

MHLA23



# MOOR HALL LODGES, AUGHTON, WEST LANCASHIRE

WATCHING BRIEF

PLANNING REF. 21/0648/FUL

commissioned by Zerum  
on behalf of Moor Hall Limited

October 2023



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#### PROJECT INFO:

HA Project Code **MHLA23** / HA Project No **2023-76** / NGR **SD 41143 05364** / Parish **Aughton** / Local Authority **West Lancashire Parish Council** / Fieldwork Date **12/06/2023-14/06/2023** / OASIS Ref. **headland1-518537** / Archive Repository **TBC**

#### PROJECT TEAM:

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## PROJECT SUMMARY

Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd was commissioned by Zerum to undertake a programme of archaeological monitoring on groundbreaking works for the development of Moor Hall, Aughton. The excavation of service trenches were monitored, and a large pit was uncovered, containing finds from the 13th-14th century to the post-medieval period.

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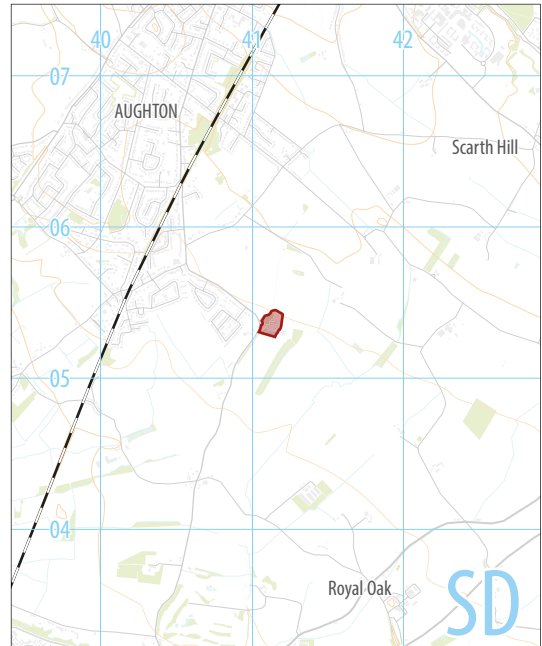
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Moor Hall Lodges  
Aughton  
West Lancashire



0 200km  
1:12,500,000 @ A4



0 50m  
1:2,000 @ A4

development boundary  
monitored area

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ILLUS 1 Site location



# MOOR HALL LODGES, AUGHTON, WEST LANCASHIRE

## WATCHING BRIEF

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Zerum, on behalf of the client Moor Hall Lodges commissioned Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd to undertake a programme of archaeological works for the development works at Moor Hall, Aughton. The overarching project comprised the construction of seven woodland lodges and associated landscaping within the grounds of the Grade2\* Listed Building, Moor Hall, which dates to the mid 16th Century. Groundbreaking works were archaeologically monitored as laid out in the agreed WSI (Headland 2023), to fulfil the conditions of planning application 21/0648/FUL for development works to be undertaken at Moor Hall, Aughton.

#### 1.1 SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The location of the monitored area of works was in the grounds of Moor Hall, NGR SD 41143 05364 (Illus 1), which is a 16th century building with associated Victorian gardens and outbuildings. The site is situated at 57m AOD and covers a total area of around 3.3 hectares, situated mainly in an area of woodland (Illus 2), and currently the extant building is in use as a fine dining restaurant and hotel.

The bedrock geology of the site consists of Wilmslow Sandstone Formation. Which comprises of a sedimentary bedrock formed between 252.2 and 247.1 million years ago during the Triassic period (NERC 2018). Superficial deposits comprise of slowly permeable loamy and clayey soils (Cranfield University 2023).

#### 1.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

A Heritage Assessment (Miller 2021) has been produced for the historic building at Moor Hall. The full details can be found within the original document although a summary has been provided below:

