



16 South Street, Leominster, Herefordshire:
archaeological monitoring and building recording

Huw Sherlock
2003



archenfield archaeology ltd

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Archenfield Archaeology Ltd is a multidisciplinary archaeological consultancy, offering a complete range of archaeological advice and services to the public and private sector. We specialise in giving archaeological advice to developers, housing associations and private individuals. We also undertake archaeological intervention, from monitoring to full-scale excavation; building survey; landscape and geophysical surveys and community-based historical and archaeological projects.

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Cover Photograph: Photograph of Leominster Priory



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Summary

In April 2003 Archenfield Archaeology conducted archaeological monitoring on a site to the rear of number 16 South Street. South Street, formerly 'In Vico versus Hereford' is believed to have been burgaged by the Prior of Leominster as part of the creation of the town in the 12th century.

The disturbance to the site was limited to the new foundations and few features were observed. The most significant of these was an unmortared stone wall of unknown date which appeared to be a property boundary running at 90° to the street. This tends to support the evidence from cartographic and documentary evidence that the site was occupied in the medieval period.

1.0 Introduction

NGR SO 4955 5890

Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record - Event No 36787

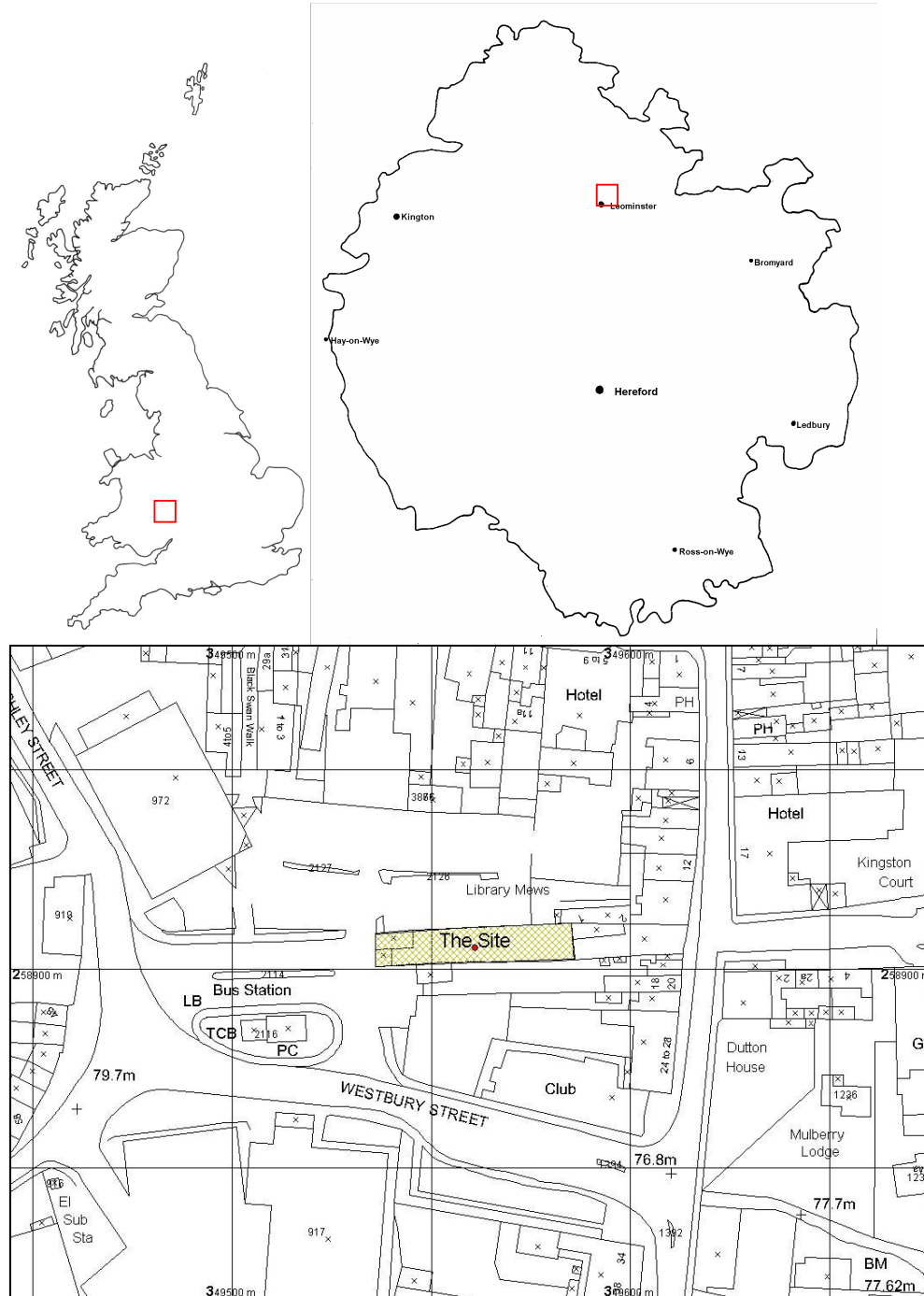


Figure 1: Location plan. Ordnance Survey Superplan data reproduced under license Drawing reference: henc_00000655

Mr J Passey (the client) commissioned a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording in accordance with a brief issued by the County Archaeological Service of Hereford and Worcester County Council dated 20th March 1995 (ref. HWCN 19581). This was originally issued in response to planning application 95/0087-95/088.

2.0 Geological, historical and archaeological background

2.1 Geological background and land use

The soils are typical argillic brown earths of the Escrick 1 and Bromyard associations and the town is fringed to the north and east by riverine alluvium of the Conway and Lugwardine associations (Ragg 1984). These soils are derived from a reddish till overlying Devonian siltstones. The site was mainly in use as a garden, with a grassed and some concrete hardstanding near the rear entrance to the site. A derelict one-storey corrugated-iron barn occupied the north-western corner.

