

ST. ASAPH ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY

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



**SAAS JOURNAL:
NOVEMBER 2012**

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN- PAUL EVERS SWINDELL

Our year has been saddened at its end by the tragic loss of our Chairman, Doctor David Casemore who had struggled indomitably to fulfill his office through the year to serve the Society as he would have wished and to take as full a part as possible in its activities. His loss will be keenly felt for a long time and we extend our sincere condolences to Ann and their family.

During the year, once again a full and varied one, Members were given the opportunity to hear a wide variety of excellent speakers. It was so very interesting to hear Christine Longworth speaking about Mediaeval floor tiles and then to join her a few days later for a day-school in the identification and drawing of pottery. Philip Holdsworth spoke on "Early Mediaeval Art" and Eric Lander on "Industrial Anglesey" and who could forget John Gould enthusing about the prehistoric life style of the Plains Indians or Native Americans. Gillian Dunn opened our eyes to Roman finds in Chester and so many aspects of Roman life in that city. The passion of Idris Evans when telling us the history of the last true Prince of Wales brought to mind the saga tales of old and he held us spellbound with his rhetoric. Neil Johnston gave a fascinating insight into the "Rebuilding of Llys Rosier."

Members joined together on several memorable visits, to the New Liverpool Museum, which we combined with a meander around Mann Island with Sarah Peveley, a truly special visit to Mostyn Hall with tea and cakes in the drawing room and a wonderful trip to Little Moreton Hall in Congleton. There were walks as well, to the landscape of the lost

Vikings with Paul Parry and to Montgomery, where Maria led a walk around the castle, the mediaeval town and a motte and bailey, all in one go. There was also a visit to the Poulton dig to see the progress they had made and to Acton Scott historical working farm. Beverley organised a well planned St.Asaph Explorer Day, with walks of varying distances which she had researched, which was well supported considering the vile weather on the day. We also had a presence at the St Asaph Country Fair where much interest was shown in the Society, thanks to members who manned our stall [in the tea tent of course!]

Add to the above our the regular Quiz, Social Evening and Tan Llan Jigsaw Day [otherwise known as the Pottery Sort, with a packed lunch and lots of fellowship], and you will see why I said a "full and varied" year, so much of the credit for which goes to Tina Edwards for her efforts in arranging speakers and collating the annual programme. I would like to express our particular thanks to Tina for her hard work and efforts on our behalf and our sadness that she is now relinquishing the post. Our dig has continued at Tan Llan, for which our gratitude to Hazel Formby and our thanks for the able supervision of our Site Manager, Graham Cragg and for the continuing hard work of all those members who are able to take part.

As usual members must be reminded that success is 5% inspiration and 95% perspiration and that the year has been marked by some sterling efforts by committee members, the officers and indeed yourselves. My personal thanks and those of the Committee go to the Cricket Club for hosting our meetings and to those who man the doors, make the teas, run the library, sell the raffle tickets, write "Dig This" and write up and print the Journal; all the tasks and duties willingly performed which make for a successful and happy Society. Thank you all so much.

SAAS POTTERY SORT IN YSCEIFIOG VILLAGE HALL, 21 OCTOBER 2011.



Sixteen members of the Society joined in with sorting the washed pottery "finds" from Tan y Llan site. This activity

Have you got a bit with blue dots? resembles an enormous jigsaw puzzle with missing pieces distributed round the hall on different tables. The idea is to sort and match "like with like" and bag these pieces together. Very subtle differing shades of white and patterned blue make this difficult, as there is a vast amount of both. It is an enjoyable and social event and the Hall is ideal for such an activity. Andrew Coomber, from Ysceifiog, photographed us from many angles as a record of one of the uses for the Hall.

CLOSING DOWN TAN Y LLAN SITE FOR THE WINTER, 23 OCTOBER 2011.

Preparing the site for covering up over the winter entails weeding and removing all the fallen leaves.



An enormous piece of *Closing down* black plastic is laid over the whole site and weighted down with stones. A special path is defined with small stones for Hazel to negotiate her way across the hazardous plastic to her washing line. The barn we use has been tidied and made ready for our next season. The occasion of the "close down" for winter was marked by extra refreshments, mainly provided by John & Sid.

"NORTON PRIORY'S MEDIEVAL TILES" BY CHRISTINE LONGWORTH. 1 NOVEMBER 2011. ARTICLE BY BEVERLY WEBBER

Christine Longworth had been awarded a grant to catalogue the medieval floor tiles at Norton Priory. She set the scene for us by giving the background to the Priory in its historical context. An Augustinian Priory



Christine Longworth

was founded in 1115 in Runcorn, and a new foundation was moved to Norton in 1134. In 1284, after a disastrous fire, much of the Priory was rebuilt, and in 1300 a magnificent tiled floor was laid. Norton Priory was an important foundation and owned a number of churches in different parts of the country. These were Runcorn and Great Budworth (Cheshire), Kneesall (Nottinghamshire), Castle Donington (Leicestershire), Burton on Stather (Lincolnshire) and Pyrton in Oxfordshire. However, between 1300 & 1366, turbulent times forced the Priory to sell off some of its holdings. In 1536, at the time of the Reformation, the priory was dissolved, and in 1545 the Brooke family purchased it. A Tudor mansion was built on part of the site, and this remained until a Georgian house replaced it, but in 1928 this was largely demolished. The Brookes lived at Norton for over four centuries. In 1966 the priory was in considerable decay and was given to the Runcorn Development Corporation by Sir Richard Brooke. Very little of the medieval priory remained visible, and it was decided to excavate and display the ruins as an amenity for Warrington and Runcorn. The excavations, headed by J Patrick Green, were carried out intermittently between 1970 and 1987, and remain one of the most extensively investigated religious foundations in Europe.

The Norton Priory Museum Trust, founded in 1975, constructed a museum on the site in 1982, with the aim of providing an educational and recreational resource for the local community. The Trust then approached English Heritage for funding to bring the archaeological record and material archive to the public notice. Subsequently the Trust commissioned Oxford Archaeology North to undertake the analysis and interpretation. As a result of this in 2008, a publication appeared: *"Norton Priory: monastery to museum. Excavations 1970-87"*.

During the excavations fragments from around 600 vessels were found. These included cooking pots, jugs, cups, chamber pots, bowls and pans. Usually pottery in the medieval period did not travel very far from where it was produced. However, French and German jugs were found, as well as pottery from Stamford and Ewloe, near Buckley. There were also pieces of medieval pottery from jugs with "rouletted" decoration; this type of jug being unique to Norton Priory. Their quality is

superior to the contemporary products marketed in nearby Chester, and their source is likely to be very local, possibly the monastic site itself.

Probably one of the most exciting elements of the excavations was the discovery of a tiled floor which was to make the site of great archaeological importance. The floor was



a mosaic, constructed with shaped tiles which fitted together almost like a giant jigsaw puzzle. Some portions

A tiled mosaic of such tiling had previously been discovered at other monastic sites in England, but never on the scale of the floor at Norton. Indeed, more was found at Norton than in all the other sites put together. The floor had been laid in about AD1300, probably at the same time as the east end chapel had been built onto the church. Even today some of the least worn of these tiles had plenty of their original colour and lustre remaining, even after being buried for some 400 years.

Some 200 years later another “more modern” floor was laid over the mosaic tiles. This consisted of square line-impressed tiles. These were on the same principal as tiles today. The tiles themselves were all the same size, and part of the floor design would be stamped on the soft clay of each tile before the tiles were fired in a kiln. The finished tiles would be laid so that the overall pattern could be seen. Some of the tiles discovered had a pattern of chain mail, as worn by knights and soldiers at that time. These were probably from ornate wall or floor tiles around the tomb of a knight. If they were from a tomb, then they were probably broken when the tombs would have been destroyed after the Abbey was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1536.

Christine came across some unique designs, and we were shown some splendid examples. Many of the fantastical beasts portrayed were mythical, or possibly heraldic symbols, as well as birds, flowers, trees and patterns forming a whole when joined together. The imagination and ingenuity of the craftsmen could only be applauded.

Norton Priory website

is:www.nortonpriory.org

For a website with medieval floor tiles enter “medieval floor tiles” into a search engine and an excellent site with images will be on the list.

SAAS POTTERY IDENTIFICATION AND DRAWING DAY WITH CHRISTINE LONGWORTH. 13 NOVEMBER 2011. ARTICLE BY BEVERLY WEBBER

This event was held in Ysceifiog Village Hall and attracted nineteen of us. Two members from the Caer Alyn project and two others from Dolwyddelan Excavations joined with us for the day. Christine was welcomed and we divided into small groups of twos and threes. Each group was presented with a bag of diverse shards of pottery from all eras. Our task was to attempt to place these in chronological order and explain why. Some groups were very methodical and noted down the types and photographed each piece within its timescale. Many of us thought that some rather dull looking pieces were much earlier than in fact they were. A piece from a Roman mortarium was the earliest, but the relatively plain “Roman grey ware” and “burnished grey ware” fooled us into thinking these were much earlier than the “Samian Ware”. Later time scale pottery included Torksey from Lincolnshire, “Undeveloped Stamford ware” (850-1100), medieval pieces of a green glazed jug, “Midlands yellow”, “stone-ware” from Germany, “press-moulded slipware”, dark-glazed “fine-wares”, “cream ware”, porcelain, white salt-glazed stone-ware, transfer printed pearl-ware (after 1780) and Spode “Willow Pattern” (1780-1781); in all eighteen examples.

