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The Faversham Society
Archaeological Research Group

Community Archaeology



Faversham Society Archaeological Research Group

Preston: a most peculiar parish

PSN15

Report on Keyhole Pits K124 and K125 18 and 17 Nelson Street Faversham

**Grid References: 124: TR 01461 60685
125: TR 01456 60687**



**Brickfield in the Yemen, c2014.
Note the clay extraction areas.**

**Keyhole excavation K124, showing
lower levels**



Introduction

Early research into this part of Preston next Faversham parish, enclosed by Preston Grove, Nelson Street, The Mall and Canterbury Road (the A2, Watling Street) had quickly shown that this area contained brickworks. This brickworks was a surprise: it had not been included in Syd Twist's excellent publication on the Stock Bricks of Swale¹ or marked in on Arthur Percival's very useful map of the Faversham area brickworks in the 19th-20th century with areas of brickearth extraction shown².

Further interest came from the fact that the older part of Faversham is a town of red bricks, and as far as we could see initially, no one had identified a local site making these red bricks before the mass production of the yellow, cinder flecked Kentish Stocks in the second half of the 19th century. Were these brickworks those of an old established, comparatively small scale red brick and peg tile producer?

This interest was further stimulated by the discovery, towards the end of the first Preston season PSN13 in a small keyhole in a garden on the east side of the Mall, of a brick dust floor with the slaked lime and sand layers above that suggested a mortar floor: below the brick dust floor was a mass of medieval discarded pottery³. This hinted at very early brickworks nearby, maybe dating back to the Tudor period. How could this be investigated?

2. Geographical and historical background

a) Geography

The area enclosed by the four roads (see above) lies at an altitude of 23 metres. It is almost level, with an abrupt rise of around two metres on the eastern side (along Preston Grove) but being level with the street pavements on the western (the Mall) and northern side (Nelson Street). Due to modern house building and in-use industrial buildings in the north, it was not possible to examine the level of the land along the southern edge.

b) Geology

The geological map shows the Mall and Preston Street as being Head Brickearth.⁴ Although the Upper Chalk is near the surface it dips down quite sharply to the north and in nearly all places on the geological map in the central Mall and Preston Street, we have found quite thick brickearth deposits of a particularly fine grained type. The map also shows a small 'island' of Thanet Sands exposed just to the east of the Mall.

Crow, writing in the mid 19th century,⁵ 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 only on very limited

¹ Twist, S 1995 *Stock Bricks of Swale* Sittingbourne Society, Sittingbourne, Kent

² Percival A, c 1980 Faversham Extractive Industries map, unpublished

³ Report for K99/ 99A FSARG website www.community-archaeology.org.uk, Reports for PSN13.

⁴ British Geological Survey Faversham, England and Wales Sheet 273 Solid and Drift Edition.

⁵ Crow E 1848-61 *Historical Gleanings relative to the Town of Faversham and Parishes Adjoining*. CD transcript by P Tann, 2009, Faversham Society: Faversham

excavation so far, this seems to be rather too sweeping a statement, as we have found considerable quantities of medieval pottery in at least one pit in the garden of a house built around 1850.⁶ Nevertheless, close to the brick and tile works (see next section) within this area enclosed by the four main roads, in some places there is a clear drop of the kind of depth described by Crow e.g. at the junction of Preston Grove and Nelson Street. We would expect much of the drift geology to have been removed in this particular area, with the extractions also explaining the features noted above in the geography section.

c) Known historical background

The featuring of a brickfield and kiln on the tithe map (1840) and the OS map of 1865 has already been mentioned. In 1840, Thomas Barnes was renting the brickfield from Thomas Starr. Thomas Barnes as a builder is a person we have come across in other contexts, e.g. 57 Preston Street⁷. Later research has, however, taken the brick making further back into the past and put flesh on the bones of the people involved.

The key document here is a very long and detailed account, drawn up in 1847, of the previous ownership of land in the area going back to 1749⁸. The point of this laborious process is to justify the current ownership of a small plot on the southern corner of Nelson Street and The Mall so that it can be sold to Thomas Barnes. This plot will shortly come to be the site of the Crown and Anchor pub, which is why this document is housed in the archives of Shepherd Neame - enormous thanks to John Owen, the archivist at Sheps, for drawing my attention to this document.

