



From the Chair

The lighter evenings and vaccination program creates a better summer outlook for us individually and as a society. The MAS council has been discussing various ways of re-establishing evening lectures and running a summer programme. We need to know how you feel, so we will put a time aside after the April meeting to have an open discussion about how we provide lectures and field trips, post restrictions.

Zoom Lectures to continue.

The first change to routine is that we will endeavour to continue a summer programme of zoom lectures to replace the fieldtrips that are not currently possible.

Summer Visits

Subject to the lifting of restrictions we will have local visits later in the summer, easily accessed by public transport. Possibly outdoors rather than an internal venue to enable social distancing.

Zoom meetings and Friends Meeting House meetings.

Here I assume is where your thoughts will be most useful either discussed at the meeting or by e mail or letter. Zoom meetings have been a success. We are able to attract speakers from distance as they do not have to physically attend and attendances have been up. Possibly more members are available for a home based presentation so do we want to change the way we used to meet? Some of the options available when all restrictions are lifted are:

1. Continue with Zoom meetings, possibly December / January, whilst other times we have Meeting House lectures.

Advantage is that we do not have to come into Liverpool when the weather could be at its worst and there are no Christmas revellers.

Disadvantage is that there are less meetings where we meet up together.

2. Return to full Meeting House lectures.

Advantage is we will meet up together as before lockdown.

Disadvantage is we must travel into Liverpool during bad weather.

3. Continue as we have been, holding all meetings virtually.

Advantage is that we reach out to more of the membership.

Disadvantage is that we do not reach membership without internet and we lose the social experience of meeting one another.

There may be other options you want to consider so the floor will be open for discussion after our Members meeting on the 15th April.

Roy Forshaw

Merseyside Archaeological Society

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Merseyside Archaeological Society publishes three newsletters each year. Contributions are invited on all aspects of archaeology in Merseyside. If you wish to contribute information please contact the Newsletter Editor. Please note that contributions may have to be edited.

Disclaimer: *Any views or opinions expressed by contributors to this Newsletter are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of Merseyside Archaeological Society.*

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Spring Meetings 2021

Meetings will be held 'virtually' via Zoom. A link to join the meeting will be issued via e-mail a few days beforehand.

Programme

Thursday 15th April 7.30 P.M. Members Evening.

Short talks as follows:

Gina Muskett. – 'Roman' figurine in the University museum.

Howard Harris – Heritage of Court Hey Park.

Maurice Handley – Merseyside Wartime Defences

There are some technical points to put across to ensure everything runs as smoothly as possible.

1. Zoom sessions will last 40 mins; please make sure you log on promptly.
2. Please set your microphone to mute whilst the speaker is talking. This is to ensure that we get the best audio quality so that everyone can hear.
3. Just as we would in a physical meeting, please save any questions until the end of the session.
4. It's possible to post text comments during Zoom meetings, but we found this quite distracting, so please keep this to a minimum.
5. If you'd rather not appear by video that can be turned off and replaced with a photo.
6. A link to the Zoom meeting will be sent out by email to members in the week prior to the meeting, so please make sure that our membership sec, Vanessa Oakden, has your current email address.
7. There's a handy introduction to how to use Zoom in this video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOUwumKCW7M>.

Obituaries



Bob Parry

Bob regularly attended indoor MAS meetings at the Quaker Meeting House and was also a member of Merseyside Industrial Heritage Society and Liverpool History Society. He had a background in the building trade and ran a joinery business in Smithdown Road.



Carole Brooksbank

We regret to report that Carole passed away last year. She lived in Widnes and was a good supporter of MAS, helping with the Childwall graveyard survey and regularly attending meetings and field trips.

They will be sadly missed.

How Old? Speculation on Early Salt Production in Lancashire

I'll admit to an ulterior motive in inviting Claire Christie to talk about the Triton Knoll project last month. The project sounded interesting anyway, but I've been speculating about the origins of salt production in South-West Lancashire/Merseyside for a couple of years now and wanted some ideas about what to look for and how to go about looking for it. I hope everyone found it as interesting as I did.

This began with the rediscovery of the Roman fort at Burscough (it turns out it was first found in the 1880s, but more of that in a future newsletter perhaps) and I began to wonder why it was there. Armies don't plonk 3 ha. forts in the middle of nowhere for no good reason, they're placed to control someone or something, even if that's just the passage between two places. The trouble with Burscough is that it's not really on the way to anywhere or in an obviously resource rich area; it lies off the main north-south and east-west routes and in an area with little known native settlement, access to minerals or much else. There is perhaps a road leading north from Burscough towards the fort at Kirkham, north of the Ribble. The road may even extend south to Liverpool and the Portway at Speke, though both are contentious. There's almost certainly a route east to Wigan where it joins the main network, any routes to the west are a mystery. In short Burscough seems to have been set in a bit of a backwater (see <http://www.romanroads.org/gazetteer/lancspages.html>).

