

The Chester Antiquary

Newsletter of the Chester Archaeological Society
2005 Issue1(Spring/Summer)

Theodor Fontane – a German visitor to Chester in 1857 (part three)

Theodore Fontane was a German writer, never translated into English, who visited and wrote extensively about Chester – its society, history and architecture

'Descending by a stone stairway, we leave the Watergate, where we started our tour. I have already spoken of the unique character of the gabled houses. The first house of interest is called Bishop Lloyd's House and is, despite its age of two hundred and fifty years, well preserved. The big crossbeams that divide up the frontage are covered in wood carvings stimulating the imagination and making me believe that I am at home in Germany and not in England; twenty houses from a giant child's playground. The next house is similar and carries the inscription 'God's Providence is my inheritance'. This house was the only one in the city that was spared in the year of the plague 1652. The present owner is challenging God's mercy in the present dilapidated state of the building. Chester has something that is seen in no other place in the world; the Rows. Colonnades eight feet above ground level below the gabled frontage and filling whole streets. From where and how they arose, nobody knows; they are an enigma. The archaeological society has put forward theories but I am not convinced. They are an attractive, picturesque oddity. The Chester streets consist of two levels. The people look down from covered walkways on the carts being driven below.'

I have acquired the Penguin Classics translation of Effi Briest, which has an introduction and notes by Helen Chambers, Professor of German at St Andrews. She gives a short biography and notes on the social and political history of the period. The story is of a very young member of the German aristocracy who marries a senior government official twice her age. She has an affair with an army officer, which her husband discovers six years later. He arranges a duel with the lover and kills him and Effi goes into exile. The

story is set in Fontane's childhood town of Swinemunde on the Baltic (which I incorrectly located in the first part of this account, since it is now in Poland with a different spelling).

Not only was Fontane a successful travel writer, he also wrote about the three wars of Von Moltke; the defeat of Denmark 1864, the defeat of Austria 1866 and the defeat of France 1870/71, when he was a war correspondent operating on both sides of the line. He was captured by the French and nearly shot as a spy. He put these experiences

into books, which are important because he describes the landscape of these wars as well as using sources from both sides and dwells on the heavy casualties caused by the use of new technology. The military establishment were not pleased and so he turned to writing novels. At first these were historical and later he turned to descriptions of contemporary Prussian Society, for which he is best known.

Roy Coppack

New Books

Prehistoric Cheshire by Victoria and Paul Morgan 484pp + ill. Ashbourne: Landmark Publishing 2004. ISBN 1843961406 £19.95

SIXTY years have elapsed since a comprehensive book about the prehistory of Cheshire was published for the general reader. The present volume makes good that omission and admirably brings up to date all that is known about this most interesting period in our county's development. The authors are well read in their subject and are informed about current archaeological trends and opinions.

The book covers a period of some ten thousand years, from the days of the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers to the end of the Iron Age, when changes introduced by the Roman occupation began to take effect. With such a long time-scale, the book could so easily have become tedious but it has not done so. On the contrary, the text is quite lively and the reader's attention is held throughout.

The volume is comprehensive and it is difficult to recall a site which has not been mentioned. There is a useful gazetteer of sites at the end of the book, arranged by county boroughs, with descriptions and national grid references. Useful for the general reader, the latter are essential for the researcher. In addition, the book has a glossary of archaeological terms and a good bibliography. This is arranged under main period headings such as *The Neolithic* or *The Bronze Age* and these, in turn, have sub-headings such as *Life and Settlement* or *Copper Mining and Metalwork*

The only serious criticism that could be made concerns the lack of colour. Everything is in black and white with not a single colour photograph or drawing in an otherwise excellently produced hardback volume. The reason for this omission is presumably the cost of colour printing, which would have increased the retail price. However, in my opinion, an extra pound or two would have been well spent.

Despite the lack of colour, the authors are to be congratulated on this publication, which will probably become required reading on several

archaeological and local history courses. I commend it to readers of *The Chester Antiquary*.

(An extended version of this review will appear in Volume 79 of the *Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society*)

Rhys Williams

A Frontier Landscape: The North West In the Middle Ages by N J Higham 273pp + ill. Landscapes of Britain: Windgatherer Press 2004. ISBN 0-9545575-6-5 £19.99

Nick Higham will be well known to many members of the society since he has worked extensively in the region. His work on Tatton has been published in recent issues of the *Journal* and he has already published an account of the earlier history of Cheshire in *The origins of Cheshire*, dealing with the period up to the Norman Conquest. This current volume deals with the period between the conquest and the dissolution of the monasteries and covers the wider area, which comprises the post-1974 reorganisation of the counties of Cheshire, Lancashire, Merseyside and Greater Manchester. The particular focus is on the landscape history of this region and, in telling this story, the author draws on the fullest range of evidence – historical, archaeological and geographical.