A summary of the contents of the document can be found in Appendix 2, the main point here being that the brickfield and brickworks are mentioned on numerous occasions over the years. The earliest mention is in 1749, when the whole area of Preston Farm changes hands: at this point a brick kiln and lime kiln are mentioned on a long list of items such as barns and cottages and 118 acres of land. In 1806 the large plot began to break up, with William Baldock buying a lot of the farmland. The brickfield, however, is bought by James Knowler, a brickmaker from Boughton under Blean. Knowler builds brick kilns, lodges, sheds, installs ovens, coppers and furnaces and also sells building materials but by 1816 he is bankrupt, owing money in all directions. The land is taken over by one of his earlier creditors, Thomas Starr, who takes on Thomas Barnes as a tenant to run the brickworks and brickfield. All this leads onto the situation as shown on the tithe map and schedules.

So far, we are not sure about when the brickworks changed over fully to builder's merchants: the map sequence shows industrial buildings on this site throughout the period. In the 1906 detailed map of the Preston House Estate when it was coming up for auction, the brickworks buildings as shown on the 1865 map are shown as still present, although outside the Estate boundaries. Perhaps, however, the actual manufacturing side had ceased by then. Further research will be undertaken on this in the near future.

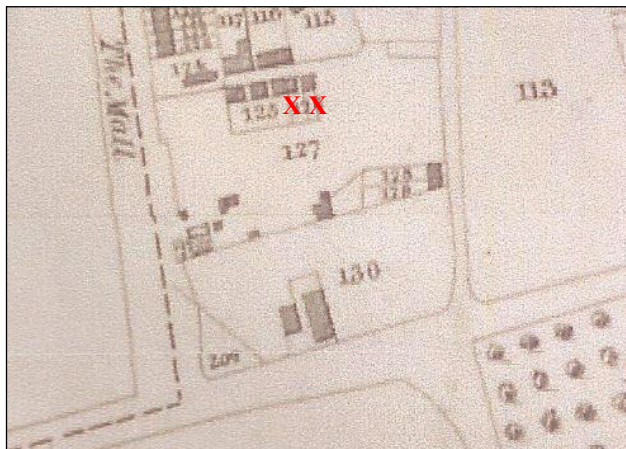
⁶ See 2013 report on PSN13 KP99 and 99A , op.cit.

⁷ See 2013 report on K97, www.community-archaeology.org.uk PSN13

⁸ *Abstract of the title of Mr Thomas Barnes to a piece of land in the parish of Preston Next Faversham*
Document held in the archives of Shepherd Neame Brewers, Faversham , Kent

Fig 1: Map sequence for the area of interest, 1840-2007

1. Mall/ Canterbury Road/ Preston Road/ Nelson Street block on the 1840 tithe map⁹.



127 is the brickyard, occupied at that time by Thomas Barnes, the builder.
125 and 126 are cottages.
128 and 129 are down as houses with gardens.
130 is Alfred House, demolished in the 1970s.

No Crown and Anchor yet!

2. Mall/ Canterbury Road/ Preston Road/ Nelson Street block on the 1865 OS map¹⁰



Along Nelson Street, most of the houses have been built by this date.

The Crown and Anchor has arrived.

The southern part is occupied by Alfred House and its big garden.

3. Mall/ Canterbury Road/ Preston Road/ Nelson Street block on the 1908 OS map¹¹.



The block of land has become much more built up.

The brick and tile works is no longer labelled as such.

⁹ Preston Near Faversham Tithe Award Schedule and maps 1840. KAS/ KCC archives.

