

President Dr Paul Booth FRHistS

The Chester Antiquary

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

2023 Issue 1 – March

Spring Forward!

With the return of the light, the flowering of daffodils, and the first lambs gambolling about, there are signs of new life everywhere. The Society has various buds that are ready to take bloom in the spring and summer, so we thought it a good moment to be in touch.

Most importantly of all, it is the time of year when we hold our Annual General Meeting, which will take place online via Zoom on Wednesday 26 April at 7:00 pm (*note the time*). As well as our usual business – electing or confirming members of Council and taking annual reports from our Officers – we are looking forward to short talks by two contributors to the most recent volume of our *Journal*, and we hope to have another on this year's Dissertation Prize.

Of course, we are still enjoying our 2022/3 lecture series. Our next online talk will take place on Wednesday 5 April at 19:30, delivered by Katherine Wilson from the University of Chester and focusing on late medieval chests. This will be followed by our final lecture in May, by Sarah Hinds, a Chester alumna completing her PhD at the University of York on a White Rose Scholarship, who will speak on late medieval sexual badges. Note that this lecture will be delivered in person. We will be in touch with details; we are just confirming the availability of the venue.

For this year's Dissertation Prize, we are delighted to have three wonderful dissertations on the shortlist, from which we shall be selecting our overall winner shortly:

- Elsa Heebner, Analysing hat production techniques at the Bronze Age cemetery of Xiaohe, Xinjiang: an experimental approach
- Samuel Perry, An archaeological investigation of the early medieval activity of Histon and Impington, Cambridgeshire
- Siobhan Wordingham, An exploration of the pre-Viking early medieval stone sculpture known as Irton 1

Following approval by Council, we are delighted to announce that we are organising a conference to be held on Saturday 24 June, to coincide with the Chester Heritage Festival. The theme will be Chester as a persistent place with local, regional, national and transnational connections, and speakers will cover the periods from prehistory to the post-medieval. Please save the date and watch out for further details to come.

In this newsletter there is a wealth of things for your attention: a taster of a film on the Rows for the Chester Heritage Festival; previews of two new exhibitions in the Grosvenor Museum; a short discussion of the Bronze Age Wrenbury Hoard; notes on a new piece of prehistoric rock art from Delamere and on excavations around the former Lake Flixton in Yorkshire; an update from the Cathedral Works Department; and a summary of our response to the Chester Gateway Strategic Regeneration Framework.

Tom Pickles

Chair, Chester Archaeological Society

Dates for your Diary

Weds 5 April at 7:30 pm, online via Zoom
Commerce and consumers: the ubiquitous chest of the late Middle Ages. Presented by Dr Katherine Wilson. [Click here](#) for more information.

Weds 26 April at 7:00 pm, online via Zoom
AGM followed by short talks

May (date and venue to be finalised)
Medieval sexual badges Sarah Hinds

Members will be sent email notification of the AGM and invitations to register for online lectures. Non-members can buy tickets; look out for notices on social media.

‘Galleries Which They Call The Rows’

A new forty-minute film on the origin and development of Chester’s Rows by Peter Carrington and Julian Baum will form a topical part of the Society’s contribution to the 2023 Chester Heritage Festival.

The Rows are an iconic feature of Chester’s built heritage and have attracted tourists for over 150 years. However, the recent national decline in ‘bricks and mortar’ retail has resulted in a threat to the viability of this unique example of medieval urban innovation, and they are currently the subject of a High Street Heritage Action Zone to improve their condition and attractiveness.