2.2 Historical background

Leominster may be one of the earliest documented site of Mercian Christianity, pre-dating Hereford Cathedral by almost three decades. The present town of Leominster was the site of a Saxon abbey, founded by the 7th century and probably dissolved soon after 1046. The religious institution was founded in 660 by Merewalh, king of Mercia. The 'Legend of St Etfrid, Priest of Leominster' describes how the Columban missionary Edfrith converted Merewalh to Christianity, and was placed in charge of the church. Edfrith probably came from the great centre of Columban Christianity, Lindisfarne, and the first church at Leominster therefore conformed to Columban, not Roman, practices.

Merewalh ruled a people called the Western Hecani, 'the folk who dwell west of the river Severn'. Evidence suggests that Leominster may have already been an important ecclesiastical centre, very probably of Welsh (British) origin. Early Welsh churches have been identified in the area south of the Wye, but north of the Wye its involvement is only hinted at. Records suggest that the Welsh Church of Saint David founded twelve monasteries including one at 'Llanllieni', what is thought to have been the original Welsh-British name for 'Leominster'. St David's feast is recorded in the Leominster 'kalendar', and certainly remained one of the Priory's principal feasts throughout the Middle Ages. Perhaps Edfrith's mission at Leominster was more to do with the re-instatement of Christianity than with a conversion from pagan practices (Hillaby 2001, 48).

The fact that there may have been a church of Welsh origin at Leominster has important topographical implications: monasteries tended to be marked off from the secular world by banks and ditches, and marsh or water. These characteristics can still be seen at Leominster, and form a primary element in the existing town plan. To the south and west there was a great earthen bank but little of this remains today, and the fact that it was rectangular rather than curved suggests it was linked not to Welsh but to Columban tradition. To the north the Kenwater and to the east the Lugg still provide natural boundaries. During the 7th century there were also extensive tracts of marsh: early records describe Leominster as a 'more', a 'low lying marshy area'. The lowland area was dominated by the Lugg, Arrow, Little Arrow, Pinsley and Eye Brooks and their tributaries. These rivers were liable to sudden and extensive flooding, dividing the district into tongues of land. The name Leominster means 'the minster on the streams': the term 'leon' comes from the old welsh 'lion' or 'lian', from the root 'lei' meaning 'to flow, water'.

