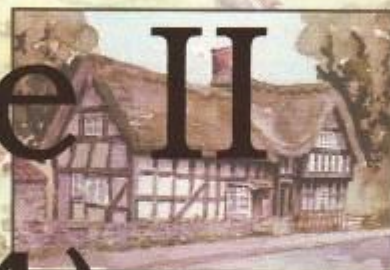


Living History

Yarpole Group Parish
2000



Volume II
(2004)



Living History.

NEWSLETTER JUNE 2004.

Welcome to our 4th Newsletter – in time for the Fete- where we will have our *Living History* display and at which, hopefully, the latest edition of the Parish Photo CD will be available. Also we hope to present preliminary reports (1) on the results of the Monumental Inscriptions Project and (2) on the History of the Bell Tower.

With this edition we have included two articles;

- (1) An account of the hill-fort at Croft Ambrey; and
- (2) The medieval floor tiles at Croft Church.

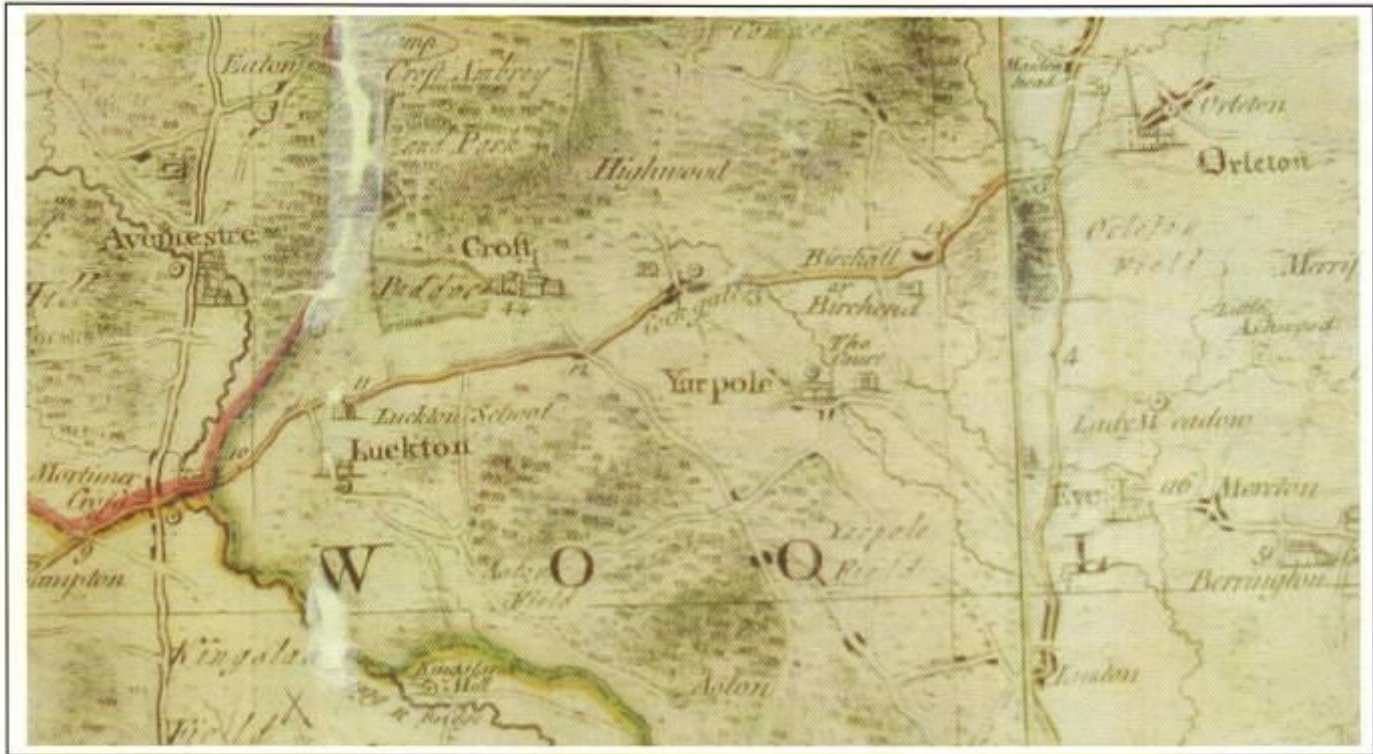
Ahead of schedule (i.e. before the provision of the proposed shed), the Bell Tower was finally cleared just in time for the Lecture and Guided Tour on the 8th May.



