

Archaeological assessment of Weston-under-Penyard (*Ariconium*), Hereford and Worcester

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with contributions by Derek Hurst and Elizabeth Pearson

Summary

The Roman settlement at Weston-under-Penyard was surveyed during the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey, a desk-based study of the 64 smaller historic towns in Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Archaeological evidence relating to the historic core of Weston-under-Penyard was carefully analysed, comprising topographic data, published and unpublished archaeological reports, museum collections, historical maps, and field data recorded by the project team.

Detailed evidence is provided on the character and layout of the settlement in the Roman period. The available information is analysed and mapped in detail, and a model of the development of the town is proposed. In addition, the evidence for pre-urban occupation is considered, together with evidence of post-Roman settlement. All archaeologically-relevant information has been recorded as part of the county Sites and Monuments Record. Specialist assessments of artefacts and ecofacts are included. A detailed archaeological research framework has been developed for Weston-under-Penyard, which will inform future archaeological investigations as well as management decisions.

The Roman settlement at Weston-under-Penyard contains buried archaeological deposits, and these are judged to have high potential. In addition there is high potential for the recovery of artefact and ecofact assemblages. Weston-under-Penyard is a Roman small town with a specialised industrial function. However, it is much less well understood than either of the other Roman towns in the region (iron-working in Worcester and salt production in Droitwich) in terms of its chronology or basic layout, and little is known of the technology or operation of the iron industry.

Please note: at the time of writing (April 1996) a comprehensive desk-based study of archaeological data from the Roman settlement is underway, alongside post-excavation work on recent sites. The analysis and assessments presented in this report will undoubtedly be revised in the light of ongoing work.

1 Introduction

1.1 Location and landuse

The Roman small town of Weston-under-Penyard (*Ariconium*) is located at NGR SO 645240 in South Herefordshire District. The Roman settlement lies in agricultural land northeast of the historic village of Weston-under-Penyard, although a small part is occupied by the small hamlet of Bury Hill.

1.2 Topography, geology and soils

Weston-under-Penyard lies at a height of between 85m and 125m OD on sloping ground rising to the northeast. The site is drained by a shallow valley to the southwest. The soils are typical brown earths of the Eardiston 1 association (Soil Survey of England and Wales, Ragg *et al* 1984) overlying Breconian Brownstones (British Geological Survey 1:250,000, sheet 52°N-O.4°W).

1.3 Chronological outline

Weston-under-Penyard may have originated as an Iron Age settlement. Dobunnic and other coins from the site may indicate a late Iron Age high-status site (Allen 1961, Crickmore 1984, 72-4; HWCM 12573). Late Iron Age deposits have been provisionally identified in the southern part of the Roman settlement (R Jackson pers comm; HWCM 12666). Aerial photographic evidence shows that near the main settlement area there are a number of rectangular enclosures which on general grounds could be dated to the Iron Age or Roman periods. However the origins of the settlement are unclear at present.

The development of the Roman settlement is not well understood due to the rather limited quantity of archaeological information and the lack of modern research. Coins and pottery indicate the site was occupied from the first to the later fourth century (Hayter 1923; Bridgwater 1965). The settlement has been classified as a Roman "small town" with a primarily industrial function based on iron-working using ore from the Forest of Dean (Crickmore 1984, 72-4; Stanford 1991, 101; Burnham and Wachter 1990, 5, 11-12, 41). An alternative interpretation that the site was a villa (Hart 1971, 2) does not conform with the nature and extent of archaeological evidence.

There is little evidence for chronological development of the settlement, although it has been suggested that the town was flourishing in the third century (Hayter 1923, 9). The date of abandonment is unknown, and the published coin list includes a few late 4th century coins (*ibid*, 9-13). It has been suggested that the settlement was in decline in the late 4th century (*ibid*, 9), which might be expected on general grounds (Esmonde Cleary 1987, 197-200).

