

Excavations at Peel Park Primary School, Accrington, Lancashire 2011

Draft Report

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Students and school children excavating in trench A on the original stand with the tree covered bank of the Peel Park Kop at the Huncoat end in the background

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I Introduction

Peel Park, Accrington was the home of the former Football League club Accrington Stanley from 1919 until shortly after their enforced resignation from the league in 1962. The ground is now the playing fields of Peel Park Primary School and is also the home ground of East Lancashire League side Peel Park FC. Excavation on the site of the stands and terraces at Peel Park was planned as a joint community archaeology project between the University of Central Lancashire, Peel Park Primary School and BBC Sport North West.

1.1 History of the Ground

The history of Accrington Stanley FC has been documented by Lindberg (2011) and Whalley (2001: 2006). The 1919/20 season was the first in which games were played at Peel Park: at that stage still without any facilities (Whalley 2001, 18). Over the next 43 years a series of documented ground developments took place. These can also be identified through map regression (see figure 1.1) and archive photographs (see particularly Whalley 2001). These developments can be summarized as follows. By the 1920/21 season the development of small roofed stand on the south east side of the ground near the Peel Park Hotel had taken place (usually referred to as the 'original stand' or 'Hotel side stand'). The terrace banks on all four sides of the ground were also in place by the beginning of the 1920/21 season, including a substantial enclosure on the Burnley Road side; although the concrete terracing wasn't built in these areas until 'around 1930' (Lindberg 2011). Before the 1922/23 season the original stand had been extended northwards to twice its original length along the Hotel side and forwards to cover the pitchside terracing (Whalley 2001, 20-21).

The club paid off the mortgage on the ground in February 1948 (Kynaston 2008, 265). This was the spur for major redevelopments and a much larger new open terrace was constructed at the Huncoat end of the ground. Around this date the upper parts of most of the other terraces were also extended in concrete (Lindberg 2011). The landscaping for some of this development is visible in pre-season training photographs from August 1950; the work was completed by supporters to create the Peel Park Kop for the beginning of the 1953/54 season (Whalley 2001, 36). At the same time Stanley became one of the first clubs to install permanent floodlighting. Contemporary aerial photographs (Lindberg 2011) show eight pitch-side pylons: four along each of the long sides of the pitch. Further work on the facilities took place in 1955 with improvements to perimeter walls, offices and toilets and another increase in ground capacity suggesting more additional terracing (Lindberg 2011).

The final, and most notorious, ground development at Peel Park was the new Burnley Road stand added at the beginning of the 1958/59 season (Whalley 2001, 57). The structure had been bought from Aldershot Military Tattoo and the cost of transport and erection was a severe burden on the club's finances just at a point when attendances declined following a slump in playing form (Lindberg 2011). The Burnley Road stand quickly came to be seen as a white elephant and is still remembered in the town as a primary cause of the financial difficulties which led to the collapse of the club in 1962.

Football continued at Peel Park at various levels after 1962 but the infrastructure gradually and inevitably began to decay. Most dramatically, the original Hotel side stand was destroyed by fire in April 1972 (Lindberg 2011). Peel Park had been sold to the town council in 1965 and by the late 70s demolition and restoration work had returned the ground to an open

playing field. The only surviving structure from the league football ground is a small brick building built by the supporters association in 1937 behind the original Hotel side stand. This is currently used by Peel Park FC as their changing rooms.