It is proposed that (1) an information leaflet be produced;
(2) the lighting be improved; and
(3) an audio-presentation be considered.

And we hope to produce a full article for publication at a later date.

Launch of possible projects based on Isaac Taylor's Map of 1754.



- (1) Already some members are interested in studying the road (and lane) network, including the Turnpikes, throughout the Parish;
- (2) Detailed interpretation of the other features on the map; and
- (3) Identification of the actual sites of the original milestones.

We could take the opportunity to discuss this at the Fete.

Also to be discussed at the Fete, is how we should proceed with the development of our embryonic Web-Site which you can find at – www.freewebs.com/yarpolelivinghistory/

Nature News;- Another sighting of a Red Kite, this time over Yarpole, on Monday 24th May.

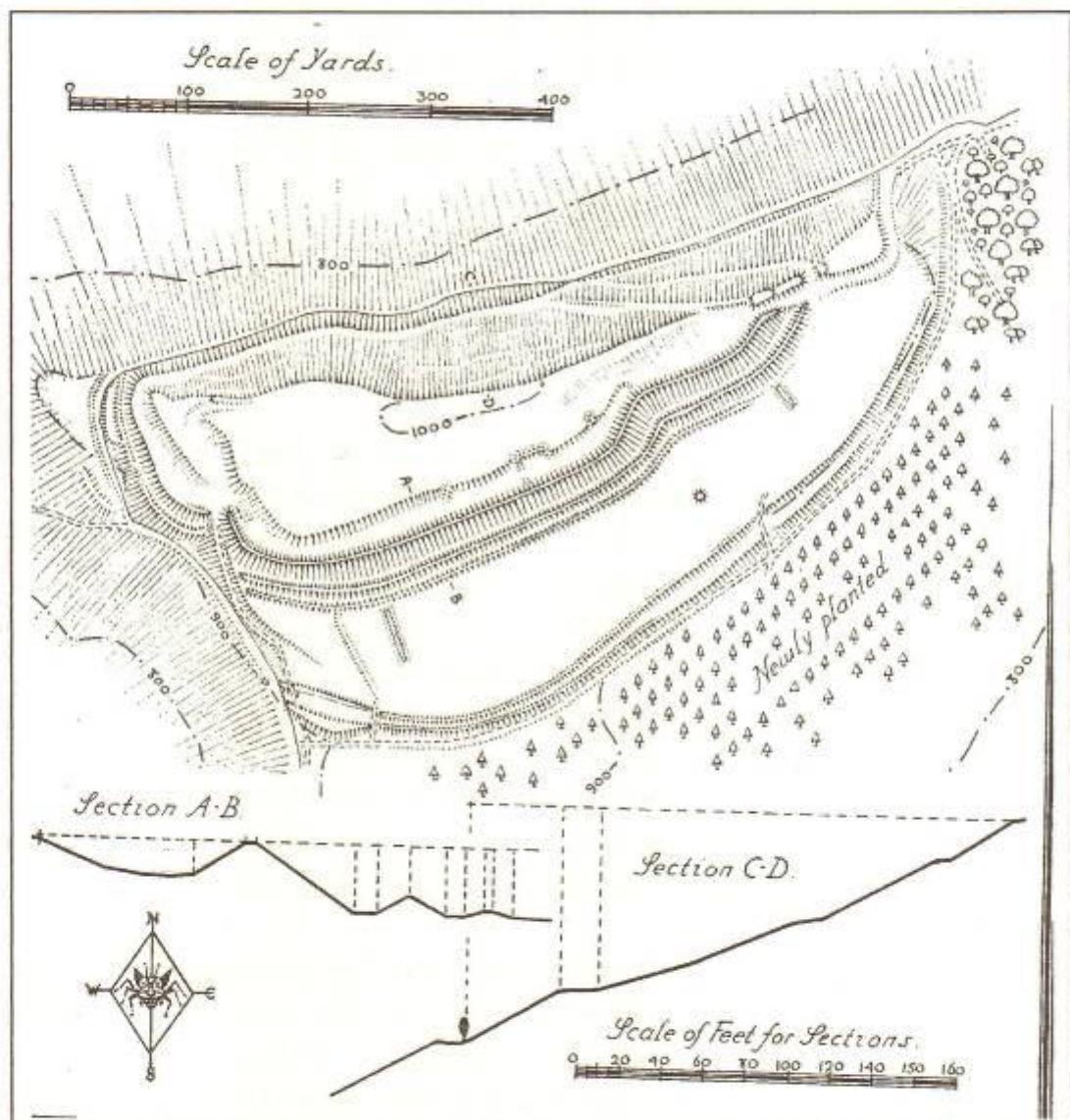
On-going research;- Quaker wedding in Yarpole in 1686.

