



President Dr Paul Booth FRHistS

# The Chester Antiquary

2021 Issue 6 – December

## Best Wishes for Christmas to all our Members

**A**s we finish the year with renewed talk of restrictions and face masks, it may feel that we have gone back to where we were last Christmas, so it is important to celebrate all that we have achieved in the last twelve months.

Throughout 2021, Council has continued to hold virtual meetings to carry out important 'behind the scenes' work, from membership to finance, advocacy to library work and more. Thank you to each and every member of Council for their enthusiasm and commitment to keeping our Society running smoothly. This year, we have introduced a number of new features, the latest of which, I'm delighted to announce, is an online payment system. So, if you would like to gift membership of the Society to somebody, it will soon be even easier!

It has been lovely to see so many of you joining our diverse and successful programme of lectures online, and we have even run several physical excursions this year. I hope that everyone who visited Wrexham Museum to see the

'Hidden Holt' exhibition for our most recent outing on 2 December had a thoroughly enjoyable time. Keep an eye out for announcements of more excursions in 2022, coming soon. We are also looking forward to sending out a bumper edition of our journal in the coming weeks for you to enjoy.

It is with great sadness that we say goodbye to our Chair, Dr Rachel Swallow, who has recently stepped down. The Council would like to thank Rachel sincerely for her wonderful leadership and hard work over the past year, which has been of huge benefit to the Society. We wish her all the very best for the future. The Council will be working on plans to appoint a new Chair over the coming months.

On behalf of all members of Council, I wish you a very happy and healthy festive season. We look forward to seeing you in 2022!

**Elizabeth Montgomery**  
*Vice-Chair, Chester Archaeological Society*

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## A New Editor for our Journal

Earlier this year we announced that we were seeking a new editor for our journal. We are delighted to announce that Dr Sam Rowe has taken on the role. Her responsibilities start with volume 92 for 2022, which is still open for contributions.

**S**am brings with her over ten years' experience in the heritage, community and commercial sectors, having worked as a Finds Liaison Officer, community archaeologist and post-excavation officer. She is currently the Science Advisor for Historic England, covering the North-West, and has a passion for our regional heritage.

Her particular interests include finds of all varieties, community archaeology, ceramics production, ceramic type series, material science, and the preservation of archaeological remains.

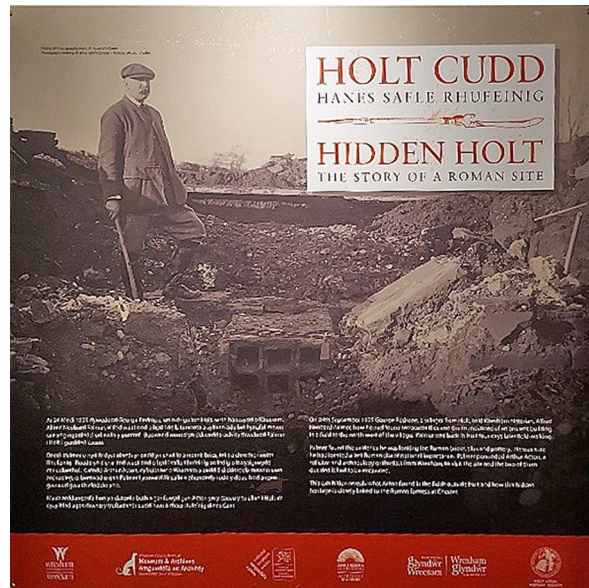


## Society Visit to Award-Winning ‘Hidden Holt’ Exhibition at Wrexham Museum

On a dark Thursday evening in early December, twenty members braved the cold weather to visit Wrexham Museum to see the ‘Hidden Holt’ exhibition put together by the museum, Holt Local History Society, Glyndwr University and the National Museum of Wales.

The Roman pottery- and tile kilns at Holt were investigated by a local solicitor, T A Acton, between 1907 and 1915 and remain the only kilns attached to a permanent legionary fortress to have been excavated in Britain. After Acton’s death, many of the finds were sold to the National Museum of Wales in 1925 and were the subject of an exemplary publication by W F Grimes. Amazingly, this is the first time in nearly one hundred years that they have been on public display in north Wales.

