



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



Community
Archaeology

The Davington Mysteries

**Report for Keyhole Excavation 68
1 Stephens Close, Davington, Faversham.**

Grid Reference: TR 00938 61412



Nathan finds the spindle whorl.

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**).

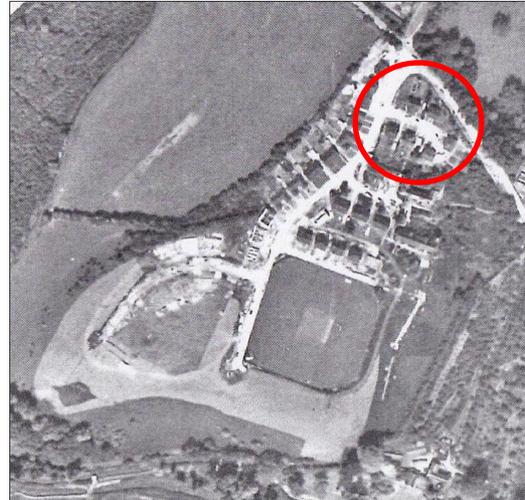
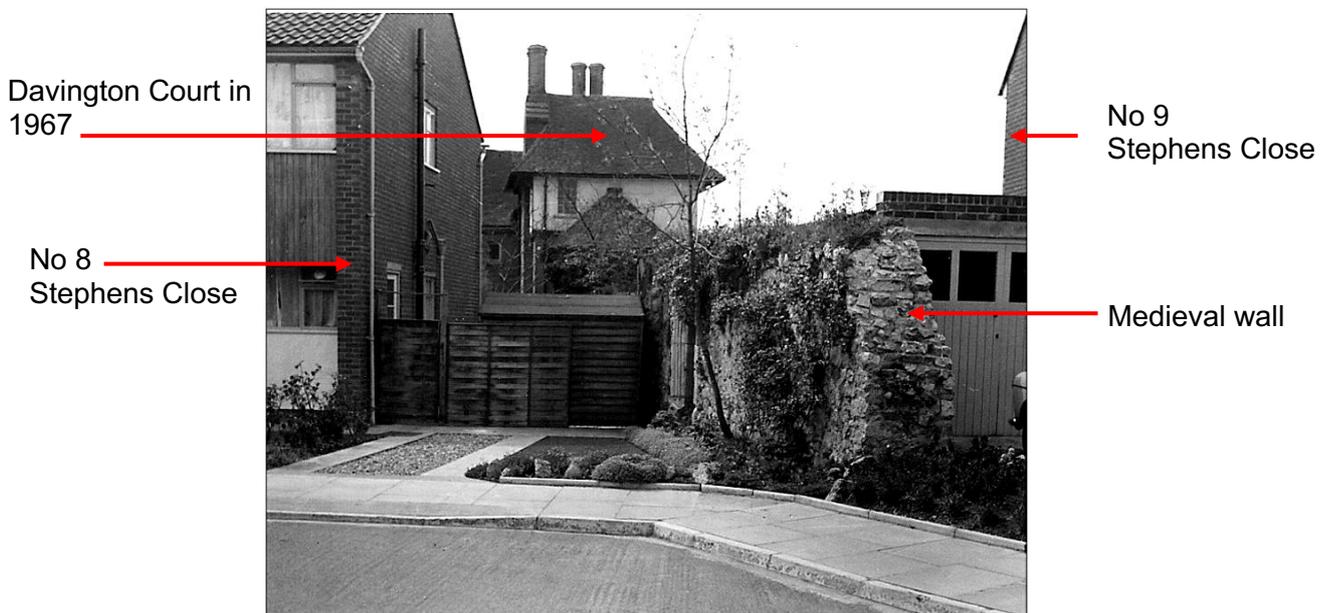


Fig 1: Aerial photographs of the Davington Plateau in 1946² and 1962.³ Stephens close in the red circle.

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 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.

