

Investigating the Stonebridge Crossing SBC15

Report for Excavation KP9A at 3 Tanners Street, Faversham

Grid Reference: TR 01180 61431



A variety of Mesolithic flints from KP9A

1. Introduction

FSARG's first two years, 2005-6, were spent working in the Tanners Street and Lower West Street area, hunting the Saxons.¹ After several years investigating topics in Abbey Street and then in Ospringe, we returned to the other side of the Westbrook valley, looking in detail at the Davington Plateau in 2010², 2011³ and 2012 (Brent Hill)⁴. These investigations have yielded abundant archaeological finds, from Mesolithic tools to a medieval manor to Roman and Saxon pottery.

In 2015, after a sojourn in Preston next Faversham⁵, we returned for a single two-week season to try and fill the gap between the findings on the Davington Plateau and those in Tanners and Lower West Street. It seemed to us that the Stonebridge Crossing of the Westbrook has been a focus for human settlement and movement for a very long time indeed - we have evidence from the area going back 14,000 years. This season was an attempt to increase our understanding of the area immediately adjacent to the crossing.

An essential part of FSARG's investigation of the archaeology of the Stonebridge Crossing was the requirement for a site on the headland overlooking the junction of Tanners Street and West Street and also the Crossing itself from the East. Back in 2005, we were offered the chance to dig in the garden of No. 3 Tanners St and this pit produced the best assemblage of Roman pottery that we have had in our eleven years around Faversham, Preston, Ospringe and Davington.⁶ Back in 2005, this was only the third pit we had ever dug and in those early days we used spits (fixed depth layers) as a digging method. Obviously, the diggers, for all their care and attention to detail, lacked experience. The opportunity to return to this unusual garden with what are nowadays highly skilled diggers and professional methods of excavation and recording was seized upon gratefully.

2. Geographical and historical background

a) Geography

This small walled garden is located on the higher ground overlooking the valley, as described above. The house No. 3 Tanners, part of a terrace, is set into the hillside and the garden is separated from the rear of the house by a paved passageway and elevated about 2m above the house level. The garden itself is level at a height of around 8m OD, similar to that of the Bull Inn garden and the garden of No. 7 Beckett St, both of which have yielded interesting finds in the past (see **Figs 2 & 3**).

Subsidence of South East England in response to post glacial warming has been happening for thousands of years and continues to this day, resulting in a relative raising of the sea level which in itself diminishes the cutting down power of streams.⁷ This means that back in Roman times, 2,000 years ago, let alone Mesolithic 8,000 years ago, the Westbrook would have been a more powerful stream running deeper in its valley. Since then the valley has silted up to produce a narrow flood plain, though how much of this silt build up is due to the activities of man (damming the Westbrook since at least early medieval times) is hard to estimate.

¹ FSARG website www.community-archaeology.org.uk / Hunt the Saxons HSX05 & HSX06

² FSARG website op.cit. Davington Mysteries DVN10

³ FSARG website op.cit. Davington Mysteries DVN11

⁴ FSARG website op.cit. Davington Mysteries DVN12

⁵ FSARG website op.cit. A most peculiar parish PSN13, PSN14, PSN15

⁶ Watts A B 2001 *Isostasy and the flexure of the Lithosphere* CUP: Cambridge

⁷ British Geological Survey England and Wales Sheet 273: Faversham: Solid and Drift Edition

b) Geology



Fig 1: Geological map of the Stonebridge Crossing area. This geology map has the location of KP9A marked in with a **X**. From this it can be seen that this is a chalk headland topped by Head Brickearth.

c) Known historical background

Here the early 2005 report can be quoted in full:

'3, Tanners St is part of a mid-19th century terrace in the lower (northern) part of Tanners St on the east side.⁸ Road widening in the post war period has made the front entrance unusable, so the property and its neighbours now face onto a passageway at the rear. No. 3 possesses a curious garden plot, raised around 2m above the level of the rear passageway, accessed by steps and surrounded by walls.

To the east, the garden is bounded by the old-established flint and brick wall which runs from north to south all the way down the east side of Tanners St. It adjoins to the north the land of the Bull Inn and formerly (see 1865 map below) adjoined to the south the land of the Royal Oak. The Royal Oak became a lodging house, the Holly Bush, and was demolished around 1960 being replaced by new residential units exactly matching the rest of the terrace in style. The garden and outhouses of the Royal Oak, which must themselves have been stepped up to the level of the No. 3 garden, have been replaced by garden plots and garages with an open space in front of them. Meanwhile, the walled garden of No. 3 has remained unchanged, a secret garden in the heart of Faversham'.

