NORTH PENNINES ARCHAEOLOGY LTD

Client Report No. 263/05

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT AND FIELD EVALUATION AT SOLWAY SCHOOL, SILLOTH, CUMBRIA

For CAPITA SYMONDS LTD

NGR NY 1125 5393

Planning Application Nos: 2/05/9026

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CONTENTS

Page

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

In June 2005 North Pennines Archaeology Ltd undertook an archaeological field evaluation at Solway School, Silloth, Cumbria. The work was requested in response to a series of planning applications for Mr M Withey of Capita Symonds Ltd, a scheme considered to affect an area of high archaeological potential. The work conformed to the standards set out in a brief provided by Cumbria County Council Historic Environment Service.

The work involved the consultation of the County Sites and Monuments Record in Kendal and the County Record Office, Carlisle, in order to assess the existing information regarding the site's historic, archaeological, topographical and geographical context prior to the commencement of fieldwork. This involved the collection of all readily available information regarding the archaeological landscape of the study area, including the locations and settings of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Listed Buildings, Parks and Gardens and other, non-designated archaeological remains. This was followed by a visual site inspection and the excavation of a trial trench in order to assess the presence/absence, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains.

No significant archaeological deposits were observed within the trench. The strongest potential for archaeological activity comes from the Roman period, with previous work indicating that a possible Roman road may run under the school (Walker 2003). Though the evaluation area was relatively small, there is absolutely no evidence of this, or any other structure previously identified, such as Milefortlet 11, or Turret 10 B.

The impact of any development within the proposed area is believed to be negligible. Despite the rich archaeological landscape, there is no evidence that any of these sites spread into this area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

North Pennines Archaeology would like to thank Mr M Withey of Capita Symonds Ltd and Jeremy Parsons of Cumbria County Council for their assistance throughout the project.

The project was managed and directed by Richard Hewitt, assisted by Mark Dodd and Jen Kinsman. The report was written by Mark Dodd. The Illustrations were produced by Matthew Town and the Project Design was produced by Gareth Davies.

1 INTRODUCTION AND LOCATION

1.1 On October 27th 2005, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd undertook an archaeological field evaluation at Solway School, Silloth, Cumbria on behalf of Mr M Withey of Capita Symonds Ltd. The work was required in a brief provided by Jeremy Parsons of Cumbria County Council Historic Environment Service (CCCHES, 2005) in response to a planning application for the construction of a new music room. Silloth is situated 23 miles west of Carlisle and approximately 10 miles north of Maryport, on the Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Figure 1).

1.2 The site is situated within an area of landscaped grounds on which the school has been constructed, at a height of 8.87m AOD. The specific area to be developed currently functions as playground, constructed with tarmac (Figure 2). The geology consists of wind blown dune sand and shingle of raised storm beaches.

2 AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 The work undertaken consisted of a visual site inspection and field evaluation. This consisted of a single linear trench, which measured 2m x 5m to assess any surviving archaeological remains.

2.2 Project Design

2.2.1 A project design was prepared in response to a brief prepared by Cumbria County Council Archaeology Service and English Heritage for an archaeological field evaluation. This included a detailed specification of works to be carried out, which consisted of a desk-based assessment prior to fieldwork, a visual site inspection, the excavation of a single trial trench and a programme of post excavation and reporting.

2.3 Desk-Based Assessment

2.3.1 The assessment involved the consultation of the Cumbria County Council Sites and Monuments Record, Kendal. This was in order to obtain information on the location of all designated sites and areas of historic interest and any other, non-designated sites within the study area, which included monuments, findspots, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.

2.3.2 An electronic enquiry was also made of English Heritage's National Monuments Record and the website of the Archaeology Data Service. This was in order to enhance and augment the data obtained from a search of the appropriate repositories.

2.3.3 Further documentary study was undertaken at the County Record Office, Carlisle, which involved the collection of all relevant historical maps and documents including surveys, Tithe and Enclosure Maps, Acts of Parliament and early Ordnance Survey maps.

2.3.4 The desk study was undertaken in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments (IFA 1994).

2.4 Visual Site Inspection

2.4.1 A visual site inspection was undertaken by Richard Hewitt prior to the commencement of fieldwork which found neither hazards to health or safety nor any constraints to undertaking fieldwork, such as Tree Preservation Orders or public rights of way.

2.4.2 The walkover survey viewed the area of development for any visible archaeological remains and found none. It was found to be covered with tarmac, which serves as a playground for the school.

2.4.3 Located within the area of the development is a manhole cover, which suggests the presence of some underlying drainage systems.

