

Archaeology Wales

Land off Wrexham Road, Whitchurch Shropshire

Archaeological Watching Brief



By
Ian Davies
Kate Pitt MA ACIfA

Report No. 1440

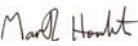
Archaeology Wales Limited,
Rhos Helyg, Cwm Belan,
Llanidloes, Powys SY18 6QF
Tel: +44 (0) 1686 440371
E-mail: admin@arch-wales.co.uk


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Archaeological Watching Brief

Prepared For: J Ross Developments Ltd

Edited by: Mark Houliston
Signed: 
Position: Managing Director
Date: 14/3/16

Authorised by: Mark Houliston
Signed: 
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Non Technical Summary

This report results from work undertaken by Archaeology Wales Ltd (AW) for J Ross Developments Ltd on land opposite 'Sunnyside', off Wrexham Road, Whitchurch, Shropshire. The report details the results of an archaeological watching brief, placed as a condition of the planning permission for 40 dwellings and associated infrastructure (Shropshire Council Planning Application No. 14/00462/FUL).

A desk-based assessment of the development site undertaken in 2013 identified a general potential for Roman activity within the scheme area.

The ground reduction over the site did not reach the natural in all areas. There were no indications of archaeological features, and the recovered abraded post-medieval pottery sherds are characteristic of manuring for ploughed fields.

1 Introduction

1.1 Location and Scope of Work

- 1.1.1 In March 2015 Archaeology Wales Ltd (AW) was commissioned by J Ross Developments Ltd to carry out an archaeological watching brief on land opposite 'Sunnyside', off Wrexham Road, Whitchurch, Shropshire, OS grid reference: SJ 53145 41252, (Figures 1&2). This work relates to Shropshire Council planning application number 14/00462/FUL (Condition 4) for the development of 40 dwellings, with the formation of vehicular access and site landscaping to include a central open space and infrastructure.
- 1.1.2 Prior to the development of the site it was agreed with Dr Andy Wigley, Principal Archaeologist, Historic Environment Team, Shropshire Council (HET-SC), that an archaeological watching brief would be undertaken during all ground works associated with the development. An approved Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was produced by AW in accordance with the Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief (CifA, 2014). The approved scheme of archaeological work was implemented during the construction works.
- 1.1.3 The watching brief commenced on the 18th November 2015 and was undertaken intermittently until the 13th January 2016.
- 1.1.4 The AW project number for the work is 2327 and the site code is WRW/15/WB. The project details are summarised on the Archive Cover Sheet (Appendix IV).

1.2 Geology and Topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies at approximately 95m above sea level on the western side of Whitchurch. The land is relatively flat. The site comprised an irregularly shaped field, aligned north-west to south-east. The field measured approximately 100m by 110m and consisted of low, ungrazed pasture sloping gently and regularly to the north-west, at the bottom of which was a (low-energy) hedged water course, forming a field boundary. The boundary to the southwest comprised another (low-energy) hedged water course field boundary. The south-eastern field boundary consisted of a modern, straight hedge-line, the opposite side of which was a mix of modern and Victorian to Edwardian period properties fronting onto Belton Street. The north-eastern field

boundary consisted of a hedgeline, on the opposite side of which was Wrexham Road. Along the south-western field boundary a particularly wet circular area, approximately 35m in diameter, appeared to be a silted up natural pond (at SJ 53117 41235).

- 1.2.2 The underlying geology of the area is comprised of halite stone and mudstone. Superficial deposits comprised of glaciofluvial sheet deposits, Devensian – sand and gravel (British Geological Survey, 2016).

1.3 Archaeological and Historical Background

- 1.3.1 A desk-based assessment was undertaken in 2013 to establish the potential impact on the cultural heritage of the proposed residential development (Pack, 2013). The study was complemented by a walkover survey and an examination of designated (scheduled, listed and registered) assets located up to one kilometre from the development site.
- 1.3.2 The assessment identified a single heritage asset within the development area; a small 20th century building or animal pen, which no longer exists: this asset has been assessed to be negligible overall value. A possible Roman road has been identified along the line of Wrexham Road, adjacent to the development area and this, together with a hoard of Roman coins some 500m to the west, is suggestive of Roman activity in the general area. There is no direct evidence for activity within the study area during the medieval period, although a motte-and-bailey castle and possible deserted settlement lie over 500m to the west. Later activity in the area is mostly associated with the development of the Shropshire Union Canal, in the form of a possible chemical works and the gradual spread of the town's suburbs within the scheme area.

