

# 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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Volume 2 for 2020

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University of  
Chester

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## Volume 2 for 2020

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# Living after Offa: Place-Names and Social Memory in the Welsh Marches

Howard Williams

*How are linear monuments perceived in the contemporary landscape and how do they operate as memoryscapes for today's borderland communities? When considering Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke in today's world, we must take into account the generations who have long lived in these monuments' shadows and interacted with them. Even if perhaps only being dimly aware of their presence and stories, these are communities living 'after Offa'. These monuments have been either neglected or ignored within heritage sites and museums with only a few notable exceptions (Evans and Williams 2019; Williams 2020), and have long been subject to confused and challenging connotations with both the modern Welsh/English border and, since the 1970s, with the Offa's Dyke Path. Moreover, to date, no study has attempted to compile and evaluate the toponomastic (place-name) evidence pertaining to the monuments' presences, and remembered former presences, in today's landscape. Focusing on naming practices as memory work in the contemporary landscape, the article explores the names of houses, streets, parks, schools and businesses. It argues for the place-making role of toponomastic evidence, mediated in particular by the materiality of signs themselves. Material and textual citations to the monuments render them integral to local communities' social memories and borderland identities, even where the dykes have been erased, damaged or obscured by development. Moreover, they have considerable potential future significance for engaging borderland communities in both dykes as part of the longer-term story of their historic environment.*

*Keywords:* house-names; Offa's Dyke; memory; place-names; street-names; Wat's Dyke.

## Introduction: living 'after Offa'

Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke are Britain's first- and third-longest ancient monuments respectively. Communities throughout the Welsh Marches still live in their shadow, with Offa's Dyke frequently confused with its smaller sibling, and with each often conflated with the present-day Anglo-Welsh border and the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail. While protected as scheduled ancient monuments over large sections of their length, recent archaeological evaluations and fieldwork has revealed their neglected status as well as their potential for fostering public interest in, and appreciation of, the historic landscape (Ray and Bapty 2016; Belford 2019). Yet, to date, evaluating contemporary receptions and perceptions of the dykes has received limited attention (Noble 1981: 23; Ray and Bapty 2016: 373–376). The sense of 'living after Offa' has recently been deployed to connect the oral histories of communities and individuals to the landscape of north-west Shropshire (East and Anderson 2012), yet it also merits consideration in relation to the naming practices of the region and their material components: signs. To critically evaluate the rich and contested social memories of borderland communities living in the Welsh Marches, references to Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke are key and hitherto

under-investigated components. More broadly, living 'after Offa' warrants detailed exploration from historical, archaeological and heritage perspectives of the various tangible and intangible legacies of the linear earthworks, focusing on the intersections and interactions between the material presence and narratives associated with this pair of great linear earthworks and the contemporary inhabited environments they encompass. How and where are these monuments remembered by those living in their shadows?

To tackle one element of this field in order to better understand their significance of the monuments for local communities, the article explores the place-name evidence from Gloucestershire in the south to Flintshire and Denbighshire in the north, compiled from maps, digital sources, and fieldwork conducted in spring 2020. The article focuses on the names of houses, roads, public buildings and spaces and businesses which today cite the earthworks' current, former or imagined presence in the landscape. I deploy Ordnance Survey maps and other online resources to compile and reflect on naming practices evoking the Dykes in today's landscape and the materiality of signage bearing these names. Although it would be a legitimate topic for further research, historic field and farm-names are not the focus of comprehensive survey in this article.

There are two key questions for this article. First, how and to what extent do these naming practices reveal the significance of the linear monuments in the routines and social memories of borderland communities within and beyond locations where they are demarcated as heritage assets: how do they afford place-making (cf. Jones 2016)? Second, how might these names provide the basis for future public engagement with the monuments and their life-histories, especially by exploring their 'monumental intangibility' (by which I mean their state of being too long and too large to readily apprehend in any single locale: see Williams 2020) as well as challenging simplistic, particularly nationalistic, discourses in relation to Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke?

To answer these questions, I take each monument in turn, exploring the names of houses, street names, public buildings and spaces as well as businesses related to each, before evaluating their relationships. A series of maps were created to present the evidence, drawing upon a template for the linear earthworks created by Liam Delaney. The results reveal how naming practices constitute a distinctive expression of 'borderlands' identities by commemorating the linear earthworks in relation to the early medieval past.

## Offa's Dyke

### *Dwelling along Offa's Dyke*

There are only two settlement names which extend an association of the Dyke to sizeable modern conurbations. These are the hamlet of Offa's View, Forden, and the medieval and modern town of Knighton (Powys). Notably, Knighton's Welsh name

Table 1: House-names citing Offa's Dyke from south to north

House-name	Location	Earliest OS recording (Digimap)
Offa's Dyke House	Spital Meend (Glos.)	1920
Offa's Dyke Cottage		contemporary
Dykewood		1970
Offa's Mead	The Fence Bigsweir (Glos.)	1970
Offa's Lodge		1970
Offas Chase House	Hewelsfield (Glos.)	1970
Offa's Dyke	Tumpshill Grove (Glos.)	contemporary
Offas Dene	Dinedor (Herefords.)	contemporary
Offa House	Hereford	1960
Offa's Cottage	Holme Marsh (Herefords.)	contemporary
Offa's Way		contemporary
Offas View	Lower Harpton (Powys)	contemporary
Pen Offa	Evenjobb (Powys)	1900
Offa's Mead	Discoed (Powys)	contemporary
Offa's View	Pilleth (Powys)	contemporary
Dyke House	Rhos-y-meirch (Powys)	1880
Glen Dyke	Knighton (Powys)	1970
Cwm Offa		1970
Bryn Offa		1920
Ty Offa		1970
Offa's Rise		contemporary
Offa's Way Flats		1970
Offa's View		contemporary
Offa's Barn	Lower Spoad (Salop)	contemporary
Offa's Pitch	Mardu (Salop)	contemporary
Offa's Dike Cottage	Lower Cwm Bridge, Cwm (Powys)	1900
The Ditches	Brompton Hall (Salop)	1880
Offas Close	Hem, Forden (Powys)	1970
Offa's View		contemporary
Dykelands	The Meadows, Forden (Powys)	1970
Pen Offa	Forden (Powys)	contemporary
Offas Way	Hope (Powys)	contemporary
Dykelands	Buttington (Powys)	contemporary
Llwyn Offa	Grove Cottages, Four Crosses (Powys)	contemporary
Offa Severn	Four Crosses (Powys)	contemporary
Hafod Offa		1900
Ty Offa		contemporary
Bryn-Offa		1900

Bryn-Offa Cottage		1970
Maesoffa		1970
Offas Way	Llanymynech (Powys)	contemporary
Carregoffa Hall		1870
Bryn Offa	Treflach (Salop)	contemporary
Offa House		1970
Offa House		contemporary
Bryn Offa	Trefonen (Salop)	1970
Plas Offa		1970
Offa Cottage		1970
Offa's View		contemporary
Hafod Offa		contemporary
Bryn Offa	Old Racecourse, Oswestry (Salop)	contemporary
Bryn Offa	Bronygarth (Salop)	1970
House by the Dyke	Chirk Castle (Wrexham)	1970
Plas Offa	Chirk (Wrexham)	1870
Wynn Offa	Ruabon (Wrexham)	contemporary
Llys Offa		contemporary
Offa Cottages (1870), Offa Terrace (1960), Offa Cottage (1960)		1870
Bryn Offa		1960
Glen Offa		1960
Tan-y-clawdd	Johnstown (Wrexham)	1870-1970
Tan-y-clawdd-canol		1870-1960
Plas-y-Clawdd		1870
Offa Court		contemporary
Bryn Offa		1960
Crud-y-Clawdd		contemporary
Mercia		1960
Glen Offa		1960
Tan-y-clawdd-uchaf		1870
Llys-Offa		1960
Aberderfyn		1870
Fynnant		1870
Bron-Offa	Coedpoeth (Wrexham)	1870
Offa Place		1890-1910
Offa Cottage		contemporary
Offa Mews		contemporary
Offa Villas	Brymbo (Wrexham)	contemporary
Rhyd Offa	Llanfynydd (Flints.)	contemporary
Clawdd Offa		contemporary

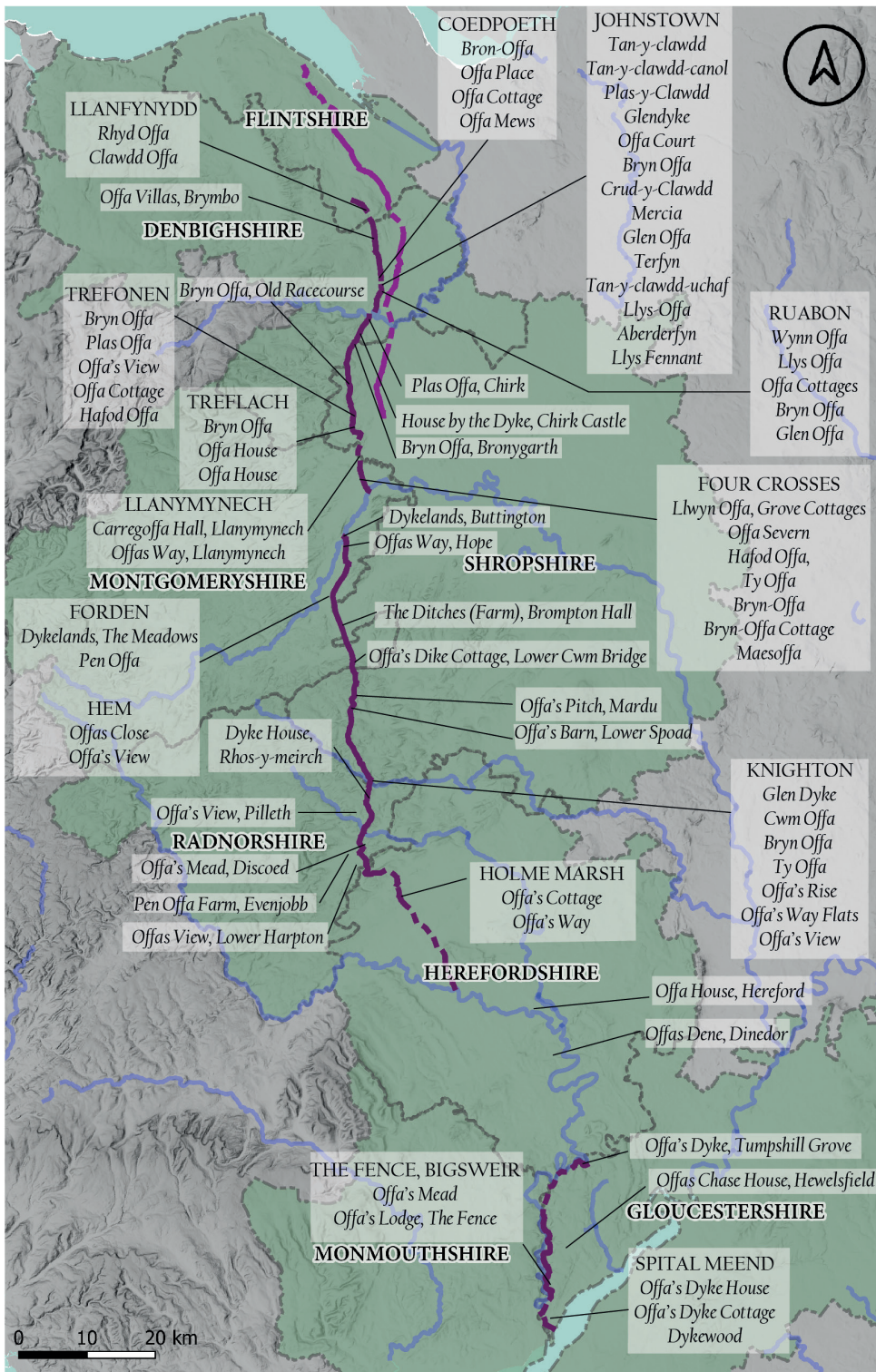


Figure 1: House-names citing Offa's Dyke (Map by Howard Williams. Basemap: Liam Delaney)



