

President Dr Paul Booth FRHistS

The Chester Antiquary

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

2025 Issue 2 – September

Looking Back, Looking Forward

A Busy Summer

The past summer has been a busy and successful time for the Society. Officers contributed a wide variety of events to the Chester Heritage Festival and the University of Chester's Festival of Ideas, largely organised by our past Vice-Chair Katherine Wilson: from the navigability of the River Dee in Roman times, through virtual reality reconstructions of the amphitheatre and in-depth tours of Roman Chester and the archaeological site at Heronbridge, to new thoughts about the origins of Chester's Rows.

June saw the launch of the invaluable *Historical Map of Chester*, researched by our past Chair

Tom Pickles with help from students at Chester University and input from Society members and others. Thanks to our Excursions Secretary, Pauline Clarke, members have also been able to enjoy outings to Alan Garner's Old Medicine House, near Holmes Chapel, and to the excavation of a Bronze Age ring-cairn by the Clwydian Range Archaeology Group at Brynegrllwys.

We have responded to five consultations: on habitat creation and heritage safeguarding at Shotwick medieval deer park, Saughall; the design details of a welcome rebuilding of Upton High School; the conversion of a unit at Barons Quay, Northwich, into a new market; on the Council's Local Transport Plan; and on an Issues and Options paper for a new Local Plan.

Autumn Meetings

Our autumn season of meetings starts with a preview of the 'Gladiators of Britain' exhibition at the Grosvenor Museum. We shall also be hosting one or more public online lectures in connection with this exhibition on behalf of the museum service. This season's events, organised by Pauline Clarke and Liz Montgomery, feature a greater mixture of lectures, visits and excursions than in the past and more will be held face-to-face than in recent years. Let us know whether you like it! We are also looking forward to events as part of the '#Rowvember' festival, led by the Council's conservation officer, James Dixon.

To keep up to date with all that we are doing, check your emails for specific events and follow us on social media for more general information and reminders.

Grosvenor Museum
Part of West Cheshire Museums
Cheshire West and Chester

A British Museum Partnership Exhibition with Colchester and Ipswich Museums

GLADIATORS OF BRITAIN

20 September 2025 - 25 January 2026

Grosvenor Museum
27 Grosvenor St, Chester CH1 2DD

Free Entry

www.grosvenormuseum.westcheshiremuseums.co.uk

Photograph: © Colchester and Ipswich Museums

The British Museum
Colchester+Ipswich Museums

Supported at the Grosvenor Museum by Avanti West Coast and Visit Chester
Supported by the Dorset Foundation

Handbridge Community Archaeology Project

Members may recall that some time ago Caroline Pudney from the University of Chester held an event to encourage a community archaeology project in Handbridge, an idea that was enthusiastically welcomed by residents. The idea went on the 'back burner' for a while, but we shall be meeting Caroline shortly to hear her latest ideas and see what we can do to support this venture.

Help for Teachers?

We occasionally receive enquiries from teachers and parents asking if we can help with children's activities. Much of this is currently beyond our capabilities, but it may be possible for members to lead classroom sessions on subjects on which

they are knowledgeable. Andrew Reynolds has set up a small working party to see what we can do.

Journal

The next issue of our journal, volume 95, will probably appear early in the new year and will contain a wide variety of articles, including a new discovery of prehistoric rock art near Daresbury, the remains of a Roman farmstead at Radway Green, east of Crewe, discoveries relating to the churches at Wallasey and Woodchurch (Wirral), a summary report on the excavation of Roman buildings and the medieval St Mary's Nunnery on the old Police Headquarters site in Chester, and a note commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the discovery of Lindow Man.

Council: New Members Urgently Needed

Our last AGM saw considerable changes in the makeup of the Society's Council: Tom Pickles and Katherine Wilson stood down at the end of their terms as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively, and we thank them warmly for their stimulating and energetic leadership. I have agreed to serve as Interim Chair for a year, to give time for a younger candidate to be found, but we are currently without a Vice-Chair. Hugh Bray stood down after serving two terms as Treasurer and Membership Secretary; in recognition of his exemplary administration of our affairs, Hugh was elected as one of our Distinguished Members, and we are delighted that both he and Tom have agreed to continue to serve as Ordinary Members of Council. Pauline Clarke has stepped up as Treasurer and Liz Montgomery as Membership Secretary.

At our next AGM we need to elect a new Chair, and Clare Dudman, Julian Baum and Andrew Reynolds will all have come to the end of their first terms of office as Secretary, Webmaster and Newsletter Editor. In addition, some officers are currently fulfilling multiple roles.

For the Society to survive, we urgently need other members to join Council. If you are interested, please get in touch (see back page for contact details); by no means all of the work requires a deep knowledge of archaeology or history, it need not be burdensome, and plenty of support is always available. You do not need to wait until the next AGM: we can co-opt up to three members to Council during the year, so why not give it a try?

Peter Carrington

Chair, Chester Archaeological Society

Meetings 2025/6

2025

September 21st (Sunday)
11:00am

Members event: 'Gladiators of Britain' exhibition members preview at the Grosvenor Museum. Light refreshments will be provided; *please advise attendance by 14 September for catering purposes.*

October 9th (Thursday)
7:30pm

Public lecture: "'The Colchester Vase'" by Dr Glynn Davies, formerly Senior Curator of Colchester and Ipswich Museum, now Curator of Archaeology at York Museums Trust. Via Zoom. *The Society is pleased to host this online lecture on behalf of West Cheshire Museums in connection with the 'Gladiators of Britain' exhibition at the Grosvenor Museum. The 'Colchester Vase' is one of the most important depictions of gladiators from Roman Britain.*

October 22nd (Wednesday)
11:00am

Guided tour: St Johns Church, Chester. *Meet at the church just before 11:00am.*

November 19th (Wednesday)
7:30pm

Lecture: 'Victorian Housing' by Gareth Carr, Senior Lecturer, University of Wrexham. Grosvenor Museum Lecture Theatre.