In terms of resources there's little there at first glance. There's good agricultural land in places, for example the Clieve Hills round Ormskirk, and evidence of settlement at Lathom, and possibly Burscough Marina, but much of the surrounding area would have been occupied by wetlands of little apparent economic value to the Roman army. So why was the fort there? Wetlands have lots of seasonal resources potentially exploited by rural populations; these include excellent summer grazing for livestock away from arable. Saltmarsh is particularly good for fattening livestock and providing 'sweet' meat. In addition migratory wildfowl, fish, reeds, rushes etc for roofing, flooring, animal bedding and peat for fuel (Sue Stallibrass pers. comm.). However, many of these may have been of only limited interest to the Roman army. Was control of salt production at least part of the reason for the fort's location?

The Evidence

The development of salt production along the Mersey and Dee rivers during the 17th and 18th centuries is relatively well known and Roy Forshaw has given us some excellent talks on that (see also Forshaw 2010), but the discovery of Burscough made me curious about our area's potential for medieval and earlier salt extraction. The salt marshes and wetlands along the Wirral, Sefton and Fylde coasts bear a striking similarity to the Lincolnshire landscape where Roman and Iron Age salterns have been excavated and studied since the 1970s and 80s (e.g. Chowne et al 2001; Morris & Lane 2002). Was there similar potential in South-West Lancashire? David Cranstone produced a survey for English Heritage of the Solway Coast, and later for Morecambe Bay. Cranstone apparently found the evidence very ephemeral and not like the 'red hills', famous on the Lincolnshire coast (Sue Stallibrass, pers. comm.). Middleton et al (2013, 185) considered the potential of the wetlands inland of the Mersey to Ribble coast for medieval and earlier salt production and noted the lack of physical evidence.

Annakin-Smith (2012) provides documentary evidence of coastal sea-salt production in Flintshire, Cheshire and on the Wirral at Lower Kinnerton, Hilbre and Burton; whilst Taylor (1975) gives evidence of salt production in Amounderness. Further north, salt extraction is also known from the Solway Firth (Annakin-Smith 2012); though generally the focus of most studies has been on the Cheshire 'wiches' (e.g. Nevell 2015).

However, a brief review of primary and secondary sources shows that there is some evidence for medieval salt production along South-West Lancashire's coast, including in the area around Burscough, often on a significant scale. For example, in 1561 in Hesketh-with-Becconsall about 4 km to the north of Burscough, Robert Cowdrey, a tenant of Sir Thomas Hesketh, complained that '...having made a little cabin on the sand by the river Asland (now known as the River Douglas) to well salt in the same,' he had been assaulted and his saltcote destroyed. From the rest of the text it is clear that other tenants were involved in salt-making and another dispute of 1565 mentions 'a stack of salt sand containing 500 cart loads to the value of £5'. VCH Hesketh-with-Becconsall <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/lancs/vol6/pp111-114>. The quantities imply something more than a cottage industry.

This isn't the only example, at Crossens, North Meols in 1204 'Roger gave to Sawley Abbey an acre at Ratho for a saltpit, with rights of pasture and turbary' <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/lancs/vol3/pp230-236> (though modern Ratho is near Edinburgh, so this may be an error; however William de Cowdray's charters mention a saltpit at Crossens in the early 13th century (ibid)) and there are other examples of salt workings or placenames indicting saltworking at Pilling, Formby, Lytham and elsewhere (See also Taylor 1975).

This indicates a significant industry within c. 10 km of Burscough, perhaps easily accessible by water from the fort; the river Douglas and the Eller Brook pass close to the fort and may have been navigable (Middleton et al 2013 Fig 50), and would have given access to salt workings at Hesketh and the surrounding area.

However, this leads on to the question of where the coastline was when the fort at Burscough was occupied? The instability of the coast between the Mersey and the Ribble is well documented. If it was significantly further east or west than at present during the Roman period, how would this have affected the potential for salt production?

Griffiths et al (2007) give a detailed assessment of changes to anchorages in the Dee and a similar study would be relevant for the Ribble estuary, though they note that there are ‘...few dated index points for sea-level during the late Iron Age and Roman periods in Britain, making it difficult to assess the position of the ancient coastline, and the impacts on havens, tidal regimes, and on lower courses of rivers at this period’ (see also Tooley 1990).

