

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT TODAY

Herefordshire Council's Historic Environment Newsletter

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Hereford and Beyond

It has been a busy spring for Herefordshire, as regards the historic environment. A number of major projects have either commenced or come to fruition in Hereford and its near environs. This issue of Historic Environment Today is largely devoted to summarising these projects and how they have progressed, but also makes initial mention of news items elsewhere.

We report on the plans for alterations to The Cathedral Close. We describe the archaeological finds made during the building of a new sports hall at The Cathedral School, the construction of Hereford's new central flood defences, and on the proposed Rotherwas 'Futures' site.

Moving further afield, we report on the latest analysis of last years' major find, the 'Rotherwas Ribbon'. Particularly interesting results have come to the fore, which are detailed below. Also, we look into early stage proposals to provide a 'Strategic Flood Option' for Hereford, in connection with the emergent Edgar Street Grid. The new season of work at Credenhill has just commenced, and we give an outline of the projected work programme.

'... significant finds ...'

Finally, as a post-script, we feature the recent and significant finds that have been made at two county sites; the Rowe Ditch, north of Pembridge, and at the Prospect, in Ross on Wye. More detail about these finds will be provided in our next issue.

Julian Cotton, archaeological advisor & guest editor

Hereford Cathedral Close

Following detailed discussions and the submission of a planning application earlier this year, a major scheme is now in coming forward to improve and reconstruct the historic close of Hereford Cathedral. This scheme (amongst other things) will involve landscaping, new railings and gates, and the provision of new paths and lighting.



The cathedral close

It is anticipated that the works will commence next year, and needless to say, will run in train with an associated archaeological project. This project will be necessary to record and deal with the archaeological finds encountered during construction, and to secure the long- term future of these finds.

It is only rarely that such an exceptional opportunity to undertake a conservation and recording project in such a significant location occurs. We await next years' project with bated breath!

Julian Cotton, archaeological advisor

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Hereford Cathedral School

In a sense, only a limited archaeological project has been necessary in relation to the large new sports hall currently being built (off East Street) by Hereford Cathedral School. The reason for this is the considerable amount of work that has gone into the planning and execution of a particular foundation design.

'archaeological deposits known to exist on the site'

The foundations, involving an extensive network of shallow beams and a rigid integral 'raft', were sufficiently raised to avoid any wholesale impact on the (deep down) archaeological deposits known to exist on the site. We are reminded by these sort of cases that avoiding the archaeology may sometimes be a better option than excavating it. No news is good news!

Rotherwas Futures

As part of the broad long term vision to redevelop and improve the Rotherwas Industrial Estate (the 'Rotherwas Futures' project) Herefordshire Council has been undertaking an extensive archaeological evaluation of parts of the estate that might be affected by new development.

The principal area of likely archaeological interest was the southern sector of the estate, around the former munitions factory magazines, and also near to where the 'Rotherwas Ribbon' and other Neolithic-Bronze age finds were made last year.

The most interesting discovery made during the futures evaluation was probably that of a limited area burnt stone deposit, associated with pottery, flint, and bone. This deposit, although superficially similar both in content and likely date to the Ribbon, was more rounded in form and located within a marshy hollow.

The deposit may be part of a former 'burnt mound', resulting from prehistoric feasting and ceremonies. Elsewhere, post-holes and an unusual shell-rich soil provided further possible evidence of the use of the area in antiquity. The Futures discoveries, taken together, add to our growing knowledge of prehistory in the region directly to the south of Hereford city.

Hereford City Centre - Flood Alleviation Scheme

As previously reported in *Historic Environment Today*, the long - term archaeological project associated with this development has been very revealing in terms of our understanding of the nature and dating of Hereford's historic defences, south of the river Wye.

More recent work has indicated how intensively used the area to the west of the Bishop's meadow was in medieval times. An extensive dump of iron slag and numerous associated features in this location are suggestive of an important industrial complex nearby. An appreciable assemblage of medieval pottery was encountered here.



Medieval jug handle from flood scheme

Other parts of the scheme area, notably to the south of the swimming pool, were less interesting. Nevertheless, the full opportunity to observe works throughout was extremely valuable.

