



Understanding Ospringe

Report for Keyhole 54 46 Water Lane Ospringe Grid Reference TR00256 60769

1. Introduction

Number 46 is on the west side of Water Lane and the house was constructed in 1965. It is adjacent to Fern Lodge, a listed building officially dated to the 18th Centuryⁱ but possibly partly earlierⁱⁱ. Maps of 1865ⁱⁱⁱ show two outbuildings on the plot, one probably remaining as the current garage of number 46. A map of 1907^{iv} depicts a path leading to these buildings from Water Lane.

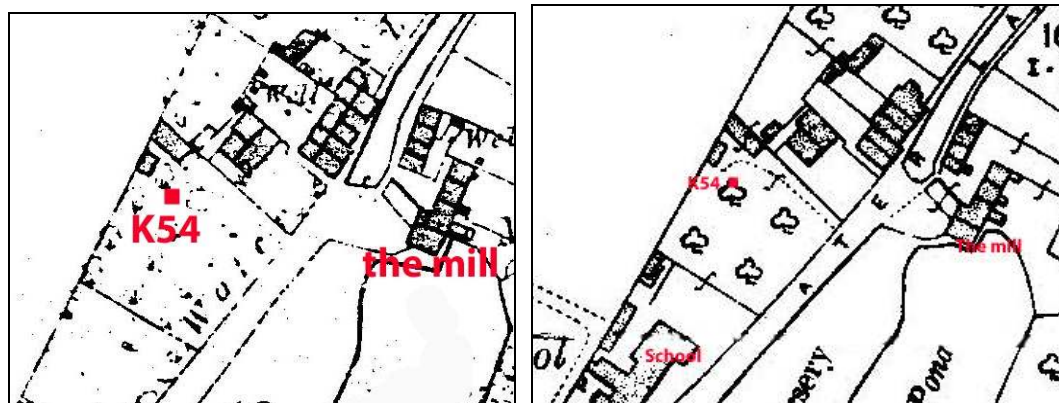


Fig 1a: OS 1st edition 1865

b: OS Special Edition 1907

2. Location of pit

The pit was the same distance from the road (the last route of the stream) as previous pits where evidence of prehistoric activity was found during this project^v. It was 1.5 x 1 metre in size and the long axis spanned the line of local prehistoric activity. The final position was chosen to avoid the lost outbuilding.

3. The procedures

A plot 1 x 1.5 metres was pegged out and delineated with string. The position of the pit was recorded by measuring to mapped corners of the house. Turf was removed carefully, rolled and stored in plastic bags. The pit was hand excavated using single contexts, each of which was recorded. The keyhole was excavated to a maximum safety depth of 1.2metres. All excavated soil was sieved meticulously and the

ⁱ www/online.english-heritage.org.uk/BuildingDetailsForm.aspx?id=438516&search=y

ⁱⁱ Householder pers. comm.

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

^{iv} OS 1907 Sheet XXXIV Scale 1:2500

^v www.community-archaeology.org.uk/projects/UnderstandingOspringe/K52rep.htm and
www.community-archaeology.org.uk/projects/UnderstandingOspringe/K44rep.htm and
www.community-archaeology.org.uk/projects/UnderstandingOspringe/K59rep.htm

spoil heap scanned using a metal detector. Finds were retained from each context and any features revealed carefully recorded. Finally the spoil was replaced, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

4. The findings

The top layer of this pit, extending to a depth of 12cm, contained a mix of inclusions, including pottery, glass, animal bone, shell and coal [1]. The pottery was mainly late post-medieval and undated redware, although some pieces of medieval (date span AD 1066-1539) were found. The context below this, which spread across the whole pit, contained a similar range of inclusions, but with more flint and chalk [2]. A Bronze Age worked flint was retrieved from this layer, as were numerous stressed flints (pot boilers).

The third layer contained much less late post-medieval pottery, and more medieval sherds were present [3]. Below this, and confined to the western end of the pit, was an 8cm thick, firm, even layer of small pebbles and shingle [4]. This contained pottery of a similar age distribution to the layer above.

Below and level with this 4th layer was silty clay, which extended to a depth of 65cm [5]. This fifth context contained a large collection of pottery, of which the vast majority (97%) was medieval, including some early medieval sherds (date span AD1050-1225). This included a particularly large section of a rim of a North Kent shelly ware pot^{vi}. Most of the shell recorded in the pit was in this layer, along with a significant amount of animal bone. Most of the worked flints found were also from this context, presumably residual. These were dated to the Bronze Age, with one tentatively identified as a Mesolithic rod.

In the eastern end of the pit, within the layer described above, a distinctive flint feature was revealed [7]. The flints were not obviously shaped and not mortared together. They were arranged in approximate layers forming a line running north/south through the pit with the feature curving eastwards before it reached the southern pit wall. Some chalk and oyster shell were present between flints. This feature was not dismantled and finds were limited to a few sherds of medieval pottery and even fewer pieces of iron and bone. Set within the flint feature was a round pit [8]. Careful excavation of this using small tools yielded pot sherds, the majority of which were early medieval.

Excavation continued, with layer [5] being removed, but retaining the flints in the eastern third of the pit. The layer below 5 consisted of large, unworked flints with gravel [6]. A coarse, paste like substance of variable colour was noted between many of the flints. In places, the flints were tightly impacted and in section on the pit's western wall flints were arranged in a regular pattern with 2 oyster shells between. The only find from this context was a single piece of pottery with sharp, non-abraded edges, tentatively dated to the Roman period. A scale plan was drawn of the arrangement of the flints.

A small area in the south west of the pit was excavated further, avoiding and hence retaining the majority of the aligned flints described above. A surface of yellow brown, gritty gravel was revealed, containing rounded and sub-rounded pebbles and flints [10]. This was interpreted as being the natural geology, possibly the stream-bed, and excavation ceased.

