

ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
WATCHING BRIEF  
AT  
TEME BRIDGE,  
TENBURY WELLS,  
WORCESTERSHIRE

Simon Sworn

Illustrated by Carolyn Hunt

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Project 2987  
Report 1506  
WSM 36087



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## Archaeological watching brief at Teme Bridge, Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire

**Simon Sworn**

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### Background information

|                                             |                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Client</i>                               | Worcestershire Highways<br>(Worcestershire County Council) |
| <i>Site address</i>                         | Teme Bridge, Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire                 |
| <i>National Grid reference</i>              | SO 5955 8558                                               |
| <i>Sites and Monuments Record reference</i> | WSM 36087                                                  |
| <i>Project design</i>                       | HEAS 2006                                                  |
| <i>Project parameters</i>                   | IFA 1999                                                   |

### *Archaeological background and previous archaeological work on the site*

The present bridge, crossing the Teme to the north end of the town is of medieval date, probably built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is likely that the stone bridge replaced an earlier timber structure. The bridge, consisting of six semicircular sandstone arches, does not cross the river in a straight line but has a noticeable bend in the centre. The three northern arches probably date from the 16<sup>th</sup> century; the three to the south were rebuilt after being destroyed in a flood of 1770 (WSM 05309). In 1908 the sterlings on the east side were rebuilt and the bridge widened by the addition of reinforced concrete arches on both sides which rest upon the 'sterlings' (piers), while the ancient parapet wall was replaced on both sides by modern iron railings (VCH 1924). This early 20<sup>th</sup> century alteration has deprived the bridge of most of its interest and beauty.

Three watching briefs have been undertaken in the vicinity of the bridge, two during the de-silting of the river gravels (WSM 27079, 29692) and one on the bridge surface, (WSM 30169) neither of these watching briefs resulted in any of the medieval fabric being exposed.

### *Previous archaeological work on associated sites*

Tenbury Wells has been the subject of a recent survey undertaken as part of the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey (Dalwood 1996) and contains a summary of previous archaeological work in the town.

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### Aims

The aim of the watching brief recording was to record the structure of the bridge as exposed during the excavation of three trial pits in the present carriageway to assess the connection between the ancient and the modern widening of the bridge.

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### Methods

|                                        |                                           |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| General specification for fieldwork    | CAS 1995                                  |
| Sources consulted                      | SMR/HER                                   |
| Date of fieldwork                      | 26 <sup>th</sup> November 2006            |
| Area of site                           | c 2.21m <sup>2</sup> , Indicated on Fig 2 |
| Dimensions of excavated areas observed | Test Pit 1                                |
|                                        | length 1.52m                              |
|                                        | width 0.52m                               |
|                                        | depth 0.46m                               |

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|            |        |       |
|------------|--------|-------|
| Test Pit 2 | length | 1.56m |
|            | width  | 0.61m |
|            | depth  | 0.46m |
| Test Pit 3 | length | 0.78m |
|            | width  | 0.60m |
|            | depth  | 0.39m |

#### *Access to and visibility of structure*

Observation of the excavated areas was undertaken during/after machine and hand excavation. The exposed surfaces were sufficiently clean to observe archaeological deposits.

#### *Statement of confidence*

Access to, and visibility of, deposits allowed a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

### **Deposit description**

| <b>Context</b> | <b>Description</b>                                                                            | <b>Date</b> | <b>Interpretation</b>                                                                                                                           | <b>Depth (OD or below present road surface)</b> |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 100            | Tarmac                                                                                        | Modern      | Present road surface                                                                                                                            | 0 – 0.11m                                       |
| 101            | Compact grey stones, gravel, sand and tarmac fragments                                        | Modern      | Hardcore make-up for tarmac surface                                                                                                             | 0.10 – 0.40m                                    |
| 102            | Compact crushed brick, stone and sand                                                         | Modern      | Compact layer over 104                                                                                                                          | 0.16 – 0.23m                                    |
| 103            | Concrete structure                                                                            | 1908        | Early 20 <sup>th</sup> widening of bridge                                                                                                       | 0.24m+                                          |
| 104            | Compact brown sand and small angular gravels                                                  | Modern (?)  | Levelling layer, probably for overlying hardcore 101                                                                                            | 0.40 – 0.46m                                    |
| 105            | Roughly hewn reddish brown sandstone blocks, set within a compact yellowish brown sand matrix | Medieval    | Existing medieval sandstone bridge structure                                                                                                    | 0.32m+                                          |
| 106            | Loose brown sand, stones and sub-angular gravels                                              | Modern      | Fill of modern truncation to lower sandstone structure, appeared to be the infill of redundant service pipe or former footing of lamp-post etc. | 0.24 – 0.46m                                    |

