



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

Community  
Archaeology

## Davington Mysteries

### Report for Davington Priory Cricket Club grounds OA66 & OA67 Davington, Faversham.

**Grid Reference (centroid) TR 00861 61470**



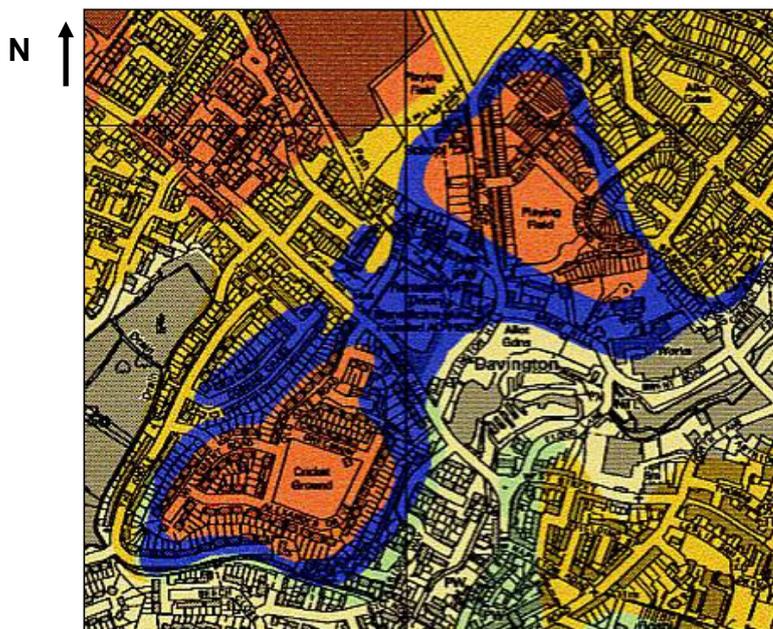
**Mike, the supervisor of Trench 66, points out significant features.**

## 1. Introduction

Davington Priory Cricket Club ground occupies a central position on the top of the Davington plateau, 15m 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>**

<i>Pale green:</i>	<i>Upper Chalk</i>
<i>Blue:</i>	<i>Thanet Beds</i>
<i>Orange:</i>	<i>Head Gravels</i>
<i>Yellow:</i>	<i>Head Brickearth</i>
<i>Cream:</i>	<i>Alluvium</i>
<i>Grey:</i>	<i>water and marsh</i>



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 only 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

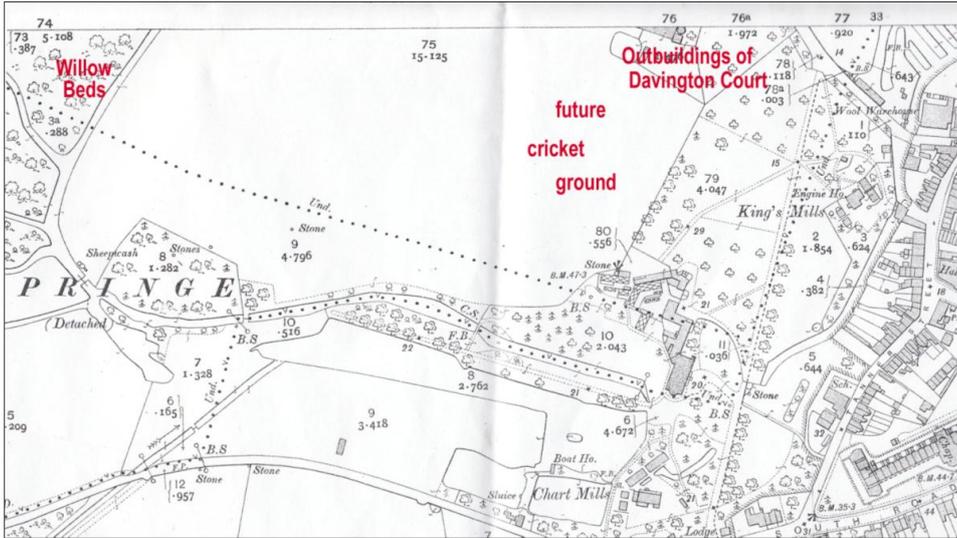
<sup>4</sup> Kent Historic Towns Survey 2003 *Faversham: Archaeological Assessment Document* English Heritage & KCC p19

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

<sup>6</sup> See FSARG report, in preparation

<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>**



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



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

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

<sup>9</sup> Google Earth view

<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

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 'Belgic' pottery sherds lying on the surface justified the decision from Day One.

