Offa's Dyke Journal

Volume 2

Edited by Howard Williams and Liam Delaney

Aims and Scope

Offa's Dyke Journal is a peer-reviewed venue for the publication of high-quality research on the archaeology, history and heritage of frontiers and borderlands focusing on the Anglo-Welsh border. The editors invite submissions that explore dimensions of Offa's Dyke, Wat's Dyke and the 'short dykes' of western Britain, including their life-histories and landscape contexts. *ODJ* will also consider comparative studies on the material culture and monumentality of frontiers and borderlands from elsewhere in Britain, Europe and beyond. We accept:

1. Notes and Reviews of up to 3,000 words
2. Interim reports on fieldwork of up to 5,000 words
3. Original discussions, syntheses and analyses of up to 10,000 words

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Saxon Kent versus Roman London? Presenting Borderland Heritage at the Faesten Dic in Joyden's Wood, Kent

Ethan Doyle White

Standing on Kent's western border with Greater London, the Faesten Dic in Joyden's Wood is one of Britain's less-well known linear earthworks. There has been speculation as to its origins since the late nineteenth century, although as of yet no conclusive dating evidence has been revealed. This article reviews the archaeological and historical evidence for the site, before exploring the ways in which the heritage of this earthwork has been presented to the public by the Woodland Trust, a charity which own Joyden's Wood, focusing on how both information boards and installed sculptures have foregrounded the narrative of the earthwork as a fifth-century defensive barrier between 'Roman London' and 'Saxon Kent.' This, in turn, has interesting connotations regarding the current administrative divisions between Greater London and Kent.

Keywords: Faesten Dic; Joyden's Wood; Bexley; Dartford; Woodland Trust

Introduction

The public imagination may more readily be captured by the likes of Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke thanks to their sheer scale or visual impact, but archaeologists must be cautious not to overlook the many other, lesser known linear earthworks of putative early medieval origin scattered around the landscapes of Britain. In western Kent, very close to the contemporary border with Greater London, stands the Faesten Dic (Figure 1), a roughly 1.67km-long west-facing earthwork stretching in a roughly north-to-south alignment across high ground on the eastern side of the Cray Valley (Figure 2).[1] Bisected by a steep-sided valley cutting through it in a roughly north-west/south-east direction, the dyke is preserved comparatively well in large part because it is now situated within Joyden's Wood, an area that has been owned by the Woodland Trust since 1987.[2] Despite its proximity to the nation's capital, the Faesten Dic has attracted scant attention from those writing on the presentation of early medieval heritage, the only prior comments on the topic appearing in a blog post by Robert Briggs (2013). The comparatively little attention that the Faesten Dic has received has instead, quite understandably, focused on the date and reasons for its construction.

[1] It must be stressed that this refers to the present-day county boundary, which dates from the 1960s. In previous centuries, much of south-east Greater London, including territory now encompassed by the London Boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, and Lewisham, was considered part of Kent, a situation evident by at least the eleventh century.

[2] Although the Woodland Trust obtained most of Joyden's Wood from the Forestry Commission in 1987, an area of almost 8 hectares in the north-east part of the wood remained the property of Dartford Borough Council until the latter gifted it to the Trust in 1993.

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Figure 1: The ditch and bank of the Faesten Dic in a northern part of Joyden's Wood. Photograph taken by Ethan Doyle White in March 2020

What do we know about Faesten Dic? The earliest document to testify to the earthwork's existence is a charter, S 175 (or BCS 346), which claims to date from the year AD 814 (Birch 1885: 483–84; Sawyer 1968: 115; Brooks and Kelly 2013, no. 49). It is probable that this charter is a later forgery; Dorothy Whitelock highlighted that there were discrepancies in the charter's language 'which would be odd in a genuine text' of the early ninth century (Sawyer 1968: 115). Simon Keynes subsequently proposed that S 175 was based partly on another charter, S 176, which genuinely dates from 814 (Keynes 1993: 114 fn. 23). The latter, however, discussed land at Bingley's Island near Canterbury and thus makes no reference to the Faesten Dic. Our *terminus ante quem* for the feature thus rests on the genuine date of S 175; that matter is not settled, although Peter Sawyer (1968: 115) noted that the earliest surviving manuscript containing this charter may be tenth century.

Despite the problems associated with S 175, it does at least testify to the fact that the earthwork existed by the end of the Early Middle Ages and that at that time it was referred to by the Old English term *fæstendic*. This is a term that was not unique to this site but can be found in either six or seven instances across England (Baker 2008: 334). The Old English term *fæsten* has traditionally been understood as defining a 'strong place' although John Baker (2008: 341) more recently argued that the term applied specifically to 'naturally inaccessible places that might be deemed suitable for a stronghold.' In this manner, Baker (2008: 338) argued, a *fæstendic* would be 'a particular type of ditch, one that created a *fæsten* or had a specific role as part of the defences of a *fæsten*.'

