



# The Chester Antiquary

Newsletter of the Chester Archaeological Society

2012 Issue 1 (Spring / Summer)

## Society Excursion to Wroxeter September 2011

The Society's members enjoyed a very interesting and informative day on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2011 with a guided tour of Wroxeter Roman City and St Andrew's Church Wroxeter.

We were privileged to have as our expert guide the Society's Vice President Professor Dai Morgan Evans who supervised the construction of a Roman Town House at Wroxeter for the Channel 4 TV programme "Rome Wasn't Built in a Day."

The construction of the Town House and the publicity raised from the TV programme has led to a sharp increase in visitor numbers to what is still one of the most fascinating Roman sites in the country. The Townhouse was a fine example of its type, located close to where Bushe-Fox excavated a similar building in 1914, and provided a real insight into early Roman construction techniques.



Following on we toured the Roman City which is one of the best preserved examples of a Roman town in Britain. The survival of large chunks of upstanding walls provide evidence of the scale of its buildings whilst the bath suites provide evidence of its glorious past.

The day was completed with a tour of St. Andrew's Church in Wroxeter. This fascinating building has a Saxon foundation and there is much evidence of Roman materials used in the construction of the church's walls. The font is large and round and constructed from the base of a Roman column. The largest memorial in the church is an alabaster tomb-chest with the effigies of Thomas Bromley, former Justice of the Queen's Bench who died in 1555 and his wife. This was well worth the visit.



Members of the Society party looking at the Roman wall of St Andrew's Church

Everyone enjoyed the day and for once the weather was on our side. Many thanks go to Professor Dai Morgan Evans for a great day out

Phillip Miles

## Eccleston Project Public Launch

Meeting at Eccleston Village Hall  
March 25<sup>th</sup> 12.30

This event has been organised to provide details of the Project to the local community and local stakeholders, and encourage them to participate in fieldwork and the history of the village.

Society members are welcome especially those who wish to actively participate in this exciting project.

## Cheshire Archaeology Day 2012

Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> April at the Winsford Lifestyle Centre

Guest speaker:

**Dr Hannah Cobb** from **Manchester University**  
speaking on the **Ardnamurchan Viking boat burial**

Contact details if you are not on the Cheshire Archaeology Day mailing list:

[archaeology@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:archaeology@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

Phone: 01244 973997



**Cheshire  
Archaeology Day**

## A really good reference library' or a burden ?

The Society has been acquiring a library (in the widest sense) since its foundation. In the nineteenth century, in the absence of local record offices, it actively collected archives of all sorts. It also sought books and journals by gift and exchange, in order to build up 'a really good reference library for all students of history and archaeology' (Society Council, 1888). However, cataloguing and maintenance were always a problem. By the 1930s few new books were being acquired, and since the war the growth of public and university libraries has increased, reducing the relevance of private specialist libraries. The more recent closure of the City Record Office and the scattering of the Society's library to a variety of often inaccessible premises have brought problems to a head.

Most of the manuscripts, maps and engravings belonging to the Society are now held safely by Chester and Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, although some remain in Chester Town Hall. Likewise most journals are housed at Chester University, where they are accessible to members and where even very old copies are consulted by students. However, in addition the Society still holds some journals and a large collection of books and pamphlets.

We are now carefully reviewing these three categories:

We have already earmarked for disposal journals of which we have only very short runs or which are of little relevance to Chester. These have already been

advertised to members and now being offered to the wider archaeological community; unwanted items will be recycled.

Many of the books and most of the pamphlets relate to church doctrine and organisation and we are delighted to report that the Chapter of Chester Cathedral have agreed in principle to accept these *en bloc* and add them to the Cathedral Library.

Of the remaining books, we aim to dispose of those that are of no local relevance, have no archaeological or historical research value, or because of their age require special care.

The hope is that we shall end up with a much smaller collection that is relevant to the present and possible future activities of Society members. However, we are well aware that there may be books that we wish to dispose of that ought to remain in Chester, and will take steps to ensure that outcome.

In disposing of items we shall protect the Society's financial interests.

We believe that there remains a role for a tightly focussed, publicly accessible archaeological library in Chester and we hope that by freeing ourselves from the many inappropriate items that we have inherited we shall be able to concentrate once again on building up 'a really good reference library for all students of history and archaeology'.

**Peter Carrington**

For the varying fortunes of the Society's library in the past, see A Crosby, *The Chester Archaeological Society: the first one hundred and fifty years 1849–1999*, especially 49–50, 56–60, 72–7. For the principles guiding the present disposal exercise, see the Society's website:

[http://www.chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/CAS\\_Library\\_Review\\_2010\\_Retention\\_Criteria\\_V04\\_pc\\_25-01-2012.pdf](http://www.chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/CAS_Library_Review_2010_Retention_Criteria_V04_pc_25-01-2012.pdf)

## Society Excursions 2011 / 2012

In May 2011 the Society excursion was to Derbyshire. After splendid cakes and coffee at the Peak View we went on to Winster Market Hall and then on to the Masson Mill in Cromford, where we were told about Arkwright's innovative spinning machines.

On to Willersley Castle, the house above the Mill which has some very interesting features and a spectacular view.

Our last visit was to Wirksworth where we visited the splendid church. Coincidentally we were able to enjoy listening to the Derby Youth Orchestra rehearsing.

In July a group from the Society went to Llandudno to visit the impressive castle, the splendid Church of St Lawrence and the architecture and layout of the town. In the afternoon we visited Much Wenlock and saw the remains of the Priory, which was followed by a talk at the Town Hall by the local historian.

