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The Faversham Society  
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## The Davington Mysteries

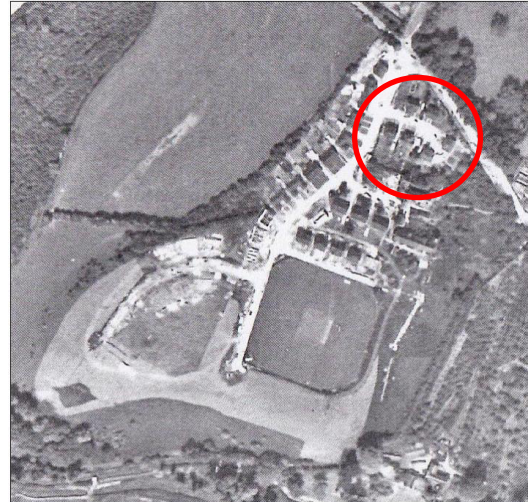
**Report for Keyhole Excavation 74A  
7 Stephens Close, Davington, Faversham.**

**Grid Reference: TR 00960 61606**



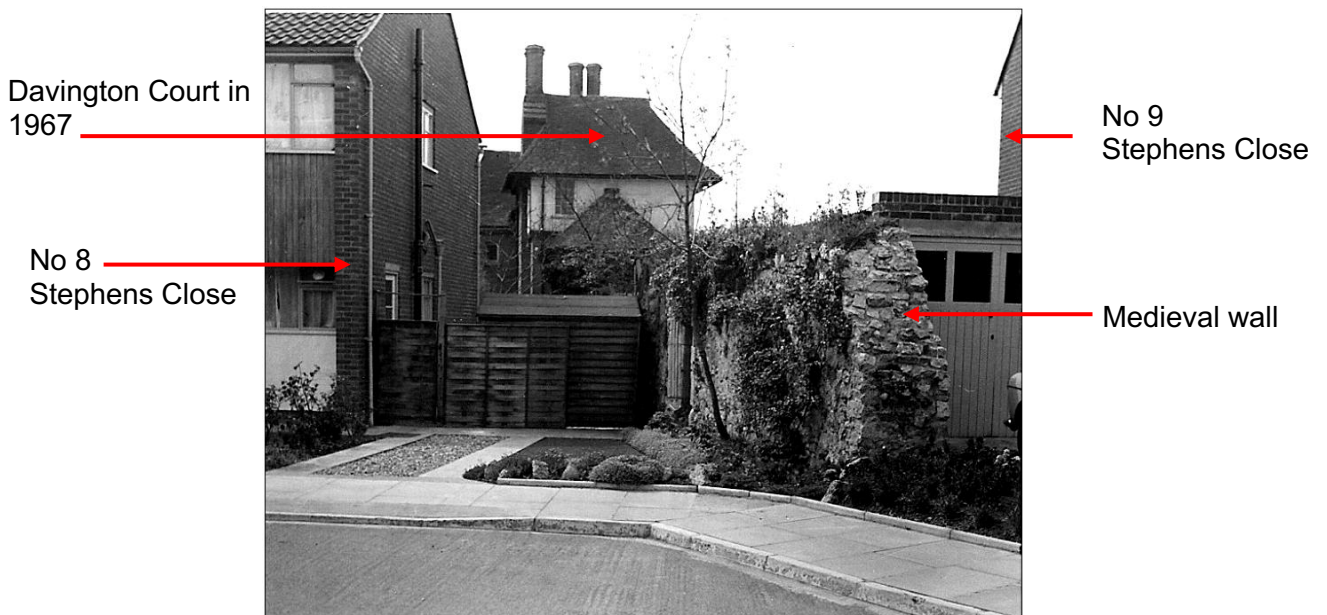
## 1. Introduction

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.<sup>1</sup> 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 1946<sup>2</sup> and 1962.<sup>3</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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**).

<sup>1</sup> Melrose, K 1996 *Davington: Parish and People* Faversham Papers No 52 Faversham Society

<sup>2</sup> Aerial Photograph 1 May 1946 F/20" //541 SQ DN. KCC photographic archive

<sup>3</sup> Aerial Photograph 1962 KCC Photographic Archive

The OS maps of 1865<sup>4</sup> (Fig 4) and 1907<sup>5</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> century wall was demolished.



Fig 3: The Mannerist Gateway dated to 1624.

