Offa's Dyke
Journal

A Journal for Linear Monuments,
Frontiers & Borderlands Research

Volume 5

Edited by Howard Williams

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 linear monuments, frontiers and borderlands. 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 land divisions, boundaries, frontiers and borderlands from elsewhere in Britain, Europe and beyond from prehistory to the present day. 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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Front cover: Reconstruction of the Olger Dyke at Gårdeby Mark (Jørgen Andersen, Museum Sønderjylland, Arkæologi Haderslev). Cover and logo design by Howard Williams and Liam Delaney.

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Evaluating the Early Medieval Portable Antiquities Scheme Data for the Welsh Marches

Pauline Clarke

This article explores the early medieval data from the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) from across two countries and several counties to ascertain what this can reveal about boundary formation, including the construction and use of Offa's and Wat's Dykes, during the seventh to ninth centuries AD. Surveying the borderlands which become Welsh Marcher lordships in the Later Middle Ages, the study disproves the popular assumption that the region is devoid of early medieval material culture. Instead, by examining what material culture is known through the PAS it may be possible to demonstrate activity here from the beginning of the ingress into Britain of Anglo-Saxon and later Scandinavian culture.

Introduction

The area that was to become the Welsh Marches was an early medieval liminal area while large swathes of it was subject to differing influences and rulerships (Guy 2022: 86). Much more is known still about the multi-faceted politics of the post-Norman period onwards, albeit focused upon dynastic narratives, but for the fifth to eleventh centuries the region is often considered one in turmoil and conflict (Brady 2017: 3; Stephenson 2019: 1). Fox (1955) was to cite the two vast monuments in the borders landscape, Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke, as the outcome of this ongoing tension in his first major study of these constructions. In spite of their scale, they remain poorly researched, as do the broader frontier landscapes through which these monument passed (Williams and Delaney 2019: 1, 4). The scale of linear earthwork construction creates specific issues for interpretation; the Welsh Marches come under the archaeological auspices of not just differing counties, but differing countries which serve as barriers to the integration of data in their own right (Belford 2020: 1).

This article attempts to add to the information already known about the Welsh Marches, and the possible role of the Dykes, during the early medieval period by surveying the data available for the area as collected by the Portable Antiquities Scheme. This provides information about largely accidental losses of personal items, and may point to the movement of different peoples, or certainly different cultural ideas, through this landscape. In turn it may be possible to draw conclusions about the role of the Dykes in affecting this flow of people, things and ideas. First, the area will be characterised and then the distribution of artefacts will be examined, and some inferences drawn from these patterns. It is argued that the Dykes did not inhibit significant movement of ideas, and that there is evidence too that life in the borderlands was not an exclusively martial one.
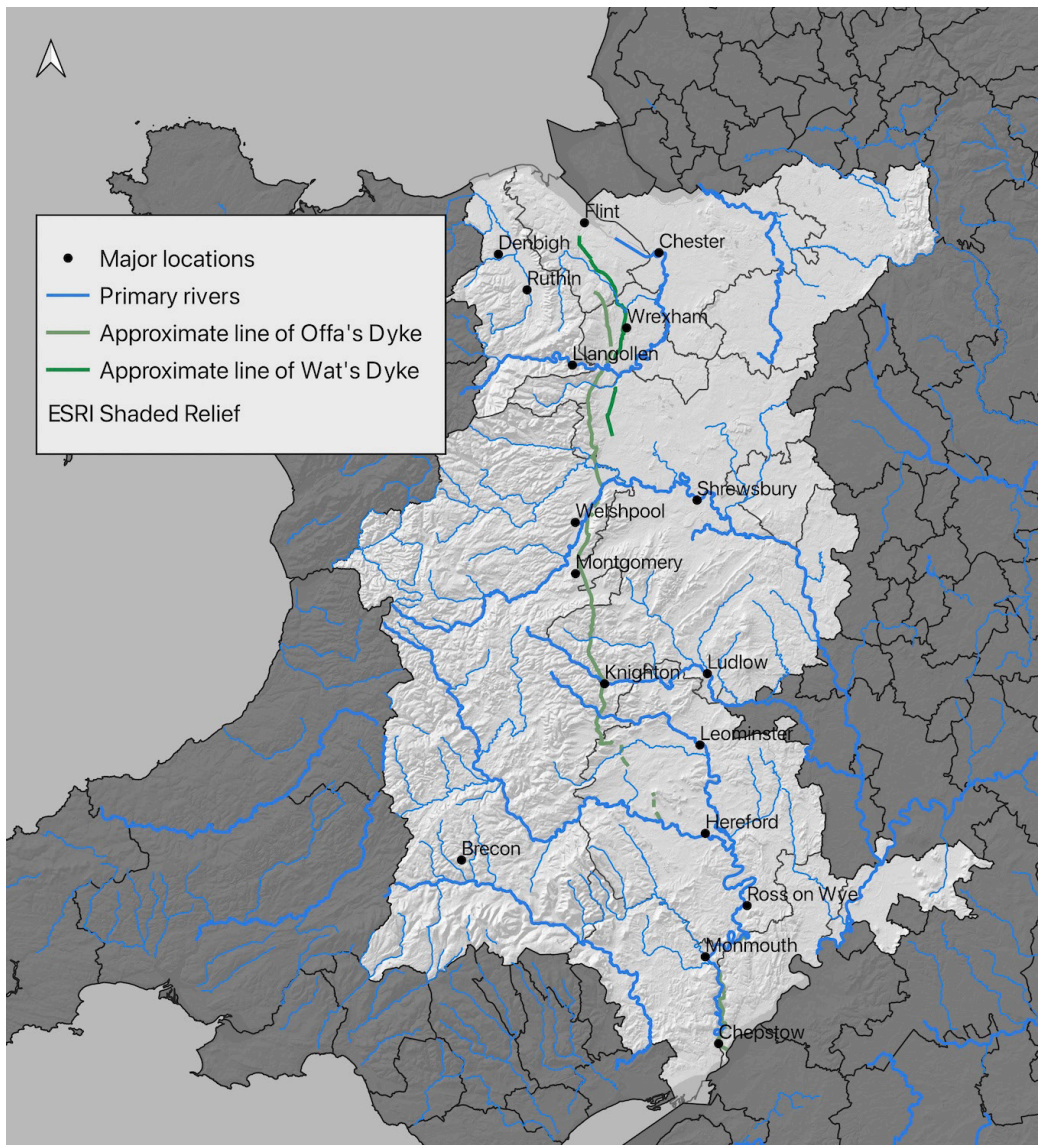
Figure 1: The maximum extent of the Welsh Marches, showing major locations and rivers, and Offa's and Wat's Dykes (©ESRI Satellite (ArcGIS/World_Imagery))

Background: The Welsh Marches

What today compromise the Welsh Marches are usually considered to be the counties immediately adjacent to the modern England and Wales border, that is Cheshire, Flintshire, Shropshire, Powys, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire. To this can be added Denbighshire, which was for a long period of history part of the same kingdom as modern Flintshire, and Wrexham Unitary Authority, although a separate government body it sits within Flintshire (Stephenson 2019: 12; Figure 1). The area can

be viewed as representing a transition zone between the low-lying plains of the West Midlands and Staffordshire to the east, and the uplands of the Cambrian Mountains to the west (Stoertz 2004: 9; Belford 2020: 8). Traditionally, it achieved its designation following the Norman conquest when it was declared to be a distinct territory, but landscape differences, and cultural and linguistic intersections between 'Welsh' and 'Anglo-Saxons' were also apparent in the early medieval period even if it was not then defined as a coherent region (Brady 2017: 15; Edwards 2017: 66).

The underlying geology is complex and therefore gives rise to a wide range of soil types across the area, most suited to stock rearing rather than arable farming in the north, with arable increasing to the south (Stanford 1980: 33; Stoertz 2004: 10). Land use today is still predominantly agricultural with some woodland, and while there are major towns, such as Chester, Shrewsbury, Welshpool and Hereford, the majority of the area is characterised by small, dispersed settlements (DEFRA 2021: 10).

The rivers are perhaps key to understanding the region. They are not only a water supply but an important means of communication. This significance is demonstrated by Carver (2019: 21) who suggested that they 'irrigate early medieval society' both with trade and by supporting the interaction of people, for example in facilitating alliances and marriage arrangements. The Dee, Wye and Severn are three of the major rivers in the area; the Dee rises in Snowdonia and flows east to Chester and into the Dee Estuary and thus the wider Irish Sea zone; the Severn rises in central Wales and runs through Welshpool and Shrewsbury before entering the West Midlands and finally draining into the Severn Estuary and the Wye rises near to the source of the Severn, running through Hereford and Monmouth before also discharging into the Severn Estuary (Stoertz 2004: 9). There are also the Rivers Lugg and Arrow across Herefordshire which are important features.

Connecting and intersecting between these river systems were prehistoric routeways and Roman roads. These in turn were crossed and connected by the early medieval linear earthworks constructed in the region (Ray and Bapty 2016: 168; Williams 2021: 165). For example, the major road known in some publications as Watling Street West underlies the later Offa's Dyke west of Leominster, and may have in part defined the Mercian frontier (Ray and Bapty 2016: 240; Ray 2022: 134).

It is a feature of 'the Marches' that there was not a fixed identity but a zone whose emphasis and definition shifted over time and with political and cultural influences. Ultimately the terms 'Marches', or indeed 'England', 'Wales', 'Shropshire' and so on are all later medieval and modern constructs which had no value at all in the early medieval period. They are used here only as convenient locators but we must be wary of their anachronistic draw to conjure divisions that did not exist in the period. The area outlined above, including all of Cheshire and Gloucestershire, represent what is considered to be the maximum extent today (Belford 2020: 8). Traditionally, the division may be that formed by the watershed between the Trent and Severn basins, which follows approximately the Staffordshire/

Shropshire border to the east of the Marches. Many researchers deploy a more restricted geographical area in their study, including Burnham and Davies (2010: 19) regarding the Roman 'frontier' in Wales. They restrict the 'English' area to that west of a line from Chester into west Gloucestershire, through Shrewsbury and Hereford. The finds from this latter truncated area will be used in this evaluation to shift the perspective away from the modern Anglo-Welsh border as an analytical division.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme

The publicly available records for the area found on the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) website[1] will provide the artefact data that will be used in this analysis, and it is appropriate to give some context for information held there. The Portable Antiquities Scheme, administered by the British Museum, was founded in 1997 following revision to the medieval Treasure Trove rules by the ratification of the Treasure Act (1996). It is primarily an opportunity for detectorists (although it is open to anyone) to record finds, mainly of metal objects, made in pursuit of their hobby, which are logged onto a publicly accessible database by a Finds Liaison Officer (FLO) (Robbins 2014: 11–2). Over 1.5 million objects are now recorded and have been used in support of many early medieval period studies, for example by Williams (1997) in categorisation of stirrup strap mounts, or Hadley and Richards (2021: 89–91) in their identification of a Viking winter camp at Torksey, Lincolnshire. In contrast to areas in the east of England (there are, for example, over 6,500 artefacts listed by the PAS for the early medieval period in Lincolnshire alone), artefact evidence is still relatively scarce for the Marches. There are now though enough finds listed from the early medieval period to perhaps support some research; certainly, it is possible to identify preliminary patterns of distribution, temporal and geographical. This is valuable because, in common with much of the country following the end of direct Roman rule, the area is largely aceramic and evidence for the ephemeral structures of the period is also scarce, at least without excavation. The era has little transparency and yet emerging from it are such notable features as Offa's and Wat's Dykes, the Pillar of Eliseg (Edwards 2017: 65) and early religious foundations such as the only known pre-Norman stone-built church at Presteigne, Powys (Cross 2010: 201). Belford (2020: 13) states that the PAS evidence does not feature prominently in research about the borderlands; while harsh it has been largely the case, although steps are being taken to incorporate this data in the next iteration of the Research Framework for Wales (Comeau and Seaman 2022: 4). As artefacts are not found in large numbers there is a need to consider a different scale of finds here, to review those artefacts which are present with a less numerical-based approach than was used in identification of so-called productive sites by 'unusually large quantities' of coinage in the east of the country (Ulmschneider and Pestell 2003: 2). As each year further items are being recorded on the PAS (nearly 70,000 in 2018 alone), more possibilities for analysis in the area arise (Lewis 2019: 4). In a recent study, Redknap (2022) used areas in Wales with as few as

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[1]   finds.org.uk

two objects recorded to discuss their potential significance, considering the quality and landscape context of the items as opposed to absolute numbers. This approach is a new way of reviewing areas with relatively few finds such as here in the Marches.

