

Saxon cross found in Civil War ditch

When archaeologists were excavating in advance of a housing development in Tarvin, they were in for a few surprises!

Several pieces of decorated stone were uncovered whilst the excavators were digging out a ditch. After some careful study it has been confirmed that they are part of one or more crosses dating to the tenth or early eleventh century.

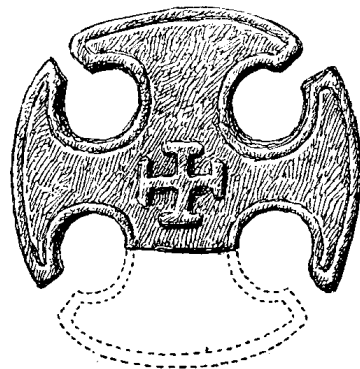
HEAVILY weathered fragments of the head, arms and shaft were found. The head has a flat boss in the centre which was probably surrounded by a ring, carved in relief. The arms and shaft have traces of moulding. The fragments were all found together, so they probably all come from one cross. On the other hand, it has not been possible to get them to join. The cross would have been a substantial monument, with an arm span of c 55 cm (21.5") and is larger than those at St John's Church in Chester.

Tarvin is 5½ miles to the east of Chester. The excavated ditch, less than half a mile from Tarvin Church, appears to be associated with the Civil War. Historical records of Civil War period fortifications are known for many Cheshire villages, including Tarvin, each being associated with the siege of Chester. Troops and ordnance were moved from the Parliamentary garrison at Tarvin in preparation for an assault of Chester in September 1645. It is possible that the cross was destroyed at this time.

The cross is to be included in the national inventory of Anglo Saxon stone sculpture, administered at the University of Durham.



The head and arms of the cross found at Tarvin. (Photograph: Earthworks Archaeological Services)



The head of a stone cross from Burnsall in North Yorkshire. This is a close parallel to the one from Tarvin – the tips of the arms being squared, not pointed.

The excavations were carried out by Earthworks Archaeological Services. They are most grateful to Professor Richard Bailey, who is preparing a detailed report on the cross, and Peter Bowen of Antler Homes, for his help and support.

Service changes

Regular readers of the newsletter will have noticed a slight change to our name.

Towards the end of last year the Archaeology Service was transferred from Community Services to Development Services within the City Council. We have joined a team called Distinctiveness and Place Marketing alongside services such as Countryside and Landscape. In particular, we will be working more closely with Building Design and Conservation. A review is currently being undertaken to see how best we can combine our collective expertise to meet the changing demands of managing and promoting Chester's heritage assets.

Mike Morris



Barracks under the bowling green

EVIDENCE for a Roman barrack building has been uncovered under the former bowling green to the south of Hunter Street.

As part of the large-scale Northgate Development scheme in Chester, a new department store will be located in the Princess Street–Hunter Street area. Archaeological excavations in the early twentieth century and more recently have confirmed the high archaeological potential of this area, which lies in a part of the Roman fortress that was occupied by barracks. The barracks were long narrow buildings arranged in facing pairs and, in this area, aligned east–west. A requirement of the new store will be two escalator pits so an archaeological evaluation was deemed necessary and took place in autumn 2006.



Excavated trench showing the junction of two Roman walls. 1 metre scale. (Photograph: L Dodd)

One test trench measuring c 1.5 x 1.5 m revealed the junction of two masonry walls. Two faces of roughly squared and dressed red sandstone blocks measuring up to 36 cm in

length were used for their construction. The core of the wall was filled with red sand and sandstone fragments. The walls are in good condition and survive at a relatively shallow depth, only 67 cm below the current ground surface.

The results of this work will assist in the management of the archaeological remains during the forthcoming development.

Excavations were carried out by Earthworks Archaeological Services and were commissioned by Northgate Limited Partnerships c/o ING Real Estate Development

Conservation news

Conservation in action

WORK on the Listed Building at 8–10 Northgate Row has been ongoing for many months but the repairs have now been completed and the scaffolding removed.

Problems were identified when the rear of the building was investigated and revealed movement in the top of the gable. It was feared that the complex roof structure could fail. The City Council's Building Control team moved rapidly to secure the building under The Building Act and installed structural scaffolding to the exterior of the building as well as internal propping. The scaffolding, in a highly visible location, was provided with decorative hoarding to reduce its impact on one of the city's main shopping streets.

