

Merseyside Archaeological Society

Archaeological Services,
Liverpool University,
PO Box 147,
Liverpool L69 3BX.

March 1987.

Archaeological Survey of Merseyside.

Moreton Chapel, a chapel of ease in Bidston parish, is recorded in documents of the 16th and 17th century, and was demolished at the end of the 17th century. The 1st edition OS map of 1850 marks the 'Site of Chapel' within an oval boundary, the latter being the characteristic form of early ecclesiastical enclosure in western Britain (cf. Prescott, Walton-on-the-Hill, Overchurch - all with suspected or known pre-conquest activity).

Excavations on Hoylake Road, Moreton in 1985 by Peter Davey and Robina McNeil showed that an existing boundary wall followed the line of the earlier enclosure shown on the 1850 OS map but no trace of medieval activity was recovered from the area immediately outside the enclosure.

The recent demolition of the houses within the enclosure area in advance of redevelopment provided an opportunity to continue the search for the chapel and excavation began late in January in what had been the gardens of houses on Hoylake Road. It soon became apparent that a layer of ploughsoil containing a little medieval and 18th century pottery had developed over the whole site, presumably after the demolition of the chapel. The only features so far detected which are earlier than the ploughsoil are three ditches and a possible post-hole. Two of the ditches are relatively insubstantial, but the third measures up to 1.2m wide and curves in an arc which if continued would intersect with the oval 'chapel enclosure'. None of these ditches has yet produced datable finds but the largest has some pig bone. It is difficult to see the large ditch and the oval enclosure in use at the same time and if it is correct to see the oval enclosure as associated with the chapel this raises the interesting possibility that the ditch may predate the chapel. Further investigation of the ditch to establish the alignment, relationship to the enclosure and the date of the fill is a priority.

Finds are not prolific - apart from a few fragments of animal bone in the large ditch, the ploughsoil has produced a possible worked flint flake, about a dozen very small, abraded medieval sherds and surprisingly little post-medieval pottery or clay pipes.

Work continues on the site but the vagaries of the weather and dependence on volunteer labour mean progress is slow. Any help from members of the society would be most welcome. Contact Rob Philpott at the Archaeological Survey (051 207 0001 x260).

Liverpool District

Hale

Work continues on the archaeological survey of Hale township. Most of the group's efforts have been directed at the completion of recording sheets for buildings surviving in the area which date to 1850 or before. Approximately 60 buildings have been identified so far. Research at Chester Records Office has recently brought to light two collections of records relating to the history of buildings in Hale. A cursory examination has revealed 19th and 20th century ground plans of dwellings belonging to the Hale estate. It is evident that these records will supplement work carried out to date and an organised examination of the collections is planned for the near future.

The same collections also contain some early post-medieval documents and a transcription of a charter awarded to Hale in the reign of Edward III. Miscellaneous maps and plans are also available for consultation. These documents also require consultation.

A fieldwalking programme has started and so far five fields have been examined. The results at this very early stage are rather inconclusive although isolated finds of worked flint and medieval pottery indicate the potential of the area. The programme will continue as fields become available.

A find of a Roman silver denarius, dated to the reign of Septimius Severus, at Oglet, together with the discovery of Roman artefacts reported two months ago indicate the potential of this area.

It has now become apparent that the documentary record for Hale, especially in the 19th century, is far more extensive than was originally anticipated. If we can get a very accurate picture of the village in the early 19th century there may be scope for projecting this back into the earlier post-medieval and medieval periods to help put together the more fragmentary medieval documentary record and the archaeology. To achieve this further assistance from Society members is required. At present only four people are working on this aspect of the survey. If anyone could spare the odd day to work, particularly in Chester, I would be grateful. Anyone who is interested should contact Dave Roberts at 051 428 5115 in the evening.

Wirral Field Group.

Excavation of a cobbled road surface on Irby Mill Hill lying between two fields would now seem to be the crossing over a culvert between the fields, the entrance having long since gone out of use. Excavations in search of the 'Sulphur' well on Irby Mill Hill have proved to be fruitless, although an interesting stile made of sandstone was uncovered. This had partly been buried by earth and leaves and was very much overgrown by brambles.

