

Etherstone Hall Project

Dig Greater Manchester

Between 2006 and 2008 a series of community excavations were undertaken in Manchester under the title of Dig Manchester. Sites included in the project were at Moston Hall, Northenden Mill and Wythenshawe Park. They involved a unique collaboration between the City Council, University, Heritage Lottery Fund, sponsors and local communities. One of the goals of the project was to get children from inner city areas to aspire to higher education at the University of Manchester. But it was also very successful in encouraging both young and old to get involved and learn more about their local heritage. Now the Centre for Applied Archaeology (CfAA) base at Salford University is expanding the project to include authority across the county. Fortunately for us, Wigan has been selected as the lead borough and over the past year or so, plans have been put in place to select a suitable site. Possible sites looked at have included Haigh Hall and Hawkley Hall, but the site eventually chosen is Etherstone Hall near the new Sports Village in Leigh.

Etherstone Hall

This site dates from the early 15th century and is thought to have originally been a Medieval hall surrounded by a moat (map evidence suggests the moat was a sub-rectangular enclosure flanked by two linear ponds). A 'new' hall was built in 1826, the farmstead greatly enlarged and the grounds radically altered. This hall was demolished in 1908 and the rest of the farmstead between 1972 and 1985. In 2006 the University of Manchester Archaeology Unit (UMAU) were commissioned to



undertake an archaeological evaluation of the site in advance of the proposed Sports Village complex. Four trenches were dug and evidence for the 1826 construction was uncovered. Significantly, however, they also identified a large cut feature which proved to be Medieval in date as well as industrial activity dating to the early post-Medieval period. There seems, therefore, to be a lot of potential archaeology on this site.

The Project

The Dig Greater Manchester Project is funded by the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) and Wigan Borough Council who are keen supporters of the project. The dig at Leigh is scheduled for the week beginning 5th March and will last for two weeks. The team from Salford will be on site on the 1st and 2nd March to set it up

and then excavations proper will start on Monday 5th. The dig is open to everyone during the fortnight and places will be available for up to 3 full days (not necessarily consecutive). More may be on offer if there are spaces not taken up. The team will also be on site on Saturday 10th March for those who are working during the week and also Saturday 17th March which will be the open day. The site will then be closed down and any drawing that needs to be finished on 19th and 20th March. This is a great opportunity for anyone interested in archaeology to work alongside the professionals on a site which has great potential. If you are interested in getting involved please contact myself or Eric Walter on 01942 820957 or E-mail eric.walter@hotmail.co.uk with your preferred dates.

Further Opportunities

If you can't make it this time there will be another opportunity in July when the main excavations take place. These could even be at Haigh Hall in Wigan if Etherstone Hall does not produce the expected results (as this is just the evaluation phase of the project). The second phase will be wholly fund by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund which the Wigan Archaeological Society is currently in the process of applied for.

Please see <http://www.wiganarchsoc.co.uk/Forum/read.php?18,1090> for more information and updates.