



# Cheshire Archaeology News

Issue 11 Spring 2004

## Medieval Nantwich...

2003 produced further dramatic evidence of Nantwich's early salt industry. Excavations before residential development at Second Wood Street, in the heart of the historic town, produced medieval evidence to compare with the Roman discoveries from nearby Kingsley Fields (*Cheshire Archaeology News 10*).

The site lies close to Wood Street, where excavations in 1979-80 provided evidence of medieval salt making. Preliminary evaluation of the site in 2001 revealed waterlogged deposits and an abundance of well-preserved timbers.

Full excavation uncovered a number of simple timber-framed buildings fronting onto Second Wood Street and Welsh Row. There were also property boundaries, using re-used timbers, running back from the street frontage. They seem to have been in use from the late medieval period to the 16th or 17th centuries. They were preserved in an organic deposit, three metres deep in places, containing pottery, leather and wooden artefacts.

Most spectacular was the evidence of industrial activity, almost certainly salt production. It included six wooden barrels, set in a timber-lined channel packed with clay, and probably dating to the 16th or 17th centuries. The barrels originally stood level with the ground surface, against the south wall of a timber-framed workshop which may have burnt down. They were probably cisterns for storing brine, and overlay an earlier medieval phase where the cistern was a huge hollowed-out log, similar to the 'salt ship' discovered during the 1979-80 excavations. A grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund has enabled the new 'ship' to be lifted, conserved and eventually displayed in the town's museum.

*The Nantwich salt 'ship'*  
*is prepared for lifting.*



Supported by the  
Heritage Lottery Fund

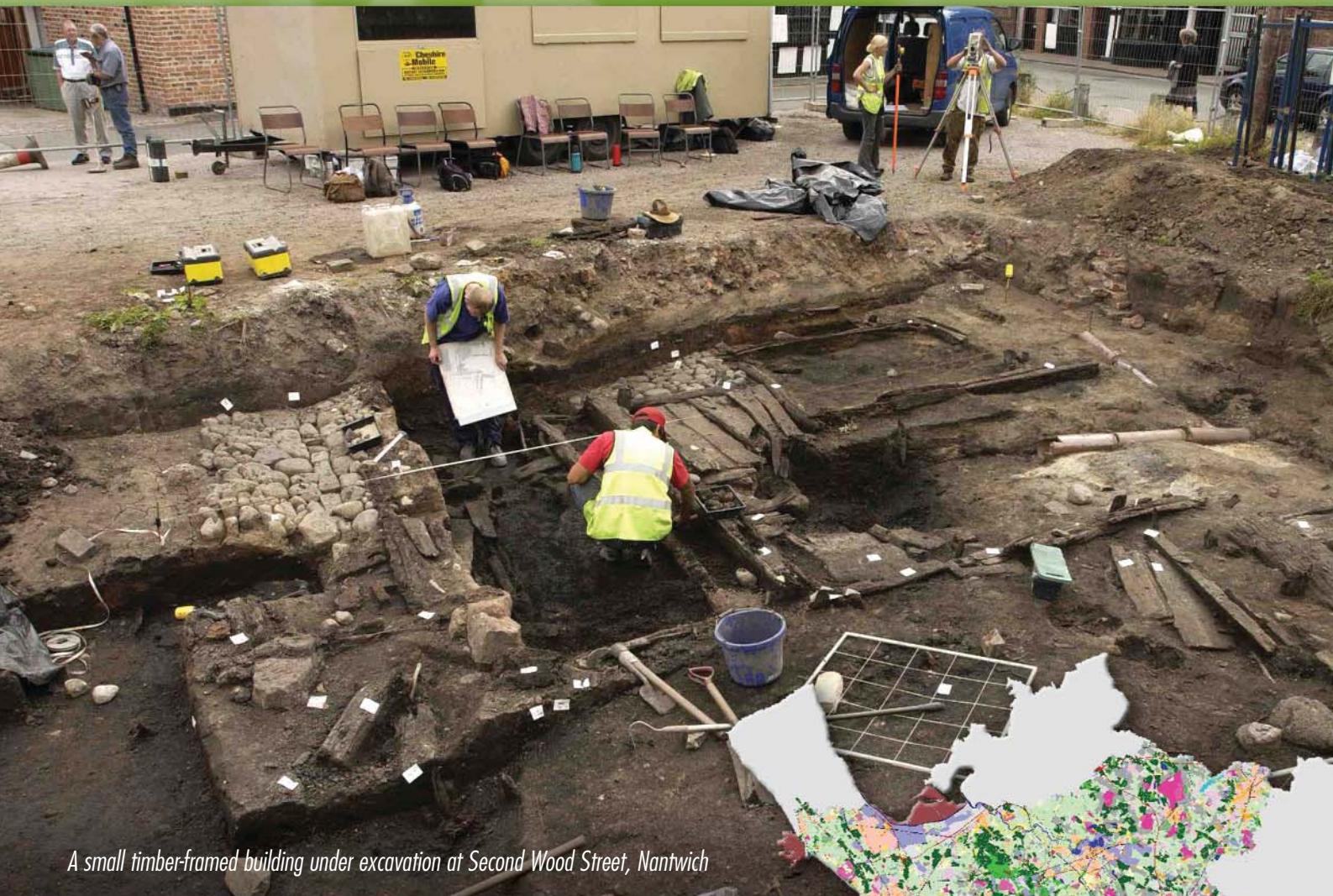
## Medieval Nantwich continued.

