



F·S·A·R·G
The Faversham Society
Archaeological Research Group

Community
Archaeology

The Davington Mysteries

**Report for Keyhole Excavation 71B
4 Stephens Close, Davington, Faversham.**

Grid Reference: TR 00969 61658



1. Introduction

The twelve houses in Stephens Close, Davington, were built in 1962-3 (**Fig 1**). Before this, the area was part of the grounds of Davington Court, itself demolished in 1968.¹ From the early 1980s, the site of Davington Court has been occupied by the so-called 'thrupenny bit' houses, a complex of six sided apartments built by a housing association, but photographs from the early 1960s clearly show Davington Court immediately adjacent to the Stephens Close houses (**Fig 2**).

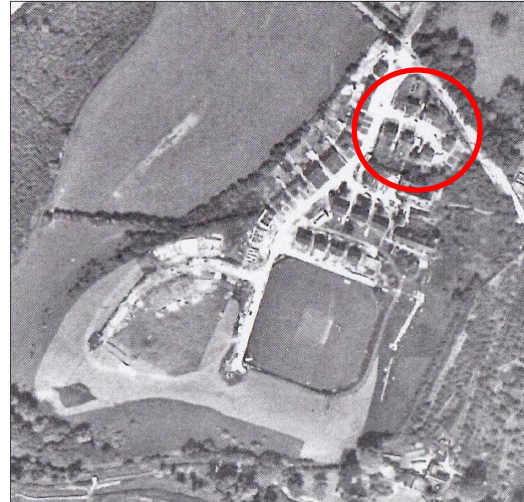
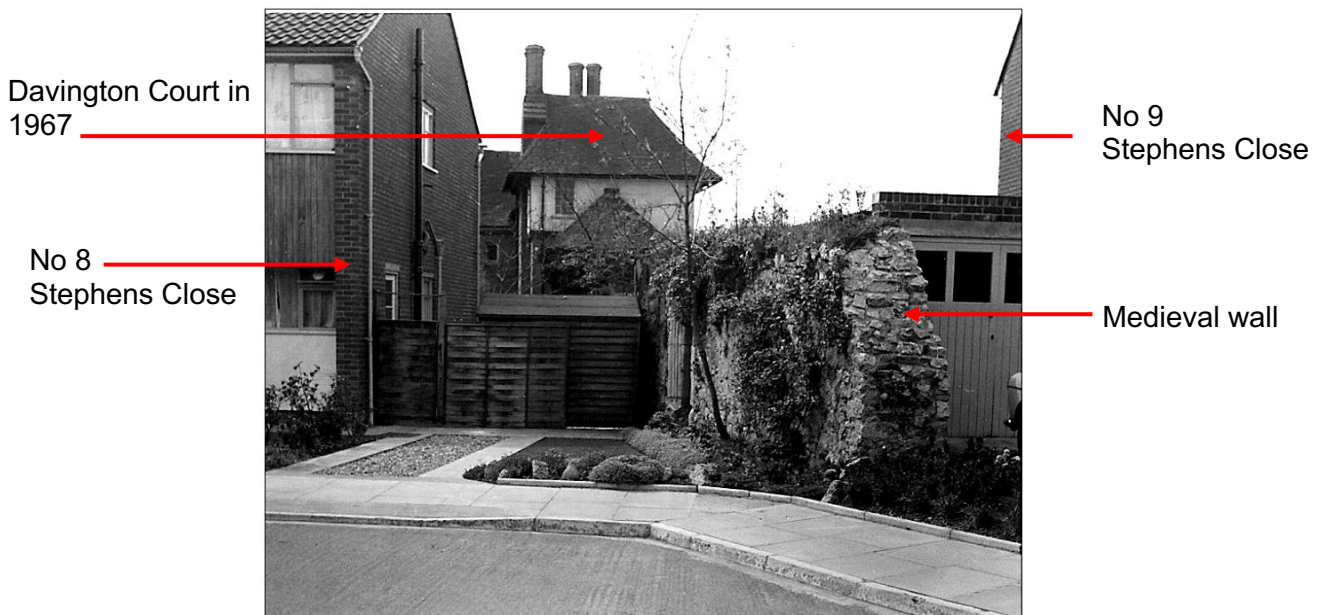


Fig 1: Aerial photographs of the Davington Plateau in 1946² and 1962³. Stephens close in the red circle.

Fig 2: View to south from Stephens Close in 1967.



Numbers 9 to 12 of Stephens Close are bordered by walls of 17th century brick, lying on a 1m high base of re-used medieval worked stone and flint. This stone is mostly Kentish Ragstone but also contains at least one example of moulded Caen stone. An elaborate gateway in the Mannerist style with a plaque stating year of building as 1624 survives in the western wall, facing onto Oldgate Road (**Fig 3**). Another gateway in similar style but less elaborate survives at the foot of the garden of No 9 (visible in **Fig 2**).

