

The Road to Farleigh Bridge, 1st of June 1648
(The initial phase of the Battle of Maidstone)

An Archaeological Investigation



Abstract

This project looks at the events that took place in the initial stage of the Battle of Maidstone on the 1st of June 1648. In particular the project focuses on the Parliamentarians probable movements in the vicinity of East Farleigh Bridge and the Royalists defensive positions. My research not only looks at the artefactual evidence in so far as it is available, but also it is an exercise in landscape archaeology. I have also tried where I can, to tie in the archaeological evidence with the historical literature available.

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ii Note on Cover

This cannon is typical of the type used during the Civil War. Cannons were used extensively during the Civil War not only as support for the infantry but also to reduce fortifications. There were many types of cannon in use ranging from the larger Cannon Perrier weighing 3500(lb) to the light Robinet weighing just 120(lb). The cannon in the photo is probably a Demi Culverin weighing 1500(lb). The cannons main advantage was its range. It could reach over a 1,000m. The cannon not only caused actual damage to defensive positions or bodies of troops but also affected the enemies' morale.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Aims

My research aims to enhance our understanding and knowledge of the events of the skirmish at Farleigh Bridge and environs on the 1st of June 1648. I hope this is achieved by looking at the archaeology of the event including landscape archaeology. Also I am comparing the archaeology of the event against the documentary evidence to see where there are differences in the record and also where the archaeology supports the historical texts. The village of East Farleigh is located on the south side of the River Medway about two miles upstream of the town of Maidstone. The bridge crossing the river here was built in the 14th century and is considered to be one of the oldest in Kent; although it is not particularly suitable for modern traffic conditions, owing to its narrowness. It provided the main crossing point for the Parliamentary forces during the initial stages of the Battle of Maidstone.

1.2 Battlefield Archaeology

The study of fields of conflict is a relatively new discipline in archaeology. Battlefield Archaeology has been defined by Sutherland and Holst as “an all encompassing term that is popularly given to the discipline of the archaeology of ancient or historical conflict”. In addition (Dyer 1985) says that “battlefields provide a unique opportunity to study the material by products of human conflict”. Some excellent research has been done in this field such as Sutherland and Holst’s “Battlefield Archaeology - A Guide to the Archaeology of Conflict” and Sutherlands and Schmidt’s “The Towton Battlefield Archaeological Survey Project”. Peter Harringtons “English Civil War Archaeology” is also a very detailed study of the archaeology of this period.

1.3 Background to the Second English Civil War

The Second English Civil War (March to August 1648) saw a Royalist rebellion in Wales, the revolt of the fleet, a Scottish invasion and riots and discontent in towns across England. Places such as Norwich, Bury St Edmonds and London saw extensive rioting and damage. The Rioters were calling for Charles I to be reinstated as King and the disbandment of the army. Lack of coordination saw all the Royalist military operations fail and as a result was a hopeless cause for the King. The Second English Civil War was summarised succinctly by Winston Churchill in his History of the English-Speaking Peoples. He said “Kings, Lords and Commons, landlords and merchants, the city and the countryside, bishops and presbyters, the Scottish Army, the Welsh people, and the English Fleet, all now turned against the New Model Army. The Army beat the lot”.

1.4 The Situation in Kent

The Royalist rebellion began in Kent when the County Committee at Canterbury tried to stop a petition calling for the return of Charles I and the disbandment of the New Model Army. On the 21 May 1648 Royalist forces immediately moved to seize Canterbury, Rochester, Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sandwich. On the 26 May 1648 the Royalists took Dartford and Deptford. The next day the fleet declared for the King. Now with the prospect of being attacked by sea the forts at Deal, Walmer and Sandown surrendered to the Royalists. Dover Castle was also under siege. On the 29 May 1648 at Burnham Heath the Royalists made the Earl of Norwich their leader. The Earl gathered his army at Maidstone with some 2000 men posted in Maidstone itself, another 1000 sent to cover Aylesford Crossing. In addition he had 7000 men positioned at Penenden Heath.

The Parliamentarians meanwhile were not slow to act. Parliament ordered General Fairfax to march his army to Kent to deal with the rebellion. They feared that with a rebellion so close to London that the Royalist forces in Kent could be joined by Royalists from Surrey and Essex. Fairfax mustered his army at Hounslow Heath on the 27 May 1648 and by the 30th he had advanced to Blackheath. As soon as the Royalists received news of the Roundheads advance they retreated from Deptford and Dartford. The Parliamentarians then marched straight for Maidstone bypassing Rochester.

1.5 1st June 1648

In the late afternoon of the 1st of June 1648 most of General Fairfax's Parliamentary Army marched across Barming Heath. The night before they had camped at East Malling Heath having marched from Meopham. The army was made up of 4 regiments of horse and 3 regiments of foot, some 7000 men plus a number of cannon. These were hardened veterans of Cromwell's New Model Army. Advancing down the road by Barming Rectory the Parliamentarians arrived at Farleigh Bridge. The Royalists were aware that the Parliamentary Army was approaching. The written sources tell us that, "at five o'clock that afternoon somebody with a "perspective glass" saw the forces of Fairfax descending a hill on the west side of the Medway" (Abell 1901, 209). The Royalists had a small detachment posted at the bridge which according to the written sources gave a good account of itself. "At the bridge there was evidently stiff fighting" (Abell 1901, 212). The Parliamentarians eventually crossed the bridge pushing the Royalists back. As the Royalists retreated according to Abell they fought for every foot of ground. After 2 hours of hard fighting Fairfax's Army finally arrived on the outskirts of Maidstone.

2. Materials and Method

2.1 Field Visits and Walk-over Survey

I made four trips to East Farleigh to look at the route taken by the Parliamentarians from Barming Heath to East Farleigh Bridge. My first trip was to get a general feel of the area around East Farleigh where the skirmish took place. For my second trip I walked across Barming Heath and down to East Farleigh Bridge. This gave me a good impression of the landscape the Roundheads crossed and an indication of how difficult it must have been maneuvering an army of 7000 men and horses here. My third trip was to focus in particular on the possible Royalist position at St Mary's Church and to observe the landscape across which the Roundheads came. I also had a detailed look at the church and studied what looked potentially like battle scarring. For my fourth visit I focused on the area around Hermitage lane close to Barming Rail Station.

