

ANNUAL REPORT: Pendle Hill Witches 2018 FIELD SCHOOL

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Students begin excavation in southern trench

The initial season of archaeological research at Malkin Tower Farm in Lancashire, England, was a huge success. The goal of the project was to attempt to discover whether a house site could be located that might be associated with the infamous Malkin Tower witches' meeting that occurred on Good Friday 1612. The exact location of this remarkable event is mentioned in the report of the 1612 trial of the "Malkin Tower Witches," but its precise location has remained a mystery for over 400 years.

As the director of the project, I worked alongside the 12 enrolled students excavating in two locations in a field belonging to Andrew and Rachel Turner, the owners of present-day Malkin Tower Farm. A local historian, after years of studying 16th- and 17th-century documents, has identified the farm as the most likely site of the famous Good Friday meeting held in the home of the oldest and most powerful Pendle "witch," Elizabeth Southernns, called "Old Demdike." She and eleven others were tried and executed in 1612.

Students conducted all excavation with hand tools. As part of the educational process, they compiled the excavation paperwork, drew scale maps, assisted with establishing the site grid, washed all excavated specimens, and helped to interpret the meaning of the artifacts. They attended nine formal lectures. One student used some of the artifacts for a senior honors thesis,

and several other students will write reports of their experiences for their specific academic programs. As director, I will use the collected information to write professional manuscripts and to help plan further research at the site.

The excavation revealed the remains of two buildings. One appeared as a large, flat “padstone” and an associated series of post holes. Padstones are flat stones builders in northern England used before the 19th century to support the bases of timber-framed houses and barns. The artifacts associated with these remains range in date from the 17th to the 19th centuries. The date of many of the artifacts suggests that the area has been disturbed by plowing since the 17th century. The artifacts from the second site were much tighter in date, ranging only from the 17th and early 18th centuries. The remains of this structure appeared as a scatter of stone rubble interspersed with hundreds of artifacts, mostly pieces of coarse earthenware ceramics from vessels used for food preparation and storage. Few sherds of fine ceramics, of the sort that would have been used in a home with a substantial income, appeared at the site. This finding adds credence to the idea that the second house site may indeed have been the location of the 1612 Good Friday meeting, the event that led to the accusation of witchcraft. The first site may represent the remains of a barn rather than a domestic dwelling.

We excavated approximately one-half of the second building site during the five weeks of the 2018 season. Having had wonderful support from the landowners and the local community, we hope to return to the site in 2019 and complete the excavation of the remains of the second house.