F·S·A·R·G The Faversham Society Archaeological Research Group

Community Archaeology

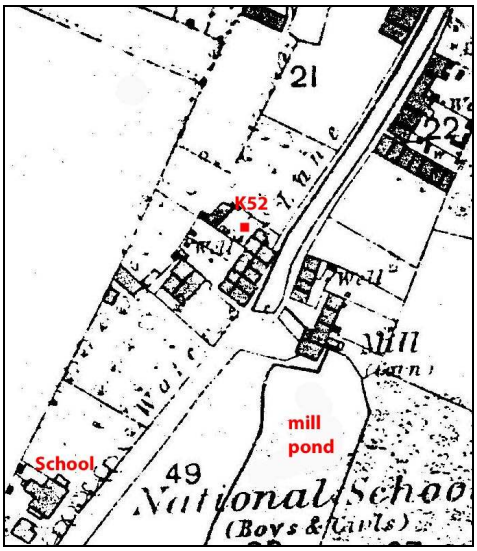
Understanding Ospringe

Report for Keyhole 52
Orchard House, Water Lane, Ospringe
Grid Reference TR 002800 607750

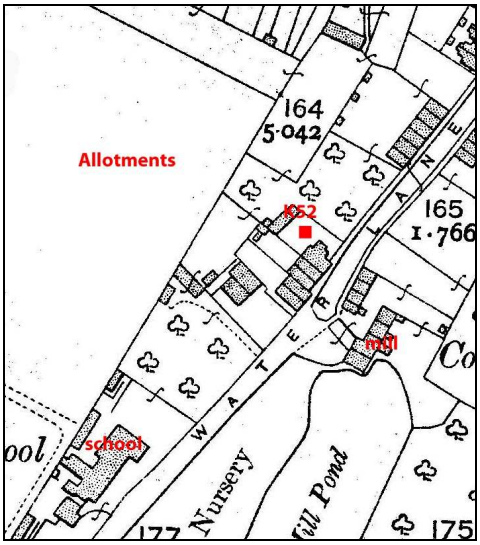
1 Introduction

Orchard House lies on the west side of Water Lane and is the end cottage of four timber framed buildings known as Liberty Cottages, which are opposite the point at which the outlet from the mill pond entered Water Lane and flowed northwards. (See Fig 1) Officially dated to the 17th century[1] but possibly of 15th-16th century origin,[2] Orchard House is Grade 2 listed and has a dragon beam and crown post to the roof area. The house appears to face north wards, at right angles to Water Lane.

Fig 1: location of K52



a) 1865[3]



b) 1907[4]

At the rear of the property is an outbuilding and paved area with an ornamental water feature. The garden backs onto Ospringe School, an undeveloped area currently used as playing fields. Previous to this investigation a 17th century main gauche dagger handle with the heads of William and Mary had been found in a garden flower bed.

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[1] Swale Borough Council c 1990 *Townscape Survey: Ospringe Village*
[2] House residents pers. comm..
[3] OS 1865 (1904 reprint) Sheet XXXIV Scale 1:2500
[4] OS 1907 Sheet XXXIV Scale: 1:2500

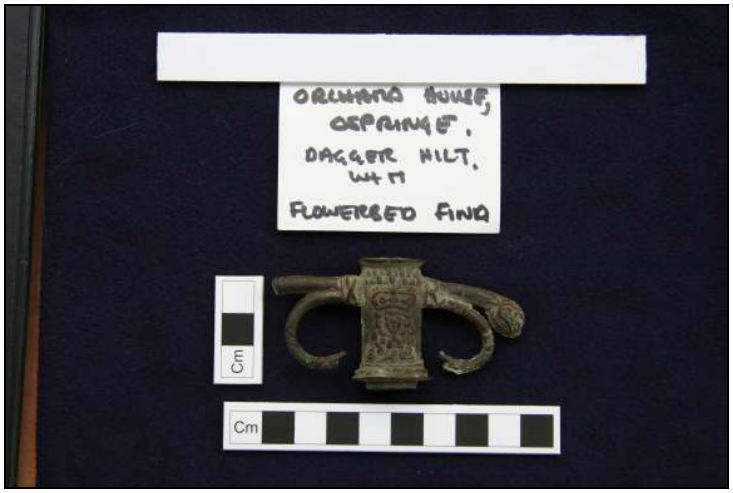


Fig 2: Bronze 'Main Gauche' dagger handle with head of King William III (c1690)

2. Location of pit

Because of the garden landscaping, K52 was set well back from the house. Its exact location was measured in with reference to the western boundary.

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. Early in the excavation, a soil pipe was discovered in context [03]: this was covered up and the keyhole extended by a further 0.8 metre further south. The keyhole was excavated to the maximum safety depth of 1.2 metres. All 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

Below the top soil [01] and underlying ashy layer [02] was a rubble layer [03], with a large quantity of brick, tile, mortar and plaster fragments. Mixed in with this building material were a few small worn sherds of medieval and late Saxon pottery.

Fig 3: Dump pit on west side of K52

At the western edge of the keyhole, a pit [04] had been sunk into this rubble layer through to the dark brown soil deposit below. The pit was filled with other brick rubble and topped off with a vivid deposit of builder's sand. A useful spot dating find in the sand was half of an early design red Lego brick. The contents of this pit were counted as one deposit [05] although stages in deposition could have been distinguished if it had been considered important.

Elsewhere the rubble layer [03] shaded gradually into dark brown clay [06], still with a high content of brick and tile fragments. By this stage, the pottery content was almost entirely post medieval (1550-1800) but with some small much worn medieval sherds. As [06-07] was removed, a firm yellowish clay surface with green flecks [09] emerged in the west of the keyhole at a depth of 50 centimetres. This was cleaned carefully eastwards, where it dipped suddenly down before ending abruptly. In the eastern part of the keyhole, beyond [09] the deposit [06] went deeper to interface with a layer containing large flints and gravel [08] at a depth of 90-100 centimetres.

