

Archaeological Assessment

Aconbury Wood Herefordshire

NGR SO 50895 33311 to SO 51016 32978

BORDER ARCHAEOLOGY

On behalf of Laing O'Rourke/Dwr Cymru Welsh Water

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1. Executive Summary

An assessment of the impact of the proposed pipeline route along a 375m section of trackway extending along the E side of Aconbury Wood has revealed that:

- The trackway and associated earthen banks on either side of it appear to represent a long established landscape feature
- The substantial western bank of the trackway appears to be a long established cross-slope boundary feature, defining the edge of a series of narrow earthen terraces extending downhill from the Iron Age hillfort of Aconbury Camp.
- These earthen terraces or lynchets appear to be associated with ploughing activity for arable cultivation and are commonly accepted as being of medieval or early post-medieval date.
- However, particularly in view of the proximity of these features to Aconbury Camp, the possibility that these terracing features could be related to prehistoric or Romano-British agricultural activity outside the hillfort must be seriously considered.
- The line of the trackway is first depicted on an estate plan of Aconbury Court dated 1757 which shows a well-defined bank marking the boundary of the Aconbury Court estate to the E and Held Wood and The Warren to the NW and W respectively.
- It is possible that the present trackway and associated banks preserve the line of an ancient estate boundary, marking the division between the Aconbury Court estate (which represented the core estate of the dissolved Aconbury Priory) and Held Wood and The Warren, which formed part of the medieval royal forest of Aconbury.
- It is also possible that the trackway and associated banks may have functioned as the eastern boundary of a substantial rabbit warren (in existence by 1573) of medieval date, which occupied the central and southern parts of Aconbury Woods.

Mitigation Strategy

Border Archaeology are currently developing a strategy for the investigation, dating and preservation by record of the earthen banks that will be impacted and this will be completed following a site meeting with Laing O Rourke personnel on the 3rd September.



2. Introduction

Border Archaeology has undertaken an archaeological assessment on behalf of DCWW/Laing O Rourke of a 375m section of trackway running approximately NW-SE (NGR: SO 50895 33311 to SO 51016 32978) along the E side of Aconbury Wood and approximately 400m E of the eastern extremity of Aconbury Camp Iron Age hillfort (DCWW/LOR scheme map refs W140-03 & 04).

The trackway forms part of the route of a pipeline extending from Ridge Hill Reservoir to Aconbury Reservoir, which is situated on the S slope of Aconbury Hill. The trackway measures approximately 3m wide and is flanked on the NE and SW by substantial earthen banks that will be almost wholly removed on the SW side to create an 8m-wide way-leave. An initial visit by Neil Shurety and Mike Stokes identified the extent of the engineering impact and this Assessment was produced to (1) identify the archaeological resource and issues thereof and (2) produce a mitigation strategy to ameliorate the effects of the substantial removal of the earthworks herein described.

Copies of this Assessment will be sent in due course to Mr M. Stokes Esq. of Laing O Rourke and Mr Julian Cotton of Herefordshire Archaeology.

2.1 Soils & Geology

The predominant soil type in the immediate vicinity of the specific study area consists of typical brown earths of the EARDISTON 1 (541c) series, comprising well drained reddish coarse loamy soils over sandstone, shallow in places with some reddish fine silty soils over shale and siltstone.

The underlying geology consists of Devonian and Permo-Triassic reddish sandstone, silty shale and siltstone.

3. Methodology

3.1 Archaeological Assessment

3.1.1 Research Aims

The purpose of this part of the Archaeological Assessment is to review all existing archaeological information (where readily available) and to identify any features of archaeological interest lying within the area of the proposed works, specifically the installation of a new water mains pipeline.

3.1.2 Research Methods

The research carried out for this archaeological assessment consisted of the following elements:



3.1.2.1 Evaluation and study of archaeological databases

The National Monuments Record Centre (NMR) at Swindon and the Herefordshire Archaeology Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) were both consulted and details obtained of all known archaeological sites, listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments in the study area.

3.1.2.2 Evaluation and study of cartographic and other pictorial evidence

Historic maps and aerial photographs of the specific study area, where readily available, were examined. Aerial photographs and maps were obtained from the Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record and the Herefordshire Record Office.

3.1.2.3 Evaluation and study of secondary (published) sources

All published works relating to sites and structures of archaeological and historical interest within the study area were evaluated, including relevant volumes of the *Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club* held within Border Archaeology's own library.

