

Lost Treasures

No.1 Winwick Giants & Great Battles - 11th August 2005

Welcome to this exciting new six part 'adventure archaeology' series presented by antiquarian Mark Olly.



The North West has one of the richest histories in Britain but archaeologists have only just scratched the surface.

Mark went out and about in search of some of the North West's most intriguing lost treasures, legendary heroes and hidden history. Discovering how ordinary people frequently unearth lost treasures right on their own doorstep and demonstrating how anyone can help in solving some of the most puzzling mysteries in history by applying basic detective skills and commonsense.



"I call it adventure archaeology because you never know what you're going to turn up!"

Mark Olly

Winwick Giants & Great Battles

This week Mark uncovers new evidence about a lost Stone Age circle and sacred burial site, the terrible secrets of a Saxon Cross and traces violent events from Dark Age Britain right up to the English Civil War.

Mark's journey starts three miles north of the former industrial centre of Warrington in a small town called **Winwick**, which has witnessed some epic events from history...

St. Oswald's Church, Winwick, sits on a mound overlooking the main north south A49 – an ancient route from prehistoric times. A Roman road passes close by but it was the position of the church, which intrigued Mark.

Whenever visiting ancient sites like churches, it's always a good idea to speak to local experts. Historian **Frank Bryce** told Mark about the time the tombs of the Gerard Family Chapel were opened up. Lead lined coffins were discovered but due to a lack of funds the tomb was closed and no one knows exactly what lies beneath the stone floors of the knave. This Church, however, has more secrets to give up.

In the early 19th century the section housing the Alter underwent reconstruction and artist, Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, best known for his work on the Palace of Westminster, designed the fabulous floor tiles and ceiling decoration. During the restoration the workers dug their way into an ancient burial chamber containing some extraordinary skeletons. Three of the bodies found were over seven feet tall – giants of men. These 'giants' probably were buried in a 'barrow' or raised burial mound dating from the late Stone Age period over 5,000 years ago and may be the reason why the Church was positioned on this ancient site, following in the footsteps of many sacred sites before it.

Another of the Church's hidden treasures is the 16th century bell tower - the clock and bell mechanism need a total of 400 revolutions twice a week to operate and it is one of the last remaining hand wound clock mechanisms in the North West. The bells were recast in 1600 and have been ringing out across Winwick parish for over 400 years.

In prehistoric times people clearly respected the Winwick site and built a series of burial mounds in the surrounding area dating from about 2000 years BC.



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Amazingly, the position and alignment of the Winwick mound and these neighbouring mounds seemed to mirror the famous Avebury stone circle in Wiltshire. Both are centred on ancient crossroads, surrounded by *tumuli* or smaller burial mounds on one side with a Christian church built later within the site. The mound would certainly have been a prominent feature in the landscape and the later Bronze Age burial mounds appear to be aligned with it on a north east axis to the rising and setting of the sun and moon.

In the 1980s a rescue archaeology team were called in to excavate one of the burial mounds close to the neighbouring village of Croft.

The main feature discovered was a slot in the middle of the mound – possibly the site of a standing stone erected as a marker. Archaeologists also discovered evidence of a wooden structure which burnt down in about 1520 BC, possibly an early Bronze Age sanctuary or observatory similar to *Woodhenge* near Avebury, Wiltshire. A second massive mound was built on top of this with yet more burials added.

One of the discoveries in particular was remarkable... dating from around 1440 BC; two urns were found - one on top of the other - with the first burial marked in some way so the second could be placed exactly on top.



About 2000 years later in around 600 AD, the site suddenly and dramatically expanded. Burials stretched out in all directions with as many as 2 – 3,000 bodies, all of which have dissolved in the acidic soil conditions. Many burials had the typical Christian alignment with feet pointing west suggesting a post-Roman Christian or perhaps even an Anglo Saxon cemetery.

Amazingly, this burial site had been used continuously for over 4,500 years from pagan to Christian times, yet sadly today none of this incredible sacred site remains... blasted away for material to construct the M6 motorway – possibly one of the most important ancient sites in the North simply bulldozed into oblivion.



