

# CHESHIRE PAST

an annual review of archaeology in Cheshire



## ISSUE 3

Cheshire County Council









## EDITORIAL

Welcome to Issue 3 of **CHESHIRE PAST** - the annual review of all the latest archaeological news in Cheshire. This is the first issue to appear in colour, and we very much hope you like the new format. If you have any suggestions for improving either its appearance or content, we would be very pleased to hear from you.

Probably the most talked-about national issue was the publication in October 1992 of English Heritage's Strategy paper 'Managing England's Heritage: Setting our Priorities for the 1990s'. This proposed, among other things, the local management of some of EH's smaller Properties in Care. In Cheshire, only two sites would be affected: Sandbach Saxon crosses and Chester's Roman amphitheatre. The plan received a guarded response from most local authorities, who saw little value in local management of such sites unless adequate resources were made available for their upkeep, and unless the new managers have the necessary skills and experience to do the job.

In Cheshire the past year has been another memorable one, not least because two important and long-awaited publications have appeared. The English Heritage monograph on excavations at Beeston Castle from 1968-85 contributes almost as much to our knowledge of prehistoric Cheshire as it does to our understanding of the site's military history, while the Royal Commission's volume on East Cheshire Textile Mills is the first fully-researched guide to this important aspect of the county's industrial heritage.

Significant new fieldwork and research has also been undertaken. In this issue, for example, we carry reports on major excavations on the Roman settlement at Wilderspool (the largest ever undertaken in the county outside Chester), the results of an exceptional year for aerial photography, the year's work in Chester, and a first hint of Iron Age and Roman saltworking near Crewe. We have reports on restoration work at Little Moreton Hall, research on medieval moats and crosses, Cheshire's only surviving open-pan saltworks, and the use of archaeological evidence in the classroom, as well as all the latest finds from around the county. We also have an illustrated report on one of the most exciting finds of recent years - the magnificent 13th century wall paintings recently uncovered at Chester Castle.



*A colour-coated Roman flagon from Wilderspool, page 8*

**CHESHIRE PAST** is edited by Adrian Tindall, Cheshire County Council Environmental Planning Service, and designed by Cheshire Museums. Issue 1 is now out of print, but copies of Issue 2 are still available in some bookshops and by post from the Editor. If you have any items of archaeological news, please contact the Editor, **CHESHIRE PAST**, Cheshire County Council, Environmental Planning, Commerce House, Hunter Street, Chester CH1 2QP, Tel Chester (0244) 603160.



## 1 THE DISCOVERY OF AN EARLY SALTWORKING SITE NEAR CREWE *John Price, British Gas Plc*



Pit 1 during excavation

The author is grateful to Stephen Penney of Cheshire Museums Service for his help in identifying and dating the briquetage and VCP. A full description of the Middlewich briquetage is given in J D Bestwick: 'Romano-British Inland Saltings at Middlewich (Salinae), Cheshire' in *SALT: THE STUDY OF AN ANCIENT INDUSTRY*, Colchester Archaeological Group, 1975.

During pipeline construction in July 1992, two pits were found close to the railway line between Crewe and Sandbach (SJ 723 585). The late recognition of the two features and the nature of the engineering operations in this area meant that only a cursory examination could be made at the time.

The first pit, measuring some 2.5m wide by 950mm deep, contained miscellaneous pieces of fired clay and a small quantity of *briquetage* - very coarse organically-tempered fired clay bricks of a type normally associated with Roman saltworking. The second smaller pit was located approximately 70m west of pit 1, measured 550mm wide by 300mm deep, and contained a few fragments of very coarse pottery (VCP).

The *briquetage* from pit 1 is similar to that from Middlewich, which dated from the late 1st through to the 4th century AD. Unlike the *briquetage* from Droitwich (Worcestershire), which occurs only as tall vase-like vessels, the Cheshire material seems to be principally kiln furniture; the material from pit 1 consists of parts of flat plates and a fire bar, but without vessel fragments. The brick fragments are presumably parts of the hearth.

The stony VCP from pit 2 is similar to material recovered from Iron Age contexts at a number of sites in North West England (including Beeston Castle) and North Wales. This pottery represents fragments of a type of coarse, porous vessel in which it is believed salt was dried and traded.

In the 19th century, brine springs were recorded at Elton, half a mile from the recently-discovered site. Further up the Wheelock Valley, saltworking is well documented from the 17th century at Wheelock, Betchton and Rode Heath. It is therefore probable that the recent finds of *briquetage* indicate an area of salt production centred around natural brine springs which had been active over a considerable period of time.

The fragments of stony VCP represent the first discovery of this material in a saltworking context, and the area could well repay further investigation.

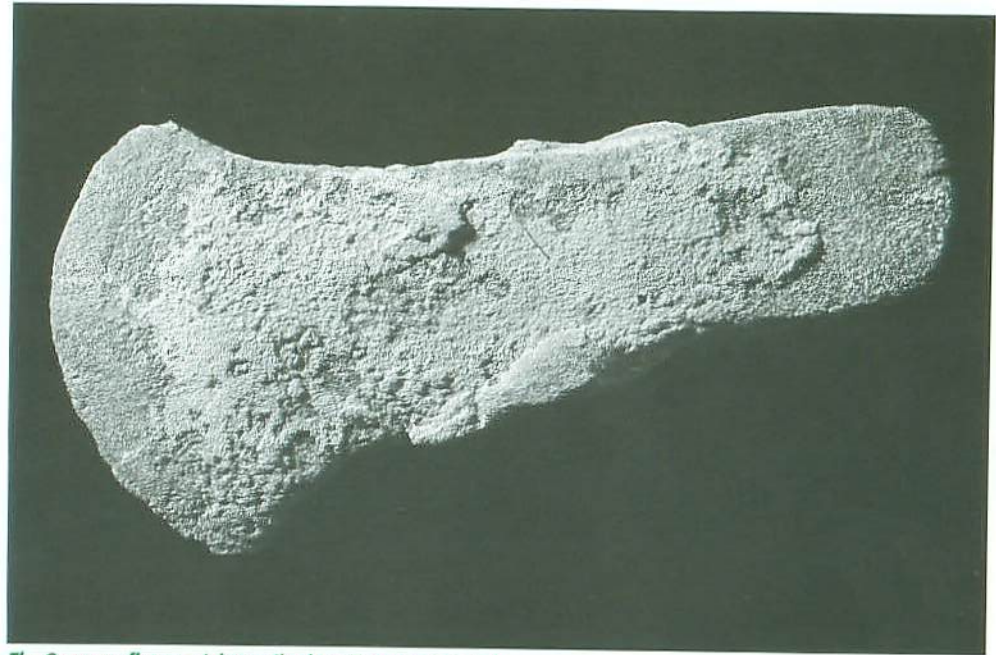


## 2 TWO EARLY BRONZE AGE AXES FROM CHESHIRE *Stephen Penney, Cheshire Museums Service*

Two Early Bronze Age axeheads were found in Cheshire by metal detector users during 1992-93. Both are thin-butted flat axes of a type in use from approximately 2,000 BC, when bronzeworking technology was in its infancy. Axes of this type were cast in one-piece stone moulds, and were used mounted in split wooden hafts.

These discoveries bring to ten the number of Early Bronze Age flat axes now recorded from Cheshire, previous finds occurring at Grappenhall, Mottram St Andrew, Newbold Astbury, Kinderton, Tattenhall, Burwardsley, Bickley and Malpas. A marked concentration along the flanks of the Central Cheshire Ridge is apparent.

The first of the recently-discovered axes was found in October 1992, at a depth of c100mm in ploughsoil at **Gorstage** near Weaverham. It measures only 58mm in length, 29mm across its splayed cutting edge and 4mm thick. The axe is in good condition, with only superficial corrosion. A similarly small axe was found at Kinderton near Middlewich in 1987 (CSMR 2059).



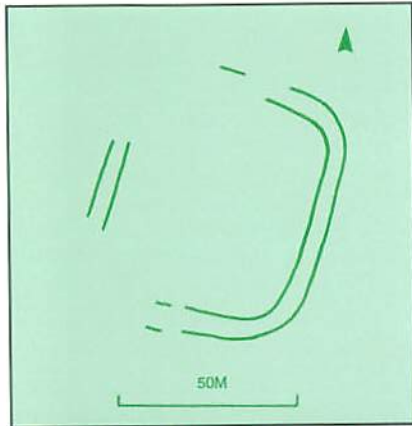
*The Gorstage flat axe (photo: Cheshire Museums Service)*

These diminutive forms are at the very smallest end of the range of flat axe sizes. Although they follow the same pattern as larger axeheads it is quite possible that these smaller implements were hafted as chisels.

