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Herefordshire Archaeology
Conservation and Environmental Planning
Planning Services
Environment Directorate
Herefordshire Council

**Herefordshire Woodland
Pilot Scheme: Phase 1
Nether Wood, Aconbury
Herefordshire Archaeology Report
No.53**

Herefordshire Archaeology,
March 2002, revised 2004

Report prepared by
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Herefordshire Archaeology is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic landscapes, maintains the county Sites and Monument Record, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects. The County Archaeologist is Dr. Keith Ray.

Herefordshire Woodland Pilot Scheme: Phase 1 Nether Wood, Aconbury

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No.53, May 2002, (revised 2004).

Summary:

The survey described in this report, (EHE32671), formed part of a pilot study in partnership with the Forestry Commission. A rapid walk over survey was carried out in Nether Wood, Aconbury. A hand held G.P.S unit was used to record the location of features encountered.

Structures were recorded within the wood that illustrate the intensive use of the woodland resource in the late and post medieval periods, i.e. saw pits, charcoal burning platforms and woodland management boundaries.

Of particular interest were the well preserved remains of a mill with dams and races.

Much of the wood has very dense undergrowth particularly in the central and eastern areas making the recognition of many features impossible, however traces of its potential were recorded on its periphery.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGR's are accurate to approximately 10m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50, and 0.02m at 1:20.

Figures contain material from the Ordnance Survey. The grid in this material is the National Grid taken from the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. This material has been reproduced in order to locate the site in its environs.

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Introduction

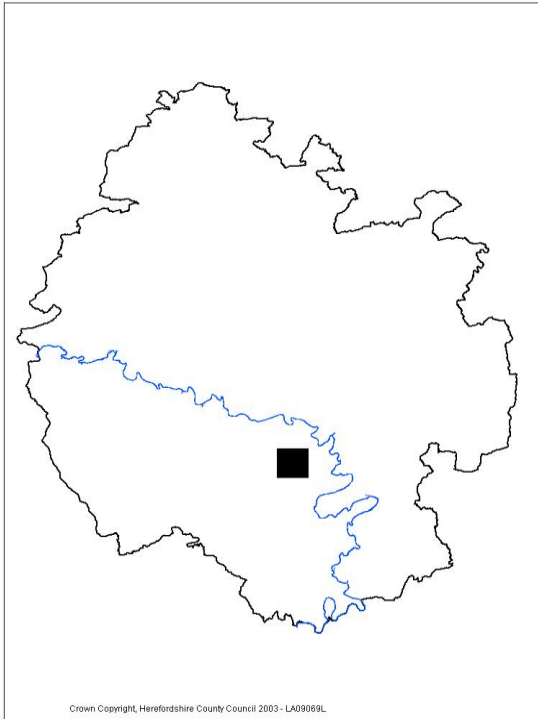
This report provides an account of a rapid survey of Nether Wood, (EHE32671). The survey was undertaken as part of a pilot study in partnership with the Forestry Commission in order to document the archaeology of woodlands in the county. Woodlands are areas of high archaeological potential in that they have seldom been subjected to the types of disturbance associated with intensive modern agriculture. Relatively little information concerning archaeological sites within woodland has been recorded in the past. Access is often difficult, aerial photographs are of little or no use and until recently recording an accurate location within woodland was often not practicable.

Since 1999 Herefordshire Archaeology has been involved in regular discussions with the Forestry Commission concerning the lack of archaeological data available when management plans are being prepared and applications for Woodland Grant Schemes are submitted. As a result of these discussions, the Forestry Commission has grant aided Herefordshire Archaeology to undertake a two phase pilot study. Phase one took place in 2001-2 and involved the rapid survey of eight areas of woodland in different areas of the county. These woodlands were split into those that are owned and managed by Forest Enterprises, those owned by large private estates, those that have recently been the subject of Woodland Grant Scheme applications and those for which Native Woodland Plans have been or are in preparation.

