York Archaeology

Transforming the Trent Headwaters

Cultural Heritage Audit Summary

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

Made possible with Heritage Fund

Part of Transforming the Trent Valley

Staffordshire County Council

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Cultural Heritage Audit Summary

Introduction to the Audit

Staffordshire is full of history, with evidence of human activity stretching as far back in time as the Palaeolithic, up to 650,000 years ago. You may think that the more recent industrial changes of the past few hundred years would have wiped any evidence of earlier heritage in the area, but recent research by York Archaeology has proven otherwise.

As part of the Transforming the Trent Headwaters Project, York Archaeology has completed a Cultural Heritage Audit of the area known as the Upper Trent Valley (the 'Study Area'), an area of 180km^2 covering part of the Upper Trent Valley between Biddulph and Trentham, encompassing the Boroughs of Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and parts of Staffordshire and the Staffordshire Moorlands.

This presents a summary of results of the audit, the links between this and the Natural Heritage Audit, how ideas for future projects have been devised, and the next stages.

What is a Cultural Heritage Audit?

The Cultural Heritage Audit involved collecting sets of data held by Historic England and regional Historic Environment Records (HERs) – in this case Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire. We also use old maps and LiDAR imagery to look at how the landscape has changed over time, where buildings have disappeared and towns have expanded.

This data was then used to help trace the cultural historic development of the Study Area and what evidence of that heritage still exists within the Study Area.

The data is referred to as a "Heritage Asset" – these can be either Designated Assets, determined to be Nationally important by Historic England; or Non-designated Assets, determined to be of local to regional/national significance.

These assets might consist of standing or buried remains. You may be aware of some designated assets near where you live. They can be Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings or Registered Parks & Gardens. In the case of non-designated assets these could be discoveries of single archaeological artefacts, buried archaeological sites, earthworks, standing buildings or lost buildings but whose locations are recorded on maps.

We then organized these into time period, ranging from Prehistoric (as far back as the Ice Age) through to the Modern Period:

- Palaeolithic 650,000 – 8500 BC;
- Mesolithic 8500 – 4000 BC;
- Neolithic 4000 – 2400 BC;
- Bronze Age 2400 – 700 BC;
- Iron Age 700 BC – AD 43;
- Romano-British AD 43 – 409;
- Early Medieval AD 410 – 1065;

- Medieval AD 1066 – 1539;
- Post-Medieval AD 1540 – 1799;
- 19th Century AD 1800 – 1899;
- Modern AD 1900 – present.

This involves wide ranging historical and archaeological assets such as flint tools, Roman roads and forts, medieval castles, houses and farms, industrial heritage and new types of housing, churches, parks and things like war memorials and air raid shelters - the list of asset type is quite long!

Cultural Themes and The Natural Heritage Audit

The audit was then used to draw out cultural themes, such as landscape impacts (natural and human) and the development and impact of industry, in order to work with the Natural Heritage Audit to not only prevent harm to heritage assets but to see if we can improve access, awareness and interest in the history whilst working to improve the environment and access to the natural environment.

For example, some heritage might be at risk of damage such as a Prehistoric Monument that is being neglected or harmed by human activity such as ploughing. The natural and cultural heritage teams want to explore how heritage can be protected, whilst at the same time improving the natural habitat and helping people to better understand what their locality has to offer.

The following cultural themes were identified and serve as a basis for future discussions and to further define ideas in the future:

- *The evolution of the landscape through time*
- *Designed landscapes*
- *Industrial and post-industrial heritage*
- *Ritual and religion*
- *Conflict*
- *Roads, rivers and routes (including lost waterways and watery landscapes)*
- *Heritage at Risk*

The Natural Heritage Audit identified a number of sites for improvement, such as Apedale Country Park, and through the heritage audit we can see what assets are likely to be affected by the improvements, such as the Wroxeter to Chesterton Roman Road that passes through Apedale Country Park. Another example is Bradwell Wood, which is close by to the Bradwell Hall moated site.

