

The Chester Antiquary



Newsletter of the Chester Archaeological Society
2007 Issue 1 (Spring/Summer)

Forty-six years of planning in Chester

AT the outset of the period, the demolition of important medieval buildings awoke Cestrians to the need to establish an active Civic Trust within the city. In parallel with that, the City Council had welcomed Donald Insall to Chester as leader of one of the teams whom the government had appointed to examine the problems and opportunities of four of the most interesting historic towns in England - Bath, Chester, Chichester and York.

At that point, Duncan Sandys introduced conservation areas, a new concept to the care of our heritage, which was to open our eyes to the correlation between artefacts and nature. The City Council appointed an independent advisory committee whose members were well suited to that task through their deep knowledge of Chester and its history and familiarity with other relevant professions. If the Council is to serve its city wisely it needs to heed the advice of our archaeological and advisory committees with care.

During the 1960s the largest new developments within the City Walls were the Grosvenor-Laing Precinct, the Forum Precinct and the new council offices behind the Town Hall. Each site hides its own secret.

The Grosvenor Precinct occupies an island site which was wholly concealed from public view. It contained a unique array of standing Roman remains up to 4.88 metres high. Members of the City Council and staff of the Grosvenor Museum remained silent while the wholesale demolition took place.

The Forum Precinct's site contained an elliptical Roman hall of very unusual form. Although of exceptional interest it was quietly and completely destroyed, never to be seen by the public. Archaeologists conversant with that reprehensible incident have suggested to me that its loss, purely for the

developer's profit, has been wholly beyond forgiveness.

While this was occurring, the City Council negotiated the planning consent which led to the erection of the massive and ugly Moat House Hotel. English Heritage was appalled that the building had been 'waved through' without their knowledge. Perhaps the most damaging effect of the incident was that the city lost Andrew Brown, the best conservation officer whom they had, up to that point, ever employed. While Andrew was at the Town Hall, he undertook a thorough examination and record of the surviving medieval houses within the walled city. This work achieved a huge improvement in our understanding and appreciation of the development of the medieval city, but Andrew decided that his best course was to move elsewhere.

Since the last decade of the twentieth century the City Council has changed its planning policies on dwellings, particularly apartment blocks, in a manner which they have never publicly discussed with their constituency. Members of the Conservation Areas Advisory Committee and the Chester Civic Trust New Works Committee noted that planning consent was being given to applications, each of which contained many more dwellings than the Council's development brief permitted. Requests for an explanation of the discrepancy received no response, but in time the Government Office for the North West found that Chester's planners had already allowed developers to build much more than the local plan should have allowed. The Office instructed the Council to approve no more dwellings until they were once more within the permitted number.

The two advisory committees constantly informed the planning department that they were deeply

concerned that the blocks of apartments, especially those to be built between Boughton and Canal Side, were at best mediocre in design, almost wholly bare of landscaping and extremely cramped in layout, but their queries were ignored.

October 2005 brought in the most difficult period yet for the Council's two advisory committees. Both had to consider the proposal to demolish the simple, but generally unloved, former Cheshire Police Headquarters, which overlooked the Roodee, and to replace it with a massive circular building 80 metres in diameter and 21.4 metres in height, which would contain a restaurant, a hotel, a block of offices and a range of apartments. The site is directly opposite Thomas Harrison's masterly Castle Square - the *Propylaea*, Castle Square, Shire Hall and Courthouse.

The advisory committees were, quite independently of each other, unanimous in recommending to the City Council that the proposed new building would be grossly out of scale and brashly overbearing in form and mass in relation to its grade I listed neighbours. The City Council made no response to those representations except to refuse point blank to require a model of the proposed building *in its setting* 'because the applicants wouldn't like it'. The Chair of the Chester Civic Trust New Works Committee took it into his own hands to make an accurate model to show the relationship between Castle Square and the proposed building, which took him a week to complete. Simultaneously he sent a copy of the application drawings to the Council for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) who wrote to the City Council to state that the building was clearly and wholly unsuited to the proposed site, but they regretted that instant personal

(continued on page 3)

The Library

THE collection of archaeological journals owned by the Society is now housed in the Blue Coat School Resource Room, in the Archaeology department of the University of Chester, where it is now available for consultation by members of the Society.

