More Beer Vicar?

In the early medieval period the church was the focal point of every parish. Apart from everyday services, the church could host all kinds of events. Law Courts would meet and plays and festivals were often held, involving much dancing and drinking. There were more than a hundred Saints’ Days in the church calendar before the reformation, and the celebrations gave rise to ‘church ales’. These were celebrations held within the churches, particularly at Whitsuntide and May Day when ale was sold in order to raise funds for good causes in the parish. In the mid 15th century, the churches started to be used for worship only, and ‘Church Houses’ were built in the churchyards purely for the purpose of holding ‘ales’.

In July, archaeologists from the Service, commissioned by Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust Ltd, carried out a building survey on Church House at Areley Kings. This grade II(*) building is in the churchyard of St Bartholomew’s, and at first appears to be just a small house, but as its name suggests, it has a more interesting history.

The results from a dendrochronological study suggest that Church House was built in 1536, right at the peak of church house building. The rooms were arranged with a large open space on the first floor, where the ‘ales’ were held, a room downstairs where the ale was brewed with an internal wooden staircase between the two.

Church houses were built from the middle of the 15th century through to the 16th century, but with the growth of Puritanism in the late 17th century, church ales attracted serious disapproval. There was great concern about the ‘disorders accompanying church ales, bastards conceived after the festivities and many inconveniences, which with modesty cannot be expressed’. Feasting and drinking was seen as sinful, and church houses were gradually closed and abandoned, demolished or put to other uses.

Church House is one of only two church houses known to survive in Worcestershire - the other being the Mughouse at Claines.
Hartlebury Common

In the spring of 2003, the Service conducted a desk based assessment and field survey at Hartlebury Common. The study was commissioned by The Countryside Service of Worcestershire County Council and forms part of a strategic management plan that is intended to meet a number of aims. The broad objective, however, is to restore and enhance the character of the Common over the next ten years.

Hartlebury Common, or Hartlebury Heath, is south-east of Stourport on Severn in the north of Worcestershire. The land was carved and shaped into three terraces during the post-glacial period. Its present extent of 87 hectares was established at the time of Enclosure in 1821. Prior to this the Heath was in excess of 255 hectares and extended as far north as Summerfield. The historic landscape of the Common is unique within the County as the land has never been brought into cultivation, and has been common land since at least the medieval period. In ecological terms, as an example of lowland heath, Hartlebury Common is of national importance.

The Common is a fascinating place to walk around. Casual observation will note evidence of the post-medieval and modern sand, gravel and clay quarrying that dominates much of area. The deep-cut extraction tracks eroded into the slope of the upper terrace give walkers a sense of the huge scale of this activity. Although extensive, the quarrying has not obliterated the evidence of earlier human activities. Rush Pool and The Bog on the lower terrace are surviving features of the post-glacial landscape. Rush Pool, in particular, contains an assemblage of nationally significant environmental material representing the last 10,000 years. Mesolithic and Neolithic flint artefacts, the evidence of early prehistoric hunting, have been recovered from the ground surface at various locations across the Common.

Perhaps, the most exciting prehistoric feature is a large circular earthwork enclosure situated on the edge of the upper terrace. It is not yet clear how this structure was used, although the key may lie in its highly visible location. This suggests possibilities including a meeting place, a religious site, an observation post or some form of settlement. Following the landscape survey, South Worcestershire Archaeological Group has made a detailed survey of this mysterious monument.

Medieval earthworks marking out boundaries and a network of late and post-medieval tracks and holloways have shaped and imposed a distinctive pattern on the land. Dating from more recent times, several features survive that can be attributed to a 19th century Rifle Range on the lower heath and home guard manoeuvres during World War 2.

The survey has built upon existing research, further illuminating the nature of the historic landscape of Hartlebury Common. Certainly, the Common is a beautiful and historically varied resource worthy of further exploration.

Adam Mindykowski

Hot Dry Summer Brings Out Our Ancestors!

This summer has been one of the driest for a long time and therefore the potential for cropmark formation was high. I had the privilege this season, of flying with two pilots in two very different aircraft. As always I am indebted to Eric Giles and his Cessna 172, and also to Rick Holt in his rather compact Glasstar, who flew several sorties while the Cessna was unavailable. Many thanks to you both.

Despite the excellent conditions for the formation of cropmarks it was notable how much less arable crop was sown this year. The conditions may have been good, but without the wheat and barley sites are unlikely to show. Maize, potatoes, pulses and acres of flowers have appeared in quantity this year.

However, a number of new and significant sites were discovered, and the parish of Bretforton produced no less than three previously unknown settlement sites. Perhaps the most notable of these is the first ‘Clothes-Line’ enclosure group to have been found in the County. These are characterized by a series of enclosures sharing a common linear boundary, a bit like sheets hanging from a washing line. Clothes-line enclosures are found in a number of regions in England, principally Leicestershire, north Warwickshire, Dartmoor and Yorkshire.

