GMAF
Greater Manchester Archaeology Federation

Newsletter

Issue 22 – June 2025

GREATER MANCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGY IN 2024/5

Last year proved to be a challenging one: at short notice the University of Salford closed the Salford Archaeology contracting unit and it was decided not to hold the annual Greater Manchester Archaeology Day. Things are looking better this year. The valuable local knowledge and skills developed at Salford Archaeology over 15 years have been preserved through the establishment of a new, locally based, archaeology unit called Civic Heritage incorporating key staff from Salford Archaeology. Ollie Pope provides details in this newsletter. There is a commitment by the University to complete Salford Archaeology's unfinished projects. Ian Miller reflects on another busy year for the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service, which is still firmly based at Salford University. GMAAS will host the GM Archaeology Day on Saturday 29th November this year, so keep this date free in your diary! The GM Past Revealed series continues to grow with No. 35, on the archaeology of Stockport, about to be published. Several significant local society archaeological excavation projects are illustrated in this newsletter along with news of other events and activities. Finally, Colin Elder provides details of a community archaeology initiative.

Norman Redhead, former Director of GMAAS and County Archaeologist

The following groups are members of the Federation:
Bolton Archaeology and Egyptology Society, Bury Archaeological Group, Cheadle & Gatley U3A, Glossop and Longdendale Archaeological Society, Historic Graffiti Project, Holcombe Moor Heritage Group, Littleborough Historical and Archaeological Society, Manchester Region Industrial Archaeology Society, Mellor Archaeological Trust, Middleton Archaeological Society, Moston Archaeology Group, Peel Tower Research Group, Prestwich Heritage Society, Royton Lives Through the Ages, Friends of Castleshaw Roman Forts, Salford Archaeology & Local History Society, South Manchester Archaeological Research Team, South Trafford Archaeological Group, Tameside Archaeological Society, Wigan Archaeological Society, Wilmslow Community Archaeology, Manchester Bolton and Bury Canal Group

GREATER MANCHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL ADVISORY SERVICE: A REVIEW AND UPDATE, JUNE 2025

By Ian Miller, Director of GMAAS

Overview

This article highlights the work undertaken by GMAAS from April 2024 to March 2025 and is derived from the annual report submitted to GMAAS' principal funders, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA).

The year has seen a slight reduction in the level of planning applications and associated archaeological work undertaken across the county, although some work has uncovered important and fascinating remains.

As many people will be aware, the annual Greater Manchester Archaeology Day was not hosted in 2024. This was a very difficult decision, but in the wake of the University taking the decision to close Salford Archaeology, it proved too great a challenge to organise the Archaeology Day. However, 2025 will see the return of Greater Manchester Archaeology Day, which is scheduled to take place in Peel Hall at the University of Salford on Saturday 29th November 2025. Further information and tickets will be available on-line in the coming weeks.

The *Greater Manchester's Past Revealed* series has continued to flourish and a new booklet has been produced taking the series total up to 34, with Volume 35 currently at the printers.

Details of the Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service and its work, including special projects, can be found at https://gmaas.salford.ac.uk/

Key statistics for the year April 2024 to March 2025 include the following:

- The Historic Environment Record (HER) database now contains **21,052** individual entries comprising monuments, find spots, listed buildings, local historic interest buildings, historic places and ancient landscapes;
- There are **54,000** records for the Historic Landscape Characterisation project which was completed in 2012;
- A total of **517** reports on archaeological investigations carried out in Greater Manchester have been added to the HER in the last year, many of these being drawn from a backlog created during the Covid pandemic;

- GMAAS were consulted on **434** planning applications by the ten local planning authorities of Greater Manchester, with **145** having an archaeological interest that resulted in conditions being applied to planning consents to secure programmes of archaeological work.

A current copy of the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record dataset is now lodged with Heritage Gateway, where the entries can be viewed online. https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/default.aspx

Strategic Projects

Places for Everyone

GMAAS continues to be involved in providing advice to consultants and LPA officers for some of the GM Places for Everyone land allocations that are moving forward. Attention most recently has been focused on the archaeological interests across the Timperley Wedge and New Carrington allocation sites in Trafford, Northern Gateway in Bury / Rochdale, West of Wingates in Bolton and North of Mosley Common in Wigan. In some cases, initial archaeological investigation of these large sites has been implemented in advance of development groundworks.

North West Historic Environment Research Framework

GMAAS, with support from Historic England, continues to lead a steering group that is responsible for updating the Research Objectives set out in the North West Historic Environment Research Framework in the light of the fresh information recovered from archaeological work carried out across the region. GMAAS, as a NW planning archaeology service, is also ensuring that the Research Framework is embedded in consultant's project designs, reports and publications. The Research Framework can be accessed online at: https://researchframeworks.org/nwrf/ and a 'point in time' publication has been produced in hard copy under the auspices of Council for British Archaeology North West.

Local Heritage Listing Project

GMAAS continues to work with Bolton, Oldham and Trafford councils to support the process of validating candidates that have been nominated for inclusion on the districts' Local List of Heritage Assets. The emerging Local List for Trafford is currently in the final stages of consultation and it is anticipated it will be formally adopted in the coming weeks. All the candidates for the Bolton Local List have been agreed via a Validation Panel and awaiting Bolton Council to implement a final round of consultation prior to adoption. The candidates for Oldham are currently being reviewed by a Validation Panel, although it is anticipated that this process will have been completed by the end of June 2025.

‘Project K’: Creating SHINE Data for Low Sensitivity Areas

In December 2023, GMAAS was commissioned by the Forestry Commission to contribute to their national project to improve access to historic environment data. Known as ‘Project K’, the work is intended to enable efficient and rapid assessment of woodland creation proposals through the development of a Selected Heritage Inventory for Natural England (SHINE) dataset. This single, nationally consistent dataset of non-designated historic features that would benefit from management through agri-environment scheme delivery in England was created initially in 2008 and has been used subsequently by the Forestry Commission to process Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier applications involving existing woodland. This process clearly demonstrated the huge potential benefits of employing an adapted SHINE dataset to inform the woodland creation process. The principal aim of Project K is therefore to enable local historic environment services to create new, additional and updated SHINE records in accordance with the recently revised standards and guidelines within ‘Low Sensitivity Areas’ as defined by the Forestry Commission’s Sensitivity to Woodland Creation Mapping.

The HER held precisely 1800 monument records within the Low Sensitivity Areas across the whole of Greater Manchester at the start of the project. These comprised 304 buildings, 108 findspots, 1 hedgerow, 11 landscapes, 186 listed buildings, 1100 monuments and 90 places. Of these, the findspots and listed buildings were excluded, leaving 1506 records that required assessing, of which 1062 HER records lay within the five districts studied as part of Project K in the 2024-25 financial year (Tameside, Trafford, Salford, Stockport and Wigan); records for the districts of Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham and Rochdale were reviewed in the 2023-24 financial year.

In total, 46 new SHINE records were created in 2024-25, together with 14 new monument records for sites that were identified during the course of the project; 32 new SHINE records were created following a review of the existing monument sites in the Greater Manchester HER for the districts of Tameside, Trafford, Salford, Stockport and Wigan.

Combining the results from the two stages of the project, a total of 118 new SHINE records across Greater Manchester have been created, together with 63 new Monument records for sites that were identified during the course of the project. In addition, 55 new SHINE records have also been created following a review of the existing Monument sites in the Low Sensitivity Areas. Project K thus successfully enabled an enhancement of the Greater Manchester HER through the identification of new Monument records and enhanced SHINE records.

The staff time afforded to the project was covered by a grant from the Forestry Commission, and has enabled a welcome enhancement of the SHINE dataset held in the HER.

NRHE to Greater Manchester HER Transfer Project

GMAAS secured a grant from Historic England in March 2024 to reconcile the 4474 records for Greater Manchester held by the National Record of the Historic Environment (NRHE) with the Greater Manchester Historic Environment Record (HER). The project is intended to help address long-standing issues of duplication and complexity between national and local records of the historic environment and thereby improve access to heritage information to support planning, research and use by local communities. The project was put on hold for a few months whilst GMAAS awaited confirmation that the University of Salford confirmed an intention to host GMAAS beyond the term of the current contract. Work on the project has since progressed and it is anticipated that the transfer of the NRHE data will be completed by December 2026.

The National Record of the Historic Environment (NRHE) contains over 550,000 digital records relating to England's historic environment, which includes 4474 records for Greater Manchester; these comprise 3127 Monument and 1347 Events records. Since their introduction in the 1980s, the NRHE and HERs have developed along different lines that have culminated in two complementary resources that are divergent in content, quality and standards. This situation adds duplication of effort, complexity and cost to any searches undertaken for planning or research purposes. The current project offers a unique opportunity to resolve this divergence through the facilitated transfer and reconciliation of the NRHE with local authority HERs.

The project involves manual accessioning of the data to the HER assisted by web-based resources. The data is being incorporated into the HER via our existing interface (HBSMR v6) by copying from a definitive web-based view of the NRHE data and downloading shapefiles from the NRHE to HERs project website.

Planning Archaeology Highlights

There was a slight reduction in the number of planning consultations per authority compared to the previous two years. Whilst Manchester continued to be the busiest district in terms of consultations received by GMAAS, the total number was notably lower than that for the 2023-24 financial year. A similar reduction was noted in the number of consultations received from Bolton, which fell from 28 in 2023-24 to 15 in 2024-25, whilst those from Salford fell from 72 to 61. Conversely, there was an increase in consultations from several districts, including Oldham, Rochdale, Tameside and Wigan, with Stockport providing the most pronounced increase. The following section summarises a selection

of case studies of archaeological projects from last year that have come out of the planning process. These are selected to illustrate the diversity of project types and outcomes.

Lower Hinds Weir, Wellington Street, Bury

A Level 2-type historic building investigation of a weir across the River Irwell in Bury was carried out on behalf of the Environment Agency during August 2024 prior to its removal as part of a flood alleviation scheme. The weir was thought to be contemporary with a former logwood mill that was erected in the late 18th century but since demolished.

The construction of the upstream face of the weir was of a single phase, although the downstream face of the stone apron evidently derived from four different phases of construction, with the easternmost end likely representing the earliest surviving element as dendrochronological analysis of two samples of structural timber recovered from the core of the weir produced a felling date of no earlier than 1790. The stones to this section were aligned longitudinally across the weir, whilst those forming the central section faced downstream. The timbers to this section could not be dated, although the stone infilling was contemporary with the eastern section, suggesting it to represent a repaired section. The western half contained a further two repairs, with large sandstone slabs forming the third phase and a concrete section to the west forming the final phase. The shape of the weir also suggests this was an original design as no evidence during the watching brief could suggest widening or repositioning of the apron.

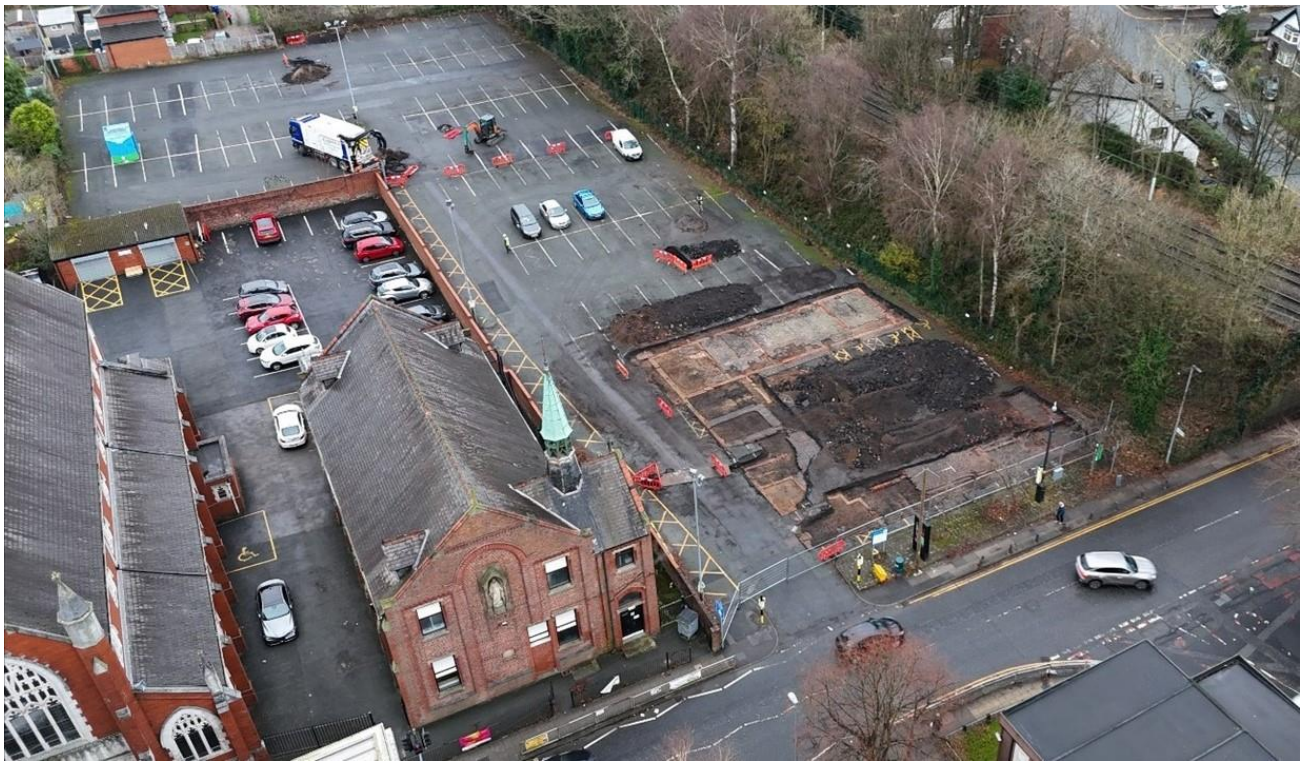
View across Hinds Weir (© GMAAS)

Fairfax Road, Prestwich, Bury

A ‘strip, map and record’ excavation was carried out across the site of the former Prestwich Town Yard and fire station on Fairfax Road by Civic Heritage in December 2024. The Town Yard was established in 1880 by the Prestwich Local Board to store vehicles, tools and materials, and stable the council-owned horses required to facilitate works and services to the local area. The excavation recorded the lower courses and floor surfaces of the depot buildings arranged around three sides of a stone sett yard. These included the footprint of the town stable, divided internally into a series of stables, each with stone-sett floored stalls and an adjoining flagged front passage. The partial outline of a house fronting onto Fairfax Road, comprising the rear outshot, yard and an outbuilding, was also uncovered.

The foundations and layout of another building fronting onto Fairfax Road were also recorded. This had housed the horse-drawn wagons originally, but was repurposed at the turn of the 20th century for use as the Prestwich Fire Station. The excavations revealed two phases of construction, comprising a small room backing onto the rear yard and an adjacent room rebuilt utilising frogged bricks and a concrete floor. The alterations were confirmed by entries in the Prestwich Urban District Council Minutes of the Offices and Towns Yard Committee who ordered renovation works on the fire station in 1907 to improve the facilities, provide electric lighting and accommodate a new ambulance service.

A public open day was held at the end of the excavation where more than 100 people from the local area toured the site and shared their own recollections.



The excavated remains of Prestwich Town Yard and Fire Station (© Civic Heritage)

Ardwick Green North, Manchester

An archaeological excavation of land immediately to the north of Ardwick Green in Manchester was completed in September 2024. The fieldwork followed on from an initial evaluation, which identified the presence of a buried soil horizon and brick-built foundations. The earliest evidence for the occupation of the site dated to c.1550-1700 and comprised plot boundaries identifiable from two intersecting linear ditches.

