

A journey into the past **M62**  
Archaeology at junction 6, Tarbock Roundabout



## Introduction

This booklet outlines the results of a four month programme of archaeological investigation that took place prior to the construction of a new link road at Junction 6 of the M62 motorway in 2007. Although close to Huyton, the site mostly falls within the ancient township of Tarbock, and the investigations have provided much new information about the history and development of the area. This booklet summarises that work in a series of snapshots of long-lost times, and ways of life very different to how we live today.

The project was a joint enterprise undertaken by a team of archaeologists from National Museums Liverpool in co-operation with the construction company Laing O'Rourke Infrastructure under the aegis of the Highways Agency. The excavations concentrated on five sites marked A to D and G on the aerial photo. These were all locations where previous work had shown that there was archaeological evidence that would be affected by the road scheme.



M57

Whiston

Area G

To Warrington and Manchester 

Area A

A5080

Area D

Ox Lane

A5300

Tarbock

Image courtesy of Laing O'Rourke Infrastructure

## Early prehistoric Tarbock (about 5000 BC)

Most of the excavations took place in Area D, close to the A5300 slip road. Here an important discovery was the line of an early, small stream channel. This channel had become buried by soil from ploughing over the last 600 years or so, but when open it had been an important focus for people throughout the ages. It was probably originally linked to the Ochre Brook which now lies partly under the Knowsley Expressway just to the south of the motorway junction.



*The former stream channel being excavated at the foot of the sloping ground where it had lain hidden for centuries*



Next to the stream channel was a small sandy terrace backed by a low sandstone cliff. This terrace had been used by small bands of hunter gatherers as a temporary camp on many occasions from about 7000 years ago in what is known as the Mesolithic period.

*A View of Area D from the Knowsley Expressway slip road*



*A reconstruction of how the area around the channel may have looked 7000 years ago*

Evidence for their activity was represented by a few pits and a scatter of hundreds of pieces of worked flint.

*The sandy terrace, with white tags marking find spots of prehistoric tools*



*Flint tools from the site. Possibly, the tips for arrowheads to be set in the end of wooden shafts rather like barbs. They could also have been used for tasks such as collecting and using plants*

One pit contained burnt hazelnuts and oak branches which produced radiocarbon dates of around 5000 BC.

The terrace was a place that people came back to time after time over many centuries. The radiocarbon dates show that the hazelnuts were the remains of meals they ate on several different occasions many years apart.



*Reconstruction of hunter-gatherer camp on the sandy terrace*



*Reconstruction of the local wild landscape that was home to roaming bands of hunter gatherers in their search for food*

As these people lived in the wild, a thousand years or more before farming arrived in Britain, they followed a nomadic lifestyle. The Tarbock site was one of many stopping off points as they moved through the local woodland hunting, fishing or collecting wild plants. They would have had to find food and other resources in different places at different times of the year. There are many such early sites across Merseyside, for example along the nearby Ditton Brook and in the Alt valley to the north of Liverpool. There is even a hint, from the type of stone tools used on the Tarbock site, that these people may have been living in the Pennines for some parts of the year, or were in contact with other groups who spent part of their time there.

Given the constant movement and noise of the modern traffic around this site today, it is hard to imagine a time when perhaps no more than 100 people might have been moving around this area - theirs would have been a largely silent wild world of woodland, rivers and lakes, with nothing more than the smoke from campfires to mark their presence. But idyllic as it may seem, these people must often have been living on the edge, their survival depending on how plentiful the resources were in any one place in any one year, or how harsh and long the winters may have been. But they did survive, due to their innate understanding and knowledge of their environment.

