



**Willot Hall,
Wilmslow Road,
Prestbury,
Cheshire**

**Archaeological
Watching Brief,
Phase 2**



Oxford Archaeology North

April 2014

Mr David Mook

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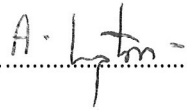
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SUMMARY

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 an extension to 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. 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 in line with condition 7 of the planning approval (variation of conditions issue, ref 11/0118M). A verbal brief was, therefore issued by Cheshire Archaeology Planning Service requesting a permanent presence archaeological watching brief. OA North produced a project design outlining the proposed methodology for the works, which was accepted by Mark Leah, Development Control Archaeologist for Cheshire. This work is the second phase (Phase 2) of archaeological works associated with development at the hall, the first phase being a watching brief, carried out by OA North in 2011, in association with the ground works for the construction of a three bay garage block, with buildings for a biomass boiler. During this phase, three brick-built structures relating to former garden features of late nineteenth to early twentieth century date were recorded, possibly associated with greenhouses and a set of steps. No features of archaeological significance were recorded.

Phase 2 watching brief was carried out over three days on 21st, 22nd and 23rd January 2014, and covered the groundworks carried out within the grounds of Willot Hall for the construction of an extension to the south of the main hall. This revealed the existence of several features including the remains of brick and cobble surfaces and the lowest courses of several walls. Also discovered were areas of clinker and rubble probably representing successive phases of rubbish spread and/or demolition. The brick and cobble surfaces, together with the walls, probably represent the remains of former agricultural buildings associated with the hall and were possibly removed during the 1930s extension.

No significant archaeological remains or deposits were revealed during this phase of watching brief. However, given the high archaeological potential of the site, any further groundworks, such as the installation of below ground services or other excavations elsewhere within the grounds, it is recommended that archaeological investigations, the scope of which will be determined by the nature of the works, be carried out. Further works within the excavated footprint of the proposed extension to the hall were considered unnecessary.

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 Karl Taylor, who also wrote the report. The illustrations were prepared by Karl Taylor. The project was managed by Alan Lupton, 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 an extension on the south end of 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 in line with condition 7 of the planning approval (variation of conditions issue, ref 11/0118M). A verbal brief was, therefore issued by Cheshire Archaeology Planning Service requesting a permanent presence archaeological watching brief. OA North produced a project design (*Appendix 1*) outlining the proposed methodology for the works, which was accepted by Mark Leah, Development Control Archaeologist for Cheshire. The work is the second phase (Phase 2) of archaeological works associated with development at the hall, the first phase being a watching brief, carried out by OA North in 2011, in association with the ground works for the construction of a three bay garage block, with buildings for a biomass boiler (OA North 2012). During this phase, three brick-built structures relating to former garden features of late nineteenth to early twentieth century date were recorded, possibly associated with greenhouses and a set of steps. No features of archaeological significance were recorded.
- 1.1.3 The Phase 2 watching brief carried out over three days on 21st, 22nd and 23rd January 2014, 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 was included in the Phase 1 report and 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 (other than the Phase 1 watching brief carried out by OA North in 2011 (OA North 2012)).
- 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 verbal brief for an archaeological watching brief was produced by Mark Leah, the Development Control Archaeologist, and OA North produced a project design outlining the methodology (*Appendix 1*), 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 mini-excavator fitted with a 1m wide, toothless ditching bucket, under the constant supervision of an archaeologist. The area of the footprint of the extension was excavated in spits to a maximum depth of 1.5m at the eastern end, whilst gradually getting shallower at the western end due to the current ground level sloping towards a lawned garden area. All material was piled beside the trench for removal later.

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.

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). A sample of artefacts recovered from 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 CHER. 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 features recorded during the archaeological watching brief. A list of contexts has been provided in *Appendix 2*.

3.2 FIELDWORK

3.2.1 The area of groundworks measured 9.5m by 5.5m (Plate 2). It was covered in a dark brown silty topsoil, **1**, with a thickness of up to 0.45m, containing approximately 5% to 10% well-rounded stones and was similar in appearance to that recorded during Phase 1. The topsoil deposit overlay a layer of demolition/rubble material, **2**, which consisted primarily of clinker and 10% crushed brick. For the most part this was between 0.2m and 0.3m thick and sealed the natural geology, **3** (although this undulated), which was a combination of orange-yellow sands and brownish-yellow boulder clay. An area of yellow-orange sand, **9**, was present as a strip running down the side of the main house. An area of clinker and ash was present at the east end of the site, **10**, which was cut into the natural geology.



