



## **Notice of Annual General Meeting**

**7.30 pm Thursday 17th December 2020**

Owing to the Covid-19 situation the AGM on 23rd April 2020 was cancelled and it is proposed to hold a 'virtual' meeting using Zoom on Thursday 17th December at 7.30 pm. MAS Council will be meeting in October to act according to guidance from the Charity Commissioners about the conduct of the meeting and the voting procedure. In particular we are considering the arrangements for those who are unable to attend via Zoom. The agenda and associated documents for the AGM will be sent out in due course.

### **'Guest' Editorial**

The Newsletter may have an unfamiliar look this month because our esteemed editor, Dave Roberts, is on holiday and yours truly has filled the breach. I don't have the skills to produce a newsletter to Dave's high standard but I hope this meagre effort is acceptable. Although the Covid situation is changing unpredictably, the Society is soldiering on with a walk and some planned Zoom meetings detailed below. For details of the officers of the Council and contacts please look at a previous Newsletter. Thanks also to Vanessa, Sue and Mark for their contributions.

### **Events**

Talks will be via Zoom and details of the link will be emailed to members before each meeting.

**Thursday 8th October 11.30 am** Sue Stallibrass *A social walk in Calderstones Park*

For details of the arrangements and to book a place, please contact Sue at [sue.Stallibrass@Liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:sue.Stallibrass@Liverpool.ac.uk)

**Thursday 15 October 7.30pm** Maurice Handley *'Merseyside's Industrial Heritage - a short illustrated guide'*.

Maurice will give a short introduction to the industrial archaeology of Merseyside based upon the latest MIHS publication, "*A Guide to the Industrial Heritage of Merseyside*". This is an experimental presentation to familiarise members with Zoom.

**Thursday 19 November 7.30pm** Mark Adams *'Capstans, Winches and Walls - Industrial Archaeology at Princes Dock'*.

Keeping up the industrial theme this talk will cover a (currently) ongoing watching brief at Princes Half-Tide Dock. See also Mark's article in this Newsletter.

**Thursday 17 December 7.30pm** Maurice Handley *AGM & Quiz*

The AGM will be followed by a non-competitive multi-choice quiz, though you will unfortunately have to supply your own mince pies and refreshments.

## **Margaret Cragg (1938 - 2020)**

It is with great sadness that we learnt that Margaret Cragg passed away suddenly in the summer. Margaret was a valued member of MAS for a number of years and will be missed by many. She regularly attended meetings and field trips with her friend Neville King.

Margaret worked as a Mechanical Engineer for Liverpool Corporation and North West Water. She was a member of various family history groups. Her interest in the archaeology of Merseyside and further afield was visible in her extensive collection of books, some of which were kindly donated to the Society by her niece Laura. These will be kept until such a time as we can safely meet and will be available for members to take. Tributes to Margaret can be read beneath her funeral notice which took place on 1st of July here <https://funeral-notices.co.uk/notice/cragg/4855742>. If you would like to pay tribute to Margaret in our next newsletter do please get in touch.

*Vanessa Oakden*

## **Bidston Fieldtrip - led by Mark Adams**

A small group of MAS members dodged the crowds for the field trip to Bidston Hill which took place on a bright and sunny Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September and the views of Liverpool and beyond were worth it in their own right (sorry, I was too busy picking out landmarks to take photographs). One of the things that struck us was how easy it was to confuse Wallasey Float with the Mersey; and was that the Lake District, the Howgills or the Sefton Coast that could be seen far to the north? The views gave a real sense of why the hill was such an important navigation marker for shipping in the days before GPS/SatNav.

We followed the Heritage Trail available on the Friends of Bidston Hill website which also gives a summary historical background to each of the sites on the trail which also has marker posts to show the way <http://www.bidstonhill.org.uk/heritage/map/>. The trail is easy to follow, so those who missed Sunday will be able to follow it easily on their own.

Tam O'Shanter's Farm is worth a visit, but was very busy on Sunday, so we hit the trail. A pity as it would have been good to view the work being done by the Bidston Community Archaeology group <https://sites.google.com/view/bidstoncommarchaeology> see also the January 2012 newsletter [https://www.merseysidearchsoc.com/uploads/2/7/2/9/2729758/newsletter\\_jan\\_2012.pdf](https://www.merseysidearchsoc.com/uploads/2/7/2/9/2729758/newsletter_jan_2012.pdf)

All of the locations are interesting, though the windmill site, horse carving and sun goddess sites were highlights for me. At the windmill site there's not just the early 19<sup>th</sup> century brick tower mill to see but numerous cuts into the bedrock, at least two of which pre-date the tower mill. We couldn't decide what they were, but they're parts of circles, so perhaps earlier mills or something else (see below)? Just to the north are the foundations of the post mill which blew down in the 1790s. There's a lot to make sense of there, but that's difficult to do from ground level. At work I've been using a pole mounted Gopro camera and a process called photogrammetry to produce plan views of similar sites, so I plan to return and do something similar here; watch out in future newsletters. For those wanting to know more about the mills I can recommend Rowan Patel's book on Wirral mills [https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/The\\_Windmills\\_and\\_Watermills\\_of\\_Wirral.html?id=-3MwjwEACAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/The_Windmills_and_Watermills_of_Wirral.html?id=-3MwjwEACAAJ&redir_esc=y)

The horse's head carving is easy to find but much harder to date; and who are/were the experts from Museum of Liverpool attempting to date it? It wasn't me, and anyway I won't claim to be an expert in rock art..... though stylistically it doesn't look Iron Age so that perhaps rules that out.