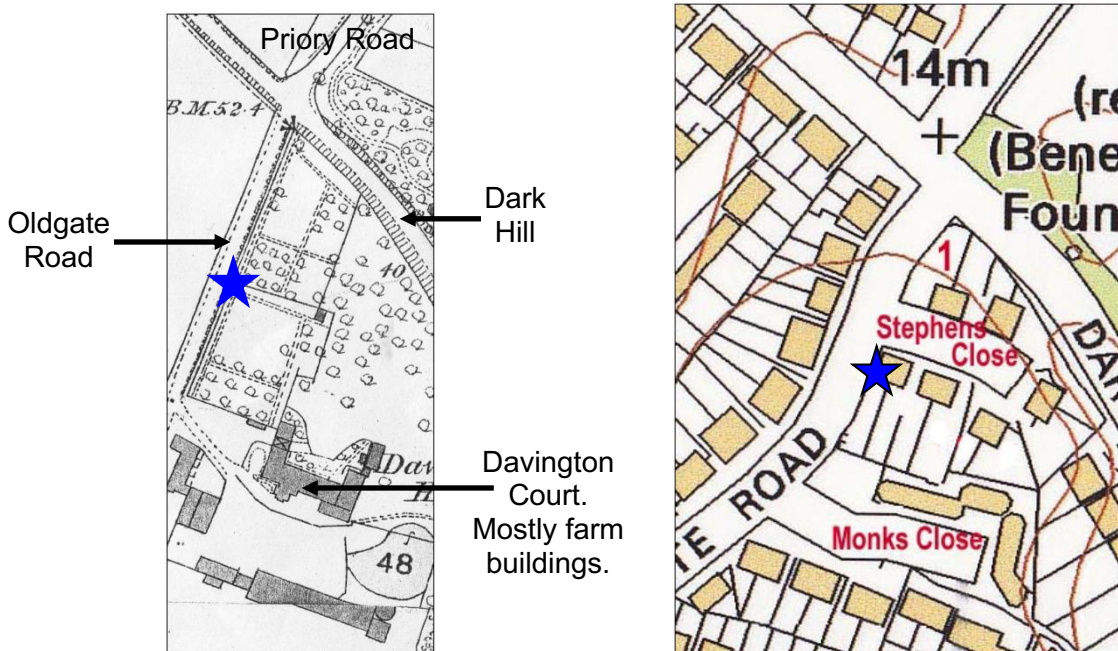


Fig 4: The Stephens Close area in 1865 and 2007. The blue star is the gateway shown in Fig 3.

Even more striking is the survival between numbers 8 and 9 of a 17m stretch of medieval wall (Fig 2), including a 13<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> century documents such as that of Crowe<sup>6</sup> and Willement<sup>7</sup>, 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

<sup>4</sup> OS 1865 (1904 reprint) Sheet XXXIV Scale 1:2500

<sup>5</sup> OS 2007 1:5000

<sup>6</sup> Crow, E 1850, quoted in Melrose 1996 op cit p 163

<sup>7</sup> 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 period<sup>8</sup>, 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 1650-1660<sup>9</sup> possibly because of the rapid growth of the nearby gunpowder industry in the Westbrook Valley with all of its environmentally invasive implications.<sup>10</sup>



**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 London<sup>11</sup> and Canterbury<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> Melrose 1996 op.cit. p 159-163

<sup>9</sup> Melrose 1996 op.cit. p 161

<sup>10</sup> Percival A 1967 *Faversham's Gunpowder Industry* Faversham Papers No 4 Faversham Society

<sup>11</sup> e.g. in Shepherd J. D. 1998 *The Temple of Mithras excavated by W F Grimes & A. Williams at the Walbrook* English Heritage

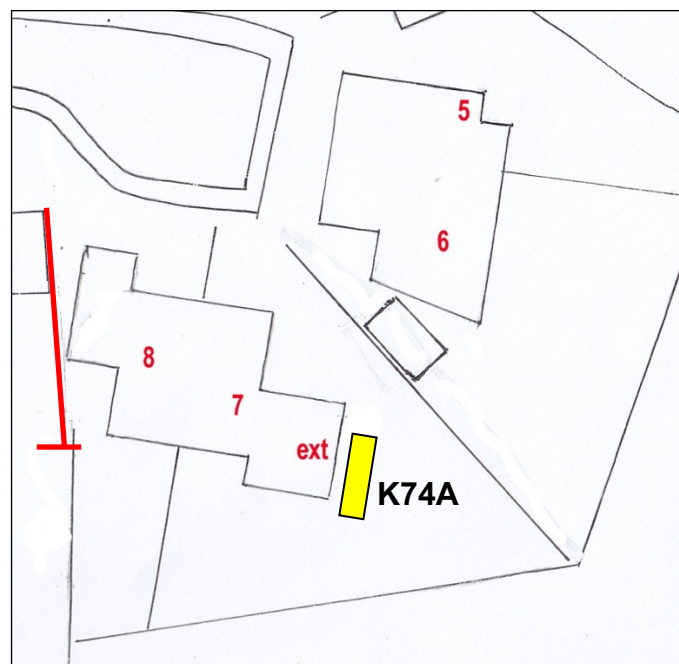
<sup>12</sup> e.g. in Frere S. S. 1962 *Roman Canterbury: the City of Durovernum*. Canterbury Excavations Committee.



