



Archaeological Investigation of the Air- Raid Shelter at the former Caffyns Garage site, Grange Road, Ramsgate, Kent

October 2011

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Archaeological Investigation of the Air-Raid Shelter at the
former Caffyns Garage site, Grange Road,
Ramsgate, Kent

NGR: 637435 164606

Site Code: RAMS/EV/11

(Planning Application Number: TH/10/0435)

Report for
Jenner (Contractors) Ltd.



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Summary

Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) carried out an archaeological evaluation on land at Grange Road, Ramsgate, Kent from the 9th to the 17th May 2011. A planning application (PAN:TH/10/0435) for the construction of two, three and four storey buildings to accommodate 39 flats, and three houses together with associated parking and vehicular access at the above site was submitted to Thanet District Council (TDC) whereby Kent County Council Heritage and Conservation (KCCHC), on behalf of Thanet District Council requested that an Archaeological Evaluation be undertaken in order to determine the possible impact of the development on any archaeological remains. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (KCC 2011) and in discussion with the Archaeological Officer, Kent County Council.

The Archaeological Evaluation consisted of five trenches which encountered no archaeological features of any significant antiquity. However, there was uncovered in the north-east area of the site a tunnel and possible bomb shelter.

1. Introduction

Swale & Thames Survey Company (SWAT) was commissioned by Jenner (Contractors) Ltd. to carry out an archaeological evaluation at the above site. The work was carried out in accordance with the requirements set out within an Archaeological Specification (KCC 2011) and in discussion with the Archaeological Officer, Kent County Council. The evaluation was carried out between the 9th and 17th May 2011.

2. Site description

The site is centred at NGR 637435 164606 (KCCHC: 2011:2.1), and the underlying geology of the site, according to the British Geological Survey consists of Upper Chalk although a dry valley filled with Head Brickearth is recorded 30m north-east (KCCHC 2011:4.3). During the evaluation, Head Brickearth was encountered in two trenches (T. 2 & 3).

The development area is approximately 40m aOD and fairly level, sited along Grange Road to the east, St Mildreds Road to the north and Christ Church C of E Junior School to the west.

A rapid map regression exercise of the site shows it as an undeveloped area up to 1890 and a garage from 1929.

There was however, a substantial building from 1890 on the north-east corner of the site (Fig. 2) which is remembered by a local inhabitant as a cheap hotel although verification could not be obtained from a perusal of Kelly's Street Directory of 1895, 1910 and 1932.

3. Planning background

A planning application (PAN: TH/10/0435) for the construction of 39 dwellings with access and car parking at the above site was submitted to Thanet District Council (TDC). Kent County Council Heritage and Conservation (KCCHC), on behalf of Thanet District Council, requested that an *Archaeological Evaluation* be undertaken in order to determine the possible impact of the development on any archaeological remains. The following condition was attached to the planning consent:

"No development shall take place within the site until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation, to include the proposed investigating body, previously submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. (KCCHC 2010)

Requirements for the archaeological evaluation comprised trial trenching targeting a minimum of 5% of the impact area with trenches designed to establish whether there were any archaeological deposits at the site that may be affected by the proposed development. The results from this evaluation were used to inform KCCHC and TDC of any further archaeological mitigation measures that may be necessary in connection with the development proposals.

4. Archaeological background

The garage site lies immediately north of the former Sticky Fingers Nursery site which was redeveloped in 2007 for housing. Archaeological work in advance of this (**TR 36 SE 345**) by the Trust for Thanet Archaeology revealed a Roman cemetery with two surviving graves. The burials were well preserved despite the extent of modern development impacts and the demolition of the former buildings. The graves were found almost immediately below the contemporary ground surface, post-demolition.

Nineteenth century finds of Roman burials are also recorded 100m further south towards the roundabout (**TR 36 SE 2**) and 100m north east on Willson's Road (**TR SE 15**), whilst undated cut features have been recorded at the neighbouring school.

