Archaeology South-East

ASE

Archaeological Evaluation Report
North-West Tower
Otford Palace, Otford
Kent

NGR: 552805 159194
(TQ 52805 59194)

Scheduled Monument No: SM KE 9, HA 1005197
SMC Ref: S00247831

ASE Project No: 240016
Site Code: ABP25
ASE Report No: 2025241
OASIS id: archaeol6-537939

By Lucy May

REGISTERED CIfA ORGANISATION

UCL Institute of Archaeology

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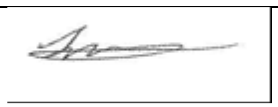
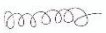
Prepared by:	**Lucy May**	**Project Officer**	
Reviewed and approved by:	**Dan Swift**	**Project Manager**	
Date of Issue:	**November 2025**		
Version:	**1**		

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Abstract

This report presents the results of an archaeological evaluation carried out by Archaeology South-East at the Northwest Tower, Otford Palace, Otford, Kent between the 7th and the 9th of October 2025. The fieldwork was commissioned by the Archbishop's Palace Conservation Trust in advance of the development of detailed architectural designs for the ground floor of the tower. Four test pits were excavated, 3 within the northwest tower and 1 outside the entrance to the tower.

The test pits were excavated to a depth at which water ingress occurred. No natural geology was encountered. A sterile silt-clay deposit recorded at the base of the sequence may represent a naturally formed layer. Within the trenches inside the tower, this deposit was sealed by a dark brown, grey silt clay which produced numerous finds such as CBM, metalwork and animal bone dating from the medieval to post-medieval periods. A truncated layer of mortar was recorded above this in all 3 of the internal test pits. A single fragment of green glazed tile was recovered from a trample layer above this and it may be therefore that the tower did indeed once have a green glazed tile floor, but that this was removed. The dating evidence suggests that this occurred probably in the 19th century. The test pit located outside the entrance to the tower exposed a sterile silt-clay deposit, similar to that within the tower, overlain by a made ground deposit of likely 19th-20th century date.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Background

1.1.1 Archaeology South-East was commissioned by the Archbishops Palace Conservation Trust to undertake an archaeological evaluation at Otford Palace, Palace Field, Otford, Kent (centred on NGR 552805 159194; Figure.1).

1.1.2 The site lies wholly within a Scheduled Monument, Otford Palace (List No. 1005197, Figure 1) which includes the remains of the medieval palace of the Archbishops of Canterbury surviving as upstanding remains, earthworks and below-ground archaeological remains.

1.1.3 Within the Scheduled Monument, upstanding remains include the Grade II* Listed Castle Cottages and Store Building at East End (NHLE List No. 1273146), the North-West Tower (attached to the west end of the cottages), Gatehouse (attached to the east end of the cottages), Grade II Listed remains of walls in the gardens of numbers 5-11 Bubblestone Road (List No. 1273169 and 1259003), and Grade II Listed Castle House (List No. 1259004).

1.2 Location, Geology and Topography

1.2.1 The palace covered a significant area and the corresponding Scheduled Monument encompasses an extensive area to the east of Sevenoaks Road, south of the parish church of St Bartholemew and north of Bubblestone Road. Extensions to the Scheduled Monument to the east are the locations of various ponds and of St Thomas a Becket's Well (Figure 1).

1.2.2 According to the data available from the British Geological Survey, the natural geology of the site comprises Gault Formation – Mudstone (BGS 2025).

1.3 Planning Background

1.3.1 As the site lies within a Scheduled Monument No. SM KE 9, HA 1005197, Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC Ref S00247831) is required for any intrusive works, including archaeological works. The SMC consent process is managed by Historic England for the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI; ASE 2025) for the archaeological works was prepared in accordance with the relevant Standards and Guidance of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2023a & b; 2014) and was submitted to all parties for approval prior to the commencement of work at the site.

1.3.2 All work will be reported upon in line with guidelines set out in Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment (MoRPHE; English Heritage 2015). All work will be carried out in accordance with the WSI and with the KCC standard specification (KCC 2007).

1.3.3 In the event that further archaeological work is required it will be subject to a separate WSI and SMC.

1.4 Scope of Report

1.4.1 This report details the archaeological evaluation which was carried out between the 7th and the 9th October 2025.

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The Archbishop's Palace Conservation Trust have extensive background documentation available on their website, including digital copies of various papers, publications and historic maps as well as recent photographs and drone images. Recent work has also been undertaken by ASE (e.g. ASE 2021, 2023) along Bubblestone Road. The following archaeological and historical background has been summarised from these sources with due acknowledgement.

2.1.2 Given the focus of the works is within the Tudor tower, only a brief summary of the pre-medieval periods is included here. It is however acknowledged that there is the possibility for remains of these earlier periods to be present. Further historical background on the palace can be found in WSI (ASE 2025).

2.2 Pre-medieval

2.2.1 Known archaeological remains of prehistoric date in the vicinity of the site generally comprise finds spots including Palaeolithic handaxes and Iron Age metalwork. The 'Pilgrim's Way', a prehistoric ridgeway, runs through the village to the north of the ste on an east - west alignment following the natural causeway of the southern slopes of the North Downs. The Otford area was well established during the Roman period with several settlement sites and many Romano-British date finds spots. The most significant of the sites is the Otford Villa, a Scheduled Monument located to the east of the site which comprises a minor Roman villa that was partially excavated in the 20th century (List No. 1005155).

2.3 Early medieval

2.3.1 Otford was known during the Saxon period as 'Ottanford' and in the Domesday Book as 'Otefort' (Hasted 1797). It is possible that Otford drew its name from 'Otta's Ford' after the founder of the settlement that was sited at a convenient crossing point on the river (Sevenoaks District Council 2010). The Church of St Bartholomew's, Otford, which lies just to the north of the site, is thought to contain late Saxon elements and may have been built shortly after 791, when Otford was granted to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Two famous Anglo-Saxon battles were fought at Otford; one in 773 between Offa, King of Mercia and Aldric, King of Kent, and the other in 1016, between the forces of Edmund Ironside and Cnut. In 790 or 791, Offa gave Otford, then known as 'Otteford', to the Archbishopric of Canterbury. Two Anglo-Saxon charters of 821 and 822 appear to convey a larger area to Wulfred, Archbishop of Canterbury (Ward 1929). This is thought to include the area of what was to become the Great Park; the nucleus of an estate which was, by 1086, one of the largest of the archepiscopal demesne manors (Stoyel 1985). The manorial centre may have been the same as that of the medieval moated complex discussed below. Otford remained in the archbishop's possession when the Domesday survey was conducted, in which it is recorded under the title of Terra Archiepi Cantuariensis (the land of the archbishop of Canterbury) (Sevenoaks District Council 2010; Ward 1929).

2.4 Medieval

2.4.1 Otford is recorded as an agricultural estate centre in the Domesday Book of 1089 and was probably in existence as a village by c.1200. The medieval house complex was situated to the south-east of the site, and south of what is now Castle Farm. It was

clearly of high status and is referred to as a 'palace' in Archbishop Peckham's Register of 1279-1292, the precursor to the 16th century palace is included within the SM. Various archbishops' accounts hint at the range of buildings/rooms which were present at the house. The accounts of Archbishop Reynolds (1313-27) include reference to a hall, lord's chamber and turrets, and kitchen (Clarke 1967). Various repairs are mentioned in the accounts through the medieval period. A new hall was built in 1382-3 and furnished with buttresses and battlements (ibid). The standing walls in the front gardens of nos. 5-11 Bubblestone Road are of random rubble. The list description identifies these as being of early 16th century date, but Stoyel suggests these are the retained walls of the medieval chapel buildings (Stoyel 1985). Similarly, those in the rear gardens which form the southern side to a water conduit are probably those of the medieval great hall. The complex sat within a moated enclosure, roughly located between the access track to Castle House and Bubblestone Road, c. 75m to the south of the site at its closet extent.

