

**An Archaeological Watching Brief
At Castle Street, Liverpool
Merseyside.
Site Code 130**

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Produced for Liverpool City Council

June 2011

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Non-Technical Summary

This report describes the results of an archaeological watching brief conducted during road improvement works at Castle Street, Liverpool, Merseyside.

The site is recorded in the Merseyside Historic Environment Record (HER 3490-004) and lies within the Liverpool World Heritage Site and forms part of the historic core of the city, being one of the original streets laid out within the medieval borough when it was established in 1207 AD. The principal focus of this project was 'The Sanctuary Stone', a crudely carved boulder set within the road surface. Its precise origins and history are unclear, though traditionally it is believed to have been one of the markers for the boundary of Liverpool's fair which was held twice yearly in the area to the north. The precise date at which the fairs ceased to be held is unclear, though they had lapsed by the early 19th century.

The Sanctuary Stone was accidentally disturbed whilst road works were in progress and at the time of the site visit was loose within its setting. The stone was lifted and the setting partly excavated revealing two pennies of 1937 and 1947 beneath the stone, thus showing that it was probably placed in its current setting, which is cast in concrete, sometime after 1947.

Monitoring continued around the immediate area surrounding the Sanctuary Stone's setting as tarmac and a lower layer of setts were removed. No significant archaeological deposits were observed and it was concluded that the present location of the stone was last set during the removal of tramways post-1957.

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An Archaeological Watching Brief at Castle Street, Liverpool, Merseyside

1. Introduction

This report describes the results of two archaeological watching briefs at Castle Street, Liverpool, Merseyside. The project was commissioned from National Museums Liverpool Field Archaeology Unit (NMLFAU) by the Liverpool City Council and was undertaken on 24 January and 17 June 2011. Documentary research was undertaken following fieldwork.

The site is located within the historic core of Liverpool and falls within the bounds of the medieval borough established in 1207 AD (Fig. 1). This part of Liverpool is part of the Liverpool Maritime Mercantile City World Heritage Site (WHS) (<http://www.liverpoolworldheritage.com/>) and as such is covered by a Supplementary Planning Document adopted by Liverpool City Council on 9th October 2009 (<http://www.liverpoolvision.co.uk/Docs/DownloadDocs/Liverpool%20Maritime%20Mercantile%20City%20World%20Heritage%20Site%20Supplementary%20Planning%20Document.pdf>). The Unitary Development Plan (Section HD17) is also relevant.

Section 5.7.2 of the WHS Supplementary Planning Document states: '*The City Council considers that the entirety of the WHS is an area of suspected archaeological importance under the terms of UDP policy HD17. All developments in the WHS will therefore need to follow the guidance set out in Policy HD17 i, ii, iii and iv*'. Effectively this recommends that the archaeological impact of all works within the WHS be assessed at an early stage.

The project was commissioned by the client following the accidental or deliberate loosening of the stone within its setting which occurred during road improvement works on Castle Street. At the time the stone lay outside the area of on-going works but was due to be removed under archaeological conditions later in the scheme. The works are part of a wider scheme of road improvements in Liverpool city centre.

2. Archaeological and Historical Background

Castle Street forms part of the core of the medieval borough of Liverpool which was granted letters patent establishing it as a borough by King John in 1207 AD. The earlier history of the settlement is not clear. Liverpool is not mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086, though it may one of six berewicks or farms attached to the manor of West Derby. The earliest mention of the placename is in a charter of 1190-4 and there is little direct evidence for settlement pre-dating the medieval borough, though several Roman coins found within the city centre hint at contemporary activity and the letters patent of 1207 hint at the presence of an existing settlement.

