



Preston: A Most Peculiar Parish PSN13

A report on Keyhole Pit K100 57, The Mall, Faversham

Grid Reference: TR 01382 60613



Fig 1: Finds from context [2], KP10.

1. Introduction

Preston: a Most Peculiar Parish is a new project starting in 2013 and planned to run for at least two and probably three years. FSARG will be working in the part of the parish known as Preston Within or Preston Next Faversham. Although nowadays included in the domain of Faversham Borough, the parish of Preston has a long history of its own with some astonishingly early documentary mentions e.g. in AD822 when the parish is donated to the Archbishop of Canterbury and Christchurch.¹

St Catherines, the parish church, is undoubtedly a very ancient foundation with both archaeological and documentary evidence putting its foundation well back into the Saxon period. Given the proximity of the rich Saxon Kingsfield cemetery looted by brickfield workers and railway builders in the mid 19th century², some interesting questions are raised about this church and the area around it during these early times.

The aims in 2013 have been to examine the evidence for medieval land use along the line of Preston Street - the Mall. This is the shortest route joining Faversham town centre and the quays of the Creek to Watling Street running west to Rochester - London and east to Canterbury - Dover. This line forms the western boundary of Preston Within. Almost no proper archaeological work has been done along the Preston Street - Mall line, with only the looting (as mentioned above) and a few stray or accidental finds mostly of Roman burial material giving any information at all.³ The main aim of the work in 2013 was to uncover medieval levels at well spaced points along the line and see whether the evidence was for habitation or agriculture or both.

KP100 was located right at the extreme south eastern end of the Mall, on the corner made by the Mall and the A2 (Watling Street).

2. Geographical and historical background

a) Geography

This is a level house plot lying at an altitude of 24.7m. The plot is set back from the road at an angle to the road junction, as there is an undeveloped triangular plot of ground occupying the corner itself. This triangle is a long-established feature and is shown on the 1840 Tithe map and schedules as Waste Ground belonging to the Lord of the Manor.

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 (**Fig 2**). The map also shows a small 'island' of Thanet Sands exposed just to the east of the Mall.

Crow, writing in the mid 19th century⁵, 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 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 We also saw brickearth in the same pit (see **Fig 2**). Nevertheless, there was a brick and tile works (see next section) within the area enclosed by the four main roads and in

¹ Hasted 1798 *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent* Vol 6 pp532-49 on Preston

² Richardson A 2005 *The Anglo Saxon Cemeteries of Kent* Vol 1 BAR British series 391

³ e.g. HER TR06 SW17 Romano British flagon found on building site of Argosy Cinema. See also FSARG 2013 report for KP101 (Old Wine Vaults)

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

⁶ See 2013 report on www.community-archaeology.org.uk PSN13 KP99 and 99A

some places, there is a clear drop of the kind of depth Crow refers to. This is a situation that must be kept in mind when dealing with the drift geology of this area.

Fig 2: A pit from the eastern side of The Mall, showing conspicuous brickearth deposits below a wall foundation.



c) Known historical background

The house dates from the 1960s and there have been no major interventions in the plot since then. No 57 is part of a pair of semi-detached houses built on a corner plot belonging to a large property, Alfred House.⁷ Alfred House was still there over the wall to the east when No 57 was built, and was demolished in 1972. Only the Squash Court and adjacent building, built around the 1920s, survive today. See **Appendix 2** and a later paper on the '*Lost houses of Faversham*' for more about Alfred House.⁸

The superbly detailed 1865 map **Fig 3b** shows that the large plot to the east of Alfred House itself was laid out as a formal garden. The corner plot with which we are concerned was to the west of the house and had a large greenhouse along the north wall and gravel paths cutting the space into quarters. An even larger one is seen on the 1906 map. In 1917, it is recorded that this part of the Alfred House garden was rented to Thomas Lowton of 48 Court Street for use as a plant nursery⁹: this continued at least to the 1930s and explains the huge amount of garden type equipment found in this pit (see cover picture). On the 1968 OS map, the former nursery garden is now occupied by the pair of semis and greenhouses are lining the north wall in the eastern garden of Alfred House.