After lunch we were given a selection of the pottery from a different group from the morning, and attempted to place this selection in its correct sequence. It was an interesting exercise to see what we had learned.



How big was this pot?

Later we were given a lesson on drawing the shape of a pot from a piece of rim or base. A chart with many differently sized concentric circles was used to determine the measurement of each particular rim or base. A vertical line

dissected by a horizontal line (measurement from the chart) was drawn on a sheet of paper, and the “fabric section” of the left hand side of the shard was drawn. Any pattern and shading on the front of the same piece was sketched on the right of the line. Varying success within the groups caused anxiety as well as mirth at our differing results.!

It was a very worthwhile day and Paul thanked Christine for her excellent tuition.

CHRISTMAS ‘GET TOGETHER’. 7 DECEMBER 2011

On a murky December evening, Members of the Society came along to the last indoor meeting of 2011. They brought with them donations of food and drink and what a feast we had. Sincere thanks must be extended to all our Members who have supported the Society over the last year and for their kindness and generosity for their donations towards the Christmas party.

Following the usual Society announcements and the presentation of some gifts to Hazel Formby for allowing us to ‘destroy’ her garden and for her forthcoming significant birthday, Bev, the Society’s Archivist, gave an update on the dig at Ysceifiog, showing slides of the progress that had been achieved during the year.

The Society was also pleased to welcome several new Members to the Society.

“MEDIAEVAL ART” BY PHILIP HOLDSWORTH, 2 FEBRUARY 2012. ARTICLE BY MONTY CORDWELL

Philip Holdsworth, well known to the Society for his expertise in deciphering old documents, made a welcome return to the Society when he spoke to a packed audience on the themes found in early mediaeval art. He explored his topic through four main elements—the character of the first Christian art, the 5th-6th century art of the



Philip Holdsworth

Mediterranean, the pre-Christian art styles in Britain’s “insular art” and the subsequent British and continental styles in the 7th-9th centuries. With illustrations drawn from many sources, some well known such as the Lindisfarne Gospels and others

much less so such as the Utrecht Psalter he set them in their historical context in a novel way.

The first Christian iconography clearly derived from the earlier pagan Roman imagery such as seal impressions like the control stamp of the emperor Anastasias and sarcophagus carvings suitable to illustrate a Christian message.

On the division of the Roman empire into east and west the western capital migrated to Ravenna where christian building began —the mausoleum of Gallia Placida and later Theodoric’s St Appolinare Nuovo and Justinian’s San Vitale with their splendid wall images of evangelists in golden mosaics. Strongly favoured by Mediterranean Christians of this period were pictures of evangelists in pastoral settings.

The collapse of the western Roman empire led to much change in Britain which tended to social, economic and political fragmentation. Pagan settlers in the south east pushed Christianity westwards to Wales and Ireland. The arrival of St Augustine to convert these pagan settlers ultimately led to Christian reunification from the west and east in Northumbria.

The pre Christian art of pagan England is well illustrated by the motifs found at Sutton Hoo. These consist of interlaced snakes, biting beasts, serpents and many abstract patterns of linked whorls. In brilliant colours with inlaid garnets and millifiore glass it contrasted sharply with the developing Christian art in Ravenna.

The arrival of St Augustine brought illustrated written gospels of the Ravenna style to Britain in the 6th century but this did not overturn the preference of the British for their pagan art forms which were continued in locally produced gospels such as the Book of Kells c.670 and the Book of Durrow c800.

On the continent Charlemagne sought to reinforce the legitimacy of his regime in the recreation of late antique styles. He also sought to revive learning and British scholars such as Alcuin of York and others attended his court. About seven schools of Carolingian art can be distinguished although Carolingian gospel books continued to derive from the Mediterranean look with naturalistic rural scenes.

Despite this the arrival of Anglo-Saxon and Irish monks on the continent began to have an effect on the continental art and the influence

of the insular British art can be discerned in such as the Book of Treves.

An entirely new style emerged with the early 9th century Utrecht Psalter where numerous cameo pictures on one page serve to illustrate the gospel

SAAS VISIT TO THE NEW LIVERPOOL MUSEUM, 11 FEBRUARY, 2012. ARTICLE BY BEVERLEY WEBBER

Our first “field” trip of the year took us to the new Museum of Liverpool, which had partially opened last summer and the remaining galleries being available for visitors in the late autumn of 2011. Built on the Waterfront next to those iconic maritime buildings, affectionately known as “the three graces”, it shouts “look at me!” It is definitely a building of “our” time, but who knows how it will be viewed as a piece of architecture in a hundred year’s time. Hurrying inside out of the icy wind we were immediately struck by the lightness and space within. The building is on three floors with an atrium that rises up to the glass ceiling. A circular stairway invites you to explore the galleries telling the history of Liverpool from the Ice Age to modern times. It is definitely a museum “for the people”, but there is material and displays and artefacts to suit any level of curiosity. Liverpool’s maritime importance, living conditions, exotic imports and the cosmopolitan mix of this vibrant city were all emphasised and demonstrated by innovative displays. Each area had a number of interactive computer screens which allowed you to dig further by listening to interviews and viewing short historical videos. A carriage from the famous “overhead railway” and the “Lion” steam engine were tangible reminders of a not so distant past. Football and the Beatles may not have “made” Liverpool the place it is today, but they certainly have raised its profile in the popular imagination. There is too much to take in on just one visit to this museum and it is certainly a place to revisit.

After lunch in the restaurant, we met Sarah Pevely, who had kindly agreed to give us a talk about the development of the landscape of Mann Island before the Museum was built. As a working archaeologist in Liverpool, Sarah was involved with the excavations before the redevelopment. An old map showed the old docks, and indeed remains of the wooden lock gates were discovered and are now in the Albert Dock area. A large amount of pottery

and clay pipes were found and these were processed in the “finds shed”. Recently, Sarah discovered that her grandfather had been working on a pilot cutter the “Edmund Gardner”, which is now permanently moored in a dry dock just outside the building!



It was exceptionally cold standing outside, but apart from that, we all had a stimulating and enjoyable day.

“THE PLAINS INDIANS” BY JOHN GOULD, 7 MARCH 2012. ARTICLE BY CHRIS JOHNSON

Mr. Gould introduced a very interesting talk on the Plains Indians by talking about his lifelong interest in the subject.



John Gould

Once there were about 1500 different tribes on the American plains, but now there remain only about 500, among which are the Lakota, often also known as the Sioux, which means 'people who creep in the grass'. Mr. Gould has been to the homeland of the Lakota on several occasions and describes them as a very proud, solemn people, difficult to get to know. Their legends say that the Sky (Manitou) is the father of their people, and the Earth is their mother.

It is probable that the native American peoples came over the Bering Sea from Siberia, as their DNA closely matches that of the people of Mongolia, and similar arrowheads have been found in both regions. After 1600 white settlers began moving in from the East, pushing the tribes further and further west. The Spanish had brought horses to the Americas and the tribes quickly adopted their use in preference to the dogs they had used until then. On horses they could travel further and faster, and they were able to hunt and raid more effectively. Bison were very important to them, and they used every part of the animal to manufacture almost everything they needed,

such as arrowheads, spoons, paintbrushes, tanning agents, bow strings, saddles, stirrups, shields and blankets, among other things.

As settlers continued to push into Indian lands, the Lakota began to fight back, and mounted raids on the immigrants. The Cheyenne were the most feared of the war parties, and were the finest light cavalry in the world at the time. The Black Hills were sacred to the Lakota, and in 1868 they signed a treaty with the Americans exempting the Hills from white settlement forever. However four years later gold was discovered and miners and settlers moved in. Understandably the Indians were angry, and mounted raids on settlers and miners. The Americans responded and a series of battles ensued, culminating in 1876 with the Battle of Little Bighorn, in which General Custer, who had underestimated the number of tribes camped there, was killed. In response to this defeat the US government expanded the army and overcame the Lakota in numerous battles until the tribes were eventually confined onto reservations and prevented from hunting bison, making them dependent on government rations. Over the next 14 years they suffered greatly from inadequate rations and harsh treatment, and became increasingly restless. The Americans, worried about possible attacks, arrested Chief Sitting Bull, and in the ensuing scuffle, killed him. Later the tribes were rounded up, and, amidst general panic and misunderstanding, were slaughtered at Wounded Knee in 1890.

Mr. Gould concluded his talk with the interesting anecdote that Buffalo Bill (William Cody) brought a company of Indians, including the son of Sitting Bull, to Britain in 1904, to re-enact the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and one of the places they visited was Llandudno.

