

EXCITING FIND HELPS THROW LIGHT ON "DARK AGES"

The recent discovery of an item of metalwork in the County has provided more information on a period of which relatively little is known.

Recently, Mr. Paul Field of Prestatyn was walking over Penycorddyn hillfort near Abergele, and discovered a finely decorated metal item on the surface of the ground that had been disturbed by sheep. This turned out to be a late



Roman end-buckle dating from the approximate period c.370-400 A.D. The end-buckle (which originally would have fitted on the end of a belt) is made of bronze, and is decorated with engravings of fish and peacocks facing a tree of life on the plate, whilst the buckle itself is of a stylised dolphin's head surmounted by reversed horse heads.

The end-buckle is the first one to be found in North Wales and the first to come from a hillfort site (which were originally constructed in the pre-Roman, Iron Age period). It is important in that the finding of the end-

buckle may well indicate late Roman re-occupation of Penycorddyn, particularly as they are thought to be associated with late Roman military equipment. This is a period of which relatively little is known, occurring as it did at the time of the Roman withdrawal from Britain and the start of the "Dark Ages". Hillforts may well have been re-fortified at this time, as central authority collapsed, and pirate raids threatened the safety of the inhabitants of the North Wales coast.

Ian Sanderson

1992 Excavations at Minera

The 1992 season of excavations at the Minera Mines, Wrexham, have concentrated on the Meadow Shaft site.

Funding by Wrexham Maelor Borough Council has allowed the excavations of the extensive lead-mining remains to continue the work started during the recent land reclamation scheme. The earliest features uncovered to date are a pair of ore bins and associated dressing floors probably dating from the late 18th century/early 19th century workings of the mine. Also surviving to a remarkable degree are the foundations to a steam powered horizontal winding engine erected in 1858 complete with its boiler house, flue and damper. Adjacent to the

winding engine is a pit which contained the fly-wheel powering a rock crusher and another pit containing a rope drum onto which the winding rope was wound.

Large quantities of organic material - rag, cloth, leather and matches - have been recovered from these two pits, preserved by the accumulation of lubricating grease dripping off the winding rope, machinery and bearings.

Three different styles of wire rope construction have survived: two differing weaves of flat rope measuring 3" wide by 1/2" thick (80mm x 13mm) and 3 1/4" wide by 1/2" thick (85mm x 13mm) and one piece of round rope measuring 1" (26mm) diameter. The flat rope dates from the installation

On the 26 October 1992 English Heritage issued a press release entitled 'Managing England's Heritage : Setting our Priorities for the 1990's.

The 'priorities' included:

- dividing English Heritage's 400 ancient monuments and historic buildings into three categories of importance - A, B and C
- concentrating resources on the maintenance and improvement of properties in categories A and B
- seeking local authority or private sector owners for all properties in category C and some in B and A
- privatising the directly employed labour force of 380 skilled tradesmen and labourers who repair and maintain the properties

● securing 100 volunteers from the headquarters staff to take early retirement before 31st March 1993.

Monuments to be passed to the

have been widely criticised in the National Press. Headlines such as 'English Heritage sites named in sell-off hit list' (Observer 25th October), 'The road to monumental folly'

Managing Heritage

public or private sector include such famous household names as Avebury Stone Circles, Birdoswald Fort on Hadrian's Wall and Fountains Abbey.

(Guardian, 27th October) and 'Taking the guard off the gatehouse of the nation', (Telegraph, 31st October) tell their own story.

The English Heritage proposals have caused alarm throughout the archaeological world, and

It is difficult to escape the assumption that English Heritage is trying to dispose of

those sites which possess little potential for income generation. Hard pressed Local Authorities, many without in-house archaeological expertise, are unlikely to take such monuments into their care from English Heritage without all their costs being underwritten. It is also relevant to wonder whether monuments in Wales, or indeed Clwyd, will be subject to the same sort of review by Cadw.

At the time of going to press Cadw was contacted by the Clwyd Archaeology Service for its views on the news from English Heritage, and was asked whether Wales would follow in England's footsteps. A Cadw spokesperson had no comment to make concerning English Heritage and also said 'Cadw has no plans to take any monuments out of state guardianship'.

of the winder and was in use up to 1870. The round rope reflects the use of a better quality steel and a more advanced weaving process in its construction.

