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Faversham Society Archaeological Research Group

Preston: a most peculiar parish

**An investigation into St Catherines Church, Vicarage
and the immediate surrounding area.**



**Fig 1: St Catherines Church,
Parish Church of Preston-next-Faversham in February 2021
View from the north**

This report includes investigations at the locations listed below

KP 106 in the garden of 62 Preston Park

TR 018 608

KP 121 in the garden of Tall Trees, St Catherines Drive

TR 017 607

Graveyard investigation into the graveyard of St Catherines Church

TR 017 608

Surveys of St Catherines Vicarage, its grounds and the Schoolroom.

TR 016 608

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PART ONE: GENERAL BACKGROUND

1. Introduction

The project *Preston: a most peculiar Parish* started in 2013 and ran for two more years. FSARG was working in the part of the parish of Preston next Faversham that is known as *Preston Within* (there are two other detached parts of Preston, Preston North Without and South Preston Without). Although since 1935 Preston Within has been included in the domain of Faversham Borough¹, the parish of Preston has a long history of its own with an astonishingly early documentary mention in AD822 when the parish is donated by Cenulph, King of Mercia, to the monks of Christchurch, Canterbury and the Archbishop of Canterbury² and given the name Prestetone (Priests' town).

In the first year the project sought to identify the levels at which medieval activity was apparent along a north-south line bordering the west of the parish. In all of the excavations, the medieval level was readily identifiable through midden scatter³ but in some cases more striking evidence for medieval activity was found⁴, and in a couple of cases much more limited evidence for early medieval (Anglo-Saxon).⁵ Reports on all of these are available on the FSARG website.

The aims for 2014-15 were to focus on the sites of what seem to be the three most important buildings in the Preston Within area. Two of these were obvious - i.e. the Church-Vicarage complex and Preston House (demolished in 1930). The third, Preston Farm, was not nearly so obvious and indeed its importance was only realised from finds in the nearby garden of 3, The Mall in 2013.⁶ This report covers St Catherines graveyard, the impressive Vicarage and two keyhole excavations in the immediate surroundings.

2. Geographical and historical background

a) Geography

The ancient heart of Preston next Faversham, i.e. the location of St Catherine's church, is situated at the top of a slope at a height of 20m overlooking to the east a shallow valley that runs south to north. South of the church, this valley runs uphill between the Preston manors of Macknade to the east and Perry Court to the west. Further south, towards the head of the valley on the 40m contour, lie the manors of Copton and Westwood. Macknade and Perry are mentioned in the Domesday Book.

To the north, the line of the valley was obscured by levelling to form the Recreation Ground in 1860⁷, but just to the north of the Recreation Ground the line of the valley is picked up by a stream, the Cooks Ditch, that runs northwards, bending to the west to enter Faversham Creek just north of Iron Wharf. It is possibly significant that a straight line drawn along the west front of St Catherines and carried northwards intersects the entrance to Faversham Creek from the Swale.

Extractive industries (brickearth, chalk, gravel), the building of the railway and urbanisation have obscured the lie of the land to the north, which is best brought home by **Fig 2**. This is taken from the Environment Agency Flood Risk website⁸ and shows possible floodwater reaching right up to a point just

¹ www.ukbmd.org.uk/genuki/reg/districts/faversham (2014 version)

² Hasted 1798 *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent* **Vol 6** pp532-49 on Preston

³ FSARG website www.community-archaeology.org.uk/ Preston: a most peculiar parish/ all reports

⁴ FSARG website op.cit. reports of K99, 99A and 97.

⁵ FSARG website op.cit. report on K96A

⁶ FSARG website op.cit. KP99 & 99A

⁷ www.faversham.org/ Recreation Ground 2014 version

⁸ www.environment-agency/floodmaps UK 2014 version.

below St Catherines. Similar risk-points to the east relate to powerful springs at Clapgate and School Farm, and it is tempting to speculate about a spring near St Catherines in earlier times.

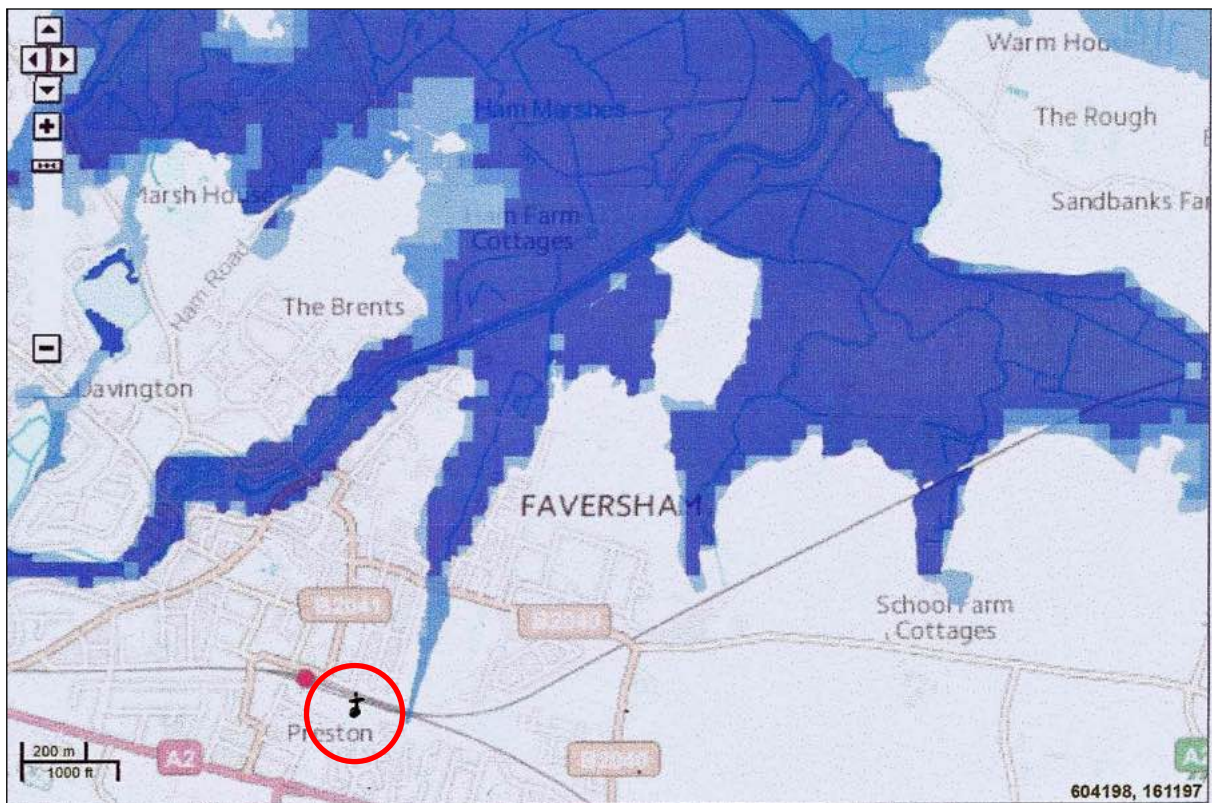


Fig 2: Flood risk in Faversham area. Dark blue is high risk, light blue low risk.

We have not been able to find any evidence for a spring from early maps predating the creation of the Recreation Ground, such as the 1795 First Surveyors Draft of the Ordnance Survey. Local people in the immediate area of St Catherines, however, talk about a spring running underneath the houses. Clearly further research needs to be carried out on this.



Fig 3: St Catherines around 1900 from the south east.

The farm lies just to the west of the Church and Vicarage, on the higher ground overlooking the valley to the east. It would also have had a good view out across early Faversham town to the sea beyond.

b) Geology

The geological map **Fig 4** shows the Mall and Preston Grove as being Head Brickearth.⁹ Although the Upper Chalk is near the surface it dips down quite sharply to the north and is masked by these drift deposits. There are important caveats, however. Edward Crow, writing in the mid-19th century¹⁰, says that the area to the east of the Mall 'enclosed by the 4 main roads [is] ... where the whole of the surface from 4 feet to 8 feet in depth has been removed for brickearth'. Based on excavation so far, this does seem to be too sweeping a statement: for example, the report for K99 and 99A at 3, The Mall shows considerable quantities of medieval pottery in K99, a deposit that would not have survived the kind of brickearth removal Crow is describing. We also saw untouched brickearth deposits in KP 99A. Nevertheless, there was indeed a brick and tile works within the area enclosed by the four main roads¹¹ and in some places e.g. at the junction of Nelson Street and Preston Grove there is a clear drop of the kind of depth to which Crow is referring. This is a situation that must be kept in mind when dealing with the surviving drift geology of this under-researched area. At least one of the smaller excavations in the Farm area, K102, was intended to investigate possible survival of brickearth in the area of small cottages just to the south of the Farm and the larger scale investigations in the garden of Grove House had a similar objective.

