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Bridge Sollers Bridge, Herefordshire archaeological monitoring

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2004

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Bridge Sollers Bridge, Herefordshire: archaeological monitoring

Report number 2003/53

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Project Manager: Huw Sherlock BA (hons), ArchDip, MIFA

Cover Photograph: demolition of the old bridge

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Summary

Archenfield Archaeology were commissioned by Herefordshire Council to carry out a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording in the area to the north-west of the late Victorian bridge at Bridge Sollers. An earlier archaeological evaluation[1] of the area immediately to the north of the existing bridge abutment revealed a layer containing significant amounts of medieval pottery. In 2003, an area (area 1) of approximately 20 x 20 metres was stripped of topsoil and a series of trenches dug, producing significant quantities of stratified medieval pottery. This may relate to the shrunken medieval settlement of Lulham. Given the opportunity, more extensive and structured excavation might have produced structural evidence to support the presence of settlement.

[1] Sherlock and Maurice, 2003

1.0 Introduction

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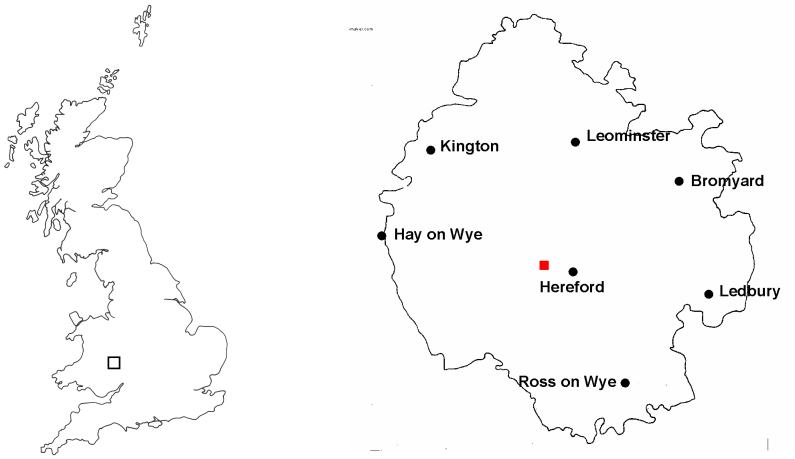


