

The Chester Antiquary



Newsletter of the Chester Archaeological Society
2008 Issue 2 (Autumn/Winter)

The southern boundary of the liberties of Chester of Chester

The boundary stones situated to the south of Chester between Handbridge and Claverton along the Great or Grey Ditch are a visible reminder of the long history of Chester. They mark the boundary of the liberties of Chester, which was first demarcated by a precise boundary in 1354, but which must have existed as a known area long before this.

THE 1911 third-edition Ordnance Survey map shows fourteen boundary stones along the boundary between the River Dee by Heronbridge House and the Wrexham Road. Now only eight can be found. A later boundary stone, dated 1972, is situated by the footpath to the south of Heronbridge House. This boundary stone marks an extension to the county borough made in 1936. There is also a metal boundary post on the road outside Heronbridge House.

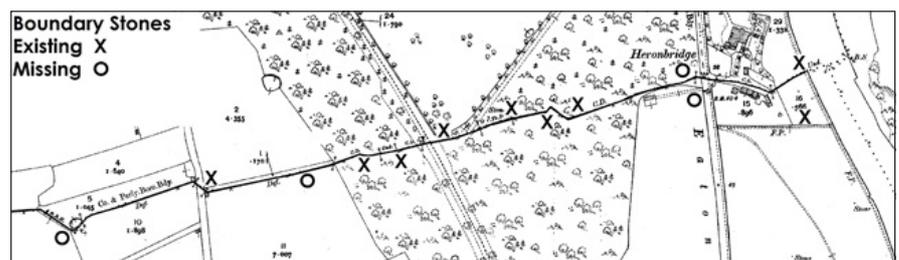
Some of the boundary stones are damaged or badly worn, making it difficult to read the inscriptions. My reading of the inscriptions is as follows:

PE	HH	CNR
M	M	Mayor
1857	1785	1972
5+1	2 stones	1 stone
probable stones		

PE is Peter Eaton, mayor in 1856/7. HH is Henry Hegg, mayor in 1784/5. CNR is CN Ribbeck, mayor in 1972/3.

All of these boundary markers are of historical interest and should be protected before any more of them disappear.

The boundary itself is also of interest. It is believed that the Roman settlement at Heronbridge was outside the *prata legionis*, an area around the



fort controlled by the legion, and in territory belonging to the *civitas Cornoviorum*. It is possible, and this is pure speculation, that the Great Ditch marks the boundary of the Roman *prata legionis*.

The boundary is obviously not a straight line drawn across an empty piece of countryside, it was drawn around or to connect features in the landscape. These features may or may not be old, eg the twentieth-century extension to the city boundary by Heronbridge House. However, deviations in the boundary may have fossilised landscape features that have now disappeared. The nature of the boundary and the Great, if indeed it is great, Ditch is also of interest. 'Great' implies a very large ditch, which might be locatable using geophysics. If the ditch can be found, excavation may provide a date for the boundary. However, excavating a deep Roman ditch would not be easy or cheap.

All of these boundary stones are accessible, although some are difficult to

Above: Map showing the location of known boundary stones



Above: Boundary stone of Peter Eaton, Mayor of Chester, 1857
(Photograph by Alan Austin)

find. It does, however, get very wet and muddy after heavy rain especially by the river.

Alan Austin

Stanlaw Abbey

ON a peninsula thrusting out into the River Mersey are the lost remains of this Cistercian Abbey. It was founded in 1172 by John Lacy, Baron of Halton and Constable of Chester, as an act of piety before setting off for a Crusade, in which he perished. The topography of the site has changed out of all recognition since then. It is now surrounded by industrial development and is out of bounds to the general public. Originally it was a remote spot, with no proper road access and the River Gowy flowing on both sides of the peninsula. It was only approachable at low tide along a trackway across the marsh from Ince. If you look at an OS map of the 1920s, you will see that there is no main road between Ellesmere Port and Helsby. Construction of the modern road and the M56 involved some very expensive civil engineering. Grazing the salt marsh was the local source of income, but the monastery gradually built up a portfolio of manors in Lancashire, such as Newton, Blackburn, Whalley and Rochdale. The Lacy family became the Earls of Lincoln and was very important in the national political arena. The Lacys were buried in the vaults of the abbey and attracted gifts from others, including pilgrims from other parts of Britain, who were rewarded with generous indulgences.

The Cistercians looked for remote places, which would tax their abilities, but after a century Stanlaw defeated them, mainly due to inundation by the sea, which damaged buildings and took away a large area of the saltmarsh. In 1279, a great storm flooded the abbey and also damaged the Dee Bridge at Chester. In 1287, the great tower was blown down and, in 1289, the abbey was almost destroyed by fire. Support came from the Bishop of Versailles, the Archbishop of Moutroyal and the Bishop of Bangor in special indulgences 'to all who should go to Stanlaw, to pray for the Earls of Lincoln and Constables of Chester there buried.' One of the special problems was that the crypt containing their remains was flooded and the lead coffins displaced.

