

Original Report: February 2003  
Revised: December 2011

# **The Weir Estate: An Archaeological Assessment and Field Evaluation**



**Report prepared by  
Tim Hoverd and Keith Ray**

**Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 61**

**Herefordshire Archaeology**  
Environment, Planning and Waste  
Places and Communities Directorate  
Herefordshire Council

# **The Weir Estate: An Archaeological Assessment and Field Evaluation**

**NGR: SO 440 418  
EHE 1037**

## ***Contents:-***

- Summary
- Introduction
- Aims and Objectives
- Location
- Background History and Previous Archaeological Work
- Fieldwork in 2002 / 2003
- Discussion
- Site Archive
- Acknowledgements
- List of Illustrations
- Bibliography

**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 Archaeology  
PO Box 230  
Blueschool House  
Blueschool Street  
Hereford  
HR1 2ZB***

**Summary:**

*During January 2002, a test area of resistivity survey was undertaken over the course of the Roman road in order to ascertain its survival and the presence (or lack) of possible roadside settlement.*

*An archaeological field evaluation north of The Weir Garden followed up the reported discovery of Roman material apparently eroding out of the river terrace bluff directly above the Romano-British terrace site within The Weir Garden. Following geophysical survey of this area, a series of trenches was excavated by machine across the parkland directly to the east of The Weir Nursing Home. No traces of structures and no finds of any kind were retrieved, natural soil profiles being found in all eight trenches. It is therefore more likely that the material eroding from the bank is associated with Roman structures which have been covered by material which has slipped or gradually eroded from the river terrace. This raises the possibility of the presence of the remains of high status buildings surviving, close to the base of the river terrace in this location.*

**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.

Figures contained within this report 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 (OS Licence 100024168). This material has been reproduced in order to locate the site in its environs.

Contact details: Herefordshire Archaeology, Blueschool House, Blueschool Street, PO Box 230, Hereford. HR1 2ZB. Copyright Herefordshire Council 2011.

## Introduction

This report (SMR event EHE 1037), provides an account of two areas of geophysical survey, an assessment walkover survey and small scale evaluation excavations carried out by Herefordshire Archaeology.

During January 2002, a test area of resistivity survey was undertaken over the course of the Roman road in order to ascertain its survival and the presence (or lack) of possible roadside settlement.

A second area of resistivity survey grids and eight evaluation excavations were excavated and recorded. Seven of the eight trenches were excavated by machine under close archaeological supervision, the eighth trench was excavated by hand. This followed up the reported discovery of Roman material apparently eroding out of the river terrace immediately above the well known Romano-British site within The Weir Garden. The evaluation excavations took place between Monday 21<sup>st</sup> January and Friday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2002. Fieldwork was undertaken by Herefordshire Archaeology staff and three volunteers.

During January 2003, A rapid walkover survey was undertaken in order to identify earthwork features relating to the changing land use and development of the estate.

## Location

The Weir Estate is located within the parish of Kenchester approximately six miles to the west of Hereford City, (NGR SO 440 418). The site comprises part of the floodplain on the northern bank of the river Wye together with its river terrace.



The underlying solid geology of the area consists of Lower Red Sandstone of the Devonian period. This is overlain by soft beds of red and grey marl with more compacted sandstone at regular intervals (British geological survey 1989)

Figure 1: location of the site within Herefordshire

## Background history

Both the Weir Garden and New Weir, the adjacent mansion, were part of the Weir Estate acquired by The National Trust from Mr. Roger Charlton Parr, a wealthy banker, in 1959. New Weir is leased as a private Residential Nursing Home, but the garden is open to the public. The walks are thought to have been laid out with advice from Humphry Repton c.1778-96 (Whitehead, 2001, 287). However, the garden as it is today was developed by Mr. Parr with his Head Gardener, William Boulter, in the period 1925 to 1955.

New Weir itself began as a simple farmhouse with that name (to distinguish itself from the earlier house, henceforward known as 'Old Weir') in the late seventeenth century. The first known owner, Timothy Markham, was in possession of the property by 1765, and partially rebuilt the house before putting it up for sale in 1778. He had sold much of the estate to William Parry soon afterwards, and although he was still in residence in 1783, had sold the house to Parry by the following year when the present 'villa' was built. This house was described by Price (1796, 188) as having been "considerably enlarged and improved by its present possessor, William Parry Esq., who has extended the walks and plantations, and added much to its natural beauties." It was Parry who knew Repton and presumably commissioned from him the designs for the basic framework of walks and planting that has endured into the present century.



Figure 2: Extract from the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1887.

The area immediately above the river terrace comprises a gently sloping area of parkland, with a roughly level area, mid-slope. The parkland is currently grazed and contains occasional mature parkland trees relating to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century designed landscape.

## **Aims and objectives**

Several visits have been made to the presumed 'villa' site at the Weir Garden, at various times of the year, since the establishment of Herefordshire Archaeology in 1998. This has included study of the slopes above the site whence came the material (including tesserae, mortar, tile and pottery fragments) derived from animal burrowing. The fieldwork was designed to investigate the presence of Roman buildings located at the top of the river terrace from which this material could have derived. If archaeological features or deposits were encountered these would then be recorded and sampled.