By far the most exciting discovery was of a small henge near Bredon. Not only is this the largest yet identified, but it also has an a double ditched circular feature next to it which matches it perfectly in size. We do not know what this is, but it may form part of a ceremonial complex. The site also contained evidence of other enclosures and a coaxial field system.

In addition to the above this year produced a road through a former parkland [Bushley], an unenclosed settlement just outside the county in Gloucestershire, another Oakington Pillbox [Honeybourne], square enclosure, [Stourport], enclosure group [Leigh], 2 square enclosures [Bretforton], small square enclosure [Wyre Piddle]. Of course there were a number of sites that have been photographed in the past, some of which have not been seen for a number of years.

Finally a mystery site. While flying over Doverdale near Droitwich I recorded an unusual cropmark of a large circular feature. When we checked the tithe map the field is called Lords Hill…could this be a previously unknown motte? Research continues!

Mike Glyde.
Dayschool 2003

This year’s dayschool will be held on Saturday 8th November 2003 at University College Worcester from 10am—5.45pm.

As usual there will be a wide range of talks on aspects of the historic landscape and archaeology of Worcestershire. Topics will include the Digital Tithe Map project, Romano British and Anglo-Saxon settlement at Ryall Quarry, the Medieval archaeology of Hallow, the archaeological landscape of the Lower Lugg Valley and an overview of the palaeolithic archaeology of the West Midlands Region.

There will also be talks on Roman, Medieval and Victorian discoveries in Worcester and recent excavations in Worcester Cathedral’s Chapter House.

As well the talks there will be exhibitions and displays of related information on archaeology in the county.

The booking fee is £10 including tea and coffee (student reduced fee is £5). Lunch is optional and costs £5.50.

Further details and booking information from Deborah Overton or Hal Dalwood at the Archaeology Service.

Round up

There have been relatively few projects undertaken by external archaeological contractors over the past year, exceptions being Cotswold Archaeology who have undertaken a major excavation at Ryall Quarry. As well as a Romano British farmstead, five sunken floored Saxon dwellings were unearthed making it one of the most important discoveries of this date for many years. Cotswold Archaeology also completed an evaluation of a well-preserved Romano British settlement site at Eckington, and further work is anticipated in the near future.

Martin Cook carried out a building evaluation in Brefton, which identified the medieval origins of a small but complex timber framed dwelling, dated by dendrochronology to AD 1315. He has also been recording a number of farm buildings prior to conversion.

Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Unit made a brief visit into Worcestershire to do a watching brief at Strensham, while Archaeological Investigations Ltd recorded a fine timber framed barn at Hanley Swan, and Birmingham Archaeology (formally BUFAU) recorded a farm complex in Bromsgrove.

New Worcestershire Young Archaeologists’ Club

We are pleased to announce that after an absence of three years a brand new branch of Young Archaeologist Club (YAC) is to be launched in Worcestershire. We have got a great team of professional teachers and archaeologists together to organise the branch and run special events and activities for young people from age 9 to 16 years. The new branch is in response to the huge increase in interest from youngsters who want to get involved in archaeology.

The Young Archaeologists’ Club is a national club run by the Council for British Archaeology based in York. YAC national members get a glossy newsletter and the opportunity to get involved in activities and competitions, including the chance to go on a ‘digging’ holiday. The idea of a local branch is to make sure that there are monthly activities or visits for YAC members near where they live and to really get them involved in local archaeology. A local branch will give YAC members the opportunity to undertake landscape archaeology training such as surveying bumps in fields or woodland and fieldwalking to collect pottery or flint and to learn how to process and identify the finds. The branch newsletter will focus on local archaeology and keep YAC members informed on current excavations.

The launch of the Worcestershire YAC will be at Avoncroft Museum of Buildings, at Stoke Prior near Bromsgrove on Sunday afternoon 23rd November. Several historical and archaeological activities will be taking place making use of the fantastic array of historic buildings. Highlights of the day will be a Roman campsite set up by the Ermine Street Guard and The Civil War Society will be demonstrating 17th century weapons and crafts, including how to make the white clay tobacco pipes.

The new branch has already set up a website which YAC members will be able to contribute to with their letters, articles and photographs. The first competition will be to design a logo for Worcestershire YAC that we can use on the website, in leaflets and on tee-shirts and baseball caps. The first newsletter will be handed out at the launch to new members of the branch. A programme of events and activities will soon be completed and will include visits to the Archaeological Service to work with historic maps, aerial photographs and process archaeological finds and to the County Record Office to look at old documents. There will be trip to Chedworth Roman villa, Hartlebury Castle and Avoncroft Museum of Buildings. A day event investigating invisible archaeology at the Wyre Forest Discovery Centre making woodland crafts and using natural resources has been arranged. They will also have the chance to do some fieldwork. This will include fieldwalking a Roman rural site and a survey of some earthworks.

