MAS 2013-14 Lecture programme

Our 2014 lectures start next month. Meetings are held at The Quaker Meeting House in School Lane in the City Centre. The room is booked from 7 p.m. for tea and coffee and lectures start promptly at 7.30. All welcome - including non-members.

Thursday, 16th January
Dr Vicki Cummings, Reader in Archaeology, University of Central Lancashire
‘The Structure of Dolmens’

Thursday, 20th February
Dr Sue Stallibrass, English Heritage Archaeological Science Advisor for North-West England
‘Roman NW England: Just another part of the Empire or a Regional Speciality’

Thursday, 20th March
Dr Andy Shuttleworth, Honorary Research Fellow, the University of Liverpool
Title tba

Thursday, 17th April
AGM followed by a talk from Kerry Massheder
‘Liverpool’s Court Housing: An Oral History Project’

If you have heard a particularly interesting talk please pass the information on to Gina as an idea for a future speaker. Georgina.Muskett@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

MAS January Meeting

The Society’s Christmas meeting was held on Thursday 12th December. We had two really good and interesting presentations from ‘home grown’ speakers. Sam Rowe gave an excellent run down of the first year of work on the Rainford Roots Community Archaeology project and Betty Nesbitt talked of her research and the fieldwork undertaken by the Bidston Community Archaeology Group on the archaeological and historical evidence of the flag signalling system used to alert shipping owners of the sighting of their ships heading for the Port of Liverpool. However, only 12 members attended the meeting, (including the two speakers) which is far less than the usual numbers at monthly meetings. We would therefore like to hear from those who did not attend to help us decide what to do at future December meetings.

Merseyside Archaeological Society on Facebook

You can now follow us on Facebook:-
http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1481822652#!/groups/151058304987687/

2014 Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 2014 will be due on 1st January. A membership renewal form is included with this Newsletter.

Merseyside Archaeological Society

Web Site: http://merseysidearchsoc.weebly.com
The Merseyside Historic Environment Record (HER) and Archaeology on Merseyside

Responsibility for the Merseyside Historic Environment Record (MHER) has now passed to the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS), who are facilitating access to the Record, and maintain and update it on behalf of the five Merseyside borough councils (Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton and Wirral).

MEAS is an existing joint local authority advisory service hosted by Sefton Council. National Museums Liverpool will lend the paper-based MHER documentation to MEAS so that it can be digitised. MEAS will appoint an HER Officer who will be responsible for overseeing the digitisation process and subsequent maintenance of the Record. In due course a web-site presence for the HER will also be established.

During the transitional period, which began on 14 November 2013, access to the Merseyside HER will be restricted to the provision of point-data index information from monument records, which National Museums Liverpool will endeavour to offer on an interim basis. The daily fee remains at £500; with a minimum fee of £100 per enquiry. From 1 April 2014, all enquiries should be directed to MEAS at: First Floor, Merton House, Stanley Road, Bootle, L20 3DL. During this transitional period the contact officer at MEAS is Paul Slinn, telephone: 0151 934 2791 or email paul.slinn@eas.sefton.gov.uk.

While the digitisation project is ongoing, MEAS will not be offering planning advice to the districts, but will facilitate access to the archive from 1 April 2014 to enable assessment of the archaeological potential in areas of proposed development. The access fees will be confirmed in due course.

Securing a positive future for the Merseyside Historic Environment Record has been a priority for National Museums Liverpool and many stakeholders including MAS. This transfer has been achieved through agreement between National Museums Liverpool, MEAS and the five Merseyside districts, with the support of English Heritage.

Further information regarding the HER can be found at: http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mol/collections/historic-environment-record

Publications

Many of you will know that Julia McLaughlin Cook has stood down as Publications Secretary after many years in the job. The Society is indebted to Julia for her enthusiasm in fulfilling the important role of promoting and selling Society publications as it is one of the key ways in which we generate our income. MAS is pleased to announce that Sam Rowe has kindly offered to take over from Julia. Sam can be contacted by email at: Sam.Rowe@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

Work has started on Volume 15 of the Journal of Merseyside Archaeological Society. The publication will be available in the first half of 2014. We are also gathering material for Volume 16.