## **Previous archaeological work**

The Romano-British site at The Weir Garden, Kenchester (also known as New Weir) was first described at length in articles that appeared in the Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club (TWNFC) from the late nineteenth century into the 1930s. These articles were mostly concerned with documenting the Roman remains of Herefordshire as a whole. Summaries of the Roman period in the county also appeared in Volume 1 of the Victoria County History (1908), and in the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments Inventories (1934: Mortimer Wheeler). In particular, the remains comprising a surviving buttress supporting a riverside terrace and the stepped base of a presumed ornamental pool were described in such accounts.

A modern era of archaeological exploration of this site was marked by the conduct of two weekends of work in 1977 and a geophysical survey in 1978 by the former Director of the City of Hereford Archaeological Unit, Ron Shoesmith. This work was published in the TWNFC in 1980. Further more detailed work was carried out by Cotswold Archaeological Trust on behalf of The National Trust in 1994, in advance of works to secure the main buttress from riverine erosion. This work cumulatively demonstrated the existence of a multi-roomed residence built upon a 4m high artificial terrace overlooking the Wye. The terrace was supported by four or more buttresses that in at least one case actually contained a carefully floored room. The structure also featured further suites of rooms, mosaic floors, and stonework imported from the Cotswolds including columns.

Meanwhile, aerial survey by Chris Musson and others in the 1980s and 1990s had revealed the existence of further sites at Old Weir, further downstream and in the vicinity of the former crossing point of the River Wye of the Roman road from Caerleon to Wroxeter. This point is 1.2km from the east gate of the walled Roman settlement at Kenchester. In particular, parchmarks appeared to indicate the presence of buildings located beside the Roman road immediately north of the former Wye crossing.

## Fieldwork in 2002/3

### Geophysical survey

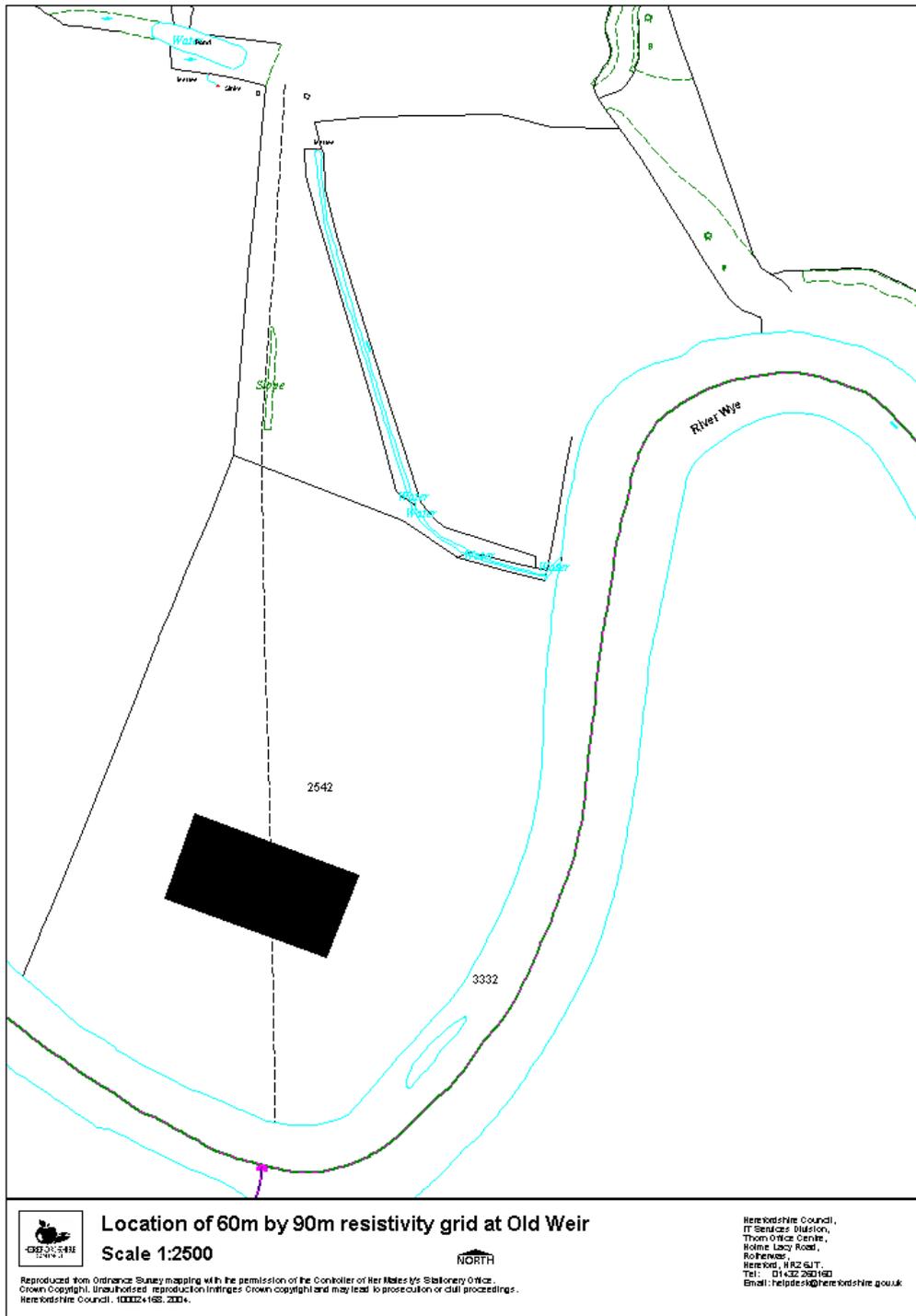
This was carried out as a test exercise at the same time as the field evaluation early in 2002. Two areas were surveyed using a Geoscan RM15 resistivity meter. The first area to be surveyed was a localised area straddling the line of the Roman road actually on the floodplain north of the former river crossing at Old Weir. The second survey area was in the parkland to the north of the Garden and east of the Nursing Home at New Weir. It confirmed the presence of features such as a carriage-way that were partially visible from surface inspection.