2.5 The Tuder Palace

2.5.1 Much of the medieval house complex was demolished on the orders of Archbishop Warham around 1514-18, to make way for a new palace. The size and scale of this new palace was dramatic, rivalling Hampton Court, described by Stoyel (1985) as an 'immense structural complex' reflecting the importance of archbishops as occupying a princely office second only to that of the sovereign.

2.5.2 A massive new courtyard was added to the north, with the northern arm of the moat reduced by channelling the water through a culvert defined by medieval and later stonework walls. On the north side of this courtyard was the principal gatehouse with towers (the site being the only above ground surviving tower), galleries running down the west and east sides (that to the west partly surviving as Castle Cottages).

2.6 Post-medieval

2.6.1 From 1576 onwards, the Sidney family continuously pressed the Crown for ownership of Otford and in 1601 the palace was finally sold to Henry Sidney's son, Robert Sidney (Sydney) of Penshurst Place. The Sidney's converted the western side of the north range (now Castle Cottages) to private quarters. However, Sidney also could not afford to repair the buildings, and they further deteriorated. Sir Robert Sidney sold the estate, including the palace, to Sir Thomas Smith in c.1618 (Hasted 1797). The north-east tower was demolished in 1761 and the stone transported to build Knole Folly. Most probably the remaining palace was largely demolished, and the lands of the Greater Park and Little Park were disparked soon after the grant of them to Sir Thomas Smith.

2.6.2 In 1790, the Place Farm, which included 'the Ruins of the Ancient Castle and Palace of Otford' was sold (Hesketh 1915). Hasted (1797) describes the palace in the late 18th century:

There is nothing left of the mansion [inner court] itself, but vast heaps of rubbish and foundations, which cover near an acre of ground. The present ruins were part of the outer court, the two remaining towers [i.e. the site] of which were not many years ago two stories higher, but the roof of the largest which was covered with lead falling in, the uppermost story of each was taken down.

2.6.3 The site remained ruinous thereafter and Otford Palace became a Scheduled Monument in 1928 (List No. 1005197), although the extents of the original scheduling are unknown. In 1935 Sevenoaks Rural District Council purchased '… the greater part

of the Palace site and remains' in order to protect them and retain them as open space. The southern part of the Palace, remained in private hands, and was developed through the 20th century, but some of the extant walls survived and are now listed. Excavations in 1974 to the south-east of the site, in the general vicinity of 11 Bubblestone Road, recorded the remains of medieval buildings, moat and Archbishop's Palace.

2.7 The Northwest Tower

2.7.1 The tower is of three storeys, constructed of locally made bricks, ragstone dressings, diapering detailing. Internally, each floor has a large hearth. Recent works have seen stabilisation of the structure and the installation of a roof. This tower has an octagonal plan, with the frontage being parallel to those of Castle Cottages and facing c. NNW. To the rear is an attached squared garderobe tower (SW) and octagonal stair tower (SE). The West Gallery would have attached to these but is no longer extant. Access to the ground floor of the tower itself is via a doorway between the garderobe and stair towers, with a second doorway providing direct access to the latter. Both these doorways would probably originally have been located internally, within the West Gallery. The Archbishop's Palace Conservation Trust has noted that there are earlier, undocumented reports of green tiles adjacent to the fireplace. Recent installation of a French Drain has established that there is some brickwork in the area between the garderobe and stair towers.

2.8 Project Aims and Objectives

2.8.1 The general objective of the archaeological work is to ensure that any deposits, features, artefacts or ecofacts of archaeological interest exposed by the evaluation are recorded, interpreted and reported on to appropriate standards and to enable appropriate mitigation methods. This will inform the development of the designs for the tower, and an appropriate programme of archaeological mitigation works.

2.8.2 Site-specific research aims are identified as follows:

- *What, if any, remains are there of the original flooring within the tower survive (it is reputed to have had a green glazed floor)?*
- *Do these extend across the whole of the tower floor?*
- *Can the brickwork in the area between the garderobe and stair towers be better defined, characterised and dated? Does it represent the remains of the West Gallery of the Tudor Palace?*
- *Is there evidence for deposits relating to the earlier medieval arch-episcopal manorial complex?*

2.8.3 Site-specific research aims are proposed below with reference to the South-East Research Framework (SERF; KCC 2025):

Medieval

- *Consider the role of ecclesiastical palaces within the pattern of elite residences designed for defence and display by the major gentry from an early period. Developments during the period in defensive walls and structures associated with private and ecclesiastical houses as well as towns (e.g. Canterbury, Chichester) can*

also be seen as affording protection from within the region as much as without [SERF Medieval, 8]

Post-medieval

- *A number of Royal and ecclesiastical houses/palaces exist in the region: 11 Royal houses were situated in Surrey alone by the time of the death of Henry VIII. The most notable excavations are those at Nonsuch, which have given a good insight into the nature of both the buildings and associated material culture (Biddle 2005), and the Archbishop's Palace at Otford (Philp 1984a), both sites demonstrating the massive nature of the remains associated with sites of this type. Can the investigation add anything to our understanding of this important building complex?* [SERF post-medieval, 10]

- *During the 16th century the increased desire for comfort and its easier attainability for the wealthier are demonstrated in the new style of large stately houses built across the region. These sites offer the opportunity to study the changing fashions and comforts of the upper-class houses and study this level of society which until now has mainly been undertaken using historical sources alone. Sampling of appropriate deposits for plant and animal remains has the potential to shed insights into the diet of the occupants, providing an often-illuminating comparison to the historical sources (Ayres 2011; Locker 2005).* [SERF post-medieval, 9].

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

3.1 Fieldwork Methodology

(Figures 2-3)

3.1.1 The evaluation set out to comprise of three hand-dug trial holes with two being located within the tower and one located outside the doorway. During the works, it was agreed between all parties that a fourth (Test pit 4) was also to be excavated inside the tower.

3.1.2 All test pits were placed where accessible and where it would not interfere with access and egress within the tower. Test pit 1 was located inside the main tower and measured 2.5m by 0.80 wide. A deeper sondage was excavated towards the southern end of the test pit. Test pit 2 was located within the garderobe off to the side of the tower, this measured 0.76m by 0.53. Test pit 3 was located outside the entrance to the tower and measured 1.77m by 1.1m. A deeper sondage was excavated towards the southern end of the test pit.

3.1.3 Test pit 4 was located just inside the doorway, to check that the results of Test pit 1 continued further into the room. This measured 0.50m by 0.50m.

3.1.4 Excavation was to be undertaken by hand to the depth of the Tudor floor level or the natural geology (Mudstone of the Gault Formation); whichever was encountered first. In the event, natural geology was not reached in any of the tests pit due to the water table being higher than the level of the geology.

3.1.5 The trenches were reduced by hand in spits of no more than 0.10m with artefact recovery taking place throughout.

3.1.6 A digital photographic record was maintained of the work throughout.

3.1.7 All fieldwork and recording was carried out in accordance with the Written Scheme of Investigation (ASE 2025), and Charted Institute for Archaeologists guidelines (CIfA 2023a, 2023b and 2024).

3.2 Archive

3.2.1 The site archive will be held at the offices of ASE in the short-term and will be assembled in accordance with the guidelines set out in: ‘Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections’ (SMA 2020).

Context sheets	19
Section sheets	1
Plans sheets	1
Colour photographs	0
B&W photos	0
Digital photos	92
Context register	1
Drawing register	2
Watching brief forms	0
Trench Record forms	0

Table 1: Quantification of site paper and digital archive

Bulk finds (quantity e.g. 1 bag, 1 box, 0.5 box)	2 boxes
Registered finds (number of)	2
Flots and environmental remains from bulk samples	0
Palaeoenvironmental specialists sample samples (e.g. columns, prepared slides)	0
Waterlogged wood	0
Wet sieved environmental remains from bulk samples	0

Table 2: Quantification of artefact and environmental samples

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Test pit 1

(Figure 4)

4.1.1 Test pit 1 was the largest of the test pits and was located near to the fireplace in the north-west corner of the ground floor of the tower.