See you at the Fete; otherwise –

Date of next meeting – Tuesday 18th July at The Bell.

Croft Ambrey.*

Croft Ambrey occupies a prime defensive position on top of a long narrow hill, with a very abrupt scarp on the north, and gentler, though still steep, slopes on the other sides. Archaeological excavations under the direction of Dr. S.C. Stanford, between 1960-66, revealed that in about 550 BC, a small rampart and ditch had been built, to protect an enclosure of about 5.5 acres, which was extended later by a more massive rampart, to almost 9 acres.



Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, Herefordshire Vol.III.

Within the inner enclosure lines of regularly spaced small four-post huts were built. These huts varied in size between 1.8 and 3.6 square metres, about half being dwellings to accommodate an estimated population of just over 500, and the other half, the smaller ones, granaries or store-

houses. The evidence that they had been regularly rebuilt would confirm the continuity of occupation throughout the 600 years of the hill fort's life.

Great importance was put on the design of the protective gateways. The first gateway of the enlarged hill fort had been a simple double portal, formed by three large posts, which was subsequently rebuilt, the gate passage narrowed to a single portal and lengthened. A pair of rectangular guardrooms was built using sandstone, brought from the foot of the hill, for the wall footings; later a bridge was added across the passage in front of the gate, altogether a huge construction.

Outside the main enclosure there is a further enclosed area of about 15 acres. No evidence of habitation was found, but this 'annexe' contains a sacred site, - The Mound - where, it is thought, the villagers performed religious ceremonies, which, whatever form they took, left considerable quantities of charcoal, ash and burned bone.

Primarily the site was fortified for the defence of the population, which, as has been noted, could have been over 500. To support this size of population would have required a very efficient system of farming, for the hinterland of Croft Ambrey, available for agriculture, would have been limited in extent to something akin to our present day parish which extends to 4,600 acres.

Across Bircher Common there are traces of early field cultivation, with two or three visible earthwork enclosures possibly dating from this time. These Celtic fields were small - being between a half and one acre; their smallness was the consequence of various factors; as each area was cleared so it would be intensively cultivated, but their simple wooden plough (the crook-ard), was inefficient and each field had to be 'cross-ploughed'. They would have had a simple system of crop rotation, likely to have included arable fields for the production of wheat, and some fields would have been set aside for the production of winter fodder, for we know that as well as cattle, sheep were over-wintered, no doubt for wool production; and loom-weights have been found - as evidence of weaving.