## Roman Tarbock (about 200 AD)

The next snapshot in time is of a scene that may be somewhat more familiar to a modern mind. After about 4000 BC, a primitive form of farming had started to appear in Britain which would eventually result in a radical break with the past. Excavations on the line of the original Knowsley Expressway in 1993 near Brunt Boggart in Tarbock, a mile or so to the south of the 2007 excavations, produced tantalising evidence of what may have been one of the earliest farms in the area. This was dated to about 1800 BC, or the early Bronze Age, but the archaeological evidence was too limited to be able to understand exactly the nature of the site. We do know, however, that the centuries before the Roman conquest in AD 43 generally saw a relatively large increase in the spread of scattered farms and land cleared for agriculture.

We already knew from the 1993 excavations that a Roman farmstead existed close to Area D (see aerial photograph on page 1). This farm lay within a rectangular ditched enclosure inside which were several



*Reconstructed tile roof, with the rounded imbrex tiles overlying the flatter tegulae tiles*

rectangular wooden buildings. What was special about this farm was that in about AD 167 the people here were making roofing tiles for the Roman Army's Twentieth Legion, which was stationed in Chester, some 20 miles away.

*A roof tile, known as a tegula, found in the stream channel in Area D. Marks on its surface seem to have been caused by rain or water falling on the surface while the clay was still wet*



One of the stamps on the tiles shows that a man called Aulus Viducus made some of them. It is intriguing to speculate what the link was between this farm and the legionary fortress at Chester. Did the Tarbock area have special natural resources, perhaps coal, which made large-scale tile production here especially attractive?

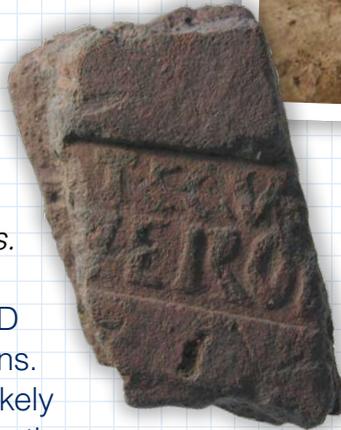
*A stamped Roman tile from the third consulship of Verus (AD 167) found in Area D in 2007. The letters VERO can be seen, referring to the name of Verus.*

The 2007 excavations in Area D hoped to answer such questions. From previous work the most likely location for the tile works was in the field to the north, just beyond the line of the new link road. This still seems the likeliest option, for although a lot of tile was found during the excavations, mostly that which appears to have been thrown into the open stream channel, it was not directly linked to the kiln sites where it would have been made.

The southern part of Area D was mostly associated with Roman metalworking.



*The depressions left by the disposal of iron working waste on the edge of the stream channel. This was found with pieces of tile and Roman pottery*



*Roman pottery was also found on the site. These are fragments of the rims of jars*

On the same sandy terrace next to the channel where 5000 years before hunter gatherers had visited and left traces of their daily activities, a Roman blacksmith had discarded the debris from his workshop. This was mainly chunks of iron slag from smelted ore, as well as a few fragments of hearth material and the fine working debris which is produced when shaping the metal. Small pieces of tile and pottery found amongst the debris proved that it was Roman in date.

*One of the hundreds of pieces of iron working waste, or slag, from Area D*

*Roman nails recovered from the area of the channel*

*A Roman coin of Constantine II, minted in Constantinople between AD 347-8, from Area D.*



Particularly significant amongst the other Roman finds were seven coins found on both sides of the channel in the later plough soil. Some were of 4th century date, including two imports that will have travelled across the empire from their mints in Constantinople to eventually finish up in Tarbock, probably through trade or the army. There were also several copies of these coins that were made in Britain. The coins tell us that there must have been people in the vicinity of the site in the 4th century, presumably living at the nearby farm.

It appears therefore, that in 2007 we were excavating in or close to the 'industrial' zone to the west of the main farm buildings, but we did not find any of the workshops associated with this activity. Pieces of Roman pottery were also found slightly further afield, for example in Areas A and B (see page 1), while previous work had found the occasional piece of Roman pottery in the fields to the south of the Roman farm. This may represent the spreading of manure in fields extending out from the site.