Jonathon Gammond of Wrexham Museum provided an entertaining and very enthusiastic introduction to the exhibition, starting with the history of the museum building itself. It was erected in 1857 as a barracks for the Royal Denbighshire Militia and then became home to the Denbighshire Constabulary and the local



*Winner of the Society for Museum Archaeology Exhibition Project Award for 2021.*

*‘A fantastic example of a collaborative project to bring dispersed collections back home to be displayed in context and with recent finds.’*

courts for over a century before being refreshed and redesigned to meet the expectations of the twenty-first century as a modern museum.

The exhibition itself is housed in a dedicated alcove in the museum and is very well laid out and lit. Jonathon took the Society group through the early history of the discovery of the tile- and pottery works, followed by more detailed look at Acton’s excavations. He went on to show us some wonderful models of the kilns and many of the key finds such as roof-, floor- and hypocaust tiles, antefixes (some decorated and stamped with the symbols of the Twentieth Legion), bowls, drinking wares and plates. One of the centrepieces of the exhibition is a large-scale plan of Acton’s discoveries, overlain by the results of the geophysical survey by Archaeology Survey West in 2018, initiated by the Holt Local History Society and supported and published by the Chester Archaeological Society in *JCAS* vol 89 for 2019.

The exhibition also included Roman materials from the Ffrith metal mining and processing area as well as a display of the Esclusham hoard of Roman silver coins. Sadly, the Rossett lead ingot







had only recently arrived back from the British Museum and was not on display. Is this a reason for visiting the exhibition again before it ends in January 2022, when a film of the recent Rossett villa excavation should also be available?

The attendees had lots of questions for Jonathon and they extended the visit to well over the scheduled hour. Six of the party then migrated to 'The Bank' bistro on the High Street for a convivial chat over glasses of wine, Welsh whiskey and beer – socialising that we hope will become more frequent as times improve.

**John Cubitt and Kelly Griffiths**

You can now hear about the exhibition at [Hidden Holt: The Story of a Roman Site - YouTube](#).

*Bottom of page 2* A selection of pottery made at Holt: Normal coarse ware forms plus more exotic vessels found at other legionary kiln sites on the continent.

*Left* Models of the Holt kilns.

*Above* The Esclusham Roman coin hoard, mid-1 cent BC – late 1 cent AD.



## Local List Workshops

Society members trial aesthetic aspects of the *Cheshire Local List* project

**W**hat does 'local listing' mean in an area as packed with nationally designated buildings as central Chester? It means that there is an opportunity to recognise, investigate and understand those elements of the built environment that form an important part of how we relate to that historic landscape but are not really recognisable as heritage assets in the traditional sense.

As part of the current DLUHC-funded *Cheshire Local List* project, two groups of Society members set out along Bridge Street and Northgate Street to investigate, as archaeologists, our sensory experience of the area. Each participant collected evidence on a different theme, covering between us Sounds, Colours, Texture, Words, Stillness, Fun, Views, Movement and Time. After some time wandering, observing, feeling and paying attention, members gathered in an alleyway behind Storyhouse to share their sensory narratives, discuss the positive and negative ways in which those experiences shape our being in those spaces, and recognise the things that are key contributors to that.

We hope to make use of this workshop format across Cheshire as we expand the *Local List*, and I am extremely grateful to the Society and its members for taking part. Perhaps we can reconvene to go East to West in the New Year!

**James Dixon**

*Built Environment Officer,  
Cheshire West and Chester Council*



*Left* Society members taking part in the second workshop, in Town Hall Square.



## Nesscliffe Camp Hillfort Excavation 2021

Nesscliffe Camp comprises the remains of a small multivallate hillfort in north Shropshire, with extensive views to the north and west towards the hills of the Welsh borderland. Society members have been taking part in the recent excavations.

After several years of work including habitat management, site protection measures, photographic analysis and geophysical and topographical surveys, excavation at Nesscliffe Camp began in 2019 but was then interrupted by the Covid pandemic. However, in 2021 restrictions were lifted for long enough to organise a small core team to reopen the 2019 excavations on the inturned entrance of the western enclosure (Lock & Reilly 2019; 2020). This work is reinvestigating excavations carried out by schoolboys from the Priory School, Shrewsbury, in the 1950s (Hume & Jones 1960).

