

Archaeological Investigation at Kingsley Fields ground for Nantwich Town Football Club

Claire Statter, Archaeologist at L – P : Archaeology

The potential for archaeological remains at the site of the new Nantwich Town FC stadium were identified by the Cheshire County Archaeologist during the planning process. It was known that Roman industrial activity had taken place in the area of Kingsley Fields and that the Medieval town of Nantwich was very close to the site, therefore there was a very good chance that other archaeological evidence would be discovered during the construction process. An archaeological Watching Brief was undertaken at the site between August and September 2006 in response to this prior knowledge.

The fieldwork consisted of the monitoring the removal of the topsoil covering the site and a detailed metal detector survey. The work was carried out by staff from L – P : Archaeology along with volunteers from the Crewe and Nantwich Metal Detecting Society.

SHORT HISTORY OF NANTWICH

The earliest evidence we have for human activity in Nantwich is from the Roman period. Although there is no evidence of a settlement itself, artefactual finds in the area indicate that there was settlement in the vicinity by the 2nd century AD. The majority of finds indicate the area was used as a Roman industrial area, with activities including salt making and lead production. Two large salt pans with Roman inscriptions have been found in the area and are now on display at the Nantwich Museum. These salt pans will have been used for the evaporation process in order to obtain rock salt from the natural underlying deposits.

By the early Medieval period Nantwich was one of Cheshire's most successful salt production towns, the others being Middlewich and Northwich. Into the Medieval period the town of Nantwich began to expand, and new timber structures were erected, some of which can still be seen around the town centre today. Unfortunately many of these were destroyed in a fire dating to 1583.

During the Civil War Nantwich was garrisoned by the Parliamentary forces and became the main base for attacks on the Royalist forces on the Welsh border. In December 1643 the Royalists laid siege to the town. From Nantwich Sir Thomas Fairfax led a force of 5,000 men to meet the Royalist forces near Acton. It was here that the Battle of Nantwich took place.

HOW THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK WAS CARRIED OUT

L – P : Archaeology supplied an archaeologist to monitor the machine stripping of the top soil of the site in order to identify any potential archaeological features or structures that may have been

revealed during this process. L – P liaised with the Crewe and Nantwich Metal Detectors Club who were interested in the site and a volunteer metal detectorists helped the archaeologist.

During the archaeological monitoring, the metal detectorists surveyed the newly stripped areas of the site and the large amounts of soil which were to be removed from the site. As the detectorists identified each individual find, it was given a distinct number and its location was recorded using a Global Positioning System (GPS). This was done so that once the data was collated the spread of finds could be readily plotted within a Geographical Information System and their positions could be related to each other.

RESULTS

No archaeological features, such as house foundations, were discovered at Kingsley Fields, this is most probably due to ploughing and other agricultural activity that has taken place on the site within the 20th century. The make up of the soil, especially close to the brook which runs through the site, included sandy silt. It is thought that the fields may have been repeatedly flooded during the past, which would have resulted in this sandy build up.

Large amounts of metal artefacts were recovered and these ranged from modern buttons and tractor parts, to Medieval and Roman coins. There was also a large amount of lead waste, in the form of lumps of probably relating to its industrial heritage.

The range of finds shows evidence of a long occupation of Nantwich and the close settlement of Kingsley Fields Farm, to the north east. From the Roman coin finds to the Medieval coins and buckles to the large amount of musket balls and lead shot from the Civil War, it can clearly be seen that the area has played its part in the growth of Nantwich.

Contacts:

Claire Statter (c.statter@lparchaeology.com Telephone 01244 317 210)

Emma Bentley (Press Release if required from emmabentley@lparchaeology.com)

Address:

L – P : Archaeology
Unit S9D Chester Enterprise Centre
Hoole Bridge
Chester
CH2 3NE