

*The Faversham Society Archaeological Research Group*

*5th Anniversary Report*

*November 2009*



## **Community Archaeology - five years on**

FSARG, Faversham's community archaeology group, is just coming to the end of its fifth year of archaeological activity. Community archaeology is first and foremost local – by Faversham people, for Faversham people and about past Faversham people. Sixty local people have been directly involved at some stage over the last five years with around thirty active each year. We have met and worked with hundreds of you in the town and we are learning more and more about those vanished people who created the landscape around us today.

FSARG specialises in small scale 'light touch' archaeology. Over the five years we have dug forty 'keyhole' trenches (one square metre in size) and eight larger ones, and carried out numerous surveys. I hope you will enjoy reading about some of our findings. In the true traditions of community archaeology, however, we will also be trying to teach you how to recognize some of the less obvious but archaeologically important material you find in Faversham gardens.

If afterwards you want to know more, go to the FSARG website:

[www.community-archaeology.org.uk](http://www.community-archaeology.org.uk).

There you can read detailed reports on the different excavations and much more besides.

Finally, I hope that, after reading this, all of you who have helped us so much in our voyage of discovery will feel that your support was justified.

**Dr Pat Reid**

**Honorary Archaeologist for the Faversham Society, Director FSARG**  
**October 2009**  
**Email: [patmreid@hotmail.com](mailto:patmreid@hotmail.com)**

## **800 years of leather: the tanneries of Tanners Street**

FSARG's first task was hunting for evidence of Saxon settlement in the Tanners St/Lower West St area. We didn't find the Saxons until 2006, but in 2005 we found abundant evidence for the tanneries which gave Tanners St its name.

Most striking were the finds in the garden of Our Lady of Carmel (founded 1937) and next door at number 37, Tanners Cottage. Documents tell us that this area was part of the Great Tan Yard. In 1743 the owner William Gilbert built the splendid house on the site which is nowadays known as Whitefriars (Fig 5). In the Prayer Garden, a small test pit (TP25) uncovered the demolition rubble and foundation of 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings, set into a thick layer of rammed chalk which covered the whole excavated area. Trodden into the top of the chalk was a very early clay pipe, along with similarly dated pottery, so the surface of the chalk was in existence around 1620.

Underneath the chalk was a clay layer, on top of which was a heap of cattle horn cores. Hides were delivered to tanneries with heads and feet still attached. The tanners would remove the outside of the horns and sell it on to be used, for example, for knife handles or lantern panes, and then dump the useless cores. A horn core dump is therefore good evidence for a tannery. A number of sherds of medieval pottery dated the dump to AD1300-1500. Mike Frohnsdorff dug around in his Maison Dieu archive and came up with a reference to a tannery on the Westbrook owned by the Hospital of St Mary in the mid 1200s. We even have the name of some tanners – John and Walter.

Next door at Tanners Cottage (TP14) we found yet more horn cores, one with the cattle skull still attached. There was also a lot of medieval pottery, including a near complete late Tyler Hill pot with splashed glaze and a thumbled bung hole (Fig 4). The cattle remains and pottery were just below and

across from an area paved with large rounded stones of exotic origin for Faversham, such as granite and serpentine. These stones must surely be ballast from visiting ships. Possibly in medieval times, this paving formed the edge of the Westbrook and the horns and pots had been dumped in the mud - they were certainly in good condition.

Further down Tanners Street behind numbers 50 to 52 (TPs 17, 17A) we found more evidence. This attractive terrace was built for senior employees of the nearby gunpowder works in around 1763. In the garden of 51, we found a substantial demolition layer from the previous property on the site (Fig 11). The demolition layer contained quality pottery from the 1600 and 1700s, such as the Early English Delft bowl with the jaunty mermaid which has become FSARG's logo.