Plate 2: View northwards across the excavated area

3.2.2 In total, four structures were revealed during the excavations, **4**, **5**, **6** and **8** (Fig 2). Structure **4** was the remains of a brick floor/surface approximately 1.13m long by 0.39m wide made up of red handmade brick, the average size of which measured some 0.15m by 0.13m by 0.07m (Plate 3). They were laid in straight courses with a row of headers at the northern end. The surface was a single course deep, and lay directly below the topsoil, **1**, and was constructed

the demolition/rubble material **2**. It appeared to be truncated at the southern end and may have extended further.



Plate 3: Structure 4, facing east

3.2.3 Structure **5** consisted of a single row of re-used stone copings partially sited on top of a brick wall, **6** partially overlapping deposit **2** (Plate 4). The copings were of grey sandstone and each one measured some 0.76m by 0.30m by 0.26m. They were chamfered on one side and were laid on an approximately north-west/south-east axis for a length of 2.55m (Fig 2).



Plate 4: Structure 5, facing west

3.2.4 Below structure 5 a rectangular arrangement of brick walls, 6, was present (Fig 2, Plate 5). These probably formed the foundations of some sort building/s and each of the walls was cut directly into the natural geology, 3 and sealed by deposit 2. The walls were two or three courses deep and bonded with lime mortar, laid in stretcher bond, the walls aligned on a north-west/south-east axis being 0.36m wide, whilst those on an north-east/south-west axis were 0.23m wide, probably indicating external and internal walls. The bricks were handmade and had average dimensions of 0.23m by 0.11m by 0.08m. No trace of any internal floor surface was visible, although a possible sandstone threshold was present within one of the north-west/south-east aligned walls (Fig 2). The northern end of the walls are truncated by a cut containing a layer of sand, 9, probably associated with the 1930s extension to the hall.



Plate 5: Structure 6, facing north

3.2.5 Further to the north-east of Structure 5, a fragment of cobbled surface was present, 8 (Plate 6). This was quite limited in extent, measuring no more than 1.4m long by 0.7m wide at the maximum extent. The cobbles were rounded, each being approximately 0.1m in diameter and were laid on edge directly into the natural geology, 3. The cobbles were defined on the eastern edge by a sandstone kerb consisting of two rows of individual sandstone blocks measuring approximately 0.25m by 0.3m by 0.03m. These were all laid on edge, directly into the natural geology, 3.

3.2.6 During the excavation, a concrete slab was lifted that appeared to be a continuation of the cobbled surface 8. This sloped to the north-east towards a culvert/drain of twentieth century appearance. To the north-east of this a pit, 10, was cut into both the natural geology, 3 and deposit, 2. This pit contained ash and rubble and was probably a rubbish pit.



Plate 6: Structure 8, facing west

3.3 FINDS

- 3.3.1 Most of the finds from the watching brief were examples of nineteenth – twentieth century pottery, the majority of which were recovered from the topsoil, **I**, and, therefore, un-stratified; these were not retained
- 3.3.2 Other finds included several fragments of broken glass, representing smashed bottles, although some appeared to be from plate glass windows. Several fragments of animal bone were collected from the topsoil, **I**, that were identified as representing pig and bovine mandibles and teeth (S Rowland *pers comm.*).
- 3.3.3 An area of clinker and ash, **10**, at the east end of the excavated area yielded several fragments of nineteenth century pottery, as well as a small amount of animal bone identified as bovine (S Rowland *pers comm.*).

