Settlement, Land-use and Communication at Cuerden, Central Lancashire: An Archaeological Case Study

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Abstract

An archaeological investigation undertaken by Salford Archaeology in 2016-18 ahead of a large development at Cuerden in Central Lancashire yielded significant evidence for land use in the area from the prehistoric period through to the present day. In particular, the excavation uncovered a probable roundhouse and a well-preserved section of the Roman road between Wigan and Walton-le-Dale, together with rare physical evidence for medieval agriculture and settlement dating from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries that appears to have developed along the alignment of the Roman road. The remains of a cottage dating to the seventeenth century were also excavated, together with a regionally important assemblage of medieval and post-medieval pottery.

Introduction

In 2016-18 Salford Archaeology, part of the Centre for Applied Archaeology at the University of Salford, carried out an archaeological investigation of land within the historic township of Cuerden in the South Ribble borough of Lancashire (NGR SD 55525 24600). The work was undertaken as part of the planning process in advance of a major development led by Lancashire County Council, and comprised a comprehensive desk-based study, followed by initial intrusive investigation via evaluation trenching and the subsequent full excavation of several areas that were found in the initial trenches to contain archaeological remains of potential significance (Figure 1).

The site had been subject to very little archaeological research previously, although desk-based studies and field reconnaissance of the wider area was carried out in 1970s and early 1980s by the Central Lancashire Research Unit. This survey was intended to explore the archaeological and historical character of the Central Lancashire New Town, and highlighted the potential for numerous sites of archaeological interest.[1] The work carried out in 2016-18 provided an important opportunity to investigate the landscape around Cuerden in greater depth, building upon the results obtained from the earlier survey.

Location and Setting

Cuerden is situated 5km south of Preston, a similar distance to the south-east of the important medieval settlement of Penwortham, and 2km north-east of Leyland. The development site occupies 65ha of land to the south of the M65 and A582, bounded by the A49 to the east and the A5083 to west (Figure 1). The site is crossed by Old School Lane and Stoney Lane, both of which represent thoroughfares of some antiquity.

Topographically, Central Lancashire is characterised by a gently rolling plain dissected by the Ribble and Douglas valleys, although the closest watercourse to Cuerden is the River Lostock. Rising near Withnell Fold, the River Lostock meanders west and north towards Bamber Bridge skirting around the northern edge of the site before flowing south-west to join the River Douglas near Croston in West Lancashire.

The solid geology within the site is mapped as both the Sidmouth Mudstone Formation and Hambleton Mudstone Member, overlain by thick glacial sequences, which were laid down during the last glaciation (75,000-11,500 B.C.). Archaeological excavation has demonstrated variation in the superficial geology from till in the southern and central parts of the site to glacial sands and gravels in the north and north-west. Soil formation reflects the underlying geology with sandy soils in the north

and thicker, albeit less permeable clayey loam encountered to the south; peat-filled hollows formed within the natural sand and gravel geology in the north-west of the site. The area currently hosts a range of man-made ecosystems including pasture, wetland and plantation.

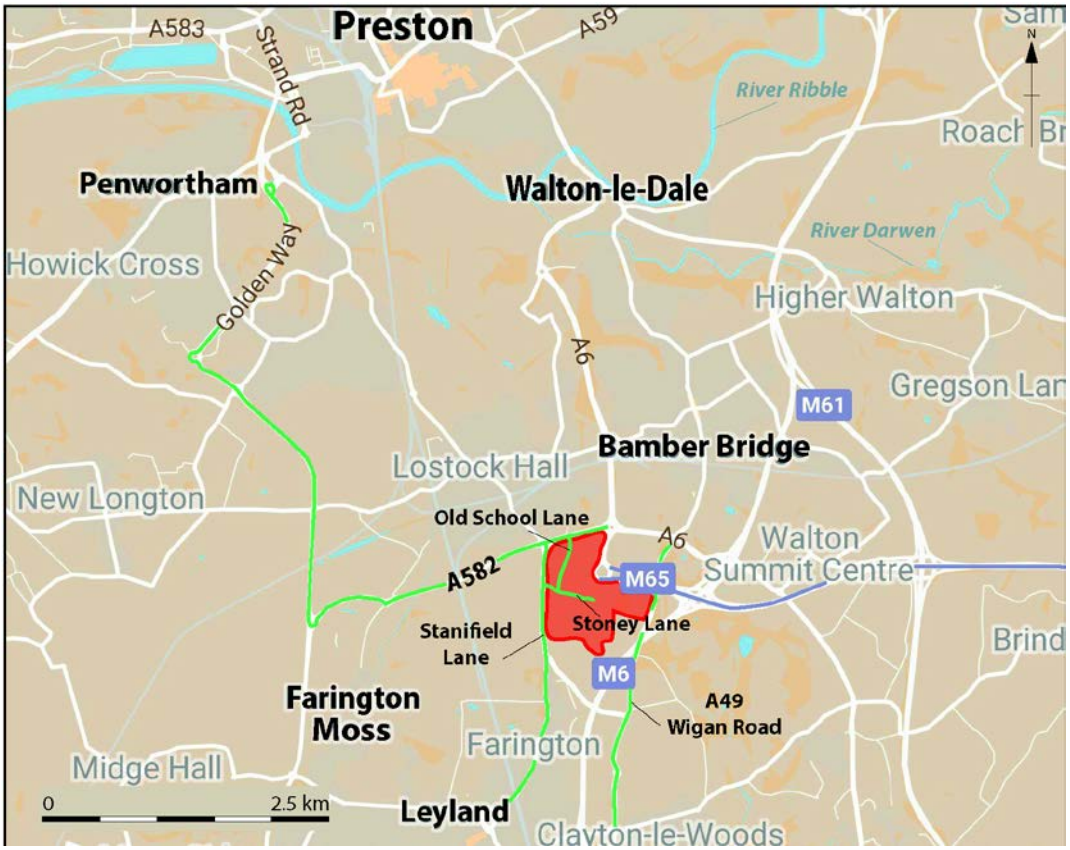

Figure 1: Location plan, showing the areas of archaeological excavation

Archaeological and Historical Background

The extent and nature of human activity across Lancashire during the prehistoric periods is poorly understood, although research has suggested that existence throughout the Mesolithic period (10,000-3500 B.C.) was based on subsistence, exploiting natural resources and occupying areas seasonally, utilising coastal base camps and inland hunting sites.[2] Physical evidence for Mesolithic activity in the region is drawn largely from palaeo-environmental data and scatters of flint tools. The North West Wetland Survey of the mosses around Farington, about 2km south-west

of Cuerden, has provided good evidence for prehistoric activity in the form of flint tools and debris as well as palynological sequencing.[3] Archaeological excavations at Walton-le-Dale between 1981 and 1996 similarly yielded a number of Mesolithic and later flint tools,[4] demonstrating a sustained exploitation of the area, presumably attractive to hunter-gatherer groups and to those exploiting relatively light soils and good seasonal grazing.

A gradual increase in permanent settlement across Lancashire appears to have occurred during the Neolithic (3500-2200 B.C.), a period that is characterised by increased evidence for cereal pollen and the emergence of ceremonial and funerary monuments, such as the chambered cairn on Anglezarke Moor, some 10km to the south-east of Cuerden.[5]

The Bronze Age and Iron Age are likely to have brought continued intensification of woodland clearance, landscape exploitation and a probable increase in arable farming across Lancashire, together with the introduction of metal artefacts, although there is very little firm evidence that has been obtained from archaeological excavation. Hallam suggested that Cuerden could have been occupied during the Iron Age, a conclusion based on the identification of a cropmark to the east of Old School Lane. This seemingly represented a sharply defined circular ditch, approximately 25m in diameter with some suggestion of an internal bank and an 'antennae' extending out to the west, leading to its interpretation as a prehistoric enclosure.[6] However, no intrusive investigation was carried out to corroborate this interpretation, and the site was damaged subsequently by the erection of an electricity pylon. Similarly, the lack of formal archaeological investigations across the wider area has hampered an understanding human activity in Central Lancashire immediately prior to the Romano-British period.