Community involvement

Community consultation sessions were held during the first six months of 2025, in order to understand what local people from the Study Area thought of as 'Heritage', how they engaged with it, what questions they would like to ask about it, and about how they would like to be involved in future projects. These consultations, alongside the cultural themes, have then enabled us to come up with a series of potential projects that have been listed in the full Audit document. The projects do not necessarily include excavation, but could include art-based activities, social history, research and making history more accessible through trails and signposting.

Idea for future projects included:

- Oral History projects
- Roman Heritage projects at Wolstanton, Chesterton, Fenton Manor and Basford Bank

- Heritage trails about Biddulph, lost buildings and industries, the River Trent, and about the pottery manufacturing industry
- Reconstruction of an auroch (an extinct form of large cattle), with information, at NHA Site Fowlea Brook/Etruria Valley which is very close to where it was found
- General walkover surveys on remaining available arable land for systematic finds collection - attempt to increase number of medieval and earlier finds
- Digital recreations of Newcastle Castle, Hulton Abbey and the Roman Landscape
- Folk Tales
- Heritage skills and training
- Linking local industries
- A larger project about the 'Potteries at War' – research, survey of Keele Hall and re-use of the Abbey Hulton air raid shelter.
- How landscapes developed over time, for example, to look at how the prehistoric landscape changed, there could be fieldwalking surveys, excavations of potential barrows and maybe create a permanent visitor attraction.

Many of the assets, projects and themes interact and connect, highlighting the need to promote a broader appreciation of the cultural heritage within the Study Area. It is anticipated that further discussions will promote wider engagement with the history and heritage of the Upper Trent Valley, leading to the development of wide-reaching and engaging future projects in the area.

Study Area History and Assets

A total of 2057 assets were recorded in the Cultural Heritage Audit. There were also 37 Conservation Areas, encompassing important heritage such as historic medieval to post-medieval villages, post-medieval to modern centres with significant concentrations of historic buildings, designed landscapes and important industrial developments such as the Trent and Mersey and Caldon Canals.

Here is a brief summary of each time period and a selection of assets dated to that time period.

Palaeolithic (650,000BC - 8,500BC)

Staffordshire in the Palaeolithic was a place constantly changing shape due to alternating ice ages and warming periods. Any early rivers were destroyed during the Anglian Ice Age which is estimated to have begun around 480,000 years ago. The River Trent formed after this, but the landscape was still affected by shorter and less widespread ice ages. The Upper Trent Valley was shaped by the flow of meltwater from the Devensian Ice Sheet that covered most of the UK 27,000 years ago.

During this time, hunter-gatherers moved across the landscape during the warmer periods, but any evidence for these groups has likely been lost due to the overwhelming power of the glaciers, carving their way through the landscape. Rivers and their valleys are likely to have been constantly relied on for water and food sources by humans and animals alike, so we can assume activity was concentrated around the valleys.

Examples of an aurochs skull and pair of horns without the skull in between, both examples from the gravels of the River Trent in the East Midlands. *Copyright York Archaeology*

An auroch skull was found near the Fowlea Brook at Etruria, once a Devensian meltwater channel, it may have been hunted through the valley approximately 10,000 years ago, although the remains showed no physical evidence for this.

Mesolithic (8,500-4000BC)

During the Mesolithic, hunter-gatherer society continued as the climate warmed and sea levels rose, cutting the UK off from mainland Europe. Away from the coast, the UK became a heavily wooded environment full of large animals, such as deer and elk and human activity continued to be focussed along rivers.

Although people still moved about in hunter-gatherer groups, there is evidence, such as hearths and rare examples of structures, that places were occupied for periods of time. Microliths, first found in the Mesolithic, were small stone tools that were mounted together on a shaft to create a serrated edge. One flint was found in 1938 from Blurton, but has only been broadly dated to 'Prehistoric'. It may be due to the heavy industrialisation of the Study Area during the 19th Century that many early artefacts have been lost, hence why the numbers of assets from these time periods are low.

