

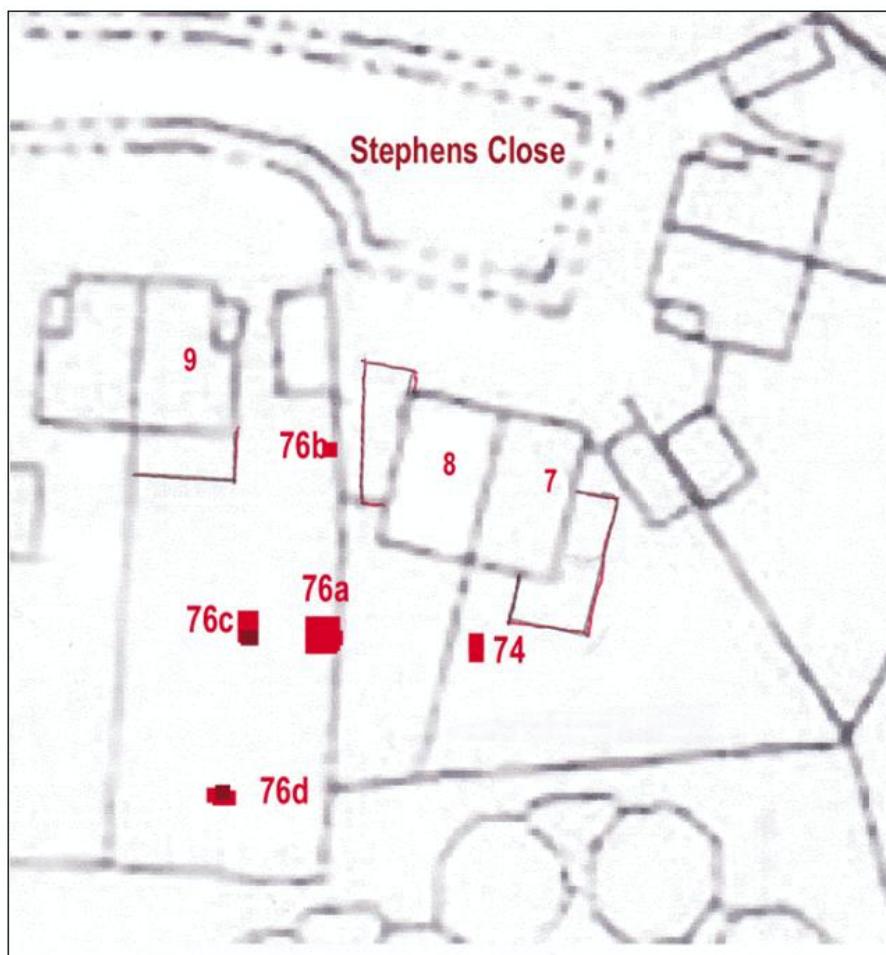


The Davington Mysteries 2010

**Report for archaeological investigations K74, K76a, 76b, 76c, 76d.
7, 8 and 9 Stephens Close, Davington, Faversham, Kent**

Grid References (centroids for gardens):

**No 7: TR 00960 61606, No 8: TR 00940 61610,
No 9: TR 00941 61621**



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**).