The Alfred House plot backs onto a large curtilage occupied currently by Jewsons Building Merchants. The 1865 and 1840 tithe map show exactly the same curtilage being occupied by a brick and tile works. In 1840 these were owned and run by Thomas Barnes, a name we have come across elsewhere in Preston Street.¹⁰ Thomas Barnes sold a corner of this land to Shepherd and Hilton for the building of the

⁷ David and June Bone, householders at No 57, pers.comm.

⁸ Reid P *Lost Houses of Faversham*. in prep.

⁹ 1917 conveyencing documents and other documents held in the Shepherd Neame archive, archivist John Owen.

¹⁰ See 2013 FSARG reports on KP101 (Old Wine Vaults) and KP97 (57-8 Preston Street).

Crown and Anchor to become part of the Shepherd Neame empire in 1847.¹¹ The Crown and Anchor still runs as a public house in 2013.

On the Kent HER a number of modest but early to mid 19th century houses on the eastern side of the Mall are listed, some because of their basement railings. When these houses were being built around 1840 several Roman urns were found, also a coin of Nero in the gardens of the Mendfield Almshouses.¹² The site of the almshouses is not known but is thought to have been at the north east end of the terraces.

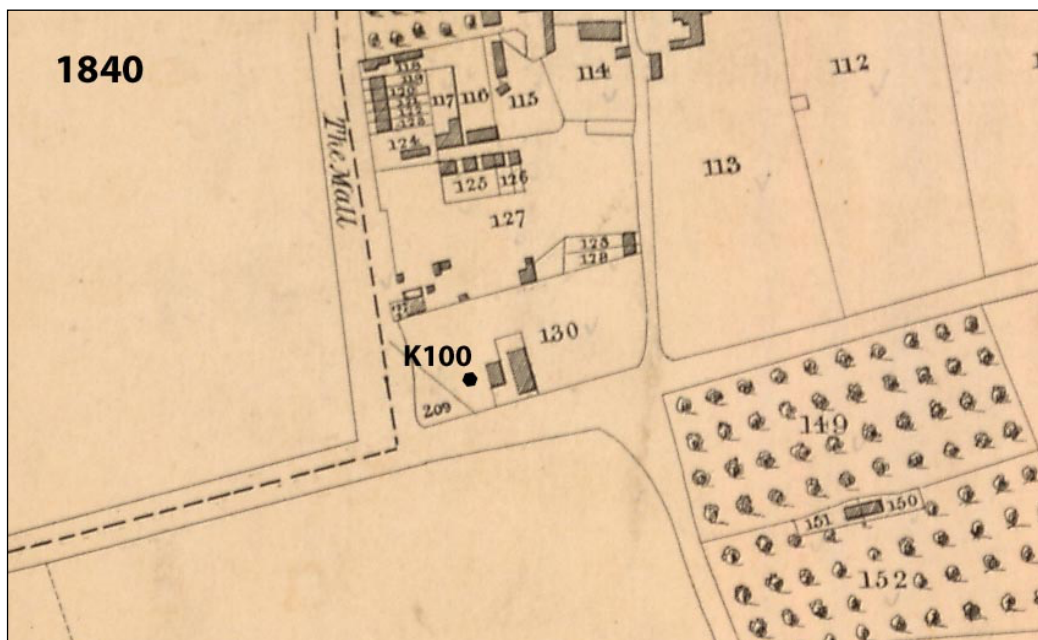


Fig 3a: 1840 Tithe map.¹³



Fig 3b: OS 1865 5 inch.¹⁴

¹¹ Stevens P 2005 *Faversham's Historic Pubs and Breweries* No 92 Faversham Papers: Faversham Society. p 23-4

¹² On the KCC HER: TR06 SW 134

¹³ Preston Near Faversham Tithe Award Schedule and maps 1840. KAS/ KCC archives.

