



## Hereford, Herefordshire

Ἰερεφόρδ

Mill Street / St Owen's Street

Earthworks

Grid ref ..... SO 51? 40?

### The Defences of Hereford: Mill Street/St Owen's Street

The burh of Hereford was probably founded late in the C7 and was the earliest Saxon town west of the River Severn. A frontier town, it had a complex series of defences which were amongst the strongest in the land. Archæological work has exposed much of the history of these defences and a reconstructed section at the corner of Mill Street and St Owen's Street uniquely displays over 1,000 years of development.

The earliest (C9) defence included only the cathedral precinct and a few surrounding streets (area now bounded by Victoria Street, Eign Gate Street, High Street and High Town, and St John Street).

Later in the C9, the defended area was increased eastward by the inclusion of the land which was later to become the castle. These late C9th defences are displayed at the corner of Mill Street and St Owen's Street. A rampart built of a mixture of clay and turf sods, possibly from Widemarsh, was restrained and strengthened at the front with a timber fence. A ditch was dug some distance in front of the timber fence. The timber face has been reconstructed from the archæological evidence.

The pressure of the rampart eventually made the timber fence lean outwards and although repairs

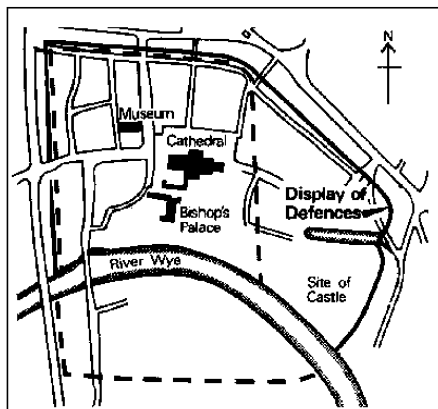
were attempted they were unsuccessful. Early in the C10, a stone wall was built in front of the timber fence to strengthen the defences. The remains of this stone wall have been consolidated and are on display. The wall may have originally been about 2.5m high, probably with a fence surmounting it.

The defences were allowed to fall into decay during the C10 and early C11. The stone wall collapsed and the rampart material partly filled the ditch. The town was burned by the Welsh in AD1055 but although it is recorded that the defences were then re-built by Harold Godwinson, the only apparent re-fortification was a fence, probably of brushwood and thorn palings, which surmounted the earlier works. It was not until the C12 that the defences were reinstated.

Further evidence of the burh defences can be seen on the Georgian front of Barclay's Bank at one end of Broad Street, where two of the ground floor window-sills slope slightly downwards towards the doorway between them, having been built across the infill of the Anglo-Saxon ditch, which has settled a little.

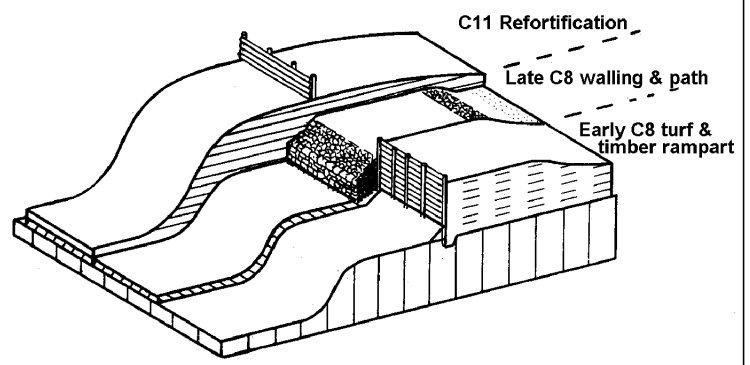
Full details of the excavations are included in a 3 volume report produced by the City of Hereford Archæology Committee and published by the CBA.

*Madeline Leonard*



### SAXON DEFENCES AT HEREFORD

(after City of Hereford Arch. Committee)





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Hereford, Herefordshire

Ἠερεφορδ

Grid refs .....see below
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Earthwork

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### Offa's Dyke

Conspicuous by its absence in most of Herefordshire, where its largest gap occurs, but it can be seen near:

Byford (OS 407 431);

Mansell Gamage (OS 396 455, and 403 440);

Yazor (OS 395 464 and 395 471);

Lyonshall (OS 328 560, 331 554 and 335 550);

Lower Harpton (OS 280 599);

Titley (OS 323 587, 325 578 and 325 581); and

Knill (OS 281 603, 288 595 and 294 594).

The Offa's Dyke Association is concerned with the long-distance path rather than the dyke itself, but they co-incide at certain places

The Offa's Dyke Visitor Centre, West Street, Knighton, Powys D7 1EW (01547 528753) has some information and an exhibition.

*Madeline Leonard*



Hereford, Herefordshire

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Cathedral church of St Katherine & St Mary Magdalene,  
*Mappa Mundi* and chained library exhibition.