The original borough was relatively small consisting of six streets arranged in an H plan. The castle, situated at the southern end of Castle Street, in the area now occupied by Derby Square, and Castle Street was probably established in c. 1235. Despite the benefits granted by borough status the settlement does not appear to have been especially prosperous, remaining a relatively minor harbour, farming and fishing village compared to the ports of Chester and Lancaster. The reasons for this were complex, though key factors appear to have been lack of access to the continental wool trade, competition from Chester (which held the Customs House),

the difficulty of navigating the Mersey and the gradual silting of the Pool in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Liverpool only began to flourish as a port from the early 18th century, largely as a result of the construction of the Old Dock in c. 1715, the world's first commercial enclosed wet dock. From the 18th century onwards Liverpool developed rapidly, the original medieval core of the city becoming part of its commercial centre dominated by the offices, warehouses and other buildings necessary for the operation of one of the largest ports in the British Empire. One of the consequences of this rapid development was that from the 18th century to the mid-20th century, buildings within the city centre were being constantly demolished and replaced by new structures. Whilst this has left central Liverpool with a very rich architectural heritage of 19th and early 20th century buildings, it has resulted in there being very little surface evidence of its earlier origins.

The Sanctuary Stone is probably the only extant surface monument of the city's medieval past. However, its origins are obscure, there being no specific references to it in either of the city's charters of 1207 and 1229 or in Liverpool's Town Books which begin in the 1550's. It is believed to be one of the boundary markers for Liverpool's fairs, which are first mentioned in 1292-1296 (OS Record Card in MSMR) and which from at least 1327 were held at St. Martin's day, November 11 (Kermode, Hollinshead & Gratton, 2006, 63) and on St. James' day, 25 July (ibid, 82). There were presumably other markers of the fair's limits, the Sanctuary Stone is believed to mark its south-western point. Perry's Map of Liverpool of 1769 (Fig. 2) shows a circular mark with a dot in the centre at the junction of Dale Street and Stanley Street and this is presumed to have been one of the other sanctuary stones referred to in antiquarian accounts, though it does not survive (HER 3490-003). Interestingly Perry's map does not show the Sanctuary Stone on Castle Steet. The positions of any other markers are unknown and none of the other late 18th and early 19th century maps of the city (e.g. Eyes (1785), Horwood (1803), Kaye (1816), Walker (1823)) show either the Sanctuary Stone or the Dale Street marker.

The fairs were centred on the High Cross which stood at the junction of Dale Street, Castle Street and Juggler Street (now High Street) and were subject to their own regulation, each day of the fair and for ten days before and after '...all persons coming to or leaving the fair were free from arrest and any disputes or offences arising within the fair were dealt with summarily' (OS Record Card in MHER).

This freedom is that referred to by Touzeau (1910, 186) who cites a proclamation issued by the Mayor in 1638, i.e.

' Thomas Eccleston, gen. Maior of the Kinges Maties Burrough & Porte Towne of Liv'pool and his Matie's Leivetente wthin the same town, and lib'ties thereof Giveth open monicon & notice, that all & ev'ry p'son & p'sons that have anything to doe at this fayre May have quiett and free Egress & Regresse in and from the same during the accustomed tyme without any arreaste or other molestacon by reason of any p'cesse or warrante issueing out of the said Maior's Corte during that tyme. And further the said Mr. Maior strictly Chardgeth and commandeth in the King's Maties name all mann'r of p'sons here assembled or to bee assembled, that they & ev'y one of them keep his Maties peace & quietly & honestly as good subjects ought to Carrie & demeane themselves as they & ev'y of them will avoyde such paynes & punishmts. as by the lawe may justly be inflicted upon them for such their demerritts & evil Carriage. And furthermore they said Mr. Maior willeth & Requireth all manor of p'sons that shall find themselves agreived by Reason of any wronge or offence done

unto them, That they forthwth Repaire to the said Maior, who will Remedily heare their greevances and administer such speedy and due Redresse therein as shalbe according to law & justice-God save the Kinge'. (Sic)

Whether these freedoms pre-date this proclamation is uncertain, though it is likely that this document is merely a restatement of existing customs relating to the fair.

