

News NW

Council for
British Archaeology
North West

Autumn 2018

www.britarch.ac.uk/cbanw

Derek Pierce, Community Archaeologist, 1929 to 2018

On the 29 June 2018, Derek Pierce, one of Manchester's great community and voluntary archaeologists died. Derek was involved in voluntary and professional archaeology for more than 40 years, contributing to our understanding of several major sites and inspiring many to participate in archaeology.

In the late 1970s Derek volunteered to help dig on a number of Roman military sites being investigated by the late Prof. Barri Jones of Manchester University. Falling in with a like-minded group of enthusiastic volunteers the idea to establish a local archaeology society was born. That idea became the South Trafford Archaeological Group (STAG), the home of most of these friends, and Derek was its first chairman. In fact, he would go on to serve as chair for the next 35 years, stepping down in November 2014.

Under his leadership, the Group established its own headquarters to hold meetings and display its discoveries. This was in a building donated free, and then moved and rebuilt by STAG members at Altrincham golf course. It was opened in 1987 by the historian Michael Wood, quite a coup for a local archaeology society. Derek was always immensely proud of this recognition. In the 1980s and 1990s the group's membership flourished and regularly topped more than 100, well above the national average for such societies. During this time, STAG expanded our knowledge of the first people who lived in the Trafford area over several thousand years, Derek and his team uncovering a Bronze Age burial, mapping the Roman road through Bowdon and Little Bollington and locating the first evidence for Saxon Altrincham.

Under Derek's leadership and ably supported by STAG's first secretary, Pat Faulkner, the group did not confine itself to Trafford, working on sites across southern and eastern Manchester, and central and northern Cheshire. At the helm was Derek, biting the end of his pipe in thought, and at break-times munching on cheese and marmalade sandwiches, interpreting what the Group had found with the aid of his flask of foul-tasting coffee.

Such was Derek's enthusiasm for archaeology, that when made redundant in the mid-1980s he took the opportunity to become a professional archaeologist. Thus, he worked on several digs in Manchester and Salford in the late 1980s with the Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit. His expert field knowledge, combined with his enthusiasm for the subject, made him a natural teacher. He was a passionate believer in the power of archaeology to unlock our understanding of the past, and was always keen to pass on his enthusiasm and knowledge to others, no matter what their age.

Of the many sites STAG worked on during his time as chair (over 100, by my reckoning) two fired Derek's imagination and enthusiasm the most. These were the Roman fort at Northwich in Cheshire, and the Timperley moated site, the original Timperley Old Hall. Derek led digs at Northwich in the 1980s and 1990s, and worked there again in the 2000s, studying its pottery kilns. The site he was most passionate about, though, was Timperley Old Hall. Excavations between 1989 and 1999, and again from 2009 to 2012, produced one of the best recorded and understood late medieval moated halls in North West England,

with an important collection of late medieval and post-medieval pottery. At this site Derek combined two of his three passions, archaeology and gardening, for after the digs were finished the moated platform was landscaped and a small garden established, very much through his vision.

Derek continued to dig and survey with the Group when he could. His most recent and final discovery was of a musket ball, jammed between the stone setts by Altrincham's covered market, recovered during the recent renovations. This small item was a remnant of the site's original use as a training ground for the Cheshire Militia in the mid-19th century. A true archaeologist to the end, he knew the value of even the smallest items in rediscovering the past and telling the story of the everyday folk, especially of the Altrincham and South Trafford areas.

Mike Nevell

The Archaeology of Peterloo

The 38th North West Industrial Archaeology Conference will take place in Manchester on Saturday 29th September. Full details including the programme and a booking form can be found on the CBANW Website.

http://www.archaeologyuk.org/cbanw/CBANW_meetings_intro.html

Merseyside Archaeological Society One Day Conference

MAS and Museum of Liverpool will hold a joint conference in the Museum of Liverpool at Pier Head on Saturday 13th October 2018.

A series of talks will cover recent

archaeological discoveries in Merseyside including an important Mesolithic hunter-gatherer site a surprising excavation at an Anglo-Saxon site in Bromborough, a dig in medieval Prescott, an intriguing project involving 19th century court housing in Liverpool, 20th century coastal defences, and the latest on Portable Antiquities finds.

