



President Dr Paul Booth FRHistS

The Chester Antiquary

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

2022 Issue 2 – June

Nothing New under the Sun...

Here we are in June, ready to welcome the Summer sun to shine on Chester's past.

Having only recently joined the Society and been elected as Chair, it has been a delight to see the long-term plans that are bearing fruit – how lucky I am to become involved just now.

At the Society's AGM, we said enormous thanks once more to Rachel Swallow for her time as Chair, while we saw through some of the important adjustments to the constitution that her review set in motion. We also expressed huge gratitude to Liz Montgomery for excellent work stepping up from Vice-Chair to Chair to manage the transition period, and to all the Council officers for their achievements over a tricky and demanding two years of improvising responses to the pandemic. To cap off an excellent lecture series, available to watch on the Society's website (<https://chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk/lectures/>), we had great AGM talks on the Swettenham sword, Poulton and the Storeton Cross, and a wonderful Newstead Lecture from John Thomas on the Trojan War mosaic from Rutland.

Hopefully you will all be able to take advantage of the contributions of the Society to the Chester Heritage Festival (<https://www.chesterheritagefestival.co.uk/>), including Peter Carrington's recorded talks on the City Walls and Roman lead-mining reported below. Remember, too, that you can take in Liz Montgomery and Katherine Wilson's exhibition *Medieval Chester Retold* at the Grosvenor Museum until 9 July, after which it moves to Chester Cathedral (<https://mob.chester.ac.uk/>). Once again Cheshire West and Chester Council and the archaeologists at the University have collaborated on a successful Grosvenor Park training dig, also reported below, and you should take in the super student-designed exhibition, *Parkaeology*, at the Grosvenor Museum until 31 July, showing off the multi-period finds from over the years.



Coins from the outport at Meols in the *Medieval Chester Retold* exhibition at the Grosvenor Museum, including silver pennies from England, Scotland, Ireland, France and Belgium, some cut into halves or quarters for low-value transactions.



The Water Tower in the late 14th century. Painting by Chris Mitchell presented to the Grosvenor Museum in 2013. © C Mitchell.

Over the summer we are looking forward to working on a calendar of excursions, next year's lecture series, and plans for a conference timed to coincide with next year's Chester Heritage Festival, as well as with the long-awaited publication of the Heronbridge excavations!

Dr Tom Pickles

Chair, Chester Archaeological Society

New Council Member Profiles

Tom Pickles (*Chair*)

I grew up in Whitby, North Yorkshire. My father, Roger, was a history teacher and active member of the Cleveland Industrial Archaeology Society, with a particular interest in the archaeology of alum extraction. This meant a lot of being dragged around historical and archaeological sites. The most memorable of these was a visit as an eight-year-old to Dominic Powlesland's amazing Anglo-Saxon site at West Heslerton, after which I joined the Young Archaeologists Club.



At the University of Oxford I studied History (History and Archaeology not being a combination, sadly), but was lucky to take John Blair and Helena Hamerow's second year optional module on Anglo-Saxon Archaeology. John thoughtfully sent me to meet Richard Morris, Philip Rahtz and Lorna Watts for advice about an undergraduate dissertation, which turned into an interdisciplinary study of the Church in Anglo-Saxon Yorkshire, now *Kingship, Society, and the Church in Anglo-Saxon Yorkshire* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), combining texts with buildings, sculpture, excavated sites and place-names. Hence I have been fortunate to work in interdisciplinary institutions – the Centre for Medieval Studies at York, the Department of Classics, History and Archaeology at Birkbeck College and History and Archaeology at Chester.

Here at Chester, with Katherine Wilson (whose husband I am), I have become fascinated with the history and archaeology of the city and region, which we have been exploring through collaborations with the Grosvenor Museum, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, and the Cathedral, through an AHRC-funded project, and through membership of the Cheshire Society for Landscape History.

Katherine Wilson (*Council member*)

I grew up in Forres, near the location of an internationally significant Pictish fort currently being re-excavated, site of a famous Pictish standing stone, and an important medieval borough. Through my MA at the University of Glasgow, which follows the Scottish liberal arts degree model, I was able to combine history, archaeology and literature for two years before specialising in history for the final two years. This meant a thorough grounding in theoretical and practical aspects of archaeology.



Having obtained a PGCE in History teaching I returned to Glasgow to pursue my fascination with the history of trade and material culture, through work with the Burrell Collection's world-leading collection of medieval textiles and a study of what the later medieval documents of the dukes of the Burgundian Netherlands, preserved in the archives at Lille, Dijon, and Douai, revealed about the production, circulation and use of textiles – this is now *The Power of Textiles: Tapestries of the Burgundian Dominions (1363–1477)* (Turnout: Brepols, 2018). Thanks to this focus I have been able to work in interdisciplinary environments at Ghent, St Andrew's, the Centre for Medieval Studies at York, and in History and Archaeology at Chester.

