



Merseyside Archaeological Society Newsletter 3/2017

Registered Charity No 510831

MAS Membership Subscriptions 2017

Subscriptions for 2017 fell due on 1st January. If you have not yet renewed your membership please return the form which was sent to you at the beginning of the year or contact the Membership Secretary now.

MAS Lectures at The Quaker Meeting House, Liverpool - 2017 Autumn meetings

Merseyside Archaeological Society meets at the Quaker Meeting House, School Lane, Liverpool, L1 3BT. Tea and Coffee is available from 7 p.m. and lectures start at 7.30 prompt. All are welcome including non-members.

21st September - 'Discovering early modern Prescott and its Playhouse' - Rosemary Tyler

Early modern Prescott was a relatively small market town in South West Lancashire, it however has an intriguing cultural history - it was the site of the first known purpose built Elizabethan Playhouse built outside London. This talk will explore the history of the early modern town, using contemporary and later data, that will place the Playhouse within the town and the immediate region.

19th October - 'The Neanderthal "burial" site at Shanidar: a reappraisal' - Chris Hunt (JMU)

In the 1950s Robert Solecki discovered the skeletons of a number of neanderthals at Shanidar Cave in Kurdish Iraq. He interpreted the finds as burials. Sediment close to one cluster of skeletal material, Shanidar V, yielded clusters of pollen interpreted at the time as the remains of flowers, sparking the stories of the "Shanidar flower people". Sadly, the political situation in Iraq made further work on the site impossible until quite recently, in spite of the intense controversy engendered by Solecki's work. Our new project at Shanidar has now obtained enough evidence to be able to reappraise Solecki's findings, but there is still much to learn about this most challenging site.

16th November - 'Recent excavations at Halton Castle (Runcorn)' - Sarah Cattell

Sarah from the University of Salford, led the recent excavations at Halton Castle where "they didn't find what they expected but instead found surprising and unexpected things".

14th December - Members' evening

An opportunity for members and friends to bring photographs, artefacts or just themselves. If you need help with a slide presentation let Maurice Handley know. There will be a short multi-choice quiz (non-competitive). Tea, coffee and mince pies will be available from 7pm. Contact: mahandley@tesco.net.

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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Provisional dates for next year

January 18th - Fred Bezombes (JMU) 'Archaeology by drones'

15th February - t.b.a.

15th March - t.b.a.

19th April - Annual General Meeting + speaker t.b.a.



Halton Castle - July 2017

Message from Mark...

After 23 years and 2 months (no I haven't been keeping count, it's what my record with HR tells me) at Museum of Liverpool I'm leaving to take up a new post with RSK, an environmental consultancy based at Helsby. I've had a great time at the Museum, working on some fantastic projects with some great people, but it really was time to move on. Highlights of the past couple of decades are many but include (in no particular order)... Irby, the Formby footprints, Court Farm, Hilary Breck, Stanley Bank, the Museum of Liverpool site and Mark Rake (which is featured in this newsletter). If anyone can claim to have worked on all of those with me I probably owe them a pint or two for putting up with me. Although I'll be working in Helsby I intend to keep involved in Merseyside's archaeology and will stay on as Chair.

Mark Adams

MAS Web site

Please note the change to our web site address below. We have also now made MAS Journals 1-10 available on-line in PDF format on the Publications page.

CBA North West Newsletters

CBA North West (CBANW) is gathering together an archive of old Newsletters to publish on its website. The organisation, which

at the time was called CBA Group 5, is missing several Newsletters from the 1970s and early eighties. If you have retained any of these documents and are willing to lend them to CBANW for copying please contact Mike Nevell. E-mail: m.d.nevell@salford.ac.uk

Childwall Graveyard Survey

The MAS graveyard survey at All Saints Childwall is still on-going. If you have a few hours to spare doing work in the churchyard, recording monuments, or in Liverpool Museum, entering data into the project database, please contact Dave Roberts - details on page 1.