The late 7th century was an era of rapid change as Roman traditions became firmly established in Mercia. After Edfrith's death his house was reorganised as a monastery on Roman lines, and Leominster was replaced by Hereford as the political and religious centre. Despite this shift in power, Leominster remained an important religious centre throughout the Saxon period. Its vast estates continued

to receive considerable wealth from royal donations. By 1086 the large and wealthy manor of Leominster was owned by the Crown.

In 1123 the manor was transferred to the Benedictine Abbey of Reading and a monastery was founded probably on the site of the Saxon Abbey. The Saxon priest-minster continued to be used; at least part of it remained until the first stage of the Priory church was completed (Hillaby 1987). The Priors of Leominster seem to actively promoted Leominster as a commercial centre and in 1170 Henry II granted the first fair (Wills 1981). There is no documentary or archaeological evidence to suggest a town at Leominster before the 12th century (Buteux 1994a).

By 1221 Leominster had the legal status of a borough and was a successful market centre. In both the medieval and post-medieval period the prosperity of the town was based on the marketing of agricultural produce. This encouraged the growth of trades and industries such as tanning, weaving and dying which processed such produce.

The town is likely to have been affected by the period of disastrous crop failures, cold winters and the subsequent widespread plagues such as the Black Death in the early fourteenth century. The population may have been reduced by as much as a third during this period, and may not have recovered to its late thirteenth century levels until the Elizabethan period. After the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539 the Priory was dissolved and is recorded by the antiquarian Leland as being *'meetly large and hath good buildings of timber'*, but also states that it was *'decayed'*, which may reflect the adverse economic conditions of the previous century, reduced population and competition in trade from the growing centres of Hereford and Worcester (Price 1795, 46).

In 1539 the Priory was dissolved but the town of Leominster continued to prosper. During the 17th century the wool trade, a staple of the medieval economy, declined but other industries using, or powered by, water became increasingly important (Reeves 1973). By the eighteenth century Leominster was regarded as being a far more prosperous centre than Hereford.

By 1793 the antiquarian Stukeley noted that "Leominster is a town of brisk trade in manufactures of their remarkable wool in hat making, leather and many other" (Price 1795). Leominster was very prosperous in the 18th century, much more so than Hereford. It was described in a geological dictionary of the period as a large, handsome and populous town trading considerably in wool, fine wheat, flax, gloves, leather, hats etc; as a great thoroughfare between south Wales and London; and as a venue for fairs noted for horses, black cattle etc (Reeves 1973).

2.3 Archaeological background

The site lies within the central part of the historic town. Medieval tenement plots (burgages) fronting onto West Street appear to have been laid out in the 13th century (Buteux 1996), and this pattern of development may have extended along South Street. The site may therefore have been occupied by one or more of these medieval properties, and archaeological features and deposits such as boundary walls and cesspits, rubbish pits or wells might have been expected to be preserved there. The house standing on the street frontage of the property is listed in the Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record as a medieval dwelling (HSM 8901), and a block of medieval tenements is recorded to the west of South Street (HSM 19583). The site of an early medieval battle is recorded to the east side of South Street, to the south east of the site (HSM 8905).