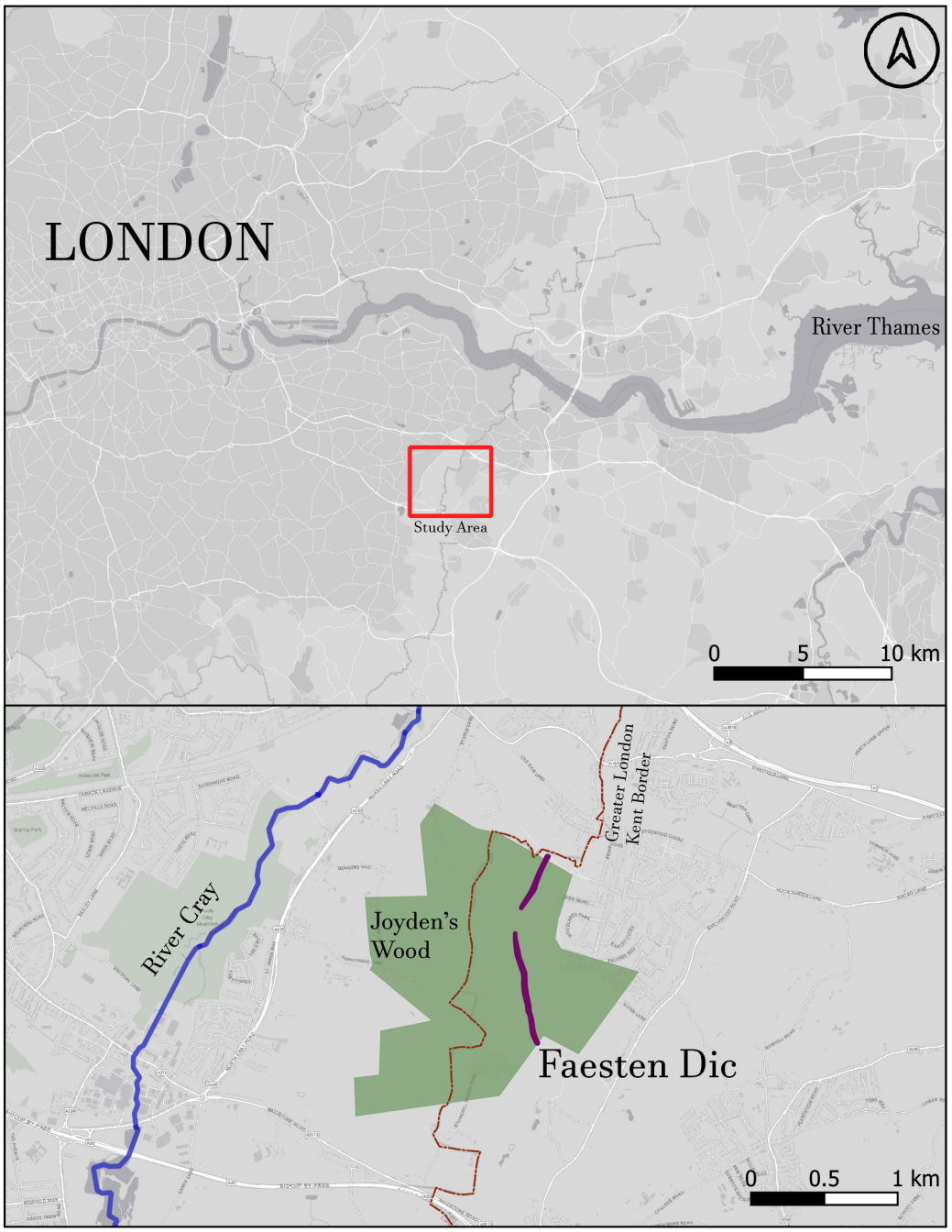

Figure 2: A map of the Faesten Dic in Joyden's Wood and the surrounding area. Created by Liam Delaney

This article will not seek to further elucidate the origins of the Faesten Dic, something which will probably only be achieved through excavation and the application of radiocarbon and optically stimulated luminescence dating. Rather, it focuses attention on the public presentation of the site, a case study which raises interesting issues

relating to the interpretation of linear monuments, not just for the heritage of the Cray Valley and the wider Kent/London borderlands but also for the public archaeology of early medieval Britain as a whole. To achieve this, it provides an overview of previous archaeological interpretations of the site, contextualising such interpretations within broader conceptions of the Early Middle Ages. It then examines how the Woodland Trust have presented the Faesten Dic to the public, in particular their decision to promote one specific narrative – that the earthwork represents a fifth-century defensive barrier erected by the 'Anglo-Saxon' communities of Kent to keep the 'Roman' communities of the London area at bay – despite there being no reliable evidence regarding the accuracy of such an interpretation. Ultimately, it considers how this narrative of the Faesten Dic as a Kent/London barrier alludes to the present administrative border running through the Cray Valley and plays into local anxieties regarding the westward encroachment of Greater London and associated processes of urbanisation.

The archaeology and history of the Faesten Dic

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the local archaeologist Flaxman Charles John Spurrell discussed the various archaeological features of Joyden's Wood in two articles (Spurrell 1881, 1889).[3] Although he did not identify it with the *fæestendic* of the medieval charter, Spurrell was clearly aware of the Faesten Dic, including it in his plan of the wood drawn up with the assistance of William Matthew Flinders Petrie (Spurrell 1881: 405; Plate I), then something of a specialist on Kentish earthworks.[4] Nevertheless, Spurrell does not appear to have been particularly interested in it, devoting far greater attention to other features in Joyden's Wood, namely its deneholes and a series of (now destroyed) earthworks to the east of the Faesten Dic. The latter included a square earthwork which Spurrell assumed to be Roman, in large part due to his discovery of what he took to be Romano-British pottery (Spurrell 1881: 405; Spurrell 1889: 307).[5] He nevertheless thought that earthworks to the south and east of this square feature represented part of a prehistoric settlement (Spurrell 1881: 405–406), and it seems probable that he included the Faesten Dic in this assessment.

[3] A nearby road in the largely post-war conurbation of Joydens Wood is called Spurrell Avenue, no doubt after the eponymous archaeologist; others are titled Dykewood Close and Faesten Way, both referencing the nearby Faesten Dic.

[4] The Kentish-born Flinders Petrie published an overview of the county's earthworks (1880) while in his late twenties; although not mentioning those at Joyden's Wood, he pointed his readers to Spurrell's (1880: 14) researches in the Dartford area. Later in life, he would rise to wider prominence as one of the world's foremost Egyptologists.