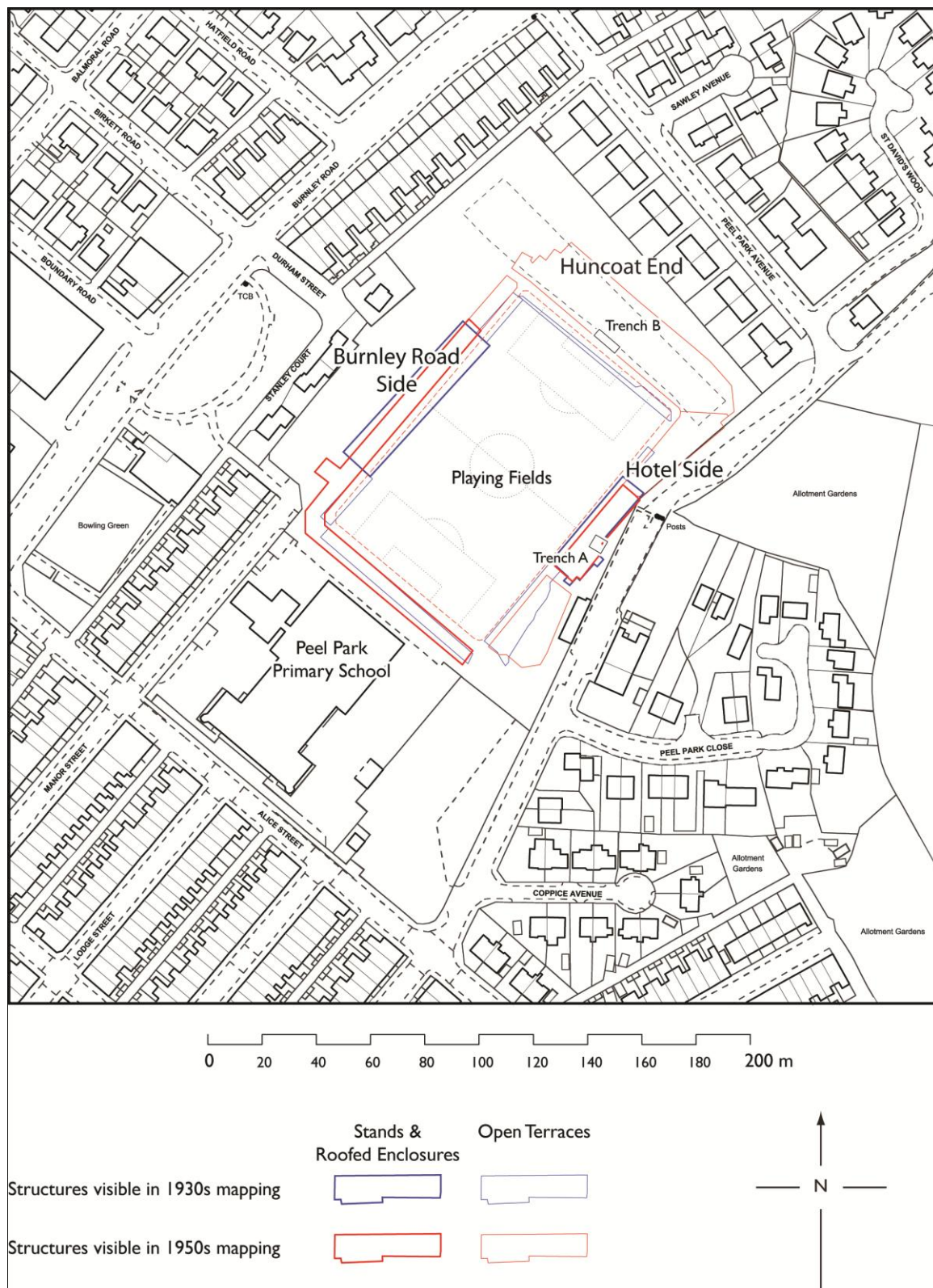


Figure 1.1 location of excavations at Peel Park and map regression evidence for the ground developments

Two areas were excavated over four days. Trench A was a 5 x 5 m area sited over part of the original Hotel side stand and Trench B was a 10 x 3 m area opened over the front edge of the Peel Park Kop at the Huncoat End (figure 1.1).



