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The Faversham Society  
Archaeological Research Group



Community  
Archaeology

## **The Davington Mysteries DVN12**

**Report of excavation OA86  
Davington Cricket Ground**

**Grid Reference TR 00829 61466**



## 1. Introduction

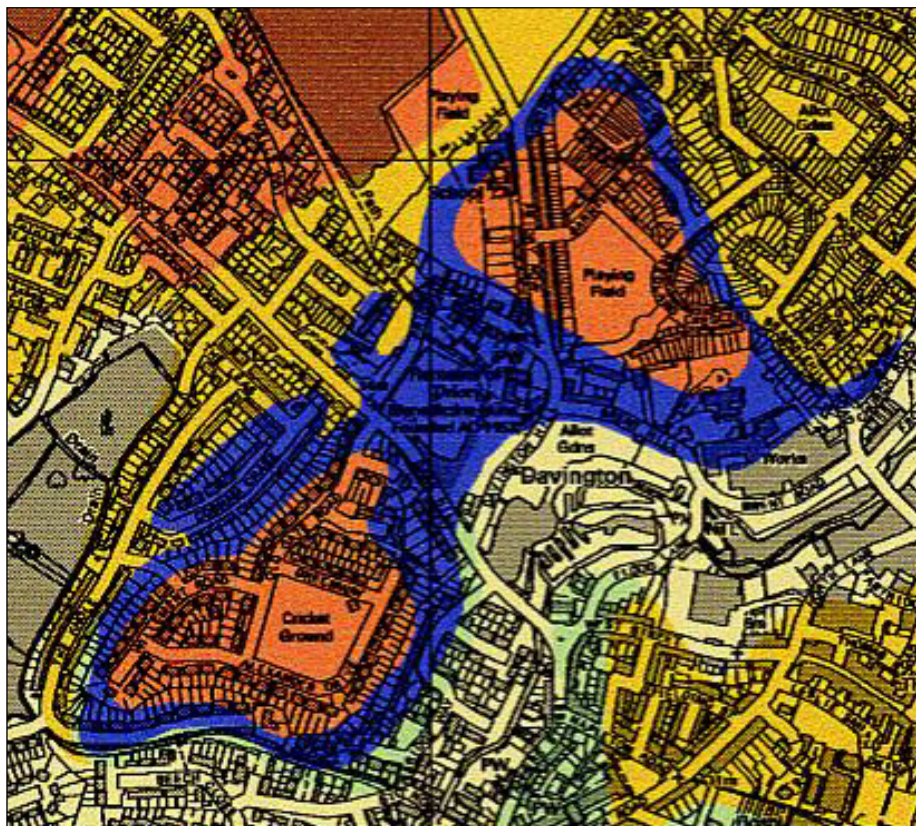
Davington Priory Cricket Club ground occupies a central position on the top of the Davington plateau, 15 to 16m above sea level. This plateau is composed of Upper Chalk, overlain by Thanet Beds and with a thin skim of Pleistocene deposits such as Head Gravels and Brickearth.

**Fig 1: The geology of the Davington Plateau.<sup>1</sup>**

Key:

Pale green: Upper Chalk  
Blue: Thanet Beds  
Orange: Head Gravels  
Yellow: Head Brickearth  
Cream: Alluvium  
Grey: Water & marsh

(North is at the top)



To the south, east and west the ground slopes away steeply and to the north the plateau slopes gradually downwards to sea level. To the east, the slope forms the west bank of the Westbrook stream, a powerful spring fed watercourse which is nowadays much diminished in volume due to water extraction upstream.<sup>2</sup> To the south, the slope forms the north bank of a small watercourse, tributary to the Westbrook but much modified by interventions in the post medieval period.<sup>3</sup> To the west lies an area known nowadays as the Willow Beds, a marshy area in which the tributary stream originates. The Willow Beds also show many signs of modified drainage and it is possible that the Westbrook tributary is in fact a diverted stream which once drained north westwards to Oare Creek. To the north, the plateau is cut steeply east to west by Dark Hill, at the eastern foot of which is the Stonebridge crossing of the Westbrook. Again, the deep cutting of Dark Hill may well be man made: the east-west route running through here is believed to be pre-Roman.<sup>4</sup>