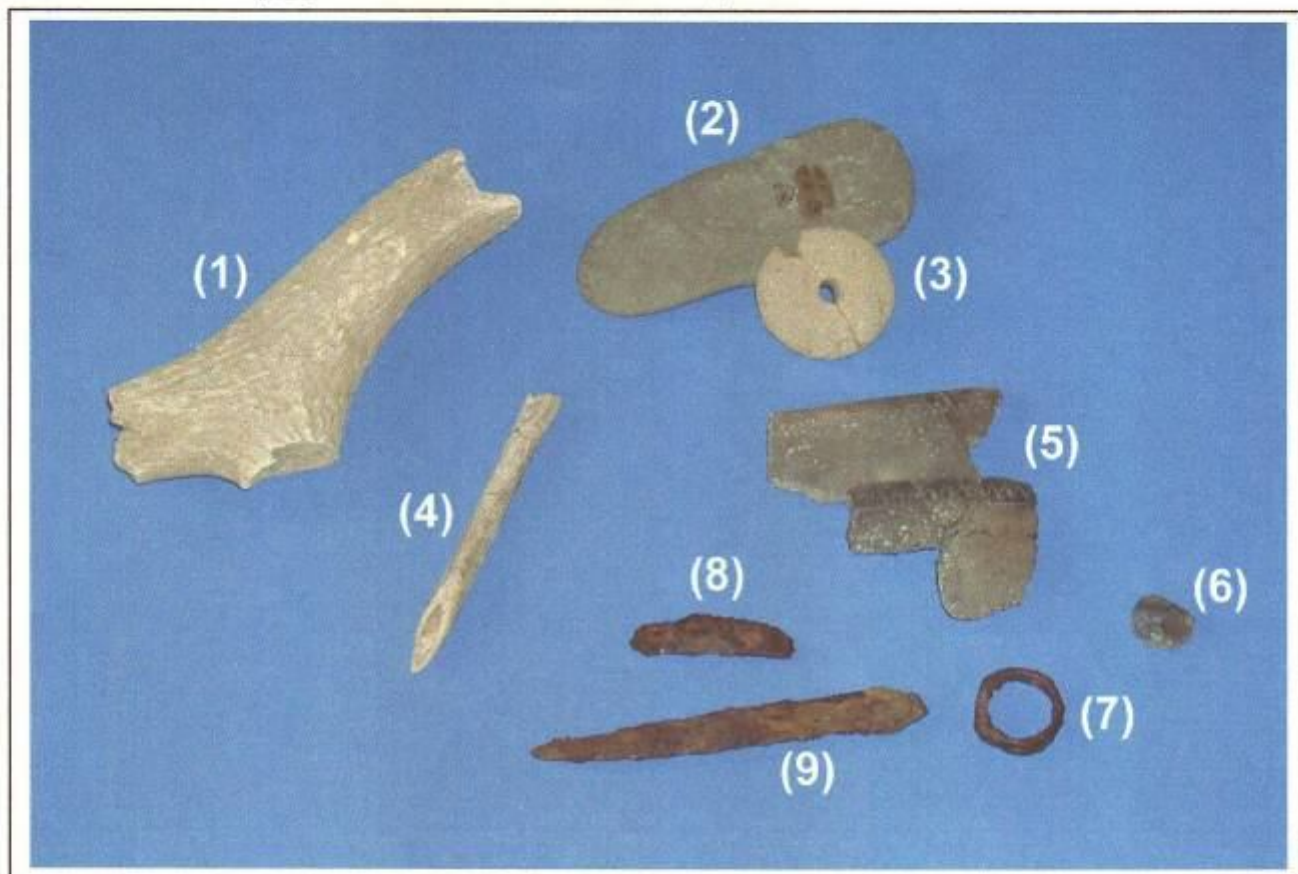
There would have been hill pasture for sheep and cattle, and they had goats to help in the clearance of scrubland; bracken would have been used for bedding cattle and also probably (when young) for feeding. A considerable amount of woodland would have been retained, for timber and coppicing, and in which pigs could forage freely. Meadows, on the lower slopes nearer the flood plain, would have provided summer pasture and/or winter fodder.

