



# Merseyside Archaeological Society Newsletter 2/2012

Registered Charity No 510831

## From the Editor:

Welcome to the MAS Summer Newsletter. This issue contains features on Hilbre Island, the recent fieldtrip to Formby, a review of the Council for British Archaeology North West (CBANW) Spring Meeting at Bromborough, an impression of the archaeology displays at Liverpool Museum and an article on a Roman copper annulus found in a spoil heap in Liverpool. There are also the usual smaller pieces of news and details of our forthcoming 2012-13 lecture programme.

Dave Roberts

## MAS Fieldtrip to Llandudno

Our next fieldtrip will be on Saturday 21st July to the Bronze Age mines on Great Orme. Uncovered in 1987 during a scheme to landscape an area of the the Great Orme, the copper mines discovered below the ground represent one of the most astounding archaeological discoveries of recent time. Dating back 4,000 years to the Bronze Age they change our views about the ancient people of Britain and their civilized and structured society 2,000 years before the Roman invasion.

The price of the trip will be £25 which will include the cost of a coach, leaving from outside Dr. Duncan's pub in the city centre, and entrance to the mines. Please note this trip will not be viable if less than 20 people attend. Early booking is therefore advisable. For further information contact Chris: [C.M.Wood@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:C.M.Wood@ljmu.ac.uk)

## MAS 2012-13 Lecture programme

18th October. Christine Longworth, MAS/Freelance Archaeologist, *The Archaeology of Hilbre Island*

15th November. Brian Grimsditch, Salford University, *The 'Dig Manchester' Project*.

17th January. Prof. Nancy Edwards, Bangor University, *Medieval Churches*.

21st February. Dr David Robinson, University of Central Lancashire, *The Stonehenge Riverside Project*

21st March. Dr Vicki Cummings, University of Central Lancashire, *The Structure of Dolmens*.

18th April. Dr Kate Waddington, Bangor University, *The Whitchurch Project*.

If you have heard a particularly interesting talk please pass the information on to Chris as an idea for a future speaker.

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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 that you feel would be of interest to members of the Society, 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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### ***Closure of Merseyside Archaeological Advisory Service***

Since the last Newsletter there have been a number of developments. MAS has been engaged in a long round of correspondence with the Liverpool City Council Chief Executive and his Building Conservation team regarding how they intend to meet their obligations with regard to the preservation and conservation of archaeological sites with the demise of the MAAS. In the meantime government legislation with regard to this has changed. The former PPS5 has been replaced by the National Planning Authorities Frameworks.

Liverpool City council have taken the stance that they continue to meet their obligations under the new legislation. MAS has issues with this statement as one of the key clauses is to have access to and maintain an Historical Environment Record. However, the Merseyside Historical Environment Record closed on 31st March 2012 so how can this be the case? The dialogue continues and MAS has been joined by English Heritage, CBA and academics in the north-west in further rounds of correspondence.

On the wider front on Merseyside the situation is not quite as bleak. There are some signs, on Wirral in particular, that active steps are being taken to find a resolution. Although I do not have firm details I hope that I shall have something more positive to report in the Autumn.

*Dave Roberts*

### ***The Calderstones***

Some years ago MAS collaborated with the Dept. of Parks and Greenspaces, Liverpool City Council in the preparation of a Heritage Lottery Fund bid to re-locate the Calderstones to a more favourable environment. The state of the 1960s vestibule in which the stones are housed had become a major cause for concern and was in urgent need of repair. Unfortunately, the response to the HLF project submission was unsuccessful but the Council have since explored interim measures to conserve and improve the plight of the Calderstones.

MAS is pleased to report that with support from the Council's Premises Management Unit, Parks and Greenspaces have prepared a scheme to refurbish the Harthill Vestibule with the main objectives to improve the environmental conditions and security of the stones. A secondary objective is to enable improved, managed access to the stones, including better provision of information. The works, which have now started, will comprise the reinstatement of the brick, timber and glass structure incorporating additional ventilation while restoring the structural integrity – and security - of the building. It is intended to include a notice board at the entrance to display information about the stones. Notably these improvements to security, access and the appearance of the Calderstones monument should enable greater promotion of the stones, and hopefully the basis for developing increased awareness and potentially a renewed project bid, in due course.

