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**An Archaeological Watching Brief at  
Fieldview Garage and Stables,  
103B Barnston Road,  
Barnston.  
Site Code 179  
Final Report**

**NGR SJ 2795 8328 (Centred)**

*Prepared for Mr Colin and Mrs Jacqueline Wilson.*

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*March 2017*

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# **An Archaeological Watching Brief at Fieldview Garage and Stables, 103B Barnston Road, Barnston. Site Code 179 Final Report NGR SJ 2795 8328 (Centred)**

## **1. Introduction**

This document is the final report on the results of an archaeological watching brief at Fieldview Garage and Stables, 103B Barnston Road, Barnston, Wirral, Merseyside. The site has planning permission (Wirral Council Ref APP/16/00231) for the conversion and extension of the existing garage to residential accommodation.

The project was conducted by Archaeological Services National Museums Liverpool (ASNML) on behalf of Mr Colin and Mrs Jacqueline Wilson (hereafter the Client) and was aimed at establishing the nature of any archaeological deposits on the site.

Monitoring of excavation was undertaken on 22 and 28 February 2017 by the author.

## **2. Site Location, Topography, Geology and Soils**

The site (Fig. 1) is situated within the core of Barnston village and is centred at NGR SJ 2795 8328 and is approximately 0.15 ha in extent.

The site lies at the end of a short trackway which branches off westwards from Barnston Road. The property lies in the core of the village, within the Barnston Conservation Area.

Fieldview Garage & Stables was built after c. 1930 and was identified as a building making a Neutral Contribution to the Character of the Conservation Area (Bryson McHugh 2016). The building was a double height Garage/Stables with approximate dimensions 7.1 m wide and 7.8 m long. Externally the walls were 200 mm blockwork finished with a pebble dash render and the roof is slate. There were windows to each elevation and a pair of double garage-type doors to one gable end.

The rest of the site was occupied by an area of rough pasture or former lawn. Information from the client suggested that there was an unknown depth of recent made-ground in the area of the proposed patio.

The underlying geology consists of fine- to medium-grained, red-brown to brick red sandstones which are generally pebble-free, cross stratified, with sporadic siltstones of the Wilmslow Sandstone Formation (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html> consulted 15/02/2017).

Although the map evidence suggests that bedrock outcrops at ground level, there are extensive deposits of Devensian Till (Boulder Clay) to the east, west and south.

The site and the immediate surrounding area lie in an area of Typical Stagnogley Soils of the Clifton Series which form over Glacial Till (Soil Survey of England and Wales, Sheet 108, 1:50 000; Beard, Thompson and Lea 1987). Top soils are usually slightly stony clay loam or sandy clay loam with coarsely structured sub-surface horizons of stony clay loam.

### **3. Archaeological and Historical Background**

The following is based upon the Heritage statement submitted with the planning application (Bryson McHugh 2016), the Conservation Area appraisal (Donald Insall Associates Ltd 2007) and internal NML sources.

The site lies within the historic core of Barnston, placename evidence and a brief entry in the Domesday Survey suggests that the village was established by at least the early medieval period and possibly by the 7th-8th centuries AD.

The site's potential for evidence of prehistoric (i.e. Mesolithic to Iron Age) settlement was difficult to assess accurately. Its location and topography on the flanks of a sandstone ridge suggest that it may have been an attractive location for settlement at all of these periods. Recent fieldwork suggests that the cores of at least some Wirral villages have been settled periodically since at least the Late Neolithic (Adams 2016) and that some locations seem to have seen repeated episodes of settlement at widely separated chronological intervals (Philpott & Adams 2010, Adams 2017). The Heritage Statement notes finds of Prehistoric stone tools found in Barnston which suggests the presence of a population in the wider area, though at present it is impossible to accurately predict its location or nature. However, analogy with sites such as Mark Rake, Bromborough (*ibid.*) suggests that any deposits present are likely to consist of widely dispersed truncated shallow pits and gullies and that that this is likely to be the case for all periods up to the 15th to 16th century AD.

