



Hunt for the Saxon Royal Manor: HSX18

A report on keyhole KP178 excavation carried out at The Faversham Club, Gatefield Lane, Faversham, Kent

Grid Reference TR 01653 61204



Fig 1: (Left) Entrance to the Club, excavation spot shown by arrow. (Right) Diggers uncover a chalk layer.

1. Introduction

The 2018 FSARG project follows on from the 2016 -2017 research, which has been an attempt to identify the site of the Saxon Royal Manor in upper Faversham. A document of AD811 named Faversham as the 'Kings little town' and the market dates to this time. In the 1860s an exceptionally rich early Saxon cemetery was discovered in the area where Faversham railway station now stands. In earlier projects, FSARG had found archaeological evidence for a Saxon settlement down in the Stonebridge Crossing area which we see as the working merchant town. Now we are looking for the Royal Manor itself.

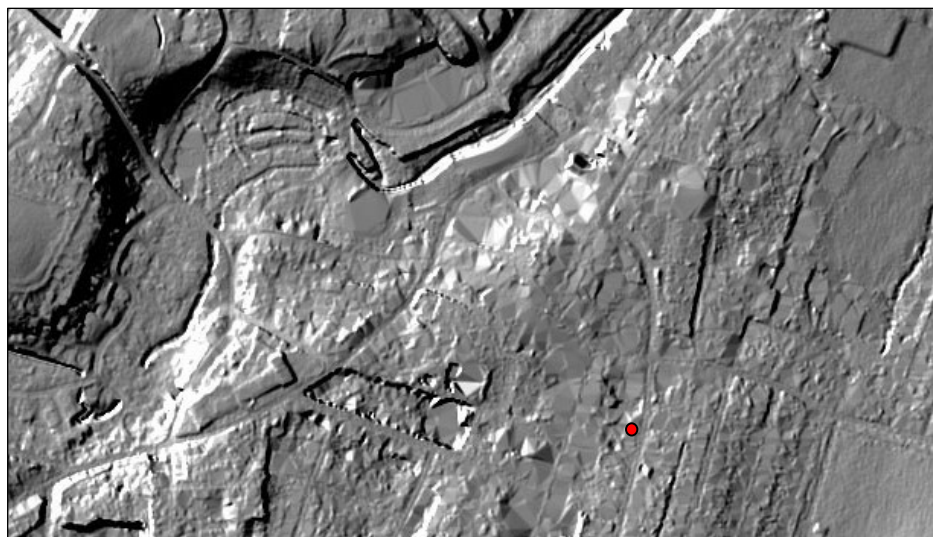
In 2016 our starting point in the search was a single piece of evidence for domestic occupation in the upper town. This was a mid-Saxon loom weight found on a bomb site in East Street being cleared in 1953 to build the present-day Post Office. So far, on two nearby sites we have found mid Saxon Ipswich ware and have identified a possible Saxon chalk floor and post holes. These have led us to realise that the Gatefield Lane - Cross Lane route was very probably the Saxon 'High Street'. Now we are looking closely at the zone around Gatefield - Cross Lane (except where it has been dug-off for brickearth for the brick industry (1860-1920s)): the KP178 location next to Gatefield and very close to the Ipswich ware sites was ideal.

2. Geographical and historical background

a) Geography

The land between the Westbrook and Cooksditch valleys is a slope running down from 24m altitude at Watling Street to the south to 9m at St Marys church and 7m at Standard Quay, a total distance of 1.5km. This slightly higher ground falls away to either side, westward to the Westbrook Valley and eastward to the Cooksditch, both streams running south to north. The Cooksditch nowadays rises in a spring to the east of St Marys School and runs down past the Abbey Barns, to Cooksditch and joins Faversham Creek at Iron Wharf, Grid Reference TR 012354 62131. There is some evidence that the Cooksditch originally rose up near St Catherines church and was cut short by the creation of the Recreation Ground in 1862.¹

Fig 2a: The LIDAR map shows the relief of the land in Faversham town centre, with the 'dug off' areas showing up very clearly.



¹ FSARG website community-archaeology.org.uk/ archaeological investigations / Preston a most peculiar parish 2013-15/ Preston Farm report p5

b) Geology

The gentle downward slope to the north is related to underlying chalk dipping northwards to disappear under Thanet Beds and then under London Clay. Overlying the chalk, however, is a layer up to 2m – 3m thick of superficial deposits, laid down during the last major glaciation. These are very important for human settlement.

