



## Hunt the Saxons 2007

### Test Pit report for Test Pit 32 Fighting Cocks Cottage, Abbey Place, Faversham, Kent Grid Reference TR 16169 60192

#### 1 Introduction

Fighting Cocks is the most southerly of a pair of cottages, thought to date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. These cottages are of special interest because the masonry lower front wall is believed to be the most southerly part of the east wall of the Inner Precinct of Faversham Abbey.<sup>1</sup> This wall also survives directly to the north, running along the western boundary of the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School playing fields, where it is believed to be part of the western front of St Saviour's Royal Abbey itself.<sup>2</sup> Jacobs map of 1774<sup>3</sup> show the cottages facing onto what is still, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an open space corresponding to the Inner Precinct. (Fig 1a) Thus the garden plot behind Fighting Cocks was inside the Abbey's outer precinct. Evidence from the rescue excavation of the Abbey site in 1965, motivated by the building of Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, suggests that the outer precinct was enclosed only by a ditch in this area.<sup>4</sup>

In 1790, the cottages were one property, used as a public house, Fighting Cocks, with the cock pit thought to have been located beyond the present eastern garden wall.<sup>5</sup> It then became four cottages and in recent times, two. (Fig 1b & c)

Just to the north of Fighting Cocks garden, in the corner of the playing fields of Queen Elizabeth School, are large, overgrown mounds of debris. Judging by the age of the covering vegetation, this is probably material removed from the Queen Elizabeth School playing fields when they were levelled in 1965. The mounds may also include some archaeological spoil from the 1965 excavations. This dumped material will be relevant when interpreting the findings in the garden itself

The whole of the Faversham Abbey site is scheduled, including Abbey Green and the garden of Arden's House, but the scheduling does not include the garden of Fighting Cocks cottage.<sup>6</sup> The foundations of the Abbey itself are still in situ, protected by a mound in the playing fields of the school, and the 1965 excavators, quite rightly, did not attempt to investigate beneath them. Of interest to the *Hunt the Saxons* project, however, is the widespread assumption that the Royal Manor of Domesday Faversham, was located here from late Saxon times.<sup>7</sup> Certainly the Abbot of Faversham Abbey, built around 1147 by King Stephen as the

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<sup>1</sup> Philp, B 1968 *Excavations at Faversham 1965* 1st Research Report of the KERGC p 30

<sup>2</sup> Philp 1968 op cit p30

<sup>3</sup> Jacobs, E 1774 *History of Faversham* republished by Faversham Society 1974

<sup>4</sup> Philp 1968 op cit p30 and map Fig. 3

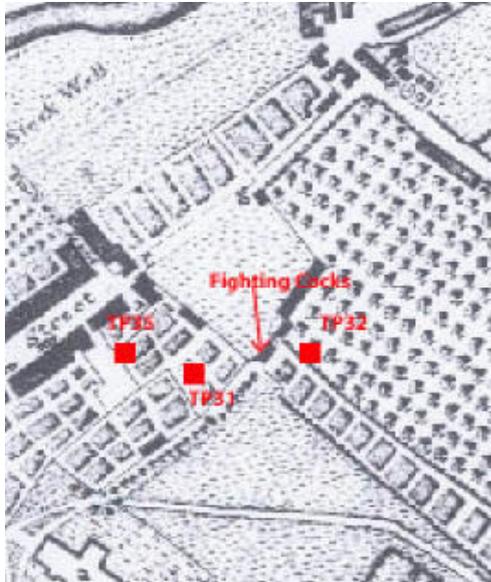
<sup>5</sup> From Fighting Cocks' description in 2002 *'Secret Gardens' Guide*, published by the Faversham Society: Entry No 11.

<sup>6</sup> Kent Historic Towns Survey, 2003, KCC/English Heritage: Maidstone Fig. 20

<sup>7</sup> Williams A & G. Martin (eds) 1992 *Domesday Book* Penguin: London p 7

Mausoleum Abbey for the House of Blois<sup>8</sup>, had the powers of Lord of the Manor.<sup>9</sup> Yet there is no evidence, to my knowledge, of any occupation later than Roman but prior to the Abbey from this part of Faversham. This is what we were looking for the garden of Fighting Cocks.