¹⁰ OS 1865 (1904 reprint) Sheet XXXIV.9.10 Scale of original 1:536

¹¹ OS 1907 Sheet XXXIV Scale of original 1:2500

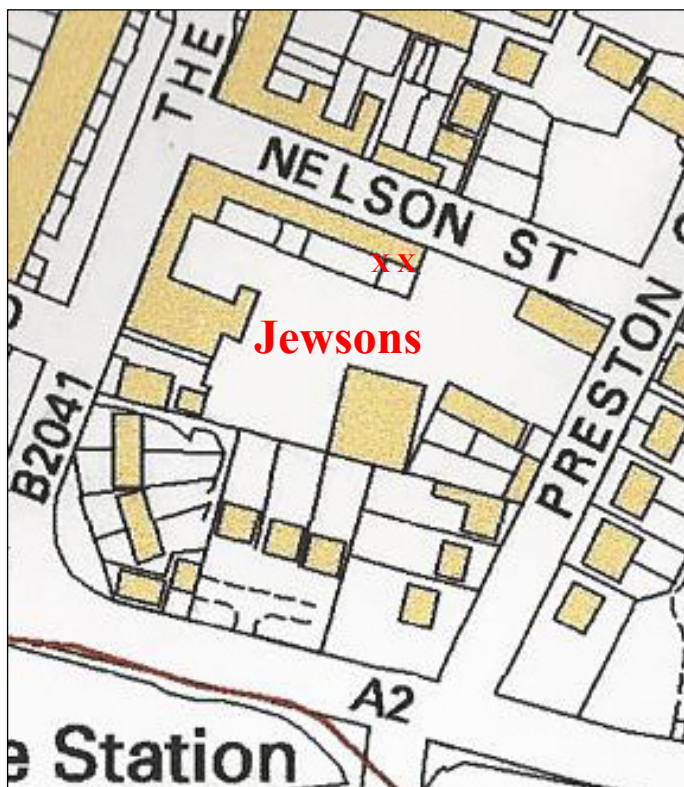
4. / Canterbury Road/ Preston Road/ Nelson Street block on the 1963 OS map¹²



Alfred House is still there.

There are even more buildings in the brickfield area but the central building still survives.

5. The Mall/ Canterbury Road/ Preston Road/ Nelson Street block in 2007¹³



Alfred House has gone except for two outbuildings.

The old central brickfield building has gone.

Generally, much as it is now, except that the controversial block of flats on the corner of Preston Grove and Canterbury Road is not yet there.

¹² OS 1963 Sheet XXXIV

¹³ OS 2007 Sheet XXXIV

3. Location of pit

The central difficulty in investigating the brickworks is the fact that almost the entire curtilage of the former brickworks is covered by a half metre thick layer of concrete. Appositely, this plot had become the site of Jewsons, the building materials chain. Although sympathetic to our interest, there was nothing they could do to give us access. Attention was therefore focussed on the gardens of properties backing onto the site.

Some property development was shown on this site in the 1840 tithe map and listed as cottages in documents such as the Thomas Barnes title document for the site of the Crown and Anchor in 1847. They do not seem to be present, however, on the 1795 OS draft surveyor's map, when the area under consideration is shown as completely empty. We do, however, have mention of brickfield and brickworks here from 1749 in the Barnes title document (see above).

When the gardens of 17 and 18 Nelson Street were offered, these two being as close as possible to the former actual works shown on the 1865 map, the opportunity was gratefully seized. Both excavations were located as close as practicable to the rear wall of the gardens and lined up with each other - see Fig 1.

4. The procedures

For each Keyhole, a one metre square was pegged out using the planning square and the area delineated marked with string. The position of the squares was recorded by measuring to mapped corners of the house. Turf was removed carefully from the squares, rolled and set aside in plastic bags. The pits were then hand excavated using single contexts, each of which was fully recorded. The keyholes were excavated to a maximum depth of 95 cm for K124, 60cm for K125. All excavated soil was sieved meticulously, and the spoil heaps 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. Any features revealed were carefully recorded. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the soil and turf replaced.

5. The findings:

Keyhole pit 124 at 18, Nelson Street

Removal of the turf [1] revealed a dark, friable top soil, well sorted, containing many small fragments of pottery, bone, shell, nails, clay pipe, tile and brick (the latter all red brick). This shaded down to a lower layer [3], which in turn overlay a layer [4], with the top of context [4] at a depth of 40cm.

Context [4] was different in colour and character, being much lighter and more yellowish than the upper layers i.e. a brickearth type soil. Into [4] was sunk a trench, running north-south across the south west corner of the keyhole. containing an earthenware drainage pipe.

