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**Ashgrove Quarry, Marden:
Preliminary Archaeological
Investigations in 1999**
Herefordshire Archaeology Report No 3.

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

Ashgrove Quarry, Marden: Preliminary Archaeological Investigations in 1999

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No 3, October 2000

Summary:

There are various references documenting the recovery of human skeletal remains during the working of a small quarry , (SO 5375 4960, HSM 6544), in the 1930s and 40s. The quarry face was exposed by Herefordshire Archaeology staff, in three areas and these areas were cleaned and recorded. No material of archaeological significance was encountered. This may be due to recent tipping and erosion in the northern end of the quarry obscuring the true quarry face. Further research is scheduled for 2000.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGRs 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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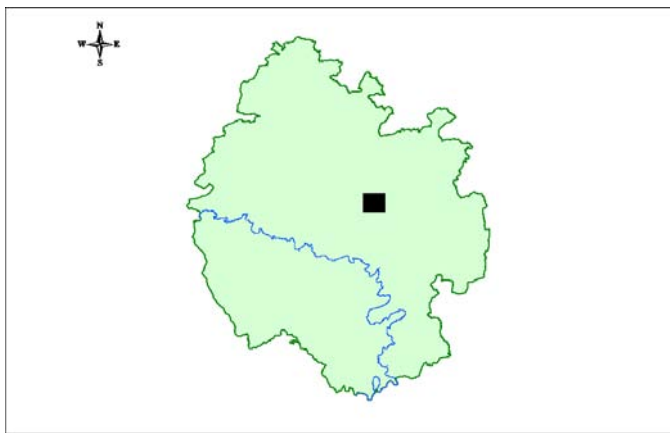
Ashgrove Quarry, Marden: Preliminary Archaeological Investigations in 1999

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No.3

Herefordshire Archaeology, October 2000.

Introduction

Ashgrove quarry (SO 5375 4960) lies within the parish of Marden approximately 1km south-west of the village of Bodenham. The quarry is cut into the southern side of a flat topped hill at a height of approximately 110m above sea level.



The quarry is one of many small workings which took glacial boulders (Anglian Glaciation), and gravel. The now abandoned quarry is approximately 85m long, (north-south) and 30m wide, (east-west) and has a maximum depth of 5.5m.

Figure 1: Site location Plan

Within the base of the quarry are a group of agricultural buildings dating from the 1940's or 50's. Ashgrove quarry appears to have fallen out of use during the Second World War and it is understood that the extraction licence has recently expired. The site was brought to the attention of Herefordshire Archaeology staff after certain papers were received in 1999 from the Worcestershire SMR which concerned sites in Herefordshire. Within these papers was a letter describing a visit made to the quarry in 1943, (presumably written shortly after this date), during which a large number of human burials were encountered. The quarry has been visited by a number of respected antiquarians and archaeologists but a formal report on the discoveries has never been produced.