In this part of Faversham, the superficial deposits are mainly distinctive yellow-brown Head Brickearth, often overlying a gravel superficial deposit. The Kentish Stock brick industry flourished in the Faversham area between around 1850 and 1920, and large areas around and in the town under later housing development have been 'dug off', removing all except the most recent and most ancient archaeology.² In the LIDAR map in **Fig 2a**, the large 'excavations' in the lower centre are 'dug off' areas. Preston Street and other central areas have, however, escaped this destruction due to their pre-1860 enclosure of plots.

The most recent superficial deposit in this area is alluvium in the Westbrook and Cooksditch valleys, running northwards, with this site lying midway between the two.



Key:

Orange:	Head Gravels
Yellow:	Head Brickearth
Blue:	Thanet Sands
Light Green:	Chalk
Cream:	Alluvium

Fig 2b: Geological map of central Faversham, the same area as in Fig 2a.³ The distinctive Davington Plateau (blue and orange) and Stonebridge Ponds (cream) areas can easily be identified in Fig 2a. KP178 lies on Gatefield Lane and is shown in red.

c) Known historical background

The Faversham Club lies on Gatefield Lane, an important early road in Faversham as explained above. Originally the building was built by Calvinistic Baptists in 1833. The building appears on the 1842 tithe map and is described as a Baptist Chapel, owned by the Trustees thereof. By the 1860s, it had become a Wesleyan Methodist Chapel but by the 1870s the Methodists too had departed to larger quarters and The Plymouth Brethren met there. The Faversham Club took over in 1884. The Churches have left their mark in a tombstone in the garden and several on the roof, enclosing the chimney, a strange sight (see **Fig 9**).

The Faversham Club continues until this day, with private membership. The house retains many 19th century features and the snooker rooms upstairs are a remarkably nostalgic sight.

²TWIST Sydney 1984 *Stock Bricks of Swale* The Sittingbourne Society: Sittingbourne, Kent

³ British Geological Survey, 1:50 000 series. Faversham England and Wales Sheet 273

