



Davington Mysteries

Report on investigations in and around Davington Priory 2010

Grid Reference (centroid) TR 01033 61470



The last surviving remnant of the Priory precinct wall

1 Introduction

Davington Priory and its extensive grounds occupy the part of the Davington Plateau immediately to the north of Dark Hill. To the south it is bordered by the deep cutting of Dark Hill itself. To the east, it is bordered by Davington Hill, which forks away from Dark Hill just past the crossing of the Westbrook, and runs diagonally uphill towards the north east. To the north and north west, the Priory Estate is bordered for the most part by Priory Road, although nowadays there are a number of modern private houses on the Priory side of Priory Road. With the exception of this latter part, the area occupied by the Priory, its church and grounds does not seem to have changed for a long time.

Early maps such as Andrews and Dury 1767¹ and the initial survey for the Ordnance Survey in 1795² are small scale and show only a gap in this area with the church marked in. The earliest detailed large scale maps available are those shown in Fig 1.

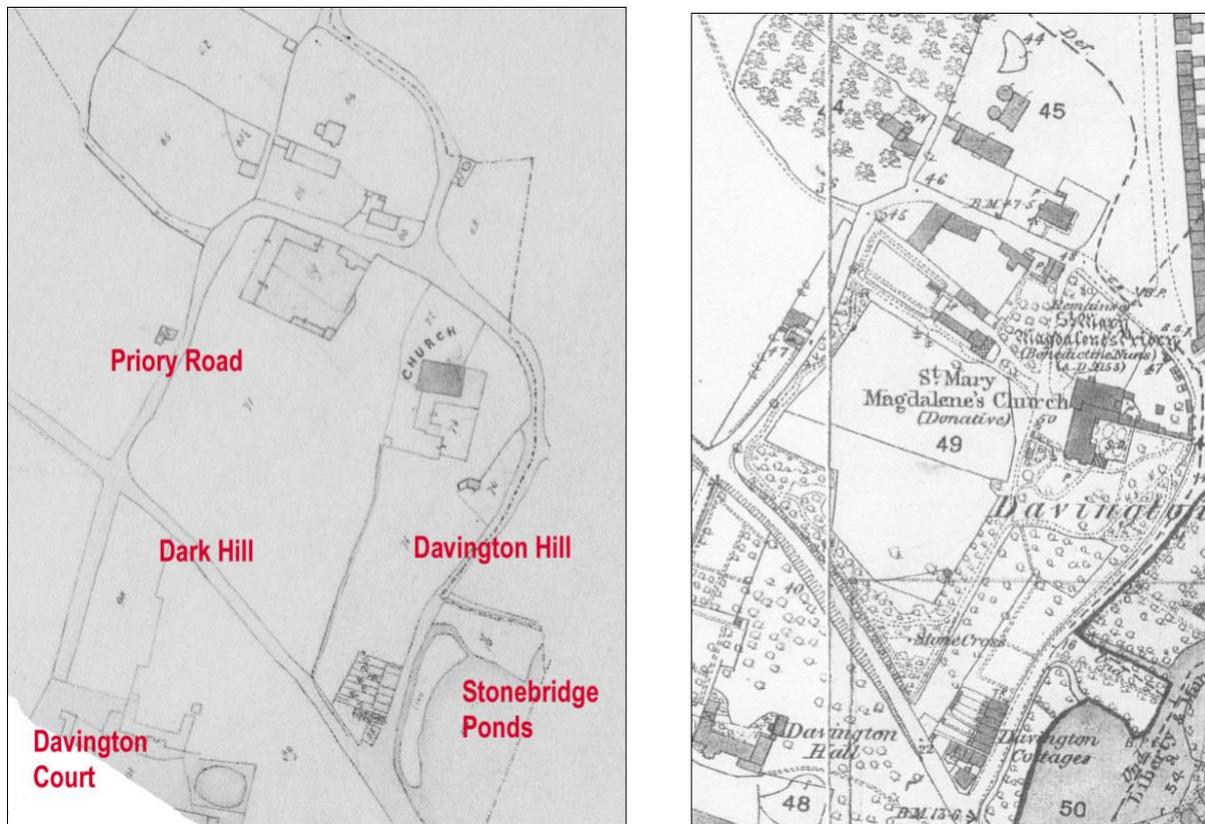


Fig 1: The Davington Priory Estate in 1844³ and 1865⁴

Between 1844 and 1865, the boundaries of this diamond shaped plot of land have not changed and the estate cottages at the foot of Davington Hill are already in place. The twenty year gap, however, saw an important change in Priory ownership. In 1844, the Priory was at

¹ Andrews, Dury and Herbert's map of Faversham, 1769

² Field Drawing for the OS of the Faversham area 1795

³ 1844 Tithe map for Davington Parish. held by East Kent Study Centre, Canterbury

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

the end of a long period of decline and neglect. In 1845 the buildings, including the church which had been used for lambing, were bought by Thomas Willement, the famous expert on the newly fashionable Gothic Revival. By 1865, his sensitive renovation and rebuild of the estate was nearly complete. Details of this process can be found in Willement's own account of the Priory⁵ and in two very useful publications on Davington by Melrose⁶ and by Burke and Young⁷. See also Fig 7 in this report.