More recently I have become interested in how studying material culture can help us rethink the commercial and consumer societies of the later Middle Ages; an AHRC funded project has focused on the amazing medieval objects in the Grosvenor Museum collection, and I'm putting together a project to study Chester's connections to geographically distant locations by combining Cheshire Archives and Local Studies documents with the Grosvenor Museum collection.

Heronbridge Twenty Years On

Work on analysing the results of the 2002–5 Heronbridge project has been slow for some years, but there is now a determined push to bring it to publication.

In the late 1990s the Society's Council sought to revive involvement in fieldwork and settled on Heronbridge as a site to investigate. It was one of our members, W J Williams, who first investigated the earthwork there in 1929 and in so doing discovered the underlying Roman settlement. The Society has been involved in one way or another with subsequent investigations, and all the published accounts of work at the site have appeared in the *Society's Journal*. The 2002–5 excavations, directed by our then Secretary, Dr David Mason, made a number of important finds – a Roman quay, followed by a number of riverside burials; further discoveries about the so-called 'battle cemetery' (now plausibly associated with the Battle of Chester (AD 604 x 616) between Æthelfrith of Northumbria and the realms of North Wales and possibly Mercia), and the early medieval earthwork bank and ditch. It is intended to publish the Roman and later discoveries separately, and it is the former that are highlighted here. The final publication will also summarise the results of the unpublished excavations carried out between 1958 and 1960 and in 1966–7.

The main discoveries were made in Trench III. A rocky promontory by the mouth of an ancient stream bed had been adapted for use as a quay, reached by a sloping track from the north. The remains of six holes that were probably the settings for mooring posts were found around its edge, together with a slot for a timber fender to stop small boats crashing into the rock face. This installation probably dates to the early second century AD.

Towards the end of the century, the quay seems to have become less important and may have gone out of use altogether. Three graves were dug into the rock, one for a child; the face of the promontory was cut back and a platform was cut at its point. Fragments of three tombstones were found, plus parts of a table, carved out of a single piece of stone, used for offerings to the dead and often depicted on tombstones. This was found in the silt at the foot of the promontory.

We now know that the Roman settlement extended for about 800 m along Watling Street (Eaton Road) and flourished from the late first to the late fourth century.

You can read an [interim report](#) on the results of the excavations in volume 78 of our journal .



Promontory, with holes for mooring post to left, three graves to right.



Above 'Funerary banquet'-style tombstone, showing child with parent's hand on shoulder. The three burials may all have been of members of one family.



Left Stone table for offerings, as depicted on the right-hand fragment above.

Chester Heritage Festival 2022

This year's festival will be held between 17 and 27 June, with a launch event on 28 May at the racecourse. This year the Society will be offering two brand new contributions, as well as making its talks and recent articles available to all.

Our Vice-President Peter Carrington has devised two new presentations: one on Chester's City Walls and one on Roman lead-mining. Both will be available online, and there will also be a guided tour of part of the walls.

'New Walls for Old' focuses on the history of the Roman sections of the City Walls, between the Newgate and St Martin's Gate: how the defences were modified, fell down and were rebuilt in Roman times, how the course of the sections that have disappeared can be recognised in the modern landscape; how much of what we can see today is eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rebuilding; and why some sections have proved so unstable.