[5] This square earthwork contained a late medieval house, excavated in 1939 and again in 1957 ahead of suburban development on the site (Colvin 1948; Tester and Caiger 1957; Tester and Caiger 1958). Tester and Caiger (1958: 25–26) suggested that the earthworks surrounding the house were probably roughly contemporary with it, dating from the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. A small quantity of Roman material, including Samian ware, was found here (Colvin 1948: 134) while further evidence of Romano-British activity, including a kiln, was found in the south-eastern corner of Joyden's Wood (Tester and Caiger 1954).

The earthworks of Joyden's Wood were next surveyed by Colonel O.E. Ruck for a 1906 piece in the *Royal Engineers Journal* and then included in Isaac Chalkley Gould's 1908 chapter on Kentish earthworks for the Victoria County History project. Like Spurrell, both Ruck and Gould appeared to be most interested in the square earthwork, which they too thought was Roman, although they each suggested that other earthworks in the wood, perhaps including Faesten Dic, might be older. For Gould (1908: 404), such features 'carry the mind back to a faraway Celtic period,' while for Ruck (1906: 16) they represented 'primitive, almost primæval, works, the origin of which literally bristles with controversial theories.' Again arguing in favour of a Roman origin to many of the earthworks at Joyden's Wood, F.C. Elliston Erwood was the first to draw attention to the medieval charter referring to the *fæestendic*, which he translated as 'ditch of the Fortress' (Erwood 1928: 183–84).[6] In doing so, Erwood allowed the earthwork, which at this point was apparently nameless, to take on the designation by which it is now commonly known. He further proposed that it may have been a post-Roman 'British work, built on the lines of Roman fortification, the memory and knowledge of which would still remain, as one of the outpost defences of London' as Germanic invaders pushed westward (Erwood 1928: 184). Erwood was thus responsible for first publishing the suggestion that the Faesten Dic was an early medieval feature.

During the early 1930s, the Faesten Dic was surveyed by Alexander H.A. Hogg, who initially published his findings as a note in *Antiquity* (Hogg 1934). He subsequently carried out limited excavation of the earthwork, including his findings in an article for the county archaeological journal, *Archaeologia Cantiana* (Hogg 1941). Hogg cut two sections into the Faesten Dic, although neither instance revealed evidence which he thought clearly dated the structure. Hogg's excavation exposed what he interpreted as a hard gravel path behind the bank, leading to his suggestion that 'the line of the earthwork was intended to be patrolled' (Hogg 1941: 21). Three small fragments of pottery were recovered from beneath the bank; on examining them, Christopher F.C. Hawkes suggested that they were neither prehistoric nor Roman, although could not positively identify them (Hogg 1941: 19). Hogg noted that 'there is nothing to suggest a Roman date for the earthwork' and instead thought it almost certainly 'post-Roman' (Hogg 1941: 16). He noted that it must predate the ninth century because of its appearance in the purported 814 charter (the authenticity of which had yet to be seriously questioned) although chose not to attribute it to anything more precise than 'the Dark Ages' (Hogg 1941: 21).

Hogg's somewhat cautious approach contrasted with Mortimer Wheeler's view that the Faesten Dic was built in the fifth or sixth centuries. Presented in a 1934 article in *The Antiquaries Journal*, Wheeler's argument relied on circumstantial evidence drawn from a broad time period and from comparisons with other earthworks in southern England, namely those often referred to as 'Grim's Dyke' or 'Grim's Ditch' near Berkhamsted

[6] Erwood's translation was assisted by George Beardoe Grundy (Erwood 1928: 197), the military historian also known for several publications on early medieval charters.

(Hertfordshire) and Pinner (then Middlesex, now Greater London). He saw these as sharing a common origin and purpose, referring to them collectively as the 'Grim's Ditch—Fæstendic series' (Wheeler 1934: 263). He dismissed the idea of any prehistoric origin, maintaining that they could not possibly be older than 'the Saxon settlement' of southern England (Wheeler 1934: 258). For Wheeler, they must also predate the Christianisation process of the seventh century, because – following an established notion – he took 'Grim' as being a name of the pre-Christian god Woden (Wheeler 1934: 259). Similarly, he argued that these earthworks did not run along any of the political boundaries recorded from the seventh centuries onward, and thus must be older than this (Wheeler 1934: 260). In this way, he reasoned, these earthworks must date from the fifth or sixth centuries.

Wheeler also sought to understand the purpose of these earthworks. For him, they were political statements regarding territory, 'a clear boundary in a mapless age' (Wheeler 1934: 261). Wheeler drew upon the established narrative of his time, that the fifth century had seen large numbers of 'Saxon' migrants spreading across Britain from continental Europe and coming into conflict with indigenous populations. He assumed, however, that these earthworks could not be the work of Saxons themselves: for Wheeler the Saxons were, 'of course, pre-eminently a valley-folk' with little interest in deforesting the sort of clay uplands on which many of the earthworks had been found. Instead the structures must have been created by 'Roman ('sub-Roman') Britons, whose agricultural tradition had always inclined towards plateau-cultivation' (Wheeler 1934: 260). He proposed that they were the creations of a Romano-British population whose territory spread from the Chilterns in the west to the River Lea in the east, and who were seeking to block the encroachment of those incomers from 'that great dumping-ground of early Saxondom, the well-watered Wash-region' (Wheeler 1934: 261). In this manner, Wheeler saw the Faesten Dic and other earthworks as 'tangible evidence for an enduring London capable from the outset of controlling the Saxon settlement of the London Basin' (Wheeler 1934: 263). In this, Wheeler was clearly echoing Erwood's earlier ideas, although he did not cite the latter's work explicitly. Wheeler thus thought that such earthworks had pertinence for pre-existing arguments about the persistence of 'a substantially intact administrative unit [in London] throughout the Pagan Saxon period' (Wheeler 1934: 254). Here, he was consciously providing support for Laurence Gomme's argument that the eleventh and twelfth-century territorial rights of Londoners ultimately stemmed from earlier Roman precedents (Gomme 1907: 106; 1912: 70–72).