Andy Boucher, Manager, Archaeological Investigations Ltd

'Ribbon' Latest

Many of our readers will no doubt recall the discovery last year of the 'Rotherwas Ribbon' – an unusual and interesting Neolithic or Bronze Age linear structure made of burnt stone and quartz, and associated with nearby pits also containing burnt stone

As part of the post excavation research programme (coordinated by Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service), specialist analysis of the large quantity of flint and bone fragments found with the ribbon is now beginning to shed further light on it.

Many of the 143 items of flint found had been carefully flaked, and a large number showed signs of burning and breakage. Particular tools, such as 'strike-a-lights' have also been identified. All these patterns are unusual, compared to the 'typical' groups of flint usually found on sites of this period.

Much the same story is represented by the animal bone remains (cattle, pig, dog, cow and sheep). The bones were unusually weathered and also showed some evidence of having been burned at temperatures in excess of 800°C – far beyond the temperature required for normal cooking etc. Moreover, only skulls and long bones were present.

Intriguingly, human bones have also been identified. A single human finger bone was recovered from the Ribbon surface, and a burnt fragment of human bone was found in a probable cremation pit to the east of the Ribbon.

It does now seem likely that the Ribbon was not just connected with 'normal' everyday life, but was a special feature connected with ceremonial activity and religious belief. Activities at the Ribbon apparently included deliberate high temperature burning, disposal of important objects such as flint tools and stone axes, specialised treatment of animal heads and limbs, and the possible deposition of human remains.

Many questions remain, and we are still a long way from fully understanding the Ribbon and its environs. As part of one ongoing research process, Herefordshire Archaeology is hoping to coordinate further surveys, to clarify the possible extension of the Ribbon beyond the 67m length so far demonstrated.

Ian Bapty, Senior Project Archaeologist

ESG Strategic Flood Option

As part of a more strategic approach to the whole issue of flooding in northern Hereford (and within the Edgar Street Grid area specifically), ESG and the Council have been looking into some options for temporarily storing and diverting peak time flood build-up to the north and west of Hereford. Such storage and diversionary schemes, because of their scale, often have implications for the historic environment.

'numerous features of archaeological interest around The Weir'

One of the options being looked at involves the provision of a swale or culvert, taking excess water from the Yazor Brook to the River Wye, via Credenhill village and The Weir Garden. Given the proximity of the former Roman town [at Kenchester], and the numerous features of archaeological interest around The Weir, a high quality design is being sought that will protect the archaeological interest.

Full archaeological surveys will shortly be taking place along the various postulated diversion routes. These will involve a thorough re-appraisal of the known information, followed by geophysics and trial trenching.

Julian Cotton, Archaeological Advisor

Credenhill

Peter Dorling, our Landscape Archaeologist, is directing a second season of excavations at Credenhill this June and July, sponsored by our project partners, The Woodland Trust. The work is linked to a programme of tree management that will progressively remove conifers from the site in the next two years.

The excavations, involving students from both Cardiff and Hull universities, is uncovering Iron Age occupation levels but has also focused upon a concentration of Roman period material that appears to belong to the first century AD. Surprisingly, this also seems to relate to military activity on the hilltop a decade or more after the original conquest.

Dr Keith Ray, County Archaeologist

P.S. NEW DISCOVERIES!

Within the last few weeks some significant archaeological discoveries were made on two sites in the county currently under development works. We give a brief 'taster' below:

The first discovery was made near to the Rowe Ditch linear monument, north of Pembridge. Border Archaeology, recording the pipe-work operations of Welsh Water, uncovered extensive remains of prehistoric and romano-british date.



Ancient ditches revealed near the Rowe Ditch

The second discovery was at The Prospect, Ross on Wye, during repair and replacement works to a collapsed historic wall. The sizeable foundations of an important rounded structure of likely Roman date were disclosed. Current interpretations include a temple, a signal tower, and a dovecote! It is hoped to eventually conserve this structure in its original position, following recording and analysis.

Julian Cotton, archaeological advisor

Forthcoming events

Thursday 17th July: Wolferlow Park historic landscape walk

HEREFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY WEEK

Saturday 19th July: Family event. "Kilpeck, the life and death of a medieval village", Kilpeck

Wednesday 23rd July: Tours of The Prospect, Ross on Wye

Thursday 24th July: Family event. 'history detectives' at St Peter's Church, Bromyard

Contact for Herefordshire Archaeology

To book places for Herefordshire Archaeology events and walks and for general enquiries, contact Herefordshire Archaeology on, 01432 260470 or archaeologists@herefordshire.gov.uk