

BRIDGETOWN WEIR

EXTON

SOMERSET

Heritage Statement and Statement of Significance



South West Archaeology Ltd. report no. 210507



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Bridgetown Weir, Exton, Somerset Heritage Statement and Statement of Significance

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Report Version: Final

Issued: 7th May 2021

Work undertaken by SWARCH for
The West Country Rivers Trust (The Client)

SUMMARY

South West Archaeology Ltd. was commissioned to produce a heritage statement for a weir located to the north east of Exton, Somerset. This work was undertaken on behalf of the West Country Rivers Trust in advance of proposals to modify the fish passage which was cut into the weir in the 1950s and is a concrete structure. Proposals also include placing a concrete cap on the drop-weir element.

The weir at Bridgetown was built with seemingly two distinct elements and functions; primarily supplying water to a mill c.450m to the south with a drop-weir element forming quite a head of water behind it. The weir also creates a white-water or waterfall effect across the river, which may be for aesthetic or sport-fishing purposes. The extant mill building is of likely 19th century date, acknowledged on the HER as being 'post-medieval' and although it appears on the Tithe Map of 1838, it does not appear on the surveyor's draft of 1802. The weir has been altered and repaired in the 20th century, using concrete and a fish passage was cut into the structure in the 1950s, directly associated with sport fishing and ecology.

The site inspection was undertaken in the spring when water levels were relatively low. Recommendations are for any modifications works to be monitored briefly at the start, when a boom or similar is in place and the drop-weir crest fabric is exposed and dry. In relation to the extent of the works, 'a light touch approach' with minimal interference is of course preferable, however, concrete as a material is not considered unfavourable as it has been used so extensively elsewhere in the structure. Aesthetics are however very important to the success of these alterations from a heritage perspective and the different profiles of the two distinct elements of the weir must be retained.



May 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

LOCATION:	BRIDGETOWN WEIR
PARISH:	EXTON
COUNTY:	SOMERSET
NGR:	SS 9232 3376
PLANNING APPLICATION:	PRE-PLANNING
SWARCH REF:	EBW21

1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

South West Archaeology Ltd. (SWARCH) was commissioned by the West Country Rivers Trust (the Client) to undertake an assessment of the weir at Exton and produce a heritage statement and statement of significance. This work was undertaken in advance of any proposed changes to the existing fish passage to facilitate fish movement along the River Exe. The report places the weir in its historical and archaeological context.

1.2 TOPOGRAPHICAL AND GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Bridgetown Weir is located to the north of the settlement of Bridgetown and just to the north west of Exton, on the west side of the A396. It is located along the River Exe to the south of its confluence with the River Quarme, at a height of c.180m AOD. The soils of this area are the well-drained fine loamy or fine silty soils over rocks of the Denbigh 1 Association (SSEW 1983). These soils overlie alluvial deposits of sands, silts and gravels which overlie the sandstones of the Pickwell Down Sandstones Formation (BGS 2021).

1.3 HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Bridgetown Weir is located within the ecclesiastical parish of Exton c. 250m north west of the settlement of that name. Exton was recorded at Domesday in the lands of Bishop Geoffrey of Coutances and the Lord of the manor was Drogo. It had been held in 1066 by King Edward and Edwin, son of Burgred. The church in Exford is thought to contain masonry of Norman date. The Exmoor Historic Environment Record (HER) documents Bridgetown Weir as a post medieval weir with a pool on the downstream side named 'Shetter's Pool'. A leat leaving the river on the upstream side of the weir may have been constructed to facilitate this (MEM 24926).

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The site visit was carried out by Emily Wapshott on 28th April 2021. The work was undertaken in line with best practice and follows the guidance outlined in: ClfA's *Standard and Guidance for the Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures* (2014) and Historic England's *Understanding Historic Buildings: A Guide to Good Recording Processes* (2016). The River Exe was fairly low so assessment of the weir in person was possible, however the water was flowing over the functional drop-weir section and more recording of this may be considered necessary as part of the programme of works since this will bear most of the alteration.

