

## Chester students uncover the history of Grosvenor Park

This year's training excavation for Chester University archaeology students in the Grosvenor Park has revealed more evidence for the history of Cholmondeley's Mansion, a town house which occupied the site from Tudor times until the nineteenth century

**L**AST year three trenches were excavated in the park (see *The Past Uncovered* October 2007). In the second of these we found a Roman road apparently heading for the eastern entrance of the amphitheatre, and possibly buildings to the north of it. There were also remains of early post-medieval occupation, notably a large refuse pit.

The main area excavated this year was a westward extension of last year's Trench II, where we expected to confirm the line of the Roman road and explore the adjacent buildings. In fact, Roman levels were not reached. A mass of early post-medieval demolition debris spread across much of the trench. This included bricks, fragments of moulded plaster and glass, including two small crushed and fragmented windows with leaded diamond-shaped panes.

The debris dated to the sixteenth century although the finds in it show that it was not deposited until the mid-seventeenth century. Similar debris was found in 2007. We think it derives from a substantial Tudor town house known as Cholmondeley's Mansion. The house may have been built on the site of earlier, medieval buildings attached to the collegiate church of St John which had passed to Sir Hugh Cholmondeley after the Dissolution.



University students begin the second season of excavation in Grosvenor Park

The mansion was badly damaged during the Civil War in the seventeenth century and was rebuilt in the eighteenth century. Cholmondeley's Mansion is believed to have lain further west than our trench, but the density of the debris possibly indicated that it extended into this area too. There are hints that structural remains lie beneath the debris but it will require further work to confirm this. The investigation of Roman occupation will also have to await a future opportunity.

After the demolition debris was spread and levelled, the area reverted to open ground and land drains were laid in a regular pattern across the site. In 1867 the land was donated to the city and laid out as a park.

A group of twenty-eight second year archaeology students from Chester University took part in the dig, undertaking a rigorous four-week schedule of activities. They were trained in a wide range of fieldwork tasks including excavating, surveying and planning, site photography, finds processing and environmental sampling. Dr Meggen Gondek, Programme Leader for Archaeology at the university said that .... 'the students really gain from having this local field experience to complement their lectures and other fieldwork conducted over the course of their degree. Chester's archaeological heritage is a fantastic resource

and it is particularly important for archaeologists in training to work with professionals such as the team from Chester City Council's Archaeological Service.'

**Simon Ward**



An unusual find from the excavation is this piece of lead, moulded to look like stone window tracery. It is possibly a fragment of a medieval window grille or ventilator which would have been fitted unglazed into a window. (Length 60 mm)



## A designer's view of Grosvenor Park

**T**HE excavations in Grosvenor Park and the plans for the park's restoration have brought into focus the somewhat neglected figure of the park's designer, Edward Kemp. Born in Streatham, Surrey in 1817, he moved to Birkenhead in 1843, where, until his death in 1891, he was Superintendent of Parks.

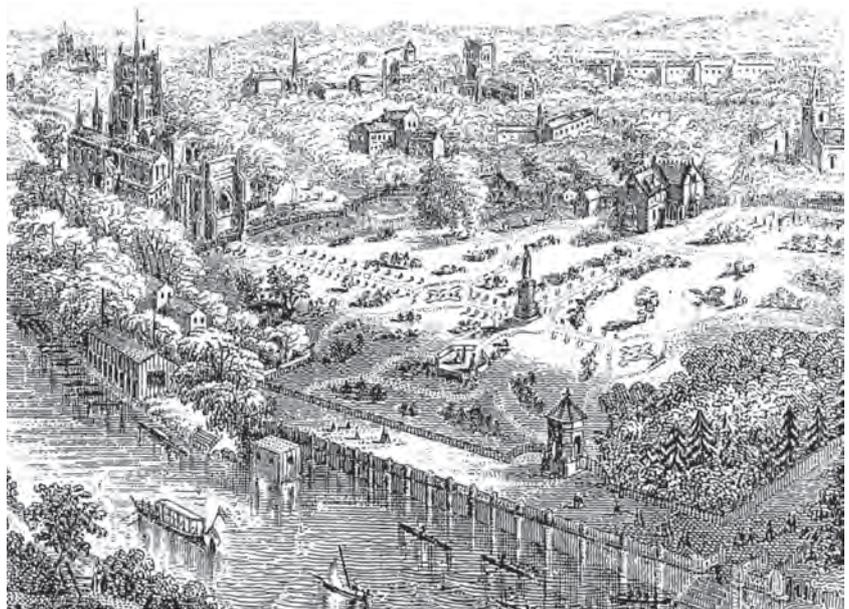
Visit many of the towns of the north west and Kemp's influence is there. He laid out Newsham and Stanley Parks in Liverpool, Hesketh Park in Southport, Congleton Park in Congleton and Queen's Park in Crewe. Above all he was for nearly fifty years responsible for Birkenhead Park, the first publicly funded park in the country, designed by his mentor, Joseph Paxton.

