

Row Ditch, Bartonsham: A Community Archaeological Investigation



Report prepared by

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Summary:

Bartonsham History Group successfully applied for a Heritage Lottery grant in order to investigate the earthwork bank known as “Row Ditch” in the parish of Bartonsham, on the south-eastern outskirts of Hereford City. Documentary and cartographic evidence strongly suggested that this was a defensive earthwork constructed during the Civil War by the Parliamentarian Army. Whilst this earthwork may well have been utilised during the Civil War, a number of theories have been put forward for the earlier construction of this monument, including it being a length of Offa’s Dyke.

The lottery funded project included the excavation of two trenches across the ditch of the monument in order to retrieve evidence concerning its origins and use. The excavations confirmed that the monument had indeed been used during the Civil War but that it was a natural feature in origin. The stratigraphy within the “ditch” clearly showed that the feature was a river terrace, immediately below which was a paleo-channel. There was no evidence for any cultural use until lengths of it were excavated and a “breastwork” thrown up in order to shelter troops and horses from cannon fire and detection, during the Civil War. The feature was used for a period of six weeks between 28th July and 4th September 1645 and a number of actions were led from it in repeated attempts to breach the city defences.

After the Civil War it was used as a boundary for the 19th century development of Bartonsham and St. James’s.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGRs 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.

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Introduction

This report (EHE 80363) provides an account of a Heritage Lottery Funded project designed to investigate a linear earthwork feature, historically known as Row Ditch, at Bartonsham, Hereford.

The monument known as Row Ditch (HER 31823, SAM 1001780), comprises an earthwork bank and ditch approximately 700m long and up to 18m wide, (bank and ditch). It runs along what is now the limit of the urban spread on the southern edge of Bartonsham, a parish on the south-eastern side of Hereford City. Approximately 80 percent of the monument is designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Following discussions between the Heritage at Risk Projects Officer, Herefordshire Council, landowners and local residents a community group was formed in order to prepare and submit an application for Heritage Lottery Funding to support a small archaeological project designed to shed light on the origins, lifespan and use of the monument. In order to facilitate the HLF application, the Heritage at Risk Projects Officer, produced a brief for the investigative works (Brief: Community Archaeology Project at the Row Ditch, Hereford) and a geophysical survey was funded by Historic England. In response to the brief, a Written Scheme of Investigation was produced by Herefordshire Archaeology describing a fully costed programme of works forming a community project. The application for Heritage Lottery Funding was approved in early 2017.