Wheeler's opinions are significant because of their impact on subsequent interpretations of the Faesten Dic, including the public presentations of the site in the twenty-first century. Ralph Merrifield concurred with Wheeler's assessment that these earthworks were fifth or sixth century in date and reflected territorial tensions in the region. He nevertheless differed from Wheeler (and Erwood) in highlighting that these dykes all faced towards London, thus suggesting that they were meant to 'prevent encroachments' coming from the city, not vice versa (Merrifield 1983: 260–63), a point echoed for the Faesten Dic specifically by Peter J. Tester (1985: 22). Although he did not explicitly state it, Merrifield's comments

imply that Wheeler was wrong in attributing the Faesten Dic and similar earthworks to the Romano-British population of London and that instead an origin among invading Germanic communities should be considered.

A similar approach can be found in the Historic England listing for the Faesten Dic, which was created in 1955 and most recently updated in 1995. This proposes that the 'Anglo-Saxon frontier work' is fifth or sixth century in date, 'during which time the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records tribal warfare in the Bexley area.' This link to the late ninth-century *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is of particular note as it is apparent that the latter has cast a long shadow over the ways in which the Faesten Dic has been interpreted, in particular with regard to its age. The *Chronicle* refers to a battle at *Crecganford* in 456 or 457,[7] during which the continental incomers Hengest and his son Æsc clashed with the indigenous Britons, driving them out of Kent and into London. Many later writers have identified this location with Crayford, a town just north of Bexley in the London Borough of Bexley – and which is located only around 3km from the Faesten Dic. Most of the archaeologists who have commented on the Faesten Dic have made reference to this battle: Erwood (1928: 184) suggested that the earthwork 'may have played some part' in the battle, while Hogg (1934: 222) thought that the feature 'may perhaps' have been connected to it. Wheeler (1934: 263 fn. 1) also hinted at some possible link, and half a century later, Tester (1985: 22) proposed that the dyke might have been created 'after the Battle of Crayford to demarcate the area gained by the invaders'. While the historicity of those fifth-century events recounted in the *Chronicle* cannot reliably be accepted at face value (Sims-Williams 1983: 26–27), throughout the early and mid-twentieth century they often were, including by prominent early medieval archaeologists.

More recent assessments have been less committed to the idea that Faesten Dic must originate from the opening centuries of the Early Middle Ages. Peter Drewett, David Rudling, and Mark Gardiner (1988: 288, 290), followed by Briggs (2013), proposed a date in the seventh or eighth centuries, with the earthwork erected as a Kentish defence against documented incursions from Mercia and Wessex. In their book on early medieval Kent, Stuart Brookes and Sue Harrington suggested that the Faesten Dic is probably eighth or early ninth century in origin, thus being of a comparable age to Wat's Dyke, Offa's Dyke, and Wansdyke (Brookes and Harrington 2010: 96). Other commenters have been more reticent about applying a date to the construction of the earthwork. In his book on British dykes, Mark Bell stated that the Faesten Dic's origin was 'unknown' (Bell 2012: 132), while in his doctoral thesis on early medieval earthworks, Erik Grigg (2015: 413–14) noted only that the Faesten Dic was 'possibly early medieval,' leaving open the option of a late prehistoric or Romano-British origin. Simply put, the age and function of the earthwork, as well as its precise relationship with other built features of the landscape, remains a mystery.

[7] The year in question varies between the Winchester and Peterborough manuscripts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

Encountering the Faesten Dic

Joyden's Wood is one of various areas of natural beauty in this part of south-east England and, like most of the others, is popular with dog walkers. A mix of deciduous and coniferous forest, it covers an area of almost 135 hectares on a high point along the eastern side of the Cray Valley. As it lacks any set-aside parking space, most of the woodland's visitors instead park in the various roads to the east of the wood, in a largely post-war suburban conurbation also known as Joydens Wood.[8] An entrance to the south-eastern part of the wood can be found sandwiched between two houses along Summerhouse Drive; another entrance, into the north-eastern part of the wood, is located along Ferndell Avenue. Additional entrances along other sides of the wood are more rarely used.

On entering the wood from the Summerhouse Drive entrance, the visitor is immediately presented with a sign for the Faesten Dic Trail. This is one of the two suggested tracks for walkers through the forest, the other being the Woodland Walk. The Faesten Dic Trail (Figure 3) lasts for 3.3km and, despite its name, does not follow the Faesten Dic throughout its route but rather crosses it at two points where the earthwork is most visible. The decision to refer to the linear earthwork as the Faesten Dic, thus deliberately alluding to the medieval charter, reflects the Woodland Trust's desire to maximise the perceived heritage value of the earthwork. In this they are following the example of Historic England, which also refers to the site as the Faesten Dic. It is probable that comparatively few walkers would immediately recognise that the name 'Faesten Dic' is Old English or be able to translate the term into Modern English. Thus, the Trust may well have considered giving the earthwork, and the trail named after it, a more straightforward moniker. O.G.S. Crawford had, for instance, referred to the earthwork as 'the Strong Ditch' (Crawford 1953: 186), while the Historic England record translates it as 'The Strong Dyke.' Indeed, the Woodland Trust's main information board at the site gives the earthwork's name as both 'Faesten Dic' and, in larger letters, 'The Strong Dike.' The decision to use the Old English term so prominently must therefore be a deliberate decision, one which underscores the perceived early medieval identity of the earthwork.

