structures

Brick structures investigated during the course of the fieldwork include the remains of foundations (22) and (32), a large circular brick soakaway (14), a small brick built drain (31) and two small truncated areas of brick paving (20) and (21). These are described below.

- Brick foundation (22) comprised a modern brick footing on an east-west alignment that measured c. 0.35m across and up to 3.00m in length.
- Brick foundation (32) also comprised a modern brick footing that measured 0.35m in width and up to 2.60m in length.
- Possible Brick soakaway or tank (14) comprised a large circular structure built of red unfrogged brick, with an internal diameter of c. 4.00m, and constructed within a circular cut [17]. Due to the presence of diesel contamination in this area, this structure was not examined in any detail.
- Brick drain (31) comprised a modern brick drain 0.20m deep by 0.30m wide, with a sandstone capping that extended in an east-west orientation.
- Brick paving (20) was situated immediately adjacent to the rear of the George Inn and measured 1.20m by 0.60m. Brick and pottery recovered from this floor was of 19th century date.
- Brick paving (21) comprised a sub circular patch of surviving paving that measured 1.00m by 1.00m. Brick recovered from this floor is dated to the 19th century.

FINDS by Luke Barber

5.1 The archaeological work recovered a small assemblage of finds. These are quantified in Table 1. The current assemblage is not considered to hold any potential for further analysis and has been discarded with the exception of the pottery from Context (18).

Table 1: Finds quantification (no./weight in grams)

Context	Pottery	Weight (g)	CBM	Weight (g)	Stone	Weight (g)	Fe	Weight (g)	CT P	Weight (g)	Glass	Weight (g)
8			3	100							1	5
15			10	796								
18	4	28	4	1105	1	4						
20	12	120	1	144								
21			1	94								
24									1	<2		
26							1	382				
28	1	350										
30											3	
31					1	2790						
topsoil											1	318
surface											3	142

Table 2: George Inn, Robertsbridge (GIR 06) Spot Dates

Context	Spot Date
8	mid/late C18th – 19 th (cbm only)
15	?C18th – 19 th (cbm only)
18	pot C16th – 17 th (but cbm looks more C18th – 19 th)
20	mid/late C19th
21	C19th (cbm only)
24	C19th (x1 small c. pipe frag only)
26	post-medieval (prob. C18th/19 th) (metal only)
28	C19th
30	C19th – early 20 th
31	undatable (stone only)
topsoil	C19th – early 20 th

5.2 Pottery Luke Barber

The earliest pottery from the site consists of material of probable 16th- to 17th- century date (Context (18)). The sherds are quite small and show some signs of abrasion: indeed, they appear to be a little earlier than the ceramic building material from the same context which suggests an 18th- to 19th- century deposition date to be more likely.

These early sherds consist of: one, hard-fired, unglazed, reduced earthenware; two medium fired oxidized unglazed fine sandy earthenwares and a single sherd of a similar fabric but with a thin internal glaze. None of the sherds are large enough to discern the form, though all are likely to be jars. The remaining pottery, which consists of larger unabraded sherds, is all of 19th- century date. A near complete (139mm tall, 63mm diameter) off-white stoneware vessel from Context (28) is stamped 'Blackwood & Co Patent Syphon'. The small assemblage of material from Context (20) consists of mid/late 19th- century transfer-printed 'china' tablewares, all in 'willow', or similar Chinese patterns.

5.3 Building Material

Ceramic building material was recovered from Contexts (8), (15), (18), (20) and (21). Most consists of pieces of peg tile (13 fragments). These are usually quite well made and well/hard-fired. Tempering consists of sparse fine sand with sparse to moderate iron oxides to 3mm and occasionally white clay pellets/streaks. Only one diamond-shaped peg hole was noted (Context (15)). These tiles could comfortably be placed in an 18th- to 19th- century date range. The remaining pieces of cbm consist of brick fragments. Two pieces from Context (8) are tempered with fine sand with moderate iron oxide inclusions to 5mm – an 18th- to 19th- century date is probable. A similar date range can be ascribed to the remainder of the bricks from the site, though some could be a little earlier. Two fragments from Context (18) are well made and fired and contain moderate iron oxide inclusions to 4mm. One piece is 107mm wide by 63mm high. Context (20) also produced a similar well-made brick some 61mm high, while Context (21) contained a well made and fired fragment tempered with fine sand and abundant iron oxide inclusions to 6mm. Presence of adhering cement suggests a 19th- century date for the example from Context (21).

5.4 Glass

A small assemblage of glass was recovered. The topsoil yielded the base of a later 19th- to 20th- century green wine bottle and a further wine bottle fragment, possibly of 18th-/19th- date, was recovered from Context (8). The only other material was from Context (30) which produced two clear/aqua glass mineral water bottle fragments and a similar stopper. All are probably of later 19th- to early 20th- century date.

5.5 Metalwork

A single fragment of curving iron strip (50mm wide) was recovered from Context (26). The internal face shows the presence of mineralized wood and the strip is almost certainly a binding strip from a large barrel.

5.6 Clay Pipe

A small fragment of plain 19th- century clay tobacco pipe stem was recovered from Context (24).