Immediately beneath the modern turf at site A was a 0.17 m thick layer of modern topsoil, context I – very dark brown friable clay loam. Within this layer were large quantities of building material fragments, including brick, concrete, iron fittings, glass, wood and plentiful evidence of burning in the form of vitrified and charred objects. Once this layer was

removed a further spread of debris was identified over the whole excavated area. This was context 2, a very dark grey compact sandy clay loam around 0.30 m deep, which similarly contained large quantities of burnt and broken building material (figure 2.3). At this stage of the excavation it was decided to limit excavation of the layers beneath context 2 to a 2 x 5 m strip along the southern edge of the original excavation area (see figure 2.1). Following the removal of context 2 in this area a complex of surviving structures and further demolition layers was visible. These are reported below with the most recent layers described first (figure 2.2 and appendix 1).

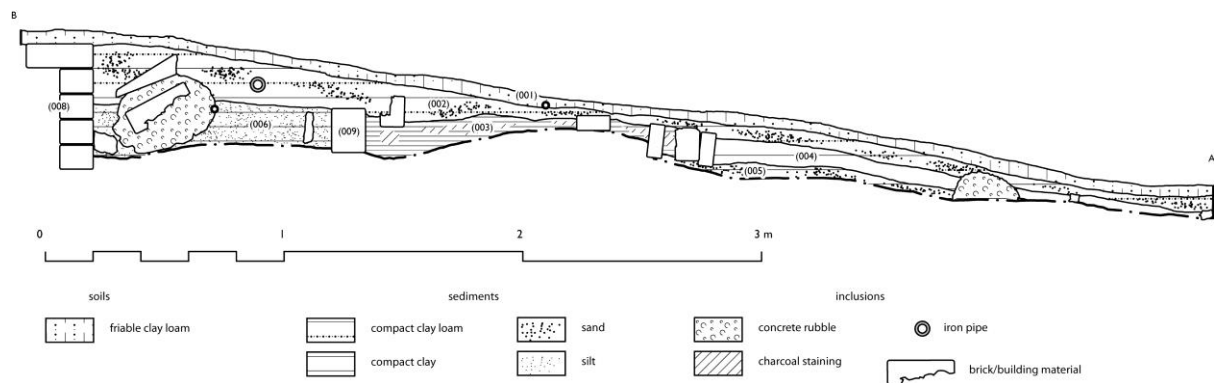


Figure 2.2: section through deposits in trench A along the southern edge of the trench

Context 3 was a compact mix of heavily charcoal-stained clay with further demolition rubble: particularly bricks and charred timber. It was between 0.35 m and 0.11 m deep in the excavated section: being shallower towards the west end of the deposit.



Figure 2.3: demolition rubble and burnt material in situ in trench A. Part of context 2 viewed from the north (Scale = 1 m).

Context 6 lay to the east of this layer and was a very compacted very dark grey silty clay around 0.35 m in depth. It also contained extensive amounts of building debris: particularly brick, asbestos roofing and many fragments of ceramic sanitary ware (see section 3.1 below).

Separating these two deposits, and older than both of them, was a wall foundation, context 9, formed of $0.36 \times 0.18 \times 0.15$ m concrete blocks. Beneath the blocks was a layer of foundation packing, context 10, a mixture of compact brown clay soil and concrete rubble. These wall foundations filled a linear cut, context 11, around 0.42 m wide. The whole wall structure ran on a north-south alignment around 1.2 m from the eastern edge of the excavated area. Large sections of mortared brick-work were found within context 2 on this alignment (see figure 2.3) and these almost certainly represent the demolished remains of the upper part of this wall.



Figure 2.4: trench A from the east showing both wall foundations: context 8 and, behind the scale rod, context 9 after the removal of the demolition rubble in this area (scale = 1 m)

To the east of context 9, and also earlier than context 6, were the much more substantial brick foundations of another wall. This wall, context 8, survived as at least seven courses of red Accrington NORI brick, and was wide enough to extend beyond the eastern edge of the trench. The uppermost surviving layer was a header course; beneath this was a stretcher course and then another header course. This in turn was followed by another three stretcher courses before there was an off-set header course which broadened the base of the foundation by around 0.2 m. The wall foundation slot was not clearly visible without removing the bricks, which was not attempted. This large wall ran on a north-south alignment parallel to the context 9 wall described above.