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 DISCUSSION

- 4.1.1 The groundworks carried out within the grounds of Willot Hall for the construction of an extension to the south of the main hall revealed the existence of several features, including the remains of brick and cobble surfaces and the lowest courses of several walls. Also discovered were areas of clinker and rubble probably representing successive phase of rubbish spread and/or demolition.
- 4.1.2 Structure **4**, the brick surface, may represent a walkway or similar such feature leading towards a formal garden at the rear of the hall. It was placed directly on top of demolition rubble/ash, **2**. Structures **5** and **6** represent probable small structures/buildings situated to the south of the current hall. Interestingly, they are aligned on a slightly different axis to the main building and it is entirely possible that they once continued further to the north as they are truncated at the northern end by a cut containing a deep layer of sand, **9**, that appears to be associated with the 1930s extension to the hall.
- 4.1.3 To the east of the brick walls, **6**, a small fragment of cobbled surface, **8**, possibly mainly replaced with a later concrete slab, may represent a yard or other such space.
- 4.1.4 All of these structures appear to date to the nineteenth or early twentieth century and may be evidence of former agricultural buildings associated with the hall. These structures may have been removed during the construction of the southern extension to the hall in the 1930s. 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 Given the high archaeological potential of the site, any further groundworks, such as the installation of below ground services or other excavations elsewhere within the grounds, will require an archaeological investigation the scope of which will be determined by the nature of the works. Further works within the excavated footprint of the proposed extension to the hall are unlikely to yield further information and, as such, an archaeological presence is considered unnecessary as the area was excavated to the natural geology.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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5.2 WEBSITES