### Geophysical survey at Old Weir

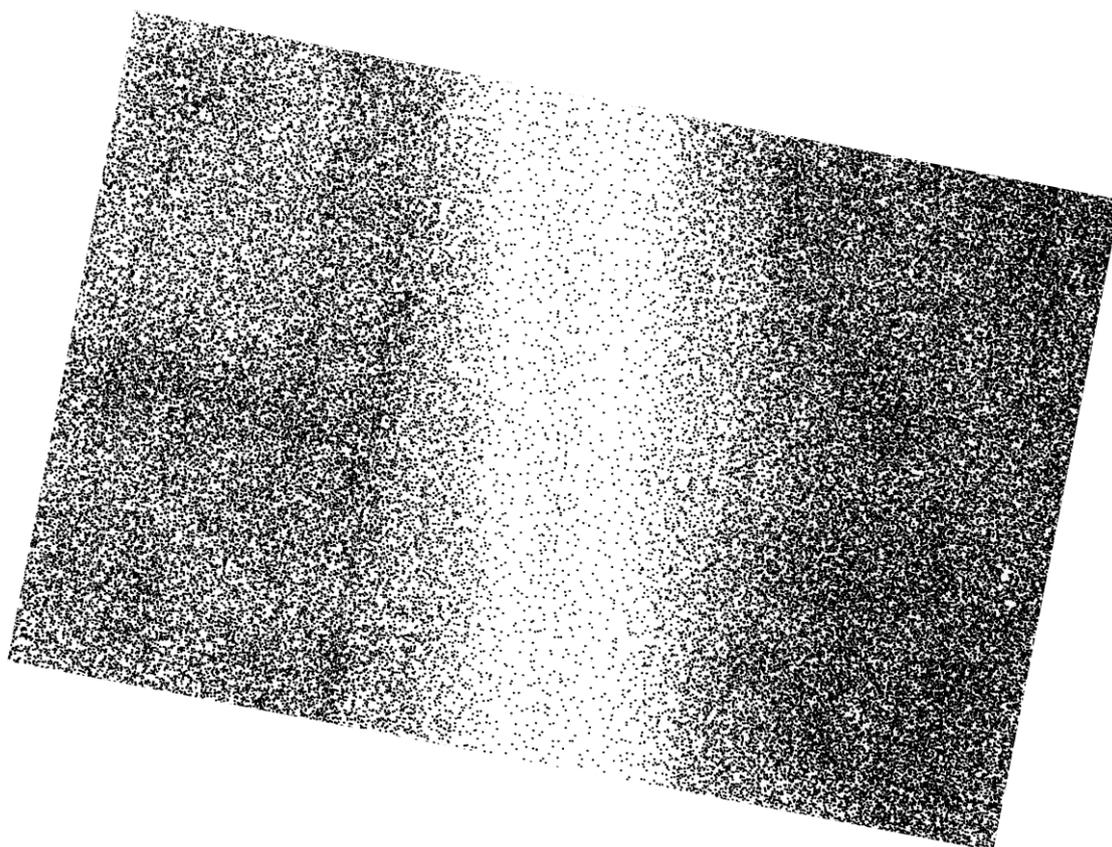
The resistivity data, (see figure 3 and figure 4), indicates that the survey area comprises two distinct areas, east and west of the road. The geophysics sample identifies distinct differences between the area to the east of the road from that of the west possibly suggesting the presence of features here that include high resistance anomalies on the western side of the road. This may represent the location of buried foundations and / or disturbed ground.

This evidence may be supported by parch-marks recorded on aerial photographs taken some while ago which appear to indicate that there are foundations of former structures arranged along the course of the Roman road in the field within the loop of the Wye here.

Within the field concerned, an area of c.250m north to south and up to 150m east to west is contained between the Roman road causeway and the river Wye. Both the geophysics and the surface topography tentatively point to a very different configuration here. Firstly, there are no clear indications of structural foundations to the east of the road causeway here. Secondly, a further causeway appears to extend to the east at right-angles from the road causeway. Thirdly, broadly rectangular areas (at least two) appear to exist on either side of this further causeway. Whilst the surface features are less sharp than the road causeway, they survive to a height in excess of 0.5m suggesting the presence of significant and long used structures.



