

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TODAY

Herefordshire Council's Historic Environment Newsletter

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Editorial: Heritage Protection Review (HPR)

The last two years have seen the gradual development of a series of proposals for major reform of the way in which the historic heritage is protected. The complex system of designation and consent procedures that has developed over the past century and more has worked well to protect buildings, sites and monuments. However, it is perceived in some quarters as slow, bureaucratic and difficult for people who are not specialists to understand and use.

The government has brought together the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, DEFRA, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and English Heritage to drive forward the reforms, with the latter taking a lead role. There has also been wide consultation within the heritage sector.

The proposals in outline involve:

- New definitions of historic assets
- New interim protection
- Published principles of selection
- A unified Register of historic assets
- Clear information for owners
- One process for dealing with consent applications, and
- New Partnership Agreements for longer-term management

In future issues of HET we shall explore different aspects of the proposals, being formulated into a Parliamentary White Paper in 2006. The system that emerges from a new Heritage Act by 2010 will see more emphasis on local delivery of consents and management. To this end, English Heritage has commissioned research into local capacity building, and Herefordshire has been chosen - with Worcestershire - as one of 17 'case studies'.

Keith Ray, County Archaeologist



The newly completed conservation of the Saxon town wall, Hereford (see item and contrasting photo, HET 8, 1).

Annual Symposium – number Eight

The Eighth Annual Symposium on archaeology in Herefordshire will take place at The Courtyard Theatre on Saturday 12th November. The aim as ever is to provide a roundup of archaeological work that has taken place in the county over the past twelve months, with highlighted projects receiving more extended coverage.

This year, the Symposium features a talk by the excavator, Bruce Watson, summarising the results of the excavation at Leominster Priory designed to discover whether the circular feature traced by a radar survey was, as trailed, a late Saxon 'rotunda'. There is also a report on the novelty of excavations on either side of a Roman bridging point on the Wye at Old Weir, Kenchester.

Other highlights include three talks about aspects of the People of Old Whitbourne project and a talk about Downton, also on the river Teme. An important excavation took place next to All Saints church in Hereford, and the results of this will be described.

Two more general topics will be covered – Scheduled Monuments At Risk, and recent studies of medieval pottery.

Inside : Moccas sluice ♦ Bircher Common ♦ Big Roman Dig

Projects update

The late summer saw the close of archaeological fieldwork on two key Local Heritage Initiative projects, at Upton Bishop and Whitbourne. The archiving work for both projects has now also been completed, and specialists are working on finds and samples from the excavations. The results of the work will be published as reports that will be prepared and issued by mid-2006.

Post-excavation work has also continued on the Croft Castle Environs Project, and report writing for the Frome Valley Archaeology, Landscape Change and Conservation Project. The two information panels prepared as part of the latter project were installed on site and an exhibition was prepared and launched.

Deep down Romans at Coughton

During recent archaeological evaluation of a proposed housing site (the former Water Board depot) at the village of Coughton, south of Ross, it was discovered that an area of Roman deposits and features was present. The site is shortly to be built upon, but not before a formal archaeological excavation has taken place to record the remains. This excavation will be starting within the next few weeks and we hope to report on it further in subsequent issues.

The excavation presents a number of practical difficulties, including a considerable depth of partly contaminated material dumped on the site in modern times, and the close proximity of high voltage overhead power lines. It is not just urban sites that have such problems! Nonetheless, an appreciable amount of Roman pottery was found during the evaluation phase, along with such features as ditches, pits, drains, and post-holes. It is therefore anticipated that the excavation will add considerably to our knowledge of Romano-British settlement in Herefordshire.

Julian Cotton, Archaeological Advisor

“the excavation will add considerably to our knowledge of Romano-British settlement in Herefordshire”



The sluice at Moccas following clearance of undergrowth. Photo: Tim Hoverd.

A sluice of Moccas

In 2000, English Nature extended the National Nature Reserve boundary of Moccas Deer Park to the east, to take in a series of silted marshy pools. This also took in the site of medieval Moccas Castle.

Since then, a programme of drainage and conservation works have taken place in the new extension, with the ultimate aim of re-flooding the pools and restoring the wetland habitats. This has necessitated finding out more about how the complex system of water management put in place in the eighteenth century worked.

As part of these studies, it was decided to repair a sluice near to the south entrance to a culvert under the Bredwardine to Madley road. Before doing so, EN staff asked Herefordshire Archaeology to carry out a survey and recording of the sluice stonework. This proved to be quite difficult, given the growth of sycamore and the partial collapse of stonework.

The sluice was found to have an hour-glass shape in plan, with originally a fixed boarded ‘sluice gate’. The structure was a fine, if modest, piece of ‘Estate furniture’ and as such merited both the recording and the restoration now in progress. The archaeological work is being complemented by palaeo-environmental investigation of the peat-filled hollows that were once pools here.

