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COUNTY COUNCIL
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New Series 1992/1

CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICE

Newsletter

Editorial

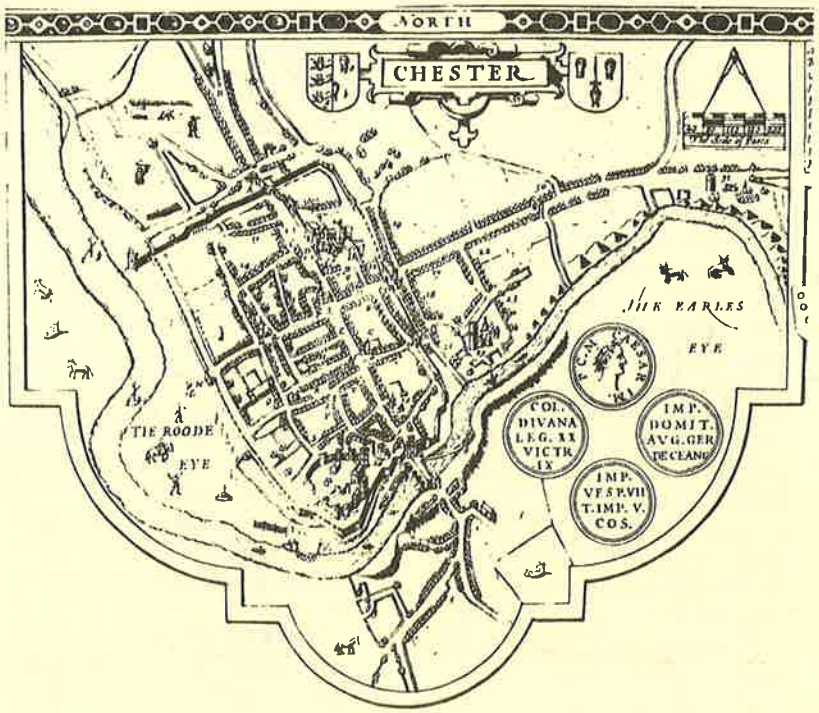
We wish all our readers a Happy New Year. In this edition we are pleased to have contributions from our colleagues in other Sections in the Grosvenor Museum and also from Adrian Tindall, the Cheshire County Archaeologist, and consequently we have a bumper issue. We hope you will enjoy reading it.

Projects

THE ROODEE

Last October an underpass was excavated mechanically across the race track on the eastern side of the Roodee near the Stands. Because the Roman quay lies nearby, a watching brief was carried out by Lesley Harrison and Simon Ward of the Archaeological Service with the hope of finding evidence for the development of the Roodee.

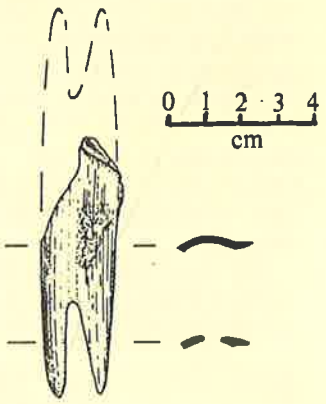
Today, of course, the Roodee is dry land, but the position of the Roman quay shows that at one time the river flowed close under the City Walls, totally covering the area where the race-course is now. About 1 metre (3') down we found a 2.5 metre (8') thick layer of coarse sand, laid down in fast-flowing water. Below was 2-3 metres (6'6" - 10') of dark blue-grey silty sand. Most of the finds, ranging from the Roman period to the late 18th century, and animal bone came from this layer. Samples taken from this layer showed that it had a high organic content which would only have settled out in slow-moving water.



Speed's map of Chester (1610), showing the shape of the Roodee at the start of the 17th century

We must therefore picture the Roodee as having been occupied by sandbanks and shifting channels, perhaps turning into a vast lagoon at high water. The organic material was probably washed into the river higher up because of erosion caused by **deforestation or agriculture. It is to** be hoped that we will have further chances to find out more about the development of one of Chester's most famous features, especially the dates at which the various changes took place.

