



Merseyside Archaeological Society Newsletter 1/2012

Registered Charity No 510831

From the Editor:

A Happy New Year to you all and welcome to the first Newsletter of 2012. The change in the format of the Newsletter has not gone un-noticed, so many thanks to those of you who have made favourable comments. As I mentioned last time it is my intention to broaden the appeal of the Newsletter and the more contributions I receive the better. If you have short pieces describing fieldwork you have done which you wish to get into the public domain or any items on archaeology related to Merseyside which you feel may be of interest to other members this could be the place for them. MAS is also keen to hear from others outside the Society who have an interest in archaeology in the region so if you are a member of a formal or informal group involved in archaeology related activities please get in touch.

With this in mind, this Newsletter contains contributions from Wirral Archaeology and Bidston Community Archaeology telling us about themselves. We also have further news of the exciting finds from Rainford and the start of what will hopefully become a regular feature on finds which have been recorded by the Finds Liaison Officer at the Portable Antiquities Scheme at NML. There is the latest news on the progress of the Merseyside Historic Landscape Characterisation project and on a more sombre note there is an update on the current position regarding the closure of the Merseyside Archaeological Advisory Service.

Together with other small pieces of news and forthcoming events I hope that members will find something of interest within.

Dave Roberts

Merseyside Archaeological Society on Facebook

To go with the revamp of the website, the Society now also has a Facebook page. Up to date information about events will appear on this page, and you will get a reminder so you need never miss an event again. Its much more than that though, it is the place for all members of the Society to share information, or publicise events that they think might be of use or interest to others. We hope that you will find this a useful addition.

You can now follow us on Facebook:-

<http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1481822652#!/groups/151058304987687/>

2012 Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 2012 are now due and a renewal form is enclosed with this Newsletter.

If you have not supplied us with an e-mail address please do so in order that we can issue the newsletter and other correspondence more efficiently. It will also save the Society money on postage.

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 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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Merseyside Archaeological Society

Web Site: <http://merseysidearchsoc.weebly.com>

Closure of Merseyside Archaeological Advisory Service

In the previous Newsletter I detailed the background to the closure of MAAS in March last year. On 7th December Jenny and I attended a meeting convened by Gill Chitty, Head of Conservation at CBA and founder member of this Society, along with others involved in archaeology in the Merseyside region to discuss what further action could be taken to preserve the level of service formerly delivered by MAAS and the future of the Historical Environment Record (HER). We had discovered that the Liverpool City Region (LCR) District Planning Officers (DPOs) were scheduled to meet in early January to discuss what form the service formerly provided by MAAS might take within Merseyside. Our meeting was invited to provide input to the DPOs by the submission of a short paper outlining our preferred options.

We discussed and submitted a number of options ranging from keeping the service on Merseyside to an offer made by Cheshire West and Cheshire (CwaC) to host the service and HER. The latter option seemed to be quite attractive as it came with the offer of further funding from English Heritage. The DPOs subsequently met a few weeks ago and after lengthy discussion the CwaC offer was rejected, mainly on the grounds of increased costs. However, they have said that discussions will continue to find a solution so all is not yet lost.

In the meantime, I have written to Merseyside MPs outlining the MAS stance, largely as reported in the last Newsletter. The replies I have received to date have been broadly supportive of our position and we intend to keep the pressure on until a satisfactory solution can be found. In the meantime, it is important that MAS members continue to remain vigilant with regard to planning applications which may impact archaeological sites or buildings of historical importance. There is some evidence beginning to emerge that without the specialist archaeological knowledge within the planning departments sites will be missed and subsequently lost to development. If anyone becomes aware of any such cases please respond to the relevant authority and copy the correspondence to me. More next time.

The Historic Environment Record currently remains open to enquirers for information with guidance and details on charges etc at www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/historicenvironmentrecord

Dave Roberts

2012 Lecture and Field Trip Programme

We continue to hold our Thursday evening lecture meetings at the Quaker Meeting House in School Lane. As usual the talks start promptly at 7.30 p.m. but the room is open from 7.00 p.m. when we serve tea and coffee giving everyone an opportunity to socialize before the start of the formal meeting. Our next meetings will take place on

16th February: George Nash, Bristol University. *The Calderstones and its wider implications: a monument in transition (see page 3)*

15th March: David Symons, Birmingham Museum. *The Staffordshire hoard*

19th April: Colin Richards, Manchester University. *On the road in Rapa Nui (Easter Island) & MAS AGM*

A small charge will be made: Members £1 and Non-members £2.