Until the 1960s, the south end of the Davington Plateau was largely used only for farmland, although the area north of Dark Hill was occupied from the 12<sup>th</sup> century by Davington Priory.<sup>5</sup> The only historically recorded settlement on the southern part of the Plateau was Davington Court or Hall, descendant of a medieval manor.<sup>6</sup> The cricket ground area seems to have been used solely for farming up until the 1920s when it was first set out as a cricket ground (earliest Club minutes are from 1929).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> British Geological Survey Faversham: England and Wales Sheet 273

<sup>2</sup> Southern Water Pumping stations upstream at TR 00105 60163 and TQ 99506 58779

<sup>3</sup> Percival A 1967 *Faversham's Gunpowder Industry* Faversham Papers No 4 Faversham Society p3

<sup>4</sup> Kent Historic Towns Survey 2003 *Faversham: Archaeological Assessment Document* English Heritage & KCC p19

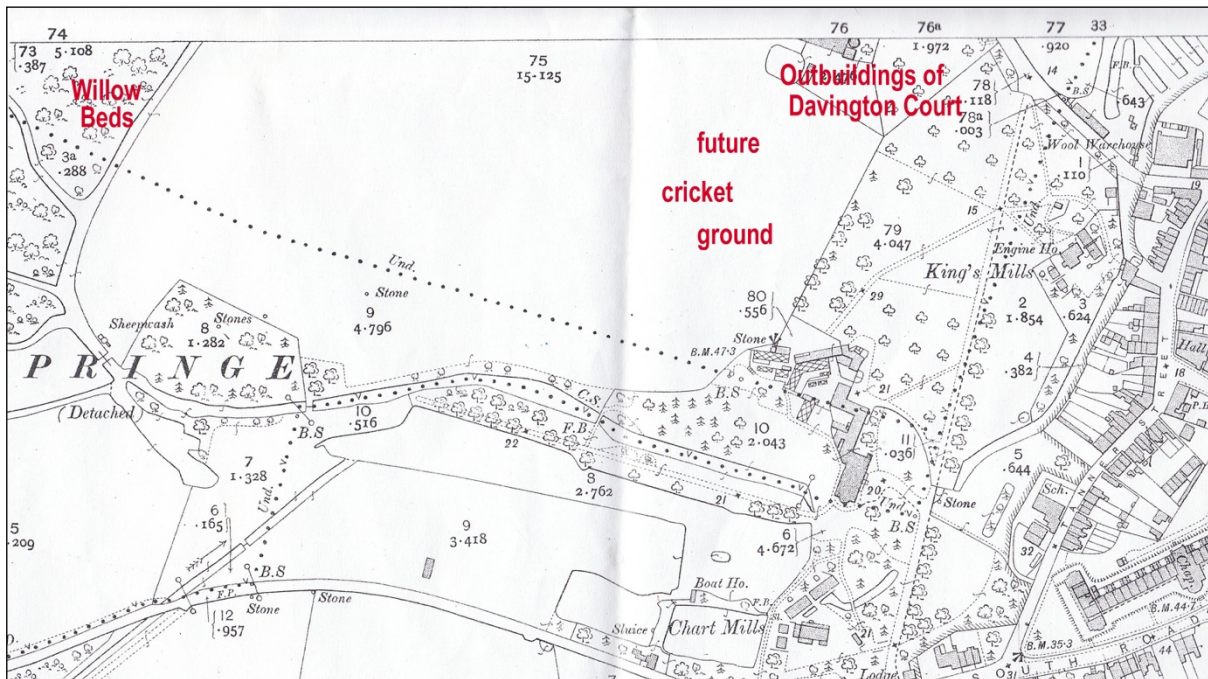
<sup>5</sup> Burke J & L Young 2003 *A History of Davington Priory* Davington Parish publication

<sup>6</sup> See FSARG reports under DVN10 and DVN11 on the FSARG website [www.community-archaeology.org.uk](http://www.community-archaeology.org.uk)

<sup>7</sup> Graham Owen, pers.comm



**Fig 2: The southern part of the Davington Plateau in 1907.<sup>8</sup> Note the emptiness of the whole area between the built-up Westbrook valley and the Willow Beds. (The dotted line is a boundary marker.)**



**Fig 3: Aerial photographs of the Davington Plateau. Use the unchanging Willow Beds to orientate yourself. The top is always to the north.**



**a) The Davington Plateau in 2007.<sup>9</sup>**

<sup>8</sup> OS 1907 edition. Kent Sheet XXXIV.9

<sup>9</sup> Google Earth view



**b) The Davington Plateau in 1962.**<sup>10</sup>



**c) The Davington Plateau in 1946.**<sup>11</sup>



In the early years of the Cricket Club, the clubhouse occupied an outbuilding of Davington Court but after the development of the surrounding area for housing in the 1960s and the demolition of Davington Court in 1968, a proper clubhouse pavilion was built in the north east corner of the ground. Except for the gentle care of the Cricket Club groundsmen and Swale Council, this large plot of land has remained untouched by modern development.

