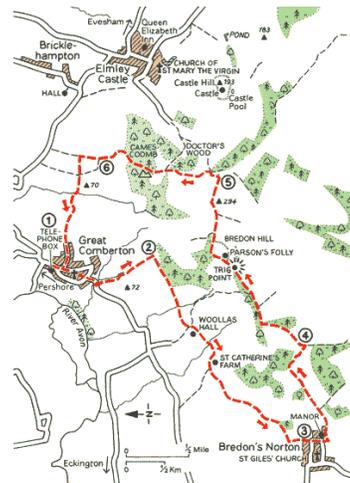


Holt WI

February's monthly meeting saw an almost full house, despite the cold and uninviting weather and we were richly entertained by an enthusiastic talk from Deborah Overton on the History and Archaeology of Bredon Hill, which focussed particularly on the hill in the pre-Roman years, when an Iron Age Hill Fort dominated the landscape. The remains of a medieval village can be found at the base of the hill, with a view to Woollas Hall, the site of an original manor house. This is a Jacobean mansion, built from stone quarried from the hill, but it probably contains a medieval core. Of course, the Roman impact was there as well; one interesting side-step about Worcestershire's role in Roman times links to the very fertile soil of the county. There was considerable wealth in Worcestershire with strong and large half-timbered farmsteads, but they lacked the status of areas in Gloucestershire, where exquisite villas and, of course, the baths, pinpointed the Roman elite.



The Roman farmsteads and much of the infrastructure of paths, wells etc, were, as far as can be ascertained, in existence before the Romans arrived and were merely requisitioned and adapted. Vast amounts of Roman pottery indicate that it was a massive industry in Worcestershire with industrial-sized “factories” in the Malvern area. Iron Age pots were made of wood and horn, so we know that the clay production was a Roman innovation. Incidentally, if you feel moved to identify a shard of pottery found out walking, look for a reddy-yellow exterior, with a grey core. The Roman firing process could not reach the temperatures of a kiln – hence the grey core.

We “walked” along the base of the hill, through a series of slides, and then progressed up it, stopping at sites of particular interest. Ridges and furrows mark out the strips of medieval farming; raised mounds show the platforms of the medieval houses; the spring half-way up the hill has always been of spiritual significance, from Iron Age beliefs, through a medieval chapel, identified by encaustic tiles, and a later church – all excavated in the 1930s.



Reaching the top of the hill, we looked briefly at Parson’s Folly Tower (built only to allow its owner to boast that it was a foot taller than Broadway Tower), now something of a bristling monstrosity of mobile phone masts. Then came the really interesting history of the Iron Age Hill fort. The excavations have proved to be most informative about how highly developed this society was; obviously they had iron tools and weapons, but also there were sophisticated farming methods, although the diet sounded rather bland: a good deal of meat (spit roasted) and bread. Vegetables were mainly roots and beans and what could be foraged from the wild hedgerows; it was the Romans who brought in salad and most of the fruit we cultivate today. The only apple in Iron Age Britain was a crab apple! The fort yielded evidence of some exquisite textiles, especially plaids, with bright dyes and beautiful, highly wrought jewellery. On a more macabre note, burial habits revealed some probable superstitions, such as the severing of the head after death to release the spirit. There is also some evidence that the “sky burials” (known from the Native American tribes) may also have been practiced by Iron Age Britons. All in all, we were treated to a fascinating glimpse into Bredon Hill’s history.

As we move into Spring, we have plans afoot to get out and about. The Evesham Country Centre, the Hop Pocket and Burford House are on the list. We have plans for an open meeting with the renowned “pearl lady”, Frances Benton, and two coffee mornings to help the coffers. So, as ever, we would still like to remind readers that, we welcome new members. We meet on the first Thursday of the month at 7 pm, Holt Village Hall.