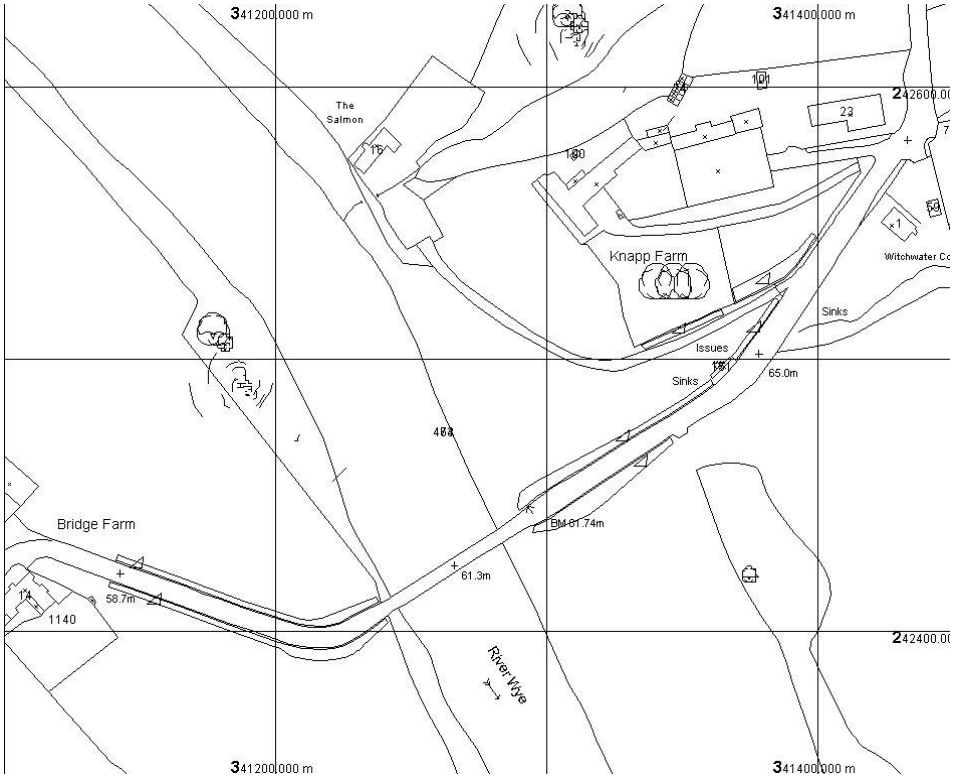


Figure 1: Location plan

Herefordshire Council (the client) commissioned a programme of archaeological work in accordance with the brief issued on 28/11/2002 by Julian Cotton, Archaeological Adviser to Herefordshire Council. This was issued in response to the proposal to replace the existing bridge across the Wye at this site (application ref. NW2002/3286/F). This document gives details of how the archaeological project was conducted, as stipulated in the brief. The programme of work detailed below was designed to meet the criteria laid out in The Institute of Field Archaeologists 'Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Evaluations'.

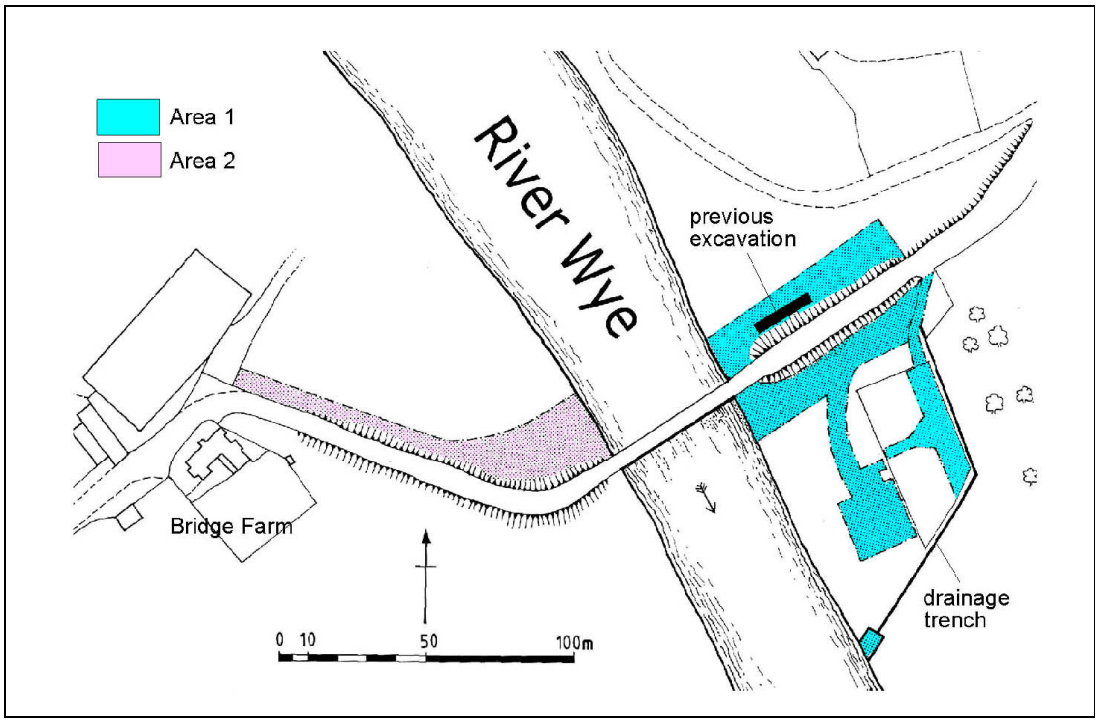


Figure 2: Site plan showing area 1 (east bank) and area 2 (west bank)

2.0 Geological, historical and archaeological background

2.1 Geological background and land use

The underlying geology of the area consists of beds of Old Red Sandstone with the drift geology consisting of overlying drifts of poorly sorted sands and gravels of the Staunton Moraine and alluvium (British Geological Survey Ten Mile Map).