Some cross-border work has already been presented on this data (cf. Reavill undated) but it is limited and largely unpublished. This wider approach is necessary for the Marches because of the fluid nature of these borderlands over time as well as in spatial terms (Belford 2020: 15). The structure of the heritage and archaeological bodies who operate in the area leads to an approach that is nearly always focused on a specific county or country, but these are, as seen, not concepts that were recognised in the past in the way they are known in modern times and a different scope is thus required (Belford 2020: 12).[2]

The Marches in the early medieval period

The early medieval period was a time of highly competitive and fluctuating territorial and socio-political organisations operating on differing scales. New cultures and ideas entered lowland Britain following the end of the Roman province of *Britannia* and elements of these changes are discernible in archaeological evidence through, for example, new ways of dealing with the dead, settlement architectures and material culture forms and frequencies (Williams 2006: 24). From the seventh century, emerging larger polities attempted to expand into and control this region, notably but not exclusively the kingdom of Mercia (Stanford 1980: 167–168). Throughout these shifting historical processes, settlement evidence for the period is rarer in the Marches due predominantly to the use of wood for building which generally leaves no trace above ground and is seen in archaeology only when excavated (Higham and Ryan 2013: 92). Furthermore, unlike in eastern and southern England, burial sites are difficult to identify as poor soil conditions mean human bone rarely survives. Indeed, intrusive 'Anglo-Saxon', and later 'Anglo-Scandinavian'/'Viking' influences in the region have long been considered rare and sporadic.

The written sources perpetuate this impression that the early medieval Marches were sparsely populated and very much peripheral to the story of early medieval Britain. For example, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* chart changing fortunes only for elite families and of the areas they ruled and primarily document conflicts and chaos, not daily life (Brady 2017: 2, 6–7). Taking into account also that these sources, such as Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* are not contemporary, their value for sketching the story

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[2]   A note on the terminology to be used here. 'Anglo-Saxon', 'Germanic' and 'Viking' all have well-publicised limitations and problems with their use, but at the moment there are no acceptable substitutes for terms used to describe the people who moved into Britain from the northern continental area following regrouping after the shift in Roman power which culminated in the early fifth century AD, or the (originally) martial people originating from Scandinavia in the late eighth century AD. These terms will be employed here in the spirit of movement of ideas and art forms, not as a label of ethnicity, which is a much more complex area than could be explored in a discussion about artefacts only.

of the Welsh Marches is limited (Higham and Ryan 2013: 72). There are though still striking documented events in the Welsh Marches from these sources, such as the battle between King Æthelfrith of Northumbria and the Britons at Chester, which occurred in the period between AD 614–616, as recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E manuscript (although other sources offer differing dates). The inscription on the ninth-century AD Pillar of Eliseg in the Vale of Llangollen celebrates the victory of an eponymous Powysian ruler over Anglian armies; but while this monument might mark an important assembly place, we know scarcely anything else regarding this Welsh dynasty, their settlements and society (Gelling 1992: 76; Edwards 2009: 170; Murrieta-Flores and Williams 2017: 70, 75). It is seductive to consider the relationship between the Welsh and the English as being played out mainly on the battlefield given such sources, but only through excavations at Heronbridge, south of Chester, possibly associated with the aforementioned Battle of Chester, do we find direct evidence of conflict in the archaeological record (Mason 2003: 56; Molyneaux 2012: 268). The lack of material culture found from cemeteries and developer-led excavation in the region causes a dearth in evidence for less martial activity (Seaman 2010: 11: Edwards 2017: 65).

The Dykes

In contrast to, and in part inspired by, the paucity of other strands of evidence, the linear earthworks of the Welsh Marches loom large in archaeological discussions of the region. In addition to a series of short dykes, at least some of which are demonstrably early medieval in date (Hankinson and Caseldine 2006), the most prominent and perhaps best-known features in the area may be the two great dykes which run from north to south close to the modern Welsh/English border. There are no contemporary written sources which mention the building of Offa's and Wat's Dykes, the earliest known reference, and perhaps the one most often quoted, comes from Asser in the *Life of Alfred*, written in the ninth century in which he states that 'Offa… ordered a great wall to be built between Britannia and Mercia, from sea to sea' (Fitzpatrick Matthews 2020: 4). The dykes have been subject to investigation at various times over the last one hundred years. Fox (1955) was the first to carry out a detailed ground survey of Offa's Dyke, beginning in the 1920s. He saw the Dyke as a managed frontier, defining the agreed limit of Mercian territory (Fox 1955: 277). He also examined Wat's Dyke although not in so much detail, concluding that it was 'moderate' in comparison to its near neighbour (Fox 1955: 259). Frank Noble then developed the study of Offa's Dyke further, adding charter evidence and that from the undated document *Ordinance concerning the Dunsæte*, which suggests that the River Wye formed the accepted boundary between the 'English and Welsh', as opposed to the Dyke in its possible southern stretches (Noble 1983: 9, 16). The *Ordinance*, most probably dated to the tenth century AD, may be the formalisation of an agreement between the Welsh and the 'English' about conduct and law in an unidentified territory, possibly located between modern Gwent and south-west Herefordshire, but this is not certain (Guy 2022: 97). Noble's views contrasted with those of Fox in that while he considered the Dyke to be

a Mercian construction, built with their territorial definition in mind, he did not consider that it was an agreed frontier as Fox had believed. Instead, Noble considered Offa's Dyke to reflect an asymmetrical relationship between the Mercians and the Britons (Ray and Bapty 2016: 78). Hill and Worthington were the next to take up the challenge in some significant measure, undertaking excavation at twenty-three sites along both monuments as well as less invasive fieldwork (reviewed by Ray and Bapty 2016: 83). They concluded that it was built as a 'significant defence', specifically for Mercia in opposition to the kingdom of Powys (Hill and Worthington 2003: 108, 111, 112).

Over the last two decades, a host of new work has focused on these linear earthworks. Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) have largely led their contemporary excavation and investigation of the two earthworks, attempting to attribute a date for building of the monuments through radiocarbon dating and Optically Stimulated Luminesencce (OSL). Along with who built the dykes and why, when they were constructed is the other most pressing question about these enigmatic features. Wat's Dyke pre-dates a motte in Erdigg Park which was constructed in the twelfth century AD (Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2020: 6). Worthington and Hill excavated across Offa's Dyke at Brompton Hall, Shropshire, where an underlying Roman marching camp there gave a *terminus post quem* of AD 410, the traditional date for the withdrawal of Roman armies from Britain, although when the camp was actually abandoned in unknown (Hill and Worthington 2003: 83, 85; Belford 2017: 69; Fitzpatrick 2020: 5). Aerial survey of a section of Offa's Dyke near Chirbury demonstrated that a section of ridge and furrow which dates to the eleventh or twelfth century AD respects the line of the Dyke, allowing at least a *terminus ante quem* (Belford 2017: 69). Following illegal damage to a section of Offa's Dyke at Chirk in 2004, Ian Grant, acting then for CPAT, took samples of deposits for radiocarbon dating; these gave one date range of AD 430–652 for commencement of its construction and another range of AD 887–1019; in contrast an earlier interpretation from a different section carried out by Hayes and Malim yielded a date in the early ninth century (Ray and Bapty 2016: 20; Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2020: 57). OSL data for Wat's Dyke suggest that it was probably built in the early ninth century AD, still during the period of Mercian rule in the area (Malim 2020: 157; but see Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2020). There are though known issues with all of these dates and the dates now generally accepted for their construction by most commentators are broadly late eighth century AD for Offa's Dyke and slightly later early ninth century AD for Wat's Dyke (Murrieta-Flores and Williams 2017: 76; Malim 2020: 147).

Another question is that of east-west crossing places in the Dykes. If they existed, they would provide evidence for the locations of trade as well as the routes which the Mercian forces monitored (Ray and Bapty 2016: 232). Fox (1955: 112–113) argued that there was a gap at Hope Farm near Hope, a further one where Offa's Dyke crosses the Kerry Ridgeway to the west of Bishops Castle with a final one at Hergen, where the Dyke takes an unusual form. Hill and Worthington later concluded that the gaps that Fox had identified in Wat's Dyke did not in fact exist and any through-ways

were 'extremely scarce'. Ray and Bapty (2016: 248) proposed another crossing place at Discoed, Radnorshire, and Belford (2017: 77–78) proposed a further two possibilities at Selly and Treflach. None of these have been verified to date.

Bringing the research into the Dykes completely up to date, Ray and Bapty (2016: 3) published the most extensive modern appraisal of Offa's Dyke, in part to answer some of these disputed claims which arose mainly from the work of Hill and Worthington; that it was built by Offa to counter Welsh attacks on Mercia, and existed only in a form 130km long. They demonstrated that the Dyke can actually be traced for 185km along the Marchlands, although some sections are not readily visible in the landscape (Ray and Bapty 2016: 13). Some of these 'missing' areas have been revealed in recent and very detailed work by Liam Delaney (2021: 101–102), who used LIDAR to demonstrate that Offa's Dyke, as it runs through Herefordshire, is not a series of disjointed features as had been claimed by some, but is a coherent monument. The apparent reduction in scale of Offa's Dyke in South Herefordshire may have been indicative of a different type of frontier, where rivers were in fact acting as the Dyke, in conjunction with a fort of some form; if this is the case it would signal a different relationship between Mercia and the British kingdom of Ergyng, than that with Powys in the north (Delaney 2021: 99, 102). In addition, Delaney (2021: 102) states that the gaps at rivers could indicate the critical nature of these waterways to the operation of the Dyke. Ray *et al.* (2021: 76, 78) support this work through their study, and consider that the operation of the Dyke's, particularly Offa's, may have been zoned, changing in function and appearance moving from north to south along their routes. The possible role of water in the construction and subsequent use of Wat's Dyke is explored further from a unique perspective by Williams (2021: 177) who demonstrated that the Dyke linked the important waterways of the Dee and Severn and therefore offered control of north-south flow of trade along its line, as well as east-west moment across the landscape.