*Tref-y-clawdd* means 'town on the dyke'. While seemingly just descriptive, these names connect people and place to the referential presence of the ancient monument but in part at least can be regarded as commemorative (cf. Hough 2016). Yet, today's landscape bears the name of a significant number of private dwellings whose names refer to the close proximity of Offa's Dyke. Seventy-nine locations (eighty-one dwelling names) were recorded through a visual examination of contemporary and historic Ordnance Survey maps available online via Digimap (Figure 1; Table 1). This review allows for an approximate date to be identified by which the names were established, whether associated with new buildings or the re-naming of older habitations. Historic place-names now out of use were also identified and included where they were used until recently and/or were translated into street names (e.g. the farms *Tan-y-Clawdd* and *Tan-y-clawdd-canol* in Johnstown, Wrexham, plus more subtle shifts in nomenclature were noted for *Offa Cottages*, *Ruabon*). Further examples were identified for Shropshire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire by conducting a search of postal records.<sup>1</sup>

The residential names are mainly demonstrable through an explicit reference to the monument (e.g. *Dykelands*, *Buttington*, *Powys*; *House by the Dyke*, *Chirk Castle*, *Wrexham*) and/or *King Offa* (e.g. *Llys-Offa*, *Johnstown*, *Wrexham*; *Cwm Offa*, *Knighton*, *Powys*). A few further general allusions to the Early Middle Ages were also recorded, but only *Mercia* (*Johnstown*, *Wrexham*) is explicitly associated with the monument. Selected settlements were scrutinised farther afield in the region but no dyke-related naming practices were identified.<sup>2</sup> A bias needs to be mentioned: OS maps record larger detached properties, more often those which might be considered 'middle-class' together with some 'upper-class' dwellings: hence semi-detached and terrace houses with names are less readily formally recognised as part of their official address and marked out on maps. This issue notwithstanding, the seventy-seven examples identified are sufficient to recognise clear patterns worthy of description and discussion (Figure 1, Table 1).

The first observation regards chronology. Only nineteen of the seventy-seven demonstrably pre-date 1920. The early instances set the precedent for what was to come and they are a mix of agricultural buildings: cottages and farms such as *Pen Offa*, *Evenjobb* (*Powys*), *Dyke House*, *Rhos-y-meirch* (*Powys*). There is also a specific cluster of farms around *Johnstown*, *Wrexham* (*Tan-y-clawdd*, *Tan-y-clawdd-canol*, *Tan-y-clawdd-uchaf*, *Aberderfyn* and *Fynnant*) and *Plas Offa*, *Coedpoeth*, *Wrexham*. Yet there are also larger middle-class residences such as *Offa's Dyke House*, *Spital Meend* (*Glos.*) and one country house incorporating an historical association of the nearby *Llanymynech Hill* with *Offa* (*Carregoffa Hall*). Forty-five were present by 1970 and the remaining thirty-four occurred only since the 1970s: all seemingly private dwellings. In short, the majority of the Dyke-related residential names are mid-/late-twentieth

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Liam Delaney and Giles Carey for their assistance in compiling Tables 1 and 3. Additionally, residential names likely alluding to the Dyke – *Aberderfyn* and *Fynnant* – augment the striking concentration in *Johnstown* (*Wrexham*); these were pointed out by Spencer Smith, a Welsh-speaking heritage expert which would otherwise have been missed.

and twenty-first-century creations, and there seems no demonstrable indication of the abandonment of the popularity of the term.

Regarding the character of the house-names, only five include the explicit and unambiguous combination ‘Offa’s Dyke/Offa’s Dike/Clawdd Offa’ and these are spread from Gloucestershire (Offa’s Dyke House, Offa’s Dyke Cottage, both Spital Meend) to Flintshire (Clawdd Offa, Llandfynydd). Fourteen further instances refer to the Dyke/Clawdd or a boundary feature without specifically referencing Offa; examples include The Ditches (Brompton Hall, Salop), Dyke House (Rhos-y-meirch, Powys) and Plas-y-Clawdd (Johnstown, Wrexham). I regard these as very likely but inevitably inconclusive citations to the monument’s proximity and/or former presence. However, the vast majority simply refer to ‘Offa’ as a prefix to House, Cottage, Mead, Lodge, Dene, View, Rise, Barn, Pitch, Close, Place, Villas, Mews and Way and as a suffix to the Welsh habitation and topographical terms Carreg, Cwm, Pen, Bryn, Ty, Plas, Maes, Rhyd, Bron, Llys and Hafod. These names connect the Mercian King Offa and his Dyke to that specific locale, rather than merely a generic allusion to the region. A further conjunction is with ‘Glen’, found in Glen Offa and Glendyke in Johnstown (Wrexham) and Glen Dyke in Knighton (Powys). The adoption of the Scottish or Irish ‘glen’ to refer to a narrow valley might well accurately describe the topography and evoke pan-Celtic associations, but it is neither a traditional English nor Welsh dwelling-name from the region. Still, it illustrates the creative and personalised link between Offa, the Dyke and the hills and valleys of the Anglo-Welsh borderlands. Notably, however, the most commonplace association with Offa is actually Welsh and the word *bryn* (hill), occurring nine times. Offa is therefore connected not only with the Dyke but with the hilly terrain of the landscape writ large. For each area, these names are unique, with the one exception of Treflach (Salop) where there are two Bryn Offas in close proximity: one inside the village, one just outside to the south-west: both close to the line of the Dyke. In summary, it is the connection of the Dyke to the Mercian king and the topography of place and immediate environs that are key in these house-naming practices, rather than a names alluding to other far-flung locations or the assertion of a region-wide or nationwide affinity.

In terms of their geographical distribution, they are found up and down the line of Offa’s Dyke from Gloucestershire in the south to Flintshire in the north and the focus is upon those farms and settlements that are immediately proximate to, or on the line of, Offa’s Dyke. This very close association with the surviving physical monument is further demonstrated by the near-complete lack of farms or settlements citing the monument in their names set even a short way off the line of the Dyke. In Gloucestershire, only Offas Chase House is set east of the Dyke, while in Herefordshire there is an Offa House but this relates to the fact that it is upon Offa Street in Hereford (see below). There is also a recent and reasonably incongruent Offas Dene, Dinedor, close to Hereford; while in the region it is detached from the Dyke by a long way. I infer these to relate to historic connections between Offa and the Anglo-Saxon origins of Hereford unrelated to the

Dyke (see Bassett 2008; Ray 2015: 224–228). Furthermore, the Offa's Dyke Path is only rarely a substitute where the monument is lacking: there is only one likely reference to the Offa's Dyke Path and it is at a point where the Path is on the Dyke. Here, the residence is called Offas Way which simultaneously applies to both the course of the monument and the trail for walkers (Llanymynech, Powys).

Meanwhile, settlements upon the supposed historic line of the Dyke but where the physical monument cannot be identified seldom possess monument-related house-names, evidenced by sparse examples across the Herefordshire Plain. Similarly, the villages of Llandegla (Denbighs.), Porthwaen (Salop), Newchurch (Powys) or Monmouth (Gwent) have no Offa's Dyke-related house names: notably all are on the National Trail but not associated directly with historically extant sections of the monument. Indeed, the Offa's Dyke Path seems to have had limited impact and there is also a near absence of Flintshire house-name examples which reflects the perceived absence of the Dyke north of Treuddyn. Significantly therefore, only a few settlements on the line of the Dyke do not reflect it in some regard through house-names; one example is the dispersed community on St Briavil's Common, perhaps because the Dyke is not particularly visible and the settlement is so dispersed its presence cannot readily be seen and experienced within the vicinity.

A further striking feature is that only twenty-four of the seventy-nine locations with dwelling-names are in England, the remaining fifty-five are in Wales. Furthermore, almost half – thirty-two – are unambiguously Welsh formulations. While the identities and motivations of those who named the dwellings cannot be discerned in this survey beyond the aforementioned bias towards detached dwellings in the naming of properties and their formal recognition, at the very least the evidence questions the perceived Welsh ambivalence towards Offa's Dyke within the borderland. Indeed, the spatial precision of the volume of Offa names along its entire line from Gloucestershire to Flintshire might reflect a higher degree of attachment to the Dyke among residents, stretching back in places to at least the late nineteenth century, particularly on the Welsh side of the border. If house names are by definition eclectic because they are personalised and thus specific and referential (Koopman 2016), then reference to the linear earthwork constitutes one form of social remembrance performed throughout the Anglo-Welsh borderlands.

### *Offa's Dyke odonyms*

As with residential names, a visual survey of Ordnance Survey maps available via Digimap took place, together with a search via StreetMap,<sup>3</sup> resulting in the identification of thirty-five dyke-related odonyms from the region (Figures 2–6; Table 2). These constitute the repeated spatial referencing and orientation of public movement, as well

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.streetmap.co.uk/>



Table 2: Street-names citing Offa's Dyke from south to north

Street-name	Location	Earliest OS recording (Digimap)
Mercian Way	Sedbury (Glos.)	1920
Norse Way		1920
Danes Hill		1920
Ormerod Road		1920
King Alfred's Road		1920
Denmark Drive		1960
Saxon Place		1960
Offa's Close		1960
Penda Place		1960
Offa Street	Hereford	1880
Offa Maes	Norton (Powys)	contemporary
Pen Offa	Norton (Powys)	contemporary
Cae Clawdd	Knighton (Powys)	contemporary
Offa's Road		1920
Heritage Gardens	Forden (Powys)	contemporary
Y Clawdd	Four Crosses (Powys)	contemporary
Ffordd Clawdd Offa/ Offa's Dyke Road		contemporary
Plas Offa		contemporary
Offa	Chirk (Wrexham)	1970
Offa's Close	Treflach (Salop)	contemporary
Ffordd Offa	Johnstown (Wrexham)	1960
Heol Offa		1960
Offa Street		1890
Tanyclawdd		1980
Clawdd Offa		1960
Aberderfyn Road		1900
Bryn Offa		1960
Fennant Road		1900
Heol Offa	Coedpoeth (Wrexham)	1890
Heol Offa	Tanyfron (Wrexham)	1910
Offa Street	Brymbo (Wrexham)	1960
Dyke Street		1960
Parc Offa	Trelawnyd (Flintshire)	contemporary
Maes Offa		contemporary
Ffordd Clawdd Offa	Prestatyn (Denbighshire)	contemporary