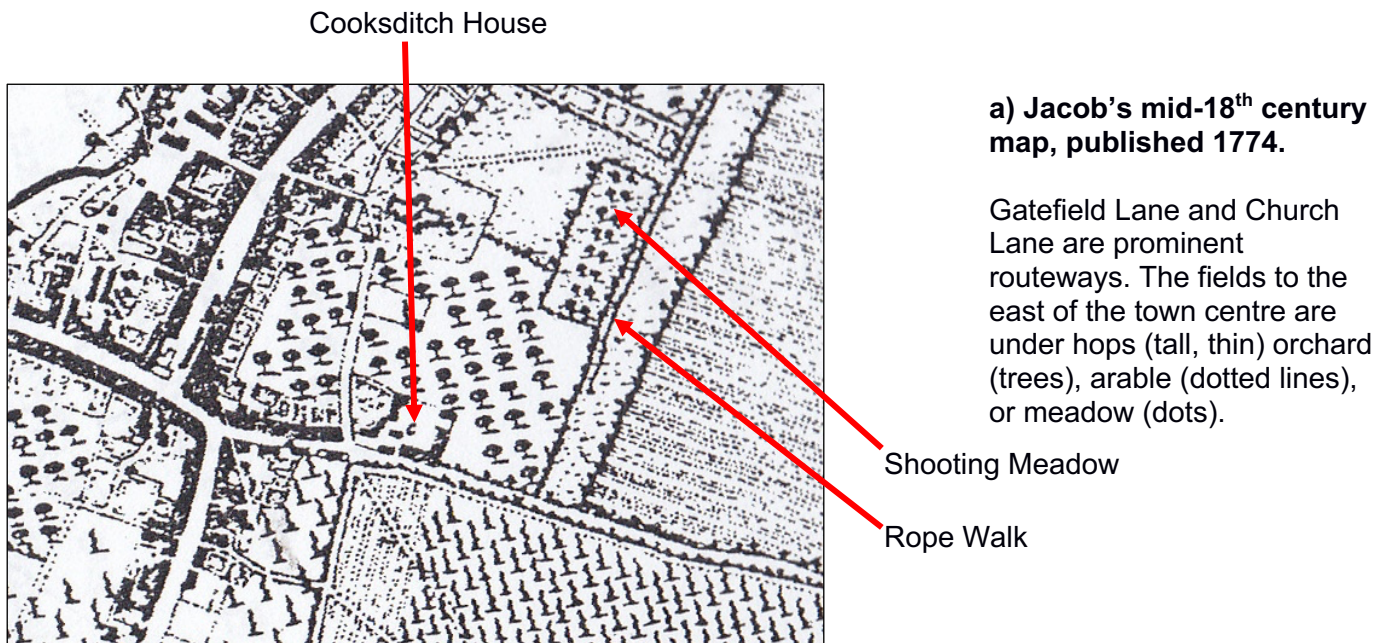
3. Location of pit

The garden of the Faversham Club is at the front and is mainly footpath and attractive planted borders. One area has been covered in pebbles and used as a patio, this was the only suitable area for our pit and was located between the eastern garden wall and footpath, at the furthest 5.43m from the building. The pit was surrounded by safety fencing completely when not being worked upon.

4. The procedures

A 1m by 1.5m rectangle was pegged out using poles and measuring tape, the area delineated marked with string, the longer side was aligned almost NW to SW. The position of the pit was recorded by measuring to the front door support and corner of the house. Pebbles and membrane were carefully removed, and the pebbles stored in a builders' bag. The pit was then hand excavated using single contexts, each of which was fully recorded. The keyhole was excavated to the depth (in one corner) of 1.3m. Most of the excavated soil was sieved meticulously, however some contexts were partially sieved or hand sifted. The spoil heap was scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each context and special finds were given three dimensional coordinates, where possible, to pinpoint the exact find spot. Any features revealed were carefully recorded. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, the membrane and pebbles replaced.

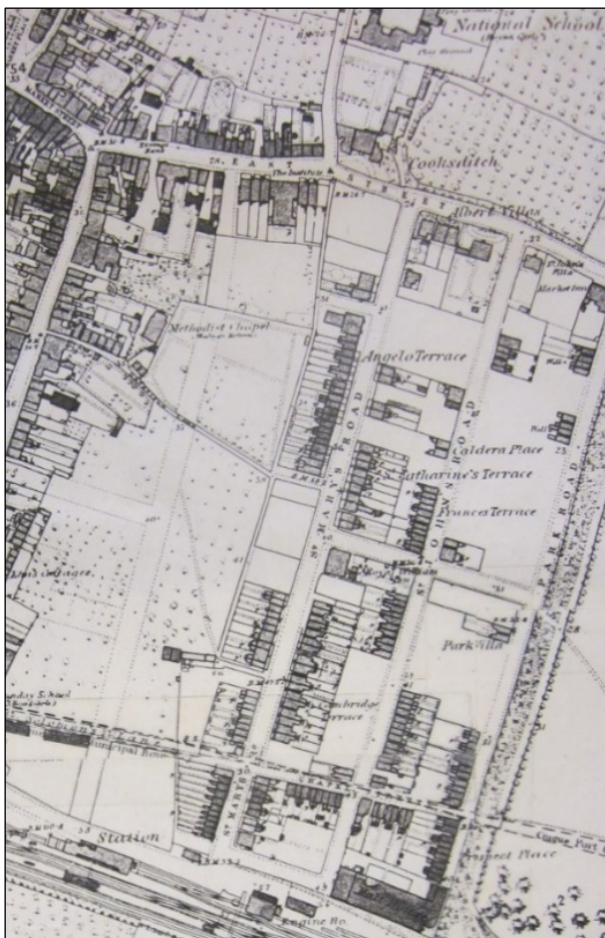
Fig 3: Map regression for 2018.





b) Tithe map 1842.

This lists owners, tenants and land use. There have been few changes in land use since 1774, just one new building at the south end of the Rope Walk. The land use is listed as mostly meadow and orchard.



c) 1865 OS map, 6" to mile.

Now there are big changes in this eastern end of Faversham. St Marys and St Johns Roads are well under way, with many small terraces being built by different speculators. Houses have been built along both sides of East Street. The railway has arrived. A Methodist chapel has been built along Gatefield Lane. The Recreation Ground has been created to the east. Newton Road, however, is just a sketch on the map and the Crescent, of course, does not exist.