The Wood Street area of Nantwich was divided into individual salt houses during the medieval and post-medieval periods, and salt production was regulated by a complex series of tolls and regulations. The salt house cisterns were fed with brine via wooden pipes from the town's brine well, which lay on the east bank of the River Weaver, just north of the present bridge.

These and other recent excavations have shown that waterlogged deposits do not survive in isolation, but occur across the historic town on both sides of the river. They represent a rich archaeological resource, unique in Cheshire and exceptional in the North West region. There will no doubt be further opportunities for excavation as development continues in and around the town. However, we must try to ensure the

preservation of some of these remains for the future, when new techniques will inform and expand our knowledge of one of Cheshire's richest archaeological environments.

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*A small timber-framed building under excavation at Second Wood Street, Nantwich*

## Cheshire's Historic Landscape

The Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) Project is a partnership project with English Heritage to characterise the historical development of the present day landscape and to create a means of managing it more effectively. The project has passed a number of significant milestones in 2003. The initial categorisation of the landscape of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington is now complete, and workshops have been held with planners and academics to refine the technique and agree the most effective way to present the results.

The most significant development has been an invitation from English Heritage and Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council to extend the project to cover the Wirral. Not only will this enable the project to study an area with close historic and landscape ties to Cheshire, but it will also provide an opportunity to work closely with the Merseyside Urban Characterisation team. The Merseyside project aims to characterise the built environment in a similar way to that in which HLC characterises the rural landscape, and is the first of its kind to be undertaken in a major urban centre.

2004 will see the analysis of the data and the production of the final maps, report and datasets. These will eventually feed into a regional HLC map for the whole of the North West region.

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Plan of Warrington, 1772.

## ...and other towns

Whilst we may know something of medieval Chester and Nantwich, Cheshire's smaller medieval towns have not so far received the same degree of attention. However recent small-scale excavations have provided an insight into the nature of archaeological survival in three such towns.

In **Knutsford**, an evaluation took place in the backyards of properties fronting onto King Street, adjacent to Church Walk. This was the first investigation on the east side of the town's main medieval street. Towards the rear of the plots, the natural sand dropped away rapidly and the overlying deposits consisted of over two metres of organic silts. These seem to represent the remains of an infilled mere, probably a southern extension of Tatton Mere, a fragment of which survives in the nearby park to the north and east. This suggests that open water once extended right up to the back of the King Street properties, and that the town was originally laid out along the southern shores of a once more extensive Tatton Mere.

In **Macclesfield**, development of the new bus station provided the opportunity to examine a large area east of Mill Street, the town's main medieval thoroughfare. Disturbance was extensive, and terracing on the slope north of Mill Street proved to be of quite recent origin. In places, however, the old ground surface survived and fragments of medieval pottery were recovered. Unfortunately, the existing buildings on Mill Street contain recent cellars and the town still awaits a modern excavation of the medieval street frontage.