The geological map also shows a tiny 'island' of Thanet Sands exposed just to the east of the Mall. Further east, the Upper Chalk outcrops along the eastern edge of the shallow valley running south to north. Beyond Preston Park itself, chalk was quarried from at least 1795 to the 1950s: the quarry can be seen on the map sequence **Fig 5**. There is no record of gravel working in this area.



Fig 4: Geological map of Preston.

Blue: Thanet Sands
 Green: Upper Chalk
 Yellow/orange striped: brickearth (superficial deposit)

c) Known historical background

The historical sequence since 1795 is shown in the map sequence **Fig 7** but the story of St Catherine's church goes back much further than that. The donation of the parish by King Cenulph in AD822 has already been mentioned. Prestentune (Priests Town) was re-dedicated and gifted to the monks of Canterbury by King Edmund in AD 941, presumably necessary because of desolation from Viking raids in the later 9th century. The only survival from the Anglo-Saxon period is a piece of carved masonry found in the Norman wall rubble when the church was being drastically renovated in the mid-19th century – see **Fig 5**. This will be returned to in the final discussions.

St Catherine's is mentioned in the Domesday book as 'a church and 1 slave and 1 mill without rent and 1 fishery rendering 250 eels, 2 acres of meadow and woodland for 5 pigs'. There were 17 men mentioned

⁹ British Geological Survey Faversham, England and Wales Sheet 273 Solid and Drift Edition.

¹⁰ Crow E 1848-61 *Historical Gleanings relative to the Town of Faversham and Parishes Adjoining*. CD transcript by P Tann, 2009, Faversham Society: Faversham

¹¹ See on maps b) and c) in Fig 7: p10 this report

besides the slave. It was worth £10 under King Edward, by 1080 worth £15 (Faversham was worth £80 at that time).¹² A very solid article by Canon Scott Robertson published in 1895¹³ gives excellent detail on the Norman church and on the major alterations that took place in 1853-5 and 1866-67, with extensive repairs in 1981-91. The Canon also describes in detail the monuments in the church, including two brasses and an elaborate tomb in the chancel.

The variety of memorialised names involved in Canon Robertson's account points to an unusual fact about St Catherine's role as a parish church. The standard situation in Kent by the later Anglo-Saxon period, shown clearly in the Domesday Book, is that parish churches started as chapels linked to a local manor. Looking at a modern map of the Faversham Hundred, the links between what are often called Court Lodge and the local parish church are conspicuous. St Catherine's, however, was linked to at least five manors - Westwood, Copton, Macknade, Perry Court and Ham, The first four of these were in South Preston Without and the last one in North Preston Without i.e. none of them were close to the Church. Later, in the 16th century, a strong link was also formed with newly built Preston House which was close by: the Boyle family who lived there around the late 16th - early 17th century commissioned that splendid tomb (and yes, this is the family who gave birth to Boyle of Boyle's Law). More about Preston House can be found in the FSARG online publication¹⁴ which focuses on this impressive property that no longer exists.



Fig 5:

- a) Left: an Anglo-Saxon cross from Conisholme, Lincolnshire shows the same characteristic patterning as the St Catherine's example. This interweave design is thought to derive from metalwork patterns.
- b) Below: the 8th century cross fragment from St Catherine's, Preston, Faversham.



The Vicarage, still in spacious grounds next to St Catherine's is an extraordinary mixture of different periods of architecture. This will be described more fully in PART 2 (4) in this report. In the picture below,

¹² Williams A & G Martin (eds) 1992 *The Domesday Book* Penguin Books: London p12

¹³ Scott Robertson C 1895 'Preston Church, next Faversham' *Archaeologia Cantiana* Vol XX1 pp126-134

¹⁴ FSARG website op.cit. Preston Project, Preston House.

Fig 6, the Vicarage looks like a 19th century house with a modern single storey wing, but this is a property full of surprises.



Fig 6: The Vicarage with St Catherine's Church in the background. The large tree to the right, being studied by the author, is the Tulip Tree (leafless at this time of year) that has given its name to St Catherine's Tulip Tree Fetes.

Hardly any archaeology has been carried out in this area, and almost none in the St Catherines-Vicarage area. In 2010 a small soakaway excavation was carried out in the grassy area against the Vicarage wall. It seems to have been a simple watching brief but I have been unable to find any published record of this work on the KCC HER website so we do not know if any features were found but our local expert Nigel Mannouch took photographs of some of the pottery he found on the spoil heap – see **Appendix 6**. At the time of writing (February 2021), work is due at St Catherines to install toilets, so archaeological involvement will be necessary.



c) 1865¹⁷

This is a detailed and attractive map edition. Notice the development of terraced cottages along the Mall and Nelson Street. The arrival of the railway is a startlingly drastic event.

This map also gives plenty of information about Preston House and its park layout. The Farm has a pond.

The Quarry continues to expand to the east and has lime kilns.



d) 1907¹⁸

North of the railway line, the town is beginning to fill up but Preston Park remains almost untouched except for a couple of large greenhouses.

The quarry and 'turnpike village' have not changed much.

The Schoolroom has arrived!

¹⁷ OS 1865 (1904 reprint) Sheet XXXIV.9.10 Scale of original 1:536

¹⁸ OS 1907 Sheet XXXIV Scale of original 1:2500

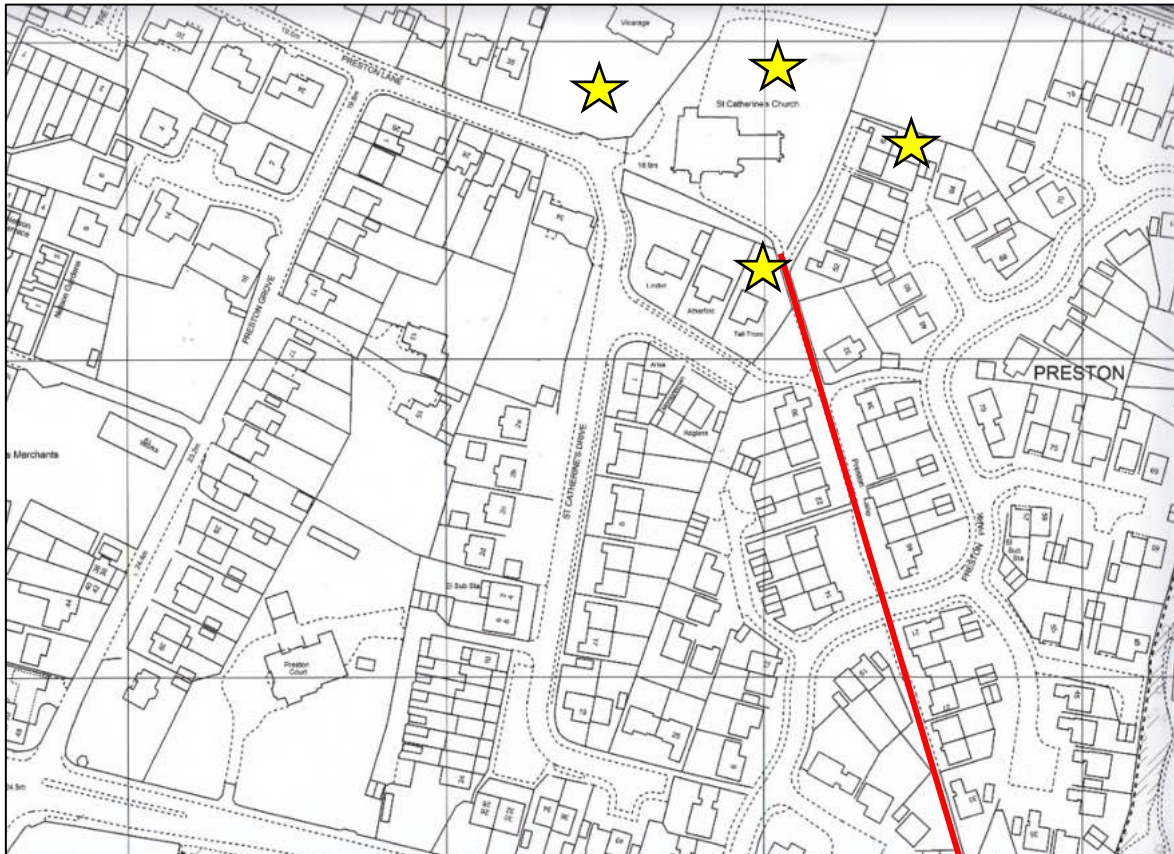


OS 6 inches to the mile 1963

The quarry is now disused and a large horticultural nursery has appeared nearby. Preston House has disappeared and is replaced by a row of detached houses. The Farm is much reduced in size. At the southern end of the former Preston Park a large house, nowadays known as Preston Court, has arrived and semis line the northern side of Preston Lane. Only the Church and Vicarage endure unchanged in their spacious settings.