Romano-British activity in the North West is better documented, although much attention has traditionally been directed towards military installations, and the extent

and character of native rural settlements remain poorly understood.[7] Nevertheless, the limited evidence available for indigenous settlement in the region implies a level of continuity, with archaeological excavation of sites such as Dutton's Farm in West Lancashire demonstrating continuous occupation through the Iron Age and Romano-British period.[8]

The nearest known Roman site to Cuerden lies 3.5km to the north, near to the confluence of the rivers Ribble and Darwen at Walton-le-Dale (Figure 1). This important settlement was established by the Roman military at the end of first century A.D. with occupation continuing into the fourth century, and probably functioned as an industrial centre and supply base to nearby forts such as Ribchester.[9] The settlement lay at a strategic crossing point of the River Ribble between the Roman military bases at Wigan and Lancaster on the main north/south road along the West Coast. The precise route of this road between Wigan and Walton-le-Dale has, until recently, been a long-standing topic of debate. William Thompson Watkin traced the road from Wigan as far as Standish in the late nineteenth century, but could find little evidence for its route any further north, except for anecdotal evidence for its discovery in Worden Park near Euxton, where it was said to be '13 yards wide', and near Meanygate in Bamber Bridge.[10] Based on these latter references, it was postulated that the Roman road continued south from Bamber Bridge following the line of the modern A49 near Cuerden Hall, along the eastern edge of the development area (Figure 2). An alternative route was proposed in 1996, however, when a well-preserved section of the road excavated at Walton-le-Dale appeared to head south in the direction of Leyland rather than Bamber Bridge, taking a projected course along Stanifield Lane towards Euxton, where it rejoined the A49. Whilst limited archaeological work along the route in 2014 was unsuccessfully in locating the road,[11] considerable weight to the veracity of this alternative route was provided more recently by careful analysis of Lidar data.[12]

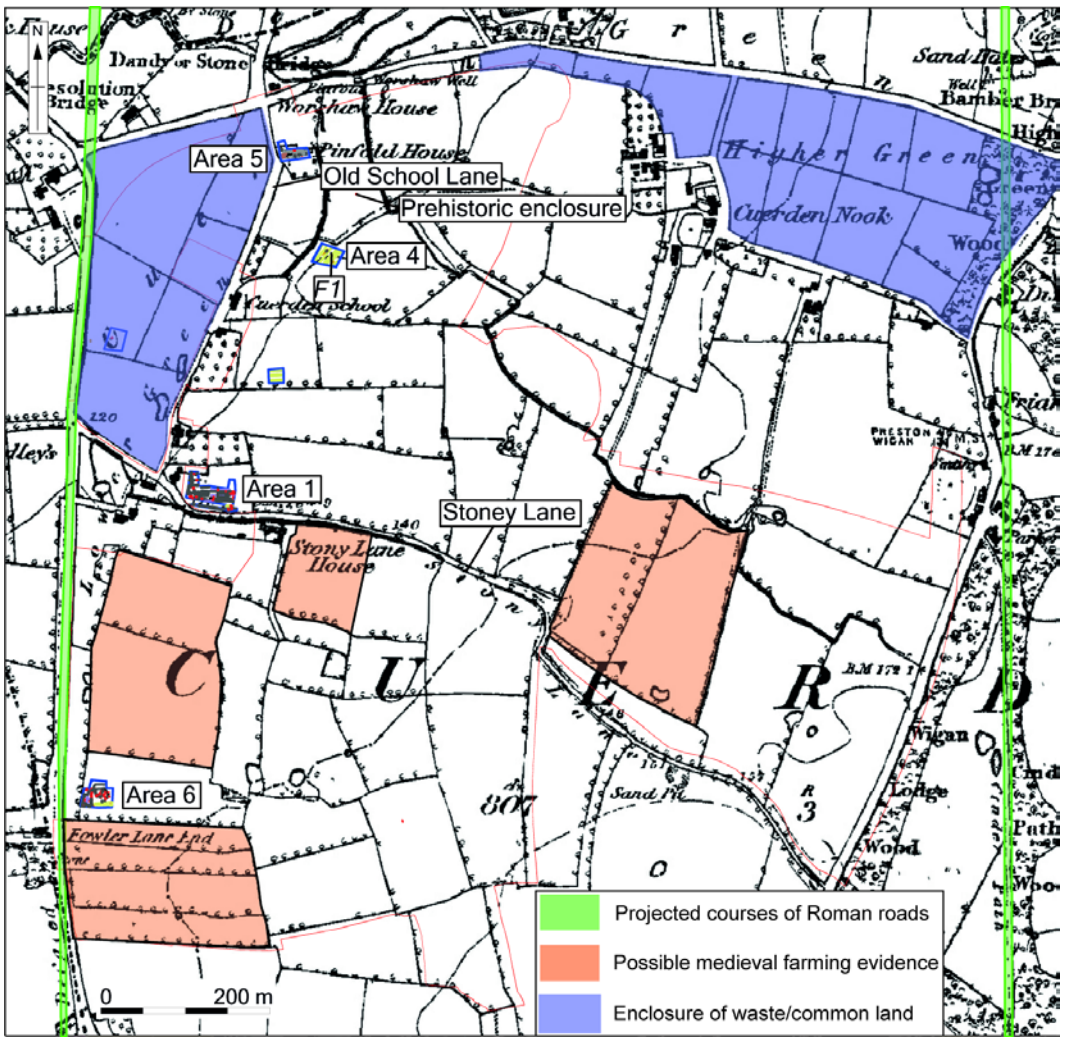

Figure 2: The location of the excavation areas

There is a paucity of direct evidence for early medieval occupation (fifth to eleventh centuries A.D.) across Lancashire as a whole, although a presence is testified by the discovery of several isolated coin hoards. The most remarkable of these was from Cuerdale, on the south bank of the River Ribble *c* 8km to the north-east of the Cuerden (Figure 2). This was the largest Scandinavian hoard to have been discovered in Europe, containing some 7250 coins and hacksilver that weighed around 40kg.[13] It was buried sometime in the early tenth century A.D., and its deposition close to the River Ribble reflects the importance of the valley as a trade route, and hints at a significant amount of early medieval activity in the area.

Place-name studies also provide vital clues of human activity during this period, culminating in the flourishing of the Irish Sea trading network and settling of Hiberno-

Norse peoples across Lancashire in the late ninth and tenth centuries A.D.[14] The toponym, Cuerden, appears to pre-date these incursions, deriving from Cumbric, an ancient language akin to Welsh; this became extinct in the Ribble Valley in the seventh century A.D.[15] The persistence of this place-name (Kerden, derivative of *cerddin*, meaning mountain ash) implies that some form of native settlement – synonymous with the tree – existed in the area from this time.[16]

Cuerden is known to have formed one of nine townships within the Leyland Hundred administrative district, and is mentioned briefly in the Domesday Survey of 1086.[17] The manor of Cuerden was granted to Roger de Poitou after the Norman Conquest, passing subsequently to the Molyneux family, and then to Henry de Kuerden. It was in the possession of the Banastre family of Walton-le-Dale and Newton-in-Makerfield by 1270, later passing to the Charnock and Langton families.[18] Another local landowner of importance was the Woodcock family, which is mentioned in documentary sources dating back to the early thirteenth century, when Henry de Kuerden made several grants to them. Little is known about the development of the site throughout this period, though previous studies have suggested that the agricultural community was concentrated in a series of hamlets, namely Old Cuerden, Cuerden Green and Cuerden Nook.[19]

Thomas Woodcock died at Cuerden in 1602 holding 'the capital messuage called Lostock' in Cuerden, together with lands in Cuerden and Walton-le-Dale. In 1666, a later Thomas Woodcock built Woodcock Hall at the junction of Stanifield Lane and Lostock Lane, immediately beyond the north-western corner of the development area; the hall was demolished in 1961, although some of the ancillary buildings are still in use as part of the farm that presently occupies the site. Another local family of repute was the Dandy's, who acquired Lostock Hall in the seventeenth century.[20] In 1673, Andrew Dandy left money to establish a school in Cuerden, which had been erected on the east side of what is now known as Old School Lane by the end of the

seventeenth century; a dedication stone on the building lists members of the Dandy family, together with the date 1690. The building survives, and is now afforded statutory protection as a Grade II listed building.

