



F·S·A·R·G

The Faversham Society
Archaeological Research Group



Community
Archaeology

Understanding Ospringe OSP09

Report for Keyhole 62 The Ship Inn, Ospringe Street, Faversham.

Grid Reference TR 00402 60881

1. Introduction

This keyhole excavation was positioned in the garden of The Ship Inn public house, a building dating from the 17th century.¹ This is an area of Ospringe adjoining the previously excavated site of the Hospital of St Mary, the extant buildings of which lie on the south side of Ospringe Street (modern A2). A surviving building on the corner of Water Lane and Ospringe Street is known nowadays as the Maison Dieu and is a scheduled site, used as a charming and informative museum.² Opposite the Maison Dieu to the east is another surviving part of the medieval building which is listed Grade 2. Most of the area formerly occupied by the Hospital of St Mary lies to the north of Ospringe Street and is not scheduled.

Five published archaeological investigations have taken place on the unscheduled site of the former Hospital.

- In 1957, trenches for new drains revealed substantial structures below ground, recorded and reported on by Rigold.³
- In 1977, a large scale and very thorough excavation was undertaken by the Department of the Environment, prior to the building of Waterstone Court for the elderly. This was fully published.⁴ The archive for the 1977 excavation now lies with English Heritage and some of the finds are displayed in the Maison Dieu museum.
- In 1989, excavations took place underneath a terrace of houses facing onto Ospringe Street during refurbishment, and extended into the land to the north of the houses which was to be developed for housing.⁵
- In 2007, small scale but important excavation took place in the entrance of the road Fairways to the new (1990) housing, in connection with work by Southern Water.⁶
- In 2008, FSARG carried out a geo resistivity survey of a previously untouched part of the site (Barkaways Field) and excavated a small test pit in the garden of Numbers 20-22 Ospringe Street.⁷

From the 1977 excavation came a plan for the former Hospital which rapidly became taken as definitive. **Fig 1** shows this plan overlain on a modern aerial photograph of the area. Only the northern (uppermost) complex on this overlay is based on archaeology, the southern complex is speculative. This overlay also shows the results of the georesistivity survey carried out by FSARG in 2008 and the location of K62 in the garden of the Ship Inn. This garden was thought to be on a continuation of the complex beyond the

¹ Stevens, P 2005 *Faversham's Historic Pubs and Breweries* Faversham Papers No 92 Faversham Society: Faversham p 57

² KCC Historic Environment Record number TR06 SW15

³ Rigold S 1965 'Two Kentish Hospitals re-examined' Arch. Cant. Vol. LXXIX p 31-47

⁴ Smith G.H. 1980 'Excavation of the Hospital of St Mary Ospringe, commonly known as the Maison Dieu' Arch. Cant. Vol. XCV p 81-184