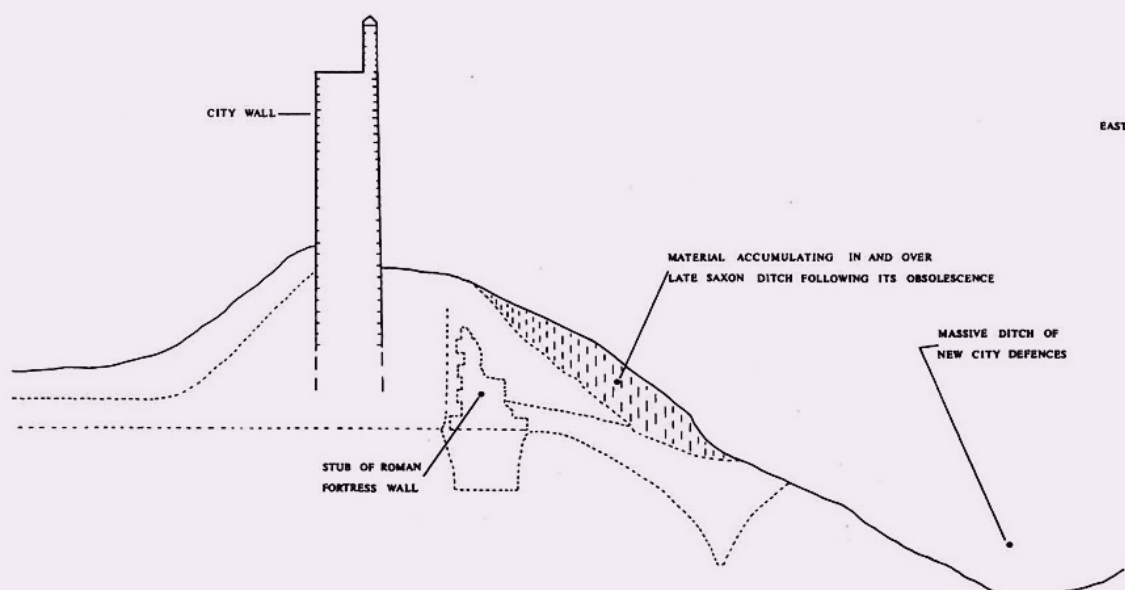
The tour of the walls will take place on Thursday 23 June, starting from the Roman Gardens at 2.00pm and finishing in the Northgate Gardens, near St Martin's Gate; it will probably last about one and a half hours. The event is free but booking is necessary.

For more information and booking, see the Festival website <https://www.chesterheritagefestival.co.uk/events22>.

Left Roman fortress wall in front of the present City Wall south of the Kaleyad gate.

Below Re-erected Roman wall in the Northgate Gardens.

Bottom Schematic section through the defences, as excavated at St John St in 1989.



The presentation on Roman lead- and silver-mining focuses on the ingots in the Grosvenor Museum and what they tell us about some of the motives for the Roman invasion of Britain and the organisation of the mining industry. It includes interviews on Halkyn Mountain with our former secretary, Dr Alan Williams, who has made a special study of ancient mining, and in Wrexham Museum, where the Rossett ingot is now on display. Julian Baum has done the filming for both presentations.



Roman lead ingot in the Grosvenor Museum. The imperial titles on the top date it to AD 74, while that on the side states that it came from the territory of the Deceangli of Flintshire. Image © Grosvenor Museum, Cheshire West and Chester Council.



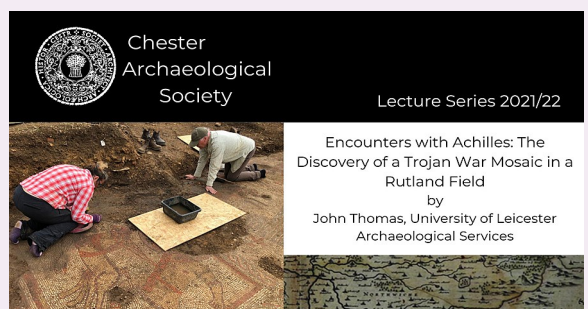
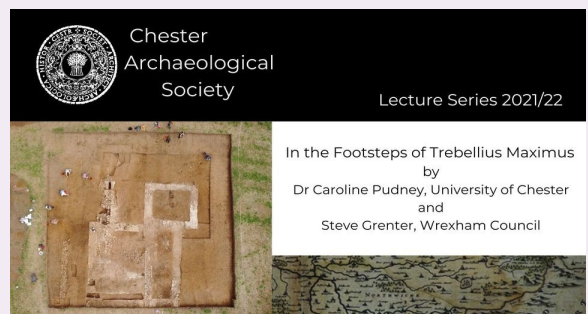
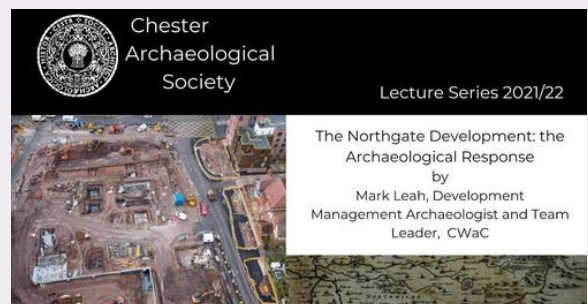
Late Roman copper alloy vessels found about 1760 while sinking a mine shaft in the Old Rake on Halkyn Mountain. *Archaeologia* vol 14, 1804, pl 49.



Alan, Julian and Peter confer during filming in the 'Old Rake' on Halkyn Mountain.

Lecture recordings, tours and short talks from the last two years are available on the Society's [YouTube](#) Channel. The titles of some of them are shown below. Just click on the images to play the recordings. In particular, don't miss this year's Newstead Lecture on the Trojan War mosaic found in Rutland (coming shortly).

