

The Chester Antiquary



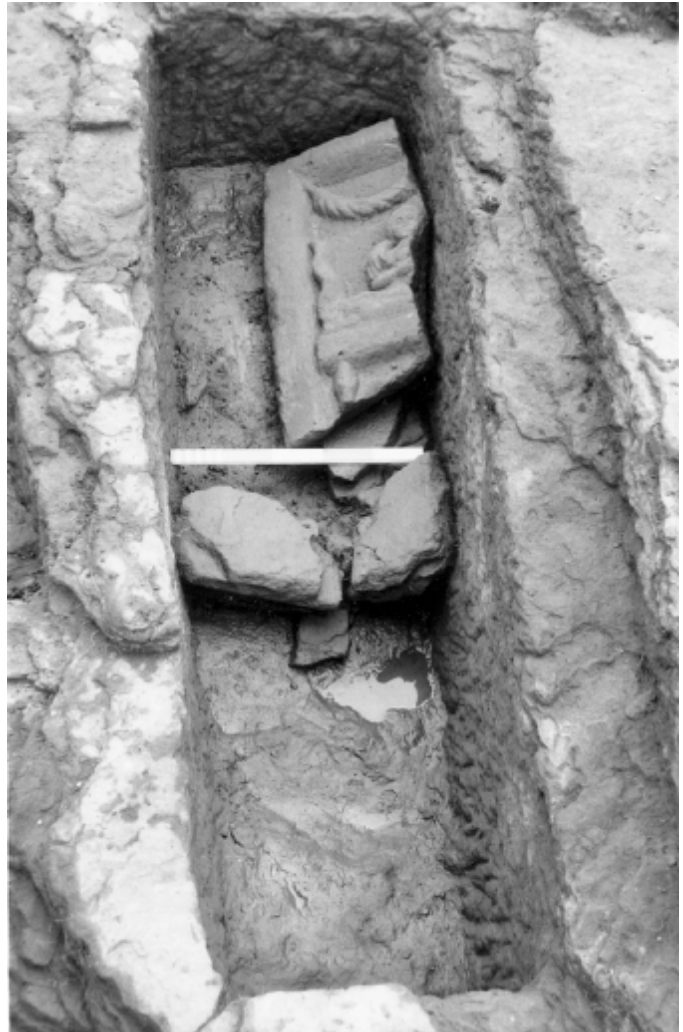
Newsletter of the Chester Archaeological Society
2002 Issue 2 (Autumn/Winter)

The Heronbridge Research Project

WORK this year was concentrated at the spot where a natural watercourse met the ancient river-cliff. The mouth of the watercourse had once formed an inlet some 10–12 metres wide, which had been used as a quay in the Roman period. The rock face had been straightened to improve access for boats and a gravel trackway led down to the side of the inlet to facilitate the loading and offloading of carts. The river was clearly wider in the Roman period, the present floodplain being a medieval formation. Sizeable pits cut into the rock on the side of the inlet presumably marked the foundations for simple cranes or other lifting devices for offloading cargoes from barges. These modifications to the inlet mouth were carried out *c* AD 130, following earlier use of the area for industrial purposes.

Much later, probably during the first half of the third century, three tombs were built nearby. Each consisted of a rock-cut grave with some form of memorial structure above. Two were for adults and one was for a child, perhaps a family group. They had been thoroughly ransacked at a later date and most of the bones had been removed. However, the backfill of one of the graves yielded pieces of a tombstone depicting a funeral banquet scene, which had once adorned the superstructure of one of the graves. The surviving portion of the sculpture depicts the head and upper torso of a young girl with the arm of one of her parents resting on her shoulder.

Two trenches were excavated to see if the defences of the post-Roman enclosure continued along the riverbank. No trace of any form of defensive works was found and it seems that the enclosure was open along its river frontage. Another trench partially sectioned the northern arm of the rampart and ditch system. Thirteenth



Rockcut grave with a tombstone depicting a funeral banquet scene (Photograph by David Mason)

century pottery found at a high level in the ditch fill implies that the enclosure is considerably earlier than *c* AD 1250. It also confirmed that the base of the rampart had been reinforced with a stone revetment, a feature intermittently encountered in previous sections. Much of this had subsequently collapsed into the ditch. An extensive geophysical survey within the interior of the enclosure has identified areas worthy of future investigation.

The Heronbridge Project is supported financially by the Grosvenor

Estate (landowner), the St John's House Trust, Bristol Myers Squibb, Marks & Spencer Financial Services, and the Local Heritage Initiative Scheme of the Heritage Lottery Fund, operated by the Countryside Commission and the Nationwide Building Society.

The work was carried out by volunteers under professional direction. If you would like to take part in next year's excavation, please contact Dr David Mason (Tel: 01978 760834; Email: djpmason@dircon.co.uk)

Dr David Mason Project Director

Obituaries

Dr D F Petch

It is with very deep regret that we have to record the death, at the age of 74, of Dr Dennis Frank Petch.

