



Cheshire Archaeology News

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Return of the Nantwich salt ship

Nantwich Museum has an exciting new display celebrating the town's early salt industry. The centre piece of *The Past Beneath our Feet* is part of the medieval salt ship excavated in 2003 at Second Wood Street. Full excavation at this site off Welsh Row was carried out by Earthworks Archaeology, prior to residential development. Spectacular evidence was revealed of the town's early salt industry, including a medieval cistern for storing brine, in the form of an eight metre long hollowed-out log, known as a 'salt ship' (see *Cheshire Archaeology News 11*).

The display tells the story of the excavation and preservation of this important object and is accompanied by artefacts found with the 'ship'.

The growing body of evidence from archaeological investigations in Nantwich has drawn attention to the extensive organic waterlogged deposits, dating from the Roman periods onwards, which lie beneath the town. These provide ideal conditions for the preservation of materials, such as wood and leather, which do not usually survive. They represent a rich archaeological resource, unique in Cheshire and exceptional in the North West. Cheshire County Council and English Heritage are working together to produce a strategy to inform development in the town and so ensure that these remains are managed and preserved for the future.

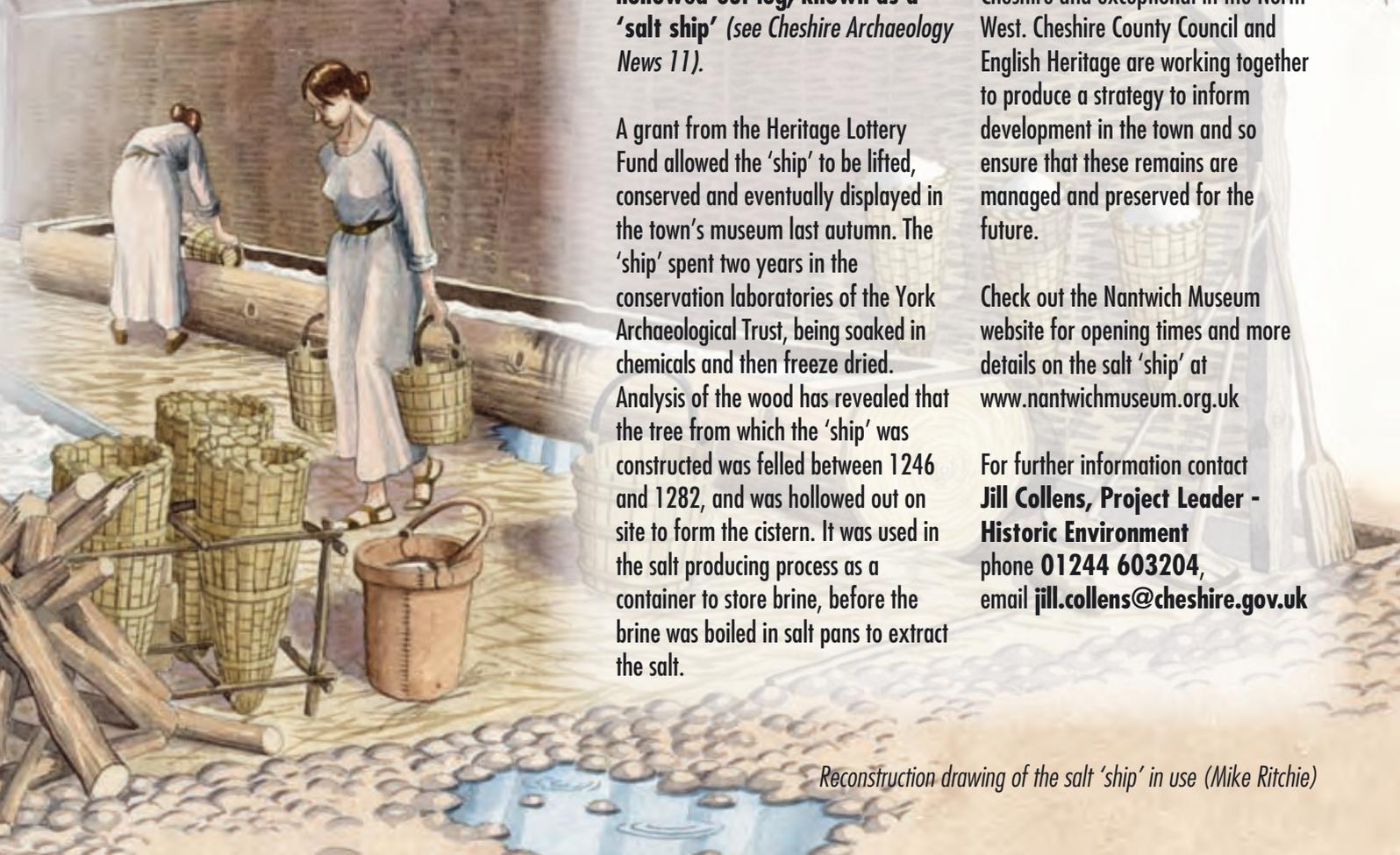
Check out the Nantwich Museum website for opening times and more details on the salt 'ship' at www.nantwichmuseum.org.uk

