

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT OF LAND AT THE CAPEL BATTERY SITE, CAPEL-le-FERNE, KENT

Dated 20/11/2024

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Front cover: 1896 OS map of the site (red line)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In November 2024 Dr Paul Wilkinson of SWAT Archaeology carried out a rapid archaeological desk-based assessment of available data on land at the Capel Battery Site, New Dover Road, Capel-le-Ferne in Kent.

1.2 Historic mapping, aerial photographs and the HER records were studied and shows that prehistoric and WWII archaeological activity has been recorded within 500m of the proposed development site (PDA).

1.3 The principal elements of the archaeological survey involved the creation of a record and description of any known archaeological and historical sites within the environs of the PDA together with an analysis and interpretation of the sites origins and historic development.

1.5 A review of Historic OS mapping has been made and the Pevsner Architectural Guide (*Kent, East and East Kent 2012*) was consulted as was the National Heritage Register for England.

1.6 This report consists of a descriptive report accompanied by aerial photographs and annotated plans and maps.

2.0 HISTORICAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Location

The Proposed Development Area (PDA) is located south but adjacent to the New Dover Road (B 2011) and north of the Warren Cliffs and the railway line from Folkestone to Dover. Beyond is East Wear Bay and to the west Dover Hill and to the east Capel-le-Ferne (MAP 1-4).

2.2 Historic Background

A rapid map assessment of OS historic mapping shows that in 1841 the PDA (Proposed Development Area) was open ground but bounded to the north by the Folkestone to Dover Road and beyond numbered plots of ground (MAP 1).

By 1872 some of these plots had acquired ponds and the PDA in the NW corner had a group of buildings called Valiant Sailor (P.H.). To the south the boundary of the site was demarcated by sloping cliffs (MAP 2).

The 1896 map shows additional buildings clustered around the Valiant Sailor and the land to the east divided into three areas or plots (MAP 3).

By 1931 the plots had been altered with only one plot around the bounds of the Valiant Sailor. To the north buildings were now apparent on some of the plots to the north of the New Dover Road (MAP 4).

The 1955 map shows numerous buildings on the site and mostly of WW11 (MAP 5) but by 2020 most of these buildings have been demolished (MAP 6).

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

3.1 The HER records show that known archaeology is mostly Prehistoric and WWII in the vicinity of the PDA. To the east at 600m the KCCHER notes that an 'Archaeological Site and Buildings' (Ref. 1478151) whilst to the north east a 'Volunteer Rifle Range' did exist (MWX 44045).

3.2 The summary from KCCHER record 1416952:

A Second World War artillery battery at Capel was built between 1941 and 1942 and manned by 520 Coast Regiment Royal Artillery. The battery mounted three eight-inch coastal guns. Aerial photographs show all but one of the buildings on the site have been demolished on aerial photographs taken in 1966. Cropmarks and earthworks are visible on aerial photographs taken in 2007, several underground structures survive, and the eastern side of the site has been remodelled into the Battle of Britain memorial. This site has been mapped from aerial photographs as part of the South East Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment Survey NMP.

3.3 In 2012 Canterbury Archaeological Trust carried out an evaluation. Power cables relating to the battery were located to the north of the site.

3.4 The battery was armed with three eight inch guns, each with a magazine and controlled from an underground command room. The crews were

accommodated on site, to the west of the emplacements. The battery was constructed between April 1941 and June 1942. It was manned from December 1942 by 424 Coast Defence, Royal Artillery. The battery was placed into 'care and maintenance' status by June 1944. The guns were removed in 1947.

Description from the KCCHER record 1416952:

Site of Capel Battery. Various roads, tracks and hut bases still extant. Battle of Britain Memorial occupies part of site.

Capel Battery. 3 x 8in guns.

3.5 Site of Capel Battery. Various military roads, tracks, hut bases, etc. still extant. Battle of Britain memorial occupies part of site. Destroyed No.1 Gun coastal battery. Three gun emplacements remain (buried) and may be in reasonable condition. Remaining buildings have now gone bar one small ancillary structure 400-500m SW of battery at cliff edge. [Information from 1979 aerial photographs].