This part of the trench was left untouched from then on to avoid any damage to the pipe, with removal continuing over the rest of the pit.

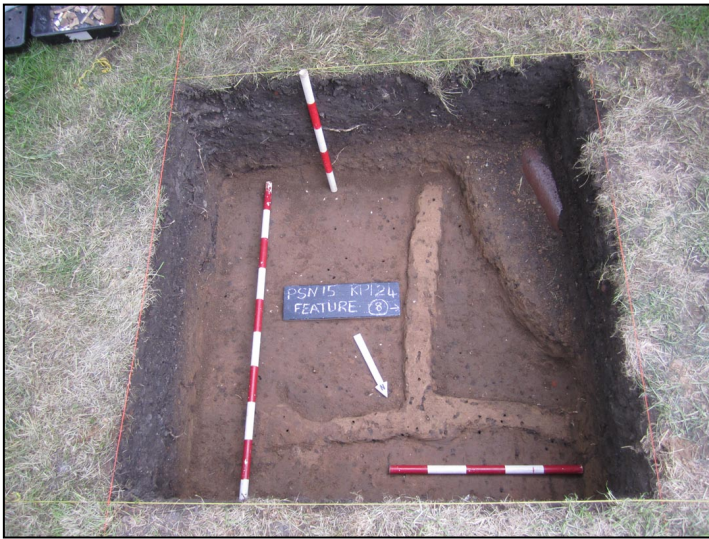


Fig 2: K124 at a depth of 50 cm. The drainage pipe is in the top right hand corner.

At a depth of around 50 cm, a curious pattern started to emerge - a T-shaped set of hardened brickearth 'walls', about 8-10 cm thick [8]. A small investigative slot was cut into one of these and it was found that it continued downwards, separating what was now appearing as infills from each other. Each infill was labelled as a

cut and fill giving contexts [12] & [9], [13] & [10], [14] & [11]. On removal of fills [10], [9] and a small part of [11] the much firmer floor underneath was revealed and given the context number [15], although it could be argued that it forms the base of the cuts and is therefore part of context [8]. Excavation stopped at this point, at a maximum depth of 95cm. See Fig 3 below for a summary, also the scale drawings in Appendix 3



Fig 3: summary of the relationships between these contexts.

The upper contexts [2] and [3] had the typical artefactual content of a 19th century Faversham garden - 19th century pottery (both red ware and higher quality wares), coal, and clay pipes etc. The infills [9], [10] and [11] had very little artefactual content except for some incongruous larger objects - a bone in [9], some brick and tile fragments in [10].

Pottery, though was absent in the infills except in [11] where six sherds of highly abraded Tyler Hill medieval pottery was present.

Fig 4: finished flint tools and a core from K124.

This small pit did yield, however, a surprising number of items of worked flint that included no less than 15 actual flint tools. These ranged in age from the Mesolithic (the commonest type, which included a tranchet adze and 5 microliths) through the Neolithic (a two faced core) to the late Bronze Age (a borer). These are shown in Fig 4 and listed in Appendix 4. They were well distributed amongst the contexts, suggesting a high degree of movement and mixture of material.



Keyhole Pit 125 at 17, Nelson Street

This pit was excavated after K124 and was located directly in line with it.

Dark, friable topsoil [1] shaded into a second layer, also dark and well sorted but much firmer [2]. Into this layer was set a small dog burial, complete with studded collar [3] [4]. Below [2] at a depth of around 30 cm was a dump of building material in a large cut [5] that spanned the pit - the contents being brick and tile on one side [6] and a smaller areas of chalk and plaster [7] in another. Below this was the abrupt change noted in K124, where colour changed to the distinctive yellowish-red of brickearth [8]. This layer had a high artefactual content.

Then two lighter, harder baked lines emerged, identical to those in K124 except that in this case, the lines were parallel and followed the east and west sides of the pit. The infill between these was given than context number [11] with the lighter 'walls' being labelled [12]. There was not time to fully excavate [11] to a probable brickearth base.