Neolithic (4,000 – 2,400BC)

The Neolithic is defined by a change from hunting and gathering to farming, growing crops (barley, wheat and pulses) and breeding animals (sheep, goats, cattle and pigs). Farming arrived in the UK c. 4000 BC and people began to settle down, clearing woodlands for crop growing and building enclosures for livestock.

This new lifestyle meant new tools, such as polished stone and flint axes, antler picks, and pottery. Some of these were traded hundreds of miles across the UK. Large enclosures, defendable causewayed

camps and long earth barrows used for burying the dead are typical features of a Neolithic landscape. In the later Neolithic, wood and stone henges start to be built.

Evidence for farming and settlement in the West Midlands from this time is low, it is likely that groups led a semi-nomadic lifestyle, however some artefacts have been found in the Study Area, such as flint arrow heads and axe-hammers.

Bronze Age (2,400BC – 700BC)

The late Neolithic into the Bronze Age saw an explosion of ritual and funerary monuments, especially along river valleys, suggesting their continuing importance to society. Round barrows became a common site in the Bronze Age – a upside-down bowl-shaped monument surrounded by a ditch and usually containing human burials. A nationally important surviving barrow within the Study Area is the Bowl Barrow North of Hargreaves Wood Scheduled Monument at Swynnerton. The barrow is situated on a ridge of high ground some 300m from the River Trent. Evidence for a number of other barrows have been recorded in the audit, but now mostly consist of just the ring ditch as the upstanding bowl shape has been levelled by erosion or farming methods. Others were excavated by antiquarians and have since been lost due to urban development.

Bronze Age Palstave. *Copyright York Archaeology*

Metals appear in the UK in c. 2300 BC. The Beaker culture brought the skill of refining metal to Britain. Copper and gold were used first, followed by bronze (copper alloy with tin and then lead). They were traded across Europe with other materials such as jet, salt and glass. Stone tools however were still in use during this period. A number of metal finds have been found in the Study Area, mostly palstaves

(a Bronze Age axe head) but also a sword and dagger. An urn and beaker recovered from a sand pit at Normacot are the only examples of prehistoric-aged pottery to be found within the Study Area.

Iron Age (700BC to AD43)

During the Iron Age, people lived in small settlements and farms, but also large enclosures known as hillforts, defended with banks and ditches. Communities were growing their own food (grains for porridge and bread) and raising sheep, cattle and a few pigs. In the Late Iron Age people were divided into tribes, with tribal leaders ruling defined areas, with constant skirmishes on the borders. The Study Area lacks examples of such settlements, but there is a potential hillfort at Harecastle Clump, and earthworks documented in 1930 that are now currently beneath the M6 motorway.

Extensive trade continued across Europe. Due to this contact, designs in art and ornamentation were similar across Europe and Britain, with each area having their own variations. Iron gradually replaced bronze as the main metal used, especially for blades (swords and sickles). Pottery was produced locally in settlements at first, but was mass-produced by specialist potters by the 1st Century AD. Coins were produced in the Late Iron Age. A gold coin was found by a metal detectorist in 2013 at Silverdale, likely from a nearby settlement.

Romano-British Period (AD43 – AD409)

The Romans brought a different style of leadership, an efficient road and fort system aiding taxation, subjugation and trade, and new style of architecture using brick or stone-faced rubble concrete to the UK. The Romans found Britain rich in lead, iron, zinc, copper, silver, gold and slaves. Roman pottery was imported from Gaul (France) and the Rhineland. Glass vessels were widely used. The occupation was weakened when Magnus Maximus permanently reduced the number of troops in about 383 AD. After 407 AD no troops left in Britain were paid with monies sent from Rome and we can suppose that most of the Roman army had left by this time.

