

# The Chester Antiquary

2026 Issue 1 – March

President Dr Paul Booth FRHistS

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHESTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## A Time for Reflection

As your Chair, I naturally find the approach of our AGM on 22 April a time for reflection. We have had a very active year, thanks to the dedicated Council members whom I have had the pleasure of working with, and the months ahead look just as busy and exciting. I will present a full report on the year at the meeting.

Since our December newsletter, we have had three meetings for members: talks on German war graves and Nesscliffe hillfort and a visit to the *Treasure: History Unearthed* exhibition at the Museum of Liverpool; unfortunately the visit to Souldon barrow had to be postponed for reasons beyond our control. We also had a stall at a conference of the Roman Finds Group at the Grosvenor Museum on 13–14 March.

Volume 95 of our journal was distributed to members in January and contained a wide variety of articles and reports, stretching geographically from Alsager via Daresbury to Wallasey, and from the Neolithic/Bronze Age to the early post-medieval period. The contribution from the Cheshire West and Chester (CWaC) conservation team tackled the important issue of upgrading historical buildings to make them fit for the future. I hope that you found items to interest you!

We have replied to five consultations: on the design of a local centre to serve the King's Moat development, Wrexham Road, Chester, on proposed reforms to the Statutory Consultee system and a revision of the *National Planning Policy Framework*, and on refinement of the 2022 draft CWaC Heritage Strategy for the borough and of the Local Transport Plan as it might apply to Chester. In all of these we emphasised the importance of protecting the historic environment and its potential for creating better places for tomorrow.

Looking forward, our last talk of the season will be by Heather Beeton on the operation of the Portable Antiquities Scheme, to accompany the

AGM. We have offered an in-depth tour of Roman Chester and a talk with the latest thoughts on the Rows for the University of Chester's *Festival of Ideas*, and we are hoping to stage a family event for the *Chester Heritage Festival* based on Roman surveying in the amphitheatre and classical architecture in the Roman Gardens. The Education Group will also be leading a workshop on the Romans and a tour of Roman Chester for the Arches Primary School, Blacon, in the next few months.

Work on the next issue of journal, volume 96, is already well under way, with major articles on Roman saltmaking at Middlewich and on the bounds of the now almost-forgotten Hoole Heath on the outskirts of medieval Chester.

Do look out for more information on the forthcoming events, and please come to the AGM and make your views known.

A very happy Easter to you all!

**Peter Carrington**  
Chair, Chester Archaeological Society



Restoration of Tarporley Manor House in progress, including improved insulation. Photo © N Gatt

## Chester Amphitheatre – an 8000-Year Story

This exhibition at the Grosvenor Museum displays finds made during the major research excavations at Chester Amphitheatre in 2004–2006 and tells the story of one of the city’s most significant archaeological sites: what was there before the Romans built the largest amphitheatre in Britain, what new information was revealed about it and what happened in the centuries after the Romans left.

The amphitheatre is now regarded as such a significant Roman site in Chester that it is easy to forget that the Romans only occupied that patch of land for a relatively short period of time. From the time of its discovery in 1929 until evaluation trenching in 2001–2003 by Keith Matthews of Chester Archaeology, the focus of work on the site had been to excavate and reveal its structure, and anything later or earlier was incidental. The Chester Amphitheatre Project was created not only to re-examine questions about the structure of the Roman building but to understand the whole history of the site and its surroundings, from prehistory to the present day, and to use the discoveries to inform its preservation and presentation.

Three areas were targeted – area A in the north, where Keith had noted that undisturbed archaeology remained, and previously unexcavated areas in the south (Area B) and over the centre of the arena (Area C). These produced the earliest and largest amount of evidence for prehistoric Chester, and the trench over the centre of the arena revealed evidence of early medieval occupation as well as the Roman ‘tethering stone’. In addition to these structural and stratigraphic results huge quantities of artefacts and ecofacts were recovered.

The exhibition attempts to tell the story of the site through these finds: a considerable challenge as, for example, the botanical, insect and small mammal remains and one of the largest assemblages of Roman period fish bones in Britain could easily fill a whole room by themselves!