**Fig 7: Davington Court around 1900 after 'renovation'.**

## 2. Location

No. 7 Stephens Close occupies a large plot in the north east corner of the Close. Although level, it overlooks the steep slope down to the east. In recent years, a large extension has been built.



**Fig 8: Large scale map of No. 7 Stephens Close and its neighbours, adapted from the latest Google aerial photograph so that all extensions are shown. The solid red line is the medieval standing wall.**

The large flowerbed running along the south edge of the main garden contained a number of large fragments of worked Kentish ragstone, most notably a large chunk with a line of small square holes drilled into it (**Fig 9**). The initial excavation in the garden of No. 7 was a small keyhole K74 to see whether a flint wall exposed in the garden of No. 9 ran through into this plot. The results were negative, and can be seen in more detail in the report for No. 9.<sup>13</sup>



**Fig 9: Boulder with socket (?) holes.**

We had been told that this boulder and some of the smaller ones had come from the area now occupied by the extension. Kial, the householder at No. 7 also told us that when this extension to the house was built, a flint wall and adjoining parallel ditch were observed, running east-west. He was able to show us more or less where they emerged from the line of the extension. The area to the east of the extension then became the main area of interest.

### **3. The procedure**

A 0.5m wide trench was pegged out to run parallel to the extension eastern wall for 4m, at a distance of 1m from the wall itself. This trench was widened to a maximum of 1.8m as features of interest became evident. 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 trench was excavated to the maximum safety depth of 1.6m. 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, and scale plans and sections drawn. Levels were taken using a dumpy level. Finally, the spoil was put back in, tamped down, watered and new grass seed sown as the turf was of poor quality.

The location and final extent of this trench is shown in **Fig 8**.

### **4. The findings**

After the top 30cm of deposits had been removed, it became clear that this trench cut across two very different kinds of deposits.

The northern third was occupied by a corner of flint, loose mortar, chalk block and ragstone wall [7], 70cm wide and bound together with a lime mortar with some shell fragment content. This was probably a continuation of the wall noted by the householder as running east-west through the foundations of the extension: the wall at this point turning northwards. Sitting partly on top of the wall and also running east-

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<sup>13</sup> [www.community-archaeology.org.uk/projects/davingtonmysterires/ Test Pits/ Report for 76a, b,c,d and 74.](http://www.community-archaeology.org.uk/projects/davingtonmysterires/Test%20Pits/Report%20for%2076a,%20b,c,d%20and%2074)

west was a thin ash and cinder layer [6] itself on a thin shingle layer [4]. [6] / [4] were seen as a garden path dating to the previous and earliest occupier of No. 7. The path deposit then sat directly on top of yellow brickearth [8] with a little artefactual content at the top but none from around 2cm downwards. [8] was enclosed by the wall corner and, at a depth of only around 35cm, did seem to be the natural geology. Only the very lowest part of the wall had survived, embedded to a depth of 15cm - 20cm in the brickearth, and it was not possible to discern any structure. To the east of the trench adjacent to the wall was an area of pebble shingle at a depth of around 35cm which could have been a pebbled surface or a natural deposit [23].

**Fig 10: The wall complex.**

The square holes into [8] are investigative sondages, not excavated features.



**Fig 11: The ditch feature at the south end of excavation. See also Appendix 2.**

The southern two thirds of the trench was excavated revealing a sequence of infill deposits, clearly shown in **Fig 11** and captured on the scale section in **Appendix 2**. The most significant and extensive infill deposit was layer [13] which ran down the north side of the cavity into its base and contained a substantial amount of early- mid 19<sup>th</sup> century artefactual material. This included 1.5kg of large fresh break pottery sherds, mostly Staffordshire cream ware, London coarse red ware with a clear black

flecked glaze and most of a Midland Black red ware jug. A single sherd of 17<sup>th</sup>- 18<sup>th</sup> century Westerwald stoneware and a sherd of white porcelain with a scalloped pattern were also found in [13]. Layer [13] also contained a fair amount of fragmentary animal bone and shell, along with iron nails, vessel glass, brick, tile and mortared flint and a few pieces of clay pipe stem.