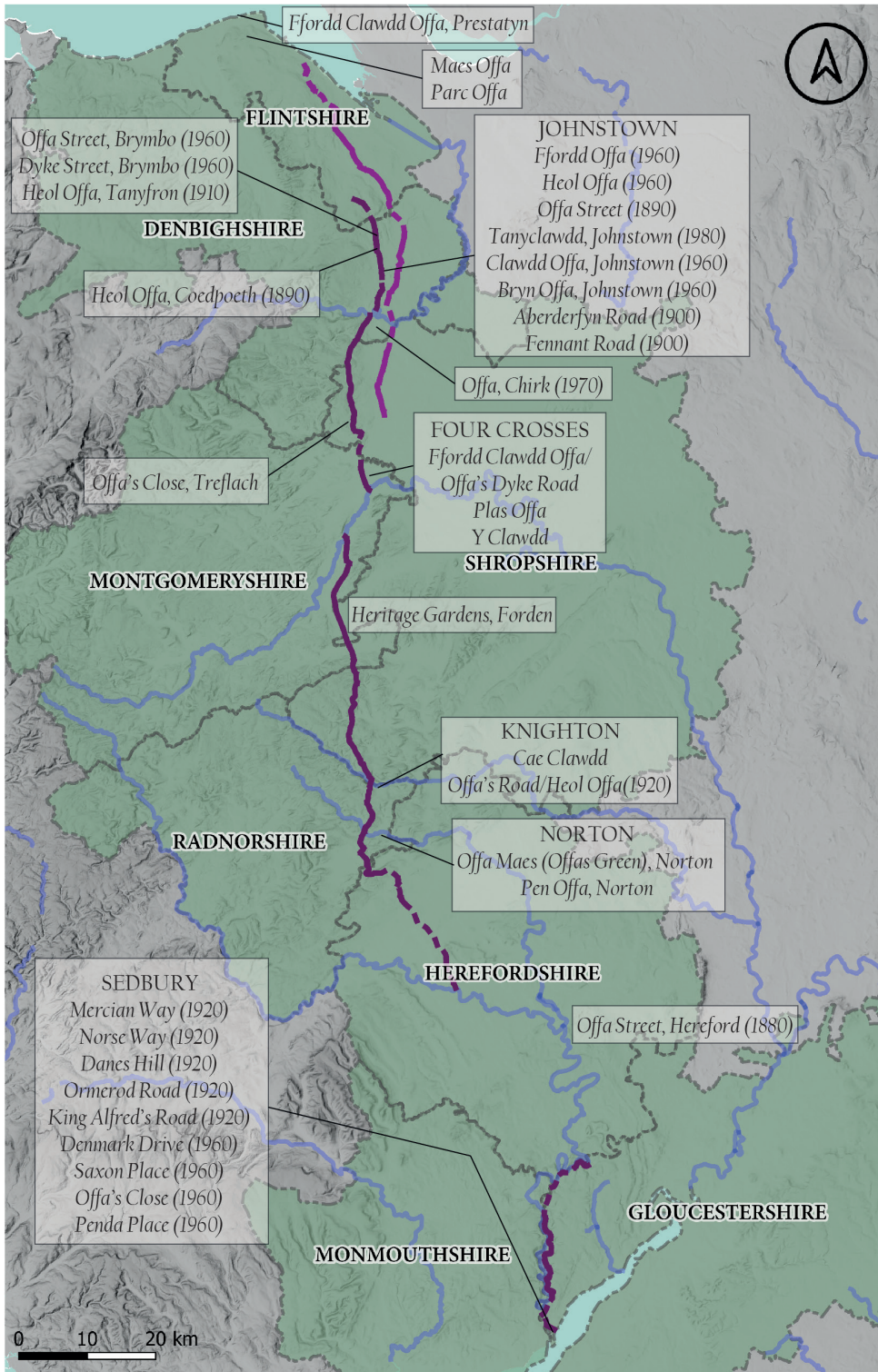


Figure 2: Street names citing Offa's Dyke (Map by Howard Williams. Basemap: Liam Delaney)

as dwelling, thus explicitly commemorating the presence or former proximity of Offa's Dyke within the inhabited landscape (see Neethling 2016). Since the streets and their associated developments sometimes actively destroy or obscure Offa's Dyke during their construction, the namings constitute both acts of remembering and wrapping processes of forgetting.

There is a single Clawdd Offa (Johnstown, Wrexham). In addition, there is Ffordd Clawdd Offa/Offa's Dyke Road (Four Crosses, Powys), a name recently deployed for the brand-new approach road to Ysgol Clawdd Offa (Figure 3). The monument is cited in Dyke Street (Brymbo, Wrexham), Y Clawdd (Four Crosses, Powys), Cae Clawdd (Knighton, Powys) and other likely allusions to the dyke mediated through historic farm-names translated to roads include Fennant Road, Aberderfyn Road, and Tanyclawdd (all in Johnstown, Wrexham). The rest are related to Offa, taking the form of Parc and Maes (adjacent to the Whitford Dyke: traditionally considered part of Offa's Dyke: Trelawnyd, Flints.), Heol (Johnstown, Coedpoeth and Tanyfron, all in Wrexham), Ffordd (Johnstown, Wrexham), Road (Knighton, Powys), Street (Hereford and Brymbo, Wrexham (Figure 4)), Close (Treflach, Salop) (Figure 5), Plas (Four Crosses, Powys) and Pen and Maes (Norton, Powys). The most popular residential name – Bryn Offa – appears once only as a street-name (Johnstown, Wrexham). Finally, Chirk (Wrexham) possesses a gnomonic street-name: Offa (Figure 6).



Figure 3: Sign for Ffordd Clawdd Offa: the newest street-name attributed to Offa's Dyke: the approach road to Ysgol Clawdd Offa, Prestatyn, Denbighshire it is the farthest away from the surviving monument (Photograph: Paul Parry, 2020)



Figure 4: Street sign for Offa Street, Brymbo, downhill and east of the surviving earthwork (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)





Figure 5: Street sign for Offa's Close, Treflach, Shropshire, immediately east of the line of Offa's Dyke (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)

There are then a cluster of further allusions to the past: Heritage Gardens (Forden, Powys) is recent and banal, reflecting the most generic allusion to the fact the recent housing estate abuts Offa's Dyke. Yet, the Sedbury (Glos.) cluster of estate names demonstrate a far more informed, explicit and planned desire to cite both the early medieval past connected to the Buttington Tump section of Offa's Dyke (Mercian, Norse, Danes, King Alfred's, Denmark, Saxon, Penda as well as Offa's) (Figure 7).

They might also reflect the local antiquarian speculations regarding this section as being built by, or linked to, the presence of the Danes and West Saxons as much as the Mercians. These street-names collectively evoke a sense of the past, but also the history of antiquarian investigation in the locality. This is because Ormerod Road likely refers to the antiquary George Ormerod (1785–1873) who researched Chepstow Castle and the environs, and who died nearby at Sedbury Park and was buried nearby at Tidenham. Together, they evoke a sense of the locality's past in the built environment and link the general story of Offa's Dyke to the specific history of the place.



Figure 6: Street sign for Offa, Chirk, detached from the monument by 1.6km–1.8km (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)

In chronological terms, only four – Hereford's Offa Street, Offa Street and Fennant Road (both in Johnstown, Wrexham) and Heol Offa (Coedpoeth, Wrexham) – can be dated to before 1900 and Heol Offa, Tanyfron (Wrexham) existed by 1910. These are joined by 1920 with five additional names from the Sedbury Estate (Figure 7) plus Knighton's Offa's Road (Figure 17). The rest are later, first recorded from 1960 onwards.

These street names thus commemorate the proximal presence and/or cite the former presence of Offa's Dyke and are closely tied to the monument's course from Gloucestershire

up to Flintshire. Notably, as with residence names, none are reflective of areas where the Offa's Dyke Path runs, and only one is found away from where the Dyke has monumental survival: the aforementioned exception being the brand-new Ffordd Clawdd Offa approach road to Ysgol Clawdd Offa in Prestatyn. The pair of street-names Parc Offa and Maes Offa in the Flintshire village of Trelawnnyd reflect immediate proximity to the Whitford Dyke; while now discounted as part of Offa's Dyke, it has



Figure 7: Street sign for Mercian Way, Sedbury, with bank of Offa's Dyke landscaped and behind it (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)

long been considered as part of the monument and is still called so on Ordnance Survey maps. This close spatial proximity to the monument is made further apparent when it is recognised that only five of the thirty-three are in the region but situated away from the line of Offa's Dyke. Chirk's (Wrexham) is east of the monument by 1.6km–1.8km and intervisible with it. Hence, it can be regarded as meaningfully situated in relation to the monument which runs through the National Trust-managed estate of Chirk Castle. Meanwhile, Norton's (Powys) pairing are not far from Offa's Dyke, meaning that only Hereford's historic Offa Street, making a royal allusion and not necessarily related to the Dyke at all, is away from the Dyke by a significant distance. As already mentioned, the latest attribution in Prestatyn relates to the school-name to which it runs.

Looking farther afield, there are hundreds of 'Dyke' street names across the country from Dyke Lane in Brighton to Dyke Court in Harthill, West Lothian, but very few in the region beyond the line of the monument itself. Dyke Street, Brymbo, is an exception and the only one in Wales. Even starker is the fact that 'clawdd' is incredibly rare as a street-name elsewhere in Wales. Notably, Clawdd Du in Monmouth and Clawdd Lane in New Radnor are the only ones disconnected from the Dyke in the borderland region, and neither have a convincing connection with Offa's Dyke or the Offa's Dyke Path; instead they are associated with other historic ditches and dykes relating to medieval towns. Similarly, there are 'Offa' street-names in Tamworth, Cambridge, Kenilworth and elsewhere disconnected from the region, but not (perhaps unsurprisingly) in Wales. Therefore, this underpins the specificity and the relationship with the monumental presence, however denuded it may be, to Offa's Dyke, and how commemorative naming practices are confined to a specific connection to the Marches and the monument. In short: Offa and Dyke are not significant and meaningful away from the monument, but only where they are related to the monument.

Even clearer than house-names, there is also a stark Welsh bias to the distribution of the street names. With the exception of the distinctive cluster of nine themed historic place-names from the same housing estate in Sedbury, Hereford's Offa Street and the Offa's Close name from Treflach (Salop) (Figure 5), the rest are in Wales (21/33). Of these, over half are in Welsh (12/21) (plus, the street-name 'Offa' in Chirk is by definition bilingual!). In these regards, the street-names mirror the situation with house-names. The particular concentration at Sedbury, just east of the Wye (the modern border) has already been addressed, but the concentration of seven street-names at Johnstown reflects the proliferation of house-names linked to Offa's Dyke in this former coal-mining community, some adapting the names of former farms (Tanyclawdd, Aberderfyn, Fennant).<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, within the concentration of Sedbury names, it is Offas Close (sic) and Mercian Way that run along the line of Offa's Dyke, as does Offa's Road in Knighton, thus both citing its former line and its continuance from well-preserved stretches. Heol Offa was established west of, and parallel to, High Street in Johnstown (Wrexham), with Ffordd Offa to the monument's west and upslope, but parallel with it. Meanwhile, Dyke Street and Offa Street run along the contours east of, and below, Offa's Dyke at Brymbo (Wrexham). In each case both the naming and the trajectory of the road responds to the Dyke's former presence, thus furthering the association: close by, north and south of Johnstown, the Dyke is well-preserved.

While house-names are the choice of residents themselves, past or present, and therefore always operating in relative idiosyncratic isolation in a cacophony of disparate house-names with often far flung allusions and connections, the context of street-names is worthy of further attention. They were choices made by local authorities in consultation with developers and communities, and thus considered uncontroversial by local people. Here, we learn more about how the citations to Offa's Dyke are contextualised to the locality and its history, sometimes directly connected to the damage or dissolution of the monument being cited. For Sedbury, we have a coherent set of 'Anglo-Saxon' commemorative associations with the Early Middle Ages and its antiquarian investigation. At Coedpoeth (Wrexham), Heol Glyndwr runs down to Heol Offa, while Llewellyn Road runs north of the B5430 close to its intersection with Heol Offa on the north side of Coedpoeth, and parallel to the Heol Offa in Tanyfron. Therefore, Welsh princes 'oppose' or 'complement' Offa in the landscape, perhaps helping to moderate or contextualise the king's negative associations in the Welsh landscape.

In Brymbo (Wrexham), Dyke Street and Offa Street (Figure 4) are associated with Cheshire View and Mountain View. These seemingly banal names actually illustrate a sense of landscape affinity and the stupendous views afforded eastwards over the Cheshire plain. Likewise, there is a potential association with the Welsh princes,

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<sup>4</sup> Again, thanks to Spencer Smith for pointing out to me the significance of the Fennant Road and Aberderfyn Roads.