SAAS VISIT TO FLINTSHIRE RECORD OFFICE, HAWARDEN, 21 MARCH 2012. BEVERLY WEBBER



Since certain government cuts, Flintshire Record Office is no longer open to the general public on Wednesdays. On these “closed” days, pre-booked groups can be given “tours” of the Library. The idea is to give people who might like to carry out research in the future, some idea of the records held. Claire Harrington, the chief archivist, welcomed us and explained about the procedures of registering and catalogue references and about some of the records that are held in the repository. An array of historical maps of St Asaph was displayed on tables, ready for our delectation and curiosity. A large plan of St Asaph dating from 1854 is remarkable in its detail of the centre of the City. It is fascinating to compare the later maps with those of earlier dates to note the changes of use of certain buildings and the different layout of some. The 1828 Enclosure Award maps in particular show how the River Elwy has changed its course quite dramatically. An 1810 survey of St Asaph by Richard Shone is beautifully executed in pen, and is the earliest detailed map of which we know. The digitised collection of old photographs was an attraction, these being shown on computer. A large number exist from St Asaph and from other Flintshire towns and villages as well. A number of these can be viewed on-line at

www.flintshire.gov.uk/archives

Lastly we saw Mark Allen, the conservator, at work. Grants from different bodies including Cymal help to fund certain projects. At present, a number of volunteers are “cleaning” records of the Coal board. This work is carried out over sophisticated “machines” that suck down any small particles of debris from the volumes. Mark is a specialist in parchment restoration and conservation and is sought out by other record depositories and as well as individuals for commissions of all kinds. This “private” work brings in valuable funding for the ongoing conservation work for Flintshire Record Office. We were very privileged to see an illuminated pedigree of the Vaughan family, going back to King David of Scotland, William the Conqueror et al. The artistry from the early 1600’s of the detailed figures and heraldic decoration was quite breathtaking in its brilliance of colours. Mark showed us an early 17th century cookery book he had recently partly rebound and repaired for a private individual. It appears that this is the only surviving copy; so a very rare item indeed. Two other outstanding items involved a Royal proclamation with a crumbling

seal (neatly packaged in an acid free box, fashioned by Mark) and highly decorative and intricately printed initial lettering, which would have been engraved on a wood block. The second document with two “wrapped” seals had been executed in fine secretary hand. Claire thanked Mark for allowing us to view his studio and we, in turn, thanked Claire for making us so welcome.

“ROMAN FINDS IN CHESTER” BY GILLIAN DUNN, APRIL 4 2012. ARTICLE BY PAUL EVERS SWINDELL

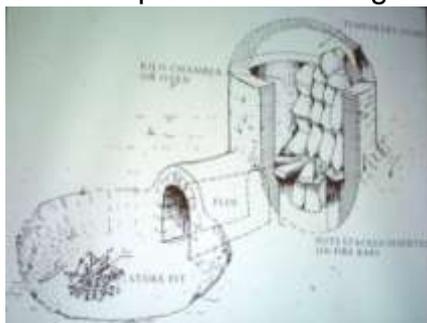


Gillian Dunn

The speaker brought a large number of artefacts of differing kinds and the appetite and curiosity of the audience were whetted by watching her setting them out on four tables prior to her talk. She began by explaining that conditions of acidity

and soil moisture were not conducive to the survival from Roman times of organic items, such as those of wood, leather or textiles; the majority of items discovered being those of pottery or metal. She then took us gently and with great knowledge, through a time-line of the artefacts which she had brought to discuss.

She began with pottery of the “Common Orange” type of the late first and early second centuries AD, mostly military in purpose and emanating from the kilns situated at Holt; the orange hue being caused by oxygen being present in the kiln when firing took place. Most of the wares were plain and for kitchen use. Gillian explained how firing took place in



An updraught kiln

updraught kilns, where the firing was accomplished by the hot gases present. She moved on to show

Examples of black and brown wares, again functional with rough sides to aid grip, the tops of the vessels merely sliced off

with a wire. The mortaria that she went on to show us, used for grinding herbs and grains had, she explained, inner surfaces textured with pieces of quartz or similar to aid the grinding process.

When the Roman army moved North more pottery was imported, slipware and more decorative pieces in the second century, including “black burnished ware” from Dorset, often for drinking vessels and hand-made rather than produced on a wheel. Such pottery was fired in a clamp or bonfire kiln, hence the black colouration, and is excellent for dating as the rims change with the centuries. Gillian explained how a petrological scan of a potsherd revealed the various minerals in the clay from which it was made, enabling accurate source identification. Even the sound made when a sherd was struck could reveal much and she demonstrated this with a piece of German ware which had a distinctive tinny sound. She showed how mortaria from different areas were identifiable by their distinctive hand grips and showed us differing types of both coarse and fine ware, including Samian ware from Gaul with its distinctive colour and surface. Some Samian ware was fired in large kilns holding some twenty or thirty thousand items at each firing, both plain styles thrown on a wheel and hand moulded decorative types. Some of the small Samian ware bowls we were shown had wear on their inside surfaces where food or drinks had been mixed within them, perhaps even at table.



Remains of an amphora

Amphorae were imported, not as pottery but because of their contents, olives, oil, wine etc.

From areas such as Turkey, North Africa, Spain etc., sometimes stamped with the seal of the estate of origin, or rarely with a description of the contents painted on them, a residual analysis can often reveal what they had held. A Roman lamp, familiar to most was shown, together with its less well known lead base to give stability. Glazed pottery was rare in this area and towards the end of the third and beginning

of the fourth centuries quality grew poorer, much of it being “shellware” containing ground sea shells, from Yorkshire and the North of England.

Gillian had even brought with her some examples of square, flanged roof tiles and the anti-fixes which closed up the exposed ends of a tile run to prevent water penetration. Tiles were heavy and coarse and were dried on sand beds on the ground, leading to traces of paw-prints, birds feet etc., while curved tiles were dried on shelves. The scale of building materials used was discussed; at Chester the bath-house alone had used some seventy thousand bricks and thirty thousand roof tiles



Tiles and pipes

while the mosaic surfaces had needed some three million tesserae to complete. We were shown light tube-like bricks for forming strong arches, courtyard tiles which were laid on edge in a herringbone pattern and small examples of plasterwork. Window glass, merely to let in light rather than to look through, was initially moulded and quite thick, a later piece had been blown and opened out before it cooled. Many Roman glass objects were blue-green in colour, comprising bottles and jars for medicine, perfume etc, with first century glass being a dark blue. The larger jars were imported for their contents, as with amphorae.

Roman jewellery was mentioned, melon beads, glass beads and both decorative and functional brooches, the latter for cloaks or robes. Not many rings had been found and yet many of the stones for rings were in evidence, as were seals. Gaming counters were also found but not in large numbers as the metal and glass ones were often recycled, the pottery ones being discarded. Bone counters had been made on a lathe, but due to the paucity of waste material little is known of the bone industry.

With time slipping away the pace quickened and we were shown a final slew of objects ranging from copper alloy tweezers, military fittings, buckles and horse gear to coins. Amongst the final objects were very rare and fragile wooden tablets to be written on in ink,

stylus pads in which messages were written with a stylus.

To close Gillian explained that some of the items had already been conserved, whilst some still awaited conservation but that all metal items were x-rayed to evaluate what was beneath the corrosion so that limited funds were best allocated. A final image was that of a sword scabbard revealed by x-ray within a mass of corrosion.

After a round of questions, willingly and expertly answered, a sincere vote of thanks by Monty Cordwell produced a warm and appreciative response from an enthralled audience.

SAAS VISIT TO LITTLE MORETON HALL, 22ND APRIL 2012. BEVERLY WEBBER

A day of spring weather with enough sunshine, between the showers, to highlight the blossom and spring flowers was ideal for seeing this fine Tudor/Elizabethan house in the heart of Cheshire. On approaching this iconic black and white timber-framed building, one would be forgiven for wondering how it still remains standing. To quote from James Lees-Milne’s *“People and Places”* “..the absurd half-timbered structure, crowned by an unbroken length of gallery window like some fantastic, elongated Chinese lantern, and toppling, if not positively bending over the tranquil water of the moat, the whole ancient pack of cards about to meet from the first puff of wind its own reflection ...once seen can never be forgotten.”

A moated, timber-framed house surrounds an inner courtyard, built by the Moreton family in 1505. They had been powerful landlords from the 13th century, and after the Black Death and the Dissolution of the monasteries, the family benefited through buying up land that had become available, a consequence of these two



Little Moreton Hall

dramatic events. The manor house is built of traditional (and readily available) materials of oak and wattle; the original wood would have

been unfinished and allowed to weather to a pale silver colour. Today, some restored timbers have been left in this condition to give visitors the chance to picture the house as it would have looked. The Great Hall and the northern half of the east range date from the time of the first William Moreton. The east range was extended southward and the north-west wing and porch were added in about 1546. In 1559, a carpenter called Richard Dale carried out major works for William Moreton II, including two magnificent bay windows in the courtyard. The carpenter's name and the date have been carved above. New, fashionable additions were added shortly afterwards, creating a collection of interlinked buildings surrounding a cobbled courtyard.