## Tarbock before the Roman invasion (about 200 BC)

We now know that there was a flourishing Roman period farm here from the 2nd century to possibly the 4th century AD, but we also found evidence that farming had begun much earlier in the locality, during the Iron Age. These Iron Age farmers are sometimes referred to as Celts; this area may have been occupied by a group known as the Setantii. By the mid 70s AD, the Roman army had largely pacified the north of England, and local communities were influenced by Roman administration and culture. In the north-west however, this influence seems to have been largely resisted and the region never became as 'Romanised' as those areas further to the south.



*A pit with burnt bones and cereal grains from Area B, before excavation*

We did not find the settlement itself, which at this time would probably have consisted of a series of roundhouses surrounded by small fields and paddocks, but there may have been one in the vicinity of Area B.

Here, we found two pits that we know were Iron Age, plus a few others that might have been of this date. Burnt grains of oats and barley in one of the pits showed that people were farming in the area in about 200 BC. Both pits also had burnt bone in them, probably from animals. We may well have been excavating on the very edge of a settlement that lay outside the line of the new road, or perhaps these people were

*Reconstruction of a nearby Iron Age Farm at Lathom, West Lancashire*





*The burnt bones gave radiocarbon dates of about 200 BC.*

operating some distance away from the farm out in the fields or surrounding woodland.

*An impression of how the Brook House Farm Iron Age site may have looked.*

Iron Age farms are generally very hard to find in this area as the local Iron Age people did not use pottery and had largely stopped using stone tools by this time. There is, therefore, often little trace of their sites on the surface, as was the case here at Tarbock. However, the excavations in 1993 at the southern end of the Expressway, about three miles away in Halewood, did provide evidence of another Iron Age farm that seems very different from what we found at Tarbock. This one dated to the mid 300s BC and consisted of two enclosed areas marked by the circuits of an outer and an inner ditch. The inner area containing the farm was surrounded by a massive bank and ditch. The outer area may have been a corral for cattle. This site, overlooking the Ditton Brook, was probably home for an important family or families.



Another feature representing early agriculture in Tarbock that we found in 2007 was preserved under Ox Lane at Site C (see aerial photograph on page 1). Here, a small area of criss-cross plough marks had been protected from more recent ploughing by the lane. These kinds of marks are very rare and represent an early form of ploughing usually associated with the prehistoric period, although they can be a little more recent.

Such evidence seldom survives and so is not very well understood. It is only because the 16th or 17th century lane had been built over the plough marks that they had survived at all. It is unfortunate that they cannot be more closely dated or else they would be regarded as being of great importance but it is interesting to speculate whether these could be connected with the traces of Iron Age occupation found at nearby Area B.



*Criss-cross plough marks beneath the surface of Ox Lane at Area C. The large stones overlying the ploughmarks are probably the remnants of an old field bank.*