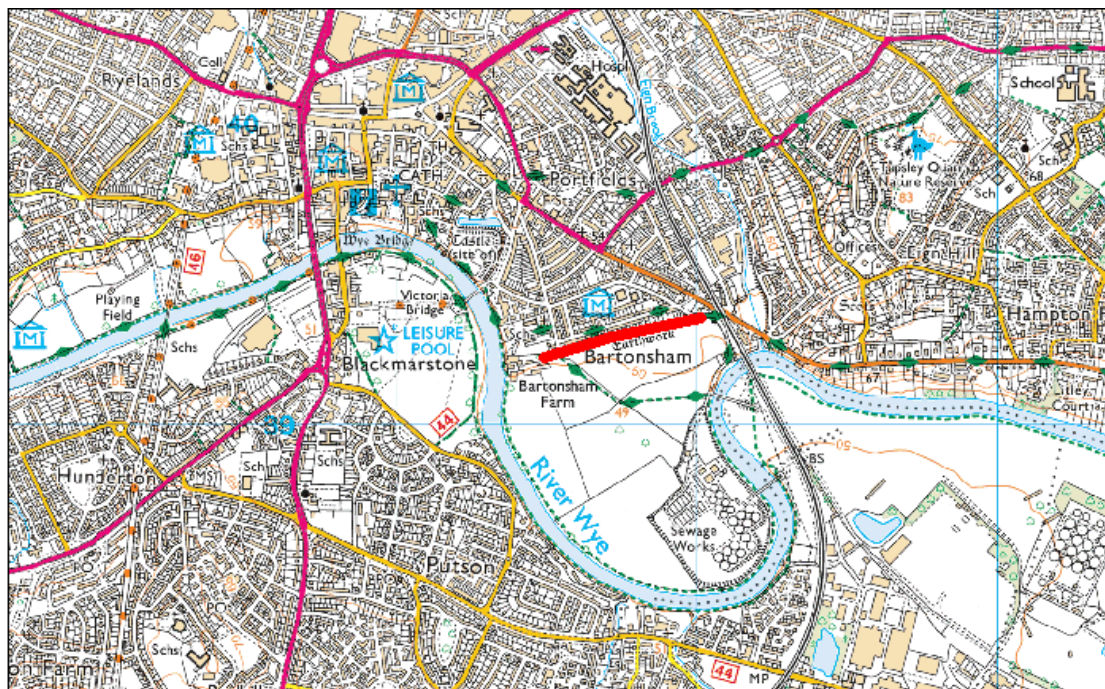


Figure 1: location of the site in relation to the City of Hereford

The monument runs on a south-west / north-eastern alignment and appears to cut off a major meander of the River Wye. Much has been written about this earthwork, little of it verifiable and this had led to a degree of confusion and folklore. It has variously been recorded / described as a natural river terrace (Roseff, 2001), a section of Offa's Dyke, (VCH Vol 1, 1908) and a defensive breastwork constructed during the Civil War by the Scotch Army, (various). A more modern explanation of the monument is that it was a main spillway for diverting water to and from a water-meadow system. It has been compared to the earthwork which marks the southern line of Hereford's medieval defences within the Bishops Meadows (known as Rowe Ditch or Kings Ditch) and on this basis the favoured explanation appears to be that it is a continuation of the defences constructed by the Scotch Army during the siege of Hereford. It is understood that no recent or adequately recorded intrusive archaeological work has been undertaken on the Bartonsham Row Ditch and that it remains a monument whose origins, lifespan and use(s) are unknown. It is further understood that the scheduled area was fenced off from the fields to the south and a geophysical survey was undertaken in 2013. Historically this monument has been included within the Scheduling of the monument also sometimes referred to as Rowe Ditch which runs across the Bishop's Meadows (both Scheduled under SAM 1001780 and old designation number 47). It is clear that these two stretches of bank and ditch are not the same continuous monument and in order to attempt to clarify the descriptions Rowe Ditch on the Bishop's Meadows (also known as The King's Ditch), is referenced as SAM 47a; whilst the Row Ditch at Bartonsham (also known as Bartonsham Ditch) , is referenced as SAM 47b.

The HER description of the monument is as follows:

Row Ditch (aka Bartonsham Ditch), Bartonsham Meadows, Hereford

SMR Number : 31823 Grid Reference : SO 51703 39277 Parish : HEREFORD CITY, HEREFORDSHIRE

A 700m intermittent earthwork runs in a straight line across Bartonsham Meadows, following a possible channel of the Wye. The ditch was reported to have been filled in by the farmer in the early 1990s. This was numbered at one time with SMR 6002, Row Ditch or Kings Ditch in the playing fields south of the river. (1)

It is not shown on the Speede map of 1610, it could therefore be, as stated on the OS scheduling map "constructed by the Scotch Army 1645". There is thus no connection between SAM 47a the late 12th century town defences (SMR 6002) and SAM 47b the Bartonsham meadows section and they should be scheduled separately. (2)

At Bartonsham Farm, the south-west (?) corner of the city, a well-defined bank strikes east from the river for a distance of 250 yds to a clump of yew trees. There it gives place to a broad, dry ditch, continued in the same direction and parallel to but outside the city wall, to the Eign Road. This Ditch, known as Rowe Ditch, has been erroneously asserted to have been constructed by the Scots Army in 1645. The Ditch is mentioned however in records of the time of Edward I and Henry VIII, called Rough Ditch and Rowe Ditch. This Rowe Ditch is actually a course of Offas Dyke. It continues a few yards beyond the eastern end into Eign Road after crossing the brook as a well formed bank, then onto Mordiford and Checkley. (3)

A narrow trench dug for a water pipe in June 2003 to the west of the scheduled part at Bartonsham farm, just to the west of St James Road showed a river terrace deposit. It looked a natural feature here. (4)

Scheduled Monument Consent granted for excavation for and erection of one fencing post within the scheduled area, 20/06/2013. (5)

<2> SHE13557 - Bibliographic reference: Leigh, Judith. 1987. Monument Wardens Report, SAM 47. English Heritage, Monument Wardens Report, SAM 47.

<1> SHE14579 - Verbal communication: Roseff, R. 2001. Field Observation. Field Observation.

<3> SHE14583 - Bibliographic reference: Wood, James G. 1908. Offa's Dike in Herefordshire (pp 258-263). The Victoria History of the County of Hereford edited by William Page, Vol I.

<4> SHE15364 - Verbal communication: Roseff, R. 2005. Personal Observation. personal observation.

<5> SHE19019 - Document: English Heritage. 2013. Letter granting Scheduled Monument Consent for proposed works at Row Ditch (Entrenchment), Hereford, Herefordshire.

Background history and previous archaeological work

The earthwork referred to as Row Ditch comprises a linear earth work approximately 700m in length running from the river wye at its western end, eastwards towards Eign Brook. This effectively cuts off a large meander of the River Wye. The earthwork today is, in the main a 2.5m high terrace topped by a contiguous line of garden walls which form the southern boundary of the Victorian suburb of St. James's. The houses of these gardens front Park Street. The Scheduled Area runs from Crozens Lane at its eastern end, (terminating at an electricity sub-station) and terminating at its western end to the rear of No. Eight, Park Street, forming an area 493m in length and between 15 and 20 m wide. Only the easternmost 80m has not been affected by the construction of Victorian housing and gardens and remains as an earthwork bank with shallow ditch on its southern side. This appears to have been at least smoothed and the bank spread so that it is almost completely filling the ditch. To the west of the Scheduled Area, on the western side of Green Street, the earthwork appears as a well formed terrace, topped with a slight bank but no visible ditch. This impressive and well preserved section of earthwork continues westwards for 45m after which it is truncated by buildings associated with Bartonsham Farm.

