

FILLING THE GAPS – A DECADE OF GROWTH: 1962-73

by D F Petch BA, FSA, AMA

A challenge to be met?

My title is a punning one, chosen to reflect what I think were the significant features of the decade under review: firstly, the unprecedented surge of building and redevelopment in the city centre; secondly, the resultant response to that challenge from the Grosvenor Museum in particular, and the City in general, which produced a noteworthy burst of archaeological endeavour. Inevitably, the capacity of the museum to rise to the occasion, and to do justice to the research opportunities presented by redevelopment of gaps in the townscape from the early 1960s, depended on the availability of sufficient staff and adequate resources. My account is as much concerned with relating how these were eventually obtained as with what was achieved archaeologically, important though that was.

Other historic towns subjected to very similar threats to their archaeological and historical heritage were, of course, served by museums comparable in general terms to the Grosvenor Museum. However, seldom did these museums react in as positive and effective a way to the crises of the 1960s as did the Grosvenor Museum: indeed, at the time there were those who criticised the museum and the City for taking on the burden of rescue archaeology. It will be unnecessary for me to explain *why* this decision was reached, for this will have been made clear by previous speakers. Suffice it to say that the essential ingredients were the will of the City Council and Cestrians, combined with a solid tradition of archaeological research and excavation in Chester going back to Robert Newstead's days. However, it is still a question to ponder whether we did the right thing by accepting such a heavy burden, and this is an issue to which I should like to return.

Retrospective: the Webster years

Having commenced, in true classical form, *in medias res*, I must now go back to the beginning of my story. How did I find myself concerned with rescue archaeology in Chester? When I left the army and went on to read Medieval and Modern History at Leicester University, I opted to take Roman Britain as a special subject under Dr A K B (Babette) Evans. She arranged for those taking this option to be taught by Dr Graham Webster, both in the Grosvenor Museum and at a training excavation at Great Casterton. After a post-graduate year at Nottingham I was lucky enough to join the staff of the Grosvenor Museum as a Junior Assistant. For a young beginner in archaeology and

museum work I could not have hoped for a better first post. Although he had been preceded by both Robert and Alfred Newstead, Graham Webster was the first full-time 'professional' curator, with a remit from the Education Committee to develop the displays and services of the museum along the lines proposed in the Wheeler and Corder reports. He set about this task with great zest, and when I came to Chester it was well advanced. This was a heady time, in which there was a great feeling of achievement and purpose. We were quite literally making a fresh start in an important provincial museum, for new galleries and displays were being created, the centrepiece being the Newstead Gallery. Despite the fact that he was neither a professional curator nor a museum designer, Graham Webster created a spectacular new gallery devoted to the fortress and its legion, subsequently and somewhat irreverently referred to by a visiting scholar as the 'regimental museum of the Twentieth Legion'. Forty years on it is difficult to convey the impression made by this gallery on the general public and museum professionals alike, for nothing quite like it had been seen before, and in a number of ways it broke new ground.

The stir which this and other changes at the museum caused in the local community undoubtedly helped to bring archaeology, and incidentally rescue archaeology, into the public eye. As in the museum, so in the Archaeological Society there were new initiatives, notably revision of the format of the *Journal*, still today much as it was refashioned in the late 1940s. Graham Webster undertook a series of excavations in the city for the museum and Society, some of which should certainly be classed as rescue excavations, for they took place on sites which it was known would ultimately be occupied by new buildings, an instance being work on the fortress defences in Linenhall Street. In this way the tradition begun by Robert Newstead was continued and enhanced in the post-war years.

Until the early 1960s the museum and the School of Art continued to share the same building, as they had since its completion in 1886, and space for collections and staff was very tight. As a consequence the Curator's office was shared by his juniors, an arrangement which would probably not now be tolerated, although my recollection of working in the museum at the time is of an informal and collaborative atmosphere in which everyone knew what was going on and what needed to be done – and got on with it. Graham's background in civil engineering led him to accept the situation in the belief that staff, and in particular juniors, would spend a considerable portion of their time 'in the field'. This was indeed the case, for from that cramped office we went out to work in the galleries, stores or on the excavations, returning from time to time to report or confer. Sometimes guests were accommodated, too, for example Brian and Kay Hartley during several spells of work at Heronbridge. Graham was a 'live wire' who had the knack of creating and harnessing enthusiasm in others – and not only in young juniors. At that time I took for granted (in my innocence) the interest shown in all we were doing in the museum and on the excavations by the Director of Education, Richardson Peele, who had the habit of dropping in at all hours. He would stay and chat, asking questions about our work which demonstrated real interest in the museum. It would have been quite impossible to resent these visits, for he was treated (and clearly expected to be treated) as a colleague rather than a superior.

