

Hunt the Saxons 2007

Test Pit Report for Test Pit 36 at 19 East Street, Faversham, Kent. OS Grid Reference TR 01737 61329

1. Introduction

Number 19 is situated on the north side of East St, the most easterly property of a terrace of three, next to Church Road and Cooks Ditch. Deeds in the Rigden Archive dated 1719 mention 'three small tenements or stone houses tyled adjoining Cooks Ditch'.¹ The deeds further mention that these properties were demolished around 1815 and replaced by three brick and slated structures. The selection of the gardens at the rear of numbers 17-19 East St for investigation was due to their closeness to the site of the discovery of an Anglo Saxon loom weight during the construction of the nearby Post Office in 1954 (loom weight currently on display in Maidstone Museum²). This is the only evidence for Anglo Saxon occupation (as opposed to burial) found in Faversham before the *Hunt the Saxons* project. The garden area behind 17-19 East St was the only undisturbed land anywhere near this find site, hence the request to investigate. This account of TP36 should be seen in conjunction with the report for TP37, dug further east in the same garden.³

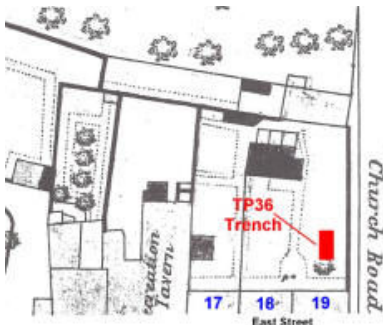


Fig 1a 1865⁴

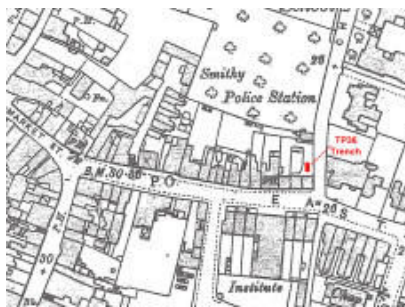


Fig 1b 1907⁵



Fig 1c⁶

2. Location of pit

The rear gardens of 17 – 19 East Street are open plan and mainly laid to lawn (see Fig 1c). The garden of No. 19 has been raised by approximately 0.3m as can be seen in photo Fig 2.

¹ Rigden Archive, 281/40/40-1 Box L. Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone.

² Maidstone Museum Accession Number 116/1954: HER No TR06 SW33 MKE 4159

³ Report for TP37 published on www.community-archaeology.org.uk/projects/HunttheSaxons

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

⁵ OS 1907 Sheet XXXIV Scale: 1:2500

⁶ www. Google Earth

A flower bed occupied the Church Road side of the lawn and a water feature was situated towards the north end of the garden. The exact location was also decided in order to align with Test Pit 37 which had already been excavated at 17 East Street. As with all FSARG excavations, the exact position of the trench was recorded with reference to the property.



Fig 2. Showing raised lawn and flower bed.

3. Procedures

A 1.5m by 2m rectangle was pegged out and the area delineated marked with string. The position of the trench was recorded by measuring to mapped corners of the plot and the corners of the trench later surveyed for levels. Turf was removed carefully from the area, rolled and set aside in plastic bags. The trench was then excavated using single context methods i.e. deposits were removed in reverse chronological order to the events which created them. Finds were set aside for each context with Small Finds given three dimensional coordinates to pinpoint the exact find spot. Most of the excavated soil was sieved meticulously, and the spoil heap scanned using a metal detector. For some layer contexts, *sample* sieving took precedence over 100% recovery methods. When this was the case, the results were multiplied to give a representative figure. Scale sections and plans were drawn where appropriate, and photographs taken. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

This was the third trench that the FSARG team had excavated using a wholly contextual (as opposed to spit) method, and the second for 2007.

4. The findings

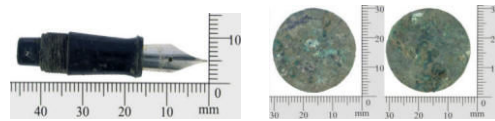
Directly underneath the turf (context 01) the soil was typical of town occupational areas being dark and ashy, and was full of relatively modern rubbish and rubble. This extended to a depth of 0.5m. Subsequently, the decision was taken not to sieve this first context since it would not have provided any useful data. It did however contain a number of what appeared to be small animal burials. The pottery recovered was predominantly 19th century (44%) with 16th – 19th century Red ware and 18th century pottery the next prolific (25% of each). Included was a small amount of 16th and 20th century pottery. This churn is typical of well-worked soil. There were 6 small finds recovered from this context (see fig 4).

