

Amphitheatre News

The amphitheatre in focus: an exhibition of images

Chester-based photographer David Heke followed the long-awaited amphitheatre excavations throughout the first summer of work. Focusing on the strong images found in even the most routine of activities, he gives an overview of the dig which is more than simply documentary.

An exhibition of his work is currently on show at the Chester Visitor Centre and will be regularly updated over the next two years, with photographs of the latest events on site.

Reflections and projections

There will be another chance to hear Dan Garner, co-director of the amphitheatre excavations, talk about the results of last year's dig on Wednesday 18th May in the Lecture Theatre, Grosvenor Museum 1 pm. Admission free.

County news

Cheshire Archaeology Day 2005

This will take place on Saturday 23rd April at Northwich Memorial Hall. The guest speaker will be Dr Nick Higham on the medieval landscape of Cheshire and Lancashire, and there will be the usual range of displays and bookstalls.

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



Publication news

Prehistoric Cheshire

This book by Paul and Vicky Morgan provides a new and valuable insight into the people who shaped the landscape of the area prior to the Roman conquest. Covering the whole of the modern county, as well as areas formerly within its boundaries such as Stockport and the Wirral, it focuses on the long barrows and chambered tombs, henges, stone circles, round barrows, standing stones, ancient settlements and hill-forts.

It is written very much for the layman whilst at the same time being based on the most up-to-date archaeological research. As well as providing the reader with a grounding into all of the well known and most of the more obscure sites in the county, Prehistoric Cheshire also instils a better understanding of how and why certain industries thrived, particularly the Bronze Age mining at Alderley Edge and the prehistoric salt production in the Nantwich and Middlewich areas.

If you have ever wondered why a burial chamber of a type normally only found in Scotland lies close to the town of Congleton, how a stone circle came to be buried beneath a barrow, or why Lindow Man really ended up in a Cheshire peat bog, then you will certainly find the answers in Prehistoric Cheshire.

Prehistoric Cheshire by Victoria and Paul Morgan is published by Landmark Publishing Ltd, 2004, ISBN 1-84306-140-6, £19.95

Haunted Chester!

A new terrifying tourist guide claims that Chester is England's most haunted city!

The Haunted Chester Tour takes visitors on a gripping 3 km (2 mile) circular walking tour through the dark heart of the city, with twenty stories to fascinate, frighten and amuse.

Based around an attractive bird's-eye view map of central Chester, the guide leads readers through narrow streets, hidden alleyways and shadowed graveyards. Readers will learn the differences between ghosts,

The Past Uncovered

hauntings and poltergeists. They will also discover why staff at the Town Hall refuse to go into a tiny stock-room alone, and what really happened when a poltergeist wrecked a confectionery shop on Valentine's Day.

The colourful, fold-out, pocket-sized guide is produced by Wordplay Publishing costs £1.50 and is available from local tourist information centres and bookshops.

The Past Year

The Past Year, Chester Archaeology's annual review for the years 2002/3 and 2003/4 is now available. If you would like a copy, please contact Alison Jones, 01244 402023 or email a.jones@chester.gov.uk

A large-print version of this newsletter is available. Please phone (01244) 402023 or fax (01244) 347522

The Past Uncovered

is produced by the City Council's Archaeological Service to keep you in touch with discoveries in Chester and the surrounding area. It appears three times a year, in February, June and October. Copies can be obtained from the Grosvenor Museum and other City Council venues or by post direct from Chester Archaeology. If you have any comments or questions, or would like to contribute, please get in touch with Gillian Dunn at Chester Archaeology, 27 Grosvenor Street, Chester CH1 2DD. (01244) 402023.

