



Hunt the Saxons 2005

Report for Test Pit 19 2 Fairlight Cottages, Tanners St, Faversham.

Grid Reference TR 01116 61268

1. Introduction

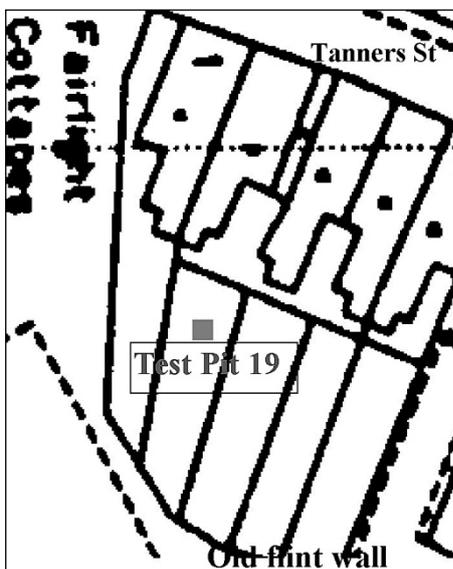
2, Fairlight Cottages lies on the eastern side of Tanners Street, where it rises southwards to join Ospringe Road. The house is part of a five house Victorian terrace, built in the 1870s. The gardens are long and narrow, tapering to a 2m brick and flint wall running north-south. This wall predates the houses and its line continues northwards all the way to West Street. The 1865¹ map shows an earlier pair of houses on this site, and there is some documentary² and map evidence³ that in the 1700s a single larger property stood here and was owned by the tanyard opposite. In the 1860s a huge almshouse development was built just beyond the old wall on a raised terrace: the nearest building of this development is only 6.25m from the wall at the top of 2 Fairlight's garden.

2. Choosing the site.

The narrowness of the garden restricted choice. The map shows the final choice, which sloped only marginally up to the flint wall to the east. The garden showed no evidence of terracing.

→ N

Fig 1: Location of the site.



3. The procedures

A one metre 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 excavated in 30cm spits (layers), each spit being trowelled out in 5cm layers. Because of pressure of time, only a quarter of Spit 4 (90 – 120cm) was removed. All excavated soil was sieved meticulously, and the spoil heap scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each spit, with special finds being given three dimensional coordinates to pinpoint the exact find spot. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

¹ OS map 1865 (1904 reprint) TR0161SW Scale 1: 500

² Title deeds for 37, Tanners St, courtesy of Lesley Jameson

³ Jacob's map of Faversham c1774

4. The findings

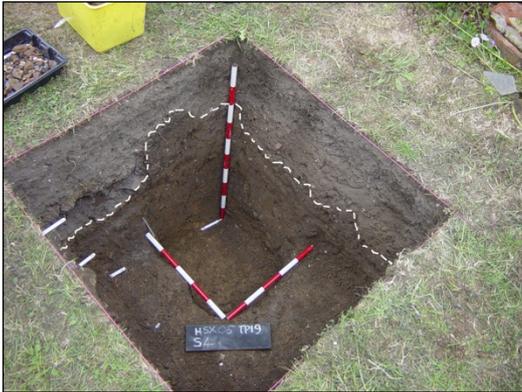


Fig 2: Layers in TP19.

Although fragments of brick and tile were found at all levels, the quantity was not as great as in many of the HSX05 test pits and there were no clear demolition layers. Domestic pottery, vessel glass (mainly bottles including a champagne bottle associated with a near complete clay pipe in Spit 3 (**Fig 3**)) and iron objects such as nails were found throughout. Clay pipes were abundant in spits 1, 2 and 3. Animal bone (pig and sheep) and shell (oyster, winkles, mussels and whelks) were also common throughout.

The upper 0.6m of this pit was exceptionally rich in ash, cinders, clinker and small pieces of unburnt coal. The soil was ash-grey and friable, and although there were no major stratigraphic features, shallow bonfire pit hollows could be seen in section on the sides of the pit (**Fig 2**). At least two levels showed artefacts undisturbed since deposition (**Figs 3** and **6**).

Below 0.6m the pit became much less ashy, dominated by an orange clay-silt. Small chalk inclusions become commoner towards the lowest areas.



Fig 3: Pipe and champagne bottle, S3.



Fig 4a: Medieval pottery from Spit 3.

