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2008 SEASON NEWS

By M M Emery

Overall, the 2008 season proved to be the most successful yet. Archaeologically, the sites have thrown up many new questions to be answered and a record number of students undertook the training courses this year.

The Chapel Site

Some 80 whole or partial burials were excavated, primarily from the western graveyard and the nave. A few were also recovered from the chancel, an area now completely devoid of graves.

The burials are currently undergoing intensive and extensive study by teams of students from John Moore's University (Liverpool) and the University of Liverpool. Apart from ongoing research into pathology, trauma, dietary and weaning habits, new approaches will include DNA analysis and facial reconstruction.

The chancel has now been excavated down to a known Roman level. It is now evident that a modest timber structure once stood on the chapel site, long before the advent of Christianity.

The Prehistoric Area

A second ring ditch has now been fully exposed, 80 metres to the north of the chapel. It lies immediately to the south of the Late Bronze Age reconstructed timber circle monument.

Comparable in size to the latter, the ring ditch has two entranceways. However, its form and function is totally different. Whereas the timber-circle is enclosed by a ditch-and-bank, the second ring-

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Intriguingly, it appears to have been constructed and abandoned in a very short space of time; as if its conception and function was for a one-off event. Quantities of human cremated bone, pottery and animal bone were recovered but they are minimal compared to that retrieved from the timber-circle.

However, one rare and potentially very important artifact did come to light from the bottom of the ditch, close to the south-east entrance-way: a fragment of limestone incised with abstract lines. Is this a piece of Bronze Age art?

The third ring ditch is only partially exposed and is later in date. Only minimal investigation has been undertaken, but there is enough evidence to demonstrate that it is very different to ring-ditches 1 and 2. It has produced large quantities of human cremated bone, charcoal and ash (perhaps from a funeral pyre?), pottery and animal bone.

Analysis of the finds is being undertaken by PHD students at Sheffield University.

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POULTON NEEDS FRIENDS

Poulton is a unique archaeological site in the North West of Britain covering 9000 years of human activity.

We are an independent Charitable Trust, with links to Liverpool and John Moores Universities, but without a secure source of funding. We are an active and enthusiastic group of both professionals and amateurs, and we strive to involve the local community, schools and youth organisations and anyone who has an interest in the history and

archaeology of the North West of England.

Your support as a Friend helps us to continue and expand our work. As a Friend you will receive two Newsletters a year and be informed of any events, site visits and training courses.

If you would like to become more involved in the project, why not become a volunteer? See Pages 4 and 5 for more details.

BOOK REVIEW *Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066 – 1550* *Christopher Daniell, Routledge*

By Tonnie Richmond

Poulton' Chapel and graveyard spans several hundred years, and this book should help you understand changing medieval burial practices. It is a comprehensive, well-referenced book summarizing current research, but is written in an accessible manner for the non-specialist reader.

The majority of skeletons found so far at Poulton are clearly shroud burials, without coffins, some with shroud pins but many without. This book discusses the common Christian practice of wrapping naked bodies in shrouds, which were then tied at the top or bottom or sewn together.

Despite, however, the generally-held view that people should not be buried in clothes or with grave goods, it was very often high status ecclesiastical people – bishops and the like – who were buried in all their finery and with various symbols of office such as chalices.

The book also discusses how changes in religious beliefs influenced burial practices. In the very early Christian period, belief in bodily resurrection meant that careful burial with the skeleton facing east was of prime importance. One explanation given in medieval texts was that Christ would appear from the east on the Day of Judgement and all bodies would physically rise up to greet



him. However, in some grave sites a major shift in the care of graves has been detected during the 12th century. After that date less care was taken about cutting through existing graves and many bones were casually thrown into the backfill of the new grave cut.

This casual approach to previous burials is a common feature at Poulton. Daniell suggests the explanation for this is a shift in religious views away from the Day of Judgement and to the idea of souls going to Purgatory: the preservation of bodily remains becomes less important with this new doctrine.

POSSIBLE ABBEY SITE UNDER INVESTIGATION

We are currently investigating a nearby field as a possible site for the lost Abbey.

This field seems to have remained unchanged for the last 330 years. It has retained its shape and size and was always pasture. It is situated in the crook of a bend in the River Dee which would facilitate the use of significant amounts of water the Cistercians needed.

Our experienced geophysics team (well, Kevin and volunteers) have recently undertaken a resistivity survey of the field over a three week period. This was hard work as the field was very waterlogged and the weather was not good.

The results are inconclusive so far but there is definitely **something** there.



PLANS FOR THE 2009 SEASON

Work for the 2009 season will include ongoing excavation of the chapel and its graveyard, particularly the relatively untouched southern area. This will be complemented by continued exploration of the Roman structure underlying the chapel.