**Fig 4: Surveying (or 'scratching') on Dark Hill and one of the late Iron Age pottery sherds found.**



## 2. Procedures

Permissions from the Cricket Club and Swale Council (the freeholder) having been obtained, the first major field activity involved a large-scale geo-resistivity survey of the whole site (**Fig 5**). This took place during the Easter season and revealed some fascinating patterns. Over the Bank Holiday weekend of the Early Summer Season, permission was given for FSARG to dig two 4m by 1m trenches across two of the most striking features, one in the south east corner and one in the North West corner. Both of these were well out of the way of the main cricket pitch area.

These trenches were each dug as one-day trenches, 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. For each trench, a 4m 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 georesistivity survey results.

<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-

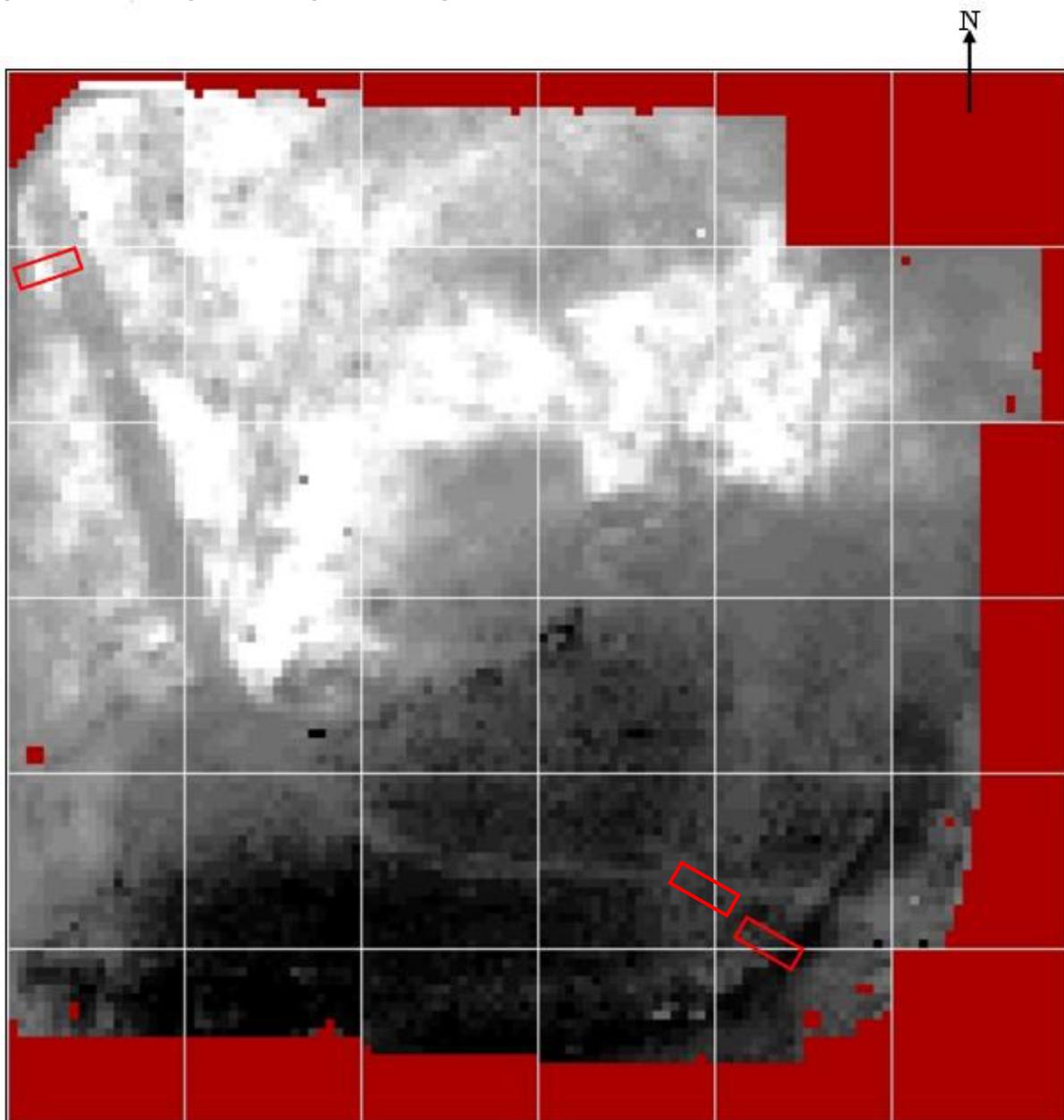
<sup>15</sup> See FSARG website [www.community-archaeology.org.uk](http://www.community-archaeology.org.uk) for project aims

Turf was removed carefully from the 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.