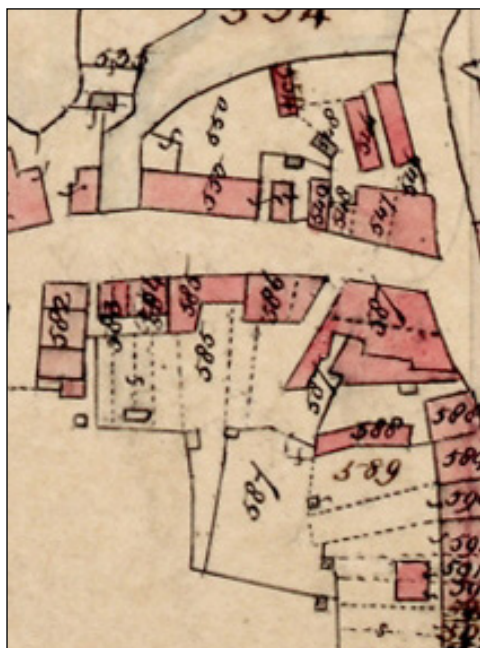


Fig 2: Extract from the Tithe map of 1839.⁹

The garden of the property labelled 586 is the one we are interested in, and is called 'three cottages and a garden'. This is too early for the present property on the site.

In 1839, this was owned by William Rigden of the local brewing family. The Bull Inn is 587, and, along with 588 and 589, is also owned by William Rigden.¹⁰

⁸ Swaine, A. 1969 *Faversham Conserved* Maidstone: KCC p110

⁹ 1839 Tithe map, taken from the Tithe map for Faversham, KCC archive, Maidstone

¹⁰ Tithe Schedule for 1839 tithe map, KAS website [www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/tithe map schedules](http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/tithe%20map%20schedules)

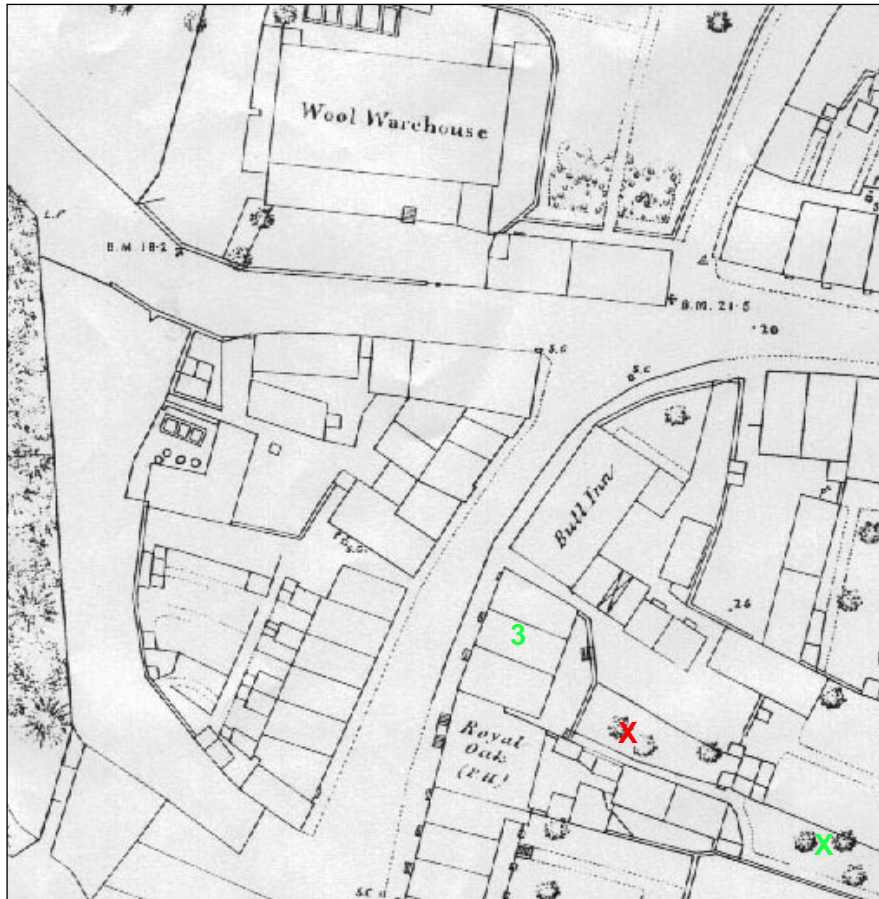


Fig 3: OS 1865 map of the area.¹¹

This shows the relationship with the neighbouring pubs and the now disappeared triangle of housing opposite. **X** marks the site of KP9A, **X** the site of TP1 which yielded Saxon and Roman pottery and a Roman 4th century coin in 2005.¹²

