



Understanding Ospringe

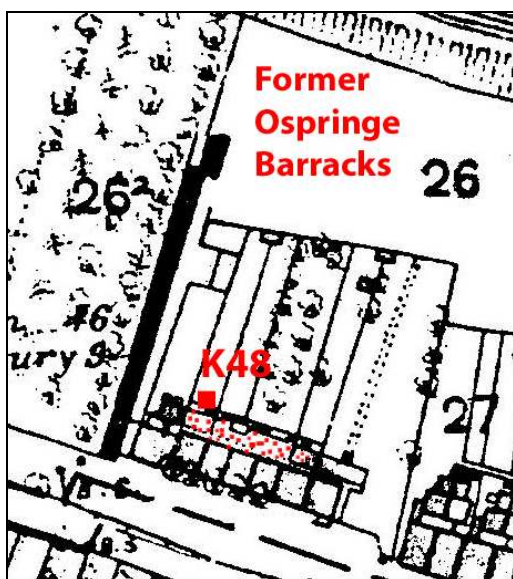
Report for Keyhole 48 60 Ospringe Street, Ospringe Grid Reference TR 002100 609300

1 Introduction

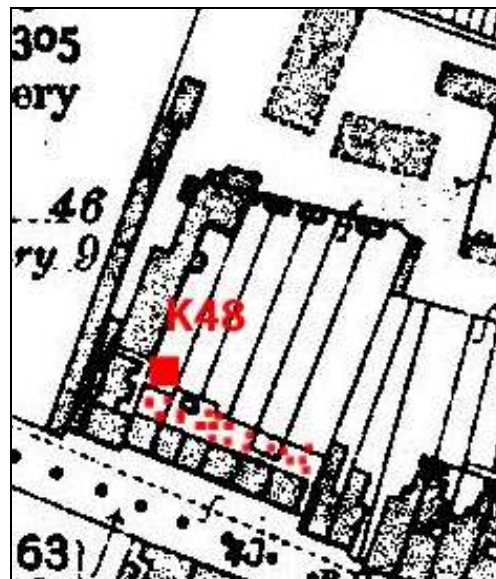
60 Ospringe Street is a particularly interesting property. It was built around 1790 as the end property in a terrace of six houses to accommodate officers of the adjacent Napoleonic barracks (c1790 and 1815): the terrace is still known as Officers Row.¹ These houses and their gardens backed onto the Parade Ground shown on a map of 1803.² The abandoned barracks (but not these houses) were occupied by Faversham Parish Workhouse between 1822 and the building of a new large workhouse in 1836.³

Officer's Row houses have a basement storey which backs onto a flagged courtyard to the north. Local people believe that this courtyard running through at the rear of the row is associated with stables for officer's horses, although no stables are shown on the 1803 map (these were presumably infantry barracks). Steps lead up from the courtyard to the garden which is just below the level of the main living floor and Ospringe Street itself. The garden soil is held in place by a late 18th century brick revetment wall.

Fig 1: Location of K48. The red dotted area is the sunken courtyard.



a) 1865⁴



b) 1907⁵

¹ Swale Borough Council c 1990 *Townscape Survey: Ospringe Village*

² Ospringe Barracks ground plan 1805 Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone.

³ J Stevens 2002 Faversham Union Workhouse: the early year. Faversham Society Papers: No 80 p4

⁴ OS 1865 (1904 reprint) Sheet XXXIV Scale 1:2500

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2. Location of pit

Because of the excavation of the huge trench into which the basement/courtyard was set, archaeological expectations of the garden were not high. The assumption was that the considerable amount of builder's spoil had been used to make up the garden, with the deepest material (around 3m below street level) ending up on top of the garden make-up. This surface material would be, if we were right, natural deposits and devoid of finds. Part of the aim of the keyhole was to test this assumption.



The keyhole was placed as close to the property as possible without endangering the revetment wall. (See figs 1 and 2). The exact location was measured to the corners of the revetment.

Fig 2: View of rear of 60, Ospringe St showing location of K48. The stairs down to the courtyard are on the left.