¹⁴ OS Ordnance Survey 1865 Sheet XXXIV.10.1

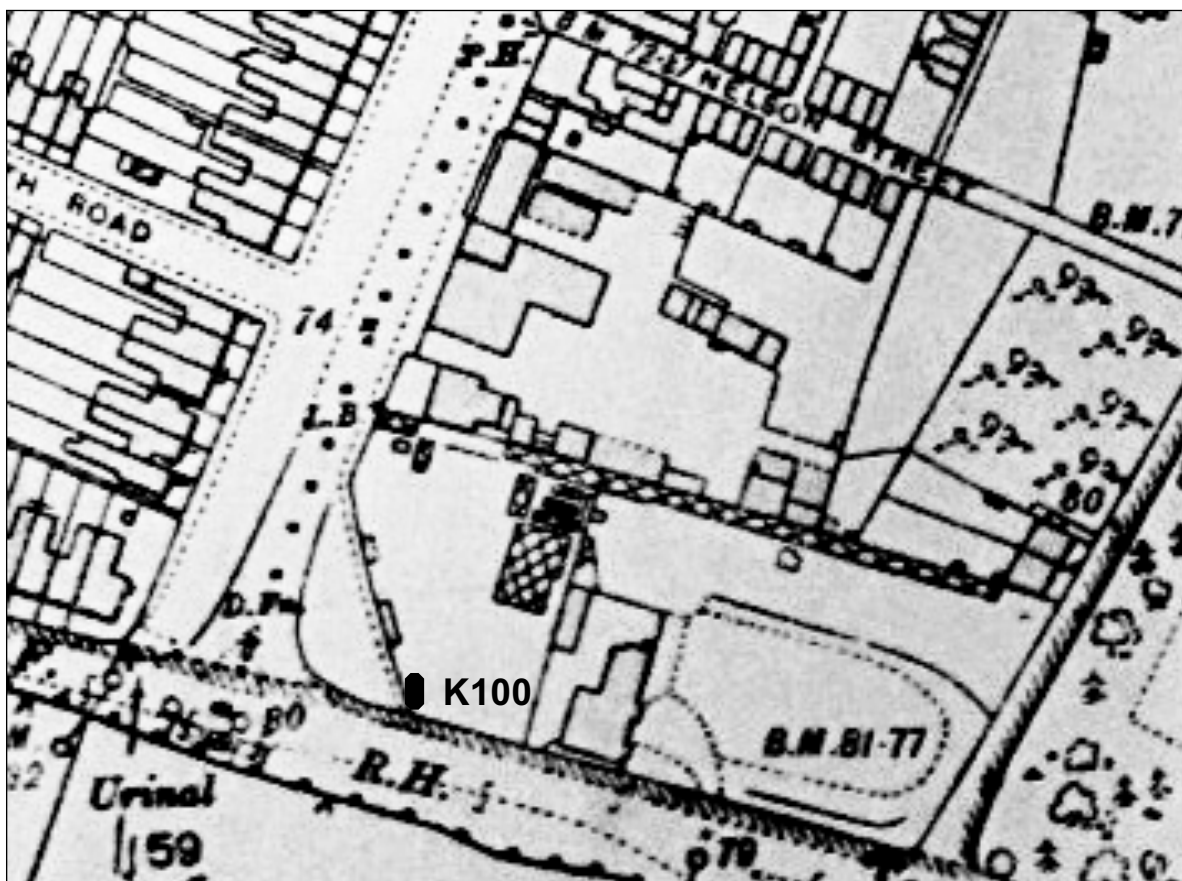


Fig 3c: OS 1906 6 inch.¹⁵



Fig 3d: OS 1968 25 inch.¹⁶

¹⁵ OS Ordnance Survey 1906 Sheet XXXIV .10

¹⁶ OS 1968 25 inches to mile, same sheet as above.

3. Location of pit

The pit was dug in the front garden of the house, into a small lawn. This, rather than the rear garden, was chosen simply to get as close as possible to the line of Watling Street.

4. The procedures

A 2m by 1m rectangle was pegged out using the planning square, and the area delineated marked with string. The position of the rectangle was recorded by measuring to mapped corners of the 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. The keyhole was excavated to the maximum depth of 1.1m. All excavated soil was sieved meticulously, and the spoil bags 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 turf replaced.

5. The findings



Fig 4: The whole trench, just before the end of excavation.

Below the turf was a thick (around 40cm) layer of masses of debris [2] - see the photograph on the front cover and in the side of the pit. The assemblage was dominated by huge numbers of flowerpot fragments. There were also considerable quantities of window glass, vessel glass, nails and the matrix was mostly ash and cinder. **Fig 5** and the cover photograph give an idea of the density of material remains (this came from a small 2m x 1m pit).