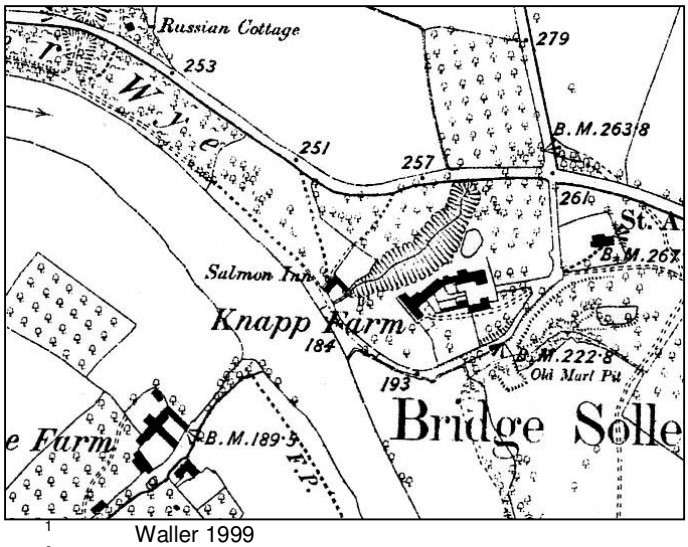
2.2 Archaeological and historical background

Pollen samples recovered nearby provide us with a sequence of prehistoric activity dating back to the Late Last Glacial.[1] Further evidence relating to the possible prehistoric background to the site comes from aerial photographs: a cropmark enclosure and associated linear features have been identified north of the river.[2]

The Domesday settlement of Lulham is within the present parish of Bridge Sollers.[3] This belonged to the canons of Hereford cathedral and is described as: 'In Lulham 8 hides which pay tax. In lordship 1 plough; 11 villagers and 5 smallholders with 13 ploughs. 1 female slave; meadow, 3 acres; 1 more plough would be possible in lordship. ... Of this land 2 clerks hold 2 hides and 3 virgates and 1 man-at-arms 1 hide. They have 2 ploughs in lordship; 13 villagers and 2 smallholders with 8 ploughs. Before 1066 it was waste, 'value now 10s'. This may be the origin of the site of the deserted medieval village represented by vague earthworks recorded west and south of Marsh Court farm.[4]

Bridge Sollers is '*Brugge*' in Domesday, meaning simply 'Bridge'.[5] The earliest bridge was not constructed until 1896, however, and there is no evidence indicating the presence of a bridge there before this date. The bridge referred to must therefore have been the Roman bridge situated less than a mile downstream at New Weir, implying that it was still standing when English speakers first arrived in the area. The name '*Sollers*' came from a family associated with the church and parish of Bridge Sollers.

Figure 3: Extract from the 1888 Ordnance Survey six inch map showing the position of the ford and the course of the stream prior to the construction of the bridge. It is interesting to note the 'Old Marl Pit' dug into higher ground above the area of excavation. This may have already impacted upon the archaeology. The stream that was diverted through this area may have carried down the quantities of abraded pottery found on site.



1 Waller 1999
2 Herefordshire SMR 30992
3 Herefordshire SMR 25769
4 Herefordshire SMR 1053
5 Thorn & Thorn 1983; Ekwall 1960

The church at Bridge Sollers is dedicated to St Andrew, and is largely of Norman build.[1] There are two arcades and a nave dating to the late 12th century, and the chancel dates to *c*1300.[2] Late in the 13th century the chancel was rebuilt, and the northern aisle was largely reconstructed *c*1330.[3]

The old bridge across the Wye was built (partially by public subscription) in 1896 and consisted of three separate spans on four circular piers.[4] The abutments were of coursed stone with massive copings. The bridge was built as part of a scheme to build three road bridges across the Wye and replaced an earlier ferry; situated close to the site of a house some 150 yards to the north, at that time the Salmon Inn (see plate 2).