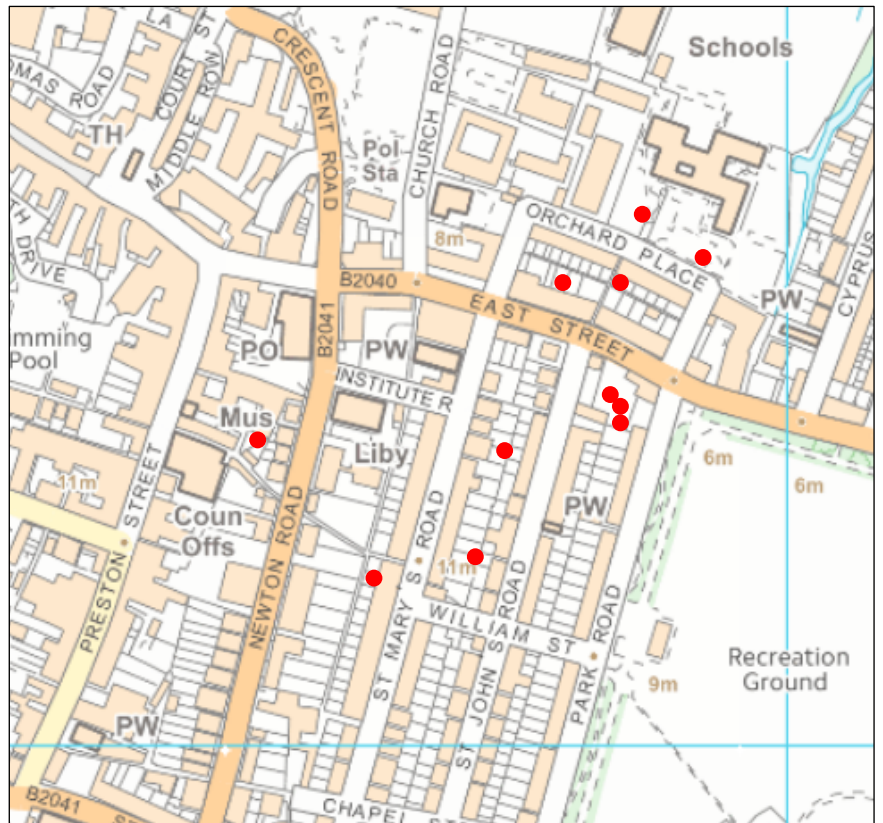


d) 1907 OS map.

A more limited area is shown on this map, but it well and truly shows the arrival of Newton Road in the years since 1865. Although the housing is very densely packed, a small orchard survives just north of East Street. The Methodist Church has become a Club. Note the splendid Institute on East Street and the large Congregational Church on Newton Road – both gone nowadays. Still no Crescent – that has to wait until the 1960s.

e) 2019 OS map.

This is now a densely built-up area with the Recreation Ground, a charity donation, the only large open space. The red dots show the locations of the Keyhole Pit excavations in 2018. The Physic Garden pit is just off the map to the north of St Marys church. KP178 at the Faversham Club is the one furthest west.



5. The findings

Context [01] comprised pebbles and gravel above a membrane.

Context [02] was a compacted layer of soil and gravel (the gravel from Context [01]), 50% was sieved and the finds were mostly rubble - brick, tile, mortar, slate, glass, iron, shell, lead, coal, coke, pottery, worked flint and some Clay Tobacco Pipes (CTP). The pottery dated from Late Medieval to Late Post Medieval, Flints were possibly Mesolithic and Neolithic arrowheads with the CTP being mainly 18th century.

When the soil became undulating and slightly lighter in colour, we stopped context [02] and started context [03] at approximately 25cm from the surface. Context [03] comprised a mixture of soil, mortar, chalk, pottery, brick, tile, mortar, one pot boiler and one piece of CTP. There were pockets which were sandy with some coarse and some chalk inclusions. The pottery was Redware and Late Post Medieval. Once context [03] was being excavated it became apparent that underneath the area to the North West side was chalk, this was context [05]. At the south east end a very rubbly context [04] emerged. It was considered that contexts [03] and [04] were the same material however context [04] contained more bricks than [03] and one piece of Medieval Tyler Hill glazed tile. Context [04] was excavated to a depth of 50cm when a metal pipe running diagonally across the pit became visible, this meant context [04] was a fill and we named its "cut" context [09]. However due to Health and Safety concerns we did not completely excavate context [04] and have no information therefore about cut [09].