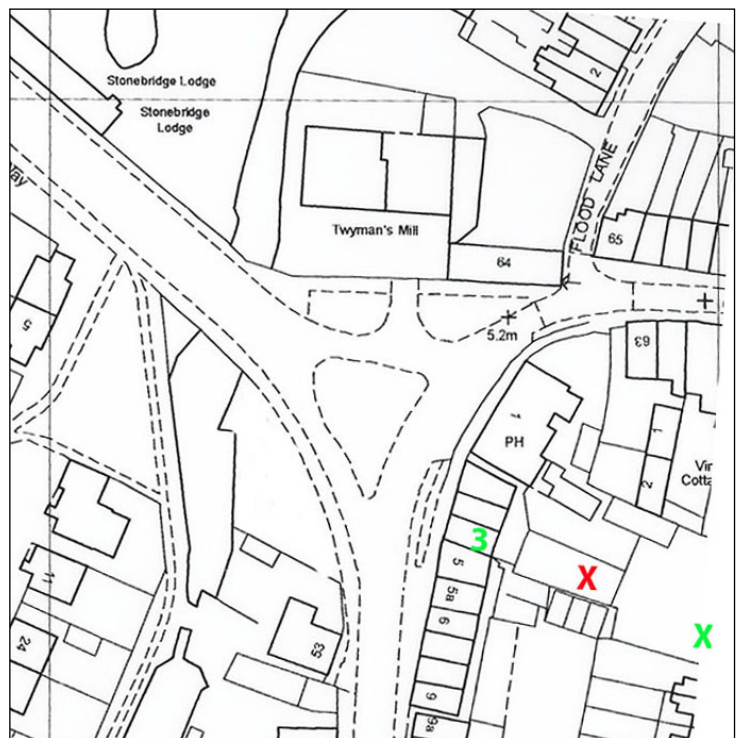
Since 2005, nothing seems to have changed in this area, except for the gentrification of the Bull Inn patio.

3. Location of pit KP9A

Fig 4: The headland area in 2008¹³, same symbols for K9A and TP1.

This highlights the drastic changes between this area and the Westbrook since 1865, and also shows the changes to the immediate south of KP9A but the garden of No 3 in itself has not changed at all.

The location of TP1 seems to be nowadays in the garden of the Bull Inn but in reality, a fence still separates it from the Bull garden.



¹¹ OS 1865 (1904 reprint) Sheet XXXIV Scale 1: 500

¹² FSARG website [www.community-archaeology.org.uk/Hunt the Saxons/ Report on TP1](http://www.community-archaeology.org.uk/Hunt%20the%20Saxons/Report%20on%20TP1)

¹³ OS 2009 National Map Centre No 00600700 Centroid co-ords 600945 161604 Scale 1:1250

4. The procedures

A 1m 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 corners of the house. Turf was removed carefully from the square, rolled and set aside in plastic bags. The pit was then hand excavated using single contexts, each of which was fully recorded. The keyhole was excavated to the maximum depth of 1.25m. All excavated soil was sieved meticulously, and the spoil heap scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each context and special finds were given three dimensional coordinates to pinpoint the exact find spot. Any features revealed were carefully recorded. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

5. The findings

The top layer [2], to a depth of around 20cm was well sorted topsoil. It had a high 19th century artefactual content- over a kg of 19th and early 20th century pottery, lots of ash, cinder and coal pieces, nearly a kg of vessel glass fragments, clay pipe fragments and brick fragments, all of these broken down into small pieces. Context [2] shaded into a firmer, but similar layer, context [3] - the top of [3] can be seen in the excavation photo sequence shown in **Fig 5**.

Almost immediately, however, the northern half of the pit began to differ from the southern part. **Fig 5a** shows a point where a new context [6] has been identified. When [6] was removed - see **Fig 5b** - the differences between the northern and southern half became really strong. The northern half was from then on treated as the upper layers of a rubbish pit, cutting downwards from the [2] / [3] transition point. The exposed southern half of the pit, at a depth of 0.5m, now has the distinctive yellowy-red of brickearth, very familiar to us from our digging in the Faversham area, and becomes context [7]. Part of [8] was then removed and the deposits chased downwards through a gravelly flinty deposit [11] ending at 1.25m in a chalky clayey surface [13].