Mixed in with the pottery and demolition material was an unusual animal bone assemblage. In Faversham gardens, we nearly always find many bits of animal bone, along with many shells and tiny fish bones. These tell us a lot about the details of diet in the past. With TP17A, however, the animal bones were nearly all complete cattle foot bones (metapodials) with one horn core. (Fig 1) Here again we had evidence for hide discards. This time, however the associated pottery was from the 1600s and 1700s.



**Fig 1: Animal bone assemblage from TP17A**

Additional evidence for tannery sites came from old maps, documents and photographs held in the Fleur de Lis Heritage Centre. The Wool Warehouse (now Twymans Mill) built in 1806 originally had a fellmongers yard on the northern side, processing hides. Opposite the Wool Warehouse, just to the southeast of the bridge across the Westbrook, was large leather drying shed. The shed is shown in a Croseur coloured slide of around 1910 and is mentioned in the childhood memoirs of Herbert Gower (Faversham Society Paper 26).

When did all this end? We know from documentary evidence that the Great Tan Yard shut down in 1840. The tanning in central Tanners St seems to have ceased in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century with

the building of the new gunpowder worker houses. The closure date for the drying shed has, however, been hard to pin down. We do know that by the 1930s, the space it had occupied was being used as a scrap yard. Its foundation platform is still there, sticking out of the east bank just south of the bridge, an evocative reminder of one of Faversham oldest industries (Fig 2)



**Fig 2: View south from Stonebridge. The drying shed platform is visible in the bank on the left.**

### How to identify Tyler Hill pottery

Over the last five years, around 80% of the medieval pottery sherds found during our excavations in Faversham and Ospringe has been identified as coming from Tyler Hill kilns, near Canterbury. This pottery was made around 800 years to 450 years ago. Perhaps you have already found some of this pottery when working in your garden! It has a hard sandy fabric which is generally orange or brick red but not infrequently dark grey or even patchy orange and grey. To the touch it feels gritty like fine sand paper. Quite often you can see a patch of splashed-on orange or dark green glaze.

Jugs formed a large part of the original output and almost always they had a thumb printed and frilled base (fig 3). Some jugs were characterized by a combed decoration and broad strap handles with deep stabbing and thumb edges. Contrasting white clay was sometimes added to the surface either as an overall paint which was then green glazed or more usually applied as a smeared- in strips arranged in simple geometric patterns. Rows of thumb impressions and plain horizontal grooves are also common.

Tyler Hill pottery was starting to be made at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century Tyler Hill potters seem to be proficient with the faster type of potter's wheel. Between around AD 1275 and 1350, Tyler Hill potteries

moved into a phase of mass production. The fabric became harder and the colouring (firing) much more irregular with patchy orange grays. Most jugs were undecorated in this phase. Cooking pots and to some extent bowls were also very common and thumbed strips of clay were fixed to the sides and even along the undersides of large pots to give extra strength. Another aid to identifying Tyler Hill ware is the profusion of stabbing or pricking marks found on the rims, handles and sometimes all over the body of some vessels.



**Fig 3: Main period Tyler Hill pot sherd with thumbed, frilled base c AD 1300**

By the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, peak production was over. The later pottery is often very hard, over fired and dark grey with a dark brown lustrous glaze. The fabric is made up of poorly mixed clay and does not look as compact as the earlier fabric. Decoration became rare. New kinds of vessel come into popularity such as large jars called cisterns for holding ale and other liquids. These had bung holes near to the base for liquid to be drawn off by removing a stopper or turning a tap. (We found one of these in a Tanners St garden TP14, see Fig 4)



**Fig 4: Late Tyler Hill cistern TP14 c AD1500**

During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, pottery making at Tyler Hill declined, due mainly to competition from outside the area. By the early 16<sup>th</sup> century it had ceased altogether, although peg tile making continued in the area until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

We are greatly indebted to John Cotter for sharing his knowledge and expertise on Tyler Hill pottery with us through his publications and an invaluable training session.