Development in **Warrington** provided a rare opportunity to examine part of the medieval street frontage and the land to the rear. Excavations took place on the west side of Bridge Street - one of the medieval borough's main streets laid out in the 13th century following the construction of a new bridge over the Mersey. The site was 100 metres north of Warrington Friary (*Cheshire Archaeology News* 7). In most cases the early street frontage has been lost to cellars, but in this area archaeological deposits survived right up to the modern street front. They consisted of a number of medieval pits and, in the yards to the rear, boundary ditches. These had been recut several times and probably marked the rear of the burgage plots into which the medieval town was divided. Significantly, several sherds of Roman pottery were recovered - suggesting the presence of a Roman settlement beneath the medieval town.

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## REVEALING CHESHIRE'S PAST



Revealing Cheshire's Past is a project to help people find out more about Cheshire's archaeology.

Its first outcome is a Community Exhibition showing how Cheshire has changed since prehistoric times. Since it began its tour in June 2003 it has appeared at libraries across the county, as well as special events like conferences and shows. From this Spring, it will be accompanied by a series of fact sheets, with colourful reconstructions of life in ancient Cheshire.

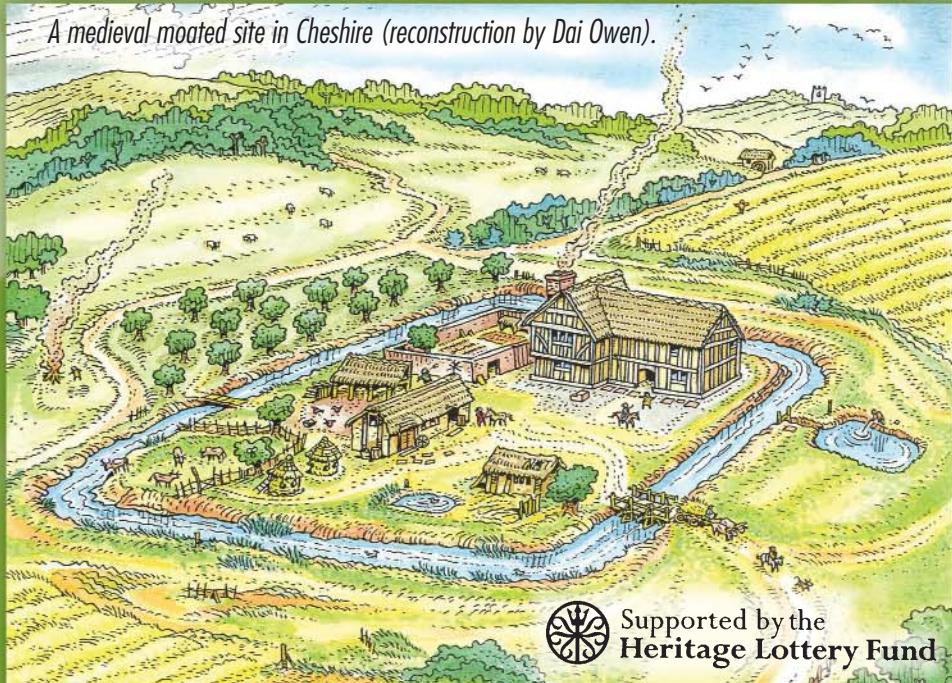
During 2004 it will be on display at Ellesmere Port Library (5 February - 4 March), Winsford Library (4-31 March), Cheshire Archaeology Day (3 April), Middlewich Library (5-30 April) and Alsager Library (30 April – 27 May).

Amazing artefacts from different museums will be brought together in a major travelling exhibition, which will open at the Salt Museum, Northwich on 9 October. At the same time, a public access version of the County Sites and Monuments Record will go online in libraries across Cheshire.

For further information contact **Moya Watson, Project Officer**, phone 01244 603997, email [moya.watson@cheshire.gov.uk](mailto:moya.watson@cheshire.gov.uk) or visit [www.cheshire.gov.uk/archaeology](http://www.cheshire.gov.uk/archaeology).



*Revealing Cheshire's Past* to Loyd Grossman, at the Best of British Archaeology conference in Liverpool (photo: CBA).



Supported by the  
**Heritage Lottery Fund**

## In brief

Watching briefs have been carried out during development at the Bus Station and St Michael's Church **Macclesfield**, St Bartholomew's Church **Wilmslow**, Town Farm Quarry **Norley**, the Vyrnwy to **Wooore** Ash pipeline, and Runcorn town centre. Archaeological evaluations in advance of development have been carried out at the Cottage, Kingsley Fields and the Lamb Hotel, Hospital Street **Nantwich**, the Bullring, Finney's Lane, Lewin Street, Wheelock Street and the proposed Eastern By-Pass **Middlewich**, Chorley Old Hall and the proposed By-Pass **Alderley Edge**, Church Walk **Knutsford**, Clayhanger Hall **Crewe** and Church Street **Warrington**. Archaeological excavations have also been carried out at the Old Mill **Congleton**.