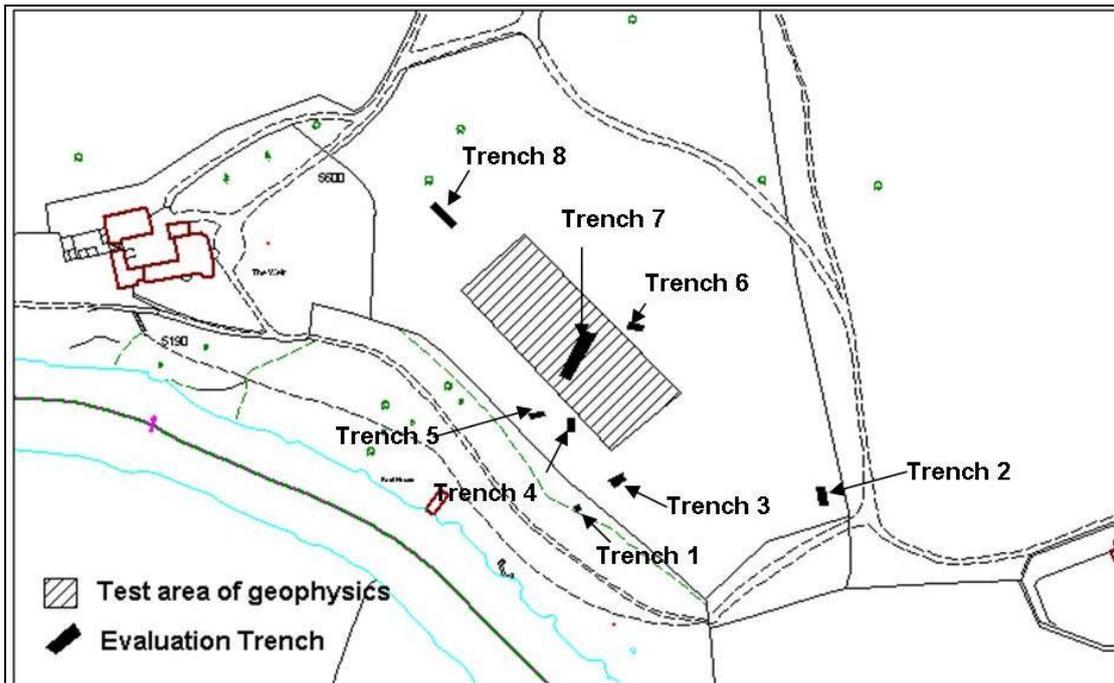
**Figure 3: Location of resistivity survey. (dotted line shows centre of Roman Road)**



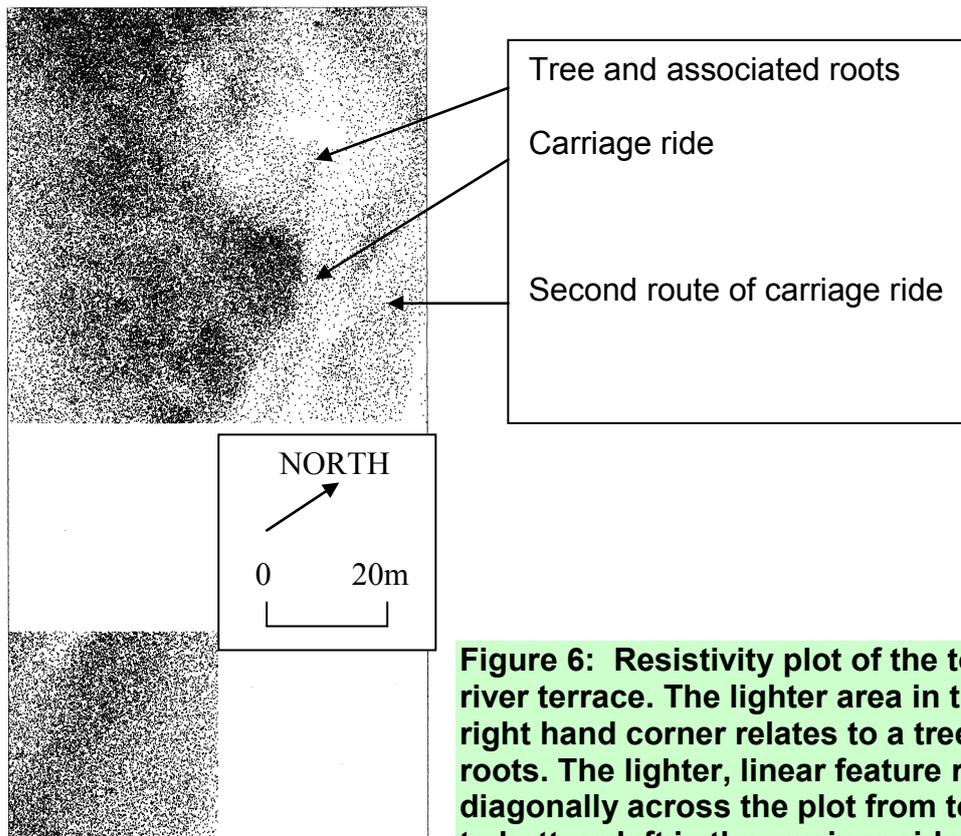
**Figure 4: Resistivity survey plot over Roman road (plot size 90 by 60m)**

### **Geophysical survey at New Weir**

An area of 60m by 120m was surveyed, comprising eight 30m square grids, using a Geoscan RM 15 resistivity meter. Readings were taken at 1m intervals. Three grids within this area were not surveyed due to the presence of a large beech tree and a substantial area of fallen branches and nettles.