Directly beneath was the next recorded context (02) which was a well sorted yellow fine grained clay soil. Running along the East side of the trench was a well defined pit extending southerly 1.66m from the NE corner and 0.44m west (see Fig. 3). The pit was defined as cut 03, fill 04. It looked suspiciously like a grave!



Fig 3. Pit (dark rectangle shown at the top of the photo) extending to nearly the whole length of the trench.

**(20th century)
Fountain pen nib.
Georgian coin.**



**(Probably 19th -20th century)
Graphite writing stick**



**(19th century)
Bone knife or fork handle.**



**(18th century)
Shoe or garter buckle tongue bar.**



Piece of Quern stone



Fig 4. Small finds from context 01

The pit (04) was excavated and, as the fill was homogenous, a 1 in 3 sieving sample was decided on in order to assist progression. During the removal of 04, a sondage (investigation slot) was cut through to assess the relationship with the yellow clay layer (02). The disturbed base of 04 was consistent with the clay layer (02).

There was much speculation about the purpose of the pit, but once the base was reached, all was revealed. Unexpectedly, at the bottom was a large collection of iron including a Victorian bed side-rail and headboard (see Fig 6). The iron extended under the baulk to the east of the trench, and because of this, it was left in-situ and not removed. Once photographed, the area was covered over to maintain a safe working area. Pottery finds from this pit were mainly 19th century with a small quantity of 18th century and medieval. There were also 2 small finds recorded (Fig 5). Other finds were mainly brick and tile fragments with a quantity of coal / coke, some vessel and window glass, and small amounts of animal bone.

(19th -20th century)
Graphite writing stick end (shaped)



(Medieval / Tudor)
Lead token.



Fig 5. Small finds from context 04



Fig 6.
Showing large collection of iron. Pieces that were identified were from a Victorian bed, and possibly Anderson shelter.

The clay layer 02 was next to be excavated. This was taken down 10cm at a time, all the while looking for features. Sieving was limited to a 10% sampling regime to keep to a manageable level. Medieval and 16th – 19th century Red ware made up the majority of the pottery (65%) while there was also a quantity from other periods from the 19th century dating back to the Saxo-Norman period (10th – 12th century) indicating that this context too had seen a great deal of churn. Eight small finds were recorded for this context including part of a medieval bronze ear-scoop shown in Fig 7.



Fig 7. Medieval ear-scoop (approximately half remaining).

Other small finds included a collection of 10 pins, wire, part of a knife or fork bone handle, and a crude needle (possibly tapestry).

At a depth of 1m from the surface, a number of medium to very large flints were revealed. Intermixed with these was a quantity of CBM, chalk, stone, shell and pottery (of which nearly 90% was medieval). This flint surface (classified as context 05) was confined to the south end of the trench and extended northwards by 1m (see plan drawing reproduced here in Fig. 8). A further context (09) was identified as a yellow clay layer (shown in Fig 8 at the northern half).