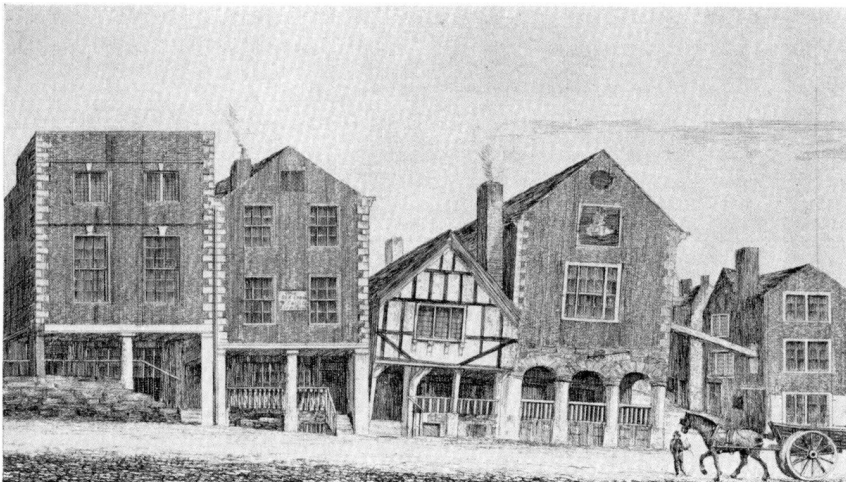
The Rows have been a focus of interest for the Chester Archaeological Society almost since its foundation and have been the subject of numerous articles in its *Journal*. However, it is now almost a quarter of a century since the publication of the results of the Rows Research Project, initiated by the Society in 1984. We thought, therefore, that it was high time that those results – and some remaining puzzles – were brought to the attention of a new audience.

The Rows developed as an adaptation of a fairly standard type of English medieval town house to Chester’s sloping site, with the continuous walkways being made possible by the ranks of contiguous undercrofts – testimony to the city’s wealth in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, founded on its role as a supply base for the conquest of Wales. This experimentation with a new urban form may have been encouraged by the familiarity of people connected with Chester with what they had heard about abroad, perhaps at Venice and even Constantinople.



‘On Another Level’ exhibition at the Grosvenor Museum

The Rows have been altered many times over the centuries, and many sections were lost as they went out of fashion in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, by the middle of the nineteenth century they formed a key part of Chester’s attractiveness to tourists and were at the heart of the Society’s campaign for vernacular architecture that was its *raison d’être* in its early years.



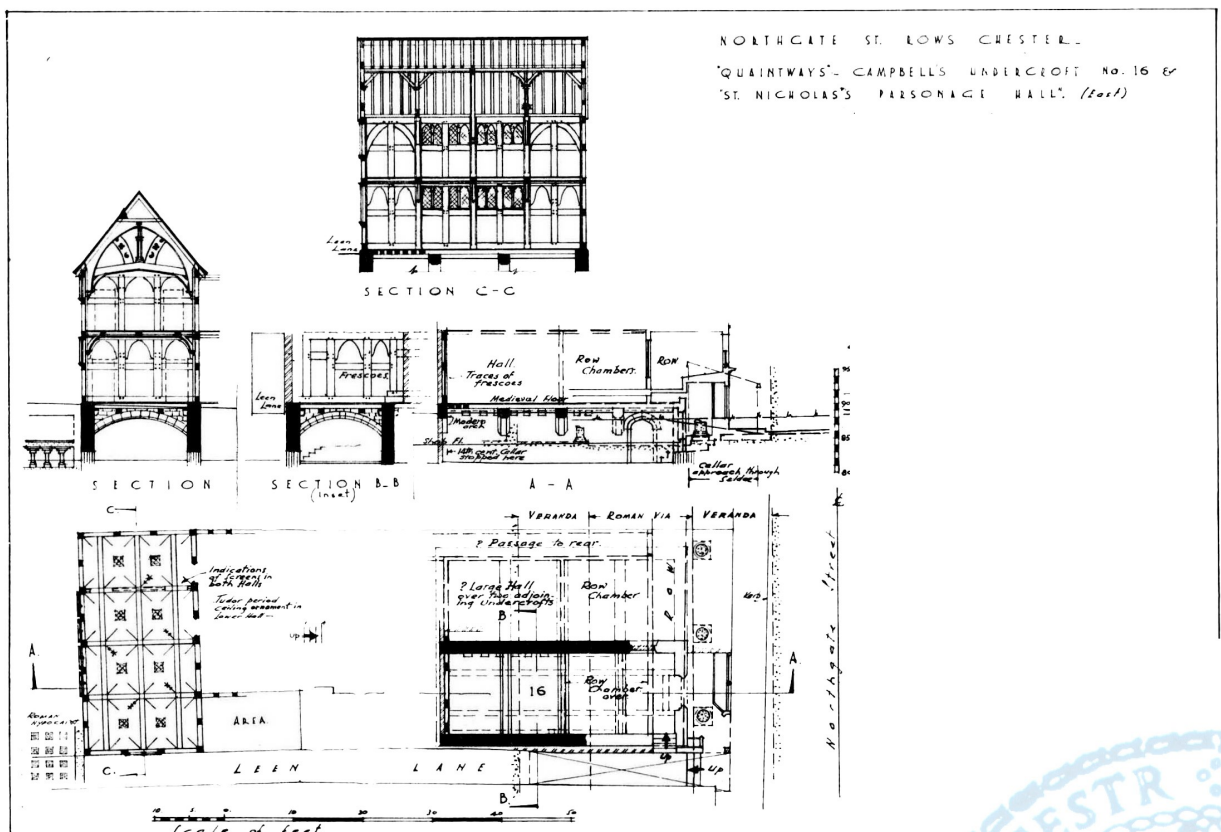
Early 19th-century print by Batenham of ‘Old Coach Row’ near the corner of Lower Bridge Street and Duke Street. The undercrofts were removed here in 1850, and the doors to the houses were subsequently reached by steps.

