

**An Archaeological Watching Brief  
At Wicks Lane, Formby,  
Merseyside.  
Site Code 120**

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*Produced for The National Trust*

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## **Non-Technical Summary**

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief conducted during the widening of a bridlepath at Wicks Lane, Formby, Merseyside. The path crosses the boundary between the Blundell and Formby estates which is documented as having being established in 1667. It was possible that the works would disturb deposits associated with the boundary, which for much of its length is defined by a bank.

No archaeological deposits were encountered.

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# **An Archaeological Watching Brief at Wicks Lane, Formby, Merseyside**

## **1. Introduction**

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief at Wicks Lane, Formby, Merseyside. The project was commissioned from National Museums Liverpool Field Archaeology Unit (NMLFAU) by the National Trust and was undertaken between 12 and 13 January 2010.

The site is located on the southern edge of the National Trust's property at Formby Point which lies at the core of Seftons coastal dune system (Fig. 1). The works consisted of widening the existing bridleway which follows this section of Wicks Lane and extended for c. 85 m East-West along Wicks Lane from a point at SD 2798 0711 to SD 2790 0709 along the southern side of the bridleway (Fig. 2).

## **2. Archaeological and Historical Background**

The site lies within the dune system at Formby Point in an area with evidence for human activity from the Prehistoric period onwards (see Adams & Harthen 2007).

However the most relevant data relating to the present project concerns Post-medieval land-use. Until the early 19th century much of the coastal dune system in Sefton was occupied by rabbit warrens owned by the principal landowners in the area. The area was particularly suited, as rabbits flourish in areas with a light, sandy soil which is easy to dig and where burrows remains dry and warm. They were protected from predators by ditches and fences, or banks, often capped by gorse or thorn bushes. Some scrub was encouraged to provide cover and winter food. The warren was under the control of a keeper or warrener who often had a watchtower to look out for poachers. It would appear that a cropping rate of 40% per year was sustainable.

In 1667 Henry Blundell and Robert Formby established rabbit warrens at Formby, setting their boundary at Wicks Lane in an 'Agreement for division of 'Hawes Sandie Hilles and Coney Warrans of Formbie' (Lancashire Record Office DDFo/34/1). The boundary was marked by a bank which survives to the east and west of the area covered by the present project, though it is absent or very poorly defined in the area of the watching brief where it has either been masked by later dunes or destroyed by erosion. Metal and wooden posts also marked the boundary, the metal posts have pitched heads over a square section post marked 'F' and 'B' on the south and north facing sides of the head.

A trial trench measuring 7 by 1 m was excavated across the bank though this found little evidence of the bank's date (Milln 1993).

## **3. Watching Brief Methodology and Aims**

No formal brief or method statement was produced though NMLFAU's standard procedures for watching briefs were followed throughout.

## Wicks Lane, Formby. Final Report.

The project consisted of the monitoring of the excavation by machine of a c. 1-2 m wide strip along the southern edge of the existing bridleway. The area was excavated to a depth coinciding with the top of the current bridleway (c. 2 m max).

All archaeological fieldwork was by M. Adams.

The project aimed to record features relating to the Wicks Lane boundary bank and if possible to collect samples for palaeo-environmental analysis from any earlier land surfaces sealed by the bank

### **4. Results and Conclusions**

No significant archaeological deposits were observed, all of the excavated deposits consisting of loose unconsolidated fine to medium grained yellow sand typical of the deposits of windblown dune sand found in the area. These were at least 2m deep. A darker more humic horizon c. 20 mm thick was present in places but appeared to be a recent (i.e. 20th century) land surface.

A very slightly darker deposit of sand c. 0.3 m thick was present at the base of the southern end of the excavated area (Plates 1 and 2) and extended over a length of c. 1-2 m. This may relate to the bank but was very poorly defined and is more likely to relate to different phases of dune building. This deposit was not considered sufficiently well defined to justify sampling.

No finds were recovered.

### **5. Bibliography**

Adams M. & Harthen D. 2006 *An Historic Landscape Survey of the National Trust Property, Formby*. Unpublished NMLFAU report for the National Trust.

Milln, J. 1993 *Brook's Field, Wicks Lane, Formby. Sampling Results from Southern Boundary Site 2707/1*. Unpublished National Trust Report.

