

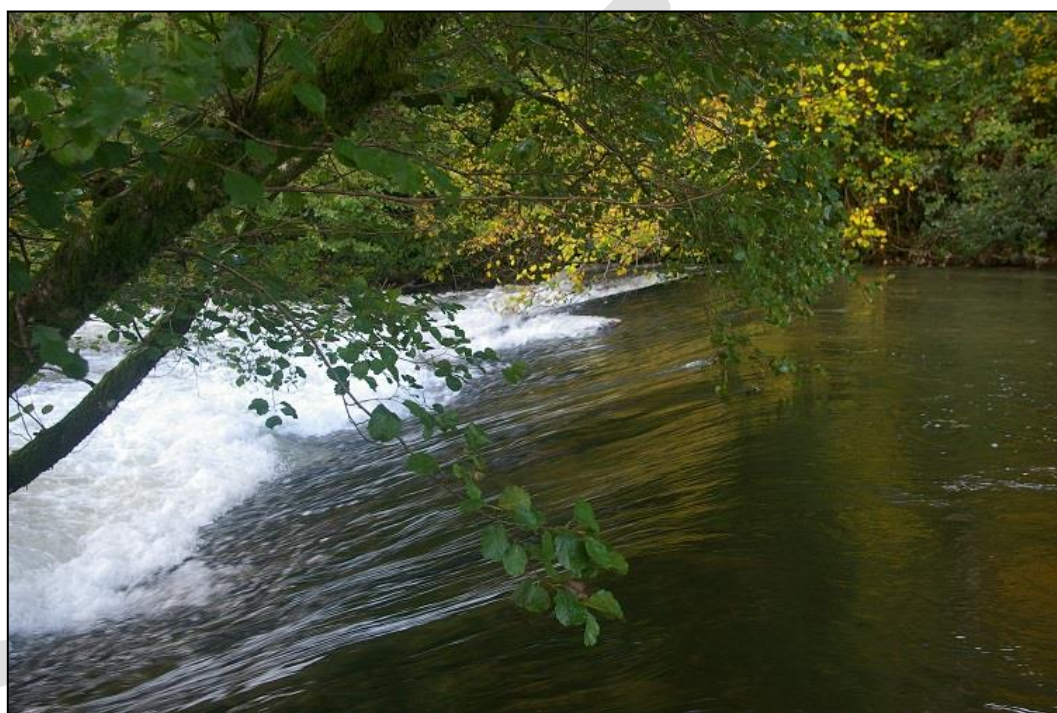
HELEBRIDGE WEIR

DULVERTON

EXMOOR

SOMERSET

Heritage Assessment



South West Archaeology Ltd. report no. 211118



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Helebridge Weir, Dulverton, Exmoor, Somerset

Heritage Assessment, including site visit

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Draft issued: 17th November 2021

Finalised: 6th December 2021

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

SUMMARY

South West Archaeology Ltd. was commissioned to produce a heritage assessment for Helebridge Weir, located to the south of Hele Bridge, Dulverton, Somerset. This work was undertaken on behalf of the West Country Rivers Trust as part of a proposal to remove the weir to facilitate fish movement. A desk-based assessment and site visit has been undertaken.

Helebridge Weir is documented as a Post Medieval weir to the south of a Grade II Listed Medieval stone bridge. It is first clearly depicted on the 1887 First Edition Ordnance Survey map. The Tithe apportionments for the parishes of Dulverton and Kingsbrompton show that the land on either side of the weir was in the ownership of the Earl of Carnarvon (Pixton Estate) at this date while the river was held by the Trustees of the Minehead Turnpike Road. Pixton was recorded at Domesday and the estate appears to have been in the ownership of the Dyke family by the 17th century. The estate passed through the female line to the Acland family of Killerton (becoming Dyke Acland from this date). The present Pixton House was built c.1760 for Thomas Dyke Acland 7th bt and the estate passed to the Herbert family through the marriage of Henry Herbert, 2nd Earl of Carnarvon to Elizabeth Acland in 1796. It is documented that significant alterations to the house and estate took place in the 1870s, under the ownership of the 4th Earl of Carnarvon. It is likely that the construction of Helebridge Weir along with the provision of a leat to Weir Saw Mills and the alterations evident at Machine Court can be seen in the context of the development of the Carnarvon Estate during this period.

*The weir is not a designated heritage asset but is expected to hold limited local significance – for its associational and historical value within the Pixton estate, particularly for its connection via the leat to the saw mills and 19th century phase of woodland management. The proposals to completely remove the weir would have a **negative/substantial** impact on the structure and **negative/moderate** impact on the wider landscape. It is recommended that if significant alterations or removal of the structure were to be carried out that further investigation work and recording of the structure should take place before and during works to facilitate a better record and understanding of the structure and to minimise the impact from its loss.*

A site inspection to verify whether the weir fabric supports the late nineteenth century origin date suggested by the desk-based research confirmed the historic mapping. The weir structure is in fair to good condition and is substantially complete and very authentic – of a single phase of construction as far as can be seen when it is overtopped by water.



November 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WEST COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST
THE LANDOWNERS (FOR ACCESS)

PROJECT CREDITS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

LOCATION:	HELEBRIDGE WEIR
PARISH:	DULVERTON
COUNTY:	SOMERSET
NGR:	SS 93303 27687
PLANNING APPLICATION:	PRE-APPLICATION
OASIS REF:	SOUTHWEST1-503223
SWARCH REF:	DHW21

1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

South West Archaeology Ltd. (SWARCH) was commissioned by the West Country Rivers Trust (the Client) to undertake an assessment of Helebridge Weir and produce a heritage assessment. This work was undertaken to place the weir in its historical and archaeological context as part of a proposal to remove the weir in its entirety to facilitate fish movement.

1.2 TOPOGRAPHICAL AND GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Helebridge Weir is located along the River Exe, which originates on Exmoor and joins the larger River Barle at Exebridge before continuing as the Exe to the sea at Exmouth. It lies c.130m south of Hele Bridge on the B3222 Jury Hill road to Dulverton at c. 130m AOD. The soils of this area are the well-drained fine loamy and fine silty soils over rock of the Denbigh 1 Association (SSEW 1983), which overlie the slate of the Upcott Slates Formation with superficial alluvium deposits (BGS 2021).

