

The Worcestershire Historic Towns Survey

The information on the historic towns of Worcestershire is based on work carried out in 1992-95 as part of English Heritage's Extensive Urban Survey initiative. The project was called the **Central Marches Historic Towns Survey**.

Archaeologists from the County Council studied the historic towns of Worcestershire,

Herefordshire and Shropshire, and wrote a

report on each of the 64 smaller towns in these historic counties. Worcester, Hereford and Shrewsbury were excluded, as they are covered by a different English Heritage initiative.



The survey looked at all the evidence for each town up to 1800. Nineteenth and twentieth century developments were excluded from the project, as were settlements which only became towns after 1800, such as Malvern.

The reports were written for professional archaeologists and those who manage the historic environment and work with planning authorities, rather than for a general audience. They provide a detailed understanding of each town based on the information available in 1995/96.

What is a town?

This seems to be a simple question, but the answer can be complicated. It is not just about size. Some very small settlements were towns, and other quite large settlements have never been towns.

Historians have developed a range of criteria which they use to gauge whether a settlement can be called a town, as opposed to a village. For the medieval period these criteria depend on the survival of documents about the town describing its legal status, who lived there, and whether markets and fairs were held there. Essentially, a town is considered to be a settlement where most people did not make their living from farming.

Archaeologists consider all the evidence for the different activities which took place in a settlement, in order to decide whether it can be counted as a town. In a town, there would be archaeological evidence for crafts, industries and trade as well as farming.

This document is based on work carried out by researchers from the county archaeology service. They made use of historical documents and maps as well as archaeological evidence to establish what activities took place in settlements in Worcestershire in the past. They came up with a list of 13 historic towns, some which have been towns since the Roman period, such as Droitwich, and others which can only be counted as towns for a brief period, such as Clifton-upon-Teme. The project had specific national aims which meant that the city of Worcester was excluded, as well as any towns which developed after 1800, such as Malvern.

Historic Towns Map



Bibliography

The books listed here give information about different aspects of all Worcestershire towns, or about towns in general.

If you live in Worcestershire, you can look up books that are in the library on the online catalogue <http://opac.worcestershire.gov.uk/TalisPrism/index.html>

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<http://www.worcestershireceramics.org>

Glossary of terms

AD	This is the shortened form of the Latin term 'Anno Domini' which means 'the year of our Lord' in the Christian calendar. It refers to dates in the Christian calendar after the year Jesus is believed to have been born. This dictionary was written in the year AD 2005. 'AD' is not usually used for dates after about 1000.
Almshouses	Almshouses usually date from the post-medieval period. They were usually established in towns, and were independent charitable institutions for the care of elderly people who were unable to look after themselves.
Anchorite	During the medieval period an anchorite was a religious recluse, similar to a hermit. Hermits often lived alone and far from other people, but the word anchorite is used for individuals who lived alone in a cell within a church or friary.
Antiquarian	This word is used to describe scholars who studied artefacts and monuments of the past before the principles and methods of modern archaeology were developed.
Anglo-Saxon period	In England this refers to the early medieval period between the 5th century and the 11th century.
BC	This is the shortened for of the term 'Before Christ'. It refers to dates in the Christian calendar before the year Jesus is believed to have been born. It is usually used after the date, eg 150 BC.
Borough	This was originally a medieval word meaning town, which developed from the word 'burh'. A borough was created when the King granted a charter for a particular settlement.
Bottle-oven	This is a type of post-medieval kiln for firing pottery which was named because of its shape. The oven chamber is cylindrical, brick-built with a domed roof, fired from multiple fireboxes arranged around the circumference. The fuel is usually coal.
BUFAU	Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Burgess	Townspiece, tradesmen or craftsmen, who rented plots of land (burgages) and who had rights in the town to carry out their trade. Not all

