

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TODAY

Herefordshire Council's Historic Environment Newsletter

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In this issue

We report the exciting discovery of a Saxon watermill, one of only a handful to be examined in England, and the preliminary findings from excavations at the site of the new Magistrates Court in Hereford. Also in this issue there is news about Forbury Chapel, Croft Castle, Hom Bridge, Colwall Conservation Area, research into presence of Bronze Age barrows and the opening of the Youth Hostel at the Priory, Leominster. Readers should also note that tickets are now on sale for the Third Annual Symposium on Archaeology in Herefordshire - (see Forthcoming Events).

Dale Bristow

An Anglo - Saxon watermill at Wellington

A team of archaeologists from Worcestershire County Archaeological Service have uncovered the remains of one of the earliest medieval watermills yet to have been identified in England. The work at Wellington Quarry in Herefordshire, was undertaken in close co-operation with the quarry owners (Lafarge Redland Aggregates) and *Herefordshire Archaeology*. It has enabled the careful investigation of a well preserved rectangular timber structure, constructed from substantial oak beams. Fragments of several large millstones were also found and, although the upper elements of the structure had been robbed in ancient times, sufficient evidence survived to indicate that the large beams formed the base of the wheel pit for a vertical waterwheel.

Preliminary dating of a some of the timbers, using the technique of dendrochronology (tree-ring dating), has indicated that the watermill was probably built sometime during the first half of the 8th century AD. Although the Romans had introduced watermills to England, possibly as early as the 2nd century AD, archaeologists know very little about the use of water power over the following six centuries. Charters and other documents indicate that mills were commonplace in the medieval landscape. By the late 11th century,

the Domesday Book records over 6000 mills throughout England, yet only a handful of early watermills have been excavated.

Apart from the late 7th century vertical wheeled mills found at Old Windsor in Berkshire, the project leaders, Robin Jackson and Simon Griffin, believe that this exciting new find is the earliest medieval mill yet identified in England. It pre-dates any of the documented examples and will make an important contribution to the study of early medieval watermills.

The site raises some interesting questions about early medieval watermill technology. Although both horizontal and vertical wheeled mills have been found, it has often been assumed that initially horizontal wheels were more common because they use a simpler technology, without requiring complex gearing to transfer the power to the millstone. Now the discovery of a vertical wheeled watermill of such an early date at Wellington, along with the still earlier example from Old Windsor, challenges this assumption and raises important questions about the character of the earliest medieval mills in England.

Robin Jackson

Worcestershire County Archaeological Service



The well-preserved timber structure of a medieval watermill is uncovered at Wellington Quarry.

Photograph courtesy of R. Jackson

Roof truss revealed at Forbury Chapel

Paul Gibbons, one of the senior members of the historic buildings team in the Conservation and Environment Planning section has recently had the opportunity of inspecting the Forbury Chapel in Church Street, Leominster. The Chapel is a Grade II Listed Building. The list description indicates: 'interior not inspected, but reported as containing late 15th/16th century hammer - beam roof mostly hidden by 20th Century ceiling.'. This ceiling has concealed from public view the truss and roof.

Hammer- beam roof trusses are not common. They were a feature of prestige buildings, such as 'great halls' either ecclesiastical or secular, where large volumes of space were required. While the total number still remaining within this county is unknown, the original number that existed is likely to have been small. The Forbury Chapel is a plain structure in that an elaborate carving or painting is generally lacking. However, mounded pendants and carved heads strengthen the visual character of the scissor - trusses with their deep chamfers to the underside edges. Indeed the roof construction can be described as 'unusual and probably unique' the like of which I have not witnessed in my thirty years of experience in building conservation within Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

It is hoped that the Forbury Management Committee will proceed with moves to 'open up' the structure as much as is possible. This will enable better public appreciation of the original space and form.

Paul Gibbons

Under the Magistrates Court

As a requirement of the planning permission for the new Magistrates Court in Hereford an initial exploration and subsequent full excavation was carried out in March/April 2000.

Documentary evidence showed that the site was known to have been occupied in 1601. The fieldwork comprised the excavation of three trial trenches followed by an open area excavation of features to the west side of the site. It demonstrated that there were very few archaeological features on the east side of the site. The open area excavation targeted the site of the proposed basement of the Court where destruction of archaeological features would be total.