The first antiquarian references to the Sanctuary Stone date to the early 19th century. Troughton (1810, 94) provides a description of the opening of the fair when '*...the mayor, bailiffs and burgesses, in their gowns, went in procession with a band of music, from the exchange to the middle of Dale Street, where they passed round a large stone, white washed for the occasion, and thence proceeded to another stone in the centre of Castle Street, and back to the exchange, where they dined. The dinner tables were furnished in a most superb and luxurious style, and the populace were admitted to behold this display of plenty and elegance, which was then thought a gratifying sight. This ancient custom has been discontinued about fifty years...*' (i.e. since c. 1760). The reference to a stone in Castle Street is almost certainly to the Sanctuary Stone.

Picton (1873, 25-26) locates the Sanctuary Stone '60 yards south of the Town Hall' (i.e. close to its present position) and mentions the privilege of freedom from arrest before, during and after the fair and also records that this was marked by '*...a huge hand thrust out in front of the Town-Hall, as in the act of blessing, or as a sign of protection*' (Brooke (1853, 113) mentions that the hand was made of wood). Picton dates the end of the fairs to 1835 and the passing of the Municipal Reform Act, whereas Brooke seems to suggest that they continued into the 1850s.

Touzeau (1910, 186) places the Sanctuary Stone at a similar location to Picton, providing the additional information that it was located '*...between the Second Tramway Standard from the Town Hall and the footpath on the west side of the street...*'. He was of the opinion that the four lines engraved on its surface were an act of 'unaccountable vandalism' intended to give it a similar appearance to the surrounding setts. Touzeau also believed that the Dale Street/Stanley Street stone was lost when the area was repaved following the construction of the tramway lines which would place its disturbance to sometime after c. 1865. However, Brooke (1853) makes no mention of the Dale Street/Stanley Street stone, so presumably it had already been removed. The absence of this marker from early 19th century maps suggests that Brooke was correct.

It is unlikely that the Sanctuary Stone is in its exact original position, Castle Street was widened on at least one occasion, in 1786 (Stonehouse 1880, 55), and the road surface has been continually renewed and replaced since. None of the available 19th century OS maps (in 1846 and 1892) of Liverpool mark the position of the stone.

Prior to the present project the stone was set into the carriageway on Castle Street where it was visible as a roughly circular slab of greenish stone c. 0.45 m in diameter. Four parallel lines were incised into its surface and were aligned east-west. The stone type was identified as Borrowdale Volcanics by Philip Phillips of NMGM's Geology Department in 1981 (Note in MHER file) and is likely to be a glacial erratic.

3. Watching Brief Methodology and Aims

No formal brief or method statement was produced though NMLFAU's standard procedures for watching briefs were followed throughout. The project consisted of the

monitoring the lifting of the Sanctuary Stone, excavation and recording of the underlying deposits.

All archaeological fieldwork was undertaken by M. Adams and C. Ahmad.

4. Results

Prior to lifting the Sanctuary Stone was loose within its setting and was easily moved by hand (Plate 1). The tarmac around the stone appeared to have been loosened though it was impossible to determine whether this was deliberate or accidental. No obvious tool marks, e.g. from a pick, were seen in the tarmac and there was no evidence of damage to the stone's surface.

The stone was carefully levered out of its setting and found to be roughly lenticular in shape with a flat upper surface and a deeply dished base. Beneath the stone was a very compacted layer of black silty clay with frequent small pebbles up to 7mm across (Context 1) (Plate 2). On excavation this layer was found to be up to 10mm thick, thinning towards the top of the setting and coating the setting for the stone. It was presumably material added to seat the stone within its setting. The setting was formed in concrete (to be confirmed) cast to mirror the base of the stone (Plate 3). Two coins, both pennies, were found securely stratified within context 1 with dates of 1937 and 1947. The Sanctuary Stone was therefore placed in its present position sometime after 1947 but before decimalization in 1971.