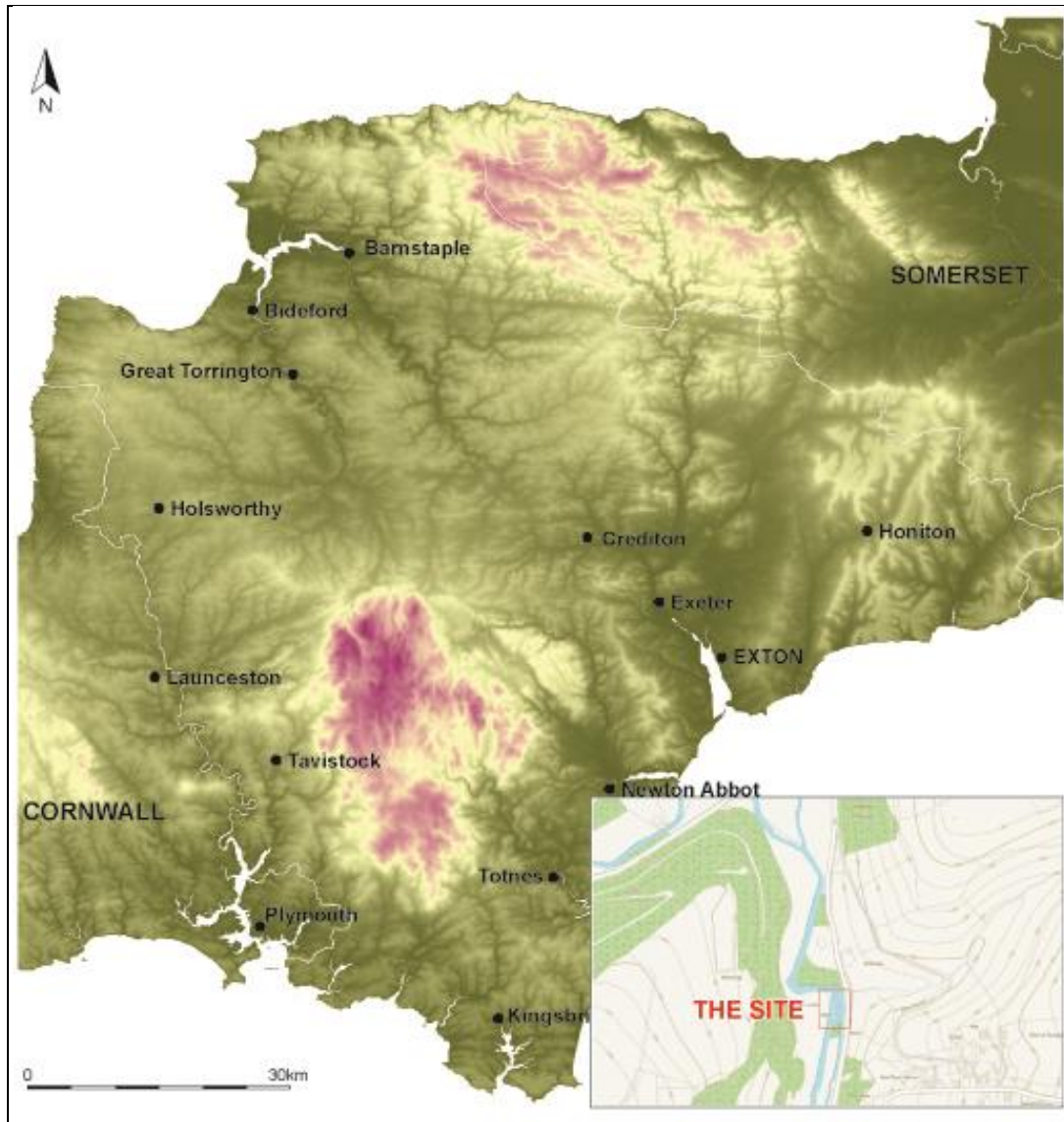


FIGURE 1: LOCATION MAP.

2.0 HISTORIC STRUCTURAL ASSESSMENT OF WEIR

2.1 SITE DESCRIPTION

Bridgetown Weir is located to the north west of Exton, along the River Exe. The weir appears to be associated with a leat to extract water from the river to feed Bridgetown Mill, a post medieval corn mill which lies c. 450m to the south of the weir. The mill is now a residential dwelling, run as the Exe Valley Caravan Site, within landscaped gardens which border the river and weir. The weir lies just south of the confluence of the Rivers Exe and Quarme, below a point at which the river forms an almost 90-degree bend to the east and then again to the south. Whilst both the Quarme and Exe are quite sinuous in their passage through the landscape with many horseshoe meanders, the regularity of the banks above the weir, with some visible under-building and revetment banking to sections of the western riverbank would suggest that the river has in fact been considerably engineered here, brought west, nearer the road, the banks rationalised, to serve the mill.

Just north of the weir is a large culvert carrying a tributary under the road, which feeds into the river above the weir and along the north bank is a small section of marshy scrub woodland. On the east side of the river, the A396 road is terraced into the slope. The road is retained by a tall rubble stone wall alongside the weir, the road widens at this point, seemingly creating a viewing point along this historic tourist route which followed the river up to Dunster. To the north-east alongside the road is Weirside, a 19th century cottage, which formerly looked down on the site. Above the road wooded steep slopes rise up to the east to Exton village, the landscape much more enclosed on this side. Generally the setting is of simple rural farming character but with Exmoor's typical sporting and tourism elements.