This newsletter is also available on the internet at:

http://www.chester.gov.uk/archaeology

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Battle victims found at Heronbridge

New and exciting discoveries were made at Heronbridge last year. A further report by project director David Mason outlines the site's importance

HERONBRIDGE is situated on the west bank of the River Dee 2 km south of Chester city centre. Excavations by a member of the Chester Archaeological Society in 1929 revealed the existence of a previously unknown Roman settlement, straddling the road running south from Chester to Whitchurch. Further work in 1930 and in the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated that the settlement was very extensive including stone buildings, some with hypocausts.

One of the aims of the 2004 excavation was to locate, and if possible, examine the 'battle cemetery' found in 1930, so-called because of the discovery of twenty or more human skeletons displaying injuries suggesting that they belonged to battle casualties. The burials were successfully re-located in what appeared to be a mass grave pit. The bodies had been laid side by side in partially overlapping rows, aligned east-west. Within the limits of the trench there were fourteen individuals. Two skeletons were fully excavated and removed for analysis. Further study confirmed them to be males and showed that both had died as a result of several sword blows to the head. Carbon-14 dating of two bone samples have provided dates of AD 430-640 (with 59 per cent probability of being within the range AD 530-620) and AD 530-660 (with 51 per cent probability of being in the range AD 595-645). It was suggested by the late Graham Webster in 1951 that the burials found in the 1930s were victims of the Battle of Chester, c AD 613, and given the absence of any other known substantial engagement in the area, the mass grave seems likely to be associated with this battle and the victory of

Aethelfrith of Northumbria over the forces of Gwynedd and Powys.

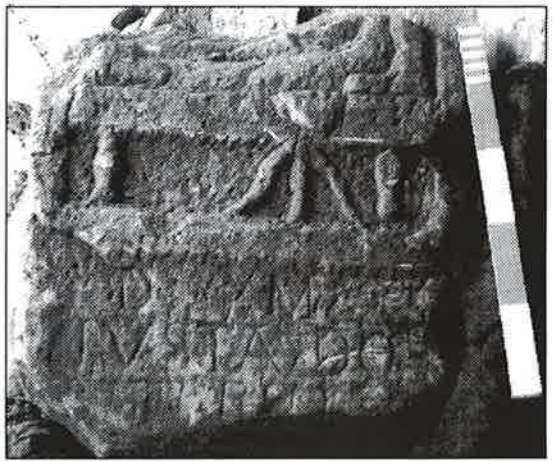
An unexpected bonus in this trench was the discovery of the central section of an inscribed Roman tombstone. Enough survives to show that it was carved with the common 'funerary banquet' scene. The first two lines of text show that it commemorated a lady whose first name was Justa and whose second began Do... This is the first inscribed tombstone to be found in or near Chester for forty-five years.

Work was also resumed last year at the site of the Roman quay. The vertical rock face found in 2003 was confirmed as the original river cliff and inlet. A short distance back from this were two circular pits cut into the rock which are thought to have held mooring posts.

Excavation of the silt deposits at the foot of the quay revealed matching pieces of a sculpture from a funerary monument found in previous seasons' work. This included the head of one of the two female figures depicted (probably representing the deceased and her maidservant), as well as the pediment-shaped area above, decorated with what appears to be a dolphin and a sea-centaur or Triton.

The recent work at Heronbridge has shown that it has much to contribute to our understanding of the early phases of Chester's development and is also of regional, national and even international importance.

David Mason
Chester Archaeological Society



Tombstone depicting a funerary banquet scene (photograph: D Mason)




Funerary monument with female figure and pediment (photograph: D Mason)

The 2002-4 excavations were carried out by members of the Chester Archaeological Society. The project is supported by the Grosvenor Estate (landowner), the St John's House Trust, Bristol Myers Squibb,



Roman Research Trust and the Local Heritage Initiative Scheme of the Heritage Lottery Fund operated by the Countryside Commission and the Nationwide Building Society. The Carbon-14 dating was carried out by the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre.

 *The Past Uncovered* October 2002; February 2004 and October 2004.

Heronbridge: posh suburb or a case of social engineering?

