

Hunt the Saxons 2006

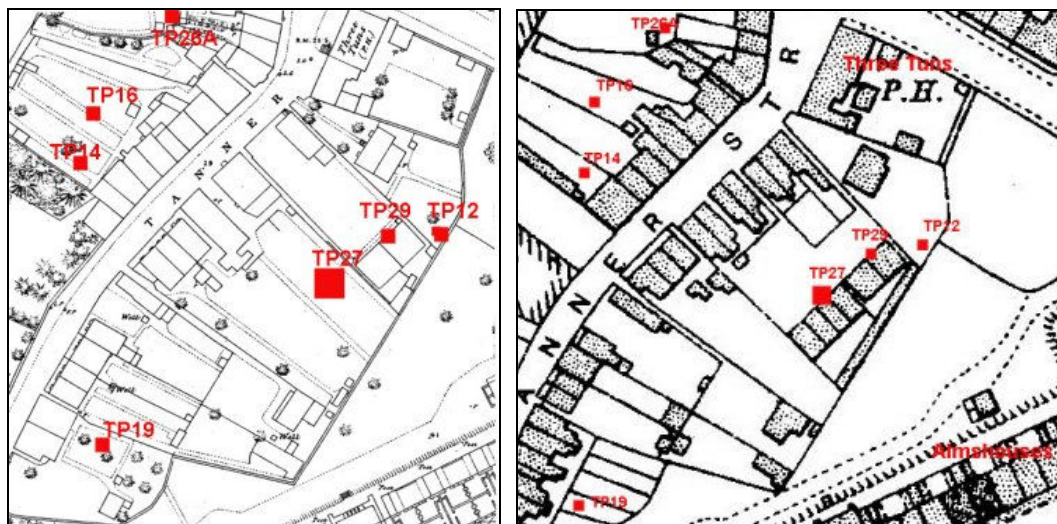
Test Pit report for Test Pit 29 at 18 Tanners Street, Faversham, Kent

Grid Reference: 601160 161385

1. Introduction

18 Tanners Street is situated on the eastern side of Tanners Street, close to the Three Tuns public house. It is an end of terrace Victorian residence, built in the late 19th century. It has a long garden which stretches to the old flint and brick boundary wall, on the other side of which lie the grounds of the Almshouses. Where the lawn is now there stood until the 1950's the first two of a row of 8 cottages known as Garden Place, which was situated behind numbers 18-24 Tanners Street. The earliest of these weather-boarded buildings were built sometime before 1865¹, with the rest being added before 1907.² Behind these cottages, against the boundary wall stood the wash houses³, now also demolished. Jacobs' map of Faversham shows the land as being used for orchards in the late 18th century.⁴

2. Location of pit



¹ OS 1865 XXXIV.9.10 1:536

² OS 1907 Kent Sheet XXXIV.9 1: 2500

³ Rev H Hugh Gower 1996 'Leaves from a Life' The Faversham Society Faversham Paper 26 pp32-33

⁴ Jacobs E 1774 map of Faversham in *History of Faversham*, reprint 1974 Faversham Society

Fig 1a: TP29 and neighbours in 1865 Fig 1b: TP29 in 1907

As the lawn was extensive with no large trees or outbuildings there was plenty of scope for deciding where to dig. It was eventually decided to site the pit near the northern boundary of the garden. This location was chosen for 2 main reasons: a) the grass in this area varied in colour and lushness, leading to speculation that there may be the ruins of a building below the surface, and b) an initial sweep with a metal detector indicated the presence of a non-ferrous metal object in the soil.

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 and to fence line/ back wall junctions. Turf was removed carefully from the square, rolled up and set aside in plastic bags. The pit was then excavated in thirty cm spits (layers), each spit being trowelled out in 5cm layers. Due to the presence of a wall and a possible floor surface the pit was excavated partly using the spit method and partly contextually. Because of pressure of time only half of spit 2 from 40-60cm and a quarter of spit 3 (60-90cm depth) were removed, to provide a representative sample of finds. All excavated soil was sieved meticulously, and the spoil heap scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each spit, with special finds being given three-dimensional co-ordinates to pinpoint the exact find spot. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down and watered and the turf replaced, but not before Sam and Georgina had put a time capsule in the bottom of the pit.

