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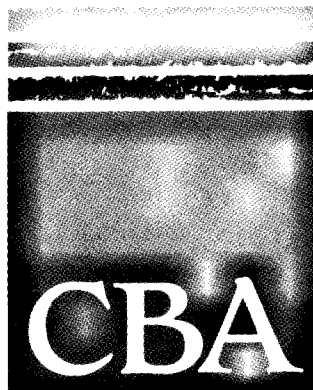
Surveys, Excavations and Burgage Plots

Recent Work on the Medieval Towns of North West England

Edited by Tom Saunders

Archaeology North West  
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Council for British Archaeology North West



COUNCIL FOR BRITISH  
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*North West*

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# Introduction

Tom Saunders

Welcome to the first volume of a new series of the *Archaeology North West*. After twenty years under the stewardship of Mike Nevell, the editorial baton has been passed to me, and I will endeavour to run with it just as successfully. With Mike's expert guidance *Archaeological North West* has emerged as one of region's leading archaeological journals, reporting on the latest discoveries and new directions in research. I hope to continue in the same tradition and maintain *Archaeology North West*'s high standards and reputation as a publication that enhances interest in the archaeology and history of the region amongst professionals and amateurs alike. In one sense, therefore, this is a new series only in that it has a new editor and new numbering system. The aim of the publication will be same. I will continue the editorship in Mike's footsteps and organise *Archaeology North West* around thematic volumes, containing interpretative and synthetic articles discussing the latest archaeological findings and research. However, instead of an annually published journal (which has proved practically and financially quite difficult to sustain), *Archaeology North West* will now become a less regularly produced monograph series.

The last two volumes of *Archaeology North West* comprised an archaeological research framework for the region, consisting of a resource assessment (Brennand 2006) and a research agenda and strategy volume (Brennand 2007). Combined they provide a comprehensive overview of the region's archaeology and outline of priorities for addressing the gaps in knowledge and understanding. This research framework will certainly provide the basis for future thematic volumes of *Archaeology North West*.

The archaeological potential of urban settlements is

one key area identified in the regional research framework for the Romano-British, medieval, post-medieval and industrial and modern periods. It is this theme that forms the basis of this current volume. But rather than adopting a multi-period approach to urban settlements, the focus will be on medieval towns, and in particular, medieval small towns. Although there were relatively few major urban centres in the North West during the medieval period, numerous small towns were established in the region during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Medieval small towns, both nationally and regionally, have yet to receive the same archaeological attention as the major urban centres. However, small towns were an integral component of the medieval landscape and are a valuable source of information with great archaeological potential (see Hilton 1985, Dyer 2003). One of the formal initiatives proposed in the recent research framework is to prioritise work in this area. Initiative 5.18 states: *'The role and nature of small towns should be examined which should include below ground investigations in well preserved small towns such as Hornby and Walton in north Lancashire'* (Newman & Newman 2007, 104).

The three main articles forming the first part of this volume report on and discuss recent work on medieval towns in the North West. Originally the aim was to produce a more extensive monograph, incorporating a wider range of articles examining various projects in the region and new ideas on medieval urban development. Unfortunately, as so often is the case, the original idea proved too ambitious and, despite the best intentions of all concerned, a number of planned articles were not actually produced. However, the three articles presented here do provide a flavour of some of the current work in the region and demonstrate the

importance and potential for the archaeological study of medieval small towns.

This volume starts off with Peter Iles' discussion of the Lancashire Extensive Urban Survey. Set up in 2001 and running until 2007, this project was part of a wider national programme of surveys to assess the archaeological potential of our historic towns. Peter provides an overview of methodology involved in the mapping of the townscapes of the county, quantifying previous archaeological work and evaluating the historic character of different urban areas. The finished survey will undoubtedly form a valuable resource for the future management of archaeological deposits and historic buildings, as well as contributing to the general analysis of the origin and development of towns in the North West.

The following two articles then focus on the results of recent excavations in some of the other medieval small towns of the region. Mike Nevell looks at three sites in the Greater Manchester area at Salford, Altrincham and Stockport, while Andy Towle and Lawrence Hayes discuss work carried out in two Cheshire towns, Middlewich and Warrington. Both articles raise issues of great importance for improving our understanding the nature and character of urban developments within the high medieval period. Mike highlights the significance of a sub-regional pottery assemblage (Chapel Wharf) and implications that can be drawn from the excavation of burgrave plots on the fringes of medieval Salford and Altrincham. He also considers the development of a town house in Stockport by reviewing the survey and excavation work on the impressive Staircase House (now a museum and visitors centre that fronts the town's historic market place). Andy and Lawrence then continue and extend the discussion of medieval burgrave plots in their analysis of the excavations of urban tenements at Wheelock Street, Middlewich and Bridge Street, Warrington. In doing so they address

an intriguing phenomenon. Although both sites lay at the heart of these two medieval centres there was remarkably little evidence for intensive occupation within the properties uncovered. Such a pattern has crucial ramifications for assessing the functioning and limitations of the urban economy within the small towns of the medieval North West.

The second part of this volume takes on a slightly different format than past editions of *Archaeology North West*. Following the success of the archaeological walks and science sections within the CBA's *British Archaeology* magazine, I thought that similar type articles could form a successful component of this new series of *Archaeology North West*. The general idea being that along side the thematic section, each volume could include an archaeological walk, as well as a discussion of an aspect of scientific archaeology in the region. These could form regular features of this publication, along with an overview highlighting some of the latest finds of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) in the North West.

Part two of this volume, therefore, starts with an archaeological walk. Given the medieval urban theme, Simon Ward presents a tour around Chester, the principal medieval centre of the region. The city has a rich medieval heritage and this walk takes in a selection of the best surviving monuments. There is also a medieval theme to archaeological science and PAS articles. Firstly, Cathy Tyres looks at dendrochronology and discusses, through a number of case studies, its potential for dating and enhancing our understanding of historic buildings in the region. Finally, Frances McIntosh and Dot Boughton introduce their work as finds liaison officers in the Portable Antiquities Scheme in the North West, drawing attention to some important medieval finds that have recently been recorded, as well as providing an overview of their education and outreach activities.

I very much hope you enjoy reading this first volume in a new series of *Archaeology North West*.

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