



The Davington Mysteries

**Report for Keyhole Excavation 78
11 Stephens Close, Davington, Faversham.**

Grid Reference: TR 00919 61621



Mesolithic worked flints from K78.

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**).

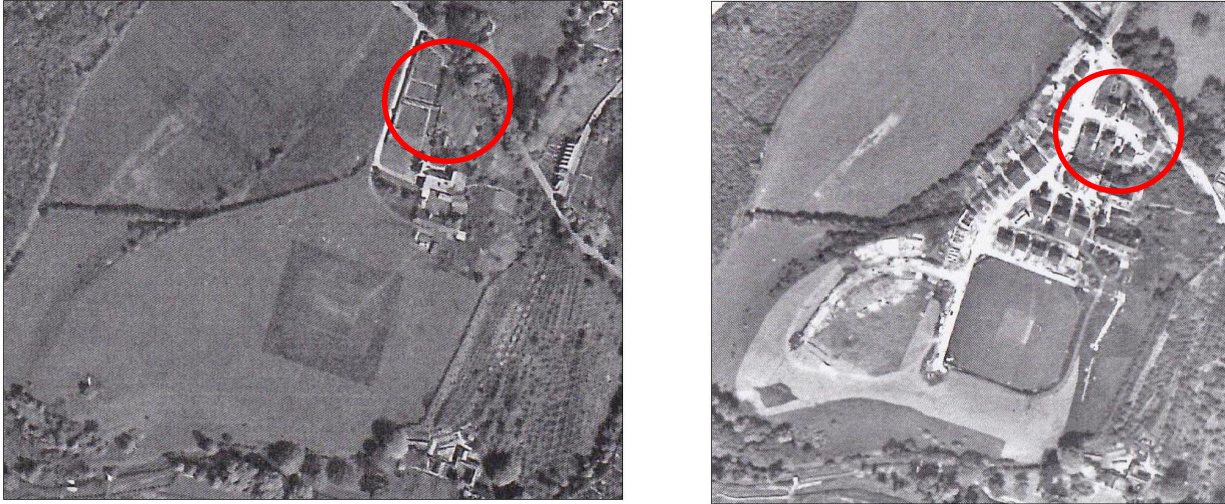
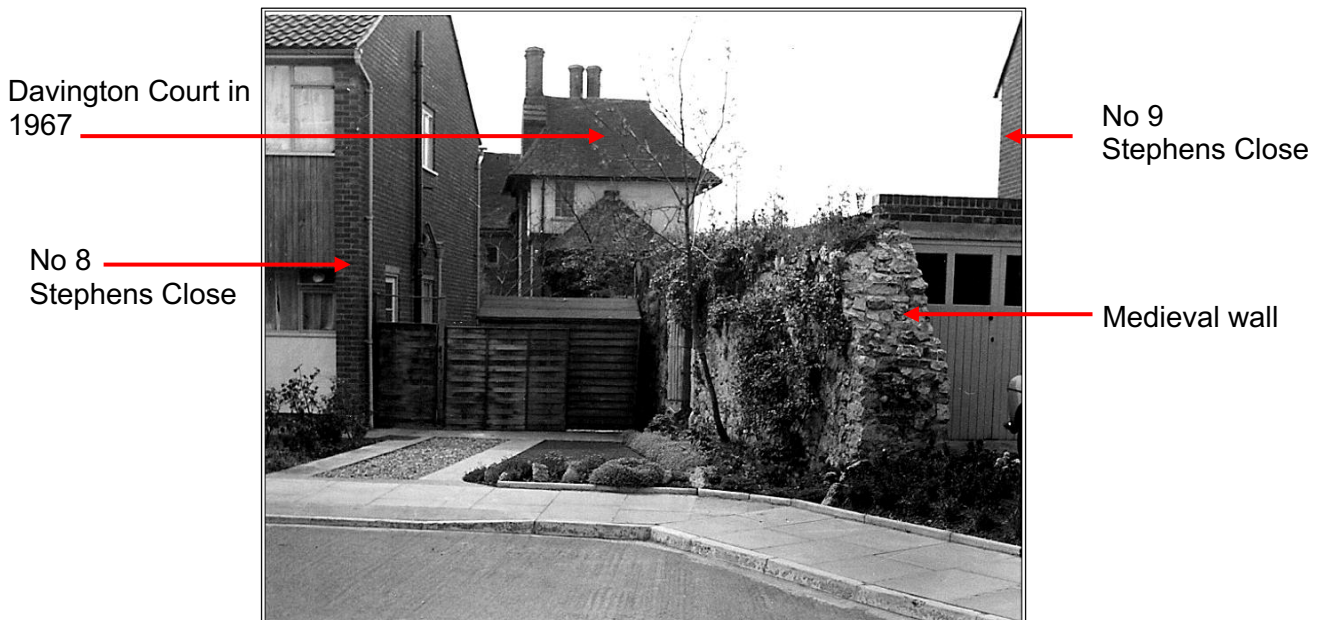


Fig 1: Aerial photographs of the Davington Plateau in 1946² and 1962.³ Stephens close in the red circle.

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.