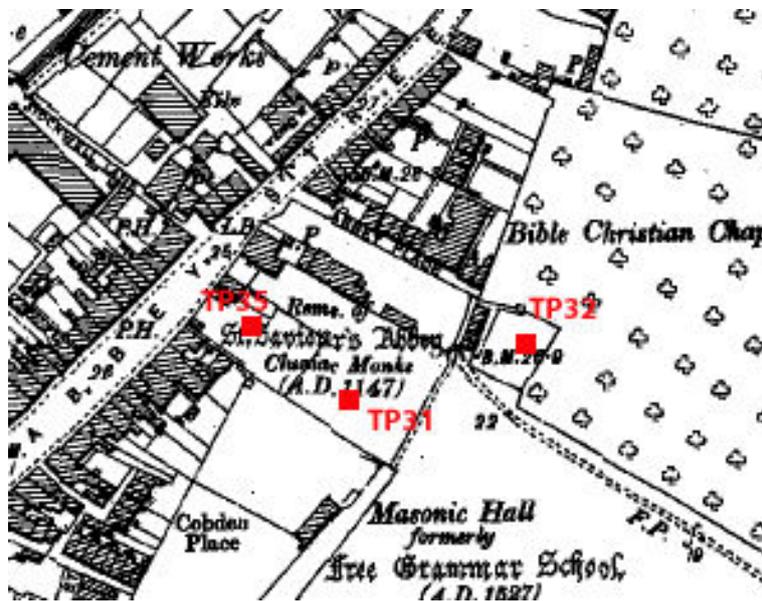
**Fig 1: Location of Test Pits 31,32 and 35**



a) for 1774<sup>10</sup>



b) for 1865<sup>11</sup>



c) for 1907<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Telfer, W 1964 *Faversham Abbey and its last Abbot, John Caslocke* No 2 in the Faversham Papers Series: Faversham Society p 1

<sup>9</sup> Telfer W 1964 op cit p 5

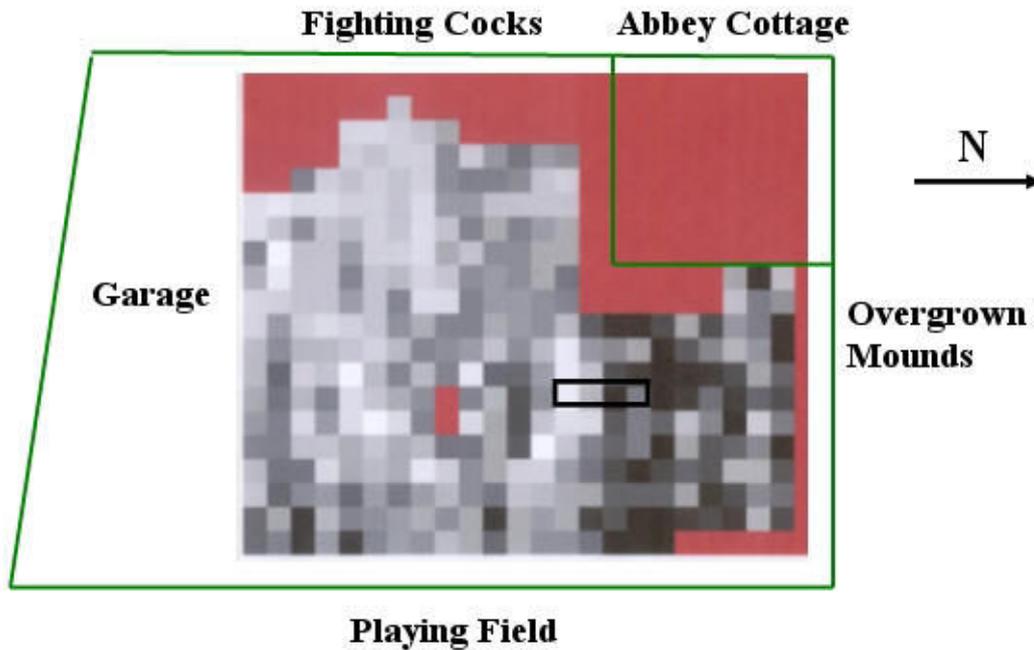
<sup>10</sup> Jacobs E, 1774, *History of Faversham* reprint 1974 Faversham Society map of Faversham

