

YCCART

Yatton Congresbury Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team

Newsletter December 2019

Chairman's chat

Welcome to the December edition of the YCCART newsletter. This edition is much shorter than previous editions with only three contributors. You could make a New Year resolution to contribute an article this coming year. It does not have to be a major piece of primary research. Janet's articles in this edition are perfect examples of sharing knowledge - links to an interesting newspaper article, in this case about using dogs in archaeology or something historical/archaeological noticed on a walk, visit or on holiday. It may be just one paragraph and a photograph, but it would be most welcome. As Vince has contributed the main article this month we have given Ferdie the temporary use of Vince's corner. May I wish you all a happy Christmas and a prosperous and healthy New Year.

Arthur Langley

Congresbury's other bridges

Bridges have an unshakable place in the human psyche: we talk about 'building bridges' when trying to reconcile different ideas - even the 'Bridge over Troubled Waters'. In myth, trolls live under them, and a 'rainbow bridge' reaches Asgard. I'm sure you can think of your own examples.

After seeing the YCCART report on 'Congresbury Bridge', the road bridge that joins the two halves of the village, it is inevitable to begin thinking about the other bridges over the Yeo in Congresbury. There eleven known bridges, or sites of bridges, in Congresbury crossing the Yeo, though obviously there are (or were) many more in the parishes between the Yeo's source at Rag Spring in Compton Martin, and the sea at Wick St Lawrence.

Some are recent: the Millennium bridge by the pub car park, or the bridge by the water metering site at Iwood, and some are of ancient (but unclear) age, like the bridge at the bottom of Somerset Lane, or Iwood bridge. Some have come and gone, like the old railway bridge on Weston Road.

In a watery landscape like that of Congresbury, people (and live stock) would have known how to deal with crossing rivers and moving about by water. We have photographs, for example, of peat boats operating in the Somerset Levels, and the movement of (small numbers) of livestock is equally well recorded. Nineteenth century records show that stock often simply swam across rivers when compelled: they obviously didn't choose to, since ditches would not then have kept them in fields. There is modern film of exactly this in rural India today, with cattle and keepers jumping in to swim across rivers.

I suspect (although I can't prove it) that in the days before Congresbury West Mill began (probably in the mid 11th century) there would have been unofficial use of fords, or even informal boatmen who lived close to river crossings, and could be summoned with a shout or a provided bell. Once the mill

weir was built, of course, this would probably rapidly become a crossing point in itself.

There are 'ford' names in adjacent villages (Sandford = 'the sandy ford'; Langford = 'the long ford' etc), but these do not appear to survive in Congresbury. The two 'ford' names occurring on the Congresbury Tithe Map, on the Weston Road, seem to refer to something between them, rather than a crossing place of the river (although by an amusing coincidence, they are exactly where the railway crossing of the river stood for a century or so!)

One of the problems with bridges is that unless they are grand, and have datable architectural features, they are very difficult to date, as the methods generally used (stone caissons on either side of the river, with a freestanding single stone arch between) have been known since Roman times, or before.



Fig 1: This late 20th century footpath bridge at Iwood replaces one recorded since at least 1885

In the accounts of Queen Elizabeth's Hospital, Bristol, who were for centuries the Lords of the Manor of Congresbury, however, there are accounts which imply other types of bridges, which do not survive today. The accounts talk of planks, boards and gravel being purchased for various bridges in Congresbury (and beyond). Presumably, these bridges were largely wooden in construction, and with the

inevitable widening of the river and engineering of the banks in recent centuries, have been lost, all but their known sites.



Fig 2: The Listed bow (bridge) at Iwood: all these bridges are difficult to photograph because of overgrowth

Minor bridges, otherwise, are simply not well recorded. Clues to their origins could be, for example, where a footpath crosses a river: the modern footpath bridge at Iwood, a product of North Somerset's Rights of Way team (see Fig 1), undoubtedly replaces an earlier one, since maps back to at least 1885 show a river crossing here.