The sequence of historic maps spanning the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has yielded further clues to the nature of settlement and land-use within the site. Of particular interest are a series of small rectangular plots flanking Stanifield Lane, the principal road through Cuerden Green (Figure 2). These were interpreted as earlier tofts, perhaps of late medieval origin. Maps and aerial photography have revealed outlying areas of medieval farming, enclosure and later parliamentary division. The once communal arable fields, formed of furlongs, were enclosed into strip fields, and these were amalgamated subsequently to create larger fields to use for grazing rather than arable. Areas of waste land and common were also enclosed, similarly reflecting an increased emphasis on pastoralism. By 1801, there were an estimated 519 people living in the township of Cuerden, a figure that had increased to 569 by 1821, comprising 96 families residing in a total of 88 houses.[21]

Prior to the addition of motorways in the late twentieth century, the two principal roads serving the area were the A5083 (Stanifield Lane) and the A49 (Wigan Road), skirting the western and eastern edges of the site respectively. Wigan Road forms part of the turnpike system established in the mid-eighteenth century, whereas Stanifield Lane follows a route of considerable antiquity. Dissecting the site are remnants of further ancient tracks and lanes, the most prominent being Old School Lane and Stoney Lane. Old School Lane lies at a slightly lower level than the adjacent fields, reminiscent of a medieval hollow way, whilst Stoney Lane is referred to in a document of 1509 but is almost certainly considerably older.[22] Together, these routeways connected the dispersed zones of rural settlement with their manorial seats and nearby markets in Leyland, Wigan, Penwortham and Preston.

The Archaeological Excavations in 2017-8

A desk-based study that was compiled in 2016 to support the planning application for redevelopment identified several areas of the site that were of potential archaeological interest.[23] This was tested in 2017 via the excavation of a series of initial trenches across the site, which was intended to establish the presence, extent, date and significance of any below-ground archaeological remains. Trenches placed across the northern part of the site revealed physical remains of Pinfold Cottage, a former medieval/post-medieval farmstead, together with evidence for associated agricultural practices. Trenches placed across a series of cropmarks to the south of Pinfold Cottage exposed several ditches and gullies that diverged from the existing pattern of field boundaries and appeared to be remnants of ancient field systems, potentially representing prehistoric or Romano-British activity or settlement in the area. Trenches were also placed across the two projected routes of the Roman road between Wigan and Walton-le-Dale, but yielded no physical remains of this elusive highway. It was concluded from the results obtained from the initial trenches that the north-western part of the site had potential to contain buried archaeological remains of sufficient research interest to warrant more detailed investigation, and six discrete areas were subject to 'strip and record' excavation to fully understand the survival and extent of the archaeological resource in advance of development. The complexity of archaeological remains identified during the 'strip and record' investigation led to a final stage of more detailed excavation of three of the targeted areas (Figure 2).

Archaeological Evidence for Prehistoric Activity

A shallow, oval-shaped pit uncovered in the northern part of the site (Area 4), approximately 250m to the south of the current course of the River Lostock and close to the putative antennae enclosure postulated by Hallam in the 1970s, offered a tantalising glimpse of the early exploitation of the landscape. The pit (*F1*) was filled

with sterile, sandy clay that contained a worked flint tool, dated broadly to the Mesolithic to Early Neolithic period (Figure 3). The underlying geology comprised stiff clay, interspersed with geological fissures filled with sand and gravel.

Figure 3: Plunged blade dating to the Mesolithic or early Neolithic recovered from the fill of pit F1 (Area 4)

Further hints of prehistoric activity were identified in an area excavated in the southern part of the site (Area 6). Amongst a number of indistinct features that could easily have derived from natural processes was a shallow, sub-circular pit (*F2*). Although devoid of finds, it produced small pieces of charcoal that were collected and subjected to radio-carbon assay. This charcoal – identified as hazel – yielded calibrated dates of 3185 ± 24 BP (1211-1259 B.C.), placing the feature in the Middle Bronze Age. Whilst it is tempting to equate this with human settlement, it seems more likely given its irregularity that the feature and its contents derived from prehistoric forest clearances. The discovery of a fragment of angular Pennine chert in the fill of a nearby gully adds a little weight to the possibility of settlement during this period, although this could not be ascertained beyond doubt from the evidence available.

It was similarly impossible to provide a precise date for several other features identified in Area 6, although they could have derived from either prehistoric or Romano-British occupation. The most significant of these was a penannular feature composed of two arcing gullies (*F4* and *F5*), situated on slightly higher ground (Figure 4). The south-west gully (*F4*) cut through two earlier pits. Neither pit produced datable material though it is possible they could have derived from a separate, earlier phase of activity on the site; the north-eastern gully (*F5*) was stratigraphically isolated (Figure 5). The fills of the two gullies were generally devoid of anthropogenic inclusions, consisting of firm clay; despite the overall sterility of the deposits, a small quantity of fire-affected stone was recovered from the terminus of *F4*. It is noteworthy that *F4* revealed a probable recut with three distinct clay fills, which indicate multiple stages of deposition. Continual use was also deduced from their form, namely the splayed terminus and varying width of *F4*.

Figure 4: Aerial view of the roundhouse

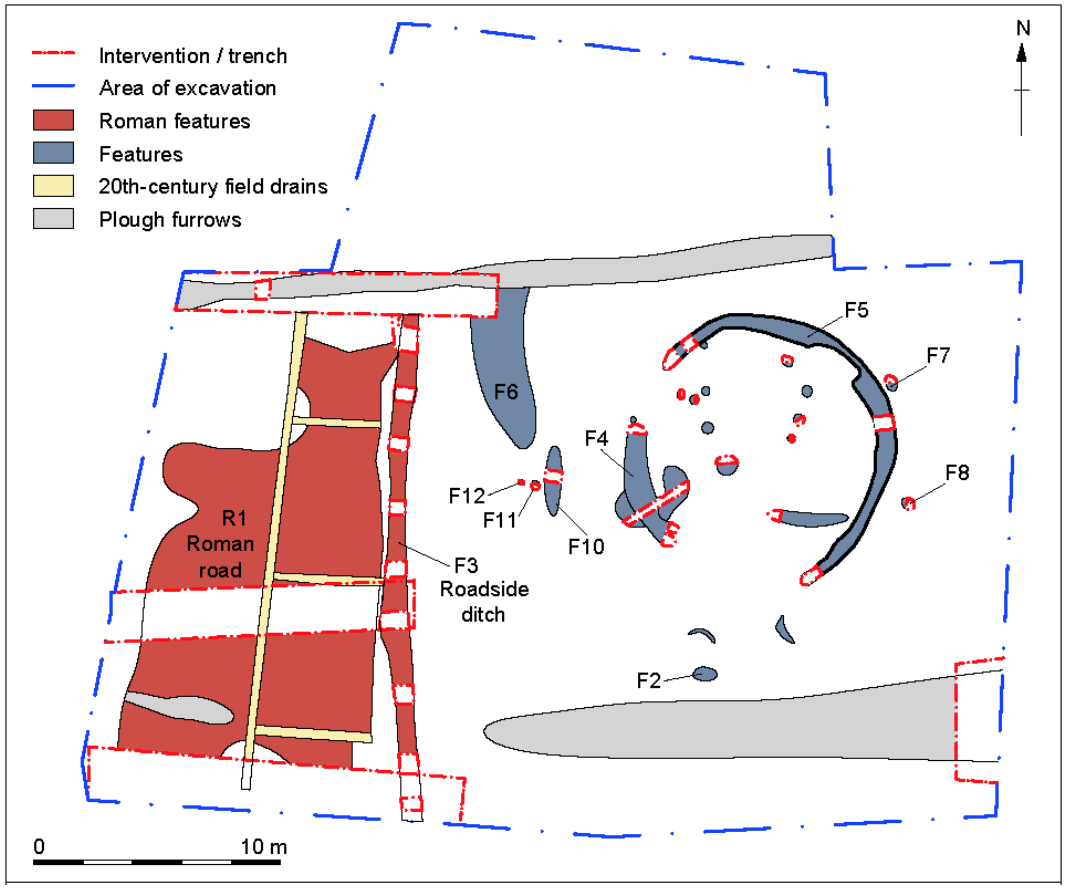

Figure 5: Plan of Area 6

Charcoal collected from the fill of the *F5* terminus returned a calibrated radio-carbon date of 1863 ± 24 BP (A.D. 63-111); assuming the gullies were cleared out and re-cut episodically, this suggests the gully was established either during or prior to the early periods of Roman occupation and went out of use in the last quarter of the first century, *c* A.D. 87. This date is particularly significant as it implies a phase of activity during the period of road construction across the North West by the Roman military. This in itself is unsurprising, but nevertheless affirmed that the road excavated a short distance to the west formed part of this network.