The main differences between 1844 and 1865 seem to be associated with this drastic change in management. The farmyard area in the north has been cut back and an organised nursery area and staff accommodation established for the gardeners. Outside the estate boundary, the main new arrival is Priory Row, a long terrace of houses built to accommodate workers in the nearby gunpowder and brick industries. This development brought about a modification of the road pattern north of the Priory with the old northward route being abandoned.



Fig 2: The Estate in aerial photographs 1946⁸ and 2007⁹

The most drastic change in the surroundings of the Davington Priory estate can be seen in the contrast between the two aerial photographs, Fig. 2. (The school visible at the top of the photos was built in 1882). The few earlier houses, visible on the 1844 tithe map, have been swallowed up by modern development, happening mainly in the 1960s and 70s. Many

⁵ 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

⁶ Melrose, K 1996 *Davington: Parish and People* Faversham Papers No 52 Faversham Society

⁷ Burke J and L Young 2003 *A History of Davington Priory* Davington Parish Council

⁸ Aerial Photograph 1 May 1946 F/20" //541 SQ DN. KCC photographic archive

⁹ Google Earth, 2007

fascinating details of change can be noted but for the purposes of this Report the main point is that the Davington Priory estate remains unchanged, other than the replacement of the vestigial farmyard by modern development in the northernmost point of the estate. The cottages at the foot of Davington Hill remain throughout but, by 2007, have been sold into private ownership¹⁰.

Pre 1844 continuity of the estate boundaries is more difficult to judge. The Priory itself was founded as a small convent in AD1154 by Fulk de Newnham, on the high point opposite the great Royal Abbey of Faversham built in AD1147-8 by King Stephen. After the dissolution, the estate was passed to Sir Thomas Cheney of Shurland Hall, Sheppey and the eastern end of the Church was demolished. Again, details can be found in Burke and Young's publication¹¹ and in Melrose's *Davington: Parish and People*¹². It does seem clear, though, that even in the medieval period the Priory estate (described as 'Little Davington' in the sale to Willement in 1844)¹³ was separate from Davington Manor (later 'Court' or 'Hall') to the south of Dark Hill.¹⁴

It has long been thought, however, that a medieval road or track way ran across the Priory estate, coming up from the junction of Dark Hill and Davington Hill and running past the west front of the Priory and Church. The 1844 tithe map (fig 1) shows a footpath more or less following such a route. It has also been suggested that there may have been buildings along this road, perhaps clustered outside the west gate of the Priory. Looking for evidence of such features was one of the main aims of FSARG's work in 2010.

In 1977, an archaeological investigation carried out in the area to the immediate east of the Church and house revealed the foundations of the original convent of 'Poor Nuns'¹⁵ (see Fig 3) Sales documents over the last 150 years or so indicate that the area sloping down towards Davington Hill has long been used as a vegetable garden and later allotments although nowadays it is controlled scrubland.¹⁶ During the Second World War there were temporary Home Guard structures somewhere in the Paddock¹⁷ but since the war, the main part of the paddock has been under grass. A seed producing industry grew up between 1948 and 1972, mainly in the fenced off area to the south of the farmyard.¹⁸ In between 1968 and 1971, the pastureland was ploughed to restore its soil condition¹⁹ but since 1971 it has been under grass again, disturbed only lightly by the annual Davington Fete and the grazing of sheep.²⁰

2. Locations used.

For this particular part of FSARG's 2010 *Davington Mysteries* project, the main aim was to check out the presence of medieval features beyond those known. Permission for access to

¹⁰ Ken Judges pers. comm.

¹¹ Burke and Young op cit

¹² Melrose op.cit.

¹³ Burke & Young op.cit. p33

¹⁴ See Report on the Lost Manor of Davington, P Reid, in prep. FSARG

¹⁵ Tester, P, 1977 A Plan and Architectural Description of the Medieval Remains of Davington Priory Arch. Cant. XCV pp 205- 212

¹⁶ Ken Judges pers.comm.