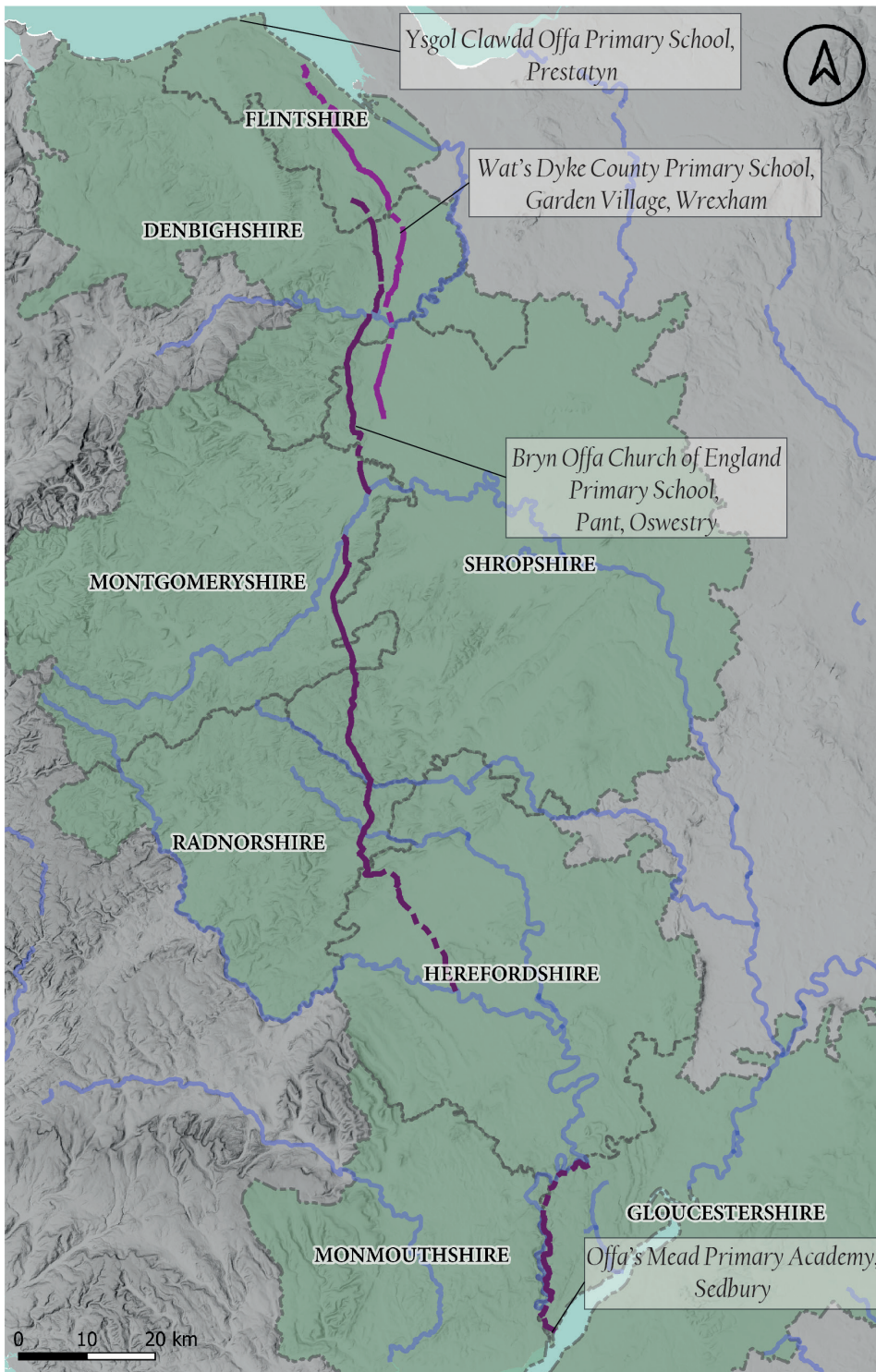


Figure 8: Schools citing Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke (Map by Howard Williams. Basemap: Liam Delaney)

for Ffordd Owain (perhaps alluding to Owain Glyndŵr) runs close by. In Chirk, the complex of road and closes collectively called 'Offa' (Figure 5) runs parallel to a similar arrangement called 'Crogen', presumably citing the 1165 battle in the Ceiriog valley to the west where the Welsh defeated the English forces of Henry I. Johnstown's rich concentration of Dyke-related street-names are juxtaposed against other royal allusions both historical and legendary. Hence, Merlin Street crosses Offa Street, while Victoria Avenue leads to Clawdd Offa. Close to Ffordd Offa, between Johnstown and Rhosllanerchrugog, are streets named after Powys, Dyfed and Gwynedd. Moreover, parallel and adjacent to Ffordd Offa up until the 1970s was Ffordd Dewi. At Four Crosses (Powys), Y Clawdd is adjacent to The Clawdd green, whilst the Ffordd Clawdd Offa/Offa's Dyke Road leads to Rodney's View: the cul-de-sac alluding to the viewshed connection to the Breidden Hill and Rodney's Pillar upon it, and thus a British naval hero and a Mercian king are interconnected with landmarks through their environs. Whether by design or happenstance, Offa and Dyke street names are enmeshed in complex networks of meaning and storytelling through naming practices in specific locales, both remembering and forgetting the monument, and connected to other street-names, place-names, and the topography and history of the localities.

#### *Teaching and learning with Offa's Dyke*

The fact that there is a King Offa Primary Academy in Bexhill-on-Sea (East Sussex) warns us about reading too much local pride and affinity into the association of Mercian kings and their monuments with educational facilities. However, there are three schools, all primary, named after Offa and situated in relation to the actual and historically conjectured line of Offa's Dyke (Figure 8). There is one at either end of the Offa's Dyke Path (Sedbury and Prestatyn) and the southern one is close to the line of the Dyke. Meanwhile, at Pant near Llanymyech, the primary school is close to the line of both Dyke and Path. Notably, none are specifically connected to the Dyke (in contrast to the primary schools associated with Wat's Dyke (see below), but two are in proximity to the monument at Sedbury and Pant, Oswestry. Meanwhile, Prestatyn has long utilised Offa in association with its identity and heritage tourism (Figure 3). Even though there is no demonstrable evidence of the Dyke running this far north, the Offa's Dyke Path ends here and is embellished with monuments and art. Subsequently, the association with Offa and Prestatyn has been enhanced with the addition of a street-name which serves as the school's main approach.

#### *Offa commons*

In regards to public spaces, there are two key green open-area environments named after the Dyke, The Clawdd, Four Crosses (Powys) and Offa's Dyke Park, Knighton (Powys). The latter was set out with a stone commemorating the foundation of the Offa's Dyke National Trail and thus is intimately related to the history of the Offa's Dyke



Association and the Offa's Dyke Path, situated next to the Offa's Dyke Centre. Together with the house- and street-names, these indicate how Offa's Dyke enmeshes with local identities and heritage through recreational public spaces too.

### *Business Offas*

Finally, and perhaps most eclectically, we focus on businesses named in relation to Offa's Dyke (Figure 9). These are both geographically more detached from the line of Offa's Dyke and its monumental presence, but there remains a spatial association with the monument. Three sets of visitor accommodation are overtly related to the long-distance National Trail and are clearly named to attract guests: the Offa's Dyke Lodge at Gladestry, Offa's Dyke Retreat and Offa's Bed & Breakfast, Monmouth. Whilst in the region and close to the Path, they are far removed from the monument. They enhance what is already widespread: a public confusion regarding the relationship between the Dyke and the Path. Conversely however, further facilities are proximal to both the Path and Dyke: Offa's Ditch (Mardu, Clun, Salop), Offa's Dyke Yurts (Weston Rhyn, Salop), and Offa Dyke House (Knighton, Powys). The Clawdd Offa Barn Holiday Cottage relates to the historic farm name on the line of Wat's Dyke for which Offa names are commonplace (see below).

In terms of public houses, one is related to the National Trail (Offas Tavern, Prestatyn), while the other is close to Chester although in the region (Offa's Dyke Hotel, Broughton). The Offa Bar in Hereford is, again, in the region but disconnected from both Trail and Dyke. Most explicitly connected to the monument is the Offa's Dyke Brewery situated upon Offa's Dyke in the Shropshire village of Trefonen (Figure 10).

There is also a single antiques centre and a bookseller in the region that uses the association with Offa's Dyke but with no specific connection to the monument itself, but it is worth noting that at Buttington (Powys), close to where Offa's Dyke runs to the River Severn, there is the Offa's Dyke Business Park (Figure 11). Other interesting yet eclectic examples of business names from the region are coarse fishing at Llanfynydd (Offa's Dyke Pools), and a Riding Club in the Forest of Dean (Offa's Dyke Riding Club), both using the association with Offa's Dyke and in relatively close proximity to it. There are also rather less directly relevant business names and these are in the region but farther from the Dyke: the ITC company Offa Systems Ltd based near Monmouth, and the Offa Property Management, St Asaph. While close to the Dyke, the most incongruous mash-up of all is perhaps the Offa Glyndwr Training & Consultancy, based in Knighton.

Beyond accommodation linked to tourism and, specifically, walking the Offa's Dyke Path, the monument is occasionally cited as a shorthand affording an aura of the region and its early medieval past. With the Offa's Dyke Business Park and pub names in particular, we can see a prominent commemorative dimension to the naming practices.

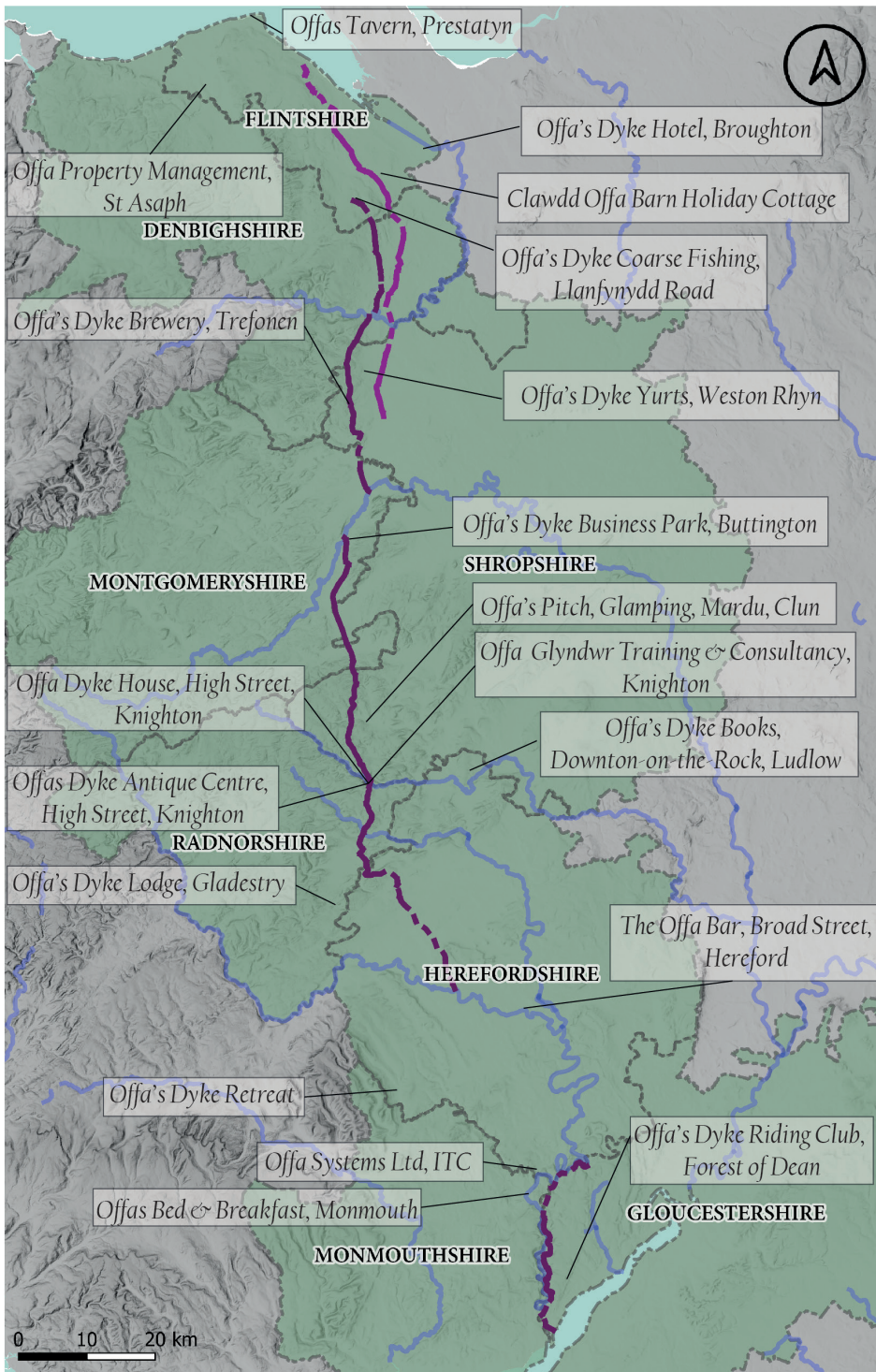


Figure 9: Businesses citing Offa's Dyke (Map by Howard Williams. Basemap: Liam Delaney)





Figure 10: The Offa's Dyke Brewery, Trefonen, Shropshire, situated on the precise historic line of Offa's Dyke which runs through the centre of the village (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)



Figure 11: Offa's Dyke Business Park, Buttington, Shropshire, adjacent to the line of Offa's Dyke (Photograph: Giles Carey, 2020)

Table 3: House-names citing Wat's Dyke from south to north.

