



**A desk top and nonintrusive field survey
of the St Anns area,
Faversham, Kent
Centroid GR: TR 00923 61265
Site Code: HMS12
May 2012**



**Looking
eastwards
across
Faversham**

Introduction

In 2012, the Faversham Society Archaeological Research Group (FSARG) conducted a part-desktop, part-non-intrusive fieldwork activity with the aim of collating information to construct a chronological narrative of the area now known as the St Ann's estate, and in doing so, to identify possible areas for future investigation. The area of research lies to the south and east of the Davington plateau along the path of the Westbrook Valley.

The process utilised resources and techniques such as map regression, aerial photography, HER (Historic Environment Records) records, other existing local documentation, and first-hand knowledge.

Physical

The area lies in a natural valley in which fresh spring water flowed (and still flows to a lesser extent) from a number of different sources. Water flowed through the area from the Westbrook Valley (initiating from springs past White Hill in Ospringe), from the Willow Beds (which appear to have been artificially diverted into this area), and also from a series of natural springs in the locale. Water certainly appears to be the primary pre-requisite for the land use here.

The sides of the valley to the west and also overlooking the stream from the Willow Beds to the south are very steep, ranging in height from around 17m to just above sea level, around 3m. It is likely that these slopes have been artificially steepened by cutting back to increase the width of the valley. The eastern (town) side of the valley slopes upwards much more gradually.

Both the western and eastern sides of the valley are basically Upper Chalk, which is dipping northwards. To the west, the Chalk is capped by Thanet Sands, themselves capped in places by Head brickearth and gravel. On the lower eastern bank the chalk is very close to the surface, with some small deposits of brickearth in places. The valley floor is filled with recent alluvium¹.

Development Phases

This area has seen a number of phases of development over the years:

- (a) Medieval watermills(?) prior to c1550
- (b) Home Works gunpowder manufacturing c1550 – c1820 main period, some activity until 1934
- (c) 'Stately Home' period 1815 – 1934
- (d) Watercress beds mid 1930s – late 1960s²
- (e) St Anns estate late 1960s – present

The following maps (**Figs 1a-f**) show the changing landscape from 1774 to 1960. For reference, Lower road is shown in green, and the water courses shown in blue. It should be noted however that the earlier maps are somewhat vague regarding the watercourses, with incomplete details.

¹ British Geological Survey. England and Wales Sheet 273 1:50 000 Series

² KCC HER TR 06 SW 1044

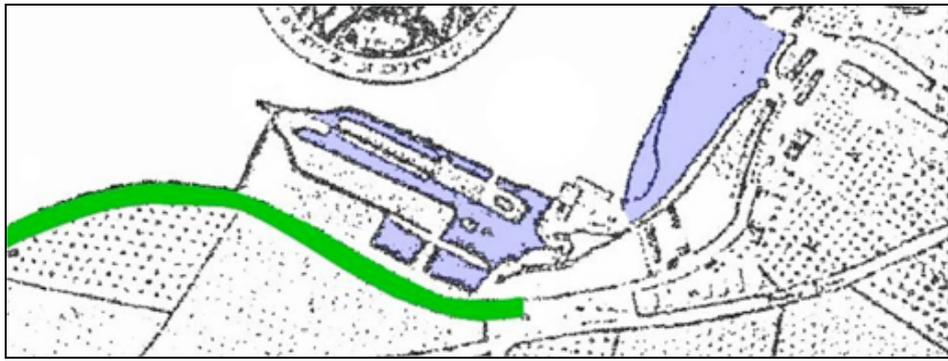


Fig 1a: Jacobs Map of 1774³



Fig 1b: 1795⁴



Fig 1c: 1842 tithe map⁵.