Despite many assessments of the geomorphology of the Sefton coast, the exact nature and position of the coastline during the Roman period seems to remain poorly understood. Its position is known to have fluctuated significantly during the post-glacial period, a final period of high sea-level being indicated by dune slack deposits at Formby dated to c. 2300 BP, i.e. c. 300 BC, though the dunes appear to have formed a protective barrier preventing the sea accessing the area to the rear (Cowell 2008, 27). However, it remains possible that lower lying areas to the east of the dunes were, if not permanently inundated by the sea, either periodically flooded and/or occupied by salt marsh. When seen in this context the position of the Burscough fort perhaps makes more strategic sense. The map below would place it closer to the coast than it now is and in an area with access to significant potential for salt extraction.

What are the next steps? Should we be looking for Lancashire VCP?

The 2006 research framework noted extensive evidence of salt production in the northwest but focused on Cheshire, ignoring Lancashire, and the update does the same <https://researchframeworks.org/nwrf/>. Perhaps we need to reconsider and begin to start looking? If we do, what should we be looking for and how should we look? The notes below are my initial thoughts, but I’m sure that they could be extended.

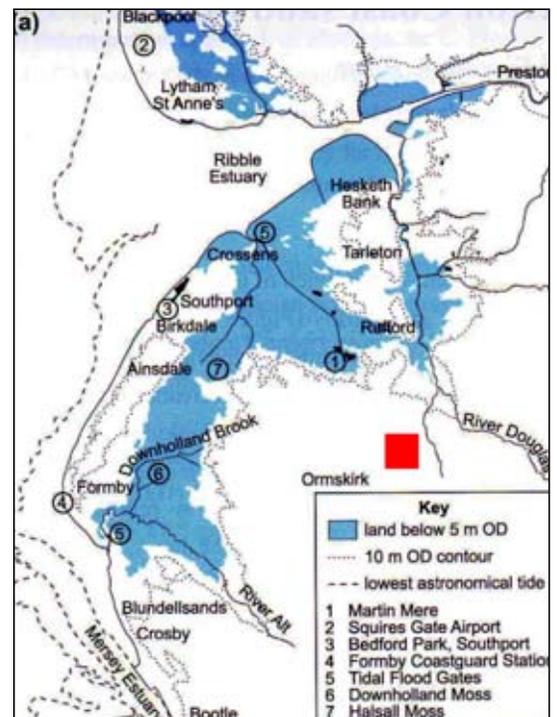
The outline above is just my first review of the primary documentary evidence by trawling the National Archives catalogue. There’s likely to be more, and I’ll continue the search. However, one thing that has already struck me is how patchy the evidence is. For example, there seems to be little from the Frodsham/Helsby area despite that area’s topographical similarity to the Dee and Ribble estuaries; why? One possibility is that the salt industries on the Dee and Wirral were early victims of the success of the Cheshire salt industry, they didn’t survive long enough to be documented. The only indication of salt extraction is ‘half a salthouse’ listed in the Domesday entry for Frodsham, though this may have been merely an indication of manorial ownership of property located in Middlewich or Northwich.

There has been archaeological fieldwork in the Frodsham Marshes; evaluation in advance of construction of the waste disposal facility found two very interesting peat deposits relating to different periods of major sea level changes (Sue Stallibrass, pers. comm.). This doesn’t necessarily show evidence of people’s activities but does indicate that the marshes have been in existence in some form for thousands of years. The presence of a monastic grange at Ince also indicates that the ecclesiastical landowners were interested in having an agricultural settlement in the marshes during the medieval period. Any surviving abbey accounts may be worth examining.

The front cover of Historic England (2018) ‘Pre-industrial Salterns: Introductions to Heritage Assets’ which features an aerial photograph of saltern mounds suggests that a review of both aerial photographs and lidar data would also be worthwhile and that will probably be my next stage.

Fieldwork would be more difficult, though many of the Lincolnshire salterns have been discovered in section alongside drainage channels, a rapid survey may pay dividends and we should be looking in more of those; the Hesketh area seems one to target given the documentary evidence above. Maybe one for a post Covid walk?

Large pipeline/cable routes such as Triton Knoll are relatively sparse in our area, but they do happen and when they do they provide a great opportunity to look at long, and deep, excavations; evaluation trenches in lowlying coastal areas shouldn’t stop at apparent deposits of geological deposits.



