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## Welcome from Richard Fair, Chair of the Trustees

Welcome to the second edition of the Friends of Poulton Newsletter. I hope you find it interesting and informative. My thanks to Tonnie Richmond, our editor, who has worked extremely hard putting this edition together.

We've had an interesting and varied season and Mike Emery's article gives a good flavour of the archaeology. Niall McFayden's piece on the Roundhouse provides an illustration of some of the other activities we undertake on site and Colin Armstrong provides an insight into how valuable are our links are with Liverpool John Moore University. Hilary Kirk's piece on the work with the volunteers shows the vital contribution all our volunteers make to the Project. There are many other activities that take place over a season, for example work with local schools, and we'll be sharing more of these in future editions.

About 3 years ago the Trustees of the Project undertook a fundamental review of both the aims and objectives of the Trust and the way it operated. I, as Chair of the Trustees and the landowner on which much of the activity takes place, was deeply concerned at the way I thought the Project was drifting away from our original reason for existing and that feeling was shared by many, both Trustees and volunteers. That fundamental review culminated in an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Trust in July 2008 at which 4 key objectives were adopted. These objectives now underpin all that the Trust and those involved in it aim to do.

### The objectives are:

- 1 To establish what has happened on the site over the last 10,000 years**
- 2 To maintain the volunteer ethos, support and participation in the Project**
- 3 To develop greater participation in the local and wider community**
- 4 To establish, maintain and increase a stable funding base to achieve all of the above.**



The Poulton Plaque *see page 2*

My fellow Trustees and I have worked hard this year on creating a stronger and more robust organisation that can continue to provide the outstanding opportunities that Poulton does. Part of that work has included behind the scenes discussions with our neighbours to secure their commitment to our project, fund raising both for specific projects, like the thatch for the Roundhouse, and for general running costs like the portaloos, and meetings with other Projects to share knowledge and learn from people who've faced the same challenges in the past that we do now. We have a number of challenges this coming year - the most important is to replace the dilapidated portacabins - but we are all committed to continuing our work in making this Project a success.

The Trustees want to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in the Project for all their contributions over the last year and I want to thank my fellow Trustees for all their hard work on behalf of the Trust.

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## 2009 SEASON NEWS

by Mike Emery

The 2009 season demonstrated, once again, what a community-based project can achieve. Furthermore, some 1,100 members of the public were able to gain an insight into the ever-growing importance of Poulton, through site visits, lectures, training courses and work-experience for schoolchildren.

The archaeological work was concentrated on two main projects; the second Bronze Age/Iron Age ring ditch and the ongoing excavation of the medieval chapel and its graveyard.

### THE RING DITCH

Excavation of the ring ditch focused on the south-east entrance-way and investigation of the interior. The latter proved quite different in form (and presumably function) from the first ring-ditch and its timber circle.

No discernable structure was uncovered and only one small pit/posthole, located off-centre, was excavated. A few post-holes were investigated but proved to be randomly spread and most, if not all, were deemed to be “modern” in origin.

Two sections were cut across the western arc of the ring-ditch. These did reveal the shallow remains of 3 post-holes at the base of the ditch. This suggests that (as with the first ring-ditch) a timber structure once stood on the site. However, the post-hole remnants were so slight as to make any interpretation, as to form or function, highly speculative.

However, it is just possible that a second timber circle once stood on the site, possibly contemporary with the first (now reconstructed) ring ditch.

The south-east entrance-way proved to be particularly intriguing and archaeologically significant. A section was cut through the

western side of the entrance. This demonstrated that the ditch widened considerably as it approached the causeway (it also cut an earlier post-hole, perhaps associated with those found along the western arc – see above).

### THE POULTON PLAQUE

At the base of the section were carefully deposited fragments of cremated bone, charcoal and a few potsherds sealed by small burnt pebbles. Among these deposits was a find of almost unique significance.

This was a near-complete limestone block or “plaque” with curious etched lines in each of its surfaces. There is only one such parallel for such an artefact being found in Britain; two chalk plaques recovered from a pit, barely half a mile from Stonehenge. Their size and “design” are uncannily similar to the Poulton Plaque.

What the incised lines signify or represent is unclear. Such designs do occur on Rock or Boulder Art, particularly in Scotland. However, the fact that the plaques from Stonehenge and Poulton were both deliberately buried suggests a possible association with death.