As with K124, the pottery sherds from the upper contexts were all 19th century, with a small collection of abraded Tyler Hill sherds coming from [11], the lowest infill context. The brick found in [1] and [6] especially was all red brick. Unlike K124, however, K125 did not yield any finished flint tools although there were a fair number of waste flakes from the manufacturing process, especially in the infill [11].

Fig 4 shows the two pits at the end of excavation, with the K125 one angled to give it the same orientation as K124.

Fig 5: End of excavation photographs K124 top, K125 below.



6. Interpretation

The aim of these keyholes had been to look for evidence for the age and product types of the nearby brick and tile works.

In general terms, the brick and tile content of both pits supported the hypothesis that the nearby brick works was producing red brick only, in that no yellow stock brick at all was found at any level. The brick and tile fragments, however, were so small that it was hard to get any evidence of date of manufacture from them - to date bricks, size, density and presence of frogs are all important.

Evidence from brick and tile fragments, however, paled into insignificance compared with the features displayed in the lower half of these two pits. Whatever they are, they have not been truncated or altered in any way since they were backfilled and went out of use. We had passing thoughts about settling tanks but decided that they were insufficiently robust for such a purpose - settling tanks are usually lined. Research to date has not been helpful, as articles on the archaeology of brickworks concentrate on kiln structures and/or later brickworks with relatively large scale facilities for mass production; they say almost nothing about the archaeology of extraction.

Our tentative hypothesis is that these are extraction cells. Both Syd Twist, our local brick expert¹⁴ and also Gerald Lynch writing about brick production for Hampton Court¹⁵ point out that red brick was made from only the topmost layers of the brickearth or clay - what Syd calls the 'strong part'. The finding of a picture from the modern day Yemen¹⁶ where brick making techniques are not unlike those of post medieval Britain (see cover pictures) was a real eye opener. We do not know why they leave these boundaries between the cuts for clay extraction but the scale of the operation in the Yemen photo matches our Nelson Street finds very closely. Research into this continues.

For now, though, what can this tell us about the age of the red brick producing works at this spot?

- Firstly, these gardens have existed for at least 175 years, as they are shown on the tithe map of 1840. (The Nelson Street cottages on the tithe map are not the same as the ones there now but the locations are the same).
- Secondly, there is documentary evidence for brick making in this spot back as far as 1749¹⁷, a date that **precedes** the 1790s building of Grove House and the rebuilding of Preston House round the corner in Preston Grove¹⁸.
- Thirdly, the back fill of the extraction spots - presumably tossed in when other areas were being opened up - contains only worked flints and the small, abraded fragments of medieval pottery that are characteristic of medieval midden scatter - i.e. date back to a time of open countryside.

¹⁴ Twist S 1995 op.cit. p 3

¹⁵ Lynch G 2012 'Tudor Brickwork' on the website of the Building Conservation Directory www.buildingconservation.com

¹⁶ Yemen photograph from website theglobeandmail.com in 2015. Taken by Mohammed Al Sayaghi for Reuters

¹⁷ See Title document of Thomas Barnes, 1846, op.cit.

¹⁸ Report on Preston House, 2015 on the FSARG website www.community-archaeology.org.uk under PSN14

It is quite possible, of course, that a 17th- early 18th century red brick manufactory here could have been supplying the needs of builders in Faversham Town - there are plenty of buildings with post medieval brick work¹⁹. Nearby, however there are two known constructions going on - the first Preston House in the mid 16th century and the rebuild of the large mystery building in Preston Farm, in the early 17th century. Did this brickworks start off as a supplier for the original Preston House? In Tudor times, brickworks for the big houses - and it must be remembered that the use of bricks had been a no go area for almost 1,000 years in Britain at this stage, with peg tile coming in the late 12th century- were always dedicated ones nearby. The only way we will ever know for sure is if Jewsons leaves the site and it is given over to housing development - a far from unlikely prediction!

7. Final comments

Given the aim of this exercise, we would have been happy to find some good artefactual evidence to help us understand the brickworks better. What we actually found was much more exciting and thought provoking - maybe Faversham's oldest brickworks? When those mysterious lines appeared under the trowel for the first time, it was a moment of true archaeological discovery.