There is no direct evidence for post-Roman occupation of the site, although the place-name Eccleswall indicates a post-Roman Christian population in the area (see section 1.4). The estate of *Weston* is recorded in Domesday Book (Thorn and Thorn 1983, 183c), and by this period the settlement focus was probably the village of Weston-under-Penyard. There is archaeological evidence for re-use of Roman slag in the post-medieval period (Bridgwater 1965, 132; HWCM 21360). The hamlet of Bury Hill probably developed in the post-medieval period, and contained half a dozen cottages and a methodist chapel in 1838 (HFNS nd). This hamlet is now rather shrunken. Scrub and masonry were cleared from the settlement site in 1785 when the land was enclosed and since that date the site has been regularly ploughed.

1.4 Placename studies

The placename *Ariconium* is recorded in the *Antonine Itinerary* and early antiquaries suggested a number of locations for the site. It was first identified with the site at Weston-under-Penyard in the early 19th century (Brayley and Britton 1805, 512-4), and this identification has been confirmed by modern scholars (Rivet 1970, 57). The place-name Eccleswall (cf HWCM 21372) means "spring of the Christian community" (Coplestone-Crow 1989, 130; Gelling 1990, 114). This place-name refers to the Christianity of the early medieval Welsh kingdom of *Ergyng* or Archenfield, whose name derives from *Ariconium* (Gelling 1990, 114-8). The earliest form of the place-name Weston-under-Penyard is *Westune*, recorded in Domesday Book (Thorn and Thorn 1983, 186c), meaning "west settlement" (Coplestone-Crow 1989, 202). The form *Weston subtus Penyard* was recorded in 1376 (*ibid*).

1.5 Syntheses of documentary and archaeological data

Archaeological discoveries up to 1922 were summarised by Jack (1923). The artefactual evidence has been reassessed by Berry (1994), together with a reconsideration of the excavated evidence. The present assessment was carried out by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in 1994. The text was revised in 1995 to incorporate the results of fieldwork undertaken by the Survey (see section 1.7). No information published after December 1994 has been incorporated into this assessment.

1.6 Cartographic sources

The title map of 1838 (HFNS nd) and the Ordnance Survey first edition 1:2500 map (*Herefordshire sheet LII.5* (1885)) were consulted.

1.7 Archaeological excavations and surveys

The Roman site was first recognised in 1785 when Roman artefacts and structures were discovered near Weston-under-Penyard (Brayley and Britton 1805, 512-4; Cooke 1882, 214-8; HWCM 21380). Subsequently discoveries were made in the 19th century comprising stone buildings, inhumation burials and further artefacts, including a bronze ram's head (Brayley and Britton 1805, 512-4; Fosbroke 1821, 22-38; Bull 1882, 250; HWCM 21381).

The first excavations at Weston-under-Penyard were carried out by Jack in 1922, and comprised six trial trenches, one of which was expanded to excavate most of a stone building (Jack 1923). Further work within the core area has been limited in scope, although two areas were excavated in 1967 (unpublished; Garrod and Moss 1967; HWCM 21369 and HWCM 21370).

Small-scale investigations and survey work have recorded slag-surfaced roads dated to the Roman period (Watkins 1929, 231; Anon 1932, lxxxii; Bridgwater 1959; HWCM 21361; HWCM 21365; HWCM 21367). However roads of similar construction have been positively dated to the post-medieval period (Bridgwater 1959, 220-1; HWCM 21362). Salvage recording in 1993 along the route of a pipeline to the south of the scheduled area identified extensive structural remains, and also provided information on the extent of the settlement area (R Jackson pers comm). A limited number of aerial photographs have been plotted which show some aspects of the layout of the settlement (RCHME 1979).

Fieldwork was undertaken by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in November 1994. This identified remains, investigated and revised the extent of components, and recorded modern developments in the urban area.

1.8 Acknowledgments and personnel

Survey fieldwork was undertaken by Victoria Buteux and Nigel Topping. Analytical work was aided by Robin Jackson, who supplied information on the results of fieldwork along the 1993 pipeline, and Duncan Brown, who commented on an earlier draft of this report. Analysis, report writing and editing were carried out by Hal Dalwood.