After William's death, his son John continued to work on the house and constructed the south wing, followed by the so-called domestic block around 1600. Adjacent to the Gatehouse, for all to see is a garderobe with its chute going down to the moat. It was the south wing which, symbolically at least, led to a decline in both the hall and the family's fortunes. The Long Gallery seems to have been an afterthought, conceived during the construction of the gatehouse on which it sits. Arch-braced roof trusses support the weight of the heavy stone slates on the roof, while the gallery itself is loaded directly onto the first-floor ceiling joists. The fact that the entire South wing has little or no foundation goes some way to explain the lopsided appearance of the house. Iron-tie rods were inserted at the end of the nineteenth century as a further precaution against collapse, but the crooked and bowed windows, floors, panelling and beams all combine to make visitors to Little Moreton feel somewhat seasick. It has been suggested that the heavily decorated fireplace in the Upper Porch Room, just off the Long Gallery, is the only true vertical in the house!

As Little Moreton's foundations creaked under the weight of the Gallery, so England's people were bowed by civil war. The Moreton family, staunch supporters of the King, found themselves isolated in a region of Parliamentary sympathies. The Hall survived use as a billet for Cromwell's men, but the family's finances were placed under a considerable strain.

The family kept the house as well as they could, but by the early 1700s they had let the

property to tenants. By the end of the eighteenth century much of the house was being used for storage and only a fraction of it was still inhabited. The house eventually passed to a nun, Elizabeth Moreton. As the last surviving member of the Moreton family, Elizabeth left the house to her cousin, Bishop Charles Thomas Abraham, on the condition that it was never to be sold. Between them, Elizabeth and Bishop Abraham performed much timely restoration. The National Trust, to whom Bishop Abraham and his son bequeathed the building in 1938, continues this legacy of conservation.

The imaginative window glazing merits a mention. Thirty thousand leaded panes (known as "quarries") designed from different arrangements of triangles, rectangles, diamonds, circles, squares and lozenges adorn the house. A recent archaeological excavation at Biddulph Grange, just four miles away, has identified a glass site. It is possible that itinerant glass makers from there would have travelled to Little Moreton to supply the glazing. Today fish and ducks swim in the freshwater moat, while the garden has been restored to its heyday; flowerbeds in their original planting schemes, a carefully clipped knot garden and an orchard. Biblical wall paintings, which were discovered behind Georgian panelling, can be seen in the Parlour, while the Withdrawing Room houses a round table on an octagonal base that may have been made to fit the window. A "cupborde of boxes" described in an inventory of 1599, along with a long "board" or table in the Hall, are two of the original items still remaining.

"THE LAST TRUE PRINCE OF WALES" BY IDRIS EVANS, 2 MAY 2012. ARTICLE BY MARIA BLAGOJEVIC



Idris Evans

Idris gave a potted history of Owain Glyndwr, the last true Prince of Wales, or as he was known by his English name of Owen Glendower. Born into a wealthy aristocratic family c 1349, it was

said that he was directly descended from the Princes of Powys

and Cyfelliog. He was part of the Anglo-Welsh gentry of the Welsh Marches (the border between England and Wales) in north east Wales. The group moved easily between Welsh and English societies and languages, occupying important offices for the Marcher Lords while maintaining their position as 'uchelwyr' – 'nobles descended from the pre-conquest Welsh royal dynasties – in traditional Welsh Society.' As a result of his status, he learnt English, Latin and French and studied in London, spoke Welsh fluently and was a gifted academic who studied law and became a loyal and distinguished soldier of the English king before returning to Wales and marrying.

Idris gave more background of Owain's father Gruffydd who wanted to rule a united Wales by marrying Elen the daughter of Tomas ap Llywelyn from a small town outside of St Davids in South Wales. Owain was born in this area and was not born in North Wales. The marriage was rumoured not to have been happy; they only had three children which was unusual for the period. It was said that Elen had suffered from a mental illness.

The young Owain, following his father's death, was taken in by Sir David Hanmer, a rising lawyer shortly to be a justice of the Kings Bench and also into the home of Richard Fitzalan, 3rd Earl of Arundel. Following a successful legal apprenticeship in The Inns in London, he returned to Wales where he married David Hanmer's daughter, Margaret and started his large family.

Owain was educated and trained in warfare and was a brilliant tactician of great expertise. He entered the English King's military service in 1384 when he undertook garrison duty on the English-Scottish border. In 1387 he was in south east England under Richard Fitzalan. In the late 1390s, a series of events occurred that began to push Owain towards rebellion and on 16 September 1400, Owain was proclaimed Prince of Wales by a small band of followers which included his brothers, eldest son, brothers-in-law and the Dean of St Asaph in the town of Corwen. The following morning he went to Caer Drewen and proclaimed his princehood and amassed about 200 people from North Wales who were all excellent bowmen and one English man. After a number of initial confrontations between King Henry IV and Owain's followers in September and

October 1400 the Welsh Revolt against the rule of Henry IV of England began in earnest. In 1402 he captured his arch enemy, Baron Grey de Ruthyn and put him in a pig sty and burnt the town because it was controlled by De Grey's merchants. There was no loss of life. He then marched to Denbigh Castle

He made a fatal mistake in Oswestry and the Shropshire army were aroused. Whilst resting on the banks of the Severn they were attacked and he had to retreat into the hills, mountains and forests. By 1403 he had captured castles and needed assistance from the French. Two thousand men arrived by sea from Milford Avon, but they were not used to guerrilla fighting. The support of the French eventually faltered and although successful in terms of uniting the Welsh against their oppressors, the uprising eventually ran out of pace due to key home ground lost whilst chasing the English army towards London. Following the receipt of a letter from Owain to the French, the French sent two ships containing some exotic animals. One animal, a gorilla, was befriended by Dafydd Gam and he spent endless hours trying to teach this animal to talk.

Owain was last seen in 1412 He had become a renegade and was never captured nor tempted by royal pardons and never betrayed. His final years are a mystery. He was sheltered and protected by his followers and their families but he was aware that he was endangering their lives. Tradition has it that he was buried possibly at the Church of SS Mael and Sulien close to his home, or possibly at his estate in Sycharth.

It is also said that he died at his daughter's home as he was very ill, probably with TB and his last words was that he wanted to see his blue mountains. The mountain behind Cymer Abbey actually turns blue in certain light and it is possible that he was buried at Cymer Abbey or on the mountain.

In conclusion Idris surmised that Owain was a charismatic, great and kind man of his time, who went from Prince to pauper to resist the rule of the English and to encourage Welsh independence and encouraged the audience to go and see Sycharth Castle, the home of this great man.

Following a few questions, Paul Evers-Swindell thanked Idris for this insight into a heroic Welshman.

FIELD TRIP TO MONTGOMERY, 10 JUNE 2012. ARTICLE BY MARIA BLAGOJEVIC, SOCIETY'S SECRETARY

On a fine sunny morning a group of Members visited Montgomery. Montgomery is a medieval new town founded in the 1220's at the foot of a precipitous rock outcrop, upon the summit of which Henry III built what was then an impregnable castle, forming part of the border defences against the Welsh. The remains of the castle, which was started in 1223, have been excavated and secured. Granted a Royal Charter in 1227, the new town was then enclosed with a massive wall and ditch, the line of which is still clearly visible on the east and west sides of the town, though none of the four gate towers survive.

Montgomery is important historically because the medieval street layout remains virtually unchanged and architecturally because it is a fine example of an almost upspoilt small Georgian market town.

The first stop was a leisurely stroll down a country lane to visit the Iron Age Hillfort of Ffridd Faldwyn.



The Group © M Blagojevic

Ffridd Faldwyn occupies a prominent hilltop commanding the Severn valley near its confluence with Camlad and its crucial crossing at Rhydwhyman. It is the precursor of a series of Roman and medieval sites in the area.

The excavations of 1937-9 were among the earliest on a hillfort to examine an open area, so that the excavators had little previous evidence to compare with the features they found. Some Neolithic material was recovered, and the remains of a Bronze Age barrow on the summit were trenched with no result. The earliest Iron Age settlement appears to have been a fairly small enclosure. It had a double

timber palisade, built in two parallel rows, the post holes for which lay beneath the earthwork defences now visible.

At a later date a timber-laced rampart, with a second rampart outside it, was constructed at a lower level, completely surrounding the earlier work. It enclosed a greatly increased defended area, 300m by 200m. The main entrance of this larger enclosure faced south-west, and an annexe was built at this vulnerable end, visible in the field next to the road, before the entrance proper is reached over the second stile.

The inner enclosure contained a number of large post holes, almost certainly for 'four-posters,' which might have served as granaries. A number of round hut sites containing hearths and occupation debris were uncovered between the inner and outer enclosure, to the west of the south-western entrance. Next we visited the Castle.