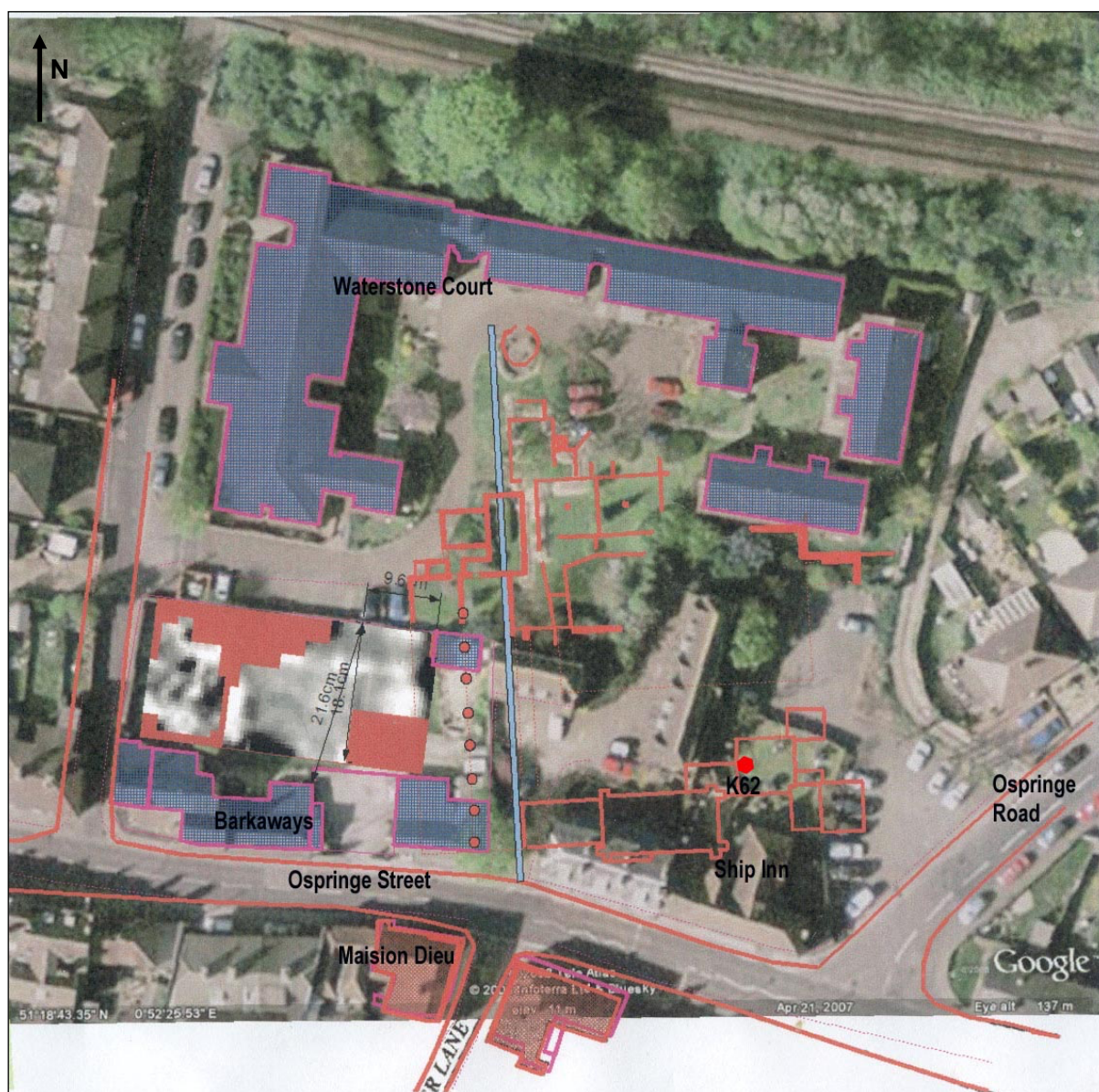
⁵ Parfitt, K 1990 *Archaeological Excavation and Recording at 12-14 The Street, Ospringe, near Faversham, Kent*. Kent Minor Sites Series No 2. KARU: Dover

⁶ Margetts, A 2008 'Archaeological Investigations at Fairways, Ospringe, near Faversham, Kent' Site Report Archaeology SE: Portslade

⁷ FSARG website at www.community-archaeology.org.uk/projects/understanding-ospringe/keyholes/K43

Westbrook stream to the east and north of Ospringe Street. There is however a conflict between the 1977 theoretical complex and the remains actually found in the two more recent excavations in relation to orientation and relationship to the existing main road. These recent excavations in 1989 and 2007 were in the area between the former Westbrook course and the garden of The Ship so it was hoped that the FSARG micro-archaeology could aid the discussion in respect of the orientation of the outlying structures of the complex, i.e. would any walls we found conform with the orientation of the walls found in 1989 and 2007 or those found in 1977?

Fig 1: The layout of the Hospital of St Mary, Ospringe, from the 1977 investigation, superimposed on a 2009 aerial view adapted from Google Earth. The plan has been aligned with the remains exposed in Waterstone Court's garden.⁸ The geo resistivity survey shows dark for wetter areas, light for drier ones. See also Appendix 1.



⁸ Overlay created by John Clarkstone, FSARG

2. Location of pit

A geophysical survey was conducted over the complete lawn area of the pub garden revealing a reasonable contrast between low electrical resistance 'wet' and high resistance 'dry' zones (see **Appendix 1**). A large high resistivity area evident in the NE corner of the garden was thought to be caused by disturbance around an underground pipework system associated with a large manhole. A similar area of high resistance in the SW corner was chosen for our excavation as it was:

- a. Inside the area previously undisturbed as 'the publican's private garden' but now incorporated into the larger lawn.
- b. The area closest to the known archaeology of the Hospital complex.
- c. The area containing the projected extended range of the Hospital complex suggested on the basis of the findings of the 1977 excavation (see **Fig 1**).