OS 1:1250 large scale map 2013

Preston is now packed with modern housing, although the ancient footpath from St Catherines to the manors of Westwood and Copnor, shown in red, is still respected and the grounds of Preston House are still visible, though much reduced. The Vicarage and St Catherines hold their ground. ★ Shows locations of fieldwork and excavation.



PART TWO: INDIVIDUAL INVESTGATIONS

This section contains four reports - two on garden keyhole excavations, one on a survey of St Catherines graveyard and one on the Vicarage and its grounds.

1) KP106: 62 Preston Park, Preston near Faversham

a) Location

This 1m x 1m pit was excavated in the rear garden of a property that backed onto the cemetery extension of St Catherine's church. It was located centrally on the lawned area, around 5m from the rear of the property.

b) 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 house. Turf was removed carefully from the square, rolled up and set aside in plastic bags. The pit was then hand excavated in single contexts, each one of which was fully recorded. The keyhole was excavated to a depth of 70cm, stopping when the natural deposits had been reached. All excavated soil was sieved and the spoil heap scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each context and special finds, where possible, were given 3 dimensional coordinates to pinpoint the exact find spot. Any features were carefully recorded. Finally, the spoil was put back, watered and turf replaced.

c) The findings

The lowest context, [9], was identified as the natural because of a complete lack of man-made features or finds. Above this lay the main context [3], a layer around 25cm down to around 55cm down. This was the yellowy brown, well-sorted soil commonly found around Faversham i.e. brickearth (see Part 1, 2b). This contained small amounts of late 19th - 20th century pottery, fragmented shell, small pieces of animal bone and a number of small pieces of coal and cinders. In its north west corner were two pits [4] / [5] and [6] / [7] next to each other - see **Fig 8**.



Fig 8: a) Pits within the main pit emerging.

b) Pits partly excavated. Note the stone fill.

A narrow pit contained relatively large stone fragments and another bigger, rounder one held burnt material that darkened the soil. Over this ran context [2] with a similar range of content to [3] except with some clay pipe fragments, initial on a bowl being SM. The top turf layer [1] was also similar to [2] and [3]. 5 worked flints were found, 3 mesolithic and 2 late neolithic but these too were distributed throughout the upper 3 contexts. No items were identified as Small Finds.

d) Interpretation

The simplicity of the findings from this small excavation is best understood using the 1927 aerial photograph below. St Catherine's church and vicarage occupy the foreground with Preston Park immediately below (note that ancient footpath crossing it!). The extension to the cemetery, onto which 62 Preston Park's garden backs, is just coming into use. The rest of the foreground, Preston side of the railway lines, is all allotments except for the horticultural nursery. It is fair to see context [3] as being at the surface at that 1927 stage, with its rubbish burning pit, and with context [2] accumulating on top of this, the topsoil being constantly dug over. The sprinkling of shells and bone fragments, the clay pipe fragments, the broken simple-type pottery are easily understood as the leavings of the allotment holders, relaxing by their huts. The stone in the pit, however, is intriguing and not yet explained.

The houses here nowadays are recent 1980s builds; in the KP106 case the garden seems to have been simply smoothed over and turfed.

Fig 9: Aerial photograph from 1927. The yellow star on the aerial photograph below marks the location of 62, Preston Park (KP106) and the blue star Tree Tops (KP121) in 2016.



2) KP121: Tall Trees, St Catherines Drive

a) Location

This property, backing onto St Catherine's churchyard to the north and adjoining the ancient footpath to the east has a large garden, see **Fig 10**.¹⁹ The area adjoining the footpath drew our attention and as far as possible this part of the garden was georesistivity surveyed – see **Fig 11**. This part of the garden sloped downwards towards the footpath.

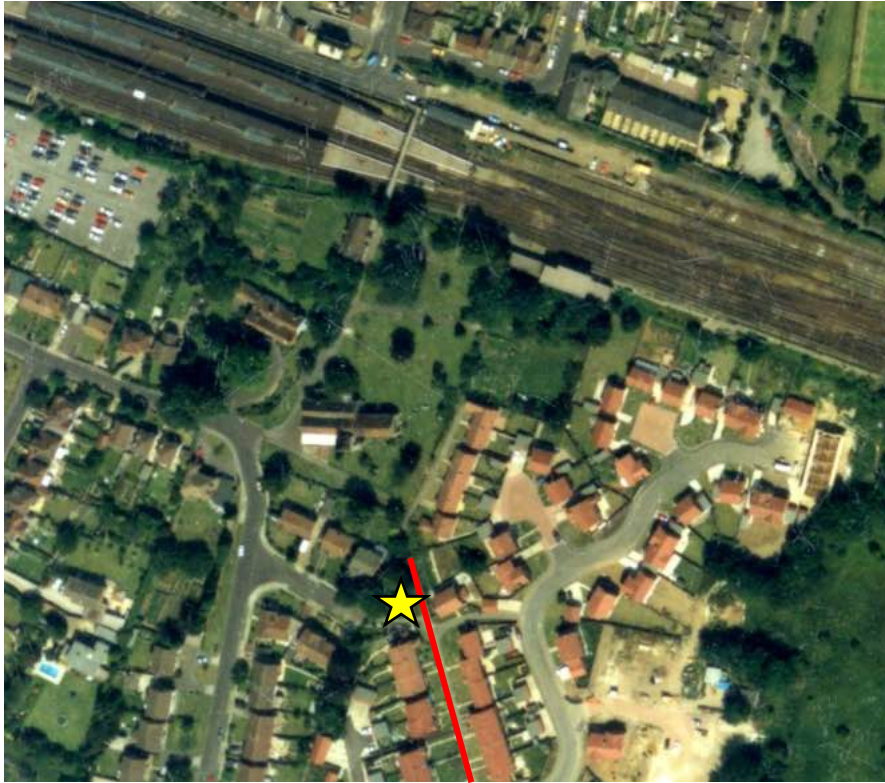


Fig 10:

The 1990 aerial photograph of the St Catherine's area shows the modern property development. The yellow star shows the site of KP121, in a thickly wooded part of the garden – probably a remnant of the trees shown in **Fig 9**. The ancient footpath is highlighted in red: it has been sensitively incorporated into the modern estate.

A 3m x 1m trench was opened up to span the wettest (dark) and driest (light) parts of this area and avoid the steeper parts of the slope – see **Fig 11**.

