

Formation of the Merseyside Archaeological Society

During the winter and spring of 1975/76, a number of professional archaeologists and amateurs attending evening classes became increasingly aware of the absence of an archaeological society within the new Metropolitan County of Merseyside, or for that matter any person or organisation who would be the obvious focal point for such activities. This unfortunate situation meant that very little was being done to record and investigate archaeological sites threatened by building operations - both large industrial and small housing developments - or by the many roads and motorways linking Merseyside with cities and other areas of commercial activity.

The first of two such examples of the destruction of archaeologically important sites within the new County in 1976 was a previously undisturbed moated site at Halewood, where a party of volunteer diggers, mostly from the University Archaeological Society, arrived more or less in the wake of the bulldozers (pp 5-10). This site would probably have been very rewarding to investigate and could have yielded much useful information on a type of site about which we know very little. It was directly after Halewood that a meeting was held on 25th March, 1976, at which the Merseyside Archaeological Society was launched, and a Steering Committee was formed.

The second potentially important site destroyed in 1976 was at Wavertree, where a large housing development was undertaken (pp 11-12) in the area adjacent to 'Urn Mount' where the Bronze Age urns were discovered in 1867. With the north west lacking so much in known finds or sites of the prehistoric period, an opportunity to make an extensive investigation of the site would have been very valuable.

A small group from the Steering Committee and members of the University of Liverpool Students' Archaeological Society spent several weekends carrying out an exploratory excavation on the site. The proposed development covered such a large area, however, that anything meaningful, other than further stray finds, would have involved the stripping of a very large area; such man-power and backup organisation was unfortunately lacking.

When the intended development of the New Crown Courts in South Castle Street, Liverpool, became known, the Steering Committee decided to take positive action to try to avoid a repetition of the two previous events. A grant was obtained at short notice from the Department of the Environment. The Property Services Agency, and the contractors, Messrs. Tysons, kindly gave their permission for an excavation to take place during a six-week period in August and September, 1976. The interim report of this excavation appears on pages 13-16.

On October 26th, 1976, a Consultative Meeting was held to discuss with interested local bodies, other societies, planning departments, etc., the formation of the proposed Archaeological Society for Merseyside. This very helpful and instructive meeting resulted in the formal inauguration of the Society on December 4th, 1976.

Since then the Society has completed a survey of the grave monuments in St. Mary's churchyard, Birkenhead, in advance of landscaping of the area. Undoubtedly, the most significant achievement of the Society, to date, is its negotiations with the Department of the Environment, Merseyside County Museums and the County Planning Department, which resulted in the appointment of an archaeological field officer for the County, based at the University of Liverpool, this appointment to commence in October, 1977.

It is hoped that the Society will continue its work in the County, co-operating on all sides with the variety of professionals connected with the archaeology of Merseyside.

It would not be fitting to conclude without mentioning one person in particular, Keith Myers, our former Acting Secretary. Without his hard work and enthusiasm the Society would probably not have come into being. It is unfortunate that he was not to see the fruit of his efforts, as he left Merseyside just before the first Annual General Meeting on April 30th, 1977, to take up a new appointment in Reading, Berkshire.

D.F.K. Morgan.



Halewood - the section drawn in fig.4 and part of the sandstone lining.