

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TODAY

Herefordshire Council's Historic Environment Newsletter

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A special urban issue

This issue of *Historic Environment Today* is dedicated to catching up with news from Herefordshire's historic towns – present and former market towns and Hereford city itself. There's much to report – excavations, building surveys, historical research and archaeological research – undertaken by the whole range of agencies active in the county: local community groups, archaeological contractors, consultants, researchers and *Herefordshire Archaeology* staff. The future of the urban past is changing fast...

Nigel Baker, Urban Archaeologist & guest editor

A new database for Hereford

Last year work began on the Hereford Urban Archaeological Database (UAD), a major project to enhance and re-organise the archaeological records for the city held by the county Sites & Monuments Record. Hereford is one of about thirty of the top English historic towns to receive funding for such work from English Heritage as part of their national *Urban Archaeological Strategy* programme. The UAD aims to provide a comprehensive and accurate summary of the latest archaeological information concerning the city's monuments together with a brief record of every archaeological excavation trench, watching-brief or survey. The UAD commenced with a review of the city's oldest archaeological records, compiled before 1914 by amateur archaeologists with a keen eye for urban topography and for whatever turned up on construction sites and in roadworks (see article overleaf). Next on the agenda was the Edgar Street Grid, the area of north Hereford earmarked for a major urban regeneration campaign following the impending move of the Victorian cattle market. Evaluation on the cattle market has already found Beaker pottery and a pit.

Weobley building discoveries

Phase III of the Weobley Castle Project, run by Weobley & District Local History Group and funded through the Local Heritage Initiative, has been a study of the Borough's medieval buildings. This has involved reviewing the RCHM findings of 1933 in conjunction with visiting over 50 buildings in order to select eight of them for more detailed study and from these to choose three for tree-ring dating. The work has been highly productive in terms of opening the way to a comprehensive reassessment of Weobley's standing archaeology.

“the work of a team of local carpenters”

A finding of some significance is the discovery that Weobley has more than three Wealden-type houses – also known as half-Wealdens. For years it has been acknowledged that Unicorn House in the High Street formed two units, and No. 4 Portland Place just one, of three 'outliers' of the Wealden-type house – the only ones in Herefordshire. However, the recent research has revealed another five of this rare design all of which date from the mid-fifteenth century. Because they use indigenous Weobley features it is likely that they were the work of a team of local carpenters incorporating elements of the design from elsewhere. Tree-ring dating on three buildings, carried out by Dr Ian Tyers from Sheffield, produced various dates in the mid-to-late 15th century which can be linked, through stylistic and structural evidence, to other Weobley houses and it is now possible to conclude that the township underwent a significant phase of rebuilding during the 15th century and that this coincided with a period of renewed activity on the castle site.

*Duncan James.
Insight Historic Buildings Research.*

Inside : Gaol Street Excavations ♦ New Surveys ♦ Forthcoming Events

Gaol Street excavations, Hereford

In 2006 Archaeological Investigations Ltd (AIL) excavated a site between Bath Street and Gaol Street ahead of the development of new houses. Discoveries included the gravel rampart thrown up at the end of the 12th century to enclose the new market place (now High Town), its external ditch, and part of a building built up against the back of the defences. This is possibly the earliest structure using stone footings to have been discovered in the city since the possible Saxon cellar uncovered during the Cathedral Library excavations in 1993. Further exploration on the site revealed an earlier building in the same location built using earth-fast posts (a more common occurrence in Hereford at the time). The earliest use of the building appears to have been for metalworking, based on evidence for considerable burning and hammer-scale (small sherds of iron created during smithing).

“a rare find of a medieval tuning peg”

From the presence of a quantity of horn cores and feet bones from cattle, sheep and goat, the site appears to have been used for processing animal skins or tanning by the 13th century. This is an unusual location for a tannery as it lies within the city's defences. Tanneries are very smelly and therefore tended to be kept away from areas of dense occupation; they also need access to a good water supply whereas this was located on the 'wrong' side of the defences when there was a stream running round the city ditch. Perhaps this indicates that the defences did not then comprise anything more substantial than the brushwood and thorn palings documented in 1223. If this were the case then a 13th-century tannery might well have been supplied with water by nipping over the bank and bringing buckets back to fill the tanning vats (no pits were found on the site). Objects recovered included a well-preserved and rare find of a medieval tuning peg from a stringed instrument of 13th-century date such as a harp or lyre.

Andy Boucher, Managing Director, AIL

The Crystal Rooms, Hereford

In January and February this year Archenfield Archaeology excavated on the site of the former Crystal Rooms nightclub between Bridge Street and Gwynne Street. Archaeological deposits were expected to be deep and complex, and to date over 600 contexts have been recorded – including a multitude of post-medieval walls, floors, wells and yard surfaces and, in a 20-metre area behind the Bridge Street frontage, these covered older medieval deposits.

“excellent preservation of organic matter...”

Any medieval buildings along Bridge Street had been destroyed by cellars, but in the back-plot areas a dense concentration of inter-cutting pits was excavated. One of the deeper cesspits was cut below the water table and the excellent preservation of organic matter within the cess deposits will provide information on both the diet and the health of people at that time. One of the specific aims of the excavation was to investigate the feature known as the King's Ditch. It is orientated north-south and runs through the rear of the site, immediately east of the Gwynne Street warehouse.



Looking west across the Crystal Rooms site

A trench was positioned roughly in the centre of the King's Ditch and to everyone's surprise, revealed the north-east corner of a substantial medieval wall that cut peat-like deposits. At least one internal wall and the floor of a porch/outbuilding were recorded; its function may become clear after deposits retrieved from within it have been analysed. Further trenches to the west of the building revealed the western edge of the ditch.