**Figure 5: Location of evaluation trenches and test area of geophysics.**

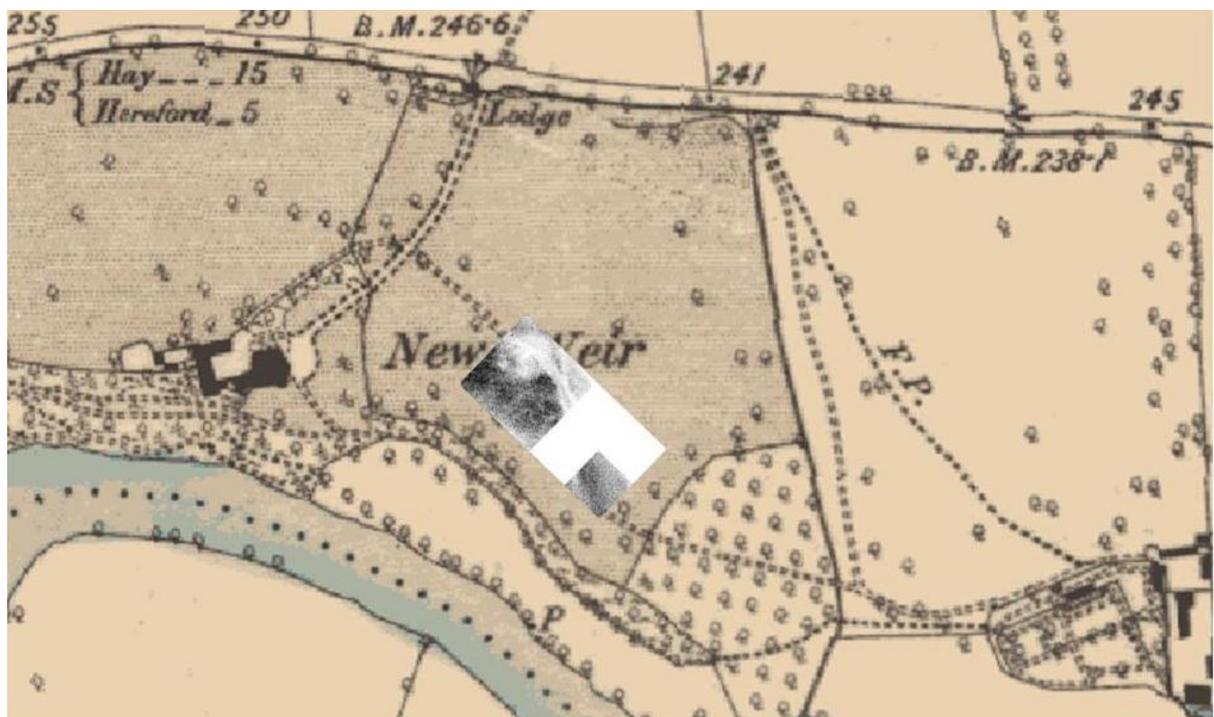


**Figure 6: Resistivity plot of the top of the river terrace. The lighter area in the top right hand corner relates to a tree and its roots. The lighter, linear feature running diagonally across the plot from top right to bottom left is the carriage ride.**

The resistance data produced, failed to identify any anomalies which could potentially relate to any form of Roman structure. It did however show the former carriage ride which ran off the main drive to the house and crossed the parkland in south-easterly direction, heading for the walled garden and gardeners cottage( see figures 5 and 6). The geophysics plot also suggested that there was a second carriage ride, (or a spur off the first carriage ride) which ran northwards towards the lodge.

The south-easterly aligned carriage ride is apparent as a double dotted line on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Map. The second ride or possible spur of the first, is however absent from the mapping (figure 7).

No other anomalies were apparent that could not be related to the natural topography.



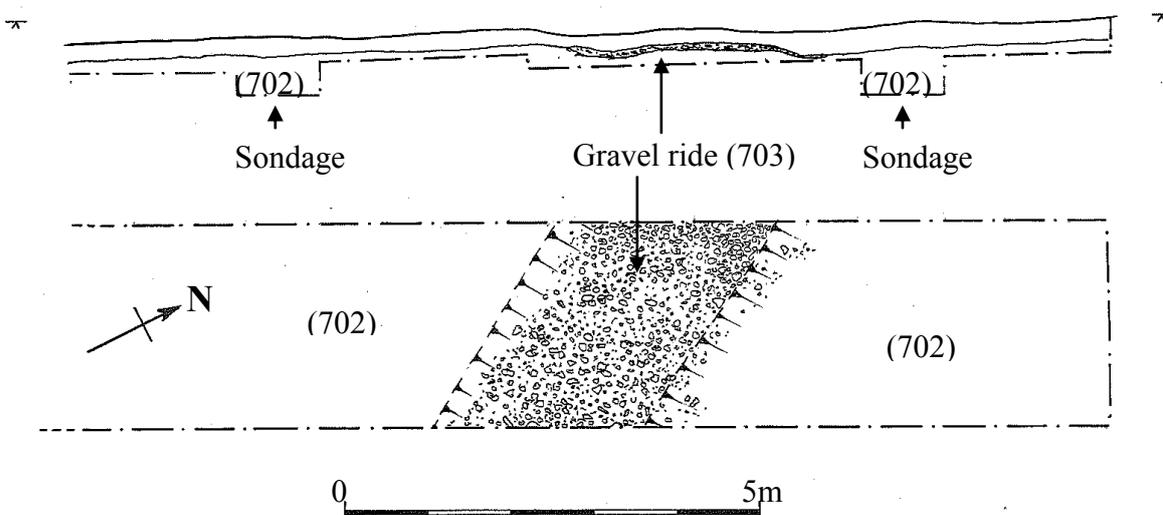
**Figure 7: Geophysics plot overlying the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Map extract (1887), showing the course of the carriage ride.**

## Evaluation trenches at New Weir

A total of eight trenches were excavated across this area of parkland. They were located in order to test the geophysical results and to investigate areas outside the area subjected to the resistivity survey in order to maximise the potential for intercepting buried archaeology.

