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The Faversham Society  
Archaeological Research Group

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Community  
Archaeology



## Searching for the Kings Manor: HSX18

### Report for Keyhole KP175

### The Abbey Physic Garden, Abbey Place, Faversham



**Fig 1: Precise digging of small keyhole pit KP175, sieving into barrows.**

**The overlooking building is the Masonic Lodge, formerly the Free Grammar School**

## 1. Introduction

The Abbey Physic Garden is nowadays one of the most beautiful and calm places in Faversham. Enclosed by ancient brick walls, paths meander amongst glossy vegetables, lovely flowers and bushes and a scatter of small lawns. It was set up in 1996 as somewhere for folk to find peace and help and it became a Charity in 2007.<sup>1</sup> The Abbey Physic Garden is run by volunteers. As a location, it is historically interesting, tucked between eastwards a footpath that leads from the former Abbey to the parish church of St Mary of Charity (known in the medieval period as the Church of Our Blessed Lady of Faversham<sup>2</sup>) and westwards Abbey Street lined with houses (see **Fig 4** for maps). Within the walls is one of Faversham's most interesting buildings, built in 1587 to rehouse the Free Grammar School founded in the Abbey in 1527 by John Cole.<sup>3</sup>

The small 1m x 1m keyhole pit KP175 was dug in a single day as a quick investigation of the potential of this site for archaeology. Some experts think that in Anglo Saxon times (AD500-1066) when Faversham was a Royal Manor, the actual King's Manor House was north of the parish church of St Mary of Charity.<sup>4</sup> The major excavation in 1965 prior to the building of the new Grammar School (see **Fig 4a**) revealed a lot of important archaeology, Roman and Medieval<sup>5</sup>, but no Anglo-Saxon. The same is true of the many small-scale excavations in the area between St Marys and the Abbey Barns to the north<sup>6</sup>, some carried out by FSARG for the same reason as in 2018 - find the Kings Manor! The Abbey Physic Garden had not been investigated before so this was an ideal place to take a quick look as part of our Manor hunt, especially as in 2008/9 a possible sunken featured building was found as part of a pre-construction excavation on the corner of Church Street and Abbey Street, only several hundred metres away.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Background

### a) Geography

This level plot lies on the gentle slope downhill to the north, at a height of around 7.7m. There are no springs in the immediate area.

### b) Geology

The gentle downward slope to the north is related to underlying chalk dipping northwards to disappear under Thanet Beds and then under London Clay. Overlying the chalk, however, is a layer up to 2-3m thick of superficial deposits, laid down during the last major glaciation. The superficial deposits are important for human settlement.

In this part of Faversham, the superficial deposits are mainly distinctive yellow-brown Head Brickearth, often overlying a gravel superficial deposit. The Kentish Stock brick industry flourished in the Faversham area between around 1850 and 1920, and large areas around and in the town under later housing development have been 'dug off', removing all except the most recent and most ancient archaeology.<sup>8</sup> In the LIDAR map in **Fig. 2a**<sup>9</sup>, the large 'excavations' in the lower centre are 'dug off' areas. Central areas have, however, escaped this destruction due to their pre-1860 enclosure of plots. **Fig 2b**<sup>10</sup> shows that the most recent superficial deposit in this area is alluvium in the Westbrook and Cooksditch valleys.

<sup>1</sup> Faversham News April 15<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> 2021 p 3.

<sup>2</sup> Harrington D 2018 'Peace, Patronage and the Hand of God' p 105 in Reid 2018 *Faversham in the Making* Oxbow Books: Oxford.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob E 1774 *History of Faversham* republished by the Faversham Society 1974 Cassell Ltd: Sheerness.

<sup>4</sup> Owen John and others pers.comm.

<sup>5</sup> Philp B 1968 *Excavations at Faversham, 1965* First Research Report of the Kent Archaeological Research Groups Council Jarvis: Crawley.

<sup>6</sup> For example, FSARG's Test Pits 31,32,33,35 on [www.favershamcommunityarchaeology.org](http://www.favershamcommunityarchaeology.org) Excavation Reports.