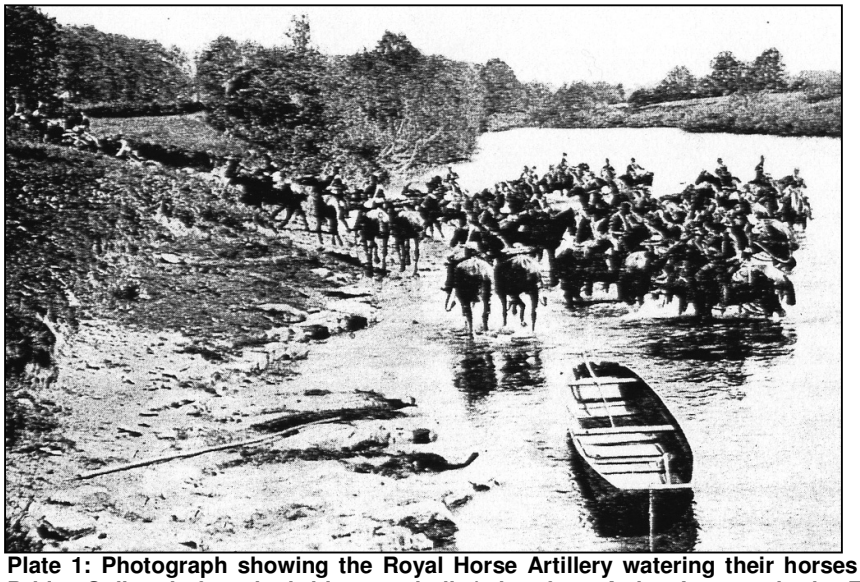


Plate 1: Photograph showing the Royal Horse Artillery watering their horses at the ford at Bridge Sollers before the bridge was built (taken from Arthur Lamont, in the *Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists Field Club* 1921)

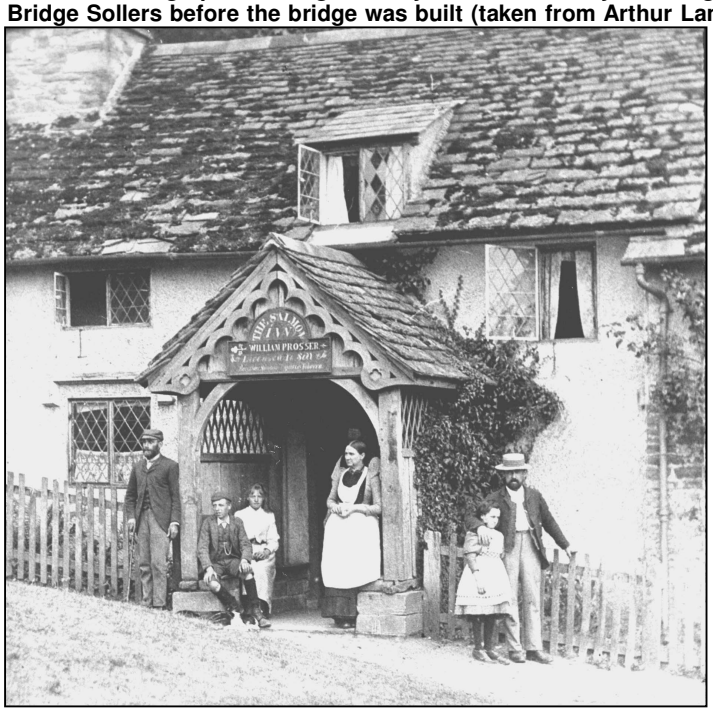


Plate 2: Photograph taken by Alfred Watkins showing the frontage of the Salmon Inn *c*1880 (courtesy of Ron Shoesmith)

1 Herefordshire SMR 7237
2 Pevsner 1962
3 RCHM 1934
4 Herefordshire SMR 7225

3.0 Project aims and objectives

The aims of the project were: -

- To monitor the stripping of topsoil by the use of a mechanical excavator. This was to be used to remove the overburden in successive spits of soil, allowing the examination of the spoil for diagnostic artefacts and the recognition of *in situ* deposits and features.
- To clean the area of the trenches using archaeological techniques and to make a contextual, photographic and drawn record of any archaeological features or deposits exposed.
- To manually excavate and record any archaeological deposits within the trenches. This work was to be carried out following standard Institute of Field Archaeologists guidelines for archaeological excavation, and the methodology laid out in the Archenfield Archaeology Site Recording Manual.
- To record the presence of sensitive archaeological material within all the trenches and in the spoil removed during the excavation, and to retrieve any potential dating evidence.
- To make a record of all finds and any environmental material recovered.
- To ensure that the location and of the area excavated was accurately recorded on a suitably scaled plan.
- To record negative evidence and to consider its implications.
- To ensure that where important archaeological remains existed plans for the preservation in-situ of such remains was discussed with the Archaeological adviser to Herefordshire Council and the client.
- To ensure that a recording strategy was adopted that allowed for the production of a stratigraphic record of the deposits encountered, and a record of the extent and depth of the excavations.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Field methodology