Excavation at Mark Rake, Bromborough

During November and December 2016 archaeologists from the Museum of Liverpool led by Mark Adams conducted an excavation at Mark Rake, Bromborough ahead of the construction of housing on what, until then, had been the Rectory gardens.

The site lies in the historic core of the village of Bromborough, adjacent to the churchyard of St. Barnabas church which almost certainly pre-dates the Domesday Survey. The medieval church was demolished in 1827/8 after it had become impossible to maintain. Eventually the new church became too small for the rapidly expanding village and was itself demolished and rebuilt on a much larger scale in 1862-4. During the rebuilding fragments of Anglo-Saxon sculpture were recovered from the foundations of the 1820s church and were stored on the lawn of the Rectory until they were lost during reconstruction of the Rectory in the 1930s.



Neolithic pottery being excavated from a small pit

The aim of the excavation undertaken in 2016 was to locate any surviving fragments of sculpture and to record any other archaeological deposits which might have been disturbed by building works. The excavation found evidence for Neolithic activity on the site which consisted of shallow pits and post-holes scattered, apparently at random, across the site. None of them seem to define recognisable buildings or structures, though at least one contained small fragments of burned bone which has since been identified as



Sandstone fragment highlighted in the 1880s photo

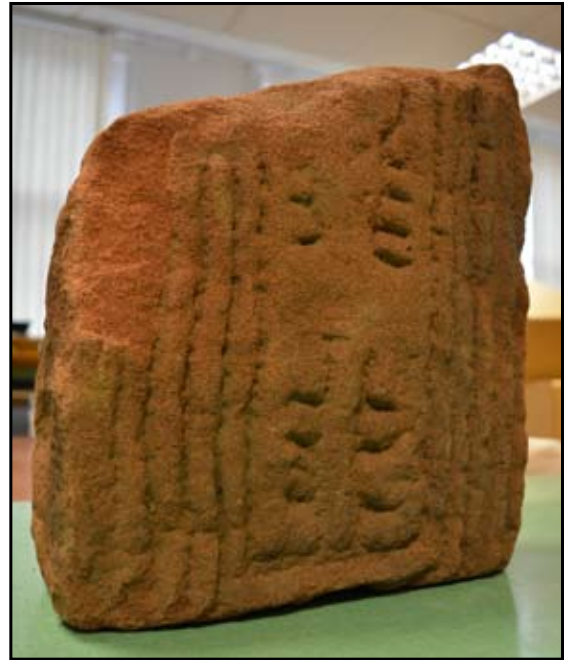
human. The Neolithic date is based upon fragments of locally made carinated bowls (a common type of Neolithic pottery) and flintwork found in some of the features, though this may change once the features have been radiocarbon dated.

The site was crossed by three small ditches (or deep gullies depending upon one's perspective) which ran parallel to the churchyard boundary. One of these was assumed to be Bronze Age based upon the only datable find it contained, a fragment from the rim of an Early Bronze Age Collared Urn, though processing of the soil samples has found oat, rye or bread wheat-type cereals in the fills which suggest that they are likely to be medieval; again radiocarbon dates are awaited. It's possible that the Collared Urn fragment was originally associated with the cremation burial and ended up in the ditch/gully during the medieval period, though it's unlikely that we'll ever know.

Part of the brief was to look for surviving fragments of Anglo-Saxon sculpture. After about three weeks of turning over every fragment of sandstone larger than head size, the piece in the photograph was found. It is recognisably one of the pieces shown in a photograph taken in the 1880s of the carvings stacked on the Rectory lawn and forms part of a slab decorated with a cross motif probably carved in the 10th century AD.

