

Heritage and the archaeology in Aldington across the proposed StoneStreet Solar site

It cannot be underestimated the importance of this particular area in Kent from its historical and archaeological perspective. Whilst much work has already been done through historical records research, archaeological fieldwork both in a rescue sense but also in research excavations, much of the history in our landscape still remains hidden to us, buried in the earth under our feet, waiting, its treasures to reveal, until disturbed by developers for buildings or other infrastructure required for our rapidly increasing population need, and in respect of this particular site, that of the StoneStreet Solar project around the village of Aldington in Kent.

Kent is covered in a series of significant roman roads criss-crossing the county north to south and east to west, with Aldington itself straddling the roman road running from the village of Lympne known as Port Lymanis in roman times, through to meet with the roman road running north to south from Rochester through Maidstone and on southwards.

Within the Aldington area itself there is already a scheduled monument site at Burch's Rough 750m southeast of Middle Park Farm, which is a known roman villa site, dating to 289/350 AD from coins found on the site. IT is sited 500m north of the roman road on a nw facing slope near a tributary of the East Stour River at Court-at-Street. the area is also visible on aerial photos which show a rectilinear crop mark likely associated with the villa itself. Cultivation over the years has yielded tile and brick fragments as well as tesserae likely from mosaic flooring.

Moving into the StoneStreet solar area, there has been a desk based archaeological report done with accompanying geophysics. As a villager of long-standing with a lifelong interest in archaeology I have now read both reports and can see significant missed areas of reporting, so I have been doing my own research and have several issues with the apparent lack of investigation into the archaeological and historical evidence surrounding much of the area.

Interestingly there is an area within the main site, north of Handen Farm, which has been noted on the Historic Environment Record (HER) but has not been fully looked at. The area has been covered by geophysics will not necessarily pick up all data and I wonder in this case, why, when the crop marks are so clear, this has been ignored with only the statement in the geophysics report section 5.10 of "crop mark is recorded within the centre of the site boundary to the north of Handen Farm, but remains undated"

This area has not been trial trenched by the archaeological group responsible for the desk-based report and I question whether this was because the geophysics appeared unremarkable. Looking at the map on the HER the site behind Handen Farm is approximately the same distance and on the north side of the roman road as the villa site at Burch's wood and together with the various crop marks at both sites indicating potential roman settlement buildings of some sort, I feel that looking at this field behind Handen Farm in more detail, paramount at this point as the plans for StoneStreet Solar indicate that there is likely to be a battery housing placed in the middle of the square enclosure area.

In reviewing the various available aerial photos available on google earth, both recent and historic, I also saw a large crop mark south of the square enclosure crop mark behind Handen Farm. It was clearly apparent on the 1940 aerial photo and in the 1960 photo it would appear that it was also visible at ground level. Asking various archaeologists with experience viewing this kind of data, the suggestion is that it could be a medieval moated building of some sort. I haven't accessed many old maps of the area, but the ones I have seen dating to the mid-1800s don't appear to show anything there, however that doesn't mean that there wasn't something significant there in the centuries before.

At present Aldington has commissioned an expert in LiDar to review any relevant material and the early signs are that this whole area has significant hidden archaeology, covering many of the fields involved in the Solar Farm site.

