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The Faversham Society
Archaeological Research Group



Community
Archaeology

The Davington Mysteries

**Report for Keyhole Excavation 73
6 Stephens Close, Davington, Faversham.**

Grid Reference: TR 00976 61620



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**).

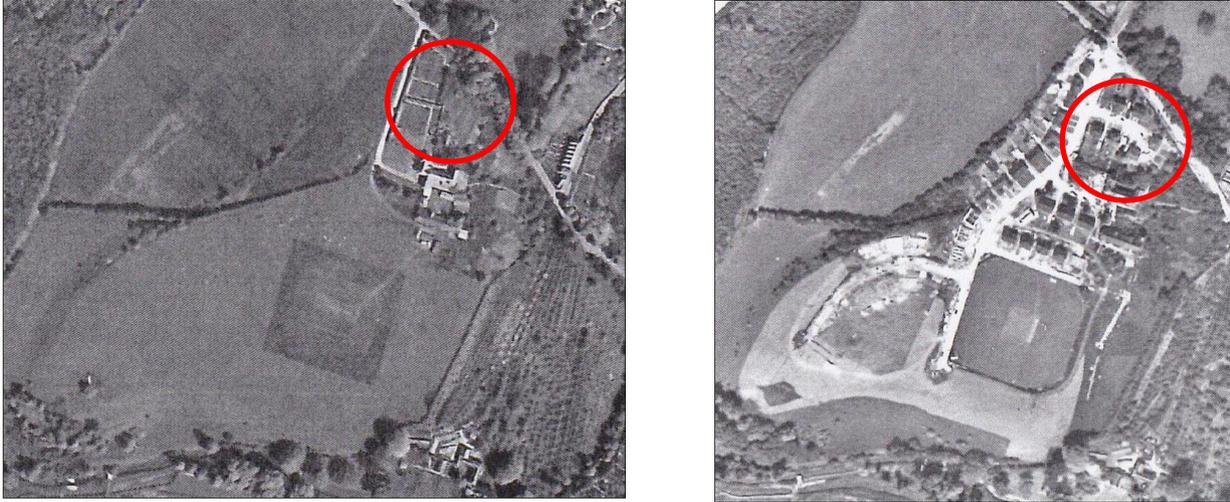
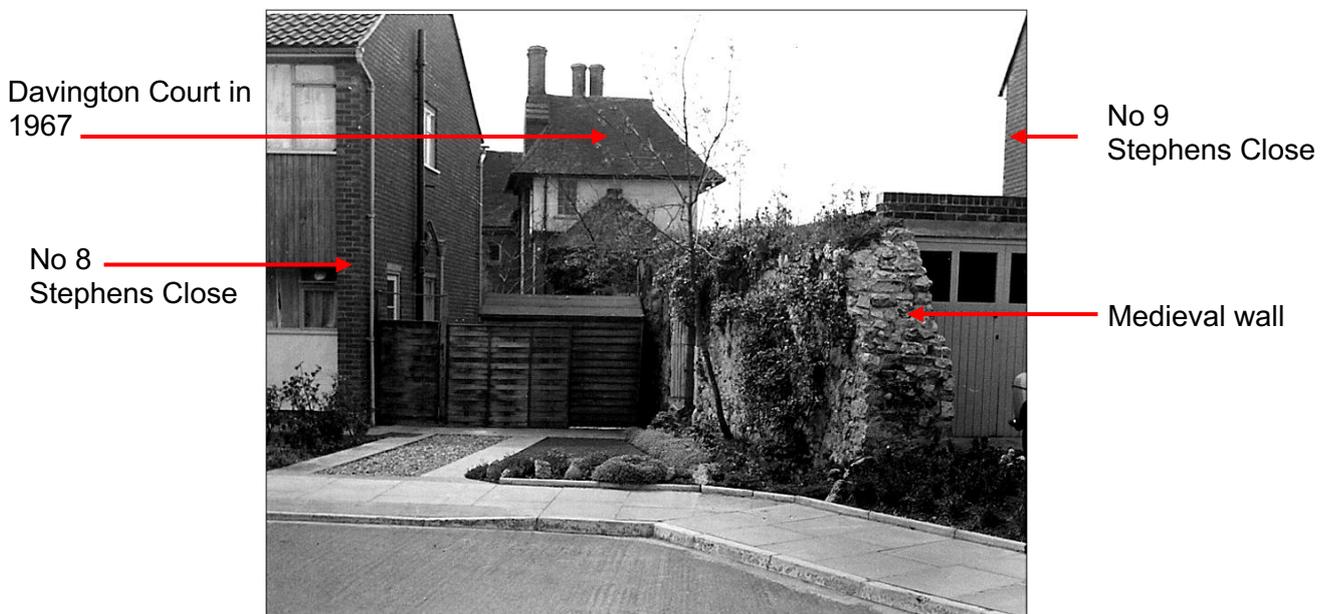


