



Hunt the Saxons 2006

Test Pit report for Test Pit 27 The Yard, Tanners St, Faversham, Kent

Grid Reference TR 01157 61312

1. Introduction

The Yard, a plot tucked away between the backs of numbers 21 to 24 on the east side of upper Tanner's St and the rear wall of the Faversham Almshouses, was the only non-garden excavation site available to the *Hunt the Saxons* team. At present, it is lightly used as a storage yard, and has a small modern garage-type building in its south east corner.

Fig 1: North east corner of the Yard.

Note the ancient wall which separates it from the new Almshouse wing at the back.



The earliest map available for this corner of Faversham, Jacob's map of 1774, shows no buildings in this location (**Fig 2a**). A distinctively-shaped boundary line, however, runs to the east of the plot and this boundary stays unchanged over the next 200 years. It is marked by a wall which is a patchwork of materials both new and old. Between 1862¹ and 1865, a pair of cottages has appeared, beyond the modern fence shown in **Fig 1** (see **Fig 2b**). By 1907, this pair has been extended across what is now the Yard to give a terrace of 6 small houses (**Fig 2c**). This row was known as Garden Place and was demolished in the 1950s as unfit for human habitation.² The Garden Place cottages were of weatherboard construction, with slate roofs (see TP 29 report: **Fig 6**).³

Since then the land has remained unoccupied though at some point the large plot was divided into north and south portions by the modern fence seen in **Fig 1** (the Yard being the southerly portion). Access nowadays is through a plot to the south occupied by garages. Secure fencing shuts it off from outside interventions.

¹ 1862 Town of Faversham, Commissioners of Pavements (sewer routes) map. 3 chains:1 inch

² Stanley Bushell, local resident, pers. comm.

³ See www.community-archaeology.org.uk/projects Hunt the Saxons/test pits/TP29

The opportunity to excavate in this location was particularly welcomed. The plot lies along the top of the bank which runs north-south behind the properties on the east side of Tanners St. Previous test pits in similar locations along the top of the bank surface (TPs 1, 11, 12 and 29)⁴ had suggested that the archaeological deposits were not as deep as in the gardens along the street itself, and that medieval strata lay only 60cm below the surface. This site, saved till last, gave an excellent opportunity to test this theory.

