The Old Dial House, 39 High Street,
Eton, Berkshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief

For Mrs J. L. Caney

by Steve Hammond
Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code 39HSE03/44

May 2003
Summary

Site name: The Old Dial House, 39 High Street, Eton, Berkshire

Grid reference: SU 9669 7749

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 20th–21st May 2003

Project manager: Steve Ford

Site supervisor: Stephen Hammond

Site code: 39HSE03/44

Area of site: -

Summary of results: No archaeological finds or features were located.

Monuments identified: None

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

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Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at The Old Dial House, 39 High Street, Eton, Berkshire (SU 9669 7749) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mrs J. L. Caney, 13 Broomfield Court, Broomfield Park, Sunningdale, Berkshire, SL5 0JP.

Planning permission (03/83340) has been granted by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead to erect a new single storey rear extension on the site. The permission is subject to a condition relating to archaeology, which requires a watching brief to be carried out during the groundworks as a result of the possibility of damage or destruction of archaeological deposits.

This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment’s Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the Royal Borough’s policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr K. Beachus, Senior Archaeologist, Babtie (Archaeological Advisors to the Royal Borough). The fieldwork was undertaken by Stephen Hammond and the site code is 39HSE03/44. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, RG1 5NR and will be deposited with Reading Museum Service in due course.

Location, topography and geology

Eton lies on the north bank of the River Thames, opposite Windsor in the Middle Thames Valley. The site is located on the east side of the High Street. The river curves round the settlement south and east of the site. The site lies at a height of 20.4m above Ordnance Datum on the floor of the Thames Valley. The geology according to the British Geological Survey is Flood plain gravel (BGS 1981) but this was not encountered in the watching brief as the trenches did not go below made ground levels.

Archaeological background

The Thames Valley is rich in archaeology from all periods. A study of potential archaeology attested to the high density of prehistoric activity along the Middle Thames Valley (Gates 1975). Cropmarks are noted to the west and east of Eton at Dorney and Datchet. Recent work in the area (Eton Rowing Lake, Windsor and Maidenhead
Flood Alleviation Scheme) demonstrates that the floodplain river gravels in particular have a high concentration of sites of all periods from Mesolithic to Saxon. A complex of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments are noted to the north-west of the site at Eton Wick (Ford 1993) as is a Roman site (Lowe 2003, 19).

The site lies in the core of the Medieval town of Eton and recent excavations at the medieval waterfront (Blinkhorn and Pugh 2000) show the development of activity from the 11th/12th century onwards. Eton probably developed in conjunction with the 12th century suburb Underore on the opposite bank of the river and was further stimulated by the foundation of Eton College in 1440.

**Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the watching brief was to observe and record all archaeological deposits within areas of ground disturbance associated with the works. If archaeological deposits were present further aims were, if possible: to produce relative and absolute dating and phasing for the features on site, provide information on the economy and local environment and to establish the character of the deposits and produce a settlement history of the site.

All foundation trenches were to be observed and spoilheaps to be monitored for finds. All potential archaeological deposits were to be hand cleaned and excavated.

**Results**

The foundations of the conservatory were observed close to the northern boundary wall of the property (Fig. 3). They were 0.62m wide and continued south from the boundary wall before following the line of the conservatory. Typical stratigraphy observed consisted of 0.06m of concrete lying above grey brown sandy clay with occasional to moderate amounts of modern brick and occasional pieces of slate. No archaeological deposits were observed but a brick-built drain and a late post-medieval mortared brick wall foundation were noted at the western end. No finds were recovered from the spoilheaps. The depth of the trench was variable: up to 0.97m at the west and eastern ends, but only 0.57m in the central section.

A pipe trench was also observed closer to the existing house foundation. Approximately 0.4m wide, it originated in the existing kitchen and continued into the courtyard. Stratigraphy observed was 0.04m of concrete onto 0.06m of brick paving, onto 0.86m of mid grey brown sandy silt with frequent brick and tile with occasional rounded flint pieces. No archaeological deposits were observed.
Finds

No finds were recovered from this site.

Conclusion

Despite the central location of the site in Eton, this watching brief was not successful in locating any deposits or finds of archaeological origin. The stratigraphy in the foundation trench only revealed a thick layer of modern garden soil and associated modern brick and slate. The relative shallowness of the trenches meant they did not reach the natural geology where archaeological deposits levels were more likely to have been encountered.

References

Blinkhorn, P, and Pugh, G, 2000, Excavation of the medieval waterfront at King Stable Street, Eton, Berkshire, Oxford Archaeological Unit, Occas Pap 7
Gates, T, 1975, The Middle Thames Valley. An archaeological survey of the river gravels, Berkshire Archaeological Committee, Publication number 1
39 High Street, Eton, Berkshire, 2003
Archaeological Watching Brief

Figure 1. Location of site within Eton and Berkshire.

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Figure 2. Location of site within Eton.
Figure 3. Detailed location of foundations observed.