Despite the fact that no recognisable building plans or similar evidence was recovered from Neolithic and Bronze Age phases, the finds are significant as some of the first excavated evidence for Neolithic settlement from the Wirral. The earliest definite settlement at Irby was Bronze Age, although some earlier stone tools were present they were all found with later material, and Mark Rake has demonstrated the potential of sites close to early churchyards on the Wirral for evidence of much earlier settlement. Whilst it was great to find at least one surviving fragment of the carvings, the piece was found in a thin layer of red sand. This suggests that the local story about the builder of the 1930s Rectory grinding them up for sand to make mortar may sadly be true.

Mark Adams



10th century slab fragment decorated with a cross motif

2017 Field trips report

Castlefields 3rd June



Norman Redhead describes the Roman site at Castlefields

Seven members of MAS joined nine members of the Merseyside Industrial Heritage Society for a sunny morning walk around Castlefields in Manchester led by Norman Redhead of the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service at the University of Salford. Starting at the White Lion pub on Liverpool Road, there is a small heritage park where there are the exposed building foundations, ditches and a gatehouse reconstructed on the remains of the Roman fort which existed for 300 years and gives Manchester its name. Norman told us there are considerable Roman remains in the area, much of it is found less than 25cm below the surface. Evidence has been found of iron working, which makes it the earliest industrial archaeology site in Manchester.

After the Roman period, the centre of Manchester developed around the Cathedral area and Castlefields declined until the construction by James Brindley of the Bridgewater Canal in the 1760s. The canal terminates at the Castlefields canal basin where several warehouses were built between 1770 and 1840. The surviving warehouses show typical design elements of warehouse architecture. The multi-storey buildings have loading bays with hoists directly above the waterside. A classic feature is the internal 'boat arm' that brought the canal to the centre of the warehouse directly beneath a water wheel powered hoist system. Brindley redirected the River Medlock via a tunnel that takes the water underneath the basin and connects with an overflow system at the western end of the basin. Permo-Triassic sandstone was seen outcropping in various parts of the canal area with a small quarry probably providing a source of suitable building stone for the canal. This sandstone doubtless provides a suitable bedrock for the numerous inappropriate very high rise buildings proposed for the area. Earlier, on Liverpool Road, we saw vernacular workshop dwellings with long attic windows. The Roman dig nearby also revealed the foundations of back to back and blind back houses of the 'affordable' type criticised by Friedrich Engels in 1842.

During the 19th century railways became a dominant feature of the Castlefields area with every type of bridge carrying the lines at high and low level across the canals. The first railway station in the world is on Liverpool Road and, with the earliest example of a railway warehouse, now forms part of the Museum of Science and Industry. Work is well advanced on the construction of the Ordsall Chord; although a number of listed structures have been removed or affected, George Stephenson's impressive skew arch bridge over the Irwell remains intact. Thank you Norman for an excellent visit.

Neston - July 6th

Setting out on a pleasant evening in the quiet backwater of Little Neston, our guide Anthony Annakin-Smith, pointed out that in the 18th and early 19th centuries, this was once a hive of industry in the most populous part of Wirral (i.e. before the growth of Birkenhead). Coal mining and associated industries such as brickmaking and limeburning, took place in Neston from 1750 to 1927. The collieries exploited an extension of the Flintshire coalfield which lies under the Dee estuary. Canals were constructed underground to transport coal from the coal-face to the bottom of the pit shaft. Coal was exported from Denhall Quay to Chester, North Wales and Ireland - remains of the quay can still be seen near the Harp Inn. The collieries were principally owned by two families - the Stanleys and the Cottinghams. There was a long running dispute between the two owners with allegations of trespass and sabotage which culminated in the Stanleys paying a fine of £2000 in 1827. By 1866 the railway had reached Neston and this revitalised the declining coal mines.

Walking along old railway lines, our guide took the party past capped shafts of former coal mines, the sites of Deeside Electric Works and a House of Correction where Irish vagrants were imprisoned before deportation. Finally we passed a row of miner's cottages before returning to the Harp where Anthony was thanked for an enjoyable and informative evening.