Articles received so far include 2 excellent papers from Jen Lewis concerning Speke Hall. The first article discusses the structural history of the house and the second reports the results of an archaeological survey undertaken in 1993 on the site of the Speke Hall Home Farm. Both are significant additions to an understanding of what is possibly Merseyside’s finest building and its landscape.

We have also received a paper from Oxford Archaeology North outlining the results of an excavation at Old Millfield Lane, which lies to the north of Haydock. The excavation was undertaken during the construction of the United Utilities West-East Main pipeline. It uncovered several post-medieval ditches, a small enclosure, as well as a small eighteenth-/nineteenth-century building.

MAS Council

We are happy to announce that the Council has recruited and co-opted a new member. Martin Cox is an active participant of the Rainford’s Roots Project and we are pleased to welcome him to serve on the MAS Council. Martin has kindly volunteered to take on the vacant role of Secretary.

Graveyard Recording at All Saints Church, Childwall

Excellent progress has been made this year with over 1000 graves now recorded. If you are interested in joining this project please contact Dave Roberts. Tel 0151 4272980 email: drandpr@blueyonder.co.uk
Rainford’s Roots - Project Update

The Rainford’s Roots community project has had an excellent year engaging local people with the archaeology of the area. Between April and September this year the project has run four excavations in the village, one building recording exercise, several heritage walking tours, and numerous outreach and exhibition days. The excavations have uncovered a wealth of exciting material, teaching us about the history of the village; from 16th-17th century pottery assemblages, clay tobacco pipe scatters, ceramic manufacturing waste, to a post medieval gun flint. The project has run a mixture of volunteering and outreach events so far, including practical fieldwork and finds processing days, open day events and handling sessions.

Our last excavation at Rainford library gained huge interest from the public. During the 7 days of the dig, 59 volunteers helped out totalling 413 hours working on-site! 209 visitors came to see the progress of the dig during the two open days, as well as council members, library staff, and the St Helens Mayor.

Since the excavation at Rainford library, the project team and its volunteers have been focusing on processing and archiving the boxes of material recovered from fieldwork activities during the year. This has included over five weeks of finds processing sessions with volunteers, including local Rainford residents, as well as students from the University of Liverpool and many other enthusiastic individuals. The project team based at the Museum of Liverpool has been hosting three student placements from the University of Liverpool since October. The students have been helping the team to process material from sites in Rainford, as well as doing historic research and assisting with project events.

Activities and events since the summer

In September, the Rainford Heritage Society hosted a heritage weekend event at Rainford village hall, focusing on what life was like in the village during World War II. The Society organised many local businesses and groups to be involved, and the Rainford’s Roots team had a stall at the heritage event. Around 500 people visited the event on Saturday 14th September and it was a great success for the local community.

On 11-12 November Liverpool was host to the annual Museum Association Conference. 42 people attended the Rainford’s Roots project workshop on the benefits and achievements of community archaeology, which allowed the team to present the progress and experiences of the project to date to an international audience. Two of the project’s volunteers, Martin Cox and Becky Gardom presented alongside the Project Officer, Sam Rowe.

Museum Association Conference

The project has been working with youth groups and schools during November. The project ran an event for the Young Archaeologists’ Club at the Museum of Liverpool where they ran interactive activities, teaching young people how to research historic maps and sites, as well as how to prepare for an excavation, and how to sort and record archaeological objects. For a week in November the project team also ran a series of school workshops at the museum for 101 children from three schools in St Helens, including workshops for children with Special Educational Needs.

Project statistics for 2013

Total volunteering hours: 2198
Total visitor numbers: 999
Number of days processing material: 50
Number of days excavating: 21
Number of outreach events: 17

News and upcoming events

From the end of November, some of the best finds from recent
excavations in Rainford will be on display at the Museum of Liverpool. This exhibition forms part of the ‘recent finds’ case in the History Detectives gallery on the first floor of the museum. The exhibition will be running into the New Year. Please come along and see some of the objects the project has discovered.

