

# HEREFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL NEWS



HAN 26      June 1973

WOOLHOPE CLUB  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH SECTION

**CONTENTS**

EDITORIAL..... 2

INTERIM REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS IN BERRINGTON STREET, HEREFORD, 1972-73  
..... 2

RECENTLY SCHEDULED MONUMENTS..... 6

NOTES ON LONGTOWN CASTLE..... 6

**HEREFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL NEWS SHEET  
WOOLHOPE CLUB  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH SECTION**

**No. 26     June 1973**

**Edited by:     Ron Shoesmith**

**EDITORIAL**

Once again I must apologise for the long delay in the appearance of this issue. The committee has now decided that the newsletter should be issued three times a year - March, August and November. This, I hope you will accept as a rather belated March issue.

Again I must plead a lack of material for the newsletter. The "deadline" date for the next issue is the end of July, and I would very much appreciate any articles before that date so that stencils can be cut in advance.

The Secretary of the Group is now Gp. Capt. J B Lewis, of 'Hilltop', Linton Hill, Ross-on-Wye, HR9 7RT who should be contacted on all items of membership and area inspection problems.

I now seem to have re-organised my life so that I run the hostel at Staunton-on-Wye for about 6 months of the year and work for the Department of the Environment for the remaining period. Over the last winter I have been directing excavations at Chepstow on the Port Wall and the site of the Norman Priory and also over the last few weeks at Monmouth on the Town Defences and the Roman Iron Workings. I also did a month in Hereford in Berrington Street which is reported in this issue of the Newsletter.

CBA Group 8 is now setting up a West Midlands Rescue Archaeology Committee to liaise with DOTE on necessary rescue excavations in the West Midlands. This will affect Hereford which is within CBA 8 area especially as there are schemes afoot for Central Area redevelopment and also development of a large area just within the City Wall in the Delacy Street area. Excavation will probably be desirable in both areas.

**INTERIM REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS IN BERRINGTON STREET, HEREFORD, 1972-73  
By Ron Shoesmith**

**Preface**

Demolition during August 1972 on the site recently occupied by No. 6 St Nicholas Street, St Vincent's Convent and St. Francis Xavier's RC School exposed the remains of some 60 metres of the Saxon defences of Hereford. The Western boundary of the site is the medieval city wall.

Previous excavations have been carried out both to the north and south of the site. An excavation to the north of the site by Philip Rahtz established the potential of the area and this was confirmed in 1971 in an area close to the southern edge of the site. These previous excavations established a sequence from the post-Roman period through the Saxon period down to the Middle Ages.

The site in Berrington Street is the only remaining undeveloped part of the western defences and is the longest surviving stretch of the Saxon rampart. The Department of the Environment realised the importance of this area and placed an interim Preservation Order on the site. After the developers had submitted revised plans it was agreed in the first

instance to excavate the part of the site directly threatened by the proposed block of offices during November and December 1972, and the necessary funds were made available by the Department.

### **Introduction**

The full sequence of defences around Hereford was well demonstrated by excavations on the western side of the town in 1967 (Trans. Woolhope N.F.C. Vol. XXXIX, pp. 44-67 - 'Hereford City Excavations 1967' by Noble & Shoemith) and in 1968 (Current Archaeology No. 9, July 1968, pp. 242-46 – 'Hereford' by Philip Rahtz). During Lister 1972, the Saxon defensive works were further excavated at the eastern side of the town in Cantilupe Street, where they were in an excellent state of preservation. (Current Archaeology No. 33, July 1972, pp. 256-58 – 'Hereford' by Ron Shoemith).

During these excavations on the western rampart, five periods of defensive work were identified, but only three of these were represented on the eastern side. Chester ware was associated with the collapse of the imposing Period 5 rampart, and this suggested a late 9th to early 10th century date for the construction.

The excavation in Berrington Street was intended to tie in the internal occupation levels of the town with the various periods of the Saxon rampart. Excavations were only carried out in the immediately threatened and limited area due to be covered by the new buildings of St Nicholas House. Only a small trench was cut into the rampart due to an agreement with the developers to retain an earthen bank consisting of most of the Saxon rampart which will act as a support to the medieval wall.

