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Herefordshire Council

# **Herefordshire Commons Survey Wyson Common, Brimfield Parish SO 509 669**

**Herefordshire Archaeology Report No.208**

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 Commons Survey: Wyson Common Brimfield**

## **Herefordshire Archaeology Report No.208**

Herefordshire Archaeology, February 2006.

### **Summary:**

*The survey (EHE43228) described in this report formed part of a pilot study for The Community Commons Project operated by Herefordshire Nature Trust. A rapid walk over survey was carried out on the Common concerned. A hand held Global Positioning by Satellite System was used to record the location of features encountered.*

*Features were recorded within the Common that illustrate the intensive use of the land resource in the post-medieval period, i.e. quarries, drainage channels, settlement platforms and hollow way.*

*Eight features were recorded within the current extent of the common. The features include the parish boundary that separates the parishes of Brimfield and Orleton. Other features include drainage channels and quarrying activity. The features are largely thought to be post-medieval.*

**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.

Figure 1 contains 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 archaeological survey of Wyson Common, Brimfield, Herefordshire (EHE43228). A total of twelve commons have been targeted as part of the Community Commons Project. The project was created by Herefordshire Nature Trust with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund. The overall aims of the Community Commons Project is to record and measure the level of biodiversity upon the common land in order to form a management plan for each common to improve and promote the habitat of local fauna and flora as well as improvements to public access. The project also provided the opportunity to document and record known and previously unknown archaeological features within the common landscape through a series of rapid survey assessments.

Commons 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 common land in Herefordshire has been recorded in the past. The rapid survey assessment centres on the recording of archaeological features and their position within the landscape.

When the visible archaeological traces within each common have been documented and understood, the results can be combined with the ecological records. From these, a well-informed management strategy can be developed to preserve and interpret the archaeological record alongside the other aims of the Community Commons Project.

### *Location*

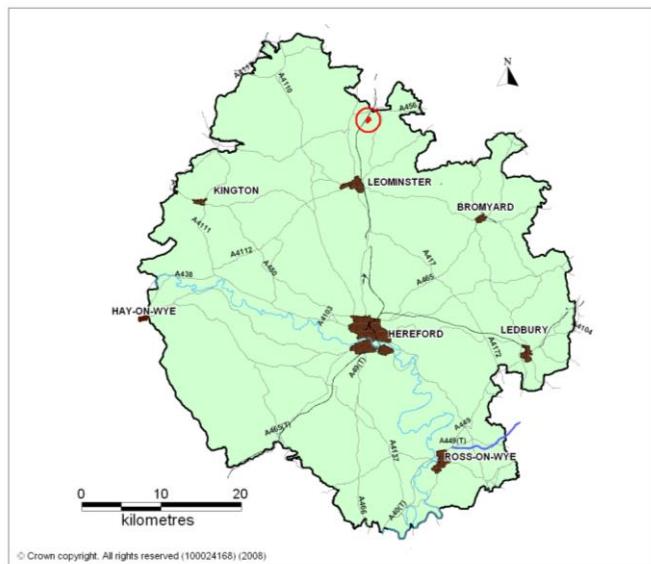


Figure 1: Location of Wyson Common in Herefordshire

Wyson Common is located at SO 50954 66985, 1 m west of Brimfield, north of Leominster, Herefordshire. The area surveyed is located to the east of the A49 and the topography drops from 80m Ordnance Datum to 75m. The Common occupies the valley bottom.

## *Method*

Wyson Common was surveyed on February 8th 2006. The survey comprised a rapid assessment of the potential of the common to contain well-preserved archaeological features. The survey therefore approximated a 'Level 2' survey (RCHME 1999) and

as such it has identified most of the more prominent traces. It should not be regarded as definitive in its results however, given that survey coverage, although systematic was not total. Features were mapped using a hand-held Garmin 12 XL Global Positioning by Satellite system, enabling a ten-figure grid reference to be recorded for each feature. This system is accurate to within approximately 10m.

The common (17.5 hectare) was walked in transects aligned roughly south/north and approximately 50m to 100m apart. If a large feature was encountered and no other features of archaeological significance could 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 following survey therefore provides only a sample of the remains located upon the common and should not be regarded as exhaustive or its results as definitive. Its purpose is to record the type of features present, their state of preservation and something of their relationships to other features throughout the common.

#### ***Field conditions***

Wyson Common occupies a valley bottom. The underlying geology consists of Late Devensian (Late/post-glacial) deposits of alluvium consisting of mixed clay, silt sand and gravel.

The vegetation on the common is a mix of open grasslands and wood, the tree cover consisted predominantly of alder due to the favourable waterlogged conditions.