*Excavating at Site C on Ox Lane*

Location of Windy Arbor  
Medieval Site in Area G

A5080

A5300

Halsnead Park

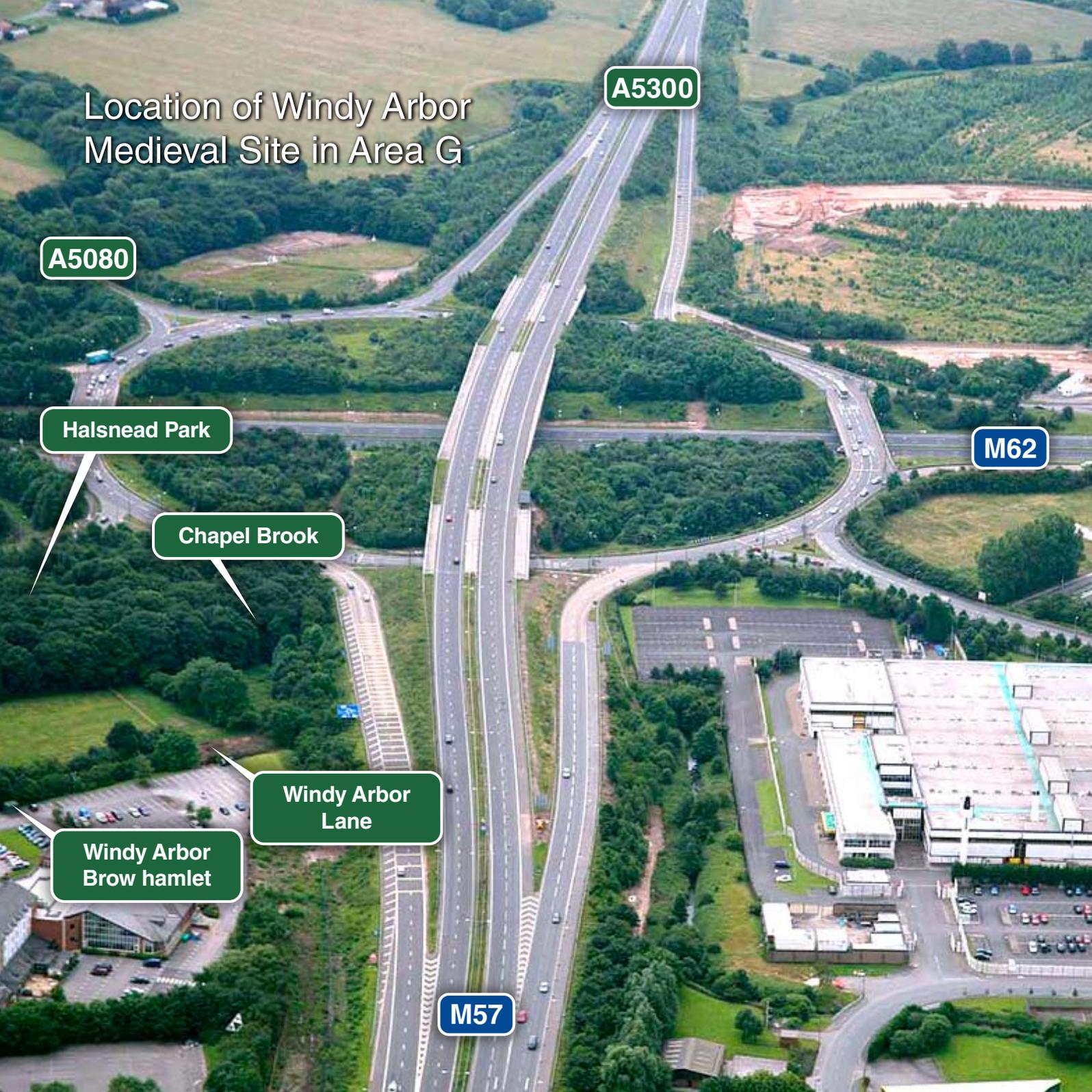
Chapel Brook

M62

Windy Arbor  
Lane

Windy Arbor  
Brow hamlet

M57



## Medieval Tarbock and Whiston (about AD 1300)

The fourth historical snapshot uncovered in the excavations is of a time when agriculture was widespread locally. Perhaps at first glance the landscape of the late Medieval period (AD 1100-1500) may seem lost or hidden, but in many instances its farms, villages and lanes still influence the shape of our modern day landscape. From about AD 1200 local documents start to record everyday life and activities, and in our area villages first become identifiable, although the pattern of dispersed farms that was typical in the Iron Age and Roman periods was still much in evidence. Local communities also started using pottery again for the first time in about 800 years or so.



*A late Medieval sword attachment, found in Area G*

All this makes Medieval sites more visible on the ground and easier to understand. But many of these settlements may well have been in existence for centuries before - we just do not have the documentary and archaeological evidence to prove it in this area.