A fragment of a second flat axe was reported from **Chowley** near Tattenhall in March 1993. It had been found at c300mm depth in a pasture field that had previously been ploughed. The heavily-corroded fragment measures 35mm across the cutting edge, with a 30mm length of blade surviving. Score marks at the point of fracture suggest that the axehead had been deliberately broken in antiquity, perhaps for scrap.

*The author is grateful to the finders, Mr W Elson and Mr A Harper, for reporting the discovery of the Gorstage and Chowley axes to Cheshire Museums Service and the County Sites and Monuments Record respectively. Both axes have been retained by the finders. Further information on each is held in the Cheshire County Sites and Monuments Record: Gorstage (CSMR 2378), Chowley (CSMR 2381).*

### 3 NEW LIGHT ON ROMAN SETTLEMENT: RECENT AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY IN CHESHIRE *Robert A Philpott, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside*



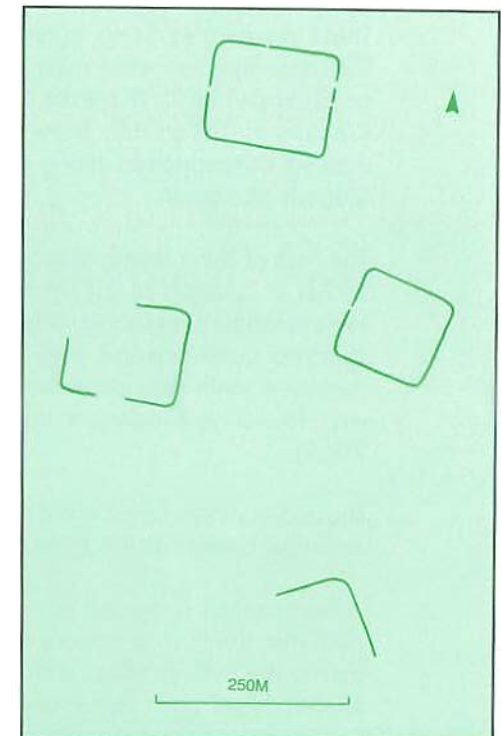
*A newly-discovered Roman fortlet on the Mersey estuary*

In many parts of the country, aerial photography has proved the most effective way to locate elusive Roman farmstead sites in the countryside. However, in Cheshire the heavy clay soils and extensive pasture are difficult terrain for the aerial archaeologist, since cropmarks tend to develop only in exceptionally dry summers. The prolonged dry spell in the early summer of 1992 was particularly welcome as it produced excellent conditions to reveal cropmarks. A number of new sites were discovered in the Mersey basin and, together with the gradual accumulation of sites located in previous years, these have begun to fill a major gap in our knowledge of the Romano-British archaeology of the county.

From the air, Romano-British farmstead sites usually show up as ditched enclosures. Most are sub-rectangular in form, but they may also be irregular or oval in plan. In 1992 several sites appeared in areas which had been repeatedly flown before. Amongst them was one oval enclosure, located near **Hale** in a field which has produced a little Roman pottery. The enclosure has a close parallel in Irby, Wirral, where the interior contains traces of circular buildings.

Two enclosures of sub-rectangular form were discovered in the **Winwick** area. One of these, at Croft, was subsequently trial-trenched and produced 2nd century pottery in the ditches and a probable basket-lined pit in the interior. The second enclosure may be the source of the placename Arbury. First recorded in c1215 as *Herdberi*, Arbury is derived from the Old English *eorthburg*, meaning 'earth-fortification'. This is an instance where the earthworks of a Romano-British farmstead survived as such a prominent feature of the landscape in the Anglo-Saxon period that it gave its name to the surrounding township.

These two new sites, together with a third cropmark enclosure known since the early 1980s at Winwick, lie close to the major north-south Roman road from Wilderspool to Lancaster. There is growing evidence that they form part of an extensively exploited landscape in Roman times along the valleys of the Sankey and the Glaze Brook, running from Ashton-in-Makerfield via Newton-le-Willows and Winwick to the edge of Chat Moss, a development which may have been stimulated by the construction of the road in the late 1st century AD.



*Computer plot of four Roman practice camps near Chester*



One unexpected result of the recent aerial photography is new evidence for the military occupation of the region. In the early 1980s a sub-rectangular enclosure had been sighted to the north-east of **Chester** by Dr Nick Higham, but a small trial excavation failed to produce dating evidence. Another example nearby had been thought to be a Civil War encampment. However, repeated flying in the vicinity has revealed two further examples in neighbouring fields, with another possible example coming to light in June 1993. They are all similar in form and size, the smallest measuring 120 by 125m, the largest 130 by 155m. They thus fall within the lower end of the size range for Roman marching camps in Wales and the Marches, but unfortunately the most diagnostic feature, the entrances, cannot be seen clearly. In view of their spacing and similar size, it is likely that they are practice camps, comparable in scale and layout to those at Bootham Stray outside the legionary fortress at York. The Chester group thus represents a succession of such camps, erected by detachments from the neighbouring legionary garrison.



*A probable Roman farmstead cropmark near Arbury, Warrington*



*An oval enclosure cropmark near Hale*

Another new discovery is a double-ditched fortlet, overlooking the Mersey estuary near **Stanlow**. It measures about 70 by 60m externally, with an internal area of about 3550m<sup>2</sup>. The form of the fortlet and the prominent location suggest that it belongs to an early phase in the military occupation of the North West, when a key element in strategy required the control of movement along the river Mersey. One possible context lies in the 60s AD, after the Boudiccan revolt, at a time when Roman policy saw a need to separate the troublesome tribes of the Brigantes in northern England from the Ordovices of north-western Wales, probably from a fort located in friendly Cornovian territory. Similar fortlets, founded in the 50s and 60s AD, were positioned on the north Devon coast to guard against attacks from the Silures of South Wales. A role in the Roman offensive in Wales under Scapula in the years 47-48, or possibly in Paulinus' attempt to conquer Wales in 59-60, might also account for a fortlet in this position. The point may only be resolved by excavation, although the dating evidence may not be sufficiently precise to distinguish between the various possibilities.

The programme of aerial photography continues to produce new sites; further work is needed now to investigate the evidence on the ground.

*The air photographic project has been undertaken jointly since 1988 by Dr Jill Collens of Cheshire County Council and the writer, with grant aid from the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments. Grateful thanks are due to the Commission, Cheshire County Council and the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside for their continuing support.*



#### 4 ROMAN WILDERSPOOL AND OTHER WORK IN CHESHIRE 1992-3 *Gifford Archaeology Service*



*A Romano-British mortarium is carefully exposed*

During a busy year the practice has been involved in an exciting variety of projects, including evaluation, excavation, publication and exhibition preparation.

After a two-year programme of desk-based and field evaluation, a major excavation has been conducted at **Wilderspool, Warrington** (SJ 612 865) funded by the Greenalls Group Plc. A large area of the Roman settlement has been investigated, revealing timber-framed building foundation trenches, clay floors, a cobbled surface (possibly a street or courtyard) and perhaps most importantly a number of industrial furnaces, probably for the manufacture of lead and copper artefacts from ingots. Heavy items such as lead ingots from Deceanglian territory (North Wales) would have been brought to the site by waterborne transport.

A diverse assemblage of artefacts has been recovered, with large quantities of Roman pottery including several near-complete vessels. Other finds include coins, copper alloy brooches, buckles and pins, iron objects including knives and a wood-plane, quernstones, glass beads and vessel sherds.

The main excavation commenced in January and was completed in May 1993. Post-excavation analysis is therefore still at an early stage but the excavation has shed new light on the settlement's date and function, which have remained unclear despite two previous major excavation programmes - by Thomas May at the turn of the century, and John Hinchliffe and John Williams in 1966-9 and 1976.

