

Hunt the Saxons 2006

Test Pit Report for Test Pit 1 at 7 Beckett Street Grid Reference: 601200 161905

1. Introduction

7 Beckett Street lies on the eastern side of the northern end of Beckett Street at the junction with Hatch Street. The property is a typical Victorian tunnelback terraced house, which was probably built in the 1880's. As well as its original garden the property has annexed an extra area of land on its north side. In the 1865¹ map, a path can be seen joining this piece of land to the rear of the Royal Oak public house in Tanners Street. By 1960 the land is shown² as part of the garden of the Bull Inn. It has been cultivated by the present owner for the last eight years, immediately prior to which it had been waste land. Jacobs' map of Faversham suggests land use as an orchard in the late 18h century³.

2. Location of pit

It was decided to site the test pit in the newly acquired land rather than in the original garden. The latter would have been hard to work in due to a large central bush, and it was hoped that the other area would yield clues as to its past uses. The pit was sited as close to the western end of the garden as was practical, whilst keeping a safe distance from a tall tree at the west end of the plot.

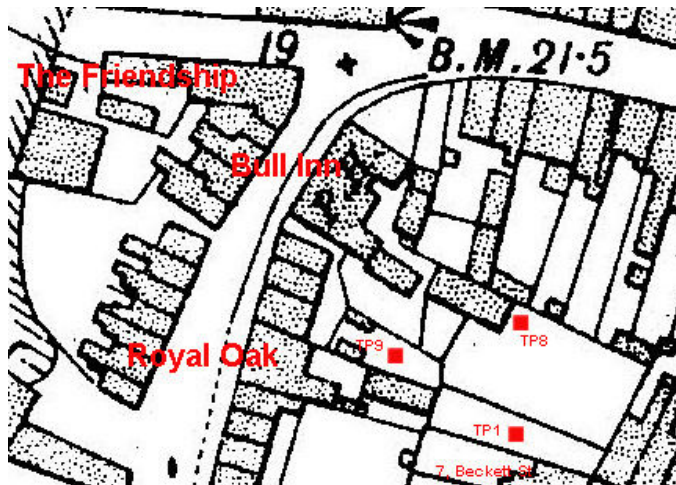


Fig 1: 1907 map of location of Test Pit 1, showing its relationship to Test Pits 8 and 9.

In 1907, the ownership of the TP1 plot is not obvious.⁴

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

² OS 1958 TR 0161 SW 1: 1250

³ Jacobs E 1774 Map of Faversham in *History of Faversham*, reprint 1974 Faversham Society

⁴ OS 1907 Kent sheet XXXIV.9 1: 2500

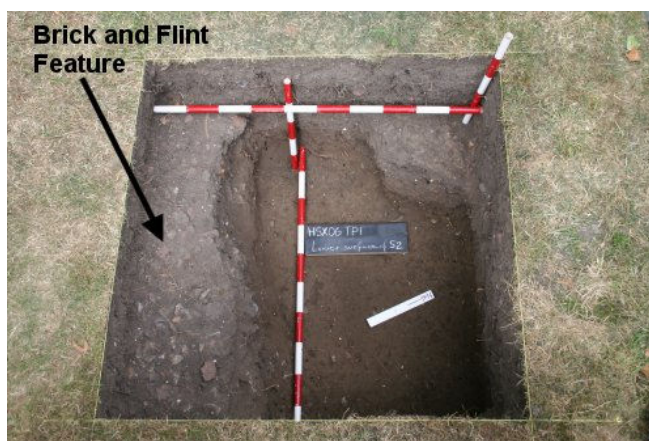
3. The procedure

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 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. We excavated down to the bottom of spit 4, a depth of 120cm, the deepest we can go for health and safety reasons. 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.

4. The findings

The soil in the upper 0.3m (spit 1) of the pit was greyish-brown, friable and ashy. Below this layer the soil became lighter in colour and more clayey in nature, with more chalk and flint inclusions. At a depth of 0.25m a brick and flint structure was discovered running along the south side. Once this had been carefully exposed and recorded it was removed in order to discover what may have been sealed beneath it.

Fig 2.



From 0.6m downwards it became apparent that there were two types of clay. These were: a) a very compacted yellowish clay and b) a darker siltier clay which appeared to be an infill for two small pits cut into the yellow clay.

The first spit proved very rich in finds, including Medieval and Roman pottery, a 19th century market trader's tally (SF 607)⁵ and a late 18th century/early 19th century clay pipe bowl bearing the coat of arms of the Inniskillen Regiment.(CTP dB item 2, fig 3 below). From 0.3m downwards the quantity of finds was noticeably less, but nonetheless included some very interesting items. In spit 2 a small bronze Roman coin was discovered, probably mid-4th century in date (SF 608).⁶ As the pit deepened, the quantity of animal bones and their individual dimensions showed a marked increase, and whilst sieving the spoil from spit 3 a small copper buckle was found (SF 610), which probably dates back to the fourteenth century.⁷

⁵ Fletcher E, 2003, *Tokens and Tallies through the Ages* Essex: Greenlight Publishing p85

⁶ Marsden A *Roman Coins found in Britain* Witham, Essex: Greenlight Publishing p79-80

⁷ Whitehead R 2003 *Buckles 1250-1800* Witham, Essex: Greenlight Publishing p 18 No44

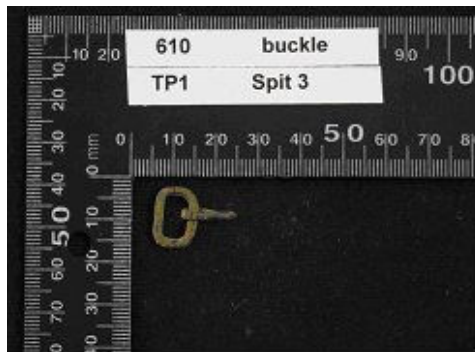


Fig 3: Inniskillen Dragoons clay pipe Fig 4: Buckle from S3

Other finds from the test pit were of a kind with those found elsewhere during the Hunt the Saxons project: shells (oyster, cockles, mussels), slag and clinker, coal and coke, vessel and window glass, clay pipes and bricks, tiles and other building materials.