The first Castle built at Montgomery was



Entrance to Castle © M Blagojevic

situated a mile nearer the River Severn at the hamlet known as Hen Domen. The remains of the motte and bailey castle of the Norman period can be seen from the road but cannot be visited as it is built on private land. The current Castle was started in 1223 and completed around 1233.

The Castle stands on an imposing ridge of rock. The Castle comprises of three wards: the Inner Ward to the north being the highest is divided from the next ward by a deep ditch. The Middle Ward is the largest and in the 17th century was the site of Lord Edward Herbert's mansion. The Outer Ward is an irregular shape and very rocky.

We then had some lunch at the Dragon Hotel and proceeded on to the Church followed by a tour of the town.

St Nicholas Church



The Church © M Blagojevic

Originally founded as a chapel from the neighbouring priory of Chirbury and at first consisted of a nave and chancel only. The original building may be dated about 1225, the transepts being added at the end of the century when the church was lengthened.

The church contains a double screen of 15th century work with a richly decorated rood loft, a royal coat of arms of the reign of George I dated 1726 and a magnificent Elizabethan canopied tomb of Richard Herbert of Montgomery Castle, probably built by Walter Handcock of Much Wenlock, the designer of the old Market Hall at Shrewsbury. There is a lot to see in the Church.

The Churchyard contains a number of interesting graves including the Robber's Grave. The story of this is that one John Davies, who was hanged in 1821 following an unjust charge of highway robbery, declared that to prove his innocence, no grass would grow on his grave for at least one generation. This proved to be the case for over a century and a half. The site is still marked on the west side of the path leading from the tower to the north gate. Another interesting grave, nearly opposite the west end of the church, records the death of PC William Davies in 1903. Carved on the gravestone are his policeman's helmet, dark-lantern, truncheon and belt.

Montgomery has a plethora of interesting buildings and the town has been designated an Outstanding Conservation Area. Not to be missed is the 16th century house in Arthur Street known as the Old Bell, which is now the Town's museum and well worth a visit.

Roman Fort

Although now only the outline of this is visible at The Gaer, it was an important Roman staging post connected with a network of roads to and from other Roman sites including Wroxeter and Caersws. The fort appears to have been established at the time of the Roman Conquest in AD75, was occupied and abandoned several times and finally held until the close of the Roman occupation towards the end of the 4th century.

The above is just a taster of some of the more interesting side of this town. More information is available on the Internet on various sites – too many to list together with information from the local Old Bell Museum.

QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE & ST ASAPH CITY STATUS CELEBRATIONS. 4 JUNE. BY BEVERLY WEBBER

During the extended celebrations weekend, on Monday 4 June, SAAS shared a stall with "Transasaph" (St Asaph Transition Town/City) at "Party in the Park". William Evers Swindell and Sarah Pevely are the prime movers behind the Transition initiative and were "spreading the word" to the locals about sustainability by selling "seed bombs". These consisted of clay,



Seed Bombs.

compost and wild flower seeds that can be "broadcast" anywhere to benefit native wild flower growth and therefore pollination by bees. SAAS' contribution to the celebrations, apart from publicising ourselves, was to ask the general public for ideas as to what should go inside a "Time Capsule" that will be buried next year under a new extension to the Cathedral. I'm afraid most people we approached seemed



Our Stall

to have no ideas at all. However, there were a few good suggestions and a number from SAAS members.

We are still looking for more creative thoughts and ideas, so if you do have any brainwaves, please contact any member of SAAS Committee, you have until 2013/2014!!

I am very grateful to those SAAS members who helped on the day.

**“INDUSTRIAL ANGLESEY” BY ERIC LANDER. 6 JUNE 2012.
ARTICLE BY MONTY CORDWELL**

Eric Lander is now retired but was the engineer at “electric mountain” and has worked on several hydro schemes in Britain. He is now involved with industrial archaeology in an academic and practical sense.

Eric’s lecture revealed that over time Anglesey has hosted an unexpectedly wide range of economic activities, of many of which there remain only traces.

He described the island’s heritage under the headings of Roads, Railways, Ports, Fishing, Minerals, Farming etc.

Beginning with roads he reminded us that in 1801 unity with Ireland brought the need for faster access to Ireland and illustrating with slides and old postcards he brought to life the construction of the A5 and the problems for Telford of the Admiralty’s demands for 100 ft clearance over the Menai Straights in 1810. A 1938 reconstruction merged and widened the two earlier suspended carriageways. At this time the chains were renewed to the same design as in 1826. An original A5 toll house still stands at Llanfair. The old road across Anglesey was largely ignored and Telford took a new route.

So far as railways were concerned, the original wrought iron tubular bridge bringing the railway to Anglesey (subsequently burnt down in 1970). was built in 1850 by Stevenson, the towers being constructed of local Penmon quarry stone. Remains of a jack for hoisting the bridge into place and which broke under the strain can still be seen on site. The only original signal box left on the Chester to Holyhead line still exists at Llanfair. A branch line was built on the island but suffered under the “Beeching Axe”

The sea has been a major factor in the island’s past. Holyhead breakwater was once the longest in Europe, needing seven million tons of stone for its base. A special broad gauge

railway was constructed to move the stone and deposit it without the need for side tipping. The Old custom house and the Memorial Arch still stand on the pier.

The island coast has several noteworthy lighthouses, no longer manned but automatic, these being important for Liverpool bound ships, notably South Stack.

Anglesey stood at the west end of a chain of ten semaphore signalling stations designed to relay to Liverpool advance news of sailing ships approaching Liverpool. Messages could be sent to Liverpool in minutes enabling owners to book berths in time for a ship’s arrival and avoid losses due to waiting times. Several still exist. These were of course superseded by wireless telegraphy. Holyhead mountain is a communication centre still for public services.

Amlwch port was sufficiently important to the copper trade that it had a dry dock for repairs to ships and some shipping was built there too. These days pilot boats are stationed there to take ships into Liverpool to avoid the ever growing number of wind turbines in the sea.

Anglesey played its part in the national oil pipeline network with a line running from Amlwch to Stanlow in Cheshire. Following the closure of the Amlwch terminal it now carries gas.

A very small fishing industry exists mostly for local consumption. (The first fish traps in the straits were built by the then Bishop of Bangor as a commercial venture). Connections with the sea were formerly reinforced by Seamanship Training Schools, notably the “Indefatigable” now a recuperation centre for the forces. HMS Conway, another training ship was lost when under tow for repairs. A marine research laboratory still exists at Menai.

The minerals of Anglesey were for long very important. The remnant volcano of Parys Mountain provided rich copper ores. The large visible excavations hide extensive underground workings where wind operated pumps (one, unusually, was five bladed, an inflexible number for the miller to manage) were needed for dewatering but later steam technology was used and a beam engine of the James Watt type was installed at the Pearl Engine House.

The limestone at Penmon Quarry provided building stone for many local uses from castles to houses and indeed latterly provided replacement stone for original "A5" mileposts perhaps lost to souvenir hunters. Kilns to burn stone to make lime for farm use and for mortar was an inevitable local product .

Coal was formerly mined on a limited scale at the Berw mine (now an RSPB reserve) near Maltreath and serpentine, better known as Anglesey marble was also mined but only one source is still in production. Local china clay from Llan Lleiana was used for the production of pottery. A silica brickworks also manufactured firebricks on the coast at Porthleven. for export by sea. Although there was no slate on Anglesey it was imported to make school writing slates for export.

A testament to the significance of agriculture, over 80 corn mills existed at one time supplying much of North Wales. Melin Lyon mill survives in working order and several others have been converted to houses. A water powered wheel operated at Melin Howell till 1999 and two tidal mills existed on Church Island at Menai.

Aluminium was smelted until recently but only rolling processes now continue.

A peculiar local industry was Marram weaving. This formed a cottage industry exploiting the ready supply of Marram in the local dunes. The product was used for matting and to cover haystacks.

Saunders Roe factory was established at Beaumaris during the second world war for receiving and servicing seaplanes and building motor torpedo boats. Post war their staple product was busses for export and for London.

One nuclear reactor still functions at Wylfa.

One of the biggest employers is at RAF valley where aircraft servicing and training of pilots and air sea rescue operations are carried out.

Tourism has become a significant employer in more recent years and goes some way to compensate for the decline of old industries.

**TRE CEIRI JOINT FIELD TRIP WITH
DOLWYDDELAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY.
9 JUNE 2012. ARTICLE BY MARIA
BLAGOJEVIC, SOCIETY'S SECRETARY.**

On a very wet and grey day an intrepid bunch of people from Dolwyddelan Historical Society and St Asaph Archaeology Society took to the hills to ascend one of the peaks in The Rivals, where they would investigate and enjoy the

sights of an Iron Age Hillfort with a long and varied history.

SHORT HISTORY OF TRE CEIRI



Tre Ceiri

As we followed the footpath up the hill, we stopped to look at some remains of roundhouses on the lower slopes. We followed the path along the valley floor between The Rivals before we ascended into the hillfort itself. On our way we saw a number of different plants in the boggy area of the valley floor. We took our time and gently ascended the path into the hillfort via the south western entrance. The party were informed to look out for some stones with drill holes, this signified that the stonework has been replaced by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust during their excavations in 1990-1994.