¹ Melrose, K 1996 *Davington: Parish and People* Faversham Papers No 52 Faversham Society

² Aerial Photograph 1 May 1946 F/20" //541 SQ DN. KCC photographic archive

³ Aerial Photograph 1962 KCC Photographic Archive

The OS maps of 1865⁴ (Fig 4) and 1907⁵ suggest that this very distinctive wall previously extended along the former course of Oldgate Road until the 1960s building phase. When Oldgate Road was re-routed at its junction with Dark Hill in the early 1960s, much of the 17th century wall was demolished.



Fig 3: The Mannerist Gateway dated to 1624.

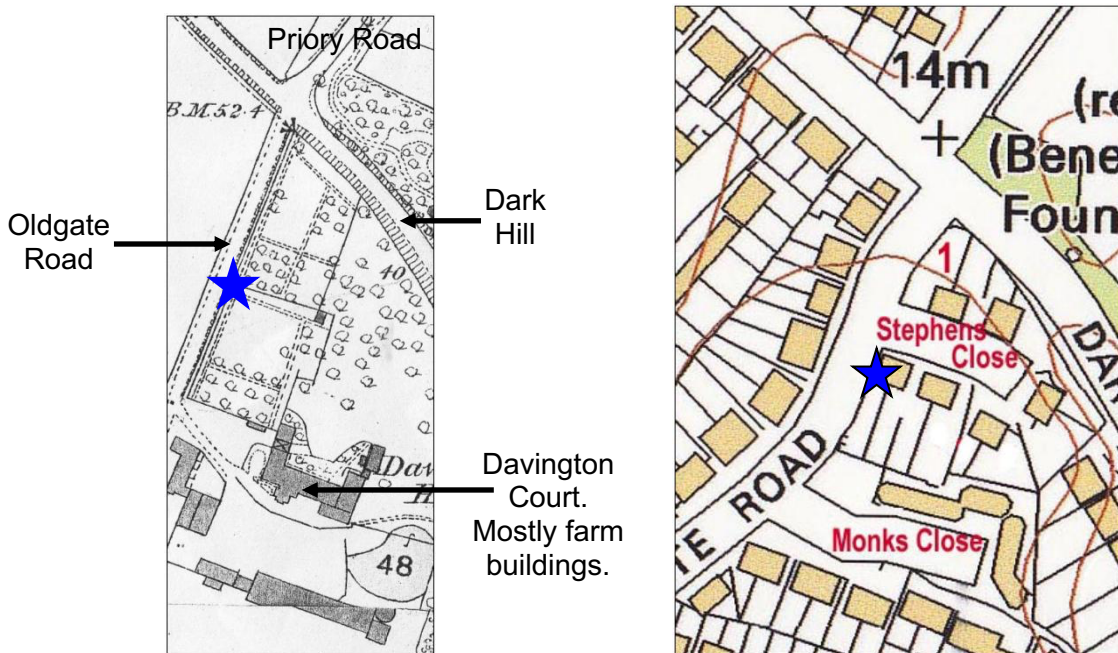


Fig 4: The Stephens Close area in 1865 and 2007. The blue star is the gateway shown in Fig 3.

Even more striking is the survival between numbers 8 and 9 of a 17m stretch of medieval wall (Fig 2), including a 13th century gateway. The wall has an average height of 2m and a maximum height at the southern end of 5m. The northern and southern ends of the wall show signs of major reconstruction but the middle section is composed of well-shaped, neatly coursed medieval stonework. At the southern end, the wall makes a right-handed turn, as for a room corner. Exposed sections of the end wall show a rubble filling and abundant mortar containing large shell fragments.

References to this 'ruin' can be found in several 19th century documents such as that of Crowe⁶ and Willement⁷, who describe a room-like structure overlooking Dark Hill in 1844. These documentary references and earlier ones make it clear that the so-called Davington Court (outside the 1624 wall) was

⁴ OS 1865 (1904 reprint) Sheet XXXIV Scale 1:2500

⁵ OS 2007 1:5000

⁶ Crow, E 1850, quoted in Melrose 1996 op cit p 163

⁷ Willement, T 1862 *Historical Sketch of the Parish of Davington in the County of Kent, And of the Priory There.* Kessinger Publishing and Legacy Reprints: www.kessinger.net p52

no more than a dressed-up farm bailiffs house, and photographs from around 1890 and 1900 show this 'social mobility' dramatically around 1900 (**Figs 6 & 7**). Yet earlier documentary information indicates that there was indeed a 'Davington Court' or Manor here throughout the medieval period⁸, and the surviving stretch of medieval wall seems to be a part of this earlier and important building. This manor house, on documentary evidence, seems to have been abandoned around 1650-1660⁹ possibly because of the rapid growth of the nearby gunpowder industry in the Westbrook Valley with all of its environmentally invasive implications.¹⁰



Fig 6: 'Davington Court' around 1880.

In short, Stephens Close occupies a historically highly significant site. In the early 1960s, even early rescue archaeology barely existed except on the redeveloped bombsites of London¹¹ and Canterbury¹² and evidence for Davington Manor was largely swept away. We are fortunate indeed that the survival of above ground evidence is as striking as it is, in our hunt for the site of the 'real' Davington Manor.

