



THE HABITATS AND HILLFORTS PROJECT



This is section through rampart at Woodhouses being excavated by Dan Garner and his team in July this year. Copyright Dan Garner.

The “Habitats and Hillforts of Cheshire’s Sandstone Ridge” is an exciting new Landscape Partnership Project, that aims to conserve the natural and historic heritage of this unique area, to increase people’s awareness and understanding of its special assets, and provide opportunities for people to access and enjoy its heritage. The project is led by Cheshire West and Chester Council and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund’s Landscape Partnership Scheme.

The Project is focused on the chain of hillforts along the mid-Cheshire Sandstone Ridge that stands prominently above the surrounding plain and is visually one of the most distinctive features of the Cheshire landscape. Research undertaken to define an Ecological Network for Cheshire has identified the Ridge as one of the most important landscapes in the County and a historically and ecologically rich area.

The aim of the Project is,

therefore, to provide a strategic and co-ordinated approach to a priority area within the wider Sandstone Ridge EConet Partnership scheme and to integrate the historic and natural heritage of the Ridge by:

- Managing the hillforts and any associated heritage features in their vicinity.
- Restoring and increasing natural habitats in the vicinity of the forts, as these are areas

of countryside that would be visited by people and the landscape setting could benefit from increasing areas for wildlife.

- Making the hillforts more accessible, by improving footpath access where appropriate and linking them to the Sandstone Trail.
- Interpreting the historical landscape and the natural habitats and the management work being carried out to enhance them.
- Involving the local communities of the parishes where the hillforts are located, and the wider SREP area.
- Providing volunteering and training opportunities.

The Project was launched in October 2008 and has just passed its first anniversary, which was marked by a feedback evening at Peckforton Castle. In our first year the archaeological element of the work has been fairly varied and spread across all six hillfort sites with plenty of opportunity for

volunteer involvement. In summary the following work has been undertaken:

- Geophysical surveys at both Helsby Hill and Kelsborrow Castle during March and April as part of training events for both Liverpool and Chester University students.
- In early April the opportunity was taken to launch the archaeology volunteer scheme with a day's fieldwalking on Eddisbury Hill. The gold star went to Alexis for finding a Roman glass 'melon' bead!
- Later in April volunteers were given the chance to take part in a topographic survey taster day with members of a professional survey team from West Yorkshire Archaeology Service. The West Yorkshire team were engaged to compile a new topographic survey of Woodhouse Hill which has produced a fantastic new record of the earthworks within the monument.
- During July volunteers as well as students from Chester and Liverpool Universities took part in a 4-week training

excavation on Woodhouse Hill. If you want to know more, the preliminary results of this work have been posted on our website www.habitatsandhillforts.co.uk.

- In early November volunteers were given the opportunity of being trained in geophysical survey techniques in a week-long event at Beeston Castle. This included the use of fluxgate gradiometer and resistivity equipment.
- During late November a professional survey team undertook a geophysical survey on Eddisbury hillfort that included a survey using a 'caesium' magnetometer, which produces very high definition results.

If you are over the age of 16 and are interested in getting involved in our archaeology volunteering events or would like to be kept up to date about the results of our archaeological work then please contact Dan Garner Dan.Garner@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk (archaeology project officer) using the contact details provided on our website.

Visit to Hungate excavations in York

In October members of the Society visited the Hungate excavations in York following up on an earlier lecture as part of our lecture series.

This was a very rewarding day. Dr. Peter Connelly conducted us round the site and explained its complexities. The area is a very large one and much has yet to be excavated, but already there are finds dating from prehistory to

the recent industrial past. We were able to appreciate how changes in the water level had affected the course of the River Ouse and therefore the land use in the immediate surroundings.

In addition to this participants had free time to visit other attractions of their own choosing. The Minster, Fairfax house and the Yorkshire Museum, currently displaying

the Vale of York Hoard, were among them.

I am sure there are members who have in mind other places they may be familiar with or would like to visit. Prue Wendt and I would be pleased to give any assistance to arrange these, so that the society could benefit from your local knowledge.

