Willot Hall,
Wilmslow Road,
Prestbury,
Cheshire

Archaeological
Watching Brief

Oxford Archaeology North

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Mr David Mook

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For the use of Mr David Mook © OA North: January 2012
SUMMARY

Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) was commissioned by Fish Associates Ltd, on behalf of Mr David Mook, to undertake an archaeological watching brief during ground works for the construction of a three-bay garage, with buildings for a biomass boiler, within the grounds of Willot Hall, Prestbury, Cheshire (NGR SJ 8888 8024). The hall is a Grade II* listed building (2/223; CHER 1504/1) of medieval origin, being a fifteenth century timber-framed hall encased in stone during the seventeenth century. It was further extended in the seventeenth century, and again in the early twentieth century. Consequently, it was anticipated that earthmoving activities associated with the construction may impact on deposits associated with earlier activity on the site. Therefore, an archaeological condition was imposed on the planning permission (ref 08/2104P) for the groundworks to be undertaken under permanent archaeological presence. A detailed specification was issued by the Development Control Archaeologist (DCA) for Cheshire Shared Services for a watching brief, which was adhered to during fieldwork undertaken on 28th and 29th November 2011.

The groundworks revealed three brick-built structures of late nineteenth century to early twentieth century in date. Two of them were hardstandings, possibly associated with the greenhouses that formally existed in this part of the garden, while the third structure was a set of steps leading up from the grounds into an area that was formally part of the manor hall grounds.

No significant archaeological remains or deposits were revealed during the watching brief, and so no further work is required during the construction of the three-bay garage. However, given the significance of the hall and the archaeological potential it is recommended that any additional intrusive work or disturbance within the grounds would require an archaeological investigation.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

OA North would like to thank Steve Fish of Fish Associates for his help and information, and Mr David Mook for commissioning the project. Thanks are also due to Mark Leah of Cheshire Shared Services (CSS) for his advice.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Vickie Jamieson, who also wrote the report. The finds were assessed by Chris Howard-Davis, with the bone commented on by Andrew Bates. The illustrations were prepared by Mark Tidmarsh. The project was managed by Emily Mercer, who also edited the report.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

1.1.1 Mr David Mook commissioned Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring during groundworks associated with the construction of a three-bay garage block, with buildings for a biomass boiler at Willot Hall, Wilmslow Road, Prestbury, Cheshire.

1.1.2 Willot Hall is a Grade II* listed building (LB no 2/223) of medieval origin, and is recorded on the Cheshire Historic Environment Record (CHER 1504/1). It is therefore of archaeological significance, with the potential for earlier archaeological remains to be disturbed during the groundworks. Consequently, an archaeological watching brief was required as a planning condition (ref 08/2104P). The work was carried out over two days on 28th and 29th November 2011, and the following report summarises the results of the fieldwork.

1.2 LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

1.2.1 The site is located approximately 9km to the north-west of Macclesfield, and 1km to the south-east of the village of Newton, to the south of Wilmslow Road, Prestbury, Cheshire (NGR centred SJ 8888 8024; Fig 1). The development is situated within the grounds of Willot Hall, south of the large manor house, and adjacent to the existing barn (Fig 2; Plate 1). The grounds have been extensively landscaped, and lead on to open fields to the south and west of the site.

1.2.2 The underlying geology of the area is reddish-pink Triassic sandstone, overlain by glacial deposits, largely consisting of boulder clay, with local deposits of silt, peat, sand and gravels (Countryside Commission 1998).

1.3 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

1.3.1 The following background information is a summary of the information provided by English Heritage (britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/en-413844-willot-hall-prestbury; list.english-heritage.org.uk), and the Cheshire HER (heritagegateway.org.uk). No previous archaeological interventions have been recorded within the grounds of Willot Hall.

