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**Archaeological  
Evaluation**

Whittle Hall Farm,  
Warrington, Cheshire

**Client:** Red Apple  
Design Ltd

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## Summary

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Red Apple Design Ltd has obtained planning consent (Planning Ref 2015/26350) to redevelop the site of Whittle Hall Farm in Great Sankey, Warrington, Cheshire (centred on NGR 357000 389130). The development proposals allow for the demolition of the existing farm buildings and the erection of a two-storey, 70-bed care home.

Salford Archaeology carried out a historic building investigation (CfAA/2016/30) in July 2016. Following this work the existing buildings on the site were demolished. A further programme of archaeological works was proposed once the buildings had been demolished to establish the presence or absence of buried archaeological remains to enable informed recommendations to be made for the future treatment of any surviving remains. This programme of work was undertaken by Salford Archaeology in August 2016.

A heritage appraisal carried out in 2015 (Miller 2015) demonstrated that a farmstead, possibly Great Sankey Manor House, had been known within the study area from the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. This work also noted a pond present on 19<sup>th</sup> century mapping that may have been the remains of an earlier moat, suggesting the possibility that the later farm occupied the site of a medieval hall or farmstead. The standing buildings could be grouped in three phases with the earliest being the cottage which, although heavily modified, contained elements dating to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Following this were the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century barn and fodder shed. Lastly there was a farmhouse, cow and cart shed and a threshing barn dating to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The reuse of older bricks and timber within some of the buildings also indicated a long continuous occupation.

The evaluation works established that no remains of archaeological significance survived within the site and that the earliest remains are likely to have been the 18<sup>th</sup> century cottage recorded during the building investigation and now demolished. The trenching also established that the possible moat feature shown on the 19<sup>th</sup> century mapping was actually a 19<sup>th</sup> century pond and did extend around the site. It had been infilled in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with refuse and was contaminated with fuel oil and asbestos.

# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Planning Background

Red Apple Design Ltd has obtained planning consent (Planning Ref 2015/26350) to redevelop the site of Whittle Hall Farm in Great Sankey, Warrington, Cheshire (centred on NGR 357000 389130, Fig 1). The development proposals allow for the demolition of the existing farm buildings that occupy a 1.76 acre (0.712ha) area and the erection of a two-storey, 70-bed care home.

The site comprised a group of nine buildings, now demolished after the completion of an historic building investigation by Salford Archaeology in July 2016 (CfAA/2016/30), the earliest of which probably dates to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although potentially on the site of an earlier building. The history of this site is poorly understood, although it is believed to have been the manor house of Great Sankey, which is first documented in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. It appears the site was used subsequently as a farmstead and is considered to be of significant local interest as a typical farmstead of the post-medieval period.

In order to secure archaeological interests, Warrington Borough Council attached a condition (No. 3) to planning consent that allowed for an appropriate programme of archaeological investigation to be undertaken in advance of development, in accordance with Paragraph 141 of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

*No development shall take place within the area until the applicant, or their agents or successors in title, has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The work shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the approved scheme.*

*Reason – In interests of the heritage value of the site in accordance with policies CS1 and QE8 of the Local Plan Core Strategy for Warrington*

Following consultation with Warrington Borough Council (WBC) and the Cheshire Archaeology Planning Advisory Service (CAPAS), it was recommended that an archaeological Level II-type building survey was carried out for four of the nine structures prior to demolition. This work was completed in July 2016 (CfAA/2016/30). It was further recommended that an archaeological ‘strip, map and record’ exercise should be carried out after demolition of the buildings is complete. A third phase of trenches across the projected position of the moat was also proposed. The objectives of this is to establish the presence or absence of buried archaeological remains and thus enable informed recommendations to be made for the future treatment of any surviving remains, in line with Paragraph 128 of the NPPF.

In light of this advice, and in order to fulfil the requirements of the planning condition, Red Apple Design Ltd commissioned Salford Archaeology to undertake the required scheme of archaeological investigation. In this instance, the recommended programme of a 'strip, map and record' exercise and trenching was carried out in August 2016.