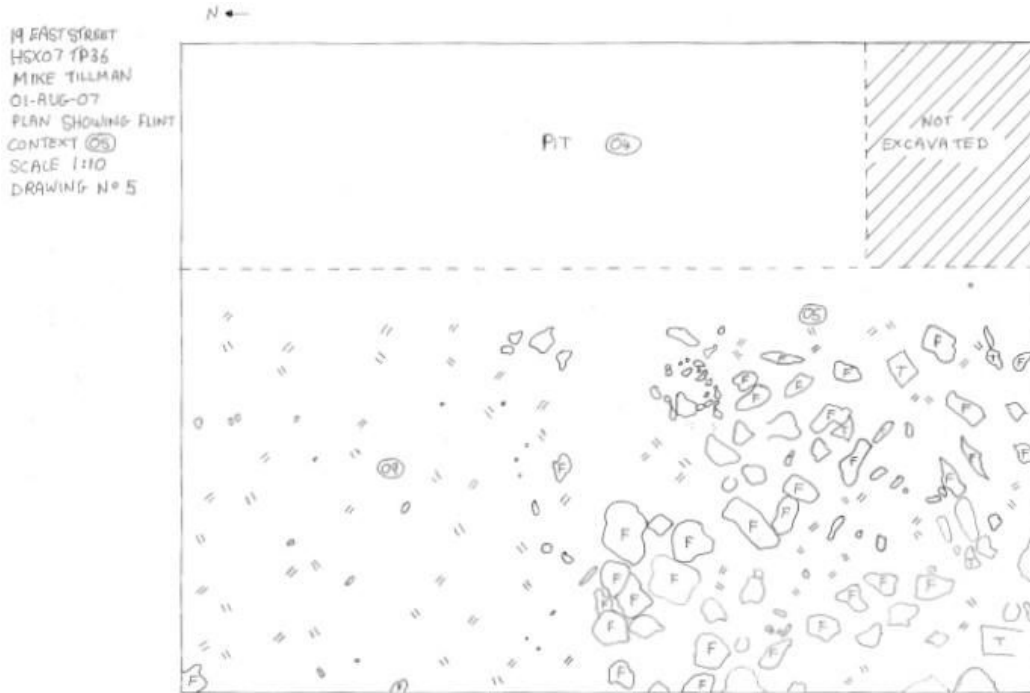


Fig 8. Plan view showing flint surface (05) to the south end of the trench.

The flints (a total of 179) from 05 were removed and recorded. Fig 9 shows the quantity recovered. A single small find was also recovered - a copper alloy pin. The soil directly below 05 was classified as 06, a sealed context beneath 05. An area 46cm – 57cm extending from the southern end of the trench revealed a narrow trench (21cm wide) running east-west at a depth of 8-10cm (see Fig 10).



Fig 9. Flint surface before excavation (left) and quantity removed (right)

The undisturbed sealed layer (06) beneath the flints contained substantial, fresh-edged late medieval/early 16th century pottery fragments (100%), chalk, animal bone and shell. While excavating this layer, 2 small post holes were discovered 5.5cm diameter (possibly fence posts). The northern end of the trench (09), however, consisted of a complex arrangement of inter-cutting pits (07, 08, 10, and 13). Because of the arrangement, it was very difficult to distinguish one pit from another. The layer (09) contained mainly medieval pottery (97%) with a small amount of Saxo-Norman (3%), while the pits contained very much the same, but with the addition of a very small quantity of 17th century pottery. The bulk material was mainly CBM shell, chalk, some mortar and animal bone.

A slot 1.25m x 0.5m wide was cut through the centre of the trench to establish the relationship between the north and south ends. Fig 11 shows a new context (11) which is made up of a very bright orange sandy clay layer.



Fig 10 showing shallow trench (right of centre) with one of the inter-cutting pits to the left.



Fig. 11 showing new bright orange clay layer (11).

On top of this layer were a number of flints that caused some debate. Fig 12 shows them in-situ. This feature consists of a 'circle' of 7 flints surrounding a single one. Once these were removed, another item was found just beneath and to the west of the centre flint. This has yet to be identified by a geologist, but seems to be a large iron slag nodule. The base of this context sloped away from south to north as be seen in Fig 13. The excavation concluded at this point due to time constraints and excavation depth.



Fig 12. The flint feature



Fig 13 clearly showing the orange clay layer sloping away to the north

5. Interpretation

This small trench reveals a sequence of at least four major phases. The earliest phase is that indicated by the enigmatic lower flint scatter shown in fig 2 above, sitting on top of what is seen as the natural brick earth. Immediately north of this scatter, the brick earth sloped downwards to the north quite steeply (fig 13), with no evidence in the layers immediately above (06, 09) to suggest that this slope is the outcome of a later intervention. Finds at this level were too scanty for anything but speculation on dating, but early Saxon remains have been found nearby (see earlier) and Roman material has been found not only in this pit and the nearby TP37⁷, but also in nearby PPG16 excavations^{8 9}. The nature of this feature will have to await future investigation.

⁸ Willson, J 1986 'Excavations at Faversham Institute site', *Kent Archaeological Review* p108-118

⁹ Roman ditch on site of Tesco garage, recorded as HER TR06 SW 183 1996.