¹⁷ Burke & Young op.cit. p36

¹⁸ Burke and Young op.cit. p36

¹⁹ Ken Judges pers.comm

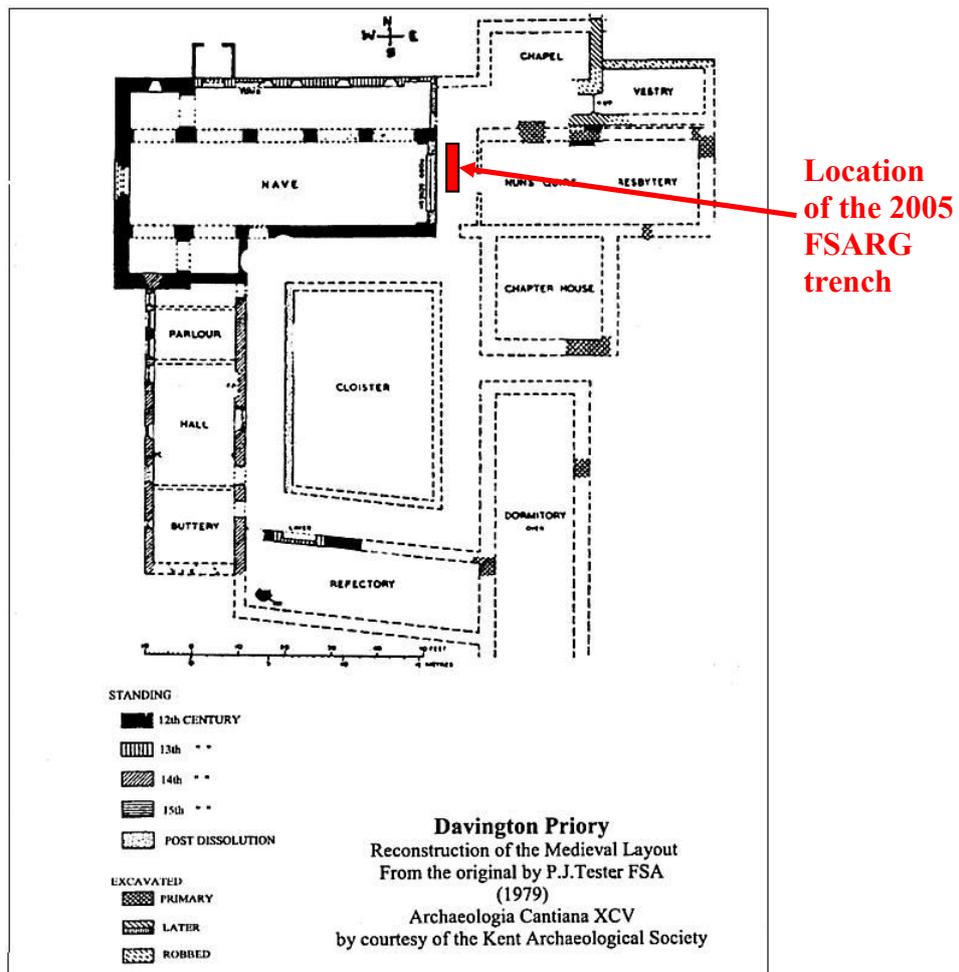
²⁰ Ken Judges pers.comm.

the Priory grounds was for three days at maximum and for non invasive work only. As the site is around six acres in size, hard choices about coverage needed to be made.

Given the relatively undisturbed nature of the deposits in the Paddock, it was decided that the whole of the Paddock should be surveyed using georesistivity methods. At the same time, a metal detecting survey using minimal intervention methods would be carried out.

The garden areas around the house needed more thought. Although inside the Priory perimeter and therefore of interest, the garden areas behind the church and house had been previously excavated and might therefore present confused readings. One large lawn area had, however, not been previously investigated. It was decided to survey the large lawn fully and the cloister lawn if time allowed. Finally, the sloping former vegetable garden area and the wooded areas would not be surveyed for practical reasons. (See fig 2b)

The area east of the chancel end of the church was to be left alone. In 2005, FSARG had been given permission to carry out a small excavation close to the chancel wall on the site of a lean-to building which had just been demolished. This excavation was located one metre from the chancel wall. The report on this excavation will form part of this wider report, and, along with Tester's 1977 excavations, be considered sufficient for this area



3: Tester's 1977 excavation plan

3. The procedures

a) Excavations in 2005

A two by one metre rectangle was pegged out using the planning square and the area delineated marked with string. The position of the square was recorded by measuring to mapped corners of the church. The pit was then hand excavated using single contexts, each of which was fully recorded. The keyhole was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.8 metres, ceasing when the natural soil was encountered. 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. Features revealed were carefully recorded. Finally, the spoil was put back in and tamped down.

b) Metal detecting and resistivity surveys in 2010

A grid was created to cover the study area, dividing into 20 x 20 m cells (Fig. 4). Metal detectorists would be allocated a complete cell to survey individually. For the georesistivity survey, each cell was further divided into bands one metre wide, with surveying taking place at 1 metre intervals along the line.

