



Hunt the Saxons 2005

Test Pit report for Test Pit 25 at St Judes Shrine, Our Lady of Carmel, 36 Tanners Street Grid Reference TR 0161 601040 161290

1. Introduction

St Judes Shrine and Our Lady of Mount Carmel church occupy a range of buildings on the west side of upper Tanners Street. The main building, now used as the Presbytery, was built in 1743 by John Gilbert, a wealthy tanner.¹ [Fig 1] One associated building was built originally as the British and Foreign School in 1861 by Mr Halls, a local gunpowder magnate.² From 1910 to 1935 this building was used as a cinema. In 1937, the buildings were taken over by the Carmelite Friars and the cinema converted to the Church of Our Lady of Carmel³. The garden to the west of these buildings is the largest piece of open space in Tanners Street, and is currently used as a Prayer Garden and a car park. Two one storey buildings in the estate to the south of the Prayer Garden are occupied by the Carmelite Press.

Immediately south of the estate is a former entrance to the Home Gunpowder works. To the west, the border is the West Brook, with Chart Gunpowder Mills adjacent. To the north is Tanners Cottage (see report for Test Pit 14)⁴. The eastern part of the estate slopes up quite steeply to the south, as Tanners Street climbs to join South Avenue, and the Prayer Garden slopes gently down to the West Brook.



Fig 1: Presbytery, front view

For some reason, the Presbytery building was not included in Swaine's survey of buildings in central Faversham.⁵ Title deeds for neighbouring Tanners Cottage,⁶ however, have proved very useful indeed for the reconstruction of the history of this part of Tanners Street from the 17th century onwards.

¹ Title deeds for 37 Tanners St, courtesy of Lesley Jamison

² F Giraud & C.Donne 1876 A Visitor's Guide to Faversham

³ H Dane 1968 the story of a Thousand years: a chronology of Faversham History

⁴ www.community-archaeology.org.uk

⁵ A. Swaine 1969 Faversham: its history, its present role and the pattern for its future. FBC/KCC

⁶ Title deeds 37 op cit

2. Location of pit

Most of the Prayer Garden surface was ominously lumpy and bumpy, in a way that hints at demolition materials. A relatively smooth patch was chosen, as close as practicable to the West Brook edge of the grass and midway between the north-south edges.

The 1865 and later maps showed this as an area free of buildings:

Fig 2: the Prayer Garden area in 1865.



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 excavated in thirty cm spits (layers), each spit being trowelled out in five cm layers. By the bottom of Spit 2 (60cm down) it was evident that a feature was appearing, with associated medieval pottery. A decision was taken to go no deeper and instead to widen the pit to north and south by 0.5m each way, thus giving a small trench 2 x 1 metres. These extensions were excavated contextually. All excavated soil was sieved meticulously, and the spoil heap scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each spit in the original pit and each context for the extensions. Special finds were given three dimensional coordinates to pinpoint the exact find spot. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

In April 2006, a resistivity survey of the whole Prayer Garden area was carried out by DKR Survey of Sittingbourne. (Fig 3)