3.0 Project aims and objectives

The aims of the project were: -

- to monitor all groundwork undertaken by the contractor.
- to make a record of the extent and depth of all such groundwork.
- to make a record of any archaeological features or deposits exposed.
- to record the presence of archaeological material within the trenches and in the spoil removed during excavation, and to retrieve any potential dating evidence.
- to make a record of all finds and any environmental material recovered.
- to ensure that if any environmental evidence was preserved, that a sufficient sample be retained to allow for further analysis.
- 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.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Field methodology

The following methodology was employed: -

- Suitably qualified archaeologists monitored all activity that involved disturbance of the ground surface.
- An assessment of the archaeological significance of finds, structures and deposits was made and appropriate action taken.
- Structures and stratigraphic sequences observed were recorded on scaled drawings and the position of all work disturbing the ground, and any archaeological features, was located on them.
- The presence of artefacts and was recorded with a description of their type, quantity and original location. The spoil was scanned for significant finds but in fact none were observed.
- 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 each photographic exposure was recorded in the photographic log.
- Staff carrying out the monitoring of the groundwork 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.
- Huw Sherlock examined the ceramic material recovered and has provided spot dates and an assessment of the potential of the assemblage to address research aims.
- All data were entered into a Microsoft Access relational database

5.0 Results

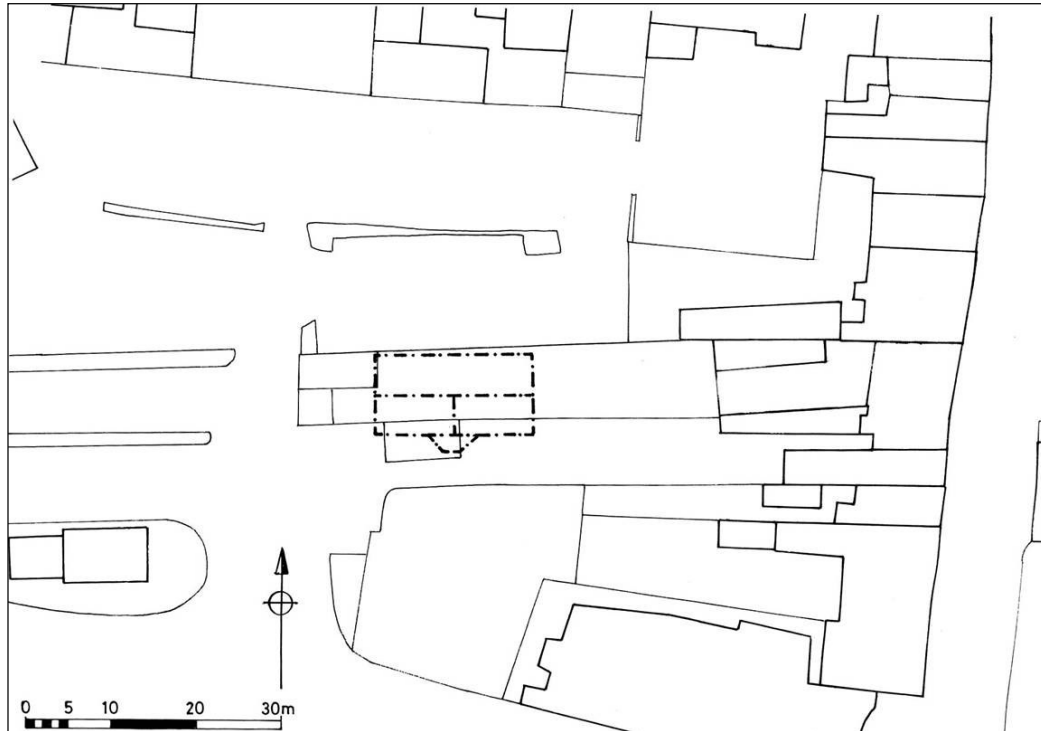


Figure 2: Plan showing the location of the foundation trenches superimposed on the property boundaries.

5.1 The standing buildings



Plate 1: The barn looking north

The only building occupying the plot at the time of the start of the project was a simple steel framed Dutch barn type construction with a corrugated iron roof and timber weatherboarding on the exterior. It stood at the north

western corner of the site, with its northern elevation backing up against the site boundary.