In 1294, Henry Lacy, the last Earl of Lincoln and builder of Denbigh Castle, assisted them in the transfer to

Whalley. This transfer was approved by Pope Nicholas. The contents of the Lacy family vault are recorded as being transferred to Whalley, although in the nineteenth century the sea broke open a vault containing bones and some lead coffins. The Cistercians continued to occupy the site as a grange until the dissolution. After the dissolution, it eventually fell into the hands of the Poole family, who had an estate based on Poole Hall located beneath Bowaters Paper Works.

I have twice visited the site. In 1950, a friend and I were taken by a member of the Society, Arthur Hughes, who supported young people interested in local history. He was on an extended leave from his very senior post in the Indian Civil Service. We were able to visit what is now known as Stanlow Point, which is controlled by the Manchester Ship Canal Company. He knew Stanlow very well because he spent some time there as a child, recuperating from an illness. The ship canal operates a ferry for residents on Stanlow Point and its workers, who maintain the Dock built in the 1930s. At that time, Arthur Hughes' friends still lived in the farmhouse, which had some medieval stonework. There was also a substantial entrance to a medieval crypt. Modern police houses and fishing boats were moored in the mouth of the Gowy.

We were given permission to walk the far side of the ship canal and cross the locks at Eastham. This involved negotiating a very long wooden sluice, in a bad state of repair, known as the gantry, which adjusts the level of the ship canal. Further along was the mountain of spoil known as Mount Manisty, which was peppered with hundreds of rabbit holes.

My second visit, in the 1970s, with my industrial archaeology class, was a big disappointment. The farmhouse and the modern houses had been removed and it had become a nature reserve, an impenetrable forest of bramble bushes.

From time to time, the Ellesmere Port and Neston Council contacts the Society on planning issues and recently I had a discussion with them about the status of Stanlaw Abbey. I am pleased to report that it was surveyed by English Heritage in 1994 and I have a copy of the official description of the monument, which confirms what I saw. Sadly, it appears that there is no chance of an

archaeological investigation because of security concerns and the fact that it is not threatened by any future industrial expansion.

Roy Coppack

Notes and News

Important announcement – AGM date change

PLEASE note that the Annual General Meeting and the talk by County Archaeologist, Mark Leah, on 'Recent Archaeological Work in Cheshire' will now take place on Thursday 23 April 2009 rather than Wednesday 22 April. This is because the museum lecture room is not available on that date. At the AGM the promised financial review of the society will be presented and plans to undertake a new fieldwork programme will be proposed.

Update to 2009 lecture programme

We are pleased to announce that the lecture for 16 May 2009 will be given by Richard Hall, York Archaeological Trust, on the Hungate Excavations in York.

CBA North West Spring meeting

This will be held on 16 May 2009 at Brindle Community Hall, Water Street, Brindle, Chorley and will focus on recent archaeological work in the area. Details can be obtained from Andy Towle, Hon Secretary, SLR Consulting Ltd., 9 Beech House, Padgate Business Park, Warrington, Cheshire, WA1 4JN or from the Chairman, Peter Carrington, Chester Archaeology, Grosvenor Museum, 27 Grosvenor Street, Chester, CH1 2DD, Tel (01244) 402028, Email p.carrington@chester.gov.uk.

New books

I would encourage all members to visit the Society's website at <http://www.chesterarchaeolosc.org.uk>.

Here you will be able to access much more information about the society and its activities. Recent additions include details of Simon Ward's new book *Chester: A History*, published by Phillimore & Co Ltd, April 2009, and information about the most recent volume in the Chester Archaeological Service series of excavation and survey reports, *Excavations at Chester, 25 Bridge Street 2001, Two thousand years of life in microcosm*, by Dan Garner and others. Published by Chester City Council.

Excavations in the backlands on the east side of Bridge Street have provided a wealth of archaeological evidence for 2000 years of the city's history. Combined with documentary references, this has enabled us to build up a detailed picture of the evolution of Chester's urban form and the trades, lifestyle and status of the people who lived in the area.

The groups of Roman and early post-medieval ceramics, clay pipes, vessel glass, well-preserved animal bones and palnt remains are the largest to be published from the city and, in some cases, from the north-west, and will ensure that this publication remains a major reference work for years to come.

Now available from the Grosvenor Museum shop, 27 Grosvenor Street, Chester, CH1 2DD, UK. A4, xiv +437pp; Price until end of March 2009 £25.00 + £4.20 p&p. Tel 01244 402029. Email grosvenormuseum@chester.gov.uk.

Chester: a history by Simon Ward, is a beautifully illustrated book which explores the city through the ages and looks at the activities of the people who contributed to its intriguing story. Numerous archaeologists and historians have attempted to throw light on those lives and the author has drawn widely from their work, as well as his own, as well as using the surviving historic fabric of the city.

Available to order from Phillimore, at www.phillimore.co.uk, for a special pre-publication price (until end of March 2009); Hardback, 114 pp, 150 illus.

Ian Archibald and Alison Heke

Society trip to Galloway, September 2008

THE Society continued its circumnavigation of the Irish Sea with a trip in the late summer to Galloway in South West Scotland. From the sea shore in Galloway it is possible to see the coastline of the Isle of Man, which we visited in the summer of 2007.