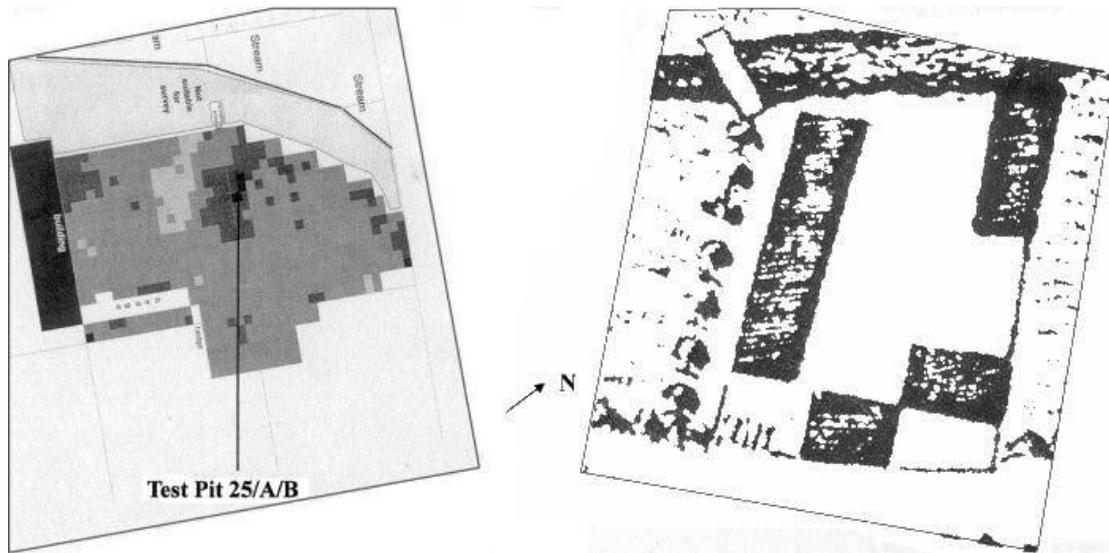


Fig 3: Left: Geophysical resistivity map from survey carried out by DKR Surveys on 28.04.06 Right: Extract from Jacob's 1774 Map of Faversham showing same area to approximately same scale and orientation.

4. The findings

The initial test pit cut down through stratified deposits, clearly shown in section A, Figs 4 and 5. Beneath shallow topsoil, about 10-15cm down, was a layer of peg tile fragments, about 15-20cm thick. Beneath this was a densely packed chalk layer, 40cm thick, with some artefactual content. In the south east quadrant of the pit, removal of the chalk exposed a clay surface. (Section A)

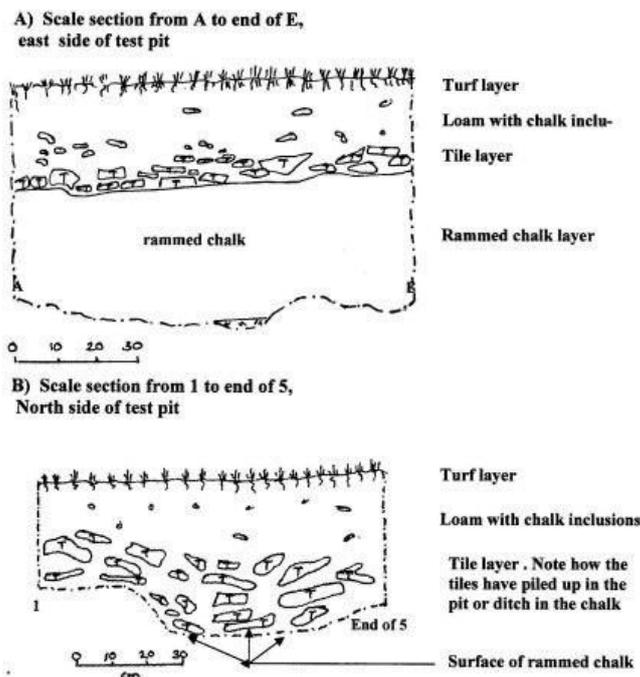


Fig 4: Scale sections for Test Pit 25

| Key | |
|---|-----|
| Turf layer | +++ |
| Mortar | ■ |
| Clay | □ |
| Chalk | □ |
| Flint | ○ |
| Brick | ▭ |
| Tile | ▭ |
| Pottery | ▲ |
| Clay pipe | ⊗ |
| Horn cores | X |
| Limits of excavation/ edge of cut section | --- |



