

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TODAY

Herefordshire Council's Historic Environment Newsletter

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Local Heritage and Initiative

The Local Heritage Initiative is ending this month. The Initiative was launched six and a half years ago and was based within The Countryside Agency. The Agency itself is also terminated this month, being amalgamated into 'Natural England' – an unfortunate title for a new quango that remains heterodox in its scope, being (despite English Nature's absorption within it also) not exclusively concerned with the natural environment.

LHI was a partnership that included also the Heritage Lottery Fund and The Nationwide Building Society. It was a small-scale funding initiative that delivered modest support to a plethora of organisations. It worked well for local groups because it didn't require the acres of form-filling and complex claiming procedures that so many other grant-giving agencies seem to find essential.

A report has just been published that summarises the achievements and lessons of the LHI. *Lessons Learnt: A review of the Local Heritage Initiative, 2000-2006* provides an overview of the rationale for and results from the projects that accounted for 1,418 grants and £22,711,309 across England during that time.

Of around 160 projects in the West Midlands, 36 were in Herefordshire. Of these, 18 were archaeological, or featured it as a significant component. We therefore provide updates on some of these briefly in this issue of HET, as a valedictory to the grant scheme, the scope but not the format of which has now been transferred to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

These are not the only 'initiatives' on local heritage, however, and in this issue we also note some other current examples of community-linked projects involving archaeology in the county.

Garway Hill – the surveys



Garway Hill from the air: The main settlement enclosure is at centre-right

One of the last LHI projects to be approved by the Countryside Agency was for Garway Hill commoners to explore the history and archaeology of Garway Hill. The starting point was a series of surveys undertaken with help from Herefordshire Archaeology staff. This included terrain mapping using aircraft-mounted radar, oblique aerial photography, and ground-based reconnaissance survey.

The surveys produced a second early farmstead enclosure to add to the well-known one north of White Rocks, and as many as three distinct early field systems. All of these were located on the upper part of the south-facing slopes of the Common, and at least one of them is contemporary with the presumed later prehistoric farmsteads (see separate article below). In early times there was definitely a 'sunny side' of the hill for human occupation – facing south. Besides enjoying spectacular views over the Monnow valley and westwards into Wales, these settlements and fields were clearly located to maximise the sunlight and lengthen the growing season.

“There was definitely a ‘sunny side’ to Garway Hill in early times – facing south”

Inside : Kilpeck Excavations ♦ HPR Local Delivery ♦ Community Commons

Churchyard stories

The 'Caring for God's Acre' charity has acted as a catalyst for several LHI projects, a component of some which involved archaeological survey. Herefordshire Archaeology staff looked at Leintwardine, Weobley, Letton, Llangarron, and, in 2006, Eye churchyards. In each case, clues were read from the local topography concerning the reasons for the churches' locations. Meanwhile, the pattern of expansion of the churchyards (historically recorded and not recorded) was mapped.

Castles and manors

A number of LHI projects have arisen from the interest of local people in the major Medieval sites in their midst. In this way, new surveys and investigations of castles and manor houses in the county have taken place over the last six years. One of the first such projects saw the Eardisland Oral History Group's archaeology team exploring Burton Court, and finding evidence of Norman wealth and kitchens. At nearby Pembridge the Amenity Trust hosted investigations of the Court House Farm moated site, and in the process uncovered hitherto unsuspected complexity in the stone buildings formerly present at the site.

Weobley Historical Society's surveys and test excavations at and around Weobley Castle, directed by George Nash, have been well publicised with two small 'popular' books published by Logaston Press, and a full report (launched this summer) in the British Archaeological Reports series. Another 'late-comer' LHI project has seen in 2006 a detailed survey of Ewyas Harold Castle by Archaeological Investigations Ltd on behalf of the local castle group. Here, geophysical surveys have recorded a number of stone structures sited behind the bailey wall.



Timber-framed buildings at Weobley: historic answers are coming out of the woodwork

The answer's in the wood

Some local history groups became so absorbed in the process of investigation that they obtained more than one award to study their past in projects that had more than one component. A highly productive innovation was the use of dendrochronology to support studies of historic buildings – with a considerable input to the analysis by local architectural historian Duncan James.

So again at Weobley, and also at Pembridge, LHI projects involving the dating of several domestic buildings have transformed our understanding of the surviving timber-framed buildings. At Pembridge, all the buildings with datable timber have now been dated, and it is clear that the 'stock' of buildings with 15th and 16th century origins is considerable there, but equally that none are earlier than this.

“At Ewyas Harold in 2006 several buildings have been traced in geophysical surveys”

People

In late May, Lucie Dingwall, the new job-share Sites and Monuments Record Officer, took up her post here. Lucie has joined us from Brecon-based software specialists ExeGeSIS, who created a new database platform to support SMRs. Before that, Lucie worked as a Project Manager with Birmingham Archaeology and on the Joint Data Team that managed the West Midlands SMR for a consortium of local authorities.

In July we have welcomed Andrew Ashcroft as Head of Planning Services, and John Stagg as Team Leader for Historic Buildings and Areas in the Conservation Section. Andrew was formerly Head of Planning for Isle of Wight County Council. John worked as Conservation Officer for many years at Worcester City Council, and most recently in Bromsgrove.

And in August, Ian Bapty, known to some in the county for his recent work as the Offa's Dyke Archaeological Management Officer, joined us to deliver the first stage of the Lower Lugg Aggregates and Archaeology project mentioned in the last issue of HET.