b) The procedures

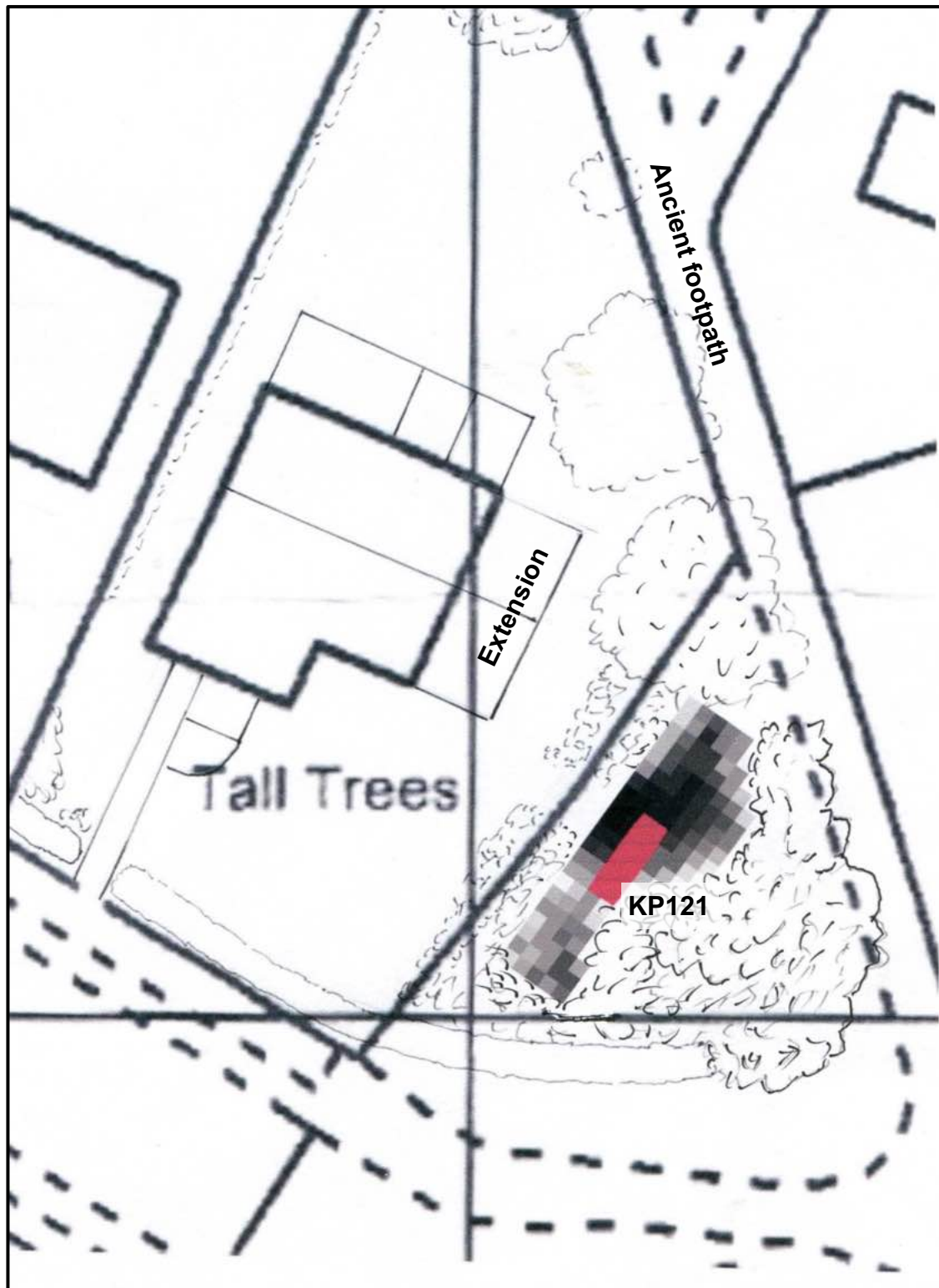
The trench was pegged out using the planning square and the area delineated marked with string. Turf was removed carefully, rolled up and stored in plastic bags. The trench was then hand excavated using single contexts. This keyhole was excavated to a depth of 85cm. The spoil was sieved roughly or carefully, depending on the perceived need, and the spoil heap scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each context and special finds given, where possible, three dimensional co-ordinates. Any features revealed were carefully co-ordinated. Finally, the spoil was put back, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

c) The findings.

Although this pit seemed to have a simple layered structure, the dating of these layers showed some complexity in origins. The Harris Matrix in **Appendix 1** shows the sequence revealed. The double numbering, later merged, arose from working separately at each end of the trench, but there was no difficulty in merging them later.

¹⁹ KCC HER Historic aerial photos

Fig 11: The georesistivity survey of part of Tall Trees garden (drawn by Jim Reid).



At 90cm down, the lowest layer [12] was seen as the natural, although a small sondage to check identity did yield a Mesolithic awl / scraper and some flint flakes showing signs of human action. The layer above this [10] = [11] contained a tiny amount of medieval pottery sherds, along with bone and shell fragments but also some later redware and a few clay pipe fragments. [8] = [9] contained more pottery of ages up to modern – above this level, little pottery was found. A shouldered tea spoon was found in [8] (see **Appendix 4**). A number of worked flints (see **Appendix 3**) were found in this context, also red brick fragments.

Above this level in layer [6] = [7] the quantity of all kinds of finds was much reduced – no pottery or worked flint was found in [7]. An interesting comment by the excavators on this layer was that it smelt strongly of urine! Above this in [3] were, by contrast, large quantities of building rubble of a modern type – brick, tile, mortar – as well as glass, coal and cinder fragments and two keys 19th - 20th century origin (**Appendix 4**).



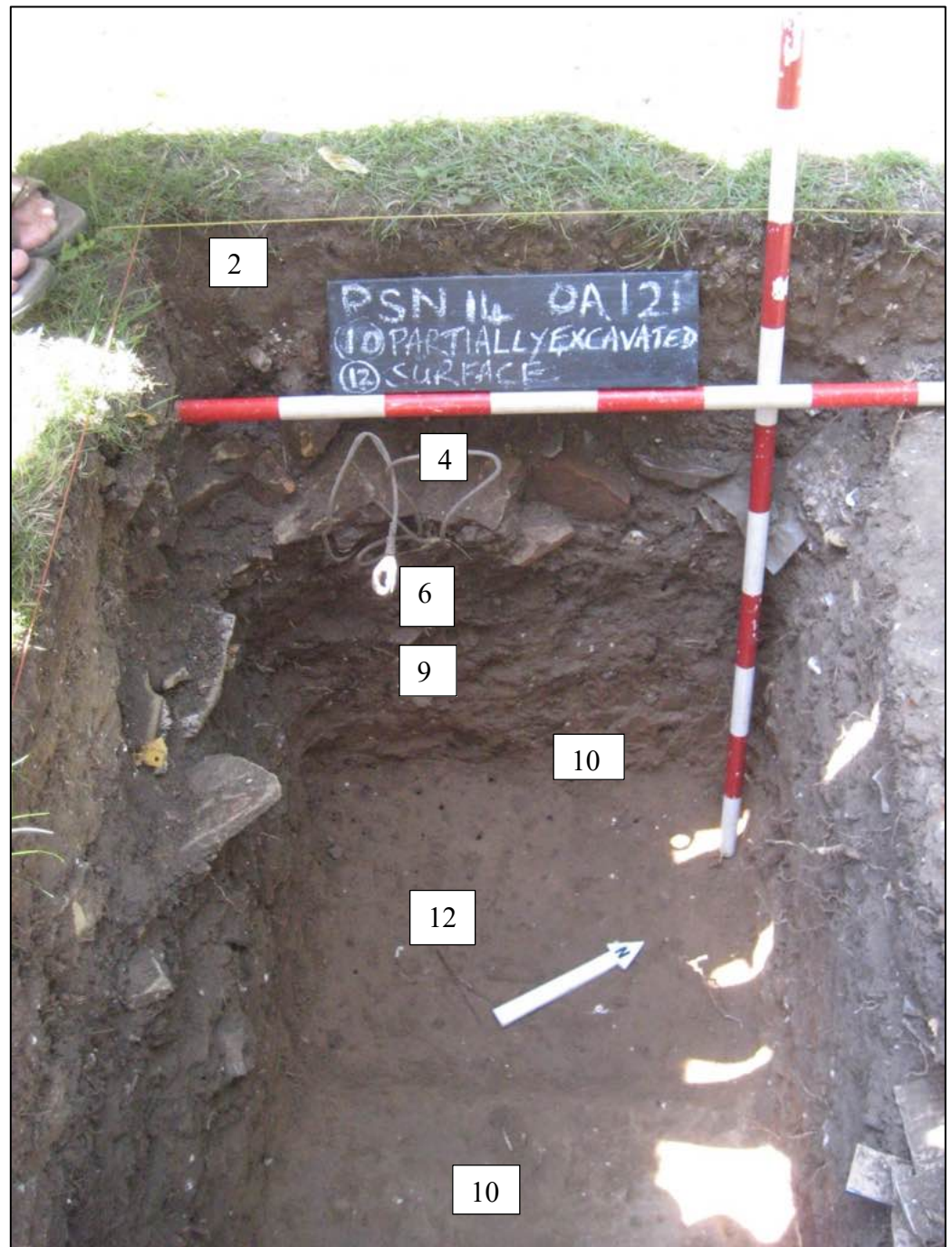
Fig 12: the rubble.

This photograph clearly shows the rubble-filled layer [4] = [5] with the surface of [6] = [7] creating the floor and the rubble-free [2] = [3] above the rubble. The character of the rubble can be seen in the pile beside the trench.

Finally, and at first glance very strangely, the uppermost layer [2]=[3] had no 19th-20th century pottery and hardly any other types but had the largest quantity by weight of worked flint.

Fig 13: End of digging.

This shows the south end of the trench, excavated down to the natural. The mass of rubble on top of the original footpath-side deposits can easily be seen. The lowest floor with chalk flecks and worm holes and a yellowish tinge is probably the natural.



d) Interpretation

The explanation for these seeming anomalies lies in the history of this little corner of Preston. Tall Trees itself was built in the 1980s but until 1992 did not own the triangular eastern corner. This corner faced onto the footpath that has been there for centuries, with the usual problem of people dumping litter along the way. In 1992, the then householder acquired this triangular plot and an extension was built on the eastern side of the house. In this building process, good soil from foundation digging was put aside, then building rubble from wall demolition and waste from the extension building was dumped on the recently acquired garden area. Finally, this dump was then covered up by soil from the spoil heap – soil that had come from relatively deep down.