The gullies (*F4* and *F5*) resemble the eaves drip gullies of a roundhouse, whilst the area enclosed by the gullies (9m in diameter) is comparable with the small number of other probable roundhouses excavated in the region, including those uncovered at Samlesbury in 2002, at Barker House Farm in Lancaster in 2003, and at Lathom, near Ormskirk. Breaks in the southern and north-west sides of the excavated gullies

hint at the position of entrances in and out of the roundhouse. Of particular note is the opening on the north-western perimeter of the structure, facing obliquely towards the Roman road (Figure 5).

A group of post-holes found in the interior of the roundhouse may have derived from a structure or series of structures constructed therein. This enigmatic grouping did not resemble a typical alignment of posts that form the outer ring of a roundhouse. The posts were clustered in the north-west of the interior, although a considerable variation in form and width was also detected with no clear grouping discernible (Figure 5). This may in part reflect loss through later ploughing, which would also account for the absence of any artefacts (with the exception of single possible flint core), occupation layers, hearths or floor surface within the roundhouse. Fire-affected stones found in the terminal end of the curving gully *F4* and a small proportion of oak and alder charcoal recovered from gully *F5*, however, suggest the presence of a domestic hearth.

The Roman Road

The most substantial feature uncovered in Area 6 was a metalled surface (*R1*) that was aligned north/south, broadly parallel with the modern Stanifield Lane (Figure 5). This metalled surface almost certainly represented a surviving section of the Roman road between Wigan and Walton-le-Dale. The road was 11.40m wide, and was excavated for a length of 18.32m, beyond which it appeared to have been destroyed by ploughing (Figure 6). The gravel component was dominated by rounded stones of varying sizes, deposited thinly above a layer of clayey sand. This underlying material either formed a bedding layer or derived from fine particles that had leached through the road surface. The layers survived to a combined thickness of 0.34m, though in places the gravel surface had been worn away considerably. It was best preserved in the central part of the excavation, petering out in the northern part of the trench, where only a thin scattering of gravel survived.

Figure 6: View of the Roman road, showing the sections excavated across the roadside ditch

Only the eastern roadside ditch survived, as that to the west had been removed by a later field boundary. The surviving ditch (*F3*) was cut into the natural clay and was excavated to a total length of 18.94m. The ditch profile varied considerably across its length and was far from uniform in shape, but was characterised by a steeply sloping outer side and a more gradually sloping inner side, tapering to a concave base. It was filled with an accumulation of sterile silty clay that was devoid of anthropogenic inclusions, except for a single piece of iron slag. Although the deposits in the roadside ditch were not conducive to sampling, the road can be dated broadly by its spatial association with the nearby roundhouse (mid- to late first century A.D.).

Other Features

A sunken metalled feature, *F6*, was uncovered a short distance to the west of the roundhouse and broadly parallel to the Roman road (Figure 5). The metalling was formed of gravel that lined a shallow depression, sealed beneath an accumulation of

dark silty clay. The gravel component of the surface was not dissimilar to the adjacent road, comprising small to medium-sized rounded stones. The feature was equidistant from the road and the roundhouse, its shape mirroring the arc of the adjacent gullies, implying the features were broadly contemporary. The northern extent of surface *F6* was cut by a large post-medieval pit. Another less well-defined patch of gravel was observed to the south of this feature, partially damaged by a later furrow. It is uncertain whether this material constituted a separate feature or had been dislodged from the road.

Two additional ovate post-holes (*F7* and *F8*) were investigated immediately to the east of the roundhouse. These displayed similar diameters, ranging from 0.47m to 0.58m; neither exceeded 0.16m in depth. Although the fills of both features were largely sterile, stone inclusions and flecks of charcoal were noted. It is possible these related directly to the roundhouse or delineated a fence line.

A north/south-aligned elongated pit with rounded ends (*F10*) was located to the south of the metalled surface *F6* (Figure 5). This feature was 2.90m long and was widest in the middle, 0.68m, narrowing at either end, with a stepped profile culminating at a concave base, 0.20m deep. Investigation of two adjacent post-holes (*F11* and *F12*) revealed steeply tapering sides and narrow bases, whilst the vertical sections retained probable post-pipes, suggesting the upright timbers of a structure had decayed *in-situ*.

Archaeological Evidence for Medieval Activity

A complex of ditches, gullies and agricultural features recorded in the central part of the site (Area 1) represent elements of a late medieval field system, spanning the twelfth to sixteenth centuries. This group of archaeological features was found close to the junction of Old School Lane and Stoney Lane in the centre of Cuerden Green hamlet (Figure 2).

Phase 1

The earliest group of features was concentrated in the eastern part of Area 1, and related to a phase of twelfth- to thirteenth-century activity. The most prominent feature was a 0.90m wide and 22m long linear ditch (*F13*), aligned east/west, with a southerly return. Characterised by a profile with sloping or concave sides and a flat base, the boundary showed signs of being re-established periodically over time. An important assemblage of pottery fragments with a date range spanning the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was found in the fill of the ditch, presumably representing its abandonment. Charcoal was also retrieved through environmental sampling from this fill and was dated to 656 ± 24 BP, giving a calibrated range of A.D. 1270-1318. The charcoal derived principally from alder, a species of tree which favours wet conditions, whilst a charred soil fungus associated with woodland soils was also present.

A series of narrow gullies and ephemeral plough scars was identified to the north and south of the ditch (Figure 7). The spacing and concentration of these features proved difficult to interpret with complete confidence as they were hard to define precisely, although it seems likely that they were broadly contemporary and derived from repetitive action of digging drainage furrows. Further indications of contemporary agricultural practices were present in Area 4, in the form of other sinuous drainage gullies that contained fragments of sherds of pottery with a date range spanning the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

An L-shaped, stone-filled feature (*F14*), measuring 4.98m by 3.70m, was defined in the south-east corner of Area 1 (Figure 7). A spread of densely packed cobbles at the western end resembled a wall foundation, although the stone inclusions were more sporadic across the remainder of the feature, which proved to be shallow (less than 0.08m deep) when excavated. It was hard to determine a function for the

feature, and whilst the use of cobbles in the vernacular architecture of Lancashire, specifically as wall foundations, raises the possibility that it had fulfilled a structural role, it may equally have represented the remains of a field clearance cairn. A concentration of pottery fragments found amongst the stones and within an adjacent gully (*F17*) situated immediately to the north, suggest a date range from the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries.

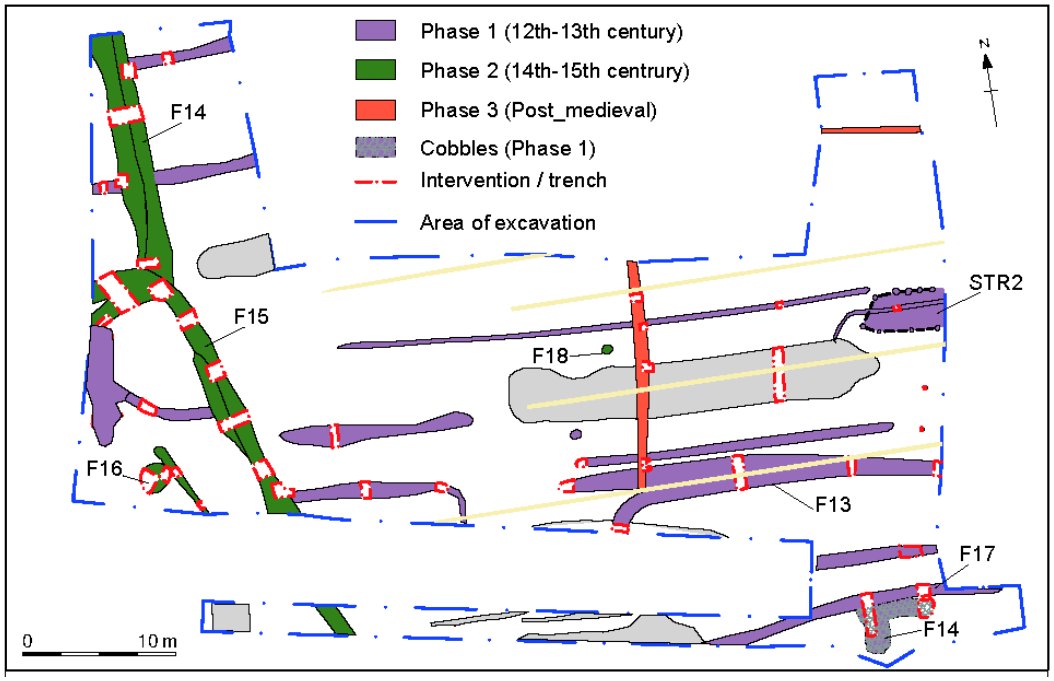

Figure 7: Plan of Area 1

More convincing structural evidence was found on the eastern edge of Area 1 in the form of a post-built structure (*STR2*) that was defined by two parallel rows of post-holes. The axis of the structure was crossed by a thin linear feature, interpreted as a gully, its western extent arcing, seemingly respecting the position of the post-holes. Three of the post-holes contained fragments of pottery dating typologically to the late twelfth or thirteenth century, whilst a sample of charcoal from the fill of one of the post-holes provided a corroborative date of 733 ± 24 BP, giving a calibrated range of A.D. 1193–1241.

