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Bythan, Avenbury: A Whole Farm Archaeological Survey

**Herefordshire Archaeology Report
No. 184**

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.

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Summary

The survey described in this report (EHE42796) was carried out during February 2005 as one in a series of whole farm surveys. In turn, these formed part of the Frome Valley Archaeology, Landscape Change and Conservation Project.

Bythan is a good example of landscape change over time, and shows how it is possible to restore some historic aspects of this landscape. The earthworks identified during survey were mainly representative of small-scale management of landscape features such as field boundaries. Boundaries shown on the 1840 Tithe map of Avenbury and 1841 Tithe map of Linton, which had been removed, are now being re-established under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. The present owners are aware of the importance of historic features and are keen to preserve them whilst still maintaining a good practical use for the land.

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.

Figure 1 is reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Herefordshire Council. 100024168. (2005)

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Introduction

This report provides an account of a whole farm survey of Bythan, Avenbury (SMR 42796). The survey was carried out as part of the Frome Valley Archaeology, Landscape Change and Conservation Project during 2005. The project was part financed by the European Union (EAGGF) and DEFRA through the Herefordshire Rivers LEADER+ Programme and English Heritage, and was carried out in partnership with the Bromyard and District Local History Society. The idea behind the project was to try to learn more about the historical development of the Frome Valley (and especially the river environs) from the earliest continuous human occupation of the area 12,000 years ago, up until the present day. A core aim of the project was to involve the local community in a series of events and activities exploring the Valley's rich heritage and human impact on the landscape.

The farm surveys were an important part of the project as they helped to indicate how agricultural practices have altered the landscape over time, to raise awareness of archaeological features, and to provide an oral history element. The farm visits comprised of a rapid walkover survey and systematic observation of historical features. This was undertaken where possible with a hand-held Global Positioning System (GPS). Where possible, the farmer or landowner accompanied the surveyor, providing a first hand account of the history of land use and agricultural methods. The surveys were only possible through the kind co-operation of the landowners/farmers, permitting access to their holdings and devoting half a day or more of their time.

This report describes the location of Bythan, the methods and field conditions of the survey, and any previous known observations regarding the historic environment. Results of the survey are given on a field-by-field basis, with comments provided on land-use and any archaeological features observed.

Location

Bythan is located at NGR SO 66679 53011 with the southwest part of the farm falling within the parish of Avenbury, and the northeast part within Linton, approximately 2km southeast of Bromyard and east of the River Frome. It consists of 8 land parcels, covering an area of around 58.5 acres over moderate to steeply sloping topography.