Because of the size of the area and the complexity of the grid laying out in the garden areas, teams were created for the activities. The metal detecting team had four members and a full time recorder serving all of them. For the resistivity, a second meter had been borrowed from the Kent Archaeological Society and calibrated to match with the FSARG meter. Each of the two resistivity teams consisted of three to four members.

Fig 4: Surveying the grounds.



a) The grid



b) The teams



c) Phil the metal detectorist in full gear.

The detectorists' meters were set to register all kinds of metal finds (not just precious metals, as with treasure hunters). Because of the sensitivity of the area, they used sharp knives to cut the turf to access finds- the tuft could be replaced without leaving visible marks

4. Findings

a) Excavation 2005

The earliest level revealed was at a depth of around 80 cm. It was a greeny-grey sand and pebbles layer with no visible artefactual content and underlay all of the structures and fills in the trench. This was seen as Thanet Beds, the surface geology of this part of the plateau.

Set into the Thanet Beds was a complex of substantial brick structures (see fig 5a and b). These consisted of a central rounded feature, assumed to be a rainwater collection cistern with other brick features leading into it. The lower of these, on the left of 5a, consisted of heavily mortared red brick capped by shaped bricks of similar material. This formed a covered channel to the central cistern. On the right of 5a, a second covered channel can be seen, but this is made of more modern bricks and the only shaped brick has been formed by cutting a standard one. This second channel was partially blocked with mortared flints (5b). At the back left of 5a is a straight brick structure, of mixed age construction (repair of an original build?) which may be a third channel into the cistern.



Fig 5a above: The whole brick structures complex



Fig 5b left: Two bricks removed from the junction of channel and rounded structure to show the blocking flints.

The whole trench around these structures contained an infill with a high artefactual content - pottery, clay pipes, large glass bottle fragments, a lead statuette head and fragments of brick, tile, mortared flint and other building materials such as ragstone and slate. This was overlain by a thin mortar layer running across the whole trench, itself overlain by late 19th century topsoil and then the floor slabs from the recently demolished lean-to building.

b) Metal detecting survey 2010

The metal detecting produced around 800 artefacts, mostly from the Paddock. The vast majority (including a lot of modern coins) were bagged as bulk finds. 55 items were set aside as Small Finds for further study and dating.

The Paddock produced a large number of coins, ranging from one pound to half pence. None of these were older than 1971. A large number of crushed drink cartons and ring pulls were found, along with more unusual items such as a glass bead bracelet, two biros and tarpaulin

eyelet rings. This assemblage is doubtless the detritus from the Davington Fetes held on the Paddock over the years.

The artefacts found nearer the house were more varied, and included two thirds of the Small Finds. The coins found (bulk bagged) were more diverse in origin and included coins from Ireland, Australia, the USA, France and the Netherlands. They were also often earlier in date e.g. 1919, though none were especially old.

The Small Finds included personal and domestic items, such as buttons, furniture mounts, a log splitter, musket ball, buckle and a lead shoe wrenched from a cast figure. All were of late 18th century or later date - even the lead shoe was of a 19th century imitation-medieval style. The buckle was probably a shoe buckle (curved) of 18th century date. The earliest dated find was a modest lead token with portcullis symbol, a common find usually assigned to the 17th century. The most striking find was a medal to celebrate the victory of Admiral Rodney at St Eustatius in 1781. This medal has Rodney's head on one side and on the reverse, ships of the line firing in battle and 'Rodney for Ever'²¹.



Fig 6: Garden Small Finds. From top left anticlockwise: 18th century shoe buckle, 17th century lead token, 19th century lead shoe, late 18th century Rodney medal (both sides). A complete list of Small Finds is given in Appendix 1.

²¹ National Maritime Museum Collections, Greenwich. Medals catalogue E3668-1, E3668-2. Online.

c) Geo-resistivity survey 2010

The georesistivity survey gave some very interesting results. Fig 8 shows the outcome for the whole area surveyed. The light areas are drier and the dark areas wetter than average. Natural deposits of waterlogged or well drained soil have fuzzy boundaries: what archaeologists are looking for are regularities such as linear light lines which could suggest buried walls or dark bands which could suggest buried infilled ditches.