On Friday 12 September, after a gentle morning on the motorway, the expedition arrived in Dumfries in time for lunch. Dumfries is the proud possessor of the oldest multi-arched bridge in Scotland, dating from no later than 1431. The late afternoon took us to Gatehouse of Fleet and our Hotel, the very grand eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Cally Palace. The hotel was once called 'The House of Cally' and was home to the ancestral lairds of Gatehouse, the Murray-Usher family.

Saturday saw us on the road to Whithorn and its famous early medieval religious site. We were fortunate enough to receive an introduction to the Whithorn Trust and its activities from the manager, Margaret Butterworth, who was able to provide us with some insight into the latest excavations, which have not yet been published. We then went on south to the Isle of Whithorn where we had lunch at the famous Steam Packet Inn.

In order to work off the lunch, there was a vigorous walk in the afternoon to see St Ninian's Cave, where we were able to exercise our ingenuity trying to locate the many carved early medieval crosses on the cave walls. I do not think that anyone managed to locate every single one.

On the way back to Whithorn, we visited the Drumtrodden stones with their many cup and ring marks. Although the stones had to be reached by crossing a very muddy cow field, the richness and enigmatic nature of the decoration made the effort rewarding.

In the evening, we attended the annual Whithorn lecture, now a prestigious vehicle for early medieval scholarship. This year the talk was by Dr Fiona Edmonds, of Cambridge Uni-



Above: Members of the society crossing the River Dee to Threave Castle
(Photograph by Zosia Archibald)

versity, and was entitled 'Whithorn's renown in the early medieval period: Whithorn, Futerna and magnum monasterium'.

Sunday took us to Sweetheart Abbey, which glowed warmly red on a beautiful sunny day. The abbey was founded in 1273 by Lady Devorgilla, in memory of her husband John Balliol. After a lunch in Castle Douglas, we visited Threave Castle, home of Archibald the Grim. In order to reach this evocative site, we had to take to the water to cross another River Dee. On Sunday evening we had a comprehensive lecture on the local archaeology from Andy Nicholson, Assistant County Archaeologist for Dumfries and Galloway, and part-time re-enactor.

On Monday, the trip homeward was via the Caerlaverock Castle and the world famous Saxon cross at Ruthwell Church.

I would like to thank Margaret Ford for organising such a splendid trip for us. I hope that more members will be encouraged to join us on our trip to Dublin his year.

Ian Archibald

Continuing Education at the University of Liverpool

ALTHOUGH the closing date for registration for most spring modules has now passed, preparations for late spring and early summer courses are well under way.

The programme, which reflects the wide range of skills and interests of our lecturers and students, will be extremely varied. Have you ever wanted to learn about Egyptian archaeology from experts who have actually dug on the sites? Do you want to brush up on your rusty Latin? Or maybe you would like to read Latin poetry and prose? Perhaps you'd prefer to acquire another practical skill by learning how to record a graveyard? Have you ever wanted to handle a five-thousand year-old Egyptian artefact? Or learn about the history and development of war memorials? If so, our programme is for you!

To receive a free printed prospectus, please contact the Centre for Lifelong

Learning with your name and address at conted@liverpool.ac.uk, tel (0151) 794 6952/6900, stating that you would like to receive a copy of the summer brochure as soon as it is available.

For more details on any of the content of any of the courses, please contact Dr Gina Muskett, SACE Academic Organiser for Continuing Education, G.M.Muskett@liv.ac.uk, tel (0151) 794 2578 (answering machine available).

Gina Muskett

The Website

THE Society's website went live in 1998. Peter Carrington, who created and designed the pages, became the Society's first webmaster. I was invited to take over this role in 2001 and have been maintaining and updating the website since then.

There are twelve pages altogether: comprising the Welcome (or home) page, pages for Notices, the Society's Contacts, Lectures, Excursions, Fieldwork (with a link to a page on the Society's project at Heronbridge), the Journal (with links to a list of all of the Society's journals and notes for contributors), the Library, the *Antiquary* (with a downloadable version of the newsletter), a How to Join (or membership) page, the History and Activities of the Society, and useful links to Related websites.

Society members are encouraged to contact the webmaster, Alison Heke, at Chester Archaeology, Grosvenor Museum, Chester, CH1 2DD, T: 01244 402023, E: a.heke@chester.gov.uk, with any comments or queries about the website, as well as notices of any events, exhibitions or meetings that they would like to bring to the attention of other Society members.

Alison Heke

Forthcoming excursions

**Northwich
16 May**

THE visit to Northwich, which had to be cancelled last year, will now take place this year. The visit will include the Anderton Boat Lift and the Salt Museum.

**Dublin
18–20 September**

Our programme of weekend excursions around the Irish Sea continues with a trip to Dublin in September (ferry crossing via Holyhead), with visits to Dublin museum and Georgian town buildings, and visiting neolithic tombs at New Grange, Knowth and Dowth outside Dublin.

If you are interested in either of these excursions or would like more details please contact the Excursions co-ordinator, Ms Margaret Ford.

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 30 May 2009.