May was of the opinion that there was military occupation on the site, but the evidence for his interpretation remains inconclusive. Although the construction of some of the earlier buildings may have been influenced by military designs, there is no firm evidence against the idea that the settlement was largely civilian in character, with only a military stimulus to the original development of the site.

The results of the previous excavations appeared to show a marked decline in the settlement during the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. The present excavations have shown that there was much more activity during the later Roman period than was previously thought, although archaeomagnetic dating has confirmed that the peak of the activity was during the 2nd century AD. It is hoped that the nature of the industrial activity will be revealed by analysis of the waste material found in association with the furnaces.





*Archaeomagnetic dating of a furnace*

deposits relating to a medieval moated site at **Reaseheath, Nantwich** (SJ 650 542); cut features related to a Bronze Age barrow cemetery at **Fishpool Lane, Delamere** (SJ 567 671), and deposits and features related to a medieval moated site known as **White Hall, near Wilmslow** (SJ 844 796). Visits to the excavation for local schoolchildren were also arranged at the White Hall site, followed by finds washing at the school and finds displays and talks.

Archaeological evaluations with negative results were conducted at **Lewin Street, Middlewich** (SJ 705 663), **Tytherington, Macclesfield** (SJ 913 757) and **Hapsford, near Chester** (SJ 465 748). Desk-based archaeological appraisals were conducted for a second runway at **Manchester Airport** (SJ 800 830) and for the **Shotwick Park Estate** (SJ 345 715). Gifford and Partners have also contributed to an exhibition on The Romans in Cheshire by Cheshire Museums Service, producing display text, advising upon illustrative material, and presenting a public lecture.

Site visits were arranged for several groups including school parties, the Warrington and District Historical and Archaeological Society, Greenalls employees and the general public. Interim and full publications are planned, and lectures on the excavation are being given to archaeological groups and schools.

Other archaeological evaluations conducted in advance of redevelopment have revealed the following archaeological features: post-medieval deposits and a ploughsoil containing medieval pottery sherds at **High Street, Tattenhall** (SJ 485 583); a rectangular cropmark, low earth mound and ditches of unknown date at **King Street, Middlewich** (SJ 668 708); earthworks and

*The projects were funded by the Greenalls Group Plc, Cheshire County Council, Wimpey Asphalt Ltd, Jockaro Ltd, Mr J M Rideal, Dunlop Heywood and Bushwing PLC. Gifford and Partners especially want to thank W Walker and B Turner-Flynn of Earthworks Archaeological Services. The project archives are currently held by Gifford and Partners until deposition in a suitable local museum or store. Further reports will be published in suitable local or national journals and deposited with the County Sites and Monuments Record and National Monuments Record. For further information on Roman Wilderspool, see J Hinchliffe and J H Williams: ROMAN WARRINGTON, EXCAVATIONS AT WILDERSPOOL 1966-9 AND 1976, Brigantia Monograph No 2, Manchester University 1992 and F H Thompson: ROMAN CHESHIRE, Cheshire Community Council 1965.*



**5 SOME FINDS FROM CHESHIRE REPORTED TO LIVERPOOL MUSEUM** *Ron Cowell and Robert A Philpott, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside*

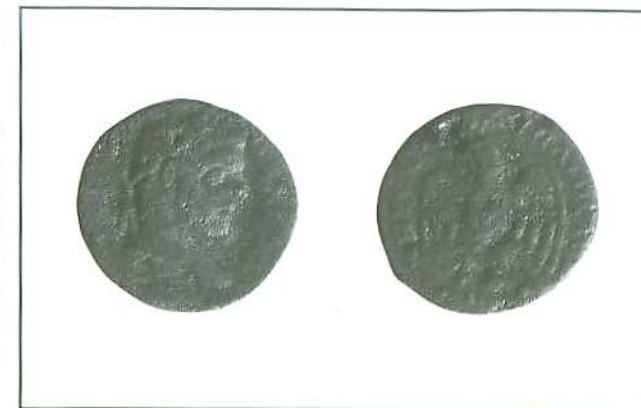
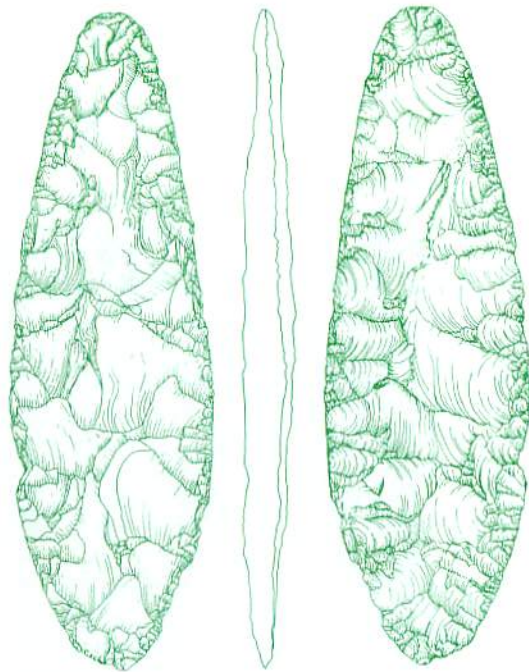
Members of the public regularly bring finds to the museum for identification or donation, and these include a number from Cheshire.

The first of these, a flint dagger, is of exceptional importance both for its fine workmanship and its rarity in western Britain. It was found in a ploughed field at **Southworth, near Winwick**, and donated to the museum in 1965. It has been carefully chipped from reddy-orange flint, probably of local origin, and dates to the Early Bronze Age, c1850-1400 bc. It measures 175mm long, 54mm wide and 10mm thick, and weighs 101g. The lower part would have been set in a bone or leather handle, and it would have been a prestigious possession of a local chieftain or warrior.

Such daggers are often found in burials, mainly with beakers or associated finds such as flint arrowheads, shale buttons, copper or bronze daggers, and leatherworking equipment. The nearest beakers are from the Castleshaw Roman fort near Manchester and from a burial at Gawsworth, with a few occurrences in Cumbria and Wales. Although the dagger came from the surface of a field, there are four known Bronze Age barrow cemeteries in the area, and it is therefore possible that more barrows remain to be found.

The second piece is an Early Bronze Age axe-hammer, found in 1984 in a field at **Kings Marsh, near Churton**. It is probably made of siltstone which may have come from coal measures of the Welsh borders. Axe-hammers are generally quite massive and this example is no exception, weighing 1.85kg and measuring 192mm in length, 90mm in breadth and ranging from 50mm to 73mm in thickness.

Axe-hammers are generally found singly on the surface, although some may have been associated with burials, such as at Winwick (above). They seem less likely than flint daggers to have been prestige objects, but seem too unwieldy for use as weapons or general purpose tools. They could have been used as wedges to break timber into planks or as agricultural tools. They are found throughout Britain, with the greatest concentration in the North West. They are found across Cheshire, though concentrated in the Pennine foothills and adjacent lowlands around Macclesfield, and decreasing towards the west - perhaps corresponding to the settled arable areas of Bronze Age Cheshire



*A 3rd century AD base silver tetradrachm found near Malpas*



A recent metal-detector find from near **Malpas** has added an interesting 'exotic' Roman coin to the Cheshire corpus. Among a group of eight Roman coins, two Roman brooches and a quantity of medieval metalwork found dispersed along a stream bed was an unusual base silver tetradrachm of the Emperor Elagabalus (AD 218-222). The coin, which has Greek legends and bears an eagle motif on the reverse, was minted in Antioch, Syria.

Coins from the eastern Mediterranean, mostly of the mint of Alexandria in Egypt, turn up occasionally on Roman sites in the North West and many are likely to be genuine ancient losses. The presence of several other coins of late 3rd and 4th century date suggests a Roman site nearby, and enhances the credibility of the Malpas find. Precisely how the coin came to the area is open to speculation, but a connection with the legionary fortress at Chester or the Roman harbour at Meols (Wirral), where other exotic Mediterranean finds are known, is highly plausible.



*The Early Bronze Age flint dagger from Southworth, near Winwick*



*A 9th century Carolingian silver denier from South Wirral*

Another unusual find from the region is a Carolingian silver denier of Charles the Bald (AD 840-75 and 875-7), King of the West Franks, minted in Melle, Aquitaine. The coin was recovered from a ploughed field in **South Wirral**. Continental coins of this period are present in some quantities in the Cuerdale and other Viking hoards in the North West, and it has been suggested some were obtained from a Viking raid on Aquitaine, western France, in AD 898. The Viking settlement of the Wirral, following the expulsion of the Norse from Dublin in AD 902, is attested clearly in one contemporary Irish source as well as in the placenames of Wirral. It is likely that this coin is a casual loss, perhaps from the purse of one of these Viking settlers, early in the 10th century.