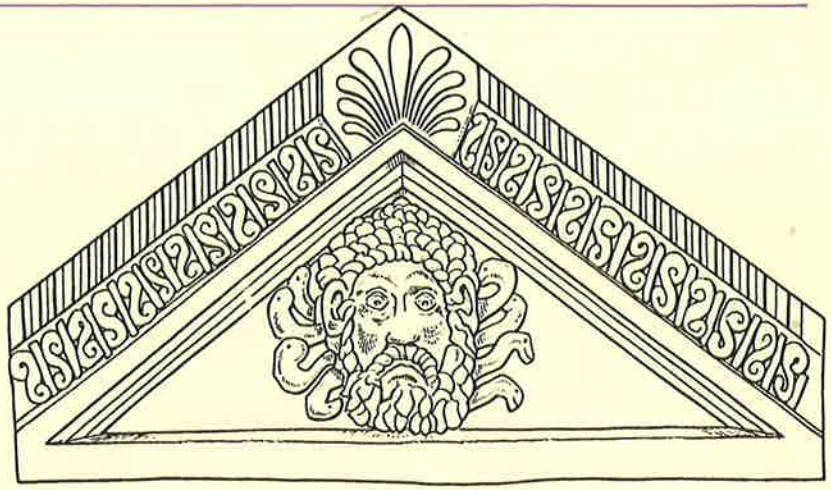
Lesley Harrison



Bone needle used for mending fishing nets, Found in the Roodee excavation

Displays

The Roman Stones Return to the Museum



Gable end of built tomb decorated with a Gorgon's head

Graveyards and tombstones are not everybody's cup of tea, but Chester's Roman tombstones are rather special. They are a collection of over 200 stones - the largest from a single site in Britain - which give us an amazing amount of information about life in Chester in Roman times.

History books nearly always talk about the deeds of the rich and famous, so we rarely have a chance to find out about the ordinary people who lived in the distant past. Therefore the Chester stones, with their inscriptions and sculptures of soldiers, women, children and slaves, give us a wonderful opportunity to learn about the people who didn't make the headlines in Roman Britain. They are naturally very popular with schools (more than ever now, thanks to the National Curriculum) and are visited by students from Britain and all over Europe.

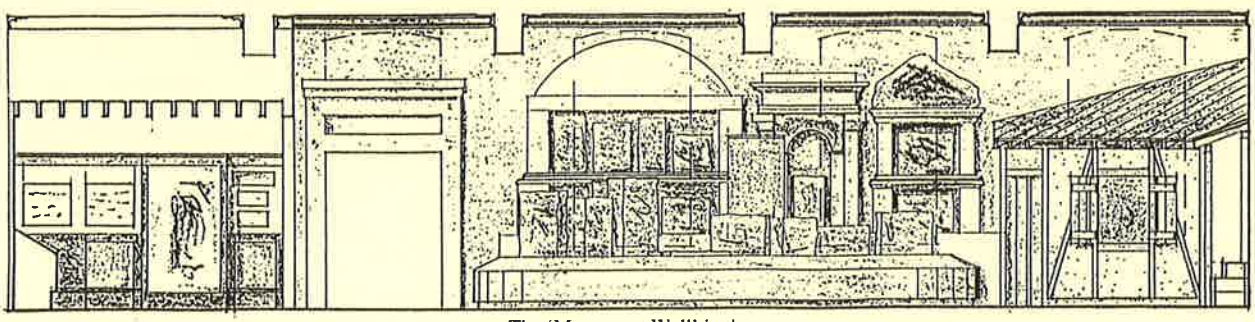
Most of the stones came to light in a most unexpected way about 100 years ago. The City Surveyor of the time was carrying out repairs on the northern section of the City Walls when he found a few Roman carved stones built into the base of the Walls. Over the next five years he and local archaeologists were to find almost 150!

The stones had all been used as building blocks, but none of the carved faces had been exposed to the weather. This explains why they are in such good condition today. Nobody knows for certain when the stones were used to repair the Walls, but it was probably towards the end of the Roman period, between AD 300 and AD 400. The stones must have come from a nearby cemetery, perhaps by the side of the Roman road which led northwards from the fortress of *Deva.*

After being in store for 18 months the Roman stones will be back in the Grosvenor Museum this summer. We are building a new gallery to display the best of them. It will be called the Webster Gallery in honour of the Museum's first professional curator. During his stay at Chester (1948-54), Dr Webster was responsible for creating both the Newstead Gallery and the Stones Gallery.

