

**CHESTER  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
SERVICE**

# Newsletter

## Chester Castle

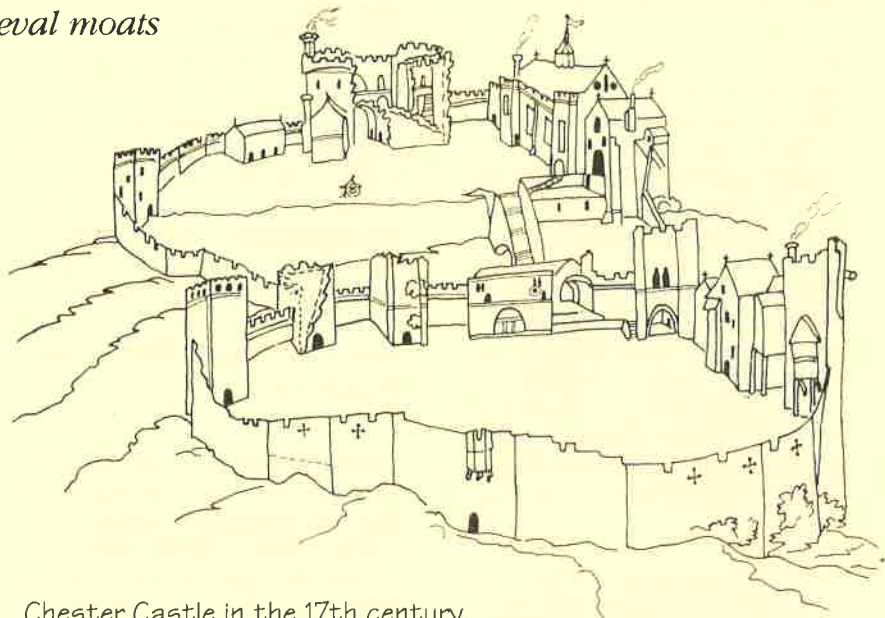
*Excavation on site of medieval moats*

### Projects

Chester Castle as it exists today is largely the creation of the architect Thomas Harrison. In 1788-91 he swept away the medieval outer bailey and built a fine range of buildings in the classical revival style. To their front, facing Grosvenor Road, he laid out a large semi-circular parade ground.

Unfortunately, the new buildings extended beyond their medieval predecessors. As a result the parade ground extends across what had been the moat outside the outer bailey of the medieval castle. The line of the moat is marked by a wide curved subsidence depression around the eastern and northern sides of the parade ground which is now used as a car park. It is very likely that the moat is filled with soft rubbish-rich and organic silts dating from the later years of the medieval castle like the ones that we found in the City ditches on the recent W H Smith dig. It is the compression of these silts that is causing the subsidence.

The current excavations were commissioned by Cheshire County Council's Architectural and Building Service to enable them to devise ways in which the modern surface and the recent deposits underlying it could be relaid to counter the subsidence and yet not damage the important archaeological layers which lie further down.



*Chester Castle in the 17th century.*

For three weeks in February, in co-operation with the County Archaeologist Adrian Tindall we excavated two holes outside the Military Museum Block. In each, excavation was restricted to deposits dating from the period of the construction of the Harrison building. Earlier deposits lay at too great a depth to be safely dug in the time available. The southern hole contained only a great deposit of sand and quarry waste. The northern one was a lot more mixed with soil ash and refuse. Nevertheless, both these sets of deposits seem to be merely great levelling dumps put down in the top of the old outer bailey moat when the eighteenth century castle was built.

**This project was funded by Cheshire County Council.**

**Simon Ward**

### Foregate Street

A little over a year ago proposals were put forward to redevelop the properties at 105-109 Foregate Street. The buildings had lain derelict for some years, and a developer was planning to rebuild them.

When planning permission was granted the City Council and the developer entered into a legal agreement according to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This ensured that the archaeological remains would be protected on some parts of the site and excavated where destruction was unavoidable. We often enter into agreements of this kind in areas where we know the archaeology to be particularly sensitive.

Gifford and Partners carried out an archaeological evaluation and discovered a medieval pit and Roman building remains.

Our negotiations with the developer enabled us to suggest ways in which the foundations for the new building could be modified. This was necessary to reduce the destruction of archaeological remains. One part of the site, though, could not be protected in this way - the pit at the base of a lift shaft in the rear of the building.

Our expectations were high: the site was only five metres away from the Roman building found in 1992. We were confident of finding it as well as more medieval pits. However, reality did not live up to our expectations.

The first thing we discovered on the site was a vehicle inspection pit. This was originally built earlier in the 20th century, enlarged in the 1960s and filled in during the 1980s. Whilst we were digging it out the man who had filled it in called by to tell us he had done it!

Before the garage was built the area had been an open yard. We found garden walls and a cobbled surface, dating from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. This had covered a pit whose contents dated from the late eighteenth century.

