

# HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TODAY

Herefordshire Council's Historic Environment Newsletter

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## Historic Landscapes

In the past archaeology almost exclusively concentrated upon the discovery and the investigation of individual sites, such as hillforts or castles and attempted to understand each site's separate development. However, the emphasis in recent years has changed to understanding sites in relationship to the wider historic development of the landscape. The number of educational institutions that now offer landscape archaeology courses reflects this. There has also been an increased appreciation of other historical features, other than obvious archaeological sites, that contribute to the historic character of the countryside such as hedgerows and woodland and the need for better conservation management of these areas is now recognised.

This change in emphasis is reflected firstly by the introduction of legislation, such as the Hedgerow Regulations that aims to conserve historic hedgerows in the landscape. Secondly, by archaeologists moving from the designation of specific areas for management, like Scheduled Ancient Monuments, and thereby preserving the 'best bits' to the characterisation and appreciation of far larger areas of landscape.

This cannot be better illustrated than by English Heritage's programme of Historic Landscape Characterisation that *Herefordshire Archaeology* have been undertaking for the past 15 months. Our knowledge of the rates and nature of change in the landscapes of Herefordshire has been greatly increased. It is hoped this will lead to the better management of change in the landscape for the future.



*The field pattern in Craswall parish provides us with information on the nature of the past landscape*

### STOP PRESS: STOP PRESS: Changes to Historic Landscape Walks Programme

Due to the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the county, the Historic Landscape Walks planned for 14th March and 18th April around Brilley and Mansell Lacy, respectively, are now replaced with Historic Town Walks.

14th March: A Guided Walk around the historic town of Leominster. Meet by the southern porch of Leominster Priory at 2pm.

18th April: A Guided Walk around the eastern precinct of Hereford City, taking in the former walled defences and castle area. Meet at the eastern end of Hereford Cathedral at 2pm.

For any more information please contact Tim Hoverd on 01568 614931

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## More Woodland Discoveries

The winter months have seen the continuing survey of previously undiscovered archaeological features within the woodland of the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The area south of Storrige is the current focus of attention. The latest technology is being used, like a Global Positioning System (G.P.S.), which uses satellites in orbit around the Earth that can provide you with an accurate location on the ground. It has greatly aided the survey as it works even in the thickest of woodland undergrowth.

Initial results confirm what has previously been noted in the woodland around Ledbury (as reported in earlier editions of HET). It appears that the areas have not necessarily been wooded for as long as previously believed and that there is far more archaeology within these areas than imagined. Although the land is often marginal and steeply sloped the woodland compartment banks and boundaries overlie a series of well preserved medieval field systems consisting of ridge and furrow and large lynchets. This evidence illustrates the extreme pressures of the 13th and early 14th century population in its attempt to feed itself during a period of less than ideal climatic conditions.

Documentary evidence records that during the first half of the 14th century there were a series of poor harvests due to drought. This put a severe strain on the population, (which was much larger than the present population of Herefordshire), and forced every available area, no matter how marginal to be farmed. This weakened the population and made the impact of the Black Death far greater, hence the subsequent abandonment of these marginal areas.

The survey has also identified a large number of charcoal burning platforms, located predominantly on the eastern sides of the ridges. Other features include limestone quarries, complex networks of holloways and a particularly large bank and ditch which may be some form of estate or territorial boundary between Cradley and Mathon.

*Tim Hoverd*

## New Date for Lecture

The first **Herefordshire Archaeology Lecture** by John Barrett, of Sheffield University on 'Researching Iron Age Communities in the Central Marches' is now scheduled for **Friday 8th June**.

The venue for the talk is The Studio Theatre at the Courtyard Theatre, Edgar Street, Hereford. Tickets go on sale in April, and can be obtained from The Courtyard booking office.

## Wall Decoration Revealed

Remnants of a wall painting contemporary to the construction of a late 16th/early 17th century timber framed cottage have been revealed in Cradley. Although these fragments are confined to one wall there was evidence that the whole room would have been decorated at one stage.

Paint work taken for laboratory analysis has revealed at least two phases of decoration. The original design (which had evidence of soot and smoke from the fireplace) was then covered by a layer of limewash and a new design applied, probably within 10 years of the first scheme. The detail of the painting is relatively crude but a chevron border with a floral/ vine pattern can be observed. Pigments like red ochre, charcoal and lime were used.



*Detail of the painted wall plaster showing the crude design*

The survival of such wall painting is unusual due to buildings often being repaired or altered, or simply because the decoration becomes quickly unfashionable and are decorated over long ago.

*Rachel Bonner*

## Finds aid future planning

During February an 'access' condition site monitoring visit was made to a development site in Sutton St. Nicholas. This type of condition is attached to a planning permission when the Sites and Monuments Record has insufficient data regarding the impact of the development upon the archaeological and historical significance of the area to ensure a more extensive condition to be enacted. Information collected from access visits can then be added to the Sites and Monuments Record in order to aid the planning department in attaching appropriate conditions to future developments.

During the course of the visit a small quantity of medieval pottery was recovered from newly dug service runs and footings. The size of the pot sherds and their unabraded appearance would suggest that they had been disturbed from medieval features like pits.

Initial research on the pottery suggests that the vessels were made locally. Sherds from a green glazed jug made in Herefordshire are dated to the mid- 13th to 15th century, while fragments of a black cooking pot dates to the mid- 12th to early 14th century and were produced in Worcestershire, close to Malvern. These types of pottery are fairly common as they were used as everyday domestic tableware. The presence of the assemblage indicates that in this part of Sutton during the medieval period domestic refuse was being deposited from nearby occupation sites.