### ***Further news on Rainford***

Following the exciting finds at Rainford last year a Heritage Lottery Fund bid has been prepared to support a 21-month project to investigate 'Rainford's Roots'. The project will be wide-ranging including a detailed geo-physical survey, field-walking and extensive trial trenching of several sites which have the potential to reveal further information regarding Rainford's industrial past. From previous experience the amount of material recovered from sites in Rainford could be huge so it is expected that post-excavation work will be a time-consuming and important part of the work. There will also be a research programme, delving into documentary evidence of Rainford's past to produce a guide book and local walking plan. Should the bid prove successful there will be opportunities for MAS members and local residents to take part in a number of activities. Hopefully, we should hear whether the bid has been successful by the time the next Newsletter is due, so more then.

### ***Other Grants***

The Heritage Lottery Fund has launched a new £1 million grants programme called "All Our Stories" to support local projects across the UK that want to explore their local heritage. A wide range of voluntary and community sector organisations (including charities, community groups, and heritage organisations) throughout the UK can apply for grants of between £3,000 and £10,000. If anyone is keen to set up a project please get in touch. Some urgency is required as the deadline for submission is 31st July.

## Hilbre Survey

Hilbre Island is located just off the coast of West Kirby and has a history dating back to the prehistoric period although most of the visible remains relate to the 19<sup>th</sup> century maritime connection.

Four years ago I decided to do a small project recording the main buildings on the island associated with the visual telegraph system linking Holyhead with Liverpool and the Trinity House buoy store where buoys aiding navigation on the River Dee were maintained. It soon became clear that a survey record for the rest of the island was very basic and therefore the project was extended to cover the whole of Hilbre.

The survey is done by traditional methods using tape measures to construct a triangulation framework covering the island off which ground features were recorded. The method is similar to the first ordnance survey of the British Isles and I am trying to achieve an accuracy of 50mm between points over the whole island.

The drawing is being prepared using computer aided design software which allows historical information to be superimposed in layers. The historic environment record was accessed before its closure and the finds information included on the plan. Excavation information such as Ecroyd Smith's 1868 dig and Newstead's 1926 search for monastic remains have been superimposed. National Museums Liverpool has also kindly provided excavation drawings and these have also been incorporated into the record.

Building elevations have been measured and by digitally removing any photographic distortion a scaled photographic image can be used to 'trace' over to record the bonding of the brickwork and stonework. This has been a useful exercise as many of the buildings have had a variety of uses over the years with numerous adaptations. Finely worked sandstone blocks can be found incorporated in otherwise basic buildings such as cart sheds and animal houses. It is hoped to analyse the various finishes to these blocks to identify whether they are salvaged materials used elsewhere throughout the island or in situ foundation remains of earlier structures.

The survey is also using state of the art technology to evaluate the landscape and the KOREC group, located in Crosby, are providing a detailed photographic survey of the island using SenceFly equipment used for civil engineering and archaeology. A detailed photographic plan to scale can be produced along with a 3D model. LiDAR laser scan data is also being purchased from the Environment Agency which also allows 3D modelling of the island to an accuracy of 250mm. A partnership has been set up with National Museums Liverpool who will cover any archaeological excavations and Oxford University who will carry out a geophysical survey of Hilbre and Middle Eye.

The survey work is an ongoing labour of love. With having more spare time recently a large portion of the work has been done whilst living on the island in four and five day blocks which has amounted to over 6 weeks since September. Breakfast watching the sun rise over the Wirral and a glass of wine on the cliffs as it sets over Liverpool Bay with archaeology literally on the doorstep during the day all adds to the enjoyment of the Island. The summer compensates for freezing icy rain in January. When work is half an hour outside before returning to stoke up the log fire in the cottage to thaw out



*Programming the SenceFly - Hilbre Islands*

icy fingers. There is no water on the island so all provisions have to be brought on beforehand in bottles. The electricity supply to the one plug socket is wind dependent so illumination is by gas light and heating is by whatever wood can be scavenged for the fire. This all adds to the experience which is similar to earlier inhabitants. The benefit is that the knowledge of the archaeology on the island is greatly increased as more remains are identified and recorded which may form the basis for further archaeological excavation in the future.

*Roy Forshaw*

## Field Trip to Formby

On Saturday June 16 Dr. Mark Adams, archaeological project officer at Liverpool Museums, led our first fieldtrip of the year, to the beach at Formby Point. Here coastal erosion regularly reveals the subfossil footprints of humans (adult and child), mammals (aurochs, cattle, red deer, roe deer, unshod horse, dog / wolf, wild boar, sheep / goat) and wading birds (crane, oystercatcher and rail) in the late Holocene silt exposures. The footprints are generally dated in the Mesolithic to mid-Neolithic period (ca 8,000- 3,000 BC), although some of the higher layers also have footprints of Iron Age domestic oxen.