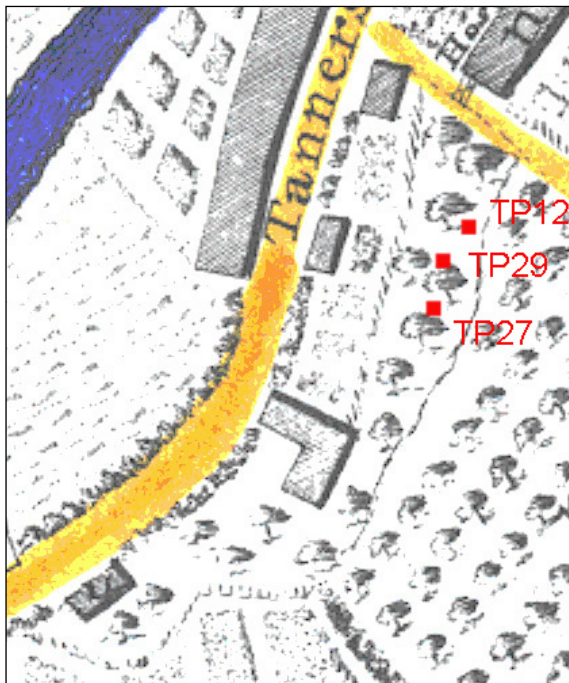


Fig 2a: The Yard area in 1774.⁵

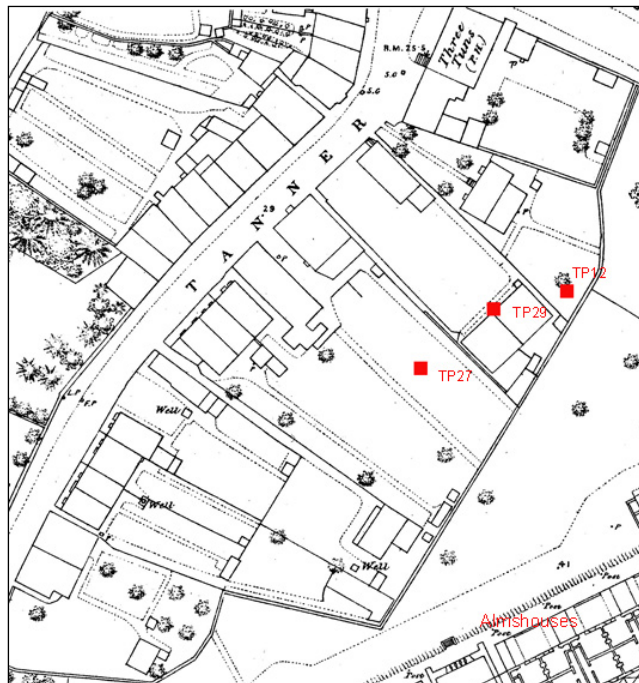


Fig 2b: The Yard in 1865.⁶

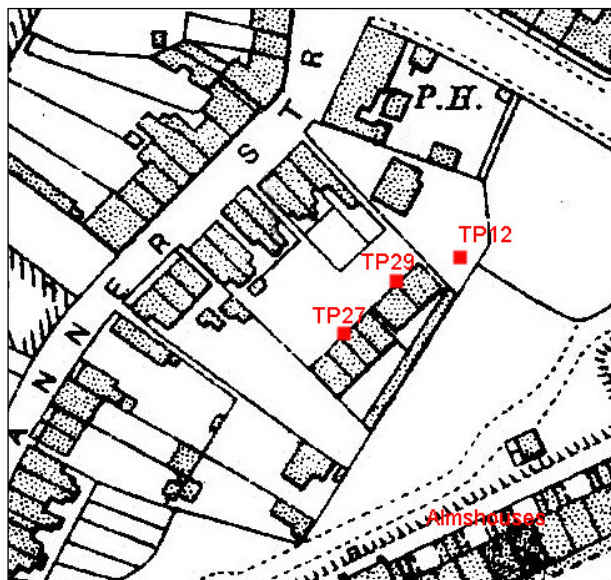


Fig 2c: The Yard in 1907.⁷

⁴ Website op cit, test pits

⁵ Jacobs E 1774 Map of Faversham in *History of Faversham*, reprint 1974 Faversham Society ² OS 1958 TR 0161 SW 1: 1250

⁶ OS 1865 (1904 reprint) Sheet XXXIV.9.10 Scale 1:536

⁷ OS 1907 Kent sheet XXXIV.9 1: 2500

2. Location of pit

Apart from the garage site, this plot offered a wide choice of possible locations for excavation. Mature trees, tree stumps and piles of builder's debris (see **Fig 1**) across much of the site did, however, have to be taken into account. A clear space in the middle of the plot, which lined up with the location of TP29 in the neighbouring plot, was selected, the aim being to find the front of Garden Place, beneath which should be a sealed context. There was enough room to make the Test Pit – perhaps better called an Exploratory Trench – two metres square, the largest excavation undertaken by FSARG so far.

3. The procedures

A two metre square was pegged out and the area delineated marked with string. The position of the square was recorded by measuring to mapped corners of the plot and the corners of the trench later surveyed for levels. 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. All excavated soil was sieved meticulously, and the spoil heap scanned using a metal detector. Scale sections and plans were drawn where appropriate, and photographs taken.

This was the first time that the FSARG excavation team had excavated using a wholly contextual (as opposed to spit) method. The greater size of the trench and the expected straightforwardness of the stratification made the strategy an obvious choice, and it did indeed provide a very useful training exercise, not least because 'trowelling back' became a real option.

