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

Community Archaeology

The Davington Mysteries

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

Grid Reference: TR 00980 61649

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**).

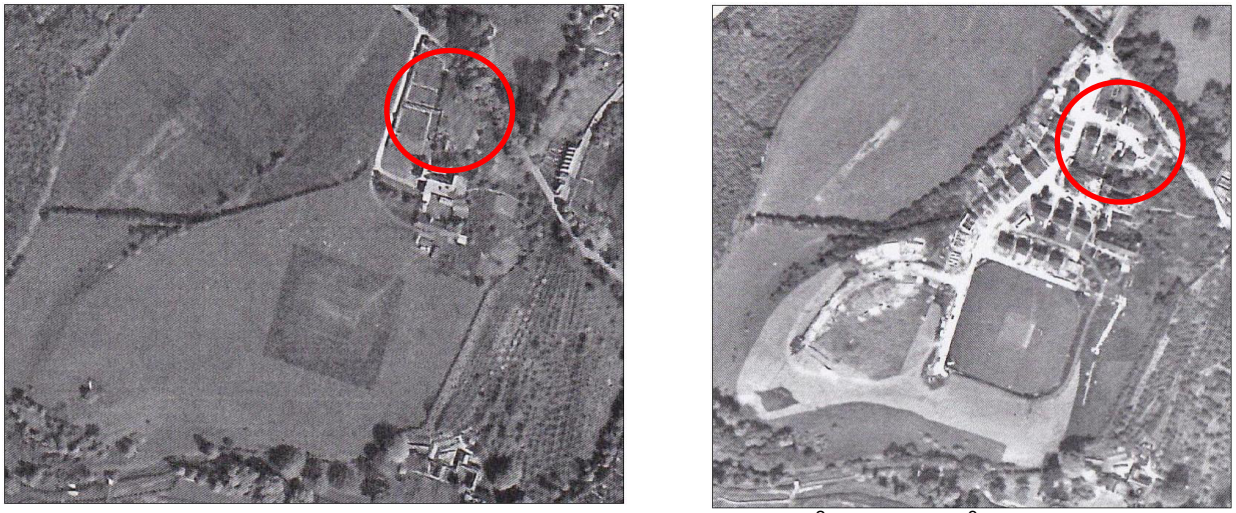
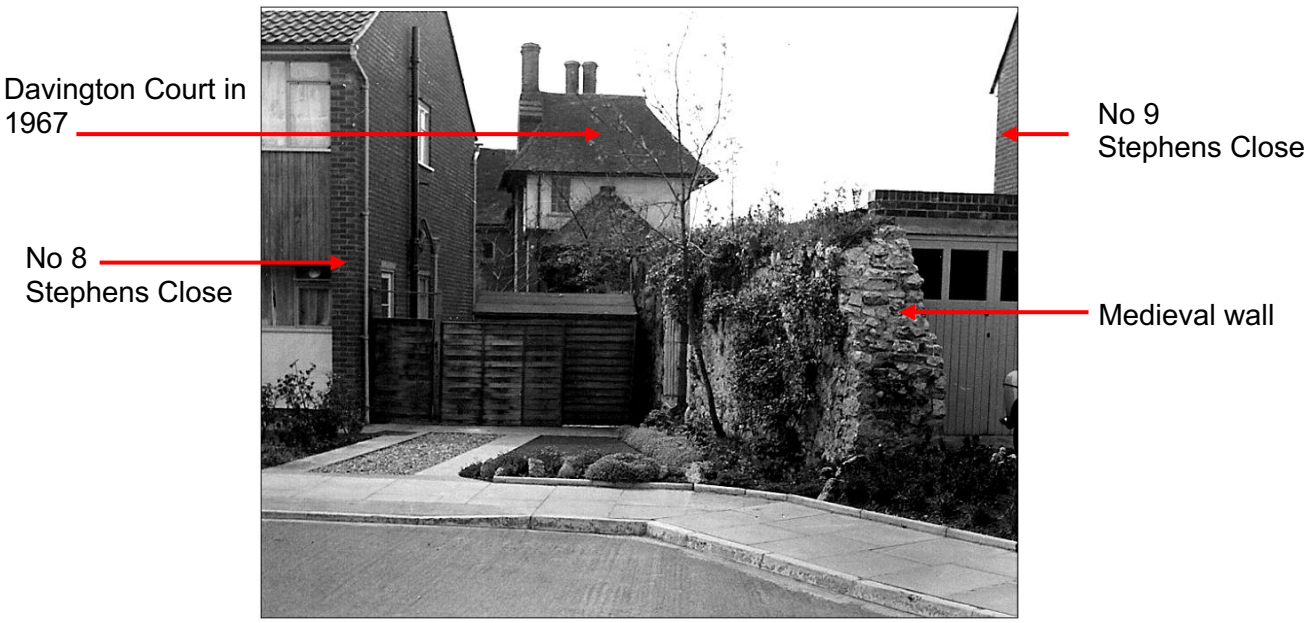


