

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TODAY

Herefordshire Council's Historic Environment Newsletter

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Up and running

During the early part of 2005, several projects involving *Herefordshire Archaeology* (HA) working in partnership with members of local communities are already underway, or about to begin. These include Local Heritage Initiative Schemes at Upton Bishop and Whitbourne, and an archaeological survey in the Olchon Valley. A further partnership programme, organised jointly by HA and the University of Sheffield, involves site investigations at Ashgrove, Marden.

The general aim of the Heritage Upton Bishop project is to characterise the early occupation of the parish in the period 50AD to 1200AD, and also to attempt to determine whether a Roman villa once stood on or near the site of the parish church. Specific aspects of the project led by HA include an archaeological study of the parish based on available maps, aerial photographs and other historical documentation, and visits to farms and areas of woodland; intensive landscape archaeological survey of a four square-kilometre area centred on the parish church, including some geophysical prospecting; site investigations (excavation); post-fieldwork archiving, analysis and reporting.

HA is contributing to the People of Old Whitbourne project by leading a series of surveys and site excavations centred on the old village core. Specific components include rapid archaeological survey of the old village setting; intensive earthwork and geophysical surveys of selected areas; site investigations (excavation); community archaeology, including school visits; post-fieldwork archiving, analysis and reporting.

In the Olchon Valley, as a result of meetings between local residents and HA staff, a three year programme of archaeological surveys is about to begin. This area of Herefordshire is particularly

'Do you recognise this person?'



*The carved head from Bredwardine. Height 28cm.
Drawing by Tim Hoverd.
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See A face from the past by Tim Hoverd in this
issue of HET.*

intriguing since there is some evidence that an early British monastic site was once located in the upper valley. Keith Ray discusses the Olchon Valley survey in this issue of HET.

At Ashgrove, an exploratory investigation of first millenium AD inhumation burials is being undertaken as a partnership project involving HA and the University of Sheffield. Burial contexts will be examined and fully recorded without lifting the bones.

Richard Lello, Field Archaeologist

Inside : Saxon Wall ♦ Leominster Priory ♦ Olchon Valley ♦ Bredwardine Head

Stone me!

‘...the only example of extant Saxon town defences open to public view in England.’

Work has begun to repair and to interpret one of the most unusual sections of city wall visible in Britain. The site, at the rear of 5 Cantilupe Street, Hereford, contains the remains of at least two phases of the Saxon city defences with associated ditches, and is bounded on the east by the later medieval city wall. The remains continue beneath the adjacent house gardens in Cantilupe Street. These gardens stand some 2m above the former ground level inside the medieval wall. The land, which encompasses both the Saxon and medieval city walls, was purchased by the former Hereford City Council in 1975. The original Saxon timber revetment, to which a stone wall had been added, was re-constructed and the site made open for viewing by the public.

This is the only example of excavated Saxon town defences open to public view in England. The significance of the site, both as part of the Saxon and medieval development of Hereford and as a public resource, cannot be overstated. However, the lack of any on-site interpretative information has meant that, at present, the sequence and significance of the structures can be explained only through guided visits. Moreover, the area has become increasingly overgrown despite periodic vegetation clearance and remedial stabilisation by Hereford City Council. Further, the timber revetment has started to decompose and tumble, and large areas of the stone wall have already collapsed, (see photo)

During 2000, following consultation with Herefordshire Council Property Services, the walls were cleared of vegetation to enable a more thorough inspection of the site. Over the next few weeks, archaeologists and building conservation specialists will reinstate dislodged and collapsed masonry, and reconstruct the timber revetment. An interpretive panel will also be erected on the site so that the complex phases of the Saxon and medieval city defences can be both seen and appreciated by visitors.

Tim Hoverd
Archaeological Projects Officer



The Saxon wall, Hereford.
Copyright Herefordshire Archaeology.

Leominster Priory

During 2004 there was great excitement, including articles in the national archaeology press, about the results of a Ground Penetrating Radar survey at Leominster Priory. Peter Barker of Stratascan carried out this survey on behalf of the Friends of Leominster Priory. The Friends have been running a Local Heritage Initiative project aimed in part to achieve a better understanding of the layout of the great medieval Benedictine Priory. The survey across the car-park of the Old Priory revealed an unusual circular solid feature 17m wide and with a large circular void in the centre. The foundation was also found to be more than 2m deep, so presumably once supported a massive above ground structure.

Joe Hillaby has been researching Leominster for many years, as well as having a long-standing interest in early ecclesiastical establishments. He has developed the theory that the structure represents a ‘rotunda’ for the keeping of relics known to have belonged to the wealthy Mercian nunnery that preceded the Priory. As a consequence, the Friends have amended their previous plans, and have invited Bruce Watson of the Museum of London to direct a trial excavation to test the theory.

Having gained permission from Herefordshire Council to close the car park for a short period in late July and early August, Bruce Watson is now awaiting Scheduled Monument Consent for the work. Look to the next issue of HET, and the local press, for details about site visits during the investigations.

Keith Ray, County Archaeologist

Back to school

'I stood in front of the class of 9 to 11 year olds, their expectant faces turned towards me, waiting.'

Admittedly I was terrified. I stood in front of the class of 9 to 11 year olds, their expectant faces turned towards me, waiting. I had never done anything quite like this before. My mind raced. How would I hold their attention? What level should I pitch it at? "Does anybody know what an archaeologist does?" Ten hands shot up. Their answers were impressively accurate. I had underestimated how much they knew and, delightfully, how eager they were to find out more. I asked them to gather around a table. I began to relax. We started to put together a timeline using pictures and real artefacts. Their eyes shone as they handled the flint arrowheads and a piece of pottery thousands of years old. One little girl, however, was utterly fascinated by the pink silk scarf I was wearing.