The survey for each woodland area in the pilot study identified the potential for the survival of archaeological features and sampled the types of features present. The stage two survey will re-visit woodlands identified in the stage one study as being of high archaeological potential and a more detailed survey undertaken. This will illustrate the density of archaeological sites within the woodland and record the relationships between features to enable some degree of understanding concerning the evolution of the woodland. The phase two survey will also expand the stage one survey and subject additional woodlands to rapid survey.

It is only when the changes throughout history within a wood have been documented and understood and put together with ecological information that a well informed management strategy can be implemented. Woodland boundaries have often moved over the centuries, sometimes expanding to encapsulate and preserve evidence of alternative land-use, e.g. field systems and on other occasions shrinking and being subject to differing forms of woodland management. These variations in land-use within a woodland influence the ecological data from that woodland. As such archaeological survey can contribute significant data concerning woodland history, management history and sequential development. This can provide independent verification of historical change from ecological study.

Location



Nether Wood is located approximately 7 km. south of Hereford, in Aconbury Parish and comprises a low hill bounded on its northern, western and eastern sides by small streams.

The Historic Landscape Characterisation Study for Herefordshire describes Nether Wood as woodland surrounded by fields derived from the enclosure of former common arable fields. (Ray and White, 2003).

Figure 1: Site Location.

Previous Fieldwork / Records

Prior to the survey taking place the county Sites and Monuments Record was consulted prior to the survey but no entries were found within the wood. However, a single entry was recorded for an area of field immediately to the west of the wood:

HSM 35371 Field name in Tithe Apportionments “Mill Meadow”

Method

Nether Wood was surveyed on February 8th 2002. The survey comprised a rapid assessment of the potential of the woodland to contain well preserved archaeological features. Features were mapped using a hand-held Garmin 12 XL Global Positioning System, enabling a ten figure grid reference to be recorded for each feature. This system is accurate to within approximately 10m under tree canopy.

The wood was walked in transects aligned roughly north / south and approximately 50m apart. If a large feature was encountered and no other features of archaeological significance can be seen, then this feature was followed and features 50m either side of it recorded. Field observations and grid references were recorded on a dictaphone and transcribed at a later date.

The survey examined only a sample of the woodland and should not be taken as exhaustive or its results definitive. It is intended to record the type of features present, their state of preservation and their relationships to other features within the woodland.

Results (Figure 2)

The recorded data from the survey is described in detail within the results section. This latter section is concluded by a brief discussion highlighting the historical development of the woodland as understood using the 2003 survey results. The significance of recorded features and management implications are then commented upon within the discussion section. Appendix 1 contains a simple data base which cross references each site to the Ordnance Survey National Grid, (NGR), and the series of unique Sites and Monuments “Primary Record Numbers” (PRN), allocated following the transcription. These numbers are referred to within both the text and illustrations. They are prefixed by HSM, these initials relating to Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record unique numbers.

Woodland management features

A total of six charcoal burning platforms were recorded. These ranged in size from 5-12m in diameter and in the main comprised a level, circular platform with a pronounced down-slope lip. These were often recorded in small clusters of three or four, usually also associated with saw pits and possible storage platforms. The size of some of these charcoal burning platforms, (HSM 32688), would suggest prolonged use.

A single saw pit was recorded, (HSM 32683). This comprised an oval depression 4m long and 2m wide with spoil on its down-slope side.

A substantial level platform was recorded within the wood, (HSM 32681). This feature was 8m long and 4m wide and was probably used to store timber and / or processed charcoal. A smaller, 5m square, platform, (HSM 32679) was also noted close to the stream. This too was probably used for storage / stacking timber etc.

Woodland boundaries

Few woodland boundary banks were recorded during the survey. This is chiefly because the woodland is bounded on its northern, western and eastern sides by small streams providing a natural boundary for much of its circuit. The southern edge of Nether Wood is bounded by a road and there is no sign of a woodland boundary bank on this side. There is however a very straight break in slope running parallel to the road, probably resulting from works associated with road widening and drainage in the 19th or 20th century.