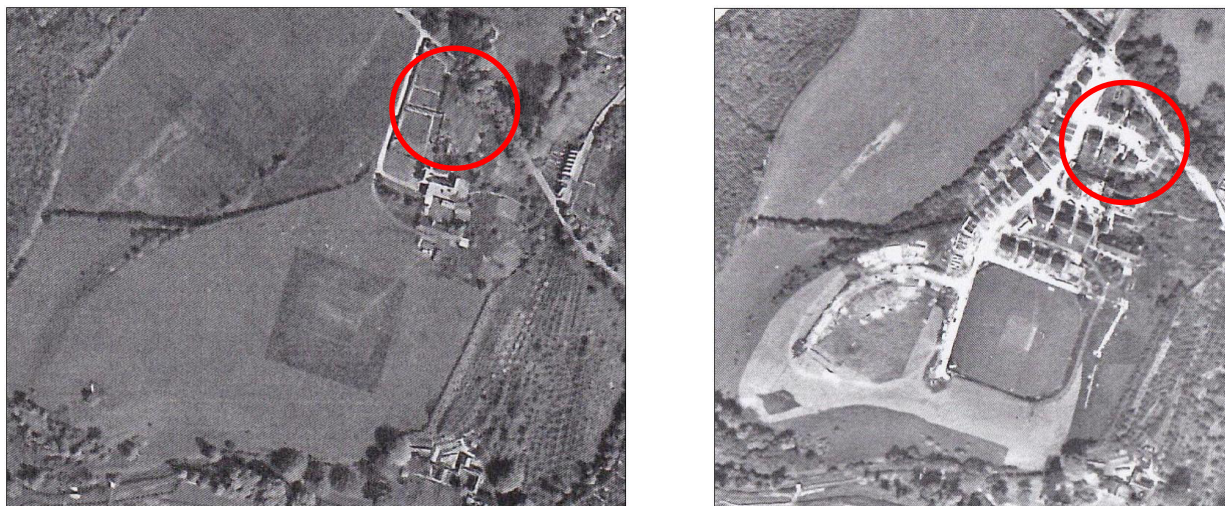
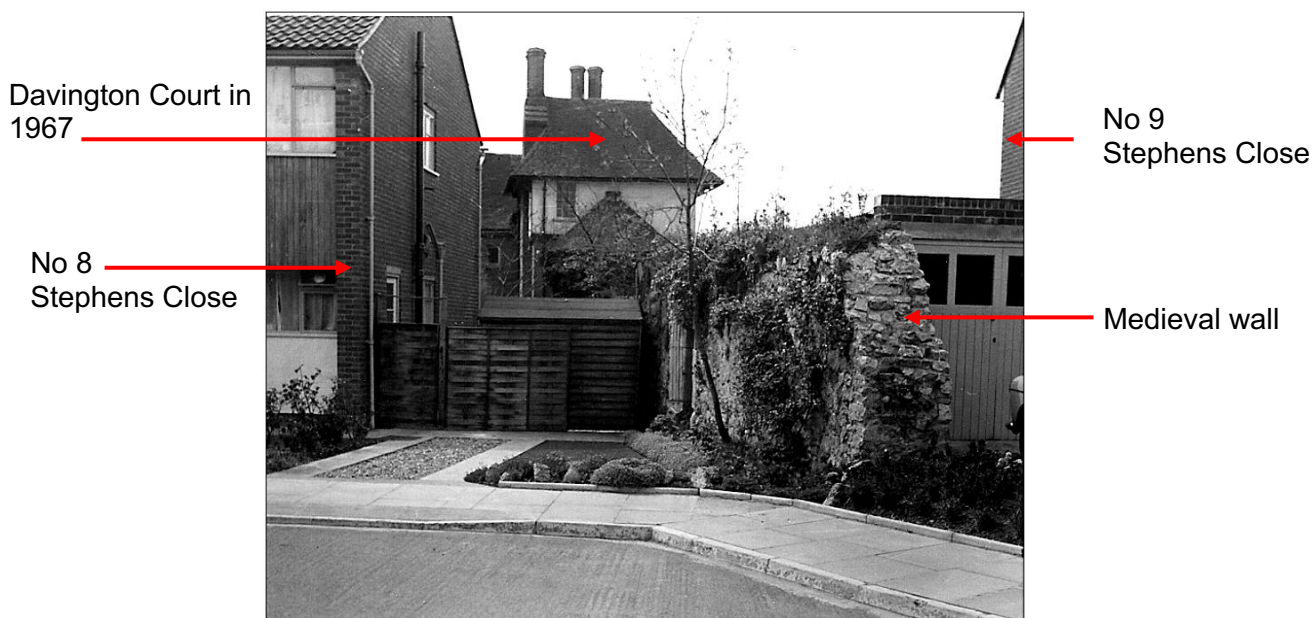


Fig 1: Aerial photographs of the Davington Plateau in 1946² and 1962.³ Stephens close in the red circle.

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

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

gateway in similar style but less elaborate survives at the foot of the garden of No 9 (visible in **Fig 2**). 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.

