Transforming the Trent Valley: Cultural Heritage Audit Summary Report

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

An audit of cultural heritage was undertaken for the Transforming the Trent Valley landscape partnership project. This covered an area of 200km² within the valleys of the River Trent its tributaries, the Dove and Tame, in the counties of Staffordshire and Derbyshire.

Archaeology, history and geology underpin the formation of our landscapes, and help to create a sense of distinctiveness and identity for the places in which we live, and the ways that people understand and engage with them. 'Cultural heritage' includes historic buildings and structures, earthwork monuments, buried archaeology, artefacts and historic landscapes. Particularly rare, or culturally significant sites, buildings and landscapes have been recorded on national registers or designated as conservation areas, to allow for extra protection in the planning process.

The aims of the cultural heritage audit were to produce a catalogue of recorded cultural heritage sites within the study area, drawing together existing documentation and recorded information. The audit summarises some of the key themes represented in the valley's cultural heritage resource, which will inform interpretation and spatial strategies for the project area, as well as the development of a landscape conservation action plan.

This document presents a summary of the main cultural heritage themes identified within the Transforming the Trent Valley landscape, along with information on some of the management issues that will allow the valley's historic environment to be sustained into the future.
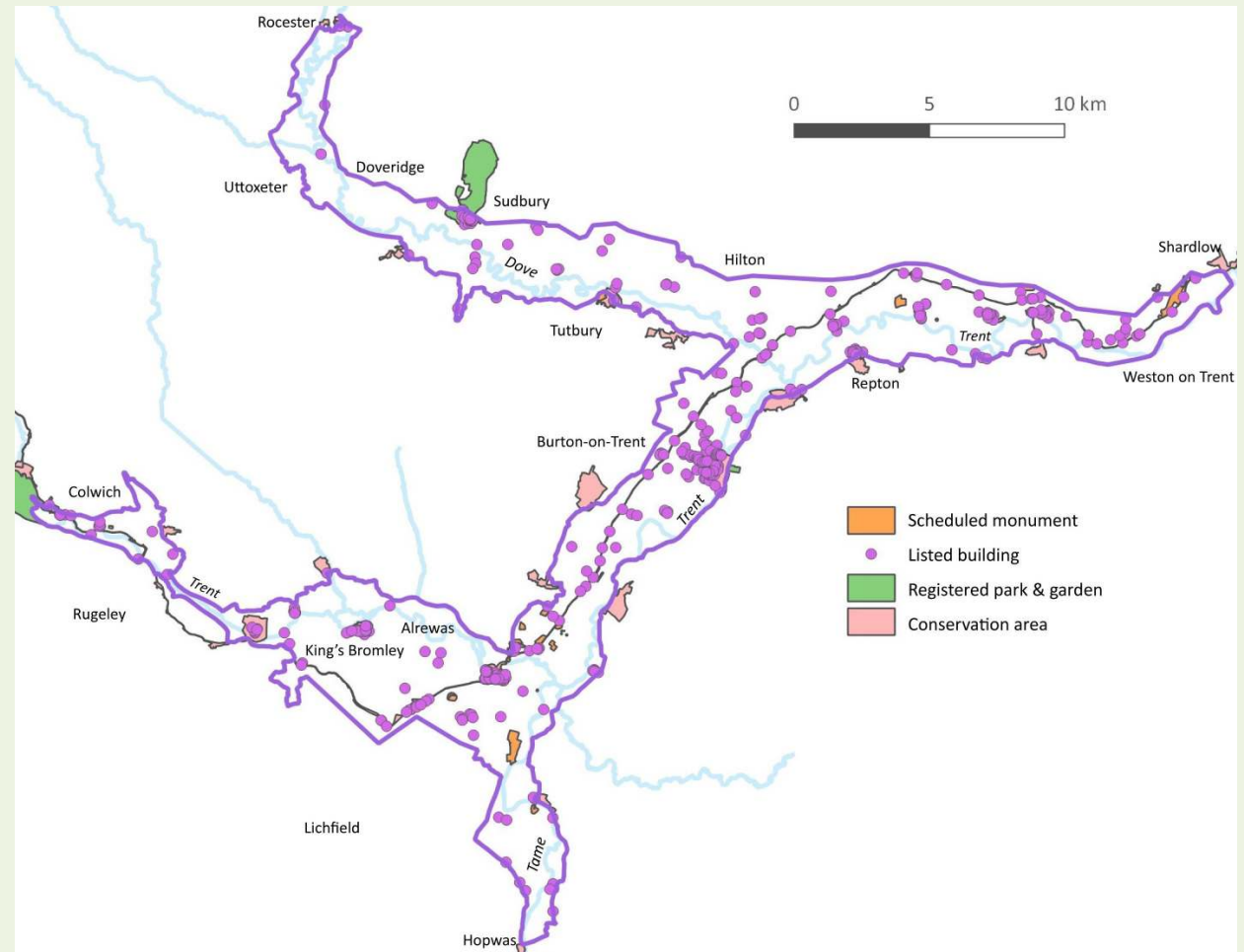
Study area map showing designated cultural heritage sites

