

## Threats to local heritage: Arden Hill



Arden Hill in South Street is up for sale as a development site and could be at risk of demolition. It currently houses part of Warwickshire County Council's Social Services Department, but no doubt cuts are causing them to re-think their accommodation needs.

This Victorian house is one of the last remaining of the substantial 'country' houses built for entrepreneurs who needed to be close to their businesses in the town. It was built in 1860 by Hanson Sale, of the family of bankers, woolstaplers, corn and seed merchants, who dominated local life for most of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The architect and builder was Robert Jennings, a local man who, from 1838 to 1844, had supervised the building of Merevale Hall for architect Edward Blore. Later Jennings built the Atherstone Corn Exchange in Long Street (now demolished) in a Gothic style probably influenced by his time at Merevale.

The house is built in a warm and surprisingly clean Derbyshire and Bath stone with a slate roof. The gables, edged with carved bargeboards, have more of the Arts and Craft movement than the Gothic revival about them it and was clearly a very modern house for its day.

Unfortunately, Arden Hill is unlisted and is outside the extension to the Atherstone Conservation Area. However, its loss would have a serious impact on the character of South Street. The Society will do what it can to save the building. (See *Mark Girouard, The Victorian Country House, p. 120, and John Austin, Hats, Coal and Bloodshed, p.4*).

On 11th March, again at Trinity Church, **Tim Bridges of the Victorian Society**, gave us a potted history of Birmingham, illustrated by photos of the city's many historic buildings, some under threat, and some finding new uses, even as mosques, where a Victorian chimney can serve as a minaret!

We were reminded of the difficulty of saving unlisted local heritage by the fact that that many Arts and Crafts houses on the Hagley Road and in Handsworth have been demolished in recent years, despite the efforts of the Victorian Society to preserve them.

## Programme of coming events

2014

**Tuesday, 29th April 7.30 pm Annual General Meeting** at Trinity Church, Coleshill Road, Atherstone. Followed by, "Recent Bosworth Battlefield Developments," by Eddie Smallwood of the Bosworth Heritage Centre and Country Park.

**Wednesday 21st May, 6.30 pm** A guided walk around Roman Mancetter, led by John Ellis. Meet at Plough Inn, Mancetter.

**Tuesday 10th June, 7.30 pm** Talk by a speaker from the Canal and River Trust, at Trinity Church.

**Thursday 10th July, 7.00 pm.** Garden party at New House Grange, Sheepy Magna. Members £10, non-members, £15.

**Thursday, 31st July** Guided tour of the Clifton-on-Dunsmore candidate site for the location of Boudica's last battle (time to be advised).

**Friday, 12th September, 2.30 pm.** Visit to Astley Church and Castle, including the recent restorations, and tea in Astley Reading Room.

**Thursday, 2nd October, 2.30pm.** Visit to Abbey Farm and Merevale Church, including tea, courtesy of Jenny Pitman. Meet at Abbey Farm.

**Tuesday, 11th November, 7.30 pm** at the Quaker Meeting House, Hartshill. Talk by Stella Roberts on George Fox. And Our Local Quaker Heritage.

**Tuesday, 9th December, 7.30 pm.** ACS Christmas Dinner at Purley Chase Centre, Mancetter.

**For more details** please contact Pauline Gurney on 01827 713976, or [carlandpauline@talk21.com](mailto:carlandpauline@talk21.com)

*Atherstone Civic Society was formed in 1990 to stimulate interest in, and action for, the improvement of the local environment.*

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Atherstone Civic Society

'TOWN AND VILLAGE'  
THE NEWSLETTER OF ATHERSTONE CIVIC SOCIETY

No.86

Spring 2014

**Welcome to our Spring Newsletter.** You may notice a change in editorial style, as our usual editor, **Margaret Hughes**, (below speaking at the launch of *Roman Mancetter*) is temporarily indisposed. We have Margaret to thank for the success of the Roman Mancetter project, and we wish her all the best for a speedy recovery. (*Judy Vero, deputy editor*)



Having been slightly worried about the 'compact' size, of the new programme we were heartened by the positive feedback. Some thought it was quirky whilst others liked the fact that it will fit into a wallet or a purse. Please note that we now have details of our visit to **Clifton on Dunsmore** (see page 4).

We have also been heartened by a growth in membership, much of which is thanks to **Pauline Gurney's** efforts to promote the Society, and the **Roman Mancetter** project, which has raised interest

*In Loving Memory of Queen Boudica, Queen of the Iceni who died near Watling Street AD 62*



This is the inscription on a bench which can be found on the footpath bridge under the A5 at Wood Lane near MIRA, brought to our attention by **Mike**

**Trye**. Does anyone know who put it there?

## Is Atherstone changing?

As you walk up Long Street, if you glance into the window of Costa Coffee, these days, you may see clients sitting reading *The Guardian* or the *Daily Telegraph*. A number of the town's famed tally of pubs have closed, and instead of 'Book Town' (which apart from the St Giles Bookshop,



has been an abject failure) we could now be called 'Bridal Town' for the number of wedding dress shops now appearing. It is remarkable how few empty shops there are compared with other market towns.