December 10th (Wednesday)
7:30pm

Lecture: 'The Making of the Three Ravens' by Clare Dudman, CAS Secretary. A buffet will be provided for members at the start of the evening. *Please advise attendance by 3rd December for catering purposes.*

2026

January 21st (Wednesday)
7:30pm

Lecture: 'German War Graves and the British: The Great Exhumation Mission of 1962' by Professor Tim Grady, University of Chester. Grosvenor Museum Lecture Theatre.

February 18th (Wednesday)
7:30pm

Lecture: 'Nesscliffe excavations' by Gary Lock, Emeritus Professor of Archaeology, at the University of Oxford. Via Zoom.

March 18th (Wednesday)
11:00am

Excursion: Saulton Hall Long Barrow. A chance to see a new way of handling cremation that references an old practice. *Meet at Saulton Hall, near Wem.*

March 26th (Thursday)
1:30pm

Excursion: 'Treasure: History Unearthed'. A curator-led tour of an exhibition at the Museum of Liverpool. *Cost £15, including general entry to the museum.*

April 22nd (Wednesday)
7:30pm

AGM followed by lecture: 'The Portable Antiquities Scheme' by Heather Beeton, FLO for Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside. Grosvenor Museum lecture theatre.

May

Excursion: to be arranged.

June

Excursion: to be arranged.

Note: In order to plan for catering for the September and December events, please advise attendance to excursions@chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk one week before the event. Thank you.

Members will receive emails with more information about meetings and, where appropriate, will be invited to register for Zoom links.

‘Gladiators of Britain’ Exhibition

Chester’s Grosvenor Museum will be hosting the ‘Gladiators of Britain’ exhibition from 20 September 2025 until 25 January 2026.

This exhibition, bringing together some of the country’s most important objects on the topic, will look at the history of gladiatorial fights in Britain, who gladiators were and the importance of spectacle in Roman culture.

Exploring Roman traditions across the province and In our local area, visitors can follow in the footsteps of the gladiators who fought in the amphitheatres of Britain.

Occupying Britain for over 350 years, the Romans introduced many aspects of their culture including gladiatorial fights for public entertainment. Events in the amphitheatre, including wild beasts and enslaved fighters, are among the most enduring aspects of Roman culture that still capture the public imagination today.

‘Gladiators of Britain’ will look at the social position of enslaved fighters, who were both vilified and admired as the celebrities of their day. Considered as *infamis* in Roman law and society, they were excluded from having the rights of other citizens. Visitors will also find out about the many different classes of fighters and how they were ranked, including beast-fighters known as *venatores*, who clashed with predators including lions and bears.

Showcasing the best gladiatorial artefacts from the British Museum and Colchester and Ipswich Museum collections, alongside local finds, you will have a unique opportunity to explore this fascinating aspect of Roman culture.

Top right: Altar dedicated to the goddess Nemesis. © West Cheshire Museums

Middle right: ‘Colchester Vase’. © Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service



Bottom left and middle: Bone and terracotta figurines of gladiators. © 2024 British Museum

Bottom right: Intaglio showing a fallen gladiator. © West Cheshire Museums



Liz Montgomery

More Prehistoric Rock Art from North Cheshire, 'Lindow Man' Forty Years on, and much more!

Volume 95 of our journal will be published early in the new year and will contain a wide variety of research articles, plus the usual annual reviews. It would spoil the surprise if we gave too much information in advance, but here are snippets from three of them.

More Prehistoric Rock Art from North Cheshire

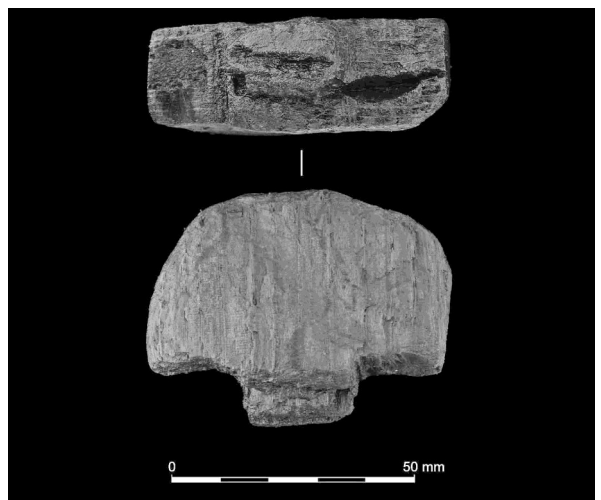
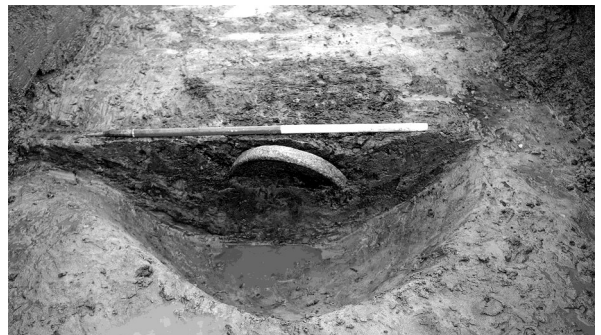
Cheshire is a county that has hitherto been poor in recorded examples of prehistoric rock art. Readers may remember the recent discovery of a stone with a spiral motif, found on a track in Delamere Forest and published in volume 93 of our journal for 2023. More *in-situ* panels with a variety of motifs have now been found at Daresbury, at a site overlooking the Mersey, inviting comparisons with examples from Willaston, Wirral and the Calderstones, Liverpool. The discovery leads to a re-consideration of the problems surrounding the carving techniques used on these stones and an analysis of the significance of their siting.