Roman glass found from excavations at Wolstanton Grammar School, *Copyright Staffordshire County Council*

The Roman Period provides the first sure evidence of significant human impact on the landscape of the Study Area, in terms of settlement and communication networks. A fort was found at Chesterton dating to the late 1st Century AD, with an outlying temporary camp identified by aerial photography, suggested to have housed a military cohort whilst the construction of Chesterton Fort was ongoing. Another possible fort was identified at Trent Vale. A substantial settlement, or *vicus*, was discovered

at Holditch, which seemed to have been in use for over 200 years and possibly associated with the forts at Chesterton and Trent Vale. Evidence for further settlements in Newcastle-under-Lyme and at Bucknall has also been discovered and recorded in the audit. These sites are connected by Ryknield Street Roman road, with tantalising evidence of other roads at Wolstanton Grammar School, and to the southwest and southeast of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

A number of finds have been recovered in the Study Area, including two hoards of the 3rd and 4th centuries, the latter also containing three jewellery items; and possibly a Bronze statuette of Hercules found in a garden in 1810.

The Early Medieval Period (AD410 to AD1066)

This period stretches from the collapse of Roman rule to the Norman Conquest. The Angles, Saxons and Jutes from Europe migrated to England and settled during the 5th and 6th centuries, possibly displacing the native British. England was again made up of many small kingdoms, with constant skirmishes on their borders. The Study Area is within what eventually became the Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Mercia. Christianity was largely accepted by 597AD. In the late Anglo-Saxon period, English coinage was the major trading currency of Northern Europe, and the economy thrived.

Base of crossshaft in the church of St Peter's. *By Neil Theasby, CC BY-SA 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=84346885*

The Domesday Book, compiled by the Normans in 1086, is a survey of every town, village, field and structure within the Kingdom of England and parts of Wales at the time. A number of these places would have had Anglo-Saxon origins. The element 'under-Lyme' in Newcastle-Under-Lyme' could be of Saxon origin. Other settlements listed in the Domesday book include: Penkhull, Hanford, Meir, Weston Coyney, Bucknall, Abbey Hulton, Bradeley, Norton-le-Moors, Burselem, Fenton, the original settlement of Stoke, Dimsdale, Knutton, Clayton, Hanchurch, Biddulf. All of the settlements are on or close to the River Trent and its tributary streams and brooks which would have provided both water and food sources, as well as prime agricultural land. Trentham and Wolstanton were listed as the largest settlements and as having a priest, suggesting they already had churches. Early-Medieval stone crosses have been found in the Study Area within the churchyards of St Mary and All Saints, Swynnerton, and St Peter's in Stoke-on-Trent. These monuments are found at various locations (some having been relocated over time) but are thought to represent established churches/monasteries, burial places or other religious focal points; or possibly community gathering or way-marking and boundary demarcation. Later examples often display Scandinavian influences, a result of the Viking settlement within parts of northern and eastern England from the 9th century, and the cross in St Peter's Church is an example of an Anglo-Scandinavian type.

The High Medieval Period (AD1066 to AD1539)

The Medieval period is marked by periods of growth and decline in both settlements, economies and populations (the Black Death and the Wars of the Roses counting amongst the most well-known causes), with some places flourishing and others disappearing completely. Earth and timber castles (motte and bailey), hastily constructed by the Normans, were replaced by stone castles with large towers and enclosing walls during the 12th and 13th centuries. These changed shape and style as the centuries went by. Great monasteries and abbeys were also being founded. Wheel-made pottery and tiles were made locally by specialists and became highly decorated. Art, architecture and technology boomed.

Newcastle was established as a Borough by the end of the 12th century, with the focus of urban growth shifting from a potential early location on Upper Green to the present-day High Street in the 13th century. The castle is thought to have been initially held by the prominent earls of Chester before passing into Royal hands under King John. Another form of elite residence, called the moated manor site, can be found within the Study Area, up to eight examples have been noted in the audit. The majority of moated sites appeared in large numbers in the 13th and 14th centuries and are considered important heritage assets. Another example of high-status settlement found within the Study Area are hunting parks, one example located at Knypersley Hall.