2 Pre-urban evidence

There is limited evidence for pre-Roman occupation at the site of Weston-under-Penyard. An early Iron Age brooch has been recorded (Crickmore 1984, 31; HWCM 12573), and Iron Age and Roman republican coins have been recorded from the site (Hayter 1923, 9-10; Allen 1961, 122-3, 133-5; HWCM 12573). Iron Age deposits were provisionally identified during the course of salvage recording on the route of the pipeline in 1993

(Robin Jackson pers comm). It has been suggested that the Iron Age evidence should be interpreted as post-Conquest occupation or other activity (Crickmore 1984, 31), and it is possible that the evidence represents a high-status site.

3 Roman archaeological evidence

3.1 Roman remains

A large number of relatively small areas have been excavated in the study area and produced evidence of Roman activity. Evidence for buildings or occupation deposits were located at five sites (Jack 1923: trenches 1 and 6, Garrod and Moss 1967; HWCM 6097, HWCM 16780, HWCM 21097, HWCM 21369, HWCM 21370). Three areas of iron-working have been identified (Bridgwater 1965, Garrod and Moss 1967, R Jackson pers comm; HWCM 6097, HWCM 21360, HWCM 21369). Two investigations have identified Roman slag-surfaced roads, although it is possible that these are in fact post-medieval (Watkins 1929, 231; Bridgwater 1959; HWCM 21361; HWCM 21367). Small-scale excavation and salvage recording in other areas have recorded Roman deposits, artefacts and iron slag (HWCM 3896, HWCM 6093, HWCM 6094, HWCM 10672, HWCM 10673, HWCM 12666, HWCM 15980, HWCM 15981, HWCM 15982, HWCM 16781, HWCM 21095, HWCM 21098, HWCM 21385, HWCM 22049, HWCM 22050, HWCM 22051, HWCM 22052, HWCM 22053).

A number of chance finds of Roman material were recorded in the late 18th century and 19th century, and a number of probable Roman structures have been investigated (Jack 1923, 32-44; HWCM 21380; HWCM 21381). Roman artefacts have also been recorded in the 20th century, but these are mostly unlocated (HWCM 21368 and HWCM 21379).

Rectilinear enclosures have been identified from aerial photographs in fields adjacent to the Roman settlement (ie HWCM 6094, HWCM 10008, HWCM 10010, HWCM 10676). A small settlement area has been excavated 350m southeast of the town (R Jackson pers comm; HWCM 15983), which may form part of a group of rural settlements near the town.

3.2 Roman urban components

Analysis of the evidence summarised above did not allow individual components to be identified. Evidence can be summarised under a number of headings, which may be interpretable as a number of components in the light of new evidence in the future.

Street system (insufficient evidence identify as a component). A number of Roman roads have been identified orientated on or bypassing the Roman settlement. Of five roads identified in the study area, two are based on alignments of modern roads (HWCM 21382 and HWCM 21384), one on aerial photographic evidence (HWCM 10113) and two on limited archaeological evidence as well as modern alignments (HWCM 21383 and HWCM 21371). A further road has been archaeologically investigated but is not located (HWCM 21367). It is not possible on current evidence to define the possible route of these roads through the settlement, and moreover it is possible that some of these roads are post-medieval in date.

Occupation areas (insufficient evidence identify as a component). Archaeological investigation indicates that occupation areas are quite widespread, and evidence of domestic occupation has been demonstrated in four areas (HWCM 6097, HWCM 16780, HWCM 21369, HWCM 21370). Antiquarian discoveries suggest that there were a number of substantial stone buildings within the settlement, but these are unlocated at present (HWCM 21380, HWCM 21381; cf Jack 1923, 32-44).

Industrial activity (insufficient evidence identify as a component). It is probable particular areas were predominantly used for industrial purposes, particularly iron-working. Archaeological investigation in the northern part of the settlement indicated that there were areas with iron-working furnaces (Bridgwater 1965, HWCM 21360). However in another area, iron-working was post-dated by domestic occupation (Garrod and Moss 1967; HWCM 21369).