## 2. The Setting

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### 2.1 Location and Topography

The site (centred on NGR SJ 5700 8911) lies in Great Sankey, situated approximately 2 miles to the north-west of Warrington town centre in Cheshire. It comprises 1.76 acres (0.712ha), and is bounded to the north and west by Littledale Road, to the east by Mossdale Close and open ground to the south. It is set within a wholly residential location, being encompassed by modern housing units (Plate 1, Fig 2). The former farmstead has a fairly level topography, with vehicular access provided from Littledale Road.

There are no nationally designated sites within the study area, nor does it lie in or within 100m of a conservation area. However, the farm, now demolished, is included in Warrington Borough Council's local heritage list.



*Plate 1: Recent aerial view across the study area*

### 2.2 Geology

The study area lies on an area of geology dominated by the Wilmslow Sandstone Formation. The overlying superficial geology consists mainly of Till, Devensian – Diamicton clay with lenses of sands and gravel ([www.bgs.ac.uk](http://www.bgs.ac.uk)).



## 3. Historical Background

### 3.1 Introduction

The full historical and archaeological background can be found within the Heritage Appraisal (Miller 2015). Presented below is a summary.

### 3.2 Background to Whittle Hall Farm

There are no documented Prehistoric, Roman or early Medieval finds from the study area and there is very little evidence from the surrounding area. The origins of Whittle Hall are poorly understood however it is entered onto the Cheshire Historic Environment Record (HER 564/2) as the probable manor house of Great Sankey. It is believed to have belonged to the Legh family in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and is recorded to have comprised 'rooms, kitchen, stable, barn, byre similarly with orchards and three gardens with a hundred acres of land lying in 14 fields enclosed together with hedges and ditches'. It was passed to Sir Thomas Tyldesley, then onto the Irelands of Bewsey and their successors.

The earliest survey of Lancashire is provided by William Yates' *Survey of the County Palatine of Lancaster*, printed in 1786 which shows a building in the approximate location of Whittle Hall (Plate 2). However, in contrast to other hall sites in the vicinity such as Barrow Hall, Whittle Hall is not annotated on Yates' map. This suggests that it was not a significant building and may not have had a moat.