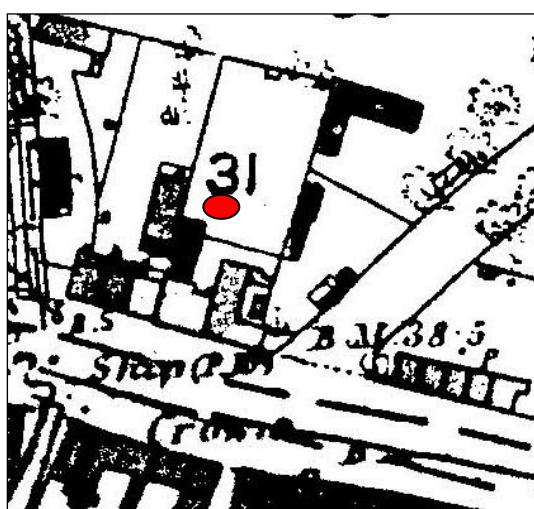
Because of these factors, it was felt that some remains may be present to support or otherwise the alignment / orientation issue. **Fig 2** shows the location of K62.

3. The procedures

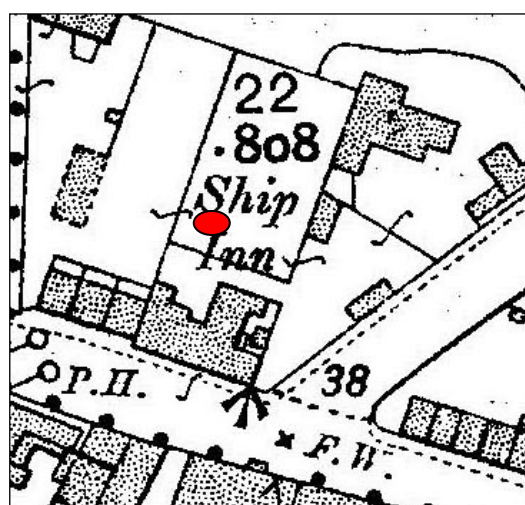
A one metre square was pegged out using the planning square and the area delineated marked with string. The position of the square was recorded by measuring to mapped corners of the rear wall of the public-house. Turf was removed carefully from the square, rolled and set aside in plastic bags. The pit was then hand excavated using single contexts, each of which was fully recorded. During excavation the keyhole was extended to the east to become a 2m by 1m excavation for reasons described below. The keyhole was not excavated to the FSARG maximum safety depth of 1.2m, again for reasons that will become clear below.

Excavated soil was generally sieved meticulously, and the spoil heap scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each context and special finds were given three dimensional coordinates to pinpoint the exact find spot. As will be seen below features revealed were carefully recorded. Finally, when excavation was terminated and recording complete, the spoil was put back, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced to the satisfaction of the publican. Within two weeks, the excavation area was indistinguishable.

Fig 2: The location of Keyhole 62.