Excavations in progress at Garway Hill.

Heritage Protection Reform – local delivery arrangements

This is the fourth in our series of short pieces introducing aspects of the current proposals for reforming the way in which the archaeological and historic built heritage will in future be protected. (By the way, the change in title is deliberate: ‘Review’ has now officially been replaced by ‘Reform’ in the wording for the acronym ‘HPR’).

The proposals for local arrangements for delivering the reforms to simplify the system for all historic ‘assets’ in England, and that will produce ‘Heritage Protection Agreements’ (or equivalent), are the least well defined at present. Last autumn, the County Archaeologist was invited to participate in a study that examined how historic environment services are currently delivered, and whether they will have the capacity to deliver a new system. This study, by the consultants W. S. Atkins Environmental, has now been reported upon. Although not yet made public, its conclusions will inform the proposals included within the White Paper.

One idea that has been put forward is that while responsibility for designation should be transferred from the Secretary of State for Culture to English Heritage, responsibility for the granting of consent for works at monuments should be devolved to local government. Much of the work of monitoring compliance with HP Agreements may also be carried out locally. Clearly, this will have significant implications for the scope and scale of the monument and landscape management work undertaken by Conservation services operated by Councils.

Garway Hill – the excavation

Detailed earthwork surveys were made of the two settlement enclosures and the more prominent of the field system traces located in the preliminary surveys. Local theories about the date of the main enclosure were many and varied, so it was decided to open three trenches to trace its development.

The trench near the apparent entrance was the most productive. Not only did it confirm this south-east facing gap in the earthwork as the original entrance, but it also showed that the stretch of wall either side of the former gateway was faced in stone. Moreover, it produced Middle Iron Age pottery that dates occupation of the enclosure to the final centuries BC. In the trench within the interior, at least one clay-floored hut was found, also dated by pottery to the Iron Age.

Christopher Atkinson, Community Archaeologist

Kilpeck – under the surface

Meanwhile, another enclosure was examined at nearby Kilpeck as a preliminary exercise forming part of a Herefordshire Archaeology project looking at Medieval Marcher lordship. With again three strategically sited trenches, it was demonstrated that the enclosure north of the Kilpeck Castle was used as an outwork of the castle from the 12th century.

That anything could be gleaned from the former earthwork was remarkable, since bulldozers were used in the 1950s to level it to extend the cultivable area. The excavation also linked the site to late medieval ironworking also attested close to the church. The western side of the enclosure was found to feature a large levelled platform in use in the mid-17th century, perhaps for housing Civil War artillery.

“Given the bulldozing, it was remarkable that anything could be gleaned from excavating the former earthwork”

Upton – the enigma remains

Despite recent suggestions in the local Press that the enigma of the carved stone frieze at Upton Bishop church has been solved, we can assure HET readers that it is very much alive! Herefordshire Archaeology staff have worked through the summer to produce both a full (nearly 200 page) report on the LHI funded project there, and a more popular account illustrated in full colour.

The latter is the first in a new 'Herefordshire Community Archaeology' series of A5 format books around 60 pages in length, that are designed as readable introductions to local projects into which the county archaeology service has had a significant input. The title of the Upton book is *Enigma in Stone: Archaeology at Upton Bishop, Herefordshire, 2004-5* by Keith Ray.

And the stone? It may well have formed part of the decoration of a pre-Norman Saxon stone church, and the archway to the north door could well be a structural survival of this church, but it is still far from proven.

Whitbourne – the results

As the LHI programme comes to a close, so too does reporting of the projects concerned. *Whitbourne: The Archaeology of a Herefordshire Village* by Tim Hoverd, our Archaeological Projects Officer, was produced in March 2006 (Herefordshire Archaeology report No. 197). In its 90 pages, it describes in full the progress and results of the community archaeology project that took place there in 2005.

The archaeological project added over 60 new SMR records of earthwork and excavated features to the 76 previously known. It also produced evidence for the extent of early settlement, and the origins of local brick-making. It is hoped that the local 'People of Old Whitbourne' team will also promote a more popular book on the archaeology component of their many-faceted project.

“....hopefully another community archaeology series book will publicise this multi-faceted local project”



Excavations in progress at Kilpeck, July 2006

Community Commons + archaeology

Herefordshire Nature Trust are co-ordinating another community-linked initiative, with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This is the Community Commons Project, which aims to help commoners and local residents to improve the condition of some of the most extensive and well-used of the commons throughout the county.

Ecological surveys are being undertaken to better understand the unique habitats of these commons, and the Trust asked Herefordshire Archaeology to contribute to the information base with archaeological surveys. Early in 2006, therefore, Chris Atkinson carried out six surveys. The bulk of the discoveries were the usual traces of medieval agricultural and post-medieval industrial activity – nonetheless vital for reconstructing historic land-use.

At Cefn Hill near Michaelchurch Escley, however, he located a major prehistoric monument, several cairns, and a possible early ecclesiastical site, as well as recording an abandoned post-medieval farmstead site.

Symposium and contacts

The forthcoming Annual Symposium is earlier this year, on October 21st, as usual at the Courtyard Theatre. This year the Theatre is offering the option of a bookable buffet lunch as part of the ticket price.

Tickets are available only from the Courtyard box office (0870 122 330), but to contact Herefordshire Archaeology you can visit the website, e-mail archaeologists@herefordshire.gov.uk, or phone Jacky Denovan on 01432 260532.