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The question remaining for Mark was, what could account for the huge number of bodies from around 600 AD onwards?

The legend of a great bloody Saxon battle in the area suddenly seemed to gain a lot of credence...

Here in the North West the Anglo Saxon Chronicles tell of a violent Dark Age battle between two opposing Saxon armies near Winwick at **Makerfield**.

The young **King Oswald of Northumbria** fought his older rival **King Penda of Mercia**; now present day Cheshire and the Midlands. Penda won the battle and Oswald was slain with his forces scattered.

Weapons expert **Mike Loades** took up the story of the two great Saxon armies.

Similarly attired and armed they would have worn chain mail and helmets, held shields, used spears, swords and axes. Fighting shoulder to shoulder with interlocked shields, missiles were used like small javelins and axes to breach the opponent's defences and of course their main weapon, the sword.

A Saxon's sword was hugely important, they even gave them names like 'blood letter' and 'leg biter' - theirs was a hero culture, fighting until the last man stood, death was an honour, not simply a fate.

Back to our burial site, was the large number of bodies found nearby evidence of this Saxon battle cemetery? We'll never know for sure but amazingly, Winwick church holds a vital clue to the authenticity of this battle, not least its name.

Much of St. Oswald's church is still medieval including the bases of the columns, which can be seen as the *footprint* of the earlier building.

Mark found the carved head of King Oswald with his battle helmet on virtually under a floorboard and everywhere there are references of his history, numerous carvings as well as a Victorian stained glass window depicting his image.

More importantly part of a huge stone cross was found buried on the site. The cross has been dated to the 8th century and provides vital clues as to how **Oswestry** got its name and the legend of **St. Oswalds Sacred Well**.

The cross depicts of the horrific fate of the Christian King at the hands of his enemy Pendra...



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One legend tells us that when King Oswald lay slain on the battlefield he clawed for his sword upon the ground and water mysteriously gushed up.

Another that Pendra hacked Oswald's body to bits and hung them on a tree, where his arm fell to the ground water sprang from the ground... thus the ancient well at Oswestry was established. Being a Christian King, supporters maintain that the ground where he fell became a sacred site and sure enough the well at Oswestry (Oswald's Tree) still survives albeit in a housing estate, but water still gushes forth!

Like everything in archaeology though there's more than one possibility and Mark's theory is that the real sacred well is actually located in the neighbouring field.

It is known that for over 1,000 years pilgrims had been coming and removing soil from around the well for healing purposes and that would leave a really wide large dip in the ground and the actual well would also have probably silted up.

A thousand years after St. Oswald's fatal battle, another great battle took place at **Redbank** just outside Winwick during the **English Civil War** in **1648**.

Scottish Royalist forces numbering 24,000 men under the **Duke of Hamilton** were cut off by Cromwell's troops and had to fight a running battle for 30 miles as they retreated south from **Preston**.

Civil War expert, **Peter Gaunt**, told us that this was really a containment battle; to hold off Cromwell long enough for the bulk of the Scottish army to refresh and regroup before crossing the Mersey at Warrington and this was a good spot to defend the road.

Cromwell's forces, however, overwhelmed the Scots and a thousand men were massacred in a single day. The royalists fell back to the Church at Winwick and a fierce battle ensued. You can still see the marks where the lead shot has scared the exterior walls. Parliamentary forces shelled and captured the church leading to another mystery that has puzzled Mark for years - what ever happened to the church treasures?

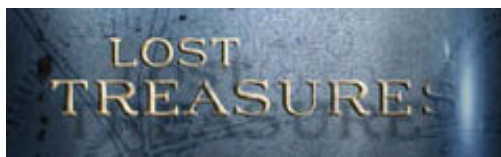
Frank Bryce had one intriguing theory that the treasure may have been hidden away in a secret cavity before Cromwell's troops arrived but subsequent investigation of likely holes have led no where, it's a tempting thought but perhaps it really is a lost treasure and we'll never actually know...



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Who would have thought that Winwick, one of thousands of ordinary places in the North West, holds so many clues to our secret history...lost treasures just beneath the surface just waiting to be re-discovered!



