

1. Introduction and Background

In May 2007 Mr Nigel Astell of Astell Associates, commissioned Alison Cameron of Aberdeen City Council Archaeology Unit, to conduct an Archaeological Watching Brief on excavations associated with the creation of a filter mound soakaway and associated pipework for a new septic tank (Klargester Biodisc BB treatment unit) at Kingswells House, Kingswells, Aberdeen.

The work was commissioned in direct response to a Specification for Archaeological Watching Brief set out by the Keeper of Archaeology, Aberdeen City Council (May 2007).

Stewart Buchanan was sub-contracted by the Council Archaeological Unit to carry out the Watching Brief on their behalf.

Historical and Archaeological context

The following is a short appraisal by the Keeper of Archaeology, Aberdeen City Council (as set down in a Specification for Archaeological Evaluation (May 2007)) of the historical value of the site that determined the rationale behind the current work.

Kingswells estate was owned from the late 16th century by the celebrated Jaffrey family, which produced two Lord Provosts of Aberdeen as well as several prominent members of the Quaker community. In the 19th century, the estate belonged to Dr Francis Edmond, who carried out a wide range of agricultural improvements. Kingswells House dates in part from the 17th century, with 19th-century additions on the north, south and west sides.

In 1971 Historic Scotland produced a Listed Buildings Report (HB Number 15681) which categorized Kingswells House as a category B Listed Building.

The name Kingswells supposedly originates from the story that King Charles (presumably Charles II) drank from a Well at the front door of the house.

No previous archaeological work has been conducted on the present site.

2. Objectives and Methodology

The objectives of the Watching Brief were:

- To identify the location, nature and extent of any features or objects of archaeological importance that could be damaged or destroyed by the proposed groundworks.
- To record archaeological features located in situ to the highest professional standards.
- To propose arrangements for the safeguarding where possible, of any archaeological features or finds identified. These would need to be agreed with the Keeper of Archaeology, Aberdeen City Council.
- To make sure that the needs for archaeological conservation and recording are met without causing any unnecessary delay or disturbance to the development project.

To this end:

- All archaeological features and deposits encountered will be fully excavated by hand and recorded by using pro forma recording sheets and a continuous unique numbering system.
- All plans, sections, profiles and elevations will be drawn at 1:10, 1:20 and 1:50 as appropriate.
- Drawings will be made in pencil on permanent drafting film. The depth of all principal features and levels will be calculated in meters relative to Ordnance Datum. Plans, sections and elevations will be annotated with depths as appropriate. All features and sections will have photographs taken to produce a photographic record consisting of monochrome prints and colour slides (The latter will be deposited with the National Monuments Record of Scotland, Edinburgh).
- All archaeological work will be undertaken following guidelines recommended by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA, 1999).

Monitoring

It will be necessary for City Development Services – Planning, to monitor the progress and effectiveness of the evaluation in order to ensure the proper execution of the specification and therefore conformity to the brief. Stages at which monitoring is appropriate will be agreed between the archaeological contractor and the Keeper, Archaeology. The possibility of random inspections should not be excluded.

Finds & Samples

Finds of objects will be subject to the Scots Laws of Treasure Trove and Bona Vacantia and reported by the archaeological contractor to the Secretariat of the Treasure Trove Panel (Dr Alan Saville, National Museums of Scotland, Queen Street, Edinburgh EH2 1JD) for disposal to an appropriate museum.

The post-excavation of finds will be processed by an approved archaeological contractor employing a recognized specialist.

Specialists in relevant subjects will be employed as appropriate to deal with archaeological artifacts recovered during work.

A bulk sample of deposits to be made where there is likelihood of organic or dateable remains, on-site factors to determine size of sample. All bulk samples to be submitted to an

approved contractor who will submit relevant material reports on the results.

Any human remains which are encountered must initially be left in situ. Their removal will be a matter of discussion with the Keeper, Archaeology (who must be notified within 12 hours of their Discovery) and will comply with the provisions of Scots Law.

Reporting

A report on the findings of the work will be compiled following guidelines stipulated in the Aberdeen City Council's Specification for Archaeological Evaluation (A5/1608).

Copies of the evaluation will be sent to the Keeper of Archaeology, the applicant and the City of Aberdeen City Development Services - Planning. A summary of the work undertaken will be submitted to the Council for Scottish Archaeology's publication Discovery & Excavation in Scotland.

Archive Deposition

The project archive, including written, drawn and photographic elements (together with a summary of the contents of the archive) will be deposited with the National Monuments Record Scotland (Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland). The archive will be prepared in accordance with the requirements of the RCAHMS.