4.1.2 The stratigraphy for this test pit consisted of a dark brown grey, clay silt layer, [008], which produced occasional snail shells. Water ingress caused the excavation to cease at 0.77m depth below ground level.

4.1.3 Layer [008] was overlain with by a similar dark, brown, grey, silt clay layer, [003], which produced Ceramic Building Material (CBM) comprised of roof tile dated to the medieval - post-medieval period. Two fragments of Roman to the post-medieval period iron nails were also collected along with animal bones comprised of cattle, dog and birds which are likely indicative of the disuse of the tower over time.

4.1.4 Overlying [003] was a thin, patchy layer of mixed mortar and dark grey, silt clay, [002], which may be the remains of a partly robbed-out and trampled floor surface.

4.1.5 Above this, located close to the fireplace, was a thin layer of orange sand, [019] which was likely bedding for the floor.

4.1.6 This was overlain by a thin layer of mortar [018].

4.1.7 This was overlain in places by several bricks and stones, [017] forming the fireplace floor.

4.1.8 Across most of the test pit a layer of trample [001] was recorded at the top of the sequence. This comprised a mid-grey brown, silt clay and produced a small assemblage of medieval CBM. A small quantity of roof tile with glaze splashes present indicates the medieval date alongside a single fragment of green glazed floor tile. However, the remaining CBM from the layer comprised of post-medieval material.

4.2 Test pit 2

(Figure 5)

4.2.1 Test pit 2 was located in the far southwestern corner of the garderobe and measured 076m by 0.53m. Water ingress caused the excavation to cease at 0.56m depth below ground level.

4.2.2 The lowest deposit encountered was layer [006], a mid-brown grey, silt clay with frequent fragments CBM comprised of roof tile with round peg holes which is an indicator of medieval roof tiles as well as a small collection of bricks which date between the medieval to post-medieval period. A single fragment of iron nail was recovered which is a type found from the Roman period up to the post-medieval period. Numerous animal bones from a pig, rabbit and several birds were also recovered suggesting a level of disuse of the tower over time.

4.2.3 Overlying this was a layer of mixed mortar and clay [005]. Three fragments of pottery were recovered from this deposit which all date from the mid-late 19th century.

4.2.4 This was overlain by a layer of mid-brown, yellow, silt clay [004], which is most likely trample material.

4.2.5 A stone/mortar footing for the existing wall [007] was encountered close to the surface overlying [005] along the western edge of the test pit.

4.3 Test pit 3

(Figure 6)

4.3.1 Test pit 3 was located outside the door to the tower, at the south-east of the corner of the garderobe. Due to the access in and the area being tight, the test pit measured 1.77m by 1.10m. Water ingress caused the excavation to cease at 0.63m depth below ground level.

4.3.2 The lowest deposit encountered was a layer of soft, light, brown, grey, silt clay [011], which produced moderate fragments of CBM which included roof tile dated medieval to post-medieval as well as fragments of brick and mortar dated from the 19th century. A fragment of salt-glazed stoneware pipe of 19th-20th century date was also recovered from this deposit.

4.3.3 Along the western side of the test pit, the footing for the existing tower wall, comprised of stone and mortar [016], which was found 0.18m below ground level.

4.3.4 This was overlain by a dark brown grey, silt clay [010] with frequent roots which produced a small group of roof tile, floor tile and brick dated between the medieval and post-medieval period alongside fragments of Welsh roofing slates. A small assemblage of pottery, all dated to the late post-medieval period, as well as fragments of glass dated to the 19th-20th century. Fragments of animal bones from a sheep or goat were recovered alongside a number of fragments of metalwork which includes two registered finds, <1>, an iron horseshoe and <2> an iron staple, both of which are likely post-medieval base on the surrounding material.

4.3.5 This deposit was then overlain by a layer of Terram sealed with a layer of topsoil, [009], a loose, mid-brown grey, silt clay.

4.4 Test pit 4

(Figure 7)

4.4.1 Test pit 4 was located just inside the entrance to the tower and measured 0.5m by 0.5m. Water ingress caused the excavation to cease at 0.30m depth below ground level.

4.4.2 A layer of dark, grey brown, clay silt [015].

4.4.3 This was overlain by a dark brown grey, silt clay [014] which had frequent CBM.

4.4.4 This was overlain by a patchy mortar layer [013], likely the remains of a floor and a layer of trample [012].

Test pit	Context	Type	Interpretation	Length m	Width m	Thickness m	Levels mOD
TP1	001	layer	Trample	2.50	0.80	0.10	66.08
TP1	002	layer	Mortar	2.50	0.80	0.02	
TP1	003	layer	Grey layer	2.50	0.80	0.30	
TP2	004	layer	Trample	0.76	0.53	0.60	65.92
TP2	005	fill	Mortar	0.76	0.53	0.60	
TP2	006	fill	Grey Layer	0.76	0.53	0.60	65.37
TP2	007	masonry	Footings	0.80	0.26	0.20	65.91
TP1	008	layer	Grey layer	2.50	0.80	0.33	
TP3	009	layer	Topsoil	1.10	1.77	0.08	66.22
TP3	010	layer	Backfill	1.10	1.77	0.38	
TP3	011	layer	Grey layer	1.10	1.77	0.20	66.05
TP4	012	fill	Trample	0.50	0.50	0.10	66.09
TP4	013	fill	Mortar	0.50	0.50	0.05	
TP4	014	fill	Grey layer	0.50	0.50		
TP4	015	layer	Grey layer	0.50	0.50		
TP3	016	masonry	Footings	1.10	>0.26	0.28	65.48
TP1	017	masonry	Fireplace floor	1.50	1.26	0.10	66.14
TP1	018	layer	Mortar	1.30	0.20	0.20	
TP1	019	layer	Sand	0.90	0.80	0.03	

Table 3: List of recorded contexts

5.0 THE FINDS

5.1 Summary

5.1.1 A moderate assemblage of finds was recovered during the evaluation at the Archbishop's Palace, Otford. Finds (other than any of iron and copper alloy) requiring cleaning were washed by hand and left to air dry as appropriate. They were subsequently quantified by count and weight and bagged by material and context. The hand-collected bulk finds are quantified in Table 4.

5.1.2 Two finds have been assigned unique registered finds numbers, detailed in section 5.10 and in Table 5. All metal objects other than those of lead will be x radiographed according to Historic England guidelines (Fell et al 2006). Conservation of artefacts, where required, has been carried out, or is ongoing. All finds have been packed and stored following CIfA guidelines (2014). If conservation recommendations have been made, they are detailed in the relevant material section.

Context	Pottery	Weight (g)	CBM	Weight (g)	Stone	Weight (g)	Bulk Metal	Weight (g)	Bone	Weight (g)	Glass	Weight (g)	Shell	Weight (g)
001			11	684										
003			7	449			2	3	14	76				
005	3	184	1	1										
006			8	5452			1	8	43	19				
008													13	5
010	16	345	24	1255	12	95	7	107	3	36	5	43		
011			8	1069										
Total	**19**	**529**	**59**	**8910**	**12**	**95**	**10**	**118**	**60**	**131**	**5**	**43**	**13**	**5**

Table 4: Quantification of hand-collected bulk finds

RF	Context	Material	Object	Count	Weight (g)	Period	Notes
1	010	IRON	HORSESHOE	1	20	?Post-med	Incomplete, iron horseshoe
2	010	IRON	STAPLE	1	90	Med to post-med	U shaped, Iron staple with sub-circular section

Table 5: Summary of the Registered Finds

5.2 **The Post-Roman Pottery** by Luke Barber

5.2.1 The archaeological work recovered 19 sherds of post-Roman pottery, weighing 529g, from two individually numbered contexts. The material has been fully listed by common ware name in Table 6 as part of the visible archive. The pottery consists of small to large sherds with the earliest being notably the smaller and more abraded. The later material is characterised by medium to large fresh sherds. As such the bulk of the material does not appear to have been subjected to any significant reworking.