The book brings together a wealth of detail, not easily accessible elsewhere, on the development of the settlement patterns, the agricultural landscape, forests and woodland, buildings and castles, markets and fairs and the influence of the church. He argues for the marginality of the region.

Although, as landscape history, there is a strong focus on the rural parts of the region, there is a considerable discussion of Chester itself, its institutions, architecture and trade. The author observes how unique Chester was in the region, being the only substantive urban centre. There is much food for thought here for those interested in the relationship between Chester and its hinterland.

This is a serious account of the Northwest's landscape and economic history, rich in detailed analysis. The exposition is careful but never dull. There is an extensive bibliography, which alone justifies the purchase price

of the book. The text is well illustrated and the maps are particularly useful.

It is a pity that the text is let down by the poor quality of the binding, which in my copy disintegrated upon first reading. Despite this, 'A Frontier Landscape' will be of great interest to members of the society.

Ian Archibald

Twentieth Century Handbridge by Len Morgan and Noel St John Williams 162 pp + many illustrations. Handbridge Area Local History Group 2004. ISBN 0 9547483 0 1 £9.50

In complete contrast to the two previous works, *Twentieth Century Handbridge* takes as its subject a very small area and a time period restricted to the twentieth century and, as a result, provides a view of the historical landscape in which real people feature strongly. No anonymous archaeological cultures here!

After a brief overview of earlier periods, the authors consider the life and times of the recent residents of the suburb of Handbridge, just south of the Dee in Chester. It describes the salmon fishing industry, the pubs and shops, the wartime experiences, local events, the schools, the churches and much else. Although I have been a resident in Handbridge for fourteen years, there was a great deal here that was new to me.

The book is constructed around Len Morgan's prodigious collection of photographs, which conveys a vivid impression of life in Handbridge as well as providing an accessible record of some of Chester's lost domestic architecture. There are also some small biographies of notable Handbridge residents including one of Professor Newstead, once chairman of our society.

The photographs are backed by a commentary and a wide range of quotations from contemporary sources and archival material. The book is very well researched and a delight to read. It is well produced and, very important for a book of this type, the photographs are very clearly reproduced.

Twentieth Century Handbridge should be of interest to members outside Handbridge because of its insight into the 'Archaeology of the Future'.

Ian Archibald

Excursions

North Yorkshire 2–6 September 2005

THERE are three excursions planned for the rest of the year. Two single days: one to Holywell and one to Anglesey and a main excursion to North Yorkshire. Details of the two single-day excursion excursions can be found among the enclosures with this copy of the Antiquary.

Holywell 21 May 2005

This excursion will include the Dark Age cross at Maen Achwyfan, Holywell (for lunch) and, in the afternoon, Basingwerk Abbey and the Greenfield Valley Heritage Park.

Anglesey 9 July 2005

This excursion will include Penmon Priory, Beaumaris (for lunch) and, in the afternoon, Amlwch and the Parys copper mine.

The itinerary for this will include the following: Aldborough Roman Town, Castle Howard, Fountains Abbey, Scarborough Castle and late Roman signal-station and Whitby Abbey. It is likely that we will be staying at an hotel in Malton. Note that the dates for this excursion are Friday 2 to Tuesday 6 September 2005.

For further details contact Dr David Mason, Ochr Cottage, Porch Lane, Hope Mountain, Caergwrle, Flintshire LL12 9HG. Tel: 01978 760834 or 07966 547272.

Your Library

FOR over 150 years the Society has been building up a library, either by purchase or exchange or, in many cases, by gifts from members. Consequently the library as it stands today, is a rather miscellaneous collection, covering not only archaeology but a wide range of topics. Essentially, the library can be separated into three categories: a) runs of journals from other societies; b) a valuable collection of maps and prints; and c) books separated into 'early/rare' (i.e. mainly pre-1800) and 'general'.

