



Hunt the Saxons 2007

Test Pit Report for Test Pit 35 82-83 Abbey Street, Faversham, Kent. Grid Reference TR 6018 1617

1. Introduction

82-83 Abbey Street is a large L-shaped house on the south-east side of Abbey Street, next-door to Arden's Cottage and two doors from Arden's House, which was the site of the outer gatehouse of the medieval abbey. We knew, therefore, that we would be digging in an interesting area.

The history of the site is complicated. The houses in the block of 82–84 Abbey Street were built in the very late 16th/early 17th century, and were re-fronted in the 18th century.¹ There is a plaque above the entrance to no. 83 which reads "H.S. 1598". This house was built by Henry Saker, whose father William Saker (obviously the owner of the land here in the 16th century, and possibly a previous house on the site) gave a portion of the orchard behind the house for the building of the Old Grammar School.² The frontage on Abbey Street between no. 82 and Arden's Cottage is now filled in with outbuildings or garages, but until the mid 19th century this gap was filled with medieval cottages. Their demolition created a very large garden for the then 82-84 Abbey Street, which stretched away from Abbey Street as far south-east as Church Walk, including the area which is now the Abbey Physic Garden.³ Fig 1 overleaf attempts to show some of these complexities

2. Location of Pit

Although it is smaller now than it was in the mid 19th century, we had quite a large garden in which to choose the place where we would dig our test pit, and took some time to decide on the best spot. We eventually decided to dig fairly near the corner of the garden which was closest both to Abbey Street and to Arden's House. This would then be close to known medieval activity and some distance away from the test pit we had already dug in a garden in Abbey Place.

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

¹ Swaine, Anthony, 1970, "*Faversham Conserved*", report for KCC & Faversham Borough Council, K.C.C., Maidstone, p62.

² Stevens, Peter, 1995, "*Childhood Memories of Abbey Street & Faversham in the 1930s and 1940s*", Faversham Paper No. 44, Faversham Society, p5.

³ Percival, Arthur, April 2007, pers. comm.

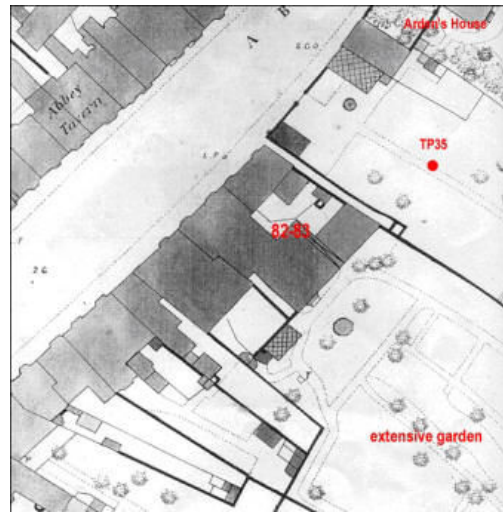
corners of the house. Turf was removed carefully from the square, rolled and set aside in plastic bags. The pit was then excavated in 30cm spits (layers). Notes were kept as we dug down, and photographs were taken so all features were recorded. All excavated soil was sieved meticulously, and the spoil heap was scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each spit. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

Fig 1: this sequence of maps shows the complex changes in this area just outside the former Abbey precinct.

a) 1774⁴



b) 1865⁵



c) 1907⁶



⁴ Jacobs, E 1774 *History of Faversham* republished by Faversham Society 1974

⁵ OS 1865 (1904 reprint) Sheet XXXIV Scale 1:536

⁶ OS 1907 Sheet XXXIV Scale: 1:2500

4. The Findings

Immediately on commencing to dig out Spit 1 we came upon the top of a line of red bricks in the south to west side of the pit. After digging down several centimetres, it became clear that these bricks formed a path, not the remains of a wall, and we decided to leave them in situ as there was room to dig beside them. The finds from this spit were varied and mostly quite small – some pottery, bone, glass, shell, brick, clay pipes and metal pieces. The pottery from this spit has been dated to between medieval and 19th century, showing that the garden soils had been turned over to a certain extent over the years. We also cut through a couple of more compacted layers, perhaps where this area of the garden had been walked on for some years. At the bottom of this spit we came upon a small heap of bricks with mortar on one side of them – presumably waste from the demolition of a wall or building.

Fig 2: Base of Spit 1, showing the top of the path to the south



In the second spit the soil became softer and more patchy and variable in colour. The finds were similar to those from Spit 1, with the addition of some medium to large flints and occasional small pieces of chalk and charcoal. The great majority of the pottery from this spit was either medieval or 16th century in date. Towards the bottom of the spit we could see more clearly where pits had been cut into the garden for the dumping of domestic rubbish.



Fig 3: Base of Spit 2

At the top of Spit 3 a number of large flints appeared. They were not an in situ surface, so we took them out and continued to trowel below them. Presumably they had been used nearby and been discarded in the area of our pit.

There were also some quite large pieces of pottery at this depth in the pit. The pottery in Spit 3 was mostly medieval in date, and other inclusions were shell, bone, flint, tile, chalk, mortar and small nails. There was a small scatter of stones in the southern corner, which we cleaned up and recorded, and leveling was done of the pit and its surrounds.