The Roman artefacts focus largely on soldiers and civilians, and by highlighting items of dress, jewellery, household objects and objects that have been inscribed with people’s names give links to individuals. Religion is one theme. Key to the Roman display are intagli, with images that may relate to the beliefs of their owners. A tiny medieval stud with the seal of Solomon decorating its head was found in a medieval pit; in the fourteenth century the symbol was thought to ward off evil. A medieval seal matrix displays powerful Christian symbolism as well as the name of the owner.



A general view of the exhibition, with the Roman ‘tethering stone’ (used to secure beasts and condemned people in the middle of the arena) in the foreground



above: intagli and other personal items



below: Roman gaming counters



The amphitheatre tin-glazed owl cup



A selection of bone from the 'Tudor pit'

Games and recreation also appear across the periods: there is a buzz bone amongst the late Saxon finds and a lead whirligig or buzz disc from the post-medieval period. Gaming counters and dice occur particularly in the Roman and post-medieval periods. A collection of blue and white glass counters was found together in an amphitheatre seating bank deposit – perhaps people were playing games between gladiatorial bouts.

If the tethering stone can be said to be the iconic Roman find of the excavations, then the tin-glazed ware owl cup is that of the post-Roman period. This eye-catching object is adorable, but it is a highly unusual find from an archaeological site in this country and indeed highly unusual in this country as a curated object.

The owl is a link to a fashion in sixteenth-century Germany and the Low Countries for owl cups and to early tin-glazed ware production in Germany and Switzerland, as well as reflecting a contemporary enthusiasm for highly decorative novelty objects amongst the wealthy. These objects were made of precious metals but also of materials that were new or rare in Europe north of the Alps; tin-glazed ware production was still relatively new in northern Europe. Pottery objects are often thought of as being cheaper, later imitations of metal ones, but in this case it has been suggested that the reverse is true. The owl is displayed alongside two more or less contemporary owls from the Continent. The Grosvenor Museum is extremely grateful to the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford for the loan of two owl cups from their Wellby Collection, one made from coconut mounted in silver and the other gilt. The Grosvenor Museum Society generously sponsored their display.

Redeposition and residuality was high across the site for all periods and there were few undisturbed deposits that can be described as primary. One very interesting assemblage is, however, firmly datable to the sixteenth century: it has become known as the Tudor pit and contains a small assemblage of sixteenth-century finds including some very fine glass, the tin-glazed ware owl cup and a gold enamelled ring that is associated with the pit but was found by metal detector. The significant assemblage for interpretation was however bone – a wide variety of animal, bird and fish bones which appear to represent a high-status feast. To avoid possible confusion, bags of bone were chosen representing a cross-section of species and their contents laid out in discrete groups with their labels. The handwritten labels, like the plastic finds packaging seen elsewhere in the exhibition, serve as a reminder that an individual sorted and identified the bones as well as being a means of safeguarding their work when the exhibit is dismantled.

Adapted by **Peter Carrington** from the text of a talk to the Roman Finds Group, 13–14 March, by **Julie Edwards**, Archaeological Officer at the Grosvenor Museum, who curated the *Chester Amphitheatre – an 8000-Year Story* and *The Chester Amphitheatre Owl – a 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Curiosity* exhibitions. Photos © Julie Edwards. Thanks are due to Julie Edwards for kindly sharing this information. The exhibitions are open until 12 July and 7 June respectively.

## Education Group

The Education Group met again on 5 February and has developed several initiatives aimed broadly at increasing understanding of archaeology and increasing the membership of the Society. We are a small group and are always looking for members to get involved and it was pleasing to add a new member to the group.

The initial ideas being developed include a schools-focused pilot programme that offers a variety of engaging activities for young people aged 7–11, focusing on hands-on experiences in archaeology. Society members will provide opportunities for primary school pupils to learn all about archaeology and why it matters, whilst exploring some of the many eras of human history within a local context, such as the Romans, Vikings, and Victorians. Archaeology provides the opportunity to tie in many different aspects of learning, from geography, science and art to developing teamwork and leadership skills.