5.2.2 All of the pottery is of the late post-medieval period. The earliest sherds consist of the

small slightly worn scraps of creamware and pearlware in context [010] that represent residual pieces of the later 18th to early 19th centuries. The Yellow ware and blue transfer-printed Asiatic pheasant plate are probably of mid to later 19th- century date. The remainder of the assemblage is characterised by larger fresher sherds and all of this material can easily be placed in the early 20th century. The assemblage is essentially domestic in nature, the flower holder could have been used for internal decoration as well as in garden or cemetery settings.

5.2.3 The pottery assemblage is small, mixed and of types well known of in the area. It is not considered to hold any potential for further analysis beyond that undertaken for this report and is not suitable for long-term curation in a museum. As such it has been added to the pool of material held for handling/teaching.

Context	**Fabric**	**No**	**Weight (g)**	**Comments** (including estimated number of different vessels represented by form. ? = undiagnostic of form)
005	Blue transfer-printed refined whiteware	1	17	Plate x1 (Asiatic pheasant)
005	Red transfer-printed refined whiteware	1	163	Plate x1 (Floral/foliage design with black infill between on rim)
005	English stoneware	1	4	Preserve jar x1 (grey Bristol glaze, close-set vertical grooves on body)
010	Creamware	1	2	?Bowl x1
010	Pearlware (transfer-printed)	1	1	Plate x1 (unclear design)
010	Yellow ware	1	3	Jug x1 (brown annular slip lines & white bands)
010	Bone china (porcelain)	1	2	Saucer x1 (x2 gold gilt rim edge lines)
010	Refined buff earthenware	12	337	Flower holder x1 (Domed top with 38mm diameter aperture surrounded by 13mm diameter apertures. White glaze on exterior only

Table 6: Post-Roman pottery assemblage (Late Post-Medieval c. 1750-1900+)

5.3 The Ceramic Building Material by Rae Regensberg

5.3.1 A moderate assemblage of ceramic building material (CBM) consisting of 59 fragments, collectively weighing 8,910g, was recovered from six contexts at the site. The dateable assemblage appears to be mostly post-medieval in date but there is a small group of medieval material mixed in with the post-medieval material. The bulk of the assemblage is broadly medieval to post-medieval.

5.3.2 All of the material was recorded by form, weight, complete dimensions (when present) and fabric, and entered into an Excel spreadsheet. Fabrics were identified with the aid of a x20 binocular microscope, and site specific fabric codes have been applied using the following conventions: frequency of inclusions (sparse, moderate, common, abundant); the size of inclusions, fine (up to 0.25mm), medium (0.25-0.5mm), coarse (0.5-1.0mm) and very coarse (larger than 1.0mm). Fabric descriptions are provided in Table 7.

5.3.3 Flat roof tile made up the majority of the assemblage with forty fragments. Eight fabrics were identified in the roof tile assemblage, which suggests debris from a number of different sources, some possibly collected for rubble fill, hardcore etc. The fabrics were

quite varied (Table 7) and most were represented by fewer than five fragments. Only fabric T2 had more than ten individual fragments. Clearly none of the tile was in situ.

Fabric	Description
T1	Orange fabric with areas of sparse fine quartz and sparse very fine calcareous speckling.
T2	Orange fabric with common very fine calcareous speckling, sparse fine to medium dark red oxidised material and sparse fine quartz.
T3	Orange fabric with moderate fine quartz and sparse fine black oxdised material.
T4	Hackly orange fabric with sparse black oxidised material.
T5	Orange fabric with common to abundant fine quartz and sparse fine black oxidised material.
T6	Cream fabric with sparse fine to coarse dark red oxidised material.
T7	White/grey fabric with abundant fine quartz.
T8	Orange fabric with moderate quartz, mostly rose quartz.
FT1	Orange fabric with sparse fine quartz, sparse very fine calcareous speckling and sparse fine to coarse black oxidised material.
FT2	Fine orange fabric with cream streaking and fine speckle, sparse fine dark red oxidised material and sparse fine quartz.
B1	Yellow fabric with abundant white speckle and sparse fine to medium red oxidised material.
B2	Red fabric with common fine quartz and sparse black oxidised material.
B2A	Orange, much fine version.
B3	Yellow fabric with abundant fine quartz.
M1	Pinkish white lime mortar with common fine dark red oxidised material.
M2	Sandy, white lime mortar.
M3	Sandy, mustard lime mortar.
P1	Cream to buff stoneware pipe.

Table 7: Ceramic building material fabric descriptions

5.3.4 A small quantity of the roof tile had glaze splashes present (all T1 fabrics), which indicates a medieval date as glazed roof tile was common up to the 15th century (Pringle 2020, 28). There were also two tiles with round peg holes, another indicator of medieval roof tile, although less reliable than glazing. The medieval fragments were retrieved from fill [001] and backfill [006]. However, they were found in association with post-medieval CBM. Most of the tile was too fragmented for any dimensions other than thickness to be recorded, this ranged between 10mm to 15mm, but there were two larger pieces from backfill [6], one of which was 263mm long, and the other was 160mm in width. The full-length fragment had a diamond peg hole (14mm x 14mm), which is an indicator of a post-medieval date. The full width fragment had round peg holes in each corner of approximately 13mm diameter. Roof tile dated medieval to post-medieval was collected from contexts [003], [010] and [011].

5.3.5 Two pieces of floor tile were recorded. One was retrieved from fill [001]. It had a green glaze, was in the FT2 fabric, had bevelled sides and was 30mm thick. Glazed floor tile is found in the medieval period, and floor tile 30mm and over is commonly seen in the Tudor period. The second fragment of floor tile was recovered from backfill [010]. It was heavily abraded on the upper surface, with bevelled sides and was 25mm thick. No glaze was visible, although it may have been abraded off.

5.3.6 A small collection of bricks were retrieved. Consisting of eight pieces in three fabrics, B1 to B3. Five bricks were in the B2 fabric and the remaining fabrics were represented

by one fragment apiece. Two of the B2 pieces had sunken margins, rounded arrises and notable creasing on the stretchers, all of which are indicators of medieval to early post-medieval brick. These fragments were collected from backfill [006]. Most of the bricks were generally post-medieval but there was one late post-medieval brick in the B3 fabric, also collected from backfill [006]. It was 100mm in width and 60mm thick, had sharp arrises and a neat, consistent form. The rest of the brick was retrieved from contexts [010] and [011].

5.3.7 Several pieces of lime mortar were collected from contexts [001], [006] and [011]. These consisted of a pinkish type, a white mortar and a mustard-coloured mortar (Table 7). Coloured mortars were popular in the 19th century, although not exclusively found in this period. Lastly, a 19th to 20th century piece of salt-glazed stoneware pipe was collected from fill [011].

5.4 The Glass by Elke Raemen

5.4.1 A small assemblage, comprising five fragments of glass with a combined weight of 43g, was found in backfill [010]. Three colourless fragments from a cylindrical vessel, e.g. a bottle or jar, date to the 19th or early 20th century. Included are two body shards as well as a base fragment. Two colourless window glass fragments of similar date were also recovered.

5.5 The Geological Material by Luke Barber

5.5.1 The archaeological work recovered just 12 pieces of stone from the site. The material has been fully listed in Table 8 as part of the visible archive.

Context	Stone type	No	Weight (g)	Comments
010	Coal	2	7	Shiny
010	Welsh slate	10	88	to 4mm thick

Table 8**:** Stone assemblage

5.5.2 The assemblage consists of a scatter of Welsh roofing slates, typical for mid-19th- to early 20th- century roofing, and two small pieces of coal. All are in keeping with the associated pottery.