House-name	Location	Earliest OS recording (Digimap)
Pentre-Clawdd Farm	Oswestry (Salop)	1870
Pentre-Clawdd Cottage		present
Ebna! Dyke, Gobowen	Gobowen (Salop)	present
Wat's Dyke View	Ruabon (Wrexham)	1960
Pentre-Clawdd Farm		1870
Bryn Offa estate & recreation ground	Wrexham (Wrexham)	1960
The Dyke	Hope (Flints.)	present
Dyke Mews		present
Wat's Dyke		present
Clawdd-Offa Farm	Penyffordd (Flints.)	1870
Offa's Dyke		1960
Bod Offa Farm	Mynydd Isa (Flints.)	1890
Maes Offa	New Brighton (Flints.)	present
Bryn Offa		1870
Lake Offa		present
Llwyn Offa	near New Brighton (Flints.)	1870
Offa Bank	Sychdyn (Flints.)	1960
Clawdd Offa Farm		1870

## Wat's Dyke

Wat's Dyke is a shorter monument, more poorly preserved over long sections, and less widely recognised. Its associated long-distance path – the Wat's Dyke Way – does not possess the National Trail status of the Offa's Dyke Path. Moreover, its name does not demonstrably link to an historical personage. In these regards, it is lesser known and has fewer overt commemorative citations through naming practices. Still, both the similarities and differences from the names associated with Offa's Dyke are revealing. Specifically, its line does take in a larger number of contemporary settlements making its significance within the contemporary memoryscapes revealing in itself (see Williams 2020).

### *Habitations and Wat's Dyke*

Eighteen house names were identified in connection with Wat's Dyke through an examination of the historic and contemporary OS maps and also field inspections of many settlements. However, the same provisos apply as with Offa's Dyke, namely that smaller semi-detached and terraced properties with names might be missed off the maps and a full survey of historic place-names has not been attempted (Table 3, Figure 12).

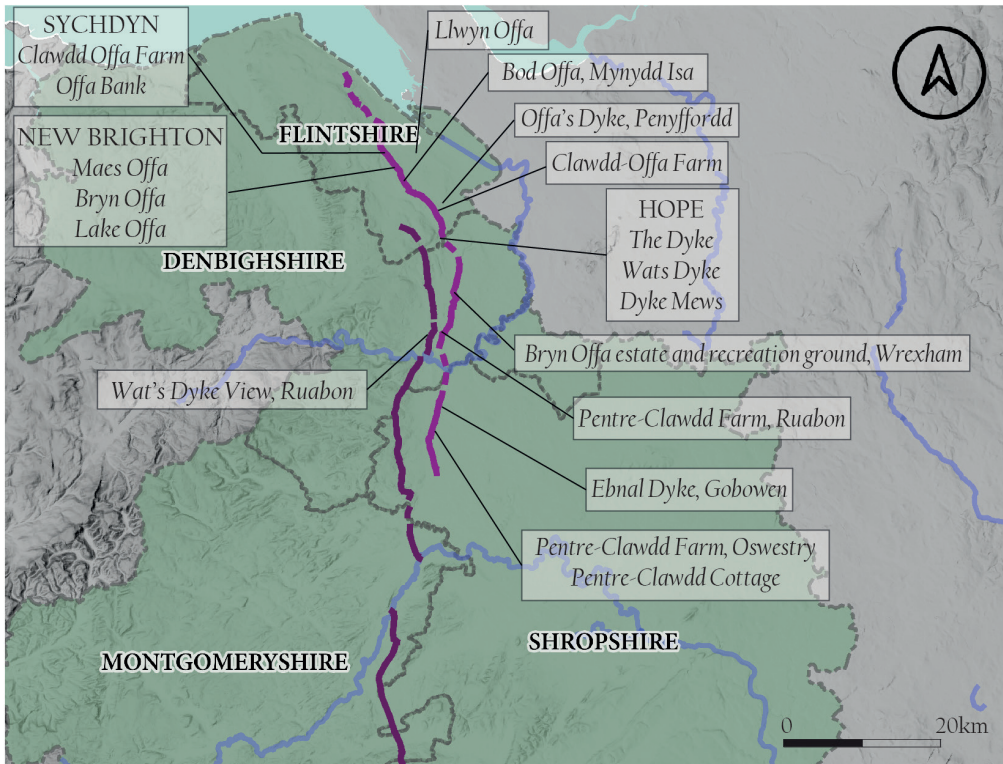


Figure 12: House-names citing Wat's Dyke (Map by Howard Williams. Basemap: Liam Delaney)

Because Wat's Dyke is shorter than Offa's Dyke, we would expect fewer house-names connected to it. Yet, since Wat's Dyke tends to be situated on lower-lying terrain, its line runs through or close to far more modern settlements than Offa's Dyke. Still, overall, Wat's Dyke has seemingly fewer house names per kilometre than Offa's Dyke.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, there are settlements that seem not to recognise Wat's Dyke in terms of house names, including the town of Holywell under which Wat's Dyke has long been subsumed, and Mynydd Isa which was built over Wat's Dyke north-east of Mold. Still, Wat's Dyke's citation in habitation names is not new: there are seven pre-1900 names, mainly farms, joined by some private dwellings. These have been augmented by four additional names from the mid-twentieth century and seven from recent decades.

The character of the names is striking, since there are only two referencing the formation 'Wat's Dyke' (Wat's Dyke View, Ruabon and Wat's Dyke, Hope) and neither pre-date the mid-twentieth century. Indeed, a larger number reference the monument as Dyke or Clawdd without reference to 'Wat', five in total (Pentre-Clawdd Farm, Oswestry;

<sup>5</sup> As a crude estimate, Offa's Dyke has eighty-one house names along the 198km as the crow flies from Chepstow to Prestatyn, meaning an average of one habitation every 2.4km. Wat's Dyke has eighteen dwelling names along 62km from Maesbrook to Holywell, meaning one house name every 3.4km.



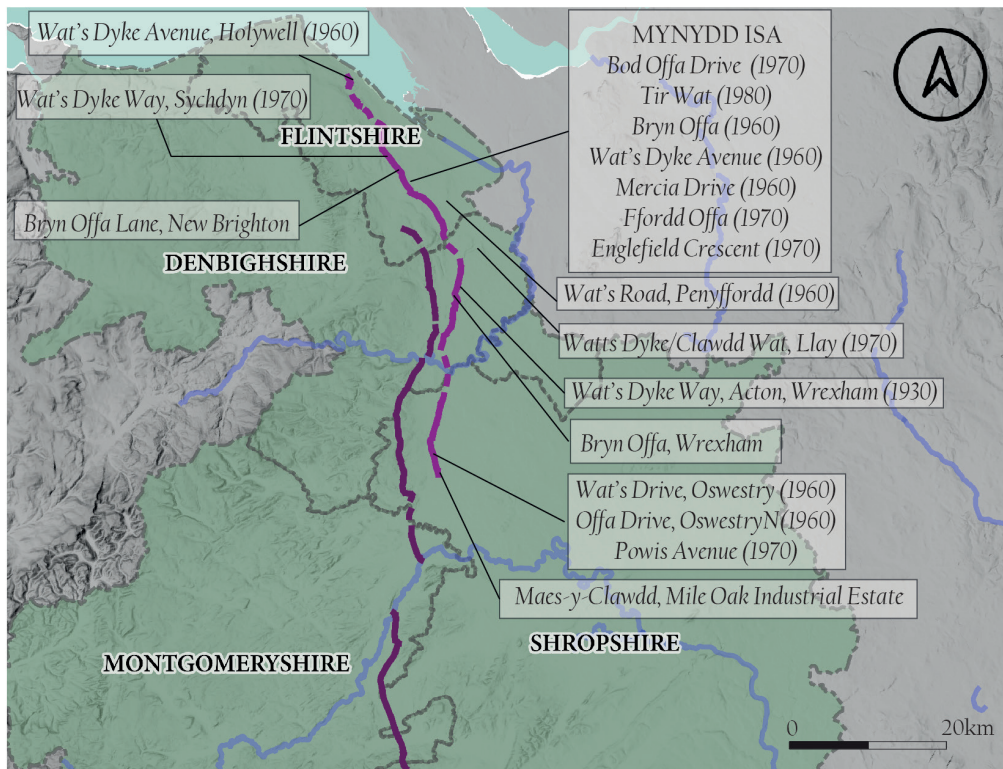


Figure 13: Street-names citing Wat's Dyke (Map by Howard Williams. Basemap: Liam Delaney)

Pentre-Clawdd Cottage, Oswestry; Pentre-Clawdd Farm, Ruabon; The Dyke, Hope; Dyke Mews, Hope). Then, there are ten habitations referencing 'Offa', one of these Offa's Dyke (Penyffordd). The name Offa is combined with Bod, Maes, Lake and Llwyn prefixes together with Bryn Offa appearing twice, once for a house, once for an estate and recreation ground in Wrexham (which as a district also has its own community council). This association of Wat's Dyke with 'Offa' is not a recent confusion: five of the seven pre-1900 house names are 'Offa'. In dwelling naming practices, Wat's Dyke is Offa's Dyke since at least the nineteenth century.