This season we cleared backfilled rubble from earlier excavations to investigate the construction of the entrance and two recesses ('guard chambers'). We were fortunate to have site visits by the two principal investigators of the 1950s digs and several of their co-workers, whom we had tracked down with the help of local media (Lock & Reilly 2021). Rodney Hume and Gareth Jones were able to indicate the extent and depth of their trench on the southern inturn, which they had abandoned not realising that they had just reached the top of the surviving wall of the guard chamber. When cleared, the walls of the guard chamber on the northern inturn still stood well over 1.5m high.



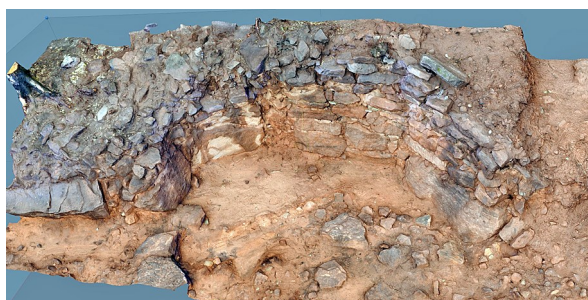
Standing in front of the guard chamber in the north inturn of western enclosure entrance passageway, Gareth Jones and Rodney Hume, who led excavation at Nesscliffe as schoolboys in the 1950s.

Despite the modern disturbances, this year's excavations were able to establish several phases of construction. As yet we have no firm dating evidence, but it appears that the earliest phase uncovered so far consisted of two short

inturns, stone-revetted on both sides. Later, both inturns were extended using well-built walls of local stone with sand and rubble cores. These extensions also featured a pair of opposed semicircular recesses ('guard chambers'). Postholes at each end of both guard chambers within the passageway revetments may indicate gateposts. We shall have a better idea of their function when they have been fully excavated next season. The back wall of the northern guard chamber was split top to bottom, interpreted for the moment as a wide post pipe running down through the wall.



The entrance passage with northern (to the top) and southern inturns and entrance recesses. Drone photogrammetry courtesy of Paul Hutchinson, Drone Rangers.



Terrestrial photogrammetry image of the northern entrance recess, showing postholes at each end and the split in the stonework of the back wall.

Fortunately, the rear walls of both the inturns were not badly affected by modern disturbances, and we were able to identify traces of a footing trench and take environmental and potential dating samples from the surface on which the walls were constructed.

The inner revetments of both the extended northern and southern inturns show signs of crude repairs to large 'bites' taken out of both

of them at more or less the same position. It appears that the repaired southern inturn was later widened with dumps of sand and then capped with rubble to create a level platform. Deep down in this built-up material we uncovered a large spread of charcoal and bone, from which we hope to obtain a useful date. Three postholes, one with what were clearly packing stones, were uncovered cut into the rubble platform (ie the top of the rampart – a very rare discovery). Our working hypothesis is that this phase included a palisade. Further excavation will explore this possibility.



Terrestrial photogrammetry plan view of the rampart top, showing postholes of possible palisade.

This season's work stopped just after we had finally cleared the modern disturbances. We are hopeful that not all floors or ground surfaces have been destroyed and we can still investigate their use and development next season.

*Editor* We are grateful to Gary Lock, Emeritus Professor at the School of Archaeology, University of Oxford, and Paul Reilly, Senior Visiting Fellow in Archaeology at the University of Southampton, for kindly supplying the report from which this account has been adapted.

The work was recorded using traditional hand-measured plans and sections, standard digital photography, as well terrestrial and aerial photogrammetry and 3-D scanning. A virtual walk through will soon be available on Shropshire Council's web portal.

#### Acknowledgements

We should like to thank Andy Wigley and Shaun Burkey and his team (Shropshire Council) and Bill Klemperer (Historic England) for their continuing support. Thanks as ever to the core team of excavators and to this season's volunteers. The work is funded by the Robert Kiln Trust, the Society of Antiquaries of London and the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society (Pagett Fund).

