



Hunt the Saxons 2005

Test Pit report for Test Pits 23A and 23B at 78, West St, Faversham, Kent. Grid References TR 0161 601250 161470, TR 0161 601253 161480

1. Introduction

78, West St is a large stuccoed house built in the mid-17th century.¹ To the west it adjoins a substantial 15th century building, which was until recently the Castle pub (see all maps in Fig 1). Map evidence shows that until the early 20th century another pub, the Shakespeare Inn lay next but one to the east (Fig 1d, e)

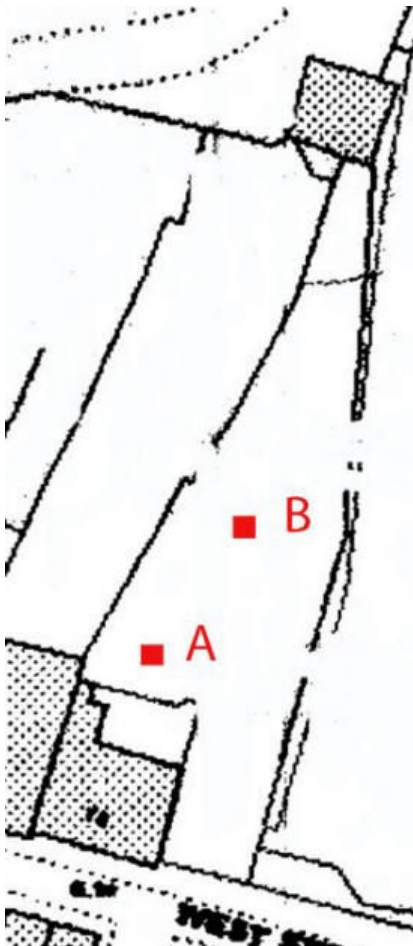


Fig 1a: 78 West St in 2005, with large plot

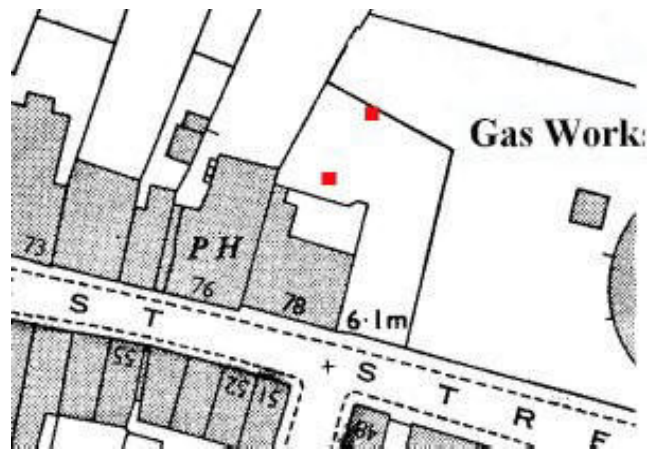


Fig 1b: 78 West St in 1980s, shortly before Gas Works demolition



Fig 1c: 78 West St in 1950s. Note large outbuilding with glasshouse attached.

¹ Swaine, A. 1969 *Faversham Conserved* Maidstone: KCC p123



Fig 1d: 78 West St in 1906. Note that the house has two extensions at the rear and that the outbuilding in 1c has not yet been built.