It is likely that in times of attack, the livestock was not corralled into the hillfort or other protected enclosures, but dispersed widely to make rustling more difficult.

Selection of Finds at Croft Ambrey:

During these excavations numerous articles of everyday living were unearthed; these are now held at Hereford Museum. By courtesy of the Herefordshire Heritage Service a selection has been photographed.

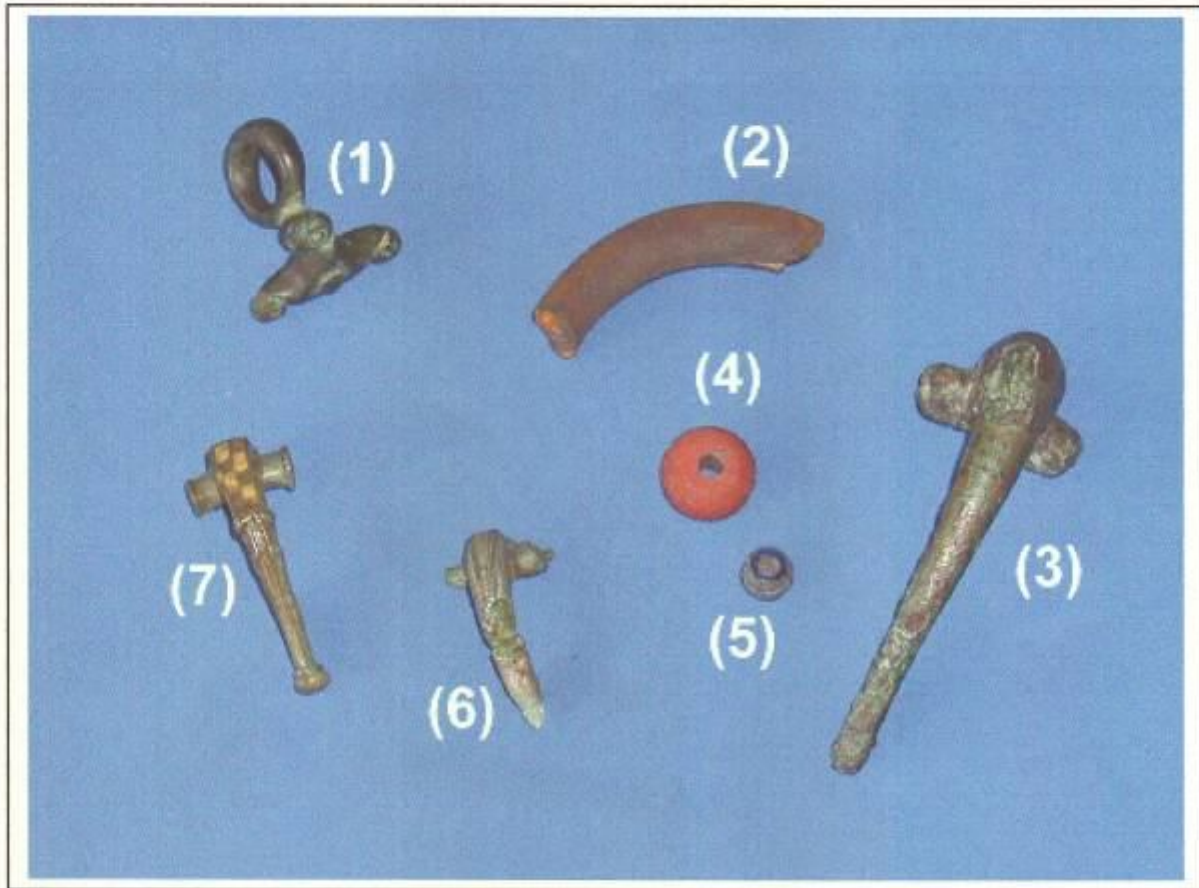
Photo ONE (approx. one-third actual size).