The team will allow pupils to take part in all sorts of hands-on activities, such as working with chronological activities, handling artefacts, taking part in experimental archaeology and undertaking their own research. We see the key

**Andrew Reynolds**, *Education Group Leader*

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## Finds Research Group Conference, 8–9 May

The theme of this conference at the Grosvenor Museum is 'Post-Roman finds from the Chester amphitheatre and beyond'. As well as talks, it will include a walking tour taking in the Rows and the Church of St John the Baptist.

Originally planned around the two new exhibitions on discoveries at the amphitheatre site between 2004 and 2006, the meeting has expanded to include finds from the Welsh Borders and the West. The weekend will consist of talks (full line-up to follow), a chance to take in the exhibitions and a finds viewing on Saturday, and on Sunday a walking tour of Chester to include the medieval Rows led by Julie Edwards, our host for the weekend, and the Norman church of St. John the Baptist.

Tickets are £5.00 for FRG members and £10.00 for non-members, available through Eventbrite: <https://bit.ly/3PkP2Y5>.



The amphitheatre – a place ideally suited for learning about Roman surveying

focus as exploring local place and heritage, with lots of supporting resources based within Cheshire. If pupils have an artistic streak, we have plenty of craft-based activities to have a go at as well, based on archaeological periods and technology. For example, members might end up baking some prehistoric bread! The group will have met with schools in Handbridge, Blacon and Crewe before the end of term

Confirmed speakers include:

**Tony Wilmott** on the Chester Amphitheatre excavations

**Julie Edwards** on post-Roman finds from the amphitheatre excavations

**Karla Graham** on the conservation and analysis of the amphitheatre metal finds and the 'owl'

**Pauline Clarke** on early medieval finds from the Welsh borders

**Dan Garner** on the Bunbury Anglo-Saxon oven with probably the only stratified assemblage of Anglo-Saxon mill-/quernstones from Cheshire

**Jim Glazzard** on Viking-age silver-working

## German War Graves and the British

Professor Tim Grady's talk shed light on a neglected aspect of the aftermath of World War II and the 'tidying up' of history

In his talk at the Grosvenor Museum on 21 January, Prof Tim Grady related how in 1962/3 the German authorities sought out the graves of their nationals who had died in Britain in the two world wars, either in action or as prisoners, and reburied them in a single cemetery on Cannock Chase. This was no mean logistical feat and was part of understandable efforts to rehabilitate the country's reputation by creating a war cemetery comparable to those of its former enemies.

However, this was in effect a rewriting, or at least simplification, of history that to some extent created a more adversarial relationship. Hitherto, civilian communities had been left to bury the enemy dead in their closest cemeteries. Sometimes, local people embraced these graves, often caring for them and bonding British and German families together in their shared loss and grief. However, all this ended when the enemy bodies were moved to new military cemeteries. Ties between the bereaved families and those who cared for the graves were severed and the memorials were destroyed, obliterating all signs of this episode of history from the landscape and recognition by future generations.

With the enemy out of sight and mind, the British and Germans could concentrate on commemorating their own war dead and their



The German war cemetery on Cannock Chase. Care for local enemy graves was replaced by hostile graffiti soon after the cemetery was completed.

own sacrifices. Clearing away signs of the enemy resulted in a more inward-looking public memory of the world wars and much simpler narratives of the recent past.

Tim Grady is Professor of Modern History at the University of Chester. His book *Burying the Enemy - The Story of Those who Cared for the Dead in Two World Wars* was published by Yale University Press in 2025.

**Peter Carrington**

## Nesscliffe Hill Camp

For our only online talk of the season, we were treated to a fascinating account by Prof Emeritus Gary Lock of Oxford University of the excavations that he carried out with Dr Paul Reilly of Southampton University of this long-lived hillfort.

Nesscliffe Camp is a 2.8 ha promontory fort 12.5 km north-west of Shrewsbury within the Nesscliffe Country Park, with wide views across the plain of the River Severn to the west. There are two ramparts to the east, of which the inner one is possibly the earlier; the western and northern defences probably always depended on the natural scarp, although the present contours have been modified by recent quarrying.