Recently discovered panel of rock art at Daresbury overlooking the Mersey, including a cup-mark, serpentiform, dished areas and numerous peck-marks, plus numerous modern graffiti. © T Cockrell

A Roman Rural Settlement at Radway Green

Excavations by Wessex Archaeology in advance of commercial development at Radway Green, about four miles east of Crewe, revealed two ditches, a large pit and possible buildings remains associated with Roman pottery, probably representing the remains of an enclosed farmstead of a type increasingly common across Cheshire, although prehistoric and Roman remains in this a particular area remain rare. What was unusual about this site was the presence of two pieces of worked wood and an upper quernstone made from Millstone Grit in the pit.



Radway Green: quernstone *in situ* in the pit (above); handle of possible wooden toy sword (below).

© Wessex Archaeology

The two pieces of wood appear to be the handle and top of the blade of a miniature sword or, less likely, a weaving wand used to compact lines of newly woven thread. These may well not represent the casual discard of a broken object: the excavators cite the discovery of a miniature sword alongside the burial of a six-month-old infant from Roman Gaul, which suggests some cultural significance, while symbolic meanings have been attributed to quernstones in prehistoric and perhaps Roman contexts. This may therefore be a votive deposit that as yet we do not yet fully understand.

'Lindow Man' Forty Years On

It is hard for some of us to appreciate that it is now over forty years since the discovery of Lindow Man, in 1984! However, this body (Lindow II), now on display in the British Museum, is not the only one to be found in Lindow Moss.

The first, Lindow I, found in 1983, was originally thought to be female but is now thought to be male. Two more, Lindow III and IV, were found in 1987 and 1988. Lindow II and IV are now believed to represent a single adult male.

All the Lindow bodies appear to have met a violent end and were placed or cast into the watery peatland, but who they were and how and why they were killed have given rise to much speculation.



Rescue excavation of Lindow Man (Lindow II) in 1984.

The Cheshire Historic Environment Record have recently been working to digitise the considerable archive of records relating to the Lindow finds, and this has resulted in the discovery of additional information that helps to refine our understanding and will in the future be more easily accessible.

Portable Antiquities Scheme Finds Study Grant

The Portable Antiquities Scheme collects a vast amount of new information every year but Finds Liaison Officers rarely have the opportunity to do anything with it on a local scale. The Society publishes some statistics and highlights the most outstanding finds in the annual summary in its journal but also offers a grant of up to £1000 every two years to encourage the study of particular periods and topics, the results to be published in our journal.

Previous awards have permitted the publication of coin hoards and of early medieval finds from the county in volumes [87](#) and [90](#) of our journal. Some suggested topics for future research include:

- A review of Bronze Age material, as existing reviews are now very outdated.
- A review of Roman brooches, possibly also taking into account north Wales, to build on early work by Rob Philpott and Frances McIntosh on the Wirral brooch and other possible regional brooch profiles.
- The Sandbach lithics assemblage, to be published in the annual summary forthcoming in this year's journal.

- An assessment of medieval religious objects such as ampullae and pilgrim badges, including examples in museum collections.

The '[Treasure: History Unearthed](#)' exhibition currently on display at the Museum of Liverpool may also provide ideas. Further ideas and guidance can be found on the [Research](#) page of the Portable Antiquities Scheme website,

If you are interested in taking advantage of this scheme, see the application form on the [Grants & Awards](#) page of our website. You should also discuss your ideas with the Finds Liaison Officer for Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside, [Heather Beeton](#).

Rowvember 2025

Cheshire West and Chester Built Environment Officer James Dixon gives a foretaste of this year's events.

Coordinated by the Heritage Chester team, Rowvember will be returning soon for another month-long celebration of the history, architecture, and community of Chester's Rows. As well as a Building of the Day feature going out on social media, the 2025 Rowvember programme will include:

- New tours looking at the historical development of the Rows and their contemporary heritage
- Pop-up art and heritage events and displays
- Performances on and around the Rows
- Planning and repair workshops for Rows building owners and tenants
- A new pub trail, featuring experts in different aspects of Chester's history waiting to chat to you over a drink in venues across the Rows
- Craft and art workshops for all ages

The Heritage Chester team are also working on creating other events that will fill the month with fun and interesting Rows-related stuff. The Rowvember calendar is coming together, so keep an eye on the Heritage Chester website and Heritage Chester social media for updates.

If any members of the Society have an idea for a Rowvember event that they would like to put on, please get in touch with the organisers at info@heritagechester.co.uk.

HERITAGE CHESTER

love our heritage

The Grosvenor Museum Database Needs You!

Our former Vice-Chair Katherine Wilson explains more about the 'Objects Resource Database' for the Grosvenor Museum that she consulted on during the University of Chester's Festival of Ideas and asks for your input.

Behind the wonderful, internationally significant Grosvenor Museum collections lie the records necessary to support each object – acquisition files and the museum's database.

Like many local museums in Britain, the Grosvenor utilises Modes collection software for its database: <https://www.modes.org.uk/>.

Despite the many strengths of this software, it is accessible only to authorised museum staff. This creates limitations. First, it is not easy for volunteers to be given access to create new records or add to existing ones. Second, it is not possible for members of the public to search the database and discover the objects held in the collections.

To confront these issues, with University of Chester Knowledge Exchange funding, I collaborated with what was then the University Informatics Centre and our Computer Science colleague Helen Southworth to design a model for making the database public and to begin programming a test version of this model.

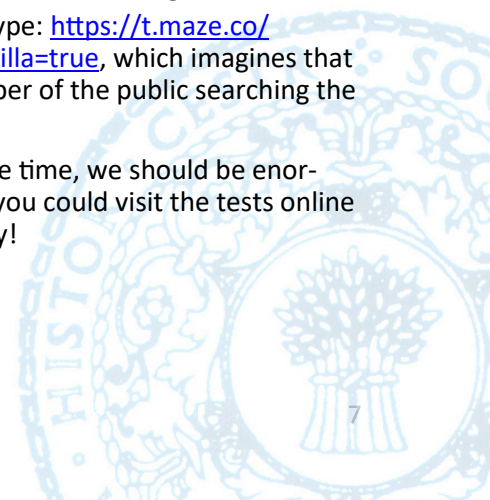
Building on this work, we are working with Liz Montgomery, Senior Curator, to put together a National Heritage Lottery Fund application to complete a final version.