3. The procedures

A one metre square was pegged out using the planning square and the area delineated marked with string. The position of the square was recorded by measuring to mapped corners of the house. Turf was removed carefully from the square, rolled and set aside in plastic bags. The pit was then hand excavated using single contexts, each of which was fully recorded. At a later stage in excavation, the pit was extended northwards by 0.5 metres, for reasons given below. Excavated soil was sieved meticulously, and the spoil heap scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each context and special finds were given three dimensional coordinates to pinpoint the exact find spot. Any features revealed were carefully recorded. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

4. The findings

Beneath a thin layer of dusty top soil [01], a yellowish clay layer [02] emerged over most of the pit, but with the broken top of a vertical earthenware pipe surrounded by cindery deposits emerging in the south east corner. This pipe was quickly shown to be the top feature of a major structure which ended up occupying most of the original keyhole. [05a] [05b] the pipe (diameter 30 centimetres) was supported by a cement and brick fragment heap, itself adhering to a concrete horizontal slab. This slab rested upon the top of a brick dome structure which went down far below the limits of the keyhole. The top part of the dome had been slathered with cement.

The pipe was blocked with soil and several rusty tin cans. [04] When these were removed, it was possible to photograph at arms length the interior of the structure. As can be seen in Fig 3, this was a circular empty area, floored with deposits. [07] Measurements with a plumb line gave the surface of the deposits at 2 metres below the top of the pipe. Later probing with a rod gave a total depth of 3m for the structure.

i.e. the floor was lower than the level of the courtyard and basement floors and the [07] deposit 1 metre thick

Fig 3: The brick structure



a) Inside. Note the water-swirled debris with Brobat containers and entry pipe.

b) Outside. Note the different phases. The access trench has been emptied and a slot taken down to reveal the brickwork

Outside, the brick dome was hugged by a narrow semicircular trench [06] backfilled with a mass of cinders, building materials, pottery, glass, clay pipes and metal objects. [03] The oldest object found in this fill context was a late 18th century boot buckle⁶ with most of the artefacts late 19th – early 20th century in date. Over five kilograms of pottery and nearly three kilograms of vessel glass came out of this curved trench, some of the glass being complete vessels e.g. three ink bottles and Codd lemonade bottle (1875-1930)⁷ (Fig 4).

Fig 4: Examples of vessel glass and pottery fragments from the trench fill context [03]



⁶ R Whitehead 2003 *Buckles 1250-1800* Greenlight Publishing p 114

⁷ A. Hedges 2002 *Bottles and bottle collecting* Shire Publications pp 13-14
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At the bottom of this trench were many bricks and large flints. Some of the bricks were kiln wasters, others were fragments of 18th century bricks but, significantly, several bricks were definitely post-war machine-made with the initial W.

The brick dome had a puncture at one point, and putting weight on the structure seemed inadvisable, so K48 was opened up a further 0.5 metres to the north. This gave better and safer access to the dome and also enabled a closer look at the main garden material. The yellowish clay [02] continued down with no change and contained few finds other than a few sherds of residual Roman pottery, being devoid of cinder, charcoal specks or any other kind of human imprint.

5. Interpretation

Given the correspondence in level between the floor of the brick structure and the house, it seems that the structure was built at the same time as Officers Row perhaps as the first on-site project after the digging out of the main trench and followed by the basement and courtyard construction. The revetment was then created and the garden backfilled to completely bury the brick structure. At a much later date, certainly post war, the upper brick dome was excavated, maintenance and repair work done and a new outlet pipe inserted at the top. The puncture in the dome which gave us so much cause for concern was probably a pick axe hole from the opening up process. The access trench was then backfilled with a mass of what looks like ‘roughstuff’ (see below). The top deposit inside the dome contained some early design Brobat bottles which give the last possible date for entry of debris into the brick structure. The pipe was eventually blocked, though this looks accidental rather than deliberate, and a thin layer of garden soil and turf spread above. (When the keyhole was backfilled, we made sure that the pipe was properly blocked off)

The purpose of the brick structure is suggested by the 1865 map (Fig 1a) which shows small buildings in this location. Although along the courtyard outside lavatories are still present in 2008, these would have been installed later in the 19th century. This brick structure was possibly the cess pit for the original late 18th century lavatories. Although this is a rather prominent location within the garden for such a feature (they would be visible from the rear main living floor windows of the house) the lavatories would have been associated with a wash house and drying green. Perhaps this was a fresh water cistern for storing rain water?