Fig 1: Aerial photographs of the Davington Plateau in 1946[2] and 1962.[3] Stephens close in the red circle.

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 1865[4] (**Fig 4**) and 1907[5] 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.

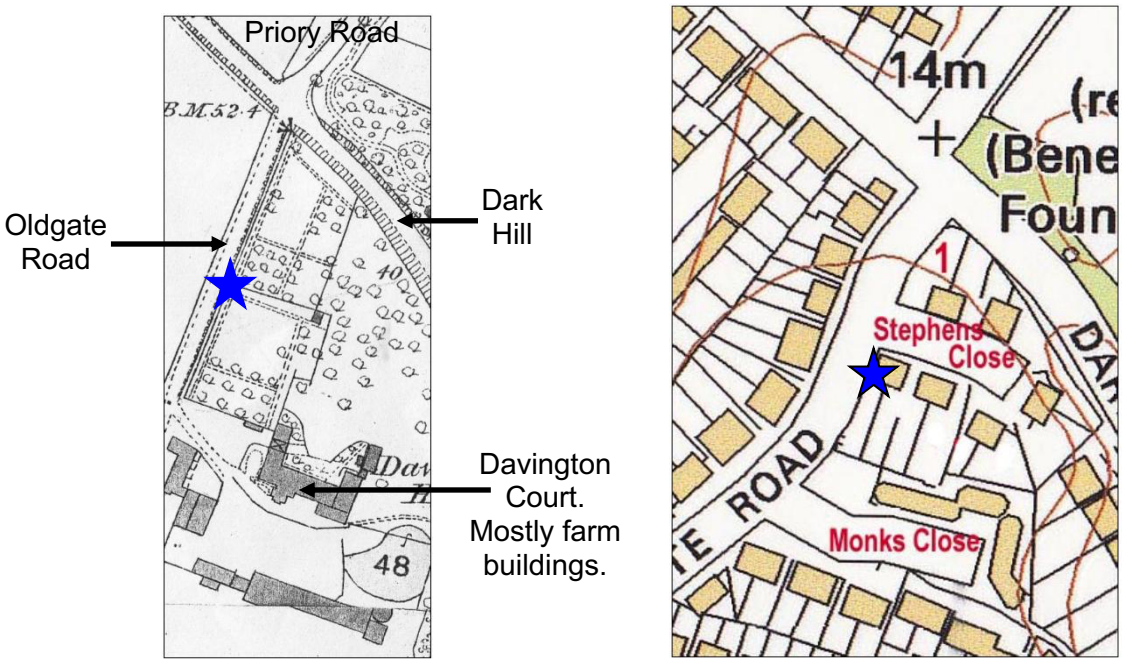


Fig 4: The Stephens Close area in 1865 and 2007. The blue star is the gateway shown in Fig 3.