Watch out for the launch of the film during the Heritage Festival, which will be held 17–28 June. In the meantime, do not miss out on the excellent exhibition [‘On Another Level: Exploring the Unique Rows of Chester’](#) at the Grosvenor Museum until 30 April. If you want to burrow into the detail, see A Brown, [The Rows of Chester: the Chester Rows Research Project](#) (English Heritage, 1999), now available online as a free download from the Archaeology Data Service.



Off the beaten track: behind Leche House, Watergate Street.

Not only does Leche House have a splendid interior that preserves an open hall and 17th-century fire-place, it is also a rare example in Chester of a courtyard house. In the early 17th century a gallery carried on wooden columns was built along the side of the courtyard. At the back there may have been a kitchen and dining room on the site of the now apparently isolated 18th-century Lion House.

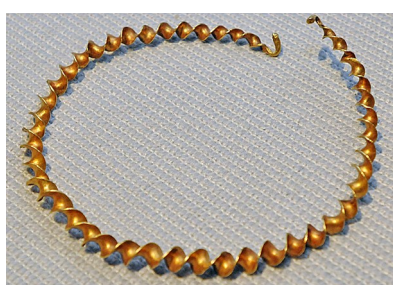
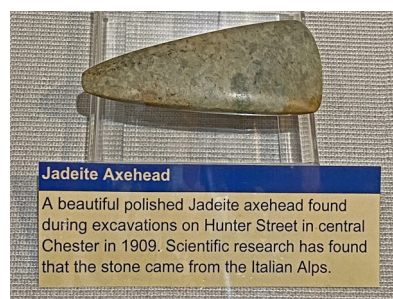


Reconstruction drawing by P H Lawson of a Row building in Northgate Street on the site of 'Quaintways' (now 'Rosies') with courtyard and rear range (demolished 1892), based on observations by F H Thompson and E W Cox. See Lawson, P H & Smith, J T, [The Rows of Chester: two interpretations, J Chester Archaeol Soc new ser 45, 1958](#), 14-15 and [Wirral Notes and Queries 1, 1892](#), 42 and 48



Before the Walls: Life in Prehistoric Chester

This exhibition at the Grosvenor Museum, researched and designed by third-year archaeological students at the University of Chester as part of their degree work, gives us a fantastic insight into life in prehistoric Chester and the surrounding area and offers a taste of the wealth of the museum's collections.



Above Bronze Age cremation urns from Moel Famau and Manley, and an incense cup from Betchton

Above right Neolithic jadeite axehead from Hunter Street, Chester

Below right Gold 'ribbon' torc, probably from Aberwheeler

The exhibition is the product of the annual collaboration between Liz Montgomery, Senior Curator at the museum, and Dr Caroline Pudney, Senior Lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Chester. Running from 6 March to 30 April, it showcases the Grosvenor Museum's significant prehistory collection, with additional items from the Poulton Research Project.

The students introduce us to the environment, daily life and technology of the period, and you can even watch a video of one them engaged in experimental flint knapping.

As Caroline said, 'Until you see the bones, it is hard to imagine that at one time Cheshire was home to woolly mammoths and aurochs. This was the time of our Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer ancestors. It is extraordinary to think that anything survives from this time, and yet close to Chester's amphitheatre a highly worked flint – the all-purpose Swiss Army penknife of its day – would have had multiple uses, including stripping animal hides.'

