



From Downs to Sea The study of a Kentish valley

1. Main Aim

Since its foundation in 2004, FSARG has carried out research into Faversham's past through a number of small-scale highly focussed projects. Perhaps unsurprisingly, almost all of the research locations cluster around the central, highly populated Westbrook valley, between Stonebridge pond at the northernmost point and the Ospringe Vicarage at the southernmost.

The presence of the Westbrook stream, small but powerful and fed from reliable chalk springs, has long been seen by historians as being by far the most important factor in the development of Faversham.¹ Much historical research has demonstrated the importance of the stream for watermills² and associated industry³, from the medieval period onwards. The tidal section, nowadays downstream from Stonebridge ponds, has long been important for shipping - indeed, Faversham has been a limb of the Cinque Ports since at least AD1260.⁴ Archaeologically, there is abundant evidence for Roman⁵ and Saxon⁶ settlement in the immediate area, and the Westbrook is crossed by Watling Street at Ospringe. Finally, recent work by FSARG has identified many areas of prehistoric activity in the Westbrook valley⁷, with the earliest finds dated to the Lower Palaeolithic.⁸

The aim of this project *From Downs to Sea* is to build upon the work done so far and complete a detailed portrait of the Westbrook valley, including Faversham Creek. This will be presented in digital map form, linked to a database, in the style of a Historic Environment Record (HER) and be accompanied by a comprehensive bibliography. The project will work outwards from existing studies, such as those by local historians, commercial developer-paid archaeologists and industrialists, identifying gaps and areas of weakness and developing strategies to remedy these.

2. Priorities

At this point, it is helpful to divide the Westbrook Valley into three sections (see Fig 1).

Zone 1: Upper Valley (TR 99508 58781 to TR 00057 60175)

The stream has not flowed in this section since the 1960s due to water extraction, although after heavy rain some trickles can be seen. The course of the stream and its valley are, however, clearly visible. As far as I can ascertain, there has been little historical research into this largely rural area of mixed farming and woodland⁹, and no archaeology apart from metal detecting. The priority here is, then, swift desk top research (to pull together what is already known) and then to set specific targets and develop strategies to achieve them.

Zone 2: Middle Valley (TR 00057 60175 to 01303 61572)

Again, the stream has not flowed through most of this section since the 1960s. It emerges as a waterway at Chart Mills, the restored gunpowder mill managed by the Faversham Society. Apart from the fields opposite Ospringe Church and Daws Row, this is a built-up section. Considerable amounts of research have already been done for Zone 2, but there are still some blanks. The priority here is to address these gaps as soon as possible.

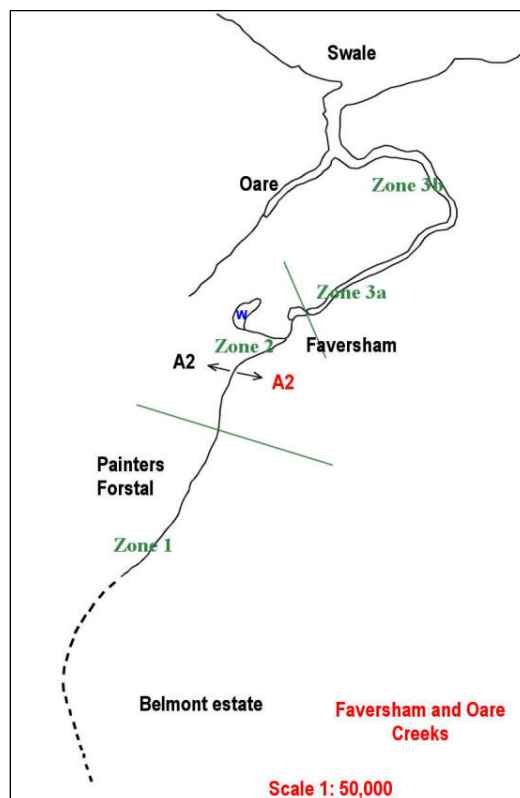


Fig 1: The Westbrook and Faversham Creek: Project Work Zones.

Zone 3: Lower Valley (Tidal stretch) (TR 01303 61572 to TR 01960 64514).

This stretches from the head of the tide to the Swale. The head of the tide is an artificial construct, being the sluice gates at Stonebridge Pond.