The following methodology was employed: -

- Structures and stratigraphic sequences observed were recorded on scaled drawings and the position of the trench, and any archaeological features within it, were located on them.
- The presence of artefacts was recorded with a description of type, quantity and original location. The spoil was scanned for significant finds.
- All descriptions of structures and deposits, photographic records and drawing numbers were recorded on the relevant data capture documents in accordance with Archenfield Archaeology's standard site recording procedures.
- Significant features were, where possible, photographed next to an appropriate scale rule, and a board displaying a unique context number. Each photographic exposure was recorded in the photographic log.
- Staff carrying out the evaluation excavation followed the guidelines laid down in the Archenfield Archaeology Health and Safety Policy
- Archenfield Archaeology conforms to the Institute of Field Archaeologists' Code of Conduct and code of Approved Practice for the Regulation of Contractual arrangements in Field Archaeology. All projects are, where applicable, carried out in accordance with IFA Standards and Guidance or Draft Standards and Guidance.

4.2 Processing methodology

- All retained artefacts and ecofacts were subjected to further analysis.
- All data were entered into a Microsoft ©Access relational database

5.0 The results

5.1 Brief description of the bridge

The bridge at the time of its build in 1896 cost £3,600 of which £900 was contributed by the late Rev G H Davenport, of Foxley, who also donated the stone for the bridge.[1]

There were solid stone foundations on both banks of the river, with two iron pillar supports in mid stream carrying the iron bridge, which was of the railway viaduct type.

The stonework was of a well dressed rusticated type with a projecting string course of a simple roll moulding. The top of the abutments were finished using overhanging coping stones with a pyramid shaped top.

For the first visible metre above ground level, the inner face of the east abutment was made up of thin stones. Above this the stonework became much thicker and irregular in its coursing. Presumably these first few courses were laid for levelling and strength. Also on this face were a number of irregularly placed drainage holes to help drain the water off from the higher ground level to the east of the bridge.

The bridge was in a poor state of preservation, having major structural breaks in the stonework and severe rusting in the cast iron pillar supports. Several bands of strengthening strap work could be seen on both pillars. At some stage, extra concrete had been added to the west abutment in a series of steps down to the river and footings around the east pillar. The sheer volume of traffic had compounded the stress factors to the bridge and it was finally condemned.

5.2 Archaeological monitoring

Work took place over a long period of time in different phases, but in general there were two main areas excavated. Area 1 was on the eastern bank of the river, directly south of the bridge, and area 2 was on the western bank and north of the bridge.

The first area examined was at the entrance gate to the field south-east of the bridge. A JCB was used to strip the grass using a toothless bucket. Stone rubble and fragments of brick and pottery were found directly beneath the grass. This was interpreted as modern and was probably laid by the farmer for a more solid entrance into the field during the winter months. A plastic membrane was laid and scalpings were placed over the top as part of a temporary road leading into the works compound (Area 1).

[1] Ford and ferries at the Wye. Arthur H. Lamont

Plate 3: Structural damage in the stonework

Plate 4: Demolition of the bridge, looking west

Area 1 (East Bank): temporary works compound area

The compound covered an area 32 metres by 59 metres. Within this area a T-shaped temporary road was built, 10 metres wide and approximately 500mm deep. A total of 59 holes were hand-dug for the metal posts to support the fence which was to enclose the compound area. Each hole measured 300mm x 300mm and was dug to a depth of 500mm.

Plate 5: The fenced off compound area

In the T-shaped trench within the compound it was evident that the soils on the east and west sides were distinctly different, separated by a definite cut. On the western side of the trench was a light brown silty soil (figure 4, 1) 0.3m beneath ground level. The soil to the east of the trench was a mid-brown friable silty loam with occasional pieces of black pottery and burnt stone (figure 4, 2). There was a slight change in soil colour further east (figure 4, 3), but no clear edge was visible. Both soils to the east of the trench produced quantities of medieval pottery; the layer to the west produced no finds.

Plate 6: Small drainage trench to the east of compound, looking south

No finds or features were observed in any of the post-holes. Finds were however found in the eastern side of the compound, consisting of a scattering of very worn

fragments of medieval pottery, an unidentified piece of metal, and a stone tile. The spoil from this area was also inspected, and further fragments of pottery of a medieval date were recovered.

Two metres outside and the east of the eastern fence of the compound, a small drainage trench, 350mm wide and 500mm deep, was excavated using a mini digger. At the south-east corner of the compound this trench turned west to run into the river. The soil in the trench was very clean with no features visible in section, although large quantities of finds were recovered from the spoil, and from the trench itself, including medieval pottery, ceramic building material, iron nails and a small piece of bone.