³ Jacobs E 1774 Map of Faversham

⁴ OS 1795 Surveyors 1st Draft Sheet 112 Faversham



Fig 1d: 1865⁶

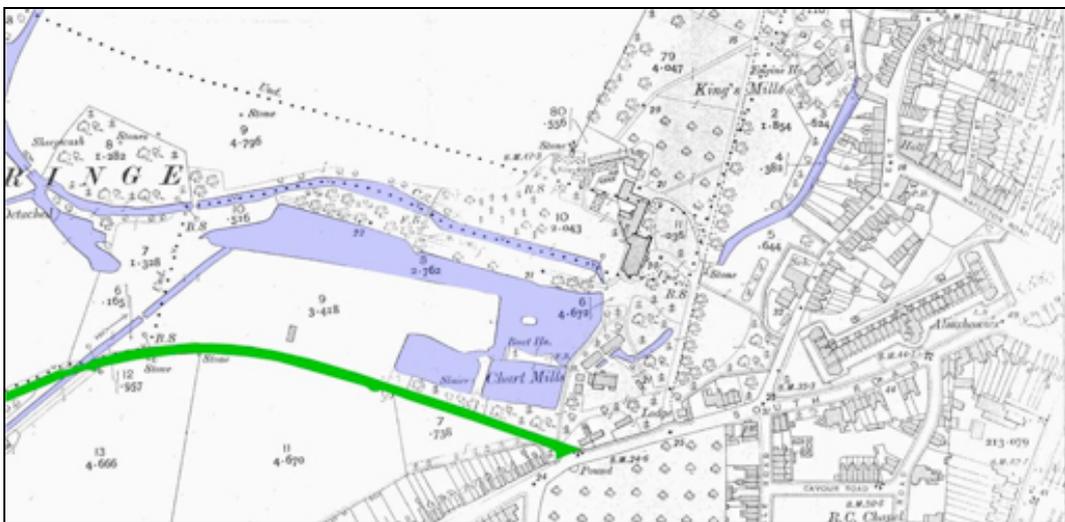


Fig 1e: 1907⁷

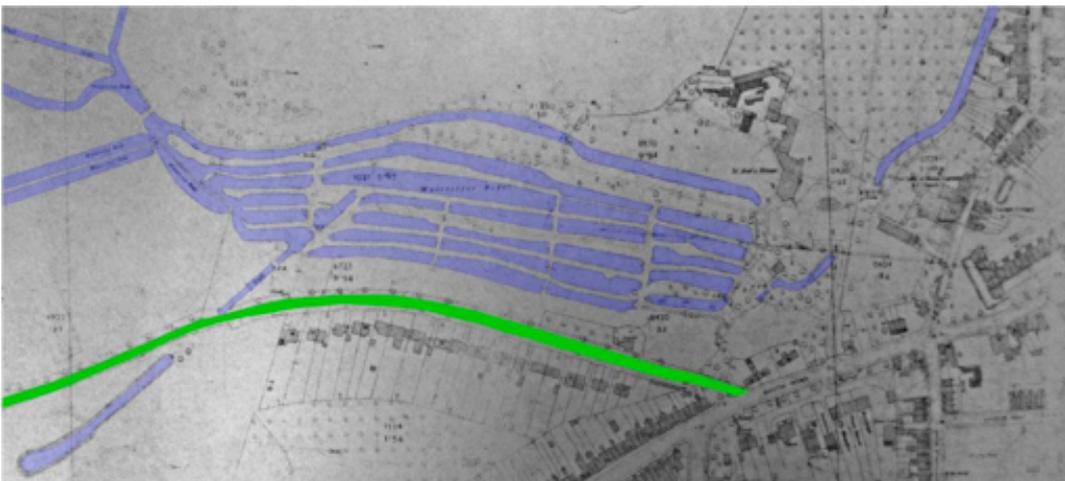


Fig 1f: 1960⁸

⁵ KAS Kent Tithe Maps

⁶ OS 1865 (1904 reprint) Sheet XXXIV Scale 1: 500

⁷ OS 1907 Sheet XXXIV Scale 1:2500

⁸ OS 1960 Sheet TR 0161 SW Scale 1:1250

Phase (a) Medieval Watermills

Prior to the start of gunpowder manufacturing (which is believed to have started around the reign of Elizabeth I 1558 – 1603 according to Edward Jacob's account of the *History of the town and port of Faversham* published in 1774), there is very little known. Archaeological excavations carried out by FSARG in Tanners Street (which lies adjacent and to the south of this area) did however provide evidence of tanning dating back to the 13th Century. See the FSARG reports TP17A & TP25 on our website <http://www.community-archaeology.org.uk> in the *Hunt The Saxons* section.

Phase (b) Home Works Gunpowder Manufacturing

The earliest evidence known of major industry here is the gunpowder Home Works factory. Gunpower production took place in Faversham over three factories, Home, Oare and Marsh Works, with Home Works being the first of these three sites. The full extent of Home Works is shown in **Fig 2**. Home Works incorporated a series of mills - Ospringe, Chart, and King's⁹.



Fig 2: The extent of Home Works towards the end of the 18th Century is shown in the shaded area.

Home Works was situated on the western side of the town along the path of the Westbrook. Water was an essential component in the gunpowder manufacturing process, and was used not only as a power source to operate the mills, but also in the ingredient mixing process and for the transportation of powder during its production stages, and subsequently for its onward journey from Faversham creek. Water was provided from two main streams that converged into this area -one coming from just beyond Whitehill in Ospringe, the other from the Willow Beds to the north west of the site (which appears to have been directed along an artificial waterway). Further local springs would have also contributed to the overall water supply. The water was stored in millponds to the west of Chart Mills¹⁰ (to the north of Lower Road). These can be seen on all of the maps from the earliest 1774 edition through to the 1907 map (see Figs 1a - 1f).

