Ditton Laboratories, Kiln Barn Road, Ditton, Kent

Building Recording and Archaeological Watching Brief

by Felicity Howell

Site Code: DLD10/104
(TQ 7160 5695)
Ditton Laboratories, Kiln Barn Road,
Ditton, Kent

Building Recording and Archaeological Watching Brief

For Millwood Designer Homes Ltd

by Felicity Howell
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code DLD10/104

December 2013
Summary

Site name: Ditton Laboratories, Kiln Barn Road, Ditton, Kent

Grid reference: TQ 7160 5695

Planning reference: TM/11/01844

Site activity: Building Recording and Archaeological Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 1st October – 6th November 2013

Project manager: Sean Wallis

Site supervisor: Felicity Howell

Site code: DLD 10/104

Area of site: c. 1.95 ha

Summary of results: The watching brief successfully investigated those parts of the site which were to be most affected by the demolition and new groundworks. No previously hidden features of the laboratory building were noted during the demolition of the existing building, although the demolition process meant that close inspection was impossible due to health and safety considerations. No archaeological features were recorded during the groundworks for new houses, although a brick-lined soakaway associated with the laboratory building was observed.

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Maidstone Museum in due course.

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Introduction
This report documents the results of a watching brief carried out at Ditton Laboratories, Kiln Barn Road, Ditton, Kent (TQ 7160 5695) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned Mr Pete Bland for Millwood Designer Homes Ltd, Bordyke End, East Street, Tonbridge, Kent, TN9 1HA.

Planning permission (TM/11/01844) had been gained from Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council to demolish most of the existing buildings on the site, and redevelop the area for housing. The permission was subject to several conditions (11, 12 and 13) relating to heritage matters, and Ms Wendy Rogers, Senior Archaeological Officer with Kent County Council, had indicated that three distinct elements of work were required to satisfy the planning conditions. These were to entail recording of the main laboratory building prior to its demolition; an archaeological watching brief to be carried out during the demolition to record any historical features within the building which may previously have been obscured; and the formulation of a heritage Management Strategy. This report is solely concerned with the watching brief, which was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation submitted to Ms Rogers, and following an on-site meeting with the various stakeholders.

This is in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012), and the Borough Council’s policies on archaeology and the historic environment. The fieldwork was undertaken by Felicity Howell between 1st October and 6th November 2013, and the site code is DLD 10/104.

The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited with Maidstone Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology
The site is located on the east side of Kiln Barn Road, just over 1km south of the historic core of Ditton, Kent (TQ 7160 5695) (Fig 1). Ditton sits west of Maidstone within a broad bend of the River Medway, where its course north is blocked by the south facing scarp of the North Downs until it breaks through at Halling. According to the British Geological Survey, the underlying geology consists of the sandy limestone calcareous sand of the Hythe Beds (BGS 1993) and this confirmed during the monitoring of the footing trenches.
The site was occupied by various buildings associated with the Ditton Laboratory (Fig. 2), the earliest of which date from 1929 and which have already been the subject of a separate recording action (Wallis 2012). Much of the ground between the buildings had been landscaped to some degree, with many areas covered in Tarmac. The area around the main laboratory building was relatively flat and lies at a height of approximately 36m above Ordnance Datum.

**Archaeological background**

The archaeological potential of the site was highlighted in a desk-based assessment (Wallis 2010). In summary, North Kent has been the focus of human activity from the earliest times, and one of Britain’s most important Palaeolithic sites was identified on the banks of the River Thames at Swanscombe (Hubbard 1982). Closer to the study area, Ightham to the west has a particularly rich concentration of Palaeolithic finds, at least some of which are probably in situ (Wymer 1999, 16). The site itself is located just to the south of the North Downs, and two clusters of Neolithic monuments occur in the area, on either side of the river Medway. One group, to the west of Ditton, includes the Coldrum and Addington long barrows, whilst the other, to the northwest, includes the Megalithic remains of Kit’s Coty. Finds of Grooved Ware pottery have been found to the west of the site, at East Malling (Clarke 1982). A number of Bronze Age cist burials were recorded in the late 19th century at Aylesford, to the north-east of the present site (Champion 1982).

Also at Aylesford is the important rich late Iron Age cemetery, excavated in 1890 (Evans 1890) and further burials of this period are also known from closer to the present site at Allington. During the Late Iron Age, the site lay between Oldbury hill fort (Ward-Perkins 1939; 1944), to the west, and the oppidum at Quarry Wood, to the south-east (Cunliffe 1982, Kelly 1971).

A fairly extensive Roman settlement has been identified to the east of the site at Maidstone, by the plotting of building remains, burials and other scattered finds. This settlement would have been on the Roman road which led northwards towards the major town of Durobrivae (Rochester) (Blagg 1982), and there are a number of Roman villas in the general area.