Fig 3: The Listed bow (bridge) at Somerset Lane: subtly different from Iwood Bow

Three of Congresbury's river bridges, at Iwood, Somerset Lane and Park Lane were Listed at Grade II in 2007. Historic England's dating of them is characteristically vague - 'possibly late C-18 or early-C19' (see Figs 2 - 4). Bridges are, however, marked at all three sites on the deWilstar 1736-9 maps of Congresbury. At least two are named, but unfortunately, the



Fig 4: The Listed bow (bridge) at the Park, Congresbury: note the one stone deep parapet, which the others don't have

names are no longer readable. Incidentally, HE's use of the term 'Bow Bridge' is tautological: certainly in Somerset, the word 'bow' is understood to be the sort of structure seen at Somerset Lane today: I should know - I lived for many years at a place by the Cheddar Yeo called 'Hythe Bow'.

This illustrates one of the frustrating things about small rural bridges: despite being shown as river crossings on maps, it is not clear what physical structures are represented by the maps: they could represent a stone bridge, as at present, or simply a few planks. It is only in areas where bridges were erected as part of well-recorded large-scale works (like Kenn Moor Gate bridge, or Moor Street Bow, over the Little River in Yatton, which were constructed very soon after 1815, as directed by the Kenn Moor and Cleve Hill Inclosure Act of that date (Fig 5).



Fig 5: An unusual example of a small dated rural bridge (1815) at Kenn Moor Gate in Yatton

Neither does it help that there was not (strictly speaking) a name for bridge used in the medieval period. The Latin 'pons' could mean bridge or causeway, both of which could apply to most of these sites.

There is ongoing research into these 'other' bridges, and when sufficiently carried out, a report will be published on the YCCART web site. If nothing else, the historic photographs of these structures are captivating (Fig 6)



Fig 6: A party on the bridge on West Mill weir, c1910 (from the Andrew Sheppey collection)

Vince Russett

The extraordinary abilities of cadaver dogs!

Cadaver dogs are frequently used to locate the bodies of the newly deceased but did you know that they can sniff out the remains of skeletons buried hundreds, if not thousands, of years ago? An article appeared recently in the Guardian recounting the extraordinary ability of two dogs named Sattve and Mali on an archaeological site in Croatia.

In 2015 associate professor Vedrana Glavaš used the dogs to locate the presence of graves at an iron age hill-fort in the Velebit mountains along the Adriatic coast. Both dogs were independently put through their paces to locate previously excavated remains before being sent to a more remote area where graves were suspected.



Professor Glavaš believed that the porous rock around the excavated soil had probably absorbed enough of the aroma of decomposition that the dogs could still detect it whilst at the new location the bodies had been laid out on limestone slabs. At this new site the dogs found six tombs consisting of small stone burial chests in the middle of walled stone circles, each about five metres in diameter; the chests contained small bones and some artefacts.

The article can be found at
<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2019/oct/24/dogs-show-nose-archaeology-sniffing-out-ancient-tombs>

Janet Dickson

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

The walk on Charterhouse has been postponed until later in the year. This is due to the long spell of bad weather when surveying could not take place. This is particularly important for the RM15 team as the licence for work at Woodspring runs out at the end of January so every Thursday after Christmas is now precious.

We hope to have another walk for members and guests in the spring; possibly around Axbridge, date to be arranged.

Local Knowledge Quiz

Do you know in which nearby local church this fine fellow can be found?



Answer

This effigy of a 14th century knight can be found in St Bridget's Church, Chelvey and is considered to be the oldest memorial of its kind in the county. It was moved to St Bridget's when the Tynte Chapel was added in the 1600s.

Janet Dickson

Ferdie's Corner ~ (for one issue only)

"Ode to a whitish van"

The whitish van has disappeared to its final resting place
Some said it looked all forlorn, but how will Vince replace
For to Vince it was a dear old friend who had been with
him thro' thick and thin
A van you could leave anywhere with no fear of a break-in
It meant he leave it abandoned as the countryside he did
explore
And record all his findings to reveal to us more and more
But now he has a new car, a Berlingo in crimson red
Which may slowly change its colour, the "odds" are short
it's said.
And there is a PRIZE awaits you, so why not take the
plunge
If you correctly guess the hue. You'll win a cleaning
sponge.

Ferdi