#### ***Survey Conditions***

The rapid walkover survey was conducted on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2006. The weather was predominantly clear with occasional light rain, providing average light conditions for archaeological survey.

The open grasslands provided ideal survey conditions. The area of alder restricted visibility for survey and there is a greater chance of missing surviving archaeological features in this area. The only restriction to access experienced during the survey was the marshy areas and these will have masked the surface visibility of archaeological features.

#### ***Previous records***

Prior to the commencement of the walkover survey a search of the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) was made in order to locate any known archaeological features within the common and avoid replication of the archaeological record. The survey would serve as a reinterpretation of some of the previously recorded archaeological features. On this occasion no archaeological features had been recorded prior to this survey.



Figure 2: Wyson Common viewed from the northwest. © C R Musson [REF NO]

## Results

The recorded data from the survey is described in detail within the results section. The present section is concluded by a brief discussion providing an interim assessment of the historical development of the common. 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.

### Land management features

Four drainage channels were identified within the common (HSM 43229, 43232, 43237 and 43238). The first drainage channel (HSM 43229) was located in the northeast corner of the common, running in a south-southwest direction into the commons interior. It runs from a small pond along the common boundary and continues south for 30m before entering the alder wood that covers the northern half of the common, at which point it peters out. There is no evidence for an associated bank with the ditch that measures c.1.50m wide and 0.50m deep. The second, HSM 43232 is situated to the south of the common again running from the boundary but aligned west-northwest for c.100m before again petering out into the alder woodland. It may be that originally HSM 43229 and HSM 43232 were part of the same channel though the conditions on the common make it difficult to distinguish. Associated with HSM 43232 is a low bank on its northern edge. The drainage channel is c.1m wide and associated bank c.1-2m wide, 0.50m high.

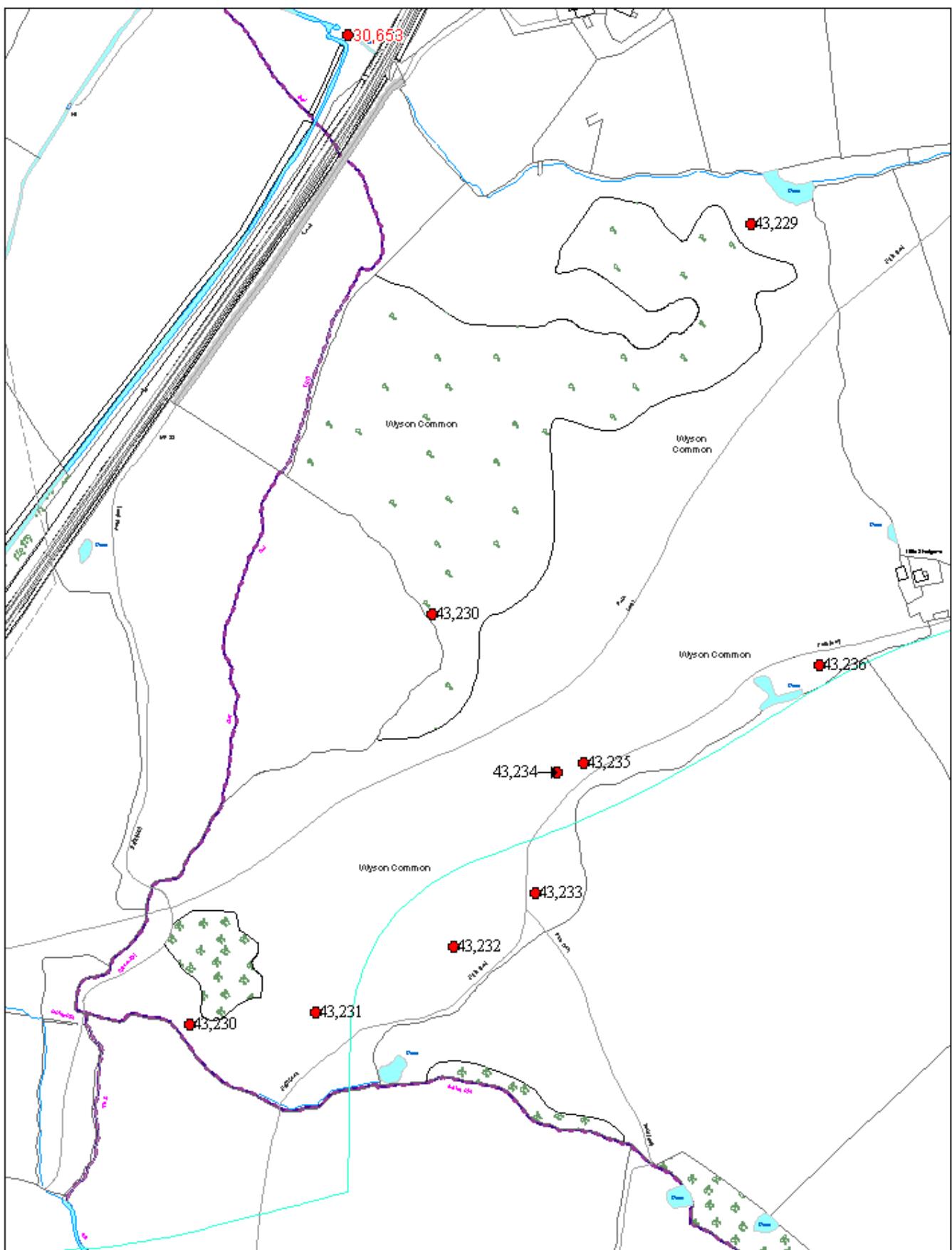
The third drainage channel HSM 43237 runs from the common boundary. The channel is c.1.50-2m wide and aligned north-northwest. The channel cuts a platform (HSM 43236) before running into a ditch that encompasses the northern edge of the platform. There is no continuation of the channel after this point. The fourth drainage channel (HSM 43238) runs away from the common boundary for c.10-15m and aligns north-northwest before it peters out into the common interior. The channel is 2m wide and c.0.50m deep. Both drainage channels run down a gentle northward slope for c.200m

