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The Faversham Society
Archaeological Research Group

Community
Archaeology

The Davington Mysteries

**Report for Keyhole Excavation 70
3 Stephens Close, Davington, Faversham.**

Grid Reference: TR 00947 61674



Getting down to digging.

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**).

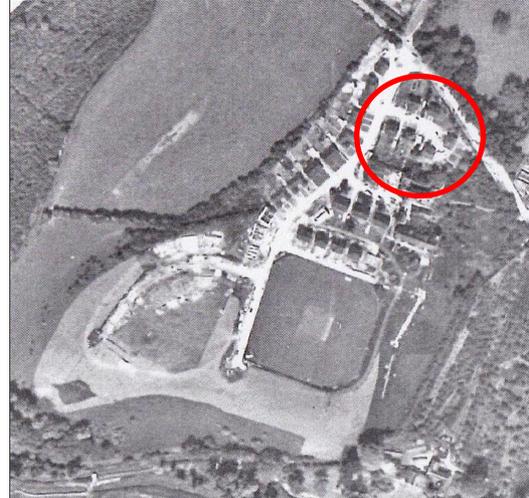
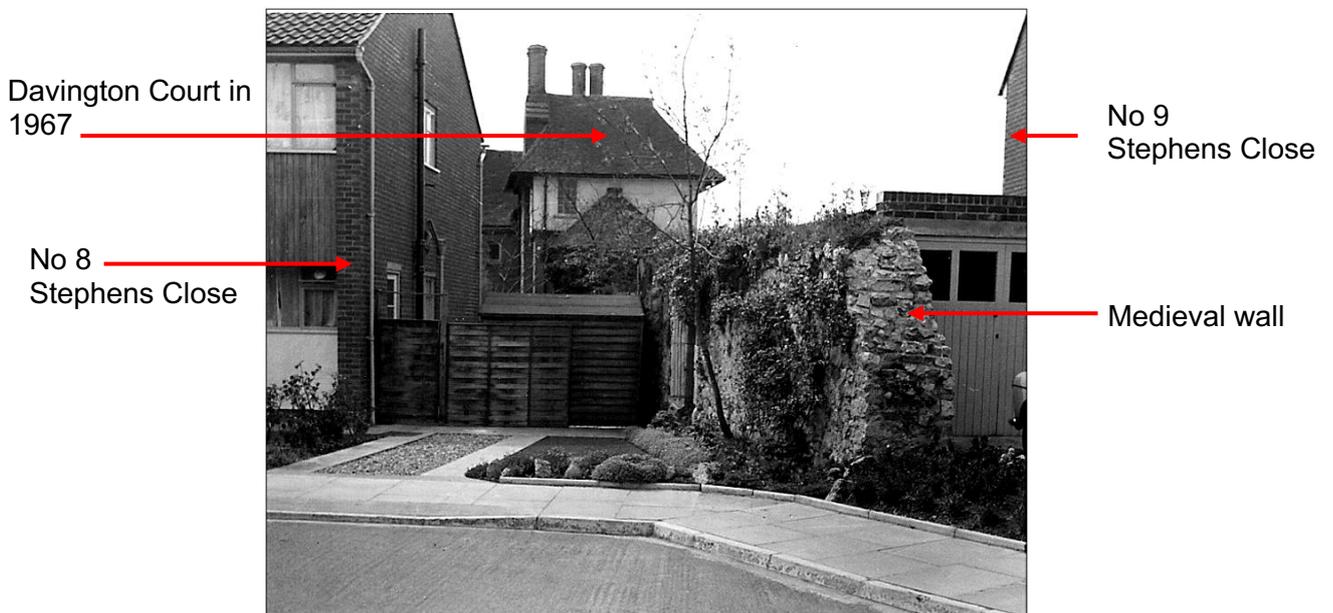


Fig 1: Aerial photographs of the Davington Plateau in 1946² and 1962.³ Stephens close in the red circle.

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.