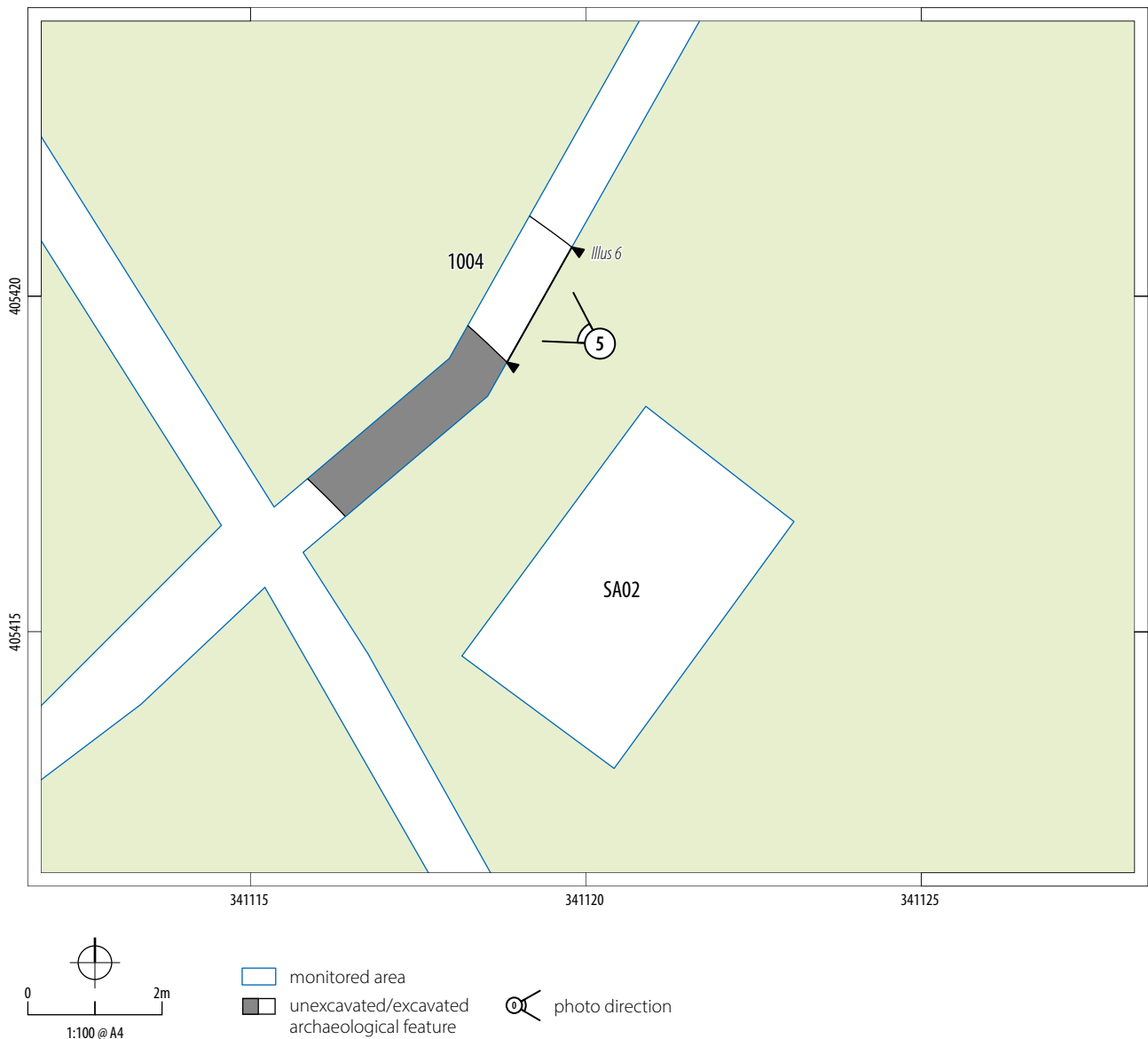
Moor Hall was first recorded in 1282 on a site with possible preceding activity. The land was purchased in 1533 by Peter Stanley, and the Moor Hall building was constructed shortly afterwards. As a Grade 2\* designated listed building, Moor Hall is noted to be nationally important both architecturally and historically. As it is an example of a late medieval country house, with landscaped grounds consisting of additional barns, ancillary buildings, a walled garden and a lake. There is also a possibility of a moat which may have existed, lying north of the extant house.

In 2017, the building was converted for use as a restaurant although minimal changes were made during these renovations. Proposed lodges which are to be built on the land at Moor Hall have been assessed for their impact on the extant historic assets on site, these were assessed as a low scale of harm.

A 1km baseline HER (Historic Environment Record) search was undertaken to provide background information of any local historic records. Within this perimeter, the Historic building record of the Stable Block at Moor Hall is the only HER listed.

