

## The River Lugg at Mordiford

Following on from Andy Tatchell's article about the Mordiford Mill and his work on restoring the Mill and its watercourses, I should like to continue the watercourses theme and write about the part played by the River Lugg in the history of Mordiford.

At the end of the Ice Age the River Teme, swollen with water from melting ice, joined the Lugg and formed one mighty river flowing down the centre of what was to become Herefordshire and carved out a great wide valley. Later moraine blocked the outlet of the Teme and forced it to flow East to join the Severn. This left the wide valley we see today, underlain by sheets of gravel, to be occupied by the much smaller Lugg. Nowadays  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the River Lugg is in Herefordshire while its catchment occupies  $\frac{1}{2}$  the county.

Through most of post-Roman history bulk carriage was by water. There were 4 Parliamentary Navigation Acts to improve the state of the Wye and the Lugg (1662, 1695, 1727 and 1809). Water mills were the main statute matter of the 1665 Act, so it affected the Lugg greatly as it featured a greater incidence of water mills length for length than the Wye. Physically the Lugg is a very sinuous river so that many of the meanders would have posed great difficulties for the teams of bow hauliers, (there was never an intention to provide a horse-towing path for the Lugg) and these same meanders would have also restricted the dimensions of river craft. Consequently, it seems doubtful that some of the larger Wye trows could have ventured much beyond Lugg Mills and the lower reaches. Furthermore, for much of the year the shallowness of the river in places would have restricted the draught of some larger vessels; whilst at other times the Lugg was, and still is, notoriously plagued by flooding. Various attempts were made to improve the navigation by removal of mill weirs and by dredging and by constructing locks.

In the Act of 1695 the proposed navigable portions of the river were required to be surveyed. It was recommended that the low arch of Mordiford Bridge be raised, shallows below the bridge be alleviated and a "hedge weir" be constructed at Lugg's Mouth. This weir was to be left in place until the pound lock below the bridge was completed. Information about cargoes carried down the Lugg over the years is sketchy; the mainstays were timber, cider, malt, hops, wool, corn and oak bark for tanning. The most famous boat cargo to travel on the Lugg through Mordiford was the bells of Leominster Priory in 1756. They were taken on down the Wye to Chepstow to be recast before returning back upstream to Leominster. Navigation on the Lugg steadily decayed, with the last regular usage – to Tidnor and Lugg Bridge Mills - being around 1829.

We have no definite date for the building of the pound lock at Mordiford. It has been dated by the Woolhope Club as being between 1700 and 1750. They date the hedge weir at Lugg's Mouth (of which I can see no sign nowadays) as being around 1702. The pound lock has plenty of visible traces. The slot in the stonework where the lock gates once were can still be clearly seen, a curved piece of iron from the closing mechanism is still in place and the walls on both sides of the lock are still obvious. Our lock has an annual visit from English Heritage, who photograph it but, sadly, do nothing to prevent its further deterioration.

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