1.3 HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Helebridge Weir is documented as a Post Medieval weir to the south of a Grade II Listed Medieval stone bridge. There are references to Hele Bridge in a 1765 Act of Parliament and in a lease of 1626, suggesting its significance as a place marker in the landscape. The weir is first clearly depicted on the 1887 First Edition Ordnance Survey map. The Tithe apportionments for the parishes of Dulverton and Kingsbrompton show that the land on either side of the weir was in the ownership of the Earl of Carnarvon (Pixton Estate) at this date while the river was held by the Trustees of the Minehead Turnpike Road.

Pixton was recorded at Domesday in the hundred of Williton and was held by Roger of Courseulles having been held by Brictric in 1066. The Pixton Estate appears to have been in the ownership of the Dyke family by the 17th century. The estate passed in 1746 through the female line to the Acland family of Killerton (becoming Dyke-Acland from this date). The present Pixton House was built c.1760 for Thomas Dyke Acland 7th bt. The estate passed to the Herbert family through the marriage of Henry Herbert, 2nd Earl of Carnarvon to Elizabeth Acland in 1796. It is documented that significant alterations to the house and estate took place in the 1870s, under the ownership of the 4th Earl of Carnarvon, including the construction of the Carnarvon Arms Hotel close to Dulverton Station. It is likely that the construction of Helebridge Weir along with the provision of a leat to Weir Saw Mills and the alterations evident at Machine Court can be seen in the context of the development of the Carnarvon Estate during this period.

No archaeological work is recorded in the Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Record (ENPHER) on or in the vicinity of Helebridge Weir. There is one Scheduled Monument and Eight Listed Buildings (1 Grade II*, 7 Grade II) within 1km of the weir. There are no Conservation Areas or Registered Parks and Gardens within 1km of the weir. A number of monuments are recorded in the ENPHER within 1km of the site, those closest to the weir are of Medieval or Post Medieval

date and comprise Hele Bridge (Grade II Listed) and the Post Medieval leats associated with Hele Bridge Weir.

1.4 SITE LOCATION

Helebridge Weir is located c.130m south of Hele Bridge on the B3222 Jury Hill Road to Dulverton (Figure 1).

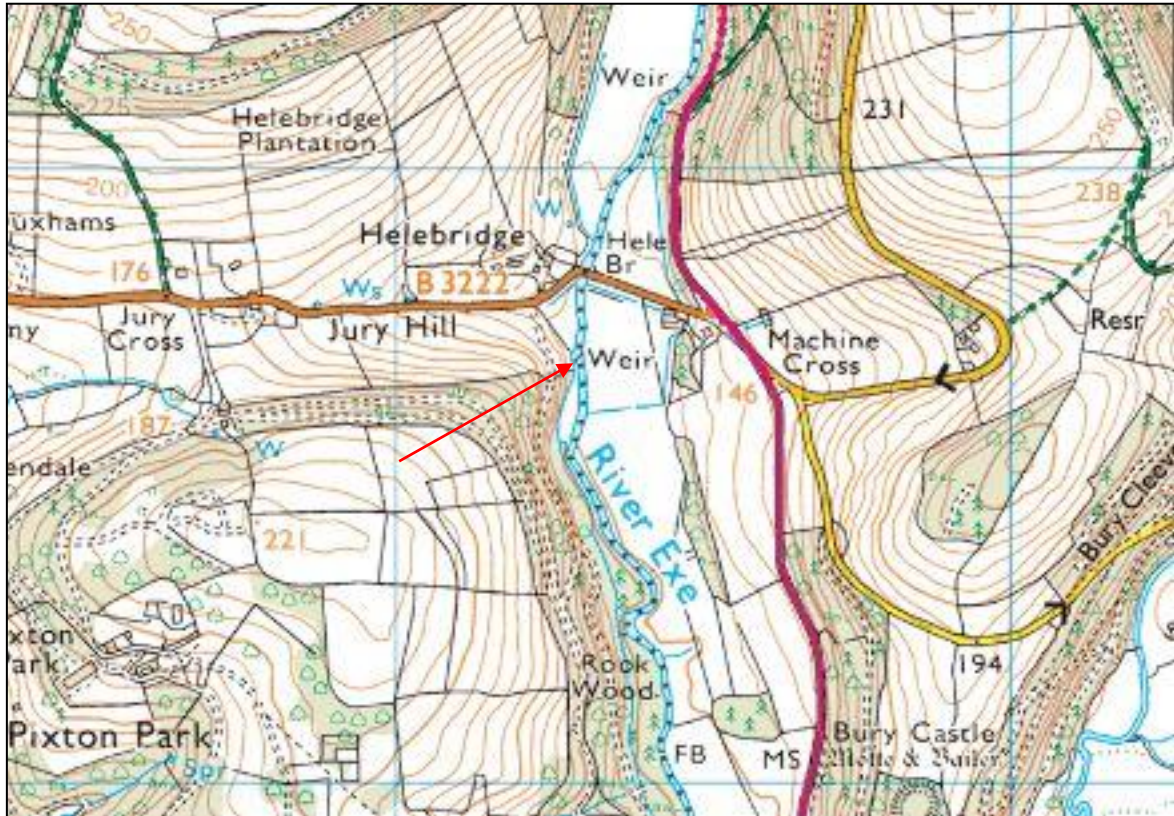


FIGURE 1: LOCATION MAP; THE WEIR IS ARROWED.

2.0 DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

2.1 HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Helebridge Weir is documented as a Post Medieval weir to the south of a Grade II Listed Medieval stone bridge. There are references to Hele Bridge in a 1765 Act of Parliament for repairs to the road from Minehead to Hele Bridge (House of Lords Journal 31) and in a lease of 1626 (SRO A/AHT/20), suggesting its significance as a place marker in the landscape. The weir is first clearly depicted on the 1887 First Edition Ordnance Survey map and no documentary reference to the weir has been recorded predating this. The Tithe apportionments for the parishes of Dulverton and Kingsbrompton show that the land on either side of the weir was in the ownership of the Earl of Carnarvon (Pixton Estate) at this date while the river was held by the Trustees of the Minehead Turnpike Road.