During my spell as Junior Assistant I naturally found myself undertaking various tasks outside the museum, including following up reports of casual finds by builders or

contractors in the city – and can still very clearly remember being unceremoniously ordered off a site in Nicholas Street by the principal of the building firm concerned. Whether there was any truth behind the rumour that antiquities were being found there remains an unanswered question! More important from the point of view of my future career was my assignment to run a rescue excavation on a site in Crypt Court-Commonhall Street. At this time little was known about the layout of the *praetentura* of the fortress, and this opportunity to augment our skimpy knowledge was very welcome. The reward was a row of three great legionary granaries which, from an early stage in the excavation, could be identified from their characteristic plan. This was fortunate, as the funds allocated by the Office of Works were ludicrously small, even by the modest standards of the time, extending no further than the hiring of a labourer for a week or two. No more than a few exploratory trenches could therefore be dug, but a factor in our favour was the existence of cellars on the site which, when emptied of rubble, revealed beneath their floors the foundations of the underlying Roman buildings. Indeed, one cellar in which we dug was still roofed, providing something of the atmosphere of a cave excavation. The experiment has not frequently been repeated since, perhaps because of the difficulty in seeing anything, although the north wall of the *palaestra* of the internal bath building was revealed by this means in a cellar behind the *Observer* office in Bridge Street in 1963. As was the custom at the time much of the work, whether on site or in the museum, was carried out in our own time, either in the evenings or at the weekends. In part this practice was adopted to allow volunteer helpers to take part.

Lincoln

The excavation of the granaries was completed by Hugh Thompson, for in 1955 I replaced him as Keeper of Lincoln Museum. Lincoln gave me valuable experience of rescue archaeology in a different milieu, albeit in an otherwise similar urban context, for excavations there were carried out by Lincoln Archaeological Research Committee and in theory were a spare-time activity. Despite this apparent limitation we mounted long-running rescue excavations that could be frighteningly deep by Chester's standards (for example, the excavations on the southern defences of the fortress and *colonia* in 1955-8), and sometimes very extensive (eg, the bath building at Cottesford Place, 1957/8). An important development in the provision of rescue archaeology at Lincoln was Tom Baker's determination to schedule all significant open spaces within the city walls, thus ensuring that the option of undertaking rescue excavations on potentially sensitive sites could be considered by the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate and the local Research Committee. This was a revolutionary development at the time, to be followed in due course by other historic towns.

Chester again: into the maelstrom

An opportunity to return to Chester came in 1962 when Hugh Thompson moved to Manchester University. Those who knew the city at that time will be aware how much it has changed since then. Vast areas which had been cleared of slum housing before 1939 were still open and had only very partially been explored, despite the efforts of Newstead

and his successors to take advantage of a golden opportunity to investigate them, and in particular to study the legionary fortress. The very destructive Inner Ring Road was still on the drawing board, whilst large shopping malls like the Grosvenor Precinct, now commonplace, were at that time unknown. However, a radical reshaping of city centres was about to begin which inevitably threatened the historic core of cities like Chester, both in terms of historic buildings and of archaeology below ground. The challenges presented by this transformation were considerable:

- i) The large extent of sites threatened by redevelopment was quite disproportionate to the small scale of the excavations hitherto conducted in the city.
- ii) The new developments that emerged in the 1960s were considerably more destructive than previous rebuilding, which had tended to be small-scale and piecemeal. Almost universal provision of parking and delivery bays underground meant the complete removal of archaeological structures and deposits over extensive areas – for example in the Central Redevelopment Area south and west of the Town Hall – and often required removal of some of the underlying geology as well.
- iii) An important consideration in weighing the case for rescue archaeology in the city became the realisation that for substantial parts of the historic centre there would be no second chance, for once new building commenced there would be little or nothing left of previous structures or contexts for future archaeologists to study.
- iv) Linked with this growing awareness of the scale of the threat posed by new developments there was undoubtedly increasing expectation on the part of archaeologists and the general public that opportunities to excavate in advance of total destruction should not be allowed to go by default. An opinion that was commonly expressed was that something had to be done now to record our past for posterity.