The idea behind the new displays is to create the feeling of being in a Roman cemetery. You will enter the room and walk through it along a winding Roman road. On either side of the road the tombstones will be raised in tiers or staging which will be hidden beneath artificial grass. We shall be displaying some of the carved stones which originally came from funeral monuments in a special 'monument wall' feature. Its shape will echo the outlines of the large Roman tombs which once stood outside the walls of *Deva.* Wherever possible we will use stones in their original positions. For example, the 'Gorgon's head' stone, which was once the gable end of a tomb shaped like a small house, will sit on top of a stand which looks like the original tomb.

Elsewhere in the gallery we shall be creating a small auditorium for 30-40 people, where visitors can be given short talks on the stones. It will be made to look like a small Roman theatre. We have also included an Information Centre where you can find out more about the stones and see pictures of those which are not on display. At the other end of the gallery you will find a full-size reconstruction of the office of an *optio* (a junior officer who acted



The 'Monument Wall' in the new Stones Gallery

as a general clerk). We are including this feature because we have an altar set up by an *optio*, and we wanted to show how it looked in its original setting.

We have pulled out all the stops to make the design for this new gallery as colourful and eye-catching as possible. Watch out for details of when it is opening in the press, and come and see what YOU think.

Dan Robinson, Keeper of Archaeology, Curatorial Service

The Heritage Centre 'Tactile' Display

The Heritage Centre was reopened in May/June 1991 completely refurbished. Within the new design there is a considerable amount on the archaeological importance of Chester, illustrating and explaining the siting and importance of the Roman fortress and the medieval port-based town.

As well as the series of display panels there are two tables of finds from sites in the city which visitors can handle. These have proved so popular in the last six months that the labels have had to be renewed and another 500 accompanying leaflets printed. Each of the large fragments of pottery and bone are clearly numbered and, together with the tray of oyster shells, are listed and described.

Most of the items are Roman to relatively recent pottery tablewares, locally made as well as imported types. There is also a fragment of a discarded clay mould from the casting of a medieval metal cauldron, roofing tile of Roman and 17th century date, and four decorated medieval floor tiles.

The Heritage Centre is open until March at the following times: Monday-Saturday 11.00am-5.00pm Sunday 12.00am-5.00 pm. Thereafter, Summer opening times apply.

Janet Rutter,
Archaeological Service

Enquiry Service

The Museum offers an enquiry service every Thursday afternoon from 2pm onwards. If you have an archaeological object you would like identified, bring it along and we will do our best to help you - but please note that we are not allowed to give valuations. We treat 'archaeological' as being:

- Anything dug up from the ground
- Objects older than the end of the English Civil War
- Coins and medals

The service operates every Thursday, but as usual we would advise you to phone in and check if you have to make a long journey to reach us. We are also happy to answer enquiries by telephone or letter, but please do not post objects to us - they may get lost!

Please contact: Dan Robinson, Keeper of Archaeology, Curatorial Service, Grosvenor Museum. Tel (0244) 321616 extn 44.

Notes & News

Seminars

Building up cooperation between organisations and across administrative boundaries is important to us. Archaeologists cannot work in isolation any more than anybody else. There are many organisations active in archaeology in this part of the country, and we felt that communication needed to be improved. Last November we therefore organised two one-day seminars, at which people could give informal talks about their recent work and discuss ideas and problems. Participants came from Cheshire, Merseyside, Manchester and North Wales, and despite sometimes heated debate the meetings seemed to be a success. We hope that there will be more such meetings, perhaps once or twice a year at different places. If you are working in archaeology in this part of the country and would like to contribute or attend, do get in touch.

Please contact: Peter Carrington, Archaeological Service, Grosvenor Museum. Tel (0244) 321616 extn 36.

Work Experience

Are you looking for 'work experience'? As a student at school or college, you may be looking for a work experience placement this year. In the last fourteen months, twelve students aged between 15 and 20 have spent one or two weeks in the Archaeological Service, working alongside a member of staff.