The excavations, initiated by Shropshire County Council, were prompted by storms in 2015/16, which toppled trees planted in the 1950s by the then landowner, Lord Bradford, and damaged the fragile archaeology.

There were two areas of excavation, focusing on the inner rampart. The northern one revealed an inturned entrance, which had been modified with a longer passage, an inner gate and recesses on both sides with a wooden structure above. The angle of the southern entrance passage and the rampart had been infilled, and the postholes of a palisade survived in its top. A carefully-tooled ditch had been cut into the sandstone bedrock north of the entrance and the space between it and the rampart surfaced with green cobbles – all signs of decoration. Hearths for iron-smithing and copper-alloy working were found in the ditch. A postern gate was found at the north end of the rampart.



The modified inturned entrance passage showing recesses and the platform between the southern passage wall and the rampart to the right. Photo courtesy of G Lock

The second area of excavation, to the south, showed that a possible entrance through the rampart was modern, probably created in 1823, when a meeting of the Society of Ancient British Bowmen was held at Nesscliffe, to give access from the flat area outside the camp, where events were held, to the viewpoint of Oliver's Point. It also revealed details of construction of the rampart: with multiple carefully cut blocks of stone for the inner face but only about two for the inner face, with the areas of soft infill divided by roughly built transverse walls.



Circular area of bedrock (possible shrine), with rampart behind. Photo courtesy of G Lock

Inside the rampart was a raised circular area of bedrock with a spiral path around it and associated postholes – possibly a Roman-period shrine judging by the finds. A four-post structure nearby may have been an Iron Age granary.

The excavation also provided a good starting point to consider the development of archaeological thought about 'hillforts' and the numerous questions that still surround them: their definition, setting, morphology, dating and function(s).

Nesscliffe proved unusual in several respects:

- Postholes on top of the rampart
- Details of rampart construction
- Inturned entrances with recesses
- Well-preserved tool marks in the ditch
- Metalworking in the ditch
- Roman shrine and reuse.

You can listen to a recording of this talk on the Society's YouTube channel [here](#).

**Peter Carrington**

Gary Lock was principally responsible for the [\*Atlas of Hillforts of Britain and Ireland\*](#).

## ‘Treasure – History Unearthed’

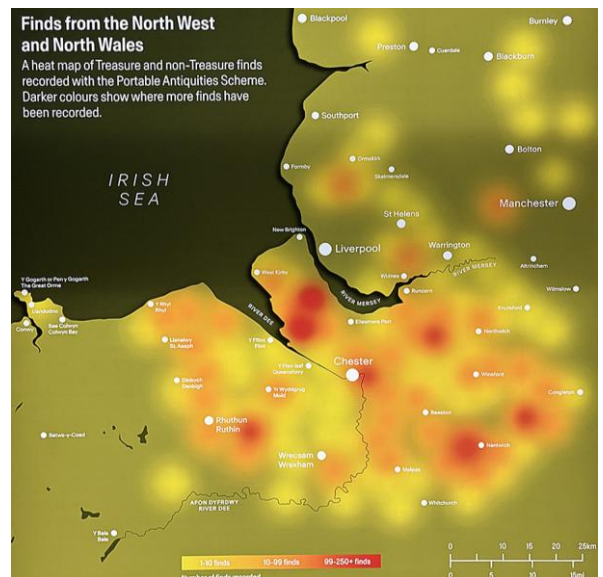
On 26 March, members were privileged to enjoy a guided tour of this exhibition at the Museum of Liverpool, led by Vanessa Oakden.



At the entrance to the exhibition a line led to a fine animation showing how an object can be buried, hidden and then revealed again to become ‘treasure’. Through looking at the treasure in this exhibition, we learnt about connections between people over 5000 years: who made the objects, who used them, and how they may have been lost or buried. We also learnt how they were found again and about the connections between this history and us: the people coming here to see these objects; because they had all been found locally, it gave them a special significance.

After a consideration of what exactly constituted ‘Treasure’, we were quickly introduced to the Portable Antiquities Scheme and a torc and a diverse collection of rings. Vanessa Oakden picked out a Chester ring for special mention, with a reused Roman stone and the various mottos found engraved inside. On either side of the case was a mesmerising [movie](#) of the ring, greatly magnified, rotating in space.