Kent was one of the first areas of the country to be settled by the Saxons, during the 5th century. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states that two brothers, Hengist and Horsa, were initially employed by the British king Vortigern as mercenaries. They subsequently turned against their employer, and effectively started the Anglo-Saxon invasion of England, although migration had been underway long before. The Chronicle records that a battle was fought at Aylesford in 455, between Vortigern and the brothers, in which Horsa was killed.
Unfortunately the attribution of this event to Aylesford is not certain, as the manuscripts differ, but it seems probably correct (Swanton 2000, 12-13).

The historical background for the demolished laboratory buildings is detailed in the building recording report (Wallis 2012).

**Objectives and methodology**

The aims of the watching brief were to record any historical features within the building which may have been previously obscured and later revealed during demolition and to excavate and record any archaeological deposits affected by further groundworks. This was to include the monitoring of demolition, removal of ground slabs and inspection of foundation trenches along with any other areas of ground reduction. Sufficient time was to be allowed within the developer’s and groundworkers’ schedules to record any archaeological and historical features revealed.

**Results**

Partial demolition of the laboratory buildings was observed during the course of the watching brief. A complete monitoring of this process was hindered by several health and safety issues, in particular, the removal of the structure’s roof and contamination risks. However, the demolition that was inspected revealed no historic features that were previously obscured (Pls 1 and 2).

Removal of ground slabs underneath the pre-existing oil tank was inspected whilst mercury contamination tests were carried out. The groundworks involved with the removal of these slabs were not deep enough to impact upon any buried archaeological deposits but a brick-lined soakaway was revealed (Fig. 3; Pl. 3), which was clearly associated with the laboratory buildings.

Some footings for the new development, adjacent to the original laboratory buildings were also observed (Fig. 3). In general the footing trenches were 0.70m wide and reaching a depth of 0.65m. The stratigraphy for plot 1 consisted of 0.55m made ground, above natural sandy clay (Fig. 4). This plot would have been previously disturbed by the construction of tennis courts and ancillary buildings. The stratigraphy for plot 2 (Pl. 4) consisted of 0.11m of garden soil (50), above 0.35m of mid grey-brown sandy clay subsoil (51) which lay directly above natural sandy clay. Plot 25 revealed a similar stratigraphy, consisting of 0.21m of garden soil (50), above 0.30m of mid grey-brown sandy clay subsoil (51), which lay directly above natural sandy clay (Fig. 4). No archaeological finds or features were observed in any of these plots.
Conclusion

The watching brief at Ditton Laboratories successfully examined those parts of the site which were to be most affected by both demolition and construction work in respect of the new structures. No archaeological finds were observed during the groundworks, and no previously obscured historic features were noted during the demolition of the laboratory building. A brick-lined soakaway was uncovered when ground slabs for the oil tank were removed.

References
Evans, A J, 1890, ‘On a late Celtic urn-field at Aylesford, Kent’ Archaeologia, 52, 315–88
Wymer, J J, 1999, The Lower Palaeolithic Occupation of Britain Salisbury
Kent County Council SMR summary form

Site Name: Ditton Laboratories, Kiln Barn Road, Ditton, Kent

Site address: Ditton Laboratories, Kiln Barn Road, Ditton, Kent

Summary: The watching brief successfully investigated those parts of the site which were to be most affected by the demolition and new groundworks. No previously hidden features of the laboratory building were noted during the demolition of the existing building, although the demolition process meant that close inspection was impossible due to health and safety considerations. No archaeological features were recorded during the groundworks for new houses, although a brick-lined soakaway associated with the laboratory building was observed.

District/Unitary: Tonbridge and Malling Parish: Ditton

Periods: Modern

NGR: TQ 7160 5695

Type of archaeological work: Watching Brief

Date of Recording: 1st October – 6th November 2013

Unit undertaking recording: TVAS South

Geology: Hythe Beds

Title and author of report: Ditton Laboratories, Kiln Barn Road, Ditton, Kent; An Archaeological Watching Brief by Felicity Howell

Summary of results by period: Hythe beds cut by a modern soakaway.

Location of archive and finds: The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47–49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading RG1 5NR and will be deposited at Maidstone Museum in due course.

Contact at Unit: Sean Wallis Date: 03/02/2014
Figure 1. Location of site within Ditton and Kent.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Explorer 148 at 1:12500
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Figure 2. Detailed location of site.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Digital Mapping at 1:2500
Figure 3. Location of areas monitored.

- Demolition of main laboratory building monitored
- Footing trenches monitored
- Removal of ground slabs underneath the oil tank observed

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Figure 3. Location of areas monitored.
Figure 4. Representative sections.

Plot 1

N  
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S  36.00m AOD

Made Ground

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Sandy clay natural geology

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Base of trench

Plot 2

N  
---

S  36.00m

50

51

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Sandy clay natural geology

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Base of trench

Plot 25

W  
---

E  36.00m

50

51

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Sandy clay natural geology

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Base of trench
Plate 1. Central area demolition.
Plate 2. Front of building demolition.
Plate 3. Soakaway exposed.
Plate 4. Plot 2 groundworks

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Plates 1 to 4
## TIME CHART

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