



Understanding Ospringe

Report for Keyhole 46 42 Ospringe Street, Ospringe, Faversham.

Grid Reference TR 00250 60921

1. Introduction

Number 42 is on the north side of Ospringe Street and is one of five (36 to 44) early Victorian terraced properties.¹ 42 was formally a Post Office and still has a small post box set into its front wall. It also has a series of out-buildings to the rear.

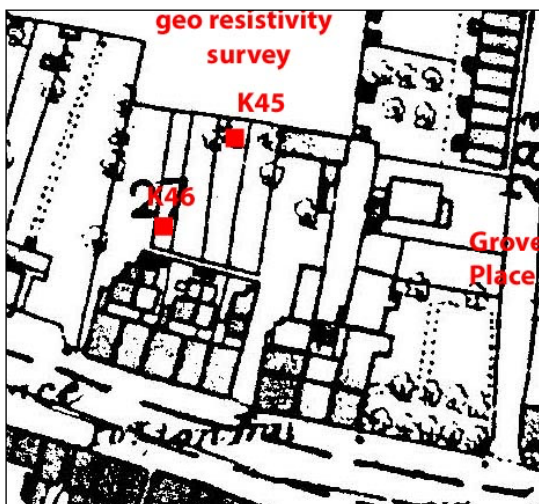


Fig 1: The location of Keyhole 46 (a) in 1865.²



(b) in 1906.³

These outbuildings adjoin a similar series in the neighbouring property to the west, number 44. The long garden area is paved near the house and outbuildings, giving way to lawn, flower beds and trees towards a rear wall. The garden backs onto an undeveloped area of managed open space associated with the modern development of Sheerways. The rear wall is of mixed age but is thought to be on the line of and in places part of the original building of a short-lived barracks block (Fig 2). The only map of the barracks is from 1805.⁴ This map is displayed in the Maison Dieu museum at the Ospringe Street / Water Lane junction. It is known that the barracks was used between 1790 and 1815 during the troubled Napoleonic period. Later it housed the over crowded Faversham work-house until the new workhouse was built in 1836 following the National Reforms.⁵

¹ Swale Borough Council c 1990 *Townscape Survey: Ospringe Village*

² OS 3rd edition 1906 Kent Sheet 34.09 1:2500

³ OS 1st edition 1865 Sheet XXXIV 1:2500

⁴ Kent County Records office.

⁵ Stevens J 2002 *The Faversham Union Workhouse: the Early Years* No 80 in the Faversham Papers, Faversham Society

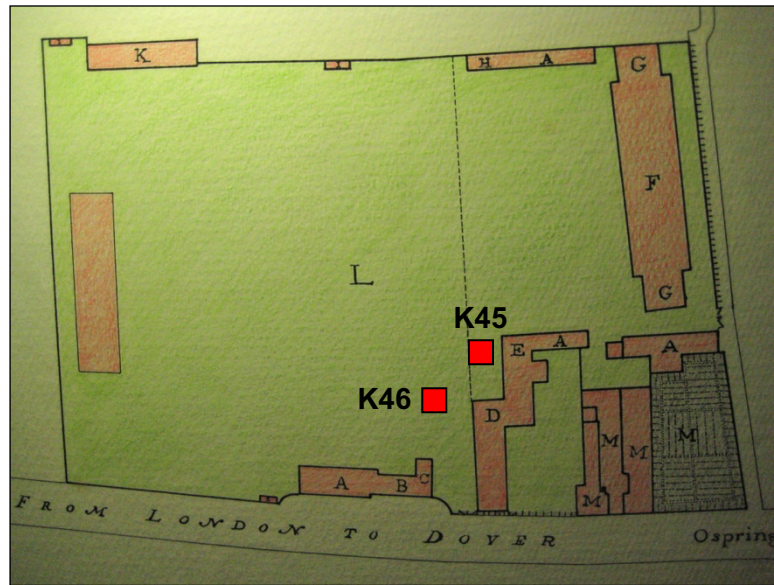


Fig 2: Napoleonic Barracks 1803 with approximate positions of keyholes.

