



Herefordshire Archaeology
Conservation and Environmental Planning
Planning Services
Environment Directorate
Herefordshire Council

**Mounboon & Lower
Witherstone Farms,
Little Dewchurch**
An Historic Landscape Appraisal

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No.7

Report prepared by
Tim Hoverd

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Herefordshire Archaeology is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic landscapes, maintains the county Sites and Monument Record, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects. The County Archaeologist is Dr. Keith Ray.

Mounboon & Lower Witherstone Farms, Little Dewchurch

An Historic Landscape Appraisal
Herefordshire Archaeology Report No 7, December 2000, (revised April 2004)

Summary:

In response to a Countryside Stewardship Application a site visit was made to Mounboon Farm near Carey. The land had become very overgrown particularly with bracken. The current owner has mown much of the bracken and removed much of the dead timber. This revealed a series of strip lynchets, a deep holloway connecting the farm to the village of Carey and the stone footings from a possible mill with a system of weirs. A brief documentary search located an area within the study area which had been used as a musket, and later rifle range, originating from the Napoleonic era.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGR's are accurate to approximately 10m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50, and 0.02m at 1:20.

Figures contain material from the Ordnance Survey. The grid in this material is the National Grid taken from the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. This material has been reproduced in order to locate the site in its environs.

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Introduction

Mounboon and Lower Witherstone farms are located at NGR SO: 3176 5594 and NGR SO: 3108 5566 respectively. Both farms lie within a small but steep sided valley between the hamlets of Carey to the south and Bolstone to the north.

The historic landscape appraisal was undertaken in support of a grant application by Mr. P. Cassell of Mounboon Farm for the clearance of timber and scrub from a holloway and lynchets as part of a landscape enhancement scheme. A field reconnaissance was undertaken at Mounboon Farm in order that the features associated with the grant application could be better understood. A field visit was also made to Lower Witherstone farm as the owner, Mr Price had information concerning features no longer visible.

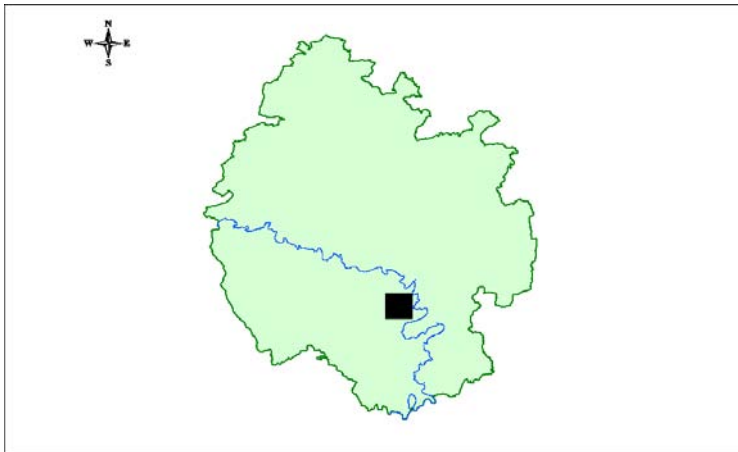


Figure 1: Site location

Historical Background

The area surrounding Witherstone and Mounboon farms consists of mixed farming due to topographical constraints. Whilst the area retains the place name of Witherstone it is unlikely that the settlement was ever anything more than two or three farms and associated buildings.

Witherstone is first mentioned in documentary sources in 1671 as *Witherston* in the Herefordshire Hearth Tax List, (Bannister 1916). It is suggested that the name either originated from the name of a landowner in the area (Witherstone is a common surname in Herefordshire), or it may be a reference to the stream which runs down the valley, known as the Withy Brook.

Other documentary information is contained within the Tithe Map and Apportionment's for the parish of Little Dewchurch in 1838-9. This source is particularly useful as it lists land owners, rents and fieldnames. Tithe maps are also an important record of old trackways and field boundaries, many of which have since fallen into disuse or have been destroyed.

Method

A rapid walk-over survey was conducted in order to identify earthwork features of archaeological significance. The owners of both Mounboon and Lower Witherstone Farm were consulted as to their individual recollections of landscape change within the survey area.