The primary fills of these ditches produced fragments of late medieval and early post-medieval pottery, including 17th-century glazed red earthenware, Rainford/Cistercian Ware and Midlands/North-West purple ware, which together constitute an important contextual group of finds. Sherds of later post-medieval pottery date the closure of the ditches to the late 17th century and early 18th century. Whilst the ditches fell out of use by this time and were sealed by a layer of garden soil containing 18th- and 19th-century finds, the layout of later buildings within the site appeared to respect the general configuration of the earlier plot boundaries; it seems likely that the placement of the buildings was to some extent influenced by pre-existing landownership.

A programme of post-excavation analysis and research is now ongoing to further examine the finds and environmental samples.

The excavated remains of a late medieval plot boundary ditch, associated features and finds from Ardwick Green (© Civic Heritage)

Ten Acres Lane, Newton Heath

Initial evaluation trenching across a large site in Newton Heath revealed structural elements of two late 19th-century brickworks. Documentary evidence for these two brickworks is scant although that on Ten Acres Lane, along the western edge of the site, appears to have been established by Joseph Milward in the 1880s and probably remained in production until the mid-1920s. The second brickworks was accessed from Mitchell Street, which formed the eastern edge of the site, and likely dated to the mid-1890s. It was acquired by J. & A. Jackson Ltd in 1940 and continued until the early 1970s.

Excavation revealed extensive remains of Jackson's Brickworks, which included the foundations of a drying shed, a detached kiln and chimney. Excavation demonstrated the kiln to have been of a form that was consistent with a Staffordshire transverse-arched continuous kiln. Internally, it was divided longitudinally by a central wall that survived to a length of 23.68m. A series of internal partitions created at least 12 and possibly 14 firing chambers, each measuring approximately 8.29m by 4.38m internally. A series of vaulted flues were excavated beneath the floor of the kiln, including a central main flue and 12 smaller flues that served individual firing chambers. The remains of an engine house were also excavated. A second engine house was added after the mid-1920s and may have been intended to serve as a winding engine for a tramway that had been laid between the clay extraction pit and the pugmill in the south-western part of the site.

The excavated kiln at Jackson's Brickworks (© University of Salford)

Greengate, Salford

In December 2024, an archaeological evaluation of land off Greengate in Salford city centre was carried out by Civic Heritage. The evaluation provided some evidence for post-medieval activity within one trench in the form of a thin subsoil layer. An assemblage of finds recovered from the layer included a wig curler, pottery and clay tobacco pipe stems, which were dated broadly to the late 17th to early 18th century, contributing to the growing corpus of artefactual evidence generated by excavations on the fringe of Salford's medieval core.

Partial remains of cellars relating to 19th-century workers' housing were recorded in all the trenches in varying degrees of preservation. Most of these buildings dated to the early 19th century, by which time the site and wider area had experienced a boom in housebuilding. One trench targeted buildings previously fronting onto Queen Street between Caygill Street and Boond Street, which retained the most intact cellars.

Pipe clay hair curler showing illegible makers' mark (© Civic Heritage)

Monks' Hall, Eccles

Monks' Hall is a Grade II listed building in Eccles that dates to at least the 15th century and was built on land once owned by the monks of Stanlaw (later Whalley) Abbey. There is a possibility the hall originated as a monastic grange. Occupants of the hall are well-documented from the 15th century onwards. The hall was occupied by the Hey family from the late 16th century through the mid-17th century. The hall's estate subsequently passed through multiple owners until the mid-19th century, when it was sold for development as housing. The hall continued to be lived in but was used subsequently as a doctor's surgery, museum and restaurant, although the site has been vacant for over 20 years and has fallen victim to vandalism and arson, with a major fire in 2012 causing significant structural damage

View of excavated trial pits demonstrating the depth at which archaeological layers survive (© Civic Heritage)

A proposal to develop the hall and its grounds is being brought forward and an initial programme of archaeological investigation was commissioned to better understand the site's archaeological resource and thereby inform the design proposals. Six test pits were excavated by hand across the grounds to the rear of the hall in September 2024. This revealed a simple sequence of remains overlying the natural geology, which included horizons of subsoil and relict soil, some negative archaeology in the form of pits, gullies and a post-hole and later levelling layers, drainage features and topsoil. The presence of cut features demonstrated a potential for archaeological remains of interest to survive across the site at depths below approximately 500mm below the modern ground surface. These remains are potentially of sufficient interest to warrant further archaeological investigation in advance of development.

Manchester Road West, Little Hulton, Salford

A ‘strip, map and record’ excavation of the pithead of the former Charlton Colliery in Little Hulton was carried out Oxford Archaeology during June and July 2024. The early history of the colliery is unclear, although it was probably established by Francis Charlton in the mid-19th century and operated by the Trustees of the Duke of Bridgewater between 1885 and 1898, after which mining activity ceased. Nevertheless, the colliery was taken over by the Earl of Ellesmere in c.1901, although it may have been just the above-ground processing plant that was used at this stage. The colliery had been abandoned by the late 1920s and the site was used for dumping spoil from adjacent collieries.

The excavation revealed substantial remains of the winding engine house and boiler house, which appeared to have contained three Lancashire boilers. A detached stone building to the north-west and had housed the winding engine for the main shaft that lay directly to the north-east. The mapping also shows a possible chimney incorporated into the corner of the boiler house, immediately to the north-east of the excavated flues, and a ventilation shaft to the south-west of the engine house.

A second, small, excavation area uncovered the foundations of several houses that had formed part of a terrace that had been erected to accommodate miners in the later 19th century. The excavated houses were the focus of a public open day that was hosted towards the end of the excavation, which attracted a good number of local residents.

The excavated remains of the boiler house at Charlton Colliery (© Oxford Archaeology)

Clarendon Road, Hyde

An archaeological evaluation was carried out on land off Clarendon Road in Hyde between late January and early February 2025. Archaeological interest in the site was focused on the former Newton Bank Print Works, a textile-finishing business that was established in 1812. In total, 13 trial trenches were opened across the footprint of former buildings and structures across the extent of the early 19th-century works. The evaluation identified the remains of wall foundations, floor surfaces, drainage systems, boiler houses, flues and an engine house.

The excavated remains confirmed and complemented the known identity and function of several of the former standing buildings, and in some cases shed light on the functions of early phase buildings which had been heavily modified from their original form or in other cases had been completely replaced by later structures. The results of the fieldwork support the interpretation of the process flow around the works from the mid-19th century onwards, with textiles initially passing through the western part of the site before moving on to the eastern part to be finished and dispatched.

The excavated remains of the stone-lined processing vats within the former print works (© CFA Archaeology)

Warburton Lane, Trafford

An initial archaeological investigation of two parcels of agricultural land that straddle the parish boundaries of Warburton and Partington was carried out in stages during October and November 2024. In the first instance, a geophysical survey was carried out, followed by the excavation of a series of evaluation trenches that targeted some of the anomalies identified by geophysics.

The trenches opened across the first plot of land revealed a series of field boundary ditches that survived below-ground, most of which could be related to boundaries shown on the Warburton estate map of 1757. A gully recorded in one trench, however, did not correlate with any field boundaries evident on the estate map or later mapping, raising the possibility that it formed part of the documented medieval deer park in the area. Trenches placed across the second plot of land, situated to the east of Warburton Lane, uncovered a concentration of pits and linear features within a house plot shown on the 1757 estate map were likely associated with a post-medieval property referred to as Mosslane Cottages. In addition, a sunken linear depression proved to represent the remains of a historic trackway that historically acted as the boundary between the parishes of Partington and Warburton.

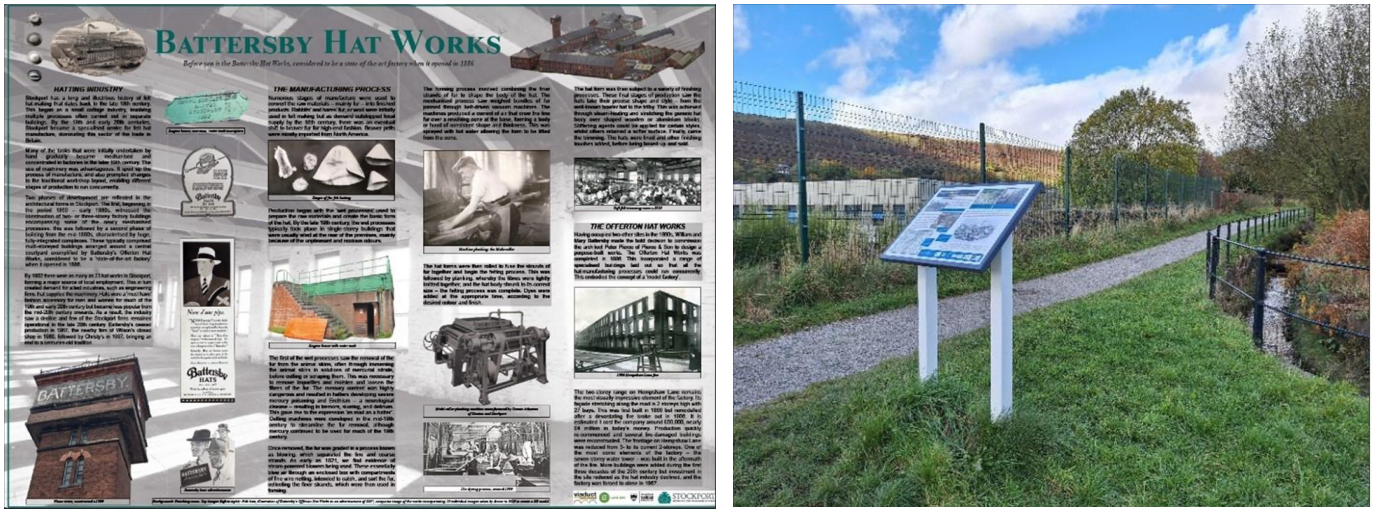
Archaeological features associated with the post-medieval Mosslane Cottages (© Civic Heritage)

Heritage Displays

GMAAS have provided advice and input to several schemes to display heritage arising from conservation schemes to designated heritage assets or as a conditioned requirement to disseminate results of investigations within a development site. These often include information panels but more

complex schemes might incorporate heritage themes into the public realm. Examples of information panels prepared over the last year include those at First Street in Manchester city centre and the former Bell Vue Gardens in West Gorton, Battersby's Hat Works in the Offerton area of Stockport and two panels at the new Stockport Interchange.

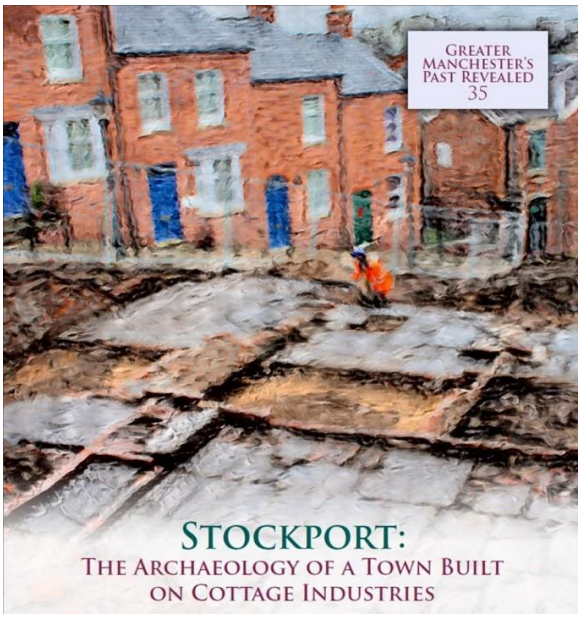
Information panels produced and awaiting installation at First Street and Belle Vue in Manchester (above), and those installed in Offerton (Stockport) and Saddleworth School (below)



Publications

The Greater Manchester's Past Revealed Series

The production of several new booklets in the *Greater Manchester's Past Revealed* series that were scheduled for release in 2024 was halted as a result of the closure of Salford Archaeology. However, one of these booklets, which presents the archaeological investigations at Covent Garden in Stockport, has recently been completed by Civic Heritage and is scheduled to be printed in the coming weeks.



Front cover of the latest volume in the Greater Manchester's Past Revealed booklet series

Other booklets in the series that are anticipated to enter production in the coming months include one that summarises the archaeological work undertaken in support of the Ordsall Chord railway scheme, and a booklet synthesising all the archaeological work carried out at Ordsall Hall in Salford.

Other Publications

Amongst the more academic publications this year are two articles in *Industrial Archaeology Review*, the leading international journal for the archaeology of the 18th-20th centuries. The first of these presents the results obtained from a comprehensive documentary survey and excavation of the former Salford Twist Mill, one of the world's first iron-framed buildings and the first factory to be illuminated by gas (https://doi.org/10.1080/03090728.2024.2357425), whilst the second paper summarises the fascinating excavation of JM Bennett & Sons iron foundry that produced decorative cast-iron goods in late Victorian Manchester (https://doi.org/10.1080/03090728.2024.2457310).

CIVIC'S ARCHAEOLOGY AND HERITAGE TEAM – A PHOENIX FROM THE ASHES

By Ollie Cook, Civic Heritage

Founded in 2009, Salford Archaeology, part of the University of Salford, functioned as a commercial enterprise unit within the primarily academic institution. It was dedicated to both development-led and community archaeology and grew from just a few individuals at its inception to a team of over 20 staff. Over its lifespan of nearly 15 years, it developed a strong pedigree of work within Greater Manchester and was well known for both its adoption of cutting-edge technology (drone photogrammetry and laser scanning) and its application to recording industrial sites and perhaps more importantly, the regular stream of community-led archaeology projects.

In the summer of 2024, much to the surprise of the archaeological team of 17 staff members, a decision was taken by the University to bring an abrupt end to the operations of the team and begin a process of closure. This decision left the staff with a great deal of uncertainty regarding their own futures. There were also wider concerns amongst curatorial archaeologists and developers as to who would fill the potential void left by the fragmentation of the team, some of whom had been working in Manchester for over two decades.

It didn't take long for the message of the Salford Archaeology's closure to spread among its client base within Manchester and when word reached the directors at Civic Engineers, who had been longstanding clients and collaborators on some key flagship projects, such as Mayfield Park, discussions were held to find a solution and devise a plan to retain the core team.

Acting quickly, discussions were held between Oliver Cook and Katie Fletcher, former Project Managers at Salford Archaeology and the managing director of Civic, Julian Broster, to establish a new company – Civic Heritage. A conscious decision was taken to grow the team, through building up momentum and taking on staff to fulfil key roles across different strands of work. From August 2024 to now, the team has grown from one to eight!

We are formed of experienced members of staff dedicated to archaeological consultancy, fieldwork and historic building recording. We take on work from the very early stages sometimes even appraising sites pre-planning, right through to the end result – publication and dissemination. We cover everything in-between from historic building recording and of course evaluation and excavation.

Not straying too far from our roots, we have a keen interest in promoting awareness of our discoveries with the wider public, be this through engagement and open days, to designing information panels installed in the public realm. This summer we're taking on placement students and interns, who we hope to inspire to pursue a career in the heritage sector.

Since starting, we've provided continuity to a key client, the Duchy of Lancaster, working both above and below-ground recording Roman, medieval and modern remains at Lancaster Castle. Building on our expertise in industrial archaeology, we're working both on the ground and in the office on some fantastic glassworks in St Helens, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and 'good ole' Manchester. More recently still, we've concluded the first phase of an impressive investigation on Liverpool Road, in the heart of Roman *Mamucium*, excavating the north exit road leading out of the fort; this excavation has also led to the discovery of boundary ditches and evidence of potential buildings, adding further detail to our knowledge of the civilian settlement that grew up around the fort.

To conclude, the final message would be, 'all's well that ends well'. We've cemented a fantastic working relationship with the engineers and other professionals within Civic, finding a place where our services and the output of our work are truly valued. There's a tremendous amount of cross-over with other elements of the business and we see lots of areas of future growth for the business. Here's to the future!