On Tuesday 14th January 2014 the project will be holding a talk at Rainford Library, Church Road WA11 8HA to talk about the latest news and discoveries from the project. The talk will start at 2pm and include a small display of some of the artefacts discovered during the excavation at the library. Contact Rainford library for details on 01744 677820.

The project is now on Twitter! Search @rainfordsroots to hear the latest news on the project. You can also still follow us on facebook www.facebook.com/rainfordsroots.

To get involved

Rainford’s Roots is always looking for enthusiastic volunteers to help out with the project. In the New Year there will be plenty of opportunities to help the team catalogue and archive material from the 2013 excavations, ready for storage and display purposes. There will also be more fieldwork to get involved with (dates and arrangements tbc).

By email rainfordsroots@gmail.com or telephone 0151 4784560

Up to date information can be found at www.rainfordsroots.com

Sam Rowe

Processing finds from Rainford

My name’s Barny Hoffman and I am a 2nd year Evolutionary Anthropology student, studying at the University of Liverpool. I am currently taking part in a placement with National Museums Liverpool (NML). The placement has included processing finds from the excavations currently taking place at Rainford. Rainford itself is a village outside St Helens, which, through recent archaeological digs, has exhibited sites rich with post-medieval culture that is invaluable to the archaeological record.

I personally found the finds processing session to be extremely enjoyable and valuable. A number of archaeologists/archaeology students gathered in a relatively informal setting and proceeded to group similar finds together, then bag them up. For example, pottery made out of the same material would be grouped together; clay pipes were grouped together (with the exception of pipes featuring patterns or designs on them which would be grouped separately); glass was grouped together, and so on. Waste material was put to the side as this is not kept but is noted in the archaeological record. In terms of bagging the grouped material up, it was deposited into carefully labelled bags which could then be categorized in order and referred back to.

The general atmosphere was great – everyone was relaxed and keen to get involved. You could have had no previous knowledge of archaeology or the site itself and still got stuck in and enjoyed yourself, as well as coming out of the experience more informed about Rainford and archaeology in general. All in all, I found it not only interesting but – dare I say it – fun, and highly recommend it to anyone expressing an interest in archaeology, or even if you are just curious about what archaeology is about/has to offer.

Barny Hoffman

Liverpool’s Court Housing: An Oral History Project

Court housing was a type of poor quality, high density ‘back-to-back’ style housing in urban Britain that existed from the late 18th Century until the mid 20th Century. This form of housing was particularly common in Liverpool where landlords took advantage of the population increase and the resulting demand for low rent accommodation.

In Liverpool, courts were commonly built three storeys high, sometimes with a cellar. Court houses were built both ‘back-to-back’ and ‘side-to-back’ with anything from two to ten houses in each court. Courts were constructed in both an ‘arched court’/‘closed court’ style, entered via a narrow passageway and ‘open court’ style where the entrance was the same width as the court itself resulting in improved ventilation.

Court houses were built around a shared central court typically with an ashpit, and toilet for the use of all residents. As with other forms of Industrial Revolution era urban housing, courts were often overcrowded, insanitary, lacked adequate ventilation and were inhabited by the often poverty stricken working class thus becoming labelled as ‘slums’ and their residents ‘slum-dwellers’.

Drawing public attention to the housing conditions of the urban poor developed into a popular exercise in the 19th century with reformers such as Friedrich Engels, Charles Booth, James Hole and Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree carrying out investigations into the causes and characteristics of poverty. These reformers are partly responsible for the negative connotations surrounding the term slum that exist to the present day. To these reformers a lack of good sanitation, poor quality housing and overcrowding were evidence of an area was a slum. However the inhabitants of such areas were also ‘studied’ and their characteristics often criticised as criminal in nature, disorganised, unemployed, and feckless with a lack of motivation to escape their poverty stricken lives and as a result the term slum involved the buildings, the neighbourhood and its inhabitants.