The Bronze Age ring-ditches will also be completed.

Students from John Moore's University are to undertake an extensive and long-term environmental survey of the site and its environs.

It is also hoped that some limited evaluation can be undertaken on the new sites revealed through geophysical survey.

There will be plenty of work for our team of volunteers in the new year.

In addition to further exploration of the archaeology in the ground, there will be opportunities to be involved in some experimental archaeology.

We intend to finish the construction of the round house. New thatch has been purchased, and volunteers with a head for heights will have an opportunity to learn some basic thatching skills. Others may prefer to have a go at the construction of the wattle and daub walls using our on-site Cheshire clay.

M M Emery (November 2008).

DO YOU WANT TO BECOME A VOLUNTEER?

If you are fed up with spending Saturdays shopping or cutting the lawn, why not join us at Poulton for some healthy exercise in the fresh air?

We are out on site most Saturdays between 10am and 1 pm. If you are a beginner, you will be supported and shown how to trowel, wash finds, help with digging and recording. We often help with more mundane tasks such as painting and cleaning the portacabins but it is all good fun.

Volunteers pay a minimum of £60 a year. You are welcome to come down to site for up to 3 visits before you commit yourself to becoming an official volunteer. We are a friendly group and you will be made to feel welcome.



Volunteers pretending to be timber posts in our first ring ditch.

2008 – GREAT TRAINING DESPITE THE WEATHER

The 2008 student training courses were a great success. All students said the teaching was good or excellent and were good value for money and that they would recommend the course to other people.

Many of the students commented on the variety of archeological activities that were available at Poulton.

Unfortunately, the weather in the summer was bad, with torrential rain most days. Our students are to be congratulated on their perseverance.

“I particularly liked that you were able to do some digging from the start and that you could experience many different aspects of archeology.” - Ulrich

WANT TO DO SOME TRAINING IN 2009?

The 2009 training season runs at Easter between 30th March to 1st April and the summer season from 22nd June to 28th August. Full details can be found on the website.

Training is available for both archeology students and for volunteers. Regular **volunteers**

and **Friends of Poulton** are especially encouraged to join in.

If spaces are available, training for volunteers can be arranged for less than a full week, so if you have a few days to spare, do get in touch via the website.

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Geophysical Survey

Two geophysical surveys were undertaken. The first concentrated on an area immediately outside and to the west of the medieval graveyard. Circular features were identified and rapidly evaluated. Both Roman and prehistoric artifacts were recovered from across the surface. Interpretation and positive dating of these potential structures must await future excavation.

A second area was intensively surveyed, some 1,000 metres north-east of the chapel site. The area is almost adjacent to the monastic grange confirmed by the visit of 'Time Team' in 2006.

Early indications suggest that a substantial building is present. As to its form, function and date this can only be determined through future, long-term, excavation.

JOIN THE FRIENDS OF POULTON

If you are interested in the archeology of the North West of England or of Poulton in particular, you can become a Friend of Poulton.

There are two levels of membership.

For **only £20 a year**, you will receive a copy of the newsletter twice a year, and be kept informed of any events, site visits and training opportunities.

If you want to become a regular volunteer, we ask you to contribute **£60 per year**. Volunteers come out to the site most Saturday mornings.

If you are unsure about volunteering, why not join first as a Friend, then come out to site for a couple of Saturday mornings to see if you like it? You will be made welcome and you will not be asked for the annual contribution of £60 until you are sure you

want to commit to a regular volunteer role.

Friends of Poulton will receive a newsletter twice a year. This is new venture, designed to complement our website.

Our website is: <http://www.poultonproject.org>

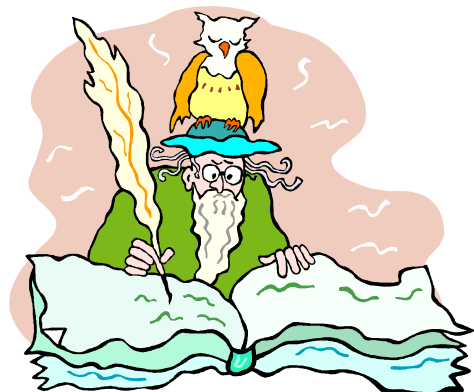
You can download a copy of the Friends of Poulton Application form from the website if there is not one enclosed in this newsletter.

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEXT NEWSLETTER!

We hope that friends and volunteers will contribute to the next edition. We would like to include a letters page in the next edition. Please send articles, letters or queries to:

tonnie1@btinternet.com

Please do not be shy.



Poulton Research Project

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*Kevin with the
resistivity
equipment and his
troupe of willing (?)
helpers, looking for
the lost abbey.*