*The authors are grateful to the following for allowing the finds to be studied and published: Mr Alan Glover, His Grace the Duke of Westminster, Mr Ken Parker of Widnes and Mr Ken Davies of Great Sutton. Thanks are due to the following staff of Liverpool Museum: Susan Nicholson for administration, Mark Faulkner for the illustration, Dave Flower for the photographs and Geoff Tresise and Wendy Simkiss for stone identification. The flint dagger is held by Liverpool Museum, the axe-hammer at the Duke of Westminster's estate at Eaton Hall, and the coins have been retained by the finders.*



## 6 MEDIEVAL WALL PAINTINGS IN CHESTER CASTLE *David Park, Courtauld Institute of Art, and Caroline Babington, English Heritage*



*Detail of the Visitation scene on the vault*

Thirteenth-century paintings that have been rediscovered in Chester Castle form one of the most important recent 'finds' of medieval wall painting in England.

The paintings have a rather curious history. As early as 1810 engravings were published showing some of the decoration, which is in the chapel of the Agricola Tower. The painting then recorded included a subject on the west wall that was interpreted as 'Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law', but which in fact clearly showed the legend of Theophilus - the priest who sold his soul to the devil, but then had it retrieved by the Virgin.

A programme of uncovering was undertaken in the 1920s, when it was found that "the chapel had been covered with beautiful paintings", some of which were briefly described in an article at the time. But Tristram's standard catalogue of medieval wall painting (published 1944-55) merely recorded "traces of scroll ornament" as still surviving, and perhaps for that reason the paintings were then largely forgotten.

In the early 1980s, during the ongoing National Survey of Medieval Wall Painting, an initial inspection revealed that a significant amount of painting still existed, including a scheme of angels on the soffit of the altar recess. These raised the exciting possibility that the paintings formed a royal scheme of decoration. The castle was taken over by Henry III in 1237, on the death of the last Earl of Chester, and it therefore seemed no coincidence that the closest parallel for the angels is provided by sculpture in Westminster Abbey, itself built under Henry's patronage. Although documentary evidence for royal wall painting in the 13th century is plentiful, almost nothing survives apart from fragmentary paintings in Windsor Castle.

The Agricola Tower is in the care of English Heritage and, as part of an overall collaborative project with the Courtauld Institute on wall painting conservation and research, the first phase of a programme of detailed recording and conservation treatment was undertaken in the chapel in May-June 1992.



On the vault, where the paintings were obscured by limewash, the most complete subject is an exquisite Visitation scene which, together with other remains, seems to have formed part of an overall cycle of Christ's Infancy. At the top of the walls, part of the Theophilus scene has been found still to exist, including a marvellous head of a bishop, while other fragmentary subjects - such as one featuring a gallows - could well show other apocryphal miracles of the Virgin. Not only the exceptional quality of the paintings, but also their unusually small scale is particularly striking, and reminiscent of contemporary stained glass and manuscript illumination.



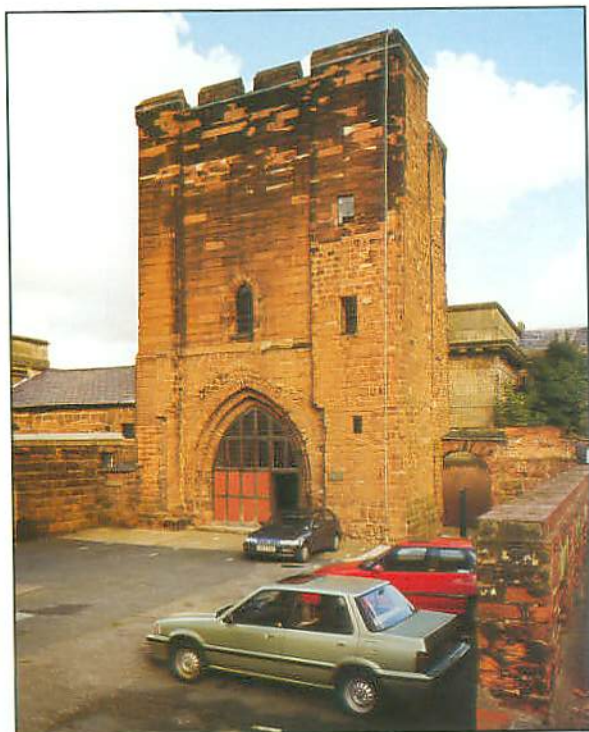
*Head of the bishop in the Theophilus scene*

Further recording and conservation will be undertaken in 1993-4, when it is hoped to resolve the problem of dating the paintings. Are they really royal, or do they pre-date Henry's ownership of the castle? While there would be no difficulty in dating the elegant, purely Gothic figures in the Visitation to c1240, some other parts of the scheme seem earlier in style; thus, the furrowed brow and heavy facial shading of the bishop suggest a date closer to 1220. Perhaps, therefore, the paintings date from the time of Earl Ranulf III (d1232) and, if so, they would in some ways be an even more exciting discovery, since virtually nothing is known of baronial wall painting of this period. The chapel itself dates from the late 12th century, and evidence of what is likely to be the original scheme can be seen through losses in the 13th century layer. This too will be investigated in the forthcoming phases.

*The recording and conservation work is being undertaken as part of a collaborative project between English Heritage and the Courtauld Institute of Art. The 1992 phase was carried out by postgraduate students of the Courtauld Institute's Conservation of Wall Painting Department, supervised by Caroline Babington and Peter Wellford. The National Survey of Medieval Wall Painting is a joint project of the Courtauld Institute and the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England.*



## 7 CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICE 1992-3 *Michael Morris, Chester Archaeological Service*



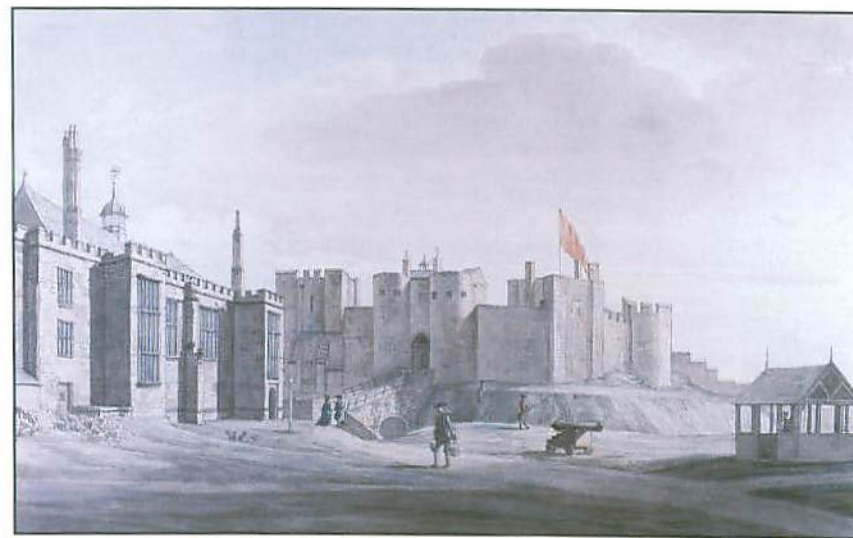
*The Agricola Tower, Chester Castle  
(photo: Cheshire Museums Service)*

The continued recession has led to a reduction in the number of field projects carried out this year. During the year the Service carried out three excavations, five evaluations, five watching briefs and one desk-based assessment. Details of some of these projects are described below.

At 32-36 **Foregate Street** (SJ 408 664) an excavation was undertaken in the former New Union Hall, prior to redevelopment. Traces of a 1st or early 2nd century structure with stone foundations were revealed. In 32 Foregate Street, floor surfaces dating from the 10th to 18th centuries were found. The 10th century floor also contained a hearth, positioned centrally within the burgage plot. Early deposits in 34 Foregate Street had been destroyed by a stone-lined cellar, filled in during the 19th century. The masonry of the cellar suggests a late medieval date. Another cellar at 36 Foregate Street lay to the south of the street frontage, and Saxon deposits survived to its north. Later deposits had been truncated by 17th century pits containing metalworking debris. Several structures with brick and sandstone foundations, presumably outbuildings at the rear of 34-36 Foregate Street, were also revealed.