The children had been doing a project on local heroes of World War One, using documentary sources, so they were familiar with the concept of piecing together evidence. They asked endless questions and, as I answered them as best I could, I realised it was forcing me to confront some of my own assumptions. The children had not yet reached that age when inhibitions start to appear, and did not think twice about asking the 'obvious'. Sometimes, as archaeologists, we get so wrapped up in the complex evidence and intellectual theories that we forget that these were real people.

Next we used the interactive whiteboard to look at their parish on the SMR, and some of the children gleefully pointed out their houses. They were fascinated by the idea of a hillfort: how did they move all that earth without a JCB; what were their spades made of? I showed them a picture of the Queenstone, a standing stone with man-made grooves running down it, and explained how archaeologists don't always have answers. I asked them what they thought it might be. One suggested a spear rack. "I know what it is," said another, "it's definitely...a people grater."

*Clementine Lovell
Community Archaeologist*

People

This year, we have said goodbye to three members of Conservation staff, Paul White, Cori Renfrew and James Byrne. Paul joined *Herefordshire Archaeology* in November 1999 as Landscape Archaeologist to lead the Historic Landscape Characterisation Project. In 2003, he managed the Arrow Valley Archaeology, Landscape Change and Conservation Project, and, more recently, he managed a similar project in the Frome Valley. Paul left in February to join *Wessex Archaeology*.

Since April 2003, Cory has been employed as Project Archaeologist, and worked with Paul on both the Arrow Valley and Frome Valley projects. Cori left at the end of March on completion of her contract.

James has been employed for three years as Ecologist. He worked with Planning Officers in relation to development proposals. James left at the end of March to join Creswell Associates of Cardiff.

We offer Paul, Cori and James our best wishes in their future endeavours. They will all be missed.

Frome Valley information

As part of the Frome Valley Archaeology, Landscape Change and Conservation Project, two display panels and a series of public information leaflets are currently in production and will be available in the near future.

An outdoor interpretative panel will be located near Yarkhill Moat in the lower Frome Valley. A general information panel, based on the work of the project, will be displayed at the Local History Centre, 5 Sherford Street, Bromyard.

A series of nine leaflets, each addressing a particular topic in the areas of archaeology, landscape change and conservation in the Frome Valley, will be available in Herefordshire libraries and tourist information centres, and at the Bromyard Local History Centre from May 2005. Leaflets may also be obtained by post. Send a stamped, self-addressed A4 size envelope (stamps to the value of 46p (1st class) or 35p (2nd class), please) to: Frome Leaflets, *Herefordshire Archaeology*, PO Box 144, Hereford HR1 2YH.

The Olchon Valley survey



The carved stone from the Olchon Valley.

In 2000, I carried out a rapid survey of evidence for the early church in Herefordshire, the results of which were published in the Leominster History Group's *The Early Church in Herefordshire* (2001). I have since returned periodically to Llanveynoe in the shadow of the Black Mountains to follow up intriguing clues that there was once an early British ('Celtic') monastic site in the upper Olchon Valley. It became evident that an archaeological survey of the Olchon Valley was overdue. As a result, *Herefordshire Archaeology* staff have met with local residents, and the first of three seasons of survey is about to begin.

At the end of 2004, a local resident couple sent me a photograph of a stone bearing a carved circled cross re-used in a barn on their property (see photograph above). This connects directly with the discovery of an inscribed memorial stone (since lost) in the valley below the church and reported to Edward Llyud in the late 17th century. Other stones incorporated into the church, and a short-armed cross in the churchyard, are also thought likely to have been brought there from the valley (as recorded in Albert Watkins' 1930 survey of churchyard crosses).

It is too early to draw firm conclusions about what this implies regarding the early monastic centre, but it supports the idea that such a centre, legendarily founded by St. Bueno, once existed here. Extraordinarily, local oral tradition not only supports this idea, but actually appears to point to its location. It is hoped that the survey will throw further light on this.

Keith Ray, County Archaeologist

A face from the past

'The carving... appears to represent a particular individual, with a pronounced cleft chin and lined forehead...'

During a public talk at Bredwardine in 2004 when an illustration of the Upton Bishop carved stone figure was shown (see HET Volume 7, Issue 2, June 2004), a member of the audience told me he had "something like that" in his shed at home. His father had ploughed it up 20 years previously half a mile from Bredwardine parish church. The carving was subsequently loaned to *Herefordshire Archaeology* for recording and assessment by specialists.

The carving depicts the head of a man (see page 1). It appears to represent a particular individual, with a pronounced cleft chin and lined forehead, rather than a cherub or puto. The eyes, nose and lips are all clearly depicted. The figure is broken at the neck, but a collar or neck-band can be seen. This suggests that care had been taken to depict clothing, and that the head was formerly part of a more complete figure.

The right side of the face has suffered from considerable surface erosion. This indicates that part of the carving had been exposed to weathering while the remainder was buried or built into a wall or some other structure for, apparently, a significant period of time.

The hair on the head had been purposefully chipped off; the reason is not known. This is unfortunate since hairstyle can be a key factor in dating such figures. As a result, dating the carving based on stylistic characteristics is very difficult.

However, the hair had been removed prior to weathering. The considerable surface erosion present is evidence of an extended period of exposure, and may be indicative of a late medieval or early post-medieval date. It has also been suggested that the carving may be Norman in origin. Whatever the age of the figure, two intriguing questions remain unanswered: where did it come from, and who does it represent?

*Tim Hoverd
Archaeological Projects Officer*