To discover how people interact with the current design, we therefore have an interactive test, which tracks how users respond to the design. There are two versions of the test:

- An admin prototype: <https://t.maze.co/37790624?guerilla=true>. This imagines that you are a trained volunteer who might create new records or amend existing ones.
- A public prototype: <https://t.maze.co/37789808?guerilla=true>, which imagines that you are a member of the public searching the records.

If you can spare the time, we should be enormously grateful if you could visit the tests online and give them a try!

Katherine Wilson



'What the Romans Would Have Wanted'

The Chester Heritage Festival and the University's Festival of Ideas: Personal reflections by our Secretary Clare Dudman

There were aerobics and flamenco in the amphitheatre in this year's Heritage Festival. There were quiet walks for the neurodiverse, no-steps walks for the differently mobile, and for those with aspirations to be a twenty-first century pilgrim, a pilgrimage from St Plegmund's Well to the churches of the surrounding countryside. Children could emulate stained-glass artists in card and coloured tissue paper or assemble mosaics, just as the Romans once did in the fortress baths, and after dark their parents and guardians could leave them to the care of the curators of the Grosvenor Museum for the entire night to help solve mysteries.

For twelve quid you could be shown the relics of the Welsh, the Georgians, the pubs, the Gothic, the courts and lanes, or the footsteps of the condemned or (allegedly) restless ghosts by a Green Badge Guide.

On one day, Peter Carrington took a gang of people to a field in Heronbridge to imagine the bustling Roman lanes and houses leading to the dock by the river, and then, several hundred years later, a battle and the bodies of young men with horrible wounds laid out in trenches – Northumbrians fighting the Welsh with monks from Bangor on Dee cheering them on with prayers.

Then, on another day, he went out again – the day hot and exhausting – to lead a treasure hunt for signs the Romans left behind: their monumental wall, the angle towers, hypocausts, their amphitheatre (quiet now) and their shrine to their legionary colours and their god of quarrymen.



Participants in the Roman Chester tour heading for Northgate Gardens.

At the chapel of Chester University, Aleta Doran described the work of artist Trena Cox. Throughout her life, Trena Cox was commissioned to make stained glass windows in the chapel to commemorate the college lecturers, and Aleta showed how these windows revealed the development of Trena Cox's work through time.

At the Albion pub, Mike Graham, a Civil War reenactor, fought heat and the bells of dancing Morris Men outside to tell us how the citizens fought off the advances of some more puritanical foes 350 years ago.



Mike Graham showing ammunition belt used in the Civil War.

On another day I learnt about the suburb of Saltney and admired the dreams of the post-World War One architects of Buddicom Park with Linda and Stewart Shuttleworth and Paul Hyde, while on another Ann Marie Curtis led us around the Parish of St Werburgh and talked about the Catholic fight for survival, and architect Tony Barton described more recent history – less than a lifetime ago – and the timber-imprinted concrete of a Row re-imagined for the twentieth century, and a bell-tower bristling tiles.

This Heritage Festival, the tenth, now with the Society's Jane Hebblewhite at the helm, started with bubbles and giant puppets on Exchange

Square outside the Picturehouse and ended inside the theatre with a talk on a real crime case of the past. It was in some part wild and in some part wonderful, and even if it wasn't quite what the Romans had in mind when they built the amphitheatre, I think the citizens of Chester thoroughly enjoyed it.

Heritage is one thing, and ideas, of course, are something else. I am not sure whose idea it was to have a festival celebrating ideas, but I think it is a great one, and it is the Society's Katherine Wilson who is in charge of delivering it for Chester.

There are ideas about facts, about theories, about different approaches and discoveries, and the festival dealt with all these: how to operate a museum, what's the origin of Cheshire names, which Magna Carta was the important one, and what motivated the author Isabella Banks and the doctor John Haygarth.

I read once that the great French mathematician Henri Poincaré thought that facts whizzed around the mind and that great ideas arise when two unrelated facts happened to collide, and I think that this is what this sort of festival is for. Someone, listening to all these assorted ideas might one day combine them to come up with something great of their own.

Ideas, then, can generate ideas, and all sorts of people can have them: from headline speaker Natalie Hayes who gave us a TED-like talk on a brand new appraisal of Greek goddesses; to lecturers from the university, like the Society's Tom Pickles who led a workshop on how to use his historical map in teaching; or our chair Peter



Carrington, who presented his innovative ideas on the origin of the Chester Rows; or our webmaster Julian Baum, who not only gave two VR workshops on the Roman amphitheatre, but also led a discussion on new ideas on reconstructing the Roman river channel. It was exciting to listen to them all, and I do think that as I walked home all these ideas were spinning around inside my head. I was hoping that a great insight like Poincaré's might follow, and although I am sorry to report that so far nothing has done so, I am sure that it is just a matter of time.

Below: Natalie Hayes talking about Greek goddesses at the Town Hall.



The Amphitheatre VR Project

Our Webmaster Julian Baum gives some background to the highly successful workshops that he delivered at the Festival of Ideas.

The technology that drives the electronic gaming industry is being brought to bear on Chester's Roman amphitheatre. The Amphitheatre VR, a Chester University project, led by Dr Caroline Pudney with research partners Alex Foster and Julian Baum, is about developing an interactive experience to explore Chester's Severan amphitheatre.