Highlights of the display include an extraordinary Neolithic jadeite axehead and three gold torcs. The axehead (c 4000–2500 BC), found in Hunter Street, Chester, is made from stone quarried high in the Swiss Alps, shaped and polished to



Dr Caroline Pudney with the students responsible for the exhibition

give it a luminescent surface. Because they show no signs of use and are usually found in funerary settings, such axes seem likely to have had high symbolic significance to their owners. Two of the torcs are replicas of small 'ribbon' torcs found at Malpas (originals in the Manchester Museum); the other 'ribbon' torc probably comes from Aberwheeler in the Vale of Clwyd and was found in the nineteenth century.

Among other items on display are a saddle quern used for grinding grain, Bronze Age cremation urns, axes and spearheads, worked antler and an Iron Age adze, VCP (Very Coarse Pottery, for transporting and storing salt) and a rare ceramic tuyère for forcing air into a furnace.

Treasure at the Grosvenor Museum

In March 2023 the Grosvenor Museum is mounting an exhibition by University of Chester students of items of Treasure recently acquired by the museum via the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

Since the 1996 Treasure Act, the discovery of any item 300 or more years old with at least 10% precious metal must be reported to a coroner within fourteen days and recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) on their publicly available database (www.finds.org.uk). Usually, a regional museum has the opportunity to purchase the item for a reward not exceeding its market value, payable to the landholder and finder. Members of the Chester Archaeological Society will be aware of local finds thanks to the annual summaries in our *Journal* and the lectures that we have been treated to by our regional Finds Liaison Officers, including the most recent one by Heather Beeton.

Thanks to the wonderful efforts of The Grosvenor Museum Society (www.grosvenor-museumsociety.co.uk), a number of Treasure items from recent years have been purchased for the museum's collection. These include some really fascinating objects with interesting stories to tell.

Several of these are inscribed rings. Amongst them is an extraordinary example of an apotropaic talisman carrying the names of Jesus, Mary, John, and the three Magi: Jaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. Others are early modern 'posy rings', which take their name from their short poetic inscriptions – things like the lovers' mottoes 'In trust be just' or 'If this, then me', or the New Year sentiment (in French) '*en bon an*'.

Other items are high-status dress accessories: strap ends, hooked tags, a bodkin (for sewing and stitching, but also for doing up early modern bodices), and cufflinks.

Together, Archaeological Society Chair Tom Pickles and Vice-Chair Liz Montgomery, Senior Curator at the Grosvenor Museum, have been working on these items with University of Chester History students. For a new second-year History module – History at Work – Liz has invited students to research the items, design an exhibition, and deliver an Object of the Month talk.

Members may wish to visit the Grosvenor Museum in March 2023 to see the exhibition. Here they will discover how these objects link Cologne and Chester with the foundation of

Stockport Grammar School and celebrate the marriage of Charles II and Catherine of Braganza.



Late 17th–early 18th century silver-gilt posy ring from Tattenhall with the inscription 'In trust be just'.

[LVPL-3B1132](#)



17th-century silver seal matrix from Farndon with motif of pierced heart, as also seen on cufflinks of the period. [LVPL-B42673](#)

The Wrenbury Hoard: A Small Hoard but a Strong Gesture

A small Bronze Age hoard consisting of a gold ring and six copper alloy items discovered near Wrenbury in 2018 is a rare find, offering an almost unique insight into Bronze Age Cheshire and raises questions about its date and composition.

The hoard was found by a metal detectorist on farmland close to the headwaters of the River Weaver near Wrenbury, Cheshire East, in January 2018, and is almost unique in consisting of a solid penannular gold ring, five pieces of copper alloy casting waste or miscast material, and a distorted and unfinished copper alloy penannular ring. After being reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme and declared Treasure (2018 T41), it was acquired by Nantwich Museum. A brief note on the ring appeared in *Cheshire Past* in 2018 Part 2 (Jones & Oakden 2019, 163 and 166, illus VI.2.3). Full details are available on the PAS website ([LVPL-822B3B](https://www.pas.org.uk/record/LVPL-822B3B)).