The report by Caroline Pudney and Steve Grenter on the discovery of the Rossett villa, published in volume 91 of our journal, will be free to download from the [home page](#) of our website until the end of July.



Grosvenor Park Excavation 2022

Evidence for courtyards of the later sixteenth-century Cholmondeley House and the medieval precinct of St John's Church.

This year's excavation in the Grosvenor Park, Chester, ran from 25 April until 20 May and trained nine second-year students from the Department of History and Archaeology at the University of Chester in excavation methods and techniques. This was the first excavation since 2019 that was run without a full Covid-19 risk assessment, but social distancing and good hygiene precautions were employed to successfully reduce the risk of infection and a 10 x 10 metre trench ensured everyone had adequate space.

The area investigated this year lay to the west of the north-south wall and boundary ditch partly excavated in 2021 (see the [Chester Antiquary June 2021](#)). Here, soil deposits had been revealed beneath a layer containing evidence for the destruction of buildings during the mid-seventeenth century, probably associated with the Civil War siege of Chester in 1645.

The 2022 excavation area had been identified as a potential location for the survival of structures linked to the east-west Roman road found in previous trenches to the north. That potential may still exist, but in the event this year's work revealed features and deposits suggestive of gardens and/or courtyards relating to the later sixteenth-century Cholmondeley House and the medieval precinct surrounding the church of St John the Baptist. The finds assemblage was relatively small and fragmentary compared to previous years, reflecting the smaller number of students and the type of deposits examined. It is notable that the residual Roman ceramic building material and pottery is in a very poor and abraded condition and that a higher proportion of medieval material was found.

The first stages of work were the completion of the excavation of a nineteenth-century field drain and the Civil War destruction layer in the south-west quadrant of the trench. There was also further investigation of a large stone-capped drain identified last year running eastwards across the northern side of the trench.

The Civil War destruction layer was composed of building debris such as mortar, plaster, brick and tile fragments, but it also contained quantities of animal-, bird- and fish bone and household and personal objects ranging in date from the sixteenth to early seventeenth century. Distributed throughout the debris was evidence of military

action, such as various calibres of lead shot, gunpowder holder caps and hammered-lead slugs. Rarer than shot, and only recently identified in Chester, slugs are solid, square-sectioned pieces of lead about 20 mm long; they are a type of ammunition that may have been used as case shot. Two coins potentially of the reign of Charles I were also found in the debris.

The line of the cut for the stone-capped drain was first identified in 2020, and sections excavated in 2021 across the fill of the cut found the drain itself, emptying into the north-south boundary ditch. Removal of the remaining fill of the cut revealed a well-constructed stone channel capped by rectangular sandstone slabs. Fragments of sixteenth-century Cistercian-type wares and Tudor Green cups in the backfill suggest that the drain was constructed at that time, perhaps by the Cholmondeleys.



Sixteenth-century stone-capped drain, perhaps built by the Cholmondeleys.

Beneath the Civil War destruction layer was a crushed sandstone surface edged by reused sandstone blocks, set on edge to form a kerb. This was possibly a sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century garden feature. However, a cobbled surface edged with sandstone blocks in the south-east of the trench appears to be medieval in date, and a thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century anthropomorphic decorated handle was found on its surface.

In the south-eastern quadrant of the excavation two large postholes, one of them packed with masonry blocks, were thought to represent part of a substantial timber building. On the last two days a possible ditch or large pit was revealed on the southern edge of the excavation, containing medieval floor tiles and pottery. Hopefully next year we can return and find out more.



The dig team 2022.



Medieval cobbled surface.



Anthropomorphic handle found on the cobbled surface.



Medieval floor tiles and pottery found in a ditch or large pit in the final days of excavation.

Dan Garner, L– P : Archaeology
Julie Edwards, West Cheshire Museums

Acknowledgements

The training excavation is a partnership project between Cheshire West and Chester Council and the University of Chester; we are grateful to the staff of Grosvenor Park for facilitating the excavation.



Make a Donation

Annual subscriptions only cover the regular running costs of the Society, plus some of the costs of our *Journal*. We want to be able to cover more of our *Journal* costs and to expand our range of prizes and grants in order to reward excellence in student performance, encourage people to undertake research, and promote local archaeology and conservation generally.

You can help us to do this by making a donation. Click the [Donate Now](#) link to make payments by PayPal or debit/credit card and allow us to claim Gift Aid. Thank you for your support!

Grants and Awards

We shall be making the following grants and awards in 2022:

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.

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.

The Society will advertise this grant, with a submission date for applications, later in the year.

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.

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

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