Material culture in the Marches

One possible seam of evidence which may allow the development of a picture of early medieval activity in the area is that from artefact data, which so far has not been explored in depth, and this chapter provides only an introduction to the wider study that is required. Specifically in relation to the Dykes, the evidence is sparse. Fox recovered Roman period objects from excavation of Offa's Dyke at Ffrith, Flintshire, while Varley, excavating Wat's Dyke at Myndd Isa, recovered a loom weight placed on what he interpreted as a hearth, which he attributed to the 'middle Saxon' period (Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2020: 56). This lack of artefactual data was further confirmed by Hill and Worthington (2003: 75) who note Mortimer Wheeler's quote from the 1923 edition of Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies in which he stated that 'a flint chip, ... and a fragment of ... pottery' were the only finds from one excavation he supervised.

The background to the building of the Dykes, if the date of construction is to be accepted as late eighth and early ninth centuries AD, is the state of the kingdom of Mercia at that

time. As discussed above, opinion about the purpose of the dykes has varied, and until recently it was viewed mainly through the lens of conflict and suppression of the British by the Anglo-Saxon rulers. Hill (2020: 4) for example stated that the Dykes should 'tell us about the nature of English settlement and its organisation ... into a defensive net against Welsh raids'. This is no longer seen as to be the definitive purpose of the Dykes and a more nuanced approach to the role of the monuments is now taken. Can the study of material culture in the area add to this discussion?

Blair (2018: 20) specifically excluded the Marches (and indeed much of the west of Britain) in his work on sixth- to eighth-century architecture because of what he considered lack of evidence for occupation by Germanic peoples here. He is not the only medievalist to consider this to be the case. Carver (2019: 77) in his recent reassessment of the early medieval period states that Wales has no evidence at all for this era. Their opinions, and those of other researchers, arise in part because of the lack of identified burial grounds in the west versus those in the east of England, with their often-rich material evidence which have proved to be such a major source of information. This is in turn partly a result of differential bone preservation, discussed already, but also increased construction activity in the east which in turn leads to more developer-led excavation. However, even the few excavations which have occurred in the west have yielded little, adding to the lack of consideration of the general material culture of the area.

Methodology

The data for early medieval artefacts were downloaded from the PAS database for each of the counties along the border, as defined above. This was then further refined to include only that which can be considered to have been found in the Marches, that is along a line on the English side approximately running from Chester to Monmouth, and all of those found in the Welsh border counties. Finally, the artefacts have been allocated a category in relation to the building of the dykes, pre- or post-AD 796, that is before or after the death of Offa (Ray and Bapty 2016: 114). This is an arbitrary figure; however, it is rare that an object can be confidently assigned a very specific date, most are accorded a date range and so using this date is not unreasonable.

Some dates given as part of the PAS entries have been subject to revision, for example, Haldenby's (2012) work on collared pins means that dates attributed to these items on the database prior to publication have been revised to the ninth century AD onwards, reflecting his assigned period. The same is true of strap ends, as Thomas (2004: 1) considers that they were not introduced in great numbers until the late eighth century AD; these works supersede some early PAS records. Spindle whorls are difficult to date accurately within the early medieval period and appear here as 'not dated' (n/d). Having made these provisos it is important to state that, in general, the PAS record is being used without further interpretation, only when new research supersedes the entry is a revision required, the database entry is otherwise taken here as the authority.

This applies also to the category of object assigned by the FLO; while there is a degree of uncertainty in some identifications (which are allocated the categories of certain, probable or possible), the identification given is accepted here; a review of the data reveals little reason to deviate from these, apart from one record which has been deleted, that is CPAT–42D547 which is probably a modern ring. Following this sorting there are a total of 205 artefacts, of which 41 (20%) items are thought to date from before AD 796 while 146 (71%) post-date this and 18 (9%) have not been allocated a date (Appendix).

In all of this discussion the issue of differential detecting and recording should be borne in mind. Detectorists tend to prefer ploughlands to the pasture found here, which may be reflected in limited activity and therefore low finds numbers. The accepted limit for viable agriculture is set at 300m OD, this theoretically places much of the west of the Marchlands out of the purview of detectorists (Robbins 2014: 30, 87). The patterns here may also be influenced by under recording, a feature of the scheme, although the scale is not understood (Robbins 2014: 34–35). The Marches are not immune to criminal activity as the recent trial of the detectorists who did not report the finding near Leominster of an early medieval hoard of national importance, demonstrates (Hoverd *et al.* 2020).

The locations quoted in the text for the finds follow the PAS guidelines in using the 'known as' designations listed on the PAS database. More specific locations are not used in order to protect sites.

It is important to remember in the following discussion that although the artefacts are being used as a proxy for activity in the landscape by people of different cultures, these patterns are never conclusive, and more evidence needs to be found in support. Indeed, these data are being tested against existing knowledge of the area in the early medieval period and are not, in their current form, going to answer many of the questions that are still open. The main objective here is to explore what evidence exists in light of the new scales of evidence proposed by Redknap (2022) for the area; he contended that while the Marches and Wales especially may not have the volume of objects see in the east of England, those that are recorded are significant in themselves. This lower numerical threshold could then inform new conclusions of possible developments in the early medieval landscape.

The artefacts

What is most obviously apparent from mapping the location of these finds (Figure 2) is that the vast majority are located on the lower lying areas along the Cheshire Plain, and of Shropshire and Herefordshire. This is not surprising: detecting is carried out predominantly on the type of low-lying ploughed and pastureland found here (Robbins 2014: 38, 41). Higher ground does not completely exclude detecting, but recorded finds are sparse at these levels. These factors do however mean that fewer artefacts are recorded as being found in modern Wales but the resultant illusion that there are no finds west of the border should be guarded
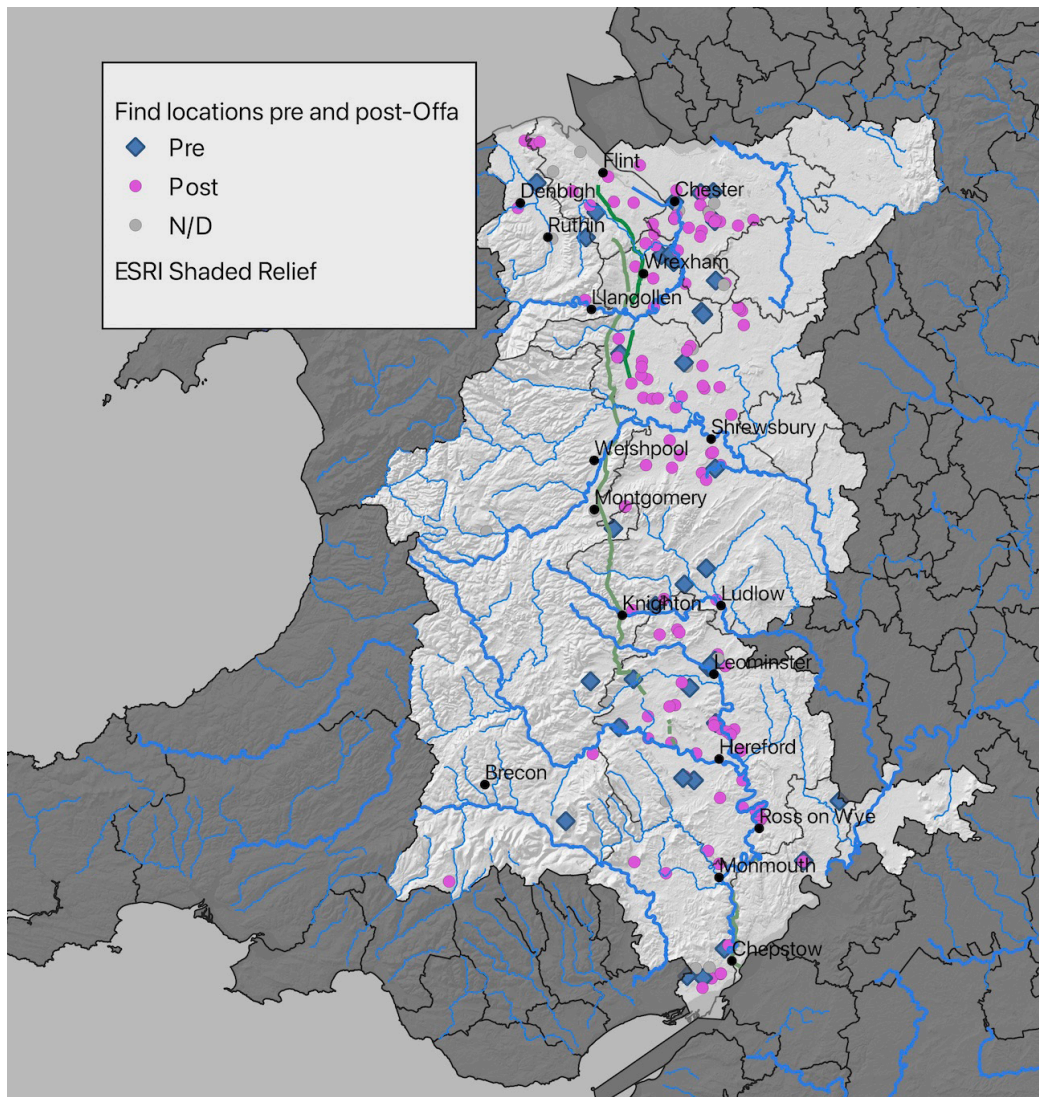
Figure 2: Distribution of PAS finds in the Welsh Marches, pre- and post-Offan dates (Note: Some of the findspots have multiple artefacts) (©Digimap Edina, National Museums)

against; that there are any there at all is considered exceptional in many studies and they should be seen in their own merit despite their low numbers (Redknap 2022: 77).