*Marian Spouse*

### Faversham in its prime

We hear a lot about the importance of medieval Faversham with its Royal Abbey, ancient market and Cinque port connections. From our investigations so far in the town, however, it is the finds from the 1600s and 1700s (the post medieval) which have impressed us.

This is the period when most of the largest and best-looking domestic buildings in the town were built (Fig 5). In a number of cases such as at 78 West St (1643) and 51 Tanners St (1763) we have found the demolition layers of the previous buildings (TPs23a,23,b,17,17a). Many older late medieval properties did survive, especially in Abbey Street, but they were dressed up with fancy red brick and mathematical tiles and given whole new frontages.



**Fig 5: Whitefriars in Tanners St, built in 1743**

The most attractive finds have been of post medieval ceramics. These include a wide variety of exotic wares such as Dutch rooster ware, Westerwald stoneware, Bellarmine pot and exquisite Dutch delft. Cheaper English wares include Early English Delft, Staffordshire Black, Surrey Border wares and lots of trailed slip ware in orange and yellow. If you are viewing this online,

you can see the vivid colours of this robust, eye catching range of household crockery. (Fig 6)



**Fig 6: Dutch Delft (right) and a cheap Early English Delft copy (left) TP37**

Metalwork has also been abundant. From the earliest post medieval period (around AD1540-60) came a decorated bone knife handle with the iron knife tang still in place (Fig 7). From the 1600 and 1700s a near-complete decorated bronze spur and a number of handsome belt and boot buckles have survived. Coins have been found along with named 18<sup>th</sup> century tokens and lead seals. We have also found a number of Nuremberg tokens, with the names and motifs of their German manufacturers: these were used as counters in an abacus system in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.



**Fig 7: Decorated bone scale tang knife handle, AD 1530-1560 TP16**

Clay pipes are very common from 1600 onwards. We have found pipes from all periods in Faversham, many from the very earliest period. Three fine early examples came from the excavations for the building of the Meeting Room at the Fleur itself (Fig 8). In the next section, Keith Robinson explains how to recognize an early pipe, if you find one in your garden. These pipes were being smoked when Charles 1 was on the throne, which makes them just as much an antiquity as a rose farthing or a Jacobean buckle.

Finally, in many places we have found carefully paved garden paths and other decorative features dating from this period. In a couple of places we have had a glimpse of elaborate water storage and cess pit structures, curved and domed tanks beautifully built in red brick, very necessary facilities in those days before sewers and water treatment plants (Fig 13).

### How to identify an early clay pipe

Early English clay pipes are quite commonly found when digging allotments and gardens especially in historic towns like Faversham. They are usually in pieces, as the long stems were very fragile, but sometimes the bowls survive.

When Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas at the end of the fifteenth century, the land was inhabited by Native Americans ('red Indians') who lived by farming and/or hunting. When Europeans came to settle they discovered that the Native Americans had crops that were unknown at home such as potatoes and maize and tobacco.

Tobacco was smoked as medicine, as part of religious ceremonies or as a sign of friendship between tribes. When first taken to Europe tobacco was most popularly used as a medicine ground up very fine in the form of snuff. Others chewed tobacco which had been soaked in rum. By around 1590, smoking tobacco in pipes was becoming popular with both men and women in England. Tobacco was very expensive so the bowl of the pipe which held the tobacco was tiny. Most of the pipes they used were very simply made of clay without decoration other than milling around the rim. The bowls also had convex sides, so that they were almost globular.

It is easy to tell the age of a pipe from even a small piece of stem. Most pipes made before 1700 had a borehole in the stem measuring about 3mm in diameter. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, pipe stems increased in length from 100mm to as much as 350 mm by 1700. Towards the end of the century the bore got smaller until it was only 1mm in diameter by the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Fig 8)

As tobacco got cheaper, the inside size of the bowls got larger – from 6mm in diameter in 1580 to 13mm by 1800. The shape of the bowl changed, with the sides becoming straight vertically, and the angle between the stem and bowl which had been sloping (oblique) became more upright (close to a right angle). Later pipes, from around 1800 onwards, are often decorated. Dating relies not only on the shape of the pipe and bowl but also on

the maker initials which they stamped on their products and the character of the decorations

*Keith Robinson*



**Fig 8:** 17<sup>th</sup> century clay pipes from the Fleur de Lis Meeting Room site. Above c1690, below c 1620.

### Before the coming of the Romans

Early man was around in this part for the world at least 400,000 years ago but people like us only arrived in these parts around 12,000 years ago. In this little taster, I'm going to talk only about these later ancestors – the bigger story will have to wait until another day.