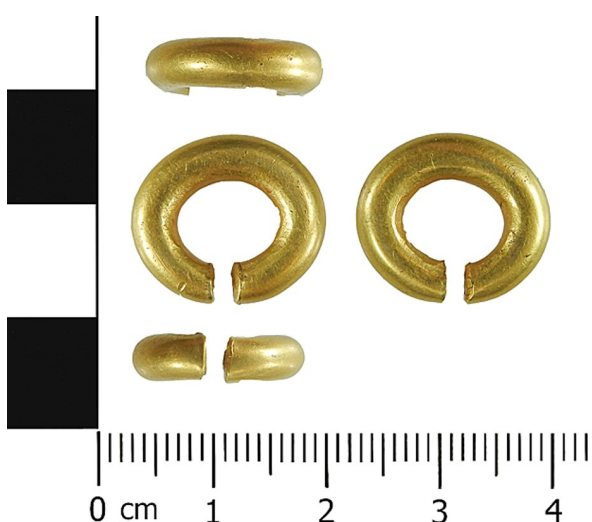
The gold ring belongs to a class of artefact termed 'hair-rings' and 'ring-money'. Despite the name, it is likely that they were actually personal adornments, possibly worn on the ears or nose, rather than being hair ornaments or items of trade or exchange. 'Hair-rings' are rare in Cheshire but have been discovered in significant numbers elsewhere: almost 130 are known in Ireland and 100 in England. There is also a small but growing number from Scotland and a handful from Wales. On the near continent, there is a significant scatter, especially from burials, across Belgium, north-east France and the Netherlands. However, the copper alloy objects associated with the Wrenbury ring are more unusual and deserve further research.

Few examples of 'hair-rings' have been dated through archaeological investigation or radiocarbon dating, but the continental burials and Scottish and Irish hoard associations have suggested a date belonging to the Ewart Park phase of the late Bronze Age, between 1000 and 800 BC. However, evidence for their earlier currency has been growing. A number of simple 'hair-rings' have been found in a gold hoard near Cirencester directly associated with twisted torc and bracelet fragments belonging to the Penard phase of the middle Bronze Age. In Ireland, 'hair-rings' discovered at excavated sites at Rathgall, Co Wicklow, and Ballypriorbeg, Co Tyrone, have recently been radiocarbon dated to 1290–1040 cal BC and 1373–1019 cal BC respectively. The Wrenbury ring may therefore be dated to the middle or late Bronze Age (c 1300–800 BC) and exemplify a widespread trade in gold that included Cheshire at this time.

The copper alloy fragments are likely to be casting waste that solidified at the top of a two-piece clay mould after the molten metal had filled the object-shaped void below. Some of the fragments are layered, and two fragments are melted together. Fragments of casting waste were often reused; they do turn up in base metal hoards of the Bronze Age but are rarely found in gold depositions of the period.

Andrew Reynolds with thanks to Kate Dobson and Nantwich Museum

Jones, B & Oakden, V 2019. VI: Cheshire past in 2018 part 2: finds reported under the Portable Antiquities Scheme. *J Chester Archaeol Soc new ser* **89**, 161–83



Items from the Wrenbury Hoard. Above the gold ring
Below the copper alloy ring. Images © National
Museums Liverpool



Chester Cathedral Works Department

The department is the primary centre of heritage skills training in the north-west of England and has had a busy start to 2023.

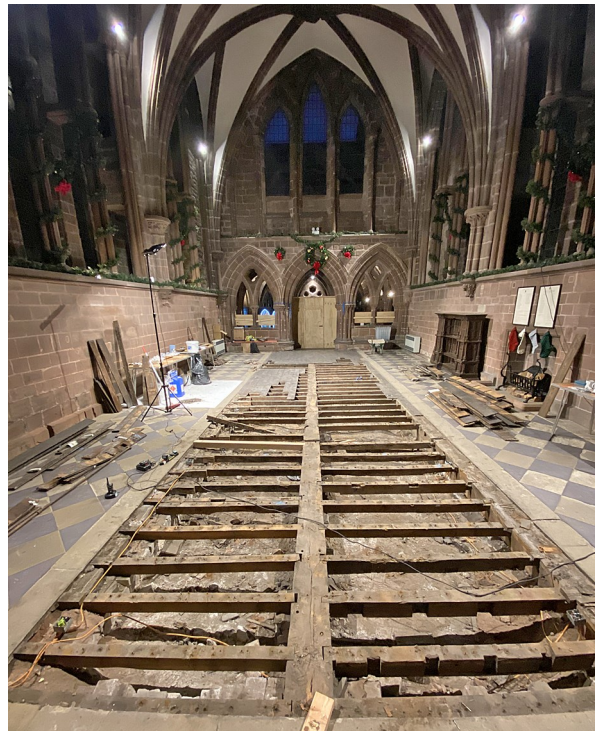
The Cathedral Works Department – made up of stonemasons, a conservator, a collections manager, and other heritage skills professionals – is tasked with conserving and advising on the use of the impressive 900-year-old red sandstone building. The team engage with local and national audiences with regular outreach opportunities, including our popular Heritage Discovery Day.