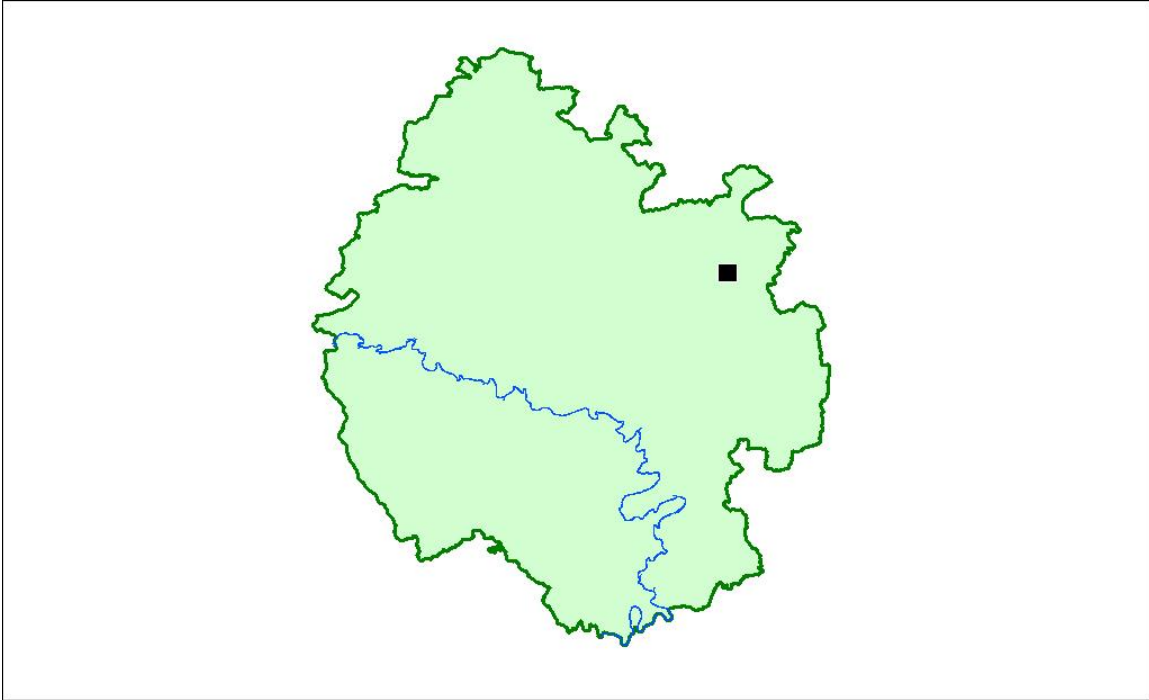


Figure 1: Location map. Ordnance Survey data 100024168 (2005).

Method

The whole farm survey at Bythan was undertaken on February 22nd 2005 and progressed in three stages, following a format devised specifically for the Frome Valley project. Initially, a check was made of the Herefordshire SMR, and historic maps were consulted, such as the 1885 1st edition Ordnance Survey map and the Tithe Apportionment Maps for Avenbury and Linton, dating to 1840 and 1841 respectively. The second stage of the survey involved an interview with the landowner Mrs Hillier. This provided an opportunity to gain information on the current farming practices and how these may have changed over time, any farm management schemes that might be in place, as well as any known historical features on the farm, or oral histories. The interview would also provide insights into the farm's recent history and previous owners. The third stage was a systematic walkover of the landholding, accompanied by Mrs Hillier. Each land parcel was recorded individually and assigned a number or, where possible, the field name given by the landowner.

All visible archaeological features were recorded as well as information about current land usage, cover, boundary cover and any potential destructive factors such as root damage or erosion. The position of any identified archaeological features was recorded using a handheld SILVA Multi Navigator Global Positioning System (GPS). This enabled a ten-figure grid reference to be recorded for each feature. The system is accurate to within approximately 3m and to within 10m under tree cover. These records provided the basis for the database and synthesis in this report. During the third stage of the survey the general building material and usage of the farm buildings were recorded.

Field conditions

The survey was undertaken in February 2005. This meant that conditions were good for the recognition of earthwork features, as vegetation was low enabling excellent visibility. The weather was good on the day of the survey, making earthworks more clearly visible in low sunlight.

Seven of the land parcels were improved pasture, and earthworks were recorded in five of these. The eighth land parcel was a small area of woodland.

Previous fieldwork / records

The County Sites and Monuments Record was consulted prior to this survey. Only one record was within the current boundaries of Bythan, consisting of prehistoric flints found in 1995. The farm itself is not recorded on the SMR. The other entries are for sites in the surrounding area within the parishes of Avenbury and Linton.

SMR number	Site name	Grid ref	Site type	Period	Description
927	St Mary's, Avenbury	6616 5315	Church	Medieval	Ruined church dating from the early 13 th century
18044	Houses (site), S of Church, Avenbury	6610 5300	Dwelling	Post-medieval	House, garden and orchard
18133	Vicarage (site), NW of Church, Avenbury	6610 5330	Vicarage	Post-medieval	Vicarage house and garden
20087	Bythan, Avenbury	6660 5310	Flints	Prehistoric	Prehistoric flint finds
22140	East side of Church,	6620 5310	House platform	Medieval	Earthworks, possibly

	Avenbury				remains of a building.
22141	Southwest of Church, Avenbury	6610 5310	Holloway	Undated	Holloway around south side of church
39873	Quarry	6679 5335	Quarry	Post-medieval	
39876	Quarry	6603 5375	Quarry	Post-medieval	
41154	Clay Pit	6685 5385	Clay Pit	Post-medieval	Clay pit seen on 1 st edition OS map

Results

Documentary sources

The investigation of documentary sources for this landholding has not been exhaustive. The main cartographic evidence utilised for this survey has been the available Tithe and Ordnance Survey mapping, along with the relevant Sites and Monuments records.

Bythan is recorded as Bythen homestead and garden on the 1840 Tithe map of Avenbury. The field to the north of the house is shown as Bythen Field, and to the south is Bythe Pasture.