3.1.2.4 Measured Field Survey

A measured field survey was carried out on the 16th August 2007 along the 370m of banks & ditches that will be removed by the new pipeline way leave (see Section 6 for further details).

4. Historical Overview

4.1 Iron Age and Roman (c.600BC-410 AD)

The study area is located on E perimeter of Aconbury Woods, approximately 350m to the E of the substantial hillfort of Aconbury Camp, this being an irregularly shaped univallate enclosure of approximately 17.5 acres in size measuring 550 yards long (E-W) and 150 yards wide (N-S) and surrounded by a rampart on the S and E sides and a berm (raised bank) on the N and W sides (RCHME, 1931, 13-14).

Relatively little archaeological fieldwork has been undertaken at the Camp or the immediate surrounding area; an archaeological investigation undertaken in the early 1950s was limited to 'surface scratching' but did reveal a large number of Iron Age pottery sherds, dating back to the 4th century BC and some Roman sherds (Kenyon, 1953, 25-26).

4.2 Medieval (5th-16th centuries AD)

Documentary evidence exists suggesting that the hillfort continued to be occupied into the early medieval period. It is identifiable with 'Caer Rein', located on the northern border of the early medieval district of Archenfield, which is mentioned in an early 12th century charter defining the bounds of the diocese of Llandaff. Aconbury Camp may have been the centre for a large composite estate or 'maenor' within the region of



Archenfield (Coplestone Crow, 1989, 22, 33-34). The place name Aconbury (*Akornebir*), first recorded in 1213 is of Old English origin, denoting a ‘fort inhabited by squirrels’, which would seem to imply that the area of the Camp was heavily wooded at this time (Mills, 2003, 3).

The forest of Aconbury first appears in documentary records from the early 13th century onwards. In 1213, King John made a grant of 33 oaks for the fortification of Hereford Castle and three years later, he granted ‘three carucates (roughly 360 acres) of land to be ‘assarted’ (ie. cleared of woodland and converted to arable) and cultivated in our forest of Aconbury’ for the establishment of Aconbury Priory, a house of Augustinian nuns.

From these references, it is clear that Aconbury was a royal forest and it would appear from the latter record that it originally extended further to the E than at present, incorporating the site of the nunnery, which was located in the vicinity of Aconbury Court and the adjacent parish church of St John the Baptist, approximately 150m NE of the present woods.

Aconbury appears to have remained a protected royal forest throughout the rest of the medieval period; in 1251 it was specifically excluded, together with Athelstan’s Wood and Harewood when King Henry III granted exemption from forest laws to the community of Archenfield. However, the forest was rented out for ‘herbage’ (wood pasture) to the nuns of Aconbury on at least one occasion. In 1257, Henry III granted the wood to the Priory for seven years at a rent of £8 per annum (Lovelace, 2001, 35).

4.3 Post-Medieval (16th century to present)

In 1542, following the dissolution of Aconbury Priory six years earlier, the site of the Priory, together with the manor of Aconbury (also including Aconbury Woods), were granted to the mayor and burgesses of Gloucester and subsequently came into the possession of a local landowner, Hugh ap Harry (Bull, 1883, 305).

An inquest held in 1573 concerning Hugh ap Harry’s title to Aconbury describes the contemporary state of the woods and mentions that Kings Held Wood comprised 38 acres of coppice, 33 of which were ‘now destroyed by Conies’. (NA E178/964) This reference shows that the woodland in the vicinity of the Camp had been significantly reduced by the end of the 16th century and the reference to ‘Conies’ indicates the probable existence of a warren nearby. It is significant, therefore, that later documents and maps refer to the southern part of Aconbury Woods as ‘The Warren’ (Lovelace, 2001, 35-6).

Documentary evidence reveals that significant military activity took place in the vicinity of Aconbury Camp during the first half of the 17th century. Accounts survive for the maintenance of a beacon station at Aconbury Camp in 1625 and the hillfort was often referred to as ‘Aconbury Beacon’ throughout the 17th and 18th centuries (Bull, 1883, 295).

During the English Civil War, the Camp was occupied on at least two occasions, by Royalist forces in 1642 and subsequently by the Scottish army commanded by the Earl of Leven during the protracted siege of Hereford in 1645 (Bull, 1883, 295-6). The Camp briefly served as Leven’s headquarters in August 1645 and it has been suggested that

modifications to the defences were carried out during this period, although precisely what these were and their location remains unclear (RCHME, 1931, 14).