Madley Old Manor and manorial fishpond Scheduled Monument. *By Ian Brereton, CC BY-SA 2.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12922631*

A substantial number of high-Medieval assets are associated with Christianity. Three churches in the study area are Medieval in date; St Margaret's in Wolstanton, St Giles in Newcastle-under-Lyme, and St Lawrence's at Biddulph. In addition to churches, three monastic sites were found within the Study Area, of which Hulton Abbey is a Scheduled Monument. The site of Trentham Priory is partially occupied by a 19th century church which has some medieval elements probably taken from the Priory remains; whilst the exact location of the Dominican Priory in Newcastle-under-Lyme is unknown although excavations on Friar Street have suggested it to be towards the southern end of that street.

Monasteries were also economic centres often with wide holdings such as mills, fishponds, granges, farms and other centres of production, some of which were picked up in the audit.

Medieval hospitals were also religious institutions often run by monastic communities. The probable site of the *c* 13th century St Loye's hospital could be to the south of Newcastle-under-Lyme at the present site of the current Royal Stoke University Hospital. Medieval hospitals were also often located on the edges of, or some distance from, a town centre – particularly leper hospitals, due to the stigma attached to them.

Excavations at Hulton Abbey, Scheduled Ancient Monument, *copyright Staffordshire County Council*

Pottery manufacture in this period was still only part of the rural economy. By the 13th century, pottery production is considered to have been a widespread, predominantly rural and seasonal activity. Excavations in Burslem Market Place revealed evidence for early pottery manufacture, whilst just to the south at Sneyd Green two kilns were discovered along with 14th century green-glazed pottery waste sherds.

Other assets include evidence of mills, deserted settlements, farmsteads (such as Gillowfold Farmhouse at Biddulph), holloways and trackways.

The Post-Medieval Period (AD1540-1799)

The Post-Medieval period is defined by increasing exploration, industry and international trade, the break with the Catholic Church and the establishment of the Church of England. Canals are developed as a form of produce transportation. Town and cities across the UK become centres for different industries, such as iron working, lace manufacturing and boat building. Centres for pottery production are established, such as the Study Area, and pottery is traded across the country. New techniques are developed and fashions are created. Timber framed structures are replaced by brick buildings. Imports from the 'newly discovered' Americas, such as the potato and tobacco, are introduced to the UK. The Civil War and the rise in naval battles allow weaponry and warfare to evolve over this period.

The landscape of the Study Area begins this period as mostly rural, with Newcastle-under-Lyme as the main urban centre. Towards the end of the century however, the rural space began to be filled in as settlements expanded. This change was predominantly a result of the expansion of pottery production, focussed in and around the settlements of Stoke, Burslem, Hanley, Longton, Tunstall and Fenton.

Excavations at Cotehouse Farm, Berryhill, *copyright Staffordshire County Council*

Pottery production is known to have been strong by the 17th century, with a steady growth in the number of makers and the amount of pottery produced. The demands for the pottery led to a steady shift towards mass manufacturing rather than a small cottage-type industry. There are 88 assets associated with pottery manufactories just within Stoke alone. Perhaps most notable is The Roundhouse of *c* 1769 which was formerly part of the Wedgwood Pottery works in Etruria.

Post-medieval industry within Newcastle borough was more diversified than that of Stoke, with the likes of a tobacco pipe factory and glass furnace being recorded. The post-medieval beginnings of collieries have also been recorded, the most significant of which is the Springwood Blast Furnace. The sites of a silk mill at Knypersley and a cotton mill in Newcastle-under-Lyme complete the picture of this more varied industrial landscape compared to the pottery focus of Stoke.

Transport links were also expanded, leading to the creation of assets such as turnpike roads and canals, bridges and toll houses. The Trent and Mersey Canal and its Caldon and Newcastle branches were important not just for the potteries, but for the other industries in the region. In fact, they helped to fuel the wider national industrial revolution by connecting the north and south of the country and the main river systems of the Trent, Severn, Mersey and Thames via the wider canal networks. Only

the main branch and the Caldon branch survive essentially complete, and are designated Conservation Areas.