Tre'r Ceiri hillfort stands 450 metres above sea level on an exposed peak of Yr Eifl on the Llŷn Peninsula in Gwynedd. It is one of the best preserved and most densely occupied hillforts in Britain, its stone ramparts surviving in places to near full height and enclosing over 150 visible stone houses.

Early investigations in 1904 and 1906 involved the clearance of many house interiors and the discovery of a number of important artefacts. Later survey and excavation of the hillfort during the 1950s improved our understanding of the defences and of the building style of the houses. Visible are gateways and ramparts.

The earliest fort was defined by a stone wall, which surrounded an elongate area of the ridge top. It enclosed an Early Bronze Age cairn, which has been the focus of a recent excavation. The fort was entered through two main entrances, each with approaching trackways. A second outer wall was later built around the western and northern sides of the fort.

Small oval terraced enclosures surround the fort and were probably used as stock enclosures and cultivation plots. A spring immediately outside the fort probably provided the water supply for people and animals.

House styles varied through time: the earliest were stone built roundhouses; the latest were roughly rectangular. During an intermediate period, circular houses were internally subdivided with stone walls, creating two or three rooms within a single building.

The Iron Age fort probably housed 100 people living in about 20 houses. During the Romano-British period, the fort grew into a large village or small town with perhaps as many as 400 inhabitants.

Most of the finds from this hillfort, including pottery, iron tools, stone spindle-whorls and glass beads, belong to the Romano-British period (AD50-400), showing that it continued as a settlement during the occupation of north-western Wales by the Roman army.

In one of the houses, a fine and unique gold plated brooch was discovered. Its elaborate decoration is of the late La Tène art-style and it was probably made during the middle of the first century AD. This brooch is displayed in the Roman Archaeology Gallery at the National Museum Cardiff.

More information can be obtained via www.coflein.gov.uk website, CADW and Gwynedd Archaeological Trust. There is also a great deal of written history that is available on the Internet.

Due to the inclement weather, a decision was taken to descend from the mountain, which unfortunately led to the party not being able to fully explore the complete site.



Having a spot of lunch © Maria Blagojevic

Following our very wet adventure we then retired to The Lion Inn at Tudweiliog where we partook of afternoon tea which was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone.

During the tea, Certificates of Achievement were presented to all those who had managed to climb to Tre'r Ceiri, a very successful joint venture which the two Societies hope to repeat in the future.

Thanks to the Members of Dolwyddelan Historical Society who assisted in the planning of the walk and for helping to get Members of both Societies safely to the top and down again.

YOUNG ARCHAEOLOGY CLUB. 17 JUNE. ARTICLE BY BEV WEBBER

A few months ago we were approached by Fiona Gale and Heather Butler, both leaders of YAC groups, asking if they would be permitted to visit the excavations at Ysceifiog. Sunday 17 June was chosen and a good turnout of diggers and helpers from SAAS made for a successful day.



A view of the site

Each was met in the Village by Bev, and given a brief history of Ysceifiog along with mention of field names belonging to the old house and other facts as they walked down the "ancient highway" (as described in the 1805 Enclosure Act) to Tan y Llan. Parents of the youngsters who came too also became involved and asked questions. At the site, the barns were pointed out and the groups were told about the importance of mining in the area as well as farming. Next Graham gave the "guided tour" of the



Graham at work

the site in general. The Wrexham youngsters were given a "taster session" of using a trowel in the new trenches in the stack-yard under



A "taster".

close supervision and guidance of SAAS members. Fiona's group were invited to wash finds in the barn which they did with enthusiasm. In the garage we had displayed an array of some of our "better" finds which caused considerable interest. Sid brought along his metal detected finds from the Denbigh area, and kindly allowed the youngsters to handle them as he talked about them. After refreshments they departed, somewhat reluctantly, the leaders having requested that they be allowed to visit on another occasion, possibly next year.

"THE REBUILDING OF LLYS RHOSIR". BY NEIL JOHNSTONE, 4 JULY 2012. ARTICLE BY BEVERLY WEBBER

Neil Johnstone is an archaeologist who is



Neil Johnson (r). and Paul Evers Swindell (l)

now working for the Enterprise Agency: "Menter Môn", promoting the heritage and history of Anglesey. This high profile initiative is to help regenerate the economy of the Island. EU and other funding are being used for instituting infrastructure, to improve access

to certain historical and archaeological sites. Town trails, interpretation boards and modern technological features which can be downloaded to mobile devices and used by tourists for information are being imaginatively developed. Llanddwyn Island is one such site, with ongoing work to reinstate an arch in St Dwywyn's church. In the past, two pilgrimages to Llanddwyn were considered equal to one such journey to Rome, St Dwywyn being held in such high esteem.

Before Neil's present appointment, he was working with GAT in the 1990's searching for Llys sites in Gwynedd (i.e. on the Llyn and Anglesey). These were the courts of the Welsh Princes of Gwynedd, largely being used during the 13th century. CADW was also proactive by giving money to this project to discover these lost sites. Looking at documentary evidence, including medieval "Praise Poetry", old estate maps, field names and old paintings all contribute to pinpointing these sites.

Welsh culture, heritage and archaeology are being promoted as searching for "our" ancestors, rather than Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic peoples. Edward I, the Norman King of England, subjugated the Welsh by building a series of castles in strategic places from 1282. Before this time, a Cistercian Abbey at Deganwy had been very significant, along with the castle, but King Edward moved the monastic order to Maenan Abbey, as a way of imposing his rule and removing the Welsh dynasty and appropriating its culture. Several academics have been looking at the symbolism of castles, how they are set in the landscape and how they have been sustainable. Dolwyddelan Castle is one such study.

Sites that are being identified as llys sites may be discovered on old maps. Looking at place names (Henllys, Gadllys, Maerdref); field names (cae llys, quilleys, cae cafyd – leper field); field boundaries; continuation of land holdings; deserted mediaeval villages -"DMV's" (sheep replacing people being one reason); church, llys and village together, are all clues. A cantref (100 townships) would have supported one Llys. The cantrefi on Anglesey: Aberffraw, Rhosyr, Llanfaes, Penrhosllugwy, Cemaes and another should be at Llifon. Of these, Llanfaes became very powerful, attracting guildsmen including goldsmiths. Aberffraw, similarly, became very significant

and was granted a licence for a market and fair. A corbelled head deemed to be a major piece of masonry was discovered there bearing a strong resemblance to a similar piece in Caerphilly castle. A Romanesque arch in the church may well have been taken from the Llys chapel. The Bodorgan Estate retains an interesting map, denoting: "palace" in the north-west corner. Stones from this now vanished building have been removed for use in field boundaries, repairing the church and generally for buildings in the village of Aberffraw. Indeed, the plan of the Village resembles very much that of an English medieval village. The hierarchy of the villagers was that of bondsmen, free settlers and unfree men tied to the land, who were required to work the fields of the demesne lands, (thus providing food for the llys), make repairs, carry the corn and ask permission from the Lord for just about everything. The tenants were also expected to provide the hall, chamber, food house, stable, porch, barn, kiln, dormitory and privy.

The royal palaces, or llysoedd, of the Princes of Gwynedd, during the centuries of independence before the conquest by the Norman Edward I in 1283, have been described as among the most important secular settlement complexes in the Welsh Medieval landscape. It was from halls of llysoedd such as Rhosyr that Gwynedd was governed. When the king was in attendance at the llys he might summon his councillors and other important men from the commote to meet him. Business would be done in the hall during the day. Llywelyn Fawr signed a charter at Rhosyr in 1237. In the evening feasting and entertainment would take place around the great open hearth.

Rhosyr is well documented as the maerdref of the commote of Menai. A charter of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth was issued there in 1237 and a fair and market were well established before the conquest. The pre-conquest demesne extended over 600 acres and in 1303 the new borough of Newborough was established on these lands. In 1332 over 200 acres of land were lost as the result of a sand storm and blown sand must have been a persistent problem. In the eighteenth century Henry Rowlands referred to the sand-covered rectangular ruined walls of the former llys a short distance south of St. Peter's Church, Newborough, on the crest of a low but locally

prominent ridge between the estuaries of the Braint and the Cefni. By the twentieth century nothing was visible. The local place-name, Cae Llys, together with the generalised locational information provided by antiquarian sources, the topography and the apparent association with the adjacent church recommended the site for limited trial excavation.

The trial excavations at Llys Rhosir began in 1992. Structural debris, including stone walling and stratified pottery of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries confirmed the potential of the site for further work. Major archaeological work, undertaken by GAT and led by Neil Johnstone, followed between 1994 and 1996. Substantial standing, dry stone masonry was discovered, and the hall, measuring 11m20 wide and 9m long. A semi-circular feature at one end has been interpreted as either a bake-house or a guard room. Coins from an English mint and a medieval spur were amongst the finds.

