

The Chester Antiquary



Newsletter of the Chester Archaeological Society
2006 Issue 1 (Spring/Summer)

Excavations at the amphitheatre in 2006

AN interim report on the results of the second season of excavation at the amphitheatre was co-presented to the society by Dan Garner and Tony Wilmott at the Grosvenor Museum in January 2006. Work has now begun in earnest on a programme of post-excavation assessment and analysis. It is anticipated that the results will be presented in a two volume publication divided between the Roman archaeology and the post-Roman archaeology of the site. The second volume will include a synthesis of the results of the non-invasive survey work carried out under the direction of Stewart Ainsworth.

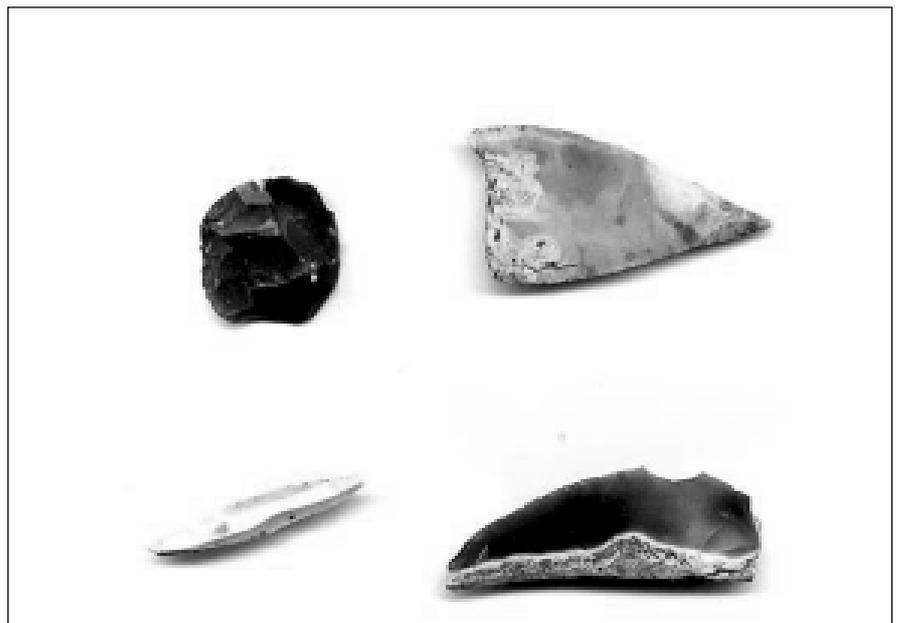
However, the Chester Archaeology Service will be returning to the site this summer for a third subsidiary season of excavation that is intended to concentrate on trying to resolve two outstanding issues. Firstly, we intend to look at as much of the pre-amphitheatre archaeology in area 'A' as possible, in order to understand what the original Roman plan/use of the site might have been and to define the prehistoric timber building, which was implied by the post-holes found at the end of the 2005 season. Secondly, we are going to return to the floor of the eastern entranceway in order to complete work started there by Keith Matthews in 2002.

The excavation is expected to run from late June until early September and more details will be posted on the website as they become available (www.chestramphitheatre.co.uk).

Dan Garner
(Senior Archaeologist,
Chester City Council)



Excavating in the east entrance of the amphitheatre in 2002
(photograph by Keith Matthews)



Prehistoric flints recovered from the amphitheatre
(photograph by Dan Garner)

Point of View

A message from the Chair

The sense of place

This phrase has been coined recently to define the Heritage business, to highlight the need to recognise and protect those aspects of a 'place' which give it its uniqueness – its identity.

WHEN this concept is applied to an historic city, such as Chester, it can lead to argument and conflict. There are those who would like to keep Chester as it is, who would fight tooth and nail to protect every stone and half-timbered aspect. There are those who would like to enhance and even exaggerate the historic – especially the Roman – aspects of the city and there are those who wish the city to move on, out of the historic skeleton which defines it, into the twenty-first century. These struggles usually lead to compromise and compromise can be the enemy of quality.

What is the 'sense of place' that defines Chester? Surely it is the sense of history in its widest definition, remembering that today is tomorrow's history. Should we then freeze Chester in its present form or allow it to develop as the world develops around it? These are important decisions which will determine Chester's future and they must be taken with a long term view in mind.

Many of Chester's visitors come to the city because of its history. Many of the businesses which move into our business parks do so because it is an attractive city with an attractive 'sense of place' Should we actively try to maintain this sense? Do the recent proposals for development help to maintain it?

Why do planners who approve and develop a business park, which is spacious and attractive, also approve and develop inappropriate buildings inside the city, such as the proposed town hall offices (the slug), the replacement project on the police headquarter's site, and the possible insertion of the Further Education College into a tight site in the centre of the City. These developments have



Excavating at Heronbridge in 2004
(photograph by David Mason)

been criticised by most of the organisations which have an interest in the preservation of the 'sense of place' that is Chester.

Speaking more parochially, our Society was responsible for identifying and protecting many of the sites and monuments which define our city. It found and protected the amphitheatre against planning proposals of the day; it also found and developed the Heronbridge site, where recent discoveries in a Society-initiated excavation seem to have identified the site of the Battle of Chester and dated the extensive post-Roman earthworks on the site to a surprisingly early date.