In 1641, the manor of Aconbury (including the Woods) became part of the estate of the Bridges family, dukes of Chandos, who subsequently sold their estates in Herefordshire to Guy's Hospital in 1731, although the revenues from these estates remained in the possession of the Marchioness of Carnarvon until her death in 1754. A substantial collection of written documentation and maps relating to the Guy's Hospital estates in Herefordshire has survived which shed considerable light on land use and topography in Aconbury Woods during the 18th and 19th centuries.

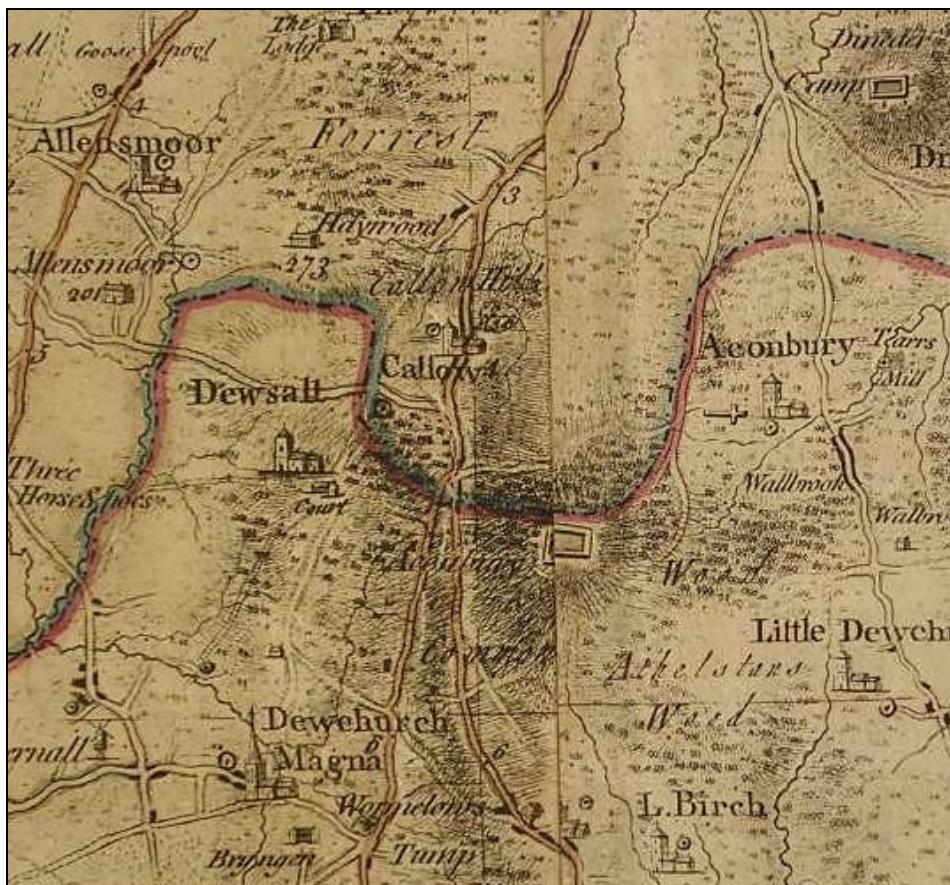


Plate 1: Extract from Isaac Taylor's Map of Herefordshire (1786) showing the hillfort enclosure of Aconbury Camp apparently devoid of tree coverage (C99/III/232)
(Reproduced by courtesy of Herefordshire Record Office)

A survey of the Herefordshire estates acquired by the Hospital, dated 1731, mentions only three areas of woodland in Aconbury: Held Wood (forming the N part of Aconbury Woods), Pikes Wood and Walbrooks. The survey also reveals that 'The Warren' farm estate, which occupied the central and southern parts of present day Aconbury Woods (including the hillfort of Aconbury Camp) was largely cleared of trees and under arable cultivation or pasture. The site of Aconbury Camp is shown apparently devoid of tree coverage on Isaac Taylor's map of Herefordshire dated 1786 (**Plate 1**).

