



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

**Herefordshire Woodlands  
Archaeological Survey,  
Part 1  
Ast Wood, Aylton**

**Herefordshire Archaeology  
Report No. 161  
September 2004**

Report prepared by  
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**Contents**

**Summary  
Introduction  
Method  
Results  
Discussion  
Acknowledgements  
Archive  
Appendix 1**

**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 Woodlands Archaeological Survey,  
Part 1  
Ast Wood, Aylton  
Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 161  
Herefordshire Archaeology, September 2004.**

***Summary:***

*The survey described in this report (EHE80039), formed part of the Herefordshire Woodlands Archaeological Survey undertaken in partnership with the Forestry Commission. A rapid site identification survey was carried out in the wood concerned, using a hand held Global Positioning System to record the location of the features that were recognised as having archaeological significance.*

*Earthwork features were recorded within the wood that illustrate the intensive use of the woodland resource in the late and post medieval periods. These included saw pits, charcoal burning platforms, quarries and woodland management boundaries.*

*Medieval ridge and furrow was recorded covering a large area within the wood, indicating that at least part of the wood was under the plough probably up until the middle or end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.*

**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 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 Ast Wood, Aylton (EHE80039). The survey was carried out in 2004 within year 1 of the Herefordshire Woodlands Archaeological Survey which followed a pilot study undertaken by Herefordshire Archaeology in partnership with and grant-aided by the Forestry Commission. The purpose of the survey is to begin 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 for site identification and until recently recording an accurate location within woodland was often not practicable.

Woodland boundaries have often moved over the centuries, sometimes expanding to encapsulate and preserve evidence of alternative land-use (for instance, field systems) and on other occasions shrinking and being subject to differing forms of woodland management. These variations in land-use inevitably influence the kind of ecological data that can be obtained from different areas of woodland. Archaeological survey can contribute significant data concerning woodland history, management history and sequential development, and this can provide independent evidence of historical change. It is only when the changes throughout history within a wood have been documented and understood in this way that a well informed management strategy can be implemented.

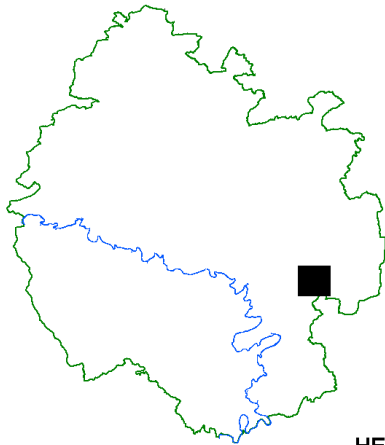
Since 1999 Herefordshire Archaeology has been involved in regular discussions with the Forestry Commission concerning the lack of archaeological data available when management plans are being prepared and applications for Woodland Grant Schemes are submitted. As a result of these discussions, the Forestry Commission has grant aided Herefordshire Archaeology to undertake a two phase pilot study, Phase One of which took place in 2001-2, and Phase 2 took place in 2003. The surveys carried out in early 2004 were an extension to this initial pilot work.

The survey for each woodland area identifies the potential for the survival of archaeological features and samples the types of features present. Further planned survey may re-visit woodlands identified in the rapid reconnaissance surveys as being of high archaeological potential and will involve a more detailed survey. 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.

### ***Location***

Ast Wood is located at NGR: SO 673 383, within the parish of Aylton. The woodland covers the top and northern sides of a gentle slope at an elevation of approximately 80m OD (Ordnance Survey, 1998).

The soils for this area are derived from the Bromyard Series of reddish brown, silty soils over soft siltstone and coarse sandstones. (Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983).



The Historic Landscape Characterisation Study for Herefordshire describes Ast Wood as woodland surrounded by fields to the east and south derived from the enclosure of former common arable areas, (HLC 381). The field boundaries to the north and west are more degraded due to more recent boundary loss but are still aligned on the common arable.(HLC 363), (Ray and White, 2003).