Fig 3: Forming a line for the first time.



4. The findings

Beneath a thin layer of weeds and vestigial soil (0001), the trench area was covered with a thin layer of shingle (0002) some of which had trickled down into the next layer. Once 0002 was removed, a solid mass of rubble covering the whole area was revealed (**Fig 3**). Beneath a partial layer of breeze block fragments (0003), covering around half of the area, was a densely packed layer of brick, mortar, concrete and some large timber fragments (0004).

The depth of 0004 increased from around 15cm at the eastern side of the trench (wall side) to around 40cm at the western edge (street side) and deeper still in the middle. Besides the building materials, 0004 contained a fair amount of dateable pottery (mostly 19th / 20th century but with a few sherds of earlier) and other domestic finds such as a carved bone knife handle, a watch key and an iron door key.

A more unusual find was a 19th century apothecaries' weight.⁸ Most of the animal bone found in this trench was in 0004, mostly food animals such as pig and sheep with some bones showing butchery marks.

The brick content was extremely varied, with many examples of different kinds of modern maker-named factory-made brick, many variants on local early frogged bricks and a few examples of earlier loaf shaped dark red bricks that were probably 18th century. Small amounts of tile and slate were found, and there was a large quantity of nails of various sizes.



Fig 4: Range of brick types from (0004), arranged in approximate order of age from (left) latest to (right) earliest.

Beneath 0004, again across the whole area was a layer of white plaster and mortar, mostly powdered although with some larger fragments (0005). The plaster layer was clearly defined in the eastern part of the trench but towards the western side became much more disturbed, mixed with rubble and soil, and plaster powder was found at a greater depth. The plaster layer had few finds, just a few sherds of 19th century pottery and some tiny pieces of glass.

At the same level (c 30cm down) on the eastern side two masonry contexts were identified (0007), (0008). 0008 was the exposed corner of two courses of yellow / red local bricks projecting at an angle from the baulk: these appeared to be in situ. 0007 was a masonry tumble, again of yellow / red local bricks: although not in situ, these bricks appeared to be close to their original relationship and position. The bottom of 0008 sat directly upon the top of a soft light brown clay, which, once all traces of plaster were removed, proved to underlie the whole area (0006). Beneath the front edge of 0007 was a small pit [0009], (0010) cut down into 0006 and containing some large flints, brick fragments and a tiny fragment of clay pipe.

The surface of 0006, once exposed, was curiously deformed (**Fig 5**). Flat on the eastern side, it showed large craters on the west, formerly filled with jumbled plaster and building rubble and in the cratered area the context boundaries between 0004 / 0005 / 0006 were blurred. The 'holes' did not look intentionally dug, and, as 0006 was penetrated by many root holes, the conclusion was that the area had been disturbed by the removal of a large tree root boll at some stage. The content of 0006 itself, however, was very homogenous, with well-distributed small chalk inclusions, small shell and animal bone fragments, and small abraded pottery sherds that were overwhelmingly medieval / 16th century (59%), Saxo-Norman (25%) or earlier (15%). By a depth of c 90cm, 0006 was consistent across the whole area.