5.2 Stratigraphy

Maker: Qrator www.mapmaker.com

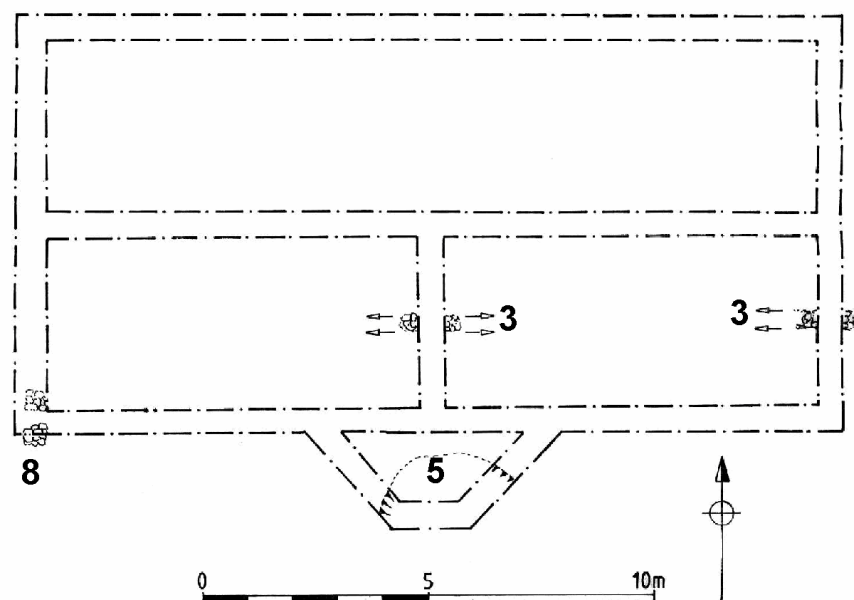


Figure 3: Plan showing the layout of the foundation trenches and archaeological features recorded.

The field project comprised observation of the removal of recent timber-framed buildings and the insertion of strip foundations for the new structure.

The excavation of a series of strip foundations excavated by machine was monitored (see figure 3). Dark brown-black humic friable topsoil (1) was present across the site to an average depth of 0.6 metres. This overlay stiff, light orange-buff silty clay (2) with frequent inclusions of charcoal and very occasional fragments of medieval pottery.



Plate 2: Wall 3 in section looking west

A wall consisting of roughly coursed, unmortared, irregular sandstone blocks up to 0.6 metres long x 0.4 metres in width and 0.15 metres thick (**3**) was observed running east-west across the site in the eastern and central trenches. This appears to be running along the line of a former property boundary. The division still exists between the two properties that front onto the street and seems to have been reflected in the deeds (pers. comm. J Passey). A short section of wall **3** was exposed in plan to the immediate west of the central north-south trench. The wall had a decayed mortar bond and had pieces of roof tile and brick in the upper courses. A second section of rubble stone walling (**8**) was observed in the south western corner of the site. It was similar in construction to wall **3** and appeared to be aligned with what may have been the back of the burgage plot.

In the foundation cut for the bay window to the south of the main building a large area of very loose disturbed ground was excavated to a depth of approximately 2.5 metres (**5**). The fill of this pit consisted of very loose, dark, humic, friable soil (**6**) with a high percentage of ash, clinker and twentieth century detritus and pottery included within it.

Within the central trench which ran east-west across the site, the topsoil layer (**1**) overlay a very loose layer of decayed lime mortar (**7**) approximately 0.2 metres thick. This was first observed at the northern end of the central trench, some 5 metres from its terminus. Below this lay a very loose layer of mid brown topsoil heavily mixed with broken pieces of slate, crushed brick and other building debris up to 0.45 metres thick (**10**). Beneath this layer **2** was visible at the base of the trench.

5.2 Pottery

A very small assemblage of pottery was recovered from the site. In total 10 sherds of pottery were recovered weighing a total of 407 grams, all of which have been catalogued and analysed. Four sherds of later post medieval pottery were recovered consisting of a sherd of slip trailed Staffordshire stoneware bowl, two pieces of blue and white transfer printed porcelain and a sherd of salt glazed stoneware. These were all found within the upper layers across the site. Five pieces of medieval earthenware pottery were recovered from within layer 2. All four of these sherds are small and heavily abraded, making analysis of form and fabric type difficult. One piece appears to be a body sherd from an unglazed black cooking pot in a Malvernian fabric. One piece has a light green speckled glaze on its outer surface and is made of an orange sandy fabric with a reduced core. The only diagnostic sherd is piece of handle in a mid orange earthenware fabric. This is also very abraded but is likely to be in the Malvernian fabric B4, and to come from a jug.