### *Wat's Dyke odonyms*

This study identified eighteen street-names citing the presence/former presence of Wat's Dyke and they span its entire route from Oswestry to Holywell (Table 4, Figures 13–16). As with the house names, the vast majority are in Wales, with a massive concentration of seven street-names in the village of Mynydd Isa where there was also formerly a Mercia Inn (now a supermarket). The earliest was established in the 1930s in Garden Village, Wrexham (Wat's Dyke Way, Figure 14), but all others date from the 1950s to recent years, indicating the exponential growth in house-building in settlements along the line of the Dyke. Five names cite Wat's Dyke, and there are three further references

Table 4: Street names citing Wat’s Dyke from south to north

Road Name	Location	Earliest OS recording (Digimap)
Maes-y-Clawdd, Mile Oak Industrial Estate	Oswestry	present
Powis Avenue		1970
Wat’s Drive	Oswestry	1960
Offa Drive	Oswestry	1960
Bryn Offa	Wrexham	present
Wats Dyke Way	Garden Village, Wrexham	1930
Watts Dyke/Clawdd Wat	Llay	1970
Wat’s Road	Penyffordd	1960
Bod Offa Drive	Mynydd Isa	1970
Tir Wat	Mynydd Isa	1980
Bryn Offa	Mynydd Isa	1960
Wats Dyke Avenue	Mynydd Isa	1960
Mercia Drive	Mynydd Isa	1960
Ffordd Offa	Mynydd Isa	1970
Englefield Crescent	Mynydd Isa	1970
Bryn Offa Lane	New Brighton	present
Wat’s Dyke Way	Sychdyn	1970
Wat’s Dyke Avenue	Holywell	1960

to Wat (Wat’s Drive, Oswestry; Wat’s Road, Penyffordd (Figure 15); Tir Wat, Mynydd Isa). Yet these eight references to Wat are matched by no less than five citations to Offa, including the parallel Wat’s Drive and Offa Drive in Oswestry. While Wat holds its own, the association with Offa is explicit as in ‘Bryn Offa’ road and estate in Wrexham (Figure 16). Two further instances reference ‘clawdd’, and the territory of Englefield, Mercia and Powis are all alluded to.

The further point to make is that Mynydd Isa (Flintshire) fills a gap in settlements without dwelling names with its cluster of street-names. Moreover, there are instances where the street-names here are along the line of



Figure 14: Wats Dyke Way and Wats Dyke Primary School, Garden Village, Wrexham (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)



Figure 15: Wat's Road, Penryffordd, Flintshire, a settlement to the east of the line of the early medieval monument (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)



Figure 16: Bryn Offa, Wrexham (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)

Wat's Dyke (e.g. Wat's Dyke Way, Sychdyn) and parallel to it (e.g. Powis Avenue, Oswestry, Salop; Wats Dyke Way, Garden Village, Wrexham; Wats Dyke Avenue, Mynydd Isa, Flintshire). The only exceptions are Watts Dyke/Clawdd Wat, Llay (Wrexham), and Wat's Drive, Penryffordd (Flintshire): both settlements are proximal to, but east of, the line of Wat's Dyke and both in the monument's immediate proximity. Again, the relationship to the physical survival and former course of the Dyke is paramount: the names cite a monument close by whether lost or surviving, and sometimes commemorating stretches destroyed or damaged during its construction together with associated housing. Furthermore, the confusion/conflation/association of Wat's Dyke with Offa and Offa's Dyke is a consistent theme from Oswestry up to Sychdyn, a feature most prominent in the themes street names of Mynydd Isa and the Bryn Offa estate and recreation ground.

### *Wat schools, public spaces and businesses*

The extension of the association of Wat's Dyke to other naming practices is evident in the Bryn Offa district of Wrexham and the attendant Offa Community Council.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in addition to the density of Mynydd Isa street-names, the primary school there was originally called Wat's Dyke Infants School and the adjacent park remains Wat's Dyke Park. Likewise, Wat's Dyke Primary School in Wrexham sits upon the monument in Garden Village adjacent to Wats Dyke Way (Figures 8 and 14). Yet, in contrast to Offa's Dyke, specific businesses that evoke Wat's Dyke were not identified in this study. Partly this might be because of the difficulty and ambiguity of 'Wat' as

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.offacomunitycouncil.gov.uk/>



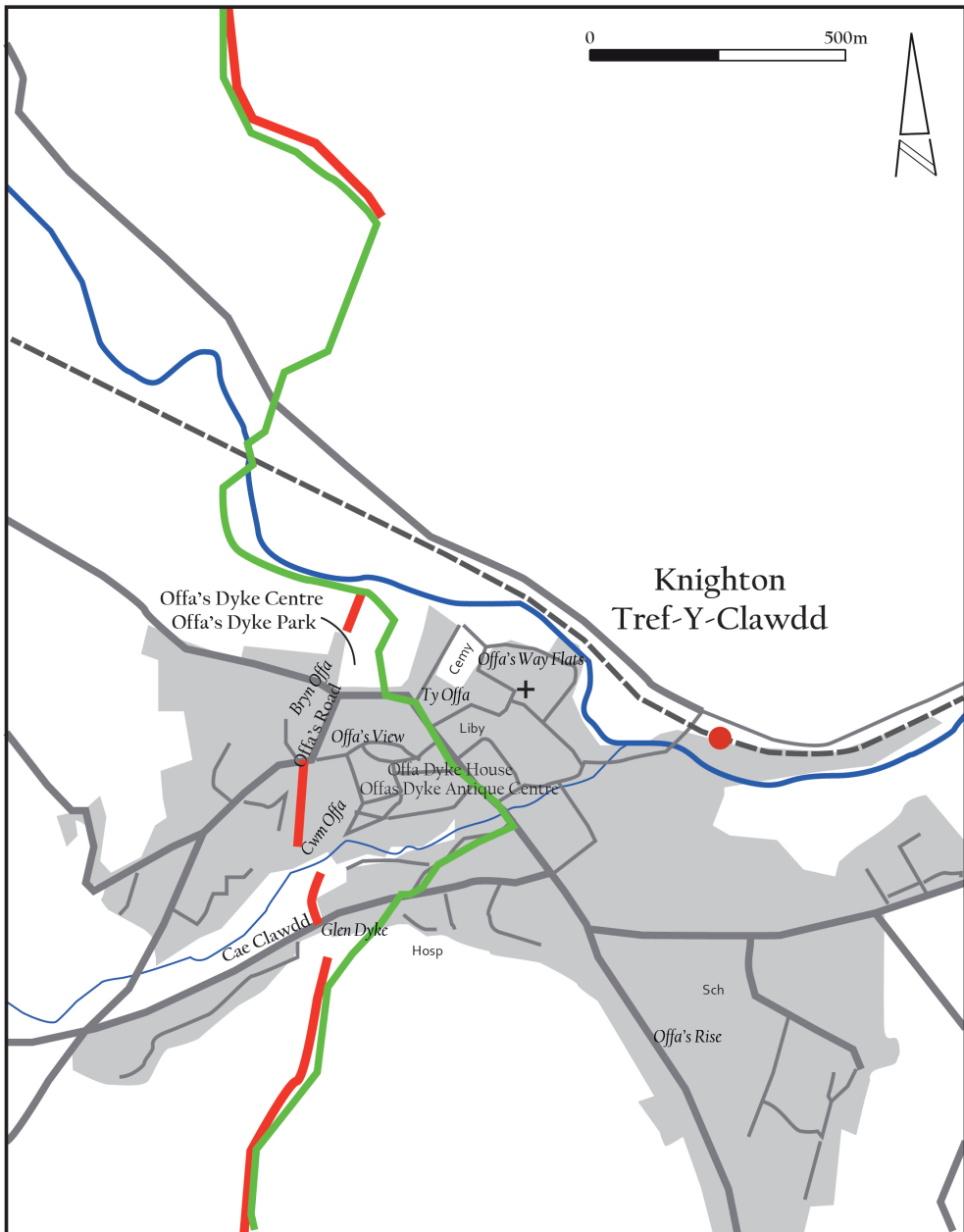


Figure 17: Map of Knighton/Tref-Y-Clawdd, Powys, showing the surviving line of Offa's Dyke (red), the Offa's Dyke Path (green) and the house, street and business names citing Offa's Dyke, plus the Offa's Dyke Centre and Offa's Dyke Park (Map by Howard Williams)

an informal spelling of 'what', but equally it attests to the low profile of the monument and its conflation with Offa and Offa's Dyke. Notably, while the Offa's Dyke Hotel in Broughton makes little sense in relation to the actual Offa's Dyke, its proximity to Penyffordd and the course of Wat's Dyke is more readily appreciated (Figure 9).

## Accretive toponyms as memoryscapes

So far, we have looked at a broad-brush scale, treating the names as abstracted texts, rather than considering how they are embedded into the material fabric of specific inhabited landscapes. To explore this further, we need to foreground clusters of names as more than 'themes' with a single author, their commemoration only amplified by their increased frequency (see Room 1992: 179–187). Instead, we might consider them as memoryscapes in which their spatialities both amplify and extend the commemorative associations between inhabited landscapes and the ancient monument. The physical presence of street names and other signs makes these names more than abstracted concepts, but integral to the inhabited landscapes of settlements and spaces. Together, as they accrue over decades and endure together, house and street-names, schools and public places are interacting with each other as a chorography for those traversing the landscape (cf. Árvay and Foote 2019). As one walks, cycles or drives through the environs, inscribed memories are constituted in the signs one encounters, but also memories are incorporated through one's embodied movement. Sometimes, these relationships are further enhanced when they are specifically linked to sections of the surviving linear earthwork or serve as giving a material presence in its monumental absence by alerting people to its former course. Hence, the naming practices have both incorporating and inscribing mnemonic dimensions to them (see Connerton 1989).

Here, I wish to follow up on the discussion above by focusing on three case studies where multiple names intersect with each other. For Offa's Dyke, I look at the coincidence of the market town 'on the Dyke' of Knighton with explicit heritage dimensions in the form of its Offa's Dyke Centre upon the Offa's Dyke Path. I will contrast this with the post-industrial community of Johnstown, Wrexham, where the Dyke has been obliterated by housing and the Wrexham-Ruabon road. For Wat's Dyke, I consider the high concentration of street-names, a park and a formerly named primary school at Mynydd Isa, Flintshire. Each case illustrates the specificity and accretive spatialised remembrance of Offa's Dyke through toponyms and materialised through signs.



Figure 18: Offa Road/Heol Offa, Knighton, follows the former line of Offa's Dyke (Photograph: Ian Mackay, 2020)

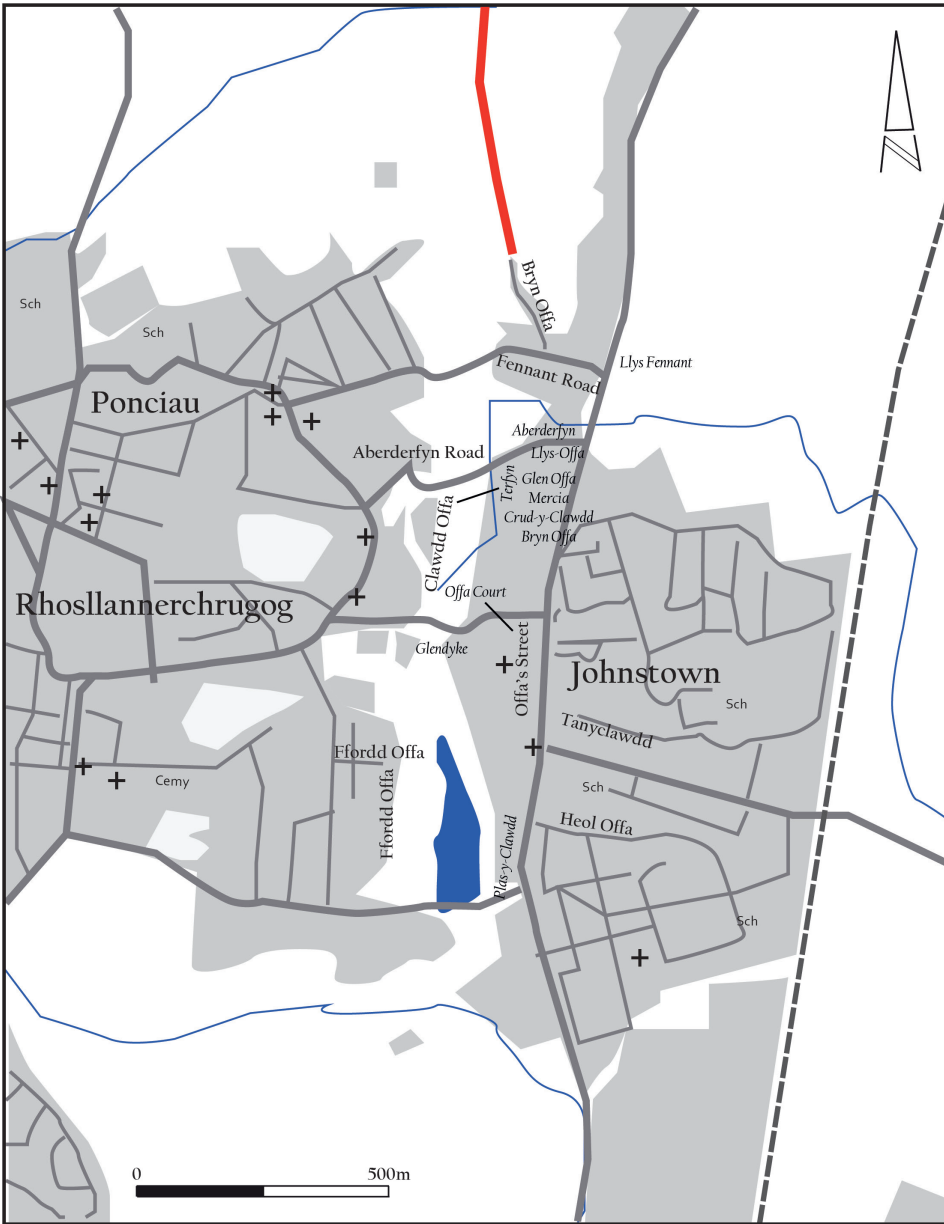


Figure 19: Map of Johnstown, Wrexham, showing Offa's Dyke (red) and the house and street names citing Offa's Dyke (Map by Howard Williams)