Some intriguing linear markings in the central area of the Cricket ground were not examined further, because of the sensitivity of the ground, and must await further attention.

**Fig 5: Results of the Geo resistivity survey carried out April 2010, and the locations of the two trenches OA66 (SE corner) and OA67 (NW corner).**

In the plot, a small square is equal to 1 square metre.



## 4. The findings and preliminary interpretations

### a) Georesistivity survey

The findings of the georesistivity survey are shown in **Fig 5**. In general, the lightest areas are the driest and the darkest areas the wettest. The generally lighter, drier area in the north is presumably given by gravels and chalk close to the surface and the darker, wetter areas in the south relate to areas of greater soil depth and water retention. The actual cricket square and wicket, watered regularly, can clearly be seen in the middle.

Superimposed on this general pattern are some striking anomalies. The most visible is the broad band of intermediate colour which starts in the north west, travels southwards then swings around to go to the south east corner. This band is remarkably consistent, more water retaining than its surroundings in the north and drier than its surroundings in the south. In the north and west it is around 8m wide, narrowing to around 0.75m in the south. This looks like a track way or perhaps a large ditch which has been backfilled with identical material throughout its length.

The south east corner also shows some striking features. A dark band curves around the corner, with a light band adjacent inside the curve and a darker area inside that. This looks very much like two curved ditches, following the line of the edge of the hill, with a bank in between - a very late Iron Age fortified boundary pattern.

Finally, two narrow bands of intermediate colour run from north north east to south south west across the middle area. These are not quite parallel, diverging slightly towards the south. These are more puzzling, and may be tied up with relatively modern fence lines: we have been told that in its early years, the wicket area was fenced off to prevent access by grazing animals. Even so, it is hard to see a fence leaving such a continuous line: the mystery remains.

### b) Spoil from Dark Hill

After the initial finding of late Iron Age pottery on the slopes of Dark Hill, enquiries were made locally as to where the spoil from the widening and steepening of the cutting in the 1960s had gone.



**Fig 6: 'Spoil' pot found in 1964.**

We were extremely lucky to make contact with Bob Costa who lived at that time in one of the brand new houses to the east of the Cricket Pitch.

Bob and his eight year old son had noticed spoil being dumped on the eastern edge of the cricket field and had been quick enough to find pottery sherds and a near complete pot. They took this to the Beaney Institute in Canterbury for identification - Belgic! Bob's son now lives in Cardiff, but was able to email us photographs of this pot, which he still treasures.

Not only did this 'rediscovered' find confirm the importance of the Dark Hill area itself for Late Iron Age settlement, but it gave us advance warning that we should not be surprised to find Late Iron Age pottery in the uppermost layers in the eastern part of the Cricket pitch, where the spoil might have been spread out. Moreover, findings from later work in 2010 searching for the location of the former medieval-Jacobean manor house (see Report 71A)<sup>16</sup> strongly suggested that demolition material from this property could very well have been in the Dark Hill spoil, given the house's closeness to the edge. Therefore we should look out for 18<sup>th</sup> century brick and tile debris on the north side of the cricket ground.

<sup>16</sup> Reid J in preparation *Report of Excavation 71A at 4 Stephens Close, Davington*. To be available on FSARG website Spring 2011

### c) Trench OA66 (SE)

OA66 stretched across the dark / light / dark bands observed in the georesistivity survey in the south east corner. The deepest layer [8], revealed at 95cm and not fully excavated, was a greyish sandy deposit with flecks of orange ironstone. This was probably the natural soil, the Thanet Beds. Above this was layer [7], similar in texture but more greenish and with fewer iron stone inclusions and some artefactual content, notably a sherd of prehistoric pottery and two pieces of a broken Mesolithic blade.

[7] dipped downwards in the middle of the trench, as did the layers above it, [6] and [3]. Both [6] and [3] were poorly sorted with a high brick and tile content along with pottery sherds and flints, but the content of [6] was earlier than that of [3]. [6] contained mostly 17<sup>th</sup> century brick whereas that in [3] was later. The pottery in [6] was dominated by late Iron Age and Early Medieval shelly ware; whereas in [03] the pottery was almost entirely post medieval and later. Both contexts, however, contained a fair number of Mesolithic flints such as a hollow scraper and awl in [3] and a scraper and broken blade in [06].