Sub-fossil footprint exposures in an open, unprotected environment are rare. Some have been found in other Holocene, intertidal environments such as the Severn Estuary, South Walney Island and Jersey (Channel Islands) in the United Kingdom, the Canche Estuary in northern France, and the Pampean Coast of Argentina. Of these locations, Formby Point has yielded the greatest number of prehistoric, human footprint trails.

In the past over 200 human footprint trails have been recorded at Formby Point, of men, women and children. A statistical analysis of 75 of the best defined trails suggested that the men were 1.66m tall, and the women 1.45m. Analyses of the distance between the individual footprints suggested occupations such as food gathering (shrimps, razor shells and other sea food) by the young women and children, while the male footprints could sometimes



*Animal footprints on Formby Beach: photo Jennifer Mirdamadi*

be directly associated with red and roe deer tracks, suggesting hunting activity.

According to Professor Geoffrey Wainwright (English Heritage): “The intertidal zone, because of its nature and because of the fact that it is in an inundated landscape, can give us a great amount of information about the past environment of the last six thousand years, and this gives us a picture of human settlement which, ironically, gives us a more complete picture of Man and his lifestyle and his environment than we get from the dry, terrestrial sites. It is a very important environment for us to study and, indeed, a very neglected environment. It is also very difficult to put a human face on archaeological evidence, and with these footprints you have actually the mark of the people concerned, and that is what makes them so important”.

Because most of the footprints are located in the intertidal zone, timing was essential. So at 11.00 sharp 16 MAS members in wellies and cagoules set out under Mark’s expert guidance, in spite of the rain (which fortunately cleared fairly soon). While prints of birds were common, the first large footprints found were those of roe and red deer, and eventually some aurochs footprints were also found in the hardened silt layers. Towards the end of the walk we eventually found some trails of human footprints, the icing on the cake. The whole trip took some 4 hours. Our thanks go to Mark Adams, for his expert guidance and extensive and informative explanations.

Source:[http://www.seftoncoast.org.uk/hist\\_footprints.html](http://www.seftoncoast.org.uk/hist_footprints.html)

*Eveline Van der Steen*

### **The Archaeology Galleries at The Museum of Liverpool**

The new Museum of Liverpool (MoL) opened in July 2011, and was officially opened by the Queen in December 2011.

The first thing to understand about MoL, is that it is not just about Liverpool, it includes items from the rest of Merseyside and its environs. In particular, most of the earliest exhibits are from the Wirral. Liverpool itself is singularly lacking in any early finds.

The exception to this though is the Calderstones, which formed part of a Neolithic burial chamber some 4-5,000 years ago. On the floor

of the atrium is a depiction of a spiral from one of the stones, and this is also reflected in the form of the elliptical staircase. Given that MoL have chosen to give such prominence to this image, they are very coy about explaining what it is. Just a small card affixed to the nearby staircase; if you weren’t looking you definitely wouldn’t see this. There are other exhibits relating to the stones in different contexts, and it is a matter of opinion whether they would be better displayed all together. Most particularly, on the first floor, there is a nice art installation of a number of concentric circles presumably referencing the stones (there is no explanation); these would be very effective if displayed on the staircase beside the spiral motif.

One of the major galleries is History Detectives, this is described as “a time travellers dateline ... packed with objects”. For some reason, (probably purely down to space) the early pre history – ice age, Calderstones etc is included in the “Great Port” gallery. The timeline starts from 5,000 BC, it is unfortunate that the first part of the timeline is in an area barely 8’ wide; the constant flow of people passing makes it difficult to view the exhibition. It is however a good mix of information, actual exhibits, and replicas, video, and illustration. In the Roman section, the eye is drawn to the large hedgehog occupying centre stage in the middle of the Roman finds, but all becomes clear as the narrative explains that hedgehogs were eaten at this time.

The next key section is that covering the Viking period. On display is “The Huxley Hoard”. This was discovered in November 2004 during a weekend metal detector rally at Huxley, Cheshire. The hoard is thought to date to the first decade of the 10th century AD. Also in this section is a replica hogback stone from St Bridget’s in West Kirby, and is the most southerly example found in the British Isles.

After this we move on to Medieval Liverpool (1066-1485), the start of more recognisable objects referencing things people are more familiar with, a good selection of events and objects, well illustrated.

Alongside the main timeline, there is a series of exhibits focusing on a particular area:- eg South Castle St, Toxteth Park, Lydiate Hall, Meols. All very interesting and well exhibited.