Trench 1, (see figure 8), was located at the top of the river terrace, as close to the scarp edge as was practicable. The trench was located close to an area of old animal burrowing from which some of the tesserae were thought to have derived. Due to the presence of a modern fence-line and a number of trees on the terrace slope, this trench comprised a 1m square test pit excavated by hand. The test pit revealed a loam rich layer of well mixed, mid-brown soil with occasional charcoal flecks, to a depth of 0.25m. This directly overlies a clean buff / brown clay soil which continued to a depth of 0.4m at which point it became increasingly more gravelly. Hard, natural gravel was encountered at 0.6m. No finds were recovered from this trench and no features recorded within it.

Seven trenches were excavated by machine, under close archaeological supervision, within the parkland. These varied in size from 6m in length and 1.5m wide (trench 4) to 35m in length and 4m wide (trench 7). Trenches 2,3,5,6 and 8 contained no deposits or features of archaeological significance. All comprise a 0.35m thick layer of mid-brown, well mixed loamy soil overlying a well compacted, clean red/buff clay. All trenches were excavated to an average depth of 0.45m, however one or more sondages were dug within the base of each trench (depending on the length of each trench), in order to confirm the presence of natural deposits and to ensure that any archaeologically significant features were not being masked by alluvial deposits etc.



**Figure 8: Plan and western section of part of Trench 7**

Trench 7, (figure 8), comprised a 35m long trench (aligned NNE / SSW), running across the centre of the geophysics plot. This was located within an area that could not be surveyed during the geophysical survey due to fallen timber. This was removed (by JCB) prior to the trenching taking place. The trench was excavated to a width of 4m. Running diagonally across the trench was a 0.05m thick layer of gravel (703). This occurred at a depth of 0.25m and comprised a 2.4m wide, closely packed, gravel layer laid on to a levelled terrace which had been cut into the clay subsoil, (702). A one penny piece dated 1887 was recovered from the gravel surface. The excavation would appear to have intercepted the carriage ride to the south of the point where the spur to the lodge left it. No other features / deposits were encountered within the trench.

Trench 4 comprised a 6m long and 1.5m wide trench approximately 18m to the south of Trench 7. This also intercepted a length of the gravel carriage ride, within the north-eastern corner of the trench. No other features or deposits of archaeological significance were encountered.

## Discussion

The data recorded during the geophysical survey as been confirmed by the evaluation trenches. With the exception of features relating to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century designed landscape, no other archaeological remains exist. It is clear from the level of detailed picked up during the resistivity survey that under the right conditions this method of geophysical survey works well within this environment and soil type.

It would appear that the top of the river terrace at this particular location has changed little since the end of the medieval period. It is likely, (as indicated by the depth of topsoil) that this area was ploughed during the medieval period. This is in part supported by both aerial survey and a brief walk over survey which identified very fragmented ridge and furrow over parts of this area of parkland. Both the geophysical survey and the evaluation excavations would strongly suggest that no Roman occupation occurred on the site.