A Repairs Notice was prepared with a view to compulsorily purchasing the building and exploratory talks were held with the Chester Building Preservation Trust about restoring it. In the event, new owners were found and they have carried out repairs in accordance with the agreed plans.

Repairs included steel windposts internally, steel rods in the brickwork on the front elevation and truss

reinforcement to the attic. Re-pointing in lime mortar, re-plastering with lath and lime plaster and repair and replacement of windows was also required.

The whole operation has been tricky because of the location of the building and the need to keep at least part of the street open to vehicles. Close teamwork has produced a solution which has involved minimum demolition and maximum repair *in situ* which should, when the building is back in full use, result in a street scene almost indistinguishable from the way it was before – truly conservation in action in a city



Repairs in progress at 8–10 Northgate Row

whose historic architecture is distinctive and a key element of its commercial success.

Howard Dickenson, *Design and Conservation Manager*

For further details of the work carried out contact John Healey on 01244 402233

Conservation Areas under review

Central government has decided that a performance indicator for Conservation Services is to be based on the percentage of Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans reviewed within the last five years.

There are sixty-one Conservation Areas within Chester District which will be reviewed over a five-year period in partnership with Chester Civic Trust. This updated documentation is being produced in line with English Heritage guidance. Starting from a performance indicator of zero in 2005 (resulting from no reviews within the previous five years) a performance indicator of 20% was achieved in 2006. This figure will improve by 20% each year (twelve Conservation Areas per year), achieving 100% by 2010.



Last year the Council consulted the public on draft management plans for Dunham-on-the-Hill, Horsley Lane, Lower Kinnerton, Stoak, Stretton and Tattenhall. The next settlements include Gorstella, Kelsall, Puddington, Shotwick, Sheaf and Tilstone Bank. Recommendations will be made to protect the character, appearance, landscape and general environment of the areas.

Councillor Ann Farrell said: 'Improving the way we manage conservation sites will bring positive benefits to many areas of the District. We are committed to consulting people about the conservation plans through Parish Councils and Area Committees and we will be contacting all properties affected by the proposals to make sure residents have the opportunity to comment'.

Charles Meyer, *Design and Conservation Officer*

University news

Survey of Deanery Field

Four students from Chester University, assisted by Simon Ward, undertook a survey of the Deanery Field as part of their Heritage Management module last summer.

The Deanery Field, occupying the north-eastern corner of the area within the City Walls, was partially excavated by Professors Newstead and Droop in the first half of the twentieth century, before the area was levelled for playing fields. Extensive remains of Roman barracks were found. The purpose of the present exercise was to see if the Roman stratigraphy has been damaged by the levelling. A new level survey was carried out and compared with the levels recorded in the original reports. We concluded that the Roman remains probably survive well along the eastern and western sides but that there is a strip in the centre where they have been truncated. The Roman remains which do survive in this area must be very close to the modern ground level.

The results of this survey will prove a useful tool in the future management of the area.

Simon Ward

District news

Saighton Camp

AN interesting sequence of land use over many centuries has been established at Saighton Camp in Huntington.

A large housing development is planned for part of the old army camp on the southern outskirts of the city. Whilst no archaeological sites or finds were previously known from the actual development area, extensive trial trenching was undertaken to see if any archaeological features were present. The sequence revealed, prior to the twentieth-century army camp, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century hedged fields, medieval ridge and furrow and an extensive system of ditches and gullies cut into the natural clay sub-soil and pre-dating the ridge and furrow.

Large areas of the site were stripped of topsoil to reveal as much as possible of the early ditch system. Features were traced over hundreds of metres and appeared to represent large-scale boundaries, perhaps for stock control rather than arable fields or plots. There was virtually no dating information, and no indications of nearby settlement.



Bronze brooch dating to the first century. (Photograph: M Morris)

The only find was a Roman brooch in the filling of one of the gullies.

The best current interpretation of the gullies is that they formed an enclosure for cattle, supplied to the Roman fortress and surrounding civilian settlement. It is also possible that they were part of a prehistoric system which only fell out of use in the Roman period.

This discovery is an important addition to the small but growing number of early sites in and around Chester District such as Chester Business Park, Brook House Farm (Bruen Stapleford) and Birch Heath (Tarpurley). Close examination of development sites in the rural area

is demonstrating that rural settlement did exist in what was once thought to be a fairly empty landscape beyond settlement 'hot spots' such as the Roman fortress.

