

# ADVICE ON ARCHAEOLOGY

## Countryside Archaeology Advisors

*In 1996, the Monuments at Risk Survey (MARS) report highlighted the threat to archaeological sites from modern-day intensive agriculture. An English Heritage pilot project funding Countryside Archaeology Advisors is starting to redress the imbalance*

*Elmley Castle, Worcestershire. Designated as a SAM and an SSSI, the early Countryside Stewardship Scheme missed the opportunity to protect all elements of the parkland and its earlier features under one management plan*

When faced with the startling statistic that agriculture is the largest single cause of piecemeal loss and damage to MARS monuments in 1995, English Heritage agreed to fund Countryside Archaeology Advisors in seven local authorities. The challenge was to develop models of best practice for managing archaeological sites in the countryside at a local level.

English Heritage is funding my post for three years, in partnership with Worcestershire County Council. Both are seeking increased protection of the historic environment, the archaeology of the countryside that makes up around 70% of recorded sites in the county.

Along with local authority colleagues in the South West Region, we are exploring ways of bringing more archaeological sites, monuments and landscapes into positive management. We are part of a small, but expanding community of archaeologists with this role, representing our profession on partnership working groups, liaison with local conservation groups and national agencies such as English Nature and the new Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

### Building positive partnerships

The job of a Countryside Archaeology Advisor must be based on good relationships with landowners and farmers, where few statutory controls exist, in order to provide better information on archaeological sites and improve management of the sites in their care. The emphasis is on demonstrating the value of positive partnerships and avoiding the current impression of archaeology as a negative restraint.

Local authority archaeologists have been consulted on agri-environment schemes, forestry proposals and hedge removal applications for several years. Only a reactive response, however, has been possible to limit damage to sites or advocate enhancements proposed by ecologists.

DEFRA agri-environment schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and Environmentally Sensitive Areas give incentives to farmers to manage habitats, archaeological sites and historic landscapes in a positive way (see Middleton,

16–21). Importantly, these criteria are given equal weighting when applications are considered, but before now the historic environment has often been overlooked. Therefore, one of the biggest challenges facing curatorial archaeologists is to make the best use of today's opportunities in order to influence future strategies.

Farm visits can be spent working through management issues of the archaeology on the farm, then harnessing the farmer's enthusiasm with a whole farm management plan and finding ways of caring for archaeological sites as part of the day-to-day farming activity. Zero-cost options are proposed alongside more holistic opportunities through Countryside Stewardship or County Council subsidised grants. Many of these funded initiatives are more likely to succeed if proposed alongside wildlife conservation measures. While this is beneficial to farmer, archaeologist and conservationist, some conservation schemes do not take account of the historic environment.



© Worcestershire County Council



*Medieval settlement remains, Naunton Beauchamp, Worcestershire. Attention is focused on respecting the grain of the historic landscape through planning control and environmental enhancement schemes, with archaeology contributing to a 'sense of place' in Worcestershire villages*

### **Joining forces with bio-diversity?**

Following the Rio Summit in 1992, farmers have recognised the big push to meet bio-diversity goals. Many large-scale habitat creation schemes are forging ahead while paying only lip-service to the historic environment in their written objectives. In reality, some unrecorded sites are suffering from poor management or destruction as a result.

The challenge for the Countryside Archaeology Advisor is to demonstrate the benefits of well-thought-out natural environment conservation schemes that take account of archaeology. The potential is undoubtedly there, for example, to incorporate restored historic water meadow and water control features into wetland re-creation schemes before modern hydrological controls are imposed on the landscape.

### **Risk – target – action**

Although schemes to benefit the natural environment are popular, we need to develop our own targets and objectives for the continued conservation of historic sites and landscapes. The first stages of this process are underway, with Historic Landscape Characterisation and MARS suggesting the way forward. The job for Countryside Advisors is to help target those types of monuments at greatest risk from agriculture and develop action plans on a local, regional and national basis.

To help us achieve this goal, we must use our Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs) to collate facts and figures on the condition of monuments that can be used in assessing risk. Not all relevant information is in an accessible format. In Worcestershire, we have gathered this information from meeting landowners during the Foot and Mouth recovery plan.

Government money is providing farmers who had animals slaughtered during FMD with enhanced business support. Critically, this will include advice on environmentally friendly farming from the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group. By working together on all 120 affected farms in Worcestershire, we are showing farmers the economic gains to be made from producing food with real benefits for the natural and historic environment. At the same time, we will be collecting data for future targeting of sites, while gauging farmers' responses.

In this growing sector of the profession, we are demonstrating the value of such posts in tackling the issues that face archaeology in the countryside. The projects and initiatives that you read about elsewhere in this issue are all invaluable to the practitioner in the field and help support this expanding sector. □

**Jez Bretherton**  
**Countryside Archaeology Advisor**  
**Worcestershire County Council**