

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TODAY

Herefordshire Council's Historic Environment Newsletter

Vol 3 Issue 2

August 2000

In this issue

In this issue we consider some of the 'green' conservation projects being undertaken within the Conservation and Environmental Planning section. These initiatives do relate directly to the historic environment, even if this is not always immediately obvious. As we have come to realise, it is the sum total of all our decisions that make an impact upon our environment. An example of the links between the concerns of the natural and historic environment is the case of hedgerows. Not only do these features incorporate and contribute to historic landscapes, they also enhance local distinctiveness and provide valuable habitats.

It is hoped that the initiatives introduced here can be seen as being of concern to everyone.

Dale Bristow
Conservation Officer



The Wye valley landscape from Merbach Hill: hedgerows provide historic texture and contribute to the wealth of biodiversity.

Biological Records Centre

In July the Council appointed a consultant to prepare a Development Plan to investigate issues surrounding the establishment of a Biological Records Centre for the County.

The contract has been awarded to the company *Environmental Information Management* from Somerset, who have extensive experience with biological data and record centres. They will undertake interviews and hold workshops with local naturalists and potential data users such as the Council and other agencies. Clearly the identification of natural vegetation classifications and species will often correspond to historic sites. For example, hedgerows, ancient woods and veteran trees may not only host diverse species but may also be historic features in their own right.

The final development plan complete with recommendations should be delivered by March 2001.

Joanne Hackman
Ecologist

Rural Development Regulation

A 'new direction' for agriculture has been announced as a consequence of the European Rural Development Regulation. The Regulation seeks to adopt a holistic approach towards rural development through reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy. Most significantly, it aims to switch spending away from direct farm production aid and towards support for the broader rural economy and sustainable developments within rural areas. *The England Rural Development Plan* is the government's response as to how it will be implemented within England.

The Plan has been split into Regional chapters and tailored to meet regional needs. It has been agreed that some £1,390 million over the next 7 years will be injected into the West Midlands region to further the objectives of the Regulation.

This funding will be a significant boost to everyone concerned with the protection and enhancement of the County's habitats. It will also help influence landowners to restore historic parkland features and conserve archaeological sites within the Herefordshire landscape through agri-environment schemes like the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

“In forthcoming years we hope to see a real change in fortune for the County’s wildlife”

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

The Biodiversity Action Plan was launched in Leominster on the 1 June 2000. It represents many months of hard work and partnership by a range of individuals and organisations. The Biodiversity Officer Charlotte Gault who works at the Nature Trust has co-ordinated the project since 1998. A small steering group includes staff of the National Farmers Union, English Nature, and the Nature Trust, as well as of Herefordshire Council.

The Biodiversity Planning Process originated from the Rio Earth Summit where in 1992 the UK Government signed up to a motion to produce plans for the conservation of biological diversity. The UK national plans have now been produced and most Counties are now following suit with local plans. This recognises that ultimately biodiversity is lost or conserved at the local level.

Nine broad habitat plans and seventeen species action plans have been compiled. The range of actions is very diverse and covers everything from land management, to survey work, to education. For example an action identified in the Parkland plan is to ‘identify and ensure protection of historic parklands and ancient trees’ whilst the Woodland plan seeks to ‘increase knowledge of woodland history and associated archaeological features’. The species action plan for the otter meanwhile looks to ensure that the Council provide mitigation measures such as underpasses under roads at known problem sites.

Joanne Hackman

Historic Parks and Gardens

It seems appropriate at this, the start of a new millennium to take stock of our legacy of historic parks and gardens. In order to protect, restore or promote the County’s historic gardens, it is vital to know where they are and what is special about them. Twenty-four historic gardens in Herefordshire are Registered by English Heritage. A further twenty-nine are currently being assessed and may eventually be added to the Register of Listed Parks and Gardens.

The remainder of the historic parks and gardens, estimated to be in the order of two hundred, will not be recognised as nationally important by the English Heritage Register. Much research is still needed to understand the importance of these gardens, their historical development and their extent on the ground. Herefordshire Council’s Conservation and Environmental Planning Section and the Hereford and Worcester Gardens Trust are working together to carry out this research.

Many gardens especially those of the 18th Century, were designed to be ‘outward looking’, relying on contrived views of the ‘borrowed landscape’ and carefully sited ‘eye catchers’, framed views or vistas rather than the all encompassing general view of a wider landscape. This ‘designed visual envelope’ is unfortunately rarely recognised, and therefore is not considered when protecting or restoring an historic garden. We are aiming to identify these designed visual envelopes so that the intentions of the original designers can be explained to the public and to owners and then taken into account when considering restoration or protection. By identifying these visual envelopes the planning system will have the opportunity to consider the impact of other, remote development on the designed setting of an historic park or garden. This is an entirely new approach and Herefordshire Council is in the forefront of local authority thinking in this field.

*Jane Patton
Landscape Officer*



Brockhampton Park is a grade II mid C18 landscape park and house.

Stewardship and landscape issues

Applications for grant aid under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme are increasing every year (see Rural Development Regulation above: Ed). Generally, these represent an ecological improvement and are to be welcomed. However, it is important to take into account the potential impact on any designed historic landscapes and also on the landscape character of the area. Proposals should strengthen the inherent character of the local landscape and not impose significant changes. Herefordshire Council staff are completing a landscape character assessment based on key indicators which identify the various natural and humanly- influenced components which make up the character of any landscape.

The impact of proposals on any designed landscapes present in the affected area should also be considered. While progress and change are to some extent inevitable, any proposals affecting a historic park or garden should respect the original design intentions. These may extend to land well away from the designed landscape where the proposals may compromise a view that is integral to the original design.

