



Hunt the Saxons 2006

Test Pit report for Test Pit 28 The Almshouses, South Road, Faversham.

Grid Reference TR 01239 61288

1. Introduction

Faversham's impressive Almshouses, built in brick and stone, were completed in 1863 using funds left to the town by Henry Wreight.¹ A local solicitor, Wreight died in 1840 leaving the whole of his fortune, around £75,000, to be spent for the benefit of the town. New schools were built, the recreation ground was laid out, and these new Almshouses were constructed to bring together under one roof the poor who had been living in six individual groups of almshouses in the town.

The site chosen in South Road was known as Town Orchard and then belonged to Napleton's Charity.² The Almshouses were built on the higher, level ground facing South Road, while behind them the land bounded by Tanners Street and Napleton Road begins to slope downwards towards the West Brook at the bottom of the hill.

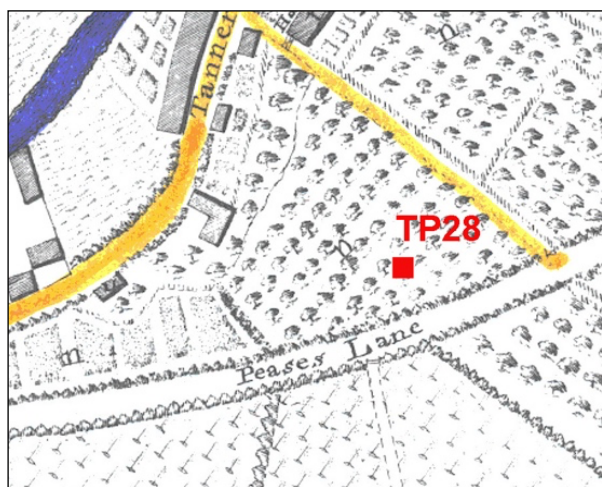


Fig 1: Jacobs map of Faversham 1774.³

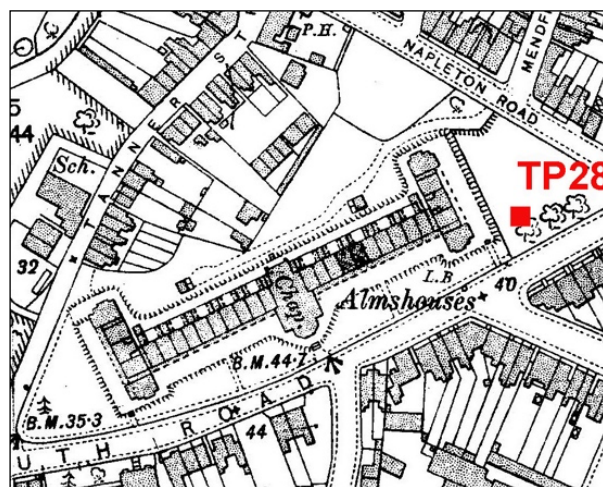


Fig 2: 1907 OS map showing the Almshouses.⁴

¹ Dane, H 1964 *The Mayoralty of Faversham* Faversham Papers No 1 Faversham: Faversham Society pp 12-14

² Dane 1964 op. cit. p16

³ Jacobs, E. 1774 *Map of Faversham* from *History of Faversham* repub. 1974 by the Faversham Society

⁴ OS 1907 Kent Sheet XXXIV.9 1:2500

2. Location of pit

The pit was placed on the eastern side of the Almshouses on an area of lawn quite near to South Road, close enough to the building to enable accurate plotting measurements to be taken, and with easy access from South Road via a gateway. This part of the grounds was used as allotments from c1914 to the early 1980s.⁵ The excavation of this test pit was to be open to public viewing, so we wanted to be clearly visible from the road so as to attract people in. Space was set aside and marked out so that the public could walk around the pit and watch the digging and sieving of spoil, and also view the washing, sorting and processing of finds and talk to some of the participants. Some of the Almshouse residents were able to help with finds processing.



Fig 3: The Almshouses with our dig in the foreground.

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 points, one on a corner of the Almshouses building and the other on the brick corner of the gate post in South Road. The turf was removed carefully from the square, rolled and set aside in plastic bags. The pit was then excavated in 30cm spits (layers), each spit being trowelled out in 5cm layers. In all we reached a depth of 80cm. 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 coordinates to pinpoint the exact find spot. Finally, the soil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

⁵ Andrew Osborne, Chairman of Faversham United Municipal Charities, pers. comm.



Fig 4: Recording our pit.



Fig 5: Finds processing on site.

4. The findings

The top layer in this pit consisted of a fine-grained, friable soil, greyish brown in colour and very dry. It contained well-sorted, occasional inclusions of small pieces of pottery, tile and red brick, shell, glass and a single nail. The only notable finds at this level were two small worked flints.

In Spit 2, at about 40cm down from the surface, the soil became darker and more clayey, but the inclusions were similar with the addition of small amounts of bone and coal / charcoal. A George III penny dated 1807 (SF634) was found in this spit.

As we worked our way down, by the third spit the soil had become more compacted and even darker. There were signs that animals had burrowed at this level. Finds were still well-sorted and rare, including brick and tile fragments, small sherds of pottery, shell, small nails and two more worked flints. We continued down until, at a depth of 80cm no inclusions at all were apparent in the pit.