From left to right: Julian Broster, Katie Fletcher, Oliver Cook and Stephen O'Malley

The Heritage Team in Spring 2025, left to right: Oliver Cook, Lewis Stitt, Richard Ker, Steve Tamburello, Katie Fletcher and Natalie Poundall

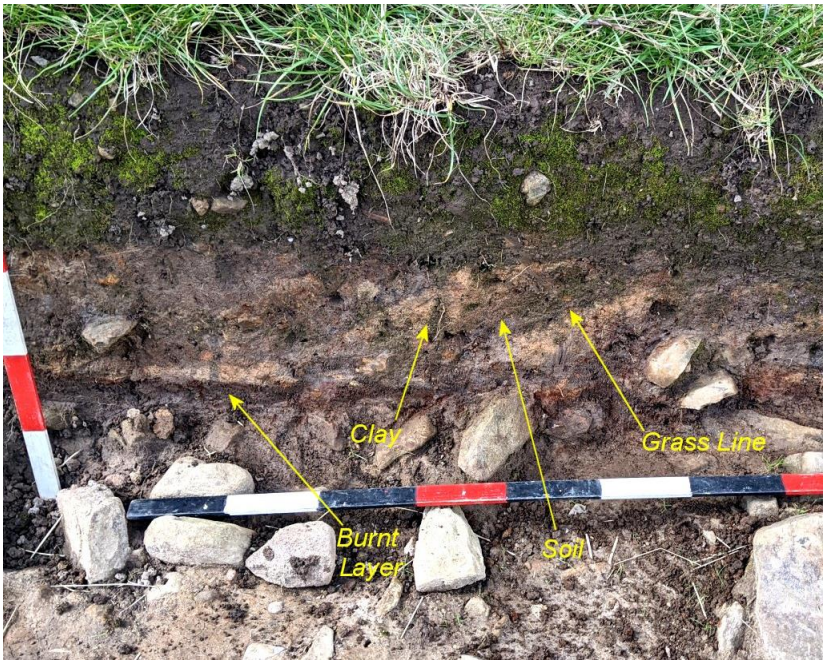
Associate Director Graham Mottershead talking to members of the public about the excavation of the Roman Road at Castlefield House

Ongoing Excavations at the glassworks in St Helens showing the engine and boiler house for the grinding and polishing operations

ASPULL RING DITCH EXCAVATIONS

By Bill Aldridge, Wigan Archaeological Society

2024 saw another season of exceptional discoveries at this remarkable site in Aspull, which is just a few miles northeast of Wigan. As reported in previous Newsletters, we started digging two years ago when we established this site to be a huge, slightly elliptical, ring ditch with an entrance on the western side. Its size and shape suggested a Neolithic henge but carbon dating showed that it had still been open in the mid Bronze Age. Last year's work focused mainly on the mound which covers almost all of the interior. By extending Trench 1 and Trench 3 towards the centre, we discovered the mound to be made of soft sandy clay topped with a layer of stones which covered just the central area. A thin layer of burning was found to be spread over the stones, which in turn, was sealed beneath a layer of mottled clay. Banding in this soft sandy clay suggested it was probably created using turfs (evidence suggests these were placed upside down).



The stony layer was not continuous however, with areas devoid of stones lying beneath the mottled and burnt layers. It was while investigating these areas that two cinerary urns were discovered. This confirmed we had indeed a Bronze Age burial site. Cremated bone from the first urn (which we labelled Feature [1]) revealed an early Bronze Age date (1891–1688 cal. BC (95.4%)). This closely matched two other dates also obtained last year - one from charcoal retrieved from the urn (1895–1699 cal. BC (95.4%)) and one from the burnt layer (1921–1703 cal. BC (95.4%)). This was exciting news as it meant that everything below the burnt layer must be older. Both urns were left in situ until we could arrange for their removal at a later date, but work has continued around them this season which has revealed more information about them.

Contrary to last year's assumption, we now know that our first urn was buried the right way up and almost complete. It is likely therefore most of its cremated material has been retained. It is hoped we will be able to remove it intact this year which will enable it to be study in a more controlled environment.

Our second urn [2], which was found buried in the raised sandy clay mound (truncated by ploughing), has turned out to be buried in a flat-bottomed pit containing a quantity of cremated bone and charcoal.

Again, this was contrary to our earlier assumption. The urn is badly cracked but using an endoscope, we have been able to peer inside. This has revealed the urn to be mainly empty but other cracks could be seen which probably means we won't be able to remove it in one piece. Probably the best option would be to excavate the surrounding pit and then carefully excavate the urn itself in situ.

Octagonal Feature

Unusually mild weather in February together with enthusiastic volunteers meant our season started early this year. A session of trowelling on the mottled clay layer in Trench 3a (near our first urn) unexpectedly turned up a strange octagonal feature [4].

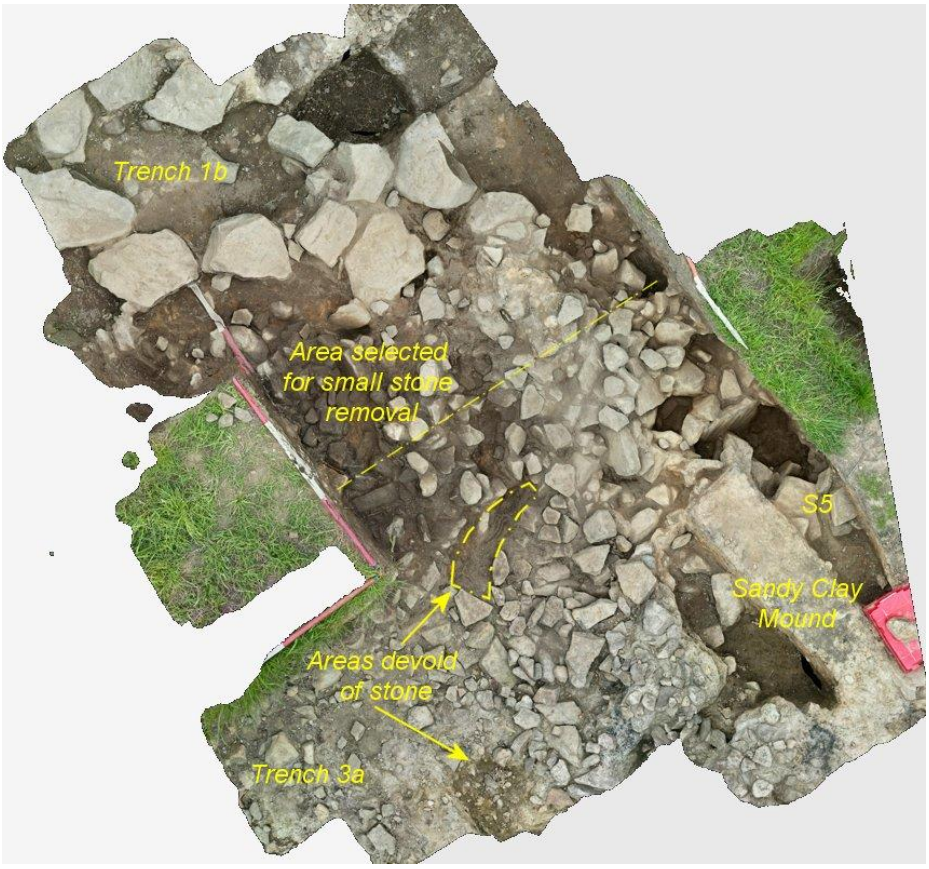
Its shape was defined by a thin band of bright orange clay and significantly its internal area contained organic or burnt material. Not surprisingly this feature attracted a lot of attention throughout the year. Excavating it in situ eventually revealed it to be another cremation burial. Large quantities of cremated bone interspersed with layers of burnt wood came from its interior suggesting possibly a family plot. It

also displayed a strange internal partition and there seems to be a large stone at its base. The bright orange clay defining the feature, was at first thought to be a poorly fired vessel. However, excavations down its side, to see if there was a pit in which it might have been placed, revealed no sign of one. Our latest thoughts therefore are that it is more likely to be a clay lined pit but we haven't, as yet, come across anything remotely comparable.

Excavations

Expanding Trench 3a on its eastern side has enabled us to see the full extent of the stony layer in that direction. It seems though that the burning and mottled clay layers continue beyond this and its full extent has yet to be established.

Towards the end of our 2023 season, an array of large flats stones emerged in Trench 1b which seemed to be heading towards the sandy clay mound in Trench 3a. We extended Trench 1b until it eventually broke through into Trench 3a but this only revealed a few more large stones. The spread of smaller stones however did continue and seemed to get more intense as it approached the area around the central sandy clay mound.



Further work in this area revealed a fair depth of stones which seemed to be surrounding the sandy clay mound, possibly acting as a revetment on its western flank.

Possible Cist

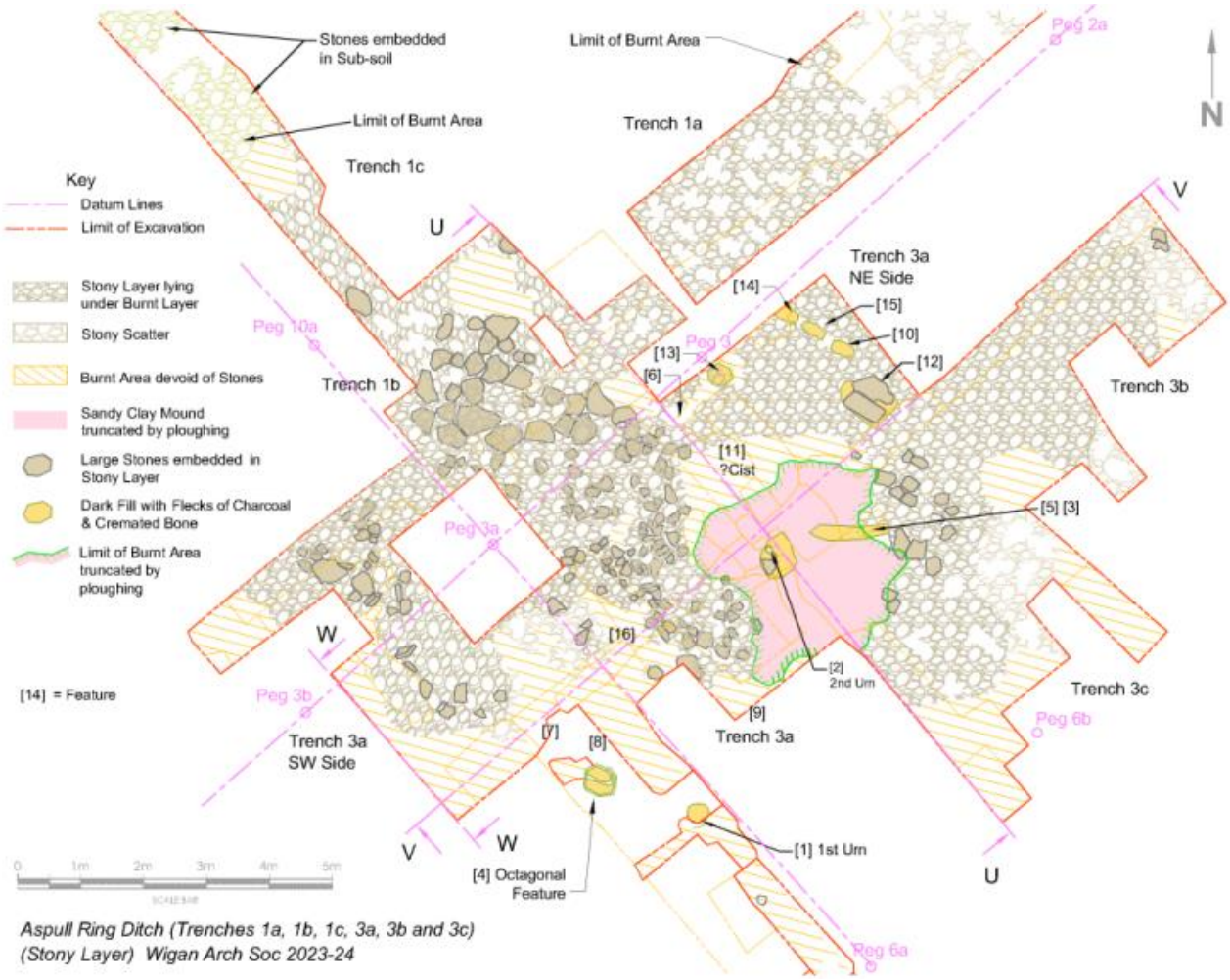
To investigate this further, a sondage was cut through the sandy clay mound (along section lines V-V and U-U – see drawings below), designed to capture its profile and its association with the surrounding stony layer. This revealed another depth of stones embedded in the mound, this time on its eastern side. It was about this time that we made another exciting discovery i.e. a cavity [11] in the side wall of the section on the northwest side of the sandy clay mound. It seemed to be going right under the baulk and close to where we had discovered larger stones embedded in the soft sand lying beneath the stony layer. Some of these stones were thin slabs and one or two were positioned almost vertically. After removing the overlying baulk, a large stone slab emerged partially protecting the cavity but broken in two presumably by the weight of the material above it. Our thoughts were that this could be the remains of a possible cist, albeit badly disturbed. The interior therefore was covered to protect any possible remains and left until we can properly investigate it at a future date.

Cremation Pits

As the season progressed, investigations continued on the stony layer on the northeast side of the sandy clay mound. This revealed some brown sandy clay patches, some of which had flecks of cremated bone in them. One of these patches developed into a small pit [13] which was cut into the underlying soft sandy clay. Lying at the bottom of the pit was a large deposit of cremated bone and charcoal. Some of the pieces turned out to be quite large, perhaps even fragments of a skull.

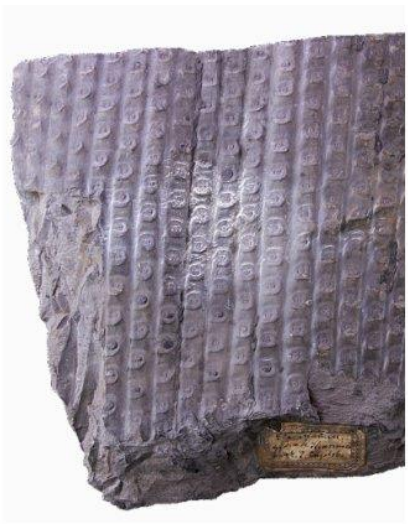
Just a couple of metres away another pit turned up [12], this time lying under two large flat stones and again with a large deposit of cremated bone and charcoal at the bottom. We now had three more confirmed cremation burials on the site, to add to the two we had found the previous year (and we still had the possibility of a cist to investigate). Strange as it may seem, each burial was constructed differently, which suggests the site was in use over a long period of time. More carbon dating will hopefully help to give a definitive answer to this.

Plan Drawing



Fossil Stones

One of the most mysterious features uncovered last year was a collection of stones seemingly engraved with parallel straight lines. At the time we had no idea what to make of these grooved stones as we were unable to find anything like them in any other Bronze Age or Neolithic context. However, a close study of one of the small ones in the low afternoon sunlight, revealed small cell-like structures running along the tops of the ridges. These were very similar to the tree-like club moss fossil known as *Sigillaria* occurring in the Carboniferous period.