- (1) Piece of antler showing clean saw cut (no.5 page 179).
 - (2) Probably a whetstone for sharpening knives (approx 6 inches long).
 - (3) Spindle whorl for spinning wool (no 2 page 181).
 - (4) Bone 'gouge' probably used as a shuttle on a loom (no 6 page 178).
 - (5) Pieces of Iron Age pottery – note the decoration on the rims.
 - (6) Small flint scraper.
 - (7) Iron ring. (8) Small saw blade (no 6 page 169).
 - (9) Part of iron blade, probably from a dagger (no 3 page 167).
- (the references in brackets are to illustrations in *Croft Ambrey*, by S.C.Stanford).

Selection of Ornaments:

Photo TWO (approx. actual size).



(1) Bronze triskele pendant (no 2 page 159).

(2) Fragment of shale bracelet (no 15 page 159).

(3) 'Dolphin' brooch in bronze (no 1 page 145).

(4) Glass bead (no 21 page 159). (5) Glass bead (no 20 page 159).

(6) Bronze brooch with spring and pin intact (no 2 page 145).

(7) Bronze brooch with enamelling (no 4 page 145).

(the references in brackets are to illustrations in *Croft Ambrey* by S.C. Stanford).

The main cereal grown was spelt wheat, which was milled between two specially shaped stones (a quern), to provide flour for the baking of bread; (bread wheat, with its higher gluten content, was not introduced until the time of the Saxons).

The social structure of the community at Croft Ambrey would have reflected the Celtic tribal system with a ruling chief, supported by members of the warrior aristocracy, there would be those with special skills and training - the craftsmen, bards and Druids, and then the freemen farmers who made up most of the population; all, except the Druids, would have been prepared to fight when required. Although Celtic society was definitely male dominated the role of women was more prominent than in Greek or Roman society.

The villagers would have been skilled in working wood to provide buildings and utensils; wool was spun and woven; leather would have been available for clothes and containers; antlers were fashioned into handles of knives; iron, possibly from Clee Hill or the Forest of Dean, would have been forged into weapons and cutting tools.

In the early stages there was hardly any pottery, but from the 4th century B.C., pottery became more common, originating from potters' workshops in the Malvern Hills region, 18 miles away. The discovery of broken pottery which had been repaired using iron rivets, would suggest that new supplies may not have been always available; but it does confirm their skill in the working of iron.

Amongst the sherds (small pieces of pottery), some 'briquetage' has been identified as the remnants of the porous clay pots in which salt was dried and stored. This salt had come mostly from Droitwich, where brine, from the springs, was first boiled in open pans and the resulting wet salt crystals were scraped into porous clay pots to dry. Traders would then transport these pots on foot or by donkey over a wide network of 'salt-ways'. Trading, confirmed by the presence of salt, iron and of pottery from Malvern, would have played an important part in the life of the community; their excess wool, woven cloth and wheat being used for barter.

Current archaeological research* would suggest that the earlier dense population within Croft Ambrey declined after 100 BC and that the large hillforts, such as Croft Ambrey, continued to act as social, political, economic and religious centres within a more widely populated landscape.

* Research paper available as a 'library copy'.

On Croft Ambury

by Geoffrey Bright.*

I climbed the hill where many years ago, The Ancient Briton made his final stand,
And gazing at the wondrous scene below, Thanked Him who made this lovely, peaceful
land.

For far as eye could travel, were the hills, The streams, the woods, the rich red soil,
The verdant fields, the babbling hurrying rills, The age-long fight of Nature 'gainst man's
toil.

Far to the west, the broken line of Wales, Was marked by Hergest, Hanter and the Gore;
Like galleons rigged with square top-gallant sails, To garner fickle winds that blow off
shore;

And nearer was the long Silurian ridge, That runs past lovely Ludlow to the Clees,
With Wopley, Shobdon, Bircher, Wenlock Edge, Gatley and high Vinnals with its trees.