2 Aims and Objectives

- 2.1.1 The purpose of the watching brief, as defined by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014), is:
- To allow, within the resources available, the preservation by record of archaeological deposits, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of development or other potentially disruptive works.
 - To provide an opportunity, if needed, for the watching archaeologist to signal to all interested parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief itself are not sufficient to support treatment to a satisfactory and proper standard.
 - To make available the information about the archaeological resource that exists on the site.

3 Methodology

3.1 General Procedures

3.1.1 The methodology for the archaeological watching brief followed that set out within the approved WSI (Appendix III). In brief, this work included the following key elements:

- The site overburden was removed in spits with a 360° tracked excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket. The watching brief was maintained on all groundworks.
- The fieldwork was undertaken by Ian Davies. Management of the project was undertaken by Kate Pitt (ACIfA).
- All areas were photographed using high resolution (14mp+) digital photography. The on-site illustrations were undertaken on drafting film using recognised conventions and scales (1:10, 1:20, 1:50) as appropriate. All the deposits were described in the field on pro-forma context sheets.

3.2 Finds

3.2.1 Finds were recovered by hand during the course of the excavation and bagged and labelled by context.

3.3 Palaeo-environmental Evidence

3.3.1 No deposits suitable for sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

4 Watching Brief Results (Plates 1-9)

4.1 The topsoil strip revealed the mid reddish grey sandy topsoil to be approximately 0.20m deep. Beneath this was a mid-yellowish brown sandy subsoil, approximately 0.15m deep. The natural deposit beneath the subsoil consisted of a light reddish brown fine sand. However, the natural was revealed in areas where the machining process had also removed the subsoil. During the topsoil strip of the site entrances onto Wrexham Road, where the excavation was deeper and more substantial, it was noted that the natural consisted of a very firm reddish brown boulder clay, interspersed with lenses of fine bright orange sand.

4.2 Fifty-four pottery fragments and one decorated 18th to 19th century tobacco pipe bowl were recovered from the topsoil in the eastern and northern areas of the site. The pottery fragments consisted of 17th to 19th century Staffordshire trailed slip-wares, Buckley-ware and occasional white china. There appeared to be no noticeable pattern in the location of these finds; the spread of the recovered fragments appeared random and haphazard.

4.3 During subsequent excavation following the removal of the topsoil, a drainage sump (SJ 53149 41240) was excavated in the wet areas of the western field in an attempt to alleviate the high ground water (and surface water) issues encountered on the site. The sump measured approximately 6.25 metres square, and was excavated to a maximum depth of approximately 4m (ground water was encountered at approximately 1.5m below ground level). While no archaeological features were revealed, the sides of the sump did reveal layers of stratigraphy within the sandy

natural. The topmost layer, approximately 0.20m deep, comprised a mixed layer of a greenish-grey clay silt and a very humic dark greyish black silt. Below this was a sequence of sand layers varying in depth from 0.20m to 0.30m; the colours ranged from light greys to mid reddish browns. These layers could not be examined more closely due to the depth of the excavation (and ground water) as well as the general instability of the sides of the sump.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Overall Conclusions

5.1.1 Despite no archaeological features being revealed, the recovery of a number of pottery fragments was interesting. These fragments covered a wide date range, the largest recovery being of 17th to 19th century trailed slipware fragments, along with Buckley-ware and occasional white china. All pottery fragments were unstratified: these were not associated with within any archaeological deposits. The finds were retrieved over a wide area.

5.1.2 The amount of pottery recovered, and the wide age range of it, would suggest that these fragments originate from manuring deposits dumped onto the field from properties within and around Whitchurch over the post-medieval period. The overall condition of the pottery fragments is abraded and damaged, which would suggest frequent ploughing action.