4. The findings

The topsoil in the pit was fine-grained and consisted of clay with high ash content. At a depth of 15cm this became mixed with a large proportion of mortar, beneath which a wall was discovered running the whole width of the pit from north to south. (see Fig 2) To the east of the wall was found a quantity of bricks, fireplace tiles and sections of a fireback. To the west of the wall from a depth of 20cm, beneath a building materials layer corresponding to the level of the walls, the soil changed to a light brown, firm, silty clay with a lot of flint inclusions. Once the wall and building rubble had been carefully recorded they were removed and the soil beneath them was found to be the same silty clay as just described above. The wall consisted of two courses of bricks of various shapes and sizes.



Fig 2 Surface at the base of Spit 1.

Finds from the ashy clay tended to be relatively modern (most less than 150 years old) and quite sparse. Only a small quantity of pottery fragments was found of which the vast majority dated from the 19th and 20th centuries. The object found by the metal detector revealed itself to be an Edward VII halfpenny. One other find of note was a ceramic gas mantle holder found amongst the brick and tile rubble.

Finds in the deeper, silty clay also tended to be sparse and were mainly chalk, bones, shells and pottery. Again the pottery was only small fragments, but now of much earlier date. A couple of pieces are possibly Iron Age or Roman, with the vast majority being Saxo-Norman and Medieval.

In the clay area to the west of the wall a large corroded metal object resembling a window catch was found in a vertical position at a depth of 20-30cm and beneath this at 35cm depth was found a spark plug inscribed **Bosch Germany** and also positioned vertically. Directly below this at 40cm a small circular pit of 6cm diameter was discovered, loosely filled with fragments of building material. This was excavated to a depth of 13cm, the narrowness of the pit preventing deeper excavation.



Figs 5: spark plug in situ and ‘washing pole’ hole after excavation

5. Interpretation

The wall is no doubt part of the front wall of the cottage in Garden Place. It directly matches the position and alignment of the wall as shown in the maps. This is further backed up by the fact that the fireplace debris and the gas mantle fitting were found where the inside of the house would have been. Sydney Bushnell, a local resident of long standing who supplied the unique photograph in Fig 6, told us the houses never had electricity so the gas fitting is especially poignant. The wall was of poor quality, constructed of ill-assorted bricks, but would have been substantial enough to support the small weather-boarded cottage for a century. The objects found above the level of the wall such as the coin and the pottery can for the most part be dated to the period of the occupation of the building.



Fig 6: Garden Place cottages not long before demolition in the 1950s

The finds from beneath the remains of the cottage were all much earlier in date, with pottery dating from the Iron Age through to Medieval times. This suggests that the area was continually populated for at least 1500 years before being developed as orchards. The one seeming anomaly was the 20th century spark plug. When this was considered in conjunction with the window catch above it and the circular pit beneath it one plausible explanation presented itself. The circular pit, in front of the cottage is exactly the right diameter to hold a washing-line pole. Careful inspection of the photographs of the upper west side of the pit revealed that the hole came down through the demolition rubble, showing it to have been created after demolition. The objects probably fell into the cavity left when the pole was removed. This explains why the spark plug is seemingly out of context and why the items were preserved in vertical positions

6. Final comments

This pit, yet again in 2006, highlighted the problems inherent in the arbitrary spit method of excavation. The changes in soil type and the discovery of structures and pits could have been better explored using the contextual method. These features made it a complex pit to dig and progress was often slow. Nonetheless the objectives in digging the pit were finally achieved, and the ‘washing pole’ posthole context generated a useful learning experience!

7. Acknowledgements

Thank you to Mia Scanlon for allowing us to dig in her garden and for the welcome cups of tea and biscuits. Thanks also to Sam and Georgina for all their enthusiasm as budding archaeologists.



Small Finds



SF622



SF623



SF624

Small Finds Details

- SF622: Coin. Ob: head of male sovereign with indistinct lettering. Rev: almost worn away figure of Britannia, most letters indecipherable, but date is 190*. Edward VII halfpenny Seaby 1997: 322
- SF623: Gas mantle holder. White ceramic gas mantle holder. Marked with 'SUGG' and '2'. Late 19th Century. Possibly associated with Garden Place Cottages.
- SF624: Spark plug. Cylindrical spark plug, heavily corroded at one end, well preserved at the other. Well preserved end has two blue bands encircling it on white background, with letters BOSCH underneath, GERM under that. 20th century - should be able to date more closely.