

Archaeology in the park

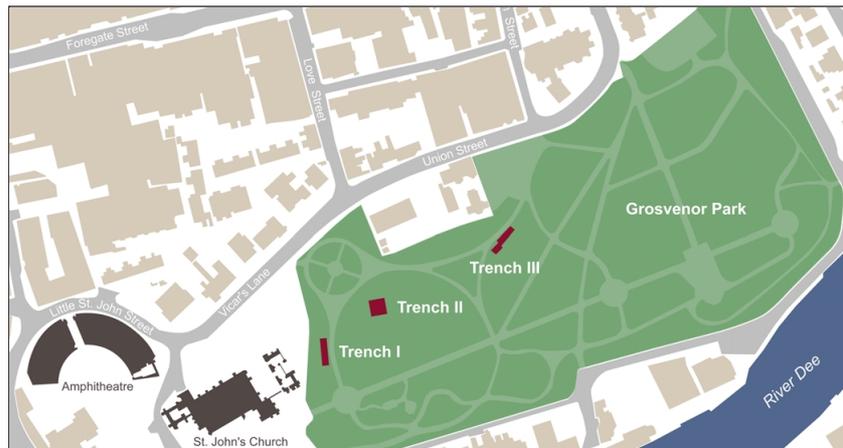
From brooches to burials, this summer's excavations have provided significant new evidence for the story of Chester's historic park

THE two main objectives of the work in the western side of Grosvenor Park this summer were to locate the remains of a substantial eighteenth-century town house, owned by the Cholmondeley family, and to establish what the area was used for during the Roman period.

The excavations in Trench III confirmed the line of a massive Roman defensive ditch running north-south across the park. The ditch was over 5 m wide and more than 2 m deep. Previous discoveries suggest that it continued north beneath the modern line of Union Street. A complete Roman brooch dating to between the late first and mid-second century AD was found in the layers in the top part of the ditch, implying that the ditch may have become obsolete fairly early on in the development of Roman Chester.

The excavations also showed that Chester's Roman civilian settlement appears to extend further south from Foregate Street than previously thought, possibly all the way to the banks of the River Dee. All of the trenches produced some evidence for Roman domestic rubbish dating to the second and third centuries AD. However, the most compelling evidence came from Trench II where the line of a Roman cobbled street was traced for a length of 10 m. The street was aligned roughly east-west and its projected route west would have taken it along the northern side of St John's Church and directly to the eastern entrance of the amphitheatre.

Evidence for late medieval industrial activity came in the form of a large pit in Trench II. It is thought to have been used for soaking animal hides as part of the leather tanning process. The pit appears to have been



Location of the three trenches excavated in the western part of Grosvenor Park



Roman enamelled brooch found in the ditch in Trench III

abandoned and filled during the sixteenth century. Plant remains survived well in the pit because it was waterlogged. Analysis of these remains will provide valuable evidence for the local environment during the Tudor period.

One of the most unexpected discoveries was the presence of at least four human burials at the southern end of Trench I, outside the limits of St John's cemetery. The hands and wrists of one of the skeletons lay under the lower spine, suggesting that the hands may have been tied behind the back. Furthermore, the alignment of the legs, ankles and feet suggests that the feet had been



One of the burials in Trench I

tied together. This has raised the possibility that this person was a criminal buried in a designated area, separate from the main cemetery.

To the north of the burials the excavations identified the western end of a stone-built cellar, which had been backfilled with demolition debris and domestic rubbish during the





A copper-alloy jetton made in Nuremberg in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Jettons were used as counters for making up financial accounts.

latter part of the seventeenth century. This would seem likely to have been part of Lord Cholmondeley's house which was razed to the ground in 1646.

Working alongside the professional archaeologists throughout the project was a group of students from Chester University, gaining valuable experience in both fieldwork and artefact studies. Local volunteers also took the opportunity to join the team. All their hard work means that we now have a much better understanding of the history and development of this area of the city.

Dan Garner

The archaeological work in the park supports both a Conservation Management Plan and an application by Chester City Council to a Heritage Lottery Fund initiative known as Parks for People. For more information follow the links from www.chestramphitheatre.co.uk

You can read all about the excavations in a new booklet which will be available in November. Copies of *Archaeology in the Park, Grosvenor Park, Chester 2007* will be on sale in the Grosvenor Museum shop and Tourist Information Centres.

Io Saturnalia!