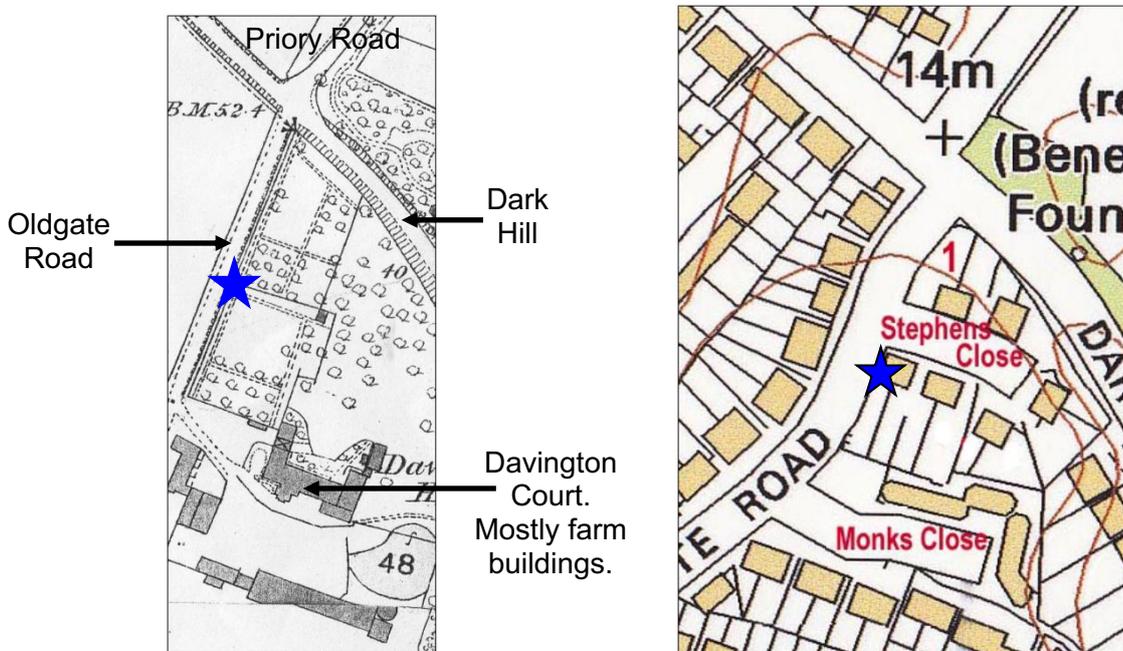


Fig 4: The Stephens Close area in 1865 and 2007. The blue star is the gateway shown in Fig 3.

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 and 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 of excavation

This excavation was in the back garden of No.1 Stephens Close. No.1 sits atop Dark Hill and, like many of the gardens in the Close, has views across the hill towards the grounds of Davington Priory. The hill itself runs down to Stonebridge Ponds and thence to Faversham itself. Dark Hill road runs close to the garden ends which drop away sharply on this side of the Close to meet it. No.1 has a large mature garden, rectangular in shape with a patio area the width of the back of the house connected by a step to a spacious raised lawn.



Fig 8: The garden at No.1, looking south from the Dark Hill end of the garden, across the site of the backfilled swimming pool.

The youngest member of our FSARG team – a lad called Nathan – had found a Late Iron Age spindle whorl in the flower border of the house next to the right hand fence between numbers one and two Stephens Close during a foraging expedition of the Close the previous Easter (see cover picture). The spindle whorl was an ancient method of spinning wool. On its own this was an important enough find to justify further exploration of the garden. The keyhole pit was therefore dug near to where this had been

found. The garden was also the site of the long-disappeared swimming pool of Davington Court, an exotic 1950s addition to the grounds.



Fig 9: Left, enlarged from 1962 aerial photograph, during building phase of Stephens Close. Right, geo-resistivity survey of the gardens undertaken by FSARG Easter 2010. The swimming pool is clearly visible in both.