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6. ILLUSTRATIONS

6.1 FIGURES

Figure 1: Site location

Figure 2: Plan of phase 2 excavation

6.2 PLATES

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

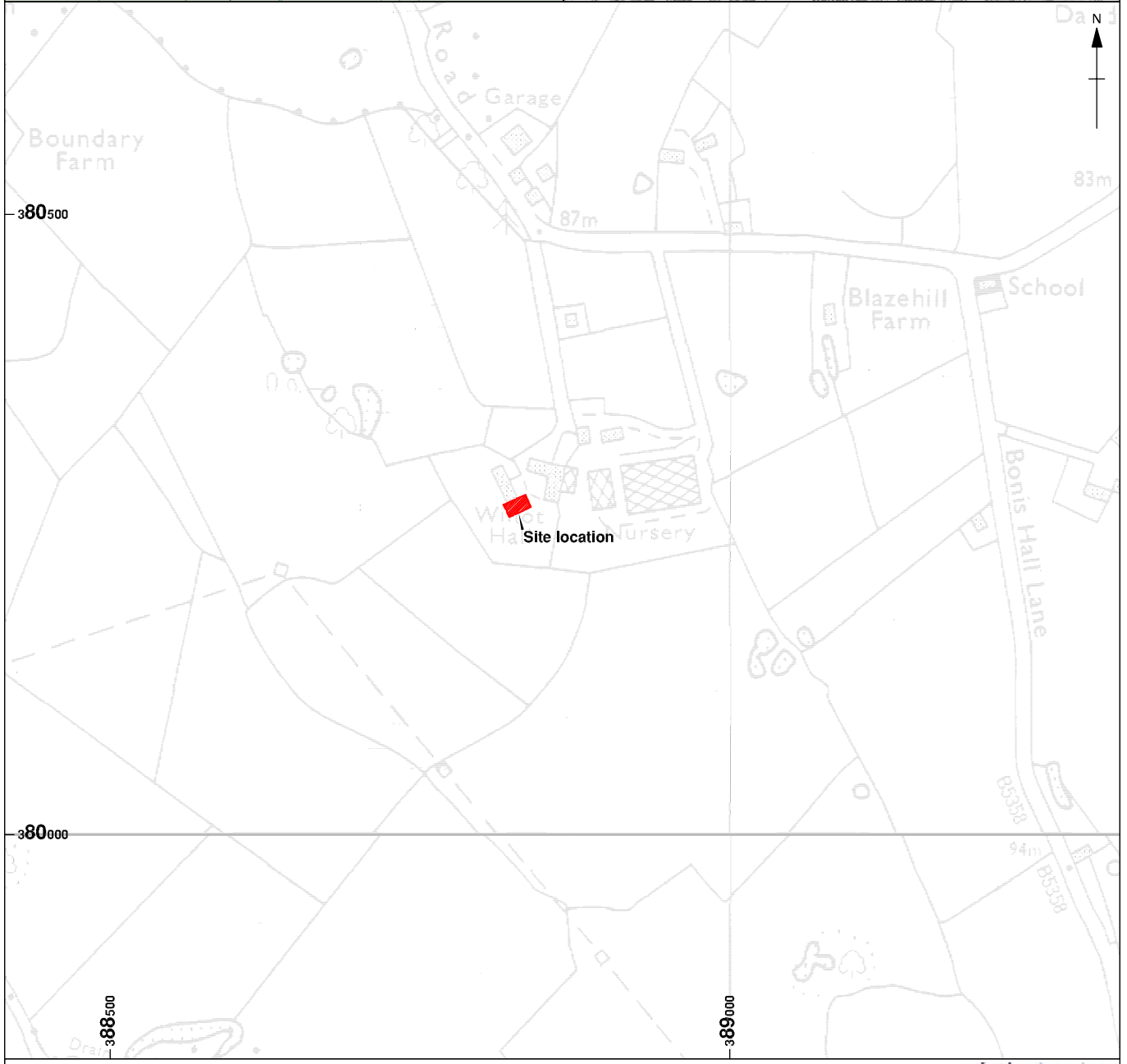
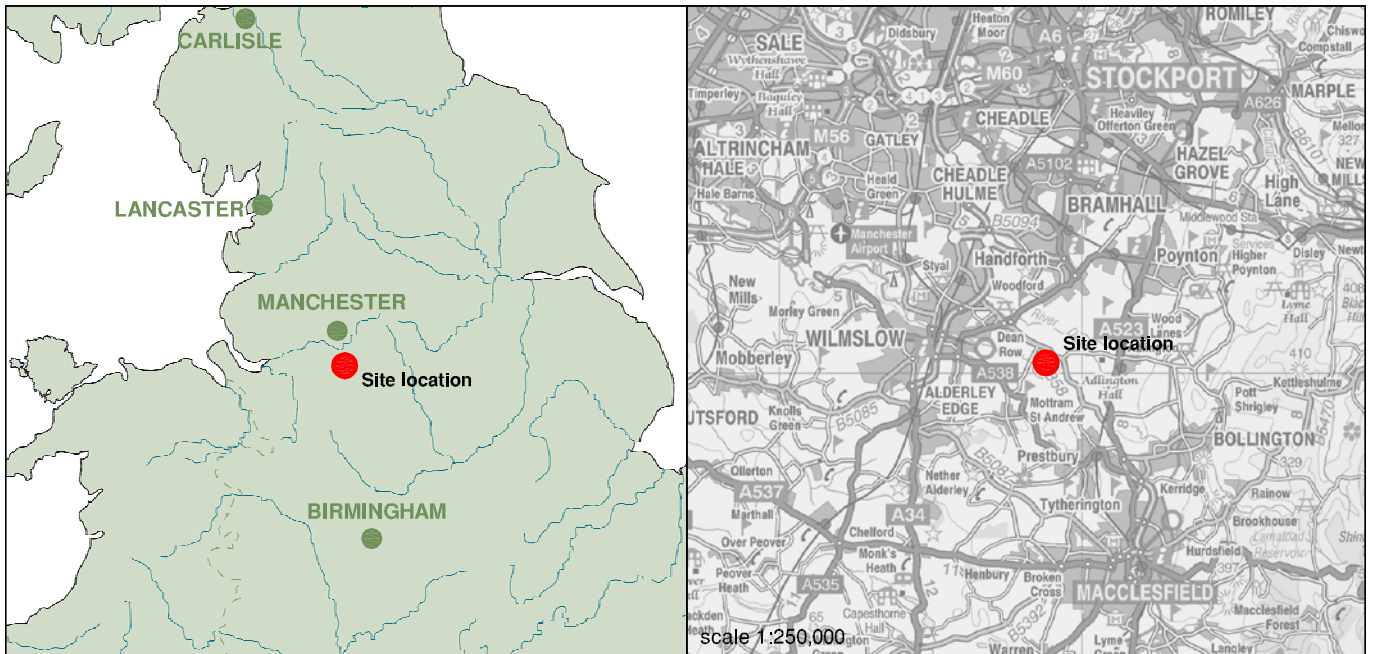
Plate 2: View northwards across the excavated area