A single woodland compartment boundary was identified, (HSM 32680). This took the form of a ditch approximately 1.2m wide and 0.3m deep, with no noticeable bank to either side. This is aligned south-west / north east and slits into two just before reaching Tars Brook with one arm running due north and the other running west.

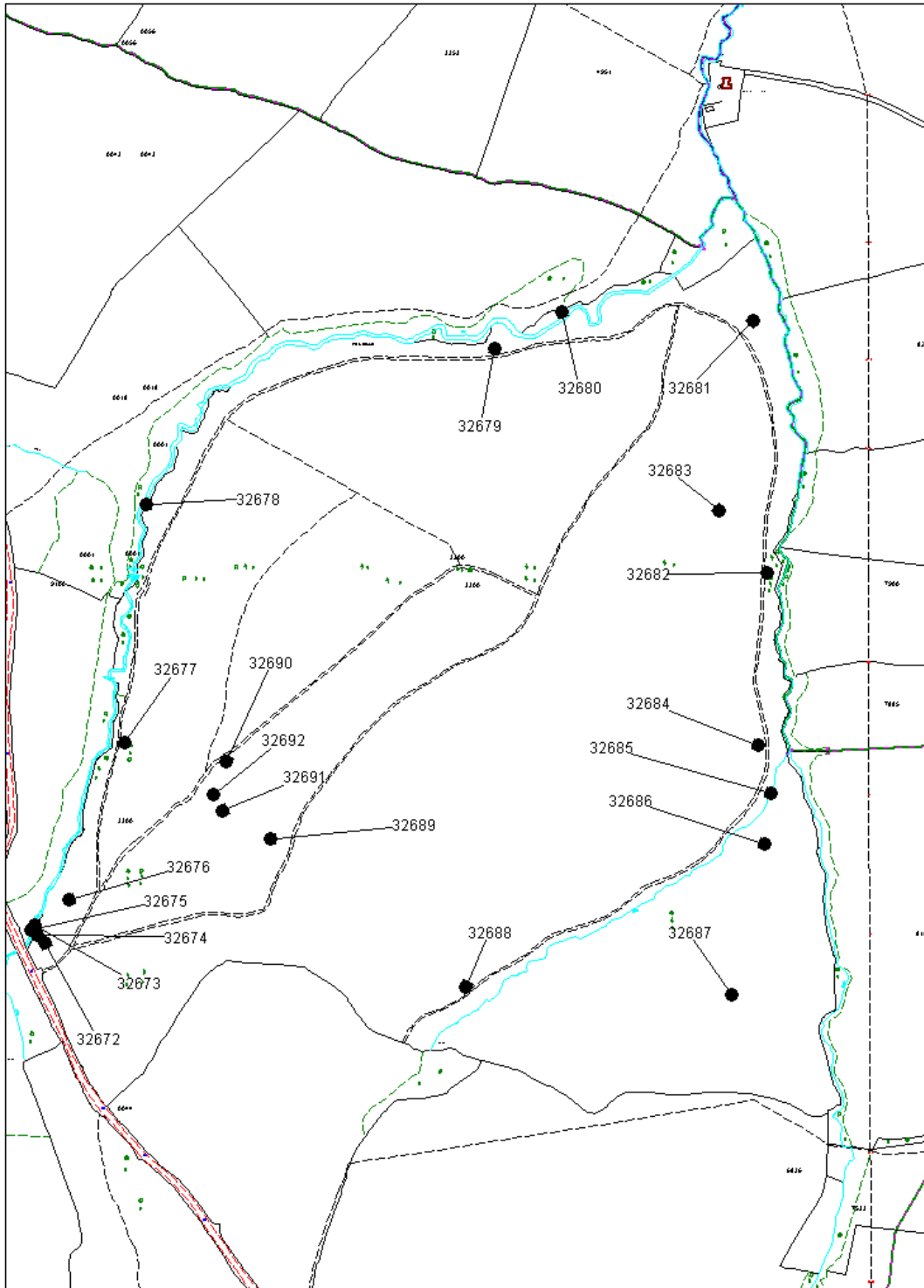


Figure 2: Location of earthworks recorded during the survey.