Grid ref .... SO 510 397

Church fabric

Manuscripts

Sword

Now included in later S wall of Bishop's cloister: only surviving fragment of earlier two-storeyed chapel (demolished in first half of C18) built by Bishop Robert de Lorraine 1079–95 including earlier building – probably period C3

*Taylor*

Admission to Exhibition

Adults £4

Concessions £3

Family £10

Children under 5 free

Discounts for group bookings and school visits

Gospel Book (below)

The oldest book in the cathedral's possession is a C8 Gospel book, known to have belonged to it since the time of Bishop Æpelstan (1012–56). Bishops and deans of Hereford still take their oaths upon this book, which is carried in procession, on a cushion, at the relevant ceremonies. It is written in either Irish or Welsh script, and has affinities with the Book of Kells; the first page of each gospel is beautifully decorated, but that of St Luke is missing, and there has been a certain amount of

discoloration and fading. At the end of it are written, in Old English, records of a law suit between a mother and her son; this can be read in Whitelock: *English Historical Documents* vol. 1 (Charters and Laws 135) and has been cited as evidence that women at that time could hold and dispose of property in their own right.

Books

There is also a C9 book; *Katalogus Ieronimi*, and two earlier fragments (C7 or C8) of a commentary on St Matthew's Gospel.

Sword

Also in the cathedral library exhibition is a sword, thought to be of early 11th century date, with a pattern-welded blade, but without its hilt. It was found when excavations were carried out before the building of the new cathedral library.

References:

*Hereford Cathedral Records and Muniments*

F. C. and P. E. Morgan *A View from Hereford's Past Sites and Monuments Record*

*Madeline Leonard*





## Hereford, Herefordshire

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Museum and Art Gallery, Broad Street, Hereford HR4 9AU

☎ 01432 260692

Grid ref .....SO 510 397

Artifacts, various

## Location

The museum is situated opposite Hereford Cathedral.

## Opening times

All year:

Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 5pm

Sunday and Bank

Holiday Mondays 10am – 4pm  
(April – September only)

## Closed:

Good Friday

## Admission:

free (as of January 2000)

A small display, comprising:

## Pottery

Shard (shoulder/rim) of cooking pot with roller stamp decoration. Rim diameter originally about 13.5 cms. C10-C11.

West Midlands early mediæval ware, Fabric G1 (Chester-type ware). Excavated from Berrington Street, 1972-76.

## Comb

Carved bone, incomplete, battered, and with only about 30% of its teeth, but construction is visible, and engraved pattern is discernable on its back. Mid-C10-C11. Excavated from Victoria Street, Hereford, 1968.

## Dress hooks

Small copper-alloy decorated hooks used to fasten clothing. Each about 2 cms long. C10 – early C11. Excavated from Berrington Street in 1972 – 76 and the Brewery site in 1968.

## Spearhead

Iron, originally with traces of wooden shaft inside. C10 – C11, 35 cms long. Found in the River Lugg while diving in the river for alterations to the Lugg Bridge.

## The Marden Bell

Bell (large example of the cow-bell type) made from iron coated in bronze, riveted together down

each side. Approximately 12 inches high. Clapper is missing but loop remains. Probably C9-C11.

Found during the clearing of a pond adjoining the churchyard at Marden in 1848, recorded as being 18' below the bottom of the pond.

It may have been associated with the place where King Bhelbert's body was initially buried after his murder by Offa, prior to its translation to Hereford. In Wales and Ireland these bells often have sacred or superstitious beliefs attached to them, and are frequently associated with saints.

Legend has it that a bell of Marden church fell into the River Lugg and was seized by a mermaid. It was magically retrieved using a team of twelve white heifers (free-martins) yoked to the bell with yew wood, and with bands and goads made of mountain ash. The whole proceeding had to be conducted in perfect silence. The bell was successfully raised to the edge of the river. However, in his excitement, a driver cried out,

'In spite of all the devils in hell / Now we'll land Marden's great bell'.

This woke the mermaid, who had been sleeping inside the bell. Crying out,

'If it had not been / For your witten bands / And your yew tree pin, I'd have had your twelve free-martins in!'

She took the bell back into the river, where it is supposed to lie at the bottom of a deep, clear pool.

## 'Borderline' items

Sheep or cow bell

Iron bell of cowbell form, possibly used for livestock. 6.3 cm long; 4.7 cms wide. About 50% corroded away. Saxon or possibly Roman. Found at Croft Ambrey hillfort in 1960-66, unstratified.

Reliquary mount

Strap mount from a reliquary or portable shrine. Leaded bronze alloy body, with yellow and red enamel and niello decoration. Originally attached to the end of a leather or cloth strap. 3.3 cms long, 2.3 cms side, incomplete. Saxo-Norman C11-C12. Found at Weston-under-Penyard in 1992.

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## Hereford, Herefordshire

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### Human skin

Fragment of human skin from a church door. This is certainly pre-C14, as it was transferred to a new door during rebuilding. Tradition has it that the flayed skins of malefactors and Viking invaders were nailed to the doors as a warning to others..'

### Photograph

Coin of Offa not in the Museum;s collections.

### References

- R. Shoesmith: *The Finds Hereford City Excavations*, Vol 3 C.B.A. Research Report 56, 1985
- A. Sandford and R. Shoesmith: *Hereford Archæology in the City*: 1975.
- S. C. Stanford: *Croft Ambrey*: 1974