	townspeople were burgesses. Burgesses had status within the town, they were the head of their household, and were usually men, but if there was no son, a wife might carry on her husband's business after his death.
Burgage	Plot of land in a town that was rented out by the landowner to an inhabitant of the town who paid an annual rent, traditionally 12 pence. Typically narrow street frontage, laid out in a regular fashion.
Burh	This word is used for Anglo-Saxon towns. All burhs had a military function and were surrounded by a defensive bank and ditch. Some were also important trading centres.
cal AD or cal BC (see radiocarbon dating)	When an object has been dated using radiocarbon dating, the result is a date range, for example cal AD 1350-1450. Here, 'cal' is short for 'calibrated radiocarbon date'.
Century	A century is a period of 100 years. The 1st century AD was from 0 to 99, the 2nd century from 100 to 199. This is why, for example, the 12th century is the years from 1100 to 1199, or the 19th century from 1800-1899.
Cess pit	A cess pit is a deep straight-sided pit which was used as a toilet before flushing lavatories and mains drainage were available.
Chapel of ease	A chapel of ease is a church subordinate to the parish church. In a large parish a chapel of ease might be established so people would not have a long journey to church each week.
Charter	A charter is a legal document from the King to a landowner when a town was established. It sets out rules and regulations for the economy of the town, for example how many fairs could be held each year, and when markets could take place.
Civil War	The English Civil War lasted nine years, during which there were three periods of fighting, 1642-46, 1648, and 1650-51. The final battle of the Civil War was fought at Worcester in 1651.
Cropmark	Evidence of buried archaeological deposits can be revealed in growing crops. Buried walls can cause stunted growth and early ripening plants, and buried ditches can cause better growth and late ripening plants. The patterns of these can reveal underlying archaeological sites.
Deposit	This is the word archaeologists use for any kind

	of layer of earth, stone or organic material which was created in the past, and which could be excavated. A deposit might include gravel laid along a path, or the gradual silting up of a ditch, or the fill of a cess pit.
Dissolution	By the 16th century there were hundreds of monasteries in England which were major institutions and owned about a quarter of the land in England. Between 1536 and 1540 Henry VIII broke up these institutions and took all the land and buildings into royal control. The monastic estates were sold, the monks were pensioned off, and the lay servants were dismissed. Many monasteries were sold and the buildings were reused or demolished.
Domesday Book	The Domesday Book was commissioned in December 1085 by William the Conqueror, who invaded England in 1066. The first draft was completed in August 1086 and contained records for 13,418 estates in the English counties south of the rivers Ribble and Tees (the border with Scotland at the time).
Earthwork	Buried archaeological deposits may show as humps and bumps above ground. Archaeologists call these earthworks.
Estate	An estate was a defined large landholding. From early medieval times land might be owned by the King, by monasteries or by members of the aristocracy.
Fair	In the medieval period fairs were held in towns, usually on an annual basis, and lasted for three days. Merchants would come to the town to sell their goods, and large numbers of people would come from the town and surrounding areas to buy things which were not normally available locally.
Feature	This is the word archaeologists use for something standing on or dug into the ground.
Friar, Friary	Friars were members of one of a number of religious orders established from the 13th century. The institutions themselves were called Friaries, and were often found in towns. Orders of Friars focused on preaching and religious instruction of the population.
Georgian	Georgian is an architectural style of building which developed in the 18th century. Historically the Georgian period covers the reigns of the

	first four Georges, between 1714 and 1830.
Geophysical survey	Archaeologists use different techniques of geophysical survey to detect buried structures and deposits. These techniques do not involve disturbing the ground, unlike archaeological excavation. Geophysical survey gives a general idea of buried deposits, rather than the detailed picture which can be obtained from excavation.
Holloway	A holloway is a sunken lane or road, usually going up a hill, which was gradually cut into the ground and can be anything from half a metre to several metres deep. Some are still in use, others are earthworks which reveal the line of a now disused road or track.
Hospital (medieval)	A hospital was a medieval institution owned by the church which cared for people who could not support themselves or whose families could not care for them. Although the sick and the elderly were cared for in hospitals, they were provided with food and shelter, rather than medical treatment. Some hospitals specialised in care for those suffering from leprosy.
HWCC	Hereford and Worcester County Council
HWCM	Hereford and Worcester County Monument number. This was the prefix used for Sites and Monuments Record numbers, which has now been replaced by WSM (Worcestershire Sites and Monuments) for sites in Worcestershire.
Iron Age	In England this is the period from about 700 BC to AD 43.
Leland	John Leland travelled throughout England and Wales in the 16th century. He wrote an account of his extensive travels which includes descriptions of the places he visited. This is a valuable source of information about what places looked like at the time, and is often the earliest description of the towns he visited
Manor	The medieval countryside was divided into thousands of manors, each owned by a Lord of the Manor, who might be a member of the aristocracy, the abbot of a monastery or the King. The manor controlled most aspects of economic and social life, and manorial courts administered justice.
Market	Towns held weekly markets when townspeople and people from surrounding areas could come to buy and sell goods and animals.