Gemstones revealed the details of intricate settings, each loving stroke of the engraver clearly visible: the mouth of a serpent opened wide to clasp a blue stone akin to an eye, transparent lens and amethyst-coloured retina below complete with a rope-like design beneath. These objects had been found individually: treasure lost rather than deliberately hidden in a hoard.



‘Heat map’ of Portable Antiquities Scheme finds from the North-West

Local hoards were represented, too, all marked on a map of Portable Antiquities Scheme ‘hotspots’: Acton, Heronbridge, Poole, Malpas, Dutton, Agden – hoards I had come across in books, now here in front of me. And then the more familiar Chester Castle Esplanade hoard, with details of its discovery enhancing the already-interesting description. Roman coins gave way to Viking hacksilver and early medieval sophistication, with a Carolingian-style cup from the Halton Moor hoard, possibly looted from a French abbey.



The early medieval Cuerdale, Silverdale and Huxley hoards

The late tenth-century Castle Esplanade hoard of coins and hacksilver from Chester

It was interesting and impressive to see just how much treasure had been found around the 'elbow' of the north-west of England and north-east Wales. Some of this had been tested and the metal had come from afar: silver from Afghanistan and Iraq in the Huxley hoard could have been dispersed in other hoards (Cuerdale and Silverdale) around the region and then, having been found, split again between hundreds of people in Victorian times, each one eager for their bit of history: ingots, interlocking bracelets, arm-rings, flattened arm straps together with containers; sometimes a pot, other times a leaden 'purse'. One of these latter containers burst open to reveal shiny silver coins – the normal tarnishing precluded by the lead that preferentially and sacrificially reacts in place of silver.



Well-preserved Roman silver *denarii* from sealed lead container

There were hoards from all ages: later medieval, Tudor, then Stuart, and the interesting case of the Mayor of Congleton, who had split his treasure and buried it in a field during the Civil War.



Coins from the Civil War Congleton hoard

Most of these hoards had been found responsibly: Vanessa said that legal detectorists tend to stop when they find several 'hits' and call in the archaeologists to properly record the find. But at Beeston Castle there had been illegal activity and the police (in 'Operation Roundhouse') did some impressive detective work comparing the soil found embedded in the hoard with that on Scheduled areas around the castle.

Then we returned to Bronze Age Britain and its trade routes and the connectivity essential to making the alloy. There were Scottish bronze axe heads, gold lockrings that could have come from Ireland or France, and a golden torque, allegedly used to fasten a gate when found in the nineteenth century (although Vanessa was sceptical). Analysis showed that this torque had been mended using zinc, a modern metal.



Gold torque, mended with zinc in the 19<sup>th</sup> century



Vanessa Oakden talking about the Bronze Age shield from Moel Hebog (below) and the concept of 'significance' in the latest revision of the Treasure Act



above: the Mold cape  
below: detail of the neck, showing holes for attachment to an undergarment



gold and silver had to be hidden with the intention of recovery, and this had not. Like the Mycenaean golden masks and jewellery, it was part of a burial and presumably had gone with its owner to the afterlife.



The exhibition ended with another example of what today would probably be considered Treasure but was not when it was found in 1784 – the Bronze Age shield from Moel Hebog. It perhaps would not have counted as treasure in 1996 either. However, since 2023 'significant' metal objects over two hundred years old can be declared Treasure, and the Moel Hebog shield is surely significant if only because of its rarity.

And then we came to the magnificent Mold cape, found at Bryn yr Ellyllon. This was made 1900–1600BC – just before the time of the Mycenaean empire in Greece – and is unique. Sadly, since it was found in 1833, the associated bones and amber beads, which may have told us a little more about the people who made it, were lost. The cape may have been stitched onto an undergarment via holes in the 'hem' around the bottom and neck. Surprisingly, because the cape was found before the Treasure Act of 1996, it could not be considered to be legally Treasure, since at that time under Treasure Trove laws

I am grateful to Vanessa Oakden for giving us such an entertaining and fascinating tour, other members of the group for some very interesting discussions that further enhanced the experience, Pauline Clarke for making the whole brilliant excursion happen and National Museums Liverpool for putting it on such a well-set-out and annotated exhibition – and also for the excellent Scouse in the cafe afterwards!