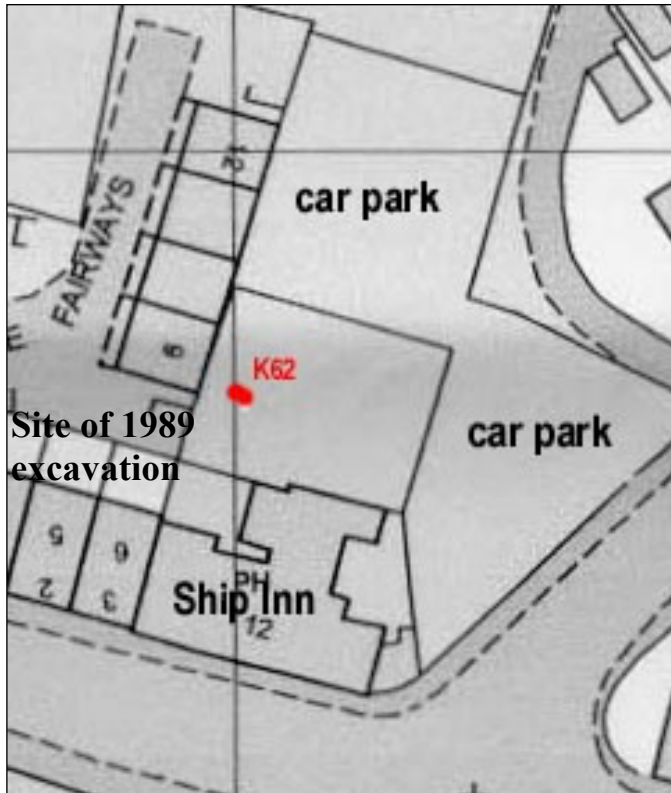
a) Location on 1865 map.⁹



b) Location on 1895 map.¹⁰

⁹ OS 1865 Sheet XXXIV Scale 1: 2500

¹⁰ OS 1895 Sheet XXXIV Scale 1: 2500



c) Location on 2008 map.¹¹

Notice that there has been little change in the Ship Inn and garden boundaries over this period.

The neighbouring properties to the west are the 18th century ones refurbished in 1990. Their foundations are aligned precisely with those of the Hospital Chapel.¹²

Those along the new road Fairways are new builds from 1990-1991.

4. The findings

The initial excavation of the 1m by 1m keyhole was taken down to context [06] which was a familiar grey-brown, high ash content domestic garden soil, typical of the 19th century Faversham town gardens previously excavated by FSARG (see website and elsewhere: *Hunt the Saxons* project reports¹³). Finds to this level were few, consisting of a 1921 penny coin, an iron buckle, possibly from a man's belt or horse harness, and fragments of two lice 'nit' combs made of wood. The latter were in context [02] and a small pit within it [04]. The contents of this small pit, at 37cm down and 18cm deep, were dominated by an assemblage of animal bone fragments in poor condition: this turned out to be a cat burial.

At 50cm the soil was more compact and yellowish brown and it was decided to enlarge the keyhole to the east to 2m and this new 1m by 1m was taken down to the same level. No significant finds or soil differences were detected in this 50cm and the upper contexts. [01] and [02]. Trowelling into the yellowish brown surface [05] soon revealed loose flints and mortar [07] and in the southern half of the trench this became a significant structure of large flints firmly fixed in an east-west direction [08], with traces of cream coloured mortar. This was interpreted as a wall remnant and was 30cm - 40cm wide.

To the north of this structure the matrix became a compacted mortar surface [09] with small flint and soil particles. Both the wall and the mortar layer had been invaded by later small pits. The pit at the north-western end [07] [15] was shallow and contained post-medieval fragments, glass and tile. Its location suggests that it may have been associated with removal (robbing-out) of wall flints rather than being a rubbish pit and the material occupying it was seen as the lower level of [07].

To the south of the wall in the south-east corner of the excavation, an area had been identified and separately excavated as a later rubbish pit [12] [13] containing small amounts of clay pipe, vessel glass, coal and 19th century pottery, although also yielding a small sherd of medieval pot. This pit overlay a

¹¹ OS 2008 Serial number 00332800 Scale: 1250

¹² Parfitt 1990 op cit

¹³ FSARG website op cit, Test Pit Reports TP1 onwards

small circular, vertical sided cut whose filling yielded only two small sherds of pottery, one medieval and one early medieval: this was interpreted as an earlier post hole. To the west of this rubbish pit, sandwiched between the flint wall structure and the southern baulk of the trench, a shallow layer of dark loam overlay a layer of fine shingle beneath which was a level feature consisting of small, rounded flint pebbles packed closely together [14]. This feature was not found in the south east corner, probably because of the rubbish pit and posthole mentioned above. The feature abutted the wall to the north and was interpreted as a courtyard surface. The plan **Fig 3** and photograph **Fig 4** show the archaeology at this stage.

The wall and courtyard surface were left intact, but the mortar layer [09] was then removed to a depth of 70 cm. At this depth, the consistency was harder and more compacted, so given a new context number [20]. A slot in the mortar area was taken down to a depth of 1.23m. The wall feature [08] continued downwards to and beyond this level, but the mortar layer seemed to be becoming darker with higher soil content. Excavation ceased at this point, see **Fig 5** for the final state of play.