Elsewhere his work survives in a number of private gardens, some of which, like Castle Park, Frodsham, originally known as Park Place, or the grounds of the former Halton Grange, now Runcorn Town Hall, are now in the public realm.

Cemeteries, too, benefited from his skills. Among those he designed were Flaybrick in Birkenhead, Anfield Cemetery, Liverpool and the cemetery in Barrow in Furness. These he planned and planted with the same thought and care as his parks – they were literally 'gardens for the dead'. Flaybrick, where he himself is buried, was so richly endowed with trees that today it has the status of an arboretum.

Kemp's involvement with Chester began when, still a young man, he was commissioned by such Chester worthies as the Frosts of Queen's Park to design their private gardens. It was no doubt this connection as well as his general reputation that brought him the commission for Chester's 'New Park', on which he began work in January 1864.

For two years Kemp took a keen interest in the undertaking. Leaving the day-to-day supervision to a clerk of works, Robert Reid, he nevertheless made over twenty professional visits to the city on behalf of the park, as well as updating his original plans. Always insistent on payment in guineas, his fees for the years 1864–6, including expenses, amounted to £70 19s 4d. It was mon-



Grosvenor Park from the south east. (From Gresty and Burghall's *Chester Guide*, rev J Hicklin 1867)

ey well spent. That so much of his original design for Grosvenor Park survives, including the fine avenue of limes and hollies, is something of which the city can be proud.

**Elizabeth Davey**

### Cheshire Gardens

Elizabeth Davey will be speaking on the public parks of Cheshire and the works of Edward Kemp at Cheshire History Day, to be held on Saturday 25 October at Northwich Memorial Hall. The theme of the day will be 'Cheshire Gardens, Parks and Gardeners'. Other speakers include Sam Youd, Garden Manager at Tatton Park; Jonathan Pepler, Cheshire County Archivist, and Wendy Morgan, Principal Conservation Officer for Liverpool City Council. Tickets cost £10. For further information contact Cheshire Local History Association, c/o Cheshire Record Office, Duke Street, Chester, CH1 1RL, tel 01244 602559, e-mail [recordoffice@cheshire.gov.uk](mailto:recordoffice@cheshire.gov.uk)

### Cheshire tithe maps online

After more than four years the 'e-mapping Victorian Cheshire' project has come to an end – 479 Cheshire tithe maps and their accompanying apportionments are now available on line.

Tithe maps and apportionments were drawn up following the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836. Traditionally tithes were a local payment in kind for the upkeep of the local church and clergy. They are a unique record of land ownership, occupancy and use. The acreage, names of all tithe owners and their tenants and the rent due on each plot of land (some 250,000 plots in all), have been entered on to a database and linked directly to the maps.

The tithe maps, some of which are nearly 4 m long, have been digitised so that they can be directly compared to Ordnance Survey maps from c 1875 and c 1910, modern mapping and aerial photographs of the county from both the 1970s and c 2000.

The project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and made possible by the support of volunteers, Cheshire Information Services and DigiData Technologies. For more information go to: <http://maps.cheshire.gov.uk/tithemaps/>



## Collapse of the City Walls

In early April a 10-m section of the inner part of the City Walls behind the Grosvenor Hotel collapsed. Emergency scaffolding is currently being installed to support both this and a further section of the wall affected by the collapse behind properties in St John Street. We are carrying out regular inspections with English Heritage and discussing plans for a metrical survey of other parts of the walls circuit. This is in line with the City Council's Conservation Management Plan, which is due to be adopted shortly.

We will also carry out a 3D laser survey of the surfaces of the wall adjacent to the collapsed section to provide a digital image of its overall shape and surface condition. This could also be used as a basis for creating a 3D model of the wall to help interpretation.

The whole scheme of investigation and repair will be a lengthy process; current estimates suggest that this will be at least eighteen months. However, we hope to complete the stabilisation work by the end of 2008, a process which may involve the complete dismantling of the collapsed section of wall. The timing and nature of this work will depend on circumstances such as the findings of the initial assessment of the collapse. In the meantime we plan to make the work in progress visible through open days and possibly a temporary walkway.

We will provide a further update in the next issue of the newsletter.



Part of the collapsed City Wall behind the Grosvenor Hotel

## District news

### Carden Hall boathouse

The demolition of a boathouse on a small island at the north end of a lake in Carden Park Estate has prompted a detailed record to be made of the building.

Carden Hall, eight miles south of Chester, was built in the sixteenth century and became the home of the Leche family. It was destroyed by fire in 1912. The park was created in the late eighteenth century, and it was probably at this time that the lake was constructed. A cottage on the island was first mentioned in the tithe apportionment of c 1839. On the Ordnance Survey map of 1875 the lake is marked as a fish pond and a footbridge connects the island to the park.