2.2 Typology

2.2.1 Cannonballs

A number of possible cannonballs have been found and I have grouped them into 3 types. The first type is the cannonball that came from the cottage at Farleigh Bridge. This is a stone cannonball made of flint and weighs 3lb's. It is approximately 10cms in diameter. This is the largest find. This cannonball may have been fired from a Minion Cannon.

The second type of cannonball is much smaller with a measurement of 4cms and weighing less than 1lb. The cannonballs found at Hermitage lane, Bydews Farm, The Old Vicarage and St Helens Lane all appear to fall into this category. These may have been fired from either a Falconette or Robinette Cannon.

The third type are the cannonballs found at Aylesford which were iron and approximately an inch and a half in diameter. Again these are likely to have been fired from a Falconette or Robinette Cannon.

2.2.2 Musketballs

We have only one actual possible musketball find from Hermitage Lane. It is made of stone and is approximately 18mm in diameter. Musketballs tended to be lead but occasionally stone was used. Another musketball is said to have been found near Priory Close but I have not seen this. Further musketballs are also thought to have been found in the Barming area but this has not been verified.

2.2.3 Gunflint

One piece of gunflint has been found off Hermitage Lane and has been identified as of the Civil War period. It is about 2.5cms in diameter.

2.2.4 Farleigh Bridge

East Farleigh Bridge is described by the Historic Environment Record as “a 14th century road bridge of Kentish ragstone spanning the River Medway between Barming to the north and East Farleigh to the south. It was originally built with four large, pointed arches but a smaller arch was added later, spanning land. It is scheduled as an Ancient Monument and considered to be the finest bridge in Southern England. It is a perfect example of medieval design and workmanship”

The bridge at East Farleigh is similar in type to the bridge at Teston which is described as follows “Teston Bridge is a scheduled Ancient Monument Grade 1. It is one of a series of fine medieval bridges across the River Medway. The south eastern end of the bridge is in the West Farleigh parish. The bridge has a large pointed centre arch with a smaller arch each side of it. These were built in the 15th century or earlier”

2.2.5 St Mary's Church

In the Historic Environment Records, the following is written of St Mary's Church. “The church is known as St. Mary's. The tower is Early English; many of the windows of the church are Decorated and Perpendicular; the porch is old. (3) The church comprises west tower, nave, chancel, north and south aisles and south porch. It has a shingled broach spire. A modern north vestry adjoins the chancel. List of vicars within the church commences in 1279 AD. The nave and aisles are a rebuilding of the 19th c. incorporating some of the original windows. The chancel and Lady Chapel have 14th/15th c. windows and early timber roofs. The original west door to the nave, now within the tower, has chevron ornament around the arch; a fragment of long and short work is discernible at NW corner of the nave. GP A0/59/19/7 from south of Tower. The church is in use for ecclesiastical purposes”.

The church is similar to churches found in the area for example St Margarets Barming is described as follows:-

“The church of East Barming is dedicated to St. Margaret. It consists of nave, aisle and chancel with a spire steeple. The church was 'repaired and ornamented' c. 1785. [Gives details of patronage, et from temp. Stephen]. (2)

In the east wall of the chancel are the three small single round-headed lights of 12th c. date partially restored, and in the south wall of the nave is a small ogee-headed cupid window, probably early 13th c. The tower is 14th c. and the arcade and north aisle and opening into the

tower are 18th/19th c. work. There is an early south porch. List of Rectors begins with 13?? and 1347 AD. The vicars wife stated the church to contain a bell dated 1450. GPs AO/59/19/3 from SE of E end of chancel; 19/4 from SW. General view. The church is in use for ecclesiastical purposes”.

2.3 The Development of the Research

My research began in October 2010 with a visit to the Templeman Library at the University of Kent. I borrowed three books on Kent during the English Civil War. My attention was particularly drawn to the Battle of Maidstone and the skirmish at Farleigh Bridge. It struck me that these books were all written around 1901 and in fact very little appeared to have been written since. It was at that point that I widened my search to the internet to see what other information I could find on the Battle of Maidstone. East Farleigh seemed to be cropping up everywhere I looked and so it became the focus for my project. I was particularly looking for evidence of any actual artifacts that had been found in the area of East Farleigh.

Further to this I contacted Maidstone Museum to see if they had any artifacts associated with the skirmish at East Farleigh but was informed that they had nothing that they could attribute to the bridge. They explained that all the Civil War artifacts they had were generic. They sent me a list of Arms and Armour held at the museum. As there was nothing on the list that would help my project aims I moved on with a search of the Historic Environment Record (HER).

I also contacted Ben Croxford at the HER whose reply to my e-mail gave me encouragement to press on with my research. His e-mail is copied below as I think this has helped give me direction.

“If you do pursue this topic, do let me know about the results. If nothing else, it would be great to get some entries on the HER recording the locations of the fighting and to add information to existing records (such as the bridge but also the church that was the site of the last stand - though I cannot now remember which church it even was). It is not a Registered Battlefield (a legal designation) but I see no reason not to record it, especially if it enhances existing HER entries. I suppose it might make an interesting archaeological project in that it is a major event that at the moment appears to have left no archaeological traces!”

At this stage I then contacted Farleigh’s History Society to see what information they might be able to give me. They were very helpful and gave me a number of other contacts to pursue. It was at this stage that my contact at Farleigh’s History Society informed me that she had in fact found cannon balls in her garden. This seemed to be an exciting breakthrough in my project as so far I had not come up with any actual archaeological finds.

Next I contacted Jennifer Jackson at the Portable Antiquities Scheme who advised me to do a parish search on the database and that if I needed more detail on any findspots to register for an account upgrade. I also contacted the National Monuments Record with a search request. I received a detailed response. They completed searches on both their archaeology and aerial photograph databases for me for an area covering 1km around the central grid reference TQ734534.

To try and extend my research I contacted the local Kent Messenger Newspaper and asked them if they could put an appeal in the paper asking for any information in relation to possible civil war finds in the area of East Farleigh. Unfortunately I had only one reply from a Civil War re-enactment enthusiast. This was disappointing, however I was put in contact with the Maidstone Area Archaeological Group and their secretary Linda Weeks checked with members to see if anyone was aware of any finds in the area. One member, Mr Phil Barham, who had done some research on this period came back to me with the following response “I have not yet seen any hard evidence with regard to artefacts from the skirmish. I have heard of musket balls being found around the area and I have been told about cannon balls buried in garden walls etc. but nothing substantial. Although there were several fatalities in this first contact, it was not a full on battle so I think the chances of finding a genuine civil war relic are pretty slim.”