The Roman settlement at Heronbridge seems to have originated in the late first century AD and to have survived until the middle of the fourth century.

In its architecture there is little to distinguish it from other roadside settlements, consisting as it did of shops-cum-houses fronting onto a single street. Finds from the site show that its inhabitants lived similar lives to those of the civilians in the extramural settlement which grew up under the walls of the fortress.

However, its legal status may have been more complicated. Frequently outside Roman legionary fortresses we find not just one settlement, immediately outside the fortress – the *canabae legionis* (the ‘huts of the legion’), – but another, like Heronbridge, a couple of kilometres away. Whereas the former were built on army land and probably just housed essential non-combatants, the latter may have lain within the territory of the local tribe. Perhaps they were founded deliberately to encourage the native population to take up urban life under the watchful eye of the garrison. In practice, in some cases they took on a ‘native’ flavour, in others – as at Heronbridge – a more ‘Roman’ one. In the early third century the *canabae* and the more distant settlements seem to have been merged administratively.

Peter Carrington

Project news

Nuns Road

A medieval burial, Roman surfaces and part of a military barracks were just some of the features found on the site of the Cheshire Police Headquarters

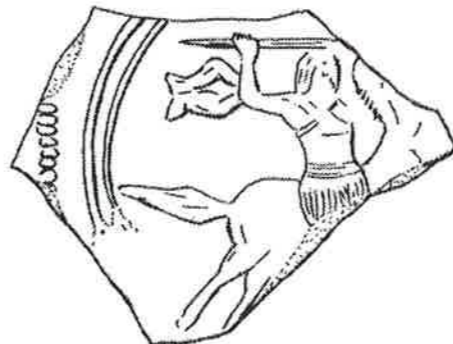
AN extensive archaeological evaluation has been carried out in Nuns Road in advance of the redevelopment of the police headquarters. The site lies immediately to the west of the Roman fortress and within the southern corner of the medieval walls. Previous observations, together with limited excavation prior to the construction of the police headquarters in the 1960s, indicated that archaeological remains may survive in the area.

In each of the eight trial trenches that were dug, deep modern landscaping deposits were encountered, along with layers of redeposited natural clay mixed with disturbed archaeological material. These were almost certainly derived from the digging of the foundations and basement of the headquarters building. However, in two of the trenches, Roman surfaces constructed from sandstone, cobblestones and ceramic tiles were uncovered. The presence of Roman concrete and flue tiles (used in underfloor heating systems within some Roman buildings) suggest the presence of high-status buildings nearby.

At the base of one of the trenches was a possible Roman ditch cut into the natural clay, but the limited extent of the excavation meant that it was difficult to interpret this feature. At a higher level there was an *in situ* inhumation burial, almost certainly associated with the medieval Benedictine nunnery. This suggests that the area to the north east of the police headquarters was once a graveyard to the religious house. In fact, medieval burials were found during the construction of the police headquarters and earlier, in 1939, during the construction of an air raid shelter in Grosvenor Road.

The results of this work have shown that archaeological remains in this area lie beneath a thick protective layer of landscaping deposits

and soil. However, around the periphery of the existing headquarters building the remains have the potential to add to our knowledge of the development of Chester from the Roman period onwards.



Sherd of a Roman decorated samian ware bowl showing a figure on horseback. The vessel dates to AD 150–180 and the potter was probably *Cinnamus*. It was recovered from one of the Roman surfaces. (Scale 1:1, drawn by L Dodd)

The archaeological work was carried out by Earthworks Archaeological Services on behalf of Liberty properties plc

All is not lost in the Mall!

A recent archaeological evaluation within the service area of The Mall, Grosvenor (formerly the Grosvenor Shopping Precinct) has demonstrated that, despite massive disturbance in the 1960s, truncated but significant archaeological remains survive close to the present ground level.

Trial-trenching revealed the truncated remains of a Roman roadside drain, together with surviving masonry from a probable military barrack block. Two pits, which would have been at the back of properties that fronted on to Newgate Street in the medieval period were also observed and found to be rich in finds and palaeoenvironmental potential.