At around 38cm to 40cm, [2] abruptly gave way to a) on the west side of the pit a line of similar sized lumps of slag in a neat row [7], bordering a reddish hardened surface [8] and b) on the east side of the pit a light coloured loamy soil that although it contained a fair amount of artefactual fragments was not an actual dump as in [2]. Into a small pit [4] [5] in the surface of [3] had been put debris the same as for the whole of [2].

Layer [3], thought to be the garden soil of Alfred House's kitchen garden, was consistent for around 40cm. Below that, down to 1m under the ground, the soil was stickier, greener and more clayey [6]. The artefactual content by this stage was zero, so [6] is seen as the natural. A small sondage was put down into what looked like the base of this excavation and a very curious pattern of marks on the soil were exposed - see **Fig 6**.



Fig 5: The flowerpot assemblage from context [2].



Fig 6: The curious pattern at the base of the pit.

Very little pottery was found over and above modest amounts of 19th - early 20th century material. A few sherds of medieval were found in both [2] and [3] but this is typical residual material in almost all Faversham town contexts. One tiny piece of early medieval North Kent Shelly ware was found in [3]. The most attractive find was residual but dated to the Early Bronze Age (Beaker period) - a beautiful barbed and tanged arrowhead found around 46cm down in [3] (**Fig. 7**).¹⁷ Although broken, its wonderful craftsmanship can easily be seen.



Fig 7: Barbed and tanged arrowhead. Early Bronze Age.

¹⁷ Butler C 2005 Prehistoric Flintwork Stroud: Tempus p163-5

6. Interpretation

K100 was a straightforward pit. The top layer was conspicuously the demolition material mainly from the greenhouses which lined the north wall of Alfred House's rented out garden being used as a nursery. The garden path with its edging of slag lumps, not exactly high-class landscape gardening, was part of Lowton's nursery. The top of [3] is the top of the garden soil as it was when the dump - itself clearly the result of many smaller dumps (barrow loads?) - was created in around 1959 / 60.

Context [3]'s artefactual content is entirely consistent with it being a 19th - 20th century garden soil - 19th century pottery, coal etc. Although the residual medieval sherds perhaps suggest that there was a midden scatter deeper down, this was not at all obvious in this pit and [3] seemed to give way directly to [6], the natural brickearth.

The 'artistic' pattern under [6] was seen as the outcome of purely natural events, probably a fresh water swampy area with silting and leaf decay happening rapidly. We thought the pale leaf patterns were a kind of 'cast' where the organic material decayed and paler sand sifted into the hole. Attractive to see but more the province of the palaeontologists!

7. Final comments

This was a pleasant pit to dig, the garden well shaded from the July sun. The mass of greenhouse demolition material, although not very old, made the usual big impression on the householders who had no idea as to what was lurking under their well-kept lawn.

I personally found it very interesting to be looking closely at a corner of Faversham that I must have passed a thousand times and never really noticed. To find a posh squash court, an area of waste land owned by the Lord of the Manor and an early red-brick making brick and tile works I'd not heard of before was quite an eye opener, as was finding out about Alfred House.

8. Acknowledgments

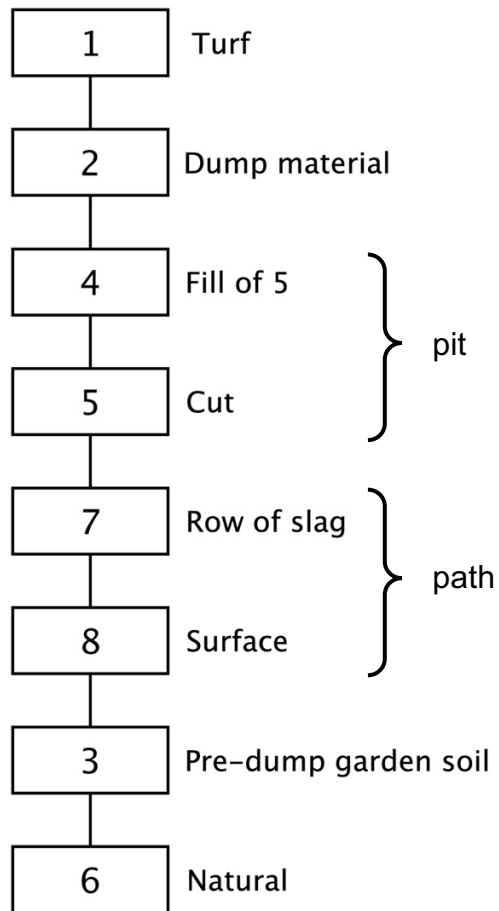
Great thanks to David and June Bone for the kind permission to dig in their pretty garden and taking so much interest in what we found. I am also very grateful to John Owen, archivist for Shepherd Neame for giving access to a lot of invaluable information about this hitherto under researched area.