In the north of the area, in Cheshire and north Shropshire the finds are spread across the area on both sides of the Dykes, with some concentration around Chester and the River Severn. In the south, the artefacts follow faithfully the line of the Rivers Wye and Lugg. In the centre of the area around south Shropshire and North Herefordshire the artefacts are less densely distributed, there is in fact an area 'missing' virtually any artefacts, only partially explained by areas of higher ground which rarely exceed 300m here, such as Wenlock Edge.
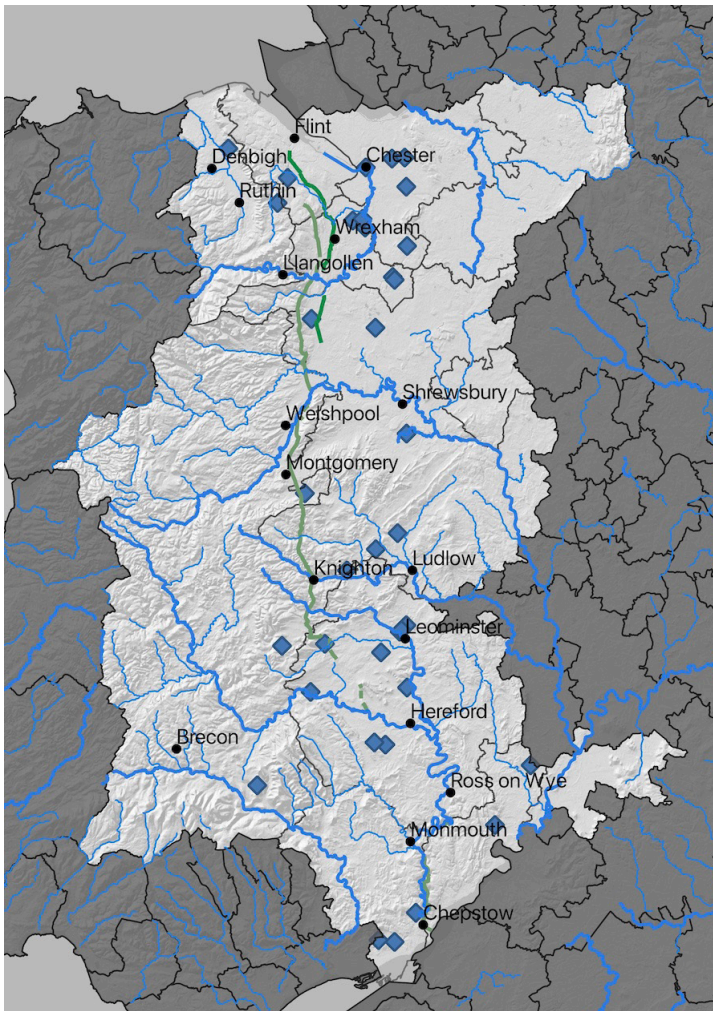
Figure 3: Artefacts pre-Offa

If the finds are considered against the temporal division discussed above, the bias in dated artefacts is towards the later period (Figures 3 and 4, Table 1). However, before the reign of Offa there were still a considerable number of artefacts lost (the majority of PAS finds are considered to be accidental losses) in the area, around Denbigh and Ruthin, Knighton and Hereford.

Some of the artefacts are exceptionally early, such as a buckle (LVPL–BFBC1E) found in Huxley which may date from the late fifth century AD. It should be noted though that this is missing the garnet inlays which probably decorated it and is perhaps more likely to have been 'reworked' by the Scandinavians who are known to have operated in this area later, as demonstrated by the presence of the Huxley hoard of Viking hacksilver (Griffiths 2010: 108). Another early find is a complete mount found in Condover, Shropshire (FAKL–DFAC23), dated, on stylistic grounds, to between AD 470–570.
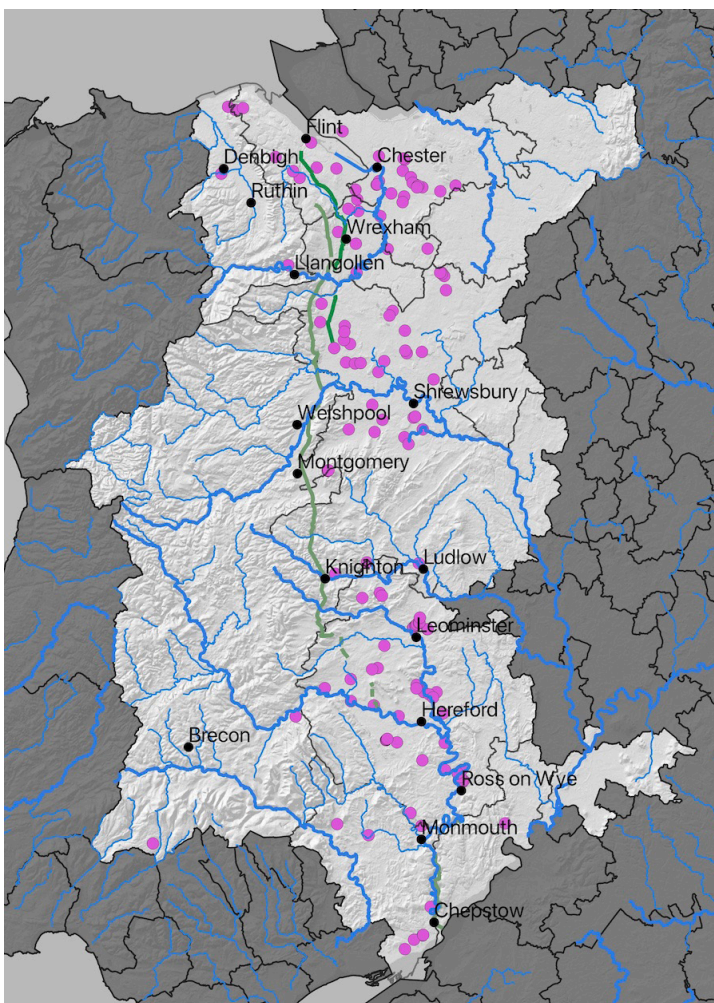
Figure 4: Artefacts post-Offa

The later artefacts are more numerous but show the same pattern of distribution as the earlier finds. Again, there are few found on high ground, and in the south of the Marches they follow the course of the rivers. It remains the case that many artefacts from the early medieval period are found in the Marches, especially when considered against Redknap's (2022) new criteria for significance in the area.

The undated finds are largely too fragmented to allocate a correct identification or so ubiquitous that they could have been manufactured in the Roman or medieval periods; the difficulty with spindle whorls has been already mentioned. The undated coin is a gold stater, possibly originating in India or Afghanistan, this is the only commentary available and therefore no date can be allocated, although it is likely to have been brought into the area by Scandinavian traders. The pin fits no specific type and seems to have given rise to some healthy debate without any conclusion, and it has therefore been attributed a wide date range on the database.

Table 1: Summary of artefact types found in the Marches.
Notes * 2 Hooked tags are recorded as Dress Fastener, revised here to match later PAS guidelines
** Possibly medieval

Period	Object Types as per PAS Description	Total
Pre-AD 796	Bead (1), Brooch (13), Buckle, (2), Coin (8), Finger ring (1), Harness mount (1), Mount (4), Pin (3), Scabbard (1), Sleeve clasp (3), Strap fitting (1), Sword (1), Vessel (2)	41
Post-AD 796	Axehead (1), Bell (2), Book fitting (1), Bridle bit (3), Brooch (6), Buckle (4), Coin (12), Dagger (1), Finger ring (1), Harness fitting (15), Hoard (1), Hooked tag* (5), Ingot (3), Key, locking (2), Mount (4), Pendant (1), Pin (12), Scabbard (1), Spur(1), Staff (1), Stirrup (19), Strap end (40), Sword (4), Unidentified (2), Vessel (1), Weight (3)	146
Undated	Bell** (2), Coin (1), Dagger (1), Knife (1), Mount book (1), Needle (1), Pendant (1), Pin (1), Spindle whorl (4), Stylus** (1), Tile (1), Unidentified object (2), Whetstone (1)	18

It is the case though that the pre-Offan period is less well represented in this material than post AD 796, but there is still enough evidence of activity here. It is not the intention to review the artefacts in any detail here, but there are some specific finds which it is worth commenting upon, starting with the pre-Offan period.

Diagnostic finds

Pre-Offan artefacts

These are some limited artefact types which are very specific to a group of people and were used only for a short period of time. Sleeve clasps are one example, and three of these have been recovered in the area, PAS numbers HESH-85E083, HESH-926A22 and HESH-09A4C1, the first two from a site known as North Herefordshire and the third from Whitney-on-Wye, Herefordshire, 2.5km east of the country border. Sleeve clasps originated in Scandinavia in the late fifth century AD, more specifically they have been found in Norway, eastern Sweden and Denmark and those who migrated from these areas who seem to have brought this fashion with them in c. AD 475 (Owen-Crocker 2004: 56). They are known in England predominantly from female burials, whereas in Norway they have also been found in male graves (Walton Rogers 2007: 123). They have been found in many eastern counties of England where they were often worn with cruciform brooches in what Owen-Crocker (2004: 56) terms 'Anglian' style but were not, at the time of these studies, known in the west of England. Finding these in this area is one of the first indications that Anglo-Saxon culture arrived in the Marches earlier than may have previously been considered.

Another early find is described as an 'Anglo-Saxon/Frankish' glass bead (PUBLIC–11D081) found near Old Radnor in Powys, dated to the second half of the sixth century AD and another strongly female gendered item (Owen-Crocker 2004: 85). A similar bead was found in a grave at Mucking, Essex, but coloured examples, as is the one here, are generally less common. Old Radnor was the site of a Norman borough, but it may have originated even earlier in what Ray and Bapty (2016: 282) term the 'late British' period. Unlike the sleeve clasps which had definite cultural affiliation, the bead might conceivably have been traded rather than being an indicator of movement of Germanic peoples.

Other early dress accessories are brooches, for example a disc brooch found near to Wrexham (LVPL–6BF678), dated to a range AD 450–550. A cast saucer brooch (HESH–BD1AD8) was found in Cockshutt, Shropshire, the dating for this is given as AD 450–720. There are also fragments of two cruciform brooches from the site in North Herefordshire (HESH–B8F058 and HESH–B90507), and one also from Great Barrow, Chester (LVPL–E1F877). These are very specifically early Anglo-Saxon cultural forms which Martin (2015: 128) dates to the narrower range AD 475–525.

Table 2: Finds from North Herefordshire

PAS ID	Object type	Date from (AD)	Date to (AD)
HESH-B8F058	Brooch cruciform	430	550
HESH-B90507	Brooch	480	600
HESH-85E083	Sleeve clasp	500	600
HESH-926A22	Sleeve clasp	550	800
HESH-F3BC94	Sword	600	850
HESH-927418	Vessel: pottery sherd	500	700
HESH-5AD183	Coin: Northumbrian styca	800	900
HESH-5AFD80	Coin: Northumbrian styca	830	855
HESH-5B1DB2	Coin: silver sceatta	695	715
HESH-859D01	Pin	650	900
HESH-85ADC8	Pin	650	900
HESH-85C3B3	Pin	650	900
HESH-85CC82	Pin	650	900
HESH-85D871	Strap end: Class A Type 2	800	1000
HESH-9296F6	Strap end: Class C	850	1000
HESH-85D275	Strap end: Class A Type 1	800	1000
HESH-1F7483	Buckle	1000	1200
HESH-1F9457	Finger ring	700	1200
HESH-1F8A76	Mount	700	1200
HESH-928C27	Harness fitting	1000	1100
HESH-B8FE61	Unidentified	400	900

It can be argued that the brooches could have been in use for many generations when they were lost or deposited in some way and are therefore not an indicator of early settlement. However, this same cannot be said for sleeve clasps, which are so fragile that they are often not even found in matched pairs or even present on both sleeves because of their tendency to fracture (Owen-Crocker 2004: 58). These are then a probable indication of use of early Anglo-Saxon female dress accessories, which could in turn be interpreted as evidence that women were present in the Marches. This may then potentially represent evidence for settlement. If so, this would subvert to an extent the traditional picture of a purely martial, predominantly male, society in favour of a more domestic one operating in the area much earlier than many would consider.