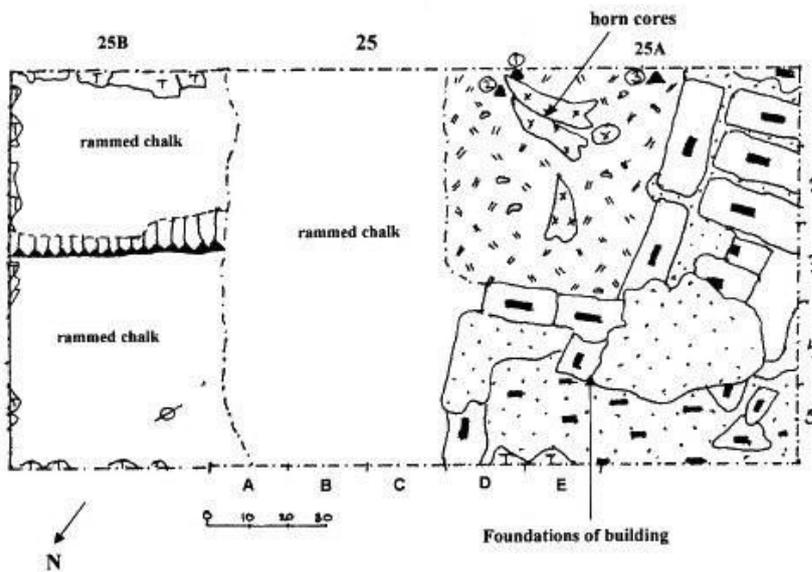
Fig 5: 25B end of Trench showing topsoil/tile/chalk layers

Because of the finding of horn cores and medieval pottery in this zone (**Figs 6 and 7**), excavation did not go any deeper, leaving deposits undisturbed below 60 cm. In the south west quadrant of the pit, a heavily mortared three course deep brick feature had been uncovered at a depth of around 35cm. The tile layer lay over this feature, and the top of the brick feature was flush with the top of the chalk layer.

The pit was then widened. At the southwest end (**25A**), the chalk was removed and the brick feature was shown to continue to the south west, with another brick feature, this time only one course deep, running off at right angles to the south. Beside but lower than this, more horn cores and medieval pottery were uncovered. (**Figs 6, 7**) At the northwest end (**25B**), the top soil and tile layer were removed and the surface of the chalk layer was exposed. The surface showed a clear dip to the east – see **section A**. An early 17th century clay pipe was embedded in the chalk surface. (**Fig 8**)

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Fig 6: Scale plan of Test Pit 25



Pottery 1: 15th century 'pie crust'

Pottery 2 & 3: small sherds of Tyler Hill 13th-14th century

All directly associated with horn core deposit

Clay pipe with complete bowl, 17th century. Embedded in surface of rammed chalk

Tile of Kentish peg type, probably from demolition of building (see sections)

| Key | |
|---|---------|
| Turf layer | ↑↑↑ |
| Mortar | ■ |
| Clay | ■ |
| Chalk | □ |
| Flint | ○ |
| Brick | ■ |
| Tile | ■ |
| Pottery | ▲ |
| Clay pipe | ⊗ |
| Horn cores | x |
| Limits of excavation/ edge of cut section | - - - - |

The Scale Plan **Fig 6** and matching photograph **Fig 7** show the trench (as it had become) at the end of the two days of digging. Remember that the parts indicated as 25 and 25A had been taken down to 60cm except where the brick features were present and 25B had been taken down only to the surface of the chalk layer.