2012 field trips

Chris is currently putting together thoughts for the 2012 trips. One of his ideas is a tour of Binchester Fort at Durham. Excavations are ongoing, and the site was recently in Current Archaeology. It is felt that this is a very worthwhile trip although it is further than we normally travel. Before going ahead with the arrangements we would like to ask members if they would be happy to make the journey. Please speak to Chris or any committee member at the February lecture or contact Chris by e-mail if you are interested in supporting this field trip.

Finally, if any member has an idea for a future fieldtrip please speak to Chris.

C.M.Wood@ljmu.ac.uk

MAS Christmas Party – feedback

Our recent Christmas party held at The Ship & Mitre public house was a moderate success. Although not as well attended as the 2010 event most people present seemed to enjoy the evening which included an excellent lecture from Sam Rowe on the recent excavations at Rainford. If you attended the event we would like your views on the venue, the food, the format of the evening etc. so we can make improvements in 2012. If you did not attend for a specific reason (e.g. the choice of venue) we would also like to hear from you.

Lecture from George Nash on 16th February

We do not usually give special promotion to any of our guest speakers. However, George Nash is a good friend of the Society and an internationally recognised authority on prehistoric art. George is travelling a long way to give what should be a fascinating lecture on his latest thoughts on the origins of The Calderstones. In 2007/08 the Society collaborated with George in conducting a new photographic survey of the stones (photo) which brought 'to light' new prehistoric artwork. The work was subsequently published in The Calderstones book written by Ron Cowell and in Volume 13 of our Journal.



CBA North West Spring Meeting

The date of the Spring conference has been confirmed as 12th May 2012 and will be held at Bebbington. There will be a number of local speakers who will talk about Wirral related topics.

See the website for details in due course: www.britarch.ac.uk/cbanw

Merseyside Historic Landscape Characterisation Project

The Merseyside Historic Landscape characterisation project reporting has been completed by the Merseyside Archaeological Officer, Museum of Liverpool. Covering the entire urban and rural landscape of Merseyside, the project documents and consistently maps (database digital modern and historic maps) the present day landscape as an aid to understanding and describes its evolution and the scale of change. Part of an English Heritage national programme, characterisation work is about providing information to support the intelligent management of change within our dynamic landscapes, boosting the local Historic Environment Record (HER) in informing a range of planning, conservation and other strategies which involve change within the historic environment. The digital survey is already integrated into the HER where it can be queried alongside the existing information on individual archaeological sites, artefacts, investigations etc. Five district reports have been produced covering Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens and Wirral. These include an historic character analysis of each district, using statistics and graphic examples to demonstrate project findings, interpretation and analysis. In addition, the project carried out studies into each district's historic settlement. All reports are expected to be available via National Museums Liverpool web in the next couple of months.

Sarah-Jane Farr, Merseyside Archaeological Officer, Museum of Liverpool, NML



Rainford Week - Volunteering Opportunity

Date: 6th-10th February 2012

Host: Museum of Liverpool

Location: Dock Traffic Office, Albert Dock

Time: 10.00-4.30pm weekdays

Summary: Opportunity to catalogue, photograph, and label pottery from the Rainford assemblage to form part of the Regional Archaeology Collection at MOL.

Note: space is limited to around 5 people per day.

To book a place, contact Sam Rowe:

sam.rowe@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

Tel: 0151 478 4560

Childwall Graveyard Survey - Volunteering Opportunity

We are now entering the 4th year of this long-running project which started in 2009. To date, over 800 monuments, dating mainly to the 17th to 19th centuries have been recorded. Currently, we are tackling the backlog of forms which need entering onto the database at the Field Archaeology Unit. The Survey will start again soon, following a break due to Christmas and the recent cold and wet weather. It is anticipated that the recording of the ancient part of the chuchyard will be completed before the end of 2012. If anyone is interested in joining us please contact Dave Roberts. No prior experience required.



Archaeological Investigations in Rainford – Current and Future Work

As mentioned in the last newsletter and the MAS Christmas Party talk, a small community excavation took place in the village of Rainford last September. It was organised by the Field Archaeology Unit of the Museum of Liverpool to investigate the archaeology and stratigraphic sequence of a resident's back garden. Uncovered was a collection of ceramic material forming a waste dump from a local pottery kiln. The assemblage predominantly contained pottery wasters of dark-glazed ware (fig. 1) and kiln furniture, mostly saggars (fig. 2) and parting sherds. The assemblage dates to the 16th century, which makes it the earliest pottery assemblage to be uncovered in Rainford so far. The vessels in the assemblage vary considerably in form, indicating a community-based, individual 'made-to-order' mode of production.