Meanwhile, half of the exposed context [7] had been removed to see whether the flinty deposit [11] ran underneath the brickearth, as is standard in North Kent for brickearth deposits to lie on top of Head Gravels. A flinty layer [12] was indeed found at about the same level as [11] but whereas [11] had a finds content, including 19th century pottery, cinder and a clay pipe fragment, [12] appeared to have no finds content apart from some worked flint waste flakes.

In the North West corner of the pit, again on the [2] / [3] interface, was a small undisturbed dog burial [5], [4] which was excavated carefully.

The greatest bulk of finds came from [2] and [3], similar in content through churning. These were overwhelmingly dominated by 19th century deposits. Although the deposits [6] and [8] in the rubbish pit were much less in quantity, they too contained 19th century pieces. Context [7], however, was quite different, containing no 19th century pottery, but with small quantities of medieval, Roman and prehistoric (see **Fig 6**). The prehistoric included a sherd of distinctive Middle Iron Age rusticated ware. The Roman was black burnished ware, as were the pot sherds and base found in 2005 in TP9.

Fig 5 takes you through the sequence of the process of excavation. **Fig 6** shows the range of early pottery types in context [7]. The rusticated ware is comparable in age to an assemblage found up on the Davington plateau in OA86 in 2012.¹⁴

¹⁴ FSARG website op.cit. Davington Mysteries *Report on Open Area 86*.

Fig 5:

This series of photographs shows the sequence of excavation in this complex little pit.

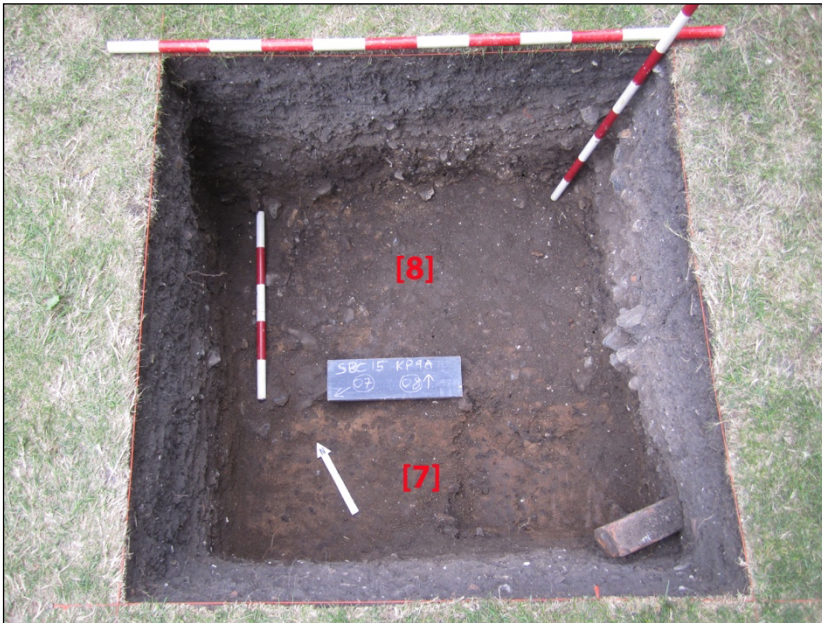
Care has been taken to orientate each photograph in the same direction so that stage by stage comparison can be made



a) Top of Context [3].



b) Context [3] continues down but a pit infill [6] has made itself known.



c) The rest of [3] and all of [6] have been removed. A brickearth surface [7] has emerged and the pit continues downwards with another fill [8].



d) Part of [8] has been removed to reveal yet another fill [11], this time very flinty.



e) To see if [11] is in fact a Head Gravel that runs under [7]; part of [7] was removed to show [12]. [12] contained no man-made finds. Further down, [13] is almost certainly the weathered and clayey top of the Upper Chalk.

f) This summary view at the end of excavation shows parts of most of the contexts (though sometimes only a cut, the fill having been removed).

Unexcavated rubbish pit fill.

Unexcavated [7] over [12]
Medieval surface exposed?