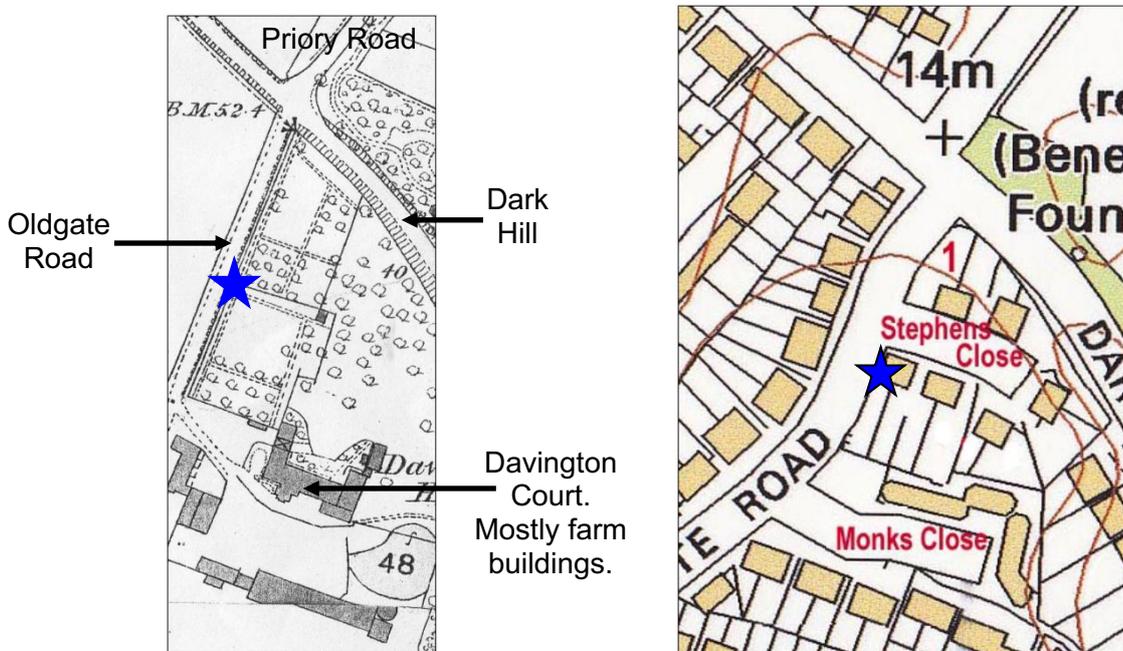


Fig 4: The Stephens Close area in 1865 and 2007. The blue star is the gateway shown in Fig 3.

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 pit

The pit was sited where it was calculated that the continuation of the medieval wall from No.s 8 to 9 Stephens Close (opposite No. 3 - see **Fig 2**) would pass through if it continued running in a straight line, as well as the continuation of the ditch found in the garden of No.1 Stephens Close¹³, to give the best chance of picking up one or the other of these features. It was not possible to line up exactly with the ditch as it passed through the site of a soakaway in the middle of the garden, and so the closest possible was obtained.

3. The procedures

A 1m by 1.5m area was pegged out using the planning square and the area delineated marked with string. The position of the area 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 the maximum safety depth of 1.2m. The excavated soil was sieved meticulously. 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

This site, next to the road, was thought likely to have undergone some disturbance from the building of the road.

¹³ See Report for Keyhole 68 on the FSARG website www.community-archaeology.org.uk

The lowest level reached, context [11] at 114cm, was a greenish yellow sandy soil, almost certainly the natural Thanet Sands. No finds were found in [10] above, though this yellow sandy soil had a few flecks of charcoal. Yellow flecks of soil were less frequent as you move up through [09], a clayey soil which revealed some interesting finds. Potboilers and several pieces of crude pot were found mainly in the north east corner, with three pieces of Samian ware and four Mesolithic worked flints. The flints included two scrapers and two blades. Some small mammal bones, pig teeth and sheeps teeth were also found, suggesting a possible agricultural significance.

[8] was a clay and flint layer, with more flints than [9], mostly sub rounded. Previously a continuation of [3] it was made a new context at depth of 44cm. Findings included early medieval pottery in particular, and the skeleton of a hare.



Fig 8: K70 at middle stage of excavation, showing small pits at top.