There are some definite regularities in this plot. The ones in the garden areas can be related to the buildings suggested in Testers plan. The ones in the Paddock, shown in Fig 9, are new discoveries, apart from the sewage pipe (which we think is leaking). They will be discussed in the interpretation section.

5. Interpretation

a) Excavation 2005

According to Tester's proposed plan, this excavation took place in the corridor between the Rood Screen and the Nuns Quire. No direct evidence for the medieval building was found, however, even though the natural surface was reached. The mortared flints, ragstone and especially the slate²², however, were probably remnants of the demolished 'nun's quire' or from the demolition and rebuild of the surviving east end by Willement (see fig 7). Apart from these, everything found was post medieval or later.

The rounded brick structures were almost certainly part of an extensive rainwater collection system. Rainwater was important, often specifically used in washhouses as the water was soft. The adjacent post medieval wing, on the line of the north cloister, is known to have been a kitchen/scullery from the 17th century and a laundry was installed here by John Bennett around AD1800.²³ We are told that similar water management systems underlie these buildings. The brick type and style of building suggest a 17th century date for the earlier brickwork. This system was probably installed by John Edwards, who lived here from 1578 to 1631 and who made many structural alterations, but could be as late as 1750.

The later brickwork is mid 19th century. The complete covered channel runs across to link with the drainpipe coming down from the vestry building which projects from the north east corner of the Church. The vestry was built by Willement (see Fig 7) and underneath it lies his family vault. Willement also rebuilt the upper east wall of the chancel, which had been badly damaged by the nearby gunpowder blast of 1781 and subsequently roughly repaired in brick²⁴ (see Fig 7). It would seem that this location, just east of the chancel wall, was a building site for some time in the mid 19th century, and the 2005 trench area had been excavated 150 years earlier to modify the water system and to install the drainage channel from the new vestry. Any remnants of the floor of the medieval church would have been removed at this stage. The 19th century construction hole was then backfilled with a soil containing building debris and a lot of household waste. None of the artefactual material is earlier than the 19th century.

²² See Tester op. cit. p 212 for medieval use of slates

²³ Willement op.cit. p38

²⁴ Willement op.cit. p31

The puzzle about all this is the fact that the 17th century cistern seems, from its curvature, to extend backwards under the chancel wall. Although the upper part of the chancel wall is assumed to have been first created in the post dissolution period²⁵ and then extensively remodelled by Willement in the 19th century, the lower part is believed to be part of the rood screen of the original church, mainly because two now-blocked doorways are visible on either side of the altar inside the church (see Fig 7 for 1845 - the ladies are standing on our trench site!). These doors are seen as having originally given access from the aisles to the nun's quire, though there are problems with this.²⁶ Quite how the water system could have been inserted **underneath** the original rood screen is a mystery - perhaps the curved brick cistern becomes straight-sided closer to the wall?



Fig 7: Rear elevation of the east end of the Priory/Parish Church in 1845²⁷ and 2010, demonstrating Willement's rebuild. Note the aisle doors (now blocked) and the new vestry on the right.

b) Metal detecting and geo resistivity survey

The assemblage from the paddock was entertaining - ritual feasting on a high spot, i.e. Davington fete over the years. It was significant that the earliest coin date of 1971 was the end date of the brief ploughed phase 1968-1971, mentioned earlier. It would seem that any earlier material had been down turned by the ploughing. The assemblage for the gardens was more personal, but with the exception of the Rodney medal and the lead statue foot, not

²⁵ Burke & Young op.cit. p27

²⁶ Tester op.cit. p208

²⁷ Frontispiece from Willement op.cit.