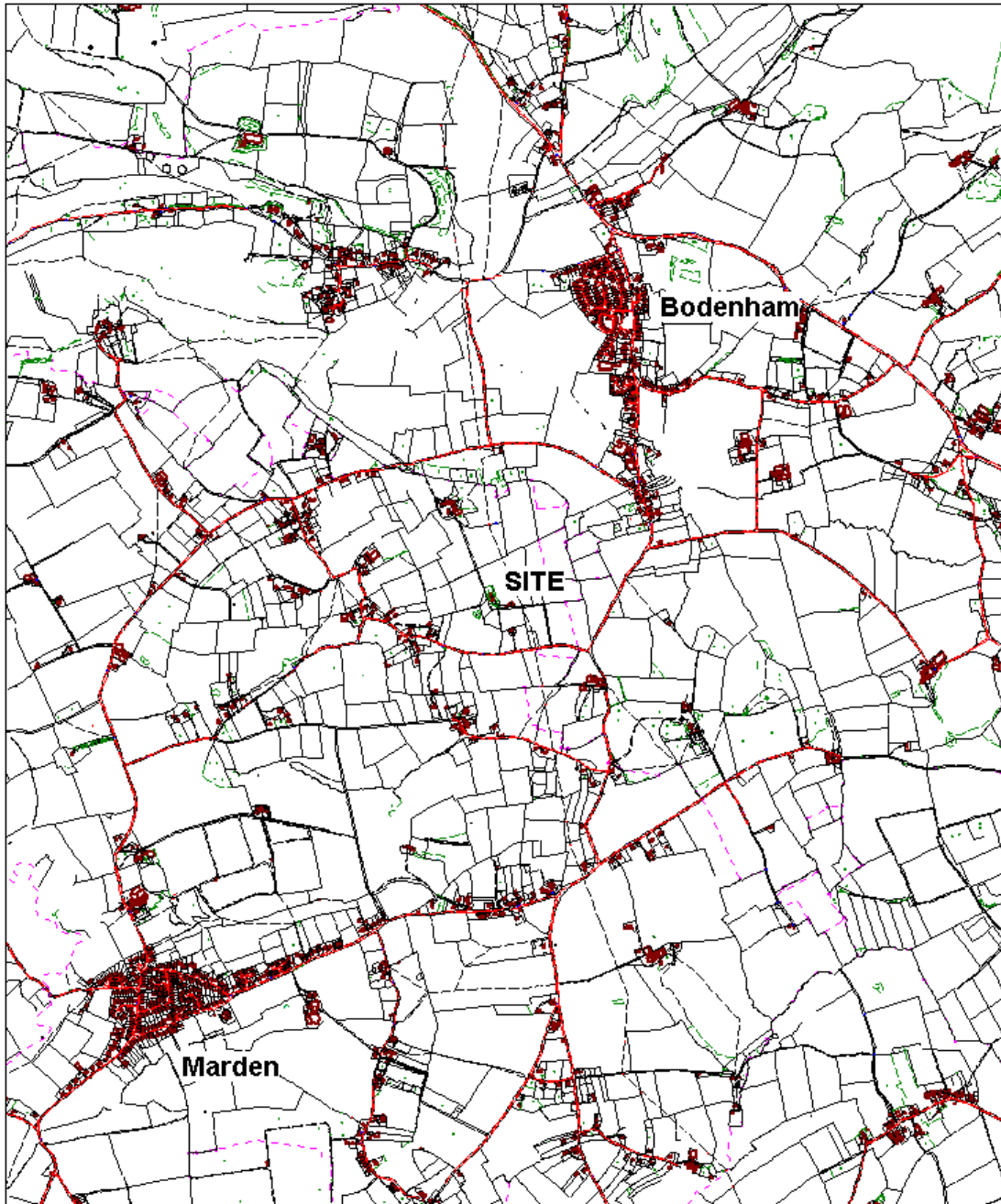


Figure 2: Detailed site location plan.



SCALE 1:25,000

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Documentary Research

There are various references documenting the recovery of human skeletal remains during the working the quarry in the 1930's, 40's and 50's. In the Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists Field Club, Part 1, 1930, pp55-6, Alfred Watkins wrote :

“Mr. J. Quarrell told me that in badger-digging here he had come to the bones of two men. I went out with him, and found this to be in the outside of an earthen bank, which I judged to be the vallum of a camp, as a hedgerow bank was below and separate. Many years ago Mr. Edwyn Gurney of Hereford, had told me that, when a boy, staying at Ashgrove Farm, he used to find human bones, so investigation seemed desirable. I went out again with Mr. George Marshall.....We found the gravel pit, and surmised faint traces of the whole outline of a fairly large camp on this high ground facing The Vault.....The gravel pit has been enlarged and developed since the first finds of the bones there, which is on the other side of the camp to Mr. Quarrell's find of remains. I picked up a bit of early pale-coloured pottery in the camp, but nothing was dug up with the bones, some of which, including a bit of jaw, teeth and skull, I brought home. We traced a report of finds of swords, spears and other things (at the time the bones were first found), to a steam cultivator man, Mr. Edwards.....who thought them to be of the date of Wars of the Roses, but these had been broken up and thrown into the gravel pit at the time.

The most detailed account is by an anonymous recorder who wrote a manuscript letter which is now contained in the Sites and Monuments Record (HSM 6544), and was among the papers received in 1999.

“ I visited this quarry with Miss Wight, on Sept. 23rd 1943, as she had received a report of bones being found there. We found the centre of the excavation and the surrounding dumps strewn with human bones. In the quarry face we could make out 14 graves. They were of “V” shaped section, about 3 feet deep and 6 feet apart. They appeared to be orientated. The bones seemed large and a workman had made the same observation, stating that he had tried a lower jaw bone and it had gone round easily - he had quite a beefy face. The teeth of the only skull we examined were very worn but strong, the surfaces worn flat. Around two of the skeletons was a scattering of charcoal.....The skeletons were usually articulated but some seemed in disorder, this may be due to the stony ground. We uncovered one skeleton which was extended on back, arms crossed with hands at groin as finger bones were found between legs. One of the vertebrae appeared to be dislocated. Another which could be examined from quarry face seemed to be extended with arms crossed and hands low, fingers being in pelvis. No ornaments or weapons were seen by us but we were told that weapons had been found and buried under a dump.