The medieval and early post medieval material probably comes from fabrics that occurred in the period between the late thirteenth to early sixteenth centuries. The recovery of securely stratified material from the site was hampered by the fact that access to the trenches was difficult and the opportunity for cleaning and recording sections was limited.

6.0 Conclusions

Although no medieval features were excavated, the layer (context 2) exposed over much of the site produced medieval pottery. There is little doubt that had this project been an excavation rather than a monitoring exercise, medieval features would have been found. The presence of walls 3 and 8 in alignment with the predicted boundaries of medieval burghage plots is significant in that medieval settlement outside the immediate core of the town has been discussed (Buteux 1996) but not conclusively demonstrated by archaeological excavation in this part of the town.

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 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.

Appendices

Date	Source	Name	Occupation
1841	Census	Henry Crowe	Carpenter
1850	Slater's directory	Henry Matthey	Painter and decorator
1861	Census	William Neale	Furniture dealer
1871	Census	William Neal	Furniture dealer
1876	Littlebury's	William Neal	Cabinet Maker
1879	Kelly's Directory	John Webb Harden	Grocer, Tea Dealer, Provision and corn merchant
1881	Census	Frederick Holmes	China Dealer
1890	Jakeman & Carver's Directory	Frederick Holmes	General Furnisher
1895	Kelly's Directory	Frederick Holmes	Cabinet Maker
1900	Kelly's Directory	Frederick Holmes (Mrs.?)	Cabinet Maker
1910	Finance Act	Esther Ann Holmes	
1913	Kelly's Directory	Frederick Holmes	Cabinet Maker
1914	Jakeman & Carver's Directory	Frederick Holmes	Cabinet Maker
1922	Kelly's Directory	Frederick Holmes	Cabinet Maker
1926	Kelly's Directory	Frederick Holmes	Cabinet Maker
1929	HRO 367/76/3	Miss Mary Frederica Holmes	
1929	Kelly's Directory	Richard William Page	Painter, Paper Hanger and Glazier
1934	Kelly's Directory	Rd. Wm. Page	Painter
1937	Kelly's Directory	Rd. Wm. Page	Painter
1939	Kelly's Directory	Rd. Wm. Page	Painter
1941	Kelly's Directory	Rd. Wm. Page	Painter
1960	HRO 367/76/2	Part leased to Wallis & Son	Furniture Dealer
1973	HRO 367/76/1	Richard William Page and representatives of Mrs. Mary Page deceased (?)	

Table 1: Occupiers of 16 South Street, Leominster

General bibliography

Buteux, V <i>et al</i> 1996	Archaeological assessment of Leominster, Hereford And Worcester . Hereford and Worcester County Council, County Archaeological Service Report 325
Hillaby, J G, 1987	Early Christian and Pre-conquest Leominster, and exploration of sources, <i>Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists Field Club</i> , 45
Price 1795	<i>An historical and topographical account of Leominster and its vicinity, Ludlow</i>
Ragg, JM ed. <i>et al</i> , 1984	<i>Soils of England and Wales sheet 3, Midlands and western England</i> , Soil Survey of England and Wales
Reeves 1973	<i>The town in the Marches</i> , Leominster
Wills, J, 1981	<i>Archaeology in Leominster</i> , unpublished typescript, HWCC SMR

Cartographic material

Tithe Commissioners, 1849	Leominster Parish Tithe Map
Ordnance Survey, 1886	1 st edition 1:2500 plan. County Series, Herefordshire
Ordnance Survey, 1905	2 nd edition 1:2500 plan. County Series, Herefordshire

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