8. Acknowledgments

We were very fortunate indeed to be offered these two gardens, which could not have been closer to the original brickworks. Great thanks to David Root at Number 18 and to Ryan and Ellie at Number 17 for trusting us with their small gardens and thereby allowing us to make some important discoveries.

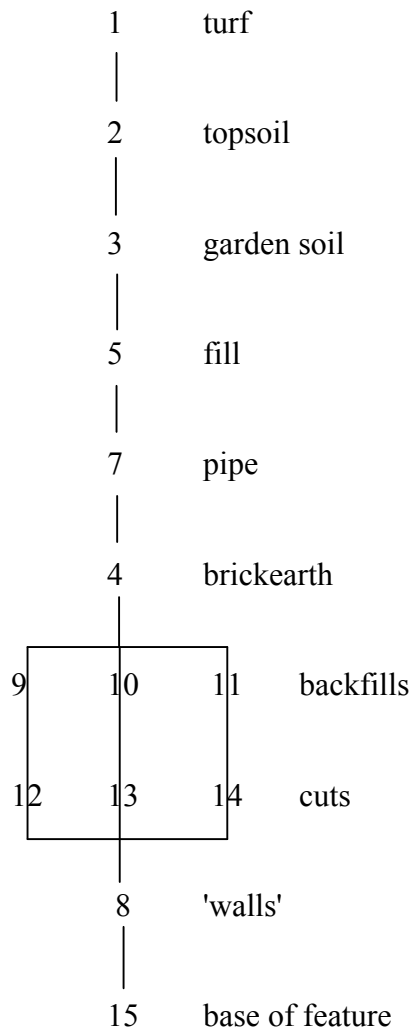
Dr Pat Reid

October 28th 2015

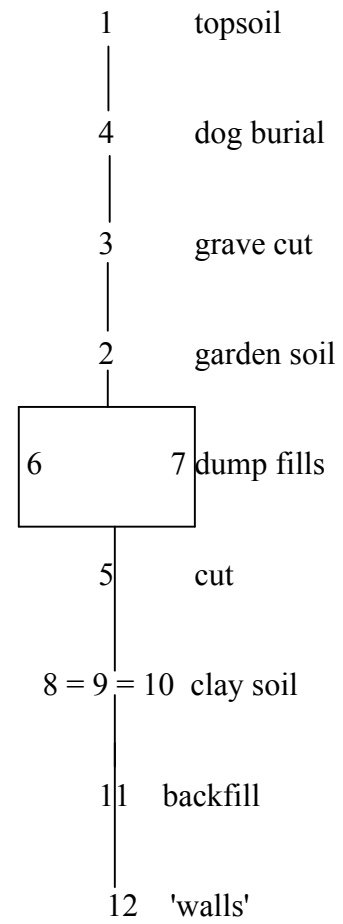
¹⁹ e.g. The Granary at Standard Quay, see numerous guide books to Faversham.

Appendix 1: Harris Matrices

a) K124



b) K125



Appendix 2: Summary of the changes in ownership of property in the Preston next Faversham area between 1749 and 1846.

Taken from *Abstract of the title of Mr Thomas Barnes to a piece of land in the parish of Preston Next Faversham.* Document held in the archives of Shepherd Neame Brewers, Faversham, Kent, in relation to the Crown and Anchor Public House, The Mall, Faversham.

1. 1749

Property described as : 4 messes, 2 cottages, 2 barns, 3 stables, 1 oast house, 1 smiths forge, 1 brick kiln, 1 lime kiln, 1 dove house, 9 gardens, 5 orchards, 80 acres of ground, 12 acres of pasture and 26 of Hop grounds with the appurts in the parish of Preston next Faversham.

Owned by Thomas Dawes (Preston), Charles Tassell (Faversham), Samuel Shepherd (Faversham), Thomas Clement (Preston), William Sparks (Faversham, blacksmith), Henry Johnson (Faversham, gardener), Edward Palmer (Withcot, Leicestershire, husbandman). Tenanted by Henry Greenstreet, then Edward Gater, then William Plume.

Bought by Stephen Beckingham and his wife Catherine.