The site known as North Herefordshire on the PAS database is probably an early Anglo-Saxon cemetery containing a small number of furnished burials. The site is not excavated or published but Capper (2020: 204–205) suggests that the artefacts found are typical of such sites. In this small area, covering two small uncultivated fields, have been found the sleeve clasps and cruciform brooch fragments discussed above, but there is also a sherd of pottery of a type typical of cremation urns of the period – the full list of detected finds is shown in Table 2. Furnished burial ceased c. AD 680 (Capper 2020: 206). However, if this site is indeed a burial ground it would represent one of the most westerly pre-Christian cemeteries known. This again perhaps signals a domestic, settled element to the area as opposed to a purely martial one and, while incongruous for the region, should not be dismissed as a rare westerly instance of groups who practiced mortuary procedures considered more typical of southern and eastern England.

Table 3: Viking era artefacts in the North Wales triangle

PAS ID	Object Type	Location	PAS date range (AD)	Culture
LVPL-FC2097	Needle/Ring-headed pin?	Ruthin	500–1000	Irish
LVPL-918135	Mount book?	Mold	600-–900	Unclassified
WREX-6BB64D	Bell, Norse	Llanasa	700–1100	Scandinavian
NMGW-3E31B4	Brooch, gold	Llanrmon	700–800	British?
WREX-ABEEDC	Pin	Dyserth	700–900	
LVPL-30A793	Brooch	Nannerch	750–1000	
WREX-C2544A	Brooch, penannular	Bodfari	750–850	Irish
CPAT-28F196	Strap end, Class F	Denbigh	800–999	Scandinavian
LVPL-CDD0D0	Book fitting	Llangollen	1000–1200	
LVPL-7D2F34	Coin	Mold	1056–1059	Unclassified
LVPL-3E7790	Tile, roof	Holywell	400–1066	Unclassified
LVPL-5EAC05	Strap end, Class A1, silver	Mold	400–1066	Anglo-Saxon
HESH-66049B	Pendant, lead	Caersws	50–1100	Scandinavian?
NMGW-799430	Ingot	Trelawnyd	N/D	Scandinavian

Post-Offan artefacts

Turning to later period finds, these do start to look more martial, or at least more associated with Viking or Scandinavian culture. Of the 147 items listed, there is a significant amount of horse harness fittings, 41 (28%), and nine (6%) items of weaponry. Most of these items are dated to post AD 850, the 19 (13%) metal stirrups and their associated mounts were introduced by Vikings and are not seen earlier in Britain, while the 16 (11%) harness fittings too are all of Scandinavian form. The knife has been included here as a weapon, perhaps without justification, but the daggers listed are more accurately described as quillion guards; as these could also be used on a knife as well as a dagger the distinction between them is unclear.

The increase in number of finds in the later period seems then to be a function of incoming Scandinavian raiders, settlers and traders. It is considered that the Dee estuary was an important node in the Irish Sea trade with Dublin and the Isle of Man, and Chester and North Wales were both settled (albeit briefly in the case of Chester) by Viking armies from AD 893 (Horovitz 2008: 9; Griffiths 2010: 38; Williams 2021: 172). Artefacts found around Denbigh and the coastline of North Wales support the importance of the area for trade in the pre- and post-Offan periods (Mason 2014: 77; Table 3). Further, while the finds in this northern Welsh triangle do include domestic items, they are predominantly of Viking culture and include some high-status items such as the silver strap end (LVPL–5EAC05) and gold brooch (NMGW–3E31B4). It is likely that these are indicative of the Irish Sea trade that Meols was the focus of (Griffith 2010: 111–113). This is due perhaps to increased population, but also specifically the advent of the Viking era and its attendant diaspora of Scandinavian people. For instance, Viking groups are attested as having camped, if not settled at Chester and near to Bridgnorth. In addition, a substantial Viking force fought the combined might of Mercia, Wessex and the Welsh at Buttington, Powys in AD 894, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Horovitz 2008: 9; Harding 2016: 97; Ray and Bapty 2016: 56). The Viking period has long been recognised as a time of increased trade across the Irish Sea zone. The presence of Viking-period hoards in the area surrounding Chester also indicates the importance of Scandinavian activity here. The hoard listed by the PAS is the Huxley Hoard of hack silver and ingots, found near to the River Gowy, which would have been navigable in the period, giving access to this wider Irish Sea zone of trade (Garner 2009: 50). Five further early medieval period hoards have found within 10km of Chester city centre (Garner 2009: 50; Mason 2003; Swallow 2016: 315; Williams 2009: 74).

The spread further west of weaponry and horse equipment in the southern part of the Marches is in accordance with the assertion by Delaney (2021: 99), Ray *et al.* (2021) and earlier Hill and Worthington (2003: 111), that the relationship across whatever border existed between Mercia and Ergyng (an ancient kingdom in what is now south Herefordshire) was not the same as that between those on either side of the northern stretch of the Dykes (Stanford 1980: 25, 173). If the River Wye acted as a border or
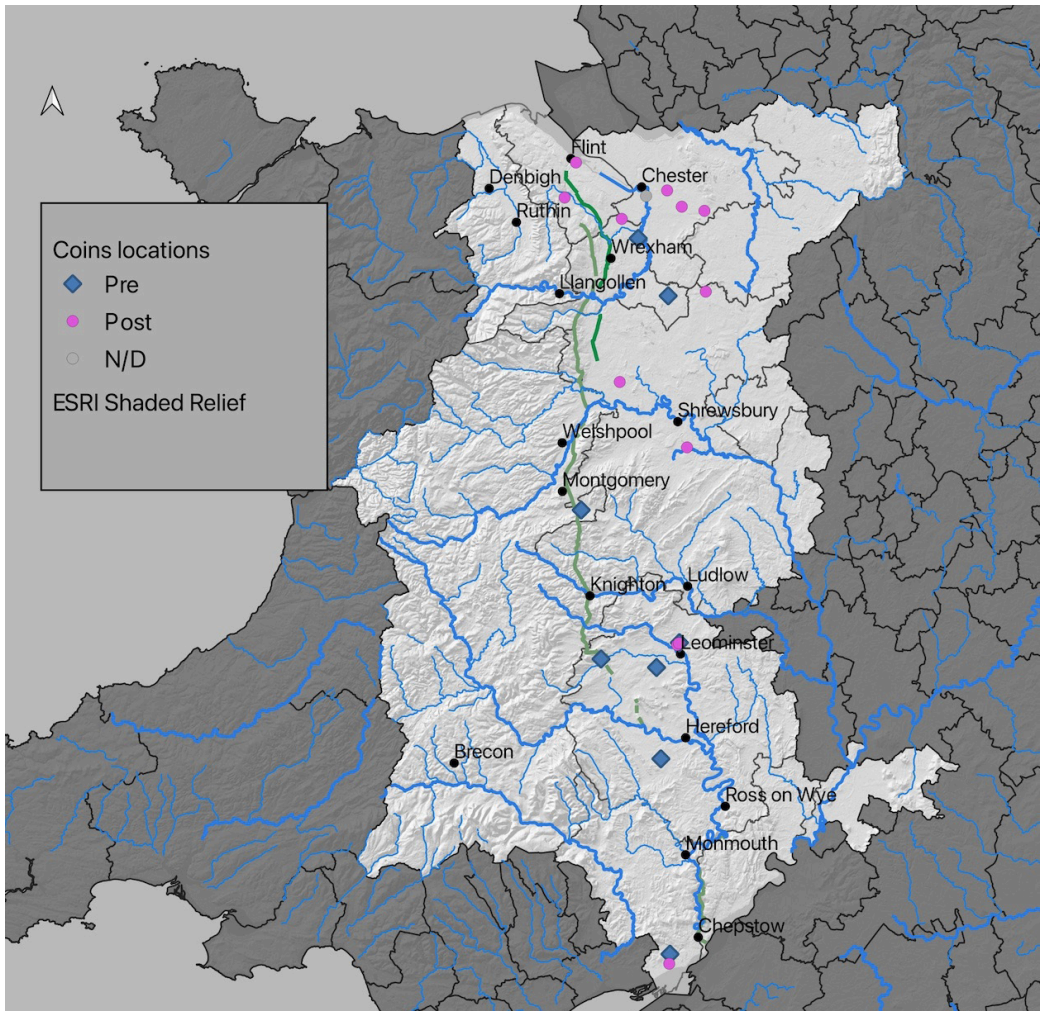
Figure 5: Coin distribution

frontier zone equivalent to how Offa's Dyke operated elsewhere, then this area would seem to be more porous in the spread of culture and people than perhaps the northern, central and most southerly stretches of the border (Ray *et al.* 2021: 78–79). This view is explored too by Ray (2022: 132) in his re-evaluation of the diversity of organisation and management along Offa's Dyke. Redknap (2022: 77) sees horse harness as indication of a mobile society, further supporting this interpretation.

Coins

It is valuable to consider briefly the pattern of coin loss in the area across both the pre- and post-Offan phases (Table 4). They are widely distributed across the study region (Figure 5). The concentration of later coins in the north reflects trade but there are

a number of earlier (pre-Offan) coins which are found in the west of the area, in the foothills of the higher land masses, indicating links with the areas of coin economy from near its resumption post-Rome. That the majority of coins (12 as opposed to 8) are dated to the post-Offan period is not typical: Richards and Naylor (2010: 197) in their analysis of coin distribution from Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire found that over 80% of coin loss was pre-Offan in date. The peak in coin dates between AD 680–710 in the study area is however consistent with the wider distribution and it must therefore be inferred that a larger sample would show a more typical pattern. The coin use in the area then seems to be in agreement with national patterns. It is perhaps noteworthy that no coins of Offa have been found in the area, although one from the reign of his successor, Coenwulf, is present, CPAT–4AAF81. It is a small sample and this may only be coincidental, with no conclusions possible. The two sceattas minted in the Netherlands, and the range of monarchs in the later coins all attest to wide ranging trade contacts in the area.

Table 4: Coins in the study area

PAS ID	Date from AD	Date to AD		Type
HESH-F54465	700	715	Pre	Sceat
WREX-9F2C2D	710	750	Pre	Sceat
NMGW-9A4808	690	710	Pre	Sceat, minted Netherlands
HESH-33C368	685	690	Pre	Sceat
HESH-5B1DB2	695	715	Pre	Sceat
LVPL-20C747	700	710	Pre	Sceat
HESH-C9EF2A	700	710	Pre	Pierced sceat
HESH-B37EA8	700	750	Pre	Sceat, minted Netherlands
HESH-696AA7	979	985	Post	Aethelred II, England
LVPL-B32CD5	825	828	Post	Ecgbert, Wessex
HESH-5AD183	800	900	Post	Northumbrian styca, Redwulf 844–858
HESH-5AFD80	830	855	Post	Northumbrian styca
LVPL-1DCD95	1029	1036	Post	Cnut, England
CPAT-049EA1	979	985	Post	Aethelred II, England
LVPL-7D2F34	1056	1059	Post	Edward, England
WREX-C1D6F4	946	955	Post	Eadred, Wessex (and England)
NMGW-EC9AAB	985	991	Post	Aethelred II, England
CPAT-4AAF81	796	805	Post	Coenwulf, Mercia
LVPL-C15BC5	796	798	Post	Eadberth, Kent (under Offa)
HESH-E20370	995	1005	Post	Sihtric III, Dublin
LVPL1327			N/D	Stater

Discussion

The number of artefacts evaluated in this study may fall outside of the critical weight considered to constitute evidence by Blair (2018) and Carver (2019) in their recent appraisals. Hinton (2005: 39) too, amongst others, stated that culture and/or people spread west and north during the sixth century but did not present any evidence from the Marches in this analysis. These approaches may be considered limiting when considered against the corpus of material discussed here. It is true that the numbers are not on the scale of other areas in the south and east of England, but this supports Redknap's (2022: 77) call for a new approach in judging activity in Wales (and this equally applies to the Marches) against a qualitative versus quantitative scale. Further, the artefacts are of the same classes of materials as are found elsewhere in the east of the country, brooches and metal fittings from the PAS being listed specifically by Carver as evidential finds for Southumbria (2019: 77). The presence of a small cemetery, and some more domestic items would perhaps indicate a level of settlement, albeit on a much lower level, early in the period. Redknap (2022: 77) contends that brooches are associated with settlement as well as accidental losses, while hack silver is found within occupation zones. There are nineteen brooches or brooch fragments listed across the area, while the three hack silver ingots are all confined to the north, within the Irish Sea trading region. These would perhaps add to the evidence for some form of settlement in the Marches.