Industrial features

Within Netherwood, on the eastern bank of Tars Brook there is the earthwork remains of a mill. This is on the opposite side of the stream from the field, (HSM 25371) recorded on the Tithe Apportionments as being called “Mill Meadow”. The Mill site comprises a complex series of earthworks including a series of two rubble and earthen dams, (HSM 32673 and HSM 32677), the site of the mill building, (HSM 32676) and two mill races, (HSM 32672 and HSM 32678).

The top mill race, (HSM 32672), comprises a lynchet which runs parallel to but approximately 15m east of Tars Brook. The lynchet is 1.5 – 2m high on its down-slope side and 2.5m wide. It runs from this point to the north-east for over 30m before turning to the north-west where there was presumably a sluice to control the flow into the stream. The mill race runs round a large mound approximately 4m high and 8m square, (HSM 32675), which presumably was a platform for the mill was building and wheel. The building platform is attached on its south-western side to a dam by a short bank or causeway. The dam, (HSM 32673), is over 20m wide and stands to a height of 2m above the upstream ground surface and 5-6m above the downstream ground surface.

At the point where the mill race turns to run north-west towards the stream, a wide but shallow ditch continues to run in a north-easterly direction. There is a 3-4m wide but low bank on the western side of the ditch and the ditch is 5-6m wide and 1.2m deep. This feature, (HSM 32676), appears to be an earlier phase of mill race which runs for approximately 80m before running into a natural gully that leads to the stream.

Downstream from this there are the remains of a second dam, (HSM 32677). This has largely been destroyed by the stream but the large quantity of stone work in the locality suggests a structure similar in size and construction to dam HSM 32673. Beneath this feature there may be a further mill race, HSM 32678. This may utilise in part an redundant stream course however some sections are very straight suggesting a certain amount of canalisation.

Communication routes and other route-ways

Three lengths of holloway were noted during the survey. HSM 32685 comprises a 5m wide and 1m deep holloway which runs down to the stream and can be seen continuing to run in a northerly direction outside the wood on the other side of Tars Brook. HSM 32689 and HSM 32690 were identified in the southern area of the wood. Both holloways are 5m wide and 1.5m deep and run on a north-west / south-east axis.

Discussion and Implications

Site and feature condition

The survey recorded a wide range of features dating from the post-medieval and medieval periods. These included features associated with woodland management and industry. The earthworks associated with the mill were particularly well preserved. Much of the south-eastern portion of the wood was too overgrown to survey and large areas

within the centre of the wood appear to have been subjected to considerable machine disturbance, presumably prior to the last period of re-planting. These works have had a considerable impact on the survival of any surface features. As a consequence no features of archaeological significance were noted within these areas.

Implications regarding the archaeological resource

Whilst a relatively small number of features were noted when compared to the area of woodland surveyed, many of these features are of significance. The group of features associated with the mill are of particular interest.

Implications regarding site condition

Due to the large area that could not be surveyed due to dense bramble and the areas damaged by heavy plant most features recorded during the survey were located on or close to the edge of the woodland. Features farther into the wood are particularly difficult to recognise due to lack of slope and disturbance.

Implications for future management

Existing access routes should be used for future management and extraction within the woodland. Care should be taken to avoid further damaging areas within the central area of the woodland particularly those located on the more level ground. Care should also be taken when extracting timber from the area on and immediately surrounding the site of the mill complex.

Implications for future field work.