At both of the points where the Faesten Dic Trail crosses the linear earthwork, visitors are presented with identical timber presentation boards (Figure 4), probably installed in the mid to late 2000s.[9] These present a useful cross-section plan of the feature, allowing visitors to better comprehend what they are looking at. Both boards state that 'This Anglo-Saxon Dyke was a defensive structure built 1500 years ago to keep Roman Londoners out of Saxon Kent.' At another point along the earthwork, visitors

[8] Although not a totally clear-cut means of distinguishing the woodland and adjacent settlement, the former is usually rendered with an apostrophe as 'Joyden's Wood', whereas various parts of the settlement spell their name without the apostrophe, such as Joydens Wood Pharmacy and Joydens Wood Junior School.

[9] These two boards were already present when Simon Bateman-Brown became site manager in 2008 (Bateman-Brown pers. comm.) but probably post-date the report on Joyden's Wood produced for the Woodland Trust by Bexley Archaeological Group in the late 1990s.

Figure 3: A sign for the Faesten Dic Trail that runs through Joyden's Wood. Photograph taken by Ethan Doyle White in March 2020

are presented with a timber and laminate information board (Figure 5), also probably installed in the mid- to late 2000s.[10] This contains greater information than its timber counterparts, stating that 'Anglo-Saxon settlers in Kent built Faesten Dic around AD 457'. Echoing Wheeler, it adds that the earthwork was 'one of six 'Grimsditches' that surrounded London on [sic] the 6th Century'.

This information is accompanied by an illustration of warriors clashing on the earthwork, with one of the defenders holding aloft a model of a dragon-like creature on a pole, perhaps to be understood as a banner symbolising his community. The artist Jon Cane originally produced this image for Tim Malim's 2003 booklet *The Anglo-Saxons in South Cambridgeshire*, at which point it was intended to depict either the Devil's Dyke or one of the other linear earthworks in eastern England (Malim 2003: 26).[11] Cane subsequently reused the image for a leaflet on Joyden's Wood, although was unaware that the Woodland Trust had also added the image to their site information board (Cane pers. comm.). On this board, the image is explained with a particularly detailed caption:

[10] Again, this board was already present in 2008 (Bateman-Brown pers. comm.), but must also postdate 2003 due to its inclusion of Jon Cane's image.

[11] Cane's image has also been used as the basis for an information board at Wat's Dyke in Gobowen (Shropshire), where Caroline Malim produced a pencil and watercolour version (Malim pers. comm.).

Figure 4: One of two identical timber information boards placed at junctures where the Faesten Dic Trail passes by the earthwork. Photograph taken by Ethan Doyle White in March 2020

Figure 5: The laminated information board placed by the Faesten Dic. The transparent plastic covering has darkened with age, rendering it more difficult to read the text. Photograph taken by Ethan Doyle White in May 2020

> A retreating Saxon raiding party has been intercepted by a small force of Roman-British [sic] horsemen. Faced by cavalry, the Saxons take refuge behind Faesten Dic. The Romano-British, unable to use their horses, dismount to storm the obstacle. A bloody but evenly matched struggle takes place over the wooden palisade atop the rampart. Hidden by the ramparts, another force of Saxons hurries along the patrol path to surprise the attacking Romano-British troops.

Joyden's Wood also contains three newer information boards (Figure 6), installed while Simon Bateman-Brown was site manager (2008–14), two of which are identical and found at the aforementioned entrances to the forest. These discuss the wood's history and ecology more broadly, although refer briefly to the Faesten Dic by describing how visitors can 'discover the amazing defensive structure built by the Saxons over 1500 years ago'. A not dissimilar assessment appears on the current iteration of the Woodland Trust's website, where the Faesten Dic is referred to as 'a defensive structure possibly built around AD 457 by the Saxons to help keep out the Romano-British Londoners' (Woodland Trust 2020). Similarly, the Trust's current management plan for the site states that it was 'built by the Saxons, to keep the Romans from moving out of London' (Woodland Trust 2018: 7).

As well as using information boards, the Woodland Trust have also employed more artistic means of communicating the archaeological value of the Faesten Dic to their visitors. With funding from both the Heritage Lottery Fund and Cory Environmental Trust, in 2011 they approached the sculptor Peter Leadbeater to create a series of seven wooden sculptures to be positioned around Joyden's Wood (Palmer 2012). Four of Leadbeater's creations focused on the area's wildlife while the other three drew attention to its history. One featured the tail and fuselage of a Hawker Hurricane, commemorating those British fighter planes shot down over Joyden's Wood during the Battle of Britain in 1940. Two others were created in reference to the Faesten Dic, representing figures positioned on either side of the earthwork having a 'face off' (Figure 7). These, a Saxon warrior (Figure 8) and a Roman soldier (Figure 9), were carved from blocks of wellingtonia sourced from a timber merchant in the Midlands (Peter Leadbeater pers. comm.). Leadbeater's Roman was a quintessential caricature of a legionnaire, his *lorica segmentata* armour making him immediately recognisable. The Saxon was bearded, with a round shield and short sword: the archetypal barbarian. Indeed, nothing here explicitly conveys the image of the 'Saxon', as opposed, for instance, to the 'Viking' – unless of course one discounts the absence of any horns upon his helmet![12]

A photograph of this timber Saxon warrior was subsequently used as the main image on the front of a Joyden's Wood leaflet, first issued in 2012, which was available at the Summerhouse Drive entrance. Below the image was the slogan 'History brought to life', indicating that the Woodland Trust were interested in emphasising the wood's heritage

[12] Although not based in the realities of the Viking Age; since the nineteenth century the Vikings have been popularly stereotyped as wearing horned helmets (Frank 2000).