And to the East, as if they stand on guard, The Malverns rising from the Severn's plain;
And Hegdon Hill that lies beyond Bromyard, And in the valley Lemster's Norman fane;
And softly, grey against the dark green trees, Of Eaton Hill, and Dinmore's wooded slope,
The smoke that wafted slowly in the breeze, Marked Lemster's Town, Stoke Prior and
Hope.

And further to the South I could discern, Beyond the glorious valley of the Wye,
Lone Garway's coloured coat of gorse and fern, And May Hill's clump of firs against the
sky:

And Skirrid's Holy Mountain, with the rift That gives distinction to that pointed height,
And nestling at the foot of Ladylift, Old Weobley's patch of chequered black and white.

And then I saw the grandest of them all, A massive line of blue, and black, and grey,
Black Mountains, running like a wall From Pandy and Pontrilas up to Hay:

Where once King Arthur and his valiant knights, On evenings when the mountain air
was still,

Pursued the wild red deer upon these heights, Or sat at leisured ease on Merbach Hill.

Then far beyond the border town of Hay, Naked and gaunt, without a single tree,
The Brecknock Beacons seemed to bar the way To Pembroke, and the stormy Irish Sea.

And as I gazed, I slipped into the past, And thought I saw a little cavalcade
Of men in armour, riding very fast; Wild Welshmen on a border raid.

And now the magic circle was complete, Except for hills that flanked the silvery Wye;
The Eppynts with their little fields so neat, Like coloured patchwork quilts, hung out to
dry.

And there, within this ring of noble heights, The varied hues of nature in accord,
With boundless sky, and ever-changing lights, The pleasant fertile land of Hereford.

*Geoffrey Bright was born in Ludlow in 1895; educated at the Grammar School and then at Harper Adams College. In the 1st World War he served with the King's Shropshire Light Infantry and led the assault at the Battle of Bligny for which he and the battalion were awarded the Croix de Guerre. He was the *Bright of Russell, Baldwin and Bright*, specialising in the fine arts. He wrote a successful play – *Memories*, a hymn, an anthology of anecdotes – *West of the Malverns* and a book of poetry – *Hereford is Heaven*, from which this poem is taken. After retirement he lived in Kingsland; he died on 16th Sept 1980, and is remembered by those who knew him as an expert in his field, an honourable man, a lovable man, a man who loved Herefordshire.

Parish History:

A Living History.

Medieval Floor Tiles at Croft Church:

During the archaeological excavations at Croft Castle in 2002, when the foundations of the former medieval castle were explored, part of a relief-patterned tile was found which was presumed to be from the floor of the chapel associated with the medieval castle. This tile matched those laid as the floor in the nave when the present church of St. Michael was rebuilt around 1515. They were laid in a random fashion and are now very worn; a few were set in the facing of the alter step, and have therefore been protected from wear (see immediately below).



The original medieval tiles in the floor of the nave.

Tilemaking was introduced to Britain in the thirteenth century in the service of the Church and the King, when mosaic, relief and inlaid tiles began to be used as floor coverings, to add colour and design to the interiors of abbey churches and royal palaces. The inlaid tiles, made from red-firing clay, were the most common type of tile. An impression was stamped into the clay and white slip was poured into the hollow for decoration. After a period of drying the tile was scraped level, covered with a transparent glaze and fired. After firing, the reddish clay and the white slip looked brown and yellow-white respectively. All this work was done by hand and was therefore labour-intensive. Only grand institutions such as the Church and the royal court could afford such ornamentation.

With the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536-40, the craft of making inlaid tiles died out and it was 300 years later when the technique was re-invented for mass production. Tile makers such as Walter Chamberlain of Worcester copied the medieval designs and this is nicely illustrated in this photograph of the floor tiles at Croft church which shows a diagonal division between (a 'patch' of) the Victorian encaustic tiles (probably from the Yarpole bell tower) in the upper left and the medieval tiles in the lower right. The medieval tiles are more worn but have more intricate designs but the resemblance is obvious.