The strange world of ancient slavery

This year we are celebrating the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the British slave trade by Parliament. However, we should remember that the civilisations of Greece and Rome were 'slave societies' just as much as were those of the Americas. About twelve million Africans were transported across the Atlantic; arguably almost ten times that number suffered enslavement during the life of the Roman empire.

ANCIENT slavery seems to have developed in the most advanced parts of the ancient Mediterranean world. Ideas on citizenship were strongly linked to economic independence, so the



The tombstone of Curatia Dinyasia in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, a probable freedwoman, who died aged forty. Greek names (in this case related to Dionysus, the god of wine) were often given to slaves. She would have been given her first name (possibly related to that of her former owner), when she was freed. Her owner was probably a soldier, and she may have been kept as a concubine. First half of the third century AD.



Fetters found during excavation within the Roman fortress at Chester, in Hunter Street in 1909. Fetters like this were used on slaves thought likely to escape. Could they also have been used just for securing criminals?

main way in which the rich could acquire a subordinate workforce was by buying slaves, most often prisoners of war. The Roman use of slaves increased vastly in the last two centuries BC as their empire expanded.

Slaves seem to have remained most common in Italy. In other parts of the empire, where conditions similar to serfdom often survived, they were generally rarer. However, they could be found wherever there were specifically 'Roman' organisations, for example the army, and in cities. Slavery was the main source of social mobility in the ancient world, up and down. Not only were slaves used in the worst occupations, such as mining; they frequently appear in responsible positions, such as managing tax revenues for the emperor. Slaves and free men might work side by side doing the same jobs. They had no rights – they could be put to death virtually on the whim of their owners and were often sexually abused; on the other hand they could sometimes accumulate enough *peculium* (pocket money) to buy a slave of their own! On the death of their owner – before if they were lucky – they might be set free and also gain the privileges of Roman citizenship held by their former owners.

In the later empire the number of slaves may have fallen. The reason for this is not fully understood, but it may be related to a reduction in manufacturing and a decline in the status of the free rural population.

Peter Carrington



Chester
City Council

Chester's Roman town

Roman Chester is best known as the base of the Twentieth Legion. Although there are still important gaps in what we know of its plan, and although many excavations remain to be published, we have a good overall idea of what it looked like.

UNTIL recently our idea of what lay outside the fortress walls was very disjointed. Now, as a result of numerous trial excavations in advance of development and study of old discoveries, we can begin to see hints of a pattern: we can imagine what it felt like to live there and walk from one distinct area to another; and we can begin to compare it with other Roman towns in Britain and elsewhere in the empire.

Residential buildings with elaborately painted plaster on their walls and good-quality cement floors were first discovered to the west of the fortress, in the Greyfriars area overlooking the Roodee, thirty years ago, while on the north side of Lower Watergate Street fragments of a large bath building have been coming to light for two hundred and fifty years. Reports of discoveries made when much of Chester Castle was rebuilt in the early 1800s, hinted that high-status buildings with tessellated floors (made in the same way as mosaics, but in only one colour) existed south of the fortress as well. Part of a hypocaust, probably belonging to the bath suite of a private house, was found on the south side of Duke Street in 1989.

We have long known that what is now Foregate Street was lined with narrow 'strip buildings' containing workshops and residential accommodation arranged end-on to the street – like a modern industrial estate. These probably extended from the Roman and modern east gate almost as far as City Road. However, this summer's excavations in Grosvenor Park showed that they extended further south than we thought, at least as far as the newly discovered road leading to the eastern entrance of the amphitheatre.

Outside the north-eastern sector of the fortress there was larger-scale,



Substantial remains of the Roman bath house excavated on the north side of Lower Watergate Street in 1989

revealed shallow ditches and slight building remains, especially roof tile. These seem likely to be remains of cottages standing in their own garden plots on the edge of the settlement.

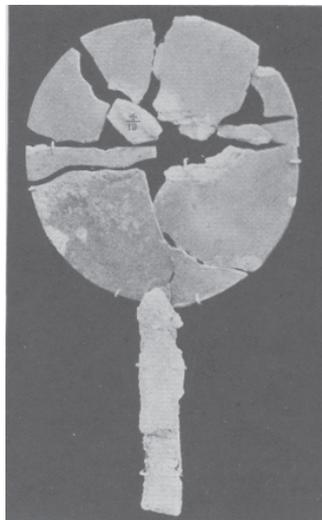
Dotted among these suburbs were the cemeteries. The earliest were the cremation cemeteries, between Liverpool Road and Parkgate Road, opposite the university; in Handbridge and in Great Boughton. There were later inhumation cemeteries, again in Handbridge and especially on the old Chester Royal Infirmary site.