*Knighton, Powys*

The 'town on the dyke' is rich in all categories of toponyms: house-names, street-names, the Offa's Dyke Centre, its associated park, and local businesses on the High Street at the centre of the town. Together they cohere a memoryscape with the monument itself overlooking the town from the hills, and accessible via the Offa's Dyke Path, both within the town and to its north and south. Yet Knighton is not peppered throughout with dyke-





Figure 20: Offa Street/Stryt Offa, Johnstown, Wrexham (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)



Figure 21: Clawdd Offa, Johnstown, Wrexham (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)



Figure 22: Ffordd Offa, Rhosllanerchrugog/Johnstown, Wrexham (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)

related naming practices: what is also notable is the spatial specificity of the homes and streets associated with Offa's Dyke. With one exception, all of the house-names are immediately proximal to the historic line of the Dyke (Figure 17). Furthermore, Offa's Road commemorates the former line of the monument, now adjacent to the Offa's Dyke Centre (Figure 18). Within the park, a section of the Dyke is preserved with a stone commemorating both the opening of the park and the National Trail (Noble 1981).

#### *Johnstown, Wrexham*

By way of contrast, I select here a case study that is away from the Offa's Dyke Path, which diverges from the monument north of the Vale of Llangollen (Figure 18). In Johnstown, Wrexham, the Dyke is long-gone beneath the developing village of the late nineteenth century (Barrett 1962). It is completely subsumed beneath the line of the High Street (B5605): the historic route from Ruabon (to the south) and Wrexham (to the north) constituting the spine of the village (Fox 1955: 50–51). In so doing, the Dyke becomes the artery of the settlement with dwellings and shops, even the war memorial, situated upon its alignment (Figures 20–22). A collective sense of the line of the Dyke is recognised equally in both house-names and street-names, including the road Bryn Offa which runs up to where the Dyke is still visible on the northern edge of Johnstown. These names have pre-industrial roots, accreting from

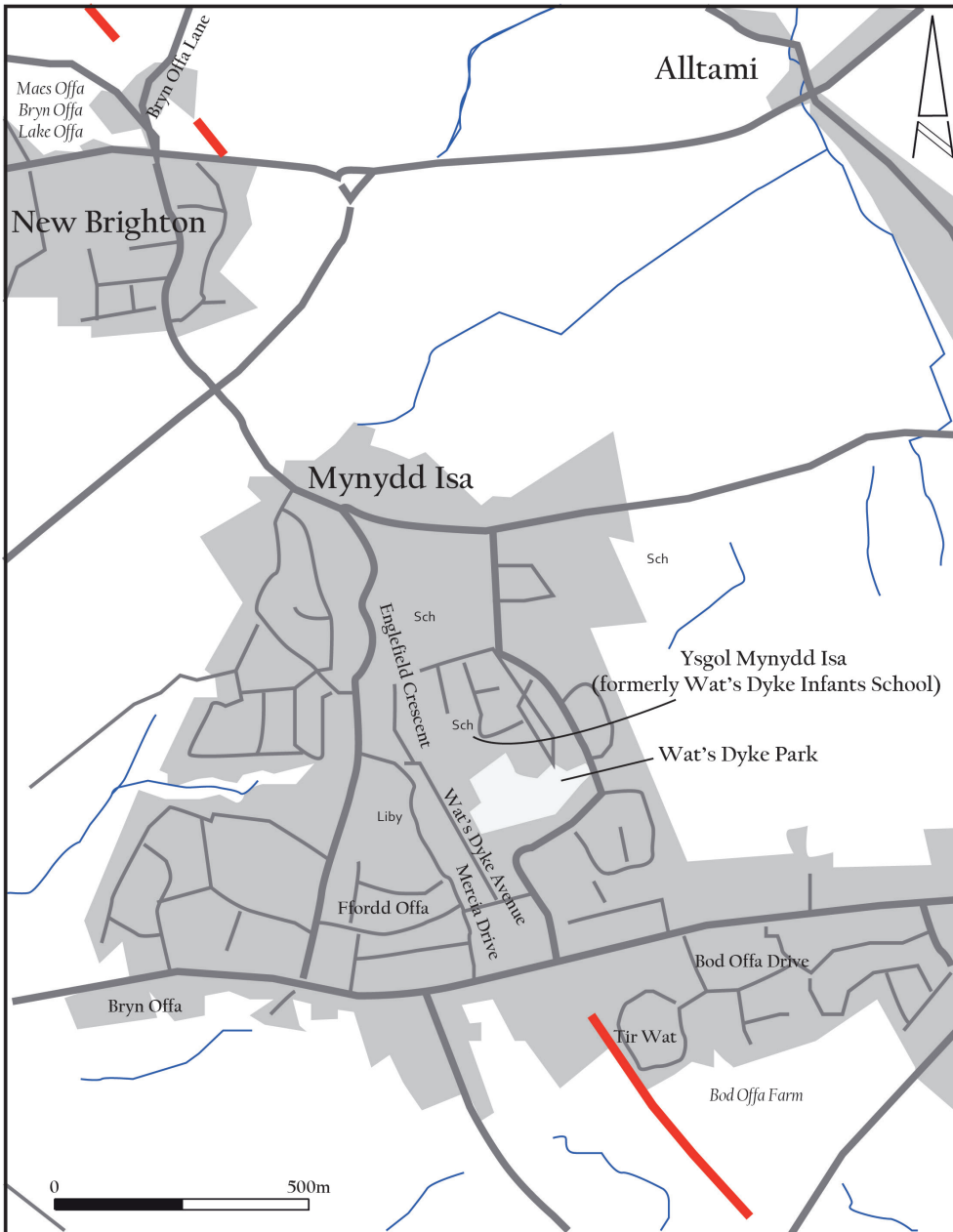


Figure 23: Map of Mynydd Issa and New Brighton, Flintshire, showing the surviving line of Wat's Dyke (red) and the house and street names citing Wat's Dyke, as well as Ysgol Mynydd Issa (formerly Wat's Dyke Infants School) and Wat's Dyke Park (Map by Howard Williams).

five historic farms citing the Dyke in their names. Of these, Llys Fennant, Aberderfyn Farm still survive, but the remaining three, Tan-y-clawdd-uchaf, Tan-y-Clawdd-canol and Tan-y-clawdd are subsumed within housing estates and commemorated through a street name each. Former businesses included the Aberderfyn Brick Company (Barratt 1962).

While very different from Knighton, the specificity of the spatialisation is comparable. Notably, there are no house or street names citing Offas' Dyke in Ponciau or Rhosllannerchrugog uphill to the west. Rather than a single top-down planning decision, unwitting and unplanned rather than discursive, the names enshrine the north-south linearity of the settlement and the road between Ruabon and Wrexham, and the former existence of Offa's Dyke. The intangible monumentality of the Dyke is thus materialised through the settlement's fabric and naming practices, including the house- and street-names visible to inhabitants and visitors.

*Mynydd Isa, Flintshire*

As a sole case study for Wat's Dyke, I focus on the Flintshire village where the dyke has long been lost and subsumed within the incremental expansion of the settlement during the twentieth century (Figure 23). Partly mitigating this destruction, there is a striking concentration of toponyms comprising a farm (Bod Offa), a former public house (Mercia Inn), the former name of a school (Wat's Dyke Infants School), an



Figure 24: The sign for Wat's Dyke Park, Mynydd Isa, Flintshire (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)



Figure 25: Street sign for Wats Dyke Avenue, Mynydd Isa, Flintshire, parallel to the historic line of the monument (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2020)

extant park adjacent to the school (Wat's Dyke Park; Figure 24), and a startling seven street-names, two referring to Wat (Figure 25), three to Offa, one to Mercia and one to Englefield (the English name for the cantref of Tegeingl often related to Wat's Dyke). There is no easy way to trace the monument through back gardens and beside the primary school and there is nothing to be seen in the local park beyond its naming. Yet the map illustrates the spatial



specificity of the namings within the planning of the housing development. Wat's Dyke Avenue and Englefield Crescent follow the former line of the monument in association with the school and park. Moreover, the map (Figure 23) also includes the adjacent community of New Brighton where the Dyke is prominent on display in the grounds of the Beaufort Park Hotel (Williams 2020) and where there are three residential names and a lane leading to a further residence citing which might be citing the linear earthwork's proximity (Llys Offa).

### *Summary*

These three examples serve to illustrate how naming practices are not simply abstracted, but operate in relation to each other to accrue and culminate a sense of belonging linking communities' businesses, schools, dwellings and streets to both extant and lost sections of each linear earthwork. Each case features different durations from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and it is improbable that there has ever been a discursive, let alone planned, strategy of naming. Yet the cumulative memoryscape emerging from the nineteenth century to the present day presents a network of localised choices and decisions made by house-owners and local authorities to distribute the monument in the inhabited landscape.

### **Discussion**

Both monuments operate in dialogue with each other in regards to naming practices: the former dominating the latter: a tradition already reflected in pre-modern naming practices which associate Wat's Dyke with Offa. While the physical presence (or former presence) of the Dykes themselves is the principal reason for house and street names citing the Dyke, there is also a dialogue between the Dykes and the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail, evoking the antiquarian tradition that Offa's Dyke extended towards Prestatyn. Yet, the overwhelming pattern is one of precise mnemonic spatialisation: house and street-names in particular are not everywhere alluding to the Dykes or Offa in abstracted or vague terms: they cite the immediate proximity to where the Dykes either survive or were historically manifested but destroyed or subsumed within developments. The same applies to schools and public places, although businesses are more broadly spread across the Welsh Marches and seem to be attempting to evoke a sense of 'pastness' to afford their businesses more a sense of authority and reliability (including perhaps a royal association with a famed king) as much as a particular connection to place.

Certainly, the naming practices reveal different localised responses to the monumental presence of linear monuments at different locations in the Welsh Marches and, with the exception of Sedbury, they have accrued over the long-term, rather than being a singular policy or strategy of naming. They are thus the result of localised heritages linking to these monuments (see also Ray and Bapty 2016: 373–376).