- ① Original site of post-medieval farm
- ② Modern disturbance
- ③ The medieval pottery mainly came from this layer
- ④ Short segment of wall of unknown function, later than AD 1250 – 1400



*Excavating  
in Area G next to Windy  
Arbor Lane*



*An impression of how the lower part of Windy Arbor Brow may have looked in the Medieval period. This is based on the post-Medieval farm to the west of the lane having a Medieval origin and the clay floor found in the excavations belonging to a small Medieval building.*

In Area G, archaeological investigations were limited, and took the form of a 'watching brief' during construction. The main reason for our interest here was that it lay close to the modern day 18th and 19th century hamlet of Windy Arbor, which lies at the upper end of the lane known as Windy Arbor Brow. This is in land that in the late Medieval period probably belonged to the hamlet of Halsnead, a lesser estate within the larger township or territory of Whiston. This name means 'half piece', as Halsnead appears to have split off from the neighbouring township of Cronton by the 12th century. It was possible, therefore that the modern Windy Arbor had Medieval origins closer to Chapel Brook, and had perhaps migrated along the lane over the centuries to its present location. The brook got its name from a chapel and attached leper hospital that Medieval documents tell us was somewhere in this vicinity in the 14th century.

As it turned out, there had been a lot of modern disturbance from previous road and motorway construction in this area. However, we were extremely lucky to find one small area of archaeology that had survived which showed us we were right to suspect that people lived here in the Medieval period.

*A silver halfpenny from the reign of Edward I or Henry III AD 1247-1279 from Area G. The original penny coin would have had a full cross on the face which has allowed it to be broken down the middle to make the halfpenny.*

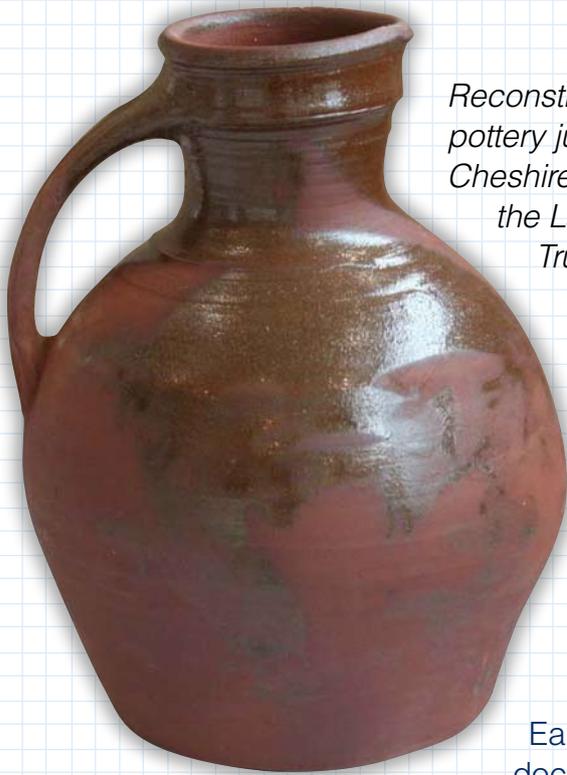


No evidence for the chapel or leper hospital was found, but the number and type of artefacts recovered suggests that there was indeed a Medieval rural settlement here of some kind. A small badly eroded clay floor or remains of a structure was found, but this was impossible to date. But next to it was one of the better collections of late Medieval pottery and metalwork from the area.

*Examples of pottery from late Medieval cooking or storage jars from the Area G site. They have thumb print decoration on the rims*