Tickets are £10 (plus booking fee). Booking via Eventbrite and further details are on the Merseyside Archaeological Society's website www.merseysidearchsoc.com

Norton Priory 2018 bi-annual Conference

Norton Priory's third bi-annual conference will take place on Saturday 6th October and cover the latest exciting research into the site, environment and the extensive archaeological collection. Speakers will explore a diverse range of topics from the eighteenth-century landscape to evidence for medieval inter personal violence! Preliminary results from the first season of a new series of research excavations at Norton Priory will be presented including some finds, as well as latest thoughts on Halton Castle.

Norton Priory and Halton Castle will also have free entry on Sunday 16th September. There is also an Osteoarchaeology Workshop on Saturday 22nd September. Further details and booking at www.nortonpriory.org

The Calderstones, Calderstones Park, Liverpool. Heritage Open Days

Liverpool's 4,000 year old Neolithic Calderstones comprise a collection of internationally significant prehistoric rock-art and represent the earliest evidence of settled life in the region. Originally part of a passage-grave which stood adjacent to the boundary of the modern Calderstones Park, the 6 highly decorated Stones were moved to a glasshouse in 1964, an unsuitable environment which has accelerated their deterioration. Thanks to funding secured by The Reader from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Liverpool City Council, the ancient monoliths are to be removed to undergo essential conservation work approved by Liverpool City Council and Historic England and carried out by Orbis Conservation Ltd. in London. Early next year the Stones will return to a new, specially designed home within the gardens of the Calderstones Mansion House when it reopens in Spring 2019 as The Reader's International Centre for Shared Reading.

Their journey starts on Heritage Open Days, during the week beginning 10th September, when conservation specialists will remove the Stones from the ground and unearth the hidden secrets below. Visitors will have the opportunity to watch the work as it's undertaken, to discover the history – and future – of the Stones and the Mansion House which is currently being transformed into The Reader's International Centre for Shared Reading.

Manchester Young Archaeology Club

Due to the Manchester Museum's redevelopment, (not scheduled to be completed until 2021) YAC is moving to Bolton Museum and Art Gallery. Bolton is opening its magnificent new galleries at the end of September, and YAC hopes to be there. Since the club is moving to new headquarters, Ian Trumble is taking over as the main leader of ManYAC, so there will be changes afoot.

We have also had a successful summer out and about, looking at Manchester's Canals at Castlefield, visiting the National Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port and walking along the Bollin to investigate Quarry Bank Mill's waterworks. The superb weather this summer has been an added bonus.

Clare Pye

Archaeology on a precipice - A view from the trenches

At first glance, Archaeology in England would appear to be in a healthy position with an increase in Archaeologists in full time employment undertaking more projects, but what is the reality? Whilst it can rightfully be argued that over the last few years there has been a resurgence in Developer led (funded) Archaeology as Britain comes out of the recession and monies generated by this have led to improved job prospects within the Industry there are a number of worrying signs for the future.

Where is the next generation of Archaeologists coming from? Up to now, professional Archaeologists have come from one of two sources, Universities and in some cases the Voluntary sector (local societies). However there has been

a gradual trend to only recruiting graduates, with a degree in Archaeology or a similar discipline. Although this can be understood we are in danger of suffering from demand outstripping the supply of new graduates. Historically, only a small proportion of students who study Archaeology at University have actually elected to seek a living in it, as it was perceived to be "an easy degree" to be used as a stepping stone into other careers. However, as some Universities, for example Manchester University, reduces the size of its Arts and Archaeology Department and merges with other Disciplines the available pool of new recruits drastically reduces. This comes at a time when there are more opportunities for employment within the industry.

Cut backs in local government services have also led to so called "non-essential Council departments" being either drastically reduced or scrapped altogether. This affects museum services, libraries and archives. We have already seen large amounts of rare reference books and documents being sold or cleared out, as libraries close, along with the archives they keep. These are the very documents that Archaeologists and Students rely on when carrying out research. Even more worrying, is that one of the worst hit professions is Local Heritage Officers and specialist Planners whose role is to advise Planning Officers when archaeologically sensitive sites are threatened by local development. These are the people whose specialist knowledge of their locale is invaluable to our Heritage and its preservation.

The biggest increase in Archaeological work has been seen in the Developer funded market. However, there are a number of drawbacks with this type of work. Because of its nature it is more akin to firefighting rather than a structured approach to Archaeology and leaves no room and little time for research. In fact a large number of sites fail to have full scale reports published, with summary documentation only going to the Developer to be locked away in their offices. So where is the knowledge for future research going to come from?