Since there were no distinct archaeological contexts to be seen on this site, the trench shown in Figure 4 was divided into horizontal areas or zones and lettered A through M. Finds were made either in the trench or in the spoil heap next to each of these zones.

Immediately south of causeway leading to the bridge, an 18.5 metres long trench was excavated. The east end was a continuation of the excavation in area 1 and here the trench was approximately 300mm deep. The trench deepened to the west until at the river bank, it was 4.8 metres from the top of the existing river bank. The base of the trench was then covered with a membrane seal and over this scalpings were laid.

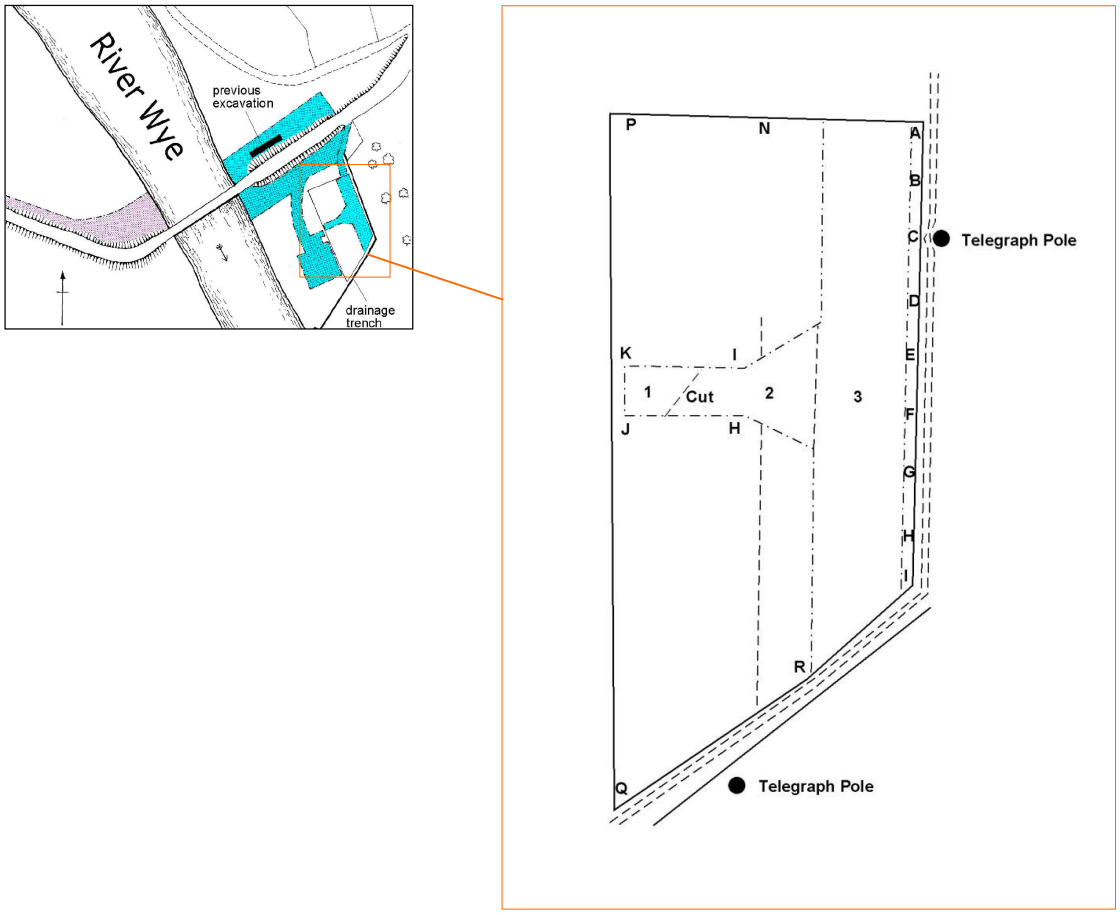
This area had been marshy and was stripped to give construction vehicles firmer ground in order to dismantle and re-erect the bridge. As the banks along the river Wye are protected, rarer plant species from around the marsh area were relocated to an excavated area west of the compound, attached to the end of the drainage trench.

With the exception of bricks and fragments of modern pottery, there were no finds.

