

Oswestry & Border History & Archaeology Group Newsletter

Issue 22

Summer 2021



Spectacular Bronze Age finds from the Oswestry area

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this Newsletter.

OBHAG activities will continue in virtual form until restrictions ease.
Members will be updated well in advance of events.

The objects pictured on the cover are just two of the many amazing finds retrieved by local detectorist Bob Greenaway. The exquisite gold lock rings were discovered enclosed in a sheet of lead, perhaps to ensure that they sank under water. Described as “very fine examples of their kind” by Dr Neil Wilkin of the British Museum, they were found to be 80 to 82 per cent gold. Peter Reavill of the Portable Antiquities Scheme explained that the real treasure was the wrapping, as lead from the period is very rarely found in a pure or near pure state.

The bronze palstave is among the largest and heaviest of its type ever found and the copper used in its manufacture is thought to have come from the mines on the Great Orme. Many of the finds, including axes and a bronze razor, have come from quite a small peaty area which is near to the findspot of the Shropshire bulla, a 3,000-year-old gold sun pendant heralded as one of the most important bronze age finds of the last century, (Newsletter Feb 2019).

Bob will be representing Shropshire PAS in a Channel 4 series this autumn and he has kindly offered to talk to OBHAG next year, if and when normal meetings resume.

Maintaining the peace in 18th century Oswestry – constables, night watchmen and halberdiers: John Pryce Jones

Over the past months, at least during the periods when this has been possible, I have paid a number of visits to Oswestry’s Guildhall to use the archives belonging to the Town Council.



*Halberdier and Two Pikemen:
Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington*

One of the documents that I have been using has been document A19, a small-ish notebook containing lists of ‘watchmen’ from 1771 to 1799, and constables for the years from 1783 to 1799. Lists of constables for the years from 1737 to 1761 are included in another document, C1/1, one of three quarter sessions books held at the Guildhall. Also included that volume are lists of ‘holberteers’ or halberdiers for November 1743 and May 1744. These were men who presumably each carried a halberd, which was an axe blade topped with a spike mounted on a long shaft, with a hook on the back of the axe blade.

This is ‘work in progress’ for me, though progress has been halted for the time being. I have transcribed in full the lists of halberdiers, the lists of constables from 1783 to 1799, and the watchmen from 1771 to 1791. The remainder will be done once travel for such purposes is allowed. The lists present a fascinating insight into life in 18th century Oswestry, providing the names and occupations of a cross section of

Oswestrians, referring to numerous local inns and public houses, with their innkeepers, and demonstrating how wealthier citizens could arrange for others to fulfil their public duties for them, the substitutes presumably receiving a cash payment for their troubles.

These records show that the **halberdiers** were provided by the different trade guilds and companies in the town. For example, in 1744 the Mercers’ Company fielded David Roberts

and Richard Pidgeon; the Tanners Thomas Jones and John Hall; the Smiths John Daniel; the Glovers nominated Silvanus Jones and Arthur Lloyd; the Shoemakers Hugh Stoakes and William Smith. The Butchers' Company were represented by John Jones and Thomas Smith; the Weavers' Company by Griffith Thomas; and the Taylors by Richard Humphreys

Constables were appointed for each of the five wards of the town, in November for twelve months, being sworn into their office by the mayor, deputy mayor or coroner. Those appointed on November 18th 1786, being sworn in by Richard Salisbury esq., mayor, were listed as follows:

Cross street

Robert Price for Mr D. Price, hairdresser

John Phillips for Mr Richard Coleman

William Edwards

Bailey street Edward Price, breeches maker

Philip Swinerton for John Rogers

Leg street

Richard Hayward

Evan Jones

Mr Andrew Lloyd

Willow street

Thomas Sands, innkeeper

Abel Evans for Mr Beckett, baker

John Jones, innkeeper

John Tomkies, tanner, for Griffith Rob-

erts

Church street

John Taylor

William Taylor

Thomas Dale

Thomas Hughes, weaver.

The number of constables from each ward, two from Bailey Street ward, three from Leg Street and Cross Street wards, and four from Willow Street and Church Street wards, was constant, year on year. From 1790 onwards, the sixteen men from the five wards were supplemented by two 'special constables'.