After years when developers appeared to turn their back on Atherstone, we now see speculative residential development in every part of the town. Space may be at a premium but luxury fittings are abundant, and the built-in solar roof panels are unobtrusive, and reduce running costs. The Queen Elizabeth School is to be rebuilt with some urgency as a Government-sponsored academy, leading to hopes that the school has at last emerged from a period of decline, and may one day have a VI Form again. All this bodes well for Atherstone, but we have to be very vigilant if we are to retain the historic character and friendly ambience that makes the town so appealing.

The Civic Society's ranks have been boosted recently by retired 'downsizers' coming here from different parts of the country to be nearer to children and grandchildren. We live in the centre of the country and the proximity of motorways and inter-city train services means we can get to most places fairly easily, traffic permitting of course. From this influx of 'new blood' perhaps may come one or two willing to give up a little of their time to take the Society forward as those of us older ones gradually step aside. (JV)

**Malcolm Lockett, Hinckley Archaeological Society 'What can be discovered by Fieldwalking'** *(As space is limited the print version is edited. Please contact Judy for the full text which includes a plan).*

In October 2013 two groups, Hinckley Archaeological Society (HAS) and the Atherstone Civic Society (ACS) combined to carry out systematic fieldwalking in the Mancetter/Hartshill area. From previous excavations and field surveys it is known that within this area there were many Roman kilns which produced fine wares and mortaria during the period from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The mortaria, in particular, was distributed extensively in the Midlands and northern England. The field we chose is in the village of Hartshill and was excavated in the 1980s by the late Keith Scott and his team from Atherstone Archaeological and Historical Society (now defunct). A large area of the field was stripped back to reveal the remains of several Roman kilns and it was clear that Roman activity spread beyond the excavation area.

**The two main objectives of the 2013 field survey were :**

**To assess** the full extent of the Roman activity by an archaeological technique known as fieldwalking. This is a non-intrusive way of investigating a site for past human activity. The basic principle is to walk across a field (preferably ploughed) to examine what is lying on top of the soil. If the field has been recently ploughed, then artefacts that have been buried will surface. By using a grid system with "traverse" and "stint", field walkers can recover artefacts from the surface of the ploughed field and record them onto a field plan. Broken pottery is often the most abundant artefact to survive. Pots were easily broken and then disposed of in the fields along with manuring to enrich, and break the soil down. Pottery does not decay and is rarely recycled.

**To establish** the length of time that activity could have occurred on the site during the Roman occupation, by analysis of the style and composition of the pottery sherds. The "scatter" or concentration of pottery sherds can also indicate areas of activity and/or settlement.

Prior to this field survey, information supplied by John Ellis (a member of the team who carried out the earlier excavations and now a member of HAS) was that the size of the excavation was in the region of 100m x 60m. This accounts for approximately one tenth of the area of the field. The fieldwalking was scheduled to cover approximately nine tenths of the field.

The site is bounded along its northern edge by the Coventry Canal. On the fields' east flank is the Mancetter to Hartshill Road. The field has a gentle slope running west to east and north east. A trackway truncates the field to the west, almost at the field's highest point.



The field walking survey recovered just over 2,000 pieces of Roman pottery of which nearly 80% was Roman mortaria. (see left). Mortaria were mixing bowls, mainly used in domestic activity. The bowls had a wide rim which made handling the bowl a lot easier when mixing or grinding ingredients. Inside the bowl and set into the bowl's fabric were small pieces of grit. This made it a very efficient grinding bowl. Set into the rim was a pouring spout, ideal for emptying the prepared contents. The rims and the grits are features that can provide guide lines as to its date and place of manufacture.

Other finds were Roman greyware, oxydised wares and colour coated wares plus Medieval pottery sherds dated c. 1100AD to 1500AD. The fieldwalking team also noticed large amounts of broken granite, many being angular and similar in size – approximately 5cm to 8cm. It is possible that these are the ploughed-out remains of metallised surfaces for access to working areas and kilns.

Also present were small square pieces of granite (Roman tesserae for mosaics) that most of the fieldwalkers either collected or noted. It is possible that the Romans were making tesserae from the local granite as a sideline to their pottery production. A more modern activity was apparent on the field margins beside the canal where deposits of glass, pottery, plastic and metal were found which dated from mid-late Victorian and continuing throughout to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This reflects the activities of the bargees and narrow boat users discarding their "rubbish" onto the canal banks. Interestingly, there was no evidence of Roman pottery in this area. It is possible that signs of Roman activity have been covered by the soil from the digging of the canal and the subsequent detritus of canal life!