**HEREFORDSHIRE** **Figure 1: Ast Wood Location.**

### ***Previous fieldwork / records***

Prior to the survey taking place the county Sites and Monuments Record was consulted. However, no entries were found indicating the discovery of sites within the present woodland, and it is therefore assumed that no fieldwork that has resulted in a published record has taken place here previously.

### ***Method***

The primary survey work at Ast Wood took place on January 21<sup>st</sup> 2004. 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 Silva Multinavigator Global Positioning System, enabling a ten figure grid reference to be recorded for each feature. This system is accurate to within approximately 5m under tree canopy.

The wood was walked in transects aligned roughly north / south and approximately 50m to 100m 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 following survey comprises only a rapid appraisal of the woodland and should not be taken as exhaustive or its results as entirely definitive. It is intended to record the type of features present, their state of preservation and their relationships to other features within the woodland.

### **Field conditions**

The weather during the survey was fine and dry and visibility within the wood was generally good.

## ***Results (Figure 2)***

The recorded data from the survey is described in detail within this results section. This 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 subsequent 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 four charcoal burning platforms were recorded. These ranged in size from 5-10m in diameter and in the main comprised a level, circular platform with a pronounced down-slope lip. This is an unusually low number to record within such woodland and it is suggested that the lack of natural slope within the wood means that such features either do not show up well or that there was little need to construct a well defined platform. Therefore the small number of charcoal burning platforms recorded is probably not an accurate reflection of the scale of charcoal burning industry taking place within the wood during the post-medieval period.

A single saw pit was recorded within Ast Wood, (HSM 38757). The earthwork remains comprise an oval depression between 4 and 6m in length, 1.5m wide and 0.3-0.5m deep with spoil on their down-slope sides. This feature appears to have been truncated by a modern access track.

The presence and distribution of these classes of features suggests that either:

- The woodland has been primarily managed historically for the production of coppiced timber predominantly for the production of charcoal, or
- The woodland has been managed with standards and an under-storey of coppice but much the lumber has been taken elsewhere for sawing.

### **Woodland boundaries**

The woodland boundary bank is well preserved on all sides with the exception of the south-western edge of the present wood. Here the wood once extended to the south-west and has subsequently shrunk, the present boundary running along a track present on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1886, (see figure 3). Woodland boundary banks usually comprise a bank approximately 2m wide with a ditch on either side. The western and northern boundary banks have been truncated by more recent ploughing and now comprise a lynchet with a 0.6m drop into the field outside the wood. The eastern woodland boundary bank, HSM 38741 follows the line of the Parish Boundary and this is

reflected in the large size of the bank, (2.5m wide) and the 1m drop into the field to its east suggesting the presence of a substantial ploughed out ditch.

A single compartment boundary or drain was recorded, HSM 38762. This comprised a bank and ditch and was located within the southern portion of the wood. This feature was much eroded, the level nature of the woodland in this area making it very difficult to trace such subtle features.

### **Industrial features**

A single small quarry, HSM 38747 was recorded in the north-eastern portion of the wood. This comprised a small kidney shaped delve which cut through an area of medieval ridge and furrow, (HSM 38745). No access track was recorded leading to/from the quarry.

### ***Buildings/structures***

A single standing building was recorded during the survey, HSM 38761. This comprised an octagonal wooden pergola approximately 5m in diameter and of 20<sup>th</sup> century date. It has been constructed over a spring or shallow well and forms a garden feature associated with a house to the south-west.