<sup>11</sup> OS 1865 (1904 reprint) Sheet XXXIV.9.10 Scale of original 1:536

<sup>12</sup> OS 1907 Sheet XXXIV Scale of original 1:2500

## 2. Location of pit

A thorough preliminary survey of this important location was carried out. This included a flowerbed survey, contour survey and geo resistivity survey (Fig 2). From these we learned that a) we could indeed expect to find later medieval pottery b) that most of the garden was under lawn and was raised a metre above the adjacent playing fields and footpath c) that an area of high resistivity stretched from east to west across the garden, in line with the boundary line between Fighting Cocks and Abbey Cottage. The decision was to excavate 4m x 1m north-south trench across this line, as shown in Fig 2. This location also avoided tree roots and underground services.



**Fig 2: Georesistivity survey results, with garden boundaries in green and the location of TP32 in black. Each square corresponds to 1 square metre.**

## 3. The procedures

A 4m x 1m one metre trench was pegged out using the planning square and the area delineated marked with string. The position of the trench 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 trench was then excavated by context, i.e. material was removed in reverse order to the original deposition. Excavated soil was sieved meticulously, although where a context was particularly homogenous the sieving was confined to a 1 in 5 sample. The spoil heap was scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each context. 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. This test pit is one of three larger contextually-excavated excavations carried out in *Hunt the Saxons*.



**Fig 3: The garden of Fighting Cocks: sieving in the foreground, excavation in the background.**

#### 4. The findings

Excavation began with the removal by trowelling of a layer around 40cm deep [02], which lay with some degree of discontinuity over a yellow-brown clay. This upper layer [02] was a poorly sorted jumble of ceramic building material, clay pipe fragments, pottery, iron nails, small fragments of shell and animal bone and some modern items of plastic. It contained lenses of yellow clay and a stripe of orange sand. Dateable material (pottery and clay pipes) ranged in age from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the later 20<sup>th</sup> century. A perforated bone handle was probably the handle of a quill pen sharpener, of 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century date.<sup>13</sup>

The surface of the underlying yellow-brown clay [05] was irregular with a number of prominent pits, the contents of which were removed before tackling [05] as a whole. The largest of these was a bonfire pit [03][04] consisting of two ‘basins’ with a north-south clay ridge in between. The bonfire pit contained a lot of ashy burned material, notably burned brick and large pieces of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century pottery.



**Fig 4: Surface of context [02], after the removal of the bonfire pit fill.**

Next to the bonfire pit to the south was a large circular hole lined with large slivers of teak [11][12]: this was interpreted as a telegraph pole stump. Two other small but distinct post holes were identified [06][07], [08][09]. The yellow brown clay itself was then removed, and contained substantial amounts of shell, animal bone, vessel glass, and building material fragments. Clay pipes from this level were mainly 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century, as was the pottery, but there was a fair proportion of medieval pottery and early medieval shelly ware (about 30% of the total for [05]).

<sup>13</sup> See [www.todsstuff.co.uk/penknives.php](http://www.todsstuff.co.uk/penknives.php)