5.1.3 No archaeological features were revealed during the topsoil strip.

5.1.4 The ground reduction over the site did not reach the natural in all areas.

5.2 Statement of Potential

5.2.1 The finds were post-medieval in date and have not been retained for archive deposition. The artefact assemblage was from an unstratified deposit (topsoil).

5.3 Storage and Curation

5.3.1 The project archive will be prepared in accordance with: Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives (CIfA, 2014) and Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment, MoRPHE (Historic England, 2006). The archive will be deposited with the Shropshire Museums Service.

6 Bibliography and References

British Geological Survey: Geology of Britain Viewer
<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/> (Accessed 16/03/15)

Pack, K. 2013, *Proposed residential development, Wrexham Road, Whitchurch, Shropshire: cultural heritage assessment*. CPAT Report 1239.

Shropshire Council: Discovering Shropshire's History
<http://search.shropshirehistory.org.uk/> (Accessed 10/2/16)

5 Acknowledgements

Archaeology Wales would like to thank J Ross Developments Ltd and the ground-staff for their on-site liaising and help during the project.

6 Bibliography and references

Pack K. 2013. *Proposed residential development, Wrexham Road, Whitchurch, Shropshire: cultural heritage assessment*. CPAT Rep. 1239.

British Geological Survey materials ©NERC 2016.

<http://search.shropshirehistory.org.uk> (accessed 10/02/16)

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APPENDIX I: Figures



Figure 1.
Location of Site











-  Existing trees to be retained
-  New specimen trees
-  Small tree planting (new)
-  Garden wall
-  Timber fence (1.8m)
-  Picket fencing (0.9m)
-  Public Open Space (POS)
-  16 amp electric car charging point (20% of total dwellings)

Figure 2
Site Plan showing
Watching Brief areas
(red shading).

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APPENDIX II: Plates



Plate 1. Site access strip from Wrexham Road, looking south-east



Plate 2. Site access strip from Wrexham Road, looking south-east



Plate 3. Eastern field site strip, looking north-west



Plate 4. Eastern field site strip, looking north-east



Plate 5. Eastern field site strip, looking south-east



Plate 6. Eastern field site strip, looking south-east



Plate 7. Western field access strip, looking west



Plate 8. Western field access strip, looking west



Plate 9. Drainage sump in eastern field, looking south-west

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APPENDIX III:

Written Scheme of Investigation

Archaeology Wales

SPECIFICATION
FOR AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
AT
Wrexham Rd, Whitchurch

Prepared for:

J Ross Developments Ltd
17 Mile Oak
Maesbury Road
Oswestry
Shropshire, SY10 8GA

17 March 2015

Archaeology Wales Limited
Rhos Helyg, Cwm Belan, Llanidloes,
Powys, SY18 6QF
Tel: +44 (0) 1686 440371
Email: chris@arch-wales.co.uk

NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This Written Scheme of Investigation details the proposal for an archaeological Watching Brief during groundworks associated with construction at Land Opposite Sunnyside, off Wrexham Road, Whitchurch, Shropshire (Planning Application No. 14/00462/FUL).

1. Introduction and archaeological background

This Written Scheme of Investigations (WSI) has been prepared by Mark Houliston (MIfA), Managing Director, Archaeology Wales Ltd (AW) at the request of J Ross Developments Ltd, 17 Mile Oak, Maesbury Road, Oswestry, Shropshire, SY10 8GA. It provides information on the methodology that will be employed by AW during an archaeological watching brief at the site. The work is required by Shropshire Council as a condition (No. 4) of planning application number 14/00462/FUL.

The site is on Land Opposite Sunnyside, off Wrexham Road, Whitchurch, Shropshire, and the proposed development is for the erection of 40 dwellings, formation of vehicular access, site landscaping including a central open space and infrastructure.

The methodology set out in this WSI has been agreed with Dr Andy Wigley, Principal Archaeologist, Historic Environment Team, Shropshire Council (HET-SC). HET-SC has recommended that a watching brief is carried out during all groundworks due to be carried out on the site.

All work will be undertaken in accordance with the standards and guidelines of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2015).