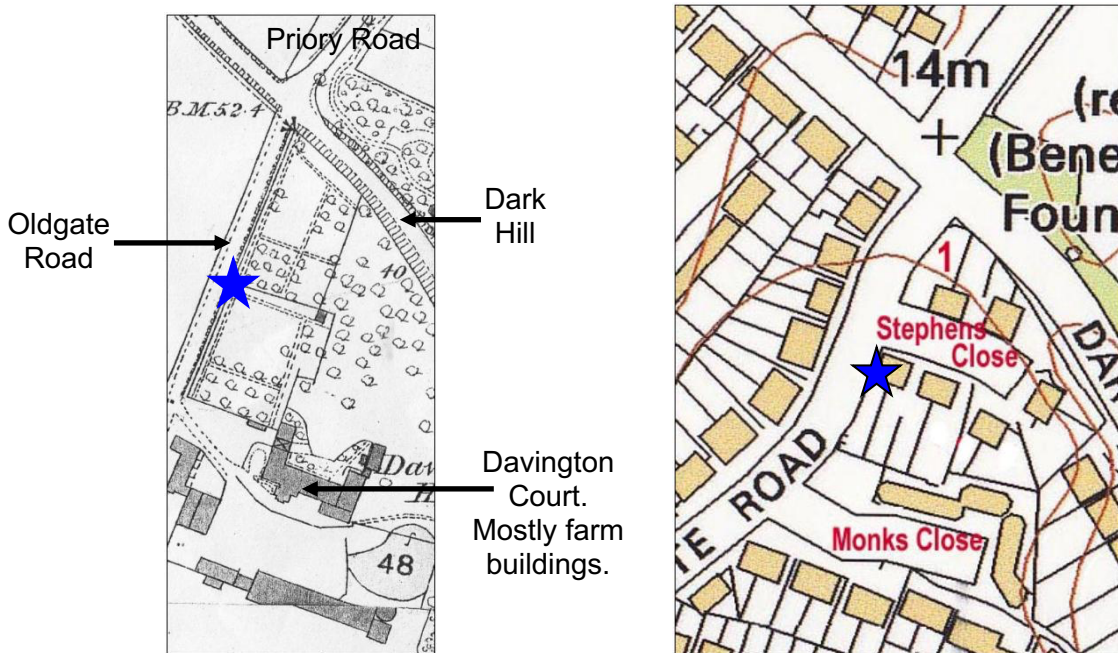


Fig 4: The Stephens Close area in 1865 and 2007. The blue star is the gateway shown in Fig 3.

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.

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

⁵ OS 2007 1:5000

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 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.

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

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 excavations

The garden of No. 9 occupies a large area, with extensive shrubberies. Between No. 9 and No. 8 is the surviving stretch of medieval wall, described in the introduction. No. 8 is a much smaller garden (see **Fig 4**).

Fingertip foraging in flowerbeds and geo resistivity surveying of lawns were carried out as far as possible. Foraging in the garden of No. 9 yielded only relatively modern pottery, but the much smaller garden of No. 8 yielded the largest number of medieval sherds in Stephens Close and a small fragment of medieval glazed tile. The resistivity survey hinted strongly at building remains in the north part of the garden of No. 9 near the standing wall but showed no definite wall lines.

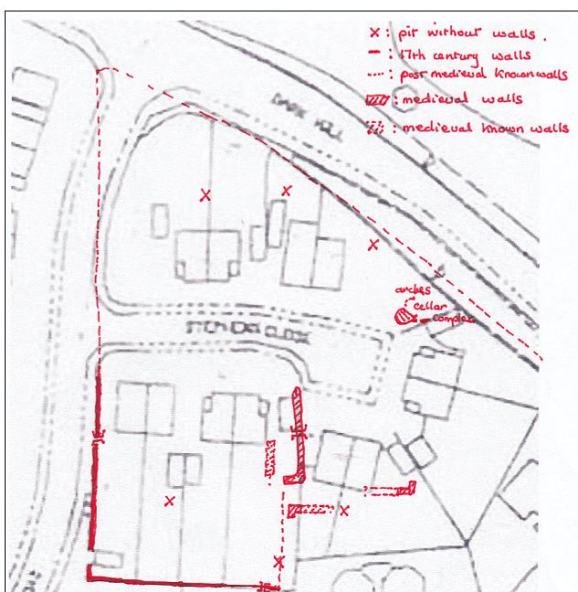
Much more useful was information from householders. Dave of No. 9 told us that when the extension to No. 9 was built around 2006, a length of flint and stone wall was exposed. This now lies underneath the extension (see **Fig 8** map). No. 8 has a much smaller garden, carefully cultivated, and Brian the householder told us that he was convinced that a wall crossed his garden running north-south about halfway down the garden. He had also had glimpses of a flint wall when putting in the fence separating Nos. 8 and 9. In addition, study of early maps (**Fig 4**) showed that the 17th century wall encircling this area had previously extended through the garden of No. 9: nowadays it only survives as a stretch along the back with a Mannerist gateway still existing (**Fig 3**).

Fig 8: The medieval wall.



Above, the 13th century gateway and the northern (street) end of the wall. This end has been drastically restored but the massive construction can clearly be seen.

