committed to electric power. The text, consisting almost entirely of extracts from Council meetings, letters etc, may appear a little stilted at first, but as the sequence of events is recounted there is still the sense of a story unfolding. A good read for anyone with an interest in Chester's industrial past and how such events were recorded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Gillian Dunn

Chester Electric Lighting Station is written and published by Gordon Emery, 2002. 80 pp, 23 b/w photographs, 1 line drawing and 1 map. It is available in local bookshops and the Grosvenor Museum Shop price £7.50. ISBN 1 872265 48-0. There is a limited edition of 500 copies.

Atlas of Cheshire

Also published last year was *A New Historical Atlas of Cheshire* which demonstrates in map form a range of aspects of Cheshire's history. The maps and text present the results of recent research which the editors acknowledge can often be no more than interim statements and are likely to be modified by subsequent findings.

This second edition, which concentrates on recent centuries, does not set out to displace or revise *The Historical Atlas of Cheshire* published in 1958, but stands as a separate contribution. A number of wide-ranging themes are dealt with in the book including the physical environment, Anglo-Saxon Cheshire, war and society, population and health, transportation and politics.

Gillian Dunn

The new historical atlas of Cheshire is edited by Dr Tony Phillips and Dr Colin Phillips, published by Cheshire County Council and Cheshire Community Council Publications Trust, 2002. 116 pp, 180 colour maps and 14 plans and diagrams. Price £25. ISBN 0 904532 46 1. Copies are available from Bookland, Chester and The Cheshire Record Office.

Chester Archaeology

County News

Cheshire Archaeology Day 2003

Cheshire Archaeology Day 2003 will take place on Saturday 5 April at Northwich Memorial Hall. The guest speaker will be Kate Howell on the Newport Ship, and there will be the usual range of displays, bookstalls and videos. For further information, contact Environmental Planning, Cheshire County Council, Backford Hall, Backford, Chester CH1 6PZ, (01244) 603656, e-mail wadea@cheshire.gov.uk or rutherfordp@cheshire.gov.uk

The North West Regional Research Framework

Since 1990 there has been a dramatic increase in the number of archaeological projects carried out in response to development. This has prompted the need for a research framework within which all archaeological research projects should be carried out. English Heritage has proposed that each of the English regions should develop a research framework, by assessing the region's archaeology, recognising the gaps in our knowledge, and identifying the main objectives for future research.

In 2001 a conference was convened by the regional group of the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) for all archaeologists with an interest in the region.

A project design was submitted and English Heritage have offered a grant of over £50,000 spread over two years. They recognised the quality of the project design, the high degree of participation by the region's archaeological community, and the good value for money, since the region's archaeologists will be contributing around £90,000 in matched funding or help in kind.

This project is a significant landmark for archaeology in the North West.

If you would like to be involved in any way, please contact Adrian Tindall, Convenor, ALGAO North West, (01244) 603160, tindalla@cheshire.gov.uk

Dig News

If you want to keep up to date with the latest archaeological discoveries in the City and District throughout the year why not take a look at our *Dig News*. It is available in electronic format on the City Council's website. It can be accessed directly at http://www.chestercc.gov.uk/heritage/archaeology/dig_news.html or by a link from the newsletter web page. Paper copies of all issues of *Dig News*, since its start in August 1996, are available for public consultation in the Chester Archaeology library in the Grosvenor Museum.

Alison Jones

For further information contact Alison on (01244) 402023 or a.jones@chestercc.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.chestercc.gov.uk/heritage/archaeology/news.html

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The Past Uncovered

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FEBRUARY '03

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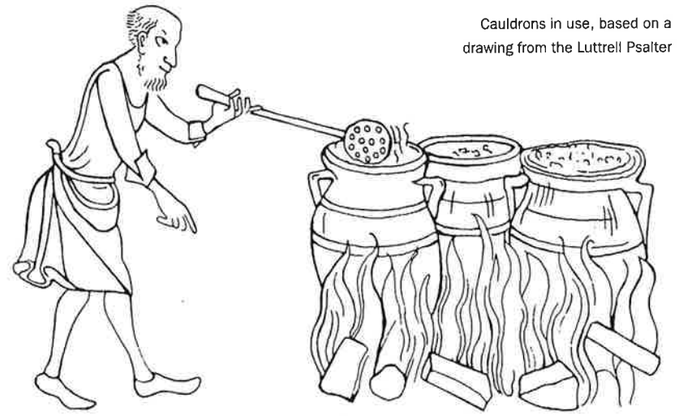
Cauldron makers and Italian jars at Witter Place

An exciting find of cauldron moulds has added greatly to our knowledge of late medieval and early post-medieval industry in the city

A dump of more than 30 kg of clay moulds used in the casting of copper-alloy vessels was discovered in a shallow pit during a trial excavation at Witter Place/Seller Street, near the junction of City Road and Foregate Street, an area where little is known archaeologically. The excavation was carried out prior to a major development of the site and has provided us with evidence for extensive industrial activity at the back of properties fronting onto Foregate Street.