There is also a key exhibition of the finds of the excavation of the Manchester Dock, showing the diverse range of pottery used as infill for the quayside – this could be improved by more specific dating information rather than just saying “creamware” or “Staffordshire pottery”. The reconstruction of the Manchester Dock starting from the bedrock, and showing the various layers of infill is excellent.

Another key feature of the History Detectives Gallery is the interactive maps. I’ve visited a number of times, and sadly have never found all 6 in working order. But when you can access one working, it is extremely interesting; well put together, with information on a variety of aspects of Liverpool history. What is disappointing though was the number of icons that still have the legend “image coming shortly” This has been planned for a number of years now yet the images still aren’t there, and indeed some – a much smaller number – don’t have any text. It is to be hoped that someone within MoL is still working on this. That said, you could easily spend a couple of hours exploring this part of the exhibition.

There is a general criticism though of this gallery, which is the way information is presented. There doesn’t seem to be a ‘house style’ to



*Calderstones Spiral - Museum of Liverpool Atrium*

distinguish the various information panels. They are all white text on differently coloured background, some more legible than others. This problem is compounded by the lighting which variously casts a shadow in some places, and a glare in others; all in all does not lead to easy reading. (This probably has little to do with MoL staff, more to do with an expensive graphics company!)

Another key gallery is “The Great Port”. The exhibition entitled “The Development of Liverpool Docks” consists mostly of a series of paintings depicting the docks at different periods, and a small number of information panels, giving really quite sketchy information. The exhibition includes one of the dock gates excavated from the Manchester Dock, (on which the museum is built). There is a model of the Albert Dock, and surrounding docks, this could be greatly enhanced by the addition of a simple illustration of the whole of the dock estate – this model is only a tiny section, and that is not really apparent.

My last visit was during a wet and windy half term, and there were lots of grandparents and children – both groups seemed to be deriving equal enjoyment. The model demonstrating how goods were loaded and transported was of particular interest – one elderly chap had a few children enthralled with his stories of how it all worked.

I’ve not even touched on the other galleries: Wondrous Place, The People’s Republic, Global City etc. If you haven’t already visited, then you must do so. At once. You won’t be disappointed.

*Joyce Hughes*

### **CBA North West Spring Meeting 2012 at Bromborough**

On a sunny Saturday morning, Helen Caffrey, CBANW Chair welcomed over 100 members to the CBANW Annual Spring Meeting held in 2012 at St Barnabas Village Hall, Bromborough. This year’s meeting had a Wirral theme featuring top class speakers from near and far.

Proceedings commenced with talks from Christine Longworth and Roy Forshaw who described the archaeology and recent survey work on the Hilbre Islands. Christine summarised the human presence on the islands from the earliest to modern times. There is abundant evidence of the presence of early man on Hilbre from Mesolithic midden sites, Neolithic flint tools and possible Bronze Age field boundaries.

Further finds from the Bronze Age include a socketed axe and a bucket-shaped urn. The Roman period is represented by a small number of finds but no structures. Early Medieval finds include a glass bead and an Anglo-Norse cross head which may be related to an early religious presence on the Islands. It has long been suspected that there was an early Christian chapel site on Hilbre but so far it’s location has proved elusive. The discovery of a tiny fragment of Medieval floor tile in 2006-07 adds to the evidence for a religious foundation somewhere on the Island. The later historic period is well documented including leases relating to the 17th and 18th-century salt trade of which there is abundant evidence on the ground. Roy Forshaw described recent survey work he has carried out on the Islands. Detailed drawings of the surviving buildings and industrial remains related to the aforementioned salt industry have been produced. The navigational history of the Islands, in the 19th and early 20th centuries has been investigated including round the 19th century Telegraph Station which still survives today. Other recent maritime history is represented by the mid 19th -century Life Boat Station and Mersey Canoe Club which was based on the Islands.

Our next speakers were David Griffiths and Dean Paton from the University of Oxford who gave us a summary of their recent work on the evidence for the British, Anglo Saxon and Viking presence on the Wirral peninsula. From the late prehistoric onwards there is much evidence for the importance of Wirral as a centre of trade. Many of the finds come from the ancient port at Meols. Wallasey was an important British centre in the 5th century AD. Coin evidence from the Iron Age, through the Roman and post-Roman periods demonstrates the importance of the Meols, Leasowe and Moreton areas as part of a trading network having connections in the 6th century with the Mediterranean and beyond. Continuity of settlement on Wirral is represented by sites such as Irby, which have produced Roman material and Anglo-Saxon and Viking finds. During the Saxon and Viking periods the Dee and Mersey estuaries became strategic outposts. It was suggested that the Viking period was a relatively transitory phase between the Anglo Saxon and Medieval periods although there is a dense group of Viking place names in Wirral. Using evidence from documents, place-names and archaeology Dean Paton has concluded that the relationship between the Anglo-Saxons and their Viking neighbours was complex with lots of crossovers and the intermingling of peoples. Using map evidence Dean is investigating places situated on parish boundaries e.g. Thingwall. Interpretation of the evidence for this period is complicated and will only be resolved by a structured programme of landscape interpretation.

