

Hunt the Saxons 2007

Test Pit report for Test Pit 31 at St Saviour's Lodge, 13, Abbey Place, Faversham, Kent Grid Reference TR 60186 16167

1 Introduction

St Saviour's Lodge is a modern detached property, the most southerly of a pair built in the 1980s. These two properties were erected in the south eastern portion of the garden of Arden's House and only around 150 metres south of the former Abbey inner precinct wall. To the east, they open onto Church Lane: although now a footpath, Church Lane is thought to be a route way which precedes the creation of Abbey St in the 13th century, possibly dating back to the late Saxon period.¹ South of St Saviour's Lodge lies the Abbey Physic Garden, with which it shares a high wall dating to around 1800. The Physic Garden has no connection with the historic Abbey, but is the garden of the Free Grammar School, erected in 1587 and since 1887 used as a Masonic Lodge.²



a)



b)



c)

Fig 1: a) 1745³ b) 1865⁴ c) 1907⁵

These extracts from historic maps show both the continuity of the southern boundary line of the plot and also an absence of buildings throughout the period shown.

The walls fronting Church Lane east of St Saviour's Lodge and the north end of the eastern Physic Garden wall contain a great many Kentish Ragstone blocks, some of which have been used to create a gateway onto

¹ Kent Historic Towns Survey 2003 Faversham KCC/EH Fig 14 (map)

² Perrin, T *The Old Queen Elizabeth Grammar School* Lodge of Harmony, Faversham

³ Edward Jacobs 1774 Map of Faversham from *History of Faversham* Repub. Faversham Society 1974

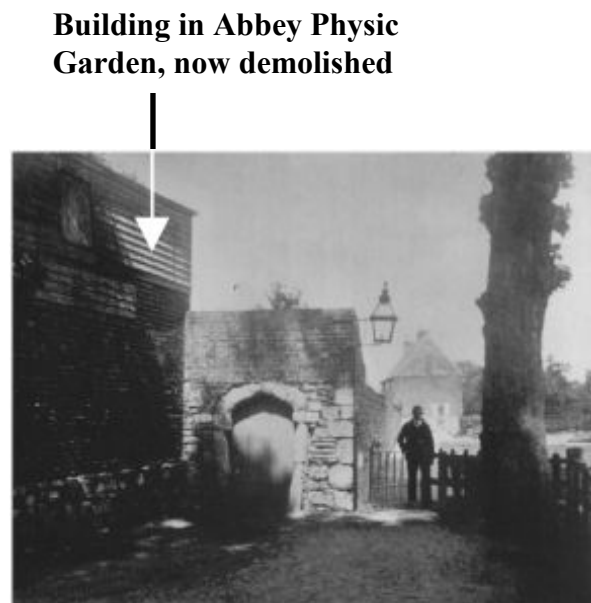
⁴ OS 1865 (1904 reprint) Sheet XXXIV Scale 1:536

⁵ OS 1907 Sheet XXXIV Scale: 1:2500

Church lane (supposedly the gateway through which Thomas Arden's body was carried in 1551⁶ – the form of the gateway does suggest a mid-Tudor date, see fig 2). These blocks must have been recycled from Faversham Abbey, the main church having been demolished in 1539. The sections of wall fronting onto Church Lane at this point are a palimpsest of materials, including not only the recycled masonry but also local brick of varying age.

There is no evidence for habitation on the St Saviour's Lodge plot (see fig 1) over at least the last 500 years, although Telfer does mention in passing a barn belonging to the medieval Abbey (Fale's Barn) in this area.⁷ Because of this absence, there was an expectation that the depth of archaeology at this point would be shallow compared with elsewhere in the town and that we had a rare chance of reaching either earlier deposits or natural deposits well before our maximum pit depth of 1.2m.

Fig 2 shows the gateway marked on Fig1b in around 1910 (left) and 2007.



2. Location of pit

A georesistivity survey was carried out on this site beforehand, but did not reveal clear features apart from a wet zone along the foot of the high southern wall. The test pit was therefore located away from the wall and midway down the plot itself (see red marker in figs 1).