Thus contexts [10] = [11] are the oldest layer, dating to well before Tall Trees was built, with a medieval use content with the layers [8] = [9] and [6] = [7] accumulating above that. Perhaps the urine smell from

[6] = [7] came from folk relieving themselves behind the trees before they came out onto the churchyard itself or after leaving a long service and going towards home? Certainly, [6] = [7] is the least finds rich layer apart from [2]. Then come the rubble filled layers [4] = [5] finally topped out by the far less rubbly [2] = [3] which has finds content more ancient than the levels now below.

Final comments on the two excavations KP106 and KP121

Although, as always in Faversham, interesting to dig, these two excavations did not shed light on St Catherines itself as we had hoped – no discarded weapons from a Viking attack or signs of outbuildings from the early Anglo-Saxon time! – unless the urination habits of the early footpath users count. Nevertheless, we had signs of activities from prehistoric, medieval, post-medieval, 19th century and modern Favershamians.

Great thanks to the householders Mrs Maureen Barclay at 62 Preston Park and Madeleine and Derek Cox at Tall Trees for their kind permissions to dig in their gardens in such a peaceful place.

See the Appendices for further details.



Fig 14: Archaeologists at work.

3) St Catherine's Graveyard

FSARG was fortunate enough to be contacted by Rebecca Parr, a local student from Leicester University, who wanted to use the St Catherine's graveyard for her BA Dissertation. We were pleased to help her with the mapping and record keeping for the contents of the graveyard and were most interested in her findings. A full copy of Rebecca's Dissertation is available at the Faversham Society.²⁰ In this report, I will concentrate on the basic facts of the graveyard and strongly recommend that you read the fascinating account of gender bias (or lack of it) in Rebecca's account.

a) Location

Firstly, here is a map, borrowed from Rebecca's Dissertation, of the graveyard as it was in 1971 just before a major re-arrangement took place. The graveyard was considered to be in a poor state at the time and had been taken over by the local council.

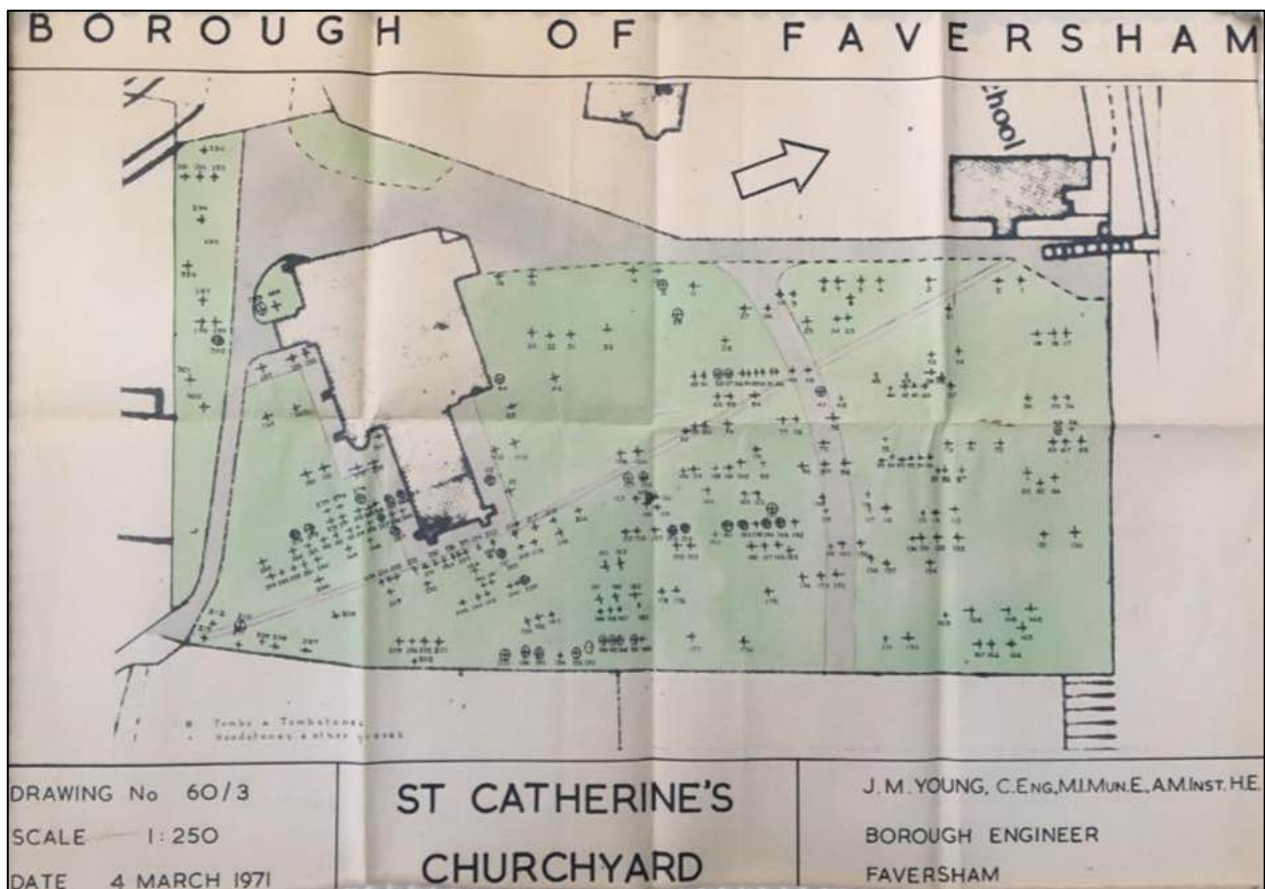


Fig 15: Map showing distribution of gravestones before the clearance.

Note the difference in alignment of the graves nearest the Church, which parallel the East-West axis of the Church itself, and those further away to the right. The latter ones were created at the time of 19th century extension to the graveyard and are aligned more to the boundaries of the site.

302 gravestones were said to exist in 1971 in the main graveyard (the 1920 extension, see **Fig 9** aerial photograph from 1927, was not included in this drastic tidy up). 170 stones were moved to line the surrounding walls: these were ones in poor repair, damaged or less than 120 years old. In Rebecca's study, she found only 236 monuments still in existence i.e. 66 unaccountably missing.

²⁰ Parr, Rebecca 2018 *Not just a Relict: Gravestones and Gender: Monumentality, Survivability and Identity: A study of St Catherine's Churchyard, Preston, near Faversham* 119047761 University of Leicester BA Dissertation.



Fig 16: Damaged tomb in 2018.

Quiet, non-overlooked graveyards like this are very vulnerable nowadays.

In this reshaping, most of the ironwork was removed because of deterioration, along with all kerbstones and all body-stones bar one.

b) Procedures

Each gravestone was recorded by FSARG members over four Easter seasons 2014-2017, using the form in **Appendix 5** supported by digital photographs of each stone. A complex triangulation system, using the Church itself as a base, was developed to allow for plotting the position of each gravestone in the graveyard. Finally, a local gravestone mason was consulted on identifying the types of stone used for the gravestones. The information gathered by these means was entered into an Excel database. Further details on these procedures can be found in Rebecca's Dissertation.

The approach was non-invasive but was helped by council ground maintenance workers coming to St Catherines to tidy the site by removing vegetation etc.

c) Findings

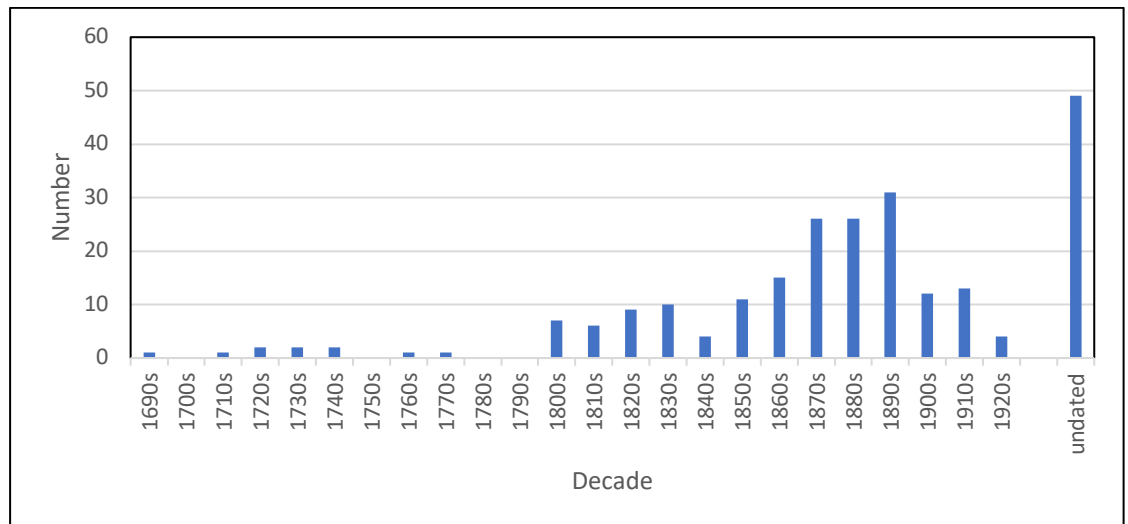
The graph **Fig 17**, borrowed from Rebecca's Dissertation, shows the proportions of graves per decade. The ones closest to the Church, near the Chancel, are the earliest, with largest categories being late 19th century. An example of the scary 17th century style is shown in **Fig 20**, with a typically romantic and sentimental example from 1890 shown in **Fig 19**.

