NORTH WEST WETLANDS SURVEY **2**

THE WETLANDS OF

Greater Manchester

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GIS mapping by

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Front Cover: Carrington Moss from the south showing the River Mersey, Irlam, and Chat Moss *(top left)* (Photo: Sky Comm 1/5/1994 (neg no CCN 000 700))

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Abbreviations

EH	English Heritage
ESA	Environmentally Sensitive Area
GIS	Geographic Information System
GMAU	Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit
LRO	Lancashire Record Office
LUAU	Lancaster University Archaeological Unit
NERC	National Environmental Research Council
NWWS	North West Wetlands Survey
OS	Ordnance Survey
OD	Ordnance Datum
PRO	Public Record Office
SMR	Sites and Monuments Record
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest

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Foreword

For many people, wetland archaeology has strong associations with lake villages, trackways, and bog bodies, but readers of the present volume will find few references to these traditional categories of evidence. Instead, they will be introduced to an industrialised wetland landscape and perhaps to the unexpected survival of deep peats and of palaeoenvironmental sequences alongside the fast disappearing physical remains of peatland industrial archaeology. Fieldwork in these conditions demands ingenuity, experience, and determination, and only those readers who have worked in similar conditions will perhaps fully appreciate the efforts put in by the two principal authors, David Hall and Colin Wells, to assemble the evidence presented here.

The wetness of the Greater Manchester region from the later prehistoric period onwards, and its subsequent key role in the early modern industrialisation of Britain, have conspired to make traditional archaeological survey difficult because of the low level of human activity from the Mesolithic to the medieval times has been masked rather than revealed by the recent and current land-use. The challenge of working in these conditions has stimulated the NWWS team and their helpers to explore every possible means of recovering evidence for past conditions and human activity, and we can be confident that the picture given here is representative.

One intriguing question raised by the results of the survey is that of the inter-relationship between the Manchester wetlands and the inception of industrialisation. Did the mires make a positive contribution, in the form of resources required by the developing industries? Or did they simply, as large marginal areas not claimed by agriculture, provide a setting for development once the technological difficulties of transport and drainage has been mastered? These questions are not the normal concern of wetland archaeologists, but they are proper to the Manchester context, and they underline the individuality of the human response to wetlands in this region. Neither in prehistory nor in historic times have the Greater Manchester wetlands been perceived and exploited quite according to our general models which are based largely on evidence from the Fens and the Somerset Levels.

In the long run, one of the most important results of the current survey will be the conclusive demonstration of the diversity of human responses to wetland environments in the past, responses influenced by the prevailing environmental conditions and compounded by the economic, technological, and social demands and capabilities of the local people.

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