These are significant discoveries, showing that construction of the shopping precinct in the 1960s did not completely remove the archaeological remains. Features and deposits, now protected by only 30–40 cm of modern overburden, still survive.

The archaeological work was carried out by Earthworks Archaeological Services for Seymour Harris Keppie and The Mall Corporation

District news

Viking treasure in Huxley

A spectacular hoard of Viking age metalwork has been unearthed near the outskirts of Huxley

THE hoard, found by members of a local metal detecting group, amounted to twenty-two silver objects. This included one small cast ingot, a length of twisted rod and twenty strips. Each strip had been folded at the centre giving the appearance of a clip – probably for ease of burial. Sixteen of the strips were intricately decorated using a distinctive type of punch work suggesting that they were items of jewellery. In the majority of cases the centre and opposing ends of each strip had small panels decorated with an ‘X’ pattern and the areas in between were filled with a repeated geometric design.

This type of artefact has been recovered from other hoards in the north west of England and Wales, as well as hoards in Norway, and is generally believed to be a type of arming ring produced by Norse settlers in Dublin during the late ninth and early tenth centuries AD. Fragments of lead sheet found with the silver may be significant as they could represent the remains of a container within which the silver was buried, such as a lead-lined wooden box.

The most obvious comparison for this recent discovery is the large and much-studied Cuerdale hoard found on the banks of the River Ribble in Lancashire in 1840. The Cuerdale hoard had been buried in a lead-lined chest and contained some 7,500 coins and 1,000 pieces of silver including examples of Hiberno-Norse arm rings. It was thought on the evidence of the coins that the Cuerdale hoard was buried around AD 905, hence a similar date could be inferred for this recent find.

Smaller hoards of Viking-age silver have also been recovered from Chester, but most recently a small cache of coins minted during the reign of Edgar AD 957–75 was found to the north of the present find.

During the tenth century many Vikings did not mint their own coin-



Silver hoard from Huxley and detail of one of the arm bands (photograph: N Herepath)

age and used bullion as currency instead; often this bullion was buried for safe keeping close to a landmark for easy recovery. At this time, north-west Cheshire was prone to water-borne Viking raids and incursions from the Irish Sea, some of which led to permanent Viking settlement as is well attested in the northern half of the Wirral Peninsula. Although not much of a river today, in the tenth century the River Gowy would have been navigable to the sort of shallow-bottomed craft favoured by the Vikings and could have been accessed from the Irish Sea via the River Mersey.

In this context the recently discovered hoard could have been buried by Viking raiders prior to a poorly-conceived raid into English territory, from which they ultimately never returned. Alternatively, Hiberno-Norse refugees expelled from Dublin by the Irish in 902 AD may have buried it for safekeeping.

The hoard is currently at the British Museum for valuation. An inquest will then have to be carried out and if the hoard is deemed to be treasure then the British Museum, as agents for the Crown, can either keep the silver or offer it to a local museum.

Dan Garner

Malpas motte

Improvements at Castle Hill Motte in Malpas last year prompted an archaeological watching brief which provided significant evidence of medieval activity in the area.

The motte is located in the centre of the village, to the rear of property fronting on to Church Street, west of the medieval cross. The motte, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, was constructed c 1100. The ditch and bailey have been built over by a road to the east and north and by St Oswald’s churchyard to the south and west. The motte was disturbed in the early nineteenth century by the addition of two access paths and the levelling of the top of the motte c 1820.

During the watching brief fragments of glazed and unglazed medieval tile were recovered, possibly contemporary with the construction of the church in the fourteenth century, and a single sherd of medieval pottery. Post-medieval pottery, glass bottles and fragments of clay pipes were also recovered, largely of eighteenth and nineteenth-century date.

The watching brief was carried out by Castlery Archaeology for Mr P Howell