3.3 Roman urban form

Definition and classification. The Roman urban form (HWCM 842) has been provisionally mapped, based on the available archaeological evidence. The available evidence indicates that the Roman urban form of Weston-under-Penyard can be classified as a Roman small town (English Heritage 1992).

Survival. Roman deposits have been recorded within the urban form, although the thickness of deposits and depth below modern ground surface has not been consistently recorded. Excavation at the northeastern part of the settlement in the 1920s showed that deposits up to *c* 1.0m thick beneath relatively shallow ploughsoil (after photographs: Jack 1923, pls 1-2; HWCM 16780). Excavation in the southwest part showed that thick deposits survive beneath *c* 0.75m of ploughsoil and hillwash, and included waterlogged deposits (County Archaeological Service 1993; HWCM 6097). The site of the Roman town was not occupied after the end of the Roman period. The remains of Roman buildings were cleared in the late 18th century when the land was enclosed, and since that date the fields have been regularly ploughed.

4 Post-urban archaeological evidence

Archaeological evidence indicates that the Roman town was not occupied after the late fourth century. Post-medieval evidence from the study area is limited to evidence of 17th century re-use of iron slag from Roman furnaces (Bridgwater 1965).

5 Specialist assessments

5.1 Assessment of artefactual evidence J D Hurst

A large amount of artefactual evidence is available for Weston-under-Penyard. The earliest artefacts from the study area are of prehistoric date. These consist of a neolithic stone axe (HWCM 841), and late Iron Age coins (HWCM 12666 and HWCM 12573). The majority of artefacts have been Roman, comprising pottery and a wide range of other artefacts: stone and ceramic building materials, iron and copper alloy objects (including many coins), vessel and window glass, and worked bone and stone objects (eg HWCM 3896, HWCM 12666). A few medieval and post-medieval finds have been recorded (Bridgwater 1965, and HWCM 6093).

5.2 Environmental evidence E A Pearson

Much of the archaeological work (until salvage recording in 1993) were chance finds or antiquarian field intervention, and there has been no policy of wet-sieving samples for environmental remains. The majority of the environmental evidence has been hand-collected during fieldwork and is mostly restricted to larger visible items.

Human burials. Human skeletons were discovered in 1804 when a road that crossed the Roman settlement area at Bury Hill was widened (RCHME 1932; HWCM 23565).

Animal bone. Numerous bones of ox, pig and sheep, antler of red deer, and horn cores of *Bos longifrons* (Celtic shorthorn ox) were found in association with Roman remains during

excavations by Jack (1923). During salvage recording along the Lea and Western-under-Penyard sewage pipeline, a quantity of animal bone (including worked bone) sufficient to provide information on diet and butchery practices was recovered. However, this has yet to be analysed by a specialist.

Plant and other remains. Plant remains have been discovered as early as 1785, during the enclosing and levelling of Bury Hill. Here, charred wheat was discovered within vaults, in addition to other Roman antiquities. As a result of excavations in 1922, plant remains were reported consisting of charcoal fragments and a short species list was produced; a small quantity of oyster and other mollusc shells were also noted. During salvage recording in 1993 (HWCM 6097), in an area close to the stream, waterlogged plant remains were recovered as a result of wet-sieving and flotation, and timbers were recorded. At present these remains have not been studied in detail.

6 Archaeological research framework

6.1 Model of urban development

A model of the Roman town of Weston-under-Penyard has been produced which is predictive and capable of testing through archaeological investigation. This model has both chronological and spatial (landuse) dimensions (see sections 2 to 3) and is based on an analysis of documentary, cartographic and archaeological sources. The model is derived from the current academic understanding of urban development in Britain, and forms one element of a developing regional research framework. The model is provisional and will be subject to confirmation or revision in the future as new information becomes available, or new studies lead to changing understandings of towns in the region.