Clare Dudman

## A Focus on Roman Middlewich and Hoole Heath

The next volume of our journal will contain a major report on the excavation of a Roman saltmaking site at Middlewich and an article on the now almost-forgotten area of Hoole Heath, on the outskirts of medieval Chester.

### Middlewich

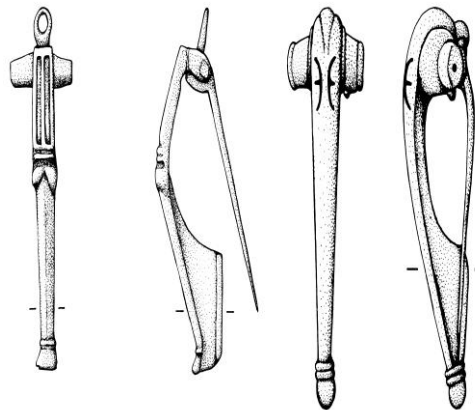
A review of what was known about Roman Middlewich up to 2009 was published in [volume 83](#) of our journal. Since then, major excavations have been carried out at Jersey Way and Buckley’s Field. The one to be reported in our next journal, at Gasworks Yard, was on the last large piece of open ground in the area of the Roman civilian settlement. The site lies south of the fort on Harbutt’s Field, between the River Croco to the west and King Street to the east.

The excavation was carried out by Oxford Archaeology in 2021 and revealed three rectilinear plots defined by ditches. The most interesting was the central plot, which contained two timber-lined brine wells and a probable timber building. The southernmost plot contained two brine-settling tanks. The site seems to have flourished from the late first to mid-second century AD – roughly the period of occupation of the fort.

The timber lining of the brine wells was well preserved and their construction was of particular interest. One of the settling tanks produced two copper alloy brooches and a gold amulet – possibly a ‘ritual’ deposit. With the exception of animal bones, environmental remains also survived well, providing a wealth of information on diet and surroundings.



Timber-lined brine well in Plot 2. © Oxford Archaeology



Copper alloy brooches found in settling tank. (Scale 1/4). © Oxford Archaeology

### Hoole Heath

In the Middle Ages, the bounds of the city of Chester to the north-east lay along Flookers Brook. Beyond lay the townships of Hoole, controlled by the Earl of Shrewsbury, and Newton. Straddling the two townships lay Hoole Heath, where citizens of Chester claimed right of common; this right may have originated in the fact that part of Hoole township lay in the parish of St John the Baptist while Newton was controlled by St Werburgh’s Abbey. An inquisition of 1339 seeking to regularise the situation set out the legal boundaries of the heath. A detailed study by Clive Tolley traces these boundaries in the modern landscape and shows that in reality, even allowing for enclosure, the common was probably much smaller, confined to an area around Hoole ridge. A major approach to the common may have been via St Anne’s

Rake (droveway), now Hoole Lane; Hoole Rake, now Hoole Road, may have been a later addition that eventually took over the role of the ‘Highway’ (Newton Hollows) as the major route out of Chester to the north-east.



Newton Hollows today, formerly the Highway north-east from Chester. © Clive Tolley

## Advocacy

We have recently responded to five consultations, two national and three local: on reforms to the Statutory Consultee system and revision of the *National Planning Policy Framework*, and on the proposal for a 'local centre' on the King's Moat development, Wrexham Road, Chester, the refinement of the draft 2022 Cheshire West and Chester Heritage Strategy and the application of the council's new Local Transport to Chester through the Chester Movement Strategy. The principles of good placemaking are well established; we continue to advocate the key role of heritage in creating local character and the importance of proactive planning in maximising its potential.

In our response to the consultation on reform of the Statutory consultee system, we concerned ourselves with the proposals to remove the Gardens Trust as a statutory consultee, to raise the threshold for notification to Historic England of works to Listed Buildings and of developments in conservation areas, and to strengthen local government planning departments.