Finally, the most recent deposit [2] was light brown, friable, well sorted topsoil with some small artefactual pieces, spread across the other deposits. A small posthole [4] [5] (10cm x 10cm) with a chalk infill was found at the base of [2], set down into [3]. The relationship between these contexts can best be seen in **Fig 7**, which shows the section along the north east face with contexts labelled.



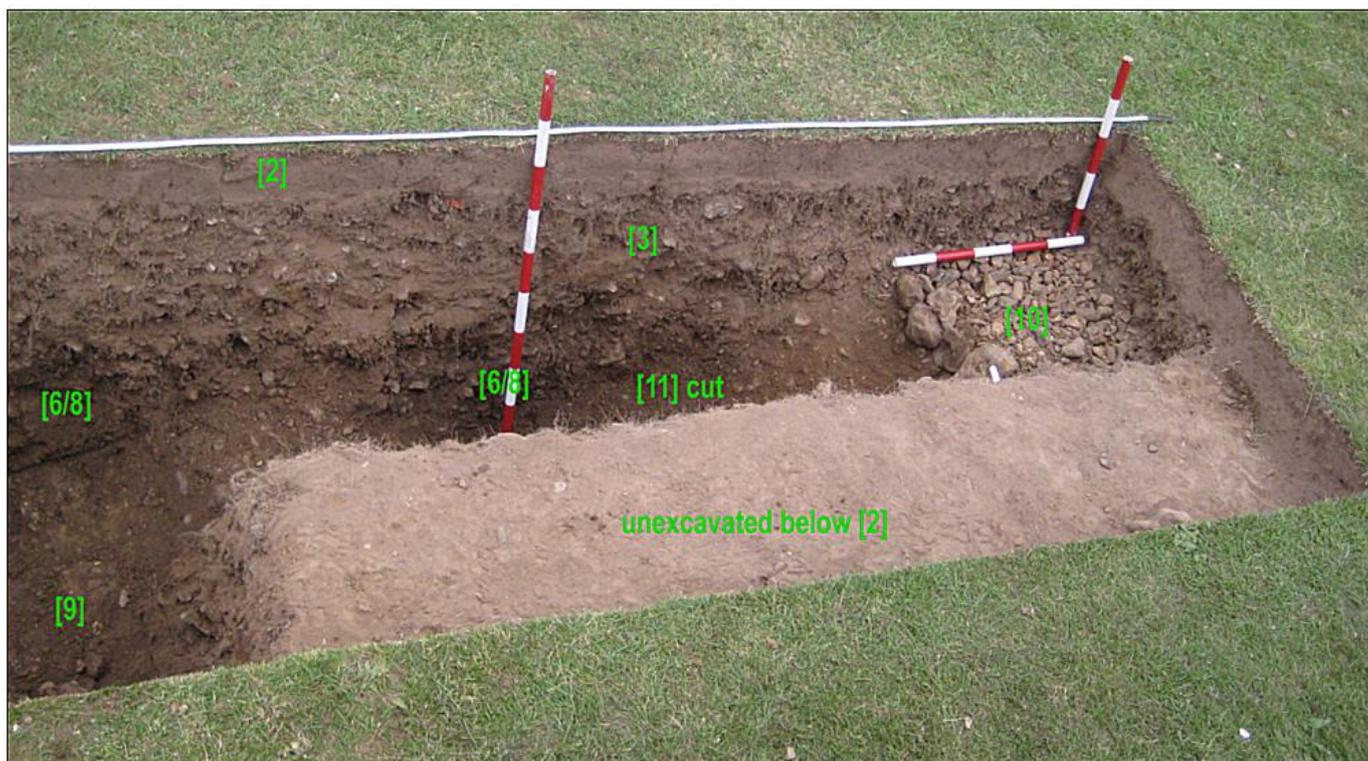
**Fig 7: The central part of OA66.**

What we seem to have here is the very opposite of two ditches separated by a bank. Instead, we had a poorly defined, shallow ditch-like depression filled in with building material so that it had given a 'dry' reading compared with the land on either side. Contexts [6] and [3] seem to represent two different stages of backfilling of this depression. The historic aerial photographs in **Fig 3** do show a line of trees or hedge running around this corner. Perhaps with the uprooting of these trees during the development of the site in the 1960s, spoil from Dark Hill was used to fill in the holes created?