The Parish Boundary marks the boundary between Brimfield CP and Orleton CP to the west. At SO 50858 67000 (HSM 43230) the parish boundary is visible as a bank c.0.50m in height and 1.50-2m in width. This is flanked by two parallel ditches c.1.50m wide. The feature forms the current common boundary and runs south-southwest. The second recording (HSM 43231) at SO 50691 66716 the parish boundary bank survives at 0.50m high and 2m wide. The associated ditches are absent due to silting.

### **Industrial features**

The south of the common appears to have held the main concentration of land management activities. At SO 50930 66807 (HSM 43235) a hollow way enters the common aligned north-northeast. It runs for c.50m before it disappears in an area of rough terrain associated with quarrying (HSM 43233). The hollow way is c.3.50m in width and 0.50-1m in depth. HSM 43233 lies to the west of the described hollow way and consists of a large shallow depression. This depression represents an extraction pit for the extraction of sand or clay and measures c.25-30m in diameter and 2m deep. It occupies the commons highest point at 80m OD.

A spoil heap (HSM 43234) associated with the extraction pit lies to the northeast. The spoil heap is semi-circular in plan with its open end facing south-west towards the clay pit. It measures c.4m in diameter and stands at a maximum height of 0.50m. To the southeast of the spoil heap is an easterly-aligned platform (HSM 43236) running parallel with the Common Boundary. The platform/terrace measures c.1.50m high and c.15m wide. Along its northern edge is a ditch 2m wide and 0.20m deep. The platform and ditch continue east for c.20m at which point the ditch becomes indiscernible. The platform continues for a further 70-80m before it becomes undistinguishable from the surrounding landscape. The course of the ditch and platform (HSM 43236) is interrupted by a north running drainage channel HSM 43237 at SO 50963 66897. The drainage channel terminates within the platform's ditch. At SO 50944 66890 the platform and ditch turn sharply south for a distance of 8-10m before they become untraceable.



### Archaeological features recorded within Wyson Common

Scale 1:3500



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## ***Discussion and Implications***

### **Interpretation of the Results**

The earliest evidence identified during the survey was the Parish boundary located forming the western stretch of the Common Boundary. The scale of the boundary bank and its associated double ditch may indicate medieval origins.

The features recorded within the south of the common are suggestive of the post-medieval period associated to small-scale industrial activity. The recorded platform (HSM 43236) and the nearby hollow way HSM 43235 are features formed as support to the quarrying activity (HSM 43233) concerned with the extraction of clay.

The surviving drainage channels (HSM 43229, 43232, 43237 and 43238) within the common indicate that during the post-medieval period there was an attempt to drain and improve the common grazing for livestock.

### **Implications regarding the archaeological resource**

The topography and geology (especially the soils) of Wyson Common dictates that due to the waterlogged, un-drained condition of a large area of the common, any archaeological features may have been masked through the build-up of deposits. The area may provide an extremely good resource for the study of palaeo-environmental evidence assuming that drainage attempts have not been damaged this evidence. A palaeo-environmental assessment of these areas would provide an indication as to the potential of these deposits to provide important information on the ecological development and human intervention on the common and surrounding landscape.

The remainder of the common is under a stable grass sward and therefore the sites are under no active erosion pressure.