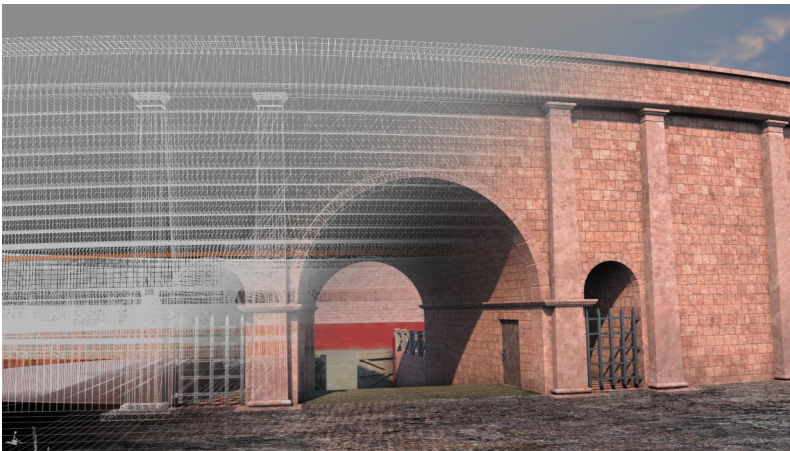
This exploration will include the ability to move around the arena, entrances and gates, seating banks and *Nemeseum*. Expanding on his work with Historic England, Julian is rebuilding the original components and developing new materials to give the interior of the amphitheatre a realistic, used look. In addition, crowd systems are in development to populate the seating banks and the arena.

The project is in its earliest phase, but the aspiration is to extend the exploration to other parts of third-century Chester – the most complete stone

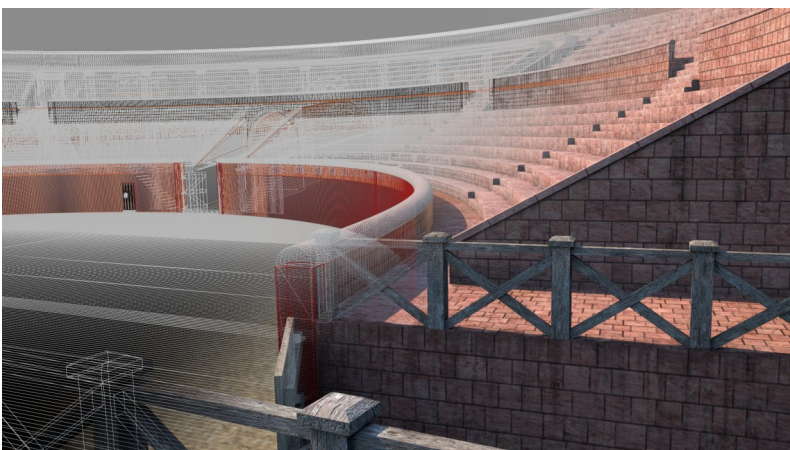
-built phase of the fortress – an ambitious goal and one which will not only offer educational opportunities but also a platform to raise the profile of historical Chester in popular awareness.

The 2025 Festival of Ideas offered an opportunity to present some embryonic material to the public in one of the VR suites at the Riverside Campus of Chester University. A representative from IMITO, a London-based company offering AI-driven avatars, also presented their initial developments of characters able to answer questions via the use of AI – an interesting concept that was well received by visitors to the session, as was the early work on the ability to move around the amphitheatre. What were proposed as two one-hour sessions merged into a single four-hour session, with much discussion and useful feedback – a very positive experience for a very exciting project.

Julian Baum



The east entrance of the Severan amphitheatre. The points and polygons that define all the elements of the structure are here overlaid onto the finished render. These so-called wireframe views are a means to assess the flow and density of data, and point to areas that may need optimising.



The arena viewed from the south side of the east entrance. On the far side can be seen the north entrance and the door to the *Nemeseum*. The density of points and polygons comprising the seating banks is clearly visible.

Mapping Historic Chester – A Learning Curve

Our former Chair and Vice-Chair, Tom Pickles and Katherine Wison, reflect on the creation of this valuable resource and what it taught them about the evolution of the city.

After a year or so of intense collaboration, consultation, and correspondence, it was a delight (and relief!) to be able to launch the new Historic Towns Trust *Historical Map of Chester* online in June of this year. Co-created with the Historic Towns Trust, funded by the University of Chester, and – crucially – the result of contributions by the Chester Archaeological Society, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies and the Grosvenor Museum, the development of the map and text has been a steep but enjoyable learning curve.

Above all, the map encouraged us to think about the influence of topography and hydrography on the historical development of Chester, an insight which runs through the accompanying text. However, the text is organised, by convention, site-by-site, so parts of overall picture are not easy to spot.

A key to understanding the city is the strategic location chosen for the Roman fortress. It was sited on a sandstone outcrop forming a 'hogback' of land, adjacent to the lowest bridgeable point on the Dee, where the river flows westwards through a restricted gorge and loops northwards to form a natural harbour. In the long term, this position facilitated Anglo-Saxon and medieval urban defences utilising the River Dee as a natural boundary and encouraged Chester's role as a seaport. However, it also constrained urban development, with the Dee as a

natural boundary on two sides and suburbs therefore most easily growing to the north and east.

Following abandonment of the Roman fortress, the Anglo-Saxons constructed a *burh* or fortified town in the tenth century. This seems to have involved extending the northern and eastern defences to the river and reusing but adapting elements of the Roman street plan to create a new grid pattern. After the Norman Conquest, a similar area was defined by the full line of the City Walls, completed by the end of the twelfth century.

The implications of this Roman, Anglo-Saxon and medieval activity were manifold. The first was that the city was inextricably bound up with its role as a seaport

A second was that it had to adapt to the changing circumstances of the river. St John's Church and its corpus of tenth-century wheel-headed crosses have been associated with a group of 'viking' traders and a possible tenth-century 'strand' on the river below the church. By the medieval period the principal quays were to the south, near the Shipgate, and the west, near the Watergate, but shifting sands and the silting of the Dee mean that it is now very difficult to imagine these. Outports were created: the Portpool at the north-western limit of the city liberties from the 1200s to the 1400s, at Shot-

Extract from the *Historical Map of Chester*, showing the north-west part of the city. Note the open ground surviving at the northern end of the Crofts, with the infirmary and gaol to the south; the progressive shift of maritime access, from the Water Tower to New Crane Wharf to the Dee Basin; and the way that the canal and railway circumvent the medieval city on its rocky outcrop.



wick from 1449, and then at Burton, Denhall, Neston, Gayton, Heswall, Redbank or Dawpool (in Thurstaston) and Point of Ayr (in Flintshire). From 1674 it became clear that an artificial channel was required to ensure seagoing vessels could reach the city, fulfilled by the Dee Cut created from 1734 to 1738

Urban geography necessarily adapted to these changes. The Water Tower was created from 1322 to 1325, probably to oversee those ships landing on the west side of the city, but this role was undermined by the silting of the Dee within a century. The existence of the Portpool fostered the Portpool Lane (Garden Lane) and bridge as a key communication route from the North Gate to the north-west. The junction of the Dee Cut with New Crane Wharf made this area to the north-west of the medieval and early modern city a new focus for trade and industry.

