



The Assembly Rooms / Drill Hall Cottage and Gun Room, Preston Street, Faversham.

Finds of Clay Tobacco Pipes and Ceramics during renovation works and the supply of services 2014

Site DFG14 - Grid Reference **TR 0155 6107**

Report produced by Keith Robinson March 2023

1. Introduction.

Assembly Rooms were built in the 18th and 19th centuries as meeting places for members of the middle/upper classes. They were the venue for business and political meetings, celebratory banquets and such like. Social gatherings such as balls and concerts allowed unmarried ladies to attend and socialize with suitable gentlemen within an acceptable chaperoned space. A common feature of assembly rooms was the lack of assessable ground floor windows thus ensuring privacy.

Faversham's first assembly rooms, at 12, Market Street eventually proved too small and the owners, a syndicate comprised of the users, built a replacement in Preston Street in the 1830s. This building burned to the ground in 1848 but had been so successful that replacement rooms were swiftly constructed by local builder Thomas Ware to the designs of Maidstone architect Martin Bulmer.



The newly renovated Faversham Assembly Rooms

The establishment of the Faversham Institute in East Street during 1862 provided superior facilities which led to the eventual demise of the rooms as a social centre. In c1869 the rooms were let to the local Volunteers, a precursor of the Territorial Army. Use by various military groups continued until 2006

when the building, then long known as the Drill Hall, was taken into formal ownership by the Ministry of Defence under 'squatters rights' - the previous owners' rights having dissipated over time.

The Drill Hall complex then consisted of the old assembly rooms and a detached 19th century house, Drill Hall Cottage, both Grade II listed, and a large brick-built Gun Room dating from sometime between the 1871 and 1897 Ordnance Survey maps. Because of limited use of the buildings by the military and lack of funds to maintain them the Ministry disposed of the hall and house to the Faversham Buildings Preservation Trust in 2011 who subsequently sold the house into private ownership to fund the renovation of the hall.

The Gun Room remains in Ministry ownership for continued use by the Air Training Corp. and the Kent Army Cadet Force. Over the years the Gun Room served as storage for horse drawn artillery and in later years as a garage. In late 2011 extensive works were undertaken to make the building fit for its current use. The storey height within the building was increased by breaking up the concrete floor and relaying at a lower level. Trenches were dug internally and externally to take services. Alan Ward, a professional archaeologist, undertook a watching brief of the works and submitted a detailed report within which ceramic expert Nigel Macpherson-Grant reported on the finds as summarized below.

2. Works to the Gun Room – interior.

After the removal of the concrete floor the ground level was mechanically reduced by c40cm. These works revealed that the building had originally a wooden floor evidenced by infilled slots within the walls which would have taken the floor joists. The materials removed in lowering the floor level showed compacted sand, consistent with levelling prior to laying the concrete, chalk, clay and mixed soils including some charcoal probably evidence of the destruction by fire of the first Assembly Rooms on the site. At the west end of the building service trenches were dug 50cm deeper revealing further layers of clay, mixed soils and charcoal down to geological brickearth. Though the materials removed were not sieved nor closely examined the sherds of pottery and glass collected were dated from c1700-1825, representing dumped materials, garden soils and material from rubbish pits – prior to the building of the Gun Room. A second grouping, indicating disturbance just prior to or contemporary with the building of the Gun Room dating 1850-1900, the latter date perhaps indicating activity at the time of the replacement of the wooden floor with concrete.

2.1 Ceramic and glass finds.

A ceramic sherd datable to c1550 / 1575-1625 and a second red earthenware sherd dateable to c1650-1700 / 1725 were found, probably residual within the soil from the gardening / pit digging processes. The overall baulk of the ceramic assemblage appears to fall within two main groups. The majority between c1775-1825 and a second smaller group dating principally to between c1850-1900. As well as a number of pieces of glass, five complete glass bottles c1850-1930 /40 were found. These finds totalled 95 in number weighing 2,936g.

2.2 Clay Tobacco Pipes.

The finds of clay tobacco pipes within the Gun Room were few, only four identifiable bowl / stem junctions made by known Faversham pipe makers.

Thomas Hull was active c1747-1784. The item found was of poor quality showing a possible armorial bearing with foliage. The spur was moulded with the initials TH and the bore was 4/64”.

John Sheepwash (1759-1803) served his apprenticeship under Hull. He lived and worked making pipes in Preston Street. A single pipe junction was found of poor quality the spur marked IJ and the bore being 5/64”.

A third find with a spur marked JS. John Sheepwash (1797-1862) and namesake (1817-1890) were the son and grandson of the first John Sheepwash. The productions of both men were marked JS, the bore

being 4/64" and the bowl was undecorated.

The spur to the fourth find was marked DH and had a bore of 4/64". The only Kent pipe maker with these initials currently known was Daniel Harvey (c1752-1755) of Dover.