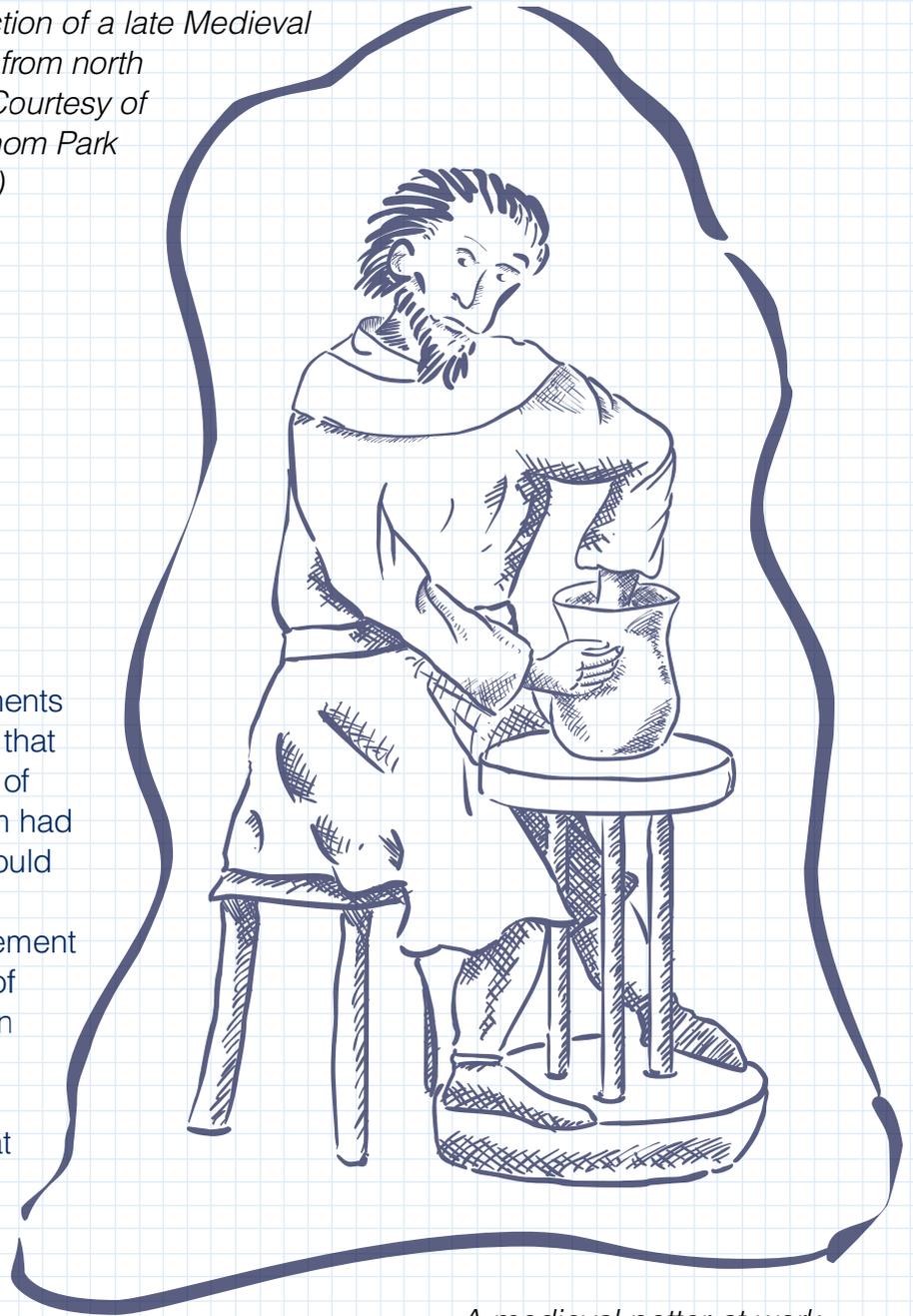


*Reconstruction of a late Medieval pottery jug from north Cheshire (Courtesy of the Lathom Park Trust)*



Early documents also tell us that

there was a farm on the western side of Windy Arbor Brow in 1840. If this farm had its origins in the Medieval period, it could have been the source of this material. Or there could have been a lost settlement on the eastern side of the lane most of which had been destroyed by modern development. Whatever the detail may be, the evidence for the present Windy Arbor Brow settlement being at least 800 years old, with origins in the Medieval period, is now much stronger.



