



FOREWORD

The impact of historical coal mining on a landscape is rarely seen as clearly as at Cutacre, which, until recently, was an area dominated by a gigantic colliery spoil heap. Elsewhere much of the land has been removed by opencast mining. You could therefore be forgiven for thinking that not much of archaeological interest could possibly survive; however, archaeological investigations have revealed a remarkable range of sites from various periods stretching back to around 7000 years ago. Funded by UK Coal and the Harworth Group through a planning condition of consent to win the remaining coal and regenerate the site for commercial and other uses, this has been one of the largest archaeological landscape studies undertaken in Greater Manchester.

It is important for archaeologists to let the local and wider community know about key discoveries from their investigations. At Cutacre, these discoveries were plentiful and include early prehistoric artefacts, a Middle Bronze Age settlement, medieval iron smelting, an early seventeenth-century great hall, as well as a farmstead of the same period. One of the remarkable aspects of the archaeological investigations has been the successful application of a variety of modern scientific techniques to maximise our understanding of the excavated evidence. All of this is described in this booklet in a well-illustrated and readable style, in common with the previous 23 volumes in the *Greater Manchester's Past Revealed* series. This booklet therefore represents an important aspect of the public benefit arising from the programme of archaeological work, and Oxford Archaeology North is to be congratulated on its production.

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INTRODUCTION

Cutacre forms a 314ha (hectares) mixed-use commercial site and public open-space in Greater Manchester, some 4.75km to the south-east of Bolton. It straddles the three metropolitan boroughs of Bolton, Salford, and Wigan, and lies between the modern settlements of Little Hulton, in Walkden, Shakerley, in Atherton, and Over Hulton, in Westhoughton. Today, the site contains a mixture of woodland and wildlife areas, farmland, and also a commercial logistics area that opened in 2016.

*A modern aerial view
across Cutacre, looking east*



The large spoil heap at Cutacre, prior to its removal as part of a major coal reclamation and regeneration scheme

Immediately prior to the nineteenth century, Cutacre formed a rural landscape, typical of those on the Lancashire Coal Measures, in southern Lancashire. Hence, for much of its history, this landscape contained a smattering of farmsteads, some dating back to the prehistoric period, interspersed between agricultural fields and small areas of woodland. From at least the twelfth century AD

onwards, up until the nineteenth century, there was also some small-scale rural industry within the area. Wharton Hall was also established during this period, creating a high-status dwelling.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the landscape of the Lancashire Coal Measures was transformed by large-scale industrial coal mining, which led, at Cutacre, to the creation of the largest spoil heap in Europe. This tip was in the eastern half of the development area, and had been partly created through mining activity associated with the former Charlton Colliery, the pit-head being adjacent to the north-western boundary of Cutacre, and also through the dumping of spoil, which had been transported from Brackley, Mosley Common, and Sandhole collieries. Another smaller coal tip was also constructed in the south-eastern part of Cutacre, which was associated with another former colliery, lying directly within the development area, known as Wharton Hall Colliery.

Between 2006 and 2011, these spoil heaps were reworked by UK Coal, which also undertook some surface mining, after which the area was restored and landscaped by the Harworth Group to create the present-day parkland and commercial area. During this period of reworking and restoration, an archaeological study was undertaken to identify any significant archaeological sites. This was then followed by targeted investigation that primarily aimed to record archaeological sites which might be affected by the reworking and redevelopment of the area. This booklet presents the results of this work, paying particular attention to the sites identified and recorded by an extensive campaign of archaeological excavation.