Another potential llys site is at Abergwyngregin, with on-going archaeological excavations. Historical evidence lends credence, with the deaths there of Llewelyn Fawr's wife Siwan, and that of his son Dafydd. A motte, parch marks in the shape of a hall and remains of metal smithing are quite significant.

Neil Johnstone put forward the theory that those yet to be identified could well be connected to the sites of Edward I's castles and towns. In all there should be twenty one llys sites.

Neil concluded his lecture, by promoting the new Visitor Centre at Amlwch. It is situated in a once derelict copper ore shed and tells the story of copper mining at Parys Mountain.

VISIT TO POULTON. 21 JUNE 2012. BY MARIA BLAGOJEVIC

A small group of SAAS members and friends met on a very wet evening with the intention of being shown around this multi-period archaeological site by archaeologist and Site Director, Mike Emery and his assistant Alan. Unfortunately due to the very inclement weather the site was waterlogged and

consequently it was felt that it would be unsafe to actually go on site.

Mike took us to the on site museum and showed us some plans of the site and gave a detailed lecture on progress achieved over the last year. This included further finds on the Neolithic henges and Roman boundary and it was hoped that during the current dig season that a Roman shrine/church or indeed villa might be uncovered as a number of small kilns had recently been found.

Members asked a number of interesting questions which Mike answered with his usual flair and expertise. Members then looked around the excellent museum which had displays of many of the fascinating objects discovered. Such an exciting project seems to produce new discoveries of importance almost daily. An inspiring visit, and Mike invited the leader to arrange another visit later in the year to visit the site. We agreed this would be done as soon as we were able.

POULTON REVISITED. 26 JULY 2012. BY BEVERLY WEBBER

Our return visit was necessary because on our previous visit the site had been flooded. Poor weather has not been encouraging and consequently the excavations have been limited. We were taken to the chapel site and Mike showed us the most recent exposed burials. Two young children together in a grave



A poignant sight.

was a poignant sight. Work with John Moore's University has given impetus for a project to discover the age at which children were weaned in the early and later medieval periods. It is thought that children would have been breast fed up to the age of five or six years, thus minimising the risk of being infected by tuberculosis from drinking cows'

milk. This would have been one of the reasons for high infant mortality. A number of graves containing children have been discovered in a row from north to south, along the chapel graveyard. The date for these burials appears to be around the time of King Canute, in the early 1000's.

The clay-lined Roman ditch was aptly full of water and any hope of discovering the possible Roman villa on the site is now hampered by the diggers' tents. Alan showed the group a newly discovered post hole and explained how



to identify one. Notice the variant colour of the surface soil and the cut itself has looser infill than the surrounding soil. Very often there will be

Another post hole.

smaller "packing stones" at its base. A new "Portakabin" houses some of the artefacts from this fascinating dig. We thanked Mike and Alan for their time and will no doubt make a return visit next year.

FIELD TRIP TO A "FEW HOLY WELLS" WITH TRISTAN GRAY HULSE, 5 AUGUST 2012. ARTICLE BY BEVERLY WEBBER

This field trip turned out to be quite an adventure. Tristan navigated our route whilst



Tristan Gray Hulse and his dog

Bev drove, leading the other two cars. Our first destination was Llandegla where the heavens opened. A kind lady offered the group shelter in her garage which was accepted very gratefully. St Tecla's well was renowned for curing

epilepsy and the condition was locally as “Clwf Tecla”. An elaborate ritual was required to affect a cure. After sunset, sufferers washed their limbs in the water making the offering of a goat (4d). After this they walked three times round the well and the church carrying a chicken, whilst reciting the Lord’s Prayer. From thence, the pilgrim would go inside the church to sleep under the altar, resting the head on the bible. The next day they would depart leaving the chicken and six pence. If the chicken died, the epileptic was cured. Sufferers may have assisted the bird’s death by pricking it with silver pins; a number of these have been discovered in the well. Louise and Graham tested out the well water as did Ursula (Tristan’s dog), the latter with total immersion. Willow, a “guest” dog looked on with surprise. “New Age” offerings had been left in an urn with ribbons adorning one of the trees.

Our tour took us via some very narrow, winding and at times, steep lanes through magnificent countryside, far from the tourist hot spots. Derwen was our next destination. We regrouped at the church and decided to go inside. It is an ancient church retaining its finely carved rood screen and has an early medieval cross in the graveyard. Ffynnon Sara, several miles on is not “holy”, but a “healing” well. It is thought that the well was dedicated to an Irish Saint Saran, who was a missionary travelling



At Ffynnon Sara

Believers immersed themselves in the waters and offered pins or money to the well keeper. A guardian’s cottage once stood in the grounds, but was burned down in 1860.

After a picnic break we headed for Llanrhaeadr and St Dyfnog’s well. The walk through the woods by the stream is quite magical and quite suddenly you stumble upon the well in a hollow, fed by two springs. The spring only received its healing powers after Dyfnog stood in its cold waters as a penance for an undisclosed misdemeanour. It specialised in

around in the sixth century. It’s reputed to relieve rheumatism, skin diseases and cancer. It sits within a grove of holly and conifers, beside the Mynian Brook.

healing “scabs and itch”. The oblong stone structure was constructed in the 18th century, along with changing rooms for its many visitors. Thomas Pennant described it as “enclosed in an angular wall, decorated with small human figures”. Inside the church we admired the splendid Jesse window and the carved angels in the roof.

Our final well, on private land, was quite a surprise. Near to Llangynhafal, this fine stone vaulted well with steps leading down is dedicated to St Cynhafal. Its waters were believed to cure warts and skin cancer. Breathtaking panoramic views over the Vale of Clwyd made it a very special place. Some members of our group had made “offerings” at each of the wells we had visited and tested the waters by immersing their hands. It was a fantastic day and Tristan inspired us all with his depth of knowledge and willingness to share it. The dogs had enjoyed the day too!

FIELD TRIP TO STOKE-ON-TRENT TO VIEW THE STAFFORDSHIRE HOARD. 16 AUGUST 2012. ARTICLE BY MARIA BLAGOJEVIC, SOCIETY’S SECRETARY.

18 Members of the Society visited Stoke-on-Trent to view 226 pieces of the conserved Staffordshire Hoard. The Hoard was found by an amateur metal detectorist in the summer of 2009 in a muddy south Staffordshire field near Lichfield. The discovery is changing the way in which Society thinks about the Anglo-Saxons. More than 5 kilos of gold, 1½ kilos of silver and thousands of garnet pieces were unearthed and declared to be treasure. Most pieces were damaged to some degree, probably when they



were wrenched from their bases before burial.

Stylised seahorse © www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk

The Hoard has been bought by the Potteries Museum and Birmingham Museum and the

public made individual donations which amounted to nearly £1,000,000. It is thought that the Hoard was buried towards the end of the 7th century AD but work is still on going as to why and by whom and opinions are likely to change as the Hoard is conserved.

No traces of a body was found with the Hoard and it contains no jewellery, equipment or dress fittings associated with women. Nearly all of it is military – including parts of a helmet, shield decorations and sword trappings. There are some surprising omissions. While there are handle parts from almost a hundred swords, there are only pieces from 6 or 7 scabbards. There are no large buckles or mounts that would have been used on a warrior's belt and leather harness. There are no blades.

There is an important group of Christian objects, including at least 3 crosses and a gold strip inscribed with a Latin text from the Bible. Mercia was one of the last Anglo-Saxon regions to convert to Christianity in the mid 7th century, so these Christian artefacts are particular intriguing.



Christian cross © www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk

Among the many decorative mounts and fittings are pieces of unsurpassed delicacy, decorated with gold filigree or garnet cloisonné. Some are shaped like birds or animals, but others are unlike anything that have been found before.

One of the Museum's staff Cathy Shingler gave us a fascinating insight into the Hoard and tried to explain or indeed question the whys and wherefores of the pieces. She told

us that painstaking excavation of the site by archaeologists shortly after the find was made to ensure that there was nothing in or around the area. The work of cataloguing, cleaning, conservation and research is ongoing and will continue for a considerable time. Special cleaning methods have been developed using natural thorns, which are firm enough to



Biblical inscription © www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk

remove soil but flexible enough not to scratch the soft gold. New techniques are enabling staff to explore the pieces physically and analysis of some of the garnets suggest currently that they might be from the Indian subcontinent. The gold probably comes from melted down Byzantine or Roman coins. Some objects resemble finds from other sites but many pieces are unique and there is nothing to compare them with.

Prior to us viewing the Hoard, Monty Cordwell, Committee Member gave a vote of thanks on behalf of the Group.

The Group were then taken to view the Hoard. As you can imagine Members were overawed by the pieces, some so tiny that they had to be viewed using magnifying glasses and the intricate work was extraordinary.

The Group then took time to have lunch and refreshments and view the remainder of the Museum before departing for home.

The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery was built and maintained by the City of Stoke-on-Trent and contains some beautiful exhibits, which I would recommend you to visit and enjoy.

