ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY INFRASTRUCTURE AND UTILITIES LAND AND PROPERTY MINING AND MINERAL PROCESSING MINERAL ESTATES WASTE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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ANWYL CONSTRUCTION

FORMER ROCK FERRY HIGH SCHOOL, WIRRAL

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

APRIL 2021





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FORMER ROCK FERRY HIGH SCHOOL, WIRRAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

APRIL 2021

PREPARED BY:

Dave Laverty

Archaeologist

REVIEWED BY:

Kevin Horsley

Principal Archaeologist

APPROVED BY:

Frank Giecco

Technical Director

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SUMMARY

Wardell Armstrong LLP (WA) was commissioned by the client, Anwyl Construction, to undertake an archaeological watching brief at the former Rock Ferry High School, Rock Ferry, Wirral, CH42 4NY, centred at National Grid Reference (NGR): SJ 32926 85841. The watching brief was required as a condition of planning consent. The watching brief was undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) produced in response to advice given by Vicky Nash, archaeological planning advisor on behalf of Merseyside Environment Advisory Service (MEAS).

The archaeological watching brief was undertaken over seven days between 22nd February and 2nd March 2021. The investigation revealed that no archaeological remains were present in the stripped area. However, 20th century landfill was observed along the northern edge of the stripped area.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Wardell Armstrong LLP (WA) thanks Anwyl Construction for commissioning the project, and for all their assistance throughout the work. Also, WA thank Ben Croxford, of Merseyside Environment Advisory Service (MEAS) for his assistance.

Wardell Armstrong LLP also thanks Hollingsworth Bros Civil Engineering plant hire company, for their help during this project.

The archaeological watching brief was supervised by Dave Laverty who also wrote the report. The figures were produced by Helen Phillips. The finds assessment was undertaken by Dave Laverty. The project was managed by Lorna Goring and the report edited by Kevin Horsley.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 **Project Background**

- 1.1.1 Between 22nd February and 2nd March 2021, Wardell Armstrong LLP (WA) undertook an archaeological watching brief at the former Rock Ferry High School Site, Rock Ferry, Wirral, CH42 4NY, centred at National Grid Reference (NGR): SJ 32926 85841. The watching brief was commissioned by Anwyl Construction who intends to redevelop the site, with the erection of an extra care scheme comprising a three-storey apartment block containing 102 units and ancillary facilities, the erection of 76 dwellings and the conversion of Ravenswood into 8 units, with associated access, car parking and landscaping on land formerly occupied by Rock Ferry High School, under which a conditional planning and listed building consents, granted by Wirral Council (planning references: APP/19/01459 & LBC19/01460).
- 1.1.2 The grant of planning permission by Wirral Council, dated 14th February 2020, stated that "No development shall take place until the applicant has submitted a written scheme of investigation for archaeological work for approval in writing by the local planning authority. The work shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the approved scheme."
- 1.1.3 Initial discussion with Vicky Nash, Planning Archaeologist for (MEAS) confirmed that the programme of archaeological work required by condition 12 includes a historic building recording of the Grade II listed Ravenswood comprising the creation of a record to Level 2-3 as set out in Historic England's 'Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Practice' (Historic England 2016). However, this was later deemed unsafe to undertake due to the recent fire damage of the building.
- 1.1.4 Further consultation with Dr Ben Croxford at MEAS confirmed that in addition to a programme of archaeological building recording, a watching brief of ground disturbance within the northern part of the site should also be presented within the WSI required by condition 12 (Croxford, B. Via Email, 5th of June 2020).
- 1.1.5 The proposed development footprint within the northern part of the site is thought to have the potential to contain possible prehistoric archaeological remains, the heritage significance of which may be affected by the approved development.

1.2 **Project Documentation**

1.2.1 The project conforms to a brief which was prepared in consultation with Dr Ben Croxford at Merseyside Environment Advisory Service (MEAS). A Written Scheme of



Investigation (WSI) (WA 2020) was then produced to provide a specific methodology based on the brief for an archaeological watching brief. This was approved by the archaeological planning advisor prior to the fieldwork taking place. This is in line with government advice as set out in Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (MHCLG 2019).