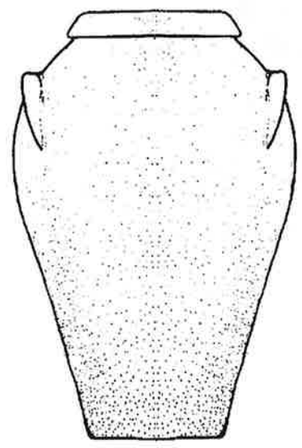
Cauldrons in use, based on a drawing from the Luttrell Psalter

The casting process involved pouring molten metal into a two-part clay mould that was then broken to remove the finished vessel. Casting sites therefore produced large amounts of waste as the broken moulds were simply thrown away. Many of the fragments found are extremely small and crushed but there were also larger pieces which probably formed the body of the cauldrons. Some of the fragments showed impressed parallel lines, often in sets of three, which would have formed the shallow raised cordons commonly seen on illustrations of medieval cauldrons. Two conical-shaped fragments may have been from where the metal was poured into the mould. Some other intriguing fragments may be from models used to make small bells, which were also cast in clay moulds.

This is the first large assemblage of metal vessel moulds recovered from Chester: previously only fragments of single moulds have been found. Recent further excavations at the site have produced a second similar sized dump. Whilst base metal vessels would have played a role in most medieval and early post-medieval homes in Chester, little has been known up to now about where they were made in the city. No trace of working surfaces such as a hearth or furnace was found on this site, but the large quantity of waste suggests that manufacturing was taking place close by.

And another surprise also recovered from the site were fragments of two Italian oil jars found amongst a large group of nineteenth-century pottery.

When complete the red earthenware jars would have had a heavy rim, round shoulders, moulded crescent shaped handles, a flaring lower body and a flat base. They would have stood almost a metre high.



An oil jar, based on a drawing by John Ashdown

The jars were made in northern Italy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A painting by Samuel Scott in 1757 of the Old Custom House Quay in London shows two of these jars; one is still wrapped in straw and rope used to protect it on its journey. They were used to import Italian olive oil which was used for cooking, lighting, soapmaking and as a lubricant. The oil appears

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to have been sold through 'Italian warehouses' and oilmen's shops. In London the jars were used as trade signs by oilmen and occasionally can still be seen cut in half and cemented to nineteenth-century shop fronts.

The empty jars were often re-used as garden ornaments and are found throughout Britain, although they are more common in the south. This is the first time any have been found on an excavation in Chester.

The reason for their presence at Witter Place is unclear. A search through trade directories has not revealed any oilmen in the area, but the 1875 Ordnance Survey map shows that some of the houses on the site had large gardens. The current fashion for container gardening is not new, so perhaps the jars were in a garden - a number of flowerpots were found with them. Chester did have an Italian dealer: Pietro Gaspare Bordessa's 'Original Bazaar' in Bridge Street Row advertised 'barometers' and 'foreign fancy merchandise' in the 1840s and 1850s. Could he have perhaps sold these jars?

John Wood's map of 1833 showing the large gardens of the Seller Street properties

Julie Edwards

The trial excavation was carried out by Gifford & Partners and the recent work by Earthworks Archaeological Services. The work was funded by David Wilson Homes (North West). We are also grateful to Bolton Birch, Chartered Surveyors. Assistance was provided by the staff and owners of the Witter factory.

News from Nepal

TWO members of staff took their expertise further afield recently when they travelled to Nepal as part of the Asia Urbs project.

The project is a European Union-funded aid programme, whereby cities in Europe join together with partners in Asia to combine their knowledge and experience. Chester, Feltre in Italy, the city of Lalitpur (also known as Patan) and Khokana in Nepal are working together to develop their expertise and procedures in managing and protecting their ancient buildings and urban fabric. Archaeology is an integral part of this process.

Patan is a wonderful, busy, crowded city with many fine ancient buildings. They are traditionally built of brick and timber, with rich decoration. However, there are also many new concrete houses and uncontrolled development. The centre of the city, Patan Durbar Square, contains the old royal palace and many temples. It is part of a designated World Heritage Site.

The project staff in Nepal includes two archaeologists, Saubhagya Pradhananga and Anita Tamrakar. Mike and Simon's mission was to demonstrate modern archaeological techniques in an urban environment and to show the potential of the archaeological resource. Although much archaeological work has been carried out in Nepal on temples and similar major monuments, little urban archaeology has been attempted.

The site chosen was a mound close to Durbar Square within the World Heritage Site. It is called Patukdwon (Patuka's Mound) and is traditionally considered to be the site of the Kirati Palace, an early royal dynasty.