#### References

- Hume, C R & Jones, G W 1960 Excavations on Nesscliffe Hill. *Trans Shropshire Archaeol Soc* **56**, 129–32
- Lock, G & Reilly, P 2019 Investigations resume at Nesscliffe hillfort. *Shropshire Archaeol Hist Newsl* **88**
- Lock, G & Reilly, P 2020 Nesscliffe Hill Camp excavations 2019. *Shropshire Archaeol Hist Newsl* **89**
- Lock, G & Reilly, P 2021 Nesscliffe Hill Camp re-summing in 2021. *Shropshire Archaeol Hist Newsl* **91**

## Excursions Secretary Vacancy

The Society is looking for a new Excursions Secretary to organise and deliver a programme of four (minimum) excursions to places of archaeological, architectural and historical interest for members each year.

Key tasks/responsibilities include:

- Research, plan and cost the excursions;
- Carry out a risk assessment for each visit and ensure that a qualified first aider is present (*help will be provided if needed*);
- Attend and manage the excursion (this will include liaising with the participants and host venue);

- Report on visits to Council and prepare a short summary for the Society's website;
- Supply an annual report reviewing the year's visits for inclusion in the Newsletter.

No particular experience or qualifications are required for this role.

Time demand: this varies according to the visits selected and the number of people participating but about ten days per year.

If you would like to know more please email the Secretary, Jo Kirton: [secretary@chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk).



## A Bumper Journal to End the Year

This year's journal will be slightly delayed but will be the longest for thirty years and more than usually varied.

This year's journal will be 276 pages – the longest since vol 71 exactly thirty years ago. Its scope is appropriately wide, from the Neolithic to the nineteenth century and from Storeton in Wirral to Swettenham near Congleton.

We have two detailed excavation reports: by Dan Garner and colleagues on the Seven Lows barrow cemetery near Delamere and by Kevin Cootes and colleagues on Iron Age occupation at Poulton.

At the Seven Lows, the excavation of a barrow descheduled because it had supposedly been ploughed out showed that it had probably been a shallow 'saucer barrow'. Four Bronze Age cremation burials in Collared Urns may well have been secondary to a late Neolithic central inhumation now attested only by Grooved Ware pottery. The excavated barrow may have been the nucleus of the cemetery, with the other barrows forming a semicircle around it.

At Poulton, deep ditches surrounded eight roundhouses that spanned the whole of the pre-Roman Iron Age. Because of the protective environment of these ditches, and the neutral soils, the site is exceptional for the richness of the finds assemblage in a region where survival is usually poor and should make us question our assumptions about the period.

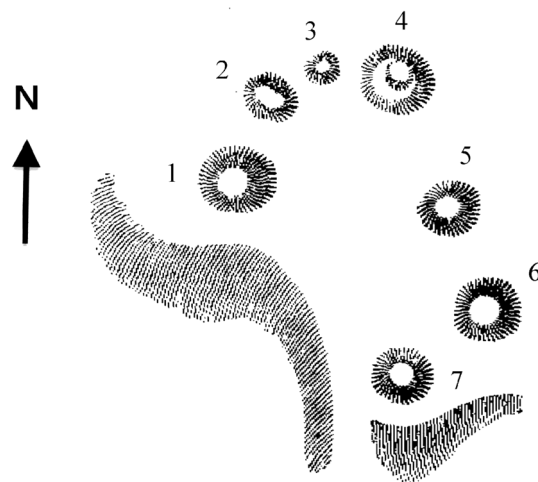
The final prehistoric article is a detailed study by Matthew Knight, Vanessa Oakden, Ben Jones and Dirk Brandherm of the late Bronze Age 'carp's-tongue' sword from Swettenham reported in *JCAS* vol 90 and now donated to Congleton Museum. Bronze Age swords in general are rare in Cheshire, as is this type of sword in western Britain as a whole and its deposition unfragmented – all suggesting knowledge of wider cultural practices on the part of its owner.

Two articles feature important Roman discoveries in Wrexham County Borough. The first, by Susie White, Finds Liaison Officer for Wales for the Portable Antiquities Scheme, discusses the lead ingot from Rossett. The inscription constitutes the first record from Britain of the provincial governor M Trebellius Maximus (AD 63–9). The second, by Caroline Pudney, of the University of Chester and one of our Council members, reports the discovery in 2019 by geophysical survey of a Roman villa nearby – the first confirmed example in north-east Wales.

A short article by another of our Council members, Rowan Patel, draws attention to a socketed stone at Storeton and suggests that it could be part of the base of a cross that was mentioned in a lease of 1334 and which may have originally stood only a short distance away.