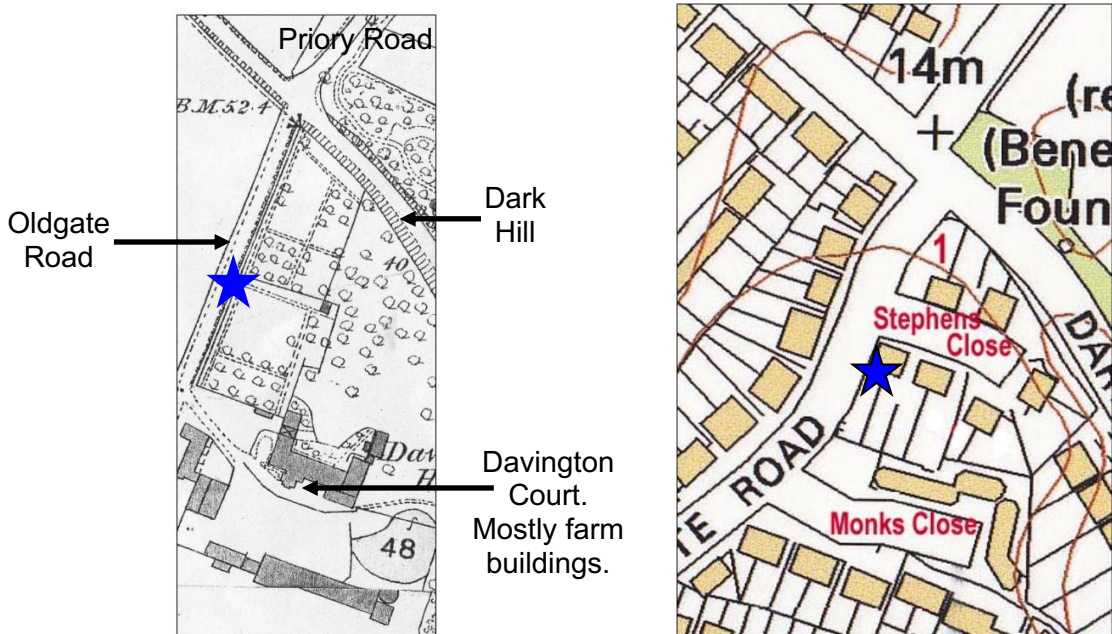


Fig 4: The Stephens Close area in 1865 and 2007. The blue star is the gateway shown in Fig 3.

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 excavation

Dug at the rear of No. 11 Stephens Close, the pit was positioned to ascertain if a wall uncovered in No. 9¹³ extended further in this direction.

3. The procedures

A 2m by 0.6m 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. 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. The keyhole was excavated to a maximum depth of 75cm. The excavated soil was selectively sieved. 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

After removal of the turves [1] which contained no finds, a mid brown, dry, compacted soil was found [2]. This context was trowelled and sieved and found to contain small quantities of brick and tile, mortar, pottery, shell, clay pipe and iron fragments. Some 39 pieces of bone, some showing butchery marks, were found. To gauge the depth of this context, which was considered to be infill, a sondage was dug in the centre of the pit to a depth of 30cm at which point the soil became darker and easier to trowel [3]. Context [2] was then removed, the only significant find being a small badly corroded coin, possibly Roman.

¹³ see *Report for No 9 Stephens Close*, on FSARG website www.community-archaeology.org.uk



Fig 8: Viewing northwards to show the path remains.

At the northern end of the excavation at a depth of 20cm there was a change in the colour of the soil to pinkish brown and of a gritty, gravelly texture. The householder suggested that these were the remains of a concrete path removed twenty years previously.

Context [3] was excavated yielding some few bones, eleven of which had butchery marks, and two worked flints, a small backed knife and a small rod or fabricator. Context [4] was excavated to a depth of 37cm and a deposit of large flints, tile, soft red brick and lumps of mortar was found, concentrated mainly at the north end of the pit (see **Fig 9**). Further excavation showed that this deposit context [5] was loose and unbonded - rubble rather than the remains of an in-situ wall.

Context [5], the rubble, was taken out and laid out for photography (**Fig 10**). Amongst the rubble were found pieces of glazed brick and tile, and a fragment of Early English Delft pottery. At a depth of 50cm, slight changes in the colour and texture of the soil were designated as context [6]. This context contained mostly building rubble and potboilers and was later considered as a 'lens' and incorporated back into [5].

At the southern end of the pit a gravelly context [7] was encountered. Trowelling to a depth of 70cm revealed a series of four 'post holes' arranged in a curved line at 19cm intervals across the width of the pit. These were excavated and found to contain small flints and sandy soil but no finds. A sondage was dug at the northern end of the pit to a depth of 75cm but the gravel layer was not encountered.



Fig 9: The rubble in context [5].

Fig 10: The rubble from context [5].



The sondage was then extended southwards to half the length of the pit revealing a greenish yellow sandy deposit, seen as the natural Thanet Beds [8]. The interface between [5] and [8] showed a ditch like shape in elevation with the lower part filled in with some very large nodular flints and few finds. The plan and elevations of the pit were cleaned and photographed.



Fig 11: Worked flints, fabricator in centre.



Fig 12: Post medieval glazed floor tile.

5. Interpretation

Though failing to locate an extension of the wall found in No. 9, the high incidence of building rubble indicates that there was extensive building activity in the area. The rubble is probably from the demolition of the original Davington Manor which was being sought.¹⁴ The presence of prehistoric to late post medieval pottery, the Roman coin and clay pipe fragments mixed together in the upper contexts suggests that these have been relocated, probably during levelling in the course of construction of the Stephens Close houses. Prehistoric, Roman and medieval pottery was found in the rubble deposit [6]. The ditch like feature into the Thanet Beds may indicate prehistoric habitation or be associated with the wall that was being sought.

6. Final comments

This site needs to be considered within the overall context of all of the Stephens Close excavations and desk top research.

7. Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the help and encouragement of Mo Wickham.

Keith Robinson

December 2010.

¹⁴ See also Report for 4 Stephens Close and Report for 7 Stephens Close, forthcoming on FSARG website www.community-archaeology.org.uk