Finally, the **watchmen**, or night watchmen, who patrolled the streets through the night, until six in the morning (or 4 o'clock in summer months), were appointed for a much shorter period, in March, May, August and December. Price's *History of Oswestry* tells us that the watchmen were sworn for keeping order overnight during each of the ancient fairs, which in 1815 took place each year on March 15th, May 12th, August 15th and December 10th. Two watchmen were appointed from each of the five wards. For instance, in August 1780, the following men were sworn

Bailey Street

Charles Felton for Mrs Edwards, Three Tuns

Thomas Richards for George Maddocks

Willow Street

Robert Price for Susannah Davies

Edward Griffiths for Edward Lewis

Leg Street

John Edwards for R. Phillips, Unicorn

Edward Francis for Thomas Price, Trumpet

Cross Street

James Lloyd for Peter Edwards

John Rogers for Mr Williams

Church Street

John Jones for Edward Gittins, Coach

[& Dogs]

Morris Thomas for himself.

In some cases, such as with Edward Gittins and Thomas Price listed above, their premises were named. In others, this was not so – Richard Moody, long-time landlord of the Bell in Church Street, was listed thirty-three times in these lists of watchmen between 1771 and 1791, on each occasion providing a substitute to carry out the watch, and on only four occasions was the Bell mentioned.

The watchman's oath was much longer than that for the constable, and required the candidates not to go "to any place so as to get drunk but walk to and fro in order to preserve his Majesty's peace, and if nay mutiny or affray happen that [they] cannot of [themselves] suppress ... to call for aid and bring the offenders before the Mayor in order to be punished according to the nature of the offence".

There seems to have been a subtle difference in approach between those required to serve as constable and those volunteered to undertake watchman duties. In part this might reflect the greater inconvenience of serving overnight, especially in winter, and also the inferior status of the watchman role. It seems that the majority of those named as constables undertook the task themselves, whilst the lists of watchmen generally contain the names of those responsible for providing a watchman, and the names of the men that they were putting forward to serve. Whilst the task formally was not salaried, in effect it was, as those serving would have been paid by the person for whom they were substituting.

This being so, looking through the quarterly lists, some names crop up time after time, substituting for a range of different people. David Swinerton's name is to be found in thirty-five lists of watchmen between 1776 and 1791; Edward Francis's name appears in thirty-four lists between 1771 and 1789. And it is interesting to note, in the lists of constables, that although the practice of providing substitutes was less common, some names do appear year after year. Between 1784 and 1788, Philip Swinerton took on the duties of others for five consecutive years, and, from 1790 onwards he, almost always with John Phillips, was listed each year as a Special Constable. For those Oswestrians on the receiving end of the law in the last quarter of the 18th century, Philip Swinerton and John Phillips would have been, in effect, a permanent presence; they may be regarded as Oswestry's first 'regular' police officers.

Clearly more work remains to be done. It would be good, for instance, to confirm that each of the three 'forces' had their own uniform – at least a stout coat, for winter nights, and an impressive hat – and carried a regulation staff, stick or other such weapon with which to bring quiet to unruly behaviour or affray. The answer may lie in other records at the Guildhall, possibly in the sets of mayoral accounts.

Invitation to take part in a research study on the presence of Welsh in the Oswestry area : Derek Williams



Main University Building, Poznan
Photograph by A. Savin (CC BY-SA)

The Celtic Department at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland, is about to begin a study looking at the use of Welsh within the community. In particular, the project will look at opportunities to use the Welsh language in the Oswestry area. The project is co-ordinated by Dr Michael Hornsby, head of the Celtic Department.

If you decide you would like to take part, please contact the project organizer, Dr Michael Hornsby, by email (mhornsby@amu.edu.pl) or by phone: 07709925430, who will send you the questionnaire link, or a paper copy by post.

Gwahoddiad i gymryd rhan mewn astudiaeth ymchwil ar y Gymraeg yn ardal Croesoswallt

Mae'r Adran Geltaidd ym Mhrifysgol Adam Mickiewicz, Poznań, Gwlad Pwyl, ar fin dechrau astudiaeth sydd yn edrych ar ddefnydd o'r Gymraeg o fewn y gymuned. Yn benodol, fe fydd y prosiect yn edrych ar y cyfleoedd a geir i ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg yn ardal Croesoswallt. Cydlynir y prosiect gan Dr Michael Hornsby, pennaeth yr Adran Geltaidd.