Next I went to visit to St Mary’s Church and a close examination of the outer walls seemed to show some possible battle scarring. I then contacted Dr Glenn Foard who is the Project Officer at the Battlefield Trust to ask him if he could examine some photos of the church. He was very helpful and I received this response. “I am interested in what you are doing. Happy to advise on potential bullet impact scars if you would like to take some digital images both showing the broad pattern across the wall(s) and then some examples close up on individual bullet holes with a scale beside it. I have done no work at all on Maidstone myself so can’t immediately help any further”. Having sent some photos to Glenn Foard his response was unfortunately not good news. However his comments about the features on the walls were interesting. (See 3.2.3).

One of my fellow students at the University of Kent David Applegate whom I had told about my project revealed some further interesting information. While metal detecting a friend of his had made some discoveries near Aylesford Bridge. He was able to give me some detailed information which was extremely useful. (See 3.2.1)

My tutor also forwarded me some photograph’s with details of the approximate find spot of a gunflint found by a former student of the University of Kent. This information was also sent to a contact of his to confirm if this was gunflint from the Civil War period. (See 3.2.2)

A strange twist in my research then came about. While attending another course at the University my conversation about East Farleigh was overheard by a student, who was in fact the Chairman of the Farleigh History Society. This was quite a coincidence. He was able to put me in touch with local historian, Brian Heggarty, who had detailed knowledge of East Farleigh. Shortly after this I arranged to meet with Mr Heggarty, who had what appeared to be a cannonball from Farleigh Bridge in his possession. I took some photographs of the cannonball. In addition he was able to give me further information of further possible finds. Mr Heggarty very kindly chatted to me for a couple of hours giving me all sorts of details about the history of East Farleigh. He also gave me an old book with some Civil War stories relating to East Farleigh.

I forwarded the photograph of the cannonball in Mr Heggarty’s possession to Dr Glenn Foard for further analysis. In addition I sent him the weight and measurement of the cannonball.

Dr Foard responded, stating that further analysis was necessary. I also sent him photographs of more possible cannonballs and a musketball and am now awaiting his response.

To follow up on the gunflint I arranged to meet with former student Angela Muthana, who very kindly showed me around the area where she found the gunflint. She also found in close proximity to this spot a possible musketball and cannonball. She showed me a number of old pathways which are likely to have been in existence in 1648 at the time of the battle.

3. Data/Results

3.1 Landscape

The landscape around East Farleigh played a crucial part in determining the movements of both armies on the 1st of June 1648. The undulating nature of the landscape and the woods helped to conceal the Parliamentarians until they started their descent from Barming Heath down to East Farleigh Bridge. The Royalists also used the landscape to try and stop the Parliamentarians from reaching Maidstone. In particular using key landmarks as defensive positions such as the Bridge and St Mary's Church.

The woods the Parliamentarians came through are to the West of Maidstone. Oaken Wood or East Malling Wood is quite dense and overgrown in places with brambles and there are a number of hollows. Trees are predominantly Chestnut with some Oak, Silver Birch, Hornbeam and Hazel. Many of the tracks are only passable in single file. It is hard to imagine an army passing through here encumbered with artillery. However during my research I have looked at an ordinance survey map dating to 1856 and this map shows that the area behind Barming Heath was in fact wooded at this time. This means that presuming their antiquity the Parliamentarians would have had to come through these woods.



Fig 1: Ordnance Survey First Series Map 1856.
Barming Heath and the surrounding area is shown here, including the river and East Farleigh.



Fig 2: Barming Heath today
The photograph above of Barming Heath gives an indication of the terrain traversed by the Parliamentarians. Oaken Wood can be seen in the background. The terrain is quite rugged in places.

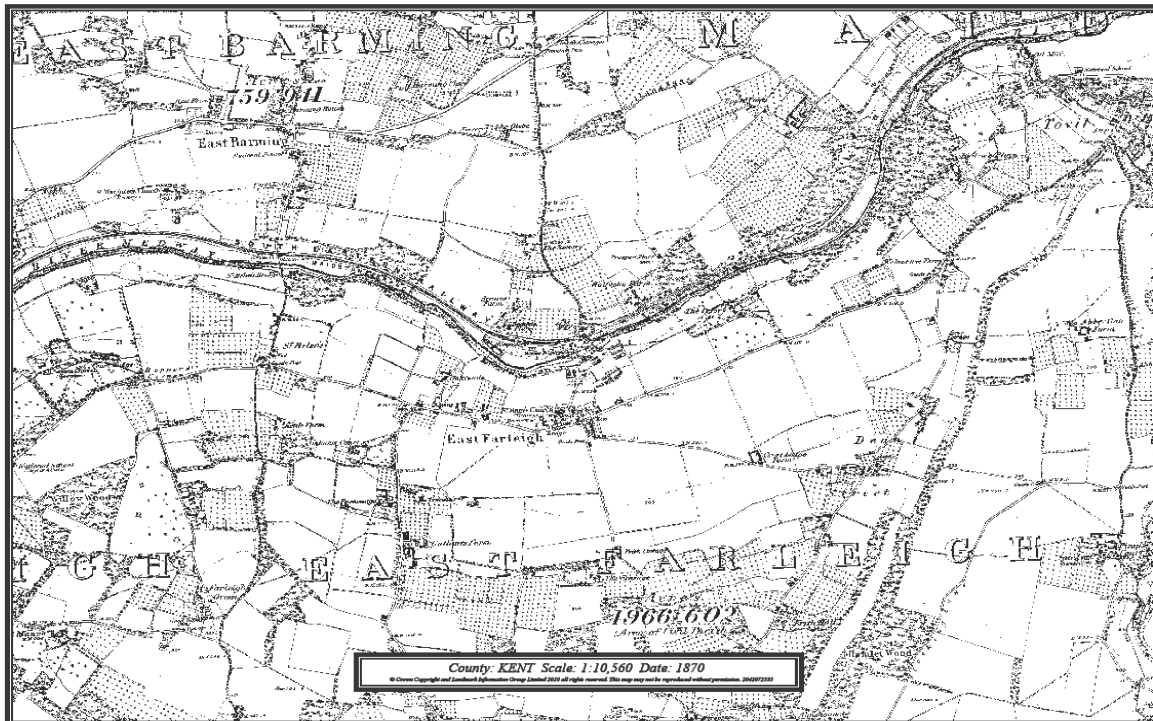


Fig 3: Ordnance Survey map 1870: East Farleigh The map above shows the area around East Farleigh in 1870. Comparing this to the recent map below it can be seen that there has been development in the Barming Heath area across to East Barming. However the area in front of Oaken wood and around East Farleigh Bridge itself has remained unchanged. It is likely that there was relatively little change between 1648 and 1870 also.