Pixton was recorded at Domesday in the hundred of Williton and was held by Roger of Courseulles having been held by Brictric in 1066. The Pixton Estate appears to have been in the ownership of the Dyke family by the 17th century. The estate passed in 1746 through the female line to the Acland family of Killerton (becoming Dyke Acland from this date). The present Pixton House was built c.1760 for Thomas Dyke Acland 7th bt. The estate passed to the Herbert family through the marriage of Henry Herbert, 2nd Earl of Carnarvon to Elizabeth Acland in 1796. It is documented that significant alterations to the house and estate took place in the 1870s, under the ownership of the 4th Earl of Carnarvon, including the construction of the Carnarvon Arms Hotel close to Dulverton Station. It is likely that the construction of Helebridge Weir along with the provision of a leat to Weir Saw Mills and the alterations evident at Machine Court can be seen in the context of the development of the Carnarvon Estate during this period.

2.2 CARTOGRAPHIC SOURCES

This first map available to this study is the 1802 Surveyors draft map for Tiverton (Figure 2). This shows Hele Bridge but gives no indication of a weir in the location of Helebridge Weir nor does it show the leat which runs from the western side of the river. Machine Court is not shown on this map and there is no indication of the leat taken from further upstream at Machine Weir. There does appear to be a line shown across the river, to the south of Hele Bridge, however this lies slightly north of the expected position of Hele Bridge Weir. It is possible this relates to property ownership, fishing rights or mapping depiction rather than necessarily suggesting a weir was present at this date.



FIGURE 2: EXTRACT FROM THE 1802 SURVEYORS DRAFT MAP (BL). THE APPROXIMATE LOCATION OF THE WEIR IS INDICATED

The stretch of the River Exe in which the weir lies forms the boundary between the parishes of Dulverton and Kingsbrompton (now Brompton Regis). Neither of the Tithe maps for these parishes indicates the presence of a weir in this location (Figure 3) or leats to the east and west of the river. Hele Bridge Farm can be seen to the west of the river as a well developed farmstead with a courtyard arrangement of buildings and separate ancillary structures. The bridge to the south of Hele Bridge Weir is named Weir Bridge and the holding west of it is named Weir. It is interesting to note that this strongly suggests a weir in this location however none is depicted on either Tithe map. It is possible it had gone out of use by this date however it may also indicate a lack of depiction of these as features by the Tithe surveyor, particularly because they lay on the parish boundary.

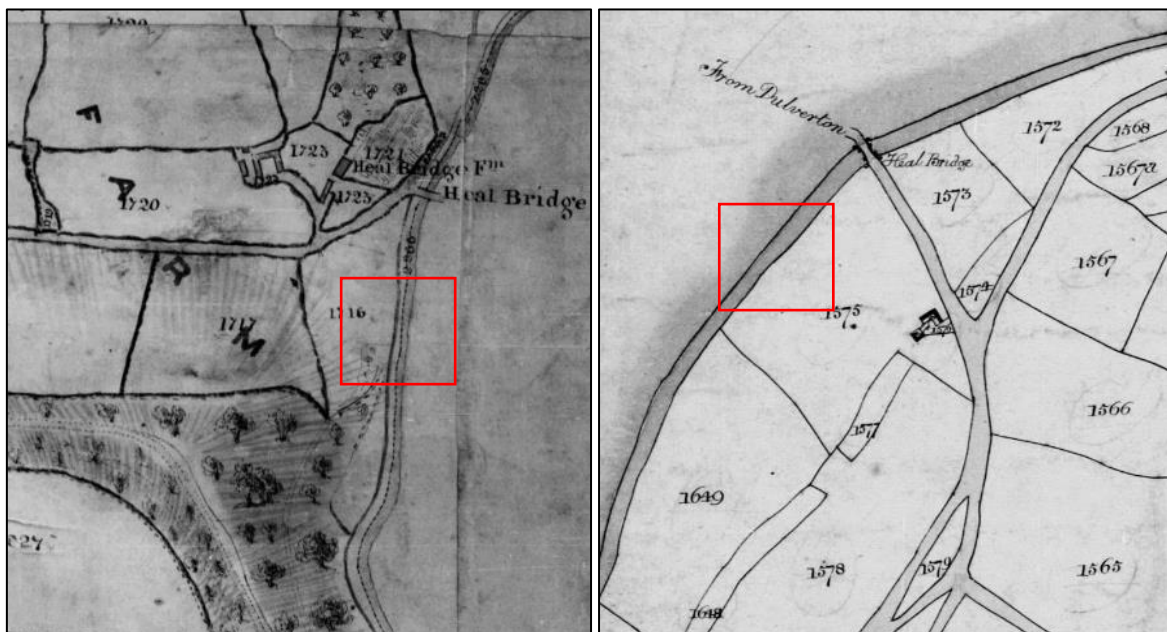


FIGURE 3: EXTRACT FROM THE DULVERTON TITHE MAP (LEFT) AND KINGSBROMPTON (BROMPTON REGIS) TITHE MAP (RIGHT) SHOWING APPROXIMATE LOCATION OF THE WEIR.

TABLE 1: DETAILS FROM THE TITHE APPORTIONMENTS FOR DULVERTON (1839) AND KINGSBROMPTON (1841) PARISHES

No	Owner	Occupier	Plot Name	Cultivation
Dulverton Parish				
Heal Farm				
1716	Earl Carnarvon	William Dobbs	Higher Home Mead	Meadow
1852		Himself	Rook Woods	Coppice and Timber Woods
2266	Trustees of the Minehead Turnpike Road	-	River Exe	-
Kingsbrompton Parish				
Part of Hele Bridge Farm				
1575	Earl Carnarvon	William Dobbs	The Ham	Meadow
1576			Barn Courtlage Barton etc	-
1649			Dascombes Meadow	Meadow

The 1887 Ordnance Survey First Edition map (Figure 4) clearly shows Helebridge Weir with a sluice labelled at its location, along with the leat to the west leading down to Weir Saw Mills. A leat is also evident, taken from the river upstream to provide water to Machine Court, where a corn mill is documented, and had expanded in size between the mid and late 19th centuries. An aqueduct is also shown running east-west to the south side of Jury Hill towards Machine Court and a leat to the south of the property issues the water back into the River Exe below Helebridge Weir. Machine Cross and Machine Court are first used as names on this map, the Tithe apportionment having included this area as 'part of Hele Bridge Farm'. It is likely that the machinery installed at Machine Court in the second half of the 19th century may therefore have given this location its enduring name. Helebridge Farm is named Helebridge on this map and the western range of buildings appears U shaped by this date with further buildings added to the eastern group of structures. No major discernible changes are visible between the First Edition and Second Edition (Figure 5) Ordnance Survey maps.