A paper by former University of Chester student Alison Smithson, based on her final year undergraduate dissertation for which she won the Society's prize, reviews nonconformist chapels in parts of west Cheshire: their location, architecture and decoration, and the attitudes of their founders and congregations.

Thanks to Kirsty Lloyd, Mark Leah, Mike Nevell and Heather Beeton, the volume is rounded off by the now-customary roundup of fieldwork and PAS finds from the county. Among the latter it is worth drawing attention to a seventh-century gold *tremissis* from Darnhall near Winsford – a very unusual find for north-west England.



Plan of the Seven Lows in Ormerod's *History of Cheshire*. The excavated barrow had not then been recognised and lay bottom left.



Merovingian gold *tremissis* found at Darnhall (LVPL-2C65B2). © National Museums Liverpool

## Book Review\*

The Battle of Brunanburh, continues to attract attention for its political significance and location. Our Secretary, Dr Joanne Kirton, reviews the latest book on the subject.

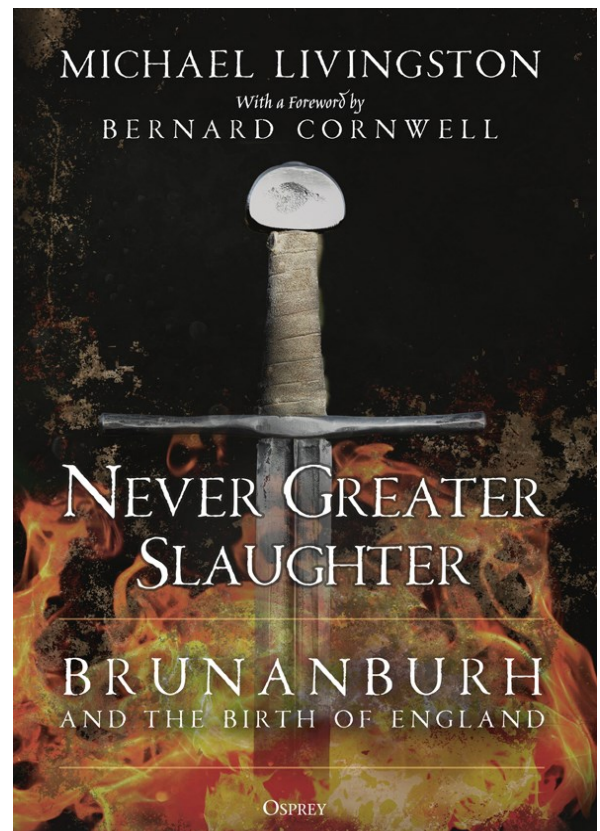
***Never Greater Slaughter: Brunanburh and the Birth of England*** by Michael Livingston with a foreword by Bernard Cornwell was published in 2021 by Osprey. Hbk. 224 pages. ISBN 1-472849-37-X

The Battle of Brunanburh, fought in AD 937 between the West Saxons and a Viking-led army, has been referred to as the greatest single battle in Anglo-Saxon history before Hastings and is notorious for both its scale and bloodshed. Over the past decade or so, there has been significant interest in the event and especially the location of the battle. This has not always been good natured, and Michael Livingston's latest foray into the 'debate', *Never Greater Slaughter*, is a product of this hotly disputed topic.

The book is written for a popular audience new to the discussion, and Livingston's approach to the evidence repackages the arguments made in his 2011 edited volume *The Battle of Brunanburh: a Casebook*, in which he emphatically concluded that the battle had taken place on Wirral. However, some historians, most notably Michael Wood, have reasoned that there is no conclusive evidence that the battle was fought there and have argued for other locations, particularly in Yorkshire. In this volume, Livingston's stance has not changed and the tone aims to challenge those who a) suggest a different location or b) refute that the case is closed.

The first portion of the book largely deals with the historical events (from AD 865) leading up to Brunanburh and the accounts of the battle itself, using the original sources. This section is useful for highlighting the different sources and the issues that can arise when using them. Livingston paints an evocative and exciting picture of the period and the individuals involved, providing an overview for those unfamiliar with the background and battle.