The Department of History and Archaeology would like to thank the Chester Archaeological Society for allowing them to house their journal collection and granting access to the collection to students.

Over the summer, the journals were catalogued and new shelves were installed in the Resource Room to house and display the volumes. Society members are welcome to consult the journals, which are non-circulating.

The Resource Room at the Blue Coat School is open Monday to Friday from 9.00 am – 4.00 pm. As a courtesy, visitors are asked to make themselves known to the administrative staff at reception. The Resource Room is

housed on the first floor of the building and visitors should be aware that there are several flights of stairs to reach the room. After saying hello to reception, proceed through the door to the right and up the stairs. At the top of the stairs, go straight through one door and immediately right through another door. Go down this corridor, which takes a diversion off to the right down a small step, and continue to the left. At the end of this corridor there is another door, which brings you to the top landing of a separate set of stairs. Straight ahead of you is Room 107 – the Resource Room. A bit of a maze!

The archaeology journals are at the back wall of the Resource Room and in the centre of the room is a large table and some smaller desks for working. General history and archaeology books are located on the opposite wall. Please be aware that this room is provided for students to work in. They use this room to read, research, study, write papers,

access the internet and do small group work. Therefore, the room is not a complete 'quiet zone'. However, we do expect noise to be kept to a minimum and the use of mobile phones is strongly discouraged.

The computers in the room are linked to the University network and require a university login to use. There is a photocopier in the room that works on a copycard system. Copycards are usually available from reception. The journals and other volumes within the Resource Room are strictly non-circulating. Toilets are located at the bottom of the stairs by the Resource Room.

If you wish to visit the Resource Room during University holidays, please ring the department first to ensure the building will be open and the room accessible. The telephone number is (01244) 512160.

Meggen Gondek

Book reviews

The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire Vol 138: *Accounts of the Manor of Macclesfield, Cheshire, Michaelmas 1361 to Michaelmas 1362.* Edited by P H W Booth.

The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire Vol 140: *Extent of the Lordship of Longdendale 1360.* Edited by John Harrop with Paul Booth and Sylvia Harrop.

THESE two new volumes have been acquired for the Society's library and are fully reviewed in the forthcoming Journal. Perhaps these will renew interest in the history of medieval Cheshire. The starting point for research on medieval Cheshire economic and social history is a book published in 1929 by H J Hewitt: *Mediaeval Cheshire*; Chetham Society New Series 88. An easier introduction is available in *Cheshire Under the Three Edwards, Volume Five of the History of Cheshire* 1966, by the same author, which should be available in most Cheshire libraries. Some of the conclusions are challenged

by the work of Paul Booth, especially in his lecture to the Society in 1977 'Farming for Profit', in which he revised Hewitt's theory that Cheshire was economically backward in the fourteenth century and also in his doubts about the existence of a major revolt by Cheshire Tenants in 1353.

The fourteenth century produced Edward of Woodstock, Prince of Wales and Aquitaine, Earl of Chester, and a dominant personality in that century and beyond. He only made three visits to Chester but his officials struggled to provide an income from his Cheshire assets, which not only included land but also the profits from the administration of the law.

These books, produced by the Record Society, are the result of a proposal by Paul Booth in 1977 that the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire should produce a programme of published texts from the categories of fourteenth-century Cheshire Palatinate documents in the Public Record Office. This has resulted in the trilogy of published sources produced

under his leadership. The first volume is an *Account of Master John de Burnham the Younger, Chamberlain of Chester 1361-62*. This we need to acquire for the library because the commentary in this book sets out how Cheshire was administered by these officials in this intensive period of activity during the wars with France.

Volume 138 is a transcription of the accounts of the manor of Macclesfield. The accounts of the manor were presented to the Black Prince's Auditors in the Exchequer room in Chester Castle in May 1363. Probably the most important documents relate to the cattle farming experiment on the demesne pastures, which are presented in great detail and form a separate chapter in the introduction to this transcript.