⁹ Percival, A.J. 1986 *The Faversham Gunpowder Industry and its Development* 3rd Edition (augmented). Faversham Papers No4. The Faversham Society: Faversham p2 - 10.

¹⁰ KCC HER TR 06 SW 45

Home Works was initially a private concern, but was acquired by the government in 1760 to become the Royal Gunpowder Factory. After the Napoleonic wars were over in 1815, explosives production was much reduced and most of it moved to the Marsh Works, along the Faversham - Oare Road. Some production at Home Works continued until 1934.

Chart Mills fell into disrepair in the 1930s but was rescued and restored by the Faversham Society and re-opened to the public in April 1969. The mills are believed to be the oldest of their kind in the world. In addition to the Mills, there are a number of other features from the Home Works factory that can still be seen today;

- A number of Yew and Sycamore trees can be found marking part of the original boundary by No.10 Finlay Close. GPS GR TR 00841 61349
- Tooled stone blocks retain an earth bank in the same area. The stone blocks appear to be the same as those used in the boundary wall along South Road, and could well be part of the landscaping of St Ann's house. GPS GR TR00920 61345
- In Lower Road, part of the brick arch (**Fig 3**) can be seen where the water originally flowed under the bridge. This can be found in the children's play area. GPS GR TR 00594 61229
- **Fig 4** shows the 1888 'Corner House' located on the junction of Lower Road and Wallers Road which marks the western extent of Home Works GPS GR TR 00394 61140
- **Fig 5** shows 'White House' - a charcoal-burner's 17th Century cottage located a few metres further east in Lower Road ¹¹. GR TR 0044 6114
- One of the Works boundary stones can be found outside of No. 67 Lower Road shown in **Fig 6**. Three further boundary stones¹² can be found close to Chart Mills (two outside the entrance to the Mills and a further one along the Westbrook Walk). GPS GR TR 00635 61241
- In the rear garden of the same property can be found one of the footbridges that spanned a mill leat (**Fig 7**). GPS GR TR 00653 61256
- Another reminder of the gunpowder era is the cottage to the south west of the park entrance in South Road named *Gun Cotton Cottage*.



Fig 3: Showing the culvert running under Lower Road. Today this is normally dry, but serves as a surface water run-off from the M2 during periods



Fig 4: 'Corner House' on the junction of Lower Road and Wallers Road.

¹¹ KCC HER TR 06 SW 1254 listed building record

¹² KCC HER TR 06 SW 1208 (single example)

of heavy rainfall.



Fig 5: 'White House' – the 17th Century charcoal-burner's cottage in Lower Road.



Fig 6: One of the Boundary stones outside No. 67 Lower Road



Fig 7: The footbridge in the rear garden of 67 Lower Road.

Phase (c) St Ann's House – The 'Stately Home' Period.

St Ann's House was built in 1764, primarily as a residential dwelling for use by the Home Works factory Storekeeper, and replaced an earlier dwelling that existed there¹³. The rather imposing 18th Century house is shown in all its splendour in **Fig 8** in its picturesque surroundings. During the time that Clement Watson-Smith (1862 – 1916) was manager, he kindly allowed local groups to use it. This was a quite amazing house in a lovely setting and must have been a real status symbol reflecting the success and importance of the Royal Gunpowder Factory.

¹³ Percival 1986 opp. cit. p3



Fig 8: Three views of St Ann's House (photos courtesy of George Hawkins). The top two photos show the front of the house from the main driveway. The lower photo is looking at it from the rear terraced gardens showing one of the original water courses.

Set in grounds to become known as St Ann's Park, the house was serviced by a driveway leading from South Road. The park was enclosed (at least partly) within a walled boundary, parts of which remain today along South Road, Tanners Street and Lower Road. The park entrance is still in use today (see **Fig 9**). The current configuration has changed somewhat with the ground level being higher than it originally was, and some of the iron railings have been removed. The gate lodge remains – now 56 South Road (see **Fig 10**).



Fig 9: The entrance to St Ann's Park.