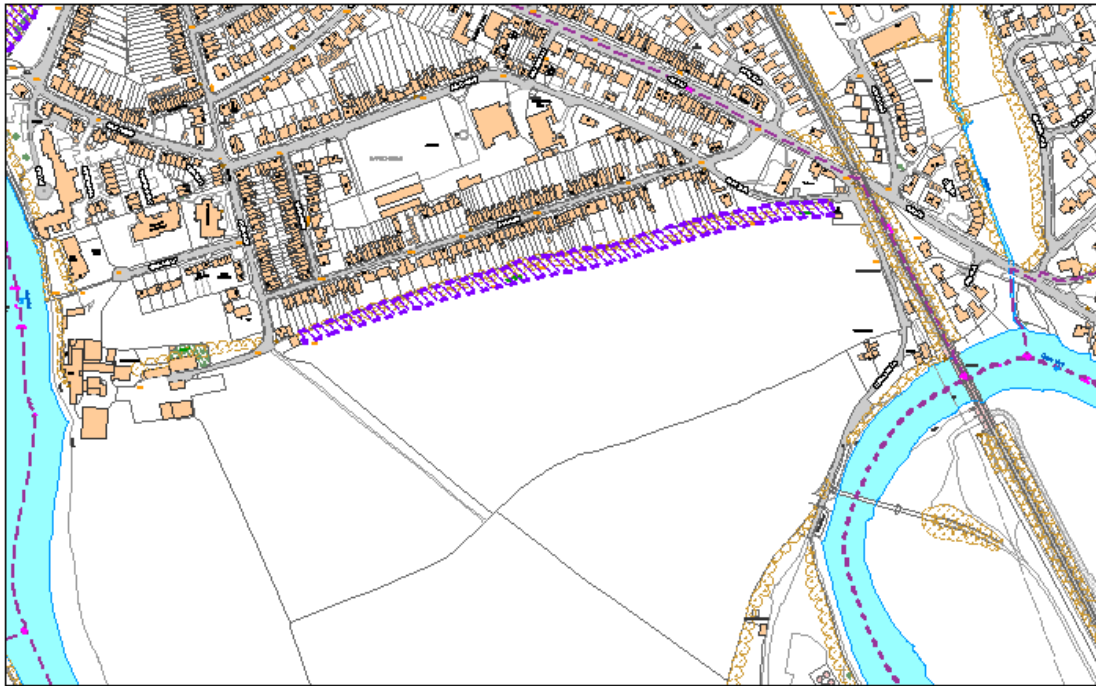


Figure 2: Modern mapping showing the extent of the Scheduled Area.

Documentary evidence would strongly suggest that during the six week siege of Hereford, (between July 28th and September 2nd 1645) the Scottish Army re-fortified the, by then abandoned and ruinous, medieval defences on the Bishops Meadows, known as King's Ditch in order to construct a breastwork from which to bombard Hereford Castle. They also constructed some form of defensive line or breastwork out of musket range, across Bartonsham Meadows running between the River Wye and Eign Brook. This became known as Row Ditch and may well have originally been called "Rough Ditch". It is believed that this is where their troops and cavalry were quartered.

Price, (1796) describes how the Scottish Army...*"had pitched their tents about a quarter of a mile south-east of the city, in some common fields, now called Bassom or Bartonsham Meadows, where several remains of their entrenchments are yet visible. Pieces of swords, gun-locks, &c. are oftentimes picked up there by those who till the ground."*

The last sentence may be more folklore than factual as this was never the site of any action and swords and wheel / match locks would not have been discarded even if broken.

Duncumb, in his 1804 "Collections towards the History and Antiquities of the County of Hereford", provides a detailed description of the works: *"amongst other operations deemed necessary by the besiegers, during their attempt on the city, a strong parapet, or breast-work of earth was thrown up across a neck of land, from a point of the river in the Belowe-Eigne suburb to another point of the river, about three hundred yards below the castle, being an extent of eight hundred yards, nearly in a right line from east to west."* Duncumb went on to estimate that *"the parapet, in its original state, measured twenty feet in height from the bottom of the fosse."*

The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, England 1931 describes the monument as: “....a broad ditch with the counterscarp on the north side rising six and a half feet above the bottom of the ditch. At the top of this is a garden wall. This portion of the ditch appears to be in three lengths with rough traverses between them...”

It has been suggested that the works undertaken by the Scottish Army during the Civil War could not have been as extensive as to have constructed from scratch an earthwork of this scale and that therefore some form of earthwork existed on this alignment before the Civil War and that this was re-used, (exactly as the medieval defences were on Bishop’s Meadows), to form a quick but strategically secure defensive line. A number of suggestions concerning its origins have been put forward since before 1908. These have included it being a natural river terrace, (Roseff 2001), a natural paleo-channel and terrace, (Roseff 2003), a section of Offa’s Dyke, (Wood, J. 1908) and more recently a canal or spillway for diverting water to and from a water-meadow system, (Whitehead, pers comm). Certainly the stretch of earthwork between Bartonsham Farm and Green Street has the appearance of a natural river terrace and reports from the cutting of a trench for a water pipe close to this location suggested the presence of a paleo-channel at the base of the terrace, (Roseff 2003), with nothing of archaeological significance being noted. This appears to be the only documented intervention associated with the monument.