5.5.3 The stone is of well-known types for the area/period and is not considered to hold any potential for further analysis. The assemblage has been discarded.

5.6 The Industrial Waste by Luke Barber

5.6.1 A single piece of slag was recovered from the site (Table 9).

Context	Slag type	No	Weight (g)	Comments
010	Clinker	1	4	Black, aerated

Table 9: The slag assemblage

5.6.2 The slag is waste from burning coal as fuel and is probably simply part of the spread of 19th- to 20th- century domestic waste. It is not considered to hold any potential for further analysis and has been discarded.

5.7 **The Bulk Metalwork** by Rae Regensberg

5.7.1 Seven incomplete, general purpose iron nails were recovered. All of the nails have rectangular stems. Four were found in backfill [010], two in fill [003] and one in backfill [006]. Nails of this type are found from the Roman period up to the post-medieval period. Two incomplete pieces of iron strap were also collected from backfill [010]. They are both 31.5mm in width with a thickness of approximately 1.7mm, which suggests that they are either from the same object, or two matching straps. Lastly, a late 19th to 20th century, white metal finial with a hemispherical glass terminal was also collected in backfill [010].

5.8 **The Animal Bone** by Emily Johnson

5.8.1 A total of 58 animal bone specimens, weighing 131g, was recovered by hand-collection during the evaluation (Table 10). Three contexts from the three test pits yielded animal bone; a fill [003] from the main central tower floor, a backfill [006] from the garderobe area, and a backfill [010] outside the current door to the tower. Specimens were all well-preserved.

English name	**Taxonomic identification**	**Context**			**Total**
		003	006	010	
Mammals					
Cattle	*Bos taurus*	1			1
Caprine (Sheep/Goat)	*Ovis aries/ Capra hircus*			2	2
Pig	*Sus scrofa domesticus*		1		1
Dog	*Canis lupus familiaris*	1			1
Rabbit	*Oryctolagus cuniculus*		1		1
Birds					
c.f. Woodpigeon	c.f. *Columba palumbus*	1			1
Pigeon family	Columbidae sp.	1	19		20
c.f. Jackdaw	c.f. *Coloeus monedula*	8			8
Corvid family	Corvidae sp.		6		6
c.f. Starling	c.f. *Sturnus vulgaris*		1		1
Indeterminate bird		1	15		16
Total		**13**	**43**	**3**	**58**

Table 10: Taxa abundance per context by Number of Identifiable Specimens (NISP).

Methodology

5.8.2 The assemblage was recorded onto an excel spreadsheet following Historic England guidelines (Baker and Worley 2019). Taxa identification used the ASE faunal reference collection and manuals (Hillson 1992; Schmid 1972; Cohen and Serjeantson 1998) and bone zones present were noted (Serjeantson 1996; Cohen and Serjeantson 1998). Specimens were assessed for evidence of surface modifications (butchery, heat exposure, taphonomic agents) and pathology.

Results

5.8.3 The assemblage is likely indicative of redeposited waste over the tower's periods of multiple uses, and of the local wildlife using the building.

5.8.4 Certain specimens could be indicative of human activity. Cattle, caprine (sheep/goat), and pig bones and teeth could be the result of carcass processing or meat consumption waste, although no definitive evidence of butchery was recorded. The presence of a dog ulna may also be suggestive of redeposited waste, possibly a disturbed burial or deposit of an unwanted dog carcass. However, with such a small sample size, it is difficult to ascribe an origin to any of these domestic animal bones.

5.8.5 The wild species present included a single rabbit bone from backfill [006]. Rabbits are not uncommon on archaeological sites and are generally taken to be indicative of relatively modern bioturbation. This specimen thus could be further evidence that disturbance and redeposition likely contributed to the site's taphonomic history. That said, rabbits were also high-status animals in the Palace's heyday (Bailey 1988), and warrens were relatively common in these types of landscapes (Mileson 2018: 329). Further research into whether a rabbit warren was part of the grounds at Otford may contribute to this discussion. A preliminary investigation found no mention of a warren at Otford in Pittman's detailed analysis of primary sources for Elizabethan and Jacobean deer parks in Kent, although warrens are included for other sites (Pittman 2011, 428-434).

5.8.6 The majority of wild species present were birds, particularly pigeons and corvids, likely woodpigeons and jackdaws in the vast majority. Smaller species of bird, likely starling, were also in evidence. Skeletal part representation showed wing, leg, torso and skull fragments among the assemblage. There is possible evidence of birds nesting in the tower from occasional juvenile specimens. It is likely that most bones were the result of accumulated natural deaths, with multiple specimens qualitatively likely to come from the same individual.

Discussion

5.8.7 These animal bones offer an interesting snapshot of the accumulated and redeposited detritus from a period of disturbance and disuse. Our understanding of the assemblage could benefit from comparisons with unpublished zooarchaeological datasets from previous excavations at the Palace, and possibly C14 dating and further research into rabbit warrens.

5.9 **The Shell** by Rae Regensberg

5.9.1 Thirteen fragments of land mollusc, collectively weighing 5g, were retrieved from fill [008]. Based on Cameron's (2003) identification, eight fragments appear to be pieces of adult *Helicella itala*, and three are possibly *Monacha cantiana.* The identification is tentative as the condition of the shell is poor. The remaining fragments are small and have no distinguishing features.

5.10 **The Registered Finds** by Rae Regensberg

5.10.1 An incomplete, iron horseshoe, RF<1>, consisting of a section of one heel was recovered from backfill [010]. No calkin and no nail hole visible are visible, although x-radiography is still to be done and nail holes may then be identified. The heel had a maximum width of 20.5mm and a thickness of 5.1mm. With such a small fragment, it is difficult to date closely but a post-medieval date is considered probable considering the late post-medieval finds (pot, glass and CBM) found in the same context.

5.10.2 RF <2> is an incomplete, iron staple also collected from backfill [010]. The staple is U

shaped, has a sub-circular section with one terminal point narrowing to a blunt point. The other terminal point has broken off. It is 69.1mm in length, 61.3mm wide and has a maximum diameter of 14.5mm. Although most staples have a rectangular section, several examples in Goodall (2011) have circular sections (e.g.179;181 H123, H127). Staples of this type have been found in both medieval and post-medieval periods, although, as with the horseshoe, is likely to be post-medieval based on the other material found in the context.

6.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Overview of stratigraphic sequence

6.1.1 The overall stratigraphic sequence of the test pits comprised of a lower dark brown grey, clay silt in which the water table started to appear within the test pits. This deposit was sterile with very occasional snail shells present. Overlying this was a similar dark brown, grey silt clay which contained fragments of CBM, slate and metalwork, all of which gave a broad medieval to post-medieval date. A layer of disturbed mortar and clay overlying the darker material is likely the disturbed remains of an early floor. This produced post-medieval pottery and CBM. This early floor appeared to be sealed by a trampled layer of material, a mid-grey brown, silt clay, which produced a small assemblage of medieval to post-medieval CBM. Natural geology was not reached in any of the test pits.

6.1.2 In Test pit 1, above the early floor, the brick and stone floor for the existing fireplace was recorded.

6.1.3 Within Test pits 2 and 3, the stone and mortar footings of the garderobe walls were recorded between 0.01-0.18m below ground level. In Test pit 3, outside the tower a thick layer of medieval to post-medieval made ground was recorded.

6.1.4 The archaeological trenching was successfully employed and resulted in finding no evidence of existing floor other than small areas around the fireplace.

6.2 Deposit survival and existing impacts

6.2.1 A layer of disturbed mortar and clay interpreted as the disturbed remains of an early floor on which perhaps floor tiles would have been placed were recorded in all 3 of the internal test pits. This was overlain by layers of trample. No evidence for an intact tiled floor was uncovered.