To return from the general to the particular, the problems faced can be illustrated by a brief account of the first crisis I encountered on my return from Lincoln. It concerned a site immediately north of the Guildhall (Holy Trinity) which extended northwards to Princess Street: initially occupied by a two-storey car-park, this is now the site of the International Hotel. Both Graham Webster and Hugh Thompson had excavated here, primarily on the defences, but nevertheless various questions remained unanswered, for relatively little of this vast site had actually been explored because of the low level of rescue excavation funding at the time. Since the contractor had already been given the go-ahead to begin his work, all we could do was to attempt to record the features and structures which came to light as machines ripped out the fills for the basement – literally recovering evidence from the teeth of the bulldozer. Unfortunately the work took place in winter and the weather was against us, for the winter of 1962/3 was exceptionally hard (the River Dee froze above the weir), and in retrospect it seems remarkable that anything useful was achieved. In point of fact the effort was not altogether unrewarded (the question of the spacing of interval towers in the *retentura* was in part resolved, for example), but this mode of recovering evidence was clearly not very satisfactory: something better was required.

Meeting the challenge: a triple partnership

It must be said that the only conceivable way of providing archaeology in Chester at this time was through the Grosvenor Museum. By tradition its Curator was an archaeologist with experience primarily of urban and Romano-British sites; from Graham Webster's time he had been aided by a Junior Assistant, who was invariably a recent graduate and therefore by definition relatively inexperienced. How was the museum to cope with the challenges now coming to the fore, notably in the extensive Central Redevelopment Area? The key, of course, lay in additional resources. It is fashionable these days to deny that problems can be solved by 'throwing money at them'; whether or not that is true, in fairness I do not think that this expression describes what actually happened at this time in Chester. Nevertheless, little by little the situation improved; the system became increasingly able to cope with the demands made of it; and by the end of the decade very few sites were lost without some investigation, one regrettable exception being Commerce House, Hunter Street, which by a curious irony eventually housed the County Council Planning Department. In most cases the excavations we mounted were adequate in length and degree of coverage by the standards of the time, constrained (as always) by finite resources and conflicting priorities within the City. This became possible because the foundations had already been put in place for a partnership between central government (through the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate) and the City (the Grosvenor Museum and the City Surveyor's Department) in which:

- a) Threats to archaeological sites were defined
- b) Programmes of excavation were agreed
- c) Grants allocated from government were matched pound-for-pound by the City Council
- d) The Grosvenor Museum carried out the excavation and post-excavation work
- e) The Chester Archaeological Society's Treasurer held the funds from both sources, and with the Curator deployed them on the excavations. From this money we paid the salaries and wages of temporary staff taken on to help run excavations, and bought equipment, hired plant and so on.

Whilst naturally the accounts were audited regularly, the onus for running the account fell principally on the museum. This system offered a useful degree of flexibility which largely ceased when the City Treasurer later agreed to handle the account, but on the other hand it permitted us to run knowingly into the red without any firm commitment from anyone that we would be bailed out – and from time to time this inevitably caused a sleepless night. The effective working of this arrangement was dependent on the personal commitment and goodwill of the participants, notably Gerald Burkinshaw, Town Clerk for much of this period, and his successor Malcolm Kermodé; also John Collicutt, Treasurer of the Society at a crucial time. Mr Griffiths, the last Director of Education for Chester, was also most supportive. I should perhaps explain that this rather odd tripartite system had its origins at a time when a grant from the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works

might be for all of £100. With this princely sum we could take on a small gang of labourers and an assistant or two to provide support, sometimes under that anomalous title 'paid volunteer'. One such was David Morgan Evans (now Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of London) who joined us as a temporary site assistant in 1963. He recently recalled to me the simple, in some respects primitive, conditions of that time. Our workers were among the last of the old-style 'navvies' and were a hardy breed unused to such refinements as site huts. He spoke of the men with respect and almost affection, and rightly so, for they almost invariably gave us loyal service; a few progressed in their skills to the point where they could instruct young assistants as much in the refinements of excavation as those of a 'triple Yankee' (a complex form of bet). Anyone who has worked with such men comes to marvel at what can be achieved without elaborate equipment or machines.