During 2013 a post and rail fence was erected along the southern edge of the monument in order to remove it from agricultural grazing.

During 2013 the scheduled area was subject to a geophysical survey.

Legislation and Constraints

The earthwork is designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument under the 1979 Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act.

The monument is owned by The Church Commissioners but a permissive path runs along its length.

A buried electricity cable runs from a transformer pole approximately half way along the earthwork eastwards to the electricity sub-station.



Figure 3: Extract from the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1887.

Aims and Objectives

The principal aim of the community project was to undertake targeted excavations across the earthwork in order to expose a running section through the ditch so that deposits can be recorded which will provide information concerning its extent, use and development through time.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork began on 4th September 2017 and comprised the opening of an 8m long by 3m wide trench using a mechanical excavator under close archaeological supervision. It rapidly became apparent that the ditch had been filled in recent times and that there did not appear to be any material or features relating to the Civil War within the trench, (for a full description see the trench description for Trench 1). After consultation with Historic England and the community group it was decided that a second trench should be placed further to the west in order to sample an area of the monument at some distance from the first trench. The excavations lasted for five days and involved a core staff of 4 professional archaeologists and up to 6 volunteers each day. The trenches were recorded using single context recording and were photographed, planned and sections drawn in accordance with the CfA Professional Standards. Both trenches were backfilled using a machine and the site made good.

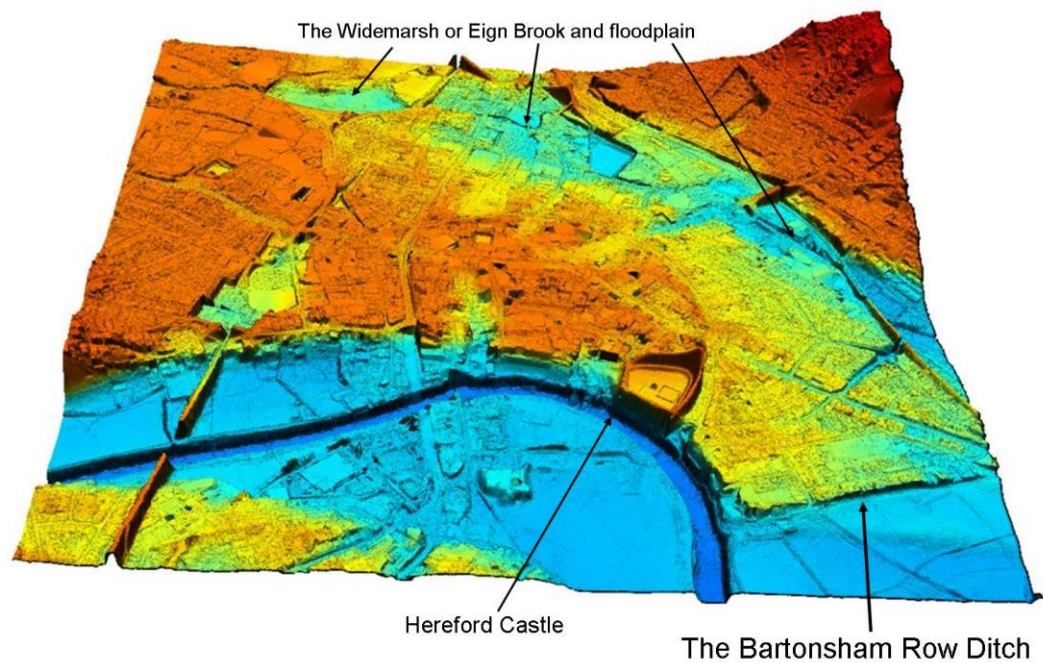


Figure 4: The Row Ditch in context: location figure based on LiDAR survey (Geomatics Team, Environment Agency)



Figure 5: Trench location plan

Trench 1

Trench 1, measuring 8m by 3m was opened by a JCB under archaeological supervision and the topsoil (100) removed. This was found to overlie a greyish red-brown silt (101) with a concentration of 19th-20th-century artefacts (blue & white transfer-printed pottery, brick and tile fragments, ash) at the north end, at the base of the slope below the back garden wall of the 19th-century houses on Park Street. Underneath, there was a further tip at the north end of the trench (123) dominated by similar 19th-20th-century rubbish; when removed, a deposit of red-brown gritty gravelly silt (103) containing some pottery, bone and glass fragments, was exposed over the length of the trench.

103 was removed (still by supervised machining) to reveal a thin band of red-brown silt with 1cm-diameter rounded gravel (105) containing no artefacts. The underlying material (106) consisted of gritty gravel in a red-brown silt matrix, and in turn overlay a finer red-brown deposit with a smaller proportion of gravel and grit (107); neither deposit contained any artefacts.