The second part, however, is largely based on conjecture mixed with fictional narrative, used to give the reader a sense of the likely tension, the sights, sounds and smells before and during battle but also to subtly further the argument. For example, when describing the battle and



Cover image courtesy of Osprey.

how it unfolded, Livingston uses locations and topographical features found on Wirral. This is where the volume becomes problematic, as it presents many assumptions as fact through both the fictional portions and the broader presentation of his argument. There is, therefore, an uncomfortable switch between source material, Livingston's unproven arguments and the fictional narrative. This style of writing undermines his argument and leaves the critical reader with the sense of only being presented with a portion of the information needed to make a balanced judgement of the evidence and arguments.

Two segments of the book highlight this issue best. Firstly, new archaeological evidence is presented in Chapter 11, highlighting the work of Wirral Archaeology, who have recovered numerous objects from the peninsula, through metal detecting and subsequent excavation, some of which are Scandinavian in origin and pre-date 950. This is not surprising as we know, through historical sources and ongoing research, that the Wirral was inhabited by people of Scandinavian heritage during this period. However, there is not enough detail about the context and location of the material discovered to usefully make any

\* Reviews are accepted and published in good faith as expressions of considered opinion, but the views expressed remain those of the authors, and the Society accepts no responsibility for them.

assessment of its potential links to Brunanburh or the wider Scandinavian presence on Wirral. Yet Livingston uses it to further his argument for the battle taking place on Wirral and goes on to postulate how the material assemblage relates to the field of battle and associated camps.

Secondly, the Appendix is used by Livingston to summarily list and quickly refute opposing views and evidence. Had these been consistently presented within the main body of the text and discussed by the author in more detail, the reader would have had the opportunity to weigh up the arguments for themselves and better understand Livingston's suppositions. By moving these arguments and summarily dismissing them in the

appendix, the presentation of the argument is consistently unbalanced, and the reader cannot help but feel that they are being told a good yarn rather than presented with a factually reliable argument.

In summary, I have come away with a greater sense of the importance of the battle, its scale, and the aftermath, and it has left me with a desire to investigate further in order to gain a more balanced, contextualised view of the evidence – and in that sense the book is a success, as it has certainly planted the seed of curiosity. Am I convinced that the battle took place on Wirral in the areas identified by Livingston? No, but I look forward to being convinced!

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## West Cheshire Museums

West Cheshire Museums are pleased to announce that, coming out of lockdown, we have expanded our Curatorial Team – one of the few heritage organisations in the country to do so at this uncertain time.

**W**e are delighted to welcome Gina Cottam and Poppy Garrett as Assistant Curators.

Gina was already working for the service in the Learning Team. She has very strong collections management experience and has recently completed important inventory work at two of our sites, Weaver Hall Museum and Lion Salt Works. Poppy has joined us from the Wordsworth Trust in Grasmere and has already organised some key events, including three Clothes Swaps, and has been posting online about our behind-the-scenes collections work. They join our existing team members: Archaeological Officer Julie Edwards, Interpretation Development Officer Lucy Ashdown, and two technicians, Mike and Gordon Witter. Elizabeth Montgomery, formerly Collections and Interpretation Officer, has moved into the role of Senior Curator managing the team.

Over the next year, we shall be concentrating on maintaining our Accredited Museum status, further documenting and researching our ever-growing collections, offering high-quality training, maintaining and developing partnerships and working with our communities in recovery.

Please follow West Cheshire Museums on social media for more information on all our work:

*Twitter* - @cwacmuseums

*Facebook* - Grosvenor Museum and Stretton Watermill

*Facebook* – Weaver Hall Museum and Lion Salt Works

**Elizabeth Montgomery**

*Senior Curator, West Cheshire Museums*

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## Chester Castle

**O**pen days at Chester Castle proved very popular in 2021 and English Heritage are currently working with their team of volunteers to organise more for 2022.

The fragmentary but very important programme of paintings in the Agricola Tower chapel (St Mary de Castro) probably dates from the time of Earl Ranulf III (d 1232) or from soon after the earldom and castle were taken over by King Henry III in 1237. The paintings were last conserved in 1992–4 but have since deteriorated, and there is now an aspiration to create a digital reconstruction of them.



*Right* The Visitation. Reproduced by courtesy of English Heritage.



## Mersey Forest Draft Land Action Plan for Cheshire West and Chester Council

The effects of climate change are increasingly visible, both in the threats to our everyday lives and to built heritage: witness last winter's floods at Chester and in Northwich town centre, and the images of the Dee lapping around the ends of the medieval Holt–Farndon bridge.