Many residents of courts were moved into new build communities such as Kirkby and Norris Green following forced eviction and demolition of inner city ‘slum’ housing. Sadly, there is only one remaining example of court housing left in Liverpool today located at 35-39 Pembroke Place.

Pembroke Place included two courts: Watkinson’s Buildings and Watkinson’s Terrace. They do not appear on Gage’s map of 1841 but do appear on the OS First Edition map of 1848. They originally consisted of eight houses per court, four houses on each side of a shared courtyard. The courts abutted the frontage buildings of Pembroke Place. Today, only two houses of Watkinson’s Terrace survive behind number 35 and number 37 Pembroke Place and one house of Watkinson’s Buildings survives behind number 39 Pembroke Place. The remains were listed in 2009 for the following reasons: ‘They have special architectural interest as individual survivals of court-dwellings, a once numerous but now near-extinct
The vegetation and topsoil was removed from the surface of the monument within which excavation could not be undertaken without special permission from English Heritage. The trench was laid out just outside the area of the scheduled monument associated with the Priory’s medieval water management.

Dan supervised, cajoled and directed more than 80 local volunteers with great enthusiasm and patience over the two week period and everyone seemed to enjoy the experience despite the rain, the mud and an unbelievable number of vicious mosquitoes which dominated the first few days of damp warmish weather.

The only finds were a large fragment of decorated medieval floor tile, a sherd of Cistercian ware drinking cup of probable 16th-century date, some small fragments of cremated bone, occasional pieces of brick and many unidentifiable fragments of stone. Despite the fact that the original objective of the excavation was not fulfilled, all was not lost. The discovery, by Dan Garner himself, of a fine but broken prehistoric flint tool of probable Neolithic date, was greeted with great satisfaction. As Lynn Smith said “I am delighted that after 26 years we have started digging here again and despite the extensive excavations in the 70s and 80s, no finds from before the medieval period were recorded. It is fantastic that we finally have some evidence of prehistoric life here at Norton”.

Jenny Woodcock & Lynn Smith

**Sun Moon & Man: Astronomy in Prehistoric Britain**

On 2nd November, as part of the Bluecoat’s nocturnal themed day, Dr John Hill of The University of Liverpool’s Department of Continuing Education gave a talk entitled ‘Sun, Moon & Man: Astronomy in Prehistoric Britain’.

He started by describing the chronology of natural events and human development from the last Ice Age (15,000 – 12,000 BC), via the Mesolithic hunter gatherers (10,000 – 4,000 BC) and the Neolithic farmers (4,000 – 2,500 BC), to the Bronze Age (2,500 – 800 BC). He then described the evidence for ancient astronomy which stretches from the start of the Neolithic period to about the middle of the Bronze Age (4,000 – 1800 BC). This evidence includes a variety of monuments, some burial chambers, but mainly stone (and a few wood) circles of differing size and complexity. Although it has long been assumed that Stonehenge had an astronomical purpose, Dr Hill explained that there is still not enough evidence to prove this to be the case. As a completely unique construction, Stonehenge cannot be compared and analysed with similar ancient monuments.

However, the evidence for astronomy can clearly be found in the many other stone circles found across Britain. Dr Hill talked about the circles found in Aberdeenshire (about 120 in all) which have very similar features, including two vertical stones separated by a horizontal stone. These three stones, in all cases, aligned to various phases of both the sun and the moon.

Dr Hill’s research into ancient astronomy has included some elements of experimental archaeology. In particular, he has built a reconstruction of a stone circle in Ness Gardens, which has been called ‘Nesshenge’.

**News from Norton Priory**

The first excavation to take place at Norton Priory for 26 years ran for two weeks from the 23rd of September – a real community archaeology project organised by Senior Keeper Lynn Smith and directed daily by Dan Garner. The aim of the investigation was to try and locate the southern-most extent of the moat system associated with the Priory’s medieval water management. The trench was laid out just outside the area of the scheduled monument within which excavation could not be undertaken without special permission from English Heritage.