If you'd like to find out more about the history of the area and do some of your own exploration and research check out the following links:

Warrington Museum For treasure on view – including Bronze Age burial urns, the Civil War artefacts and local history.
www.warrington.gov.uk/entertainment/Museum/home

History and location of Oswestry
www.oswestry.com

The town of Warrington
www.warrington.gov.uk

Church of St. Oswalds, Winwick:

www.lancashirechurches.co.uk

Anglo Saxon Chronicles

'Compiled on the orders of King Alfred the Great in approximately A.D. 890, and subsequently maintained and added to by generations of anonymous scribes until the middle of the 12th Century.'

'The ultimate timeline of British history from its beginnings up to the end of the reign of King Stephen in 1154.'

Step back in time at:

www.britannia.com/history/docs

More on King Oswald

www.britannia.com/bios/saints/oswald

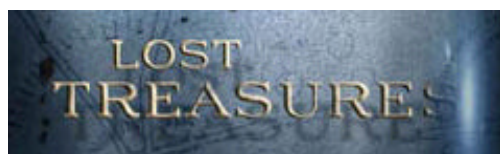
UK's national, virtual museum

www.24hourmuseum.org.uk

Got a term you don't understand?

Check it out here:

<http://archaeology.d.dictionarypage.co.uk>



Get Involved!



Send us details of your local lost treasure: Click the **your treasure** tab on the main www.lost-treasures.co.uk website or email the team at info@lost-treasures.co.uk

Portable Antiquities Scheme

Established in 1997 the **Portable Antiquities Scheme** is a countrywide community archaeology project to encourage the voluntary recording of archaeological objects found by the public in England and Wales - people who use metal-detector, go out walking, gardening or just going about their daily work. The objects found - if properly recorded - offer an important and irreplaceable source for understanding our past.

At its heart are the Scheme's **Finds Liaison Officers**, offer everyone a way to log all the finds for public benefit. The data recorded - itself an important educational resource - is published on the Scheme's website: www.finds.org.uk

The site gives you public access to over 134,000 records and over 52,000 images of finds, as diverse as prehistoric flints to post-medieval buckles – and new finds are going online every day! Emails to info@finds.org.uk

English Civil War Society

www.english-civil-war-society.org

Anglo-Saxon, Viking, Norman and British Living History

Vikings & Anglo Saxon re-enactment group, 'Some of us are fighters, others are craftsmen and living historians - often we are all of these.' www.regia.org



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Presenter, Mark Olly



Born and raised in Warrington. Mark Olly established and runs the **Celtic Warrington Project** archaeological unit (CWP), whose aim is to document all prehistoric and Dark Age remains in the Mid Mersey Valley, North Cheshire and South Lancashire. This unique historical project for the North West is revealing an unsuspected picture of the region in Dark Age times.

Mark writes on archaeology and other subjects for local and national press. His books include the '**Celtic Warrington & Other Mysteries**' volumes, which have been based on six years of research.

His other interests are wide ranging and include, musician, artist, photographer, and archaeologist, having trained at Liverpool University. Mark also holds a Certificate of Ministry and a Diploma of Biblical Studies and is part of '**Dalraida The Norsemen**', a dark age, living history, re-enactment aspect of Celtic Warrington.

Mark joined forces with **Virtual-Knutsford** in June 2000 and his work features regularly on the site. The second of Mark's '**Celtic Warrington & Other Mysteries**' volumes, which covers Knutsford and surrounding areas, appears in regular instalments. Find out more at www.virtual-knutsford.co.uk

Mike Loades

Mike is a man of many parts; action arranger, historical weapons expert: historical advisor, presenter, writer, producer, director, teacher, lecturer, horseman, jousting, carriage driver, swordsman, archer, falconer and last but not least, black powder shooter: A good man to have in a tight spot, Mike's amazing knowledge of weaponry and fighting technique has led him to contribute to countless documentaries, films, theatre productions and books.



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Title Music

Title music from the series comes from Finnish band, '**Nightwish**'. If you'd like to find out more information about them check out: www.nightwish.com

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