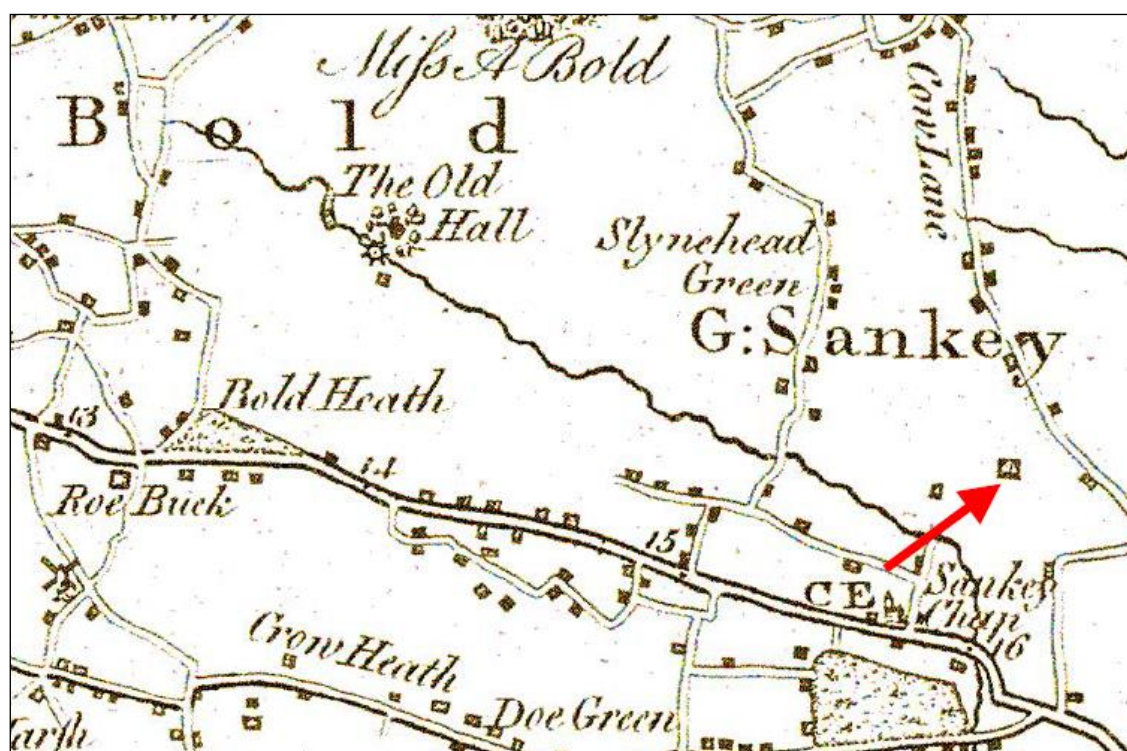


Plate 2: Extract from Yates' survey of 1786 with an arrow marking the site of Whittle Hall



The next available map of the area is provided by Hennet's survey of Lancashire, which was printed in 1830. This map was produced at a scale that was too small to analyse individual buildings, although Whittle Hall is annotated and seemingly comprised a small group of buildings.

The site is first depicted in detail on the Ordnance Survey 6" to 1 mile map of 1849, which identifies Whittle Hall as a historic site, and depicts several blocks of buildings arranged loosely around a central courtyard, typical of a post-medieval farmstead (Plate 3). An L-shaped range forming the south-western part of the farm complex provided residential accommodation, with the barn occupying the northern side of the courtyard. Two smaller buildings may have been livestock pens. The census returns confirm that these buildings were in use as a farm, with the Kelsall family living here and farming the land during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The farm is shown to have been set in a rural landscape, surrounded by enclosed fields and was accessed via a drive to the south. A smaller track leads northwards from the central courtyard, presumably providing access to the fields to the north. The Ordnance Survey map also marks a 'draw well' (*ie* a deep well from which water is lifted by bucket on a rope).

A curvilinear feature is also shown on the Ordnance Survey map to have crossed the south-eastern part of the hall site. This feature is not annotated although its size, form and position relative to the buildings are consistent with it having formed part of a moat around the buildings. However, there is no documentary evidence to firmly support any suggestion that Whittle Hall was encompassed by a moat.

The Ordnance Survey 25" to 1 mile map of 1890 provides the next available plan of the site. This appears to show the farmhouse and adjacent cottage occupying the footprint shown on the earlier mapping, although extensions have been added to the barn on the northern side of the farm.

The same configuration of buildings is shown on the 1907 and 1928 mapping, with the exception of another building added to the north-east (Plate 4). Changes were limited to the addition of two small structures against the eastern wing of the large barn and the addition of a new drive which approached the south side of the farm from Whittle Hall Lane. Further

The farm complex continued to expand up to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and several new structures are shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1962 (Plate 5). Several of these survived at the time of the survey, and comprised single-storey animal sheds.