1.5 m to the west of both wall foundations was a 0.5 m square pad of red Accrington brick: context 12. This was bedded in concrete within a 0.58 m square cut: context 13. Further west still, by another 1.5 m, was another square concrete patch of similar size which was

not investigated. In the unexcavated portion of context 2 there were larger, linear concrete patches which seem likely to have related to whatever structure was supported on these pads (see figure 2.1).

In the western part of the trench beneath the demolition layer, context 3, and cut by context 13 was a layer of very pale brown compact clay which was free of finds. This layer, context 4, overlay another sterile layer, context 5, which was a compact very dark grey sandy clay. It is likely that both these layers are natural. Between the two walls discussed above, in the eastern part of the trench, there was a similar layer beneath context 6. This was context 7, a very dark grey compact silty clay. Although some fragments of pottery were recorded from the top of this layer it is likely that this is primarily also a natural sediment.

2.2 Trench B

Once the turf was removed from the 10 x 3 m area of trench B it was realised that the amount of water draining from the terrace banking would make the eastern end of the trench very difficult to excavate. For this reason, work was confined to the western half of the trench.

The topsoil in this area, context 101, was a very dark brown friable clay loam which was around 0.1 m deep. Within this layer there were large quantities of concrete rubble fragments, broken bricks, fragments of asbestos roofing, glass and iron fittings. Beneath context 101 was context 102: a compact dark reddish grey silty clay at least 0.2 m thick. Context 102 contained even larger quantities of demolition rubble. These included some substantial mortared brickwork pieces and large concrete fragments, alongside smaller fragments of building material and glass.

No clearly defined structures were identified within trench B. It is likely that the demolition material found came from further up the surviving terrace bank to the north of the excavated area.

2.3 Discussion

The excavated remains within trench A are clearly the lower layers of the Hotel side stand. In particular, context 8 can be seen to be the foundations of the original rear wall of the stand. Context 9 is likely to represent a later sub-division within the stand. All of these features are buried beneath extensive debris from the 1972 fire which has trapped and preserved both surviving fixtures from the stand and artefacts that had been deposited on its surfaces.

The archaeology in trench B indicates that the demolition and removal of the, admittedly less complex, structure of the Peel Park Kop was more thorough and complete. Here rubble and building material from the terrace is thoroughly mixed with objects which are likely to have been moved some distance from their original place of deposition. There were no surviving traces of the terracing itself in the area excavated.

3 Finds

All classes of finds were recorded by context, photographed and catalogued. Brick, concrete, asbestos roofing and glass were then reburied in the backfilled trenches with all other finds kept by Peel Park Primary School as a teaching resource. All the bricks on site

were red Accrington NORI bricks stamped 'Accrington'. These bricks were produced in Huncoat, about 1 km to the north of the ground.

3.1 Ceramics

The bulk of the ceramic assemblage was 20th century mass-produced domestic wares. However there were a significant number of fragments from either hand-wash basins or urinals from trench A. There were also white interior tiles from this area and other interior tiles in a range of colours. Single finds of interest included a marble and the limb of a small doll, both in pipeclay. Clay marbles were common throughout the 20th century. Up until the 1950s the majority of marbles used were clay (Evelyn Peterson *pers. comm.*); although they had largely, but not completely, been superseded by glass by the time of the authors' own childhoods in the 1970s. There was also a stoneware bottle or jug sherd, stamped 'Bughan + Portobello Edinburgh', which is obviously Scottish in origin. It is likely to be a lemonade bottle but a search through trade directories failed to identify either manufacturer or trader. Clay tobacco pipes were in relatively common, but declining, use throughout the 20th century, with manufacture ceasing in the 1970s (Ayto 2002,4).