Os penderfynwch yr hoffech gymryd rhan, a fydddechystal â chysylltu â threfnydd y prosiect, Dr Michael Hornsby, drwy e-bost (mhornsby@amu.edu.pl) neu dros y ffôn: 07709925430, ac fe fydd yn danfon cyswllt yr holiadur atoch, neu gopi papur drwy'r post.

Two Pictures: Tom Lerwill



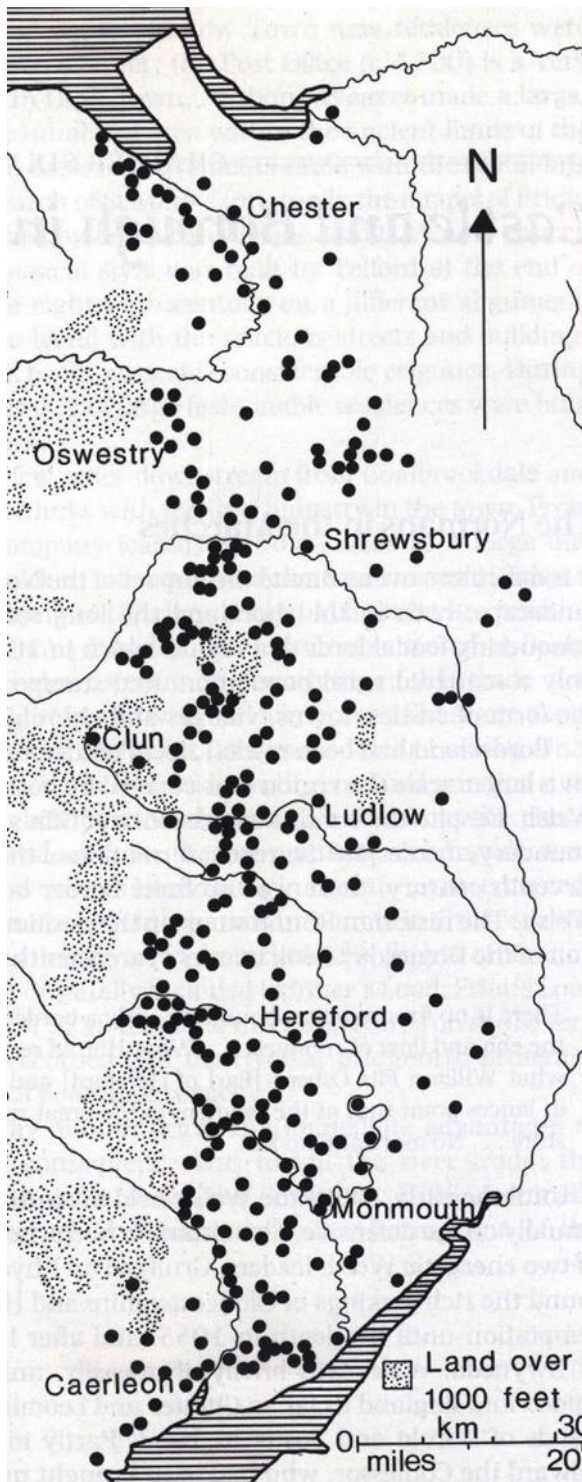
This is how Palmyra looked like in 2008. It is now in a war zone and cannot be visited. It is much changed because of the fighting and ISIS iconoclasm. The whole tragedy of Syria was made real for us by our memories of our 2008 holiday in what seemed a safe, friendly and fascinating country. The loss due to deliberate and ideologically driven destruction was heart breaking and incomprehensible. But iconoclasm is part of history.

The strange beast in the second picture is on a hoodmould of the church in Llandderfel, near Bala. It is described as a 'grotesque ruffed beast' in Pevsner. It was carved in about 1500, a couple of generations before more than 98% of medieval art was destroyed in the iconoclasm deemed necessary to drive the reformation towards our modern world. This poor creature would have witnessed the looting of the church of its Saint Derfel - a saint that rode a stag. The wooden saint was transported to London and burnt with hundreds of others in 1538. However, the remains of the stag remain in the church - a rare survival. I was fascinated by this hoodmould beast. It was strange - an artistic expression of ways of thought now so alien to us. Iconoclasms can mark important and substantive changes in ways of thinking. The very word 'medieval' is now an insult because of it. A bit rough on this ruffed little beast.