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. Spit 4 (90-120cm) was taken out only as a quadrant to a depth of 17cm, due to shortage of time. All excavated soil was sieved meticulously, and the spoil heap scanned using a

⁶ Holt, A. 1970 *Arden of Faversham* No 7 in the Faversham Papers Faversham Society p 6

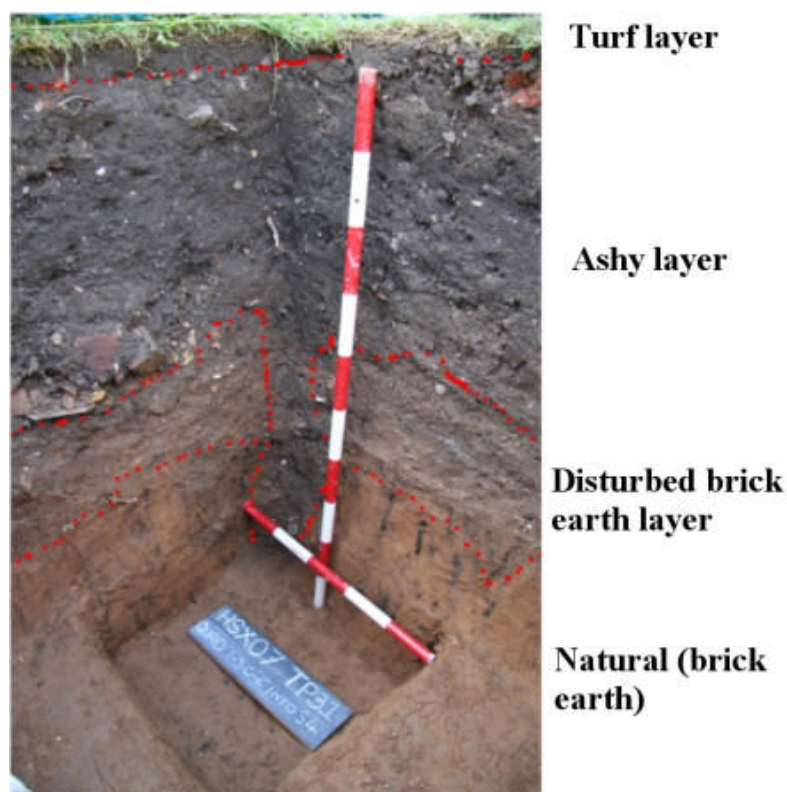
⁷ Telfer, W. 1965 *Faversham Abbey and its last Abbot, John Caslocke*. No 2 in Faversham Papers series, Faversham Society p viii, 11.

metal detector. Finds were set aside for each spit with special finds given three dimensional coordinates to pinpoint the exact find spot. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

4. The findings

At the maximum depth reached in this Test Pit, 107cm, the soil was dense silty clay, bright yellow-brown in colour. Marked vertically by worm holes dating back to a time when the surface was lower than at present, this deposit was free of any inclusions. In the south east corner it was penetrated by a pit or posthole. The yellow-brown deposit continued upward for around 40cm and gave way across the pit to a slightly darker and more disturbed layer which had inclusions of shell, animal bone and pottery. After about a further 30 cm (less in places) this gave way to a grey-brown friable ash and cindery layer, also with abundant inclusions. At three points this layer dipped down, the hollows being filled with fragmentary building materials, gravel and other artefacts. One of the shallow pits contained a fragment of plastic sheeting, and a narrow deep pit penetrated down to the lowest level. Finally, a shallow turf layer of about 10cm depth topped the pit off. Fig 3 shows the relationship between these deposits.