2.2 HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Exton was recorded as Essatuna at Domesday and formed part of the estate of the Bishop of Coutances in Carhampton Hundred. It was held by Drew or Drogo of the Bishop of Coutances. No reference to a mill is made in the Domesday records. There are limited documentary references to a mill at Bridgetown or a leat supplying it until the 1838 Tithe apportionment for Exton. One possible document held by the Somerset Heritage Centre relates to a draft conveyance of a water mill in Exton in 1827 although it does not state specifically which mill (DD/CCH/3/1). It is possible that this document may provide information regarding the earlier origins and ownership of the mill, if it refers to Bridgetown Mill. The tithe apportionment of 1838 records Ann Clatworthy as resident at 'Mill house, garden and Blade Mill'. The property is owned by James Liscombe. The only Ann Clatworthy resident at Bridgetown in the 1841 census was 8 years old at that date however a property named 'mills' was occupied by a Joan Clatworthy (70), John Clatworthy (50) and Jane Clatworthy (45), along with two lodgers. A number of other properties are recorded at Bridgetown showing the settlement was well established by this date. The 1851 census records John Clatworthy (61) as a miller who resides with his unmarried sister and brother, also recorded as a miller. Their residence is given only as Bridgetown Village but it is assumed they resided at the mill.

By 1861 Robert Liscombe is recorded at Mill House as the miller, resident with his wife and children. The 1871 census shows he had been replaced by James Phillips as Miller and wheelwright who by 1881 is still resident but recorded as auctioneer and miller employing two men. By 1891 William Phillips appears to have replaced James Phillips as miller and auctioneer and a Charles Reed (miller) is also resident at another property in Bridgetown. By 1901 William Phillips is recorded as a grain merchant with William Hockworthy, also a Bridgetown resident documented as a miller. William Phillips is recorded as an auctioneer in 1911 although still resident at Bridgetown Mills. William Hockworthy is documented as a miller's labourer. Although

there appears to be no documentary evidence for Bridgetown Mill and its leat prior to the mid 19th century, the census data suggests it had a relatively transient tenancy but by the later 19th century was evidently prospering, with its occupants branching out into other professions and employing millers in the village. Documentary references to the weir are limited however a document relating to the installation of the fish pass at Bridgetown weir in 1954 is held by the National Archives at Kew (MAF 209/1364).



FIGURE 2: VIEW OVER THE RETAINING WALL ALONGSIDE THE ROAD, SHOWING THE DROP-WEIR ELEMENT AND LEAT (TO THE LEFT OF SHOT) LEADING TO THE MILL; FROM THE NORTH-EAST.



FIGURE 3: THE A396 ROAD, WITH RETAINING WALL TO THE WEIR AND WIDE GRASS VERGE, WITH 19TH CENTURY WEIRSIDE COTTAGE; VIEWED FROM THE SOUTH.

2.3 CARTOGRAPHIC SOURCES

The 1802 Ordnance Survey draft map for Minehead appears not to show either Bridgetown Weir or the leat leading off it from the east. The settlement of Bridgetown appears relatively well developed although it is not clear whether a building is shown in the location of the mill. Certainly there is no evidence of a leat supplying this location.



FIGURE 4: EXTRACT FROM THE 1802 ORDNANCE SURVEY SURVEYOR'S DRAFT MAP (BL). THE SITE OF THE WEIR IS INDICATED.

The 1840 Tithe map for Exton shows the location of the weir, although a weir is not depicted, however the pool to the south of the weir and the mill leat running parallel to the river down to Bridgetown Mill can clearly be seen, which suggests the weir and leat is likely to have both been constructed between 1802 and 1840.