SECTION 2: EVOLUTION OF THE RIVER VALLEY

The underlying geology of the area has had a significant impact on the current and historic landscape character. The bedrock geology largely comprises mudstone, siltstone and sandstone formed 200 to 251 million years ago. Valleys were cut through the bedrock by glaciers and rivers, which deposited sand and gravel terraces during cold glacial and warmer interglacial periods in the Quaternary period.

The present routes of the rivers within the study area are largely the result of a series of ice age glaciations. The earliest gravel terraces in the study area are thought to have been deposited around 300,000 years ago. These gravels can contain the remains of stone hand axes made by earlier human ancestors. More recent deposits associated with the last ice age have revealed the remains of woolly rhinos, mammoths and reindeer, from a period when the landscape was covered by an open tundra grassland, similar to present Arctic conditions. The rivers at this time would have been 'braided', with multiple channels spread out across the valley floor.

After the last ice sheets retreated, a wildwood forest gradually regenerated and would have covered most of the study area by the beginning of the Neolithic period (around 4000 years ago). Plant remains, pollen and insects from waterlogged deposits have indicated that by the late Neolithic period, the study area was dominated by shallow and slow flowing braided rivers. Marshy conditions prevailed next to the river, with evidence for open, cleared areas close by and wildwood remaining on the higher ground.

Tree clearance to create fields would have increased the erosion of topsoil and contributed to increasing deposition of clay and sand alluvium in the flood plain, particularly in association with a deteriorating climate and increased rainfall. These factors contributed to an increasingly unstable flood plain environment and more deeply incised river channels.

Slight climatic fluctuations continued through the prehistoric to post-medieval periods, and documentary and archaeological evidence indicate that the pattern of fairly mobile river channels appears to have remained the norm into at least the 18th century. The current river channels appear to have become established by the late 19th century, in the main resulting in a single river channel, though some fossilised old channels survive. More recent changes to the route of the Trent occurred in association with adjacent 20th-century gravel quarrying, which has also created large ponds and wetland environments in former quarry pits.

MANAGEMENT - MINERALS EXTRACTION

Sand and gravel quarrying leads to the destruction of any archaeological remains within the footprint of the quarry, and can cause changes in the surrounding water table, impacting on the preservation of organic remains in buried deposits across a wider area. Whilst archaeological remains in upper subsoil deposits can be recorded prior to extraction, remains in deeper gravel deposits can be difficult to monitor or recover due to the mechanisation of modern quarrying methods.

Sand and gravel quarries at Borough Holme, Staffordshire
Aerial photography © GetMapping (2006-10)

SECTION 3: EVOLUTION OF SETTLEMENT

Post-medieval houses at Repton, Derbyshire

The first occupants of the valleys were mobile hunter-gatherer groups in the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods. So far, only one site in the study area has definitive evidence for Palaeolithic human occupation. At Tucklesholme Quarry, a scatter of artefacts indicated a place where stone tools were manufactured around 10,000 years ago, on low-lying land between river channels. Such sites are rare nationally.

The only clear evidence for Mesolithic occupation activity within the study area is at a ridge-top site at Swarkestone Lowes, again a scatter of flint artefacts resulting from tool manufacture. The majority of Mesolithic sites within the wider Trent Valley have been found on ridge-top locations; the elevated ground may have offered longer-distance views and more convenient routes than densely-wooded valleys.

