

More discoveries in Middlewich

The pace of archaeological fieldwork in Middlewich shows no sign of slackening, with further excavation work undertaken during the spring on two sites in the town.

On the north-eastern outskirts of the town, excavations have explored an area on the edge of the Roman settlement, in advance of a housing development.

The excavations have revealed what appears to be a ditched drove way, leading eastwards from the settlement. A sub-rectangular enclosure was attached to the southern side of the drove, whose ditch had cut through an earlier Roman hearth, probably concerned with salt making. Elsewhere on the site, a number of other shallow ditches were excavated. It is hoped that when these features are plotted and considered with evidence from other excavations, a much clearer picture of land division in and around Middlewich in the Roman period will begin to appear.

Excavations have also been completed on the last remaining part of the site off King Street. Of particular interest is a salt-boiling hearth. The rectangular firing chamber was clay lined, with sandstone covering the surface around the chamber. Interestingly, this appears to be the same feature first exposed in the 1960s and briefly recorded. The present work provided an opportunity to obtain a much more detailed record of the feature, which was then reburied. It will be preserved *in situ*, within the garden of one of the new houses.

Excavations were carried out by Earthworks Archaeological Services and L-P Archaeology

New faces

Two new members of staff have been appointed to carry out new projects. Rob Edwards is Project Officer for Historic Landscape Characterisation and Moya O'Mullane is the Project Officer for Revealing Chester's Past, promoting public access to the County Sites and Monuments Record through touring exhibitions, fact sheets, a web site and a public access database.

Malpas churchyard survey

During April we carried out a survey of the monumental inscriptions in Malpas churchyard. This is part of an extensive survey of churchyards within a five-mile radius of Carden Park, part of our research into the historic landscape of Carden. When complete, the project will be one of the largest regional surveys ever undertaken on English gravestones.

At Malpas the majority of the memorials to the north of the church were removed during the twentieth century to decorate the churchyard walls. We have been able to recover details from their inscriptions, but we do not know where they originally stood. If we can find the sextons' books, we may be able to locate the individual plots, at least roughly. On the south side of the church, most of the memorials range in date from the later seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries and are reasonably preserved.

A notable feature of Malpas churchyard is the large number of stones put up by churchwardens recording their building work. We saw at least nineteen, and many of the rainheads on the drainpipes around the building also record names of churchwardens.

Keith Matthews

The survey was carried out by Keith Matthews of Chester Archaeology and students from Liverpool University.

Churches and cathedrals

This year's conference of the Association of Diocesan and Cathedral Archaeologists, entitled Archaeology and Management of change in Churches and Cathedrals, will be held in Chester 25-26 October.

Cathedrals and churches are undergoing more rebuilding and renovation than they have been for most of the twentieth century. In addition, there has been a drive to update and enhance the facilities for congregations and the increasing number of visitors.

Chester Cathedral, which comprises one of the most complete abbey structures in the country, is no stranger to major developments.

The conference is aimed primarily at all who work with or are interested in churches and cathedrals, including archaeologists, architects, planners and all who have a historic church to work round or with or care for. It will be based at the Cathedral and accommodation for Friday night can be arranged.

The provisional list of speakers includes A Arrol (Cathedral Architect), P Boughton (Grosvenor Museum), P Dixon (University of Nottingham) and M Rylatt (Phoenix Initiative).

The conference fee, accommodation and dinner costs £115. Conference only, including lunch and teas: £40 for two days, £25 for a single day. Conference dinner: £20.

For further information contact Simon Ward, Chester Archaeology, 27, Grosvenor Museum, Grosvenor Street, Chester, CH1 2DD (01244) 402026 or e-mail: s.ward@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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FOUR-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF

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Poverty and prosperity in seventeenth-century Chester

Excavations below Bridge Street Row East have given us a fascinating insight into Chester's past. A large quantity of artefacts have been recovered dating from the Roman period to the nineteenth century. The animal bones in particular are revealing evidence for the diet of Chester's seventeenth-century residents.