2. 1758

Stephen Beckingham junior, father deceased, passes rights in Preston farm to his future in laws the Sawbridges of Wye, Kent as part of the marriage agreement.

William Plane continues to farm the land as a tenant

3. 1786

The Sawbridges and Stephen Beckingham junior and his wife sell Preston Farm to John Bax and his wife Jane of Preston House 'for his quiet enjoyment'. The document refers to a 'tenement then lately rebuilt with brick ', presumably Grove House.

4. 1806/7

The estate has now increased to 320 acres of land, 10 acres of meadow and 70 acres of pasture. John Bax and his wife sell the estate to William Baldock with Charles Delmar acting upon his behalf. William Baldock is a wine merchant from Canterbury.

5. 1808

The block of land with the brickworks on it is defined carefully in the document, with reference to the Turnpike Road [A2] and other stretches of the Kings Highway [Preston Grove, The Mall], abutting to the north onto an orchard owned by William Baldock. It is described as 'all that piece or parcel of land part whereof was then used as a brickfield ... 4 acres and 3 roods'

This is bought by James Knowler, brickmaker of Boughton under Blean. Knowler borrows £600 from Thomas Starr of Canterbury to carry out the purchase.

6. 1809

Other creditors of Knowler appear on the scene - Thomas Phillpot, Thomas Carden, Thomas Baxter. Knowler sells the strip of land bordering the London-Canterbury Road to Phillpott. Knowler's debt to Starr was turned into a mortgage on the property. Arguments over Knowler's ever increasing debts carry on until 1816.

7. 10th October 1816

Knowler is declared bankrupt, at the instigation of bankers and other creditors mainly from Canterbury. Richard Halford, Thomas Moss and Mark Redman appointed trustees.

8. 11th December 1816

Auction of the brickfield, kilns and other assets of James Knowler at the Ship Inn, Faversham. The land didn't reach the amount owed to Thomas Starr. Arguments go on. In 1820 very complicated arrangements made by Halford et al to assign land to Thomas Starr and Thomas Docker.

9. 9th July 1823

Petition by Starr to the High Chancellor / Court of Chancery that he had been mislabelled in the post bankruptcy process (cheated?). The court was on his side and let him purchase all of the land he wanted.

[1839: tithe map gives Thomas Starr as owner of the brickfield with Thomas Barnes as tenant.]

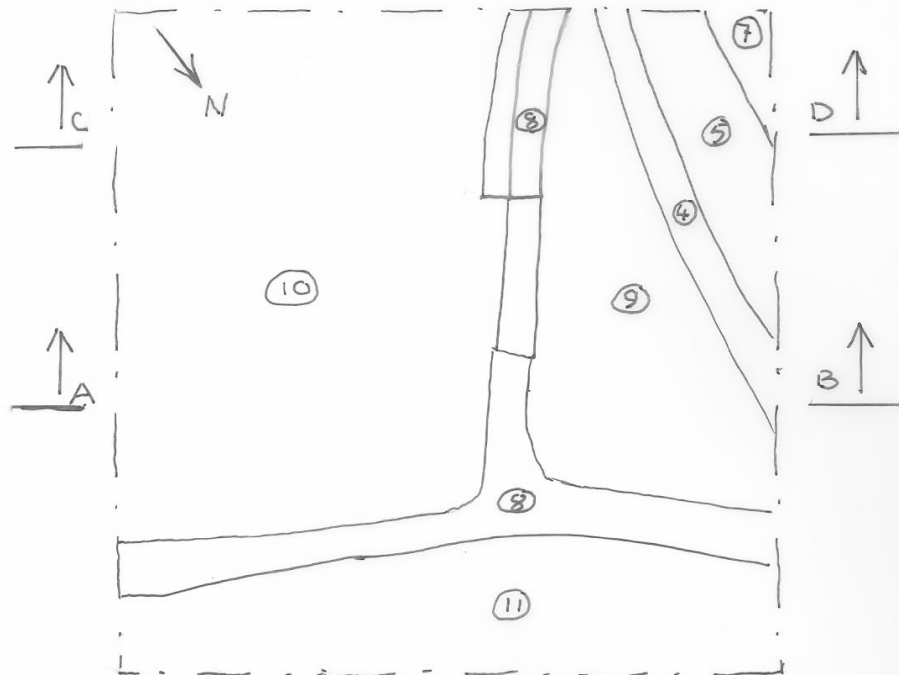
1840

In Starr's will [he dies later in the year on 18th March] he leaves everything to his son John and his widow Dells.