Fig 4: Showing Context [04] (rubble on left with pipe unexposed) and Context [05] (chalk).

From the photo above it can be seen that the top surface of context [05] was level and thus nearer the surface to the north west than at the South East. Initially a couple of darker patches were visible in context [05], they were carefully measured in and then extracted but proved to be material consistent with context [03]. It was decided to make a 50cm x 50cm sondage into context [05] to see how deep the chalk was. This was made in the Southern most North East corner and progressed until a change was found (at nearly 51cm from surface, context [06]). The chalk layer was approximately 24cm thick. One piece of pottery was found quite early in the chalk so all the volume of the sondage was hand sieved (hard chalk is very difficult to sieve). This piece of pottery was Late Post Medieval. It was estimated that the sondage contained 75kg of chalk (1 bucket of chalk weighs 15kg).



Fig 5: Sondage into Context [05], showing surface of Context [06] and darker area to north of sondage.

It was becoming clear that the area to the north of the sondage was a darker coloured area so this was examined as context [08]. This was duly extracted and thought to be a pit / fill which extended beneath contexts [05] and [06]. The cut was named context [07]. Context [08] looked like an abruptly ended trench cut into contexts [05] and [06] and contexts not yet dug.



Fig 6: The North West end of the pit becomes complicated, with 3 contexts showing, as explained on the chalk board.

Where the depth of context [08] stopped was not clear but it was rammed with red broken bricks at 90cm from the surface. Finds included a large number of broken bricks (one yellow, the rest red and 12kg discarded on site), tiles, mortar, slate, pottery, shell, bone, iron, coal / coke, glass, 1 piece of CTP, 1 worked flint. Pottery included Roman, Late Medieval, red ware and Late Post Medieval.

At this stage in the excavation, it was becoming difficult to reach the bottom of context [08] and we did not yet understand the rest of context [05] and anything about context [06]! Therefore the “lip” of context [05], which can be seen in the middle of the photo (Fig 6), was removed, and then most of the rest of context [05] extending South East 90cm from the North West side of the pit. Only 20% was hand sieved. What was extracted of the rest of context [05] contained only nodules of flint, no artefactual material.

Under context [05] was context [06] which was a compacted sandy layer probably laid at the same time a context [05] since a piece of pottery found was identical to that found in the context [05] sondage. It also contained other pottery dated Late Medieval, red ware and Late Post Medieval. Also found were bricks, tiles, concrete then small quantities of bone, shell, iron, coal / coke, glass and CTP.

Beneath context [06] was context [10] which was next examined, and it was assumed that we may have disturbed this context when extracting context [08]. Context [10] included a large quantity of broken bricks (77kg were discarded on site) and 6kg of tiles. Other finds comprised: pottery, bone, shell, iron, coal / coke, glass, CTP, marble, flints, other stone. A hammered copper ring was found (dated Medieval to Georgian). Pottery finds included Prehistoric, Roman, Middle to Late Saxon then Late Medieval to Late Post Medieval, with the earlier pottery low down in this context, with this lower part less compacted and with fewer finds of brick and tile. The CTP found dated from the 1770’s to 1800’s. Flints were crudely made Bronze Age piercers.

Context [11], the next layer, started at around 1m down and continued until 1.05m when a possible tile layer became visible (context [12]).

Finds from Context [11] comprised pottery, bone, shell, iron, coal / clinker, glass, CTP, brick, tile, mortar, slate, flints, other stone. One piece of floor tile with a faint yellow pattern c7cm x 7cm was found, probably Late Medieval. Pottery included Roman, Medieval, Post Medieval, red ware and Late Post Medieval. Again, the CTP found dated from the 1770’s to 1800’s. Flints were a crudely made Bronze Age piercer and a Mesolithic knife and tranchet adze. A small find of half a hexagonal bone button or toggle was found, but not easily dated.



Fig 7: Small Find 8, a bone toggle.

At this point we considered that potentially contexts [08], [10] and [11] could have occurred at the same time and the finds do indicate that they may be the same.



Fig 8: North West view of pit showing surface of context [12].