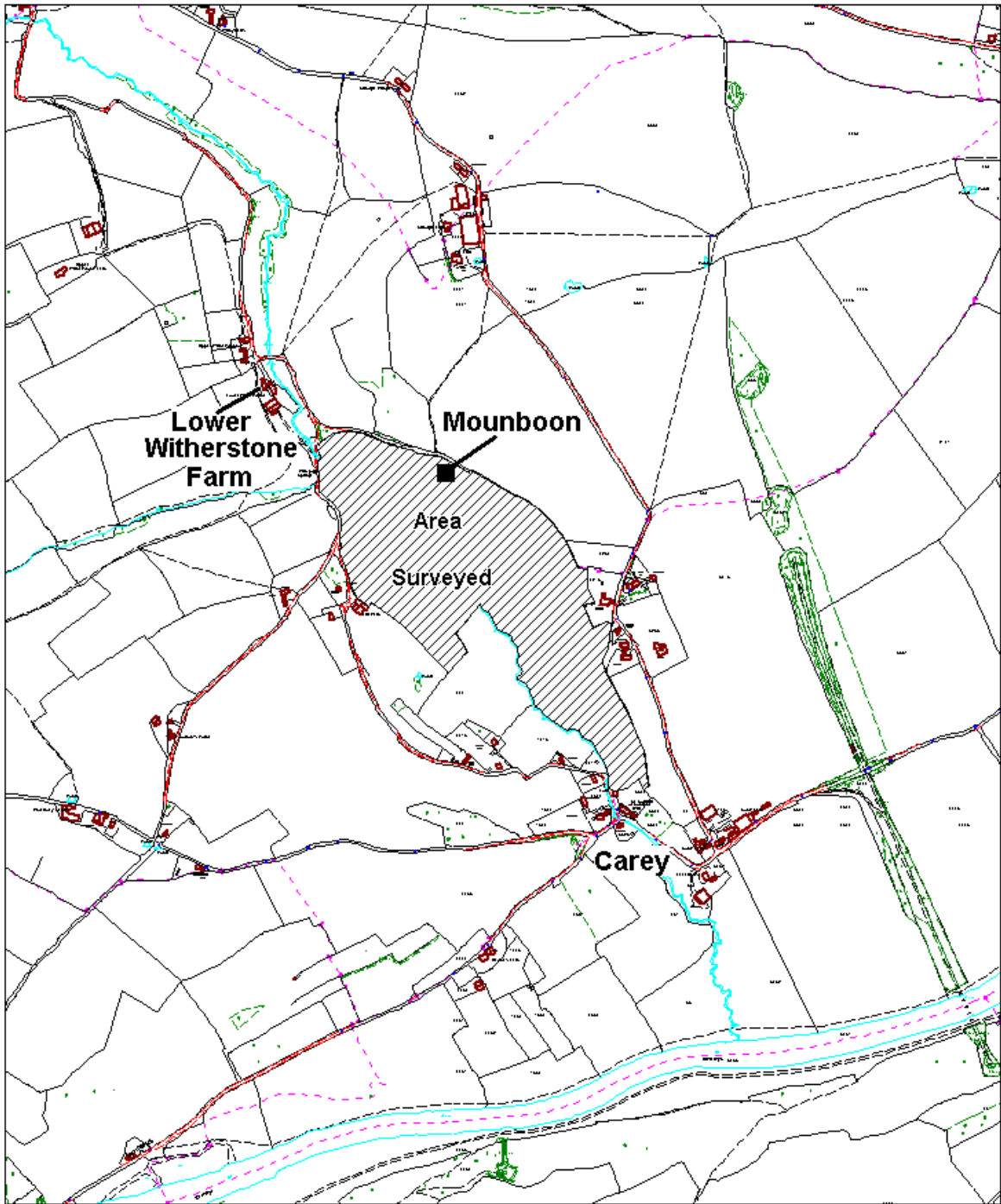


Figure 2: Site location plan



SCALE 1:10,000



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Results (figures 3 & 4)

Features identified as being of historical/archaeological significance:

1. A holloway (HSM 30377) running north from Carey (NGR SO: 5638 3112) to Lower Witherstone (NGR SO: 5571 3177) and running along the eastern side of the valley. This holloway is severely overgrown along its boundary with Smiths Hill wood. There is a large quantity of lying timber within it making it impassable. The holloway is deeply cut with a “U” shaped section and reaching a maximum depth of approximately 2.5m. To the north of Smiths Hill Wood the holloway has been filled in but its course is still evident in the form of field boundaries. The holloway loops round to the west, past Mounboon Farm and joins the present road just to the south of Lower Witherstone Farm. The Tithe Map shows that this holloway was clearly out of use by 1838.

2. A green lane / holloway running north-west / south-east along the valley bottom, (HSM 30378) leaving the present road at NGR SO: 5575 3166 and rejoining it at NGR SO: 5575 3166. This trackway is apparent as a slight dip over some of its length and through differential ground water retention. The route is most visible on Aerial Photographs. The Tithe Map does not show this trackway indicating that it fell into disuse well before the map was produced.