5.7 Stone

A piece of coal was recovered from Context (18) and a large, slightly water-worn, boulder of Wealden sandstone was recovered from Context (31).

6. INTERPRETATION

- 6.1** This investigation has provided evidence of activity on the site of 18th-19th century date and later. Though the 16th – 17th century pottery recovered from an area of brick paving (20) and the posthole (19) raises the possibility that some activity occurred on site from that period, it should be noted that in both cases this material is clearly residual.
- 6.2** It is conceivable that the terracing noted in the southeast corner of the site had removed any earlier deposits but even if this was the case, the lack of any residual material earlier than 16th-17th century in date suggests that no medieval activity was present on the site. Significantly, no evidence for the site of the medieval Robertsbridge Abbey was found during the investigation.
- 6.3** Features recorded during the investigation include pits, postholes, and brick foundations, drains and paving. Given their late date it is likely that all these features were related to the George Inn and this is a premise supported to some extent by quantities of glass and stoneware recovered from features such as pit [29]. Indeed, it is possible that at least some of the pits recorded during the investigation were used to dispose of refuse from the Inn.
- 6.4** Posthole Groups 1 and 2 are likely to represent light structures or boundaries within the grounds of the George Inn, with brick foundations (22) and (32) representing the remnants of a more substantial outbuilding to the Inn, possibly with associated drainage (31). Similarly, the brick paving (20) and (21) is probably best seen as the remains of a paved yard associated with the Inn.
- 6.5** The exact function of the circular brick structure (14) remains difficult to determine but given the presence of significant quantities of diesel within fill (13) it is possible that the structure represented a fuel tank.

REFERENCES

Hart. D. 2006. The George Inn, Robertsbridge, East Sussex. Archaeological Watching Brief – Method Statement. Ditchling, Archaeology South East.

Martin D and Martin B. 2004 An Archaeological Interpretative survey of The George Inn, High Street, Robertsbridge, East Sussex. ASE Client Report

SMR Summary Form

Site Code	GIR 06					
Identification Name and Address	The George Inn, George Hill, Robertsbridge, East Sussex.					
County, District &/or Borough	East Sussex					
OS Grid Refs.	NGR 573795 : 123446					
Geology	Greensand and Gault over Cretaceous chalk					
Arch. South-East Project Number	2331					
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/ Oct 2006	Other		
Sponsor/Client	Roi Projects Limited					
Project Manager	Neil Griffin					
Project Supervisor						
Period Summary	Palaeo.	Meso.	Neo.	BA	IA	RB
	AS	MED	PM ✓	Other Modern		
<p>100 Word Summary.</p> <p>Archaeology South East (ASE), a division of University College London Field Archaeology Unit (UCLFAU), was commissioned by Roi Projects Limited to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the construction of new dwellings on land adjacent to the George Inn, Robertsbridge, East Sussex (NGR 564085 104538). The site lies within the historic core of the medieval town of Robertsbridge. 18th - 19th century deposits and 19th – 20th century deposits were identified during the watching brief with some, earlier residual finds of 16th – 17th date.</p>						

Appendix A – OASIS Summary Form

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OASIS ID: archaeol6-24247

Project details

Project name George Inn , Robertsbridge

Short description of the project Archaeology South East (ASE), a division of University College London Field Archaeology Unit (UCLFAU), were commissioned by Roi Projects Limited to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the construction of new dwellings on land adjacent to the George Inn, Robertsbridge, East Sussex (NGR 564085 104538). The site of the proposed development lies within the historic core of the medieval town of Robertsbridge. The site is generally characterised by 18th / 19th century deposits and 19th / 20th century deposits. The earliest finds are from a brick path, which produced residual pot of 16th / 17th date.

Project dates Start: 04-09-2006 End: 20-09-2006

Previous/future work Yes / No

Type of project Field evaluation

Site status None

Current Land use Residential 1 - General Residential

Methods & techniques 'Visual Inspection'

Development type Urban residential (e.g. flats, houses, etc.)

Prompt Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPG16

Position in the planning process Not known / Not recorded

Project location

Country England

Site location EAST SUSSEX LEWES LEWES George Inn Robertsbridge

Postcode TN32 5AW

Study area 900.00 Square metres

Site coordinates TQ 7379 2344 50.9835092878 0.476236355732 50 59 00 N 000 28 34 E Line

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 Neil Griffin
 Type of sponsor/funding body Developer
 Name of sponsor/funding body Roi Projects Limited

Project archives

Physical Archive recipient Lewes Museum
 Physical Contents 'Ceramics','Glass','other'
 Digital Archive recipient Lewes Museum
 Digital Contents 'Stratigraphic','other'
 Digital Media available 'Text'
 Paper Archive recipient Lewes Museum
 Paper Contents 'Stratigraphic','Wood'
 Paper Media available 'Context sheet','Diary','Drawing','Map','Notebook - Excavation',' Research',' General Notes','Plan','Report','Section','Unpublished Text'

Project bibliography 1

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 Title Hart. D. 2006. The George Inn, Robertsbridge, East Sussex. Archaeological Watching Brief – Method Statement. Ditchling, Archaeology South East.
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