

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TODAY

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Lugg Valley Archaeology

The river Lugg is Herefordshire's 'second river' and, together with its two main tributaries, the Arrow and the Frome, it crosses a significant land area within the north of the county. In fact it is fair to characterise north Herefordshire as the land of these three rivers – apart from the valley of the Teme that traverses much of the northern border with the counties of Shropshire and Worcestershire.

Given this geographical centrality, it is hardly surprising to find that the Lugg valley has been an important focus for human activity for millennia. The archaeology of the valley is itself both important and varied. 2006 sees a number of archaeological projects and initiatives based on and within the Lugg valley, so this issue of Historic Environment Today is largely devoted to items looking at the Lugg and its historic environment.

One project represents the first ever study devoted to improving knowledge of the whole of the Lugg valley within Herefordshire. The Lugg Valley Archaeology, Landscape Change and Conservation Project, the latest Herefordshire Archaeology LEADER+ Herefordshire Rivers project is being directed by Peter Dorling and is now half way through its year-long programme. Two site investigations undertaken as part of this project have already transformed our understanding of the Neolithic period in the county (see entries below).

The aim is to sustain the work of the project into the future locally. One way of doing so is to form a 'Lugg Valley Heritage Network' that will promote survey and other works within the valley. It is hoped that this will include studies on the mills and the promotion of heritage facilities at the former Wellington Quarry (see entries below).

Keith Ray, County Archaeologist

Flying the Lugg



The lower Lugg valley from the air in winter.

Since 2002, Chris Musson has been working with Herefordshire Archaeology on an aerial archaeological survey project funded by English Heritage. One focus of this project each year has been to fly the Arrow, the Frome, and now the Lugg to contribute to the valley project underway in each area. In 2004 we carried out a small scale excavation in the Frome valley, as part of the Frome project on an enclosed late prehistoric/Romano-British settlement at Ashperton that Chris had recorded only in 2003.

In the Lugg valley this year, Chris is recording both the historic landscape and archaeological sites – including the project excavations in this issue. This will have provided new records of already known sites and hopefully added some entirely new sites. It also provides a contemporary record of landscape change. This will complement the terrestrial view logged by the archaeological survey team and volunteers.

“The aerial record....will complement the terrestrial view of landscape change in the Lugg valley logged by the archaeologists and volunteers”.

Inside : Excavations ♦ Lugg Historic Landscape ♦ Historic Mills

All change in Lugg historic landscape

The Lugg Valley Archaeology, Landscape Change and Conservation Project is looking at a variety of dimensions of change. One view will be gained in the geomorphological study being carried out by Professor Mark Macklin and his staff at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. They are mapping the course of the river Lugg, including its former courses – to show how it has altered its character through time.

Meanwhile, the excavations at Stapleton and Bodenham, and hopefully also at Kingsland, will throw light upon how particular places in the landscape have been created and used through time. Surveys of buildings in the landscape being undertaken by volunteers will show what is locally distinctive, and will provide clues as to how and why this variety has emerged. And survey of individual farms and the wider landscape will chart how changes in farming practice and water management are reflected in today's fields.

Survey of the area will extend also to the views of residents about their environment. A questionnaire will seek to 'profile' attitudes to the historic landscape of the valley.



Excavations in progress at the Stapleton 'henge'.

“A henge was probably a community facility – a bit like combining a village hall with the parish church”

‘An early village hall’

Imagine an early morning in January 2006, on a day more suited to igloo building than excavation. On a day like this, Herefordshire Archaeology cut its first turf of the year, as part of the Lugg valley LEADER+ project. The site complex, just south of Stapleton, consisted of three sites first identified by aerial photography. The earliest of these is reminiscent of a later Neolithic henge monument (HSM 43269).

The remains consisted of a 17m diameter ditch, with an entrance in the east side. There was no physical evidence on the ground to suggest an exterior bank, but excavation of the ditches clearly indicated that the primary fills were from outside the monument. The only datable pottery recovered was of Bronze Age type and was from the upper ditch fill. There was also a small quantity of cremated bone from the upper fill of the southern terminal, but there was no central burial. A henge was probably a community facility – a bit like combining a village hall with a parish church, only 4500 years ago.

The second feature was a large rectangular enclosure (HSM 43267). No finds were recovered from this feature, but the V shaped ditch is indicative of the Iron Age period. Lastly was a linear crop mark that was shown to be a trackway (HSM 43268) dating from the Romano-British period. Post excavation work is still underway and we especially await the pottery specialist report and the results of radiocarbon dating.

These discoveries are important, for two reasons. The henge shows how communities were visiting the valley in remote prehistory, and how 1000 years later people came to the already ancient site to bury the debris from a cremation pyre. Secondly the Iron Age farm and Roman period trackway take the story on a further 1000 years.

David Williams, Project Archaeologist

People

Peter Dorling's 'landscape team' welcomed both Natalie Preece and David Williams as Project Archaeologists early in 2006, they will be assisting Peter to deliver the Lugg Valley project. Natalie has a degree in archaeology, but joined us from a technical role in Transportation within the Council. David was job-share Field Archaeologist with Herefordshire Archaeology up until September 2005.