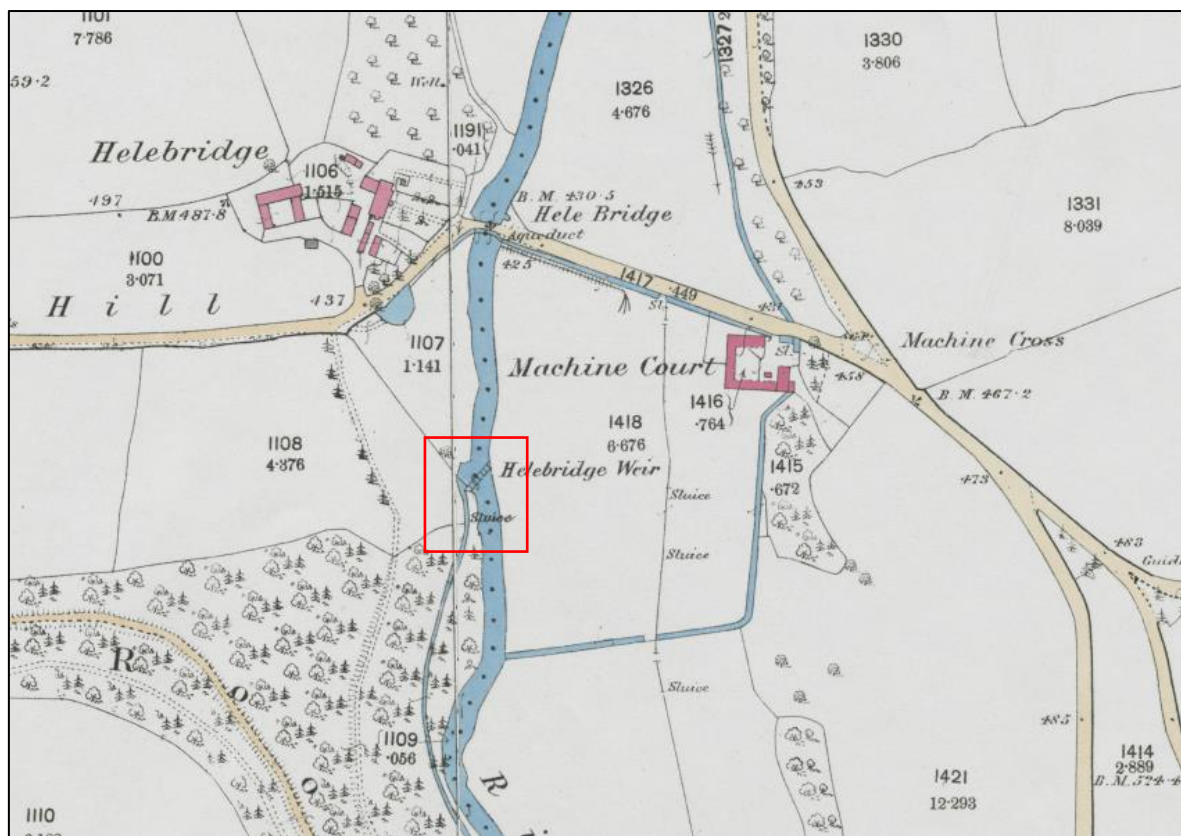


FIGURE 4: EXTRACT FROM THE 1888 FIRST EDITION 25" OS MAP (NLS). THE WEIR LOCATION IS INDICATED.

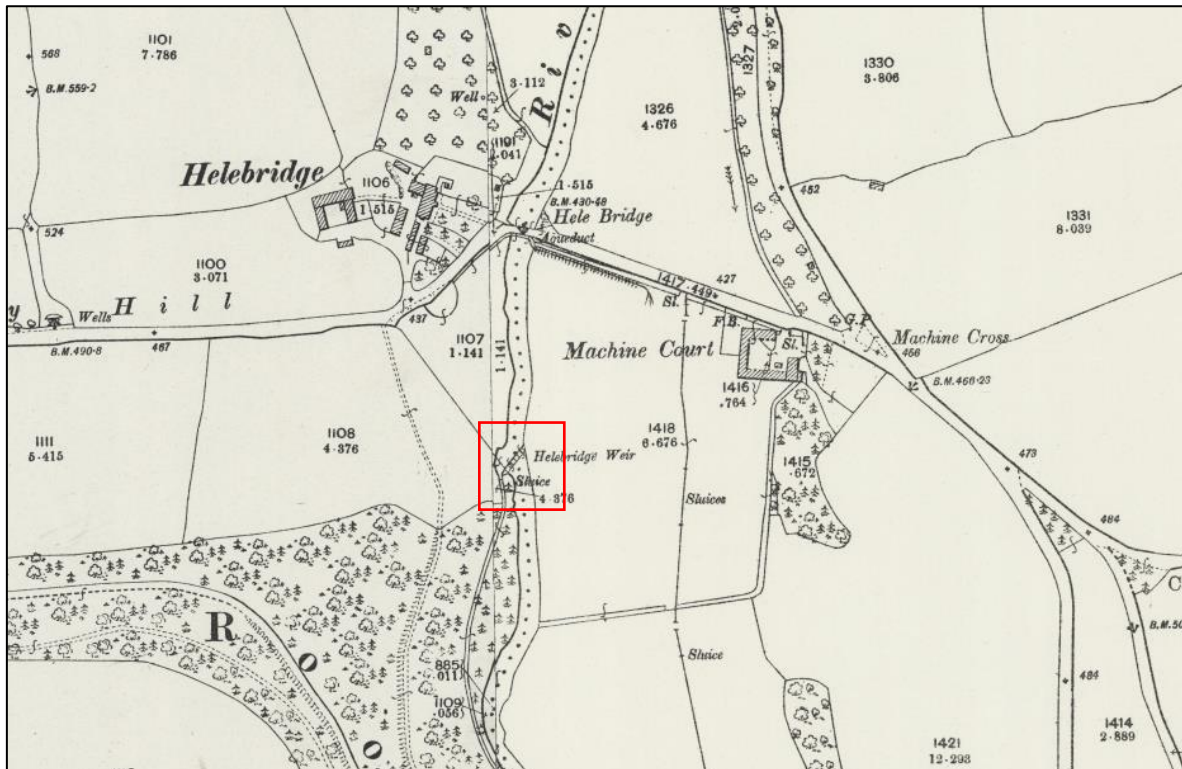


FIGURE 5: EXTRACT FROM THE 1902 SECOND EDITION 25" OS MAP (NLS). THE WEIR LOCATION IS INDICATED.