Dennis became Curator of the Grosvenor Museum in 1962 from a similar post in Lincoln. He served as Curator for twelve years when, following local government re-organisation, he was appointed Director of the Museum Service for Cheshire. Later, he became a Research Fellow at the University of Liverpool.

A practicing archaeologist with a passionate interest in Roman archaeology, Dennis was responsible for many of the major excavations carried out in Chester in the 1960s and 1970s, when much redevelopment was taking place. Perhaps one of the most important of these was at the site of the Old Market Hall, which uncovered the enigmatic elliptical building. Much of his work was published, and several of his papers appeared in the Society's

Journal. He also wrote the chapter on the Roman period in the first volume of the History of the County of Cheshire in The Victoria County History of England, edited by B E Harris and A T Thaker.

Dennis was a very active member of the Chester Archaeological Society. He served as a member of the Council and did not stint in his work as its Honorary Secretary. More recently he became a Trustee of the St John's House Trust, where his judgment and expertise on archaeological matters was greatly valued.

Dennis died on 31 July 2002, after battling with considerable fortitude against a serious illness. Shortly before his death he had the pleasure of knowing that he had been awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by the University of Liverpool.

The Society has lost a good friend, and the City of Chester has lost a man who served it well and added greatly to the understanding of its past.

To his widow, Hazel, and her family we should like to extend our sincere condolences on their loss.

Dr J T Driver

Stephen Hansen Penny BA

Stephen Penny died in March 2002 after a long illness. He studied at Queens University Belfast and had a long career in archaeology, holding positions at the Ashmolean, Lancaster and the Oxford Museum, before taking the post of Curator of the Salt Museum and Stretton Water Mill in 1988. His last publication, on Roman salt pans, co-authored with David Shotter, appeared in Volume 76 of the Society's Journal. He will be sadly missed by his many friends and colleagues. I would like to express our sympathy, in particular, to his mother, Mrs Jean Penny.

David Roberts

Letters

The Library

As members are aware, probably the most important issue facing the Society at the present time is the future of its library. Since the closure of the City Record Office the contents are more fragmented and less easily accessible than previously. Although this is unfortunate we must ask how much use was made of the facility by members and by the general public, even when access was relatively easy.

The other question which has to be asked is how relevant many of the books, etc are to the Society. Are we holding what I know the Editor of the Newsletter has described as a collection, rather than a library?

Local government is increasingly measuring the cost of any facility and we have been told how much each metre of shelf space costs to provide. I would hope that some solution for increased use of the library may be found, perhaps by involving Chester College,

particularly in regard to our journal collection.

We have valuable books in the library, a number of which are sadly in poor condition. It is the duty of the Society to be responsible for their care. Although we may get grants towards the cost of repairs we have to accept that the Society will have to provide a matching contribution.

I would appeal to members to visit the library, borrow books which might interest them and hopefully express opinions on its future.

Rosemary Martin

Gift Aid Scheme

The scheme was introduced two years ago to simplify the system for making donations, including subscriptions, to charitable organisations. Neither a minimum payment nor a deed of covenant are now required.

However, the donor must pay Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax, at least equivalent to the amount of tax that the Society reclaims on the payment for the tax year (currently 28p for every £1 given), and also complete a Gift Aid Declaration form.

There has been a very encouraging response from members and the Society has been able to reclaim from the Inland Revenue in excess of £500 each year. This makes a very useful addition to our funds at no additional expense to the donor.

This notice is primarily aimed at all members who may decide to use the scheme and complete the simple Gift Aid Declaration before the next subscription falls due on 1 January 2003.

Subscriptions for next year are unchanged, for Ordinary Members £15, Associate Members £7 and Institutional Members £20.

For further information and a Declaration Form, please contact the Honorary Treasurer, Mr E S R Warwick. (See **Society Information** on page 4 for contact details).

Excursions

Berwick

6–10 September 2002



Statue of St Cuthbert at Lindisfarne Priory
(Photograph by David Roberts)

Halifax 6 July 2002

The day was fine when we crossed the Pennines to visit Halifax. Our guide, Mr. Bell the Chairman of the Civic Trust, met us in the Piece Hall, a large open-air space surrounded by shops and galleries. It had been built as a market for weavers to sell their wares to merchants. The first stop was at a door beside the Yorkshire Bank. We walked upstairs and along a worn corridor. We were amazed to find very finely-carved plaster decoration on the ceiling and walls. Somerset House was built for a cloth merchant, John Royds. The carvings represent the Royds family in classical poses. There are also two splendid mirrors, said to be the largest available at the time.

Next was the Town Hall, designed by Sir Charles Barry. The mayor's attendant showed us the mace and other civic treasures.

Finally we visited All Soul's Church, which was built in the mid nineteenth century by Colonel Edward Akroyd as part of one of his 'model villages'. It is

A busy, interest-packed excursion, based at the Kings Arms in Berwick, began with a visit to Floors Castle with its sixteenth and seventeenth century furniture and fine works of art.