Oswestry Castle and the Domesday Book: Roger Cooper

I would like to pick up on an area that John Price Jones mentioned in his "*Oswestry Castle, its history from Domesday Book to the Civil War*" given via Zoom on the 12th February 2021.



In his excellent talk John touches on motte and bailey castles, their distribution and what Domesday has to say. I thought that it would be good to expand this area for those that are interested in such things.

Firstly, there is a famous distribution map of early Norman fortifications, amongst other gems, by Derek Renn, in his book *Norman Castles in Britain*. This clearly shows the large concentration of Motte, Ring works and Motte and Bailey Castles along the Welsh Marches; I have included a version in plate one which illustrates this concentration of recorded mottes.

However, in the Domesday book (1086) only two are mentioned in Shropshire, Oswestry and Shrewsbury, which initially raises the question why? I can verify from my own site visits and others more experienced than myself that Derek Renn was not wrong.

But, on considering why Domesday was written the answer is obvious, the remit for those who wrote Domesday was to describe who owned what land and what were the resources, for example, ploughs, and mills. In addition, who was holding what lands under a greater lord. For instance, In Shropshire, from 1070-1071, Roger de Montgomery held pretty much most of the land but subinfeudated it to his followers which eventually gave rise, to name but a few, to the families of the FitzAlans, Le Stranges, and Corbets, all of whom were local and Marcher lords. King William 1st wished to have this information with a view to future taxation plus it gave him an overview of who actually owned what.

Castles were not in the remit of the compilers of Domesday and so their mention is more of an aside.

Plate One
Distribution of early Norman fortifications along the Welsh Marches

On the question of numbers it is my opinion that they can be broken down into roughly three categories: Campaigning mottes, Caputs (that is the Honour of a knight or Lord) and Strategic.

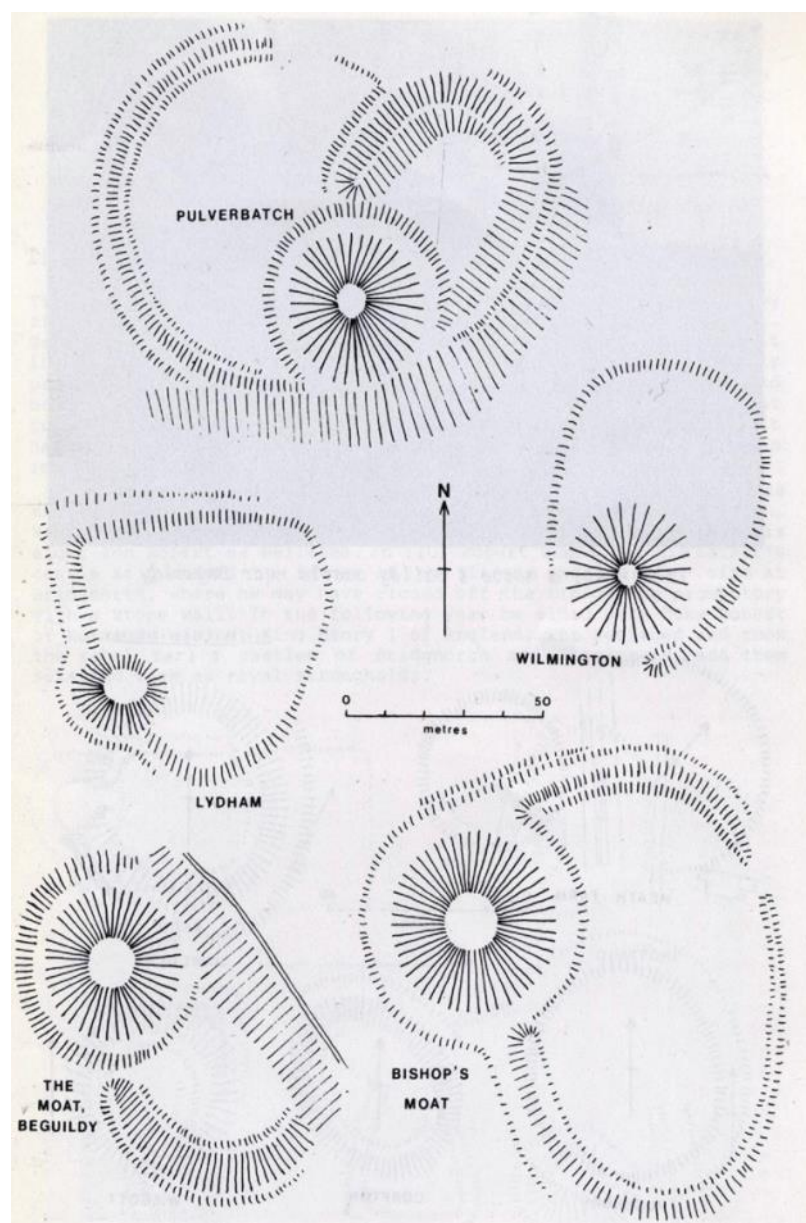
The Campaigning M&B,s are often used to consolidate an incursion into for instance Wales which may not be held for long and then abandoned. If the consolidation is not threatened then some may come to be strategic or indeed a Caput.