A charred seed of *Chrysanthemum segetum* (corn marigold) was also recovered from a sample taken from the fill of one of the post-holes. This arable weed is commonly found in association with cereal grains, in particular oats, which thrive in similar conditions. This circumstantial discovery hints at the use of the post-built structure as a barn for storing or processing crops.

Four gullies similar in form to those exposed in the eastern part of the excavation were revealed within the western enclosures. Two of these were cut by the main north-west/south-east-aligned boundary ditches *F14* and *F15* (Phase 2), and thus appeared to represent the earlier phase of medieval farming. These gullies were typically shallow, with a maximum depth of 0.25m, and were no wider than 0.40m.

A circular pit (*F18*) revealed in the central part of the excavated area is also likely to have derived from the first phase of medieval activity. This measured 0.6m by 0.52m, and contained several fragments of twelfth- and thirteenth-century pottery.

Phase 2

A later phase of medieval activity was defined along the western edge of the excavation. A substantial boundary was created by two north-west/south-east-aligned ditches (*F14* and *F15*) extending across the excavation area for a distance of 33.50m (Figure 8). This boundary varied in width across the excavated area from 0.9m to 1.7m, and had evidently been re-cut on several occasions, implying that it had been a feature of the local landscape for a considerable time.

Three intercutting ditches branched off from the main boundary to form two enclosed plots that continued beyond the western limit of the excavation, and may have defined garden plots or property boundaries. The ditches were filled with sterile clay, although a sample from ditch *F15* yielded traces of charred heather, which although not suitable for dating certainly reflect anthropogenic activity. The fills were

characterised by gleyed clay soils, which had developed under wet conditions and were noticeably darker in colour than the earlier phase of ditches to the east.

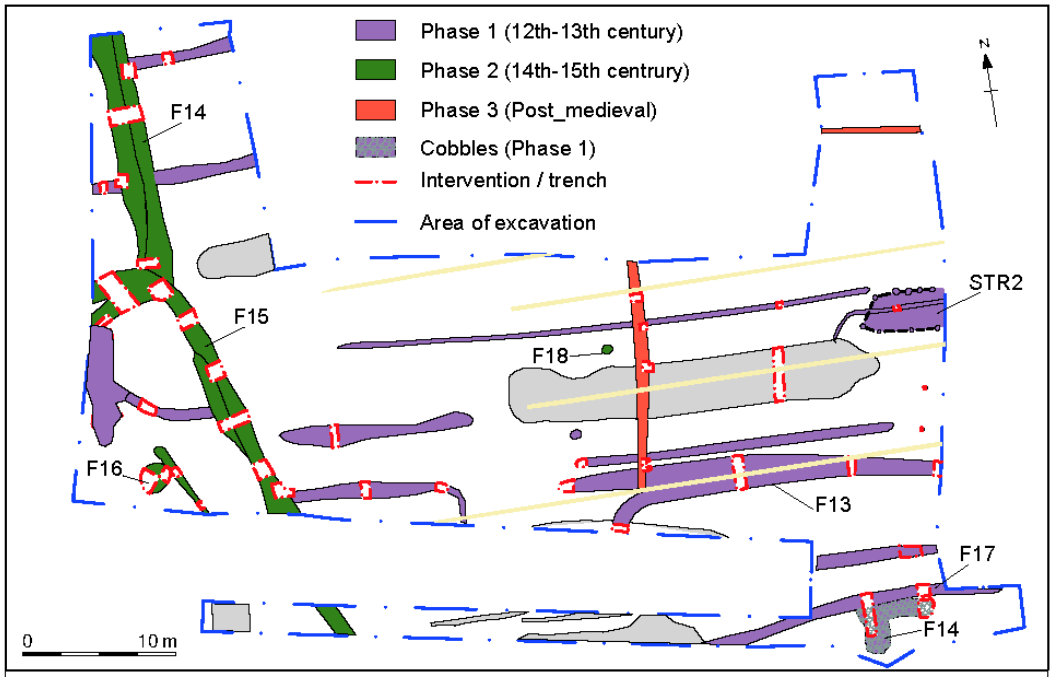

Figure 8: Section excavated across one of the boundary ditches (F15) revealed in Area 1

A large, oval-shaped pit (*F16*), measuring 2.15m by 1.81m with a maximum depth of 0.35m, was identified in the western part of the excavation area. Its clayey fill had a band of organic-rich material, indicating an intermittently damp or waterlogged taphonomy. A few sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the pit.

The closure of the boundaries with a probable realignment to the divisions shown on eighteenth-century mapping is attested by a small proportion of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ceramics from the closure of the ditches and overlying topsoil. The pottery from the enclosures in the western part of the excavation was dominated by wares from the fifteenth to sixteenth century, including large unabraded sherds of domestic storage, cooking and serving vessels.

The Pottery

In total, 750 sherds of pottery with a combined weight of 20kg, was recovered from the excavations, with the majority coming from Area 1. Approximately half of this total was medieval in date, with a predominance of Northern Gritty-type wares. Some of these sherds retained evidence of patchy olive to green lead glaze on their exterior surfaces, although most vessels appeared to be unglazed. Vessel forms mainly comprised bulbous jars with flat rims with internal flanges, but little evidence for any decoration.

Gritty wares were the main pottery fabric type in circulation throughout the north of England during the twelfth century and, in broad terms, appear to have continued as such until the mid-thirteenth century, when they began to be superseded by Partially Reduced Grey wares.[24] These wares with their characteristic grey cores, extensive use of green lead glaze and wider range of vessel forms are typically ascribed a date range spanning the mid-thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, based largely on material recovered from stratified sequences excavated in Carlisle, which is one of the very few places in the region where independent dating has been obtained from excavated layers.[25]

The later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw the introduction of more refined types of pottery, such as Cistercian wares and Midland Purple wares, although the extent of their distribution across the region is unclear; the occurrence of Midland Purple-type wares during this period is greatly diminished across North Lancashire and Cumbria, where the pottery in widespread circulation appears to have been dominated by Reduced Greenware types. The pottery assemblage from the excavation, however, provides a rare example of both ware types occurring in well-stratified fifteenth-century contexts, raising the possibility that the River Ribble may have formed the northern extent of the widespread distribution of Midland Purple-

type vessels. Amongst this type was a largely complete example of a bunghole cistern with a patchy dark purple glaze that was recovered from one of the ditches in Area 1 (Figure 9). The same ditch fill contained fragments of two Cistercian ware cups of a probable fifteenth-century date, together with a fragment of a Reduced Greenware vessel.

Figure 9: A Midland Purple-type bunghole cistern recovered from Area 1

Pinfold Cottage and Post-medieval Activity

Excavations in the northern part of the site revealed the remains of Pinfold Cottage, a post-medieval farm cottage (Area 5). The date at which this cottage was built is unclear, although it is represented on William Yates' *Survey of the County Palatine of Lancaster* that was published 1786, and George Hennet's survey of 1828-9. The outline of the building is shown in greater detail on the tithe map of 1839 and the Ordnance Survey first edition 1:10,560 map of 1848, and Census returns for 1861 and 1871 indicate that it was occupied by Thomas Eastham, who is described initially as an agricultural labourer and latterly as a cotton weaver.[26] Thomas Eastham is listed as a farmer residing at Pinfold Cottage in a trade directory for 1881, although the Census for that year records John Bradley, a railway worker, as the occupant,

suggesting that it was no longer a farm.[27] Pinfold Cottage is not listed in the Census for 1891, nor a trade directory for 1982, and the absence of the building from the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1893 implies that it had been demolished by that date. The excavation uncovered the fragmentary foundations of the building, enabling several phases in its developmental sequence to be elucidated.