Excavations on Raby Hall Farm have uncovered what is believed to be the continuation of the Roman road at Street Hey, Willaston - the new find being on exact alignment from Street Hey. A ramp to negotiate a steep bank on the road was also identified. Further work when the weather permits should reveal a ford crossing the stream over which the road passes. Peter France is preparing a detailed report from plans and photographs taken by the group.

A visit to Thornton Grange site, west of Clatterbridge revealed the remains of a tumbled sandstone wall thought to be associated with the Grange. Some interesting features were observed at Umerston Covert, Storeton, which may be associated with the campus de Humbleston referred to by Dodgson.

Field walking in Caldby produced fragments of clay pipes and a cannon ball (4" diam.) close to the Dee side of Caldby Golf Course.

E.E. Richards.

North West Archaeological Trust.

Excavations are due to begin at the motte at Castle Hill, Newton-le-Willows at the end of March and are planned to continue until late July. Volunteers will be welcome on the site. For further details contact Jen Lewis, c/o North West Archaeological Trust, 19 Abercromby Square, Liverpool L69 8EN.

Lecture Programme 1987.

- April 25 AGM, Liverpool Museum: 2.00 pm.
Guest speaker: Alan Millard (Dept of Oriental Studies, University of Liverpool).
'Archaeology and the World of the Bible'
- October 22 Niall Sharples (English Heritage: Director of Excavations, Maiden Castle, Dorset)
'The Maiden Castle Project'
- November 19 Robina McNeil (North West Archaeological Trust)
'Work at Halton Castle, Runcorn, 1986-87'
- December 11 Members' reports and Christmas party

All meetings except the AGM take place at 7.30 pm. in Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool.

Field Visits.

About four visits will be arranged during the summer. Proposed visits at present are to Stafford Castle, Shotwick (Wirral), Bersham Colliery, Wrexham and the Lune Valley. Further details will appear in the newsletter.

Merseyside Archaeological Society Publications.

A list of the Society publications which are still available is enclosed with the newsletter.

Courses

Early Christian Sites in the North-East Tutor: Miss Dorothy O'Hanlon

The course will examine the evidence for the conversion of England, and Northumbria in particular, and will focus on visits to sites such as Jarrow, Escomb, Monkwearmouth and Durham. Meetings other than field trips will take place in 126 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool. The first meeting is on 9th June but prior enrolment by 3rd April is necessary through:

Liverpool Branch Secretary, WEA, 7/8 Bluecoat Chambers, School Lane, Liverpool 1.

The cost is #29.70 (reduced fee #22.70), including dinner, bed and breakfast in Durham, but not including transport costs.

Pottery and Potteries in the Liverpool Area c. 1500-1770: 2-4 October 1987.

A conference run jointly by Liverpool University, Liverpool Museum and the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology is to be held in Liverpool to survey the research of the last decade into the pottery of the Liverpool area and to consider the results of archaeological excavation in the Merseyside region. It will include papers on the Buckley potteries to 1800, the Liverpool finewares in the 18th century, a survey of excavated pottery and potteries in the Merseyside area, the pottery of the Liverpool area in a national context, and the local 18th century coarsewares.

A major feature of the conference will be the opportunity to see, handle and discuss many of the kiln groups and major excavated sequences from the region.

For further information and bookings please contact Rita Langman, Department of Continuing Education, 19 Abercromby Square, P.O. Box 147, Liverpool L69 8EN (051 709 6022, x 2797).

Residential Course

Isle of Man - Peel Castle Teaching Excavation.

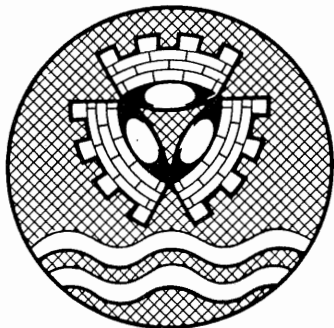
P.J. Davey, D. Freke and others. 13 April- 9 May 1987. Further details are now available.

Summer Academy: One Week Study Holiday - 1987.

Roman Britain

T.J. Strickland. Chester College. Details from Summer Academy, School of Continuing Education, The University, Canterbury, Kent.

For further details of all courses contact The Director of Continuing Education, 19 Abercromby Square, P.O. Box 147, Liverpool L69 3BX. Tel: 051 709 6022.



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September 1987.

Archaeological Survey of Merseyside.