Fig 4 : Ordnance Survey map

Weather

1648				Very wet, but probably not as wet as 1258 & 1527. The summer in particular was described as worse than several of the past winters (i.e. 'cold & wet').
(Annual)				

Fig 5: Weather conditions on 1st of June 1648

Weather on 1st of June described as wet. This is supported by the literary sources, “As the lowering clouds began to break in torrential rain” (Everitt 1973, 262).

3.2 Artefactual Evidence

3.2.1 Cannonballs

Aylesford Bridge Cannon Balls

I have been informed that, around the mid 1980s, a metal detectorist, C W Bullock, was metal detecting down by Aylesford Bridge on the Aylesford Village side near The Chequers pub on the actual river foreshore. There he discovered about four or five cannon balls about an inch and a half (4cm) in diameter. These have apparently since rusted to nothing, but they were identified by David Kelly at Maidstone Museum as being from a Falconette and Robinette guns. This was later authenticated by the Tower of London Armouries. These were light artillery field pieces.

Possible Cannonball off Hermitage Lane



Fig 6: possible cannonball found off Hermitage Lane

The spherical object above was found off Hermitage Lane not too far from Barming Station. Although quite light it is possible that this was a projectile possibly fired from the Royalists positioned in the vicinity of Aylesford Bridge. This object is similar to the possible cannonballs that were found at St Helens Lane.

Cannon balls found in St Helens Lane.

The Farleigh History Society provided me with information about a number of cannonballs found at the top of St Helens Lane. They were described as stone balls about three inches (7.5cm) in diameter plus one slightly smaller one. They were found at a depth of one foot. It is interesting that these cannonballs were stone compared to the iron cannonballs found at Aylesford. This implies the Roundheads, if indeed these were fired by the Parliamentarians, were using a mixture of ordinance. In addition these cannonballs are larger than the ones found at Aylesford so a different calibre of gun was probably used. A minion is likely to have been the largest cannon used possibly by both sides as anything larger would have been difficult to move around. Of course as stated in the discussion below they may also have been fired by the Royalists from St Mary's Church.

Possible Cannonballs found at the Old Vicarage

In the NMR repost for The Old Vicarage it is stated that two stone balls were found. The NMR reference is 415803 and the grid reference is TQ73155328. Although the report is associating these stone balls with the Roman pottery found there, it could be that these are in fact civil war cannonballs and the finder missed the connection. In fact the report goes on to say that similar stone balls were found with Roman pottery in Badminton Gloucester. Again Badminton House was ruined during the Civil War so stone balls found there could also be cannonballs. The Old Vicarage is very close to St Mary's Church so it is not a surprise that cannonballs would be found here. Further analysis of these stone balls would indicate if in fact they are cannonballs. Further investigation would also be needed to find where these may now be located.

Possible Cannonball from cottage near East Farleigh Bridge.



Fig 7: Possible cannonball reputed to have come from a cottage near East Farleigh Bridge.

This possible cannonball is in the possession of local Historian Mr Brian Heggarty and was given to him by a previous owner of Miller's Cottage. It weighs 3lb's and is 4 inches (10cm) in diameter. Photographs of this object have been sent to Dr Glenn Foard for further analysis, however his initial report was not encouraging. He described it as follows: "This looks to be just a natural flint nodule – it is not spherical". However I explained to him that it was found embedded in the timbers of the cottage to which he responded "OK – if embedded then it sounds like it needs more consideration!"

Cannon balls found at Bydews Farm

Two further spherical objects were found at Bydews farm off Dean Street. These also appear to have been found in a civil war context as this is where the Parliamentarians pushed the Royalists back into Maidstone itself. These cannonballs are very similar to the possible cannonball found of Hermitage Lane.

3.2.2 Musket flint found at Hermitage lane

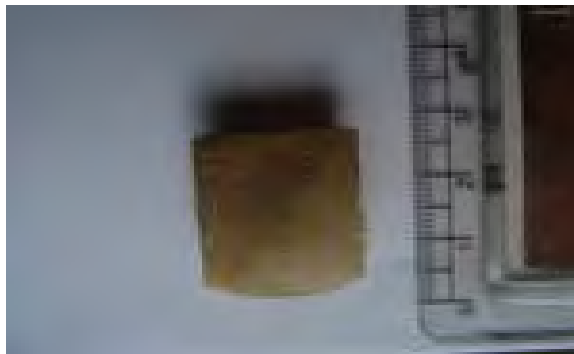


Fig 8: Musket flint

The gunflint found by former student Angela Muthana was found in a field off Hermitage Lane. The field is about half a mile, as the crow flies, from Oaken Wood. She kindly sent through the above photo plus several others. My tutor Steven Willis had the following response from Jez Bailey his contact in the Sealed Knot Society regarding his request for verification of this artifact.

"This is most certainly a musket flint rather than a smaller pistol or carbine flint. Compared to a 17th century reproduction it is almost identical in size and shape. Interesting to note this flint does not display the conchoidal fractures associated with a gun flint that has been used to strike the frizzen of flintlock musket. We can conclude that this was probably a spare carried by most soldiers of the period which was dropped on the site accidentally rather than discarded intentionally. It is certainly consistent with flints used in the civil war period, however this size and shape of flint was used in flintlock muskets until the mid 19th century. Most sporting guns of the period however tended to use a smaller flint and be of a narrower gauge than this flint would indicate, pointing to military origin".