Fig 1: Sample of dark-glazed vessels from the Rainford assemblage

On further investigation of the site in January 2012, it was clarified that the assemblage formed one phase of pottery dumping into a hollow which lay close to an ancient field boundary. More pottery was uncovered, expanding the range of forms of dark-glazed vessels present. A second smaller concentration of dark-glazed pottery was found in a shallow gully near to the original assemblage but these vessels appear to differ slightly in form, and it may represent a slightly later episode of dumping.

Future research potential into this project is high. The MAS, in conjunction with the Museum of Liverpool, is proceeding with a Heritage Lottery Fund grant application to undertake a community archaeology project. If successful, we will be able to investigate the history of Rainford village further, with the help and co-ordination of local people and volunteers, through means ranging from documentary research, field surveys to excavation.

Museum of Liverpool staff are currently undertaking analysis and documentation of the material already uncovered at Rainford. For a week in February, volunteers and members are invited to come and help staff at the museum to catalogue the assemblage.

In conjunction with these discoveries at Rainford, a workshop entitled "Bringing Pottery to Life" will be taking place in February/March this year (date TBC). The session will include talks by local specialists and handling sessions.

Sam Rowe



Fig 2: Sample of saggars from the Rainford assemblage

Wirral Archaeology

We are a small landscape research group, founded in 2004 as a successor to the Wirral Field Group, of which we are surviving members. We are a group of individuals working together on joint projects, rather than a Society, and have acquired a great deal of knowledge and experience over many years, 47 years in the case of this writer. The group has the benefit of qualifications and life - skills from varied professional careers, not just archaeology, although one of us is a fully qualified archaeologist. We have also received superb training and experience on archaeological sites both in this country and abroad, and keep up to date by means of membership of several Archaeological Societies, and subscriptions to leading archaeological publications. We are entirely self-funding.

Projects

We have several projects in hand at the moment, working on them as time permits. We have made much progress on the Roman road system in Wirral, a project which is still on-going, and is proving to be more complicated than expected. The only stratified dating evidence is from the Chester/Meols road. We have discovered an unsuspected length in Storeton, which appears to be a minor road leading to a probable farmstead.

This township is the subject of a detailed research project to investigate the possibility that the battle of Brunanburh was fought in the area. We are using our Bartington 601 magnetometer and metal detectors to search for burial pits and any surviving metal objects, and also use Lidar and aerial photography. We have hundreds of finds of all periods to tell the story of this important township, but the documented site of a burial pit is so far proving elusive, as is the field where hundreds of arrowheads used to be found when ploughing. Still, it is early days yet, as we have only examined a very small percentage of the land available. We have, however, discovered crop marks of great interest, and also the base of the Storeton Cross, last mentioned in 1390.

We also undertake archaeological projects with local schools, mainly field visits, with the occasional Roman road excavation for good measure.

Since buying our magnetometer just over a year ago, we have

also undertaken surveys on other sites, for both professional archaeologists, and local societies. We have been very busy at Holt, where we have surveyed the castle ruins for Holt Local History Society, and also for Wrexham museum. We located the missing curtain walls, five towers, the moat inner edge, and the Watergate. In the area, we have surveyed two of the nine cropmarks of suspected Roman military origin, and using Lidar have helped to identify lengths of Roman road and a farmstead.

At the hillfort of Caer Alyn, we have located roundhouses, pits, hearths and what looks like a processional avenue leading towards a tumulus. We have been working with students here during the summer, to give them practical experience in using geophysics in the field, and also to help them interpret the results. This project will be resumed this year.

We have also been invited to a site near Whitchurch, where we were able to plot a re-aligned course of a newly discovered Roman road, and where we also found a large curved wall, associated with Samian and Roman glass. We will be back here soon to continue.

Despite our advancing years, we remain very busy!

Peter France.

Bidston Community Archaeology

In Summer of 2010 many of us who did not know the difference between a mattock and a trowel. An advert in the local paper soon changed that - "Volunteers wanted" for a community dig on Bidston Hill. It was to be a community based project at Tam O'Shanters Urban Farm. After a training weekend we were all raring to go and throughout the summer we carried out excavations on Bidston Hill under the direction of 2 local archaeologists and completed training in all aspects of field archaeology, recording and archive research. The archaeology bug had truly bitten us, we all had become firm friends and we knew that our lives would never be the same again. Our group ranges in age from 70 to 14, some with experience and some without, but all with one thing in common... A love of archaeology and bucket loads of enthusiasm! Our confidence



Excavation on Bidston Hill

as archaeologists grew as did our thirst to experience more.