Context	1	2	3	6	7	Trench A total	101	102	Trench B total
ceramics, clay marble	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
ceramics, clay pipe stem	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
ceramics, doll's leg	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
ceramics, electrical insulator	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
ceramics, misc	32	59	0	30	8	129	36	65	101
ceramics, sanitary white ware	10	30	0	0	0	40	2	1	3
ceramics, stoneware stamped bottle	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
ceramics, tile red/red glazed	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
ceramics, tile, brown glazed	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
ceramics, tile, red/black glaze	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
ceramics, tile, white	11	3	0	0	0	14	5	3	8
ceramics, transfer printed white ware	4	6	0	0	0	10	0	2	2

Table 3.1: ceramic finds (excluding brick)



Figure 3.1: pipeclay doll's leg, context 1, trench A



Figure 3.2: clay marble, context 2, trench A



Figure 3.3: stamped stoneware sherd, context 1, trench A. Inset: stamp at x2 magnification.

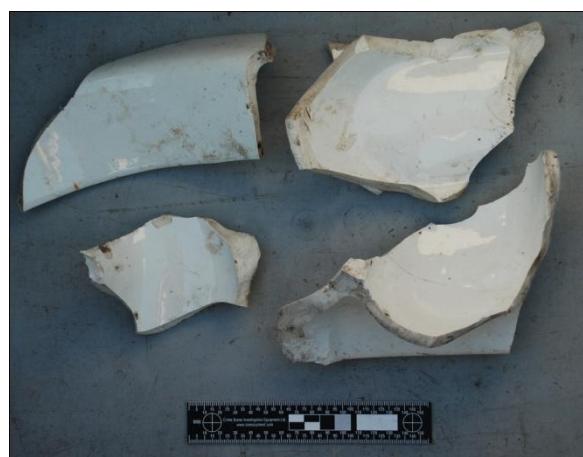


Figure 3.4: sanitary whiteware, probably a handwash basin, context 2, trench A

3.2 Iron objects

The iron objects from the site fall into two broad classes. There are many architectural and building fittings ranging from nails to large strap hinges and roof fittings. There are also objects directly associated with playing football, particularly the pegs used to fasten down goal nets. The strap hinge from trench A is likely to be from one of the access gates into the stand. Several of the fittings and bolts still retain traces of red and white paint. Goal net pegs come from both excavated areas: although they are most plentiful in trench B behind the main goal mouth at the Huncoat end. There are historical photographs (Whalley 2001, 87) showing schools football taking place prior to April 1972 on reduced size pitches with goals in front of the original stand (i.e. at right angles to the main pitch alignment), which probably explains the presence of these pegs in trench A. The whitewashed steel pipe from trench B is also likely to be a goalmouth fitting: in this case probably part of one of the stanchions behind the main goalposts.

Context	1	2	3	6	7	Trench A total	101	102	Trench B total
Fe object, pipe ?goal stanchion	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Fe object, stainless steel rod	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Fe objects, bolts	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	1
Fe objects, disc	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Fe objects, goal net pegs	0	2	0	0	1	3	1	4	5
Fe objects, knife blade	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Fe objects, misc	20	14	0	0	0	34	5	55	60
Fe objects, nails	0	25	0	0	1	26	7	19	26
Fe objects, roof fittings	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Fe objects, strap hinge	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

Table 3.2: Iron objects



Figure 3.5: Iron strap hinge from access gate to the stand, context 2, trench A. Scale 0.4x0.2 m



Figure 3.6: Iron seat support and gutter bracket with paint traces, context 2, trench A



Figure 3.7: Goal net pegs, context 2, trench A



Figure 3.8: Iron pipe with whitewash traces: probably part of a goal stanchion, context 101, trench B

3.3 Other metal objects

The non-ferrous metal objects from the site include lead, aluminium and copper alloys, and some composite objects. Plumbing and electrical fittings were found in both trenches. The coinage was all small denominations and ranged in date from 1915 to 1979.