A more detailed survey may record additional features and provide greater clarity concerning the organisation of both internal boundaries and route-ways, however, this would need to be done after large areas of the south-eastern part of the woodland has been cleared but before re-growth has begun.

A detailed, measured survey of the mill complex would add greatly to our understanding of its lay-out, phasing and the way in which it operated.

<i>Discussion</i>

This survey has identified a range of features within the wood reflecting woodland management and industry dating from the post-medieval period or earlier. Of particular interest was the well preserved mill complex.

The presence of a mill on Tar's Brook is not surprising, indeed the northern most point is called Tar's Mill. It is however surprising to find the mill earthworks so well preserved within woodland. Much of the central and eastern portion of the wood is badly overgrown, making this type of survey almost impossible. Although relatively few archaeological features were recorded during this survey most types of woodland features were encountered including saw pits, holloways, boundary banks and ditches and charcoal burning platforms. The lack of features within the central area of the wood can

be explained by past management regimes. It appears that much of the central area of the wood has been subjected to much disturbance by heavy machinery and has been allowed to grow a thick under-storey of bramble and elder, leaving only a fragmentary record of relatively well preserved features around the wood edge and on the steeper slopes.

Most common types of archaeological features associated with woodland management were encountered in this survey. Although much of the wood was too overgrown to provide any data for the survey and the central area has been subjected to surface damage by heavy machinery within the last 50 years, enough remains to provide a picture of the intensive industrial activities taking place within Nether Wood certainly from the post-medieval period onwards.

Acknowledgements

Herefordshire Archaeology would like to acknowledge the help and co-operation the Forestry Commission and of the land owner.

Archive

1 Dictaphone tape
 1 Transcription Record
 1 Excel Database
 1 Mapinfo data file
 This document

Appendix 1: Database of features and grid references.

SMR No.	East	North	Site type	Period	Description
32672	51906	33616	Woodland boundary bank	Medieval	running parallel to and c. 15m east of the stream. It is 1.5-2m high and 2.5m wide
32673	51896	33634	southern end of a dam	Post-medieval	c. 2m higher than the wood floor
32674	51898	33623	Mill race and sluice	Post-medieval	c. 8m long
32675	51892	33629	sub-angular mound	Post-medieval	c. 4m high and 8m in diameter
32676	51931	33660	1 st phase mill race	Medieval?	c. 6m wide
32677	51990	33824	dam	Post-medieval	runs for c. 5m on the eastern side of the stream and 10m on the western side.

32678	52012	34073	Possible mill race / canalised stream course.	Post-medieval	c. 5m west of this position. Consists of an 8-10m wide ditch
32679	52376	34236	circular platform	Post-medieval	c. 5m in diameter
32680	52446	34274	Compartment boundary	Post-medieval	c. 6m wide
32681	52646	34265	platform	Post-medieval	c. 8m long and 5m deep, facing north-west
32682	52661	34001	old stream channel/ race	Post-medieval	
32683	52610	34067	saw pit	post medieval	aligned east/west and is 4m long and 2m wide with spoil on its downslope side
32684	52651	33822	charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	c. 10m in diameter
32685	52664	33772	ditch or holloway	Post-medieval	
32686	52658	33719	charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	c. 5m in diameter and facing west
32687	52624	33561	charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	8-10m in diameter
32688	52345	33569	charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	c. 12m in diameter
32689	52142	33724	holloway	Medieval	c. 5m wide and 1.5m deep
32690	52096	33804	holloway	Medieval	c. 5m wide and 1.5m deep
32691	52092	33753	charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	6m in diameter and facing west
32692	52083	33770	charcoal burning platform	Post-medieval	c. 8m in diameter and very well preserved

Validation

Herefordshire Archaeology operates a validation system for its reports, to provide quality assurance and to comply with Best Value procedures.

This report has been checked for accuracy and clarity of statements of procedure and results.

Dr. K. Ray County Archaeologist.