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 Crowe[6] and Willement[7], 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 period[8], 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 1650-1660[9] 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 London[11] and Canterbury[12] 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

In preparation for the summer season and to support the extensive desk top work outlined above, a group of FSARG archaeologists undertook non-intrusive fieldwork over an Easter weekend in 2009. This consisted in part of examining verges and flowerbeds at various points around Stephens Close and the Davington plateau. This became termed *scratching* for obvious reasons. When the southern verge of Dark Hill was divided into sections and the surface of the ground of each examined for finds the group were pleasantly surprised to discover sherds of late Iron Age and medieval pottery. This was mainly towards the upper part of the hill, particularly the section adjacent to the rear of the garage of No. 4 Stephens Close. The group had to speak to the house owners Kevin and Charlotte.

Whilst talking Kevin mentioned a structure uncovered when sinking the footings of his garage. At the side of the hole required for the huge concrete base two stone arches were found. Kevin did not pursue recording of this as Swale building inspectorate staff had been informed and as there was no interference with the space needed for the footings, these structures were left embedded in the soil on the eastern side of the hole. At a later date Kevin built a shed with a shallow concrete base over the area of this structure. Scratching around the garden, more late Iron Age pottery was found on the flowerbeds and flowerpots. Kevin and Charlotte were truly surprised that these ‘pieces of stone’ were in fact pottery and of such great age. They were very happy for FSARG to excavate and agreed to our proposal for two excavations, K71A and K71B, the latter is reported separately.[13]

Given the background story, there was only one possible location for this pit K 71A i.e. close to the garage and the shed which were built beside and over the ‘arches’ described above. Knowing that the garage base was a huge mass of concrete it was clearly safe to dig within our normal safety margin adjacent to a standing wall. The excavation was sited to the south of the shed and close to the east of the garage, this being roughly in line with the arch structure.

[13] www.community-archaeology.org.uk/ projects/ Davington Mysteries/ Test Pit report 71B

3. The procedure

Fig 8: The excavation looking north and before widening, showing the brick garage and wooden shed. The brick feature [7] is just showing through.

A section of the driveway hard-standing paving bricks was lifted slightly larger than 2m x 1m to enable this area to be excavated. This was later enlarged to 2m x 1.5m and as digging proceeded downwards each deposit was taken out a context at a time.

Following the completion of the excavation the spoil was returned to the pit, watered to consolidate and the driveway structure and bricks reinstated to the satisfaction of the householders Kevin and Charlotte.

4. The findings

At 68cm depth and running south east from the northwest corner of the excavation and diagonally across it to the eastern side was a brick structure [7]. This feature divided the lower levels of the area and with further excavation this apparent stepped structure became the upper surface of a westward and downward sloping ceiling / roof for a lower-level covered area. This had been filled with rubble.

The lower level of our excavation was therefore in two parts. In the south a surface of brickearth [13], a yellow brown 'sandy-clay,' was reached at a depth of 1.0m and a small sample slot was cut into it. Although this context contained one small piece of Iron Age / Roman period pottery and a piece of stressed flint in its upper level, further excavation was stopped. Context [13] extended towards the brick structure [7] in the centre of the pit and at this point in the excavation it was taken to be the pre-building period matrix and a natural deposit. The problems with this will be discussed later.

To the northeast of the feature [7] the excavation had to stop at 1.6m depth for safety reasons. Here the lowest context was demolition material [11] with a high content of tile fragments and lime-mortar, most of which contained shell and gravel. Under [7] to the south was a wall [17] and to the east another wall [15] became visible, extending into the baulk and running towards the northeast in line with [17]. Between these two walls was a gap of 90cm where the walls turned to the south to form an opening. On their southern sides, these two brick structures and the rubble filled opening were backed against the brickearth of context [13].