There have long been rumours locally that Davington Plateau is the site of an Iron Age hill fort. Although no earthworks or ditches are visible, the view from the plateau, northwards to the sea and in other directions towards known Late Iron Age settlements e.g. at Syndale<sup>12</sup> and the Queen Elizabeth School playing fields<sup>13</sup>, is impressive. There have been tales of so-called 'Belgic' pottery found during the development stage, although nothing had been published or retained (though see later). Indeed, apart from a few stray finds of Neolithic axes<sup>14</sup>, no formal archaeology is known to have taken place in this southern part of the Plateau, the developments having long preceded the developer-pays for archaeology procedures which have been in place in England and Wales since 1991.

Investigating the possibility of a fortified late Iron Age settlement in this area, then, seemed an ideal research project for Faversham's community archaeology group FSARG in 2010<sup>15</sup>, and the cricket ground area was an obvious starting point. The fact that on the very first day of the Easter season 2010, surveying on the southern slope of the Dark Hill cutting produced flint tempered Iron Age pottery sherds lying on the surface justified the decision from Day One.

## 2. Locations

The first investigations took place in 2010, with a large-scale geo-resistivity survey and two one day trenches K66 and K67 dug to explore the most striking feature shown by the geo-resistivity, which was a broad sweeping feature travelling from north west to south east. See the report for OA66 and 67 for a full

<sup>10</sup> Aerial Photograph 1962 KCC Photographic Archive

<sup>11</sup> Aerial Photograph 1 May 1946 F/20" //541 SQ DN. KCC photographic archive

<sup>12</sup> 2004 *Syndale Park, Ospringe, Kent: archaeological evaluation and assessment of results*. Wessex Archaeology, for Time Team, Channel 4.

<sup>13</sup> Philp, B 1968 *Excavations at Faversham 1965* First Report of the Kent Archaeological Research Groups Council

<sup>14</sup> 1966 'Researches and Discoveries in Kent' Arch.Cant. **81** p246, also KCC HER No TR 06 SW 42-

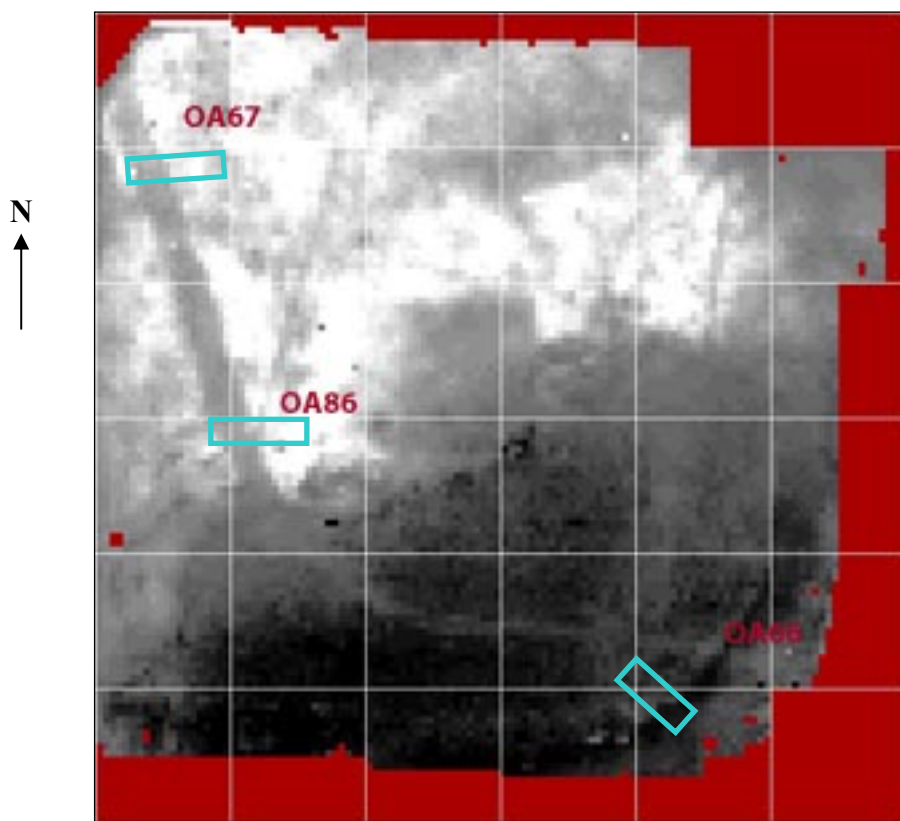
<sup>15</sup> See FSARG website [www.community-archaeology.org.uk](http://www.community-archaeology.org.uk) for project aims