5. Aims and objectives

Specific aims of the evaluation, as set out within the Archaeological Specification (2011) include (not exclusively):

- Assessing the likely archaeological impact of the proposed development
- Assessing the impact of past development including terracing, demolition, grubbing out and landscaping on the site's archaeological potential
- Establishing the degree of Iron Age and Romano-British activity on the site including the potential for further burials based on the distribution of the known graves nearby.
- Establishing the degree of earlier prehistoric activity on the site
- Establishing the degree of Saxon, medieval and post-medieval activity on the site.
- Contributing to the environmental and landscape history of the area

6. Methodology

Trial trenching was carried out on 9th May 2011, with the excavation of five trenches measuring 1.5m in width and between 10m and 30m in length (see below). Trench location was agreed prior to the excavation between KCCHC and SWAT. The trenches were initially scanned for surface finds prior to excavation. Excavation was carried out using an 8 ton mechanical excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket, removing the overburden to the top of the first recognisable archaeological horizon, or natural, under the constant supervision of an experienced archaeologist. Trenches were subsequently hand-cleaned to reveal features in plan and carefully selected cross-sections through the features were excavated to enable sufficient information about form, development date and stratigraphic relationships to be recorded without prejudice to more extensive investigations, should these prove to be necessary. All archaeological work was carried out in accordance with the KCC Archaeological Specification (2011).

A single context recording system was used to record the deposits. A full list is presented in Appendix 1. Layers and fills are recorded (**001**). The cut of the feature is shown [**001**]. Context numbers were assigned to all deposits for recoding purposes; these are used in the report and shown in bold.

7. Monitoring

Curatorial monitoring was carried out by KCC during the course of the evaluation.

8. The buried structure

Situated in the north-east corner of the site was an exposed underground entrance to what was thought to be a dene-hole, defunct quarry or air-raid shelter.

After consultation on site with the KCC Archaeological Officer it was agreed that the underground structure would need recording. The underground complex was considered by SWAT Archaeology to be a confined space and all work of survey was undertaken in accordance with current health and safety regulations, the SWAT Archaeology WSI (Written Scheme of Investigation for recording of structures) and advice provided by consultation with the appropriate H&S manuals.

Escape kits and gas monitoring equipment was used at all times during the survey and a hoist with fall arrest harness was deployed at the tunnel entrance.

The tunnel was mapped using EDM total station supplemented by hand taped data and drawn up on AutoCAD. The tunnel was tied to the SWAT Archaeology survey and thence to the Ordnance Survey National Grid using Ordnance Survey digital mapping. Levels were taken within the tunnel using an automatic level and were related to Ordnance Datum using a height value provided by 'Digitise This'.

A photographic record of the tunnel was made using a digital camera (Nikon Coolpix). Both general and detailed record shots of the tunnels were taken (Plates 1-3).

The underground structure had been exposed during the demolition phase of works and an entrance exposed on the north-east side of the structure and enclosed for safety reasons inside a Heras fence. Entrance was through a deep shaft lined with a concrete 'sewer' ring with an internal measurement of 1.85m. The chalk rubble base of this ante-chamber was at 35.98mOD whereas the ground surface is about 40mOD giving an initial depth of about 4m.

Entrance to the underground structure was through a 'doorway' cut through the south-west side of the concrete ring and was 0.77m wide (Fig. 6) and led to a descending series of six concrete steps (S14) constructed inside a chalk tunnel about 1.75m high. The steps stretched for 2.40m and led into a small chamber with an OD height on the concrete floor of 33.73mOD. The rectangular chamber (S12) was lined with concrete 'breeze blocks' and the dimensions of the chamber were 1.70m x 2.20m with a height to the natural chalk ceiling of 2m.

Leading off from this chamber, itself about 6.32m below the ground surface, was a large chalk-cut cavity (S13) to the north with another collapsed cavity beyond that and a set of chalk-cut steps leading to the south-west. The chalk-cut cavity had been capped by a brick dome of about 1.80m.