### **Implications regarding site condition**

Within the southern, higher landscape of the common, platforms and associated ditches and drainage channels survive generally well. As such a relationship can be established between the various features. Traces of past communications also survive well in the form of a hollow way that can be related to specific features i.e. platform/terrace and neighbouring extraction pit. The chronology of the associated features is difficult to assess although it is certain that the platform (HSM 43236) pre-dates the drainage cut (HSM 43237) linked to post-medieval land management.

### **Implications for future management**

The implications for the future management of the historic environment on Wyson Common fall into two categories: reducing further loss and potential enhancement.

In order to reduce further loss to the historic environment a number of management approaches are recommended.

- Avoid works that cause disturbance to the ground surface on or adjacent to known archaeological features as these may disfigure upstanding monuments and can irreversibly damage any *in-situ* archaeological deposits.
- Avoid the dumping of materials on or adjacent to any upstanding archaeological features as this will result in a modification to their form.
- Significant earthmoving operations such as the creation of new drains, ponds, parking areas, and access tracks may disturb currently unrecorded archaeological deposits. Proposals should be subject to a rapid assessment by Herefordshire Archaeology to assess the potential archaeological impact of the works and if appropriate instigate a programme of archaeological work.
- The clearance of alder scrub in vicinity of archaeological features should be done with care to avoid disturbance or disfigurement to the archaeological feature.

### **Implications for future field work.**

Wyson Common contains a low density of visible archaeological features relating to land management (both medieval and post medieval) as well as industrial activity.

This mainly includes drainage channels and landscape boundaries (Parish boundary), but to a lesser extent also includes an extractive industry with shallow pits.

A second, more intensive survey is not essential, though exploring the relationship between the platform/terrace (HSM 43236), the holloway (HSM 43233) and extraction pit (HSM 43232) would assist with the phasing of activity on the common. This could be achieved through a measured survey of the features.

A palaeo-environmental assessment of the Common's peat deposit would be beneficial. A simple coring programme and palaeo-environmental assessment would provide an assessment of the waterlogged deposits to preserve a record of the ecological development and human intervention on the common and surrounding landscape.

### **Archive**

- 1 Dictaphone tape
- 1 Transcription Record
- 1 Excel Database
- 1 Mapinfo data file

### **Bibliography**

British Regional Geology (Third Edition 1971). *The Welsh Borderland*. London: HMSO.

Soil Survey of England and Wales (1971). *Soils of Midland and Western England 1:250,000*. Southampton: Ordnance Survey.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the help and co-operation of Herefordshire Nature Trust for assistance with access for this survey, and to the Herefordshire Community Commons Project for their commitment to this scheme.

Dr. Keith Ray, County Archaeologist, for his editorial input into this report.

Dr. Neil Rimmington, Countryside Advisor, for his editorial input into this report.

## Appendix 1: Database of features recorded during this survey.

HSM	Easting	Northing	Site type	Period	Description
43229	351252	267420	Drainage channel	Post-medieval	Straight channel running south-southwest from Common boundary, it measures 0.5m wide and 0.3m deep.
43230	350858	267000	Parish boundary	Post-medieval	Bank 0.50m high, 1.5-2m wide. Flanked by two ditches, wet ditch on southwest side c. 1.5m wide. The other is less well defined.
43230	350691	266716	Parish boundary	Post-medieval	Continuation of Parish boundary. Consist of a bank 0.50m high, 2m wide.
43231	350778	266725	Drainage channel	Post-medieval	Bank and ditch running northeast from Commons boundary, bank lies north side of ditch, 1-2m wide, 0.50m high. Ditch 1m wide. Stretches 100m before petering in bog.
43232	350873	266770	Extraction pit	Post-medieval	Roughly circular shallow pit, c. 2m deep 25-30m in diameter. Positioned at the commons highest point. On its north-western edge is a spoil heap measuring c. 4m diameter and 0.5m high.
43233	350930	266807	Hollow way	Post-medieval	Running north-northeast from common boundary for c. 50m before petering out in rough terrain.
43234	350944	266890	Platform/terrace	Post-medieval?	A north south aligned platform/terrace measuring 1.5m high and c.9m wide lines the eastern edge of the common over a distance of c.100m. The southwest corner of the platform is lined by a ditch c.2m wide and 0.3m deep. It lines the western edge of the platform for c.20m before it peters out.
43235	350963	266897	Drainage channel	Post-medieval	Platform cut by ditch running north-northwest for 20m from boundary, 1.5-2m wide, runs into platform ditch HSM 43234
43236	351126	266964	Drainage channel	Post-medieval	Ditch, 2m wide, 0.50m deep running north-northwest from boundary into common for 10m before petering out