6.3 Discussion of archaeological remains by period

6.3.1 Two layers of silt-clay containing finds of a broad medieval and post-medieval date were the earliest deposits recorded. Above this a layer of disturbed mortar and clay containing 3 fragments of mid-late 19th century pottery, interpreted as the disturbed remains of an early floor (on which perhaps floor tiles would have been placed) were recorded in all 3 of the internal test pits. It seems likely that any potential tiled surface above this was robbed away. This was overlain by layers of trample. Only one fragment of green glazed tile was recovered, and this was from the uppermost trample layer recorded in Test pit 1. Part of the brick and stone fireplace floor was located adjacent to Test pit 1.

6.3.2 Test pit 3, located outside the tower, had a stratigraphic sequence of the similar dark brown, grey silt clay, which produced CBM dated between the medieval to post-medieval period. Overlying this was a thick layer of material comprised primarily of discarded brickwork and tile of medieval-post-medieval date. A large quantity of other post-medieval finds including metalwork, glass, and pottery were also recovered.

6.4 Consideration of research aims

6.4.1 The general objectives of the archaeological work have been met.

6.4.2 In terms of the site-specific research aims, a layer of disturbed mortar and clay containing 3 fragments of mid-late 19th century pottery, interpreted as the disturbed remains of an early floor (on which perhaps floor tiles would have been placed) were recorded in all 3 of the internal test pits. One fragment of green glazed tile was recovered from a trample layer above this in Test pit 1. It seems possible therefore to conclude that a green glazed tile surface above this may have been robbed away in post-medieval times.

6.4.3 In terms of addressing the South-East Research Framework (SERF; KCC 2025) aims, the rabbit and other animal bone recovered from the test pits may have some potential to shed insights into the diet of 16th century onwards occupants of the property.

6.5 Conclusions

6.5.1 Four test pits were excavated, 3 within the northwest tower and 1 outside the entrance. The test pits were excavated to a depth at which water ingress occurred. No natural geology was encountered. A sterile silt-clay deposit recorded at the base of the sequence may represent a naturally formed layer. Within the trenches inside the tower, this deposit was sealed by a dark brown, grey silt clay which produced numerous finds such as CBM, metalwork and animal bone dating from the medieval to post-medieval periods. A truncated layer of mortar was recorded above this in all 3 of the internal test pits. A single fragment of green glazed tile was recovered from a trample layer above this, and it may be therefore, that the tower did indeed once have a green glazed tile floor, but that this was removed. The dating evidence suggests that this occurred probably in the 19th century. The test pit located outside the entrance to the tower exposed a sterile silt-clay deposit, similar to that within the tower, overlain by a made ground deposit of likely 19th-20th century date.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ASE would like to thank the Archbishops Palace Conservation Trust for commissioning the work and for their assistance throughout the project, and Lena Delaney, Assistant Inspector of Ancient Monuments (Sussex and Kent), Historic England for her guidance and monitoring. The evaluation was directed by Lucy May. Adam Cheshire produced the figures for this report; Leonie Pett managed the excavations and Dan Swift the post-excavation process.

HER Summary

Site code	ABP25					
Project code	240016					
Planning reference	SMC Ref S00247831					
Site address	Northwest Tower, Otford Palace, Otford,					
District/Borough	Kent					
NGR (12 figures)	552805 159194					
Geology	Gault Formation – Mudstone					
Fieldwork type	Eval					
Date of fieldwork	7th – 9th October 2025					
Sponsor/client	Archbishops Palace Conservation Trust					
Project manager	Leonie Pett					
Project supervisor	Lucy May					
Period summary						
			Medieval	Post-Medieval		
Project summary	Four test pits were excavated, 3 within the northwest tower and 1 outside the entrance. The test pits were excavated to a depth at which water ingress occurred. No natural geology was encountered. A sterile silt-clay deposit recorded at the base of the sequence may represent a naturally formed layer. Within the trenches inside the tower, this deposit was sealed by a dark brown, grey silt clay which produced numerous finds such as CBM, metalwork and animal bone dating from the medieval to post-medieval periods. A truncated layer of mortar was recorded above this in all 3 of the internal test pits. A single fragment of green glazed tile was recovered from a trample layer above this, and it may be therefore, that the tower did indeed once have a green glazed tile floor, but that this was removed. The dating evidence suggests that this occurred probably in the 19th century. The test pit located outside the entrance to the tower exposed a sterile silt-clay deposit, similar to that within the tower, overlain by a made ground deposit of likely 19th-20th century date.					

Finds summary

Find type	Material	Period	Quantity
CBM	Ceramic	Medieval – Post Medieval	10656g
Pottery	Ceramic	Post-Medieval	586g
Stone	Stone	Medieval – Post medieval	122g
Iron	Iron	Roman-Post Medieval	226g
Metal	Metal	Roman-Post Medieval	43g
Bone	Bone	Post Medieval	131g
Glass	Glass	Post Medieval	43g
Shell	Shell	Unknown	5g