Removal by machine of the underlying gravel layer 112 showed that it consisted of large cobbles (10-20cms) with smaller pebbles and gritty gravel in a pale yellow-grey silt matrix, overlying a grey-brown sandy deposit with grit, gravel and larger pebbles (113). These layers overlay, successively, a thin band of black sand with black, probably manganese inclusions (114), iron-rich gravel (115), black sand (116) and coarse gravel (117) down to the limit of excavation.

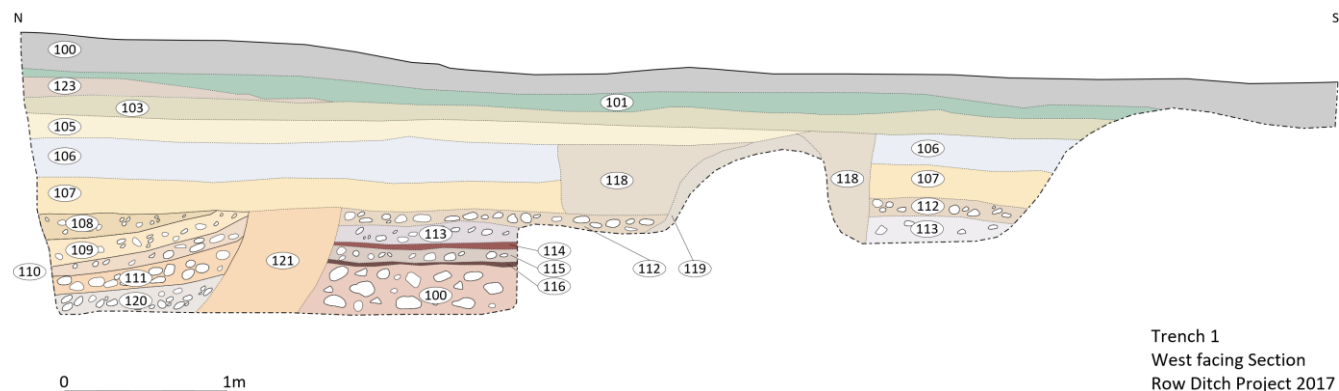


Figure 6: Western Facing section of Trench 1

Towards the southern end of the trench the higher layers (106, 107) in this sequence of deposits were interrupted by an area of slightly different gritty gravel in a pale grey-brown silt-sand matrix (118) that appeared to have vertical edges, resembling those of a cut feature. As machining continued, removal of 118 disclosed a dome-like feature (119) within it consisting of rounded gravel bonded with a very hard white chalky matrix, crossing the trench perpendicularly on an alignment parallel to the escarpment forming the north side of the Row Ditch. This was, at first, very confidently identified as the domed concrete vault of a 20th-century culvert, running

along the length of the monument. However, further investigation by hand excavation showed that the gravel component of 119 faded into and appeared to be part of the surrounding gravel deposit 112, though the concretion was concentrated in the domed east-west ridge. Cutting into the dome of the 'culvert' revealed only further concreted gravel in the same extremely tough chalky/lime matrix. It was concluded that the 'linear dome' 119 was in fact a natural feature of the post-glacial gravels. Little further explanation can be offered for it, other than to note that it was also present, in a reduced form, in Trench 2, runs parallel to the present escarpment/terrace edge and what appears to be the natural re-cut paleochannel following its foot, and was presumably part of this same system (for example, the remains of a levee type structure formed by overbank deposition).

Towards the north end of the trench, the sequence of gravel layers 112-117 was cut by a large, steep-sided negative feature with two distinct fills. It too was of natural origin.

The primary fill, lining the feature (121), consisted of a grey-purple-tinged fine gravel with sand and silt and occasional larger cobbles. This deposit was cut away on the north side by a second, later, cut filled with banded layers of grey-brown pebbly grit (108), larger gravel and cobbles in which the surface of the stones was coated with a hard grey calcareous deposit (109), further gravel and silt with the calcareous deposit on the stones (110), a layer of large cobbles and gravel with a grey-brown silt component and very occasional pieces of green sandstone (111), and large (10-20cm) rounded cobbles with many voids between them and their surfaces blackened by an unidentified but probably calcareous deposit (120). This was the lowest deposit excavated: it was at a depth of 1.7m (measured at the N end of the trench) and, like the whole sequence of coarse gravels, was clearly non-anthropogenic in origin.

These deposits are interpreted as the fills of a re-cut stream channel or channels running along the line of the monument. The earlier channel, cutting through the local sequence of mineral-rich gravels, silted up (121), but was partly scoured out by a later channel that was filled, in turn, by deposits in a much faster flow (108-111, 120). The surface of these features was later planed-off by a much broader river channel in which the uppermost natural gravels were deposited (105-107). This was later, at some distance from the excavations, cut down by the present course of the river and its floodplain.