After the death of the Marchioness of Carnarvon in 1754, a survey of the Herefordshire estates belonging to Guy's Hospital was undertaken, which revealed that much of the extant woodland 'has been greatly reduced and what is left standing has been greatly



abused' (HRO Ref. C99/III/235). Nevertheless, large quantities of timber continued to be felled upon the Herefordshire estates of the Hospital (including Aconbury) throughout the second half of the 18th century, mostly sold for shipbuilding. A report by the purveyor of Deptford Naval Dockyard to the Commissioners on the Woods, Forests and Land Revenues of the Crown Estates stated that 'most of the timber which grew on the Estates of Guy's Hospital, in the county of Hereford, has been cut down within 25 years and a great part sent to His Majesty's Yards' (Lovelace, 2001, 37).

The Governors of Guy's Hospital appear to have determined to replenish the rapidly stocks of timber on their Herefordshire estates, and a programme of extensive plantation in the vicinity of Aconbury Woods took place in about 1830-40. This is confirmed by a remark in an account of a Woolhope Club field visit to Aconbury Camp in 1883 that 'the wood which now crowns the summit (of Aconbury Camp) and is obstructive of the view is of modern origin, having been planted about 50 years ago by the owners, the Governors of Guy's Hospital on land formerly occupied as a farm (Bull, 1883, 297). A plan of the Aconbury estate dated 1852 shows that Held Wood and The Warren were both heavily wooded at that time (C99/III/227).

5. Site Specific Information

The trackway and associated banks on either side appear, on the basis of documentary evidence and visual inspection, to be a long established landscape feature of man-made origin. However it is difficult to say with certainty when this feature came into existence.

The possibility of a prehistoric origin, particularly in view of its proximity to the Iron Age hillfort of Aconbury Camp, cannot be discounted; although it seems unlikely that it represents part of the defences of the Camp itself, it is entirely possible that it may have been associated with agricultural activity or occupation within an annexe outside the hillfort.

The likelihood that this feature is of ancient date is strengthened by the existence of a flight of terraced earth banks extending eastwards from the Camp downhill to the substantial bank marking the W edge of the trackway. This terracing may represent evidence of 'lynchets', ridges or ledges formed on slopes by the action of ploughing moving earth downhill and piling it against a lower field boundary.

These lynchets are often classified as being of medieval or early post-medieval (16th-17th century) date, similar features have been recorded at nearby Athelstan's Wood at Little Birch (SMR Record Nos. 44897, 44899, 44903) and identified in other areas of ancient woodland in Herefordshire. **However the possibility should be recognised that this terracing could also be associated with agricultural activity of prehistoric origin**, as has been observed in a recent survey of Herefordshire woodland forming part of the Malvern Hills AONB (Hoverd, 2003).

Whatever eventually is identified as being the most likely provenance, it seems reasonable to assume, in view of the existence of this terracing, that the adjacent trackway and banks represent an ancient cross-slope field boundary and this is further corroborated by the documentary and cartographic evidence discussed below.



Plate 2: Extract from 'An exact plan of Aconbury Court with several other adjacent tenements and woods' by Meredith Jones (1757) showing the line of the trackway defining the boundary of the Aconbury Court Estate with The Warren and Held Wood to the W and NW. The route of the proposed pipeline is superimposed in red
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Herefordshire Record Office)

The earliest cartographic representation of this feature appears on a plan of the Aconbury Court estate dated 1757 (HRO Ref. C99/III/217), which shows a substantial hedge boundary on the alignment of the present trackway, running NW-SE and then turning sharply S, marking the division between the Aconbury Court estate to the E and the Warren and Held Wood to the W and NW respectively (**Plate 2**).

It may be inferred, from the evidence of the 1757 map, that the present trackway and associated banks preserve the line of a long established estate boundary. Precisely when this was established is not clear, but it may represent the boundary between the royal forest of Aconbury to the W and to the E, the three carucates of land which were granted from the forest in 1216 'to be assarted and cultivated' for the establishment of Aconbury Nunnery. **It was not uncommon for areas of woodland to be defined by an enclosure bank and ditch during the medieval period.**

An alternative explanation is that the bank represents the E boundary of the extensive rabbit warren that appears to have covered the southern half of Aconbury Woods. The earliest specific references to The Warren occur in documentary records dating back to the early 18th century although it was certainly in existence well before that date, based on the evidence of the 1573 inquest which refers to Kings Held Wood, located immediately to the N of The Warren, as having been partially 'destroyed by Conies' (NA E178/964).