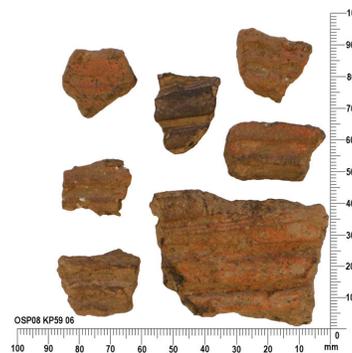
When FSARG took up the community archaeology banner five years ago, we first studied the findings of previous archaeologists in our area. The medieval and Romano-British were well covered, also the people living around here when the Roman legions first arrived in AD43, but the picture of earlier people was almost completely blank. If it were not for a few 'stray finds' by 19<sup>th</sup> century antiquarians in fields and some tantalizing discoveries near Clapgate Spring by archaeologists carrying out initial evaluations for the Abbey Fields development in 2003, you would have thought the Westbrook valley uninhabited before around 50BC.

Digging in Faversham Town in 2005-7 did not add much to the picture. The gardens of most properties in the older parts of town have been in use for approaching a thousand years, and the depth of occupational deposits (household rubbish, as you would call it) is very great. In some gardens we were not even down to the medieval strata at our maximum excavation depth (1.2 metres).

Once we had moved up to Ospringe, in 2008, evidence for the prehistoric came thick and fast. The archaeology in Ospringe village is much

shallower than in the old parts of Faversham town. At a depth of 80 cm in many cases we were back three thousand or more years, down onto the gravels of that powerful spring fed stream which had been running down the valley since the melting of the ice about fifteen thousand years ago.

Our first proper prehistoric assemblage came from a small trench in the garden of the former Anchor pub in The Street. (KP59) An assemblage is a group of artefacts recurring together at a particular time and place, and representing a way of life. In K59 amongst the riverbank gravels of the ancient Westbrook, we found not only beautiful flint scrapers and waste flakes from flint knapping, but also pottery fragments of a highly distinctive type called grooved ware (Fig 9) There were lots of calcined flints, often known as 'pot boilers'. These are common in pre metal using cultures where water could only be heated using hot stones. Also in this assemblage were animal bone fragments, e.g. from red deer, with cut marks on them from butchering. Most impressive of all were two huge cattle type teeth which turned out to be from an aurochs, a giant and now extinct form of wild cattle. Already we are back four and a half thousand years in the Westbrook valley, to the Neolithic – the time of the first farmers in northern Europe.



**Fig 9:** Neolithic pottery: grooved ware KP59

In April 2009 we found another assemblage in a Water Lane garden. (K61) This time, the quantity of flint working evidence was startling – everything from rough broken nodules to cores to waste flakes to finished retouched scrapers. There were also many small calcined flints and a few tiny pieces of flint tempered pottery (Fig 10). After taking advice from the experts, this pit was re-opened and extended in summer 2009. At the time of writing (September 2009) it is still under excavation using meticulous 3D plotting for all finds. Already several possible bone punches, used in flint knapping, have been identified, and nearly two thousand flint items plotted in. Some more pottery

fragments have been found, along with small amounts of animal bone and some shell.