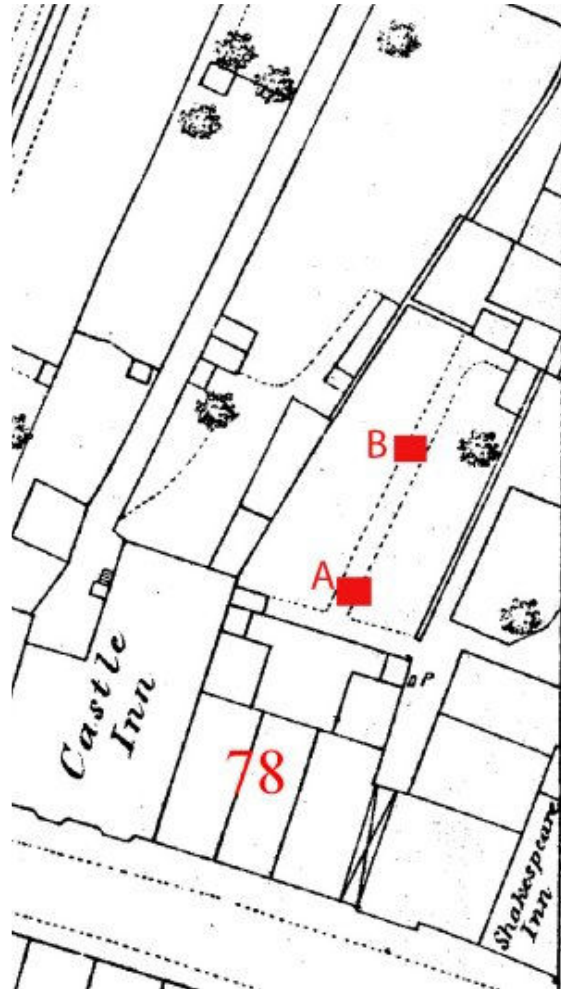


Fig 1e: 78 West St in 1865. Note that the wall in Fig 1d does not yet exist at this stage.

At the rear, 78 West St is raised around 1.5m above the surrounding properties, with a two tier 5m north facing terrace dropping into the back garden. The plot itself is exceptionally large for properties in this area, tapering northwards to a point close to the West Brook, but this size is the outcome of modern extensions. Inspections of the five maps in Fig 1 show a great deal of change in this plot over the last 140 years. In the 20th century, 10 houses to the east of 78, including the Shakespeare Inn, were demolished to give room for the Gas Works. Houses and industrial buildings to the north and the gas works itself were in turn demolished in 1992 and some of the land liberated was added to the 78 West St plot. The rest of the Gas Works land is now occupied by the Coop superstore and car park.

An archaeological investigation was carried out on the Gas Works site in 1992 by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust.² This was limited by contamination of the ground and waterlogged conditions. It did reveal, however, a sequence of silt layers and enough dateable material to suggest that ‘... domestic rubbish and other debris had been dumped continuously [in the southern part] from the 12th to the late 17th century at the same time as alluvial silts were being deposited by tidal action in the creek [in the northern part]’.³ The archaeologists suggested that the creek was revetted in the late 17th or early 18th centuries,

² Allen T, A. Ward & J. Cotter 1992 *Evaluation of Faversham Gasworks* Canterbury: CAT report

³ Allen T. op cit

with the area to the south (i.e. between 78 West Street and the present West Brook) being levelled up and used for industrial and commercial purposes.⁴

Because of the availability of archaeological evidence and the size of the plot, it was decided to dig two Test Pits (TP) in the garden of 78 West Street. Both are covered in this report.

2. Location of pits

TP23A was located on the terrace of the garden, close to the back of the house. Before the excavation, we were unsure as to whether this elevated part of the garden represented a built terrace or was a remnant of the natural bank of the creek or a combination of both. TP23B was located in the lower part of the garden. At the time, judging by breaks in the west boundary wall, it was thought that position was part of the original garden plot: that matters were a good deal more complex than this will become clear in this report.

3. The procedures

One metre squares were pegged out using the planning square and the areas delineated marked with string. The position of the squares was recorded by measuring to mapped corners of the house. Turf was removed carefully from the squares, rolled and set aside in plastic bags. The pits were then excavated in 30 cm spits (layers), each spit being trowelled out in 5 cm layers. With 23A, only half of Spit 4 was excavated, and that only to a depth of 20 cm because a layer of face-down plaster was encountered (see below.) With 23B, a brick feature and cobbled surface emerged in Spit 4 (90 – 120 cm) limiting excavation.

All excavated soil was sieved meticulously, and the spoil heaps scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each spit, with special finds being given three dimensional coordinates to pinpoint the exact find spot. Weighing of the large amount of brick and tile from these pits was estimated on site. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

4. The findings

a) Test Pit 23A

To a depth of 28cm, the top layer was dark loamy top soil with an abundance of artefactual inclusions – brick and tile, glass, iron nails, coal and clinker and a substantial quantity of pottery and clay pipes. Most of this pottery was 19th century (around 60%) with the remaining proportion being 16th-18th century except for five sherds of late medieval pottery. The clay pipes ranged in date from the 17th to 19th century.

A dense layer of large pieces of brick, tile, mortar and plaster was then encountered, below which was a brown clay deposit with well distributed flecks of charcoal and chalk. The clay contained more animal bone and oyster shell than the top soil above and hardly any glass. In Spit 4, the amount of charcoal increased. A clay pipe from this level was dated to the 17th century. At around 1 metre overall depth, a solid layer of face-down plaster with

⁴ Allen T. op cit

lath markings was found. This deposit looked like a collapsed wall, and was left unexcavated. A 1640 Rose farthing (SF4) was found in contact with this plaster layer.