The pattern of concentration of the finds in the north and south of the areas with a lesser density in south Shropshire and North Herefordshire can perhaps be explained as a result of differential detecting activity, as the high ground found here is not favoured by detectorists. Much of the land is also owned by the National Trust, who do not permit metal detecting; however, neither of these factors account for the entire area. It is counter to Gelling's (1992: 59, 69) argument that fewer British/Welsh names survive in Shropshire than do in adjacent, eastern counties such as Staffordshire and Worcestershire, as this would suggest that there should be a significant presence of Anglo-Saxon cultural items. Another place-name study carried out by Gelling was highlighted by Rowley (2001: 72), this time of the occurrence of *tūn* names in this area, an early Saxon name for an enclosure or settlement (Ekwall 1960, 482). There are an exceptional number of place-names in Shropshire which include this element, and their variations: Norton (north town), Aston (east town), Sutton (south town) and Weston (west town) (Figure 6). These may be evidence of an Anglo-Saxon administrative structure where the geographically named towns were grouped around estates, and Mercian rulers may therefore have formed governments based on a series of linked central places, often located on such rivers and roads (Rowley 2001: 72; Blair 2020: 400). This organisation may have been in operation from as early as AD 750–850 (Blair 2018).

It is apparent from the maps that the distribution of these settlements also follows the artefact distribution with the same apparent gap in the central region. Many of the *tūn*
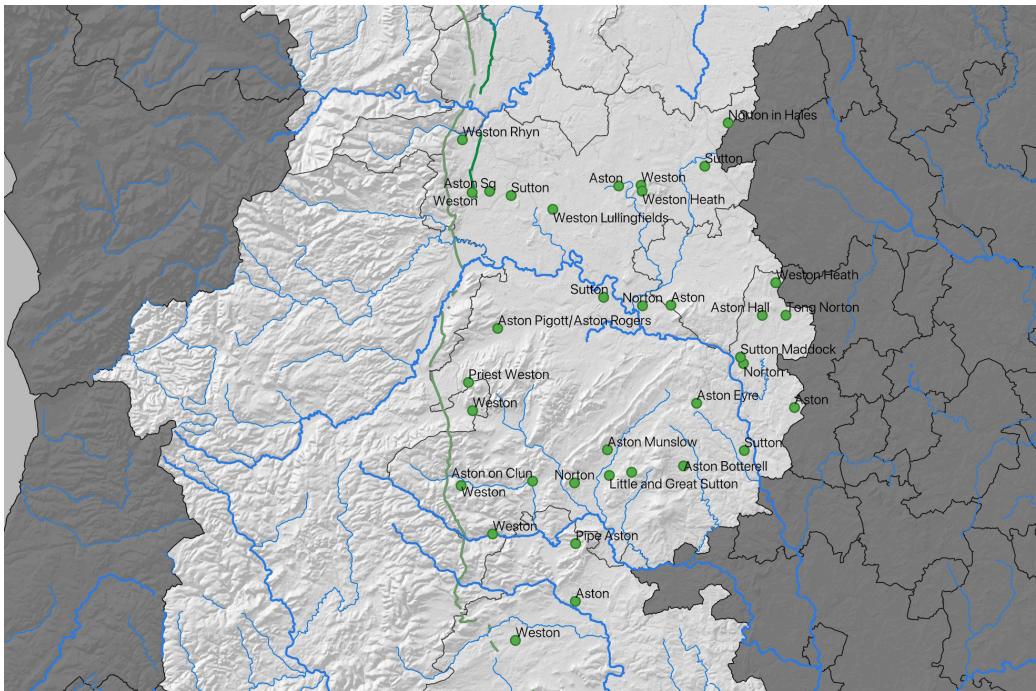
Figure 6: *Tūn* names in Shropshire

names are located on the high ground of the Long Mynd on which are also found a number of Iron Age hillforts, although evidence for the reoccupation of these in the Anglo-Saxon period is not available and it is by no means certain that their occupation and the later administrative structure are linked. The 'Westons' also follow the line of the Dykes, and while this is to some extent geographically inevitable, it gives rise to the possibility that these estates, formed in the later period, were deliberately bounded by the Dykes, with the resultant implication for Welsh autonomy on the western side. This is counter to Blair's (2018: 208) assertion that the Mercians possibly controlled a portion of land to the west of the Dykes.

This place-name evidence though is not reflected in the finds distribution which should in theory be dense in this central area. If it is assumed that detectorists operate uniformly, then there was a special circumstance in operation in this area. It is notable that the area is also the site of many short dykes, although these are not fully understood or dated, making it difficult to draw any conclusions about their operation.

There are also a limited number of artefacts to the west of what was to become the line of Offa's and Wat's Dyke, and what is apparent here is that the proportion of artefacts east and west of the Dykes does not change significantly after their building, with 27% being west of the dykes pre-AD 796 and 22% after this date. There are of course a lot of faults with this figure and the amount of data is not enough to offer statistical significance but

as a crude count it offers a point for consideration. A much more detailed analysis than is possible here would need to be carried out using, for example better, more robust dates than enabled by the PAS, and addition of other data sources, before conclusions could be drawn in any meaningful manner, but, if as for example Belford (2017: 83) states the Dykes were only in use for a few generations then this is visible in the resumption – or continuity – of material flow across the Dykes, but might mitigate too against their possible use in formation of *tūn* administrative areas. Again, the oddly unpopulated (with finds) central area does not show artefactual evidence across the west of the monuments but there is little to the east either. The building of the Dykes may not therefore have had a significant impact on trade or other exchange, for example of gifts or dues. In contrast, David Hill (2020: 6) argued that there was no evidence for trade and commerce along the Dykes but this would not necessarily be the case – it is just not possible to judge whether the appearance of artefacts is a result of trade (that is, uptake of the new introductions by existing people) or movement of these new people, from this sample (Murietta-Flores and Williams 2017: 98). Murietta-Flores and Williams (2017: 98) proposed the area surrounding the Pillar of Eliseg, near Llangollen, Denbighshire as a potential meeting and trading site; although there is no artefactual evidence here to support this, the presence of Scandinavian cultural items at the northern end of the area around Denbigh and Ruthin would suggest the existence of a Viking trade route in the later period.

A further phenomenon apparent is the close relationship between finds and rivers, which, while seen all over the area is especially strong in the south, around the River Wye, as it moves from the foot of the Black Mountains towards Hereford and then to Ross-on-Wye. The River Lugg enters Hereford from the north, the same patterning of artefacts is seen along its course. To an extent this is also seen along the Dee and Severn rivers further north, but not with the same rigidity. The major River Trent in the east links with the Rivers Dane and Weaver that run through the northwest of the maximum area of the Marches and therefore linked Mercia and Northumbria (Carver 2019: 23). While this part of Cheshire is not included in this survey it serves to illustrate the long-distance communication routes enabled by these waterways. Rivers, as seen above, were considered to be of vital importance in society and trade (Carver 2019: 21). Williams (2021) considered the rivers along Wat's Dyke in some detail, discussing how they interact at various points, for example when the Dyke blocks the Alyn, and therefore movement along it, outside Wrexham (Williams 2021: 163). Further, the monument 'links' the Dee and the Severn, thus allowing north–south shipment of goods and people; there may even have been a jetty at Basingwerk projecting into the Dee which would have facilitated unloading of ships arriving from across the Irish Sea (Williams 2021: 172). There is certainly a spread of artefacts along this path, from Basingwerk and Flint, but also from Prestatyn, to the east of the Vale of Clwyd, then following the landscape along both sides of Wat's Dyke. This may reflect Ray's proposed (2023: 148) 'neutral zone' which operated between Offa's and Wat's Dykes, if this did indeed exist then trade would thus have been facilitated here. There is also a slight concentration along the River Dee as it flows south which then develops into a

cluster after the known southern limit of Wat's Dyke and thence towards the Severn. There are then artefacts noted around the Severn as it flows towards Shrewsbury, in the flat and fertile lands either side of the Severn. Before this river eventually drains into the Atlantic, it passes within 5km of the important town of Droitwich which was a major source of salt, a vital commodity for much of history and widely traded (Maddicott 2005: 24–5). This adherence to river routeways in the central and south of the area is especially pronounced. This is not so strong a correlation in the north, as many artefacts are scattered across the plain between the Rivers Dee and Weaver in Cheshire and again across land in North Shropshire, although the Huxley Hoard, as discussed above, was located near to what would have been a navigable river at the time (Garner 2009: 50).

Rivers too formed at least some of the traditional boundaries of states; the Dee, for example, was at one time the boundary of the Welsh kingdom of Gwynedd and it may be that the transition to upland areas also acted as a border of some kind (Belford 2020: 16). If indeed the high land was a limiting factor in settlement or other activity then the lack of artefacts in these areas may be a result of this as opposed to lack of detection, a conundrum that will ultimately only be resolved by excavation. Controlling water courses and their catchments seems to be a factor in the location of Bronze and Iron Age agriculture and settlement and there is no reason to suspect that this was not the case in later times (Belford 2020: 8). The adherence to rivers in the south is so strong and so widespread that it is unlikely to be the result of differential detecting but a phenomenon in itself.