On the seaward side of the B2011 road near Capel-le-Fern (3)

Capel Battery located at TR 2442 3801. The battery was commissioned in June 1942 and was armed with three 8-inch guns. The three gun emplacements were located at TR 2442 3801, TR 2453 3805 and TR 2463 3809. The position finder was at TR 2416 3774, the plotting room at TR 2431 3798 and radar (B4) positioned at TR 2490 3821. (4-5)

Aerial photography from 1979 shows that the three gun emplacements are buried and may be reasonable condition. The buildings have gone, except one small ancillary structure located 500 metres south-west of the battery at the cliff edge. (6)

3.6 The Battle of Britain Memorial website shows photographs of Capel Battery under construction in 1941. According to this website, several underground structures remain at Capel Battery including a dressing station/shelter, Battery Plotting Room and magazines. This article about the Capel Battery includes images of the look-out post and tunnels which still exist at the site. It was to be sold at auction on 21 September 2009.

3.7 A Second World War artillery battery at Capel was built between 1941 and 1942 and manned by 520 Coast Regiment Royal Artillery. The battery mounted three eight-inch coastal guns. Aerial photographs show all but one of the buildings on the site have been demolished on aerial photographs taken in 1966. Cropmarks and earthworks are visible on aerial photographs taken in 2007, several underground structures survive, and the eastern side of the site has been remodelled into the Battle of Britain memorial. The site as a whole is centred on TR 2437 3801 and extends over an area which measures 635 metres SW-NE and 150 metres SE-NW. This site has been mapped from aerial photographs as part of the South East Rapid Coastal Zone Assessment Survey NMP (Component 2).

3.8 Aerial photographs taken in 1942 and 1945 show an extensive site, with probable barracks indicated by Nissen huts, roads, hard standings and circa 19 military buildings. The domestic side of the site is sheltered by a large berm extending along the seaward side, and the whole site is surrounded by barbed wire obstructions. A group of associated observation posts are visible on the southwestern side of the battery, at TR 2418 3777, TR 2415 3774, TR 2413 3770 and TR 2431 3771. Two of these are surrounded by blast walls. The OP at TR 2413 3770 is still extant on aerial photographs taken in 2007 (10-12).

3.9 Canterbury Archaeological Trust excavations following machine trial trenches at the site of the WWII memorial took place between June and July 2013. A large assemblage of Prehistoric flintwork was recovered:

Grid Reference:	TR 2455 3820
Map Sheet:	TR23NW
Parish:	CAPEL-LE-FERNE, DOVER, KENT

Monument Types

- FIND SPOT (Early Mesolithic to Late Neolithic - 10000 BC to 2351 BC)

Associated Finds

- STRUCK FLINT (Early Mesolithic to Late Neolithic - 10000 BC to 2351 BC)
- SHERD (Modern - 1901 AD to 2050 AD)

Full description of the archaeological investigations are:

Excavations following machine trial trenches at the site took place between June and July 2013.

A large assemblage of Prehistoric flintwork was recovered. The report summarises the excavations as follows:

“Following on from three machine-dug evaluation trenches, cut at the Battle of Britain Memorial site, Capel-le-Ferne (NGR 624560 138201, centred) in 2012, five smaller hand-dug trenches were excavated in June and August 2013 in order to more closely investigate the context of prehistoric flintwork discovered during the earlier work. The new trenches (Trenches 4–8) recovered more prehistoric flints, together with a small amount of prehistoric pottery. The bulk of the material was recovered from two adjoining trenches (Trenches 5 and 8), where it had been subjected to only limited disturbance. The identification of conjoining waste flakes, together a number of very small flakes and chips, indicates that knapping was taking place in this locality. The excavated flint assemblage, however, is not of one phase and contains material of Mesolithic, early Neolithic and later Neolithic date. Despite initial appearances, the flintwork cannot be accepted as representing an undisturbed prehistoric occupation horizon”.