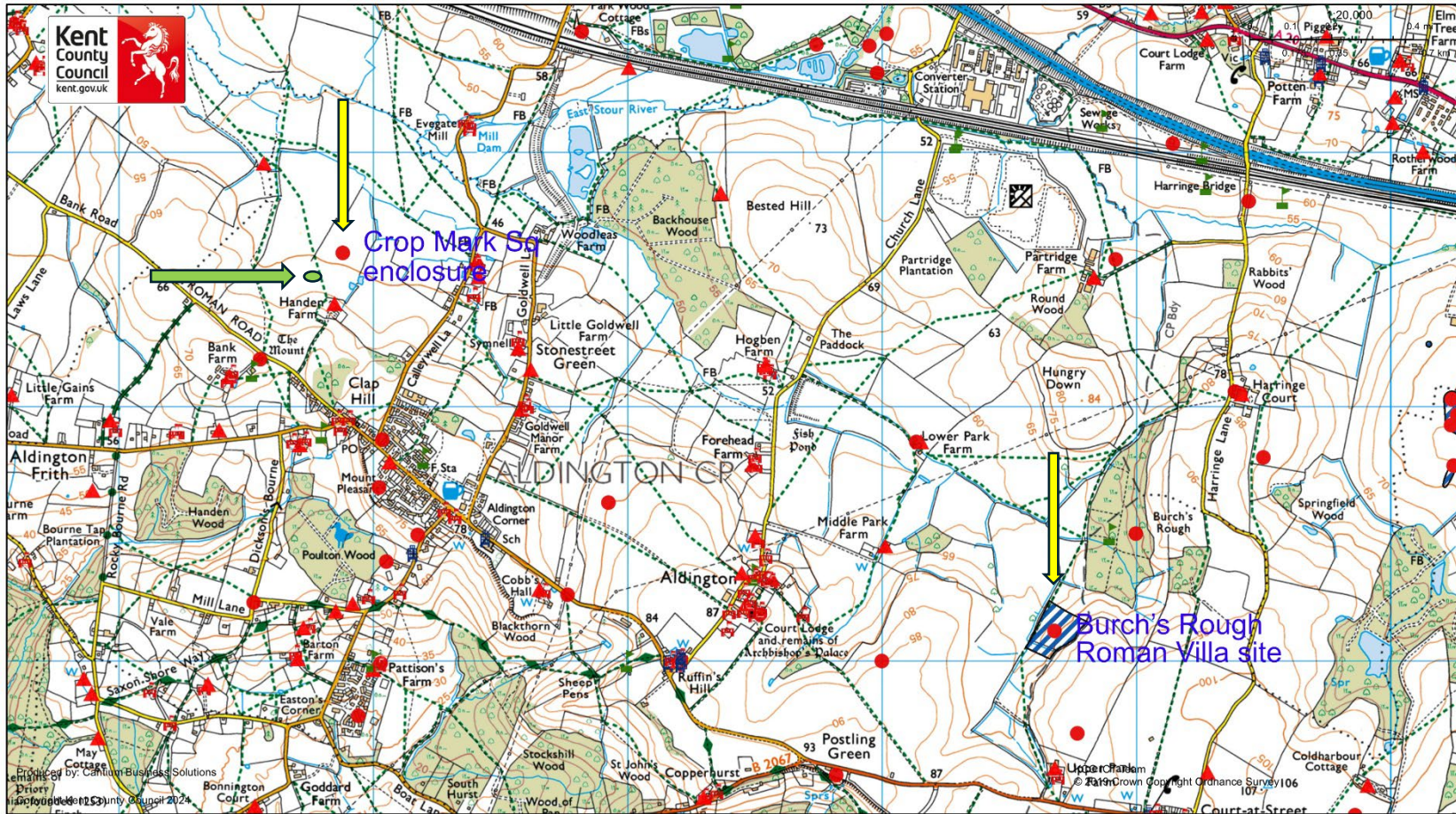
I do feel at this stage with so many unknowns in respect of the both the known and the hidden archaeology in these fields, we need to look at them further rather than risk the archaeology of this historic area being destroyed forever. Sitting on a significant roman road as it does, archaeology fieldwork via excavation has been done at Lympne this year, work at Richborough Amphitheatre, as well as the Roman Villa site at East Wear Bay in Folkestone, slowly building a more complete picture of the richness of the archaeology in this corner of England and the wider UK, and together with excavations at Stowting looking at the Anglo-Saxons in Kent together with their DNA analysis we are understanding more and more the importance of this corner of Kent as the gateway to this country, something used continually from long ago historic times right up to the present day.

Personally, I would like to see an excavation of some sort investigating the are behind Handed Farm fully, to make sure that a significant roman villa site is not being missed. I don't know the ploughing history of this field, so I don't know if the field has ever been walked to look for any plough disturbed evidence as has been the case at Burch's Wood site. I walked that regularly in the 80s and picked up many roman tiles, bricks and tesserae from the villa. Working with a significant county organisation like the Kent Archaeological Society, a community dig on this site might go some way to help the village feel involved in this project as well as learning more about the village they live in.

Chilmington Green, a large house building development outside Ashford, has had a similar project funded by the developers encompassing a legacy project looking at the whole history of the area and how it fits into the general landscape, so that any history is not lost and the new blends with the historical landscape for future generations to come. As with Chilmington, StoneStreet Solar has the potential to destroy any hidden archaeology forever even though the site is projected to only have a 40-year lifespan.

Lets see it as an opportunity to further our knowledge of this wonderful valley, where clearly even the romans saw its potential for their farms and significant villa sites, picking areas with wonderful views, close to water sources and with good transport links criss-crossing the south east of the land they chose to make their home for nearly 400 years.

(Map of Handen Farm Site and Burch's Rough site attached)



Legend

Archaeological Sites and Buildings

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|--|-----------|--|-----------------|--|----------|--|---------------------|
| | Building | | Hedgerow | | Maritime | | Scheduled Monuments |
| | Farmstead | | Landscape | | Monument | | |
| | Findspot | | Listed Building | | Place | | |