The brick structures, [7], [15] and [17] seemed to consist of two phases. The stepped 'roof' structure [7] seemed later than the southerly side wall [17] and its eastern companion [15]. These walls were of early brick, probably a late 16th early 17th century construction. The rear, western support wall, and 'roof' structure were of later, 18th to early 19th century build and the fabric was a mixture, consisting of an inverted nearly whole glazed medieval floor tile, a part glazed brick, and other bricks of varying size and probable date. The material filling the space under the 'roof' and adjacent to it towards the north and east was the demolition material [11] noted above. This was dominantly a shell rich lime mortar. There was a high tile content but it also contained flints, small pieces of wood and Kentish Ragstone. Within this matrix the skull of a small pig [12] and beside it a piece of green glazed earthen ware pottery were found. These two items were part of the rubble mix on the northern side of the eastern wall [15]. Context [11]

demolition material filled the whole of the northern end of the excavation up to the level of the ‘roof’ structure [7].

To the south, the brickearth was covered with a brown soil [10] which graded upwards into one containing increasing quantities of brick pieces and flints with shelly-lime mortar attached, chalk pieces, oyster and cockle shells, sherds of pottery and some worked flints. The pottery sherds were dominantly pre-historic and Roman period in age but with some medieval and one very small sherd of late post medieval stoneware.

At around 90cm depth the demolition material [11] seen to the north was spread across the whole excavation, although it was only a scatter on [10] and [7]. The matrix above this to the south extended upwards from 90cm to 70cm as context [9] grading into context [6]. Context [9] was a similar basic dark brown soil material to [10] but with a significantly higher proportion of rubble in the form of brick, oyster shell, some small lenses of clay, flint, tile and stone. This context was not sieved because of this rubble and clay but all datable items seen were retrieved. Again, some pre-historic sherds of pottery were found, more medieval, and late medieval but no Roman period. Context [6] was again the dark brown soil but although the rubble mixture was of similar materials the quantity was smaller and sieving was possible. Here pre-historic and Roman period pottery was present but there were also late medieval and post medieval sherds.

Back at the northern end, the demolition layer [11] with its high shelly-lime mortar and tile content was topped just under the ‘roof’ by a spread of what seemed to be a spill / dump of modern concrete [14] with an air space of 3cm to 5cm left free under the ‘ceiling’.

On top of [11] a dark brown soil [8] with high rubble content filled the hole up to the top of the level of the structure [7]. Although [8] had a piece of pre-historic and some Roman period pottery it also had a piece of rim from a medieval splash glazed pottery colander or sieve-edged vessel, and another piece of similar glazed ware, post medieval red ware and 19th century sherds. It also contained cockle, mussel, clam, and oyster shells, some bone fragments, two iron nails, a green glass bottle neck and a separate green glass fragment, together with a heat stressed flint and five possible worked flints. Two of these have been identified as a Bronze Age piercer and a scraper of Mesolithic date.

Fig 9: K71A fully excavated, looking to the north as in Fig 8.

Fig 10: Inside the cavity, with the early wall [17] on the left. Remnants of [11] can be seen on the lower right.

Fig 11: Close up of the pig's skull [12], next to the early wall [15] and embedded in the demolition layer [11].

Above the structure [7] from a depth of 68cm to 70cm, the level of its top, the dark brown soils to either side were similar i.e. context [6] to the south and [8], with a greater rubble content, to the north. These became one similar soil context [5] from this level up to 34cm in depth. It again contained demolition material, less in quantity but with a greater mixture of materials including, coal / clinker, vessel and window glass, clay tobacco pipe stems, rectangular sectioned iron nails, oyster and cockle shells, pieces of animal bone, a small piece of slate, and a charcoal twig, as well as the brick, tile, stone, mortar, flint, and both worked and heat-stressed flints found in the lower levels. The range of pottery from this context [5] was impressive with again pre-historic, Iron Age / Roman period and early medieval, but here also post medieval (mainly red ware) and19th century. This range can be seen below in **Fig 12**, with the earliest pottery on the left.

Fig 12: Pottery from Context [5].