Plate 3: Structure **4**, facing east

Plate 4: Structure **5**, facing west

Plate 5: Structure **6**, facing north

Plate 6: Structure **8**, facing west



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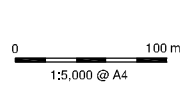
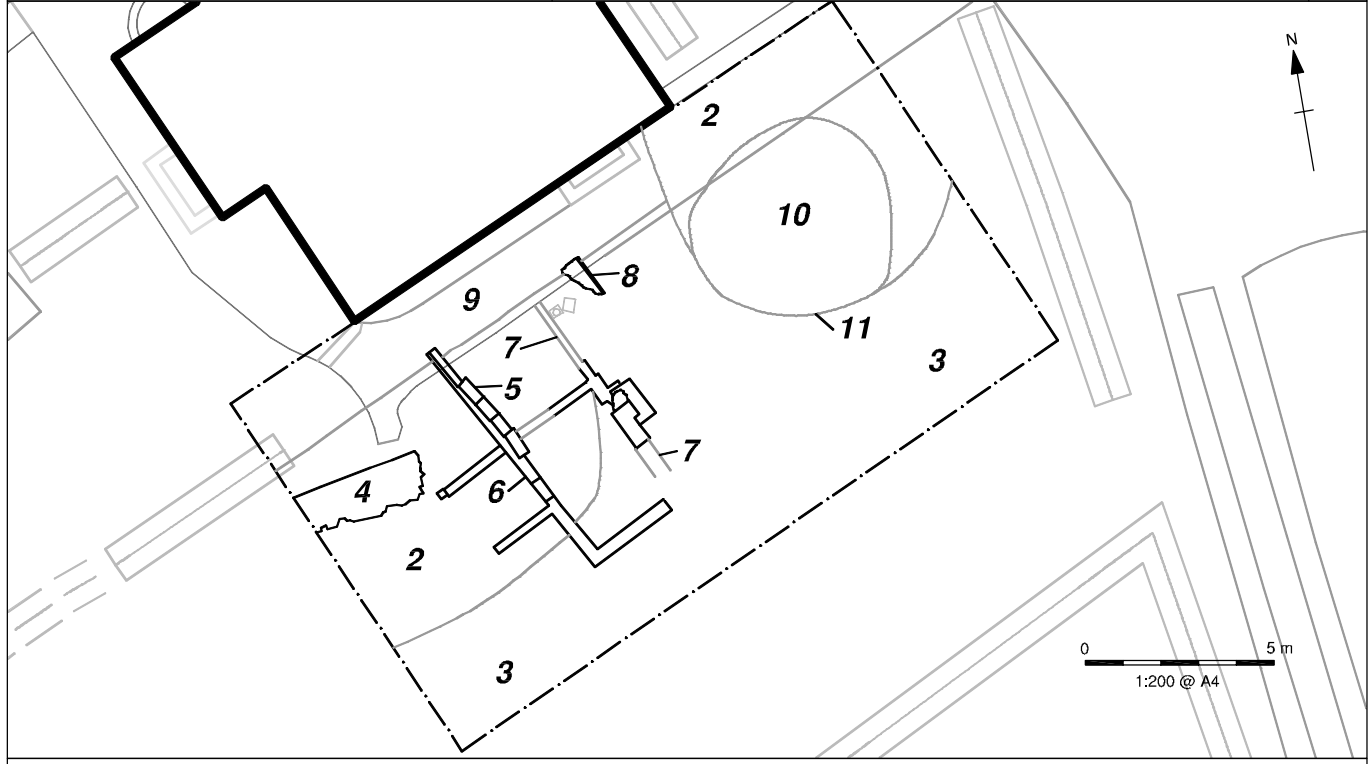


Figure 1: Site location

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- Limit of excavation
- Structure
- 4** Context no
- Cut
- Drains



Figure 2: Plan of phase 2 excavation

APPENDIX 1: PROJECT DESIGN

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

1.1.1 Fish Associates, on behalf of Mr David Mook (hereafter the client), has requested that Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) submit proposals to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring during groundworks associated with the construction of an extension to Willot Hall, Wilmslow Road, Prestbury, Cheshire (NGR SJ 8888 8024). This work is required in line with condition 7 of the planning approval (variation of conditions issue, ref 11/0118M). 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. Due to the high archaeological potential a verbal brief has been provided by Mark Leah, Development Control Archaeologist, Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service, requesting that a permanent presence archaeological watching brief is required during any groundworks or earth moving activities associated with the extension to the Hall.