A fascinating, but very wet, walk around Berwick was led by Mr Green, Curator of the Borough Museum who had given us a very entertaining talk on Friday night. The weather cleared in the afternoon for Bamburgh Castle, very austere after the warmth of Floors.

On Sunday we visited Thirlestane Castle one of the seven 'Great Houses of Scotland' and Mellerstain House, which has wonderful Adams plasterwork and original decoration. Both are delightful places.

On Monday morning we visited Holy Island with its magnificent ruined Abbey. The rains began during lunch and reached a peak as we arrived at Paxton House with a pre-eminent collection of Chippendale furniture and an impressive picture gallery. The rains did ease enough for us to see the gardens, but the red squirrels kept well out of our way.

Our journey home was via Jedburgh Abbey which stands proud in the town and then on to Chesters Roman Fort. Chesters was a fine ending to the trip, with bright sunshine and an excellently-presented Roman Fort.

Our thanks go to David Mason for organising the trip. Unfortunately he was unable to come with us, but George Storey was an excellent stand in.

David Roberts

a very fine example of Victorian neo-gothic architecture, now, sadly, little-used and in poor condition.

Our last visit of the day was to Snibden Hall, with its interesting furnished rooms. The last of the family died in 1933, since when Halifax Council has opened the hall as a museum. Much of the original furniture is on view making it very much a family home. There is also a barn which contains many displays of farm and country life, and a lovely garden with beautiful views over the park.

Prue Wendt

Conwy Valley 18 May 2002

The excursion began at the impressive Bodysgallen Hall Hotel, which has medieval origins but was mainly the seventeenth-century home of one of the Wynn family. Unfortunately, heavy rainfall prevented all but the most

determined from seeing the historic walled gardens laid out in the eighteenth century. A visit to Conwy was centred on the restored medieval house, Plas Mawr, built by an earlier member of the same Wynn family in 1580. It is probably the best presented, late medieval, town house in Britain and considerable effort has gone into explaining the process of restoration.

After lunch in improving weather we visited the site of the Roman fort of Conium and the medieval church of St Mary Caerhun. Only the outlines of the fort can be seen in the fields surrounding the church, but it is in view of two major prehistoric hill forts and many other historic sites. The fine detail of the medieval wooden roof of this church comes as a pleasant surprise.

Finally we visited Trefriw Wells Spa, which may be Roman in origin, but is now dominated by the 1874 Victorian Pump Room. It now distributes its iron waters across Europe.

Roy Coppack

Chairman's remarks at the 2002 AGM

I would like to share with you some of the problems facing our Society and our City, with particular reference to the library.

You will have read Derek Nuttall's account of the present status of our library. Our books and journals are dispersed between the Heritage Centre, the Record Office, and the basement of the Town Hall, and the journals are virtually inaccessible. The journals could be very useful to Chester Archaeology, and to students of Chester College, in addition to our members, but it is very difficult to access them.

We have surveyed what other archaeological societies are doing with their books, and have made good progress at cataloguing what we have. Our journal collection must be one of the most comprehensive collections in the UK, (theoretically) accessible to the

general public. The learned societies and universities have good journal collections but they are accessible only to their members.

Perhaps in collaboration with another local organisation, such as the Public Library, the Record Office, Chester History & Heritage, Chester College, Chester Cathedral or St Deniol's Library, some way might be found to make all, or part, of our collections more generally accessible. We have had preliminary discussions with all of these bodies, but have not made much progress to date.

Until we can find premises to contain our collection it is unlikely that it can be made generally accessible. But this is only part of the general problem of how to make all of Chester's heritage accessible.

Chester has never had a city museum. The Grosvenor Museum was never intended to be a 'city museum'. It

remains what it was originally intended to be, somewhere to house archaeological artefacts, natural history specimens, and local art. Nowhere in it will you find information on Chester's industrial past – cheese-making, glove-making, hydraulic engineering, ship-building, printing etc.

What Chester badly needs now is a cultural centre with a museum displaying the history of the city in all its aspects, a much better public library, an archaeological library bringing all the archaeological books together, perhaps a general art gallery which is not limited to local art, meeting rooms and display areas. The Northgate Development might include such a cultural centre, but it seems unlikely that it will. The buildings on the castle site could be adapted to this purpose, but that would need determination and money.

Until the general problem has been solved I see no prospect of our library becoming the professional research tool it could be.

We should all campaign, through the ballot box, and through the various initiatives which are being progressed at the moment – Best Value, and the so-called Sub-Regional Cultural Strategy for Cheshire – for the building of a genuine cultural centre in Chester which would, among many other things, cater for our library.

Alan Comyns

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Library

Members are reminded that they are welcome to come in and browse through the Society's library at Chester Community History and Heritage.

Internet

<http://www.chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk>

The *Chester Antiquary* is published twice a year, in Spring and Autumn. We welcome letters and articles from Members. Contributions for the next issue should be with the newsletter editor, Dr David Roberts, no later than 31 March 2003.