From the above photo, tiles are visible at the surface of context [12]. Due to time constraints, it was decided to put a 30cm slot into context [12] which is visible in the next photo showing the North West end of the pit. The slot extended down to 1.3m. Finds included pottery, bone, shell, iron, bricks, tiles (some peg tiles), and lime mortar. Pottery was Medieval and Post Medieval. A large fragment 8cm x 9cm of a medieval glazed floor tile decorated with golden yellow concentric circles was found. This is identical to Faversham Abbey Floor Tiles.⁴

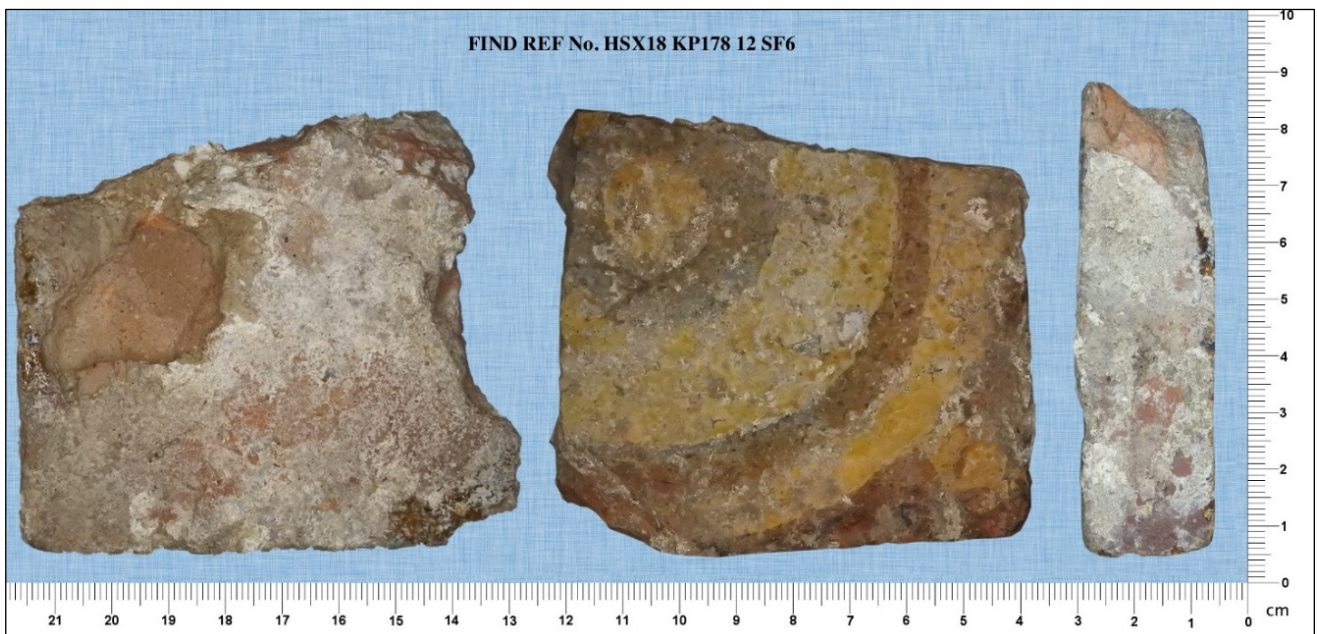


Fig 9: Medieval floor tile.

This was the end of the excavation due to time constraints.

⁴ PHILP B 1968 "Excavations at Faversham 1965" Page 49, figure 83.

6. Interpretation

This was an interesting pit, near to a building which has seen many changes and the archaeology reflects those changes.

If we imagine an area in a field which already contains items from Pre-History through Roman and Saxon to Late Post Medieval, we must then see it disturbed by the placing of a deep layer of chalk, probably to assist with building work, the floor of a building or as a hard-standing for a temporary surface. Could this chalk floor be associated with the building of the Calvinistic Baptist Church sometime in 1833 or pre-date it? This is hard to answer as Late Post Medieval pottery, dated from 1800 until now, was found both above and below the chalk context. The early pottery, however, (prehistoric, Roman, Mid Saxon, medieval) is found only *beneath* the chalk layer.