At the start of 2021 Cheshire West and Chester Council published its [Climate Emergency Response Plan](#). As a follow-up, the Mersey Forest has now prepared a draft [Land Action Plan](#), on which the Council has been seeking comments.

Emissions from land use account for only 8% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the borough, compared with 52% from industry, 24% from transport and 14% from residential properties, but the proposals to mitigate them, principally by tree-planting, will have a significant impact on our landscape.

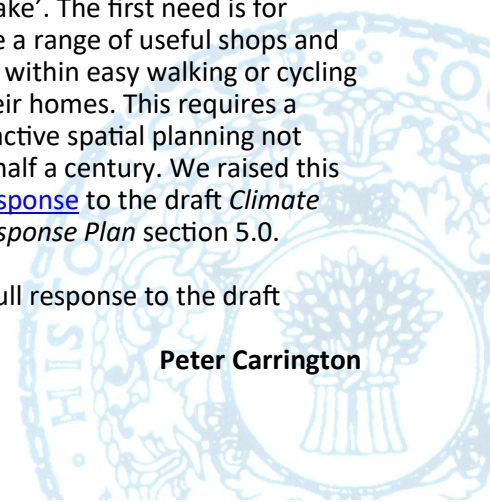
We are supportive of the principles of the plan, but it leaves a lot to be desired. An 'Action Plan' needs to be much terser and to set out concisely and more precisely the proposed measures, with a short paragraph of explanation for each, the expected benefits, quantified wherever possible, the timescale, and detailed maps shown as a layer on the CWaC [Public Map Viewer](#).

We have a number of specific comments

- Preservation of the remains of medieval ridge and furrow ploughing and other archaeological earthworks. This can best be achieved by ensuring that these areas remain under pasture. The draft *Action Plan* states that west Cheshire has some of the best pasture land in the country, so we hope that there might be a confluence of interests here.
- Siting wind turbines and solar panel arrays to do the least possible damage to views, landscape character and to archaeology. Damage to views and landscape character can also be done by inappropriate tree-planting; this applies particularly but by no means exclusively to the proposed Sandstone Ridge AONB.
- If tree-planting, wind farm construction or solar panel array are considered in areas where knowledge of archaeology is poor, surveys should be undertaken at an early stage; compare the good example set by the National Trust in Northumberland ([National Trust Press Release 6 October 2021](#)).
- Managing visitor pressure requires much deeper thought and probably its own policy document. While more green spaces in communities are very much to be welcomed, they may not replace local 'honeypots' such as the Sandstone Ridge with its magnificent views and easily eroded hillforts. Perhaps other local historical sites could be promoted to add interest and serve as 'destinations' in new green space.
- The section on reducing the need for car travel suffers as a result of the weakness of other CWaC plans. The *Climate Emergency Response Plan*, page 30, 5.1 sets the target of a 25% reduction in car travel by 2025 and highlights active travel, alongside improved public transport, as an alternative. However, it is not clear what steps are planned to achieve this target.
- In Chester at least, the provision of direct cycleways from the suburbs to the city centre stops short at the Inner Ring Road. Much more needs to be done, by reducing urban road- and parking capacity for motor vehicles and thus freeing up space both for cycleways and trees, as well by improving low-emission local bus services (as envisaged in the government's [Bus Back Better](#) document). We have addressed this issue in detail in our [response](#) to the *Walk, Ride, Thrive* consultation.
- We also sympathise with the sentiment that 'Greener neighbourhoods can also result in a 30 per cent increase in retail sales as people look to shop closer to their homes.' However, 'greener neighbourhoods' are the 'icing on the cake'. The first need is for people to have a range of useful shops and other facilities within easy walking or cycling distance of their homes. This requires a degree of proactive spatial planning not seen for over half a century. We raised this issue in our [response](#) to the draft *Climate Emergency Response Plan* section 5.0.

You can read our full response to the draft *Action Plan* [here](#).

Peter Carrington



## St John the Baptist Church, Chester

Recent maintenance has uncovered long-concealed high-quality architectural fragments that can now once again be seen in the north aisle of the church.

