

The Chester Antiquary



Newsletter of the Chester Archaeological Society

2007 Issue 2 (Autumn/Winter)

Flights into History

I BELIEVE I can honestly say that I pioneered aerial archaeology in Cheshire. Some prominent sites, such as the Eddisbury hillfort, had been photographed from the air, but no programme of aerial archaeology had been pursued in the county. A high-level photographic survey had been flown by the Royal Airforce during 1946/7, but I found this of little use for archaeology: it was all too easy to discover 'ancient sites' in much the same way as 'canals' were discovered on Mars.

While I pioneered Aerial Archaeology, it was not originally my intention to do so. My main brief at the time, as the County Archaeologist, was to discover what we had in Cheshire that should be recorded in our Register of County Treasures, later to be incorporated in the Department of the Environment's Archaeological Sites and Monuments Record. During the severe drought of 1976, it was appreciated by the County Council that ancient sites were appearing all over Britain as parch marks in crops. It was, therefore, readily agreed that I should take to the air to see what was visible in Cheshire.

My first, tentative, foray was over Chester where I photographed such well-known landmarks as the Roman amphitheatre and the earthworks at Heronbridge. This was soon followed by flights further afield, taking in Beeston Castle, the Central Ridge with its hill forts, then central Cheshire and, eventually, the southern half of the county. There were fewer flights over the far east of the county due to the proximity of Manchester airport and its busy flight paths.

Unfortunately, because of the prevalence of heavy clay sub-soils in much of Cheshire, cropmarks do not readily form. This situation is exacerbated by the large extent of



A view of a small settlement at Bruera, showing the re-occupied moated site, hedgerows following old lanes, at least two former house sites, and medieval ridge and furrow

pasture land. Grass does not encourage cropmark formation, whereas cereals, especially barley, are excellent. Consequently, most of the sites I discovered resulted from observing shadows cast by a low sun. These revealed a wealth of low banks, silted-up ditches and similar features which were quite invisible at ground level.

It became apparent that the medieval landscape, at least in West Cheshire, was largely intact, although it was overlaid by later features. Several villages were seen to be associated with large moated sites, identified as those of lost or forgotten great houses. Many could be seen to have had bridged entrance roadways or to have had subsidiary features such as fishponds. Few Cheshire villages seem to have been completely deserted, but some of those that were abandoned could still be located by their former lanes. Several existing villages were seen to be diminished in size, with deserted tofts and crofts among those still occupied.

The most obvious feature in the landscape was ridge and furrow (known locally as butt and rein), not all of which was of medieval date. It was ploughed in Cheshire mainly to improve drainage, as witnesses the significant placename Wetreins Green. There are several varieties of it in the county, much of it passing beneath later hedgerows.

The Romans left little visible impression on the landscape. Several road lines were identified or confirmed by noting long straight hedgerows, sometimes supplemented by linear cropmarks. In this context, I recall with some amusement, and not a little chagrin, that I photographed the cropmarks of several 'Roman roads' until I realized that they were radiating from the Stanlow oil refineries

Prehistoric sites were even more ethereal than those of Roman date. Many ancient burial mounds, or barrows, were already known in Cheshire but a few more were discovered during my
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flying days. The barrows themselves had long been ploughed away, but the shallow ditches that once surrounded them could, on rare occasions, be revealed as dark rings, or rings of differential growth, in crops - usually in the corners of much later fields. A few enclosures were also observed. They could have been prehistoric, but this can only be ascertained by excavation.

Aerial archaeology has moved on since the 1970s and '80s. Methods have improved and the wider picture of settlement is better understood. However, as with all else these days, the costs of private flying are prohibitive. The aerial archaeologist must, of necessity, take a back seat which, as any flier will testify, is not the best position for aerial photography!