The excavation revealed a high level of industrial activity behind tenements that probably fronted onto Commercial Road. This varied from

possible tanning pits to kiln-type activity. It is hoped that further analysis will elucidate the nature of this activity. Some of the later tanning pits were over 2.5m deep and there was evidence that these had been timber lined. Clay lined pits had probably been constructed to hold water which was locally available from the stream running through the town ditch.

The use of the site appears to date from after the construction of the city defences and probably through to the early 14th century. In the early phases of medieval period occupation there were a large number of changes in the way that the site was laid out and divided judging by the phases of boundary ditches recorded. A building identified on the site was probably constructed after the civil war in the late 17th century.

The most important finding is that there was a high level of activity on the site during the late 12th century and 13th Century. This continued on site until the 14th century when it became marginal land accumulating waste from the town. At some point in the 16th or 17th century a building was constructed as is evident from maps of the time.

*Andy Boucher
Archaeological Investigations Limited*



Excavations in progress at the site of the new Magistrates Court, Hereford.

Priory has guests again

The role of medieval monastic houses as hosts to travellers is being revived at the Old Priory at Leominster. Part of the later workhouse complex built onto the surviving portion of the refectory has been converted to a family youth hostel, which was officially opened on October 5th. Herefordshire Council Tourism Development Officer Lisette Davies managed the conversion project. New interpretation panels have also been erected around the priory precincts.

Keith Ray

Bridging Time

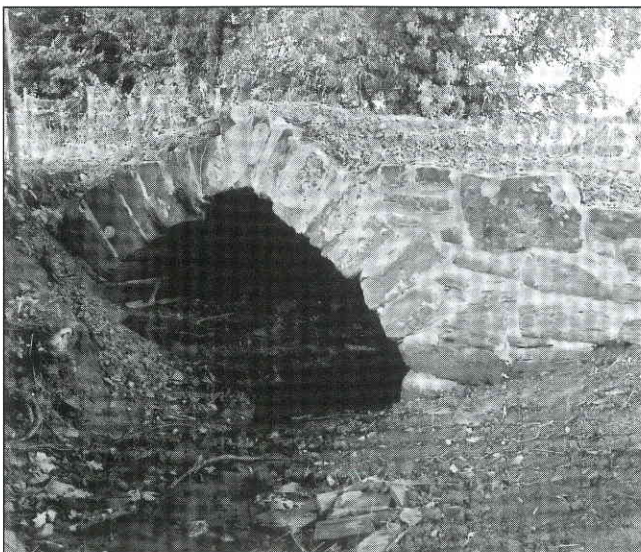
Thanks to the diligence of local Footpaths Warden, Frank Pexton, structural and re-pointing work has recently been completed on one of the county's smallest Scheduled Ancient Monuments, (SAM). Hom Bridge lies on the parish boundary of Burghill and Stretton Sugwas (SAM no. 21670) at NGR: SO 47414336. The monument includes the standing and buried remains of a small medieval bridge, which crosses a south flowing tributary of the Yazor brook. The bridge, which is thought to be of 14th century date, is constructed of roughly dressed sandstone blocks and is carried on a segmental pointed arch with a span of approximately 2.5m. The bridge is unusually small, at only 5.2m wide and 1.4m high.

The building works included some re-positioning of slipped stones within the span and complete re-pointing using lime mortar. Additional material was placed on the surface of the bridge in order to protect it in the future. Staff of Herefordshire Archaeology monitored the works, and a basic photographic record was made.

Single span bridges were in use for much of the medieval period as a means of enabling pack animals and carts to cross narrow watercourses. The most prominent feature at Hom Bridge is the pointed arch, which was in use until the 15th century. Well preserved monuments of this class are relatively rare both locally and nationally.

The bridge has survived largely unchanged since the medieval period and therefore retains information concerning its method of construction. The monument remains part of a bridleway running from Hereford to Burghill and Tillington. English Heritage and Wyevale Trees have paid for the works.

Tim Hoverd



The 14th Century Hom Bridge, one of the County's smallest scheduled ancient monuments which has recently been repaired.

Archaeology within the Region

Earlier this year, following provisional discussions, English Heritage began initial moves towards an agreed archaeological research framework for the West Midlands region (this region includes Herefordshire). There has for some time been a consensus of opinion among archaeologists working throughout the region that better definition of archaeological research needs is desirable. An initial meeting, held at the English Heritage offices in Birmingham, set the scene for this proposed framework, and established the basis on which a temporary Steering Group could be established.