*Tim Hoverd*

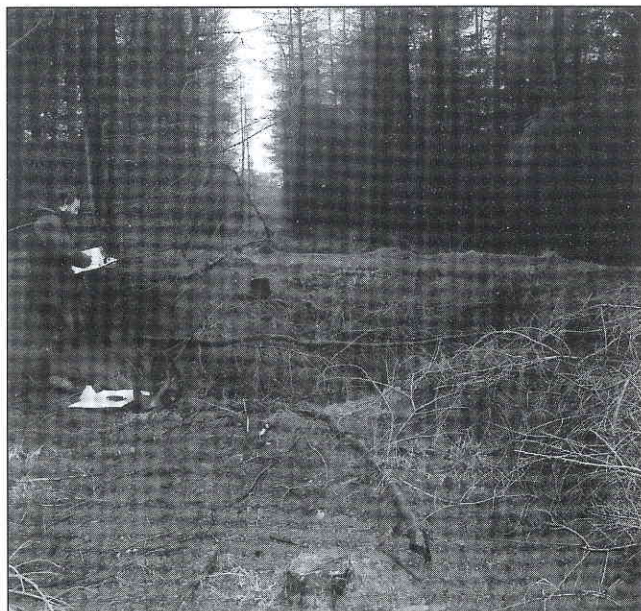
## Early Church Book

Over 200 people attended the day conference on the early church last June. That meeting was an expanded version, at Leominster, of the annual Herefordshire Local History Day school. The papers delivered then have been supplemented by new ones by Ann Malpas and Hugh Pawsey and worked up into chapters of a book 'The Early Church in Herefordshire' to be published for 1st June 2001. The chapter by the County Archaeologist, Keith Ray, on the archaeology of Romano-British, British and Anglian Christianity introduces many of the new survey findings of Herefordshire Archaeology over the past 12 months.

## Bircher discoveries

The foot and mouth outbreak has brought to a temporary halt a new archaeological survey of the National Trust's Croft Estate, that Tim Hoverd and Keith Ray have been conducting during the early weeks of 2001. The results for Bircher Common are particularly interesting, since several settlement sites that were previously undiscovered have come to light.

The earliest is an enclosure that appears to pre-date the known late prehistoric embanked enclosure at the eastern edge of the common. Much later in date are a series of abandoned farmstead sites surviving as earthworks in the bracken-covered areas. These are uphill from the scattered crofts still inhabited on the southern margin of Bircher Common. The abandoned sites are very similar in form to these (probably early post-medieval) crofts. In the valleys that 'frame' the common to the east and west platforms for huts probably belonging to medieval or earlier summer grazing areas have been located.



*Recording earthwork features within Bircher Coppice*

Meanwhile sites in the middle of the common have been affected by wartime ploughing. Other earthworks thought in the past to be elements of a prehistoric field system have been re- interpreted thanks to information provided by the Bircher Common graziers. These features mark the position, ironically, of a mass burial pit for the victims of the 1967-8 foot and mouth outbreak.

*Keith Ray*

## A Roman Shortcut

A possible ancient route way has been rediscovered as part of the ongoing analysis of the Herefordshire Historic Landscape Characterisation. The field pattern, south of Norton Canon is cut acutely by the modern roadway, suggesting that the field system might have an earlier formation. Subsequent analysis of the surrounding area and place names evidence suggests the possible existence of a Roman route way. It would have connected the Roman Road west of Kenchester to the northern Clyro-Blackwardine Roman Road.



*The Norton Canon road on the line of an earlier track*

From Portway (a place name linked to Roman Road crossings) on the Kenchester roman road the route continues as a modern road northwards to Norton Canon, though the exact route to the north of the village is more difficult to distinguish due to historical changes in the field pattern. However if the orientation of the road is extended as a straight line it passes through Eccles Green (a place name associated with Romano British Christianity) and joins the Clyro- Blackwardine road at Sarnesfield church (Sarnes- a Welsh place name for Street).

Its location in the landscape is also interesting. Topographically it lies along the top of the ridgeway that separates Letton Lake to the west from Yazor and Weobley to the east. The route would have provided a shortcut joining the two main roman roads together, by utilising this higher ground and avoiding the low lying wet area of Letton Lake. Also worthy of note is how the surviving stretches of Offa's Dyke in the area also respects the orientation of the road.

*Paul White*

## British Camp Quern

On guided walks around British Camp (the hillfort otherwise known as Herefordshire Beacon on the crest of the Malverns within Colwall parish), I have been asked the whereabouts of the quernstone found there in 1940. I have until now been unable to say. However, Valerie Goodbury has written to me to report the results of a joint effort between Mrs. Irene Southall and Mrs. Joyce Ingledew, to locate it.

The quernstone is in fact on display in Malvern Museum, and a very fine piece it is too. It is a fragment of the upper stone of a mill pair, and is of Romano-British type. The information card at the Museum indicates that it was found on the crest of the 'outer rampart' of the hillfort, a detail omitted from the report published in the Woolhope Club Transactions for 1941.

*Keith Ray*

## Field Reports available

The first fifteen Herefordshire Archaeology reports are being published this month. Each of them concern projects or discoveries of the county archaeology service during 1999. Most of the reports concern individual sites or locations, but one of them summaries a range of field discoveries made during a variety of monitoring or reconnaissance visits. A list of the reports can be obtained from Tim Hoverd, and orders for copies can be placed with him also.

## Computer Volunteers Needed

In order to finish the computerisation of the Tithe Map field name survey I need more volunteers. The aim is to have completed the county by the end of the year. We are half way through the project so we have done a lot, but there is still a long way to go. If you have a home computer and would like to type up some names for this project, please get in touch with me.

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