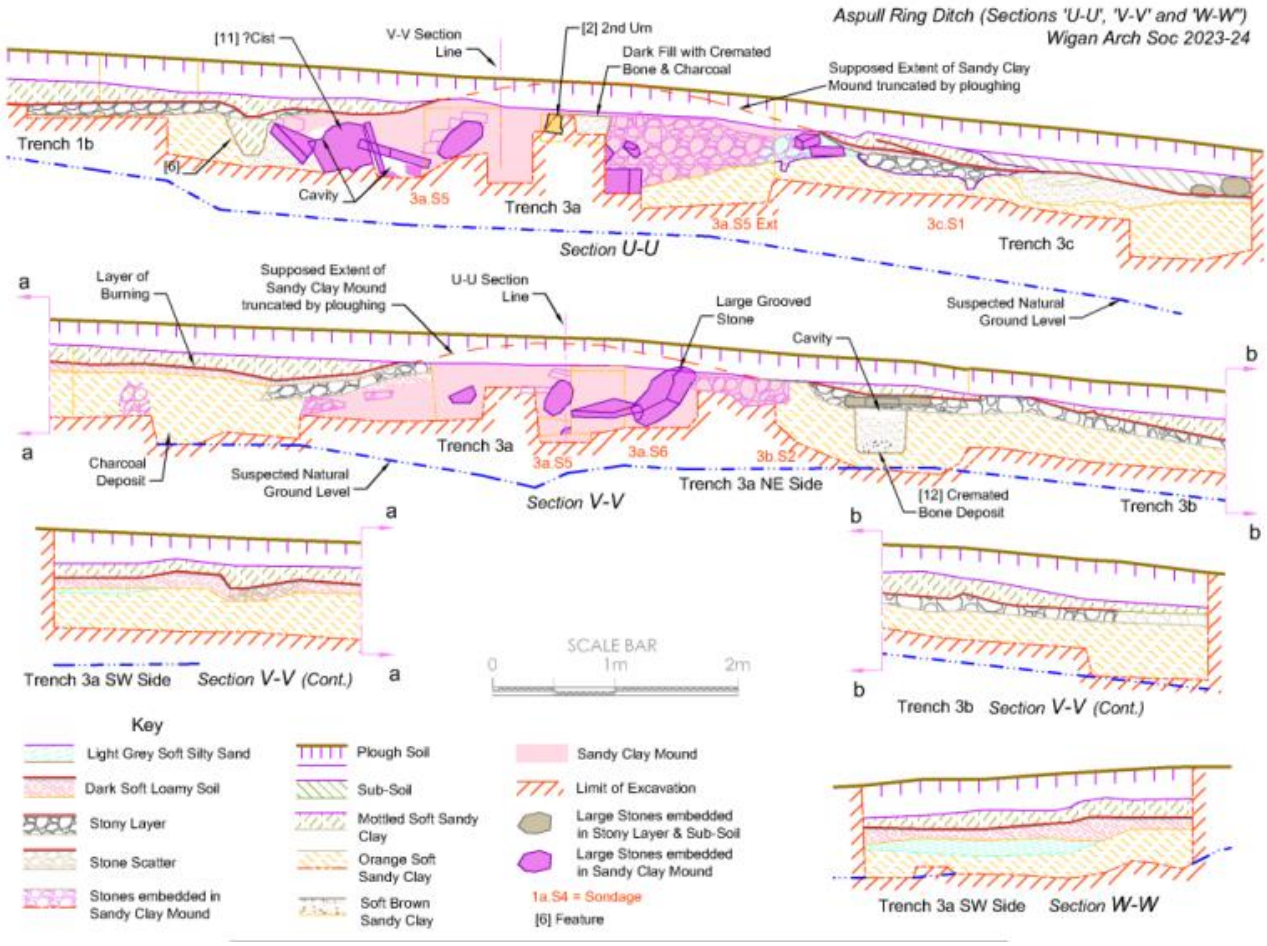


The general consensus now is that all these stones are in fact fossils. Appearing as they do in close proximity to the central sandy clay mound, suggests they have had some significance to the ancient builders of the monument.

We are still finding small flints, some of which could well be tools. Another enigmatic find from last year was small, well-formed stone ball. It was unfortunately found on the spoil heap but analysis of our daily drone images strongly suggests that it must have come from archaeological layers around the sandy clay mound. It seems to be made of something like hard granite and is quite heavy for its size.

It has been dismissed as a cannon ball as it isn't round enough, shaped more like a tangerine. It could possibly be a sling shot used for bring down large game (although a lot of work for a single-use throwaway item). Maybe it's one of the stone balls that are found in their hundreds in Scotland. Most of them are elaborately carved but some are plain and some have been found in Neolithic contexts. However, very few have been found south of the border and these are in Northumbria.

Section Drawing



Future

Work will resume this year as the farmer is very kindly continuing to give us access to his field. One aspect of the site, still to be established, is the nature of the general soft sandy clay mound which covers almost all of the interior, particularly its depth. This is because the original undisturbed natural ground surface has been difficult to identify. Sondages in some areas have reached a harder stonier level and probing in other areas area suggest a certain depth. However, there does not seem to be a definitive level that the mound was built on which probably means the surface was significantly disturbed before the mound was built on it. The relationship between the central sandy clay mound and the rest of the soft sandy clay has also yet to be understood.

For more information and a full summary of this year work, visit our blog site here and the day-to-day progress on our site diary here.

A SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT CASTLESHAW ROMAN FORT ANNEXE IN 2024

By Norman Redhead, Lead Archaeologist for FoCRF

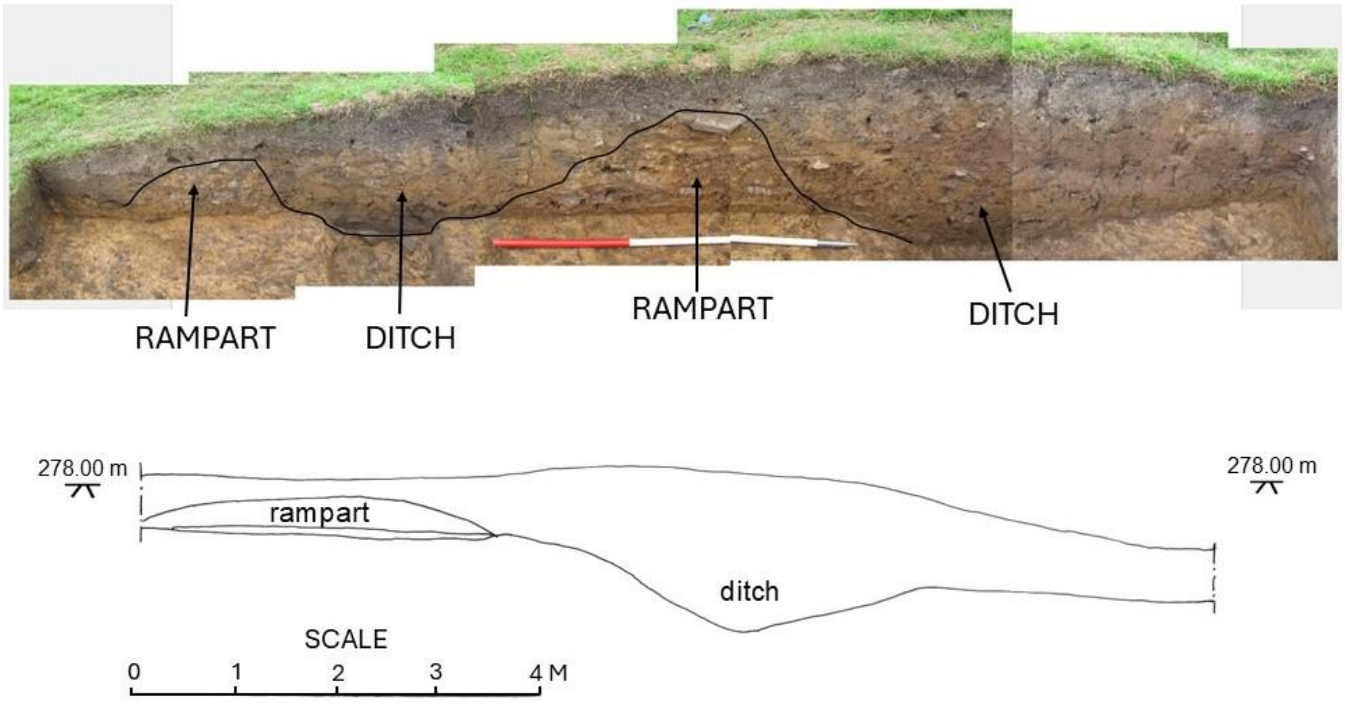
As part of the Castleshaw Roman Forts Hinterland Survey, the Friends of Castleshaw Roman Forts (FoCRF) carried out an archaeological excavation of an area of land east of the defences at Castleshaw Roman Fort (Heritage Asset No. 1017837), centred on grid reference SD99830953. This took place over 21 days in summer 2024. 11 trenches and 17 test pits were excavated within the recently discovered annexe attached to the east side of the late 1st century AD fort. A further 3 test pits were dug across the proposed line of the trans-Pennine Roman highway which linked York and Chester legionary fortresses.

Plan showing the location of trenches and test pits (in red) excavated during the 2024 season. Previous trenches and test pits are shown in black.

Based on a geophysical and Lidar survey in 2023, three 1 metre square test pits (6,7 and 8) were excavated over the projected line of the main highway in Daycroft Field adjacent to Drycroft Lane and east of the fort. There was no evidence for the road, only deep plough soil and a potential Roman linear

cut feature at c 80 cm depth. It is concluded the road has been completely removed in this area due to later disturbance.

Three trenches (1,2 and 3) were dug across the line of the annexe's south rampart which was shown to run straight for at least 44 metres eastwards from the south west corner of the fort rampart before meeting Dirty Lane. The north and south annexe ramparts survived mostly at around only 25 cm deep which may explain why the annexe had not previously been recognised. However, in Trench 1 it was found to be up to 60 cm high, although badly truncated to the front and rear. From the 2024 and 2023 trenches it is now possible to provide a complete profile of the annexe southern rampart and ditch, with the rampart being c 3.5 m wide and the ditch 3 m wide and around 1 m deep. It was not possible to find the eastern side of the annexe due to significant post medieval disturbance witnessed in Trench 3, whilst in Test Pits 1 and 2 medieval and post medieval buildings had removed the Roman remains. These included Husteds farm and cottage as well as Dirty Lane (as shown in Test Pit 10), which is likely to have occupied the site of the eastern defences.



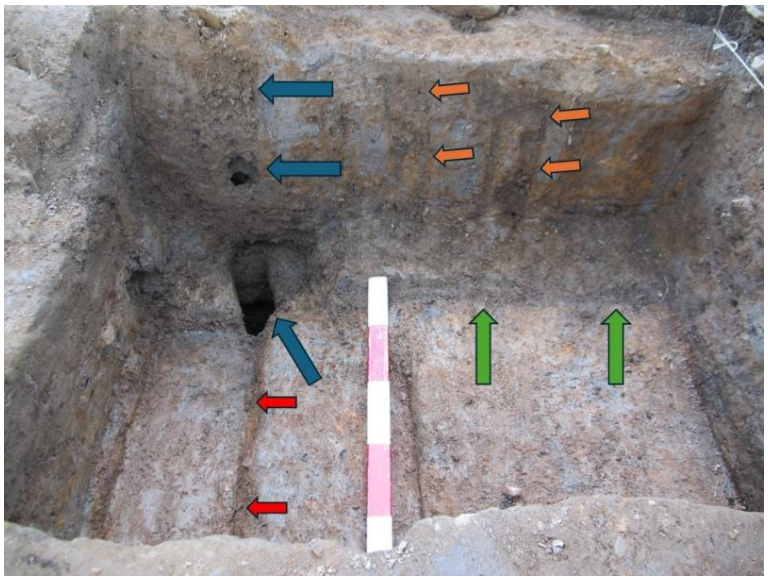
Trench 1 east facing section with interpretation and, below, profile of the annexe southern defences.

A deeply buried line of substantial kerb stones in the south east corner of the site (in Trench 3) were found to be part of a foundation for a large building with an associated drain cutting through the top of the annexe rampart. The building was probably dismantled in the second quarter of the 19th century and is likely to be of medieval origin.

Overhead view of Trench 3 showing foundation of possible medieval building (under left photo scale) and an associated drain running left to right across the annexe rampart.

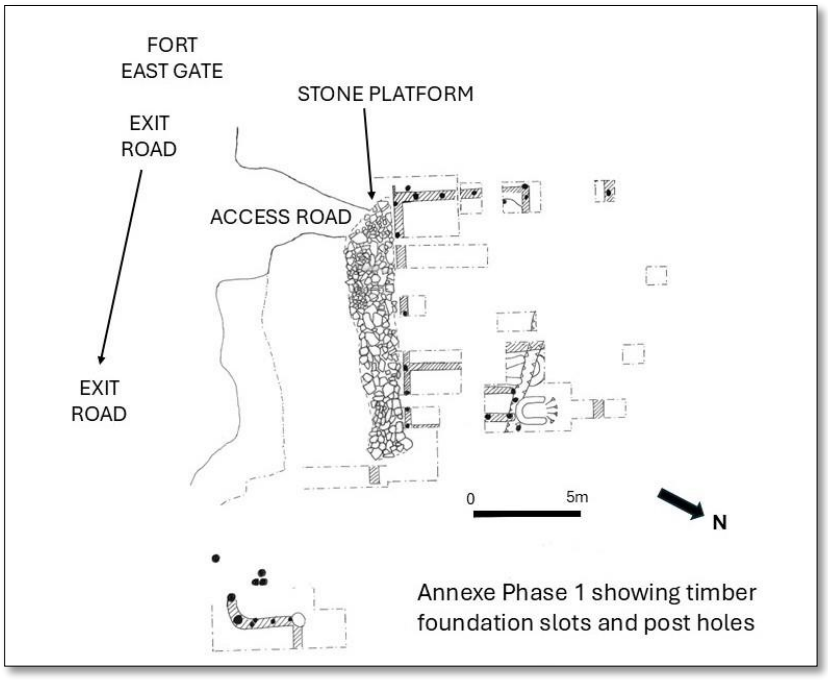
The terminus of the fort's eastern ditch was confirmed in Trench 9. It runs for 22 metres from the north east corner of the fort, straddling its junction with the annexe northern rampart. Its tongue shaped terminus was filled with stone rubble and some Roman tile came from the ditch fill. It is very rare for a ditch not to extend along the whole length of a fort rampart. Given the weakened defences, this implies a strong connection between the fort garrison and the function of the annexe.

A plethora of post holes and foundation slots for timber buildings were found to the north of the long stone platform revealed in 2022. A long line of slots/post holes was revealed running alongside the platform while further north were several internal and external wall alignments. These took the form of regularly spaced posts separated by short sections of horizontal beams ranging from 0.8 m to 1.5 m long and 15 cm wide.



Blue arrows indicate post hole F8, orange arrows point to impressions in the clay revetment of vertical timbers set into the sill beam (indicated by the green arrows). The internal partition wall slot F6 is shown by red arrows.

The north west corner of an external wall was exposed, which demonstrated the continuation of the wall line from the corner revealed in the 2023 trench to give a total length of 6.5 m. As this is the only complete wall line it is not yet possible to define a complete building plan so this will be a priority for next year. A building slot was partly exposed to the south of the stone platform suggesting, along with evidence from last year's excavation, that buildings also filled the space between the east gate exit road and the stone platform.