The middle phase is much easier to identify as late medieval, early –mid 16th century. TP36 yielded an exceptional amount of pottery from this period, nearly all of it of local Tyler Hill manufacture, and included a distinctive ceramic roof ridge ornament fragment. This pottery was found in the lower parts of 02, amongst the flints (05) and just under them (06) and also in the rubbish pit complex just north of the flint surface (08, 09, 10). The flint surface can clearly be seen as a late medieval/early Tudor courtyard surface with a pit/ditch area adjoining to the north into which household waste was being dumped. The large size, fresh-break edges and overall similarity of some of these fragments does imply a lack of disturbance since dumping and suggests that much of the dumping and the creation of the flint surface happened at the same time: this will be given much more intensive study in the near future and we will be looking at the possibility of matching up some of these fragments as from the same pots.

From Phase 3, the relatively small amount of 17th-19th century pottery is, however, quite striking, considering how much we have found elsewhere in Faversham and how there is evidence for cottages on this site preceding the present early 19th century ones. Perhaps the household dump sites were closer to the houses than the location of TP36, although Tp37 had no shortage of pottery and other occupational debris from this period... The excavation of the ‘burial pit’ for the iron bedstead and other iron objects probably took place relatively recently (post-war?), sunk into these 17th-19th century deposits.

The last phase was the dumping of a very mixed layer to raise the level of the gardens. This happened relatively recently (1980s?) but the origin of the actual levelling material is uncertain.

These relationships are summarised on the Harris matrix diagram fig 14

Final comments

This was a fascinating pit, and it was a great shame that we lost around 30% of it to the ‘bedstead burial’ so early on. The late medieval courtyard and possible associated ditch to the north, was particularly interesting, as its dating overlaps the dissolution and the demolition of Faversham Abbey about half a kilometre to the north. Further more, the uncovering of the ‘natural’ at around 140cm down confirmed that this plot is an important area of undisturbed and relatively shallow archaeology in central Faversham, and should certainly be treated with great respect should it ever be redeveloped

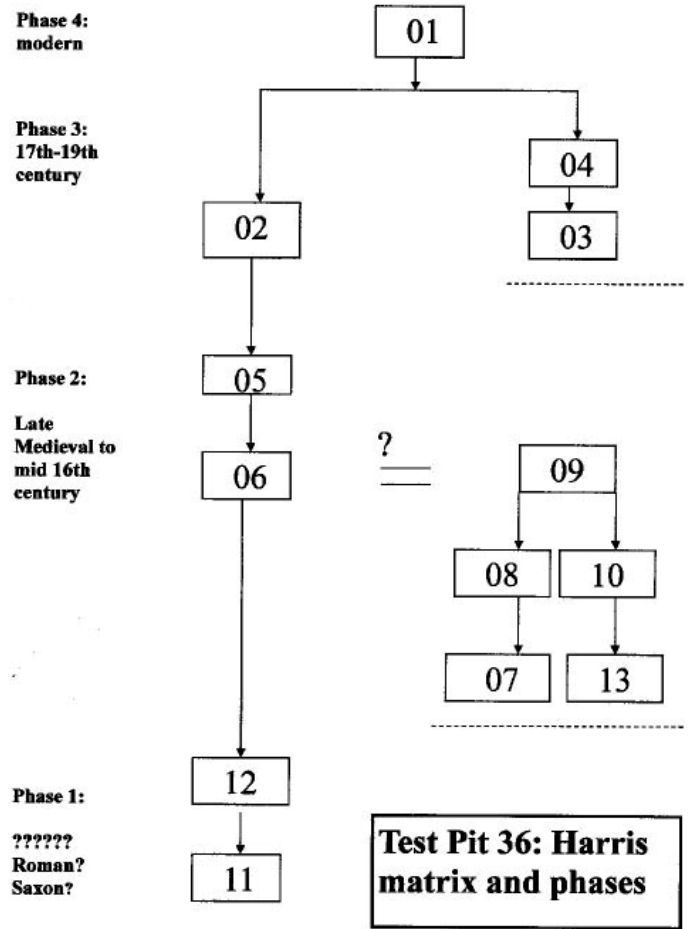
Acknowledgements

Great thanks to our host Peter Hutton who showed so much interest in and enthusiasm for our findings. We also owe a big debt to the medieval pottery expert John Cotter who during a training day with our team cast an eye over the pottery from TP36 and helped us date it confidently to the later medieval/ early 16th century period.

