

Poulton Research Project Website address <http://www.poultonproject.org>  
E-mail address Chris Caroe [chris1160@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:chris1160@hotmail.co.uk)

## 2011 – SEASONS NEWS

*Mike Emery –Consultant Archaeologist*

### Student Training and Visitors

Student training this year has been far the most successful ever, eclipsing that of the record 2010 year. Courses were run during March-April and June-August. This breaks down into 186 paid student weeks, a third more than recorded for last year.

This season we had students from 23 British Universities and an increasing number of students from abroad. We had students from France, Hong Kong, China, Malaysia, Australia, Holland, Switzerland, USA and Spain. In addition, special courses were arranged for students from Liverpool John Moores University.

We also provided 29 pre-arranged visits to the site by the general public, local schools from Cheshire and North Wales, historical and archaeological societies. In total, around 1200 people have visited the site this year.



*Some of the students, washing finds with Alan supervising.*

### Inside This Issue

2011 Seasons News	1
Plans for 2012	2
My Poulton Experience	3
Poulton's Skeletons	4
Volunteers Report	4
A Word from the Trustees	5
How Can I Get Involved?	6

### The Archaeology

#### The Chapel

Further excavation to the north and south of the graveyard has produced many more burials. The number of burials has now reached 610. These will continue to be studied by students and post-graduates from Liverpool John Moores University.

Skeletal analysis is, by its very nature, a slow process so results are still forthcoming. But one burial has stood out from the rest this season – that of a man with an arrow lodged in his chest. This is currently under intense forensic analysis at LJMU. The hope is that we will also obtain a date for his death which may lead us to work out exactly who he was.



*The arrow, retrieved from one skeleton's chest.*

In the northern part of the graveyard a large stretch of a Roman enclosure ditch has been painstakingly investigated by the Poulton volunteers. A mass of material has been retrieved through carefully selected and excavated ditch sections. Of great note has been the unearthing of a fine piece of Samian ware with the maker's stamp mark - a potter named Deoccus who was based at Lezoux (Central Gaul) and operated between 165-200AD. The quality of such wares further attests to the obvious possibility that a major Roman structure is located nearby.

As to what the Roman ditch is enclosing remains unanswered. However, the fact that it underlies the later medieval graveyard is highly suggestive of a specialised continuity of function, perhaps relating to religious observance on the site over hundreds of years.

### The Ring Ditches

The end of the 2010 season had produced tantalising evidence of possible pottery production in this area. The opening of a large trench to the east has produced further evidence of light industrial activity during the Roman period. This has been imposed on part of and within the area of the third ring ditch. The area is still under investigation but the early evidence points to at least some firm of metal working activity, not least the presence of an iron ore fragment recovered from what appears to be a Roman bowl-furnace.

### Pottery

All the pottery and building material, from both the chapel and ring ditch area, is currently being researched and catalogued by Kevin Cootes with the invaluable assistance of Steve Crane and his wife Hazel. This is a slow and ongoing process owing to the vast quantities recovered.



### PLANS FOR 2011

We will concentrate on the further opening up of the northern graveyard and complete excavation of the **Roman enclosure** ditch to determine its full extent, its function and what it is enclosing.

The southern part of the graveyard has recently been completely opened up and will be fully investigated next year to establish how many burials are present and whether or not this section of the graveyard is also enclosed by a ditch.

One interesting feature has been exposed. This comprises a carefully laid sandstone surface. It is difficult to be positive as to its purpose but there is a strong possibility that it is the foundation for a plinth bearing a sandstone cross.

The **third ring ditch** has only been partially excavated but complete excavation is envisaged throughout the winter and spring period. What is plainly evident is that it is much later than ring ditches 1 and 2.

The animal bone is predominantly pig and cattle, with lesser quantities of goat and sheep. The discovery of a pony skull in 2010, deliberately deposited in one section, suggests a high status site. Further horse bone fragments have been retrieved this year.

Ponies were symbols of wealth and status, particularly in the Iron Age. Only the elite possessed them as they were used for pulling chariots. The deposition of the skull alone possibly hints at sacrifice or conspicuous consumption.

In essence, Poulton is a special and wealthy site and it continued to be so well into the Roman period. The Roman "industrial" activity will be fully investigated over the coming year, with the aim of helping us to understand the wider aspects of the trade and technology, as well as the exploitation of resources.

