

Lost Treasures

No. 5 - Knutsford & Tatton

8th September 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

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Knutsford is an affluent Cheshire market town 10 miles south of Manchester, right under the flight path of Manchester Airport and the town was made famous by

Elizabeth Gaskell's classic novel '**Cranford**' in the 19th century.

Elizabeth was the Jane Austen of the North, using her writing to comment on society, but unlike Austen's wry comment on polite society, Elizabeth often wrote about the lives of ordinary working class people in the Victorian era...

The daughter of a Unitarian minister, Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), was raised by an aunt in Knutsford and spent most of her life in the town. '**Cranford**', by far her most popular work, described her girlhood village of Knutsford and the efforts of its shabby, genteel inhabitants to keep up appearances - not really an issue today as it is more Porsche than pawn shop!

Visitors can visit Cranford Avenue and the **Gaskell Memorial Tower** in the town to this day. You'll also find a row of Georgian houses now named Gaskell Avenue.

Elizabeth once called No. 17, 'Heathwaite', home but No. 19, 'Heath House', had a more infamous occupant, as the residence of **Highwayman Higgins!**

Edward 'Highwayman' Higgins played the gentleman by day and thief by night. More of a confidence trickster and burglar than Highwayman, Higgins was too clever to make random raids in the hope of loot. His alias as a gentleman enabled him to survey whichever well to-do house he visited before returning to rob the family. Also ranging further a field he had a remarkable knack of escaping unscathed from his exploits, in 1767, however, he robbed two houses in Carmarthen and was tackled as a suspicious character by two burly butchers. His life of crime had finally caught up with him and in 1767 Highwayman Higgins was hanged for his crimes.

The people of Knutsford are really proud of their town's history and several years ago funded a heritage centre. Tucked away between the two main streets the centre has many artefacts from its history and Heritage Centre manager, Val, told Mark about one of their most treasured, a wonderful tapestry depicting the town. Every street is represented and all the major places of interest. **Sue Newhouse** designed the project, which took 3,000 people over four years to complete.



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Forty feet by ten feet the tapestry was worked by men, women and children – a real testament to community and undoubtedly a hidden treasure of the North West.

For the past five summers the Heritage Centre has hosted Mark's travelling archaeology exhibition where people have dropped in to help identify and share their lost treasures.... A little while ago a lady brought in a find from her garden or allotment that only later struck Mark as to what it could be. The lady thought that it might be a flint tool but Mark thinks that it is, in fact a 'Venus figure'. These hail from Northern France and Mark is very keen to visit the site where it was found to take a more detailed look around - so if that lady is you, please get in touch!

Twenty odd years ago a little girl found a strange object in her back garden. That little girl was Jennie Cule and now, all grown up, she is still fascinated with her unique discovery. Jennie had stumbled upon a beautifully worked flint hand axe, probably used by our ancestors 300,000 years ago to cut meat.

The tool sits comfortably in the right hand with serrated edges and smoothed out indentations so that the tool can be used without slipping from the grip – a fabulous lost treasure regained.

Around the town there are lots of clues of how Knutsford may have got its name.

In 1086 when the **Domesday Book** was compiled, the Norman scribe would have asked what the place was called. The Saxon peasants may have replied 'Canetesford' and recognising the name of King Canute this was misinterpreted as 'Canutesford'.

Another more likely interpretation for the name Canetesford would be 'Carnute's Ford' which means '**Druid's Ford**'. Druids were Celtic priests, feared and hated by the Romans as they incited the locals to rebel against Roman government. It's thought that druids from all over the British Isles met at a 'grove of the Carnutes' or 'place of the druids' - could this secret place of the druids lie hidden somewhere in the Knutsford area?

An unexpected piece in the Knutsford jigsaw appeared with the so called **Canute Stones**, which in turn may help to shed some light on the legend of **king Canute**... **John Heap** is the Chairman of Caddishead Local History Society and he was shown two carved stones in a local garden.



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The stones appeared to be medieval and seemed to tell the story of a Christian Viking wedding; Canute was one of a very few Christian Vikings. The other stone, which appeared to match the first, depicted the coronation of a king, could Mark have found a direct link to King Canute?