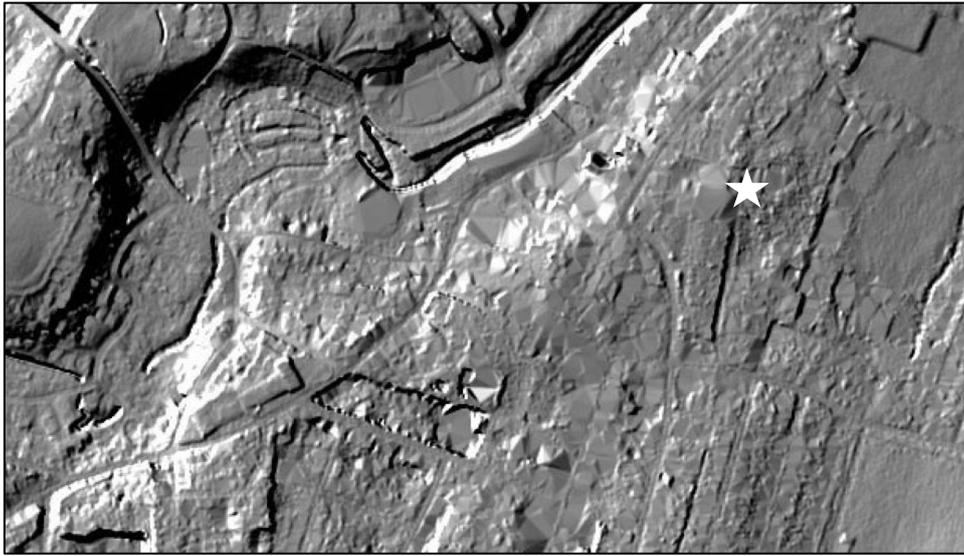
<sup>7</sup> SWAT Archaeology 2009 'Former Whitbread Training Centre, Abbey St, Faversham'. SWAT Archaeology: Faversham.

<sup>8</sup> TWIST S 1995 *Stock Bricks of Swale* Sittingbourne Society: Sittingbourne.

<sup>9</sup> LIDAR map of Faversham area DEFRA.

<sup>10</sup> British Geological Survey, 1: 50 000 series. Faversham: England and Wales Sheet 273.

The Cooksditch valley lies just to the east of this area. Happily, the Abbey Physic Garden is not in a dug-off area so its archaeology should still be there.



**Figure 2a: The LIDAR map shows the relief of the land in Faversham town centre, with the 'dug off' areas showing up very clearly.**

☆ shows the location of KP175.



**Fig 2b: Geology map solid and drift.**

**Blue: Thanet Sands**  
**Orange: Head Gravels**  
**Light Green: Chalk**  
**Yellow: Head brickearth**  
**Cream: Alluvium**

### c) Historical background.

The development (or lack of it) of this enclosed space over recent times is shown in the map regression (d). The only building of importance was the school, a timber-framed building supported on wooden pillars originally with an open ground floor, built in 1587. This Elizabethan building remained in use as a school till 1879, when much larger premises were erected in St Ann's Road. For a few years it was used as dwellings, and its condition began to deteriorate. Fortunately, the town's Masonic Lodge of Harmony was seeking a permanent home of its own, and in 1887 bought it and saved it from decay. The first-floor schoolroom was altered as little as possible, and extra accommodation was provided by walling in the covered playground at ground-floor level. Graffiti of many kinds survives on the outside walls and carved into the wood of preserved desks. A fascinating account of the Free Grammar School can be found in Edward Jacob's *History of Faversham* published in 1774, pages 55-59 and in Wikipedia.

During medieval times, this plot was just beyond the Abbey precinct wall. It is not known how it was used but building on this site is unlikely. Relations between Faversham Abbey and the Parish Church were

often difficult and sometimes tumultuous<sup>11</sup> so this would have probably been a buffer zone. Possible Anglo-Saxon activity has already been mentioned, although Abbey Street itself did not exist until after the building of the Abbey in AD1147. Romano-British leavings are found throughout the Faversham area and Watling Street (the 'Roman bypass') runs to the immediate south, but they are yet to be found in this immediate area.



**Fig 3:**

The old Grammar School building from the footpath showing the wooden pillars, the 19<sup>th</sup> century walling-in of the open area and, to the left, the 17<sup>th</sup> century brick wall with ex-Abbey stone at its base.

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<sup>11</sup> Harrington D 2018 op.cit. p105.