Fig 3: Plan of K62 showing wall structure [08], pebbled surface [14] rubbish pit [13] and possible posthole before excavation [16]. F = large flint nodule. Large flints removed as a slot (see photograph below) have been placed back into position. The area covered is 2m x 1m.

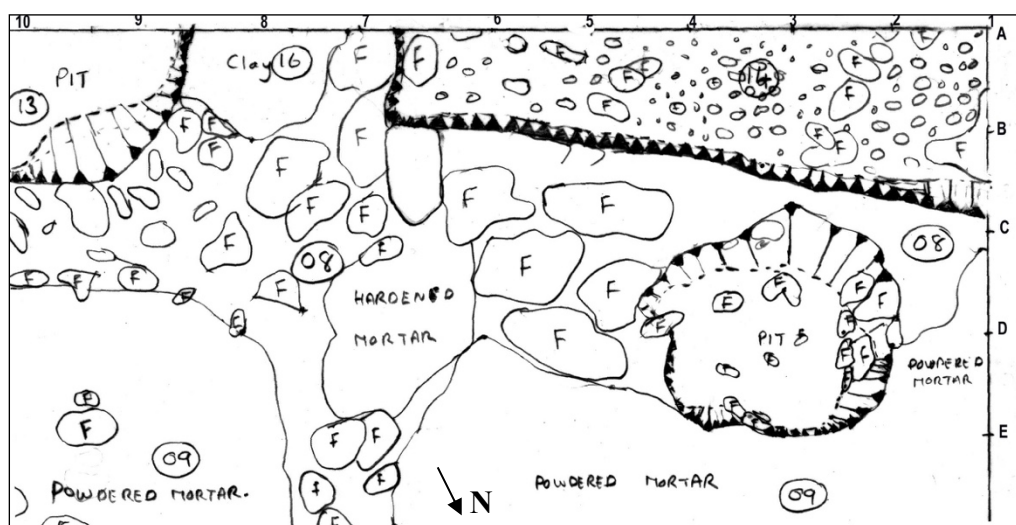


Fig 4: Photograph of K62 at the same stage of excavation as in Fig 3.



Fig 5: K62 at the end of excavation. The continuation of the wall structure down to at least 123cm below the surface is visible, as is the depth of the 19th century rubbish pit in the south east corner.