### THE CHAPEL

Work continued within the chapel walls, primarily to complete the excavation of burials in the Nave; the aim being to clear the way for future excavation down to known Roman levels (already reached in the chancel).

The nave is now almost clear of burials. However, the southern area of the graveyard was opened up, producing both “mass” and single inhumations. This suggests a densely packed area of the cemetery, perhaps of similar density to that encountered in the western graveyard.

*Continued on page 4*

## A year in the life of a volunteer

by Niall McFayden

I got involved at Poulton because my wife said she thought I should do evening classes, and I decided to do archaeology at West Cheshire College. I started attending Mike's evening lectures. These were great, and I am still attending, but I was also intrigued by the background conversations about the dig, the lost abbey and the finds etc. Eventually it was March and I was told that the season had started, and I should turn up at the gate of the Grosvenor estate on Saturday morning at 9.45.

The first day I was given the job of weeding the ring ditch site, ready for proper excavation to start, but Pat, who was working along side me, found a Neolithic flint tool, which seemed like a good start. At 1.0'clock we all headed down to the pub to celebrate and discuss plans for the coming season.

The next few weeks all merged into one, under the title of 'mud'. I was doing experimental archaeology and we were going to build a replica iron age round house. The first job was to build the daub and wattle walls, which involved mixing straw and soil and water into a glutinous mess. This had to be tested for consistency by seeing how well it stuck to your boots. The best bit was the application technique. Apparently it stuck best if you took a big handful and threw it at the wattle walls. As you can imagine, with as many as four or five people all throwing mud at the walls at the same time, often from opposite sides, this was a messy business! However, by June it was more or less finished and we started thatching the roof.

Clark had got a £3K grant from the Grass Roots fund, and we bought a load of second-hand roofing reeds from Turkey. We hired a Master

Thatcher, Phil, for a day, who spent a few hours teaching us the basics of how to thatch a roof. He then left us to it, having left his phone number, and happily telling us that to learn properly you needed a five year apprenticeship. Half our time was spent re-doing the work of the previous day, but we learnt by our mistakes, and after a couple of weeks the results were looking good and staying on the roof. Thatching is a very relaxing activity once you get the knack. You basically use an 18 inch needle to sew the bundles of reeds onto the roof, and then tie them in place between two withies (horizontal wooden sticks).

Now it's November, and after 6 months of thatching, the roof is almost finished\*. I can say I have really enjoyed my first season at Poulton. Saying you spent Saturday morning building an iron age round house certainly beats golf, and the first residents of the new house have already moved in – we found owl pellets on the floor of the hut last Saturday morning.

*\*Editor's note: The thatching was finished at the end of November with the help of Phil the Master Thatcher. Take a look on the website.*



*Niall and Caz getting instruction from Phil the Thatcher.*

### 2009 Season News continued from page 1

The season's excavation has now brought the total number of burials to 467. This is a significant number, worthy of serious academic research, and rapidly approaching the status of famous sites such as the deserted medieval village of Wharram Percy. Through Poulton's close partnership with John Moore's University (Liverpool) some 20 burials have been earmarked for C14 dating at Oxford. Other burials are being forensically analysed for DNA, pathology etc. The value of such a mutually beneficial partnership cannot be praised highly enough, nor the skeletal analysis and talks undertaken by Steve Crane and Ray Carpenter.

### A ROMAN BUILDING?

A potentially very significant feature has appeared in the chancel, well below the foundation and burial levels. An east-west linear "slot" (a small timber foundation trench) has been revealed. The slot is on exactly the same alignment as the medieval chapel. However, all finds within and around the slot are of Roman origin.

The slot indicates the presence of a small timber structure during the Roman period. It is tempting to suggest that maybe (and only maybe!) that the slot is part of a much earlier, pre-medieval, foundation. Is this the reason why a small medieval chapel was established in such an outlandish spot? Until its full extent is revealed the jury must remain out!

### GEOPHYSICS

Other work included further geophysical survey to the south-west and west of the chapel site, undertaken by Kevin Cootes and

his team. Early results suggest a circular feature bisected by the hedge line.

### UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGY

An archaeological dive in the river Dee has revealed the timbers of a possible jetty that may relate to the abbey and mill of Poulton.