account.<sup>16</sup> In April 2011, another one-day dig was carried out to extend the original trench OA67 by 3m. The new excavation overlapped the original excavation by 50cm which allowed continuity of contexts throughout. Questions still remained outstanding so in September 2011 a new one-day trench was dug 50m south of OA67, positioned to further investigate the dark broad band revealed by the geo-resistivity survey and allow comparisons with the findings of OA67. This new trench was called OA86.

It had become clear by this point that one-day trenches were just not going to give the answers being sought, so in April 2012 OA86 was re-opened and extended over a nine-day period. This is the longest period so far devoted to a single site excavation by FSARG.

This report covers the extension to OA67 and the whole of OA86.



**Fig 4: Results of the geo-resistivity survey carried out in April 2010 and the locations of the three trenches OA66, 67, 86.**

### 3. Procedures

The extension to OA67 was dug as a one-day trench, involving about 12-13 hours of continuous digging and making good. The decision to dig in this way was for public safety reasons, because of the openness of the cricket ground. A 3m by 1m area was carefully pegged out using the planning square and the area delineated marked with string. The location was tied as closely as possible to the earlier 2011 excavation and overlapped it by 50cm. With OA86 and its extension, the procedures were similar but the extension greater.

Turf was removed carefully from each area, rolled and set aside in plastic bags. The pit was then hand excavated using single contexts, each of which was fully recorded, to a maximum safety depth of 1.2m. All excavated soil was examined carefully with some contexts sieved 100% and others sampled. The spoil heap was 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.

<sup>16</sup> FSARG website op.cit. DVN10/ field reports/ OA 66 and 67

With OA86, special care was taken at the end of each days digging to cover the trench with wooden planks and make absolutely sure that the enclosing fence was robust and prominent. We were very aware that this is an open area with consequent risk to the public and although we are fully insured, we would hate any harm to come to anyone or their dogs.

## **4. Findings**

### **a) OA67 extension.**

The turf [1], topsoil [2] and subsoil [3] were carefully removed and [2] and [3] were sieved. At the western end of the extension context [3] dipped down, forming a shallow depression approximately 1m in width rising at the eastern end to meet what appeared to be a flint surface [5]. An extension of the excavation to the east was then undertaken - 50cm wide- to ascertain the extent of the surface. The surface was found to be 2.5m wide (east to west), level and well compacted flint with gravel.

Context [6] at the western end of the excavation was carefully trowelled out to a maximum depth of 1.5m being the bottom of a depression reflecting that of context [3]. Context [9] below [6] was considered to be the natural after a small slot was dug revealing deposits of an orangey, sandy / gravelly nature with no artefactual finds.

Post-excavation analysis of finds from the pit extension showed a marked increase in artefactual finds than had been found in the original OA67 pit. 32 worked flint tools and 2 cores were found, 24 from context [3] and 8 from [6]. These are currently part of a wider study into the worked flint from this area.<sup>17</sup> Overall, this trench which finally extended to 9.2m in length, 46 worked flints were found of which 31 were scrapers and 6 were boring tools which suggests that people in this area were predominantly concerned with the processing of skins and the making of leather goods.

Prehistoric pottery made up 56% of the finds from this pit with 25% Romano-British and 17% post medieval.

### **b) OA86 (Phases 1 and 2)**

Contexts from the earlier trench Phase 1 were merged into those identified in the extension Phase 2.

