

# HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TODAY

## Herefordshire Council's Historic Environment Newsletter

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### Industrial Archaeology Issue

When one thinks of Herefordshire, it is the rural landscape and its tranquillity that tends to spring to mind. Even, if most of us were asked to name ten things that historically define Herefordshire, then industry is very unlikely to figure. However, Herefordshire does have industrial archaeological sites. These range from those linked to agriculture such as brewing, tanning, and limekilns, to those that are more traditionally thought of as industrial sites such as ironworks and forges, glassworks, and brickworks.

So, to uncover a part of Herefordshire's past that is less evident than some of our more characteristic monument types, this issue of *Historic Environment Today* is devoted to industrial sites, their archaeological study and their conservation.

*Neil Rimmington, Countryside Adviser (Archaeology) & guest editor*

### New Weir Ironworks, Symonds Yat

As part of the Overlooking the Wye Heritage Lottery Funded project, a scheme of works has been started at New Weir Ironworks to improve conservation and appreciation of the remains that are within Forestry Commission owned land.

### '...jingling of bells'

Over the last month, the remains of the ironworking site that operated from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century have been the subject of a programme of tree felling and extraction. Doug Joiner's

Heavy Horse Ltd. team has been removing the felled timber from the site and adding a bit of seasonal cheer with the jingling of bells on the horses' bridles. Horse extraction was used as the nature of the site made the use of conventional forestry vehicles impractical.



*Doug Joiner's Heavy Horse team at work removing trees from the New Weir Ironworks site  
© Kate Biggs*

The next stages are to produce a management plan to guide future management of the site and carry out archaeological excavation in spring 2009 and in 2010 before erecting interpretation above the site.

*Neil Rimmington, Countryside Adviser (Archaeology)*

### The Industry of War at Rotherwas

As many people will know, the Rotherwas Industrial Estate has gradually evolved over the last 50 years from a major former munitions factory where tens of thousands of shells and other weapons were produced during both the First and Second World Wars.

ROF Rotherwas was commissioned in June 1916, and after a remarkable effort

of industrial design, organisation and construction, the first shells were produced in November of that year. The factory at Rotherwas performed the last stage in the munitions manufacturing process, and was where the explosive chemicals were combined and placed in the shell cases. Although mothballed between the wars, the factory was re-commissioned in 1939, and munitions were stored on site until the 1960s.

Despite modern development (ongoing under Herefordshire Council's Rotherwas Futures project), many First and Second World War buildings still survive at Rotherwas. Perhaps most evocative are the distinctive 'jagged' roofed First World War North-Light buildings which formed the main factory areas. In addition, administrative and service buildings, and the magazines where the chemicals were stored, also still survive. Given wholesale demolition of most former munitions factories of this period, many of these structures are now nationally rare.

Preserving this remarkable legacy is a significant conservation challenge. Herefordshire Archaeology is preparing management guidance for the Futures project with the aim of preserving key groups of buildings linked to the munitions production processes, and generally encouraging creative re-use and refurbishment of the 20<sup>th</sup> century structures.

The past of the Rotherwas Industrial Estate may be uncomfortable, but at the same time it touches the lives of the large numbers of local people who worked at the factory, and conveys a story which remains all too relevant in the modern world. This may not be a heritage to celebrate, but it is still one we should protect, remember and value.

*Ian Bapty, Senior Project Archaeologist*

## **Stony (Bronze Age) Sheep?**

Burnt mounds are a category of site well represented in the earthwork record of

upland Britain. They comprise mounds of burnt stone in an ashy matrix, covered in turf. They are often found next to or close by streams and boggy places. Upon excavation such sites have produced associated 'troughs', sometimes wood-lined, that are assumed to have been used to boil the water that the heated stones were dropped into. Experiments have shown that dropping the stones into the cold water heated it up to boiling point over a period of time, and shattered the stones. These were then cleared out and heaped up as 'waste'. Dates from such sites range from the Neolithic period through to the Medieval period, but most were created in the Bronze Age.