More information can be obtained from the official website: www.staffordshirehoard.org.uk

**SAAS AT ST ASAPH'S ROTARY CLUB
"COUNTRY FAYRE", 19 AUGUST 2012.
ARTICLE BY BEVERLY WEBBER**

It was decided that SAAS should have a "stall" at the St Asaph Rotary Club's "Country Fayre" at Llannerch Park on 19 August.



Our Stall

It was a very enjoyable day and a number of people expressed an interest in our Society and its activities. The weather was mixed, but the whole day was a great success, with diverse activities and events to please everyone. Possibly the bid for freedom by a group of young male alpacas was one of the more unusual happenings! Thank you to those SAAS members who helped on the day, and to others who came along to support us.

**"ST.ASAPH: THE MAKING OF A CITY"
BY ANDREW THOMAS. 5 SEPTEMBER
2012. ARTICLE BY MONTY CORDWELL.**

Andrew Thomas was the Mayor of St. Asaph during the campaign to acquire official city status for St. Asaph in 2012. and he described the successful efforts of the town council to gain formal recognition.

He began his talk by acknowledging that most people had thought that St. Asaph already was a "City" perhaps deriving from the old general assumption that a town with a cathedral constitutes a city. Old travel writers such as the Reverend Bingham certainly called it a city and it is widely referred to as a city elsewhere. But this was an illusion....

Realisation of the lack of formal city status came to light in 1974 when the design of a new mayoral chain was disallowed because its design details presumed city status. Exposure in the Sun newspaper followed where the lack of the all important "letters patent" was revealed to the vulgar gaze.

St Asaph was not alone in its quest for the accolade and suffered the disappointment of

being overtaken in the race in 1995 by the smaller town of St. Davids, a town suspected locally of having influential advocates not available to St. Asaph.

At the time of the Millennium 2000 a further submission was made which proved to be only one of about twenty but again St. Asaph was passed over in favour of places like Wolverhampton and Brighton. Here however progress was made in the acquisition of some skills in radio presentation by the St. Asaph team, most notably in not making background noises audible to sensitive microphones.

In 2001 yet another try was made ready for the 2002 Jubilee. Out of five or six submissions from Wales Newport was successful and again local suspicions were that Newport commanded the discreet support of influential political figures. The merits of St. Asaph went unrecognised.

The diamond jubilee of 2012 presented a slender chance of success as the cabinet office decreed that only one city would be awarded the coveted status on this occasion. This time the submission had to be very good to stand any chance at all.

A less modest approach was called for so much was made of the facts that with a population of 3400 the town employed 4000 and over 800,000 people visited local attractions each year. Proximity to an airport and railway station were emphasised for the first time. Last but not least the support of local worthies was canvassed. Surprisingly the exercise cost only about £300 for 50 copies of the submission in sharp contrast to large sums known to be expended by other competitors!

Interviews on "Breakfast Television" followed with St Asaph appearing with Dudley and Tower Hamlets.

A somewhat mystified Town Mayor Andrew Thomas received guarded telephone congratulations for unspecified reasons shortly before the 12th March when it fell to the Deputy Prime Minister Mr Clegg to make the announcement of the award and congratulate the now "City" of St Asaph

Once public, the news released a flood of congratulations with a good "write up" for the town in the Sunday Times and only a minor gripe from Radio 5 at the lack of night clubs in town. (You can't please everybody).

A trip to London followed to collect the precious "Letters Patent". An impressive



Andrew Thomas with the Letters Patent.

red carrying box proffered by the Chancery Office was declined in favour of the convenience of a large brown envelope which was carried back in triumph to St. Asaph.

It remained to arrange exhibitions in all the local schools and work is in hand to see how best to capitalise on this well deserved and hard won success.

The subsequent town jubilee celebrations, with their local added reason for joy was favoured with a royal visit and soon the vellum letters patent with their irreplaceable seal will be on view in the Cathedral.

EXCAVATIONS AT TAN Y LAN 2012. REPORT BY GRAHAM CRAGG, SITE SUPERVISOR.

Thanks to all who helped to close the site down last season we were ready to excavate as soon as the cover was removed. Hazel has been entirely supportive, looking after us all very well despite no longer being able to access her garden easily.

Our sixth season has seen significant progress in particular areas of the site, with new information coming to light in recent weeks. New areas have been examined and intriguing finds made.

With the 'footprint' of the main house at its latest stage now substantially exposed, we have begun to explore in more detail the lower level(s) of occupation discovered last season. We have managed to link hitherto isolated areas and establish the stratigraphy of the site in more detail, though pottery finds are now unusual.

Here a section has been taken through the upper 'flooring' level to expose more of the very different 'flooring' material at the lower level. The change from light to darker material in the centre shows the join between two parts



Two floors and a spike

of the building, probably constructed at different periods. The two brown marks are an iron spike in situ and a hole where another has been.

There are three distinct parts of the building, constructed at different periods. We have yet to determine which is the earliest.

After much geophysical activity, we have opened three new trenches on the far side of the outbuildings, within a 10 metre square. Here we can see cobbles and more substantial



Cobbles

stone work in front of the barn door. We were looking for signs of the horse whim which connected to the interior of the barn. This is where Sid unearthed the now famous set of pig's milk teeth.

Well laid cobbles have been exposed in another trench and a mix of cobbles and more substantial stone on the opposite side

Illustrating what can lie below an innocuous surface, Andrea is carefully excavating a suspiciously circular patch of burnt material next to what may be a later foundation for an internal support.



A suspicious patch

This could be part of the hearth area for the brew-house on the rear of the building, but then again, have we found our first posthole? It is true that certain 'supportive' features on the site can be carefully imagined to line up in various directions

Bev and I have continued to receive support from Fiona Gale, Sarah Peveley, Janet Smith and other distinguished visitors. The site has been also visited by two Young Archaeologists groups, courtesy of Fiona Gale and Heather Butler.

Our thanks to all members who attended 'ad hoc' and provided valuable input and assistance.

DIRTY BOOKS IN RUTHIN. ARTICLE BY BEVERLY WEBBER

On the second and fourth Mondays of each month, a small group of volunteers takes part in a "cleaning" operation at Denbigh Record Office in Ruthin Gaol. It has begun to be known as the "Dirty Books" session. It is not a punishment, but seen as a morning of "conviviality" amongst a group of friends. There are three of us from SAAS and four other "personalities". Our remit is to carefully brush all the pages of different Parish Registers and other associated volumes. There is no

stipulation or competition to see how many we can "clean" in one session, as we can take our time to read out any "gems" that we might think worth airing to the others. Since this began about eighteen months ago, between us we have completed over three hundred volumes. Jane Brunning and Sarah the archivists, oversee us and provide coffee midway through the session. Hot topics of conversation include wind farms (don't mention these!), solar panels, genealogy, current affairs and anything topical that seems right to discuss. A tradition has developed where we bring in a "mystery object" to show and surmise its use or provenance. From time to time Jane has brought forth a "document of the month" from the Denbighshire collection, usually something rare or just a beautiful work of art. Some of the "finds" in amongst all these pages have been finger nails, old receipts, a communion wafer and insects, not to mention piles of dust deposited on our sheets of blotting paper at the end of the morning. Maybe these latter should be saved, and in the future a group of archaeologists should "excavate" them!



Cleaning Dirty Books

ARCHAEOLOGY COURSE AT GREAT ORME MINES LLANDUDNO. 11 AUGUST 2012. ARTICLE BY SARAH PEVELEY.

An archaeology course was held at the Great Orme Copper Mine in Llandudno on August 11th 2012, run by our own member Sarah Peveley. The aim of the course was to give an overall experience of archaeological field techniques whilst reducing the amount of physical labour involved to almost zero and having lots of fun at the same time. The difference with this field course was that nearly everything could be done indoors. How you say? By having everything in miniature, the trenches, equipment, even the trowels, all the digging can be done sitting down with no heavy lifting required.

The day started with some activities over tea and coffee that included a stratigraphy quiz as



well as an experiment with indoor geophysics. The group was then given a guided tour of the mine by Sarah who has been working there for the last few months. It is one of the largest prehistoric metal mines in the world and dates back to the bronze age. It is a fascinating site and well worth a visit. The route is a 200m loop through the underground tunnels which are narrow in places but everyone made it through OK!

After a spot of lunch we returned to the 'site hut' to begin excavating miniature archaeological sites in sand trays using mini trowels and even mini planning frames. The group was split in to two Time Teams. The rules were that they had to excavate as if it were a real dig. No easy task, as the group found out. However, by the end of the day both teams had excavated their sites revealing a Roman bath house and an Egyptian tomb. It was very exciting to see the two teams progress in their investigations and all the time they were learning the thrill, the field techniques, as well as the pitfalls of a real dig. Although everyone was thoroughly exhausted at the end of the day, we all agreed it had been a great experience and everyone went home tired yet still buzzing from the day's achievements.

Another course will hopefully be held next year at the mine and possibly in the cricket club in the near future.

Many thanks to all those involved and especially to Great Orme Mines for hosting the event.