Over the past few months, most of the collection of books has been moved from Chester History and Heritage Centre, at St Michael's Church, to the City Council store at Bumper's Lane – which also houses the journals. A few hundred volumes, mainly of local history or genealogical interest, have been retained at the History and Heritage Centre for reference by both the public and society members. Our thanks must go to Mrs Pamela Lynch, who keeps a careful watch over our books at St Michael's and who has been, for many years, a valuable help in looking after and caring for the Society's books, not only in St Michael's but earlier, at the Chester Record Office, when our library was at the Town Hall.

As a result of having to move some 100 boxes of books from the Heritage Centre to Bumper's Lane, at rather short notice, there was no opportunity to list the contents prior to removal.

Consequently, George Storey and I have been spending many hours at Bumpers Lane listing the contents of the boxes. At the time of writing, around half of the boxes have been recorded and put on computer. This should mean, when completed, that if anyone wishes to consult a work – whether a book or journal – it should be possible to locate it very quickly and have it taken to St Michael's for consultation or borrowing.

There remain dark clouds over the future of the library. Firstly, we may be asked to remove the rare books and maps/prints which are still stored in the cellars of the Town Hall. If this happens at short notice we have a big problem, as the store room at Bumper's Lane will not hold any more boxes, although there is a small room adjacent, which is not being used, that could just about hold the material from the Town Hall, if it could be acquired. Secondly, there is a possibility that some, if not all, of the runs of journals may be transferred, on loan, to University College, Chester, which has an Archaeology Course. Thirdly, there is no guarantee that we shall have use of the Bumper's Lane store indefinitely. The building is showing signs of deterioration and may well be scheduled for demolition or replacement. This highlights the urgent need to find a permanent base for the Society's collections under one roof. To this end, it had been hoped that rooms may have been available in one or other

of the two empty buildings at Chester Castle, but latest information indicates that these buildings are destined to become an hotel. At present, no other potential locations can be envisaged. Trying to find somewhere to house around 10,000 volumes is far from easy!

During the difficult times of the past two or three years, the Society's Chairman, Dr Alan Comyns, and Mr George Storey, have been towers of strength, finding funding for restoration work on some of our more precious volumes, or giving time to the physical work of boxing, moving, or recording books.

One thing that has emerged, as George Storey and I have been going through the boxes at Bumpers Lane, is the wide range of interesting works which may have escaped the attention of members. Hopefully, when all the books have been recorded, it might be possible to produce a catalogue and, in a future article, I intend to draw attention to some of our more unusual or interesting works.

Derek Nuttall

Notes & News

Annual General Meeting

THE society will hold its AGM on Thursday 28 April at 7.30pm in the Grosvenor Museum. One of the items to be agreed will be some updates to the constitution. These modifications are shown in one of the enclosures with this copy of the *Antiquary*, so that you can read them in advance of the AGM.

Council for British Archaeology

Our Society is hosting the CBA NW AGM and Spring Reports meeting this year. The lecture programme accompanying the AGM will focus on our recent excavations at Heronbridge and will look, in addition to excavation and the site history, at aspects of the iron working, Roman sculpture and the palaeopathology of the war grave

skeletons. The meeting will be held in the village hall, Ecclestone, from 9.30am to 4.30pm on Saturday 14 May 2005. Details are included in the enclosures with this copy of the *Antiquary*. Note that tickets need to be ordered in advance and that the closing date is 9 May 2005.

Bluecoat Archaeology and History Society

The University of Chester archaeology department has started a new archaeological society which has an exciting events programme during term time. The final event of this term is at 7.00pm on Friday 20 May 2005, encouragingly entitled *Brewing through the Ages*. Guest speakers from the re-enactment society *Gesta Anglorum* will present a talk on the techniques of brewing and the etiquette of drinking in the medieval world. Audience participation is compulsory! A range of vessels will be distributed

and home-made beers sampled. Price £5.00. Tickets must be purchased in advance and are available from Sarah Semple, Lecturer in Archaeology, Department of History, University of Chester, Parkgate Road, Chester.

David Mason

Moving on

David Mason has been secretary to the society for ten years, but is now moving on to take up the job of County Archaeologist in Durham. We wish him all the best in his new job and thank him for his outstanding service to the Society and to archaeology in Chester.

Heronbridge 2005

This year's excavation will commence on Saturday 25 June 2005 and will run until early/mid August. Days worked will be Friday to Tuesday inclusive. Volunteers should report to the portakabin compound as usual. Work this year will focus on the southern defences of the seventh-century earthwork and the southern limits of the Roman settlement.

David Mason (Project Director)

Society Information

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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 Ian Archibald, no later than 30 September 2005.