2.3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

No archaeological work is recorded in the Exmoor National Park Historic Environment Record (ENPHER) on or in the vicinity of Helebridge Weir. There is one Scheduled Monument and Eight Listed Buildings (1 Grade II*, 7 Grade II) within 1km of the weir. There are no Conservation Areas or Registered Parks and Gardens within 1km of the weir. A number of monuments are recorded in the ENPHER within 1km of the site (Figure 6).

2.3.1 PREHISTORIC

Two sites of Prehistoric date are recorded within 1km of the weir, the Scheduled Bury Castle Iron Age Hillfort (MSO8841) which lies to the south-west of the weir on a spur of land between the rivers Exe and Haddeo, and a possible round barrow located to the north-east of Hele Bridge (MSO10072).

2.3.2 MEDIEVAL

Limited evidence from the Medieval period is recorded within the vicinity of the site, however two areas of ridge and furrow ploughing are recorded, one to the north-east of the site (MSO10063) and the other to the west (MSO10065). The Grade II Listed Hele Bridge, to the north of the weir, and from which it takes its name, is a stone bridge with origins in the Medieval period (MCO8843).

2.3.3 POST MEDIEVAL

A number of sites of Post Medieval date are recorded in the ENPHER within the vicinity of the weir, not least the weir itself (MEM25086). These include the landscaped park at Pixton and its pre park field systems (MSO9334), the north-eastern boundary of which lies adjacent to the weir. A field gutter system at Machine Court, visible on historic mapping is also documented close to the weir (MMO858). The leat which flows southwards from Helebridge Weir is of Post Medieval date (MEM22030) along with that supplying a corn mill at Machine Court (MSO11099). Helebridge

Farmhouse, to the north of Hele Bridge, is believed to date from the 17th century (MSO10829). Most of the Listed Buildings within 1km of the weir are Post Medieval in date.

2.3.4 MODERN AND UNKNOWN

Two modern signposts are documented to the east of the weir, close to Machine Cross (MEM23454; MEM23453). The ENPHER also records an 'iron room' prefabricated hut at Pixton used as a Catholic chapel by the Herbert family in the early 20th century (MEM22011) however the Exmoor Oral History Archive suggests that this was a former 'ironing room' in the house which was no longer needed with the advent of commercial laundries so was repurposed (Exmoor Oral History Archive 2021).

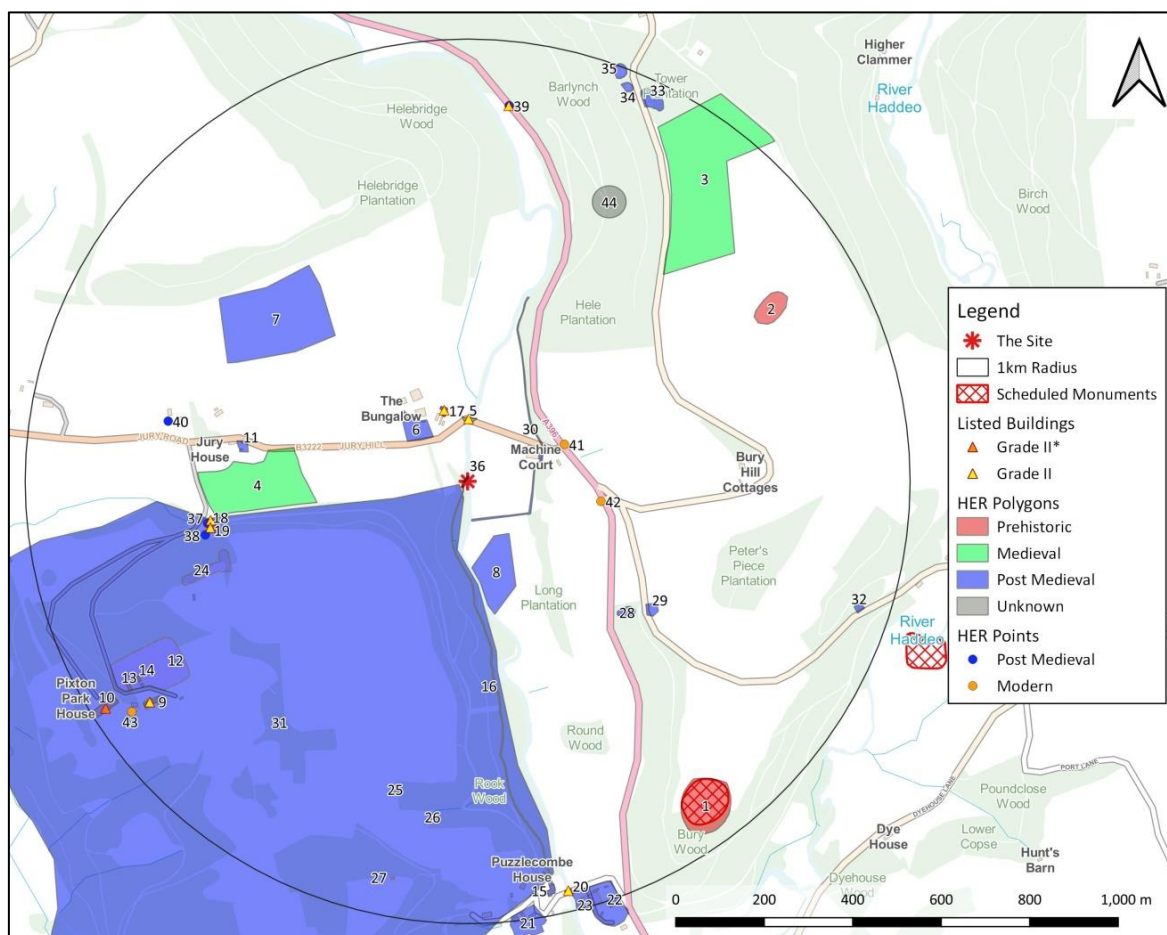


FIGURE 6: HERITAGE ASSETS WITHIN 1KM OF THE WEIR (ENPA AND HE) © HISTORIC ENGLAND 2021. CONTAINS ORDNANCE SURVEY DATA © CROWN COPYRIGHT AND DATABASE RIGHT 2021.

