

# Lost Treasures

No.3 - Lewis Carroll and Roman Mileforts 25<sup>st</sup> 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*

### Lewis Carroll and Lost Roman Mileforts

A short distance from the big mushroom shaped reactor at Daresbury Nuclear Research laboratory is a place forever associated with a Victorian Oxford mathematician also known to millions across the world as a famous children's author....

**Daresbury** is a leafy Cheshire village, which is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1082. Just off the main A56 dual carriageway is an idyllic and unassuming little church of All Saints. God has been worshipped on this spot for over 850 years and as far as we know a church has stood on this site since the 12th century.

In Norman times the building was probably a simple wooden structure, plastered or lime washed so it stood out in the landscape. In fact it was known as the **White Church of Cheshire**.

The church's tower has an inscription dated 1100m this, however, is a fanciful Victorian re carving of an original inscription. The tower actually dates from the 15th century.

**Charles Lutwidge Dogdson** - the celebrated author **Lewis Carroll**, was born in the parish and baptised in this church and the references to the author can be found around the church.

Hundreds of visitors from all over the world come here to see the Lewis Carroll memorial window where he is depicted alongside Alice and other creatures from his amazing books.

Carroll's father was curate of Daresbury and the family lived in the nearby vicarage. Sadly, the vicarage burnt down in 1898, however some old photographs survive of his boyhood home, taken by Carroll on a nostalgic return visit in 1865.

Carroll lived at the vicarage until the age of eleven and recently archaeologists on the site of the old house found a few discarded metal toys, probably lost by the young boy and his siblings.

Elements of the Cheshire landscape feature quite prominently in Carroll's stories, as do elements from the church itself. Carroll would make the one and half mile journey with his father to Daresbury church and diligently listen to sermons delivered to the congregation from the pulpit.



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This Jacobean pulpit is also really interesting; the striking griffin carving could easily have influenced Carroll's young creative mind!

Originally the [nave](#) - the main part of the church - was separated from the altar by a [chancel or rood screen](#) composed of 34 carved panels in eleven varieties of perforated design. The body of the medieval church disappeared in 1870 during rebuilding and some of the panels survived in the wall behind the altar. One in particular is of great interest.

You'll find a wonderful carving of a [Green Man](#) surrounded by grapes and vine leaves carved by the monks of nearby [Norton Priory](#). The Green Man is a mediaeval image usually found in churches, carved in stone or wood, depicted on stained glass or within illuminated manuscripts. He can be recognised as a face, often grotesque, with foliage sprouting from his mouth, nose, eyes or ears. Alternatively, he may be a face composed entirely of leaves. Exterior or interior, he features on capitals, corbels, choir stalls, bench ends, fonts, screens, roof bosses - indeed, any surface open to ornamentation.

It is thought that he represents the life cycle of the natural world; the earliest known examples are in the art of Classical Rome, from where the idea seems to have moved northwards, to be adopted by Christianity and spread far and wide along the pilgrimage routes. The early Christian church in Britain often absorbed the primitive beliefs of existing cultures and this may explain the presence of the a Green Man at Daresbury.

[However, two unrelated bits of information took our investigation in a completely different direction...](#)

A fleeting reference in an obscure Victorian book on Roman Cheshire published in 1886 mentioned a 'mass of Roman concrete', found under the church. This was thought to be evidence of a Roman building nearby. Roman buildings normally occur near Roman roads.

The second clue to Daresbury being part of a much earlier Roman landscape came from the churches' possible link with [St. Elyn of the Legions](#)... Once upon a time the church had an image of St Elyn, which has since mysteriously disappeared... St Elyn was tremendously important. As an emperor he was responsible for legalising Christianity after returning from the holy land with the 'true cross' and the 'four nails of the crucifixion'.



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According to legend [St. Helen](#) was born a Welsh Briton who married the Roman Emperor [Constantous](#) at York and gave birth to a son [Constantine the Great](#) in 274AD.

Helen of the legions is traditionally associated with the building of Roman roads. A number of Roman roads heading into Wales surround Daresbury. Why would Roman remains appear on a site dedicated to Roman Empress known to have spent time in northern Britain?

[Like Alice down the rabbit hole, you can't always predict which door will open next and where it will lead. Was Daresbury much older than we thought? Was the tiny cemetery hiding a secret just below the surface? Had we stumbled upon a Roman site lost in antiquity...?](#)

During field walking in 2000 a fragment of Roman pottery and smelted glass were recovered behind Daresbury Old Hall.

This part of the North West was a military zone controlling the badlands in Wales and northern Britain.

A system of Roman roads ran between major military sites, like the fortress at [Chester](#) holding the frontier line with north Wales, and important river crossings such as the one at [Warrington](#) where a Roman settlement had developed on the banks of the [Mersey](#).

In between the great garrison towns, a line of Roman [mileforts](#) stretched out like links in a chain – lookout posts for securing reinforcements in case of hostility they had two main uses – signalling and observation; knowing the movements of people especially enemy troops across a dangerous frontier line was crucial. Thus these Mileforts were placed at strategic distances, approximately a mile apart so they could mobilise their forces and meet any oncoming threat.

With no modern day technology such as radios or mobile phones, a line of fire beacons was the most effective and rapid way of signalling across great distances...

The main locations of Roman mileforts in the area had been identified but there was one obvious gap in this line... The missing milefort had to be in Daresbury located on or near a main Roman road.



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**Saxons** utilised Roman road systems so the presence of a Roman road and milefort further supported the position of a Saxon estate. The place name Daresbury is derived from two Saxon words: 'Dares', which relates to a Saxon chieftain and 'bury' from burh, the Saxon word for fortified stronghold. A short distance from All Saints Church, a raised hill suggests the imprint of just such a Saxon castle.