### **The Excavation**

#### Area 1

It was rapidly established that the whole site was covered with a vast build-up of Victorian debris. Area 1 consisted of a cutting into this build-up which had previously contained a semi-basement. In an attempt to establish the stratification of the site, machinery was used to lift the concrete floor of this area and the resulting surface was then cleaned. It was found to be crossed by foundation trenches, presumably to support the internal partitions of the semi-basement. The areas between these foundation trenches contained over 20 interconnecting pits dating from the 10th to the 16th centuries. At the east end of the area, the pits were out directly into the natural clay and gravel of the site. At the west end, however, a thin deposit of gravel and earth was found to overlie the clay. This deposit produced several sherds, of Chester ware and it could be seen that the semi-basement had removed all the post-conquest levels. Due to the short time available, the pits were not sectioned, but were excavated directly. They provided a very useful series of pottery examples and types, which, due to the interconnecting relationships of the pits can be put into a time sequence. The remaining brick walls of the basement could not be removed, so no sections showing the upper levels were available.

#### Area 2

While the pits were being emptied in Area 1, the level in Area 2, directly to the south, was lowered by machine and a trench was cut into the rampart. A 16<sup>th</sup> century industrial level was found some 2 metres deep but in the time available it was not possible to establish the use, and after quick planning machinery was again used to lower the level to a mixed soil and gravel layer which seemed to represent a garden level of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Removal, again by machinery, followed by hand clearance, exposed an occupation level containing Chester ware which, at the western edge of the trench, continued over the tail of the clay and silt period 5 rampart. There was some indication of burnt timber buildings.

A similar level continued under the rampart but could only be identified from the overlying layer towards the east of the trench by its complete lack of pottery. A coin, dated by the British Museum as late in the reign of Alfred, was found in this layer. On clearance, a metallated surface, running at about 30 degrees to the rampart line and surrounded by a layer of re-used stone was the earliest occupation on the site. One or two abraded sherds of Roman pottery and tile were found. This level was also associated with a series of postholes which showed in the subsoil over the eastern half of the area. The area was not large enough to establish building plans.

### Area 3

To establish continuity over the site, and ensure that the occupation levels in Area 2 were firmly tied to the rampart levels, a machine trench was cut into the rampart.

Poor weather and the depth of the excavation, caused the trench to collapse before completion, and as a result it had to be left until the last day when Area 2 was completed, and a machine could be used to re-cut the trench into the rampart. The trench was taken from a point some 3½ metres inside the city wall, through the gravel of the Rahtz period 6 rampart, to the top of the period 5 rampart and tail. In the last few minutes of the excavation the machine exposed a series of postholes cutting into the tail of the period 5 rampart. These were examined and planned by artificial light during the last evening, but their purpose is still very uncertain

### **Conclusions**

Pre-10th century occupation has now been shown to be consistent over most of the western defensive line. The area cleared was not large enough to establish building plans of this period, but the metallating, stonework and postholes present in Area 2 gives an indication that such plans would be feasible with clearance over a larger area. A date for this period in the 7th-8th centuries is still likely.

The massive clay build of the period 5 rampart was thought to have been built by Aethelfleda (913-915) although radio-carbon dates did not confirm this. The coin of Alfred (c. 900 AD) from the layer running under the rampart makes the Aethelfledan date seem the most likely one.

Chester ware did not occur in or below this layer, so it would be reasonable to suggest that it is not earlier than AD 900, and, with the coin evidence from Chester, is in use by AD 970.