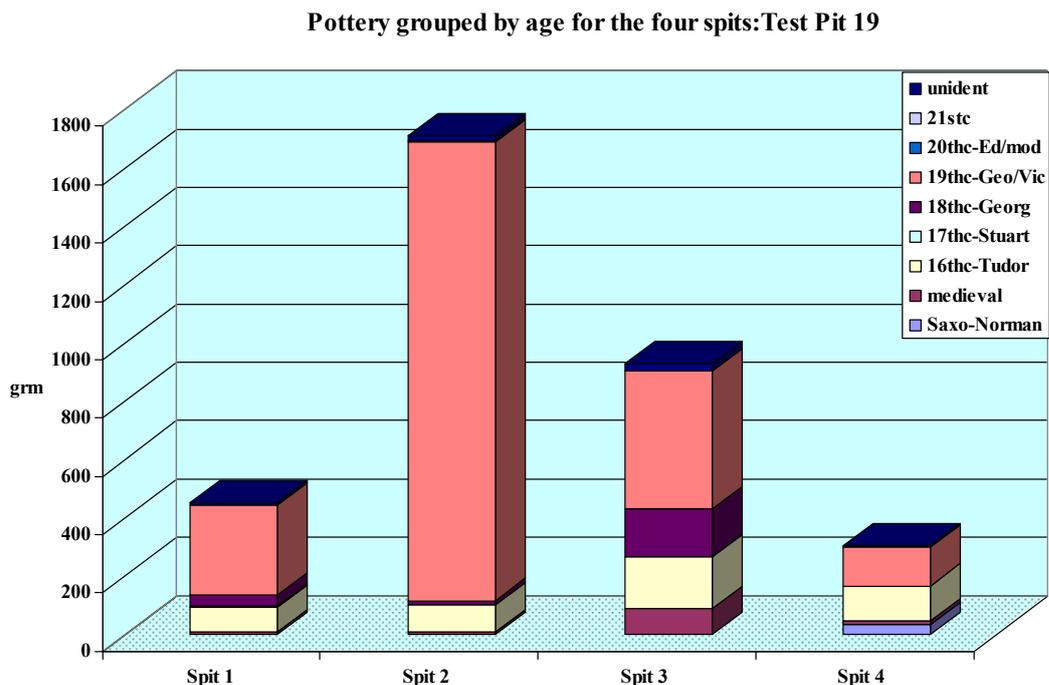
Dating of the pottery showed an interesting pattern. Although Victorian pottery (as in **Fig 6**) is by far the largest group by weight, most of it was found in Spit 2 (30 to 60cm down), and much less important proportionally in Spits 3 and 4, as is shown in **Fig 5**. In Spit 3 Medieval (**Fig 4a**) and Tudor pottery was found and in Spit 4 a fragment of Saxo-Norman shelly ware (11th - 12th centuries) (**Fig 4b**) as well as a small shard of medieval pottery. Most of the medieval pottery was Tyler Hill ware, made in the Blean area. This early pottery was moderately abraded.

The natural, undisturbed surface had not been reached at the maximum permitted depth on Health and Safety grounds of 1.2m.



Fig 4b: Saxo-Norman pottery from Spit 4.

Fig 5: Different ages of pottery in Test Pit 19.



5. Interpretation

For the last 130 or so years, this location, not far from the back door of the house, was clearly the dumping ground for domestic rubbish of all kinds. The contents of the grate were regularly tipped here and small bonfires lit. The presence of complete dishes, apparently broken as they landed on the dump



Fig 6: Broken plate with 'dinner'

is intriguing, especially the one which still had remains of dinner sandwiched between the fragments (**Fig 6**). In spite of the champagne bottle, the debris does seem to be that of a household of modest income with a taste for a wide variety of shellfish. The presence of much earlier pottery at the lower levels is, however, important and needs to be seen as part of the wider pattern in the Tanners Street area: the abraded (worn) nature of these small shards suggests they were part of a field midden scatter rather than an occupational dump.

6. Final comments

Of the 11 test pits dug in July 2005, Test Pit 19 was the closest to the model we had of a 'typical' garden pit, with most of its contents understandable in terms of post medieval household waste dumping. 18% of the pottery, however, was pre-17th century showing how even an 'ordinary' pit can show unexpected outcomes. Comparison with Test Pit 12 which is in a similar location but even closer to the brick and flint wall (which may mark an ancient boundary line) will be especially interesting.

7. Acknowledgements

Great thanks to Melanie Relf for allowing us to dig in her garden.