

# Manor Farm, Bredenbury

## Preliminary Archaeological Survey

Summary In 1997 Archaeological Investigations Ltd. engaged in a phased survey of an area of land which lies adjacent to Manor Farm, Bredenbury. The site is centred at SO 613 560 and comprises a stream valley with a rise to either side on which remains of earthworks survive. The geology is sandstone and St Maugans Formation of the Old Red Sandstone. The aim of the work was to combine documentary and preliminary field evidence to try and ascertain the significance of the features within the site and help determine strategies for their future management. Bredenbury itself dates back to before the medieval period. The site lies either in or adjacent to the manorial estate. There is a documentary reference to two small holdings which at the end of the 18th century were brought into the manor's estate and then demolished. It is possible that the features in the site are the remains of these two small holdings. The methods employed during the work were an earthwork survey to rapidly (but accurately) map out the earthwork features and resistivity survey which it was hoped might provide some clues as to buried archaeology. The results of the first demonstrate a well organised landscape which could well fit in with the documentary evidence for the site. The resistivity survey produced less conclusive results but still might hold clues as to the location of features. Over all the survey has demonstrated that the earthworks are of considerable significance both in their preservation and the amount of documentary evidence which may relate to the site. As a whole the landscape would appear to be worthy of preservation. Certainly the use of more destructive agricultural practices such as ploughing would result in the complete destruction of the features in a very short time. It is possible that further investigations will reveal more about the site and a scheme of work is being drawn up to follow on from this survey.

Introduction Archaeological Investigations Ltd was commissioned by David Jones of Manor Farm, Bredenbury to carry out an archaeological survey of a landscape containing earthworks within the farm estate. The fieldwork was carried out over a period of approximately 18 months with the idea of assessing the significance of the remains, and their archaeological and landscape value. It was intended that the results would be presented in support of an application for Countryside Stewardship Grant Aid. The site itself comprises a small stream valley with high ground to either side and lies to the east of Bredenbury village. The stream bisects the site on a north-west/south-east alignment. The geology beneath the site comprises alternating bands of sandstone and St Maughan's Formation of the Devonian Old Red Sandstone. On the north-east side of the brook the land rises up a steep slope which coincides with a change between these two geological members. The site presently lies under permanent pasture. Aims The exercise had two main aims:

- to map the extent of earthworks and attempt an interpretation,
  - to determine the extent of buried features beneath the earthworks.
- Historical background The main work relating to Bredenbury is a book produced by Jennifer Weale (1997). The earliest archaeological evidence for settlement in the area around Bredenbury is from finds of Roman pottery such as the 3rd-4th century AD pottery at Batchley farm. The first historically documented settlement is recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086. However, the place-name is Anglo-Saxon, briden meaning of boards. There is some discussion as to the meaning here of burg or bury, and it might refer to a camp or hillfort with a palisade, but modern place-names experts strongly favour a boarded manor house. In the Domesday survey, Bredenbury was listed among the Plegelgate hundred held by Roger de Lacy. Here it is recorded that Bredenbury. Leofsi held it; he could go where he would. 1 hide which pays tax. In lordship 1 plough; 4 villagers with 4 ploughs; a further 3 ploughs would be possibly there in lordship. 5 slaves. Value before 1066 30s; now 10s. Herman holds from Roger's. The entry shows that the land was not fully exploited following the Conquest and implies that there were four farms in the pre-1882 parish in addition to Bredenbury Court and Wicton (Weale 1997 and pers. comm.). Historically the de Lacys held the manor at Bredenbury until 1241 after which it was held by the bishops of Hereford until the mid 17th century during which time it was sublet to a number of absentee landlords. In 1726 it was purchased and occupied by Richard West. The site itself is bounded on its south-western side by a deep hollow way which marks the old Bromyard to Leominster route. A small track leads out of the old road and joins a further, smaller hollow way which crosses the site towards the brook. On the crest of the ridge adjacent to the old road are a number of levelled terraces, situated wither side of this second hollow way (Site B). The later having reached the brook then followed the stream, against the flow, and rises up the steep slope (mentioned in section 2) to a second group of earthworks (Site A). Prior to the work starting a number of fragments of pottery had been collected by David Jones (the land owner). A rapid identification of these on site concluded that they were mainly 18th century in date with one or two sherds of medieval black cooking pot (13th century AD?). Jennifer Weale in her historical study identified that near to site B was a holding which may have been Benyam's House, a blacksmiths purchased by William West the Younger who had the estate from 1804. In fact the location of Benyam's House on the site is speculative, the evidence for this is the field named Benyam's Orchard shown on the tithe map as lying between the stream and the old road on the south-east side of the small holloway which crosses the site. An affidavit of 1827 by Edward George is reproduced below: '65 years ago William West purchased two small estates near the Stake [now the manor farm] and after he had purchased the same two small places, he threw them into the original estate and took down the Cottages and buildings thereon..many of the internal fences have been materially altered, and several fields thrown into one and their form much changed, yet the external or boundary fences remain the same as they did about 65 years ago.' A further historical reference which may be of significance is that between 1777 and 1831 small holdings were brought up by the estate and do not appear on the tithe map. The site of the old manor house is believed to lie down hill from the church, the present building having started in 1810. With the new site of the manor and subsequent emparkment there is