The pottery distribution shown in Fig 2 confirms the findings of the CAT team in 1992 (see above)⁵. Each spit contained pottery from the medieval period onwards. What the graph does not show is the quality of some of the pottery. Along with various coarse wares, this assemblage contained small sherd of Raeren (Belgian 16th century), Rhenish stoneware (German 16th century), a face from a Bellarmine pot (German 17th century), Early English Delft (London 17th century) and some small sherds of fine 19th century porcelain (Staffordshire). The medieval ware included Surrey whiteware (Surrey 14th century) and Tudor Green (Surrey 15th century) as well as the more predictable Tyler Hill local ware.

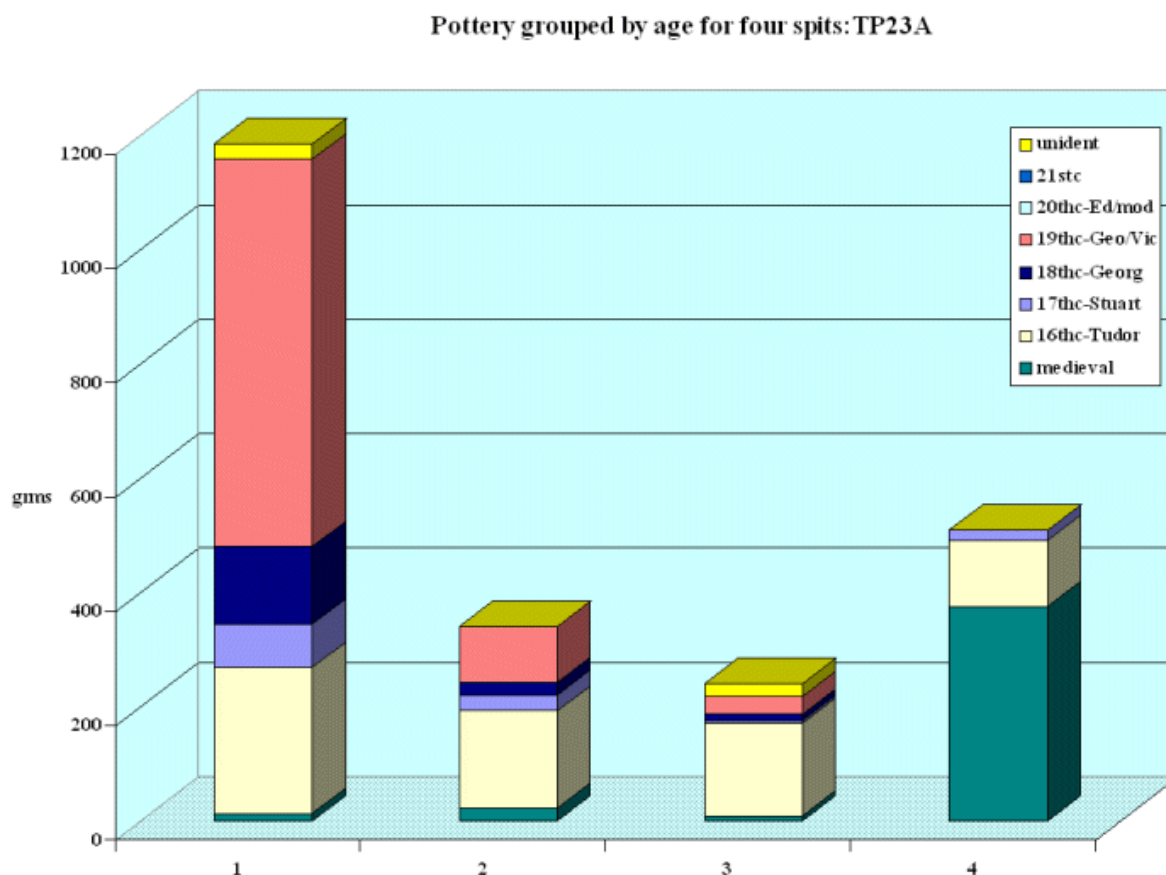


Fig 2: pottery grouped by age per spit for TP 23A (S4 weighted x 4).

b) Test Pit 23B

15 cm down into the dark, loam topsoil, a surface of thin tarmac with embedded pebbles emerged. This 5 cm thick surface stretched across the whole pit and was underlain by a layer of large unworked flints. Beneath the flints was a dense layer of large pieces of brick and peg tiles. The tile was pink-beige and a number of them were curved. The bricks were hand made, soft and dull red. Below the tile layer was silty clay with small fragments of brick and tile along with iron (mostly nails), oyster shell and a substantial amount of pottery. As the bottom of Spit 3 (at 90 cm) was approached, a brick and flint wall emerged, running at right angles to the house. The slot to the west of the wall was excavated and soon revealed a cobbled surface covering the floor of the slot and running into the baulk (Fig 3). The cobbles were smooth flint pebbles, around 10 x 4 cm in size, and carefully arranged to

⁵ Allen T. op. cit.

give an even surface: the cobbled surface was left intact. A small sherd of Tudor Green pottery was found at the cobbled surface level.