Occupations listed on some gravestones give some idea as to what kind of people were buried here – Apothecary, Captain, Curate, Reverend, Vicar, Grocer, Gunner, Leading Stoker, Major, Seaman, Private, Police Sergeant, Solicitor, Steward (RN), Surgeon. MD, Yeoman, Esquire. Women, who were just as numerous as the men, were described in nearly 80% of burials as 'Wife', a description of a respected occupation in its own right in those days.

The occupations give some hints on the social classes who used this graveyard. The gentry, such as the Boyles, were memorialised inside St Catherines. Here in the graveyard are folk of the professional middle classes (e.g. Solicitor, Major) and the respectable working class (e.g. Police Sergeant, Stoker). At present we do not know if the poor were buried in St Catherines graveyard - paying for a gravestone seems impossible – and we would welcome hearing from anyone well informed about what happened to the rural poor when they died in those times.

Fig 17:

Graph based on the Excel database showing the numbers of burials in this graveyard by decade.

**Fig 18: Middle class tombs.**

Left in place after the 1970s tidy-up were the larger tombs. The only surviving ironwork surrounds a collection of posher tombs.

Fig 19: Mary Ann Martin's memorial from 1893.

Some of the finer gravestones have survived well. This one includes a biblical quotation and a poem. An appendix of Rebecca's Dissertation records all of the quotes and poems on those gravestones in St Catherine's graveyard that remain legible. The one illustrated is particularly touching.



Finally in this section, the photograph below is one of St Catherine's oldest gravestones, nearly indecipherable but clearly from its highly distinctive style dating from the 17th century. There are a number of similar headstones in St Mary of Charity's graveyard in Faversham, perhaps products of the same gravestone mason?



Fig 20: Post medieval gravestone.

Final comments on the St Catherines graveyard project

FSARG was happy to be involved in Rebecca's research project. We now have detailed records of all of the gravestones still present in 2014-17 and these records will become accessible through the FSARG website. Meanwhile, the commercial database Find My Past²¹ has records of St Catherines burials taken from the documentary Burial Registers currently held in the Archives at Canterbury Cathedral: these records cover the period 1563-1812. We are most grateful to Rebecca for asking us to help and sharing her research findings – also to our own John Clarkstone for organising the Easter sessions and developing the remarkable triangulation mapping system and database.

²¹ www.findmypast.co.uk

4) The Vicarage

a) The House

St Catherine's Vicarage is a large property on an extensive plot shared with the Schoolroom. The Map Regression **Fig 7** shows the presence of the Vicarage from 1795 onwards, although its plot size and nature varies over the years. For many years it was a country house (the population of Preston in 1881 was 333²², and this included North Preston detached and South Preston as well as the Preston Within) but the coming of the railway in the 1850s disturbed its isolation. It was not, however, until the second half of the 20th century that the Church and Vicarage became hemmed in by houses. In 2015, however, the Church of England took the decision to dispense with the post of vicar at St Catherines and the vicarage is now privately owned: the Church remains open with a shared minister.

The Vicarage is a mixture of buildings of various age, early ones encased in later builds. The front view (south facing) in photograph **Fig 21** below shows a mainly c1840 frontage, with a later 19th century addition at the west (far) end:

Fig 21:

Right: South front of the Vicarage in 2015

Below: North wall of the Vicarage in 2015, with a close up (left) of the eastern end



²² National Census Records, available through family research websites.

The rear view, as is so often the case, reveals a more complex and intriguing situation. At the west (nearest) end is a single storey mid-late 20th century addition. In the middle, white painted, is an early 19th century wall, maybe earlier. Beyond that is a low two storey wing with a chequerboard of dark red and blue brick, 17th - 18th century but with a substantial buttress composed mainly of medieval worked stone.

Inside the house are even more curiosities. Part of the property has a very impressive roof – see **Fig 22** below.



Fig 22:

This impressive timber roof is plainly late medieval, though with some replacement timbers. The view below is looking towards the west end of the house. The photograph on the left looks towards the east end – the same end as the stone-reinforced buttress outside: look closely at the far end of the photograph.



This is the roof of a small manorial-type hall, in which folk would gather to dine and read the Bible aloud: these roofs belong to a period where ceilings and separate rooms on upper floors were great rarities.

Now for that mysterious stonework. Hidden away in the cellar are even more stone features **Fig 23**.



Fig 23:

This is a north facing wall of the cellar. It is stone built and pierced by a window and also a slit both of which are now walled up by 19th century brick. Note the thickness of the wall.

If you are thinking that this stonework looks church-like, you would be right. Incorporated into the Vicarage is a small medieval chapel dedicated to St Anthony and St Catherine. The chapel stands in the north east corner of the present house. It used to have a colourful stained-glass window, according to Hasted writing in 1798.²³ The window featured the two saints and the Vicar of Preston (John Sturrey, vicar 1399-14??²⁴) in a purple cope kneeling before them. Another trace of Sturrey's chapel can be seen in the main entrance hall of the house, **Fig 24**.



Fig 24:

Note the stone arch around which the later wall has been created. This later wall runs west-east and divides the newer front from the older back of the house.

²³ Hasted E 1795 *The History and Topography Survey of the County of Kent Vol 6* Nabu Popular Domain Reprints USA p 547-8

²⁴ Scott Robertson, c 1895 'Rectors and Vicars of Preston by Faversham' *Archaeologia Cantiana* **Vol 21** pp135-156

b) The Grounds of the Vicarage

An extensive geo resistivity survey was carried out in the grounds of the Vicarage where the vegetation cover and paving permitted.