A unique feature of Worcestershire YAC will be that contact information and news will be texted to their or their parents’ mobile phones. There will even by a fun text question and answer facility.

All in all this is going to be an exciting club for our YAC members and we will be recruiting at the Avoncroft Launch in November.

Contact: Deborah Overton – general enquiries and launch information, Sheena Payne – membership enquiries or Mike Glyde – Web site enquiries, all on 01905 855455 or email doverton@worcestershire.gov.uk Spayne@worcestershire.gov.uk or mglyde@worcestershire.gov.uk
Out and About

Archeology Day School, 2003
This will be held on Saturday 8th November at University College - see item on page 3 for details.

Worcestershire County Museum, Hartlebury

Lifting the Lid
22nd July to 30th November
Look inside our museum, see what treasures are inside, and have your say on future exhibition plans at Hartlebury.

More information from the County Museum on: (01905) 250416.

The Commandery, Sidbury, Worcester – The Battle of Worcester, 1651
Special exhibition commemorating the last battle of the English Civil War.

Lives and Legacies A temporary exhibition looking at the lives of the ordinary people who lived and fought in the Civil War.

The Commandery Chronicle - Trace the fascinating story of the Commandery through this display and highlighting some of the earlier history of the site.

Worcester 1250 AD - A 1:500 scale reconstruction of the walled city of Worcester in the 13th century for details of these, contact the Commandery on (01905) 361821.

Contacts
For more information about any of the items in the newsletter, to put yourself onto our information mailing list, or for general enquiries about archaeology in Worcestershire, please contact:


County Archaeology Officer: Malcolm Atkin, (01905) 855474
General enquiries: Mo Uyt den Bogaard, (01905) 855455
Field Archaeology Section: Simon Woodiwiss, (01905) 855499
Information and Records: Victoria Bryant, (01905) 855494
Planning: Mike Glyde, (01905) 855454
Countryside: Jez Bretherton, (01905) 855597
Fax for all sections: (01905) 855035
email: archaeology@worcestershire.gov.uk
website: www.worcestershire.gov.uk/archaeology

Avoncroft Museum of Historic Buildings
October
4th-5th - Mercian Guard Viking Group.
11th-12th - Campaign 2000.
18th-19th - The Tudor Group.
25th-26th - Tudor Ghosts and Model Wheelwrights Exhibition.

December
6th-7th - Avoncroft Victorian Family Christmas. A wonderful start to the festive season.
for details - Tel: (01527) 831 363 or 831 886 Email avoncroft1@compuserve.com

Regional Research Framework Papers
In the November 2002 newsletter, the seminar series for the West Midlands Regional Research Framework for Archaeology was announced. At each seminar a series of papers were given by archaeologists working in the region, providing overviews for each county, comparing the evidence and setting it into a national framework. A summary of the papers from each of the period based seminars has been placed on the University of Birmingham web site and they can be read or down loaded now.
http://www.arch-ant.bham.ac.uk/wmrrfseminars.htm

Illustration Technical Papers
The Association of Archaeological Illustrators and Surveyors publishes a series of papers dedicated to the techniques of illustration and surveying. Each one addresses a specific material or technique.
The subjects currently available are:
Archaeological reconstruction: Recent Research in Archaeological Footwear, The Illustration of Lithic Artefacts, The Illustration of Excavated Window Glass; The Illustration of Wooden Artefacts; The Survey and Recording of Historic Buildings; Prehistoric Pottery. The Journal of the Association of Archaeological Illustrators and Surveyors 2003 is also now available.
More details are available from the AA&S at AA&S, c/o University of Reading, 2 Earley Gate, PO Box 239, Reading, RG6 6AU
email: info@aais.org.uk
or on the web site: www.aais.org.uk

Volunteer Opportunities
The Service is always ready to welcome individuals or groups who would like to become involved with our work in the County. Volunteers regularly help with processing finds and washing and marking pottery from excavations, but there are also research projects which are organised and run by volunteers from our offices.

The Ridge and Furrow Survey is recording the remains of the medieval open field system. It involves fieldwork in combination with the study of aerial photographs and maps.

The Worcestershire Tithe Map Project aims to trace and transcribe all the tithe maps of Worcestershire so that the information on them can be compared with modern mapping to be used by local people, archaeologists and historians.

The Defence of Worcestershire Project is creating a database of information on the sites and buildings used for both civil and military defence during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

The Worcestershire Settlement Survey is capturing an image of settlements in Worcestershire as they exist at the beginning of the 21st century.

All of these projects would welcome new volunteers and for more information about any of these, please phone our general enquiries number which you can find on this page, or email v.bryant@worcestershire.gov.uk.

Newsletter on line
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