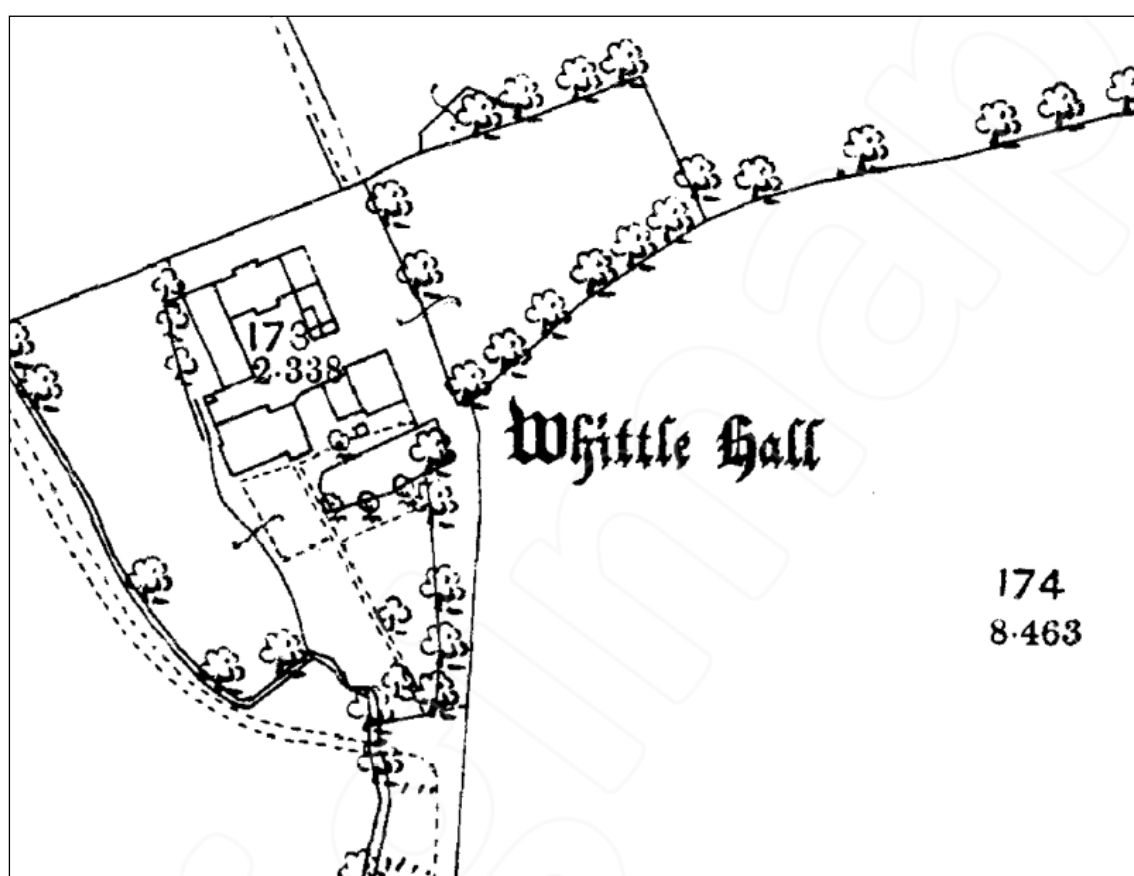


Plate 3: Extract from the Ordnance Survey 6" to 1 mile map of 1849 and the 25": 1 mile map of 1893, showing the development of the farm during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that created the layout of buildings that were extant prior to the recent demolition