OASIS Form

OASIS ID (UID): archaeol6-537939

Project Name: Northwest Tower, Otford Palace, Otford, Kent

Activity type: Evaluation

Sitecode(s): ABP25

Project Identifier(s): 240016

Reason for Investigation: Scheduled monument consent

Organisation Responsible for work: Archaeology South-East

Project Dates: 07-Oct-2025 - 09-Oct-2025

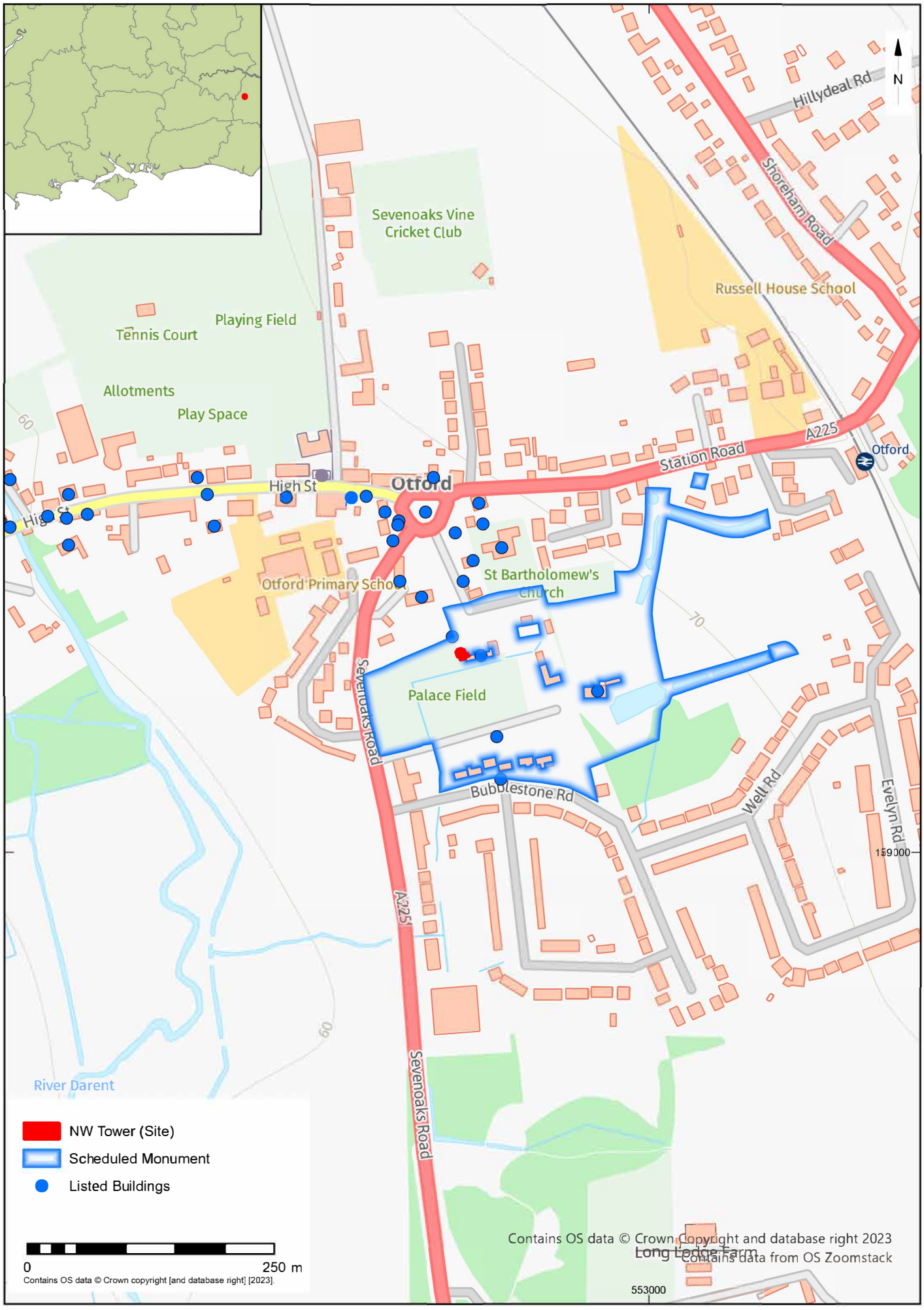
HER: Kent HER

HER: SMC Ref S00247831

Project Methodology: Four hand-dug test pits were excavated, 3 within the northwest tower and 1 outside the entrance.

Project Results: The test pits were excavated to a depth at which water ingress occurred. No natural geology was encountered. A sterile silt-clay deposit recorded at the base of the sequence may represent a naturally formed layer. Within the trenches inside the tower, this deposit was sealed by a dark brown, grey silt clay which produced numerous finds such as CBM, metalwork and animal bone dating from the medieval to post-medieval periods. A truncated layer of mortar was recorded above this in all 3 of the internal test pits. A single fragment of green glazed tile was recovered from a trample layer above this, and it may be therefore, that the tower did indeed once have a green glazed tile floor, but that this was removed. The dating evidence suggests that this occurred probably in the 19th century. The test pit located outside the entrance to the tower exposed a sterile silt-clay deposit, similar to that within the tower, overlain by a made ground deposit of likely 19th-20th century date.

Reports in OASIS: May, L., (2025). An Archaeological Evaluation at Northwest Tower, Otford Palace, Otford, Kent. Portslade: Archaeology South-East. 2025241



© Archaeology South-East		North-West Tower, Otford Palace, Kent	Fig. 1
Project Ref: 240016	October 2025	Site Location	
Report Ref: 2025241	Drawn by: EMH		

© **Archaeology South-East**		Otford: Archbishops Palace	Fig.2
Project Ref: 240016	October 2025	Site plan	
Report Ref: 2025241	Drawn by: AC		

552794, 159209

N

Test Pit 1

Test Pit 4

Test Pit 2

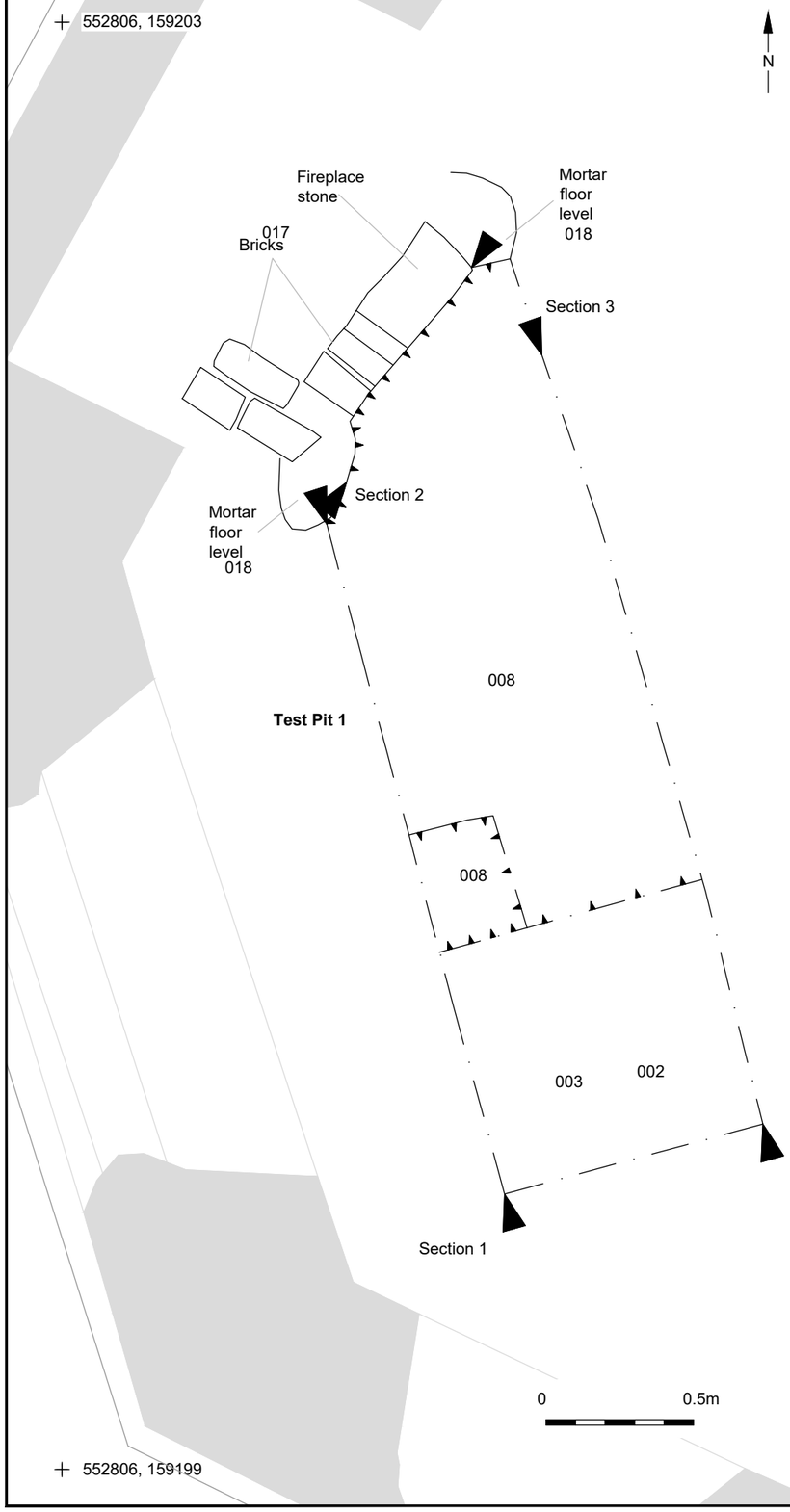
Test Pit 3

0 2m

552794, 159187

552824, 159187

© Archaeology South-East		Otford: Archbishops Palace	Fig.3
Project Ref: 240016	October 2025	Trench locations	
Report Ref: 2025241	Drawn by: AC		