6.2 Chronological framework

The date of origin of the settlement has not been established, and the relation of the Roman small town with a possible late Iron Age settlement is unknown. The chronological development of the town and the date of its desertion are similarly uncertain, although it is probable that the settlement was abandoned by the end of the 4th century. The broad outlines of this chronological framework are provisional and require testing through archaeological investigation. Although a detailed understanding of the chronological development requires further archaeological evidence, it is probable that re-examination of published artefacts and material in museum collections may illuminate this chronological sequence.

6.3 Urban landuse

The layout of the small town is extremely poorly understood at present, and no well-defined components could be identified in the present study (see section 3.2). In particular, the available evidence for roads forms an unreliable basis for an interpretation of the layout of the settlement. Only a small number of aerial photographs of the town have been plotted (RCHME 1979), and it is probable that a study of the available aerial photographic coverage and careful plotting would illuminate the basic layout of the settlement, and might allow the existing information on Roman road alignments to be critically re-examined.

6.4 Potential for survival of buried remains

It has been demonstrated that substantial and significant archaeological deposits survive in Weston-under-Penyard. These are located beneath post-medieval and modern deposits of variable depth, which are the result of ploughing and hillwash (R Jackson pers comm). Some of these deposits are waterlogged. The deposits contain datable artefactual and environmental assemblages, and have potential for illuminating the chronological

development and economic basis of the small town. Fieldwork was undertaken by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in November 1994. The extent of 20th century development (new buildings and major landscaping work) was mapped. This showed that there was very little modern development within the area of the town.

6.5 Potential for artefactual studies J D Hurst

Some archaeological excavation has been undertaken in Weston-under-Penyard, though much of this work was undertaken some years ago. However it is evident from these investigations that large quantities of artefacts may be expected from fieldwork in certain areas. The range and quantity of Roman artefacts, especially pottery and coins, is notable, and as they are derived from limited fieldwork, the density of finds in some parts of the area is high. Since much of the fieldwork undertaken was published between the 1920s and 1950s, some of the specialist reports are accordingly rather outdated, and identifications and dating of some finds may need revision. Some material has been re-assessed by Berry (1994).

Though deposits are generally shallow, in selective areas there are deep (often industrial) features which could provide valuable pockets of deposition. There are likely to be minimal problems with residuality as the site was occupied for a relatively short chronological span, and there has been little subsequent disturbance of deposits since the site was deserted.

Period discussion. The neolithic stone axe (HWCM 841) is likely to be a stray find. The Iron Age coins may also be stray finds. No pottery or other finds of this period has been identified in the study area, except possibly during salvage recording during pipeline construction in 1992-3 (HWCM 6097).

The majority of artefacts are of Roman date. Roman pottery has been one of the most common finds, and some of the pottery groups may have been large (ie over 1000 sherds), but this is difficult to determine as no detailed quantification of pottery is available. The vintage of some of the reporting has also meant that classification and dating, especially in the case of ceramics, is now outdated. The range of Roman artefacts is exceptional and includes some very unusual objects. A copper alloy head and a statuette of Diana (material uncertain) are reputed to have been found in the 18th century (RCHM 1932, 209). In 1870 an exhibition of finds from the site included many copper alloy *fibulae*, keys and pins, glass beads, and *intagli*. The range of building materials was also exceptional as it includes stone pillars (HWCM 12666), flue tiles (usually indicative of a hypocaust system), *tesserae*, and painted wall plaster. These suggest a building (or buildings) of Romanised type.

The quantity of iron slag is exceptional, and much of this material was reused in the Roman period for surfacing roads. The slag has been interpreted as the result of smithing and smelting activity (Bridgewater 1965, 132), and indicates that a major ironworking industry was present at Weston-under-Penyard.

6.6 Potential for environmental archaeology E A Pearson

The majority of the fieldwork was carried out before wet-sieving samples for environmental remains was commonplace, and therefore opportunities for recovering biological remains has been limited. The full potential for recovery of environmental remains and research is largely unknown. As the area is located on soils overlying permeable sandstone, good preservation of organic deposits preserved by waterlogging is not generally expected. However, salvage recording in 1993 demonstrated survival of organic remains including timber and wood alongside the stream. Similar deposits may be encountered along this watercourse in the future. Such material may provide information relating to the surrounding environment and to dumped occupational rubbish, particularly where settlement is close to the stream. In general the soils are slightly acidic, and

therefore good conditions for the preservation of faunal remains such as animal bone and molluscs are likely to be limited.