The people who were buried in the latter cemetery may well have lived just to the south, in the Greyfriars area, and some at least were quite wealthy (one woman was buried wearing gold earrings and another was buried with a mirror).

Roman Chester now seems to have formed a number of distinct zones. At the centre lay the legionary fortress. From its west gate and around its southern side a high-status residential area extended as far as the modern Souters Lane, with pleasant views across the river and enjoying the clean air of the prevailing winds from the west. At Souters Lane a natural gully, exploited as another quarry, separated it from the amphitheatre. Outside the east gate was the craft and commercial area, with activities needing more space to the north-east. Around the town lay cottage gardens from which the garrison and townsfolk may have bought their fresh food, and dotted between them the cemeteries. Chester is now beginning to feel like other Roman towns, not just army bases. What we need now are larger-scale excavations to confirm some of the hints and careful study and publication of the results to fill out the details.

Peter Carrington

more untidy industrial activity. Excavations on the site of the old Delamere Street bus station have shown that it was the site of a Roman sandstone quarry. Fragments of overfired pottery were also found there. Similar fragments were found



A mirror, c 8 cm in diameter, which was broken into twelve pieces and placed inside a small pottery jar before being put into a grave. Excavated at the Infirmary Field site in 1912-1914

during the building of the Inner Ring Road in 1970 and suggest that there were pottery kilns in the area.

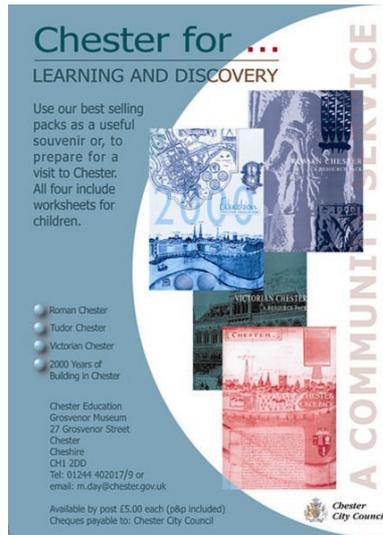
Further out, along Boughton in the east and also north of the fortress at Tower Wharf, excavations have



Education news

Resource packs

Chester Education offer a range of teacher's resource packs, designed to prepare pupils for a visit to Chester. Packs include Roman Chester, Tudor Chester, Victorian Chester and 2000 years of building in Chester. Available by post for £5.00 (postage and packing included).



Work experience

Are you or your students thinking about a work experience placement? Please contact us at the Grosvenor Museum if you are interested in a placement as we always have a lot of requests and enquiries. The places go to those who are really interested in the work of the museum and the Education Service. We are looking for those people who are mature and really motivated and interested in broadening their experience of the workplace.

For further details contact Janet Axworthy, Chester Education (01244) 402019, fax (01244) 322045 or e-mail j.axworthy@chester.gov.uk

Publication news

Research in the north west

The second volume of a review of archaeological research in the north west region has recently been published. The first stage (Volume 1), published in 2006 was essentially a 'stock-taking' exercise to evaluate archaeological work previously undertaken in Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside. It demonstrated the rich archaeological potential within the region but it also identified major gaps in our current knowledge.

The agenda now sets out priorities and proposals for future research, work programmes and changes in working practice to promote research objectives. This is presented chronologically, covering such topics as settlement and land use, environment, military activity and technology, production and exchange.

The final stage of the framework is a research strategy which represents current opinion on the key areas in which the region's archaeological research should be focused. It suggests a number of programmes considered to be priorities. An example of this is landscape analysis, where a need has been identified for research projects to address occupation over multiple periods and across a variety of topographical zones. Other examples include aerial survey – one of the most cost-effective ways of undertaking large-scale survey; and buildings archaeology – many historic buildings have no protection and no record.

The volume can be used by all those involved in researching, conserving and managing the historic environment.

The project was initiated by the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (North West) and English Heritage. Volumes 1 and 2 are available from Dr Mike Nevell, University of Manchester Archaeological Unit, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL. Each volume costs £15 + £2.50 p&p.

Society news

The Chester Archaeological Society has another full programme of lectures beginning in October. These range from 'The Stonehenge experiment', 'Castles in early Norman England' and 'Soldiers of the twentieth legion'. Meetings are held at the Grosvenor Museum and non-members are welcome on payment of an admission fee of £3.00.

Full details of the programme are on the society's website: www.chesterarchaeolsoc.org.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 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.

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

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