

Understanding Ospringe

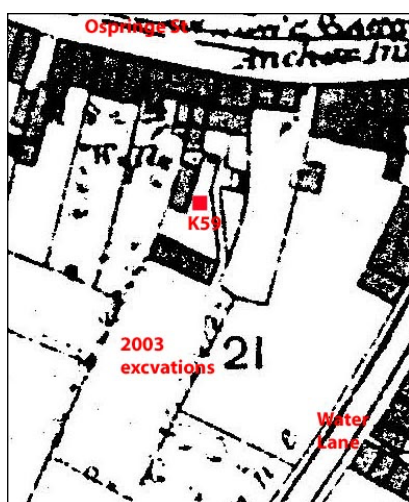
Report for Keyhole Pit 59

Former Anchor Public House, 33 Ospringe Street, Faversham.

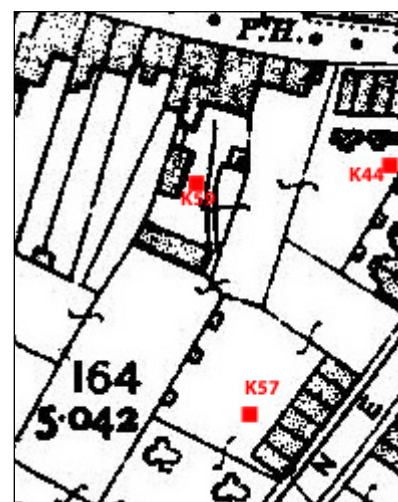
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1. Introduction

This keyhole pit was in the back garden of the former Anchor pub in Ospringe Street. The building, a former coaching inn, is Grade 2 Listed and dates from around 1790-1820.¹ The garden, now mostly laid down to grass and flowerbeds, contains an unusual Victorian bowling pavilion.



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig 1: (a) Location of K59 in 1907².
(b) Location of K59 in 1865³.
(c) Rear of the former Anchor pub and garden with K59.

¹ Swale Borough Council c 1990 *Townscape Survey: Ospringe Village*

² OS 1907 Sheet XXXIV Scale: 1:2500

³ OS 1865 (1904 reprint) Sheet XXXIV Scale 1:2500

2. Location of Pit

The large garden gave us the opportunity to sink the pit centrally in the lawn, some distance from the rear of the house. However, we very soon uncovered an underground pipe running diagonally in the western side of the pit, so it was necessary to shift our position a little to the east and re-measure our square metre, which luckily just fitted in now between the underground pipe and the garden footpath.

3. The Procedures

The 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. This all had to be repeated when it became necessary to shift the pit 40cm to the east of the original site. Turf was removed carefully from the square, rolled and set aside in plastic bags. The pit was then hand excavated using single contexts. It was decided to conduct a “sample only” excavation of context [01], as it seemed to be identical to other pits that we had dug nearby, having a top layer of fine, ashy soil. A 10cm quadrant was dug out carefully and sieved, and the rest of this context was removed by spade. The rest of the pit was excavated more slowly by trowel, all excavated soil was 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 co-ordinates to pinpoint the exact find spot. Any features revealed were carefully recorded. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and the turf replaced.

4. The Findings

As we had expected, the top layer was well-disturbed garden soil, fine and ashy with various small inclusions. The layer below that was a brown, clayey soil containing the usual debris that would be common to back gardens – mostly small sherds of pottery, bone, coal, shell, metal and brick fragments. This had all been churned around over the years, as evidenced by the wide spread of dates of the finds. For example, pottery sherds dating from Roman to Late Post Medieval were to be found here at similar depths. The most interesting find in this layer was a silver farthing dating to the reign of Edward I (1272-1307). A pit containing various pieces of bone had been cut into this clayey garden soil.



Fig 2: Flint and gravel layer.

At a depth of 65cm – 70cm from the top of our keyhole pit we came upon a layer of soil containing large flints (**Fig 2**) with smaller flints and then gravel beneath them. At this point we thoroughly cleaned and then photographed the pit. The clayey soil was becoming damper as we dug down, continuing to a depth of about 1m from the surface. In amongst and below the flints the finds were predominantly animal bone, stressed flint and pottery, with some worked flint. These were the most interesting group of finds, providing dating evidence and fuel for discussion on the area's prehistoric past.

Continuing to dig down, a layer of yellow clay was reached, which contained still more flints and gravel mixed in. We excavated a quadrant through this to a depth of 25cm, coming across very few finds. Only pieces of bone and well-worn pottery were in the very damp, sticky clay at this level.

Fig 3: Surface of lowest deposit.

The final surface revealed at the base of this quadrant was a yellow-brown, fine grained brick earth deposit which seemed to be free of the flints and pebbles we had come across above it. The only finds in it were extremely small pieces of bone and teeth. Excavation stopped at this point.



5. Interpretation

It would seem that the top 65cm or so of the keyhole pit contained garden soil with added household refuse and fire debris, which had been continuously churned and turned over for very many years. There was one distinct pit which had been dug into the garden to dispose of animal matter, leaving now an assortment of small pieces of bone.