The Society, together with other local societies, also sponsored, built and managed the Grosvenor Museum, before gifting it to the City Council. The right earned by these societies to have free use of the museum lecture theatre

for a certain number of lectures each year has been partially eroded over time. Similarly the Archaeological Society Library has been housed, originally in the City Library, subsequently in the City Record Office, and now, due to pressure on accommodation, although still stored on City Council premises, is largely inaccessible to students and members.

The City also has its own professional archaeological department which has, over the years, explored and illuminated the city's history with the work it has done on the Rows, the City Walls, the city's medieval religious houses and the Cathedral – to highlight only a few. Much has been achieved by these organisations and much remains to be achieved. Yet the signs are there that these activities are regarded in some quarters as non-productive – they are
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Your Library

AS many of you know, most of our Library is now in storage of one kind or another. We thought we should bring members up to date on the situation as it exists at present. The library stock is now in four locations. Those of our books dealing with Chester and Cheshire are available to be consulted on the shelves of the History and Heritage centre on Bridge Street Row; they cannot be borrowed. The remaining books are in storage in the City Council depot at Bumpers Lane. Our rare books and collections of pamphlets, maps and prints are stored in the Town Hall basement in secure storage. Much of our collection of Journals from other Societies and associations are now on extended loan to the Archaeology Department of Chester University in the Blue Coat School on Northgate Street. The remaining Journals are also stored in the Council's depot.

We have recently completed a computer listing of our various collections and are hoping to be able to put a simplified version of this listing on to the Society's website in the near future. When this is available, we shall also indicate the way in which members can access this resource. Any member with an urgent need to consult any item from the library in the short term should contact the Society's Librarian, Dr Nuttall.

Recent accessions to the library

Grotte Préhistorique de Gargas by Sahly Ali (in French)

Pen Llystyn – A Roman Fort by A W A Hogg

A Victoria History of the Counties of England Volume 5 Part 2, Chester: Buildings and Architecture

Gedenkschrift für Felix Hettner Rheinische Landmuseum Trier (in German)

Bronze Age Settlements in the Welsh Marches (BAR Series No 384) by John Halstead

Archaeology International 2004/2005 by the Institute of Archaeology London

Welsh Poetry and English Pilgrimage by B J Lewis

Normans in the Celtic Northwest, 'Across the Mersey' by D Bigelow

These are in addition to the continuing exchange series of Archaeological Journals of the major Societies in the United Kingdom, the latest reports by the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire and by the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire. We also receive reports from The Ancient Monuments Society.

George Storey

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activities which can be sacrificed in the interests of economy. Museum posts are not being filled. In some county and city councils, entire archaeological departments are being closed.

We must be careful that this erosion of these resources is not allowed to go so far that the protection of the city's heritage – its 'sense of place' – is not compromised. The various societies who seek to do this seem unable to prevent it and perhaps it is time that individuals who also wish to protect the city make their views known via their elected representatives.

George Storey

Events

Council for British Archaeology North West

THE Council for British Archaeology North West will be having its Spring Reports meeting and Annual General Meeting on Saturday 6 May at Euxton Parish Community Centre near Chorley and Leyland, Lancashire. Among the subjects under discussion will be 'Roman Roads in Lancashire'; 'The Three Sisters site'; 'Brocklehead Farm Excavation'; 'B-Roads in Roman South Lancashire'; 'Wigan's Roman Bath House'; 'Recent work by the University of Manchester Archaeological Unit' and Senior Archaeologist with Chester City

Council, Dan Garner, talking about the amphitheatre. The meeting will cost £5.00 for members of CBA NW and £7.00 for non-members. Lunch is extra at £5.20. The meeting starts at 9:30am and continues until 4:15pm. If you wish to attend, please contact Dr Jen Lewis, 43 Freshfield Road, Formby, nr Liverpool, L37 3HL by 30 April.

Julie Edwards

Forthcoming Excursions

Summer excursions

THERE will be two excursions this summer. Application forms are included with this copy of the *Antiquary* for return to Prue Wendt (*see below for contact details*).

Derbyshire 13 May 2006

This will include the Neolithic and Bronze Age site of Arbor Low, Bakewell – with its museum and Anglo-Saxon crosses, and the medieval and Tudor Haddon Hall.

Stafford 1 July 2006

This will involve stops in Eccleshall, Stafford, to see the Museum and Shire Hall, Stafford Castle and Hodnet Hall Gardens.

The future of the Spring week-end excursion

Unfortunately it was not possible to arrange an excursion this Spring. Before re-considering it, I would like to know how many people might be interested in this concept. If you are interested in the

Spring excursion, or have any ideas, please contact me. I would then know whether there is a nucleus of people who might participate in future. This would not involve any definite commitment for next year at this stage. One possibility could be to re-consider the Worcestershire area. Another idea might be to spend a day analysing and assessing a medieval site from the archaeological and documentary evidence available, with some visits on the other day. Please contact Rosemary Martin with your ideas and suggestions. E:gmartin@cadoux.fsnet.co.uk.

Rosemary Martin

Society Information

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Fieldwork co-ordinator Mr Phillip Miles (*address as for Mrs Kathryn Miles*)

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 2006.