Context	Trench A						Trench B		
	1	2	3	6	7	Trench A total	101	102	Trench B total
Al alloy objects, misc	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Al alloy, drinks cans	7	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0
Al alloy, matchbox car	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Al alloy, tube, lipstick case?	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
cigarette lighters	2	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	1
coins	2	1	0	0	0	3	1	2	3
Cu alloy, firearm cartridge	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Cu pipe	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Cu, insulated electrical flex	2	0	0	1	4	7	1	0	1
Pb pipe	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	4	4

Table 3.3: non-ferous metal objects

The aluminium alloy drinks cans include the distinctive 'red, white and blue' Vimto can introduced in 1964 (Nicholls 2007). This example is probably a fairly early example of the

design which persisted in some form until 1992. The ring-pull is of the completely detachable variety which certainly dates the can before the mid 1980s. The cigarette lighters included both disposable Bic products, first marketed in 1973, (Société BIC 2011) and a heavily ornamented Ronson refillable gas lighter from trench A. Three small arms cartridge cases were found in trench B, all from context 101 and all blanks. One is Umarex 8mmK blank ammunition, another a 7.62 x 51mm NATO rifle round, and the third is 9mm x 19mm automatic pistol or submachine gun ammunition. The 8mmK is probably from a starting pistol with both of the others likely to be military blank ammunition in service since the 1950s (Steve Andrews *pers. comm.*) Other metal objects included fragments of a toy car and an aluminium alloy tube which is probably part of a lipstick case.



Figure 3.9: Aluminium alloy 'Vimto' drinks can, context 1, trench A



Figure 3.10: Ronson cigarette lighter, context 1, trench A



Figure 3.11: blank 7.62 x 51mm NATO rifle round, context 101, trench B



Figure 3.12: Aluminium alloy tube, context 101, trench B



Figure 3.13: toy car fragments, context 1, trench A

3.4 Glass

Glass finds were dominated by clear bottle glass and, even more particularly, by clear window glass. There was some wired safety glass from both trenches, although this

predominately came from demolition layers in trench A. The complete small medicine bottle from context 2 is amber with a hexagonal cross section and a standard screw cap. It is likely to date to the second half of the 20th century but to predate the widespread adoption of the 'clic-loc' safety cap in the late 1970s (Chambers 1981).

	context								
	1	2	3	6	7	Trench A total	101	102	Trench B total
glass, bottle, brown	7	17	0	0	0	24	2	11	13
glass, bottle, brown, complete medicine bottle	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
glass, bottle, clear	33	24	12	8	3	80	2	38	40
glass, bottle, clear stopper	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
glass, bottle, green	5	3	0	0	0	8	1	6	7
glass, window, clear	115	73	0	11	7	206	3	57	60
glass, window, clear etched	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
glass, window, clear wired safety	10	0	0	0	1	11	0	3	3

Table 3.4: Glass



Figure 3.14: etched window glass in situ in context 1, trench A (scale 0.4x0.2 m)



Figure 3.15: wired safety glass, context 102, trench B



Figure 3.16: amber glass medicine bottle, context 2, trench A

3.5 Plastics

As with metals and glass there are a number of plastic finds which clearly relate to the built structure of the stands. Perspex glazing and linoleum is present but infrequent. There are also some quite substantial fragments of dark red PVC from demolition layers in trench A which is likely to be the remains of seat coverings. Other plastic finds were the remains of more portable artefacts. Polystyrene drinking cups were relatively common in the lower destruction layers of trench A. Of particular interest from trench B are the 27 fragments of a green plasticised board with the remains of football pitch markings still visible. This is the remains of a portable tactics board.