TABLE 2: DETAILS OF HERITAGE ASSETS SHOWN ON MAP ABOVE (ENPA AND HE).

No	Mon No	Name	Summary	Designation
1	MSO8841	Bury Castle, Brompton Regis	Bury Castle, on a spur end, overlooks the junction of the Rivers Exe and Haddeo. It is a series of earthworks forming an oval enclosure of probable Iron Age origin, with a small motte believed to be of the early 12 th Century at its southern end.	SAM
2	MSO10072	Mound east of Hele Bridge, Brompton Regis	A mound 20m in diameter, possibly a Bronze Age round barrow, visible on 1981 aerial photographs.	
3	MSO10063	Ridge and furrow south of Bury Hill, Brompton Regis	Medieval or post-medieval ridge and furrow, visible as earthworks on aerial photographs taken in 1946.	
4	MSO10065	Ridge and furrow southwest of Hele Bridge, Dulverton	Medieval or post-medieval ridge and furrow, visible as earthworks on aerial photographs taken in 1964.	

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5	MSO8843	Hele Bridge	A medieval stone bridge of three arches over the River Exe.	Grade II Listed
6	MSO10067	Enclosures, Hele Bridge, Dulverton	Post-medieval conjoined, embanked enclosures, situated between Helebridge Farm and Jury Hill Road, are visible on aerial photographs taken in 1952 but have been ploughed level. They could be the remains of garden plots and buildings.	
7	MMO848	Post-medieval water meadow north of Jury Hill	A post-medieval field gutter system, visible on aerial photographs taken in 1946. It has been ploughed level.	
8	MMO858	Post-medieval water meadow system south of Hele Bridge	A post-medieval field gutter system, visible on aerial photographs taken in 1952.	
9	MSO10858	Pixton Stables, Pixton Park	The stables to Pixton Park are now a dwelling. The building is U-plan with symmetrical wings at the rear.	Grade II Listed
10	MSO10857	Pixton Park House, Dulverton	Pixton Park is a country house, built in c1760 for the Acland family and altered internally in 1820 and 1870 by the Earl of Carnarvon.	Grade II* Listed
11	MEM21981	Kennels at Jury House, Pixton Park	In 1740, the mastership of the Devon and Somerset Staghounds passed to Mr Edward Dyke of Pixton. The hounds were kept at kennels at Jury, on the slope of the hill above Hele Bridge, next to the North Drive to Pixton Park.	
12	MEM21982	Pixton Park House Gardens, Dulverton	A map of 1800 shows the gardens as formally laid out and fenced along two sides rather than walled. The structures adjacent to the garden are barns and other garden related buildings. The house and garden are surrounded by a shrubbery.	
13	MEM21984	Laundry at Pixton Stables, Dulverton	The main building, the laundry, is a two storey barn with an L-shaped leg that incorporates the greenhouse and melon house.	
14	MEM21985	Potting Shed at Pixton Stables, Dulverton	The potting shed / garden cottage was built on the east side of the yard in the mid or late 19 th Century.	
15	MSO9355	Weir Saw Mills / The Old Sawmills, Weir Bridge, Dulverton	Weir Saw Mills is marked on historic mapping. It is known to have had a modern wheel driving generator and saw benches in an old wheel pit.	
16	MEM22030	Leat from Helebridge Weir, Dulverton	There is a leat from Helebridge Weir through Rock Wood to the Weir Saw Mills.	
17	MSO10829	Hele Bridge Farm	Farmhouse likely to date to the 17 th Century, enlarged in the early or mid-19 th Century.	Grade II Listed
18	MSO10855	1, Jury Lodge, Pixton Park	One of a pair of mid to late 18 th Century lodges. The listing description describes this house as no. 1 Jury Lodge but the OS map records it as no. 2.	Grade II Listed
19	MSO10856	2, Jury Lodge, Pixton Park	One of a pair of lodges, originally dating to the mid to late 18 th Century but enlarged in the late 20 th Century. The English Heritage listing states this house is no. 2 Jury Lodge but the Ordnance Survey map shows it as no. 1.	Grade II Listed
20	MSO10833	Weir Bridge	A 19 th Century bridge built of local stone, with a Ham stone saddleback coping. It has a single arch span. It may have been part of the Pixton Park estate.	Grade II Listed
21	MEM23667	Weir House	The homestead is on historic mapping.	
22	MEM23669	Crewes Cottages	The building is shown on historic mapping.	
23	MEM23673	Post-medieval nursery south of Crewes Cottages	A nursery is shown on historic mapping.	
24	MEM23677	Post-medieval quarry south of Jury Lodge	An old quarry is depicted on historic mapping.	
25	MEM23679	Post-medieval building northwest of Weir House	A building is shown on historic mapping but appears to have been demolished.	
26	MEM23680	Post-medieval building northwest of Weir	A building is shown on the Tithe Map for Dulverton but appears to have since been demolished.	

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		House		
27	MEM23681	Post-medieval building west of Weir House	A building is shown on historic mapping but appears to have since been demolished.	
28	MEM23682	Post-medieval quarries north of Bury Castle	Two old quarries are marked on historic mapping.	
29	MEM23682	Post-medieval quarries north of Bury Castle	Two old quarries are marked on historic mapping.	
30	MSO11099	Post-medieval mill at Machine Cross	The remains of an 18 th Century building, used as a water powered corn mill, attached to Machine Court. A covered wheel pit and silted leat survive and appear to date to the mid to late 19 th Century.	
31	MSO9334	Pixton Park, Dulverton	An 18th Century landscape park to Pixton Park House, referred to as a 'deer park' on the Ordnance Survey map of 1891. Earthworks of ornamental ponds, a terraced drive and an emparked field system were recorded during survey work in 1996.	
32	MEM24978	Post-medieval quarry at Hiccombe Cleeve	A quarry is shown on historic mapping.	
33	MEM24981	Post-medieval and 20th Century quarries south and west of The Tower	The quarries are shown on historic and modern mapping.	
34	MEM24981	Post-medieval and 20th Century quarries south and west of The Tower	The quarries are shown on historic and modern mapping.	
35	MEM24981	Post-medieval and 20th Century quarries south and west of The Tower	The quarries are shown on historic and modern mapping.	
36	MEM25086	Helebridge Weir	The weir is shown on historic mapping on the River Exe diverting water into a leat.	
37	MEM22706	Gate pier, Jury Lodges, Pixton Park	One of a pair of mid to late 18th Century gate piers. The other has been demolished.	
38	MEM23678	Post-medieval well southwest of Jury Lodge	A well is shown on historic and modern mapping.	
39	MSO10803	Milestone at Barlynch Woods, Brompton Regis	A milestone, inscribed "17 miles to Minehead" and which shows on the 1st and 2nd edition Ordnance Survey mapping.	Grade II Listed
40	MEM22028	Horse Carriage Brass Fittings, Heleball Lane, Dulverton	A brass fitting labelled 'Page & Son, Dulverton', and other broken parts (including bits of skid pans) from a horse carriage have been found in the hedgebank.	
41	MEM23453	Signpost at Machine Cross north	The signpost is situated at a T junction.	
42	MEM23454	Machine Cross signpost	The signpost is situated at a T junction.	
43	MEM22011	Iron Room, Catholic Chapel, Pixton Park	Mary Herbert fostered a Roman Catholic congregation at Pixton, where Mass was said in a prefabricated hut, known as the 'iron room', until a permanent church was opened in Dulverton in 1955.	
44	MSO12290	Iron mine, Barlynch Woods, Barlynch	A 20m long adit runs into the hillside at this point.	