North of the embankment, another area, 14.4 metres wide, was stripped of its topsoil to a depth of no more than 350mm. Again this was to improve access for construction vehicles. The outline of the trench excavated during the previous evaluation[12] was visible, as was the cut of the edge of the later embankment (see plate 7). No other features, or any finds were observed during excavation of this area.

Plate 7: Excavation of cut through north face of the embankment

[12] Sherlock and Maurice, 2003



Levels OD

A = 58.72
B = 58.67
C = 58.76
D = 58.56
E = 58.37
F = 58.23
G = 57.99
H = 57.89
I = 57.74
J = 57.89
K = 57.87
L = 57.98
M = 57.90
N = 58.24
P = 57.57
Q = 57.72
R = 57.52

Figure 4: Trench on western side of the compound area

Area 2 (West bank)

Plate 8: Area to the west of the bridge

A large area, 25 metres wide, was excavated on the north side of the embankment, down to a depth of 500mm. This was to provide better access for construction vehicles during the dismantling and erection of the bridge. The area followed the curve of the main road, and finished at the barns belonging to Bridge Farm. A field drain was observed running east-west, with its eastern end draining into the river. Only unstratified 20th century finds were recovered from the spoil-heap. No features were observed, and the ground was later covered in a membrane and scalpings.

All hedges along the road that were removed during the dismantling were reinstated. Stonework from the bridge was re-used.

5.3 The finds

The finds included pottery, glass, roof and floor tiles, and a number of small finds such as nails, plastic tubing, and a piece of flint. The following tables give the weight of the finds from each zone of the trench.

Pottery

Zone	*Body*	*Rim*	*Base*	*Other*	*Total Weight/ grams*
K	***9***		***1***		***85***
M	***1***				***4***
C	***2***			***1***	***50***
D	***24***	***1***			***73***
E	***1***		***1***		***33***
A	***4***				***19***
H	***2***				***6***
F		***1***			***15***
J	***3***				***7***

Table 1: Pottery sherd count and weight by zone

Glass bottle

Zone	*Body*	*Neck*	*Base*	*Total Weight/ grams*
G	***4***			***9***
H	***3***			***9***

Table 2: Glass fragment count and weight by zone

Ceramic building material

Zone	*Type*	*Quantity*	*Weight/ grams*
J	***Roof tile***	***5***	***352***
K	***Tile***	***13***	***286***
H	***Floor tile***	***1***	***160***
G	***Tile***	***2***	***36***
C	***Tile***	***2***	***66***
B	***Tile***	***2***	***72***

Table 3: Ceramic material count and weight by zone

Small finds

Zone	*Material*	*Quantity*	*Weight/ grams*
K	***Metal object***	***1***	***234***
H	***Metal object***	***1***	***72***
K	***Copper object***	***1***	***5***
H	***Nails***	***2***	***12***
I	***Horse shoe***	***1***	***579***
A	***Plastic tube***	***1***	***16***
D	***Flint***	***1***	***9***
K	***Nails***	***2***	***71***
F	***Metal objects***		***167***

Table 4: Small finds number and weight by zone

The Ceramic material

All of the pottery in this report was recovered from discreet lettered zones of the site and not from separate contexts. All of the medieval pottery and a few pieces of ceramic building material have been abraded by water. This supports the suggestion that it was disturbed by the digging of the marl pit shown on Figure 3. It was probably washed down to its position when recovered by a stream which once flowed into the river from the DMV (Herefordshire SMR 25769) which is believed to be near the church. The smaller amount of later post medieval pottery and ceramic building material is the result of random deposition from the nearby road and houses, Knapp Farm and The Salmon.

Methodology

All pottery was examined under 10X magnification and compared to the pottery type series described by Alan Vince from the City of Hereford (1985). They were also compared to a collection of pottery, also from Hereford, whose fabrics have been identified by Stephanie Ratkai. Hereford is only 6 miles (10 km) east of the site.