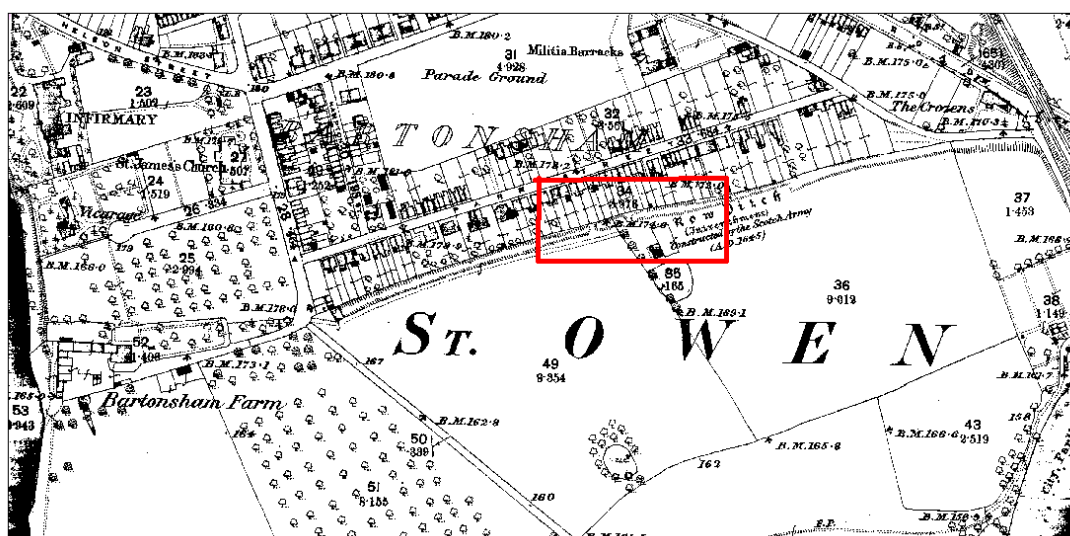


Figure 7

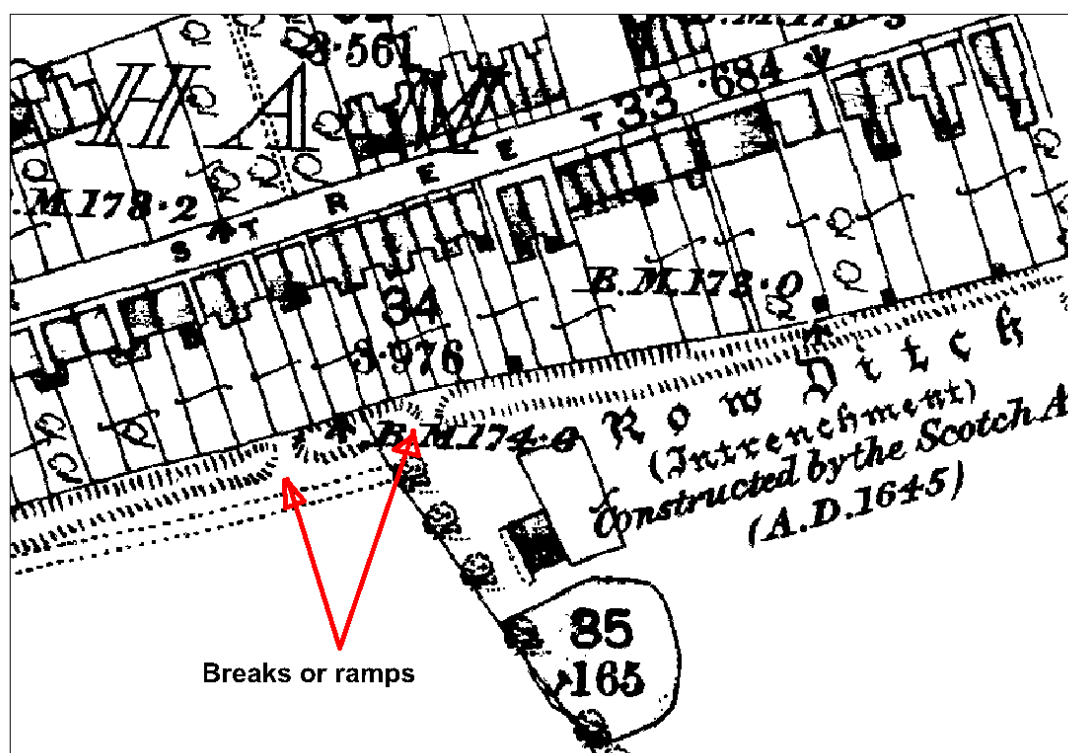


Figure 8

Trench 1 discussion

With the exception of the uppermost artefact-containing soil deposits 100-103, all the stratigraphy in Trench 1 was of natural origin. The deposits appeared to represent fast-changing post-glacial environments. The concreted gravel ridge appears to be related to fast flowing glacial water depositing calcareous deposits within an eddy or eddies. The location of Trench 1 appears to have exactly corresponded to one of the breaks within the monument which were recorded on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Mapping, (see Figures 7 and 8). Local inhabitants

who remember the 1959 tipping and levelling have stated that there were two earthwork ramps where the gaps were. These were presumably to enable troops and horses to get over the breastwork easily on their way to and from sorties on the eastern (St Owens) gate and church. The location for this would make sense and both breaks / ramps are located well out of cannon fire range.