This section is usefully subdivided into the *Town* section and the *Marsh* section.

3a) Town section (TR10303 61572 to TR 02117 62061).

This part of the waterway has long had quays, wharves, warehouses and industries. The centre of the old town lies nearby at the top of the terrace. Much change has taken place in this section in recent years and since 2005 it has been the centre of a debate about its future, a debate still unresolved in 2012. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the debate.

Although FSARG has not carried out any specific research in this area, the recent development of brownfield sites means that a lot of commercial archaeology has taken place on the east (town) side. This is usually very useful and high-quality work but reports have been tucked away in obscure places and not integrated into a proper account. Making the most of these would be the top priority. The west side of the Creek has been less investigated and will need a strategy for establishing (for example) the areas which have been scraped for brickearth by the brickworks which was there until 1907-8 plus other queries.

3b) Marsh section (TR 02117 62061 to TR01960 64514).

Here the Creek flows through alluvial reclaimed marsh, an ancient landscape protected by embankments and drained by a network of channels and sluices. The marsh east of the Creek is under arable cultivation nowadays but west of the creek, between the Faversham and Oare Creeks, the land is still under grass.

Apart from work done in advance of gravel extraction, hardly any archaeological investigation has been done out here and not much historical research. Landscape recording has been mainly from the aesthetic viewpoint. This lack of recording is all the more troubling with the threat of further gravel extraction taking place in the between- the- Creeks area. Although Bretts' archaeological consultants are very good and community friendly, they cannot possibly have the time to record all of the features of the current landscape. The priority here then is to record as much as possible in a variety of light-touch ways before it changes forever.

3. Methods

A wide range of methodological approaches will be used, according to research need.

For the Upper Valley (Zone 1), map / aerial photograph regression, publication and document research are the starting points, along with the obtaining of metal detecting finds information from the Portable Antiquities Scheme and contributions from the Kent HER. After this, non-invasive field methods will be used, with field walking, feature logging and photographic archive-building the main methods. At this stage, it is impossible to say whether there will be any need for excavation.

For the Middle Valley (Zone 2), a great deal of 'desk top' work has already been done, along with much geo resistivity surveying, garden foraging and keyhole excavation.¹⁰ Two areas have, however, been identified as needing clarification and recording, namely a) the area just to the south of the Davington Plateau, at the foot of the slope and b) the area west of Brent Hill. Both of these will be investigated using the same methods as elsewhere in the central area. Care must be taken to establish which areas have been scraped for the brick industry.

In the Lower (Tidal) Valley (Zone 3), the eastern side of the town section 3a has been well looked at over the last few years by professional commercial units¹¹. This needs pulling together, along with information from maps, the HER and other sources.

The western side of 3a, the Brents, has been well researched for a Faversham Society paper¹² and does seem to have only modern development (early 19th century onwards) with most space occupied by the 1950 / 60s North Preston Estate. Furthermore, this area does seem to have been thoroughly scraped by the brick makers. At present, geo resistivity surveys of the Creekside grassed areas to test out the survival of foundations of demolished properties and a pair of carefully sited keyhole excavation to look for remains of the very simple residences that existed here before the building of the North Preston Estate would seem to be sufficient.

For the marsh section, 3b, the tantalising fact here is that the alluvium undoubtedly conceals much archaeology (especially prehistoric) inaccessible to light touch methodologies. The landscape as seen nowadays is really medieval at the earliest. Nevertheless, the cuts of ditches and, very occasionally, crop markings do give hints at what is below, and the surface features are important in themselves. We plan to use a recording method for features adapted from the 'groundtruthing' method developed to test out LiDAR results.¹³ This will use GPS systems to record location, a proforma to record details and GIS to plot form and distributions.

Two points along the lower valley where the Creek cuts through slightly higher ground will justify a closer look. One of these is the site of the historic Thorne Key (quay), cited up until 1538 as the main unloading point for ships using the Port of Faversham.¹⁴ The other is the raised ground at Nagden, including the site of the former Nagden Bump, demolished in 1954 to build embankments after the 1953 floods. The former site justifies geo resistivity surveying and possibly excavation. The second was field walked by FSARG in 2006, and needs proper writing up, feature recording as above and the incorporation of desk top findings, such as a Faversham Society paper on the theory that this is the site of Beowulf's tomb.¹⁵

4. Overall Project Plan

Detailed proposals will be drawn up for each of the three zones and focus will shift from one to the other over, provisionally, three years. This time span is, however, not carved in stone - it can be lengthened or shortened as we decide at our annual Evaluation and Planning meetings in 2012 and 2013. The following table is a provisional guide to this broad use of time and **Fig 1** shows the working zones of the valley.

