

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TODAY

Herefordshire Council's Historic Environment Newsletter

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Infrastructure and Archaeology

Although it is probably true to say that Herefordshire, "England's most rural county", has not been greatly affected by the kinds of large infrastructure developments that have transformed some other parts of the country, it would be wrong to say that such developments have been wholly absent, either in the past or more recently.

This year has been notable for the passage through Herefordshire of one of Europe's largest construction projects for some years, a major natural gas pipeline from South Wales to Gloucestershire. The archaeological background to this pipeline, and some of the findings made on it to date, are discussed below.

It needs to be stressed that Herefordshire Archaeology were fully involved in early and extensive archaeological consultations about this Pipeline, and the archaeological methods to be adopted prior to and during its construction. We are currently monitoring the associated archaeological project on behalf of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Also in this edition, the particularly significant discoveries made during construction of the new Rotherwas Access Road to the south of Hereford are featured. In addition, a short summary is provided of archaeological work on a replacement water main between Portway and Ledbury.

Investigations of Roman Roads that took place (and were reported on in H.E.T.) some time ago are revisited. These investigations were on the A4103 'Roman Road', and at The Weir, Kenchester. Finally, an account is given of recent restoration work along the route of the former Hereford and Gloucester canal.

*Julian Cotton, Herefordshire Archaeology,
Guest Editor*

Hereford/Gloucester canal - Yarkhill

Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal Trust have the aim of restoring the full 34 miles, 22 locks and three tunnels of the canal that runs from the River Severn at Gloucester, via Newent, Dymock and Ledbury, to the city of Hereford. In Herefordshire the Canal Trust has sites at Aylestone Park and Yarkhill.

In 1994 an agreement was made with Mrs. Oram of Whitwick Manor for the Canal Trust to control and restore a 962-yard stretch of canal bordering the Manor's southwest boundary. This stretch is the end of the 10-mile summit level, which runs from just outside Ledbury. Significant clearance work was carried out between 1994 /1996, the stretch of canal was returned to water. A culvert that passed under the canal, connecting land drainage ditches, later collapsed causing loss of water. The culvert was repaired early in 2005.



Tidied - up stretch of canal

In the last 18 months a dedicated team of volunteers has been looking after and improving the Yarkhill site. Accessed by permissive footpaths the towpath is now a pleasant walk, the canal bed is clear of most major willow growth, and, even though this length has no long-term water supply, for part of the year the canal is in water.

Chris High, Hereford and Gloucester canal Trust

Inside : Natural Gas Pipeline ♦ Roman Road ♦ Rotherwas Access Road

Felindre - Tirley Natural Gas Pipeline

Some fascinating evidence of our Iron Age and Roman ancestors has been uncovered by archaeologists working on a new natural gas pipeline for National Grid.



Romano-British pottery found on the pipeline near Foy

A team from Network Archaeology Ltd, working in partnership with Murphy Pipelines Ltd, have made the discoveries during investigations along the 110km long Brecon to Tirley Pipeline (part of the Milford Haven Gas Connection Projects), which is currently being built across the counties of Powys, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. The Herefordshire section of the pipeline runs from Cusop to Kempley.

Several years careful planning by National Grid took a staged approach, comprising desk-based assessment, LIDAR survey, reconnaissance survey, fieldwalking survey, trench evaluation, and open-area excavation, in advance of construction. Very important archaeological sites were avoided by re-routing the pipeline. Some of the more significant advance discoveries in Herefordshire included a Romano-British field boundary near Dorstone, and an Iron Age / Romano-British settlement enclosure, prehistoric pit alignment and old stream channel containing Roman pottery near Hinton, by Peterchurch.

Also found was part of a Romano British site south of Kingstone, a Romano-British settlement enclosure (that produced some higher status goods, and evidence of metallurgical activity) northwest of Peterstow, and a Romano-British settlement enclosure and possible cremation south of Foy, across the Wye.

Advance works proved so successful that very few new sites have been revealed during recent observation of construction activities, the most significant of these being an Iron Age structure northeast of Ross; a post-medieval structure north of Bridstow, and prehistoric pits and a Romano-British settlement enclosure near Pencoyd.

Finds and samples from all of the above sites have been carefully removed and sent away for further analysis. The archaeological field investigations are almost complete. Now begins the process of reporting what will no doubt prove to be a fascinating insight into Herefordshire's landscape long ago.

Graham Cruse, Network Archaeology

Roman Road Revisited

As previously reported in *Historic Environment Today*, (Vol. 7 Issue 2) archaeological investigations were undertaken on behalf of Herefordshire Council, along the route of the A4103 Roman Road Improvement Scheme. The modern highway lies over a stretch of the original Roman road that linked the Roman towns of Stretton Grandison and Kenchester (*Magnis*). The road is thought to have been constructed in the period of the Roman conquest of Wales (c AD 47-70).

“The Roman road surface comprised a compacted layer of cobbles and smaller pebble gravel”

The Roman road surface comprised a compacted layer of cobbles and smaller pebble gravel, generally dug into a shallow trench, and bounded by roadside ditches which were engineered to drain water into a pool at Veldifer. Analysis of environmental remains recovered from the ditches indicates that the road existed in an open, often wet, landscape of ungrazed grassland, interspersed with cultivated fields.