Dr Pat Reid

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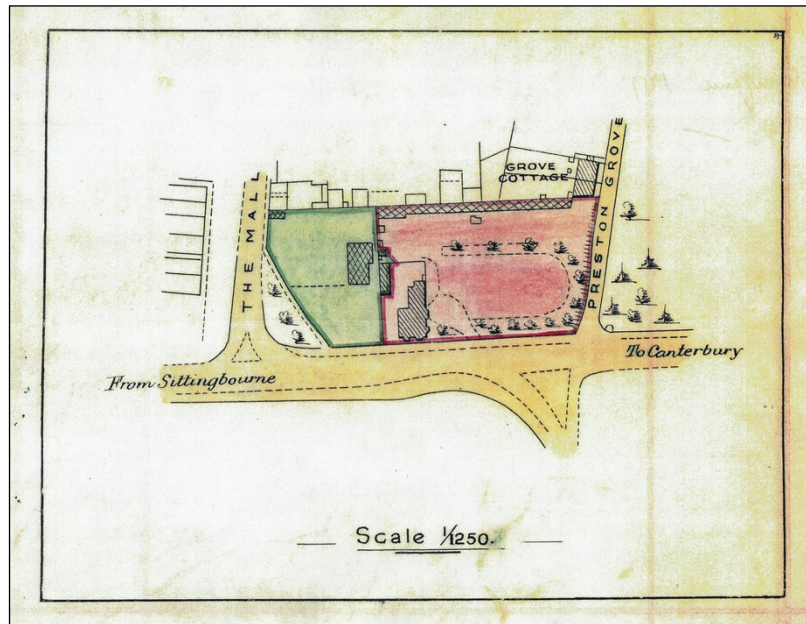
**Appendix 1:
The Harris Matrix for KP100**



Appendix 2: Alfred House

The first document by kind permission of Shepherd Neame through their archivist John Owen. The photograph with permission from Arthur Percival.

a) Conveyancing map from the settling of the estate of Percy Neame, 1917. The green shaded area occupied by Lowton's Nursery.



b) Alfred House in the 1960s. Canterbury Street / A2 in the foreground. Squash Court just visible on the left.



**Appendix 3:
Small Finds From KP100**

Small Finds No.	Context No.	Simple Name	Material(s)	Weight	Written Description	Earliest Date	Latest Date
26	02	Part of figure	Ceramic	6.59g	Part of an ornamental figure: calf of leg with boot. Leg has crazed white glaze; boot has shiny brown glaze. The artefact is solid cast with seam clearly distinguishable on boot.	1800	1900
27	01	Button	CuA + Fe	3.50g	A decorated button or press stud, heavily corroded by steel spring and its housing detached from face piece, making three fragments in two pieces.	1880	1950
28	02	Wire	Glass and copper	1.47g	Glass support for bulb or valve filament - three wires are embedded in glass with 2 detached wires.	c.1890	1900
29	02	Collar stud	Bone	0.43g	Bone stud of the shirt collar type, but small and more likely a button, made as a single piece in near 'H' cross-section, although one leg shorter than the other. There is no decoration. May be a dress shirt or lady's blouse button. Although detachable short collars are said to have been invented in New York in 1827, this collar stud may be earlier and from a shirt or blouse rather than a shirt collar (History of Dress Shirts, Wikipedia).		
31	04	Bottle	Glass	35.8g with dirt inside	Small simple moulded bottle of type used for perfume, made in a two-piece mould (from flashing lines). The only marking is a '6' on the base. It has an external screwed closure thread on neck with two and a half turns. The underneath is recessed with the 6 or 9 at one end. No closing cap found, and dirt inside remains in situ.	1850	1950