**If you are interested in fieldwalking or require further information about Hinckley Archaeological Society then please contact:**

Shirley Hailstone, Secretary, Hinckley Archaeological Society .

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*( We welcome Malcolm as a recently co-opted member to the committee of Atherstone Civic Society.)*

**THE BOUDICA PROJECT . . . . . BY NO MEANS OVER!**

Our EU-funded LEADER project to find the site of Boudica's last battle may be officially over, but has sparked a renewed interest in Roman Mancetter and we are currently involved with partners in a number of initiatives.

**The Friends of Atherstone Heritage** are working with Warwickshire Museum's Finds Curator, Sara Wear, to catalogue an estimated 650 boxes of Roman pottery, much of it from excavations by the late Keith Scott over forty years. Our thanks to the volunteers who have come forward to help. If you would like to be one of them, please contact Pam Colloff on 01827 703249.

Margaret Hughes, and Stuart Palmer of 'Archaeology Warwickshire' have each met with **Dr Adam Booth of Imperial College, London University** about high-tech non-invasive research on Roman Mancetter, using ground penetrating radar. With Dr Booth this method has been successful in finding at least one new tomb in Egypt and also proved that there are no 'buried WW2 Spitfires' in Malaysia in the sites where their presence had been suspected.

We have also been contacted by a television production company aiming to produce a programme on **Boudica at Mancetter**, and other proposed sites, for 2015.

**Marketing Boudica.** We met with the Friends of Atherstone Heritage, Stuart Palmer, Helen Maclagan, an archaeological consultant, (whom you may remember as Warwickshire County Archaeologist,) and Glynis Powell, Museums Development Officer. They wish to expand our Roman Mancetter Trail. (Board 6 is soon to be erected on the new Housing 21 development in Manor Road, currently in planning). Firstly, they intend to set up a website dedicated to Boudica and Mancetter, then they will be looking at a place to site a small information kiosk.

**John Waite, as a Roman Legionary**, attended Atherstone Town Council's annual dinner with his wife, Helen, aka



Salvina, the opulently dressed wife of a Roman centurion. John has written books on the Roman invasion and was of the opinion that Boudica's last battle took place at High Cross. However, the recent find at Manor Road of an

annexe to the fort of around AD60 has led him to revisit his theory and he is softening towards Mancetter.

**The King Under the Car Park** - Over 70 members and visitors came to **Matthew Morris's** talk on 21st January, at Trinity Church. As excavation supervisor, he was well-placed to update us on one of the most remarkable archaeological finds of our generation. Matthew and his team from the University of Leicester, had set out to find the remains of the Franciscan Friary, locate the position of the buildings, and the friary church, within which they hoped to find the choir. They little hoped to find Richard III's remains. But remarkably all objectives were achieved. For those who had already heard his talk at Hinckley Archaeological Society in 2013 Matthew enlarged on the findings in the church. But if you missed the talks, you can buy his book, *Richard III: The King Under the Car Park*, co-written with Richard Buckley, excavation director, and published by the University of Leicester Archaeological Services, price £4.99.

**Planning—Poor design now acceptable?**

With strong pressure for development in Atherstone it may not be surprising that there are more planning applications for residential development in the pipeline than we have seen in many years. But it appears that, in the their haste, to get development NWBC officers are approving applications under delegated powers which would probably have been rejected had the Planning Board seen them.

The argument is that, 'If we don't give planning consent then the developer will go to appeal and with the Government wanting houses at any cost, refusals will be overturned, and we shall have to pay the costs.' This may be true in some cases but there are three recent consents for housing in the town which are all likely to be visually harmful, and which could have been so much better had an architect designed them. But understandably architects are expensive and are not used often for small schemes.

To the rear of the Barge and Bridge, in **Westwood Road**, the Council has given consent for a 3-storey block of flats which will rival Charles Wills Court opposite for ugliness. In **Ratcliffe Road**, on the corner of St George's Road, a bungalow in a large garden is to be demolished to make way for another large block which will urbanise a pleasant low-density area of the town. In their report the officers accept that 'a fewer number of units could have achieved a better design,' but they passed it nevertheless.

At **Mythe Bridge Farm**, redundant barns are to be converted to dwellings. Just a little design input could have made this an excellent scheme but the planners wrote in the report, 'If additional design and quality requests were added it could lead to the scheme not being viable'. So a precedent is being set for poor-quality projects which would not have been accepted a few years ago. The Government's National Planning Policy Framework is very strong on the importance of good design, and in our view, there was plenty of scope to refuse this scheme.

None of these applications were scrutinised by the Planning and Development Board. Overstretched officers are taking the easy way out, sidestepping their Planning Board, and approving schemes which, when built, will leave Atherstone with 'eyesores' which will mar the townscape for the foreseeable future.

However, the larger developers have got the message. In addition to Redrow Homes, the new houses on the site of the Magistrates Court (Cameron Homes) promise to be better designed, and easier on the eye (JV)