2.5 Field Evaluation

2.5.1 The field evaluation consisted of the excavation of a single linear trial trench (Figure 2) measuring 5m x 2m, which provided a 11% sample of an area 90m^2. This was in order to produce a predictive model of surviving archaeological remains detailing zones of relevant importance against known development proposals.

2.5.2 In summary, the main objectives of the excavation were:

- to establish the presence/absence, nature, extent and state of preservation of archaeological remains and to record these were they are observed;
- to establish the character of those features in terms of cuts, soil matrices and interfaces;
- to recover artefactual material, especially that useful for dating purposes;
- to recover paleoenvironmental material where it survives in order to understand site and landscape formation processes.

2.5.3 The trench was mechanically excavated by a JCB 3CX excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket, under archaeological supervision, to the natural substrate. The trench was then manually cleaned.

2.5.4 Photography was undertaken using Canon EOS 100 and EOS 300V Single Lens Reflex (SLR) cameras. A photographic record was made using digital photography, 200 ISO Colour Print and Colour Slide film.

2.5.5 All work was undertaken in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations (IFA 1994).

2.6 Project Archive

2.6.1 The full archive has been produced to a professional standard in accordance with the current English Heritage guidelines set out in the Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage, 2nd Ed. 1991). The archive will eventually be deposited within an appropriate repository and a copy of the report given to the County Sites and Monuments Record, where viewing will be available on request.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND AND RAPID DESK BASED ASSESSMENT

3.1 The site is located within the centre of Silloth, close to a Roman fort and part of the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site (Scheduled Monument 27735). It also lies within the visual envelope of the World Heritage Site.

3.2 Evidence of Roman period activity in North Cumbria consists of the military installations of the Stanegate and Hadrian's Wall systems and their associated 'native' settlements. The military installations consisted of milefortlets, turrets and a palisade linked by a metalled trackway. There is evidence of two phases of coastal defence at Silloth identified from aerial photographs, an earlier palisade and associated features are known to have been built prior to the construction of the known system of towers between milefortlets (OAN 2004). Across the area to the east are a pair of side ditches, probably the remains of a coastal road (Ibid.).

3.3 A number of sites and finds spots have been recorded near to the vicinity of the proposed development on the SMR database. The majority of these are believed to be of Roman date, but also include finds from the prehistoric periods. The first, second and third editions of the Ordnance Survey were also consulted, but none of these showed any potential archaeological features. There is no indication of any structures prior to 1925 on the third edition of the Ordnance Survey (Figures 3 and 4).

3.4 With regards to aerial photography, none could be found that relate specifically to the area of proposed development. References to aerial photography relate to the initial identification of sites entered into the SMR database.

3.5 Prehistoric.

3.5.1 Silloth Pick-Axe Find (SMR No 379)

NGR 31000 554000

Several Neolithic flaked flint axes or picks have been located on the raised beach at Silloth.

3.5.2 Silloth Field System, Settlement Cropmark, Holme Low (SMR No 4196)

NGR 311500 553600

In 1976-77 Barri Jones (Manchester University) carried out excavations over cropmarks located by aerial photography behind the Silloth-Skinburness road, uncovering a possible palisade trench (Higham and Jones 1991). This was a univallate, with an internal bank, measuring approximately 0.6 acres. A number of associated features were also recorded and are suggestive of rural farmstead (OAN 2004). Though in 1994, David Wooliscroft re-excavated the trenches and disregarded the palisade, observing only modern water-pipes (Walker 2003).

3.5.3 The impact of this development upon any prehistoric archaeology is believed to be minimal. Although there have been artefacts recovered close by, there is little evidence to indicate that this site in particular is of specific importance.

3.6 Romano-British.

3.6.1 Turret 10 B, Silloth (SMR No 360)

NGR 311630 554750

Studies of aerial photographs from the area have indicated extensive cropmarks. Although this specific site cannot be readily identified, this is the estimated position of Turret 10 B.

3.6.2 Milefortlet 11, Silloth (SMR No 361)

NGR 311160 553880

Studies of aerial photographs from the area have indicated extensive cropmarks. Although this specific site cannot be readily identified, this is the estimated position of Milefortlet 11.

3.6.3 Solway Lido Cropmark Site (SMR No 9604)

NGR 311470 554310

Multiple linear cropmarks have been identified, running in a straight line from Milefortlet 11.

3.6.4 Roman Camp, Road, Silloth (SMR No 6487)

NGR 311300 554070

Analysis of aerial photographs has identified a double-ditched road running behind the palisaded coastal defences to a square enclosure. Wooliscroft subsequently investigated this in 1994 (Walker 2003).