2. Location of pit

The position of a storeroom and canteen block identified on the map as D and E fell within the bounds of this house and garden so it was possible that a section or demolition material still existed. KP46 was set where it was hoped this area would show a presence, about 8m into the lawn area, back from the house and its paved area. During pre-excitation discussions it was revealed that the neighbouring house owners had found a poorly covered in stairway under their western garden wall area during garden redesign work. This had not been recorded and had been filled in for safety.

3. The procedures

A one metre square was pegged out using the planning square and the area delineated marked with string. Its exact location was measured in with reference to the rear buildings which are clearly present on today's OS maps. Turf was removed carefully from the square, rolled and set aside in plastic bags. The keyhole was then hand excavated using single contexts, each of which was recorded.

From the top of [06] only half the keyhole was excavated. The surface [04] up to where it thinned to reveal [06] was used as the working surface for excavation of [06] and below in the eastern half. This surface enabled safe excavation to reach a depth of 1.36 m. The final act of excavation was to remove the [04] context adjacent to the brick path. This confirmed that the path was not located on a wall base but on the soil matrix the same as [04].

Samples of the excavated soil were examined meticulously. Contexts [02] to [04] were sieved, however only the south east quadrant of [01], [06], [07] and [08] was sieved. The remainder of the spoil from each was hand examined as each bucket was emptied into a separate large bag. This separation was in case it was found necessary to sieve 100%. All spoil heap bags were scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each context. Any features and special finds revealed were carefully recorded. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

4. The findings

Context [01] was garden topsoil in the west 13cm thick overlaying a series of cinder (ash) layers and shingle rich soil, with dense ash to the west where it formed a path contexts [02], [03], [04], and [05]. [01]

deepened to the east to a 30cm thick general cindery garden soil matrix on top of [06] a clay-based soil. This [01] context showed considerable churn with pottery fragments ranging in date from a piece of early medieval to late post medieval with only traces of the [02] and [03] contexts showing away from the path line.

At 13cm the western half was wholly ash and formed the base of a slab path, now removed (pers. comm. Householder). Further excavation on this side confirmed this ash layer was one of a sequence of ash paths, given the single context [02] as no discernable dating material was present within the ash layers, the pottery all being the same late post medieval red ware, 23g and glazed ware, 90g. **Fig 3** shows the series in section on the north-west section.



Fig 3: Contexts [01] - [05]: The pathway.

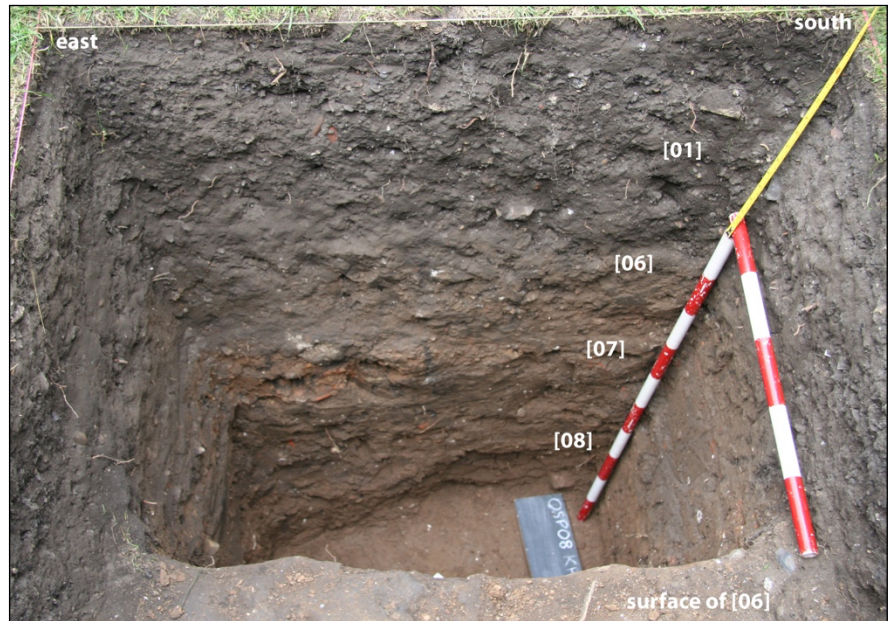
In the west underneath the ash-rich layer [01] was [03] a gravel-rich layer which spread over half the excavated surface, thinner to the east away from the path area. This contained domestic fire ash / clinker but less kitchen rubbish, again with only late post medieval wares but a smaller quantity, 20g and 31g. Below this a clay rich ashy soil [04] sloped and thinned towards the east, this again contained late post medieval pottery, 57g and 85g but with a single 3g piece of possibly earlier type. Along what was now clearly a path on the north western side, this context gave way to [05] one containing a number of whole and part red-coloured bricks with only 17g of late post medieval pottery. Away from this brick path the ashy soil with clay matrix [04] continued across the excavation. It was decided to continue the excavation away from this path and concentrate on the eastern 0.5m, the western side with its path remaining at a depth of 25cm to 35cm.