In December 2005 we bade farewell to Rebecca Roseff as job-share Sites and Monuments Record Officer. Lucie Dingwall replaced her in May (see profile in the next issue). Meanwhile, the new Conservation Technician is Rachel Elliott, who began work with the section in April. One of her first tasks has been to help to produce this edition of HET – for which, many thanks!

Heritage Protection Review – ‘Heritage Partnership Agreements’

This is the third in a series of pieces introducing aspects of the proposals for reforming the way in which the archaeological and historic built heritage will be protected. Central to the new simplified procedures being planned are ‘Heritage Partnership Agreements’ – HPA.

Currently, if you own a block of land with multiple designations eg. Listed Buildings, you are faced with a continual process of submitting applications for consent whenever you want to effect a change, however minor. The idea of HPA is that an agreement is made that specifies the works planned and agreed for a defined period. The White Paper on Heritage Protection is at present (re)scheduled for October 2006.



Mill on the Lugg: Lugg mills near Hereford were re-instated after the demise of the intended navigation.

‘the Network represents a new kind of heritage partnership in the county’

Networking the Lugg

In February 2006, a Lugg Valley Heritage Network was formed. The idea is that, initially with practical and organisational assistance from Herefordshire Archaeology, local residents interested in heritage from the Presteigne area to Lugwardine and Mordiford, meet to share information and activities. The aim is to grow the organisational framework through the secondment of people who have established and operated action groups.

These groups have special interests, with a mills group and an orchards group already forming. They also ‘coalesce’ around particular activities. Examples are earthwork surveys and monument management work parties. It was suggested that the Network might adopt a positive campaigning role, with the promotion of positive ideas - like electricity generation at former mill sites.

Mills of the past - for the future

It is hoped that the Lugg Valley Heritage Network represents a new kind of heritage partnership. One idea was featured in a front-page article in The Hereford Times in February. This was that heritage remains are ‘assets’ that may have a practical use for the local economy beyond tourism. An alternative to the impact of wind farms, there is considerable potential to generate energy from the installation of generators at former mills and mill sites on the river Lugg.

This idea is not new. In the nineteenth century, the Arkwrights generated power for their saw-mill at Hampton Court. Moreover, Aymestrey mill has had its own turbine producing electricity for domestic use since 1980. From the survey of former mill sites future locations for turbine installation could be identified. Historic mills are very much on the agenda, as nationally renowned mill enthusiast and restorer Alan Stoyel has moved to the county. Alan organised the first ever opening of Herefordshire mills in celebration of National Mills Weekend when, no fewer than nine mill owners opened their doors to the public.

Keith Ray, County Archaeologist

“...the landscape of the valley above Lugg Bridge is undergoing a cumulative transformation”

An aggregate transformation

Herefordshire Archaeology has been successful in its bid to English Heritage for funding from the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund to study the impact of gravel quarrying in the lower Lugg valley. Although the lakes at Bodenham are the legacy of post-war extraction immediately below Dinmore Hill, since the mid-1980s the focus has shifted southwards. With the Wellington Quarry operations extended into the former Moreton Camp, the Lugg Bridge Quarry in progress, and permissions to be enacted at Upper Lyde and St. Dormat's farm, the landscape of this part of the valley is undergoing a cumulative transformation.

The first stage of the new project will involve a review of past discoveries in the area, and the development of a research framework. The aim is also to study the geomorphology of the alluvial landscape to better predict where early settlement was located.

Lugg buildings – not just mills

Lugg valley buildings are now being studied to determine local distinctiveness as part of the LEADER+ project. We hope to be able to identify variations in building style, construction techniques and materials, not just from north to south but on a parish by parish basis. Work within nine of the 23 Lugg parishes is already underway, recording all the buildings in a simplified way, whether the building is built of brick or stone, the roof, tile or slate, one or two storeys, domestic or agricultural etc. If you or your group is interested in helping with the survey please contact Natalie Preece on 01432 383238 or npreece@herefordshire.gov.uk.

Contact us

If you have any comments on HET, or any news of discoveries that you want to share, contact us at archaeologists@herefordshire.gov.uk.

'Herefordshire's earliest settlement'

The second excavation taking place as part of the Lugg Valley LEADER+ project was in March at Hill Croft Field, Bodenham, with the help of a small but determined group of local volunteers. This site, like that at Stapleton, was also identified from aerial photography featuring a large oval crop mark with a possible entrance in the north. This transpires to be so far the earliest known built settlement or gathering place known in Herefordshire.

Following a geophysical survey three trenches were excavated to determine the nature and date of the enclosure. The most important was opened up over the possible entrance. Two roughly squared-ended ditch terminals were identified, either side of a 4.50m wide entrance, made all the more impressive as the ditches were cut into limestone. Finds from the base of the western ditch terminal consisted primarily of animal bone and snail shells, but more importantly, there were also small fragments of what appear to be human jaw. Sherds of plain bowl pottery and pieces of worked flint blades date the site to the earlier Neolithic period. However, archaeologists from Cardiff University will be co-ordinating the precision radiocarbon dating of the bone and charcoal as part of a nation-wide study of early Neolithic enclosures.

Peter Dorling, Landscape Archaeologist



The Hill Croft Field enclosure ditch terminal being excavated