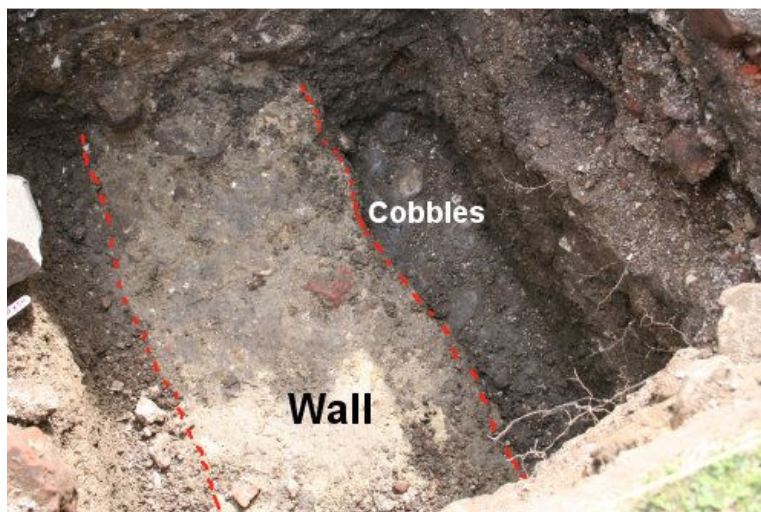


Fig 3: features at the limit of excavation in TP23B

TP23B, like TP23A, had more than the usual number of clay pipes, most of these in the top soil. At least 3 of these were 18th century in date, with one from Spit 3 being dateable to the 17th century. There was little evidence of grate content dumping (coal and clinker), and not much animal bone or shell (compared with other pits). The pottery was mainly coarse ware or large cream glazed early 19th century mass products, and the pieces were large and clustered enough to suggest an actual dump (Fig 4).