Eighteenth-century pit lined with horn cores. (Photograph: Gifford & Partners)

THE excavation, which came to an end in March was carried out as part of the extension and modernisation of the Browns of Chester store (Debenhams). In the Roman period this area lay between the tribunes' (officers') houses fronting what is now Eastgate Street and the bath house under the Grosvenor Shopping Precinct. During medieval times it was used for gardens and workshops associated with the properties on the Rows. Houses and courtyards were built on these backlands in the eighteenth century.

Some of the earliest activity identified on the site includes road surfaces and associated stone-built drains dating to the Roman period. One road probably marked the northern limit of the fortress bath house to the south. The other is thought to be a side road between two buildings within the fortress.

Amongst the later structures uncovered was a rectangular pit some 2 x 3 metres in plan and over 1 metre in depth and lined with horn cores. The structure dates to the first half of the eighteenth century. Although a number of features of similar date and form have been recovered from London they are uncommon in the north-west of Britain and this is the first to be found in Chester. The horn cores were laid in such a way that

the majority of their points faced outwards. This made a robust structure which was difficult to disassemble during excavation. The lower fill from the pit suggests that it probably acted as a soakaway cess pit. It seems likely that a horner was working somewhere nearby since a few thousand horn cores were used to construct this feature.

The horn cores were all from cattle - the majority probably from longhorn cattle. They provide a valuable source of information from which it is possible to group breed types and to gauge the approximate age and probable sex of the cattle that were brought to Chester at this time.

Other bones to be recovered from seventeenth-century deposits include those of goose, duck, calf, deer, and suckling pig. Such groups of butchered bones seem most likely to have originated from the table of a prosperous household. In contrast, from the same century, there are groups of bones that seem most like-

ly to indicate a period of hardship or poverty. Amongst them are poorer cuts of meat and butchered dog bones. The dog bones, like those of sheep were thrown away with the rest of the kitchen rubbish. We can speculate that they may date to the long Civil War siege of Chester when the lack of food meant that people were prepared to eat horses, dogs and cats. In the last issue of *The Past Uncovered* we mentioned the unusual find of an elephant's leg bone recovered from a sixteenth-century cess pit. This has now been radiocarbon dated to 1290-1410 and it is suggested that it may have been brought to Chester as a curio from a trading expedition. The bone is currently stored at York Archaeological Trust where it will be conserved.

Ian Smith

The excavations were carried out by Gifford and Partners and funded by Debenhams plc. Chester Archaeology are carrying out the finds analysis.

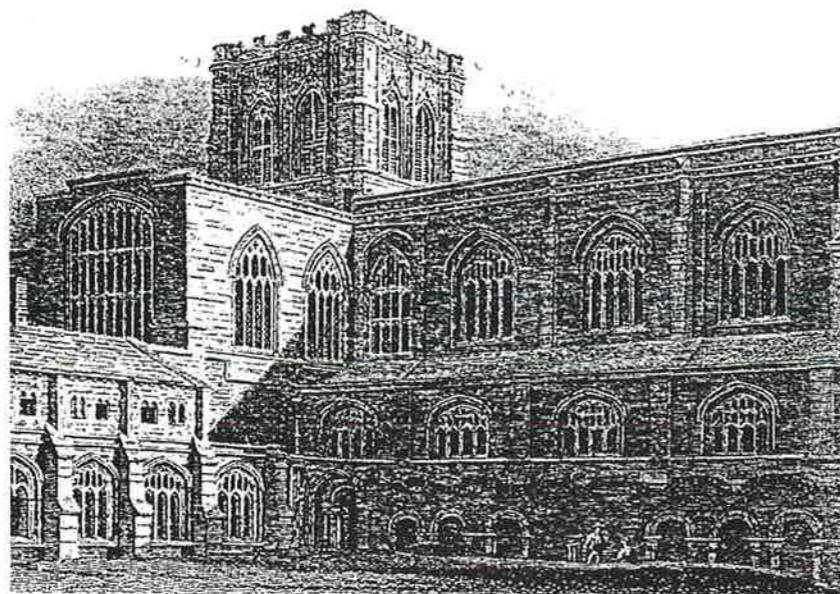


Cathedral Song School

A small-scale excavation at the Cathedral at the beginning of the year has produced a rich collection of finds including medieval floor tiles and painted window glass.