Operational Factors

The archaeological contractor will at all times follow and confirm to the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and other various regulations and the Codes of Conduct and Approved Practice and Standards of the Institute of Field Archaeologists of 1999. All plant will be provided by the client.

Fieldwork

The watching brief was carried out between the 4th and 11th of September 2007.

3. Results

Groundworks for the project were conducted in the driveway and lawn area in front of the west façade of Kingswells House (see fig 1, and plates 1 - 4).



Plates 1 & 2. View across excavations for filter mound and septic tank to W-façade of Kingswells House.



Plates 3 & 4. Excavation of trenches for sewage pipes in front of the W-façade of Kingswells House.

Trenches dug up to a depth of 2.0m on the tarmac and flowerbeds directly in front of the house were cut through made-up ground sitting on top of light orange subsoil; there was no evidence for the remains of any buried field soils. The pit for the septic tank was also dug through made-up ground and subsoil; again, there was no evidence for field soils.

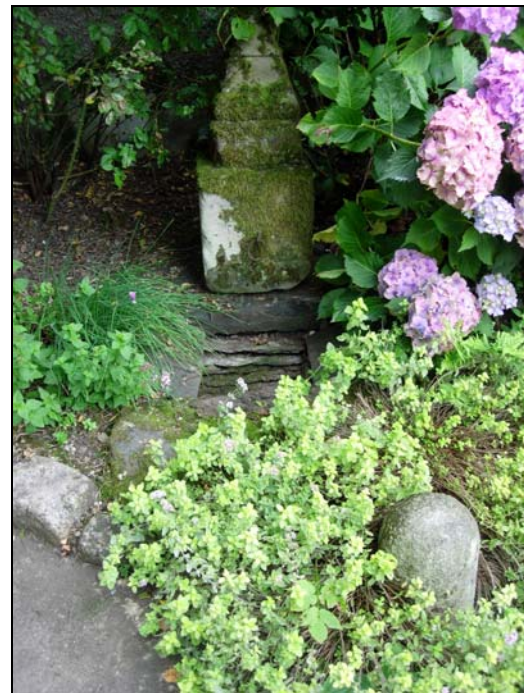
An area of gently sloping lawn approximately 160m² in size was excavated down to subsoil for the filter mound soakaway. An average of 0.45m of topsoil was removed; this soil was a field/garden soil with a well established fabric.

No archaeological features were encountered within the excavated areas during the Watching Brief

A cursory survey of the environs of Kingswells House (outwith the remit of the watching brief), located a stone slab (see plate 5.) underneath which was a subterranean drystone shaft (see plate 6 - 8).



Plates 5 & 6. Subterranean feature with capstone; and without.



Plates 7 & 8. Subterranean feature showing depth to fill (1m scale); and milestone/marker (bottom right of picture).

The feature was located at the N/W corner of Kingswells House, and is of drystone construction using rectangular slabs of limestone to create a vertical, square shaft about 0.35m wide. Soft packed earth was encountered 0.65m from the top of the shaft; it was not clear whether the limestone slabs continued beyond the earth fill.

An illegible granite marker/milestone was located 1.0m to the W-S/W of the subterranean feature.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

No archaeological features were encountered within the excavated areas during the Watching Brief; this report recommends that no further archaeological work is necessary.

The subterranean feature would appear to be connected to a previous phase of water management at Kingswells House. It is tempting to see the remains of the feature as being an old well-head that has been blocked up by subsequent activity. Diverting also to speculate that this was the well from which King Charles drank giving Kingswells its name, certainly the well was meant to be near the front of the house, perhaps the granite marker indicates the spot where the event occurred.

The structural evidence however, seems to suggest a more recent provenance for the feature. The stonework appears to be too freshly worked for these to be the remains of a well dating from the 17th Century; there is evidence for it having been exposed to the elements, no build up of soils between the limestone slabs, no evidence for staining caused by mosses or lichens or by its use as a well, the granite marker too is very similar to milestones found in the area dating from the mid 18th century, certainly, further investigation would be necessary to establish whether the present feature was part of, or indicated the presence of, a more venerable construction.

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5. References

Aberdeen City Council (May 2007). *The Specification for Archaeological Watching Brief, Keeper of Archaeology, Aberdeen City Council.*

Historic Scotland (16-APR-1971). *Listed Building Report, HB Number 15681.*

IFA (1999) *By-laws, Standards and Policy Statements of the Institute of Field Archaeologists. Reading.*

6. Acknowledgements

Jan Dunbar (Illustrations, fig 1.), Alison Cameron and Judith Stones, Aberdeen City Council Archaeology Unit.

Dode McArthur, of Waste Water Solutions Ltd.