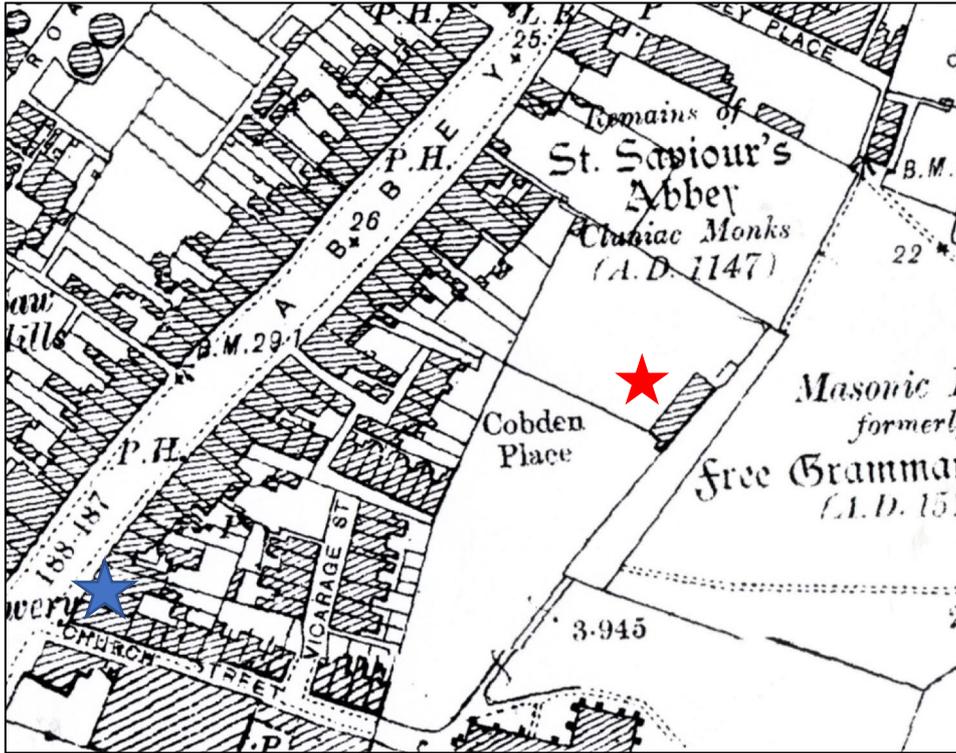
**d) Fig 4: Map regression**

The red star ★ is the location of KP175. The blue star ★ shows the location of a possible SFB (Grubenhaus), Early to Mid-Anglo-Saxon in date.



**a) OS map 2019**

On this map the Abbey Physic Garden is very clearly shown, with its layout of paths, buildings and a pond. The largest of these buildings is the Masonic Lodge for Faversham, a separate organisation to the Garden which is a charity. The wall facing the footpath running north-south beside is of 17<sup>th</sup> century brick with a lower 1m of stone blocks derived from the demolished Faversham Abbey which was close by. To the east of the footpath is the huge complex of the co-ed Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, built in 1965, with the open area to the north the playing fields. Archaeology carried out in those playing fields before the building of the school uncovered not only the vast Abbey, burial place of King Stephen, but also a modest Roman villa and evidence for Late Iron Age settlement. To the west is Abbey Street which you will see in all these maps. To the south is St Mary of Charity, one of Kent's largest parish churches.



### b) OS 1907 map

There are few differences with 2019 map (a). Outbuildings exist near Abbey Place that have disappeared by 2019, and the Masonic Lodge label acknowledges the former function as a free grammar school. There is, however, no sign of the modern grammar school or buildings on the APG.



### c) OS map 1871

This shows the layout of the APG area. The area just to the north is gardens and orchards. The predecessor of the Masonic Lodge function is shown here as Free Grammar School, with its founding date of 1527 (this building is actually post reformation). The complex of small, terraced cottages around Vicarage St have not yet been built – the building in that garden is presumably the Vicarage. Abbey Street has changed little except that some properties have been subdivided since then.



d) In this 1842 tithe map, north is towards the bottom of the map. In all the other maps it is, as usual, towards the top.