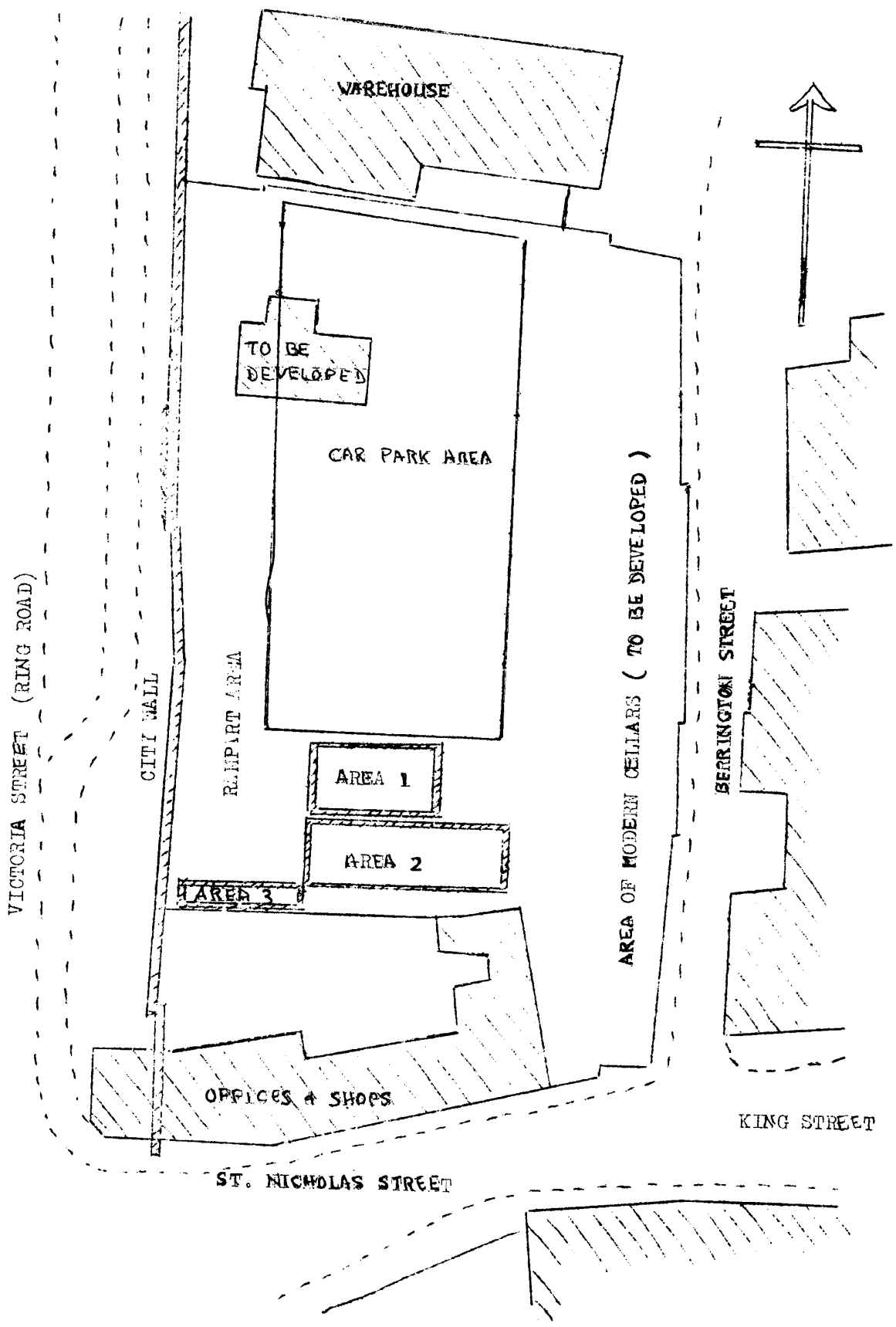
The occupation on the tail of the clay rampart was only present in Area 2, and left far fewer signs of building than the earlier period. However, it is still likely that buildings could be identified if a larger area is taken.

It is expected that the material from the pits will add considerably to our knowledge of 12th-13th century pottery along the Welsh Border.

### **Future Possibilities**

Plans were made to excavate the car park area north of Area 1 over Easter this year. Unfortunately the contractor would not allow archaeologists on the site during this period, although it was pointed out that the heavy machinery he was using would largely destroy the remaining Saxon levels. This applies even more due to the heavy rain over Easter which will soften the ground and allow it to be cut up by lorries. All the Saxon levels are within 25 centimetres of the surface and the occupation on the tail of the rampart must be within 5 centimetres of the surface in many places.

If anything remains, an excavation may be mounted in July by the Department.



## **RECENTLY SCHEDULED MONUMENTS**

### **Information from Stan Stanford**

#### **Monument, County No. 88, NGR SO 396 654**

##### **Castle Mound, Camp Wood, Aymestrey**

Castle mound 120ft in diameter at the base, 80ft diameter at the top and nearly 20ft high. There is a bank or rampart (RCHM) around the top, and a ditch 10ft deep on the north and east sides. There is no ditch on the south and west sides but scarping is added to the already steep slope down to the River Lugg.