There was no sign of earlier activity on the site. A thick deposit of grey-brown soil had accumulated over the entire site, and from it finds of Roman, medieval and post-medieval date were recovered. This deposit was puzzling as it was over half a metre thick, and the material of different dates contained within it was thoroughly mixed up. The earliest pottery, of Roman date, was not always found at the bottom and the latest, dating from the 18th century, was not always near the top. It may be that this was a garden soil for many centuries and the pottery dropped on or near it by one generation of Chester's residents was simply reworked into it by the next and so on for 1700 years.

**This project was funded by Stratton Property Developments.**

**Keith Matthews**

## **Recent discoveries in Pulford**

During the first week of February we undertook a small investigation of a site opposite the church in Pulford, three and a half miles south west of Chester at the junction of Dodleston Lane and Wrexham Road.

Pulford is an ancient parish. It was first recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086, although it was probably established much earlier.

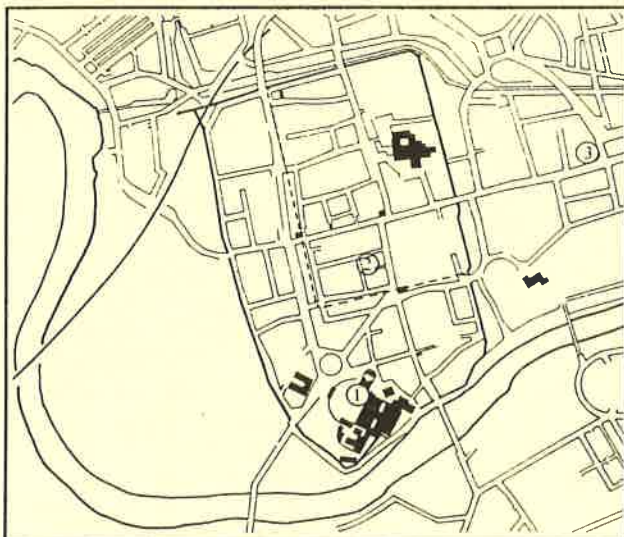
A castle was built next to the church during the twelfth century to protect the border with Wales, and we had hoped to find medieval occupation opposite it. As it turned out the field had been cultivated during the Middle Ages, and no traces of early houses were found. Evidence of old farming methods in the form of 'ridge-and-furrow' - a pattern of humps and dips - still exist on the southern part of the site.

At the northern end, towards Dodleston Lane, we found stronger evidence of occupation including traces of a building, but this was restricted to the mid to late eighteenth century. This ties in with Burdett's Map of Cheshire, published in 1777, which shows a building on this site. What we now call Dodleston Lane was at that time just a back lane, whilst Dodleston Lane itself ran past Pulford Hall, some way to the north. The old line of the Lane was closed by about 1830.

The evidence from our evaluation and of the landscape of the village suggests that its medieval focus lay rather to the north, where a crossroads once existed. The original Dodleston Lane has gone, but Old Lane, leading east to Poulton, carries on the line of what may have been a very ancient route.

**This project was funded by Griffin Homes (Gresford) Ltd.**

**Keith Matthews**



- Location plan showing sites of excavations
- 1 Chester Castle
  - 2 Commonhall Street
  - 3 105-109 Foregate Street

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## Curatorial

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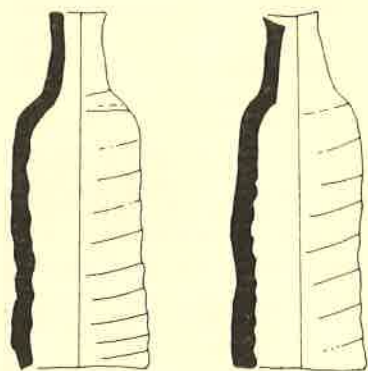
After the Civil War anniversary celebrations of 1992, this year sees the 1950th anniversary of the Roman invasion of Britain.

Cheshire Museums are creating an exhibition on *'The Romans in Cheshire'* which will run from 6th April to 26th July at the Weaver Hall Museum in Northwich. Since Chester was by far the most important place in Roman Cheshire it is not surprising that the City Council's Archaeological Service and its Museums and Galleries Service are combining to make a major contribution to the new exhibition, supplying a considerable number of objects and illustrations.

More Roman material is being lent to Wrexham Borough Council who are establishing a Visitor and Information Centre at Minera to explain the lead mines there. Although the spectacular white spoil heaps which are such a feature of the area date to the 19th century, it was the Romans who first began to exploit the lead and silver deposits of the area.

### Dan Robinson

*Keeper of Archaeology, Grosvenor Museum.*



Earthenware tubes used in the vaulting of the legionary bath house - excavated in Pepper Street in 1963. Currently on loan to Northwich Museum. (After DJP Mason) Scale : 1/4

# Deva Roman Experience

*Your opportunity to reveal Chester's buried history in Commonhall Street!*

This is the name of an exciting new enterprise in Chester which is the brainchild of Peter Dentith, a local businessman. The Experience is a visitor attraction that will include displays and life-size reconstructions of Roman Chester. It will also include a 'live' excavation carried on in front of the visitors, which is where the Archaeological Service comes in.