Precisely when the warren was established is impossible to ascertain definitively; it may have been established by the nuns of Aconbury, whom records show as having rented the woods from the Crown intermittently during the 13th-16th centuries (Lovelace, 2001, 35). An alternative explanation is that The Warren was established in the early post-medieval period, after the Priory was dissolved and the Aconbury estates came into private hands.

By the early 18th century, The Warren had given its name to a farm estate within the manor of Aconbury and a survey of the Herefordshire estates purchased by Guy's Hospital in 1731 shows that the estate had been heavily enclosed for arable cultivation and sheep pasture (HRO Ref. C99/III/241). The references in the 1731 survey to field enclosures on 'Beacon Close' probably relate to land both within Aconbury Camp and its immediate vicinity, as the Camp is specifically described as 'Aconbury Beacon' in 1625 (Bull, 1883, 295).



Plate 3: Extract from the 1852 plan of Guy's Hospital Estates at Aconbury Court and Bowle, Merrivale, Maddoxtöne and Caldecott Farms in Aconbury & Holme Lacy, showing the trackway lined by trees running along the E edge of Aconbury Woods. The route of the proposed pipeline is superimposed in red
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Herefordshire Record Office)

It would appear, then, that Aconbury Camp and much of the immediate surrounding area had been cleared of woodland and enclosed for arable cultivation or pasture by the beginning of the 18th century and probably some time before that date. This appears to have remained the case until shortly after 1800, as the noted Herefordshire antiquary John Webb, describing the condition of Aconbury Camp in the early 19th century, stated that 'it was then open rough pasture, I believe planted over since' (Lovelace, 2001, 37).

A plan of the Guy's Hospital estate at Aconbury drawn up in 1852 (HRO Ref. C99/III/227) is the earliest surviving detailed plan of Aconbury Woods in its entirety, some twenty years after the extensive programme of tree plantation had been carried out (**Plate 3**). This plan provides a considerable amount of topographical detail concerning the woodland and shows the trackway on its present alignment. The trackway is marked on the accompanying schedule as 'Road and waste planted' and the plan shows trees lining it on either side. Significantly, just S of where it turns sharply NW, the trackway is shown to broaden and a bank of trees is depicted running along the middle of the trackway. This widening of the trackway and the intervening bank of trees is still visible today.