Recent history and current farming practices

The current landowners, Mr and Mrs Hillier, bought Bythan in December 2001, including the farmhouse and all of the current landholding apart from Burley Field. This was purchased at a later stage from Burley Farm. The previous owner bought Bythan during the 1960s, renovated the house from derelict, built a modern extension and re-roofed the barns. He then purchased the land from the Turners at Burgess Farm, and farmed it until the mid-late 1990s when he lost his herd during the Foot and Mouth scare and was forced to sell. During his ownership he rented some of the fields as pasture to a farmer from Bishops Frome, and made no changes to the land.

The Hilliers managed to successfully purchase the house and land from different owners, reuniting the former landholding. They have only sold a small strip of land on the southeast boundary of Burley Field to neighbouring residents. Mrs Hillier tells me the land has generally been worked as part of larger farms in the past. She has noticed that Burley Field has more modern grass species than the pastures that came with the original landholding.

The Hilliers do not farm the land themselves, but let out the grazing to a neighbouring farmer. They do have considerable involvement in the management of their land, however, particularly through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme in place since October 2003 (see below).

Cattle are grazed here at the beginning of the year, with some fields put aside for silage and hay. Fields 3, 5 and 6 are generally cut for fodder crops. After this all fields are used as cattle pasture until the end of October, or earlier if the weather is wet. The land is then used to graze sheep until mid December. All livestock are removed between December and early April, depending on the weather, and the Hilliers use this time to continue work under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

Buildings

There were four buildings recorded at Bythan:

1. The original part of the house, built during the mid 18th century. Timber-frame building with brick infill and clay tile roof. The building is two storeys high and is currently lived in by Mr and Mrs Hillier. The previous owner renovated it from derelict during the 1970s and added the extension (2).
2. Modern extension to the house. Forms the section between the house and a barn. Brick, one storey building with clay tile roof.
3. Stone barn with clay tile roof. Open fronted with timber posts. Currently used for storage, but previous use certainly agricultural. Likely to be same date as house. Re-roofed by the previous owner during the 1970s.
4. As above, but there are plans to convert this building.

Field names and past farming practices

The present landowners plan to rename all fields as they were on the Tithe maps of 1840 and 1841. At present only three of the fields have names, but two of these may be changed. Those fields without names have been assigned numbers for the purpose of this survey. The previous owner did not use names for the fields.

Field 1/Big Field

Shown as Big Field on the 1840 Tithe map of Avenbury where it is marked as arable land. Currently used as pasture. The track leading to the house runs along the northwest boundary of this field.

Field 2/Front Field

Name may change. On the tithe map it is recorded as Bythe Pasture, with an area marked Foxley in the southeast part of the field.

Field 3

To be renamed Bythen Field as on Tithe. Used as arable land during this time, but currently improved pasture with a new plantation of standard orchard trees.

Field 4

Formally three separate land parcels (1841 Tithe map of Linton) called Lower Stoney Field (arable), Stoney Field (arable) and The Sharl (meadow). No name at present.

Field 5

Tithe map shows this field divided into two meadows collectively named Little Foxley.

Field 6/Burley Field

Burley Field is one land parcel but a narrow strip of land not included in the holding separates the northern and southern areas of the field. On the 1841 Tithe map of Linton the northern part is shown as an arable field called Three Acres, with the southern part divided into two unnamed meadows. The Hilliers chose the current name when the field was purchased from Burley Farm. Mrs Hillier has been informed that the field was planted with beans at some stage prior to the previous owner.

Field 7

Part of a meadow marked The Sharl on the Tithe map; the field contains a quarry (see archaeological features). No current name.

Home Wood

This is a small area of woodland to the west of the farmhouse. It is not marked on the 1840 Tithe map of Avenbury, but there are some mature trees, and it is shown on the 1885 1st edition Ordnance Survey map as a wooded area. A new planting last year has increased the area of the wood to double its original size.

Archaeological features identified**Field 1**

Field bank with oak trees along it, running parallel to and approximately 2.5 metres inside of southeast boundary. Does not form wide enough space between for a trackway. This shows small-scale re-organisation of the field boundary, sometime during the post-medieval period. Part of the southeast boundary of this field follows the line of the parish boundary, which continues into the neighbouring field, running parallel to the same boundary until it rejoins the southeast boundary of Field 2.