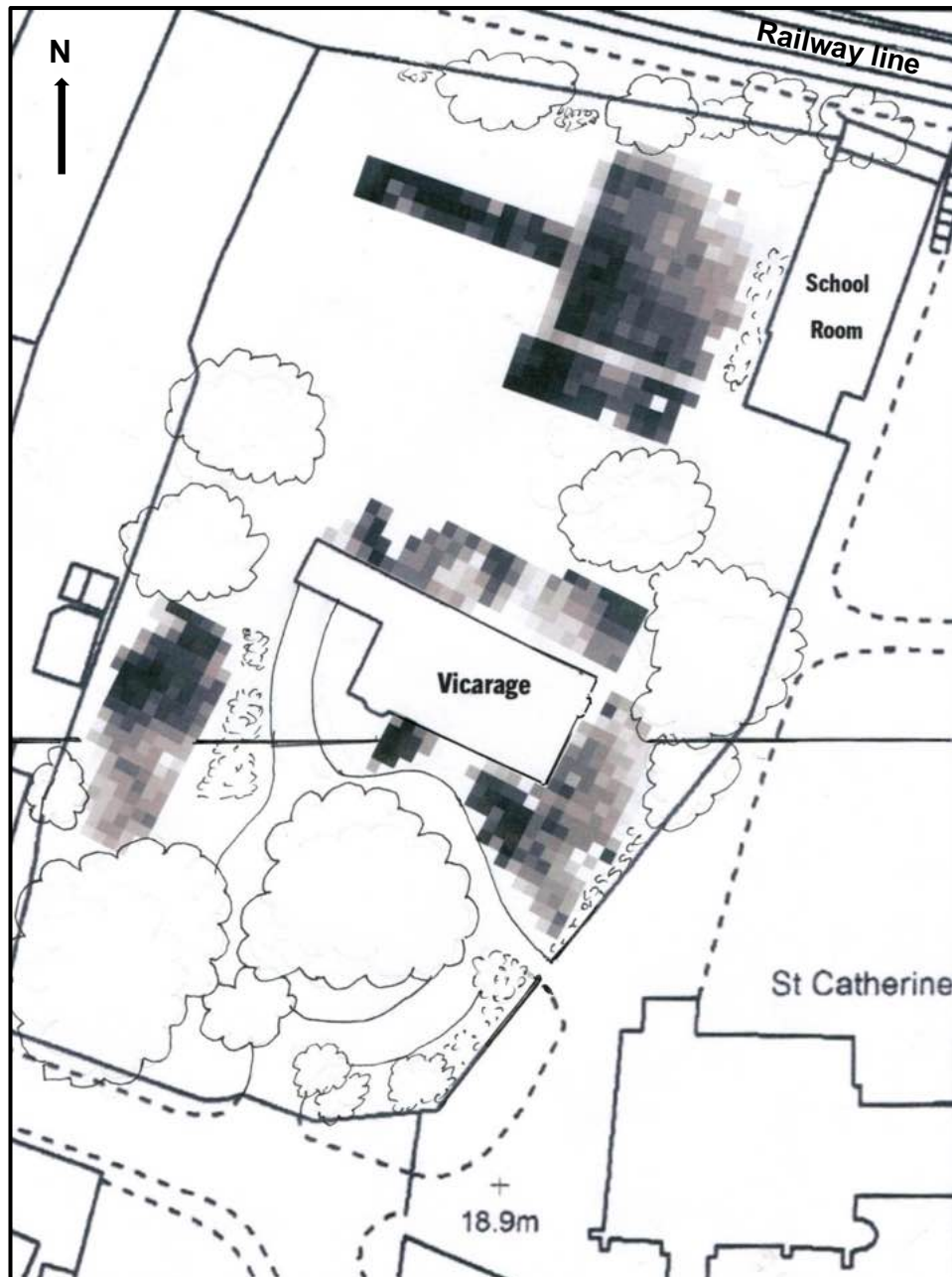


Fig 25: The georesistivity results from the FSARG survey in 2014.

Some of the contrasts shown here are quite sharp (dark = damper areas, possibly former ditch or pond; light = dry areas, possibly buildings or rubble). The lighter areas show tree and shrub root drying of the soil and compaction of walking areas. Of note is the rear lawn (adjoining the house) where a pipe running to the sewage catchment situated near the paddock lawn shows up as a light area. Adjacent to the east is another light area, possibly a storm water soak-away pipe.

The Paddock lawn by the Schoolroom is different. The area by the school door is light showing compaction and possibly ash / gravel whereas the area to the west is dark where leakage from the sewage system has improved the conductivity of the soil.

The only truly clear structural indicator, however, appeared to be the pale straight lines enclosing a square area to the west of the Schoolroom. This could be associated with a pathway, perhaps cindered or the foundations of a wall. The map regression **Fig 7** failed to show a wall in these locations, so this was probably a pathway. To test this, permission was given for a limited excavation **KP119** in the paddock area.

c) Excavation: KP119 and the cesspit.

i) KP119

As excavation in the Vicarage gardens was not part of this project, limited time was available for this investigation. Across the western arm of the square was dug a trench 1.5m by 0.3m, which was trowelled to a depth of 25cm. Two contexts were recognised: the top layer down to 15cm was a dry garden soil with occasional fragments of building rubble and a single piece of late 19th century pottery. Taking the trench down another 10cm in the limited time available showed a similar soil but with a higher brickearth content. A similar trench on the northern arm being excavated at the same time to a depth of 20cm produced the same results. It was decided that a fuller examination of these tracks was required as the excavations failed to show the expected pathway close to the surface.

ii) The Cess Pit excavation

In December 2019, a new cess pit was dug at the Vicarage (**Fig 26**), spotted and photographed by Nigel Mannouch. Beneath the 25cm dark topsoil was a 35cm layer of lighter subsoil lying apparently straight on the solid Upper Chalk.



Fig 26:

The new cess pit being dug in the Paddock area.

Although most unusual for us to find chalk so close to the surface in the Faversham town area, the geological map on page 4, which includes superficial deposits like brickearth as well as the solid geology where is exposed at the surface does show chalk as outcropping in this part of Preston. Perhaps, though, this chalk is an infill in the cess pit to soak up liquid waste?

iii) Final comments on the Vicarage

FSARG's knowledge of this property is admittedly superficial, based only on a single tour. The survey of the grounds was successfully carried out but has not yet been thoroughly followed up. The entry in the KCC Historic Environment Record about the Preston next Faversham Vicarage is perfunctory and its listing (Grade 2) by English Heritage hard to trace. Yet this is a special and unusual property with a long history and deserves a great deal more attention from experts and an article in *Archaeologia Cantiana* at the very least. St Catherine's Church has been thoroughly studied: now it is the turn of its fellow building.



Fig 27: The south wall of the Vicarage cellar. Note the hint at an archway, walled in by brick, just to the left of the ladder.

PART THREE: CONCLUSIONS

St Catherines is an unusual Kentish church in terms of its history and relationship with the community. Rather than being founded by a single manor as a chapel that later grew to be the local parish church, as is the case with nearly all other local churches (almost certainly including the church nowadays known as St Mary of Charity), St Catherines is more like a Minster church in that it serves a group of manors (see p7 for the list) and is close to none. The early Mid-Anglo-Saxon churches (7th - 8th centuries AD) in Kent were nearly all of Minster type, i.e. centres with monks and / or nuns and priests who would go out to preach in the open air at standing crosses near settlements. It is interesting indeed that St Catherines with its stone cross fragment is only about 300 metres from the site of the wealthiest Anglo-Saxon dressed-burial site in Kent, used until the 7th century i.e. well into early Roman Christianity times in England and only 10 miles from where it all began in AD597 in this green and pleasant land.

Such theories, though fascinating, are hard to test. There have been suggestions that the jewellery from the Kingsfield, Faversham site occasionally used early Christian symbolism, but there are no early documentary references to a 7th century Minster church in the what-would-be Faversham area. The fact that a line drawn along the West front of St Catherines leads exactly to the entrance to Faversham Creek must surely be a coincidence? Also, common sense suggests that Preston would lie on the route from Canterbury across to the Isle of Sheppey and the Minster founded by Sexburga in AD670, via Harty ferry. Sadly, our excavations on sites adjacent to St Catherines did not yield the least evidence of Anglo-Saxon activity so all this remains speculative, for now.

Something more definite is the interesting fact that St Catherines itself was rebuilt so thoroughly, in Norman and again in 19th century times that the building itself shows almost no survivals from medieval times apart from the memorials and poppy headed benches. Even the sedilia seats with an arcade in the chancel which look so attractive are mostly fake according to Canon Robertson, who wrote crossly in 1895:

*'the gables and pinnacles now seen above the sedilia are entirely the work of Mr Austen's imagination. The old horizontal string which formed the original top remains untouched but it is unhappily obscured by Mr Austen's additions'*²⁵

Mr Austen was, of course, the restorer. The Vicarage tells a different story. Although a whole new block was built in the 19th century, the earlier buildings were hidden from view but not erased. There is no doubt that this whole building needs full recording by experts in historic buildings, with a thorough search for relevant documents.

Acknowledgements

We owe a great debt to Hilary and Ken Tulett who arranged access to the Vicarage and permissions to photograph and carry out the resistivity surveys. As Trustees for the Schoolroom, they organised permission for the use of the Schoolroom as a base for our work in Preston in 2013-4. It was ideal accommodation for us, as can be seen from **Fig 27** and we are extremely grateful for this privilege.

We have already thanked Rebecca Parr for her invitation to join in her graveyard research and the householders who gave permission for us to work in their gardens – to them in particular I must apologise for the lateness of this report. Finally, great thanks to the FSARGers who took part in these projects, especially Nigel Mannouch, who lives nearby and is a former choir boy at St Catherines and is extremely knowledgeable about Preston-near-Faversham: many of these excellent photographs were taken by Nigel.