The team have started the year with conservation work on the floor of the Chapter House. The Chapter House was the location of the monks' daily 'chapter' or meeting, where they discussed the running of the abbey. It was constructed in the first half of the thirteenth century and has particularly striking architectural features. The Works Department is conserving this space with a three-phased approach:

- Lifting each wooden board to assess the extent of damage
- Identifying areas of stone which require replacement or other work
- Replacing and/or repairing materials to ensure that the floor is safe and cared for

Our masons are looking forward to starting the first whole-building maintenance programme in over 100 years. As the first phase in a multi-year project, work taking place includes full checks on each section of the building, raking out and repointing mortar joints and replacing masonry where required, ensuring that the friable Cheshire red sandstone that the building is made of will remain intact for years to come. We have welcomed a new stonemason to our expanding team. Robin joins us as an experienced artist with a particular passion for sculpture and is graciously funded by the Hamish Ogston Foundation via the Cathedrals Workshop Fellowship (CWF). He is particularly enjoying working on and caring for a living building and has been getting a thorough bedding in (pun intended!) with the basics of historic masonry.

Our Collections Manager has been working on improving the bank of information we have for our historic collections, including refining our understanding of parts of our collection held off-site in places like Cheshire Archives and the Grosvenor Museum. We have also been developing our partnerships, including with the University of Chester on heritage skills in the



Repairs to the Chapter House floor



Deteriorating stonework of the south aisle

workplace as part of their undergraduate degree course and improving access to the collections via VR modelling. Finally, we have been putting together exciting exhibitions to fill our new display cases in the building, including one on manuscript fragments (out until Sunday 16 April) and another later in the year in celebration of the Chester Mystery Plays.

You can follow the Works Department of Chester Cathedral on Facebook (Chester Cathedral Works Department), Twitter (@ChesterWorks) and Instagram (@the_works_department).

Mesolithic Hunter-Gatherers at Lake Flixton

Excavations by University of Chester staff at Lake Flixton in the Vale of Pickering have produced nationally significant finds of woodwork and animal bone.

During our 2021/2 lecture series, we were treated to a fascinating talk by Dr Barry Taylor of the Department of History and Archaeology at the University of Chester on 'The first conservationists? Land management and environmental impacts in the 10th millennium BC'. Underpinning Barry's lecture was evidence from excavations at sites around Lake Flixton, in the eastern Vale of Pickering, north Yorkshire.

At the end of the last Ice Age (the Devensian 26,000–12,600 years ago), glacial meltwater created lakes in the vale that in time became the focus for Mesolithic communities attracted by the rich range of resources provided by the lakes and the surrounding land. As the water retreated, peat bogs developed, providing the perfect conditions for preserving rare organic remains that attest the activities of these communities.

Most famous amongst the excavated sites is Star Carr (<http://www.starcarr.com/index.html>), originally excavated by the Cambridge prehistorian Grahame Clark and more recently by the [Vale of Pickering Research Trust](#) and the Universities of York, Manchester and Chester, funded by a major European Research Council grant. Such is the fame of Lake Flixton that it has its own collection of stories in *Current Archaeology* (<https://archaeology.co.uk/tag/lake-flixton>). Barry played a significant role in these excavations and their publication.

Inspired by the work carried out around the lake edge, Barry has been co-directing further excavations with Amy Gray Jones (University of Chester) and Nick Overton (University of Manchester) on one of the islands within the former lake. These have been funded by their respective universities and by the Royal Archaeological Institute, the Prehistoric Society and the Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society (SAHS) and have involved students and graduates from Chester and Manchester, as well as volunteers from the SAHS. Chester Archaeological Society Chair Tom Pickles and Council member Katherine Wilson were lucky to visit the excavation in Summer 2022 and see the exceptional finds that were being unearthed.

Out of the peat emerged evidence for flora and fauna, including bones from elk, red deer, beavers and water birds, along with parts of hunting weapons – antler projectile points, some decorated – and an internationally significant assemblage of woodworking debris. Crucially, only selected parts of the animals and of the deconstructed weapons had been deposited in a confined area. This suggests that social conventions shaped the killing and disposing of animals. All of the remains are rare, but among them a decorated antler point is one of only a handful known from Britain.