1.3.2 Willot Hall is a Grade II* listed building built in the fifteenth century. It was originally a medieval timber-framed hall, converted to a farmhouse, and now a private residence. It underwent extensive renovation in the seventeenth century when it was encased in stone, along with repairs and brick additions of a service wing in the late seventeenth century. The building underwent a major restoration, with extension of the solar, in 1939. The current building consists of sandstone rubble and brick, with a stone-slate roof. The interior plan of the hall, solar and the passageways survive, and the medieval hall has been re-opened to the roof (ibid).
Plate 1: View of the facade of Willot Hall, showing the varying phases of construction
2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 PROJECT SPECIFICATION

2.1.1 A formal specification for an archaeological watching brief was produced by Mark Leah, the Development Control Archaeologist (DCA), Cheshire Shared Services (Appendix 1), the methodology of which was adhered to in full. The work was consistent with the current standards and procedures of the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA 2008a; 2011) and English Heritage (1991), and generally accepted best practice.

2.2 FIELDWORK

2.2.1 The site was excavated by a seven ton 360° mechanical excavator fitted with a 1m wide, toothless ditching bucket, under the constant supervision of an archaeologist. The trench was excavated in spits to a maximum depth of 1m at the southern end, whilst gradually getting shallower at the northern end due to the current ground level sloping towards the manor house. All material was taken away from the site by a front-loading dumper.

2.2.2 All deposits observed during the watching brief were recorded on pro forma sheets produced by OA North, and a plan of the excavated area was illustrated at an appropriate scale. Digital photographs were taken for reference purposes.

2.3 FINDS

2.3.1 The recovery of finds and sampling programmes were in accordance with current best practice and subject to appropriate expert advice. Handling of finds, their management and storage during and after fieldwork followed professional guidelines (IfA 2008c; UKIC 1984 and 1998). All artefacts recovered from the evaluation trenches were retained for assessment.

2.4 ARCHIVE

2.4.1 A full and professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the current IfA (2008b) and English Heritage guidelines (1991). The original record archive will be deposited with the Cheshire Archives, and a copy of the report will be submitted to Cheshire East County Council and HER. An OASIS (Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations) form will also be submitted.
3. WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 The following provides a detailed summary of the deposits and the results of the archaeological watching brief. A list of contexts has been provided in Appendix 2, and the finds are described in detail in Appendix 3.

3.2 FIELDWORK

3.2.1 The area of groundworks measured 16.5m by 17.7m. It was covered in a dark brown silty topsoil, 1, with a thickness of up to 0.45m, containing approximately 5% well-rounded stones and large amounts of tree roots from the clearance of the pine trees before the general groundworks commenced. This topsoil deposit overlay a layer of demolition material, 2, which consisted primarily of discarded coke and 10% crushed brick. This in turn sealed the natural geology, 3, a combination of orange-yellow sands and brownish-yellow boulder clay.

Plate 2: View northwards across the excavated area

3.2.2 In total, three structures were revealed during excavations, 4, 5 and 8 (Fig 2). Structure 4 was the remains of a hardstanding made up of red unfroged bricks, each measuring 240mm by 110mm by 70mm. It was bonded with a dark yellow sand mortar, with a dark grey flagstone floor (Plate 3). The structure was almost square in shape, measuring 1.3m by 1.25m, and only three courses high, built directly onto the natural sands, 3.
3.2.3 Structure 5 was almost identical to structure 4, made of red unfrogged bricks of the same dimensions (Plate 4). However, this structure only had two courses surviving and did not have a flagstone floor. It measured 1.3m x 1.4m, and was positioned 5.8m to the west of structure 4, and parallel with it. There was evidence for a construction cut into the natural geology, 3, for structure 5, and the surrounding backfill, 7, consisted of rubble and coke.

Plate 3: Structure 4, facing west

Plate 4: Structure 5, facing north
3.2.4 Structure 8 was parallel to structures 4 and 5, at a distance of 4.5m east of structure 4 (Fig 2). It measured 1.1m x 1.35m, and was constructed with red unfrogged bricks measuring 240mm by 110mm by 70mm, and bonded with a dark yellow sand mortar (Plate 5). This structure butted against the eastern banked area of the site, with only five courses remaining, and against large rounded revetment stones in the embankment behind.

