

Hunt the Saxons 2006

Test Pit report for Test Pit 26A at 46, Tanners St, Faversham, Kent

Grid Reference TR 601205 161330

NB this report should be considered in conjunction with that for TP 26.

1 Introduction

Number 46 is situated on the west side of Tanners St, with an unusually large plot sloping down to the West Brook. This plot includes land previously occupied by numbers 43, 44 and 45 Tanners St. Swaine¹ describes number 46 in 1969 as an early 17th century timber framed two storey house with a ground floor rebuilt in brick and ‘unfortunately in a very poor condition’. This condition has since been remedied, and number 46 has a new wing, in keeping with its character, occupying the site of number 45 and part of 44.

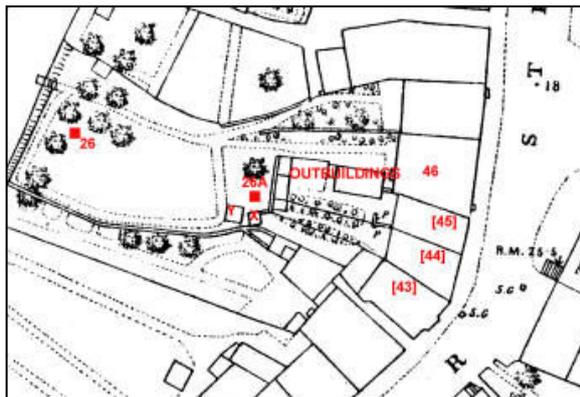


Fig 1: 1865 map of the plot.²

Stevens believes that numbers 43-45 were demolished in stages in the 1950s.³ These events gave rise to a complex series of boundary shifts with a sequence of outbuildings, few of which have survived. The most recent was an outbuilding in the central part of the garden, still present in 2000⁴ and apparently including a now demolished 19th century lavatory, shown as X on the map. The building shown as Y on the map was still there in 2006. The outbuildings shown in 1865 have, however, completely disappeared.

¹ Swaine, A 1969 *Faversham Conserved* Maidstone: KCC/ Faversham Borough Council

² OS 1865 (reprint 1904) Sheet XXXIV.9.10 1:536

³ Stevens, P 2003 *A look at Tanners St, Faversham* Faversham Society Series No 82 Faversham: Faversham Society

⁴ OS 2000 TR 0161 1:1250

Worth special note is the southern boundary of the modern plot of No 46, which consists of a high wall of intriguing nature (fig 2a & b)



Fig 2: Wall at number 46 a)

b)

This wall is a complex palimpsest of red bricks of various ages, some yellow brick and large quantities of worked stone. A large slab of plaster (2a) suggest that this view is of the inside wall of the demolished number 43. This was one of only two places in our research area where we had seen stone used in walling in this way.

2. Location of pit

Taking all of these complications into account, TP26A was located on a flat gravel covered area adjacent to the brick shed (Y in Fig 1). This was approximately 90cm below the level of the house lawn which was bounded by a retaining wall. The upper lawn was avoided because of the possibility of the presence of infill materials from demolition.

3. The procedures

The gravel and its weed proofing plastic membrane were removed from the surface to be excavated and placed to one side for reuse. 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. The pit was then excavated in thirty cm spits (layers), Spits 1 and 2 being trowelled out in five cm layers. All excavated soil was sieved meticulously, and the spoil heap scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each spit. Small finds were given three dimensional coordinates to pinpoint the exact find spot. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the membrane and gravel replaced.

4. The findings

Spit 1 consisted of very dry soil containing abundant wooden joinery fragments, large pieces of an earthenware toilet pan, brick, stone and concrete containing shell, particularly in the NE corner where an irregular surface was exposed about 15cm down. On removal during the excavation of Spit 2, this surface was found to be protecting a service pipe which was left supported by a baulk of earth. Loosely compacted chalk lumps made up most of S2 and were trowelled away, exposing a solid chalk feature in the south east corner. Excavation of S3

further exposed this right-angled chalk feature which showed a ridge of about 15 x 15 cm with a pitched surface sloping away to the north side. The surfaces of the internal angle were vertical.