Eight steps were cut into the chalk in the south-west corner of the rectangular room and led upwards to a small right-angled level corridor, probably a bomb blast baffle, which led to a further set of steps

cut into the chalk and leading to the surface, and presumably the entrance on the south-west side of the buried structure. The width of both these passages was about 0.62m with a height to the domed chalk ceiling above the steps of about 1.50m (S13). The side walls of the tunnels are near vertical or, locally, slightly bowed out, to a height of c. 1.50m, then slope in to meet a flat or concave roof c.0.60m wide. The surfaces of both the roof and walls are uneven with tool marks evident along most of their length. Tool marks are also evident in the shelter area. Most of the cutting is horizontal, with localised vertical cutting. The majority of the tool marks appear to belong to round bladed shovels or trenching tools, though there are some pick type marks.

Running down this passageway was an electric cable with three bayonet connectors for electric light bulbs. No other fittings or furniture or graffiti were to found inside the structure.

The underground structure located in the north-east area of the site was investigated and fully recorded and was thought to be a small underground air-raid shelter built for the occupants of the hotel situated on this corner of the site (Figs. 1&2). The layout comprised a small rectangular deep room accessed by a flight of stairs cut into the chalk from the east and another flight of steps to the west. Electric light fittings still in situ date from the mid-20th century. Other small air-raid shelters are known from the vicinity. The HER lists “A small chalk passage discovered in the cellar of a Victorian house. The passage is entered by descending a small flight of chalk steps leading from the cellar” (**TR 36 SE 335**) and “Romano-British burial found whilst digging private air-raid shelters in 1939 at Willson’s Road” (**TR 36 SE 15**).

A survey of the structure at the Caffyns site was carried out by ‘Digitise This’ and SWAT Archaeology to a written specification (WSI) provided by SWAT Archaeology for the client.

9. Additional Investigation

Following discussions with the KCC Archaeological Officer further investigation of the air-raid shelter were requested and an additional Archaeological Specification for building recording issued. The specific aims of the additional investigation itemised in the KCC Specification were:

- Understanding the form and function(s) of the underground complex including identifying different phases and types of activity through analysis of the records produced.
- Understanding the structures in the context of Ramsgate’s twentieth century history and its post-medieval development.

In addition: “Documentary research on the twentieth century history of the site including consultation with specialist authorities on civil and government structures eg Victor Smith, Kent Underground Research Group will also be undertaken in order to further understanding of the site”.

Victor Smith was briefed on the structure and kindly looked at the plans and photographs provided by ‘Digitise This’. His comments were sent to SWAT Archaeology in September 2011.

Victor agreed that the underground structure was an air-raid shelter and he has seen other 'stand alone' shelters with impromptu designs like this and that the plans and photographs were excellent and did not require further recording on site. One of the key points Victor made is that the right-angled configuration would be just right for a bomb blast baffle- a point of detail highlighted in the original SWAT Archaeology report (Sept 2011).

Victor Smith remembered documents he had seen which highlighted the need for hotels to provide shelter accommodation for their guests and that an ARP summary of April 1939 highlighted the need to provide shelters and Ramsgate was designated a 'Shelter Area'. Victor wrote that: "Under Home Office memoranda public houses and hotels were expected to make provision for the sheltering of their customers".

In March 1939, Ramsgate Borough Council obtained Home Office agreement for the first phase for its famous system of '*deep tunnel shelters*.' Extensive new excavation would link together some of the existing shelters, and a disused railway tunnel, forming a wide arc through the chalk hills encompassing the town centre. The system was large enough to have its own electrical generators, and first-aid rooms, and had the added advantage of connecting with Ramsgate General Hospital.

10. Conclusion

The structure has been drawn to a level of recording as requested in the Archaeological Specification. Interpretation of the structure by Victor Smith confirms that it is an air-raid shelter of a known type, usually constructed to provide shelter for the customers of public houses and small hotels. Given the excellence of recording by 'Digitise This' it has been possible to generate a virtual reality 'walk-through' of the shelter which is attached to this report. A selection of photographs is included in this report whilst the corpus is curated in the site archive.

Paul Wilkinson. SWAT Archaeology
20th October 2011

10. References

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Kent County Council (KCCHC) (2011) *Specification for an Archaeological Evaluation at the former Caffyns Garage site, Grange Road in Ramsgate*. Kent County Council Heritage & Conservation

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Plate 1. View of the chalk staircase on the west side- see Section 13



Plate 2. Bomb baffle on the west staircase,(with collapsed ceiling).