1.2.2 This report outlines the work undertaken on site, the subsequent programme of postfieldwork analysis, and the results of this scheme of archaeological watching brief.



2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 **Standards and Guidance**

- 2.1.1 The archaeological watching brief was undertaken following the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (CIfA 2020a), and in accordance with the WA Excavation Manual (WA 2017).
- 2.1.2 The watching brief was followed by an assessment of the data as set out in the Standard and guidance for an archaeological watching brief (CIFA 2020a) and the Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials (CIFA 2020b).

2.2 **Previous Documentary Research**

- 2.2.1 A Heritage Statement was prepared by Mosaic Town Planning (Mosaic Town Planning 2019) to accompany the planning and listed building consent applications for the development. This document set out the likely impact of development upon the heritage and archaeological assets located within the site boundary of the development of the site. This was required due to the presence of the Grade II listed Victorian house; Ravenswood within the site boundary (Mosaic Town Planning 2019; 2).
- 2.2.2 The Heritage Statement did not identify the potential for any below ground archaeological remains (Mosaic Town Planning 2019; 14 15) within the Site. However, further consultation with the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service concluded that a findspot for an undesignated heritage asset of an archaeological nature (a Neolithic polished stone axe found in 1964 in the garden of number 8 Ward Grove, Bebington) was identified outside the Site boundary to the north (HER reference: MME2205).
- 2.2.3 Although this find is indicative of transient activity only, correspondence with MEAS intimates that this find in the vicinity of the site may be indicative of potential prehistoric archaeological remains within the site boundary. However, no further desk-based research to support the justification for the request for mitigation by archaeological watching brief was deemed necessary by MEAS when queried by WA prior to the preparation of the approved WSI (Croxford, B. Via Email, 8th of June 2020).

2.3 Archaeological Watching Brief

2.3.1 The archaeological watching brief was undertaken to monitor the removal of topsoil



in advance of the development.

- 2.3.2 Deposits considered not to be significant were removed by a 360° tracked mechanical excavator with a toothless ditching bucket, under close archaeological supervision. All possible features or deposits were inspected, and selected deposits were excavated by hand to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples. Once completed all features were recorded according to the WA standard procedure as set out in the Excavation Manual (WA 2017).
- 2.3.3 All finds encountered were retained on site and returned to the Wardell Armstrong's Carlisle office where they were identified, quantified and dated to period. A *terminus post quem* was then produced for each stratified context under the supervision of the WA Finds Officer, and the dates were used to help determine the broad date phases for the site. On completion of this project, the finds were cleaned and packaged according to standard guidelines (Watkinson and Neal 1998). Please note, the following categories of material will be discarded after a period of six months following the submission of this report, unless there is a specific request to retain them (and subject to the collection policy of the relevant depository):
 - unstratified material;
 - modern pottery;
 - material that has been assessed as having no obvious grounds for retention.

2.4 Site Archive

- 2.4.1 A full professional archive has been compiled in accordance with the project specification, and the Archaeological Archives Forum recommendations (Brown 2011). The archive will be deposited with Museum of Liverpool, with a .PDF copy of the report sent to the Merseyside HER, available upon request. The archive can be accessed under the unique project identifiers: WA 2021 / CL12546 / RFW-A.
- 2.4.2 Wardell Armstrong LLP supports the **O**nline **A**cces**S** to the Index of Archaeological Investigation**S** (OASIS) project. This project aims to provide an on-line index and access to the extensive and expanding body of grey literature, created as a result of developer-funded archaeological work. As a result, details of the results of this project will be made available by WA as a part of this national project. The OASIS reference for the project is: **wardella2-416669**.



3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Location and Geological Context

- 3.1.1 The site is located at National Grid Reference (NGR): SJ 32926 85841. The site's environs comprise Ravenswood, the Grade II Listed Building and surrounding environs of the former Rock Ferry High School which have currently been left as wasteland. The site is bounded to the north by Ravenswood Avenue, a primary school, and residential properties, whilst the east is bounded by Highfield South. The south and west of the site is bounded by woodland.
- 3.1.2 The underlying solid geology within the area of investigation is mapped as sandstone of the Wilmslow Sandstone Formation deposited during the Triassic Period 247 to 252 million years ago under local environment was previously dominated by hot deserts. This is overlain by superficial deposits of till of the Devensian Till Formation deposited up to 2 million years ago during the Quaternary Period (BGS 2021). The natural substrate observed during the current phase of works comprised a mid-brown, fine grained clay with regular sandstone inclusions which is consistent with the mapped geologies above.