Fig 3: the chalk surface



a) At 60cm depth



b) After removal of loose material



c) : Straight down into the 'pit' in the SE corner.

As shown in Figs 3b and 3c, the loose material in S3 and S4 was excavated from the angle in the SE corner to a depth of 120cm, which proved to be the bottom of the chalk feature. The soil beneath was soft, black and loamy.

S2 had inclusions of tile and brick, glass, shell, animal bone and coal. Through all the spits, building materials constituted the largest group of finds. Three badly corroded copper alloy tokens/coins came from S1. S1 and S2 yielded pottery from the 17th to 20th centuries, with the pottery from S3 and S4 nearly all 17th -18th century. A broken but near complete 17th/ early 18th century earthenware pot was found with its fragments distributed between S2, S3 and S4 (Fig 4)

5. Interpretation

The contents of TP26A can be divided into three distinct parts. S1 was mostly a demolition layer composed of brick, tile, stone, concrete and wooden joinery material which came from

Fig 4: near-whole pot from spits 2/3/4

the demolished small building X (a lavatory), and probably also from the structure shown in the 1960 and 2000 OS maps. Below this was an earlier demolition layer, which penetrated down into the 'pit' shown in Fig 3c: the distribution of the parts for the pot shown in Fig 4 imply that the 'pit' was infilled at the same time as this earlier demolition layer was deposited. Below this was what appeared to be a part of a substantial chalk structure. Earlier thoughts that this might be part of a chalk-lined tanning pit (as at St Mildred's in Canterbury) were discounted due to lack of staining and the sheer bulk of the chalk layer.



The only other substantial chalk structures known in Faversham at present are those which formed the 12th century foundations of Faversham Abbey.⁵ The depth of these foundations, as shown in plate XVII in Philp's publication, was around 1 metre, the same as the chalk in TP26A. Do we have here a chalk foundation platform upon which formerly existed a stone built medieval building, demolished at the time of building No 40 and its neighbours? Is the considerable amount of stone incorporated in the wall of the former No 43 and its garden associated with this demolition? These important questions will be returned to when further research has been carried out and the findings from all of the test pits are put together, but for now it is worth mentioning that the location of the medieval Guildhall or 'Yeldhall' mentioned by Jacobs⁶ is in this part of Tanners St

6. Final comments

Initial perceived difficulties posed by the dry, loose soil high rubble content and the service pipe were soon overcome when the chalk feature was exposed. The peephole given by this Test Pit was quite different to any of the others excavated in the *Hunt the Saxons* project so far and raised all sorts of important questions.

7. Acknowledgments

We were grateful for the help, interest and encouragement of Anna and Tim throughout the dig and afterwards for revisits. George and Catherine were a delight. George continues to take an interest and expects a WW2 weapons cache to come to light any day now.

Keith Robinson
November 2006

⁵ Philp, B. 1968 *Excavations at Faversham Abbey* First Research Report of the Kent Archaeological Research Groups Council

⁶ Jacobs, E 1774 *History of Faversham* repub. 1974 by the Faversham Society p15

Small Finds



SF604



SF605



SF606

Small Finds Details

- SF604: Token. Possibly part of a 17th Century token. Two thirds incomplete, badly corroded and very thin. The lettering 'OB' is very faintly visible on the obverse side of the outer edge, with hints of a design in the centre. One main fragment plus one tiny fragment.
- SF605: Coin or token. Circular. Even depth but with flattening at one part of rim (as if pinched). No designs discernable on either side, even though the corrosion is not especially severe. Dating by inspection impossible.
- SF606: Button? Token? Small disc, heavily encrusted with corroded material incorporating chalk. Rim only visible in limited area. Hints at dishing towards the centre suggest button. Dating by inspection impossible.