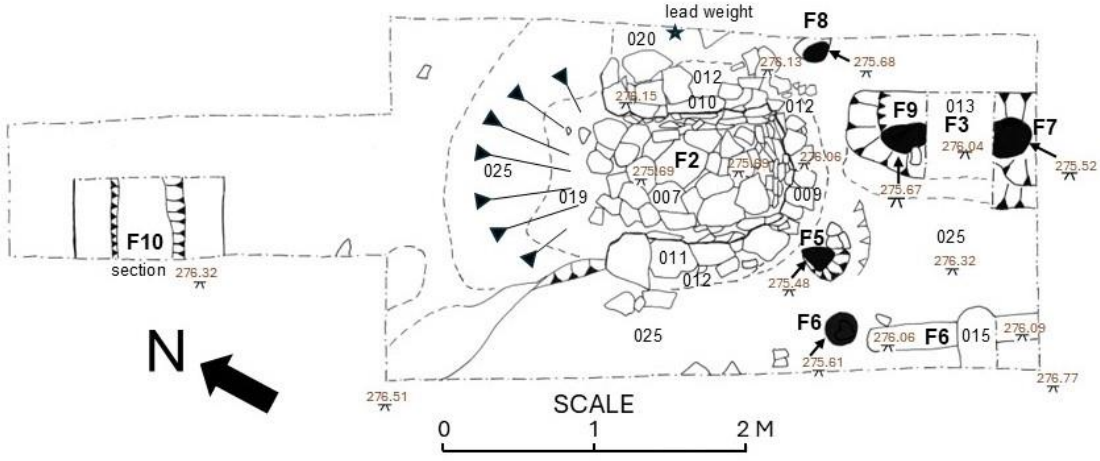
Annexe Phase 1 showing timber foundation slots and post holes

The phasing of last year was confirmed. The timber buildings formed the first phase but were then dismantled and the area capped with clay and shale for a second phase of intense oven and hearth activity. Several more hearths were uncovered in 2024 and one of these clearly overlay an earlier building slot (in Trench 4 – red clay of hearth shown by arrows below).

In Trench 5 a subterranean stone structure was found, interpreted as a grain drying kiln. It was formed of roughly coursed gritstone walls up to 7 courses deep on 3 sides with an open end to the north for the furnace. The east and west sides were straight and the southern end gently curved, giving an internal dimension of 1.1 m by 0.8 m. There was evidence for intense heat in the form of burnt red clay deposits and burnt stone rubble used to backfill the disused kiln, along with deeply red oxidised clay under and to the side of the kiln. The kiln had a small flagstone floor. Adjacent post holes and a building slot to the north may have formed part of a timber superstructure to house the kiln. Unfortunately, soil analysis showed no evidence for grain or any other function residues. Pollen analysis undertaken as part of previous investigations has shown that spelt wheat was grown near the fort and it would have been essential to dry this to protect it from damp if it was to be used for bread making. The floor of the kiln shows little sign of heat reddening unlike the walls and the clay underneath which was oxidised red to a considerable depth. This suggests that the floor was a replacement and did not see much use before the kiln was abandoned.

View of the corn drying kiln after excavation

A 1.2 kg disc-shaped lead weight marked with the letter 'M' was found laid alongside the kiln. The ‘M’ probably stands for *Modius* which was a Roman measure of grain. The weight was formed in a mould and had been clipped on one side to achieve the desired weight. It was presumably used either to measure out the grain for distribution or to check that the grain conformed to the required dry weight. It appears to have been carefully deposited when the kiln was decommissioned.

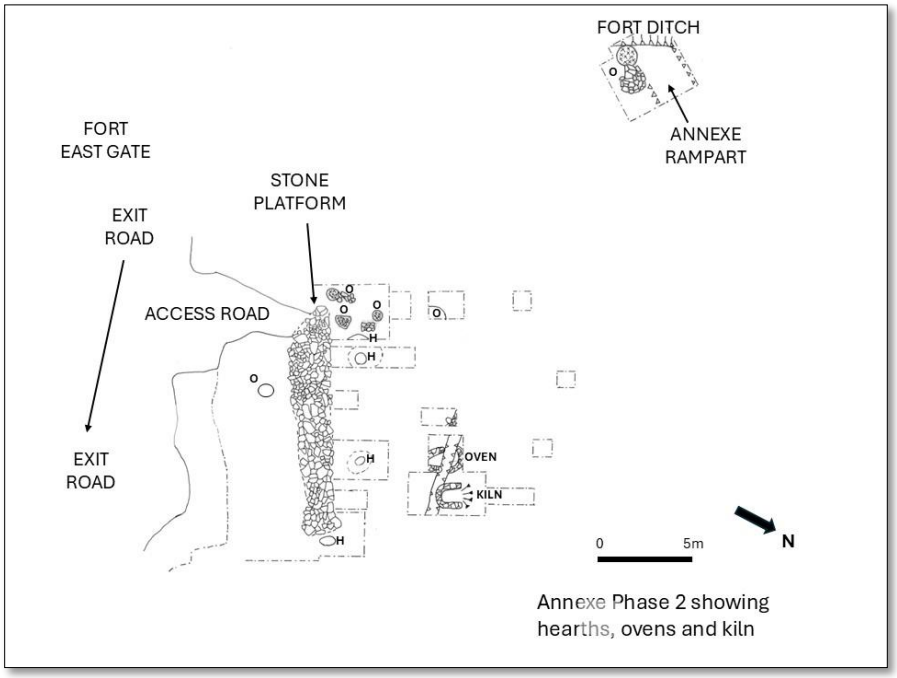


Plan of (left to right) Trenches 8, 5 and 7 joined up, showing the kiln, post holes and slots for timber structures, and the location of the lead weight.

Immediately to the west of the kiln were remnants of a stone-built bread oven, probably dome-shaped. This had been cut through by an old excavation trench, thought to be dug by Bruton in 1907/8 and not recorded. The stone walls of the flue and part of the back wall and floor of the oven survived. Two test pits provided strong evidence that more ovens or kilns existed in this area and further exposure of these will be an objective for future investigations.

Trench 11 looking south after removal of the baulk with the photo scale in the middle of the old (1908) excavation trench and stone oven base.

Test Pits 17 and 18 suggest, along with Thompson's 1963 trench, that Roman activity dies away in the central northern part of the annexe. However, this is not the case on the eastern and western sides. The 2023 excavations revealed an oven set tight against the inside north west corner of the annexe where the fort ditch met the annexe rampart.



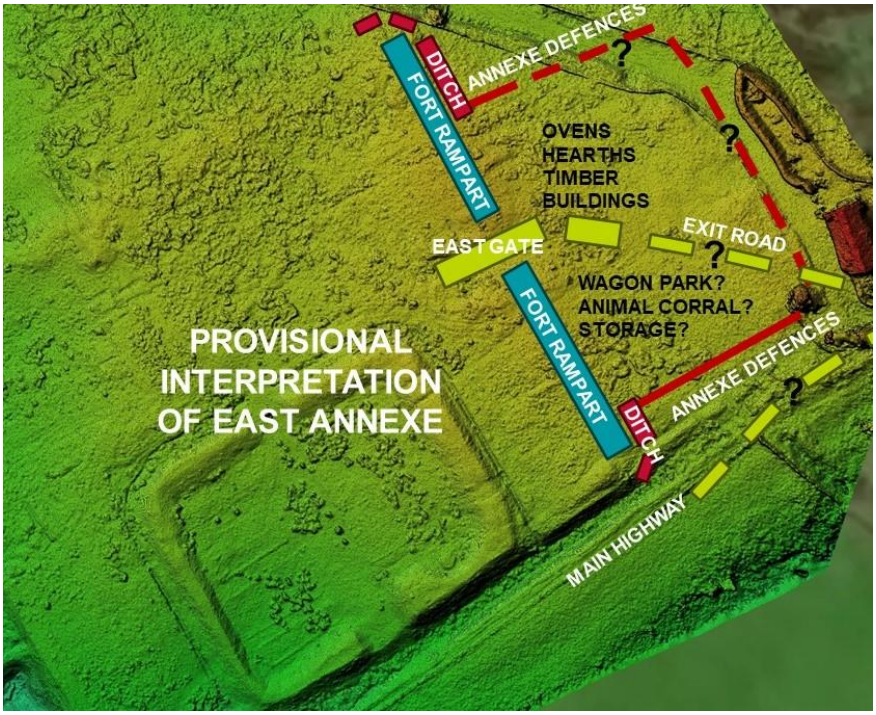
In 2024 Test Pit 19 appeared to show a building slot running east to west, roughly in line with the slot found north of the kiln in Trench 8. These might indicate the rear, northern sides of timber buildings.

Towards the north east corner of the annexe, Test Pit 11 and Test Pit 5 (dug in 2018) showed good potential for Roman remains. A burnt clay deposit in the corner of Test Pit 9 might indicate the site of an oven.

Several pieces of Samian ware were recovered along with a few Roman coarse ware pottery sherds and nails. The artifact dating is in line with previous seasons and indicates a late 1st century AD date.

Soil sample analysis showed no plant remains or metallurgical traces within the 11 submitted samples. However, charcoal analysis identified oak, willow/poplar and hazel – typically used for fuel purposes.

It is theorised that the annexe had a special function connected with transport and travel on the main cross Pennine highway between York and Chester. The climb from the fort eastwards to Standedge is a very steep one and extra haulage animals would be needed to help wagons make the ascent. The southern half of the annexe is almost devoid of archaeology perhaps because it was used to park wagons and tether animals and store goods. In contrast the northern half has a great deal of activity with, in the second phase, a concentration of meat roasting clay ovens, hearths, stone ovens (for baking bread?) and a grain drying kiln. Were these to provide refreshments for travellers/officials?



The function of the earlier timber building phase is uncertain. Perhaps the annexe served as quarters for the constructors of the fort or for an additional unit attached to the fort for a special operation.

The annexe activity is thought to belong to the late first century fort phase however it is possible that there were also early 2nd century fortlet elements. Around AD 120 the main highway was diverted

round the back of the fortlet to make way for buildings on the flat ground opposite the south gate yet there is plenty of flat ground available in the former annexe area. Why not use this instead of having to divert the road, or was this space already taken with various activities? There is much more to find out.

In 2025 further investigation of the annexe will take place to: determine the east and northern annexe defences, define the first phase timber building plan forms, and establish the extent and character of the kilns and ovens.

The success of the 2024 excavation season was due to the 43 Friends volunteers who gave their time, skills, enthusiasm and dedication over 21 days spread out mainly through July and August. During the excavation days a total of 312 visitors were given tours of the site. A Dig Diary was maintained to show progress along with regular posts on Facebook and X. See https://www.castleshawarchaeology.co.uk/

Volunteer excavators from the Friends of Castleshaw Roman Forts point at the kiln at the end of a digging day in summer 2024.

TEST PITS AT THE SITE OF CHEADLE HIGHER MILL, 10TH TO 12TH APRIL 2025

By Carolanne King, SMART

Introduction:

The South Manchester Archaeology Research Team (SMART) were invited by the "Friends of Higher Mill Wood" to undertake preliminary archaeological investigation of the site (Ordnance Survey grid reference SJ 8553 8820) of a demolished mill (Higher Mill) in Cheadle that gives the wood its name.

SMART have a long relationship with community groups within Cheadle having undertaken many small-scale investigations of potential archaeological sites within the township. These include investigations at Abney Hall, St Mary's Church, Cheadle Green and the site of the Beeches opposite the Green.

Objectives:

The new project aims to discover the extent and level of survival of the remains of a corn mill originating in the medieval period then replaced by much later structures and additions in the 18th and 19th centuries. These buildings were finally demolished in the early 20th Century. The mill remains are situated within an area of woodland that has become neglected. The local community have formed a group, "The Friends of Higher Mill Wood", who aim to restore the condition of the woodland turning it to a local amenity benefiting the community in a variety of ways. One of the aims is a series of information panels to interpret and illustrate the history of the site (L. Baddeley pers. comms 2025). Establishing the extent of the surviving remains of the mill will feed into this and may help with understanding the medieval origins of the village of Cheadle. The village is known to have existed in the medieval period, but the original layout and organization are not certain.

Plate 1: The site of Cheadle Higher Mill showing the stone base for a steam engine. Viewed from the west looking east. Image N. Redhead taken 2014 before the engine bed became covered in ivy.

Topography:

The site is a flat area within woodland situated on the north eastern side a bend in the Micker Brook (Plate 1) (Fig. 1). At times the brook is fast flowing and in places has exposed a sandy sub soil above sandstone bedrock. The drift geology consists predominately of sands and gravels laid down as river terrace deposits. These are above an underlying solid geology of Permian and Triassic undifferentiated Bunter and Keuper sandstone (British Geological Survey, from Power 2005, p. 4). A cobbled track leads from Downs Bridge past the surviving mill weir and along the north east side of the now dry overgrown mill pond to the site of the mill buildings. Here another track turns to the south west and passes over a well-built stone and brick bridge that gives access to High Grove Road. (Fig.1).

The woodland appears to be mainly self-seeded deciduous trees though some planting may have occurred in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In recent years the undergrowth has become dense with the area very overgrown and a focus of some antisocial behaviour. Despite this the paths are a popular dog walking route for the locals.

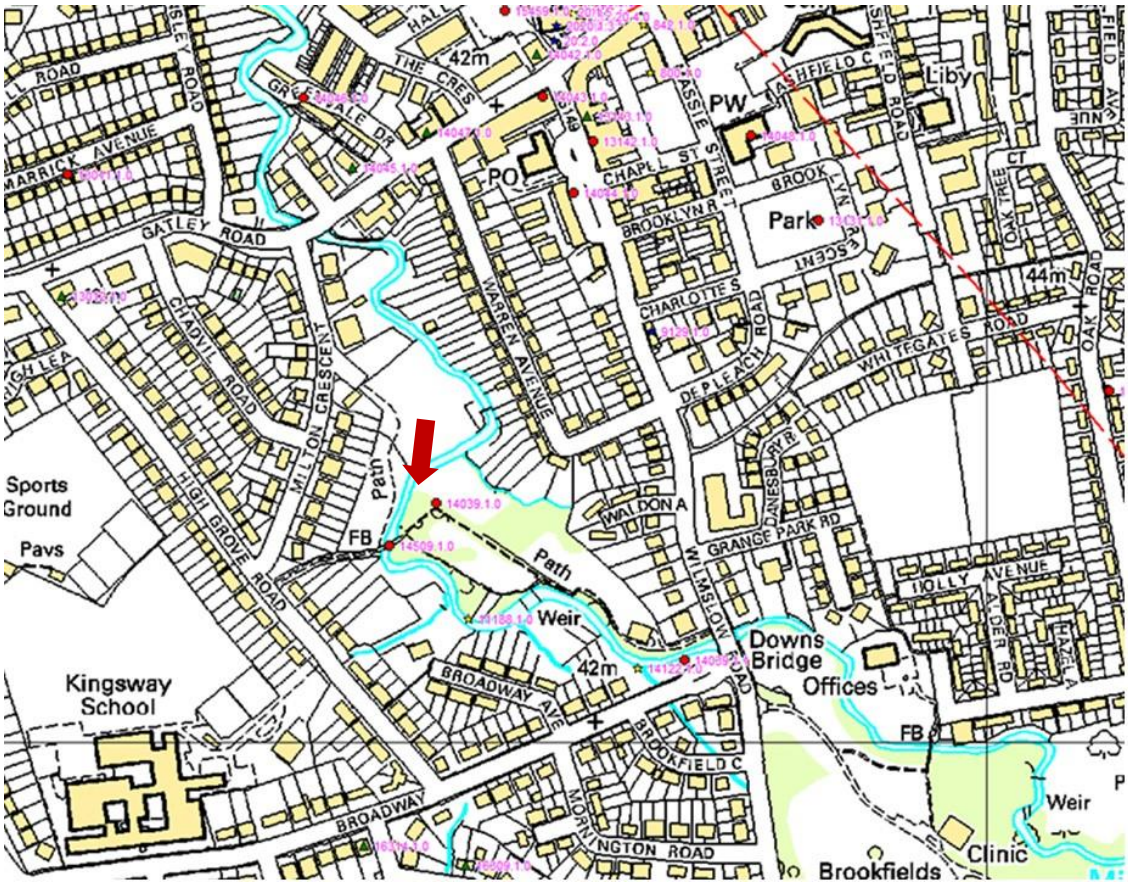


Fig 1: Ordnance Survey 1:2500 mapping extract from the GM Historic Environment Record. Tthe arrow shows the site of Cheadle Higher Mill.