Market place	The market was held in the main street of the town, and in some cases also in an open space designated as a market place.
Medieval period	In England archaeologists use this for the period between the Norman Conquest in 1066 and the Dissolution of the monasteries around 1540, and this is how it is used for this website. Defining 'medieval' can be quite complicated, however. In Europe it can mean the time between the collapse of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance in the 15th century.
Mill	Every town had at least one mill which was used to grind wheat and other grains into flour. Medieval mills were powered using a waterwheel.
Minster (church)	This word is used for major Anglo-Saxon churches.
Norman	Norman refers to an architectural style of the late 11th and 12th century which is seen in churches, monasteries and castles.
Norman Conquest	The Norman Conquest is the military conquest of England by William, Duke of Normandy, in 1066. The English army was defeated at the Battle of Hastings and King Harold was killed. A new ruling dynasty was established, and the lands owned by the English aristocracy were given to Norman lords.
Palaeoenvironmental	Some archaeologists specialise in biological evidence relating to the past, which can include both plant and animal remains. The word means 'relating to the past environment'.
Post-Roman period	This term is used as a label for the period between the end of Roman Imperial organisation in AD 410 and the establishment of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. In the west midlands this was as late as the 7th century.
Post-medieval period	Archaeologists use this term for the period from 1540 on. Some give the post-medieval period an end date, which may be as early as 1750 or as late as 1900. The study on which this website is based used the date range 1540 to 1800.
Pound	A pound was an enclosure used to hold stray cattle or other animals.
Precinct	An abbey precinct is the area enclosed by the walls or boundaries which separated the

	grounds and buildings from the surrounding town or land.
Prehistoric (Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age)	The prehistoric period literally means the period before written history. In England the prehistoric period is the general term which includes the Iron Age (about 700 BC to AD 43), the Bronze Age (about 2500 BC to about 700 BC), the Neolithic (about 4000 BC to about 2500 BC), the Mesolithic (about 7000 BC to about 4000 BC), and the Palaeolithic.
Radiocarbon dating	This is a scientific method used by archaeologists to find out how old certain materials are. It can only be used for organic materials, that is, things that have been alive, such as wood or bone. This technique can never give a precise date, it will provide a date range for the object tested.
Ridge and furrow	These are earthworks resulting from a particular method of ploughing which left a long low mound of earth 1-5m wide and as long as the field. Ridge and furrow formed during the medieval period is often gently curved in a backwards 'S' shape, called 'reverse S-shaped'. Post medieval ridge and furrow is usually narrower and straight.
Roman period	In England this is the period between the Roman conquest in AD 43 and the end of Roman Britain in AD 410.
Salvage recording	This is the same as a watching brief, which is when an archaeologist monitors work being carried out by builders or developers, usually to record any archaeological deposits revealed when foundations or service trenches are dug.
Saxon	See Anglo-Saxon.
Shambles	This word refers to butcher's stalls, usually in the market. Animals were slaughtered and butchered there, so shambles were likely to be messy, smelly places.
Tanning, tanning pits	Leather is produced from animal skins by a process called tanning. The skins are soaked for a long time in a sequence of strong-smelling solutions in tanning pits to preserve animal hides and turn them into leather.
Tenement plot	A tenement plot is a piece of land in a settlement. The term is used for the historic towns of Worcestershire to refer to house plots or groups of house plots in the towns.

Timber framed	Timber framed buildings are constructed using a rectangular structural framework of wood
Town	See 'What is a town' page.
Trow	A 'Severn Trow' is a particular type of sailing vessel used to transport goods up and down the River Severn which could be used in quite shallow water.
Turnpike road	In the 18th century turnpike roads were established. Tolls were collected to pay for the upkeep of the roads at gates, called turnpikes, at either end.
Watching brief	A watching brief is when an archaeologist monitors work being carried out by builders or developers, usually to record any archaeological deposits revealed when foundations or service trenches are dug.
Workhouse	Workhouses intended to house destitute and homeless people are known from the 17th century but became common after the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act when no aid was given to poor people unless they lived in the Work house. They covered one or more parishes. The work house system was abolished in 1929 although some persisted into the 1940's
WRO	Worcestershire Records Office
WSM	Worcestershire Sites and Monuments number. This is the prefix used for records held by the county Historic Environment Record. Contact the HER for further details of any individual site.