Later, our chalk floor is covered by yet more building rubble, then, a pipe needs to be laid to the building, from Gatefield Lane, in the South East of our pit. If this is either a water pipe or to provide town gas for lighting, then it could have been placed any time after 1830s (Faversham's first coal gas producing works, owned by the Faversham Gas Light and Coal Company was set up in 1830).⁵ As the pipe is metal, however, it is unlikely to have been laid after 1960. Therefore, this pipe *could* have been laid when the Calvinistic Baptist Church was built in 1933: if so, then our chalk floor is older than the first church!

Likewise, our chalk floor has been disturbed at the North West end by what appears to be a truncated empty trench. Since this was once a church, we did consider that the resulting cut and fill could have been a child burial since the trench has an East West alignment and is only 30cm wide. We have no information to suggest that burials themselves were dis-interred and moved when the building changed hands to different religious groups, although grave-stones were definitely shifted at some point (see **Fig 10**). Or did a workman start a trench in the wrong place?

6. Final comments

This was a challenging dig. Space was constricted and at times we felt like caged animals at the zoo! Also, what was found was puzzling. The chalk floor could possibly pre-date the 1833 building, and its purpose remains unknown. The truncated trench could indeed be the void left by an empty child grave made between 1833 and 1887 (when the Faversham Club took over the building). I wonder how this could be proven. Further documentary research definitely needs to be carried out, and the pottery re-visited with a much more detailed chronological analysis of the Late Post Medieval category to enable firm dating of the chalk layer (context [5]).

7. Acknowledgments

Thanks to the staff and visitors at the Faversham Club who encouraged us during our dig and to the FSARG crew who worked really hard.

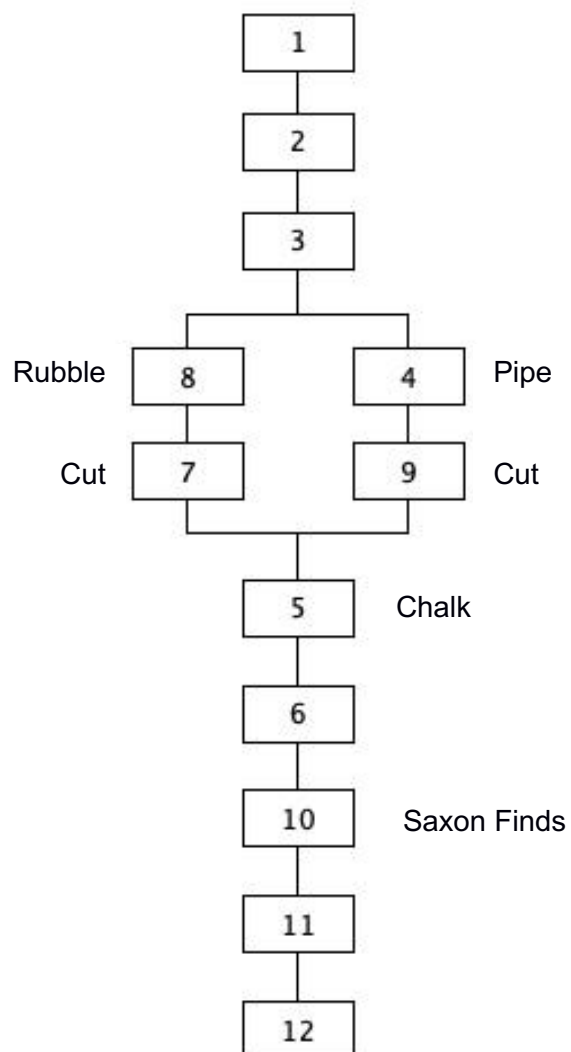
⁵ REID P 2007 Thoughts on the archaeology of the Upper Basin, Faversham Creek
On FSARG website www.community-archaeology.org.uk p12.

Fig 10a: Close up of the chimney of the Faversham Club, shown in the distance in Fig 1. This must be one of the oddest locations for gravestones in the UK!