At the site of the mill the stone base of a steam engine is visible (Plate 1) with the iron bolts that held the engine down still protruding. On the southern side of this brick work appears to extend to the west to meet the edge of the brook where it is exposed in the bank. At this point, in the bank and in the water, there are blocks and slabs of stone along with dislodged bricks indicating the foundations of the building demolished in the 20th century may survive.

Archaeological and Historical Background:

The historic background is paraphrased from (Redhead and Miller 2014 p.15 and p. 36 to 40).

'Cheadle is known to have had two mills in the medieval period with a corn mill first referred to in a charter of c. 1185-1200. This is likely to have been at the site of Cheadle Lower Mill which was redeveloped as a bleach works in the late 19th century; with the site then used for residential development in the 21st century. These phases removed all the above ground elements of the original medieval mill.

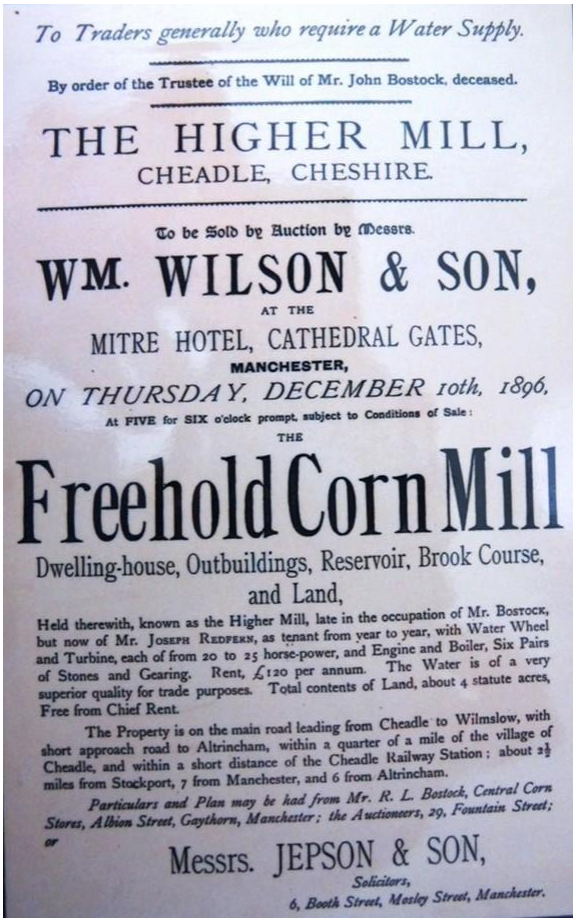
A mill at the site of Cheadle Higher Mill is not mentioned in any records until the 16th century though it was probably built around 1320 when the manor of Cheadle was split into Cheadle Bulkley and Cheadle

Mosely with Higher Mill being the mill for Cheadle Mosely. The original 14th century Higher Mill was almost certainly rebuilt before the mid-19th century when the owner was Charles Bostock.

The Bostock family retained ownership of the mill until 1896 when, at the death of John Bostock, it was put up for sale. The sale notice (Plate 2) has a description of the mill buildings and it's associated machinery referring to both a water wheel and a supplementary steam engine. The buildings included a dwellinghouse and outbuildings whilst the land holding included a reservoir and the brook course. After 1896 it continued as a corn mill under the tenancy of Joseph Redfern until the early 20th century when he ceased trading as a miller. By 1922 Fredrick Taylor was running a grocery business from the buildings. By 1924 the main mill building had been demolished with the outbuildings and house finally taken down in 1937 by order of Cheadle and Gatley Urban District Council. A millstone from the mill now stands near the Downs Bridge entrance to the woods which are used as a local park.'

Fig 2: Peter Burdett's Survey of the County Palatine of Chester, 1777. The arrow shows the location of Cheadle Higher Mill.

Fig. 3: Bryant's Map of the County Palatine of Chester, 1831. The arrow shows the location of the mill.



To Traders generally who require a Water Supply.

By order of the Trustee of the Will of Mr. John Bostock, deceased.

THE HIGHER MILL,
CHEADLE, CHESHIRE.

To be Sold by Auction by Messrs.

WM. WILSON & SON,

AT THE

MITRE HOTEL, CATHEDRAL GATES,

MANCHESTER,

ON THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10th, 1896,

At FIVE for SIX o'clock prompt, subject to Conditions of Sale:

THE

Freehold Corn Mill

Dwelling-house, Outbuildings, Reservoir, Brook Course, and Land,

Held therewith, known as the Higher Mill, late in the occupation of Mr. Bostock, but now of Mr. Joseph Redfern, as tenant from year to year, with Water Wheel and Turbine, each of from 20 to 25 horse-power, and Engine and Boiler, Six Pairs of Stones and Gearing. Rent, £120 per annum. The Water is of a very superior quality for trade purposes. Total contents of Land, about 4 statute acres, Free from Chief Rent.

The Property is on the main road leading from Cheadle to Wilmslow, with short approach road to Altrincham, within a quarter of a mile of the village of Cheadle, and within a short distance of the Cheadle Railway Station; about 2½ miles from Stockport, 7 from Manchester, and 6 from Altrincham.

Particulars and Plan may be had from Mr. R. L. Bostock, Central Corn Stores, Albion Street, Gaythorn, Manchester; the Auctioneers, 29, Fountain Street; or

Messrs. JEPSON & SON,
Solicitors,
6, Booth Street, Mosley Street, Manchester.

Plate 2: Sale notice for Higher Mill 1896.

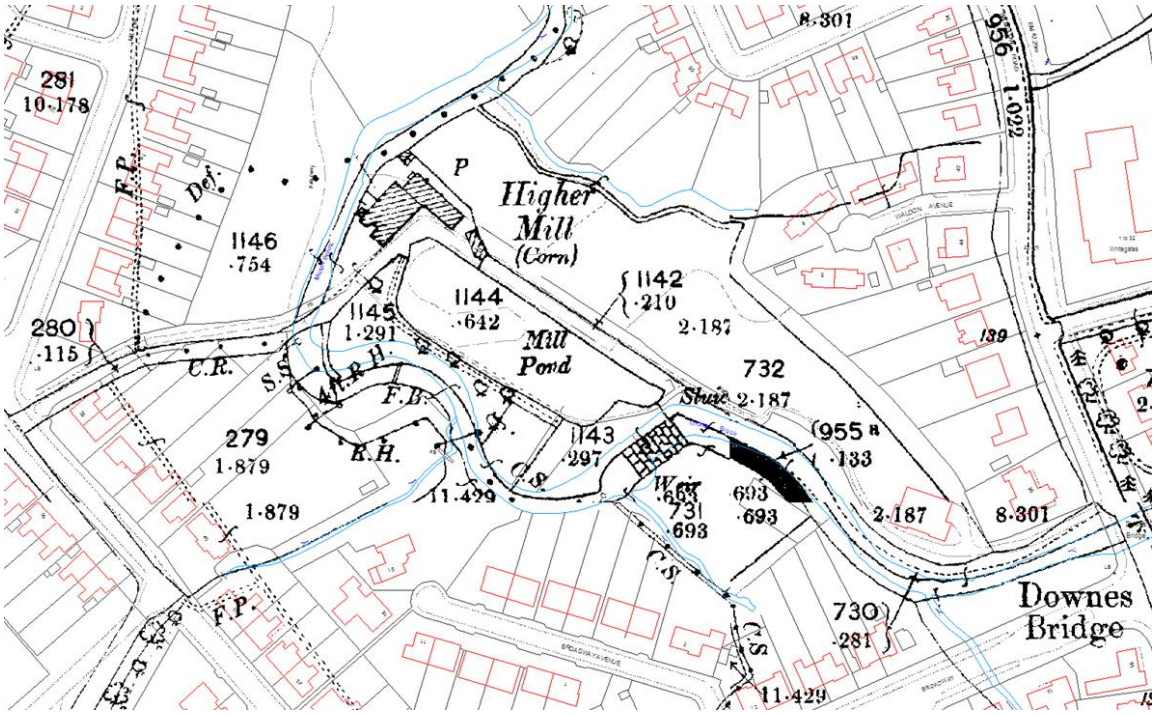


Fig. 4: Extract from the Ordnance Survey map of 1897 superimposed on modern OS mapping

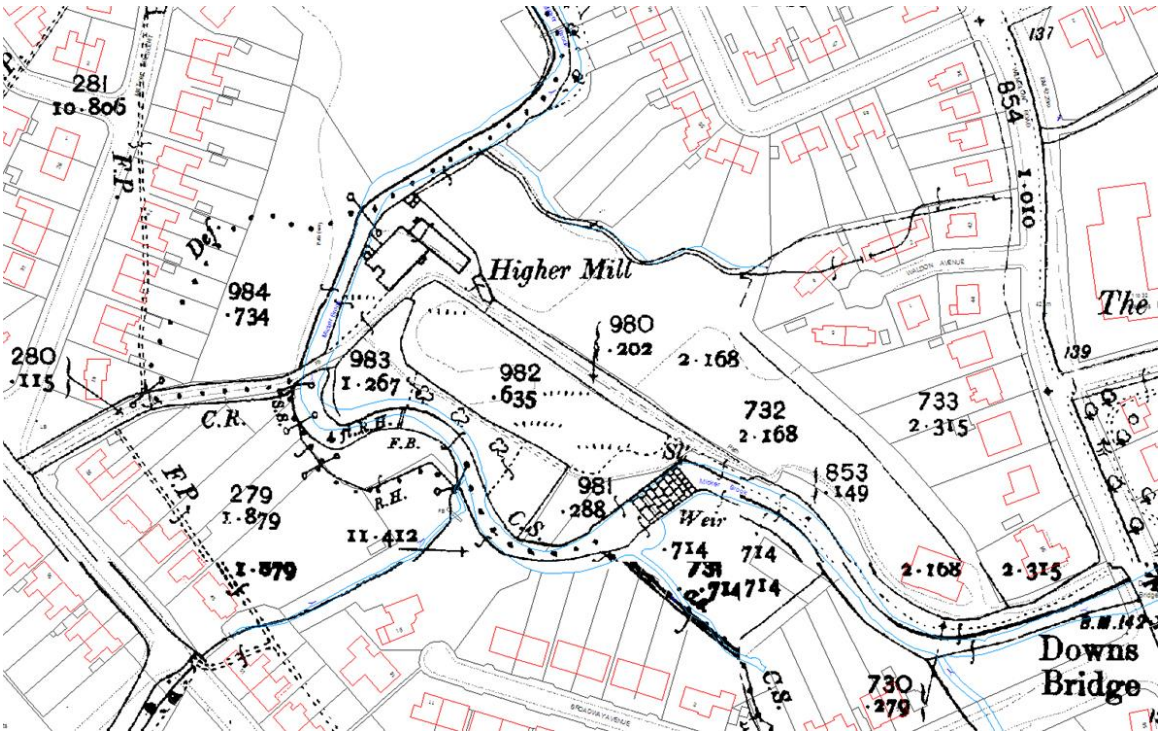


Fig. 5: Extract from Ordnance Survey map of map of 1909 superimposed on modern OS mapping. This shows the mill pond drained of water and overgrown.

There have been no formal archaeological investigations on or near the site of Cheadle Higher Mill and until 2005 there had been none in Cheadle Village (Redhead and Miller 2014 p.49). Since then, a series of amateur and professional investigations have looked at sites in and around the village with the results compiled into a booklet as part of Cheadle Civic Societies 50th anniversary project “An Ancient and Historic Place: The Archaeology of Cheadle (number 12 in the Greater Manchester’s Past Revealed series)”.

In the proximity of the mill there have been no investigations but random finds hint at a Roman presence in the area. Roman glass from Schools Hill and a unique pottery vessel with a long neck found near the weir were provisionally dated to the Roman era. The location of Cheadle at the confluence of the River Mersey and the Micker Brook is also suggestive of a possible early settlement site.

Map regression from the tithe apportionment of 1846 to the early 20th century demolition of the mill shows the extent of the mid-19th century buildings (Figs 4, 5 and 6).

The site of Cheadle Lower Mill has been investigated by a commercial company in advance of residential development and shows what might possibly survive, awaiting discovery at Cheadle Higher Mill. At the site of the Lower Mill, despite 19th century demolition and redevelopment, a stone wheel pit with two 19th century water wheels left in place was uncovered (Redhead and Miller 2014 p. 37).

Test Pitting Phase One Preliminary Results:

South Manchester Archaeology Research Team were invited by the Friends of Higher Mill Wood, with permission from Stockport Council, to undertake a series of preliminary investigations at the site of Higher Mill over three days from the 10th to 12th of April 2025. A series of test pits were originally planned but on examining the site it was decided to focus on the large upstanding engine bed, trying to locate it within the footprint of the buildings shown on the historical mapping. The reasoning was that by establishing where the engine bed lay within the building we could measure from it to locate key areas for investigation.

The first test pit, Test Pit 1, was positioned by measuring out north from the engine bed to where we anticipated the western wall of the cottage might meet the northern wall of the mill building (Fig. 6). This came down directly on to a south west north east aligned wall (Plate 4). Test Pit 2 was dug to the south of this and came down on to a compact layer of demolition materials (Plate 5), including corrugated iron which, when removed, appeared to be lying on natural sand (Plate 6). This was interpreted as meaning that the test pit lay within the building in an area where the floor had been removed.

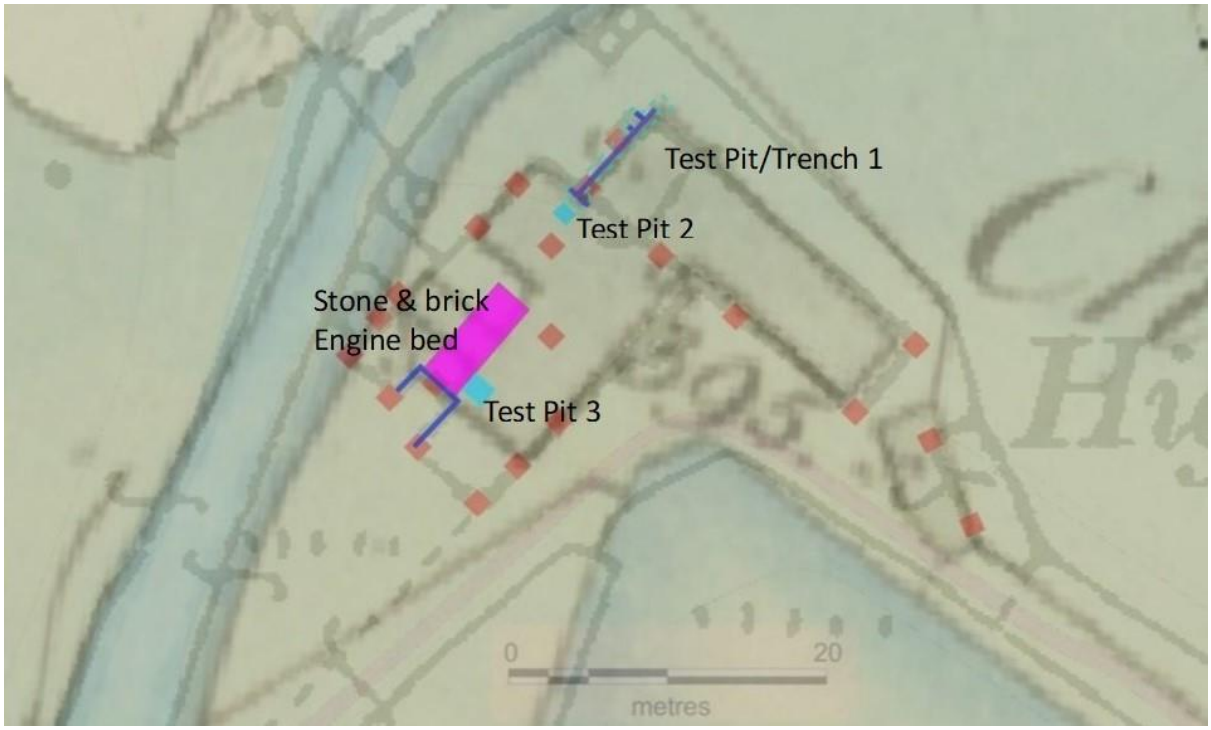


Fig. 6: Tithe map of 1846 with superimposed OS map of 1909. Dark blue lines are wall alignments uncovered by the current investigations. The pink is the engine bed. Red squares are the proposed test pits; light blue is the test pits dug and the test trench of the recent excavations. The rotational mismatching of the river boundary features and mill pond is a result of different survey methods and inaccuracies in the Tithe map

In Test Pit 1 the alignment of the wall was followed to the north east and the south west by extending the pit into a trench (Plate 7). The aim of this was to find the returns of the northern wall of the house and the junction of the house with the mill building to its south. This wall is thought to be the western wall of the house that was attached to the mill and in place by the tithe map of 1846. A T-junction with a brick wall and what might be a stone threshold slab was seen at the southern end (Plate 8). Towards the northern end of the wall alignment followed by Test Pit 1 two areas of brick projecting west from the wall may be the foundations of a small structure seen at this location on the map of 1909 (Figs. 4). The north wall of the house was not discovered as the excavation halted before it was found.