Plate 3. Entering the concrete block lined room from the east staircase.

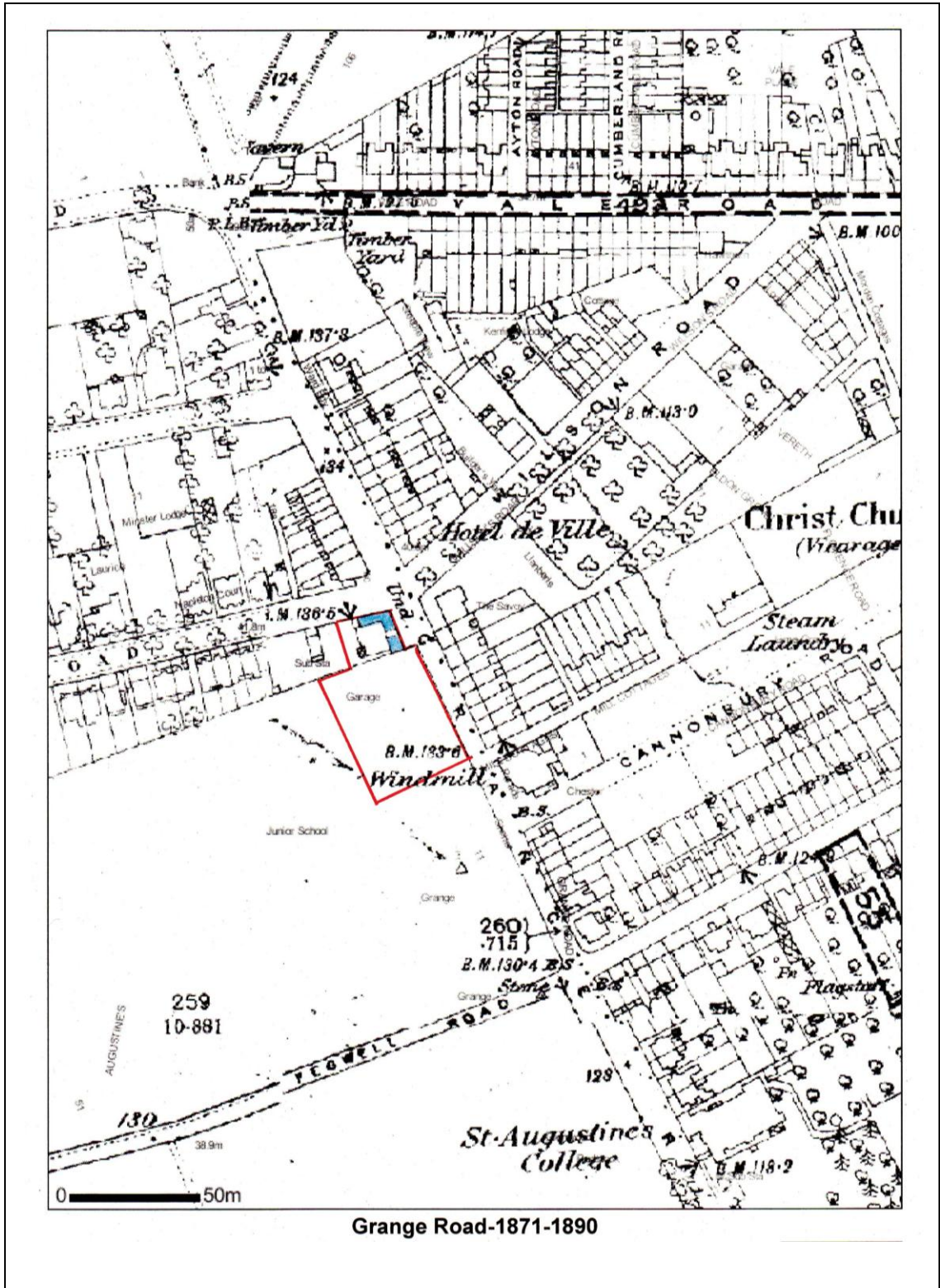


Figure 1. OS map from 1871 showing buildings in the vicinity of the air-raid shelter.