Other than [03] and [05] the quantities of animal bone, shell and iron in contexts [01] to [06] were similar and contained nothing striking. Those of coal / coke / slag were only high in the path contexts. Quantities of glass also diminished with depth, again with nothing striking.

Context [06] was a layer underlying and with more clay than both [04] to the west and [01] in the east. The clay was as pockets within this matrix. [06] contained brick and tile building material, mortar or plaster as in the higher contexts but here the mortar / plaster was soft and there was also much more flint and chalk. Although it contained similar quantities of bone there was less shell and coal / coke / slag but more iron. Late-post-medieval pottery was again present, 11g red ware, 91g glazed, but here in addition 9 sherds (42g) of medieval were identified. [06] also contained fish-bones and dressmaking pins (found during hand sorting).

In the eastern quadrant a yellow-brown clay [07] containing some gravel / shingle and part house bricks of a red colour, was uncovered. This shingle and clay matrix contained 1kg of building material but less mortar, a further increase in chalk but less flint, and minimal coal and ash, iron and shell. Few pieces of clay tobacco pipe were found in the whole excavation and [07] had the most with only 12g. 18g of late post medieval red ware pottery was here joined by 13g of medieval date. The quantity of animal rib bone although small, 49g, was twice previous contexts. This layer thickened towards the east resembling a demolition layer in the section.

Fig 4: The east to south side of the keyhole, showing the full depth.



At 1.05m the clay content increased to become a clay soil [08] with scattered pieces of tile, chalk, oyster shells, and flints, some with shell mortar attached. There were now no pieces of brick but the greatest quantity of animal bone. Two of the roof tile pieces had peg holes. Context [08] was taken down to 1.36m where excavation frustratingly had to stop as Roman period and earlier pottery were found. A single piece of later period glazed green-ware pottery of the London type was also present, however. The total pottery retrieved from [08] was dominated by the 31g piece of pre-historic, probably late Iron Age, and the 7g of Roman (one piece Samian ware and one Romano-British) but also included 16g of medieval and 3g late-medieval.

5. Interpretation

The evidence for the barracks is slight being limited to context [07], a shingle / clay surface thickening towards the east and containing demolition material. Of great interest to the householders and archaeologists was [08] as it revealed the evidence of Roman and pre-historic activity in the Ospringle area. This context, although churned to some extent, contained shell-mortared flints i.e. evidence for a former structure probably of medieval date. The absence of late and post medieval pottery is a surprise when it is so abundant in nearby Faversham gardens. The garden path layers [02] to [05], although intriguing failed to reveal significantly different dating finds to be useful and was not part of the barrack buildings.

The animal bone records show the greatest quantity at the lower levels with [07] having over twice that at younger levels and [08] three times. This is likely to be associated with the path dominating the other contexts and [01] being a more modern churned soil when, unless a dog was present, bones were not discarded in gardens in quite the same way as previously.

6. Final comments

At the final depth the family of the household were invited to leave a modern object to act as a 'time capsule' item, in this case it was a redundant (Sharp) pocket calculator.

7. Acknowledgments

Great thanks to Jan Stuart and her family who allowed us to dig in their garden and showed so much interest.



Fig 5: Suzanne gets down to it while Lesley, Pat and Poppy get down to sieving and sorting.

Jim Reid

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