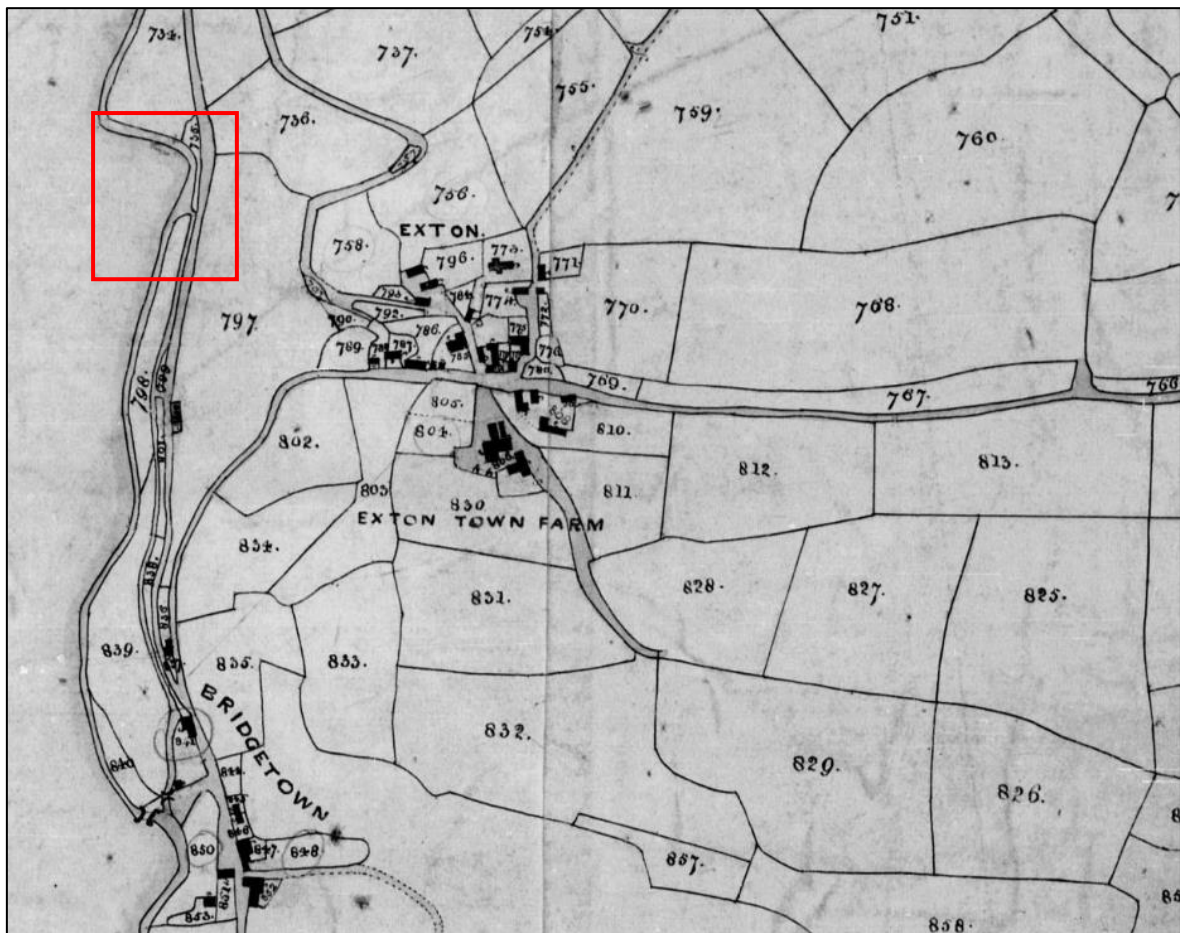


FIGURE 5: EXTRACT FROM THE 1840 EXTON TITHE MAP (PRO). THE SITE OF THE WEIR IS INDICATED.

TABLE 1: EXTRACT FROM THE 1838 TITHE APPORTIONMENT FOR EXTON.

No.	Landowner	Occupier	Name	Cultivation
Widlake and Soggetts				
735	Abraham Smith Senior Esquire	James Melhuish	Waste	
Ridges				
797	Guy Robert Everard	Lawrence How	Bar Close	Pasture
Vinnacombe				
799	Guy Robert Everard	Thomas Phillips	Garden	
801			Garden	
836	Reverend Charles William Everard	George Blackmore	Garden	
Sundries				
798	James Liscombe	William Clatworthy	Weir Land	Meadow
841		Ann Clatworthy	Mill house, Garden and Blade Mill	
Exton Town Farm				
835	Guy Robert Everard	Lawrence How	Bridge Town Cleeve	Meadow
839			Lower Ham	Meadow
837		George Blackmore	Cottage and Garden	
838		Ann Clatworthy	Garden	
850		John Ridler	Meadow	Meadow

The 1888 Ordnance Survey First Edition map clearly shows the form of Bridgetown Weir with Shetter's Pool labelled. The leat running south from the eastern side of the weir is also visible. The parish boundary is shown running down the centre of the river Exe, with the northern part of the weir appearing to be in Winsford Parish. Bridgetown Corn Mill is labelled with the leat running down to the mill and re-joining the River Exe to the south of Bridgetown Bridge. The Ordnance Survey Second Edition map shows little change to this area with the Weir and Shetter's Pool depicted as they are shown on the First Edition map.