The second phase of the watching brief consisted of monitoring the removal of tarmac and a lower layer of setts associated with *in-situ* tramlines dating from the 1860s or later. This had originally been recommended within a 10 m radius of the stone's setting. However, monitoring was terminated at an approximate 5 m radius when it became clear that no significant archaeological deposits were present and that the setts were continuous and consistent as a layer.

A mechanical breaker was used to break through the upper tarmac surface (Context 2) surrounding the Sanctuary Stone's concrete setting which was also shattered during excavation (Plate 4). The tarmac deposit overlay an *in-situ* layer of rectangular stone setts (Context 3) and a tramline to the east, observed in previous sections of excavation along Castle Street. The depth of tarmac varied from 70 – 100 mm over the setts.

The setts had been cut by a later service trench or drain which cut through the central area of exposed setts, to the west of the Sanctuary Stone setting, and had been backfilled with a dump of loose slate fragments (Context 4). Tarmac over Context 4 reached a depth of c. 0.37 m. (Plate 5)

Immediately below the setts on either side of the slate in-fill (Context 4) was a layer of concrete (Context 5) at a depth of 0.23 – 0.26 m below ground surface. A roughly circular impression from the Sanctuary Stone's concrete setting was visible surrounded by concrete at a depth of 0.23 m. The impression was filled with a compacted mid-brown gravel deposit (Context 6) containing frequent small pebbles and was presumably laid as a base for the concrete setting (Plate 6).

No further excavation took place as ground works were not going below the concrete surface (Context 5) i.e. to a depth of 0.30 – 0.40 m.

5. Conclusions

The Sanctuary Stone is a unique relic of Liverpool's medieval origins, being the only extant element of the medieval landscape to have survived to the present within the city's historic core. It marked the southern limit of the city's summer and winter fairs which were subject to their own legislation. Although the fairs can be traced to the early 13th century, the protection from prosecution within their bounds can only be traced with certainty to the mid-17th century. However, it is likely that the mayor's proclamation of 1663 was merely a restatement of customs which had been in force since the fair's beginnings.

When combined with the documentary evidence the results of the watching brief suggest that although the Sanctuary Stone is probably close to its original position, it has probably been moved and re-set on more than one occasion i.e.

- During the widening of Castle Street in 1786.
- During the laying of tramways in the 1860s or later.
- Sometime after 1947, possibly during the removal of tramways post-1957.

Several of the antiquarian sources describe it as the base of a truncated pillar. In fact it has more of the appearance of a boulder, probably a glacial erratic, selected for its hard wearing properties and distinctive appearance which would have contrasted markedly with the other commonly available local building materials.

The significance of the four lines inscribed on its upper surface is uncertain. They may indeed have been cut in order to make it blend in with the cobbles which surrounded it in the 19th century (Touzeau 1910, 186), though to modern eyes this would appear to be a peculiar action; it would have been easier to have replaced the by then redundant stone with cobbles. It is probably more likely that the lines are an original feature of the Sanctuary Stone.

6. Recommendations for Further Mitigation

Any new setting for the Sanctuary Stone should be designed with the following criteria in mind.

- Protection from damage and/or deterioration.
- Protection from unauthorized removal, whether accidental or deliberate.
- Celebrate the stone's cultural, historical and archaeological significance.
- Should be reversible and not in itself cause damage/deterioration.

The existing setting appears to have served the first and fourth criteria well since c. 1950. However, recent events suggest that it is not especially secure. In addition the only significant marker for the stone is a small plaque attached to an adjacent building. A roughly circular impression left by the concrete setting is visible within the layer lower of concrete, below the cobble setts, and could be used a location identifier when the stone is re-set.