Small stretches of metalled tracks were revealed, leading off from the main route alongside the Yazor Brook and south-east of Stretton Sugwas. Finally three cremation burials were identified within the soils at Stretton Sugwas. They are conjectured to be of later Roman date. Although badly disturbed, one was identifiable, as the remains of an older juvenile or adolescent of unknown sex.

The road is thought to have seen a decline in traffic from the late 2nd century AD (c AD 150+), after which time the road was no longer maintained and the ditches were allowed to silt up. However this was clearly not the end of the story, as the route has remained in use to the present day.

Tom Vaughan, Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service

The Weir, in Retrospect

In July 2005, the Roman road crossing of the river Wye at Kenchester west of Hereford was the subject of a field investigation by *Herefordshire Archaeology* in association with Wildfire TV (for Channel 4 Television) and The National Trust. This was one of nine key sites nation-wide featured in the week-long *Time Team* 'Big Roman Dig' broadcasts, and was the only site so featured in the West Midlands.

The Roman road at The Weir produced some surprises. The first was that, beyond the first 100m out from the edge of the floodplain, the character of the 'causeway' changes considerably. In effect, from this point the road *is* the causeway, and foundations were simply consolidated over the alluvium.

The composite construction of the road in this part of its course was interesting – with a 'high/fast' element to the east and a 'low/slow' element to the west. The latter comprised large cobbles set directly onto the foundation matrix, obscuring the latter from view.

The cobbles showed much wear, and there were broad worn ruts (that approximated the width of broad axles) that were noted running axially along the roadway. There was also surface scratching of cobbles, suggesting use by slow moving heavy vehicles that had experienced slippage in wet conditions. In contrast the higher roadway on the eastern side of the road was made up of a light gravel and mortar matrix.



Composite roadway, from west

The evidence for maintenance of the two roadways was also interesting. The procedure for the 'lower' western carriageway appeared to have been simply to patch the surface where it had become worn or stones had lifted out. In contrast, both the foundation and the surface of the 'upper' road were re-laid on top of the old surface when the latter had begun to break up. This had occurred twice during the time when the road was in use.

Tim Hoverd, Herefordshire Archaeology

Ledbury Trunk Main

Border Archaeology are carrying out a series of archaeological investigations along a replacement Welsh Water pipeline running from the reservoir at Portway across the Lower Lugg and Frome valleys to Ledbury.

“The landscape through which the pipeline passes is one of high archaeological potential”

The landscape through which the pipeline passes is one of high archaeological potential which has previously revealed evidence of prehistoric, Roman, medieval and post-medieval activity, including the Roman urban settlement at Stretton Grandison and the remains of the Hereford and Gloucester Canal dating from the 1840's.

Where the pipeline crosses the Stretton Grandison Roman settlement and the line of the canal, Border Archaeology are pre-excavating a series of engineering access pits to establish, prior to the insertion of the new main, the nature and depth of archaeological remains and to assess the potential of the deposits encountered for palaeo-environmental analysis.

Archaeological observation of the topsoil strip extending from the Bewdley Bank Reservoir to Lower Lyde Farm has so far revealed some evidence of prehistoric, Roman, medieval and post-medieval activity. In relation to the first of these periods, two flint flakes provisionally identified as being of Mesolithic date have been found in fields lying to the NW of Lower Lyde Farm, in close proximity to crop-mark features identified from aerial photography.

Neil Shurety, Border Archaeology

Rotherwas Access Road

Exciting discoveries are being made along the route of the Rotherwas Access Road. Even before construction commenced, a settlement dating from the Neolithic/Bronze age had been discovered, and contract archaeologists from Worcestershire County Council were recording and excavating it.

In one location a ring of postholes that would have supported the main timbers for a Neolithic round-house were found. Further posts formed the porch of the house, which faced south (they usually did), and had a fine view of Dinedor Hill. We should not think of these buildings as “huts” as they were very substantial and probably very comfortable to live in.

Houses of this early date are only very rarely found in England (this is the first instance in Herefordshire), and represent an important addition to archaeological knowledge. From here came some of the oldest pottery (early Neolithic) yet found in the county, which, although rather crude, was elaborately decorated and well preserved.

On a nearby excavation, the remains of an ancient watercourse were found, containing well-preserved deposits dating from the early Bronze Age through to the medieval period. By looking at the pollen found we should get an idea of the landscape and environment of this part of Herefordshire as it changed through time.



Investigating cut across watercourse

“an extraordinary find has been made that is perhaps unique in the country”

Also, an extraordinary find has been made that is perhaps unique in the country. Beneath a later Roman ditch is a very large linear feature comprising an extensive spread of closely packed fire-cracked stones (usually a by-product of prehistoric cooking) laid within a wide linear depression, adjacent to a succession of fire-pits.

The whole feature forms a continuous ‘ribbon’, sloping down from south to north. The ribbon is very large, being well over 60m in length and up to 10m wide. Flint artefacts (thumbnail scrapers) found within it suggest a Bronze Age date, but it could be earlier. Interpretations of the ribbon vary, but there is little doubt that it would have been a large and important feature within the prehistoric landscape.

Simon Woodiwiss, Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service

**Herefordshire Archaeology
Annual Symposium at
The Courtyard, Hereford on
Saturday 10th November**