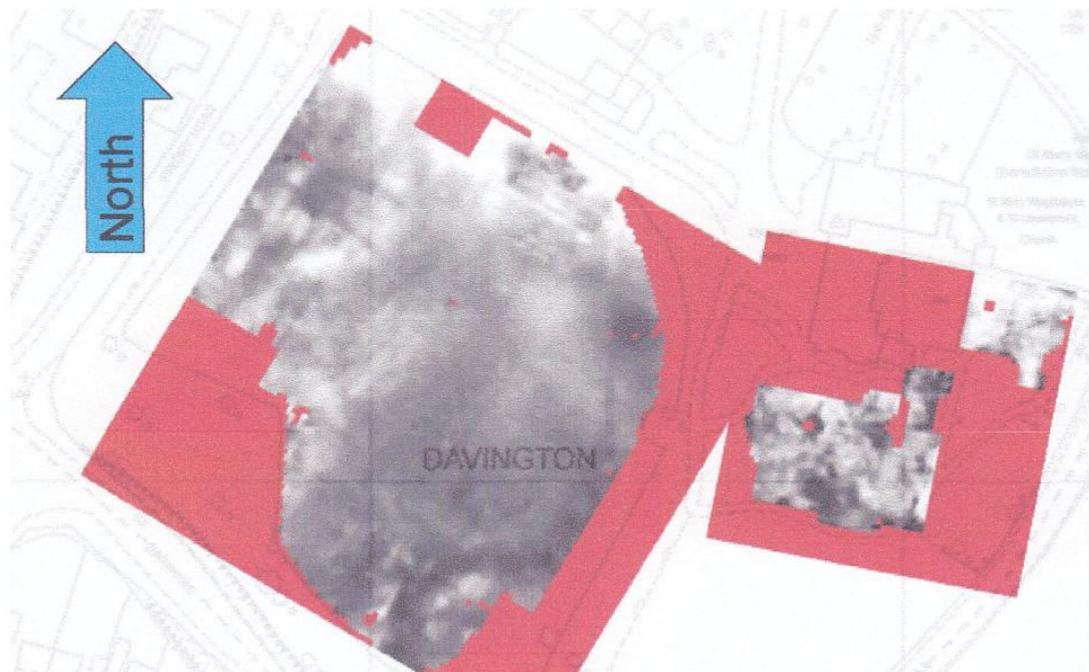
particularly high status and/or early. For the hard working metal detectorists, the absence of the medieval was disappointing.

The geo resistivity survey on the other hand, was very informative. In fig 8, the plot at the top shows the whole surveyed site. Fig 9 shows an analysis of the Paddock, with features outlined in yellow.

The garden areas first (Fig 8, right hand plots). The northernmost area shows a lot of white. This is where Tester excavated for the Chapter House and the resistivity survey does indeed show a lot of building material just beneath the surface. The other garden area is more varied, except for a white stripe at the eastern edge which corresponds to the line of Tester's dormitory wall. The lighter patches elsewhere could relate to debris from the two gables demolished by the 1781 blast, but there are hints in the southern part of the lawn at a circular solid feature. The 1845 inventory for the Priory²⁸ does mention a dove or pigeon house, and this would be a likely location. It is not clear as to whether the dove house was original medieval or of later build, although they are standard in medieval monastic complexes²⁹.

The Paddock patterns are much clearer. The linear dark feature in the east is the sewage pipe, laid down in living memory. The winding dark line, about 6 metres wide, which appears to extend the sewage pipe line, could well be a drainage ditch of some kind. It could, however, be a trodden (sunken) track with its continuation disrupted by the much later laying of the sewage pipe. It lies just outside the Priory precinct wall. The light areas to the northeast are adjacent to the nursery plot and buildings and are blurred enough to be dumps of building materials.