Figure 6: One of the three information boards added while Simon Bateman-Brown was manager of Joyden's Wood. Photograph taken by Ethan Doyle White in March 2020

value to visitors. The two timber figures remained in place for several years until, around the summer of 2017, vandals broke some of their limbs. The Woodland Trust were planning to destroy the damaged sculptures, but they were rescued by Penny Metcalfe, who was walking her dog at the time. She negotiated with the Trust to ensure that the two sculptures could be moved onto land run by the Baldwyns Park Scouts, adjacent to the eastern side of the woodland. Several volunteers helped to restore them and erected them on the western side of the Scout hut, where they were given the names Fred and Barney – possibly an allusion to the characters in *The Flintstones* (Metcalfe pers. comm.).

Figure 7: Peter Leadbeater's two sculptures facing one another across the Faesten Dic. Photograph taken by Ethan Doyle White in June 2015

Visitors to Joyden's Wood can thus still view the sculptures, even if they have been decontextualized from their originally intended placement on the Faesten Dic.

The Woodland Trust state that the interpretation of Joyden's Wood that they publicly present derives from information provided by Historic England (Woodland Trust, pers. comm.). As noted above, this guideline – which was last updated in 1995 – links the site to the fifth century but does not expressly outline who built it or why. It thus seems probable that the individuals responsible for setting out the original information boards drew upon other sources, most notably the report on the heritage of the site that the Trust commissioned from the local Bexley Archaeological Group (BAG) in the late 1990s. BAG's field unit had surveyed the wood over the course of 1997 and 1998 (Vicerey-Weekes 1998: 25), after which one of BAG's founding members, David Vicerey-Weekes, produced an evaluation report for the Trust. He referred to the earthwork as 'Festens Dyke', believing that Wheeler's explanation of its origins was the most plausible one (Vicerey-Weekes 1998: 6, 12). Vicerey-Weekes also noted that 'If the Bexley Dyke in fact belongs to the Dark Ages, its construction must surely be connected with the fighting in this district recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as the battle of Creeganford [sic], in A.D. 457' (Vicerey-Weekes 1998: 12).

The material included on the Woodland Trust's information boards can all be sourced to this BAG evaluation report, but at the same time it is noteworthy that there are additional elements and interpretations that do not derive from it and which probably emerged from the imagination of one or more of the Trust's employees. Specifically, the presentation of the Saxons as being *Kentish* and the Romano-British as being *Londoners*, which the boards emphasise, does not come from the BAG report. As shall be discussed later, it is quite possible that this interpretation thus drew heavily on the contemporary administrative divisions of the area. In addition, the presentation of the Faesten Dic as a site of physical violence, as depicted in Cane's illustration and implied by Leadbeater's statues, is also partially novel. Although Vicerey-Weekes (1998: 12) did link the Faesten Dic with fifth-century conflict, the specific caption accompanying Cage's image bears no relevance to the

Figure 8: Peter Leadbeater's carved timber sculpture of a Saxon warrior, now wearing a Scouting scarf, looking into Joyden's Wood from the property of the Baldwyns Park Scouts, having been rescued from destruction and repaired. Photograph taken by Ethan Doyle White in May 2020

material in his report. Depicting violence of this kind can lend a sense of excitement and action to the site, thus capturing the interest of visitors and fulfilling expectations of the 'Dark Ages' as an era of near-incessant warfare, but it clearly entails pushing a very specific interpretation of the earthwork and its purpose, one which may not be warranted.

Romans versus Saxons: an enduring narrative

The depiction of a conflict between incoming Anglo-Saxons and established Romano-Britons in south-east England stems largely from ideas with a long pedigree that remained pervasive throughout much of the mid-twentieth century. The account of a fifth-century invasion spearheaded by continental warriors such as Hengest and Horsa, as was promulgated in eighth and ninth-century sources such as Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, have loomed large over later interpretations. Over the course of the twentieth century, archaeologists such as E.T. Leeds and J.N.L. Myres published influential books in which they drew on archaeological evidence to support this traditional account, one which was further promoted in fictionalised narratives such as Alfred Duggan's 1951 novel *Conscience of the King*.

Subsequent generations of historians and archaeologists have challenged the traditional narrative, proposing alternative readings of the evidence.[13] However, while the traditional invasion narrative now carries little weight within contemporary academia, it undoubtedly remains widespread among broader public perceptions, influenced by its continued promulgation in works of popular

[13] For the most recent summary on this reassessment, see Oosthuizen 2019.

history. Terry Deary's child-oriented Horrible Histories book *The Smashing Saxons*, for instance, presents the tale of Hengest and Horsa arriving in Kent as if it were historical fact (Deary 2016 [2000]: 7–21). Various popular best-sellers aimed at an adult readership, such as Jeremy Paxman's *The English* (Paxman 1999: 54–55) and Simon Jenkins' *A Short History of England* (Jenkins 2011: 11–14), similarly present largely uncritical accounts of a fifth-century invasion.[14] While these sources do not specifically discuss the Faesten Dic, they nevertheless reinforce traditional narratives about this period in the popular imagination, narratives that in turn condition how visitors understand sites such as this one.