1. Canterbury Archaeological Trust, 2014, *Battle of Britain Memorial Site, Capel-Le-Ferne, Kent: Archaeological Excavation report* (Unpublished document). SKE31093.

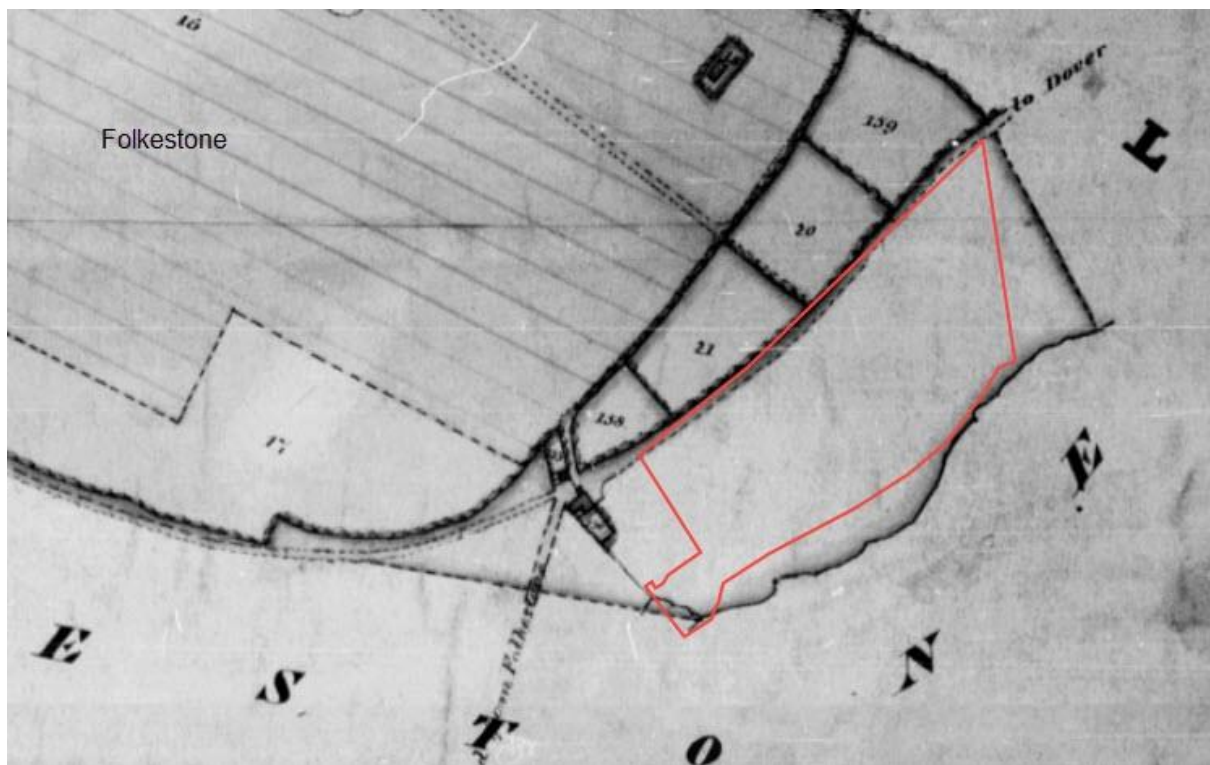
4.0 DISCUSSION

4.1 A review of the available data shows that archaeological sites both Prehistoric and WW11 are known within the 500m radius of the PDA.