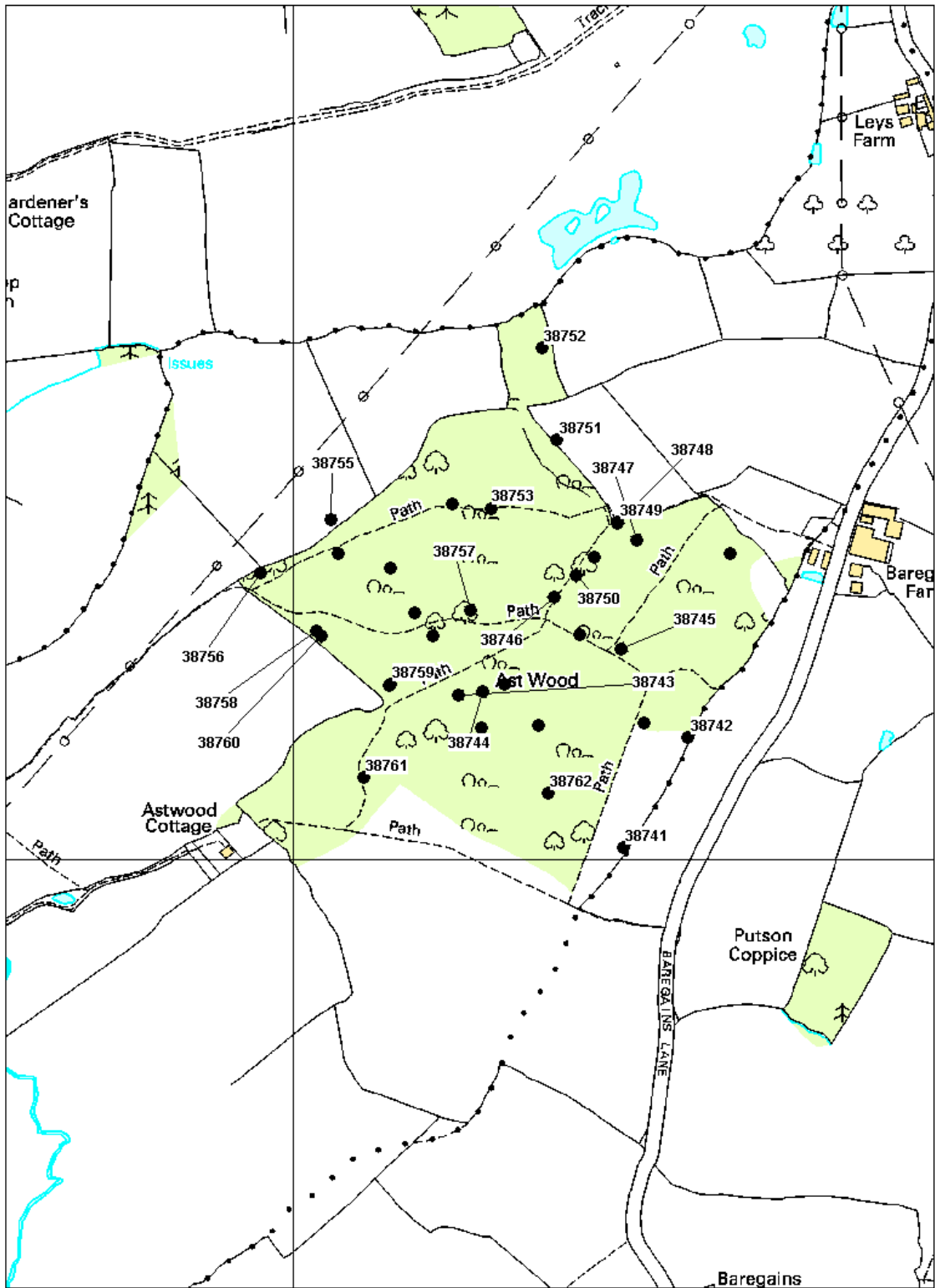
An area of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century debris was recorded close to the north-western edge of the wood, (HSM 38760). The debris was made up of glass bottles, stoneware jars and enamelled pots etc. It is unclear whether this represents evidence of a settlement site or an area of dumping / tipping. There is no record of a building at this location on any of the Ordnance Survey maps.

### ***Former land use***

A large area of well-preserved ridge and furrow was recorded within the north-eastern portion of the wood, HSM 38745. This is aligned on a north-east / south-west axis with a distance of approximately 4m between ridge centres. It was noted that the access tracks both currently in use and those apparent on the 1886 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map all follow this axis in this part of the wood. The Parish Boundary, which forms the eastern boundary of the wood and is immediately adjacent to the area of ridge and furrow is also aligned on this axis.