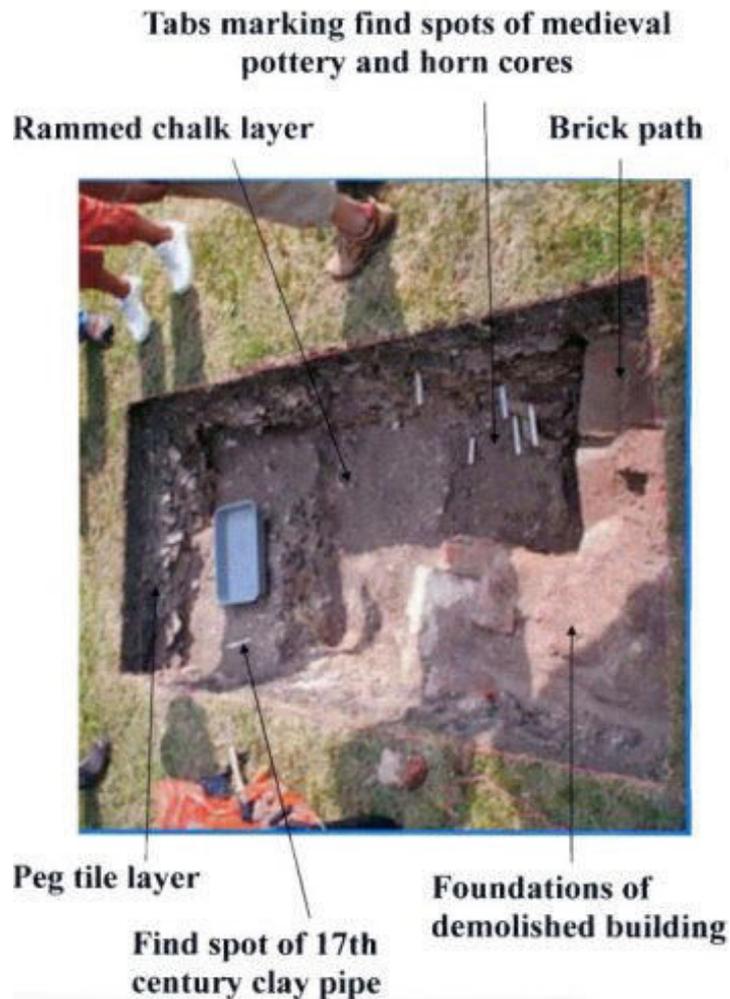


Fig 8: 17th century clay pipe HSX05 CTP No 82

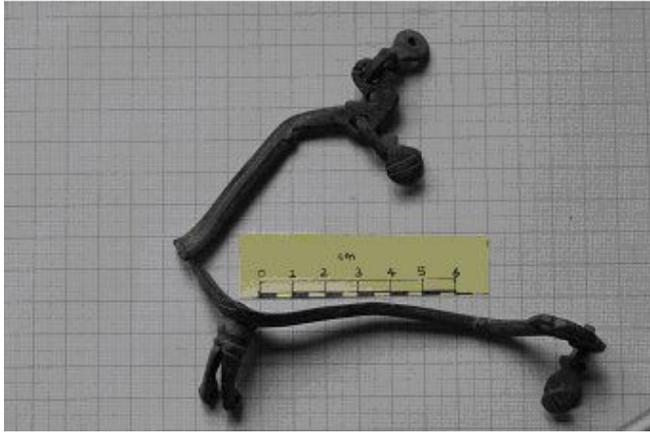
The topsoil contained very fragmentary shell, brick (red and yellow) and tile, small nails and animal bone fragments. Interestingly, though, a near complete bronze decorated spur was found in this layer. (Fig 9) The spur has been dated to the 18th century at latest, and possibly earlier (16th-17th century)⁷. The tile layer was mainly made up of substantial fragments of red tile, some of which had round peg hole, were curved and/or shaped, but also had small fragments of glass, animal bone, pottery and large chunks of lime mortar. A probably residual chunk of Saxo-Norman pottery was found in the tile layer. The chalk layer had some small fragments of brick and tile, shell, and animal bone but most notably towards the bottom of the level, at the interface between chalk and the underlying clay, was a heap of horn cores. An 18th century boot buckle⁸ was found in the spoil heap by metal detecting.



Fig 8: 17th century clay pipe HSX05 CTP No 82

⁷ G. Bailey 2002 Detector Finds 5 Witham: Greenlight Publishing pp32-5

⁸ R. Whitehead 2003 Buckles 1250-1800 Witham; Greenlight Publishing p114 No 734



**Fig 9: Bronze decorated spur, 16th-18th century.
HSX05 SF52**

base with a pie crust rim, not local to Kent. (Fig 10) Seven small sherds of local Tyler Hill ware were identified as 14th century.

Finally, a small piece with a green glaze and thick white slip seems to be the same as the robust, decorated ware which was found in Faversham Creek in 1965 when the water shaft was being renewed, next to TS Hazard: this ware was identified by Rigold as early 14th century, and made somewhere in London.¹⁰



Fig 10: 15th century 'pie crust' pot and horn core.