a case to be made that the earthworks are the remains of one or two small holdings cleared during this process. Six small holdings disappear from the land tax register between 1777 and 1798, a further three disappear later than this but we know these were not on the site. This just gives an end date for their occupation of somewhere in the later 18th century. In the hearth tax assessments of 1671 there were 17 houses recorded. It is likely that these include at least some of the small holdings which disappear at the end of the 18th century. So to summarise, the documentary evidence indicates the presence of small holdings, abandoned in the late 18th century, which may date back to at least the 17th century one or two of which could possibly have been sited in the study area. The present surveys would struggle to solve these questions and are targeted to establishing the location and possibly the function of the earthworks.

**Geophysical conditions** The resistivity of clay lies somewhere between 10-30 ohmm whilst sandstone is between 30-100,000 ohmm (Bell 1975).

**Method Earthwork survey** The earthwork survey was carried out using a Geoscan 610 total station with logger. The data was processed using Blue Moon Systems's Landscape software. The total station was used to map the breaks of slope across the site and define the edges of earthwork features. The data was then processed, printed out to 1:1000 and a copy of this plan was taken back to site and the hachured interpretation of the features drawn using the survey as an accurate guide to the positions of features. The survey was located by mapping a number of boundary features which exist on the present Ordnance Survey maps for the site. Ridge and furrow was not mapped at this stage as the purpose of the survey was more to look at the distribution of features than provide a detailed analysis.

**Resistivity survey** The survey was carried out using a Geoscan RM15 resistance meter with a PA5 electrode array. The mobile electrodes were separated by 0.5m giving an approximate maximum depth of detection of 1m below the ground surface. The two remote electrodes were separated by c.20m from each other and also by at least that distance from the nearest part of the survey area. This enables the apparent resistivity to be estimated. The current was set to 1mA and the mains frequency to 50Hz. Readings were taken at 1m intervals on traverses spaced 1m apart.

**Results Earthwork survey** The results of the earthwork survey can be divided up on the basis of the scale and nature of the features. The results are discussed from the largest components to the smallest. Also as the study area is naturally divided into two by the stream each side is discussed separately. The notation in Weale (1997) is continued, so Site A is the east half and Site B the west. It is important to note that for the purposes of this exercise reconnaissance outside of the area shown on Figure 2 was minimal.