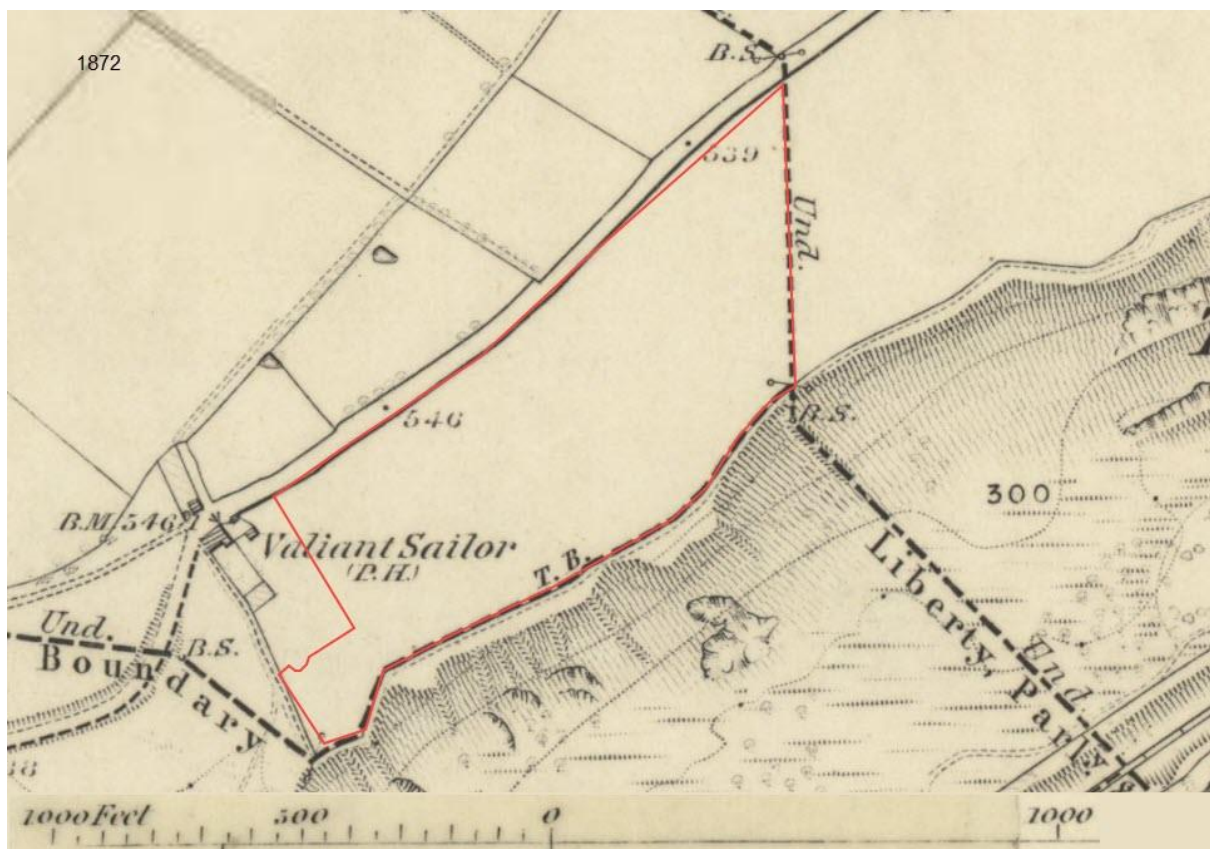
5.0 PARAMETERS

5.1 The archaeological survey was conducted using on-line data from Historic England and other agencies.

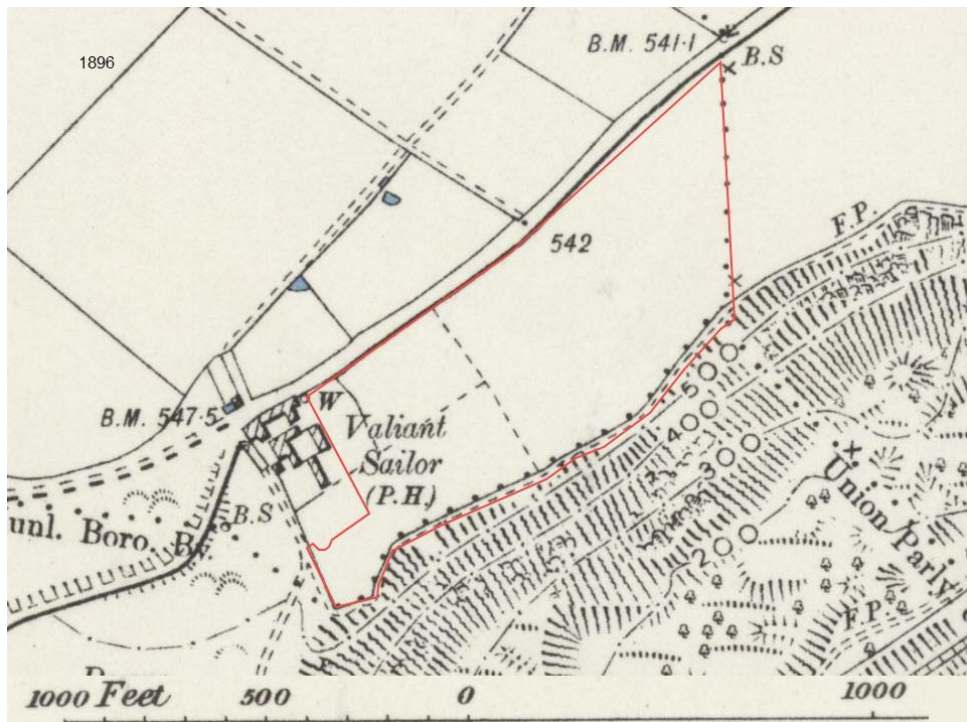