7. Bibliography

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8. Figures

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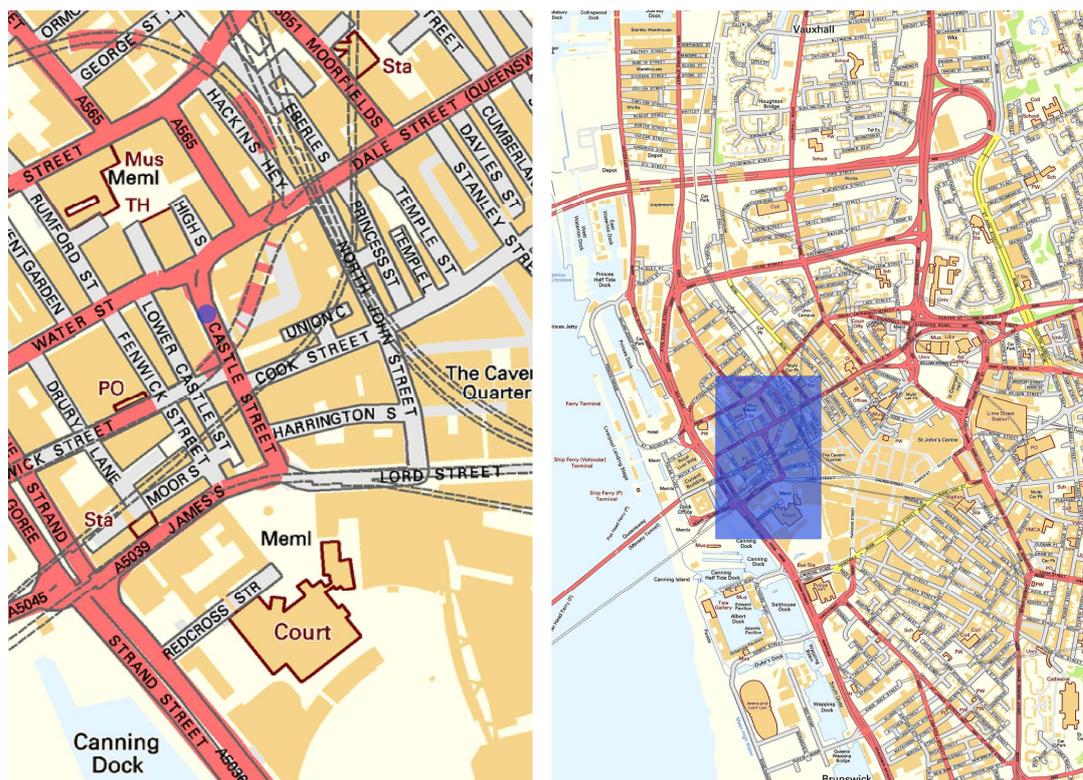


Fig. 1. Site location. Not to Scale.



Fig. 2. Part of G. Perry's 'Plan of the Town and Port of Liverpool' surveyed 1769. The circle at the junction of Dales Street and Stanley Street is presumed to be one of the boundary markers for the fair.