The Neolithic period marked the introduction of farming, though communities probably continued to move seasonally between resources. Excavated evidence for Neolithic settlement within the study area can be ephemeral, but evidence for post-built houses has been found at Willington. One of these sites was located on a gravel island between streams, though this settlement within the flood plain had been abandoned by the Bronze Age, perhaps due to increased flooding.

Bronze Age settlement is typified by small groups of unenclosed roundhouses, perhaps farmsteads, on gravel terraces above the flood plain. These unenclosed farmsteads were succeeded by a landscape of dispersed, enclosed farmsteads set within fields from the middle Iron Age. By the late Iron Age and Roman periods, evidence of permanent settlement is sparse, and it has been suggested that occupation moved away from the lower terraces, perhaps onto higher ground.

During the Anglo-Saxon period, small settlements of post-built houses and sunken-floored buildings have been recorded within earlier fields on the terraces above the river, but by the time of the Norman conquest in 1066 the majority of settlement appears to have become focused in more nucleated villages on the higher ground.

In the late 18th to 19th centuries, the advent of factory-based industries and changes in agricultural practice led to increased migration to industrial centres. Burton upon Trent increased substantially in size from the later 18th century onwards. Other settlements within the study area have largely remained villages, with limited modern development.

MANAGEMENT - DEVELOPMENT

Construction activity can lead to the demolition of historic buildings and the destruction of buried and earthwork archaeological remains. It can also impact on the setting of heritage assets through altering the character of historic settlements and landscapes. These impacts can be mitigated through the planning process, through preservation *in situ* or by record, and through promoting sympathetic development in historic areas.

SECTION 4: DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Farming was introduced into the area during the Neolithic period, with pastoral animal herding and arable cultivation occurring in woodland clearings on the river terraces. Tree clearance increased over time, resulting in a largely open landscape by the Iron Age period. The available evidence suggests that the Bronze Age valley was generally undivided, perhaps with shared use of resources and seasonal movement to upland pastures. The increase of land enclosure during the Iron Age may reflect a greater pressure on resources.

Ridge and furrow earthworks at Egginton, Derbyshire, visible in Lidar data
2m DTM Lidar data (multi-angle hillshade) © Environment Agency

From the later part of the Iron Age and into the Roman period, the pattern of fields suggests a more specialist pastoralist economy. Field patterns in the southern part of the study area became concentrated on droveways, and a lack of evidence for permanent settlement suggests temporary dwellings associated with seasonal herding activity.

In the Anglo-Saxon period, farmstead-type settlements returned to the valley, with some evidence for continuing use of the Iron Age and Roman fields. Arable cultivation is attested in the medieval period by the widespread remains of ridge and furrow earthworks recorded across the study area. These earthworks result from medieval ploughing in open fields, and survive in areas where subsequent land-use has been largely pastoral. In some areas, open fields persisted into the 18th century.

Some of the ridge and furrow earthworks are likely to have been reused as water meadows in the post-medieval period, with further earthworks created for the purpose in this period. Water meadows comprised a system of drains, carriers and sluices used to flood fields in the winter period, keeping the ground warmer and allowing a rich growth of grass and hay for fodder in the spring. These again indicate a predominantly pastoral focus that appears to have lasted into the 19th century.

Agricultural improvements in the late 18th and early 19th centuries led to significant changes in the landscape layout. Surviving open fields and commons were enclosed and allotted to the major landowners, to enable the employment of more efficient agricultural methods . By the later 20th century, a mixed farming regime was present within the valley, and many earthwork remains of earlier agriculture have been lost to ploughing.

MANAGEMENT - AGRICULTURE

The main threat from agricultural activity is ploughing, which can level earthwork features and cause damage to buried archaeology. Many of the sites designated as Scheduled Monuments in the valley are at risk from ploughing. Grazing regimes may also impact on earthworks, with cattle grazing causing greater disturbance to topsoil than sheep, which leads to more severe erosion. In general, pastoral regimes lead to a better preservation of earthworks and buried remains.