3.2.3 Possible Battle Scarring on St Mary's Church



Fig 9: Possible Battle Scarring St Mary's Church

A close inspection of the walls of the church showed possible musket ball scarring. However this turned out not to be case and Glenn Foard commented as follows "The images suggest there may be a problem with the features on the church – it is the brown staining in the centre of the pit. I have never seen an embedded lead bullet – and anyway only iron would be brown. So I wonder if there is in fact some form of inclusion in the stone that is causing failure of the stone and creating features like impact scars that are not." Having spoken to local historian Brian Heggarty he confirmed that the church went through much renovation. It is possible therefore that any scarring would have been repaired as part of the renovation. A search of the NMR record for St Mary's Church in fact confirmed this. A restoration took place in 1891. It is likely then that any scarring on the outer walls was repaired. The church is constructed of ragstone which was quarried nearby at Barming. The bridge at Farleigh was also constructed from the same material.

3.2.4 Musketballs



Fig 10: Musket Ball found at Boxley

The musket ball above was found at Boxley and while this is the other side of Maidstone it may well have been fired by the Parliamentarians at the retreating Royalists.

Further information on another musket ball find by metal detectorists has come to light. According to local Historian Brian Heggarty “The metal detecting group found the musket ball and the buckle in the field between my house and The Priory. Look for Lower Road and Priory Close on the map. In the middle of the field there is a house, Lone Cottage, I believe it was around that area”.

A further possible musketball was found very close to where the gunflint detailed above was found. This one is made of stone. The photograph below of the possible musketball has been sent to Dr Glenn Foard for further analysis.



Fig 11: Possible Musket Ball found off Hermitage Lane.

I have also been informed of further musket ball finds and a shoe buckle in the Barming area near the Medway. These have not been verified.

3.2.5 Doublet worn by General Fairfax



Fig 12: Doublet worn by General Fairfax

The doublet in figure 12 above is in Leeds Castle near Maidstone. This was worn by Fairfax on the day of The Battle of Maidstone. It is made of leather and is of a type worn by many on both sides in the Civil War. This was a surprising find in Leeds castle as I only came across it by chance on a day trip there.

3.2.6 National Monuments Record

A search of the National Monuments record at first glance did not appear to offer any additional information in relation to my research into the Civil War in this area. The report sent to me lists various Roman finds, details of the church, the bridge and other local historic buildings and also information about Second World War defensive pillboxes. However on closer inspection of the searches two interesting items came to light. The first was the report on the Old Vicarage. The report states that in 1843 fragments of a Roman Urn and two stone balls were found. A discussion of these two stone balls is above under Cannonballs. The second item that came to light was in relation to the church. I have detailed this above in the section on Possible Battle Scarring at St Mary's Church.

3.2.7 Historic Environment Record

A search of the Historic Environment Record yielded no information with regards to any finds. Having contacted Ben Croxford from the HER he commented as follows:-

“I am afraid that a search of the HER turned up no records relating to the battle, including chance finds that could be related (shot, buttons, that sort of thing). There is not even mention in the history of surviving buildings that were key to the events (East Farleigh Bridge has much about how impressive it is but nothing about the crucial skirmish and crossing made there). I also had a quick search of the PAS database but that also came up blank”.

3.2.8 Portable Antiquities Scheme

A search of the PAS database revealed no specific artifacts that directly relate to the events leading up to and including the Battle of Maidstone. There are some items listed which are of the period. An example being the musket ball in Fig 9 above. The lack of finds recorded on the PAS may be as a result of a number of things. This is discussed in detail below.

3.2.9 Leybourne

The metal detectorist who found the cannonballs at Aylesford also said that when they were doing the roadworks in the Leybourne area some years ago, they came across some horse and human burials near the roundabout area of 'civil war' date. This has not been verified.

3.2.10 Lack of Finds/Recycling

Despite the fact that there was a skirmish at Farleigh Bridge and in the immediate vicinity the lack of actual finds seems at first puzzling. Much of my research has pointed to for instance large numbers of cannonballs being found. The written sources also talk about trenches where Civil War Accoutrements have been found. If this is the case then where are they? On further analysis we often discover that finds are not reported and so their whereabouts remain unknown.

My research has shown this to be the case. People often do not realise what they have in their possession and the potential historical and archaeological value of such finds. In addition they may well be, for instance, in Maidstone Museum but the exact provenance has never been reported. Of course a full scale geophysical survey and/or archaeological excavation at

Farleigh Bridge using modern excavating techniques is, in my opinion, very likely to yield some results. Yet another feature of the English Civil War was recycling. It is known that cannonballs, particularly iron ones, were retrieved and reused again. Shells and grenades fired by the Parliamentarians at Lichfield were retrieved by the garrison and fired back. The same for musket balls as attested by Richard Symonds in 1644; “we gott many of their bullets” (Harrington P 2004, 120). Peter Harrington also tells us that; “discarded weapons were retrieved by the victorious Parliamentarians from the field of Marston Moor and reused in subsequent battles” (Harrington P 2004, 88). Soldiers could also earn money by handing in discarded items. The recycling of items fits in with the economy of war at the time. Both sides suffered from a lack of money and shortages, so reusing equipment and material is not a surprise. The use of stone cannonballs may also point to a lack of iron for producing iron cannonballs.

4. Analysis/Discussion

The Parliamentarian Army marched from Meopham possibly via Leybourne and on to East Malling Wood on the 31st of May 1648. They camped overnight at East Malling Heath according to A Everitt in his book “Kent and the Great Rebellion”. The next day, the 1st of June 1648 the army appears to have possibly split into three. The main army marched across Barming Heath down Hermitage Lane and on to Farleigh Bridge. Henry Abell suggests that the Parliamentarians “passed through East Malling Wood, crossed Barming Heath, and struck straight down the narrow lane which leads past Barming Rectory to Farleigh Bridge”. A small detachment from this part of the army was sent to Aylesford Bridge to give the Royalists the impression that the main army would try and cross there.

A second force may have struck down the road between Hoath Wood and Oaken Wood towards the bridge at Teston. Gregory Blaxland in his book “South East Britain Eternal Battlefield” suggests that “In the event he continued southeastwards, using Oaken Wood for concealment and a demonstration of strength to keep attention fixed on Aylesford bridge. He crossed the Medway by the Teston Farleigh Bridge”.