The archaeological work is being carried out in advance of the construction of a new song school for the Cathedral choir on the first floor of the east range of the cloister. In the thirteenth century the first floor of the cloister housed the monks' dormitory but after the Dissolution it became ruined and was demolished in the nineteenth century. A survey of the existing buildings was undertaken in 1998 and 1999 and a trial excavation in 2000. This year's excavation was on the site of a small extension to the new building which will house a lift and staircase.

Archaeological work over the last few years has revealed remains of all periods, from the early Roman to recent times. The Roman features included a timber slot, perhaps once the base for a wall in the barracks. A masonry wall built in the Norman period might have been one wall of the monks' latrine, projecting from the dormitory. The footings of the Norman cloister and the remains of a timber-framed building have also been found. This was apparently built alongside the dormitory and may have been temporary accommodation for the monks when they started to rebuild the cloister in the



North west view of the cathedral showing rooms over the cloister. (From an engraving by J Storer c 1810)

thirteenth century. At some point in the life of the building the undercroft beneath the dormitory was partitioned, presumably to make better use of the large open space. A pier base, which supported the stone vault of the undercroft, was found.

After the Dissolution the dormitory became derelict. The undercroft survived until the early nineteenth century and for a short time was used to store coal. Pits were dug in the floor and later electricity cables were laid. Finally, the entrance to the existing underground boiler house was constructed.

The archaeological work on the site will continue as the new building work proceeds because it may well reveal parts of the ancient structure which will need to be recorded.

Simon Ward

The project was commissioned by the Dean and Chapter of Chester Cathedral. The excavation was carried out by Chester Archaeology with the assistance of University of Manchester Archaeological Unit and local volunteer Peter Aston.

Cultural heritage in Nepal

Chester Archaeology has recently been host to a senior archaeologist from Nepal as part of an international cultural heritage project.

'Prioritising the cultural heritage: urban management and economic diversification in the sub-metropolitan city of Lalitpur and the village development area of Khokana, Nepal' is a partnership project between four local authorities – Chester, Feltre in Italy and Lalitpur and Khokana in Nepal – who face similar problems in reconciling protection of the cultural heritage and the promotion of improved social and economic conditions in local communities.

Saubhagya Pradhananga, who has

a master's degree in Nepalese history, culture and archaeology has been working on the project since February, recording historic buildings and ancient monuments and preparing a conservation plan for Patuk mound, an ancient site near the middle of Lalitpur. Plans are also underway to carry out test pits and excavation of Patuk mound – which is where the expertise of Chester's archaeologists is required. Mike Morris and Simon Ward will therefore be going out to Lalitpur in November to help and advise on the archaeological work.

Lalitpur is 2,600 years old and according to local legend the mound was the palace of the Kirati King Patuk and if the structure of the pal-

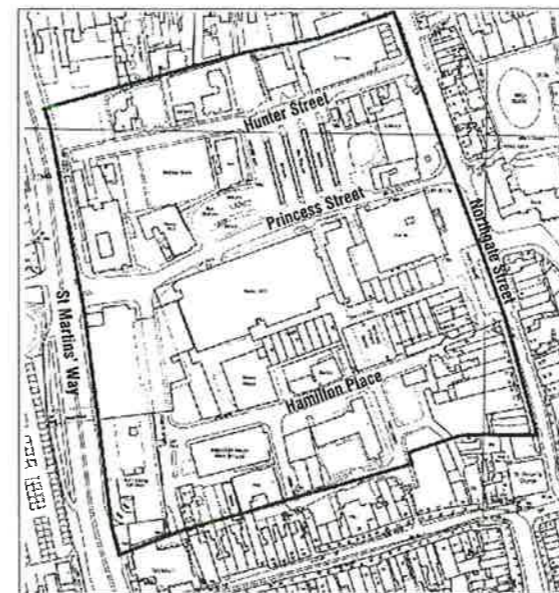
ace is uncovered it will not only change the history of Lalitpur but also the history of the whole of Nepal.