3. The Procedures

For each excavation, the relevant area was pegged out using the planning square and the area delineated marked with string. The positions of the areas were recorded by measuring to mapped corners of the house. Where relevant, turf was removed carefully from the delimited area, rolled and set aside in plastic bags. The pits were then hand excavated using single contexts, each of which was fully recorded. Depth of excavation varied but was at deepest 1m. 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

In all, nine contexts were identified in this pit with finds including pottery, bone, flint, shell, iron, coal and domestic clinker, building material, glass, and clay tobacco pipe fragments. Below the turf layer [1] the soil in the next layer [2] was dark brown with some patches of yellow clay mixed in with lots of rubble especially flint and domestic clinker, ceramic building material, some small pieces of broken pottery, a few pieces of small to medium iron, and rarely some small to medium bits of clay tobacco pipe. [2] extended to 20cm in depth.

Under this was [3], a brownish soil with much more yellow clay and a large amount of rubble mixed in it, and more of the finds similar to [2] but now including glass. Some large pieces of mortar and flint were visible in [3]. [3] was deeper at the northern end where the soil was very ashy. The ash level was found to continue down and was excavated further as part of [2]. [3] was excavated down to a depth of 30cm with the same yellow clay and rubble still evident.

Under this was layer [4] was dark brown soil with a few pieces of flint, pottery, glass, and iron. At about 40cm from the surface and cutting into [4] a triangular shape, possibly a post hole, appeared containing fine orange-brown gravel and measuring 7cm across at its widest and tapering to a point at 14cm. The pit was further excavated to a depth of 65cm where the soil became a lighter brown orangey soil – a soft damp clay. This became layer [5] and finds included worked flints, some late iron age pottery, a large piece of Belgic pottery and a couple of pieces of 18th century pottery. The soil became lighter [6] and finds included flints, stressed flints and iron age pottery. The base of the pit became [7] within which at a depth of 108cm, a cut appeared [8] filled with contrasting darker soil [9]. The cut [8] was well defined as a semi diagonal line through the lighter soil. [9] was investigated by a small slot which yielded a single

late Iron Age pottery sherd. The pit had reached a depth of 115cm, the maximum depth allowed for safety reasons, and with regret the excavation was completed.



Fig 10: K68 at the end of excavation, with contexts labelled.

5. Interpretation

From investigative work done by members of FSARG, including living memory within the community, it was clear that our pit was in what was part of Davington Court kitchen garden. It is also probable that this had also been part of the grounds of the earlier Davington Manor. The creation of the swimming pool, its subsequent disappearance, and the building of the houses of the Close have all resulted in churned soil levels down to at least mediaeval ground level. This is probably represented by [4] where the soil was darker with an appearance of organically enriched topsoil beginning to shade into subsoil as we excavated down.

It is hypothesised that some of the mix in [2] and [3] are from levels beneath the level of [4] caused by spoil from the digging out of the swimming pool and the foundations for the modern house. This is evidenced by a number of things: There is a mix of yellow subsoil (brick earth) in the upper contexts along and a mix of pottery finds ranging from prehistoric to modern, and other finds spanning from antiquity to contemporary.

When we reached [5], there were noticeably more finds of prehistoric and Roman pottery along with diminishing returns of post mediaeval and later pot. By [6], prehistoric and Roman sherds were beginning to decrease but the pit yielded a Mesolithic bladelet core and awl [5] had pre-empted these by presenting us with a flint core of similar antiquity.

Fig 11: Mesolithic flints - two cores and an awl.

In contexts [7], [8] and [9] at the very bottom of our pit and in true Time Team manner, the pit gave up its secret, where the clearly seen darker soil [9] next to lighter soil [7] is the fill of a possible Iron Age ditch identified as such by Dr Pat Reid, or maybe an even earlier feature. The curvature of the line where the fill and the cut [8] meet are suggestive of a large ditch feature.



6. Final comments

The work had to end at this moment. Yet it felt as if we were just at the beginning of something very intriguing. Supposing we had been able to follow the ditch, where would that have led? Might it be possible to work out its original size from the information we already have and so complete this particular ancient circle?

7. Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Ann and Dave Jemmett for permission to dig in their garden, for their warm hospitality, and their keen interest in the progress of the excavation. Special thanks to their grandson Nathan, whose sharp eyes were invaluable - we hope you will work with us again, Nathan.

Carole Mandeville

December 2010