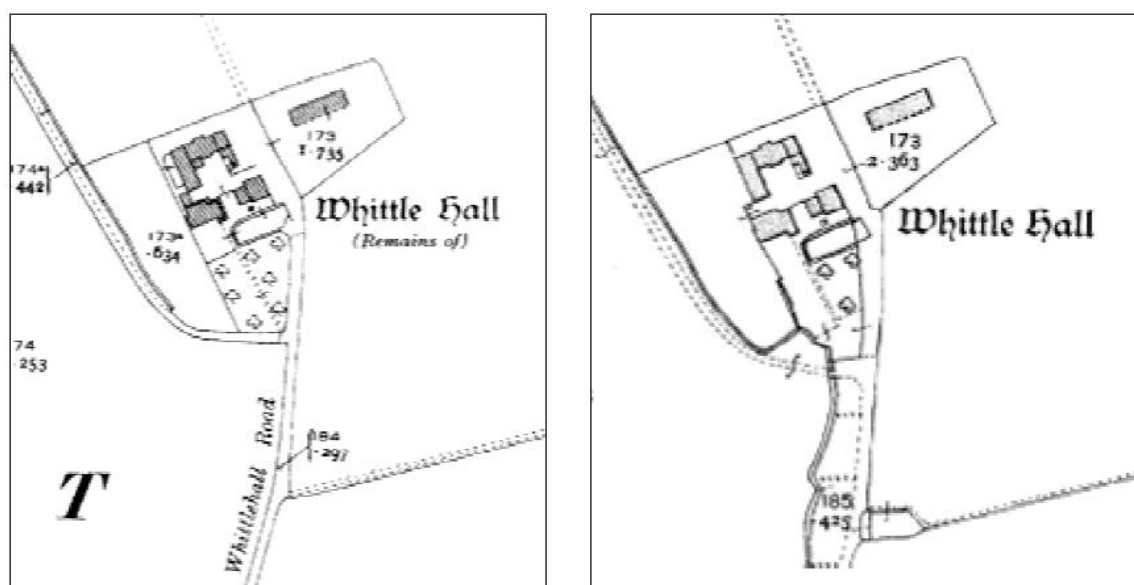


Plate 4: Extract from the Ordnance Survey 25" to 1 mile maps of 1907 and 1928

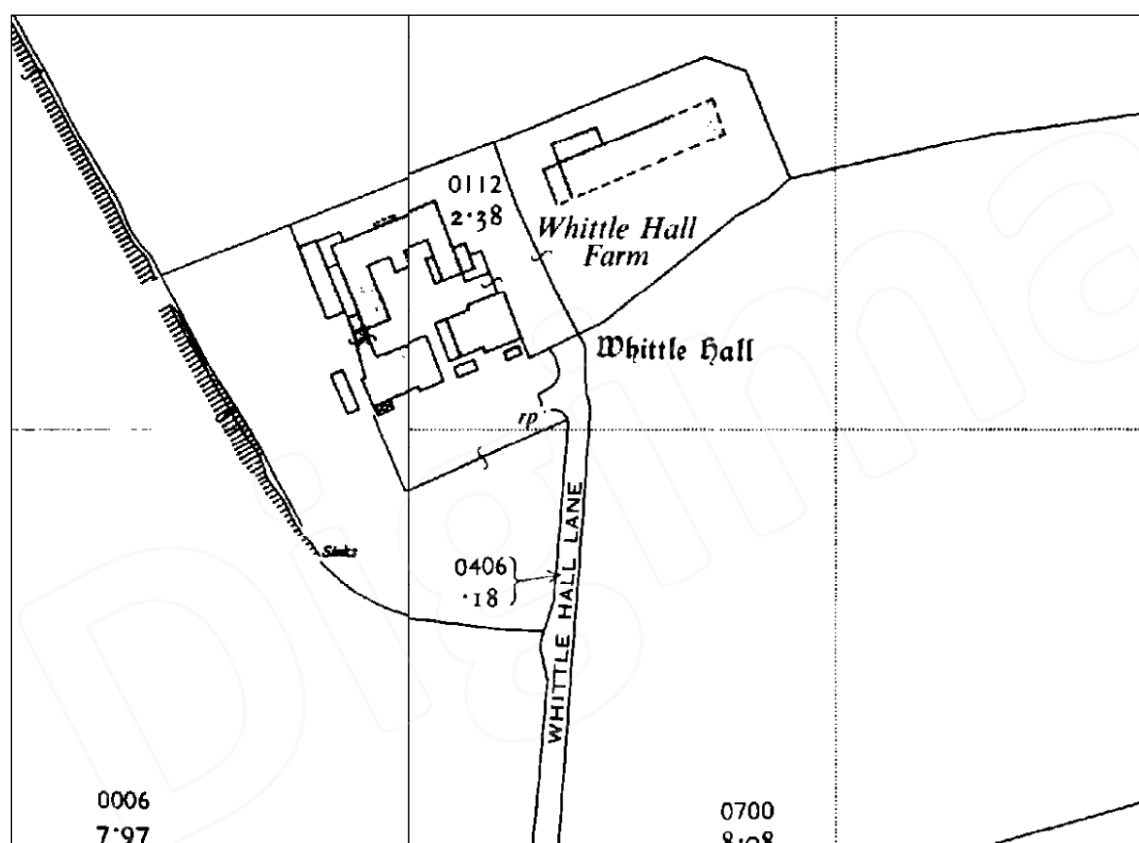


Plate 5: Extract from the Ordnance Survey map of 1962

The site retained a rural location until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when most of the area was developed for housing. The building to the north-east was demolished and subsumed within this development. The farm complex was demolished in July 2016 following the completion of the historic building investigation (SA 2016).

## 4. Evaluation Results

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### 4.1 Introduction

A 45m by 43m area, aligned north-west/south-east, was stripped to natural clay, cleaned and examined by Salford Archaeology (Fig 3). Any features or structures were then recorded. The area was slightly larger than the originally agreed 40m by 40m square to accommodate a line of piles along the south-west side of the trench. A further 14.7m by 3.2m spur was also stripped running south-east from the south-east side of the area.

Following this strip and record exercise a 10m by 1.8m trench was excavated across the pond/possible moat feature visible at the south-east side of the area. Due to the nature of the deposits no further trenches were excavated across the feature after this.