A third force may have marched through Oaken Wood coming out near East Barming and then moved in the direction of the ford at Barming Bridge. Splitting the army into three and using as many bridges as possible would ensure that the Parliamentarians got their forces across the Medway quickly instead of trying to get 7000 men, horses and equipment across one narrow bridge at Farleigh.

Gregory Blaxland’s comment about a demonstration of strength to keep attention fixed on Aylesford bridge ties in with the archaeological evidence. The five cannonballs found on the Aylesford Village side of the Medway River near The Chequers pub indicates that these were fired by the Parliamentarians on the other side. It made strategic sense to keep the Royalists guessing as to where the crossing of the Medway would take place. It also kept 1000 of the Royalists best men covering the Aylesford Bridge. We also have the only eyewitness account of the Battle of Maidstone from George Thompson. He says that “wee did not dispute the pass

at Alisforde". Having walked across Barming Heath keeping Oaken Wood on my right, I believe that this was the route taken by the main Parliamentarian Army.

Oaken Wood would have been difficult for Infantry, Cavalry and Artillery in particular to get through and they would have had difficulty keeping any semblance of order. However there are numerous pathways through the woods that they could have used. Once through the wood Barming Heath on the other hand, although rugged in places, would have been much easier to cross. The rolling hills here would also have helped hide Fairfax's army. This was the civil war historian Samuel Gardiners assessment "Fairfax at Malling was still concealed from the enemy by the undulations of the hills" (Gardiner 1901, 138). The weather conditions may have hindered them as indications are that it was raining persistently.

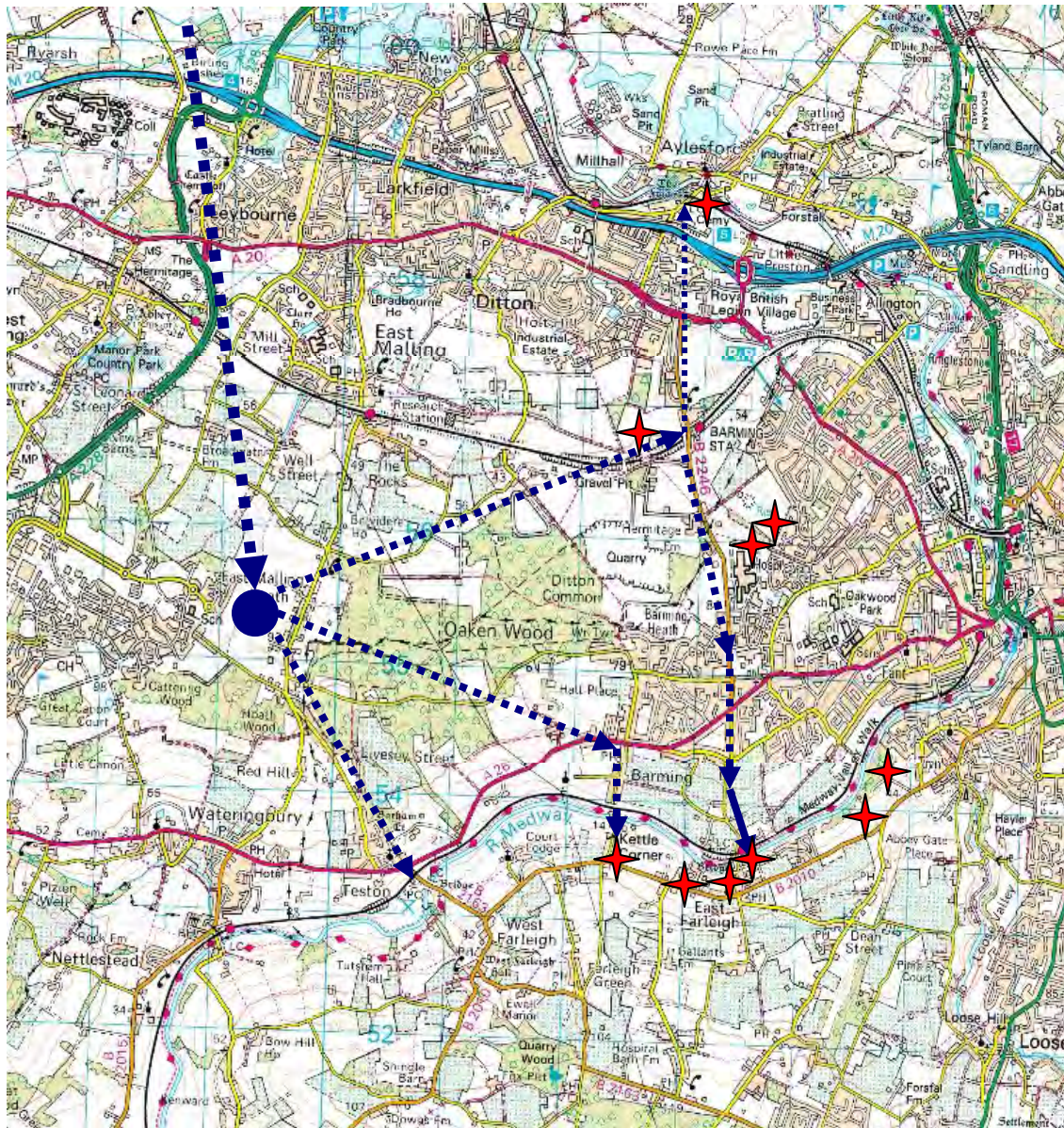


Fig 13: possible movements of Parliamentarian Army on 1st June 1648.

The map above shows the Parliamentarians possible line of march to Farleigh Bridge, Barming Bridge and Teston Bridge. The red crosses indicate where artifacts have been found or are

reputed to have been found. The large blue circle indicates the Parliamentarian Army's probable overnight encampment on East Malling Heath.