**Boundaries and fields** From the results of the earthwork survey it would appear that the entire of Site A lies within the study area. In effect the northern side of the site is defined by a lynchet (A1) and the eastern and southern sides by a deep hollow A2 (the west side is formed by the brook). Lynchet A1 is no longer respected by the modern boundary which overlies it at an angle. The entire of the eastern area of this site forms what appears to be a large field (which slopes down hill in this direction) bisected by a track on a roughly NNE-SSW alignment. It is likely that this track follows the line of an old lynchet as indicated by the earthwork on its west side which would leave two fields of roughly equal area on either side. The northern of these fields retains some hints of ridge and furrow running with the slope. A hollow way (A3) winds up from the stream and joins the northern boundary of the site A1. Platforms/structural features An irregular shaped, raised area lies in the west corner of the field adjacent to the point where the hollow way, A3, meets boundary A1. The south-east and north-east sides of this feature are relatively rectilinear. However, in the north-west corner a triangular-shaped hollow cuts into the mound (A5). A number of other hollows were also observed, A6 in the southern corner of the mound and two labelled A7 in the centre. The latter lie adjacent to a fallen tree and could be evidence of earlier tree bowls. The remnants of further platforms exist along the edge of the boundary A1. The edge of A8 lies parallel to A1 and A9 roughly perpendicular to the same. A further structure was observed in the north-east corner of the field at A10 where some stones were exposed appearing to form the corner of a structure.

**Boundaries and fields** Parts of Site B may lie off the map and outside the core study area. A brief reconnaissance of the meadows which lay down slope to the south of this site revealed valley bottom. Some features may have been lost due to the construction of a sewerage treatment plant, and also more detailed work may identify features in this area which ground conditions during the visit and time constraints may have obscured. Site B is defined by the hollow way of the old road on the south-east and the stream again on the north-east. It is possible that its south-eastern boundary lies in a similar position to that of Site A and is defined by the edge of fields 1 and 2. The same may apply for the northern boundary which could be defined by the south-east edge of field 5. If this were the case then Site B comprises four fields (1-4) surrounding a hollow way (B1 - which in turn forms a boundary between fields 3 and 4) and three areas of earthworks B2-4. Ridge and furrow can be seen in fields 3 and 4 on the cover photo. It is interesting to note that this appears to be cut through by the hollow way which by implication must post date it.

**Platforms/structural features** Looking at the two smaller earthworks first, B2 lies to the south of the junction between hollow way B1 and the old road. In fact B1 curves round B2 although it is true to say that the hollow way itself is less well defined at this point than further down slope. In fact the south side of the hollow way appears to be obscured by mound B2 at this point implying that the latter is later in date (or at the very least was eroded at a later date). A hollow lies within mound B2. This gives the impression of a small quarry. However, it is possible that further investigation could reveal a structural function for the feature and this alternative should not be written off. The second small area of earthworks is the small hollow B3. This lies at the foot of a scarp, and within the centre of the hollow is a small flat mound approximately 6m across. Another small hollow lies to the east of this (B5) which lines up with a track to the south and probably represents a cut for vehicular access (David Jones pers. comm.). The largest earthwork platform in this area is B4 which comprises a c.60m long by c.20m wide rectangular area. A recent track (B6) way runs along the south-west boundary of this feature. However, it is likely that this follows an earlier boundary. At the north-west corner of the platform a number of irregularities occur. Some of these are mounds (B7) whilst the other is a hollow (B8). The mounds probably represent tipping of spoil, the hollow may be an original feature. A narrow gully cuts through the north-east corner of the mound (B9). This is sharply defined and could well be the cut for a recent land drain. A number of stones appear to have been laid where the hollow way meets the stream. It is possible that these form the footing for a small foot bridge from which

pedestrians could make their way up to the main structures at Site A. Resistivity survey When considering the data collected by earth resistance it is necessary to attempt to understand the general trends within the data prior to attempting to interpret specific anomalies. This allows for an understanding of the effects of the site's geology and topography on the results, and enables variations which might not normally be expected to be highlighted. General trends both sites A and B On both sites A and B there are responses which are likely to be due to near surface changes in solid geology. These are marked on Figure 4. They manifest themselves as bands of high resistance. These lie on the same alignment as the scarp and the banding between St Maugans Formation and sandstone. It is likely that the high resistance banding is due to near surface sandstone. However, see discussion on Site A in 4.1.2 below for an interesting fact relating to the geological response.