The study has identified how this is mainly a late twentieth/early twenty-first-century phenomenon, but it has demonstrable nineteenth- and early twentieth-century roots linked to antiquarian and early archaeological understandings of Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke as successive early medieval borders between the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia and its Welsh rivals. Yet we cannot readily understand these naming practices in relation to a pan-Welsh sense of national identity, given their absence away from the border in other parts of Wales. Nor can we understand these in relation to naming practices in England, where 'Offa' and 'Mercia' street-names are diffused and only some relate to the historic pre-Viking kingdom.

This is not to deny their role in ideology, and contested senses of identity and territory (cf. Brocket 2019). Certainly, concentrations of street names linked to medieval kings are widespread across England, merging together national histories with specific localities and enfolding imperialist and nationalist, often overtly patriotic and royalist dimensions. Some of these can be related to specific events such as King Ecgbert Road, Dore, Sheffield (South Yorkshire), commemorating the treaty between the West Saxons and Northumbrians of 829 (Room 1992: 170). Others are equally modern-day creations but have been inspired by contrived associations of the nineteenth century without deeper pedigrees, as for Canute Place, Knutsford (Cheshire) which reflects claims that the town's Domesday Book name *Cunetesford* stems from King Cnut (Room 1992: 168). Similarly, Doyle White (2020 fn. 3) notes how Faestendic is referenced in at least three post-war street-names in Joydens Wood (Kent).

In this context, I propose these names cannot be seen merely as a localised offshoot of broader trends to commemorate British royalty and military engagements. Instead, they reflect local choices and local identities within a borderlands region rather than any strategy instigated by centralised authorities (cf. Yeoh 1992). Especially in the light of how heritage sites and museums in the region seem to generally overlook Britain's longest early medieval linear monuments, the materiality and spatializing of the early medieval past through naming practices is striking as an element of borderland's story.<sup>7</sup>

This does not appear to be simply toponymic politicking (cf. Brocket 2019): an English-speaking spatialized injustice in the Welsh landscape (see Alderman and Inwood 2013: 213), especially given the Welsh-speaking heritages of industrial communities like Johnstown and Brymbo (Wrexham). Likewise, while place-names can be connected to tourism (see Light 2014), few are connected to the Offa's Dyke Path and only a very few businesses evoke Offa's Dyke through association with walking and other kinds of visitors to the region. Here, Prestatyn stands out; situated at the northern terminus of the National Trail, the town's tourism and a sense of identity has long been connected to the Roman past as well as the Offan association. Another key exception is the tourism

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<sup>7</sup> A full survey of how Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke are discussed within the region's museums has not been completed, but with the exception of the Offa's Dyke Centre, Knighton, this author's impression is that they are afforded with cursory attention at best.



dimension to the naming practices of Knighton, whose identity as a community and as a tourist destination is firmly fused to Offa and the Dyke, extending to their Little Offa mascot.<sup>8</sup>

What are the implications? Naming practices might be seen as reflecting the socio-political order and commemorating key figures in expressing and fostering a national identity (Neethling 2016: 146-47). Yet increasingly, they have also been explored as a pivotal way communities negotiate their identities within contested places (e.g. Yeoh 1992; Alderman and Inwood 2013; Neethling 2016: 147), including creating colonial memories and suppressing former names, and creating ‘counter-memories’ in relation to dominant authorities and groups and asserting territorial and historical narratives linked to identities and ideology (Brocket 2019), including both colonial and de-colonising strategies (e.g. McCracken 2012; Neethling 2016: 148-156). Often these naming and re-naming processes mediate around the commemoration of people and events with overt ethnic and social distinctions promoted or subsequently demolished (e.g. Yeoh 1992). Much of this work has taken place in contexts of intense and divisive racial and ethno-religious tensions and contestations, and while the degree of tensions on the Anglo-Welsh borderlands might be different, the lessons for contested borderland landscapes have wider import, specifically in considering place and place-making mediated through narratives of distant pasts (Cashman 2019).

We might know little behind the naming practices, and some originate before the modern era in farm names, as noted for Johnstown, Wrexham. Their adoption and proliferation cannot be readily regarded as a strategy of English colonialism in industrial and rural communities, although a diffused patriotic, specifically royalist, strategy in street naming is shared between England and Wales. Yet the names we have seen, for homes, streets, schools and public spaces, result of a series of local responses to the Dykes, rather than national stories, and they have a persistence in relation to the Dyke, both presencing it where it is now absent, and in dialogue with its surviving sections, stretching across and perhaps subverting contemporary borders and barriers (Árvey and Foote 2019: 135). The commemoration of the ‘third space’ of the borderlands is oppositional to a Welsh or English national story of origins, and Offa’s and Wat’s Dykes thus operate to counter both of these in fashions yet to be fully explored and evaluated.

It might be more appropriate to regard these naming practices as part of a politics of belonging in operation that is not vested primarily in nationalistic or cultural/linguistic terms, but in an awareness of ‘living on the edge’, and in relation to an ancient monument in a landscape between nations past and present. These naming practices have emerged both in relation to the physical presence of the Dykes, but also the materiality of the existing house and street-names. Rather than an overt, discursive place of memory, the Dyke is complex and contested in both places where it is visible and where it has been

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<sup>8</sup> <https://visitknighton.co.uk/>

lost. The names thus create a citation to lost landscapes and a lost monument, as well as anchoring a connection with surviving traces of the monument close by.

If so, the parallel with parts of the world where place-names evoke more overt political struggles might not necessarily be in the struggle for justice against injustice (see Alderman and Inwood 2013), but perhaps as part of a complex multi-generational negotiation, sometimes overtly informed by antiquarian and archaeological literature, of borderland identities which are separate from, and implicated in, national politics, which calls attention to the dykes, and to Offa and Wat (but notably the former) as manifestations and personifications (respectively) of the borderlands as a Third Space, neither Wales nor England. As Ray and Bapty (2016: 374) note, Offa and his Dyke are as much indicative of vainglorious failed states as a prelude to English national ascendancy. Rather than anti-Welsh, the evidence prompts us to consider whether Offa has been adopted as a positive Welsh borderland aspect of identity, ambivalent to some deeper into Wales and in England, but nonetheless powerful and diffused through the natural topography as much as the Dyke itself. Whatever the intention of their creators, they have endured and thus have a power of their own to affect perceptions and senses of identity for future generations.

This is especially important given the systematic omission of Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke from authentic heritage discourse in the Anglo-Welsh borderland. They are seemingly perceived as a 'can of worms' not to be opened, and something too 'offensive' or 'problematic' to be promoted and debated. Such a position is simple and desirable within the framework of nationalist politics in both England and Wales, but seeks to systematically overwrite and repress complex, fluid but vibrant borderland identities at play along and between the national border and the monuments that still evoke much about this complex history. In this context, the royal Anglo-Saxon past of the Mercian kingdom, while mutable and ambivalent, has an efficacy to challenge our simplistic narratives about linear earthworks' tangibility and intangibility in contemporary landscapes.

For public and contemporary archaeologists, this case study promotes awareness of not only the importance of naming practices in fostering potential synergies with archaeological research and community engagement, but also in considering the *materiality* of street- and house-names in presencing the past in the contemporary world on a local level of the inhabited and dwelled-within landscapes, especially in areas where the dykes themselves are invisible and/or fragmentary. Here, I make two points specifically about the materiality of naming. First there is the materiality of the signs themselves: imprinting and perpetuating an historical aura into residential areas, and second, the close and careful spatial connection to the presence and linearity of the Dykes revealed in many of the house- and street-names, schools and parks in particular, but in a more vague fashion by businesses. What is clear: in considering the legacy and significance of linear monuments in the contemporary world, their physical survival

alone is but part of the story: their conservation, management and interpretation and the focus on the long-distance walking experience. Additionally, we must also consider the wider contemporary landscape and how its naming practices materially and textually constitute and perpetuate senses of place and identity, in dialogue with antiquarian, historical and archaeological ideas about the Dykes and their uses and significance in a fashion heritage sites and institutions have failed to do. The early medieval past is more than a line upon which to peg political and national identities; in some modicum and enduring fashion, the Dykes and their contemporary names reveal localised senses of borderland identity.

## Conclusion

The influence of ancient sites and monuments, those discovered during excavation and those enduring as surface features, on naming practices has received insightful but only anecdotal attention to date. While sometimes they afford sensitive recognition to significant stories hidden in contemporary landscapes, they seem on balance to have been regarded by other commentators as relatively ineffective as a means of constituting local awareness and heritage interpretation (e.g. Brophy 2013, 2015, 2016; Äikäs and Ahola forthcoming). Certainly, further work is required to consider to what extent, if any, names afford a ‘toponymic attachment’ in terms of personal, and community identities to Offa’s Dyke and Wat’s Dyke (perhaps through interviews and digital strategies of data-capture) (see Kostanski 2016). Furthermore, comparative future work is recommended to consider the naming practices identified here and those accruing in relation to other linear monuments, such as Wansdyke, the Cambridgeshire dykes, Hadrian’s Wall and the Antonine Wall (Witcher 2010: 145). Yet, based on the data gathered from the Welsh Marches, this study argues that, rather than primarily acts of forgetting – codifying the destruction and loss of the monuments – the naming practices for Wat’s Dyke and Offa’s Dyke, especially through signs, afford anchors of social memory and identity than the linear earthwork itself in many locales closely connected to the physical presence and former presence of the monuments. They thus have helped foster the creation and perpetuation of a ‘softer, culturally-distinct ‘borderland’ in which these Dykes are manifest’ (Belford 2017: 83).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it is crucial to recognise that toponyms fill a consciously and actively constructed mnemonic void for the dykes within the authentic heritage discourses of the National Trust, Cadw, English Heritage and other bodies who have collectively tended to be complicit, over the long term and until recently, of writing out the linear monuments from the story and landscape of the Welsh Marches. The narrative of these names as they have accrued through the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries creates no single coherent narrative, but the germ of a borderlands identity is palpable in the memoryscape of toponyms, contrasting starkly with the macro-scale nationalistic connotations of opposition between ‘Welsh’

<sup>9</sup> The roles of interpretation panels, walking signs, waymarkers and art in inscribing a sense of place will be considered in a separate forthcoming study by the author.

and 'English' that usually enwrap these linear monuments (see Ray and Bapty 2016: 368–69). Might they even be seen as dimensions of a borderland *habitus* of resistance to nationalist discourses on either side of the border?

The potential of utilising these naming practices as a memoryscape for public outreach is palpable and profitable, enabling the monumental intangibility of the monuments to be grasped and rendered manifest (see Swogger and Williams 2020). It is in this regard that naming practices, particularly their materiality through signs, have a latent, untapped value for public outreach. They might be mobilised as a constructive medium for place-making in the twenty-first century in which both the former presence, and contemporary redundancy, of these linear monuments, can be celebrated and curated within contemporary communities living after Offa. Certainly, at present, through their material presence on maps and signs, house and street-names, parks and schools, are more powerful means of conveying a sense of the early medieval past in the landscape than any heritage location has been able to achieve, to promote ongoing dialogues regarding what the monuments did mean, do mean, and could mean, for communities living after Offa. The materiality of names in relation to the Dykes, as naming practices for inhabited environments, have considerable transformative potential to negotiate belonging and foster fresh understandings of borderlands past, present and future and the role of the dykes in these new understandings of these pasts. In this regard, the memoryscapes of Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke mediated by namings in relation to the monument itself can be considered as mediating both pasts and potentials unrealised. Seeking new routes to engage communities with the monuments involves reflection on their private homes, streets, public buildings, public spaces, an avenue towards celebrations of divisions of the past but also alternative futures of paths not taken since linear monuments which might have never lasted for long and are no longer extant (cf. Benjamin 2019). Experimenting with reigniting the embers of local interest in the monuments through these names and sign offers considerable potential for affording local communities with a sense of pride and place-making discrete from authentic heritage discourse and nationalist origin myths, rendering Britain's greatest early medieval monuments with positive and powerful stories defining borderland identities and celebrating their redundancy at a time where borders and frontiers are being recreated anew.

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