Excavations are also underway in the main boiler house adjacent to the Meadows engine house, erected in 1857. The brick foundations to the two tubular boilers survive although both were badly damaged during removal of the boilers when the mine closed around 1914.

Excavations continued to the end of November 1992. There will then be a period of consolidation work to the structures uncovered before the site is open to public access in 1993.

Response to the mailshot in the Clwyd Archaeology Service newsletter has been good with around 40 enquiries out of which approximately 20 CAS readers have volunteered to work on the dig over the course of the excavation.

The author would like to express his thanks to John Manley and the CAS for publicising this year's excavations and hopes for continued co-operation between CAS and Wrexham Maelor Museum Service.

Bill Slater
Industrial Archaeologist
Wrexham Maelor Museum Service



A heavily worn sandstone channel used to convey fine lead-ore from the ore bin in the background.

André Cleans Up His Act



Thanks to the generous donation of a VAX 2000 vacuum cleaner by VAX Appliances Limited our Archaeological Sites Management Officer André Berry, can finally mend his slovenly ways to ensure that Clwyd's ancient monuments are turned out spick and span!

After a period of intensive training on the lounge carpet, André and the VAX 2000 have moved to the slopes of Gop Cairn near Trelawnyd.

The Cairn is an enigmatic monument. Excavations by Boyd Dawkins at the end of the last century failed to establish the function of what is the second largest man-made mound in Britain next to Silbury Hill in Wiltshire. Chance finds and the discovery of burials in the nearby Gop Caves suggest the mound may be of Neolithic date.

Concerned by evidence of deterioration in the condition of the Cairn, Cadw:Welsh Historic

Monuments asked André to formulate proposals to ensure the long-term stability of this important site.

The Cairn surface is composed essentially of limestone screes stabilised for the most part beneath a shallow, fragile turf. Susceptible to Summer drought and sun-scorch this turf is easily damaged by visitor pressure. Once grass cover is broken the steep slopes render the screes unstable and slip is exacerbated by wind, rain and frost action

resulting in erosion damage. Stabilisation of the monument in the long-term will clearly revolve around the re-establishment and maintenance of a turf cover. The site, however, has never been agriculturally-improved and consequently supports a species-rich limestone grassland featuring such plants as Early Purple Orchid, Cowslip and Common Rock-rose. André, keen as always to ensure that all aspects of the value of the site are considered, intends that the re-vegetation of eroded areas will reflect the species-diversity of the existing grassland. Enter the VAX 2000 vacuum cleaner.

Over the Autumn André has been using the vacuum cleaner, powered by a petrol generator, to collect the fine scree and gravels, plant debris and wildflower seeds from the surface of the Cairn and adjoining grassland. This material will be bulked out with lime rich heat-sterilised soil to provide the medium for the stabilisation of the exposed and eroding screes. Repair will thus be achieved using plant material native to the monument to maintain the genetic and species integrity of the area.

The design of the VAX 2000 vacuum cleaner with its powerful 1050 Watt bypass motor has proved ideal for the collection of wildflower seed and looks set to become an invaluable tool in the sites management 'broom-cupboard'! Its use in this context adds a whole new dimension to VAX appliances latest marketing slogan 'caring for more than just your carpets'!

St Mary's Church Flint

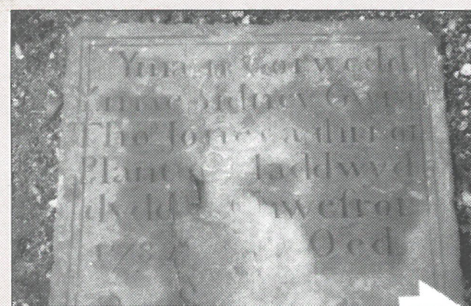
Delyn Borough Council has recently initiated a programme of pedestrianisation around St Mary's Church, Church Street, Flint. As part of that programme it was necessary to lower the ground surface in the existing cemetery.

The Borough Council wisely chose to have an archaeologist on site during this operation, which commenced in September 1992.

Richard Parry is that archaeologist and he presents some of his initial findings below.

The original church, of single nave construction, was built in the late

thirteenth century and added to over the next 300 years. By 1847 its condition had deteriorated badly and it was demolished to be



replaced by the present church in 1848. Burials on the site, effectively ceased in 1890.