After lunch Frances McIntosh, University of Newcastle, described her work on Wirral brooches, a distinct type of Roman bow brooch. They are locally produced and found mainly on Wirral as stray finds in rural areas, 8 of which were found at Meols. Wirral brooches were likely to have been worn by the local people rather than the military. However, there are 2 sub-groups of brooches outside the core area, one in Scotland and the second in the Northern Military Zone. In the Roman period the Cheshire Plain area was rich in natural resources which the Romans were keen to exploit, such as lead extraction on Halkyn Mountain and salt production at Northwich. There also appears to be a link with the production of mortaria at Wilderspool, many of which have been found on Hadrian’s or the Antonine Wall. These industries could explain the link between the distribution of brooches between



*Anglo Saxon CrossFragments - Bromborough*

Wirral and the military-zone sub-groups, the brooches either being traded or lost by the merchants engaged in these industries.

Our final speaker was Rob Philpott, who summarised recent work on the finds from Meols, which he described as Wirral's oldest port. Over 10,000 finds were recovered from Meols by the end of the 19th century. Meols would have been an important haven on the Irish Sea and in antiquity would have been dry land centred around Dove Point. Between 1792 and 1847 the coast eroded rapidly and the finds came to light. Although many of the finds were recorded they were spread across about 20 separate collections. A recent detailed study brought the finds together and a catalogue was produced in 2007. Together this represents a complex and highly specialised group of material dating from the Mesolithic period to the 19th century AD. By the Iron Age, Meols was a port of some status having contacts with Gaul and the Mediterranean perhaps through connections with the salt trade. In the Roman period Meols appears to have been a trans-shipment point between estuarine and ocean craft for the Roman fort at Chester although there are both civilian as well as military artefacts. Meols shows continuity as a port through the Dark Age period with Viking and Byzantine finds. There is a remarkable collection of Medieval finds including 900 buckles and over 100 shoes. Meols would have been a small community which makes the collection remarkable. It appears that material was being manufactured as well as consumed. During the Medieval period there were many episodes when the medieval village was encroached upon by the sand dunes. This had a devastating effect which led to the demise of the settlement.

The meeting was followed by a short talk from Dean Paton on the reconstructed Anglo Saxon cross in St Barnabas churchyard. This was an excellent day and CBANW are to be commended in putting together such a diverse and interesting group of speakers. MAS will no doubt be inviting some of them to speak to us in the future as their research progresses.

*Dave Roberts*

### A copper alloy nummus of Constantius II, (323-361)

This copper alloy coin was an unusual find as it was discovered in a spoil heap in the centre of Liverpool during recent road works by a passer by. The coin was brought to the Portable Antiquities Scheme at National Museums Liverpool for recording and identification.



*Roman Copper Alloy Nummus*

The coin is a copper alloy nummus of Constantius II, (323-361) and reads:

Obverse: FL. IVL. CONSTANTIVS NOB. C; Laureate and cuirassed bust right.

Reverse: GLORIA EXERCITVS; Two soldiers standing either side of two standards.

In exergue: SMK[A].

The coin was minted in Cyzicus, modern day Turkey, and can be dated to AD 331-4. The abbreviations on the coin's legend can be translated as FLAVIUS JULIUS CONSTANTINUS NOBILISSIMUS CAESAR. Nobilissimus translates as 'most noble' which was commonly used for junior emperors on late Roman coins.

Constantius II was born in A.D. 317 and was the second son of Constantine I and Fausta. In 324 he became Caesar after the defeat of Licinius. His brothers Constantine II and Constans also minted nummi with this reverse which was common during the fourth century AD. When the empire was divided after the death of Constantine I, Constantius II received the eastern territories.

The nummus was a low value coin and currently there are only 58 nummi recorded from Merseyside. It is great to have one from the city centre where there is not much opportunity to record stray finds due to the nature of the landscape. Across England and Wales we have recorded 87,411 nummi only 369 of which are from the North West.



*Roman nummi from the North West.*

-  - A yellow marker signifies a single findspot awaiting validation.
-  - A green marker signifies a single findspot for a validated record.
-  - A blue marker signifies a cluster of findspots.

*Vanessa Oakden*