The natural ground encountered across the site was between 0.16 and 0.4m below the current ground level and comprised very firm mid brown to dark brown clay (*II*) which dropped off slightly from the centre of the area to the south-east, south-west and north-east. Across much of the area the clay had been disturbed by animal burrows.

The natural ground was overlain by a mixed clay and demolition rubble deposit (*01*) (Plates 6 and 7).



*Plate 6: General shot looking north-east*





*Plate 7: General shot looking north*

## *4.2 Evaluation Results*

Towards the north and north-east parts of the square the brick footings (02) of the demolished farm buildings were visible cut into the clay. This area had been heavily disturbed by activity associated with the farm buildings (Plate 8).



*Plate 8: Remains of brick footings from the demolished farm buildings, looking north-east*

At the south-east side of the former farm building footings, and running north-west/south-east parallel to the building, was a ceramic field drain (**05**). This ran for 10.16m from the north-east section edge and was 0.1m (4 inches) in diameter (plate 9).





*Plate 9: Ceramic drain 05, looking north-west*

Along the south-west side of the area, 22.7m from the south corner, was a 2.7m diameter pit (06). The pit was 0.38m deep and had irregular sides, initially only visible in section. The base was flat but had four distinct parallel ‘scars’ in the clay strongly suggesting it had been excavated mechanically using a toothed bucket. It was filled with modern refuse (07), including plastic and tin cans, and was interpreted as a modern rubbish pit excavated before the farm went out of use (Plate 10).



*Plate 10: Mechanically excavated modern rubbish pit 06, looking south-west*

At the north-west corner of the area was a linear feature (**03**) running 8.5m north-east along the trench edge. A width of 0.8m was visible within the excavated area. A slot was excavated through this feature revealing an irregularly sloping cut, 0.54m deep, filled with a sterile compact silty clay (**04**). This contained no dating evidence but its irregular nature suggested an animal burrow or the edge of a tree bole rather a man-made feature (Plate 11).





*Plate 11: Section through animal burrow/tree bole 03, looking north-east*

No earlier features were present within the building footprints. A small collection of pottery sherds were uncovered. The earliest of these was 18<sup>th</sup> century in date but was retrieved from a layer that also contained 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> material.

A trench was excavated across the pond feature identified from the historic mapping. The position of the pond could be seen as a black fill and coincided with its position on the historic mapping. This feature did not extend around the area and was confined to that area shown on the mapping (marked on Figs 2 and 3). The pond had a moderately sloping cut edge (**09**) and was infilled with a waterlogged black silt (**10**) which contained a large amount of modern refuse including bricks, stone, wood and cast iron, and smelled strongly of both rotting organic material and fuel oil. The trench hit the water table at a depth of 1.4m at which point the trench completely flooded immediately. At this point excavation was abandoned due to the presence of large quantities of broken chrysotile asbestos sheeting. Due to the nature of this feature and its fill no further trenches were excavated through it (Plate 12).



*Plate 12: Trench through former pond 09, looking east*

## 5. Discussion

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### 5.1 *The Hall/Farmstead*

No remains were uncovered relating to any activity earlier than the demolished farm buildings. The brick footings were clearly part of the now demolished farm buildings and the ceramic drain was also associated with this. The rubbish found at the south-western side of the trench was certainly late 20<sup>th</sup> in date and had been mechanically excavated in order to dump refuse including plastic. The only other feature was the very irregular partial linear at the north-west side of the trench which represented either a tree bole or an animal burrow.

### 5.2 *The Pond/Moat*

Although the feature depicted on the historic mapping does resemble one corner of a small moat of the kind often associated with medieval hall/farmsteads it could clearly be seen when stripped to not extend any further around the farm site. None of the historical evidence suggested the presence a moat and the depiction on Yates' map indicates that it probably did not have one, at least in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The evidence from the evaluation work shows that the feature was probably an 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century pond that had been infilled during the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The presence of a large amount of chrysotile asbestos together with the likely contamination from fuel oil halted any further excavation.

### 5.3 *Conclusion*

No remains of archaeological significance were uncovered during the evaluation and the earliest evidence on the site is likely to be the cottage recorded during the historic building investigation and now demolished. It is felt that no further work is required on the site.



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