3.2 Historical and Archaeological Background

- 3.2.1 A Heritage Statement was produced to assess the known historical and archaeological background of the site (Mosaic Town Planning 2019). This statement identified no archaeological potential within the Site. This statement was prepared following pre-application discussions in which MEAS confirmed that no archaeological finds were expected around the Site.
- 3.2.2 Further documentary research to support the necessity of mitigation via archaeological watching brief was not deemed necessary by MEAS (Croxford, B. Via Email, 8th of June 2020).
- 3.2.3 As such, the following section is reflective of the supportive research undertaken prior to the commencement of the scheme of archaeological fieldwork.
- 3.2.4 The northern part of the site seems to have remained largely undeveloped aside from its enclosure by the mid-19th century and landscaping in association with Ravenswood by the turn of the 20th century. It is not intended to fully repeat the contents of the Mosaic Town Planning document here and what follows is a brief overview, for further details please refer to the original document.



- 3.2.5 **Prehistoric (up to AD 43)**: No Prehistoric remains have so far been located within the site boundary, however, a Neolithic polished stone axe (HER reference: MME2205) was discovered to the north west of site in 1964, in the garden of number 8 Ward Grove Bebington. However, this find may be indicative of transient activity only.
- 3.2.6 **Roman (AD 43** *c***.410)**: No Roman archaeological remains are known within the site boundary or the immediate surrounding area.
- 3.2.7 Early Medieval (AD *c.*410 1066): No Early medieval archaeological remains are known within the site boundary or the immediate surrounding area.
- 3.2.8 Medieval (AD 1066 *c*.1540): No medieval archaeological remains are known within the site boundary or the immediate surrounding area.
- 3.2.9 **Post-medieval (AD** *c***.1540 1749)**: No medieval archaeological remains are known within the site boundary or the immediate surrounding area.
- 3.2.10 **Industrial (AD 1750 1914)** The site seems to have stayed undeveloped until the late 19th century when Ravenswood was constructed. This property is noted within its listing description (Historic England) as originating in the late 19th century, evidenced by a datestone stating 1874.
- 3.2.11 Ravenswood was constructed during a period of affluence on the Wirral (WA 2020). This growth was closely linked with the commercial success of nearby Liverpool, located just across the River Mersey from Rock Ferry (*ibid*). This period saw several wealthy merchants residing in purpose-built villas and mansion houses on the Wirral, with a ferry service allowing them to commute to Liverpool across the River Mersey (*ibid*).
- 3.2.12 Ravenswood is first recorded on the 1889 Ordnance Survey Map for Cheshire, where it displays a similar footprint as it has today, but with an adjoining service building extending from the north elevation (Curtins 2019). An outbuilding range is also shown to the north west, along with extensive gardens and grounds surrounding the property *(ibid)*.
- 3.2.13 Modern (AD 1914 *present*): Ravenswood and its grounds were bought in 1920 and converted to a boy's grammar school which opened in 1926 (*ibid*).
- 3.2.14 Ravenswood was later incorporated into a purpose built; Art-Deco inspired school was in 1939 (*ibid*). In 1972 the school became a comprehensive, and in 1982 it became co-educational (*ibid*).



- 3.2.15 The school closed in 2011 when it was merged with Park High School, to form a new academy school offsite (*ibid*). As a result of this merger, all the old school buildings, aside from Ravenswood, were demolished in late 2017 early 2018 (*ibid*).
- 3.2.16 The northern quadrant of the site, subject to the archaeological watching brief, appears to have remained largely undeveloped throughout the original domestic and later educational life of the site (WA 2020).