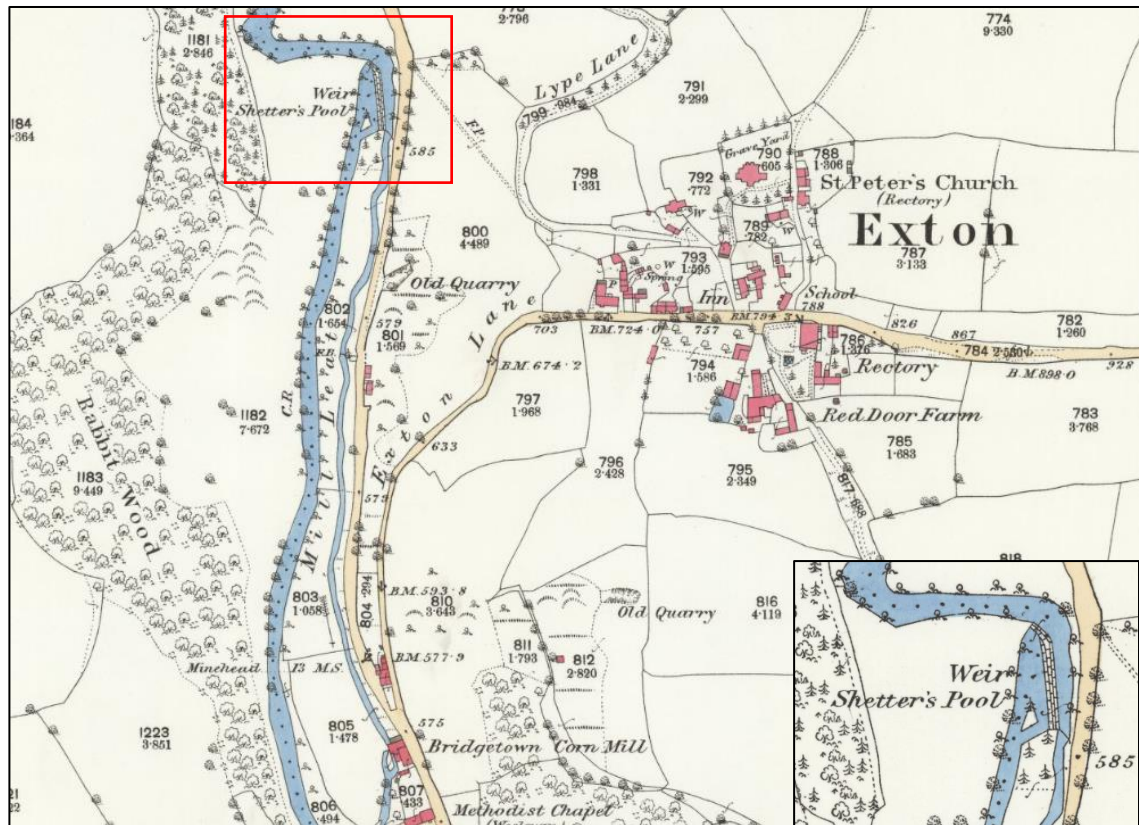
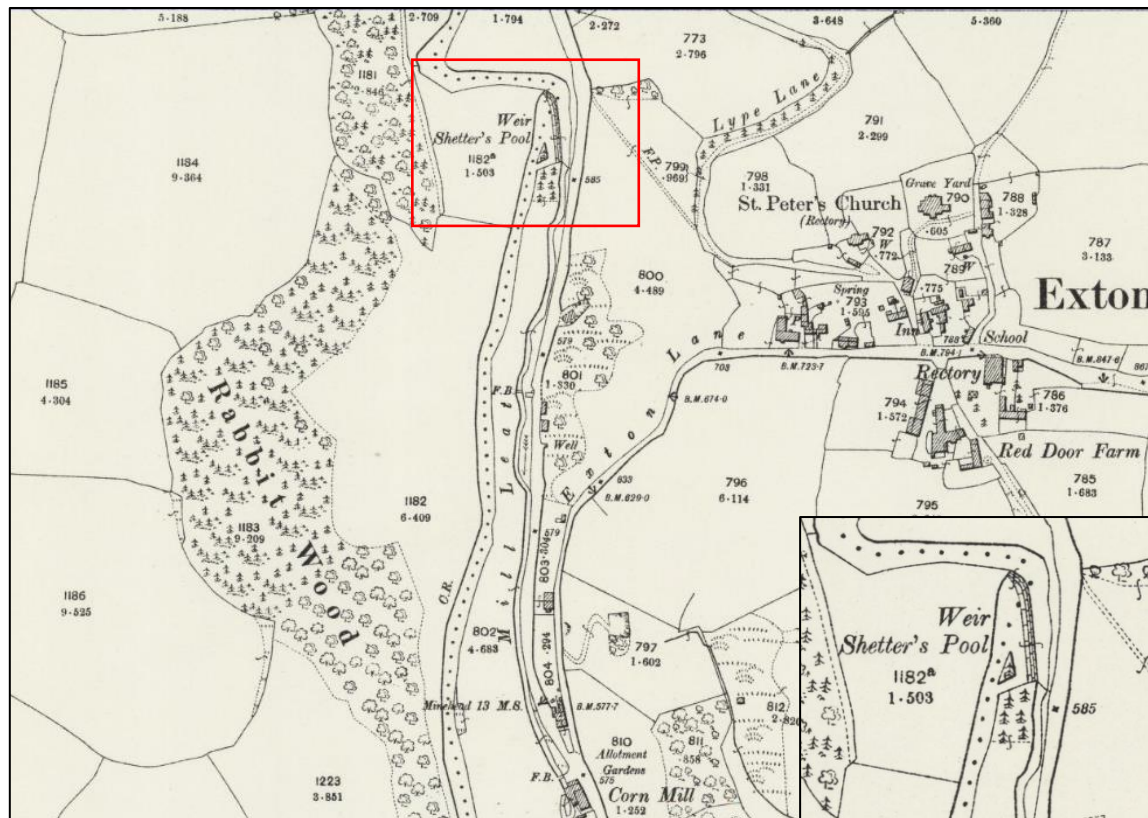


FIGURE 6: EXTRACT FROM THE 1888 1ST EDITION 25" OS MAP WITH INSET (NLS).