⁸ Bailey G. 2000 *Finds Identified* Witham, Essex: Greenlight Publishing

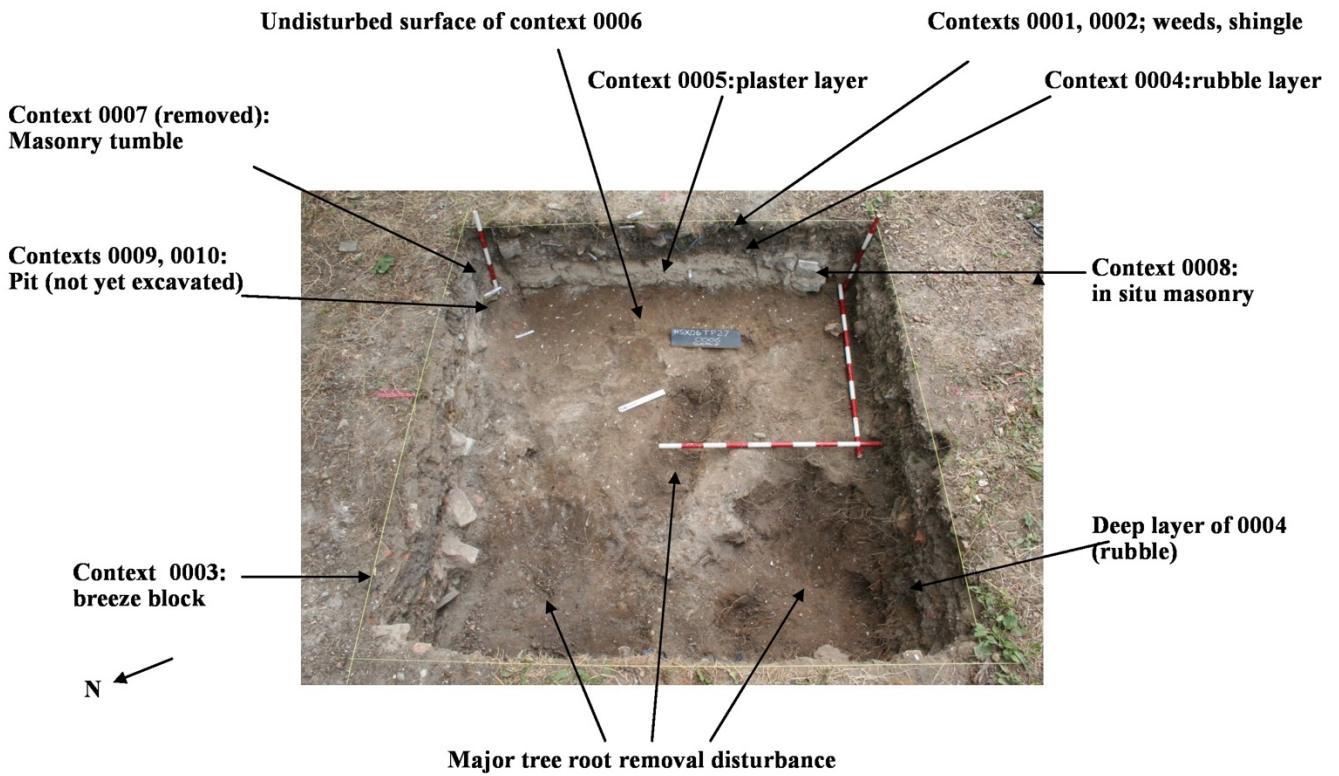


Fig 5: Surface of context 0006.



Fig 6: Shelly ware from context 0006 dated AD 1100-1225.

Fig 7: Some of the decorated sherds of medieval pottery from 0006, dated from c1300 to 1500. These show a variety of origins.



Time did not permit further excavation – removal of the upper rubble layer had been very time consuming in the exceptionally hot dry conditions at the time - but towards the end of the excavation a compacted clay surface was emerging in undisturbed places. This, tentatively labelled context 0011, was chalk flecked and was of the same light brown clay as 0006. There was no evidence for structures.

5. Interpretation

Three phases were identified:

Phase I: Norman to medieval to 16th century. Contexts: 0006, 0011

The layer labelled as 0006 in the past presumably extended as a level surface over this area before the tree root removal event. The pottery dated from around 1150AD to late medieval / 16th century and showed a degree of wear and breakdown suggesting midden scatter, i.e. long-term agricultural usage. The presence of Surrey white ware and London red ware sherds indicates imports but most of the pottery is local Tyler Hill ware of various dates. Within the layer, there was no sign of stratification, so presumably this was churned by ploughing and / or digging. Due to the tree root disturbance, stratigraphically relating the compacted surface (0011) to 0006 was very difficult.