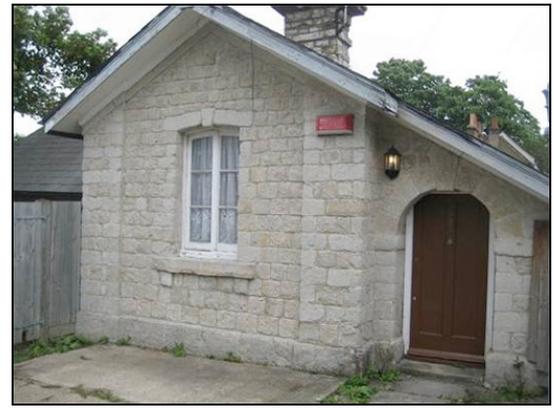


Fig10: The Gate Lodge

Fig 11 shows St Ann's House superimposed over a modern day map. The main house was situated along Stonebridge Way with its southern end close to Nobel Court, extending northwards past Finlay Close. The front entrance to the house was where No.1 Nobel Court's rear garden is (along the north-west side), with the main driveway running through the rear gardens of No.'s 1,3,5, and 7 Nobel Court before turning close to the boundary stone at Westbrook Walk and heading south to the entrance to the park in South Road. The yellow areas represent the buildings, with the lighter areas greenhouses.



Fig 11. St Ann's house overlaid on a modern map¹⁴.

In 1934 the factory closed and with it the house started on its course to its final demise, when it was demolished in 1963. Author Mary Miller recounts her time staying there with friends as a child in the 1950s...

¹⁴ OS 2009 National Geographic Database Scale 1:1250

“...You came up to it along a drive lined with millstones. Inside the front door was a big hallway, which went all over the ground floor of the house. On the left was the ballroom, but the ceiling was falling down and I wasn't allowed in there. Ahead were two reception rooms letting out onto the garden terrace.

On the right was a big kitchen complex. Most of the rooms there were too dangerous to go into, but one was safe enough to use. Upstairs were bedrooms and I was told that between the floors were layers of seashells. To the right of the house was a stable complex, and other people lived there in flats.

At the back of the house the lawn went quite steeply uphill with a big cedar tree. Halfway up the hill was a conservatory, with eagles on two pinnacles on either side of the door. At the top of the hill in some fir trees was a big ice well.

Between the house and Stonebridge Pond was an orchard. Over to the left, beyond an avenue of limes, were the watercress beds. We used to walk down there to talk to the workers in their punts...¹⁵

Mary's account depicts a rather grand house in a sad state of decline.

Phase (d) The Watercress Beds

The old millponds from the Home Works site subsequently served as watercress beds once their original use expired (which was thought to be shortly after the works ceased in 1934). The area was subdivided into long narrow ponds which can be seen in the 1946 aerial photograph in **Fig 12**.



Fig 12: Aerial photograph taken in 1946 showing the watercress beds in converted mill ponds¹⁶.

The key requirement for watercress is (not surprisingly) water, which needs to be pure and mineral-rich, so this location was perfect.

Watercress contains many vitamins and minerals, and according to The Watercress Alliance, gram for gram watercress contains more vitamin C than oranges, more calcium than milk, more iron than spinach and more folate (Vitamin B9) than bananas, with its health properties recognised nearly 2,500 years ago¹⁷.

There is currently little known about the management and ownership of these particular beds, other than a man by the name of Fred Tumber ran (at least) part of it¹⁸. We would welcome any more information

¹⁵ Percival A pers. comm

¹⁶ Aerial Photograph 1 May 1946 F/20" //541 SQ DN. KCC photographic archive

¹⁷ <http://watercress.co.uk/about/historical-facts/>

¹⁸ Ruck V pers. comm.

about this, and in particular any photographs of the watercress beds from this period (1930s – 1960s). Between the ponds were areas of grass, which allowed horses and cattle to graze there.

The watercress beds were worked up until the old millponds were filled in when the St Ann's estate was developed in the late 1960's. At this time, upstream in Ospringe, the Westbrook more or less ceased to flow and was culverted.

Phase (e) St Ann's Estate

St Ann's estate development consists of around 400 houses incorporating Lower Road, Cress Way, Beech Close, Stonebridge Way, Chart Close, Nobel Court, Finlay Close, Millstream Close and Granville Close – their names having association with the gunpowder industry period and subsequent activities. Most of the name associations are easy to recognise (such as Millstream and Chart Close etc), but others are not quite so obvious. For example, Nobel Court is named after Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite (and the man behind the Nobel Prize). Finlay Close was named after Major John Finlay, inspector of government gunpowder mills in Faversham. The origin of Granville Close is still being pursued.

Areas for Further Research

There is already a substantial amount of information known about this area during, and leading up to, the Royal Gunpowder Factory era. Possible areas for further investigation could include;

- Land usage prior to gunpowder manufacturing
- The house that was succeeded by St Ann's House
- The ownership and management of the Watercress Beds

Acknowledgements

FSARG would like to thank those that have contributed to this report, particularly Arthur Percival for much of the information on Home Works and George Hawkins for the photographs of St Ann's House.

Compiled by Mike Tillman & Dr Pat Reid

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