Bidston Observatory has a link with my current project on Princes Half-Tide Dock in that the observatory was sited close to where I'm working and moved to Bidston when the dock was remodelled in the 1860s. It's an impressive bit of Victorian masonry, as is the adjacent lighthouse.

The views of Bidston Hall aren't great from the trail, but the site has an interesting history and it's worth pausing for a look at the back of the house.

Close to the Cockpit is a capped shaft where persons unknown have created an unofficial entrance. This caps a ventilation shaft for the network of tunnels under Bidston Hill which were used as air-raid shelters in WWII. Unfortunately access is too dangerous for a future fieldtrip; and I doubt I'd fit through the gap anyway, but there's an interesting virtual tour here

<https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/bidston-hill-deep-shelter-march-2012.69843/>

poorer photos here

<https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/bidston-underground-war-tunnels-wirral.119467/>

and historical background here

<https://www.subbrit.org.uk/sites/bidston-hill/>.

Google would doubtless turn up more.

The cockpit itself is a circular cut into the bedrock, easily spotted from the path. I've not done the research, but the evidence for it being an actual cockpit seems slim. What was it? Another windmill? Perhaps, but at 8 metres in diameter it is the same size as a lot of roundhouses and the gully is the same width and depth as a roundhouse excavated at Irby in the 1990s. That could of course be a total coincidence, and in the absence of other evidence I wouldn't want to make a serious claim that the site is Iron Age, but it's worth considering.

Moving on we headed towards the Sun Goddess, pausing to examine a site not marked on the heritage trail. It's a trackway marked by parallel grooves cut into the exposed rock (At last! A photo!). The site's listed on the Merseyside Historic Environment Record, but in the wrong place, though its date is uncertain. It's probably 18-19<sup>th</sup> century, but could be earlier and it may relate to the transport of stone from one of the many small stone workings which dot the hill, the grooves being intended to increase traction for horses and wagons.

The Sun Goddess herself is slightly harder to find, but worth the effort. A description is given on the heritage trail website and I'll leave you to make your own conclusions, but to me it looked stylistically similar to the 10<sup>th</sup> century



grave slab excavated from Mark Rake, Bromborough 3-4 years ago <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/stories/astonishing-anglo-saxon-artefact> . Sadly we couldn't find the Moon Goddess.

The last site we visited was the Mummers' Carvings. I couldn't find these on the recce I did with the kids a couple of months ago, and it took a bit of effort this time around. However, the marker post is actually a better guide than it first seems. My top tip is to not look at your feet, look ahead and stare long enough. Hopefully you'll then spot a snake hiding in the moss, other carvings then appear in the gloom.

Bidston Hill's well worth the effort of making a visit and the Heritage Trail is very good. In these changed times it's well worth visiting, don't leave it 38 years as I did. The hill clearly has a lot of untapped archaeological potential.

### **Princes Half-Tide Dock**

Archaeologists from Headland Archaeology have been conducting a watching brief during Sisk's groundworks ahead of construction of a new ferry terminal at Princes Half-Tide Dock for the Isle of Man Government.

Princes Half-Tide Dock is part of the Liverpool Mercantile City World Heritage Site and is a significant part of the city's industrial heritage. During the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Liverpool's dock engineers were at the forefront of the development of dock technology, and the watching brief has recorded a range of above and below ground structures which has given Headland's archaeologists better understanding of how the dock was constructed and used.

The history of the dock began when John Foster Senior constructed Princes Dock which opened in 1821; the ferry terminal site lies on the western side of an entrance basin which lay at the northern end of the dock. As ships became bigger Princes Dock became obsolete and in the 1830s Jesse Hartley built Waterloo Dock to the north of the entrance basin.

The entrance basin was modified again in the late 1860s when Hartley's successor, G.F. Lyster, added two islands to its entrance, creating three new entrance locks. Single gates to north and south enabled its use as a half-tide dock by larger vessels, whilst in the middle was a lock which allowed smaller ships to enter or leave at any state of the tide. In the late 1930s the dock was modified further, Lyster's lock-gates were blocked and a new entrance lock, which opened in 1949, was built giving access to Waterloo Dock and Princes Dock. The new terminal building lies on top of Lyster's islands and incorporates the 1949 entrance lock.