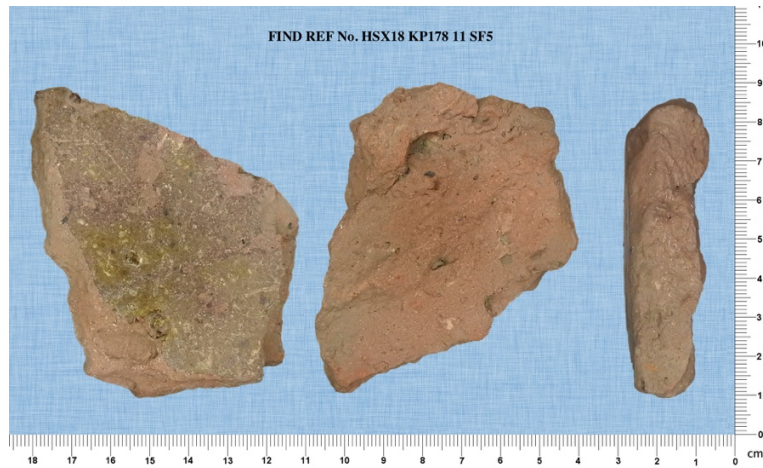
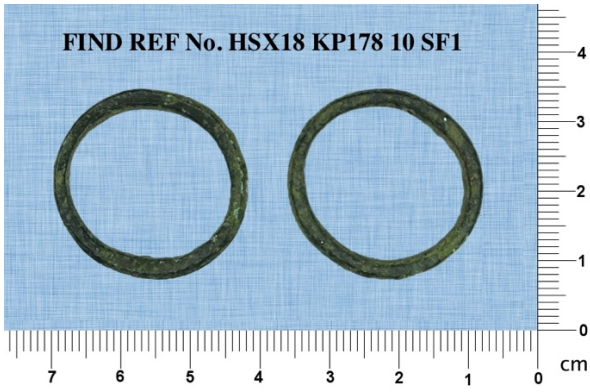


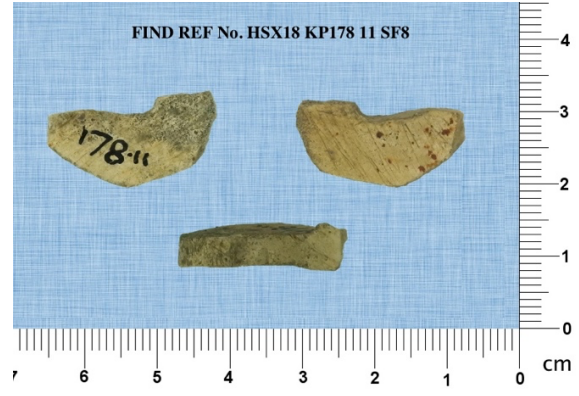
Fig 10b: A surviving gravestone hidden behind bushes next to the front gate of the Club. Who is E.S.W.?

Appendix 1: Harris Matrix for KP178



Appendix 2: Small Finds





Appendix 3: Lithics

Catalogue No.	Context	Type	Qualifier 1	Broad Date
1246	2	arrowhead		Mesolithic
1247	2	arrowhead		Neolithic
1248	4	utilised flake		Mesolithic
1249	10	point	Horsham	Mesolithic
1250	8	core		Mesolithic
1252	10	piercer	crude	Bronze age
1253	11	piercer	crude	Bronze age
1254	11	knife		Mesolithic
1255	11	tranchet adze		Mesolithic

Appendix 4: Pottery

KP178													
Context	Pre	Ro	EMS	MS	LS	EM	M	LM	PM	RED	LPM	Unident	Totals by Context (g)
2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	24	56	0	88
3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45	14	0	59
4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	35	63	0	98
5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	36	20	70	0	126
8	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	17	0	73	11	0	105
10	3	8	35	0	0	0	0	45	33	270	407	0	801
11	0	16	0	0	0	0	22	13	96	69	7	0	223
12	0	0	0	0	0	0	68	0	12	0	0	0	80
Totals by Chronology	3	28	35	0	0	0	90	83	177	536	631	0	1583

Quantities: (weight in grams)

Key to Dates:

Pre:	Prehistoric	4000BC - AD43
Ro:	Roman	AD43 - AD410
EMS:	Early to middle Saxon	AD411 - AD700
MS:	Middle to late Saxon	AD701 - AD850
LS:	Late Saxon	AD861 - AD1050
EM:	Early Medieval	AD1051- AD1225
M:	Medieval	AD1226 - AD1400
LM:	Late Medieval	AD1401- AD1550
PM:	Post Medieval	AD1551- AD1800
RED:	Redware	AD1600 - AD1900
LPM:	Late Post Medieval	AD1801- now
Unident:	Unknown	