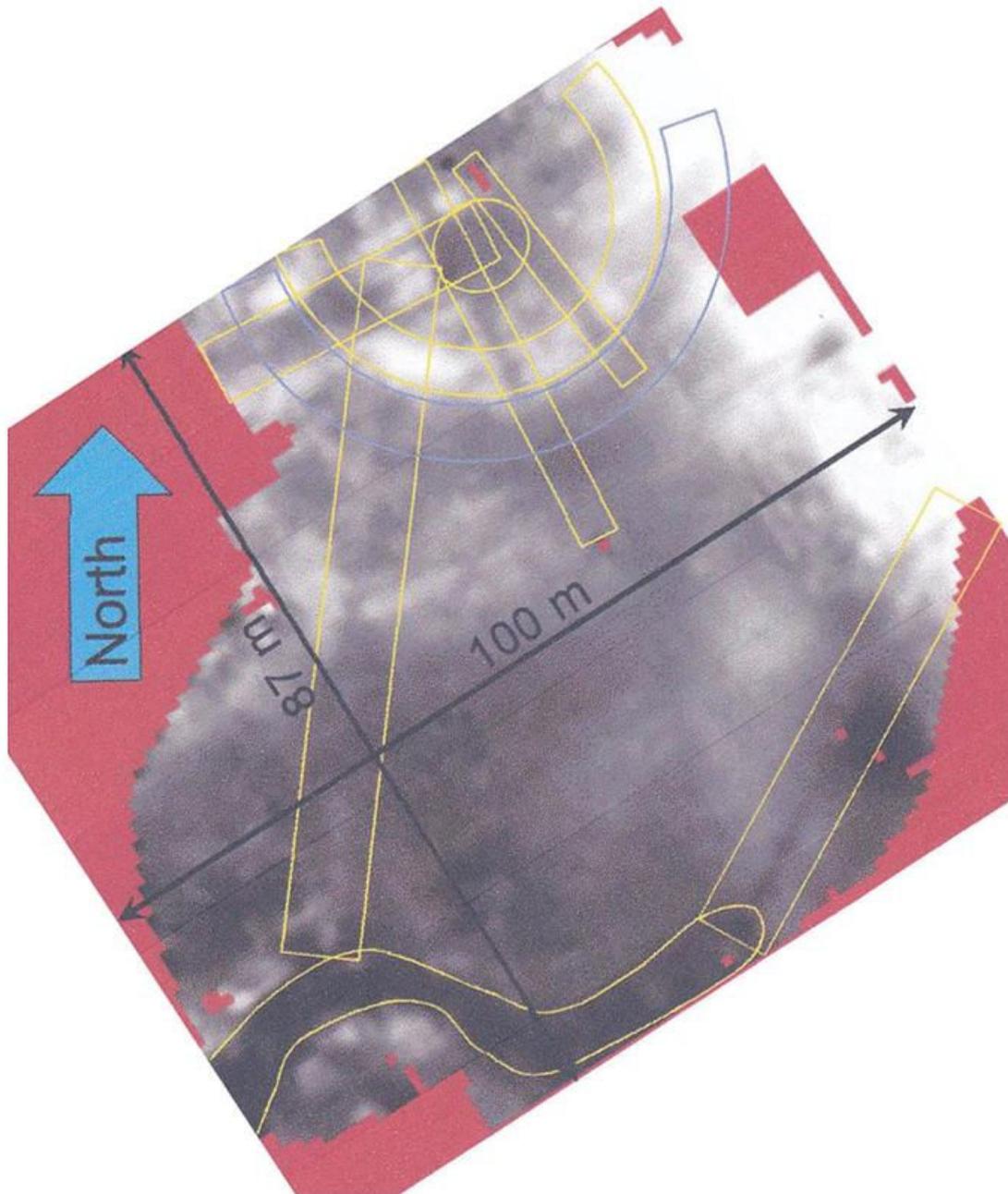
Fig 8: The resistivity plot for all of the areas surveyed



²⁸ Melrose, K op.cit. p83

²⁹ See for example the Hospital of St Mary Ospringe in Smith G.H 1980 'The Excavation of the Hospital of St Mary, Ospringe commonly called Maison Dieu' *Arch. Cant.* **XCV** pp 81-184

Fig 9: The resistivity plot for the Paddock with suggested features outlined



The cluster of features in the north of the Paddock is, however, the most eye-catching find. It appears at first glance to be a series of concentric circles with linear features converging on the centre. This is, however, misleading. Closer inspection shows that at least two of the linear features **cut across** the larger light coloured circle (therefore younger than the circle) and one of the linear features is **cut by** the circle (therefore older than the circle). There seems to have been a series of events happening in this area, over an unknown period of time.

What were these events? Nothing in the documents and maps available is helpful here. Is this to do with the Home Guard structures said to have been here in WW2? Such features do not show on the 1946 aerial photograph (Fig 2). Are they outcomes of landscaping, as at

nearby Syndale?³⁰ The Paddock pattern is the outcome of large scale, superimposed series of features, and does not look organised enough for post medieval landscaping. It is tempting to speculate about a possible apsidal early chapel or a prehistoric collection of ditch and bank events or even both, but the fact is we don't know.

In short, this part of the grounds does really need further investigation. This does not have to be excavation - a magnetometry survey would clarify whether these features are superficial or ancient. At the very least, if any development is ever planned for this area, there would have to be careful evaluation of the archaeology.

6. Final comments

This exercise took a lot of hard work and team coordination, concentrated into three days - we were very lucky with the weather! Although apart from the possible dove house and trodden track, we found little evidence for medieval other than what is already known, the curious patterns revealed in the Paddock were highly intriguing. This has been very much a 'first go' at a hitherto largely unknown area, and very worthwhile.

7. Acknowledgments

Great thanks to Bob Geldof for allowing us access to his lovely gardens, for both carrying out the investigative work and also taking guided tours around a couple of months later during our conference on the *Davington Mysteries*.

We also owe a lot to Ken Judges who had worked here man and boy. Ken has been absolutely invaluable in giving us information about the ways in which the usage of the grounds has changed over the last 50 years.

Finally, thanks to Laurence Young, Warden of Davington Parish Church who has enabled our work from beginning to end, negotiating times and access using his diplomatic skills. Without him, none of this would have happened.