Also significant is Delaney's (2021) analysis of Offa's Dyke in the south along its projected route through Herefordshire. This new research considers that the River Wye may have been used instead of, or to reinforce, the nature of the Dyke here, 'to funnel and control passage and trade' (Delaney 2021: 99; Ray *et al* 2021: 55). There is an outstanding pattern of finds directly besides the Wye all through this southern Herefordshire landscape as far as Ross-on-Wye, as there is also along the River Lugg as it flows from Leominster to meet with the Wye near Hereford. The finds along the Wye cross the conjectured course of the Dykes in this area. Some of these artefacts are the horse equipment discussed earlier, which is not found in significant numbers on the east side of the Dykes further north. It could be speculated that this was because of the presence of the British and lack of forces which utilised decorated harness, but it may alternately indicate a much more fluid relationship between British natives and the incomers. The *tūn* named settlements are also a feature here but not in the dense concentration that they are seen in Shropshire. If the Dyke did indeed operate as some sort of barrier for more than a few generations, and this is not certain, then it appears to be a more permeable barrier along the course of the Wye, and to a lesser extent along the rivers Monnow and Trothy, which flow into the Wye near Monmouth. While the majority of these finds in this more open area post-date the building of the Dykes because of their sheer volume, early artefacts are also present, such as the sleeve clasp from Whitney-on-Wye mentioned earlier.
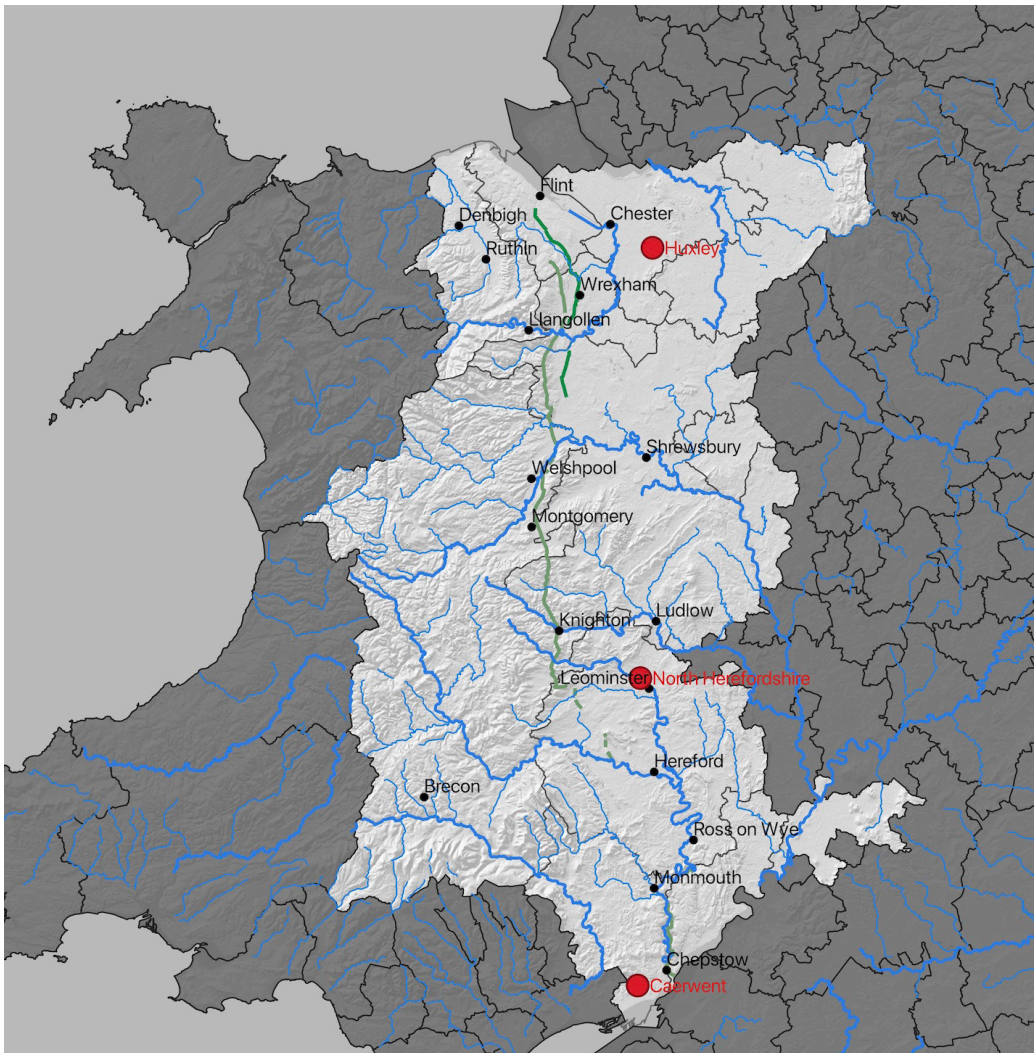
Figure 7: Location of three sites with clusters of artefacts in the Marches

There are three more locations which may be of significance in this Marches hinterland, and all are highlighted by clusters of artefacts (Figure 7). Huxley, located 11km south-east of Chester, not only is the site of the of burial and subsequent rediscovery of a Viking hoard but there are a further nine artefacts in the vicinity that have been located by detectorists. These are located near to the River Gowy, the importance of which to wider trade regions has been discussed (Garner 2009: 50). Most of the artefacts found are Scandinavian in style and it seems that the area may have been a small settlement or manufacturing/market site in the later part of the period, supported by the presence of the reworked buckle discussed above. The site known as North Herefordshire is the location of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery discussed above (Capper 2020: 204–205). Finally, there are several artefacts south of Chepstow, near to Caerwent Roman town which perhaps suggests ongoing settlement

post-Rome. The relative proximity to Cirencester, 'ringed' with Germanic cemeteries and in the area which continued to import ceramics post-Rome would indicate that the finds at Chepstow are not surprising (Reynolds 2013: 140–141).

Given the near-obsession with characterising the early medieval period in terms of warfare, there is little evidence for weaponry. Most likely this is a result of detectorists' preferences as iron objects are often 'dialled out' of the machinery, thus obviating the collection of spears, swords and so on (Richards and Naylor 2013: 193). Although this has to be considered, it may still be surprising that, against the background of ongoing battle and conflict that is often thought to have been the condition of the Marches, there are a number of 'domestic' finds, a broad term used here only as a means of differentiating non-martial artefacts. The cemetery already mentioned in North Herefordshire contains female- and male-associated items. Wrist clasps, discussed above, which are considered to be exclusively female dress item in early Anglo-Saxon England as they known only from female-gendered burial contexts, and along with the two fragments of cruciform brooch found there, would perhaps suggest an early Anglian settlement of a domestic nature which was established by the later sixth century AD. This might seem an interpretative stretch given there are no comparable sites in the region, but this can be weighed against Redknap's (2022: 77) assertion of brooches as a likely signal of settlement in Wales. However, by the late seventh century AD this area seems to have changed in the site's purpose, with the loss of small items often associated with trade or local fairs. The settlement may have shifted during this time to its historic position 2km north of the site; such a transition from cemetery to market is not unknown in the period and is a typical phenomenon in nearby counties (Richards and Naylor 2010: 197). Two of these lost items in this later phase are Northumbrian styca, thought in most cases to be a sign of Viking activity (Hadley and Richards 2021: 125). Although Vikings are known to have raided Gloucestershire in AD 877 there has been no evidence to date of their early presence so far east, although Llangorse Crannog may have fallen victim to their raids (Heighway 2003: 9; Lane and Redknap 2019: 20).

Finally though, there is little evidence to be found from the distribution of artefacts for any routeways through the Dykes. There are no clusters or lines of artefacts that would indicate a passing place or through route. In line with the lack of evidence from other sources it would seem increasingly unlikely that such routes existed, at least along Wat's Dyke and the northern extent of Offa's Dyke. However, again, if the operation of Offa's Dyke in the south was different than the scatter of items of all periods to the east and the west of the Wye, then this adds to the weight of evidence for a permeable and more symmetrical power relationship in the control and organisation of the landscape either side of this.

Conclusion

This chapter has used the data collected by the PAS to characterise the landscape surrounding the Mercian dykes which dominate the modern England/Wales border. There is of course significant bias in this record, and differential detecting has to be

considered. It is an area that does not always facilitate the detectorists hobby, as some land is unsuitable and other areas are under the ownership of bodies such as the National Trust, which prohibit detecting. As is apparent across the country, the scale of participants and reporting is not properly understood and therefore the significance of reported finds is difficult to assess (Robbins 2014: 13–14). All that can be concluded here is that there are more finds present than often thought, and that they constitute the same categories of artefacts as are found elsewhere in England. They span the periods before and after the Dykes are presumed to have been built, and occur in both clusters and with 'blank' areas.

It can be seen that movement of artefacts through the early medieval period continued on both sides of the Dykes through the period, even after their building, indicating perhaps that their construction did not exercise a totally restrictive regime on the British, and supporting Belford's (2017: 83) assertion that the Dykes only operated in their capacity as barriers of some sort for a relatively short period. This is set against a reduced number of artefacts being found to the west of Offa's Dyke in the north. Instead it is apparent that, in line with the assertions of Delaney (2021) and Ray and Bapty (2016), the southern part of the area was of a different character and may have been one of more fluid interaction between the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia and its peoples, and the British. Indeed, there may have been little in the way of barrier here. Nor is there evidence from the artefacts for any controlled routes through the dykes, although this is an admittedly small sample, and areas which may have been routes through are perhaps unlikely to be detected. Finer grained research than has been carried out here is required to draw further conclusions about the operation of the Dykes and the characteristic of the surrounding landscape but the evidence given here presents some intriguing possibilities for further study.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix – List of PAS data used in this survey

PAS Number	Object type	Date from AD	Date to AD	Location designation
LVPL-EFE07D	BELL	850	1100	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-71C370	BELL	900	1000	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-E1F877	BROOCH	500	600	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-501633	BROOCH	480	500	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-BFBC1E	BUCKLE	450	600	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL1327	COIN			Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-B32CD5	COIN	825	828	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-1DCD95	COIN	1029	1036	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-C15BC5	COIN	796	798	Cheshire West and Chester
HESH-91B1F6	HARNESS FITTING	1000	1100	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-C63F8A	HOARD	850	950	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-3E48B7	HOOKED TAG	800	1100	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL2071	INGOT	900		Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-9CC262	PIN	500	800	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-07AAB3	PIN			Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL1299	PIN	700	800	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-1E1E51	PIN	700	850	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-6AC0A7	PIN	700	800	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-A32966	PIN	800	1000	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-95AE43	SPINDLE WHORL	410	1500	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-781838	SPINDLE WHORL	410	1200	Cheshire West and Chester
WREX-788028	STIRRUP	1000	1100	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-CE9364	STIRRUP	1000	1100	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-CF45D4	STIRRUP	850	1066	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-A34D27	STIRRUP	1000	1100	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-74EDA0	STIRRUP	1000	1100	Cheshire West and Chester
PUBLIC-CB60F8	STRAP END	800	1000	Cheshire West and Chester

LVPL-CF7822	STRAP END	400	1066	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-E6C6A0	STRAP END	900	1100	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-E3B043	STRAP END	800	1000	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-123B9B	STRAP END	800	900	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-4B46A3	STRAP END	800	1100	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-4B8655	STRAP END	750	1100	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-D1295B	STRAP END	800	1000	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-628B62	STRAP FITTING	1000	1200	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-30CCE0	SWORD	850	900	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-A60C7D	UNIDENTIFIED OBJECT	410	1500	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL-935C88	WEIGHT	1400	1800	Cheshire West and Chester
LVPL1684	WEIGHT	900	1000	Cheshire West and Chester
HESH-650301	AXEHEAD	1000	1500	County of Herefordshire
HESH-54C557	BELL	950	1500	County of Herefordshire
HESH-9145D1	BROOCH	900	1000	County of Herefordshire
HESH-0969E0	BROOCH	900	1000	County of Herefordshire
HESH-B8F058	BROOCH	430	550	County of Herefordshire
HESH-B90507	BROOCH	480	600	County of Herefordshire
WAW-5ACBD8	BROOCH	400	600	County of Herefordshire
HESH-989BE4	BUCKLE	950	1000	County of Herefordshire
HESH-1F7483	BUCKLE	1000	1200	County of Herefordshire
HESH-F54465	COIN	700	715	County of Herefordshire
HESH-5AD183	COIN	800	900	County of Herefordshire
HESH-5AFD80	COIN	830	855	County of Herefordshire
HESH-5B1DB2	COIN	695	715	County of Herefordshire
HESH-C9EF2A	COIN	700	710	County of Herefordshire
HESH-B37EA8	COIN	700	750	County of Herefordshire
HESH-1F9457	FINGER RING	700	1200	County of Herefordshire
PUBLIC-85A6BB	HARNESS FITTING	1000	1100	County of Herefordshire