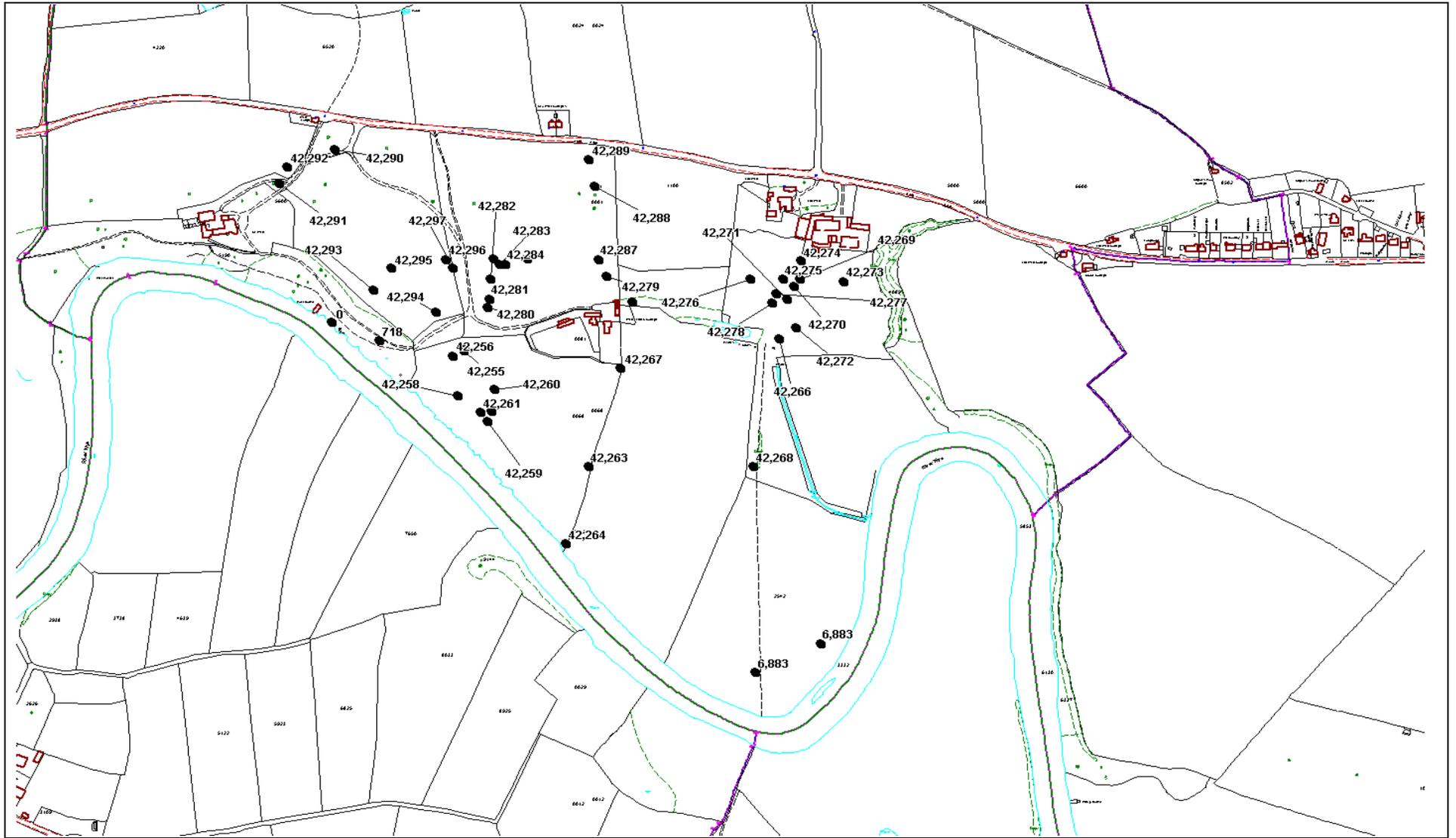
It can therefore be concluded that the tesserae, mortar and other material recovered from burrowing animals activity on the river terrace slope, does not derive from the top of the terrace. This would suggest that the material must originate from structures directly associated with the complex of buildings / rooms between the river bank and the base of the river terrace. Both Shoemith (1980) and Barber and Walker (1995) consider the possibility that there are rooms set around a courtyard within this area. Shoemith makes the particularly pertinent observation (*ibid*, 151) that hill-wash from the floodplain scarp could have buried a substantial part of the villa, and that the structure may have been stepped in a series of terraces up the slope. This provides the only realistic explanation for the casting out of Roman structural debris from the bank above the terrace by burrowing animals in recent years.

## **Assessment survey of the Estate**

A full walkover survey was carried out in January 2003. This involved the noting of all features of archaeological interest and the pin-pointing of their location using a hand-held Global Positioning by Satellite (GPS) instrument. The rapid survey resulted in the location of over 60 features of archaeological interest. These features were concentrated in the parkland to the north and east of The Weir Nursing Home, and in the environs of Old Weir farm. Finds of Romano-British material were made among debris at the base of the riverbank immediately downstream from the Roman river crossing. It is presumed that although physically this debris attaches to the left (north) bank of the Wye, the material derives from erosion of the Romano-British 'farmstead' site immediately to the west of the Roman road on the southern bank.



**Plate 1: View north from the floodplain of the river terrace and associated features. The buildings on the horizon are part of Old Weir Farm.**