Fig 3: Test Pit 31 sides facing south east



Finds from TP31 were mostly very fragmentary although some complete oyster shells were found in the rubbish hollows. The building material fragments of curved tile and early yellow and red brick suggest a post medieval origin for this debris, perhaps a 17th century building. Identified animal bone was mainly bird with some fish bones. The small amount of metal found was nearly all iron nails. No items of a personal nature were found, not even buttons, unless a mysterious bone object SF759 turns out to be a personal item (fig 4)



Fig 4 : Small Find 759, use unknown

Given the generally undiagnostic nature of the finds, the pottery assemblage becomes even more interesting. Although at 1.5kg the overall quantity was less than most of the HSX test pits in Faversham, 46% was medieval (11th-15th century) with only 11% nineteenth century. The deep pit which went down to Spit 4 contained only 17th-18th century pottery in the lowest level exposed. Within the medieval category, almost half was shelly ware with some shell dusted ware: although it is almost impossible to date shelly ware accurately⁸, the cruder shell-filled ware is thought to be earlier (11th/ early 12th?) rather than later. Most of the later medieval pottery is from Tyler Hill (near Canterbury) with one large and unabraded orange glazed sherd being a classic example of Late Tyler Hill (early 16th century). Some very small sherds of Tudor Green were also found – indeed, most of the medieval sherds are small and much abraded. The 19th century pottery was all found in the upper ash-laden layer.

5. Interpretation

The lowest layer was identified, after very careful examination, as the pre-occupation natural brick earth deposit, lying beneath a worked layer which was the medieval –post medieval occupation layer. This middle layer contained the greatest amount of medieval pottery and no 19th century pot at all. The ash-laden layer above is rather more mysterious – we did not expect to find such cindery, grate-type dumping so relatively remote from early modern occupation. The age range of the pottery in this ashy layer was also very great, from shelly ware to late 19th/early 20th century and there were also fragmentary demolition materials, including brick and curved tiles (implying house debris rather than an outbuilding). Given the fact that this plot has only recently been built on, this is possibly a levelling layer created in the 1980s and bulldozed in from elsewhere. The scrap of plastic found in one of the shallow pits at the bottom of the ashy layer and the unsorted nature of the finds do support this idea of recent origin for the whole layer. Quite where it came from in the immediate area is another matter, as inspection of the maps in Fig 1 will show. .

6. Final comments

TP31 did meet our expectations, in that the archaeology was indeed quite shallow and would have been even shallower if it were not for the levelling layer discussed above. Furthermore, this Test Pit had the second highest proportion of medieval pottery of all the 23 pits dug during Hunt the Saxons, exceeded only by TP36 (52%). If only we could date shelly ware more accurately, we might even have solid evidence for occupation prior to the building of the Abbey in 1147AD.

7. Acknowledgments

Great thanks to Jim and Doreen, our kind hosts who took so much interest. Thanks also to Norah who loaned us the photograph in fig 3 and helped us to understand the plot. Finally, thanks to the excavation team who valiantly continued to sieve completely unproductive deposits just to prove a point!

Patricia Reid

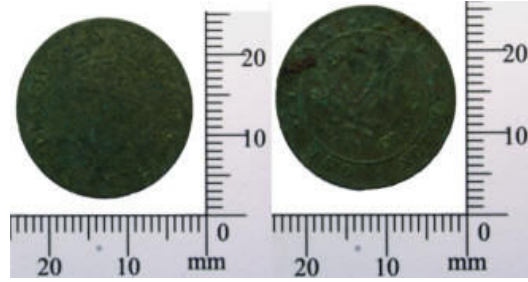
March 2008

⁸ Cotter, J *Medieval Shelly Wares in Kent: a review of recent research* CAT Annual Report 1999-2000 Canterbury, UK

Small Finds



SF755



SF758



SF759

Small Finds Details

- SF755: Button / medal. Circular object. Obverse: black basis with silvery coating. Mythical beast central in design within 21mm circle. Peripheral pseudo-latin lettering GRACIA.REX.O.LX>DOMICUS. PRIMO (by grace of king, first lord) Reverse: central raised eye for attachment within circle of 17mm. Lines around edge indicating moulding.
- SF758: Coin. George VI coin from Ceylon. Obverse: head of king wearing Imperial state crown. Reverse: inscription 'Ceylon One 1943 [possibly 1945]'.
- SF759: Needle? A needle-shaped object of a translucent, dull yellow-coloured material. Small round hole at one end of 3mm diameter. Top 20mm at hole end covered in a grey and white, unidentified corroded substance (non-ferrous).