Rachel Pope explains the stratigraphy at Penycloddiau

Field weekend 5th-6th August 'From the Clwyd to the Dee'

On Saturday morning 5th August we visited the excavation at Penycloddiau 'Iron Age' hillfort, joining a large guided tour led by Fiona Gale (County Archaeologist, Denbighshire). We walked up the hillslope to a stile, where we were treated to a hailstorm and heavy rain shower that cleared the air for marvellous views. Traversing the middle of this 23 hectare enclosure to reach the excavations at the far side made it clear that this is not a defensible site. Rachel Pope (site director, University of Liverpool) suggested that it might be a summer grazing area for livestock in her site talk. One trench exposed a hut platform cut into the hillside. Last year the team 100% sampled the hut's floor layers. Wet sieving in the university's lab is discovering many pieces of fired clay, some of it pottery and some of it probably structural material (daub), together with plenty of charcoal that can provide samples for radiocarbon dating. Although called an Iron Age hillfort, it has not yet been securely dated and may have originated in the Bronze Age. In another trench, the exposed inner face of the rampart was revealed to be constructed of dry-stone walling, possibly built in sections, although most of the bank is earth and rubble. The trench across the rampart was deliberately sited to investigate an area previously damaged by a farm track, but the excavations did not confirm any original entrance at this location. About 40 tonnes of rock were moved during the excavation which puts into perspective the impressive effort required to build the 3 km multivallate circumference. This was the final season of excavation. Publication will probably be in a monograph together with Oxford University's current excavations at Moel y Gaer (Bodfari) a little further along the Clwyd ridge, possibly also with the Clwydian Range Archaeology Group's work at Moel Arthur- although they are excavating Bronze Age material on a spur outside the hillfort. The Offa's Dyke walk passes between Penycloddiau and Moel Arthur, towards Moel y Gaer and you can walk around Penycloddiau itself: park at the Coed Llanwyfan car park. For a fuller description of the hillfort see the University's website or visit www.clwydianrangeanddeevalleyaonb.org.uk/penycloddiau/

The afternoon was spent on an informal visit to Ruthin Gaol a



The inner rampart at Penycloddiau

19th century prison modelled on Pentonville - it is now a museum and also houses the County archive. The group also visited Nantclwyd y dre, the oldest timbered town house in Wales, started in 1435 and subsequently extended several times. There are views of the castle and the surrounding landscape from the newly replanted garden.

On Sunday 6th August we made a series of brief stops and short walks at locations between the Vale of Clwyd and the River Dee. A narrow gorge at Pwll Glas is overlooked by a possibly Bronze Age hillfort. The quiet village of Llanelidan has a church which sits on a circular platform implying a pre-Christian site. A nearby mound, recorded as a 'tumulus'. was thought to be a glacial feature. A steep climb led to Gwndir on the former common and the historic boundary between the counties of Denbigh and Merioneth. The 19th century straight enclosure roads contrasted with the meandering stone and earth banks defining the earlier 'encroachments' on which a simple cottage and byre was built.

Across the watershed, a cup marked stone at Bwrdd y tri argllwyd marks the meeting point of the three lordships of Denbigh, Glyndwr and Yale. A Roman road follows the ridge at this point - gold was transported along this route between Bala and Chester. A Roman military route branched off to Prestatyn avoiding the gorge at Pwll Glas, and in the 18th century, drovers followed a similar path on the way to Ruthin.

A quick stop was made to look up at Caer Drewyn, a hillfort commanding views over Corwen and the Dee valley. Finally at Glyndwfrdwy, a pleasant walk along a wooded valley led to the Nant y pandy slate works where there were the ruins of a large waterwheel, workshops and a small section of wooden rail in the tramway which carried slate from the quarry to the railway. Thank you to all who contributed to and participated in this weekend.