Mechanical aids

Nevertheless, this was the time for a new departure in archaeology, forced on us by the need to cover increasingly large sites much more quickly, and David recalled the stage of the Crook Street excavation when we began to use machines to excavate disturbed upper fills, and to backfill trenches before we moved on to the next sector of the site. I should explain that at this time we were permitted to have only relatively small plots of land to explore so that the City's income from car parking charges would not be seriously reduced; this inconvenient system created various operational problems (including finding a tipsy pedestrian at the bottom of one of our trenches!) and fortunately did not recur on later sites. Despite some misgivings, and there were those who mistakenly believed that we were wilfully destroying the medieval and post-medieval archaeology of the city in order to reveal the Roman features which lay below, the JCB and Drott became part of the tool-kit for urban and rural sites from the 1960s, a process which was pioneered in Chester (*see* Petch 1968, an article which arose from a paper given at a conference on 'Mechanical aids in archaeology' organised by the Council for British Archaeology).

Access problems

This is perhaps the right moment at which to remark that, although it is true that seldom were we denied access to a site, equally the agreements struck between the museum and developers were almost invariably inadequate from the archaeological point of view, and owed much to the principle 'better something than nothing'; equally we well understood that the grants likely to be available to pay for the work would fall far short of what was really required, and 'unrealistic' bids would receive short shrift. It followed that short cuts and compromises, whilst regrettable, were (I believe) inevitable. Since we lacked any statutory right to require facilities for excavation our bargaining position was always inherently a weak one, although it must be added that support from the Town Clerk and the City Surveyor (a distinguished example was Mr Statham) went some way to redressing the balance, and as the rescue effort gained momentum their support was increasingly given.

Only with the passage of time and the growth of resources did the gap between the archaeological potential of sites and our response begin to narrow, and in the early to mid-1960s we were regularly put under pressure by a developer and/or contractor to finish and be gone, precipitating a last, frenzied dash to excavate and record as much as possible, working early and late, before the machines started rolling. Not only early and late, but also in all sorts of weather, for the old custom of excavating in the summer and writing up the results in winter could no longer be sustained: rescue became a year-round commitment, and problems of snow, ice, rain, and high winds had to be overcome. Anyone who took part in the Old Market Hall excavation during the winter of 1967/8 will recall the dismay caused by the sudden departure of the roof of the main site hut into the Market Square!

The Bridge Street bath house and the Liverpool connection

I have already mentioned two factors which restricted our response to the archaeological needs of specific sites: limitations of funding, and the unwillingness of most developers (the City was an honourable exception) to grant sufficient time between clearance of a site and the commencement of their works. It must also be said that from 1963 to 1965 our efforts were too much dispersed by the competing requirements of several sites under way at the same time to permit any one of these being given the attention it deserved. The worst episode of this sort came when sites in the Newgate Street-Pepper Street area and the Central Redevelopment Area were proceeding at the same time as Sybil Rutland was excavating St Mary's Nunnery for us. Quite simply there were insufficient people or resources to go round, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that our position was critical.

The turning point in the organisation and provision of rescue archaeology in Chester came when a considerable portion of the great internal bath building of the Roman fortress was destroyed – not unrecorded, but inadequately explored, leaving crucial issues (eg, dating) unresolved. A key factor in this instance was that most of the site was covered by standing buildings, in whose gardens we were able to define a group of barracks lying east of the baths, but the developer refused to give permission for any formal excavation once his work on the site had begun. Thus, the standing buildings were demolished, and with customary efficiency Laings immediately commenced the earthworks for underground storage and delivery bays for shops to be built in the precinct above. Earlier finds and observation of trial holes had led us to suppose that this site might conceal a bath building, and so it proved – with walls standing up to 12 feet or more in height. The building extended for almost 200 feet from Pepper Street at the south end of the site to St Michael's Arcade in the north. It was soon clear that the great colonnaded hall under the arcade formed part of the same complex and was in all probability one of the earliest of the covered *palaestrae* of the north-western provinces of the Roman empire. Even after the great size and high degree of preservation of the building had been clearly demonstrated, and protests against its impending destruction were made at local and national level, commercial considerations prevailed, effectively limiting our gathering of site data to piecemeal observation and recording at the pleasure of the contractor, supplemented by very little formal excavation. This was not a very satisfactory way of proceeding in the

case of such an important building which had apparently began its life in the early years of the fortress and was still in use in the third century. This debacle attracted a great deal of public attention and criticism, and the upshot was a general conviction that such vandalism should not be allowed to recur. From that time our response to similar challenges became much more assured as public support for our cause strengthened, and our resources became more commensurate with our needs.

