



Down House, Downe, Bromley

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

On 11th May 2009, Oxford Archaeology carried out an archaeological watching brief at Down House, Downe, Bromley, Kent (TQ 431 611) during the reordering of the outside seating area, specifically the excavation of a foundation pit for a parasol.

The watching brief revealed remains associated with the garden or yard to the rear of the house. These comprise a sequence of levelling layers and a gravel surface, most likely a yard surface. A drain pipe beneath the surface is likely to be contemporary with it. The area had subsequently been used as a garden, with a garden soil being deposited over the gravel surface, before the modern paved surface was laid down. Unfortunately, no artefacts were recovered that might help to date the deposits and enable this sequence to be directly correlated with phases in the development of the house and its grounds.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and scope of work

- 1.1.1 On 11th May 2009, Oxford Archaeology carried out an archaeological watching brief at Down House, Downe, Bromley, Kent (TQ 431 611, Fig. 1) during the reordering of the outside seating area, specifically the excavation of a foundation pit for a parasol.
- 1.1.2 The work was commissioned by Caroe & Partners, Architects on behalf of English Heritage.

1.2 Geology and topography

- 1.2.1 Down House is a Grade II listed building set in a 7.2 ha estate located in the village of Downe, four miles south-west of Orpington, Bromley.
- 1.2.2 The site lies at c 178 m OD and the underlying geology comprises Upper Cretaceous Chalk (BGS Sheet 271, Solid and Drift 1:50,000).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 Down House has its origins in the 17th century, with many alterations during the 18th and 19th centuries. Charles Darwin was resident at Down House from 1842 until his death in 1882. Between 1886 and 1922, the building was used as a girls school, after which it was purchased by Sir George Buckston Browne, who and converted it into a museum to Darwin (Overy 2004).
- 1.3.2 An archaeological evaluation has been carried out within the gardens, revealing a series of paths dating to the 19th century as well as the foundation of a garden shed and the remains of a tennis court, also dating to the 19th century. Architectural features suggested that the shed possibly post-dated Darwin's occupancy (PCA 2002).
- 1.3.3 The current monitoring works took place in the location of the scullery of the house. Previous works have uncovered the old scullery floor, as well as a cistern. The scullery was constructed during the 18th century and demolished in the 1960s. It was uncovered and recorded in 1996 (Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants 1998) (Fig. 2).
- 1.3.4 Down House was acquired in 1996 by English Heritage and reopened to the public as a museum of Charles Darwin's life and work (Overy 2004). In 2009 the gardens and greenhouse, in combination with the surrounding landscape, were submitted to UNESCO as the UK's nomination to become a World Heritage Site, due to the key role they played in Darwin's observations and experiments.

1.4 Acknowledgements

- 1.4.1 OA extends its thanks to Mark Stevenson of English Heritage for advice and background knowledge of Down House. The watching brief was carried out by Rowan McAlley and the project was managed by William Bedford. Illustrations were prepared by Markus Dylewski.



2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the impacted area.
- 2.1.2 To establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains within the proposed development area.
- 2.1.3 To establish the presence or absence of any archaeological remains of any period that may be affected/destroyed by the works and add to the knowledge of the construction and use of Down House.
- 2.1.4 To signal, before the destruction of the material in question, the discovery of a significant archaeological find, for which the resources allocated are not sufficient to support a treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard.
- 2.1.5 To make available the results of the investigation

2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 An experienced archaeologist was in attendance to monitor the excavation of the pit for the parasol. It was excavated by hand.
- 2.2.2 A single pit was excavated, measuring c 0.50 m x 0.60 m and 1.2 m deep.
- 2.2.3 A plan of the foundation pit was drawn at a scale of 1:50, and a sample section at a scale of 1:10. A detailed photographic record was made, comprising digital colour images and black and white negatives. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OAU Fieldwork Manual* (Wilkinson 1992).



3 RESULTS

3.1 Description of deposits (Fig. 2, Plates 1 and 2)

- 3.1.1 The natural geology, comprising orange clayey sand with some sub angular shaped flint nodules (112) was exposed in the lower part of the foundation pit, at a depth of 0.80 m below current ground level. It was overlain by a sequence of layers that may have been laid down as levelling deposits, with a total thickness of 0.50 m. The first of these, lying directly on the natural geology, was a thin deposit of grey soil (111) only 0.01 m thick, which was overlain by a layer of re-deposited natural clay 0.11 m thick (110). Above this lay a thin band of chalk and mortar (109), and a second layer of re-deposited natural clay that was 0.4 m thick (106).
- 3.1.2 Layer 106 was cut by a pipe trench (105) that was exposed at the north-western edge of the foundation pit and extended across the foundation pit on a NE-SW orientation, parallel to the rear wall of the house. The pipe trench was at least 0.30 m wide, and was exposed for a length of 0.60 m, continuing beyond the foundation pit in both directions. It was 0.50 m deep, and its base was filled by a deposit of concrete (107/108), laid as a foundation for a glazed ceramic drainpipe (113). The trench was back-filled with a mixed deposit of clay with some crushed brick and peg tile fragments.
- 3.1.3 The pipe trench was sealed by a gravel surface 0.05 m thick (103). Above this lay a layer of garden soil 0.14 m thick (102), which was sealed by the concrete bedding layer (101) for the modern paved surface, and, on the north-eastern side of the foundation pit, by further garden soil, which may have been part of a former flower bed.

3.2 Finds and palaeo-environmental summary

- 3.2.1 No artefacts were recovered during the course of the watching brief.
- 3.2.2 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were observed during the course of the watching brief.



4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The watching brief revealed remains associated with the garden or yard to the rear of the house. These comprise a sequence of levelling layers and a gravel surface, most likely a yard surface. A drain pipe beneath the surface is likely to be contemporary with it. The area had subsequently been used as a garden, with a garden soil being deposited over the gravel surface, before the modern paved surface was laid down. Unfortunately, no artefacts were recovered that might help to date the deposits and enable this sequence to be directly correlated with phases in the development of the house and its grounds.



APPENDIX A. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

- English Heritage, 2006 *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment*
- IFA, 1999 *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluation*, Institute of Field Archaeologists
- Keystone Historic Buildings Consultants, 1998 The Historic Development of Charles Darwin's 'good, very ugly house', Down House, Downe, Bromley, unpublished client report
- PCA, 2002 Down House, Downe, unpublished client report
- OA, 2000 OA Environmental Guidelines for sampling
- Overy, C. 2004 *Down House, Home of Charles Darwin, Making a Visit*.
- Wilkinson, D, 1992 *Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual*, (ed. D Wilkinson)



APPENDIX B. SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

Site name: Down House, Downe, Bromley

Site code: DND09

Grid reference: NGR TQ 431 611

Type: Watching Brief

Date and duration: 11th May 2009

Area of site: 110 m²

Summary of results: The watching brief was carried out during the excavation of a foundation pit for a parasol. It revealed remains associated with the garden or yard to the rear of the house. These comprise a sequence of levelling layers and a gravel surface, most likely a yard surface. A drain pipe beneath the surface is likely to be contemporary with it. The area had subsequently been used as a garden, with a garden soil being deposited over the gravel surface, before the modern paved surface was laid down. Unfortunately, no artefacts were recovered that might help to date the deposits and enable this sequence to be directly correlated with phases in the development of the house and its grounds.

Location of archive: The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Museum of London.