**Specific anomalies** The data presented in this report is a colour scale representation of raw readings. The data was also processed using high and low pass filters at various window sizes with a Gaussian bias. The filtering did not reveal any further features with the exception of resolving a possible linear feature in Site B. It was not felt necessary to present filtered data for the purpose of this report.

**Site A** Very few specific anomalies were located within this site. The first is an area of low resistance which interestingly continues the line of the top of the hollow way (Fig. 2; A3). Also the edge of the slope defining hollow A5 matches the east edge of the high resistance geological anomaly exactly. Similarly the banding here is thinner than might be expected or easily explained by the geology. All that remains in the data are a few trends on the same orientation and a number of isolated patches of higher resistance. An alternative could be that the high resistance areas indicate the positions of old surfaces/yards which buildings being mainly timber. A linear anomaly for a drain was located across the site aswell.

**Site B** In this case the geological response is much more solid and convincing. The mound on which the survey was carried out shows visible signs of having been cut through for a pipe (Figure 2; B9) and this is also apparent in the resistivity data as is the line of the sewer. A further response was identified within the mound. Filtering indicated that this too might lie on the line of a linear feature. However, in this case it could be that a drain has been put through the remains of a structure of some description with the remains of the structure resulting in discrete areas of high resistance.

**Discussion** Refer back to the affidavit of 1827 by Edward George. Here it describes the two small places near Manor farm which were demolished. It also describes a number of small fields being made into one whilst the external boundaries remained unaltered. This description on the basis of the earthwork results appears to fit the evidence on the ground today. Certainly for Site A features A1 and A2 could well be the lines of the external boundaries mentioned with the estate of the manor of Bredenbury lying outside of these and the areas of one of the small holdings within it. A further question would then be are sites A and B separate small holdings, divided by the stream. They are certainly independent as access is directly from the road rather than through the larger estate. In either case the antiquity and nature of occupation on the site remains a mystery. If site B were a smithy then this could benefit from gradiometer survey or electromagnetic survey (the various pipes might interfere too much with a gradiometer). Site A might also benefit from gradiometer survey in that hearths and post holes could be located by this method if employed intensively enough. However, a further element of the site is its date and length of occupation and this is only likely to be resolved by physical intervention. It is proposed that both sites are subjected to small scale trenching with the aim of establishing the answers to these questions although it is advisable that the scheme of survey mentioned above is carried out prior to this as it may enable better positioning of trenches than is otherwise possible, avoiding excessive disturbance to the archaeological resource.

**Conclusion** The landscape and earthworks at manor farm are of considerable regional interest. Firstly this is potentially an example of a documented late medieval/early Post-medieval small holding (or two even). Secondly the landscape contains features of more than one period (i.e. ridge and furrow cut by a later hollow way) reflecting both the earlier agricultural uses of the site and its later emparkment and use as open space. The archaeological landscape as it stands is worthy of preservation and it is important that the site is not ploughed. The keeping of stock on the site does not appear to cause erosion to the features. However, it is important that feeding and watering areas are kept away from the main earthwork complexes themselves. The site justifies further research and is also striking enough to be used as an educational tool although further investment in our understanding of its history would enhance the use of the site as an educational tool.

**Bibliography** Bell, F.G., 1975, Site investigations in areas of mining subsidence, pp 78. Brandon, A., 1989, Geology of the country between Hereford and Leominster, British Geological Survey, pp 26-37. Wheale, J., 1997, A History of Bredenbury and its Landed Estate The Bromyard and District Local History Society