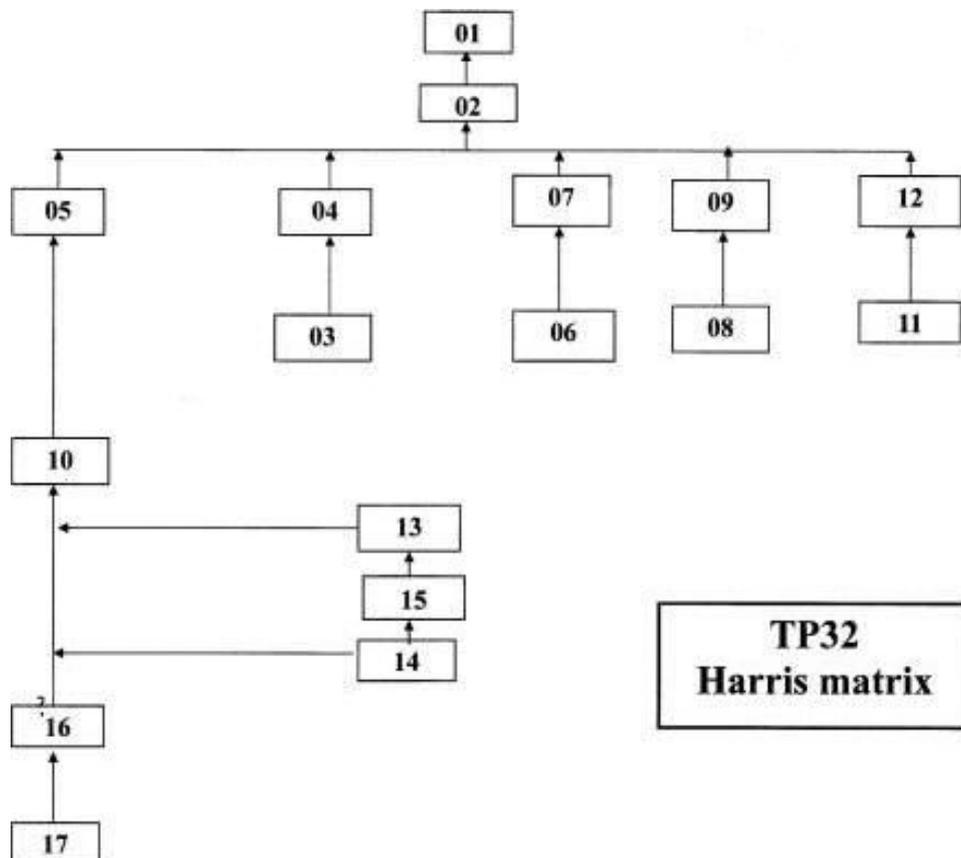
The yellow-brown clay layer [05] shaded into an orange layer [10] though without any sharp boundary. [10] was trowelled out, and in the process a patch of mortar was revealed in the middle of the trench [13], central to which was a circular hole [14][15]. The content of this was kept separate from [10]. Layer [10] contained only one tiny clay pipe fragment (trickle in from [05]?), no glass and almost all of the pottery was medieval in date, and 40% was local hand-made shelly ware dating from the 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> centuries (possibly earlier). Some small stone fragments were of a non-local type and included greenish sandstone.

**Fig 5: Slot at base of TP32, showing the greenish clay at the bottom.**



Excavation of [10] stopped at 1.2 m below ground level, for safety reasons, but a small (50cm x 25cm) slot was taken down to 30cm below this floor. The orange deposit continued but was almost wholly devoid of finds except for some stressed flint and a small sherd of shell-dusted ware (13<sup>th</sup> century), and has been tentatively designated as a new context [16], although it could be a continuation of [10]. At the base of this little slot, the soil changed abruptly to greenish silty clay [17]. (Fig 5)

**Fig 6: Harris Matrix for TP32**



## 5. Interpretation

It became clear quite early on that the uppermost layers [01][ 02] were a relatively modern ‘top up’ to the garden. Not only was it a jumble of material, but in section the boundaries between different dumps of material could be seen, showing dumping from the northern end towards the south. This could have been material derived from the mounds next door (see earlier) i.e. post 1960s. Beneath this make-up layer was the earlier (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century) land surface, much dented by rubbish pits, and post holes. A telegraph pole had stood at this point until the advent of the dumped layer [02].

Beneath [02], deposits had accumulated gradually since at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century, with those at around one metre down [10] being entirely made up of medieval material. The lens of mortar and the fragments of exotic stones found at this level are probably associated with the Abbey. The medieval pottery found varied in age from 13<sup>th</sup> to early 16<sup>th</sup> century, with some possibly earlier local handmade shelly wares. These clearly medieval levels shaded into earlier deposits which were almost free of human signs. Once again, it is a shame that shelly ware is so difficult to date: some of it could possibly date from the pre Abbey period (i.e. 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> centuries).