A third point is that the city had to exploit topographically constrained natural resources to support its population for most of its history – the springs at Boughton for a water supply, and the waters of the Dee at the causeway to yield fish from weirs and to power mills for processing cereals and cloth, again features which were superseded and are easily overlooked.

A fourth observation is that this location and the changes to the Dee, and the evolution from Roman fortress via Anglo-Saxon *burh* to medieval city resulted in some areas being free from development for long periods, some of which are now hard to spot: most obviously the Roodee with its origins as a tidal saltmarsh; the Crofts were a broad strip of land between the former Roman defences and the western City Walls which remained open at their north end. The Gorse Stacks was once a substantial area of common land to the north-east of the medieval and early modern city.

A fifth and final thing to note is that these combined factors help to explain the emergence of Chester's most distinctive medieval feature, the Rows. Peter Carrington has recently argued that the rocky 'hogback' of land and the consequent slopes prompted the creation of buildings with cellars/undercrofts near ground level facing the street, and that the city's commercial importance, thanks to its strategic position and port, resulted in there being so many adjoining undercrofts that it was became possible for continuous galleries to be built above them.

Because the map and accompanying text required us to illustrate and discuss historic fea-

tures up to the early twentieth century, we were then encouraged to observe how this earlier picture was transformed.

During the later eighteenth and nineteenth century industrialisation and exponential urban growth underpinned changes to the city, which had to work with this existing landscape, but also served to obscure many of its features.

New methods of transport avoided the occupation areas of the medieval city and its northern and eastern suburbs but needed to utilise the position of New Crane Wharf. The Dee Basin and the Shropshire Union Canal boxed in the old city to the north. This pattern was reinforced by the routes of the railways meeting at Chester General Station. New suburbs expanded around these routes.

To provide utilities, the old Boughton springs acquired a waterworks and pumping station and between the Roodee and Dee Basin the gas-works and electricity station were built.

To deliver social services some of the remaining open spaces were exploited – adjacent to the Roodee, the Union Workhouse; on the northern parts of the Crofts, the Chester Royal Infirmary (1771) and the Chester City Gaol (1807), replaced by the Queen's School.

Finally, the use of a base map which represents the city in about 1913 reinforces how much has changed in the intervening century, but also how fortunate we are to have such a well-preserved historic centre.

What was less obvious from the map, but obvious from walking around the city, was the de-habitation of the historic centre, partially the result of the creation of the new garden suburbs at Lache (1919), Boughton Heath (1923), and Handbridge (1926), and post-1945 suburbs at Blacon, Newton and Upton.

Finally, we discovered about Greenwood's post-War plan for the city and the modernist buildings which appeared.

Yet we were surprised, in the light of this, how much of the historic city centre has been preserved, thanks to the inclusion of Chester in a government pilot study of four historic towns commissioned in 1966, resulting in the report by Donald Insall on Chester in 1968, which prompted the establishment of a Conservation Area in 1969 followed by a phased programme of renovation and sympathetic redevelopment.

Alan Garner's 'Old Medicine House'

Twelve members attended this excursion on 21 June, and all of them passed the first test, which was finding the house - it really is hidden in the heart of the Cheshire countryside!

Alan Garner bought 'Toad Hall', a fifteenth-century cottage – originally a manor house – north-east of Holmes Chapel when he was twenty-two, and to this day it retains its tin roof. As his family grew, he realised that they would require more space. So, in 1970, he purchased a Tudor timber-framed house from Wrinehill in Staffordshire which was due to be demolished – the house cost the sum of £1. However, it then had to be dismantled and re-erected in its new location piece by piece. It is thought that the original markings on some of the 400 timbers were still good enough for the modern builders to use to locate them when rebuilding. This three-bay box-frame building was the focus of our visit.

It is named the 'Old Medicine House' after one of its last occupants, who was an apothecary and perhaps also a bit of a quack, selling his patent medicine, but it has also been a pub and originally a domestic dwelling in its long life. We first enjoyed an illustrated talk about the discovery and moving of the house and were then taken on a tour. It has two storeys, and through the centre runs a huge chimney, giving shape to the entire building. Around the chimney downstairs is one large space with the family's books running along one wall. In these you can see the ideas that Alan has researched for his many novels, most set in the Cheshire countryside.

Upstairs we were shown the three bedrooms. All contained apotropaic marks, but one in particular was thought to have been the main chamber as it had marks in all four corners as well as beside the windows. These were perhaps to offer protection, especially in childbirth. In one room there was a small exhibition of some of the objects that had been found when the house



The Old Medicine House to the right, Toad Hall to the left.

was moved, including a pair of small shoes, again thought to be a measure against bad luck.

We were also shown some of the archaeological objects that the site has offered up over the years, including Mesolithic flints. The exterior has a small garden, planted with herbs, and a Cheshire-type early medieval round-shaft cross stands to one side of the house, another of Alan's finds.

The house is no longer owned by the Garners as they took the decision to give it to the Blackden Trust, to ensure its continuation in its current state. To round the day off we were treated to excellent tea and cake, and Griselda, Alan's wife, joined us to answer any questions that we had. A lovely and interesting event under glorious blue skies!

