



# The Chester Antiquary

Newsletter of the Chester Archaeological Society

2011 Issue 2 (Autumn / Winter)

## Whither Chester: 'Jewel in the Crown' or clone town?

As well as campaigning for the preservation of historic buildings and archaeological remains, one of the Society's occasional roles has been seeking to maintain the quality and appropriate location of new development in Chester. It pursued this role vigorously in the first half of the twentieth century: it may need to do so again.

For instance, in the 1890s, the Society protested successfully against plans to build the new city baths on the Hop Pole Paddock, near the Kaleyards; in 1909 it lobbied against the cladding of the exterior of St Michael's Row in white tiles; while in 1928 it asked for the façade of the new shop at 1-3 Foregate Street (then Burtons) to be changed to fit better with its surroundings. In recent decades we have come to rely on increasingly detailed planning legislation to achieve good design and a harmonious townscape, although in practice it is clear that this is not enough.

Now, the government in Westminster is keen to simplify and speed up the planning process and supposedly return power to communities ('localism'), while Cheshire West and Chester Council (CW&C) wants to push ahead with new developments to create prosperity. None of us can argue with that; Chester is far from wealthy, despite its reputation, and is losing ground, the city needs to grow and change in order to survive. However, all this is happening in difficult financial times. A couple of years ago, the Council for British Archaeology North West warned of the danger that the recession would be used to justify cheap, poor-quality developments. In Chester, the historic core of the city that we all value is extremely small and cannot tolerate the intrusion of more poor, or even mediocre, buildings.



***Which of the buildings added to Chester's townscape in the later 20th and early 21st Centuries will be thought valued additions in future decades and centuries ?***

Society members will be aware of the number of new developments currently proposed in Chester; arguably the largest since the 1960s:

- the Northgate scheme, involving the re-siting of the market on the Kaleyards (a re-run of the 1890s dispute over building the city baths on the Hop Pole Paddock !)
- the displacement of the bus station
- the remodelling of St Werburgh Street
- the redevelopment of the former Delamere Street bus station; and a
- multi-storey car park adjacent to the railway station

In addition to these 'one-off' developments we have seen a comprehensive report on Chester from the Urban Land Institute and the launch by CW&C of a 'One City Plan' and of a Central Business Area Plan for land to the east of City Road.

Your Society is monitoring major proposed developments through its membership of the Chester Conservation Area Advisory Panel, attendance at other meetings and representations to officers and members of the council. We are also developing our links with the Chester Civic Trust. For all the historical perspective supposedly adopted by a number of consultants, it is clear that there is a very clear role for the Society in providing independent and informed comments on the



development of the city, and how what we value about the past can be incorporated in a city of the future that we can be proud to live in.

Chester Renaissance assert that their 'programme of new development and city centre improvements will make Chester a must-see European city by 2015'. We hope that their dream is realised. However, in reality, the quality of many of the proposed schemes that we have commented on recently has been poor, and we see a grave risk of the consequences of major developments not being thought through.

A real 'One City Plan' is desperately needed – a plan that considers architecture (buildings and public spaces), traffic and the location and quality of activities, commercial, retail and cultural. This is a tall order, but good ideas and advice are all available – if they are made use of. As a speaker at a recent event said: 'We should be designing the Listed Buildings of the future'. We could not agree more ...

Peter Carrington

Roy Coppack

Note: You can find out more about the Society's past role in conservation and urban design in A Crosby. The Chester Archaeological Society: the first one hundred and fifty years 1849–1999, especially pages 60–63 and 69–72.

## Early Post Medieval Skillet found in Congleton

In October 2009 an almost complete cast copper-alloy post-medieval skillet was found in Congleton. Cooking vessels of this type are very rarely found intact, usually only legs or handles survive. It also appears likely that this skillet pre-dates any so far recorded, and is therefore a significant find.

The skillet is a tripod with two integral legs remaining. There is a hole in the base of a skillet where the third leg is missing. The handle projects from the upper part of the skillet and has a loop which is attached to the wall. Part of the handle is missing. One of the legs is slightly shorter than the other and seems to be slightly damaged. Respectively, the legs measure 44.4

mm and 32.7 mm in length. They are approximately 20.3 mm wide and 11.5 mm thick. The remains of the handle is 33.5 mm long.

At the base the skillet measures 113 mm in diameter, flaring to 135 mm at the rim. The walls are approximately 53 mm high and are 3.3 mm thick. The skillet is decorated with two ridges running around the vessel, approximately in the centre, separated by a gap of 7.3 mm.

The exterior of the skillet is very rough and has a varying patina of dark green to pale brown in colour. The base has a clear sooty deposit indicative of having

## The Heritage Crime Initiative

Many 'ordinary' crimes are also heritage crimes. Theft of lead from a roof is crime, when that theft is from the fabric of a listed building it becomes heritage crime.

Heritage 'assets' both promote tourism and foster a sense of place and community. Crime and antisocial behaviour can cause damage to fabric, environment, image and community.