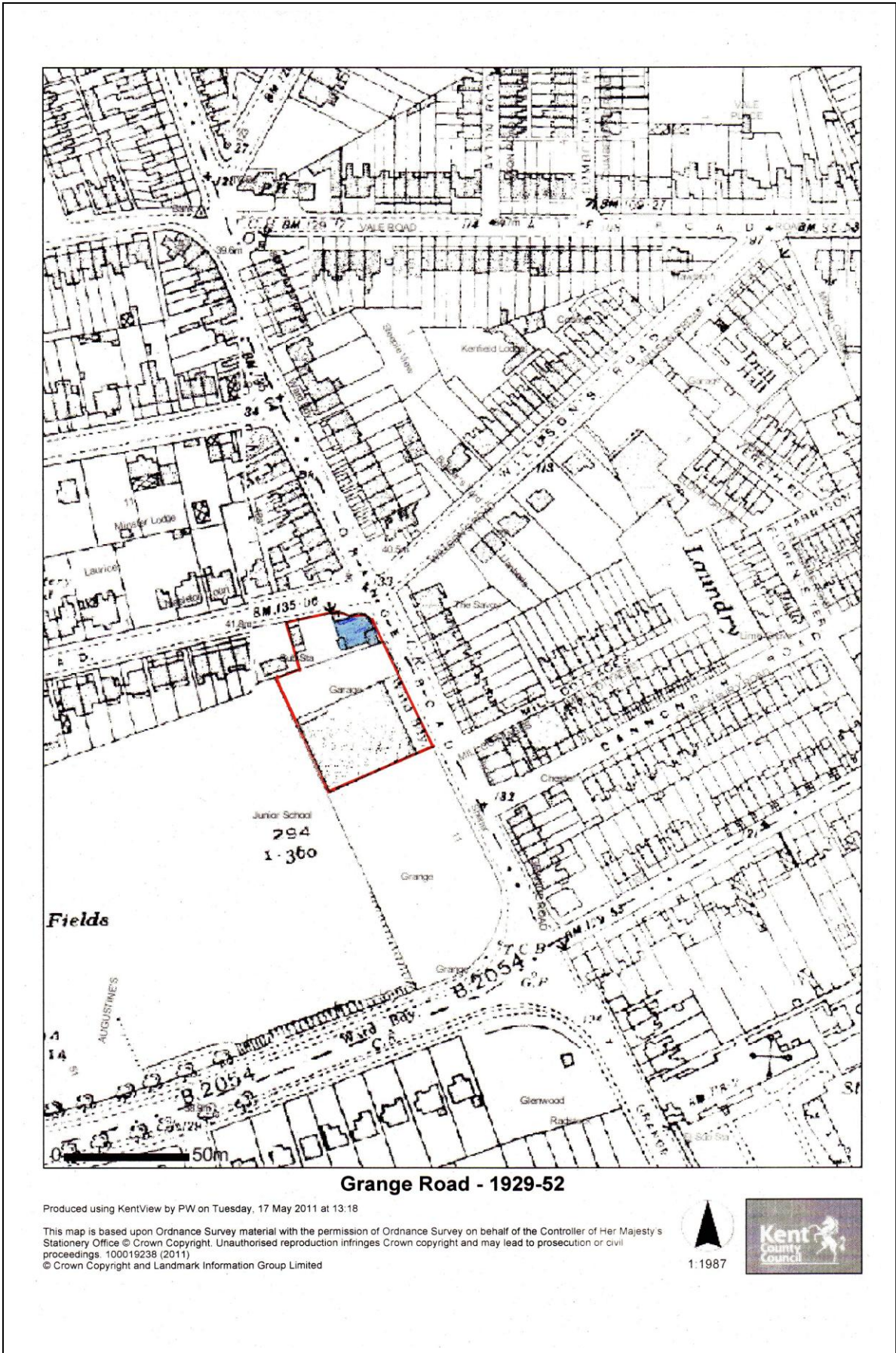


Figure 2. OS map from 1929 showing the hotel (blue) built over the air-raid shelter.