Trench 1 on completion, looking NE. Centre foreground is the concreted gravel ridge 119, either side of which is the sequence of mineral-rich gravels (112-117). Beyond, these are cut away by the two-phase palaeochannel (121; 108-111,120). Scale = 1m



Trench 1 looking east: the concreted domed gravel ridge 119, with a slot cut into its northern side to test its composition. Scale = 1m



Trench 1, north end, looking NE. The palaeochannel: foreground – silt primary fill 121; background (end section) sequence of coarse gravels 108-111, 120. Scale = 1m
Trench 2

Trench 2 was opened by supervised machining 53m to the west of Trench 1. The turf and topsoil (201) were stripped off to reveal a broad area of distinctive red-brown gravel at the northern end of the trench. Further excavation showed that this material (202) occupied a hollow and represented a fairly substantial ground levelling episode. Local eyewitness accounts place this event in 1959 when Wiggins & Co undertook major landscaping in this area. It would appear that debris and gravel from construction on the Wiggins Alloys site (now Wiggins Special Metals) was dumped along the line of the ditch in order to fill it in and the length of the monument was then bulldozed in order to flatten it out. This has been confirmed by the excavations.

Beneath it was a topsoil-like deposit of early to mid-20th-century date (203) containing large quantities of rubbish, in the form of 19th-20th-century crockery, butchered animal bone, iron objects, window (including bathroom-window type) and bottle glass. 19th-century transfer-printed crockery fragments were present in the underlying yellow-brown silty soil (204) but were not recorded in the lighter-coloured silty soil (205) beneath that.

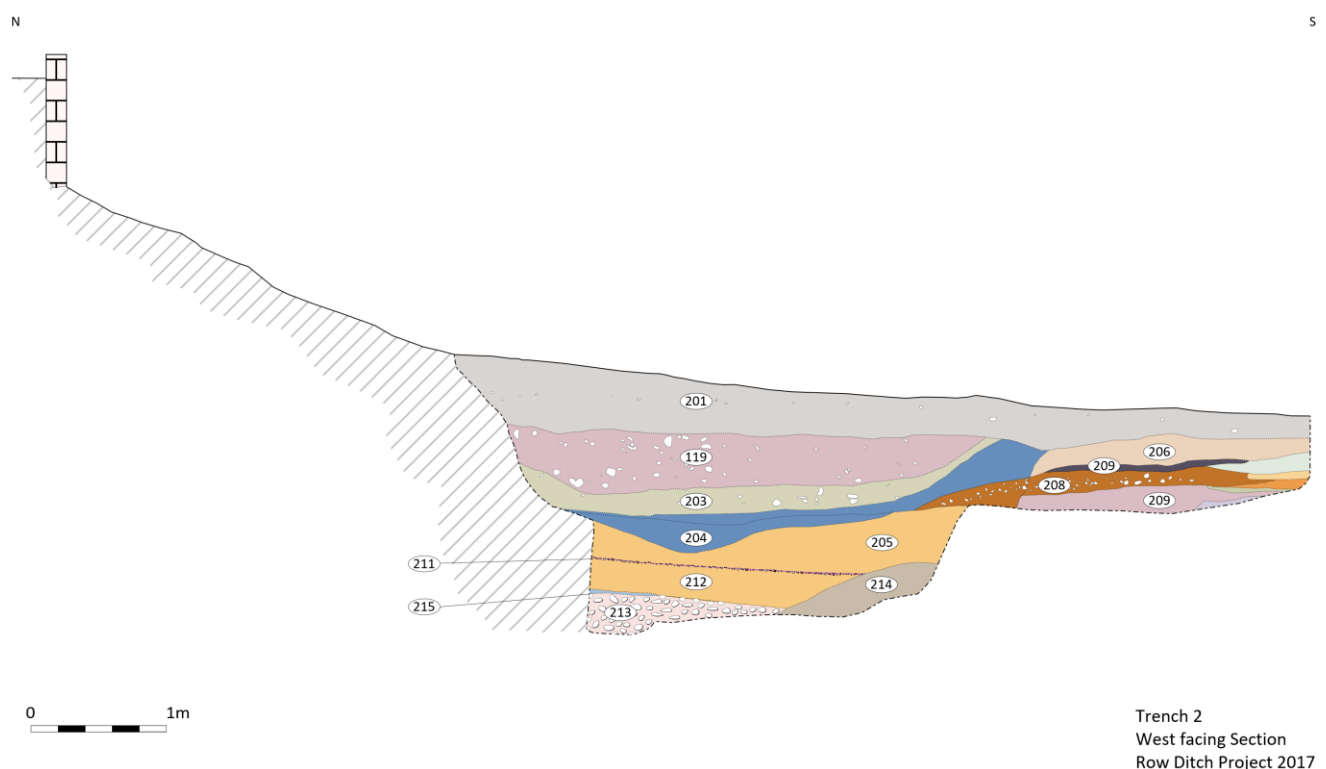


Figure 9: West Facing section of Trench 2

These deposits were confined to the north end and centre of trench 2; at the south end, natural gravel (206) immediately underlay the machine-removed topsoil (201). The gravel was a fine rounded gravel in a brown sandy soil matrix. It overlay a thin (5cm) layer of black, iron-rich gravel (207), in turn overlying orange and brown/purple iron-rich gravels (208, 209) in a sequence clearly very similar to that at the south end of trench 1. Seen in plan in the base of the trench, further

(unexcavated) multi-coloured gravel layers were present and locally subject to the same hard, white concretion present more dramatically in trench 1.