The excavations were supplemented by a survey of the standing building, built in 1809 by cloth merchants from Manchester and Yorkshire. The building was of brick with an open gallery at first floor level supported on cast iron pillars and wooden beams. The ground and first floors were subdivided into small units, while the upper floor was open. Only the east wing of the original courtyard building survived. This was demolished as unsafe in 1992 and rebuilt in 1993.

At **Hamilton Place** (SJ 404 663) an evaluation on the site of the bath house attached to the southern side of the so-called Elliptical Building revealed substantial remains of masonry and floor deposits. The southern wall was located and possibly a paved entrance in the centre of that side. A substantial internal wall at an eccentric angle may be part of an apse.



*Painting by Moses Griffiths of Chester Castle, as it existed in the last quarter of the 18th century*



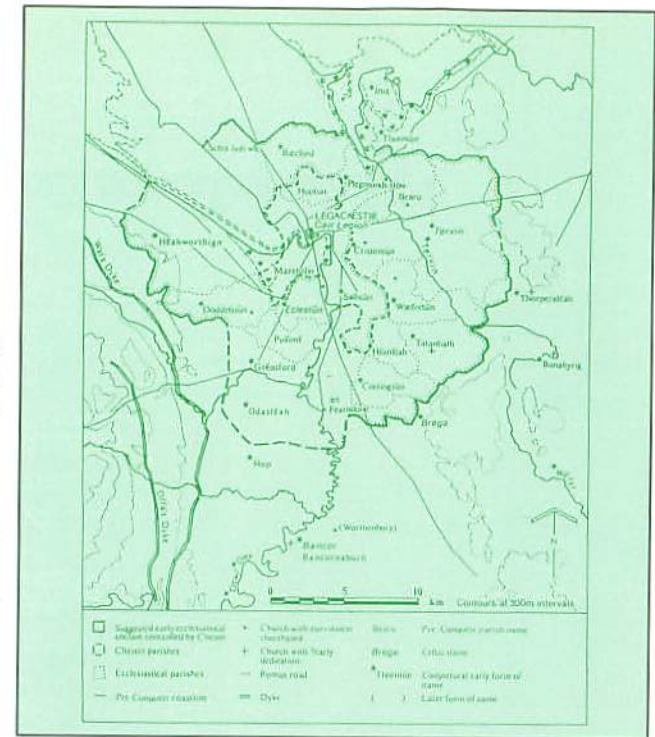
At **Chester Castle** (SJ 404 658) an evaluation in the forecourt was carried out to investigate subsidence caused by the compression of silts in the moat of the medieval castle. Two trenches were excavated, one containing only sand and quarry waste, the other mixed with soil ash and refuse. The former appears to have been dumped in the top of the old outer bailey moat when the castle was rebuilt in the 18th century, the latter presumably relates to the occupation of the castle in the 17th or 18th centuries.

Work recommenced at **Commonhall Street** (SJ 404 661) in preparation for the opening of a major new display on Roman Chester. Parts of a well-preserved Roman legionary building have been found, though its plan and function remain unknown. The overlying Saxon occupation has been located but not yet examined in detail. It may be that the ruins of the Roman building were not levelled until the Saxon period. Evidence of a medieval undercroft or cellar was recovered, and in the 16th or 17th century a further building stood adjacent to what was probably a continuation of Pierpoint Lane. In the 18th century this was replaced by a large town house with a fine cellar, which encroached right across Pierpoint Lane. This was replaced by the present structure during the 1960s.

At **Back Lane, Tattenhall** (SJ 520 585) an assessment and watching brief during the laying of a water main revealed a typical Cheshire enclosure landscape of late 18th or early 19th century date. There was some indication from aerial photographs, field names and site evidence of an earlier period of enclosure, and stray finds of 17th to mid 18th century date may relate to this earlier period.

A desk-based assessment of former farmland at **Swettenham Hall, Congleton** (SJ 809 814) found little evidence of earlier land use. However, the hall itself is of 17th century date (though much altered in the 19th century) and has a fine range of 17th century stables and an 18th century dovecote.

The past year has seen steady progress with our programme of publications. These included a booklet on the City Ditches in Foregate Street, a collection of papers from a regional seminar on archaeological evaluations, and another visitor's guide in our 'Discovering Chester' series, entitled 'Ruins and Remains'. A popular book on the history of Chester from prehistory to the 20th century has been prepared, and is due to be published by Batsford in March 1994.



*Map of the Chester area in the Sub-Roman period, produced for the Batsford book on Chester (drawing: Tim Morgan)*

*Projects were funded by Chester City Council and by contributions from the various developers: Cavendish Woodhouse plc, Scottish Widows, Cheshire County Council, Fordent Properties, Severn Trent Water Authority, Greenwood Carter Associates. They were directed and carried out by S W Ward, K J Matthews, I Smith and M Turner. The standing building survey was carried out by L Walker. The archives are held by Chester Archaeological Service at the Grosvenor Museum. CHESTER CITY DITCHES and EVALUATIONS IN RESCUE ARCHAEOLOGY are available from the Grosvenor Museum, at £2.50 each including p&p.*



## 8 RESEARCH AND REPAIR AT LITTLE MORETON HALL *Jeremy Milln, The National Trust*

These days, extensive repair work to ancient buildings is routinely attended by archaeologists. They are responsible for surveying the building in detail, documenting any changes or finds which are made, and providing properly-evidenced guidance to the architect where interpretation needs to be carried into practice.

The all-timbered South Range at Little Moreton near Congleton (SJ 832 589), with its drunken-looking Long Gallery, was found to have become structurally so weakened by decay and shifts of its eccentric loading that it needed a year's work to correct. Furthermore, the conversion of part of the hall service wing for a custodian's flat and the construction of an employees' mess and stores needed to be carried out.

A 1:20 survey, partially based on photogrammetric plots, was first undertaken. Each structural component was then numbered and recorded using a simple card system. This discipline forces critical observation, and yielded a huge amount of information about the way this complex structure had been both put together and previously repaired. No useful record of earlier repairs, by Elizabeth Moreton in the 1890s, her cousin Charles Abraham in the 1920s or the Trust itself in the 1950s - all ostensibly carried out according to the principle 'conserve as found' - had survived.



Many hundreds of decayed faces and joints had been repaired with small splices and packing pieces. It was also found, disguised by the application of familiar black pitch, that larger areas, including several windows, had been replaced. As much of this had itself perished, the opportunity was taken to reinterpret and, where evidence allowed, correct. For instance, the frame of the south window of the Guests' Parlour, which had been made up as a ten-light unit about 1895, could be reinterpreted, on the evidence of surviving mortices, as a twelve-light window jointed directly to the building. Similar research has brought back the form and richness of many of the mouldings and carving, too. A traditional repair of the joint of a weathered transom had often given us little more than a degraded moulding in a new piece of wood and an extra joint. The practice today would usually be to replace a perished component as first made, retiring the original to permanent archive storage.

*Part of a collection of slippers and boots found in the South Range garderobe, c1870-90  
(photo: The Leather Conservation Centre)*



Other findings helped clarify the way the hall had developed and been used, and these were fed into revisions of the guidebook and display areas. Lack of funds prevented the commissioning of a full tree-ring dating programme, but evaluation shows that there are several builds within the South Range. However the popular belief that, because the Long Gallery has so little relationship to the first floor, it must have been added later (for which there is no structural evidence), remains an open question. A date of c1580 is likely, but the carved consoles in the Guests' Hall, which were put in to help prop the Long Gallery, are nicely 1649, the Bake House Range (now the loos) is 1610 and the Cruck Barn (part of the adjacent farm, not open to the public) is 1545, give or take a year or two.

The base of the South Range garderobe, which was largely dismantled for repair, produced slip and mottled ware dishes, chamberpots and onion wine bottles of the period 1680-1730. Left from the 1890s repairs, an interesting range of domestic pottery and leather goods representing the hall's farmhouse period, was recovered. From behind the Long Gallery panelling, small skin-covered moss-filled tennis balls, proving that it was originally used for games and, under floorboards, beads, pins, a gaming piece and even early National Trust entry tickets were found.