To the left, a 1960s picture of the south end of the wall, showing the corner with as-yet undated plaster covering.



Left below, a map showing the known walls in the study area, after the 2010 FSARG season.

Using this information, the following interventions were made:

- 76a:** 2m x 2m trench aligned with the standing wall and the buried walls suggested by Brian of No. 8.
- 76b:** A small slot sunk beside the central part of the standing wall to explore its depth.
- 76c:** 1.5m x 0.6m keyhole in a flowerbed aligned with 76a to see whether the wall continued westwards.
- 76d:** 1m x 0.5m trench across the line of the disappeared 17th century wall in No. 9 garden.
- K74:** 1m x 1.5m keyhole in the garden of No. 7, exactly aligned with foundations found in 76a, to see if the foundations ran beyond the garden of No. 8.

The locations of these can be seen in on the cover page map.

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, where relevant, the turf replaced.

4. The findings

i) K76a



Fig 9: Flint foundations, with neatenened edges.

The lowest deposit exposed [6] was a greyish-green shingle, pebble and sand deposit at a depth of 50 cm. This was free of any kind of artefacts and seen as Thanet Beds, the natural deposit. Lying over this was a yellow brown clay deposit [5] with specks of shell, brick and tile at its upper level but at its base completely free of inclusions apart from occasional small rounded flint pebbles. [5] contained a few tiny sherds of prehistoric pottery. Set down into [5] was the corner of a flint-built structure [4] (see **Fig 9**). The outer flints were neatly trimmed to give a straight edge line with the inner filling flint and mortar rubble. The flints were held together with lime mortar containing large pieces of cockle shells and smaller complete shells. The flint walls were around 60cm in thickness, with the top surface around 30cm below modern ground level.

Fig 10: Close up of pebble surface with oyster shell.

Inside the corner, at a depth of 40cm (which corresponded to the top of the [5] level on the outside of the wall) was a surface made up of small evenly sized flint pebbles packed tightly [8] (see **Fig 10**). Resting on and embedded into this pebbled surface were animal bone fragments and a complete oyster shell.

On both sides of the flint structure, was a layer [2] containing a lot of building material, such as peg tile, red brick, mortared flint chunks and lenses of lime mortar. This was overlain by a dark friable layer [3] with a fragment of medieval tile and some medieval pottery but also a half penny coin of George III. This layer had little general artefactual content and probably represents garden subsoil. The layer above, [1], had a markedly higher ash content and a larger amount of post medieval and 19th century pottery and is very likely the top soil of the former Davington Court kitchen garden although it is not impossible that it is a soil imported at the time of the building of houses in Stephens Close.



ii) K76b

A small slot was dug to explore the depth of the standing medieval wall.



Fig 11: Wall base with ledges.

As can be seen in **Fig 11**, the stone blocks continue straight down for 70cm, and then two ledges were uncovered. The uppermost ledge contained a 17th- 18th century red brick, a possible repair.

The soil removed contained mainly 19th century glass and pottery fragments right down to the ledges. At a depth of 40cm, however, a 5cm thick bitumen layer was uncovered. This presumably related to an earlier garden surface, possibly a driveway before the building of the adjacent garage about thirty years ago.

iii) K76c

This keyhole was dug only 2m away from K76a and aligned with the flint walls.

In **Fig 12**, 76a is being dug in the background, with a long measure running along the east-west flint wall in 76a. An east-west wall is visible in K76c in the foreground, and is shown in more detail in **Fig 13**.

Fig 13: Wall segment in K76c.



Fig 12: The relationship of K76c and 76a.



This wall was made up of flint, stone and a finer lime mortar than that used for the walls in 76a. Although seeming to have the same orientation as the main wall in 76a, it was slightly further south. The wall also extended much deeper than the one in 76a, into a yellow brown deposit, uncovered at a depth of around 65cm. South of the wall was a thick deposit of mortar and other building material. In this trench, the wall was 65cm - 70cm wide.

iv) K76d

This excavation was located to run across the line of the vanished 17th century wall mentioned in the introduction, in the southern part of the garden.