Mike Tillman, Supervisor

April 2008

Fig 14:



9
Small Finds



SF733



SF738



SF740



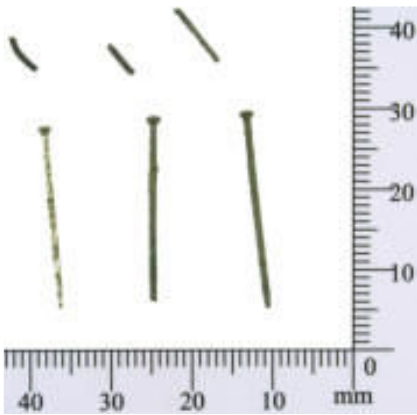
SF741



SF751



SF752



SF754



SF757



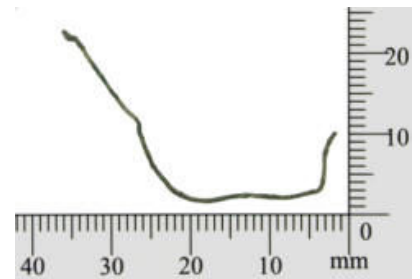
SF762



SF767



SF768



SF770



SF780



SF783



SF793



SF794



SF800

Small Finds Details

- SF733: Part of Quern. Triangular fragment of Niedermendig basalt lava (from Rhineland). Dark grey, many small holes, rough surfaces with hint of groove on one of the flat surfaces, slight curve on outer edge. Probably part of a rotary quern, but impossible to date (could be Roman onwards)
- SF738: Handle. Fragment, approx. half, of bone dinner knife or fork handle. Polished. Trace of Fe staining at tang end. Probably 17/18C.
- SF740: Pin, spherical head
- SF741: Pin. 1 pin with no head. Slightly bent and chipped inside curve of bend. Very corroded. (Possible further evidence of pin-making in Faversham? Pin got bent /damaged and therefore was discarded before head was attached? So would not have been silvered, hence corrosion).
- SF751: Pin, slightly bent, tapering to a very fine sharp point. Very corroded head - possibly wire-wound, knotted.
- SF752: Pins. (a) pin with no head, very fine sharp point (b) complete pin, bent. Wire-wound knotted head (possibly medieval).
- SF754: Pins. 3 pin fragments (a-c), (c) bent & broken in 2 during finds processing 3 complete pins (d) silver coloured, flat head (e) badly corroded, flat head, tip of point broken off (f) point broken, flat head, moulded.
- SF757: Pin, slightly bent near the tip. Spherical head.
- SF762: Lead token. Medieval or Tudor. Little trace of design.
- SF767: Needle, possibly tapestry needle. Crudely made, irregular-shaped eye.
- SF768: Medieval bronze ear-scoop with twisted stem and loop at top, but probably 50% of the length has been broken off. See illustration ref. Detector Finds 3 - Gordon Bailey - page 81 fig. 4.

- SF770: Fine wire. Corroded. Bent.
- SF780: Writing stick. Graphite stub with knife-sharpened end - possible re-use of electrode as a 'pencil'.
- SF783: Shaped end of a graphite writing stick. Part of a graphite writing stick. The end has been shaped to form a rounded point. It would probably have been used to write on slate during 19th or early 20th century.
- SF793: Knife-fork handle. Two parts of bone handle, Part of knock-on tang remains. Pale bone colour. 19C. See S. Moore, Table Knives and Forks, 2006, p28.
- SF794: Pen head. Fountain pen head. Black plastic screw-in holder with metal nib, bearing the word(s) "BESTWUALITY". 20C.
- SF800: Buckle tongue bar. Complete bar with D shaped cross section and rounded points at each end. Two identical tongues, tapering to sharp points. Traces of black shiny coating on tongues and bar on rounded side only. On flat side, two circle and dot motifs at each end of the bar. Cast artefact. 18th century boot or garter buckle part. Whitehead 2003: 114