Pauline Clarke



Grosvenor Park Training Excavation 2025

This year's excavation produced some interesting and unexpected results. We have confirmed Roman features at the east end of Trench VIII, but what was previously thought to be a pond proved to be a ditch, and beneath the structure with a tiled floor at the west end of the trench lay a medieval building with a hearth.

This year's excavations took place between 28 April and 23 May, with a team of twenty-nine second-year archaeology students from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Chester; Dan Garner of Dee Archaeological Services directed the fieldwork on behalf of West Cheshire Museums, with supervisors Julie Edwards from West Cheshire Museums and Rachael Matthews from Dee Archaeological Services. The project is a partnership between Cheshire West and Chester Council and the University of Chester.

The majority of last year's backfill was removed by machine and our largest team for several years removed the remaining fill and protective covers in record time, with the archaeological surface exposed and being cleaned on Day 2 of the dig. The ensuing extraordinarily hot dry weather – the first year when we were not rained off at all – meant that work had to slow a little as the clay-rich soils over most of the site became very hard and difficult to work. This was a good lesson on how weather conditions can affect our ability to see and feel changes in soil colour and consistency and therefore differentiate deposits.

In these conditions finding the edge of features cut into the natural clay was a challenge, but a Roman ditch running east-west and over 0.5 m deep was revealed, with some smaller pit-type features. The fills of the ditch and pits included large amounts of Roman pottery (but no later material) including amphorae, samian ware, mortaria from the English Midlands and locally made wares. The pottery spanned the Roman period but wares of the first and second centuries were noticeably more fragmentary and abraded than the later vessels. Amongst the samian wares were fragments

of vessels made in Eastern Gaul, most probably Trier, in the third century AD. An unusual ceramic object was a piece of a Roman candlestick; these are rarely found in Chester and are rare in the rest of Roman Britain, they tend to date to the second to fourth centuries.

Moving several centuries later, to the supposed 'pond' running along the southern edge of the trench, the thick clay lining was removed to re-



Top right: Roman ditch. To the right is the 16th-century drain culvert.

Middle right: Roman candlestick.

Bottom right: Drone shot of excavation, with north to bottom, well showing the dry conditions. Roman ditch middle left and medieval stone hearth right. Reproduced by courtesy of Ian Anderson Film.

veal a further fill, and 0.5 m below the top of the clay a flat-bottomed cut more akin to a ditch than a pond. The ditch runs further to the west than originally thought and much to Dan's delight it was found to be cutting another large ditch running on the projected alignment of the Saxon ditch found in Trench IV in 2018! It is unclear how this medieval ditch relates to the that running north–south across the park. More to investigate in 2026!

A tough job in the heat was the removal of the late medieval floor discovered in 2024 and its thick underlying layer of soil and rubble. The reward was a carefully constructed four-sided hearth made of stone slabs and cobbles topped by a thick layer of clay and bounded by a sandstone kerb. The hearth runs parallel to a stone wall footing on a different alignment to and underneath the late medieval floor. Such hearths tended to be used for open fires within medieval halls or main living areas; smoke would have exited through a hole in the roof. Just south of the hearth was another that appears to have had an industrial use. It was rounded with layers of burnt clay containing molten lead fragments; more work is needed next year to decide upon the relationship between the two structures.

Finally, we dug a small extension in the north-west corner of the trench to try and find out if the stone drains found in 2024 linked to that excavated in 2022 running along the northern side of the trench. First there was more English Civil War destruction layer to dig; this produced a wide variety of finds including decorated window glass, bone dice, the remains of a finely carved bone handle decorated with the head of a woman and bone buttons with copper alloy wire thread loops and decorated with ring-and-dot motifs. Adding to our collection of Civil War military equipment was a gun flint found on the spoil heap by metal detector. Obscuring examination of the drains were a number of masonry blocks which may represent a robbed-out wall and a paved area. One stone was worked in such a way as to suggest that it served as a doorstep and we may have an entrance to the building.

The excavations attract a lot of interest, and the students engaged daily with visitors to the park, describing what they were doing and why. In addition we had a successful open afternoon when we were joined by the University's Digital on Tour team. We were visited by primary schools, a University of the Third Age group from Preston, foreign tour groups and we held a Saturday event for Mersey and Dee Young Archaeologists Club. If you didn't visit this year there will be lots more to see in 2026!



Medieval clay and stone hearth.



Robbed-out stone structure over drain.



Bone buttons.

Acknowledgements

We should like to thank Andy James and the staff of Grosvenor Park for facilitating the excavation; Roger Hones for his metal-detecting skills on the spoil heap; the team of hard-working students and their archaeology work-based learning module tutor Amy Gray Jones; Margaret Ward, samian specialist, for identifying our East Gaulish wares; my former colleagues Gill Dunn and Alison Heke for providing references for Roman candlesticks; and Ian Smith for bringing along his animal bone collection and identification skills to contribute to the YAC event. Our team of conscientious local volunteers helped complete the finds processing after the excavation ended.

Julie Edwards

Archaeology Officer, West Cheshire Museums

Habitat (Re)creation, Local Transport and Placemaking: Recent Consultation Responses

The last few months have been busy one for consultations. Here we highlight what seem to be the more important ones.

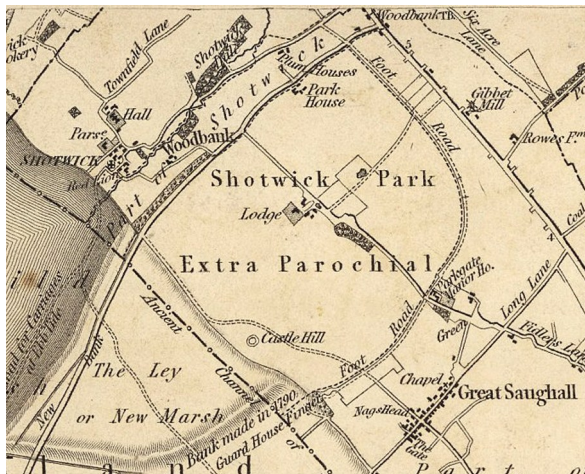
Shotwick Park

The royal castle and deer park of Shotwick, on the west side of Saughall, formed an impressive 'landscape of power' in the medieval Anglo-Welsh border zone, commanding an important fording point of the Dee. Both elements have been the subject of documentary and archaeological study, although their focus, not surprisingly, has been on the castle, the substantial earthworks of which are now also the destination of local walks. Nevertheless, the enclosure of the park (pale) can still be clearly traced through hedgerows, ditches and banks; there are reminders of the existence of the park in the names Parkgate House Farm, Shotwick Lodge Farm and Lodge Lane; a 16th-century barn and 17th-century granary and stable are attached to Shotwick Lodge Farm; and further remains (ridge and furrow, banks, ditches (hollow ways) and a moat near Shotwick Lodge Farm) have recently been revealed by a study of aerial photographs and LIDAR surveys.