Context	1	2	3	6	7	Trench A total	101	102	Trench B total
plastic, goal net pegs	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
plastic, linoleum flooring	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
plastic, misc	10	1	0	0	0	11	2	0	2
plastic, mobile phone cover	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
plastic, pen barrel	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
plastic, perspex glazing	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
plastic, polystyrene drinking cups	0	0	10	0	0	10	0	0	0
plastic, polythene pipe, green	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
plastic, PVC seat covering	0	1	5	0	0	6	0	0	0
plastic, red duplo brick	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
plastic, tactics board	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	0	27

Table 3.5: plastic finds



Figure 3.17: PVC seat covering from context 3, trench A



Figure 3.18: portable tactics board fragments context 101, trench B

3.6 Other Finds

The remainder of the finds include a Thwaites beer bottle cork from context 2 in trench A. This must post-date the introduction of bottling at Thwaites in 1925 (Daniel Thwaites Plc 2011) and pre-date the adoption of crown caps by the company. Also of interest is the football bootlace from context 101 in trench B.

Context	1	2	3	6	7	Trench A total	101	102	Trench B total
beer bottle top	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
fauna, tooth, sheep	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
rubber objects, misc	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
textile, football bootlace	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
textile, shoe uppers?	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2

Table 3.6: other finds



Figure 3.19: Thwaites beer bottle cork, context 2, trench A



Figure 3.20: football bootlace, context 101, trench B

3.7 Discussion

The finds in general can be divided into those which are likely to be associated with the period when the site was a Football League ground and those which relate to the continuing use of Peel Park after 1962. In many ways the clear message from the portable artefacts is of the continuity of use of the site. Food packaging, children's toys and smoking paraphernalia all clearly belong to both league and non-league phases at Peel Park. However, the bulk of the evidence for the actual playing of football comes from the non-league phase, with an unsurprising concentration around the goalmouth at the Huncoat end.

Some finds were unexpected: the spent ammunition from trench B raised all kinds of questions when it was initially discovered. The starting pistol round requires less explanation on the edge of a school sports field. However, we have no evidence that the other firearms were actually discharged on site. One possibility is that the military issue cartridge cases were illegally retained by cadets after visits to Army firing ranges and are another example of playthings.

The presence of building fitments in trench B, where we know from archive photographs that there were no roofed structures, indicates that the council landscaping operations after 1972 were extensive enough to move material quite long distances around the ground. However, the lower demolition layers in trench A give us a clear indication of at least one nearby ground entrance and of either changing rooms or lavatories beneath the stand at this point. By the 1950s the players' tunnel was to the south of the original stand and appeared to lead directly to the current Peel Park FC changing rooms (Whalley 2001, 87).

4 Conclusions

The project set out to examine the surviving structures at Peel Park and in particular to examine the experience of watching football at the ground during its life. We had originally expected to be able to see clear distinctions between the artefacts and structures on the Peel Park Kop and those in the original Hotel Side stand. It was hoped that there might be a visible class distinction between the archaeology of these two areas. While there are differences between the archaeology of the two structures it is now clear that these are primarily due to the different demolition histories. In particular, the catastrophic collapse of the original stand after the 1972 fire has helped to preserve the earlier archaeology of trench A much better.

Overall there is no justification for drawing strong distinctions between seated and standing spectators at Peel Park in either league or non-league phase. What is clear is that a broad range of ages and genders were represented: contradicting the stereotypical view of the pre-1990 football fan as overwhelmingly male. There is a surprising prevalence of children's toys in all phases. Some of this is due to the ground's afterlife as an unofficial playground and to the nearness of Peel Park School but at least some of these toys belong to the league phase of the site.

The other overwhelming conclusion from the excavations is the continuity of use. This is clearest in the large amount of evidence for football at the ground continuing through the early non-league life of the revived Accrington Stanley to the present day matches of Peel Park FC. Although often considered as a former football ground the archaeology of Peel Park reveals its role at the centre of the community persists. It has been and remains a place where football is played and watched; where people meet, smoke and drink; and overwhelmingly, a place where children play.

5 Acknowledgements

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7 Appendices

Appendix I- Harris Matrix for contexts in Trench A