Before moving on from this episode I must comment on two memorable aspects of the work. The first concerns our relations with the main contractor, Laings. From the first to last our personal dealings were entirely satisfactory – indeed on a number of occasions the Resident Engineer and his staff went out of their way to be helpful, within the constraints of their own imperative to come in within budget and on time. The *modus vivendi* we established enabled us to recover a great deal of important data which would otherwise have been completely lost, and for that we must be grateful. It was interesting to be reminded, during preparation of this account, that the discoveries made on this site figured prominently in Laings' house magazine.

At this juncture I should also express my gratitude to John Eames of Liverpool University for his consistent support during that dreadful summer, welcome both for the perceptive insights he offered into the complex building history of the baths, and also for the practical and moral support he gave. In the longer term, this fruitful association in the summer of 1964 led to other collaborative work, for example when he undertook several seasons' work on the 'Elliptical Building'. The university subsequently (1970) offered me an honorary Research Fellowship which enabled me to prepare reports on excavations in Chester, and for this invaluable help I am beholden not only to John Eames but also to Professor Frank Walbank and (more recently) Professor John Kenyon Davies. My association with the Department of Ancient History & Classical Archaeology (now part of the School of Archaeology, Classics & Oriental Studies) has made me more aware of the earlier and close collaboration between two exceptional scholars associated with Liverpool University – Robert Newstead and J P Droop – which also forms part of the story of rescue archaeology in Chester.

The horns of a dilemma

I ought not to give the impression that after the bath building disaster all was easy going: far from it, for over the next twelve to eighteen months the competing claims of sites on the St Martin's Fields Clinic, the Central Area, Frodsham Street and smaller watching briefs drove us to distraction. All praise is due to the junior staff whose dogged support helped us to survive a desperately difficult time. Not all were field archaeologists by training or intention, and it is interesting to recall that whilst some went on to follow careers in museums and archaeology, others like Miss Naomi Tarrant (now Keeper of Costume in the National Museums of Scotland) followed a rather different career path. Even when we achieved near total excavation of extensive sites, for example at Old Market Hall, most of the money we were allocated was used for paying additional site supervisors, hiring plant, purchasing equipment and so on; most of the wielders of picks and shovels (strange now to recall) were provided by Appleton Thorn Open Prison. To motivate and supervise such a motley bunch of wrongdoers (one of our best workers was

a bank-robber by trade) requires someone out of the ordinary, and I was very proud of the way our young supervisors rose to the challenge. We only lost one prisoner (recaptured very quickly in a nearby telephone booth), but I would hesitate to claim that this was because they found the work so interesting. It was a standing joke that to a man the convicts were serving sentences for motoring offences – in one instance this proved to be illegally driving away a lorry loaded with whisky from Forton services on the M6!

Whilst some who worked on the excavations were voluntary (an outstanding stalwart supporter during almost the whole of this period was Mrs Betty Brotherton-Ratcliffe), and others were involuntary (ie, the men from Appleton Thorn), the core staff remained the Curator and either one or two Junior Assistants. Our main commitment, at the end of the day, had to be to the Grosvenor Museum, its collections and services. Apart from Natural History, for which we had a specialist Keeper, the rest of the wide-ranging collections were our responsibility. Whilst rich in antiquities, especially of the Romano-British period, the museum is also strong in numismatics (with exceptional Anglo-Saxon coins from the Chester mint), and contains *inter alia* fine and applied art, costume and rural life material – a very varied content, as one would expect of a major provincial museum. We were part of the City's Education Department (as recommended by Wheeler), and naturally paid particular attention to the increasing number of schoolchildren being brought to see the Newstead Gallery and the Roman Stones Gallery. Many parties requested talks in either the galleries or the lecture theatre, and these commitments were honoured despite pressures in the field. There were times when it must have been very evident that the dishevelled figure in wellingtons and donkey jacket giving the talk was just back from the research face. An inevitable consequence of the excavations we were running was a flood of finds which had to be cleaned, washed, marked, labelled, catalogued, bagged and boxed, all in very confined quarters: not until we acquired 22 Castle Street and St Bridget's Hall did we have adequate space in which to process the excavation material and subsequently store it. St Bridget's Hall in particular had a far from pleasant environment for either the staff or the finds, in winter resembling either a fridge or a steam bath, depending on whether the heating was off or on.