*Mike Emery*



*Kirsty's beautifully dug section.*

### My Poulton experience

My volunteering days at Poulton began after a university visit to the site back in 2009, and after two and a half years, I have become a true Poulton addict! As a first year Forensic Anthropology student, it didn't take me long to enrol on one of the Poulton training courses. I could not believe that I was going to get the chance to excavate my own skeleton! I can remember nervously arriving at site fully clad with boots and waterproofs feeling very excited. Mike and Al were amazing mentors (the word 'patient' comes to mind, but that is probably putting it mildly), and the practical experience I achieved in one week was truly amazing and second to none.

Volunteering each Saturday and on the occasional weekday during my first two years at University really helped me to gain some valuable skills, required not only in Forensic Anthropology but also in the field of Archaeology; it also gave me the strong desire to learn more about the archaeological aspect of the site. So in the summer I did just that, and with the thanks to Tonnie who allowed me to stay at her house in Warrington, I signed up for a six week course where I spent a majority of the time helping Mike. I was given the opportunity to learn a variety of archaeological techniques, including photography and section drawing. It was hard work, but very rewarding, and I even got to excavate my very own section of the ring ditch!

A conversation last year with Mike and Al also fuelled the subject for my third year honours project, which I am currently undertaking. I have taken a sample of skeletons excavated from the graveyard and I am looking at the relevance of the arm positions of each in relation to sex, age and position within the graveyard. A big thank you must go to Ray Carpenter for assisting me in the collection of my data and I hope to share this research with you all at a later date.

I have met some very interesting characters during my time at Poulton and each and everyone has played an important role in feeding my obsession. The list is too exhaustive to name, but a big thanks must go to you all.

I can not begin to thank Mike and Al enough for their guidance and support during my time at Poulton, they have allocated me some great jobs, which have given me the opportunity to not only learn but grow in confidence. I have enjoyed the social aspect of being a volunteer at Poulton too, especially sharing a pint at the local pub after a hard day's graft! I have also enjoyed the chance to help organise fund raising events. This has allowed me to give something back to a site to which I owe so much. All of the people I have hounded for sponsorship and raffle prizes, a big thank you.

Visiting Poulton has become part of my weekly ritual and with only five months of my course left, I am already beginning to miss everyone! Hopefully I will take these experiences from Poulton and put them into good practice in the future.

*Kirsty McLeod*

### **STOP PRESS**

*Kirsty organised a Race Night at the Nag's Head on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2011 which was a great success.*

*Over £500 was raised for Poulton.*

*With thanks to Kirsty, all the staff at the Nag's Head and all those who joined in and lost lots of money.*

*A great time was had by all.*

## Poulton's Skeletons

This year to date, we have excavated 77 skeletons; 42 adults, 33 sub-adults and 2 currently unexamined. Of the 42 adults, 18 were female, 14 male, 3 ambiguous and 7 indeterminate.

Of the sub-adults, we recovered our youngest yet, prenatal at approximately 38 weeks.

From this year's crop of anomalies, along with the usual pathologies and trauma, we have:

- one skeleton with an arrow head embedded in the chest cavity. This skeleton and bodkin is being examined as part of an honours project at LJMU.

- one with an extra thoracic vertebra only. This is The 3<sup>rd</sup> Poulton skeleton with an extra vertebrae.

- another skeleton which is our 3<sup>rd</sup> "reversed" burial, that is, with its head at the east end.

Our assemblage at both Poulton and LJMU was examined this year as part of three external academic projects. Two MSc students from the University of Edinburgh used them as part of their dissertations and another from the University of Nottingham used them as part of her final year BSc dissertation.

We will continue to transfer our skeleton to LJMU for medium term storage and for use for research purposes. The law has been recently changed and we have been granted a licence to hold our skeletons for study until 2016, when they will have to be reburied.

We are planning to work with Liverpool John Moores University to create a comprehensive skeleton database.

This year we were able to offer a work based learning (WBL) opportunity to a Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) student. Carla Burrell, at the time a second year undergraduate, was the successful candidate. She spent most of the summer season working with me in the bone cabin, helping to complete and extend our post-excavation activities.