Unsurprisingly, the work of Barry, Amy, Nick, their students and volunteers was featured in the latest BBC series of *Digging for Britain*, episode 5, available on iPlayer and well worth a watch!



Barbed antler projectile point



Excavation of artefacts on the lake bed

A New Example of Prehistoric Rock Art from Cheshire?

A block of sandstone engraved with a spiral motif found in Delamere Forest may add to Cheshire's few examples of late prehistoric rock art, but its dating poses problems.

Early in 2021, a member of the Sandstone Ridge Trust found a block of sandstone in a newly recut track in the north-western part of Delamere Forest. The stone was engraved with a spiral motif typical of late Neolithic and early Bronze Age carvings in the 'Atlantic' rock art tradition. There is only one other certain example of such art from Cheshire, from Eddisbury hillfort, and it is rare generally across the Dee–Mersey–Severn catchments.

However, the motif had been engraved with a metal tool rather than pecked with a stone, as is usual for such carvings, raising the possibility that it is relatively recent. Nevertheless, the weathering suggests that it is indeed ancient. The carving may have been carried out during the late Bronze Age or early Iron Age, when this style of art was still prevalent but metal tools were available.

A full report, by George Nash, David Joyce and Peter Winn, will appear in the next volume of our *Journal*.



The carved stone as found in Delamere Forest.
Photo G H Nash

Chester Gateway Strategic Regeneration Framework

This scheme, recently consulted on by Cheshire West and Chester Council, comprises the area between the Inner Ring Road (St Oswald's Way), the Millennium Greenway, Ermine Road, Lightfoot Street and City Road, thus encompassing the railway station and maintenance depot and the planned site of the new Cheshire Archives buildings.

The main proposals are:

- A 'Mobility Hub' and multi-storey car park at the west end of Chester station and an improved station forecourt
- A pedestrian and cycle bridge parallel to the existing Hoole Road bridge
- Making Brook Street and City Road more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists
- A new link from the Millennium Greenway to the Flookersbrook area

- Concentrating the scattered surface parking in the area into a single multi-storey car park and redeveloping the sites released, primarily for housing

Plans of this type should be inherently preferable to *ad-hoc* development, so long as they are carried through. In this case, it is the proposals regarding traffic, parking and travel that provide the 'glue' that holds the other proposals together and make them strategic, and it is for these that the funding has yet to be secured! Moreover, it is not just a matter of 'doing the right thing' but 'doing things right'.

We have responded as follows:

- A 'Mobility Hub' and multi-storey car park at the west end of the station are welcome in principle and could improve the appearance of the station. However, the capacity

of the car park could be limited; Cheshire West and Chester Council rejected another proposal for a car park on the site in 2011 under pressure from English Heritage because of its size and impact on the appearance of the station.

- Appreciation of and concern for the splendid Grade II* Listed station building seem to be limited to its external façade. Much more thought needs to be given to the interior, brutally 'modernised' in 1960, but no amount of tinkering with the concourse alone will remedy the damage done sixty years ago. A comprehensive, long-term plan of restoration and rationalisation needs to be prepared.
- Two-way through vehicle traffic needs to be maintained on City Road and Station Road for access, but greater priority needs to be given to pedestrians and cyclists.
- To promote 'active travel' to and from the station, there need to be better crossings of

the Inner Ring Road to City Road at the Bars and from Frodsham Street to Brook Street. The proposed new footbridge over the railway would obviously be very welcome, but needs to be carefully designed. There will also need to be more attractive crossings of Hoole Road at each end of the bridge. For cycleways, the emphasis should not be on single streets but on complete networks – cohesive grids that enable travel from anywhere to everywhere. A holistic view needs to be taken not only of the 'Gateway' area but of the city as a whole for walking, cycling and motor vehicles.

- Better use of the land currently used for car parks is certainly desirable, but it is unlikely that they can be concentrated into a single MSCP, as they serve a variety of reasonable needs.

You can read the proposals [here](#) and our full response [here](#).

Grants and Awards

We shall be making the following grants and awards in 2023:

Undergraduate Dissertation Prize

Our annual prize of £100 for the best Final Year dissertation in the Department 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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