Originally, a trench one by 5m was opened up in the usual manner to allow restoration of the playing surface. Turf [1] was removed and set aside. The topsoil [2] was carefully excavated over the whole area of the trench. The underlying context [3] was rich in flints of varying size and composition, with those to the east end [4] being less compacted. At a depth of 47cm the composition of flints became more compacted, giving every indication of a 'surface' [6] like that found in OA67.

Investigations to the west of the trench suggested an edge to the flint surface, but in this first one-day investigation there was not time to investigate further and the trench was backfilled. Work was resumed the following April. The infill was removed and the excavation extended 2m to the west, the extension being 1.5m wide. Contexts [1], [2] and [5] were excavated but not sieved, though scrutinised for inclusions.

Contexts [3] and [4] were carefully trowelled and found to be a random layer of poorly sorted sub-angular flints within a matrix of light reddish-yellow friable soil. Pottery inclusions were subsequently dated to Iron Age, both early and late. From the west end of the excavation, [5] and [11] (later merged to form one context, [5]) extended approximately 3m to the east. These contexts contained mid-late Iron Age and Belgic pottery in a fine grained, orange brown sandy silt with a few sub rounded flint inclusions. Below this, context [19] was shallow and concave towards the west end thickening towards the centre of the excavation where it merged into [12] and [14] and curved upwards to the base of [2]. This will be known as context [19]. These contexts contained a similar range of pottery inclusions as [5] / [11] but in a much greater concentration and with the addition of a small amount of early Bronze Age pottery.

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<sup>17</sup> P Reid in prep



Below this was a fine grained soft yellow brown layer with moderately sorted flint inclusions. This was the richest context for early to late Iron Age, with a little early Bronze Age but no 'Belgic'. This context is the end result of a merge between [26], [22], [23], [21] and [27] and will be referred to from now on as [26].



**Fig 6: The post hole [13] [20] [15].**

From the interface between [26] and the layer above, [19] and therefore contemporary with early [19] a large circular hole [13] [20] [15] penetrated 30cm vertically into [26] with a layer of flints in the bottom. At the same level was a shallow circular scoop [24] [25]. The content of these holes was the same as [19].

The flint surfaces [10] and [17] also correspond to this interface level. [26] sits on the natural soil, waterlogged gravel with small to large flint in reddish brown sandy soil.



**Fig 7: Eastern end of the trench showing the flint and gravel surfaces.**

A total of 166 worked flint tools were identified. 15 were clearly Mesolithic, 1 Neolithic, 33 Bronze Age and 52 being Early Iron Age. The remaining 78 flints were undateable at present but thought to be later

rather than early.<sup>18</sup> The flint assemblage from all of the Cricket Ground excavations is currently subject to a detailed examination, the result of which will be published later. Large quantities of heat stressed flint were also found in the three main layers, [5], [19] and [26], amounting to around 15kg in all.



**Fig 8: Multi-purpose tool and blade core.**

## 5. Interpretation

The initial aim of the Cricket Ground project was to investigate a broad dark (wet) band shown on the 2010 geo-resistivity survey.

The findings from OA86 in particular indicate that the feature is a relatively shallow depressed area, at first glance more likely to be a worn track way rather than a deep boundary ditch. The fill of the depression suggests that either it was filled in with material moved in from the surrounding area (the eastern side of the depression was particularly rich in Iron Age material) or itself precedes the creation and deposition of the Iron Age material and was filled in with deposits during the Iron Age. A possible interpretation is that the depression and its infilling is quite late in date, dating from a smoothing out period on the plateau, except for the fact that the infill layers contain nothing but Iron Age material. Furthermore, the upper surface of context [26], along with the flint surfaces [10] and [17] do seem to represent an original undisturbed Iron Age occupational level with the vertical hole [13] [20] [15] almost certainly a large post hole, maybe for a stockade. It is far from impossible that the identification of the natural at the western end of the trench is mistaken and that there is a much deeper wider (to the west) ditch running through here.

The flint (including large amounts of heat stressed flint) and pottery has already been mentioned. What is striking, though, is the absence of certain usually quite abundant items from prehistoric sites in this area - shellfish debris for example, and indeed animal bone or any other signs of consumption.<sup>19</sup> The survival of a few small pieces of bone in good condition shows that this is unlikely to be explained by taphonomy.