The destruction of St John's started in the reign of Edward VI, when the college of canons was dissolved. At that time the east end of the church was very dilapidated, and in later centuries domestic dwellings were built within the ruins; the mother of the essayist Thomas de Quincey once lived in what is now the Chapter House. Renewed interest in the church after the collapse of the north-west tower in 1881 resulted in a tidying of the ruins, during which many sculptural stones were removed to the Chapter House and the floor of the truncated north-west tower, to be lost to public view.

During recent large-scale maintenance of the ruins by Cheshire West and Chester Council, it was decided to remove the stones from the base of the tower and store them in the Chapter House. However, space there is limited, and the opportunity was taken to move some of the most important fragments to the north aisle of the church, where they could again be viewed by the public, alongside the tenth-century crosses, cross slabs and effigies of a priest and knight.

The earliest stones are examples of Romanesque sculpture: a capital with an ox carved on its underside, also examples of egg-and-dart, dog-tooth and lozenge decoration. However, most are thirteenth century: a capital from the east end of the church and roof bosses. The fine carved roof bosses depict Christ, with arms outstretched, staring out in majesty; the Virgin Mary being addressed by the Angel Gabriel in the Annunciation; and a large swirling acanthus representing Gethsemane. Two smaller bosses show scenes from the Stations of the Cross, the first depicting the scourging of Christ and the second the Twelve Apostles in the Garden of Gethsemane. This would suggest that all the Stations of the Cross were once represented on the church ceiling. However, not all the bosses depict biblical or religious subjects; two represent the Wild Man, better known as the Green Man, with pagan associations.

Another stone that lay exposed for many years and has now been moved into the north aisle is carved with the Order of the Garter, founded by Edward III in 1348. When two large stones lying beside it were eventually turned over, it was found they were also carved with the Order of the Garter and coats of arms. These have yet to be positively identified, and any suggestions would be gratefully received.

Towards the east end of the aisle is a miscellany of stones, ranging from a gargoyle, a grotesque, a corbel, two ambiguous pieces fashioned like legs and talons that may have come from the crossing tower, and what may have been part of a Roman column. A fragmentary medieval cross slab with a Tree of Life has an eighteenth-century inscription carved on the underside. Furthermore, there are signs that a brass plaque was once attached to it, recycling the stone for the third time. Finally in this section there is the top half of a stone that appears to be carved with the Cheshire sheaf. It is dated 1585, possibly relating to the passing of the church to the parish. As an aside, our organ builders recently drew my attention to a stone on the inner face of the north transept wall with the date 1589 carved on it. This would suggest that it marks the date when the transepts were reduced to their present size.

Finally, there are three stones that do not fit into any particular category. The first is the Nun's Stone, a rectangle of sandstone carved with an inscription but as yet undated. The second is the Heart Stone, next to the knight's effigy. These stones represent a thirteenth- to fourteenth-century practice, generally associated with the Crusades, in which a man's heart was interred separately from the body. Lastly, there is a worn sandstone bearded figure popularly referred to as St John the Baptist – a rare survival as such statues were targets for the iconoclasts.

A long journey lies ahead. The north aisle roof and ceiling require urgent repairs before anything can be done about creating a public display of the St John's stones and associated historical artefacts. Meanwhile, I would welcome any further information you might have about our stones.

**Simon Oliver**

*Churchwarden, St John's Church*

*Subject to volunteer availability, the church is open at the following times:*

Mondays and Tuesdays 10.00am–2.00pm

Wednesdays 10.00am–4.00pm

Thursdays and Fridays 10.00am–2.00pm

Saturdays 10.00am–4.00pm.

We are open for SERVICES ONLY on Sundays



## Grants and Awards

We are offering the following grants and awards in 2021:

### Undergraduate Dissertation Prize

Our annual prize of £100 for the best Final Year dissertation in the Dept of History and Archaeology at the University of Chester.

### St John's House Fund

Grants totalling up to £500 pa for archaeological work in Cheshire. Applications may be made at any time of year.

### PAS Finds Study Grant

A grant of up to £700 for the study of finds from the pre-1974 county of Cheshire reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme, the results to be published in our journal. Applications to be submitted by 30 June.

*There were no successful applications for this grant. Council will decide when next to offer it.*

For more information on these grants and awards, see <https://chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/grants-and-awards/>.

## Contacts

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