SECTION 5: RITUAL AND RELIGION

Within the study area, the earliest evidence for ceremonial monuments that acted as centres for ritual activity dates from the early Neolithic period, when substantial monuments of earth, stone and timber were constructed within woodland clearings. Causewayed enclosures, large oval spaces surrounded by two to three interrupted ditch circuits, are thought to have been used as meeting places for dispersed and mobile groups for a variety of social, economic and ceremonial purposes. These enclosures have been recorded at Alrewas and Mavesyn Ridware.

Later in the Neolithic period, new monument types evolved, including long linear enclosures known as cursus monuments, stone and timber circles, and circular enclosures with an outer ditch and bank known as henges. Three principal groups of these ceremonial monuments are known within the study area, at Catholme in Staffordshire, and Aston upon Trent and Twyford in Derbyshire. The complexes are all located close to river confluences, suggesting they may have been at boundaries or meeting points between territories.

By the early Bronze Age, the large monuments had largely fallen out of use, though they were still visible in the landscape. A burial tradition involving the interment of bodies or cremations within and around circular mounds or barrows originated during this period, around 2400-1700 BC. It was associated with new pottery forms and the introduction of metalworking. Barrows have been recorded across the study area, though only a few survive as earthwork mounds. Deliberate deposition of bronze swords, daggers and axes in rivers and lakes also occurred in this period, probably as ritual or 'votive' offerings.

There is little evidence of ritual activity from the Iron Age and Roman periods, with the exception of a probable Roman shrine near the fort at Rocester. In the Anglo Saxon period, evidence for pagan activity has been found in grave goods associated with cemeteries, whilst probable Viking burials have been recovered from an over-wintering camp at Repton.

Christianity was introduced into the area in 653 AD, when the Mercian royal family were baptised at Repton. A minster church and abbey were founded at Repton in this period, as well as a chapel at Burton, with churches at Kings Bromley and Alrewas also in existence at the time of the Norman Conquest. Burton Abbey was founded in 1002.

All Saints, Alrewas, Staffordshire: a medieval church on a 9th-century foundation

Many of the churches within the study area have medieval origins, though there have been major restorations and complete rebuilds in later periods. From the 18th century, the growth of alternative branches of religion such as Baptists and Methodists is reflected in new chapels established in many villages and urban centres. New Anglican churches were also constructed to cater for the expanding urban population.

SECTION 6: TRANSPORT NETWORKS

The river valleys would have provided transport and communication routes throughout the prehistoric period. The earliest evidence for river transport are three Bronze Age log boats that have been found in gravel pits at Burton upon Trent and Shardlow.

Prehistoric tracks and droveways crossed the area, many associated with the agricultural landscape, and more substantial military roads were laid out during and after the Roman invasion. Ryknield Street Roman road ran through the study area, roughly on the current route of the A38.

Medieval stone bridges survive at several river crossings, as well as the timber and stone piers of superseded bridges. Post-medieval wooden revetments found along the Trent near Tywford may have been intended to improve navigation, suggesting that some river transport was possible, perhaps as far upstream as Burton.

The medieval Swarkestone Bridge, Derbyshire

Turnpike roads were developed to improve the transport network from the 18th century, with tolls used to fund maintenance. Many former turnpikes form the basis of the current road network, though some have been superseded by modern dual carriageways.

In the later 18th century, demand for a method of transporting large cargoes led to the creation of the canal network. The Trent & Mersey Canal was the first of the major inland waterways, linking the ports of Hull and Liverpool. It opened between Shardlow and Shugborough in June 1770 and was fully completed by 1777. The Coventry/Birmingham & Fazeley Canal was completed around 1789, linking the Trent & Mersey to the Oxford Canal. Its junction with the Trent & Mersey at Fradley is the focus of a wharf, warehouses, inns and canal workers' cottages.

Trent & Mersey Canal bridge and lock at Wychnor Bridges, Staffordshire

The canals formed the main cargo transport link through the Midlands until the development of the railway in the mid-19th century. Branches of the North Staffordshire Railway, the Midland Railway, the Great Northern Railway, and the London & North Western Railway ran through study area. The railways took much of the custom from the canals, but were in turn impacted by a 20th-century decline in industry and competition from motor vehicles. Several of the lines were closed and dismantled in the later 20th century, some converted into public bridleways.