Environmental remains providing information on living conditions and activities in the town may be recovered from pits, ovens and floor surfaces associated with occupational areas. Much information has been gathered on the industrial function of the town. However, it is likely that charred cereal remains are likely to survive, providing an insight into agricultural activities. Moreover, the record of a primitive breed of domestic cattle (Celtic shorthorn oxen) sometimes found in this period is of interest.

The presence of black soil in the locality of Roman occupation, frequently noted by antiquarians (eg Jack 1923), raises the question of whether this results from high levels of charcoal and slag debris in Roman occupation deposits, or whether it resembles the "dark earth" found on urban sites. Without detailed descriptions of this soil it is difficult to determine the significance of the soils. Soil micromorphology has previously provided valuable information on the nature of such soils and would be a useful research tool should they be encountered as a result of future fieldwork.

Hillwash and alluvial deposits were noted beneath the topsoil, sealing Roman archaeological features. It would be interesting to establish the date of such deposits as they are evidence of intensive landuse in the area. Determination of the source of the soils and the nature of their deposition may indicate whether its presence is related to local changes in landuse (particularly clearance and agricultural or industrial activity).

As few environmental remains have been recovered in Weston-under-Penyard, any environmental material would be of interest. This evidence could provide information on the past environment, diet, living conditions and agricultural or industrial economy. Future excavation should include a policy of sampling and wet-sieving deposits in order to recover plant, insect, molluscs and small animal remains in conjunction with hand-collection of larger items. Where appropriate, specialist sampling for soil and pollen analysis may be required.

6.7 Summary of research potential

The Roman settlement at Weston-under-Penyard contains buried archaeological deposits, and these are judged to have high potential. In addition there is high potential for the recovery of artefact and ecofact assemblages. Weston-under-Penyard is a Roman small town with a specialised industrial function, and the number of such small towns which were primarily dependent on industrial production industry was relatively small. Weston-under-Penyard is much less well understood than either of the other Roman towns in the region (iron-working in Worcester and salt production in Droitwich) in terms of its chronology or basic layout, and little is known of the technology or operation of the iron industry.

7 Management framework

7.1 Urban archaeological area

The mapped extent of the Roman urban form defined above indicated the extent of the urban area (Weston-under-Penyard Urban Archaeological Area). The significance of the urban archaeological area is assessed below.

7.2 Existing protection measures

The archaeological urban area of Weston-under-Penyard has been defined (section 7.1). Different parts of the urban area are afforded different measures of protection through legislation and the planning process. Directly relevant measures are outlined below.

Scheduled ancient monument. There is one Scheduled Ancient Monument in Weston-under-Penyard (Here and Worc no 154). It is possible that following the current Monument Protection programme English Heritage may modify the scheduled area.

7.3 Management approach

The archaeological urban area of Weston-under-Penyard contains buried remains relating to Roman occupation. The buried remains vary in complexity and depth, and demonstrably contain significant archaeological information. It is desirable that any proposed development within the urban area that has a potential impact on buried remains should be assessed by the appropriate archaeological body.

The course of action recommended will depend upon the nature of the development and current planning legislation and frameworks. The archaeological response will be based on both the archaeological information summarised in this document and any subsequent archaeological information recorded on the County Sites and Monuments Record.

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9 Mapping

The illustrations for this report comprise CAD plots of the urban components for each period and a location plot of archaeological remains combined with OS digital map data (1995) at 1:5000. These plots are current at the date of the completion of this report (March 1995). After this date new information will be held by the Hereford and Worcester County Council Sites and Monuments Record.

- * Historic buildings (listed and other recorded buildings) and urban area
- * Archaeological remains and urban area
- * Roman urban form and components
- * Observed 20th century development
- * Urban area and scheduled ancient monuments