Overlying this was context [4], a layer of 'builders' rubble' of brick, flint, chalk, stone and mortar which Kevin confirmed would have been imported to the area when the garage base was filled. It is likely that it was mixed with some of the garden dark brown soil when being laid here as the base for the driveway

hard-standing. This made up a compacted layer of 10cm - 12cm with no pottery but amongst the soil content was a worked flint fabricator later dated as being Mesolithic in date.

Fig 13: Worked flints from K71A.

Contexts [3], [2] and [1] formed the remainder of the structure of the driveway / hard-standing beside the garage and in front of the shed. These were:

[3] – 7cm to 10cm of compacted re-cycled, old road-stone and tarmac.
[2] -10cm of compacted sand and gravel.
[1] - 5cm machine-made paving bricks.

As stated above, although the brickearth of context [13] seemed to be the natural layer of the whole southern end of the excavation, the manner in which the early walls [15] and [17] of the brick structures and the opening between them abutted it made it difficult to clarify if these walls were built into it. It is possible that some of this brickearth was re-deposited against the brickwork and it seems to have occurred at a later date than the original construction period but before the major earth movements of the 1960s.

5. Interpretation

From the archaeology the excavated area can be seen to consist of five distinct phases, summarised in **Appendix 1**: the Harris Matrix.

Phase 1.

Context [13] the brickearth must be considered as phase 1, as it is the local natural geology of the hilltop, as seen on the relevant surveyed maps, regardless of the relationship between the brick structures and it.

Phase 2.

The brick structures themselves are now seen to be dating from two phases, 2 and 3. Phase 2 being contexts [15] and [17] which do seem to be of late 16th / early17th centuries' construction and probably not related to the rest of the construction other than being re-used later. If this is the case then they represent a part of a building during or following the demise of the earlier manor house referred to by Crow and Willement. One possibility is that a new building or wing was built beside or onto the older medieval building. These are just two pieces of brick wall but the brick and mortar are early. These structures may be linked to the 'arches' seen by Kevin which must be within 2m of them.

It is not clear what the brick structures [15] and [17] were. These supporting walls do seem to be of a 16th / 17th century date with shelly-lime mortar and long brick length of 22cm. Possibly this is part of a cellar for Davington Manor.

Phase 3.

The rest of the brick structure including the ceiling / roof feature seems to be of later 18th / 19th century build or repair because of the use of what seems to be a harder, although still lime rich, mortar. Could this have included the 'early cement' made in the cement works beside Faversham Creek[14] and using the septarian concretion found locally in the London clay? The construction itself is of interest as it uses an upside-down glazed floor tile and a glazed brick. Glazed bricks are generally taken to be Jacobean and the glazed tile is of the late medieval style. Re-cycling, but when and why such a strange method of construction?

The top surface of the stepped roof / ceiling structure is not a stairway as there is no wear and its construction on this topside is uneven, being a mix of materials. These materials include re-cycled medieval floor tiles and later glazed and various sized bricks held in place by a hard but lime rich cement mortar. The construction technique is also a puzzle as although it is of double thickness tile and brick, the arrangement would be a weak load bearing structure. If this was the upper arch part of a lower stairway it is difficult to see how it fits with the rest of the walls. The initial thoughts that this whole brick structure may have been a WWII air-raid shelter with corrugated-iron inner shell, or a greenhouse or pigsty base, do not now seem possible following discussions with local people who were young teenagers playing in this area in the 1940s / 50s. In addition, a structure is not seen in this location on any maps or the 1946 aerial photograph.

What can be said, however, is that this is an indication that an earlier building incorporating glazed brick existed on the site together with the medieval manor house. This 'roofed' construction therefore seems to be a repair or maybe a rebuilt or even new structure in the 18th / 19th centuries and was probably partly covered and abutted by the soil contexts [6], [9] and [10] spread from the adjoining land to the south west.