Phase IIa: c1870AD to c1955AD. Contexts: 0007, 0008, 0009, 0010

This saw the building and occupying of Garden Place (east portion of trench) and gardens in front of the cottages (centre and west portions). The three large flints in the small pit (0009), (0010) just underneath the masonry tumble 0007 and therefore preceding the building of this section of Garden Place around 1880, were of similar size to those in the surviving early parts of the boundary wall. In the Yard and neighbouring sections, the wall had been almost entirely rebuilt in brick, possibly at the time of the construction of the Almshouses in 1862-3, and it is possible that the flints were debris from the earlier wall in this rebuilding event.

Phase IIb: c1955. Contexts: 0005

The demolition of Garden Place took place. Foundation bricks were left in situ (see similar in TP29)⁹, timber and roof slates mostly taken off site and possibly reused. The plaster debris was then spread over the area, burying the foundations.

Phase III; c1955 – 2006AD. Contexts: 0001, 0002, 0003, 0004

The site was probably cleared by removing young trees which had grown up after the demolition, after which imported demolition rubble (with various randomly associated artefacts) was spread over the site to level it. The breeze blocks must have been the last load to be tipped. The sheer diversity of the brick types suggests multiple origins for this material, and many are certainly not products of the demolition of Garden Place (too modern). Before the present owners took possession, this plot had been used as a builder's yard¹⁰, so this importing of rubble is quite plausible. Shingle was later spread over the site to smooth the surface.

These relationships are shown in **Fig 8**. One immediate question relates to the apparent 'time gap' between the medieval / Tudor and the building of the Garden Place cottages in the later 19th century. Whatever the uses were during the 17th / 18th / early 19th century, they seem to have left little evidence, and evidence for the medieval / 16th century usage was found immediately below the in situ foundations (0008) of Garden Place. The same was true in TP29 next door. Jacob's map of 1774 (**Fig 2a**) does suggest that this zone, inside the old established boundary but well away from the few properties which existed at that time in this part of Tanners St, was a little used scrubby belt, neither orchard nor garden. This usage would generate little manmade archaeology.

⁹ Website op.cit.

¹⁰ Stanley Bushell op.cit.

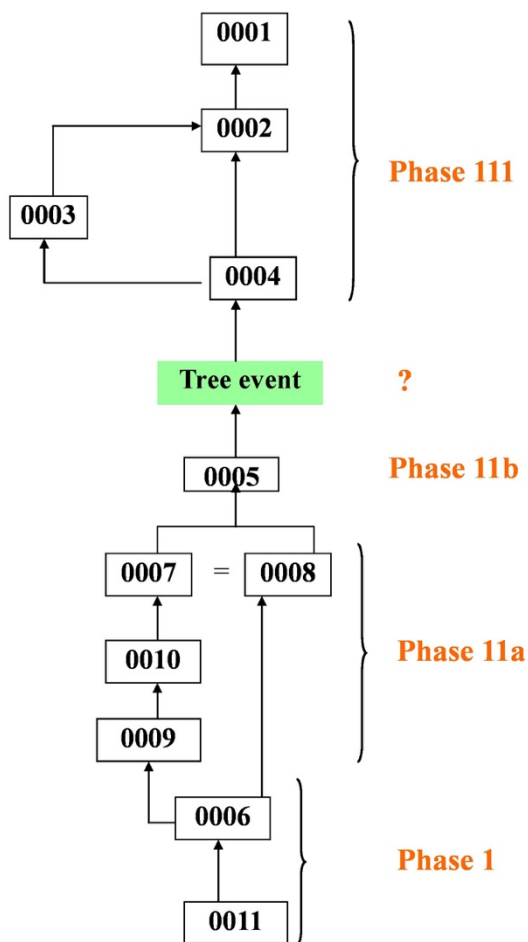


Fig 8: Harris Matrix for TP27.