Two unidentifiable bowl/stem junctions (4/64" & 5/64") and twenty-nine fragments of stem (14 - 4/64" & 15 - 5/64") were also recovered.

3. Works to the Gun Room – exterior.

Three trenches were dug in the area west of the Gun Room. Service trenches 1 & 3 and foundation trench 2.

Trench 1 ran parallel to the western wall of the Gun Room and was dug directly into backfill material to the original foundation. This dark grey loamy soil contained no finds.

Trench 2 was an approximate continuation of the line of the south wall of the Gun Room, to a maximum depth of 110cm to the brickearth. The lowest context 51 which contained pottery of c1800-1850 was overlaid with mixed soils - context 50 – containing pottery c1850-1900. Compacted layers of chalk, brick rubble and gravel may indicate a yard surface. A single medieval pottery sherd found in context 50, datable to c1375 to 1450 / 1475, was probably residual within soil relocated in more recent disturbance. The finds totalled 13 – ceramic sherds weighing 297g, and an intact, brown, salt-glazed stoneware, blacking bottle c 1800-1900/1940.

Trench 3 was excavated along the line of a previously demolished building 4 metres in length approximately parallel to the western wall of the Gun Room. Generally c55cm deep, though deepened to c140cm at its northern end - down to brickearth. Erratically stratified layers of mixed broken peg tile and oyster shell, soil and rubble, ash and chalk, overlaid the brickearth. Forty ceramic sherds weighing 316g were found dated between c1775-1825.

3.1 Clay Tobacco Pipe.

A single fragment of stem, 4/64" bore, was recovered from Trench 3.

4. Works at Drill Hall Cottage.

Recent works to renovate the house and provide services required the digging of a trench from Preston Street to the building at the rear of the site. Nigel Mannouch, a member of the Faversham Society Archaeological Research Group (FSARG), noticed in passing large quantities of clay tobacco pipe fragments in the spoil from the trench. Close examination showed that the fragments were concentrated in the areas adjacent to Preston Street and the house. Two hours were spent collecting finds from the spoil. Almost two thousand pipe fragments were collected. Thirty-eight ceramic sherds were also collected weighing 525g.

4.1 Services trench.

Approximately 48 lineal metres of trenching averaging 54cm in depth and 30cm in width was dug. A surface layer of asphalt on hardcore laid to levels to facilitate drainage was continuous over the whole area in which the trench was dug. A further layer measuring between 28cm and 40cm deep of disturbed garden soil containing building rubble, sherds of ceramic and clay pipe was laid on brickearth.

Excavations within the Gun Room showed greater evidence of disturbance than revealed by the service trench adjacent. This probably indicates a long-standing defined boundary between abutting curtilages.



View of the services trench towards the Drill Hall Cottage.



View of the trench towards Preston Street.

4.2 Ceramic Finds.

Ceramic finds were confined to Area G (Gate). Twelve sherds of creamware c1740-1825 from a number of shallow vessels were found. Four sherds of red earthenware, lead glazed on both surfaces; four sherds of wheel thrown red earthenware, lead glazed on one surface; five sherds of wheel thrown/turned red earthenware dish, glazed on one side c1825-1900/1925 were found. One sherd of a high-quality press-moulded slipware, combed, lead glazed dish c1700-175/1800. Three small sherds of salt glazed stoneware, three sherds of decorated flat earthenware and four sherds of fire damaged earthenware (one marked 'FAVE...') completed the group.

A single sherd of German made Westerwald salt glazed, grey stoneware (1590-1750) was found in Area H.

4.3 Clay Tobacco Pipes.

Clay tobacco pipes were seen to be concentrated at each end of the service trench, designated Area H (House) and Area G (Gate) – adjacent to Preston Street.



Trays of uncatalogued clay pipe fragments and ceramic sherds.

Seventeen of the identifiable bowl / stem junctions collected had spurs moulded with the initials IJ, the mark of John Sheepwash the elder. He was baptized at Hernehill on 13th May 1759 the son of John 'Shipwash' and Mary nee Pitcher. After completion of his apprenticeship with Thomas Hull, John gained

admission as a Freeman of The Company of Mercers of Faversham on 19th May 1785. He married Elizabeth Vidion (1765-1826) of Sheldwich at Faversham on 23rd October 1783. At some point they set up business as pipe makers in Preston Street. John's pipes included plain, masonic and ribbed designs.



Fragments of pipes bearing the initials IJ of John Sheepwash I.

After John's death Elizabeth continued the business. Her production was marked ES, whether she initialled her pipes thus prior to John's death is unknown. Thirty-three of the finds were initialled ES. Her pipes include plain, Freemasons, ribbed, oak and wheat decorated seams etc. One particular decoration, found for the first time on this site, depicts a native American presenting a bunch of leaves to a man in eighteenth century colonial costume smoking a long pipe. This has been dubbed 'The Gift of Tobacco'. All initialled examples found bear Elizabeth's initials.