The mound is about 7 m high, surmounted by a large peepal tree and surrounded by houses and shrines. The first season's work was confined to a trench 7 m by 3 m and was designed to investigate the nature of the mound and the potential of the archaeological remains. We were joined on site by archaeologists from the Department of Archaeology and students from Tribhuvan University. Our discoveries were not very exciting from an archaeological point of view as the upper metre or so of deposits contained large amounts of recent pottery as well as tree roots which we had to be careful not to damage. This did, however, give us the opportunity to familiarise our Nepalese colleagues with our techniques of excavation and recording.

This was a very exciting and rewarding project to be involved in. The culture is very rich and diverse and our hosts were very kind and welcoming. The project will continue in 2003 with further exchange visits of staff between Patan and Chester.

The Past Uncovered June 2002

Simon Ward

Mike Morris and Simon Ward on the steps of the seventeenth-century Krishna Mandir temple in Patan Durbar Square (Photograph: Saubhagya Pradhananga)

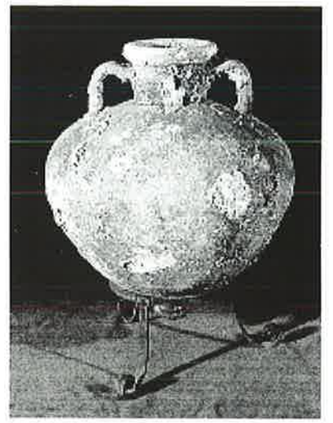
Chester Archaeology

New light on the Iron Age in the North-West

IN the centuries leading up to the Roman conquest, Cheshire and the North West may not have been the stagnant backwater that is often assumed but home to a developing society in touch with the rest of the Atlantic seaboard of Europe.

Apart from hillforts along the Mid-Cheshire Ridge and elsewhere, the Pre-Roman Iron Age in Cheshire and the North-West in general is usually seen as a blank. However, a major reassessment by Keith Matthews entitled 'The Iron Age of North-West England: a socio-economic model' in the *Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society* 76 (2000–01), 1–51 shows that in fact quite a lot is known about the period, and the picture that emerges is rather surprising.

Keith argues that during the Middle Iron Age the population outgrew the old hillforts; society became more complex, and a new elite occupying smaller, enclosed lowland sites replaced the old simple chiefdoms. Their wealth was based on Cheshire salt, which was in demand throughout the Welsh Marches; it was probably also one of the products which attracted traders from Carthage, on the coast of north Africa, to the 'beach market' at Meols on the tip of the Wirral in the third and second centuries BC. A wine amphora from Marseille, dredged up from the Dee and now in the Grosvenor Museum, perhaps represents the sort of goods that were exchanged for the salt.



An amphora from Marseille, dating to the fifth century BC, dredged up from the River Dee in c 1900

Cheshire salt is the subject of another article in the *Journal*, 'Further inscribed Roman salt pans from Shavington, Cheshire' by the late Stephen Penney, together with David Shotter of Lancaster University. One of the pans records the name Flavius Viventius, who was possibly a late Roman bishop based at Chester.

Peter Carrington

To find out more about the Chester Archaeological Society and its journal, visit its website at www.chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk

Book News

Chester Electric Lighting Station

Published last year, this book charts the history of electrification in Chester through excerpts from Council minutes, letters and newspapers of the time.

The story starts in 1882 with the Electric Lighting Act, but the people of Chester had to wait until December 1896 before electricity was finally installed, and it was not an easy process.

The original Electric Lighting Station building of 1896 with its porch of 1900 (drawn by Gordon Emery)

The location of the Electric Lighting Station was the cause of some concern as one of the preferred sites was Hop Pole Paddock, close to the Cathedral. The Dean and Chapter even offered £1,000 to purchase the paddock to keep it as open space because they considered that siting the works within a few feet of the Cathedral 'would greatly deteriorate our property, and ... make the peaceful conduct of Public Worship impossible'.

During 1894 a number of property owners in Eastgate Street and Bridge Street, tired of waiting for the Council, started to prepare for their own installation. A firm in Eastgate Row also started to lose faith and a letter written by Jos Beckett suggests 'that there is no real wish or purpose to give the City this modern necessity.' In 1894 it was finally resolved to recommend the Water Tower Gardens as the site for the station, and it opened two years later.

Chester went on to lead Britain in supplying electricity to rural areas, thanks to the city's electrical engineers. In September 1936 when Sydney Britton was a delegate to the Third World Power Conference he is recorded in the *Washington Daily News* as saying that the farmers around Chester were so advanced that they even heated their pigsties by electricity.

Bringing the story up to date, the book briefly outlines the events since the late 1980s when plans were put forward to develop the Old Port area and the subsequent outcry when there were suggestions that the Electric Lighting Station should be demolished — a building described by architect Francis Graves as a 'landmark' worthy of incorporating in a city development.

It is easy to take electricity for granted today, but this book gives the reader an insight into the problems and personalities encountered over a hundred years ago when several thousand pounds were

Chester City Council