Rhys Williams

Opportunities to get involved with the Society's Council

A number of key members of our Society Council, who have been actively and enthusiastically supporting the Society over many years, have expressed the wish to hand over their responsibilities to a new generation and will be standing down at the next Society Annual General Meeting in 2008. This is an opportunity for you to get involved with setting the direction of the Society for the coming years.

The posts involved are:

Honorary Secretary: The job involves general correspondence; organising and minuting Council meetings and the Annual General Meeting; and organising the lecture programme with the support of a sub-committee of the council. Anthony Holliday holds this post at present.

Honorary Treasurer: The Treasurer looks after the financial affairs of the Society, contributes to the long term plan and prepares the accounts on an annual basis. Edwin Warwick is the current Treasurer.

Excursions Organiser: The Society generally organises one or two weekend excursions during the course of the year

and we are looking for someone who can start to take over this task from Prue Wendt who has been doing his task for some time now.

Newsletter Editor: Ian Archibald has combined this task with his chairmanship for the last year, but the Newsletter would benefit from the attention of someone who could focus on it exclusively.

I would like to thank Anthony, Edwin and Prue for the service which they have provided over the years and would encourage everyone to think about taking up the challenge. There will be a form available during the forthcoming lecture series if you wish to express interest, or you can contact me.

Ian Archibald

Lecture Programme

The lecture Programme and membership card are included with this copy of the *Antiquary*. Please note that the first lecture 'John Handford Frere et Fils - a Cheshire Family in Lancastrian France', by Professor Christopher Almond, will be held on **Thursday 4 October** rather than the Wednesday usual for mid week lectures.

An invitation to research

Members of the Society, who are also members of the Council for British Archaeology (North West), have recently received personal copies of an exciting and much-anticipated publication. Two well-designed volumes, generously enhanced with illustrations and diagrams on almost every other page, form an up-to-date assessment of the region's archaeological heritage and potential for future investigation. The first volume* concentrates on the nature of what we currently know about broad chronological horizons: the Prehistoric, Romano-British, early Medieval, Medieval, Post-Medieval, Industrial and Modern periods. Within each period, the text explores a range of relevant topics: settlements, technology and production, ritual and ceremony, burial, etc. The period-based chapters are preceded by a very useful introduction, which incorporates short sections on the various methods that have been

applied in the field, and where the principal resources are stored. There is much here that even well-acquainted individuals will find of interest, but the text is written in an approachable style, free of technical phrasing, so that someone with little acquaintance with the region and its archaeology would quickly be in a position to evaluate the contents. This is the only publicly-available, comprehensive survey of the region's archaeology in print.

The second volume** turns to the future of these past landscapes, beginning with the sorts of issues that need to be addressed at the outset of an audit (the professional infrastructure of archaeology in the region; significant aspects of current practice; how information is disseminated; and the kinds of research questions that need to be addressed). It then goes on to look at the principal challenges for each of the main periods already outlined, with specific suggestions for the kinds of initiatives that should or could be taken up. Although this may sound like a text for professional archaeologists, it is not intended to be read only by archaeologists. On the contrary, the act of making these two volumes available, free of charge, to CBA North West members, is clear recognition of the need for non-professionals to contribute to the research agenda. There is a wealth of fascinating material here. Anyone interested in the north-west's archaeology will benefit enormously from these pages. The selection of images and examples is not the least feature that makes the two volumes a landmark publishing achievement in regional archaeology.

From now on, discussions about the future of the region's archaeology will invariably refer back to this two-part study. Members of the Society may like to consider how we can contribute in practical and strategic terms to the initiatives recommended. Further discussion of these ideas would help to make the contents of the documents better known.