We opposed the removal of the Gardens Trust as a statutory consultee in the interests of bureaucratic tidiness, leaving only under-resourced Historic England and local government planning departments to deal with proposals affecting Grade II gardens, which in Cheshire make up two-thirds of registered parks and gardens. Such a move would inevitably be seen as a weakening of the importance attached to Grade II gardens at a time when the importance of local green space to physical and mental health is increasingly recognised.

It was proposed that Historic England should no longer be notified about works (excluding total demolition) affecting Grade II Listed Buildings. These buildings play a major role in determining the quality of the built environment, and we do not consider it prudent that their fate, in terms of possible inappropriate modification, should be left to local planning authorities alone.

It was also proposed that the threshold for the notification to Historic England of development in conservation areas should be raised from 1000m<sup>2</sup> to 2000m<sup>2</sup>. Like Grade II Listed Buildings, conservation areas play a major role in the quality of the built environment and should serve as inspiration for building better places in the future. We therefore again consider it essential that local planning authorities can count on Historic England as an independent check to validate decisions and should like to see them encouraged not to shy away from providing more robust comments that serve to improve the quality of developments.

Local planning authorities need greater funding and greater expertise. However, they need to take a more proactive role in the preparation of masterplans and design codes for areas likely to be (re-) developed before planning applications are received. In that way, the expertise and interests of consultees and communities can underpin the design of new developments rather than be accommodated as an afterthought.

In the draft revision of the *National Planning Policy Framework* there was a welcome recognition of the importance of proactive planning and of the potential of heritage. However, this will require a strengthening of Historic Environment Records and there is scope to enlarge the opportunities for public engagement. There was a simplistic separation of 'archaeology' from other forms of heritage, which could have negative consequences.

We welcomed the principle of the proposal for a 'local centre' (shops, with the welcome addition of a care home) for the King's Moat development off Wrexham Road, near the school now under construction. However, the details are unsatisfactory: only four shop units are proposed, and the site is dominated by its car park when the whole purpose of a local centre is to reduce the need for car use. In the developer's own words, the design of the shops is 'functional'. Why should they not be attractive, or is architectural beauty to be restricted to 'heritage', ie a thing of the past?

In our responses to oral consultations about the Cheshire West and Chester draft Heritage Strategy and Local Transport Plan, we repeated the well-established positions that we set out in our written responses, which you can read [here](#) and [here](#).

**Peter Carrington**

## The Chantry House and School Field, Bunbury

John Bradshaw of Stockport, regicide and President of the first Council of State of the British Commonwealth (1649–1651), was one of the most eminent people Cheshire has ever produced, but his importance is often overlooked. There is evidence that as a child he lodged with the schoolmaster in the Chantry House in Bunbury and went to school in the adjacent building. He remembered the school in his will. An important part of his education included a visit from the preacher of the church of St Boniface, so the church would have played an important part in his life. However, the intervisibility of these sites, which played a significant role in national history, is now under threat from development.

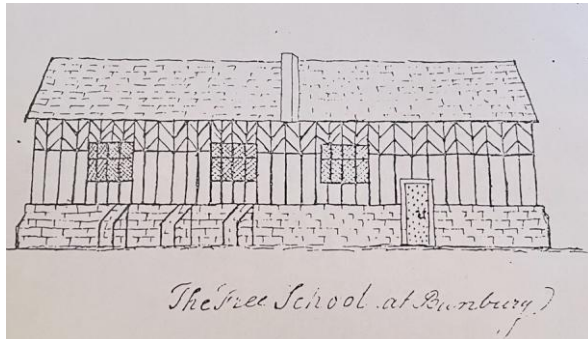
The Chantry House is a Grade II\* Listed building and is situated in a conservation area. Even by the time John Bradshaw lodged there it was almost a hundred years old and was originally associated with the chantry chapel founded by Sir Ralph Egerton. In 1594 it was donated by a native of the parish, Thomas Aldersey, a London merchant and member of the Haberdashers' Company, to the master of the school that he had founded to the east of the Chantry House. The school moved to its present site on School Lane by 1874 and the old building was subsequently demolished.