5. Interpretation

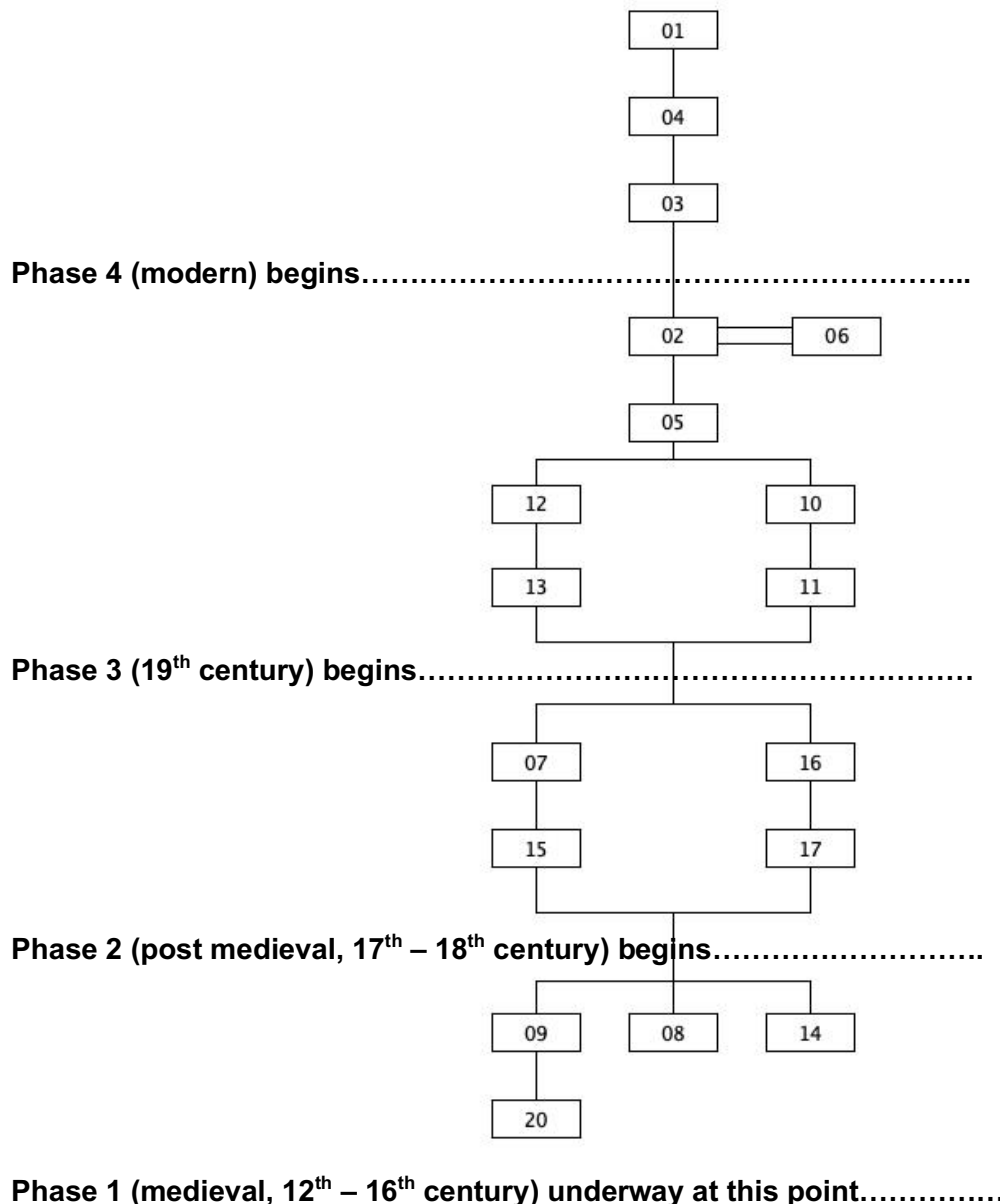
Fig 6 shows a Harris Matrix for this excavation.

There is a clear phasing into:

- Phase 1: Medieval at the lowest levels, ending in demolition and stone robbing at the end of the medieval period.
- Phase 2: Post medieval limited activity.
- Phase 3: Early 19th century with markedly more signs of occupational activity (fire grate ash, broken pottery, clay pipes) in the early 19th century. This presumably because activity arises from the increased importance of the Ship Inn in stagecoach days, although by 1865 it had been overtaken by the London to Dover railway.
- Phase 4: We know that it was part of a garden in the later 20th century¹⁴, and few finds date from this phase.

¹⁴ pers.comm from publican and other long term residents of Ospringe

Fig 6: Harris Matrix.



Phase 1 is obviously the most interesting. The medieval structures exposed must be part of a building of the Hospital of St Mary. A substantial flint wall, partly robbed out, was flanked to the south by a pebble floored courtyard. To the north a deep deposit of powdered mortar, probably from demolition, overlay a harder layer probably representing the original floor level of a room. This combination of flint wall and mortar floor is similar to that noted in Parfitt's account of the 1989 excavations for the rectangular room identified nearby.¹⁵ Parfitt also identifies a cobbled surface nearby, dating this to a relatively early phase in the life of the Hospital of St Mary (13th century).¹⁶

The orientation of this wall matched those identified in Parfitt's account and not those in the 1977 account. The 1977 imaginative reconstruction of the Hospital had quite reasonably shown the church and gatehouse, both mentioned in the inventory of 1571¹⁷, as lying at right angles to the supposed location of the Common Hall, itself aligned with the course of the stream (see **Fig 1**). The 1989 excavation had, however, shown that the church was actually parallel with Ospringle Street. If the church-gatehouse part of the 1977 plan is realigned with Ospringle Street, then the speculative gatehouse lies beneath the Ospringle Road / Ospringle Street junction and the garden of the Ship Inn contains no

¹⁵ Parfitt 1990 op cit p 7

¹⁶ Parfitt 1990 op cit p 7

¹⁷ Bolton, G 1571 *Survey of Kentish Estates* Archive of St Johns College, Cambridge

buildings at all, so what do we have? There are also other problems with the 1977 plan, such as the oblique angle the church now seems to be making with the Common Hall, and, indeed, the orientation of the buildings on the published plan compared with the actual site plans. The small but immaculate 2007 excavation adds to the confusion.¹⁸ Clearly K62 has added to the urgent need for some rethinking on the site layout of the Hospital of St Mary of Ospringe.