Because Developer funded Archaeology is usually carried out under very tight deadlines ahead of the total destruction of a site there is the danger that some remains can be left unexcavated and hence unrecorded and important features can be missed and lost

forever when the site is developed.

When we look at surveys that record the number of archaeologists involved within the Voluntary Sector, it would appear that the profession is in a healthy state. However, what the figures don't take into account is that the average age of Group members is increasing and a lot of the more active people are members of more than one Group leading to a massive distortion of the true numbers of working Archaeologists within the sector. What is also apparent is that more and more Groups struggle to recruit younger members and are also failing to fill positions on their Committees. Even Groups like our own CBA NW are struggling to recruit a new Chair when Dr Mike Nevell comes to the end of his term of office shortly.

So should we be concerned ?

If we are not careful the standards in Archaeology will gradually be eroded. As Development led Archaeology grows it will require more and more Archaeologists to fill staffing requirements. On the surface this seems like a good thing but there are a number of inherent issues. Firstly, there is a finite number of experienced Archaeologists in the UK and because of the nature of Development Funded work, it can be both complicated and time constrained, demanding a high degree of experience across a broad spectrum of periods. As many Units work in more than one geographical area knowledge of different geologies is required. There is a vast difference between excavating a sandy site on the Cheshire Plains to that of digging on a Chalk Down or Clay site.

Unfortunately, a lot of students who graduate from University have had very limited practical experience, with perhaps as little as 3 or 4 weeks over the whole of their academic education. It is therefore highly unlikely they will be able to hit the floor running and will need a considerable amount of training to gain the level of competency necessary to be a productive member of a team.

The number of people involved in the Voluntary Sector is also declining. This sector is important as not only does it provide an important lobbying group but also fills the numerous gaps where there is a lack of funding to pay for a professional team to carry out survey work, test pitting, and sometimes a trained workforce to support a digging team. In some cases volunteers are the only people

with the time and knowledge to undertake important Research work which enhances our understanding of the Archaeology both on a local and regional level. More importantly, the Voluntary sector provides a means for children, families and students to gain experience of Archaeology and as a result decide to go to University to gain a degree in the subject.

So what are the answers to the issues? Firstly, we need a better record of the number of active Archaeologists, both Professional and Voluntary, along with their interests i.e. Career, Research, Academic, and Social. We also need to address the problems caused by what could best be described as the normalisation of Archaeology where it is now becoming a 9-5, Monday to Friday occupation, thereby excluding those that are employed outside the discipline. Unless a Volunteer is retired or not working they have to use their holiday entitlement to work on professionally run sites. What it also means is that younger people with family commitments are less likely to participate in active Archaeology. Hence, this only leaves training excavations that normally require a payment by the attendee. These can be quite expensive and the true value to a reasonably experienced Volunteer can be questionable, depending upon the site and the site management team. It is worth remembering that a lot of Local Groups were either founded or are run by Volunteers who gained their archaeology expertise on important sites in the 70's and 80's or were trained by professional people who worked on those sites.

In order to attract new blood there is a need to move away from the Monday to Friday ethos and ensure that there are more opportunities for the public to experience the joys of Archaeology by having more sites operating at weekends. This will then lead to more volunteers being trained to work to a higher standard and ensure that, in the future, there are leaders capable of running Archaeological projects where there is no funding and also managing local Groups and Societies.

Already the CBA is suffering from funding shortages and as it draws some of its funds from membership it can ill afford to see a reduction in potential members, but unless we recognise the threats and look to alleviate them, the future looks bleak for Archaeology as we know it. We need to

start implementing steps that reverse the worrying trends now and start looking at how we can grow both the Professional and Voluntary sectors of Archaeology before it is too late.

David Stanley, Acting Chair Prestwich & Whitefield Heritage Society, Chair of PETOR, Committee Member S.T.A.G, CBA NW, and GMAF.

Assessing the condition of battle-related artefacts from conflict sites

I have recently completed my PhD entitled "Factors affecting the survival of metal ploughsoil assemblages: an assessment of lead bullets from 17th-century fields of conflict". I will discuss one aspect of my work here: methods for assessing the condition of artefacts.