Phase 1

The earliest structural evidence in the area was defined by two parallel trenches, 7.12-8.80m in length and 1.14-1.26m wide. These contained the vestiges of stone foundations for two walls (*W1* and *W2*), the majority of which had been 'robbed out' for re-use elsewhere. The alignment of walls *W1* and *W2* respected the layout of the later building, but did not correspond to the position of any surviving foundations. The fabric of walls *W1* and *W2* comprised facing courses of stone blocks separated by a rubble core, which were sealed beneath layers of sand and clay and cobble surfaces that derived from a later phase of remodelling and expansion of the building. Fragments of pottery collected from sections excavated through the wall foundation trenches included a single sherd of medieval date, lending weight to a suggesting that the walls belong to an early phase of the building.

Phase 2

The next phase of construction included the vestiges of two rubble-core walls (*W3* and *W4*) that formed the eastern end of the building. These were built of rounded, unworked stone set in a layer of clay. Although these walls had been damaged and partially removed by ploughing in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, two linear spreads of cobbles flanked by larger stones were visible. More substantial stone blockwork walls (*W5*, *W6* and *W10*) survived in the central part of the excavation area, delineating another rectangular room within the building. The eastern extent of this room was demarcated by wall *W3*. The fragmentary remains of

another brick wall that lay parallel to wall *W3* perhaps represented an internal structure such as a chimney or hearth in the adjacent room (Figure 10).

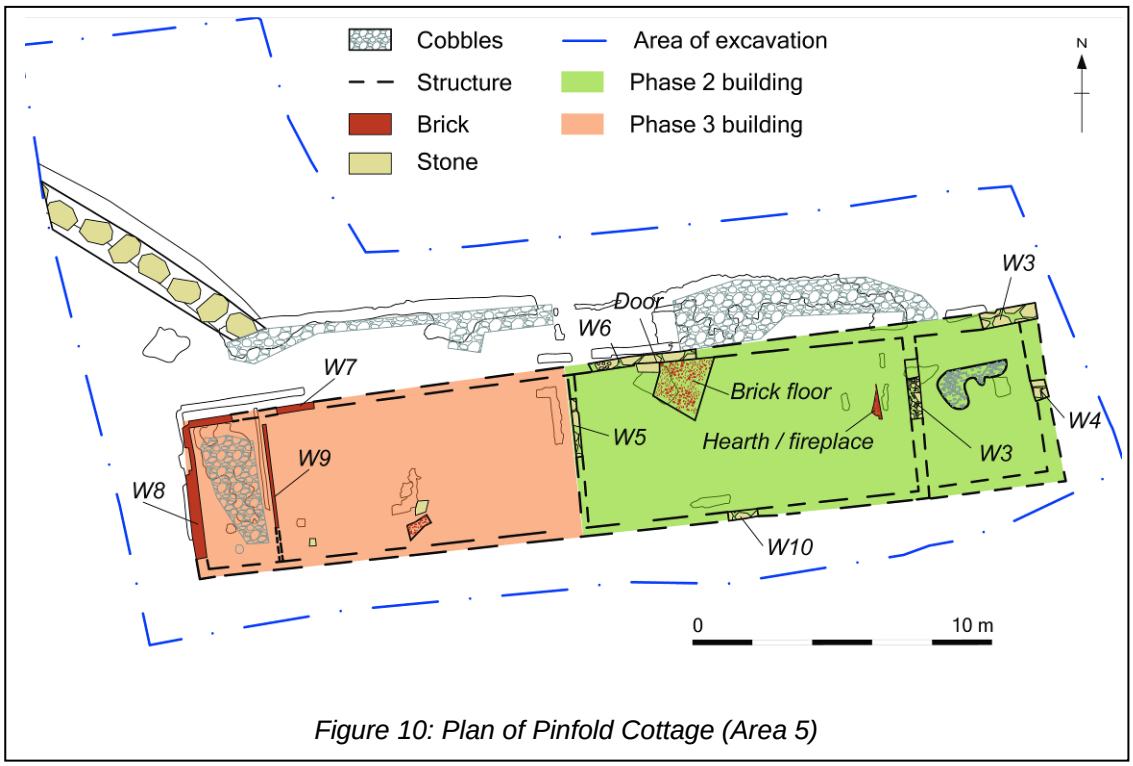

Figure 10: Plan of Pinfold Cottage (Area 5)

The northern wall (*W6*) survived largely as a single foundation course, and was formed of large, rectangular gritstone blocks varying between 0.55m and 0.70m in length with an average width of 0.25m. A socketed stone at the western end of the wall could have supported a door post, implying access to the building via a central doorway. This accords well with the surviving external surface to the north, composed of cobbles. A fragmented brick surface was visible within the interior of the building, adjacent to the northern wall.

Different walling techniques were exhibited in *W5* and *W10*. The southern wall (*W10*) was largely destroyed, with only a line of misshapen, unbonded sandstone blocks of various sizes visible. It survived as a single course and had maximum dimensions of 0.98m by 0.29m. The wall forming the western end of the room (*W5*) was 1.94m long and 0.34m wide, and was the only stone structure with obvious lime-based mortar. It incorporated neatly shaped, faced stone blockwork, cobbles and brick. Sporadic cobbling survived in the western room.

Phase 3

The latest phase of the structure was a brick addition on the western side of the building that was formed by three walls (*W7*, *W8* and *W9*). The use of hand-made bricks bonded with lime mortar suggests this was the latest part of the structure, perhaps constructed as late as the early nineteenth century. Floored with cobbles, it is uncertain whether this addition performed a purely domestic function, or was an ancillary structure such as a cartshed.

Along the northern edge of the building lay the remains of an external yard formed predominantly of cobbles, together with crushed stone, tile and brick. This surface survived in two main patches and incorporated a shallow gully, which ran into a drainage ditch to the north-west of the building. The alignment of the gully along the east/west axis of the building implies the gable ends of the building were on the east and west sides, allowing for the run-off of rainwater.

The artefactual assemblage from the site of Pinfold Cottage was largely unstratified with most of the material recovered from the layers immediately above the structural remains, thus reflecting a degree of post-depositional movement. The ceramic evidence, however, implies that the main period of occupation was between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Other finds of interest included a decorated lead spindle whorl, a token, and two large lead loom weights, providing good evidence for cottage-based textile manufacturing (Figure 11). A silvered plain button with a copper loop and head of a pewter spoon were also recovered from the excavation.

Figure 11: Lead spindle whorl and loom weights recovered from the excavation of Pinfold Cottage

Discussion

Prehistoric Periods

The distribution of known Mesolithic sites in Lancashire is sparse, although lowland locations occasionally produce isolated finds or lithic scatters. These tend to be concentrated in coastal areas, mosslands and river valleys, with the interface between different ecological zones frequently highlighted as favourable locations for prehistoric subsistence.[28]

Cuerden Green lies 2km from the eastern edge of Farington Moss, with the land rising to the east, steadily merging from drained lowland to woodland and upland. The topography within the site reflects this gentle rise, ranging from a height of 36m above Ordnance Datum in the west of the site to 53m in the east. Despite this seemingly attractive geographic position, few finds have been recovered to date that indicate an intense use of the neighbouring mossland or surrounding area in prehistory; only two undiagnostic flints were recovered at the edge of Farington Moss as part of the North West Wetland Survey in the 1990s. Documentary sources

shedding light on the historic exploitation of the moss portray an environment rich with material resources, but Mesolithic finds from the moss and its immediate environs are scarce, with issues pertaining to site visibility and land cover thought to be principal factors inhibiting finds retrieval. It seems unlikely, even given the paucity of finds, that such an environment would not have borne important resources in the prehistoric period.[29] This raises the possibility that although moss itself may not have been conducive to occupation, land on the fringes of the wetland, including Cuerden, may have been favourably positioned to exploit its resources. The discovery of the flint tool in the north of the site (Area 4) adds weight to this suggestion, representing a small yet significant contribution to the distribution maps of prehistoric activity.