In the late 1970's the cemetery was, apparently, cleared of monuments,

then topsoiled and grassed over for ease of maintenance. Removal of that topsoil in 1992 revealed 60 surviving memorial monuments,

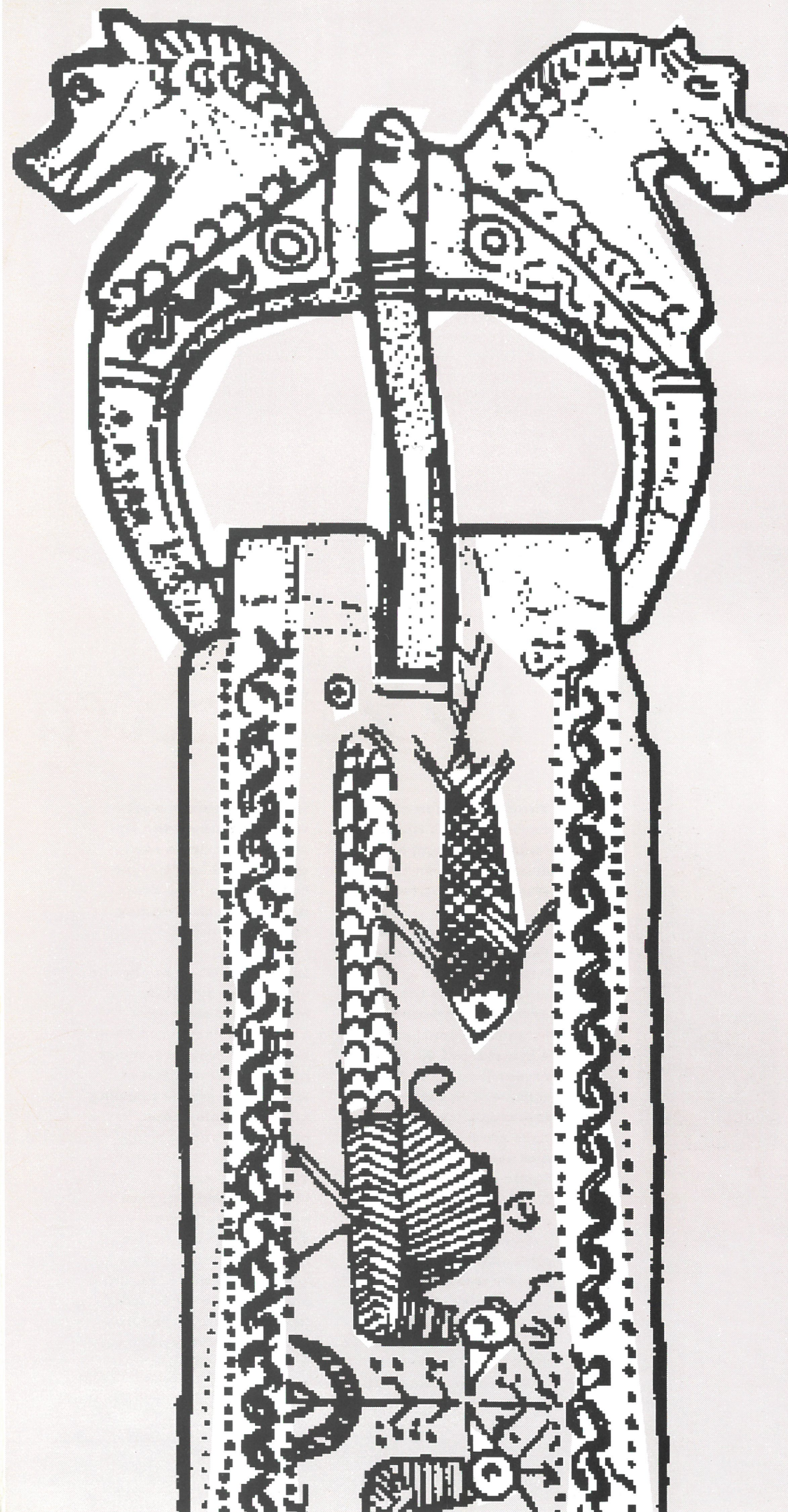
mainly the flat slab type, many telling their own stories. Take for example, the only Welsh language memorial remaining on the site which informs us, pointedly of the deaths of 'Sidney, wife of Thomas Jones, and three of her children killed on

the 8th February 1789'. Who or what killed them all on the same day? Disease seems unlikely, was it an accident, or murder? Investigations continue.....(see next newsletter!)

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