3.3 Previous Work

- 3.3.1 A small number of archaeological works have previously been undertaken within the development area aside from the Heritage Statement by Mosaic Town Planning in 2019. These works comprised the digging of three boreholes (BH3, 4 and 5) and 2 trial pits (TP3 and 4) within the northern part of the site (Curtins 2019).
- 3.3.2 These investigations generally revealed the ground within the area to be undisturbed.



4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The archaeological watching brief was undertaken between the 22nd February and 2nd March 2021, with the removal of topsoil to reveal any archaeological features or deposits.

4.2 Results

- 4.2.1 Northern Area (Figure 2, Plates 1 and 2) The natural substrate (101) consisted of a mid-greyish-brown, fine grained, natural clay with frequent sub-angular sandstone inclusions. This was cut in the northern end of site by a linear area of landfill (103) disposed of within a cut area [102] aligned south-south-west to north-north-east (Plate 3). The landfill [102] had an observed length of 58.2m, an observed width of 12.3m, and an observed depth of at least 0.89m. However, landfill (103) did continue past the limit of excavation and was deeper than the test slot was excavated to.
- 4.2.2 The cut **[102]** for the landfill was filled with a deposit **(103)** of very coarse demolition debris, general rubbish, fragmented pottery, shards of glass, fragmented metal strips, drinks cans and plastic mixed with silt and gravel **(103)**. The fill also had an overwhelming smell of diesel, suggesting this too was part of its makeup.
- 4.2.3 This, plus the natural clay (101) was then sealed by a 0.32m thick deposit of midgreyish-brown silty-loam topsoil (100). Topsoil (100) had regular inclusions of poorly sorted stones and gravel, fragmented modern frogged red brick, glass shards, pottery sherds and clay pipe stems throughout. A sample of the pottery and clay pipe stems was collected for further analysis (Plates 4 and 5).
- 4.2.4 No archaeology was identified within the strip area.

4.3 Archaeological Finds and Environmental Sampling

4.3.1 A small sample of pottery and clay pipe stems was recovered from topsoil (100). No environmental samples were retained during the groundworks.



5 FINDS ASSESSMENT

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 A total of 31 artefacts, weighing 212g, were recovered from a single context.

5.2 Methodology

- 5.2.1 All finds were dealt with according to the recommendations made by Watkinson and Neal (1998) and to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIFA) Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation, and research of archaeological materials (2020b). All artefacts have been boxed according to material type and conforming to the deposition guidelines recommended by Brown (2011) and the Museum of Liverpool.
- 5.2.2 The material archive has been assessed for its local, regional, and national potential and for its potential to contribute to the relevant research frameworks.
- 5.2.3 Quantification of finds by context is provided in Table 5.1.

5.3 **Post-medieval Pottery**

- 5.3.1 A total of 27 sherds of pottery weighing 201g were recovered. All these sherds were recovered from the topsoil deposit **(100)** (Table 5.1).
- 5.3.2 The pottery sherds were in moderate condition with little to reasonable evidence of post deposition abrasion.
- 5.3.3 The pottery was examined and recorded according to guidelines published by the Medieval Pottery Research Group (PCRG, SGRP and MPRG 2016). Where possible, the pottery was assigned a fabric code using the MOLA Medieval and Post-medieval Pottery Codes (MOLA 2014). The following fabric codes were used:

TPW – Transfer printed

TPW4 – Refined white ware with underglaze colour transfer-printed decoration (green, mulberry, grey etc)

MOCH – Mocha-type ware

MISC WW – Miscellaneous unsourced post-medieval white ware

5.3.4 A range of pottery fabrics dating to the industrial period were recovered. The pottery includes household tablewares largely comprising refined white earthenware, both plain white and with various decorations including blue and white transfer print



(TPW) (8 sherds from 7 different vessels) (Plate 4), and banded ware **(TPW4)** (2 sherds from 2 different vessels) (Plate 5). These wares represent cheap mass-produced vessels, likely manufactured in Staffordshire in the late 19th and 20th century and widely distributed throughout the country and overseas.