Field 2

Small, roughly circular depression near the front of the house, likely to have been a pond, with plans to restore it as such. The northeast boundary of this field also forms the parish boundary, but the bank is not significantly larger or more prominent than the other field boundaries.

Field 5

Field bank as in Field 1, running parallel to and approximately 2 metres inside southern boundary. The inside bank is steep and up to 2 metres high in places.

Field 6

Stone rubble close to the southwest boundary of this field must be the remains of a building shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of Linton, dating to 1885.

Field 7

Post-medieval quarry covers most of the field. The quarry is marked on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of Linton, dating to 1885. Footings of a barn were seen within this area. Large ridges in the southwest corner of the field, approximately 5 metres wide, 2 metres apart, running roughly north-south.

Home Wood

Quarry in the old coppice.

Farm management schemes

The farm has been managed under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme since October 2003. Under the guidance of the scheme, the Hilliers have worked hard to restore aspects of the farm's landscape history, with excellent results. Many of the Tithe boundaries have already been re-established, and the Hilliers have begun to carefully manage the magnificent veteran trees. Mrs Hillier has a good understanding of trees and plants and recognises areas that need management. They are keen to rename the fields as they are shown on the Tithe map, once they have successfully restored all the boundaries.

Hedge planting/restoration:

The eastern boundary of Field 1 has recently been planted as a new mixed-species hedge. The northeast boundary of Field 2 has been replanted, and there has been hedgerow regeneration on the southwest boundary. Field 3 has a modern northwest boundary fence that follows the line of an older boundary. An old tithe boundary represented by a line of oak trees has been re-established in Field 4, so far only a fence, but this will be replaced by a hedge. The northwest boundary of this field is to be regenerated by new planting within gaps. The western boundary of Field 6 had been planted the day before this survey took place.

Tree management:

Major tree surgery is planned for some of the boundary oaks. Pollarding has been started on the old ash pollards along the parish boundary (western boundary of Field 2). The management is planned to happen over a period of three years in order to reduce stress to the trees. There are some old oaks in Home Wood that are to be managed, and a new plantation has been established next to part of the old coppice. The standard orchard in Field 3 was put in under the scheme.

Wildlife:

Bythan is rich in wildlife already, including maybugs and a colony of long-eared bats. The new hedges have been planted with diverse species to encourage a wide variety of wildlife. The Hilliers plan to increase the wildflower species in Field 3 around the orchard, and also possibly in Field 5. Areas of long grass are left along the driveway to attract wildlife.

Discussion

Bythan has a relatively small number of archaeological features, but those identified tell us something about how the landscape has been managed (former field boundaries) or used for industry (quarries). These features have now been recorded, and there is now a written record of Bythan's more recent history.

The current emphasis of the farm is grazing for livestock, but some of the fields were previously arable land. It is clear that the farmer (who rents the fields from Mr and Mrs Hillier) has a good understanding of how the land should be farmed in relation to the seasons, and the agriculture currently has a low impact on the landscape.

Bythan is a good example of landscape change over time, and shows how it is possible to restore some historic aspects of this landscape. The earthworks identified during survey were mainly representative of small-scale management of landscape features such as field boundaries. Boundaries shown on the 1840 and 1841 Tithe maps of Avenbury and Linton that had been removed are now being re-established under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. The present owners are aware of the importance of historic features and are keen to preserve them whilst still maintaining a good practical use for the land.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mr and Mrs Hillier for permission to conduct the survey, and particularly Mrs Hillier for giving up her time and for providing valuable information.

Archive

8 landscape record forms
4 building record forms
Field notes
This document

Appendix 1: Database of features and grid references.

SMR No.	Easting	Northing	Site type	Period	Description
42804	66727 to 66539	52735 52569	Field bank	Post-medieval	Low bank running parallel to and approx. 2.5m from SE boundary
42805	66728	52984	Depression	Post-medieval	Small, roughly circular depression
42806	67127 to 66912	53000 52963	Field bank	Post-medieval	Steep bank running parallel to and approx. 2m from S boundary. Up to 2m high in places
30577	67130	53060	Building rubble	Post-medieval	Large stone rubble remains of building shown on 1885 map of Linton
39877	67014	53116	Quarry	Post-medieval	
42809	67031	53071	Ridges	Post-medieval	Large ridges approx 5m wide and 2m apart running roughly N-S
42810	66632	52958	Quarry	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 Keith Ray, County Archaeologist