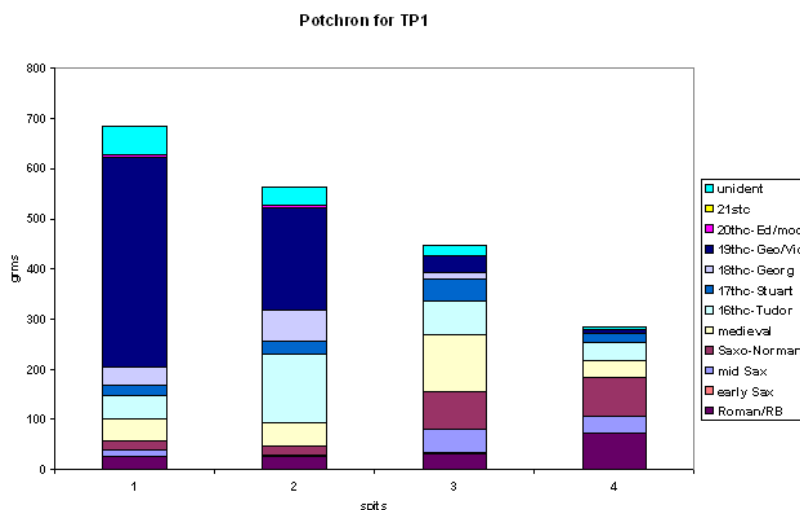


Fig 5: Pottery by age in each spit for TP1

As can be seen from the above pottery grouped by age chart, from 0.6m downwards, nearly all of the pottery can be dated to Tudor times or earlier and includes Medieval Tyler Hill ware, Saxo-Norman shelly ware and some shards of mid-Saxon Ipswich ware (Fig 6). All spits contained some Roman pottery, with a handsome little colour coated base coming from S4 (Fig 7).



Fig 6: Mid-Saxon pottery from S3

Fig 7: Roman pot base from S4



5. Interpretation

The consistency of the soil coupled with pottery spanning a 2000-year period in S1 suggests that this top 30cm had been very well worked and frequently turned over. This is born out by the fragmentary and abraded nature of the pottery sherds. The pottery was, however, dominated by material from the 19th century and the spit was ash and cinder rich.

Beneath this level although there is still a wide variety of pottery, in general the deeper one goes the older the bulk of these finds becomes. Consistent with this there is also a decrease in the amount of shellfish remains (a staple food in Victorian times), building rubble and clay pipe fragments (in use from the 17th to 19th centuries). Conversely there is an increase in the amount of animal bone and of cracked flints (placed in pots to heat the water within). All this evidence leads one to surmise that this piece of land has been in constant use for over 2000 years.

6. Final comments

This was a difficult pit to dig because of its complexities, and took 4 days to complete. Along with an exceptionally high frequency of early material were tantalising hints at features from S2 downwards. This was one of those occasions when the small size of the excavation severely hampered interpretative digging.

7. Acknowledgements

Thank you to Mary Moss for allowing us to dig in her garden, and for providing welcome refreshment on what were some of the hottest days of the year.

Suzanne Miles
November 2006

Small Finds



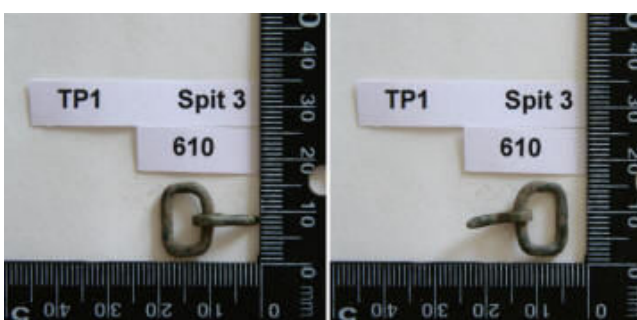
SF607



SF608



SF609



SF610

Small Finds Details

SF607: Market Trader's Tally. Hexagonal market trader's tally, probably mid to late 19th Century. Some corrosion, but figure '6d' in the centre of the obverse with some faint lettering on the rim. Nothing discernable on the reverse.

SF608: Coin. Very small wafer thin disc slightly irregular. Obv: male head facing right with laurel or diadem on head. Rev; pattern grid, possible soldiers with standard. Reverse probably GLORIA EXERCITUS with double standard (see Marsden 2001 p80 fig 331. Obverse possibly Constans. Date mid 4th century.

SF609: Lead Token. Irregular circle. Flat undecorated reverse. Relief grid design on obverse, with raised rim. Medieval token as in Fletcher 2003: p30, top row.

SF610: Buckle. Small single loop buckle with D shape frame (close to sub rectangular). The pin is not fixed and can rotate around the circumference of the frame. Probably medieval, c 14th century, functions of these small buckles unknown Whitehead 2003: 18, No 44 plus text p 16-17.