1.1.2 This watching brief will be the second phase of such work at the site. The first phase was in association with the groundworks for the construction of a three-bay garage block in November 2011 (OA North 2011), situated to the south-east of the Hall. Three brick-built structures relating to former garden features of late nineteenth to early twentieth century in date were recorded, possibly associated with greenhouses and a set of steps, but no features of any archaeological significance were uncovered.

1.2 OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGY NORTH

1.2.1 Oxford Archaeology North has considerable experience of excavation of sites of all periods, having undertaken a great number of small and large scale projects throughout Northern England during the past 30 years. Evaluations, assessments, watching briefs and excavations have taken place within the planning process and according to any statutory constraints, to fulfil the requirements of clients and planning authorities, to very rigorous timetables.

1.2.2 OA North has the professional expertise and resources to undertake the project detailed below to a high level of quality and efficiency. OA North is an Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) registered organisation, registration number 17, and all its members of staff operate subject to the IfA *Code of Conduct* (2010).

2 OBJECTIVES

2.1 The following programme has been designed to identify any surviving archaeological deposits or features, and provide for accurate recording of any archaeological remains that are disturbed during the groundworks. The work will be carried out in accordance with best practice guidelines, including English Heritage (2006) and IfA (2008a, b and 2010), and in line with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF; DCLG 2012).

2.2 **Watching brief:** to carry out a permanent presence watching brief during the groundworks, to identify, investigate and record any archaeological remains.

2.3 **Report and Archive:** a report will be produced for the client within six to eight weeks of completion of the fieldwork. A site archive will be produced to English Heritage guidelines (2006) and in accordance with the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long Term Storage* (UKIC 1990).

3 METHOD STATEMENT

3.1 HEALTH AND SAFETY

- 3.1.1 OA North provides a Health and Safety Statement for all projects and maintains a Company Safety policy. All site procedures are in accordance with the guidance set out in the Health and Safety Manual compiled by the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers (1997). OA North will liaise with the client to ensure all health and safety regulations are met. A risk assessment will be completed in advance of any on-site works.
- 3.1.2 Any known contamination issues or any specific health and safety requirements on site should be made known to OA North by the client or Main Contractor ahead of the fieldwork commencing to ensure all procedures can be met, and that the risk is dealt with appropriately. Should any presently unknown contamination be discovered during excavation, it may be necessary to halt the works and reassess the risk assessment. Should it be necessary to supply additional PPE or other contamination avoidance equipment this will be costed as a variation.
- 3.1.3 OA North staff will be wearing appropriate PPE, including steel toe-capped boots, hi-visibility vest or coat, and a hard hat. All project staff will be CSCS qualified, proof of which can be provided in the form of CSCS cards.
- 3.1.4 It is assumed that the client or Main Contractor will provide all necessary welfare facilities.

3.2 WATCHING BRIEF

- 3.2.1 **Methodology:** a programme of field observation will accurately record the location, extent, and character of any surviving archaeological features and/or deposits within the proposed ground disturbance, which includes topsoil stripping, excavation of foundation or service trenches and any other earth moving activities. Excavation of any ground surfaces should be carried out using a toothless ditching bucket under archaeological supervision (toothed buckets inhibit observation of archaeological features and their recording). Any approach to the excavator will be made from the front of the machine (i.e. facing the driver) after signalling to the driver and being acknowledged..
- 3.2.2 The work will comprise observation during the groundworks, the systematic examination of any subsoil horizons exposed, and the accurate recording of all archaeological features and horizons, and any artefacts, identified during observation. The excavation area will only be entered by OA North staff if it is considered safe to do so.
- 3.2.3 Discovery of archaeological remains will require stoppage of the excavation. Areas of potential archaeological remains will require fencing-off from any construction works, preferably with netlon-type fencing, to allow OA North archaeologists sufficient time to undertake adequate recording under safe conditions. This will be carried out as efficiently as possible in order to minimise disruption. Depending on the deposits revealed, it is anticipated that the average time for the suspension of works will be approximately 2-4 hours. Clearance will be given for excavation to proceed once the archaeologist is satisfied that either no remains are present, or that they have been adequately recorded, or that the level of impact will not disturb any deeper remains that can be preserved *in situ*.
- 3.2.4 Putative archaeological features and/or deposits identified, together with the immediate vicinity of any such features, will be cleaned by hand using trowels and, where appropriate, sections will be studied and drawn. Any such features will be sample excavated (i.e. selected pits and postholes will normally only be half-sectioned, linear features will be subject to no more than a 10% sample, and extensive layers will, where possible, be sampled by partial rather than complete removal).
- 3.2.5 Recording will comprise a full description and preliminary classification of features or materials revealed, and their accurate location (either on plan and/or section, and as grid co-ordinates where appropriate). Features will be planned accurately at appropriate scales and annotated on to a large-scale plan provided by the client.