Having crossed Barming Heath the Parliamentarians came down Hermitage Lane. The musket flint found at Hermitage Lane confirms the likelihood that this was the route taken by Fairfax's army. In addition we have a possible cannonball and musketball find from the same area. The gunflint found appears to have been dropped so it is possible that the Roundheads halted at this spot to reunite their forces with the detachment sent towards Aylesford Bridge before pushing on to Farleigh Bridge. They then marched passed Barming Rectory. Samuel Gardiner in his *History of the Great Civil War* says "The Ironsides are said to have come down by a road at the side of Barming Rectory" (Gardiner S 1901, 141). In the photograph below we can see the narrowness of the road as described by Henry Abell as follows "the stalwart warriors of Fairfax, with their cumbersome artillery, passed down the steep, hedge-girt lane" (Abell H 1901, 212).



Fig 14: The road the Roundheads marched down passed Barming Rectory to reach Farleigh Bridge. St Mary's Church can be seen in the distance.

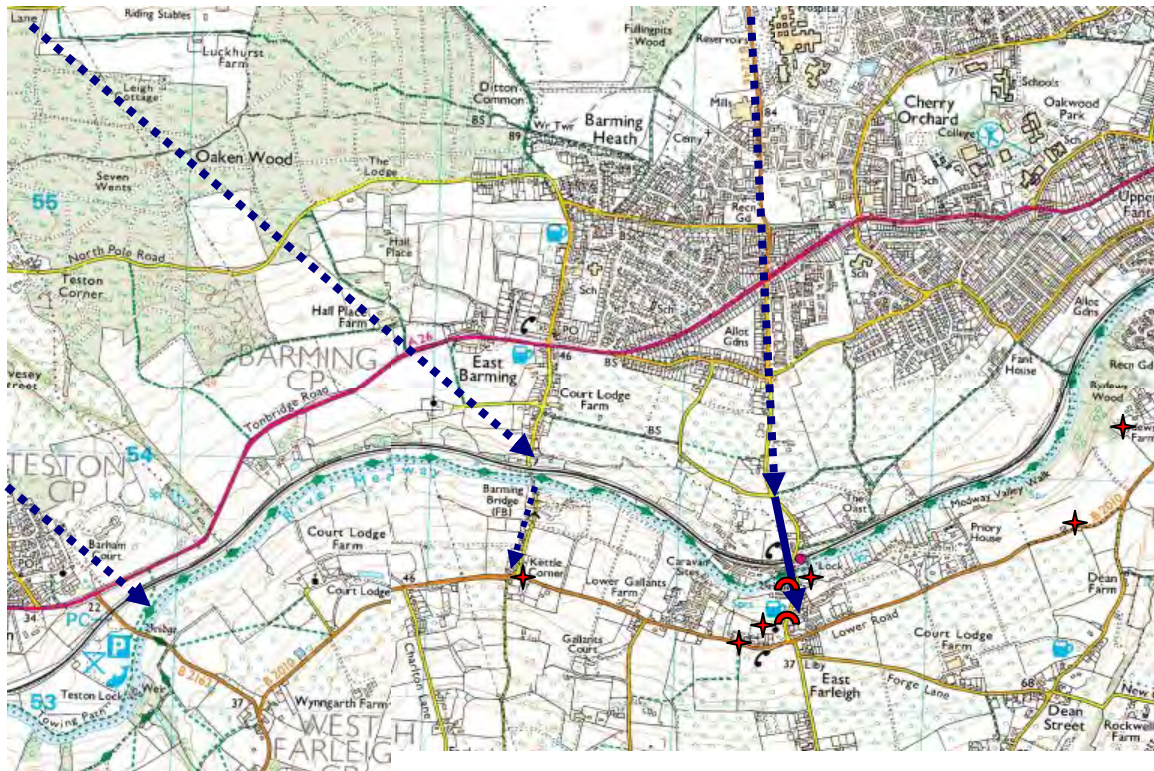


Fig 15: Possible movements of Fairfax's army on the afternoon of 1st June 1648

The map above shows the Parliamentarians possible line of march to Farleigh Bridge, Barming Bridge and Teston Bridge. The red crosses indicate where artifacts have been found or are reputed to have been found. The red half circles indicate the probable Royalist position at St Mary's Church and at Farleigh Bridge.

Farleigh Bridge

The Parliamentarians must have sent an advance party forward ahead of the main army to reconnoiter the bridge. The likelihood is that Dragoons would have been used for the task. These were effectively mounted infantry. The main army is likely to have halted out of range of the Royalist guns until the Dragoons cleared a way forward. They also brought up at least one cannon as we know cannonballs were found at the cottage on the Royalist side of the bridge. This also tells us that the cottage must have been a Royalist position covering the approach to the bridge. What we do not know is how many Royalists were positioned at the bridge and if any were positioned further up the hill at St Marys Church. If the Royalists had cannons at St Mary's Church then they would have been able to cover the bridge and halt any Parliamentarian advance. However the literary sources state that "Fairfax easily got over" (Gardiner 1901, 141). Does this mean that the Parliamentarians found the Bridge lightly defended? Or is it possible that the bridge and the church were well defended but that Fairfax ordered a further flanking movement slightly further down the river at Barming Bridge? Barming Bridge is shown in the ordinance survey map of 1870 and it is thought that prior to this date the river was fordable

here. If that is the case then it seems logical that if Farleigh Bridge was well defended then a flanking movement across the river at Barming Bridge would have made sense. This is reinforced by the fact that cannonballs have been found at the top of St Helens Lane. These could have been fired from a Royalist cannon positioned at St Mary's Church. The distance from St Mary's Church to St Helens Lane is approximately 1000 metres. This would have been just about in range for a cannon; "The range of a gun was 1500 paces or 1143 metres" (Henry 2005, 35). Although relatively ineffective at long range it could still do damage if on target. The two possible cannonballs found at The Old Vicarage near the church could also have been fired from the church at the Roundheads. The range would have been relatively short and could have done serious damage if the Roundheads were advancing in a close order. It is likely that once again Dragoons were used to outflank the possible position at St Mary's; as these were mounted men the engagement would be moving quickly. With Parliamentarians now at St Helens Lane and at Farleigh Bridge it is likely that the Royalists would have had to abandon their positions at the bridge and the church and fall back towards Maidstone. As the Royalists retreated towards their main positions in Maidstone itself it seems that it was a fighting retreat as the musket ball found between Lower Road and Priory Close appears to confirm this. The historical sources also say that "the Royalists slowly and sullenly retreated before him, from hedgerow to hedgerow, and from barn to barn, fighting for every foot of ground" (Abell 1901, 212).