	Use	Owner	Resident
298	House & garden	Daniel Pay	Himself
299	House & garden	Nathaniel Ward	Himself and others
300	House & garden	Nathaniel Ward	Himself and others
301	House & garden	James Hedgcock	Himself
302	House & garden	Executors of John Fairbanks	William Coleman and others
<b>303</b>	<b>House &amp; garden</b>	<b>Executors of John Fairbanks</b>	<b>William Coleman and others</b>
304	House & garden	Executors of John Fairbanks	William Coleman and others
305	House, buildings & meadow (Abbey Lands)	Charles Lawson	John Chambers
665	Latin School and playground	Trustees of the Faversham Latin School	Reverend Birt

#### The 1842 tithe map

This fascinating map numbers the plots of land and gives details in an accompanying document, shown in the table above. Note that the Free Grammar School was at this earlier stage called the Latin School and run by a Reverend. House 303 has a huge garden (now the APG) and a large property with courtyard - compare this with this 2019 map (a).



**e) The earliest map of the Abbey Physic Garden – Jacob's map of 1774**

This map is too small scale to see individual plots but is extremely useful for a wider view of this area nearly 250 years ago. At this stage in Abbey Street, housing only goes up to the Abbey Gatehouse (Arden's house nowadays). The APG is shown as a laid-out garden even then, with a building that must be the Free Grammar School. On this map the footpath across the fields can clearly be seen, as can the rectangular Shooting Meadow.

### 3. Location of pit

As can be seen in the cover photograph, KP175 was dug just to the west of the masonic Lodge. This location was quite close to the footpath (possibly an ancient routeway) and also interfered the least with the garden itself.

### 4. 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 masonic Lodge. 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. The keyhole was excavated to just under 1m depth. All excavated soil was rough sieved, and the spoil heap scanned using a metal detector. Finds were set aside for each context and special finds were given three dimensional coordinates, where possible, to pinpoint the exact find spot. Any features revealed would be carefully recorded. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

### 5. The findings

The turf was removed and labelled as context [1]. The next layer [2] was a grey-brown silty clay soil with many holes, probably root runs. At around 28cm the colour changed to a yellowy colour with a higher clay content, context [3]. At around 33cm the soil became even more yellow and a new layer context [4] was identified. This context had flecks of chalk and was quite damp. Because this was a one-day dig, digging was concentrated in the north west corner, see **Fig 5**. Eventually, at around 0.9m what looked like proper brickearth, yellowy-red in colour was identified as context [5]: because of time shortage and safety issues, this was only taken down about 5cm. [5], unlike [4], did not contain chalk flecks.

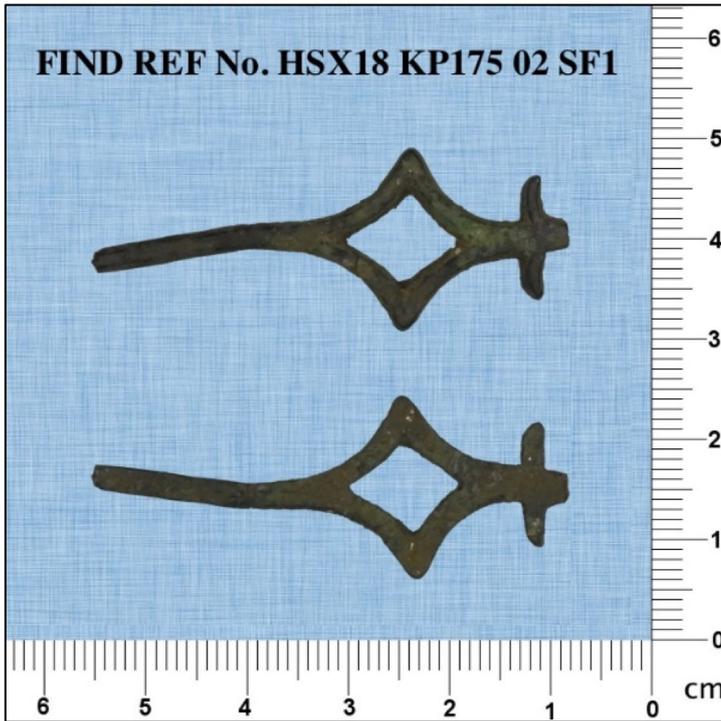


**Fig 5:**

This shows the whole section downwards. The marked change in colour between [3] and [4] is showing, we think, a change from a farming use [4] to a more domestic garden use [3], [2]. A big change from [4] to [3] is the use of chalk to lighten the upper soils. The distinctive orangey-brown colour of [5] at the base of the pit is the characteristic colour of raw brickearth. See **Appendix 4** for an interesting comparison.