A growing museum

My return from Lincoln had coincided with departure of the School of Art from Grosvenor Street, and thereafter we had sole use of the building. This presented a splendid opportunity to re-plan the layout of much of the museum, particularly the offices, workshops and stores; new galleries and displays (notably an art gallery on the top floor) were also achieved. Additional storage and office space made it easier to work over the reserve collections, doing the usual house-keeping tasks like checking, listing, card-indexing, and cleaning or conserving where necessary. New acquisitions of great importance had to be absorbed into the collections, an instance which particularly sticks in my mind being Willoughby Gardner's collection of Anglo-Saxon coins of the Chester mint. An issue that arose during the 1960s was that of security of the museum and its collections. No longer could access to the museum in the evenings be as easy for staff as it once had been, and it became rather convenient to have a bank next door in which our treasures like coins and the City plate could be safely kept. As with any museum with

collections of consequence, there was what sometimes seemed to be an endless procession of visitors eager to work through some part of our reserve collections. Not only did this in itself prove time-consuming, but the visitors themselves also had to be kept under surveillance. Needless to say, the work could not have been done with the man-and-boy level of staff described above, although for some time that was all we had. However, in the fullness of time staff numbers grew, with the addition of specialisms like Design & Display and Education, in both of which Margaret Gillison Todd made a very noteworthy contribution. One specialism which was sorely needed, both for the existing collections and also for the many important finds coming from the excavations, was in conservation. Although we were able for a time to fund a Conservator, Jimmy Macalinden, it was one of my great disappointments that this post was never established on the permanent staff.

A measure (albeit a crude one) of our increased functions and performance both at the museum and in the field during this period is the size of the museum budget. In 1963-4 this stood at about £10,500, but by 1974/5 the total revised museum spend was £70,000 – an increase which can only partially be attributed to inflation. It will be appreciated that changes such as these never come unsolicited or easily: other City officers had to be consulted and persuaded, Committee chairmen were briefed, meetings attended. Although the museum formed part of the Education Department, it was only from the mid-1960s that the Curator was invited to explain his intentions and requirements in person to the Education Committee. However, eventually the tie with Education was severed, and the museum became a free-standing department under a new Civic Amenities Committee. This sadly brought to an end the direct involvement of the Archaeological Society in the management of the museum, although on the whole the change was welcome. It permitted direct participation in Committee affairs and gave an opportunity to argue the museum's case, but brought in its train a greater administrative burden for my staff and myself. Fortunately we had a succession of sympathetic and supportive Committee chairmen, exemplified by Dr Rosemary Martin. Because all this took place at a time when the excavations demanded maximum effort, the rather odd result was that for some time the museum was effectively being run from a wooden site office, to which Kay Higgins (the Museum Secretary) brought the post every morning, and took dictation amidst all the bustle and din. I noticed that she never really fancied site tea.

Widening horizons

A significant development at this time was that the Grosvenor Museum began to look for a wider role among the museums of the region. No longer did it seem possible to regard its brief as only concerning the city and its immediate environs. I was reminded of this recently when I saw a replica of the Arderne Horn on display in Delamere Forest Centre, as it and a number of related objects came into the collections at this time through the County Archivist, Brian Redwood. This enlargement of our sphere of influence was a natural development in view of the extent and importance of the museum's existing county-wide collections and the lack of other museums in the pre-1974 county, and it was very much in line with thinking among museum professionals at the time. Another parallel development was the adoption of rescue commitments outside Chester at the behest of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works. One such was the excavation of a medieval and

post-medieval site at Grange Cow Worth (Ellesmere Port) by Mrs Brotherton-Ratcliffe in 1966/7; in 1971-2 Dan Robinson undertook field survey and observation along the line of the Chester Southerly Bypass, and some excavation followed at the south end of the Romano-British settlement at Heronbridge. In the same year Dan also investigated the proposed route of the oil pipeline between St Asaph and Stanlow, whilst in the following year Mrs Brotherton-Ratcliffe maintained a watching brief along the line of the M56 from Prestonbrook all the way to the M6 interchange. It was at this time that the Welsh Office was moving towards the creation of archaeological trusts to carry out this sort of task in Wales, and some advice and assistance was given during the forming of both the Clwyd-Powys and Gwynedd Archaeological Trusts.