**Prue Wendt**

## The Society Excursion programme for 2012:

### North Wales, Saturday 19 May

- the mound (*tomen*) at Llanarmon yn Ial
- 12th-century church of St Garmon
- the stone circle near Nannerch
- prehistoric sites and Roman and later lead-workings on Halkyn Mountain
- Flint Castle.

### Salford, Friday 22nd June

- Ordsall Hall (for more information on this see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordsall\\_Hall](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordsall_Hall))
- the charming village of Worsley (black and white buildings and section of early canal)
- a look at various crossings of the Mersey.

Further details, including booking arrangements, on the Society website at:

[www.chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/excursions.html](http://www.chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/excursions.html)

Or contact: [rmartin@phonecoop.coop](mailto:rmartin@phonecoop.coop)

## Habitats and Hillforts: Excavations at Kelsborrow Castle

The Habitats and Hillforts project excavated three trenches at Kelsborrow Castle hillfort near Willington during late October and November 2011 with the cooperation of the landowner Mr Mike Hardy.

One of the trenches was a re-excitation of a trench originally opened across the rampart by David Coombs of Manchester University in 1973; this had identified the base of an earth bank and a line of postholes that were thought to represent a timber box-rampart. Coombs also noted a patch of charcoal on the interior of the rampart and the fills to an external ditch which were described as being rich in organic material.



The 2011 re-excitation of the 1973 trench relocated the base of the earthen bank to the hillfort rampart but found no trace of the posthole alignment described by Coombs. Unfortunately, there was no evidence for a buried soil or turf beneath the rampart but the bank itself contained charred material which has been sampled for radiocarbon dating. The patch of charcoal described by Coombs on the interior of the rampart was also relocated and this appeared to be sitting within a shallow pit or hollow; perhaps a quarry scoop associated with the rampart construction.

Beyond the rampart the course of the ditch had been heavily truncated by a series of field drains; the latest of which contained an iron pipe that had shown up very clearly on the magnetometer survey conducted in 2010. Some of the ditch fills had survived this later disturbance and although very little was recovered from them, an iron horse shoe was found in the upper fills. Iron horse-shoes were being made from as early as the 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> centuries AD and we await the results of x-raying the object to date it more accurately. The lower ditch fills did indeed prove to be rich in organic material with preserved twigs and grass visible; these lower fills have been sampled for three different purposes: plant/insect macro fossils; fossilised pollen and material for radiocarbon dating. The profile of the ditch itself suggested a shallow flat-bottomed feature about 6m wide and 1m deep.

Another two trenches were excavated on the hillfort interior to test the results of geophysical surveys by Chester University and a contractor (Archaeophysica) in 2010. These trenches were located over possible circular anomalies which may have been the remains of prehistoric hut circles.

Both trenches proved to be fairly shallow with the sandstone bedrock and natural subsoil lying just beneath the plough soil. The geophysical survey results at Trench 2 had suggested the partial outline of a hut circle about 10m in diameter but no trace of this could be found in the trench. The only archaeological

feature recognised was a square rock-cut posthole which was probably on the line of an earlier field boundary and therefore relatively modern.

Manual cleaning of the upper surface of the sub-soil in Trench 3 led to the finding of an almost complete Neolithic leaf-shaped flint arrowhead; the only artefact recovered from the trench.

At the northern end of Trench 3 a sub-circular patch of charcoal was identified filling a shallow pit that was cut in to the sub-soil and the underlying rock. There was no trace of *in situ*



burning so the pit was not thought to be a hearth. The pit had some similarities to the charcoal-rich pit identified on the interior of the rampart in Trench 1 and these enigmatic features may provide some evidence for contemporary activity associated with the building and use of the hillfort. The pit fill was sampled to recover material suitable for radiocarbon dating.

We now await the results of the scientific analysis and dating programme in the hope that we will be able to offer a firm chronology to the construction and use of the hillfort.

If you are over the age of 16 and interested in getting involved in the project, or would like to be kept up to date about the results of our archaeological work then please contact Dan Garner (archaeology project officer):

[dan.garner@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:dan.garner@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

**Dan Garner**

## Society Honours 2 Students with the Dissertation Prize

The Society offers an annual prize of £100 to students in the [Department of History and Archaeology](#) at Chester University for the best final year archaeology dissertation, preferably on a local subject. The author will be invited to submit an edited version of the dissertation for publication in the Society's *Journal*.

At its discretion the Society may award the prize for a dissertation on a non-local subject if the quality of the work warrants it, although such a dissertation would not be considered for publication in the *Journal*. It also reserves the right not to award the prize if it considers that there are no dissertations of the appropriate quality.

With their authors' permission, a short-list of dissertations are selected by staff of the Department of History and Archaeology. The winner will be decided by a sub-committee of the Society's Council and announced in the October following submission.

The winning dissertation will normally meet all the Department's criteria for a first-class degree. In particular it will:

- Contain original data or interpretation
- Demonstrate a broad and deep knowledge of the subject matter
- Be clearly argued and show mature judgement

- Be easily understood by people who are not familiar with the topic or period of history.

In October 2011 the Society's sub-committee had the dilemma of having to choose between two very strong contenders for the prize. This was overcome by awarding the prize to both students and therefore for the first time the Society has awarded two Dissertation prizes.

The prize winners were Dean Paton with **Things aren't always what they seem**, and Gary Duckers with **"Polygons and Place"**.

Both are members of Chester Archaeology Society and are seen here at the presentation ceremony receiving their awards presented by Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews with Chairman Phillip Miles in attendance.



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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 newsletter should be with the newsletter editor Carolyn Kershaw no later than 15th August 2012.**