Fig 6: Worked flint from Spit 1 SF637.



Fig 7: Worked flint from Spit 3 SF635.

5. Interpretation

The area of lawn on which we placed this pit was previously used as allotments, and this would account for the change in the soil which we encountered in Spit 2. The top 40cm had been frequently dug over and churned up in the course of allotment use, whereas below this level the only movement had been as a result of burrowing animals. The George III coin perhaps dates the bottom half of this pit to the early years of the nineteenth century and earlier, i.e. the period before the construction of the Almshouses. Jacob's map of 1774 (**Fig 1**) seems to show an orchard planted on this area, but of course we have no way of knowing how long the land here had been cultivated. We can only assume that no houses were ever built here, but we know that the land was fairly close to well-used thoroughfares and inhabited areas. This theory is supported by the general lack of bone in the pit, which suggests that the ground here had only casual use for many years.

6. Final comments



Fig 8: A selection of our finds, arranged chronologically, lowest earliest.

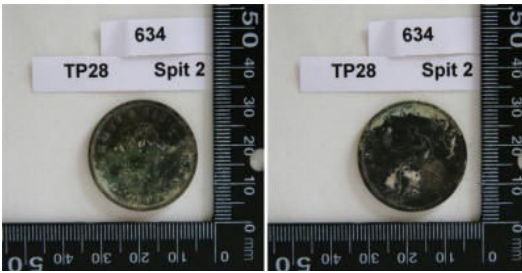
7. Acknowledgements

Many thanks are extended to the Trustees of Faversham United Municipal Charities for allowing us to dig on land at the Almshouses, and particular thanks to Mrs. Sue Bayford, the Clerk to the Trustees, for all her help with the arrangements and for letting us use facilities in the Almshouses during our time there.

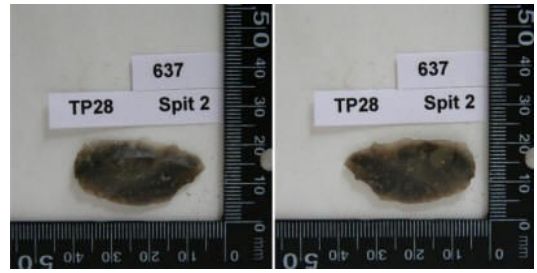
**Pauline Sieben
November 2006**

We had commenced this pit without much expectation of any great finds, treating it more as a PR exercise to conclude our second season of digging. In the event we were pleasantly surprised with the interesting outcome. The finds from our pit took us back clearly through the history of the site. The small pieces of discarded urban building materials and domestic refuse being churned up in the digging of the allotments, the coin lost by a 19th century passer-by, the fragments of pottery indicating nearby habitation right back to the time of the Saxons we were “hunting” for, and even beyond that to the flint tools made by the earliest inhabitants of the area, perhaps in Mesolithic times.

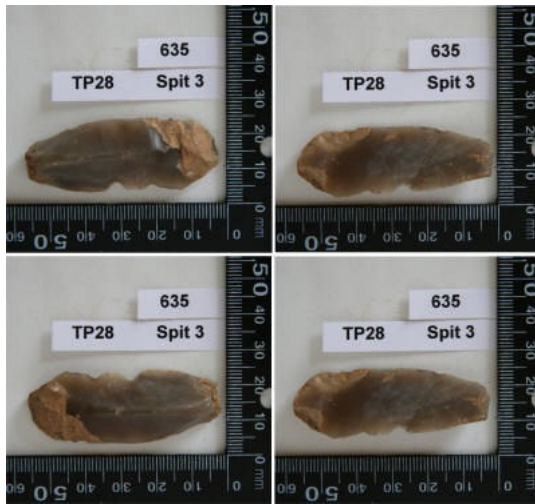
Small Finds



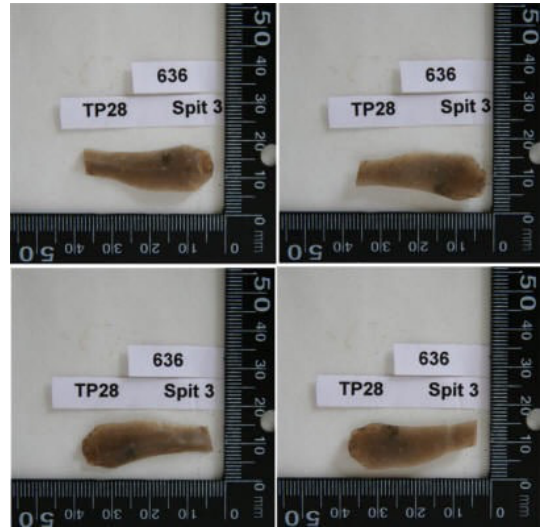
SF634



SF637



SF635



SF636

Small Finds Details.

- SF634: Coin. George III penny, Soho mint. Obv.: bust of G III with laurel wreath. Rev.: Britannia.
- SF635: Flint. Triangular in profile. Ridge along middle. Tapers from one end to other. Curve on under surface. Translucent brown flint. Possibly abandoned before finished. Mesolithic?
- SF636: Flint Blade. Worked flint blade, broken. Probably finished but incomplete. ?Mesolithic.
- SF637: Worked flint, purpose unknown, possible blade. A bit may have been broken off. ?Mesolithic.