6. Final comments

Digging this pit was a challenging task for the team, which involved a great deal of interpretative argument as well as back-breaking rubble removal. The complexity, due to the tree disturbance, was much greater than anticipated. Yet the outcomes did confirm our general expectation, which was that at around 50cm we would be back four hundred years and more. The use of a more sensitive approach paid dividends, in terms of understanding the archaeological process and constructing the narrative of the site. Yet, as we develop more skills, so still more become desirable – the next step will be the development of environmental sampling, which would have been very useful on this site.

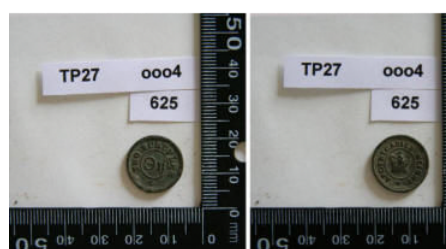
7. Acknowledgments

Great thanks to Mr and Mrs Sharp for this unique opportunity and for the interest and support they showed, not least for offering to backfill the trench afterwards. Thanks also to Stanley Bushell for the invaluable first hand information he gave us about Garden Place. Tribute must also be paid to Mike Tillman for the supervision of his first stratigraphic dig and post-excavation analysis – all that Pat has done is to write it up.

Mike Tillman & Pat Reid

March 2007

Small Finds



SF625



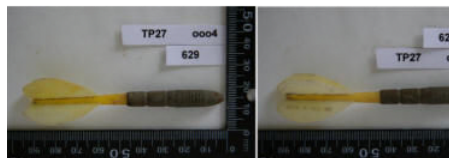
SF626



SF627



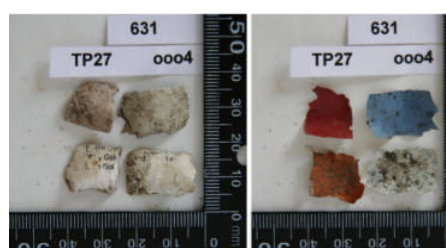
SF628



SF629



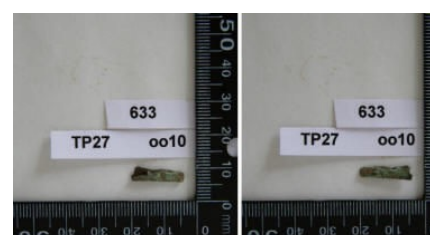
SF630



SF631



SF632



SF633

Small Finds Details.

- SF625: Weight. Small apothecaries weight. Ob: APOTHECARIES WEIGHT written around rim with depiction of crown in centre. Rev: TWO SCRUPLES written around rim, Greek lettering in centre.
- SF626: Key. Large simple key with oval head and two teeth (now fused by iron corrosion). Probably post medieval.
- SF627: Counter or insert. Polished bone disc, one slightly domed side, one flat side. Flat side has scratched decorative(?) marks and a small indentation in the centre. Could be a counter, or a disc for an inlay.
- SF628: Handle(?) Cylinder of carved bone, decorated with leaf carvings around the middle zone. The open end has screw marks externally and internally (to depth of 25mm) which look regular enough to be machine made. Closed end has channel for metal band - metal visible inside at this point. Through pin hole near screw end. Between leaves, four shallow holes each side of central divide - for inset decoration? Possibly a handle for e.g. a mirror, 19th /early 20th century.
- SF629: Playing Dart. 20th C. dart with yellow plastic flight, Cu-alloy (brass) shaft. Point missing.
- SF630: Key. Medium size key, Handle end heavily corroded but clearly originally oval loop, shaped to stem. Round stem. Key end similarly corroded, but seems to have had two prongs.
- SF631: Paper scraps. Scraps of paper, two with print. Painted backing.
- SF632: Key to fob watch.
- SF633: Strip. Tag for such as lace or cord, strip of folded metal.