**Fig 12: Pottery from context [13]. The Westerwald is just above the label.**

The infill layers above [13], visible in the scale section **Appendix 2**, are obviously later in date than [13]. [13] appeared to sit on deposit [20] but shortage of time and safety issues prevented any deeper excavations. [20] did not appear to be the natural, but possibly to be an earlier infill layer which needs further excavation.

This infilled feature, which appeared to run east-west across the trench, did seem to be the 'ditch' referred to by the householder. Although efforts were made, it proved impossible to fully establish the cut edges of this feature. To the north of the feature, south of the base of the wall [7], was a small context of natural brickearth [16] which appeared to match the deposit [8]. The south facing edge of [16] was vertical. At the southern end of the infilled feature, the sequence of infill deposits cut through a deposit [19] (see **Fig 13**). This apparent cut line [20] could not be pursued downwards due to shortage of time and safety issues, as mentioned above but this southern edge (if that is what it was) did seem to slope downwards at about 45 degrees, unlike the vertical 'edge' found on the north side.

Covering all this was a dark brown soil context [5] with a high content of small fragments of a variety of materials, mostly of building materials with some small pieces of tarmac, strongly suggesting it can be dated to the building phase of Stephens Close in the 1960s. Above this was garden type soil [3], related to the first occupation of the property. Above this was a very different yellow-brown clayey layer [2] with flint inclusions, builder's rubble (including a lens of concrete) and, startlingly, a Mesolithic tranchet adze (**Fig 14**): this layer [2] was the spoil from the digging of the extension foundations mixed with building material. Finally, was layer [1] which was a thin topsoil and turf layer for the present garden.





**Fig 13: Tranchet adze: Mesolithic tool, probably used for wood working.**

Compared with other excavations in Stephens Close, especially given its relatively large volume, K74A yielded very little *early* pottery. A few sherds of late Iron Age and Romano British pottery were found in [5], the Stephens Close 'building' layer. The main find type in most contexts was building material, ranging from tile and brick to mortared flint and worked stone, strong evidence for demolition at different times in the immediate area.

## 5. Interpretation

One of the difficulties in interpreting the striking features of this excavation lies in sorting out the relationship between the walls and the infilled ditch-like feature. The walls were set, it seems, in a natural deposit close to the surface of the ground. It is not clear whether the remaining wall was a flint wall or a foundation for a more substantial structure. The 1865 map (see **Fig 4**) does not show any garden walls or other structures in the area now occupied by the garden of No. 7. Although a photograph of the garden in the 1950s shows a large greenhouse occupying part of the garden<sup>14</sup> the greenhouse is not located in No. 7's garden area. The walls themselves are very difficult to date, although the character of the lime mortar, compared with the very shelly mortar of the standing medieval walls of No. 9 Stephens Close, suggests a post medieval date.

What does seem strange is the closeness of the walls to the ditch-like feature. The 'ditch' was not fully infilled until, at the earliest, the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, given the pottery found in [13] (**Fig 12**). Edward Crow, writing between 1848 and 1861, tells us that in 1813 buildings associated with the former Davington Manor were demolished *in the orchard area* and in 1844 some of the medieval surviving remains were also demolished.<sup>15</sup> Interpretation of the nearby excavation K71A (4 Stephens Close) suggested that the infill there related to the 1813 activity. This is too early for the pottery found in [13] and 1844 is a more likely time for the infilling of the K74A 'ditch'. The amount of demolition material in [13] and the infill layers above it (peg tile, brick and nails from weather boarding) suggests that whatever the wall building was, it was demolished at this time. If so, it must have been standing on the edge of the ditch like feature.

The question then becomes - what was the infilled feature? Observations of the householder about it running parallel to the wall towards the west suggest a major feature. Was this the remnant of a late Iron Age ditch running around the curve of the hill and overlooking Dark Hill? The sloping cut found at the southern end implies this. Or is it a former outside cellar, once perhaps boarded over at the level of the wall base: the vertical edge on the northern side would go along with this. The nearby excavation K71A certainly showed an underground structure of post medieval date.<sup>16</sup>

In short, questions raised by this excavation are far from answered. Something interesting is going on here but further work is needed before understanding can be achieved. Negotiations are taking place at the moment for some limited further investigation, targeted on finding answers.

<sup>14</sup> Photograph courtesy of Simon Barnes, former resident of Davington Court.