1846.

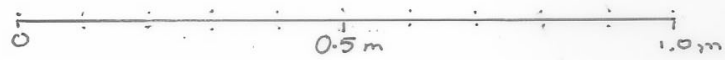
Dells Starr sells to Thomas Barnes and Henry Kingsford of Canterbury a small parcel of land 102 x 68 feet on the Mall.

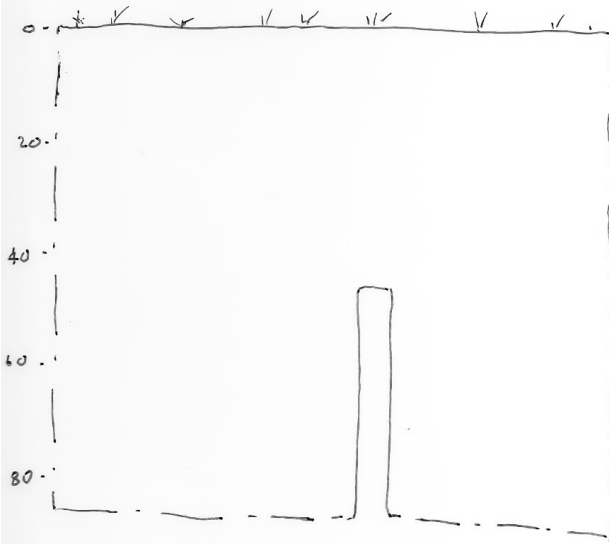
[1847 -the Crown and Anchor is built by Thomas Barnes]

Appendix 3: Scale drawings from K124

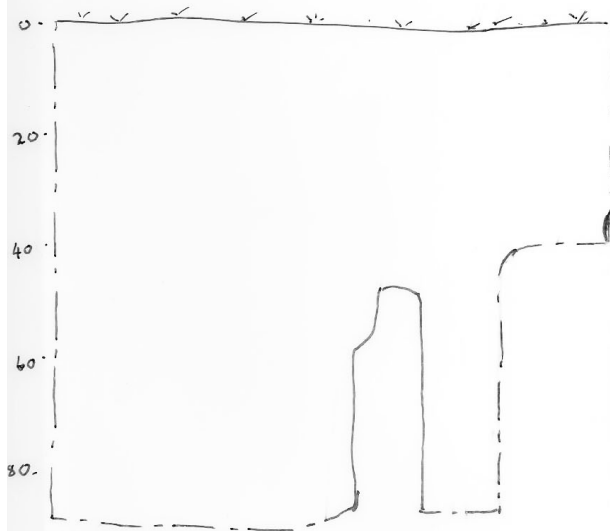
Plan

Scale 1:10





Section A-B



Section C-D

PSN 15 K124

Plan & Sections

Drawn by: S. Miles
29.5.15Copied by: J.F. Reid
28.10.15

Scale 1:10

Appendix 4: Flints from K124

Taken from the FSARG database for flint tool finds.

Query1					
catno	sitecode	pitno	context	type	period
830	PSN15	124	6	core	EN
831	PSN15	124	6	blade	M
832	PSN15	124	6	microlith	M
833	PSN15	124	6	core?	N?
834	PSN15	124	6	double ended thumbnail scraper	LN/EBA
835	PSN15	124	4	tranchet adze	M
836	PSN15	124	4	bladelet	M
837	PSN15	124	4	microburin	M
838	PSN15	124	4	micro burin	M
843	PSN15	124	3	leaf shaped arrowhead	M/EN
844	PSN15	124	3	awl	LBA/EIA
845	PSN15	124	3	blade core?	M/EN?
846	PSN15	124	9	burin or borer	N?
849	PSN15	124	9	microlith	M
853	PSN15	124	9	awl or borer	LBA?