The Experience is located behind the west side of Bridge Street, between two side streets, Commonhall Street and Pierpoint Lane, in a building that is being converted from an old showroom. This is right in the historic core of Chester and so it is not surprising that it should contain remains from all periods of Chester's history. Two years ago, the Archaeological Service carried out an evaluation in the building for a development proposal that proved abortive. This showed that substantial remains of a good quality Roman building lay beneath this site. It formed one of the buildings in the Roman legionary fortress but its function at the moment remains unknown. Perhaps when we have carried out more work and know more of its plan, we will be able to identify it.

After the Roman building had collapsed and been levelled the Saxons occupied the site. This was followed by more intensive occupation during the Middle Ages. Bridge Street was one of the most important streets during the Middle Ages and fine houses were built along it. One, the 'Three Old Arches' still survives. Immediately

west of this site there once lay the Common Hall - the City's first Town Hall - and the White Friary. In 1510, St Ursula's Hospital was founded just north-west of the site.

The excavation in the Experience will, therefore, be a very exciting one that should add greatly to our knowledge of Chester. Visitors to the centre will be able to see both the dig gradually revealing the structures of Chester's past and the work on the finds recovered from the dig.

This dig will also give us the opportunity to do something in Chester that we have not been able to do for a long time because of tight time schedules and the pressure from redevelopment that we encounter on most sites these days. On this dig there will be many opportunities for the public to become involved.

One important element of this will be a series of training digs that we will run lasting four days. On these, the participants will be given an introduction to Chester's history and training in archaeological techniques as well as lots of 'hands on' experience on the site. The first two courses are planned over the Easter holiday, 5th - 8th April and 12th - 15th April. The cost of each course is £40.

### Simon Ward

*For further information contact Simon Ward at the Archaeological Service.*





**Council of the  
CITY OF CHESTER**

**DEPT OF LEISURE SERVICES  
(Cultural Services)  
Archaeological Service**

*City Archaeologist*  
M Morris, BA, MIFA

*Archaeological Service Offices*  
Grosvenor Museum, 27 Grosvenor St,  
Chester CH1 2DD. Tel (0244) 321616

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## Staff Profile

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### Gillian Dunn

#### *Post-Excavation Assistant*



After graduating in Archaeological Sciences from Bradford University in 1982 Gillian began working in the Department of Urban Archaeology in the Museum of London. During the six years spent in London, processing artefacts and assessing their importance, she also assisted in the organisation of the archaeology archives and was involved in the early stages of computerisation. In 1988 she was appointed as Finds Officer with Winchester Museums Service to help with the publication of excavation reports and supervise the recording of finds.

She has worked on excavations in Cumbria and Hampshire and spent a short period of time in the Research Laboratory of the British Museum where she was involved in the chemical analysis of Tibetan statuettes.

Gillian joined the Chester Archaeological Service in 1991 and is currently studying the pottery

found during excavations of the barracks located within the Roman fortress. She also helps to develop a range of public activities and for the last eight months has been responsible for the compilation and distribution of the Newsletter.

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## Education

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### Work Experience in Archaeology

As a student or tutor at school or college you may be looking for 'work experience' placements this year. Over the last twelve months nine local students have spent one or two weeks in the Archaeological Service Section working with a member of staff. Space is at a premium so the work will vary according to what is current at the time. Students may therefore handle material coming in direct from a site, or assist in the compilation of a record of a previous excavation, or help with a display of finds.

There is great variety in the material from sites in and around Chester. No one site will be the same as the next! There may even be a chance of some work on an excavation but this is normally booked well in advance for the duration of the site. If you or your students are interested in 'work experience' as part of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI), or the Enterprise Initiative in Higher Education do get in touch with us and discuss what you need. Contact Janet Rutter at the Grosvenor Museum. Tel. 0244 321616.

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## News from the County

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### Roman Middlewich Exhibition

A new exhibition on the crafts and industries of Roman Middlewich has been opened at Middlewich Library. Middlewich was founded by the Romans between 70 and 80 AD, along what is now King Street. It rapidly grew into a large town covering over 60 acres, known as *Salinae*, so-called because the most common industry in the area was the drying of salt from the natural brine springs in the town. The salt was used in the surrounding countryside for curing meat and was probably traded throughout North - West England. The exhibition is a collaboration between the Environmental Planning Service, Cheshire Museums and Cheshire Libraries and can be viewed during library opening hours.

The Chester Archaeological Service Newsletter is compiled by Gillian Dunn and is published four times a year, in March, June, September and December. If you have any comments or questions, we should be pleased to hear from you.

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