<sup>15</sup> Crow 1850, op cit, p30

<sup>16</sup> FSARG website [www.community-archaeology.org.uk](http://www.community-archaeology.org.uk), Davington Mysteries, report K71A

## **6. Final comments**

This was a very challenging and exciting excavation, involving a lot of thought and care, brought to a premature end by running out of time, as is so often the case with archaeological investigations!

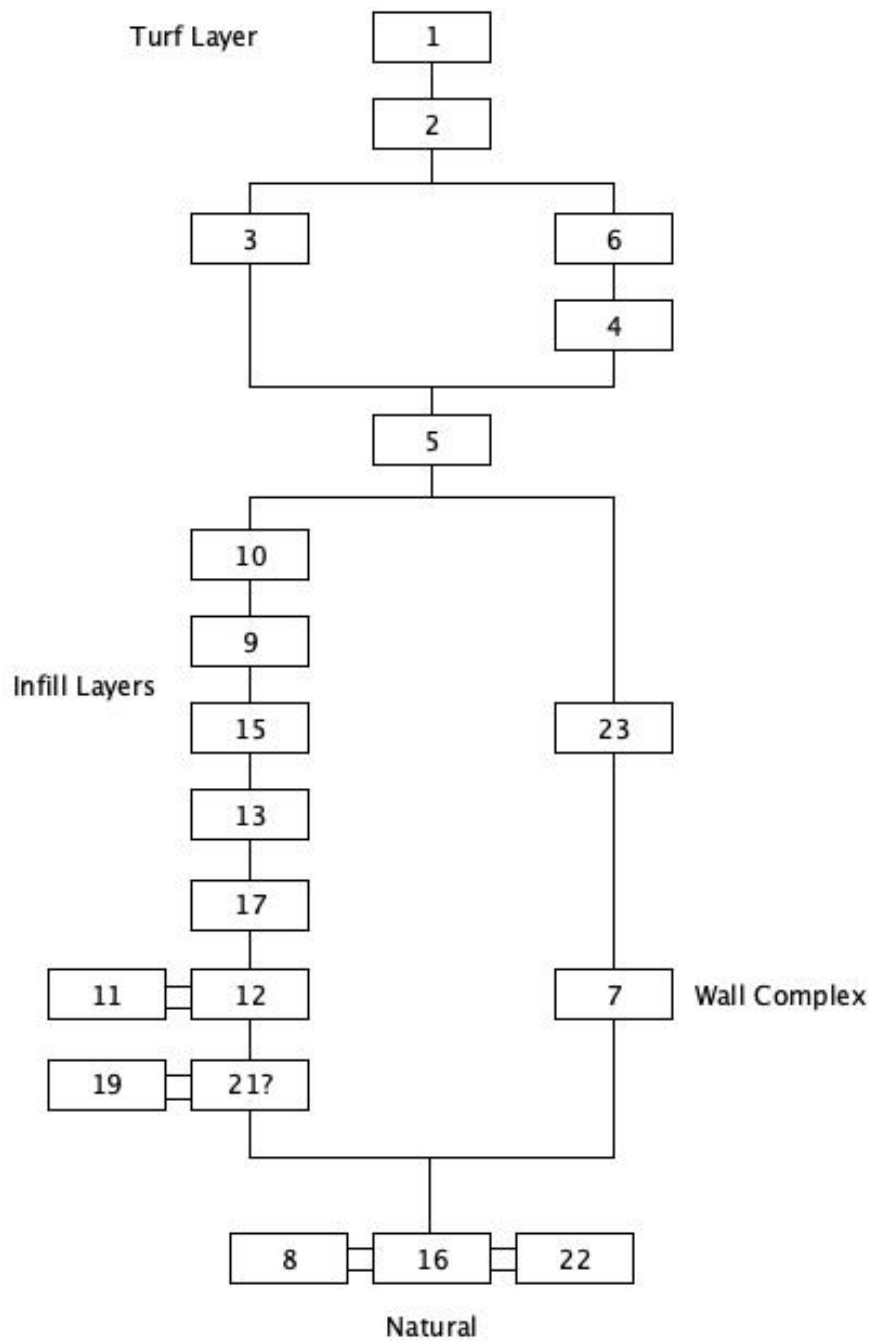
## **7. Acknowledgements**

Great thanks to Tracey, Kial and family who were very patient with us and also supplied us with a tray of the best cherries we have ever tasted!

**Nick Wilkinson, Caroline Clarkstone, John Clarkstone**

**March 2011**

## Appendix 1: Harris Matrix



Appendix 2: Scale section - western side of 74A at end of excavation.