Moreton

Work has continued over the summer at the site at Moreton. Further evidence of occupation has been recovered. The main features consist of a substantial ditch which appears to form a right angle, and was probably infilled in the late Saxon period. Two smaller ditches seem to have joined this although the exact sequence is as yet uncertain. A shallow beam slot lies parallel to a stretch of the main ditch and may be associated with several post-holes encountered nearby. The main evidence for activity on the site however is a substantial hollow filled with black material, the lowest layers of which contain much carbonized grain and some daub, the latter concentrated in the south-east corner of the site. Within the black layer a number of small stakeholes, some clearly forming lines, may represent the erection of light, temporary fences. At present the complex is seen as a grain processing area, probably involving grain-drying in one or more insubstantial kilns erected on the surface. The fences may have demarcated this area, or possibly acted as windbreaks to facilitate control over the kiln fire. So far no dating evidence has been recovered from these features, although a single sherd of pottery from above the black fills of the hollow may be 13th century in date. A further phase of activity still remains to be excavated, with at least one substantial trench or ditch visible.

Any help from members of the society would be most welcome. Contact Rob Philpott at the Archaeological Survey (051 207 0001 x260).

Wirral Field Group.

Further Investigation of I.D.Margery Road No.670 Raby Wirral

The group has successfully established the known course of this road for a further two miles, as far as the present bridge at

Clatterbridge Hospital. The road was last identified in a field to the east of Hargrave Lane in 1962, where excavation revealed a layer of cobbles in sand resting on clay with kerbstones of large cobbles.

A little to the north of this site at Raby Hall Farm, the line of the road would have had to cross a stream in a small steep sided valley and it was here that the group decided to locate the road and the nature of the stream crossing. The farmer remembered some large stone blocks lying around in the stream bed in the 1920's opposite a cutting and ramp in the north side of the valley.

The south side has a more gentle slope and a probe survey revealed a depression in the slope running down to the stream. Excavation confirmed this, with the road lying in the depression. The construction was of two layers of cobbles topped with traces of the fine gravel surfacing, which survived here below the limit of the ploughing. Investigation of the ramp confirmed that it was formed of clay and traces of a road surface remained. The field on the north side of the valley revealed traces of the road which was badly scattered by early ploughing. A large ditch two metres wide and one metre deep was found, which had been recut at least once. This ditch had been cut through a land surface which was about half a metre deeper than the present. It is not yet known if this ditch is associated with the road and further work will take place here. Excavation to ascertain the precise nature of the stream crossing at this point is eagerly awaited when conditions permit.

The alignment of the road northwards from here passes through Foxes Wood, an area of native woodland. This is bounded on the north side by a second stream. The nature of the ground here and the visible remains may suggest that the stream was crossed at high level by a large bridge. Permission is now being applied for to investigate. Between this site and the present bridge at Clatterbridge the road passes beneath three fields and is easily visible as a belt of cobbles across them after ploughing.

This road has now been confirmed from a point near Saughall, where it branches off from another road aligned directly to the Meols area, to Clatterbridge. The alignment is rigidly straight, the width about four metres and the construction of cobbles topped with gravel. Kerbstones are usually present.
Peter France.

Barn Survey, Wirral

A few years ago the S.P.A.B. commissioned a survey of all standing barns in the country. The survey for the Wirral is long overdue, particularly in view of recent planning applications to convert redundant farm buildings into modern housing units.

The field group have organized a programme to cover all the existing townships. Up to date Landican, Thingwall, parts of Irby and Greasby have been recorded. The dating evidence so far suggests a great rebuild in the area in the 19th Century, perhaps

due to increased prosperity and new technology at this time. However early 15th century timbers which had been reused to divide the bays of a later barn at Greasby Old Hall have been recorded and saved from the destruction of the bonfire heap. Jenny Whalley.

North West Archaeological Trust

Halton Castle. The excavations at Halton Castle, Runcorn directed by Robina McNeil were completed at the end of June 1987. The excavations revealed evidence of occupation on the site from the 12th century until the present day. A vertical sided rock cut ditch across the site separated the inner and outer baileys. There were indications of a shell keep, perhaps dating from the second half of the 12th century, although cellaring from later stone buildings in the northern part of the inner bailey. The fill of the ditch contained a few sherds of medieval pottery from the period 1200-1350. A rectangular tower, perhaps originally 125m high, was erected over the backfilled area and probably formed accommodation for the medieval barons of Halton.