A number of residential and commercial buildings were also recorded, including domestic dwellings, shops, public houses, a grammar school and a workhouse. There was a notable increase in religious buildings, a prime example is the Nonconformist Wesleyan Chapel at Tunstall. Denied access to Anglican churches, John Wesley was forced to establish a network of preaching houses of which this is an example. Country houses and estates such as those at Trentham, Great Fenton and Keele Hall Park were joined by mansions of the industrial elite, most prominently Wedgewood's Grade II listed Etruria Hall

The 19th Century

The 19th Century saw the continued expansion of industry, technology and the urban landscape across Britain. The arrival of the railway was a major development in this period, although the canals remained the established method of transportation through the majority of the century. In the Study Area, the initial development of the railways in the 1840s was not promoted by the potters, who had already heavily invested in the very successful canals and were reluctant to risk their stability on the new and still relatively unproven railway. It was railway companies themselves and Acts of Parliament that were to lead the way. A number of assets are associated with the success of the railways, such as stations, bridges and good sheds.

The continual urbanisation of the Study Area saw the increase in residential, municipal and commercial buildings, hotels, public houses, town halls and religious buildings, including non-conformist chapels, A Roman Catholic Church and Jewish Prayer Hall in Newcastle-Under-Lyme.

Chatterley Whitfield Colliery Scheduled Monument, *copyright Staffordshire County Council*

The increase in industrial endeavours in the Study Area included brickworks, iron works, glass works, corn mills, paper mills and saw mills. The mining industry continued to develop, the most significant asset being the Scheduled Monument site of the Chatterley Whitfield Colliery.

New legislation in the 19th century saw the development of the educational system. A mix of school systems appeared, such as Grammar, Board and National schools, including a higher status school in the form of the boys High School and the former Orme Girl's school

Further political changes to law, such as the Poor Law of 1834, brought in new legislation to nationally coordinate relief to the poor. This saw the development of workhouses, hospital infirmaries and alms-houses. A recognition of the poor air quality, health and high death-rate of residents caused by industrial activity led to the creation of public parks beginning in the 19th century. There are four such parks in the Stoke area, at Hanley, Burslem, Tunstall (Victoria Park) and Longton (Queen's Park). Alongside the creation of parks was also the provision of public baths, libraries and institutes, of which there are seven associated assets within the region. Burslem also became home to a mid-19th century art school.

The Modern Period (AD1900-present)

The modern period is seen as a period of immense change marked by the decline of the UK as a Global Power, two devastating World Wars, a whirlwind of significant social, cultural and technological changes, and the rise and fall of differing industries.

Urban and industrial growth continued as it had done in the previous century, with the construction of the first cast-concrete house construction and post-war semi-detached housing developments, growth of the potteries and flint production. However, the introduction of new cultural aspects, the boom in infrastructure and the shadow of the two World Wars and their commemoration left a number of different types of asset not seen before within the Upper Trent Valley. War memorials are present across the Study Area, with other places recording air raid shelters, army barracks and the sites of two American aircraft crashes. In times of peace, the increase of leisure activities for the masses saw the increase in public houses, the erection of sports facilities, such as cricket pavilion in Knypersley, statues in parks, and the construction of a number of cinemas in the Study Area. Cinemas had developed after the First World War from simple shed-like structures into complex large buildings with architectural styles quite independent from the theatres they were now competing with. One Grade II Listed building was designated as an example of a late 1920s American-style "super cinema" of the sort pioneered by the Provincial Cinematograph Theatre Circuit who built and owned the cinema. Newer public services, such Post Office and Telephone Buildings are also deemed culturally significant with the Study Area.

An important historical and religious development was the conversion of the 19th century Methodist New Connexion Chapel in Shelton to a Mosque in the late-20th century.

What Next?

We now have a number of potential projects from all of the resources put together, not all of which will go ahead. We need to cut down the number and maybe merge some ideas together to start forming the foundations of real and feasible projects that would likely be awarding funding. Once these ideas are formed and funding is awarded, there will then be opportunities for members of the public and community groups to get involved!

These projects maybe be long-term or short term, projects that unite natural and cultural heritage, projects that target certain groups of people, or target a certain site or open space at risk of being lost to history. The possibilities are endless, but they all start and end with Transforming The Trent Headwaters.