Fig 1: Aerial photographs of the Davington Plateau in 1946² and 1962.³ Stephens close in the red circle.

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.

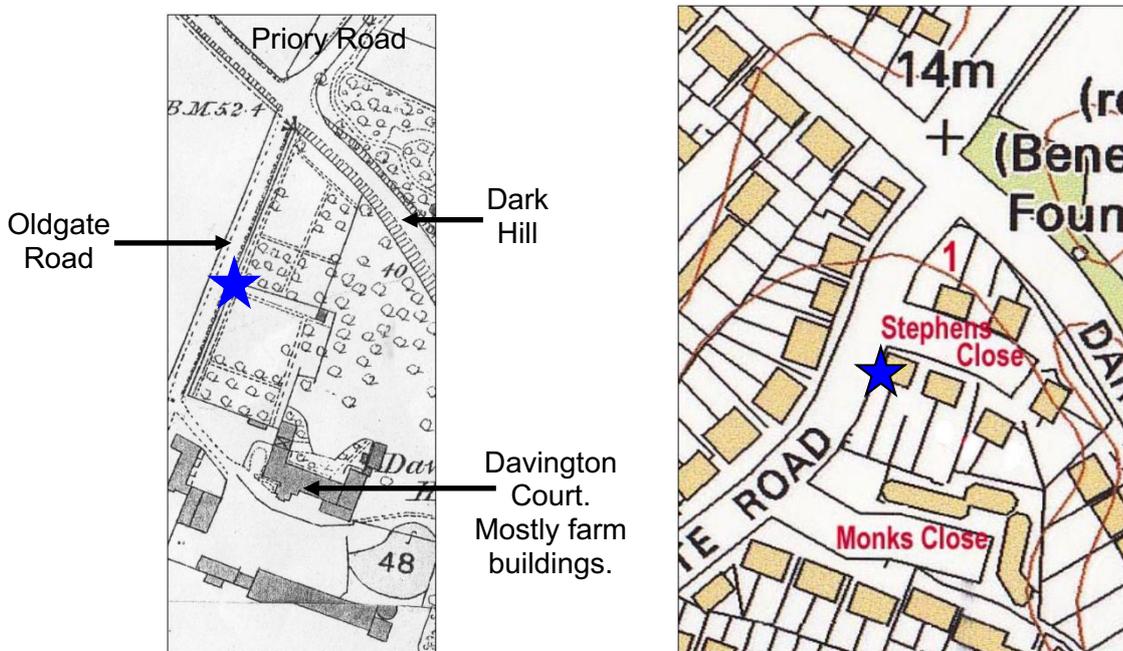


Fig 4: The Stephens Close area in 1865 and 2007. The blue star is the gateway shown in Fig 3.

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

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

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 & 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

Number 6, Stephens Close lies at the north eastern end of the cul de sac, on the corner overlooking Dark Hill. The garden forms an 'apron' around the back and slopes away from the house (see map in **Fig 4**). The 2010 geo resistivity survey of the Stephens Close gardens had suggested that a large filled-ditch-like feature curved around the slope, running across the garden. Excavation in the garden of No 7, just over the fence, had revealed a large cavity with a 19th century fill.¹³ The No 7 householder told us that this ran under the recently built extension, and we wondered whether it continued in the other direction, into the garden of No 6.

The small trench 73 was carefully located so that it sat over the dark area on the georesistivity survey and lined up with 74A, in the garden of No 7.

3. The procedure

A 1m by 2m mini-trench was pegged out using the planning square and the area delineated marked with string. The position of the trench was recorded by measuring to mapped corners of the house. Turf was removed carefully from the trench, 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 a depth within the maximum safety depth of 1.2m. 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.