Fig 4: Spit 4, final quadrant with pit in south corner

By Spit 4 we were seeing very little in the pit. Once the stone scatter had been removed we were only finding small quantities of pottery, shell and bone. The pit was cleaned up and squared at a depth of 1 metre, and then a 10 cm deep quadrant was cut down in the area under where the stones had been. A pit could be seen in this



quadrant, but there were very few finds in it – small pieces of flint, pottery and pot-boiler. The pit bottomed out at 1 metre 25 cm, and due to lack of time we were forced to close the test pit at this point, clean it and record our findings.



Fig 5: late medieval pottery from Spits 2 and 3

Spits 2 and 3 were dominated by late Tyler Hill pottery, produced at a site near Canterbury up until around 1525 and late medieval redwares (1475-1550) from Canterbury.⁷ Spit 3 had a few

tiny sherds of Tudor Green pottery (1480-1550). The late Tyler Hill sherds were unabraded, with nine sherds combining to form a substantial part of a single pot. (fig x) Small quantities of shelly ware (11th-13th centuries) were found in spits 2,3 and 4.

5. Interpretation

What struck us as unusual was the lack of nineteenth century domestic rubbish in the top of this pit, considering how close it was to the back of the house. We would have expected to find a considerable amount of broken pottery, ash and general kitchen rubbish several centimeters deep towards the top of the pit, but this was completely absent here.

⁷ Cotter, J *Pots from a Dissolution period cess tank at Canterbury Whitefriars*, CAT Annual Report 2003-4

Nearly all of the datable finds were associated with the period of building and use of the Abbey Guest House (Arden's house) and Arden's cottage. i.e. 1500-dissolution. Using negative reasoning, the absence of clay pipe finds in spits 3 and 4 and possibly the lower part of spit 2, points to an almost undisturbed late medieval and surface at around 50/60cm down from the present surface. We failed to find any traces of the medieval cottages, which must have been closer to the road. We know that Abbey Street was first built on in the 13th century when the area became known as the "New Town"⁸, designed to provide a grand entrance route to the abbey, so rarity of earlier Tyler Hill or any other 13th-14th century medieval pottery (such as Surrey White ware or London wares, both of which have been found across Faversham) is intriguing. We also found small quantities of shelly ware in this pit, significant as shelly ware is normally dated to a period earlier or contemporary with the creation of Abbey St.⁹

The brick path was presumably a fairly recent feature, as it was just below the layer of turf which we removed. Unfortunately we didn't find any precise dating evidence for it.

6. Final Comments

In general, our finds were small and rather mundane. We were obviously digging in an area of garden which contained a few earlier small pits, rather than in a back yard area full of domestic rubbish pits which might have been dug over several centuries. Perhaps, as the garden was so large, people took their rubbish to discard further away from the house.

7. Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks are extended to Mrs Beckett for allowing us to dig our test pit in this garden in such a fascinating part of the town.

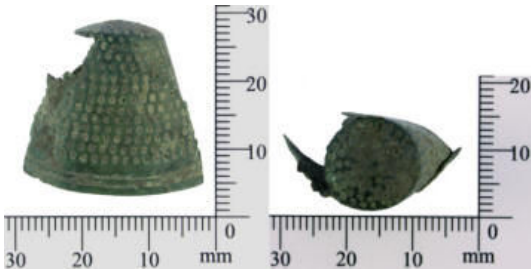
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March 2008

⁸ Hasted, Edward, 1798, "*The Parish and Town of Faversham*", *Faversham Paper No 6*, 1969, Faversham Society, p5.

⁹ Cotter J *Medieval Shelly wares in Kent: a summary of recent research* CAT Annual Report 1999-2000

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Small Finds



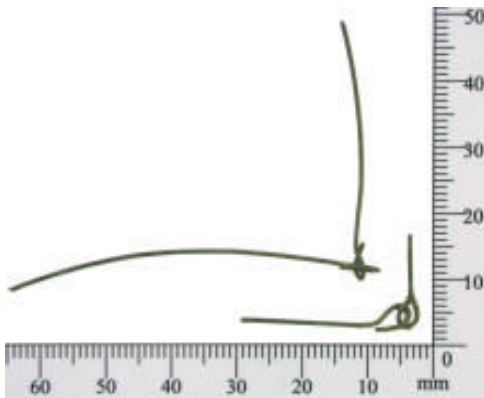
SF756



SF760



SF761



SF764



SF765



SF766



SF795



SF798



SF801

Small Finds Details

- SF756: Thimble. Copper alloy thimble (Brass?), probably late 19th century. Top present but side of thimble damaged. No rim to base. Two encircling decorative bands at base. 13 rows of indentations ring to top - not very regularly placed.
- SF760: Pins. 2 fragments (a) & (b) 2 pins with points broken off (c) wire-wound head, (d) round head with grooves 2 complete pins (e) small rounded blob-like head, (f) flat, grooved head.
- SF761: Daub. Small quantity of daub with horse hair content. Creamy colour.

- SF764: Wires. Fine linked wires weighing individually .3g and .17g. Purpose to be identified.
- SF765: Pin, made of very fine wire, tapering to a very thin, sharp point. Irregular, dome-shaped head. Slightly bent.
- SF766: Lace tag. Small cylindrical copper alloy bar with small hole through centre. Probably a lace tag - very difficult to date but could be medieval or later. For illustration see Detector Finds 3 - Gordon Bailey - page 65 fig. 10.
- SF795: Ring. Cast iron ring, originally square. Beveled edges. Rounded corners. May have had decorative purpose.
- SF798: Strip. Rolled Cu-alloy strip. Lace tag.
- SF801: Lead shot. Small post medieval lead shot.