HESH-928C27	HARNESS FITTING	1000	1100	County of Herefordshire
HESH-E23843	HARNESS FITTING	950	1100	County of Herefordshire
HESH-38B3C2	HARNESS FITTING	1000	1150	County of Herefordshire
HESH-DD7A35	HARNESS FITTING	900	1100	County of Herefordshire
HESH-5F3545	HARNESS FITTING	1000	1150	County of Herefordshire
HESH-B925B6	HARNESS FITTING	1000	1150	County of Herefordshire
NMGW-EE6D80	HARNESS FITTING	900	1200	County of Herefordshire
NMGW-A96F63	HOOKED TAG	800	900	County of Herefordshire
HESH-1F8A76	MOUNT	700	1200	County of Herefordshire
HESH-B53141	MOUNT	950	1100	County of Herefordshire
PUBLIC-235A85	PIN	700	1000	County of Herefordshire
PUBLIC-9B7CB2	PIN	700	1300	County of Herefordshire
HESH-859D01	PIN	650	900	County of Herefordshire
HESH-85ADC8	PIN	650	900	County of Herefordshire
HESH-85C3B3	PIN	650	900	County of Herefordshire
HESH-85CC82	PIN	650	900	County of Herefordshire
HESH-EA0514	PIN	700	900	County of Herefordshire
HESH-B89D55	SCABBARD	1000	1200	County of Herefordshire
HESH-85E083	SLEEVE CLASP	500	600	County of Herefordshire
HESH-926A22	SLEEVE CLASP	550	800	County of Herefordshire
HESH-09A4C1	SLEEVE CLASP	550	800	County of Herefordshire
WMID-F1C7FE	SPINDLE WHORL	500	800	County of Herefordshire
SOM-DDB789	STIRRUP	1000	1100	County of Herefordshire
HESH-89989A	STIRRUP	900	1100	County of Herefordshire
HESH-84F602	STIRRUP	950	1150	County of Herefordshire
HESH-5E2177	STIRRUP	1000	1100	County of Herefordshire
HESH-5E3A13	STIRRUP	1000	1100	County of Herefordshire
HESH-1E7057	STIRRUP	1000	1100	County of Herefordshire
HESH-DCFBE4	STIRRUP	1000	1100	County of Herefordshire

HESH-F65251	STIRRUP	950	1150	County of Herefordshire
PUBLIC-5C7155	STIRRUP	1000	1100	County of Herefordshire
HESH-85D275	STRAP END	800	1000	County of Herefordshire
HESH-85D871	STRAP END	800	1000	County of Herefordshire
HESH-9296F6	STRAP END	850	1000	County of Herefordshire
HESH-4A3348	STRAP END	800	1000	County of Herefordshire
HESH-5B0FE0	STRAP END	750	1000	County of Herefordshire
WMID359	STRAP END	410	1066	County of Herefordshire
HESH-D19A4D	STRAP END	850	1100	County of Herefordshire
HESH-2CEEC8	STRAP END	800	1000	County of Herefordshire
HESH-A5C033	STRAP END	800	1000	County of Herefordshire
HESH-CCD6C7	STRAP END	750	1050	County of Herefordshire
HESH-12BE08	STRAP END	800	900	County of Herefordshire
HESH-2A3CC9	STRAP END	800	1000	County of Herefordshire
HESH-D9E760	STRAP END	800	1000	County of Herefordshire
HESH-35C553	STRAP END	900	1500	County of Herefordshire
HESH-9D2877	STRAP FITTING BELT PLATE	500	800	County of Herefordshire
HESH-C6C958	STYLUS	700	1200	County of Herefordshire
HESH-F3BC94	SWORD	600	850	County of Herefordshire
HESH-A29404	SWORD	900	1100	County of Herefordshire
HESH-B8FE61	UNIDENTIFIED OBJECT	400	900	County of Herefordshire
HESH-62594A	VESSEL	1000	1200	County of Herefordshire
HESH-927418	VESSEL	500	700	County of Herefordshire
LVPL-CDD0D0	BOOK FITTING	1000	1200	Denbighshire
WREX-C2544A	BROOCH	750	850	Denbighshire
NMGW-3E31B4	BROOCH	700	800	Denbighshire
LVPL-FC2097	NEEDLE	500	1000	Denbighshire
WREX-ABEEDC	PIN	700	900	Denbighshire
CPAT-28F196	STRAP END	800	999	Denbighshire

LVPL-30A793	BROOCH	750	1000	Flintshire
LVPL-7D2F34	COIN	1056	1059	Flintshire
WREX-C1D6F4	COIN	946	955	Flintshire
NMGW-799430	INGOT			Flintshire
LVPL-918135	MOUNT BOOK?	600	900	Flintshire
HESH-66049B	PENDANT	50	1100	Flintshire
LVPL-5EAC05	STRAP END	400	1066	Flintshire
CPAT-3952B8	SWORD	800	999	Flintshire
LVPL-0A5FB1	SWORD	900	1100	Flintshire
LVPL-3E7790	TILE	400	1066	Flintshire
WREX-6BB64D	UNIDENTIFIED OBJECT BELL	700	1100	Flintshire
GLO-BA7C52	BUCKLE	1000	1200	Forest of Dean
NMGW-F408B2	MOUNT POSS HORSE HNSS	400	600	Forest of Dean
GLO-BA85B6	STRAP END	750	1000	Forest of Dean
NMGW-A7BF76	BRIDLE BIT	1000	1100	Monmouthshire
NMGW-D7AF23	BUCKLE	1000	1099	Monmouthshire
NMGW-9A4808	COIN	690	710	Monmouthshire
NMGW-EC9AAB	COIN	985	991	Monmouthshire
GLO-2DE06C	HARNESS FITTING	1000	1100	Monmouthshire
NMGW-08658C	HARNESS MOUNT	600	800	Monmouthshire
NMGW-1585CD	HOOKED TAG	650	1000	Monmouthshire
NMGW-2A73A3	KNIFE	410	1066	Monmouthshire
NMGW-583281	SPUR	1000	1100	Monmouthshire
NMGW-A7B175	STIRRUP	1000	1100	Monmouthshire
NMGW-BD99AF	UNIDENTIFIED OBJECT			Monmouthshire
WAW-FF3CA7	VESSEL	500	700	Monmouthshire
NMGW-40A462	WHETSTONE	410	1066	Monmouthshire
PUBLIC-11D081	BEAD	530	590	Powys

NMGW-FF0EE5	BROOCH	400	600	Powys
HESH-33C368	COIN	685	690	Powys
CPAT-4FE335	DAGGER			Powys
WMID-727B32	MOUNT BOOK?	500	1100	Powys
WAW-CD6641	STIRRUP	1000	1100	Powys
NMGW-3457EA	STRAP END	700	900	Powys
HESH-96F9A6	BELL	950	1500	Shropshire
LVPL-1ACFF1	BRIDLE BIT	1000	1100	Shropshire
HESH-A2B977	BRIDLE BIT	1000	1100	Shropshire
HESH-3AC4C6	BROOCH	800	1000	Shropshire
HESH-BD1AD8	BROOCH	450	720	Shropshire
WREX-9B19C9	BROOCH	410	849	Shropshire
HESH-C34EB7	BROOCH	900	1000	Shropshire
HESH-F3BEB9	BROOCH	420	550	Shropshire
WREX-D5FC73	BROOCH	750	925	Shropshire
HESH-892D22	BUCKLE	900	1100	Shropshire
HESH-696AA7	COIN	979	985	Shropshire
CPAT-049EA1	COIN	979	985	Shropshire
HESH-E20370	COIN	995	1005	Shropshire
LVPL-EF4421	DAGGER	950	1100	Shropshire
HESH-260152	DRESS FASTENER (UNKNOWN)	500	1050	Shropshire
HESH-6E0600	DRESS FASTENER (UNKNOWN)	500	1050	Shropshire
HESH-B61048	FINGER RING	410	750	Shropshire
HESH-E9BFD8	HARNESS FITTING	1000	1200	Shropshire
HESH-E9EF21	HARNESS FITTING	1000	1200	Shropshire
LVPL-D9F581	HARNESS FITTING	800	1100	Shropshire
HESH-20DD55	INGOT	800	1000	Shropshire
HESH-D2D0A6	KEY (LOCKING)	900	1100	Shropshire

CPAT-DAD880	KEY (LOCKING)	800	1100	Shropshire
FAKL-DFAC23	MOUNT	470	570	Shropshire
HESH-00EAF2	MOUNT	900	1100	Shropshire
HESH-E9D295	MOUNT VIKING IRISH	650	850	Shropshire
HESH-4844A4	PENDANT	750	1050	Shropshire
HESH-A2AEF1	PIN	720	850	Shropshire
LANCUM-E91A57	SCABBARD	550	625	Shropshire
SWYOR-CEAECD	SPINDLE WHORL	500	850	Shropshire
HESH-425F5F	STAFF	1000	1200	Shropshire
HESH-2B3DC7	STIRRUP	1000	1100	Shropshire
HESH-B49325	STIRRUP	1000	1100	Shropshire
WMID-C6C5F6	STIRRUP	1000	1100	Shropshire
CPAT-B14AE7	STRAP END	750	1100	Shropshire
HESH-892F38	STRAP END	800	1000	Shropshire
HESH-C708E7	STRAP END	900	1100	Shropshire
HESH-845014	STRAP END			Shropshire
WMID-FC3DA6	STRAP END	750	950	Shropshire
CPAT-9658C4	STRAP END	930	1050	Shropshire
HESH-E814B2	STRAP END	800	1000	Shropshire
CPAT-9CCC47	STRAP END	900	1100	Shropshire
HESH-896A82	STRAP END	800	1000	Shropshire
HESH-D0DF34	STRAP END	800	1000	Shropshire
LVPL-4A2CC5	STRAP END	750	1100	Shropshire
HESH-56AE46	WEIGHT	750	1000	Shropshire
LVPL-6BF678	BROOCH	450	550	Wrexham
WREX-C232E2	BROOCH	450	750	Wrexham
WREX-9F2C2D	COIN	710	750	Wrexham
LVPL-20C747	COIN	700	710	Wrexham
CPAT-4AAF81	COIN	796	805	Wrexham

HESH-91A1D7	HARNESS FITTING	1000	1100	Wrexham
HESH-ABE884	HARNESS FITTING	1000	1200	Wrexham
HESH-26E9D1	MOUNT	750	900	Wrexham
HESH-BFB171	PIN	700	900	Wrexham
NMGW-6A4AAD	STRAP END	800	900	Wrexham
WREX-E4B61E	STRAP END	800	1000	Wrexham