2 Site specific objectives

The aims of the watching brief, as defined by the CIfA (2015) are:

- To allow a rapid investigation and recording of any archaeological features that are uncovered during the proposed groundworks within the application area.
- To provide the opportunity, if needed, for the watching archaeologist to signal to all interested parties, before the destruction of the material in question, that an archaeological find has been made for which the resources allocated to the watching brief are not sufficient to support the treatment to a satisfactory or proper standard

3 Watching Brief Methodology

General

The archaeological watching brief will be undertaken by AW staff using current best practice.

All work will be carried out by a suitable qualified archaeologist with relevant level membership of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) and will follow the CIfA Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief (2015).

Detailed

The Watching Brief will be carried out by a suitably qualified archaeologist or archaeologists during the construction of all ground-works with a potential to cut into or expose the underlying sub-soil. This will include activities associated with the construction of: foundation trenches, service trenches, soak-aways, access road and landscaping). The mechanical excavation will be undertaken by a machine using a toothless ditching bucket wherever possible. Any landscaping activities involving large-scale topsoil removal will be undertaken by an excavator equipped with a large, flat-bladed bucket.

If archaeological features, finds or deposits are uncovered, work will be stopped in the area of the exposed feature in order that the supervising archaeologist can clean and identify the extent and nature of the feature and for excavation and recording to take place.

All archaeological deposits that are identified will be mapped, cleaned, recorded and fully excavated. The developer will provide a safe working area and sufficient time to record and excavate all features to the satisfaction of AW and HET-SC. Full excavation of identified features will not be compromised by the construction programme.

Contingency Arrangements

In the event of significant archaeological features being discovered all activities in the surrounding area of the site will be temporarily suspended. This will allow a period of consultation with the HET-SC and if required the opinion of specialists.

Following such consultation, recommendations will be presented to the Developer and the HET-SC.

The methodology and timescale of additional archaeological work to investigate such features will be presented and included in the Developers Programme; the feature will be fenced off and secured thus allowing the site programme to continue

Recording

Recording will be carried out using AW recording systems (pro-forma context sheets etc), using a continuous number sequence for all contexts.

Plans and sections will be drawn to a scale of 1:50, 1:20 and 1:10 as required and related to Ordnance Survey datum and published boundaries where appropriate.

All features identified will be tied in to the OS survey grid and fixed to local topographical boundaries and related to the developer's site plan. The location of all features will also be recorded using a Topcon GTS725 total station.

Photographs will be taken in digital format, using a 14MP camera with photographs stored in Tiff format. Should significant remains be identified that require excavation, photographs will also be taken in black and white and colour slide (35mm film).

The archaeologist undertaking the watching brief will have access to the AW metal detector and be trained in its use.

Artefacts

Archaeological artefacts recovered during the course of the excavation will be cleaned and labelled using an accession number, which will be obtained from the local museum. A single number sequence will be allocated to all finds. The artefacts will be stored appropriately until they are deposited with a suitable local museum.

All finds of gold and silver will be removed to a safe place and the Environment Agency, HET-SC and the local coroner informed, within the guidelines of the Treasure Act 1996.

Any finds which are considered to be in need of immediate conservation will be referred to a UKIC qualified conservator (Phil Parkes at Cardiff University).

Human remains

In the event of burials or cremations being found all work will be halted in the area of the burials and their extent and nature established. The client, HET-SC and the Ministry of Justice will be informed and a methodology of excavation agreed which will adhere to Ministry of Justice Guidelines.

Environmental and technological samples

Environmental samples will be taken where necessary when significant deposits are located. Technological samples will be taken where necessary when significant deposits are located.

Specialists

In the event of certain finds/features etc. being discovered, the site archaeologist may have to seek specialist opinion for assistance. Such specialists will be accessed either internally within AW itself or from an external source. A list of external specialists is given in the table below.