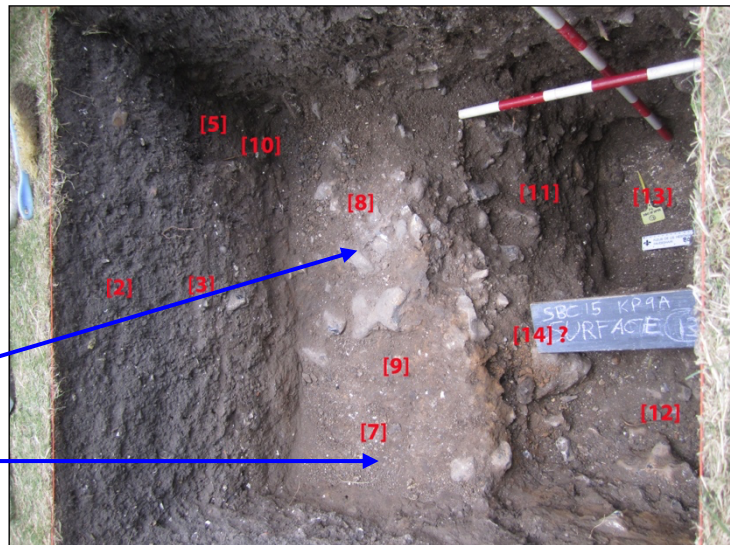
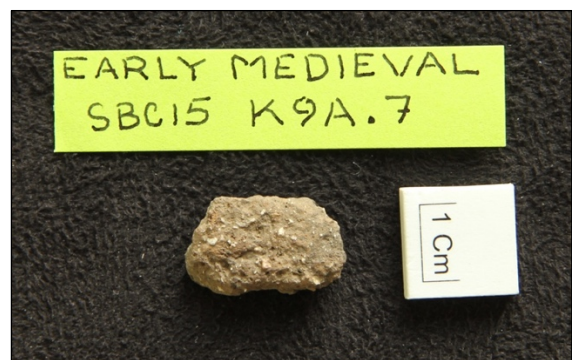


Fig 6: The pottery assemblage from Context [7].



Finally, no less than 22 finished stone tools came out of this little pit, along with many waste flakes and context [7] some heat stressed flint ('pot boilers'). The tools were mostly Mesolithic in date with some early Neolithic. They were distributed amongst nearly all of the contexts - see **Appendix 2** for details.

6. Interpretation

The photograph sequence **Fig 5** and the Harris Matrix in **Appendix 1** should be helpful in understanding the sequence of events.

Basically, the north and south sides of this pit had very different histories. The southern half was relatively undisturbed over the thousands of years people had been active in this place. Context [7] probably represents the medieval and earlier living surface. Wider scale excavation may have shown this surface to slope downhill towards the stream. [7] overlies [12] which seems to be a natural Head Gravel deposit.

The upper levelling layers of [3] and [2] almost certainly date to the building of the garden walls and the creation of a flat private space, using perhaps soil from the cutting into the hillside when the earlier house was built. This would explain there being not only Mesolithic flints in contexts [2] and [3] but also Roman pottery. The relationship to the earlier Rigden property on this site is because the soft red brick of the walls does look to be late 18th / early 19th rather than mid 19th century.

The rubbish pit occupying the north half of KP9A does seem to have been re-used several times, most recently for the burial of the dog. Obviously only a portion of this pit was uncovered in this excavation. The base of the pit appeared to be at around 1.2m but one last puzzle remains with the base deposit context [11]. Does it represent a dump in the bottom of the pit - it does have a small number of finds, some of them 19th century. Or is it a natural and undisturbed deposit of Head Gravels, really part of [12], into which bits of artefactual debris have 'leaked' down worm and rodent holes?