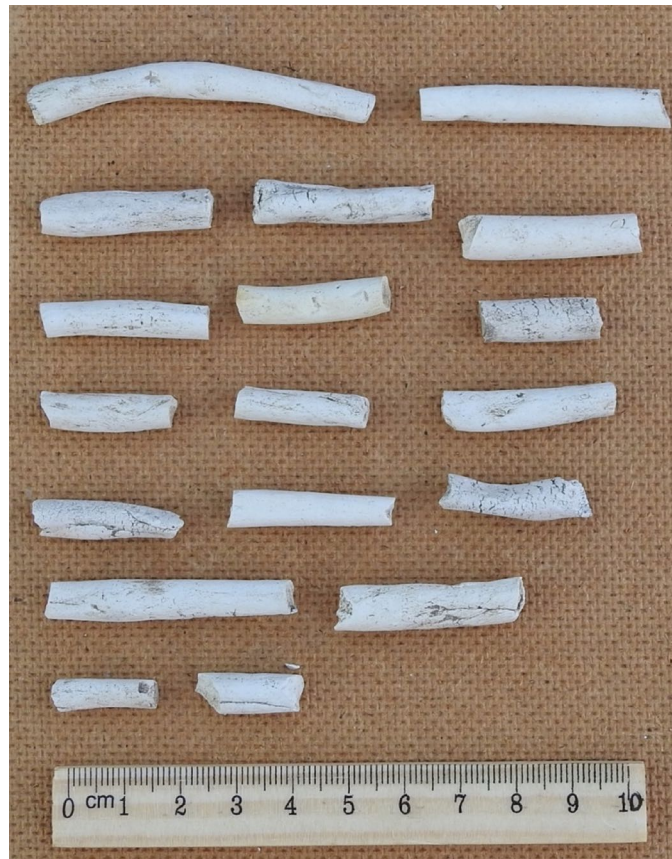


Fragments of 'The Gift of Tobacco' decorated clay pipes initialled ES from the Assembly Rooms excepting the whole bowl from Wreight's Cottage, Preston Street.

One pipe, with a damaged spur, showed S as the surname and another damaged spur had a E as the forename. Two pipes found were initialled TH and can be identified as being made by Thomas Hull as detailed above. One other, with a damage spur, had H as the surname.

Conclusion

The quality of all the clay pipe finds found in the service trench dug between the house and Preston Street was very poor. The relief decorations were indistinct and none of the bowls found was whole. Small amounts of pliable unfired pipe clay was present amongst the fired debris. Though no kiln furniture was found 36 fired pipe clay 'rolls', used as 'spacers' in the loading of kilns, were found equally distributed between the two areas H and G. Most of the rolls were solid though a few had a bore hole.



Fired pipe clay rolls used as 'kiln spacers'.

These finds are probably evidence of waste dumped from the Sheepwash's pipe works at 36, Preston Street adjacent. Early maps show that before the building of the Assembly Rooms much of the western side of Preston Street was pasture or wasteland. Both John and Elizabeth had died before the construction of the first Assembly Rooms c1830s. Census returns 1841 through to 1871 record that the Sheepwash family were resident in Preston Street. They remained resident at number 36 until 1880 when the last John Sheepwash retired and entered the Faversham Union Workhouse.

Acknowledgements

Nigel Mannouch
Alan Ward
Nigel Macpherson-Grant
Mike Tillman

APPENDIX – Finds from the services trench only

Pipe bowl / junction finds by decoration

	Location	Total	Gift	Masonic	Plain	Ribbed	Decoration Unknown
ES	'G'	8	2	1	-	1	4
	'H'	25	4	3	1	10	7
IS	'G'	7	-	-	3	1	3
	'H'	10	-	1	3	2	4
TH	'G'	2	-	-	2	-	-
Bowl Fragment	'G'		10	-	10*	7	19
	'H'		9	-	31	44	28

* Many of the plain bowl fragments are thickly made indicating early manufacture c. 17th/18th cent.

Stem bores*

	Location	Total	4/64"	5/64"	6/64"	7/64"	8/64"
ES bowl / stem junctions		31	25	6			
IS " "		16	11	5			
TH " "				2			
Unidentified junctions	'G'	39	20	19			
" "	'H'	75	71	4			1
Mouthpieces	'G'	5	3	2			
" "	'H'	40	37	3			
Stems - total length (m)	'G'		7.575m	4.115m			
" "	'H'		20.220m	6.640m	0.143m	0.175m	0.168m

* Much of the research into bore sizes was undertaken in the United States using Imperial measurements which is now the accepted measure for clay pipe bore research. Imperial measure was in use at the time of manufacture.