*A medieval potter at work.*

## More recent Tarbock and Whiston (1500s onwards)

We were also interested in the more recent history of the sites and landscape features in the area affected by the new road.

One area of interest was Ox Lane, which lay at the heart of the proposed development. To the south, this lane runs past the Medieval manor house of Tarbock Hall. It also formed the boundary of a Medieval park and so must have been in place over 800 years ago. What was less certain was the status of the northern part of the lane, where it passed through the construction site. The lane here is shown on the earliest map we have of the area, which is dated to 1769, and we assumed it ran towards another Medieval farm later known as Dagers Bridge Farm. Thus it was possible that the whole of Ox Lane might represent a Medieval landscape feature that had survived into modern times.

Two sites were excavated along Ox Lane, in Areas C and A (see aerial photograph on page 1). We have already seen that in Area C the lane overlay and had protected part of an earlier, possibly prehistoric, field system. This shows that the lane is more recent than that, although we were not sure by how much more.

The excavations in Area A showed that the present surface and form of the lane here was in fact quite recent, perhaps less than 200 years old. In the mid 19th century there were a few now demolished cottages near the junction of Ox Lane and Dagers Bridge Lane, and the lane may have been resurfaced and perhaps even realigned slightly to serve these homes. Beneath the 19th century road surface lay another one, which had cart tracks gouged into it. This is probably the surface shown on the 1769 map.



*Recording the surfaces under Ox Lane at Site A*



*The Medieval pond in Area A, showing in black against the orange clay after having been cut through by the mechanical excavator. It was regarded as too unsafe to hand excavate this at such a depth*

After the pond had been infilled, a ditch was cut through the old surface, possibly to define the new lane or the adjacent fields. This and other evidence recovered from excavations suggest that the northern part of Ox Lane was laid out sometime between the 16th and the early 18th centuries.

Beneath this there were traces of an earlier agricultural landscape, just as had been seen in Area C. However, this one was much more recent. The earliest feature was a large infilled pond, over two metres deep, and there was probably another one close by. Radiocarbon dating shows that the pond was still open in the mid 15th century, and so it was associated with the late Medieval landscape. This section of the lane must therefore be later than when the pond was filled in, which may not have been until about 1500 or so.



*Excavating the ditch in Area A that cut through the infilled medieval pond*

- ① Modern surface
- ② 1600-1700 road surface
- ③ 1900s ditch
- ④ Possible remnants of earlier path

Further evidence for the post-Medieval landscape was seen to the north of the Junction 6 roundabout in Area G. Before the motorway was built in the 1970s, Windy Arbor Brow continued south to join Ox Lane on its way to Tarbock Hall, as shown on 19th century maps. As there were strong indications from our excavations in Area G that there was a Medieval settlement at Windy Arbor Brow, it was reasonable to assume that the lane might also be Medieval. However, a section cut through it did not show any firm evidence of its original date. Unfortunately, much of the archaeological evidence here had been destroyed by later roads and other development, so only a limited amount of information was retrieved.

The final snapshot in time relates to the late 18th or 19th century landscape. Halsnead Park, centred on the Medieval estate of Halsnead, would have dominated this area before the motorway was built. Precisely when the park was established is not clear. It is shown on a map of 1840, but the now destroyed Halsnead House, around which the park formerly lay, was rebuilt in the Neo-classical style in the late 1780s and this may suggest a possible approximate date for the construction of the park wall itself. A section of the sandstone wall surrounding the park had to be demolished to make way for one of the new slip roads, and the opportunity was taken to record it. The wall is some three metres high and was originally more than four miles in length, and the exposed footings were 1.6m deep. The work needed originally to dig such deep foundations along this length, and the construction of the wall itself, entailed a monumental effort. The light grey sandstone used for the wall, from which Whiston gained its name ('white' + 'stan' or stone), was quarried from the north of the township.