Jane Patton

“Proposals should strengthen the inherent character of the local landscape and not impose significant changes”

Conservation Area Designations

Herefordshire Council has recently designated three locations as Conservation Areas. They are located at Leintwardine, Lucton and Lugg Bridge (Stapleton). This now brings the total of Conservation Areas within the county up to 62.

A Conservation Area is defined as an “area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve and enhance”. The aim of designation is therefore straightforward: to maintain, and where possible, to enhance the character of such areas. When defining the particular character of the area concerned, attention has been given to the unique and special qualities of each place.

Such qualities include the architectural and historic interest as well as the contributions made by natural elements such as trees and hedges. The archaeological significance of the area is also accounted for. This is apparent within all three of the new Conservation Areas, since they contain Scheduled Ancient Monuments within their boundaries. Details of the boundaries of the Conservation Areas and the implications of designation can be obtained by contacting me at the Conservation and Environmental Planning Team, on 01432 260151.

Dale Bristow



Leintwardine in 1959: the new Conservation Area includes most of the settlement present then.

People

Joy Tetsill joined the Conservation and Environmental Planning Team on 1st May 2000. She is here on a ten-month contract to write Supplementary Planning Guidance on Biodiversity. Previously Joy has worked at Leeds City Council for eight years as their ecologist as well as at Shropshire Wildlife Trust, English Nature, Wakefield District Council and RSPB (Wales).

There is also new volunteer member of staff with *Herefordshire Archaeology*. Benedikte Ward graduated with a degree in Archaeology from the School of European Culture and Languages at the University of Kent in 1999 and is now on a six-month placement at Leominster. Primarily working with the SMR she is busy inputting data and researching into new sites for inclusion on the record. Benedikte is also carrying out research to establish the presence of any Bronze Age barrows in the areas surrounding the River Frome. Look out for the results of this research in a future edition of *Historic Environment Today*.

Sutton Excavations

Herefordshire Archaeology completed its second season of excavation at Sutton St. Michael in June. The excavation lasted for two weeks and coincided with West Midlands Archaeology Week. This season's work was designed as a follow up to the Time Team programme, televised in March of this year. The work took place across three different sites, with three trenches dug at each site.

The area to the south of the former Freen's Court was revisited in order to provide a better understanding of the complex series of structures discovered in the 1999 season. This site revealed further evidence for a succession of buildings ranging in date from the Victorian period to before the 13th century. Many of these structures appear to have been well built with stone footings and were destroyed in the 13th century.

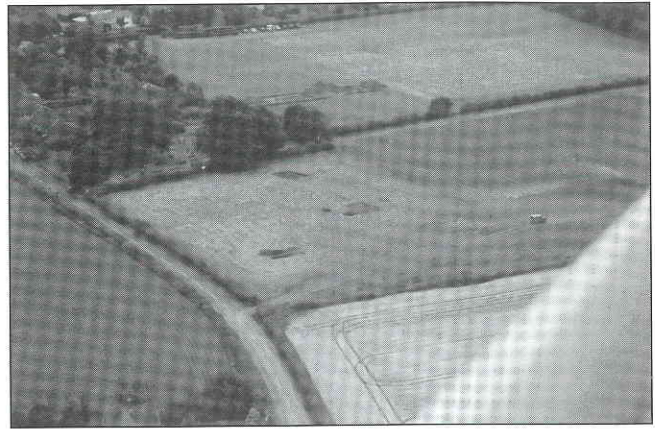
An area immediately to the west of Sutton St. Michael church was looked at in order to assess the nature and date of a series of earthworks on the site. This area proved to contain the well preserved remains of a settlement. Initial interpretation of these features suggests that the settlement had been deserted by the end of the 13th century and may well have had pre-Conquest origins.

An area to the south-east of the church was also examined, where the *Time Team* discovered more earthworks. These included a series of subdivisions within a huge enclosure. A subdivision of this enclosure proved to have been surrounded by a timber palisade, behind which was an earthen rampart. This appears to have been similar in design to the phase 1 defences excavated in Hereford City. This feature has yet to be dated but it certainly pre-dates the 13th century. Within this enclosure were found traces of occupation.

Herefordshire Archaeology would like to thank the landowners and all those who worked with us on this season's excavation. All three areas will be investigated further in a final excavation season in 2001.

Tim Hoverd

“This site revealed further evidence for a series of buildings ranging in date from the Victorian period to before the 13th century”.



*Excavations in progress near to Sutton St. Michael church.
Photo: Tim Hoverd.*

Evolving Landscapes

The discovery of possible prehistoric field systems, highlighted in the last issue of HET, has major implications for our understanding of the development of the Herefordshire countryside. The field systems appear to underlie known historical monuments such as Roman roads, linear ditches and in one case an Iron Age hillfort. It suggests that agricultural enclosure existed at an early date and was indeed extensive throughout the county. The landscape has not remained static and when previous generations have altered the enclosure pattern of an area, it has also changed its historic character. Even so, the earlier systems can still be detected as individual boundaries within the later field pattern, due to the methodology developed by *Herefordshire Archaeology* for historic landscape characterisation.

*Paul White
Landscape Archaeologist*

SMR news

The SMR is currently running a series of Focus Group meetings to establish exactly what people want from a SMR. Volunteer projects continue steadily. A group of people working from home computers have now put field name data for 84 parishes (out of 243) on the main SMR database. We could do with some help on this front. If you have a computer at home and would like to get involved contact Rebecca (01432 260130; email: roseff@herefordshire.gov.uk)

Forthcoming events

The Third Annual Symposium on Archaeology in Herefordshire will take place on Saturday November 25th at the Courtyard, Hereford. Phone 01568 612985 for details.