*Figure 1. The evolution of Princes Dock. The map on the left shows the site's original 1821 layout with the extension north to Waterloo Dock. In the middle is the layout after the lock-gates were*



*added in the 1860s and on the right following the 1949 alterations; the 'tails' of the islands are on the right of the entrance.*

So far excavation has been concentrated on the islands constructed by Lyster in the 1860s. This has shown they were built using a network of cross-walls which were used to strengthen the outer walls of the islands and the quayside at their top. Set within these cross-walls were vertical shafts which connect to culverts buried deep within the islands. The shafts held gates which controlled the flow of water in the culverts which was used to adjust the water level inside the locks and to flush away any silt which accumulated around them.



*Figure 2. Overhead view of the excavation of Lyster's south lock-gate island showing the cross-walls and square shafts connected to the sluices. Two sets of gates were found in the infilled central lock, those on the left are closed, those on the right open. The image on the right has the 1860s works shaded orange, the 1949 works are shaded blue. The lock-gates are shaded brown.*



*Figure 3. Excavation of the north island showing the cross-walls. The circle on the left is a well.*

Careful hand-digging has exposed a number of interesting features relating to the locks. These include the wooden lock-gates which were made using greenheart, a tropical hardwood used throughout Liverpool's docks from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century because of its strength and resistance to rot. Other features include the depth gauges carved into the masonry of the lock-gates which showed the depth of water in the lock.



*Figure 4. A Headland archaeologist cleaning one of the wooden lock-gates exposed after careful machine excavation and a lock-gate after cleaning.*



*Figure 5. Depth gauge carved into the entrance lock wall and indicating a depth of 32 feet to the base of the lock.*

The watching brief has also required Headland's archaeologists to excavate and record several items of dock equipment such as capstans used to help manoeuvre ships, and large winches used to open and close the lock gates. Most of these had been filled with brick rubble when the dock was closed in the 1980s and this could only be removed by hand-digging.



*Figure 6. Excavating rubble from a winch used to open lock-gates and a capstan and its hydraulic motors after hand-digging.*

Many of these were installed when Lyster remodelled the dock in the 1860s and would probably have continued working until the 1970s or 80s. They were powered by a water-based hydraulic system supplied by a network of pipes which lay under the dock's granite paving.

The best preserved pieces of machinery have been carefully moved and will be reinstalled in a Heritage Area incorporated into the terminal site.

Headland would like to acknowledge funding of the project by the Isle of Man Government. The assistance of the staff of John Sisk & Son, in particular David Rutherford, Tim Newton and Aaron Fraser, and of Ian Barnes of the Waterman Group is also gratefully acknowledged.

*Mark Adams*

### **Archaeology is Everywhere**

During the 'lockdown summer', I reached forty for the second time. Twenty-five per cent of my life has been spent living in Merseyside and I have made many friends here including quite a few amongst members of MAS. Covid-19 has limited the social side of our society and we miss the chance for a chat over coffee and the trip to the pub for a pint after meetings. Field trips in particular provide an opportunity to get to know people. My birthday celebrations were very subdued although I had a lot of cards. One from an MAS friend I thought was very appropriate with a nice link to dendrochronology - archaeology is even on birthday cards.



Sue Stallibrass has suggested a number of useful online resources in previous newsletters and I'm indebted to Sue for bringing attention to the TV series 'Britain's Biggest Dig' on BBC2 and iPlayer. Presented by anthropologist Professor Alice Roberts and historian Dr Yasmin Khan, it's about some of the extensive archaeological investigations being carried out ahead of the construction of the HS2 high-speed railway line between London and Birmingham. The first episode dealt with the excavation of a Georgian burial ground at the proposed HS2 terminus at Euston. There were thousands of burials at this compact site and viewers are treated to a surfeit of skeletons. Many of the coffins with their nameplates survived in the damp clay, making it possible to identify some of the bodies. The burials took place at a time when there was a shortage of bodies for medical training and there were gangs who would uncover a coffin and steal recently buried cadavers. To prevent the body from being pulled through a hole made in the coffin lid, the body would be held down by a metal 'coffin collar' that passed over the neck and was fixed to the base of the coffin.

The second episode, digs deeper through the excavations at the Euston burial ground and finds the remains of Captain Matthew Flinders R.N. who explored and mapped the coast of Australia. The presenters then move on to another large burial ground in the centre of Birmingham. They explore the lives of the poor occupants of court housing and workhouses. The final episode reveals how working-class Victorians made Birmingham one of the most important industrial cities on the planet. The discoveries range from why several mysterious skeletons have strange cut marks on them to the rise of the real Peaky Blinders. We were told that there's an archaeological site for every mile of HS2 but this series only deals with the two largest. Catch them on iPlayer or online at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000mmrf>

*Maurice Handley ('Guest' Editor)*