The stone intrigued Mark and he wanted to be sure it truly was medieval so he twisted it around to get a better look at the other side. This side showed a different type of carving, which was probably Victorian. So sadly these stones may be a clever Victorian folly. When investigating history you have to accept that you may come to a dead end and not get the answers you'd hoped for, it seems the Canute stones will remain a mystery for the time being!

Mark's search for the legendary 'Carnutes Ford' led him to the [Tatton Estate](#), a quarter of a mile from Knutsford town centre, where a ford is recorded on earlier maps.

Tatton is chiefly known today as one of the North West's finest stately homes, [Tatton Hall](#), with its 1000-acre estate.

The picturesque rolling parkland was created in the 18th century by the inventive genius [Humphrey Repton](#), who in turn was inspired by the famous landscape designer [Capability Brown](#). Most of Tatton's visitors would be amazed that this beautiful landscape actually goes way back into antiquity...

Tatton itself actually means [Tata's Tun](#) or [village of Tata](#) – possibly the name an Anglo Saxon chieftain who lived here.

In medieval times Tatton developed into a large estate and the annual Medieval Fayre held at the hall transports visitors back 600 years bringing the Middle Ages vividly to life with a mixture of entertainment, period warfare and weaponry.

The old hall farm itself also holds one or two surprises of its own. When the Victorians remodelled it they left an entire medieval ceiling intact with all its beautiful carved beams. Close by, at a secret location, a local farmer is now the custodian of a collection of Romano-British carved heads including a 360 degree carved ladies head, a Celtic head, possibly a grave marker, an unusual three sided stone head and a carved alabaster lion from a sarcophagus. Mark is in no doubt that these finds all point to a Romano-British temple in the locality just waiting to be discovered!



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The landscape of Tatton has yet more in store for us as was discovered in 1962 down by **Tatton Mere**. The accidental find of three flints by a young boy called **Thomas Sprott** started an archaeological investigation, which produced amazing results.

A staggering 900 flints were recovered in all including, flint fragments called microliths and various scrapers, an axe sharpener and a stone saw. This meant that Tatton was a busy flint works in the Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age, about 8 - 10,000 years ago.

Tatton was probably the site of a hunter-gatherer village and just like schoolboy, Thomas, ordinary people do make the most extraordinary discoveries. These finds can radically change our understanding of history and this new evidence clearly pointed to the presence of an early human called Homo Erectus. This is the first true human ancestor of modern man, who evolved about 500,000 years ago and survived for around 250,000 years.

These incredible discoveries at Tatton are the single oldest man made objects in Cheshire but perhaps more importantly it rewrites the story of Ice Age Britain.

About 500,000 years ago ice sheets covered northern Britain. During warmer periods the ice retreated and primitive humans could survive by hunting herds of wild animals. The discovery of these tools is dramatic evidence that the ice sheets were further north than previously thought. Incredibly, recent genetic evidence reveals that most Britons are descended from these early Ice Age hunters who lived on the edge of the vast glacier, which existed at Tatton 480,000 years ago.

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



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

Heritage Centre, Knutsford

All about the Heritage Centre and its events.

www.virtual-knutsford.co.uk/heritagecentre

Virtual knutsford website

Lots on the town and what's happening, visit Mark's pages too!

www.virtual-knutsford.co.uk

Gaskell Society

If you'd like more information about Elisabeth, her life, times and novels visit:

www.gaskellociety.users.btopenworld.com

You'll also find a wealth of information on the Gaskell Web at:

www.lang.nagoyau.ac.jp/~matsuoka/Gaskell

Tatton Park

All about the great house and gardens.

www.tattonpark.org.uk

King Canute

An ancient ruler of a vast empire.

www.royal.gov.uk

Early British Kingdoms

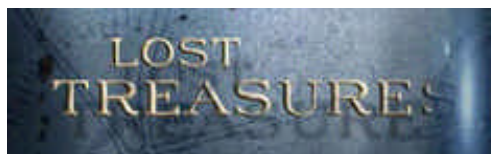
A site offering many links on early British history.

www.mythiccrossroads.com/british

Got a term you don't understand?

Check it out here:

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



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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



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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

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.



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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

Title Music from the series...

The 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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