In 2023 the Society strongly criticised private sector proposals to create numerous field ponds and scrapes in the park on the grounds that they could damage unrecognised archaeological earthworks and that the associated banks would cause visual confusion with the earthworks of the castle. When it was announced in November 2024 that CWaC intended to retain ownership of the land and pursue its own scheme of woodland and habitat creation, we reiterated our concerns. Since then, we have supplied detailed information and maps of remains and have made recommendations to the Council to protect those remains from damage and enhance their visibility as a heritage asset for public enjoyment, attempting to achieve a win-win outcome for habitats and heritage.

Since then we have walked the site with Council officers to discuss patterns of woodland creation that are good not only for creating habitats but also increase the visibility of the pale, protect the most significant earthworks and give a feel

Early post-medieval outbuildings at Shotwick Lodge Farm, both Listed Grade II; *above*: 16th-century timber-framed barn with later brick infill; *below*: 17th-century brick stable with granary above. Both are disused. What does the future hold for them?



Extract from Bryant's *Map of the county palatine of Chester from an actual survey made in the years 1829, 1830 & 1831* (London: Bryant, 1831) showing Shotwick Park. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland. <https://maps.nls.uk/joins/10417.html>.



for what the medieval deer park would have looked like, with some isolated stands of trees. We have also drawn attention to the importance of the currently disused outbuildings of Shotwick Lodge Farm. All being well, planting is due to start in late autumn, and we await sight of the final plans.

Local Transport Plan Core Strategy

CWaC also recently consulted on the Core Strategy of its Local Transport Plan. We support the aims expressed but sadly remain doubtful as to how much is achievable. The main principles underlying our response have been

- * Protect the built historic environment and buried archaeology from damage or destruction by transport infrastructure.
- ‘Restitch’ historic town centres torn apart by roads and reduce motor traffic and surface car parks to permit a better appreciation of built heritage and recreate urban grain on a human scale.
- Emphasise the need to integrate roads and transport into the planning of new developments, which should include everyday public facilities, green spaces, street trees and cycleways.
- * Advocate the potential of historic settlements and conservation areas to contribute towards understanding and addressing present-day problems of town planning and climate change and creating sustainable, distinctive and attractive places;

It seems likely that the ‘proof of the pudding’ will be in the so-called Local Movement Strategies, and we focused most of our response on practical changes to transport that would improve the built environment, benefit health and mitigate climate change. We divided our recommendations into four categories: operational (eg bus routes and frequencies), transport infrastructure (possible improvements

to rail junctions and reopening closed lines, a Western Relief Road at Chester, and joined-up networks of cycleways), green infrastructure (street trees), digital infrastructure, and building better places (designing out the need to travel by car), using the historical centres of the borough both as potential and as models.

Local Plan Issues and Options paper

We repeated and developed many of these ideas in our response to the Issues and Options paper for the new Local Plan. As was recognised in the Evidence Base for the Local Transport Plan, the small size of the historical centres of the borough’s towns means that they have been disproportionately affected by expansion in recent decades to accommodate wider streets, large surface car parks, a loose urban grain often of poor architectural quality, and consequent pedestrian isolation.

Unfortunately, by and large the options set out in the paper do not address these challenges. Nevertheless, it does set out two worthwhile principles that we support: the need for housing to be within 800m (1/2 mile) of everyday facilities and the concept of ‘key settlement gaps’ to stop built-up areas merging (effectively mini-green belts). If implemented, these principles could make a worthwhile improvement to the master-planning of communities.

The appearance of individual buildings is also vitally important, and we need clear design codes that take account of local character to try to achieve this. This need is exemplified by a question about the adequacy of policies to protect Chester’s historic character. While below-ground archaeology has been adequately protected, the existing policies have not been implemented in a way that safeguards the character of the built environment, and maybe the greater precision that a design code would bring might achieve this.

You can read all our consultation responses on the [Advocacy](#) page of our website.

Peter Carrington

Autumn Photo Fun!

We should like to invite members to share photos of items of archaeological or historical interest that they think others may find interesting or intriguing. We hope to publish at least a selection in our winter newsletter.

As a bit of fun, we should like to invite members to submit photos of historical or archaeological sites or objects that they think others may find interesting or intriguing. They may be ones that you already have, but autumn is a good season for outdoor photography, so why not take some new ones?

We suggest three categories:

- **New Views of Old Favourites** –eg familiar sites in unusual light or from a different angle
- **Local Treasures** – Local scenes of historical interest that others may not know about
- **Connections** – Sites or objects that connect us to surprising times, places or people

We should like to publish at least some of these in our winter newsletter, perhaps with the captions separately as part of a quiz, so we need them by 30 November. We may also publish them, with credits, elsewhere to promote the Society and its activities.

Email your efforts, with captions, to the Society's Editor, **Peter Carrington** (address below).

Remember, this is not a competition and there are no prizes, and if you include people in your photos, be sure to get their permission for images of them to appear in public.

Have fun!

Grants and Awards

We shall be making the following grants and awards in 2025:

Undergraduate Dissertation Prize

Our annual prize of £250 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 £1000 for a two-year 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 may be submitted at any time of year. The Society will only fund one project at once.

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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