*Mike Emery (Consultant Archaeologist)*

## The Volunteers Group by Hilary Kirk



I am a volunteer and Trustee at Poulton and took on the task of forming a volunteer group with four other members (Pat, Tonnie, Jenny and Val). The newly formed 'volunteer' committee had their first meeting just over a year ago in October 2008. One of the responsibilities of the group is to ensure that new volunteers are made welcome, are introduced to health and safety rules (of course!) and are looked after while they settle in.

We have had four meetings in all, discussing things from the Poulton Web site to fundraising. We liaised with Steve and Ray to update the web site/friends of Poulton page; this is now more 'user friendly' for people who want to volunteer. Some of the volunteers were keen to be involved in fundraising for Poulton so I suggested bag packing at a supermarket. Sainsbury's were approached by Clark, and we were given four hours on Easter Saturday morning. We all worked very hard and raised over £500.00 for the site. The season was brought to a close this year with a site tour and BBQ for the volunteers and friends.

## The Poulton Project Skeletons

by Colin Armstrong

*This is an extract from a longer article, which can be found on the Poulton website.*

For some years, a few pioneering students from Liverpool John Moores University have been associated with the Poulton Project. This relationship has increased dramatically over the last 2 years. Just ONE of the benefits has been the 'loan' to LJMU of both disarticulated bones & skeletons. (Human remains cannot be owned by anyone).

The collection has been integrated into LJMU teaching and research, and has provided invaluable experience to a large number of students.

This year, sixteen 3<sup>rd</sup> year project students are using the skeletons for their final year projects. Some are using just one skeleton for a very detailed examination of the whole skeleton. Others are using a very large number of suitable skeletons to compare a particular bone to answer a specific research question. The students have in fact used the Poulton skeletons 120 times so far this academic year (October–November 2009), which indicates their importance to our teaching and learning.

Some topics include age indicators in the pelvis, frequency of pathological conditions, new methods for stature estimation, and non-pelvic sex estimation.

Unlike the disarticulated bones which are all individually labelled, the skeletons are not marked in anyway, apart from the bags that the bones are in. This means there are very strict rules on the handling of this material, which is part of a protocol on the student's use of the Poulton Material. This is in addition to the rules the Poulton Project expect us to abide by. Many students following graduation want to go onto work in areas that could involve the legal system, so we require them to maintain 'a chain of custody' for the skeletons.



*Alison Nicholson - using digital calipers to examine the many measurements possible on the pelvis to see which fragments are more consistently available in the pelvis.*



This picture was taken after the 209 graduation ceremony at John Moores University and shows Helen and Julie, two regular Poulton volunteers in their graduation gowns. With them is Caroline (Caz) who will graduate this year.

Also enjoying themselves are Poulton's fairy godmother Dr Laura Bishop of LJMU, our Consultant Archaeologist Mike Emery and our bones experts, Ray Carpenter and Steve Crane.

## The 2010 SEASON

The 2010 season will see continued intensive excavation within the southern area of the medieval graveyard, complemented by limited investigation of the little explored north part of the cemetery.

The completion of the burial excavations on the nave will allow for determining the limits of the Roman slot underlying the chancel.

If grant money is forthcoming, it is envisaged that full-scale excavation of a third ring-ditch will be undertaken.

With many thanks to all the volunteers, Friends of Poulton, Trustees, John Moore's University and to Alan Wilmshurst for all their help and support during 2009.

*Mike Emery (Consultant Archaeologist).*

### HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

There are several ways you can help and support the Poulton Research Project

- ***Become a Volunteer.*** Come out to the site one Saturday morning and find out if this is for you. We meet up most Saturday mornings and there are a variety of jobs and activities to be done. We are a friendly bunch and you will be made welcome. Once you decide to become a regular, we ask for a small minimum contribution from you of £60 a year.
- ***Become a Friend of Poulton.*** If you do not want to get actively involved, an annual contribution of £20 will help our finances. For this you will receive regular newsletters and information about any special events, training courses etc.
- ***Become a sponsor.*** We are always seeking sponsors for our activities. We rely entirely on voluntary contributions, sponsors and fund raising activities and grants for our activities.
- ***Get your school involved.*** There are opportunities at Poulton for school visits or longer courses for schoolchildren. If you are a parent, teacher or head teacher, do get in touch.
- ***Sign up for a training course.*** Courses are run every Easter and summer – come for a day, a week, or longer. All are welcome, from total beginners to archaeology students. There are charges for these courses, but they are popular so book early!

For more information on all of the above, please visit our website at:

<http://www.poultonproject.org>

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