In Chester and Cheshire West there are:

- 116 Scheduled Monuments
- 2503 Listed Buildings
- 97 Conservation Areas
- 7 Registered Parks and Gardens
- 1 Registered Battlefield

Other acts that damage the environment may also be heritage crimes where these take place in areas of archaeological importance or with archaeological potential. Cheshire West and Chester has:

- 1 area of archaeological importance
- 11 areas of archaeological potential
- Nearly 4,500 sites of archaeological / historic importance in the Historic Environment record (HER)

This society of course has a wider commitment to Chester, Cheshire and North Wales, and a membership that includes residents of Greater Manchester, Merseyside, North Wales and Shropshire.

The Police, Crown prosecution Service, English Heritage and a number of participating local authorities including Cheshire West and Chester have established a National 'Alliance to Reduce Crime against Heritage' (ARCH) improve the prevention of heritage crime and more effectively prosecute those guilty of heritage crimes.

Measures include:

**Intelligence Gathering:** The Police want to know about heritage crimes that have taken place in the last five years in order to build up a picture of the scale of heritage crime and the level of threat in local areas.

**Co-operation:** Organisations that are in ARCH can work together develop strategies to raise awareness of and reduce the incidence of heritage crime.

**Heritage Crime Volunteers:** The recruitment of a network of volunteers is currently under consideration.

Crimes that are in progress or appear likely to occur can of course be reported by dialling 999.

Intelligence about recent crimes and / or perpetrators can be reported by phoning Cheshire Crime stoppers on 0800 555 111.

Heritage crimes that have been committed in the past five years can be reported online at the web address below.

[www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/visiting/heritage/heritage\\_crime.aspx](http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/visiting/heritage/heritage_crime.aspx)

been placed in a fire, as does one of the sides. The interior, however, is extremely smooth, suggesting that it was well maintained, and perhaps that an oily rag was kept with it to protect it.



The bowl is proportionally shallower and wider than those on recorded 17th century skilnets, being more like the so-called 'pitch-pot' found on the Mary Rose. The Mary Rose sank in in 1545, but the 'pitch pot' may date from around 1500.

The present skilnet has two interesting features:

- 1) the two horizontal 'wires' (decorative lines) not noted on skilnets previously, but found on posnets and cauldrons, especially early examples.
- 2) the curved handle brace, also not recorded on any other skilnets.

The skilnet was found wedged between rocks, suggesting it may have been deliberately placed rather than simply discarded.

### FLO Arrangements for Cheshire

Teresa Gilmore is currently covering Vanessa Oakden's maternity leave, and will be in post until she returns. She can be contacted on the same phone numbers as Vanessa (0151 478 4259 & 07837356386).

Her email address is:

[teresa.gilmore@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk](mailto:teresa.gilmore@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk)

She will be available to receive at both Grosvenor Museum, Chester and Weaver Hall, Northwich:

- Thursday 29th September: Weaver Hall
- 14th October: Grosvenor Museum
- 11th November: Grosvenor Museum
- 24th November: Weaver Hall
- 9th December: Grosvenor Museum

## The Society's Library: Planning for the Future

As members will know, the Society's library is currently split up between Chester History and Heritage, Chester University, the Town Hall basement and a council storage unit at Bumper's Lane. The items at the last two sites are inaccessible. In addition, of course, manuscripts and prints are cared for by the Cheshire Archives and Local Studies service.

One problem in finding a new home for the library is its size. It now consists of over 5700 items - books pamphlets and journals, covering a wide range of subjects, many not relevant to the Society's purposes. Over 700 items are over 200 years old. Your Council has been discussing rationalising the collection for many years, but now we have succeeded in making some progress.

For example have already earmarked over 300 journals for disposal (one-sixth of the journal collection), and members will have first refusal of these. Likewise we have identified about one-third of the books and pamphlets as irrelevant to our purposes. How we dispose of many of these has yet to be agreed, but we are in discussions with the Cathedral library about the transfer of religious works.

Members need not fear that this exercise will leave the Society intellectually impoverished: the library will continue to reflect all our interests and activities, past and present, and we shall be concerned to ensure that important works that we decide to dispose of find 'good homes', in Chester wherever possible. We hope that at the end of the exercise we shall be able to present the library as an asset that deserves a home and, *just conceivably*, start expanding it again.

Peter Carrington

## O J P Bott MA, ARIBA

Oliver Bott has been a long-time valuable member of the Society's Council and has now decided it is time to retire.

Oliver has represented the Society for over 10 years on the Chester City Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC), an influential group drawn from members of various societies within the city, meeting regularly to review and comment on planning proposals for buildings and the environment of Chester City.

On behalf of the Council and members of the Chester Archaeological Society may I take this opportunity to thank Oliver for his many years dedication and hard work on behalf of the Society.

Phillip Miles  
(Chairman)

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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 Carolyne Kershaw no later than 15th March 2011.**