Type	Name	Tel No.
Flint	Dr Amelia Pannett	02920 899509
Animal bone	Jen Kitch	07739 093712
CBM, heat affected clay, Daub etc.	Rachael Hall	01305 259751
Clay pipe	Hilary Major	01376 329316
Glass	Andy Richmond	01234 888800
Cremated and non-cremated human bone	Malin Holst	01759 368483
Metalwork	Kevin Leahy	01652 658261
Neo/BA pottery	Dr Alex Gibson	Bradford University
IA/Roman pottery	Jane Timby	01453 882851
Post Roman pottery	Mr Stephen Clarke	
Charcoal (wood ID)	John Carrot	01388 772167
Waterlogged wood	Nigel Nayling	University of Wales (Lampeter)
Molluscs and pollen	Dr James Rackham	01992 552256
Charred and waterlogged plant remains	Wendy Carruthers	01443 233466

4 Post-Fieldwork Programme

Conservation

After agreement with the landowner arrangements will be made for the long term conservation and storage of all artefacts in an appropriate local or county museum.

Archive

The site archive will be prepared in accordance with MAP 2, Appendix 3 (English Heritage 1991). It will comprise all the data recovered during the fieldwork and shall be quantified, ordered and indexed and will be internally consistent. The archive will be deposited with the finds in a suitable local museum.

Reporting

The results of the watching brief will be submitted in an illustrated and bound report, which will include the following material:

- Non-technical summary
- Location plan showing the area/s covered by the watching brief, all artefacts, structures and features found
- Plan and section drawings with ground level, ordnance datum and vertical and horizontal scales.
- Written description and interpretation of all deposits identified, including their character, function, potential dating and relationship to adjacent features. Specialist descriptions and illustrations of all artefacts and soil samples will be included as appropriate.
- An indication of the potential of archaeological deposits which have not been disturbed by the development
- Statement of local, regional and national context of the remains
- A detailed archive list at the rear listing all contexts recorded, all samples finds and find types, drawings and photographs taken. This will include a statement of the intent to deposit, and location of deposition, of the archive.

Monitoring

Any changes to the specification that the contractor may wish to make after approval will be communicated to HET-SC for approval on behalf of the Planning Authority.

Representatives of HET-SC will be given access to the site so that they may monitor the progress of the watching brief. HET-SC will be kept regularly informed about developments, both during the site works and subsequently during any potential post-excavation.

Archive Format & Deposition

The full site archive will be deposited within one month of the completion of the client report.

The paper/drawing/digital archive will be deposited at the offices of HET-SC with the finds will be deposited with the appropriate local museum. AW will agree the location and timing of the deposition of the archive before the contract commences.

The archive will include all site notes, finds, documents, drawings, photographs, digital data and a copy of the final report and any prior draft versions. All of these items will be clearly quantified in tabular form in an 'archive deposition statement' located at the rear of the clients report, and their ultimate location and proposed date of deposition stated.

5 Resources and timetable

Standards

The watching brief will be undertaken by AW staff using current best practice.

All work will be undertaken to the standards and guidelines of the IFA.

Staff

The project will be undertaken by suitably qualified AW staff.

Equipment

The project will use existing AW equipment.

Timetable of archaeological works

The watching brief will be undertaken at the convenience of the client.

Insurance

AW is an affiliated member of the CBA, and holds Insurance through the CBA insurance service.

Health and safety

All members of staff will adhere to the requirements of the *Health & Safety at Work Act*, 1974, and the Health and Safety Policy Statement of AW.

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APPENDIX IV: Archive Cover Sheet

ARCHIVE COVER SHEET

Wrexham Road, Whitchurch

Site Name:	Wrexham Road, Whitchurch
Site Code:	WRW/15/WB
Other Ref No:	-
NGR:	NGR SJ 53145 41252
Site Type:	Greenfield
Project Type:	Watching Brief
Project Manager:	Kate Pitt
Project Dates:	November 2015 - February 2016
Categories Present:	17 th to 21 st century
Location of Original Archive:	AW
Location of duplicate Archives:	-
Number of Finds Boxes:	NA
Location of Finds:	NA
Museum Reference:	NA
Copyright:	AW
Restrictions to access:	None

Archaeology Wales

Archaeology Wales Limited

Rhos Helyg, Cwm Belan, Llanidloes, Powys SY18 6QF

Tel: +44 (0) 1686 440371

Email: admin@arch-wales.co.uk

Company Directors: Mark Houlston MIFA & Jill Houlston

Company Registered No. 7440770 (England & Wales).

Registered office: Morgan Griffiths LLP, Cross Chambers,
9 High Street, Newtown, Powys, SY16 2NY