It will be increasingly clear why from the early 1970s the Curator's duties could no longer encompass a more-or-less permanent commitment to work in the field, even in the city centre, as heretofore. A further, and very cogent, reason for considering change was the backlog of reports that had built up and needed attention. The logic of creating a new post for an archaeologist whose duties would be solely to run the excavations for the museum was inescapable, but lack of funding remained a serious problem until the Department of the Environment (as it had now become) through the late Dorothy Charlesworth primed the pump and made it possible to appoint the first Field Officer. I must admit that at that moment I experienced some regret that henceforward I would find myself largely desk-bound, and that what had been an important part of my professional life was brought to a close.

Review

At the end of the day what can be identified as the main achievements of this period?

- 1) During a period of unprecedented change for the city very few sites escaped some level of investigation and recording.
- 2) Good relations were created or consolidated with a range of bodies able to assist provision of rescue archaeology in Chester: the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate; members and officers of Chester City Council; Chester Archaeological Society; Cheshire County Council; Council for British Archaeology; North-West Area Museums Service; Liverpool University.
- 3) An important advance was acceptance by the City of the rescue archaeology commitment as a City function.
- 4) Rescue archaeology was placed on a rational footing in the structure of the museum and the City Council.

To return to the question posed earlier – was the Grosvenor Museum right to commit so much of its staff time and resources to rescue archaeology at this period? Firstly, it must be made clear that the commitment was overt. Everyone from the Mayor and the Town Clerk downwards knew what we were doing, and naturally we tried to publicise our work as much as possible, but I can recall no dissent from members or chief officers. To that extent we were doing what Cestrians wanted us to do. Perhaps there is no 'answer' to the

question, except insofar as more than one colleague has said to me: 'But if you hadn't done it, who would?', and I must admit that I cannot answer that question either. It is very difficult to imagine who, *at that time*, could conceivably have attempted to fill the breach. With the best will in the world the skills, resources and time demanded by the rescue requirements of the 1960s and 1970s could not have been provided by amateur archaeologists, however dedicated. Whilst possessing the skills, the University of Liverpool was ill-equipped for various reasons to cope with the long-running excavations or short-term crisis commitments which we had to accept as the norm. In my experience guest excavation directors and teams are seldom able easily to come to terms with local conditions and problems, and they are in point of fact relatively expensive. The Central Excavation Unit had not yet been invented. Who else?

Turning the question on its head, did commitment to rescue work damage the Grosvenor Museum in other respects? Did rescue archaeology hinder its development (during the period I have been describing) into a lively and active museum for which status as a 'national museum in the provinces' was actively mooted in the early 1970s? I think the answer is clear. Association of the Grosvenor Museum with rescue archaeology was beneficial to both sides. Long may it continue.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Petch, D F 1968

Earth moving machines and their employment on archaeological excavations. *J Chester Archaeol Soc* **55**, 15-28

APPENDIX 1: RESCUE COMMITMENTS 1963-73

- 1963 January – March LINENHALL STREET (Defences)
 February – November CROOK STREET (Barracks)
 June – September NEWGATE STREET/PEPPER STREET (Trial trenches)
 from November NEWGATE STREET (Barracks)
 Other – AMPHITHEATRE (Removal of overburden)
 BRIDGE STREET (North wall of baths complex)
- 1964 January – April NEWGATE STREET (continued)
 February LINENHALL STREET S END (Defences)
 April/May – November BATH BUILDING (Recording; also limited excavation)
 July WHITE FRIARS (South-West Angle)
 August – September POLICE HQ (St Mary's Nunnery) (S McNamee (Rutland))
 from June CENTRAL REDEVELOPMENT AREA (Workshop complex)
 December INNER RING (Breach in City Walls, North-West Angle)
- 1965 January – March CENTRAL DEVELOPMENT AREA (Barracks etc)
 January – August ST MARTIN'S FIELDS (Defences, barracks)
 Autumn INNER RING (North-West Angle, Second phase)
- 1966 January – August FRODSHAM STREET (Defences, extra-mural)
 February – July GRANGE COW WORTH (Medieval Grange) (E Brotherton-Ratcliffe)
- 1967 February – March GRANGE COW WORTH (Final phase)
 October – December OLD MARKET HALL (Area S of Town Hall)*
- 1968 January – April OLD MARKET HALL (Continued)
 July – December OLD MARKET HALL (Second phase)
 from October GOSS STREET (Barracks) (G M R Davies)
- 1969 January OLD MARKET HALL (Second phase concluded)
 January – December GOSS STREET (Continued)
 July – December OLD MARKET HALL (Third phase)*
- 1970 January – February OLD MARKET HALL (Concluded)
 GOSS STREET (Concluded) (G M R Davies)
 ST JOHN STREET TELEPHONE EXCHANGE (D J Robinson)
- 1971-2 CATHEDRAL BELL-TOWER SITE (D J Robinson)
- 1972 SOUTHERLY BYPASS FIELD ASSESSMENT (D J Robinson)
 May – September HERONBRIDGE (Roman settlement)
 SHELL PIPELINE – ST ASAPH TO STANLOW (D J Robinson)
- 1972-3 NORTHGATE BREWERY (P J Davey)
- 1973 M56 PRESTONBROOK – M6 JUNCTION (Observation /recording)