FIGURE 7: EXTRACT FROM THE 1902 2ND EDITION 25" OS MAP WITH INSET (NLS).

2.4 PHYSICAL STRUCTURE

2.4.1 THE WEIR(S)

The structure comprises a long cranked diagonal weir with two very separate functional elements, with sluice and leat to the south-south-east and fish passage inserted to the north-west.

The lower weir element to the south end of the structure is a *narrow crested drop-weir* of c. 1.2-1m height 0.4m at crest, c.8-10m long. This is a diagonal weir, crossing at c.70 degree angle from the river bank, with an angle of c.20-25 degrees at its centre, maximising its effect on flow. It is built of roughly dressed slate and granite blocks. There appears to be some very crude concrete repairs to this element of the weir but as water was still flowing here, it could not be examined in detail. Larger rough boulders may have been dumped in front of this weir to slow down the water or it may have had boulders placed up against the vertical dressed 'drop' at some stage, which has since been dislodged with the force of the water, now forming an untidy pile and attracting vegetation and river-driftwood. There is a short concrete rendered angled flank wall to the south bank of the river. The force of the water coming off this weir has cut a second channel into the river bank, leaving a central small island in the centre of the channel. The difference in water flow between the two elements has also led to a large shingle bank developing in a v-shape north of the drop-weir.



FIGURE 8: THE DROP-WEIR ELEMENT OF THE WEIR, WITH 2M SCALE.

To the centre and north end the weir is at a cranked angle to the drop-weir. It crosses the river at a very sharp angle, c.45 degrees, ensuring maximum length for the crest as it crosses the river on a bend at the longest width. The angle is designed to reduce water level variations. The addition of the concrete capping to this long section of weir has created a raised lip on the upstream side; this has increased water resistance against the weir leading to the collection of debris and waste on the upstream side, particularly gathering near the top of the fish passage. However, both elements of the weir(s) would probably still be described as *low gauge weirs*.

The long section is c.28-30m long; of sloping crump-style form; built of smaller split boulders, arranged in a linear stacked form to create a waterfall/cascade effect. It has a narrow crest of c.0.2-0.3m capped in rounded greyish coloured concrete with lots of pebble inclusions, concrete appears to have been carried out in a smooth slope on the head side of the crest, further softening its effect. It has a long shallow sloping 'face' of exposed stone of c.2.5-3m length. Due to low water levels on the day of survey but also in general this is often largely now dry. To the north end the weir cranks again to the west, to meet the bank almost at a right angle, with an inserted concrete fish passage, c.1.5m wide, with a further 4-5m of rebuilt weir in blocky boulders, with a steeper gradient and set into reddish-grey cement/concrete.



FIGURE 9: THE 'CRUMP' ELEMENT OF THE WEIR, SHOWING LACK OF OVERFLOW; FROM THE SOUTH-WEST (WITH 2M SCALE).

2.4.2 THE FISH PASSAGE

The fish passage was inserted into the weir in 1954, possibly associated with the establishment of the National Park; with the pool in front formed in 2012 by the Westcountry Rivers Trust.

The fish passage itself has thick cinder block walls, rendered in reddish-grey grainy gritty cement, which has a mid-century appearance and may well have been mixed onsite using the local iron-rich clay. The fish passage runs straight through the weir parallel with the bank and then turns west, with a widened bowl to the end. There are slots to the top of the fish passage so it could once be closed off but any sluice gate here appears to have rotted or has been removed. A shallow pool now encloses the end of the fish passage built between the weir and the west riverbank. This comprises large individual boulders and a central overspill of pre-formed concrete. This is designed to slow the water and maintain levels near the fish passage.



FIGURE 10: THE FISH PASSAGE AT THE NORTH-WEST END OF THE CRUMP SECTION OF THE WEIR, WITH 2012 POOL FORMED IN FRONT, WITH 2M SCALE.

2.4.3 RETAINING WALL TO THE ROAD AND CULVERT

To the east side of the river and weir there is a large stone rubble battered retaining wall of strong 19th century character, with roughly shaped flat capping stones. This wall exhibits a raise of about 1m to the top, built in cement. The wall would have provided strength and support to the road structure and a defined edge but there would originally have been a much clearer view of the weir from the road, when it was lower. The road widens here with a flat grassy verge, as it was likely intended as a viewing spot. The wall runs for more than 400m alongside the road and flanks the leat on its eastern side.