24 HER monument entries were listed within the 1km of Moor Hall. Excluding two entries which are directly related to the Moor Hall site; there was one nearby findspot of a medieval lead spindle whorl which was identified; whilst the remaining 21 monument entries relate to the post medieval settlement and agricultural activity, primarily dating to the 19th-20th century.

No prehistoric activity has been identified within the vicinity of the PDA.



**ILLUS 2** Excavation plan showing pit [1004]

### 1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In line with the WSI, the main objective of the archaeological monitoring was to mitigate the effects of the development on subsurface archaeological deposits through preservation by record.

More specific aims of the watching brief included:

- › Monitoring any groundbreaking works relating to the installation of services, in association with the building of proposed lodges located within the grounds of Moor Hall, and;
- › Establishing the location, extent, nature and date of archaeological features or deposits present within the areas subject to ground works and preserving them by full excavation and creation of a complete record.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 SITE WORKS

During works, a suitably qualified archaeologist monitored all groundbreaking works which included the opening of service trenches and soakaways; these works were undertaken as specified in the WSI. All excavations were carried out with a 1.7 tonne excavator equipped with a 600mm toothless bucket. The excavation ended when the maximum required depth was reached.

Archaeological deposits were subject to a programme of excavation and recording. This was undertaken to provide information on any previously unrecorded features of archaeological interest within the PDA.

## 2.2 RECORDING

All recording followed Headland Archaeology standard procedures and was in accordance with ClfA Standards and Guidance for conducting archaeological excavation and watching briefs (ClfA 2014). All contexts were given unique numbers and all recording was undertaken on pro forma context record sheets that conform to accepted archaeological standards.

A photographic record of all works was taken using digital photography with a graduated metric scale clearly visible. All photographs have been recorded with individual numbers and include information on the contexts visible and the direction taken.

## 2.3 REPORTING AND ARCHIVES

The results of the works are presented below. A summary report has been prepared for submission to the OASIS database (headland1-518537).

The complete project archive will be deposited with Blackburn Museum (Accession number TBC).

# 3 RESULTS

## 3.1 EXCAVATION

A 65m continuous service trench was excavated in the northeast corner of the Moor Hall site, measuring 0.6m in width and 0.4m in depth. Small 5m branches led from this main trench. Two soakaway test pits were also excavated. As expected with the woodland location, two tree bowls were identified within the service trenches and large roots truncated the topsoil and natural heavily throughout the PDA (Illus 3).

### *Service Trench*

The service trench contained a dark greyish brown topsoil (1001) (Illus 4) with extensive rooting and medium sized tree roots with an average diameter of 0.20m. The geological subsoil (1002) varied in composition but was mainly a light brownish grey clayey fine sand, in some patches becoming coarse and darker. The topsoil was moderately deep with an average depth of 0.50m–0.60m. In some areas of the trench the natural wasn't reached as the topsoil was deeper than the required depth of excavation, in particular the southern end of the trench.

Within the central section of the service trench, pit [1004] was identified, measuring approximately 5m in width, 0.6m in depth and extending beyond the width of the service trench. It had well-defined edges, gently sloping sides and gradual breaks of slope (Illus 5, Illus 6). It did not extend into soakaway 2. It contained a single fill [1005] comprising dark grey silty sand which contained disarticulated animal bone, industrial waste and a single sherd of 13th–14th century medieval pottery. Environmental evidence indicated the pit laid open for a significant period of time and provided a wet environment at times. The lack of water-affected natural, water-

lain deposits and organic decay-related deposits within the feature indicate this feature was unlikely to have functioned as a pond, or more long-term water-filled feature. This alongside its size and shape in plan suggested it may have formed a waste disposal pit which subsequently accumulated waste material through various periods. The variety of finds and environmental evidence, both in terms of material and dating indicated a lengthy chronology and high potential for post-use disturbance. With the significant heavy tree cover across the area significant root disturbance was likely, increasing the likelihood of intrusive/residual finds entering this feature post-use.

### *Soakaway Pits*

Soakaway 1 (SA01) was oriented north to south and reached a depth of 1.7m. It measured 1.6m x 0.8m in plan. The topsoil (1001) was 0.40m in depth and was a dark greyish brown silty sand. The natural (1002) was a light greyish brown clayey sand. No archaeology was identified within this soakaway.