5. Interpretation

The horn core debris, which appeared undisturbed, suggested strongly that this was a tannery site. Hides supplied to tanneries normally came with hoof and horns attached, as shown in Fig 11¹¹. The outer layer of the horn was sold on for use as lantern panes etc, and the core discarded. The conspicuous association of these cores with medieval pottery suggests that we have here a tannery dating back at least to the early 14th century. Subsequent documentary and map research suggest that this area was occupied by a large tanyard estate, which included in its domain the cottages now known as 37-43 Tanners Street.¹² One horn core and large quantities of Tyler Hill pottery were found in the 37 Tanners Street test pit¹³. It also became clear that the splendid Presbytery building was built in 1743 by a tanner, John Gilbert, who must have been doing very well to be able to afford such a home, albeit next to a

⁹ Web site op cit

¹⁰ S. Rigold 2003 in B Philp, 'Discoveries at Faversham Creek' Kent Archaeological Review No 153 pp62-6

¹¹ S. Thomas, L. Clarkstone, R. Thomson 1983 'Leather manufacture through the ages' EMIAC No 27. p 2

¹² Title deeds op cit

¹³ Web site op cit

smelly industry. In 1840 the tanyard shut down, with tanning in Tanners Street continuing at two 19th century tanneries at the north end of the street.¹⁴

The resistivity survey **Fig 3** shows two distinct areas of high resistivity which appear to



Fig 11: The Tanner, from *Eygentlich Beschreibung aller Stände mit Kunstreichen Figuren*, Frankfurt, 1568

correspond to the two buildings shown on the Jacobs 1774 map. **Fig 12** In between them is an area of lower resistivity which could correspond to a small streamlet or ditch leading into the West Brook. Over much of the area, the background readings suggest the presence of chalk, probably as represented by the chalk layer found in the test pit. Informal conversation with the site manager in charge of the demolition of St Mildred's tannery in Canterbury (2005) suggests that St Mildred's had several hundred chalk lined tanning pits to the west of the Stour river – maybe that is what is showing up here.

If these interpretations hold up under further investigation and scrutiny, then this means that we have here the oldest industry in Faversham for which there is archaeological evidence.

6. Final comments

The findings of this test pit are important enough to be notified to the Sites and Monuments Register at Maidstone, once research has been taken as far as possible. Although there is no intention to dig further in the Prayer Garden, we do hope to a) put at least one more test pit into a garden of the associated range of cottages b) investigate the strip of wasteland bordering the West Brook c) examine the Brook bank in section. The intention is to publish an article in *Archaeologia Cantiana* on 'The Tanneries of Tanners Street, Faversham' in the near future.

7. Acknowledgments

Enormous thanks to the Carmelite Fathers for allowing us to dig in their beautiful, peaceful garden, and to carry out the resistivity survey afterwards. Jim Kilcoin was an indispensable link person and Mike the gardener tolerant of our depredations and always very helpful. A special debt is owed to Peter Stevens for his Faversham Society publication No 82 *A look at Tanners St, Faversham* (2003) which gave excellent jumping off points for the research.

¹⁴ Giraud & Donne op cit

Fig 13: Backfilling Test Pit 25



Small Finds



SF36



SF52

Small Finds Details

- SF36: Boot / Garter Buckle. Small buckle with 2 spikes / prongs (tongues) , pointed, ferrous strapbar. Frame and chape of Copper Alloy. (Chape: movable bar bearing tongues). Two fixed tongues, rectangular frame. Ref. Whitehead 2003 Page 114. Boot or garter buckle. Circa 1720 – 1790
- SF52: Eighteenth / Nineteenth Century Spur. Near complete, though arms have been bent outwards. No rowel. One arm has both hooks, the other has 1 hook. Short rowel neck with two prongs, decorated with collar at base of prongs. Decorative line down outside of arms. At end of each arm, tabs have three holes - two larger ones for hooks and a smaller one between for unknown purpose. Hooks and lacing buttons are decoratively moulded with two decorative lines on the button. Date 18th / 19th century.