### **Discussion**

The excavation consisted of three test pits, dug through the present road surface on the bridge, to test the connection between the ancient and modern widening of the bridge. Also a single, 1m long, core was taken from the downstream side of one of the concrete bridge piers (Fig 4).

The three test pits on the bridge roadway (Fig 2) exposed the make-up of the present road surface (100, 101, 104) along with sections of the concrete structure relating to the 1908 widening of the bridge (102, 103). In addition, sections of substantial sandstone structures were observed in all three

test pits, relating to the earlier medieval bridge. The sandstone structure consisted of roughly hewn red sandstones set within a yellowish brown sand matrix. In Test Pit 3 (Fig 3: Plate 5), the sandstone blocks appeared to have been laid more regularly than in the other two trial pits. The sandstones structure appeared to have the form of an earlier surface, probably the original road surface. However, in this trench there was clear indication for later truncation. In the eastern half of the trial hole the sandstone structure had been removed, the subsequent hole backfilled with loose material (106). It appeared that the sandstone had been dug out, rather than a single block removed. The function for this later truncation remained unclear, though it was likely to have been for the insertion of a service or the footing for street furnishings.

Although the extraction of the core sample was not observed, a photographic record indicated that there was 600mm of modern concrete facing sealing the earlier sandstone structure.

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## Conclusions

The observation of the three test pits on the bridge surface, and the core sample taken from one of the piers has concluded that there are substantial structural remains of the medieval sandstone bridge, presently encased within the modern concrete facade. Although the existence of the medieval bridge structure is clearly visible across the lower reaches of the bridge arches, this small watching brief has determined that the upper reaches, including the extant bridge surface remain hidden encased in 20<sup>th</sup> century concrete and only 0.32m below the present road surface.

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## Publication summary

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

*An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on behalf of Worcestershire Highways at Teme Bridge, Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire (NGR ref SO 5955 8558; SMR ref WSM 36087). The watching brief consisted of the observations of three trial pits, excavated through the present road surface on the top of the bridge, and a single core sample taken from one of the bridge piers. The trial pits on the present bridge surface revealed substantial sandstones structures relating to the original medieval bridge. The sandstone structure appeared to have the form of an earlier surface, probably the original road surface; there was evidence for partial, later truncation, though this was limited. The medieval road surface is exists only 0.32m below the present road surface.*

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## Archive

|                                |    |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Fieldwork progress records AS2 | 1  |
| Photographic records AS3       | 1  |
| Digital photographs            | 48 |
| Trench records AS41            | 3  |
| Drawings                       | 6  |

|                                                  |                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The project archive is intended to be placed at: | Worcestershire County Museum<br>Hartlebury Castle, Hartlebury<br>Near Kidderminster<br>Worcestershire DY11 7XZ |
| telephone                                        | 01299 250416                                                                                                   |

### **Acknowledgements**

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*Plate 1: General view of the eastern, downstream side of Teme Bridge (facing north-west).*



*Plate 2: Works through the present road surface. Test Pit 1 in the foreground, scale at 1m (facing north).*





*Plate 3: Test Pit 1, south facing section, scale at 1m (facing north).*



*Plate 4: Test Pit 2, south facing section, prior to removal of modern concrete 103, scale at 1m (facing north).*





*Plate 5: Test Pit 3, medieval sandstone structure/surface visible to top of excavation, scale at 1m (facing south-west).*