About 20m north of the weir, integral with and built into the retaining wall for the road is a rectangular upright projection, of the same form/build. This has a segmental rounded relieving arch of split slates over a large circular culvert pipe. This appears to bring a stream down the coombe from Exton to the east, under the road and feeds it into the river.

2.4.4 THE RIVERBANK/FLANK WALLS TO THE WEST

To the west the river bank has been retained by low abutment walls at the north end, adjacent to the north terminus of the weir and fish passage, these walls run for about 10-15m parallel with the weir, terminating in a large tree stump. They are built of weathered slabs, which look to have courses laid down and have been covered with a skim of render which is slowly eroding. The rest of the riverbank is natural and open to the field, with a modern post and wire fence closing off the river to the grazing cattle.

It is of note that north and north-west of the weir along this side of the riverbank further retaining walling or some embanking appears to have been undertaken to manage the angle and flow of the water as it hits the weir.



FIGURE 11: THE CULVERT ABOVE THE WEIR, BUILT INTO THE RETAINING WALL ALONGSIDE THE ROAD; FROM THE SOUTH-WEST (NO SCALE).



FIGURE 12: THE FLANK WALL AND RETAINING WALL TO THE WEST BANK OF THE RIVER; FROM THE EAST-SOUTH-EAST (NO SCALE).

2.4.5 THE LEAT AND SLUICE

The functioning leat runs broadly parallel to the river for c.450m down to the mill. It is flanked by the tall retaining wall to the road and by a low wall of dressed blocks to the west, with the

grounds around the mill now landscaped gardens. The sides of this leat are well defined, giving it a sharp rectangular profile, surprisingly deep and carrying quite a volume of water and this feature is very well maintained by the owners. Between the active leat and the river there is a sluice gate, this appears to be a mix of concrete and timber, of relatively modern appearance and this may have been updated when the fish passage and other concrete repairs were undertaken in the 1950s. A flank wall links the sluice and drop-weir section, clearly with large dressed faced blocks at first then the bank curves away with coursed rubble stone revetment walling. There is some rebuilding around the sluice gate piers with concrete mortar and renders visible. The gate itself looks to be metal. The cog and wheel of the winding mechanism are all still present.



FIGURE 13: THE SLUICE GATE FOR THE LEAT; FROM THE WEST-NORTH-WEST (NO SCALE).

2.5 PHASING OF THE WEIR(S)

Both elements of the weir are similar in the materials with which they are built which is a local mix of slate stone, ironstone and mudstone boulders, but there are significant differences in form, i.e. the crump-weir versus drop-weir sections which indicates a varied function. The weir may therefore have all been built at the same time but intended from the start to be multi-functional. The cartographic evidence demonstrates that the leat was seemingly built between 1802 and the 1840 tithe map. By the 1888 mapping the weir is clearly defined. The drop-weir section is closest to the leat and indeed attached sharing a flank wall and the dressed blocks etc are similar in build and possibly the more obviously functional manmade element was built for the mill, the rest a result of the increase in tourism, extended and adapted more for aesthetic purposes at a later date. The boom in tourism in the region, echoed in nearby Dunster and Dulverton was at the end of the 19th century and into the Edwardian period.

However it is also equally possible that the drop-weir element has been cut into the earlier feature, in response to the leat requiring more water at a later date, if the addition of the weir had changed the flow and may explain the scattered boulders below the weir at this end, which now lie in piles in the river. The upper 'crump-style' weir is built of smaller stone blocks with possible iron pins and concrete but it is largely the denseness of stacked stones which holds it

together and the tight linear packing, this part is on a massive scale due to its length and is more intentionally vernacular in character. The lower weir is less substantial but more modern in character, with dressed blocks, regular in shape, less sympathetic to its physical setting and clearly having a built character, although its exact fixings could not be established due to overflow of water. It has a more defined wing-wall and flank wall to the sluice which again appears to show the large flat dressed faces of boulders very much at odds to the naturalistic character of the rest of the structure.

Obviously the fish passage is a later phase, as well as the 4-5m of rebuilt next to it. This is demarked specifically by the reddish-grey concrete used for repairs and in building. Throughout the later 20th century numerous small maintenance repairs of concrete have been ongoing. The sluice gate also looks to have been renovated in the mid-late 20th century, associated with concrete repairs and rendering of piers.

2.6 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

2.6.1 EVIDENTIAL VALUE

High. The weirs and related features retain considerable evidential value on their date and construction. This rapid assessment has identified possible phasing in the differential functional elements.

2.6.2 HISTORICAL VALUE

Low. Structurally, the weir falls within the curtilage of the mill at Bridgetown, which is noted on the HER as of local heritage value and is recorded as being post-medieval, documented on the Tithe Map.

2.6.3 AESTHETIC VALUE

High. The site has definite aesthetic value and appears to be associated with a stop on the road to take in the view of the water. Particularly the longer crump weir section built of linear arranged stacked boulders, as it appears to be intentionally creating white water or a waterfall effect and emulating natural features.