TP1 looking south-west

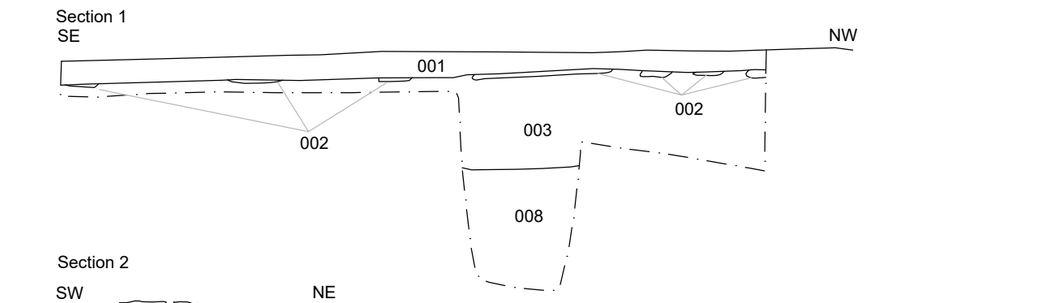
TP 1 looking south-west

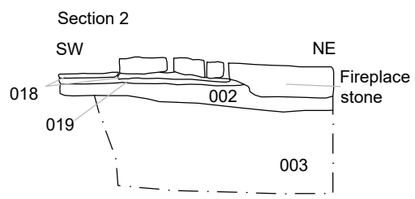
TP 1 looking south-west

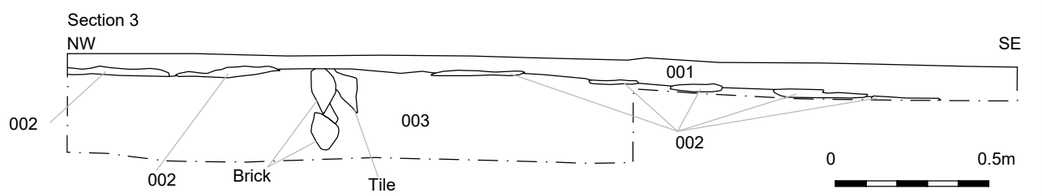
Test pit area looking north-west

TP1 looking north-west

TP1 looking north-east







© Archaeology South-East		Otford: Archbishops Palace	Fig.4
Project Ref: 240016	October 2025	Test pit 1; plan, sections and photographs	
Report Ref: 2025241	Drawn by: AC		

552808, 159199

N

Test Pit 2

006

005

007

Flagstone

Section 4

552808, 159194

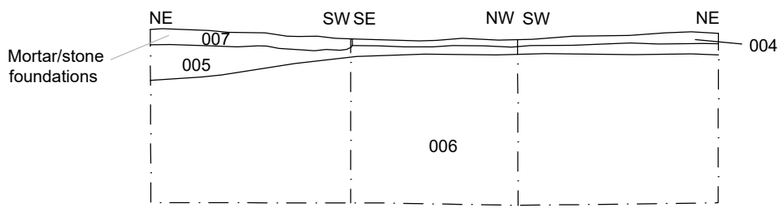
0 0.5m

TP 2

TP 2 looking north-west

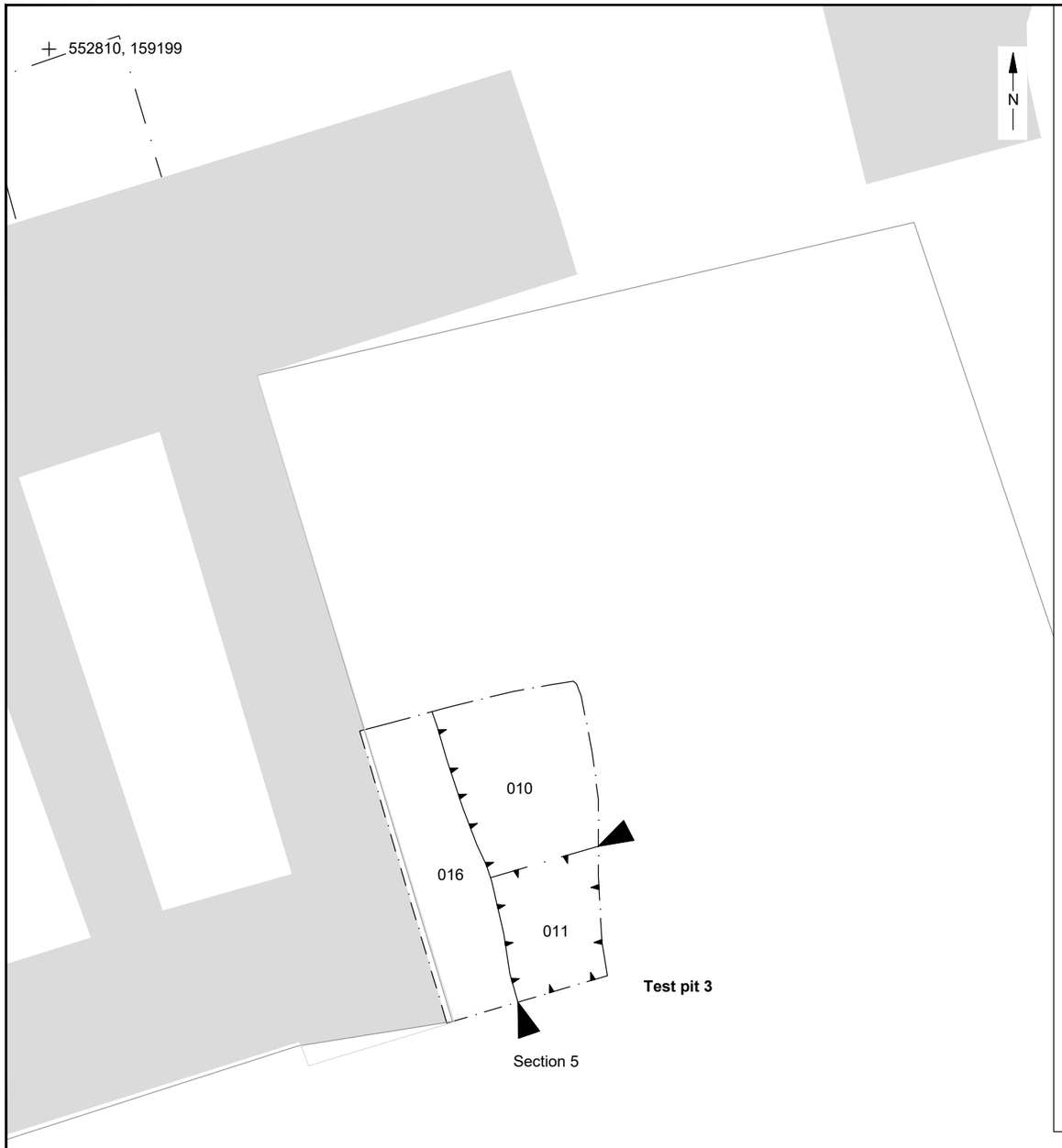
TP 2 looking north-east

Section 4



0 0.5m

© Archaeology South-East		Otford: Archbishops Palace	Fig.5
Project Ref: 240016	October 2025	Test pit 2; plan, section and photographs	
Report Ref: 2025241	Drawn by: AC		

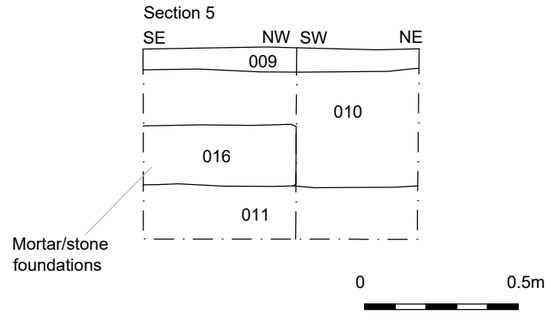


TP 3 looking west

TP 3 looking south-west

TP 3 looking west

TP 3 looking north



© Archaeology South-East		Otford: Archbishops Palace	Fig.6
Project Ref: 240016	October 2025	Test pit 3; plan, section and photographs	
Report Ref: 2025241	Drawn by: AC		

552808, 159202

N

Test pit 4

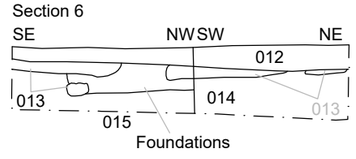
Section 6

0 0.5m

552808, 159197

TP 4 looking south-west

Section 6



0 0.5m

© Archaeology South-East		Otford: Archbishops Palace	Fig.7
Project Ref: 240016	October 2025	Test pit 4; plan, section and photographs	
Report Ref: 2025241	Drawn by: AC		

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