Soakaway 2 (SA02) was orientated southwest to northeast and reached a depth of 1.40m. It measured 1.6m x 0.6m in plan. The topsoil (1001) was 0.60m thick and had the same topsoil (1001) and natural (1002) composition as seen across the rest of site. SA02 was located 2m to the south-east of pit [1004] identified in the service trench however no archaeology was identified within this soakaway.

## 3.2 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Laura Bailey

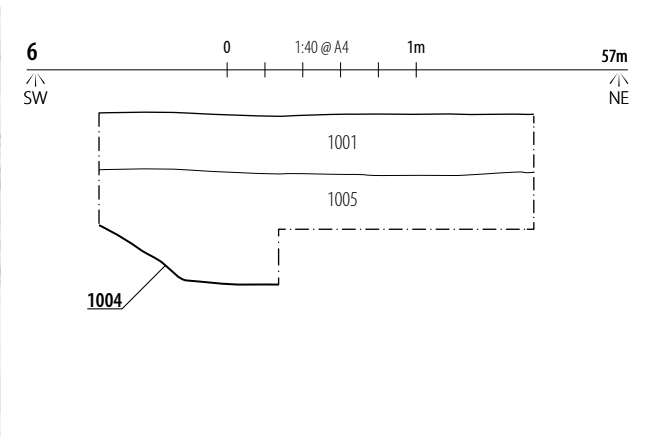
This report details the assessment of environmental material from one 30-litre bulk sample, and hand-collected animal bone recovered during an archaeological watching brief at Moor Hall Lodges, Aughton, West Lancashire. The site was located in an area of woodland within the grounds of a 16th century building with associated Victorian gardens. The bulk sample and animal bone were both recovered from the fill of a pit, [1004].

The aims of this assessment are to determine the presence and preservation of any archaeobotanical and archaeozoological remains, and to evaluate their significance and potential for enhancing the environmental and economic interpretation of the site.

### *Method*

Samples were processed using a Siraf-style water floatation system. The floating material (flot) was collected using a 250µm mesh and the residue (retent) a 1mm mesh. Both fractions were air-dried, and the heavy residue was sieved at 10mm, 5mm and 1mm and then sorted for the recovery of finds and environmental remains. Once dried, the flots were scanned using a binocular microscope at magnifications up to x60.

Macro-botanical identifications were carried out with reference to standard catalogues (Cappers et al 2012 and Jacomet 2006) and using modern reference material. Nomenclature for economic plants follows Van Zeist (1984) and for other plant taxa follows Stace (1991).



**ILLUS 3** General shot of excavator working in wooded area    **ILLUS 4** South-east facing section of service trench, showing topsoil (1001) and natural (1002)    **ILLUS 5** South-east facing section of pit [1004]    **ILLUS 6** North-west facing section of pit [1004]

Faunal remains were examined by eye or under low magnification and, as far as possible, identified to species, taxonomic group and skeletal element, with reference to Schmid (1972) and Hillson (1992). Remains that could not be identified to species, such as ribs and vertebrae, were grouped by taxonomic size. The large mammal category was equivalent to cattle, horse or red deer. Medium-sized mammal was equivalent to sheep/goat, pig and small deer. Small mammal was equivalent to dog, cat, rabbit or hare-sized mammal. Very small mammal was equivalent to species such as shrew, vole, mouse and rat. The condition was assessed with reference to Harland et al (2003).

Fragmentation and any evidence for modification, in the form of tool marks, burning and gnawing were also recorded. Butchery marks were described by type, for example, chop mark, knife mark, and their position noted. Where possible, conjoining fragments were counted as one element to minimize distortion.

## Results

The results of the environmental assessment are presented in Table 2.1 (Archaeobotanical results) and Table 2.2 (Animal bone).

### Uncharred wild taxa

The sample taken from fill (1005) of pit [1004] produced frequent untransformed archaeobotanical remains. The assemblage contained species that are commonly found in scrub, woodland and aquatic environments. Scrubby taxa were represented by seeds of elder

(*Sambucus nigra*) and bramble (*Rubus* sp.). The presence of mature trees was indicated by beech bracts (*Fagus sylvatica*) and birch seeds (*Betula* sp.) together with dicotyledonous leaf fragments. Aquatic taxa included duckweed (*Lemna* sp.), pondweed, and celery-leaved watercress (*Ranunculus sceleratus*). The seeds and leaf fragments were all in excellent condition.