![Plate 5: Structure 8, facing east](image)

3.3 FINDS

3.3.1 In all, 27 fragments of artefacts and ecofacts were recovered during the investigation. Their distribution is shown below (Table 1). All were relatively well-preserved, with little abrasion. The majority of the finds were pottery, and in all cases it suggested activity in a period from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century.

3.3.2 Possibly the earliest fragment of pottery, from the blue-painted shell-edge of a white earthenware plate, was from structure 8, but it is unlikely to pre-date the early nineteenth century and is probably more recent. Material from demolition layer 2 includes transfer-printed white earthenwares, including fragments of a teacup printed in pink, not widely used for the English market until the 1880s (Neale 2004), and a plate fragment printed in ‘flow blue’, a technique introduced after 1830-40 (ibid). The five fragments from the topsoil, I, represent a single late Industrial Slipware cup or tankard, again dating to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

3.3.3 Two undiagnostic fragments of brick came from the topsoil, I, along with a fragment of red-painted concrete, which is undoubtedly of twentieth century date, as it incorporates small fragments of modern window glass. A single
bone, from a large, presumably domestic, cat came from demolition layer 2 (identified by A Bates), as did part of a single mussel shell.

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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

*Table 1: Distribution of artefacts and ecofacts by context*
4. CONCLUSION

4.1 DISCUSSION

4.1.1 The groundworks carried out within the grounds of Willot Hall for the construction of the new garage and buildings for a biomass boiler revealed the remains of three brick-built structures dating to the late nineteenth century/early twentieth century. All of the structures were revealed below the rubble deposit, 2, built on top of the natural geology, 3.

4.1.2 Structures 4 and 5 appeared to be hardstandings, and there was no evidence to indicate that they abutted additional structures, suggesting that they were not part of a larger building. Structure 8 was a brick-built set of steps situated on the east side of the site. They were built directly into the bank with large revetment stones behind. The steps showed no evidence to suggest that they had been associated with a floor surface or further buildings.

4.1.3 All three structures would appear to be associated with the nineteenth-twentieth century rear gardens of the hall. No evidence was found within the excavated area for the presence of activity relating to the earlier use of the hall or grounds.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.2.1 No further work is required in association with this development. However, given the high archaeological potential of the site, any further groundworks elsewhere within the grounds will require an archaeological investigation.
5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

5.1 Published Sources


IfA, 2008a *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief*, Reading

IfA, 2008b *Standard and Guidance for the Creation, Preparation, Transfer and Deposition of Archaeological Archives*, Reading

IfA, 2008c *Standards and Guidance for the Collection, Documentation, Conservation and Research of Archaeological Materials*, Reading

IfA, 2011 *Code of Conduct*, Reading


UKIC, 1984 *Environmental Standards for the Permanent Storage of Material from Archaeological Sites*, London

UKIC, 1998 *First Aid for Finds*, London

5.2 Websites

Cheshire HER, accessed on 07.12.2011: heritagegateway.org.uk/Willot Hall, SMR Number 154/1


6. ILLUSTRATIONS

6.1 FIGURES

Figure 1: Site location

Figure 2: Plan of excavation

6.2 PLATES

Plate 1: View of the facade of Willot Hall, showing the varying phases of construction

Plate 2: View northwards across the excavated area

Plate 3: Structure 4, facing west

Plate 4: Structure 5, facing north

Plate 5: Structure 8, facing east
Figure 2: Plan of excavation
APPENDIX 1: PROJECT SPECIFICATION
Specification for an Archaeological Watching Brief at
Willot Hall, Wilmslow Road, Prestbury
during excavation work for foundations of new 3-bay garage

Prepared by Fish Associates Ltd

1.0 Introduction

1.1 As part of a scheme by Fish Associates Ltd.

2.0 Archaeological Interest

2.1 Willot Hall is a Grade II* Listed Building and is also recorded in the Cheshire Historic Environment Record (CHER 1504/1), where it is noted that the core of the building consists of a late medieval timber-framed Hall which was encased in stone in the 17th century. A brick service wing was also added in the 17th century and a further extension was added in the 1930's. The present proposals, particularly the construction of the new extension and triple garage, will involve significant below-ground disturbance which may reveal evidence of earlier activity on the site.