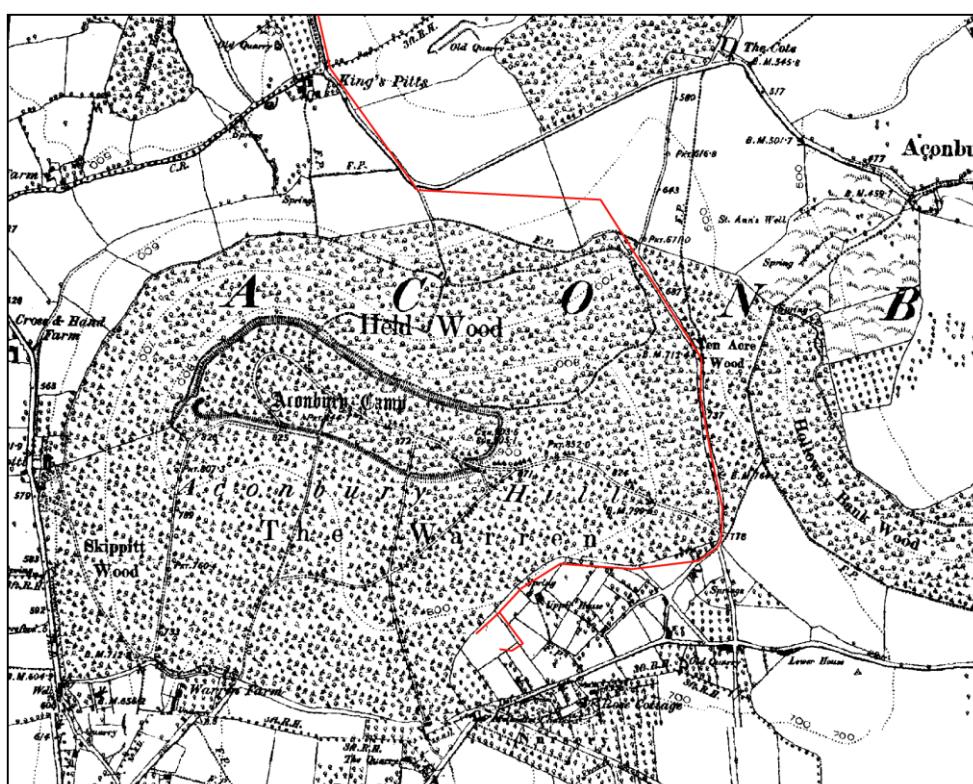


Plate 4: Extract from the OS 1st edition 6 inch map of 1888 (Herefordshire 39 SE) showing the newly established footpath running to the N of the trackway through 'Ten Acre Wood'. The route of the proposed pipeline is superimposed in red
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Herefordshire Record Office)

By 1852, the area to the W of the trackway, comprising The Warren and Held Wood (and including Aconbury Camp) were heavily wooded, while the fields immediately to the E of the trackway, which are shown as pasture on the 1757 map, had also been planted with trees. Much of this woodland shown on the 1852 plan was of relatively recent origin, having been planted in about 1830 in order to replenish the declining stocks of timber in Aconbury Woods, as evidenced by the name of the field enclosure bordering the NE edge of the trackway, which is listed as 'New Plantation'.

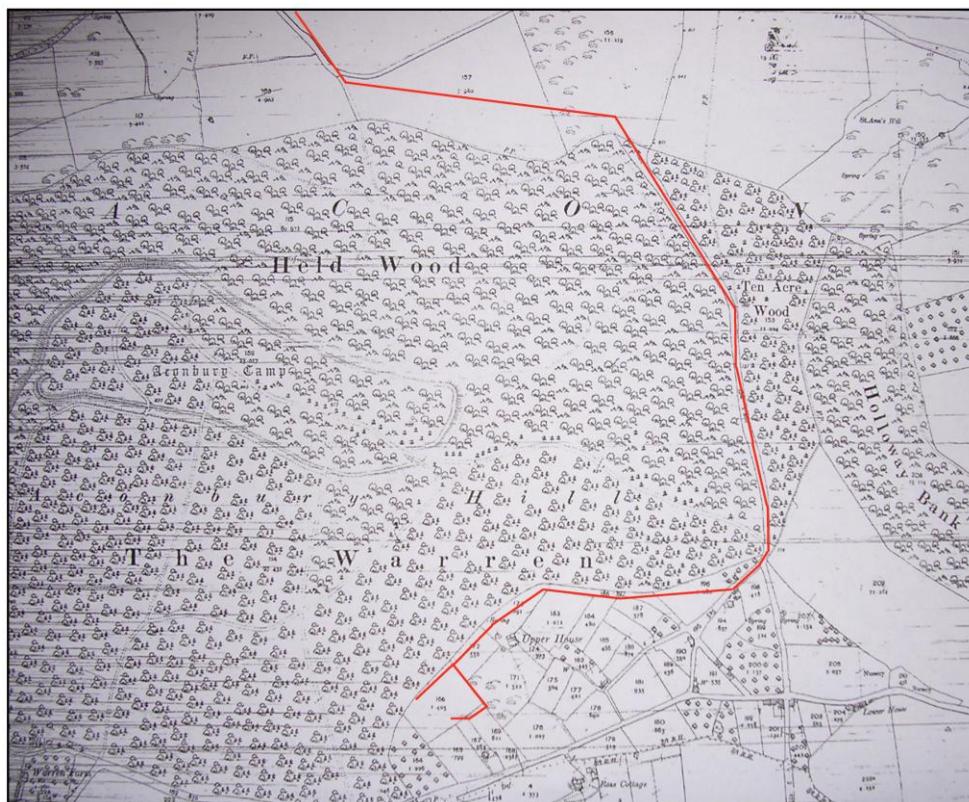


Plate 5: Extract from OS 2nd edition 25 inch map of 1904 (Herefordshire 39.14). The route of the proposed pipeline is superimposed in red
(Reproduced by courtesy of the Herefordshire Record Office)

Later historic maps, specifically the OS 1st edition 6 inch map and the OS 2nd edition 25 inch map, dated 1888 and 1904 respectively (**Plates 4 & 5**), show that a number of changes had been effected to the trackway and the surrounding woodland. Where the present trackway turns sharply NW, another footpath had been established by 1888, running roughly northwards through the newly planted woodland lying to the E of the trackway. This woodland, shown as two separate enclosures on the 1852 estate map, had been amalgamated into a single enclosure known as Ten Acre Wood by 1888. Further landscaping work appears to have occurred between 1904 and 1938, with the laying out of several more footpaths extending to the W of the trackway leading up to Aconbury Camp (**Plate 6**).