Any reader who is not a current CBA NW member, and who is interested in joining, or who has any queries about the two volumes described here, can contact Andy Towle, Honorary Secretary at: SLR Consulting Limited, Suite 9, Beech House, Green Lane,

A Very Human Trade: The Archaeology of Slavery

from prehistoric times to the nineteenth century



Council for British Archaeology North-West Regional Group Autumn Conference

**Saturday 3 November 2007
Merseyside Maritime Museum
Albert Dock, Liverpool L3 4AQ**

Cost £10.00 (£16.50 incl lunch); non-members welcome

For a booking form, go to [www.britarch.ac.uk /cbanw](http://www.britarch.ac.uk/cbanw) or phone (01254) 619803

Warrington, WA1 4JN; Email: atowle@slrconsulting.co.uk.

*Brennand, Mark, editor, with Gill Chitty, Mike Nevell *et alii*, *The Archaeology of North West England. An Archaeological Research Framework for North West England: Volume 1, Resource Assessment, Archaeology North West* volume 8, issue 18, 2006, The Association of Local

Government Archaeological Officers and English Heritage, with the Council for British Archaeology North West, 238pp.

**Brennand, Mark, editor, with Gill Chitty, Mike Nevell *et alii*, *Research and Archaeology in North West England. An Archaeological Research Framework for North West England: Volume 2, Research Agenda and*

Strategy, Archaeology North West volume 9, issue 19, 2007, The Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers and English Heritage, with the Council for British Archaeology North West, 214pp.

Zosia Archibald

Excursions 2007

Shropshire 19 May

THE excursion to Shropshire started with an interesting visit to Acton Burnell where the vicar, the Reverend Michael Gillions, showed members around the ancient church and also spoke about the history of the castle, reputed to be the site of the first English Parliament to include commoners.

The next visit was to Ludlow, with its fine castle, splendid church and old streets to explore. Malcolm Reid, who has been excavating and studying the castle, gave us some very useful notes and maps. There were a few heavy showers but they didn't dampen our spirits!

The last stop was at Stokesay Castle, in fine afternoon sun. This is a very different building to Ludlow Castle,

being domestic and not defensive, but just as interesting from a different point of view. The delightful church was open and a message of welcome had been put out for us.

Prue Wendt

North Wales 30 June

Undeterred by the unseasonably bad weather, an intrepid group, led by Prue Wendt, spent a very interesting day in North Wales. The first stop was at the attractive seaside village of Criccieth, where coffee and scones were taken at Moranedd Café. The building dates from the 1930s, having been designed by Williams Ellis, architect of the nearby Italianate Portmeirion Village. For many years in the ownership of the (Lloyd)

George family, it is now managed by Elizabeth, a great-niece of David Lloyd George.

Fittingly, the next stop was the neighbouring village of Llanystumdwy, for more of the Lloyd George experience. Here, at the Lloyd George Museum, the group was joined by Rufus Adams, who has spent a lifetime in academic study of the great man and his family. Following an introductory talk, we saw a fascinating film documenting Lloyd George's life, with some very rare footage from the early twentieth century. There was then free time to look around the museum, visit the riverside grave (another Williams Ellis design) and the nearby cottage where Lloyd George was brought up. All in all this was a great learning experience and a welcome reminder that the Society's brief encompasses history as well as archaeology.

From there it was on to Caernarfon, where the rain began to relent a little. After lunch in the town we were bussed up to *Segontium*, the Roman fort which lies in a commanding position on the edge of the town. Although now surrounded by modern housing, the fort was obviously quite a place. Sadly little now remains of it other than the outline of the buildings, and it could do with better interpretation. The final visit to the imposing Caernarfon Castle was an excellent ending to the day. This remarkably well-preserved Edward I edifice has hosted many prestigious events over the centuries, and its redoubtable walls and defences still bear testimony to the skills of its designers and builders.

Robin Wendt

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Library

Members are welcome to browse through the Society's library at Chester History and Heritage (general books) and Chester University (journals)

Internet

<http://www.chesterarchaeolsoc.org.uk>

The *Chester Antiquary* is published twice a year, in Spring and Autumn. We welcome letters and articles from Members. Contributions for the next issue should be with the newsletter editor, Dr Ian Archibald, no later than 30 March 2008.