3.0 General Considerations

3.1 Prior to the commencement of any work, the archaeological contractor should confirm in writing adherence to this specification, or state (with reasons) any proposals to vary the specification. Should the contractor wish to vary the specification, then written confirmation of the agreement of Cheshire Shared Services to any variations is required prior to work commencing. The archaeologist carrying out the watching brief should be appropriately qualified and experienced. Any technical queries arising from the specification detailed below should be addressed to C.S.S. without delay.

4.0 Fieldwork Methodology

4.1 An archaeologist should be present on site during the initial excavations for foundations to the garage until virgin strata are encountered. The archaeologist should view the area as it is being dug and any trench sections after excavation has been completed. Where archaeology is judged to be present, the excavated area should be rapidly cleaned and the need for further work assessed. Where appropriate, any features and finds should then be quickly hand excavated, sampled and recorded, within the confines of the excavated trench.
4.2 Excavated soil should be searched as practicable for finds. The presence and nature of 19th and 20th century material should be noted (quantified and summarily described) but finds of this date need not be retained for processing. Finds judged to be 18th century in date or earlier should be retained.

4.3 The actual areas of ground disturbance, and any features of possible archaeological concern noted within these areas, should be accurately located on a site plan and recorded by photographs, scale drawings (including height above O.D.) and written description sufficient to permit the preparation of a report on the site.

4.4 The intention of the archaeological watching brief is not to unduly delay the work of other contractors on site. This work should not, therefore prejudice the progress of the main or subsidiary contractor’s work, except by prior agreement and on-site co-operation.

4.5 The archaeologist on site will naturally operate with due regard for Health and Safety regulations. In this case, where archaeological work is carried out at the same time as the work of other contractors, regard should also be taken of any reasonable additional constraints that these contractors may impose. This work may require the preparation of a Risk Assessment of the site, in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Regulations. C.S.S. and its officers cannot be held responsible for any accidents that may occur to outside contractors engaged to undertake this survey while attempting to conform to this specification.

5.0 Unexpectedly Significant or Complex Discoveries

5.1 Should there be, in the professional judgement of the archaeologist on site, unexpectedly significant or complex discoveries made that warrant more detailed recording than possible within the terms of this specification, then the archaeological contractor is to urgently contact Cheshire Shared Services with the relevant information to enable the matter to be resolved with the developer.

5.2 Where any intact burials or other articulated human remains are encountered, they should initially be left in-situ, covered and protected and their discovery notified to C.S.S. as above. If removal is deemed necessary, following consultation this must comply with the relevant guidelines noted above.

5.3 The terms of the Treasure Act, 1996 must be followed with regard to any finds, which might fall within its purview. Any such finds must be removed to a safe place and reported to the local coroner as required by the procedures laid down in the “Code of Practice”. Where removal
cannot be effected on the same working day as the discovery, suitable security measures must be taken to protect the finds from theft.

6.0 Monitoring

6.1 The recording exercise will be monitored as necessary and practicable by the Cheshire Shared Services/Cheshire East Council in its role as 'curator' of the county's archaeology. Cheshire East Council should receive as much notice as possible in writing (and certainly not less than one week) of the intention to start the watching brief. A copy of the archaeological contractor's risk assessment of the site should accompany the notification.

7.0 Post-Excavation/Post-Recording Work and Report Preparation

7.1 On completion of the fieldwork, any samples shall be processed and all finds shall be cleaned, identified, assessed, dated (if possible), marked (if appropriate) and properly packed and stored in accordance with the requirements of national guidelines. Any human remains (4.2 and 5.2 above) should be assessed by an appropriately qualified specialist and a formal report produced.