To better place this find in its setting, it is important to also examine evidence pertaining to past environment. Palaeoecological evidence from the region indicates woodland reduction in coastal and upland settings, with episodic clearances in the lowlands.[30] The palynological content of the primary peat deposits dating to around 3770 cal B.C. at Farington Moss is dominated by alder and to a lesser extent birch, seen to reflect the presence of wooded areas at the fringe of the wetland with oak and hazel woodland beyond. Episodes of clearance, farming and regeneration are also suggested by the occurrence of agricultural taxa and regenerative species such as heather.[31] The implication is that there were heightened levels of human intervention in the landscape from the late Mesolithic period onwards. This may have taken place as intermittent clearances to improve hunting grounds, but was followed by instances of farming in the Neolithic and Bronze Age. When viewed in the context of finds in the wider area it helps reveal a fuller understanding for the catchment of prehistoric subsistence in this part of Central Lancashire. The Cuerden site appears to have encompassed a strategic, intermediary zone between the wetlands to the west and uplands to the east, bisected by the River Lostock.

The transition from hunting and gathering and seasonal occupation to more permanent settlement is often discussed as a unanimous change in the context of the Neolithic period in England (3500-2200 B.C.), although the process was more protracted in the North West with the degree of the permanence varying from area to area.[32] The distribution of known Neolithic sites has tended to be close to those known from the Mesolithic period in Lancashire, namely favourable locations that could have supported an expanding population in the Mesolithic.

The current state of understanding of Iron Age activity in Central Lancashire, or indeed the North West as a whole, reflects similar constraints to the preceding periods, and has been described as a 'black hole' regarding the current state of the knowledge. Broad trends can be drawn from pollen data, however, which points towards an intensification of woodland clearance and an increase in arable farming.[33] It is likely that the construction of the Roman road played an important role in stimulating clearance and settlement in the area, particularly in view of the easy access to Walton-le-Dale.

The Roundhouse

The pennanular gullies excavated in the southern part of the site (Area 6) have been interpreted as the remains of a roundhouse with an internal diameter of 9m, and whilst firm dating evidence was elusive, it is likely to represent Late Iron Age or early Romano-British settlement. Amongst the few comparable features discovered elsewhere in the area are two inter-cutting ring gullies that were identified during an archaeological excavation near Samlesbury in 2002 and interpreted as possible roundhouses. These two roundhouses had diameters of 8m and 11m, with no surviving floors and limited evidence of internal posts. One of the gullies contained a fragment of a rotary quern of a Late Iron Age or Romano-British date, whilst two flint tools of probable Late Mesolithic date were recovered from the second gully although

these were considered to be residual.[34] Evidence for roundhouses that measured 12m in diameter were also discovered during an archaeological excavation at Barker House Farm in Lancaster in 2003,[35] with further examples identified at Lathom, near Ormskirk, with diameters ranging from 8.50m to 13.40m.[36] The estimated size of the roundhouse excavated at Cuerden compares well with these other examples, and provides a welcome addition to a small but growing corpus of evidence for such structures in Lancashire.

The sunken metalled feature located adjacent to the roundhouse is thought to be contemporary. The surface comprised unworked stones similar to the metalling of the Roman road. There is a chance this hollow feature formed through footfall or traffic alongside the road, and that the metalling was introduced to make it hardwearing.

A series of trackways with evidence of rutting found at Lathom, near Ormskirk, provide a broad comparison. Rounded and tabular stones as well as shattered stone had been used, possibly to stabilise the surface; one trackway was found in close proximity to a series of roundhouses.[37] The arcing shape of the surface at Cuerden is perhaps less redolent of a trackway and could have formed more incidentally through a combination of wear and stabilisation rather than a concerted effort to establish a track. Hollows formed in a less ordered manner are documented at an Iron Age / Romano-British site in Hinkley, Leicestershire. Here, numerous depressions formed at the entrances to enclosures and contained frequent pebble inclusions.[38] The position and orientation of feature *F6* are consistent with its use in this manner, though it could equally have been used as external working area beyond the roundhouse. The occurrence of post-holes and an elongated pit nearby raise the possibility that other external structures, possibly associated with domestic activity, were placed nearby.

Roman Road

The discovery of a substantial metalled surface, together with signs of roadside activity that included a probable roundhouse and series of associated features, represent the first significant signs of permanence in the local landscape. The excavated metalled surface (*R1*) has been interpreted as part of the main arterial road connecting the Roman settlements at Northwich and Lancaster, which crossed the River Mersey at Wilderspool, on the southern fringe of Warrington, and continued north through Wigan and to Preston via a ford across the River Ribble at Walton-le-Dale.[39] This alignment formed the western of the two main Roman routes on the west side of the Pennines, with the eastern route linking Buxton with forts at Manchester, Ribchester, Overborrow, Low Borrow Bridge, Brougham and Carlisle. The latter had been considered by some to represent the main conquest route of the Roman army in the late 70s A.D, with the western route along the coast being a later addition to the road network, being constructed in the late Flavian or Trajanic period (*c*. 85-117 A.D.).[40] However, this view has been challenged more recently in the light of discoveries in Staffordshire and Cheshire, with the western route being proposed as part of the principal conquest route and its construction dating to the early Flavian period (69-77 A.D.).[41]

The section of this road between Wigan and Walton-le-Dale would have carried Roman traffic across a lowland plain, flanked to the west by lower-lying land and mosses and to the east by the gently rising uplands. The wetland mosses would have presented significant challenges for road construction, and it seems unlikely that Roman surveyors would have entirely disregarded local knowledge of the landscape or utilised existing trackways when plotting the course of a new road. Indeed, an archaeological excavation of a section of the Manchester to Chester Roman road at Broadheath near Altrincham in 1996, for instance, revealed an undisturbed buried turf horizon of Late Bronze Age date (a calibrated radio-carbon

date of B.C. 835-785) below the Roman road surface, which was interpreted as evidence for a prehistoric routeway.[42] A similar discovery was made beneath the Roman road between Manchester and Wigan at Land Gate Lane, Ashton-under-Makerfield, where a lens of relict soil sealed below the construction layers of the Roman road returned a calibrated date of 931 B.C. (Late Bronze Age). In this instance, however, it was concluded that the carbon likely derived from a deliberate clearance of vegetation or else arose as a result of natural events.[43]

The location and alignment of the Roman road in Cuerden deviates from the course set out by antiquarians in the nineteenth century, who favoured a route following the course of the modern A49 (Wigan-Euxton-Clayton-le-Woods-Bamber Bridge-Walton-le-Dale). In the immediate landscape of the site, the alignment suggests the road diverged from the present Stanifield Lane heading north-north-east towards Old School Lane, the principal historic route through Cuerden Green towards the River Lostock.

The surviving elements of the Roman road comprised a large area of metalling together with the eastern roadside ditch. Gravel was the principal construction material, comprised largely of rounded stones presumably derived from a nearby watercourse, the nearest source being the River Lostock. The availability of building material would have been a determining factor in road construction and the preference of gravel at Cuerden may reflect its local abundance, although the application of the gravel was not entirely as may have been anticipated. Sections excavated through the road revealed a thin surfacing above a bedding layer. The thickness of the metalling may reflect usage and wear, or even damage through farming activity after the road fell out of use. The exposed section of road was constructed directly above the natural clay with very little evidence of the archetypal agger. The slight camber was achieved through a greater levelling of bedding and

gravel in the middle; the material thinned out at the edges of the road where it sloped away, presumably allowing run-off of surface water into the adjacent ditches.

Estimations of the road's width were made on the basis of the surviving extent of metalling, indicating a probable width of approximately 11m. This compares favourably with a section of the road near Worden Hall Park that was reported to be '13 yards wide' (11.89m) by Thompson Watkin in the nineteenth century.[44] Similarly, a series of investigations carried out by the Wigan Archaeological Society along the course of the road to the east of Brimelow Farm, some 2km to the north of Wigan town centre, exposed the remains of a metalled surface with a shallow ditch along its western side, and concluded that the road measured approximately 10m wide.[45]

The course of the Roman road further south, between Wigan and the crossing of the River Mersey at Wilderspool, on the southern fringe of Warrington, has also been subject to archaeological investigation, including a section on Land Gate Lane near Ashton-in-Makerfield, some 4.5km to the south of Wigan. This was excavated in 2018, and revealed the Roman road to have been about 6m wide and set between two ditches.[46] Similar results were obtained from an archaeological evaluation at Bryn, a short distance to the south of Land Gate Lane, carried out by the Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit in 1993. The road was found to be at least 5m wide, and was constructed using irregular-shaped blocks of sandstone, bedded onto a base of sand and gravel, with a gently cambered profile.[47] Further south, the Roman road was examined at several locations around Newton-le-Willows between 1928 and 1932 by Dunlop and Fairclough, who concluded that it varied in width from just 14 feet to 24 feet (4.3m-7.3m).[48] This was corroborated by an excavation on Acorn Street in Newton-le-Willows in 1995, where the distance between the inner edges of the two roadside ditches was found to be 4.7m.[49] The archaeological evidence from these excavations suggests that the Wigan to Walton-le-Dale road was somewhat

wider than the section between Warrington and Wigan, implying that it was built by a different road-building gang, and possibly at a different date.