The absence of medieval finds has already been remarked upon: it is almost as if the whole plateau was truncated at the post medieval stage, a very unlikely occurrence! Faversham was a lively and prosperous medieval town and we often find worn medieval pottery sherds in the medieval levels, a remnant of so-called 'midden scatter' where household rubbish was spread over fields to compost

<sup>18</sup> Geoff Hallowell pers. comm.

<sup>19</sup> Reid op cit

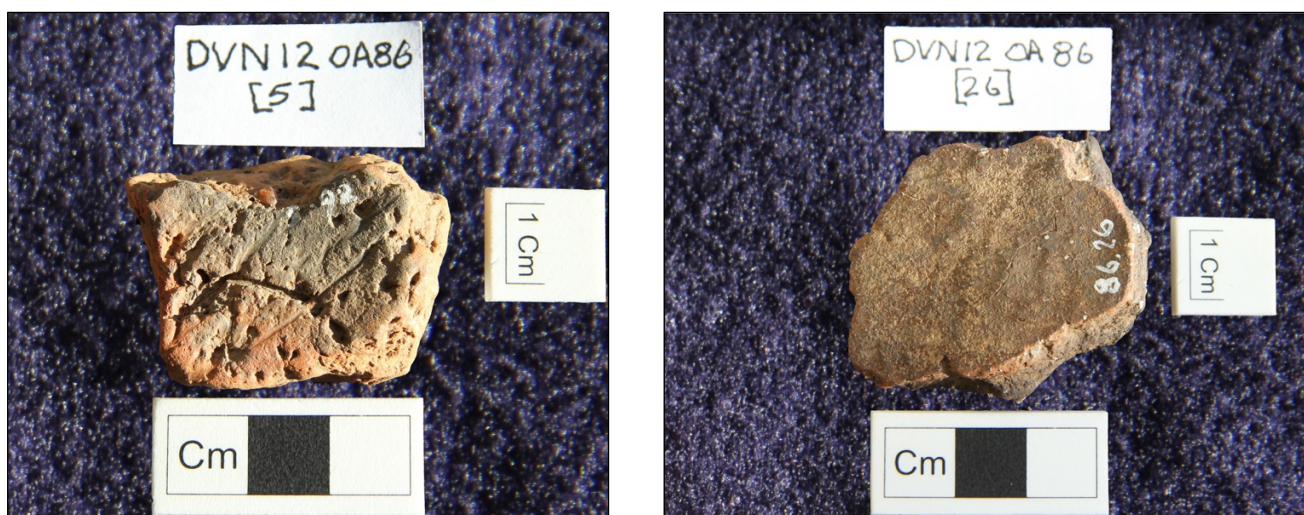


them.<sup>20</sup> The Cricket Ground is next to the site of a prominent medieval manor, Davington Hall, and close to a medieval priory, yet we found not one sherd of medieval pottery in all of the trenches. This has not been the case on the northern side of the plateau.<sup>21</sup> We can only assume that this area had been under pasture for the whole of the medieval period.

One small but valuable presence has been a few sherds of early Bronze Age pottery, almost certainly Beaker ware, a first for FSARG. So, this is yet another phase in the history of the Davington Plateau that has disappeared without surface trace.

Only much larger scale and probably machine assisted excavation would give sure answers to this, something which is only likely if this area is developed for housing (we all sincerely hope this will not happen).

What we have established, though, is that settlement up on the Davington plateau has been more or less continuous from the Mesolithic onwards, culminating in considerable activity in the early - mid Iron Age, falling away in the later Iron Age. This is consistent with Tim Allen's proposal that a Thames, Swale and Wansum trans-continental trade route stimulated settlement along the north Kent coast in the late Bronze Age, early to mid Iron Age.<sup>22</sup> By the later Iron Age, with the development of new trade routes exploiting iron ore sources in Central Europe, north coastal Kent (along with the rest of North West Europe) was out of the mainstream and settlement diminished and become poorer. It is not until the immediate pre-Roman period that this area picks up again, with much continental influence, according to Allen, but we have yet to find Belgic to Romano- British actual habitation up on the Davington plateau.