Dan Lewis, Archenfield Archaeology

A neglected archaeological pioneer

Although Alfred Watkins is rightly celebrated as an early exponent of archaeology in Hereford, one name that is less well known but should arguably be accorded similar recognition is that of Walter Pilley (1848-1913). The donor of the Pilley Collection of local history to the City Library, he was a confectioner and caterer based in Eign Street. A magistrate, he was first elected as a city councillor in 1906 and served twice as Mayor of Hereford in 1909-10 and 1910-11.



Walter Pilley in his mayoral robes

A bibliophile and numismatist, Pilley was also a keen antiquarian. In 1899, redevelopment of no. 34 High Town (now part of Marks & Spencer's) revealed an infilled ditch twenty feet deep that Pilley correctly recognised as part of the town's early defences.

“the Hereford Times recorded his descent of deep roadworks in Broad Street”

In an article in the *Hereford Times* ('The first town of Hereford' September 9 1899) he linked this discovery to others in Eign Street, Broad Street and High Town to reconstruct this part of the pre-Norman defences and published the first reconstruction map ever produced of Anglo-Saxon Hereford. In March 1905 the *Hereford Times* recorded his descent of deep roadworks in Broad Street in search of the Saxon north gate, outside the City Arms Hotel. Many of Pilley's observations were recycled by Alfred Watkin's in his 1920 Woolhope article on the King's Ditch, but it was not until the 1950s and 60s that controlled excavation finally proved the accuracy of Pilley's predictions.

New surveys of Ross and Kington

Herefordshire Archaeology has embarked on a series of new 'archaeological profiles' of the county's five market towns, the first since those of the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey (now available on line) in the mid-90s. Ross, completed last October, will form a template for the series. It includes a predictive study of the survival of buried archaeological remains, a town-plan analysis, a topographical survey to locate the terraces dug into the town-centre gradients and a characterisation of the present townscape that includes a 'date of buildings survey' to show how the historic town centre is composed. The dozen archaeological projects undertaken in the town centre since 1991 are summarised in a gazetteer. The profile concludes with an agenda for future research – a long one, given that so little is known of the origins, early life and many of the present buildings of the medieval town.

“it would be difficult to find a better-preserved or more perfectly executed single-phase medieval planned town”

A consultation draft has also been completed for Kington, the second town on the list and – like Ross – the subject of a forthcoming appraisal of its Conservation Area, to which the archaeological profile will contribute. Kington is a town with two centres. At the top of the hill is 'Old Kington', the site of the original borough, marked by the church, the castle mound and scattered housing.

'New Kington', the present town centre, lies in the valley bottom below. It would be difficult to find a better-preserved or more perfectly executed single-phase medieval planned town: a symmetrical T-plan, serviced by lanes on all sides with well-preserved plots throughout, undamaged by the amalgamations and back-lands clearances that have so compromised so many other, larger, market towns. And yet, the documentary evidence seen so far for Kington c.1300 suggests it was more agricultural than urban. Work continues...

Ledbury: England's Past for Everyone

England's Past for Everyone (EPE) is an exciting project of the Victoria County History (VCH). Here in Herefordshire the project is working on a history of Ledbury, supported by the local VCH Trustees, Herefordshire Council and the University of Gloucestershire. During the four years of the project, two paperback books will be produced. The first, bringing the story from the 16th century right up to date, is now being written: the focus is on Ledbury as a market town and its connections with the local area and it should be published in the spring of 2008. The second volume will complement Joe Hillaby's work on the medieval town and will include a section on the district's prehistory. Later this year we will begin to put some of our results onto our website (www.englishspasforeveryone.org.uk) to allow the detailed research to be shared with a wider public.

“research into the origins of Ledbury's street names...”

The volunteer projects are proving most successful. The Buildings Group is recording the shop frontages in the main streets and doing some documentary research on changes in their use over time. The Census Group is transcribing the enumerators' books for the 1851-1901 censuses, entering the data onto a database and analysing various aspects of Ledbury's population. The Oral History Group has interviewed some two dozen elderly residents, focussing particularly on the impact of World War 2. The Parish Registers Group is using the pre-1850 registers to extend our understanding of the occupational structure of the town before the mid-19th-century censuses and to do some demographic analysis of the earlier centuries. The Street Names Group's research into the origins of Ledbury's street names, down to the most modern of the housing estates, is about to be published as a booklet by Logaston Press. The Wills Group is transcribing wills and inventories from the mid-16th century to 1700 and entering the material onto a database. This provides a fascinating glimpse of people in the past – their family connections, their wealth (or otherwise), the furnishing of their homes.

A public meeting will be held at the Burgage Hall, Church Lane, Ledbury at 7.30 p.m. on 22 May 2007 to tell people about the progress of the so far and to outline future activity, including plans to start an archaeological-interest group in the early summer of 2007, to contribute towards the second volume on medieval Ledbury. We also hope that some of those who have mastered early modern palaeography for the wills may go on to look at medieval documents. While the building recording group has the scope to continue, we do not propose to undertake an oral history project on medieval Ledbury – unless anyone knows a good medium?

Dr Sylvia Pinches

Forthcoming Events:

Friday 6th July (7.30pm): Annual Public Lecture, Professor Julian Thomas on the Neolithic period in Britain and the Welsh Marches. The Courtyard Theatre, Hereford

Saturday 21st July (1.30-4.30pm): The History Mystery Trail: Breinton Church

Sunday 22nd July (2.30-4.30pm): Who built Hereford? A guided walk.

Saturday 10th November: The Annual Symposium. Courtyard Theatre, Hereford

New contact number for Herefordshire Archaeology

Jacky Denovan, Herefordshire Archaeology's administrator, has a new phone number. To book places for events and walks and for general enquiries, contact her on 01432 260470 or archaeologists@herefordshire.gov.uk