	Zones	Archaeological Activity	Community Involvement*
2012	Upper	x	Creek festival participation.
	Middle	Investigation of the two 'gap' areas (Brent Hill and Lower Road)	
	Lower	Training in feature mapping, through geo resistivity surveying and feature mapping on the Brents	
2013	Upper	Desktop	Creek festival participation. Prehistory of Westbrook valley Study Day.
	Middle	x	
	Lower	Feature mapping of the marsh stretch of Creek. Closer examination of Thorne Key (quay) and Nagden areas, possibly involving excavation.	
2014	Upper	Feature mapping, field walking etc.	Painters Forstal village activities Final exhibition
	Middle	x	
	Lower	x	

* The whole project is designed to produce a user friendly and widely accessible community resource.

5. Recording and dissemination

The data base (including the photographic archive) and GIS mapping systems will be in place by the autumn of 2012 and will be worked on continually through the project. By the Autumn of 2014, the

Downs to Sea HER should be pretty comprehensive, although it will, of course, still be open to entries. We hope to have this running online, and available in the Fleur on the Long Gallery computer.

6. Archiving

The material, digital and paper archives will be lodged with the Faversham Society.

7. Training

Training in such areas as flint identification, pottery dating and archaeological illustration will continue throughout. Arrangements have been made for training in the use of the magnetometer.

Intensive training will be needed in GIS mapping over 2012. This has already started, with Ges Moody of the Thanet Trust spending a day teaching four of us in March. When we feel confident in the use of the Mapmaker software, we will teach others.

8. Community involvement

See above table. Possibilities of more participative involvement will be examined for the second year when we are working mainly in the Town section (Zone 3a).

9. Funding

FSARG should be able to implement this programme without need for anything above our usual self-funded expenditures, so there are no plans at present to apply for extra funding.

Final comments

This is an ambitious landscape project. We know we are dealing with human (or at least hominid) activity in this valley for a quarter of a million years. For the last eight to nine thousand years, all of the pointers are towards the settlement / activity being continuous. I think that by focussing on a single coherent unit, the Westbrook valley, we stand a chance of telling a coherent story. How fortunate we are to have so much on our doorstep!

Pat Reid

March 2012

¹ Hyde P 1997 'Faversham ships and seamen in the 16th century' Faversham paper No 45 Faversham Society: Faversham

² See in Frohnsdorff M 1996 *The Maison Dieu and Medieval Faversham* Faversham Society: Faversham

³ Percival A 1967 'The Faversham Gunpowder Industry and its development' Faversham Society paper No 4 Faversham Society: Faversham

⁴ See Charter on display at the Fleur de Lis Heritage Centre, Preston St, Faversham

⁵ see for example Philp B 1968 'Excavations at Faversham 1965' 1st Research Report of the Kent Archaeological Research Groups Council

⁶ See for example Richardson A 2005 *The Anglo Saxon Cemeteries of Kent Vol 11* pp34-5 BAR British Series 391

⁷ See FSARG website www.community-archaeology.org.uk, keyhole reports for Understanding Ospringe

⁸ FSARG Keyhole Report No 83 (Ospringe)

⁹ Although see, for example, Hasted E 1798 *History of the County of Kent* . Vol VI of the 2nd Edition

¹⁰ See reports on the FSARG website www.community-archaeology.org.uk

¹¹ e.g. Archaeology SE 2004 *Archaeological Investigations at Belvedere Road*

¹² Stevens P 2004 'A Look at the Brents' Faversham Paper No 85 Faversham Society: Faversham

¹³ See website www.forestry.gov.uk

¹⁴ Wilkinson P 2006 *The Historical Development of the Port of Faversham 1580-1780* BAR British Series 413

¹⁵ Wilkinson P & G Mussett 1998 'Beowulf in Kent' Faversham Paper No 64 Faversham Society: Faversham