In this trench, however, these flat, very clearly stratified layers of ferruginous gravel were truncated by a cut feature containing 19th-century and later pottery to a level 0.9m below the surface of the topmost natural gravel 206. This was presumably therefore roughly the depth of the linear hollow surveyed by the Ordnance Survey in 1887. Excavation of the deep silt layer 205 revealed a thin layer of gritty sandy soil (211) spread over the surface of a deeper deposit of fine medium-brown to khaki soft silty soil (212).

The base of this large negative feature was represented by a small patch of grey sandy soil (215) overlying a much more general deposit of very coarse, sandy, rounded gravel with cobbles up to 10cms (213). This was interpreted as a natural post-glacial deposit, almost certainly equivalent to one of the upper palaeochannel fills seen in Trench 1, here cut down to a depth of 1.3m below the surface of the natural gravel (206). A tip of sandy khaki soil on the south side (214) was interpreted as a tip or slow accumulation of eroded soil at the bottom of the slope produced by the cut through the natural gravel deposits to the south.

Trench 2: discussion

In contrast to trench 1, this trench encountered a substantial, cut, negative feature at the base of the gradient, cut into the sequence of natural gravels underlying the field to the south, and into the much coarser natural gravel deposits filling the palaeochannel following and underlying the base of the gradient. This cut feature can be shown to have been 0.9m deep (or slightly more if contemporary topsoil is taken into account) when 19th-century transfer-printed earthenware was current and appears to have had an original depth of c. 1.3m. It is suggested that this cut represents the cut for the Civil War ditch which has gradually silted up prior to being filled and levelled in the 1950's. It is presumed that the material excavated from the ditch was thrown up into the top of the river terrace to heighten it and provide extra cover in order to form a breastwork.



Trench 2 looking NE on completion. The 1m scale bars rest on unexcavated natural gravel with patches of concretion and iron staining; upper layers of this natural sequence can be seen in section (right). The dark silt layer 204 appears in section interrupting these layers and in plan in the base of the trench contrasting with the gravels



Trench 2, north end, looking east. The natural gravel sequence can be seen (right), truncated by a c. 30-degree cut with 19th-century pottery in the dark soil layer extending down into the sondage section at the lower level.

Conclusions

These small scale excavations have proved to be a very revealing and rewarding exercise. The project has revealed the development and use of the earthwork known as the Row Ditch and has confirmed that Roseff was correct in her assertions in 2001 and 2005 that this feature was largely a natural feature having been formed by ancient courses of the River Wye. However it has also confirmed that most of its length was “enhanced” during the Civil War to form a convenient defensive / offensive line of cover (breastwork) behind which the cavalry and its horses could be kept safe with adequate grazing and water, but from behind which sorties or forays could be launched upon the suburb of St Owens. Such breastworks were vital in maintaining pressure upon Hereford City during the six week siege in 1645. It was recorded that during the Siege of Hereford, the scots army lost between 1,200 and 2000 men whilst the defenders within the City lost 21, (Shoesmith, 1995 pp 99). Various attacks upon St. Owens gate are recorded including a *“Sunday 17th August ...a midnight sally to St. Owen’s Church when the attackers works were fired “Monday 18th August, the Scots raise new batteries and St. Owen’s church is destroyed”, “Tuesday 19th August, the Scots continue to destroys. Owens Church” and “Monday 1st September, The Scots attempt Bye Street Gate with their cannons and St. Owen’s Gate with their battery, but with the news of the King’s potential arrival they withdraw their army to the open fields.”* (Shoesmith 1995, pp 101).

Whilst little relating to the Civil War enhancements can be seen today, it is clear that the buried ditch survives over most of its length, cut into the paleochannel. The project has also confirmed that the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Mapping of the monument is absolutely correct and that the two “gaps” in the ditch were access ramps used to launch sorties onto the eastern gate of Hereford City and to destroy St. Owens Church. It is likely that much of the breastwork was slighted immediately after the siege. Shoesmith writes concerning the extent and scale of the Civil War defences...*“there is little primary documentary evidence although later sources provide some information. The problem is a common one throughout the country for, once the war was over, Parliament issued orders to ensure that any works build during the war could not be used again by any opposing troops.”* (Shoesmith 1995, pp.99). The descriptions from Price and Duncumb might however suggest that any slighting of Row Ditch may have been minimal.

This monument is one of only a very few earthworks which can be directly linked to the Civil War within the county and provides an evocative reminder of the scale of hostilities during the siege of Hereford. The fact that almost the entire length of the monument is publicly accessible as a permissive path means that it can be used as an educational resource by a wide section of the local community.

Site Archive

42 digital photographs
1 site notebook entry
4 sheets of site drawings
1 DXF Data File
3 CAD data files
This document

Acknowledgements

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Data sources:

The following sources of information were referred to:

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- Archaeological records held by Herefordshire HER
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