Lower lying areas to the east of the dune network and the approximate location of the fort in red (after Pye & Blott 2010)

Pre-industrial Salterns

Introductions to Heritage Assets



Other Research Questions

Finally thinking about this has led me to other questions.

Many of the forts in the Liverpool Bay area were capable of being rapidly supplied by sea (e.g. Chester, Lancaster, Kirkham (Wessex Archaeology 2005, 2006), was Burscough similar? Was the river Douglas/Asland navigable during the Roman occupation?

Have there been any finds of anchors from the Liverpool Bay area? There seem to be few records, a Graeco-Roman lead anchor -stock of 2nd or 1st century BC date, from a sea-going vessel, which was recovered from the tip of the Llyn peninsula in north Wales is the closest I've found (Griffiths et al 2007), though it is likely that any finds of stone anchors would be easily missed. How should we look for these?

Finds of VCP (a type of Late Prehistoric and Roman pottery commonly associated with the salt trade) from excavated sites in the region may need to be reassessed. For example, at Irby (Philpott & Adams 2010) 479 sherds of Cheshire Stoney VCP were found. Thin section analysis suggested that most or all of it was from the Middlewich/Nantwich area. A smaller assemblage of 90 sherds from Brook House Farm (Cowell & Philpott 2000, 44) used a similar fabric but was not examined in thin section. Brook House Farm lies north of the Mersey, beyond the normal distribution of Cheshire VCP, could its VCP be from further to the north or west? Was Irby accessing salt traded by water from Lancashire? Is that why we see little later documentary evidence for salt extraction on the Wirral?

Summary

Ninety percent of what I've written here is wild, perhaps even fanciful, speculation and none of it is proof of Romano-British salt extraction in the area, or of the real reason for the presence of the fort at Burscough, though it seems possible that the medieval industry was more extensive than is generally recognised. If that is the case, analogy with areas such as Lincolnshire suggests the industry is likely to have deeper roots and that we should at least be looking.

If anyone has further comments or suggestions please drop me an email at mhadams@rsk.co.uk. I'd be pleased to receive them.

Many thanks to Sue Stallibrass for commenting on an earlier draft of this note and providing some very useful additional information.

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Mark Adams

COURT HEY PARK, L16 3NA HERITAGE TRAIL – Edging stones

The main drive into the park is lined with stones forming the edge of the roadway which are in fact railway sleepers shown by the bolt holes and fishplate indentations. They were once part of the Liverpool to Manchester Railway used by the George Stephenson's Rocket train in 1827. In 1878 the railway was refurbished, and the sleepers were obtained by Robertson Gladstone who was Deputy Chairman and major shareholder of the railway company. There were difficulties in delivering the sleepers because the stones had to be unloaded from wagons by hand and dropped onto the embankment for removal to Gladstone's mansion in the park.



Howard Harris

Online resources

Online talks

Westmorland Dales landscape partnership heritage talks: This is a reminder that recordings of past talks in the current series can be accessed online at:

<https://www.friendsofthelakedistrict.org.uk/Pages/FAQs/Default.aspx?CategoryTitle=westmorland-dales-heritage-talks&SubsiteTitle=westmorland-dales-hidden-landscapes-partnership>

New talk: 14th April at 3pm the last talk of the series will be on **Gamelands Stone Circle** near Orton. A 30 minute talk presented by Dr Douglas Mitcham, Community Heritage Officer, Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority. Free. BOOKING required at the same Westmorland Dales website.

Windy Harbour, near Poulton le Fylde, **Lancs.** Fraser Brown, the director of the major excavations of a **Mesolithic and very early Neolithic** series of sites alongside a palaeochannel, gave a talk in March to the Society of Antiquaries of London (SAL) entitled 'Margin Walking'. Video here: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdW1zR19oxD3JAPmkYWdU5g?view_as=subscriber

NB talk kicks off 5 mins into recording

You will find a whole host of recorded **SAL lectures** on the same website.

The two research seminars on Windy Harbour held in February were also recorded (these have expert panel discussions) and are available at: <https://oxfordarchaeology.com/research-publication/windy-harbour-research-seminar>

Online resources

York Archaeological Trust – Viking images: a selection of the 40,000 Viking-age artefacts discovered by York Archaeological Trust during the Coppergate excavations in York between 1976-81: <https://www.yorkarchaeology.co.uk/viking-images>

the **Cumbria Vernacular Buildings Group** produce interesting newsletters. Back copies can be downloaded for free from their website (up to Dec 2019): <http://www.cvbg.co.uk/newsletter.html>

Sue Stallibrass