The differences in dates of content between [6] and [3] could simply be because of different barrow loads from different contexts in the Dark Hill deposits, and the apparently chronologically sound stratigraphic sequence therefore an illusion. The 1946 and 1962 aerial photographs do not show any kind of ditch, boundary or footpath through here; neither do any of the historical maps back to 1767, so this remains the most plausible explanation. What does seem to be fairly well established is that these are not the banks and ditches of an Iron Age fortified settlement, let alone a hill fort - the in-filled 'ditch' was too poorly defined, with no clear cut edges, for such a feature.

#### d) Trench OA67 (NW)

OA67 was carefully located across the western edge of the broad band feature, in the North West corner of the cricket ground. At the western end of the ditch, a layer of natural Head Gravels [9] / [10] was exposed at a depth of only around 25cm. This gravel dipped sharply to the east, then rose again although not to the same height. The top of the natural gravels ran along eastwards for around 60cm and then dipped away again sharply, levelling out to give a flat surface covered with much finer gravels at a depth of around 90cm. [9] / [10] did not appear to have any artefactual content, but was not excavated below its surface.



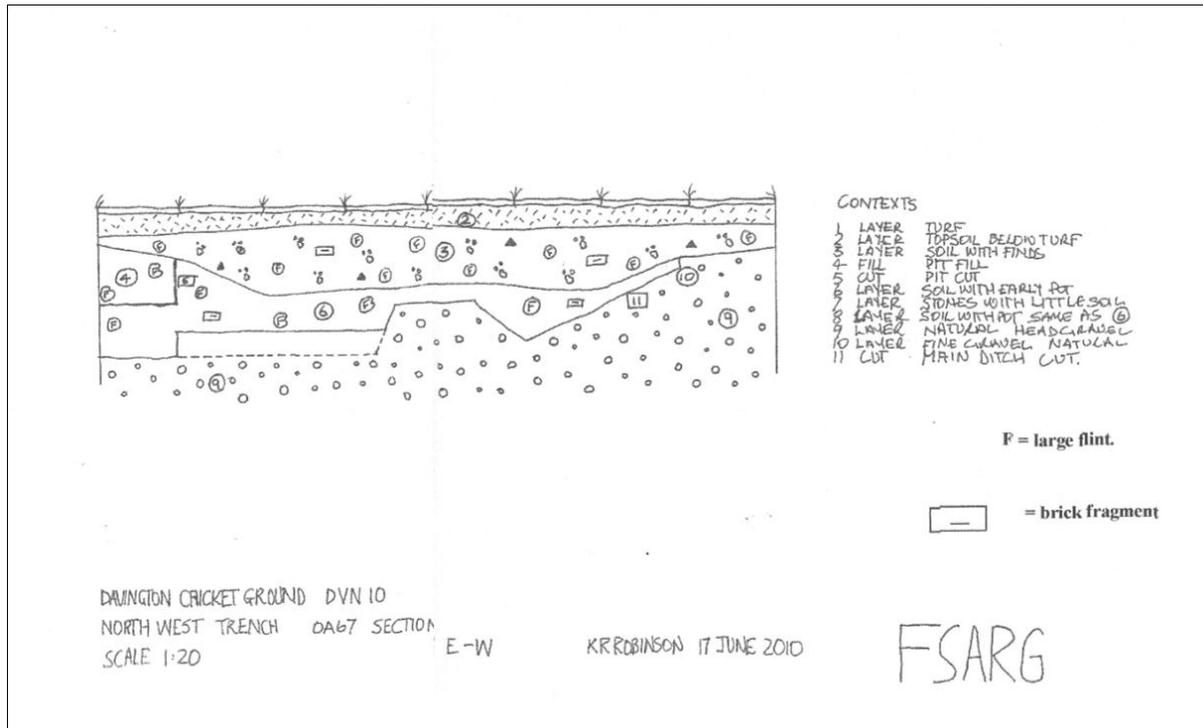
**Fig 8: The western end of OA67 with contexts labelled.**

Except in the extreme west where the gravels were close to the surface, the undulating surface of the gravels was overlain by dark greyish-brown fine-grained loamy clay. [6] / [8] Apart from a few small fragments of brick near the top, the content of this layer was entirely early, late Iron Age and Romano British pottery sherds with a few sherds of medieval. [6] / [8] also contained substantial quantities of heat stressed flint, Mesolithic and Bronze Age flint tools (including two thumbnail scrapers and a borer) and many waste flakes from flint working. Set down into [6] / [8] at the eastern end was a large roughly circular hole, seen at the time as a rubbish pit [5], [4]. The fill [4] was lighter than [6] / [8] and more loosely packed but the artefactual content was similar, though with a higher proportion of brick fragments: again the small amount of pottery was all medieval or earlier.