Tim Hoverd, Archaeological Projects Officer



*Test-pit digging at Whitbourne.
Photo: Tim Hoverd.*

The Asda 'shopping list'

Many of our readers will be aware that work has recently started on the construction of Hereford's new ASDA development, immediately to the west of the Belmont roundabout on the south bank of the River Wye. As part of the extensive and ongoing archaeological project connected with this development we are able to report a number of finds already in the basket, and a few more items we hope to be taking to the checkouts very soon.

An area including the western part of the store itself and the location of the new bowling green has been of particular interest. It has produced good evidence of Neolithic occupation, with finds of worked flint, early pottery, preserved seeds, and an intact hearth. Archaeological excavation of this area is now complete.

Archaeological excavation and recording is now beginning close to the former location of the 'Greyhound Dog' pub. Trial trenching has already indicated the presence of suburban medieval features here. Also, work will soon start on surveying and protecting the former Tramway embankment that forms the northern perimeter of the ASDA development.

Large scale developments such as this have a habit of springing a few surprises at a late stage, so watch this space – the weekly shop isn't finished yet....

Julian Cotton

People of Old Whitbourne

The archaeological component of the Whitbourne Local Heritage Initiative project in 2005 has been an outstanding success, with the investigation and dating of a 'lynchet' field system for the first time in the county, and the first investigation of a bank of field kilns making bricks and tiles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries among the most exciting findings.

Local volunteers undertook this work under supervision from Herefordshire Archaeology staff. The residents then went on to excavate test-pits on the 'Old Whitbourne' settlement itself, after receiving training in how to dig and record the pits. It was this work that established that the village has remained pretty much where it is at least since the twelfth century. Surprisingly, there were finds of exotic glazed pottery from as far afield as Hampshire – though this could have been used in the adjacent Bishop's Palace, only to be disposed of in the village.

Bracken beating at Bircher Common

Two weeks in a warm but sometimes wet September saw Herefordshire Archaeology staff and National Trust working holiday participants undertake large-scale vegetation clearance and measured survey on two complex late prehistoric earthwork sites on Bircher Common.

The first site tackled was an enclosure on, and beyond, the western extremity of the Common. Clearance of bracken and small trees revealed a complex entrance-way and a series of platforms and terraces in the interior. Fascinatingly, the earthwork evidence also survived for the 'woodland history' of the site, which saw it included and excluded from neighbouring woodland several times since the medieval period.

The second site was an enclosure entirely engulfed in bracken close to Bircher Coppice on the eastern side of the Common. One circular hut stance was known to exist within the interior of this former settlement, and others were suspected before the present survey. However, a total of eight such platforms have now been recorded here.

Tim Hoverd

Bridge-building at The Weir

“We were quick to suggest this site as one to look at during the Big Roman Dig”

Over the past four years, Herefordshire Archaeology staff have carried out a series of surveys – including measured earthwork recording and geophysical survey – at The National Trust’s Weir property at Kenchester. This work had revealed the presence of complex field system earthworks, and had demonstrated the remarkable survival of a Roman road causeway across the floodplain to the ancient crossing point of the Wye here.

It had even led to the suggestion that there might be a river-port settlement by the crossing point itself. Therefore, when researchers for Time Team’s 2005 ‘Big Roman Dig’ were looking for sites to examine that would tell the story of the communications network of the Roman province of Britannia, we were quick to suggest this site as one to look at.

So, over the course of a fortnight in July, we were able to deploy the TT resources to explore, and to capture on film, how the Romans carried their road from Chester to Caerleon over the Wye. In the event, we found not one crossing-point, but three – but to find out more, you’ll need to come to hear the talk at the annual Symposium.... or wait until the next issue of this newsletter comes out (8, 4 – for December 2005).

Keith Ray,



*Excavations in progress at The Weir, Kenchester.
Photo: Tim Hoverd.*

People

With projects and funding streams coming to an end, this has been a time of change within the Conservation Section. Dr Jess Allen completed the Lifescapes LEADER+ biodiversity project and has left to become a dancer. Clementine Lovell, Community archaeologist completed her work on the Frome Valley, Upton Bishop and Whitbourne projects and has left to pursue her career as a soprano.

Meanwhile, Field Archaeologists Richard Lello and David Williams completed their contracts at the end of September, and Miranda Green finished her three-year stint as SMR New Audiences Officer.

However, as we go to press, our vacant ‘landscape archaeologist’ post has been filled, and we have also appointed an urban archaeologist. More details in the next issue.

Upton Bishop – manor no more

Work on the other current Local Heritage Initiative project that Herefordshire Archaeology staff members are contributing to has also continued apace this late summer. The discovery of traces of the medieval village around the church has included the tracing of a remarkable sequence of activity.

In test-pits in a field to the north of the church we have located the site of the medieval manor. This was a wealthy structure, to judge from the large quantities of glazed roof-tile and the stone foundations and building debris. However, this was demolished soon after the middle of the fourteenth century, possibly as a result of the pestilence and famine that affected much of the county then. Extraordinarily, the site was then given over to intensive iron smelting in the late medieval period.

The importance of this change of use is also that it has provided the first extensive evidence for medieval industrial-scale iron working in this part of the county.

Tim Hoverd