

Introduction

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This volume of the Journal presents the results of work that in many ways is central to our current understanding of the nature of the later archaeology of Merseyside. In 1977, the Archaeological Survey of Merseyside was created to undertake a five year archaeological survey of the county, as the basis for setting up the Merseyside Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). This project was originally attached to Liverpool University but soon became established in Liverpool Museum. With the abolition of the county of Merseyside in 1986 the Archaeological Survey department became the Field Archaeology Section, which continued to administer the SMR. In 1990 a separate post was set up, funded by the District Councils of the former county, to integrate the management of the archaeological resource into the planning process, and since that date the primary responsibility for the curation of the SMR has resided with that post.

The initial survey of the county, between 1978 and 1983, was organised on a District by District basis within the new post-1974 county of Merseyside, with each survey being completed within a year. The cut off-date for the survey was 1750 AD, although for practical reasons this often had to be extended into the first half of the 19th century to understand landscape developments. The detailed survey information was fed into the SMR and general reports were produced for the County Planning Authority. These reports provided narrative accounts of the development of the historic landscape, under the general title of *Rural Fringes Survey* reports. Only the first of these reports, for Wirral, was published (Chitty 1978). The other four have been held as part of the SMR and mainly used by researchers consulting that resource (Chitty 1980; Cowell 1981; 1982; Lewis 1983). They do, however, contain a wealth of information about the development of the local landscape and it has long been planned to make this information more widely available than to SMR consultees. The active involvement of the Merseyside Archaeological Society (MAS) over the last two years has now given this project the impetus that was required and the four unpublished reports are accordingly presented in this volume.

These reports were produced between 1980 and

1983. In some fields of research much has changed in the intervening period to make the original contributions out of date. For the prehistoric period this includes; county or district surveys (Cowell 1991a; Gonzalez and Cowell in press), period surveys placing Merseyside in a regional context (Cowell 1996; 1999; 2000a; 2000d; 2000e), fieldwork in the wetlands (Cowell 1991b; 1992a; Cowell and Innes 1994) and work at specific sites (Cowell 1992b; 2000b; 2000c; Cowell *et al.* 1993; Gonzalez *et al.* 1995; Huddart *et al.* 1999; Longworth 2000; Roberts *et al.* 1996).

In the Romano-British period, similar gains have been made in understanding developments in settlement and landscape, both at site level (Adams 1999, Adams and Philpott in prep.; Philpott 1993; 1994; 2000a; 2000b; Philpott and Adams 1999) and at the local and regional landscape level (Philpott 1991; 2000c).

In the original reports, the sections on the interpretation of the prehistoric and Romano-British periods suffered from the fact that the studies were limited to the modern administrative boundaries and understanding of these periods can be better appreciated at a larger, landscape scale. The original sections of the reports for these periods have consequently not been included here and those interested should consult the publications listed above.

The presentation of the results in the initial reports was primarily for a local authority audience. The production of site and landscape information was intended to allow advice to be given to the County Planning department that would secure the interests of archaeology in development control and strategic planning matters. These elements of the reports have also been omitted from this volume, as that information is more the remit of the County SMR Officer, to use in practical ways from the detail within the SMR.

The bulk of the original reports, however, consisted of narrative accounts of the sites and landscape of the later periods, particularly the late medieval and post-medieval periods. Information for these periods, in the form of maps and documentary evidence, is more easily accessible and the availability of a group of researchers, through the then Manpower Services Commission, allowed a thorough investigation of much of the available documentary source material.

Small teams of researchers were employed to locate and research all relevant references that would aid in understanding the nature of landscape and tenurial matters for these periods. The relevant archaeological field officer undertook the interpretation of this material and the verification on the ground, which consisted mainly of vernacular buildings. New fieldwork was also initiated, generally associated with field walking, to identify sites not resulting from documentary work. The level of field walking varied from District to District depending on the particular interests of the field officer and land use conditions. Knowsley and Sefton Districts had the greatest investment of time in this task, while field walking was very limited in Liverpool and not undertaken in St Helens.

This work which is still of value today in providing an overview of the development of the medieval and post-medieval landscape provided a good base of information and interpretation for these periods. It forms the basis of this volume. As with the earlier periods in the county, subsequent work tested and developed specific theories, particularly in relation to the nature of the medieval landscape. Thus, a series of excavations have investigated the origins of medieval villages at Moreton in Wirral, Roby in Knowsley, West Derby and Higher Lane, Fazakerley (Wright 1996), both in Liverpool. A rural medieval settlement was investigated at Tarbock (Philpott 2000a) and high status medieval sites at Eccleston Hall in St Helens (Martin 2000) and Castle Hill, Newton, Barrow Old Hall, Bold and Micklehead Green, Sutton, all in St Helens.

A considerable number of historic buildings were identified in the course of development of the SMR. Some of these have since been surveyed archaeologically, and will be the subject of a future MAS volume. Of particular interest has been work undertaken at Newton Park Farm in St Helens, Lydiate Hall in Sefton and Speke Hall in Liverpool. The latter developed into David Higgins' excavations for the National Trust (Higgins 1992).

Work on the historic towns was also undertaken to facilitate this kind of research in more built up areas (Philpott 1987; 1988; Philpott and Davey 1984). Recent volumes of the Society's Journal also bear witness to the amount of smaller scale work on individual sites and buildings, particularly of the post-medieval period, that has been undertaken in the last 15 years. Where relevant to the conclusions in the original reports, the new information had been included in the current volume.

Versions of the original reports, edited in the light of the above qualifications, are, therefore, presented in the following four sections. For three of these, Knowsley, Liverpool and Sefton the original authors have edited their own reports. There was no standardised format for the presentation of the information in the original reports, each author being left to decide on the format. One notable advance recently in developing the work produced for the original Rural Fringe reports has been the production of Jennifer Lewis' Doctoral thesis on medieval landscape and landholding (Lewis 2000). This has provided much new information, which has been integrated into the Sefton report, so that this now differs considerably from the original. The Liverpool and Knowsley contributions are much closer to the originals. The fourth report, for St Helens, was originally written by Gill Chitty. With her agreement, it has been edited by Jennifer Lewis, whose comments and observations on evidence which has emerged since 1980 are presented alongside the original text. Credit for assistance in the production of the Rural Fringes Reports can be found in the individual reports.

These reports were commissioned "to review the collected evidence for sites in Merseyside's rural fringes and carry out field survey and assessments for such sites'. The study was initiated by the Department of the Environment (Ancient Monuments) and Merseyside County Council.

The detailed results of the survey have been placed in the County Sites and Monuments Record held at the Merseyside County Museums.

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