Volume 140 is a transcription of a complex series of drafts of information collected before and after 1360, which formed the basis of an official document, which has not survived. The Extent attempts to assess the value of these lands so that they can be leased to Sir

William Carrington, one of the Black Prince's retainers to produce an income of £40 per year for the Earl. On 28 January 1360, a jury of twelve principal tenants was sworn in and evidence taken in the form of oath statements on who held each property in the Lordship of Longdendale.

This series of annotated and parallel texts, in both Latin and English, give scholars a wide range of options in interpreting the text. One can look at methods of administration, social structure, economic activities or the activities of specific persons. They are volumes of great scholarship, with satisfying detail in the notes and cross references, together with very clear maps and adequate photographs. The introductions to each volume are valuable introductions to the history of the period and make the transcripts more meaningful to the general reader.

The editors of the two recent transcripts have contributed to the full range of local history organisations in Lancashire and Cheshire. Paul Booth is a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Liverpool and currently the President of the Chetham Society. He also trains future archivists in medieval palaeography. John Harrop was tutor in Latin at the University of Liverpool from 1983–2003 and is the present Chairman of the Ranulf Higden Society. Sylvia Harrop is a past-president of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.

Roy Coppack

(continued from page 1)

inspection was not possible in the face of such short notice.. To the managers of the Cheshire Police Force, finance was the sole driving force. They had vacated their former headquarters and now needed all the funds they could garner to re-equip themselves, as they made very clear to city councillors by post. The Council bowed to their demand.

The unspoken message is, however, that a council which ignores its advisers and constituents may quickly slip into the exclusive practices of a cabal. Seen through my eyes, as a retired conservation officer who was trained as an architect, a planner and a landscape



Members of the Society mastering surveying in the woods near the Duke's Drive (Photograph by Averil Downs)

historian, the outcome of this incident appears disastrous.

The present campaign in north-west England, to expand our towns and enlarge their economies, has put Chester City Council into a delicate situation. Growth of prosperity may be good, but not if it turns an ancient city of great individuality, interest and beauty into one great shopping mall with no individual character. The proposal to relocate West Cheshire College to the city centre illustrates the problems. The present site is one mile south of the Cross. The proposed site is a half mile north of the Cross and is more accessible by train and bus than the present college, but the available land is not sufficient to accommodate future expansion, nor is there adequate parking space in walking distance. The relocation could only be financed by the sale of the present college to build a large and ugly estate in the green belt.

Chester needs to become a world leader in the rare skill of interweaving ancient and the best of modern townscape, each setting off the other in harmony, not imitation. The City Council, in partnership with the Civic Trust, have begun that task with a review of the character and features of the conservation areas within the city, but that is not enough. Unless we acquire a deeper knowledge of the history and culture of our city we shall fail to pass it on, undefiled, for the delight of future generations. That can be achieved only if the City Council is willing to listen to the advisory committees which have sought to serve it for more than forty-six years.

Oliver Bott

The Claverton Project

OVER four weekends during the Autumn of 2006 and again for four weekends in March of this year, members of the Society have been learning the skills of surveying under the aegis of Margaret Worthington of Porth y Waen study centre near Oswestry. Techniques involved have included use of the level, the total station and resistivity survey as well as eye balls and tape measures.

A comprehensive system of record keeping is now in place thanks to the efforts of Averil Downs. Margaret Worthington's help and guidance throughout four weekends of unusually good weather contributed to an excellent start. She is keen to keep in touch with what promises to be a very worthwhile project.

In addition to the field work, a study of the documentary evidence is being undertaken and an informative evening was spent in the Duke Street record office learning what was available and how to access it. Our thanks to the record office staff for organizing this event.

A further evening was spent in Albion Street reviewing all the evidence and planning future activity. It is hoped that this project will increase our understanding of the context of our excavations in Heronbridge; will help to locate the lost township of Claverton; might locate the structure known as Hayward's Castle; and will shed some light on the relationship between the township and the City of Chester over the centuries.

As the project is projected to continue for a number of years, there is still an opportunity to take part. If you are interested, please contact either Averil Downs (Telephone: 01352 741589; Email: DOWNSMAIL@compuserve.com;) or Phil Miles.