3. Strip lynchets (HSM 30379) in field 382, (NGR SO: 5585 3141) and in field 385 (NGR SO: 5620 3154). These are well preserved and all run on a north-west / south-east axis, parallel to the course of the stream. Holloway (2) runs along a lynchets in field 382. The lynchets in field 382 are very overgrown with scrub and bracken. Mr. Cassell has started to clear this area and return it to pasture. The lynchets in field 385 are in an old orchard, shortly to be re-stocked by Mr. Cassell.

4. A holloway (HSM 30380) leading from Lower Witherstone Farm, around the edge of field 329 (NGR SO: 5560 3169). This has, in places been filled in but much of its course is still evident. The Tithe map shows both boundaries of this track indicating that it was still in use in 1838.

5. Field 377 is a small triangular plot of land, immediately south of the point where the present road crosses the stream, (NGR SO: 5570 3172). The road forms the western boundary of the plot whilst the stream forms the eastern boundary. To the south the plot is bounded by a small tributary. Considerable quantities of building stone is apparent on the site and the Tithe Apportionments record the plot as being *Preeces Cottage and garden or Lower Withestone House and garden*. It is suggested that this is a very damp location in which to build a normal cottage. Originally this structure may have been a mill. Its remains are shown of the Ordnance Survey 1931 and 1964 Editions.

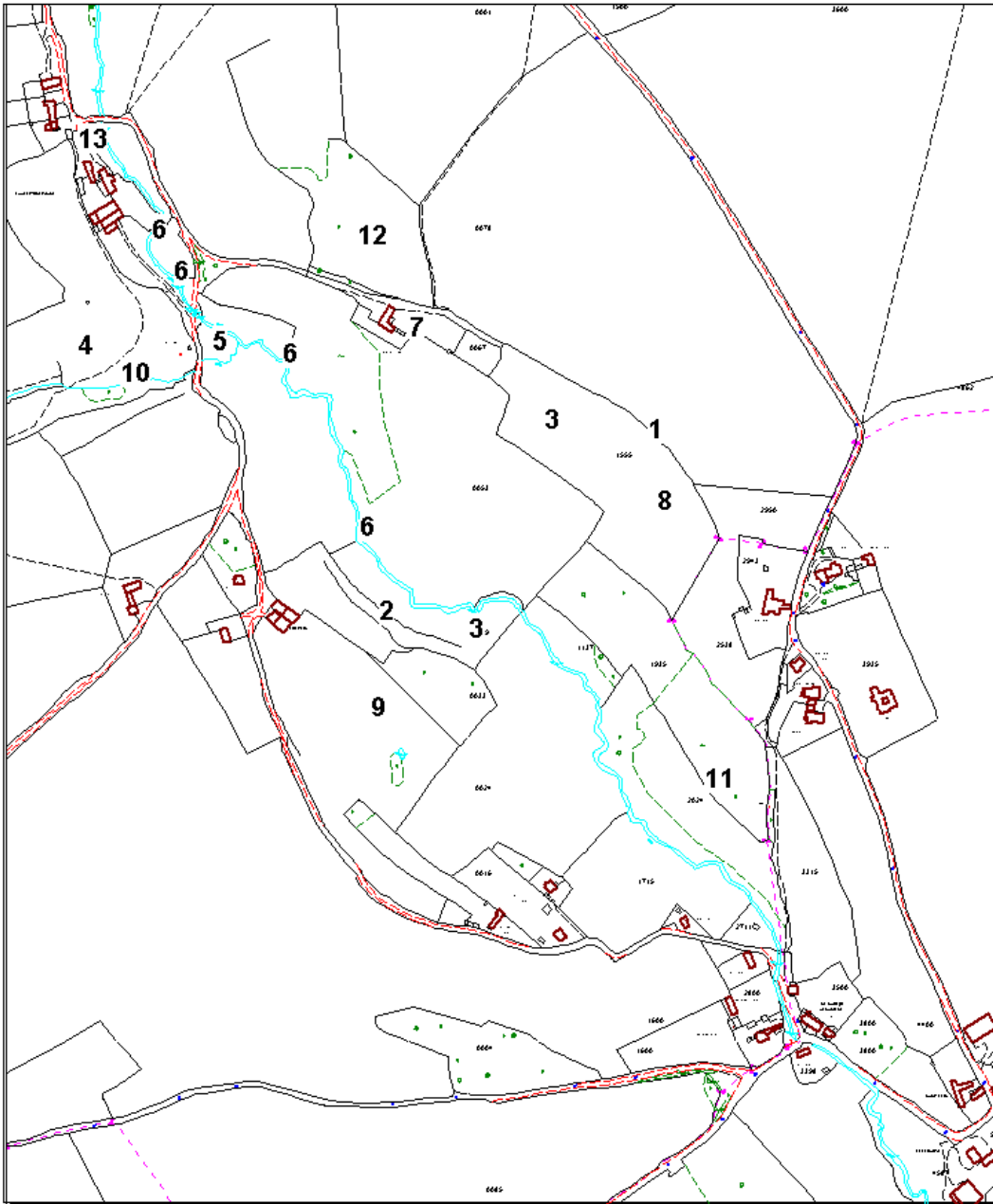


Figure 3: Location of features described

NORTH



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- 6 The remains of four dams/weirs are visible along the course of the stream (HSM 30381-5). All are stone built and lime mortar bonded. They are located at:

NGR SO: 5568 3177

NGR SO: 5567 3170

NGR SO: 5570 3166

NGR SO: 5571 3145

Immediately to the north of the dam at NGR SO: 5570 3166 is the opening (now blocked) to a stone lined and slab roofed tunnel. This was explored by local residents and is reported as being 1.4m to 1.7m high and approximately 1m wide, (HSM 30386). It runs through field 376 for a considerable distance on a north-east / south-west alignment. Where this structure finishes has not been established. Due to its proximity and assumed association with the dam, it is presumed that it represents a leat or mill race. The reason for its construction below ground is a mystery.

- 7 To the east of Mounboon farmhouse and barn is the remains of a forge. Only the south-eastern wall remains to a height of approximately 4.5m. On the south end of the wall is the remains of a stone chimney, built into the wall thickness. It is interesting to note that the wood to the south east is called Smith's Hill Wood and that a farm and house to the north are called Kilforge, both possibly associated with the forge at Mounboon Farm.
- 8 A local resident has conducted a series of metal detector surveys over most of the study area in recent years. It is understood that the majority of his finds consist of lead ball shot and regimental uniform buttons. It is assumed that this represents material used and lost during militia training during the 18th and/or 19th centuries. The Tithe Map lists fields 385, 423 and 424 as *Near Butts*, *Far Butts* and *Middle Butts*. This may well refer to a range, -Butts signifying targets. If this is the case then the most likely scenario would be the presence of a range and training area for new drafts during the Napoleonic war. Interestingly the lynchets on the opposite side of the stream to the Butts were until recently used as targets for the Ballingham Gun Club.
- 9 Field 381 is listed on the Tithe Map as *Witherstone Field and Bowling Green* suggesting that this field has been a recreational area for a considerable period of time.
- 10 Mr. Price informed me that fields 328 and 327 also contained lynchets that followed the contour of the hill, but these were destroyed after W.W.II due to land production pressure.
- 11 The south-western boundary of Smith's Hill Wood consists of a low (0.5m high) bank approximately 1.2m wide, (HSM 30387). This may be of considerable

antiquity and represents the medieval or early post-medieval woodland boundary bank.

- 12 Within the wood due north of Mounboon Farm (field 372 on the Tithe Map), are a number of earthworks. These consist of banks, lynchets and shallow quarrying but were not examined in detail.
- 13 Mr. Price brought to my attention the fact that the road marked on the Tithe Map, on the western side of the stream and to the north of Lower Witherstone Farm used to run straight through the farmyard, joining the present road at NGR SO: 5569 3171. It is believed that the road was re-routed in c.1910.

Discussion

Whilst this study is only a cursory survey of the area it illustrates that there are a number of field monuments within the study area, none of which have been previously recorded. This has been largely due to the fact that many have been under scrub and bracken for a considerable period of time and have therefore been invisible even on aerial photographs.

From this rapid walkover survey it is clear that much of the area was intensively farmed in the medieval period, this is evident from the three areas identified as containing strip lynchets. The distribution of the four dams recorded suggest the presence of a number of mills along the length of this small valley. These may well be connected to the production of iron either from its raw state brought up the River Wye, or as part of a refinement process. Although Smith's Hill Wood was not surveyed its name suggests links, (in the form of the supply of charcoal), to such mills and/or the forge present at Mounboon.

From the clearance so far undertaken by Mr. Cassell, a number of these monuments have already been made more visible and easier to understand. The proposed works will only help to enhance what is a well preserved medieval and post-medieval landscape.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mr. Cassell and Mr. & Mrs. Price for their hospitality and valuable information concerning the sites within this study.

Archive

1 Correspondence File
6 colour prints
10 SMR Forms
This Document

References

Bannister 1916 Placenames of Herefordshire.

Validation

Herefordshire Archaeology operates a validation system for its reports, to provide quality assurance and to comply with Best Value procedures.

This report has been checked for accuracy and clarity of statements of procedure and results.

Dr. K. Ray County Archaeologist.

Figure 4: Extract from the 1839 Tithe Map for the Parish of Little Dewchurch.