- 3.2.6 A photographic record will be undertaken simultaneously of features and finds, and of general working shots. This will entail monochrome contact prints with replica digital photographs for presentation purposes.
- 3.2.7 A plan will be produced of the areas of groundworks showing the position and extent of the ground disturbance, and one or more dimensioned sections will be produced, where appropriate.
- 3.2.8 **Contingency plan:** in the event of significant archaeological features being encountered during the watching brief, discussions will take place with the client and the Development Control Archaeologist, as to the extent of further works to be carried out. All further works would be subject to a variation to this project design. In the event of environmental/organic deposits being present on site, it would be necessary to discuss and agree a programme of palaeoenvironmental sampling and/or dating with the Development Control Archaeologist and possibly the Scientific Advisor for English Heritage.

3.3 REPORT AND ARCHIVE

- 3.3.1 The results of the fieldwork will culminate in a final report to be submitted as a hardcopy and digital (pdf) within four to six weeks of completion of the fieldwork (subject to any specialist reports outstanding), and a site archive will be produced to current English Heritage guidelines. The information will be finally disseminated through the deposition of the archive with the relevant museum in due course, and a digital copy of the report to the County Historic Environment Record (HER) Office.
- 3.3.2 **Confidentiality:** all internal reports to the client are designed as documents for the specific use of the Client, for the particular purpose as defined in the project brief and project design, and should be treated as such. They are not suitable for publication as academic documents or otherwise without amendment or revision.

4 OTHER MATTERS

4.1 PROJECT MONITORING

- 4.1.1 Whilst the work is undertaken for the client, monitoring of this project will be undertaken by the Development Control Archaeologist as advisor to the local planning authority.

4.2 WORK TIMETABLE

- 4.2.1 The duration of the archaeological presence for the watching brief will be dictated by the client's schedule of groundworks.
- 4.2.2 The client report will be completed within approximately eight weeks following completion of the fieldwork.

4.3 STAFFING

- 4.3.1 The project will be under the direct management of **Emily Mercer** (OA North Senior Project Manager) to whom all correspondence should be addressed.
- 4.3.2 The watching brief and any subsequent excavation will be supervised in the field by an OA North member of staff experienced in this type of work.
- 4.3.3 Assessment of the finds from the evaluation will be undertaken under the auspices of OA North's in-house finds specialist **Chris Howard-Davis** (OA North project officer). Chris acts as OA North's in-house finds specialist and has extensive knowledge of all finds of all periods from archaeological sites in northern England.

4.4 INSURANCE

- 4.4.1 OA North has a professional indemnity cover to a value of £2,000,000; proof of which can be supplied as required.

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APPENDIX 2: CONTEXT INDEX

Context no	Interpretation	Description
1	Topsoil	Dark-brown silt with 10% well-rounded stones
2	Demolition layer/rubble	A dark grey/black coarse deposit made up primarily of clinker, ash and crushed brick
3	Natural geology	A combination of orange-yellow sands and brownish-yellow boulder clay
4	Structure	A red brick former floor surface
5	Structure	Stone copings
6	Structure	Red brick walls, probable agricultural
7	Cut for Structure 6	Cut in natural geology for Structure 6
8	Structure	A cobbled surface
9	Sand layer	Possible building sand associated with 1930s extension of Willot Hall
10	Ash pit/layer	Possible rubbish spread
11	Cut for 10	Cut in natural geology for 10