Although better understood than earlier periods, the Romano-British period is similarly difficult to assess, little field evaluation has taken place in the cores of historic villages in the region and there is therefore little background against which to assess the present site. However, the Heritage Statement notes the find at Barnston Dale of several Roman coins found between 1982 and 1984 and a fibula (brooch) of devolved head-stud type. Although not within the present site these finds demonstrate activity in the wider area and should be seen in the context of the extensive site excavated at Irby (Philpott & Adams 2010) which showed that at least some sites in the Wirral were repeatedly occupied from the Late Prehistoric, Roman and Medieval periods and the site's location within the historic core of the village might therefore imply earlier settlement. It is possible that a Roman road discovered during excavations in nearby Greasby, may have extended through Barnston to Thornton Hough before eventually reaching Willaston and joining the principal route to Chester (Donald Insall Associates Ltd 2007).

The potential for Post-Roman and Early Medieval settlement was also difficult to assess. The period following the end of Roman government to the 13th century AD is widely held to be *aceramic* (i.e. pottery was not used or produced) in the North-West of England which makes site location difficult and the period remains largely understood from placename evidence. The limited available excavated evidence suggests that the cores of at least some Wirral villages had their origins in the 6th century AD or earlier (Adams 2012a & b) and there seems to be at least some correlation with the sites of Pre-Conquest churches. Later mapping, such as the 1847 Tithe Map (<http://maps.cheshire.gov.uk/tithemaps/> consulted 15/2/2017), shows the present site situated within a small sub-rectangular group of three plots of land which may represent the original village core. The group is respected by the roads within the village which suggests that it is some antiquity, though the date at which it was established is presently unknown.

Later medieval settlement was not fully assessed prior to fieldwork, though a review of the available historic mapping suggested that settlement was concentrated in and around the present village core. Although later mapping shows no structures on the present site, the presence of dwellings or other structures could not be ruled out prior to the fieldwork described in this report

The site had little potential for the presence of Post-medieval deposits, mapping from the 1840s onwards shows the site as vacant until the late 20th century.

In conclusion although there were no documented archaeological sites or other heritage assets within the proposed development it was of archaeological potential, principally for remains relating to settlement during the Early Prehistoric, Romano-British and Early Medieval periods. Any archaeological features present were likely to consist of diffuse and shallow post-holes, pits, gullies and ditches very vulnerable to disruption and damage during construction.

## **4. Methodology**

Full details are given in the Project Design (Adams 2017) but essentially consisted of the monitoring of excavation for foundations and a patio around the former garage as indicated on Fig. 2 to expose any archaeological deposits which were then to be excavated in a controlled archaeological manner.

## **5. Description of the Deposits**

To the rear (south) of the garage deposits consisted of a c. 0.4 m thick layer of topsoil containing late 20<sup>th</sup> century brick, concrete and ceramics (Plate 1). This sealed isolated patches of heavily compacted material identified as the former (pre-garage?) top soil (contexts 1 and 2) up to 100 mm thick. These contexts contained 19<sup>th</sup> century darkwares (not retained) and a single sherd of late medieval pottery identified as a body sherd from a jar or jug and a sherd of 18<sup>th</sup> century mottled ware. Geological deposits consisted of soft, pale yellow fine-grained sandstone.

On the western side of the garage the modern deposits were c. 1-1.2 m thick and sealed the same geological deposits.

Monitoring of the excavation for services to the east of the garage revealed compacted hard-core over geological deposits.

## **6. Finds Evidence**

Finds have been washed and catalogued below. The assemblage consists of 2 items and requires no further assessment.

### **6.1 Medieval Ceramics**

One sherd of glazed medieval pottery, probably part of a jug, was recovered from the upper levels of context 1.

### **6.1 Post-Medieval Ceramics**

A single sherd from the rim of a mottled ware plate, probably dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was recovered from context 2.

## **4. Conclusions**

No archaeological deposits were exposed during the works, though this may be a consequence of the relatively restricted extent of the excavation, rather than the absence of early settlement and activity in the wider, unexcavated, area.

The relative ground levels suggest that the garage/stables were constructed on a plot formed by terracing into a slight slope in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The finds of medieval and post-medieval ceramics are typical of the disposal of domestic waste during these periods and although they provide evidence for settlement in the vicinity of the watching brief from about the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards they are of no further significance.

## **5. Assessment of Potential and Significance**

No further assessment of the archive is required.