In particular, and as consequence of some previous comments, we now complete a skeleton inventory as soon as we can after the material is delivered to the bone cabin. The inventory was a specific project for Carla and its success is entirely down to her skills and efforts. She also helped to give the weekly "bone" presentations to our field course students.

*Ray Carpenter*

## Volunteer Report 2011

I find it hard to believe that here we are again at the end of another season and what a season it has been. We have kilns in the ring ditch and a Roman trench that has given up many interesting and rare finds. Thank you to the usual band of volunteers who come to site hail, rain or snow and get stuck in to whatever is asked of them. I hope this season's new volunteers have had a taste of what is to come and will stay with us over the winter months with the promise of another great season next year.

We have had our usual summer BBQ which went very well and the end of season BBQ which was a little different this year. We decided to take up Nicky Town's offer of a 'hog'. The biggest problem was storage once slaughtered and the roasting of said animal. Chris Caroe saved the day with a friendly butcher storing it and with another friend who happened to be a 'hog roaster'. When we were told the hog would feed upwards of 150 people it was decided to invite the local community as well. Ticket sales started slowly and then escalated to nearly 100. The Day went very well with many positive comments including 'when is the next one'. As usual all the food everyone provided was excellent.

The race night planned for 18<sup>th</sup> November was a huge success and we have the Christmas meal in December to look forward to.

Guest speakers at the AGM, Laura Bishop and Nicky Town, marked the start of events for the 'closed season'. By the time this goes to print we would have had another visit and demonstration by the Archer Bernard Dennis. We have a pottery talk from Kevin to look forward to and Mike is planning two or three lectures after Christmas on the relationship of Poulton to the surrounding area through time.

There is plenty of pottery marking to be done which should take us through the winter to what looks like will be another exciting season next year.

Once again thank you all for your continuing support which helps drive this project forward.

*Hilary Kirk*



*The hog, being roasted!*

## A Word from the Trustees

*This is a shorter version of the Trustees' Report to the 2011 AGM*

Richard Fair, Chairman

Yet again we have had an excellent season, but I think we all would have benefited from a bit more night time rain, you for excavation conditions and me to help crops grow. The new water bowser has earned its keep already. The addition of the new marquee has given us a much better facility and lets us keep the archaeology and mess area separate.

Our relationship with LJMU and Liverpool Universities continues to grow, certainly, our link with LJMU is growing from strength to strength.

Visitors to site remain high, and the reports we get back are very positive, the way Mike can deliver the same walk or power point to different audiences always amazes me.

Progress on replacing our leaking cabins has been slow. However, at the end of September we got an agreement from the Grosvenor estate for a long-term lease, giving us access to the site and an area for our new cabins. All we have to do now is get planning permission and the funding.

On the social side, we had a BBQ at the farm, a hog roast at the end of the summer season, a race night on the 18<sup>th</sup> Nov at the Nags Head and our Christmas do at the Golden Groves.

The hog roast was a new venture that started with one of those conversations that you don't have very often: 'Do you want a pig?' Nicky offered us a pig, Chris found a butcher and a hog roaster and Hilary sorted out the rest. The volunteers provided a good proportion of the food and drinks. Many locals attended (following a site tour with Mike) and it was a first class example of positive community involvement.

The Poulton Collection of skeletons is becoming a valuable resource and one that will only increase with time. Both LJMU and Liverpool Universities have invested in state of the art storage and we are getting requests from the wider world to use our collection.

We have had a small number of reports back from the Universities, from students who are studying the collection from both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

As to reports from site, the first ring ditch is complete and Mike hopes to have a report on that early in the New Year.



*Mike discussing the ring ditches on hog roast day*



*Race Night at the Nag's Head*



*Rainbow over the chapel site on hog roast day*

## 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 (or more!) 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!
- **Clubs and Societies** - if you belong to a local history group or other club or society and would like to arrange a visit the site for your group, please do get in touch.

You can download forms from our website for:

- **Becoming a volunteer**
- **Becoming a Friend of Poulton**

<http://www.poultonproject.org>

- **For more information about becoming a volunteer, how to get to the site or how to make a one- off contribution, contact Chris Caroe at the this email address:**

[chris1160@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:chris1160@hotmail.co.uk)