⁸ Melrose 1996 op.cit. p 159-163

⁹ Melrose 1996 op.cit. p 161

¹⁰ Percival A 1967 *Faversham's Gunpowder Industry* Faversham Papers No 4 Faversham Society

¹¹ e.g. in Shepherd J. D. 1998 *The Temple of Mithras excavated by W F Grimes & A. Williams at the Walbrook* English Heritage

¹² e.g. in Frere S. S. 1962 *Roman Canterbury: the City of Durovernum*. Canterbury Excavations Committee.



Fig 7: Davington Court around 1900 after 'renovation'.

2. Location



Number 4 Stephens Close backs onto Dark Hill, a deep cutting running east to west across the Davington Plateau (see **Fig 4**) and carrying the main east west road in Faversham town. Inspection of the south side of this cutting for surface finds at the very beginning of the Davington field project in April 2010 had straightaway yielded Late Iron Age pottery.

Fig 8: Dark Hill surface find.

This was swiftly identified as having come originally from the garden of No 4 when the garage was being built several years ago. The No 4 garden survey of flowerbeds and other exposed soil areas also yielded late Iron Age pottery. Because of this, the decision was taken to locate 71B as close as possible to the north east edge of the garden, overlooking Dark Hill. This location was well away from utility sites and free of large tree roots.

3. The procedure

A 1m by 1.5m trench was pegged out using the planning square and the area delineated marked with string. The position of the trench 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 a depth of 0.9m,

where the natural soil was observed. 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 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.

4. The findings

The sequence of contexts was as shown in **Fig 9** and **Appendix 1**.

Beneath a turf layer was shallow topsoil [2] which the householder told us was almost certainly imported. This topsoil itself yielded some early Iron Age flint tempered pottery and heat stressed flint - it would be interesting to know where it came from. The next layer down, context [3], seems to be the earlier topsoil, perhaps the original one for Stephens Close. It was a friable loam with high cinder content and a wide range of other materials, all small fragments and well sorted. Pottery dates ranged from the middle Iron Age to modern times with every period but the Saxon represented - this may seem startling but is typical of Stephens Close gardens.¹³ Context [3] also yielded a Mesolithic backed knife, waste flakes and heat stressed flint. - again, typical of Davington Plateau pits.



Fig 9: K71B at the end of excavation.



Fig 10: The demolition dump [7] running along the south side of the trench. 'gb' is a glazed brick.

Beneath [3] lay a darker brown, much less ashy layer [6] into which had been cut a shallow depression [5] with a fill [7] mainly of demolition material - brick, tile and mortar. Some of the brick was glazed and the form of the brick suggests a 17th century origin date. Context [7] also contained a lot of animal bone, including a near complete pigs head. Context [6], the layer onto which / into which this demolition material had been dumped, contained mainly prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval pottery, the most striking example of which was a chunk of Roman mortarium rim, blackened by burning. A small piece of Roman glass was found in [7].

Beneath [7] and [6] was a yellow-brown layer, free of building material and containing fewer artefacts generally. Pottery from [8] was mainly medieval, including a number of early medieval

shelly ware sherds (AD 1150-1225) but with the usual (for the Davington Plateau) sprinkling of Iron Age sherds of mid and late date. Beneath [8] was what appeared to be the natural Thanet Sands - a greenish-yellow artefact-free deposit.

A Harris Matrix is given in **Appendix 1**. Note that contexts [4] and [7] have been merged as a single context [7].

¹³ Reid, Summary of Davington Plateau investigations 2010-11 , in prep.

5. Interpretation

This little trench showed a series of topsoils of different periods, with a major demolition material dump about halfway down. This demolition dump was very similar to that encountered nearby in 71A (see report, context [11])¹⁴ right down to the pigs head. In the K71A report, demolition deposit [11] was related possibly to the demolitions noted by Edward Crow as having taken place 'in the orchard' in 1815.¹⁵ The deposit may, however, be related to the original demolition of the 'real' Davington Court in around 1655. Deposit 6, in K71B which must have been the topsoil at the time of dumping, contains only the tiniest 'wormhole sized' fragments of post medieval archaeology (pot and clay pipe), implying that in the case of K71B, a 1650 date for the dump is more likely. If it were later, we would expect rather more post medieval finds in [6].

Context [8] does seem to be an early mediaeval topsoil level, suggesting that the medieval manor building itself did not stretch as far as this spot. [8] must shade into prehistoric surfaces - heat stressed flint, prehistoric pottery and worked flint was found at this level.

6. Final comments

This was a trench requiring skilful excavation - what we call a 'dirt pit' with few obvious features and sharp divisions. Even the demolition dump was not in a clear-cut pit, and may have been in a natural depression. The finds, however, were great and contribute well to the Davington Plateau story.

7. Acknowledgements

Thanks from all the numerous members of the FSARG team involved to Kevin, Charlotte and of course the omnipresent Olly and his brother Morgan, who kept us amused, fed and watered during this intriguing excavation.

Dr Pat Reid

September 2011

¹⁴ www.fsarg.org.uk, Davington Mysteries Keyhole report 71A

¹⁵ Crow 1850, op cit.

Appendix 1: Harris Matrix