*Possible water trough, Moreton-on-Lugg © Robin Jackson*

From about thirty years ago, debate has heated up among archaeologists as to what burnt mounds were used for. Although early Irish literature mentions their use for cooking, bones and domestic debris have rarely been found in association with them. One alternative with analogies to 'shamans' of Siberia and elsewhere, and first put forward by Birmingham's city archaeologist Mike Hodder, is that they were prehistoric 'sweat-lodges' or saunas, used for bathing and purification ceremonies. Unfortunately, that idea is virtually untestable archaeologically. However, recent work in the Cambridgeshire fens has led to the suggestion that their regular occurrence in association with water-holes and field systems might indicate that they were used for some kind of processing – and the preparation

of wool for weaving has been put forward as one possibility.

## ‘...shamans of Siberia’

And the relevance of this to Herefordshire? Well, a variety of recent projects near Hereford have examined Bronze Age pits filled with burnt stone, and in two instances these were large spreads (but not mounds) closely associated with water courses. So this could be evidence of early ‘industry’ in the county. Meanwhile, the burnt stone used to build the ‘Rotherwas Ribbon’ surfaces may have been a by-product of such activity, but was unusual in that it is the first time in British prehistory that we have seen such material used to create a structure.

*Keith Ray, County Archaeologist*

## Limekilns

Limekilns are probably one of the most common, recognisable industrial features of our landscape. Despite, the dominance of sandstones in our County’s geology there are still significant areas and bands of limestone or calcium carbonate rich deposits that have been exploited.

As a result of being commonplace, these structures have rarely attracted funding for their conservation. As part of the Overlooking the Wye project a number of limekilns in Herefordshire are going to be conserved for the future. Work will start on these in Spring 2009.

*Neil Rimmington, Countryside Adviser (Archaeology)*

## Foundations in iron

In a volume due to be published soon by Oxbow Press of Oxford, Worcester-based archaeologist Robin Jackson has brought together the evidence that has accumulated over a hundred years for the early iron-working industry at ‘Ariconium’, the Roman period settlement east of

Ross-on-Wye. This began at an unknown date, but had already reached a considerable scale by the end of the first century BC. The importance of this industry based in the south of the county and thriving especially in the Roman period has long been appreciated. However, recent archaeological investigations have demonstrated not only how widespread this industrial activity was, but also how it often exceeded a purely domestic scale related to production for and within individual farmsteads.



*Draw arch of Whitchurch limekiln*

Two intriguing examples are the deeply buried ironworking waste found at the former Dales site north of the Priory in Leominster, and the extensive spreads of burning resulting from ironworking in the Roman period at the Bradbury Lines site near to the A49 in the southern suburbs of Hereford. A note on this latter site is soon to be published in the Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists’ Club and it is arguably a regionally important site for the history of ironworking in the county. The Dales site is interesting because the water-related industrial activity that the find attests to has been found to have been concentrated in just this part of the Medieval town.

*Keith Ray, County Archaeologist*



*The causeway and round foundation of Richard Blakemore's, the 19<sup>th</sup> century South Wales industrialist, iron visible from the air after the recent tree clearance at Little Doward, Ganarew*

## Little Doward

On Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2009, Herefordshire Archaeology will be undertaking a conservation day on Little Doward Hill Fort. The Woodland Trust have removed the conifers from the site as part of the Overlooking the Wye Project and in order to improve the visibility of a number of archaeological features and to promote the growth of grass a conservation day has been planned. Activities will include the cutting back of areas of bracken and other light undergrowth. English Heritage will be carrying out a survey of the hillfort and will give a short introduction to their work during the day.

Herefordshire Archaeology is also looking at organising future conservation days on other monuments. If you would like to attend this conservations days or would like to express interest in future ones, please contact Tim Hoverd on 01432 383352 or [thoverd@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:thoverd@herefordshire.gov.uk).

*Tim Hoverd*  
*Archaeological Projects Officer*

## Forthcoming events

**Wednesday, January 14<sup>th</sup>:** Wigmore Rolls historic landscape walk

**Wednesday, January 21<sup>st</sup>:** Little Doward volunteer conservation work day

**Wednesday February 11<sup>th</sup>:** Fownhope historic landscape walk

**Wednesday March 11<sup>th</sup>:** Wellington historic landscape walk

**Wednesday April 14<sup>th</sup>:** Little Doward historic landscape walk

## Contact Herefordshire Archaeology:

To book places for Herefordshire Archaeology events, walks and for general enquiries, contact Moira Cassidy, Herefordshire Archaeology's administrator, on 01432 260470 or [archaeologists@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:archaeologists@herefordshire.gov.uk)

***HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM  
ALL AT HEREFORDSHIRE  
ARCHAEOLOGY***