Paul Wilkinson PhD., MCIfA., FRSA. Dated 20th November 2024



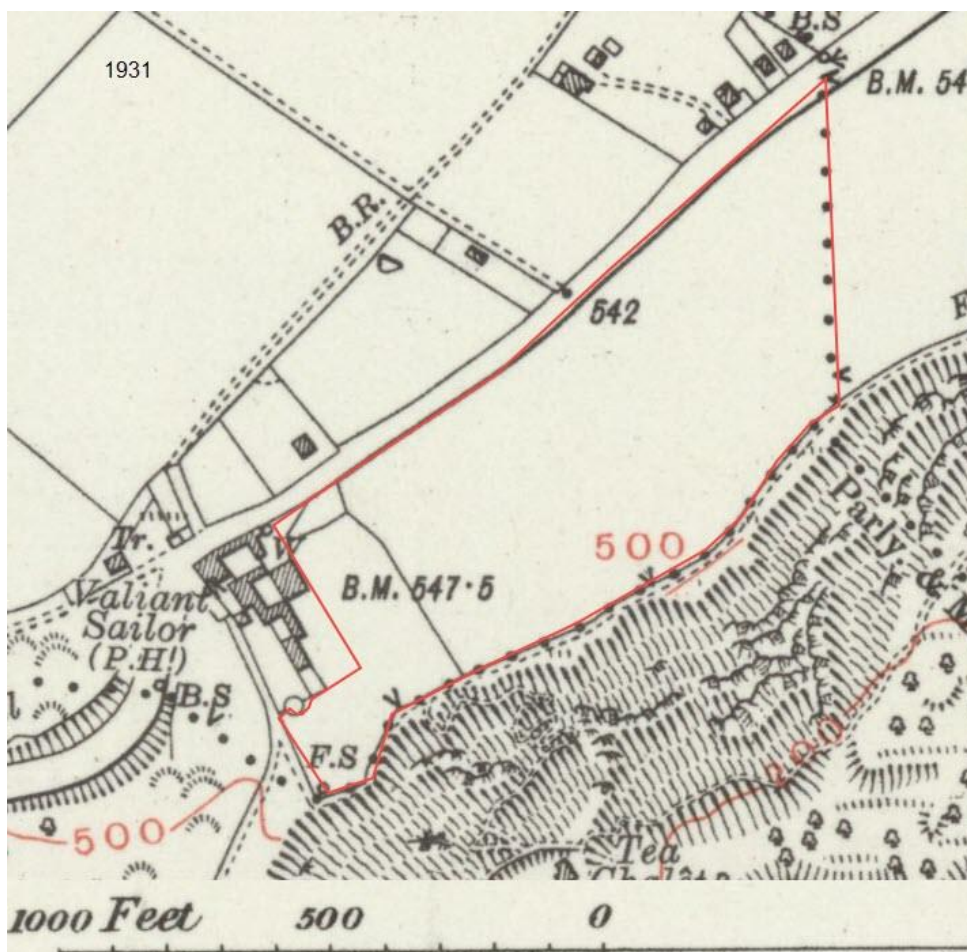
MAP 1. OS mapping c.1841 (Red line of Proposed Development Area (PDA))