When the first dig ended we completed a further course in archaeological excavation at Liverpool University under the direction of Ron Cowell, giving us the opportunity to dig and tap into his amazing expertise at his site at Latham. In Autumn 2010 several of us embarked on an AS Level in Archaeology and completed further courses in archaeology at the university.

Before we knew, it was summer 2011 and we were raring to pick up our trowels and continue where we left off but no further funding was available and we faced the prospect of having to disband. We couldn't let this happen, we had learnt so much, we had these amazing new skills between us and we would not give up! We made the decision to go it alone and Bidston Community Archaeology was formed making our base at Tam O'Shanters.

Following a number of interesting pottery finds by farm volunteers, we produced a detailed excavation rationale for the "Pig field" at the farm and with the backing of the Rangers, and Friends of Bidston Hill our trowels were not to become rusty after all.

Work commenced on the "Pig field" in the summer of 2011, revealing evidence of occupation from the early post Civil War period to the 1900's plus a single knapped flint suggesting yet much earlier occupation. Watch this space!

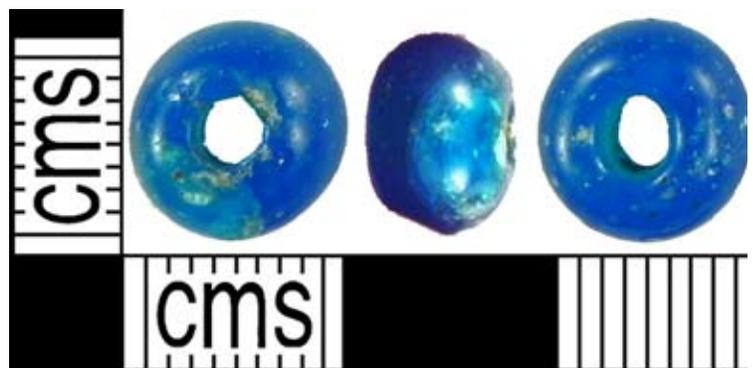
It was not all work, fun is just as important; during 2011 we visited archaeological sites and landscapes from Anglesey to Stonehenge and will visit Orkney in June.

Our aim is to add to the history of Bidston Hill through responsible archaeology and education. 2012 is going to be a very exciting year with further excavations, a plan for building a round house and extending community involvement.

For more information go to our Facebook page Bidston Community Archaeology:

Or email Bidston-community-archaeology@hotmail.com

Betty Nesbitt



An Iron Age Bead from the Portable Antiquities Scheme Database

This small blue glass bead dates from the late Iron Age to the post Roman period, (300BC-1066AD). It is a medium sized generic bead. This type is particularly common in the late Iron Age and the Roman Period but some are also known on early Anglo-Saxon necklaces. The bead is sub-spherical in plan with flattened ends and a central hole. The surface of the object has been chipped and scratched. The

bead contains small white inclusions. The internal diameter of the perforation measures 3.45mm.

This type of bead can be classified as Guido Group 6 IVb (Guido 1978, 155ff.). Guido lists a parallel from Wilderspool. Guido and Welch 1999, 48, stress the fact that they occur in all areas of Anglo-Saxon settlement and cannot be chronologically limited. In fact they discuss these as evidence for lower strata in society, to judge from a small scale study of their occurrence in grave assemblages. The bead which was found in Merseyside by a local farmer has been recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database, www.finds.org.uk/database, as LVPL-9494B3.

Two other beads are also recorded on the PAS database from the Merseyside area. LVPL-ACC747 can be dated to the Post-Roman period; however the exact date is unknown. It is a cylindrical

sectioned bright yellow glass bead. LVPL-AC8807 is a blue glass bead and has been dated from the Medieval period. Twenty-eight beads in total have been recorded from the North West dating from the Bronze Age through to the Post-Medieval period. There are currently 834 beads recorded on the database from England and Wales. The majority of finds recorded on the database are found and reported by metal detectors and as such the numbers of beads and other non-metal objects are low in comparison to metal objects which can be more easily detected. Due to their small size they can often be missed by field walkers or lost within spoil heaps also, although some as with the examples above are brightly coloured. Of the 834 beads on the database, 134 have been recorded with an unknown date and there is therefore potential for more work to be done in the future.

M. Guido and M. Welch (1999), The Glass Beads of Anglo-Saxon England, c. AD 400- 700.

Vanessa Oakden