^{vi} John Cotter 2000 'Medieval shelly wares in Kent; some recent research' CAT Annual Report 1999-2000 Part 3 pp 56-60

The flint layer



Fig 2: West end of K54 excavated down to expose the flint layer. Note the 'racking' of the flints in the western baulk.

Below, section drawing of the western baulk. Scale 1: 10

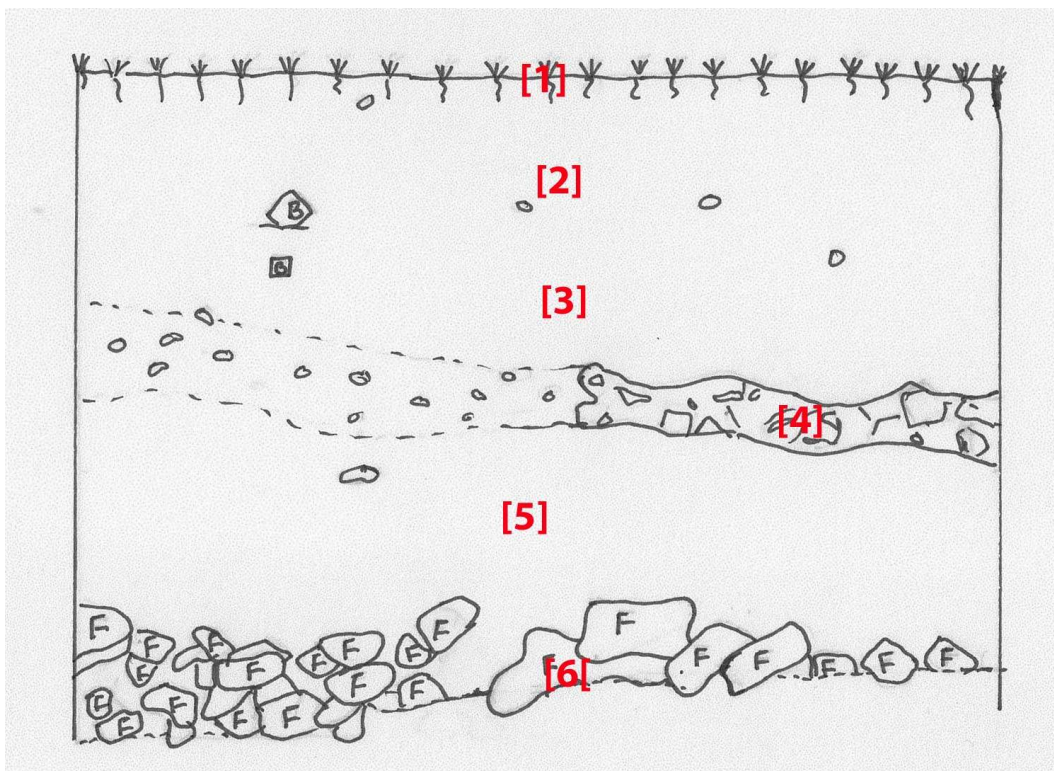


Fig 3: Flint layer [07] at the eastern end of the pit, with 'round pit' [10] on the left. All of the material excavated from the ins and outs of this feature was the same as in [5], the medieval midden scatter layer (see below).



5 Interpretation

The top 30cm of this pit, representing the first two layers, contained garden soil that had been churned, as shown by the wide range of dates for the material found. [4] probably represents a path or yard surface and almost certainly relates to the buildings known to have been on the site previously.

The presence of such high levels of medieval pottery together with shell and animal bone in layer [5] suggests that this may be medieval midden scatter (resulting from the practice of spreading material from rubbish pits over cultivated land to enrich the soil)(Fig 5). Finds of medieval pottery in Ospringe throughout this FSARG project have been generally lower than would have been expected if the village had been an important settlement during this time. The finds in this pit, however, along with those of K63/63T suggest that some intensive activity did occur. The presence of early medieval pottery, especially the rim of North Kent shelly ware, is particularly interesting as this dates from before the accepted building date of the Hospital of St Mary Ospringe in 1234.

Expert comment was required on the nature of the flint deposits in this pit and it has been suggested that the patterns are a result of periglacial frost action, causing a frost heave, with the oyster shell and Roman pottery sherd being intrusive^{vii}. Thus although the pit spanned the 'prehistoric contour' in Ospringe, no specifically prehistoric context was found. The presence, however, of prehistoric flints throughout the pit shows evidence of local activity and subsequent churning of deposits (Fig 4).

Fig 4: Bronze Age scraper from context [2]

^{vii} Geoff Hallewell (flint specialist) and Peter Golding (geologist) pers.comm.



Fig 5: Medieval 'midden scatter' pottery from context [5]



6. Final Comments

This was an intriguing pit to dig, with clearly stratified layers overlying a flint complex that looked too patterned to be natural. The overlapping rectangular flints at the west end of the pit looked suspiciously like a flint cobbled surface of some kind, such was the regularity: the specialists' interpretation does, however, seem more likely although less interesting for us archaeologists.

7. Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all involved in excavating and interpreting this pit.

Editor's note: K54 was in Lesley's own garden, along with our finds processing base, and we would all like to thank the Shea family enormously for their hospitality and tolerance, as well as this excellent report by Lesley.

Lesley Shea

December 2009

Small Finds



SF108

Small Finds Details

SF108: The core of an object which might have been a stand for flower arranging, to be placed in the bottom of a vase or a bowl. There is a large central hole at the bottom, and regular small perforations on top. The large hole would have been surrounded by holes of an equal size. It is terra cotta coloured. The object needs to be checked to make sure that it is "modern".