**Figure 9: Location of features identified during the walkover survey in 2003**

**Table 1: Features recorded during the 2003 walk-over survey.**

SMR No.	Easting	Northing	Period	Site Type	Description
SAM335	343659	241821	Roman	Structure	Large masonry structure bonded with Op.Sig
718	343723	241795	Roman	Structure	Nine sided stone cistern
42255	343835	241780	Post-Medieval	Ditch	Boundary ditch, 2m wide and 0.35m deep
42256	343820	241772	Post-Medieval	Pool	Rectangular Pool 25m long and 12m wide
42257	343836	241786	Post-Medieval	Platform	Platform, 15m long and 6m wide
42258	343827	241715	Post-Medieval	Lynchet	Lynchet, facing east, runs onto floodplain
42259	343867	241678	Post-Medieval	Ditch	Ditch, continues after lynchet turns
42260	343876	241725	Post-Medieval	Ditch	Ditch, meets ditch above runs SE fo 15m
42261	343857	241692	Post-Medieval	Lynchet	Small lynchet at an angle to main lynchet
42262	343872	241693	Post-Medieval	Bank and Ditch	Runs along base of lynchet
42263	344001	241614	Post-Medieval	Bank	Followed by modern fence
42264	343971	241503	Post-Medieval	Ditch	8m wide, follows bank above
42265	344060	241850	Post-Medieval	Bank	Southern bank for pond, c. 1.8m high, 6m wide
42266	344256	241797	Victorian?	Pump House	Small brick pump house and E end of pool
42267	344044	241755	Post-Medieval	Platform	Level area, 20m by 40m
6883	344223	241318	Roman	Road	Runs north from Roman shoreline
6883	344311	241358	Roman	Road	Runs west to meet road above, 8m wide, 0.5m high
42268	344221	241614	Post-Medieval	Ditch	Cuts road
42269	344283	241883	Medieval?	Quarry / Delve	12m in diameter
42270	344275	241873	Medieval?	Ditch	3m wide and 0.3m deep
42271	344266	241855	Medieval?	Terrace/Bank	upto 0.75m high and 3.5m wide
42272	344278	241813	Medieval?	Terrace	runs west for 50m
42273	344341	241880	Post-Medieval	Platform	Semicircular platform c. 6m in diameter
42274	344284	241910	Post-Medieval	Quarry / Delve	15m long and 12m wide
42275	344260	241884	Roman	Lynchet	Top lynchet runs west
42276	344217	241883	Medieval?	Lynchet	runs over top lynchet
42277	344251	241862	Roman	Lynchet	middle lynchet runs west
42278	344246	241849	Roman	Lynchet	bottom lynchet, curves to the SW.
42279	344025	241888	Post-Medieval	Quarry / Delve	Small quarry scoop
42280	343867	241842	Roman	Lynchet	runs north and cut by drive
42281	343869	241854	Roman	Lynchet	runs north
42282	343870	241884	Roman	Lynchet	runs north to 343852 241965
42283	343883	241904	Medieval	Headland	5m wide, western boundary of ridge & furrow
42284	343890	241905	Medieval	Ridge and furrow	area of R&F aligned north / south
42285	343875	241913	Roman	Lynchet	eroded by later ridge and furrow
42286	343920	241913	Medieval	Headland	Runs south from this point
42287	344015	241911	Post-Medieval	Track	4m wide with a bank on either side
42288	344009	242017	Medieval	Headland	4m wide and 0.2m high
42289	344002	242056	Medieval	Ridge and furrow	area of R&F aligned north / south
42290	343663	242070	Medieval	Ridge and furrow	area of R&F aligned NE/SW
42291	343589	242021	18th/19th C.	Ha Ha	remains of infilled Ha Ha
42292	343600	242045	18th/19th C.	Carriage ride	runs to the SE to the edge of scarp
42293	343715	241868	Post-Medieval	Holloway	4m wide runs to SE
42294	343798	241836	18th/19th C.	Carriage ride	runs west with ditch on its down slope side
42295	343738	241899	Medieval	Lynchet	runs east
42296	343811	241911	Medieval	Lynchet	runs west
42297	343820	241900	Medieval	Ridge and furrow	small area of ridge and furrow

Features were recorded (see Figure 9 and Table 1), relating to land-use prior to the construction of the parkland. These included four distinct areas of ridge and furrow, (HSM 42284, HSM 42289, HSM 42290 and HSM 42297) of both medieval and post-medieval date. These appeared to overlay a series of lynchets, (HSM 42275, HSM 42277, HSM 42278, HSM 42267, HSM 42269, HSM 42270 and HSM 42285). These are constructed diagonally across the river terrace and appear to either be cut by or directly associated with the earthwork remains of the Roman road (HSM 6883), as it runs over the river terrace from the floodplain. Due to the complexity of these features and the importance of understanding their relationships with one-another, particularly to the south and west of Old Weir Farm, it was suggested that this area was surveyed in more detail.

A series of field boundary ditches were observed running from the base of the river terrace across the floodplain to the river.

Features relating to the designed landscape included the fragmentary courses of two carriage rides.

## Site Archive

- 18 colour photographs
- 1 site notebook entry
- 1 sheet of field drawings
- 2 Geoplot data file (grid)
- 2 Geoplot data file (mesh)
- 2 Mapinfo files
- 1 Dictaphone tape
- 1 Word document of survey transcription data
- This document

## Acknowledgements

Herefordshire Archaeology would like to acknowledge the help of David Hughes (Property Manager for the National Trust), and National Trust archaeology staff, Caroline Thackray, Rob Woodside and Jeremy Milln and also to Ned Price, Head Gardener at the property.

## List of Illustrations

Figure 1: location of the site within the Herefordshire.

Figure 2: Extract from the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1887.

Figure 3: Location of resistivity survey. (dotted line shows centre of Roman Road)

Figure 4: Resistivity survey plot over Roman road (plot size 90 by 60m)

Figure 5: Location of evaluation trenches and test area of geophysics.

Figure 6: Resistivity plot of the top of the river terrace.

Figure 7: Geophysics plot overlying the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Map extract (1887), showing the course of the carriage ride.

Figure 8: Plan and western section of part of Trench 7.

Plate 1: View north from the floodplain of the river terrace and associated features. The buildings on the horizon are part of Old Weir Farm.

Figure 9: Location of features identified during the walkover survey in 2003

## **Bibliography**

British Geological Survey; England & Wales Sheet 216. Solid & Drift Geology, scale 1:50 000. 1989.

Barber, A and Walker,G: The Weir Garden, Swainshill, Archaeological Fieldwork 1991-1995, Cotswold Archaeological Trust 1995.

Patton, J and Whitehead, D: A Survey of Hiastoric Parks & Gardens in Herefordshire, 2001.

Shoesmith, R. The Roman buildings at New Weir, Herefordshire, Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists Field Club, Vol 43, 1980.

## **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.

Julian Cotton, Archaeological Advisor (planning)