There is also possibly another alternative reason for the cannonballs found at St Helens and at The Old Vicarage. So far we have assumed them to be fired by the Royalists from St Mary's Church. However it is possible that in fact they were fired by the Roundheads. This would mean that the Royalists had another position at the top of St Helens Lane overlooking the crossing at Barming Bridge. This could make sense if the Royalists were determined to cover all possible crossings attempted by the Parliamentarians. A Royalist position here would also protect the Royalist flank at St Mary's Church. The cannonballs found at The Old Vicarage could have been fired at the Royalist position at St Mary's Church but have fallen short.

As the Parliamentarians had four regiments of horse available it was perfectly feasible that they would have used as many crossings as possible. As stated above it is likely that they crossed at Farleigh Bridge and possibly Barming Bridge but also at the Teston Farleigh Bridge slightly further down the river. In fact Gregory Blaxland states that "He crossed the Medway by the Teston-Farleigh bridge" (Blaxland 1981, 99). He gives a Grid reference of 7053 which is the area of the Teston Farleigh Bridge. This bridge was built around 1300. So with 3 bridges in close proximity Fairfax could move his four regiments of horse across the Medway very quickly. Again by sending, say a regiment of horse, across at Teston Farleigh this would outflank any Royalist position at the top of St Helens Lane. Therefore it would seem from the historical sources and the archaeological evidence that the Roundheads may have utilised all three bridges across the Medway between Teston and Farleigh Bridge. The three regiments of foot plus artillery probably crossed the Farleigh Bridge once the cavalry had cleared all the possible Royalist positions.

There is no doubt that Fairfax was a skilled tactician and would almost certainly have been aware of all possible crossing points of the Medway in this area. Fairfax had proven himself on

many occasions and in particular at the Battle of Naseby. At Naseby Fairfax was well informed of the enemies movements and strength. His Scoutmaster General on that occasion was Leonard Watson who did his job well. There is no reason to doubt that at East Farleigh Fairfax was also well informed of the enemies deployment and strength. In comparison the Royalists were totally unaware of the Parliamentarians whereabouts: “Not a soul on Penenden Heath had an idea that Fairfax was anywhere in the neighbourhood” (Abell 1901, 209). This was also the case at the Battle of Naseby “Royalist intelligence had no inkling of Fairfax’s presence until it was too late” (Young & Holmes 2000, 238).

Ultimately it was the bridge at Farleigh which was paramount to outflanking the Royalist position at Maidstone. It is highly likely that the Parliamentarians would have had scouts inform them that the bridge was lightly defended. Taking Farleigh Bridge was the key tactical decision of the Battle of Maidstone. Fairfax’s demonstration in front of Aylesford led the Royalists to divert men here not knowing that in fact Fairfax’s intention was to cross at Farleigh and as stated above possibly also at Barming and Teston. In fact the Royalists were seemingly unaware of the whereabouts of Fairfax’s main army until, according to Samuel Gardiner “he came in to contact with a body of horse sent out of the town to prevent a surprise”. It would seem therefore that the main Royalist forces at Maidstone were not in contact with any Royalist outposts at Farleigh or possibly Barming. From the evidence, both archaeological and literary, it seems that the fight for Farleigh Bridge itself was both short and vicious.



Fig 16 Farleigh Bridge – The key to unlocking the Royalist position at Maidstone.

The literary sources tell us that, “At the Bridge there was evidently stiff fighting” (Abell 1901, 212) and “At any rate, in the exceedingly curious and well kept Parish Book of Barming, it is

recorded that about the year 1797 there were unearthed in a field just off the lane, the remains of horses and men, of armour and of leather accoutrements, which from their style were decided to be those of troopers who had fallen in the fight of 1648 here.” (Abell 1901, 212). More recent sources tell us that “Significant numbers of cannon balls have been recovered from the area surrounding the bridge together with a handgun (now lost). Trenches dug on the Barming side of the bridge produced many bones of men and horses as well as a cannon which was kept outside The Victory pub for many years” (Farleighs History Society).

Bridges were used during the Civil War as defensive positions. Radcot Bridge for example was a major crossing point of the Thames. This area saw heavy fighting during the Civil War.

St Mary's Church



Fig 17: The view from Farleigh Bridge up to St Marys Church.

Having crossed the bridge at East Farleigh the Parliamentarians marched up the hill towards St Mary's Church. During the Civil Wars churches were often used as defensive positions for the elevated panoramas their towers enabled and also because they were relatively strong, being constructed of stone.

The church near Sir John Strangeways home in Abbotsbury, Dorset was used by the Royalists and was attacked by the Roundheads. Churches provided good vantage points over the surrounding landscape. The church of St Mary's is perfectly positioned overlooking the bridge at East Farleigh as can be seen from the photo above and below. Penistone Church is another example of a defensive position used in the Civil War. This church was garrisoned by the Parliamentarians.



Fig 18: The view from St Mary's church looking down to Farleigh Bridge in the distance.

The distance from the church to the bridge is approximately 220 metres. This would have been in easy range of any Royalist cannons positioned there.

Once the Parliamentarians had crossed Farleigh Bridge and taken St Mary's Church, assuming it was defended, they then moved on towards Maidstone itself. If the Royalists had defended East Farleigh with more men and artillery it may have given their main army more time to prepare the defence of Maidstone itself. However we know the Royalists despite everything gave a good account of themselves once the main battle started.

5. Conclusions

Since the 1990's a number of English Civil War Battlefields have been studied including Edgehill, Naseby, Cheriton, Marston Moor to name but a few. Metal detecting surveys, fieldwalking and geophysics have been carried out at these sites. No study of the Battle of

Maidstone has been done before and although my research investigates only one part of the battle, it has yielded some new evidence and, I hope, consolidated existing evidence.

There is no doubt that further archaeological work, in the vicinity of Farleigh Bridge in particular, is needed. I believe this would be very likely to provide us with more hard evidence of the fight there. In addition I think that it is certainly worth investigating the area around St Helens Lane and the Teston-Farleigh Bridge area. The Parliamentary encampment at East Malling Heath also warrants investigation. From my research I believe that the Parliamentarians used all three Bridges to move their forces across the Medway. The historical and archaeological evidence although relatively scant, does provide us with this tantalising possibility.

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