The ridge and furrow does not appear to have continued further south than the top of a small break in slope, aligned roughly east / west, to the north of holloway 38742. It seems, therefore, to have been confined to the hill top and may have continued to the north and east of the present boundaries of Ast Wood.

The lack of any field banks or woodland boundary banks other than those relating to the present woodland edge associated with the area of ridge and furrow would suggest that this area was not under the plough for a long period of time. The most likely scenario being a temporary assart in order to bring additional land into intensive arable, perhaps in the late 13<sup>th</sup> or early 14<sup>th</sup> century, which due to drastic de-population in the mid to late 14<sup>th</sup> century was either abandoned and allowed to revert or was re-planted as woodland.



**Figure 2: Location of features recorded within Ast Wood.**

## ***Discussion and Implications***

### ***Site and feature condition***

The majority of features recorded were well preserved. An exception is those features which have been truncated by relatively modern access tracks and those within areas disturbed by the insertion of a 4 by 4 track in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Feature recognition was difficult in some areas within the wood due to gentleness of slope and areas of level ground. This means that some classes of earthwork e.g. charcoal burning platforms and storage and stacking areas / platforms, are almost certainly under-represented.

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

The features recorded during this survey were generally well preserved. With the exception of additional access tracks being constructed there is little threat to their survival

### ***Implications for future management***

Care should be taken if further access ways and extraction routes are to be constructed. However, the lack of internal boundaries facilitates the planning of a route or routes that would have minimal impact on the archaeological resource.

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

This rapid survey has recorded a number of features associated with past woodland management and former land use. These would suggest that the entire area surveyed has been intensively managed as woodland from the late medieval period onwards. The presence and good survival of the area of ridge and furrow suggests that the woodland to the south and west of it may be of even greater age. This may be reflected in the presence of the Wild Service Tree in all parts of Ast Wood with the exception of the area of ridge and furrow, (P.Oliver *pers.comm.*).

## ***Acknowledgements***

I would like to acknowledge the help and co-operation of the owner of Ast Wood, Penny Oliver, for her assistance and co-operation with access for this survey. The Forestry Commission for their commitment to this survey scheme. Dr. Keith Ray, County Archaeologist, for his editorial input into this report.

## ***Archive***

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



***Appendix 1: Database of features and grid references.***

HSM No.	Easting	Northing	Site type	Period
38741	367359	238013	Woodland boundary bank	Late Medieval
	367430	238133	Woodland boundary bank	
38742	367430	238133	Holloway	Post Medieval
	367382	238149	Holloway	
	367266	238147	Holloway	
	367205	238144	Holloway	
38743	367179	238179	Holloway	Post Medieval
38744	367206	238183	Holloway	Post Medieval
	367229	238191	Holloway	
38745	367357	238230	Ridge & Furrow	Medieval
	367311	238246	Ridge & Furrow	
	367476	238335	Ridge & Furrow	
38746	367284	238287	Charcoal burning platform	Post Medieval
38747	367374	238349	Quarry	Post Medieval
38748	367352	238368	Lynchet	Medieval
38749	367353	238369	Holloway	Post Medieval
	367327	238331	Holloway	
38750	367308	238311	Charcoal burning platform	Post Medieval
38751	367287	238459	Woodland boundary bank	Late Medieval
38752	367271	238560	Woodland boundary bank	Late Medieval
38753	367215	238384	Charcoal burning platform	Post Medieval
38754	367172	238389	Holloway	Post Medieval
38755	367040	238371	Woodland boundary bank	Late Medieval
38756	366964	238313	Holloway	Post Medieval
	367048	238334	Holloway	
	367105	238319	Holloway	
	367132	238269	Holloway	
	367152	238244	Holloway	
38757	367193	238272	Saw Pit	Post Medieval
38758	367025	238250	Woodland boundary bank	Post Medieval
	367104	238190	Woodland boundary bank	
38759	367105	238191	Charcoal burning platform	Post Medieval
38760	367030	238245	Debris/tipping	C19th/20th
38761	367076	238090	Building	C20th
38762	367277	238072	Ditch	Post Medieval

**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.