Mike Morris

The archaeological work was carried out by Northern Archaeological Associates. Thanks are due to Taylor Woodrow the developers and consultants Hyder Consulting.

Viking hoard returns to the north west

A group of twenty-two silver arm bands found in Huxley in 2004 has been purchased jointly by the Grosvenor Museum, National Museums Liverpool and Cheshire Museums Service, thanks to a Heritage Lottery Fund grant.

The hoard, found by a member of a local metal-detecting group, dates from the mid-ninth to mid-tenth century. The strips of silver are intricately decorated in the Irish Sea style of the period, using a distinctive type of punch work. Fragments of lead sheet were also found with the silver and may represent the remains of a container within which the silver was buried, such as a lead-lined wooden box.

The hoard is currently in the British Museum and will return to the north-west this year for the Magical History Tour exhibition opening at the Merseyside Maritime Museum in July 2007.



The hoard of silver armbands from Huxley. (Photograph: N Herepath)

Gillian Dunn

For more information on the hoard see *The Past Uncovered* February 2005



Green open space

Children from two Chester schools have teamed up with City Council officers in schemes to improve green open spaces.

The challenge for children from Overleigh St Mary's CE Primary was to explore and improve their knowledge of Grosvenor Park. They did this through creative writing, investigating nature and interviewing users of the park. They also carried out archaeological surveying under the guidance of City Archaeologist Mike Morris and Community Archaeology Officer Jane Hebblewhite.

Back in school the children worked with artist Dorothy Pickering to create nature-inspired textile art and enjoyed talks from Cllr Robert Jordan, Environmental Portfolio Holder. The project culminated with an impressive display and presentation in school, combining drama and art.

Pupils from St Thomas of Canterbury Blue Coat CE Junior School worked with landscape, archaeology and heritage staff to look at ways of improving the George Street 'pocket park'. The park, next to the canal and former Delamere Street bus station, provides excellent views of the northern city walls and impressive canal cutting. However, no-one uses it at the moment as it is unsafe and has been the target of anti-social behaviour. As part of the Open Space Investment Strategy the City Council is keen to develop the area to make it an accessible and enjoyable place to visit.

At the end of these two projects the children will share their views with a wider audience including councillors, key decision-makers, parents and school governors. Their work will go on display and will be used towards public consultation.

Jane Hebblewhite

Projects are co-ordinated by the Sustainable Environmental Education Network to feed into open space improvements. To find out more about opportunities to give your views on these schemes contact the Landscape Team on 01244 402397, or e-mail landscape@chester.gov.uk

City behind walls

Senior Archaeologist Simon Ward and Building Design and Conservation Manager Howard Dickenson, represented Chester recently at a congress in Trencin, Slovakia, on the theme of presenting historic towns in the context of modern development.

Delegates from at least ten European countries attended – western European countries with well established policies and traditions as well as those in eastern Europe which have emerged from the Soviet bloc and are trying to restore and develop their heritage. Simon and Howard gave a presentation on Chester's place marketing strategy, the Culture Park and the amphitheatre project. They were looked after most hospitably by the team in Trencin with a medieval banquet at the castle, presentations by school children and musical entertainment.

Trencin is a small town on the River Var, close to the border with the Czech Republic and the Tatra Mountains and is dominated by a magnificent medieval castle rising on a great crag. The road northwards to Poland, following the river, had to pass under this crag. The crag itself bears a Roman inscription, recording the presence of Legion II *Adiutrix*, the founders of Chester. The original town is very picturesque, built around a square and spreading up the hill towards the castle. It has one surviving gateway, surmounted by a tall clock tower and several churches. However, it is surrounded by twentieth-century development which has generally not been sympathetic to the older buildings.

Simon Ward

The congress was supported by European funding

Cheshire Archaeology Day

Cheshire Archaeology Day 2007 will be held on Saturday 21 April at the Northwich Memorial Hall. The guest speaker will be the archaeologist and broadcaster Julian Richards who will speak on his work at Stonehenge. There will be the usual range of displays and bookstalls. Tickets are £11 each (£9 concessions).

Contact Environmental Planning, Cheshire County Council, Backford Hall, Backford, Chester CH1 6PZ, phone 01244 603175, e-mail pam.rutherford@cheshire.gov.uk for a booking form.

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 Archaeology, Design and Conservation Services to keep you in touch with news 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/PDF/newsI_February07.pdf

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