A further test pit, Test pit 3, was dug at the eastern side of the engine bed where a sloping area of brick was noted, this turned out to be the springer of a collapsed arch (Plate 11). The opposite side of the arch was revealed by the cleaning of a strip parallel to the eastern wall of the engine bed. Here further walls and stone pads were noted lying parallel to the engine bed (Plate 12).

Two parallel walls ran south from the south eastern and south western corners of the engine bed (Plate 9), these were traced to the south for some 3 metres. The western one of this pair of walls appeared to finish just before a dump of refractory tile and brick thought to be from a possible boiler house.

During cleaning of the engine bed and the area surrounding it a number of broken corn drying kiln tiles were found. There were the remains of at least three different types of these tiles and some fragments seemed to have been reused in the construction of the engine bed (Plate 10). Some of the large stone blocks in the engine bed may be recycled from earlier phases of the mill.

In a brief summary of his thoughts on the engine bed John Glithero, who visited on 12th April, sees it as somewhat roughly constructed. This may be the result of alterations during its working life and weathering after exposure to the elements. There were seven 1½ inch holding down bolts which held a full length cast iron bed, about 6ft wide and 18ft long. The layout suggests it supported a single cylinder horizontal engine, probably with a condenser. The flywheel might have been about 5ft diameter. It would have been alongside the stone bed with the bottom part in a pit. The cylinder and at least one crankshaft bearing were fixed to the cast iron bed, which was bolted on top of the stone bed. The date is probably mid to late 19th century (Glithero, 2025).

Other finds included 18th and 19th century pottery along with a selection of glass from windows, bottles and other vessels. In the extended Test Pit 1, at its northern end, a fragment of possibly 17th century slipware was retrieved.

The preliminary investigations have revealed brick alignments that can be related to walls seen in the map regression enabling us to locate the engine bed within the building (Fig 6). There appears to have been an internal engine house with a boiler possibly to the west. The demolished arched structure might relate to a corn drying kiln or be an alternative location for the boiler.

Now that the engine bed can be directly related to the historic mapping it should be possible to site further test pits with some accuracy and focus on particular areas. The investigations also show that in the area around the engine bed significant below ground remains may survive to some depth. To the north it seems very likely the foundations of the house and the mill buildings will also survive.

The potential for further, more extensive investigations is clear. Further test pitting to located wall alignments should now be straight forward with the potential for deep and complex archaeology.

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Acknowledgements:

Thanks to all those members of SMART who took part in or visited the excavation without whose enthusiasm and hard work the project would not be possible.

Thank you to the Friends of Higher Mill Wood who invited SMART to investigate the Mill especially Liane Baddley (Chair).

Thanks to Norman Redhead (retired County Archaeologist) of Cheadle Civic Society who initiated the project.

Thank you to Stockport Council for their support and permission especially from Daryll Falconer Countryside Officer Neighbourhoods Team Stockport Council and James Collins Greenspace Officer Stockport Council.

A special thank you to John Glithero for his thoughts on the engine bed.

Plate 3: Starting to clean the engine bed. Plate 4: Test Pit 1 showing wall, looking south west.

Plate 5: Test Pit 2 at level of compact demolition layer. Plate 6: Test Pit 2 at level of natural sand.

Plate7 (left): Looking south west along what is thought to be the north western wall of the house revealed by extending Test Pit 1 into a trench. Plate 8 (right): Junction of house wall with the north west wall of the mill building - the slab maybe a threshold stone.

Plate 9: Southern end of engine bed showing wall projecting to the south. Plate 10 (right): North east corner of engine bed, showing reuse of corn drying kiln tiles in the lower level of grey tiles at the foot of the brick work.

Plate 11: Truncated wall and springer for brick arch in Test Pit 3 on eastern side of engine bed. Plate 12: Brick wall and stone pads on east side of engine bed.

Plate 13: The site at the end of the excavation after cleaning the engine bed and back filling pits and trenches.

AGECROFT TRAMWAY TEST PITTING – ARCHAEOLOGY ON THE MB&B CANAL

By Dave Barnes, Manchester Bolton and Bury Canal Society (MBBCS)

and Bob Huddart, BAG

Introduction (Dave Barnes)

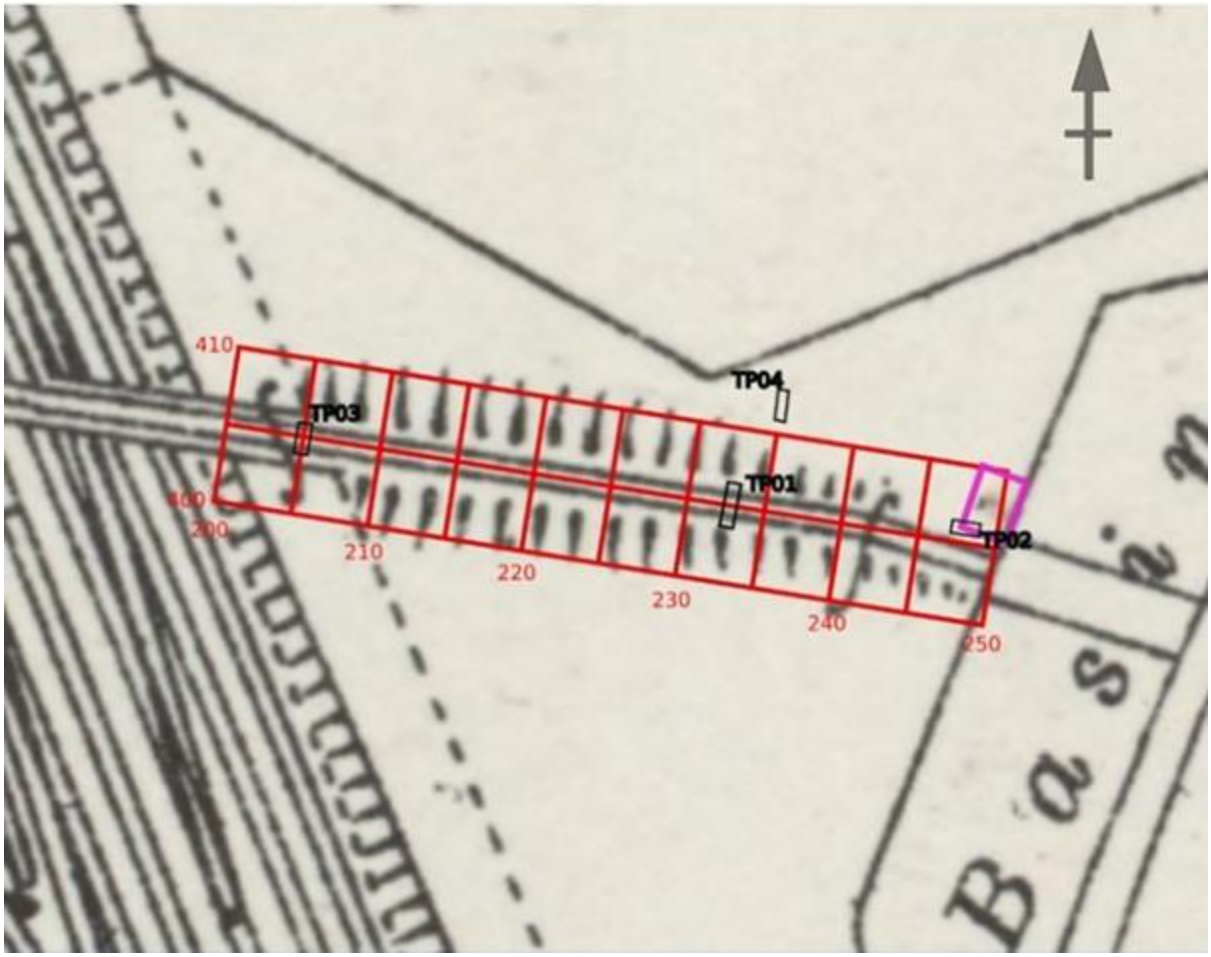
We know from the MBBCS Towpath Guide that the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal has an additional 6 ½ miles of tramroads that mostly led to coal pits. But we know very little about them, either locally or on other canals, so we set up a preliminary dig with the valuable expertise of Bob Huddart and his colleagues at the Bury Archaeology Group (BAG). This took place over two days in March and has revealed some of the structure of the tramway. We are now planning a funded project in 2026 to explore this further with the objectives of having a community engagement event with local schools and residents and publishing original research on the tramways, which were such a crucial element in the canal's function. This has been a partnership project and we are grateful to Land Trust, Lancashire Wildlife Trust and the Canal & River Trust for facilitating access to the site. I'd also like to thank Paul Kelly of the Irwell Valley Mining Project for inspiring the project. Let us know if you would like to have more information about this project, contact outreach@mbbcs.org.uk.

Preliminary Finds (Bob Huddart)

The tramway seems to have been constructed in the late 1840's to transport coal from the Agecroft colliery to the railway sidings via an overhead section, or to continue onward along an embankment and pier to the Manchester Bolton & Bury Canal where it could be discharged into barges using a tippler mechanism at the canal basin known as Agecroft harbour. It seems to have gone out of use by 1932. Sometimes described as a 'Tubway', these were narrow gauge railways with wagons small enough to be pushed by one person. Research by P. Hindle suggests that these 7 cwt tubs straight from the mine which typically had a gauge of about 18 inches.

The objective of the archaeology has been to undertake a programme of test pitting to ascertain what survives of the tramway and the potential for a larger scale excavation at a later date. Test pitting was carried out over 2 days on the 23rd and 29th March 2025.

The tramway embankment is clearly visible. It is about 35 metres long and sloping down from west to east. The condition is generally good although in a few places there is evidence of erosion. Trees growing on the embankment may have damaged the archaeology in some places.

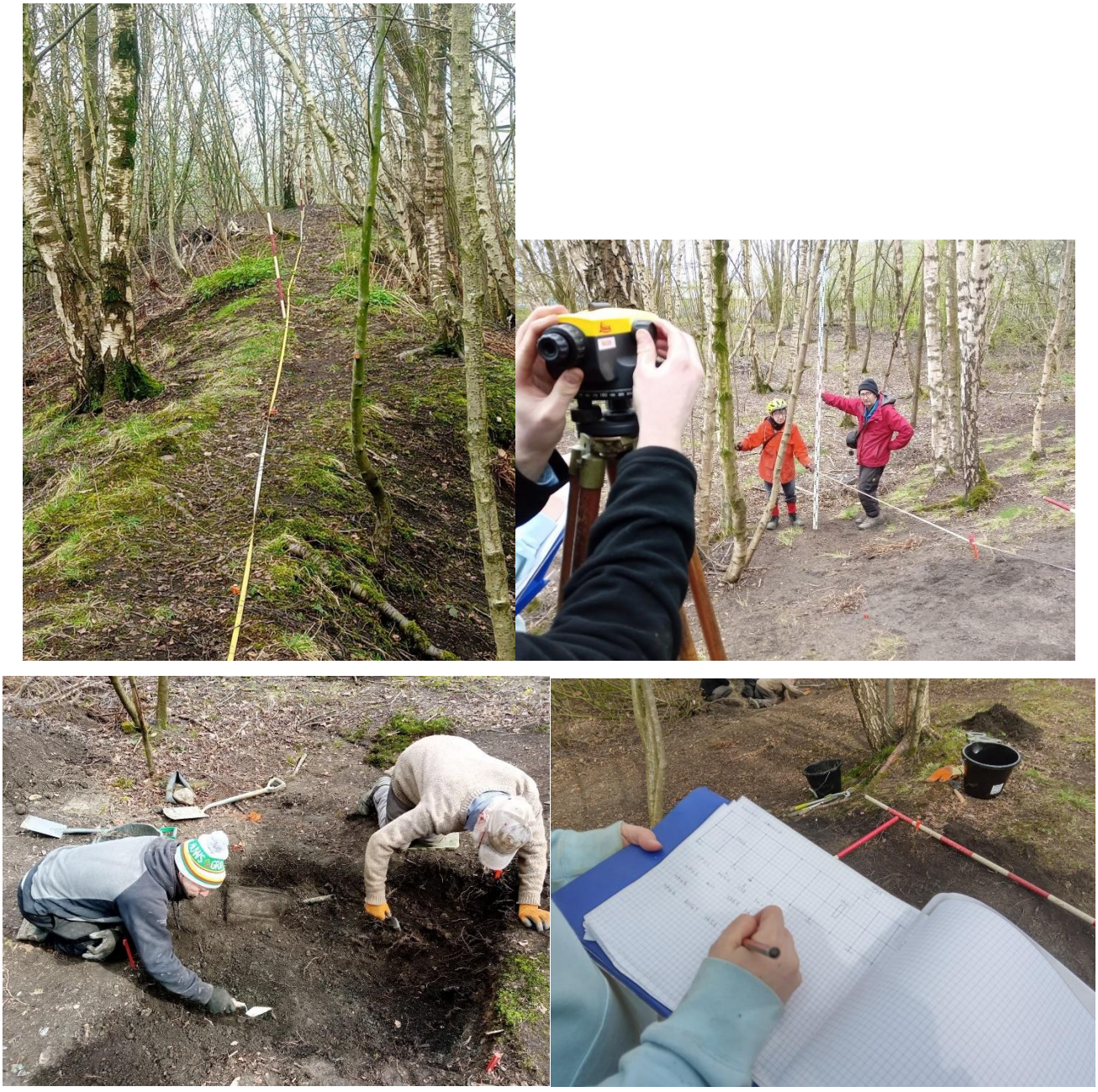


Agecroft Basin as shown on 1933 25 to 1 inch OS map, with test pit locations shown.

TP01 across the top of the bank revealed a deposit of compacted crushed stone probably the remains of railway ballast. The width of the top of the embankment is about 60 cm (about 24 inches). This is consistent with Paul Hindle's research.

TP03 revealed evidence of brickwork and vertically set rails on both the north and south side at the embankment terminus. TP04 located on a level area of ground at the eastern end north side of the embankment did give some evidence of archaeology in the form of a yard surface but seems to be fragmentary and perhaps of secondary importance in any future excavation. It was unfortunate that TP02 could not be excavated since we hadn't sought the landowners' permission and due to safety reasons. I am sure that this area could be made safe with the use of temporary fencing. This is potentially an interesting area. The 25-inch OS map published in 1893 shows a group of 4 enclosures and a very small building adjacent to each other and close to the canal basin. By 1915 only one building remained and this had also gone by the time of the 1931 revision.