Although there is a more modern extension housing the kitchen, the house itself is much like it would have been when John Bradshaw would have lodged there. Downstairs there are two large rooms, each served with one of the huge back-to-back fireplaces, which reminded me very much of the fireplace in Alan Garner's house that the society visited last year. Upstairs, the central chimney served two more fireplaces in the two rooms directly above the rooms downstairs. The ceilings are high, and each room is well-illuminated with large windows. The door is sixteenth century, and so is the panelling. The section next to the fireplace in what is thought to have been the dormitory for the schoolboy lodgers is carved with a selection of their initials and autographs.

The curate of Bunbury, Samuel Hinde, like his brother-in-law, the renowned John Bruen of Bruen Stapleford near Tarvin and his benefactor William Aldersey, was a highly regarded Puritan, and his views were no doubt inculcated into the young John Bradshaw and influenced his life-view. For a few years this small area of Bunbury – encompassing church, Chantry House and school – would have been John Bradshaw's entire world. This makes it a unique relic of an important part of our history.



The Chantry House, seen from School Field to the east



Sketch of the old school house

Panelling in dormitory



However, plans have now been submitted to build two houses on the small plot of land on which the school once stood. The obvious relationship between these three sites would be lost and the Chantry House would lose its prominence. The full planning committee decision on the land has now been put back until 3 June, so if anyone would like to add their opinion of the plans regarding the land around the Chantry House, the link is [here](#) (25/3509/PIP).

The importance of John Bradshaw has long been overlooked. Later historians, who were associated with the end of the Commonwealth, ensured that he went out of favour and so anything to do with him was neglected. His birthplace and family home in Marple, and the home he occupied when Mayor of Congleton have all been destroyed. There is now the opportunity to prevent further destruction of the unique setting and archaeological evidence of this site, so important to the man who was pivotal in the formation of our parliamentary system.

**Clare Dudman**, *Secretary*

You can watch Clare's film *Three Ravens* about John Bradshaw's involvement in local witch trials [here](#). She has written more about Bunbury in her [blog](#).

The Chantry House is no [1138635](#) in the National Heritage List for England.



Church of St Boniface



View from dormitory in Chantry House to the Church of St Boniface

## AGM 2026

Our 2026 AGM will be held at 7:30pm on 22 April at the Grosvenor Museum. Official notification and reports will be emailed to members at least two weeks in advance. The meeting will be followed by a talk by Heather Beeton, Finds Liaison Officer for Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside.

**A**ndrew Reynolds has offered to serve as Vice-Chair for the coming year, subject to Peter Carrington being elected as Interim Chair for a further year, with a view to Andrew taking over as Chair in 2027. Clare Dudman has decided to stand down at the end of her three-year term as Secretary but has agreed to rejoin Council as a non-executive member. Sophie Smith has offered to take up the role of Secretary. Julian Baum's first three-year term of office as webmaster comes to an end at this AGM but he has agreed to serve another term. Peter Carrington's first term as Editor also comes to an end but he is willing to serve another term. Looking further ahead, Pauline Clarke's and Heather Rowland's first terms as Events Secretary and Librarian respectively come to an end in 2027 but they have both indicated that, circumstances permitting, they are willing to serve second terms. These commitments will hopefully bring a

measure of stability and allow Council to focus on delivering for members and the community; succession planning is extraordinarily time-consuming! Although we have a strong Council for the year ahead, we should still welcome offers of ideas and help from members in areas of activity that they are interested in, perhaps with a view to joining Council in the future

A full list of recommendations for Council will be supplied to members, to be voted on at the meeting. There are currently two vacancies to bring Council up to its maximum permitted strength of fifteen. Members may put themselves forward as candidates for Council at the meeting or complete an application form in advance.

Only full ('Ordinary') members may vote in the AGM or stand for Council

### Grants and Awards

#### **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 the study of finds from the pre-1974 county of Cheshire reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme, the results to be published in our journal.

Applications may be made at any time of year.

#### **St John's House Fund**

Grants totalling up to £750 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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