Fig 4: Context [09] with underlying flint layer visible at top

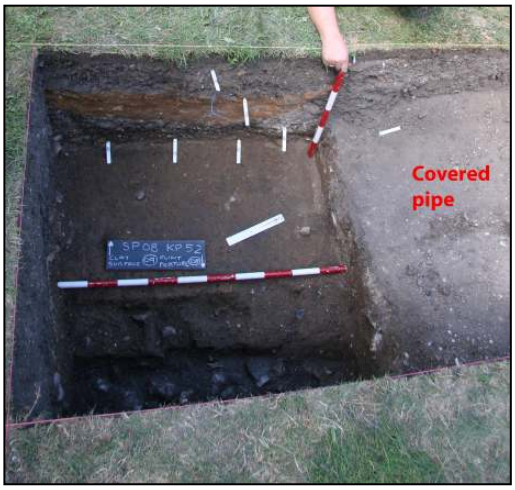


Fig 5: The sunken area at the edge of the clay deposit [09] has been removed at this stage, revealing the flint feature running underneath [09]

The top of [09] was a very clean and smooth surface. When removed, the artefactual content of [09] was entirely late medieval or earlier, although quantities were small. A small amount of fragmentary tile was found. The flint layer [08] seen in Fig 4 proved to run across the keyhole underneath deposit [09].

In the south east corner, a small pit contained Roman or earlier pottery. The flint layer itself contained a fair sized chunk of late Iron Age ('Belgic') pottery and some small pieces of Romano British pottery. Although the limit of the keyhole excavation had now been reached, the bottom of the little rubbish pit sunk into the flint layer had given a glimpse of further flints and gravels [12] and also a greenish silty deposit [13], both of which appeared to contain fresh water shells and nothing man made.

A curious find made in context [01], sticking out of the side of the keyhole, was a partly corroded iron artefact, thought to be possibly a Roman key. This was subsequently x rayed but its function and date are still uncertain.

5. Interpretation

This keyhole contained a clear record of long term settlement, from the Iron Age until the present day. The lowest deposits [12] and [13] did seem to be natural stream deposits from the West Brook, although the depth of these could not be investigated. From the flinty deposit [08] upwards, however, the small but distinctive pottery sherds showed a straightforward late Iron Age/ Romano British- medieval- post medieval- modern sequence. There was even a residual sherd of late Saxon pottery found in [03].

Fig 6: Late Iron Age/ Romano-British pottery from [08]

The nature and dating of the clay surface [09] is important. As always, the keyhole glimpse is tantalisingly small, but inspection of fig x suggests that this is the edge of a building floor with a soleplate slot at its outer edge. The content of [09] itself and the deposit immediately above [06-7] suggests a late medieval- early post medieval date for this structure. It is possible that the demolition material above, mostly peg tile but with some brick, mortar and plaster, comes from this earth floored building. The uppermost deposits, including the building material dump, are much more recent, judging by the Lego, and probably related to recent modernisation of the property

6. Final comments

This was an extremely interesting and significant keyhole. At present, our knowledge is not sufficient to date the early pottery closely, with the exception of the 'Belgic' sherd which is identical to pottery found elsewhere in Faversham.[5] Plans are already being made for FSARG training in prehistoric pottery recognition in the near future and return will be made to this assemblage afterwards.

7. Acknowledgments

Great thanks to Anna and Jim Wilbourn for allowing us to dig in their garden, and especially for allowing us to extend the digging time to overcome the pipe problem. We hope they are rewarded by the interest of this keyhole!

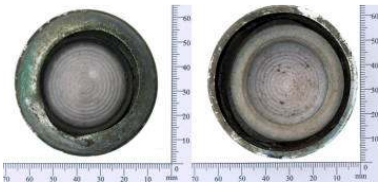
Many thanks also to Andrew Wills at Toachim House Surgery for helping us with the x-rays.

Nick Wilkinson and Pat Reid

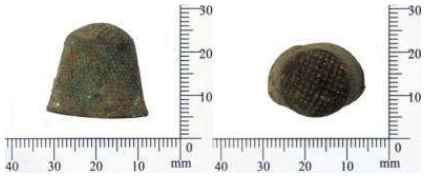
November 2008

[5] Philp P 1968 *Excavations at Faversham Abbey* Kent Archaeological Research Groups Council pp76-81

Small Finds



SF14



SF15

SF16

SF17

Small Finds Details

SF14: This is a car light cover / lens with chrome casing and glass lens and a rubber washer. It is a Lucas 489-1, with 'Made in England ' embossed on the glass. Some slight denting of chrome casing on inner rim next to glass lens. Probably supplied for a Morris Minor or a Singer Bedford.

SF15: The thimble is of a simple design, with a top stippled in criss-cross pattern with much smaller stippling on the side. The body part is slightly bent, with a small crack.

SF16: Copper Alloy 25 cent coin, with small hole in the centre. Website www.delcampe.com identifies it as an Albert 1 of Belgium coin, 1909-1934, this one dated 1910. Obverse has crown emblem above flower pattern. Reverse has 25 cents and foliage.

SF17: This is a heavy iron artefact with a square flange which is connected to a triangular flange by a circular section shaft. Large corrosion concretions are present on the upper (square) flange end of the shaft. The shank side of the square flange has small flanges to each side. The bow is absent or missing. Thought to be a Roman key (see www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mol/archaeology/pas/bestoffinds/iron_key.aspx) but subsequent checking and x ray has made this less likely.