### Wood

Fill (1005) of pit [1004] contained several blocky wood fragments and twigs that are likely to be modern.

### Animal bone

A total of 2085g of bone, NISP (Number of Identified Specimens): 7, was recovered from fill (1005) of pit [1004]. The assemblage comprised elements of horse (*Equus ferus caballus*) forelimbs and hindlimbs. These consisted of a left radius and ulna fragment, a right radius and two almost complete metacarpals, an almost complete tibia, a femur shaft fragment, and a first phalanx.

The bone surfaces were generally well-preserved but some damage was apparent on various elements including the proximal articular end of the tibia and the articular ends of the right radius, which were both badly damaged and flaky. One of the metacarpals appears to have been longitudinally split from mid-shaft to the distal end and the resulting surface was worn and flaky, which suggests that it is likely to be an old break.





**ILLUS 7** North facing shot of excavated trenches

Four of the elements were ageable and two of the bones, a metacarpal and the phalanx, were measurable. No butchery marks were apparent on the bones.

### *Discussion*

The environmental assemblage from Moor Hall Lodges provides little information on site economy but it does provide some information on the local environment and the nature of the pit from which it was recovered. The fill of the pit contained elements of trees, including a beech bract, alder seeds, twig and wood fragments, together with scrubby taxa such as elder and bramble. Beech was one of the last trees to colonise Britain and its natural range lies S and E of a line between The Wash and the Severn (Sterry 2007). It was widely planted elsewhere as an ornamental tree (ibid), and this is likely to be the case at Moor Hall Lodge. It is likely that the assemblage represents vegetation from the immediate wooded environment that has accumulated in the pit. Some of the seeds, such as the aquatic taxa, suggest that the pit is likely to have been open for some time and periodically waterfilled.

The animal bone assemblage contained only horse bone, which may have been from one individual. Bone preservation varied. Although the surfaces of the bones were generally well preserved, some of the articular ends were damaged and abraded, which suggests that some elements may have lain exposed prior to burial.

### *Summary*

The environmental assemblage from pit [1005] at Moor Hall Lodges appears to be of relatively recent origin. The pit is likely to have been periodically waterfilled, which allowed aquatic plants to colonise. Disarticulated horse bone was then disposed of in the feature. It is possible that the pit became naturally infilled over time with overgrown, scrubby vegetation and leaf litter.

### *Scientific dating potential of the remains*

The dating potential of the remains will be dependent on the nature of the research questions posed. The most appropriate component for radiocarbon dating would be the horse bone.

### *Recommendations for further environmental research*

No further work is recommended on the environmental assemblage. A summary of this report should be included in any further publications.

### *Recommendations for Archiving*

The environmental assemblage does not warrant archiving. It is proposed that the assemblage be discarded.

### 3.3 FINDS ASSESSMENT

Rebecca Sillwood and Jeff Speakman

The finds assemblage numbered six pieces of industrial waste (4g), two pieces of ceramic building material (1g), one sherd of glass (1g) and one sherd of pottery (6g). These were found in a single environmental sample from a single pit. The finds were of medieval and post-medieval date. The finds are summarised by trench/feature in Table 1 and a complete catalogue is given at the end.

**TABLE 1** Summary of finds assemblage by feature with spot dating

FEATURE	FEATURE NO.	POTTERY (MEDI)		GLASS CBM			INDUSTRIAL WASTE		SPOT DATE
		QTY	WGT (G)	QTY	QTY	WGT (G)	QTY	WGT (G)	
Pit	1004	1	6	1	2	1	6	4	13th–14thc; PM
Total		1	6	1	2	1	6	4	

*(dating is for finds in the fills of these features and does not necessarily date the features; small assemblages should be used with particular caution for dating purposes).*

#### Methodology

The report includes only finds from sample retents; no finds were hand-collected on site. The finds were collected, processed and packaged for long term storage in accordance with professional guidelines (CifA 2014b; Watkinson and Neal 1998). The finds were each assessed and recorded by appropriate specialists using relevant typologies (CifA 2021). The resultant data was then drawn together into one MS Excel database. A copy of this data is given at the end of the report. All finds were assessed by eye and catalogued by count and weight.