The characteristics of the graves seem to point to it being a Saxon cemetery, possibly a battle cemetery in view of the large size of the bones and absence of children's skeletons.....We were told by a workman that they had found "a lot" of skeletons in one pit....The site was visited by G.H.Jack, F.S.A. who recognised the deposit as being a boulder clay brought by a glacial moraine from the Black Mountains.

NOTE. In 1950 Miss Kenyon F.S.A. visited site and remarked resemblance to A.S. cemetery at Leicester, excavated by her.

In a letter dated 15.5.52 Miss Kenyon (also found among the papers received in 1999) wrote :

“...bits of skeleton stick out all round the quarry face, just below the topsoil. My impression is that it is an early churchyard, though there is not, apparently, any record of a church nearby. The burials appear to be in rows, and to be orientated east to west.....no objects have been found with the bodies.”

There would therefore seem to have been a burial ground covering much of the hill-top. The observations made concerning the formal burial of many of the skeletons would certainly suggest an early Christian date. The presence of a “camp” or enclosure as suggested by Watkins, cannot be confirmed. There are no evident traces of an enclosure visible today. Whilst there is a distinct drop of approximately 2m on the hill-top overlooking The Vault this does not appear to be a rampart and may well have occurred due to ploughing and quarrying immediately below the crest of the hill. The hill is however an excellent vantage point overlooking the Lugg Valley and the presence of an enclosure here of some form cannot be ruled out.

Watkins suggested that *“...there is room here for work by some active young members of the Club.”* It would appear that two students from Malvern College, (W.M.Dent and H.A.W.Blundstone) accepted this challenge and produced an excavation report *“Ash Grove, Hereford. Excavation Reports 1950-1”* unpublished, (this work is currently being traced). Due to the detailed descriptions and the fact that the site had been visited by a number of respected and knowledgeable archaeologists, it was decided that Herefordshire Archaeology should begin the process of researching the site and its environs.

Method

The current landowners, gave their permission for the vegetation to be removed from small areas of the quarry face and to record any features of archaeological interest encountered. Site work was undertaken between August 5th and 9th, 1999.

The fieldwork took the form of an initial walk-over survey which involved inspection of the spoil heaps and eroded material within the quarry. The quarry face was then exposed in three areas, (Figure 3), an area at the northern end (A), an area in the north-west corner (B) and an area on the south-east side (C). These areas were cleaned by hand and recorded archaeologically.

Results (Figure 3)

Area A consisted of a strip of cleaned face at the northern end of the quarry approximately 1.5 m below the lip of the quarry. The exposed strip was 2m wide and 5m long running horizontally along the quarry face, (Plate 2). After removal of vegetation and initial cleaning, revealed that there had been much subsidence and dumping in the northern end of the quarry. In order to reach the true quarry face several tons of eroded and dumped material would need to be removed. This was considered to be beyond the scope of the project. Between this area and Area C to the south, the remarkable survival of a parked, pre1900 AD hay wagon, albeit in poor condition. (Plate 1).

Area B was located in the north western corner of the quarry and consisted of a 2m wide trench running vertically down the quarry face for approximately 4m. This section was stepped to aid recording. The recorded profile provided information concerning the depth of natural stratigraphy which was again overlain by considerable quantities of dumped material. This had been heavily disturbed by animal burrowing. A single fragment of bone was recovered from this area, but size and condition made it impossible to identify.

Area C was an existing vertical section of quarry face which is subject to constant erosion due to its west facing location on the south eastern side of the quarry. This section is approximately 8m long and 2.8m high. It has not been subjected to dumping or burrowing. The depth of topsoil varies considerably from 0.20m to a maximum of 0.60m. It is clear that there has been a certain amount of intrusion into the boulder deposit in two localised areas forming “U” shaped features approximately 1.3m wide and 0.6m deep. Both are filled with topsoil and contain few stones. No artefacts were recovered from either feature. Due to their shallow nature and single fill of topsoil, it is highly likely that these represent small scale quarrying for boulders prior to the working of the present quarry.