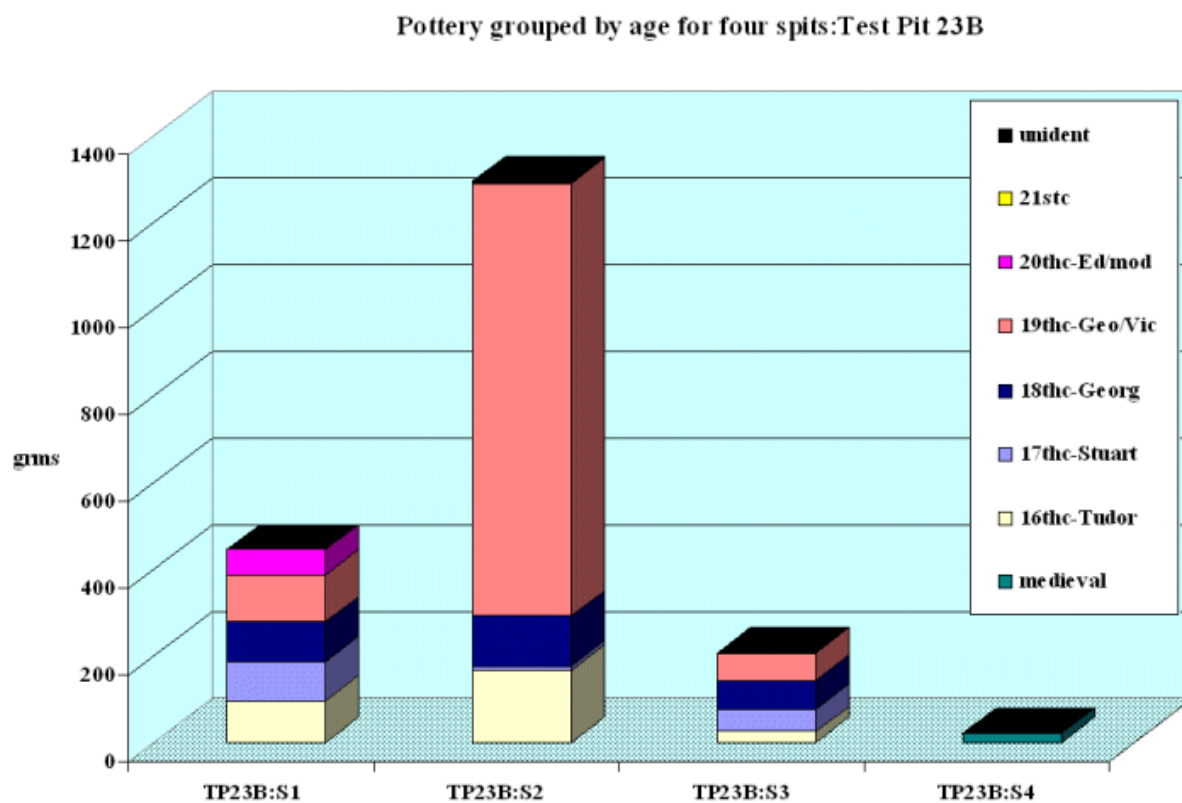


Fig 4: pottery grouped by age for TP23B

5. Interpretation

The terrace, at least to a depth of 1 metre, was clearly artificial. It displayed at least two different demolition layers – the earliest involving what seemed to be a complete wall pushed flat and, some time after, another layer involving brick, tile, mortar and plaster. These two were separated by at least 60 cm of mixed debris in a clay matrix. Above the later demolition layer was a worked top soil with a huge amount of glass bottle fragments. Tighter dating will be possible after intensive work on the glass in 2006, but for now it seems likely that the demolished lath and plaster wall was part of the original dwelling on the plot prior to the construction of the present house in the mid 17th century. This is supported by the close association of the lower demolition layer with the Rose farthing (mid 17th century). The origin of the later layer is probably related to the east rear extension of the house which is present in 1906 and earlier but has gone by the 1950s. The glass may well be dumped bottles from the Castle pub next door.

The diverse nature and origins of some of the pottery is intriguing, hinting at an affluent merchant household with modestly luxurious, imported consumer goods. It will be worth following this up with documentary research of e.g. title deeds. The pottery in the lowest part of the pit was nearly all late medieval or 16th century brown-glazed red ware.

TP23B had been expected to show garden archaeology. In fact the tarmac surface suggested that at least in the later 20th century this area was being used for industrial purposes. The brick, tile and mortar immediately below this is plausibly related to demolition of the brick outbuilding (?) with conservatory shown in fig 1 c. The wall foundation at 90cm could be the boundary wall shown in Fig 1d (1906) but not present in 1e (1865). The lower part of Spit 2, however, and the upper part of Spit 3 (i.e. *above* the demolished wall) did contain a concentration of large, fresh-break pot sherds dating to the 19th century. The small part of Spit 4 which was excavated had only small sherds of medieval pottery, and the dating of the cobbled surface is very difficult on present evidence.

The complexities of this pit seem to be related to a fluctuating boundary between creek side industrial processes and residential use, a situation which is clear from the map sequence and would need to be looked at side by side with title deeds and other documents. Although there has obviously been a degree of levelling up and movement of material, the unexpectedly stratified nature of 23B is intriguing.

6. Final comments

The importance of the changing relationship between West Street and the Creek has been highlighted by TPs 23A and 23B. It would be worth returning to survey this plot, so that the varying heights can be better understood. (See Fig 5). The findings also need careful correlation with documentary evidence and comparison with the findings for the nearby Test Pits 22 (75 West St) and 24 (Flood Lane)



Fig 5: Height differences for Test Pits 23A and 23B

7. Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Nic and Nicola Crosier for allowing us to dig in their garden, and for their unfailing hospitality and interest.

Small Finds



SF4



SF5



SF50

Small Finds Details

- SF4: (TP23A) Charles I Rose Farthing. Small copper coin. Tudor rose-style motif on one face. Carolus I D on edge of reverse. Part of edge pared off. Probably a rose farthing from the reign of Charles I. Ref: Seaby 1997 Coins of England Page 221, ref no. 3207.
- SF5: (TP23B) Pressure Gauge. Circular plate with raised edge. Back plate with 3 screw / rivet holes. Edge quite bent. Grey / green surface colour. Sector of circle with rivet-remains, which correspond with holes in plate. Pressure tube inlet and sector which would move with variations in pressure between 2 pins. Saddle which fitted over movable section. Some corrosion.
- SF50: (TP23A) Glass Bottle. Small perfume-type bottle, high shouldered with screw for cap. Faceted sides, domed interior base. '12' on base - no other inscriptions.