* 'Elliptical Building' – work by Mr J V H Eames for Liverpool University took place in 1963, 1964, 1967 and 1969 (the latter seasons concurrent with work on the Old Market Hall site).

APPENDIX 2
SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURE ON RESCUE ARCHAEOLOGY 1962-72

YEAR	GOVERNMENT	CITY	
1962	£40	£40	
1963	£1850	£1200	
1964	£573	£500	(NB £1222 deficit)
1965	£600	£600	
1966	£950	£200	
1967	£2480	£1580	
1968	£1650	£2150	(NB £1510 deficit)
1969	£2100	£1900	
1970	£1000	£750	
1971	£2500	£1000	
1972	£1000		for work outside Chester
	£8500		excavations in Chester

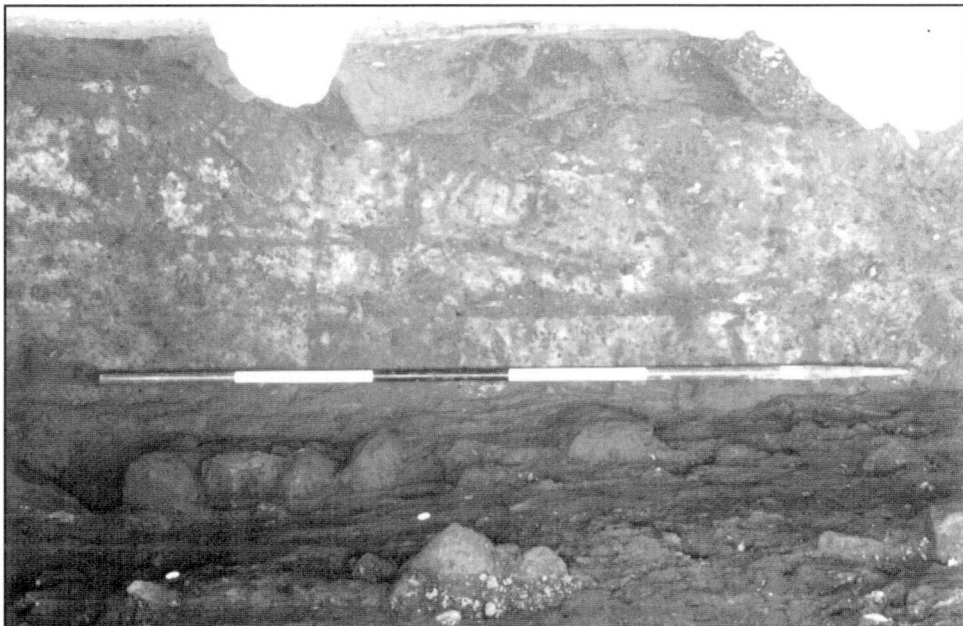
By 1974 the excavations budget figure had increased to £26,590 (gross), of which DoE contributed £12,280.



13 The opening of one of many small trenches in the Crook Street area, 1963-5. The building to the left is Matthew Henry's Chapel.



14 The south-east corner of the Roman legionary bath building, as exposed and destroyed in 1964. The concrete base in the centre being demolished with a pneumatic drill was the foundation for the water tank.



15 Pre-Roman plough marks in the sandstone bedrock, Frodsham Street 1966.



16 The 'core team' on the Old Market Hall excavation, winter 1967/8. *Left to right:* Meg Buchanan, Jimmy Burke, Terry Courtney, Christina Colyer, Mark Davies.



17 Contractor's excavation of the basement car park on the Old Market Hall site after the end of archaeological work.