If the topmost ‘make-up’ level is ignored, the medieval deposits at Fighting Cocks can be found at around 50cm down from the land surface. This is similar to the level for medieval deposits found nearby in TP31 (St Saviours Lodge) and TP35 (82-83 Abbey St).(see Fig 1) It is also similar to the level of medieval deposits on the upper town-side banks at Tanners St (see TP27 for example).<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere in central Faversham, these early deposits are usually buried far more deeply.

## 6. Final comments

This **was** not an easy pit to dig or interpret, because of the degree of ‘churn’ and the shading of layers one into the other. As is so often the case, digging had to stop (for safety reasons) just as it was getting really interesting. It did, however, give us a very useful insight into a part of Faversham which is rarely available, and makes a useful comparison with other investigated locations.

## 7. Acknowledgments

Great thanks to Jean Adderley who showed great patience both whilst the preliminary surveys were happening and during the six days worth of digging. Jean also allowed us to store our equipment in her garage - much appreciated.

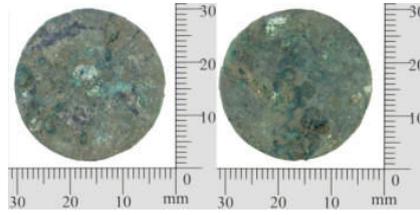
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<sup>14</sup> Other Test Pit reports can be found on [www.community-archaeology.com.uk](http://www.community-archaeology.com.uk)

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Small Finds



SF711



SF714



SF715



SF716



SF717



SF718



SF719



SF735



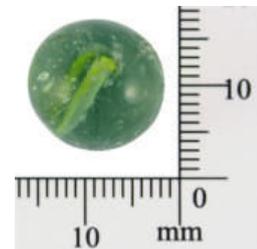
SF736



SF742



SF779



SF797

**Small Finds Details**

- SF711: Charles 1 Rose Farthing showing on the obverse side worn crown and sceptre in the centre with the lettering CAROLV/DG/M visibly around the edge. The reverse side shows a rose in the centre with the lettering FRA.ET.HI visibly around the edge. It was possibly clipped or badly stamped out. Ref: Coins of England and the United Kingdom 1997 - Seaby - page 221 - ref. 3207.
- SF714: Heavily corroded modern coin - machine produced. Nothing visible to identify - but from size possibly old penny.
- SF715: Doll's leg. White doll's lower leg with black sock (or boot?). Groove at top, knee level. Spot of accretion at top of calf.
- SF716: Figurine. Bisque (unglazed porcelain) figurine of animal, head and rear parts missing. Some green and black colouring between fore and hind legs on both sides. Appears to be a hoofed animal, possibly horse. Mid 19th- early 20th century.
- SF717: Doll / figurine. Part of white female doll/figurine, comprising torso and upper legs. Part of pink ribbon at neck. Groove in top: were arms attached with wire? No. 4 marked on upper back, plus, possibly, other letters or digits. Seams at sides.
- SF718: Strap end / clasp. Has one long slot and one short slot, with small hole between. Could have been used with ribbon or other thin fabric. Would have had twin with hook to thread into small slot.
- SF719: Lice Comb. Fragment of bone lice comb. Part of straight rectangular side and central bar with broken fine teeth above and below. No decoration. Probably early 19th century - as shown on [www.wisconsinhistory.org/museum/artifacts/archives/002505.asp](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/museum/artifacts/archives/002505.asp) web site.
- SF735: Fragment. Polished fragment of bone with groove. Probably from penknife.
- SF736: Knife handle fragments. Two worked and polished bone fragments, one with small hole (2). Parts of knife/penknife handle, probably a quill sharpening knife 17th-18thc. See website Historical Knives, [www.Tods Stuff.co.uk/penknives](http://www.TodsStuff.co.uk/penknives).
- SF742: Small piece of unidentified material with small circular lines on the obverse side and rougher on the reverse side. It could be part of a fossil or possibly bronze. If bronze, it has been suggested that it could be part of a Saxon hanging bowl mount. Further investigation needs to be carried out.
- SF779: Whetstone. Incomplete whetstone, small, grey and broken at the thinnest (most worn) end. Difficult to date, could be early. Well worn at the broken end. Type of stone needs to be identified.
- SF797: Ball. Glass marble, pale green with pale yellow 'streak' inside. A few tiny bubbles in glass.