There is slight evidence to suggest that the road persisted as a landscape feature for a considerable period after the collapse of formal Roman administration in the fifth century A.D. Its alignment is respected by later agricultural features, the most prominent being a north/south-aligned field boundary of probable post-medieval date that lay parallel to the western edge of the road. The configuration of the surrounding fields similarly appeared to respect the line of the Roman road, forming a seam in the landscape that is captured on historic mapping and aerial photographs.

Evidence of continuity in the use of the Roman road has also been brought to light during the excavation at Land Gate Lane in Ashton-in-Makerfield, where sherds of thirteenth- to fourteenth-century pottery were recovered from the upper fill of a roadside ditch, above a fill containing exclusively Roman material.[50] The apparent stratification of finds within a rural context raises the possibility that the road network had a prolonged period of use after the decline of Roman administration. Similarly, the excavation on Acorn Street in Newton-le-Willows in 1995 revealed that a probable palisade had been constructed along one edge of the road between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, implying that the road was still a visible feature at that date.[51]

Medieval Land-use and Settlement

Virtually nothing is known of the type of buildings used in this part of Lancashire during the medieval period. Higham suggests that whilst timber construction was the norm, even for some higher-status buildings, the vernacular building tradition might well have relied on turf- or clay-walled structures, which would leave little or no archaeological trace.[52] From the evidence available, however, it is possible to suggest that parcels of land within the site were being brought under cultivation from

the late 1100s. The increase of rural activity in low-lying areas of Lancashire at this time resulted in the nucleation of settlement and cultivation of strip fields, which were farmed communally.[53] The excavation yielded evidence for the cultivation of arable crops, suggesting that land-use took the form of small-scale arable farming, with foci close to the hamlet of Cuerden Green.

The suite of features excavated in Area 1 provides some indication of how part of this landscape was managed. A key element was the post-built structure (*STR2*), the arrangement of which is consistent with plans of excavated medieval barns found across England, typified by two lines of post-holes forming the outer walls and roof support. The size of the *STR2* is comparatively smaller than most known twelfth-century examples, which range anywhere from 7m to 25m in length and 5m to 11m in breadth, although a site excavated in Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire, contained a barn with a central trench along its axis, broadly comparable with the feature in *STR2*.[54] The shed-sized barn is perhaps consistent with the small-scale nature of arable cultivation in this part of the site.

The morphology and size of the furrows encountered in Area 1 are of particular interest as they deviate from the broad and regular pattern of late medieval / post-medieval farming commonly encountered in the North West. The narrow, uneven features are more redolent of the scars left by earlier cultivation techniques. A similar style of cultivation now largely extinct was previously widespread in upland areas of Scotland. In such locations pre-existing boundaries and topography led to small plots of land being cultivated, intensively by hand. This typically resulted in larger banks or ‘rigs’ separated by narrow drainage channels, which display considerable variation in their size and morphology. Whether the drainage features at Cuerden were of a similar form or indeed were dug manually is open to debate. There are certain attributes that would suggest they were ploughed rather than dug, most conspicuous being the extended length of some of the furrows. The lack of a fixed point at which

they terminate furthermore implies that no formal field boundary or headland was in place, and that the area was initially farmed in an open-field system, placed perhaps advantageously adjacent to line of the former Roman road.

What may have prompted the choice to adopt this form of cultivation presents several avenues for inquiry. The apparent small-scale nature of the farming may reflect constraints imposed by earlier enclosures or landscape features. Alternatively, it could reflect the emphasis placed on other aspects of the agricultural economy, namely pastoralism, which in the post-medieval period eclipsed arable farming in the area almost entirely. Whatever the impetus, it does appear to represent something of a crossover between small-scale arable farming found in upland Scotland and more intensive, open-field ploughing witnessed elsewhere in Britain at this time.

Settlement

The earliest features revealed in Area 1 (*F13* and *STR2*) were dated to the late twelfth to mid-thirteenth century through a combination of radio-carbon assay and ceramic dating evidence. Coincidentally, this date matches the first written references to Cuerden in 1212. From the evidence available, it is possible that ditch *F13* and post-built structure *STR2* formed elements of the field system serving medieval hamlet of Cuerden Green, one of several scattered hamlets that probably existed in a nascent form at this time.

The post-built structure *STR2* was removed and ditch *F13* in the eastern part of the site was infilled in the early fourteenth century. After a presumed hiatus, perhaps reflecting the national trend for a rise and subsequent fall in population of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, activity appears to have shifted to the west. The next phase was manifested by substantial new ditches, forming the eastern edge of two small rectangular enclosures along the west of the excavation area. These were dated by a proliferation of pottery sherds dating to the fifteenth and sixteenth

centuries. The position of these boundaries coincides neatly with the alignment of later tofts, which are depicted along on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mapping (Figure 11).

The Pottery

The assemblage of pottery recovered from the excavation is of considerable interest, especially the medieval component, as it enables a timeframe for the stratigraphic sequence to be elucidated and also furnishes a new insight into the development, dating and chronology of ceramic traditions. Very little well-stratified medieval pottery has been found beyond high-status sites such as castles and abbeys across the region, especially in Lancashire,[55] and the assemblage from Cuerden is one of the most significant to have been collected from a medieval rural settlement in the North West. The largest assemblage of medieval pottery from an archaeological excavation in Lancashire to date is that from Potter Lane near Samlesbury, approximately 9km to the north-east of Cuerden. This excavation provided evidence for the site having been used as a centre for the production of ceramic vessels between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, with more than 10,000 sherds of pottery being collected.[56] The dates ascribed to the various types of pottery from Potter Lane were based to some degree on a ceramic sequence devised from extensive and well-stratified excavations for Carlisle, where fragments of pottery from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries could be closely dated by dendrochronology and other stratified artefacts such as coins.[57] There are obvious pitfalls to ascribing dates to pottery based on broadly comparable material excavated in Carlisle, over 140km to the north, but given a dearth of an alternative dataset there is little alternative to anticipating that the transition from Northern Gritty-type wares dominated by utilitarian jars to Partially Reduced Grey wares with a wider range of decorated forms occurred throughout Cumbria and Lancashire during the thirteenth century.

Analysis of the medieval pottery from Cuerden has provided a unique opportunity to verify the accuracy of typological dating techniques when applied to a rural site in Lancashire, as some of the pottery was found in stratified contexts that also contained material suitable for radio-carbon dating. The fragments recovered from post-built structure *STR2*, for instance, may be dated typologically to the late twelfth or thirteenth century, whilst radio-carbon dating from the same post-hole returned a calibrated range of A.D. 1193-1241. Similarly, the group of pottery from the fill of ditch *F13* was dated typologically to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, whilst radio-carbon assay provided a calibrated range of A.D. 1270-1318.

The pottery assemblage also provides a rare example of the type and range of vessels that were used in rural Lancashire, and a snapshot of the evolution of ceramic traditions between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. The occurrence of late medieval Reduced Greenware in association with Cistercian wares and Midland Purple wares in well-stratified fifteenth-century contexts, moreover, is unique in rural Lancashire, and contributes to an enhanced understanding of the distribution patterns of these key transitional wares.

In conclusion, the archaeological investigation at Cuerden has yielded significant evidence for the development of this part of Central Lancashire from prehistory through the Romano-British and medieval periods, to the origins of the modern landscape in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. New light has been shed on archaeological research objectives for each period, not least of which are confirmation of the precise course and form of the Roman road, the character of a medieval agricultural settlement in Lancashire and long-awaited independent dating of associated ceramics.

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