- 5.3.5 In addition to the industrial period tablewares, a large quantity of sherds belonging to modern tableware were also recovered. These comprise mainly (11 sherds) of white wares (MISC WW) with a thick white glaze (Plate 6), along with a single sherd of Mocha type ware (MOCH) with brown and blue under glazed stripes (Plate 7). A single sherd of pure blue glazed pot (MISC WW), and two sherds from different vessels with raised decoration (MISC WW); a blue glaze with white risen decoration and a white glaze with blue floral risen decoration; were also recovered (Plate 7). These vessels also represent cheap mass-produced vessels, although of a later date, likely 20th century.
- 5.3.6 No further analysis is recommended.

5.4 Clay Tobacco Pipe

- 5.4.1 A total of 5 clay pipe fragments weighing 11g were recovered from the topsoil deposit **(100)** (Plate 8).
- 5.4.2 All of these are stems. No makers stamps were observed.
- 5.4.3 The pipe stems all had a bore of *c*.2-3mm, giving a date of 19th century onwards (Table 5.1; Kipfer 2006).
- 5.4.4 The discovery of clay pipe stems at Rock Ferry High School, although of limited archaeological significance, may add to the corpus of clay pipes produced in the Merseyside area (see Philpott 2015).
- 5.4.5 No further work is required.



Table 5.1: Quantification of finds by material and context

Site Code	Context	Material	Qty	Vessel No.	Wgt (g)	Period	Refined Date	Fabric Code	Comments
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	28	PM	Mid-late 19th C	TPW	Blue willow pattern plate base sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	9	PM	Mid-late 19th C	TPW	Plate rim sherd with blue edge decoration
RFW-A	100	Pottery	2	1	6	РМ	Mid-late 19th C	TPW	Blue willow pattern plate; 1 x rim sherd, 1 x body sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	5	PM	Mid-late 19th C	TPW	Blue willow pattern plate rim sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	3	PM	Mid-late 19th C	TPW	Blue willow pattern plate body sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	3	PM	Mid-late 19th C	TPW	Blue willow pattern plate body sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	>1	PM	Mid-late 19th C	TPW	Blue willow pattern teacup (TRB) rim sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	1	PM	Mid-late 19th C	TPW	Blue willow pattern plate body sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	6	PM	Mid-late 19th C	TPW4	Green banded plate rim sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	32	PM	Mid-late 19th C	TPW4	Red banded poss. Chamber pot rim sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	7	PM-Mod	Late 19th to mid-20th C	MISC WW	White glazed undecorated plate base sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	3	PM-Mod	Late 19th to mid-20th C	MISC WW	White glazed undecorated plate body sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	2	PM-Mod	Late 19th to mid-20th C	MISC WW	White glazed undecorated plate body sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	4	PM-Mod	Late 19th to mid-20th C	MISC WW	White glazed undecorated plate body sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	19	PM-Mod	Late 19th to mid-20th C	MISC WW	White glazed undecorated plate base sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	6	PM-Mod	Late 19th to mid-20th C	MISC WW	White glazed undecorated plate body sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	7	PM-Mod	Late 19th to mid-20th C	MISC WW	White glazed undecorated plate base sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	4	PM-Mod	Late 19th to mid-20th C	MISC WW	White glazed undecorated cup body sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	4	PM-Mod	Late 19th to mid-20th C	MISC WW	White glazed undecorated plate base sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	20	Mod	20th C	MISC WW	Cream glazed cup body sherd with vertical linear design
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	15	Mod	20th C	MISC WW	Cream glazed cup rim sherd with vertical linear design

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Site Code	Context	Material	Qty	Vessel No.	Wgt (g)	Period	Refined Date	Fabric Code	Comments
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	3	Mod	20th C	MISC WW	Blue glazed cup body sherd with white raised design
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	3	Mod	20th C	MISC WW	White glazed cup body sherd with blue raised floral design
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	2	Mod	20th C	МОСН	Mocha ware cup rim sherd
RFW-A	100	Pottery	1	1	7	Mod	20th C	MISC WW	Blue glazed cup body sherd
RFW-A	100	Clay Tobacco Pipe	1	-	>1	PM	Mid-late 19th C	-	Undecorated stem fragment
RFW-A	100	Clay Tobacco Pipe	1	-	>1	PM	Mid-late 19th C	-	Undecorated stem fragment
RFW-A	100	Clay Tobacco Pipe	1	-	2	PM	Mid-late 19th C	-	Undecorated stem fragment
RFW-A	100	Clay Tobacco Pipe	1	-	5	PM	Mid-late 19th C	-	Undecorated stem fragment
RFW-A	100	Clay Tobacco Pipe	1	-	2	PM	Mid-late 19th C	-	Undecorated stem fragment