Recarving (photo: Cliff Guttridge)



The South Range after repair. There are no plans to reblacken the timber (photo: The National Trust)

The Phase VI repairs at Little Moreton were carried out by The National Trust between October 1990 and April 1992. The main contractors were Linford - Bridgman, Lichfield, and the architects R Melville and Partners, Leamington Spa. Photogrammetry was by TSG Survey Services, York, and dendrochronology by the University of Nottingham. The author is grateful to Mr Peter Chiazzese for technical assistance, and to volunteers from the Stoke-on-Trent Museum Archaeological Society for excavation. The paper archive is held at The National Trust Mercia Regional Office, Attingham Park, Shrewsbury SY4 4TP. Artefacts are held at Little Moreton Hall.



## 9 HEADLESS CROSS, LEIGHTON *John Evans*

A continuing programme of research on the history of Leighton Township, Neston, has led to the finding of two possible early cross base stones. Close to the township boundary are several fields named 'Headless Cross' and various derivatives. It was whilst studying this area that the stones were located. They were capping a Victorian cess pit and had been badly damaged during alteration for this purpose.



*One of the stones, showing the squared recess in its face*

*The landowner, Mr R Home, allowed access and removal for safekeeping of the stones, which was undertaken with the aid of a grant from Cheshire County Council. The find is recorded in the Cheshire County Sites and Monuments Record, CSMR 2314.*

Approximately half of each stone survives, each bearing witness to its re-use in the form of slots cut for pump fixings. Enough features survive however to establish their probable origins. The most significant of these features are the square shallow recesses, perhaps cut to accommodate the next tier of stones in a cross base. The stones do not fit together and may therefore represent finds from two cross bases, or the rebuild of a single cross.

The name 'Headless Cross' appears in 16th and 17th century documents, notably a Manor Bounds description of Leighton (1581) and the Cheshire Court Rolls of 1613. In Cheshire there were at least seven such 'crosses' but none survives intact, nor is there any record of their origins or contemporary descriptions. A base stone survives at Long Stone Lane, Delamere (SJ 585 678), and it may be significant that its dimensions are the same as the recess in one of the Leighton examples.

The term 'headless cross' is ambiguous, and could refer to Christian crosses which have lost their upper portion, or to pre-Christian monoliths which were never cruciform. The latter interpretation is likely, since many of the sites are remote from present Christian centres, where continuity of worship might be expected. It might also

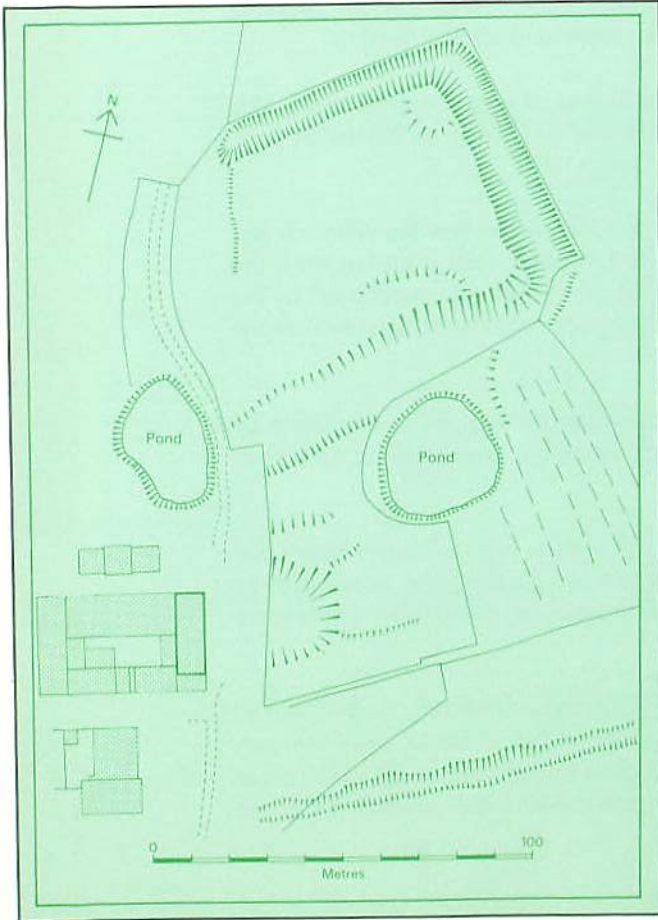
be expected that, in a continuing Christian religious environment, damaged crosses would have been repaired. In the strong Christian beliefs of the time it would be assumed that all such monuments were simply crosses where the cross bar was lost, and they were therefore worshipped as a matter of duty.

This belief appears to have changed with the advent of the Puritan iconoclastic movement in the early 17th century, when all of the 'headless crosses' were destroyed. At Chester Star Chamber in 1613, eleven men were accused of destroying "four ancient crosses, covered in diverse and curious marks and beyond the memory of man". They pleaded that the destruction was a protest against the idolatrous worship of the crosses, and that it was not against the law to destroy objects of superstitious use. The men were acquitted.



## 10 A SURVEY OF TWO MEDIEVAL MOATED SITES IN WEST CHESHIRE *Susan Reynolds*

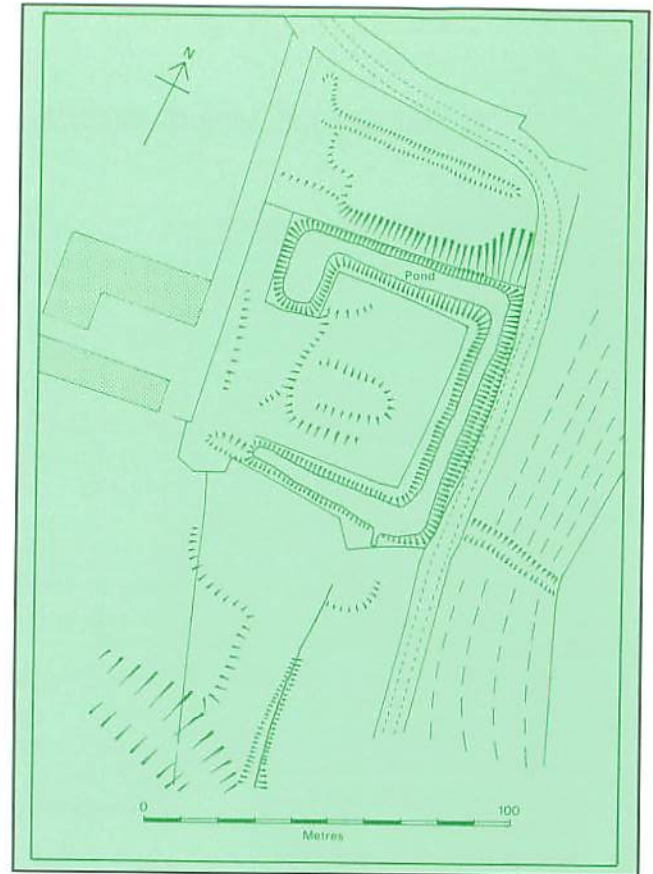
Two medieval moated sites in West Cheshire have been surveyed by students of Chester College as part of a fieldwork course. The moat at **Old Beachin Farm, Coddington** (SJ 4446 5735) may have originated in the 13th century as the manor house of the Boteler family, although from the 15th century its status appears to have declined to that of a tenanted farm. The remains of the moat are defined on three sides by a dry earthwork hollow that still holds water in periods of exceptional rain.



*The moat at Old Beachin Farm, Coddington*

A western side is suggested by the slight westward swing of the lane heading northwards to Aldford. Sometime during the post-medieval period the moat was abandoned in favour of an adjacent site to the south. The location of this later farm may clearly be identified from old maps and on the ground by a few amorphous earthworks. The present farm, built at the turn of the century, incorporates within its stables and barns one of the outbuildings (outlined in bold) of its predecessor.

