

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TODAY

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The hillforts issue

The dramatic earthwork rings which evocatively encircle many Herefordshire hilltops are the most obvious visible evidence of the county's prehistoric past. Herefordshire's 38 known hillforts typically date from between 3000 and 2000 years ago, and are part of a wider Welsh border hillfort group which is the densest concentration of such sites in western Europe.

Yet surprisingly, Herefordshire's hillforts are poorly understood. We don't even know if all the so-called 'hillforts' really had the defensive/military function which the name implies. Moreover, 20th-century land uses such as tree planting and quarrying have damaged many sites, and there is now an important need to develop positive care of surviving examples.

Fortunately, recent work is starting to address these issues. Herefordshire Archaeology excavations at Credenhill hillfort near Hereford have revealed complicated sequences of Roman and Iron Age activity, and have also illustrated varying patterns of archaeological survival within this massive site.

Elsewhere, the Environmental Stewardship scheme and the *Overlooking the Wye* Heritage Lottery Fund project have supported tree removal and conservation management programmes at hillforts such as Caplar Camp, Dinedor Camp and Little Doward.

"spectacular parts of our local heritage and landscape"

The projects reported in this issue of HET are just the start of the process of restoring Herefordshire's hillforts to their rightful place as prominent, distinctive and spectacular parts of our local heritage and landscape.

Ian Bapty, Senior Project Archaeologist & guest editor

Lugg valley project launch event



On September 30th the Lugg Valley Archaeology, Landscape Change and Conservation Project was brought to a close with the launch of public display panels, a series of information leaflets and the recently published *Herefordshire Studies in Archaeology 4: Lugg Valley* book.

Starting in Leominster library, representatives from participating community groups and other interested members of the public enjoyed a brief introduction to the project by Dr Keith Ray (the County Archaeologist), and a summary of the results from Peter Dorling (the Project Officer).

Moving on to Bodenham, the party braved chilly conditions to witness the unveiling of an information panel about the history and archaeology of the village. Fortunately, a warming cup of tea was waiting in the village hall. There was also a chance over tea to chat with the archaeologists involved in the project, and to look over the leaflets and the *Lugg Valley* book.

All in all, a very successful day!

Natalie Preece, Project Archaeologist

Excavations at Credenhill hillfort

In June and July Herefordshire Archaeology undertook the second of three planned seasons of Heritage Lottery Fund/Woodland Trust supported excavation at Credenhill hillfort. Two trenches were opened in the interior, and one through the main rampart.

The first of the interior trenches was an expansion of the 2007 excavation. As expected, this revealed complex archaeology including metallised surfaces and Roman and Iron Age features. Since preliminary analysis of the Roman pottery found last year suggested possible Roman military activity on the site, it will be interesting to see if this interpretation is confirmed by study of the much larger 2008 ceramic assemblage.

The second trench within the interior was placed within the rampart quarry ditch south of the eastern entrance. This was designed to examine evidence for Iron Age structures first identified by Stan Stanford's excavations in the 1960s. Unfortunately, this trench was flooded on several occasions, and completion was postponed until next year.



The trench through the rampart produced a spectacular section illustrating the massive scale of the defences. The rampart appears to have been constructed in two phases. The time between the two phases may have been as little as a few months, and perhaps represents a winter break in construction. An intact buried soil with a turf horizon was preserved below the rampart, and this has been sampled for palaeo-environmental analysis.

In addition to the excavation work, the entire northern half of the interior has been clear-felled of conifers by the Woodland Trust. It is intended to return this area to pasture over the next few years, so stabilising buried archaeological remains, and restoring the historic appearance of the site.

Peter Dorling, Senior Project Archaeologist

Dinedor Camp Conservation Management Plan

A Conservation Management Plan has been produced for Dinedor Camp. The main purpose of the plan is to inform and guide works to conserve and repair the monument under a Higher Level Stewardship agreement between the owners, Herefordshire Council and Natural England.



Dinedor Camp is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and lies about 4 kilometres south of Hereford. The hillfort is defined by a single bank and ditch enclosing around 4.5 hectares.

“Dinedor Camp was utilised in 1645 by the Scottish army besieging Hereford”

The site was subject to some small-scale excavation in the 1950s when Kathleen Kenyon found evidence for Iron Age and Romano-British occupation. It is also known that Dinedor Camp was utilised in 1645 by the Scottish army besieging Hereford, and it is likely that there was some modification of the defences at that time.

Mature beech trees now cover much of the interior, and these were probably planted in the 19th century when the site was part of the Rotherwas Estate. The hillfort is open access, and is much used by local walkers.