6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Interpretation

- 6.1.1 During the archaeological watching brief at the former Rock Ferry High School, Rock Ferry, Wirral, topsoil was removed from the northern quadrant at site (Figure 2). The purpose of the watching brief was to monitor all topsoil removal within the identified area during groundworks related to the approved development as set out in the planning application APP/19/01459.
- 6.1.2 The proposed development area was excavated down to the top of the natural geological substrate.
- 6.1.3 The development area was devoid of archaeological features and deposits. However, substantial modern landfill was located along the northernmost edge of site. The data recovered indicated no past activity on the site.
- 6.1.4 A small amount of finds were recovered from the topsoil, with the pottery dating to 19th and 20th centuries and the clay pipe stems probably dating to the 18th century. The finds were certainly residual, and related to casual waste disposal, possible related to past activity at Ravenswood House and the later school that was located on site. General deposition of waste would have undoubtedly continued in the years after the school had closed leaving the area as wasteland.
- 6.1.5 Although the survival of archaeology may have been influenced by past phases of development around the stripped area, no previous activity was observed within this northern quadrant of site, aside from the modern landfill which was likely dug in the 20th century.



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APPENDICES



APPENDIX 1: CONTEXT TABLE

Context Number	Context Type	Area	Description
100	Deposit	Throughout site	Topsoil
101	Deposit	Throughout site	Natural clay substrate
102	Cut	Northern edge of site	Cut for modern landfill
103	Fill	Within cut 102	Fill of cut 102 demolition debris, pottery, glass, metal, plastic, drinks cans mixed with silt, gravel and diesel



APPENDIX 2: PLATES



Plate 1; General shot of site after topsoil strip looking east-south-east. Scales = $2 \times 1m$



Plate 2; General shot of site after topsoil strip looking north. Scales = 2 x 1m





Plate 3; General shot of landfill after topsoil strip looking east-north-east. Scales = $2 \times 1m$



Plate 4; General shot of industrial period blue and white transfer print pottery. Scale = 1×10 cm





Plate 5; General shot industrial period banded ware pottery. Scale = 1 x 10cm



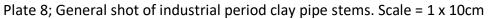
Plate 6; General shot of industrial period undecorated white ware pottery. Scale = 1 $$\times$ 10cm





Plate 7; General shot of modern miscellaneous white ware and mocha pottery. Scale = 1×10 cm