#### **Monument, County No. 114, NGR SO 366 520**

##### **Hell Moat, Sarnesfield, Weobley**

An irregularly quadrilateral shaped area, on land rising slightly northwards, enclosed by a steep sided ditch 15-20 feet across and 10-15 feet deep. There is an inner bank to the ditch on the north-west and south sides and a low outer bank on the west and south sides. On the east side the ditch partly utilises a stream gully.

#### **Monument, County No. 182, NGR SO 427735**

##### **Castle Mound, Downton Farm, Downton**

Regarded as a castle mound by VCH and 1" OS.

## **NOTES ON LONGTOWN CASTLE**

**(O.S. Sheet 142, 1 inch/mile - NGR 321 293)**

**By L P Moore**

The ruined castle near the North end of the village of Longtown is officially classified<sup>(1)</sup> as the remains of a Norman Castle. An Ordnance Survey team now engaged upon the re-survey of ancient monuments in Herefordshire has, however, shed new light upon the nature of this site.

I met the team on 5<sup>th</sup> September, 1972, on site and was informed that their survey had led them to believe that earlier suggestions to the effect that this castle had been superimposed upon a defended enclosure of earlier construction, appear to be well based, while moreover that half of the total enclosure situated on the East side of the extension of the village high street bisecting the enclosure as a whole, and hitherto thought to be an annexe to the outer bailey is more likely to be an original part of the earlier enclosure.

The team quoted the basis of their conclusions to be as follows:

- a. Judging by the smallness of the keep, it would probably not support a bailey of more than half the area of the entire site (c. three acres).
- b. Inturns of the west site ramparts immediately West of the bisecting village street, indicate that the west half only was walled by the Normans.
- c. There is a marked difference between the rampart construction around the West half and that around the East site.
- d. The ramparts on the East site are untypically large for such a castle.

### **Comment**

Having regard to the vast experience of this team in viewing historic sites of every category throughout the country, this fresh view of the Longtown site is probably the true one.

If the original construction pre-dates the castle, it could be presumed to be either Celtic or Roman or Mercian.

Sited on a ridgeway, with no natural defences on either its North or South perimeter and having regard to its regular geometric planform, it is altogether untypical of a Celtic Hill Fort or Promontory Fort.

Situated at the junction of four steep and narrow valleys of the Escley Brook, the Upper Monnow, the Olchon Brook and the Middle Monnow and hence, of their intervening ridgeways, the site obviously covers infiltration of Wales from over the great natural rampart of the Black Mountains themselves, linking via the North West – South East of the foothills for this purpose, with forts or castles covering the Wye Gap, the Usk Gap near Abergavenny and that between Llanvihangel Crucorney and Crickhowell. The Longtown site thus has a strategic significance although probably minor, relevant to both the Romans and the Normans up to the dates of occupation of Wales and equally to the Mercians, if and when their frontier ever extended to the Black Mountains.

The 'playing card' planform and the siting are typically Roman and all the evidence supports the conclusion of earlier Ordnance Survey teams, duly printed without proof positive on their large-scale maps, to the effect "Longtown Castle (remains of) on site of Roman Camp".

On that assumption, once East Wales had been safely occupied, the military significance of Longtown would have been so diminished as to make it unlikely that its garrison was further maintained, except perhaps for minor outpost duties. Thus it is unlikely ever to have served as a staging post between Magnis and Gobannium (Abergavenny), for which Pontrilas is the obvious choice.

This appears to be yet another example of a Roman fort having been re-occupied in part or in whole, by the Normans, with the keep being built upon the foundations of one of the Roman corner towers. Longtown advises us to take a further long deep look at the many 'castle' sites of Herefordshire.

### **Adjacent Earthwork**

What appears to be a trace of a facsimile earthwork immediately North-West of the present enclosure, between an alignment with its Eastern rampart and Jews Lane, appears worthy of investigation. It appears never to have been completed, as though abandoned prematurely during the long desperate years of ebb and flow of the invading Roman force, across the Middle Marches, between about 50 AD and 74 AD, finally to be superseded by the present fort.

### **Note**

- (1) 'Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments'  
'Herefordshire' Vol III