Discussion

No material of archaeological significance was encountered. This may be due to recent tipping and erosion in the northern end of the quarry obscuring the true quarry face. It is clear from the documentary sources that the findspots of human remains are fairly widespread and not limited to the area immediately affected by the quarry. This raises the possibility of more human remains lying *in situ* in areas surrounding the quarry. Much of the hilltop is under pasture and it may be beneficial for future research to include a geophysical survey of sample areas of hilltop, possibly complimented by test pitting. Such an exercise may also provide information concerning the possible presence of a camp or enclosure as suggested by Watkins and Marshall.

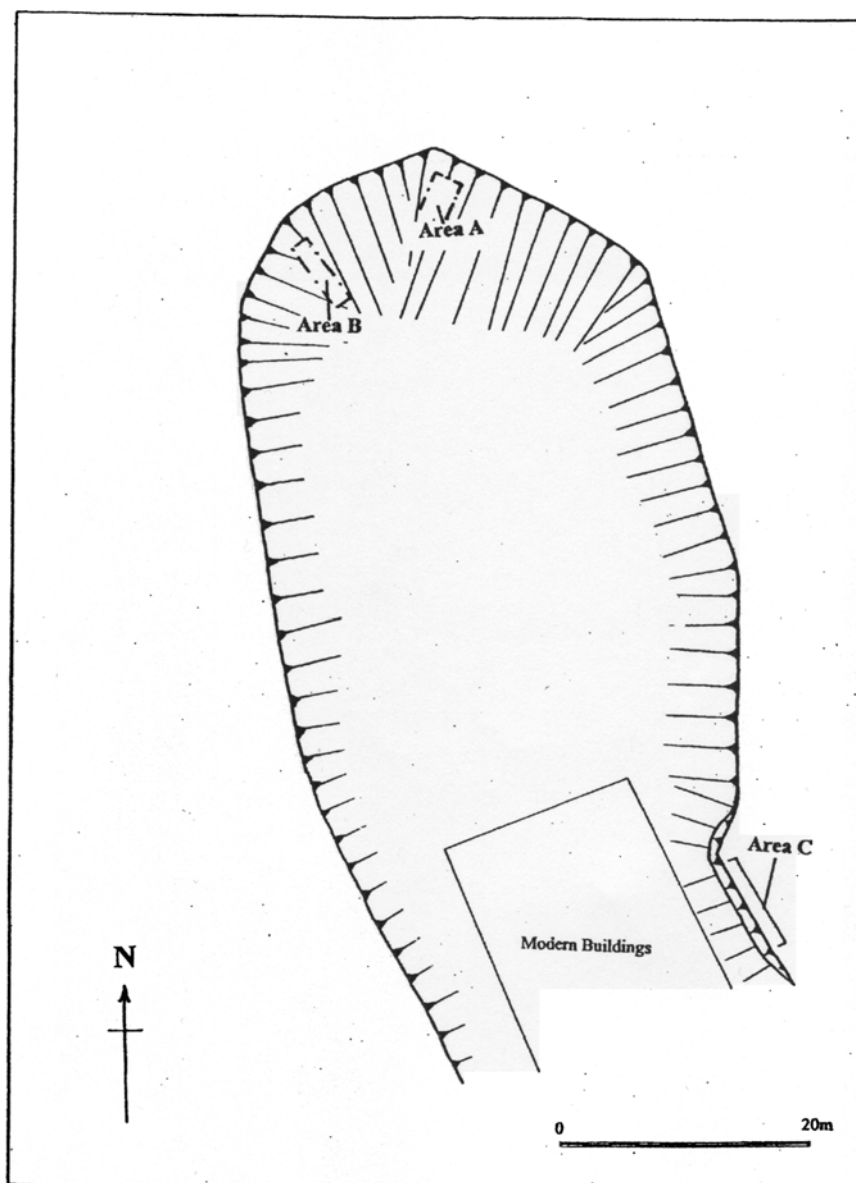


Figure 3: Plan showing cleaned sections



Plate 1: 19th Century hay wagon



Plate 2: Section A after cleaning

Acknowledgements

Herefordshire Archaeology would like to thank the current landowners and Steven Yeates and Nigel Reade for their assistance during fieldwork.

Archive

1 Site Notebook
3 Sheets of field drawings
2 Sheet of inked drawings
1 Colour print film
1 Correspondence file
This document

Further Publication

A note on the work reported here will be published in the CBA publication *West Midlands Archaeology*, 43, for 2000. Further work on the Ashgrove material will be published in subsequent Herefordshire Archaeology reports.

References

Watkins A. Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists Field Club, Part 1, 1930, pp55-6.

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.