**Fig 10: Bronze Age worked flint assemblage, straight from the ground with the mud still on it. KP61**

Over the winter, software will be used to recreate the distribution of the items within this trench. Our flint consultant thinks the date is Bronze Age – 3,500 to 3,000 years ago. A full report will be made when the trench is finished. Great thanks to Nigel the householder, to the dedicated team of Suzanne Miles, Pat Wheatley, Carole Mandeville and Nick Wilkinson and to John Clarkstone (our technical wizard) who is handling the digital side.

A third prehistoric assemblage came from the garden at the back of Liberty Cottages in Water Lane (K52). The cottages, officially down as 17<sup>th</sup> century but possibly earlier, are amongst the oldest buildings in Ospringe village. Here was found a late Iron Age assemblage, with distinctive comb decorated pottery, lying on the bank gravels beneath the earth floor of a now disappeared timber framed medieval outbuilding.

In other small scale excavations and also in field walking the big field around Ospringe Church (Fig 14), more evidence of prehistoric settlement has been found – flint tools, small pottery fragments, and calcined flints. Indeed, when earlier stray finds are taken into account, it begins to look as if settlement stretched all the way along the west bank of the Westbrook to beyond the site of the church, from around five thousand years ago to the coming of the Romans. Interestingly, the church itself lies along the same contour.

We will never know what underlies the church, of course, but we did investigate the spring just below it, on the site of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bier House. Following a careful geo resistivity survey, a long trench was hand excavated across the former

watercourse, but the trench yielded disappointingly few artefacts. The most interesting ones, heavy worked flints that appear distinctly older than the ones encountered so far, were actually found in the top layer, which had been leveled in from elsewhere in the field. These flints are being checked out at the moment, and will be reported later on in the *Archaeology Update* column and on the website.

Investigating the prehistoric has been and continues to be a huge challenge and learning experience for FSARG, both in terms of methodology and specific knowledge. The evidence is subtle and scarce and you can sieve a lot of earth without finding anything. But the feeling when you hold a piece of pottery in your hand which was made when people were building megalithic tombs and had only just started to farm is pretty unbeatable. At the moment, detailed analysis and recording of this years finds is fully occupying our time, but meanwhile the as yet uninvestigated east bank beckons .....

### What about the Romans?

FSARG has a friendly agreement with Dr Paul Wilkinson of the Kent Archaeological Field School to leave investigations of Roman archaeology in his capable hands, whilst we concentrate on the less well known periods. We can't, however, avoid finding some evidence of Romano- British occupation!

In Faversham town itself, Roman fine and coarse ware pottery, a 4<sup>th</sup> century coin and a quern fragment were found in the garden area behind the Bull Inn in Tanners St. (TPs 1 and 9). This is also where we found our only reliable evidence for Saxon occupation, in the form of a handful of mid Saxon pottery sherds. Along at 17-19 East Street, in pits that were dominated by medieval and post medieval finds and features, a Roman die and gaming counter (TP37) were found and a possible Roman period flint surface with a lump of iron slag (TP36). These findings contribute in a small way to ideas about the early importance of the Stonebridge crossing point and the East St/ West St/ Dark Hill route though the town.

Up in Ospringe village, we think we have had two glimpses of Roman Watling Street, running about 20 metres to the south of the modern road. (KPs 44 and 63), much as it does at Syndale. More about this in a later *Archaeology Update* when all the evidence has been analysed and checked.



**Fig 11: Demolition layer from a pre-1750 building**  
**Note the dressed stone blocks**

**TP17A**

**Fig 12: Medieval flint yard surface.**  
**The soil bank at the back of the picture conceals a complete Victorian iron bedstead which was left undisturbed**

**TP36**



**Fig 13: a late 18<sup>th</sup> century water management tank, repaired in the 1950s. KP48**



**Fig 14: Field walking near Ospringe Church**  
**November 2008.**



**Enormous thanks to all of the people of  
Faversham and Ospringe who have supported us with  
permissions and cups of tea  
and shared our excitement so enthusiastically.  
See you next year!**

**Copyright for the content of this report belongs to:  
The Faversham Society  
10-13 Preston Street, Faversham, Kent  
ME13 8NS**