Sue Stallibrass & Maurice Handley

Museum of Liverpool - The Huxley Hoard

This year celebrates 20 years of the 1996 Treasure Act coming into force. It is through the implementation of the Act that many museums

have the opportunity to acquire Treasure which has been reported and enhance their collections. Treasure is any object more than 300 years old which is more than 10% gold or silver, for coins it is two or more gold or silver coins found together or 10 or more base metal coins found together, two or more prehistoric objects found together, and any objects which are found in association with Treasure are also classed as Treasure. For example the pieces of lead discovered with the Huxley Hoard and the pottery found with the Knutsford Hoard are Treasure by association. When Treasure is discovered legally the finder has 14 days to report it to the local coroner for the area in which it was found. This can be done through the local Finds Liaison Officer. To celebrate museums around the country are placing Treasure 20 stickers on their displays which have come to the museums through the Treasure Act, to highlight the work of the Act. The introduction of the Treasure Act resulted in the creation of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS).



Early Medieval Brooch from Liverpool Museum

At the Museum of Liverpool the Huxley Hoard has been highlighted and there will also be a small temporary display of Treasure finds and non-Treasure finds which have been reported through the PAS. The display will run from mid-September to November and will feature interesting finds such as a sestertius of Lucilla found by 12 year old George Fowles and a fantastic Early Medieval brooch with decoration similar to that which is found in the Book of Kells.

On Friday the 22nd of September a talk will be given at the Museum of Liverpool by Vanessa Oakden on 20 years of Treasure at 1.30 followed by some object handling and a talk by Liz Stewart about the Viking Huxley Hoard. All are welcome to attend these free events.

Bronze Age Palstave from Sefton

This Bronze Age palstave axe was discovered in Sefton by a metal detectorist and was brought to the Museum of Liverpool to be recorded with the Portable Antiquities Scheme. It has been recorded on www.finds.org.uk/database as LVPL-CD9D36.



Bronze Age palstave axe

The axehead is of Middle Bronze Age date, probably of the Acton Park or Taunton metalwork assemblage dating from c.1500 to c. 1300BC and has been miscast. The blade of the palstave is worn and uneven with a blunt, convex cutting edge. The rear of the axehead has been damaged or miss-cast so that the septum (the area between the flange facets and the stop ridge) is missing or 'filled in' on one face and complete on the opposite face. On each side of the axehead is a proto-trunnion stop to aid the hafting of the axe, stopping it from moving as much. This suggests that the axe did not have a side loop. The blade is worn, slender and slight and the casting seems have been trimmed and hammered flat. The object has an undulating and pitted surface with a mid-green patina however it has been coated in wax.

Matthew G. Knight has examined images of the axe head which he discusses below:

The nature of palstave septums and flanges makes this area a structurally weak point in the design, which was quite liable to breaking (at least theoretically - more work needs doing on this). There seems to be a different patination/corrosion in the break, which suggests the absent septum broke in antiquity, and was not a miscast feature.

However, interpretation of the damage to the flanges is more problematic as this damage is not consistently corroded/patinated with the break across the septum. If it was it might be concluded that the flanges and the break across the septum occurred at the same time. In fact, the whole palstave apart from the break, appears to be smooth and well worn.

Regarding the damaged face, worn and abraded palstaves are encountered in the archaeological record, but not to the extent that an entire stop has been worn away. This suggests that the palstave was probably miscast but still prepared (e.g. by working the casting seams) and maybe used, though the blade is quite thick and does

not appear to have been hammered. Every now and again one sees what might be considered 'practice pieces', which seem to be objects that have gone wrong or have never been finished properly, as though an individual was simply practicing. It is possible this is one such example, where it may have been cast by an inexperienced caster, learning techniques like mould preparation, metal-working etc. On a less speculative note, it could just be a failed casting!

All things considered, it is probable this is a miscast object, but for whatever reason some basic preparation was taken. The broken septum was likely an accident that occurred after production of the object and possibly post-deposition.

The axe head has been kindly lent for display at the Museum of Liverpool as part of the PAS Treasure20 exhibition from September to November.

Vanessa Oakden & Matthew G. Knight