Figure 9: Peter Leadbeater's carved timber sculpture of a Roman soldier, now wearing a Scouting scarf, looking into Joyden's Wood from the property of the Baldwyns Park Scouts, having been rescued from destruction and repaired. Photograph taken by Ethan Doyle White in March 2020

The presentation of the Faesten Dic as marking the boundary between 'Roman Londoners' and 'Saxon Kent,' as it appears on the information boards, is of particular interest given the present administrative divisions within this region. The Faesten Dic is situated on the eastern side of the Cray Valley, a valley along which runs the present-day boundary between Kent and Greater London; the boundary actually cuts through Joyden's Wood itself, only a short distance west of the Faesten Dic (see Figure 2). The nature of this border, as it is perceived by those living in and around the Cray Valley, is a complex one. The boundary has little visible presence in the valley landscape, marked only by fairly discrete road signage. Indeed, the division is comparatively recent in origin; prior to the London Government Act 1963, the area encompassed by the current London Borough of Bexley was categorised, for administrative purposes, as part of Kent. Many individuals living in and around the Greater London side

[14] Although now over twenty years old, Paxman's book is for instance still widely sold at bookstores in and around central London train stations, suggesting that it continues to be fairly widely read.

of the valley identify as Kentish, often citing as evidence their continuing use of a Kentish (Dartford-based) postcode.[15] Culturally, the population of the London Borough of Bexley display many traits, particularly socio-political values, views, and voting patterns, that are closer to those of adjacent areas of Kent than of neighbouring parts of south London.[16] At the same time, both sides of the current Kent-London border are part of the commuter belt housing workers for central London, resulting in suggestions that Greater London should formally annex the Borough of Dartford (Anon. 2015).

Thus, the portrayal of the Faesten Dic as some form of fifth-century border between London and Kent mirrors the present-day boundary which is around only 400m to the west – and cuts much closer to the earthwork at its northern end. This in turn can be read in multiple ways, none necessarily consciously intended by the employees of the Woodland Trust. In one way this narrative can be perceived as legitimising the current administrative border by giving it the appearance of an early medieval pedigree. In this reading, the area now classed as the London Borough of Bexley was *never really Kentish* and those living within it should embrace their identity as Londoners, an identity that stretches as far back as the fifth century. Thus, rather than an unwelcome expression of modernism, the London Government Act 1963 merely reaffirmed something ancient.

In another way, the Woodland Trust's interpretation of the Faesten Dic can be interpreted as emphasising the idea that a border is necessary to stop London spreading into Kent. Just as the Kentish people of the fifth century needed to build a barrier to keep out London raiders, so their twenty-first-century counterparts need to resist calls for the Borough of Dartford to be integrated into Greater London, preserving Kent's perceived rural character against the urbanisation of the city. This London versus Kent narrative could therefore be seen as one of the ways in which contemporary Kentish people have emphasised an identity distinct from that of the capital, a process that has also been identified, for instance, in the revival and spread of the East Kentish tradition of hoodening (Hutton 1996: 83).[17]

Alternatively, visitors might actually see the presentation of the Faesten Dic in this manner as a forceful imposition on the landscape and a painful reminder of current administrative divisions. Many of those in the London Borough of Bexley (and the adjacent London Borough of Bromley) still regard themselves as Kentish and reject

[15] In January 2020, a reporter from KentLive asked thirty people on Bexley High Street whether they considered the area to be part of Kent or London. Twenty thought that it was now more part of London than Kent, sometimes citing growing urban development as the reason, although not all were enthusiastic about this change. A third of respondents nevertheless stated that they still regarded the area as being essentially Kentish (James 2020).

[16] The London Borough of Bexley was among only five of the thirty-two Greater London boroughs to produce a majority for Brexit in the 2016 EU membership referendum, for instance. Of these five, it produced the second highest proportion of support for leaving the EU, at 63%. Neighbouring Dartford, in Kent, produced a 64% proportion supporting leave, underscoring such cross-border similarities.

[17] Hoodening is a traditionally midwinter custom in which an individual concealed themselves within a wooden hobby horse and was part of a troupe who knocked door to door seeking payment. It has particularly clear parallels with the Mari Lwyd custom of South Wales.

the moral legitimacy of the London Government Act 1963, sometimes regarding it as something like an imperialist imposition forced on Kent by the more powerful London authorities. In this way, the Faesten Dic could be interpreted as something akin to the Berlin Wall, forcibly divorcing a Kentish community who require reunification.[18]

Regardless of whether the reader sympathises with any of these positions or not, it is apparent that the current interpretation of the Faesten Dic presented by the Woodland Trust has political repercussions for how visitors might read this borderland landscape. Parallels could be drawn here with Offa's Dyke, the popular interpretations of which are often charged with today's administrative and national divisions between England and Wales,[19] and with Hadrian's Wall, which has often been interpreted through the lens of nationalistic posturing between Scotland and England. Archaeologists concerned with encouraging nuanced and accurate understandings of how these structures operated in their original socio-cultural contexts will want to avoid the Faesten Dic being utilised for simplistic contemporary agendas. This is especially the case given that various far-right, white nationalist groups based in England have turned to the Early Middle Ages as a source of rhetorical and iconographic inspiration and in some instances have used archaeological sites – including those in north-west Kent – as spaces for ritual practice.[20]

Public interactions with the Faesten Dic

Without a fuller project entailing the dissemination of questionnaires and other similar measures, we will not be able to get a clear picture of how visitors to the Faesten Dic understand its heritage. Nevertheless, some anecdotal observations can be set forth. It is apparent that the site is used, at least on occasion, for educational purposes. The Bexley Young Archaeologists' Club surveyed the dyke in 2016 while pupils from a Crayford primary school visited in 2018 as part of a Crayford Reminiscence and Youth (CRAY) project on early medieval history (Allfrey and Whalley 2018; Hudson 2018). More broadly, some visitors to Joyden's Wood (such as Briggs 2013) arrive because of their interest in its heritage, although how many do so is unclear. During my visits, I have never seen anyone reading the information boards; perhaps most visitors are uninterested in the Faesten Dic's archaeology. Alternatively, the majority may be regular walkers who have read the boards on previous visits.