Two small pits were discovered at 38cm in [3], a yellow brown compact clay. It seemed that pit [6] [7], where [6] is the fill and [7] the cut, was still evident at a depth of 56cm, well into [8]. [6] was a 13 x 13cm pit with a greyish brown, friable soil with flecks of charcoal, and contained one piece of glass, a potboiler and a piece of pottery. The other pit consisted of the cut, [5], and the fill [4], which was a dark

greyish brown, granular, friable soil with charcoal inclusions. [5] was a cut slope tapering 3cm, with a maximum pit width of 13cm and depth of 5cm.

Fig 9: Flint level in [3].

[3] had occasional loose flints and a compact flint assemblage at 40cm depth on the west side, which was extended to the north by a sondage. A non mortared flint level was identified at 44cm depth in the north. [2] was a brownish grey soil with rubble, mainly dry and compact with mixed finds and a few small animal bones. At 28cm depth was the bottom of [2] where yellow flecks appeared across the surface fairly regularly. Post Medieval, Redware and Late Post Medieval pottery were found only in [2] and [3], as were later deposits such as clay pipes. [1] was the turf, where there were no finds.



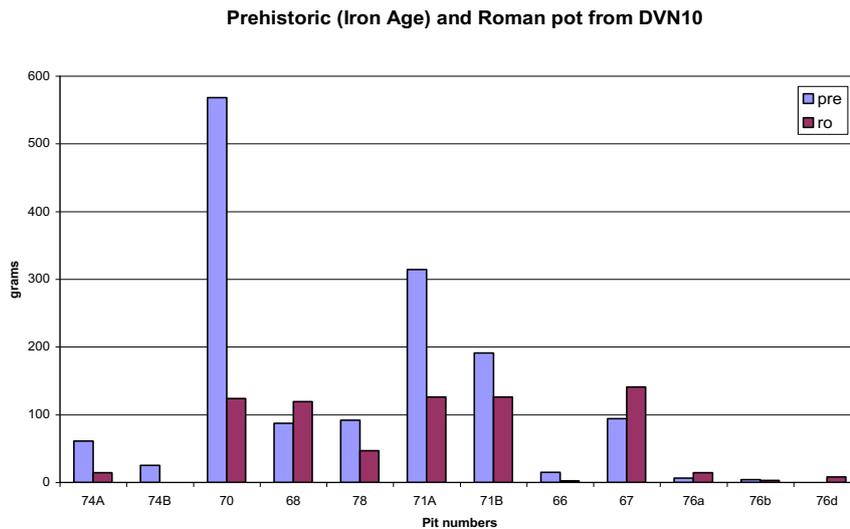
All deposits contained some prehistoric (mostly Late Iron Age) and Roman pottery. Worked flints (ten in total from this tiny pit) were recovered not only from [9] but also from [8] and [3].

Fig 9: Worked flints from K70, with nine of the finished tools in the centre, including a fine notched scraper from [3]. Generally Mesolithic in date.



5. Interpretation

There is a clear cut off point in terms of finds at the [03] horizon, with later finds only in and above this surface. There appears to have been a lot of moving of soil around and disturbance, possibly from the redevelopment of the site or agricultural practice. Below the [03] horizon it seems that there has been some heavy reworking, but at an earlier stage, washing out or mixing of the soil levels, as this pit is very scrambled in terms of finds. The number of finds and time range they cover does, however, suggest that this has potentially been a significant site in the past for Mesolithic activity and later on late Iron Age / early Romano-British. The graph below (Fig 10) shows that this small keyhole produced markedly more Iron Age pottery than any other excavation in the 2010 Davington project, followed by K71A and K71B which were both in the adjacent garden (No 4).



6. Final comments

It wasn't possible to locate the pit exactly where wanted but a good compromise was made. No evidence of either the wall or the ditch was found, but it highlights how changeable this area is and the differences between pits in such a short amount of space.

7. Acknowledgments

Great thanks go to Ray Rogers and his wife for allowing us access to dig in their garden and showing so much interest.

Rebecca Fagg

December 2010.