## **6. Bibliography**

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## 7. Figures



Fig. 1. Site Location. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2017



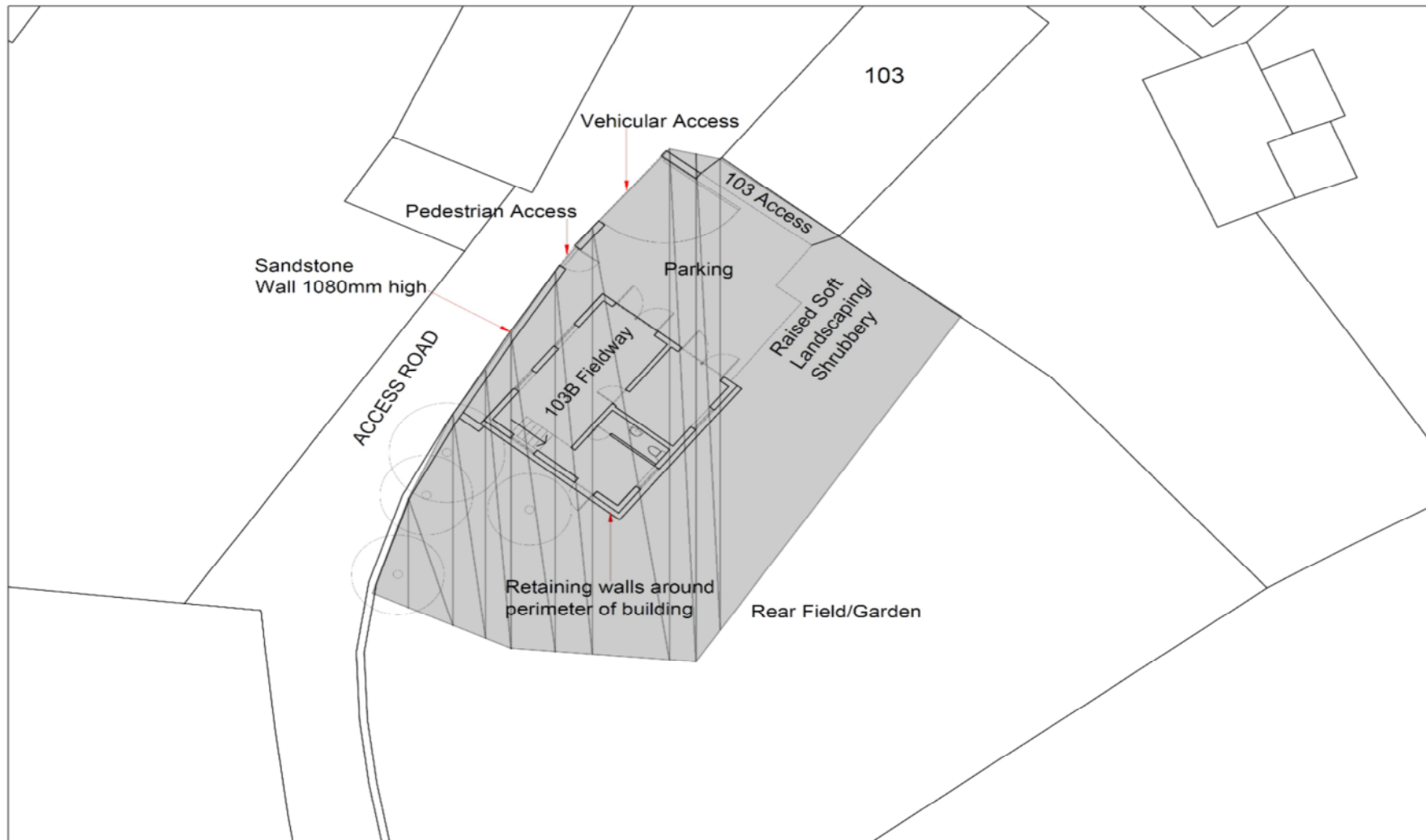


Fig. 2. Development layout with approximate watching brief area highlighted in grey. Based upon data supplied by the client.

## 8. Plates



Plate 1. Deposits to the rear of the garage, context 1 is the dark area in the foreground, context 2 is the dark area in the rear ground. View looking south-west.