SECTION 7: ELITE LANDSCAPES

The evidence for prehistoric to early medieval settlement within the area comprises small farmstead-type settlements, with no clear signs of an elite presence. Repton is an exception, where kings of Mercia were buried in the Saxon crypt, though no evidence for a contemporary elite residence has yet been found in this area.

Wychnor moated manor site, Staffordshire

During the medieval period, manors were the basic unit of landholding, controlled by hereditary landowners. Manorial administrative complexes would include the lord's or steward's residence and outbuildings such as barns, breweries and mills. Some were surrounded by moats, several of which have been recorded in the study area. Un-moated manor houses are harder to identify where no buildings or earthworks survive.

Medieval deer parks were fenced-off areas where the landowner was granted the right to hunt deer and other game by the King. These parks provided sport, meat for the table, and contributed to the status of the manorial lord, rather than being an aesthetic feature.

From the Tudor period onwards, mansion houses began to supersede the medieval manor houses. Elaborate formal gardens also flourished in this period. Changing fashions in the 18th century led to the creation of extensive parks where the landscape itself was sculpted and arranged to portray 'romantic' natural ideals. On some occasions, this involved moving villages or houses that disturbed a desired view. Parks and gardens often included feature such as summerhouses, greenhouses and banqueting halls. Anchor Chapel at Ingleby is an unusual example of an isolated banqueting hall, adapted from artificial caves in the 18th century and associated with Foremark Hall.

Most surviving mansion houses within the study area are of post-medieval date, with six constructed or rebuilt in the late 18th- to 19th centuries. Most are now in private hands, some used as hotels or private schools; only Sudbury Hall is open to the public.

Sudbury Hall, Derbyshire, in National Trust ownership

SECTION 8: KEY INDUSTRIES OF THE VALLEY

Archaeological evidence has revealed only sporadic traces of Iron Age to early medieval industry within the study area, including small-scale iron working and the manufacture of loom weights. Water-powered corn mills were common from the medieval period, most surviving in a rebuilt form into the 19th or early 20th centuries, some converted for textile production in the 18th century. Many have since been converted into residential properties. Iron manufacture was a significant industry in the Burton area in the post-medieval to industrial period, but there are few surviving remains beyond iron bridges and a pedestrian viaduct in the Washlands. Traces of glass manufacturing have been recorded at Lount, possibly similar to the medieval Wolseley Glass Works in Cannock Chase.

Former Ind Coope Brewery buildings at Burton-upon-Trent

Quarrying is a major industry in the study area, though historic quarrying is poorly documented. Sites of probable medieval to 19th-century quarries have been noted from earthworks and historic maps, and it is likely that many remains of earlier extraction have been destroyed by the extensive modern quarries. In addition to the sand and gravel quarries along the valley, remains of gypsum mines and quarries are found around Hanbury.

The most visible surviving buildings relating to industry within the valley relate to the nationally significant Burton upon Trent brewing industry. This developed from small-scale medieval brewing associated with Burton Abbey, but expanded rapidly in the 19th century, when the qualities of the local artesian water led to companies from outside the area developing large breweries in the town. The industry is still significant to the town, and many remains of historic breweries and malthouses survive.

MANAGEMENT - NEGLECT

Neglect of historic structures can have a detrimental impact on their integrity and character, as well as that of their settings. Unused or poorly maintained buildings can quickly become derelict or unsafe, and may become a focus for anti-social behaviour. Isolated structures may be particularly vulnerable, where monitoring their condition can be problematic.

*Graffiti and rubbish within Anchor Chapel, Ingleby, Derbyshire*

SECTION 9: TWENTIETH-CENTURY MILITARY SITES

The military barracks at Whittington, used as a base for Staffordshire regiments throughout the 20th century, is located just outside the study area, as are important First World War military training sites at Cannock Chase. Only one First World War feature is recorded within the study area: a machine gun factory in Branston. In addition to its wartime significance, the factory is also the former home of Branston Pickle, having converted to food production in the 1920s.

The majority of the 20th-century defence features within the study area are associated with Second World War activity, including Stop Line no.5, a series of anti-tank pillboxes constructed along the rivers in 1940, to counter a feared German invasion of Britain. Though the stop line was a short-lived operation, many of the pillboxes survive along the river banks, often sited close to road, canal and railway bridges.