*A cut through the modern surface of Windy Arbor Lane in Area G, showing a fragment of the earlier surface*

- ① *Recent disturbance*
- ② *Slight kerb with pebbles on the edge of the pebble surface*



*The wall of Halsnead Park in Area G after being cut through by the road corridor. The deep drystone footings can be seen overlying blue clay which represents the flooding of Chapel Brook, probably at some time before the medieval period*

## Conclusions

It is generally considered that it was not until the Industrial Revolution that the Merseyside area began to acquire its true character. The importance of the area's industrial heritage, however, has tended to overshadow what was there before. There is a general assumption that then much of Merseyside was wild, isolated and sparsely populated. However, the excavations at the M62 Junction 6 roundabout have helped to show that this was not necessarily the case. People have lived here from the earliest times. Initially they used the rivers and forests to successfully sustain themselves. Later, once more settled, firstly in scattered farms and then in small villages, they maintained a basic continuity and rhythm to rural life that underpinned the changes from outside influences that from time to time affected their long-held ways.

The excavations have been successful in showing glimpses of a range of these disappeared ways of life and allow us to appreciate better the nature and density of our pre-industrial past. Such results though will not be out of the ordinary, they can no doubt be replicated at many other places locally so that eventually they, along with sites such as are found at the M62 Junction 6, will form the basis of a better understood and more fully representative history of the changing character of this area.

# Acknowledgements

The text for this booklet was produced by Ron Cowell, the Field Director of the excavations, on behalf of National Museums Liverpool. Thanks also go to the archaeological consultant on the scheme Ed Dennison for his crucial role in guiding the project through and for the many hours of patient correcting of texts and advice over the three phases of the project and to John Micklethwaite-Howe of Golder Associates (UK) Ltd. who acted as Environmental Consultants on the scheme.

The team that undertook the excavation work included Sarah Pevely, Liz Callander, Cath Edwards, Andrew Burn, Sandy Cook, Emma Calver, Dorn Carron, Kevin Cootes, Steve Price, Jane Howard, Ron Gurney, Steve Baldwin, Helen Jones and Mark Adams.

The project was funded by the Highways Agency and carried out by Laing O'Rourke Infrastructure Ltd. Their team are thanked for their cooperation, interest and friendliness in coordinating their work with the archaeological timetable and in particular Neil Rogers, John Colassuono, Andy Smith, Andy Clough, Adam Rawling, Gareth Powell, Richard Newton and Dave Fisher.



The computer generated reconstructions in this booklet were undertaken by Sarah Pevely using the VUE 6 software package, under the guidance of the author and the line drawing reconstructions are by the author. Laing O'Rourke are thanked for the use of the aerial photos used on pages 1 and 13. The Medieval reconstructed jug photo used on page 15 is courtesy of the Lathom Park Trust.

Joe Roberts of the Highways Agency was of great help in coordinating all aspects of the publication work and Dave Weston and the design team of the Highways Agency are thanked for their work on formatting and designing the layout of this booklet.

Dave Weston is also thanked for his work on designing the interactive archaeological web site for the project which can be accessed here:

**[www.highways.gov.uk/knowledge/m62flash/index.html](http://www.highways.gov.uk/knowledge/m62flash/index.html)**

For general information about the Highways Agency, please contact our information line on **0300 123 5000** or email: **[ha\\_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ha_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk)**



If you need help using this or any other Highways Agency information, please call **0300 123 5000** and we will assist you.

© Crown copyright 2012.

You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence: visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence) write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU; or email [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This document is also available on our website at [www.highways.gov.uk](http://www.highways.gov.uk)

If you have any enquiries about this publication email [ha\\_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ha_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk) or call **0300 123 5000**. Please quote the Highways Agency publications code PRXX/11.

Highways Agency media services Manchester. Job number N110001

Printed on paper from well-managed forests and other controlled sources.



**Directgov**

Public services all in one place  
[www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)