#### Medieval pottery

Jeff Speakman

A single sherd of medieval pottery (6g) was recovered from sample <1> from pit [1004]. The sherd is small and abraded but likely represents a flanged jar of Pale Firing Splash Glazed Gritty Ware of 13th-14th century date. The pottery is of probable local production, but no known kilns have been excavated in this area. It is typical of the

pottery found across Merseyside and especially from the Lancashire side of the Mersey. The sherd has a very faint and patchy splashed glaze, made from local coal measures clays with the addition of sub-rounded quartz and occasional red iron oxide inclusions.

#### Glass

Rebecca Sillwood

One small fragment of green bottle glass (1g) was recovered from sample <1> of pit [1004]. The glass is undiagnostic but of post-medieval date.

#### Ceramic building material

Rebecca Sillwood

Two thin slivers of post-medieval plaster (1g) were found in sample <1> from pit [1004]. The pieces are thin and grey in colour.

#### Industrial waste

Rebecca Sillwood

A total of six pieces of industrial waste (4g) were recovered from sample <1> of pit [1004]. Four fragments comprised unburnt coal and two were probable clinker fragments. The coal was likely used for fuel and the clinker is evidence of a high-temperature fire nearby.

#### Dating, distribution & discussion

Only a single context accounts for all of the meagre finds from this site, and they were all recovered from the environmental sample. They are few and of mixed medieval and modern date and thus do not provide clear dating evidence for this feature.

#### Recommendations for further work

All finds categories are fully recorded and no further work is required.

#### Recommendations for archive

Retention and discard recommendations are recorded in the finds data. They are summarised here. The archive will be prepared in accordance with professional standards (AAF 2011) and the specific requirements of the receiving repository. It is recommended that all the finds be discarded.

## 4 DISCUSSION

A single large and relatively shallow pit was identified within the service trench, likely functioning as a waste disposal pit. The earlier medieval finds were likely intrusive/residual material incorporated into the deposits through root action or from topsoil likely redeposited within the feature. This feature is evidence of medieval to post-medieval human activity, related to activity within the bounds of the moated site. The environmental evidence was indicative of a similar scrub/woodland environment as seen today in the vicinity of the investigation area, and the lack of other features seen within the cable trench suggests little substantive change has occurred to this section of the site throughout its history as a moated site, seeing little in the way of archaeologically-visible activity.

No other archaeological remains were discovered during the of works. It was clear to see the high amounts of truncation from the extant and historic mature tree cover (Illus 7) would have had a significant impact on the survival of shallow archaeological remains across the site if present.

These works have not been able to specifically contribute towards the North West Regional Research Framework (NWRFF; Research Framework 2023) questions posed in the WSI – PM03, PM10 and LM34 (relating to moated sites and pre-18th century enclosure).

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## 6 APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1 SITE AND CONTEXT REGISTERS

#### Appendix 1.1 Context register

CONTEXT	INTERPRETATION	DESCRIPTION	DIMENSIONS
1001	Topsoil	Dark greyish brown silty sand	0.45m
1002	Natural	Light greyish orange silty sand	—
1003	Void	—	—
1004	Cut of pit	Large pit with well-defined edges, gently sloping sides and gradual breaks of slope	5m x 0.6m x 0.6m
1005	Fill of pit [1004]	Dark grey silty sand	0.6m
1006	Void	—	—

#### Appendix 1.2 Photographic register

PHOTO #	DESCRIPTION	FACING
1001	Location shot	SW
1002	Plan shot of SA01	SE
1003	SE facing section of service trench	NW
1004	Plan shot of SA02	NW
1005	General shot	W
1006	Location shot of SA02	NW
1007	West facing section of service trench	E
1008	General shot	S
1009	General shot	N
1010	General shot of SA02	NE
1011	Shot of tree bowl	NE
1012	Shot of tree bowl	NE
1013	South-east facing section of treebowl	NW

PHOTO #	DESCRIPTION	FACING
1014	Plan shot of pit [1004]	SE
1015	Plan shot of pit [1004]	SE
1016	Plan shot of pit [1004]	NE
1017	North-west facing section of pit [1004]	SE
1018	North-west facing section of pit [1004]	SE
1019	North-west facing section of pit [1004]	SE
1020	South-east facing section of pit [1004]	NW
1021	South-east facing section of pit [1004]	NW
1022	South-east facing section of pit [1004]	NW
1023	General shot of pit [1004]	SW
1024	General shot of pit [1004]	E
1025	South-east facing section of pit [1004]	NW
1026	Plan shot of pit [1004]	NE
1027	Plan shot of pit [1004]	NE
1028	Plan shot of pit [1004]	NE
1029	North-west facing section of pit [1004]	SE
1030	North-west facing section of pit [1004]	SE
1031	North-west facing section of pit [1004]	SE
1032	South-east facing section of SA02	NW
1033	South-east facing section of pit [1004]	NW
1034	General shot	NE
1035	General shot	NW