7. Final comments

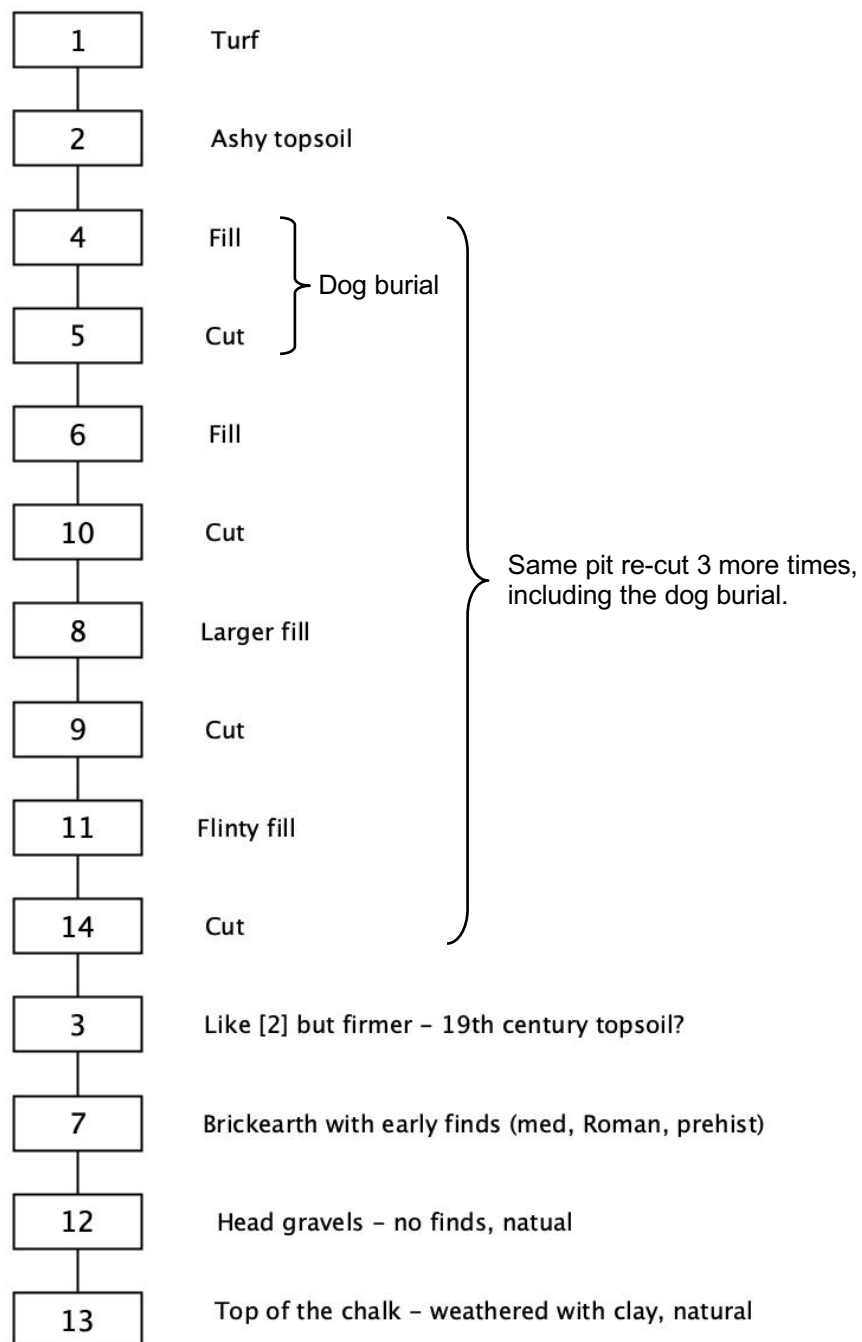
This was a complicated little pit which needed extra careful and intelligent handling, which happily it received from Suzanne Miles and her team. The excellent photographic record, with scale and directions, has been very helpful in getting to grips with the record for writing up.

8. Acknowledgments

Great thanks to Adrian Quinnell and Lyn Fennell for putting up with us yet again! It's not often we get the chance to follow up on an early dig and we appreciate it very much. I hope that you can see how much progress we have made at getting the most out of our 'keyholes'.

Dr Pat Reid
November 2015

Appendix 1: Harris Matrix for KP9A



Appendix 2: Flints

a) Table by context.

Catalogue No.	Site code	Pit No.	Context	Type	Period
875	SBC15	9A	2	microlith	M
876	SBC15	9A	2	microlith bladelet	M
877	SBC15	9A	2	broken blade	M
878	SBC15	9A	2	end scraper	M
879	SBC15	9A	2	awl/ point	Paleo?? CHK
880	SBC15	9A	2	end scraper	EN
881	SBC15	9A	3	microlith bladelet	M
882	SBC15	9A	3	thumbnail scraper	EN
883	SBC15	9A	3	burin	M
884	SBC15	9A	3	crude burin	Paleo? CHK
885	SBC15	9A	6	burin	M
886	SBC15	9A	6	notched blade	M
887	SBC15	9A	6	thumbnail scraper	M
888	SBC15	9A	7	bladelet	M
889	SBC15	9A	8	arrowhead	EN
890	SBC15	9A	8	awl/ side scraper	EN
891	SBC15	9A	8	3 bladelets	M
892	SBC15	9A	11	small knife	EN?
893	SBC15	9A	11	2 bladelets	M

b) Photograph by period (NB Mesolithic on cover).