During her stay Saubhagya has had a good insight into the workings of an archaeological unit and is keen to come back in the near future.

The project is funded under the Asia Urbs Programme of the EC's Europe Aid Co-operation Office. Howard Dickenson, Principal Conservation Officer is advising on conservation matters; David Michelmores, consultant on architecture and conservation is project co-ordinator and Paul Hartley is advising on building conservation.

Development in Northgate

The Northgate development project covers a large area of the city, from Hunter Street in the north to Hamilton Place in the south. There are plans for new shopping facilities, a new theatre, library and public open space, a new bus station and multi-storey car park.



Approximate area of Northgate development

The area covers one of the most historically significant parts of Chester. It is anticipated that remains of the Roman fortress, including the military headquarters, barracks and the Elliptical Building lie beneath the

site. Archaeological evidence has also revealed clues to Saxon occupation when Chester was emerging as a major trading centre. From the early medieval period the city's fairs and markets, attracting traders and merchants from all over the country and beyond, were held in Northgate Street. Northgate Street also became an important coaching centre in the eighteenth century.

Because of this historical importance there are archaeological constraints on the proposed development so that only minimal damage is caused to the remains. Review meetings take place regularly to help ensure that the proposals meet the archaeological constraints.

Recent trial trenches in Hunter Street and in the car park of Goldsmith House have revealed Roman buildings and floors, in some places less than a metre below the present ground surface.

The archaeological evaluation has been carried out by Earthworks Archaeological Services.

Row buildings damaged by fire

Visitors to Chester at the beginning of the year will have been surprised to see two large cranes and scaffolding in Bridge Street. A fire in January caused extensive damage to the historic buildings at 59–61 Bridge Street and 73 Bridge Street Row, leaving both properties unsafe. The buildings on either side suffered smoke and water damage but were otherwise largely unaffected.

A programme of building recording was carried out as the rubble was removed from the site. Timbers and surviving fittings were labelled and put into storage and will hopefully be re-used when the buildings are restored.

Number 59 Bridge Street is a late-seventeenth-century building which was altered in the eighteenth century and re-fronted in the 1950s. Internal

features included a seventeenth-century staircase, panelled doors and plasterwork. The properties at numbers 61 Bridge Street and 73 Bridge Street Row are mid-eighteenth-century brick buildings with re-used earlier timbers. The rear wall of a medieval undercroft survived and an eighteenth-century twist baluster staircase ran from Row level to upper Row level, where there was an impressive over-Row parlour.

The building recording and watching brief were carried out by Bob Meeson and L-P Archaeology.



Nineteenth-century drawing of Bridge Street Row East from the porch of St Michael's church. (Reproduced by courtesy of Chester Community History & Heritage)

New thoughts on Roman Chester

A new, thought-provoking book on Roman Chester has just been published by the Chester Archaeological Society. Entitled *Deva Victrix: Roman Chester Re-Assessed*, it derives from the highly successful conference organised at Chester College in September 1999 with the support of the City Council's Archaeological Service.

The nine papers include an overview of fortress studies by Prof W H Manning; a history of the exploration of Roman Chester over the past forty years by Peter Carrington with some suggestions for future research; thoughts on the military presence in Chester in the fourth century by Dr Birgitta Hoffmann; and an update by Julian Baum and Dan Robinson on progress with 3-D computer reconstructions of the fortress.

P Carrington ed. *Deva Victrix: Roman Chester Re-Assessed*. Chester Archaeological Society 2002. ISBN 0 9507074 9 X. £9.95 from the Grosvenor Museum Shop, 27 Grosvenor Street, Chester CH1 2DD, plus £1.00 p&p. Chester Archaeological Society members and conference delegates can obtain copies for £7.50 plus £1.00 p&p from the Hon Secretary, Dr D J P Mason, Ochr Cottage, Porch Lane, Caergwrle, Flintshire LL12 9HG.