A Caput or Honour is often placed in a Lords major land holding and maybe lie in a less defensible position due to the need for easy access to water, communication and commerce. Local example of this can be seen at Knockin and Whittington.

The Strategic M&B is more often placed to dominate a river crossing, road or major incursion or invasion route. All of these can become at a later date consolidated in stone, but many are abandoned due to threat, invasion or if a better site is found. I will, in my next offering discuss this subject further especially the archaeology and offer an abridged bibliography.

Plate Two

Plans of Motte and Bailey Castles



OBHAG News

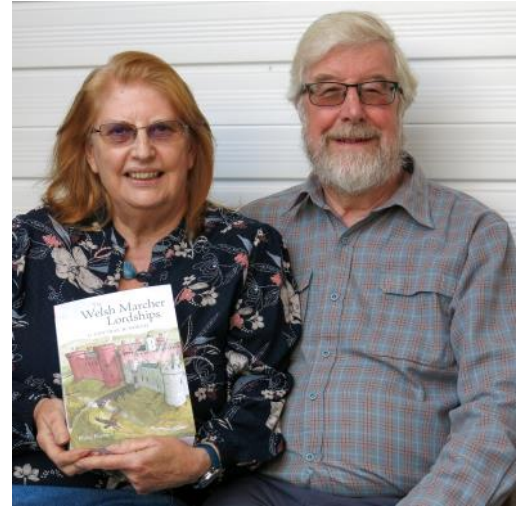
Pandemic restrictions prevented OBHAG from going ahead with the 2020/21 programme and we trialled Zoom meetings. Despite some initial hiccups this went well. In January David Stirling gave the first talk 'Excursions by the Cambrian Railways in the late 19th Century' followed in February by John Pryce Jones on 'Oswestry Castle, its history from Domesday Book to the Civil War' and Ian Hughes on the history of electric vehicles in April. All attracted good numbers and Zoom allowed for the AGM to be held in March, with plenty of opportunity for discussion.

Our first ever quiz was held in June, co-ordinated by John Pryce-Jones with Claire Dickinson taking on the role of compere, and questions provided by our committee members. It may be something we repeat in the coming months.

The prize, a signed copy of Philip Hume's new book, *The Welsh Marcher Lordships, Central & North*, published by the Logaston Press, and donated by the author, was won by Philip and Pauline Macey.

If members have any suggestions for topics for a future quiz - with the proviso that topics should relate in some way to history or archaeology please get in touch.

Although we would like to resume our usual programme of visits and meetings as soon as possible the situation is uncertain and we have decided to keep the Zoom option open. We would like to devote at least one session to members interests and if you are interested in giving a short presentation please let us know.



Diary Date

Eglantyne Jebb and Ellesmere: *Alison Utting*

Friday 10 September at 7.30pm

Eglantyne Jebb and her sister Dorothy founded Save the Children in 1919. They changed the lives of billions. But the whole family were remarkable achievers whose home was a country house near Ellesmere

OBHAG Membership

As the 2020 programme was curtailed due to the pandemic current members subscriptions will be carried over for 2021 and become renewable in January 2022.

If you would like to join OBHAG or if you have membership queries please contact the Membership Secretary by post or by email

Margaret Harrison: Email: harrisonm-r@tiscali.co.uk