



Hunt the Mermaid!

Test Pit Report for Test Pit 17A at 51 Tanners Street, Faversham

This should be treated as an appendage to the Report for TP17

Location of pit

The Test Pit (TP) was placed to overlap the corner of TP 17 (by 10cm in each direction), where the Early English Delft mermaid bowl had been found in 2005, in an attempt to locate the missing piece(s) of this bowl (Fig. 1 – also see the TP report for TP17). The excavation procedures were initially followed as for TP 17, i.e. 1 metre square pit, excavated by spit. Later however the pit was widened to the north and to the east at a depth of 40cm to increase the chances of locating the missing pottery.

Fig 1: The grid square shows the location of TP17, dug two years earlier.



The findings

In Spit 1 the soil and finds closely resembled those found in Spit 1 in TP17. At a depth of around 30cm the soil became more clayey and compacted, with evidence of burning, including a patch of burnt stones. At a depth of around 35cm the soil became very yellow and clayey in the eastern half of the pit. Below this, at a depth of 40cm a flint surface with a chalk and shell edge was found in the northeastern quarter of the pit (Fig. 2). This was about the same level as the path found in TP17.



Fig 2: Flint surface revealed 40cm down

Beneath this flint surface was found a great quantity of tile, flint and stone rubble, mainly consisting of large fragments (Figs 3 & 4). The stone was identified as Ragstone and consisted of particularly large chunks. Further excavation revealed that this layer extended across the whole of the pit with the majority of the rubble in the northeastern part of the pit. Other finds from Spits 2 and 3 included a large amount of shells – whelk, oyster, mussel and winkle. Spit 3 also contained a large quantity of animal bones, with a predominance of metapodials (lower leg bones) from cattle (mature and juvenile). These metapodials gave a Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) of 4, a large number for such a small excavation. Some showed evidence of hacking with a heavy cleaver. (See fig 5 below) As in TP17, there was an overwhelming predominance of pottery from the 16th to 18th century in spits 2 and 3. These included fragments of white glazed tinware with blue hand decoration - both English-made and Dutch imports; salt-glazed stoneware; internally glazed terracotta wares and some small fragments decorated with yellow slip. Conspicuous by its absence, however, was the rest of the mermaid!



Fig 3: The tile layer emerges first



Fig 4: Beneath the tile, a layer of worked stone

Interpretation

It is possible that the flint surface was the foundation of a path, and would originally have had concrete or brick on top of it, or perhaps is a remnant courtyard surface. It is known that there was a gunpowder explosion on nearby Stonebridge pond in 1781 and therefore it is highly likely that it caused damage to the house standing there at that time. The rubble layer (brick, tile, mortar, flint, Ragstone and limestone) found in TPs17 and 17A and appearing to continue into other areas of the garden could therefore conceivably be the remains of this house, which was knocked down as a result of being unsafe. The current house (late 18th century) would then have been built shortly after this date. The large quantity of pottery found spread immediately above this layer would have also been destroyed as a result of the explosion and discarded. The presence of stone building material in these demolition layers was particularly interesting, suggesting the re-use of material from long-gone medieval stone buildings in this area. (See also the wall construction report for nearby TPs26/26A) Thus the building sequence in this plot is for at least 3 stages of building – perhaps 12th century stone build, and then 16th century re-used stone with tile and brick, and lastly the surviving late 18th century building.

The metapodial and foot cattle bones found in spit 3 are stratigraphically associated with the earlier demolished property, suggesting that it may have functioned as a butchers or abattoir or as

a tannery. A horn core was found in TP17. What the bone assemblage most definitely is not is a typical domestic assemblage (see Fig 5).



Fig 5: Animal bone assemblage for Spit 3.

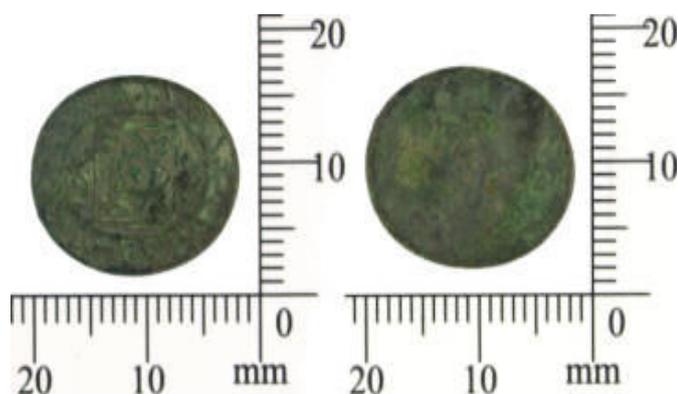
Final comments

Although Test Pit 17A failed to yield the final piece of the mermaid plate it still proved an interesting and informative exercise. In expanding the original keyhole view into the garden of Test Pit 17 the archaeologists were able to build up a clearer picture of the history of the house and the structures that had previously stood on the same site.

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Small Finds



SF773



SF774



SF776



SF777

Small Finds Details

- SF773: Decorated plaque. Small oval of bronze, slightly dished along the long axis. Obverse: stamped decoration. Border with diagonal lines and pellets between. Inner oval contains a tudor-style rose in a panel with scrolls/plumes above and below. Reverse; undecorated. Slight circular indication of former attaching device in the centre. Uncertain function - cuff link? Oval button? Small mount? Decorative style 17th/18th century.
- SF774: Love token. Circular token, apparently deliberately bent into Z shape. Obverse of token has initials W F intertwined, with indecipherable letters below. Reverse has circlet of (laurel?) leaves around the edge, with a slender rod (?) upright through the centre. Again, indecipherable letters at lower edge. The token has been evenly hammered so that one edge turns up and the other down, with a flat step in the middle. 17th-18th century on letter style. See Mills 2000:34 on love tokens.
- SF776: Piece of worked flint? Piece of flint which resembles a possible 'starch fracture', but evidence of wear at the tip would suggest it has been used for boring. Retouch along one edge.
- SF777: Clockwork cog. Delicate, thin artifact. Obverse flat with tiny nick on one edge. Reverse - raised inner circle with serrated edge. Cog from watch - difficult to date, but probably 19th/20th century.