Description

Two sherds of medieval pottery found in Zone A (one with greenish external glaze) were made of fabric similar to A7a. Zone B had ceramic building material which was late post medieval tile and land drain pipe. A piece of modern (19th or early 20th century) mould made white ware and a stoneware jar were found in Zone C. Zone D produced the largest amount of medieval or early post medieval pottery on the site. The one piece of identifiable medieval pottery form, a small everted Malvernian type cooking pot rim in B1 fabric, was in this area. In total there were 3 B1, 2 C1, 6 A2, 1 A3, and 3 with A7 type fabrics. Five of these have external green glaze. One of these, with A2 fabric, has two parallel line indentations on its glazed surface. There is one thin (1.5 mm) rim sherd with fine white fabric, possibly an imported Saintonge type ware with green internal glaze, and a piece of red slipped, internally green glazed late medieval or early post medieval pottery with A6 or A7 type fabric. The rest of the sherds from this zone are too abraded to identify. Two sherds from Zone E have fabrics similar to A3 and C1. Zone F produced a single piece of modern white tableware. Ceramic finds from Zone G include two pieces of a modern blue and white dish and two pieces of highly abraded ceramic building material one of which has A7c type fabric. The finds from Zone H include a large piece of tile with dark red slip and spots of dark green glaze, an early post medieval body sherd with A7d type fabric and mottled green copper glaze on its outside edge, and one modern piecrust edged white ware. From Zone J there was an early post medieval sherd with A7d type fabric and a piece of modern stoneware with a Roman type capital T impressed on it. Zone K contained 9 sherds, 8 of which were medieval. One of these has B2 type fabric, the rest are made of A7a type fabric. There was one post medieval 18th or 19th century Staffordshire slipware. This zone produced the largest amount of ceramic building material 10 pieces of which are probably from the same late post medieval or modern brick. The rest are water worn to some degree and are made of A7b, d or A10 fabric. The only sherd from Zone M was a small body sherd with a very coarse, poorly mixed fabric with no close match in the fabric series, possibly the earliest sherd in the assemblage.

Analysis

As stated above, the sherd from Zone M could be the earliest piece of pottery found on this site, but its origin is unknown. The known fabrics suggest a 12th to 15th century date for the main occupation of the Deserted Medieval Village which was the origin of these finds. The large proportion of pottery with A7 type fabrics suggests a local source. Eleven of the total (three probably from the same vessel) showed signs of burning, indicating domestic use. The low number of early post medieval pieces in this assemblage suggests the abandonment of this community in that period but this cannot be assumed given that the evidence is almost all re-deposited material. No further analysis of this evidence is possible because the assemblage is not diagnostic enough. The total sherd counts and weights are noted in Table 1 above (Tables 1-4).

6.0 Conclusions

It was concluded from the preliminary evaluation[13] that deposits of pottery and charcoal may have originated from the site of the nearby Deserted Medieval Village (Herefordshire SMR 25769), suspected to be in the vicinity of Bridge Sollers church. This layer was thought to represent outwash from the stream that used to run down to meet the river somewhere close to the current position of the bridge.

The evidence from this project broadly supported the the previous work. Deposits of medieval pottery again point towards the presence of a medieval settlement, possibly the shrunken settlement of Lulham, somewhere on the higher ground above the site. The presence of an '*Old Marl Pit*' on the 2nd edition 1904 OS map, suggests that archaeology in the area above the site had already been disturbed, and that the diversion of the stream through this area probably carried the quantities of abraded medieval pottery onto site. Had the opportunity for more extensive and controlled excavation been available, structural evidence may have been uncovered to support this theory.

7.0 Archive deposition

The primary project archive, consisting of the excavated material and any original paper records, will be prepared and stored in accordance with the guidelines laid down in the Institute of Field Archaeologists' guidelines for the preparation and storage of archives. The primary archive will be stored with Hereford City Museum.

A copy of the digital archive, stored on CD and consisting of context, artefact and ecofact data, together with the site plan and selected photographs, will accompany the primary archive.

The client, in consultation with the project manager, will make provision for the deposition of all finds from the excavation with the Hereford City Museum. On completion of the fieldwork and the processing, collation, recording and analysis of the finds from the excavation all finds will be handed over to the museum staff, along with the project archive. Arrangements will be made with the museum for the transfer of title.

8.0 Publication and dissemination proposals

Paper copies of this report will be lodged with the Archaeological Adviser to Herefordshire Council, Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record and Hereford City Library. A short note on the project will be prepared for publication in The Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists Field Club.

CDs of this report, together with the supporting archival material will be available from Archenfield Archaeology.

The complete photographic record, including the negatives, will be retained by Archenfield Archaeology.

[13] Sherlock and Maurice, 2003

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