In the 800s Saxon Britain was under threat of Viking raiders who not only plundered but also wanted to occupy the land with their own people. The famous Saxon leader **Alfred the Great** negotiated an agreement with the Vikings called the **Danelaw**, which was a boundary that separated Viking and Saxon lands in Britain. Virtually everything east of Lancashire was in the hands of Danish Vikings whilst the Saxons controlled the western half of Britain.

**Daresbury was, in fact, a key Saxon estate positioned to make sure that the Vikings didn't stray into Saxon territory.** King Alfred reinforced this border line with a number of Saxon strongholds on strategically sited hilltops and just three miles north east from Daresbury there's clear evidence of one such site.

On a windswept hilltop a few miles away at **Appleton**, the builders of a modern housing estate have borrowed from the archaeological evidence of another Saxon castle and built it into their street signs including Belcast (field Castle) the Manor House and Saxon Close.

To the south of Daresbury the Saxon burhs stretch out from **Sutton** near Frodsham, taking advantage of the natural contours of **Finney Hill**, on to the former prehistoric fort of **Eddisbury Hill** and finally **Kelsborrow Hill**.

This part of the Cheshire sandstone ridge was significant to prehistoric people as well as the Saxons who clearly chose these sites for their commanding positions over the surrounding landscape...

**At the most northerly end of the Cheshire ridge - overlooking the River Mersey lies Halton. Could this be another location for a Saxon stronghold?**

Halton too figures prominently in the Domesday Book and its name suggests it was indeed the centre of a large Saxon estate. Its name derives from the old English 'Halh' meaning, land lying near a river bend or beside a river.



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After the Norman conquests King William sought to firmly subdue his new kingdom and established a Norman Earldom at Chester to guard the Welsh frontier. William appointed his cousin, Nigel as the first Baron of Halton and thus started that particular aristocratic line.

Amazingly, whilst exploring the castle walls, Mark came across a stunning and most unexpected lost treasure... a Mesolithic tool amongst the stone, evidence of much earlier settlements.

The irony of Halton Castle is that there's no evidence of a motte and bailey and the Domesday Book doesn't record a castle at Halton at all. When a castle structure does appear, some time around 1200 AD, its primary function appears to be a courthouse...but NOT a castle!!

When we hear the word 'courthouse' it implies justice and a fair trial, our ancestors, however, had some peculiar ideas about how justice was served! Norman rule of law from Halton may originate from its earlier use as a Viking or Saxon moot hill where a 'thing' or law court would meet at the centre of the estate to hear and dispense judgement on cases.

By medieval times Halton possessed jurisdiction over 37 townships. Nearby, the [Seneshal's](#) house gives us another clue to Halton Castles' role in matters legal. In the Middle Ages magistrates were referred to as 'seneshals' and near to the castle a unique Elizabethan sandstone building was constructed for the magistrate in 1598 and is testament to the power he held over people in the community.

In 1474 two Welsh men from Mold who had committed a burglary at Keckwick, near Daresbury, were committed to Halton Castle. They broke out complete with fetters and chains but on recaptured they were tried by the seneschal and hanged at Halton.

A new courthouse, built in the grounds of the old castle, only ceased to operate in 1908 when it became the Castle hotel of today. The old courtroom where villains were sentenced is now used for pub functions!

The romantic remains of Halton Castle offer fantastic views for miles around and it's a chilling thought that from this stunning vista over the Mersey, our English ancestors first caught sight of Viking raiders who brought a new and terrible threat to Saxon Britain.



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In programme four of Lost Treasures we trace the impact of the Vikings and investigate the most ferocious battle which united the English nation.....

Take a good look around where you live; are you standing on a lost treasure?



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:

## **Lewis Carroll**

For more details on the man, his life and works visit:

<http://lewiscarrollsociety.org.uk>

## **All Saints Church, Daresbury**

For details of the church and the Lewis Carroll memorial window check out:

[www.daresburycofe.org.uk](http://www.daresburycofe.org.uk)

## **Romans in Britain**

A great site for the 7 – 10 year olds.

[www.brimms.co.uk/romans](http://www.brimms.co.uk/romans)

For a comprehensive history of the Romans, 100 BC to 450 AD in Britain visit:

[www.romans-in-britain.org.uk](http://www.romans-in-britain.org.uk)

## **Alfred The Great**

If you'd like to find out about Alfred or any of our monarchs, past or present, take a look at this great site packed full of information.

[www.royal.gov.uk](http://www.royal.gov.uk)

## **Halton Castle**

A website of the Castle detailing events, exhibitions, directions and admission information.

[www.haltoncastle.org](http://www.haltoncastle.org)

## **Early British Kingdoms**

A site offering many links on early British history.

[www.mythiccrossroads.com/british](http://www.mythiccrossroads.com/british)

## **The Saxons**

Find out all about the Saxons on this great site:

[www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk)

## **The Norman Conquests**

All you need to know about William and what he got up to with his Norman lords...

[www.essentialnormanconquest.com](http://www.essentialnormanconquest.com)



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**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](http://www.lost-treasures.co.uk) website or email the team at [info@lost-treasures.co.uk](mailto: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](http://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](mailto:info@finds.org.uk)*

## **Presenter, Mark Olly**



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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](http://www.virtual-knutsford.co.uk)

## Title Music from the series...

The title music from the series comes from Finnish band, '*Nightwish*'. If you'd like to find our more information about them check out: [www.nightwish.com](http://www.nightwish.com)

**'Lost Treasures'**  
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This fact sheet was compiled for ITV

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