

Woolhope Club Field Meeting to Ross on Wye 18 May 2021

This was the first Club field meeting since June 2019. The purpose of the meeting was to examine the evidence of the course of the Wye and the underlying geology from the cliff face below Ross. The meeting was led by Sue Olver and Moira Jenkins, joined by 18 other members. The meeting started from the car park next to Wilton bridge, shared by a Covid testing station. Most of the forecast heavy showers did not materialise and there was warm sunshine part of the time.

After recent heavy rain, river levels were high and made it impossible to see the gravel bars in the River Wye downstream of the bridge. We did look from the bridge across to the Wilton side where the houses and Wilton Castle are built on a river terrace, the former valley floor before the river cut down to its present level. These buildings are perched a little above the level of the flood plain. The original bridge is said to have been built in 1599 (see the *Transactions* for 1921 p.90) though much altered. The poor building stone no doubt came from the 'cliffs' and the photo shows that although eroded for its age it is in fair condition as it is on the downstream side. The party then walked south-east across the flat land towards the cliffs south of Ross. This land floods regularly but above the floodplain are former river cliffs of the Wye. The rocks in the cliffs are formed of Old Red Sandstone Devonian in age. They show evidence of the braided nature of rivers which crossed a semi-arid plain about 400 million years ago, constantly changing their courses, depositing layers of fine sand interspersed with layers of gravel.



Climbing up from the floodplain



Moira and Sue explaining how the strata show the braided nature of the river



Huge oak clinging to the cliff top. Below its roots is a reddish layer of pebbly conglomerate



Section of cliff face showing bands of smooth sandstone deposited during calmer river flow alternating with dipping pebbly bands, gravel bars which migrated downstream.



Above left is a former quarry south of Ross.



Causeway flood relief tunnel under Wilton Road, showing typical local sandstone 'stripes'. The red colour is given by oxides of iron while the grey-green is ferrous hydroxides of iron developed in wetter conditions or where there was organic material in the sediment.

The group returned to Wilton Road leading up to Ross town. From the pavement there are good views of the cliff strata which have been analysed in detail by J.R.L.Allen. The photos below show Wilton Bluff, which is an SSSI designated for its important geology.



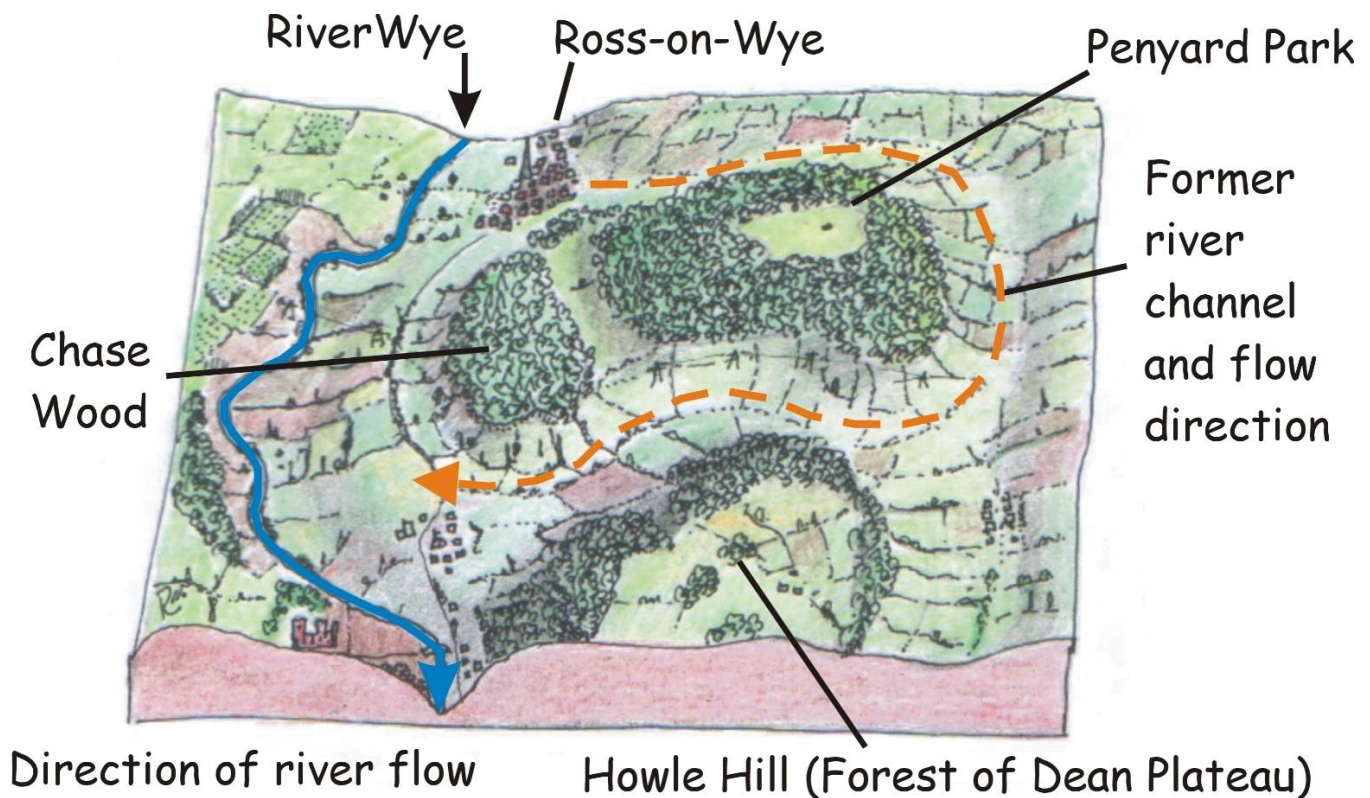
Having crossed (with some trepidation) to the road leading to the church, the lunch break was taken at the Prospect. This gave a fine view of the massive meander loop in the Wye. All of the low land can be flooded after heavy rain, as was seen in a photograph taken in 2014.

After lunch the next port of call was the roadside wall retaining the car park on Edde Cross Street.



The stone in the centre of the photo shows sandstone with hollows where mudclasts, torn off by the ancient river upstream, were later deposited. These are softer than the sandstone and have weathered out of the rock.

Walking northwards down Edde Cross Street, which dives down steeply, it was possible to appreciate that ahead of us was an earlier abandoned meander of the Wye, with the other side of the valley rising steeply ahead. The present-day route of the River Wye was not its original course. It used to flow east to the north of Penyard Park before turning to flow south of Penyard Park and Chase Wood, entering the present course near Coughton as shown in the diagram below.



At the bottom of Edde Cross Street the group took the path towards the Wye, seeing the small stream, the Rudhall Brook, which now is all that drains the former Wye meander at this point. We then walked back along the river bank seeing the Wye flowing strongly swelled by the recent heavy rains. We crossed Wye Street (often flooded) and returned to the car park.