¹³ Report for Keyhole 74A on FSARG website www.community-archaeology.org.uk

4. The findings

Under the turf layer [1] was a grey-brown soil with a lot of small / medium sized fragments of building materials, such as brick (including glazed brick), tile, mortar, ragstone and even Caen stone (one small piece) [2]. The deposit [2] also contained pieces of glass, bone and 18th-19th century red wares. This rapidly became a brownish yellow layer with high building rubble content.



Fig 8: The 'wall', context [6].

The part of the trench not affected by the 'wall' was trowelled down further and a flint layer emerged [8] (Fig 9).



Fig 9: The flint surface, context [8].



Fig 10: End of excavation surface.

In the south east corner of the pit a solid looking area of brick with mortar appeared. This was thought to be the lower part of a wall, and the trench was extended in a southerly direction to uncover the rest of this wall. Later excavation, however, showed the brick to be another rubble dump [6] / [10] with an unusually sharp edge.

Beneath this layer a pit became visible [11] / [12], at the bottom of which ran an earthenware pipe [13]. A sondage through the building dump [6] / [10] showed that it sat on the natural brickearth [15]. Fig 10 shows this complex trench at the end of excavation.

5. Interpretation

As stated above, this was a complex pit, dominated by demolition material. The abundance of peg tile in the material shows that it came not from a wall demolition (stretches of the 17th century brick and stone wall were demolished in the 1960s when Stephens Close was being built) but from a roofed structure. Crow refers to demolition of ruins 'in the orchard' in 1814¹⁴ and this part of Stephens Close does seem to lie in the former orchard, judging on the basis of the 1865 OS maps. The brick in the trench was of 17th century type, identical to that in the surviving walls.

What is puzzling, though, is that pipe. It is not linked to any modern utilities and it is hard to see why a pipe should have been laid here before modern times, especially at that depth. There is no evidence for any other buildings in this area after the demolition of the Manor. It is very possible, however, that the laying of the pipe was subsequent to the dumping of the main brick deposit and that the cut made for the pipe sliced through the dump and created the sharp edge which lead us to believe we had a wall. The flint layer [8] can then be seen as the top layer of the backfill around the pipe.

What was clear was that we did not have a nice sharp-edged V-shaped ditch running around the slope of a hill fort! Indeed, the only prehistoric pottery was found in layer [2], probably bulldozed in from elsewhere in the area during the 1960s building. Although 21 worked flint tools and many more waste flakes were found, they were well distributed through the contexts and did not constitute coherent assemblages - not really surprising given the highly disturbed nature of the ground being excavated.



Fig 11: Close up of the pipe [13].

6. Final comments

Although this excavation was disappointing in that it did not expose the Iron Age ditch that we had hoped for, it did contribute yet more to our picture of the former Davington Manor which stood very close indeed to this spot. More details about other demolition dumps encountered in Stephens Close can be found in last years reports.¹⁵ It is worth mentioning that further excavation next door at Number 7 where a deep cavity had been found in 2010 showed that this cavity was a spade-dug hole which was then filled with load after load of 'house clearance' rather than demolition material - see report which should be online by Spring 2012.¹⁶

The pipe, however, remains a puzzle. We often find disused pipes in gardens in the older parts of Faversham and Ospringe, and they are clearly links to bottom of the garden washhouses and lavatories. This is not the case here. Neither does this seem a likely spot for a land drain - this is a chalk hill, very well drained and in any case this land was orchard from at least the 19th century onwards. Anyone reading this with ideas is urged to contact us and give advice!

7. Acknowledgements

Great thanks to Sandy and Ted Eason who allowed us to dig in their garden. This was our last excavation in Stephens Close and brought this side of the project to a very satisfying end.

Dr Pat Reid
November 2011

¹⁴ Crow, E 1845-61 *Historical Gleanings relative to the Town of Faversham and Parishes adjoining* Transcribed and republished as CD Rom in 2009, P. Tann (ed), Faversham Hundred series Vol 6, Faversham Society. p 347

¹⁵ FSARG website op cit., Reports for K71A, 71B, 78, 74

¹⁶ FSARG website op.cit., Extension to Report for 74A

Appendix 1: Harris Matrix

The contexts (events e.g. dump of material) are in the order in which they occurred.