Under the turf [1] was a dark brown friable layer of garden soil [2], overlying a yellow - brown more compact sub soil [3]. The base of [3] although parallel with ground level in the west of the trench dipped down quite suddenly at the mid point, rising again towards the east end. This dip [5] ran south north across the trench, and held a fill of building rubble and soil [4]. The rubble consisted of small fragments of peg tile, lime mortar, ragstone, flint, chalk and some very small fragments of red

Fig 14: K76d fully excavated.



brick. Apart from a near complete clay pipe bowl found in layer [03], very little artefactual material was found in this trench apart from the building rubble in the shallow ditch fill [4] under [03].

v) K74

K74 was located at the western end of the garden of No. 7, Stephens Close, in alignment with the east-west flint wall in K74a. The aim was to see if this wall ran across No. 8 and into No. 7's garden. The wide border running along the south side of this large garden was strewn with building material such as mortared flints and, most interesting of all, a large ragstone chunk with shelly mortar and a square drilled hole. Kian, the householder, told us that this had come from the foundations of his extension, built about three years ago.

Fig 15: Keyhole 74 at end of excavation.



K74, however, produced only negative evidence. Beneath the turf [1] was a layer of dry, friable brown soil [2] with many small inclusions such as chalk, tile, and a few small flints with mortar. Two residual Mesolithic blades were found, along with a few pot boilers. Below [2], however, was a layer of dense yellow brick earth [3]. This was dug to a depth of 65cm and had no artefactual content whatsoever, let alone a wall foundation.

The pit was therefore not explored further. See, however, the separate report for trench 74A elsewhere in this garden which was much more productive.¹³

5. Interpretation

The aim of the interventions described above was to look for evidence for the earlier manor.

First of all, the standing wall: this was shown to extend down for a considerable depth below the present ground level. The slot K76b did, however, show a ledge like structure at the base of the wall. This contained a post medieval red brick, suggesting repair at the post medieval stage. In **Fig 16**, the ledge can clearly be seen at the base of the slot and in the background and just beyond the slot can be seen a thickening of the standing wall which does seem to line up with the top ledge width. It has been suggested that this is part of a stairway. Right at the back can be seen the wall which forms a right angle to the main wall.

¹³ *Report on Trench 74A, 7 Stephens Close*. forthcoming on www.community-archaeology.org.uk



Fig 16: K76b with standing wall.

A stretch of wall was identified as existing under the extension of No. 9. Although no details were given, it does seem possible that it is associated with the room-like corner of the standing medieval wall, mentioned above. This 'room' section of the standing wall is, however, a puzzle. The walls are massively thick (over 1m) and its construction is medieval but it does appear to be part of an *appendage* to the main section of the wall. This is, however, probably the 'apartment' ruin referred to by Crow¹⁴ and Willement¹⁵, said by them to have been demolished in 1844.

The flint walls found in 76a and the wall segment in 76c are different in character. The flint corner is shallow in depth and probably a foundation, possibly for a timber building with peg tiled roof. The surface, perhaps a courtyard or floor, abuts the flint wall foundation, which implies that it is

earlier than the foundation and cut by it.¹⁶ The wall section in 76c goes much deeper and has a stone content, which hints at it being associated with a different building to that exposed in 76a. What does seem clear is that both walls are at least late medieval, possibly early post medieval (i.e. from around AD1450 to 1600) and therefore associated with the demolished manor building. K74 showed clearly that the flint foundation building did not extend into the garden area of No. 7.

The absence of any signs of the 17th century wall in 76d was unexpected, unless the shallow dip with rubble was the result of a clumsy digging out of the wall foundations, destroying any kind of foundation trench.

6. Final comments

Although we succeeded in finding evidence for the lost medieval manor, this investigation raised many questions about the layout and history of the re-discovered buildings. The post medieval brick in the wall slot 76b was particularly intriguing, with the implication of post medieval usage. At the very least, a proper study of the standing wall needs to take place, with particular attention focused on the structure and dating of the southern ('room') end.

¹⁴ Crow, E 1850, quoted in Melrose 1996 op cit p 163

¹⁵ Willement, T 1862 op. cit. p52

¹⁶ Alan Ward. pers.comm.

This was a very gratifying investigation and it would be great to take it a bit further especially as a publication of all of the Davington Manor findings is planned for the near future.

7. Acknowledgments

Great thanks to all of the householders involved. Dave and Shirley of No. 9 allowed us free access to their garden whilst they were on holiday - an act of trust which I hope this account justifies! Brian and Jean at No. 8 were very supportive, and Brian's observations most helpful. Kian and Tracey at No. 7 were also very helpful - see the report for 74A¹⁷ for further more productive work in their garden.

Dr Pat Reid

November 2010

¹⁷ www.community-archaeology.org.uk *Report on Trench 74A, 7 Stephens Close, Davington* forthcoming