2.4 SITE VISIT AND WEIR APPRAISAL

The site was visited in October 2021 by Emily Wapshott, the weather was dry but overcast and due to recent heavy rains and the autumn season the river was in a state of 'high flow'. Whilst a basic assessment of the form/type of weir and materials was undertaken, detailed assessment was not possible as it could not be fully accessed and was overtopped by the river.

The weir can only be approached across private fields (with no public access), from the east or west banks of the river; both sides of the river are fenced for stock and are now quite overgrown with scrub trees. The valley bottom is wide and flat to the east and south-east of the weir, with the wooded slopes of Pixton Wood rising almost immediately from the western bank. The weir is cranked to an angle across the river at about 45 degrees and to the west bank there is a stone

rubble built sluice gate and leat running south parallel along the riverbank to feed a contemporary saw-mill wheel pit further downstream, on the edge of the woodland. There are direct views back to the Listed Hele Bridge and to the adjacent farmhouse, of 18th century date. There are direct views cross the valley to Machine Court from the location of the weir, but not from the weir itself. Whilst the valley feels open, the immediate setting of the weir feels enclosed due to the proximity of the wood; generally the setting is of rural, working agricultural character but the wood is clearly the managed woodland of a Gentry estate, with some specimen trees amongst native deciduous and 19th century conifer planting. The adjacent farmhouse, Helebridge Farm, has been positioned to present to the valley and has pretensions to a level of status – it appears to potentially use both the earlier extant bridge and the much later weir as ‘eye-catchers’ of a sort. The weir contributes significantly to the sound-scape of the valley, emphasising the noise of the rushing water of the river – as it creates so much white water.

The weir is of local stone rubble – including some large boulders – it is presumed it has a traditional mortar bond but the upper visible surface has been almost completely obscured by a concrete cap and thick re-pointing to the sides. The weir form may have been adapted by the concrete additions but currently presents as a steep crump weir with very shallow straight low flank wall of stone rubble to the east and tall angled flank wall and sluice gate to the west. The water flows fast and clean over the crump slope but the fairly steep angle causes a white water trough to have formed at the base. Due to the high flow of the river during the site visit the sluice was not inspected in detail but appears to survive well with metal elements and a gate, damaged but present.

The relatively low profile of the flank walls and the slightly overgrown nature of the riverbank railings means much of the weir is not even visible from the field and can only be appreciated upon accessing the riverbanks and entering the water’s edge. It can therefore be assessed as a regressive landscape feature, that whilst important, holds no visual presence outside of its immediate setting.



FIGURE 7: HELEBRIDGE WEIR; FROM THE SOUTH-EAST.



FIGURE 8: VIEW ACROSS THE WEIR, SHOWING THE PROFILE OF ITS CRUMP FORM; FROM THE EAST.

2.5 CONDITION OF THE WEIR

There appears to be a hole or minor damage to the middle of the weir – in the middle of the crump face – causing disturbance in the water and it has been completely undercut and damaged by increased flow to the west side, near the sluice, which is causing increased white-water in this location. The eastern half seems to have a slightly longer profile – the concrete capping extending further into the water. The flank walls appear intact. Condition would be assessed as **fair to good**.



FIGURE 9: PHOTOGRAPH 2020/2021 BY WESTCOUNTRY RIVERS TRUST PERSONNEL, FROM THE WEST BANK – SHOWING DAMAGE TO THE WEST END OF THE WEIR.



FIGURE 10: THE LOW EAST FLANK WALL OF THE WEIR; FROM THE NORTH-WEST.

2.6 HISTORIC PHASING OF WEIR

The weir appears, from cursory inspection during the site visit, to be of one phase – the flank walls and elements which were visible all seem to be of local rubble stone – with a similar loose build, of an irregular mix of large and small stones. The appearance suggests a date of the mid-late 19th century as seemingly corroborated by the historic mapping. The structure has of course then been further altered in the 20th century, with the placement of a concrete apron/capping across the crump slope.

The documentary and mapping evidence appear to suggest that the weir and other landscape management and farming elements in the landscape are all developed during a prosperous period of innovation and change within the Pixton Estate (which owned the valley and woodland) during the 1870s, as it is first documented on the 1887 1st Edition map. The Exe river and its dramatic valley setting has been an important tourist draw since the later 18th and early 19th century, as well as an association with the important sport fishing industry in the area. The soundscape reinforces the romantic edge-of-moorland setting of the farmhouse particularly, although this association is probably incidental – the presence of a carriage drive on the Pixton Estate, higher up the slope – a ride through the trees with a backdrop of rushing water and occasional glimpses of white water caused by the weir would strongly suggest the weir is part of a planned landscape.

2.7 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

As a stone-built weir associated with an important 19th century phase of prosperity on the Pixton Estate, it is likely that Helebridge Weir is of limited **local importance**, as it is connected to the sawmill and commercial running of the estate – which installed a lot of infrastructure in this period. It also happens to have some incidental and secondary eye-catcher function and a physical-geographical association with both Hele Bridge and Helebridge farmhouse – its placement in the landscape clearly considered for practical and aesthetic reasons – holding some

very minor aesthetic value. It is primarily of historical and associational value – with the sawmills and estate – as defined by the Historic England classifications of value. It contributes positively to the soundscape of the valley, maximising, particularly in high flows, the rushing sound of white-water. It is of fair condition and appears to be substantially complete, so high on the authenticity and integrity scale. It is considered a local undesigned heritage asset.