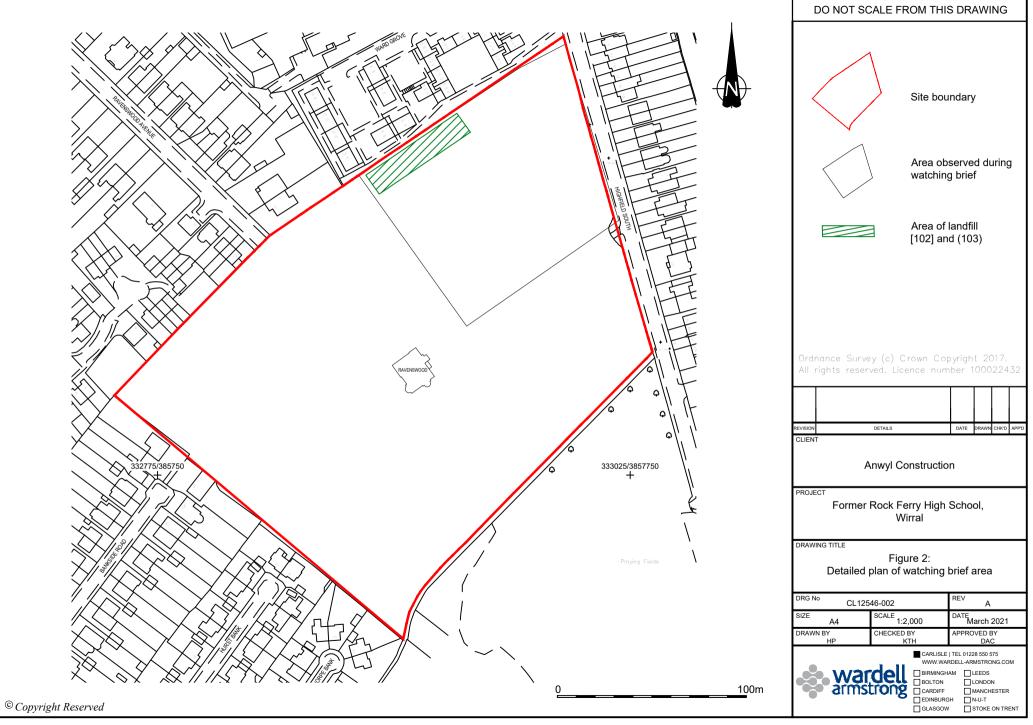




APPENDIX 3: FIGURES



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wardell-armstrong.com

STOKE-ON-TRENT Sir Henry Doulton House Forge Lane Etruria Stoke-on-Trent ST1 5BD Tel: +44 (0)1782 276 700

BIRMINGHAM Two Devon Way Longbridge Technology Park Longbridge Birmingham B31 2TS Tel: +44 (0)121 580 0909

BOLTON 41-50 Futura Park Aspinall Way Middlebrook Bolton BL6 6SU Tel: +44 (0)1204 227 227

BURY ST EDMUNDS

6 Brunel Business Court Eastern Way Bury St Edmunds Suffolk IP32 7AJ Tel: +44 (0)1284 765 210

CARDIFF

Tudor House 16 Cathedral Road Cardiff CF119U Tel: +44 (0)292 072 9191 CARLISLE Marconi Road **Burgh Road Industrial** Estate Carlisle Cumbria CA2 7NA Tel: +44 (0)1228 550 575

EDINBURGH Great Michael House 14 Links Place Edinburgh EH6 7EZ Tel: +44 (0)131 555 3311

GLASGOW 2 West Regent Street Glasgow G2 1RW Tel: +44 (0)141 433 7210

LEEDS 36 Park Row Leeds LS1 5JL Tel: +44 (0)113 831 5533

LONDON **Third Floor**

46 Chancery Lane London WC2A 1JE Tel: +44 (0)207 242 3243

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

City Quadrant 11 Waterloo Square Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4DP Tel: +44 (0)191 232 0943 SHEFFORD PI House R/O 23 Clifton Road Shefford Bedfordshire SG17 SAF Tel: +44 (0)1462 850 483

TRURO **Baldhu House** Wheal Jane Earth Science Park Baldhu Truro TR3 6EH

Tel: +44 (0)187 256 0738

International offices:

ALMATY 29/6 Satpaev Avenue Regency Hotel Office Tower Almaty Kazakhstan 050040 Tel: +7(727) 334 1310

MOSCOW 21/5 Kuznetskiy Most St. Moscow Russia Tel: +7(495) 626 07 67



wardell-armstrong.com

STOKE-ON-TRENT Sir Henry Doulton House Forge Lane Etruria Stoke-on-Trent ST1 5BD Tel: +44 (0)1782 276 700

BIRMINGHAM Two Devon Way Longbridge Technology Park Longbridge Birmingham B31 2TS Tel: +44 (0)121 580 0909

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City Quadrant 11 Waterloo Square Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4DP Tel: +44 (0)191 232 0943 SHEFFORD PI House R/O 23 Clifton Road Shefford Bedfordshire SG17 SAF Tel: +44 (0)1462 850 483

TRURO **Baldhu House** Wheal Jane Earth Science Park Baldhu Truro TR3 6EH

Tel: +44 (0)187 256 0738

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ALMATY 29/6 Satpaev Avenue Regency Hotel Office Tower Almaty Kazakhstan 050040 Tel: +7(727) 334 1310

MOSCOW 21/5 Kuznetskiy Most St. Moscow Russia Tel: +7(495) 626 07 67