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and a Roman silver finger ring with a red carnelian gemstone engraved with an eagle from **Farndon** (below).



(Photos: Liverpool Museum).

For further information contact **Nick Herepath, Liverpool Museum**, phone 0151 478 4259, email [nick.herepath@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk](mailto:nick.herepath@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk).

The 2004 IFA Annual Conference for **Archaeologists** is to be held on 6-8 April at the University of Liverpool, and will include a session on the archaeology of North West England.

For further information contact **Alex Llewellyn, IFA**, phone 0118 931 6446, email [admin@archaeologists.net](mailto:admin@archaeologists.net)

The North West Historic Environment Forum has published two reports on the region's historic environment. **Heritage Counts 2003** is the annual audit of the region's historic environment, with case studies and key data - there were, for example, over 10m visitors to historic attractions in the region in 2002. **Making it Count** highlights the contribution made by the historic environment to wider regional objectives, and suggests a series of actions to help meet them.

Both are available from **English Heritage**, phone 0870 333 1181, email [victoria.moody@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:victoria.moody@english-heritage.org.uk), or on [www.heritagetcounts.org.uk](http://www.heritagetcounts.org.uk).

Work on the North West Regional Research Framework is gathering pace. Project Co-ordinator **Mark Brennan** has set up a series of Period Working Groups who will present their preliminary findings at a seminar on 19 February at the Lake District National Park Offices, Kendal.

For further information contact **Mark Brennan, RRF Project Co-ordinator**, phone 01539 773445, email [mark.brennan@cumbriacc.gov.uk](mailto:mark.brennan@cumbriacc.gov.uk).



**Cheshire Archaeology Day 2004** will take place on Saturday 3 April, at the usual venue, Northwich Memorial Hall. The guest speaker will be Dr Paul Bahn on the recent discovery of Britain's first cave art, and there will be the usual range of displays, bookstalls and workshops.

Tickets are £10 each (£8 concessions) from **Environmental Planning, Cheshire County Council, Backford Hall, Backford, Chester CH1 6PZ**, phone 01244 603656, email [angela.wade@cheshire.gov.uk](mailto:angela.wade@cheshire.gov.uk) or [pam.rutherford@cheshire.gov.uk](mailto:pam.rutherford@cheshire.gov.uk).

County Archaeologist **Adrian Tindall** is leaving Cheshire to take up a new post as Cambridgeshire County Archaeologist, where he will lead the county's field unit. He has been with Cheshire County Council since 1989. Another familiar figure on the local archaeological scene, Chester Archaeology's **Keith Matthews**, is also leaving Chester to take up a post in North Hertfordshire.

## Thanks to...

**AAA Archaeological Advisors, Aran Construction, Birmingham Archaeology, Blacksheep Holdings, Bovis Homes, Castlering Archaeology, Catco Property Group, Cheshire County Council, Congleton Borough Council, Countryside Residential, Crewe and Nantwich Metal Detector Club, Earthworks Archaeological Services, Emerson Group, English Heritage, Gifford and Partners, Hanson Aggregates, Heritage Lottery Fund, Hillcrest Homes, Jay Ashall Associates, London Palatine, L-P Archaeology, Macclesfield Parochial Church Council, Matrix Archaeology, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, Northern Archaeological Associates, Oxford Archaeology North, Peel Holdings, Renaissance Homes, Schofield Brothers, SLR Consulting, United Utilities, University of Manchester Archaeological Unit and Wilmslow Parochial Church Council.**

*All photos Cheshire County Council, except where stated.*

## Mailing list

**Cheshire Archaeology News** is sent free of charge to all those on our mailing list. If you would like to add your name to the list, please contact: **Environmental Planning, Cheshire County Council, Backford Hall, Backford, Chester CH1 6PZ**, phone 01244 603656, email [angela.wade@cheshire.gov.uk](mailto:angela.wade@cheshire.gov.uk) or [pam.rutherford@cheshire.gov.uk](mailto:pam.rutherford@cheshire.gov.uk).