‘Roughstuff’ is the name given to the rubbish brought down from London from the late 19th to early 20th century for use in the manufacture of Kentish Stock bricks. The coal rich cinders were sieved out of the rubbish, ground up and mixed in to make the bricks self firing⁸ with the rest of the rubbish dumped, often spread across fields. As this property is close to Cremer and Whitings brick works, this interpretation is plausible except for the fact that two bottles have ‘FAVERSHAM’ on them (see Fig 4). The fill also contained a fair number of bird and possible rat bones, as well as small butchery-marked bone fragments from food animals. Perhaps the London ‘roughstuff’ had been left in an unsorted heap for some time as the Kentish brick industry declined, and attracted local rubbish of various kinds, as well as becoming a haven for wild life? What is unlikely is that this is domestic debris from 60, Ospringle St itself.

The nature of the main garden deposit [02] was consistent with our assumption about spoil from the house building stage.

6. Final comments

⁸ S Twist 1984 Stock Bricks of Swale The Sittingbourne Society. p 8
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We were lucky to have found this remarkable feature – one metre further north and we would have missed it. We were most impressed by the quality of the construction of the original structure and would dearly like to have gone inside and sectioned the deposits. Never has a keyhole been backfilled with such reluctance!

7. Acknowledgments

Great thanks to Joyce and John for permission to dig in their pretty garden, for showing us round their fascinating and unusual house and showing so much interest in what we were finding. Thanks also to the next door neighbours for letting us use their back gate for access through to the garden of Number 60.

Pat Reid

November 2008

Small Finds



SF20



SF21



SF22



SF23



SF25



SF30



SF31



SF32



SF33



SF34



SF35



SF36



SF37

Small Finds Details

- SF20: This copper alloy nail has a square shaft and circular head. It is bent nearly at right angles.
- SF21: The buckle is undecorated, with a cast double tongue, and is corroded at the spindle ends adjoining the frame. It is probably an 18th century garter or boot buckle used for fastening a strap to the top boot. (Whitehead 2003 p14)
- SF22: This small fragment of worked bone is probably a part of a handle. It has concentric hoop rings, some with signs of working on the lower side. The inner surface is marked by concentric line circles, machine produced. The object of which this was a handle must have been very small - the reconstructed inner diameter of this tube is only 6.6mm.
- SF23: These three copper alloy nails are round headed and square shafted. All three are bent, 1) twisted 2) curved 3) sharply hooked. They are possibly from a clinker built craft.
- SF25: This is a brass hinge holding the remains of wooden battens. It is probably part of a carpenter's rule.

- SF30: Slim glass bottle, no stopper. Chipped Rim. Possibly a bottle used for medicinal or "cure-all" purposes. Possible "laid-on" lid.
- SF31: Heavy, transparent fragment, bearing the word 'Faversham' down side and 'NS' at the bottom. Greenish tinge. Used, perhaps, for carbonated product.
- SF32: Probably ink bottle. Clear glass, greenish tinge. Oblong shape. Rim chipped. Words on bottom: HYCE. LONDON. No stopper. Type known as a boat bottle (<http://www.antiquebottles.co.za/Pages/Categories/Ink.htm>)
- SF33: Light blue tinged glass, probably ink bottle. Body in ribbed pattern, except one side for label. Neck plain. No markings. No stopper. For photo. Ref: Bottles and Bottle Collecting, A A C Hedges, Shire 2002 p.29
- SF34: Probably ink bottle. Clear glass, no colour. Wording on shoulder: S & E ATKINSON, LONDON. Neck mostly missing. Inverted Grown design on bottom with lettering: REGISTERED TRADE MARK. Cylindrical. No Stopper . Added 15.05.09: J & Atkinson of Old Bond St marketed lavender water in similar shaped bottles. The firm still exists, using 'retro' bottles like this one.
- SF35: Green-tinged cylindrical bottle fragment. Heavy glass. Lettering on one side: C. T. TAYLOR. MINERAL WATER MANUFACTURER. FAVERSHAM. Other side :CODD'S BOTTLE. 4. SOLEMAKER. BANBURY AND S BARNESLEY. See Bottles and Bottle Collecting, A A C Hedges, Shire 2002 p13. Typical Codd's bottle with restricted neck to trap stopper for gaseous liquids.
- SF36: Very similar to SF6. Copper alloy cast rod, rectangular shaft, slight swelling at head. Bent at right angle. Purpose unknown. Blunt ended, but looks unbroken.
- SF37: Slotted bar with loop at one end. Inside, a ratchet strip. Part of weighing device?