FIGURE 11: HELE BRIDGE AND HELEBRIDGE FARMHOUSE; FROM THE EAST.



FIGURE 12: MACHINE COURT, VIEWED FROM NEXT TO THE WEIR ACROSS THE FIELDS; FROM THE WEST-SOUTH-WEST.

2.8 CONSIDERATION OF IMPACT

The Westcountry Rivers Trust propose to remove the weir in its entirety to facilitate fish movement along the River Exe which will have a major, *permanent* and *irreversible* impact on the historic fabric of the weir itself.

The total removal of the weir would also remove any associative value that it has in its link to the sluice, leat and sawmills – indirectly impacting that site, the narrative of the estate woodlands and an overall understanding of the transformation of the landscape in the 1870s for this specific valley section (including Machine Court, etc.) – thereby having an even weaker but quantifiable impact on the wider estate, planned carriage drives and the visitor experience of the valley.

Its removal would technically have a secondary, limited but quantifiable effect on the soundscape of the valley; whilst at times in low water in summer the natural rock outcrop on which the weir is constructed, will still encourage some white-water it will not provide the same consistency of sound as the current weir structure and therefore will alter the setting of both the farmhouse and bridge, developed since the weirs installation, just upstream.

Overall, these various factors combine to give a **negative/substantial** impact for the removal of the weir structure and a more general **negative/moderate** impact on the landscape and historical narrative of the Pixton estate as a cultural entity within the landscape.



FIGURE 13: THE ADJACENT 18TH CENTURY FARMHOUSE AND BELOW IT, THE MEDIEVAL BRIDGE, JUST UPSTREAM FROM THE WEIR; FROM THE SOUTH-EAST.

It is believed the potential impact of removal could be managed and even reduced through mitigation measures; the weir may possess evidential value in determining detailed function and a more exact date, which could only be accessed by monitoring its removal and could contribute to the local record. The sluice and leat could be recorded – at least adjacent to the weir and retained to some extent and even repaired/consolidated as an offsetting measure to ensure the ‘ghost’ of

the weir and the wider narrative is retained to some extent in the landscape. These factors combine to reduce the impact – considering the overwhelming environmental evidence to support removal, down to a **negative/moderate** to **negative/minor** impact.



FIGURE 14: PHOTOGRAPH BY WESTCOUNTRY RIVERS TRUST PERSONNEL, 2020/2021 - THE SILTED UP LEAT WHICH RUNS PARALLEL TO THE RIVER AND SERVES THE FORMER SAW MILLS ON THE PIXTON ESTATE; FROM THE SOUTH.



FIGURE 15: VIEW FROM THE GARDEN OF HELEBRIDGE FARMHOUSE - SHOWING A DIRECT VIEW TO THE LOCATION OF THE WEIR - SLIGHTLY SCREENED BY 19TH CENTURY SPECIMEN PINE; FROM THE NORTH-NORTH-WEST.

3.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 CONCLUSIONS

Helebridge Weir is documented as a Post Medieval weir to the south of a Grade II Listed Medieval stone bridge. It is first clearly depicted on the 1887 First Edition Ordnance Survey map. The Tithe apportionments for the parishes of Dulverton and Kingsbrompton show that the land on either side of the weir was in the ownership of the Earl of Carnarvon (Pixton Estate) at this date while the river was held by the Trustees of the Minehead Turnpike Road. Pixton was recorded at Domesday and the estate appears to have been in the ownership of the Dyke family by the 17th century. The estate passed through the female line to the Acland family of Killerton (becoming Dyke Acland from this date). The present Pixton House was built c.1760 for Thomas Dyke Acland 7th bt and the estate passed to the Herbert family through the marriage of Henry Herbert, 2nd Earl of Carnarvon to Elizabeth Acland in 1796. It is documented that significant alterations to the house and estate took place in the 1870s, under the ownership of the 4th Earl of Carnarvon. It is likely that the construction of Helebridge Weir along with the provision of a leat to Weir Saw Mills and the alterations evident at Machine Court can be seen in the context of the development of the Carnarvon Estate during this period.

The weir is of a fairly typical 19th century build – seen across other structures on the river Exe in this period. This is likely to be of local importance by associational value as it had a role in facilitating water supply to the estate sawmills and was indirectly involved in the development of the managed woodland, utilising innovative technology for the period. The proposals to completely remove the weir would have a **negative/substantial** impact on the structure and **negative/moderate** impact on the landscape – largely for the significant change in the soundscape which would occur – as well as the impact on the saw mills and leat.

It is recommended that if significant alterations or removal of the structure were to be carried out that a standard planning condition for archaeological monitoring and recording is included as part of any permission. This will enable further investigation work and recording of the structure should take place before and during works to facilitate a greater understanding of the weir, its build etc. to inform the local record.

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APPENDIX 1: PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD



1. DAMAGED SECTION OF THE WEIR TO THE WEST END; FROM THE EAST-SOUTH-EAST.



2. VIEW OF THE WHITE-WATER AT THE BASE OF THE CRUMP SLOPE OF THE WEIR — THROUGH THE SCRUB TREES ON THE RIVERBANK;
FROM THE SOUTH-EAST.



3. VIEW DOWN THE RIVER FROM HELE BRIDGE — THE SCRUB ON THE RIVERBANK NOW OBSCURES THE VIEW TO THE WEIR; FROM THE NORTH.



4. VIEW FROM THE FRONT PORCH OF HELEBRIDGE FARMHOUSE, LOOKING ACROSS HELE BRIDGE AND THE VALLEY TO MACHINE COURT; FROM THE WEST.



5. LOOKING OVER THE HEDGE — ACROSS THE ROAD AND FIELD TO THE WEIR — FROM HELEBRIDGE FARMHOUSE GARDEN — SHOWING VIEWS OF THE WHITE-WATER FROM THE WEIR — IN A STATE OF HIGH FLOW — MOST LIKELY NOT VISIBLE IN SPRING AND SUMMER; FROM THE NORTH-NORTH-WEST.



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