#### Appendix 1.3 Samples register

SAMPLE	CONTEXT	VOL
001	1005	30L

#### Appendix 1.4 Drawing register

SITE	DRAWING	DESCRIPTION
MHLA23	001	South-east facing section of pit [1004]



## APPENDIX 2 ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

## Appendix 2.1 Environmental results

<b>CONTEXT</b>			<b>1005</b>
<b>SAMPLE</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>FEATURE</b>			<b>1004</b>
<b>INTERPRETATION</b>			<b>PIT</b>
Sample Vol (l)	30		
Flot Vol (ml)	30		
Sufficient for AMS?			N
Full analysis?			N
<b>UNCHARRED PLANT REMAINS</b>			
<i>Betula pubescens</i>	Birch		R
<i>Dicotyledonous leaf</i>			F
<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	Beech		R
<i>Lemna sp.</i>	Duckweed		R
<i>Pondweed</i>			R
<i>Ranunculus sceleratus</i>	Celery-leaved crowfoot		R
<i>Rubus sp.</i>	Brambles		O
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elder		F
<b>OTHER</b>			
Beetle			R
Wood			F
Scale of abundance: R = rare (0–5), O = occasional (6–15), F = frequent (16–50), A = abundant (51–200), D = Dominant (>200)			

## Appendix 2.2 Animal bone

CONTEXT	SAMPLE	FEATURE	PRES	SPOT DATE	NISP	WGT (G)	COUNTABLE			AGEABLE	MEASURABLE	BUTCHERY	GNAWING	COMMENTS
							EQUID			EQUID	EQUID			
							TEETH	MANDIBLE	BONE	ALL	ALL			
1005	1	Fill of pit [1004]	Good	–	1	73	–	–	1	–	1	–	–	Phalanx
1005	–	Fill of pit [1004]	Good	–	6	2104	–	–	6	4	1	–	–	–

APPENDIX 3 FINDS DATA

*Appendix 3.1 Finds catalogue*

CONTEXT	TYPE	CUT	SAMPLE	QTY	WGT (G)	MATERIAL	OBJECT	DESCRIPTION	SPOT DATE
1005	Pit	1004	1	1	1	Glass	Bottle	Green body sherd; small fragment	PM
1005	Pit	1004	1	2	1	CBM	Plaster	Grey thin fragments	PM
1005	Pit	1004	1	4	1	Industrial waste	Coal	Unburnt fragments; small	Undated
1005	Pit	1004	1	2	3	Industrial waste	Clinker	Burnt clay fragments?	Undated
1005	Pit	1004	1	1	6	Pottery (Medi)	Pale Firing Splash Glazed Gritty Ware	Flanged jar? pale firing gritty fabric with a very faint and patchy splashed glaze; local coal measures clays with the addition of sub-rounded quartz and occasional red iron oxide inclusions	13th–14th

## APPENDIX 4 OASIS DATA COLLECTION FROM: ENGLAND

*OASIS ID (UID): headland1-518537*

<b>Project Name:</b>	Watching Brief at Moor Hall Lodges, Aughton, West Lancashire
<b>Activity type:</b>	Watching Brief
<b>Sitecode(s)</b>	MHLA23
<b>Project Identifier(s):</b>	Moor Hall Lodges, Aughton, West Lancs, MHLA23
<b>Planning Id:</b>	21/0648/FUL
<b>Reason for Investigation:</b>	Planning requirement
<b>Organisation Responsible for work:</b>	Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd
<b>Project Dates:</b>	12-Jun-2023 – 14-Jun-2023
<b>HER:</b>	Lancashire SMR
<b>HER Identifiers:</b>	[no data]
<b>Project Methodology:</b>	Monitoring of ground breaking works for services trenches related to the installation of lodges within the grounds of Moor Hall Restaurant.
<b>Project Results:</b>	Watching brief completed for groundbreaking works, no further work recommended.
<b>Keywords:</b>	–
<b>Archive:</b>	–



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