Rosemary Martin



Notes and News

Membership Subscription Rates

It was decided at the recent Annual General Meeting of the Society that membership subscription rates will be increased from the 1st January 2010. The new rates are:-

Institutional - £25.00 per year
from £20.00 per year

Ordinary - £20.00 per year from
£15.00 per year

Student / Associate - £10.00 per
year from £7.00 per year

These increases being necessary to fund a new excavation program starting in 2010 and to help pay for the publication of the Heronbridge excavation report which should appear as a special edition of the Society's journal in 2010. The increase will also help to compensate for a significant reduction in our income due to the much lower interest rates currently available on our investments.

An Associate Member may be either a person in receipt of a State retirement pension, or a member of an Ordinary Member's family living at the same address. All members of an Ordinary Members family resident with the Ordinary Member will be entitled to the same benefits as Associate Members in return for a single Associate Membership sub-

scription. The Student membership is open to any student in full-time education.

Ordinary, Associate and Student Members are entitled to:

- Attend lectures organised by the Society free of charge
- Take part in the Society's excursions at preferential rates
- Borrow books from the Society's library

All members receive copies of the Society's twice-yearly newsletter, *The Chester Antiquary*. Ordinary, Student and Institutional Members also receive copies of the Society's Journal.

Can all members who pay by standing order please change the amount paid to the new membership rates before the 1st January 2010.

Alan Austin

Excursions Programme

The Council has decided not to fill the post of "Excursions Secretary" but instead provide a unique opportunity for our members to organise day or weekend trips to places of historical, archaeological

or architectural interest, supported by the Chester Archaeological Society.

The Society will provide support and encouragement in the form of:

- Pro-forma style booking forms
- Help & guidance from the Council
- Financial support
- Help with contacting specialist guides

The member(s) will be required to:

- Decide on the destination(s), and the date(s) taking care not to clash with any other Society activities
- Ensure that sufficient members intend to participate
- Liaise with the bookings agency (if necessary) to enable the smooth operation of the bookings process.

In the first instance please advise your interest in arranging an excursion & details of what you propose to the Chairman of the Society, Phillip Miles
Tel:01829741207 or by email to philkath.chester@virgin.net

Visit to Trafford Mill and Farm

We will visit this large watermill, which is partially restored. The Trafford Mill Company is in the process of making a bid for lottery funding. It has already been awarded £10,000 by the BIG lottery in partnership with the BBC. The watermill was constructed in the eighteenth century and was part of the Shrewsbury estate. It has a complete set of historic machinery. It is the only watermill that has the space to present an interpretation of Cheshire milling and farming. The mill lies within the boundaries of 'The Grange, a farm which presents farming and countryside issues to the public. Eventually the farm and mill will operate as a tourist destination. The farm is used for the breeding of Red Poll cattle and operates a farm shop selling meat products. The visit will include a Red Poll Beef sandwich lunch at the Nag's Head (or a suitable alternative). Parking is available at the Nag's Head. The visit will take place on Saturday 20th February between

10:30am and 2:30pm. Further details can be obtained from Roy Coppack Tel: 10745 591676.

Roy Coppack

Cheshire Archaeology Day

This highly popular event has not happened now for a couple of years. We have been approached by the Cheshire Local History Association with a view to restarting the Archaeology Day as a joint event between the two societies. If you would be interested in this initiative and especially if you would like to help, please contact the Chairman Phil Miles. If we wish the event to be resumed then it will be necessary to communicate with the new Cheshire West and Cheshire authority to express our concerns about the dropping of this event. The more people who write, the more chance there is that we can get the Cheshire Archaeology day reinstated. The person to contact is the Specialist Environmental Services Manager Ian Marshall (email

ian.marshall@cheshirewestandcheshire.gov.uk). We hope as many members as possible will contact Ian so that the Council fully understands what the electorate values.

Ian Archibald

Society Dissertation Prize

The society is pleased to announce that the student dissertation prize, awarded annually to a final year student from the Archaeology department of the University of Chester for a dissertation selected by the Society's Council, has this year been awarded to Thomas Crowther for his work on the brochs of iron age Scotland. We congratulate Thomas on his award of £100.

Helsby Hillfort Dig

As part of the Habitats and Hillforts project, the dig on Helsby Hill will take place in March/April 2010. Contact Dan Garner if you are interested.

Society Information

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Library

Members are welcome to browse through the Society's library at Chester History and Heritage (general Books) and Chester University (journals)

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 30th February 2010