Stop Line no.5 pillbox on the Trent & Mersey Canal aqueduct at Clay Mills
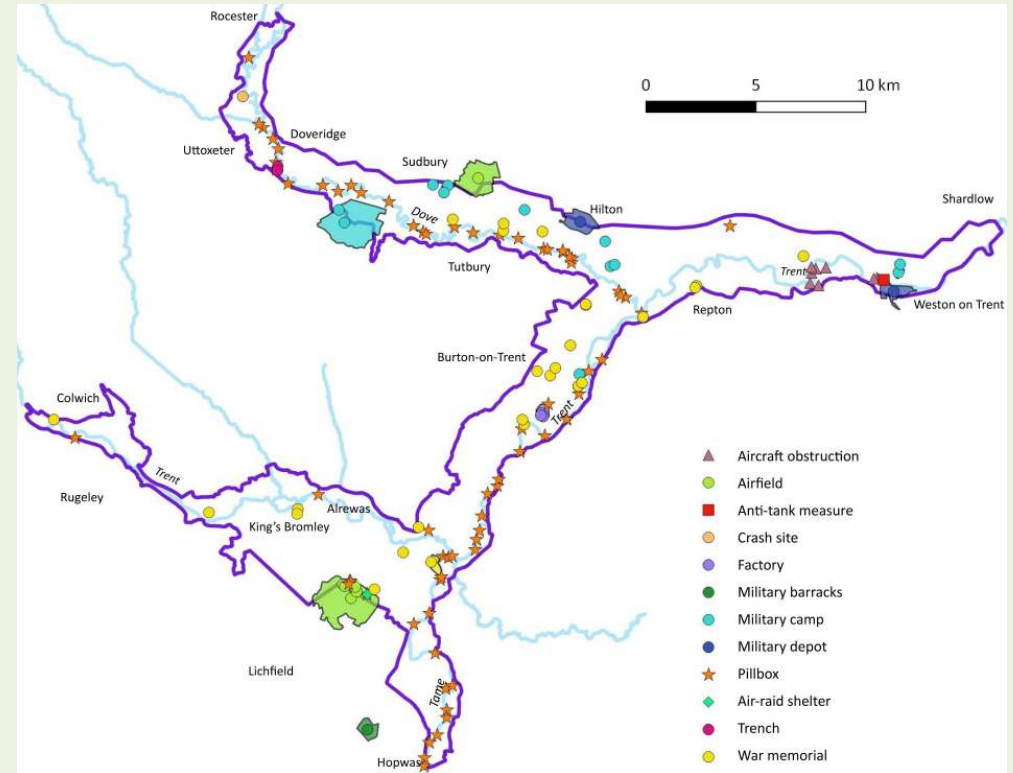
Distribution of 20th-century military and commemorative sites

Other Second World War military sites include two RAF airfields, two army depots and several military camps. Most of the structures have been removed, though some huts and associated features survive.

The commemoration of the 20th-century conflicts is well represented within the study area. Most of the villages and towns have war memorials; that at Barrow upon Trent being particularly interesting. This monument commemorates First World War volunteers rather than the fallen, and was awarded to the village in 1916 after it won a competition to find the Derbyshire village with the highest number of volunteers for its size.

SECTION 10: FURTHER INFORMATION & SOURCES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERIODS USED IN THE TEXT:

Palaeolithic	500,000 BC-10,000 BC
Mesolithic	10,000 BC-4,000 BC
Neolithic	4,000 BC – 2,300 BC
Bronze Age	2,300 BC-700 BC
Iron Age	700 BC-43 AD
Roman	43 AD-450 AD
Early medieval	450 AD-1066 AD
Medieval	1066 AD-1450 AD
Post-medieval	1450 AD-1750 AD
Industrial	1750 AD-1900 AD
Modern	1900 AD-present

ONLINE INFORMATION & GUIDANCE:

Transforming the Trent Valley Landscape Project:

http://www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/TTTV

Historic England advice and guidance:

https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/

Local authority advice and guidance:

https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/environment/eLand/planners-develo
pers/HistoricEnvironment/HistoricEnvironmentHomePage.aspx
https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/environment/conservation/default.asp

FURTHER READING:

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