Stretching across the excavated area was a layer [3] of varying depth but with a level top surface at around 10cm below ground level. [3] was made up of yellowy brown moderately sorted sandy silt, with a fair amount of brick, tile and lime mortar fragments. The pottery content was negligible (1 sherd red ware, 1 sherd 19<sup>th</sup> century). This was overlain by a yellow-brown topsoil of even depth across the whole area [2] topped by turf.

The section drawing **Fig 9** shows these changes along the southern face of the trench.

**Fig 9: West to east section along the south side of OA67.**



A small v-shaped ditch runs north to south, which matches the edge location of the broad band feature. This ditch was only around 60cm wide maximum, and separated by a low bank from a much wider flat floored north-south feature which continued eastwards into the baulk. This feature was floored with fine gravel, and corresponded to the broad band feature itself. This looks very much like an early track way or rural road, from the late Iron Age - early Romano British stage. This road swung across the plateau and presumably ran down over the south east corner and was paralleled by the small v-shaped ditch, probably to take run off.

The so-called rubbish pit is more puzzling. It is round and vertically straight sided - only its size (around 45cm diameter) prevented identification of this as a post hole. If it is a large post hole, it must date from a period subsequent to the Romano British, given its stratigraphic position but earlier than the period represented by layer [3] which is probably post medieval, with the building materials content related to the demolition nearby of the original Davington manor. It is tempting to see it as evidence for Saxon activity, but as there is no other support for this, such a proposition is (sadly) highly speculative.

## 5. Overall summary

The aim of this exercise was to check for evidence of late Iron Age (Belgic) settlement on this promontory. The pottery finds alone confirm that this was so. That this occupation ran over into at least the early / mid Roman period (at least up until the third century AD) is also shown by the pottery. The Roman pottery could have come from road side burials which are abundant in the Faversham area. The most important find from the late Iron Age / early Roman period is the possible track or roadway running across the cricket ground. It links with the line of Oldgate Road in the North West corner, although all of the earliest maps of this area show Oldgate Road ( as a track) continuing around the western edge of the plateau. Before the development of the 1960s, the line of Oldgate road continued directly northwards along what is now Priory Road: given features which showed up near this part of Priory Road on the geo resistivity survey of the Priory grounds (see Report)<sup>17</sup>, this is very interesting. It may be possible to trace this early route way further north.

More unexpected was the abundance of finds of flint from earlier prehistory. Most of them were dateable to the later Mesolithic (around 5,000 to 7000 years ago) but some were Neolithic and Bronze Age (4,000

<sup>17</sup> Reid P in prep *Report on Investigations at Davington Priory 2010* FSARG website op.cit.

to 2,800 years ago). They included many waste flakes and 'pot boilers' as well as twenty actual flint implements, or parts thereof. This is a significant assemblage for a light touch small scale investigation. Other small-scale excavations nearby in the Stephens Close area have also produced significant quantities of evidence for this period of occupation. Then there is the polished Neolithic axe found in a garden in the Greenway, next to the cricket pitch, in 1965.

**Fig 11: Flint implements found in OA66 and OA67.**



This field investigation, which took 6 days in all (4 of which were for georesistivity surveying) has yielded a remarkable amount of information about the past of the southern part of the Davington Plateau. This is especially worthwhile given the paucity of existing information. It would be most interesting to see if a more high-tech survey of the area, e.g. with a magnetometer, would produce even more information without further disturbing the archaeology.

## 6. Final comments

This has been an excellent example of what a zero funded community investigation can achieve. Although the last thing FSARG would want is to see this open area developed, at least now the archaeology will have to be taken seriously if any proposals do come up. Meanwhile, we have found some more important pieces of the jigsaw that is Faversham.

## 7. Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we owe great thanks to Davington Priory Cricket Club who gave us permission to work and were so helpful and interested. It was a pleasure to work with them all. Thanks also to Swale Borough Council for supporting the permissions.

Thanks to Bob Costa and his son - it's not often that a childhood discovery comes back 45 years later to become a key item in a new project.

Finally, thanks to the many local people who stopped to take an interest whilst walking their dogs or taking children to play on this great open space. We are usually tucked away in gardens and it is a real pleasure to be in a location where we can share our discoveries with so many enthusiastic people.

**Dr Pat Reid**

**November 2010**

**Appendix 1**  
**Harris Matrix for OA66 and OA67**