Issues considered in the plan include the management of the trees, scrub control, grassland management and the repair of small areas of erosion.

Peter Dorling, Senior Project Archaeologist

Community excavations in Ledbury

As a part of a Victoria County History project called *England's Past for Everyone*, a series of archaeological excavations are taking place in gardens in the historic market town of Ledbury.

The work is being undertaken by the garden owners, by members of the local history group and by volunteers from the wider community. Herefordshire Archaeology are providing training, equipment and supervision. The aim is to use evidence such as pottery finds to determine how Ledbury has developed through the centuries.



The seven sites are spread across the town centre between Homend and Southend, with the main focus along High Street. An average of two trenches are being excavated in each garden.

“disarticulated human bones were uncovered”

A two day training session targeted the garden of Abbot's Lodge close to the grounds of St Michael's Church. A substantial number of disarticulated human bones were uncovered. This suggests that the churchyard was considerably larger during the Medieval period than it is today. The bones had evidently been disturbed during the Post-Medieval construction of Abbot's Lodge (the former Rectory).

Excavations in other gardens are currently ongoing, and it is expected that the work will be complete by the beginning of November.

Chris Atkinson, Community Archaeologist

Rediscovering Little Doward

As part of the Heritage Lottery funded *Overlooking the Wye* project, Herefordshire Archaeology have been helping to rediscover and conserve the dramatic hillfort at Little Doward near Monmouth.

The prominent position of Little Doward above the Wye gorge at Symonds Yat has long made it an important strategic location. The earliest known features are Bronze Age burial mounds, and the hilltop was later enclosed by the impressive ramparts of the hillfort.

In more recent times, the site became an important viewing 'station' for the 'picturesque' tourists of the 18th century. To enhance the picturesque experience, the existing prehistoric features were 'improved' with additional follies including standing stones and an iron viewing tower. These attractions were linked by a network of carriageways and paths.

In the 20th century this fascinating site disappeared under a dense cloak of conifer plantation. Now, working with the Woodland Trust and the Wye Valley Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the conifers have been removed. Not only is Little Doward once again a stunning viewpoint, but many of its historic features have miraculously emerged from the undergrowth.



Over the next few years, areas of ecologically important limestone grassland will be restored, and the hilltop will be returned to a mix of pasture and managed deciduous trees. New site interpretation will also help visitors to find for themselves the remarkable past of Little Doward.

Neil Rimmington, Countryside Adviser

'New' forts from afar

Since 2002, Herefordshire Archaeology's English Heritage funded programme of aerial survey has produced new sites of all types. 2006 in particular was a bumper year for likely Iron Age enclosures. Discoveries included a substantial double-ditched site at Eardisley Park, and a hilltop fort near Much Dewchurch.

"dark lines in a ripening crop revealed long lost ancient ditches"

However, the crowning find of 2006 was made by Chris Musson above Pound Farm near Kington (see picture below). On a prominent hilltop overlooking the Arrow Valley, dark lines in a ripening crop revealed long lost ancient ditches which suddenly made sense of an unusual local field pattern. It is now apparent that the field boundaries mark parts of a double bank and ditch circuit which once enclosed a sizeable hillfort.



Recent direct vertical photographs held on the Council's computerised mapping system can also contain evidence for previously unrecorded hilltop sites, as indeed can some of the web-based satellite imaging services.

An example recently recorded on the Council system by the HA team is a smaller 'sister' fort to the one currently under investigation at Credenhill Park Wood. This second fort encircles the ridge at Merryhill to the north-west of Credenhill. In this case the enclosure had long been levelled by ploughing, but part of the ditch circuit was revealed by a ripening crop.

Keith Ray, County Archaeologist

Forthcoming events

Saturday 8th November: The Annual Symposium, Courtyard Theatre, Hereford (9.20 am to 5.00 pm, illustrated talks by local archaeologists about recent archaeological work in Herefordshire).

Wednesday 12th November: Pencome Historic Landscape Walk, 10 am to 1 pm.

Wednesday 17th December: Orleton Historic Landscape Walk, 10 am to 1 pm.

Wednesday 14th January: Wigmore Rolls Historic Landscape Walk, 10 am to 1 pm.

Wednesday 11th February: Fownhope Historic Landscape Walk, 2 pm to 4.30 pm.

Wednesday 11th March: Wellington Historic Landscape Walk, 10 am to 1 pm.

Contact number for Herefordshire Archaeology

To book places for walks and for general enquiries, contact Moira Cassidy on e-mail at archaeologists@herefordshire.gov.uk or telephone 01432 260470.