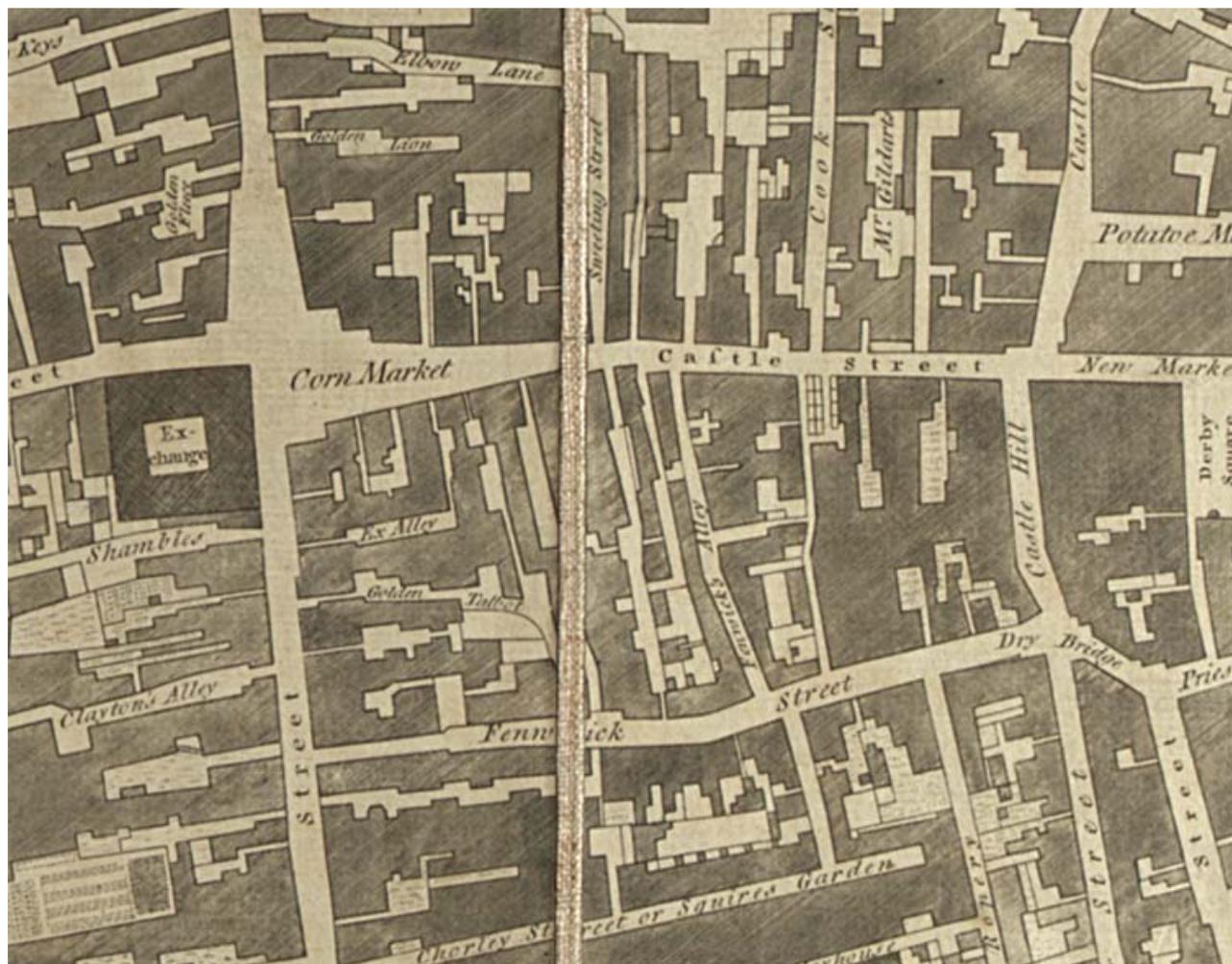


Fig. 3. Part of G. Perry's 'Plan of the Town and Port of Liverpool' surveyed 1769. This section shows Castle Street and there is no marker for the Sanctuary Stone.

9. Plates



Plate 1. The Sanctuary Stone prior to lifting. The disturbance around the edge of the stone was created prior to the site visit. Scale = 0.25 m.



Plate 2. Void left by removal of the Sanctuary Stone. Context 1 is the dark brown deposit. Scale = 0.25 m.



Plate 3. The stone's setting after the excavation of Context 1. Scale = 0.25 m.



Plate 4. Breaking through upper tarmac surface (Context 2) showing underlying setts (Context 3). View from north.



Plate 5. Area of excavation after removal of setts, (Context 2) to the west showing layer of concrete (Context 5) cut by loose slate linear fill (Context 4). Area to the east shows setts and tramline still *in situ*, east of sanctuary stone setting marked by 0.25 m scale. View from south-east.



Plate 6. Circular impression (Context 6) marking location of concrete setting for Sanctuary Stone surrounded by concrete layer (Context 5). Area to the east shows cobbled area and tramline still *in situ*. View from west. Scale = 0.25 m.