3.6.5 Romano-British Field System, Silloth (SMR No 6487)

NGR 311300 554070

Aerial photographs and subsequent excavation by Higham, in 1983 identified linear features and a bank and ditched enclosure containing timber structures. This has been identified as a Romano-British farmstead (Higham and Jones 1983).

3.6.6 In 2004 Oxford Archaeology North undertook a DBA on land centred around Solway Lido to the north of the study area. This study identified a high potential for below ground remains dating to the Roman period (OAN 2004).

3.6.7 Previously, North Pennines Archaeology Ltd have undertaken three evaluations on or near to the grounds of Solway School. Two evaluations (Jones 2003, Jones 2005) evidenced no archaeological features of great antiquity, while a third evaluation at Solway Lido recovered evidence of substantial linear ditches and a palisade. Though C^{14} dating indicated that these ditches were in fact 10^{th} Century features (Jones 2004).

3.6.8 There is still potential for significant evidence of Romano-British activity all around the area of proposed development. Direct concern relates to the Roman road, which is believed to follow a line underneath the school and may easily be affected if these suspicions are correct. Otherwise, there is potential that additional features associated with nearby sites could be threatened.

3.7 Medieval and Post-Medieval

3.7.1 There is limited evidence of Medieval or Post-Medieval sites on, or near to the proposed area for development.

3.7.2 The place name for the settlement at Silloth, however, is said to be derived from the sea-lathes or grain storage barns used by the monks of Holm Cultram Abbey, and the settlement consisted of dispersed farms and field barns until the mid 19th century.

3.7.3 The previous evaluation undertaken in March 2004 by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd revealed a series of substantial linear ditches and a number of smaller ditches which could be interpreted as palisade slots (Jones 2004). Three ditches were found to contain a significant amount of slag within their upper fills and quantities of charred grain in their lower fills. C^{14} dates recovered from charcoal samples from the fills of the ditches indicate they remained in use as late as 1000 AD (Ibid.).

4 RESULTS

4.1 A single linear trench was excavated (Plate 1), measuring 5m x 2m, providing a total area of 10m^2 within the 90m^2 footprint of the proposed development.

4.2 All references to cardinal directions refer to site grid north.

4.3 Trench 1

4.3.1 The trench was located in the centre of the proposed development close to the existing assembly hall and was oriented approximately northeast-southwest (Figure 2). The natural substrate (102) was found at a depth of 0.3m, consisting of a fine gravel and sand. This was sealed by a mid to dark red-brown fine gravel and sand with frequent stone inclusions, approximately 0.04m in diameter (101). This was probably a deliberate deposit providing consolidation for the overlying tarmac (100) forming the playground that covers the immediate vicinity.

4.3.2 A ceramic drain was also observed running down the length of the trench, cutting through (102). Presumably leading from the main school building to a manhole located just outside the northeastern end of the trench.

5 THE FINDS

5.1 No Finds were recovered from the evaluation.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 No significant archaeological deposits were observed within the trench. In fact there was no evidence to suggest any activity prior to the construction of Solway Community School. The strongest potential for archaeological activity comes from the Roman period, with previous work indicating that a possible Roman road may follow a line running under the school itself (Walker 2003). Though the evaluation area was relatively small, there is no evidence to suggest that the road ran through the proposed area of development. Taken with the other excavation evidence the potential route of the road can be narrowed down slightly more for the consideration of future development proposals. There was also no evidence that may relate to Milefortlet 11, Turret 10 B, or any remains that have previously been identified.

6.2 Of potential significance is the fact that the natural substrate was observed at a significantly shallower depth than the other excavations carried out by North Pennines Archaeology Ltd. In an evaluation to the southwest, the natural was located at a depth of 1.2m below the current land surface (Jones 2005). This indicates that the overlying deposits are less substantial in the specific area of the proposed development. Highlighting the fact that the topography rises towards the southwest where the deposits are deeper. The reason for this is unclear, though it is worth considering the proposal that Milefortlet 11 is probably located on the higher ground (Walker 2003).

6.3 The impact of any development within the proposed area is believed to be negligible. Despite the rich archaeological landscape, there is no evidence any of the archaeological sites discussed spread into this area.

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8 APPENDIX I – LIST OF CONTEXTS

Context	Type	Description
100	Layer	Tarmac, approximately 0.2m deep covering an area greater than the excavation
101	Layer	Loose, mid to dark red brown fine gravel/sand. Frequent sub-rounded stone inclusions, approximately 0.04m diameter.
102	Natural	Loose, mottled light yellow brown fine gravel/sand. Occasional sub-rounded stone inclusions, approximately 0.03-0.05m diameter.

Table 1: Index of Contexts

9 Appendix II – List of Illustrations

LIST OF PLATES

LIST OF FIGURES

Plate 1: Trench 1