Edward Crow writing between 1848 and 1861 on the subject of the various ruins of Davington Hall[15] 'this venerable manor house' describes late 16th early 17th century demolition of the 'principal part of this mansion, leaving only the south side and entrance gate standing.' Crow describes the walled gardens and 'Within these gardens on the north side next the road were the remains of a still more ancient building of stone……must have been the original manor house.' Crow describes the remaining walls of rooms demolished in 1844 and continues 'those which stood on the orchard side, disappeared about the year 1813, and from the time-worn and ivy clad walls was considered one of the most interesting ruins of the neighbourhood.' He also notes that the pavement of these buildings was of Roman shaped brick and proposed a ruined 'Roman building which might have stood on this hill.'[16] The demolition deposit [11] that filled in the cavity could well date from the 1813 activity.

Phase 4

In the period to the 1960s this whole area from Dark Hill to Monks Close and Oldgate Road was orchard / garden until Stephens Close was built. It seems clear that context [8] represent the considerable earth moving activities associated with the building of the houses and road of Stephens Close and the widening of the footpath on the southern side of Dark Hill. The wall bounding Dark Hill was demolished and much of its flint, stone and mortar material would have been used to level and where necessary raise the ground and reshape the banking on the east of No. 4.

From examination of the 1946 aerial photograph of the area and local knowledge, any building at this location had gone by the 1940s. In the 1960s any remaining structures would have been demolished during the levelling process. The new construction work could also account for the spill / dump of the small amount of concrete [14] under the brick structure although this would have been possible at earlier dates. The levelling would have moved the dark soil across the whole area mixing with the rubble to give

[14] HER No TR 06 SW 182 Faversham Cement Works. Roman cement 1813-1848, then Portland cement.
[15] Crow, E 1845-61 *Historical Gleanings relative to the Town of Faversham and Parishes adjoining* Transcribed and republished as CD Rom in 2009, P. Tann (ed), Faversham Hundred series Vol 6, Faversham Society. p 347
[16] Crow , op.cit. p347

the difference between contexts [8] and [6] of phase 3 and represents much of the spreading of the local topsoil across the site.

Phase 5

It seems clear that both [6] and [8] are linked to [5] and this context is a mixture of the spread topsoil of the original garden as the new 1960s garden and that excavated from under the garage during the period of building since 2005. The final stage is the construction of the driveway hard-standing [4], [3], [2] and the paving bricks [1].

The amount of early pottery in phases 2, 3, 4 and 5 strongly confirms the view that there was Iron Age and Roman period activity in this area. The amount of these pottery sherds in this area covering some thousands of years, close to the Dark Hill road cut in the Davington plateau, does raise a possibility that the road is on the line of something historically significant. Thus the Dark Hill 'cutting' could be:

a. A development from an ancient stream issuing from seasonal springs from the gravels of the top which would gradually cut back into the slope as stream and footpaths develop, the sherds of pottery representing the many breakages that would occur near such a stream. The possibility that such a natural cut into the slope would develop into this route-way is not unreasonable *or*

b. Part of an ancient creek-head route from Blean forest (charcoal) and Seasalter (salt) to the creek head villages such as Oare, Conyer, and on to Milton etc *or*

c. An entrance-way to a defended plateau during the Iron Age / Roman period, the pottery and Crow's Roman brick pavement being consistent with this.

It could even be all three. Clearly FSARG and others need to follow this up with more research.

The medieval pottery was expected because of the original manor house. The presence of glazed brick was unexpected however and does indicate Jacobean building activity. Crow indicates that ownership changed hands a number of times during this period. Improvements of more ancient properties is common in Kent at this time as exemplified by Chilham and elsewhere where such alterations to modernise the appearance and function of earlier buildings were made and can still be seen. Post medieval pottery from the period was also present. The final upper contexts represent the laying out and building of the road and houses of Stephens Close, part of the many rapid house-building construction programmes of the 1960s.