In the lower bailey a circular or D-shaped tower was found. This may have been contemporary with an early curtain wall and after repairs in the early 15th century survived until the 17th century. Twin polygonal gatetowers constructed between 1450 and 1457 gave access to the castle but were demolished in about 1737 when the courthouse, now the Castle Hotel, was built.

An interim report on the excavations has been prepared and is available from the Trust

Moated Sites.

During the course of the year three moated sites were investigated in Merseyside and just over the border in Cheshire under the direction of Dave Hollos.

St Michael's House, Micklehead Green, Sutton is a 17th century house of 17th century date, extended in the 19th an early 20th century. The present moat appears to have been added as a garden feature in the 18th century.

Barrow Old Hall, Great Sankey. Documents indicate occupation on the site since the 14th century but the earliest datable building excavated was 17th century. The present moat, although probably medieval in date, produced only material from the demolition of the hall in 1924.

Castle Hill, Newton-le-Willows. The topsoil on the field surrounding the motte was stripped during construction of the adjacent M6 motorway and is therefore archaeologically sterile. The motte itself is artificial, created by piling up soil from the ditch at the base of the mound, and probably served as a small watchtower to overlook the major medieval road whose route is followed roughly by the A49.

MAS Lecture Programme 1987.

- October 22 Niall Sharples (English Heritage: Director of Excavations, Maiden Castle, Dorset)
'The Maiden Castle Project'
- November 19 Robina McNeil (Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit)
'Work at Halton Castle, Runcorn, 1986-87'
- December 10 Members' reports and Christmas party
All meetings will take place at 7.30 pm. in Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool.

Courses

The following courses have been organised for 1987-88 by the Department of Continuing Education, Liverpool University.

Ancient Egypt: The Land and its People.

Donald Lowle; 20 meetings. Wed 7 Oct. 7:30-9:00.

The Continuing Education Centre, 126 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool.

Archaeological Draughtsmanship

Bevis Sale; 10 meetings. Wed 7 Oct. 7:30-9:30.

19 Abercromby Square, Liverpool.

Forts and Castles through the Ages.

Dr Quentin Hughes; 12 meetings. Wed 7 Oct. 7:30-9:00.

School of Architecture, University of Liverpool, Bedford St North (opposite Sports Centre).

Roman and Anglo-Saxon Britain.

R.A. Philpott and Dr. R. White; 20 meetings. Tues 29 Sept. Pensby Secondary School for Girls, Irby Road, Pensby.

Prehistoric Greece and the Mediterranean.

Dr C. Mee and Dr H. Forbes; 20 meetings. Thu 8 Oct 7:30-9:30.
Edge Hill College of Further Education, St Helens Road, Ormskirk.

Landscapes in the North West: Their Archaeology and Wildlife.

P.J. Davey and Dr D. Atkinson; 25 meetings. Tues 6 Oct 7:30-9:30.
Southport College of Art and Technology, Mornington Road, Southport.

The Archaeology of Ritual Sites in the North West during Late Pagan and early Christian Times

Miss D. O'Hanlon; 20 meetings. Tues 6 Oct 7:30-9:00. 19 Abercromby Square, Liverpool.

Weekend Courses.

The English Medieval Village: Continuity and Change. C. Taylor, B.K. Roberts and N. Higham. 31 Oct.

Mammal and Bird Bones for Archaeologists

Two linked day schools on Saturdays 31st October and 14th November 1987, 10.00 - 4.15 pm in Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool

Lecturers: C. Fisher M.A.
A.F. Roberts B.A.

Animal and bird bones are common finds in archaeological excavations and can tell us not only what people ate, but when and how they ate, how they worshipped, the environment about them and how it changed. This two day course is a basic introduction to the identification of mammal and bird bones with particular reference to domesticated species. Identification techniques will include working with comparative material from the extensive osteology collections of Liverpool Museum.

Advance enrolment not later than Friday 23 October.

For further information and bookings for above courses please contact: The Department of Continuing Education, 19 Abercromby Square, P.O. Box 147, Liverpool L69 8EN (051 709 6022, x 2797).

Contributions for the next newsletter should be sent to arrive in early December to Jenny Whalley, Quarry Farm, Sandy Lane, Irby Mill Hill. Tel: 648 1830.