A single-storey building of red brick and slate tiled roof, the boathouse had three rooms, though it is thought that the two smaller ones, one of which was a pantry or store-room, were originally a single room. Two of the rooms had fireplaces; one of them, with fire bars, probably functioned as a cooking hearth. The largest room had a plasterwork ceiling with imitation ropework design painted in gold, and the hearth was decorated with green and white glazed tiles.

The survey suggests that there were two building phases – a simple



The boathouse from the south east with bay to the south west. A bricked-up ogee-arch window can be seen to the left of the doorway. This style of window was typical of the Gothic Revival and popular during the 1830s and 1840s.

rectangular structure (probably the cottage depicted on the tithe apportionment), which was subsequently enlarged by the addition of a bay to the south west and embellished with an ornate decorative scheme and plasterwork ceiling. A flagged path and patio cutting through an earlier sandstone surface was probably part of this improvement phase. It is suggested that these improvements were a result of the inhabitants of Carden Hall using the island and boathouse to a greater degree for entertainment and leisure.

The archaeological work was commissioned by Mr Morgan of Carden Hall and carried out by Wardell Armstrong, Engineering & Environmental Solutions

### Seventeenth-century coin from Dodleston

When the Wrexham Heritage Society were investigating the site of the original Dodleston Hall, they discovered a Scottish silver coin of Charles I, who reigned from 1625 to 1649 and was the second son of James I of England (James VI of Scotland). The coin depicts a crowned thistle on the reverse and a crowned bust on the obverse. A hole punched through it from the obverse side has caused considerable damage. It is unclear as to why this was done: possibly it was to be worn as an amulet.

Dodleston Hall was the home of Sir Thomas Egerton, formerly Keeper of the Great Seal to

Elizabeth I and Lord Chancellor to James I.



Reverse side of the coin showing a crowned thistle



## Publication news

### Industry in Roman Middlewich

The results of a major excavation in Middlewich, which revealed Roman activity spanning at least 300 years, was published in April. The site, along King Street to the north of the town centre and close to the main focus of Roman civilian settlement, was excavated by L-P: Archaeology and Earthworks in 2001 and 2002.

It was discovered that in the first century one of the main activities on the site was the extraction of brine. Evidence for an evaporation hearth suggests that the brine was also being boiled on the site. However, this activity appears to have ceased by the mid-second century when we see evidence for other industrial activities such as iron-, lead- and leatherworking. Although these industries declined during the third century, finds of coins and pottery indicate that the area was still occupied during the fourth century.

A major part of the publication is given over to artefact reports, including coins, brooches, pottery and glass. The waterlogged conditions across the site provided important opportunities to analyse the surviving plant remains and wooden features such as a timber-lined well and pits lined with wicker and wattle. Significant finds included a plank from a barrel, branded with the letters LEV (presumably referring to the maker's name) and a stylus tablet, similar to a writing tablet and probably used for a legal document. It is believed to be the first to be found in Cheshire. Both artefacts were made from silver fir, a tree native to central Europe in the Roman period, but not to Britain.

The excavations have provided a major insight into life in one of the industrial centres established in the north west to process and produce supplies for the Roman army for their northern campaigns.

M Williams and M Reid, *Salt: life and industry. Excavations at King Street, Middlewich, Cheshire, 2001-2002*. 2008, British Archaeological Reports, British Series **456**, £37

### Roman amphitheatres in Britain

The co-director of Chester's amphitheatre project, Tony Wilmott of English Heritage, is the author of a new book on amphitheatres in Britain – the first major study of all the amphitheatres of Roman Britain in their imperial context.

The book covers the origins and development of amphitheatres, their discovery and exploration, planning, construction and distribution. Every amphitheatre and amphitheatre-type structure in the province is described under the general headings of urban, rural and theatre-amphitheatres in the south and east of Britain; and legionary and auxiliary amphitheatres in the north and west. By discussing the context of the buildings in terms of the various communities of Roman Britain that they served, whether it be military or civilian, urban or rural, native or incomers, the author demonstrates that different communities required different kinds of amphitheatres.

The two legionary amphitheatres at Chester and Caerleon, for example, are very different from those at Silchester and Cirencester. Legionary amphitheatres were constructed in the context of the military community, built by the army for the army. At amphitheatres such as Cirencester and Silchester there is evidence for terraces, which can only have accommodated standing spectators; the construction of the amphitheatre itself as well as the character and frequency of events would also have shown marked differences.

There are also chapters on the arena spectacle, what happened after the Romans, and an appendix providing directions for visiting twelve of the amphitheatres discussed in the book.

In the final chapter the author draws some general conclusions from the mass of new information that has been gathered during the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, about Britain's small group of amphitheatres.

T Wilmott, *The Roman amphitheatre in Britain*. 2008, Tempus Publishing Ltd, £17.99

### National Archaeology Week

Chester Archaeology will be celebrating National Archaeology Week on Saturday 12 and Sunday 13 July, 10.30 am – 4 pm at the amphitheatre. Come and hear about our latest discoveries, take part in a range of activities, see Egyptian dancers and the Roman soldiers marching.

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 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.

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