Below this is the interesting layer of soil with flints, which contained the most important finds in this pit. The unusual pottery with well-defined grooves which we dug out from the soil around the flints was identified for us by experts⁴ as late Neolithic Grooved Ware dating to around 3,000 - 2,500 B.C. Other pottery which came from this context may also be of similar date. The stressed flint, also known as potboilers, is further evidence of occupation remains within this context. Also mixed in around the flints at this level were some worked flints and two large teeth. A visit to Maidstone Museum was made to compare these teeth with some they hold, and the closest match was certainly with their auroch jaw with teeth.⁵

The yellow clay with flints and gravel which we came down to beneath the Neolithic finds contained very few inclusions. Perhaps the few pieces of bone and well-worn pottery here had worked down into this context. The layer of yellow-brown fine-grained brick earth at the base of our pit would appear to be the geological natural material.

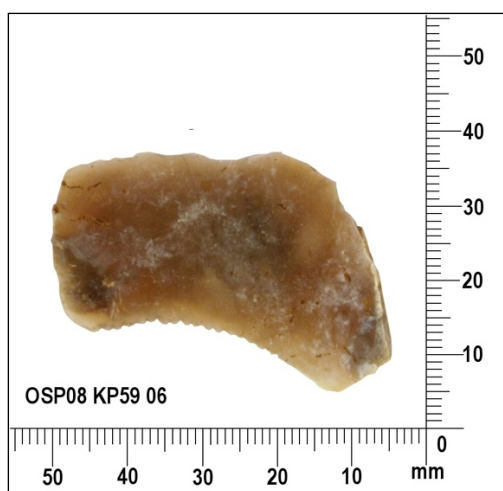
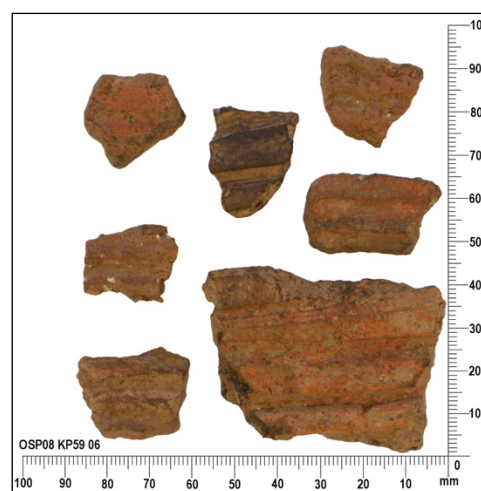


Fig 4: (a) Neolithic saw flint.



(b) Grooved ware.

⁴ Staff of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust - Keith Parfitt, Paul Bennett, Andrew Richardson – pers.comm.

⁵ Assistance from the Keeper of Natural History at Maidstone Museum is gratefully acknowledged.



Fig 4: (c) The two *Bos* (cattle type) teeth from K59 compared with an auroch's teeth (in jaw).

6. Final Comments

This was a very interesting pit, and debate on the significance of the finds from the flint layer – the grooved ware pottery, the teeth and the worked flints – could continue for some time. One wonders if we were just lucky to hit the finds that we did, or does Ospringe conceal a vast area of evidence for Neolithic and early Bronze Age occupation.

In 2003, on land behind the garden where we dug our pit, a new house was built. This required an archaeological evaluation which was undertaken by Alan Ward for the Canterbury Archaeological Trust. He dug two 2m x 10m long trenches about 30m to the south of our keyhole pit and in both of his trenches only modern, disturbed deposits were observed, producing pottery, glass and brick down to the top of natural gravel deposits.⁶ Our Neolithic occupation layer was nowhere to be seen.

So to summarize the evidence from this pit, which we must remember is a very small keyhole into the Ospringe ground, we have two general time periods represented. The first is domestic occupation related to the coaching inn and previous dwellings on and near to this site on Watling Street since Roman times. There was surprisingly little Saxon or early medieval material coming out of our pit from these contexts. The second is the Neolithic and early Bronze Age context, which gives us an image of how the area may have looked then. The proximity of the stream may be important here. It may have shifted its course, and moved material with it over the centuries. We are left with a view of the site of our pit here in prehistoric times. It would have been wet or marshy, with scrubby woodland nearby where animals would have sheltered near to their source of drinking water. The local inhabitants would have settled nearby, hunted them for food, made pottery and worked flints. The evidence is all here.

7. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Constable family of 33 Ospringe Street for permission to dig our keyhole pit in their garden. Thanks also go to the professional archaeologists who have offered helpful advice and opinions, and to Dr Ed Jarzembowski, Curator of Natural History at Maidstone Museum for letting us identify our auroch's teeth by comparison with items in their collection.

Pauline Sieben

November 2008

⁶ Ward, Alan, January 2003, "An Archaeological Evaluation on land to the rear of The Anchor, Ospringe" report produced on behalf of the Canterbury Archaeological Trust.

Small Finds



SF27

Small Finds Details

SF27: Well made flint scraper, with careful worked facets at the butt end and some secondary working on one edge. The flint is brown with a whitish patina. A flaw in the flint has lead to the loss of a facet (no patina), possibly in the excavation process. Probably neolithic, Windmill Hill type. ('Flint Implement' Brit. Mus. 1956 p70, nos 14 & 15); www.belchalwell.org.uk/artifacts-flint.asp