The moat at **Lea Hall Farm, near Aldford** (SJ 4319 5885) was the home of the de Calveley family from the mid 14th century until 1714, when it passed to Thomas Cotton whose family sold it to Joseph White in 1800. It was later incorporated into the Grosvenor Estate, in which it remains today. The moat survives as an open water-filled feature on three sides. The fourth side has been filled, but its line survives as a linear earthwork. Earthwork mounds on the moat platform may mark the former position of buildings cleared when the present farmhouse was built by James Douglas for the Grosvenor Estate. To the south is an L-shaped earthwork which may be a remnant of an outer enclosure or garden associated with the moat. This is cut by a deep linear hollow, probably the former line of a lane leading from the highest crossing over Coddington Brook.

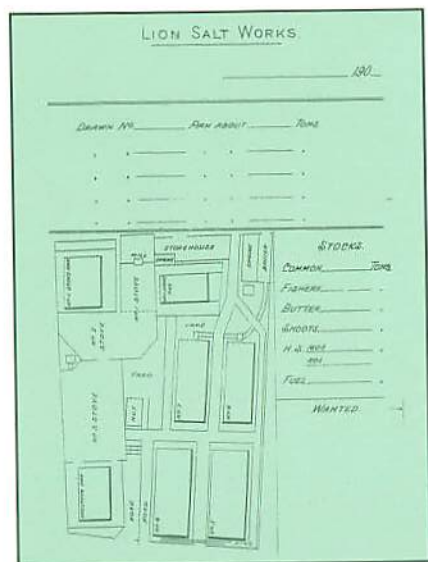


*The moat at Lea Hall Farm, near Aldford*

*The archive will be deposited with the Cheshire Sites and Monuments Record. The surveys were by kind permission of the owners, Mr and Mrs Richie-Noakes and His Grace the Duke of Westminster through his agent Mr Heywood. They were carried out by Alison Biggs, Lynda Bond, Philip Bramley, Andrea Fisher, Ann Jeffs, Christopher Leese, Judith Mellor, David Mount, Paul Stringfellow and Jane Wrin. The drawings were prepared for publication by Wayne Cocroft.*



## 11 THE LION SALT WORKS, MARSTON, NORTHWICH *Andrew and Annelise Fielding, Lion Salt Works Trust*



**A stock form, found in the loft of the Site Manager's Office in 1990, showing the layout of the works about 1900**

The Lion Salt Works is the last surviving open pan saltworks in Cheshire. It was run by Ingram Thompson and Sons Ltd and closed in 1986.

Deeds to the property now known as the Lion Salt Works date back to 1641, though the first mention of "rock salt, salt rock, seeths of salt..." is not until 1781 when John Gilbert the elder purchased the plot of land known as the Simme Fields from Samuel Sunderland. Gilbert paid £2,000 for the property, £1,000 of which paid off debts owed by the Sunderlands to Sir John Flemming-Leicester of Tabley Hall. The day after the purchase was completed, Gilbert raised a further £1,000 on the property from the same source. He used the money to sink a shaft through Marston Mine to a drier "Bottom Bed" at 300ft (100m). After this date all mines in the area were sunk to this depth.

In 1821 John Gilbert the younger sold the Symme Fields to John Buckley, tenant farmer at Marston Hall Farm. At a sale of 1868 by the Buckley heirs, Messrs Thompson Works is shown on the plan and described as leased by John Thompson (I) in 1857 for a term of 50 years. By this time a canal arm had been built.

According to the 1874 Morris Directory, Jabez Thompson was making salt on the site then called the Alliance Salt Works. This saltworks was just one of the Thompsons' businesses, which included Weaver flats, narrowboats, the Castle boatyard (later Yarwoods) and other saltworks and mines. In 1888 the Alliance Works was purchased by the Salt Union, at which time John Thompson (II) and his son Henry Ingram Thompson also sold interests in the Willowbank and Island Works at Winsford, and Witton Hall Mine in Northwich.

One of the conditions of the sale at Marston was that no saltworks could be operated on the site in the future by anyone except the Salt Union. This meant that when Ingram Thompson and Sons eventually acquired the land their saltworks was confined to the area shown as Lot 2 in the 1868 sale plan.

John Thompson (II) built a panhouse in the coalyard of the Red Lion Hotel. By 1899, when Henry Ingram Thompson inherited the business, the Lion Works were valued at £6,600 and described as surrounding the hotel. Shortly afterwards the hotel and associated cottages were demolished, and terraced houses on Ollershaw Lane were converted and extended to form a new Lion Inn, with stables and meeting room.

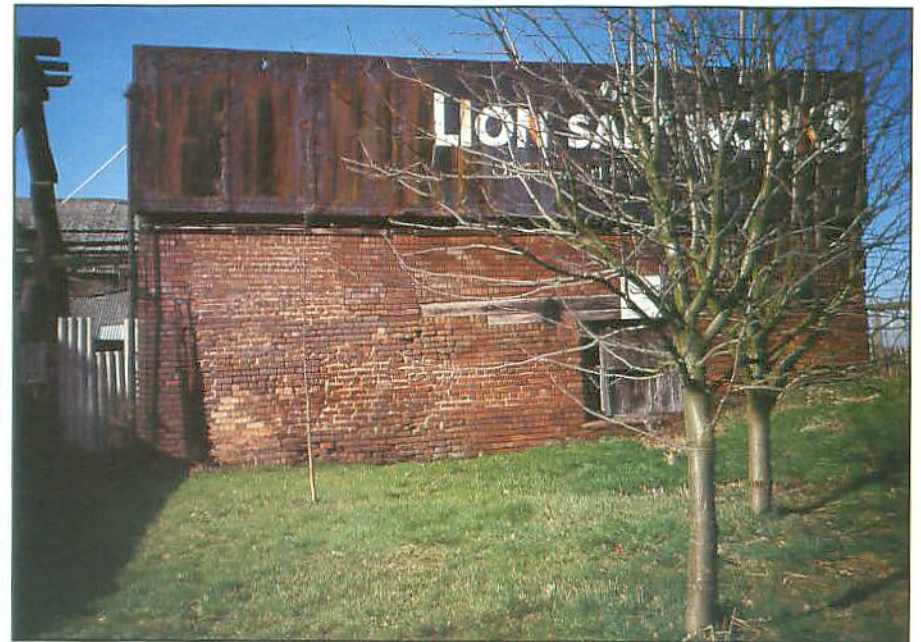
A stock record form shows the layout of the Lion Salt Works shortly after 1900. Ollershaw Lane runs north-south to the left of the sketch plan. John Thompson's original panhouse on the site is labelled No 2 Stove, with the pan fronting the canal. The Lion Hotel had been located beneath the yard and No 7 Common Pan. The south-west corner of No 2 Stove, behind the chimney on Ollershaw Lane, still follows the line of the curved wall which marked the driveway to the Red Lion Hotel.



Eventually the whole works was acquired by Henry Ingram Thompson, and expanded to comprise three fine pans, four common pans, two chimneys, a storehouse, smithy and manager's office.

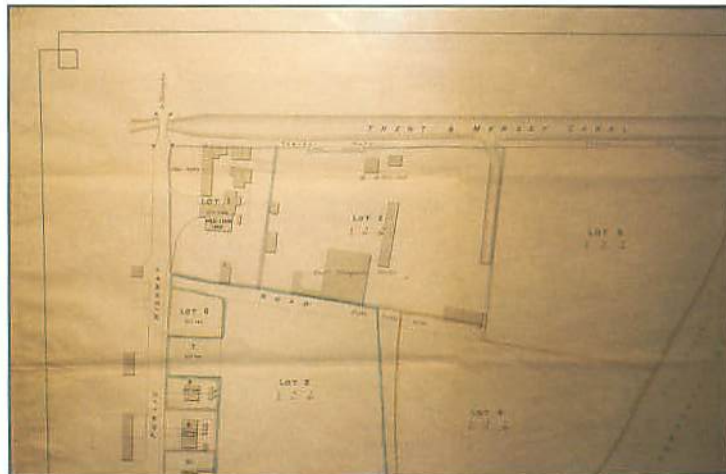
The yard and four common pans were cleared in the 1930s to make way for a fourth stove pan. A new borehole was drilled through the south-east corner of Common Pan No 5. Parts of this remain beneath the present pump house. In 1960 a cottage by the canal was demolished and Pan House No 5 was constructed.

In 1992, investigations began to determine what early structures remain. The canal arm shown in the 1868 plan still survives, but is no longer part of the present landholding and is cut off from the canal by the modern towpath. Part of Henry Ingram Thompson's railway siding has been excavated, and now has an early timber-framed pitched-roofed salt van standing upon it.



