

Sandbach History Society  
Report on October 2021 meeting  
Visit to Nantwich Museum

The October meeting of Sandbach History Society took the form of a visit to Nantwich Museum and a guided walk around the town.

23 Society members were greeted by museum volunteer Graham Dodd and whilst a few members of the group spent the afternoon looking at the extensive display of exhibits in the museum, the others were taken on one of the historical tours of the town by volunteers Barry Astbury and Andy Ridgway.

The museum, in Pillory Street, was originally built to house the Nantwich Free Library and stands on the site of the town's former jail.

The tour began by the pillory, opposite the museum, with an introduction to the history of Nantwich. Members heard about its importance as a salt-producing centre in Roman times; the likely site of a motte and bailey and castle; a fire in 1583 which destroyed most of the town; its importance to the Parliamentary cause in the Civil War; and its connection with the cheese industry.

The tours set off on a two-hour trail of discovery, stopping at key points, including the following.

A short distance away was a group of fine houses indicating that this was a fashionable area of the town, with gardens extending down to the river, in Georgian times. But the name of Barker Street indicated that this had once been the centre of Nantwich's tanning trade.

The bypass has cut through the former gardens and runs alongside the River Weaver. The speed of the water passing along the millrace, adjacent to the river, gave a clue to the location of the former corn mill which had stood here from the 13<sup>th</sup> Century until it was demolished in the 1970s.

A little further along is a large granite boulder believed to have been brought down from Scotland by the action of a glacier at the end of the last Ice Age. Nearby is a plaque which explains that the Great Fire of Nantwich, 1583-4, started near this spot and burned for 20 days.

The area near the river bridge at the top of Welsh Row has one of the natural brine springs (known as Old Biot) and still supplies the nearby outdoor swimming pool.

In High Street is the Crown Hotel, built shortly after 1583 to replace the building destroyed in the Great Fire at a cost of £313 13s 4d. Unlike some of its neighbours it lacks ornamental panelling but is nevertheless an impressive building of three storeys with a gallery on the third floor running the full length of the building.

It is thought that this site, which is on a high point in the town, adjacent to the river, might have been the location of Nantwich Castle with the layout of the nearby streets indicating a motte and bailey.

In the town square can be found the "Queen's Aid" house which bears an inscription giving thanks to Elizabeth I for contributing funds and allowing timber from the local forests to be used for the rebuilding of the town after the Great Fire.

St Mary's church, which dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, is an outstanding example of a medieval church, and has been called the Cathedral of South Cheshire. Time did not allow a tour of the church – that's a visit in its own right – but the guides pointed to a sundial on the south wall, unnoticed by most people walking past, and told the story of the devil and the landlady which influenced the design of the grotesque by the stonemasons near the top of the bell tower.

The tour ended in the Cocoa Yard (connections with the temperance movement) adjacent to the museum, the tall chimney at its centre being a reminder of the one-time cooper's hearth.

The group retired to the museum for tea and biscuits. Nantwich Museum was founded in the 1980s and its extensive galleries present the story of Nantwich through the ages including Roman salt-making; the Great Fire in Tudor times; the Civil War battle; the local shoe, clothing and cheese industries; and clock making. The museum has a full programme of events including talks, school visits, guided walks and changing exhibitions. Admission is free. See [www.nantwichmuseum.org.uk](http://www.nantwichmuseum.org.uk) for further details.

A spokesperson for the Society commented on the warm welcome the group had received; the informative walk and the well-presented and extensive displays in the museum.

The next meeting of Sandbach History Society will take place on the afternoon of 2<sup>nd</sup> November (1.45 for 2.00 pm) at St John's Parish Church, Sandbach Heath, when John Higgins will give a presentation entitled "Never to Return". He will share his research into the men from Sandbach Heath who gave their lives in WW1. Visitors are very welcome but, to facilitate arrangements, are asked to phone 01270 760810 to enter their name on the list.