6. Final comments

This has been a very satisfying excavation for the FSARG team as it confirms the doubts expressed by many concerning the early 1977 projections. It was also very good experience to dig an actual structure, with all the demands for identifying structural contexts and recording features as accurately as possible.

7. Acknowledgments

The whole FSARG team wish to thank John Baker (Johnny), the very accommodating publican of The Ship, his staff and Enterprise Inns for allowing the excavation, especially for enabling us to hold our annual open days. These days allow the general public to witness our activities and add to our local knowledge. Sunday lunches and pub quizzes were an additional bonus for the team.



Finds Processing on site with the excavation taking place in the background.

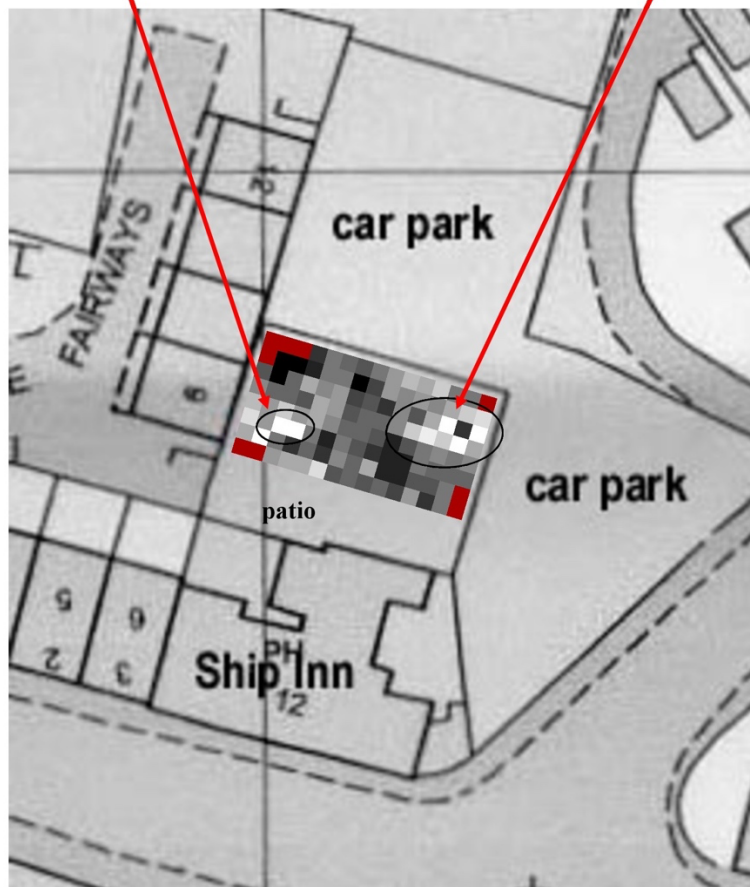
¹⁸ Margetts 2008, op cit

**Appendix 1:
Geo-resistivity Survey for the Ship Inn garden, summer 2009.**

Red areas indicate flowerbeds. The darker the resistivity square, the wetter the soil.

Area of high resistivity investigated
by 2009 mini-excavation

Area of high resistivity possibly associated
with modern water management (black
square = manhole cover). The publican,
however tells of flint wall remnants in the
neighbouring fence area. This area is worthy
of future investigation.



Base map courtesy of Ordnance Survey 2008.

Small Finds



SF68



SF73



SF75



SF105



SF106

Small Finds Details

SF68: A frog sitting on a flat stone. The frog is various shades of green with black body markings, its eyes are black and pink. The stone is black.

SF73: A George V 1921 penny. The obverse has Britannia on it and the reverse has George V on it.

SF75: An iron buckle with a centre bar and possibly a pin. There is a lot of encrustation with corrosion and mud which is possibly integrated.

SF105: Two fragments of a fine-tooth comb, with no teeth attached but the stubs of the teeth are left. It is a lice comb.

SF106: Two parts of a fine-tooth comb which are joined together and two teeth from the same comb, it is fragile. A few intact teeth are left attached.