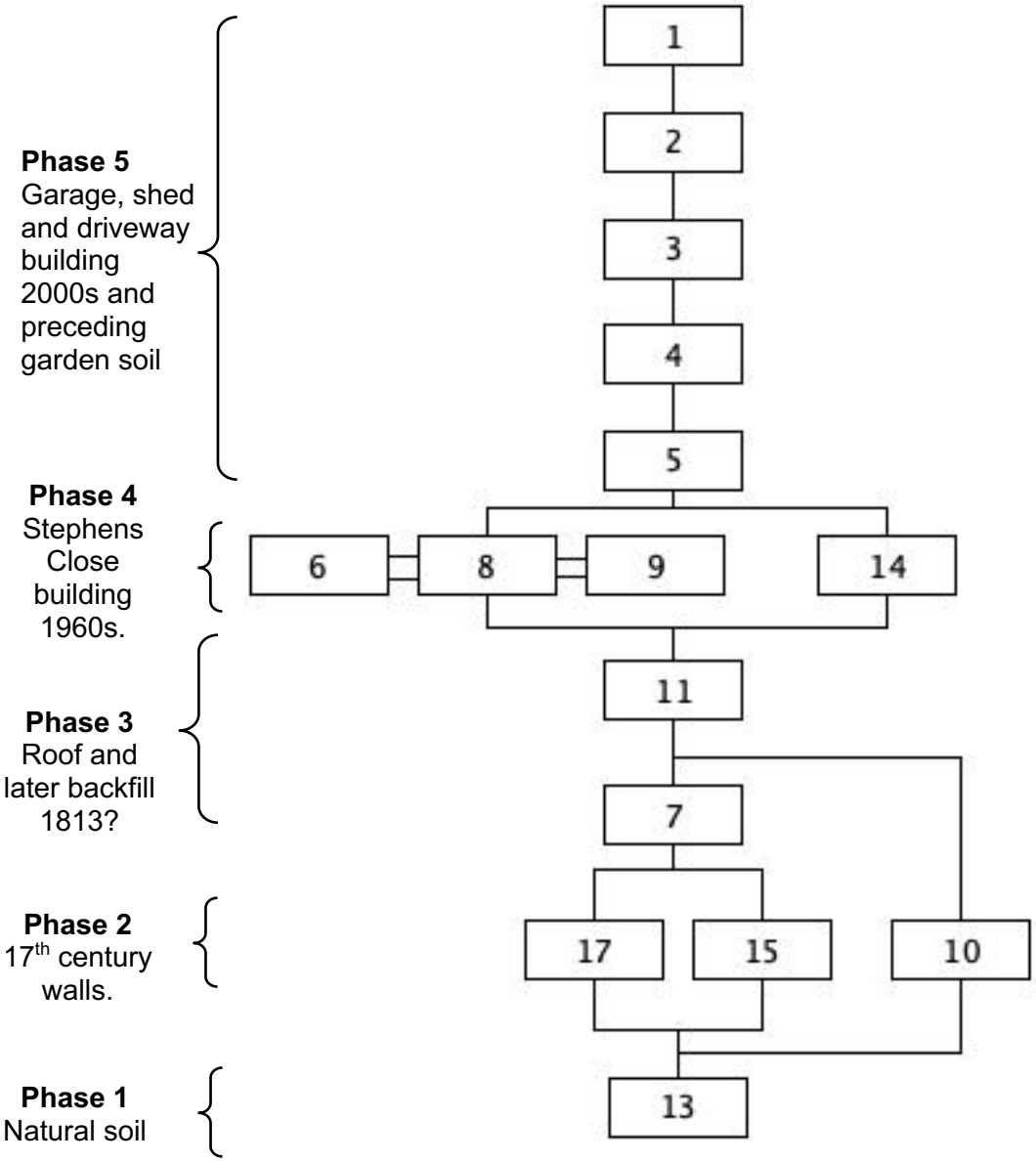
6. Final comments

This was a challenging excavation - a great deal of information coming from a very small area. Finds ranged from the Mesolithic to the modern day with very few gaps and the part of the brick feature revealed was infuriatingly complex. It was, however, very exciting to dig and we have learned a lot about the folk who have lived on the hill for thousands of years.

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.

Jim Reid

March 2011

Appendix 1: Harris Matrix