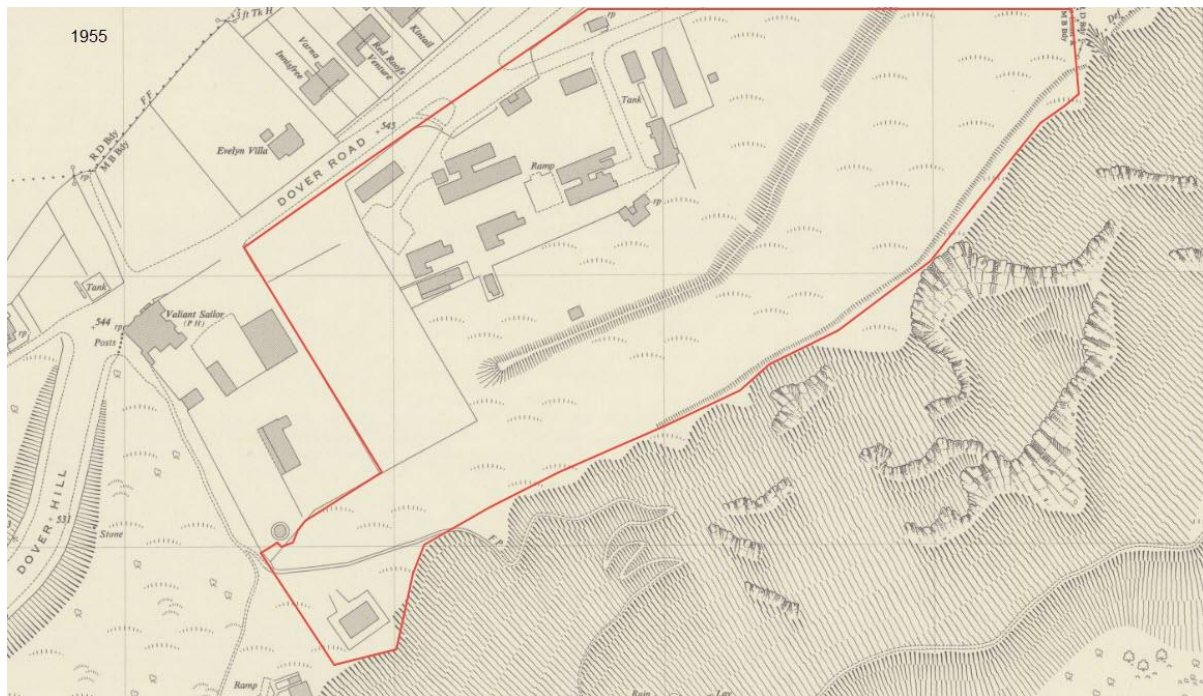
MAP 2. OS mapping c.1872



MAP 3. OS mapping c.1896



MAP 4. OS mapping c.1931



MAP 5. OS mapping 1955



MAP 6. KCCHER mapping c.2020



AP 1. C.1946 showing WWII installations



AP 2. C.1960 showing WWII installations



AP 3. c.2002 showing site cleared



AP4. c.2008 showing site cleared



AP5. 2023 showing site within red line