²⁵ Scott Robertson, C 1895 op.cit. p 128 footnote



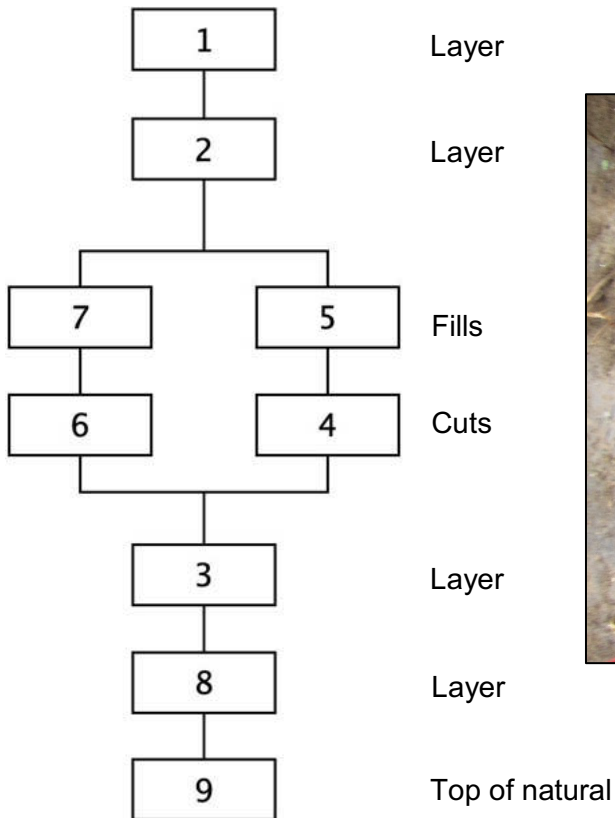
Fig 27:

Finds work in the Schoolroom and outside with the Schoolroom in the background. The stairs are descending from the railway bridge, carrying that ancient pathway seen continuing on the south side of the Church. Note the unofficial 'desire path' across the graveyard: this is almost certainly the route of that footpath before the 19th century graveyard expansion.

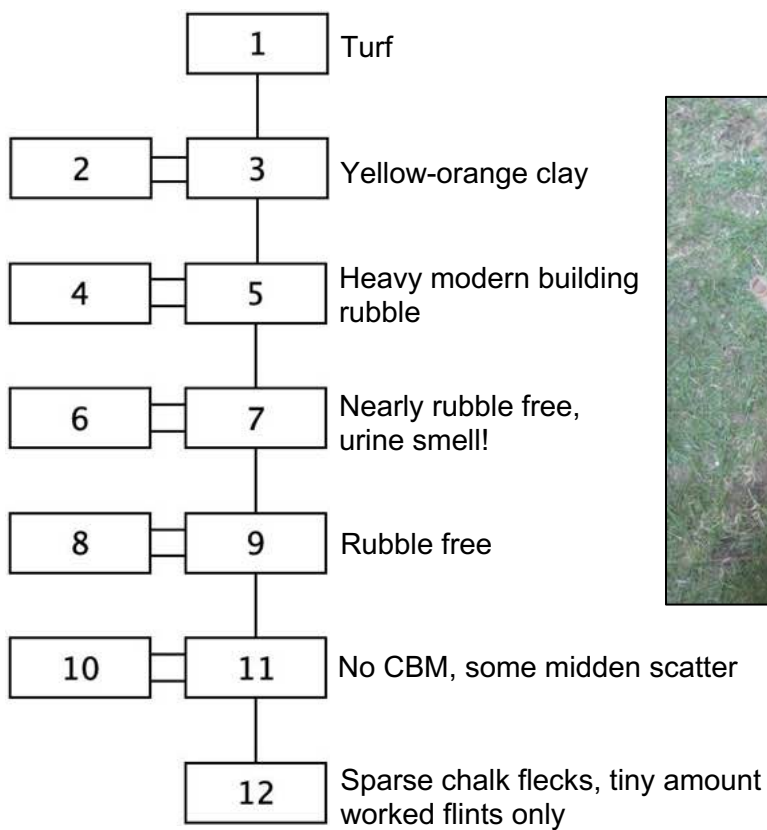


Appendix 1: Harris Matrices.

1. KP106



2. KP121



Appendix 2: Bulk and pottery finds.

(Quantities in grams)

KP106 Bulk finds

Contexts	1	2	3	3 (South)	5	7	8	9
Pottery	60	79	164				2	
Bone	5	13	24				5	
Shell	11	34	124				5	
Iron		32	18				35	
Copper Alloy								
Lead	44							
Slag		41	32					
Coal	26	170	137				51	
Charcoal							14	
Vessel Glass	7	14	22				2	
Window Glass		2	3				38	
CTP		9	12				1	
CBM (Brick)	110	150	288	25	10	5	40	17
CBM (Tile)		213	402	74			51	28
CBM (Other)	20		87					
CBM (All)	130	363	777	99	10		91	45
Dressed Stone								
Mortar & Plaster	7	166	5		7		16	53
OBM	5	2						
Flint (All)	285	327	415		36		130	6
Flint (W)	285	327	213		36		8	3
Flint (S)			181				57	
Flint (M)			21				65	3
Chalk					10		12	
Other Stone	39	156	309		1	280	23	2
Leather								
Wood								
Other Organic								
Misc	5	2	3					1

KP106 Pottery

[illegible]

KP121 Bulk finds

Contexts	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	11 (Slot)	12
Pottery	22	44	2	9	61		138	34	77	5		3
Bone	7	6		24		7	24	25	20	5		1
Shell	25	94	22	7	21	11	153	22	149	17	1	7
Iron	452	157	21	40	4	38	117	3			7	
Copper Alloy												
Lead												
Slag	426	345										
Coal		90		68		34	157	15	49	2		10
Charcoal	3											
Vessel Glass	99	56	12	17	7		30		15			
Window Glass	11	18		3			1					
CTP	7	3		5			18	15	14			
CBM (Brick)	469	1041	1301	873	329	9	454	251	443	12	3	10
CBM (Tile)	464	124	114		406	37	443		247	10		
CBM (Other)	4358	9		376	33		16					
CBM (All)	5291	1174	1415	1249	768	46	913	251	690	22	3	10
Dressed Stone												
Mortar & Plaster	117	262	108	389	64		37		82			
OBM	226	329	57	334	4131				10			
Flint (All)	1185	847		427	438	107	560	138	403	43	12	47
Flint (W)	713	285		427	438	107	534	69	385	40		45
Flint (S)	23	114					26	9	18	3	12	2
Flint (M)	449	448						60				
Chalk												
Other Stone	11						85			92		
Leather												
Wood	5	13	3									
Other Organic												
Misc	28		3	51	35		5					

KP121 Pottery

Context	R	EMS	MLS	LS	EM	M	LM	PM	RED	LPM	UNIDENT
2						1		2	18		
3	2								9	33	
4										2	
5									5	4	
6									7	1	14
8						15		2	38	78	
9									24	4	5
10						6	2		15	14	37
11						1					
12						2					

Appendix 3: Lithics

KP106 Finished flint tools.

Catalogue No.	Context	Type	Qualifier 1	Earliest Date	Latest Date	Period
789	1	core	bladelet worked out	M	M	M
790	1	scraper		M	M	M
791	1	awl	micro	M	M	M
792	2	awl		LN	LN	N
793	2	push plane		M?	M?	M
794	3	arrowhead	oblique	LN	LN	N

KP121 Finished flint tools.

Catalogue No.	Context	Type	Qualifier 1	Earliest Date	Latest Date	Period
808	3	blade		M	M	M
809	3	piercer		LBA	LBA	BA
810	8	arrowhead	transverse	LN	LN	N
811	5	fabricator	broken	M	M	M
812	8	hammerstone		X	X	X
813	9	microlith	2	EM	MM	M
814	9	scraper	horned type B	LBA	LBA	BA
815	12	scraper		M	M	M
816	10	piercer	broken point	M	M	M

Appendix 4: Small Finds (KP121 only)

SF No.	Context No.	Simple Name	Material(s)	Weight (g)	Written Description	Size (cm)	Condition	Completeness	Site Treatment
65	3	Pocket Watch Key	Brass	2.05	Major part of a pocket watch key. The lower portion is missing: this part was probably detachable allowing varying size 'keys' to be fitted. This would have been attached to a watch chain.	2.8 max x 1.3 max	Good	Nearly complete	wiped with dry cloth
66	3	Key	Iron	42.0	Heavily corroded large key, probably a door key.	10 long	Poor	Complete	soft brushing
67	8	Teaspoon	Metal alloy	19.32	This is a 'shouldered' teaspoon with a 'drop' and with terminal decoration. The decoration includes a crown with the initials WP; a triangle enclosing a circle; a circle enclosing a trefoil; a pentagon; a glyph (see drawing below). The WP in crown is the makers mark for William Page & Co, makers of silver plated spoons from 1834 (Birmingham).	14 x 3.1 max	Poor	Complete	wiped with damp cloth

Appendix 5:
Form used by FSARG to gather information on gravestones.

FSARG Gravestone and tomb inscription records (continue over if necessary)

FSARG number	Cemetery:	Earliest date decipherable:
Commonest Surname:	Condition:	Completeness:
Simple sketch of stone/tomb	Inscription:	Decorative features and other comments:
Dimensions:	Photos taken	Sig:
		Date:

Continuation for Number.....

Appendix 6: Pottery from the soakaway spoil-heap SCP10.

Right: Wealden Buff with splash glaze.

Below: Tin glazed, hand painted Early English Delft.



Left: transfer printed mass-produced ware.

Right: stoneware jar.