This pit was not rich in finds and all those found were retained. The pottery found is shown in **Appendix 2**. Context [2] contained the most pottery (though only 112g), mostly early modern redwares in small sherds. Context [3] contained single sherds of Tyler Hill (medieval AD 1225-1400) and early medieval shelly ware (AD1000-1225). [4] contained a single sherd of redware.

Other finds included small pieces of clay pipes (Post medieval- early modern) in contexts [2], [3] and [4], and tiny amounts of coal and clinker in all contexts. In contexts [3] and [4] some finished flint tools were found (see **Appendix 3**).



**Fig 6: Small Find**

Only one small find was identified. This was a small, copper alloy artefact, probably a casket key. This probably dates to the early postmedieval period when the Free Grammar School was in full swing.

## 6. Interpretation

This was a straightforward pit, with no special features such as post holes just accumulating layers of worked soil. Small traces of post medieval finds such as clay pipes and coal cinders were found right down to context [5]. The presence of medieval and early medieval pottery in context [3], however, does take activity back to the end of the Anglo-Saxon period (AD1000) but sadly there was no sign of the earlier Anglo Saxons, let alone the Kings Manor.

## 7. Final comments

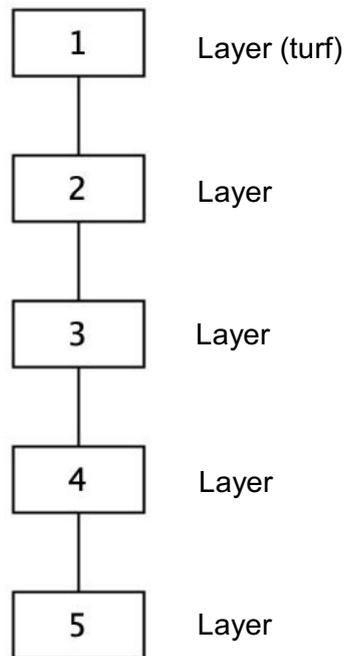
It was a pleasure to work in this beautiful and historic environment.

## 8. Acknowledgments

Great thanks to the Trustees of the Old Grammar School Charity Faversham CIO for giving us permission to carry out this dig. We are only sorry that we did not find anything more exciting! Also, big thankyou to the volunteers, especially the garden manager.

**Dr Pat Reid.**

**16<sup>th</sup> April 2021.**

**Appendix 1: Harris Matrix for KP175**

## Appendix 2: Pottery Chronology

(Weights in grams)

CAT code	Dates AD	Contexts					Total
		01	02	03	04	05	
Pre	Pre 43						0
Rom	43 - 410						0
EMS	410 - 700						0
MLS	700 - 850						0
LS	850 - 1050						0
EM	1050 - 1225			11			11
HM	1225 - 1400			9			9
LM	1400 - 1550						0
PM	1550 - 1800		10				10
RED	1550 - 1900		31		6		37
EM	1800 - now		63	4			67
Uni	any						0
<b>Totals</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>134</b>

CAT Codes:

Pre: prehistoric (more detailed sheet needed if necessary)

Rom: Roman

EMS: Early-mid Anglo-Saxon

MLS: Mid-late Anglo-Saxon

LS: Late Anglo-Saxon

EM: Early medieval

HM: High medieval

LM: Late medieval

PM: Post medieval

RED: Redware 1550-1900

EM: Early modern

Uni: Unidentified

**Appendix 3: Lithics**

Catalogue No.	Context	Type	Qualifier 1	Subtype	Period
-	4	scraper	side, end		Palaeolithic
-	3	scraper	nose & end		?
-	3	microlith	toothed		Mesolithic
-	3	chopper		crusher	Palaeolithic

**Appendix 4: An end of excavation photo from Test Pit 31 in the garden of the property adjoining the Abbey Physic Garden to the north.**



**Excavation TP31**

The layers in this are very similar to those of KP175. The natural brickearth at the base of this pit is especially striking. The black vertical tunnels in the brickearth are worm holes. Note the chalk flecks in the mid to upper layers.