The majority of archaeological data on battlefields consists of unstratified metal artefacts in ploughsoils. Topsoils are vulnerable to disturbance from weathering, agricultural activities and erosion, and the condition of buried artefacts is often unclear and hard to estimate. For instance, are artefacts stable in the topsoil or are they corroding at an accelerated rate? Several factors affect an artefact's condition in the ground, including the soil chemistry and geology, the historic and current land use, and the composition of the object itself. By systematically assessing battlefield assemblages, we can begin to understand what state of condition objects are in and we can begin to design strategies to reduce the impact various factors have on their deterioration.

I devised a systematic assessment for 17th century lead bullets and applied it to three assemblages from Civil War sites of conflict. The assessment addressed the condition of bullets using a set of categories, scoring the bullets accordingly. The condition assessment analysed the smoothness of the bullet surface, the preserved shape of the bullet, visible surface detail, the amount of corrosion products, and the stability of the surface of the bullet. The assessment centred on surface condition as this is where the most valuable archaeological data is available. The surface of a bullet can tell us how the object was manufactured, how it was loaded and fired, whether it impacted a target, and its history in the ground.

Corrosion and abrasion in the ground affects the condition of these objects and ultimately how much archaeological data we can obtain from them. Common signs of actively corroding lead are powdery surface residues, severe cracking, surface breakdown, flaking and denting, all of which formed a part of the assessment.



Figure 1: Moreton Corbet bullet with severe pitting, discolouration and lack of surface detail

Some bullets scored very high as their surfaces were pitted, cracked and no surface details were visible (figure 1). Others scored very low and were in very good condition with smooth stable patinas/surfaces and clear manufacturing marks (figure 2). The bullets were then analysed spatially to correlate soil conditions with object condition to address the reasons behind the condition of bullets. The three case studies used were the battlefield of Edgehill in Warwickshire, the siege site of Moreton Corbet in Shropshire, and the siege site of Wareham in Dorset (see location map figure 3).



Figure 2: Edgehill bullet with smooth stable patina and clear manufacturing marks

Overall, the bullets from Edgehill were in very good condition. This is down to their burial environment. The site resides

in an area of alkaline clay with impeded drainage, which reduces oxygen flow in the soil and reduces the rate of corrosion. The lack of sand in the soil also reduces abrasion damage to the bullet surfaces. Clay particles are plate-like with smaller pore spaces between particles, resulting in slower oxygen and water flow, which will slow down the rate of corrosion. Significantly, the battlefield consists of large areas of well-preserved medieval ridge and furrow which has not been cultivated since at least the mid-18th century. The lack of ploughing and soil disturbance in the upper 20-30cm of the soil in the last two centuries has clearly aided the preservation of the buried assemblage.



Figure 3: Location of Civil War sites mentioned in text

Bullets from Moreton Corbet and Wareham were in poorer condition, particularly at Wareham where 70% of the assemblage were in fair to poor condition. Soil conditions at Wareham are acidic (pH 4.5) and very sandy, resulting in well drained oxygenated soils. Sand particles are large and granular with large spaces between particles, allowing greater rates of abrasion as well as oxygen and water flow, which will promote corrosion. The landscape has also been under almost constant arable cultivation since the early 19th century, which will have accelerated the process of corrosion of bullets in the soil.

My research has shown that the most significant factors affecting the condition of bullets in ploughsoils are soil pH, soil texture, and historic land use. To

promote the best preservation of bullets on battlefields, soils should be neutral to alkaline, with a clay content greater than 30%, and sand content <20%, and ideally be retained under pasture as ploughing has the most damaging effect on the preservation of buried material. Further work needs to be carried out on more collections and other object types in order to evaluate whether similar patterns occur with other metal types. Nonetheless, the results of this work suggests that ploughing should be restricted where vulnerable topsoil assemblages may be present in order to reduce corrosion rates and preserve assemblages for future generations.

Samantha Rowe

Council for British Archaeology North West
Regional Group
Registered Charity
No. 1081620

Chair:
Mike Nevell
Tel: 0161 295 3825
e-mail: M.D.Nevell@salford.ac.uk
blog: www.archaeologyuos.wordpress.com

Hon Secretary:

Hon Treasurer:
Clare Pye
e-mail: clare.pye@manchester.ac.uk

CBA North West publishes two newsletters each year, in the spring and autumn. Contributions are invited from Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside on all aspects of archaeology in the North West. If you wish to contribute information that you feel would be of interest to members of CBANW, please contact the Newsletter Editor:

Dave Roberts
Tel: 0151 427 2980.
e-mail: drandpr@blueyonder.co.uk

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 CBANW.