The vegetation and topsoil was removed from the surface of the trench using a mechanical digger and thereafter it was volunteers on their hands and knees with the usual trowels and buckets. Very little of note was found but some linear and sub-circular features appeared and were investigated and volunteers were shown how to collect soil samples which were then processed in the on-site flotation tank which afforded them a bit of a break from the hard work of excavation.

Dr Liz Stewart (Curator of Archaeology and the Historic Environment, Museum of Liverpool) and I are currently undertaking an oral history project to record first hand memories of living in a Liverpool court house.

Liverpool’s Court Housing: An Oral History Project aims to: Identify potential sites for future archaeological investigation, map and record the standing remains (‘ghosts’) of court houses in Liverpool, enhance the existing collection of court housing material within National Museums Liverpool, produce an archive of oral testimony about Liverpool’s court housing for storage and future use, collect documentary evidence of court housing in Liverpool from the community in the form of maps, drawings and photographs, and gain a better understanding of life in court housing in Liverpool in the twentieth century.

We appeal to anyone with memories of court housing to come forward. Please contact Kerry Massheder at Kerry.Massheder@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk.

I will be giving a talk on this project at the Society’s AGM on 17th April 2014.

Kerry Massheder

Kerry Massheder
He has discovered, through his work on sites in and around Derbyshire, that these circles were probably constructed using a single length of rope – this rope would have measured exactly 135 feet long. Using this length and then by halving the rope a number of times, all the dimensions of the circle could be established, including the outer ring banks and the spacing of the stones themselves.

These monuments were first marked out on the ground, using the midday shadow to establish the line of true North. The circle would then be quartered with an East – West line and finally the position of the stones would be established using the rope and ‘petal geometry’ to intersect the circle at regular points.

Dr Hill concluded his interesting talk by describing some recent discoveries near Stonehenge. A Neolithic settlement called Durrington Walls has been unearthed about two miles from Stonehenge. Within the settlement there were some 400 buildings – enough to house about 4,000 people; making it the largest Neolithic settlement in Northern Europe. There is evidence of feasting, but little of domestic habitation. This site is believed to be temporary accommodation for visitors to Stonehenge for particular festivals. These people would have processed along the River Avon and then across the plain to the monument, before returning to feast at Durrington Walls. The following day, they would have cleared up, thrown their rubbish in pits and returned to their homes.

Ed Godfrey

Knutsford Roman Hoard

In May 2012 a metal detectorist made a remarkable discovery. Whilst detecting in a field in Knutsford he found a Roman silver coin and over the course of a week found six more coins and an object, later identified by the Portable Antiquities Scheme as the foot to a silver gilt brooch. The finds were reported to Vanessa Oakden, the Finds Liaison Officer for Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside. A small excavation was undertaken on the site, carried out by National Museums Liverpool and Cheshire Archaeological Advisory Service alongside the Finds Liaison Officer, to recover information on the circumstances and context of burial.

A series of test pits were excavated and the location of finds was logged with a global positioning system. Over 100 Roman coins were recovered from the site, mainly silver denarii dating to the 2nd century AD, as well as finger rings, pottery fragments and three trumpet brooches. The finds had been dispersed from a pottery jar by the plough. The objects were sent to the British Museum for further study and cleaning.

Who buried the hoard and why is uncertain. However, the silver-gilt brooches are magnificent specimens, amongst the finest from Roman Britain, and show the accumulation of considerable wealth by one individual. He appears to have been a rich landowner and was perhaps a member of the decurial class. Did he acquire some of his wealth through involvement in the lucrative trade in Cheshire salt?

The hoard remains at the British Museum awaiting assessment by the Treasure Valuation Committee. It is one of the most significant finds reported through the Portable Antiquities Scheme from the North West in recent years. It is hoped that the hoard will be retained in the region through a museum partnership so that it can be displayed to the wider public in the future.

Sam Rowe

Trumpet Brooches from the Knutsford Roman Hoard