Space is short, so the work will vary according to what is current at the time. Students may therefore handle material coming in directly from a site, or be contributing towards the archive of an excavation carried out in the past. There is an enormous variety in the finds from sites in and around Chester; no site will ever be identical to the next! There may even be a chance of some work on an excavation, but this normally needs to be booked well in advance, for the duration of the dig.

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.

Please contact: Mrs Janet Rutter, Archaeological Service, Grosvenor Museum. Tel (0244) 321616 extn 31.

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

Artefacts in the Classroom

The Education Service holds a small Loans Collection to enable local teachers to use artefacts in the classroom. In September, with the help of the Archaeological Service, we launched the latest addition to this collection - Roman Archaeology.

The Loans Box contains both genuine and replica items with supporting information. Much of the former is unstratified material from old excavations in the city. It includes examples of finds common on Roman sites - glossy red samian ware from Gaul, flagons, mortaria (grit-studded mixing bowls), amphorae, locally produced coarse pottery, glass, and iron nails.

The Loans Box is one way in which teachers can fulfil the 'hands on' requirements of National Curriculum history. It is available to Cheshire teachers at a cost of £3 per week. To find out more, or to book...
Please contact: Pauline Sharp, Mike Hardman or Rosemary Phillips, Education Service, Grosvenor Museum.
Tel (0244) 321616 ext 40.

Lunchtime Archaeology Lectures

In March Tim Strickland, Principal Archaeologist with Gifford and Partners, is giving a series of lunchtime lectures at the Grosvenor Museum.

Programme

3 March 'Life and Times in Cheshire on the Eve of the Roman Conquest'
10 March 'Soldiers of the Second and Twentieth Legions: A Personal View'
17 March 'The Emperor Septimius Severus and Chester'
24 March 'Life and Times in Late Roman Chester'

The lectures will be held in the Museum Lecture Theatre and last from 12.00 to 1.00. Admission is £1 for each, payable at the door, or £3 for all four if paid in advance.
Please contact:
Rosemary Phillips

News from the County

An Archaeology Strategy for Cheshire

Cheshire County Council has announced initiatives to protect the county's archaeological heritage in a new publication called **An Archaeology Strategy for Cheshire**. It is an illustrated account of the major archaeological discoveries in the county from prehistory to the present day. It also sets out the County Council's seven objectives in managing the archaeology of Cheshire over the next decade.

Development pressures pose an increasing threat to Cheshire's historical remains, and the Strategy outlines new policies for protecting sites and co-ordinating resources for archaeological work in the County. The main aim is to ensure that, wherever possible, historic sites are left undisturbed by new development. This can often be done by altering the design, layout or foundations of proposed developments. Where this proves impossible, would-be developers are expected to pay for the archaeological excavation of such sites before they are destroyed.

A set of conditions for archaeological contractors operating in Cheshire, to guarantee the highest standards of work, is to be introduced. The County Council aims to improve its database of historic sites - the County Sites and Monuments Record - by attracting grants and using the latest technology. Its information will be made more widely available to schools and local historians.
An Archaeology Strategy for Cheshire. £4.50 + 50p p&p. Available from Cheshire County Council, Environmental Planning, Commerce House, Hunter Street, Chester 2QP (cheques payable to **Cheshire County Council).**

Cheshire Past

Cheshire Past - a new annual review of archaeology in Cheshire - has just been launched. It will provide up-to-date news for the local historian, the archaeologist and general reader on all the latest archaeological research in the county.

Issue 1 contains items on prehistoric survey in northern Cheshire, Bronze Age metalwork, Roman Northwich, recent discoveries in Chester, Holt-Farndon medieval bridge, a medieval moat at Willaston, an Elizabethan garden at Gawsworth, excavations at Lewis Carroll's birthplace, and much more.
Cheshire Past. £2.75 + 50p p&p. Available from The Editor, Cheshire Past, Commerce House, Hunter Street, Chester CH1 2QP (cheques payable to Cheshire County Council) or from most good booksellers.
Adrian Tindall, County Archaeologist