2.6.4 COMMUNAL VALUE

None known.

2.6.5 INTEGRITY

Medium/High. Elements of the structure are in good order, such as the crump-style part, although still having received repairs of concrete and some concrete capping. The drop-weir element has a lot of boulders and dressed blocks tumbled in front of it, catching debris from the river. It is not immediately clear, as water was still over-topping the weir if the boulders have come off the drop weir, if so it has been significantly damaged either in a single event or over time. The structure as a whole is itself fairly stable and designed to resist its high-energy environment. These structures survive relatively well, with the exception of the fish pass that was cut through the centre.

2.6.6 AUTHENTICITY

Much of the surviving structure (weir, wing-walls, sluice) probably dates from the mid-later 1800s. The site is almost entirely authentic in character, with only functional repairs to the fabric over the last 100 years.

3.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 CONCLUSIONS

The weir at Bridgetown supplied water to a mill c.450m to the south—south-east. The extant mill building is of later 18th or 19th century date, its presence on the tithe map cannot be confirmed. Although there appears to be no documentary evidence for Bridgetown Mill and its leat prior to the mid 19th century, the census data suggests it had a relatively transient tenancy but by the later 19th century was evidently prospering, with its occupants branching out into other professions and employing millers in the village. Documentary references to the weir are limited however a document relating to the installation of the fish pass at Bridgetown weir in 1954 is held by the National Archives at Kew (MAF 209/1364).

It is interesting that the narrative of a tentative start at the mill, followed by a later 19th century increase in activity echoes the general trend of the area which was booming in the early 1900s and is also quite likely reflected in the weir structure. Certainly all of the fabric exposed correlates with a date in the mid-later 1800s. It does have a potentially interesting aesthetics angle, especially associated with the road and the multi-functional elements make it more unique, adapted to its location and function.



FIGURE 14: THE WEIR AS SEEN FROM THE ROAD; FROM THE SOUTH-EAST (NO SCALE).

3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The site visit was undertaken when water levels were relatively low but the drop-weir section was still obscured by active overflow. This southern end of the weir is associated with the sluice and leat, of different form and build. The full extent of the relationship between the leat, the sluice and the rest of the weir could not be established on this visit. Since this is the section believed to be requiring concrete capping it is suggested that some further monitoring of works occurs at the start of the project, once the crest is exposed and dry. This will allow a fuller and more accurate

record and answer some of the hypotheses raised by the site visit. This would be of value in understanding how this structure functioned and evolved over time. In particular, a more detailed analysis of the stonework should be able to distinguish the late 19th century fabric from any earlier 1802-1840s fabric and the 1950s phase.

In terms of the proposed modifications to the weir to facilitate the passage of fish, in light of the relatively modern age of the fish passage to start there are no particular issues here. In relation to capping the drop-weir section, the profile and different character of the two elements should be respected to ensure the visuals and profile of any capping aligns and maintains the current aesthetics which are important to the narrative of this structure. A light touch approach is advocated, as usual with minimal intervention and proposals should be based on a thorough inspection of the structure and full measured survey. However, concrete is not felt to be inappropriate as it appears in the repairs and in the significant 1950s phase of works.

A final element of the scheme involves the west bank of the river being cut back to accommodate the fish passage, which will remove the abutment walls and although not directly altering the weir is intrusive and alters the wider designed and engineered setting. This can be mitigated by a process of monitoring at the start of works, so a drawn or photographed profile through the wall structure is possible and evidence gathering on its construction can be undertaken. It is felt that there is flexibility here and that this area is more suitable for modification than others, the burden of ecological benefit overriding any minor heritage concerns in this regard. It was noted how extremely slow the water was above the weir almost pool like and how rushing the river is below it, the water at present backing up considerably behind the weir.

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APPENDIX 1: PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE



1. LONG VIEW DOWN THE WEIR, FROM THE SOUTH (2M SCALE).



2. VIEW OF THE POOL AND FISH PASS FROM THE WEST BANK; FROM THE SOUTH-WEST (NO SCALE).



3. VIEW OF THE TOP OF THE FISH PASS WITH SLOTS FOR SLUICE GATE; FROM THE WEST (NO SCALE).



4. THE ISLAND AND RUBBLE BELOW THE DROP-WEIR SECTION; FROM THE NORTH (NO SCALE).



5. DETAILED VIEW OF THE CRUMP STYLE SLOPE, MADE OF LINEAR ARRANGED BOULDERS AND THE SMALL AMOUNT OF WATER WHICH IS OVER-TOPPING THE WEIR; FROM THE SOUTH-EAST (NO SCALE).



6. THE WEST ABUTMENT WALLS TERMINATE BY TWO LARGE TREES TRUNKS; FROM THE EAST (NO SCALE).



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