**Fig 9: Two pottery types from the great range of prehistoric types found in OA86. Left, a possible grog tempered Beaker (Early Bronze Age) and right, a sherd of flint tempered burnished ware (Early to Middle Iron Age).**

## 6. Final Comments

Excavations OA67 and OA86 have been very hard work but richly rewarding in finds and the light cast on the obviously long-standing human occupation of the plateau. Another excavation to the south of OA86 of north south orientation to investigate the continuation of the broad dark band should perhaps be considered and there are other features on the geo-resistivity survey that remain to be explained - particularly the two narrow bands which run from north northeast to south west across the middle area: if

<sup>20</sup> see e.g. FSARG website , Reports HSX06 TP27, OSP08 K54

<sup>21</sup> FSARG website, 2012, DVN12 Report on investigations around Brent Hill

<sup>22</sup> Allen T 2012 ' Bronze, boats and the Kentish Seaboard in Prehistory: the role of coastal Kent in a major trans-continental trade route ' Arc. Cant. Vol CXXXI1 pp 1-19

the plateau was settled even if just on a seasonal basis the exact location of the settlement is as yet undiscovered.

## **7. Acknowledgements**

We remain deeply indebted to the Davington Priory Cricket Club and to Swale Council Parks Department for allowing us to carry out our investigations into this fascinating area of very ancient settlement, about which nothing was known prior to these investigations. We hope you find the discoveries as interesting as we do. We also fully acknowledge the invaluable help and expertise from Nigel Macpherson Grant (pottery) and Geoff Hallewell (flints) - any errors in this text are FSARG's, not theirs!

**Keith Robinson**

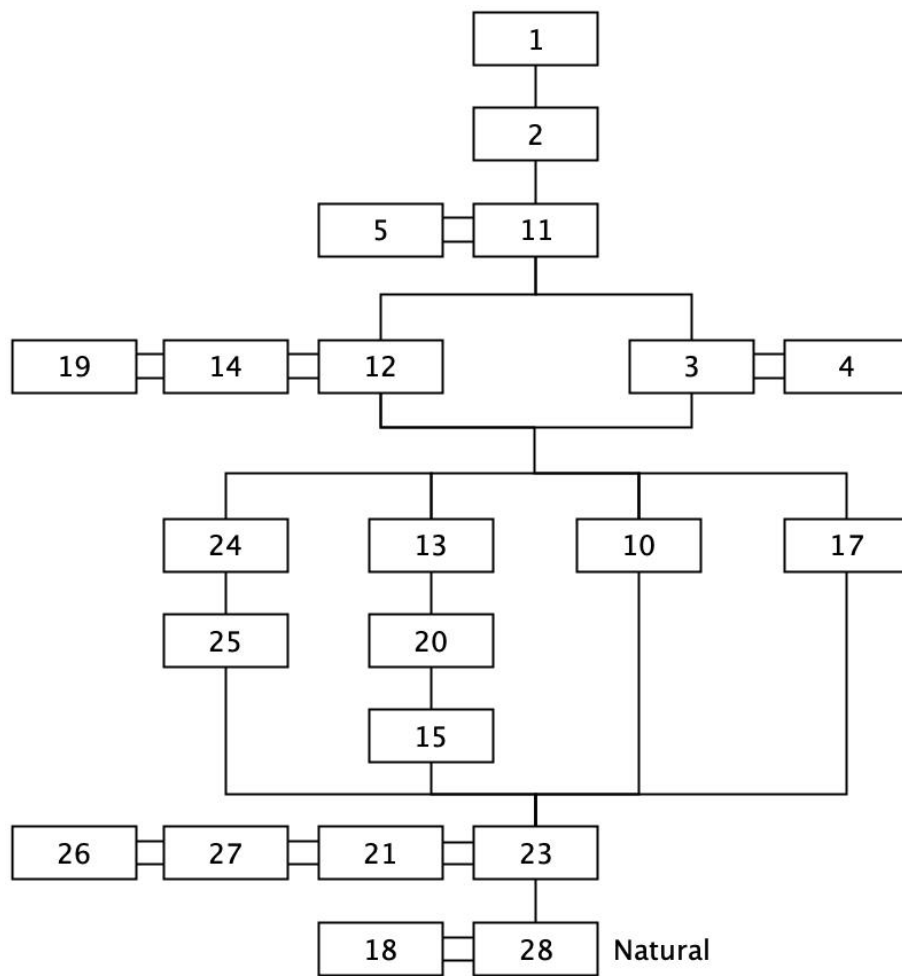
**December 2012**

**Fig 10: Completed excavation showing slot to the right dug to expose southern section.**





# Appendix 1: Harris matrix.



Appendix 2: Scale plan and section.