Averil Downs

Notes & News

Excursions 2007

THE excursion on Saturday 19 May will be to Shropshire, visiting Acton Burnell, Ludlow, Stokesay and Church Stretton. Please return the form enclosed to Prue Wendt.

The excursion on Saturday 30 June will be to Criccieth and Caernarvon, visiting the Lloyd George Museum, Caernarvon Castle, and the Roman fort at Segontium. Please return the form enclosed to Prue Wendt.

The Summer weekend excursion will be to the Isle of Man, where we will be hosted by Dr Peter Davey. This excursion will take place from 21–24 September. We will be staying in Douglas and taking various trips to see a range of sites on the Island, ranging from the prehistoric to the industrial. Accommodation for three nights in Douglas and the sea crossing will be

£175 per person, plus an additional charge for local transport and entrance charges (this is still to be worked out). If anyone is interested, please contact Ian Archibald. Those who have already registered will receive further details in due course.

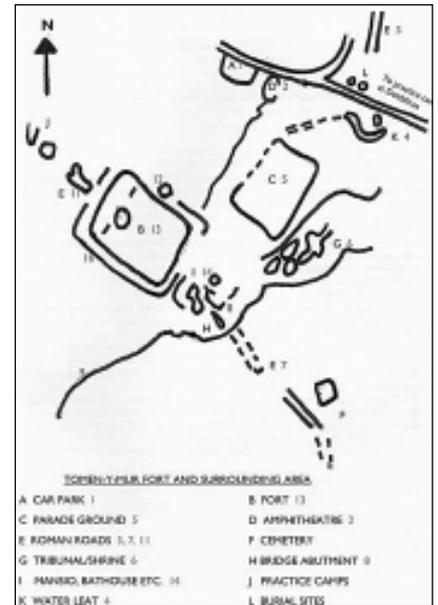
Geoffrey Martin

It is with regret that we report the death of Dr. Geoffrey Martin, one time Chairman of the Society and always an active member. We will publish a full obituary in the next Journal, but meanwhile we send our condolences to Dr Rosemary Martin and her family.

Addenda and Corrigenda

The article in the Autumn *Antiquary* by Roy Coppack on the Twentieth Legions other Amphitheatre was intended to have a nice map showing how to find it. Unfortunately, technology intervened and we were unable to reproduce it. Here

it is now, so I hope that you will all be heading to Tomen Y Mur to see it for yourselves.



Annual General Meeting

Please note the changed date of the Annual General Meeting. This will now take place in the lecture theatre of the Grosvenor Museum on Friday 20 April at 7.30 pm. The speaker will be Dr Mike Nevell on *Early Glasshouses and Glass Making Sites Around Manchester*.

Ian Archibald

Society Information

Contacts

- Chairman* Dr Ian Archibald, 67 Handbridge, Chester, CH4 7JF. Tel (01244) 680096. Email Archibald@dsl.pipex.com
- Vice Chairman* Mr Philip Miles, 10 Deansway, Tarvin, CH3 8LX. Tel (01829) 741207. Email philkath.chester@virgin.net
- Honorary Secretary* Mr Anthony Holliday, Netherleigh, Eaton Road, Handbridge, Chester, CH4 7EW.
- Membership Secretary* Mrs Kathryn Miles, 10 Deansway, Tarvin CH3 8LX. Tel (01829) 741207. Email philkath.chester@virgin.net
- Honorary Treasurer* Mr E S R Warwick, 167 Lache Lane, Chester CH4 7LU. Tel (01244) 676983.
- Honorary Editor* Dr Gina Muskett, 22 Ravenswood Road, Heswall, Wirral, CH61 6UA. Email ginamuskett@hotmail.com
- Honorary Newsletter Editor* Dr Ian Archibald, 67 Handbridge, Chester, CH4 7JF. Tel (01244) 680096. Email Archibald@dsl.pipex.com
- Honorary Librarian* Dr Derek Nutall MBE, Langdale, Pulford Lane, Dodington, CH4 9NN. Tel (01244) 660501. Email nuttallrd@tinyworld.co.uk
- Excursions co-ordinator* Mrs Prue Wendt, 28 Church Lane, Upton, Chester CH2 1DJ. Tel (01244) 382786
- 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 31 August 2007.