7.2 A fully indexed field archive shall be compiled consisting of all primary written documents, plans, sections, and fully labelled photographs. Labelling should be in indelible ink on the back of the print and should include film and frame number; date recorded and photographer's name; name and address of site; national grid reference. Photographic prints should be mounted in appropriate archivally-stable sleeves. A quantified index to the field archive should form an appendix to the report. The original archive is to accompany the deposition of any finds, providing the landowner agrees to the deposition of finds in a publicly accessible archive (see Section 8.1 below).

7.3 A report should be produced to provide background information, a summary of the works carried out, a description and separate interpretation of any features and finds identified. Details of the report's style and format are to be determined by the archaeological contractor, but it should include a full bibliography, a quantified index to the site archive and as an appendix, a copy of this specification. The report illustrations should include, as a minimum, a location map at a reasonable scale plus any drawings and photographs.

7.4 If nothing of archaeological interest is identified during the course of the watching brief, then a summary report will be adequate, as long as sufficient details are supplied for SMR purposes. Illustrations would not be required, although it would be anticipated that black and white prints would form part of the archival record. A summary record should include: (1) details of the commissioning body; (2) the nature of the
development and resultant ground disturbance; (3) the approximate position of any ground disturbance viewed with relation to adjacent existing fixed points; (4) the date(s) of fieldwork; (5) name(s) of fieldworker(s); (6) written observations on the nature and depth of deposits observed (this may include annotated sketch sections); (7) the conditions under which they were observed (for example, details of weather conditions, ease of access and views, attitude of other organisations etc.); (8) a quantified index to the field archive; (9) details of the archives present location and intended deposition and (10) a copy of this specification.

7.5 The report should be produced within three weeks of completion of the fieldwork, unless otherwise agreed with Cheshire Shared Services/Cheshire East Council. Copies of the report should be supplied to the client and C.S.S. and C.E.C. The report will become publicly accessible once deposited with Cheshire Shared Services/Cheshire East Council.

8.0 Deposition of Archive

8.1 Before commencing any fieldwork, the archaeological contractor must contact the relevant District museum archaeological curator in writing to determine the museum's requirements for the deposition of an excavation archive.

8.2 It is the responsibility of the archaeological contractor to endeavour to obtain consent of the landowner, in writing, to the deposition of finds with the Museum.

8.3 It is the responsibility of the archaeological contractor to meet the Museum's requirements with regard to the preparation of fieldwork archives for deposition.

8.4 The museum's officer should be notified in writing of the commencement of fieldwork at the same time as Cheshire East Council.

9.0 Further Details

9.1 Any queries about the contents of the specification should be addressed to: Mr Martin Leah, Development Control Archaeologist, Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service, Cheshire Shared Services – Tel: 01244 973289; email: mark.leah@cheshireeast.gov.uk. Location: Backford Hall, Backford, Cheshire CH1 6PZ.
## APPENDIX 2: CONTEXT INDEX

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<th>Interpretation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Topsoil</td>
<td>Dark-brown silt with 5% well-rounded stones</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Demolition layer</td>
<td>A dark grey/black deposit made up primarily of discarded coke with 10% crushed brick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Natural geology</td>
<td>A combination of orange-yellow sands and brownish-yellow boulder clay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>A red brick-built hardstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>A red brick-built hardstanding</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Cut for structure 5</td>
<td>Construction cut for the hardstanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fill of cut 6</td>
<td>Backfill of rubble and coke in between the structure and the cut.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Structure</td>
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# APPENDIX 3: FINDS CATALOGUE

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<td>Ceramic</td>
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<td>Two joining rim fragments pink transfer-printed white earthenware cup; five small fragments blue transfer-printed white earthenware; one fragment flow-blue transfer-printed white earthenware; four fragments plain whiter earthenware; two fragments late grey stoneware, two fragments red earthenware with yellow internal slip</td>
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<td>Nineteenth century or later</td>
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