Plate 6: Extract from OS 3rd edition 6 inch map of 1938 (Herefordshire 39 SE). The route of the proposed pipeline is superimposed in red
 (Reproduced by courtesy of the Herefordshire Record Office)

6. Measured Survey & Construction Impacts Assessment (MS & CIA)

A measured field survey was carried out by Border Archaeology staff along the 370m of banks & ditches that will be removed by the new pipeline way leave.

Two sets of measurements were taken, these being the bank & ditch profiles at two locations of banks on either side of the track way and a survey at 10m intervals of the route noting the extent of bank & ditch to be removed. It should be noted that the measurements if anything underestimate the relative dimensions since the edges of the track way are substantially overgrown and exact values were thus hard to obtain; moreover, this CIA has not as yet been able to identify those banks, behind the features to be removed, which themselves may need to be battered back or stepped to ensure safe working or passage for LOR construction personnel and equipment. Recent experience by Border Archaeology would suggest a precautionary supplemental safe working batter back of 2-4 metres in addition to the nominated 8 metres.

The indicative results are listed & illustrated in the attached Appendices.

The conclusions are demonstrably apparent; 370 metres of the route will destroy two or more banks & ditches.

It should also be noted that the lower approaches to the pipe route will also be impacted but they have not been surveyed for the purpose of this Assessment.

7. Conclusion

This assessment, based on a review of the archaeological and historical evidence and a measured survey of the existing physical remains has demonstrated that:

- The trackway and associated earthen banks on either side of it appear to represent a long established landscape feature whose date and original function are unclear, but it is possible to draw a number of tentative conclusions.
- The substantial western bank of the trackway appears to be a long established cross-slope boundary feature, defining the edge of a series of earthen terraces extending downhill from Aconbury Camp. These earthen terraces or lynchets appear to be associated with ploughing activity and are commonly regarded as being of medieval or early post-medieval date.
- However, particularly in view of the proximity of these features to Aconbury Camp, the strong possibility exists that they could be related to prehistoric or Romano-British agricultural activity outside the hillfort.
- The line of the trackway is first depicted on an estate plan of Aconbury Court dated 1757 which shows a well-defined wood bank marking the boundary of the Aconbury Court estate to the E and Held Wood and The Warren to the NW and W respectively.
- It may be inferred, from the evidence of the 1757 map, that the present trackway and associated banks preserve the line of an old estate boundary, marking the division between the Aconbury Court estate (which represented the core estate of the dissolved Aconbury Priory) and Held Wood and The Warren, which formed part of the medieval royal forest of Aconbury. Boundaries of medieval forest and woodland were often defined by a substantial bank and ditch.
- It is also possible that the trackway and associated banks may have been functioned as the eastern boundary of a substantial rabbit warren, of medieval or early post-medieval date, which occupied the central and southern parts of Aconbury Woods.

8. Copyright

Border Archaeology shall retain full copyright of any commissioned reports, tender documents or other project documents, under the Copyright, Designs & Patents Act 1988 with all rights reserved; excepting that it hereby provides an exclusive licence to the client for the use of the report in all matters directly relating to the project as described in the Project Specification.



9. Bibliography

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10. Cartography

(All maps have been obtained from the Herefordshire Record Office unless otherwise stated)

- 1757 - 'An exact plan of Aconbury Court with several other adjacent tenements and woods' by Meredith Jones (C99/III/217)
- 1786 - Isaac Taylor Map of Herefordshire (C99/III/232)
- 1852 – Plan of Guy's Hospital Estates at Aconbury Court and Bowle, Merrivale, Maddoxtone and Caldecott Farms in Aconbury & Holme Lacy (C99/III/227)
- 1888 – OS 1st edition 25 inch map (Herefordshire 39.16)
- 1904 – OS 2nd edition 25 inch map (Herefordshire 39.16)
- 1938 – OS provisional edition 6 inch map (Herefordshire 39 SE)
- 1953 – OS provisional edition 6 inch map (Herefordshire 39 SE)