Instead, the greatest level of human interaction with the earthwork that I have witnessed has fallen into the category of play: a family tossing a rugby ball to one another within the ditch. Elsewhere, a makeshift rope swing allows people to swing across the ditch at a point

[18] My thanks go to an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

[19] As discussed briefly in the epilogue of Ray and Bapty 2016 and in Williams 2020.

[20] White nationalist forms of Heathenry, a modern Pagan religion modelled on the Iron Age and early medieval religions of Europe's linguistically Germanic communities, are for instance practiced at the White Horse Stone in north-west Kent (Doyle White 2016), as well as at a range of other archaeological sites across southern England. Not all Heathens, it should be noted, adhere to far-right ideologies.

near the Faesten Dic Trail. This suggests that many of those engaging with the earthwork are doing so primarily because its shape offers a useful space for playful behaviour – they may not even be aware that it is a human-constructed feature. It is perhaps also noteworthy that there is no material evidence of sustained ritual engagement with the earthwork, as is for instance apparent at archaeological sites such as the Coldrum Stones and the White Horse Stone further east (Doyle White 2016).[21] There is nevertheless some evidence that the dyke has filtered into local folklore; Vicerey-Weekes (1998: 28) noted a story of the ghost of a knight who rides along the dyke during the full moon. Such a narrative appears to derive from perceptions that the earthwork is of a martial nature and thus may post-date the archaeological interpretation of it as a defensive feature.[22] It is also interesting that, despite the historical narrative that has been presented at the Faesten Dic, there are no recorded accounts of Saxon or Roman spirits patrolling the earthwork in local lore. In contrast, there are reports of a spectral Saxon duelling with a ghostly Roman at Richborough in east Kent (Bignell 1983: 107), a site near to one of the so-called 'Saxon shore forts', indicating that interpretations of archaeological sites as spaces of fifth-century conflict certainly have the capacity to influence ghost lore.

Going Forward

This article has shown that although archaeologists still do not know when the Faesten Dic was erected, let alone why or by whom, the Woodland Trust have nevertheless presented a very specific narrative regarding the earthwork's origins and purpose. This is a narrative that owes much to Mortimer Wheeler's interpretation of the site, rooted as it is in mid-twentieth-century conceptions of the fifth century, which in turn owe a great deal to the invasion narrative put forward by eighth and ninth-century writers. In foregrounding this one interpretation as fact, the public presentations of the Faesten Dic are inaccurate.

However, in this part of England, the presence of misleading, outdated information boards is not unique to the Faesten Dic. Signage pointing visitors to the probably Bronze Age bowl barrow on Winn's Common, Plumstead (Greater London) informs them that the tumulus is Roman. At the Coldrum Stones near Trottiscliffe (Kent), a metal plaque affixed to a sarsen boulder in 1926 states that the structure, which represents the remains of an Early Neolithic chambered long barrow, is a stone circle. Leslie Grinsell raised concerns about this misinformation back in the 1950s (Grinsell 1953: 194) although the plaque remains, itself now part of the site's heritage. In this spirit, we should perhaps regard the current public presentation of the Faesten Dic not simply as fallacious information, but

[21] Of possible relevance here is that during the government-imposed lockdown in spring/summer 2020, visitors placed painted pebbles along trackways through Joyden's Wood, including some that crossed the Faesten Dic. This was part of a larger custom that spread as a response to the COVID-19 epidemic and was not unique to Joyden's Wood.

[22] Vicerey-Weekes (1998: 28) also recorded stories of a ghostly Lady in Grey haunting Joyden's Wood, a ghostly dog pining for its lost master by one of the dene holes, and references to a 'Witch's Well' within the woodland.

rather as another instalment in its evolving history, evidence for the ways in which our society has constructed its own past.

Moreover, while archaeologists may have concerns about the narrative being offered at the Faesten Dic, it is nevertheless better than nothing. Indeed, without any form of display, most visitors would ignore the earthwork entirely, remaining completely unaware of its historic importance. This unfortunate scenario can for instance be seen at Wat's Dyke, where information boards are often lacking (Williams 2019). Closer to the Faesten Dic itself, the various archaeological features on Dartford Heath, only a short distance north of Joyden's Wood, are left without any form of public explanation, leaving visitors without any understanding of the complex material heritage of the heathland – which includes Palaeolithic stone tools, putatively Bronze Age tumuli, an eighteenth-century encampment, and Second World War anti-aircraft gun emplacements – even when they are walking directly across them.[23]

Budgetary constraints are always an issue and thus archaeologists and historians should not expect the Woodland Trust to immediately change their presentation of the Faesten Dic. Indeed, a Trust representative stated that they would only alter their interpretation if Historic England did so first (Woodland Trust, pers. comm.). However, the information boards will ultimately decay and when this occurs, there will be the opportunity to replace them; it is hoped that these future boards might prove more in keeping with current archaeological interpretation. These boards could embrace the uncertainty and acknowledge that, when it comes to the Faesten Dic, the available evidence is sufficiently sparse to permit multiple competing narratives. There is no need to promote the politically charged account of a simplistic division between Roman London and Saxon Kent nor to characterise the earthwork as a space of military combat. Meanwhile, archaeologists seeking research projects around the Greater London area should consider launching a fuller investigation of the Faesten Dic, a site which, although little known, may have much potential for revealing more about the past in this densely-populated corner of south-east England.

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[23] This is despite the presence of various identical information boards around Dartford Heath, which instead focus primarily on the area's ecological, rather than its archaeological, value.

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