Currently, the Steering Group is made up of representatives of some of the main archaeological interest groups in the region. These groups will now attend a series of period based seminars to reach agreement establish a consensus about the nature of the archaeological resource that is actually present in the region. Meanwhile, Herefordshire Archaeology staff are working on an outline research agenda specific to Herefordshire. The process of regional research frame work formation will take into account such more local agendas.

Julian Cotton

Before Croft Castle

Herefordshire Archaeology staff have been conducting a series of landscape walks at Croft, in association with the National Trust, throughout the year. This has involved reconnaissance survey work, which is leading to a re-appraisal of many of the earthwork features in close proximity to the castle. Besides noting new details of the C17th formal and water gardens south of the castle, this has produced new insights into the sequence of castle building on the site.

The present building represents successive restructuring of a castellated mansion of late C15th or early C16th date. Evidence has been noted, however, that suggests that this late 'castle' occupies only the western half of a curtained wall castle possibly of late 13th C date. Meanwhile, there are indications nearby for the site of a still earlier earthwork castle. These latter traces are located near to medieval fishponds and to the site of the deserted medieval village. This latter has now been positively identified, at a location different from that formerly suggested, and is represented by clearly visible earthwork building platforms.

These new observations have confirmed the need for further exploratory fieldwork, plans for which are now being made.

Keith Ray

Making the SMR more accessible

Recently I have been trying to find out what people want from the SMR. This is both for obvious reasons, - to direct our efforts in the most suitable way but also, more immediately, to feed into a Heritage Lottery Fund application for the SMR. We have already held one meeting in Leominster for people who work professionally with archaeological data and I have carried out a street questionnaire (of 100) to try to gauge the views of 'uninterested' people. Two more 'Focus Groups' are planned, one with the Educational Sector and one with a 'random' group of people. 'Random' people have been interpreted for our purposes as Council Officers who don't work in Conservation!

The first meeting was attended by 22 people. Herefordshire Archaeology is very grateful to these people. Their views will all be taken into account and, with the other results, will help to form the basis of the HLF bid. It has proved much harder to get people not directly involved with archaeology to either stop for a questionnaire or attend a meeting. As an aside, finding people's opinions is obviously going to become more and more of an issue for local government. Best Value and the HLF both (quite rightly) ask us to consult, but people, understandably, are not very willing to be consulted on things they have no interest in. Ideas on an email please. Anyway the broad findings from the consultations so far show that people working in archaeology want links to other data. They also want reliable data and an Internet link to the SMR as top priorities. The 'random' street questionnaire on the other hand found that the majority of people are interested in local history, but don't pursue it because of lack of time and laziness (their words). They would like more information on the things they see around them and more recent history (18th/19th and 20th centuries) -and they also want Internet links.

Rebecca Roseff



Points of view being given a recent SMR focus group.

New Conservation Area proposed

Herefordshire Council are currently intending to designate Colwall Stone / Upper Colwall as a Conservation Area. This is in recognition of the high environmental and visual quality of the area. The proposal comprises of two distinct zones. The first, Walwyn Road, is characterised by early 19th C villa style houses set back from the road amid mature landscaped gardens. Church Road has a more relaxed and vernacular feel. The prolific number of trees and the spectacular views to the Malverns also contribute significantly to the sense of place which it is hoped will be safeguarded through designation.

The next stage in the process is to be a detailed presentation to Colwall Parish Council about the implications of the designation. A full public meeting will follow to allow local residents the opportunity to inspect the proposals and to suggest their own boundary alignments for the Conservation Area.

The responses to the public consultations, and any amendments to the proposals, will then be reported back to the main Planning Committee for formal approval. Notification of designation will then be published in the local press, and nationally, in The London Gazette, as part of the statutory duty of the Local Planning Authority.

Rachel Bonner

Barrows Project

As previously referred to in HET (Vol 3, Issue 2) I am researching the presence of Bronze Age barrows in the Frome River area. During work on the Historic Landscape Characterisation project, it was noted that this particular area has numerous references to *berry*, *bury*, *beorg*, *barrow*, *ber*, *hlew*, *hlaw* and *low* which mean mound or hill in English and might reflect the former presence of a barrow in the field or nearby landscape. The lack of indicative field names north of the river is believed to be due to changes in the field boundaries in recent times. Field walking will be done in the autumn, so hopefully positive results are still to come.

Benedickte Ward

Forthcoming Events:

The Third Annual Symposium will be held this year at the Courtyard Theatre, Hereford on Saturday 25th November. Ticket price £7.50.

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