## 6. Figures

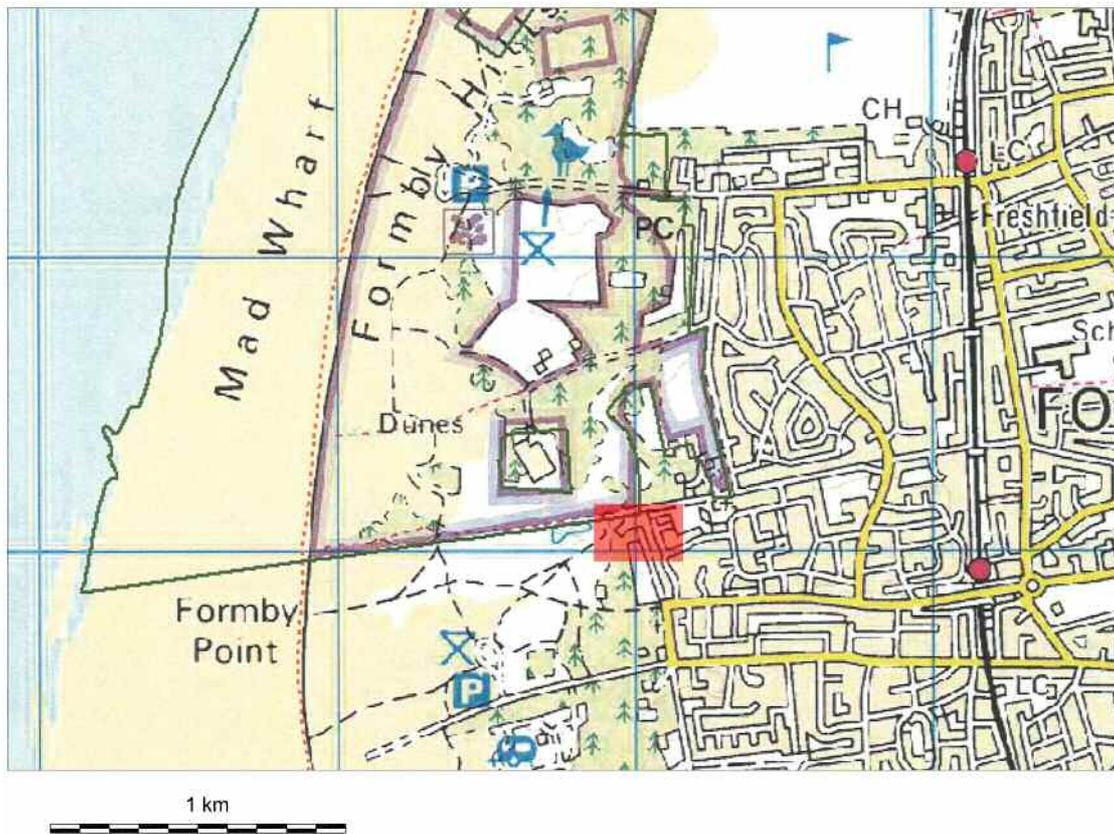


Fig. 1. Site location.

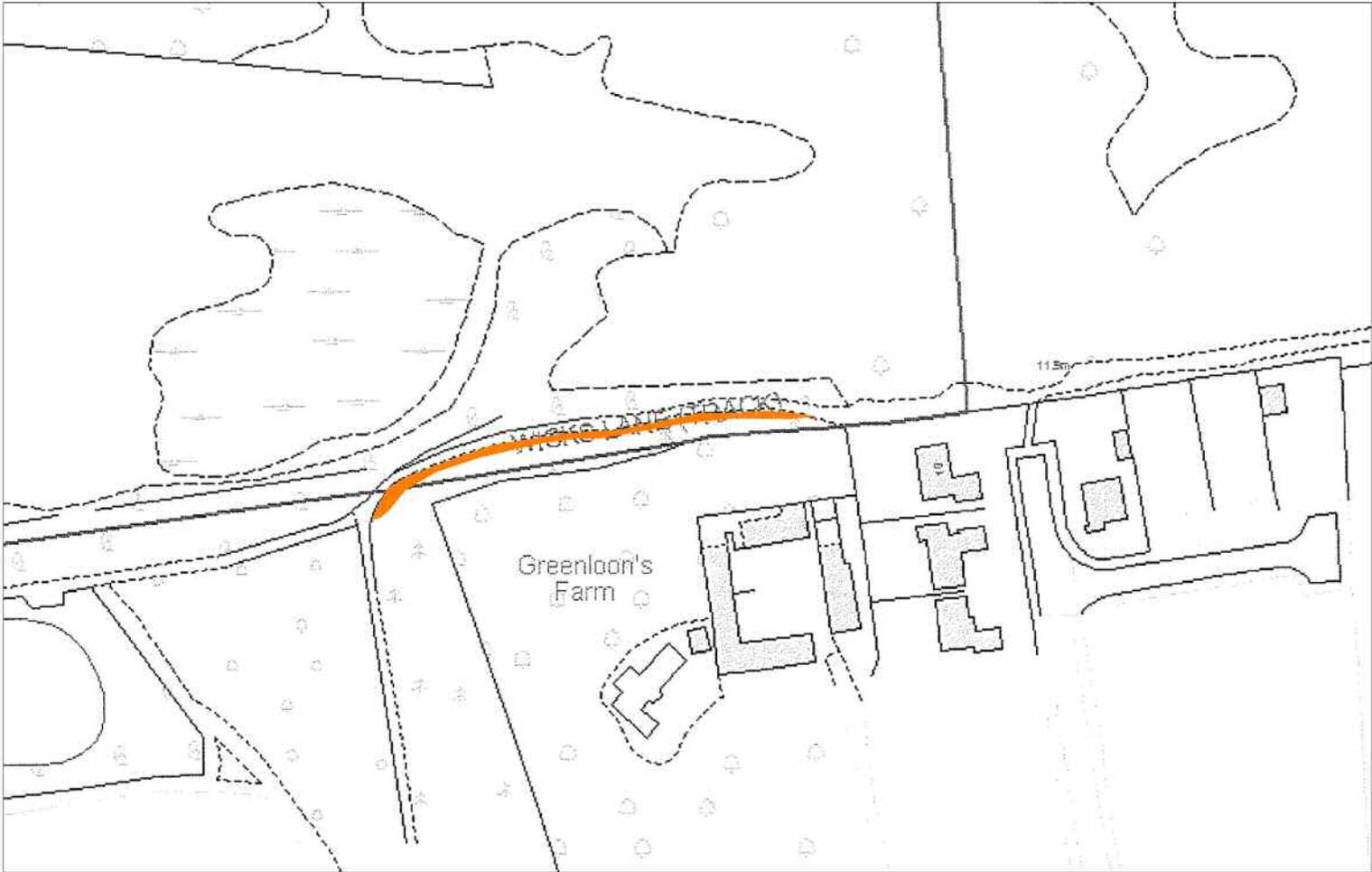


Fig. 2. Approximate extent of watching brief area.

## 7. Plates



Plate 1. Section through dune sands on line of bank.



Plate 1. Detail of section through dune sands on line of bank showing slightly darker sands in centre.