Dr Patricia Reid

Assisted by John Clarkstone for the Geo-resistivity surveys

November 2010

³⁰ 2004 *Syndale Park, Ospringe, Kent: archaeological evaluation and assessment of results*. Wessex Archaeology, for Time Team, Channel 4

Appendix 1: Inventory of Small Finds (from metal detecting)**R: found in house gardens****P: found in Paddock.**

item no	object	material	Grid ref	padd or house
0				
1	decorative piece	lead	f7	R
2	tack	iron	f7	R
3	melted blob	lead	f7	R
4	serial no tag, lettering	CuA brass	f7	R
5	halfpenny 1921	CuA	f7	R
6	Rodney medal	CuA	f7	R
7	end of chisel	iron	f7	R
8	vessel rim frag.	pewter	f7	R
9	necklace	silver?	f7	R
10	loop - purse ring?	CuA	f7	R
11	furniture mount	CuA iron	f7	R
12	ring	CuA brass	f7	R
13	part of hinge	iron	f7	R
14	blob	lead	f7	R
15	vessel rim frag.	tinned iron	f7	R
16	threaded door handle part	CuA brass	f7	R
17	strip	cast iron	f7	R
18	8 decorated small bells	CuA brass iron clappers	e7	R
19	clothing decoration	glass and metal	e7	R
20	loop with ring	iron	f7	R
21	square buckle	CuA	f7	R
22	loop	iron CuA	e7	R
23	tack	iron	f7	R
24	penny 1919	CuA	b1	P
25	twopenny 1971	CuA	b2	P
26	part of ornamental base ?	CuA	c2	P
27	button	tinned silver	c2	P
28	penny 1920	CuA	b2	P
29	loop	CuA	b3	P
30	tile or pot frag	ceramic	a3	P
31	brooch with engraved rose	CuA rim. Glass face	a3	P

32	multiple frags wingnuts etc	CuA	e1	P
33	vessel or bell rim frag	CuA cast	d2	P
34	disc	coated plastic	d3	P
35	D shaped buckle	CuA cast	e4	P
36	token (snapped)	CuA cast	e4	P
37	disc - worn token?	CuA	c2	P
38	sheet frag.	lead	e3	P
39	sealing frag.	lead	d3	P
40	tanged knife	iron	d3	P
41	cold chisel	iron	d3	P
42	buckle - shoe? Brooch?	CuA iron pin	e3	P
43	window frag. with frame	glass with CuA	e4	P
44	strip	CuA	e4	P
45	plug	lead	e4	P
46	spoon bowl	tin plated	e4	P
47	horseshoe part	iron	e4	P
48	thimble	CuA	e4	P
49	small shovel	iron - mild steel	f3	P
50	water tap valve	CuA	d5	R
51	eyelet (for tarpaulin)	tinned CuA	e3	P
52	blade or terminal from railing	iron	e5	R
53	plant tag with lettering	CuA	d3	P
54	scissors handle	CuA	d3	P
55	tube frag.	Aluminium	b4	P
56	fragment	lead	e3	P
57	flat frag.	iron cast	e3	P
58	sheet (roofing?)	lead	d7	R
59	model shoe	lead	d7	R
60	token with 'portcullis'	lead	d7	R
61	large button	CuA	d7	R
62	earring	silver & glass	d7	R
63	small button	CuA	d7	R
64	loop (broken)	CuA	a5	P
65	button with ship	modern alloy	a5	P
66	washer	lead	d7	R
67	ring	CuA cast	e7	R

68	brooch with B	copperised ?	f7	R
69	grill frag. and square headed nail	iron	f7	R
70	melted blob	lead	e7	R
71	buckle frag.	CuA silver coated	e7	R
72	dome shaped cap	CuA cast	e7	R
73	button	CuA	e7	R
74	cane ferrule?	CuA	e7	R
75	ring	CuA	e7	R
76	flat ring	CuA	e8	R
77	strapping	lead	e8	R
78	decorative button	CuA	e8	R
79	ring or round buckle	iron	d6	R
80	foot of vessel ???	lead with iron 'leg'	g7	R
81	large disc with slot	lead	f7	R
82	decorated springy strip	coated CuA	g7	R
83	decorative bell (crushed)	CuA	f6	R
84	nail	CuA	f5	R
85	finger ring	silver wire	f5	R
86	nail	CuA	f5	R
87	tack	CuA	f5	R
88	nail	CuA	f5	R
89	flat shape with hole	lead	d5	R
90	possible hinge part	iron	e5	R
91	shaped sheet frag.	lead	e5	R
92	sack seal?	lead	e5	R
93	blob	lead	e5	R
94	musket ball	lead	e4	R
95	large nail or spike	iron	c2	P
96	tube	iron cast	d3	P