The most prominent feature on the site is the tramway embankment. A topographic survey of this would enable us to make an accurate record of this feature. The objective of test pitting was to establish that there are intact remains of the tramway on the site. In this the test pitting was successful. We now have sufficient information to make a larger excavation worthwhile.



Survey, excavation and recording in progress (photo: David Barnes)

The team of volunteers (photo: Chris Nash)

THE HADES HILL BARROW

From David Grayson, Littleborough Historical and Archaeological Society

Rochdale Observer. 23rd May 1903

'Various opinions have been expressed as to the men who made and used the implements now stored in the Rochdale Museum. Some have asserted that they belong to the Iberian race which once inhabited England, who were small of stature, lithe and agile, with dark hair and eyes, possessing the dolichocephalic or "longhead," and burying their dead in long barrows. No long barrows have been found in our neighbourhood, but a round barrow has been discovered on Hades Hill, which is most interesting. The relics extracted from this have a place in Case 9 in the Museum. This is not a gruesome sight, as it has been described, but is most attractive and valuable as giving us some insight into the habits and customs of the people. For instance, we find in Case 9 the remains of the funeral feast of those ancient times telling us plainly, although history and tradition are silent upon this matter, that such a feast did take place, and that the cake and wine at our modern funerals is but a survival of a custom which has prevailed for thousands of years, showing that it means something beyond more hospitality.

On the 10th of December, 1898, Mr. W.H. Sutcliffe, F.G.S., Mr. Thomas Hill of Shawforth, and another excavator visited the barrow and removed the urn which contained burnt human bones, burnt flint

implements, burnt flint flakes, a broken nodule of jasper flint, and the burnt bones of an ox. In the soil immediately surrounding the urn a flint flake, a beautifully wrought round skin scraper, and a good minute implement of rather uncommon type were found; it is worthy of note that not a relic of any metal was found either in the urn or in the surrounding earth. An excellent description of the barrow is given but Mr. W.H. Sutcliffe, F.G.S., in a paper printed in the Transactions of the Rochdale Literary and Scientific Society (Vol. Vi., 1898 - 1900) and, in regard to the ornamentation of the urn, the student will find interesting and instructive matter in Dr. Colley March's pamphlet, "The Meaning of Ornament."

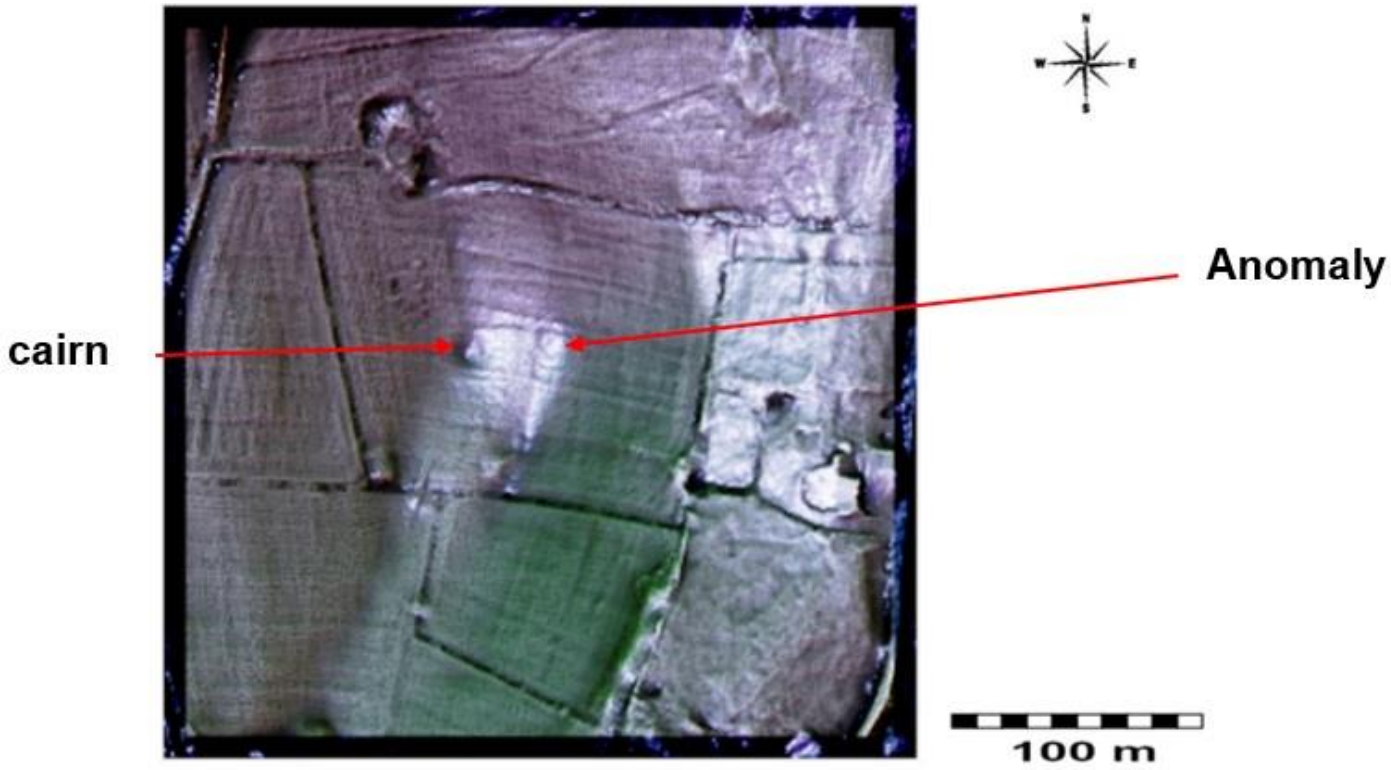
Two views of Hades Hill barrow during GMAU's excavation in 1981/2 (source: Norman Redhead)

CONTINUING ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT AT LUZLEY, TAMESIDE

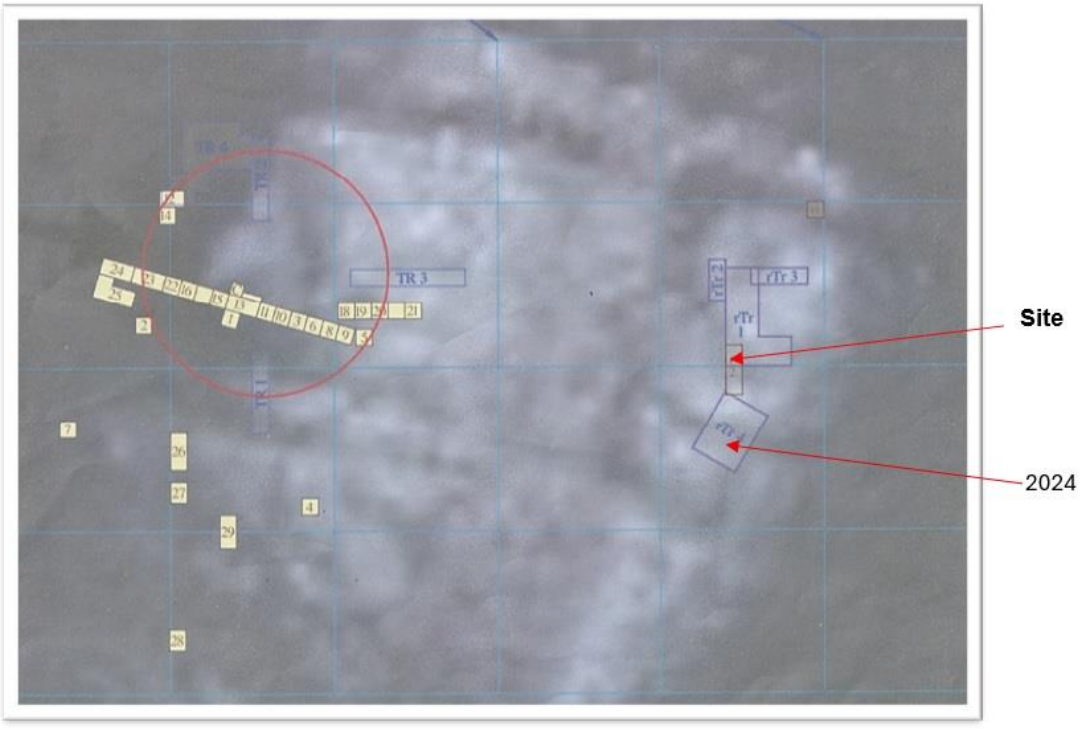
By Steve Milne

Introduction

Lidar data and field surveys identified potential archaeological remains close to a Bronze Age kiln (which previously yielded an urn), including interlocking concentric circles (SD 96759 00731) (245m AOD). The Greater Manchester Archaeological Advisory Service (GMAAS) secured funding to recover and analyse the funerary urn, including dating pottery and bone deposits. An earlier report on an unidentified circular anomaly remained incomplete in 2023, with research continuing into mid-2024. In spring 2025 further evaluation was carried out to establish whether a bank and ditch was part of the underlying archaeological Lidar image interpretation.



Lidar image by Phil Barrett showing the cairn site previously evaluated and the adjacent circular feature.



Location of test pits and trenches over the cairn (circled left) and adjacent feature (right)

Two closely spaced trenches were excavated across the line of a possible ditch.

The first trench measured 4 metres by 2 metres. It confirmed the presence of a shallow ditch which contained an organic soil near its base which has been sampled for palaeo-environmental analysis. There were two other features of note: [2021] was a stone lined probable post hole cut into the bedrock base of the ditch, [2020] was a cluster of upright stones which were found to lie over a flat stone base and probably represent another post setting.

View of the first trench showing post hole 2021 and stone cluster 2020, sat within a ditch.

The second trench was 1m by 3m and demonstrated the continuation of the ditch.

Second trench showing a shallow cut for a ditch (right: east facing section)

The evaluation suggested that the lidar imaging might be correct to some extent. However, if these ditches are part of a broader landscape pattern, there could be more complexity in the area than initially anticipated. Only two pieces of flint and one fire-cracked pebble were recovered. It may be that environmental samples will provide further insights into this area.

As is often the case with such features, their exact purpose remains speculative. It is possible that these ditches do not align with conventional perceptions of what ditches should look like. However, an examination of the lidar image data suggests that all the ditches interlock, presenting a challenge to our understanding of their true nature. The preliminary archaeological assessment indicates a potential rock-cut feature, which may have either predated or postdated the construction of the cairns. This assertion remains speculative due to the limited number of finds recovered. Nevertheless, the lidar image data corroborates the archaeological findings. Currently, the function of this area remains conjectural.

Steve and Malcolm receive a site visit from Ben Dyson of GMAAS on 13th May 2025.

TAMESIDE LOCAL HISTORY FORUM

By Christine Clough

FORUM members have been busy putting together exhibitions of 25 years since the start of the group, plus a Victory Europe exhibition and, in September, an exhibition about the Co-op buildings in Tameside for Heritage open days, which will be at Portland Basin from the 15th September.
Our programme of talks at Local Studies have been very successful so far, the new programme is now out.
All talks are at Local Studies. Cotton Street East, Ashton-u-Lyne, OL6 7BY. Tel: 0161 342 4242.

September 12th Heritage Open Days
Heritage Month Local Studies and Tameside History Forum tbc
17th September Wednesday 2pm
Voices of Kosovo in Manchester
Stories behind the archive
Saturday 20th Ashton Parish church St. Michaels
Talk

23rd September Tuesday 2pm

Mottram Castle. One of Cheshire's least known Landmarks.

Keith Warrender

Forum meeting 14th October 1.30pm at 4C Christ Church Oldham Rd. Ashton

All welcome

October 15th Wednesday 2pm Local Studies

The British Cotton Industry

28th October Tuesday Walk at Broad Mills

Mike Nevell. Meet 1.30

Book through Local Studies

25th November Tuesday 2pm

Treasures of the Archives and joys of volunteering

Chris Plazaque

3rd December Wednesday

The Moravians

A talk in progress in 2024 at the Local Studies Library.

THE NORTHERN HISTORY AND HERITAGE FAIR

From the Chair of HMHG

Holcombe Moor Heritage Group is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. As part of these celebrations the Group organised the Northern History and Heritage Fair on Sunday 16th March 2025, at Greenmount Old School, three miles north of Bury.

The idea for the Fair developed after we had attended various events in the local area such as village fetes, to try to share the work of our Group, and finding there was very little interest in our displays from members of the public attending the event. As a consequence we decided that we would organise an event that would attract an audience who had an interest in history and thought that other groups may also be interested in having a display at the event.

A wide range of history and heritage groups, societies and attractions had a stall at the Fair, which meant there was a variety of interesting and informative displays. These included: Friends of Castleshaw Roman Fort, Horwich Heritage Society, The Fusilier Museum, Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, Friends of Helmshore Textile Museum, Littleborough Historical and Archaeological Society, Friends of Smithills Hall, Ramsbottom Heritage Society, The National Trust, Pendle Heritage Centre, Turton Tower, Turton Local History Society, The Whitaker Museum, The Young Archaeologists Club, South Pennine Archaeology Group, Manchester, Bury and Bolton Canal Society, Lancashire Family History and Heraldry Society and Rochdale Development agency with Elder Archaeology. We were also very pleased that Ian Miller from Greater Manchester Archaeology Advisory Service was able to attend and share the Historic Environment Record with the visitors to the fair, who enjoyed finding out more about the historical features of the local area. Nigel Jepson, a local historian and author, was at the fair to sell his books and Bob Dobson, a bookseller, also attended with a wide range of history themed books for sale. There was no charge for stallholders and admission to the Fair was free.

The Fair was advertised widely, including on social media and was exceptionally well attended, a steady stream of visitors came through the doors throughout the day. We estimate that at least between 400 and 500 people visited the fair, we had 200 programmes printed which were given out at the door as visitors were welcomed to the event and they were all gone halfway through the day! It was a bright, sunny day which also helped to boost visitor numbers. All the members of the public who visited had an interest in history, which meant there was a buzz in the room as people chatted to each other and discovered more about the history of the local area. The stallholders enjoyed the event too and it was

a great opportunity to talk to other groups and compare notes! Some of the other groups were inspired to organise their own similar events.

We also ran a very popular tearoom, selling hot drinks and a variety of cakes and biscuits as well as a room of activities for children, such as making rubbings of old coins, a treasure hunt and crown making.

All in all, it was a fantastic day and thanks go to all the stallholders who helped to make the event such a successful one.

Left: The Holcombe Moor Heritage Group Display. Right: Looking at the Historic Environment Record

The South Pennine Archaeology Group display.

Lots to talk about!

The Pendle Heritage Centre Display

UPDATE FROM ELDER COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY

From Colin Elder, Elder Archaeology

Tickets are now available for the Big Dig Rochdale 3.0 from 7-18 July. We are offering free tickets to people interested in helping excavate the site and to those who wish to take part in a guided site tour. Tickets are free but expected to book up quickly, and these can be found here: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-big-dig-30-tickets-1381826944589?aff=ebdsshcopyurl&utm-source=cp&utm-term=listing&utm-campaign=social&utm-medium=discovery&utm-content=attendeeshare

This Dig is a part of the Rochdale Town Hall Restoration & Broadfield Slopes programme (which has previously been awarded the University of Salford's Celebration of Innovation Award for Community Engagement Activity of the Year (2024), and the Association for Industrial Archaeology's Peter Neaverson Award for Community Engagement (2024). It has now been shortlisted for the Council for British Archaeology's Marsh Community Archaeology Awards in the Community Archaeology Project of the Year category. For his work on this project, the Community Excavation of Hulton Hall, and several other community-focused projects, Dr Colin Elder has also been shortlisted in the Community Archaeologist of Year category. The winners of the 2025 Marsh Community Archaeology Awards will be announced on Tuesday 22 July 2025 as part of the Festival of Archaeology.