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A grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund allowed the 'ship' to be lifted, conserved and eventually displayed in the town's museum last autumn. The 'ship' spent two years in the conservation laboratories of the York Archaeological Trust, being soaked in chemicals and then freeze dried. Analysis of the wood has revealed that the tree from which the 'ship' was constructed was felled between 1246 and 1282, and was hollowed out on site to form the cistern. It was used in the salt producing process as a container to store brine, before the brine was boiled in salt pans to extract the salt.



Nantwich Museum Curator, Sue Pritchard, with the salt 'ship'



Reconstruction drawing of the salt 'ship' in use (Mike Ritchie)



National Award

The *Revealing Cheshire's Past* project has been recognised in the 2006 British Archaeology Awards. Held every two years, the awards celebrate the very best of British Archaeology. *Revealing Cheshire's Past* was one of three finalists in the Mick Aston Presentation Award for the best presentation of an archaeological project or theme to the public. The project helps people

to find out more about the archaeology of Cheshire through a website, public access database, travelling exhibitions and fact sheets. It is run by the Natural and Historic Environment Team and was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

At the awards ceremony in Birmingham the judges commended *Revealing Cheshire's Past* on the breadth of audience reached by the different forms of presentation and outreach. Although the project did not win first place, national recognition is very rewarding. The project has tried to reach as many people as possible with displays and exhibitions in libraries and museums across the county. The fact sheets on the archaeology of Cheshire proved so popular that the original print run of 40,000 had to be reprinted to meet demand.

To find out more about the project visit www.cheshire.gov.uk/archaeology and follow the links to Revealing Cheshire's Past.

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Recent Work on St. Anne's Lane, Nantwich



Development in Nantwich continues to provide the opportunity for archaeological work. In 2005 an extensive plot of land on St. Anne's Lane, to the south of Welsh Row, was subject to archaeological evaluation. This revealed evidence of Roman, medieval, and post-medieval activity, together with the now familiar deep

accumulations of organic waterlogged deposits. In 2006, part of the site was excavated, whilst the remainder will be preserved in the new development.

The work revealed a medieval timber-lined well and a number of features associated with the gardens of the now-demolished White Hall, which once stood on the south side of Welsh Row. Most of the features, however, dated to the Roman period and occupied a raised island of sandy ground. Around this higher land, deep accumulations of waterlogged deposits had accumulated within the floodplain of the River Weaver.

The Roman structures included pits, gullies, and a short stretch of Roman road, but the most impressive feature consisted of a large square patch of clay, set into the natural sand. Although the precise function of this structure is not understood at present, it was probably the hard standing for a large industrial feature connected with the extensive Roman industrial complex excavated c.300m to the north at Kingsley Fields in 2002 (see *Cheshire Archaeology News 10*). Further investigation of the waterlogged deposits is planned when development commences.

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Halton Castle

Halton Castle is one of the few medieval castle sites with surviving structural remains in Cheshire. It stands on a rocky promontory in the centre of Halton village in Runcorn, overlooking the River Mersey. The stone castle was constructed in the 12th and 13th centuries, with a curtain wall, towers and a range of internal domestic buildings. Additions were made over the next 300 years and the site was used as a court house and prison. Parts of the original castle still survive as ruins and the site is legally protected as a scheduled monument.

Norton Priory Museum Trust has managed the castle since 2002 and last year it commissioned Donald Insall Associates to prepare a Conservation Management Plan, with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The plan considers the long term management of the site and has involved a re-assessment of its history and development, together with a condition assessment of the standing remains.

During 2006, a new steel fence was installed on the site, together with four decorative interpretation panels. Local artist Tracey Cartledge worked with local groups and schools to produce the artwork for the panels. A watching brief was carried out during the excavation for the fence posts, which followed part of the castle's original outer bailey wall. Most of the ground seems to have been disturbed when the castle wall was consolidated in 1995, but what were probably the original medieval foundations of the castle set directly on bedrock were observed in one of the postholes.

For details of the special opening times and events at Halton Castle check out the website at www.haltoncastle.org

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Halton Castle panel (Norton Priory)