*The brine tank at the Lion Salt Works. An engine and boiler were located in the brick building below*

Dumping of ash, clinker and panscale around the site was common during the later years of production to save transport costs. It is possible therefore that structural remains of the Alliance Salt Works survive, buried in clinker deposits.



*Plan of 1868 showing the canal arm and the plot of land between Plots 4 and 5 on which John Thompson built a tramway to his saltworks*

At the end of 1992 a trial trench was excavated, and revealed brick walls beneath 450mm of ash and clinker. No attempt was made to continue excavating once brick structures were revealed, as the intention was to discover whether or not the earlier saltworks had been completely dismantled. It was quite common for all building materials to be removed for re-use.

In 1993 it is intended to continue these investigations. A decision whether to carry out a large-scale excavation will be made after the results have been assessed. Together with further documentary research, this work will be used by the Lion Salt Works Trust to prepare design proposals for restoration of the site as an industrial museum.

*The Lion Salt Works is owned by Vale Royal Borough Council. The Project Officer is employed by Vale Royal Borough Council, 50% funded by Cheshire County Council, with office support provided by Macclesfield and Vale Royal Groundwork Trust. A Lion Salt Works Trust was formed in January 1993.*



Roman remain no 2192

This piece of pot is black.  
It is rough on the outside but smoother on the  
inside because we think it held liquid.  
The pattern looks like diamonds tessellating.  
It smells like charcoal.  
It is 10cm across and about 4 1/2 cm in height.  
It has a rim of 2cm which has chips in.  
It is made of black burnished clay  
which glazes a bit in the light.



Work by Wimboldsley Primary School, near Middlewich

## 12 ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM: THE ROMAN CHESHIRE SCHOOLS LOAN BOXES *Julie Williams, Cheshire Museums Service, and Molly Spink, Cheshire Museums and Archives Education Project*

In 1992, Roman finds excavated in Weaver Street, Northwich were made available for educational use. It seemed most appropriate to organise this material into loan collections which would allow the study of archaeology in the classroom. The finds were put into special loan boxes, supported by replica pieces of pottery, jewellery, coins and a writing tablet. Teachers' notes and a catalogue of finds were also included, with a map of Roman Cheshire.

Used by primary schools to support the 'Invaders and Settlers' unit of National Curriculum History, and by secondary schools as part of the History Study Unit on 'The Roman Empire', the loan boxes show how original source material can stimulate learning opportunities in the classroom. Numerous activities, including sorting, analysing, measuring, recording and observational drawing, have been pursued. Through handling original material children can make deductions, an important aspect of Attainment Target Three, The Use of Historical Sources.

From this starting point children have then pursued individual research in order to discover how the original object would have looked and been used when it was whole. Their descriptions and ideas reveal the excitement of handling pottery from a period which is otherwise only accessible in the classroom through the use of secondary sources. The boxes have also provided the opportunity for children to consider the work of the archaeologist, the place of conservation when working with artefacts from the past, and importantly to develop an understanding of historical evidence and the concept of time.

Three in-service training sessions have been held to introduce teachers to the ideas which can be employed when studying Roman Cheshire. By the end of May 1993, the boxes had been used by 24 schools, providing 'hands-on' experience for hundreds of children across the county. As the Roman Empire is an important part of the secondary National Curriculum, and many primary schools are opting to cover this period too, it is anticipated that demand for the boxes will increase.

Four loan boxes are available for schools  
from: **THE SALT MUSEUM, 162 London  
Road, Northwich, CW9 8AB,  
Tel: Northwich (0606) 41331.**



Children from Witton Church Walk Primary School, Northwich, working with Roman pottery





### 13 OTHER NEWS *Adrian Tindall, Cheshire County Council*

A Liverpool University training excavation directed by Robert Philpott was carried out on one of the last vacant plots on the main street at **Norton** village (SJ 556 821). Previous excavations in the area had revealed evidence of a long sequence of occupation from the medieval period onwards, as well as two prehistoric pits. Apart from a single flint flake from the ploughsoil, the excavations revealed no evidence of occupation before the late 17th/early 18th century, when a small cottage occupied the site. The site was subsequently terraced to create a tennis court.



Post-excavation work has been carried out on the medieval moated site of

#### **Barrow Old Hall, Great Sankey** *Excavation in progress at Norton*

(SJ 562 896) by the North West Archaeological Trust. Barrow Old Hall is first recorded in 1330 as the moated manor house of the de Barrows. It was altered several times; by the early 17th century it comprised a hall, parlour and larder, and by 1662-6 contained three hearths. In 1859 it was sold as "An ancient moated Mansion, containing many excellent Rooms...surrounded by agreeable and productive Gardens and Grounds, with Stables and Outbuildings attached". The hall was demolished in the 1920s. Excavations in 1987 revealed the timber post-holes and beam slots of the medieval building, overlain by a sandstone wall and clay floor of probable 17th century date. On the moat edge were traces of a further timber structure, possibly a sluice or latrine. Finds from the site were largely of 16th century and later date, and suggest a site of fairly high social status.

A field evaluation on the proposed route of the A523 Poynton By-Pass has been carried out by the Greater Manchester Archaeological Unit. Several trenches were dug along the line of the proposed route, the only results of note being the stone footings of a cottage of probable 18th century date at **Adlington** (SJ 911 804). A watching brief at the **King's Arms, Hightown, Middlewich** (SJ 704 662) by the Chester Archaeological Service failed to reveal any evidence of occupation prior to the 19th century.

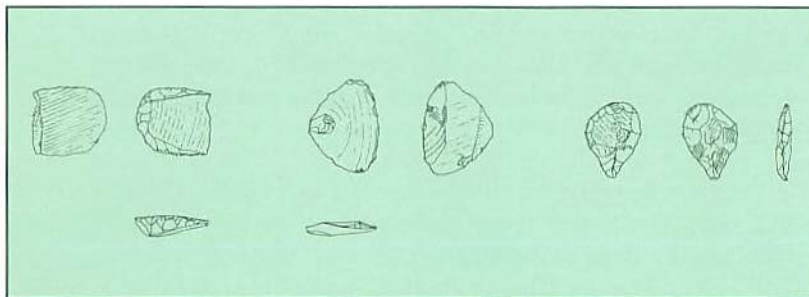


Members of the Macclesfield Historical Society have been carrying out an archaeological survey of **Macclesfield**. This includes the systematic checking and updating of information in the County Sites and Monuments Record, and a more intensive survey of the medieval borough using documentary and other sources. It has identified at least one building in need of repair, some sites which are no longer discernible and several possible candidates for inclusion in the SMR. The survey of the medieval borough aims to identify more precisely its boundaries within the modern town, and to assess the archaeological potential of individual sites. Whilst there are still areas of surviving potential within the historic core of the town, a general picture emerges of missed opportunities - even on such recent developments as the new Town Hall extension.



*The new Roman Middlewich display at Middlewich Library*

A new display on **Roman Middlewich** has been opened at Middlewich Library. The display, *'Fabricae Salinae: the crafts and industries of Roman Middlewich'*, features some of the most important finds associated with saltpanning and other industries in the Roman settlement of *Salinae*. It may be viewed at any time during normal library opening hours.



*Prehistoric flints from the Peckforton Hills reported to the Grosvenor Museum*

Have you ever come across an object you think may be of archaeological interest, but not known who to ask? The Grosvenor Museum now offers an enquiry and identification service for anyone who thinks they might have found something of archaeological interest. The service is available every Thursday afternoon between 2 and 5pm. If this is inconvenient, you can ring the Keeper of Archaeology, Dan Robinson (0244 321616), to make an appointment.

*The work on Norton, Barrow Old Hall, Macclesfield and Roman Middlewich were grant-aided by Cheshire County Council. Further information on all of these projects may be obtained from: THE PRINCIPAL ARCHAEOLOGIST, CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING, COMMERCE HOUSE, HUNTER STREET, CHESTER CH1 2QP, TEL CHESTER (0244) 603160.*







*New light on Roman Cheshire, page 6*



*Excavations at Roman Wilderspool, page 8*



*Restoration work at Little Moreton Hall, page 16*



*A rare coin from South Wirral, page 10*

Cheshire County Council



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Designed by Cheshire Museums